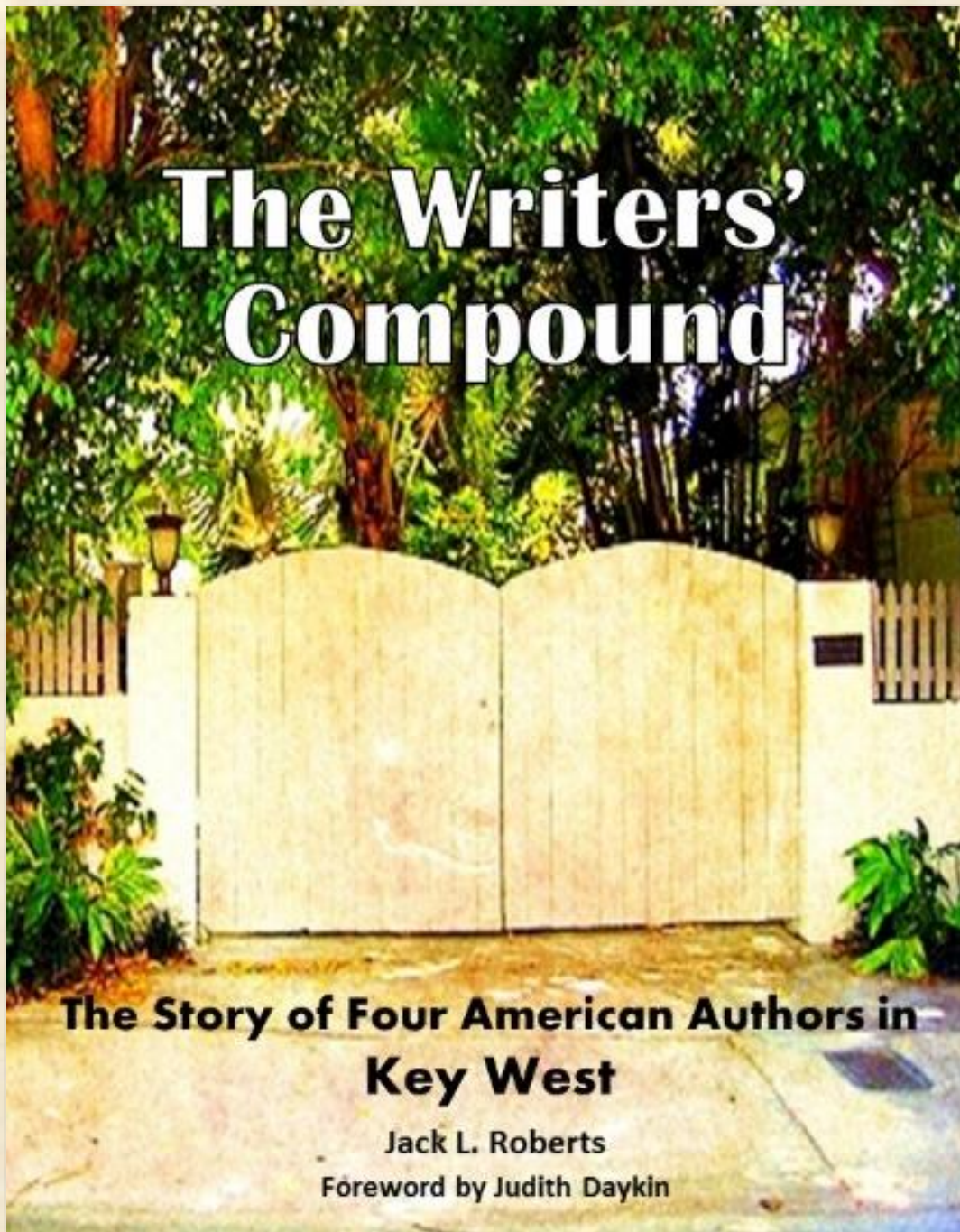


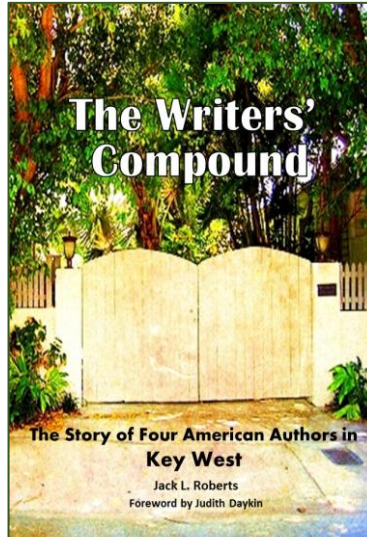
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



The Writers' Compound
The Story of Four American
Authors in Key West
By Jack L. Roberts

***"This book will be a touchstone
not only to writers but also to
anyone interested in the history
of a community that nurtured
and encouraged its artists."***

—Judith Daykin

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New Biography Features Four Key West Authors

Go behind the wooden gates of a secluded compound in Old Town and into the lives of these four award-winning American writers – John Ciardi, Ralph Ellison, John Hersey, and Richard Wilbur – who made Key West their winter residence in the 1980s and 90s.

PALM SPRINGS, CA (December 1, 2018) – For nearly 100 years, Key West has been a magnet for a variety of writers from Hemingway to Capote to Tennessee Williams, and dozens more.

Now, a new book goes behind-the-gates of the secluded Writers' Compound in Old Town, Key West, to reveal the fascinating story of four of those writers – poet John Ciardi, novelist Ralph Ellison, novelist John Hersey, and poet Richard Wilbur.

Based on a collection of anecdotes, events, and conversations gleaned from first-person interviews with other Key West writers, publishers, and compound residents, *The Writers' Compound* captures the humor, values, character, and interactions of these writers during the 1980s and 90s.

"The impetus for the book," says Jack L. Roberts, author of numerous biographies for young readers, "came about when I was living in the compound (in John Hersey's former writing studio, no less), and trying to decide on my next biography for kids."

