Roses on parade
I don’t watch parades on television. Except for one, of course, MY parade.

I always feel sorry and embarrassed for the poor “commentators,” freezing their mittens off while trying desperately to think of something original or clever to say; and, failing, flailing, clutching the first hoary cliché that happens to float by, and then, lamentably, saying it.

But I always watch MY parade, my Rose Parade, New Year’s Day, every minute of it if I can, every band and float and equestrian unit, hoping always to catch glimpses of my mountains in the distance, those harsh, dry, rocky, beautiful mountains.

I explored Eaton Canyon, climbing over the fence with the “NO TRESPASSING” sign and up to the waterfall (which only rarely had water), where John Muir and mountain lions once roamed. A few times I hiked up the Ranger service road the three miles to the nursery at Henniger Flats, where I sat and looked out over the rim of my world. One memorable day, my big brother and his then girlfriend NN and I hiked that road all the way up to Mt. Wilson, 11 miles on a 100 degree plus day, one of the great achievements of my youth.

Once a year dad would coax the ladder to stay put in the trunk of the Chevy, always a Chevy and NEVER a Ford. My brother and I would cram ourselves into the back seat, Mom would ride shotgun, and Dad would drive us down Allen Avenue to as close to Colorado Boulevard (made famous by Jan and Dean) as we could get before walking the rest of the way and their “little old lady from Pasadena.”

Dad carried the ladder. When we reached the crowds, seven or eight deep, I’d climb to my perch on top of the ladder, brother Dale would stand behind me, and Mom and Dad held the ladder on either side.

**Hoppy, tall in Trigger’s saddle, looked right at me as he rode by, his smile for me.**

More cowboys! Monty Montana! Lash LaRue! Cisco and Pancho!

The band from the college my brother and I would attend and where grandfather met grandmother.

Huge floats made all of flowers. They really did seem to float past us, and past where the Bob’s Big Boy used to be, past Vroman’s Bookstore, where I bought my first Hardy Boy books, past the Star News building, where they created the paper I carried in two enormous bags on my bicycle.

Too soon it was finished, and we drove back up to La Paz Road, my growing up place, where the mighty deodar in the front yard stretched to heaven. I lifted its bowing branches so Dad could push the mower underneath to get at the grass. I once climbed to the top of that tree during a Santa Ana windstorm, scaring myself half crazy.

Those mountains, my mountains, topped by the television relay towers on Mt. Wilson, watched over us. In my child nightmares, those towers became huge metal monsters marching down the mountain and onto the playground at Luther Burbank Elementary School.

The parade ended at Victory Park, where the floats would stay for several days and we could see them up close and even touch them.

**Sorry, Macy’s, but next to all that, you got nothin’ for me.**
I don't profess to know many things on most days but I do know this one particular thing on this day: when I arrived here this evening, I was not breathing. But as I sat here for a bit, I slowly became aware of a man and his love as they talked and laughed together sweetly, over in the corner.

It was obvious to anyone looking that when that man was in the company of his love, it did not matter who stared openly at their smiles, their undisguised concern for the other, or enjoyed their shared laughter that could be heard tinkling sweetly over our heads like a comforting descant...no, it didn't matter one bit. I'm sure that they already knew what I was just beginning to learn; Love was love was love...and when it was good and pure like they shared, well, it healed the souls of all who were touched by its warm light. As I sat, lost in my thoughts about everything and nothing, my inner being continued to drink the soothing elixir that their love produced over there in the corner. I realized suddenly that I had started breathing again. My fingers and toes had stopped their incessant tingling, and I could feel my cheeks flushed with a healthy glow. I silently thanked that man and his love over in the corner for helping me to get better...by simply sharing their love with me.

Lisa Partee

Music is the fluid that quenches the thirst of my consciousness. The rhythmic and intelligent sounds music makes creates the framework of my mood, and other times it is the catalyst that changes it.

I love jazz music more than my other favorites, which are blues, soul, R&B, and reggae music. I love to combine old and new, like Thelonious Monk and Gregory Porter. The musicians are vivid, bold, daring, and endlessly energetic, and the vocals capture every emotion, from raw to sentimental. Without music, my life would be at risk of blending into the surrounding noise, cries, disorganization, and chaos. When I decide to listen to John Coltrane, I am steady. When I play Bob Marley, I am enlightened. When I listen to Isaac Hayes, I feel everything permeate into my thoughts and create the inspiring energy to relate to him, anyone, something. Music is infinite, and so are musicians. We are so fortunate to bear witness to one another’s creative excellence.

Tamara Thompson Moore

Music is my gateway. It is my outlet, my stress reliever, and my imagination builder. On bad days, I can fly out to Billy Idol’s “White Wedding,” and on softer days I can and will listen to Old School Motown all the way to “Drops of Jupiter.” There was a time when a cotton seed was planted in my mind. I was told I could only listen to “your people’s music,” whatever that is. I love it ALL—acapella, rock, country, and more. My life would not be complete if I had no music choices. How else could we pass down magical memorable moments if we had no music?

Kelly Dixon

Don’t stop the music...
I like mostly romantic, pop, and ranchero (mariachi), but I also like the music I listened to when I was a kid.

My parents would put the radio on in the mornings while they prepared to go to work. ... Also, I listen to the music I heard when I was a teenager because it brings good memories of days when I had no worries and everything was so easy. ... They were mostly songs about love and the boys I liked. It was also so much fun to get together with friends and listen and cry over some of the songs together.

I remember the first song in English I loved, “My Heart Will Go On.” I asked my friend to translate it for me because it sounded so beautiful... Later I fell in love with the Backstreet Boys’ music, even though I didn’t know what they were singing about. (Now I have an idea).

My family and friends make fun of me because I like country music.

The other day I was listening to a CD from a 90’s group; my daughter said it was old music.

Karina Gomez

Music makes me relaxed and happy. When I feel stressed, I turn to music.

I like slow songs to let me fly and imagine. Also I like romantic poems with piano. My life without music would be dark and without flavor. For me music is sweetness, flowers, colors, and hope for life. The music we have today is wonderful and makes me sleepy after all the hard work I’ve done in a day. Music makes me feel very light with a quiet heartbeat.

Shaimaa Ahmed

I listen to all kinds of music: country, jazz, pop, oldies, and classic rock.

My dad loves music. I grew up with my father, and he would quiz me on his favorite artists or songs when they came on the radio. Oftentimes I find myself tuning in to a song because it immediately brings back a good memory. ...

Life would be so dull without music. It brings out emotions and goose bumps, and it talks so deeply to your soul. I find myself tuning in to the Christian station, and every time it’s like the music is sending me a message intended for me to hear. Without music in my life, I’m not sure what kind of heart I would have. I love the melodies and truths it brings to me.

Ashley Wills

When I least expect it, I can get hit with a wave of emotions if I listen to music that takes me back on a distant memory that’s not healthy for me to recall.

Music can also electrify me, making me feel inspired and untouchable. Music heals the soul. I oftentimes confuse my coworkers with my energetic vibe and positive attitude, making them wonder what had happened prior to work. Well, it’s definitely not the coffee. It was because I have listened to good ass music on the way to work.

Mai Thao

Music gave me the biggest connection I have with my dad. If he didn’t listen while I talked, I was sure he’d listen while I sang.

My mom in the morning would whistle whatever tune my dad was playing on his guitar. It was like we took turns making every word, every sound, and made it into a conversation. ...

My dad can’t listen to seriousness, but he can listen to a joke or two and make his guitar laugh. Every string was heavy against his thumb, and at times it seemed like it disappeared. I would spin around for minutes, my mom would laugh so loud, and my dad played faster. I would spin faster. He may not listen to every word or hold every detail, but he always listens to me sing. I know he loves me when we sing songs for God. We sing for him, but I know he sometimes strums for me.

Karina Herrejon

Music is my life, music is my life, music brings joy and roar.

I listen to hip hop, R&B, and house music. Without music my life would be a tornado storm.

Katia Robinson

I listen old school dusties, R&B, rap/hip hop, jukebox music, house music, jazz ...

I’m passionately and deeply affected by music. Music can change my day and how I respond to the events of the day. I’m a person who keeps the last song heard in the car playing in my head all day. I try to keep that party going in my head until I return home. My life would be somber and dead without music. Life without music to me is like sex without the orgasm. I love it when music does it to me in my earhole!

