Editor's note: Many of you may remember the three-part series that ran in Creativity Connection (print precursor of E.I.) several years ago about how Tom rescued a little dog being kept in a bird cage in Korea and brought him back with him to America. Walt (named for Walt Whitman) died recently, and I persuaded Tom to share this remembrance with you. Maybe we were waiting for ‘a sign,’ something so unequivocal that we’d know when Walt had run out of interest in this life. Truth be told, I wanted him to sail out quietly in his sleep pressed to my back under the covers where he’d slept for all these years. Or sleeping between us, his head pushed into the pillows. I mean he had a serious heart murmur we’d learned years before. Surely, that weakness in his wiring would take him out. Or his now failing kidneys.

Didn’t happen. Nor did any of his other vital organs fail. By my reckoning Walt was seventeen and half years old. There’s room for debate on this one since he was very young, but of an undetermined age, when he adopted me in Korea. In any case, he went on living long after his exuberant life as a dog had begun to slip away.

First came his deafness, then cataracts that gradually clouded over his play-world. A vet assured me that dogs do well without either seeing or hearing. Their noses are what keep them interested in life. Ah, so we’d gotten a pass, not a sign. Now we could live with Walt’s new disabilities without feeling too bad. “Love wants what it wants or it does not care,” Emily Dickinson said. Her poetry was certainly on message.

Mary and I couldn’t yet imagine a world without Walt. It gets confusing, love: attachment, denial, when enough is enough and for whom. And where’s that damn sign? Well, it came to us but only incrementally. Walt lost interest in his morning walks, from his traditional lead tugging, piss sniffing exuberance around the neighborhood to walks that barely got us to the end of our block, and that was slow going.

Then the day came when he showed no interest when I’d unhook his leash from the coat rack. The life-long excitement for his morning walks had gone out of him. How could I ignore that revelation? About the same time he began showing signs of dementia. He’d ‘stare’ at a wall. Or stand motionless in the middle of the front room.

While these ‘signs’ were painful for us, Walt seemed undisturbed by them. Best of all, he was in no pain. His legs worked, shakily, but they worked. As soon as I scooped him up into my arms, he’d put his head under my chin and within minutes whether I was walking or sitting, he’d fall asleep. His contented snoring seemed to reassure us that he still found happiness being with us. And sleeping was mostly what he wanted to do. I told Mary a few days before his departure that he was way more out of this world now than in it.
But the tell-tale sign(s) came swiftly. One, he stopped eating. No matter what we offered including his favorite foods—even rare rib eye steak, sauteed liver, bacon. We’d be left crouched down on the floor holding warm morsels up to his mouth, but he’d only turn away. And last, the water. His dementia cut him off from his memory of water. He’d circle the water dish in the courtyard, but his lips touching the surface would startle him. So, here was our little dog, blind, deaf, dehydrated, done with food, wobbling around in his once beloved world.

So by now we figured it was time. Walt was in my study asleep on the couch. A deep sleep. We called to make arrangements with the vet to bring him in that afternoon. We were in Mary’s study talking out the details. We were not going to leave anything to chance, right down to the towel he’d be held in, the old blue terry cloth bath towel.

Right in the middle of this check-list-conversation we both heard the old familiar sound, Walt’s paws hitting the stool from the couch. Right, Walt who couldn’t jump anymore jumping off the couch. Before we could process this ‘little miracle,’ he came around the corner walking into the room straight up and steady. Our response, as you can imagine, first amazement, then laughter. “Not today,” Walt said.

That evening Walt got in bed with us though I had to lift him up to get him there. The next day his wishes could not have been clearer. He was ready. He was leaning against the wall. He was done with all the rest that had made up his extraordinary journey. There was now the unequivocal message from our little boy, “Let’s get on with this.”

He showed no fear of the animal hospital when we pulled up. We’d made the call. Our vet was waiting and led us to a small, private, carpeted room. The three of us kneeled down on the floor with him in his blue towel. The doctor waited for our nod. We gave it. The barbiturate went in. Peace did not come tripping slow but almost immediately, and the little room filled up with it. The doctor discreetly slipped away. The way I saw it, Walt had a train to catch. So through our tears and grief we hummed the bardo into his old gray ears so he wouldn’t miss it.

We reviewed Tom’s most recent book of poems, The Names of Birds, in a previous issue. His other collections include Lauds, If It Weren’t for Trees and Wu Wei. Tom lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico with his partner, Mary Judge, who is also grieving for Walt.

Extra Innings #37

Madison, Wisconsin November, 2012

This month’s All-Star lineup: Tom Crawford, Madonna Dries Christensen, Rex Owens, Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks, Perry Stone, Vic Johnson Jim Herod, Sharon Young, Den Adler, Novelist: Gadi Bossin

Word Whisperer: Jan Kent
Cryptologist: Janice Kaat
World’s cutest baby: Liliana Lenore Cook
Web Weavers: Celeste Anton, Emily Baker
Internetters: Steve Born, Larry Tobin
Poets: Tom Crawford, Norma Sundberg, Craig W. Steele

Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook

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Extra Innings is a proud booster of Write by the Lake
The Writers Institute
The School of the Arts at Rhinelander
Weekend with your Novel and the Odyssey Project

Back issues of E.I. available at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings

Deadline for next issue: Tuesday, November 20th
My pastor shared the story to lead a recent homily. A lovely couple was celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, and someone asked, “What’s the secret of a happy marriage?” The husband answered immediately: “I do the dishes.” There it is, folks: the solution to World Peace in four words.

There can be great power in performing simple, repetitive tasks, and there may be major and beneficial side effects for writers.