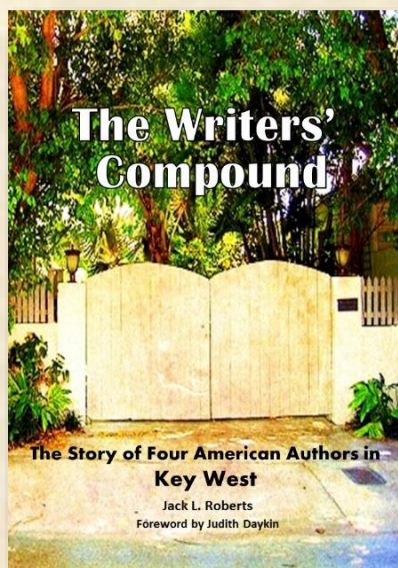
According to Roberts, his landlord and friend said, "Rather than writing another biography for kids, why don't you write about the four writers who had winter homes here? There are a lot of people in the compound and in town who knew them, so I'm sure you can get a lot of great stories." And so I did, says Roberts.

For a while, these four writers shared a special friendship on this island paradise. But, over time, as this candid account reveals, bitter resentments and acrimonious confrontations threatened to tear their longstanding friendships apart.

In addition to the fascinating story of these four famous writers, *The Writers' Compound* also captures both the nostalgia of the period, and the enduring allure of Key West today.

For more information or to request a review copy (print or digital), contact Palm Tree Press, 760-992-5962 or e-mail your request to: info@palmtreepressPS.com. For a Media Kit, visit: bit.ly/thewriterscompoundmediakit

A NEW INDIE BIOGRAPHY FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION



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*-- Judith Daykin, Longtime Compound Resident
Founder, Encores! Great American Musicals in Concert*



The Writers' Compound

The Story of Four American Authors in Key West

By Jack L. Roberts

In 1976, four award-winning American writers each bought a modest home in a secluded one-acre section of Old Town, Key West, an island paradise that for years had welcomed and embraced a coterie of other well-known writers from Ernest Hemingway to Tennessee Williams.

