

# THE SKYLINE



Volume 61, Number 18

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August 31, 2023

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## 186th Air Refueling Wing and NAS Meridian join together to welcome CODEL Staff

By Maj. Sabrina Dalton  
186th ARW Chief of Public Affairs

The 186th Air Refueling Wing (ARW) and NAS Meridian hosted staff members of the Mississippi Congressional Delegation (CODEL) and the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) at the Key Field, Aug. 24.

The CODEL and SASC staff heard briefs from 186th ARW Commander Col. Cindy Smith and Naval Air Station Meridian Commanding Officer Capt. Luke Davis who each gave overviews of operations at their respective bases and talked about how the military benefits the local community.

"We are thankful for what our state and nation's congressional members and staff do to support Meridian's military bases," said Col. Smith. "The Chief of the National Guard Bureau recently announced that Key Field would receive back the KC-135 aircraft simulator which will help stimulate the local economy."

Col. Smith also discussed with the group the value and benefits if Key Field ANGB were to receive the new KC-46 aircraft which would replace the eight KC-135R Stratotankers currently assigned to the Wing.

Capt. Davis talked about the replacement training jets coming to NAS Meridian



Photo by Maj. Sabrina Dalton, 186th ARW

**CODEL and SASC staff pose for a photo with leadership from the 186th Air Refueling Wing and NAS Meridian during a site visit at Key Field, Aug. 24.**

within the next several years, and how that too will positively impact not only the local economy but our nation by training future fighter jet pilots who traverse the world in support of contingency operations.

"Having the opportunity to brief the members of the congressional staff and Senate Armed Services Committee was very valuable for NAS Meridian," Davis said. "Keeping our congressional leaders informed is an asset for all branches of the military."

CODEL and Armed Services Committee

staff members who attended the visit represent the offices of congressmen Trent Kelly, Michael Guest and Mike Ezell and senators Roger Wicker and Cindy Hyde-Smith.

"It's so important to see our Mississippi military assets first-hand," said Elizabeth Joseph, Policy Director for Congressman Michael Guest. "Being able to visit the installations, discuss priorities, see the great things happening in our state, and work on these projects from the federal level is a true honor."

● **CODEL, page 2**

## Congratulations 2024 Chief Petty Officer Selects



NAS Meridian  
ACC (Sel) Dominic Herman  
ACC (Sel) Anthony Schlund



Navy Reserve Center  
AMC (Sel) Jeremy Crowsey

## NAS Meridian assists JRB Fort Worth with IFLOLS training

By Sandy Owens

Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base

Naval Air Station (NAS) Joint Reserve Base (JRB) Fort Worth has recently expanded its training capabilities by acquiring an Improved Fresnel Lens Optical Landing System (IFLOLS). With this specialized equipment, NAS JRB Fort Worth is now fully equipped to host specialized training flights for pilots, enabling them to practice and perfect their aircraft carrier landing skills.

"The IFLOLS, or 'meatball,' will be invaluable for student naval aviators learning to land on aircraft carriers," said Executive Officer Clayton Johnson. "The aircraft carrier environment is unique among runways since it is just 500' long, located 60' above a pitching sea with minimal lighting at night. The meatball is a key component to getting a naval aviator on deck safely at the carrier. It requires special experience to use it properly, and the consequences of ignoring it or misinterpreting its signals can easily result in catastrophic mishaps."

The IFLOLS allows new pilots to undergo training in a controlled environment. Aspiring naval aviators will undergo Field Carrier Landing Practice (FLCP) flights, both during the day and night, to master utilization of the IFLOLS under simulated carrier conditions.

"FLCP flights consist of up to a dozen touch-and-go landings per student, each of which will be carefully graded by an experienced Landing Signals Officer (LSO). The LSO is a seasoned carrier aviator specifically trained to mentor and guide pilots as they land at the carrier," explained Johnson.