You say you’ve tried therapy, meditation, antigravity yoga, even a neti pot, but nothing seems to get you past the cold, hard terror that only the blank page or empty computer screen can evoke? Spent a weekend trying to improve the feng shui in your writing place but still can’t seem to squeeze out a single syllable?

Before you try Zumba or Piloxing (pilates meets boxing), consider the soothing therapeutic properties of hot, soapy water.

**Got writer’s block? Wash the dishes.**

Soothing hot water, bracing soap bubbles, and a simple, clearly-defined task await you. As you work, you see tangible progress. There’s no question of whether you washed that pot well or not; it’s either clean or it isn’t, and if it isn’t, you get the SOS and scrub harder (a process writers call “revision”). You can watch the fruits of your labor accumulate on the drain board, even as the cache of dirty vessels dwindles.

Meanwhile, freed of having to engage in the menial task at hand, your subconscious can seek out more interesting fodder to chew on-- like, say, the jam you’ve gotten your protagonist into with no idea of how to get her out again. The subconscious works best when your hands are wet and soapy, because you can’t grab pencil and paper, and you don’t dare get your keyboard wet. It’s perfect!

If nothing comes of your mental meandering, so what? You got the dishes done! Your housemate may even be grateful.

Ah, but there’s the rub. If you would get the full cleansing benefits of your labor, the dishwashing must be performed with a pure heart, not for praise or thanks, with no thought to reward-- and no inner grousing about whose turn it was or whether it’s “fair” that you’re washing dishes while the love of your life is eating bon bons while watching *Wheel of Fortune.*

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**BARELY-RELATED SIDEBAR**

**Your fondest wish in just three words**

*Editor’s note: Some consider the following joke to be slightly risque. I have no idea why.*

Willing young man strikes up a conversation with lovely young woman in a bar. LYW seems friendly, and WYM starts to get ideas, as WYM will. “Say, he says,” staring soulfully into the woman’s eyes. “Could we continue this discussion somewhere...more private?” To which LYW replies, “Why, sugar, I’ll do anything you want me to do.”

Now she’s got WYM’s full attention.

Gulp. “Anything?”

“Anything. But there’s one catch,” she says.

“What’s the catch?” he inquires.

“You have to be able to tell me what you want in only three words.”

He thinks that over, decides its reasonable, and, taking LYW’s hands in his and leaning close, he whispers, “Paint my house.”
What about Willy?

The proverbial “imp of the perverse” allows us to enjoy sick jokes, and Little Willies are such put in rhyme. They are absurd, yet countless examples abound. Willy may be named Billy or a girl can be featured. Usually in four line couplets, such a piece may be longer, yet the thrust is the same: something horrid happens and we laugh. Perhaps pretend tragedy blocks true pain.

The Willy archetype was created by Harry Graham in a 1902 book, *Ruthless Rhymes For Heartless Homes*. His character was named Billy, but at some point that changed. Here is an example Graham wrote:

Billy, in one of his nice new sashes,
Fell in the fire and burned to ashes.
Now, although the room grows chilly,
I haven’t the heart to poke poor Billy.

A boy who wears sashes? If the piece is dated, still, punch-line is clear. Here’s another:

Willy fell down the elevator;
Wasn’t found till six days later,
Then the neighbors said, “Gee whiz!
What a spoiled child Willy is!”

A New Hampshire historian claims “to get the willies” comes from the fate of a family lost to a fatal rock-fall in 1826. Hearing a roar, the Willeys (so-spelled) raced clear of their home in Crawford Notch even as the slide split around a boulder, sparing cabin, whereas those fleeing, by cruel irony, were crushed. However poet/critic Clement Wood suggests Little Willies could have been inspired by Julia Moore, “Sweet Singer of Michigan,” famed for her truly awful odes:

We have lost our little Hanner in a very painful manner
And we often ask, how can her harsh sufferings be borne?
When her death was first reported her aunt got up and snorted,
With the grief that she supported, for it made her so forlorn.
She was such a little seraph that her father, who is sheriff,
Really doesn’t seem to care if he ne’er smiles in life again.
Hanner’s gone, we hope to heaven, at the early age of seven,
(Funeral starts off at eleven) where she’ll nevermore have pain.

Another origin, Wood speculates, might trace to Thomas Hood, a punning Brit who began his ballad “Faithless Nellie Gray” thus:

Ben Battle was a soldier bold
And used to war’s alarms;
But a cannonball took off his legs,
And he laid down his arms.

Comic grue marches on, and the next examples are mine, and yes, I like to provide titles. Clever ones give an added fillip.

**LAUN-DRO MATTIE**

Willy and Sister had a spat
At the local Laundromat.
Willy did what’s rather dire:
Tossed Sis in a spinning dryer.
“She’s all wet,” he said—with sigh—
“But I trust she’ll come out dry.”

**HIDE AND GO STREAK**

Because it’s nice to get some air
Willy stripped our sister bare.
Ma had bandage strips to tear up
But no salve to soothe the flare-up.
Peeling proves quite unappealing,
Thus, although we don’t lack feeling
Hide and streak so tanned her hide
Now we keep Sis on ice inside.

**PLAYING CHICKEN**

Little Willy aimed his gun
At rooster, hen, and everyone.
Though no teeth has Mama’s pullet
Still he made her bite the bullet!

