Just One More Day
Norma J. Sundberg
I think I’ll leave the tree up one more day
Enjoy the glow and warmth it offers me,
I’ll wait a day or two to take it down
So three-year-old and I can strip it clean,
To stretch the season out a day or three
Store memories, warm feelings deep inside,
To draw on when cold, wet days assault the soul.
The warmth and love of Christmas memories
Will bring back thoughts of friends and family
Offering gifts and greetings of the day.
Remembrances of baking, cooking, when
Fashioning holiday goodies well ahead;
Bright wrapped packages carefully hidden away,
Brought out at zero hour from Santa’s sled.
Christmas service in our church of faith
To sing, rejoice the reason for this day,
That now we can reflect and bring to mind
Those warm, sentimental reveries.
Christmas tree still stands with soft warm glow
The Christmas cards are yet another tale,
I just may leave them up until July
Or the rest of the year if I so decide….
for anything I might have said or done which you, in your ignorance and small-mindedness, may have taken offense at— not that I’m admitting that I actually said or did what some people might be saying I said or did. Whatever it is.

When’s the last time you heard a real apology, one in which the speaker actually took responsibility for his or her misdeeds? Hard to remember that far back, isn’t it?

Sure would be nice to hear somebody just stand up and say “I blew it. I’m really sorry. I’ll try really hard to make it up to you, and I swear I’ll never do it again.”

If Pete Rose had done that, he’d be in the Hall of Fame today.

“I am not a crook” didn’t do Richard Nixon any good, either.

President Barack Obama came close to a real apology recently, saying his was sorry for the botched roll-out of the Affordable Care Act. “That’s on me,” he admitted.

Toronto Mayor Rob Ford couldn’t stop apologizing, but he seemed to keep screwing up faster than he could be sorry for it. Besides, it wasn’t really his fault. He only took that crack because he was in a drunken stupor.

A lot of apologies are too little, too late.
The U.S. Government has apologized for slavery, the mass slaughter of Native Americans, the Tuskegee syphilis study, the Japanese internment during the war, and other little slip-ups— but well after the fact.

The Harrisburg Patriot News apologized for an editorial ripping a speech made by one A. Lincoln four score and 70 years before at a battleground in nearby Gettysburg. You may have heard of it. They had characterized the speech as “silly remarks.” Oops. Their bad.

The most belated apology might have come from the Catholic Church, which in 1992 allowed as how they shouldn’t have been so tough on Galileo 360 years before for suggesting that the earth revolved around the sun instead of vice versa.

Mea maxima culpa.

Evangelist Jimmy Swaggart made a tearful public self-flagellation (“I have sinned!”) in a sermon in 1988 in Baton Rouge. Caught with a prostitute, he begged forgiveness from wife, son, church, fellow evangelists, and God.

Three years later, he was again found with a hooker. This time he told his congregation, “The Lord told me it’s flat none of your business.”

Only one apology per category of sin, apparently.

I guess I’m about as guilty as any of these folks of looking for someone else to blame when I’ve messed up. I hereby resolve to be better about taking the rap when I deserve to. And I apologize in advance for those times when I forget.

Sources: “10 things you might not know about apologies,” by Mark Jacob and Stephan Benzkofer, Chicago Tribune, November 17, 2013 and “Paper that ripped Lincoln’s speech tries to make peace,” by Tina Susman, Chicago Tribune, same date.

The WORD WHISPERER
Looking it up too much trouble?
It seems impossible to read any good book these days without coming across many words unknown to the reader. What to do – look each one up; skip over them all, or some of them? Recently I stumbled across “obsequies.” It means “funeral rites or ceremonies.”

Despite my affection for paper and print books, sometimes it's hard not to view fondly the electronic book with its built-in dictionary. Ah, progress.
Orvil Hamster and the Bakersfield Blizzard of ‘99
By Richard Mallard

On January 10, 1949 a freak snow storm hit Los Angeles. A month and a half before my 4th Birthday, I remember standing in the doorway of our home on Midlothian, in Altadena, looking out the entryway at the heavy falling snow. It was night time, and my brother and I held hands with our parents as we stood in quiet wonder at the sight. There was no sound, just the motion of the falling flakes, large wet flakes. It was SNOWING! By morning the palm trees stood bent over with snow caps up Midlothian. Cars fishtailed down the slick street, and we had a day to play in the snow, before the sun made it all go away.

Fifty years and fifteen days later, I stood with my children, who were eight and seven, and watched the same event unfold at our house in Bakersfield, 100 miles North of my boyhood home. Around four in the morning, a strange orange glow lit up our bedroom window. I got up to investigate and saw the mercury vapor streetlight through a curtain of heavy wet snowflakes.

It was SNOWING! “GET UP KIDS, IT’S SNOWING!” They stood in our doorway, pajama clad, that morning, and played in the same way my brother and I had so many years before. It was deja vu to watch my daughter make snow angels and push an ever growing snowball up the hill in our front yard. Watching her play inspired the muses, and I went in the house to write story of...

Orvil Hamster and the Bakersfield Blizzard of ‘99.
Dateline: January 25, 1999 Bakersfield, California

Orvil Hamster was not a heavy equipment operator, although once he did borrow his neighbor’s backhoe armed with a front loader scoop. In an attempt to become the hero of the greatest snow event in the history of the San Joaquin Valley, Orvil intended to single-handedly save the City of Bakersfield. Thus began the legend of Orvil Hamster and the Bakersfield Blizzard of ‘99.

Measured on the Richter scale of snowfall, the 6-inch Bakersfield accumulation wasn’t much, compared to Minneapolis standards. But to Bakersfieldians it was a lot. Not that there was so much snow; it was just that no one knew what to do with it. Anyone who remembered the last storm that dropped this much snow had been dead for 30 years. In Bakersfield, this was the snow of the century.

Orvil was an incurable do-gooder. He had been watching the only local TV station not closed down by the freak weather, when she appeared, “Martha Honeydew, local news anchor, reporting from the bluffs.” Accidents on every street corner, cars spinning hopelessly out of control, trees down, power lines may fall any second, elderly not receiving meals on wheels, the list of storm related tragedy poured from her well trained newswoman lips. Orvil was mesmerized. He had to reach her. The Bakersfield snow removal budget had been severely cut by shortsighted bureaucrats. The closest thing to a snowplow the County Road Department had was a rusty flat-nosed shovel with a handle worn smooth by years of leaning civil service workers.

