

Who wrote a great book about bar trivia?

By **AMY DEAL**
For HD Media

This month we are meeting Brad Mills. Mills is the author of “Pub Prodigies: Inside the World of Competitive Bar Trivia.” He lives in Wheeling with his new bride, fellow writer Laura Jackson.

The three-time president of West Virginia Writers, Inc., is also an award-winning Team Trivia host, and he always makes any event he’s hosting or attending a fun time. Let’s get to know him.

Q: What inspired you to start writing?

A: In second grade, our teacher read Gertrude Chandler Warner’s “The Boxcar Children” to us. The language in that book was the language of a child, since it was a children’s book. I realized I could make sentences just like that and started learning how to do that effectively to tell stories. By the time I reached high school, I was writing regularly almost every day.

Q: What advice would you give a new writer, someone just starting out?

A: The most important thing to do is just start. You can write for yourself and not show anyone, and work out the details later. But get the words on the page. It doesn’t have to be perfect at your first attempt, and in fact, it rarely is.

Q: How do you handle writer’s block?

A: If I’m blocked, it’s time for a break. I’ll go find something else to do for a while and wait for the muse to return. Old “Star Trek” episodes are a good break for me; sometimes a quick snack helps, or going outside. Writer’s block is never a permanent condition, but sometimes it takes a little patience to get past it.

Q: What are the most important elements of good writing?

A: That depends on the kind of writing it is. If it’s prose — whether fiction or nonfiction — it needs to flow well from one point or scene to the next. For poetry, there needs to be an “aha” moment somewhere, something where the whole thing clicks together and becomes greater than the sum of its parts. If it’s a rejection letter, the heating element on top of my stove is the best element.

Q: What would you say is your most interesting writing quirk?

A: I’ve found that I write things out of order and then piece them together later. I don’t know how quirky that is, but it’s the process that works best for me with longer pieces.



Courtesy photo
Brad Mills, of Wheeling, wrote ‘Pub Prodigies: Inside the World of Competitive Bar Trivia.’ He is also a well-known Team Trivia host and has served as the president of West Virginia Writers Inc. three times and is now president emeritus.

Q: Are you on social media and can your readers interact with you?

A: I’m on Facebook and Bluesky right now. I don’t have time for the rest of them, and odds are I will never use TikTok. Search either Facebook or Bluesky for “weirdbook” and you should find me.

Q: What was the inspiration for the story?

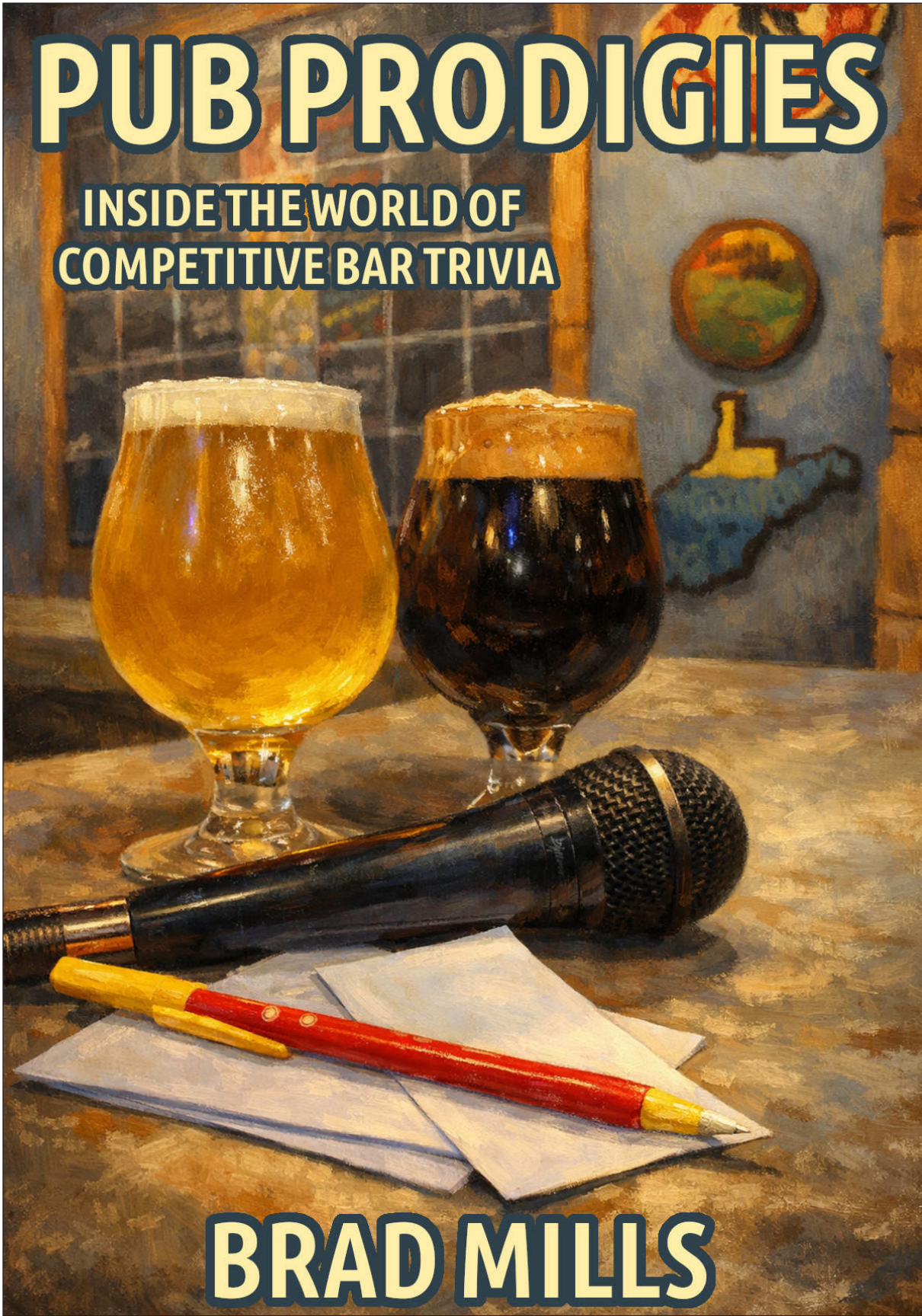
A: I host trivia four nights a week, and I’ve been a part of the trivia community since 2015. In that time, I’ve had a lot of fun experiences and have met some outstanding people. Quite a few folks told me I needed to craft these experiences into stories, and my wife (Laura Jackson, author of “Deep and Wild: On Mountains, Opossums, and Finding Your Way In West Virginia”) said I needed to compile them into a book. She was right!

