I very much enjoyed reading EI yesterday. Tom Hicks' piece ["Thanks and good bye"] touched me deeply. His memories brought back many of my own, primarily, the freedom to roam fearlessly through the countryside.

Daddy made me a wooden rowboat the summer before I turned seven. Her name, "Small Fry," was neatly spelled out in gold decals on either side near the bow, my nickname, "Boots," near the stern. He brought her up to the cottage on the Fox River where my sister and I spent summers with Gramma and three, sometimes four of my older cousins.

Small Fry's perfect coat of fresh varnish shone in the bright sunlight, and I remember feeling overwhelmed with excitement when he set her down on the back lawn to take my picture kneeling next to her. Along with the boat, he brought me an orange life vest. He took me out on the water on Saturday afternoon and again on Sunday morning to show me how to row and how to turn the bow of the boat into the wake when the boy down around the bend drove his big fancy motor boat past at break-neck speeds. Then he went home with Mom to Illinois and his job.

"I've always believed I had guardian angels because this wasn't the only time in my life I cast off from shore without much of a plan."

Grampa was down by the pier as though he'd known all along I was coming. (We never had a telephone at the cottage, so no, he hadn't received a warning call.) He drew the bow of my boat up to the pier and tied her off as I scrambled up onto the well worn planks.

Concludes on next page
I had my visit, probably lunch or some lemonade and cookies, and was soon off again, a feeling of real accomplishment under my belt. The ride back to Gramma's was ever so much easier as I let the current do much of the work and mostly just steered. I remember tying her up at the pier next to my sister's big Aluma-Craft fishing boat, “Miss Linda,” and feeling for once that I was just as capable as any of them.

As Tom said, people just didn't get that concerned in those days. Dad had given me instructions and simply expected I'd follow them. Gramma obviously felt the same way. There was no fuss when I returned. It was as though I'd merely been out on the porch for the past couple of hours.

“Small Fry” hangs in the rafters of our garage now. When Daddy died, Bruce rescued her from her idle rest on a pair of sawhorses down by the beach at Mom and Dad's home in the Northwoods. Using the photo my sister had saved from that day Dad so proudly presented her to me, Bruce restored her to her original glory and we occasionally take her out to play in the calm waters of Lake Geneva.

Anyway, my thanks to Tom for the brief ride down memory lane. And thanks to you, Marsh, for indulging me once more.

Barbara
No indulging. I just love a great story, well told.

Find more letters, including more responses to Tom's story, starting on page XIV.

Extra

Innings #50 (!)

Madison, Wisconsin December, 2013

“Ninguat”

This month’s All-Stars:
Barbara Burris, Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks,
Madonna Dries Christensen, Rex Owens, John Swift, Den Adler, with Ed Pahnke our playful punster and Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer.

Poetry from:
Sandra Rafter, Norma Sundberg,
Bill Spevacek, Bonny Conway, and The Writer’s Poet, Craig W. Steele

Staff tiger: Liliana Lenore Cook
Web Weaver: Kerrie Louis

Internetter: Steve Born
The Masked Man: Brace Beemer

Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook

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

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

Extra Innings is a proud booster of
Write by the Lake
The Writers Institute
The School of the Arts at Rhinelander
Weekend with your Novel
the Odyssey Project
the Simpson Street Free Press
and The Little Free Library

Back issues available at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings

Next Deadline:
Friday,
December 20, 2013
The men who gave us that shiny nose and the belly that shook like a bowl full of jelly

The poem known as The Night Before Christmas was created by Clement Clarke Moore in 1882 for his oldest child, six-year-old Charity. Gravely ill with tuberculosis, her only request was a new story. Happily, she did not die that Christmas, as expected. She lived to age 37—and her father’s verse is timeless.

In 1939, Robert Lewis May, a widower and advertising copywriter for Montgomery Ward, wrote a Christmas poem for his four-year-old disabled daughter. As a child, May had been teased for being small and shy, so he chose an ugly duckling theme about a bashful reindeer with a handicap, a glowing nose. The tale won May $50 in Ward’s employee contest for a promotional giveaway item for children.

Written in the same meter as Moore's poem, it begins:
"'Twas was the day before Christmas, and all through the hills, the reindeer were playing, enjoying the spills. While every so often they'd stop to call names, at one little deer not allowed in the games. Ha ha! Look at Rudolph! His nose is a sight! It's red as a beet! Twice as big! Twice as bright."

Rudolph was brave, strong, speedy, and his nose was an asset. May called the story, The Day Before Christmas: Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer. Ward's executives worried that the red nose might be associated with drunkards, so May had illustrator Denver Gillen sketch a picture of Rudolph. That sealed the deal, and 2.4 million copies of the booklet were distributed. By 1946, six million copies had been given away. In 1947, Wards gave the poem's copyright to May.