The installation and removal of the IFLOLS on the flight line will be handled by the transient line personnel at NAS JRB Fort Worth. Ground electronics technicians will be responsible for conducting maintenance to ensure the IFLOLS remains in optimal working condition.

"We proactively sent two Sailors from the transient line and one from ground electronics to NAS Meridian for training on the pre-operational inspection and proper setup of an IFLOLS," said Aircraft Launch and Recovery Equipment Maintenance Subject Matter Expert Rob Donaldson.

[Read more, click here](#)

Effective Aug. 31, 2023, the Department of Defense Civilian (GS and NAF) Retiree ID Cards will no longer be issued and are no longer valid for entry onboard Navy installations -- including NAS Meridian.

Instead, Installation Commanding Officers have been given the discretion to issue retired civilians a Defense Biometric Identifications Systems (DBIDS) card. These credentials will be issued to eligible personal upon positive identification of the individual, visual inspection of an appropriate Notification of Personnel Action Form (SF-50) or the respective service branch Non-appropriated Fund employee equivalent form.

Once retired, civilians can obtain a DBIDS card at the NAS Meridian Visitors Control Center (Pass & ID) by bringing their SF-50 and completing a background check form. The DBIDS card will be valid for one year and can be used to access MWR facilities including McCain Rec Bowling, Mini-golf, Golf Driving Range, Rudders, fitness center, hunting and fishing privileges.

**These IDs do not give retired civilians access to the Navy Exchange or the Commissary.**

If you have any questions, please call the Public Affairs Office at 601-679-2602 or 601-679-2318.

# Seven aviators earn ‘Wings of Gold’ in August pinning ceremony

There was a naval aviator designation ceremony August 25 onboard Naval Air Station Meridian.

Seven aviators received their “Wings of Gold” during the ceremony. The naval aviator designation ceremony is not prescribed specifically by U.S. Navy regulations, but has emerged as an honored

product of the rich heritage of naval tradition. It marks the culmination of nearly two years of specialized training, which has prepared these officers for the rigorous demands of aerial combat and carrier operations -- earning each the title of “Naval Aviator” and the right to wear the coveted “Wings of Gold.”



1STLT Jacob DeCelles



1STLT Matthew Dorn



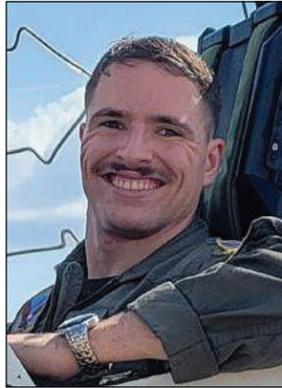
ENS Matteo Pizzuti

## Golden Stick



Photo by MC2 Molly Crawford

Roger Burke, President of the Mississippi Council of the Navy League, left, presents 1STLT Matthew Dorn with the Golden Stick award during a winging ceremony in the Chapel onboard NAS Meridian, Aug. 25. The Golden Stick is awarded to the student with the highest composite score during training.



LTJG Anthony Polo



1STLT John Rock



LTJG Francesco Rossiello



1STLT Brendan Walsh

### ● CODEL

The visit concluded with an aerial flight over Meridian aboard a CH-47 Chinook helicopter and a tour of a KC-135R aircraft.

The 186th Air Refueling Wing provides over 1,100 personnel and eight KC-135R aircraft to Air Mobility Command for worldwide operations. Additional units at Key Field include the 238th Air Support Operations Squadron, the 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron, and the 186th Air Operations Group. If you or someone you know is interested in joining the MSANG or contact a recruiter at 601-484-9213 or 601-484-9828. You can also find us at <https://www.186arw.ang.af.mil/>

NAS Meridian is home to nearly 3,000 civilian and military members. Its mission is to train future U.S. Navy and Marine Corps strike fighter pilots, as well as the production of enlisted Sailors and Marines in ratings such as Yeoman, Logistics Specialist, Personnel Specialist and Aviation Operations Specialties. Additionally, it is home to the Mississippi National Guard's Regional Counterdrug Training Academy, representing one of only five such academies in existence across the nation. You can find more information at <https://cnrse.cnicy.navy.mil/Installations/NAS-Meridian/>

# Deadline nears for recent combat vets to secure free VA health care

By Leo Shane III  
Military Times

Combat veterans who left the military more than a decade ago can still sign up for Veterans Affairs health care, thanks to sweeping toxic exposure legislation approved last year.

