

The Challenges of Writing Historical Fiction (Part 2) by Author Ronald E. Yates

When I was signing copies of my Finding Billy Battles trilogy at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books recently, I was asked several times how I conduct research when writing historical fiction.

I explained that researching the first book in the Finding Billy Battles trilogy began with my memories. I grew up in Kansas listening to the way my great-grandparents, my grandparents, and my parents spoke. Everybody in my family grew up in Kansas, so it is no stretch to say that I was immersed in "Kansas-speak" from an early age.

Nevertheless, even though I grew up in Kansas and I know the places where my characters live and work very well, I didn't know what those places were like between 1878 and 1894--the time span in which the first book in the Finding Billy Battles trilogy takes place. So, I had to do significant research, and I am glad I did. It helped me write a book that I believe is historically accurate.

Luckily, I was able to do a lot of research online. I spent a lot of time mining the website of the Kansas Historical Society as well as the Ford County and Douglas County Historical Societies. There were many other places I found useful information of the period, including the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.

I followed the same procedure while writing The Improbable Journeys of Billy Battles (Book 2 in the series). In that book, Billy Battles travels to the Orient of the 1890s. It was a time when much of Asia was under the thumb of mostly European powers who saw the region as one vast colony. The British were in Malaya, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The Dutch were in Indonesia and assorted islands. The French were Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—French Indochina. And the Americans were about to colonize the Philippines.

The fact that I lived and worked in Asia for some 17 years as a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune was a great help in describing the countries to which Billy travels. Of course, I was not there in the 1890s, so that meant I had to do a lot of digging.

However, I am a relentless researcher. That comes from my years as a journalist. I learned how important accuracy is to the credibility of a journalist and the news organization for which he or she works. Your stories MUST be accurate in every detail, otherwise the story, you and the company that employs you lose credibility.

Similarly, I believe authors who write historical fiction owe it to their readers to be accurate about the time and place into which they have put their characters. That means you MUST do proper research. You cannot rely on watching a movie about Bleeding Kansas in the 1850s and 1860s and then write a book based on how that film depicted the time, the places and the events.

As I mentioned, you can do a lot of that research on line, but NOT all of it. Libraries are still the best places to find the kind of books that will tell you what a place looked and sounded like in the 1890s. Luckily for me, I have amassed an extensive library of books during the past couple of decades about 19th Century America, Asia and Latin America--the main locales for my characters in the Finding Billy Battles trilogy. I have old maps of countries, cities, and territories that have proved invaluable in creating accurate settings in the book.

Another challenge was getting the patois or the dialect of the time and place right. People spoke differently in 19th Century Kansas than they do today. They dressed differently. They interacted with one another differently. It was a time of face-to-face communication. Telephones were a rarity and of course social media back then meant meeting

at church, at a barn dance--or, in the case of some people--in a saloon.

Transportation was an adventure. Trains were the fastest way to get from point A to point B—IF there were tracks. Horses were still the most common means of travel. I had to get all of that right down to the sounds, the smells, etc.

Historical fiction demands accuracy. Otherwise, your readers will not believe your story. We all suspend belief when we read fiction, but even when we do, we want the story to have a truthful ring to it. You cannot achieve that if you aren't accurate with the construction of your setting, the behavior of your characters and the vernacular of the era. Those were all challenges I faced, but I enjoyed meeting them—just as I enjoyed facing the long line of curious readers who came to have their Finding Billy Battles books signed at the L.A. Times Festival of Books.

