As I write this, the temperature have soared, and the sun is shining. It’s amazing how good plus one can feel, especially without wind. It’s so nice to see the sun, even if its heater doesn’t seem to work any more.

I know. Midwesterners always bitch about the weather. It’s true. Even if the weather is perfect, we’re apt to say, “Yeah, but we’ll pay for it later.”

But come on! Eighteen below zero (or, as the weather wizards now say, “negative eighteen”)! Not rising above zero for days at a time! As the great Red Barber might say, “Oh, doctor!”

How cold is it? I’ll tell you how cold it is. My poor little doggy, Pixie the Wonder Schnauzer, froze her tongue to the aluminum door frame on the back porch.

THAT’S how cold it is. You try explaining to a dog that you should never stick your tongue on the flag pole in winter, no matter how much the big kids dare you to.

Something called a "polar vortex" is supposedly responsible for this prolonged misery. Knowing that does absolutely no good. Zero. Zilch. Nada.

And how I wish the "wind-chill factor" had never been invented! Let Dick Chaney waterboard the guy who made up that statistic!

And as for comparisons to “average” highs and lows for this day, also useless. Averages are bogus. I know a very happily married couple comprised of a man, 6’6” (and that’s without hair) and a woman 4’11” (with hair). So that makes them a perfectly “average” 5’8 1/2” instead of the marvelously interesting pair they are.

Three guys go deer hunting. One’s a writer. One’s an editor. One’s a statistician.

They spot a beautiful 10 point buck. The writer fires first but misses wide to the left by 5’. Almost at the same instant the editor swings his rifle up, aims and lets fly-- missing wide to the right by 5’. The statistician throws his gun up in the air and shouts gleefully, “We got him!”

That’s averages.

I figure the weather wizards call minus eighteen degrees "negative eighteen" for the same reason they call rain a "precipitation event" and invent terms like "Polar vortex." It’s also the same reason why lawyers talk the way they do.

I should probably hibernate, but I’ve never been able to sleep much past 5:00 a.m.

Some folks are putting great faith in Jimmy the Groundhog, nearby Sun Prairie’s ace weather prognosticator, to come out of his hole on February 2 and predict a quick end to this winter of our disgruntlement. (Do NOT mention that faker, Punxsutawney Phil. Around here, Jimmy’s the real deal.)

I figure Jimmy got smart and moved to Pensacola three weeks ago.

*My monthly column, formerly called “Bullpen Bloviation,” has a new name. As baseball fans know, the pitcher’s mound, which is 18 inches high at its apex, is 60’6” from home plate.

See photo, next page
How cold was it in Wisconsin?
It was this cold!

That’s Wisconsin on the left, snow coming off the Great Lakes, state of Michigan in the center.
NASA Terra Satellite photo, taken Monday, January 6, spotted by Amy Rosebrough, Wisconsin deputy state archaeologist, and sent to us by Kimberly Cook, Wisconsin state archaeologist and Lily’s mother.
If I’d used this for the photo ID quiz, you would have thought it was a T-Rex fossil.
Clutching a football, the petite blonde’s yellow jersey flaps around her ankles as she sprints toward the end zone. The announcer shouts, “Touchdown...Sarah...Buzby.”

The magic begins when the Champion Football League of Northern Virginia’s team storms onto the field at Freedom High School.

Sponsored by the Down Syndrome Association of Northern Virginia, the team is open to anyone age five to 20 who has a disability and lives in the area. Players experience teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership, and the excitement and camaraderie of team sport. They play four quarters with specific plays; each player has a chance to score a touchdown. All games end in a tie. Each player receives a trophy at season’s end.

Board Member Maureen Buckley put the ball in play in 2011 after seeing an ESPN clip about a team for disabled people. She spoke to Freedom High School Coach Mike Mullins about hosting a game.

“I was so moved that I decided we’d do whatever it took to make this a reality,” Mullins said. “For our first game, I was apprehensive. We’d had a tough loss the night before and had gone through a two hour practice and film study that morning. I asked for volunteers; more than half the team participated. They set up the field; turned on the scoreboard; worked the microphone, and came up with the tunnel run through and player introductions. For the youngsters it was all the bells and whistles of a real game.”

Mullins, who has a child with Asperger’s, added, “I get emotional when I see her enjoying herself in the moment. It’s moving to see the smiles, hear laughter, and see the parents’ joy watching their children.

“There were happy tears that day, many of them mine. I’m proud of my players. They were stretching with the kids, running with them, getting tackled, and enjoying themselves as much as the players. It was a spiritual moment; I felt the...
love we’re capable of and the potential of all our young people.”

Eric Weismiller volunteered because Coach asked him to. “After the first day I was hooked,” he said. “I’d never experienced anything like Champion Football. After waking up from a hard-fought game, working with the players was the best medicine. Seeing those kids run around having a great time is priceless. I looked forward to going every Saturday, and when it was over, I was a bit crushed. Before the league, I never had the chance to even have a conversation with kids with special needs. This gave me a different viewpoint. These are some of the funniest kids I’ve ever met. It gives me an awesome feeling knowing they love to come here.”

Chris Cook agreed. “I volunteered because my father worked for a company that cares for handicapped people,” he said. “I enjoyed working with Dad, so I loved the idea of doing it with this team. I like giving the kids a chance to do something they would love to do, but given their circumstances, they can’t. It means the world to see them light up and smile when they put on a jersey and score a touchdown.

“Once I saw how much the parents appreciated what we did, it was something that was bigger than I could’ve imagined. I’d never looked at it from their shoes and understood what it would be like to never have been able to play the game I love so much. It put things in perspective.”

“This is the most rewarding organization I’ve been part of,” Trevor Moody added. “I loved working with each child and enjoyed finding ways to make each visit fun and memorable. I’ve grown close with a lot of the kids. If I was given a group picture I’d be able to name every child. The feeling I got as I ran into the end zone as each of them scored touchdowns with huge grins on their faces is indescribable. I’ve been humbled and blessed to help children who are less fortunate. I’ve created memories for a lifetime.”

The cheerleading squad participated, working with anyone who wanted to cheer. One girl played the game wearing her cheerleading uniform. What does it mean to the kids? Connor Garwood said, “I like playing football with my girlfriend, Sarah. I like touchdowns and spiking the ball!!”

Sarah added, “The best thing is winning a touchdown. I like throwing, and that Connor got a touchdown, too.”

“That first game, none of us knew if this would work, Coach Mullins summed up. “The league is the most rewarding experience in my career. I intend to be involved as long as they’ll have me. Sometimes you catch magic in a bottle. We had it that day.”

