Blinking couldn’t force away the mist in his eyes, so he sat quietly, thinking of that time so long ago. World War II. He rubbed his knee. He rubbed his neck. He sighed and looked at me. “Nobody knows,” he said. “I’ve never talked about the war.”

Then he began, as if talking suddenly took away the hurt. He reached for a tissue. And he continued to talk. The day after his story ran in *The Messenger*, a granddaughter e-mailed me. “Thank you,” she wrote. “Thank you for telling my grandfather’s story. I’ve never heard it before.”

And that’s what keeps me writing – to tell those stories no one’s heard before. But there’s more to consider than getting the facts right and putting all the words in the right places. My sister taught me that the day she watched me fight through draft after draft of a story I didn’t really care to write. If I put passion in it, I told her, no one will know I don’t care about it.

She looked at me as if I were her special child. “Passion without heart is just a lot of emotion,” she said. “Make sure you have heart before you add the passion.”

Her advice now runs through my mind before every story I write for *The Messenger* in Fort Dodge, Iowa. *The Messenger* took me in right after graduation from the University of Iowa in 1968, allowing me to cover county fairs and small-town festivals, church bazaars and work on the farm. I watched a family butcher a hog and process the meat and got my first fan letter. “What you wrote is so important to us little people,” the woman wrote. “We don’t care about models and
Oh wait, I did do that. I went aboard the blimp with a customs official, and they offered to let me sit behind the controls. I thought I was doing a plenty good job, until we started drifting into the flight line during the warbirds show, so I cranked it to the left, then I cranked it again. A blimp will not move fast, no matter what you do – unless you crank it to the left twice. We darn near made a U turn, and they made me leave the cockpit. But I had my own story to tell.

I have made up a story or two. Besides everything that’s been published in papers, I’ve got one novel finished, another half done and a raft of poetry. I’ve not yet started marketing, but that’s coming.

I found my husband in the composing room of the Eau Claire, Wis., Leader-Telegram, more than 40 years ago. He had wanderlust as much as I, and, following Horace Greeley’s advice, we headed west, stopping for a night at Denver, Colo. With little hesitation, we bought the weekly newspaper in Keenesburg, Colo. The Keene Valley Sun. We’d make that Sun shine, I thought, and gladly signed my name.

This was before I mellowed – age will do that – and I stood to fight any injustice I saw or thought I saw. But my husband ran the linotype, and if he thought my editorials too strong or too stupid, he refused to set the type. A built-in censor you can’t hate.

We sold the Sun within three years, moving on to jobs that actually paid for our time, and I moved on with my first writing awards, including the Colorado Press Association sweepstakes for all weeklies the year I covered a flood in Prospect Valley, a farming area about 50 miles northeast of Denver. That year I won first place for small weeklies in editorial writing, news writing, photography and advertising.

Until then, I’d never given a thought to contests. Since then, I’ve won more than 200 awards in state and national contests, including sweepstakes honors in Wisconsin Press Women and Iowa Press Women. This is feedback that goes beyond the raise you don’t get or the praise that’s half-felt – it’s saying others in your profession like your work.

Still, I’d trade every award I ever received for the life I saved. I gave CPR to a man who had a heart attack in the composing room of The Northwestern in Oshkosh, Wis., and brought him back to life. He died 10 days later in the hospital, but his wife told me, through her tears and mine, that she’d at least had the chance to tell him she loved him and how much he meant to her.

When I moved back to Iowa as lifestyle editor of The Messenger, it was coming home. Coming home to the first paper I’d worked for and coming home to the community. I grew up about 20 miles from Dodge, near Vincent.

Covering the annual fundraiser for the Vincent Volunteer Fire Department, I asked to look through the company’s thermal imaging camera. The fire chief looked at me like I had two heads. “We don’t have anything like that,” he said. “That costs a lot of money.”