Nickitija Cooper
Why we must never let newspapers die!
Actual headlines-- thanks to Sassy Sundberg

Bugs flying around with wings are flying bugs

Meeting on open meetings is closed

Republicans turned off by size of Obama’s package

Man accused of killing lawyer receives a new attorney

Diana was still alive hours before she died

Barbershop singers bring joy to school for deaf

Statistics show that teen pregnancy drops off significantly after age 25

Hospitals resort to hiring doctors

Marijuana issue sent to a joint committee

Man with 8 DUIs blames drinking problem

Homicide victims rarely talk to police

New sick policy requires 2-day notice

17 REMAIN DEAD IN MORGUE SHOOTING SPREE

Parents keep kids home to protest school closure

City unsure why the sewer smells

Starvation can lead to health hazards

The bra celebrates a pair of historic milestones this year
I have always believed that we learn by our mistakes, or at least most people do. By that standard I am a lifetime learner. My experience hosting a local FM station radio program, Writing in Wisconsin, has provided me with a lot of new ways to make mistakes.

In case my guest needed a break during the hour long program a friend recorded five songs that I could play allowing both me and my guest a chance to catch our breath and wet our whistles with a sip of water.

My guest for the premier show was none other than Marshall J. “Coach” Cook. I asked Marshall both because he is a dear friend and I knew he had previous radio experience. Before going on the air I asked him if he wanted to take a break during the show. “Naw” he said. “We’ll get to talking and the time will fly by.”

Our conversation was just like any other lunch we’ve had together. Then out of the blue after about 30 minutes Marshall said, “Well, I think we should take a break now.” I wasn’t prepared. Shock and disbelief swept across my face. My producer, Lisa Wolf, was sitting to my left. I hunched my shoulders in the universal signal I had no idea what to do.

With a few moments to gather my thoughts I decided after the song I would give credit to the musician. The song finished, and I explained the music was provided by my friend, Joe Vosen, and . . . in a senior moment I couldn’t remember his daughter’s name. I fumbled for a bit and then just said it was his daughter.

Later I wrote Joe an e-mail explaining my faux pas and asked again for his daughter’s name. He reminded me her name is Grace. Then Joe explained, “That’s not Grace on that track, that’s Liz Stattleman-Scalan.” I turned several shades of red as I read his response.

After we were off the air Marshall asked, “You know what you forgot don’t you?”

“I forgot something?”

“This is a call-in show, right?”

“Yes.”

“You never gave the phone number to call in.”

When I err, I err big.

The saga continues next month.

And a backstage bonus
Things that are NEVER said in theater
By the producer:
* Of course there’s enough money to go around.
* We have money left over.
* No thanks, I don’t drink.
MEANDERING WITH MADONNA
MADONNA DRIES CHRISTENSEN

Mighty girls

When Minnesotan Maria Keller was eight, she learned that not all children have books of their own or even have access to them. She pledged that by age 18 she would donate one million books to kids around the world. Her mother supported the idea but assumed it was a phase that wouldn’t last.

Collecting books from friends, family, and other donors, Maria reached her goal by age 13 and founded a nonprofit organization, Read Indeed, which has delivered books to 42 states and 17 countries. Now 15, Maria was one of two youths in the US last year honored with the Jefferson Award for Outstanding National or Global Service by a Young American.

Maria was featured on a Facebook page called A Mighty Girl, dedicated to raising smart, confident, courageous, and resourceful girls. The founders believe, “Girls do not have to be relegated to the role of sidekick or damsel in distress; they can be leaders, heroes, the champions that save the day, find the cure, and go on the adventure.”

Malala Yousafzai was the youngest person awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The 18-year-old Pakistani resident survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban in 2012 and was honored for her efforts to promote girls’ right to education. Malala shared the Prize with Indian child’s rights campaigner Kailash Satyarthi.

In a design class in Detroit, students were challenged to create a product that filled a need. Veronika Scott designed a coat that doubles as a sleeping bag for homeless people. The award-winning idea led to a non-profit organization that hires people from homeless shelters to help produce the coats. The updated version is water and wind proof and converts to a shoulder bag with storage in the arms.

Mighty Girls bring awareness to a host of causes: domestic violence, mental illness, sex trafficking, literacy, gender equality, animal rescue, environmental problems, and much more. Girls with facial or body disfigurements reveal their flaws and tell how they cope with their situation.

The page features inspiring women from the past: Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Nellie Bly, Christa McAuliffe, Amelia Earhart, writers, suffragettes, inventors, sports figures, scientists, military leaders, pioneer computer programmers, Civil War heroes (disguised as men)—the list is endless, all geared toward encouraging girls to follow their dreams, be it a business career or marriage and motherhood, or both.

I disagree with one aspect of A Mighty Girl. It advocates avoiding telling a girl or young adult she’s pretty, instead affirming her brains and accomplishments.

C’mon. Your teenager, who usually wears sweat pants and tee-shirts, her hair in a tangled ponytail and braces on her teeth, is dolled up for her first school dance—and you shouldn’t tell her she looks pretty?

Eleanor Roosevelt once remarked that when she was a girl no one ever told her she was pretty. With hindsight, we know she ended up having a measurable influence on lives around the world, but it seems she forever harbored a child who longed for someone to consider her pretty.

Within every Mighty Girl there’s a trace of Eleanor. Someone saying she’s pretty does not diminish her other attributes. Balance is the key.

My granddaughters receive positive comments on their academic grades, extra-curricular activities, creativity, and community involvement. They help clean the creek in their neighborhood, deliver holiday dinners to the homeless, donate most of their Halloween loot to overseas troops, and the oldest has been a reading buddy to a boy with autism.

When they’ve dressed in their finest for a piano recital, we tell our Mighty Girls they look pretty. And they perform well, too.
GROWING UP IN MADISON
RON HEVEY

Madison winters made for kid’s magic

1950s Madison winters introduced us kids to the simplest of outdoor pleasures, moments that can’t be matched, as we raced around and up and down in the cold, crispy snow.

On the East Side all we had to do was trudge through Olbrich Park to reach free ice skating and tobogganing, both close enough to walk to. At below zero we had to be careful about frozen cheeks, but bright and blue or gloom and snow, cold weather heightened the magic.

Moms and dads let us kids go out after dark and let us stay out in the cold, an encouragement to get our exercise. We needed a pair of skates; the rest was winter magic.

The city created an ice skating rink, one of many, next to what is now Olbrich Gardens. The road to Garvers ran through that part of the park, so we had to look out for giant grain trucks that drove through the space.

In late fall they flooded a low section of park lawn. We couldn’t wait for temperatures to go down and the pool turned to an ice skating rink. After-dark lighting? No problem: a few telephone poles with light bulbs on top did the job.

An innocuous stone building served as shelter, unheated and lined with wooden benches. Out on the rink common sense told us to stay away from the end where teens played spirited hockey games. Common sense also let us young kids know when it was time for a break, when mushy ice gathered on our mufflers from heavy breathing. We headed into the shelter before that mush turned to ice. We could hope someone in the shelter might pass around a thermos of hot cider for us to share.

The toboggan run was across the avenue and up Oakridge, a place once dubbed “Ice Hill” when folks used ice blocks cut from Lake Monona and stored them in a shed on the hill for summer.

In the 1950s Oscar Mayers made the ice, and their trucks brought in good-sized chunks for the toboggan run. Word was Oscar Mayers donated the ice; we ate plenty of Oscar Mayer wiener to make up for it. We watched as men laid the ice blocks in a track and packed snow in between. Down the hill the track extended across Lakeland Avenue and out past Starkweather Creek.

The wooden launch was erected annually. We hoped for a short line until we were loaded three, four or five on a toboggan. We squished together with our legs looped around the kid in front. The more of us on a sled, the faster and farther we went. A bunch of brave guys, no way we’d act scared first time down the hill.

The loading rack was tipped, and down we went watching trees whiz by, snow flurries stinging our cheeks, the rush of winter. The colder and icier the track, the louder the rumble. No one pulled shenanigans on the sled because tipping over was a real and present danger. When we got lucky the toboggan crossed Starkweather Creek blocks away. We ran back for more, lugging the toboggan behind, the brightly lit dome of the Capitol reflecting across Lake Monona.

We went skating and tobogganing day after day, week after week of winter fun, all our kid’s energy channeled into play. No interruptions. No phones. Be home by 10. The cold and the exercise were all it took to make us dog tired and sleep like dogs, too.

