



# Creative Wisconsin Magazine

*Develop your craft. Discover resources. Expand your network. Build your audience.*

March 2023

## Calendar of Events

**The Jade Ring Competition**  
Opens March 6!

**The Student Writing Competition** closes  
March 31  
(contests, see page 6)

See page 29 for details  
on below events:

**Poetry Slam**  
With Dorothy Chan  
April 27!

**Save the Date!**  
October 6-7, Waukesha  
75th anniversary  
WWA Fall  
Conference

**TWO Practical Workshops**  
March 23 and May 11



### In this edition:

We're 75! Like this wonderful old oak, we've branched out, nourished writers, and helped them flourish. Find news from our members and friends, our member spotlight on Steve Wilton, upcoming events, contest news, book reviews, and your wonderful, thoughtful, hard work.

*Founded in 1948, the Wisconsin Writers Association is a creative community dedicated to the support of writers and authors. WWA sponsors and hosts year-round workshops and events throughout Wisconsin, offering discounts and exclusive resources.*

*We aim to share experiences and knowledge while encouraging our members in their pursuit of this most noble art.*

*Images in this edition are courtesy of Pixabay.com, Steve Wilton, and the editor. Thank you.*

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## From the editor

Lisa Lickel

“Believe in what you see and what you don’t see...”



As I read through the wonderful gathering of submissions for *Creative Wisconsin Magazine*, I think “Resilience.” Wisconsin Writers Association was chartered 75 years ago. We’ve had our ups and downs as an organization, but we are still here, always better than we were, eager to adapt, ready to listen, excited to help our membership learn and practice their craft. A line from Margaret Rozga’s poem in this issue, “Clouds are Ephemeral, Not So the Moon,” made me pause and consider the difference among the things I see, what I think I see, and what I want to see. It’s a writer’s truth, a creed of sorts, our work is a journey toward our reader’s perspective. Usher them across the boundary of believe...beyond the ink...

If you’re thinking of spring cleaning, as I am, you might rethink how you treat the critters in the corners after reading Emily Buckner’s short story. Challenge yourself to write a sijo poem, ponder the future, reflect on the return of the red-wings; take a journey across the ocean, sit with someone else’s memories, immortalize the small moments in a haiku, and look forward to lawn-mowing days.

Twenty-five years ago, Kathy Coopman Voigt, 50th Anniversary Chair, wrote: “Anniversaries are about looking to the past: Sharing the good times, learning from the tough times, stirring memories and rekindling friendships. We do well to return to our roots, to remember those who planted the seeds, who nurtured our growth, who led the way and then stepped aside. ... Today we relish our preset. Today we anticipate our future.”

Let’s all do that.

## From the Vice President of WWA



### Russ Klingaman

Hi! I would like to introduce myself to you and provide an update on some of the fantastic things that are happening at WWA.

I've been a member of the WWA Board of directors since 2019. Last fall, I was elected for a second three-year term on the Board and as WWA's vice president. I'm also serving WWA as a co-chairperson of an ad-hoc committee called the "Vision Team." The other co-chair is Tom King.

**The Vision Team** has been busy revising WWA's bylaws. The committee is also working on some other projects including creating/editing mission and vision statements for WWA and creating/editing a procedures manual.

A lot of great things have happened in WWA's world since the last edition of *Creative Wisconsin Magazine* was published. **Here are a few highlights.** **First**, on September 22nd, the WWA Jade Ring Writing Contest Awards Gala was held via Zoom. The winners read their award-winning pieces and basked in much honor and glory. **The WWA Fall Conference** was held September 30 - October 1, 2022 in Superior at the Barker's Island Inn and Conference Center. It was a huge success! If you missed it, please consider attending the 2023 Fall Conference, October 6-7 in Waukesha, for our 75th anniversary. You won't be disappointed.

**Also, we have two new Board members** I would like to introduce to you and welcome as part of WWA's leadership team: **Jennifer Rupp** and **Dorothy Chan**. I encourage you to look at their bios on WWA's website. They are very talented, and we are all blessed to have them help lead WWA into the future.

**Here is some personal information about me.** I love reading. I love learning. I love research. I love teaching. I love writing. I am an attorney and a pilot. The focus of my career is aviation. I'm a part-time adjunct professor at Marquette University's Law School where I teach Aviation Law. I'm working on an aviation history nonfiction book.

**Thank you** for being part of WWA's community, and GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR WRITING PROJECTS!

## Around Wisconsin



Find more from HerStory <https://herstryblg.com/>



### Ridges & Rivers Book Festival

The festival April 28 - 30 in downtown Viroqua, Wisconsin. **Driftless Writing**

<https://ridgesandriversbookfestival.org/>



### Untitled Town

Features author events in northeast Wisconsin  
See the full schedule on

<https://www.facebook.com/untitledtown>



### Discover Classes and Events

<https://writeondoortown.org/calendar/>

### Shakerag Alley Center for the Arts



Check the **calendar** for readers events, Pathways to Publication and other workshops.

