Dickens Theme Park is downright Dickensian

I might never have known there was a Charles Dickens theme park-- in England, of course-- were it not for all the journalists scrambling to find something to write about in honor of the great author’s 200th birthday recently.

That’s how I found out about Dicken’s World.

Instead of the Haunted House, a Bleak House? Gruel at the snack bar-- with NO seconds?

Actually, it’s worse.

This “amusement” park features grimy urchins, rat-infested waters, and odors of authentic rotting cabbage and offal wafting from strategically-placed “smell pots” throughout the park. For the toddlers, there’s Fagin’s Den play area where, presumably, the little angels learn how to pick pockets.

There may even be real pickpockets roaming the cobblestone streets, along with automated Uriah Heap, Miss Havisham, Pip, and other beloved Dickens characters-- and, yes, those smell pots.

The featured attraction is the Great Expectations Boat Ride, which launches from a rat-infested creek, snakes through a graveyard, and winds up in a sewer.

People have to pay to take this ride?


What will be the next author theme park?

This set me to thinking about possibilities for other author/amusement parks.

Probably the easiest to get up and running would be Kafkascape-- which would consist of a single endless line. Folks would stand in line for hours without moving and without knowing what they were waiting for. Then they’d go home. (I got that idea from “Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me,” the funniest show on radio. The rest of these are mine. Can you tell?)

Think of the cool Francis Macomber African Safari ride you could build for Hemingwayville.

The big attraction at Yoknapatawpha County Park could be the Joe Christmas Lynching Tree.

BardLand could feature a “To Be or Not To Be” thrill ride, during which robots shoot slings and arrows of outrageous fortune at the riders.

The possibilities are literarily endless.

So how about it, E.I. readers? Email your ideas for the next great author theme park to me here at World Headquarters of Extra Innings, the newsletter for writers, their enablers, and all with a warped sense of humor. We’ll run the best ideas in the next issue and then start looking for investors. Send those gems to: mcook@dcs.wisc.edu.
In Burke’s World of publishing everyone has a story to tell

By Madonna Dries Christensen

Over the past 40 years, Publisher E.P. Ned Burke has given a voice to thousands of writers, many of whom saw their first byline in a memoir magazine called Yesterday’s Magazette.

One of those writers, Ingeborg Knight, says, “Receiving an [acceptance] e-mail marked ‘Congratulations’ felt like awakening on Christmas morning with joy in my heart.”

“It started because of my love of nostalgia,” Burke says. “When I was very young, I loved to listen to my parents, grandparents, or older relatives relate colorful stories about the good old days. Some of their tales were more entertaining than listening to George Burns and Gracie Allen, or watching The Lone Ranger.”

By the time he graduated from high school Burke had a collection of stories and old photos about Scranton, PA. After college, he worked for a weekly newspaper for three years before deciding he’d gained enough knowledge to start his own paper.

“Ah, the confidence and ignorance of youth,” he says.

Burke called his venture The Independent Publishing Company and the weekly paper The Independent. With it he produced a tabloid insert called Yesterday’s, featuring his vintage photos and the recollections he’d written.

Yesterday’s was an immediate hit with hometown folks, who responded by sending their stories. After a blurb in Writer’s Digest about Yesterday’s, Burke became swamped with nostalgia from across the country and beyond.

“As Yesterday’s was printed on newsprint and contained a few news items,” he recalls, “many readers mistakenly called my magazine a little paper. That irked me. So, I added the word Magazette, to inform readers that this was a magazine/gazette.” He added a sub-title: The Original Magazine of Memories.

After relocating to Florida, and while working for other newspapers, he founded New Writer’s Guidelines and News, and, more recently Writer’s Magazette. These publications offer advice on all aspects of writing.

Yesterday’s Magazette, has gone from that first tabloid magazine printed on cheap newsprint to a glossy magazine and on into the digital age with an online edition.

In a recent issue, Mary A. Berger commented: “So glad to have found YM again. Close to 15 years ago you published one of my articles. I never would’ve suspected that today I’d have a book published and a second ready to be released. Thanks for helping me on the road to writing.”

Now, wanting time to pursue his own writing and other interests, Burke has cut back from quarterly issues of Yesterday’s Magazette and Writer’s Magazette to annual. You’ll still find the two magazines online with “Updates” posted weekly, with new stories and viewpoints.