Then, in a flash of inspiration, Orvil saw it. He could reach Martha in Fred’s backhoe. He could clear the streets. Ambulances and fire trucks could get through. People would be able to drive. He would be a hero. He would wave to thankful Bakersfieldians in the parade from atop Fred’s backhoe holding the adoring Martha’s hand. Orvil grabbed his coat and headed for Fred’s. He was a hamster on a mission. His quest—to rescue Bakersfield and Martha, only a mile away, up on the bluffs.

Orvil woke his neighbor Fred, the backhoe owner, at around six a.m. Through the muffled backdrop of wet snow descending through the glow of the streetlights, witnesses overheard Fred drawling something like, “I ain’ go’n out in that #@$%&.” And “If you are that stupid, here are my keys.” This brings to mind the sober admonition that friends shouldn’t let friends drive their
backhoes. Had Orvil not been such a pain as a neighbor, this tragedy might not have occurred.

Large heavy clumps of dinner plate-sized snowflakes dropped through the headlights of the backhoe like large heavy clumps of--snowflakes. (Sorry, the only other simile that came to mind had to do with dying locusts.) Visibility was a problem. But undaunted, Orvil turned out of his driveway onto Union Avenue, lowered the front scoop of the backhoe and headed uphill.

Now for readers, unfamiliar as most Bakersfieldians are, including Orvil, with the science of snow classification, there is more than one type of snow. Snow formed at very low temperatures, such as summer in Minnesota, is light and fluffy. Called powder by skiers, it has many fun characteristics such as burying you up to your knit hat when you step off the porch in an attempt to locate the wood pile. One unfortunate aspect of powder is that it does not make good snowballs. Sneaking up on your best friend with a fist full of powder can be a real disappointment when it disintegrates into snow vapor as you follow through on your delivery.

Wet snow is entirely different. Wet snow is heavy. Wet snow is for snowballs. It is for making snowmen or snowwomen. It sticks together. It sticks to everything. Wet snow binds like leftover oatmeal. It also grows when rolled. Kids in snow country discover this early in life. It is the basis of snow fort engineering.

Unfortunately, this was a snow characteristic that Orvil, to his horror, discovered only half-way up the bluffs. Somewhere near Garces High School, Orvil had turned into the snowplow equivalent of a huge dung beetle.

In front of him was the Guinness Book of World Records snowball, twenty-feet tall and growing; behind him were his house and the sleepy residential area of North East Bakersfield. Only he and Fred’s backhoe stood between them.

Fred’s backhoe wanted out. It moved left, then right. Its tires slipped. The huge ball rocked sideways toward the untraveled and snow-paved downhill lane. Orvil jumped clear and started running downhill for his life. It was a directional mistake.

The ball moved left and in slow motion crossed the snow-covered yellow line. The backhoe spun sideways giving the ball a final push into the downhill lane. Orvil heard the Doppler roar of the snowy bowling ball as it gained momentum and size behind him. He dove left and just cleared the growing mass of rolling frosty. He was saying something like, “Nooo, not that houssss!!!,” when the backhoe hit him. He never saw it coming.

Orvil should be released from the hospital early this spring. Because he had cleared the road, the emergency vehicles were able to reach him in time. His release should also correspond with the snowball melting that will allow reconstruction to begin on his house.

Things are almost back to normal here in Bakersfield after the Blizzard of ‘99. Orvil is a legend. A lucky resident videotaping his kids making snow angles sold the entire episode to Martha and her TV station. Orvil has already asked Fred if he can borrow some tools for the home rebuild. Fred says that won’t happen again until hell freezes over. That would be Bakersfield, probably sometime around the year 2099.

Signal from the bullpen:

Next month we begin a new feature, The Quackerbarrel Tales, by Richard Mallard. The first installment will feature a picture of a kindergarten class so old, it must have been taken by Matthew Brady.
The grandkids played
with her hands
pulling skin to tents
smoothing liver spots
racing small fingers
up and down the knobby bumps
around the thin wedding ring
they yanked, but couldn't pull off.
She scuffed them gently from her side
to move to the piano bench
where they arranged themselves
squashed to her hips
so she could barely play,
but play she did, tinkling
nursery rhymes full of laughs
and their wobbly songs.
She played by ear, no lessons learned
to transform the next moments
into notes both so soft and harsh
the little ones backed away
to stare while the rest of us
drifted to the window sky
to eye our souls wisping by,
a prayer away. My mother
leaned into the shadows
as the dirges rose from the grave
for her father, sweetest pain,
sweetest joy, unbearable.
Grandma lay her head
on the keys in final dissonance,
frightening the children,
but smiling as she pulled
candy from her pockets.
She rubbed rough hands
to step outside to unpin
winter sheets stiff on
the clothes line. My mother
kissed her fingers
as she passed by.

Sandy Rafter
I rarely read a magazine or newspaper without scissors in hand to clip wacky headlines, fodder for producing verse with a twist. For example, I became intrigued by **MONTANA WOMAN FENDS OFF BEAR WITH ZUCCHINI**. This epic lady fought the trespasser with a green billy club, but the beast wasn’t trying to “get her goat,” and was no billy at all, but bruin. It mauled her dogs, then tried to break her back door. However, when she came out swinging, the critter wimped out. Here’s his perspective:

**I JUST CAN’T BEAR IT**
Protect me, oh Great Bear Genie!
I fear guns, but as for zucchini
I don’t wish to eat it
So I’d better beat it.
Please lady, stop being a meanie!

Another idea emerged from a Pontiac, Michigan headline, **KICKED FROM FUNERAL HOME**, in which 22 unclaimed bodies were booted to a Medical Examiner’s office for cold storage. No one stepped up to pay for burying any of them, and considering this neglected corpse corps I wrote:

**FATE OF A CHEAPS KATE**
It’s tough to be a dead body:
Just hear what happened to Roddy.
By death sore-afflicted
Our Unc got evicted
While if that action seems shoddy,
The fact is—it was *his* lookout:
When rich he shared nary a cookout!
--Gone broke from the lottery—
Not worth plaster pottery;
No urn will we buy, tightwad lout!

Limericks are handy-dandy, but light verse embraces many forms. My friend Mark Burds, who goes by the pen-name Rockin’ Red, in this piece transforms a straight-faced news statement into an untitled three-liner.

The rocket flew
In a perfectly straight line
Around the world.

