

A writer's memoirs are something very personal and yet, rather ironically, they are available for the world to see.

Darrell Bain's World of Books

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# **Darrell Bain's World of Books**

The Autobiography of Darrell Bain,  
an icon of the electronic book industry.

**Darrell Bain's World of Books**

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Twilight Times Books  
P O Box 3340  
Kingsport TN 37664  
<http://twilighttimesbooks.com/>

Credits

Book cover design ~ Lida E. Quillen  
Photo Credit ~ Mary Nicklow  
Managing Editor ~ Ardy M. Scott  
Publisher ~ Lida E. Quillen

Published in the United States of America.

*Dedication*

*To Piers Anthony for his  
continuing and highly praised efforts  
to promote the e-book industry.*

## Introduction

Darrell Bain's e-books have been perennial best sellers since their introduction into the young market. He has been a finalist many times for the Eppie Awards, and in 2007 he won *two* of them. They are the most prestigious of the E-book awards recognizing the best writing in the field. He has written about three dozen novels or non-fiction works, and more than that number of short stories, in almost every possible genre, including humor, mystery, thrillers, science fiction, and children's literature. His most notable books are *The Sex Gates*, *Alien Infection*, *The Williard Brothers* action/adventure series, *Strange Valley*, *The Melanin Apocalypse*, *Warp Point*, *Space Trails*, *Doggie Biscuit*, and *Life On Santa Claus Lane* and the other humorous books around the adventures of Bain and his wife while running a Christmas tree farm, all of which have proven to be very popular. Bain was named 2005 Fictionwise Author of the Year, with such notables as Anne McCaffrey and Lois McMaster Bujold as runners-up. He has been a finalist twice for the Dream Realm Award, given for best science fiction e-book of the year.

Almost all print fiction published nowadays has an accompanying e-book edition. These include most of the New York Times best selling authors, such as Stephen King, Douglas Adams, Michael Connelly, Anne McCaffrey, John Patterson, Dave Barry, Lois McMasters Bujold, Kurt Vonnegut, Jane Toombs, etc. Bain's books have competed with and in most cases outsold all these and many other best selling authors year after year in the e-book industry.

Most of his books are now available in print as well as e-books, but he says that he will always have a place in his heart for e-books, and will continue to publish in both venues because that's where he earned his large following and his many fans, some who have become personal friends.

He is currently working on a number of projects, including a collaboration with Travis S. Taylor, a very popular science fiction author, editing and annotating his very popular newsletters into the first of annual books, continuing to write the monthly newsletters (published every month on his web site, [www.darrellbain.com](http://www.darrellbain.com)), a biography of his and Betty's addled, ADHD affected little dachshund, a couple of short stories, an outline of another book and perhaps a series, making notes for the sixth book in his Williard Brothers humor/action/adventure/suspense series, keeping up with fan mail, and then there are always edits to go over, like he's doing with this book right now.

Darrell Bain's monthly newsletter has proven extremely popular, helping to increase the number of monthly hits at his web site from a few hundred a month to nearly ten thousand a month. The newsletter covers an array of subjects, most of them having little to do with writing. As he says, "I make notes during the month on anything that strikes my fancy and many of the subjects wind up in my newsletter." The newsletter is published at his website [www.darrellbain.com](http://www.darrellbain.com). It led to readers asking about his life and this in turn led to a series of installments on his website about his life, from childhood on. Interest in Bain's memoirs was so great that his publisher offered him a contract for an expanded version, to be published in book form. This is the version you are presently reading.

## Prologue

I may have been born to write, but if so, I took the long way around. Perhaps if I had been raised in a different environment I would have done better, earlier, but I don't like playing the 'what if?' question. I might have been in the World Trade Center building on 9/11 signing a big contract if things had been different and now I'd be dead. See? You have to take it as it comes. The only good looking back can do is keep you from making the same mistake twice. I can't even say I managed that much. What I did do is to finally become a writer, something I had wanted to do from a very early age. The fact that this autobiography is even being published is proof that I didn't do all that bad.

A writer's memoirs are something very personal and yet, rather ironically, they are put out there for the world to see. My own memoirs started when I began getting requests from fans for more information about me and my writing.