“By taking this course, I leave the door open for you to continue sharing your memories with me and with a wide and loyal audience,” Burke says. “Then, in December, I will choose the 10 best new stories received from February 1 to December 1, and our judges will help me pick one to be our “YM Best Memory of The Year,” and one WM best story. The author of each will receive a $50 prize, plus publication in our printed magazine. This will begin with our 2013 issue in January.

So, don’t despair—Yesterday’s Magazette will continue its purpose since the beginning, when Ned Burke set out to prove that “Everyone Has A Yesterday” and that everyone, regardless of age or writing ability, has a cherished story to tell. Thousands of those stories have been captured and saved in print or in cyberspace for families and individuals to savor.

Join the throng of writers and see your byline in Yesterday’s Magazette and Writer’s Magazette. In addition to that pleasure, you might pocket the monetary reward.
[To find Yesterday’s Magazette and Writer’s Magazette and explore Burke’s World of enterprises, follow the links at http://www.magazettes.com]
Plunking clock brings time, memories to light

By Sandy Mickelson

Little things mean a lot. They can also drive you crazy.

My new kitchen clock looks great, but it's the noisiest clock I've ever heard. Echoes from each second's strike mock the spot in my brain that hates noise. Plunk. Plunk. Plunk. It doesn't even tick. It plunks.

So I've got to decide whether constant plunking will drive me past sanity or if I can overlook this noise for the sake of time.

Time's been on my mind a lot lately because time changes things. All things.

You've seen me talk about Don Hansch before. My uncle who died a few years back. Time took him, but never his memory. What most people remember is the laugh. Distinctive enough that people knew he was around just hearing the laugh.

That's one of the things we talked about after the funeral of his stepson, Bruce Griffin, when family gathered for a meal before going back to his – or her – own life. Sad affairs such as a funeral usually bring on fun affairs, such as a family meal. A mini reunion.

And that's where time steps in again. Even living in the same town doesn't keep families together because time pulls them apart, and before you know it, the business of getting on with life gets in the way of life. Such a shame.

The Griffin family took a double hit on this because Greg Griffin died January 21. That's just three weeks to get over the hurt before time struck again.

Maybe it's the introspection that comes with memories relived after a death coupled with all the love shown on television because of Valentine's Day, but I've fallen into a crazy place that has nothing to do with a plunking clock.

It's become increasingly important to me to offer advice. Crazy, right? Me telling someone what to do. But I've found that in times of stress or sadness or maybe just because, rubbing a back helps. Try it. But don't just pass your hands over the back and call it good. Just sit there and rub. There's a whole lot of good in a back rub.

Be generous. Give away something that means something to you just because the other person will love it. Probably love it more because you gave it to them.

Stand up for yourself and for others. If something needs to be fixed, fix it.

And most of all, don't be shy about connecting with the past whenever you want. Make a phone call if you want. Don't let time take away a precious connection that may never happen again.

Don't let time wear away your memories, either, but you may want to let it change what you remember. If you remember only the good, time's passing – or the passing of family or friends – won't hurt as much. Grief will be easier to manage when stories are happy stories.

Trust me. And when you're laughing till you cry, no one will ever know if the tears are laughing tears or memory's tears.

So long friends, until the next time when we're together.

Sandy Mickelson is retired as lifestyle editor of The Fort Dodge, Iowa, Messenger. This column ran on Sunday, February 12, 2012 and is reprinted with Sandy's kind permission. You can contact her at mcsalt@frontiernet.net.

Actual classified ads placed in British Newspapers:
FREE YORKSHIRE TERRIER.
8 years old,
Hateful little bastard.
Bites!

FREE PUPPIES
1/2 Cocker Spaniel, 1/2 sneaky neighbor's dog.

