What’s got these kids reading (even when they don’t have to)? Find the answer and other images of Spring submitted by readers in COACH’S BULLPEN BRIEFS, page 15--followed by our BIGGEST AND BEST LETTERS COLUMN EVER, page 18. And don’t miss Sandy Rafter’s song title puzzler that befuddled, bewitched, and bedazzled Coach, page 23, plus our usual all-star line-up of essayists and poets and a whole bunch of nonsense gleaned from the Internet.

LOVE POEM
Tom Crawford
Where have you gone little bird, newly fledged? For three days hobbling around below the feeder made me nervous. I knew something wasn’t right. At night you’d hide under the cover of bushes around the courtyard. In the dark I’d throw some seeds where I’d thought you might be hiding. “Come out and live,” I’d say in the morning. And then you did. But still, the spark wasn’t there. The others birds would move around you like they knew what I couldn’t accept, that you’d never get the hang of it. You’d flutter up then back down, your wings dragging the ground. You’d pick up a seed only to drop it again. It was like you’d been invited to a party you had no interest in.

I knew a woman once, small like you. She never wanted to leave the house. I hoped her flowers would save her, all those years ago, down on her knees, bent over them, trying to believe in spring.

More poetry from Tom on page 7.
My father and mother were, as it suggests that they should be in the blessing to the parents after the rite of Baptism in my church, my “first and best teachers.”

Mom was in charge of critical areas like spelling and the importance of eight hours of sleep a night, while Dad covered fishing, camping, and sports. (They both taught honesty, integrity, courage, and love by example.)

Dad was my first and best baseball coach, taking hours to instruct and encourage me. After a hard day at work and a brutal commute on the old Arroyo Seco Parkway (now the Pasadena Freeway) home from the big city, he often shed his suit and tie for clothes that chagrined my mother, and we’d have a catch, or he’d pitch to me at the diamond at John Marshall Junior High, the field closest to our home, and hit grounders and fly balls for me.

He also checked my math homework for me every school night and went over it with me the next morning (thus carrying me all the way into the deep waters of calculus, where I was WAY over my head).

It never occurred to me that he might have other things he wanted or needed to do.

His nickname for me was “Shorty,” derived from “Short Shot,” the last link in the anchor chain, smaller than the others but needing to be just as strong as every other link, for, as he told me often, “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.” I remained “Shorty” to him all his life, although I grew to match his 6’1”.

He also sometimes called me “Slugger. This was a kindness. The man wasn’t given to irony or belittlement. It was meant, I’m sure, to encourage.

To say that I was not a natural born slugger is to dive face first into understatement.

“Nobody hits a home run every time,” he would tell me. For a long time, I would have gladly settled for just hitting the ball one time, which is hard to do with your eyes closed and your heart pounding with fear.

Practice may not always make perfect, but his help and encouragement did turn me into an okay hitter. I think he took more delight than I did when I actually hit a ball and wound up safe at first or even second.

But a home run?

As they might have said back in New Jersey, Dad’s growing-up place, “Forgeddaboutit!”

The greatest of all my sports heroes (outside of my father) was and still is Sandy Koufax, the left-handed pitcher who dominated hitters in the 1960s and who turned down a chance to pitch the opening game of the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur, a high holy day in his Jewish religion. (He also went on to almost single-handedly win that World Series for the Dodgers.)

He was the greatest pitcher-- but one of the worst hitters-- ever.

Yet even Sandy Koufax hit a home run, just one, in his Major League career, and he hit it off another of the game’s greatest pitchers, the high-kicking master of the screwball, Warren Spahn.

Then one day it happened.
I hit one, too.

The ball didn’t actually clear the canvas “wall” out in left field, but in Little League, most home runs were of the “inside the park” variety, meaning that while the fielders threw the ball around, the runner had time to circle the bases and score.

I “tore” around the bases. (Are the quotation marks around “tore” meant to imply that I was not gifted with blinding speed? Again, we dwell in the realm of comedic understatement. I spent too long running in the same place.) As I ran, my dad’s booming voice and piercing whistle from the stands propelled me ever forward.

“home run continues,” next page
I lowered my head and ran as fast as I could, as fast, I’m sure, as I’d ever run in my life when not being chased.

**I beat the throw to the plate!**
**I had hit a home run!**

“*Atta boy, Shorty!*” my dad yelled as my teammates met me at home plate with a group pummeling.

“It only takes one,” he’d say, meaning don’t worry about having whiffed on the last pitch. Here comes another chance.

“Keep pitching,” he’d urge.

Don’t get down if your best isn’t good enough to win. “‘Tis the contest, not the victory, that delights,” he’d say. Fairness, good sportsmanship, and giving your best effort mattered more than winning.

And when I whiffed on three pitches and returned to the bench: “You can’t hit a home run every time.”

I hear those words and his voice to this day, usually when I need them the most. They are still propelling me around the bases, running as fast as I can.

**Happy Father’s Day, Dad.**

Postscript: My dad had another saying. It could pertain to baseball and pretty much anything else you wanted to stretch it to fit. He said and wrote it to me all his life, but I have only just now, at the past-ripe age of 70, figured out what I think it means. The expression, which as far as I know is original with my Dad:

“It’s a long end that has no middle.”

Anybody want to take a crack at what it means? If so, write me your idea(s) at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu for July’s edition, deadline Tuesday, June 23.

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**Extra Innings #68**
“*tempora mutantur*”

Madison, Wisconsin Sweet Spring, 2015

This month’s All-Star Lineup:
Madonna Dries Christensen, Sandy Rafter, Ron Hevey, Rex Owens, Jacob McLaughlin, Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks, John Swift, Tom Hicks, and Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer
Poetry from Tom Crawford, Bonny Conway, Sandy Rafter, Marshall J. Cook, and The Writer’s Poet, Craig W. Steele
Staff neptis: Lily Cook
Internet Gleaners: Steve Born, Sandy Mickelson
Staff Photographer: GramEllie
Web Weaver: Kerrie Jean-Louis Osborne
The Masked Man: Brace Beemer
Stuntman: Yakima Canutt
Coach-in-Chief: Marshall J. Cook
Co-conspirator: S. Dardanelles