Then Mark commented rhetorically, “Isn’t that an oxymoron?” Yes indeed; for *no* straight line can curve around the Earth! Furthermore, I don’t know for certain if *oxen* are smarter than *morons.*

If a brainiac chirps, “But ‘oxymoron’ is a word from the Greek,” the term still sounds fishy to me. Anyway, speaking of critters, so far I’ve mentioned a bear, the un-graved Old Unc, oxen, morons, and even made a brief piscine reference. The next news item concerns an insect, proving we can’t rely on the web!

**SPIDER DELAYS TOWN VOTE COUNT**
The text explains, “No fraud: Spider in aged voting machine spoils Rehobeth, MA election by preventing voter-tally.” Here’s my take:

--Just a simple rote vote? /Let the spider decide’er
By means of the strands /Of her sticky silk bands!

How about rabbits of a certain sort? Hearing a cleaning product TV infomercial, I scribbled:

When fuzz-bunnies clump in a cluster
And knickknacks lose their bright luster,
From front room to back room
I *must* buy a vacuum:
Suck, Dust-Buster, till all passes muster!

If New Hampshire currently lacks the plentiful dairy farms it had once, my state still boasts gleaming crop fields, and each autumn local newspapers tout **AMAZING CORN MAZE** for the public to visit. Well, in this ditty—for nostalgia’s sake—I do indeed include bovines.

**GETTING LOST IN COW HAMPSHIRE**
Corn maze—quite amazing—
Made of maize, a kind of corn,
While placid cows keep grazing
On sweet cuds of grass up-torn.

No bossy gives one poo-plop
Halloween is nearly here,
Yet hear how squealing kids yell,
At each wrong turn, “*Bum steer!*”

When you spot an odd or amusing clipping, file it. Why strive for ideas when prompts provide tempting possibilities? T-shirt slogans and bumper stickers may offer rich suggestions, while a multi-prized and multi-published verse of mine hinges on turning the pun “time heals all wounds” into **TIME WOUNDS ALL HEELS.** However, space being limited, let me save that ditty for another occasion.
Church Bloopers: raves from the naves

A new loudspeaker system has been installed in the church. It was given by one of our members in honor of his wife.

Next Sunday, a special collection will be taken to defray the cost of the new carpet. All those wishing to do something on the new carpet will come forward and get a piece of paper.

**Eight new choir robes are currently needed, due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.**

Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles, and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

The outreach committee has enlisted 25 visitors to make calls on people who are not afflicted with any church.

**Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.**

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

On the main page of the Internet website for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada: "In a show of near anonymity, the convention approved full communion with the Anglican Church of Canada."

Father is on vacation. Massages can be given to church secretary.

The audience is asked to remain seated until the end of the recession.

**The cost for attending the Fasting and Prayer Conference includes meals.**

The agenda was adopted. The minutes were approved. The financial secretary gave a grief report.
MEANDERING WITH MADONNA
MADONNA DRIES CHRISTENSEN

My paper garden

I’m a writer; my husband is a Master Gardener. One might think those two activities have no common ground—but wait. Gardeners dig, plant, nurture, control weeds, and prune until the results are what they envisioned. The same principle applies to writing. Writers dig through their minds for ideas, sow the seeds on paper (or screen), nurture the subject with colorful phrases, pull weeds, and prune until the story blossoms.

Years ago, I opted to write what I don’t know—gardening. Not the get down on your knees and dig variety, but various kinds of gardens. I queried Florida Gardening magazine regarding an article about using antiques as garden focal points. The editor bought it. The article featured photos of vintage items: tools displayed on a fence, a large crock and a porcelain chamber pot filled with flowers, and a piece of an ancestral tombstone. My in-house gardener provided the common and botanical names of plants and flowers.

Other ideas took root, as did a relationship with the magazine. Here in town I discovered The Healing Garden, a haven for meditation, and The Children’s Garden, where the fun begins at the Yellow Brick Road that leads into a tunnel, through a rain forest and a maze with a sign warning “In is out and out is in.” There’s a fairy garden, a pirate ship, and whimsical creatures sculpted from recycled materials.

I featured Florida House, an environmentally friendly model house and garden, the Succulent Garden Society, the Palma Sola Botanical Garden, the Manatee Rare Fruit Council, and I collaborated with my husband on the problems and solutions related to gardening in a deed restricted community.

My article about Sarasota Master Gardeners spotlighted an elderly volunteer who taught horticulture to elementary school students. Mr. Dirt, as the kids called him, explained, “Kids are my thing. I love seeing how excited they become when their plant grows and when they pick and eat produce. I sing Goober Peas when we harvest our peanuts.”

John Ringling, ringmaster of The Greatest Show On Earth, was a force to be reckoned with, but his wife, Mable, was no shrinking violet. She founded the Sarasota Garden Club, and her rose garden is world famous. I displayed the roses in one article; the second covered the two minor beds: the Dwarf Garden with statuary honoring circus little people, and the Secret Garden, Mable’s private nook which became neglected after her death but has been resurrected into a hands-on plot where children are allowed to touch, sniff, and pick.

A piece about memorial gardens (not cemeteries) arose from tragedy after 11-year-old Carlie Brucia was raped and murdered. Her killer was apprehended because the abduction was captured on a surveillance camera at the carwash parking lot where Carlie encountered him. In the aftermath, the school she had attended planted a Memory Garden in her name.

Meanwhile, over the years, my husband transformed our entire yard into an impressive garden. My article, From Sand To Sanctuary, was published in Mockingbird Journal.

A favorite story in my collection is “The Reading Garden,” published 10 years ago in Florida Gardening. Fast forward to recently, when the Director of Libraries contacted me, saying that Fruitville Library was planning a celebration of the garden’s tenth year. She remembered my earlier story and asked me to write about the upcoming event in a local publication. I queried three papers, none of which responded. Then I noticed a small paper at the library. The editor accepted my idea and not only published the story at the appropriate time; he invited me to contribute regularly.

Antiques In The Garden led to a fruitful association with Florida Gardening magazine. A rewrite of The Reading Garden led to a new gig as a columnist for Today’s Seniors.

My paper garden continues to bloom.

In The Reading Garden
Muhammad Ali opened his briefcase and pulled out a home phone, a rare bit of telephony in 1970. We noticed, the handful of passengers in Boston’s USAir lounge on a lazy Saturday afternoon, and we edged toward him as he phoned home to Cherry Hill. With a smirk of satisfaction, like the one we had seen on TV when he was so often pleased with himself, Muhammad Ali was entertaining us.