My first Willy was a six verse tale following the Three Mile Isle nuclear meltdown, with this finale:

Set Willy in his concrete softly;
Sing a hymn that’s high and lofty.
He’s done, now, feeling oozy-sick;
No need of drum-roll; **click, click, click!**

Go ahead: Exercise bleak, black wit in a funny, punny way and you don’t have to stick to the names Willy or Billy or (for that matter) rhymed couplets. ABCB or ABAB verses can also be used, or try a Little Willy limerick. This paper mayhem is really harmless fun!
My parents saw their two oldest sons safely through World War II. Then, along about 1950, Poppy began worrying about a place called Korea. But his third next oldest son, Merlyn (Pug), followed his brothers’ footsteps and enlisted in the Navy. From my teenaged view, a ship seemed safer than on-the-ground battlefields. With hindsight, I know different.

This month, during which we honor veterans, marks the 60th anniversary of the first hydrogen bomb explosion, at Eniwetok Atoll, in the Marshall Islands. Staging began in March, 1952, and by November more than 11,000 civilian and military personnel were on site. Although those involved had taken a secrecy oath, journalists had speculated about the experiment for months.

Detonated by remote control from a ship 30 miles away, the nuclear blast sent a ball of flame 57,000 feet into the air within 90 seconds, and ultimately to 120,000 feet. The three-megaton bomb contained as much force as the combined weight of all bombs dropped on Germany and Japan during World War II. It vaporized an island, killing animals, vegetation, fish in the sea, and left a crater more than a mile wide.

Poppy read the daily papers, and we knew Merlyn was at Eniwetok, but details from him were scant. In an early December letter to my brother, Daryl, also in the Navy, Poppy wrote: Got two letters from Pug last week, he plans on being home for xmas, will leave Eniwetok about now and land at San Diego after 7,000 miles. He wrote he witnessed an experiment where he was, didn’t write much about it, guess you know what he meant, said the island was gone.

Poppy died on the 10th, before Merlyn arrived in Iowa. Once home, the importance of the spectacular event he witnessed must have been eclipsed by a somber family occasion. I was unaware of the secrecy oath, but consider this: My brother was the one person in our small town who had viewed something so astounding and so recent that the ramifications could not even be imagined. And he couldn’t discuss it.

As one who writes family stories, I regret never asking for his recollection of this historic event. (Unknown to me, the oath was rescinded in 1996.) I recently asked Daryl if Merlyn ever talked about the test. Daryl said he had, a couple of times. He said his ship had been there about a month. On the morning of the test, they were 30 miles away.

They were instructed to turn their back, close their eyes tight, and raise their arms across their eyes. Even then, a brilliant light flashed around them. Merlyn recalled that some of the old salts cracked jokes, as if this were all in a day’s work.

It was no laughing matter.

In 1979, the National Association of Atomic Veterans was founded with the purpose of having a united voice in getting a fair hearing regarding health problems possibly caused from exposure to ionizing radiation. Merlyn died in 2006 from liver cancer; my cousin’s husband, who was at Eniwetok in 1953, died from bladder cancer in 2011.

Atomic Veterans (military service 1945-1962) who have certain health problems (or their survivors) are now entitled to monetary restitution.

Whatever the amount, they deserve compensation.

For information, go to http://www.atomicveteran.info or http://www.naav.com.
Fascinating (and possibly true) facts

The University of Alaska spans four time zones

The tooth is the only part of the human body that cannot heal itself.

In ancient Greece, tossing an apple to a girl was a traditional proposal of marriage. Catching it meant she accepted.

Warner Communications paid $28 million for the copyright to the song Happy Birthday.

Intelligent people have more zinc and copper in their hair.

Caffeine increases the power of aspirin and other painkillers, which is why it is found in some medicines.

The military salute evolved from medieval times, when knights in armor raised their visors to reveal their identity.

In ancient times strangers shook hands to show that they were unarmed

If you get into the bottom of a well or a tall chimney and look up, you can see stars, even in the middle of the day.

The moon moves about two inches away from the Earth each year

The Earth gets 100 tons heavier every day due to falling space dust

Due to earth's gravity it is impossible for mountains to be higher than 15,000 meters

Mickey Mouse is known as "Topolino" in Italy

Soldiers do not march in step when going across bridges because they could set up a vibration which could be sufficient to bring the bridge down

Everything weighs one percent less at the equator

The letter J does not appear anywhere on the periodic table of the elements.

And last but not least:

In 2012, December has 5 Fridays, 5 Saturdays, and 5 Sundays. This apparently happens once every 823 years!
This past spring I fulfilled a long time dream by taking a blacksmithing course, a birthday gift from my wife. In the course of becoming a novice blacksmith that day in Mineral Point, WI, I learned that blacksmithing is an allegory for wordsmithing.

The blacksmith’s first job is to light a mixture of charcoal and charcoal dust. We waded up newspaper and used wooden matches. The charcoal dust was just damp enough on an early spring morning that the day almost didn’t get started. After 45 minutes of wading paper, blowing on charcoal dust and adding wood chips, we coaxed a spark to erupt into a flame.

Starting to write is like lighting the blacksmith’s charcoal. It takes patience and is often difficult, with many thwarted attempts. When the spark takes, you add oxygen to create a flame. When words begin to flow across the page, it’s like the charcoal taking fire.

The instructor had us put a quarter-inch iron rod into the fire until it became white hot. We took the rod out and pounded on it with all our strength, and the ring of metal on metal filled the smith’s workshop, until the molten iron broke off into pieces.

“You’re ruined your first rod, that’s your mistake for the day. Now I can teach you how to smith,” he explained. I kept that battered piece of iron as a souvenir and a reminder.

A first draft is filled with errors and needs to be hammered into good writing. It’s OK if the first draft is very rough; it allows you to get ideas, impressions, characters, and action in place. Giving yourself the freedom to make mistakes in the beginning will ease the editing and polishing process.