School Daze

Thanks to Mary Callahan

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

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

TEACHER: Glenn, how do you spell 'crocodile'?
GLENN: K-R-O-C-O-D-I-L-E'
TEACHER: No, that's wrong
GLENN: Maybe it is wrong, but you asked me how I spell it.

TEACHER: Donald, what is the chemical formula for water?
DONALD: H I J K L M N O.
TEACHER: What are you talking about?
DONALD: Yesterday you said it's H to O.

TEACHER: Winnie, name one important thing we have today that we didn't have 10 years ago.
WINNIE: Me!

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

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

TEACHER: George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree, but also admitted it. Now, Louie, do you know why his father didn't punish him?
LOUIS: Because George still had the axe in his hand...
Writers’ Institute celebrates 25 years

What began a quarter of a century ago has become the Midwest’s premiere writers’ conference—three full days of education, entertainment, and inspiration for writers. The 2014 edition of the Writers’ Institute, April 4-6 at the Concourse Hotel in Madison, WI, will again provide up-to-date information and trends in writing and publishing—as well as being a great place to network with fellow writers.

Four keynote sessions will star Michael Perry, Nathan Bransford, Dale Kushner, and Jane Friedman.

Elmore Leonard started it all

In 1990 Christine DeSmet and Marshall Cook started a yearly writers’ conference on the UW-Madison campus through the Continuing Studies Division. Elmore Leonard graciously agreed to be the keynote speaker. The two-day conference—one day featuring fiction topics, the next nonfiction—promised “The adventure of writing for fun, for a living!” Under DeSmet’s able direction, W.I. flourished. In 1997 Laurel Yourke joined Christine and Marshall as lead faculty for the program.

Over the past 25 years, distinguished authors such as George V. Higgins, Delle Chatman, Carol Higgins Clark, Lee Gutkind, Jerry Apps, Jacquelyn Mitchard, Donald Maass, Dara Marks, and John Vorhaus have shared their knowledge of writing with our writing community.

Laurie Scheer now directs the W.I.

“I’m here to say that it is an honor to continue to carry the torch that Christine, Marshall, and Laurel started,” Laurie says. “This year’s conference continues to celebrate the energy that began in 1990. “Beginner or advanced, fiction or nonfiction, you’ll have three days to mingle with other writers, agents, editors, and publishers to talk about what matters—your writing and the writing life.”

Contact Laurie at lscheer@dcs.wisc.edu and access the website at: http://continuingstudies.wisc.edu/conferences/writers-institute/index.html

Extra Innings #52

“Hibernis est triste”

Madison, Wisconsin Feburrrrrary, 2014

This month’s All-Stars:
Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks, Rex Owens, Madonna Dries Christensen, John Swift, Den Adler, Ed Pahnke, Sandra Rafter, Jacob McLaughlin, Ron Hevey, and special guest star Sandy Mickelson, with Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer, poetry from Jan Bosman, and The Writer’s Poet, Craig W. Steele.
Staff toddler: Liliana Lenore Cook
Web Weaver: Kerrie Louis
Internetters: Steve Born, Mary Callahan, and Larry Tobin
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.des.wisc.edu/lsa/writing

Extra Innings is a proud booster of
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the Odyssey Project
the Simpson Street Free Press
and The Little Free Library
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Next Deadline:
Thursday, Feb 20, 2014
Two Winter Rant Poems
Jan Bosman

Dirty Snow Poem

No more poems about virgin snow:
fluffy, puffy, whiter-than-white snow,
cloud-like, heaven-sent, rapturous light snow,
cottony smooth, not-yet-bruised, snowboarder’s delight snow,
record snow, adored snow, look-out-the-door snow.

I need to talk about whorish snow:
peed on, skied on, pain-in-my-knees snow,
well-used, grey-hued, sticking-like-glue snow,
black snow, brown snow, littering-the-ground snow,
shoveled snow, plowed snow, clogging-the-roadside-now snow,
night fright, banked tight, limiting-my-sight snow.
Chore snow! Eyesore! Don’t send-any-more snow!

After the Ice Storm

Tinkling branches, glistening rails,
covered with a glossy veil.
Secret crystal, shining edges
shimm’ring grass and sparkling hedges
silver-plated gleaming leaves--
fairyland and make believe.

Gardens glassy, sidewalks slick,
crafty Winter’s charming trick.
Crunch and crackle, bend and break
branches’ health and life at stake.
Painted bright by icy cold,
all that glitters is not gold.
It's a fantasy, that's what it is. That belief in indestructibility is a fantasy. It starts when you're a young punk watching television shows with old people in them. You know, old – at least 35, maybe older. No wonder they have problems, you think, they're old.

Suddenly you're watching the oldies channel, and all those people who once seemed too old to be allowed out alone now look like they're babies, too young to be allowed out alone.

Fantasy. Perspective. There but for the grace of God stuff. Only in this case, it's God's grace that keeps you getting older.

I'm trying to understand, truly I am. I'm trying to understand how it happened overnight. Once I was; now I once was.

Now I'm one of the multitude facing likely cataract surgery, and it doesn't make me feel any better that Dr. Fox says it'll be a while yet. The need to buy a new car hurts less when you hear the mechanic say it'll be a while yet. But cataracts? There's just no good to come from the knowledge that it will be a while yet.

A few days ago, I tried to buy myself an Amtrak ticket online. That seems to be the thing to do these days, buying tickets online.

Buying anything online baffles me. Prompts send me places I can't find in most cases, and even when I can maneuver to the correct location, that's not the end of it. Oh, no, not at all.

So, I've got the Amtrak information up, I find the right train, the right date and fill in my form. Check it twice. Hit submit.

“We are unable to complete your request.” Or some such baloney.

The computer told me my pin number was incorrect. How, I wondered loudly and not so nicely, did the computer even think I didn't know my own pin number. But there, just as plain as a cloudless day, the pin number box had mysteriously emptied. I filled it again. And again.

Way back when microwave ovens first came out, I didn't want one. I didn't want to be dumber than my stove, but with the help of a good salesman and a convection microwave, I climbed that hill of inability. Surely that hill could not have formed again, especially when I was looking right at that dag-nabbed pin number and it WAS correct.

While getting electronic Amtrak tickets, you get just three do-overs; then you can't even apply. If you don't know yourself in three tries, the computer figures you might not be you. But I was me, a mad me.