But time is running out.

On Tuesday, VA Secretary Denis McDonough brought that message to the annual American Legion conference being held in North Carolina. He asked the several thousand group members assembled from across the country to relay his pleas to their fellow veterans back home.

“You have to act fast,” he said. “You have until Sept. 30th to apply. That’s only a few weeks away. If it’s you, get your application in. If it’s your buddy, tell them to get their application in.”

Veterans who deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and other combat zones and left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1, 2013, can enroll in the federal health care option for the first time thanks to provisions included the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, better known as the PACT Act. But they only have until Sept. 30.

That looming deadline has led to this second public relations blitz on PACT Act benefits in less than a month, following a push from VA officials to get veterans to meet a mid-August deadline for retroactive disability payouts connected to the bill.

McDonough said department outreach efforts will increase as the deadline approaches.

“We’re already directly communicating to veterans,” he told Military Times. “I think we’ll hear more reaction from that in the coming weeks, and then we’re going to obviously crank up our communication more.”

The PACT Act is among the most sweeping veterans benefits legislation to be passed in recent decades, potentially affecting as many as one in five living veter-

ans in America today.

It includes expanded disability benefits for 12 types of cancer and 12 other respiratory illnesses linked to burn pit smoke exposure in the most recent wars, as well as hypertension for veterans who served in Vietnam and were exposed to the chemical defoliant Agent Orange.

Since the PACT Act was signed into law in August 2023, more than 344,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care. Officials did not have an estimate as to how many of those left the service before Oct. 1, 2013, or how many more could miss out on health care eligibility if they miss the upcoming deadline.

The health care eligibility options were added to the law to allow individuals whose combat zone injuries — particularly those burn pit illnesses — may not have developed in the first few years after individuals left the military. Some respiratory ailments lay dormant for years before veterans start showing symptoms.

Under the PACT Act bill, veterans are granted VA health care coverage for only 10 years following their separation from the military. In cases where individuals are found to have serious military-connected health issues, that coverage can be extended longer.

Lawmakers included in the legislation a provision to give additional time to veterans who left the service between 2001 and 2013 to ensure their potential medical issues were not ignored.

VA officials for years have emphasized the importance of veterans using free veterans medical benefits, both for cost-savings and because of the potential long-term health benefits.

Past studies have shown that veterans enrolled in VA health care are less likely to attempt suicide than their peers and more likely to get specialty care for a variety of military-related ailments.

[Read more, click here](#)



## Myth #1

### Drivers can multitask.



**THE GREAT MULTITASKING LIE**



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# Local Happenings

## SEPTEMBER

**8: Full Moon on Fifth** from 6-9 p.m. on 5th Street, between 22nd & 23rd Avenue, Meridian. Join Meridian Arts & Community Events Society for the Fall 2023 Full Moon on Fifth Series. Meridian's favorite block party returns with live music, food vendors, live painting and a rotating art gallery. For information, visit <https://www.acesmeridian.org/>.

**9: 5K Awareness Rally / Stronger Together** from 8 a.m.-noon in Downtown Meridian. Participate in a 5K Run, a 5K Walk, or a Kids Fun Run through beautiful Downtown Meridian. There will be vendors, live music and great food! Bring your whole family out and come support a good cause. Call 601-934-7119.

**11: 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb** from 5-9 p.m. at the Arts District Parking Garage, downtown Meridian. Participants will climb, walk, or run the equivalent of the 110 stories of the World Trade Center. Sign-up for this event at [Time2Run.net](https://www.time2run.net). Check-in will start at 5:00 p.m. on the day of the event. The Stair Climb will begin at 6:00 p.m. All ages and fitness levels are welcome. Call 601-703-3570.

