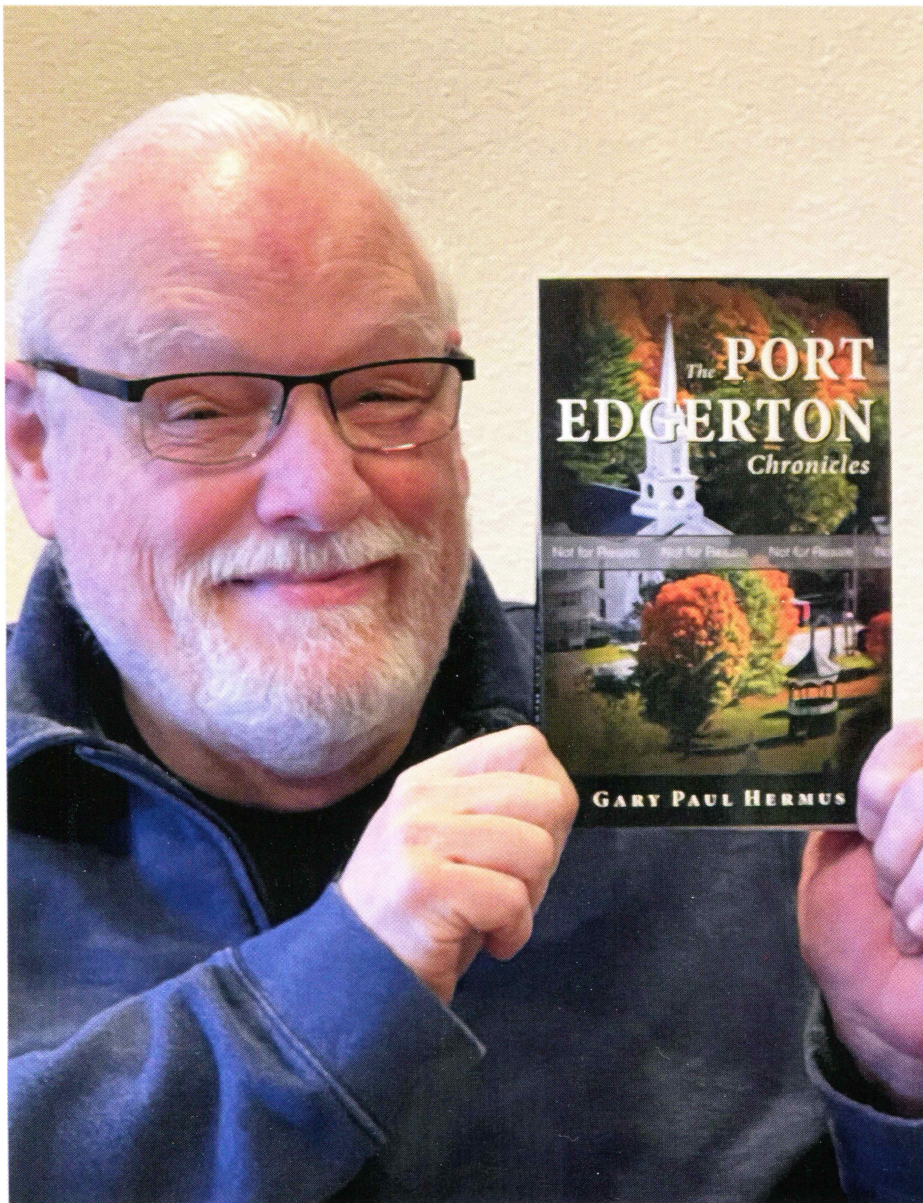


# SMALL TOWN NEW YORK MEETS NEW MEXICO IN GARY PAUL HERMUS'S DEBUT NOVEL

BY GARY PAUL HERMUS



Brooklyn-born author, essayist, actor, performing songwriter, and three-time New Mexico Music Award winner, Gary Paul Hermus has spent a lifetime telling stories. He studied drama at New York City's High School of Performing Arts and has performed as an actor, musician, and singer-songwriter while working with the developmentally disabled for New York State for more than thirty years, acquiring a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, and Master's degrees in Health Administration and Computer Science.

#### **Tell us about your life in Eldorado.**

We moved to Eldorado in 2011, when I retired from state service. Oddly enough, the national weather broadcasters got us to consider New Mexico; while describing weather calamities across the nation, they invariably stood in front of New Mexico, having very little to report there.

In my wife's subsequent research, she discovered Santa Fe's supportive environment for the arts. She found that many houses in Eldorado had studio space, an important consideration for me as a recording musician and for her pursuits in the visual arts.

What I love most about living in Eldorado are the broad vistas and the incredible sunsets. We

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tell people not to call at sunset; they would be interrupting a religious experience.