Q: What is the key theme and/or message in the book?

A: I think in any community focused on a particular single thing — like a book club or a writing group or board game club or even a fantasy football league — that it’s the people that make it great, not the thing itself. The connections you make with others, that sense of belonging, is the most important component.

Q: Do you write listening to music? If so, what music inspired or accompanied this current book?

A: I’m almost always listening to music or have



‘Pub Prodigies: Inside the World of Competitive Bar Trivia’ by Brad Mills

songs in my head. I’m into progressive rock, space rock and classic rock, so songs from those genres have been my soundtrack: The Pineapple Thief, Steven Wilson, The Moody Blues, Anathema, Muse, Dream Theater, Pink Floyd.

Q: What was the highlight of writing this book?

A: Oh, giving these stories form was the best. Having all these stories in my head is one thing, but getting them onto the page and being able to share them with others was absolutely my greatest joy.

Q: What is the most surprising thing you discovered while writing your book(s)?

A: As I got closer to the finish line and started sharing with people that I was

writing a book about the bar trivia experience, I found that people were actually interested in hearing more. I didn’t expect there to be much more than a casual interest, but people bought into the idea immediately and were excited when I had updates to share.

Q: Are you working on anything at the present you would like to share with your readers?

A: I’ve not started my next project yet. Historically, I’ve focused on poetry, but that kind of work develops quickly and is harder to share in pieces. However, I’ve been toying with a longer poetry piece called “Ghosts of Montgomery” about the various goings-on of people I knew at WV Tech in the early and mid-1990s. It’s shaping up into a “Spoon

River Anthology” kind of work, but I don’t know if it will ever see the light of day.

Heritage Station in Huntington

This month’s Writers Can Read is a special one. At 7 p.m. on Aug. 27 at Heritage Station, the author’s event will honor the amazing Carter Taylor Seaton. In a Facebook announcement about the event, Writers Can Read stated, “Carter was one of the most influential and gifted writers to come from not only Huntington, but the entire state of West Virginia. Writers Can Read would not exist without her, and many who have found success in this field owe their paths to her guidance. Even though it has been a year and a half since her passing, the void she left is still felt across the Tri-

State area. This will be a celebration of one of the most remarkable people to ever grace our lives. Please join us as Bonnie Proudfoot, Amber Koch, Shelley Jarvis, and M. Lynn Squires headline the evening, keeping Carter’s spirit shining as bright as ever.”

Signings

Tobi Doyle will be at Booktenders in Barboursville at 5:30 p.m. on Aug. 13. She will have her new book, “Ales & Aliibis,” available, along with her other books. Tobi is an amazing writer, and you don’t want to miss a chance to meet her.