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Next Deadline:
**Tuesday, June 23, 2015**
The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be happy as kings.

~~~ Robert Louis Stevenson

Mention Robert Louis Stevenson and someone will likely be reminded of Treasure Island or Kidnapped. I've long forgotten the details of those stories, if I ever knew them (they were boys' books). Instead, I recall lines from A Child's Garden of Verses.

The Swing: How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue? Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing, Ever a child can do.

My Shadow: I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me, And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.

Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on November 13, 1850. For more than a century, the Stevenson men had been prosperous engineers, building lighthouses along Scotland's coast. As a child, Robert fell ill with consumption, so much of his schooling took place at home.

The slim, brown-eyed boy had a fanciful imagination; at eight, while confined to bed, he wrote and illustrated a book he titled A History of Moses.

Attempting to follow in his father's footsteps, Stevenson studied engineering at Edinburg, but poor health and lack of interest caused him to abandon that career. He studied law and was admitted to Scotland's bar, but rather than practice law he engaged in the literary life, writing essays, travel sketches and short stories. His first two books dealt with travel: An Inland Voyage, an account of his canoe trip up the rivers of Holland, and Travels With A Donkey In Cevennes.

At 23, advised by his doctor to move to a warm, dry climate, Stevenson searched for a suitable place to live. In France, he fell in love with Fanny Vandegrift Osbourne, 10 years his senior and married with two children. She returned to California to obtain a divorce, with Stevenson soon following. Married in 1880, they set out to find a healthful climate.

Voyaging through the Seven Seas, Stevenson discovered that Samoa's weather suited him. There he wrote Treasure Island, A Child's Garden of Verses, Kidnapped, and The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (based on a dream).

Stevenson was 35 when he published A Child's Garden of Verses. Because Stevenson wrote from a child's point of view, youngsters identified with the scenes Stevenson painted with simple words. Although the collection was considered a classic almost from the beginning, some of the poems were not included in later publications. They were thought to be too philosophical, more for adults than for children. But the majority of Stevenson's verses touch on the pleasures of childhood: playing in the hayloft, the red cow in the meadow, digging in the sand at seaside, sailing toy boats, marching in a parade with pretend musical instruments. Given his lifelong illness, it's not surprising that a dozen of his verses have a bedtime theme. They speak of being tucked in, of cuddling, of shadows, and mysteries of the night.

“When I was sick and lay a-bed, I had two pillows at my head, And all the toys beside me lay, To keep me happy all the day.”

Death came at the age of 44 from a brain hemorrhage. Many consider his unfinished novel, Weir of Hermiston, to be his finest work. The last line he wrote might well have pertained to his sudden death. “It had seemed unprovoked, a willful convulsion of brute nature.”

Upon Stevenson's death, native Samoans hacked a path up a mountainside and carried their friend to the top, the site he had chosen. Fourteen years earlier, gravely ill in California, he had written his epitaph, Requiem, the last three lines of which are engraved on his tombstone. For me, this is his masterpiece.

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.
This be the verse you grave for me;
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from sea
And the hunter home from the hill.
“There is not the slightest indication that nuclear energy will ever be obtainable. It would mean that the atom would have to be shattered at will.”
--Albert Einstein, 1932

“We don’t like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out.”
--Decca Recording Company on declining to sign the Beatles, 1962

“This ‘telephone’ has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us.”
--Western Union internal memo, 1876

“Reagan doesn’t have that presidential look.”
--United Artist exec, rejecting Reagan as lead in the 1964 film The Best Man

“I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.”
--Thomas Watson, chairman, IBM, 1943

“There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home.”
--Ken Olson, President, chairman, founder, Digital Equipment Corp (DEC), 1977

“The world potential market for copying machines is 5,000 at most.”
--IBM- to the eventual founders of Xerox, 1959

“X-rays will prove to be a hoax.”
--Lord Kelvin, President of the Royal Society, 1883

“Everyone acquainted with the subject will recognize it as a conspicuous failure.”
--Henry Morton, president, Stevens Institute of Technology, on Edison’s light bulb, 1880

“The horse is here to stay but the automobile is only a novelty-- a fad.”
--Pres, Michigan Savings Bank, advising Henry Ford’s lawyer not to invest in Ford Motors

“Television won’t last because people will soon tire of staring at a plywood box every night.”
--Darryl Zanuck, producer, 20th Century Fox, 1946

“[I]t will make war impossible.”
--Hiram Maxim, inventor of the machine gun

“There will never be a bigger plane built.”
--anon Boeing engineer, of the 246, a twin engine plane holding 10 people

“How, sir, would you make a ship sail against the wind and currents by lighting a bonfire under her deck? I pray you, excuse me, I have no time to listen to such nonsense.”
--Napoleon Bonaparte, when told of Robert Fulton’s “folly,” the steamboat, 1800s

“It’ll be gone by June.”
--Variety Magazine on Rock n’ Roll, 1955
What do you really need to be a poet?

I recently browsed through a book discussing the needs of a poet and learned that I should own a postal scale. I laughed and thought ideas might be handy, too, but I did ask myself a question: what is necessary to become a successful poet? Dorothy Parker and her writer friends gathered daily for 10 years for lunch at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City. With wit, exchange of ideas, camaraderie, cribbage, poker, practical jokes, and even the writing of an acceptance speech for a Nobel Prize (William Faulkner), writers and actors flourished.

Unfortunately, a similar experience and outcome is not going to happen in Binghamton where I live. As the city loses population, large "literary hotels" are hard to come by. I suppose the Hampton Inn or any motel with free breakfast might draw writers. I do have my writing group, but jokes and wit are questionable, and no one plays cribbage.

Alfred Lord Tennyson was admired by Queen Victoria; with her in his corner, he prospered as a poet and was named as a baron. I've always listened to Sir Paul McCartney and Sir Elton John and love Dame Judi Dench, but such royal connections seem a stretch to help with my poetic endeavors.

Emily Dickinson is praised by critics for her mystic dimension. William Blake saw a tree full of angels at age ten and painted and wrote of his visions. I once viewed a lady on the Johnny Carson Show who pointed out faces and animals on potato chips. Unfortunately, I won't see any images that way since I'm cutting down on salt and eat popcorn instead of chips. No luck so far.

Langston Hughes had good luck when he was working as a bus boy in a restaurant and met Vachel Lindsay who took an interest in his poetry. Paul Laurence Dunbar worked as an elevator operator and sold copies of his poems to his riders. This "getting the poems out there" could work, but I'd probably be like Richard Brautigan who stood on street corners in San Francisco and tried to give away his poems. No one wanted them until he stapled a package of seeds to the poems.