In 1948, a nine-minute Rudolph film was shown in theaters. In 1949, Rudolph was established as "... the most famous reindeer of all" when Johnny Marks put the story into song. One professional singer after another declined to record it. The man who consented, movie cowboy Gene Autry, was reluctant at first. He thought a children's story didn't fit his image. His wife persuaded him, saying, "Everyone loves an underdog." The song sold two million copies that year. It’s Columbia Records best-seller and second only to Bing Crosby's White Christmas as the all-time best-selling record. In 1964, Rudolph became a television star, his story narrated by Burl Ives. The program is now shown annually around the world, in countries whose own Christmas lore once enriched the legend of St. Nicholas.

May worked for Montgomery Ward most of life, except for a period when he handled the licensing of Rudolph merchandise. Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer Enterprises, Inc. brought financial security to May and his wife and six children. He died in 1976. All his original material is archived at his alma mater, Dartmouth, where a figure of Rudolph stands on the campus.


Summing up the popularity of his little reindeer, May said, "Everything connected with Rudolph has a touch of miracle about it, a kindly star."

Now, Rudolph "with his nose so bright" has led Moore's team into still another century. So on Christmas eve, before settling down for a long winter's nap, go to the window, tear open the shutters, throw up the sash, and find the brightest light in the sky. It’ll be glowing red, leading Moore's original eight reindeer to houses around the world where children are nestled all snug in their beds, while visions of sugarplums dance in their heads.

I know—because my young granddaughter once awoke and saw the red beacon in the sky.
ESSAYS ON IMAGES
DEN ADLER

Christmas trust

I boarded a plane at Milwaukee’s airport the last week of December in 1969 trying to calm my embarrassment and guilt. I hadn’t found a Christmas present for my wife, Judy, and I also needed a gift for her birthday in early January.

With one semester to go before receiving my Master of Social Work from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I was job hunting, flying to Manitowoc, Green Bay and Wausau, Wisconsin, for interviews with their County Departments of Social Services.

At Manitowoc the first evening, I discovered a new problem. Judy and our two-year-old son, Eric, were at her mother’s in Kenosha, and I had left my checkbook there. I had $12 in cash for the three-day trip. There were no ATMs then, and my only credit card was for Philips 66 gasoline. At the hotel I told the desk clerk my problem. Could they possibly bill me at my address in Ann Arbor? The clerk had to check with the manager, and when I came back from a very light supper, she called across the crowded lobby, “Mr. Adler, your credit is okay. We’ll bill you for your room.”

After interviews in Manitowoc and Wausau, I flew to Green Bay and found the interview wasn’t on the director’s schedule despite a letter I got saying it was. I had most of the day to explore the city before my flight back to Milwaukee, and I came across Stubey’s Rock and Gift Shop. The name was familiar, and I learned it was the same store which, a couple of years earlier, was down the road from our home at Shawano Lake when I worked on the Menominee Indian Reservation.

Stubey’s had lots of great gifts, but the one I wanted for Judy was a twin set of ruby-red hurricane lamps priced at $39.95 (today: $195.43). Several people in the shop stopped to admire them, and one man told his wife, “There’s a lot of gold in that glass.” I wanted those lamps, but with only a few dollars left, I settled on a box of attractive note cards.

As the clerk rang up the cards I decided to give her the same pitch I’d given the hotel clerk. I was there for a job interview, a Wisconsinite in grad school at Michigan financed by a state stipend whose monthly check would arrive before we got home after Christmas break. My wife and son were at her mother’s in Kenosha where I forgot my checkbook. I hadn’t gotten her anything yet for Christmas and her birthday was coming up and she’d really love those lamps ...Pause. Was there any chance I could take those red lamps with me as a present for my wife if I promised to mail a check the day I got back to Michigan the following week?

As I said it, the story sounded so lame I suspected my face’s color matched that of the lamps. The clerk, with raised eyebrows, said she’d have to ask the owner, and she ducked past a curtain into the back room. A man—Stubey himself, I suppose—came out frowning, and I repeated my story. He studied me for several seconds and turned to the clerk.

“Wrap them up,” he said.
“For layaway?” she asked.
“No.” He pulled back the curtain. “He can take ‘em.” Then to me: “Leave us your address.”

As the clerk wrapped and boxed the lamps, she told me they had ordered 10 sets but received only that one, and she was surprised the owner let me take them because a young couple was in the day before and said they’d be back to buy them.