For years those words haunted me, and every time I heard a scanner call for the Vincent Fire Department, I’d pray it wasn’t a house fire. A few years back, when I could no longer stand the fear, I talked friends into helping me put on a fundraiser and talked the camera company into reducing its price.

When I asked for help, I invariably heard, “Why don’t you write a grant request? Big companies help with stuff like this.” But, I didn’t want some big company to buy my little town a camera. I wanted the folks concerned to rally together and raise enough money to buy it. They did.

There’s a photo of me stashed somewhere in my attic room with a silly grin on my face while I’m peering through the camera they call Sandy. Sandy hangs, plugged in and ready, in the fire truck in case they need her. If they never need her, that’s even better.

“Heart” finishes on the next page
In more than 40 years of newspapering, I’ve worked in every department except circulation. Those people get up way too early.

I’ve had good times and bad, sometimes even wondering why I continue. I remember locking myself in the photo lab, turning off the lights and beating my forehead on the shelf in front of me. An arm encircled my shoulders and held me tightly. I froze, then opened my eyes. No one was there. But that’s how I know my muse, my guardian angel, my protector – whoever it is – wants me to be doing exactly what I’m doing and that things will always work out.

Like the time we lived in Greeley, Colo., and I helped lead a Santa Claus Club fundraiser. For weeks, bags of clothing appeared in my living room. Gift items covered the ping-pong table in the basement. Boxes and cans of food spilled out of the laundry room. We raised enough money to help a lot of families that Christmas, except the family who needed a couch and a bed. That November we sold our home and just before Christmas moved back to Iowa, but not until I’d filled that last request for the Santa Claus Club. Instead of bringing home our sofa bed, it went to the family who needed a couch and a bed. I couldn’t have written a better ending for our time in Colorado.

My dad was not an eloquent man, but he was caring and kind. A farmer. My favorite memories include him and his friends lying on the ground under the old cottonwood, sweating beer bottles dangling lazily in dirty hands, while the young guys ran newly baled hay up the elevator into the barn. They told stories. Funny stories. Sad stories. Long stories or short, they never lacked for stories. They made me care about those people.

Dad said he always knew I’d be a writer because I cared about the people, too. And, he said, he loved to read my stories.

I’ve loved reading Sandy’s stories for a lot of years and thought you’d enjoy her remembrance of a wonderful writing career-- and life-- in progress.
By Madonna Dries Christensen

Stay for just a while...stay, and let me look at you...

September morn...

September morning still can make me feel this way...

— Neil Diamond and Gilbert Becaud

Neil Diamond’s ballad “September Morn” has nothing to do with the painting of the same name, but the provocative scene and the story behind the artwork is as intriguing as the song.

Paul Emile Chabas (1869-1937), a member of the Academie des beaux-arts, favored painting young nude women in natural settings. He completed *Matinee de Septembre* on a September morning in 1912 after working on it for three consecutive summers. The featured mademoiselle stands at the edge of a pond, slightly crouched, her curvaceous body in semi-profile. She seems to be splashing water on herself and shivering from the early morning chill.

The shapely form belonged to a local peasant girl, but the head and face came from a drawing Chabas did of an American girl, Julie Phillips, while she and her mother dined in a Paris café. The artist considered her profile perfect for the painting.

Chabas exhibited the painting at the 1912 Paris Salon. It won a medal, but it lacked attention elsewhere. When the painting was rejected even as calendar art, Chabas shipped it to a Manhattan gallery where he hoped to find a buyer. He never imagined the chain of events that led to the painting’s celebrity.

Harry Reichenbach, a public relations man known for setting up outrageous stunts to draw people into theaters showing B movies, claimed responsibility for the painting’s fame.

Reichenbach worked in the shop displaying the painting. The owner printed 2000 lithographs of the work, Americanized to “September Morn,” but even at only ten cents each, they did not sell. He offered Reichenbach a bonus for an advertising plan to jumpstart sales. Reichenbach quickly devised a scheme.