# Area Happenings

## SEPTEMBER

**7: Gladys Knight** at 7 p.m. at the Orpheum Theatre, 203 S Main St. Memphis, TN. Visit <https://www.memphistravel.com/events/music/gladys-knight-live-concert>

**23: Oktoberfest** from 5-9 p.m. at the Birmingham Zoo. Guten Tag and Hallo! Join us for the Annual Birmingham Zoo Oktoberfest featuring seasonal autumn brews, live music, and German food favorites. Visit <https://www.birminghamzoo.com/event/oktoberfest-2023/>

**23: Latinfest** from 4-10 p.m. at Mississippi Agriculture & Forestry Museum, 1150 Lakeland Dr. Jackson, MS. Visit <https://allevents.in/jackson/%C2%A1latinfest-2023/200025004278604>

**27: Beyonce in Concert** at 7 p.m. at the Caesars Superdome Sugar Bowl Dr. New Orleans, LA. Visit <https://neworleanslocal.com/venue/caesars-superdome/>

## Military response in Hawaii has been quick

Right now, Joint Task Force 5-0 has about 572 personnel assigned and operating in Hawaii. The task force's mission is to support and augment the efforts of county, state and federal authorities in Hawaii to ensure the people of Maui receive necessary aid and assistance.

During a recent briefing, Army Col. David Fielder, who serves as the Joint Task Force 5-0 Title 10 deputy dual-status commander, said the military response there has been as quick as what's been called for.

"It may seem slow from the outside," he said. "But ... it's been going very quickly, as needed, as requested by the local and state [officials], who are ultimately in charge of the entire operation."

On the ground in Hawaii, Fielder said, there are National Guard, Reserve and active duty personnel who make up the task force. Also included in the task force are Army civilian personnel from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

Also, Fielder said, about 50 or more members of the U.S. Coast Guard are involved as well as more than 40 civilians from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

A team of Navy divers is also getting started in Maui, and they will help with salvage operations as well as looking for remains.

[Read more, click here](#)

## U.S. will train Ukrainian F-16 pilots, ground crews

The Defense Department will begin training Ukrainians to fly and maintain F-16 fighter jets in the coming months, Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said recently.

The training is expected to begin in October at the Morris Air National Guard Base in Tucson, Arizona, and will be facilitated by the Air National Guard's 162nd Wing.

The U.S.-led training is "in support of the international effort to develop and strengthen Ukraine's long-term defenses," Ryder said.

The Netherlands and Denmark have announced their intentions to make F-16 aircraft from their fleets available to Ukraine.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken signaled the United States' willingness to approve the third-party transfer of the U.S.-made F-16s to Ukraine in a letter to his European counterparts last week.

"The training provided by the United States will complement the F-16 pilot and maintenance training that's already underway in Europe and further deepens our support of the F-16 training coalition led by Denmark and the Netherlands," Ryder said. "Moving forward we will remain in close consultation with the Danes, the Dutch and other allies to ensure U.S. training complements the broader coalition training efforts."

-- By Joseph Clark, DOD News

[Read more, click here](#)

## Eight Marines remain hospitalized after Osprey crash

Eight U.S. Marines remained in a hospital in the Australian north coast city of Darwin on Monday after they were injured in a fiery crash of a tiltrotor aircraft that killed three of their colleagues on an island.

All 20 survivors were flown from Melville Island 50 miles south to Darwin, Australia, within hours of the Marine V-22 Osprey crashing at 9:30 a.m. Sunday during a multinational training exercise, Northern Territory Chief Minister Natasha Fyles said.

All were taken to the Royal Darwin Hospital, and 12 had been discharged by Monday, she said.

The first five Marines to arrive at the city's main hospital were critically injured — and one underwent emergency surgery.