“Hey, Babe. It’s me. We are running late. Be home in two hours. I got some fine folks here with me in the airport. Bringing them home to dinner,” he said.

We didn’t hear what his wife had to say on the other end. We could tell from his look as he murmured “Uhuh,” “Yeah,” and “Ok” that she was saying something along the lines of “You gotta be kidding” or “The place is a mess and the kids are acting up” or “I thought you were taking me out tonight.” Ali chuckled.

Forty-three years ago, good manners dictated that you did not impose on famous people. None of us took it seriously that Ali wanted us to go home and have dinner with him and the family. Today, when I tell the story, some ask, “Did you go?” and “You mean you could have gone to Ali’s for dinner and you didn’t?”

The small group in the waiting area had been chatting with Ali for some time and had given him space when he opened the phone-filled briefcase and made the call. The man we knew from TV was unbelievably approachable in person. He liked having our attention, this good looking guy just as ‘pretty’ as he had proclaimed to the world, fit but not as big as you might think a heavy-weight boxer would be. The young, brash Cassius Clay who “floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee,” when he beat Sonny Liston had become Muhammad Ali. In 1970 he was three years into a timeout as Heavyweight Champion, having refused the draft.

A movement led by Howard Cosell asserted that it was time to restore Ali’s title. When Cosell interviewed Ali on his popular radio show, they went at each other, making for great entertainment. Grating How-Ard Co-Sell got under anyone’s skin. He also gave Ali ample opportunity to launch bombastic predictions.

A few folks asking for Ali’s autograph.

Dumb me, I didn’t ask and so do not possess the great Ali’s autograph. I did however decide to pop a controversial question: “You and Howard Cosell are always going at one another. Why don’t you guys like each other?”

Not hesitating, Ali shot back, “That Howard Cosell … someday I’m gonna smack him.” His face formed an exclamation mark as his left fist pounded the palm of his right hand. Was he quick! We all laughed as a smile formed on Ali’s face while he added, “Howard Cosell is my friend.” Mohammed Ali did regain his Heavyweight title, beating George Foreman in the 1974 “Rumble in the Jungle.” A man who stuck with his guns and a likable man, his Vietnam War protest was summed up when he said, “I ain’t got no quarrel with them Viet Cong,” a message that resonated as much with people worldwide as did his punches.
Fundamental differences between the sexes

NICKNAMES
· If Laura, Kate and Sarah go out for lunch, they call each other Laura, Kate and Sarah.
· If Mike, Dave and John go out, they refer to each other as Fat Boy, Bubba and Wildman.

EATING OUT
· When the bill arrives, Mike, Dave and John will each throw in $20, even though it's only for $32.50. None will have anything smaller and none will admit they want change back.
· When the girls get their bill, out come the pocket calculators.

BATHROOMS
· A man has six items in his bathroom: toothbrush and toothpaste, shaving cream, razor, a bar of soap, and a towel.
· The average number of items in the typical woman's bathroom is 337. A man would not be able to identify more than 20 of these items.

ARGUMENTS
· A woman has the last word in any argument.
· Anything a man says after that is the beginning of a new argument.

FUTURE
· A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband.
· A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

MARRIAGE
· A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn't.
· A man marries a woman expecting she won't change, but she does.

DRESSING UP
· A woman will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the trash, answer the phone, read a book, or get the mail.
· A man will dress up for weddings and funerals.

OFFSPRING
· Ah, children. A woman knows all about her children. She knows about dentist appointments and romances, best friends, favorite foods, secret fears and hopes and dreams.
· A man is vaguely aware of some short people living in the house.
My Top-10 television shows of 2013

1) Breaking Bad
Walter White's story came to an incredible close. These final eight episodes did not hold back. The series finale is the best I have ever seen. This show's legacy and impact will remain intact for a very long time.
Best episode of the year: As incredible as the finale was, I have to go with "Ozymandias."

2) Justified
If you're suffering from Breaking Bad withdrawal, Justified is a great substitute. It has an excellent cast, led by Timothy Olyphant's Raylan Givens. This season tried something new by having an almost season-long mystery.
Best episode of the year- "Decoy": In one of the best hours of television this year, Drew Thompson is in custody of the marshals, but Raylan has to get him out of Harlan alive before Boyd and the Detroit mob get to him. Patton Oswalt's Constable Bob shows that he isn't just comic relief.

3) Doctor Who
My favorite sci-fi series had a lot of highlights this year, including the show's 50th anniversary. Matt Smith announced that he was leaving after this year's Christmas special. I'm excited to see Peter Capaldi as the 12th Doctor.
Best episode of this year- The 50th anniversary special, "The Day of the Doctor": From John Hurt's excellent performance as the War Doctor to the return of my first Doctor, David Tennant, to a special cameo, this was one of the Doctor's greatest adventures.

4) Game of Thrones
This is the best fantasy series on television ever. It feels like a grand film. This season had many breathtaking moments, especially the one that pretty much broke the internet.
Best episode of the year- "The Rains of Castamere": --The Red Wedding.

5) The Daily Show
This and the next show still make up the best comedy hour on television. Jon Stewart took the summer off to make a film, and John Oliver took over, proving himself to be a great host.
Best episode of the year: When Oliver, who's from the UK, did coverage on the Royal Baby.

6) The Colbert Report
If any show was going to win the best Variety Show Emmy that wasn't The Daily Show, it had to be The Colbert Report.
Best episode of the year: When Daft Punk was supposed to make a special appearance on the show but had to cancel, Colbert performed the song himself with star cameos galore, including a roller-skating Bryan Cranston.

7) Parks and Recreation
Six seasons in, the show is still highly enjoyable.
Best episode of the year- “Leslie and Ben”: Leslie and Ben finally get married, and it's one of the sweetest, most wonderful episodes ever.

8) Veep
Julia Louis-Dreyfus is giving one of the best performances in comedy, and the rest of the cast is just as great. Tony Hale won an Emmy for the show this year, as did Dreyfus.
Best episode of the year- "Hostages": A hostage crisis in Uzbekistan ensues as Selina has a conflict with the Secretary of Defense.

9) Arrested Development
Season four has a different feel than earlier seasons. Not everything makes sense at first, but as the season moves along, it becomes a rather impressive linear structure.
Best episode of the year- "Colony Collapse": Gob finds a new group of friends after his family abandons him. It's much funnier than it sounds.