When I got back to Ann Arbor, I mailed a check with my thanks to the owner of that shop. An internet search doesn’t bring it up, so I suspect it is gone, and I’ve never seen another set of lamps like those. But we’ve had these decorating our living room for 43 years, thanks to that shop owner who trusted me enough (Because it was Christmas? He felt sorry for my wife? My story was too ridiculous to make up?) to let me carry those lamps out of his store without paying.
Gotta love those one liners

Where there's a will, I want to be in it.

The last thing I want to do is hurt you. But it's still on my list.

Since light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak.

War does not determine who is right - only who is left..

Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.

They begin the evening news with 'Good Evening,' then proceed to tell you why it isn't.

Buses stop in bus stations. Trains stop in train stations. On my desk is a work station.

I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you.

Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and a beer gut and still think they’re sexy.

A clear conscience is the sign of a fuzzy memory.

You do not need a parachute to skydive. You need a parachute to skydive twice.

There's a fine line between cuddling and holding someone down so they can't get away

I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not so sure.

You're never too old to learn something stupid.

To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first and call whatever you hit the target.

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be.

Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.

And finally........
I'm supposed to respect my elders, but it’s getting harder and harder to find one.

Thanks to Mary Callahan
FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS
ESTHER M. LEIPER–ESTABROOKS

North of Frost

Cold-time in Coos County, N.H. comes early and snow can blanch brilliant leaves before they drop. Peter and I live north of where Robert Frost did, and winter starts in October while—six months on—flakes may adorn Easter bonnets! Recall the Limbo game line, “How low can you go?” We ask that of the mercury, and handle winter themes with awe, whimsy, or even a whimper. The art of praise uplifts, but we’ve an equal urge to gripe.

Yet cold-time is happily eased by Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Valentine’s, Groundhog Day, then (happily) Easter, offering a universe of cold-time verse! Plus holidays, subjects may range from chimney cleaning to snow shoveling, from school-closure to “treading up and sledding down,” a phrase used in my lyric about sliding in NEW HAMPSHIRE MAGAZINE several years ago, while I chose this poem for THE INKLING SELECTION anthology in 1984.

WINTER PREVIEW
– by Sister Kevin Robertson
There is a poetry in snowing
As ageless as far Tibetan hills,
--Older than the Dead Sea Scrolls--
But when its whiteness spills
In cadences upon bleak rooftops
And settles iambically or otherwise
Within tree arms obliquely stretched,
It patterns newness with a stark surprise;
Then lyric winds sing similes
Into our prose-lined thought.
--There is poetry in snowing: so old
So new, well-learned and yet untaught.

Bert Penny published DANDELION AND OTHER POEMS, including this Petrarchan sonnet. However, I personally disagree. For me as a kid every “snow-day” proved welcome!

WINTER SCHOLARS
-- by Bert Penny
Sometimes our careless city while asleep
Is taken by a snowstorm unaware
And wakes like some old giant in a snare
To find its eager pace slowed to a creep
The busses and the streetcars, like lost sheep
Huddle in drifts and give up in despair;
And strong men stay at home, afraid to dare
The mounting fury of the blizzard’s sweep.

But not the children! Off they go to school—
Rebels, pint-size, who cheerfully ignore
The icy conqueror’s attempt to rule.
The world of learning waits with open door
And no mere winter snow can hope to cool
The urge to learn that two and two make four.

This shape poem I wrote for a 2007 WRITERS’ Journal, used as a sample riddle in my column “EVERY DAY WITH POETRY.”

* 
So
green & spicy
plus peaked like an A
it wears bright jewels on
Christ’s Birth-
Day!

Holiday poems often use glib rhymes like dove/love or joys/toys. Another overworked theme features the “cruel” Bethlehem inn. Yet would Mary choose to give birth knowing others would be kept awake—or was the place a raucous tavern unsuitable for her? Surely anger at “no room at the inn” shows lack of common sense. To counter that judgment, this piece appeared in my 1987 book CHRISTMAS SONNETS from Sand & Silk publishing.

THE INNKEEPER’S WIFE
Am I still thought so heartless down the years
To give the Jewish girl an oxen stall?
The mellow beasts responded to her call,
But in our hostel drunkards yelled lewd jeers
Demanding bulging wineskins.--I had fears,
--So fragile--she’d be shoved against a wall
Where crowded pallets filled the narrow hall,
But oh, I felt so helpless at her tears!
The blanket I gave Mary was the one
To wrap my own first-born, (but my boy died.)
I blanched the wool myself so carefully spun
Anticipating motherhood’s sweet pride.
--I wrought for Mary’s safety. Malice? None!
How else could I have done? Now you decide!