Fyles said she would not detail the conditions of eight who remained in the hospital out of respect for them and their families.

"It's ... a credit to everyone involved that we were able to get 20 patients from an extremely remote location on an island into our tertiary hospital within a matter of hours," Fyles told reporters.

The Osprey that crashed was one of two that flew from Darwin to Melville on Sunday as part of Exercise Predators Run, which involves the militaries of the United States, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines and East Timor.

-- By Rod McGuirk, The Associated Press

[Read more, click here](#)

# Sale... Or

### BOATS/CAMPERS/TRAILERS

**New Price 21 foot - 2021 Jayco Travel Camper.** Like new; beige & walnut interior and mattress kept in original plastic. Selling to upgrade to larger size - Price is \$15,000 some accessories included. To view or request pics please contact: Gary 601-575-5062.

**2018 Mallard M185 Travel Trailer.** Sleeps 4 with 1 queen bed/2 bunks. Easy to tow at 3,575 lbs; only selling because military member is moving

overseas. Great living quarters with lake view. Hooked up and ready to live in, including cables, hoses, plus the \$500 towing kit. Asking \$17,000. Call 360-434-3035.

### AUTOMOBILES, ETC.

**2018 Subaru Outback 2.5 limited,** 12k miles; Subaru safety features and warranties included. Asking \$29k. Call 601-480-5100.

**2017 Dodge Challenger,** grey with racing stripe. \$24k. Call 601-880-3237.

### HOMES/APARTMENTS

**For Rent:** 3 BD/1.5 BA with another room used as a gym. All kitchen appliances included. Large backyard. Address 145 Skyland Drive, Meridian. About 25 minutes to Navy Base. \$900 per month, with \$900 deposit. Available Aug. 1. No pets. Call 601-490-0849

**For Rent:** 3BD/2BD home near Causeyville Road. Furnished in quiet neighborhood. \$900 per month. 954-895-5485, 601-692-4048 or 606-571-0820.

**For Rent:** Water front home in Dalewood. Spa-

cious two-story home facing the Lake; great for fishing and relaxing. Remodeled kitchen and new appliances. Rent is \$2,000; please call 813-406-9687.

**For Sale:** 3BD/2BA Home with 2,560 sq. ft. Sits on 1 & 1/2 lots on dead end with privacy woods on 3 sides. Asking \$180,000. Contact: lucindawnichols@gmail.com, call 601-527-7829 or 601-917-6145.

**For Rent:** 2BD/1.5BA Home at 3702 Rollins Dr, Lauderdale in Dalewood. 2136 sq ft on a .29 acres

lot. Beautiful newly renovated single family home. Call 973-876-5006.

**For Rent:** 2BD/1.5BA single family home in Dalewood - fully renovated. Fenced in back yard with boat slip & pier. Pets allowed. Pet deposit \$300. \$1,300 rent per month. Call 973-876-5006.

**For Sale By Owner:** 3BD/3BA brick home with sunroom, large fenced in yard. Convenient to shopping and base. \$139K. Call 601-513-3395 or 601-227-1870.

### MISCELLANEOUS

**Event Space for Rent:** Deer Creek Banquet Hall. 6000 sq. ft. indoor with

1600 sq. ft. outdoor spaces for rent for gatherings and events. Call Reginald at 251-455-1559.

**Service for hire:** Dixie Lawn LLC, lawn care in Meridian. Call 850-376-4499. Military owned company.

To submit an item to the "Sale...Or" column, email [adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil](mailto:adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil). Deadline is the Wednesday prior to publication.

Listings in the "Sale...Or" column are free for anyone who works at NAS Meridian. To include your announcement, email [adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil](mailto:adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil)

# Hurricane Idalia makes landfall on Florida's west coast

By Daniel Kozin  
Associated Press

Hurricane Idalia made landfall on Florida's west coast as a dangerous Category 3 storm on Wednesday and was unleashing life-threatening storm surges and rainfall in an area not accustomed to such pummeling.