Sixty years later youngsters can hop into two-ton gas guzzlers, go to well-lit, temperature-controlled entertainment centers with game rooms, food courts, and giant screens for another kind of life experience. But Madison continues to provide outdoor ice skating venues. Tobogganing hills, however, have become sledding hills, a safer option. We could have used the toboggan hill for sledding back in the day, but the thought never crossed our minds.
FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS
ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS

Think young!

Don’t be averse to verse, and raise your children, not raze them! Those words, pronounced identically, have opposite meanings. To raise is to lift, but to raze means to tear down.

To start kids loving language, reading aloud introduces the joy of language.

TAKE THE LEAD!

Read to your “littlers” and poke their ribs
With sense and nonsense to please their nibs:
Add a touch of honey and a feel for rhyme;
Plus a bucket of guck cause kids like slime.
(At least I did when young and small,
But now as a grownup, not much at all!)

Clever poetry offers word-play. A dandelion is golden treasure. Gone to seed, its magic spreads in rebirth. I recall one sip of dandelion wine made from blossoms my friend Anne and I –age 10– gathered and her mom transformed. Months later we tasted summer in a teaspoon! Poems-- all good experiences--offer special magic. Do you recall free time in childhood to read, or be read to-- to listen, then ponder?

STORY HOUR

Tall tales for small folk-- adventures galore-- Will leave kids begging, “Please tell us more!”
But still be aware of which child likes what:
Bobbi loves kittens, while Sandy does not
Jen longs for princes plus a derring-do knight;
James craves zombies or werewolves that fight!
Horse tales thrill Barb—but come Billy’s turn
He wants space-faring heroes; all he can learn.
True, listeners prove glad when a princess is saved,
Carried past flames which the hero has braved
By scaling her tower with rope and with sling
Up past acrid smoke that makes his eyes sting!
While differing youngsters can all still agree Adventures prove thrilling when shared pleasantly!

Here are the top-ten children’s poets listed on the Internet: Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, Kenn Nesbit, Jon Scieszka, Roald Dahl, Paul Janeczko, Marilyn Singer, Sharon Creech, Allen Ahlberg, and Barry Louis Polisar.

Some grownups shun poetry if they only know dull examples, as I realized teaching in Tennessee as a Poet-in-the-Schools. Still, others know verse stimulates thinking via our senses. For example, bacon cooking with sizzle, scent, texture, plus taste, is something most of us enjoy! I jotted on the blackboard:

MANY A GOOD POEM…
Has humor and whimsy;
Is robust, not flimsy;
A taste of honey with rhyme;
But allow some guck too
For kids like yucky goo
Plus fishing-worms and slime!

I finished with a thought for boys who consider poetry a “girl thing.” Poetry needn’t preach, though it may explore mishaps in a cautionary—or amusing—way. Teacher Kenneth Koch quotes student-poet Hector Figueroa:

Along my house
I see a broken vase
In which the shiny colors,
Green, yellow, and blue
Shine in my eyes.

Hector sees beauty despite fracture. Another young poet, Andrew Vecchione, also wrote of an ordinary object:

Love is like a scissors. When they cut they are Together---when they part they get divorced.

Would a grownup think this way? Poets can recapture “kid-think” on paper. Charles Ghigna, dubbed “Father Goose,” has published over 100 books, including write advice. He declares:

The path to inspiration starts beyond what trails are known:
Each writer’s block is not a rock, but just a stepping stone.
The answer to the artist comes quicker than a blink,
Though initial inspiration is not what you might think:
The muse is full of magic, though her vision’s sometimes dim,
An artist doesn’t choose the work; it’s the work that chooses him!

Comic verse allows brief relief from more serious stuff. Whatever your age, you can write “young” because you were there once. No one else thinks exactly like you. Find refreshment recalling your young self on paper!
The world would be a better place if old-fashioned paper dolls were handed out to everyone. Before you chuck this idea because it’s too silly or girly, let me be bold enough to say that the male leaders of the world could learn a lot “playing” with paper dolls, and oh, what they are missing. Unfortunately, today collectors are more interested in paper dolls than are children and most adults.

The owner of paper dolls is the mastermind, chief mover, and voice for all that occurs. My flat people were better than regular dolls, because there were few limitations to them. They came in sets of people of all ages, occupations, nationalities, and with a wardrobe of paper clothes to cut out to give them personality and character traits, plus, they were cheap to own.

I controlled the insults, the fights, the mishaps, sweet talk, and all the emotions, and with my paper dolls I modeled the interactions I had seen and heard from family and people around me. In presenting the answer to why Janie borrowed her sister’s sweater without asking, I had to do some fancy reasoning for both sides of the argument, and, I realized you can’t have bodies stored in a box (a home) continually mad at each other and holding a grudge.

I learned a lot about talking to other people through my paper dolls. They were better than real people, because a rude, insensitive, or quarrelsome remark once said to a real friend is hard to take back. My paper dolls chattered away to each other over and over and were really excellent at both honest and small talk.

That was a good thing, because their owner was a very shy person. There’s no better way to deal with a person and know that person than by being that person, and that’s what my paper dolls allowed.

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Sidebar

History of the paper doll in America

Paper dolls have been manufactured in all shapes and sizes of humans and animals. Basically, the paper dolls most of us remember are those with thin punch-out card bodies with paper clothes with tabs to fit onto the bodies. Paper dolls could be found in the United States dating back to the colonies but did not originate in this country. They were part of religious rites in Asian cultures centuries ago and evolved through the years from folded paper puppets to paper “model” dolls in France during the mid-1700s that enabled the rich to view the latest fashions.

In the United States many of the first paper dolls were printed by the McLoughlin brothers using engraved wood blocks. The Milton Bradley Company, maker of games since before the Civil War, bought that company and popularized paper dolls in the 1920s with movie star and celebrity faces. Other companies followed suit and through the years for a small amount of money buyers could grasp and manipulate Martha Washington, Shirley Temple, Elizabeth Taylor, Rick Nelson, Madonna, to The Bieber nowadays. Of course, there were the simple baby and school and common person dolls. During the Golden Age of Paper Dolls, from the 1930s to the 1950s, the dolls provided children with an affordable toy during Depression days.
I wondered what it would be like to date a boy. This was my first serious attempt to really discern feelings beyond my own as I thought and vocalized for my boy paper doll. Tom and Sue were literally in my hands, and I planned many dates at the movies or taking a walk together and just having fun. Fun was much better for dating than my natural state of sheer panic without the dolls. Then there was that first kiss. I put Tom’s flat face right up against Sue’s flat face and ecstasy. Well, really, not so much; in fact, nothing, but I prepared for my real much better first kiss that wasn’t a taste of paper.

After that were the set of bride and groom paper dolls. It’s a wonder I had that set. I think my mother must have monitored my paper doll purchases. I didn’t have any sets with low cut dresses or skimpy swim suits. I was between the little girl paper dolls and and girl with boobs ones. Nevertheless, we got married. My paper bride tried on her gown and whispered to her groom about eloping, but both knew their parents would be unhappy. They actually talked to the parents, a task I was not participating in at the time.

My paper doll marched down the aisle, hummed the wedding march, and then after the vows, another paper kiss and happily ever after. How many times we did this I don’t know. It took a lot of energy and stamina, but, we were used to work. And this wasn’t work; this was an adventure! Seventy years later, I still recall that night with happiness.

Oh, yes. Did our dad know what we were up to? That hyper-vigilant man? Of course he did. It took me years to figure it out. I think Dad enjoyed playing along with us, pretending we fooled him. He always kept that secret. So we had that memory of a magical sled ride on that wonderful night all to ourselves. Thank you, Jane. And, Dad, thank you for everything.”

The author in her own words: I am 77, always wanted to be a writer. Attended a one room country school in Iowa County (WI). From there to Madison West Junior High School and graduation from Milwaukee-Downer, a women’s college (now Lawrence University). My mother said we moved 17 times! Lived in River Falls, WI since 1963.
Coach's note: This column goes back to the beginning of the medical adventure we’ve been sharing with Tom over the last many months. His update follows this column.

I lifted my grandson off a carousel with one arm while at the zoo. He’s a fifty-pound four-year-old. It was easy until I twisted my body to set him on the ground. I felt pain in my side immediately, but nothing that a few Ibuprofen wouldn’t cure. So I vowed to take it easy for a few days and heal.