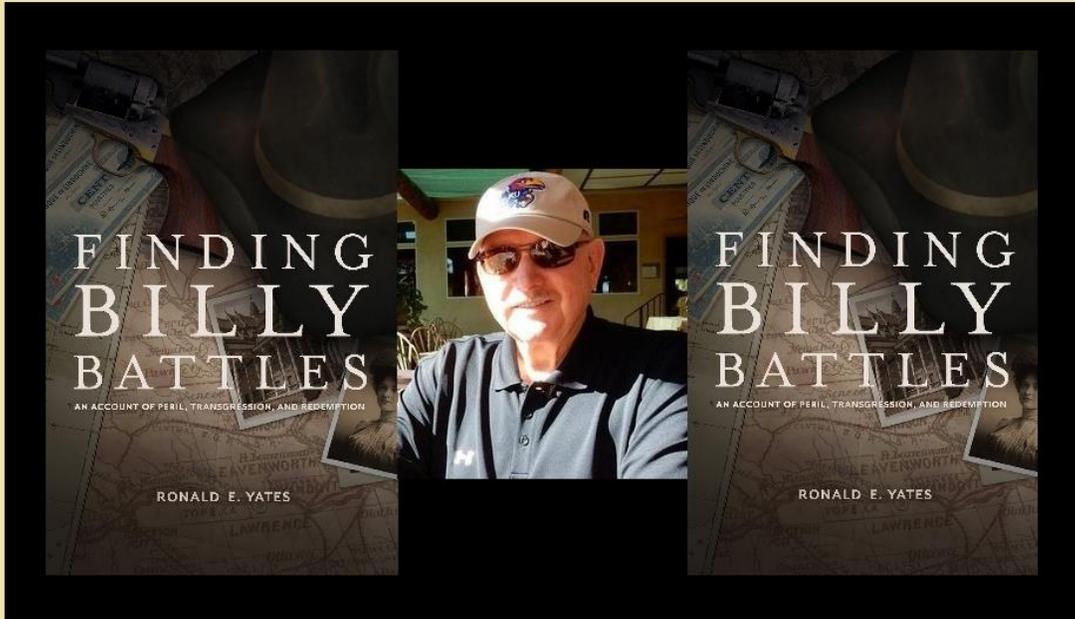
In *The Improbable Journeys of Billy Battles*, I faced even more challenges. Billy finds himself in places like French Indochina, The Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, Hawaii, and Singapore of the 1890s—and those places were utopias for cheats, reprobates, spies, and people running away from something, just as Billy Battles is.

Let me end by emphasizing again how important accuracy is in developing the historical novel. Readers need to trust you when you describe a place, a city, an event, of the past.

In fact, they almost want you to have been there so you can present them with an accurate picture of the place and time. For me, recreating 19th Century Kansas, Denver, Chicago, Saigon, Manila, New Mexico, etc. was part of the fun of writing. I want my readers to "see" what I am seeing and what my characters are seeing, hearing, and feeling.

As I said in Part One of this blog topic, I like to call my writing "Faction." It is a blend of the journalist's capacity to gather accurate, factual information about places and events, and the fiction writer's flair for creating compelling characters and stories that fit into those times and venues.

Written and Submitted by Author Ronald E. Yates



Finding Billy Battles (Finding Billy Battles Trilogy Book 1) by Ronald E. Yates

When a great-grandson inherits two aging trunks and a stack of meticulously detailed journals penned by his great-grandfather, he sets out to fulfill his great-grandfather's last request: to tell the story of an incredible life replete with adventure, violence, and tragedy. The great-grandfather's name is Billy Battles—a man often trapped and overwhelmed by circumstances beyond his control.

For much of his 100-year-long life Billy is a man missing and largely unknown to his descendants. His great-grandson is about to change that. As he works his way through the aging journals and the other possessions, he finds in the battered trunks he uncovers the truth about his mysterious great-grandfather—a man whose deeds and misdeeds propelled him on an extraordinary and perilous journey from the untamed American West to the inscrutable Far East, Latin America and Europe.

As he flips through the pages of the handwritten journals, he learns of Billy's surprising connections to the Spanish-American War, French Indochina, and revolutions in Mexico and other Latin American countries. But most of all he learns that in finding Billy Battles he has also found a long lost and astonishing link to the past.

One Special Book Review: 5.0 out of 5 Stars. Fantastic Historical Fiction. Most of my relatives are normal, boring people. They have interesting anecdotes and some cool experiences, but overall, there is nothing that will make me sit back and listen to them for hours on end. Billy Battles is nothing like these people.

Apparently taken partially from a real-life person, this tale is told through the great grandson of Billy Battles reading through the personal journals of his life as a young man, exploring the world and discovering himself.

Having studied history, the research involved in this book is striking and very thorough. The language, the details, the people and cultures, are very true to life, and I have to take my hat off to Ronald Yates. Yet the book doesn't just rest on being factual. Through the journals, I got a very close look at Billy, and the people he met, which humanized several actual historical characters, without taking any undue liberties to make them fit a certain mold.