Finally I got into an area where the computer wanted an answer. I refused to give one and hit all sorts of boxes, finally lighting on a box that gave me a phone number. A real Ashley helped me buy the ticket. And it wasn't the pin number that was wrong. It was the expiration date of my credit card. With almost-cloudy eyes, I couldn't see the number correctly.

Computers don't like that. But, still, how did it know?

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

Sandy Mickelson is the former lifestyle editor of The Fort Dodge, Iowa Messenger and continues to write a Sunday column for the paper. We reprint her column of January 19, 2013 with her kind permission.
Why do so many of us suffer from depression?

I am a writer and have struggled with depression. The list of writers who suffer or have suffered from depression is a long one, including Sylvia Plath, Robert Frost, Agatha Christie, and J.K. Rowling. Theories abound as to why writers and other artists fall into this category: writers are supersensitive people, are prone to periods of loneliness as they work at their craft, suffer from inadequate diets, don't get enough sleep, deal with situations in their writing that others ignore, do not receive much feedback as they write, are subject to depression because of their creative abilities.

Each of us have circumstances, personalities, and minds and bodies that differ so that depression has to be analyzed individually by experts. I recognize some of the reasons listed above why I sometimes feel I’m not like others. (Perhaps, this last might be added to the list)

Yet, while we differ, I believe depression is an important topic for writers to tackle, because we so often suffer so much and in silence.

Have you ever wished you were dead and wrote about it? I have. Have you ever felt so low that you were sure writing was for other writers, not for you, if you could even give yourself that title? I have. Sometimes, when I was depressed, I'd write very solemn bottomed-out poems full of self-loathing about myself and my world. Then, one day I read them all and threw them away. They were written during one low point of many I'd reach, and I'm sure that the depression hadn't cleared when I tossed them, but, frankly, I couldn't stand my own whining in the poems.

In my depressive state, I was sometimes the figure screaming in the Edvard Munch painting and other times a Mona Lisa with an inscrutable smile giving nothing away. I didn't know who I was as a writer and found myself in a place where I kept writing but found my writing was not what I wanted it to be.

I wish now that I had my poetry back, not for the words of the poems -- good or bad -- and not because I had expended a ton of emotion and effort on them. I have that wish now, because I have been learning to forgive myself when I am depressed. I wouldn't now so violently betray myself.

There have been many stages of depression in my life, from withdrawal and great sadness to feeling sunk in a hole digging my way to China.

When I was a girl, I lived in a two story house with aluminum siding. A pine tree had been planted too close to the house, and as it grew, the branches spread toward the siding so that even when the slightest wind blew, I could hear the faint scratching of the needles. A pair of doves roosted in the pine and cooed early in the morning, waking the family. At first, the sounds were annoying, but, then, I grew so used to them that they were comforting, and I listened for them the same way I'd wait to hear my mother walk down the hall to come kiss me good night.

My writing was as familiar in my life as the sounds became -- with me, part of me. I started writing early in elementary school. I didn't have to think about writing because it was what I did and what I dreamed and what I planned for my future -- until I became depressed. Then I felt as though the pine was axed down and hunter's had thrust arrows through the dove's breasts.

There were no sounds, no comfort, no familiarity; instead, my life seemed to be darkness of thoughts and loneliness. My writing disappeared.

Do we writers feel comfortable explaining and exploring our depression? For myself, in spite of my writing here, I'm not yet sure; I don't have my usual context of poem or story. Certainly, depression is better diagnosed and treated than it was when I was younger, but still, there often is a stigma attached to being depressed. I used to think our only recourse to overcome that was to write a great thick best selling tragedy, but, for some inexplicable reason, when I am depressed and can
get started, my mind turns out humor. Laughing at ourselves is good. I know now that I am not a strange person and so different from others just because I have periods of depression. However, I can’t say during those times that the effort to continue writing always has been easy. I’ve often wondered how other writers who deal with depression keep writing, or, if they don’t, how they start again. How has it been for you? To be continued: My writing reappears.

Coach’s note: I found much to resonate with in this column. In my experience with depression, both in myself and in loved ones, we tend to feel ashamed, as if being depressed were our fault, a weakness or character flaw. We’re quite sure we’re the only ones who feel this way. Sandy invites us to share those feelings and shed some light on a topic too long shrouded in darkness. As always, you can email your thoughts to mcook@dcswisc.edu. If it’s something you don’t want to share in the newsletter or would rather not have your name attached to, just let me know. I can still give our readers a sense that others share the struggle.

Bobby
Marshall J. Cook

On the screen he is alive again, speaking as he spoke in life, diffident and strong, brushing back the whimsical tumble of hair with awkward hand, speaking his monotone of promise and compassion. I am unable to turn away. Over and over he has to die, the outcome never changing, never failing to bring, as he lay in his own startled blood, the dawning of death clouding his clear and hopeful eyes.

Best reads of 2013

Last issue I asked you to provide the best book or books you read last year. Here are some of your responses.

1. Unbroken by Laura Hildebrand
2. Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson
3. David Copperfield by Charles Dickens
4. The Journal of Best Practices by a local guy, David Finch
5. Wild by Cheryl Strayed

Jan Bosman
Suspect, by Robert Crais
Ordinary Grace, by William Kent Krueger.

Clive Rosengren
The Book Seller, by Mark Pryor

Mary Post
The Goldfinch, by Donna Tartt

Sharon Young
The Harbinger, by Jonathan Cahn

Jan Kaat
How to Write with the Skill of a Master and the Genius of a Child, by Marshall Cook

William Hickey

Coach’s note: If Khaled Hosseini, Kate Atkinson, Neil Gaiman, or Margaret Atwood (to name a few) were the editor of this newsletter, I suspect Bill’s response might have been different.

Your question of the month

Did you identify with any literary characters growing up?
Who were your storybook heroes?

As always, tell all to the coach: mcook@dcswisc.edu
Yiddish has enriched our language

“Shpilkes”
I came across that word the other day. It gave me pause.
“Shpilkes” n: (plural only): state of agitation, anxiety. Colloquial; ants in one’s pants.