After two weeks the pain had seemed to move. It was still on my left side only lower. While lying on my back, I felt a lump below my ribs near my abdomen and asked my wife, Jennifer, to inspect me. She went to work on me after I assured her that this wasn’t just another sexual come-on, and she confirmed my findings. So I made an appointment with a nurse.

Call me disrespectful if you need to, but I view medical people – doctors, nurses, and technicians-- as auto mechanics. So I guess you can say that I view my body as an auto. I’m like an old Cadillac with a little rust and a need for a muffler.

After the customary smile and handshake, the nurse got right down to business by measuring my vitals and questioning me regarding my side pain. I spoke to her in unemotional flat tones and explained that, because of past and recent nightmares, I was pretty sure that I had an alien baby growing inside of me. She gave me that bored humorless look I’ve seen so often in my life, then asked me to unbutton my shirt and lay back on the exam table.

After kneading my flesh like a bowl of bread dough, she shook her head and sent me down to the X-ray department where I asked the technician if the X-Rays would harm my baby. The Techie played along by saying she didn’t think so. She assured me that she would only take a few shots with a low dose of the ray. On the way out of her area I had the final word and told her that I thought her careless use of the powerful beam had sent my alien baby into a growth mode, and if something dire happened to the Earth, it was on her shoulders.

I was ushered back into the exam room, and within a few minutes the nurse returned with my doctor. He’s a good kid – knowledgeable, capable, and he tolerates my sense of humor. Both he and the nurse worked me over some more until he stepped back, stooped, squinted at my stomach and said, “I think you have an enlarged spleen.”

He went on to ask a few questions: Had I been playing contact sports, was my wife using me as a trampoline, or had an elephant sat on me recently. Then he suggested I get right over to our local hospital for a CAT scan.

When I arrived there at noon the department secretary was aware of my visit, gave me some forms to fill along with an official wrist band labeled with my personal data and unique patient number. I returned the forms and asked how long it might be. She smiled and said they would fit me in and she would call down there again if she saw me sitting too long.

I guess that I had agreed because I sat down, powered my Kindle and read for the next two hours. The growl of my stomach, and a vision of an unhappy alien baby sent me back to the desk to remind the secretary that I was waiting and hadn’t eaten all day. She raised an index finger and punched the phone with the other, then whispered a few words and bobbed her head while taking instructions from whomever she called.

She hung up, spun in her chair, stooped to a refrigerator and pulled out a white plastic bottle. “It’s a good thing you haven’t eaten because you should have drank the milkshake.”

While shaking the bottle, I asked again about timing. She smiled and assured me it would be soon. So I drank the stuff, waited some more, and sure enough an hour later a nurse came to get me. On our way back to the imaging machine, she told me that I needed to have waited that extra hour for the milkshake to work through my organs.

I let this woman know about my theory and self diagnosis of my alien baby, too. She was a right-down-to-business person. She looked into my eyes for more than a moment and, without smiling, began giving me instructions like a robot.

Alien continues
We got along. She got her scans, and I thanked her and told her that I had never in my long lifetime experienced so much fun in a hospital. I looked at my watch as she held the door for me. “Hmmmmmm. Wonder what’s for dinner?” I asked as I passed her.

My wife is a great cook. We talked and laughed mostly about my day’s events over a wonderful Mexican dinner. And then the phone rang. It was my doctor calling to say that he read the results of my tests and that I should return to his office yet that evening for additional blood tests.

The doctor was still there after they withdrew vial after vial of my blood in the lab. He took us into his office. I could see that Jennifer was frightened, while I felt like someone was going to be playing a joke on me. That’s how confident I was. At 68-years-old, I still had that invincible, “I’m in great shape” outlook to my life.

As we took chairs I asked, “So it’s not an alien baby, is it?”

The doctor leaned back against his desk and said, “I think it’s a cancer, Tom.”

He went on to explain that my very, very swollen spleen and my high blood cell count probably pointed to a bone marrow problem and that he would make an appointment with a very good Oncology and Hematology doctor for the following morning.

He told us to keep a positive attitude, and that these cancers had excellent medical treatments. “If I’m correct, it’s a cancer, but not one of the worst, and you’re really in great shape,” he said.

We all shook hands and walked to the door. Keeping my cool, I stopped and draped my arm over the doctor’s shoulder.

“I’m not denying the cancer, I said. “I just don’t want it to hurt my baby.”

The Hicks Health Update

I’m finishing my third year of Cancer Treatment. After an extensive preparatory chemo and radiation regimen, I spent seven weeks in the hospital last January while undergoing a Bone Marrow Transplant.

My Donor’s cells diminished over the year to less than 12%. The thought of going through the entire procedure again was depressing, but I was told to prepare for it. In fact, I would go back to a chemo regimen immediately to stimulate growth of my new donor cells.

The donor cells began to appear after the reinvested jolt of the chemo treatments.

And then, the donor’s cells began to multiply. I’m 99% donor now. The donor cells are fighting the old me, and I can feel it, everywhere. It’s not a constant painful experience. It’s like discovery at times, or to be completely honest, it may very well be the drugs they give me.

For the past months I’d been putting my affairs in order and trying to do the heavy lifting for the survivors before I turn into a corpse. My recovery appeared doubtful, but I hadn’t given up. I kept to the plan, kept working to survive. I guess I like to keep busy and be prepared for hopelessness.

But I truly believe those days are over, or at least on hold for my foreseeable future. Oh, I know there’s still a way to go, and it will be difficult at times, but I can feel it. I’m going to be cured and expand my new lifetime. I can feel it!

But to be completely honest, it may very well be the drugs they give me …
The Writer’s Poet
Craig W. Steele
Your next assignment...

The most common affliction in a writing class that teachers just don’t understand?
The big difference ‘tween having something grand to write
and having to write something grand.

Whiffs of Spring
by Craig W. Steele

Anything is possible in January after the seed catalogues arrive,
each one sowing its own whiffs of spring from seasonally-impregnated pages,
where every fruit and vegetable appears perfectly perfect.
Channeling the ecstasy stoked by these harbingers of succulent harvest,
I imagine...
seeding in a greening spring,
weeding in a deepening summer,
reaping in a fleeting fall, all the while oblivious to the blizzards raging just beyond my frosted windows,
until I must assuage those surrogates of Ceres,
and dig the dirt from beneath my nails.

Cadence
Sandy Rafter

pops and tops
are words that swing for me, though I could sink
with lops and drops,
no meaning to my choice except the sound,
so, I wonder
if one, not the other, is my mood,
deliberate choice, or a remembered sound from womb
when he was pulsing for her flesh
and I shot forth a lilt of life
to tingle mingle with their flow?
Or, is my script of glum or gay
derived from images in caves
or healer’s charms and potions meant to save,
or did I read too much of Tennyson in school?
I suppose we’ll never know the why of quirk and quack,
but I am sure the tempo I select in all of these is the one swaying and surging with the sex.
Pen name
Marshall J. Cook

I once got a phone call from a man who said he was the fiction editor at *Hustler*. He had seen my short story in one of the literary magazines and wondered if I’d be interested in writing one for his magazine. (I know. *Hustler* has a fiction editor? And he reads literary magazines??) There would have to be certain requirements, certain necessary elements, the kind of thing you’d never find in any of my stories. (Write about what you know, Hemingway said, and what you dream about and imagine, I would add.)

He mentioned money.
To me it seemed a lot of money.
The magazines I’d published in till then never mentioned money.

On my way downtown to the store on State Street, the one with the brown paper covering all the windows and the sign that said “Adults only” on the door, I thought about the prospect of writing a story for *Hustler* magazine. I was pretty sure I knew what I would find in it.
I wanted to be sure.
A lot of money, he said, and he had actually asked me to write a story for him.

I would need a *nom de plume* if I wrote for the magazine I thought *Hustler* would be. (You get to choose something that has a fancy French name if you’re a writer, but if you’re a thief, you only get an “alias”?)

Langdon Street (the street where I worked then, between State Street and the lake) or Lowell Hall, (the name of the building I worked in) I would be.
I especially liked the way that last one sounded, reminding me as it did of the old newscaster on the radio. “Lowell Thomas brings you the news.” My mother’s sister, we called her “Petie,” had married a Hall. I had Hall cousins. It was perfect.