Even so, I never keep the first draft of anything I write.

Next our blacksmith instructor demonstrated different techniques, such as making a square rod into a smooth, round rod. We twisted the rod so that it resembled an iron fence outside a Victorian house. We also fashioned a square rod into a point like a nail.

In writing we call these craft skills, developing characters, showing versus telling, point of view, showing a place, letting dialogue advance the story, developing conflict and arc to the story. There are, of course, many, many skills the writer employs.

Finally, our instructor demonstrated how to make a finished metal piece. I made a one-way hook and a two-way hook and a two-way hook with a twist in the middle.

It was like writing that first poem, short story, or even novel. My arms ached, and late in the afternoon I dropped my hammer unable to grip it any longer. I rubbed my hand and arm to work on the cramped muscles.

At the end of my smithing day, my feet ached, my hands cramped from smashing the five pound hammer against hot iron, my shirt was drenched from sweat, and I needed a shower. I had three metal products that I am very proud of; they’re sitting on top of my desk now, ready to share with any visitor that passes through my office door.

When I finish an article for Extra Innings, a draft chapter in my next novel, or a grant request for a non-profit organization, my hands are sore from pounding my laptop, my where-you-sit-down aches from too much chair time, and I still probable need a shower. At the end of the day I have a finished piece of writing I’m ready to share with the world, just like my iron hooks.
ROOM TO ROOM

I go in one room, he follows me.
Everywhere in the house it’s this way, he follows me.
When I settle he settles.
He just settled on the couch over in the corner,
a little black donut,
because I’m settled behind this computer telling you about him. It’s that simple.
Where I am he wants to be,
this dog of mine. If I get up from this poem about him following me he’ll get up to be where I’m going.
Earlier, on the patio, him in my lap, we both watched the desert fog give cover to several antelope a mile away.
(I counted seven.)
His little head below me moved at the same speed mine did following them.
So, you can see there’s not much he’s not in on.
I don’t know how he’d take it if I died, me not here any more to move from room.

Tom Crawford

THE MISSOURI MUSE
PERRY ‘PAW JOE’ STONE

Be careful what you say;
some might think you mean it

I met Ms. Gullible yesterday.
After the trip to the bank I stopped at the Dollar Store on the way home. When I got out of the van I teetered, caught myself by leaning back on the van, and got my balance back. Then it was a slow but steady walk to the door. Ms. Gullible had just arrived, too. She watched as I got out and went through the balancing slow and steady ahead routine while she exited her vehicle. The nice woman, mid 30's probably, walked over and asked,"Can I help you?"

I'm not sure how a 110-lb woman would help a 430-lb man on crutches unless it was just to clear everyone out of the way if I was to fall.

However I did appreciate the offer. Which isn't to say that I didn't answer with my usual come back.
"Thanks," I said. "But I'm just practicing for when I get old."
"Really? Where'd you get an idea like that?"
She was serious.
"I was a nurse's aid and saw how much trouble a lot of older people had getting around, so I thought I'd practice using the crutches. Kinda get into it before it was necessary. Sometimes I use a walker, but it's awkward."

By this time an older lady had walked around from the driver's side.
"Mom. He's practicing for when he gets old!"
"He's kidding, Sara." The old lady laughed, shaking her head.
"WHAT? You where kidding ? I'm sorry," she said.

"I'm the one who should apologize for teasing you," I admitted. "But I'd do it again to see the expression you just had on your face."

They held the door open while I wobbled inside.
My mom's going to college but she'll get over it

I tried to explain to them
How exciting the words and phrases
the lilt of
The lyric, the poem,
And how the professor had to cut it short
Because the class was getting restless--
They said:
“That's nice Mom, did you wash our gym clothes?
They're getting pretty mature.”
I attempted to explain the fascination
Of Tribal custom,
It's contrast with our society,
Of the differences in polygamy,
polygyny,
And Monogamy.
He answered.
“That's nice dear,
did you pay the telephone bill?”
I got into Nietzsche, and Plato, and Aristotle.
I marveled at men and women who
were way ahead
Of their time,
They said,
“That's nice, Mom,
I need some notebook paper.”
2
Their friends were present when I
Rambled on about Camus,
e. e. cummings and
Gwendolyn Brooks--
They said,
“My Mom's going to college,
But she'll get over it.”
As I wrestled with gravity, and relativity,
And equations,

They grinned at me through peanut butter and jelly
and asked,
“Mama, kin I have a glassamilk?”
When other people inquired,
--they reflected mild disinterest--
When other people showed an interest,
--They changed the subject--
As soon as I said,
“Someday I'm going back for my Bachelor's
Or maybe even my Masters,”
--They disappeared into the distance
Echoing back,
“That's nice, Mom
What's for Supper?”

Norma Sundberg
Published in BBW magazine April 1981, also featured in Go For It a handbook for noon-traditional students returning to college

INK-DROP-ITIS

Writers are a twitchy breed,
Convulsing over each submission,
Dreaming every ink-filled seed
Will germinate a new edition.

Craig W. Steele
THE INTERVIEW (NOT A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE)
VIC JOHNSON

“It’s more likely writing chose me”

“Would you say that you were obsessed with writing?” she asked, crossing her legs and leaning forward.

The small digital tape recorder she held pointed toward the man.

“That won’t go off?”

“Beg your pardon . . .”

He laughed. “Well, you pointed that thing . . . A bad joke. You don’t take notes?”

“Does that bother you? Not taking notes, I mean.”

“No, of course not. I don’t mind.”