The Beat poets (Ginsberg, Corso, Ferlinghetti) both attracted and shocked readers with their counterculture ideas, drug use, and sexual openness. Would any of today's world-wise readers be interested in such? Perhaps, a return to colonial writer Ann Bradstreet's topics and style just might lead to success because of the uniqueness. It's an idea.

I came across a poet whose work I didn't know at all -- Benjamin Zephaniah. One biographical item in his list of accomplishments stood out for me: he is a vegetarian. I'll have to research whether or not his way of eating could be the key to better poetry.

Sometimes, I wonder if I aim too high. I might be satisfied to emulate Robert Burns and write just one poem like "Auld Lang Syne" which happy and inebriated people could sing once a year. I'm also much taken with the titles of poetry books, which could be creative writing without turning out the poems inside: Denise Levertov's The Freeing of the Dust, Richard Blanco's Directions to the Beach of the Dead, Galway Kinnell's The Book of Nightmares, Mary Oliver's Dog Songs, Charles Bukowski's The Last Night of the Earth Poems.


--A poet's needs continue on next page
I've always remembered the words of Rainer Maria Rilke concerning being a poet: "This above all -- ask yourself in the stillest hour of your night: must I write?" It's fun to be silly, as I have been here, but putting that aside, in the end the question is so important. I answer: Yes, I must write. I never know if others want to read my poetry, but I read it myself and grow with it. Must you write? And the next more perplexing question, must we have an audience to be successful?

One last comment: in all seriousness, I've never owned nor used a postal scale, nor do I have any connection with the U.S. Government Postal Service. I bring this up because my poetry book sans poems may be titled: Voters Go Postal Scale, a Year of Campaigning Already?

Coach's note: Next month, Sandy asks “Does a poet really need an audience?”

JAN KENT IS
THE WORD WHISPER
Who said it first?
You hear a pithy phrase that sounds so current and to the point. Who wrote it? In the case of starting us “down the primrose path,” it was William Shakespeare in Hamlet.
More of Shakespeare’s word-coining next issue.

When it comes to writing...
"Appealing workplaces are to be avoided. One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark."
So said the Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Annie Dillard.

CARE DOG
Tom Crawford
Unfold the membrane in his nose.
Spread it out like a spattered drop cloth.
It’s that big, and you’ll discover the red paint of your own wounds.
In any room where you grieve he can smell it, that odor we have no name for.
You have to brush the lilac bush for your nose to know it’s there.
But your dog, if he could tell you, he’d tell you from the back room, when it’s about to bloom.
His nose pushed into your side, you think is affection and it is— he’s taking your vital signs.
When you’re a rag of loneliness, he knows that too.
He’ll grab the other end.

Poet’s note: Walt Goes With Me is a memoir, not a book, but a manuscript, 230 pages, unpublished because it needs a good editor for that to happen if it happens at all. It recounts Walt and my eighteen-year journey together. It begins in Kwangju South Korea where he adopted me, and ends in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Walt made it plain to Mary and me one day two years ago, standing at the water bowl, legs wobbling, he no longer knew what water was for, that he’d run out of interest in life. I belong to that class of hominids we like to call, ‘dog lovers.’ So, it’s a love story plain and simple. Being a poet, the story is told in part through my poetry. Pain and joy permeate the telling, of course they do. I finally put the story together mostly because, more than ever now, Walt’s been niggling me, “Get it done.” I have. It’s a time/space problem and I’m rapidly running out of both myself.
-- Tom Crawford.

Coach’s note: Those of you who go back to Creativity Connection days no doubt remember reading several episodes of “Walt Goes With Me.” Like me, I suspect you’re looking forward to Tom getting this book shaped up and published.
Painting the park’s history
Ron Hevey

The century-old Japanese Cherry tree in Erdenheim Park, steeped in history yet to be revealed on a 2015 Spring day, begged to be painted.

Flocks came for the park’s flowering magnolias, apple blossoms, and blazing azaleas that too had emerged. Youngsters broke from moms to sneak a peek as the canvas took shape. One cutie ventured close enough to have me bet that everyone asks where she got that red hair, her proud dad grinning while he held her hand. Oldsters mostly said a ‘good morning’ as they passed by.

An elderly gentleman pushing his walker stopped. He didn’t want his nurse to help as he hobbled through the grass. I’d been willing to move the easel for him so he could see the just-about-finished painting of the cherry tree towering over a farm house beyond, its lower blooms waving in the breeze just above the ground.

I had reviewed markers chronicling this park’s history, but the elderly gentleman knew that much and more about its gentle slopes of open land with trees surrounding a stream and pond.

This place was once an amusement park called White City in the gay ‘90s, lit up thanks to Mr. Edison, with trolley cars bringing throngs from Philadelphia to enjoy the day.

I blinked to imagine kids lined up for the ferris wheel and the roller coaster, adults cramming a fashionable casino and parasoled ladies and gentlemen boating in the lake. Papers called the park a ‘veritable fairyland scene’ with its live brass bandstand, vaudeville acts and Little Hip the Elephant.

All was now changed a century later - I was in the midst of Penn’s “Greene Countrie” renewed. Nature had reclaimed what man had changed.

As the elderly gentleman made his way I whispered to the nurse, “Will he be OK?” Just fine she indicated with a hint she had learned to let him do his thing. “He’s a painter,” she said.

Painters don’t gush on other’s work; his nod was enough. All but finished, I was ready to chat.

“I understand you are a painter. I painted plein air[in the open air] until a year ago,” he said with a wheeze, pointing to his chest. “Do all my painting in the studio now.” The man’s MO had been to paint sketches and upscale them later.

Turned out Ed Jordan had grown up in Erdenheim about a decade after the amusement park closed abruptly at its peak in 1912. Civic-minded and wealthy neighbors bought the place to bring quiet back to their lives.

Ed had been imprinted by the abandoned “White City,” its infrastructure being removed, buildings demolished and holes in the ground filled, a gradual return to nature while he painted the surroundings for decades and, as a younger man, experienced a miniature version of the tree I was painting.

“They pile up don’t they.” I mentioned referring to the paintings. “Sure do, all over the house.” We discussed the merits of thin panels compared with stretched canvases. Some painters barely have enough room to walk through the rooms of their house.

It was a windy day. “Good thing you didn’t try a large canvas; damn things take off like a sail,” he said. And didn’t I know. “And then there’s picking a site where you are in the shade and have a john nearby,” I continued. Our chuckles revealed that painters at times have to be sly.

“You know I liked painting on the beach, people all around you,” Ed said. “But you were stuck in the sun and that’s a no-no,” I replied. “No problem. I built a box to keep the proper light.”

He made his own easel, too, until he discovered the French version. Ed wasn’t the least interested in my Russian easel. We could have talked painting for hours.

“Young man, I expect to see you out here again,” he said. “You too,” I said. I didn’t want to ask but he offered, “I’m 93. My good genes is what did it.”

As Ed Jordan left I packed up thinking how we had met and shared this unusual park, one that had to find its way back.
BREAK A LEG

REX OWENS

You say ‘theatre’; I say ‘theater’

Something magical and mysterious happens in small and large communities in every state in the nation. A group of people volunteer their time and talent to perform live theater.