I didn’t write the story for *Hustler* magazine. I just kept writing my stories, without the necessary elements, and getting paid in contributors’ copies and joy.

If I’d been a stripper my name should have been Cindy LaPaz. An alias, I guess, given the status of the profession, but a good enough name to be a nom de pole at least.

I made up a baseball team and wrote a novel for them and then another, set in a little Wisconsin town I made up. The Beymer Buffalo is the name of my team. (Beymer is my mother’s maiden name. Her daddy, my granddaddy was a writer. He’s the reason I’m a writer, I think.)

On that team are two bench players, relief pitchers, who get in only when Tommy Lee or one of the other starters falter. They also serve who mostly ride the pine. Still, they proudly wear the uniform of the Beymer Buffalo, and their names are Lowell Hall and Langdon Street.

If I ever write a western, and I just might given my complete lack of marketing savvy, Lowell Hall and his sidekick, Langdon Street, will bring truth and kindness, justice and peace to the Old West.
I Live
Tom Crawford

The news this morning from Santa Fe, cold, very cold, but my teeth are still holding on. They’ll turn 77 in February. Good beginning, too, the light dropping in with a pair of Oregon Juncos, down from the high country. So, the gifts keep on coming. I’m dipping into Emmanuel’s Book about living comfortably in the cosmos. He tells me death is like taking off a tight shoe. I like that. A long life I see pretty much as extended metaphor. Already I can see the black skillet in the kitchen warming up on the stove because the cold has sharpened my appetite. The junco’s at the feeder, are they happy? I’d say so. It’s the parsing out the stars from the bacon that causes most grief.

From Tom’s upcoming collection, The Art of Vanishing

Harbinger Bird
Tom Crawford

Dying’s as close as we get to flying. It's a natural state. With age we lose mass. With no muscles there is nothing to keep us here. Just climbing the stairs is out of the question. The bones head back to hollow. We grow lighter so what we see in the mirror is not so much a smile anymore, but the loss of certainty. The albatross only needs a long run to get air-borne. All this evolution for us, and still no wings.

Our plane breaks up in the sky, and we're shaken out with our heavy luggage like salt and pepper into the blue.

In the Navy, aboard ship, I'd watch for hours, albatross soar over the fan-tail. What we plowed through, they floated over.

We can’s seem to get over our own weight, and with heaven over our heads we still have fewer options than the little sparrow who appears way more contented. The flying buttress after all, was about propping up the too high church walls that otherwise couldn't carry the load. Our frailness, finally, just right, all attachment, air-borne, the bird we were waiting for.

From Caging the Robin: Poems by Tom Crawford, Cedar House Books, 2014
**Humble Pie**  
*Norma J. Sundberg*

I washed his grubby little hands  
and sat him down to eat,  
The table was loaded and over-  
flowing with holiday treat,  
He pushed the meat around the plate  
and played in his mashed potatoes  
He enviously eyed the pumpkin pie  
And ignored the stewed tomatoes.  
He reluctantly ”tried” the stuffing  
and peas then headed for the kitchen  
He left the glorious feast behind'  
While “bread and milk” he's fetchin.

**The Ruby Tree**  
*Bonny Conway*

The white farmhouse hunkers down  
in snow where feral cats roam  
December rustles through trees  
barn cows dream of lush pastures  
red gems adorn bare branches  
measured by a naturalist's eye  
weigh near a hundred carats  
plus feathers

**Uncle Jack**  
*Alan Britt*

I’ve got the uncle to end all uncles,  
not that uncles are on the endangered list,  
but my uncle arose at 3 am,  
while the rest of us dreamed of Diane Demuth  
& chased baseballs in our snuggly REM’s;  
he arose at 3 am to endure 16º  
& two feet of snow blanketing Williamsburg  
Pike  
for the next twelve hours before detouring  
to retrieve his young flock from tap lessons,  
Boy & Cub Scouts, without the slightest  
complaint,  
without a hint of regret,  
& he did this (still does, by the way),  
he did this with a determination  
that only uncles fully understand.  
The rest of us, well, the rest of us  
are the better for it.  
May you, dear reader, in need of an uncle  
to anchor your perilous foundation,  
an uncle willing to donate large chunks  
of himself so that you might thrive,  
well, I hope your good fortune  
includes an uncle like Uncle Jack.
The ‘Wisdom’ of the Internet
True or false?

1) The Declaration of Independence was written on hemp (marijuana) paper.
2) The dot over the letter 'i' is called a 'tittle.'
3) Susan Lucci is the daughter of Phyllis Diller.
4) 315 entries in Webster’s 1996 Dictionary were misspelled.
5) On average, 12 newborns will be given to the wrong parents, daily.
6) Warren Beatty and Shirley MacLaine are brother and sister.
7) A few ounces of chocolate can kill a small-sized dog.
8) Most lipstick contains fish scales.
9) Donald Duck comics were banned from Finland because he doesn't wear pants.
10) Ketchup was sold in the 1830's as medicine.
11) Leonardo Da Vinci could write with one hand and draw with the other at the same time.
12) Because metal was scarce, the Oscars given out during World War II were made of wood.
13) There are no clocks in Las Vegas gambling casinos.
14) There are no words in the dictionary that rhyme with: orange and purple.
15) Leonardo Da Vinci invented scissors.
16) Also, it took him 10 years to paint Mona Lisa's lips.
17) The phrase 'rule of thumb' is derived from an old English law that stated that you couldn't beat your wife with a stick that was wider than your thumb.
18) Celery has negative calories! It takes more calories to eat a piece of celery than the celery has in it to begin with. It's the same with apples.
19) Chewing gum while peeling onions will keep you from crying!
20) The glue on Israeli postage stamps is certified kosher.
21) The Guinness Book of World Records holds the record for being the book most often stolen from Public Libraries.

For answers, check Snopes.com.
I’m an ornery cuss, I gotta admit. I can be as stubborn as your ordinary free-range jackass and just as liable to kick and bite when I take a notion. Folks around here said that was just what was needed to be a sheriff in eastern Montana. And so I was for most of 30 years. I expect it was the best thing for me, too. Didn’t have no money to buy cows or land, so ranchin’ wasn’t in the cards. Probably woulda got myself fired any time I tried workin’ for somebody else. In reality I suspect I got the sheriff job cause folks just couldn’t find nobody else who’d deal with the likes of Rowdy Howell.

Rowdy bullied, beat up, and stole from dang near everybody all over the sagebrush end of Montana for more years than I got body parts. I suspect he probably was involved with killin’ a couple of fellas, too. Never could pin the murders on him, though. Just the sight of ‘im made folks so scared they’d near wet themselves. Had’em buffaloeed, mostly, thinkin’ he was the meanest fella around since that idiot Idi Amin fella.

I wasn’t afraid of him, though. Made me skitterish some, but I wasn’t never scared of him. Especially after the one time I struck the fear of The Almighty in him.

The notion I might kill him took hold and hung with him the rest of his days. A month or so after I got elected for the very first time, he started following my wife, Emma. Givin’ her that mean lookin’ smirk of his, sometimes just laughin’ an sayin’ “Howdy, Ma’am” in that smartass way of his. Tryin’ to get to me, let me know he was boss, I suspect. Rattled Emma sure enough though. Pretty bad, too.

Anyway, I spotted him out on Range Line Road one afternoon and pulled him over. Like most of Adrian County outside of Baxter, it’s a big, empty place where the only things shakin’ in the middle of the day are tumbleweeds and rattlers.

Rowdy had the window of his pickup rolled down and his fat, snarlin wolf-tattooed arm hangin’ over the side. Big smirk on his face like,
Part one

It's been another great year of quality television shows. I stand by my statement that TV has become better than movies in the past five years, and this year brought us some great new shows as well as returning favorites. Here are five of the standouts.

Better Call Saul-

*Breaking Bad* is one of my all time favorite shows. So when it was announced that there was going to be a spinoff series of the character Saul Goodman, first known as Jimmy McGill, I was a bit skeptical. Luckily, *Better Call Saul* is a worthy successor. Bob Odenkirk takes the reins as the leading man very well. I'm glad we get to see where Jimmy started out. Michael McKeen is excellent as his older brother, Chuck, and Jonathan Banks returns as Mike Ehrmantraut. Like *Breaking Bad*, this is a very well crafted show from top notch acting to brilliant writing to beautiful cinematography.