Originally, I intended to produce a biography of no great length, but as I began writing, old memories, many buried since childhood, were stirred and came to the surface. Before I quite knew what was happening, the "biography" turned into a full length memoir, written in installments and published on my website, [www.darrellbain.com](http://www.darrellbain.com)

Eventually, one of my publishers asked about turning the memoirs into an e-book. I agreed, with the provision that they would be greatly expanded. Why? Well, as I was writing about my life, more and more things came to mind that I had overlooked in the time period covered by previous installments. These couldn't be conveniently incorporated into the memoirs as they were then written, and consequently got left out completely. Also, as I was writing, my wife Betty and I became involved in a major project, re-modeling the office.

Doing an office over doesn't sound like much work, but bear in mind that our office was originally a two-car garage and you'll get an idea of what we went through. I won't regale you with details but I will reveal a major happening while this went on. We discovered a lot of old papers and manuscripts which we thought had been lost years and years ago. These included some stories I had written, some of which I was able to use after extensive editing. They were published at [www.fictionwise.com](http://www.fictionwise.com) and [www.ereader.com](http://www.ereader.com) under the title *A Steel Trap Mind and Other Vignettes*.

We also found a number of manuscripts and letters Betty had handwritten. Some were from the time we lived in Saudi Arabia, shortly

after we were married, and others were from a later period when she was working as a Home Health Nurse. These were also published – under her name, of course, Betty Bain – at the same electronic book stores where my own work appears regularly, [www.fictionwise.com](http://www.fictionwise.com) and [www.ereader.com](http://www.ereader.com)

And lastly, I found a hundred-page diary I wrote while in Saudi Arabia, as well as bundles and bundles of letters I had written to my mother and stepfather, some from as far back as the late 50s, but most from around 1980 when we moved out to "The Farm" and built our home, continuing until the early 90s. The letters revived many other memories. Some of this material will be included in this expanded edition of my original memoirs.

There's only one way to go about this now, and that's to start from the first original installment and begin the revisions and additional material, both from revived memories and from the old letters and diary.

I must say that the experience of writing memoirs is something I can recommend to anyone capable of typing or holding a pencil, if for no other reason than that future generations will enjoy them. One of my granddaughters followed the original installments of my memoirs avidly, always nudging me to hurry and do the next one. My stepchildren learned a lot about me. Not that I had tried to be secretive, but some things simply hadn't come up in the course of conversations and visits. And of course my own two sons learned a lot about their dad they hadn't known. Some of it isn't very complimentary but other parts show my better side, I believe. In fact, the whole story of my life, as is true for most other people, is a mix of the good, the indifferent and the bad, with all of them going into helping a person grow and change, and hopefully, improve their life and attitudes.

For me, there were two really defining moments in my life. One occurred when I was 13 years old and involved what is almost certainly the bravest thing I ever did. The other is when I met my present wife, Betty. You'll read about both of these events in the course of these memoirs, as well as many other events, some quite common but others much different from middle class American life as we know it today.

And finally, just as my fans and readers requested, I'll relate the events and parts of my life that shaped me into the writer I am today. Every writer takes a different path toward the goal of becoming a published author. I certainly did. Whether I've made much of a success of it or not is for the readers themselves to judge. I just write; I don't try to figure out why any more than most writers do. We write because something within us compels us to put words on paper and hope they're published.



Writing is a peculiar profession. Part of what makes it that way is that the supply of written material is way, way more than the demand for it. Inevitably, that leaves many writers either unpublished or forced to publish their own work at their own expense. "Vanity publishing," as it's called. I've done some of that but eventually my work began to sell on its own merits. Perhaps because I persisted. Most successful authors say that the only way to become an accomplished author is to write. And write. And write...

I hope readers will find at least parts of these memoirs interesting. The South, in the 50s through the 70s, along with my time in the military, and my final marriage to my wife Betty, were particularly formative periods of my life. There's some good and some bad. I don't promise to completely bare my soul, but what I do write will be as true as memory serves.

Sidebar on memory: As psychologists and scientists delve deeper and deeper into our brains and minds and discover more and more about the way we process information, some interesting facts have come to light. Our memories aren't nearly as accurate as we think they are. Our brains are wired to "fill in" what it thinks should be in our memories, much as we "fill in" words when reading by seeing what we think should be there. I'm sure you've heard of how unreliable eyewitness accounts are. That's because our minds don't work the way we think they do. We constantly revise and edit our memories. I've listened to some people I know describe events in ways that are pretty far removed from the way I remember them, yet I saw no evidence of deliberate deception on their part. It was simply that they "remembered" the event differently than I did. People will fill in facts and figures when they aren't certain; they will add or subtract colors and words and clothing and myriad other items when relating their descriptions of events or people.