He telephoned Anthony Comstock, self-appointed head of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, and told him about the “dirty painting” in the gallery’s window. Comstock didn’t bite, so Reichenbach persuaded others to call and complain about the shocking painting. Then he personally visited Comstock.

“You must see the painting,” he fumed.

“It’s an outrage. It’s undermining the morals of our city’s youth.”

Comstock accompanied Reichenbach to the store, where they found a group of boys ogling the artwork in the window. When Comstock, “the archangel of virtue,” heard the boys’ racy comments he stormed into the shop, showed his badge, and demanded the painting be removed.

“There’s too little morn and too much maiden,” Comstock allegedly yelled. He didn’t know Reichenbach paid the boys fifty cents each to hang out by the store.

The owner, of course, refused to take the painting from the window.

Comstock filed a lawsuit, asking the court to suppress “the most pornographic painting of all time.” Meanwhile, during the months before the trial ended, the daring damsel became the darling of newspapers across the country.
The stories kept tabs on the controversy between those who denounced the painting and those who supported it, both men and women. The fair maiden lacked the wholesomeness of the famed Gibson Girls drawings by Charles Dana Gibson, but young men were not afraid to take September Morn home to Mother (well, some mothers). At the shop, prints sold like hotdogs at a ballgame, for a dollar each.

Entrepreneurs jumped on the bandwagon. They mass produced and sold replicas of September Morn on calendars, posters, postcards, cigar bands, cigarette boxes, pennants, suspenders, bottle openers, umbrella and cane heads, and as dolls and statues. Men wore her figure tattooed on their muscular arms.

Purity leagues protested, and the postal service banned postcard reproductions from mail delivery. The painting became the object of gags and songs. Art critics labeled it “kitsch” because it lacked interesting artistic contrast, coordinated lines, a worthy subject; and leaned toward the melodramatic. They said its fame came only from the scandal surrounding it, not from anything artistic.

Paul Chabas reclaimed the painting and sold it to a Russian collector for the ruble equivalent of $10,000. Hidden by the owner during the Russian Revolution, the painting surfaced in 1935 in Paris in Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian’s private collection. Later, Philadelphian William Coxe Wright purchased the painting. In 1957, with its value estimated at $30,000, Wright tried to donate the work to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. They refused on the grounds it carried no significance in the realm of art. Wright donated it to Manhattan's Metropolitan Museum of Art, where Matinee de Septembre hangs as an example of 20th Century French works.

During the trial and for several years after, some seven million copies of September Morn sold around the world. Prints and other memorabilia still sell today.

Paul Chabas created other works before and after the one that became an icon, but who among us can name even one? Who even knows the artist’s name? Many more could no doubt identify Neil Diamond as the singer of the ballad.

During a visit to my doctor, I asked him, "How do you determine whether or not an older person should be put in an old age home?"
"Well," he said, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the person to empty the bathtub."
"Oh, I understand," I said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it is bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No" he said. "A normal person would pull the plug. Do you want a bed near the window?"

Thanks to Linda Konichek, poet and horse whisperer, author of Celebrating the Heartland.
Perfect

Yankee Stadium,
Fifth game, World Series,
October 8, 1956

Tall Don Larsen on the mound,
staring down at Yogi Berra’s sign,
left handed Dale Mitchell at bat,
Babe Pinelli calling balls and strikes.

In the background,
a sea of fans in the stands.
With no windup,
Larsen turns and kicks and throws--
a camera clicks--

the pitcher, low in his follow through,
the catcher, crouching, the ball in his
mitt,
the batter, his swing checked, looking
back,
the umpire’s right fist held high.

John Manesis

John’s latest collection, *Consider If You Will*, plays with the premise he proposes in the first
poem, “Pretend”:
Who said they had to end the way they did,
the fairy tales and nursery rhymes, the poems
so much adored, the myths and gables read
about the ogres, kings and cats, the gnomes?
Consider, if you will, a second version,
a different script or other point of view
not mentioned by the likes of Andersen,
Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, to name a few.
Check out all of John’s work at [http://www.jmanesispoetry.com](http://www.jmanesispoetry.com).