Idalia came ashore in the lightly populated Big Bend region, where the Florida Panhandle curves into the peninsula. It made landfall near Keaton Beach at 7:45 a.m. as a high-end Category 3 hurricane with maximum sustained winds near 125 mph (205 kph). And the storm brought flooding to the streets of Tampa and other communities.

Florida residents living in vulnerable coastal areas were ordered to pack up and leave as Idalia gained strength in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. And those who didn't were warned to find a safe place while the storm moves through.

"Don't put your life at risk by doing anything dumb at this point," Gov. Ron DeSantis said at a news conference Wednesday morning. "This thing's powerful. If you're inside, just hunker down until it gets past you."

Storm surge could rise as high as 15 feet (4.5 meters) in some places.

Diane Flowers was sound asleep at 1 a.m. Wednesday in her Wakulla County home while her husband watched the weather on TV. When the storm was upgraded to a Category 4, they received a text from their son, a firefighter/EMT in Franklin County, which is also along the Gulf Coast.

"He said, 'You guys need to leave,'" Flowers said. "And he's not one for overreacting, so when he told us to leave, we just packed our stuff, got in our car and got going."

They quickly packed a few clothes, their medicine, dog food for their two border collies, a computer, important documents and a bag of Cheetos and went searching for a place to stay, and ended up in Dothan, Alabama.

The National Weather Service in Tallahassee called Idalia "an unprecedented event" since no major hurricanes on record have ever passed through the bay abutting the Big Bend. The state, still dealing with lingering damage from last year's Hurricane Ian, feared disastrous results.

But not everyone was heeding the warning to leave. Andy Bair, owner of the Island Hotel on Cedar Key,

said he intended to "baby sit" his bed-and-breakfast, which predates the Civil War. The building has not flooded in the almost 20 years he has owned it, not even when Hurricane Hermine flooded the city in 2016.

"Being a caretaker of the oldest building in Cedar Key, I just feel kind of like I need to be here," Bair said. "We've proven time and again that we're not going to wash away. We may be a little uncomfortable for a couple of days, but we'll be OK eventually."

Idalia had grown into a Category 2 system on Tuesday afternoon and became a Category 3 just hours earlier Wednesday before strengthening to a Category 4 and then weakening slightly to a high-end Category 3. The National Weather Service in Tallahassee called Idalia "an unprecedented event" since no major hurricanes on record have ever passed through the bay abutting the Big Bend.

Hurricanes are measured on a five category scale, with a Category 5 being the strongest. A Category 3 storm is the first on the scale considered a major hurricane and the National Hurricane Center says a Category 4 storm brings "catastrophic damage."

[Read more, click here](#)

## U.S. Navy, University of Southern Mississippi Hydrography Program thrives

by Van Arnold

USM External relations, coastal operations

The University of Southern Mississippi's (USM) esteemed Hydrographic Science program has produced another diverse and talented group of graduates who were honored during a Class of 2023 recognition ceremony held August 1 on the University's Gulf Park campus in Long Beach, Miss.

This year, 15 students graduated from the M.S. in Hydrographic Science, the Joint International Hydrographic Applied Science Program – a cooperation between the U.S. Navy, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command, and USM. Three others graduated from the University's B.S. program in Marine Science, with an emphasis in Hydrographic Science.

USM is one of only three universities in North America providing a pathway to a certificate of completion of competence of a Cat-

egory-A program recognized by the International Board on Standards for Competence for Hydrographic Surveyors and Nautical Cartographers (IBSC). The B.S. in Marine Science, with emphasis in Hydrographic Science, is the only program in North America leading to a certificate of completion of competence of a Category-B program recognized by IBSC.

Since the program's debut in 2000, USM has graduated 255 students, including 66 international students from 36 different countries. Dr. Stephan Howden, who serves at the Hydrographic Science Program Director, applauds this year's graduates for their commitment to the curriculum.