Amy Deal is a resident of Huntington. She blogs about her literary experiences at authoramydeal.com and can be reached by email at authoramydeal@gmail.com.

How a birding hobby may boost your mental health

By **JENNIFER G. ANDREWS**
Assistant Professor of Psychology, Morehouse College

If you’ve ever found yourself stuck in a rut while cooped up all day at a nine-to-five job, or just felt stressed about work, school or life in general, you’re not alone. Hearing “just go outside” might sound like trivial advice, but researchers have been investigating a new, unconventional strategy to boost mental health: Seeking the company of wild birds.

You’ve probably heard them singing or noticed them flitting through the canopy, but if you’re not deliberately paying attention to their presence, they can fade into the background. A growing body of research suggests that keeping a watchful eye or attentive ear out for birds can help people from all walks of life feel more calm, present and refreshed.

Birding, the practice of observing birds in their natural habitat and also known as bird-watching, has experienced a renaissance in recent years. Birding exploded in popularity during the pandemic, and you may have even seen it

popping up on your social media feeds. Newcomers to the practice discovered something seasoned birders have always known: Simply paying attention to birds can be surprisingly rewarding.

There is a wealth of data demonstrating that spending time in nature leads to health improvements. For example, reviews of scientific research have cited consistent evidence for nature’s important role in supporting health and well-being.

An increasing body of research, which my colleagues and I reviewed in 2024, also suggests that interactions with birds may play an especially important role in well-being. Encounters with birds may improve mood, reduce stress, restore attention, strengthen social connections and even encourage people to care more about the environment.

Birding Rx

Birding seems to perform a special psychological function beyond the capabilities of other outdoor activities. For example, one recent study demonstrated that a walk to see birds was more likely to increase

well-being and reduce distress than going on a nature walk alone or a control condition of just keeping the status quo.

My lab at Morehouse College, where I am an assistant professor of psychology, has recently replicated and presented these findings at various conferences, including the annual convention for the American Psychological Association. We measured mindfulness behaviors in a group of undergraduate students both before and after either going on a bird walk, a nature walk, or watching a nature documentary. These mindfulness behaviors included feeling connected to the present moment, noticing the emotions or sensations in one’s body, or having moments of feeling alert and aware. Mindfulness practices have a positive effect on mental health, and these can prove especially helpful if you’re in your 20s or 30s.

We discovered that a bird walk led to more substantial increases in a participant’s mindfulness when compared to the other nature activities. These results suggest that there may be something unique

to paying attention to birds that makes people more likely to be aware, engaged and present.

No one’s 20s and 30s look the same. You might be saving for a mortgage or just struggling to pay rent. You could be swiping dating apps or trying to understand childcare. No matter your current challenges, our Quarter Life series has articles to share in the group chat, or just to remind you that you’re not alone.

Birding engages multiple senses, and you don’t even have to spot a bird to reap the rewards associated with birding. Experimental data suggests that just listening to birdsong can improve mental health. In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all bird experience when it comes to associated health benefits.

Flocking together

Although birding can be a pleasurable solitary hobby, it also builds communities. Many birders belong to local chapters of the National Audubon Society, which represents one of the most prominent organizations in the U.S. dedicated to the conservation of and education about birds and

their habitat. Similarly, many birders enjoy participating in bird walks or other bird-related activities in groups.

Furthermore, millions of volunteers contribute observations through citizen-science projects such as eBird and Project Feeder-Watch, from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, generating data that helps scientists monitor bird populations across the globe and helps birders connect with one another. These projects allow anyone, ranging from experienced birders to curious beginners, to make meaningful contributions to community science.

There is also some preliminary evidence that birding encourages people to care for their environment.

For example, some studies have demonstrated that birders are more likely to support conservation efforts and engage in behaviors that benefit the environment. It’s possible that paying closer attention to birds may deepen your sense of connection to the natural world, making you more likely to protect it.

A distinct advantage to birding, especially compared to other types of out-

door recreation, is its accessibility. Because of the wide variety of avian species found across the globe, you can go birding just about anywhere in the world, from the most remote wilderness areas to bustling city blocks. And it isn’t something to which you need to devote a lot of time, travel or money to accomplish.

You can do it while you’re on your way to work or school, or just by stepping outside for a bit. If you find yourself scrolling on your lunch break, consider going for a walk around the block instead and counting how many bird species you can see or hear. And if you’re new to the practice, you might enjoy downloading the free app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Merlin, to help you identify what you are seeing or hearing.

Flight calls

Although the evidence for birding’s benefits continues to grow, more scientific inquiry is necessary. Researchers still need to replicate findings related to birding’s health benefits before drawing firm conclusions, and other research questions remain.