

**Music and Pop Culture Historian  
Harvey Kubernik Interviews  
New Playwrights Foundation  
Chairman Emeritus Travis Edward Pike  
on Writing and Mentoring Writers in  
Hollywood**

HK: Travis, I never realized, until you started preparing for this year's *Los Angeles Times Festival of Books*, how deeply involved you are with New Playwrights Foundation (NPF) in Santa Monica, and with the recently disbanded Alameda Writers Group (AWG), in Glendale, California. Tell me about that.

TP: At the beginning of the millennium, many of my mentors in the entertainment industry were well into their 70's and 80's, and retired or retiring. I had several properties in development that were ready to go, but I found I no longer had the connections and backers I needed to further develop them. That's when a younger colleague introduced me to the AWG. I joined, hoping that through networking, I might build relationships that would introduce me to new industry contacts. At 57-years-old, I was one of the more senior members of that writers group.

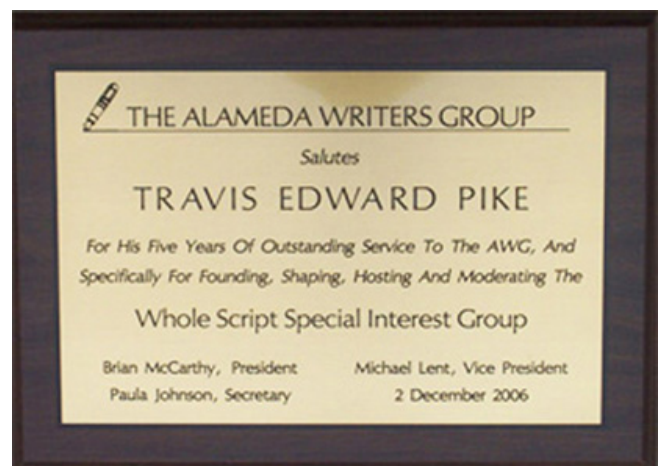
The AWG offered a number of Special Interest Groups (SIGs), hosted by members in their own homes. I attended SIGs on screenwriting, writing for television, periodicals, poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Their screenwriting SIG met twice a month to read 10 pages of submitted works in progress, critique them, and then go on to the next one. Apart from determining whether or not I thought the idea was worth developing, the meetings tended to become discussions of spelling, punctuation, and formatting. The members were highly motivated, but the procedure left me cold.

The monthly AWG meetings at the Glendale library, on the other hand, were always good and often excellent. Guest speakers were successful screenwriters, filmmakers, publishers, published authors, studio executives and literary agents who talked about what they looked for in new writers, new properties, new talent and how to contact them when you were ready to pitch your project or submit a query, usually wrapping up with illuminating question and answer sessions.

My background in music, motion pictures, and live performance was well-received and although I was new to the group, I was quickly welcomed into the "old guard," a mentor to new writers and colleague to the more established. While active with the AWG, I learned of the NPF, another writer's organization closer to home, and for all the same reasons, I joined that one, as well.

When I first joined them, the NPF didn't have a regular meeting place, but met twice a month wherever space was available, usually in a member's private home or apartment. They rarely had outside speakers, because their entire focus was on properties, some second drafts, but most presented for the first time. In order to offer more informed critiques, an entire work would be submitted and read at a meeting. They read screenplays, stage plays, musical theater pieces and rarely, entire books (which generally involved two or more consecutive meetings to complete both the reading and the critique, and required a real commitment on the part of the readers).

I found participating in those critiques most informative. Form was still important, but not nearly as important as story development, a character's "voice," and the principal's character development. Discussions addressed structure, focus, plot points -- the whole gamut of elements that make up complete and potentially saleable properties. Critiques were often accompanied by suggestions as to how to address problems detected in the reading, and I loved this format. In fact, I found it so informative and useful, that I introduced and moderated a Whole Screenplay SIG for the AWG, which became, in short order, the most popular, highly regarded and well-attended SIG they offered.



