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Naples Hilton hosts state book conclave Local author wins major prize at publishing conference

By Philip K. Jason

Naples resident Richard Ballo received the "President's Pick" award at the Florida Publishers Association's Book Awards Luncheon August 19 at the Hilton Naples.

Ballo's book, *Life Without Lisa*, recounts the author's highly personal journey from the time of his wife's death from cancer through the five years that followed. The book, based on a journal that the grieving husband kept during this period, shares with the reader the several phases of the grieving and recovery process. The appeal of the book is that this important information is not couched in medical jargon. It is not a clinical case history, but rather a nakedly honest story of what it's like to be a widower with two young sons to raise.



The winners of this year's FPA awards pose with their plaques after the luncheon at the Naples Hilton.

One feature of Ballo's story has to do with learning about the grief support classes offered by local hospices. The meetings that he and his sons attend nourish their transition to emotional balance and growth.

Richard Ballo, who has been a professional writer since 1980, received a degree in Journalism from Suffolk University in Boston in 1986. When he married Lisa, he was working as a technical writer, but he became a stay-at-home dad after his boys were born, maintaining his journalistic career by doing feature stories for a local paper in central Massachusetts. When Lisa's rampaging cancer and seemingly sudden death overwhelmed him, he had to learn how to embrace each day one at a time and build a future for himself and his family.

In presenting the award, FPA President Frank Gromling said, "I believe in the goodness of this book, in its ability to help people in significant ways." He adds, the book "made me feel like I was experiencing everything with the author."

Ballo was not expecting the award. After receiving it, he was "walking on clouds, totally surprised that they picked my book." The award, Richard realizes, will have many benefits with regard to marketing the book and thus spreading its message so that "more people can help themselves and their family and friends."

Life Without Lisa is published by Quality of Life Publishing, a Naples company focused on educating the public and health professionals about hospice care and other vehicles for dealing with terminal illness and loss.

The Awards Luncheon was part of the FPA 2006 Ed-U-Conference at which members and visitors attended presentations geared to help them generate book sales. Among the Neapolitans attending the

conference was children's book author Joan J. Curley, who used the occasion to exhibit her book *Hi! My Name Is Keiko*. This book, subtitled *A Glance at Japan*, is aimed at children grades K-5. Michelle Weston, who has a novel forthcoming in December from ArcheBooks Publishing, was also on hand. Many other authors and publishers listened, learned and exhibited their books.

The FPA awarded prizes in several other categories. Best Children's Nonfiction went to Donna Rathmell's *Carolina's Story*, published by Sylvan Dell Publishing. The Best Children's Fiction award went to Marlin L. Houser's *Generations, The Adventures of Little Fox*. This book is published by Marhouse, Inc. For Best Young Adult Nonfiction, the award was presented to *Teens Are Heroes, Too*, by Vera Ripp Hirschhorn and published by America's Young Heroes Publishing, Inc. The Best Adult Nonfiction winner was Dianna Podmoroff's *501+ Great Questions for Employers and The Best Answers for Prospective Employees* from Atlantic Publishing Group. The Best Adult Fiction winner was *Sand Mansions* by William Gilliland, published by Nemo Productions.

Other awards were given for Best Cover Design - *How to Open a Financially Successful Coffee, Espresso, & Tea Shop* published by Atlantic Publishing Company, and Best Interior Design - John Drury's *Awaken Your Soul* published by Fully Alive 360, Inc. The Best Florida Book - Nonfiction award went to Joe Marlin Hilliard's *The Ranch*, Hilliard Brothers of Florida, published by Hilliard Brothers of Florida in conjunction with the Florida Literacy Library, while the Best Florida Book - Fiction award went to Lowell Teal's *Bath Pond*, published by Oakhill Press. *Salsa Talks!* by Mary Kent, published by Digital Domain, was named Best Coffee Table Book.

All these prizewinners can now wear President's Book Awards gold foil labels on their book covers, giving them prominence on the display tables of book stores and other sales venues.

For more information on the Florida Publishers Association, see the website www.flbookpub.org.