FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

TOM HICKS

Thanks and good bye

I’ve had as many goodbyes in my life as hellos.

My formative years were spent as a victim in an alcoholic’s dysfunctional family. I left them after my 16th birthday and began an adventure that became my life.

Hitchhiking on highways was a common way to travel then. Mass shootings by crazy people were unheard of, so motorists weren’t frightened to give a kid a lift. The super highways, toll roads, and expressways were still in the process of construction, and communication was confined to the post office or a pay phone. There wasn’t a national missing person network either. The only photos on milk cartons back then were of cows. So a young adventurer was free to roam without question or interference from the police.

And so, after penning a note of my pain and disappointment, I left my home and family in search of a better life.

I had a little money saved from my job at the Go-Kart track, so I bought a cowboy hat, a pair of boots, and a Levi jacket on my way out of the city. I wore this disguise to pique the interest of truckers or tourists who were traveling west.

I met and traveled with kind people who worried for me. Some bought me meals, and others would give me a few bucks after our journey together ended. They would pull over to the side of the road, wish me good luck, and hand me the money with a parental worried smile. “You be careful out there,” they would say.

Some offered me work. I would help them out for room and board plus a few dollars. I worked on truck farms, bussed tables and washed dishes in small dinners. In Montana, I mixed paints and held a ladder for a sign painter named Sandy, who painted with his right hand while sipping whiskey from a pint bottle in his left. He was an amazing artist. I had to leave him because we would argue about my wages. He continually forgot that I worked for him and never remembered my name.

My best job was on a small ranch in Oregon. I was there for months. The people who worked for me treated me as one of their family and had no idea of how special they were or how they had saved me.

I never told them of how I would lie on my bunk before sleep wishing that they would adopt me. I felt like I was loved for just being me and began to develop confidence in who I was. I could make something of myself, something other than a run-away drifter. I had passed my 17th birthday when I left them.

I’m not good at staying in touch with people I leave behind, probably because it became a habit. I would spend a short time with them and couldn’t share addresses or phone numbers because I didn’t have them. When we parted, it was forever. To feel sad at the end of our time together, or to wish I could continue to be with them wasn’t possible. I didn’t belong to anyone but myself.

My travels began so long ago. I’m old. I’m sick. I’m dying. So I guess this is the appropriate time for an old man to think back through his life. To feel sorry for mistakes, but also to feel grateful to the people who have made the fabric that wove my life. The people I said hello and goodbye to.

So I want to tell them now, those people who enlightened me, who taught me, who made me feel valuable, the people who saved me.

Thanks for the lift.

Coach adds: Tom’s a dear friend. He posts his essays at http://extraterrestrialvisitor.com/. While you’re there, check out his art gallery. You’ll never see its like anywhere else.
Write-wise, how childlike are you? Not child-ish; not prone to whining or tantrums; rather, do you still enjoy swishing toes in mud, catching snowflakes on your tongue, and dearly hope unicorns or dragons roam the woods? Do you read “kid” poetry for pleasure, loving the four w’s named above? Kids loathe platitudes, while fresh words and ideas stir imagination. I wrote this three line “un-haiku” to recite to my pair when small, and they adored it, especially if I poked them!

Skin, skin, lovely skin
Keeps the outsides out
And the insides in!

On a deeper note, my minister’s wife asked me to put together a children’s collection to raise funds for a church project. The following piece provided the book’s title and is the opening poem:

**SUNDAYS, SUN DAYS**

Sundays are Sun Days that shine with the Lord;
Sundays are Sing days. We’re traveling toward
Our Heavenly Father, being here on this earth
For just a brief time-frame before new re-birth,
While if I get wiggly from sitting quite still
I try not to show it, but seek out His will.
Yet a window-view beckons; outside a white birch
Is bending down toward us in our little church,
But soon limbs uplifted, she seems to give prayer
As if she feels Heaven and longs to be there.

That’s as preachy as I get, but whatever the subject, young people want to be entertained. I always strive for the magic four “W” qualities. Poems for adults may be quite different—serious or philosophical, but what they should never be is dull. A dull poem is like a blunt knife; frankly, it can’t “cut the mustard.” The following piece of mine captures a childhood memory with only a slight nod to religion.