FREE PUPPIES.
Mother is a Kennel Club registered German Shepherd.
Father is a Super Dog, able to leap tall fences in a single bound.
Gaga Over Writing
By Diana R. Jenkins

There ain't no reason why I haven't yet begun to write.
(Ooh, baby! Deadline's coming!)
I got no reason that I cannot think of what to type.
I need to start out right but my ideas are all so trite.
(Ooh, baby! Deadline's coming!)
I was a fool to ever think I had the power to write.
This thing's not happenin' -- I simply can't begin.
I will forever be staring at my pc,
And I'm sure I'll never write again.
I'm on the edge of story
And it's driving me completely insane.
I'm on the edge of story
With a Gaga song stuck in my brain.
I'm on the edge
The edge
The edge
The edge
The edge
The edge
The edge
I'm on the edge of story and I'll never meet my deadline this way.
Writing is nothing but pain!
I'm on the edge of story.
My mind's become a permanent blank.
I'm on the edge of story.
My career is falling into the tank.
I'm on the edge
The edge
The edge
the
He-e-ey, wait! I just thought of the perfect beginning!
Okay…panic over. I'll be fine now.
But why do I do this to myself?
I guess it's just part of my process.
What can I say?
Baby, I was born this way.

_Diana R. Jenkins is the author of hundreds of magazine stories for kids as well as several play collections, a couple of comic collections, and a middle grade novel. Her latest book is Goodness Graces! Ten Short Stories about the Sacraments. She lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. Visit her on the web at www.dianarjenkins.bravehost.com._
Advice on advice: 
let the writer be wary

by Randi Lynn Mrvos
Let’s say you’ve posed a question to an online forum about writing. How do you handle the advice?

Recently, I read a question concerning how a writer should go about getting the attention of a publisher. Though it was posted on a respectable writing forum, one piece of advice shocked me. Someone suggested that the writer should forget sending a query and try to “stand out” by sending the publisher gifts like freshly baked cookies.

Excuse me, well-meaning advisor. Most editors will tell you that doing so will make you stand out—in a negative way.

Luckily, another person responded with sound advice: join a professional writing group like the SCBWI (Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators) and attend conferences to learn how to approach publishers more professionally.

There’s a lot of advice to be had on the Internet. Your job is to filter out the bad and find the good. That comes with perseverance and patience. If you ask a question on a writing forum, read all of the replies. Find the reply that best speaks to your heart.

But how can you be sure when there are many differences of opinion? Join a professional writing group and attend conferences. Take part in a local critique group and approach them with your questions. Read many books on the art of writing for your chosen genre. Read books on how to market your work. Once you have a feel for what is expected of an author, you’ll have a better understanding of how you should approach a publisher, and with luck, stand out.

From time to time, I’ve sought answers to questions that were not available in books. So I’ve asked published authors questions online, and they’ve usually answered me promptly with great suggestions. Other times I’ve attended conferences, where I can ask agents and publishers questions face to face. I can trust these sources. As for online writing forums, you may not know if the responder is truly creditable. So with that in mind, I caution you to be careful of the advice that you seek. You know the phrase: Buyer, beware. Here’s another: Writer, be wary.

KAAT’S COSMIC CRYPTOGRAM
For writers only

By Janice Kaat
Tangling your mind around letters and words helps to get your mind off your problems and gives you all kinds of ideas. At least it did for me. It allowed me to fall in love with words all over again.

During this process I found a lost love, cryptograms. If you’ve never trying solving a cryptogram the process can be overwhelming at first. For me the beauty is finding that illusive word and watching a whole new world open up.

Cryptograms are created by using a code to exchange one letter for another. Some people try to solve the cryptogram by cracking the code. In this day and age that becomes quite difficult because if you’re really good at creating your codes, there are many different methods to use that are near impossible to detect.

Try solving this cryptogram by looking for patterns such as three letter words that could be “the,” “for,” and “and,” for example. One letter words of course are “a or I.” If there are a lot of a certain letter it could be “e”. Have fun.

HXVV DXUAUMR UE DNVXV IFJ CVA IFJX WUMT RF OMT IFJX DFXTE HCFD. TFM’A ANUMG, TFM’A EAFB, PJA WFEA FH OCC TFM’A CVA IFJX XVSVBAUFMUEA EVA XJCVE. ENV’E CUGV O DVCC WVOMUMR HXUVMT AVCCUMR IFJ DNOA IFJ SOM OMT SOMMFA DXUA V . RUYV NVX O YOSOAFM EF IFJ SOM NDYV HXVV OSSVEE AF BCOI.

Coach’s note: I’ll publish the answer and names of those who cracked it next issue. If you like this, we can have a new one each month.
The New Testament
as told by a kid

Jesus is the star of The New Testament. He was born in Bethlehem in a barn. (I wish I had been born in a barn too, because my mom is always saying to me, 'Close the door! Were you born in a barn?' It would be nice to say, 'As a matter of fact, I was.')