<https://shakeragalley.org/product-category/adult-workshops/voice-page-ws/>

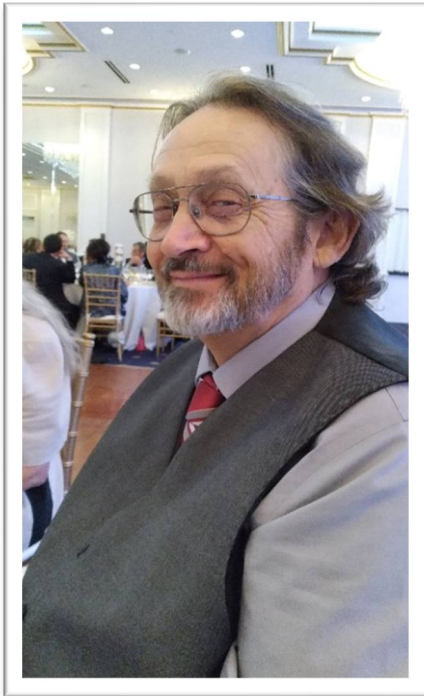


Visit <http://www.cvwritersguild.org/>

*Editor's Note: please send your news to [submit@wiwrite.org](mailto:submit@wiwrite.org) by May 15 for the next edition of Creative Wisconsin*

## Meet Steve Wilton, novelist

Antigo



**Steve says:** I was born long ago in a land far away. A place called upstate New York. Dad was in the navy and we moved around a lot. As mom was born and raised in Antigo, Wisconsin, we always called Wisconsin home. After I retired from the army, Karen and I settled in rural central Wisconsin, near Antigo. I am a volunteer slush pile reader for WWA Press. When not writing or reading, I spend my time riding motorcycles, building scale models, fishing, playing with our Chihuahua, Willie, and fighting to keep the squirrels out of our house.

I can be contacted from my website:

<https://slwilton.com/>

### How long have you been a member of WWA?

I joined WWA right after I attended the Novel-In-Progress-Bookcamp and Writing Retreat in 2018. Many of the staff members and camp attendees were members and had recommended it. I've been a member in good standing, so they say, ever since.

### What do you most appreciate about Wisconsin Writers Association?

The networking is a big plus. I also enjoy attending conferences and other events the WWA sponsors/co-sponsors. Those events provide excellent opportunities to learn from and meet great people. People who are interested in writing and improving their craft. Rubbing elbows with skilled writers can add to your skill set, too.

### What do you write?

I dabble in many genres. I mostly write long short stories, as well as a few novel-length works. I've experimented with some romance stories, some paranormal horror, urban fantasy, post-apocalyptic stuff and even a murder mystery. Straying completely out of my lane, I even wrote one poem. All of that said, my favorite genres to read and write are fantasy and science fiction. I published my debut fantasy novel, *Queen of Crows*, in August 2021.

### Share a little about your writing process. How have you benefitted from WWA?

My writing process is kind of like, "It's a twister, Dorothy!" Typically, I stare out the window a lot. Karen occasionally pokes me in the arm to make sure I'm alive. But seriously, I usually start with a vague idea about a scene I think is interesting. Then I try to expand it with more character detail and work up some stakes. Once I have that basically set, not in concrete, but in pretty stiff oatmeal, with some idea of how the story will end, I start actually drafting. I reread yesterday's work to get back in the flow, but I inevitably edit as I reread. So, I come out with a relatively clean first draft, but it takes a long time. That makes me a slow writer. I also like having critique partners read ten or twelve pages at a time, which I also tweak as needed. If I were to guess, I'd say I do at least four revisions/edits of the completed draft

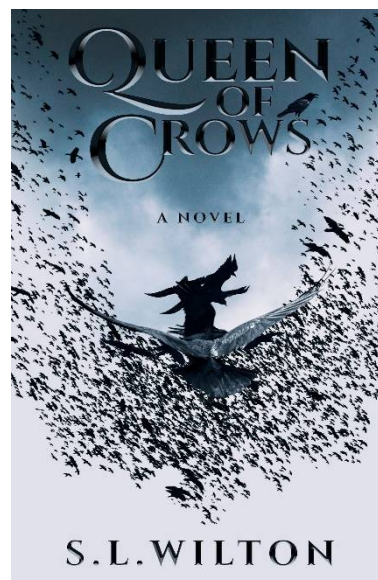
before I call it a final. And by then, I can get kind of tired of rereading the story. While WWA hasn't helped me with my chaotic process, attending seminars and conferences has helped me write better. Both at the sentence level and with the overall story arc. WWA's Jade Ring contest was the first I'd ever entered. I didn't win, but I got very useful feedback from the judge.

**What would you like to see WWA do more or less of going forward?**

I'm a big fan of conferences and seminars. Both online and in person. The more the merrier. I sat in on a Zoom meeting about WWA starting some critique groups and I'm looking forward to taking part when those groups get off the ground.

**What advice do you have for aspiring and seasoned writers?**

Starting with the caveat that I'm not an expert by any stretch, I'd say first, be a sponge. Read the how-to books and take what works for you from them. Read your favorite authors' books and pay attention to what, in the story, works and what doesn't. Bonus points if you figure out why it does or doesn't work. Broken record time: attend seminars and conferences. Listen to what the presenters are saying and again, embrace what you think will work for you. Be a sponge. Soak up everything other writers share with you about their writing process, the publishing business, marketing, whatever. You may even get a great salsa recipe. And last, the part I have the most trouble doing, put your butt in the chair and write it.



Fantasy  
Atmosphere Press  
Aug 24, 2021  
366 pp

In a world of strange magic, dangerous creatures, and villainous wyverns, an ousted young queen struggles to regain her throne.