For a while, these four writers – poet John Ciardi, novelist Ralph Ellison, novelist John Hersey, and poet Richard Wilbur -- shared a special friendship. But over time, bitter resentments and acrimonious confrontations threatened to tear their longstanding friendships apart.

Now, a candid new book, based on first-person interviews with other Key West writers, publishers, and compound residents, tells their drama-filled story. At the same time, the book captures the nostalgia of the period, and reveals the many reasons for the enduring allure of Key West for writers.

The Story Behind the Story

"The impetus for the book came about when I was living temporarily in the Writers' Compound (in John Hersey's former writing studio, no less), and trying to decide on my next biography for kids.

"Instead of writing another book for kids,' my friend and landlord said to me, 'why not write about the four writers who lived here. The vibes should be great.' And so they were."

About the Author



Jack L. Roberts is the author of more than two dozen nonfiction books for young readers, published by Scholastic Inc., Lerner Books, Benchmark Education, and other major educational publishers.

He is also the founder of Curious Kids Press, an educational publishing company focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on books about countries and cultures around the world for young readers. This is his first nonfiction book for adults.

For a Media Kit about The Writers' Compound, visit:
bit.ly/thewriterscompoundmediakit



The Writers' Compound

An Interview with Author Jack L. Roberts

What was your motivation for writing *The Writers' Compound*?

Actually, it was kind of thrust on me. I was living temporarily at the compound in Key West from 2010 to 2012 (in John Hersey's writing studio, no less). So, there was that "vibe" going on. Then, also I was encouraged by a number of the compound residents who knew the four writers and who encouraged me to take on the task of telling their story. (They also promised me some terrific first-person stories about these men, and, for sure, they lived up to their promise.) It still took seven years for me to finally dig in, though.

You have written many nonfiction books for young readers. How did you decide to focus on nonfiction as opposed to fiction?

Interesting question. I don't really know. I guess I was always drawn more to the real world, real life, real events. They are almost always more fascinating to me than anything made up. Let me give you an example. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyle is a powerful novel for mature young readers about Nazi Germany. It's a great story. But when I decided I wanted to write about Nazi Germany for young readers, I was drawn to Oskar Schindler, the German industrialist and a member of the Nazi Party who is credited with saving the lives of 1,200 Jews during the war. So, I ended up writing a biography for young readers about him.

How do you handle the "creative" part of creative nonfiction?

Creative nonfiction always has a little bit of fiction in it, don't you think? (I promise I won't tell.) Actually, I love what Truman Capote said when he was accused of making stuff up and getting some details wrong in his book *In Cold Blood*. "Well, if it didn't happen that way," he said, "it's the way it should have happened." Something to think about.

Are you saying you've made stuff up in *The Writers' Compound*?

If I did, I'm sure I'll hear about it. (*laughing*) No, seriously, as I mention in the Prologue to *The Writers' Compound*, John Berendt, author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, summed up the question of creative nonfiction when he said, "Where the narrative strays from strict nonfiction, my intention has been to remain faithful to the characters and to the essential drift of events as they really happened." I agree.

What is your favorite thing about writing nonfiction?

I love research. In fact, when I'm in the researching phase of a new project, I find I eventually have to say "Enough! It's time to start writing." But even then, the writing invariably leads me to more research. I'm always finding a new path to follow or bit of information to explore and off I go down the rabbit hole for days.



You conducted a great deal of research about the four writers who are the central focus of *The Writers' Compound*. Which author did you find most appealing or interesting?

Oh, goodness. They were all fascinating for different reasons. If they hadn't been so fascinating, I don't think I could have completed the book. I loved Ellison's discipline, even though he still only managed to produce one book in his lifetime. I thought Ciardi got a bad rap. Underneath the gruffness, he was quite generous in both his time and his support of other writers. Hersey was a true gentleman, a characteristic that everyone admired. And Wilbur was, well, just a darn nice guy, very down to earth. I'm sorry I never had the opportunity to talk with any of them directly.

Who do you think will like your book?

I hope it speaks to lots of different people – writers and aspiring writers, of course. But I also think it will appeal to people who have a general curiosity about Key West or who are planning a trip to this island paradise. The book provides lots of incidental details about the island and places that are fun to check out – like the stunning octagon house on Eaton Street, which was once owned by Calvin Klein. At the same time, the book captures the nostalgia of the period, and reveals the many reasons for the enduring allure of Key West for almost everyone.

How did you become a writer?

I really think serendipity had a lot to do with it. I know I never consciously fantasized about being a writer. Very early on in my career I was working at *Sesame Street*. It was a time during the first year of the show when the young people who were working there had an opportunity to go in different directions. One friend started out as a baby sitter for the kids on *Sesame Street* and went on to become an Emmy award-winning producer of the show years later. I gravitated toward the publishing division where I eventually became senior editor of *The Sesame Street/Electric Company Reading Kits*. Like I said: Serendipity.

Do you read your book reviews?

I try not to, even though I know I'm probably missing out on some good advice.

Do you remember the first nonfiction story you ever wrote?

I sure do. I was in fourth grade. The assignment to the class was to write a report about what we wanted to be when we "grew up." I know most of my classmates started their writing with "When I grow up, I'd like to be a ..." whatever. But I started it with a version of the Tinker Taylor nursery rhyme: "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief/ doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief. It's an age-old saying that asks an important question: What do you want to be when you grow up?" I think I got an A on that paper.

What was the best advice you ever received about writing nonfiction?

Well, as I said earlier, John Berendt pretty much hit the nail on the head as far as writing nonfiction. But Lee Gutkind, author of *You Can't Make This Stuff Up* and the man who has been deemed "the godfather behind creative nonfiction" also had some great advice about creating scenes that I've tried to follow. "Scenes are the building blocks of creative nonfiction," he said. Scenes are the "jumping off points for you to present relevant and important ideas and information related to these scenes or little stories." Good advice for any nonfiction writer.



What is your biggest handicap when it comes to writing?

I'm slow. Sometimes I can get stuck on exactly how I want to express an idea and then wallow in that destructive state for days. But I take comfort in knowing I'm not alone in that regard. Richard Wilbur once said, "Writing involves lots of doubt, lots of groping around, waiting for a word that may not be there until next Tuesday." I laughed out loud when I first read that quote since it hit home so much. I've waited for a lot of Tuesdays to roll around.

What is your next project?

I'm working on a treatment for a ten-part TV series based on *The Writers' Compound*. Hey, it's a long shot, but why not?

What do you read?

Not surprisingly, I suppose, I love nonfiction the most, particularly biographies or memoirs. Right now, I'm reading *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. The research that went into this book is truly amazing and awe-inspiring. I think she spent ten years researching and writing the book. I also have David McCullough's *Mornings on Horseback* waiting for me on my i-Pad. But, then, it seems I have a lot of books waiting for me on my i-Pad. I'll get to them soon. I know I will.

What did you edit out if this book?

Oh, I could never tell you that. (*Laughs*) But seriously in general I tried not to include anything that was hurtful. There were a few stories I heard along the way that were what you might call "juicy." But then I asked myself why repeat them? When it comes to reporting an incident or anecdote, I always ask myself three things. "Does it need to be said? Does it need to be said by me? Does it need to be said now?" If I can't answer yes to all three, I leave it out.

How fun is it to be a writer?

Fun? Let's face it: Writing is hard work. I think a lot of people have this romantic notion of what it means to be a writer and forget that it's a job. Granted, it's a job that I'd rather be doing than any other, but it's still work.

What advice do you have for other aspiring writers?

You'll never satisfy everyone. So, make sure *you* like what you've written. There will always be some people who agree with you and, of course, some who don't. That's a lesson I learned many years ago in my first year in college. We all had to take Freshmen English for three quarters and had to write a lot of papers. During the first two quarters, I got an "A," as I recall, on every paper – to the point that I had classmates lined up outside my dorm room at night wanting me to help them with their papers. Then came the third quarter. I was devastated when I got a C- or maybe worse on the first paper I wrote that quarter. How could that be? My writing hadn't changed from one quarter to the next. But then it hit me. I was right. My writing hadn't changed but what had changed was the professor. I was writing for someone who had a different idea about writing. As soon as I figured that out (and paid more attention to what he wanted), I was back to getting A's again. So, lesson learned: You're never going to please everybody.



Jack L. Roberts

Short Bio

Jack L. Roberts is the author of more than two dozen nonfiction books for young readers, published by **Scholastic Inc., Lerner Books, Benchmark Education**, and other major educational publishers.

Medium Bio

Jack L. Roberts is the author of more than two dozen nonfiction books for young readers, published by **Scholastic Inc., Lerner Books, Benchmark Education**, and other major educational publishers. Roberts began his career in educational publishing at **Children's Television Workshop** (now Sesame Workshop) where he was editor of *The Sesame Street/ Electric Company Readings Kits*. Later, he joined **Scholastic Inc.** as the founding editor of *Action* magazine, a high-interest, low reading level magazine for middle school students. During a 20-year-plus career at **Scholastic**, Roberts created hundreds of educational materials for students, teachers, and parents. In 2016 Roberts and his partner Michael Owens founded **Curious Kids Press**, an educational publishing company focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on books about countries and cultures around the world for young readers.

Long Bio

Jack L. Roberts is the author of more than two dozen nonfiction books for young readers, published by **Scholastic Inc., Lerner Books, Benchmark Education**, and other major educational publishers. In addition, he has written hundreds of educational materials for students, teachers, and parents for **Scholastic Inc., Microsoft Education Group, Teacher Created Materials**, and the **U.S. Department of Agriculture**, among others. Roberts began his career in educational publishing at **Children's Television Workshop** (now Sesame Workshop) where he was editor of *The Sesame Street/ Electric Company Readings Kits*. Later, he joined **Scholastic Inc.** as the founding editor of *Action* magazine, a high-interest, low reading level magazine for middle school students. During a 20-year-plus career at **Scholastic**, Roberts also founded *Electronic Learning* magazine for administrators and *Teaching and Computers* for elementary school teachers, and was the author of *Scholastic Computing*, a computer literacy textbook for middle school students. Roberts was the co-founder of *WordTeasers*, an educational series of games designed to help kids of all ages improve their vocabulary through "conversation rather than memorization." In 2016, Roberts and his partner Michael Owens founded **Curious Kids Press**, an educational publishing company focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on nonfiction books about countries and cultures around the world for young readers. Roberts holds an MBA from Pepperdine University's Graziadio Business School.

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Writers on Writing
Quoted in
The Writers' Compound
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John Ciardi on Writing

"Let the action speak for itself....One of the skills of a good poet is to enact his experiences rather than to talk about having had them. *'Show it, don't tell it. Make it happen, don't talk about its happening.'*"

~ John Ciardi, *How Does a Poem Mean?*

Ralph Ellison on Writing

"I am terribly stubborn, and once I get engaged in [a writing project], I must keep going until I finally make something out of it. I don't know what the something is going to be, but the process is one through which I make a good part of my own experience meaningful. I don't mean in any easy autobiographical sense, but the matter of drawing actual experience, thoughts, and emotion together in a way that creates an artifact through which I can reach other people."

~ Ralph Ellison

John Hersey on Writing

"To be a writer is to sit down at one's desk in the chill portion of every day, and to write; not waiting for the little jet of the blue flame of genius to start from the breastbone -- just plain going at it, in pain and delight. To be a writer is to throw away a great deal, not to be satisfied, to type again, and then again, and once more, and over and over."

~ John Hersey

Richard Wilbur on Writing

"Writing involves lots of doubt, lots of groping around, waiting for a word that may not be there until next Tuesday."

~ Richard Wilbur

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