We’ve absorbed many other wonderful Yiddish words:

bupkes: adj: trivial, meaningless. (Literally “goat droppings”)
chutzpah: n: extreme arrogance, nerve.
Glitch: n: minor problem or mistake. Literally “nosedive”
Goy: n: a non Jew, a Gentile.
Kosher: adj: acceptable. From Jewish dietary laws.
Kvetsh: v: to complain, whine, or fret. Literally “to press or squeeze.” (The ‘k’ is pronounced.)
Maven: n: Expert.
Mentsh: n: an honorable, decent person.
Mishegas: n: insanity or craziness.
Nosh: v: to snack or nibble. n: A snack.
Oy vey: exclamation of dismay, grief, or exasperation. Literally, “Oh, woe is me.”
Schlock: n: something cheap, shoddy, or inferior.
Sclimazel: n: someone with constant bad luck. (See Laverne and Shirley theme)
Shmalltzy: adj: excessively sentimental, gushing, corny. Literally, “chicken fat or grease.”
Shmooze: v: make small talk.
Spiel: n: long, involved sales pitch.
Shmutz: n: dirt.
Tchatchke: n: knick-knack, collectible.
Tuches: n: rear end, buttocks.
Yente: n: female busybody or gossip.
My sisters and I should erect a monument to this man. His name was John Michels.

The early 1950s were tough for my parents, and I’m sure my sisters and I felt the tension. Dad was running a small grocery store when, in 1950, the bank that owned the building cancelled his lease. Dad worked several jobs, but he also applied for a clerk position in the post office. Perhaps his dad, Mathias F. (“M.F.” or “Matt”) Adler, talked him into it after working as a rural postal carrier from 1907 to 1922, as postmaster from 1922 to 1935, and again as rural carrier after that.


The Michels and Adler names appeared together often in The Waunakee Tribune by 1922, when Matt achieved “first standing” and John Michels second in the examination for Waunakee postmaster. Republican president Calvin Coolidge appointed Matt to the then-political job, and John, who owned a dry goods and grocery store, continued in that occupation and remained active in village affairs, including service on the village board.

In 1935, however, Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed John postmaster, replacing Matt. John sold “M.F. Adler and Sons,” his store’s “entire stock and fixtures,” as the Tribune reported it. My dad had just graduated from Waunakee High School, and he took over the store when his dad went back to a rural route. Matt swore he’d never again place himself at the mercy of politicians.

When my dad applied for the clerk position in 1950, John promised to hire him, but the two clerks he already had told him they wouldn’t work with Herman Adler. If John hired him, they warned, they would quit. John had been suffering from cancer for a decade or more and often had to take time off from work. “I can’t afford to have them quit,” he told Dad. “I’m sorry. I can’t hire you right now.” One of the clerks lived in the apartment above us, and she and her husband quarreled often with my parents, but the hostility of the other one surprised me.

Weeks later, however, John, still sick, returned to work, hired my dad, and told the other clerks to resign. “He was still very sick,” Dad said, “and I always felt he came back to work just so he could hire me and let those other clerks go.” John died at age 59 less than a year later, and his wife, Anna, became postmistress, the custom then. Dad was the only one left in the office who knew what to do, and he worked long hours doing much of the work of a postmaster. It gave him experience that helped him place first in the examinations for the position in 1952.

With Democrats still in power, however, the applicant who finished second was picked for the job. But the Senate never acted on that appointment, and after Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower won that year’s presidential election, Dad was appointed postmaster in 1953.

Continued on next page
For a few years he and Matt worked together, with Dad “the boss.” For many years I remembered 1953 as the happiest year of my life. The job security and income let Dad and Mom build a new home for us. Dad remained postmaster until 1970, when he appointed himself to a rural carrier position and resigned as postmaster, finishing his postal career delivering mail to farmers around Waunakee on routes his dad had covered

“It was like a new life,” Dad said. “There was no administrative stuff or inspectors hanging over my head.” He retired in 1983 and enjoyed 25 years of retirement before dying in 2009. After I retired I visited him weekly, and during rides on roads he once delivered mail on, Dad often talked of John Michels and the gratitude he felt toward a dying man who returned to work to hire him.

Dad was proud of having followed his dad into the postal service, but I think his motivation to provide great service as a postal worker came mostly from his appreciation of John Michels as his predecessor-- and the man who made possible his career in the postal service.

A little more School Daze

TEACHER: Now, Simon, tell me frankly, do you say prayers before eating?
SIMON: No sir, I don't have to, my Mom is a good cook.
TEACHER: Clyde, your composition on 'My Dog' is exactly the same as your brother's... Did you copy his?
CLYDE: No, sir. It's the same dog.
TEACHER: Harold, what do you call a person who keeps on talking when people are no longer interested?
HAROLD: A teacher

THE WRITER’S POET
CRAIG W. STEELE

Sculpting a Poem

To sculpt a perfect poem, be like Michelangelo—persistent; relentless; ruthless.

Chip away at the formless white façade, revealing something no one else could see.

Chip away withered words, fair-to-middling phrases, lazy lines, sleepwalking stanzas.

Don’t stop until the poem emerges, its lyrics articulated seamlessly like the iridescent wing scales of a never-before-seen butterfly.
FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS
ESTHER M. LEIPER–ESTABROOKS

“Rockin Red”-- the inimitable Mark Burds

My friend Mark Burds was known as Rockin’ Red back in his 13 years of prizefighting, while now he’s acknowledged as a prolific author of light verse with work appearing in hundreds of magazines. We’ve been intermittent pen pals since I accepted his poems for *Z MISCELLANEOUS* years ago.

A decade back Mark had just short of 300 poems published, plus more than 100 three-line bon mots; (not haiku exactly, but witty, ironical sayings.)

Aging, we like to laugh at ourselves and the piling years. If wise, we forget ailments and embrace good fortune and long life with humor. Being funny doesn’t deny faux pas or follies, but we can laugh at ourselves.

When my doctor confirmed arthritis, I quipped, “So I get to have a leg up?” A bad knee is better than a lame brain, while Mark notes wryly:

*body in coffin
one wonders who passed away
remains to be seen*

A book he’s currently preparing is titled *A LEAK IN THE ATTIC*, referring to forgetfulness. He claims this problem but to me seems as incisive as ever, plus he sends on many gems, so here are three more “un-haikus,” punny-side up.

*the peaceful spider
enough legs for four soldiers
arms for none
behind the trees
Long--necked animal is hiding
giraffe is spotted
the cemetery
is up to its neck in debt
a grave matter
*Well, I couldn’t not reciprocate, so I tossed back:*

**NOT YET AT DEATH’S DOOR**
--Oh, nothing keeps one in a rut more than a too ornery gut,
So, God, thank you for the fact
I lack a bad digestive tract!
Thus I stay hot on spicy chili
Upset my stomach? Don’t be silly.
Arthritic knee may bother me
but then I sprawl in bed, you see:
Cats snug, and with dial to crank it,
handy-dandy electric blanket!