10) Archer
FX's best comedy. H. John Benjamin has the perfect voice for an animated series like this. He's made Sterling Archer his character, and he's one of TV's best dumb characters.
Best episode of the year- "Sea Tunt: Parts 1 and 2": The ISIS crew explore the Bermuda triangle to save an underground sea laboratory from its leader, voiced by Jon Hamm.

Next month: the top-10 movies of 2013 (but I think television delivered better entertainment this year).
It’s winter in Wisconsin. It snows in the winter in Wisconsin. My first book signing was Saturday, December 14 at the Beans n Cream Coffeehouse in Sun Prairie. It snowed. The snow began several hours before my 10 a.m. start time. It was the type of snow that melts when it hits the road and turns into mush. The mush makes driving tenuous. My hopes for hoards of book purchasers with books in hand to sign melted into mush.

The table at the coffee shop had a sign reading “Reserved for Rex Owens book signing.” A stack of books sat on the table. I added my book cover poster to lure in potential book readers and took a seat. My wife was armed with the camera to record the historic moments. The first person through the door was a close friend and theater chum. He picked up a book from my table, purchased it and his four shot cappuccino, then joined me at the table. Everyone that stopped by the table followed his lead that morning.

I was in author’s heaven. On a Saturday morning I was hanging out at the coffee shop, drinking coffee, selling books, signing books, and talking with my friends for two and a half hours. What could be better?

Some people from Madison didn’t make the trek due to weather, but that was OK. I sold 10 books at my first signing, but it could have been 1,000 as far as I concerned.

It’s still winter in Wisconsin. My big event was the book reading and signing at the Sun Prairie Public Library Monday evening the 16th of December. The snow began about 3:00 p.m. It snowed hard. It was the kind of snow that, when you turn on your brights when driving, a wall of white obscures the road and you realize it’s worse.

About 5:30 p.m. my phone began ringing, friends calling to tell me the snow was too much of a hazard and they wouldn’t be attending the reading. I let them go to voicemail. I appreciated the calls but didn’t want to hear them.

By 6:20 p.m. only one person had arrived for the reading. I was determined not to cancel. Then two more arrived. At 6:30 the library staff insisted I begin with only three people in the room. During my opening remarks people straggled into the room, one by one, until we had 10 in all.

I wanted to have an informal conversation with readers, not just lecture and read. We struck up a conversation, people contributed their experiences traveling in Ireland, and after the reading we continued to talk. My wife Lynette sold books at a table in the back of the room, and we sold another 10 books. I was elated.

For an author, talking directly with readers is a special experience. We all write to be read. Talking with readers completes the writing experience and provides another way for writers to enrich their writing. I thoroughly enjoy the reading and signing events. The events connect me with my community and make me whole as a writer. I’m looking forward to a year of author events in 2014.

The New Year traditionally begins with hope, resolutions, and dreams of new adventures. I want to share this traditional Irish blessing to provide perspective on our 2014:

May you have the hindsight to know where you’ve been, the foresight to know where you’re going, and the insight to know when you’re going too far.
Church Bloopers: lapses from the apses

Thanks to Emily Auerbach

The sermon this morning: Jesus Walks on the Water. The sermon tonight: Searching for Jesus.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the church help.

Miss Charlene Mason sang 'I will not pass this way again,' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.

Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and medication to follow.

This evening at 7 PM there will be a hymn singing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the Congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.

The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the church basement Friday at 7 PM. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new campaign slogan last Sunday: "I Upped My Pledge - Up Yours."
The Writer’s Poet
Craig W. Steele

Pencil or Pen?

If I could ever choose to be a poet’s pencil or their pen, which best assists the regimen of bringing forth new poetry?

If pencil, I’d grate loudly, trudging across each roughly drafted measure, with words subjected to erasure, perhaps illegible from smudging.

If pen, then I would always sport a point that’s stylishly designed, not subject to the sharpener’s grind and shrinking till I grew too short.

Therefore, a pen I’d be, I think. I’d glide upon my roller ball, while crafting stanzas that enthral—until I emptied all my ink…

Dear Poet:

I’m declining your most recent ditty. Though it’s charming, well-written and witty, it is littered with rhymes—out of step with the times; such a misuse of words is a pity.

Words That Never Should Have Died

Bookwright: A writer of books; an author; a term of slight contempt — Daniel Lyons’s “Dictionary of the English Language,” 1897

Soda-squirt: One who works at a soda fountain in New Mexico — Elsie Warnock’s “Dialect Speech in California and New Mexico,” 1919


Zafty: A person very easily imposed upon — Maj. B. Lowsley’s “A Glossary of Berkshire Words and Phrases,” 1888

The Leading Man

Bonny Conway

Legendary movie stars are a rarity. Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Stewart, John Wayne, Laurence Olivier, Cary Grant. They snatch you from dark theater seats taking you with them through the moors, onto battlefields, into school rooms stealing your soul in the name of ART. As lights come on you walk down the aisle towards a semblance of an outside world. On the marquee, you see other stars who are just popcorn and jujubes. Peter Seamus Lorcan O’Toole Esq. though, is the whole refreshment stand.

Peter O’Toole
d. December 14, 2013

How to write believable dialogue

Write out the scene the way you hear it in your head. Then read it and find the parts where the characters are saying exactly what you want/need them to say for the sake of narrative clarity. For example, “I’ve secretly loved you all along, but I’ve been too afraid to tell you.” Cut that part out. See what’s left. You’re probably close.”

LETTER OF THE MONTH

What to call Extra Innings?

Smiling portrays my expression when EI arrived on the last sunny day before wintery wind blisters through the Ozarks this evening. I loved it all, every word. Alright, to be honest, the question of the month irritated me. ["Is this a newsletter? If not, what is it?"-- last issue-- Coach]

“Newsletter,” being defined as printed news of interest to a specific group and circulated periodically, would seem fine as a description of Extra Innings.

Zine may toll a literal ring since zine refers to self publishing distributed to a specialized readership and distributed through cyber space.

Advertisements never being a priority in EI would take away one of the requirements to be a magazine. And your cyber space printout fails earning the name Gazette, depicted as a printed newspaper or official paper.

"RAG" suggests low journalist standards and conveys contempt, an insult to readers, writers, and the editor of EI.