I’ll end with a verse I wrote for a New Year’s message:

May your hearth be as warm as your heart,
Plus your children prove smarter than smart.
Grow old with grace in your favorite place,
And let happiness never depart.

For Esther’s News, see this month’s Bullpen Briefs, page XV.
With no apologies necessary to John Lennon (who was, by most accounts, a fairly open-minded bloke), imagine that there is a heaven.

Even the pharisees of Jesus’ day believed in an afterlife—although their buddies the sadducees did not. (I remember that because a priest told me that was why they were “Sad, you see.”)

Further imagine that, through some miracle, you might get to go to heaven when you die. (“Miracle” -- the miracle Christians celebrate this time of year-- is the only way I can imagine such a thing for myself.)

Still with me? Okay, now tell me what your heaven looks like.

I’m guessing maybe not angels and endless harp lessons, but if that’s your heaven, God bless you.

Just now, when I try to imagine heaven, I see Lake Arrowhead, high in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California, where I spent vacations with my parents for many summers of my growing up.

It was a glory. I had a beautiful, cold lake to swim and fish in, an endless forest to roam in, blue jays and squirrels for company, and at least once a day my brother and I got to go into the village, a faux-Swiss collection of stores, a market, the Rinks Delicatessen (with the fattest, best sandwiches I ever ate and Swiss chocolate bars the size of billboards), and a little local weekly newspaper, The Mountain News. (Then as now, I loved newspapers.)

That was just the start of it. Through a walkway between stores awaited an arcade (my mother won a Robin Hood hat for me playing skee-ball), a movie theater (I saw Danny Kaye sing “I’m Hans Christian Anderson, that’s me!” there), Barney’s miniature train ride, and a cafeteria.

Best of all, there was a miniature golf course, overlooking the lake and shaded by pine trees (which meant we had natural pine needle hazards to contend with). Playing at least twice a day, my brother and I mastered the course to the extent that it was a rare day when we didn’t win at least one free game on the nineteenth hole.

As my dear niece Alanna exulted one long-ago Christmas, after everyone had opened their presents, “And it didn’t cost anybody a nickel!” I was a child remember, and I thought as a child.

I’m a long way from being a child now (although I still think and act like one at times); I describe Lake Arrowhead to you as seen through my rosy prism of nostalgia. I’ve forgotten the fights, disappointments, impatience, even boredom (boredom in this paradise!!!). I haven’t forgotten what a strange, frightened kid I was, for whom even the sweet disruption of routine of going to heaven for two weeks caused panic attacks-- an early indicator of my Obsessive Compulsive Disorder-- but the sharp edges have been worn away from even this pain.

It wasn’t really heaven-on-earth, of course. It got so hot there in the afternoon, the blacktop in the parking lot melted. It was too crowded. Year by year, smog crept higher and higher up the mountain until even the air in paradise was hazy. One year a fire threatened us and destroyed hundreds of those beautiful trees.

Paradise or not, the village of my youth is gone now, bulldozed for a new development.

What remains are my memories and the feeling of well-being and joy, of being loved, of being with the people most important to me in the world, and of feeling near to God, in the forest or in a rowboat on the lake with my father at sunrise on a mirror-smooth lake, the only sound his soft whistling to make the fish come.

I would want many more people there with me now, of course, loved ones and friends I’ve been fortunate enough to embrace along the way. And there are many folks, living and dead, I’d love to meet and have a chance to talk with. But the feeling would be the same.

If there is a heaven, surely it must feel like that.
The Wisdom of Zen

Do not walk behind me, for I may not lead.  
Do not walk ahead of me, for I may not follow.  
Do not walk beside me for the path is narrow.  
In fact, just go away and leave me alone.

Sex is like air. It's not that important unless you aren't getting any.

Always remember you're unique. Just like everyone else.

Never test the depth of the water with both feet.

If you think nobody cares whether you're alive or dead, just miss a mortgage payment.

Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them, you're a mile away, and you have their shoes.

If at first you don't succeed, skydiving is not for you.

If you lend someone $20 and never see that person again, it was money well spent.

Good judgment comes from bad experience ... which comes from bad judgment.

Experience is something you don't get until just after you need it.

There are two excellent theories for arguing with women.  
Neither one works.

Generally speaking, you aren't learning much when your lips are moving.

Never, under any circumstances, take a sleeping pill and a laxative on the same night.
I was dashing through my library paying little attention the other day looking for something entertainingly simple, and the name, “Lee Child,” jumped out at me. So I checked out the book along with some others (We have a RFID check out system; just throw 10 books in a pile and the system reads all their numbers, checks them out to you, and you never really have to look at them), took it home and became disgusted with myself. Mr. Child had simply written a cover page blurb about the book, not the book itself. I said I wasn’t paying attention.