THE SPILL

“We’re in deep shit,” the foreman yells
when the form splits open and we all watch
the river of wet cement pour out onto the ground.

Some things can’t be saved.

Let’s say it was a rush job our evolution.

The Brown Pelican didn’t take part in the Industrial Revolution.
It just wanted to go on being a pelican.

Unable to fly, it waddles down the
beach,
dragging its useless ‘dip net’
while the ocean serves up more tar-balls
and plastic spoons.

You want a happy poem,
everything to be put back right?
That was the Romantic Period.

Even as we sleep
and dream our dreams,
ships are dragging their black nets
along the floors of the ocean.

Tom Crawford

Tom’s collections include *If It Weren’t for Trees: Poems, Lauds,* and *Wu Wei: Poems.*
Some new -- and not-so-new -- thoughts about the process we call aging

An older gentleman was on the operating table awaiting surgery and he insisted that his son, a renowned surgeon, perform the operation. As he was about to get the anesthesia, he asked to speak to his son. 'Yes, Dad, what is it? 'Don't be nervous, son; do your best and just remember, if it doesn't go well, if something happens to me, your mother is going to come and live with you and your wife....'

Eventually you will reach a point when you stop lying about your age and start bragging about it.

The older we get, the fewer things seem worth waiting in line for.

Some people try to turn back their odometers. Not me! I want people to know 'why' I look this way. I've traveled a long way and some of the roads weren't paved.

When you are dissatisfied and would like to go back to youth, think of Algebra.

You know you are getting old when everything either dries up or leaks.

One of the many things no one tells you about aging is that it is such a nice change from being young. Ah, being young is beautiful, but being old is comfortable.

THE OLDER CROWD

A distraught senior citizen phoned her doctor's office. 'Is it true,' she wanted to know, 'that the medication you prescribed has to be taken for the rest of my life?' 'Yes, I'm afraid so,' the doctor told her. There was a moment of silence before the senior lady replied, 'I'm wondering, then, just how serious is my condition because this prescription is marked 'NO REFILLS'!

First you forget names, then you forget faces, then you forget to pull up your zipper. Finally you forget to pull it down.

Long ago when men cursed and beat the ground with sticks, it was called witchcraft... Today, it's called golf.

Two old guys are pushing their carts around the Food Mart when they collide. The first old guy says to the second guy, 'Sorry about that. I'm looking for my wife, and I guess I wasn't paying attention to where I was going.' The second old guy says, 'That's OK, it's a coincidence. I'm looking for my wife, too. I can't find her and I'm getting a little desperate.'

'Well, maybe I can help you find her. What does she look like?' the first old guy asks.

'Well, she is 27 years old, tall, with red hair, blue eyes, long legs, and is wearing short shorts.... What does your wife look like?' To which the first old guy says, 'Doesn't matter, --- let's look for yours.'

From Stephen Born

“You’re either on the bus or off the bus.”

Ken Kesey

Bus by Brandon Born
Missouri Muse

Prayers answer comes out in the wash

By Perry Stone

It was the last minute. I needed to write something resembling an article. Not one topic thought of even got a rusty creak from the mental cogs trying to turn. My thoughts were: I don’t do well under pressure. What could I tell anyone about writing they haven’t read a thousand times before? I can’t just take every experience I’ve ever had and twist it into an article about writing!

Then God sent me to the laundry mat.

I don’t mean that literally. However, every piece of clothing I owned was dirty; therefore, using the whole Divine Intervention theory, one must consider the possibility that I had put off going to the laundry for two weeks, not, because I hate doing it but because God knew I needed to wait until Wednesday, the 11th of August to do it.

There at The Dutch Maid’s laundry mat, while watching the suds bubble and the clothes swill, I discovered you don’t have to have a great imagination to be a writer—if you just listen.