All this is my way of saying that my memories may not be exact. I shall do my best to be as accurate as I can, but memories from childhood, especially young childhood, are apt to vary from the literal truth. Also, memories from our very youngest days are badly fragmented, like a film a mad editor has cut to pieces, leaving more blanks than clips, then tossed into the air and mixed and randomized. And as we get into our later years, say from ten years old and up, our memories are still just fragments of all that has taken place in our lives. What we best remember are those events with emotional overtones—but they are also the memories most likely to be distorted.

One more caveat: our memories from when we were very young are not only badly fragmented, but we probably remember things in no

particular order. Children aren't nearly so aware of time, in a linear fashion, like we are as adults.

Now, having explained my reservations, and rambled along explaining what I hope to accomplish here, I guess we can get on with the stories, which is what our memories are; a series of stories which make up our lives.

## Part One

### *The Little House in Shreveport*

**This opening segment covers my very earliest memories, but not necessarily in a linear progression. In many cases I don't remember which episode came before another or what happened when; I simply have memories of the events. This period is from the time of my birth up until I was about four years old, and includes some letters from my Uncle T.C. Masters and excerpts from a very short family history written by my mother shortly before she died.**

I was born in Shreveport, Louisiana way back in 1939. Has it really been that long? It doesn't seem possible, but of course it is. Time is a funny thing. No matter how old you are, all your past life seems to have passed in the merest instant. In that sense, we're all the same age.

My first memories are from the time we lived in a little white house in Shreveport, in no particular order. I can't possibly sort them out into a timetable.

My parents were poor but honest, no cliché. Real poor, due more to my father's habits of drinking and gambling than anything else.

I can remember that small home in Shreveport very clearly. It was near the railroad marshalling yard. We lived on sort of a knoll so we could look down into the yards. Dad worked there and was able to walk to work. I don't remember if the house was part of a subdivision or not, or even whether there was such a thing back then, although I'm pretty sure there was.

Thinking back, I get the horrors picturing me as a child of no more than three or possibly four, when I frequently lit the gas heater in the living room on cold mornings while Mother and Dad were still asleep. (Even then, I was an early bird—and just recently read an article describing the "early bird" gene, possessed by approximately 0.2% of the population. I've always gotten up and gone to bed about four hours earlier than other people outside the family, but within the family, most of us have the early gene). I even remember being dressed in nothing but a pair of underwear shorts. Why they allowed the very dangerous practice of letting such young children light the stoves in the morning is a mystery to me. Maybe kids were expected to light the stove back then. I simply don't know, but it would certainly come back to haunt both me and my parents just a few years later.

I remember my two favorite cousins, Larry and Jerry, coming to visit one year, along with their parents. That was also the first time I saw Dad

gamble. He and my two uncles shot dice in the living room one day. I can still see the piles of dollar bills and quarters and half dollars. Considering that this was way back during WWII in the early 40s, that was a pretty fair amount of money.

Rationing was in effect, though I didn't know it. One morning there was no coffee. Dad got annoyed and picked the previous day's coffee grounds out of the kitchen trash to make some. I told Mother about the incident later in life and she swears it couldn't have happened, but I remember it clearly.

I was fascinated with the way Mother mixed the yellow color into the blocks of pale white stuff to get something that looked like butter. It wasn't butter, of course, just margarine. That's how margarine came back then. A package of yellow color and a block of vegetable oil, or whatever it was made of. It was mixed by squishing the ingredients together by hand until they were well blended, then putting into a wooden mold and shaped into a mound with little decorative curly cues on it.

I think Mother was very happy during the year or so we lived in that little house. She grew up during the Great Depression when times were very hard. I don't remember my first years, of course, but I do have letters from an uncle and a very abbreviated family history written by my mother late in her life.

I'll produce a few excerpts from Mother's history here, even though I don't remember it, to give a little flavor to what I'll be writing about later.