He reflected on how young she was, or appeared. At his age, she seemed no more than a kid, a teenager. “What did you say? — sorry.”

“I just said that I find when asking questions I don’t always concentrate on the answers. The recording lets me think about your answer.” She gave him a quick smile and brushed her hair back.

“You said writing was the only thing you ever wanted to do.” Her eyes widened. “I wondered if it has become an obsession.”

“I am not sure what you mean by obsession. I write because it is simply what I have chosen as a profession, and I believe I do it fairly well.” Is that like asking a carpenter if he is obsessed with nailing wood together? he thought.

“You still use a typewriter,” she said, glancing at the desk.

“Yep. Had it for 40 years. Why change? It works fine, even when the electricity goes out.”

“What inspired you to become a writer?” She had been impressed by the number of books that lined the walls of the small room. “You must read a lot.”

“Frankly, I don’t know why I chose writing. I was about 12 years old, but I knew it was what I wanted to do. It is more likely writing chose me. I did read a lot, once, but not so much any more. I’d rather write.”

It occurred to him that reading had somehow exposed him to a writing bug, that books were the hosts of a writing disease, which in time infects the reader . . .

He urgently needed to write that.

“What writers influenced you?”

Concentrate man, for god’s sake. Don’t get distracted.

Her voice became coarse as she repeated the question.

He blinked and sighed as she repeated the question. How many times had he answered that? She was waiting impatiently for an answer, so why not, “Hemingway.”

“Really? and . . .”

“Oh, many, many others, writers you probably never heard of.”

“Maybe. Who? Just give me a name or two.”

“Ah . . . Guy Murchie, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Arthur Koestler . . . When I was very young, Hemingway, sure. And then, I read The Year of the Gorilla — George Schaller. Schaller, only armed with field glasses, pencil and notebook, chronicled the everyday life of Africa’s most awesome and feared creature, the mountain gorilla. Schaller’s particular courage and purpose trumped Hemingway’s concept of the ‘great white hunter’ — and saved the mountain gorilla from extinction. Changed my thinking about authors.”

The interview was soon over; the man offered an excuse of a sore knee for not rising to show the interviewer out.

“I can let myself out,” she said, giving him a quick but insincere smile. “Thanks for taking the time to talk to me.”

After she had gone, he took out his pen and notebook. He wrote at the top of a new page:

“Next time, first make sure your fly is zipped.
One of my writing friends, Priscilla Long, writes a weekly e-column for *The American Scientist*. Her most recent post was titled “The Lay of the Land.” There, she writes about geological eons, plate tectonics, and the explosion of life forms.

I found this article very heartening. To understand why, let me describe *the lay of the land* here at the south end of Grove Hill, Alabama.

The flow of runoff water from a good portion of this small town rushes toward our backyard. In fact, when we moved here from Atlanta in ’98, there was a pretty deep gully that ran a little behind where our house was being constructed.

**It was a place in which wild things grew, not all of them firmly attached to the ground.** Some of the wild things that lived there crept out at night and left footprints in the sand that would become our lawn. Occasionally, in the late evening or early morning, we would spot these creatures out foraging.

And there were manmade objects in the gully: mattresses, washing machines, most of a school bus, more. Of course, this was unacceptable. With a little investigation, we found that the folks who worked in an agency with a name something such as The Office of Soil Conservation had several things in common with us, one being the desire to stop soil erosion. So with their aid and not feeling the least bit entitled, we let them help us pay to stop the washing away of in-town property.

Big equipment, including truck loads of gravel and top soil, came in and crushed whatever did not flee, covered the gully, developed a gentle grade, and planted grass. There is also a cup filled with big rocks into which a heavy runoff can accumulate without more erosion.

I had continued to have a low level worry about all the metal that had become useless as it languishes beneath The Nethermost – that is, buried in what used to be a gully. Priscilla Long’s article has relieved my anxiety. I now realize that, in time, this area will slide under some tectonic plate, melt the school bus, separate the seats and drive train into their inorganic parts, and allow those parts to join with the metal from washing machines and ice boxes to become accessible to future generations as primitive ore.

I’m sure you understand that this is a relief for a conservationist such as I am. *It’s been too long since Jim graced this newsletter with his presence. He reports that he’s alive and well and even still running (as in jogging). He’s expecting the page proofs for his third book of fiction, Etched, in time for the new year. I look forward to reading it.*

**Jan Kent is**

**The Word Whisperer**

**Spell-cheque has a blind spot**

Ah, Spell-check – a blessing to readers and writers alike. Well, sort of.

The problem with our little friend up there on the computer tool bar is that it can only pick out something that's not a word. If it's a real word (and sounds like the right word to the writer when she reads it), it sails on through.

Thus, we get the old-fashioned washing machine – you know, the kind with a ‘ringer.’ Hey, ding-a-ling, we need a *W* in there.

A local newspaper recently ran a long article about a woman whose daughter solved a problem for her by changing the packaging of her medications. She’d been storing each dose in a vile. (Apparently she couldn't find a benign container). After endless repetitions of the wrong word it was hard not to feel those vile feelings creeping up.

At this point we should just perhaps accept it, let nothing phase us anymore. *Coach’s note: We won’t even talk about the typo on the Wisconsin Public Radio news release.*

*Note to Jan: Send more whisperers, please. We’re all out.*
Coach’s Bullpen Briefs

Finding insights and images on the dock

Received with pleasure and joy: Poet/publisher Gary Busha’s newest collection of short epiphanies, On the Dock, issued by his Wolfsong Publications, with art by his friend Chris Halla. Here’s a little taste.

Happy as a frog
the boy on the dock and a cookie
no one will ever miss.