Our beloved editor-in-chief recently encouraged me to write about my experiences in the Sun Prairie Civic Theatre (SPCT). Our shared presumption is that most E.I. readers may not be familiar with theater beyond attending, or maybe there are playwrights among our numbers.

So, is it “theatre” or “theater”? There is no clear etymology of the word. “Theatre” is French. “Theater” is German. One person who has been involved with SPCT for more than 30 years told me that “theatre” refers to live performance, and “theater” refers to movies. While that’s plausible, my research hasn’t been able to confirm his definitions.

One interpretation per Wikipedia is that “theatre” refers to the art form while “theater” refers to the building. I find this very close to my friend’s explanation and may be its source.

Another plausible explanation for the difference is based on Mr. Webster’s *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1828. Webster wanted to base spellings on phonetics and changed many words, such as: ‘color’ instead of ‘colour,’ ‘center’ instead of ‘centre,’ and ‘gray instead of ‘grey.’ So ‘theatre’ in England became ‘theater’ in America.

The artistic director of Madison’s Forward Theater Company prefers to use “theater” because she believes “theatre” is ostentatious. She has a degree in theater from Harvard, so I’m willing to follow her lead. Funny thing is, the organization I belong to is Sun Prairie Civic Theatre, and I don’t have any idea why that spelling is used. The organization’s founders are no longer among the living to ask. I’m comfortable with theater, so that’s what I will use.

I’ve called my new column “Break a Leg” from the most common and best known theater idiom. Theater is known for superstition as much as are horse racing and baseball.

Actors believe that it’s bad luck to be wished good luck before performing. Rather than saying ‘good luck’ we shout ‘break a leg’. Ok, it doesn’t make any sense. It doesn’t have to – it’s theater and it’s tradition. Some things have intrinsic value as tradition, like Tevye’s song ‘Tradition’ in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Next month I’ll share the history of our theater group and how I became hooked on theater. If you have any questions – please send them to Marshall: mcook@dcs.wisc.edu.

Coach’s note: And here’s a question for you, readers: Anybody out there know why no actor will ever utter the word “MacBeth” backstage in a theater? (If they must talk about it, they refer to Will’s work as “That Scottish Play.”)

HAHNKE PAHNKE

ED PAHNKE

What’s up?

As winter melted into spring, Rodney still had to decide what to do with Lee Forest’s rural holdings. Should he plant trees or sorghum, or soybeans or corn or hay or...? He rung his hands while pacing back and forth in his room. Rodney wanted the right crop to make Lee both happy and prosperous.

Lee trusted Rodney’s judgment, a responsibility that weighed on Rodney’s shoulders. He slumped onto a chair next to his old oak desk, messing up papers accumulated there. He shuffled through them to see what was current or even past due.

Then he saw it, an ad telling about Ozzie Moesis, a self-styled, local seer. Could this Ozzie guy really know the right course for the future? What did he have to lose? Rodney picked up his cell phone and made an appointment to see the “seer.”

A wire-thin man in a black robe ushered Rodney into his office, which gleamed even in the shadows. Introducing himself as Ozzie Moesis, he asked Rodney to be seated on a plush chair.

“You need not say a word,” he said. “Merely concentrate on what is worrying you.”

Rodney stared into the dark recesses of the room, focusing on Lee and what he should plant on the land.

At last Ozzie Moesis made his pronouncement:

“Re-plant, Lee must see corn again.”
Soul Poem 11
Sandy Rafter

Tom swiped his finger across the top of the chocolate cake to ruin my swelling wave design. I'd decorated it remembering our trip to Maine so many years ago: dribbling toes across the wet sand to spell his name, running into the dry, warm sweep of his arms after the raw lick of the ocean against my legs.

We haven't walked in the waves in years, nor rafted in our dreams to Mount Fuji, nor bayed silly love to a three o'clock moon. We've planted roses and maples in our yard between the pool and the tool shed. We nap in our lounge chairs and rub on sunscreen with the slightest touch to bodies. The puzzle of each other now seems to be the crosswords we work.

Yet, Tom licks his finger and asks, "Is that my birthday cake?" and kisses my lips with chocolate icing. I think if I held a seashell up to my ear, I'd still hear him whispering sweet words.

Conjugating June
Mary Conway

June is the barefoot month when childhood reclaims us stows away present thoughts where winter boots are tossed tempts with cold hose water rubber taste you recall pop bottles were treasures turned in for deposits baseball had no umpires third base was Dad's old shoe the black dog chased runners beating them to home plate paste the past in scrapbooks let new memories come forth embrace technology sublime, sublimer, sublimest.

Market Research
Craig W. Steele

In reality, the hares will always win. So now we understand how clever Aesop was in writing for the tortoise market, knowing hares will never take the time to read — they’re busy winning races. And old Aesop also wins because his tale’s a number one best-selling fable.
Life’s ponderables

Thanks to Larry Tobin

I saw a rather large woman wearing a sweatshirt with "Guess" on it. I said, "Thyroid problem?" Woke up in the hospital two days later.

I don't do drugs 'cause I find I get the same effect just by standing up really fast.

If flying is so safe, why do they call the airport the "terminal"?

I don't approve of political jokes. I've seen too many of them get elected.

Shopping tip: You can get shoes for a buck at bowling alleys.

Every day I beat my own previous record for number of consecutive days I've stayed alive.

No one ever says, "It's only a game!" when their team is winning.

How long a minute is, depends on what side of the bathroom door you're on.

Isn't having a smoking section in a restaurant like having a peeing section in a swimming pool?

Marriage changes passion . . . suddenly you're in bed with a relative.

Snowmen fall from Heaven un-assembled.

Every time I walk into a singles bar I can hear Mom's wise words: "Don't pick that up, you don't know where it's been!"

How come we choose from just two people to run for president and over 50 for Miss America?

I signed up for an exercise class and was told to wear loose fitting clothing. If I HAD any loose fitting clothing, I wouldn't have signed up in the first place.

Wouldn't it be nice if whenever we messed up our life we could simply press Ctrl Alt delete and start all over?

Brain cells come and brain cells go, but FAT cells live forever.

Why is it that our children can't read a Bible in school, but they can in prison?
FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS

ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS

Left behind?

Early-on I was lead to believe I possessed a high I.Q., yet I asked in 8th grade algebra, “I know what a right angle is, but what’s a “left angle?” The class howled. I didn’t intend the question to be “smart” (as with a donkey tied at the end) but it seemed logical, as math supposedly is. Yet contrasting my numerical inability, I was handy with words, plus am left-handed, like about 10 percent of us.

Lefties were once considered unnatural. That’s superstition. Successful lefties include Stephen Forbes, Ronald Reagan, and Cary Grant; Helen Keller, Marilyn Monroe and Oprah Winfrey. Add Jimi Hendrix, Paul McCartney, and Barack Obama. As a T-shirt slogan proclaims, “I may be left-handed, but I’m always right.”

The following is the first stanza of a poem by Jill Eisnaugle from the Internet:

Left-handed people are special and neat. To some they are backward, to others they’re sweet.
Their lives have a purpose; they use their right brain:
