



Photo by Sam Stricker

James J. Griffin, who has authored six books about the Texas Rangers, re-enacts a shoot-out during presentation at the Blackstone Memorial Library.

## BRANFORD MEETS THE WILD, WILD WEST

By Diana Stricker  
For the Branford Review

**J**im Griffin is a cowboy, even if he was born and raised in Branford.

As a youngster in the 1950s he faithfully watched Westerns on television, especially "Tales of the Texas Rangers." His interest in the Old West led him to become an experienced horseman, an avid collector of Texas Rangers' memorabilia, and an author of six books.

"It's been a really wild ride, doing these books," Griffin said. "It's something I never dreamed in my wild-est imagination."

But thanks to that imagination, Griffin has penned a series of novels featuring Jim Blawczyk, Texas Ranger. He explained that using a Polish name for the hero is one of the efforts he takes to make his characters and plots realistic.

During a recent program at the Blackstone Memorial Library in Branford, Griffin discussed the differences between life in the Old West and the way it is typically portrayed by Hollywood and pulp magazines. He said many settlers in Texas were of German, Irish, Swedish, Hispanic or Polish descent, and thus the name for his lead character.

Griffin used audience participation to illustrate his point about how the Old West has been glamorized. He started the program with a simulated gunfight with Sue Marchese, an audience member who volunteered to be an outlaw. Griffin and Marchese drew their guns and the outlaw quickly won the battle while "Ranger" Griffin fell to the floor.

"That was entertaining and dramatic and absolutely fiction," Griffin said as he regained his feet. "No gunfight ever happened that way."

He said lawmen would not challenge an outlaw to a shoot-out, but would attempt to make the arrest with his gun already drawn.

"Much of what you see in movies, television and pulp magazines is just dead wrong," Griffin told the audience.

"Cowboys weren't ready to draw their gun at the drop of a hat," Griffin said, adding that very few wore two holsters or could shoot with both hands. "It was not a glamorous profession at all. It was dangerous and dirty."

Hollywood gunfights are usually dramatic drawn-out confrontations, but Griffin said actual confrontations were usually over in less than 30 seconds. However, he said many gunshot victims didn't die of a bullet, but lingered for several days until they succumbed to infection.

"Gunfights did happen, just not the way they did in the movies," he said.

However, he said some gun battles of yesteryear were more unbelievable than fiction. He cited an example of a Texas Ranger who was shot 18 times and still arrested the outlaws. "He survived those 18 bullets and lived to a ripe old age."

But while Griffin likes to point out the inaccuracy of some movies and pulp magazines, he said they are still valuable because they capture our imagination and help preserve the heritage of the Old West.

Griffin also shared some of his vast knowledge about the Texas Rangers. He said that Rangers today wear official white hats denoting the "good guys," but frontier

lawmen wore whatever they happened to own, even a black hat. While proudly displaying an authentic Ranger hat given him by a friend, Griffin said Rangers in the Old West earned \$30 a month and had to provide their own weapons, horse and saddle.

He then read from one of his books, "Trail of Renegade," while two members of the audience helped him re-enact the gunfight scenes.

He later explained how his love of the Old West led him to become an author.

"In the 50s, I grew up playing cowboys and Indians. Everybody did," he said. "I've always been a fan of the Texas Rangers. I watched the "Tales of Texas Rangers" on Saturdays when I was a kid. I never would have guessed this would all happen."

After college, he began purchasing Texas Ranger books and memorabilia, and years later began bidding on eBay to purchase vintage copies of the "Texas Rangers" pulp magazines. He eventually collected the complete set of 206 vintage magazines and a variety of other artifacts. In 2005, he donated his entire collection to the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco, Texas.

"The museum was thankful to get them," Griffin said.

While collecting on eBay, he met Texas Ranger Sergeant Jim Huggins of Company F in Waco. He credits Huggins and his wife for their technical help with the novels he has written. But it was James Reasoner, another author of Western novels, who encouraged Griffin to begin writing.

"He kept telling me I could write a novel," Griffin said. "I took a chance and I did it."

His first five novels in the Jim Blawczyk Texas Ranger series were published through iUniverse. He estimates he sold about 500 copies of each. However, his sixth novel, "Big Bend Death Trap," was purchased by Condor Publishing Inc., and will come out in August.

Griffin, who works as an emergency road service dispatcher for the Connecticut AAA Motor Club, frequently writes his co-workers and friends into his books. With their permission, he uses their names in the novels.

"If you know me, sooner or later you end up a character in one of my books," Griffin said with a laugh. "My co-workers love it. They ask who's in the next book."

He emphasized that his books are suitable for all ages and contain no cursing. "My heroes are more like the heroes of years ago. They're good family men. My books are kind of a throwback."

However, he does strive for authenticity. "I try to keep things as accurate as possible," Griffin said, noting that he will occasionally take some creative license.

He often makes presentations at senior citizen centers or at libraries. Other titles by Griffin include: "Trouble Rides the Texas Pacific," "Border Raiders," "Ranger Justice," and "Panhandle Raiders."

Griffin has traveled extensively through the West and visited the sites of many famous frontier towns. In his spare time, he volunteers with the Connecticut Horse Patrol. Griffin and his horse Yankee can be seen patrolling state parks such as Chatfield Hollow in Killingworth.

For additional information about Griffin or the Texas Rangers, see his web site at [www.jamesgriffin.net](http://www.jamesgriffin.net)

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