Fargo-

Season one was a great tribute to the Coen Brothers' masterpiece of a movie while being its own incredible show. Season two is even better. Every plot line ties together so smoothly, each character has a purpose, and the mixture of tension and humor is perfection. This season is a true crime epic from the 70s, and it's fascinating to see what each character goes through. Everyone in the cast gives a noteworthy performance.

Doctor Who-

I've been a Whovian for almost a decade, and this season is my favorite since the show came back 10 years ago. Almost every story was divided into two parts, which gives the characters and the stories more room to develop and breathe. Peter Capaldi has become one of the best Doctors. In “Heaven Sent,” he gave one of the best performances, and the episode was one of the show's finest hours. This season also gave Jenna Coleman's Clara a proper send off.

Agent Carter-

Marvel has done a fine job with their films and just as great with their shows, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* and now *Agent Carter*, the better of the two ABC series. Hayley Atwell's Peggy Carter is a great role model for women, not only fighting criminals, but also the sexism of the 1940s. She's just as important to the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Iron Man or Captain America.

Daredevil-

Matt Murdock has been one of my favorite comic book characters for quite some time, and the first Marvel series from Netflix is one of the best entries Marvel has done. Charlie Cox is perfectly cast as Matt Murdock. While the movies are mostly light-hearted fun, this is a dark and gritty series. The single-take hallway fight at the end of the second episode is incredible, and the fact that Daredevil is stumbling by the end of it, out of breath, is a great shot of realism that more comic book properties need. Vincent D'Onofrio as Wilson Fisk is one of the best villains of the Marvel universe; while he is definitely a villain, the series humanizes him.

Next month, Jake gives us the final five.

"The soul of man, left to its own natural level, is a potentially lucid crystal left in darkness. It is perfect in its own nature, but it lacks something that it can only receive from outside and above itself. But when the light shines in it, it becomes in a manner transformed into light and seems to lose its nature in the splendor of a higher nature, the nature of the light that is in it."

Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*
**Swift Take on Books**

**Tom Swift**

**The Visiting Privilege,**

*by Joy Williams*

Man has yet to invent the words to adequately describe the scribblings of Ms. Williams in this dismal collection of short stories. Depressing, deeply depressing, morbidly depressing, so depressing you start looking for a razor blade to cut your wrists to relieve the pain of conceivably being exposed to one more word. Or is she just strange? That depends on what you mean by strange. In an interview she gave once, she remarks that she never told her parents (who loved her very much) that she was pregnant, and when her husband called them to say she had given birth, they didn’t believe him.

This woman knows cruel, and so do her characters, before they die horrible deaths, or all alone, fearing death, drinking themselves to death if they can, giving their children away, abusing and killing cats and dogs, despoiling the environment, everyone they know and some they don’t.

Does that seem a bit strange to you?

These are the scribblings of a nihilist.

I begin to cringe when I see that the next story is about a dog. All stories seem to be about a man and a woman, maybe some children, rarely their own, and perhaps a poor animal. If they’re married, the man and woman despise each other; if they’re not they’re searching for some type of bliss which they do not find. They may well be married but not to each other. A father says when asked about his daughter, “Jane will not have friends. Jane will have husbands, enemies and lawyers.” The future for man and beast is death, hideous death, without friends. Then there is a story of a mother and father who never say a word to each other; it’s the child that’s insane. When it grows up to be a serial killer no one is surprised.

I conclude that these stories are not for the faint of heart. There may be other lessons in some of them, but I lack the courage to find out.

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**Jan Kent is**

**The Word Whisper**

**Sleep reading**

So who could fall asleep in that nightshirt I just saw in a catalog? It has a picture of overloaded bookcases and asserts...

“My Shelves Runneth Over!”

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**In Memory**

**Adolph Schayes**

May 19, 1928 - December 10, 2015

Syracuse Nationals

One of the fifty

I shot baskets, all alone, for hours on the nine foot baskets at Luther Burbank Elementary School. I wore a perfect little hole in each sneaker and then all my socks, practicing my hook shot, right hand and left. When I shot the running hook from the baseline, I was Frank Ramsey, Tommy Gun Heinsohn for the jumper from the corner.

But when I flashed across the lane, took the imaginary pass, pivoted on the asphalt, arm sweeping up and over, launching my hope for just over the rim, I was always ‘Dolph.

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**Your Monthly Does of Irony**

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**Friends of Irony**
Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens
Clarification for non-fans: The first three SW movies are actually episodes 4-6 in the epic saga. The second trio of films, prequels, cover the earlier activities in this alternative universe.

I should preface the review by saying I’m quite jaded by my viewings of episodes I through III of this franchise. Yes, I watched them all in the theater; no, I didn’t dress up as my favorite character. I had to see them no matter what kind of trainwrecks they all turned out to be.

When I saw Star Wars: A New Hope in the theaters at the age of seven, it was life altering. I was transported to another dimension in a way that couldn’t be replicated by any film I view now at the age of 45. My senses now are dulled within and without. I had absolutely no expectations for the first installment of Star Wars, and I was blown away.

I was optimistic from seeing the trailers for Episode 7 – Han and Chewie reunited with the Falcon, a dog fight inside a defunct Star Destroyer, X-wing fighters skimming across the surface of a lake – but the thing is, I had been optimistic after seeing the trailers for the Phantom Menace as well. I had thought Liam Neeson and Ewan McGregor would be fine additions to the Star War mythos. I had looked forward to the tale of Anakin Skywalker’s fall from grace. I reveled in the potential further fleshing out of a universe that I loved, filled with good and evil, ewoks and wookies, Jedi and Sith. I was baffled 15 minutes into episode 1 when I realized that this movie was going to suck.

I’m happy to report that at no point in the new movie did I have that experience. Episode 7 is a much better crafted film than the three prequels combined. If you are uninitiated into the Star Wars universe and everything I’ve said so far is so much word salad, you might just like this film anyway.

It’s the blockbuster of blockbusters if the returns from this weekend and the praise of critics from Rotten Tomatoes are to be believed.

It’s an adventure story that can be enjoyed equally by long-time enthusiasts and people who (blissfully) don’t know who or what a Jar Jar is.

But... there is a but... I don’t feel any movie could ever recapture for me the magic of the original trilogy. I don’t think the fault lies in the current film. My adult mind is very critical, very cynical. I will mostly talk about things I like about the film because it’s harder for me to put into words the things that bothered me (especially without spoilers).

I recommend not seeing the trailers and going to see the film just to experience what everyone is talking about. It’s the movie event of the year, which is saying a lot of a year that also included Jurassic World.

But for any of you who still put episodes 4 through 6 on a pedestal, for any of you who through the grace of generous and indulgent parents actually owned an x-wing fighter and an R2D2, for those of you who viewed the Empire Strikes Back and had to lie down at a bus stop to recover afterwards, you may feel more than one tinge of regret at seeing this film.

Your idols have aged, some less gracefully than others. The script, while good, is not flawless. I love the choice of actors for this film, particularly John Boyega. If you are one of these people (I’m thankful to say own father is not – he loved this film without reservation), be consoled by the knowledge that the squirm-worthy moments are few and fleeting. If you watch this film, you will believe in life on other planets in galaxies far, far away. You will care about little bits of metal called ‘droids.’ You will find out whatever became of the original cast after all these years.

And, even if you are cynical, you will have a moment or two during the playing of the opening credits when the hair on your arms stands on end as you get to witness another Star Wars movie. If you are particularly lucky, you will get to see it with most of your family. (Oh, Lily, so many things I can’t wait to introduce you to when you are older.)
As usual, the boys at the round table at the Dime-a-Cup Cafe are solving the world’s problems, while looking out the window at their passing minions, as is their wont. Today’s category, loosely defined, which is the only way you can define their discursive and digressive but highly democratic discussions, was The Academy Awards. Answers never get stated as a question.

“Those movie stars and rock singers, they got the right idear,” Ed “Fast Eddie” Filson observes, just to get the old conversational ball bouncing.

“What ‘idear’ is that?” Walter “Walt” Watermane, Sr., still known as Hisonor the Mayor even though he hasn’t been mayor in 15 years, seeks clarification. He has assigned himself the thankless and endless task of trying to keep the boys’ train of thought from plowing into the ship of statement.


“Until that guy, what’s-his-face, the guy that turned into a blimp and played the Godfather, got his finger caught in the pie, so to say.” LeRoy “Push ‘Em Up” Pettinger notes.