On the dock scaling fish
the ol’ man knows I lost his pliers
the scales fall like tears.

Gary published a limited number of copies “for an audience few though fitting, mainly family, relatives, and dear friends.” I consider myself truly blessed to be among them.

Olson overcomes long odds with first novel, Dead Spots

Melissa Olson didn’t have much of a chance. The thing is, I don’t like novels about vampires, werewolves, or even nulls (creatures who have the gift of defusing supernatural spells by their mere presence). Never read the stuff.

And I had just read Calico Joe, John Grisham’s redemptive novel about baseball and fathers and sons, the proverbial hard act to follow.

Yet, despite all that, her novel grabbed me from page one.

Melissa was a graduate of the Writer’s Institute several years back. I remembered her and her writing; I’d even written a letter of recommendation for her as she pursued and captured her master’s from the UW-Milwaukee. She’s a writer of talent and vitality.

It’s so nice when a former student hands you her first published novel! Congratulations, Melissa, on publishing, yes, and even more importantly, on writing a fine novel.

Booked for Murder remains an indy bookstore gem

If you live in or near Madison or visit for any reason, you should get to know Booked for Murder, a marvelous independent bookstore devoted entirely to mysteries and thrillers. Sara Barnes has created a gathering place, a community, and a rich, nurturing environment for readers and writers alike, and her frequent author events are always well attended.

Recently I participated in her fourth annual Legends of the Fall author roundup, sharing a panel with fellow mystery writers Molly MacRae and Sarah Wisserman. They and the crowd were delightful. I’ve already embarked on Molly’s marvelous first “haunted yarn shop mystery,” Last Wool and Testament, with Sarah’s The Dead Sea Codex next on my to-read pile.

Herod captures top prize in ‘bama writers competition

A friend spotted Jim Herod at the local post office after Jim had returned from Africa and asked him what he had been hunting.

“Stories!” Jim replied.

The hunting must have been mighty good.

Jim, our own correspondent from the Nethermost, won first prize for fiction at the Alabama Writer’s Conclave for his story, “Here What I See,” based on stories he had gathered at a Massai village in Kenya in 2010.

“Amazing people, those Massai,” Jim notes, “with a fantastic culture in the middle of the Serengeti.”
From the strange mind of Stephen Wright

I woke up one morning, and all of my stuff had been stolen and replaced by exact duplicates.

I'd kill for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Borrow money from pessimists -- they don't expect it back.

99% of lawyers give the rest a bad name.

82.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot.

A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel so good.

A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.

I almost had a psychic girlfriend, but she left me before we met.

OK, so what's the speed of dark?

How do you tell when you're out of invisible ink?

Depression is merely anger without enthusiasm.

When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.

Hard work pays off in the future; laziness pays off now.

I intend to live forever. So far, so good.

If Barbie is so popular, why do you have to buy her friends?
Cora Harvey Armstrong once said, "inside every older person is a younger person, wondering what the heck happened." It has happened. I am 75!

More signs of aging are occurring regularly. There are those pesky little hairs that have begun growing on my chin and around my mouth that I have to snip daily. As Janette Barber said, "I refuse to think of them as chin hairs. I think of them as stray eyebrows."

And then there's lipstick. Even lip liners do not keep my lipstick from bleeding and inching its way above my lip line into the crevices under my nose. The skin on my hands is getting thinner, and the brown spots on my arms and hands are thriving. But what the heck! I'm 75!

Age maintenance is time-consuming
My day begins with a shower, using a body wash--no bar soap for me--it dries the skin. Then I lather my tresses with thickening shampoo. Next it's body lotion, and a moisturizer with sunscreen for my face. Then it's on to brushing my teeth, and cleaning the mouth guard I wear at night because gnashing my teeth while asleep loosened one of my front teeth.

There are more visits to doctors and the dentist. I've had a complete knee replacement, cataract surgery, torn meniscus surgery, a squamous cell skin cancer removed from my forehead, surgery after a serious fall on the ice--broken arm, crushed shoulder-- and a crushed cyst on the middle finger of my left hand which demanded two surgeries.

I have crowns on my teeth. The bone spurs are deteriorating in my neck, causing a great deal of pain, and arthritis is claiming my body. My medicine cabinet is lined with prescriptions and vitamins. But taking care of myself is more important than ever, and even if it's exhausting, I'm doing it!

There are gifts, though, that come with age, such as wisdom, becoming the person I'm comfortable with, enjoying solitude, and making choices as to how I want to spend my time because at 75, time is at a premium.

I'm ready to accept who I am and to simplify my life. This includes ridding myself of worry, guilt, perfectionism--none of which is easy. As someone once said, "don't take guilt trips. Go to the mall, the next county, a foreign country, but not to guilt country."

And, there is a freedom that comes with aging. I have the freedom to be myself and to do that which gives me self-satisfaction. I care less about what other people think, most of the time. Doing what you love and following dreams balances out aging. People are living longer and staying healthier. Staying active and exercising are keys to the aging process.

An anonymous writer penned the following wise words of advice.
"Keep only cheerful friends. The grouches pull you down."
"Keep learning."
"Whether 16 or 75, there exists in the heart of every person who loves life the thrill of a new challenge, the insatiable appetite for what is coming next. You are as young as your faith and as old as your doubts."

"Enjoy the simple things."
"The tears happen. Endure, grieve, and move on. The only person who is with us our entire life is ourselves. Be alive while you are alive."
"Cherish your health."
"Surround yourself with what you love."
"Tell the people you love that you love them, at every opportunity."
"Be kinder than necessary, for everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle."
"Be joyful! The late actress Rosalind Russell once said, ‘taking joy in life is a woman's best cosmetic.’"
"Laugh often, long and loud. Laugh until you gasp for breath."