Sophia Pendergast's quest is complicated by deep rooted misogyny embedded in her culture and religion. Her lover, a dashing young knight, offers her a life in obscure comfort, but she refuses to abandon her people to the usurper's whims. To retake her throne and set prophecy on its path she must embrace a long-denied secret and discover a prophecy's hidden meaning.

In S.L. Wilton's *Queen of Crows*, we discover simple truths may not be exactly simple.

## Contests

# The Jade Ring

## Writing Contest

Opens March 6, 2023, Closes June 2, 2023

Send us your best  
poetry, short fiction,  
nonfiction

Judges: Angela Trudell Vasquez,  
Christine DeSmet, David McGlynn



Fees apply; paid critiques available, prizes

<https://wiwrite.org/Jade-Ring-2023>

### High School Juniors and Seniors:

The Youth Writing Competition is open through March 31

Free to enter – categories Poetry, Fiction, Nonfiction

<https://wiwrite.org/2023-Student-Writing-Contest>

Prizes in each category: First - \$100; Second - \$75; Third - \$50

### *Spend a Week with Your Book!*

Choose from three concurrent six-day residential programs:

Hands-on Workshop Focused Writing Retreat Book Coach

10th All-Genre Novel Bookcamp June 18-24

3rd Speculative Fiction Novel Bookcamp August 13-19

<https://www.NovelBookcamp.org>

Small classes/one fee covers enrollment, room, and all meals/taught by  
award-winning novelists, book editors/publishers/literary agents

Registration Open/Space Limited

[director@novelbookcamp.org](mailto:director@novelbookcamp.org)

Located at the Siena Retreat Center, in Racine, WI

All-Genre week Bookcamp Instructors

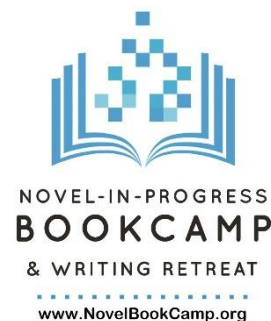
SJ Rozan, Kelly Van Sant, Robb Grindstaff

Visiting Pros from PS Literary, Renegade Press, 3 Seas Literary Agency

Speculative Fiction week Bookcamp Instructors

Sue Burke, Hank Schwaeble, Mary Anne Mohanraj

Visiting Pros from Headwater Literary Management, Donald Maas Agency, Underland Press

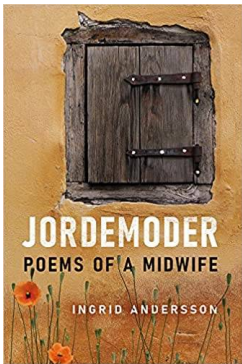




## Book Shelf Reviews

A benefit of belonging to WWA is that members can request to have their books reviewed by a volunteer reviewer. If you have a book you wish to promote, please email Kathleen (K.M.) Waldvogel at [waldvogelkm@gmail.com](mailto:waldvogelkm@gmail.com) with your request. Although the request is not a guarantee of review, our volunteers try their best to accommodate.

Here is a sample of what some talented WWA members have published.



### **Jordemoder**

by Ingrid Andersson  
Poetry, 73 pages  
Published 2022 by Holy Cow!  
Press

“Enjoy poetry? Settle in with a cup of tea or hot cocoa and savor the words of Ingrid

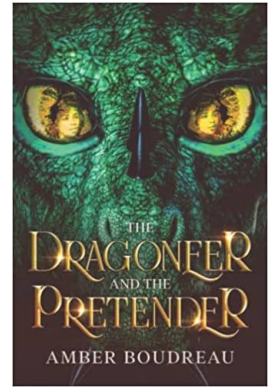
Andersson with her collection of poems in **Jordemoder: Poems of a Midwife**. The collection includes poems about her family, her experiences as a midwife, and her observations of nature.

“Andersson’s poetry is both muscular and delicate, drawing on the author’s international experiences, profession, and familial relationships in addition to her observations, joys and frustrations with the state of the world.”

Read Rebecca Swanson’s entire review <https://wiwrite.org/book-reviews/13083866>.

**The Dragoonier and the Pretender**, new YA Fantasy from Amber Boudreau.

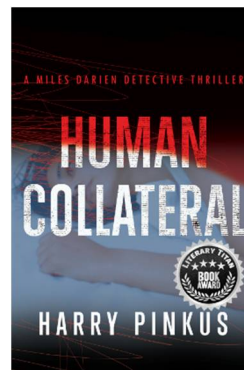
YA Fantasy, 362 pages  
Published by Dragon  
Steel Press, 2022



“Moira Noble is faced with an almost insurmountable problem: how to rescue her good friend and his twin brother who have been whisked into Darkness by the troll captain she thought she had killed. With the aid of Zephyr, her dragon, the two of them embark on a dangerous journey into the unknown to accomplish the impossible.

“Boudreau has created an enticing world of fantasy for her readers. As a former middle school and high school teacher, I could see students of that age eagerly sitting down with a copy of the book and devouring it. Boudreau has written a fantasy that would delight any Tolkien follower.” Read Gary Banker’s review

<https://wiwrite.org/book-reviews/13102944>



### **Human Collateral**

by Harry Pinkus  
Thriller/Mystery; 312  
pages; Published 2022  
by BQB Publishing

“Human Collateral is an enjoyable, quick reading mystery. The main character, Olivia, has gone missing. When her mother, Cora, cannot find her, she hires private detective ex-police officer, Miles Darien, to find her daughter. The book then follows the investigation of locating her.”