Each lefty’s committed to always sustain.
They live in a world where right-handers rule;
Must overcome obstacles at work and at school;
A small population compared to the whole;
--Each south-paw born with a kind-hearted soul.

And Ron Treanmer insists:
In the very beginning when God made woman and man
He realized some were smarter and devised a glorious plan.
He gathered the intelligent, and to tell them from the rest,
Then made them all left-handed to identify His best,
So when you see a lefty, please give due respect
And try not to be offended by their greater intellect!
Don’t fret if you’re right-handed, even though there is no cure;
God still loves you greatly; he just loves lefties more!

Still, lefties face hurdles. School desks favor right-handers, as do commercial products. Measuring cups are marked for right-handers, lefties must twist them about to read. Knives and other tools were once designed so blades turned leftward if the hand slipped; good for righties, but not for us!

Injuries from skewed manufacture boosted the concept that lefties were clumsy, thus inferior. Now left-handed utensils are available, over 150 different kinds according to Marguerite Magua, who owns a lefty shop. But they cost more, and I get along with right-hand tools, having used them all my life.

Mom was the right-handed exception in our family. Dad was a lefty, my half-brothers are, plus my grown kids, Hannah and Tom. Tom married a lefty whose mother is, plus husband Peter and I have two lefty grandkids. Indeed, my mate is the odd man out! Still, he and I continue to happily “rub along” (British expression) in our 43-year-old marriage, and “so good so far” (my expression).

People fear what they can’t explain. In Latin “right” means correct and “left” means sinister—indicating a malevolent person or force. Indeed, old Romans believed bad luck, including enemies, approached from the left, causing me to jot:

SINISTER, OH MY!
For protection, each practical Roman
Watched out for every ill omen,
Thus greedier seers
Preyed on human fears;
Charms cheaper than guardian bowmen.
  But--
Neither charms nor spells can cheat fate
If death is due one certain date;
All truly foretold
From past days of old
Is---the grave conquers early or late.

Dylan Thomas warned, “Do not go gentle into that good night” and lefties no longer “go gentle” on hearing “sinister” criticism. We protest! Happily, today many books discuss lefties positively, while a popular calendar features “left-handed legends, lore, and more.” Being different doesn’t mean abnormal.

-- Lefties’ lament continues, next page
As columnist Burt Cole declares: “My brother Tom was a southpaw, and once a teacher tried to fix him. ‘But there’s nothing wrong,’ Mom argued, trying to set the teacher right about left.” However, as Cole concludes, “Left elbows are sharp critters if dinner-eating isn’t set right.” Some claim dyslexia, schizophrenia, and ADHD are more common in lefties, who are – states one source--statistically born to older mothers. My Mom was 43 at my birth, so that could be true.

My dear hub Peter has another viewpoint. He declares, “Esther, being right wouldn’t make a smatter of difference with you, since you’re just plain weird.” Is that so, Hub of my Life? Here’s my response!

“Creative thinking in all I DO. It’s OK to be LEFT; this fact is true.”

A final ‘stat’ on lefties claims, we die nine years younger than righties. However, my lefty Dad passed at 98, while ‘right-hand’ mom died five years later, after she turned 95. My lefty half-bros (one my mother’s son, and one my father’s) are well into their eighties and doing fine. I refuse to believe God holds a sinister prejudice; since He made us, why would He?

ESTHER’S NEWS:
Four poems of Esther’s are featured in the latest issue of THE POETS’ TOUCH-STONE magazine from the Poetry Society of New Hampshire, including one free verse, one in couplets, and two in the quirky Forget-Me-Not form. The magazine also reproduced the cover of her new children’s book, CAPTAINS HUIRRAY-GEOUS.

Hidden Treasure
Claudia Greenwood

Time is a river.
Life is….
When it seems as if change is the only constant, step into the middle, look deep beneath the surface reflection of what is merely present. Stand silent, grounded, in the rich bottom silt where the stories are, layer upon layer, decade by decade. Stories to curl toes around. Stories to nourish to sustain to connect to pass on.

For time is a river.
Life is… exquisitely storied.

Poet’s note: I offer this poem, which I wrote at first for a friends' 80th birthday, then shared more recently at a funeral. I have spent 50 summers on Goulais River in Ontario, Canada. The river has been the source of many, many poems. But this one seems to be helpful to recipients and audiences alike. Perhaps that would be the case for readers of Extra Innings.
It’s more difficult than you would think to keep something like leukemia a secret for very long. You tell maybe one close friend or relative, and soon after, everybody knows. How does that happen, I wonder. I guess it’s that people gather for one reason or another and after exhausting all the usual polite conversation, there’s a quiet lull and then someone will say something like, “Hey. Have you heard about so-and-so?” They’ll reminisce and share stories about the person. In my case for example, about a predictable, silly, character who’s view of life and of humans can be both humorous and infuriating. And so, what follows are inquiries and well-wishing through cards, phone calls, and emails from distant family, friends, and acquaintances who have heard about your new diagnosed medical condition.

I put these communications into categories. There’s the “Sorry to hear about this,” the “You’re a fighter,” and the “I’ve been (or my mother, father, sister, brother, cousin, etc, has been) through this very same thing.” My personal favorites are the humorous ones-- the notes that ask for my stuff after I die, or the dirty jokes about doctors and nurses.

My least favorites are the “We’re praying for you” promises. They make me uncomfortable. Maybe it’s just something people say at times like these. I hope so. “Hey, save that stuff for people who pray themselves,” I want to tell them, but that would be unkind, like giving back the handmade wool socks an aunt has given you for Christmas.

So, I don’t respond. I can’t help but think rationally about what they say, though. I want to ask them: “If you believe that there’s some all powerful God who is in control of everything, why would you be praying to Him to save me?” My guess is that this is the same God who gave me the leukemia in the first place. I really doubt that he’s going to change his mind.

I recall some of my childhood catechism classes, those occasions where enlightened teachers explained the power of prayer. “God will grant your requests if you just pray often and hard enough.” They would say. I tried it more than once. I never got that pony, and I remained so lousy at sports that I always was picked second to last on teams, right ahead of Donny who’s his name, the kid with Polio.

So, I asked Sister Colette, a woman who claimed to know all about the value of prayer, why my prayers weren’t answered. She told me that God was real busy and only listened to the prayers that were important. He doesn’t have time to listen to a selfish, frivolous request for a pony. “He knows what’s best for you,” she said, and then dismissed me by telling me to pray for poor people, sick people, and most importantly, the poor souls who are in purgatory waiting for a vacancy in heaven.

After that revelation I kept thinking, If He knows what’s best for me, then why the hell should I bother to pray in the first place? I had to admit that if He got me that pony I don’t know where I could keep it anyway. So maybe Sister Colette had a point. So my philosophy became: Let’s not start asking questions, or look for trouble. If there’s someone in charge, I don’t think He enjoys a bunch of nagging believers always asking for stuff. Don’t piss him off.