I read this book in a day and half the night, and I don't regret the lost sleep. Reviewed by Dan Clarke

Global Library: Historical Fiction, Action and Adventure

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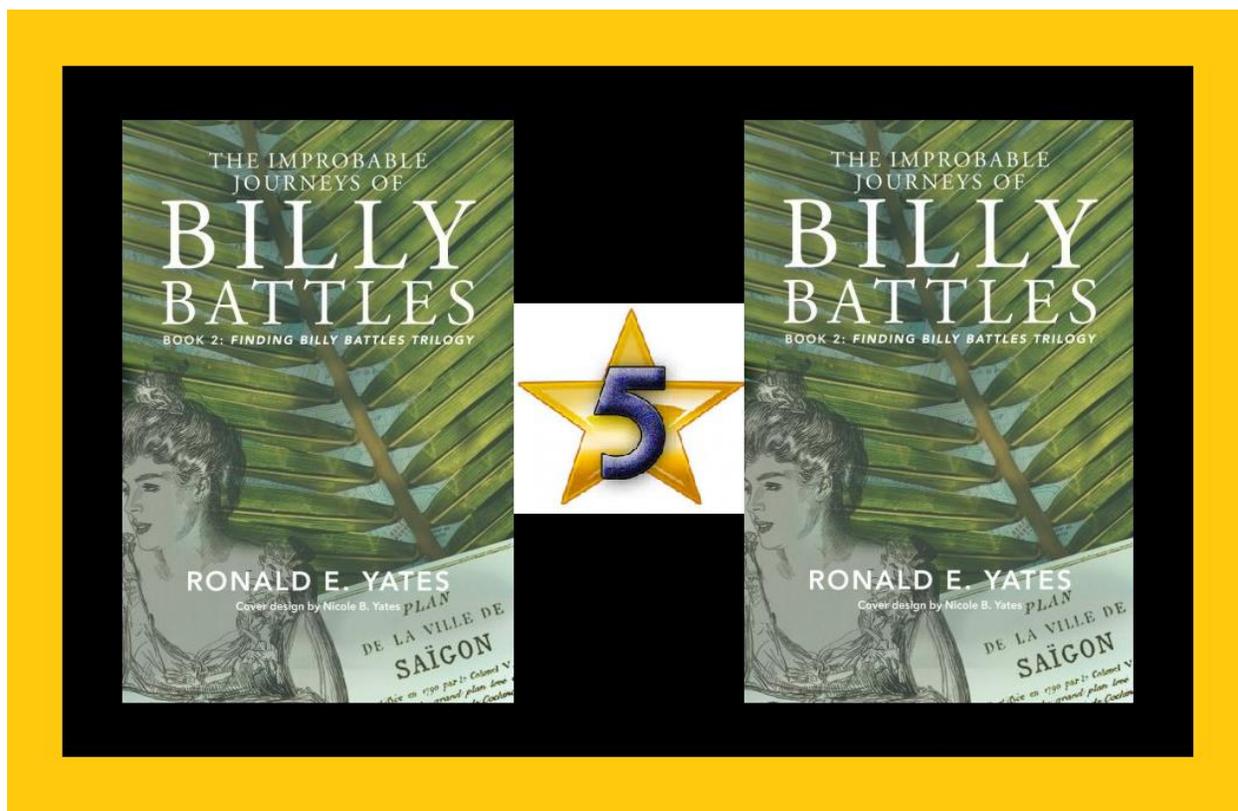
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The Improbable Journeys Of Billy Battles (Finding Billy Battles Trilogy Book 2) by Ronald E. Yates

Billy Battles is definitely not in Kansas anymore.

As Book 2 of the Finding Billy Battles trilogy opens, Billy is far from his Kansas roots and his improbable journeys are just starting.

The year is 1894 and Billy is aboard the S S China sailing to the inscrutable Far East. Trouble is not far behind. He has met a mysterious and possibly dangerous German Baroness. He has locked horns with malevolent agents of the German government and battled ferocious Chinese and Malay pirates in the South China Sea.

Later, he is embroiled in the bloody anti-French insurgency in Indochina—which quite possibly makes him the first American combatant in a country that eventually will become Vietnam. Then, in the Philippines, he is thrust into the Spanish-American War and the brutal anti-American insurgency that follows. But Billy’s troubles are only beginning.