“What guy is that, Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater?” Boomer queries.

“You mean Little Jack Homer, and it was his thumb, not his finger,” Morris “Morris” Fleishner corrects.

“Horner!” Hisonor explodes.

“Horner in the Court!” Pettinger hoots.

“Could you gentlemen please keep it down? I’m getting complaints from the paying customers.” Billie Joe Ferkin Smith, the one who made an honest man of Tommy Lee Smith, who’d had the audacity to let a woman pitch for their beloved Beymer Buffalo, makes the rounds with the grounds, filling the old boys’ cups.

It being mid-morning, the Blight of the Round Table constitute the only alleged customers in the joint. They’d been nursing those dimes for an hour and forty.

“Thank you, darlin’,” Eddie coos as Billie Joe pauses to refresh him.

“Is that why they call you ‘Fast Eddie’?” she queries flirtatiously. “Because you’re such a rogue?”

“If ‘rogue’ means ‘moron,’ you called it right there, Sister,” Boomer inserts.

“Naw!” Fleishner amends the motion. “We call him that because of that guy in that movie.”

“What movie is that?” Billie Joe innocently inquires. She likes to stir the pot while she fills the cups.

“You know. The Husker!” Boomer booms.

“That’s Hustler, you idiot,” Eddie retorts. “He shot pool. He didn’t shuck corn!”

“Brando! That was the guy,” Hisonor digresses.

“Naw. Bondo wasn’t in The Husker,” Boomer serves. “That was Old Blue Eyes,”

“Si-notrag wasn’t in The Hustler, either,” Eddie returns service. “Sinatra was in From Here to Infirmary, with that lady.”

The game is afoot. Her job here done, Billie Joe returns to the kitchen to resume prepping for the noon rush.

“What lady was that?”

“You know. That Ava Gabor. She was really something in the old bood-where.”

In the where-where.”

The polylog peters out, next page
“You know. Between the sheets.”
“You’re still wrong. Sinatra played a sailor with that other guy, Emmett Kelly.”
“That Kelly wasn’t no clown, birdbrain. He was a song and prance man.”
“Will you clowns shut up?” Hisonor asks rhetorically. “It was Brando who played the Godfather.”
“By gee, you’re right,” Eddie marvels.
“Bondo’s the one got his finger stuck in the pie with that lady, what’s her face, and had to pay her patramony.”
“What-a-mony?”
“You know, like alimony, only they was just pals.”
“And then they all started signing those prenuptial agreements, and now you can’t get away with nothing no more.”
“Nothing is exactly what you do get away with.”
“Sashay Middlefinger. That fake Indian. She was the lady what sideswiped Bondo the blimp.”
“What a world. Now even that George Cooney gets married.”
“Who?”
“You know, Rosemary’s kid.”
“The Rosemary what had the devil’s baby?”
Hisonor lets out a loud groan and stands up, shaking his jowly head. “That’s all I can take at one sitting,” he opines.
And with that, the meeting, which had never been properly called to disorder but had just fallen into it naturally, is adjourned.

Sally Mander, the dedicated herpetologist, slammed the door behind her and dropped onto her sofa. There was a serpent in her romantic Garden of Eden. Al Oaf had been cheating on Sally with another woman, that hussy Ellie Gance, the socialite.

Why was Al treating me so badly, Sally wondered. She’d thought Al had been joking when he said he could resist anything but temptation.

It was so unfair. After all, someone who loved snakes and salamanders couldn’t be all bad. She had made the study of reptiles her life and loved everything about herpetology.

She began pacing the floor, thinking of ways to get even with the deceitful duo. Give them each a rattlesnake wrapped as a present. When they opened the package, zap, they get bitten! Why not get rid of that hussy only? Then she’d have Al to herself again. No, they’d both have to go.

Why was Sally thinking such frightening thoughts? She’d forget her broken heart by doing good for others. She’d enter a convent and become a teaching sister. Yes, Sister Sally.

The telephone jolted her. She picked up the receiver, still rapt in her daydream. “Hello, this is Sister – ah - Sally speaking.”

“Please don’t hang up. It’s Ellie.”
Sally fumed. Of all the nerve!
“I owe you an explanation and an apology, too. We both love Al Oaf. He claims that he cares for both of us, so...”

“Are you suggesting what I think you’re suggesting?”

“We both date him. What do you think, Sally?”
Sally frowned. Plans for the sisterhood would have to be abandoned, but... “Yes,” she said.

For her, half Al Oaf was better than Nun.
E.I. CONTEST DEPARTMENT

Tragic figures in life and literature

John Swift, E.I. book reviewer

Willing to do just about anything to avoid working on my novel, I dreamed up a “name your tragic figure” contest for E.I readers. To get the ball rolling, I will take a crack at defining terms and provide a few examples that can be measured for conformity to the definition. I won’t even pretend that this will be more than an introduction to the subject and not a complete survey. Send your nomination to Coach with, of course, your nominating speech.

Paraphrasing Aristotle: “Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious and having magnitude, complete in itself, in a dramatic, not a narrative form, with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of emotions.” Aristotle named four species of tragedy. Here we consider mostly a tragedy of character where, because of his/her tragic flaw, the character goes from happiness to misery, evoking pity and fear.

In literature, the tragic flaw is often discontent, although Shakespeare defined four others. Aristotle’s heroes or protagonists were flawless until they became carried away by passion or some ill-advised attempt to escape their fate ordained by the gods. They also had a quality of goodness that usually meant nobility and maybe more than that if they were gods.

But there is discontent and then there is tragic discontent; that’s what we’re shooting for here.

Tragic discontent is the willingness to exchange all one has in life for the promise of forbidden fruit. Most of us have been temporarily afflicted by discontent, fewer by tragic discontent. The everyday version can be temporarily assuaged by a better house, a better car, a better lifestyle, more furniture, more clothes. My pastor says that if you’re not content with what you have you won’t be content with what you get when you get it.

So let’s look at: Adam and Eve, Anne Boleyn, Anna Karenina, and Madame Bovary, weighed on Aristotle’s scale. I could have included the scullery maid from an 18th century novel, but her fall from grace would have never impressed Aristotle to the extent of Anna Karenina’s, although it probably made quite an impression on the scullery maid.

Sometimes a catalyst is required to raise the notion of discontent in the protagonist’s mind to where his/her current situation is so intolerable as to be almost worthless. Then reaching for the forbidden fruit may be seen as a sensible decision. For Adam and Eve, this catalyst took two sentences from the serpent, for Anna Karenina, about 100 pages of courting and propositioning from Count Vronsky. For poor Anne Boleyn, the discontent came from her husband, took years, and cost Anne her head. Emma Rouault Bovary was born discontented, a condition which did not improve with age.

Ultimately, of course, everyone dies, although Adam and Eve might have put together a very long run before their long, long fall from grace. The fact that the Lord let them live takes them out of consideration. It may be said that Anna, Anne, and Emma died pretty much in their prime, tragedies all, but I’m guessing than Anna would have won Aristotle’s laurel wreath. She could nearly pass for nobility, certainly an aristocrat. Emma, the farmer’s daughter and wife of a poor doctor, living on the margins of society, would not have ranked very high on the goodness scale, and although Anne was actually royalty, she was very far from being a goddess, and her tragic end was not due to any flaw of her own.

So Anna’s the greatest tragic figure ever? You be the judge. Send your entries to the Coach (marshall.cook@wisc.edu), who will make a final selection.
Go to Kohl’s, see the world

Just finished reading *EI* 74. Such a lot of great reading. Family picture of Gramma, Grandpa, and Lily, very special. WOW and DOUBLE WOW on "All school mass"... Here is a little fun to share with you. My neighbor told me she knows I like to write, said that I should travel, broaden my horizons. Have something to inspire me. Told me she went to Egypt, saw the pyramids (litter and rubble around the grounds). Said she rode on top of a camel (it spit on her). She brought me back a picture on papyrus. Well, I took to heart what she said to me. The next day I got in the car and drove all the way to Kohl’s big sale. Bought 100% Egyptian cotton sheets, a framed picture of the pyramids in the picture department, minus litter around them, a story book about Xmas with baby Jesus and camels, no spitting allowed, and a gold bracelet that wound around my wrist like an asp. In the checkout lane where I waited, there was a cart full of lotions and balms. I spotted a bottle of Dead Sea salts; I had to buy them. She was right, you gotta get out and take trips. Yep, Kohl’s is my Egypt, right around the corner from home. I also bought a sweater with a tree full of pretty red cardinals on the bare branches. When I got home, the sweater inspired me to write a poem. Love and Merry Xmas to all.