I'm older and more tired after writing this. Not being a learned man, no big dictionary words come to my mind to say what Extra Innings is other than a great read. I smile thinking back to what uncle Dan used to say, "Call me anything you want so long as you call me in time to eat." Extra Innings is your baby, Coach. Call it what you like so long as you don't forget to send me a copy every month. Bless you and yours my friend

Paw Joe

Coach’s note: “Paw Joe” is of course our own Missouri Muse, Perry Stone. There being no other suggestions for the proper label for E.I., I’ll stick with “newsletter”-- and keep trying to best to make it a great read.

What you’ll be reading next

Last month I also asked you what book(s) you planned to read next. Here are some of your responses. This month’s question is on page 18.

Coach

Free Fire, by C J Box. I'm depending on it taking my mind off the 73 consecutive westerns I just finished.

-- Perry “Paw Joe” Stone

My next book to read will depend on what Santa brings. Not much the family can give old fellows for Christmas except books and restaurant gift cards. My Amazon wish list includes such diverse offerings as:

The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe 1944-45, by Rick Atkinson
Old Man River, the Mississippi River in North American History, by Paul Schneider
The Grand Design, by Stephen Hawking
The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why it Endures, by Nicholas Wade
Anything new by Michael Perry or John Hodgman

-- Bill Spevacek

Just finishing Doing Hard Time, one in the Stone Barrington series by Stuart Woods. Next up: his new one, Stand Up Guy.

-- Mary Tracy

The Death of Santini, by Pat Conroy. He wrote Prince of Tides years ago, and I thought it was excellent. Both are about his abusive father, whom called "The Great Santini."

-- Bonny Conway

The Bully Pulpit, by Doris Kearns Goodwin
Killing Jesus, by Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard
Poetry by Margaret Atwood

-- Sandy Rafter

Sign of the Coming Apocalypse

It doesn’t rival “Jackson” or “Sophia,” Aiden” or “Emma,” but the baby name that showed the greatest increase in usage this year just past was... Well, just say “CHEESE.”

Yeah. “Cheese.”

Admittedly, only nine new parent couples out of 500,000 studied gave their little crocks of joy this nifty unisex name in 2013, but that represents a 450% jump over the previous year.

Why on earth???

Maybe these nine sweet, coagulated, compressed, ripened curds of milk all have older siblings named “Mac”?
Submergence, by J.M. Ledgard

To review a novel by J.M. Ledgard is a great challenge. It’s impossible to capture the breadth, depth, and intellectual dash of this book. James More, descendent of Thomas More, now a British spy in Africa, by undercover a water engineer, is captured trying to enter Somalia, confined and tortured by jihadists. In captivity, his thoughts return to a romantic interlude that led to love on the French Atlantic the previous year during the week before Christmas, with Danielle Flinders, a professor of biomathematics cum deep-sea diver, oceanographer, and researcher of deep-water hydrothermal vents (perhaps the source of all life).

This is a multi-layered 208 page–book. Along the way we get snippets of Utopia, dozens of vignettes and commentaries from books about the sea and some readings from the anarchist Prince Pyotr Kropotkin critiquing the theories of Darwin, not to mention a little discussion of the statue “Christ of the Abyss,” which now lies some fifty feet below the surface of the harbor in La Spezia.

We keep returning to the Sumer Civilization that lived in the marshes of southern Iraq, a civilization said to be enraptured by the ocean and the earliest source of written work and all laws, civil and divine. James, called Mr. Water by his captors, winds up (via a forced march to escape the Ethiopian soldiers) in a Somalian marsh not unlike, perhaps, those of the Sumers.

There are no chapters in this book, only scenes. Ledgard writes primarily in declarative sentences. His captors put food into the room every morning...He opened up a fruit with his thumb. In the center of it was a gray pulp of eggs. He carried it to the drain hole and saw a maggot pushing out through the eggs. It crawled onto his index finger. It was white, with a black snout. It made him think of the white-and-black-checkered headscarves of the fighters. He lifted it to his mouth and ate it.

Danielle tries to understand the pullulating life in the deepest volcanic vents, the chain of life from microbes to man, with emphasis on the microbes and her occasional sex partners, which she uses and discards when they have accomplished their purpose with her body, having never been able to engage her mind.

She prefers horse drawn carts to speeding taxis, trying to slow the clock, squeezing a memory out of every second. In late December, she goes for a swim in the Atlantic, never the warmest of waters, trying to return to her microbial roots, looking for the consilience of evidence.

Danielle and James accidentally meet on the beach during their separate exercises and have a long lunch together. The next morning she calls him back to the beach, undresses, and goes for that swim. They make love in the bath room, where this time, “the tiles on the floor stayed sure, affixed one to the other, and there was only tenderness between them.”

He has engaged her mind. She speaks of the five levels of the ocean and of what the Norsemen had to say about it. He, being a spy, tries to divert the conversation back to her, develop a long story about some literary obscurity, mention a weird fact about Osama bin Laden’s brother, or say something about the Sumerians.

As she prepares for the dive to the bottom of the Greenland Sea and its horrible feeling of being alone in another world, a world from which return is uncertain, James is all alone in a chaotic hell that jihadists see as ushering in the end times when everyone dies, especially the infidels. His captors offer the grace of conversion to Islam. He refuses.

We are exploring many depths, as the love story deepens and twists in the currents and the inescapable Ledgard riptide pulls us away from the shore, drowning us in his intelligence. That this book was not shortlisted for the Man Booker prize shows that the judges were poor swimmers.
THE WRITING LIFE
RANDI LYNN MRVOS

Tenacity

How much perseverance do you have? Do you throw in the towel after a rejection? Do you give up when the writing muse fails to show? Do you quit because you don’t have time to write? Being a writer is not for the faint-hearted. But as with anything we desire to succeed at, we must keep on trying. For example...

With a little more time on my hands since my daughter started her freshman year at college, I looked into taking a French class. I had enjoyed the subject in high school and always wanted to learn more. The teacher at the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning in Lexington wanted me to take a beginning class. I was to buy the workbook and read through it before class started. But when I began to do some of the exercises, it was way over my head. So many rules and exceptions. How would I ever be able to learn? I seriously thought about not taking the class.

But curiosity won me over, and I decided to give it a try. To my delight, the teacher was fun, and the lesson was easy and enjoyable; however, since the class was too small, the teacher moved our session to a different day and a more advanced class, taught almost entirely in French. I got about 50% of what was taught. It was intimidating and challenging. Luckily the following week, the teacher announced that a beginner’s class would re-open now that she had more participants. Thank goodness, hallelujah!