Could it be that I got into this leukemia condition because I’m a nonbeliever? I’m sure some people think so, and that’s okay with me. These are the guys that you should be praying for, not for me, because I can’t make sense of it all.

So please-- don’t pray for me. If you need to pray, spend that time on believers, like the people who want ponies. I don’t mean to be ungrateful, but really, I don’t want your God’s help. Don’t pray for me because if I come out of this, if I’m cured, I don’t want to strengthen anybody’s superstitions, especially my own.

Update: Tom wrote this column in November of 2013. As most of you know, he has recently successfully undergone bone marrow replacement and is recuperating at home. He’s still got a long road ahead while his immune system builds back up, but he has resumed his rigorous exercise program and is improving day by day.
Spring has arrived

and with it, neighborhood kids hanging out at the Little Free Library of Felton Place, enjoying the books generous friends and neighbors have donated (from page one).

Joel Krenz finishes his mile in 5:00.48, good enough for third place, at a recent meet in tiny Fairfield, Il on a beautiful spring afternoon. (He later broke the 5:00 barrier.)

“You get the sense that on a Friday night during football season the only place to be in that town is in those stands,” says his proud mom, Lisa, who took this photo. She’s a frequent contributor to these pages.

Coach notes: A whole mile in five minutes! Really? I could never have done that unless there was a tornado chasing me!

Fun Facts

Thanks to Sandy Mickelson

> A dime has 118 ridges around the edge.
> A cat has 32 muscles in each ear.
> A crocodile cannot stick out its tongue.
> A dragonfly has a life span of 24 hours.
> A goldfish has a memory span of three seconds.
> A "jiffy" is an actual unit of time for 1/100th of a second. (which = the memory span of a newsletter editor).
> A shark is the only fish that can blink with both eyes.
> A snail can sleep for three years.
> Gangster Al Capone's business card said he was a used furniture dealer.
> All 50 states are listed across the top of the Lincoln Memorial on the back of the $5 bill.

Coach’s note: I had to cut several photos from the page in order to be able to attach this file for Kerrie, our web maven. Obviously I’m going to have to limit photos in future issues.
MORE COACH’S BULLPEN BRIEFS

We knew it all along

Madonna is an award winner

Madonna Dries Christensen’s novel, *Patricide* (discussed in a previous issue of *E.I.*) was a finalist in the Faction (fiction based on fact) category of the Indie Excellence™ National Book Awards Book Contest, sponsored by Smarketing LLC, a company established in 2007 by Ellen Reid.

Into trivia? Read on.

The World Quizzing Championship (WQC) test is scheduled for Saturday, June 6. *E.I.* teammate Ray Hamel will be co-proctoring at the Madison, Wisconsin venue -- La Hacienda at 515 S. Park St. The quiz begins at noon and takes about 2 1/2 hours to complete, including scoring time.


The quiz is free. Your reward is seeing how well you fare against your national and international competition. Results will be posted on the WQC website. Last year there were 1,894 players worldwide.

Players in the southern Wisconsin area can pre-register by sending a request to madisonquiz@gmail.com. Drop-in participants will be welcome as long as room is available. For those of you outside the southern Wisconsin area, a list of other venues is posted at [http://www.worldquizzingchampionships.com/join-in/](http://www.worldquizzingchampionships.com/join-in/).

For more information, contact Ray: raytriv@gmail.com

http://raysqotd.blogspot.com/

Coach’s book pick to click


One of the most unusual--and beautiful--love stories I’ve ever read. The book is also beautifully produced, in case you’re into book as art object.

Tom Swifties

Harvested from the *NYT* crossword puzzle for May 18th.

1) “As much as I’d like, you’re not getting any of my estate,” Tom said __________.

2) “You forgot to water the plants,” Tom said __________.

3) “Being a bit lazy, I prefer a car with automatic transmission,” Tom said __________.

4) “Oh, I think I just fed the alligator,” Tom said __________.

answers at end of briefs

What’s your pen name?

Washington Irving wrote under numerous pen names, starting with Jonathan Oldstyle and including William Wizard, Launcelot Langstaff, Knickerbocker, and Geoffrey Crayon, “author” of Irving’s most famous tales, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

Here are a few other pen names and the authors behind them:

- **Franklin W. Dixon**: Leslie McFarlane
- **A.A. Fair**: Erle Stanley Gardner
- **Stan Lee**: Stanley Martin Lieber
- **Ann Landers**: Eppie Lederer
- **J.D. Robb**: Nora Roberts
- **Boz**: Charles Dickens
- **Busy Buddy**: Ben Franklin
- **Dr. Seuss**: Theodore Seuss Geisel
- **Ford Maddox Ford**: Ford Hermann Hueffer
- **Ed McBain**: Evan Hunter
- **Caroline Keene**: Mildred Benson

followed by many others

If you had a pen name, what would it be? Tell Coach at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu?

Still more briefs follow...
Fisherman’s Prayer


I pray that I may live to fish
Until my dying day.
And when it comes to my last cast,
I then most humbly pray:
When in the Lord’s great landing net
And peacefully asleep
That in His mercy I be judged
Big enough to keep.

Let me hear you!
I’d love to hear from at least 10 folks who haven’t contributed material or e-mailed a note to E.I. in the last two years. I’d especially love to hear from folks who’ve never written in. Email Coach at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu

Parting Shot
Did you hear about the German who closed an email to a friend with “gute nacht” (“good night”)? His autocorrect kept changing it to “cute Nachos.”

answers to Swifties
1) unwillingly
2) witheringly
3) shiftlessly
4) offhandedly

Spring Politics
Bonny Conway

March voted down icicle swords
impeached frost bite, overcoats, snow
melted away frigid regimes
ordered frozen lakes to flow
daffodil troops followed April
along the fence and down the way
robins sounded reveille
lilacs pinned purple on May
E.I. readers wish Hicks well

Cheers and best wishes for Tom Hicks flooded the E.I. office after I posted our first ever BREAKING NEWS BULLETIN with his CANCER FREE diagnosis. Among Tom’s fans and well-wishers were Eric Frydenlund ("sometimes life squares things up"), Randi Lynn Mrvos, Monette Bebow-Reinhard, Sandy Mickelson ("YAHOO!"), Larry Tobin, Richard Davidson, Madonna Dries Christensen, Jack Walsh, Annette Gippe, Mary Tracy, Barbara Burris, Randy Skoog, Bonny Conway, Marjorie Gregg ("totally awesome"), Pernetta Deiner ("Praise be!!"), Den Adler, Norma Sundberg, Bill Spevacek ("Hurray for Tom!") Catherine Young, Andrea Schoenthal ("WONDERFUL!"), Wally Littman, Carol Hornung, and Jodi Diderrich.

Mother’s Day memories

In this issue [#67, last month] we both wrote about humor and how it's not easy to write. Often it's witty or funny on the page, but rarely is it the "laugh out loud" variety. I thoroughly enjoy reading "Ask The Bird Folks," but I don’t recall ever actually laughing aloud. My guess is that even if you didn't hear your mother’s wonderful laugh, she was amused and smiling and that her check marks were sincere.

Mike, from “Ask The Bird Folks,” thanked me for writing about his column, said he's still blushing at the praise.

Madonna Dries Christensen

Larry applauds Manesis, Doig

Hey, Coach,

Two things particularly caught my attention in this issue of Extra Innings. The first was John Manesis’ "Ode to a Closer." Being a lifelong Kansas City Royals fan, I'm quite familiar with Dan Quisenberry and I was truly impressed to read such a terrific tribute that wasn't merely another bunch of sports cliches. Sports writing seems to be of another language and I really appreciate that Mr. Manesis rose above it.

The other was the memorial to Ivan Doig. He was my favorite author, and I hadn't been aware of his passing. I've read all of his books and losing him creates a great literary void in my future.

Larry [Tobin]

Thanks for publishing my poem. I very much enjoyed the piece about your mother and her critique of your story.