Worst of all, it was one of those detective stories written by twenty writers, one chapter each. But ultimately, I ran out of easy things to read and opened it up.

What a find! If you have ever wanted an easy way to judge whether you might like the scribblings of some author, this is it--260 pages, 20 authors, a 13 page test for each. The book is called *Inherit The Dead*, which is some sort of peculiar metaphor for the gift of showing you how well 20 authors can write.

So, here’s a little test. What do you think of this writing? “…the barren white dunes to his right, the rolling, black ocean to his left and the vast, gray canopy of sky. …He scanned the austere landscape…”

And how about this one? “[The] office windows were shining through the pelting cold rain. …A bell rang as he pushed open the door and practically jumped into the office. …Like every garage in the world, this place smelled of oil and metal and rubber…”

And a third. “He’d bought a bagel from a deli near the motel but hadn’t been able to eat it. He’d swiped off half the cream cheese before taking a bite and had gotten some on his pants. He glanced down now at the white streak between his zipper and right pocket…Why did they have to slather on so much cream cheese anyway? Was there a surplus they he had to bring down? He took two bites and threw the rest into the waste basket.”

This last piece about an overcheesed bagel was written by Bryan Gruley, whom I’ve never heard of. But he’s been nominated for the Edgar and has won a Pulitzer reporting for Bloomberg News. This is an author I’d like to read more of.

Likewise, someone called S.J. Rozan, who has already won an Edgar, has a chapter that’s easy to read and easy to connect with. Here’s an excerpt: “The 19th Precinct behind the façade of decorative brickwork, elaborate cornice, old-fashioned wood windows…was totally new: concrete, vinyl, fluorescent lights. …Every few years, new policies and procedures made it look like the department was starting fresh. Inside, not a damn thing ever changed.”

Of the twenty authors, five made me want to read more. I’ve already read two of them. Fifteen, including the first two excerpted above, did not excite me. They have sold hundreds of millions of books. Some time ago, I read one of their books and resolved to never read another. But maybe she has gotten better with age.

The book itself was as you might imagine. Is the best stew made by 20 chefs? Line editing seems to be a lost art in New York publishing. They just don’t bother anymore. So, if extra and missing punctuation and misspelled words bother you, grit your teeth and keep reading. This book served a purpose, and for that purpose, I recommend it.

**QUESTION OF THE MONTH**

What book will you plan to read next?

Tell E.I. Send the name (or names if you’re undecided) to Coach:

mcook@dcs.wisc.edu
My final article for 2013. I have to pinch myself this morning, checking the calendar and, yes, it’s time to begin drafting my article for the December *Extra Innings*. As I age I notice that my perception of time has changed. Now time seems to slip between my fingers. Days and months slide by, and I no longer perceive an anchor in time. I depend on my smart phone to keep track of the day and date.

To prepare for my final piece of the year, I reviewed the topics I’ve written about. I would like to claim there is a theme, but I can’t find one. When I’ve been wrong, I admitted it, as in the May article called “Retraction.”

At the start of 2013 I was distraught because I was feuding with my publisher. After more than two years and many manuscript rewrites, a publication date was illusive, so I terminated the contract. I swallowed my pride and decided independent publishing was the route for me to see my book in print. Marshall Cook was instrumental in giving me both encouragement and perspective on publishing in the 21st century.

There’s a lot of literature available now on how seniors, with a potential life expectancy of 20-25 years, are re-inventing or re-imagining their lives. Since I was laid off in December, 2009 my life journey has been to make conscious decisions about my contribution to my family, my friends, my community, and society. The literature describes this phase of life as: the third act, the encore career, the self-actualization years, and many others.

As I’ve explained previously, the title for this series of articles was born during lunch with Marshall when I was sharing with him my experiences writing freelance both on-line and in print and the struggle to publish my novel. While the title “Payers, Preyers and Pretenders” was accurate at the beginning of the year, it’s no longer accurate. Independently publishing my novel has occurred only because of a great deal of help I’ve received from numerous people.

One of my greatest lessons this year is that the image of the lone writer slaving away on the keyboard, alone for days, weeks and months to produce literature, is a myth. Yes, that first draft is the work of the solitary writer. After that? It may take many people: critique groups, beta readers, content editors, copy editors, proofreaders, book cover designers, interior book designers, and webpage designers etc. to bring a book into the world. Writing a book is a collaborative, community building undertaking, and I love it.

“Payers, Preyers and Pretenders” has a negative connotation, and that isn’t the message I want to share with readers. When the year began I wanted to give warnings to others by sharing my experiences. Unfortunately, a number of my experiences were negative, and there are people who will take advantage of writers.