But what if I had given up? What if I had not tried the upper level class? My dream of learning more French might have been squashed. So, I’m glad I stuck with it. I guess you could call it tenacity.

That’s what writers need when facing hardships or a challenge. We get rejections; we stare at a blank page waiting for inspiration; we face critique partners who tell us that our manuscript needs more work. We must be tenacious. We must find the courage to continue writing despite the roadblocks. We know that sometimes a roadblock will steer us to another path that will lead to success. To writers, giving up is not an option. The only option for success is to persevere.

SHORT TAKE
JAN BOSMAN

My fall from grace

My grandchildren, ages 19, 15, 13, and 10, think I’m pretty smart. Maybe that’s because I write poetry, taught in a public high school for 32 years, and read books. Maybe it’s because I listen to them and think they’re pretty smart, too.

A couple of months ago, I took 13-year-old Joe shopping to Kohl’s, to buy him size 12½ school shoes. He had outgrown every pair he owned. He asked me, “What’s that round ball-like thing, sticking up from your dashboard?” I looked. “I have no idea,” I admitted.

We found a pair of Nike scuffs in black and red that he liked. I wondered if they’d pass his school’s dress code, banning red and black—alleged gang colors—but he was unfazed.

The shoes were on sale. He called my attention to a pair of “sweet” Converse high tops in black with green florescent trim, but he didn’t want me to buy them when he saw the price tag, $59.95. He’s very money conscious. He knows his parents’ divorce split the assets. Maybe it’s his innate goodness, or maybe he’s learning to be cautious with coins long before most kids his age.

I insisted, telling him that with my 30% off coupon, we’d save a boat-load of money. I paid for the two pairs of shoes, using my discount. Joe picked up an iTunes card (conveniently located right next to the checkout counter) for $25, which he paid for with his “own money.”

On the drive to his house, he asked, “Which do you think is healthier, McDonald’s chicken nuggets or Wendy’s?” I answered, “I have no idea.” I was stumped on two successive questions.

He asked me yet a third question just before we arrived at his mom’s house: “It says on this iTunes card that it won’t activate for 24 hours. Why not?”

“My friend, Jerry, might know, but I have no idea,” I answered. We looked at each other and laughed. Three consecutive times, I’d answered, “I have no idea.”

“Grandma,” Joseph said, “I always thought you were so smart.”

“Me, too,” I said.
PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Jesse stumps many

Diane Reinke thought it was Nathan Hale. Mary Ramey thought Billy the Kid. (She did nail it on a second guess.) Ed Pahnke thought so, too, adding that “I recognize him from my youth.” Norma Sundberg offered Daniel Boone and then Davy Crockett.

Larry Tobin (Calamity Jane) and Clive Rosengran (Annie Oakley) got thrown off by the long hair. When told he was wrong, Clive took a second stab: “Then it must be Queen Victoria.”

Keith Bowman was first to correctly identify the image as that of Jesse James. “I only know,” he says, “because according to my great-grandmother, we’re related. After learning about him, I would have preferred Billy the Kid.”

Leighton Mark and our maven of all things western, Pat Fitzgerald, also IDed Jesse.

The new poser

Yeah, yeah, I know the tall one in the chair is Lincoln. But who’s the little guy looking up at him?

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Best read of 2013

Last issue, in response to the Swift Take on Books, I asked what book(s) you were planning to read next. This month, your question is:

What’s the best book you read in 2013?

Answers for poser and question of the month to Coach: mcook@dcs.wisc.edu.

HAHNKE PAHNKE PUNishment

ED PAHNKE

Snow job

Bernie the snowplow man looked outside.

“Wow, the snow is really blowing and drifting,” his wife noted. “Get out the skis.” She chuckled.

“It’s snow laughing matter,” Bernie grumbled as he pulled on his boots.

“Whew, did you really say that?”

“Snow comment.”

Bernie waded through the snow out to his truck in the garage, opened the cab of his four by four, and saw Elmer, his helper, sitting inside.

Bernie revved up the engine. “Looks like we’ll make lots of money today, pal,” he said.

Elmer winked and replied, “Snow news is good news.”

Putting the truck in reverse, Bernie attempted to plow through the three-foot snowdrift that blocked his exit.

“Is everything alright, Bernie?”

“Snow problem.”

He drove forward, reversed the truck, and got out of the driveway in a cloud of snow.

On the street, they saw Ole Olsen stuck in his Plymouth.

Elmer snickered. “There’s snow fool like an Ole fool,” he said.

Bernie nodded without cracking a smile.

They rescued Ole and went about their business plowing snow until they’d finished their assigned area. The moon lit the sky when Bernie finally arrived home. He dragged into the kitchen, looking for his wife.

“How’d things go, honey?” she asked without looking up.

He sighed, “Snow picnic.” Looking over his wife’s shoulder, he remarked, “You’re drinking an iced smoothie on a day like this?”

Never one to let Bernie get in the last quip, she chuckled. “There’s snow accounting for tastes,” she said.
Coach’s Bullpen Briefs

Kaat’s website a chance for all of us to display our wares

Janice Kaat has created a website called The Author’s Showcase, a place for you to show off your book(s). She has created a proto homepage (below) for the site. Posting is free, but Jan asks authors who wish to participate to make a donation to defray costs if possible. You can contact Jan for details (janicekaat@theauthorsshowcase.com) and check out the site at www.theauthorsshowcase.com.

Sims emphasizes healing, not pain

The Day I Cut The Lock Off - The Treasure In My Earthen Vessel
by Marilyn Sims
Amazon and XulonPress.com
The author doesn’t share her suffering with a victimized tone. She recounts the pain, shame and turmoil but stresses God’s healing power. The author takes responsibility for her choices as an adult, even though they had their roots in being abused as a child. “We have to play the cards we are dealt,” Marilyn notes. “It takes maturity, bravery and Christ to rise above the trauma of our childhoods.”

ESTHER’S NEWS

Will this be Esther’s year?

For the third time, Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks has been nominated to become the new Poet Laureate of New Hampshire. Competition proves steep for this five-year term, so while hopeful, she says she’s not holding her breath.

Lisa Krenz is justifiably proud of her kids, Joel and Anna—just the second brother/sister basketball-playing duo in the history of Christ Our Rock Lutheran High School (Centralia, Illinois).