Moving to Eldorado from New Jersey profoundly influenced my songwriting. I still wrote narrative story songs but found a much more receptive audience here than in the Northeast with its emphasis on traditional folk music forms. Southwest songwriters were more encouraging and supportive too. I could never have written the song, “Santa Fe Trail (Kit Carson’s Last Ride),” had I not moved to Eldorado. It won me the 2016 New Mexico Music Award in the Western category.

My most recent CD, “American Road,” featured incredible musicians, many of whom were from Eldorado. Lisa Carman, a wonderful performer, and songwriter who I met at an open mic at Artisan, coproduced it. She’s moved on from Eldorado to be closer to her family in Montana, but her influence here is still widely felt. The result of our collaboration earned me eight New Mexico music award nominations and three wins.

That same artistic environment also inspired me to try long-form storytelling for the first time since winning a junior high school narrative writing contest for a short story I wrote. *The Port Edgerton Chronicles* is the product of that inspiration.

#### Describe your writing.

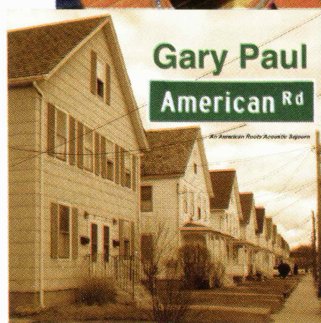
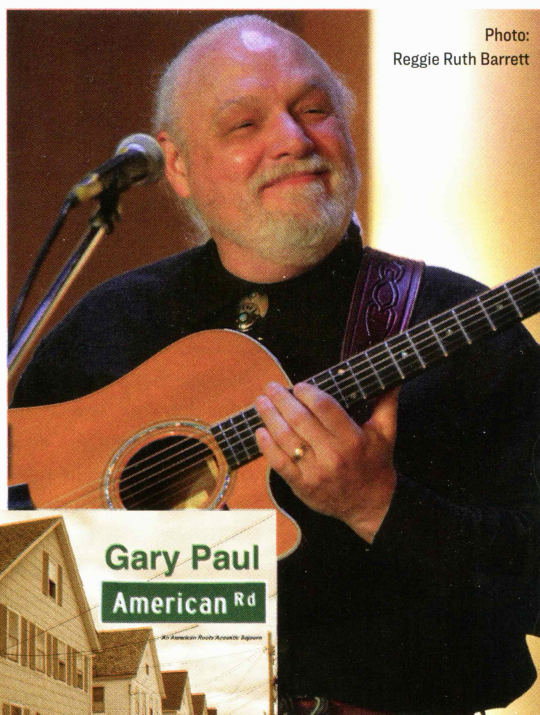
When all my performances were canceled because of the pandemic, I turned to sharing an ongoing monthly series about my experiences as a working musician, starting with my first working band in 1965. I called it, “Road Warrior: Memoirs of a Life in Music.”

Three years later, I’m recounting my experiences in the 1980s, which included working with a fabulous musician and composer, Maurice Oliver. Several years ago, he and his family decided to join us out here in Eldorado, which has proved to be a major influence in his work.

In 2018 I started writing a short story based on a vivid dream, that eventually became my first full-fledged novel: *The Port Edgerton Chronicles*. It examines the dilemma of a woman in her early thirties, born and raised in the Central New York Town of Port Edgerton, who came to New Mexico to study art at the now-defunct College of Santa Fe while repairing jewelry at a store in Madrid. When her father became ill,

she had to leave Santa Fe, just as her work was beginning to get recognition, to run the family business. Both her parents subsequently passed away, but by then she had developed new ties to Port Edgerton. When she falls in love with an old high school friend, she’s torn between her Port Edgerton life and the one she was building in New Mexico. And just to make things more complicated, a famous artist discovers Port Edgerton, with dreams and plans that could very well change the trajectory of the town’s future.

I just completed the manuscript for the second book in the series and am trying to put together funding for developmental editing. I’ll be working with the same editor who helped me shape the first book. In addition, I have a fantasy/magic realism novel in the works, inspired by my Southwestern experiences.



#### What inspired you to write your book?

I would have to say my wife, Barbara. When I described my elaborate dream to her, she insisted that I write it down. I began expanding on the dream, sharing ideas for the characters and storylines with her. Many of her suggestions for characters and circumstances found their way into the novel.

#### Who are some of your favorite writers?

My most influential writers have been sci-fi/fantasy writers, like C.J. Cherryh, Anne McCaffrey, and Rebecca Roanhorse, though I have fallen in love with the Leaphorn and Chee series.

I devoured all the Tony Hillerman novels as well as Anne Hillerman’s follow-up novels, and just recently picked up her latest work, which I loved. Their combined work helped me put the Diné Bahane’ into practical day-to-day perspective, a critical element for one of my characters in the new fantasy/magical realism book I’m working on.

#### Where can folks purchase your book?

While *The Port Edgerton Chronicles* is available online, Purple Fern Bookstore at The Agora, right here in Eldorado is carrying it. I’m a staunch advocate for supporting local bookstores and hope that anyone interested in buying it takes the extra step of doing so at a local bookstore.