As the 19th century ends and the 20th century begins, he finds himself entangled with political opportunists, spies, revolutionaries, and an assortment of vindictive and dubious characters of both sexes. How will Billy handle those people and the challenges they present? The answers are just ahead.

One Special Book Review: You can't help but be intrigued and fascinated by the intrepid, larger-than-life protagonist in Ronald Yates' entertaining and thoughtful second book of his Finding Billy Battles trilogy. This time, you see how Billy's tumultuous life begins to impact him in middle age as he seeks his next adventures to distract him from past grief and guilt. Yates has an effective way of revealing interesting details of exotic places during historic periods—this time primarily in the Orient of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—while weaving in a fascinating tale of a man in perpetual motion. One can't help but find interesting parallels at Yates' deft hand between Billy's unrest and that of French Indochina and the Philippines during a time of conflict and pushback over European colonization. Ray Elliott, Author of, *With the Silent Knowledge*, *Iwo Blasted Again*, and *Wild Hands Toward the Sky*

Awards:

Three Pulitzer Prize nominations by the Chicago Tribune, The Peter Lisagor Award from the Society of Professional Journalists, The Inter-American Press Association Tom Wallace Award for coverage of South America, Three Edward Scott Beck Awards for international reporting.

Global Library: Historical fiction, action and adventure

5 Star Review: The Improbable Journeys of Billy Battles is the sequel to Finding Billy Battles. I jumped right into this book without reading the first in this trilogy and found it to be a compelling story based on fact and expanded by narrative fiction.

*****Ted Sayles who is the great-grandson of Billy Battles inherits Billy's journals and while writing this trilogy he stays very true to the language of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While this book opens in 1894 with William (Billy) Battles heading for the Orient aboard the SS China it covers his time in the Far East, Latin America, and Europe.

*****It is aboard the SS China that Billy meets German Baroness Katharina von Schreiber. She is gorgeous and regal, far out of reach of a Kansas scribbler (journalist). Since you have probably read the book's description, I wrestle with what to share with you from this amazing story and journey that Billy Battles is about to embark on. I have decided to quote this passage to whet your appetite. I quote:

*****"Katharina's cabin was a bit larger than mine was, and like mine, its walls were covered with dark mahogany panels. In addition to the two overstuffed chairs and writing table, she also had a small dining table. That is where we settled, she on one side and me on the other.

*****"I'm sorry, I have nothing to offer you to drink." Then she paused, stood up, and walked to her wardrobe where she produced a tear-shaped bottle of Glenglassaugh single malt Scotch whiskey and two heavy cut crystal glasses. "Except for this."

*****She returned and placed the glasses on the table in front of us. "May I?" she asked, and then uncorking the bottle, she poured two fingers in each glass. "This was my late husband's favorite."

*****I shuddered imperceptibly at that remark but pulled the glass toward me anyway. Images of Katharina pushing Baron von Schreiber over a cliff or poisoning him with arsenic-laced Wiener schnitzel flooded my mind.

*****I forced those macabre thoughts out of my mind by focusing on the rich amber hue of the whiskey as I uneasily swirled the glass around and around in front of me.

*****What was I doing? I found myself thinking. Why was I in Katharina Schreiber's cabin about to drink expensive single malt Scotch whiskey with a woman who had just admitted she had killed, but not murdered, her husband?"

*****Murder, mystery, intrigue, people, places and events that were intended to divert Billy's attention from his past soon gets him embroiled in Katharina's past, with the German government, not to mention Chinese and Malay pirates. Later on, he finds himself perhaps the first American to be involved in the Anti-French insurgency in

Indochina which will later be called Vietnam and involve America. War will not end there as he is forced into the Spanish-American War while in the Philippines.

*****Just as life takes many unexpected turns for Billy Battles so will your desire to keep turning the pages of this book to find out what is it about Billy Battles that causes him to try to escape his past, endure his new reality and find measured peace as he heads into the twilight of his life.

*****I invite you to read The Improbable Journeys of Billy Battles as it is a journey worth your time. Be sure to read Finding Billy Battles (book one in this trilogy) while waiting for the author to write the final book in this amazing trilogy.

*****Author Ronald E. Yates life experience as a foreign correspondent for the Chicago Tribune in Japan, China, Southeast Asia, and Central and South America gives him the authority with which he writes. It is important to point out he won “three Pulitzer Prize nominations and several other awards, including the Peter Lisagor Award from the Society of Professional Journalists; The Inter-American Press Association Award for coverage of South America; and three Edward Scott Beck Awards for international reporting. He is a graduate of the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas. He lives in Murrieta, California.”