Read Stephen Glick’s review

<https://wiwrite.org/book-reviews/13103475>

# CRAFT TIPS

## How To Interview Your Main Character

Beckie Gaskill, Marshfield

**Want to know the secret to writing a story your readers cannot put down? Ask your main character.**

**Your stories come alive through your characters.**

Truly, the story is not yours—it belongs to your main character. If your characters are flat, then even the most original of plots will also fall flat to the reader. It is easy to create a character in your own image. But what happens when you need a character very different from yourself? How do you make that character ring true to the reader?

Character sketches are important when creating solid characters. When you start writing Chapter 23 you won't have Dillon looking into her deep brown eyes when her eyes were bright green in Chapter 1. You already know that Jake was an all-star linebacker in high school, so you don't have to wonder if he could actually lift Darren's dead body into the trunk of a car and throw him into the swamp. Your character sketch will tell you those things. What it will not tell you, however, is Jake's motivation. It won't tell you why Jake might have killed Darren. To know those things, you need to know more about your character than a simple character sketch will allow. The tool I find most effective for really getting to know a character, his motivations and his internal thought process, is the character interview.

In life, when you are getting to know someone, you do so through your interaction with them. You can do the same thing with your main characters. If you sit and talk to a character, you will get to know him and how he will react in any situation. You will know what truly motivates him (even if that underlying motivation is hidden from your reader until you expertly unveil your final plot twist). Characters with depth will pull a reader through parts of the plot that, while necessary, are not high-tension. The reader will follow these characters because you have made the

reader care. For the reader to care about a character, you need to care about that character. For you to care about your character, you need to know him or her.

This is not to say that all characters need to be highly developed. Some of your characters are needed for the story—for instance, someone needs to be driving the cab on the way home from the nightclub, or a boy stocking produce may cause apples to spill across the aisle, sending your main character tumbling into the arms of a stranger (who becomes important later)—but you do not need to know everything about them. Without these roles, your story would not be complete, but the characters themselves can be less developed. They serve their purpose, and they are gone from the story. The characters you really need to know are your main characters, especially your antagonist and protagonist.

**How do you know if you really “know” your character?** Have you sat down with him in a coffee shop or stood behind her in a long line at a department store? Have you sat in the seat next to her on a plane ride overseas? Have you walked into the local bar and found yourself sitting next to him?

What does he think of the current President of the United States? How does she feel about exercise or no-carb diets? Is there a reason she would never buy a Ford? Why does he no longer talk to his older sister? What is in his refrigerator? Has she ever lost a loved one or been cheated on?

You may say that none of these questions have anything to do with your story, and that may be true. However, questions like this have everything to do with your character. If reviewers are saying that your character is not quite right or does not ring true, it may be because you do not know them like you think you do.

An interview may be in order, or possibly just a written account of a chance meeting between you and your character. The setting can be any of your choosing. It should be a place that your main character would frequent.

**If your main character has a drastically different lifestyle than your own, you may be forced to choose the formal interview style.**



If your main character is a crack addict living in an inner city and you are from a small farming town in central Wisconsin, you may need to “travel” to the city for an actual interview with him. He will want people to know that he is not all bad and that he was once a good kid in the seventh grade. He will grant you the time because he wants you to accurately portray him in your story. He will show you he is not all bad and will trust that you’ll find a way to show your readers this.

If your main character lives in the desert and you’ve lived all your life at the seaside, again, you may need to “travel” to her location for a formal interview. She is your character. She will sit down with you to tell you her story—just to make sure you’ve got it right before you tell the world.

**If you have common interests with your main character, perhaps you have a chance meeting somewhere.** You meet a man who was just jilted by his girlfriend in a coffee shop while reading a copy of the *Canterbury Tales*. He puts down the book to attend to his coffee and sees you there. The national news is on, and he starts a conversation from one of the news stories. From there, you learn more about him through active dialogue.

Maybe you meet your main character at a local dog park. You’ve never seen her there before, but you both own black labs who seem to want to run and play together, so you strike up a conversation. Your conversation turns from dogs to day-to-day life as the animals scamper off, happy to run and play without your watchful eyes.

In either scenario, you may be surprised what you find out about your characters. The interview forces you to really get into their heads and to see their life, and the world, from their perspective. Many authors interview most, if not all, of their characters in this way to ensure that the lives they bring to the page ring true to the reader.

**As an author, you form your characters.** You breathe life into human beings and other entities on the page and make them come alive for the reader. Getting to know the character before you introduce him or her to your readers is imperative to the success

of your story. If a character is based on yourself or someone you know, it may be very easy to relay that person and all their idiosyncrasies to your readers. On the other hand, if your story calls for a person you have never met before, or someone from a different time or place, you may need to lay out that character in more detail before continuing with the story.

**The role your character plays in your story may also influence your interview questions.**

Remember, good protagonists have some negative personality traits and antagonists have some positive personality traits—they are all human (or based on a human personality). Even Freddie Krueger had a reason for the things he did. Now, simply because he was burned alive by neighborhood parents does not, to us, make his actions acceptable, but we understand him and his need for revenge. Your readers need to understand your evil characters from the same standpoint. In this interview, ask the hard questions. Get the hard answers.