My mother recently had her 97th birthday. Thought I’d share a poem which appeared in my second book, Other Candle Lights. Keep swinging away.

Mother’s Day

A bride at seventeen, she married someone twice her age, their temperaments disparate as the years. Our father, whom she hardly knew, an immigrant restaurateur, happened on the Rockford road while driving to Chicago in 1935.

They lugged an encyclopedia of Greek traditions into the marriage, an ethnicity that doted on its men, the women often footnotes relegated to the chapter’s end, although in truth they were the spines that anchored each and every page.

She raised six children, isolated from her parents and siblings, a close knit family, and must have felt as if she were marooned at times, trudging along a windward shore, waiting for a rescue ship.

She gave much of herself and, as often was the case with members of her sisterhood, heard too little in the way of praise.

Mother, let us thank you now.

John Manesis

I like the kleptomaniac joke...and the piece on Quisenberry...and always... pretty little Lily ball!! Three?! Really?! Wow!

Most of all...I shall copy, paste and keep the piece you wrote about your mom. Thanks so much for writing and sharing it!

Barry Reszel

Marsh: I had a mother like that. She wrote poetry and was wonderful. I was also a Freberg fan. Thanks for the good memories. ...Went to a Brewers game with Harry and am now being pursued by the media eager to interview someone who saw the Brew Crew win a game. Thanks.

Bill [Stokes]

-- Letters continue, next page
Monette seconds Rex’s emotion
Response to Rex Owen [“Please buy a book!” last issue]: I second that! Unfortunately, if we included with the invite, "and please buy a book," no one would come! I had a similar experience. The first time ever presenting my Henry material in Green Bay involved memorizing the material, putting on the mustache and clothes, and being the old soldier telling his story. I had a full house, which meant 15, including another author whose presentation I went to and bought one of her books. I did not sell a single book that evening, though people told me afterward they enjoyed the presentation, and I picked up another gig off of it. What does it take to impress an audience? I wish I had the answer, but I can tell you that I was unable to provide a copy of the material I presented and just hoped they liked me enough to buy my Bonanza books. It worked at some other gatherings. But not at the first gig in Green Bay. Weird, huh.

Monette [Bebow-Reinhard]
Thanks Marsh! Loved your Mother's Day story.

Readers love Lily
Coach -
WOW - Lily is already three - seems like just yesterday that she came into the world. Another great issue - thanks!

Pat [Laux]
WOW!
A treat to log in and find Extra Innings in the emails!
AND EXTRA EXTRA to find Lily on front and back pages!
It is even curioser that poets and writers seem to think same themes at the same time in order to be "paged together" in the issue (??)
I’d do an interrobang! but the machine won’t let me write one over the top of the other...

Norma J. Sundberg

Spring brings hope
You outdid yourself, as the Southerners sometimes say, with this month’s effort. I particularly liked the piece on the relief pitcher and the Lily Fields. It seemed to be full of hope, as Spring should be. Speaking of which, it looks like it might just be the Cubs year. They should have one, every 107 years or so.

John Swift

Anna Lee shares Coach’s afflictions
I feel like I need to keep tabs on you ..or you need to keep tabs on me ..to foreshadow what medical issue is in store next for us. Maybe it's just the normal aging thing, but you and I seem to be following a similar path. I escaped a CPAP but spent a night in that sleep study room you recently enjoyed. I finished a couple crossword puzzles to help me wind down before saying, "Good night" to the voice in the ceiling. I still receive an annual questionnaire from a Sleep Study group.
You recently endured the hospital's cardiac wing and all the fun that entails. I did that 2 years ago, moving toward congestive heart failure, with a touch of pneumonia thrown in for special effects. That got me an ambulance ride to Meriter. My second ambulance ride.
My very first ambulance excursion happened the year before that, when I smashed my forehead into a door handle at home as I fell forward after tripping over the cat. That one got me 26 stitches in my head at midnight in Meriter's ER. I can show you the scar over my brow at our next lunch. (My fond memory of that ordeal is of Ken coming to help me with a paper towel in his hand as blood gushed out of my head. I told him he'd need a bath towel to stop this stream.)

Before that, like you, there was a broken bone event. I fractured a piece of my tibia below my knee, which left me hobbled an entire summer. Missing every glorious art fair of that summer was the worst torture. I could have hobbled along with one of those wheeled walkers, but I didn't want to look "old." Vanity, thy name is Anna Lee.

See what I mean? I'll try to stop if you will.

Anna Lee Landen

--And still more letters follow
Leah finds *E.I.* educational
Hi, Marsh,
That was a great piece you wrote on Stan Freberg. I never knew he was the voice behind Cecil the Seasick Sea Serpent.
I also enjoyed your story about the pollywolly-doodlegram. Good luck with the CPAP thingy.
Leah
Leah Carson
Excellent Words, LLC

Friends of Sassy salute *E.I.*
Norma “Sassy” Sundberg writes to report that her friends like *E.I.* too.
“Thanks, again, for the newsletter,” writes Gerry Jerome. “The pictures of Lily are so great. Know that she is the joy of lots of lives.”
And Marion Childs wrote to say she loves the puns, tongue twisters, and word play and also liked her friend Sassy’s word poems.

Rainy Sunday Afternoon
Marshall J. Cook
My days are numbered as surely are your own. Is this not so? They always have been from your first breath--a gasp, a screech, a howl, a bewildered yelp, a hoot? What a blessing it is that we don’t know that number until the end and then why would a number matter?

Student gives teacher
great advice
Hi Coach,
In 2001 or so, I took a series of online classes with you --- fiction & non-fiction, for sure. I'm cleaning out some files today and found my notes & our correspondence from that time. What gems!
At one point, you asked me if I knew of A. Manette Ansay and her novels. No, I said, I've never even heard her name.
I forgot, until I found these notes, that there was a time when I didn't know A. Manette Ansay, that someone else (you!) pointed her out to me. These days, I tell anyone who asks that *Vinegar Hill* is one of my all-time favorite novels.
I also found a section where you wrote, "Save that paragraph you just wrote. Reread it often." Hmm, I wondered. What did I write?
I wrote:
Forget about trying to write; instead, concentrate very much on the story wanting to be told. Trust that it will unfold itself. The body knows how to give birth; the hard part is stepping aside and letting your body do what it was made to do. Perhaps storytelling is the same; somehow, you need to convince the censor to stand aside and allow creation.

Today, I think I need to cut that out and post it above my desk!
Since I wrote that, I've had two more children, divorced, and fully transitioned from a career as a Registered Nurse to one as a freelance writer. I'm a member and board member of the American Society of Journalists & Authors, and I've been published in all kinds of places, but (like all writers) I still need reminders to get out of my own way.
Thanks for all you and UW-Madison did for me and my career. I couldn't have gotten to where I am today without the help you gave me then.
Best,
Jennifer Fink
www.jenniferlwfink.com
www.buildingboys.net


POP CULTURE WATCH
JACOB MCLAUGHLIN

Mad Max well worth the long wait

*Mad Max: Fury Road* has been in development for a long time. It's gone through many delays, and it's coming out 30 years after the last film. So was it worth all the hype and the wait? Absolutely. *Mad Max: Fury Road* sets a new standard for action films and raises the bar very high for any other film coming out this year. This film has more imagination and creativity than any action film of the past decade. George Miller has brought us a modern masterpiece.