*****I really enjoyed “The Improbable Journeys of Billy Battles” (Trilogy Book Two) by Ronald E. Yates. Ronald E. Yates is the author of the “Finding Billy Battles” (book one in this trilogy) and “The Kikkoman Chronicles”: A Global Company with A Japanese Soul, Aboard The Tokyo Express: A Foreign Correspondent’s Journey Through Japan as well as three journalism textbooks: The Journalist’s Handbook, International Reporting and Foreign Correspondents, and Business and Financial Reporting in a global Economy.

Review by Theodocia McLean (Book Marketing Global Network).

Global Library: Historical Fiction, French, Action & Adventure

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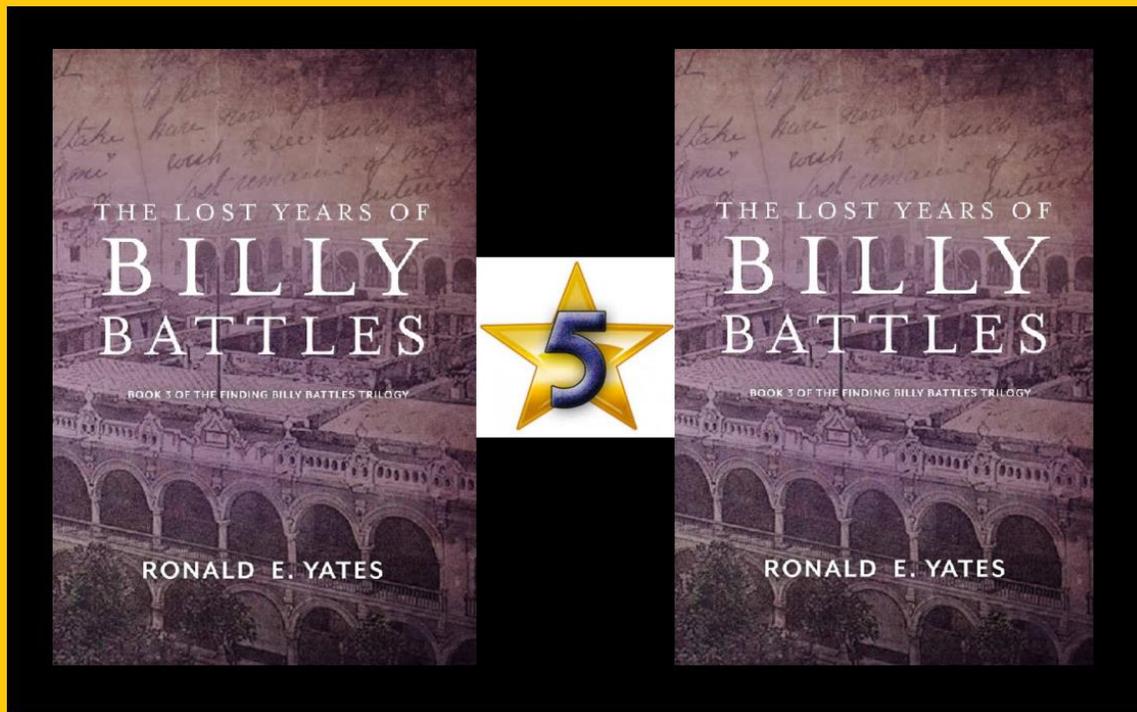
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**The Lost Years Of Billy Battles (Finding Billy Battles Trilogy Book 3)
by Ronald E. Yates**

Where in the world is Billy Battles?

As Book Three of the Finding Billy Battles trilogy begins, we know where Billy is. He is in Chicago with his wife, the former Baroness Katharina von Schreiber living a sedate and comfortable life after years of adventure and tragedy. That changes with a single telephone call that yanks Billy and Katharina back into a life of havoc and peril.

Persuaded by a powerful old friend to go undercover for the U.S. government the two find themselves in Mexico during the height of the violent 1910-1920 revolution. There they encounter assorted German spies, Mexican revolutionaries, devious political operatives, and other malefactors. Caught in the middle of the 1914 American invasion of Veracruz, they must find a way out while keeping their real identities secret.