Tom Hicks shows his art at the Almont Gallery, part of the Waunakee, Wisconsin “Art Crawl, December 7, 2013. Contact Tom for details about his paintings and unique T-shirts (Coach’s personal favorite is “The Invisible Dr. Bronsky, Master of Disguise,” with “Picasso Goes Fishing” a close second) at hicks.tom1@gmail.com.

Lisa Krenz is justifiably proud of her kids, Joel and Anna—just the second brother/sister basketball-playing duo in the history of Christ Our Rock Lutheran High School (Centralia, Illinois).

Tom Hicks shows his art at the Almont Gallery, part of the Waunakee, Wisconsin “Art Crawl, December 7, 2013. Contact Tom for details about his paintings and unique T-shirts (Coach’s personal favorite is “The Invisible Dr. Bronsky, Master of Disguise,” with “Picasso Goes Fishing” a close second) at hicks.tom1@gmail.com.

Lisa Krenz is justifiably proud of her kids, Joel and Anna—just the second brother/sister basketball-playing duo in the history of Christ Our Rock Lutheran High School (Centralia, Illinois).
This month’s All-Star Line Up:

COACH’S BULLPEN BLOVIATION
New Year’s revolution:
I’m really, really sorry...

Orvil Hamster and the Bakersfield Blizzard of ’99, by Richard Mallard
FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS
ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS
“PUNishment and other word play

MEANDERING WITH MADONNA
MADONNA DRIES CHRISTENSEN
My paper garden

GROWING UP AFTER MADISON
RON HEVEY
My 15 minutes with Muhammad Ali

POP CULTURE WATCH
JACOB MCLAUGHLIN
My Top-10 television shows of 2013

FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH . . .
REX OWENS
Neither snow nor sleet nor...

A SWIFT TAKE ON BOOKS
JOHN SWIFT
Beware the undertow in this complex novel

THE WRITING LIFE
RANDI LYNN MRVOS
Tenacity
SHORT TAKE
JAN BOSMAN
My fall from grace

HAHNKE PAHNKE PUNISHMENT
ED PAHNKE
Snow job

plus a brand new column
SUPERSTRING
SANDY RAFTER
Emily’s spirit lives on

Plus poetry from:
Norma Sundberg,
Sandra Rafter,
Bonny Conway,
and THE WRITER’S POET, Craig W. Steele
Jan Kent as THE WORD WHISPERER
with your letters, Photo Quiz,
Question of the Month,
Coach’s Bullpen Briefs, and of course...
Your Christmas Moments With Lily

Web Weaver: Kerrie Louis
Internetter: Steve Born
The Masked Man: Brace Beemer
Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook

I publish Extra Innings monthly and distribute it free to an open enrollment mailing list. To get on the list, email the Coach at: mcook@dcs.wisc.edu

Extra Innings comes to you through the good graces of the writing program at Continuing Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, led by Christine DeSmet. Find out about workshops, courses, conferences, and critiques services at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing

Next Deadline:
Wednesday, January 22, 2014
Welcome our newest feature...
SUPERSTRING
SANDY RAFTER

Emily’s spirit lives on

Author’s note: Superstring is a theory concerned with particles and forces of nature in a model of tiny vibrating strings. This explanation may not be correct since I didn’t understand it, haven’t a clue as to what it is, what will be, how to explain what is vibrating. I think this covers my writing, so I chose it for my column’s name.

I have concluded that I am the reincarnation of Emily Dickinson.

How did I figure this out? I fell in love with Emily in college when I was an English major and found that her poetry was the shortest of assigned readings, not the easiest, but the shortest. Then, I discovered we share a common birthday, December 10th. I started writing poetry. Further research leads me to believe that we are one and the same, at least as much as we can be with one of us buried in Massachusetts.

Our similarities are numerous. I shall list a few.
Emily is immortalized in a play by William Luce, "The Belle of Amherst." My grandmother’s middle name was Belle and wanted my mother to bestow the name on me. She didn't: still, the name means intelligent, and Emily and I fit the bill.

Emily wrote her verse in hymn meter, a method of having the correct number of syllables in a hymn text fit the tune. I don't think Emily wrote music for a hymn, and neither have I. I did sing hymns with my Grandmother when I was a girl.

Emily was described as a very good child in school, and so was I-- with the exception of that one incident of shoving the patrol guard at the corner, and he deserved it!

Emily dressed in white, in garments we would call house dresses. She was buried in a white dress in a white casket. I am sure at my cremation my ashes will be more white than gray.

Recurring themes in Emily's poetry are death and immortality. I'm still having arguments with people about whether cats and dogs go to heaven when they die.

Although Emily didn't venture from the family home often, she did carry on extensive correspondence through the mail with numerous people, including her future sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert. I do a lot of writing-- e-mail, Twitter, and Face Book. I also had two college roommates named Sue and dated a boy whose father's name was Gilbert.

We think of Emily primarily as a poet, but she also was known as an excellent baker and gardener. I made a custard strawberry-rhubarb pie for my father once in 1978. He liked it.

Emily's album of 400 pressed flowers and plants is now the property of the Harvard Houghton Library. Her favorites were scented exotic flowers, which she said transformed her conservatory into the Spice Isles. I like colorful flowers, too, and I may start tucking an orchard behind my ear. I love the spicy aroma upon entering a Mexican restaurant.

Emily was very reclusive in her later years, and often stayed behind her door to talk to people standing outside her room. I have bad hair days, too.

I trust my reasons for believing I am Emily Dickinson reincarnated are becoming clearer. I know there may be skeptics, but there is further proof of a kind. Only one authenticated picture of Emily exists. She sits posed in a dark, not white, long dress looking straight into the camera. She had reddish brown hair and wide spaced brown eyes. She was slim, petite, and parted her hair in the middle. I look nothing like her, and my eyes are blue. Yet, I am new to this reincarnation business, so I'm not sure how much we should look alike.

After Emily died, her family found volumes of poetry amounting to 1,800 poems. Up to that year of 1886, she had published less than a dozen. That will be about my output. I'm aiming for the 1,800 more but that's a lot, and I will definitely need help with my dashes for the rest of the poetry. I have a great amount of work ahead.

Emily (or, we could say "I" at this point) wrote: "I taste a liquor never brewed." She was describing a mystical state, but I think it was a clue, too, and perhaps, some blackberry wine from her garden berries would not be amiss right now, and, certainly, would be a suitable spirit.

and now, at last...
Your Christmas Moments with

Photos by Gramellen