"This class of graduates has done a remarkable job in their coursework and conducting hydrographic surveys that utilize both traditional survey vessels and uncrewed survey vessels," said Howden.

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## Becoming a writer: My creative process, and other myths

Sixteen years ago, I had a eureka. Military life, overseas tours, deployments and raising three children had rendered my legal career not only stale, but practically impossible. I worried that I'd never earn income again.

However, when a relative commented on how funny my annual Christmas letters were, it came to me in a flash of genius. "I'll become a writer!" I thought, envisioning myself happily tapping away at our

home computer (back then, a behemoth, dust-gathering Dell), earning a tidy second income along with international prestige while the children played in the yard and pot roast simmered in the oven. Writing was the perfect work-from-home military-spouse career!

I had no clue how to be a writer, much less a paid writer. But ignorance is stupidity masquerading as bliss, so I started immediately, writing humor-

ous commentary from our powder-blue Formica kitchen desk.

It took two years to get columns published. Another year to learn blogging. Two more years to get paid for columns. Three more years to land a decent column contract. And four more years to publish a book.

My plan to become a legitimate writer took more than a decade to implement, and even then, I hardly earned enough money to break even on printer ink.

Throughout this endeavor, friends, family and readers have often asked me, "What's your creative process?"

They expect me to describe being ensconced in an Irish sweater and vintage Levis, sitting before a classic Smith Corona typewriter with a sticky "e," in a charming shed-turned-writer's-retreat adorned with flower-filled window boxes, sipping Earl Gray tea while channeling Hemingway, Austen, Dickens and Dostoevsky.

Instead, I admit the reality of my writing process: I've scribbled most of my column ideas willy nilly on crumpled receipts, torn envelopes, or my hand, while driving to piano lessons or sitting in orthodontists' offices. I've never had a writer's retreat, or vintage Levis that actually fit. When I write, I procrastinate by searching Etsy, watch-

ing dumpster diving hauls on Reels, balancing my checkbook, painting my nails, or doing anything else BUT write.

Through writers' groups, I've known other writers who proclaim, "I write, therefore I am." Or, "I live to write, I write to live." They portray themselves as artistic scribes, burdened by their gift with words. Their inspirations fuel their innate drive to put pen to paper, else they shrivel and die without their "craft."

I still have a lot to learn, but one thing I know for certain: Writers who say those things don't have a weekly deadline.

Don't get me wrong, I love writing. No matter how many people read my work, I find great satisfaction in seeing my work in print.

That being said, there are days when I'd rather chew my own arm off than muster the brainpower required to write my column. Writing on a weekly deadline is hard work that hurts. Seriously, I've felt actual, physical pain while trying to write.

Occasionally, my friends and family offer to help. "I've got your next column!" they'll say, and bestow their brilliant cultural observations on me like precious gifts. What these well-intentioned people fail to understand

is that ideas come easy. But when I'm required to extrapolate an idea out into a well-written piece with a compelling story arc and a logical conclusion before my Thursday deadline, my brain bleeds.

Syndicated humor columnist, Erma Bombeck, — who wrote three times a week for 31 years, the last written five days before her death — referred to her creative process as "giving birth to 450 words." Other than there being no stitches, stretch marks, sagging breasts, or 18 years of parental responsibilities involved, Erma's description is spot on.

Just as a person who touches a hot oven will flinch, my brain recoils from deadline writing, and steers my subconscious toward soothingly menial tasks like cleaning the dryer lint trap. It's simple human nature.

It took me sixteen years to learn how to write columns each week. I have no lofty creative process. It's real work, and it hurts. But when the task is done, and the blood is all mopped up, the feeling of accomplishment makes it worth the pain.

Lisa Smith Molinari's self syndicated columns appear on her blog, [www.themeatandpotatoesofflife.com](http://www.themeatandpotatoesofflife.com) and she recently co-authored *Stories Around the Table: Laughter, Wisdom, and Strength in Military Life Follow Lisa@MolinariWrites*.

### COLUMN



Molinari



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