Mel Gibson in *Lethal Weapon*, although the undisputed hero of these tales, had several issues to deal with. Horatio Cane on *CSI: Miami* always gets his man, but sometimes has underlying motivations. He has baggage, too. Even your “knight in shining armor” characters have baggage. They have a past that led them to where they are in their world right now. Ask those questions. Find out those motivations. What is the reason they are fighting so hard for their cause? There must be, or they would not be fighting hard enough to win.

**There are many ways to develop great characters.**

I would never suggest using a character interview in lieu of a character sketch, for example, but I would suggest using this technique to get to know your characters in addition to many of the other tools you use regularly as an author. It will help to give your character a true and unique voice and allow you to portray that character to your readers. After all, it is not your story—it’s your main character’s story. It should be told from his eyes and with his voice.

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Beckie Gaskill is an avid writer of both fiction and nonfiction. She lives in Marshfield, Wisconsin with her boyfriend and two dogs.

## Writing Process

Denny Balish, Madison

My writing process is a bit like herding cats. Ideas dart in and out of my mind on silent mitts. Some are too quick to grab. Others amble about, enticing me to scratch them under the chin just so.

Certain ideas ruffle their furry softness around my imagination, lingering long enough to capture them. Others pounce, grabbing me unexpectedly, razor teeth nipping, leaving indelible marks. Then, as quickly as they came, they scramble off half-crazed down the hallway leaving me with nothing more than a few phantom bites.

Needing undivided attention, some dig in their claws, refusing to let go until I have memorialized them. Some fall at my feet, lolling around, bellies bared, and when I reach out to feel their lovely warmth, they dart away, taunting: "catch me if you can."

Sometimes an idea shows up like an old bedraggled stray at my door, begging I take notice. Other times I am gifted with a half dead thing that is better left to perish than to go through the trouble of resuscitation.

Occasionally, these entities will approach on tender paws, encouraging me to stroke their silken spine from head to tail over and over until mesmerized into submission.

Sometimes, if I am very still and very quiet, several at once will curl up in my lap, as I oh-so-carefully reach for a pen (without disturbing their purring eloquence) to transcribe their murmurs onto words.

Once gathered, I begin to shape these creatures into something that has never existed before. And when done, I set my creation free and begin herding cats again.

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Denny Balish is a certified coach, writer, and facilitator of transformative experiences for those who want to create a renewed sense of purpose and passion for their life and life's work. Denny is a member of the International Coach Federation (ICF), Wisconsin Writers Association (WWA) and is a flutist with Madison New Horizons Band.



## Sijo Poem

Denny Balish, Madison

In the dark, I turn my face to the heaven's  
starlight ablaze  
Eyes widen, captivated by the beauty  
enfolding me  
Tears escape, ghosts of urban life lost to  
this place, my new home



### What is a Sijo poem?

Sijo is a Korean style of rhythmic verse, originally songs, in the way of Haiku or Tanka. A sijo poem has three lines of fourteen to sixteen syllables each, totaling forty-four to forty-six syllables. Each line contains a pause near the middle that doesn't have to be relative to natural breaks or equidistant. The first half of the line contains six to nine syllables; the second half should contain no fewer than five. Sijo poetry is thematic, a mini story introduced by the first line; the second line gives the twist or conflict, and the last line wraps it up.

Why don't you try one? Send it to [submit@wiwrite.org](mailto:submit@wiwrite.org) and I'll print some in the next edition.

## The Great Deception

John J. Mutter, Jr., Shawano

I joined the Shawano Area Writers back in the early 1970s. My mother also was a member, but we were different writers. She was a poet and I was interested in prose. As the decades rolled along different people joined our group and some moved or passed away.

In late 2017, I found myself being the oldest member of our original group that had been formed in 1966. It seems to me that writers have changed somewhat from when I joined the group. Today's writers do not seem to have that clawing desire to get their name in print. Instead of getting letters to the editor of newspapers and stories in magazines printed to build a writer's background through writing credits, most of them wanted to take the short cut by plunging into publishing a book. Most of the older authors I had read about paid their dues by getting their names in magazines before books became an option for them.



In 2005, I wrote my mother's biography. In the work I included a family photo of my mother's side of our family. The photograph was taken in about 1947, with twenty-three people either sitting or standing. My brother William and I are sitting on the floor in front of the group of people. When the picture was taken, I was playing around with my left ear. I came up with the idea to write a fictitious story that I was born with my left index finger grown into my left ear canal. Then, read it to the members of my writer's group to see what the reaction would be.

Before I read the story, I explained to the group that I was hesitant in reading this, because it was a tragic part of my younger life, thus quite personal. I immediately began to feel guilt, conning my members to believe what I was about to reveal, was true. Then I passed the family photo of me sitting on the floor with my left index finger in my left ear around to the members and, as it was being passed around the table, I began to read.

## A Mother's Dilemma

It's hard to believe that any expecting mother hasn't thought about the condition of her baby at birth. When the baby is brought to her shortly after the miracle of birth, she looks it over good to see if there are any irregularities to her newborn. Mothers usually can tell if something is wrong with their baby, and if so, they are sometimes slow to admit it.

When Burnette Mutter gave birth on August 11, 1943, the doctors were immediately at her bedside. She knew why they were there and the doctors tried to be sensitive about the situation. Burnette's son, John Jr., was born with his left index finger grown into his left ear canal. "Mrs. Mutter, we suggest that we try to correct this abnormality right away, similar to the way we attend to the circumcision," one of the doctors said in a kind voice.