I enjoy the Mad Max films. They are a great look at the post apocalyptic world. The first film is a solid origin story for the character. *The Road Warrior* is one of the best sequels ever made, and *Beyond Thunderdome* has some good elements but is the weakest of the three. *Fury Road* is the best film in the series. This movie is a beast that revs up right at the start and doesn't let up until the closing credits.

The film has Max (a great Tom Hardy) captured by War Boys, a group of pale men who worship Immortan Joe (a menacing Hugh Keays Byrne, who also played Toecutter in the original film), a man worshiped like a god. Joe is a villain you love to hate and one that you can't wait to see the demise of. He has his trusted driver, Imperator Furiosa (an excellent Charlize Theron) drive an oil rig to the nearby Gas Town. She's taken his five breeder wives and plans to transport them to her childhood homeland. The film then becomes a chase film and a thrill ride that doesn't stop.

**The women are strong characters who can fight for themselves, while also being vulnerable. Charlize Theron has as important a role as Hardy does.**

The performances are all great. In addition to Hardy and Theron, all five of the wives are very good. Nicholas Holt is really good as Nux, one of the War Boys, who goes after Imperator Furiosa. Tom Hardy is perfectly cast as Max and does just as well as Mel Gibson did.

The film doesn't rely on a lot of dialogue to tell its story. A moment of eye contact is just as effective as any line.

If you haven't seen the other films in the series, you won't be lost at all. This works as a stand-alone film, but it's also an enhanced experience if you've seen the other films.

We need more of this type of action movie. These days action films are full of CGI and can be unimaginative or boring. *Fury Road* has gorgeously filmed shots, amazingly choreographed action, and incredible stunts with real vehicles and stuntmen.

The cinematography is gorgeous. Beautiful shots of wide desert landscape, close up shots of stick shifts and revving engines, armies of vehicles racing down a road, and gritty looking actors dominate the look of the film. George Miller has proven himself multiple times that he's one of the best action directors ever, and at 70 years old, he still has it in him.

He has brought us a modern masterpiece of cinema that needs to be seen on the big screen. Support this film, because if it does well, that means we get more movies like it. I will be seeing it multiple times in the theater. I'm buzzing with happiness and excitement, because this film is a promising look at what action cinema could and should be.
I’ve read a few of Jim Harrison’s novels (he also writes poetry and non-fiction) and have come to believe some of the following: He is a fair trout fisherman and grouse-hunter who cooks what he kills, a heavy drinker and left-winger, with strong fantasies about the opposite sex. He’s spent time in both the U.P. and the Patagonia region of Southern Arizona.

Recently, I read The Great Leader, a so-called faux mystery, published in 2011. I was intrigued and warned by its epigraph from John McGlynn’s book An Old Man’s Rules for Hitchhiking: “My sealed orders were to determine the shape of the world. The final report is that all presumptions are in error.”

First of all, this is not a mystery. It’s the kind of historical, literary doppelganger ramble (much like this review without the literary and historical parts) that Harrison seems to specialize in.

In it, we meet Sunderson, a one-named soon-to-be-retired broken-down divorced detective from the Michigan State Police, who incorporates most of the strengths and probable weaknesses of the author. To keep his hand in, he has decided to track down a cult leader who preys on rich donors and their 12-year-old daughters and goes by a variety of aliases-- the current one being Dwight a/k/a the Great Leader. The law is not particularly interested in this as no provable crime has been committed.

Sunderson’s first sidekick, Mona, is a 16-year-old female exhibitionist neighbor of his who enjoys tantalizing him with naked yoga, enabling his proclivity for peeping tom voyeurism when he’s not getting drunk or reading history. This girl lives all alone, despite nominally having a mother, and is a brilliant hacker, capable of tracking Dwight’s every move, and also an excellent cook. (No need for too many characters when you get a triple threat like Mona.)

We get to know little more about Mona than we do Lolita, and for the same reason. Sunderson and Humbert tell us their stories, which reminds me of a quote by Chinua Achebe, the African historian:

“Until the Lions have their own historian, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

But I digress.

Sunderson has a weakness for women’s backsides, and every woman he meets has a weakness for him, save his former wife, Diane, whom he nonetheless still longs for. The attraction is greater for those things we can’t have.

His other friend, Marion, is a mixed blood book reader like himself whose interests run to anthropology and gourmet cooking. By necessity, he does handyman work for Sunderson when not on the job as a middle school principal.

They amuse themselves concocting versions of accidental events and miscellaneous observations elevated in their own minds to liberal truths or high conspiracy. Sunderson hates many words, but he likes desuetude and ineffable, common conditions afflicting many retirees. Nonetheless, Harrison’s writing is full of Yooperisms that carry the ring of truth and are fun to read, and he’s always alluding to something literary or historical, far more than the typical novelist.

In attempting to track Dwight (who by then had changed his alias to King David) all the way to Arizona, Sunderson gets stoned, literally once and figuratively about every night.

He decides to straighten his life’s walk with a camping and hiking expedition during which he sees the irony of a retired detective peeping tom trying to run a presumed pedophile to ground.

Having found other dangers in Arizona, Sunderson follows “King David” back to the Midwest.

Sunderson has come to believe that he and “King David” may be on opposite sides of a conspiracy theory he calls “religion, money and sex,” which apparently has something to do with rattlesnakes and possibly Indians.

You may notice that we’ve been rambling on here and don’t seem that much closer to catching the heinous criminal. Harrison’s writing is like being retired and being on vacation, fishing your favorite trout stream, flushing a covey of grouse for dinner. Time flies by; we’re all having fun.

What cult? Don’t worry, we’ll solve it eventually. Relax and enjoy the book. Have another drink.
I couldn’t solve this puzzle. Can you?

E.I. columnist and poet Sandy Rafter recently concocted a puzzle for me to solve. She sent me a song a day via email, asking me to use the songs to discern the historical event she was alluding to.

I failed miserably.

She nicely sent me the answer with explanation, and I applauded her genius.

With her permission, I present the song clues for you to wrestle with:

*High and Mighty*, Johnny Desmond
*Have You Ever Seen the Rain*, Credence Clearwater Revival
*Got Some Rock & Roll Thunder*, AC/DC
*The Swim Song*, Loudon Wainwright III
*Old Cape Cod*, Patti Page
*Sink or Swim*, Tyrone Wells
*Under the Weather*, K.T. Tunstall
*The Comet Song*, björk
*The Jazz Singer*, Al Jolson
*Harbour Lights*, The Platters

She even provided a bonus clue: the answer involves a former president’s name.

If you think you’ve got the answer (or even any answer), send it/them to me at mcook@des.wisc.edu. Your solutions and Sandy’s answer, along with explanation of the clues, will appear in the next issue, coming to a computer near you just in time for July.

*Coach*

And now, the star of our show...
A pensive moment with Lily