“Occasional” verse indicates rhymes written not from deep inspiration but from mental ticklings. Lacking epic scope, such poems celebrate small matters like scratching an itch, discovering Hubby saved you the last donut, or that Puss left a generous half-a-mouse, since caring is sharing.

Mark writes late at night when (he says) he doesn’t have to be clever. Am I critical? No indeed; to me he’s always “witical.” Word play is a large part of humor, and humorists capture what others miss. Here Mark describes a lightning bug, a piece first appearing in *ZM*.

*The lightning bug’s
design is daft
With headlights built
for flying aft!*

Another critter piece from Mark is a limerick whose punch depends on how words, though spelled the same, may have different pronunciations or meanings.

*If you sing bass or fish for bass
For your sake don’t act cocky.
Coop a chicken,
Join a co-op,
Or have a drink of sake,*

Exactly opposite, words called homophones can be *spelled* differently yet are pronounced the same. Think of hoarse and horse, stayed and staid, heir and air, countless more. Mark Burds has mastered such word play, enjoys being tongue-in-cheek, plus uses exaggeration or understatement to provoke laughs. Like me, he admires rhymes.

**Continued on next page**
If certain snobs disdain matching sounds, perhaps they’ve been force-fed clumsy, inept examples. If some sneer that rhyme is out of fashion, I say nonsense. Granted, many poems don’t rhyme and are compelling plus elegant, but equally true, others are clunky and dull. Obscurity with flat (or pretentious) diction turns of readers. Dr. Seuss and Robert Frost are worlds apart, yet their life-force in writing clearly and uniquely lives on past their life-spans, while rhyme was a technique both endorsed and embraced.

Be wary when teachers declare what you should like. Force-feeding won’t help, but do read independently, for yourself, to see what suits your taste. Material offered in school you may appreciate later, but enjoy your right to choose at any life-stage.

Many cherish IDEALS magazine or the sugary inspiration of Helen Steiner Rice’s religious poems. Others prefer the Beat Era’s free spirit, or shape poetry, or experimental pieces. Select what speaks to you! For me humor is always welcome, so let’s end with Mark Burds’ delicious word-play:

GARDEN JEWELRY
I planted carrots in a circle --
Ninety from the earth did spring,
So I invited all my friends
To see my ninety carrot ring.

Esther’s Notes: Through November 2013, Esther’s tale PRINCESS SUNRISE — combining her poems and art on storyboards — showed at the Tea Birds Café Gallery in Berlin, NH. Presented in numbered sequence, the princess — with amusing incidents from multiple viewpoints — grows from childhood to marriage. The book was serialized first in the Great Northwoods Journal.

At Berlin NH’s writing center, Xanadu, novelist/screen writer Greg Norris and Esther presented a Writers’ Workshop on organizing, updating, and making files accessible. When ideas kindle, writers must be ready with notes and research that augment production.

Madison’s snuggle muddle
It was so laughable, it was fodder for “Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me,” the National Public Radio weekly comedy show disguised as a ‘news quiz.’

Host Peter Sagel asked panelist Paula Poundstone to identify a business that had failed after only three weeks of life.

“Madison made the show!” I immediately told Mrs. Coach.

Paula needed a clue. “It involves something that no man wants to just do,” Sagel prompted. “Snuggle!” Paula sang out immediately.

The Snuggle House shut down just three weeks after opening here in Madison, WI, which has long been touted, if that’s the right word, as an island on insanity in a sea of reality.

According to Todd Richmond of the Associated Press, owner Michael Hurtado chose to “pack up his pillows and beds under intense scrutiny from city officials, who questioned whether the place was a front for a brothel.”

Or perhaps it was, as Sagel quipped, “a place of employment for lazy prostitutes.”

To ensure against any such illicit activity, Hurtado, who twice before had filed for bankruptcy, produced a policy manual forbidding sex during snuggle sessions and installed security cameras and a panic button in each room.

Just what could you get at The Snuggle House for your $60 an hour? Hugs and cuddles, vertical or horizontal, your choice.

Hurtado maintains that he had plenty of customers but just couldn’t take all the hassles. (The snarky jokes probably didn’t help, either.)

It’s a tough world, indeed, when folks have to pay for a hug. That’s really sad.

Coach
Don’t mess with little kids

thanks to Larry Tobin

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal, its throat was very small.

The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale.

Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible.

The little girl said, 'When I get to heaven, I will ask Jonah.'

The teacher asked, 'What if Jonah went to hell?'

The little girl replied, 'Then you ask him.'

A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's work. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, 'I'm drawing God.'

The teacher paused and said, 'But no one knows what God looks like.'

Without missing a beat or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, 'They will in a minute.'

A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five and six year olds. After explaining the commandment to honor thy Father and thy Mother, she asked, 'Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?'

One little boy, the oldest of a family, answered, 'Thou shall not kill.'

A teacher was giving a lesson on the circulation of the blood. Trying to make the matter clearer, she said, 'Now, class, if I stood on my head, the blood, as you know, would run into it, and I would turn red in the face.'

'Yes,' the class said.

'Then why is it that while I am standing upright in the ordinary position, the blood doesn't run into my feet?'

A little fellow shouted, 'Cause your feet ain't empty.'

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The nun made a note and posted on the apple tray: 'Take only ONE. God is watching.'

Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies.

A child had written a note: 'Take all you want. God is watching the apples.'
GROWING UP AFTER MADISON
RON HEVEY

Startled by good news from Afghanistan

Abused by her father, the girl’s Taliban brother had strapped her with a bomb and sent her on the mission. When she could not find the target, she turned herself in at an Afghan police station.

Unlike many of their pieces, CNN’s January 7th clip seemed like good news. There was hope for the youngster. No need to tune out yet another terrorist attack. The child gazed into the future dressed in multi-colored winter wraps, a photo reminiscent of the famous 1985 National Geographic Afghani girl.

The saved youngster’s story stayed with me, an outcome I hadn’t heard before.

When I told my Diane about the would-be suicide bomber she asked what I had wondered: “What about her mother?”

Thanks to Greg Mortenson’s Three Cups of Tea we better understand women’s issues in that part of the world and the challenges of building “one school at a time” for girls. The book title hints at what it takes to make anything happen there.

We are thrilled that Khaled Hosseini has a new book, And the Mountains Echoed. We learned in The Kite Runner that Afghanistan is a multi-layered place. Children who cut through differences become close friends faced with life-long challenges to realize childhood dreams.

Writers like Hosseini and Mortenson infuse stores of Afghanistan with humanity and hope.