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*It was quite an awakening after I married. I couldn't quite believe we wouldn't get a check every month, like my dad, a WW One veteran, did. I soon learned, though. Actually, after I realized just how things were, I was fine. Wages then on a farm were from 75 cents to a dollar a day, sunup to sundown. We had enough money to buy flour, meal, sugar, coffee, etc. Somehow we acquired a cow (probably Papa gave it to us), then we had milk and butter, and fish when the men couldn't work, squirrels in winter, etc.*

*We finally moved to Louisiana and lived on farms for a while, then part of the time we lived in Shreveport. Your dad began working on the railroad then but for some reason we lived on a farm and he worked in town.*

*The farm was a new experience for me, having to milk cows, feed hogs, raise chickens, make a garden—all things I had never done before. Farm life was fine except for the cows, horses and SNAKES! I was scared to death of them. I just wasn't cut out for farm life. It was a good place for*

*children, though. I was really happy, believe it or not. We'd go fishing on the bayou; that was fun.*

*We moved to Stonewall, Louisiana before Darrell was born. Lester worked on a dairy farm. From there we moved to Keithville and worked on the dairy farm. We lived in what had been a field hand's house, then a chicken house. IT WAS WELL SCRUBBED BEFORE WE MOVED IN!*

*We moved to Shreveport and stayed a year or so and then back to the farm. From there we moved to Keithville again, and that's when things went wrong.*

I'll write more about farm life later on and how things went wrong from my perspective rather than Mother's. For now I'll continue for a moment with Mother's memoirs. She wrote a little about each of us kids. Here's what she wrote about me.

*Darrell was the first of the children to be born in a hospital, the old Charity Hospital that's no longer here.*

*Of course we were so proud of a son, the first after two daughters, so he was nicknamed "Son." He, of course, was a beautiful baby even if he did have hair all over him (like a monkey). Thank goodness that didn't last long!*

*He always had a good imagination. Kids back then didn't have many toys and they learned to amuse themselves. Darrell would go out to play and come back in and tell me he'd been playing with his (imaginary) friend "Semer" and they had a little blue alligator that played with them. Semer and the alligator stayed with him until he started school, then he found other friends.*

*One thing I remember about him is when we all went to the bayou fishing. Lester went on up the bayou and left me with the kids. We were having a good time until Darrell fell in the bayou. It was deep and I started screaming and thinking I'd jump in and get him when he came up and grabbed some roots along the bank and we pulled him out. He had mud all over him. His face was freckled with it. The first thing he said was, "Boy, that was fun!" I felt like pushing him back in! Ha!*

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Mother and Dad lived in a one room log cabin up in Arkansas when they first married, and they moved around a lot for several years. My two older sisters were born during that time. Dad made 50 cents a day, when he could find work. He spent two years in prison for making moonshine to earn money back before he and Mother married. He probably wouldn't have gotten more than a fine or a couple of days in jail ordinarily, but he

shot one of the revenuers in the leg when they found the still. Anyway, after the hardscrabble existence, I'm sure that little white house with a bathroom, running water, electricity and gas heat must have seemed like heaven to Mother, especially with her having four young kids, two of them not yet potty trained, and disposable diapers not even on the horizon.

I don't know what brought Mother and Dad to Shreveport, but I think it must have been the impending war and the availability of work in a "big city." It was large compared to the little town of Mena in western Arkansas where they had been born and lived, for sure. He got a job with the railroad as a brakeman.

I was born in 1939, the first of the kids to call Louisiana their native state. My two younger brothers were born while we lived by the railroad yards, as well as another sister who died shortly after birth from a heart defect, one which is easily cured these days. So at the time we left there, I had two older sisters and two younger brothers (though now that I think about it, my youngest brother may have been born right after we moved from there).

My first dream (or the first I remember) occurred in that little house. I dreamed we had gone to Arkansas to see Grandma. I was bitterly disappointed when I woke up and discovered it was only a dream. I think kids love their grandparents so much because they are always cheerful and indulgent. Not having to put up with the kids 24 hours a day, every day, makes a difference, as we know now!

I was forced to take naps during most of the time we lived by the railroad yards. I remember one day when the sun was shining brightly, creating numerous sunbeams peeking through the bedroom curtains, and Mother put me to bed. I lay there thinking, I'm a big boy. I shouldn't have to take naps. It's all sunshiny outside. Why do I have to take a nap? I think I went to sleep right afterward.

One day Dad took me with him down to the railroad yards. He was a brakeman, but knew all the engineers. He got one of them to give me a ride, just me and the engineer up in that cab that seemed to be a hundred feet off the ground. The engineer blew the horn, the long wailing sound of the coal burning engine. I was in heaven, certain that no other boy in the world had ever gotten to ride in a real steam engine. The engineer even tried to let me wear his hat with the white ticking, but of course it was a little too large.