I was among peers in the NPF, many of whom had already achieved some success, and were happy to share their insights and experiences in theater, television and the motion picture industry. Novelists, poets, composers, actors, and even a few opera singers regularly attended their meetings.

The NPF sometimes produced member's projects, and they had one well underway when I joined. However, the production was on hold, pending finding an editor with the time, equipment and skill to assemble their feature documentary. I had all three. I had recently purchased an editing system and was delighted to be invited to participate in a project that would give me an opportunity to use it.

Jo Christensen was the producer-director, and I came on board as her co-producer, co-writer and editor of the NPF feature documentary *Volunteers for Verdi*, that one fan called a "fascinating behind-the-scenes revelation of an opera company's production process." It must have been true. The NPF DVD won two Certificates for Excellence in the *2006 US-International Film and Video Awards Festival*, one for Documentary 60:01 – 90:00, and the other for Arts: Performing Arts, at just about the time I was elected the new Chairman of the NPF.



**Jo Christensen, center, and Travis Pike, right, accept the two awards won for the NPF in the 2006 US-INTERNATIONAL FILM AND VIDEO AWARDS FESTIVAL**

HK: Both the NPF and the AWG were non-profit public service organizations. You weren't paid for your services. How much time did you allot to each, how did you find time to mentor new writers, and what did you learn in the process?

TP: I was never the old professor, at least, not in my mind. I was an experienced colleague, a co-conspirator to all the writers that attended, doing my best to help them successfully realize their projects. I was certainly among the most experienced in the AWG, better off than most, and my home, Otherworld Cottage could accommodate as many as 30 people at a time – more, in a pinch, so I proposed starting a Whole Script SIG, and as founder and moderator, I wrote the rules for participation -- how to submit a script for review, what to bring to a meeting, and what was expected of the writers, readers and critiques.

It was through the critiques sponsored by both groups that I mentored aspiring writers. The groups met at my home on alternate Thursdays, so for a time, I was holding a session every week. Sessions were learning opportunities for me, too. My own concepts of structure, character, and plot development benefitted from the discourse and insights offered by the membership. For the most part, the critiques were insightful, well-intentioned, and offered by peers working through their own writing processes. Sometimes, a lone voice would pick up on something the rest of us missed. Especially if I missed it, too, I would try to come up with a solution to the problem by the time it got around to me to wrap up the session.

In 2006, planning to move out of state, I resigned from the AWG and planned to resign from the NPF, but my plans changed, and as Chairman Emeritus, I continue my NPF participation.



HK: You have three books out now, and more in development. Let's discuss your writing process. We can start with *Travis Edward Pike's Odd Tales and Wonders: 1964 - 1974 A Decade of Performance*, for which I penned the Foreword. Did you write a long draft and then edit?

TP: Actually, it was the other way around. Inasmuch as that book is non-fiction, I started by writing several short bits, a storyteller relating sometimes disjointed, but hopefully informative or amusing anecdotes to keep readers turning pages. Friends who read that early draft wanted more about this story or that, so I enlarged it as I went along, adding details about the times, places and personalities, to answer their questions. Then my wife, Judy, began pulling related items from her scrapbook -- provable things; photos, articles, posters, and flyers that not only refreshed my memories, but enhanced the stories. Some of the previously written stories were cut, because a story I could substantiate through photos, clippings or posters, made the point better. I had never written this way before, but because it was a memoir, this method proved most effective.

## Travis Edward Pike's Odd Tales and Wonders



1964-1974: A Decade of Performance

Foreword by music journalist Harvey Kubernik, author of *A Perfect Haze: The Illustrated History of the Monterey International Pop Festival and Canyon of Dreams: The Magic and Music of Laurel Canyon.*

My first published book, *Handbook for America: A 21st Century Guide to the Pursuit of Happiness*, was a non-fiction effort I wrote for and with my good friend, former Los Angeles school teacher and truant officer Herman Velarde. It was and is a much-needed volume on the American social contract, offering an understanding of our Constitution and Bill of Rights, with the stated goal of reaching out to marginalized people of all ages and ethnicities, to reveal both the opportunities and responsibilities inherent in the America Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and way of life.