During our own Northern European-centric lifetimes the world’s people and their happenings have begun to arrive at our doorstep.

In a photo, my cousin’s only son, an Army Ranger, is surrounded by youngsters in an Afghan village, kids like CNN’s child. The photo makes me wish our military could come back home and be with their own families.

Relatives of ours added to their own five young ones when they adopted three children from a war-torn country. The adoptees journey has been anything but a straight line - eight can be more than enough, even when new kids are surrounded by family who care about them.

Challenges? The oldest had to leave the family for special treatment. The next child had to do “boot camp.” The youngest is so charming I can’t wait to talk with her at family gatherings. She’s way ahead of our kids, although she is likely older than her paperwork; ages are often understated in countries that want to make orphans adoptable.

The girl in the CNN story is named Spozhmai, which means Moon. She is Pashtun – I think they are the “good guys.” Spozhmai is ten years-old.

If I have learned anything since “Write By the Lake” it is that when I wake up running a story over and over, I have a passion for that story, and passion is the best fuel going, so I got up and started banging the keys, in this case to give Spozhmai a new life.

I can only imagine Spozhmai’s horrendous backstory, but her life story is just beginning. What kind of life will she have? At this moment she is safe, but CNN reported that Spozhmai will be returned to her family “if they guarantee the girl’s safety.” Oh boy. What about other family who might want the best for her, where she could grow up in her own country? Maybe. Western adoption might be an option, a shot at the good life. It’s got its challenges.

Thanks to a minute on CNN, I can create a story for Spozhmai, giving her a shot at the future. She can become anything she wants given a chance. Influence at a distance has been proven; we are all connected. The concept might well apply to Spozhmai.
FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH

REX OWENS

Author seeks reviewers for Murphy

When I researched the elements of a marketing campaign for independent authors/publishers, all the literature emphasized that book reviews are essential. In the traditional publishing world publishers send out either advance copies or copies soon after publication and tend to work with specific reviewers. It is highly recommended that we self-publishers also send out advance copies and use the reviews received both as part of the back of the book blurb and for initial marketing.

Last October-November I was caught up in the details of producing my book, determined to publish in time to hit the holiday market; there just wasn’t time for everything. I didn’t send out advance copies to reviewers. I met the goal of having MURPHY’S TROUBLES available for holiday book purchase; it has been available on Amazon since November 18, and I ordered copies to sell myself locally. I have garnered a satisfying number of readers locally and squeezed in two book signing events in December.

The truth is I have not attracted attention to MURPHY’S TROUBLES on Amazon. In today’s publishing world a book must be on Amazon; it’s a modern truth. The reality is that putting my book on Amazon is like adding a drop of water to the Pacific Ocean.

Book reviews attract readers. I call it the Angie’s list affect. Angie’s list is popular because as humans we rely on others’ experience to help us make decisions. In my small town in Wisconsin there are about 10 plumbers. How to chose one when the bathtub faucet freezes and I’ve got water running into the garage? I check Angie’s list and get others’ experience with local plumbers. Fair price, quick response, 24 hour emergency service – that’s the plumber for me.

I would like to have readers review my book. I have had one local author offer to write a review. Unfortunately, the offer came in mid-December through my website e-mail (which I rarely check) and it was a month before I responded to his offer. I’ve sent him an e-mail explaining my tardiness, but I’m not sure if he’s still interested. I sent a copy of my book to a professor I know at the UW, requested a review but again – no response.

There are professional reviewers, meaning they get paid to review your book. The most notable is Kirkus. Kirkus wants $425 for an objective review that will take nine weeks and the review is published in catalogs available to bookstores and librarians. For an independent author that’s a lot of money. To recover that expense would require selling about 110 books. I suppose that’s possible. But I’m risk averse to devoting that much money to what is essentially a shot in the dark.

So I turn to you, the readers of Extra Innings. I would like a one paragraph review of about 50-75 words and approval to publish the review online and other appropriate places. If you’re interested in reviewing MURPHY’S TROUBLES, please contact me at: rexowens00@gmail.com. Of course I will provide a copy of the book.

JAN KENT IS
THE WORD WHISPERER

A firm line in the sand?

For years the Word Whisperer was secretly smug about the phrase “a line in the sand.” Despite its use by senators, presidents, and neighbors to mean a firm line, it seemed clear that a line in the sand would easily be destroyed by wind or water. It was one of those catchy things whose meaning had been distorted.

A check with Wikipedia provided the definition “a point beyond which one will proceed no further.” History nails it by noting: ‘In 168 BC, a Roman Consul named Gaius Popillius Laenas drew a circular line in the sand around King Antiochus IV of the Selecid Empire, then said, “before you cross this circle I want you to give me a reply for the Roman Senate.”’

168 BC – no arguing with that.
10) Rush
Ron Howard's best film in years. I'm not a racing fan, but the racing scenes had me invested. The rivalry between racers James Hunt (Chris Hemsworth) and Niki Lauda (Daniel Bruhl) makes for a fascinating story. Both actors are great in their roles, and the rivalry carries the film.

9) 12 Years a Slave
This is one of the most horrifying films I've ever seen, but like Schindler's List, you need to see it at least once. Chiwetel Ejiofor gives the performance of the year as Solomon Northup, a free man sold into slavery. Director Steve McQueen holds nothing back on the horrors of slavery, and it makes the film an unforgettable experience. Solomon's story deserved to be told.

8) Prisoners
I have not seen a mystery this intense and bleak since David Fincher's Zodiac. The plot revolves around every parent's worst nightmare. Hugh Jackman gives his best performance to date as a father who will almost do anything to get his daughter back. He had to have gone to some dark places to give this performance, and it's chilling to watch. Jake Gyllenhaal is also excellent as the detective working on the abduction case. This thriller is bleak, intense and brutal, and it provides a compelling story with excellent performances.

7) Iron Man 3
I'd put this Marvel film on a par with the first Iron Man and The Avengers. Shane Black was a great choice to direct, and Robert Downey Jr. is still the most well-cast comic book film star. I like the route this film takes, showing us how Tony Stark has to rebuild after losing almost everything, while trying to track down the Mandarin.

6) Gravity
Alfonso Cuaron is a visionary director, and this is his masterpiece. From the opening, 15-minute shot, I was in awe of the beauty of this film. It took the visual effects artists four years to complete, and it shows. They seamlessly fit in with the actors. I'm not a Sandra Bullock fan, but I was rooting for her character the entire time. She is outstanding.