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**FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS**

**ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS**

**Pleasing children: wit, whimsy, wallop, and wonder**

PRISM RAINBOWS

We set prisms in our windows to catch the winter light
So as sun sinks the colors shift in glory left to right
And make a brilliant picture show until the fall of night.
My brother claims the largest one is some enchanted king
While all the lesser rainbows their ribboned tribute bring
By billowing through tides of air with magic taking wing.
If Sister mentions peacocks and daydreams butterflies
Envisioning far marvel-worlds with multi-hued bright skies,
Our Mom calls rainbows wishes God’s angels tied and dyed.

I see imagination as poetry’s Queen and skill as King. But one also needs to recall childhood in detail; In my case, I recall country memories: forts, tree houses, secret clubs, feuds, and weird happenings—like the night a flying squirrel fell down our chimney (no fire lit, luckily) or the storm-night a snake coiled under our record-player turntable. (That dates me!)

Houdina, our predatory Siamese, caught the creature and loosed it in the living room. Slinky immediately slid to safety and wound tight-- quite impossible to pry loose without destroying the machine. Cat and hidden (but vocal) serpent hissed a hideous duet at each other while Mom perched atop the sofa, dithering, her feet well-tucked up. Dad, however, with great aplomb, calmly carried the record player outside, and the snake--like the storm itself come morning--had departed, with no real harm done. For years I pondered how to capture this odd incident and finally wrote the following sonnet-in-couplets which turned out to be not for children at all, and not about the snake or cat either, but advice for poets instead.

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II

FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS

ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS

Pleasing children: wit, whimsy, wallop, and wonder
WRITING RIGHT
Some wit and whimsy, wallop and wonder:
These are needed to give Verse its thunder.
Yes, rough draft comes first; all slap-and-dash
Till the whole gleams bright as a lightning flash.
No one can predict where ideas will go--
Like runaway horses, they drag you so
You can’t comprehend what place you’ll end
For it may be far-off; quite “round the bend.”
If a draft’s weak and you long to demolish
Loose words spilled forth, next you must polish!
A great part of writing is how to discern
What can be jettisoned. In time you’ll learn
With each poem perfected, what passes the test,
Thus keeping what’s good, then tossing the rest.

Poor Houdina! Historically her namesake,
magician Houdini, escaped the tightest bonds
whereas cat-Houdina couldn’t pry loose a little
garter snake! I might not believe the turntable tale
(in which the “tables were turned” indeed, since
snake escaped) had I not been there to witness.
Still, however we manage our subjects, writers
make readers suspend disbelief. Writing vividly
and credibly is a perpetual challenge, no matter
what age you--or your readership--may be.
Therefore, jot down ideas and strange, seemingly
impossible happenings. Clip prompts plus use
them. Recall the funniest, spookiest, oddest things
and write them right!---Right? Write!

ESTHER’S NEWS:
Esther has sold two story-length narrative poems
to these horror anthologies: “Death in a high
place” to a mummy anthology; CANOPIC JARS:
TALES OF MUMMIES AND MUMMIFICATION,
and “Behind the cellar door” to a print anthology;
CELLAR DOOR: Beautiful Words, Terrible Tales.

Extra
Innings #49
“Semper ubi sub ubi”

Madison, Wisconsin   November, 2013
This month’s All-Star features by:
Tom Hicks, Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks,
Madonna Dries Christensen, Rex Owens,
Jake McLaughlin, Ron Hevey,
and Den Adler
Poetry from:
Sandra Rafter, Norma Sundberg,
Bill Spevacek, and Craig W. Steele
Doggerel by Dick Mallard
and the further adventures of
Liliana Lenore Cook
Web Weaver: Kerrie Louis
Internetter: Steve Born
The Masked Man: Brace Beemer
Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook
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Next Deadline:
Wednesday,
November 20, 2013
Wish I'd Said That! (part one)

America is the only country where a significant proportion of the population believes that professional wrestling is real but the moon landing was faked.
~ David Letterman
*****

After the game, the King and the pawn go into the same box.
~ Italian proverb
*****

Men are like linoleum floors. Lay 'em right and you can walk all over them for 30 years.
~ Betsy Salkind
*****