Continued on next page
Celebrating seventy-five (cont)

I read an article some time ago in *The Des Moines Register* that reported that children laugh an average of 400 times a day, adults 15--an amazing statistic. I giggled my way through junior high and high school, but as an adult the laugh meter doesn't register very high. So let's laugh and keep smiles on our faces.

When we smile, facial muscles activate the "feed-good" chemicals in the brain--what a benefit. Laughter is healing, and a hearty laugh is inexpensive treatment for fear, anxiety, and frustrations. Proverbs 15:13 says, "a happy heart makes the face cheerful."

Someone once said that the 70 of today is the 50 of yesterday. When I recall how my grandmother looked at 70, I feel 25!! As much as I loved her, she did look a bit old-fashioned with her cotton stockings, substantial oxfords, and an apron always covering her dresses. She even wrapped a dish towel around her head when cooking or baking.

But now that I'm 75, I can say that the 75 of today is the 55 of yesterday. Even though life isn't easy with the battles that face us often, "Growing old isn't a sentence, it's a celebration."

Edward Tuck wrote a poem titled "Age," in which he said, "Age is a quality of mind; if you've left your dreams behind, if hope is cold, if you no longer look ahead, if your ambition's fires are dead, then you are old. But--if from life you take the best, if in life you keep the zest, if love you hold, no matter how the years go by, no matter how the birthdays fly, you are not old."

It's a great time to celebrate and welcome what this stage of life has to offer. Suddenly I'm 75, and every day is a gift of new possibilities. Let the celebration begin!!

BULLPEN MAIL CALL

Christensen connects with teacher of teachers

Dear Coach,

Finally had that free morning I'd been longing for to sit quietly and drink in the latest edition of *Extra Innings*. It was well worth the wait. As always, your opening bloviation felt like you had written it just to me. My guess is, a whole host of others felt the same way.

Even more, though, the picture and column on page 5 caught my eye and my heart. Madonna Dries Christensen's essay titled, "Glass Children" caused me to quickly reach for the print button. I plan to share this essay with all my classes from now on. I hope she won't mind.

As you know, I teach students who want to be teachers, both regular ed and special ed. This is perfect to add depth and a personal connection to help my students understand the future children and families they may one day serve. Plus it's just the right size for the copy machine and the busy college student's attention span. A big THANK YOU to Madonna for writing such an insightful piece.

Keep up the good work, all of you-

Lisa Krenz

I'm guessing that Madonna won't mind. Coach

Steele cracks cryptogram

Last month our staff cryptologist, Janice Kaat, presenting this challenge:

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T IZQBU DQKB IZKUC TFEZ EDTC ULKHFXCC LFU ILTE AZK LF XPDZ, LFU TA LF XPDZ CZQFUXU, FZ YLEEXK DZI ALTFEBO, T IZQBU CXFU ZEDXK IZKUC EZ EXBB, EZ YLKPD, EZ ATRDE, EZ PKXLEX L CXFCX ZA DQFRXK AZK BTAX EDLE RFLIC TF QC LBB.
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Poet Craig Steele hopped all over it, answering within hours of the newsletter hitting the Internet. Here's his correct answer:

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I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of hunger for life that gnaws in us all.  ~Richard Wright
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OUR WONDERFUL NATIVE TONGUE
Headline howlers reveal limitations of Spell Check

Our friend Pat Goetz (whose article on Yom Kippur ran last month) sent along some real headlines from real newspapers along with this note: “This is why we cannot let our newspapers go out of business.”

Rangers get whiff of Colon
(The Texas Rangers are a baseball team. Colon is a pitcher for the Anaheim Angels, the opposing baseball team. He pitched... Oh, never mind.)

Miracle cure kills fifth patient
Starvation can lead to health hazards

Total lunar eclipse will be broadcast live on Northwoods Public Radio
Rally against apathy draws small crowd

Police arrest everyone on February 22nd
Parents keep kids home to protest school closure

New sick policy requires 2-day notice
Man with 8 DUls blames drinking problem

Hospitals resort to hiring doctors
Homicide victims rarely talk to police

Barbershop singers bring joy to school for deaf
Meat head resigns

Statistics show that teen pregnancy drops off significantly after age 25
Federal Agents
Raid Gun Shop, Find Weapons

Caskets found as workers demolish mausoleum
County to pay $250,000 to advertise lack of funds

Man Accused of Killing Lawyer Receives a New Attorney
Bridges help people cross rivers

City unsure why the sewer smells
Worker suffers leg pain after crane drops 700-pound ball on his head

A SILLY SYMPHONY OF SIMILES
New Brooklyn arena underwhelms critics

The New York Times recently asked its readers to describe what the new Brooklyn Center basketball arena looks like to them. They got over 200 responses. Here are a few of the best:

a huge George Foreman Grill
a beached humpback whale
a lonely bun yearning for its burger
a soggy Oreo
a burping clam
a swimming pool being sucked up by a tornado.

an angry clam. An angry, angry clam.

REAL ADS FROM BRIT NEWSPAPERS:

COWS, CALVES: NEVER BRED
Also 1 gay bull for sale.
JOINING NUDIST COLONY!
Must sell washer and dryer ? 100.
WEDDING DRESS FOR SALE . Worn once by mistake.
Call Stephanie.