Later on, disaster strikes. It is a tragedy Billy is all too familiar with and one that will send him plummeting into a chasm of despair and agony. Then, Billy vanishes leaving family and friends to wonder what happened to him. Where is he? Is he dead or alive? What provoked his disappearance?

In Book 3 of the Finding Billy Battles Trilogy, those questions are answered, and the mystery behind Billy's disappearance is ultimately revealed.

5 Star Review: Saying goodbye to an old friend is always hard and that is how I feel as the "Finding Billy Battles Trilogy" comes to a close with book three titled "The Lost Years of Billy Battles". The fictional Ted Sayles has done a remarkable job reading and producing this trilogy from more than a dozen journals written by his great grandfather Billy Battles. It is the historical significance woven skillfully within the element of fiction that makes this trilogy a must read for history buffs and fans of action and adventure novels.

*****After years of travel, relationships with foreign governments, wars of American making and wars forced upon us, not to mention the Chinese and Malay pirates; Billy and Katharina finally enjoy a few peaceful years where Billy is an editor for the Chicago Record-Herald and Katharina a successful author. It is inevitable that this serene period wouldn't last forever. One phone call to go undercover will find them *"caught in the middle of the 1914 American invasion of Veracruz"*.

*****Just when danger subsides, I found myself holding my breath when the unthinkable happens. *“Katharina wasn’t the one the five men were after. It was me. But when they couldn’t find me, they decided to take Katharina to use as bait. That was the first revelation. Next was who the men were. The man who had dragged Katharina out of the house was Mason Bledsoe, son of Nate Bledsoe, the man I had killed in 1889 on my family’s homestead in Western Kansas. When I heard the name, my knees buckled and my heart raced for a moment.”* It was the ransom note that made Billy’s heart sink.

*****Of all the dangers Billy and Katharina had been exposed to in their life together, how will this one match up? When Billy is nowhere to be found, what reason will be uncovered? How will Billy Battle close the final chapter in his journal? Will Ted Sayles effort to canonize the legacy of his Great Grandfather Billy Battle live on for future generations?

*****There is no doubt in my mind that Author Ronald E. Yates’ extensive historical research, skilled character development and impeccable story telling has brought the reader to a successful conclusion in this thought-provoking trilogy. I invite you to read the entire *“Finding Billy Battles Trilogy”* as it portrays, as much a glimpse into history, as it does into one man’s life.

*****I loved *The Lost Years Of Billy Battles (Finding Billy Battles Trilogy Book 3)* by Ronald Yates as a final testimony to the life and times of Billy Battle.

Review by Theodocia McLean (Book Marketing Global Network).