I have arrived at the extraordinary time in my life when it’s all about giving me the freedom to be creative and not being afraid of being judged or critiqued. Next year I’m going to change the title of my articles to “For What It’s Worth.”

I’m borrowing this expression from my father. In our family he and I were celebrated for our lengthy discussions on politics, especially during my college years. People would gather around to witness the battle of ideas and values. The discussions were always with respect, and neither of us would relinquish our viewpoints. Dad often began our talks with: “For what it’s worth . . .” which was his way of sharing his opinion and viewpoint.

“For What It’s Worth” will be a way for me to share my writing life experiences, and I hope to begin a dialogue with *Extra Innings* readers. George Bernard Shaw, who loved to be quoted, said: “Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.” Finally, at 62, I understand what he meant, and I’m happily creating myself every day.

Look for Rex’s big publication news in the Brief, coming up on page XV. Coach
The Writer’s Poet  
Craig W. Steele

Painting on the soul
While waiting for my children to finish their music lessons at Edinboro University’s Community Music School one evening, I saw this notice (in bold Olde English script) posted on the music fraternity’s bulletin board:

A painter paints pictures on canvas.
But musicians paint their pictures on silence.
— Leopold Stokowski

Felling a bit miffed that writers were being ignored, again, I immediately composed an additional line for us:

…And writers paint their pictures on souls.
— Craig W. Steele

Maybe I could call it “Steele’s Corollary to Stokowski’s Axiom,” or something equally grandiose.

I’m pleased to say that I refrained (with some difficulty) from scribbling my contribution onto the page below the Stokowski quote, probably because the following poem popped into my consciousness (I love such moments of serendipitous inspiration; if only they happened more frequently) and distracted me from dabbling in graffiti.

Word Artist  
Craig W. Steele

I can’t compose music
or paint like Rembrandt
and my singing would bring you to tears.

I’ve naught but mere words for
composing fine art
to enlighten your soul through the years.

Great Grandpa’s journal
April 17, 1870

Searching for Myself
Several generations from the Mayflower, trying to trace back to Charlemagne or King whoever, way back when--I've heard of folks who stopped the search when bootleggers or horse thieves were found, but that's just part of circumstances, of the times that determine where, and how and when--The line proceeds, even with those interesting scoundrels or strange characters, tucked away in albums to gaze at. It is all part of an intricate pattern, like scattered puzzle pieces fitting snugly, finally, together.

Norma Sundberg
Dear Billy Collins

Sandra Rafter

I love you, although I had not pictured you three inches tall as I see you on your book jacket, emasculated no doubt by a short sighted publisher who thinks poetry is a noble charity or by a poet who envies you writing so wittily about mice and cows and varnish and the like. We are led to hearty chuckles, or always for me, a tap into your melancholia, and sometimes to ecstasy, like now as I read your poems, then write to you on the inside of my crossword puzzle book in the bathroom sitting the most at ease, should I say relieved, I shall be all day (you always put in such touches). A rendezvous would not be in jest. Perhaps, December 10th, Emily Dickinson’s birthday, at two o’clock in Akron, Ohio under the exotic, blinking, neon tire where we shall grip -- a.m.

MARBLE POEMS

Bonny Conway

When I read his "Blackberry-Picking," briars scratched me as I traipsed the page. Ripe August came swooping inside me vibrating my lungs with uncankered air. I lapped purple juices, pies, and jams as my mouth bit into countrysides. Mud sloshed up the backs of my bare legs from silent fields sodden with warm rain. Ancestral farms were his poetry, his fermented fruit, his connection. Nature wound about him like a scarf. Sediment of peat bogs caked his soul. His heart sprang from ancient wombs of gulls. The sound of sea forever in his voice. If Michelangelo heard his poems he would have sculpted them in marble.

IN MEMORIAM

Seamus Heaney
d. August 30, 2013

Burgers In Antiquity

Bill Spevacek

“Let me have men about me that are fat; “Would you like some french fries with that?”
Attributed to a Roman civic leader and restaurateur named Julius, 44 B.C.
Oxymoronically Speaking

If you are cross-eyed
and have dyslexia,
can you read all right?

Why is bra singular
and panties plural?

Why do you press harder
on the buttons of a remote control
when you know the batteries are dead?

Why do we put suits in garment bags
and garments in a suitcase?

How come abbreviated
is such a long word?

Why do we wash bath towels?
Aren't we clean when we use them?

Why doesn't glue
stick to the inside of the bottle?

Why do they call it a TV set
when you only have one?