There was probably more than one trip to Arkansas to see all the relatives up there, but I only remember one which was taken from the little house. We rode a passenger train for hours and hours. The seats

were like little loveseats facing each other, always colored a dirty green, it seemed. Perhaps that was to conceal the inevitable stains and dirt they accumulated from constant use. We rode past long rows of cotton fields where I could see Negroes out picking the white cotton bolls, dragging their sacks behind under the hot summer sun. Little puffs of dust would rise from around each one as he or she moved the bags a few feet farther up the row. We could see mountains in the distance, blue and far away, and then suddenly we were in them, with high slate ridges above and below, and trees, pine and sweet gum and oak, growing almost sideways at times. And just like on a car trip with kids today, we kept asking Mother and Dad, "Are we almost there now?"

It was for grandmas and grandpas that I loved to go to Arkansas. One set of grandparents lived up in the mountains on a farm. There were cows and horses and pigs and chickens. The hogs were in big pens. When I went to examine them from a closer viewpoint, grandma grabbed me and pulled me back several steps from the pen. "Hogs are dangerous," she told me. To prove it, she pulled her long dress up above her ankles and showed me the terrible scars on one of her legs where she had fallen into the pen one day while feeding them. Hungry pigs make no distinction between humans and any other kind of food. All my uncles on my Dad's side of the family hunted and fished constantly. It was a fascinating experience for a little boy, and grandma made the most delicious pies and cakes!

The other set of grandparents lived in the little town of Mena, except I never knew Granddad Masters. He died of tuberculosis before I was born. I feel like I knew him, though. Mother always said I took after him. He had a wanderlust, the itchy feet that are both a plague and a blessing for me and my brothers. All of us inherited them. Granddad also tried to write. When he couldn't get published, he bought a printing press and published his own work. I would give a pretty penny to see some of his writing now but it had vanished by the time I was old enough to want to read it. He taught himself taxidermy. All of us kids were fascinated when we visited Grandma and went upstairs and admired the big bobcat he had killed and mounted. Curiously, the bobcat grew smaller as we grew older! Granddad painted some and worked in various fields, never satisfied, and by all accounts was a man out of place, never finding whatever it was he searched for. He died in his 40s after battling TB for years.

Grandmother heated the house with a coal burning stove. It was the first time I ever saw coal burning. It fascinated me. I could hardly wait each morning to see her start a fire with what looked like black rocks. The only other heat was from the kitchen stove and a couple of little gas burners in other parts of the house. In later years, my brother Gary and I

and my oldest sister, Snooky, would live with Grandma in the same house for a while and go to school right down the hill.

In that little town in Arkansas, I loved to play with my cousins, Larry and Jerry. We were all three the same age. And of course my next youngest brother, Gary, always tagged along. I was tasked with "watching" him. I doubt I did a very good job, because the best I remember, I was just aggravated that he was always around when I wanted to talk and play with Larry and Jerry. On the other hand, we had fun when we were alone together, and sometimes we three let him play with us.

That's about all I remember from that part of my life. When I was four years old, we moved to a place about ten miles from Shreveport, onto a dairy farm near a very small town named Keithville. I didn't know it at the time, but Mother was bitterly against the move. She wanted nothing more to do with farms after living with amenities like inside plumbing and electricity. Of course, she had nothing to say about it. Back then, men made the decisions.

The next excerpt will begin with life on the farm. It will probably take a good number of pages to cover that part of my life even though it only lasted a few years.

Before that, though, I'd like to reproduce a letter sent to me by my uncle after he started reading the memoirs. I really had no idea of how hard times were back in the 30s and early 40s until reading Mother's little history and my uncle's letters.

Some of your earlier stories reminded me of when Helen and I lived on the dairy farm for awhile. I remember John Miller along with his wife and two daughters lived in the big (main) house. Lester and Dorothy and you children lived in the smaller house behind the big one and closer to the dairy barn. Helen and I lived in a shack (a real shack with cracks in the floor and walls) up the road about two hundred yards from the Miller house. We moved there in the spring of 1939 to work on the dairy and make a crop. I got paid \$10 per month for helping milk about 25 or more cows twice a day. That job started at four o'clock each morning and finished about three hours later. The afternoon part began at 4:30 and lasted another three hours. My hands were swollen and painfully stiff during the first few days of milking an average of 18 cows twice a day. Lester milked his part right along with me and then he had to haul the milk we strained into five-gallon cans out to a pick-up depot several miles from the dairy. I spent the rest of the daylight hours working in the fields. I was doing what was called sharecropping. In other



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