By the time I finished co-writing Herman's book, I was thoroughly versed on using computer applications for writing and preparing his book for publication, and confident enough to write and publish my own *Odd Tales and Wonders*, which is now helping to introduce me to 21st Century audiences.

HK: You introduced me to your process when I wrote the Foreword to *Odd Tales and Wonders*. Frankly, I was so impressed by what you had achieved, not only in your career, but in the publication of your book, that I asked if you would be interested in publishing my book, *It Was Fifty Years Ago Today THE BEATLE Invade America and Hollywood*.

TP: You did, and based on my experience with *Handbook for America*, and the implementation of my newly acquired layout and editorial skills, I happily agreed to do so.

HK: What are the biggest differences between writing a book or writing lyrics to a song?

TP: First, you must determine if your book will be a work of fiction or non-fiction. I explained the process I used to write *Odd Tales and Wonders*, a non-fiction work. First, I assembled the data, then wrote it as I would tell it to a live audience. Once the stories that would make up the narrative were in place, it was mostly a matter of editing.

Writing a fictional narrative is an entirely different process. Generally, you have to come up with the idea for the story, its setting and the characters and actions that you will require to tell your story. I find it helpful to write scenes, vignettes that contain key elements in the story -- the things you cannot forget to include if the story is to hold together. Some call this

writing down the bones, the process of making notes on specific actions, reactions, transitions, or bits of business, creating the skeleton (or spine), upon which the story will be developed. Non-fiction, by definition, is more related to gathering facts and using them to make the point of your story.

Either way, when you've come this far, it's all a matter of fleshing out the bones, and there's more to that than I can convey in a few sentences. For roughly the past 13 years, I've been mentoring writers, and depending on the story they are trying to tell, and the skill of the writer, remedial attention may be drawn to weakness in the structure, character development, or loose ends and plot points that have no payoff and leave readers dissatisfied.

Storytellers are allowed more latitude. In oral storytelling to live audiences, he (or she) may be allowed to meander a bit, especially if the wandering is amusing or chilling, and ultimately related to presenting the story. Writers, on the other hand, have an obligation to learn the rules of their craft, especially before they start deliberately ignoring them. (We never truly ignore them, but we sometimes find ways other than three act structure to make our stories clear.)

HK: Contrast and compare creating prose to writing a lyric.

TP: Prose is simply ordinary speech or written language, which is to say without rhyme or meter. Lyric poetry deals mostly with emotions. It need not rhyme. It need not require meter, although meter is frequently an important element of blank verse.

When we discuss song lyrics in modern Western music, it is almost always written in rhyme, although opera still makes use of recitative. In concert sets, to hold an audience's attention, it is wise to vary tempo, meter, rhyme scheme and structure from song to song, lest everything begin to sound the same.