Christmas
- What other time of the year
do you sit in front of a dead tree
and eat candy out of your socks?
PHOTO OF THE MONTH
Lady Liberty or Elvis?
The photo [last month] is of the head of the Statue of Liberty; she is Libertas by name. Send my check by registered mail unless the trophy is real gold.

Sandy Rafter
When I was 14, my uncle Frank flew me around the Statue of Liberty at close range in his beautiful Cessna airplane. (Shows right there how old I am. You'd get shot for doing far less these days.) I got a really up close and personal look at her face. The photo had been taken of her.

Barbara Burris
I believe the stone face is that of the Statue of Liberty, which was actually the face of Charlotte Beysser Bartholdi, who was the sculptor’s mother.

I’d like my million dollar prize paid in cash, please. IOU’s tend to give me an anaphylactoid reaction.

Leighton Mark
Well, of course it's Elvis, but there are other spoilsports who are going to insist it's the Statue of Liberty.

Pat Fitzgerald
It has to be Elvis

Anna Lee Landen
If it's not Elvis, it must be the Statue of Liberty. They look so much alike.

This Month’s Poser:
Send your answer to Coach by December 20th.
mcook@des.wisc.edu.

Hint: It ain’t Elvis.

PAHNKE’S PUNISHMENT
ED PAHNKE
The Case of The Missing Holmes
The great sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, had disappeared without a trace.

Was he dead or held captive by one of his many adversaries? Doctor John Watson paced back and forth in their Baker Street lodging, alternately running his fingers through his white hair and yanking at his mustache.

Holmes’ violin, pipes, and leather chair with scorch marks from errant pipe ashes only served to make his absence more noticeable. A fire crackled in the fireplace, warding off December’s icy weather. The holidays were almost upon them. What would Watson do alone, without his friend? A tear welled in his eye, and he blew his nose with a honk. They were a team like – like Holmes and Watson.

Watson stopped pacing and snapped his fingers. “That’s it,” he said. “It’s up to me. I should be able to apply Holmes’ deductive reasoning after all these years working side by side with him.”

Maybe it would help if he sat down on Holmes’ chair. He plunked down on it. Sitting in the comfortable chair only made him sleepy. A pot of tea would hit the spot. After sipping the tea, he sorted through files about cases they had worked on together. There might be a clue somewhere in the files. Someone who got away.

Watson quickly got into the spirit of the hunt. He actually smiled as he got wrapped up in the case. He hummed to himself and rubbed his hands together in glee. This promised to be a most interesting Christmas season.

For you see, there’s no case like Holmes for the holidays.

JAN KENT IS
THE WORD WHISPERER
Nothing makes the Word Whisperer's heart beat faster than an obscure, new, funky word. (Thump, thump.)

How about mumpsimus? It’s a noun meaning a view stubbornly held in spite of clear evidence that it's wrong, or a person who obstinately adheres to such a notion.

Thumpety, thumpety, thump.
Coach’s Bullpen Briefs
After considerable troubles, Murphy is here at last!
I’m so delighted to be able to announce... No, wait, I’ll let the new author tell you:

“With my chest swollen with pride (hopefully not hubris) I can share with you that MURPHY’S TROUBLES, my debut historical novel, is available on Amazon.com and will soon be available in local bookstores.” Rex Owens

He’ll be launching his novel at “Beans N Cream Café” in Sun Prairie, WI from 10-noon Sunday, December 14 and at the Sun Prairie Public Library at 6:30 p.m. Monday, December 16.

Should-be-a-word-but-isn’t dept: Incorrect
vt: 1) To ‘fix’ someone’s grammatically correct English.
Example: Insisting that someone must say “between you and I,” not “between you and me.”
2) To punish someone for using correct English.
Example: The young woman who got cut from the cheerleading squad tryouts for chanting “Two-four-six-eight, whom do we appreciate!” in a recent Dustin cartoon.

Moving day for Esther
Our popular Poet/Columnist, Esther M. Leiper–Estabrooks, and her husband Peter bought a new and larger home in Gorham, N.H. to be closer to son Tom, his wife Randi, and grandchildren. They named it The Poet House and right now shuttle between old venue and new-- sealing, painting, and ferrying belongings—”a mad-house,” she says, “till we can settle in!” Esther’s monthly column appears on page VI this issue.

That’s about $2,200 per page
Thirty-four-year-old Garth Rick Hallberg touched off a publishers’ bidding war with the manuscript of his first novel, City on Fire. The winner, Knopf, will pay young Mr. Hallberg nearly $2,000,000 for the right to publish his book.
Perhaps they’re paying by the pound; the manuscript is 900 pages long.
“It was even more evidence that the long novel is experiencing a resurgence,” according to Julie Bosman of the New York Times. She cited Donna Tartt’s The Goldfinch (771 pages) and The Luminaries, by Eleanor Catton (834), as further examples.
I hope she’s right. My nearly finished novel, Evidence of Things Not Seen, tops 200,000 words!