"The finger is not attached by much, but it will take some planning and maybe a half-hour procedure. We have to be careful not to violate the ear canal," another doctor offered.

"It's better to do it right now before the baby has grown, as it will be harder as he grows," another doctor submitted.

"I need time to think," Burnette said to the doctors, and they quietly left the room.

The doctors returned two hours later. "Have you decided, Mrs. Mutter?" one of the doctors asked.

"Yes. I've decided. God gave me little Johnny Jr. this way, so He must have wanted him to be different, so I can't let anything change the way God delivered him to me, and that's my final decision."

Other than this deformity, John Mutter, Jr., was a normal seven-pound baby boy. John Jr. now joined the

family with their other boy, Billy, who was twenty-two months older. People can be cruel and some of the young boy's relatives were just that. Behind the backs of the new parents, they made snide remarks about the little deformed boy. Instead of referring to him as John Jr., like the parents wished, they usually referred to him as "Ear-finger." Remarks were made about the little boy ending up in the sideshow of a circus someday. As Mr. and Mrs. Mutter eventually found out about this, they became more removed from the family.

Burnette Mutter was a very creative lady. She altered all of baby John Jr.'s clothes so that she could slip them over the arm to make it look like normal clothing. Life went on.

In 1946, Burnette's parents were going to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Burnette's mother delivered the invitation personally. "Burnette, I know you have heard what some of the relatives may have been saying about little John Jr. I'm here to tell you that only a few people have stooped so low as to say things about him. I have not. I consider him my grandson just the way he is, and I love him. I would like you and John and your sons Billy and John Jr. to come to the party we're having for our wedding anniversary," Grandma said.

John and Burnette Mutter and their two boys did attend the wedding anniversary for Grandma and Grandpa that year. It was a mending of some relations and in the end it brought the family closer together. A family photograph was taken and this is the only photo that has survived of little John Jr., showing the condition in which he was born.

When John Jr.'s parents decided to send the young boy to kindergarten, an argument ensued. "Burnette, we are going to have to do something about Johnny's condition before he enters school," John Sr. said.

"Nobody is going to be cutting on my little boy," Burnette defended.

"Well, he's my little boy too, and I don't want all the kids in school to be cruel to him. We must have the finger removed from his ear."

"Over my dead body," Mrs. Mutter screamed.

(I briefly looked across the table at our 80-year-old member, Irma, a mother herself, tears welling up

in her eyes. How could I do this to her?, but I had to continue the lie.)

"Then I'm filing for divorce," Father Mutter shouted, "and I'll fight for custody and after I get it I'll have the work done to make Johnny a normal person. I'm not going to let him go through life like this."

The parents did not talk to each other for several days. Finally, Burnette broke the ice. "If I agreed to have this done, where would we go? I wouldn't want to face the same doctors that delivered Johnny."

"Milwaukee General has some very good doctors. We could take him there for an evaluation," John said.

An appointment was made and two different doctors examined little John Jr. The consensus was that the finger could be removed in a procedure that would take around an hour and a half. "We do not see any real dangers to the ear canal in the surgery, although his index finger might end up being a bit shorter and slimmer," one of the doctors said.

"But as he grows you may not be able to see much difference in the finger," the other doctor commented.

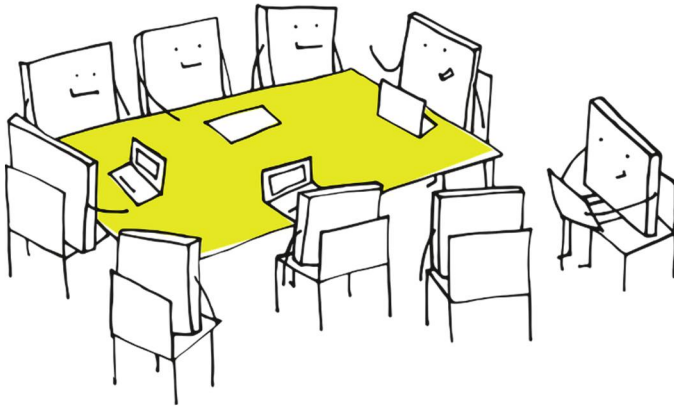
So, on August 11, 1947, exactly four years after his birth, doctors at Milwaukee General Hospital surgically removed little John's finger from his ear, and the wounds of words began to fade. The doctor's predictions ended up being correct; after some years little John's index finger looked as normal as the other one.

After I laid the papers of the story down, the room was silent. Most everyone at the table looked like I had just announced the passing of one of our dear members. I couldn't let them go on with life like this any longer. So I confessed that I had concocted this story, and one member began to laugh. "You had me fooled," he blurted.

So, maybe there's hope for my fiction stories and future novels!

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The written word has been John Mutter, Jr.'s passion for the past forty years. He has self-published four books and has received ten writing awards.