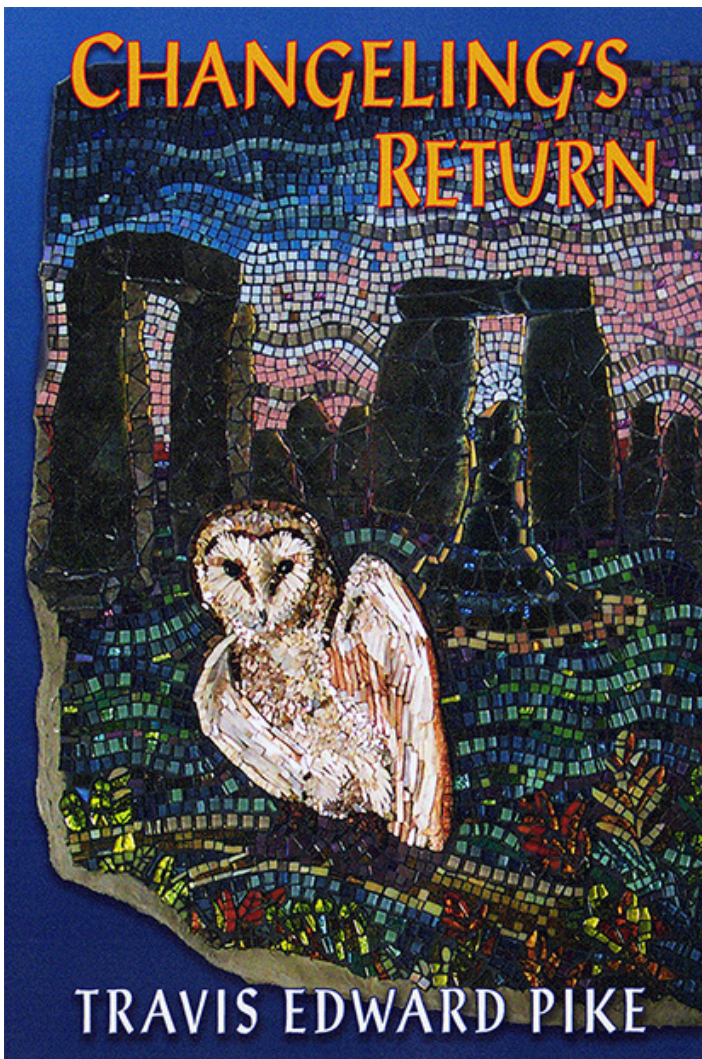
Otherwise, writing lyrics is still writing and many of the original rules and exceptions pertain. The greatest difference between the two is that whereas songs, even relatively long songs, are short, and lyric poetry can go either way, novels (and screenplays), are generally much longer. Obviously, it takes longer to

physically write a novel, so the author must retain (or recapture) focus from day to day, chapter to chapter, and sequence to sequence, until the novel or screenplay is finished. That's where knowledge of story structure can be most helpful to novelists. You can place those elements where they should appear in a well-crafted story, work your way up to them or back to them, and keep your narrative flowing.

HK: Writing an autobiography, like *Odd Tales and Wonders*, is it easier, harder, or does it make no difference whether you chronicle your own exploits, or explore worlds, real or imagined, and creatures that exist only in folklore and mythology?

TP: As of this week, I'll have three published books in print – which does not include *Grumpuss*, my fantasy adventure told entirely in rhyme, classified as an audiobook. Frankly, with music, effects, and voice characterizations, I consider it audio theater, much like radio programs of yesteryear. *Odd Tales and Wonders*, and your *Fifty Years Ago Today THE BEATLES Invade America and Hollywood*, are both non-fiction. To me, writing non-fiction is more a matter of compiling, than creating, although creative writing is what makes the compilation challenging and inspiring, a revelation that engages and informs. If the writing is pedantic, lacking a creative writer's ability to engage the reader, a simple recitation of facts and figures will likely be more dull than informative, because however accurate it is, if the reader is not engaged, the information is unlikely to be read or retained.

Fantasy adventure, a category which readily accommodates science fiction and horror stories, is my favorite fiction genre. My latest book, *Changeling's Return*, which I'll be introducing at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, April 22-23, at USC, contains the complete screenplay for my original surrealistic, supernatural, musical adventure. Our most recent interview about the screenplay and music is its Introduction, and the book also features a comprehensive section I call "His Secrets All Revealed," that explores the history, folklore, mythology, and supernatural elements underlying the story. And because *Changeling's Return* is a musical fantasy, I've released a new CD album, *Mystical Encounter (Songs from Changeling's Return)*, so that readers will be able to hear many of the songs from the story.



HK: So, how much of *Changeling's Return* is actually based on your experiences when you were doing rock and roll?

TP: Some of the detail, especially the bits about the rock and roll shows, the auto accident, recovery and song-writing, are based on my first-hand experience, but the the story is about an out-of-body experience that spirits Morgan, a modern day rock star, off to a parcel of supernatural real estate in a Celtic Otherworld. There Furies challenge him, Muses beguile him, Fates still weave Man's destiny, and where Man's insensitivity to the Laws of Nature has led to conflict among the goddesses. With the survival of Mankind hanging in the balance, Morgan becomes the single thread upon which all depends.

Reawakening in this, our modern physical world, even with Mystical Encounter's harmonies ringing in his ears, its rhythms as close and constant as his heartbeat, and its lyrics swirling 'round in his head, will Morgan accept responsibility for Mankind's

survival? The trappings of celebrity have made him wary, but it would be madness to believe that he's been selected and tasked by immortals to save Mankind. On the other hand, wouldn't it be more insane to do nothing, and by doing nothing, become complicit in the extinction of the human race? Was it all an intense, thought-provoking dream, and how, if at all, will it affect the viewers and listeners who experience Morgan's journey?

A good question, really, because in a movie theater, the audience will vicariously share Morgan's experience as it unfolds on the screen, and determine for themselves what it represents. That's why I ultimately dropped the idea of adapting it into a novel and am publishing it in a non-fiction book, cataloging its supernatural references, sympathetic magic, mysteries, mythology, and folklore. My hero's journey will be addressed through the lens provided by Joseph Campbell in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and Carl Jung's *Man and His Symbols*.

HK: Are you saying that Campbell's hero's journey influenced your screenplay?

TP: Mine and almost all the others ever produced since his book was first published in 1949. I was introduced to it by Max Shulman when he read my first draft of *Changeling*, before it ever became *Morningstone*, never mind its most recent incarnation as *Changeling's Return*.

HK: How does Jung come into it?

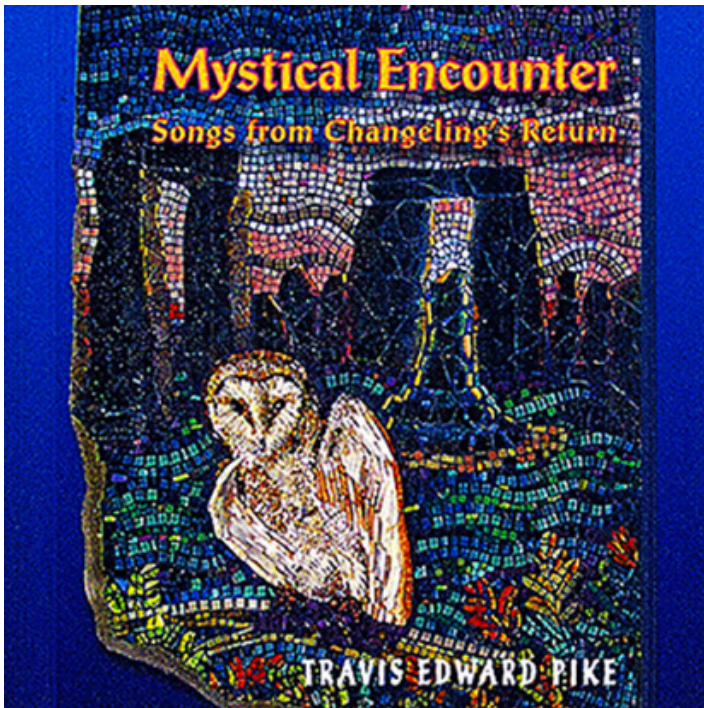
TP: It has roots in Jung's theories on the nature of dreams. My intent, with *Changeling's Return*, is to present a threshold dream that an audience will share. In addition to the surface story, it is meant to address the unconscious through symbols and metaphors, which is why it required such careful research and crafting. Such dreams may promote an individual's psychological development.

I learned early on that I have to be careful when I discuss that, because some reactionaries believe the surrealistic style I propose borders on mind control, and that somehow, I would be brainwashing my audience. In fact, if a person is not prepared for a next step in his or her psychological maturation, their reactions are most likely to focus on the surface story, either liking

or disliking it on the merits of its music, acting, sets, costumes, special effects or cast. Manipulating the unconscious of an audience of millions, can only result in millions of different reactions, fostered in each by their own individual psyches.