During His life, Jesus had many arguments with sinners like the Pharisees and the Republicans.

Jesus also had twelve opossums. The worst one was Judas Asparagus. Judas was so evil that they named a terrible vegetable after him.

Jesus was a great man. He healed many leopards and even preached to some Germans on the Mount. But the Republicans and all those guys put Jesus on trial before Pontius the Pilot. Pilot didn't stick up for Jesus. He just washed his hands instead.

Anyways, Jesus died for our sins, then came back to life again. He went up to Heaven but will be back at the end of the Aluminum. His return is foretold in the book of Revolution.
As newlyweds in 1921, my parents set up housekeeping on a farm near Ashton in northwest Iowa, one of three farms owned by my paternal grandfather. The couple probably did fairly well those first few years, but when my widower grandfather died in 1937, his will called for the farms to be sold and the money divided among his seven heirs. My father could not afford to buy the farm we lived on and, due to the Depression, farms did not sell quickly, so our family remained there until the farm sold in 1940.

After moving to town, my father worked nights at a construction company keeping a pump operating. Later, we moved to another small town a few miles away, where he worked as a carpenter for a construction company. After a heart attack in 1943 and needing an easier job, he tended the office and kept the books for a veterinarian.

My mother sometimes reminisced about leaving the farm: "On the night before we moved to town, I found Frank sitting in the barn, crying. He had sixty-five cents in his pocket. I don't think he ever got over losing the farm. At least we had food on the table, and when things got really bad, Frank sold a pig and we got by. We struggled for years and then had to leave the farm just about the time farmers were beginning to make a profit again."

The man who bought the farm once told my brother Daryl, "When your dad left, he took everything that wasn't nailed down. He didn't leave as much as a scrap of lumber."

But he did leave something, something that was found more than a half century later in a serendipitous discovery. In 1995, on a visit to Iowa, Daryl drove out to our old farm. The dilapidated barn looked as if a strong wind and a heavy rain could make it implode. When the owner said he intended to raze the structure soon, Daryl asked permission to take some boards for souvenirs. The owner told him to help himself.

Daryl searched inside and outside the barn, looking for pieces suitable to use as picture frames. He finally spotted a board that seemed the right size and shape. When he picked it up he noticed the letters F.D. carved into the board. Our father's initials. When had he done this? As a kid, trying out a pocketknife he got for Christmas? Or before he left the farm as an adult, leaving his indelible mark? We'll never know, but had Daryl gone to the farm even a day later, the entire barn might have been gone, and with it the slab of board bearing those initials.

I have a piece of the weathered wood (not the initialed one) in a frame, along with a photo of the barn and a photo of the farmhouse where my father was born and raised and toiled and began a family. The collage hangs above my desk, grounding me to a place and time that meant a great deal to my father-- and to me; it's where my life began.

This piece is from Madonna's forthcoming book of reminiscences, In Her Shoes. Watch this space for updates as it nears publication.

**lucubration***

lightning bolt
reading erma bombeck
by candlelight
Norma J. Sundberg

*We featured this word in the February Extra Innings
My Favorite Animal

Our teacher asked us what our favorite animal was, and I said, "Fried chicken."
She said I wasn't funny, but she couldn't have been right, because everyone else in the class laughed.

My parents told me to always be truthful and honest, and I am. Fried chicken is my favorite animal. I told my dad what happened, and he said my teacher was probably a member of PETA. He said they love animals very much.
I do, too. Especially chicken, pork and beef. Anyway, my teacher sent me to the principal's office. I told him what happened, and he laughed, too. Then he told me not to do it again.
The next day in class my teacher asked me what my favorite live animal was.
I told her it was chicken. She asked me why, just like she'd asked the other children.
So I told her it was because you could make them into fried chicken.
She sent me back to the principal's office again. He laughed and told me not to do it again.

I don't understand. My parents taught me to be honest, but my teacher doesn't like it when I am.

Today, my teacher asked us to tell her what famous person we admire most.
I told her, "Colonel Sanders."
Guess where I am now...