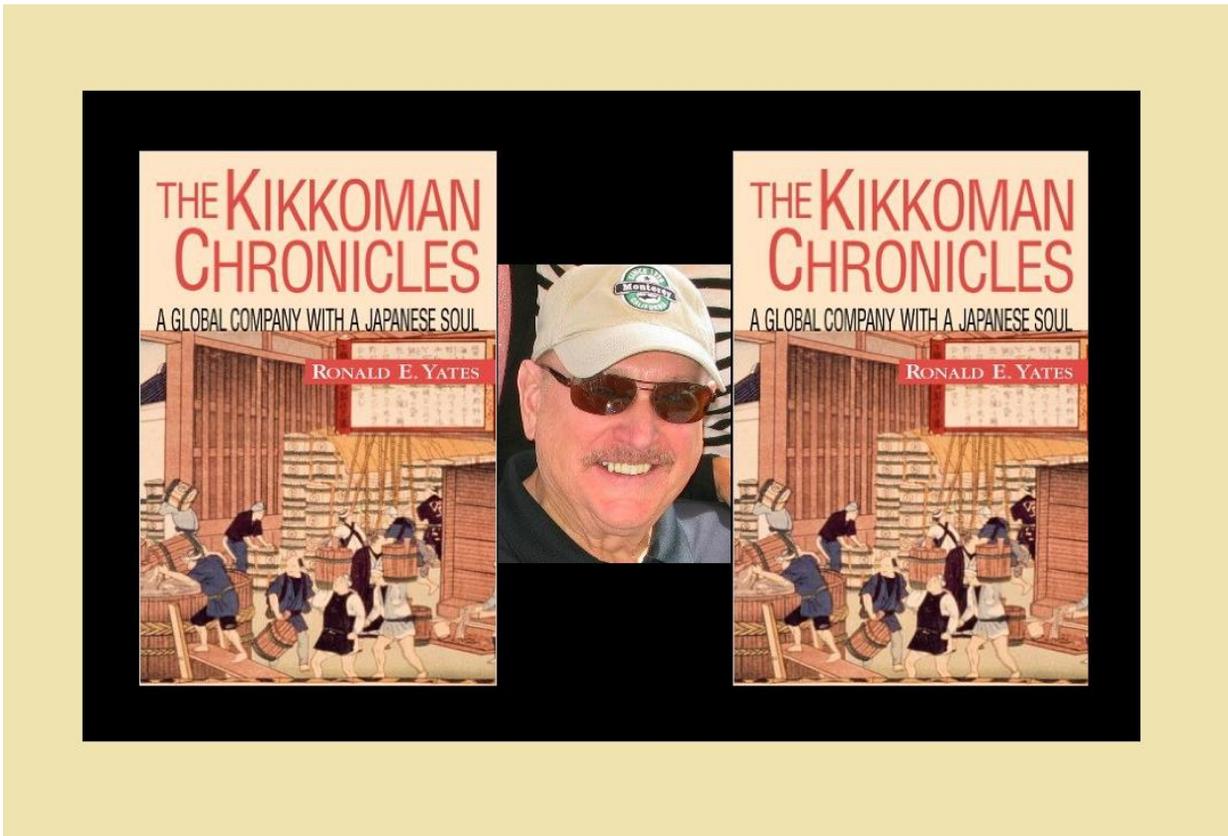
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The Kikkoman Chronicles by Ronald E. Yates

Combining ancient craftsmanship with modern technology and marketing innovations, Japan's Kikkoman Corporation has quietly become a \$2 billion market leader. This book tells the fascinating story of how

Kikkoman changed the course of international marketing, shrewdly adapting to 20th-century realities while never turning its back on centuries of tradition.

Global Library: Business, Marketing,

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About Ronald E. Yates: Ronald E. Yates is an award-winning author of historical fiction and action/adventure novels, including the popular and highly-acclaimed Finding Billy Battles trilogy. His extraordinarily accurate books have captivated fans around the world who applaud his ability to blend fact and fiction.

Ron is a former foreign correspondent for the Chicago Tribune and Professor Emeritus of Journalism at the University of Illinois where he was also the Dean of the College of Media.

His award-winning book, "The Improbable Journeys of Billy Battles," is the second in his Finding Billy Battles trilogy of novels and was published in June 2016. The first book in the trilogy, "Finding Billy Battles," was published in 2014. His latest book is entitled The Lost Years of Billy Battles. It is book #3 of the trilogy and will be released in May 2018.

Ron has been a presenting author at the Kansas Book Festival and the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, among other venues. He is also the author of The Kikkoman Chronicles: A Global Company with A Japanese Soul, published by McGraw-Hill. Other books include Aboard the Tokyo Express: A Foreign Correspondent's Journey through Japan, a collection of columns translated into Japanese, as well as three journalism textbooks: The Journalist's Handbook, International Reporting and Foreign Correspondents, and Business and Financial Reporting in a Global Economy.

Before leaving the world of professional journalism where he toiled 27 years, Ron lived and worked in Japan, Southeast Asia, and both Central and South America where he covered several history-making events including the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia; the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing; and wars and revolutions in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, among other places.

His work as a war correspondent resulted in several awards, including the Inter-American Press Association's Tom Wallace Award for coverage of Central and South America; the Peter Lisagor Award from the Society of Professional Journalists; three Edward Scott Beck Awards for International Reporting, and three Pulitzer nominations.

Ron is a proud graduate of the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas and a veteran of the U.S. Army where he served in the Army Security Agency.

Available Books:

- Finding Billy Battles: An Account of Peril, Transgression and Redemption
- The Improbable Journeys of Billy Battles (Finding Billy Battles Trilogy Book 2)
- The Lost Years Of Billy Battles (Finding Billy Battles Trilogy Book 1)
- The Kikkoman Chronicles
- The Reporter's Handbook
- International Reporting and Foreign Correspondents
- Business & Financial Reporting in a Global Economy
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