**** And the WINNER is... ****
FOR SALE BY OWNER.
Complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica, 45 volumes. Excellent condition, ? 200 or best offer. No longer needed, got married, wife knows everything.
E.I. NOVEL EXCERPT

Gedi Mason in Love, by Gadi Bossin

Gadi Bossin introduces his recently completed novel, Geddy Mason in Love:

When Annie Yousefian and Geddy Mason meet and fall in love on an Indiana campus in 1970, they know they are destined to part. Annie is the daughter of a well-to-do Iranian family and the graduate of an exclusive Parisian boarding school. Geddy is a Canadian in the USA on a student visa. He plans to move to Israel after completing his M.A. studies.

In 2006, after no contact between the two for 35 years, Geddy discovers via the Internet that Annie will be the featured speaker at an end-of-summer conference in Ottawa. He determines to go unannounced to see her. But the month-long Second Lebanon War puts his travel plans on hold and his concern that Annie might turn him away shakes his resolve.

Here we see Annie and Geddy as they part in 1971.

Annie and Geddy walked slowly back toward the rooming house. They didn't hold hands. And they didn't speak. But every half block or so, they stopped, turned to gaze for a long moment at each other. Each time they stopped that way, Geddy was conscious of taking in every detail of Annie's appearance, recording and storing what he was seeing for future recall. Then they continued on, still silent, still not holding hands.

At the end of the street where the Camaro was parked, Geddy said, "Annie, I'm parked a few houses down. Maybe we should say goodbye here."

They embraced twice, first a brief, hesitant and awkward hug, and then, holding nothing back, a long, close, intimate, heartbreaking embrace.

"Annie," he whispered, caressing her cheek with his fingertips. He held her shoulders and kissed her on her forehead and on her cheeks and then, one last time, on her lips.

Annie whispered his name, too, and her love words as well, "Geddy Mason, ahvii, mon amour. Dooset daram."
"Dooset daram. Bye," he said.
"Bye, chéri."

He turned and walked away, struggling, fighting with himself, not to look back. He couldn't allow himself to turn to look at her again. But he did stop walking and stood still to listen to the sound of her boots moving away on the sidewalk. When he could no longer hear her, he turned to look in her direction. He didn't see her. She'd already turned into her street.

He ran to the Camaro, pulled out of the parking spot, drove to the end of the street and made a right turn. He knew he could have continued on along this cross-street and driven out of the neighborhood. Instead, he turned right again and drove down the street the rooming house was on. He was desperate for one last glimpse of Annie.

He saw her up ahead. As he came abreast of her, he slowed down and waved to her. She waved back. And she smiled her half-smile. Now past her, he continued driving slowly, and, hoping for yet another glimpse of her, he glanced into the right side view mirror.

In his desperation to see her face one more time, he'd forgotten the mirror was cracked. The image he saw in the mirror was distorted, broken into pieces of a puzzle that no longer fit together.
Essays from Images
Den Adler

A private tour with an award-winning architect

Frederic Schwartz might have found other places to be, people to meet with, or plans to draw on October 6, the day I met him at the Staten Island Ferry Terminal at the lower end of Manhattan in New York City.

Mr. Schwartz is the New York architect who designed the renovation of the ferry terminal. You can find him at www.schwartzarch.com. This day he had agreed with the OpenHouseNewYork people to lead an open-to-the-public tour of the terminal as part of the 10th annual OHNY Weekend.

The guidebook wasn’t specific about where people should meet at the terminal, and six others didn’t find it. Only three of us—my N.Y. tour-guide friend, Joe Svehlak (left), another man (right), and I—found Mr. Schwartz (second from left) on the plaza in front of the terminal.

When it became apparent that no one else was coming, I thought Mr. Schwartz might cancel his tour, but instead he gave us one-page handouts that stressed that, “The building’s symbolic role as a gateway and its function as a major intermodal transportation node demanded a building with a strong civic presence.”

The ferry-terminal renewal project began 20 years ago, in 1992, and Mr. Schwartz won its International Design Competition.

“Imagine,” he told us, “taking down a 100-year-old building while simultaneously building a new terminal on top of the three oldest subway tunnels and an underground highway while 70,000 people a day move 24/7 through a construction site with uninterrupted ferry service.”

The project took 15 years, lasting through three mayors, their new administrations, and up-and-down budgets, and was subject to regulatory approval from more than 50 city, state, and federal agencies.

Mr. Schwartz might have cited people’s lack of interest in his tour and cut it short, but instead he honored the three of us by telling us the history of the Staten Island Ferry, its terminal, and his role in its renovation.

He threw in not only dry facts and statistics, but emotions and battles (“I went toe to toe that day with Giuliani,” he said about one disagreement with the mayor) that went into designing a functional, attractive building that won the 2009 New York State American Institute of Architects Award.

He led us inside the terminal, where the central waiting area holds 3,500 people and side passages lead arriving passengers around them so ingoing and outgoing crowds don’t bump into each other. A 75-foot glass-curtain front wall offers a view of the New York skyline to anyone headed for the exit doors.

Mr. Schwartz led us outside onto the plaza again, pointing out with bitter humor what is there now and how important parts of it differ from his design. “For years, I couldn’t bring myself to come down here to look at it,” he said; his vision for what should be (a wide-open plaza for markets and people) clashed with what is (walls and barriers).

It was a fantastic—and free—tour of the Staten Island Ferry Terminal, led by the building’s award-winning architect, who shared—with humor, sarcasm, passion, and personality—his vision for the city in which he lives and works.

When the tour was over, I gave my copy of Frederic Schwartz’s handout back to him, and asked him to autograph it for me.
And finally (!), a Thanksgiving triple helping of Lily

Lily with her gramellen

Lily with her dad

and Lily with her twinkle