5) Pacific Rim
This is the best summer film since The Avengers in terms of pure, giddy fun. I grew up watching the classic Godzilla films, and Guillermo del Toro's homage to Kaiju films had my inner child screaming with joy. Its characters may not be the most well-developed, but they are three dimensional enough for us to care about them. The fight scenes are massive and amazing.

4) American Hustle
This feels like it's David O. Russell's version of a Scorsese film, and I mean that as a compliment, because it works so well. It's O. Russell's best film yet, the acting is superb, the dialogue flows smoothly and naturally, the humor is well performed, and it's an all around fun time.

3) The Wolf of Wall Street
Leave it to Scorsese to make a great film about terrible people. This packed, three hour, rise and fall tale of stockbroker Jordon Belfort is Scorsese's best film since Goodfellas. Leonardo DiCaprio gives the performance of his career. While the movie shows how money can corrupt people and destroy their humanity, the movie remains entertaining. It's a great black comedy.

2) The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug
The second installment of The Hobbit trilogy adds more things that weren't in the book, but the additions work. I’m still having a wonderful time going back to Middle-earth, and Peter Jackson is still the right person to make these movies. Martin Freeman is still perfect as Bilbo, Thorin has some great development, and Smaug is one of Weta Workshop's finest creations. I’m excited for Three and think it will be a great conclusion to the film adaptation of one of my favorite books.

1) The World's End
As soon as I saw it, I knew nothing else this year would top it. Edgar Wright, Simon Pegg and Nick Frost's delightful end to the Cornetto trilogy is further proof of why they are three of the best people working in film today. As with the other two Cornetto films, I will revisit this comedic love letter to sci-fi films many times.
Photo ID baffles *E.I.* readers

You can fool some of the people some of the time...

and last month’s photo ID fooled a lot of the people all the time. Until my chiding message to you all on January 8, in fact, nobody had it right.

Anna Lee Landen, Randi Lynn Mrvos, Larry Tobin, Andrea Schoenthal, and Clive Rosengren thought it was Barack Obama laying the wreath at the Lincoln Memorial. Anna Lee got it right, but only after being given a big hint. Larry’s second guess was that it was me.

Sharon Young also thought it might be me or perhaps Martin Luther King, Jr, which put me in better company than did Judy Burnham, who thought it might be me or Gomer Pyle.

Other votes for Martin Luther King included Perry Stone, Diane Wittik, Pat Fitzgerald (who also offered Muhammed Ali as a possibility), and Jan Kaat (who also took shots with Major General Michael S. Linnington and Sgt. Anthony Petrola and “on further review,” made the correct identification).

Nat Cook thought it might be Douglas MacArthur.

William Hickey offered Bill Clinton or singer Tom Jones (which would have been unusual), while Richard Davidson tabbed Norman Rockwell.

Apparently still hung up on last month’s Photo ID, George Cutlip stuck with Annie Oakley or Jesse James.

By far the most creative possibilities came from Sandra Rafter, who also nailed the right answer. She prefaced her list with “Since you’re begging...”

1. Bruce Springsteen getting inspiration for "Born in the USA, II"
2. An actor in a commercial for IPhone, before and after, with the photo being the before
3. Richard Nixon on his unscheduled visit to the Memorial after meeting with Elvis
4. Sculptor Daniel Chester French thinking, hmm, I might have messed up the beard hair on the left side.
5. Daniel Day Lewis getting inspired for his movie role of Lincoln
6. Caretaker who has just opened the Memorial after the government shutdown
7. Ted Cruz, looking all over for marbles he lost during the filibuster

And after all that, this month’s winner is...

**Kimberly Zunker Cook**

who was the first to correctly identify the Lincoln fan as none other than Fidel Castro, in an iconic photo taken by Alberto Korda in 1959.

In April of ’59, a few months after he seized power in Cuba, Castro went to the United States, seeking loans. Not buying Castro’s talk of neutrality in the Cold War, President Eisenhower shot a round of golf, leaving Vice President Nixon to meet with Castro.

While in Washington, Castro laid a wreath at the Lincoln Memorial. Soon after returning to Cuba, he joined forces with Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev.

However, he remained an admirer of Abraham Lincoln for the next half a century. He had a bust of Lincoln in his office and wrote that Lincoln was devoted “to the just idea that all citizens are born free and equal.”

Photo ID Quiz for March

Since last month’s “who?” gave you so much trouble, this time we’ll try a “what?” Can you name this place, which played a large role in U.S. history.

Answers due February 20th: mcook@dcswisc.edu
**COACH’S BULLPEN BRIEFS**

Young not waiting for her degree to start publishing

Catherine Young is halfway through her MFA Creative Writing program and has been having wonderful publishing success. Last February she published a long essay, “Water, Tree, Heart: Mapping the Driftless Area,” in an anthology called *Imagination & Place: Cartography*. In November *About Place*, an online literary magazine focusing on the environment and social justice, published her essay, “Water Song.” (See the article at [www.aboutplacejournal.org](http://www.aboutplacejournal.org)). And in 2015, *Cricket* will publish a story/activity/recipe of hers. “It’s a story about maple syruping,” she says, “the first fiction I’ve ever written.”

Here’s a sample of her prose:

“I remember the first two-syllable word I sounded out in first grade: *river*. It was mine to keep forever. I could look out from my river-shaped valley and imagine some other world around the bend. *River*. The word carried a world of secret places; outlets to wider and wider words rushing downward.”

She lives on Dieter Hollow Creek, town of Blue River, in the driftless area of Wisconsin.

Richard Davidson has made a New Year’s resolution to finally get something written and sent for *Extra Innings*. It’s not that he hasn’t been writing. He’s authored a self-help book and six mysteries and edited an anthology!

Wally Littman sent a wonderful collection of cartoons and writings. He’s not offering it for sale, at least not yet, but you can check out his work at [www.wallylittmanillustrator.com](http://www.wallylittmanillustrator.com).

“**E.I. MAIL POUCH**

**Madonna’s garden continues to grow**

I sent EI to the editor of *Florida Gardening* so she could read my article [“My Paper Garden,” last issue]. She wrote: “How lovely, Madonna! It brought back many wonderful memories. How is it possible that so many articles have passed from you to me and onto our readers? It seems like we just started our collaboration a year or 3 ago. The best part is that neither of us is a day older, right? “Thanks so much for sharing that with me. Have a wonderful 2014, too! Kathy [Nelson]”

She has since accepted another article for this year’s line-up.

Madonna Dries Christensen

and speaking of Madonna...