## NEW IN 2023!

### WWA Virtual Critique Groups

WWA is coordinating four virtual critique group series. Each series consists of six bi-weekly Zoom sessions that last 1½ to 2 hours. The fee is \$150 for members and \$190 for non-members. This is the current schedule:

**Mixed Fiction and Non-Fiction** with Laurie Scheer  
January-March Wednesdays 6 p.m.

**Poetry** with Marilyn Taylor February-April  
Tuesdays 10 a.m.

**Strictly Fiction** with Laurie Scheer March-May  
Thursdays 6 p.m.

**Non-Fiction** with Laurie Scheer March-May  
Wednesdays 6 p.m.

### DID YOU MISS THIS ROUND?

We expect all four sessions to repeat. Registration for the next round will be posted on the Wisconsin Writers Association website soon. If you have questions, please email Jennifer Rupp, program coordinator, at [jrupp25@gmail.com](mailto:jrupp25@gmail.com)

## CREATIVE NONFICTION

### The Journey

Vvilma Pulos, Grafton

The evening prior to the journey was bittersweet, a farewell party in our honor to say “Arrivederci” to everyone was taking place at my great-grandparents’ home. All the familiar faces of our close family, friends and neighbors were there. We were showered with kisses, embraces, and many wishes for a safe and pleasant journey, and both happiness and sadness filled our hearts. After all the guests had left, my mother and I made sure we had our suitcases neatly packed and waiting by the front door.

November 21, 1962, was a seasonally common day for Naples, Italy; rainy and a bit cold. The weather did not dampen the excitement Mamma and I felt as we and hundreds of others boarded the *Columbus*. The beautifully streamlined ship would be our transitional home for the next twelve days. All were aboard; slowly and steadily the *Columbus* detached from the dock. From the enormous multilevel decks, our hands motioned “Farewell,” “Goodbye,” and “Arrivederci” until the shoreline became thin in the horizon, hardly visible, and the powerful waves engulfed us on the path to our new destination. Tears, joy, and fear filled the salty mist air as we began to float across the glorious, wide Atlantic.

Safety instructions by the well-groomed and meticulously dressed crew were given almost immediately as we sailed. Information on life jackets, life preservers and small crafts were demonstrated and all precautions were explained fully so as to have a smooth evacuation in the event of a (God forbid) emergency.

The *Columbus* seemed to float effortlessly across the waves toward what many call the “land

of opportunity” the United States of America. The promise of a better future for any and all who courageously dared to make the journey. Great vision and hope were held in the hearts of all the passengers on board. I thought about my father who had taken this journey seven years prior to escape the economic devastation left by World War II. Now this expedition was giving aspiration to the current New World travelers.

After we settled into our shared cabin, Mamma and I took some time to explore our new surroundings. In my young and innocent eyes, the enormous ship was as large as a small city, only on water. Having a curious nature, I began to search for my entertainment spot and soon discovered where I would be spending most of my time. My eyes lit up at the sight of FUN! It was a miniature amusement park with Merry-go-rounds, swings, rocking horses, see-saws and EVERYTHING a playful child would ask for. My dreams had come true and then some.

I rushed to reach the swing, my favorite playground pastime. Gently I sat in the curved seat; back and forth I pushed, tapping my tiptoes on the ground to get more height to my swing as my hair waved in the wind behind me and in front of me. Mamma would always know where to find me. She instead enjoyed all the interesting shops with enticing goods I never knew existed and socializing with the other passengers.

The cool nights were long and seemed to last forever. Rolling, swaying, and thunderous crashes of waves kept us awake many evenings and for my Mamma, seasickness had become a daily unwelcome ordeal. Many hours were spent with our cabin mate, a tall, beautiful, pale-skinned bilingual woman who taught me how to count from one to ten in English. Demonstrating with our hands and fingers, I would say “uno,” she would say “one” I would say “due,” she would say “two,” and so on until I mastered the numbers to

ten. This was the beginning of what soon would become my second language.

For the most part, the days of our trip passed quickly, but by Day Ten the remaining ones were monotonous and getting tiresome. Our water view, which at the beginning of the voyage seemed peaceful and calming, had now become mind-numbing. We were all eager for the journey to end.

December 2, 1962. Several hours before we reached our destination, everyone was packed and standing on deck. Patiently watching in amazement and fascination, we soon recognized a silhouette of the Statue of Liberty as it became visible; beautiful Lady Liberty. The crowd cheered and roared. Happiness surged through me and exploded within me, like firecrackers on the Fourth of July.

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Vvilma Pulos currently lives in Grafton, Wisconsin. She is originally from Italy and enjoys writing creative non-fiction stories of life experiences. Her background is in interior design and sales. Writing has always been a hobby for her and a diversion from her daily occupation.

### **What is Creative Nonfiction?**

Nonfiction is a true story, yes? What if you didn't record every word of a conversation during the moment you're writing about? What if you're not exactly sure what kind of day it was, or what your significant other was wearing? But you know what happens next, so you can mention that anywhere in your narrative. You can make conjectures, remember the gist and make up the rest of details enhancing the event. It's part memoir, part biography, part article embellished with your own style and voice. It can be part fable, part tall tale, part allegory, part trope, but at its heart, it must be based on something true.

## SHORT FICTION

### The Arachnids v. Dan Smith

Emily Buckner, Racine

If I had known what was going to happen, I never would've smashed that spider. I didn't even notice the creature until it skittered across my bathtub. Spiders disgust me, and I didn't want the little squirt ruining my clean bathroom. Besides, what if it laid eggs? Then I would have a bunch of baby spiders to contend with. Blegh.

I grabbed a piece of toilet paper and followed the spider with my hand. It scurried away, almost as if it knew what its fate would be.

I felt sympathetic for a moment and muttered, "I'll try to make it quick," before slamming the paper down.

Not wanting to look, but needing to make sure the deed was done, I opened the crumpled mass. In the middle of the paper lay the squished, flat spider.

My shoulders relaxed. That would teach him not to invade my space.