HK: That's still pretty heavy, but it leads well into my next question. How is writing for the page, different than writing for film or stage?

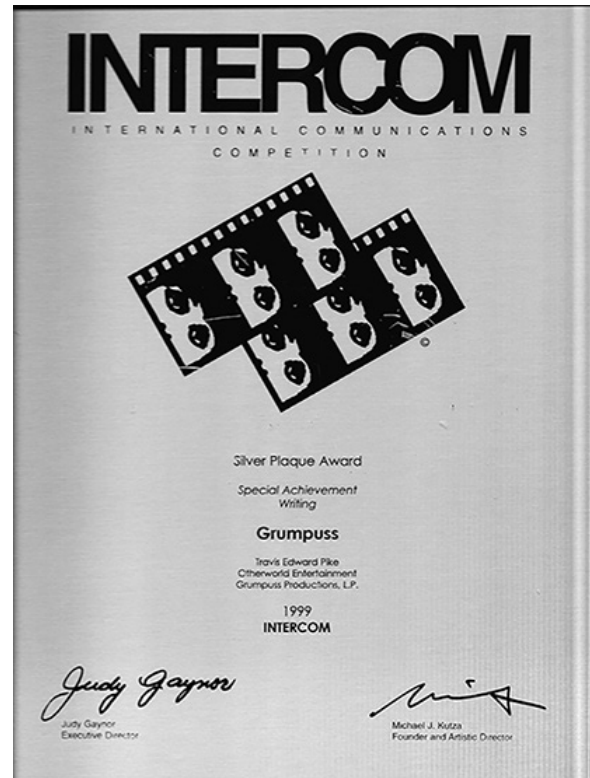
TP: The differences should be immediately apparent. Movies must MOVE. Talking heads are just talking heads, and unless the talking heads are particularly animated in their discussion, they will fail to engage a "viewing" audience. As I adapted *Changeling's Return*, I keep thinking how much more I would like to film it, let the audience experience Morgan's adventure, and leave them to decide what they'd do, given that experience. At least, with the CD, *Mystical Encounter (Songs from Changeling's Return)*, they will be able to experience the music.



Live theater lies somewhere between movies and literature. In a staged production, the audience will tolerate a scintillating soliloquy, but it is better delivered afoot than sitting on a stool, or even on an elevated, ornate throne. On stage, it is the actor who conveys the emotion in the lines.

This year, I'm also releasing a 20th anniversary edition of my Blenheim Palace, Save the Children World Premiere Benefit Performance of the award-

winning, critically acclaimed fantasy adventure in epic narrative rhyme, *Grumpuss*, on DVD.



Travis Edward Pike's epic narrative rhyme  
**GRUMPUSS**  
won an INTERCOM Silver Plaque Award for  
Special Achievement -- Writing  
at the 1999 Chicago Film Festival

HK: Tell me more about *Grumpuss*. What's it about? Is it a musical?

TP: It's not a musical, in any modern sense, but I did compose mood music for its live performance. In my catalog, *Grumpuss* really stands alone, an epic adventure composed entirely in rhyme, which places it firmly in an oral storytelling tradition that predates written language, but as rhyme, it is usually relegated to children's literature. Notwithstanding its oral roots, after I wrote it, I recorded it to aid me in memorizing it in character. Unlike transcriptions of ancient works, *Grumpuss* was composed from the start for performance in the oral tradition.

As for what it's about . . .

"A Grumpuss is not like a dragon,  
Rather more like a large surly cat  
With tremendous paws, and gigantic claws  
And jaws that can crush armor flat."

*Grumpuss* is the story of a knight's confrontations with a huge, prehistoric cat. I have since discovered that real crosses between a lion and a tigress, called ligers, are alive and thriving in captivity. My once imaginary creature might actually have existed in the Middle Ages, and if it did, and roamed the wild northwestern shores of Britain, my speculative adventure could have happened where and when I set it. My point is not that my tale ever actually did happen, but that it might have happened, and in my story, does happen, and by being exposed to that fantasy adventure, we may learn something about ourselves.