Best New Name Dept:
The Akron Aeros, the Cleveland Indians AA farm team, has changed its name for the 2014 season. They rejected The Tire Jacks and the Canal Rats in favor of the AKRON RUBBER DUCKS!

More pics of old Madison
If you’re enjoying Ron Hevey’s stories about growing up in Wisconsin, you might also enjoy a new website, “Lost Madison,” which posts pictures of the city back in the day.
www.facebook.com/LostMadisonWisconsin
**BULLPEN MAIL CALL**

**Praise for Hicks, others pours in**

Just read Tom Hick’s poignant piece [“Thanks and Goodbye,” last issue]. That deserves the front page, and it’s a tough act to follow.

Feeling grateful,

**Madonna Dries Christensen**

*I thought Tom’s piece and yours were the best one-two opening imaginable. Coach.*

Dear Coach, I always enjoy *Extra Innings*, but this time more so. I enjoyed Tom Hicks’ article, and "Wish I'd Said That" was great. Christiansen's story was very fine, and I so enjoyed Owens’ “Book Taking Shape.” (If you Google Barnes and Noble you'll see I have two books out there. Xlibris has been good to me.)

Then enjoyed the tribute to Carson Gulley. With all that behind me I read “Losing a Fan,” which set me up for reading “Closing the Closet” - and I wept.

I recovered and laughed out loud about Rosetta and topped it all off with Lily. Such a cutie.

So thank you, Coach, for what you do. You are a treasure. Love,

**Pernetta Deemer**

*Thanks so much, Pernetta, for the kind words and encouragement. Please notice that all the pieces you praised were written by other folks. I just have the joy of being the messenger of so much good, useful, and often moving material. Coach*

Dear Coach,

I am wondering how you got *Extra Innings* in my mailbox when you just returned from a trip and you had no access (or willing access) to a computer! Fairly amazing! Thank you.

**Tana Mauer Polansky**

*Credit goes to all the folks who got their stuff to me early, so I could get a good chunk edited and laid out before I left, plus all the others who nailed the deadline and gave me time to finish up, and to Kerrie Louis, our new web maven, who got my pdf posted the same day I sent it in. Coach*

Love the poem [“My Mom's Going To College But She'll Get Over It, Norma Sundberg, November issue]. As a nontraditional student when I was getting my Associates Degree, I certainly remember getting supper ready before I left and then doing the dishes when I returned as two adults sat in front of the TV. Yes, great memories. That's probably why I cried for 30 minutes after they gave me my diploma. Set the example, lead the way.

**Kathy J. Brewer, PHR**

KJ Brewer Human Resource Consultant LLC

Jake's tribute to Dr. Who struck a cord with me. My son has been a Dr.Who fan over the years and has watched numerous episodes of the series. One Christmas I gave him a Dr. Who novel.

In 1987 I was diagnosed with cancer. After the lumpectomy, the next step was radiation at Buffalo General Hospital, a two hour drive from our home. We decided I'd stay in the city during the week at Hope Lodge, a place for cancer patients and their families. My son lent me his Dr. Who book, which worked out well for me in the waiting room before treatments and through many sleepless nights.

**Andrea Schoenthal**

Hello Marsh,

I especially loved the last issue. Esther’s column was truly great; I always love reading her, but I thought the last one was exceptional.

And Lily’s pics brought back some fond memories of those “utensils optional” days of my kids. Thanks for that.

All the best,

**Craig Steele**

*Here’s Larry with another funny*

Hey, Marsh,

Hope you're doing well. Just thought I'd send along another thought for *Extra Innings*.

"Marriage is like a deck of cards. You start out with two hearts and a diamond. You end up with a club and a spade.” – Anonymous

Regards,

**Larry Tobin**

*I can see why the author wanted to remain anonymous. Did you clear this with Kathy before you sent it? Didn’t think so. Coach*

**QUESTION OF THE MONTH**

Why do you call [*Extra Innings*] a newsletter? Could be more of a “Gazette.” A “literary rag.” How about “Wavelength,”? or “e-wee-zine.” That might even appeal to a special group -- a small magazine for asthmatics and allergy sufferers.

**Sandra Rafter**

*Mighty fine question. How about it, readers? Is this a newsletter? If not, what is it? Coach*
And now...

your monthly

MOMENT WITH LILY...

Halloween 2013

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright