

Random Notes



From the desk of Michael Willard, chairman of Willard International. Random Notes are written for a few special friends of Willard (the agency and the guy).

October, 2013

Wall-to-wall

Buying stories as if they were legitimate news drives me nuts. I've campaigned against this for nearly two decades in Ukraine and Russia. It has been a Quixotic undertaking, but away I have charged at this windmill of steel.



– But, let me say this: Willard received wall-to-wall coverage this month on EBRD's announcement it was lending our client, EIG Engineering, owned by energy expert Oleksiy Butenko, Euro 15 million for Ukraine's largest renewable energy project.

– To be more precise, there were more than 60 news stories in publications big and small, as well as solid television coverage.

– How much of that news coverage was purchased? Zero, nada, zilch.

– Luck? Voodoo? No, just tenacity and knowing how to pitch a good story.

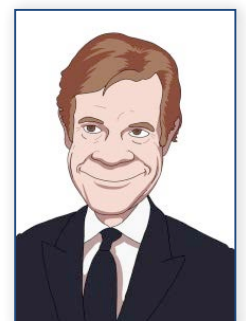
– Not to be preaching, but if your PR or marketing people come to you and say they need money to communicate your important messages through the press, tell them to simply work harder.

– My view is a good story will always rise to the top of the stack and without money crossing palms.

Villains

I do enjoy my villains.

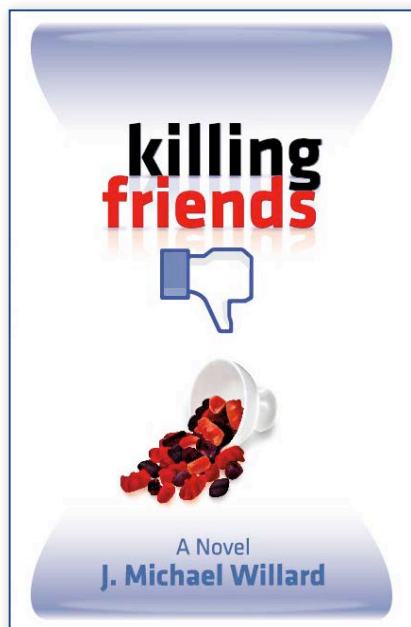
– Whether it's nondescript serial killer Joe Parker (of my novel, "Killing Friends"), the diabolical PM Argon Rasputinych ("Argon the Eliminator" of my novel/fable "Urainia"), or the corrupt U.S. official Longfellow in the upcoming novel "A Thief Wears a Burning Hat", they all - at least in the abstract - charm me.



Joe Parker

– Their charm is not that they are kindred spirits, for they are certainly not. They are truly evil. They are insanely flawed companions that walk with me through a narrative, though at a respectful distance and in the shadows.

– In the end, of course, they all get their comeuppance. One can't grow up wearing two shiny toy six-shooters on one's hip and a gigantic white cowboy hat and feel comfortable walking on the dark side for long. After all, I came of age in a town named for a singing cowboy, Gene Autry, Oklahoma.



– In my stories, the bad guys go to jail or worse, the hero gets the girl, and truth and justice prevail. I'm a sap for sappy endings. But, I have to tell you, those villains stick with me like chewing gum on the bottom of my shoe. I can't get rid of them with a stick.

– Take Joe Parker for instance. He's parlaying himself into a sequel somewhere far down the road. He's on the lam from the law but has managed once again to register a Facebook page. If nothing else, the guy is consistent and determined.

– You can follow Parker - if you dare - on Facebook (<http://tinyurl.com/p55x5yf>), but you will find his comments more interesting if you have read the book "Killing Friends" (<http://www.killingfriends.com>).

– While you are at it, order "Urainia: A Fable", too. Both books have been described as weirdly quirky. I can live with that. I've never been opposed to weird or quirky.

The President's Transformation



President Viktor Yanukovich's son Viktor Jr. (or Sasha - I get them confused) may be *L'enfant terrible* of Ukrainian business.

– Our President's mansion might rival Scarlett O'Hara's Tara, and "the family" is obviously the opposite of a Norman Rockwell portrait; but, the fellow is saying some of the right things when it comes to Ukraine and European integration.

– He’s also standing up to Putin and Russia, which takes elephant-sized *cojones*. Could we be seeing a metamorphous, or has he been sprinkled with magic dust, and this erratic but welcomed moment will pass? Let’s hope not. He certainly is positioning himself for the next election.

– I have not been one to write nicely about Ukraine’s leader; but then that was the same for the previous presidents, especially Viktor Yushchenko, who muffed his chance at having statues erected to his orange-tinged greatness. He’ll be lucky to have a ceramic flower pot dedicated to him.

– Of the other couple of leaders, the courtly Leonid Kravchuk gets a pass for a relatively short, benign tenure. Leonid Kuchma gets credit for taking East-West relations (both east/west Ukraine and worldwide) to a stratospheric level of *realpolitik*.

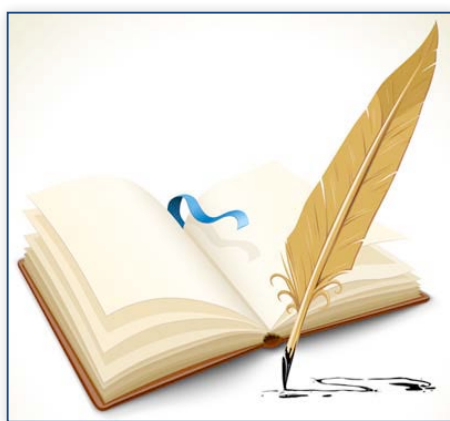
– But he did have that dark side of which we are all aware.

– Yanukovich’s public stance very much in favor of the free trade association agreement in the face of Kremlin pressure earns him another shot at universal redemption (sort of like in *Urainia: A Fable*) - at least for the moment.

Willard Editorial Services

A lot of people are challenged to write in any language.

– But it can be particularly grueling in English. We toss “a” and “the” around like literary hand grenades. Just to confuse everyone, we made it so a single word with the same sound as three others (*to, too, and two* as an elementary example) has different spellings and different meanings.



– It is, indeed, a cruel path we make non-native English speakers traverse.

– So, it is not surprising we see a lot of material translated from Russian or Ukrainian into English that sounds a little like Swahili. The problem is your important business document could be the first impression a new client has of your firm or business. It should be perfect.

– That’s where **Willard Editorial Services** comes in. We have a stable of really good native English language copywriters and proofreaders to make sure that your document, newsletter, website, etc. is perfect. If you are not satisfied, you don’t pay us. Simple as that.

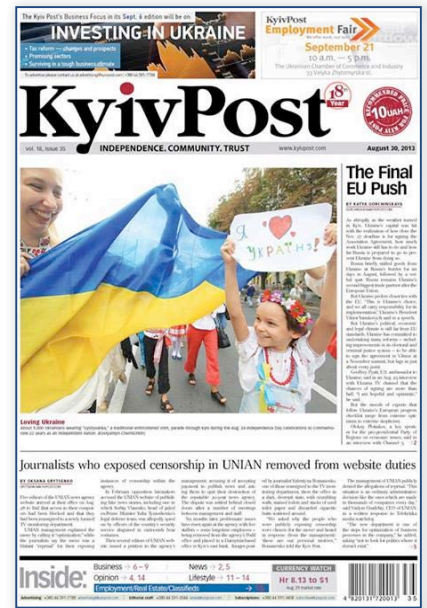
– While I’m at it, we do a pretty good job with Russian and Ukrainian editing as well. Just check in with Oksana Gogol (Oksana.Gogol@twg.com.ua).

Kyiv Post

I am no longer at the Kyiv Post in any capacity other than as a dedicated reader and supporter of the newspaper.

– It was time for me to move on. My job as CEO was done, and my fee looked ridiculously high in view of the lowered overhead we had managed to achieve. The newspaper is in good hands with Jakub Parusinski as CEO and chief editor Brian Bonner.

– My feeling about the Kyiv Post is summed up in a dedication of my new book "Urainia: A Fable". It reads: "I dedicate this book to the hard-working editors and reporters at the *Kyiv Post*, one organization that has remained independent and has, to put it crassly, stood up to the bastards for nearly two decades."



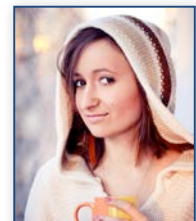
Meet Oksana

Since the founding of Willard 15 years ago, I have been fortunate to have only three "left arm, right arm" colleagues who help me make it through the work day without me screwing up too much. Two have been named Oksana and one Katya.



– The latest Oksana is Oksana Gogol who has been working at Willard for two-plus years on various clients and also as media director. She takes the title Special Projects Director and will work with me in new business development, conferences, and the Willard Roundtable.

– Katya Kalendruz, who many of you know as the super-efficient professional at my side in dozens of meetings and as a prime mover behind the Tiger Conference, was recently named by CEO Olga Willard as client leader for Danone.



– The other Oksana? That's Oksana Yerofeyeva, who no longer works at Willard but who I have put in the Willard former employee Hall of Fame.

Michael Willard