It’s six in the morning. Apparently everyone has decided to beat the heat and do their laundry early. My laundry is in; I sit back half dozing when Mary*, the attendant, speaks softly to the lady next to me. “Did you see our new door? Someone broke into the storeroom night before last.”

The two visit quietly for a few minutes. Mary leaves, after which, Rose, the lady Mary was talking to, walks over and starts a conversation with Becky. “Did you hear the laundry mat was broken into last night? We just missed it; I guess. They had to replace the doors. Someone tore them all off with a crowbar!”

Becky holds her hand over her mouth and confides an opinion, for all to hear, that it was probably Mexican junkies wanting drug money. Alice from across the table takes time out from folding clothes to say “Blacks are just as bad,” then adds, “Of course, some of the white kids take drugs, but they are a better grade of junkie.” She doubts if they would actually resort to demolishing private property.

Herman states what everyone already knows. “It could have been anyone! Get a sweet little old lady hooked on Darvocet and she’ll tear her neighbor’s siding right off their house and rob them blind.”

My mind whirls at the same rpm as the clothes spin dry: Lies and racism cover up the antics of drug crazed great grandmother. I visualize a small white-haired old lady viciously swinging her cane as she charges through the streets in her electric wheelchair, which is set in the plunder mode. Actually, my only wheelchair speeds are bunny rabbit and turtle. But my mental Granny flips hers over to a picture of a knight in black armor, sitting on a giant horse. “Charge!” she shrieks and rolls off burning rubber into my cerebellum equivalent of cyber space, leaving me to sort out the facts from the fiction.

The facts are: the laundry mat storeroom was broken into. The perp or perps demolished a door. The police came. They took fingerprints from the door and left. However, truth is always only a starting place before friends, neighbors and strangers distort it. Writers need only listen to be aware of their options, unless they write for the news media which is supposed to tell the whole truth, within the boundaries of “out of context”.

Truth to tell, I don’t believe the storeroom was broken into just to give me focus on something to write about. No two people will tell a story exactly the same. God could have been responsible for me being at the laundry mat at that moment—maybe—I did pray. I also said thanks, afterwards, for laundry mats, offices, parks and other places where people congregate to bear witness to the truth in their own misguided interpretations.

Thus, I leave you with this advice. Keep the faith, and when it is all written, keep praying—for a kindhearted editor.

Bless you and yours,

Paw Joe

*I made up the names, mainly because I don’t actually know these peoples’ names.
E.I. Book Review

Zinsser practices what he preaches in classic On Writing Well

By Jeffrey Brooks

On Writing Well, by William Zinsser, is outstanding. I especially like the part when he says, “rewriting is the essence of writing.” He also says, “how we write and how we talk is how we define ourselves.”

I also find this important:

“Writing is not an art, it’s a craft, and the person who runs away from his craft because of his lack of inspiration is only fooling himself.”

The only way to learn the craft, he says, is to produce a certain amount of words on paper everyday. “Nobody becomes Tom Wolfe overnight,” he says. “Not even Tom Wolfe.”

He advises us to be natural and only write to impress ourselves, rather than trying to impress others. He talks about keeping it simple rather than trying to be pedantic or pretentious.

In the chapter on “Writing on the Job,” he mentions that educators and other professionals would learn to write more effectively if they would stop trying to sound important. “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication,” he says.

When I got to the section on sports writing, I admit I didn’t think it would hold my interest. But it was probably the most eloquent chapter of them all.

In the chapter on humor, Zinsser notes that humor usually speaks of something that’s serious and has become part of our daily structure but sounds crazy. We may make a joke out of it, but that doesn’t conceal the fact that it’s still crazy.

In his conclusion, Zinsser returns to the point he made in the beginning: be natural, be yourself, and eventually your voice will win out.

PUNishment

A man's home is his castle, in a manor of speaking.
Dijon vu - the same mustard as before.
Practice safe eating - always use condiments.
 Shotgun wedding - A case of wife or death.
A man needs a mistress just to break the monogamy.
A hangover is the wrath of grapes.
Dancing cheek-to-cheek is really a form of floor play.
Does the name Pavlov ring a bell?
Use condoms on every conceivable occasion.
When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.
Will: a dead giveaway.
In democracy your vote counts. In feudalism your count votes.
A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion.
If you don't pay your exorcist, you get repossessed.
The man who fell into an upholstery machine is fully recovered.
Local Area Network in Australia - the LAN down under.
Money is tainted - Taint yours and taint mine.
He had a photographic memory that never developed.
A midget fortune-teller who escapes from prison is a small medium at large.
Once you've seen one shopping center, you've seen a mall.
Bakers trade bread recipes on a knead-to-know basis.
Santa's helpers are subordinate clauses.
Acupuncture is a jab well done

Thanks to Judy Lawton
Reading Bulldogs pitcher Brian Millea, Wakefield HS ’08, now Endicott College ’12, shared the bench with Timmy Lawson, 6, of Arlington who was thrilled with his role as batboy this summer. Boston sports legend Doug Flute plays second base for the Bulldogs.

Tim Lawson prepares to fire his two-seam fastball.
Photos by Steve Hartwell

F.I. Salute to the Boys of Summer

A New Cell Phone for Seniors!

Thanks to Pat Goetz
Janice Kaat launches a new blog

Longtime friend Janice Kaat has started a blog for writers, and the introductory post is a wonderful profile of the making of a writer. Jan moved from Wisconsin to Arizona several years ago, but we keep in touch with emails and, now, her blog.

All writers are welcome. She’ll include profiles and interviews with other writers and has promised to post the first chapter from her newly-completed novel, Second Chances, soon. You can access the blog at http://janicekaat.blogspot.com/PS: And yes, that’s “Kaat,” not “Katt.” When her cousin, pitcher Jim Kaat, was traded to the New York Yankees late in his long, glorious major league career, they misspelled his name in the program. We don’t want that to happen to Jan!

Another great website to bookmark

Join the ranks of the Perspiring Writers

Be sure to drop in on Ned Burke’s inspiring The Perspiring Writer, which delivers good how-to, profiles, and reviews. Ned’s an author and an expert on publishing an online magazine; he’ll even teach you how to do it.

Madonna Dries Christensen (Meandering with Madonna) and I both write for TPW, btw. In the current issue she has a great piece on first lines you really shouldn’t miss.

If you take a look at my “Keep the Day Job” column (this month: “Writing Through Depression,” also published right here in E.I.) please know that the picture under the byline is not yours truly but some fellow named Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., who apparently wrote some books or something.

As with E.I., subscriptions are free. Check it out at http://theperspiringwriter.com/

The laugh’s on Littman?

Wally Littman sends along the cover of a book that may or may not be published. I’ll let him explain.

“Several years ago the rabbi of a synagog of a friend of mine asked me if I'd be interested in contributing a cartoon a month for the synagog's newsletter. I said ‘no.’

“The next year he asked the same question. This time I said that I would do it on one condition, that he not ask me to join his congregation.

“He agreed. After 4 years I suggested that he publish a book of the gags and sell it as a fund raiser.

“I hope you enjoy.

Shalom,Wally”

LITTMAN’S LAUGHS

A compilation of cartoons by the “lah cartoonist”

“Put your shirt on, Sam, you’re getting Mrs Cohen excited.”

So you want to be a bestselling novelist?

Here’s blockbuster best-selling romance novelist Danielle Steel’s recipe for success. She writes in a flannel nightgown in her bedroom in San Francisco, typing away on a 1948 metal-body Olympia manual typewriter. She often writes for 18 hours a day. She usually works on several books at once.

She made it into the Guinness Book of World Records in 1989 for having a book on the Times best-seller list for 381 consecutive weeks. She’s broken her own record since then.
HAPPY TRAILS TO YOU, BUCKEROOS!