Thanks to our Missouri Muse

Ecdysiast
n. Stripper. One who removes his or her clothing in public for the entertainment of an audience.
Origin: A Baltimore stripper once asked the great writer H.L. Mencken to develop another word to raise the tone of her profession. Taking the scientific term for the periodic molting of a bird’s feathers, he modified it to 'Ecdysiast' for the girls who bare all.

The wisdom only age can bring
I totally take back all those times I didn't want to nap when I was younger.

Map Quest really needs to start their directions on # 5. I'm pretty sure I know how to get out of my neighborhood.

Bad decisions make good stories.

Can we all just agree to ignore whatever comes after Blue Ray? I don't want to have to restart my collection again.

I think the freezer deserves a light as well.

I would bet on any given Friday or Saturday night more kisses begin with Miller Light than with Kay.

How many times is it appropriate to say "What?" before you just nod and smile because you still didn't hear or understand a word they said?

Shirts get dirty. Underwear gets dirty. Pants? Pants never get dirty, and you can wear them forever.

You know you're getting fat when you go to unbutton the top of your pants -- and you already did it.

The first testicular guard, the "Cup," was used in Hockey in 1874 and the first helmet was used in 1974. That means it only took 100 years for men to realize that their brain is also important.
In addition to writing fiction I also like to write freelance articles on a variety of topics. Freelance writing allows me to research and write on subject areas I’m interested in, such as ‘food to fork’ and organic gardening.

When I started freelancing two years ago I was willing to have my articles published without being paid. I was a novice and needed to create my own list of clips. I took the risk that once an editor accepted a piece for publication at no cost then a relationship could be established and I could get paid for future articles.

The theory sounds reasonable, but in practice it’s not been my experience. Last year I submitted an article about a friend’s ranch where he and his wife raise grass-fed, grass-finished heritage Galloway cattle. I’ve been particularly successful with this piece and sold it, in various versions, several times. I submitted the piece to a Missouri regional publication – *Small Farm Today*. The piece was published along with a picture but I wasn’t paid.

In early November I received an e-mail from the editor asking for a submission on a specific topic. I was thrilled because I felt the theory worked – I had established a relationship. The e-mail requesting a submission didn’t mention a rate of pay or payment for pictures. No problem, I thought. I submitted the article and five pictures before Thanksgiving and added a final sentence: “Please confirm that you are accepting and paying for the article and pictures.” Clear enough?

In early January I received an e-mail from another editor asking for pictures to accompany my article. Rather than pointing out I had previously sent pictures, I responded by attaching pictures to the e-mail and returning it.

By mid-January I didn’t receive a response to know for sure if my article would be published in the Jan/Feb edition. Just to be sure I checked their website, and there was my article. The editor had never confirmed that my piece was accepted.

I dashed off an e-mail asking for both payment and a copy of the Jan/Feb edition of the magazine. No response. In mid-January I sent a second e-mail again asking for payment and a copy of the magazine. No response. On the last day of January I called and left a message on an antiquated answering machine. Two weeks later I received a copy of the Jan/Feb edition of *Small Farm Today* – but no check.

The rack price of the magazine is $5.95 per issue, and it carries 10 full-page ads in a 27-page publication. The little magazine certainly generates revenue – but the publisher doesn’t have the decency to share revenue with the people who contribute content.

Lessons learned? In the first place the request for submissions didn’t include the payment rate which should have been a huge red flag. Second, I should have required payment rates before sending the article and pictures. Third, getting stonewalled when I sent two follow-up e-mails and a phone message should have been a clue. I should have required payment rates before sending the article and pictures.

Their statement on page one that, “Although *Small Farm Today* adheres to the highest journalistic ethics . . .” is more than overstatement or misleading, it is FALSE!

Sadly, not all editors and publishers are honest, and they will take advantage of writers. Ron Macher, Publisher/Editor of *Small Farm Today*, is one of them. Caveat scriptor!
HYPED OVER HAIKU
BY ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS

You don’t have to be able to define it to love it

The PRINCETON ENCYCLOPEDIA OF POETICS declares that haiku grows so strongly from its cultural background (Buddhism, Taoism, and animism) that it "can't be adaptable as a whole" into Western languages; still we try.

Haiku (sometimes called hoku) is many things to many people. Some call it simple little nature poems, which is often true but leaves out many additional possibilities. Purists insist haiku must have a pattern of five/seven/five syllables and no title. Including any comparison is contrary to Japanese spirit, they maintain, since all existence is unique. The full moon is not a golden ball, half-eaten cookie, or silver earring; it is only itself.

The 5/7/5 seems arbitrary because Japanese word units differ markedly from English. In the Haiku Handbook William J. Higginson declares, "The Japanese count "onji." This word refers to a "sound symbol" which is a Japanese phonetic character simpler than most English syllables.

Current haiku may not be restricted to 17 syllables, may allow for an ABA rhyme pattern, and might even be titled.

In short, capturing the essence of haiku is like catching a butterfly; grabbing isn't hard; what's hard is not damaging fragile wings. Yet haiku proves remarkably enduring, having been around at least 500 years.

Let's sample varied examples. The following offers wry humor from a university biologist: "a-ha" for a few syllables so many rules
Craig W. Steele
Norma Sundberg, Floridian and author of AN ODD FABLE for children, wrote the following, which first appeared in THE PIEDMONT LITERARY REVIEW: dew-kissed morning glories climbing a cedar post mailbox yawns....

Traditionally, haiku does not include people, while senryu—similar poems that do include us—often capture a satiric quality, though not always. A book of Korean anime by Seung Won Han includes this haiku (from a sequence) in English:

In my childhood home where the wind would cry like the sound of a mandolin....

I wrote the following not worrying over definitions; simply liking the sound and sentiment.

Friendship from afar--
I sit in dusk and picture
You see the first star.

This one captured Honorable Mention for me form the Springfield Poets and Friends Annual Contest in 2009 plus Third Prize from the League of Minnesota Poets in 2010:

This shiny hubcap for a mirror--I look down into polished sky

In 2003 Smithsonian Magazine published a satiric sequence by Spike Gillespie, titled HAIKU HISTORY, which begins:
a look at our past/seventeen syllables and/three lines at a time

--And continues with 24 linked examples which a purist would insist were senryu:

Gutenberg printing thrills all the writer types with a movable feat.

Since Expert A's rules are scorned by Expert B, choose what works for you. Poetry is a vast sea and you a unique soul sailing it. Some scorn haiku as trivial (what can be captured in just three lines?); yet the form reaches sophisticates the world over.

European President Herman van Rompuy said of his own collection, "This dreamy Japanese poetry offers relief from a chaotic world." In sum, haiku holds a paradoxical duality by focusing minutely, yet also enlarging our world-view.

These odd zebra trees:

Birches in a northern wood--
Stripes go the wrong way!

Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks covered poetry for Writers' Journal (first called The Inklings) for 29 years. Her latest book, a verse novel, is Princess Sunrise, which was serialized in the Great Northwoods Journal. She lives in Jefferson, New Hampshire.
Children are quick!

TEACHER: Why are you late?
STUDENT: Class started before I got here.

TEACHER: Randall, why are you doing your math multiplication on the floor?
Randall: You told me to do it without using tables.

TEACHER: Glenn, how do you spell 'crocodile'?
TEACHER: No, that's wrong
Glenn: Maybe it is wrong, but you asked me how I spell it.

TEACHER: Sherry, name one important thing we have today that we didn't have ten years ago.
Sherry: Me!

TEACHER: STEVEN, why do you always get so dirty?
Steven: Well, I'm a lot closer to the ground than you are.

TEACHER: Phyllis, give me a sentence starting with 'I. '
Phyllis: I is...
TEACHER: No, Phyllis..... Always say, 'I am.'
Phyllis: All right... 'I am the ninth letter of the alphabet.'

TEACHER: George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree, but also admitted it. Now, Lee, do you know why his father didn't punish him?
Lee: Because George still had the axe in his hand.....

TEACHER: Now, Charlie, tell me frankly, do you say prayers before eating?
Charlie: No sir, I don't have to, my Mom is a good cook.

TEACHER: Brandon, your composition on 'My Dog' is exactly the same as your brother's. Did you copy his?
Brandon: No, sir. It's the same dog.

TEACHER: Karen, what do you call a person who keeps on talking when people are no longer interested?
Karen: A teacher

How to talk Southern

It is not a shopping cart, it is a buggy!

Jawl-P? means, Did you all go to the bathroom?

Fixinto is one word. It means I'm going to do that.

There is no such thing as lunch. There is only dinner and then there's supper.

The word jet is a question meaning, 'Did you eat?'

You don't PUSH buttons, you MASH 'em.

Ya'll is singular. All ya'll is plural.

All the festivals across the state are named after a fruit, vegetable, grain, insect, or animal.

You only own five spices: salt, pepper, mustard, Tabasco and ketchup.

All-y'all already know what a hissyfit is, right?

Fried catfish is the other white meat.

THE WORD WHISPERER
JAN KENT

What, no unicorns?

This month let's talk about our imaginary animal friends. Take the ruffled grouse; sounds cute, but doesn't exist. The ruffled grouse does, though. She's dressed in a tailored outfit of brown tweed feathers. Not a ruffle in sight.

The seagull is another non-animal. There are ring-billed gulls and herring gulls and the silly ol' laughing gull and many more. Mostly they live and thrive around fresh water – and grocery store parking lots.

Our friend from Down Under, the koala bear, isn't a bear at all but a marsupial.
When I got my B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1966, I hoped to go on for a master’s in social work, but no graduate schools came calling because of my low grade point average. One school suggested working for a couple of years and then reapplying. And that’s what I did. I became a caseworker at the Social Services Department in Wisconsin’s Menominee County, which had been, and is now again, the Menominee Indian Reservation.

I loved my job, but I wanted to do it better, so in 1968 I applied to several graduate schools whose catalogs indicated they would consider applicants with “low records.” The University of Hawaii answered first, sending me a letter I was too nervous to open until I reached the privacy of my office.

The letter said “yes.” Hawaii’s School of Social Work was the first graduate school to admit me to its program, and I’ve carried a special affection for that school ever since. However, I had no idea how I’d swing a move to Hawaii or explain to my parents and wife Judy’s that we’d be taking their less-than-one-year-old grandson Eric thousands of miles away from them.

Then the University of Michigan announced that I could come there on “low-record, probationary” status. It made sense—a Big Ten school with a great reputation within driving distance of our parents. I said yes to Michigan, sent my regrets to Hawaii, and promised Judy we’d visit there someday.

Someday came almost 44 years later, in January 2012, when we joined a local group on a Hawaiian cruise. I had continued to wonder how our lives might have played out if we had moved there in 1968. Would we still be living there? Eric sometimes said, “Dad, I could have been SURFING by the time I was three!”

Before our cruise, I surfed the website of Hawaii’s School of Social Work and discovered a professor who’d been a classmate at Michigan in 1968-69. I enjoy life’s little coincidences, so I wrote to her, and she met Judy and me when we visited the campus in Honolulu.

We didn’t remember each other, though we were both enrolled in Michigan’s casework program and probably passed each other in the hallways or even had classes together.

Judy and I rode the number four bus from Waikiki to the university campus, where we found a memorable inscription on the front gate: “Above all nations is humanity.” We found the School of Social Work in Henke Hall, which is decrepit, infected by termites, and scheduled to be replaced. It hadn’t housed the social work school in the late 1960s, however.

I bought several UH souvenirs decorated with its distinctive green H—a hooded sweatshirt, a cap, a patch, and a set of coasters—and I enjoyed imagining how things might have turned out if I had entered the grad school there. Would we have enjoyed Hawaii enough to stay, as my classmate did? There’s no way to tell, but on our trip we enjoyed the constant 75-to-80-degree temperatures, and the mix of many cultures is fascinating.

“Hawaii is a wonderful place,” my classmate said, “even beyond its natural beauty.”

And it’s possible that, in the two years I would have been a student there, I might have learned to surf with my son.
Ah, bad movies. Ever since I first started watching MST3K, I’ve had a fascination with them. The bad acting, the nonsensical plots, the small effort that was put into making them, all of which make you wonder how someone could make something so terrible and think that they were actually making something good. So I present my bottom five films of all time.

5) The Room-
This is possibly the weirdest movie experience I have ever had. Tommy Wiseau directs, produces, writes and stars in this mess of a movie. The acting is hilarious, like a very poor soap opera. The dialogue is cringe-inducing. The plot is barely there, because a lot of the time, we get introduced to subplots that are most likely there to extend the film's running time. In one, a character declares she has breast cancer to her daughter and the daughter just says that she will probably be fine. It’s never brought up again. This is how random and odd this movie can be. The actors clearly can't act. From the first scene, I can almost guarantee you will be laughing. As bad as this movie is, Wiseau is a delight to watch with his thick accent and cave man look. See it for an hour and a half of hilarity.

4) Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen-
I despise all three of the Transformers movies, but the second is the worst to me. It is one of the few movies I’ve seen where I left the theater angry. I will admit, the only reason I even saw it was because I did somewhat enjoy the first movie when it came out, but after another viewing or two, I came to hate that one, too. The action is boring, the characters are stupid, and a lot are stereotypical annoyances. Michael Bay is a horrible director. He will never be able to make a good movie, and this movie proves it.

3. Birdemic: Shock and Terror-
Alfred Hitchcock must be rolling in his grave because of this unintentionally hilarious rip off of The Birds. My review pretty much sums up everything that’s wrong with it: http://www.des.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings/extrainnings15.pdf

2) The Twilight Movies-
Easily my most hated film series of all time. The only reason I’ve ever or ever will see them is when they’re torn apart by Rifftrax. I can't believe this piece of garbage is called a "romance." It certainly isn't. These characters are so dull and uninteresting. Bella is manipulative and a sociopath. Edward and Jacob are just there so teenage girls will flock to these stupid things. The overall "story" is an atrocity. The first movie is mostly Bella and Edward wandering around for two hours and I guess falling in love, but most of the time, it looks like they are either about to fall asleep or are in pain. The second movie is Bella moping because Edward has left town, so she tries to manipulate Jacob into keeping her company only to ditch him and go find Edward. The third movie is Bella now manipulating both males into thinking she loves them, but then she just decides Edward will do. Only watch them with Rifftrax. Kevin Murphy's added lyrics to Edward's piano solo in the Rifftrax from the first movie alone makes it worth watching

1) Manos: The Hands of Fate-
To this day, nothing has been able to dethrone my worst movie of all time. The story behind the movie was that Harold Warren, a fertilizer salesman in El Paso, Texas, made a bet that he could make a film, and this was the result. (Read how the movie was made in Entertainment Weekly: http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1068572,00.html)

The acting is hysterical, it's shot poorly, the dialogue is dreadful, everything is horrible about it to the nth degree. But why do I keep watching it? Simple. It really is the best episode of Mystery Science Theater 3000 I have ever seen. See the movie at least once, riffed or not. It's an experience unlike anything you have ever seen.
The Lone Wolf sparks memories

Please tell Madonna I truly enjoyed her piece on The Lone Wolf [last issue]. I first remember staring at that print on the wall of my grandparents' dining room in their Chicago home as I squirmed through long holiday dinners - except then I thought it was a 'doggie'. When Grandpa retired, they moved up to Wisconsin, to their log cabin on the Fox River. The wolf print came along. I remember it there, on the short wall of the living room, just across from his recliner. His shotgun and collection of fishing rods leaned against the bookshelf directly beneath it for as long as I can remember. Grandpa died when I was seven, and the print remained in that exact place until Grandma died.

The next time I noticed it, the wolf print was hanging on the wall in my parents' living room in Manitowish Waters. Twenty years later, after Dad died, Mom moved down to Genoa City. When I helped her unpack, sure enough, the wolf print was there, right along with her own mother's favorite (and equally popular) print of the overly bronzed, bare chested indian on horseback. Both prints remained on the wall of her living room until she died.

Now both of them live with me. I walk by them every day, rarely stopping to think about all the places they've lived or what they've seen. I was surprised to read there were variations of the wolf print and jumped up right away to run and see which one I had. As I looked it over taking in all the details, all my memories of the people who loved it came rushing back - a nice moment. Thanks to Madonna for reminding me to take another look.

Barbara Burris

Time vanishes when you write

Taking a few moments to read E.I. was a pleasure. Your article on “Why Does Stephen King Write?” [also last issue] strikes a melodic chord. Since my writing career is in its infancy people have asked me why I wanted to write a novel. Two things come to mind. First, it's the only thing I do that when I sit down at the laptop I no longer hear the radio, and when I look at the clock, I'm missing four hours or more having been in some magical place where time is temporarily suspended. Second, I just think writing is what I do. This response isn't eloquent but it is sincere.

Rex Owens