Bonny Conway

See Bonny’s poem, “The Ruby Tree,” page 16

Readers weight in on last issue

Wonderful photo with Lily, and it was nice to see Marisela’s piece included in this issue.

Emily Auerbach,
founder and director,
UW-Madison Odyssey Project

Loved the new issue of *Extra Innings* and want to indicate my delight with the new format - it seems easier to read than before. I also like the typography change (am a fan of the older style look). And the monthly photo of the inimitable Lily (who's getting to be quite the young lady) was only made better by the addition of Gram Ellen and Coach in the photo!!

Pat Laux

What a good way to begin my day! I think this is the time I will have the whole thing printed out... so I can snuggle in my chair with a blanket on my legs, a cup of hot chocolate by my side... and just read, read, read the whole thing like I used to do. Much love and blessings.

Pat Goetz

Another great job. Kickass Louie, the loudmouthed dog who sounds off almost daily on Facebook, says you need to think seriously of making a career out of words.

Bill Stokes
Coach’s Briefs and Blurbs

Give a listen to Coach and Rex

With the new year comes a new weekly radio show, Coach’s “Writers and Their Words,” which will make its debut on Tuesday, January 12 at 9 a.m. on Sun Prairie, Wisconsin’s brand new radio station, 103.5 FM, the SUN.

Coach joins novelist and E.I. columnist Rex Owens, who has his own interview show on the first Monday of each month, also at 9 a.m. (See Rex’s column, page five this issue, for his report on the first show.)

Coach’s call-in show (where he’ll go by his alias, Marshall Cook) will feature a book, author, or theme each week, a word of the week, a word about words, and other regular features.

If you happen to be outside the listening area (I am, and I live in Madison, 25 miles away), you can access the show by computer at http://www.sunprairiemediacenter.com/. On the menu line at the top of the page, on the far left, you’ll see a little arrow pointing straight up. Click on the arrow, and in a moment the current broadcast will stream through your computer.

There’s also an app for that, which you can download if you’re app savvy. Past shows will also be archived in case you miss one.

To participate in either Rex’s or Coach’s show, call 608-825-0930 during the broadcast, and if your host can figure out which button to push, you’ll be on the air joining the discussion.

For the first show, Coach plans a discussion of Nellie Harper Lee’s American classic, To Kill a Mockingbird, and its controversial prequel, Go Set a Watchman. (See Coach’s and Madonna Dries Christensen’s takes on the book in the September, 2015 issue and Rex’s review in the October issue.

Subscribers will be getting an email prompt to remind you about the show a couple of days before the launch.

Doc Adams revealed

Just minutes after I sent out the email announcement of the December issue, challenging you to identify our team doctor, Galen Adams, Madonna Dries Christensen responded with the right answer. That’s “Doc Adams” from the old Gunsmoke western.

Minutes later, Sarah Phelan also checked in by email, adding the information that the great character actor Milburn Stone played the part during the entire 20 year, 635 episode run of the show on television.

FYI, another great character actor, Howard McNear, voiced the role for the nine year run on the radio (where the Doc was named Charles Adams, but everybody still just called him ‘Doc’).

Mary Ramey, Sandy Rafter, Mary Post, Den Adler, Bill Scanlon, Tory Latham, Janet Taliaferro, and Andrea Lozinsky Schoenthal also either knew or took the time to find out who the good doctor actually was (and always will be in reruns it seems).

Special kudos to John Swift for being wrong—but for suggesting another wonderful film doctor for our growing medical staff.

Esther publishes monster tale

Pete Kahle, publisher of the horror press Bloodshot Books, has released his first anthology titled, Not Your Average Monster! E.I. columnist Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks’ tale, “Mekoomweso’s Revenants,” is one of 22 chosen from 350+ submissions worldwide.

Sequels we’ll never see

It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown II: Snoopy’s Revenge

Thanks to Ray Hamel for derailing my mind onto this side track.

More bubbling blurbs, next page
Stories and poems wanted
Kid’s Imagination Train (KIT) magazine is sponsoring its 2nd Annual Spring writing contest. The winner will receive $100, and the winning story or poem will be published in the May, 2016 issue of KIT. All submissions must be received by March 15, 2016. For contest guidelines, go to www.kidsimaginationtrain.com and click on Contest.

How to know if you’re getting old
Take this simple test by picking the example that would best fit you.
1) You read that Dick Van Dyke just turned 90, and your first thought is, “He can’t possibly be that old!”
2) You read that Steve Buscemi is 58, and your first thought is, “He can’t possibly be that old!”
3) You read that Taylor Swift just turned 26, and your first thought is, “She’s really getting old!”

How to score:
If you picked #1, you’re OLD!
If you picked #2, you’re getting up there, pardner.
If you picked #3, you’re barely old enough to be reading this newsletter.

Thanks Dept
Hail to the booksellers
To the great independent booksellers of our land, and especially to Joanne Berg and Mystery to Me right here in Madison, to Ardis Francoeur and Toad Hall Bookstore in Rockport, MA, and to bullmoose.com in Portland, ME, to motor101, to Books and a Mission, Colorado Springs, CO, and all the other way-smaller-than-Amazon purveyors of fine used books by mail.

Sure Sign of the Apocalypse
First Amendment Department
Let the punishment fit the crime
Dateline: Bangkok
Thailand has a law making it a crime to insult the monarchy.

As reported by Thomas Fuller in the New York Times, officials recently hauled a factory worker named Thanakorn Siripaiboon out of his home and directly to jail for making a “sarcastic remark”-- about the king’s dog.

King Blumibol Adulyadej (take that, spellcheck) does not take kindly when someone speaks (or in this case posts) something unkind about his dog Tongdaeng, aka “Cooper.”

The royal dog is of mixed heritage, a good sized critter whom the king rescued from an alley years ago. He (the king, not the dog) wrote a best-selling book about her in 2002. King Adulyadej, 88, who is currently ailing in a Bangkok hospital, wrote that his buddy is “a respectful dog with good manners. ...She would always sit lower than the king.”

The Thai news media prudently refer to her as “khun,” which roughly translates to “ma’am.”

If found guilty, Mr. Thanakorn could fact up to 37 years in prison.

Yes, yes. Lily’s coming. But I’ve gotta give the cast a curtain call first, don’t I?...
Extra Innings
“In lumine tuo videbimus lumen!”

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Special by-invitation writers
Lisa Partee
Tamara Thompson Moore
Kelly Dixon
Karina Gomez
Karina Herrejon
Shaimaa Ahmed
Mai Neng Thao
Katia Robinson
Nickitia Cooper
Sandy Viney

All-Star Columnists
Madonna Dries Christensen,
Rex Owens,
Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks,
Ron Hevey,
Tom Hicks,
Sandy Rafter,
and Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer.

Reviewers
Books: John Swift
TV: Jacob McLaughlin
Movies: Scud Farcus, Jr.

Humorologists
Coach
Ed Pahnke

Poets
Sandy Rafter,
Tom Crawford,
Alan Britt,
Norma Sundberg
Bonny Conway,
Marshall J. Cook,
and The Writer’s Poet, Craig W. Steele

Tale Weaver
Larry Tobin

Staff Sage:
Buck O’Neil

Staff neptis:
Lily

Team doctors:
Galen Adams
Patch Adams
Archie Graham

Staff Statistician
Jack “Warning Track” Walsh

Internet Gleaners
Mary Callahan, Steve Born,
Larry Tobin

Web Weaver
Kerrie Jean-Louis Osborne

The Masked Man
Brace Beemer

Stuntman
Yakima Canutt

Creative director
S. Dardanelles

Assistant circulation director, midwest division
Norma “Sassy” Sundberg

Assistant circulation director, for New Hampshire
Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks

Coach-in-Chief:
Marshall J. Cook

...who distributes Extra Innings monthly to an open enrollment mailing list. Coach welcomes your submissions. All copyrights remain with the author after publication. To submit or to get on the mailing list, email Coach at: marshall.cook@wisc.edu

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

Back issues available at: www.continuingstudies.wisc.edu/writing/extra-innings

and now, at last...
Your holiday moment with Coach and Lily

photo by GramEllie