The only reason that they say, 'Women and children first' is to test the strength of the lifeboats.
~ Jean Kerr
*****

I've been married to a communist and a fascist, and neither would take out the garbage.
~ Zsa Zsa Gabor
*****

You know you're a redneck if your home has wheels and your car doesn't.
~ Jeff Foxworthy
*****

When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife.
~ Prince Philip
*****

A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kickboxing.
~ Emo Philips.
*****

Wood burns faster when you have to cut and chop it yourself.
~ Harrison Ford
*****

The best cure for sea sickness is to sit under a tree.
~ Spike Milligan
*****

Lawyers believe that a man is innocent until proven broke.
~ Robin Hall
*****

Kill one man and you're a murderer, kill a million and you're a conqueror.
~ Jean Rostand.
MEANDERING WITH MADONNA
MADONNA DRIES CHRISTENSEN

On land and sea

Some stories fall into my hands but are best told by someone else. In this tale the narrator is my husband, a 1950s Navy veteran who unknowingly became a medium between the past and present lives of two World War II veterans.

My brother-in-law’s brother Lowell served in the Army in World War II. He was badly wounded in the invasion of Southern France and was awarded a Purple Heart.

My brother Wayne was in the Navy and served on landing crafts in the invasions of North Africa, Sicily, Anzio, and Southern France.

He was 12 years my senior, so I was a mere boy when he left for the war. During a summer visit to Lowell’s Iowa farm, he and I retreated to the barn while the women chatted in the house. At one point, aided by two canes, Lowell hobbled his lanky frame toward a dusty shelf and lowered the volume on a vintage radio. He said that the radio had played for decades; he never turned it off.

I don’t recall who initiated the conversation about the war, but there in the quiet countryside, Lowell recounted the day of his wounding. Badly injured, he crawled to cover in the brush and lay on his back, supported by a small tree. From there, he watched a single Luftwaffe attack plane circle and bomb an Allied landing craft—before the plane was shot down.

Later, at my brother’s Dakota farm, I began telling Lowell’s story to Wayne. The two men did not know each other. Midway through, Wayne interrupted with, “That’s right; and then...”

Lowell Reiners at the 2003 dedication of a World War II Memorial in Sibley, Iowa.
Photo by Jean Reiners Johnson

I remained speechless while Wayne told the same story Lowell had told, from a different point of view. During the invasion, Wayne had stood double watches on his landing craft, getting troops to the beachhead. The captain ordered him to another ship for rest. The ship Wayne had been on then left for the beach, where it unloaded troops. As it pulled away from the beach, a single circling Luftwaffe attack plane dropped a bomb on the ship. The crew managed to steer the ship out of the landing zones before it sank. All Wayne’s shipmates were lost.

Lowell was hospitalized in Italy. Wayne went on to serve in the Pacific Theatre from Guam to the Philippines. Except for this story, and the route through which it emerged that day on the farm, Wayne never talked to me about the war.

There are confluences in life that are inexplicable, but this one raises the hair on the back of one’s neck.
The book takes shape

This past Monday I took one giant leap closer to releasing my novel, *Murphy’s Troubles*, on Amazon. I had a telephone conference with my design team at Create Space (the publishing arm of Amazon). I panicked when my manuscript file, converted to book format, came in at 501 pages. I attempted to change the formatting and physical dimensions of the book (called trim size) to reduce the page count. It became clear that I had stumbled into the realm of graphic design experts and was lost.

For $349 I purchased the Create Space interior design package. They sent me a document with recommendations for trim size, body copy font, accent font, and fleuron (that squiggly thing separating major paragraph breaks within a chapter). Before purchasing the package, I was asked three times if I would like to try to do the interior design myself. I appreciated not having a hard sell, but I knew I needed help.

My graphic designer, Anna, led me through a series of questions to make the decisions that will shape the physical book. I didn’t hesitate to ask for recommendations. First choice – trim size. I chose 8.5 x 5.5. Anna recommended 8 x 5 because it was more common for my genre. That size would result in a 330 page book, perfect.

I reviewed the various font options with my cover designer because I trust his judgment in the visual appearance of the book. We chose Mercury for the body copy font (interior paragraph font), Charlemagne for the accent font (chapter headings), and a simple fleuron. Next I was asked if I wanted right page chapters. That means each new chapter would always begin on a right hand page. At first I thought that was a good idea. However, Anna pointed out that could add 30 pages to the total page count. I didn’t want to do that, and she explained that most fiction books don’t have right page chapters.

Finally, we reviewed the image size of my book cover. When I uploaded the cover file several months ago we guessed at the trim size. We downsized the book so now the image needs to be adjusted. I notified my cover designer and will have a properly sized image in about a week.

With all these decisions behind me the book seems much more real because it’s taking on physical shape in the real world. I was sent an electronic proof in just five days, and the hard copy proof is in the mail winging its way to me.

I was reluctant to look at the digital proof. I don’t know why. I don’t have a reason. Of course, my wife wasn’t able to accept my lack of courage and stood behind me while I opened the file one Friday evening. It was there. It was real. Instantly, I noticed two things I wanted changed. First, the fleuron was placed under each chapter heading, which looked bad. Even worse, my name was on the top of all left hand pages. I never asked for that and it looks, well, horrible and ostentatious. That’s why I didn’t want to look at the digital proof. I would start to make changes, worry, and not sleep. I didn’t sleep Friday night either wondering what the physical proof was going to look like. I’m allowed up to 200 changes, but I don’t know how they are counted. Does removing the fleuron for each chapter count as one or each occurrence, 32; the name removal would be worse. So now I’m in that hand wringing, sleep deprived place.

It will all turn out, I know it will.

If all goes as planned *Murphy’s Troubles* should be launched by November 30th and available on Amazon by December 30th. The journey will then take a new route. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share how one person went from a laid-off administrator in 2009 to an independent published novelist in 2013. I guess you really can do anything in America, and I’m a flaming liberal!
We are here on earth to do good unto others. What the others are here for, I have no idea.
~ W.H. Auden

If life were fair, Elvis would still be alive today and all the impersonators would be dead.
~ Johnny Carson

Home cooking: Where many a man thinks his wife is.
~ Jimmy Durante

As I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind - every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder.
~ John Glenn

If toast always lands butter-side down and cats always land on their feet, what happens if you strap toast on the back of a cat?
~ Steven Wright

The first piece of luggage on the carousel never belongs to anyone.
~ George Roberts

If God had intended us to fly, he would have made it easier to get to the airport.
~ Jonathan Winters

I have kleptomania, but when it gets bad, I take something for it.
~ Robert Benchley
I'm a sucker for great, fun, smart sci-fi, which is why Doctor Who is my favorite sci-fi series ever. On November 23rd, it will celebrate its 50th anniversary, and even after all this time, this series manages to keep things fresh and fun. As a long time Whovian, I thought I'd pay tribute.

The Doctor is a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey. He is the last of the Time Lords, a race of time traveling aliens. He travels in a time machine shaped like a police box. The name of it is the TARDIS, which stands for Time And Relative Dimension In Space. He usually travels with a companion or two. Whenever the Doctor's body is old or mortally wounded, he regenerates into a new body (which is why multiple actors have played the role). Each actor is able to bring something new to the Doctor's personality.

Usually a fan's favorite Doctor is the first actor they saw play him. For me, it was David Tennant, the tenth Doctor. I saw a repeat of an episode, when they were still airing them on the Sci-Fi Channel. He was facing the Cybermen, one of his greatest and classic foes. Immediately I was hooked. Tennant managed to balance the seriousness and adventurous, fun qualities of the Doctor so well.

After Tennant left the series, it was hard for me to watch the episodes with Matt Smith, but about a year later, I watched Smith and thought he was great as well. If you are new to the series, perhaps start with the current series, which started in 2005 with Christopher Eccleston as the ninth Doctor. While he only was in one season, Eccleston was fantastic in the role. It's a good place to start, especially if you want to catch up to the current season.

Recently decided to start watching the series from the beginning with William Hartnell as the first Doctor. You can find the early episodes online. The main difference between the show when it first started and the show now is how long one story takes to tell. With the first Doctor, there were three to five parts per episode, while the current series will have two parts at most. Also the effects have obviously evolved.

The monsters and villains help make the show so memorable. My personal favorite are the Daleks, the first enemies on the series, and the Cybermen, who are genuinely creepy at times because of their blank faces. They plot to make any living thing a cold, lifeless robot.

The new series has also created two very memorable and creepy monsters, the first being the Weeping Angels. At first glance, they don't seem so scary. They look like the statues of angels with faces covered by their hands, but if you turn your back on them, you are totally vulnerable to them. Once you turn around, they are right next to you, their faces now exposed with terrifying expressions, and if you blink, you're dead.

Then in the second season of Matt Smith's, we were introduced to the Silence, an eerie alien species that you forget you ever saw right after you turn your back on them.

The Doctor is the ultimate hero, who battles his enemies with wits and has a great love for his friends and companions. He's always ready for adventure and discovery of new places in time and space. From William Hartnell to Matt Smith, each incarnation of the Doctor makes me love the character more.

So if you haven't stepped into the TARDIS yet and taken a journey with the Doctor, I suggest you get started, especially if you are a fan of a great, fun sci-fi adventure. Happy 50th Anniversary, Doctor Who!
I was surprised to see Carson Gulley, 1950s Madison’s top chef, come to our door with Dad. Our East Side neighborhood wasn’t much into gourmet cuisine; however, Carson Gulley had more on his platter than cooking.

Gulley was a TV personality, better known in town than Mayor Nestigen and in a league with Roundy. 1950s TV entertainment consisted of a test pattern from late evening well into the next morning, followed by local shows moving into prime time after supper where the biggies like Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, and Carl Reiner and their cohorts figured out how to entertain Americans on this new medium.

**Before chefs went on TV, before Julia Child became The French Chef, Carson Gulley had the top local show in Madison.**

If the name Carson Gulley rings a bell, you’ll undoubtedly read on, fondly reliving earlier days. If not, give it another paragraph or two to gain a feel for the Mojo of a 1950s Madison pop star and artist.

Carson’s official job before TV was head chef for the University of Wisconsin Van Hise Refectory from 1927 to 1954. He had learned cooking back home in Arkansas and, as a young man on the road in 1926, he was working at a resort restaurant near Tomahawk when D. L. Halvorsen, director of the UW residence halls, tasted his cooking and prevailed upon him to come to Madison. His fudge-bottom pie became a Union favorite after Carson introduced it on the campus in 1945. Around that time George Washington Carver referred to Carson Gulley reverently as "an artist."

Carson’s stint on WIBA radio led to the TV career that brought him into Madison homes from 1953 to 1962 with *What's Cooking*. That’s how I felt I ‘knew’ him before I met him, by watching him cook magic meals on TV.

**What I remember most watching his program was how he used a lot of butter, his secret ingredient. He called it “butta.” Butter in quantity may not be politically correct today, but 1950s Wisconsin widely embraced real butter, probably still does.**

At the same time, as head of the local NAACP, Gulley worked tirelessly on civil rights, not an easy task in a town with only one black neighborhood in the sticks off Park Street. Gulley couldn’t buy a house in Madison until he made an impassioned plea to the city council, where he said, “We gave up the hope of ever owning a home of our own in this city.” Madison then passed the Fair Housing Ordinance, after which the Gulleys bought a home in Crestwood. Times were changing two generations ago in Madison as well as the rest of the country.

My one brief connection with Gulley was through Dad’s work with the Borden Dairy Company. Cooks used plenty of milk and cream and, thanks in part to Gulley, they used more butter. So Dad knew Gulley going back to the early 1940s. My guess is that Dad had been working with Gulley that day when they showed up at the house. Dad did things like that, the ‘hey, come meet the family’ thing, and meeting him was a thrill.

I remember Carson Gully was by then an older and well fed man. He did taste everything he cooked on the TV show, and from look on his face, everything he tasted was oh so good.

Gulley’s philosophy: “Whatever you do, whether in cooking or anything else, to do a good and rewarding job you must strive constantly for perfection. Though perfection is seldom attained, this constant striving is what lifts the individual from mediocrity to the level of outstanding accomplishment.”
Oxymoronically Speaking

Is it good if a vacuum really sucks?

Why is the third hand on the watch called the second hand?

If a word is misspelled in the dictionary, how would we ever know?

If Webster wrote the first dictionary, where did he find the words?

Why do we say something is out of whack? What is a whack?

Why do "slow down" and "slow up" mean the same thing?

Why do "fat chance" and "slim chance" mean the same thing?

Why do "tug" boats push their barges?

Why do we sing "Take me out to the ball game" when we’re already there?

Why are they called "stands" when they’re made for sitting?

Why is it called "after dark" when it’s really "after light"?

Why are "wise man" and "wise guy" opposites?

Why do "overlook" and "oversee" mean opposite things?

Why is "phonics" not spelled the way it sounds?

If all the world is a stage, where is the audience sitting?

If love is blind, why is lingerie so popular?
ESSAYS FROM IMAGES
DEN ADLER

Losing a fan

Miriam Siker was, I’d heard, an assertive woman who said what she wanted without worrying what people thought. I admired and feared her, so in March, 2006, when she boarded my bus to Chicago and looked around for a seat, I cringed. She strode up the aisle, said “Hi!” and sat down next to me.

She and her friends were headed to Portugal, she said. They’d be getting off the bus at O’Hare Airport’s International Terminal. And me?

I was headed to Chicago’s Union Station to begin a 30-day, around-North America train trip on Amtrak and Via Rail Canada, replicating similar trips in 1976 and 1983. I had planned to write a book about them, but as time went by I decided I needed one more trip to get up to date.

She’d heard I was writing another book—a novel. What about?

I told her: A young man obsessed with becoming a priest enters a seminary, where he falls in love with his best friend’s twin sister and discovers he has serious doubts about God.

Interesting, she said. How long before it’s done? Soon, I told her.

We talked about her trip and the people with her. Most were in their mid-80s, and two had walkers, but they loved to travel.

Miriam and I had a delightful ride together. When she got off at O’Hare, she said, “I’m going to have to read your novel.”

“And I’m going to have to finish it,” I said. She laughed.

A year and a half later, I released the novel through iUniverse, using its print-on-demand service to get my book out for my seminary class’s 2007 reunion. I’m glad I did—for this book, anyway.

Miriam bought a copy and had me autograph it. After she read it and told me she loved it, she lent it to a friend. When she asked for it back, the friend told her she had lent it to one of her own friends, and then to another, and another.

Miriam, I heard, was not happy. “They should buy their own damned books,” she told someone. My sentiments exactly.

Months later, Miriam and I sat next to each other for a group discussion about my novel sponsored by the Janesville chapter of the American Association of University Women. We were about to start when a woman I know approached Miriam carrying a copy of my book.

“Well,” the woman said with a big smile, “here it is. Better late than never.” She was returning Miriam’s copy of my book.

Miriam didn’t smile. “It certainly is late,” she said.

A few years ago my wife, Judy, and I drove Miriam and Dutch friend Conny Fleischer to Milwaukee where we visited the art museum. Then I took them to St. Francis Seminary on the city’s south side overlooking Lake Michigan. I had spent six years there, and the experience gave me the background to write my novel. Conny and Miriam seemed to enjoy seeing it.

Miriam Siker died on October 16th at age 92. She was one of my novel’s biggest fans, a Jewish woman who loved my story of a young man who wanted to become a Catholic priest. The last time I saw her she looked very frail, but with the help of a walker and a caretaker, she was making her way through the aisles of an AAUW book sale—a place that seemed totally appropriate to see her. She cursed the effects of age but made her usual wisecracks and asked how my writing was going.

“She was so interested in everyone,” one woman wrote about Miriam on Facebook, “a true citizen of the planet!” And Conny, the Dutch friend with us on the Milwaukee trip, wrote that Miriam was a warm and caring host, “a strong woman with a fine feeling for jokes and fun.”

Having someone like that find my novel worthwhile is one of the reasons I’m glad I self-published it. Miriam, rest in peace.
Cleaning the Closet
Sandra Rafter

Four of my father's ties
hang clumped together
on a nail in the closet.
Not arranged as in a pretty poem,
a rainbow each on a separate hook,
but more like him, slung in,
probably, a meal stained into one.
I wore a bilious green tie he liked one
year for Halloween. Waiting on my lily pad,
I croaked like a frog and hopped
to the window, watching for him to come
with me door to door. I waited
'til the lights turned off.
He wasn't good with promises, nor hugs,
nor adept with tools for fixing sinks and cars,
nor interested in my brother's move
from the bench into the game,
nor in swimming in the pond with us,
nor, my mother shouted, able to explain
a love note in his pocket.
At the least, as he lay in the hospital,
I wish he could have been fond of me
for more than the week before he died.
The ties have been nooses many years.
I think to carry them to the trash,
but I can't. It's always the same:
the bitterness he elicits I cannot bear.
I shall never know who he was,
but I think I shall leave the ties to serve
as garlands for a lost, precious father
and as tokens of my wistful love.
My Mom's Going To College But She'll Get Over It
Norma Sundberg

I tried to explain to them
How exciting the words and phrases
the lilt of
The lyric, the poem,
And how the professor had to cut it short
Because the class was getting restless--
They said:
“That's nice Mom, did you wash our
gym clothes?
They're getting pretty mature.”
I attempted to explain the fascination
Of Tribal custom,
It's contrast with our society,
Of the differences in polygamy,
polygyny,
And Monogamy,
He answered.
“That's nice dear,
did you pay the telephone bill?”
I got into Nietzsche, and Plato, and
Aristotle.
I marveled at men and women who
were way ahead
Of their time,
They said,
“That's nice Mom,
I need some notebook paper.”

2
Their friends were present when I
Rambled on about Camus,
e. e. cummings and
Gwendolyn Brooks--
They said,
“My Mom's going to college,
But she'll get over it.”
As I wrestled with gravity, and relativity,
And equations,
They grinned at me through peanut
butter and jelly
and asked,
“Mama, kin I have a glassamilk?”
When other people inquired,
--they reflected mild disinterest--
When other people showed an interest,
--They changed the subject--
As soon as I said,
“Someday I'm going back for my
Bachelor's
Or maybe even my Masters,”
--They disappeared into the distance
Echoing back,
“That's nice, Mom
What's for Supper?”

First published in *BBW Big Beautiful Woman*
magazine, April 1981. Also featured in *Go For It,*
a handbook for non-traditional students returning to
college, and in the Madison, WI Odyssey Project.
Rosetta, We Need You
Bill Spevacek

Writing’s been around since the Bronze Age or before.
With Egypt’s hieroglyphs, Sumerian cuneiform,
Ancients scratched in stone or clay,
Who bought what, and how much they paid.
Pictures and symbols, each a statement,
Archeologists long wondered what they meant,
Conventionally thinking each picture a letter,
‘til someone found that stone called Rosetta.

Sometime around 1800 BC,
Alphabets arose, we learn from histories,
Pictographs were archaic; alphabets cutting edge.
They started in Egypt and gradually spread
To many countries throughout the region,
With major assistance from the Phoenicians.
Alphabets in Aramaic and Greek,
Are the basis of languages today we speak.

Those languages have given us Shakespeare,
The Bible, poetry, great literature,
Wise counsel and the daily news.
But also the vitriol of Limbaugh and Cruz.
While alphabets speak in many tongues,
I’ve devoted my life to mastering just one,
How best to use English to express how I feel,
What I believe, what to others will appeal.

Now, it appears, the circle is closing,
Industry inventing new ways of composing.
My computer shows icons rather than words--
An “f” or a “t” or a little bird,
Emoticon faces turned ninety degrees,
Icons offer poets much more than they need,
Home screen symbols that I don’t know,
We’re returning to pictographs of times long-ago.

Regardless--the icons we all must fathom
Are those skirted and skirtless outside public bathrooms.
The Sloth
Dick Mallard

What can one say about the Sloth that hasn’t already been said?
It looks at the world from upside down,
and moves as if it were dead.

It has a face morosely glum
that covers a brilliant mind,
and you’d never know that they exist
for they’re very hard to find.

But, if some night you’re out for a walk
and hear a funny sound.
You might look up to see a Sloth looking up while looking down!

THE WRITER’S POET
Ellipses
Craig W. Steele

Hail ellipses…
triple-stippled
dotted lines that
yield dramatic pause;

Word-reducing
grammar jammers
writers … use to
wield a shorter clause.

THE E.I. PHOTO QUIZ
Who is it?

Send answers
to Coach by
November 20
(mcook@dcs.wisc.edu)

I frankly don’t know who the people are in this picture, but I want to know if you can identify the great stone face behind them.

Last month’s winner
Marcia Marino thought it might be Tokyo Rose.
Norma Sundberg first thought it was Mary Tyler Moore but then decided it was a woman who had been in the news for seducing truck drivers and then killing them. (The height chart in the background was quite suggestive of foul play.)

Our repeat winner, Sandra Rafter, correctly identified Bea Arthur (nee Bernice Frankel), who played Dorothy Zbornak on The Golden Girls. Sandra just might retire the trophy at this rate.

JAN KENT IS
THE WORD WHISPERER

Wrong word breaks book’s spell

Aw, gee – I’m reading a really good book.
Interesting plot, fascinating setting, characters I care about, skillful writing. And, then, on page 148, this sentence: “And when Yuliang nodded LAYING down beside him in silence, he seemed strangely on the verge of tears.”

Verge of tears – yes. The Word Whisperer gets that completely.
BULLPEN MAIL CALL

An old friend reconnects

I’ve been enjoying reading all the past issues of E.I. It’s nice to read the voices of old friends from the Creativity Connection years and to read your new contributors as well. I have to say however that Lily is the main attraction. What a beautiful baby! Such beautiful and expressive eyes. She’s wonderful, Marsh.

I’m having a new baby myself. See the attached picture of, Boomer, a 9-week-old, Old English Sheepdog. We pick up the little guy in St. Louis next week. I swore I’d never be tied down by an animal in my retirement, but if I have the bone marrow transplant, the experts say that I’ll be laid-up for a year or more. So, my plan is to strap a barrel of Maker’s Mark Bourbon to his neck and keep him close.

Regards

Tom Hicks

Readers find nuggets in last issue

I found the opening article in Extra Innings [“A poem struggles to be born,” by Sandra Rafter] hit the mark perfectly and was just what I needed to read to remind me that I’m not alone.

Lisa Krenz

The newsletter was jam-packed with neat stuff. Loved the first page, the poem and the critique from the lady to whom it was sent. [Again Sandra’s article and Gloria Wheeler’s response]

Norma Sundberg

I loved the latest issue of E.I, especially your piece on teaching. This spring, I’ve been offered to teach a class on writing at the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning. You’ve given me great insight. Hopefully, I can teach as you have, with confidence and the ability to connect with students.

Randi Mrvos

[Excerpts from a letter that I inadvertently left out of issue #47]

I got the EXTRA INNINGS in today’s mail, and I think I enjoyed this one more than any I’ve seen. The opinions of the editors of the “Top- Ten Worst Top Ten were a real scream. ...I loved Bambi and read the book many times. I’m also surprised Dumbo wasn’t in their list somewhere.

The very first movie I ever saw was Dumbo, when I was about 5 or 6 years old. Saw it at the Lake Theater in Painesville. We very seldom went to movies because my dad worked afternoons and was usually working in his garden on weekends. I wonder if they ever took ratings on radio programs? We always listened to Bulah, and Our Gal Sunday, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and all those great programs when you could still use your imagination. ...My dad wasn’t addicted to much of anything on TV, but he never missed Bonanza or Lawrence Welk.

The article, “So God Made a Dog” brought forth a tear. That was so true and so sweet. I’ve got to give a copy of that to our kennel club president.

Marion Childs

BULLPEN BRIEFS

A big shout-out to Kellie Essary and the members of her fine creative writing class in Livermore, CA. I was out for a family visit recently and had the pleasure of chatting with the class, a real joy. Please welcome this great group to our E.I. family.

Janet Taliaferro had a poem selected for Cowfeathers "Mapping Madison." She says she created it out of an exercise from the first creative non-fiction class she took from me (and we won’t say how many years ago that was, right, Janet?)

And now, the star of our show...
Your Thanksgiving Moments with Lily

Sometimes Lily uses a knife and fork...

and sometimes she doesn’t.