HK: Was *Grumpuss* inspired by a dream?

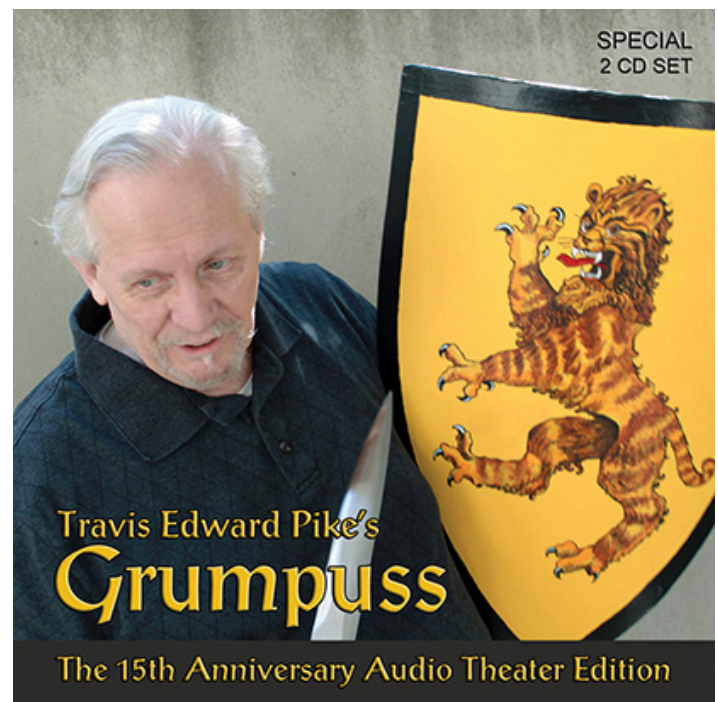
TP: No. When I married my best friend, Judy, in California in 1968, I suddenly became father to her four-year-old daughter, Lisa, who was a well-behaved, but somewhat withdrawn little girl. I noticed very quickly, that she seemed most engaged whenever I sang songs, told stories or performed any of my short, narrative poems, so I determined that the best way into her world was through my songs and narrative rhymes.

Judy had transferred from her job at Honeywell in Needham, Massachusetts to a Honeywell facility in West Covina, California, and Travis Pike's Tea Party was playing at Guru-V, a newly opened nightspot on Arrow Highway in Glendora. Money was tight, and I was doing a folksy, coffeehouse-style solo gig at Guru-V on Monday nights, to make ends meet. My show included performing my popular, original narrative rhymes, and the patrons wanted more. I had already written the first several verses of *Grumpuss* to amuse Lisa, so I quickly composed several more quatrains to arrive at an acceptable conclusion.

When I stopped performing live in 1970, *Grumpuss* was no longer important to anyone outside the family, but from time to time, I'd jot down a few new quatrains. Apart from dragging it out to amuse visiting friends and relatives, that was it, until the Fall of 1990 or so, when promised funding for *Morningstone*, precursor to *Changeling's Return*, failed to materialize, I realized I hadn't written anything new that year. Lisa, by then my executive assistant and associate producer, suggested that since I had the entire property outlined, I should finish writing the project that had fascinated her, ever since she could remember. I did, and in May, 1991, I finally copyrighted the finished work.

HK: What have you learned about the *Grumpuss* theatrical production and release of the initial VHS video in the intervening 20 years between the Blenheim Palace performance and today?

TP: I've learned that awards and critical acclaim do not guarantee monetary success. In October, 1999, the *School Library Journal* reported, "Themes of peace, compassion and courage echo through this story, but Pike's telling makes them wonderfully fun yet thought-provoking, and never heavy-handed... an outstanding choice for school and public library collections." *URI's July 1999 Newsletter for the Council of the Literature of the Fantastic* reported, "This is classic British fantasy at its best. Reminiscent of Lewis Carroll, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien, Pike's *Grumpuss* is poignantly true of both the foibles and the triumphs of humankind... quality family entertainment."