I wanted to write and wish congratulations to Madonna on her garden publications. To Rex on getting his book published and for success with the book signing and reading.

Andrea Lozinsky Schoenthal

**More comments on last issue**

Thanks to Gramellen for the Christmas photos. oh...and to you for all that stuff about writing!

Barry Reszel

Another great read-- Enjoyed every word. I'll read again a time or two. That should brighten my day some more. Always get as big a kick out of reading it the second and third time as the first.

Perry Stone

My favorite was the difference between the sexes.

Hilde Adler

*Coach*: I’ve always been fond of the difference between the sexes, too, Hilde.

"GREAT READ! It's as simple as that. It's a “GREAT READ.”

Diane Wittik

I enjoyed the most the church bloopers and loved “Just One More Day” [Norma Sundberg] ( I still have my table top tree up.) Also enjoyed “Difference between the sexes” and the article about Emily Dickinson [Sandra Rafter]. And of course, the best til’ last...dear Lily!

Mary Tracy
Review of *The Lowland*, by Jhumpa Lahiri

When I say that this is Ms. Lahiri’s worst published effort to date, remember that she has won the Pulitzer Prize, and her other works have been favorably reviewed by the *New York Times*. But when this one was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize over J.M. Ledgard’s *Submergence*, it means the judges didn’t dig nearly deep enough.

**Why do I say this? Let’s start with the Central Question. There is no Central Question.** There is a step-by-step slog through the growing up of two brothers in Calcutta, their parents and a girlfriend, cardboard characters all, as Lahiri commits the sin of starting at the beginning-- and what a slow start it is.

But when the younger rebel son steps out of line in his own family and country, he unleashes a lifetime backlash of pain and regret that propels the remainder of the novel. Usurping a long tradition of parental approval and selection of a marriage partner, he not only marries before his older brother, jumping the line, so to speak, but also selects his own wife.

This selfish act of defiance, betrayal, and abandonment destroys not only both parental families but his own created one. The act of rebelling against his country and supporting communist violence results in his murder by the authorities. His mother spends the rest of her life memorializing her dead son.

The father starts out as a non-entity and fades away from there.

I suppose we could create a Central Question of whether the selfish acts of one son can be overcome by the strengths of the remainder and permit the families involved to find some morsel of happiness, or forsaking that goal as vast overreaching, a morsel of hope for some happiness.

Let’s see how this might work. The older, dutiful son is completing his education in America preparing for a career in a laboratory. He finds some time to return for a memorial and discovers his brother’s pregnant wife being treated like a slave in his mother’s household. In part, this is because the rebel’s mother has correctly judged her to be an unworthy and unwelcome addition to their family. The pregnant wife has forfeited any claim to return to her own family. Now she has no family of any kind. So, the dutiful son doubles down on the pain by marrying the pregnant outcast and taking her back to America. Not a good start down the yellow brick road.

She repays him by vindicating the mother’s judgment and mentally abandoning her daughter and husband early on, and then, without a word of discussion, physically abandons both of them when they take a trip to India, come back and find her gone. Not able to take this slight out on the mother, her child takes it out on the dutiful father, first through mental abandonment, then physical. He soldiers on, writing the occasional monograph and attending conferences.

**Now we’re all miserable, and we still have over a hundred pages to go. It’s not too late to hope, and I leave them to you.**

I wish Lahiri had enlivened her cardboard with some believable, raw emotion, some give and take between the characters. When characters don’t deepen their development by striving, by overcoming obstacles, by showing you their vulnerabilities, their cares, and how their minds work, we’re left with cardboard figures inflicting misery on one another. Who cares?

The more I read of this, the more I wonder what the Man Booker judges were reading. Like the daughter, we can hate the selfish mother’s behavior without understanding her-- but why make it that easy on us?

So, themes of abandonment, secrets I won’t bother you with, disconnectedness, betrayal-- Lahiri has explored these themes before and much more persuasively.
When it comes to jest for pun and plays on words, my writing is full to the brim. Is it mere coincidence, or am I the re-embodiment of that most famous of punsters, William Shakespeare?

In *Two Gentlemen from Verona*, Shakespeare plays with words in this exchange between Speed and Launce, just after Launce has been criticizing his dog and Speed is advising him to hurry in case he misses the boat:

Speed: Away, ass! You’ll lose the tide if you tarry any longer.

Launce: It is no matter if the tied were lost; for it is the unkindest tied that ever any man tied.

Speed: What’s the unkindest tide?

Launce: Why, he that’s tied here, Crab, my dog. Shall we continue to other Shakespeare’s puns?

That’s a rhetorical question.

In *Hamlet*, Hamlet’s uncle, Claudius - who has recently married Hamlet’s mother - says, "But now our cousin Hamlet, and our son." Under his breath, Hamlet says, "A little more than kin and less than kind." Hamlet is both Claudius’ nephew and stepson, but he does not feel kindly towards the man who has replaced his father.

Nothing funny about the following, but a play on words certainly. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio attempts to persuade Romeo to attend the ball given by the Capulets. Romeo is reluctant to attend because he is afraid of encountering Rosaline, the woman he loves. Mercutio says, "Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance." Romeo says, "Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes with nimble soles; I have a soul of lead so stakes me to the ground I cannot move."

How about one of my punderful stories?

**The Wong Impression**

When Louie Leroy, the art critic for the Paris newspaper, *Le Charivari*, saw the artistic endeavors of Anna May Wong, he literally tore at his hair, crying out, “Not another impressionist. Do these people have no mercy on other peoples’ eyes?”

The medium for her artistry was weaving, with emphasis on changing qualities of light and puffy fabric showing landscapes. Claude Monet was her inspiration, and, as Louie Leroy learned, she wrote devoted letters to Monet.

Madame Wong sought a name for her projects. Since pictures done in oils were called paintings, he named her woven art “weavels.”

Louie Leroy dipped the point of his pen into his inkwell, preparing to tear into Madame Wong. Smiling, he mumbled, “I’ll take this Wong woman and her ‘weavels’ down a peg and blast Monet, too,” Pen in hand, he scratched out his article.

The moment he finished, the proper title for his critique came to him. He wrote quickly, not wanting to forget his inspiration:

“Monet is the root of all weavels.”

After seeing what William Shakespeare created centuries ago and my current offering, what do you think of the possibility that I am a reincarnation of Shakespeare? Those agreeing in the reincarnation theory, please blink your eyes. Just as I suspected, the eyes have it.

And now... at last...
YOUR MOMENTS WITH LILY
This month’s episode:
Lily gets a new desk and chairs

First selfie