Awards and great reviews are thrilling, but to translate them into sales, the public must be made aware of them, and the property must be available wherever such properties are usually to be found, or they will almost certainly wither on the vine.

HK: The last time I came to Otherworld Cottage, I was introduced to another of your fantasy adventures when I came face-to-face with the dragon in your office. I know he's the "Red-backed, Scaly, Black-bellied, Tusked, Bat-winged Dragon" of your song by that title, but you've never told me anything about the story.



Harvey Kubernik introduces himself to  
**LONG-GRIN**

TP: *Long-Grin* is a post-Roman occupation fantasy adventure, set in Britain, currently on my back burner. I began working on it in 1961, when I was still a student in high school. I loved it then and I love it now, although, through the years it grew from a would-be feature cartoon musical, into a multi-part, full-blown fantasy adventure, taking place in two distinctly separate time periods. One, starting about the time Macsen Wledig (Magnus Maximus), 383 A.D., when he withdrew the last of the Roman legions from Britain, up through the time of King Arthur, and the other, beginning shortly before the Venerable Bede's death in May, 735 A.D., and continuing sporadically, until around 750 A.D.

Imagine, for a moment, that the red and white dragons that fought each other in Arthurian romance, were not, originally, heraldic symbols of competing would-be royal houses, but living creatures, and that their heraldic depictions are based on real, only recently extinct, intelligent animals capable of reason. Imagine, too, that these rare and reclusive creatures, distrustful of humankind, nevertheless were able to express themselves, understand, and interact with select humans. Add to that, a human imagination determined to make order out of chaos, that runs wild when confronted by inexplicable natural events and observations, and you have the speculative stew that is the foundation of my *Long-Grin* series, still in development and destined for novelization.

HK: So this year you've published *Changeling's Return*, and the music CD, *Mystical Encounter (Songs from Changeling's Return)*, and plan to publish a *20th Anniversary DVD Edition of Grumpuss*; and an illustrated non-fiction book rooted in some of our interviews that you're calling *Then What Happened?* Anything else?

TP: Well, the Travis Pike's Tea Party recording of "If I Didn't Love You Girl" is scheduled for inclusion in *Le Beat Bespoke volume 7*, a new UK compilation album to be released this spring, and this summer, on a vinyl 45 with Travis Pike's Tea Party's original recording of "The Likes of You." Furthermore, State Records (UK) will release a vinyl 45 of Travis Pike and the Brattle Street East featuring "Watch Out Woman" and "Way That I Need You" from the 1966 movie *Feelin' Good*. And this weekend, April 22nd and 23rd, I'll be in the New Playwrights Foundation booth at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, selling and signing both *Changeling's Return* and *Odd Tales and Wonders*, and selling signed copies of your book, *It Was Fifty Years Ago Today*, *THE BEATLES Invade America and Hollywood*.

 The image shows the cover of a book titled "It Was Fifty Years Ago Today: THE BEATLES Invade America and Hollywood" by Harvey Kubernik. The cover features a black and white photograph of The Beatles performing on stage. The text is framed by a decorative border with repeating patterns of small red and white icons. At the bottom, there is a quote from Clem Burke, drummer of Blondie, praising The Beatles.
 

**It Was FIFTY Years Ago Today**  
**THE BEATLES Invade America and Hollywood**

**HARVEY KUBERNIK**

"The Beatles are the soundtrack of my generation. They are and always will be my muse. I'll listen to a few songs before a show and get a rush of emotions. They had the best drummer in rock 'n' roll that really made the recordings swing. They were the natural progression from the roots of the music. The early recordings spread the gospel of Little Richard, Buddy Holly, and Motown to a new generation of rockers." -- Clem Burke, Drummer, co-founder of Blondie