Suddenly, I felt my body tingling all over. I looked up, and the ceiling was much higher than I remembered. It kept getting farther and farther away. I was shrinking!

In my panic I lost my balance and fell into the bathtub. Soon I was so small I couldn't see over the edge. I realized that was the least of my problems when a spider crawled up from the drain. He loomed over me, black and hairy with giant fangs. His fuzzy leg shot out and looped itself around my waist.

I shuddered and retched before screaming, "Please don't eat me!"

"I'm not here to eat you," the spider said in a deep voice.

Wait a minute. Spiders couldn't talk. I pinched myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming and was awarded with a brief but sharp pain in my arm. Maybe they could.

"W-what are you going to do with me?" I stammered.

"If it were up to me, I *would* eat you. You look delectable. But you've been summoned to the Arachnid High Court, so I'll have to settle for the fly that's trapped in my web."

"The arachna-what?"

"The Arachnid High Court. It's where people like you go to be put on trial."

"People like me?"

"Suspected spider killers."

I frowned. "Plenty of people I know kill spiders. How come I've never heard of this high court thingy?"

"Because we can't possibly get *all* of the spider killers. You were randomly selected."

"Lucky me," I groaned.

The spider took me back through the drain and into my house's pipe system. The sound of rushing water filled my ears as he picked his way along the pitch-black corridors. I found myself wishing I had night vision. We made a few dizzying turns and came out into the sewer. For a moment the putrid stench overpowered my fear. My spider captor lowered himself down on his web until we stood at the water's edge. Following the water, we came to a crack in the wall, and the spider wriggled through.

The space we emerged into was pitch black, but a bit of light shone up ahead. As the spider headed toward the light, I heard whispers all around me.

"Is this the new human? Kind of puny, don't you think? He won't survive one second."

When we reached our destination, the spider sat me down on a pebble. While my eyes adjusted to the dimness, I could make out a podium of

sorts, also made out of rock. Behind the rock sat a huge, brown spider. Another spider stood ahead of the podium.

"All rise for the honorable Judge Recluse," the spider in front said.

There was a loud scrabbling all around me. Until that moment I hadn't realized that spiders of all shapes and sizes surrounded my pebble. I may have even spotted a scorpion among the crowd, though it was hard to tell.

The judge made a downward motion with his front leg, and the noise died down. "Mr. Smith," he began, "you have been summoned to the Arachnid High Court for the heinous crime of—"

"Wait!" came a high-pitched voice. The crowd parted to let the newcomer in. Crawling up the makeshift aisle was a spider with a white thorax. "Sorry I'm late. Traffic was a nightmare. A rat almost stepped on me!"

Judge Recluse shook his head. "Sit down, Thomisus."

Thomisus plunked down on a pebble next to mine. "So you're my client." He whistled. "You're a lot scrawnier than the last guy."

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"I'm your defense lawyer," Thomisus replied. "You can call me Tommy."

"Tommy," I repeated.

The judge made a sound like he was clearing his throat. "Can we begin the trial, please?"

"Yes, Your Honor," Tommy said. He stood in front of the judge's podium, turning to a group of arachnids to his right. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I'm here today to prove that my client, uh, what was your name again?"

"Dan," I said. "Dan Smith."

"That Dan Smith is innocent. There is no way such a tender-hearted man could kill a spider in cold blood."

"Thank you, Thomisus," the judge said. "Latrodectus?"

A spider on our left stood up, unfolding its legs. I tensed, recognizing the red hourglass pattern on her thorax immediately. A black widow. She took her time stalking to the podium, making sure I got a view of her long fangs.

"Thank you, Your Honor," she said. "I am here to prove that this man, Dan Smith, is guilty of killing Parasteatoda, an innocent house spider."

"Very good," Judge Recluse said. "Thomisus, you may call your first witness."

"I call...Pholcidae to the stand."

An extremely tall arachnid rose up from the back of the seated crowd and crawled toward the judge's podium. It had more legs than its spider cohorts and looked eerily familiar. Pholcidae took a seat on a rock that served as the witness stand. Tommy crawled up to him.

"Mr. Pholcidae," Tommy began. "Do you recognize this man?" He pointed to me.

"Yes. I see him in his basement from time to time," Pholcidae replied.

"And have you ever seen this man do harm to a spider?"

"No, never. He usually ignores us."

"So, are you saying he probably wouldn't kill an innocent spider?"

"Not unless the spider got in his way."

"And have you actually seen a spider 'get in his way'?"

"Not in the basement, no."

"Your witness," Tommy said to Latrodectus.

Tommy went back to his place next to me. He glanced at me briefly and blinked his eight eyes. Then he raised his front leg. I wasn't sure what he was trying to communicate. It could have been a thumbs-up, if he had thumbs. Or maybe he was just waving. I didn't think he should've had anything to be particularly cheerful about. Pholcidae hadn't exactly gotten me off the hook.

Meanwhile, the black widow had taken Tommy's place in front of the witness stand. The



hourglass pattern gleamed in the sparse lighting, reminding me of how dangerous she was.

"Mr. Pholcidae, have you ever been anywhere in Mr. Smith's house besides his basement?" the black widow asked.

Pholcidae appeared to think for a moment. "I have seen a few other rooms in his house."

"How about the bathroom?"

"Perhaps once."

"And were you in Mr. Smith's bathroom on the day in question?"

"No, I wasn't."

The black widow continued her line of questioning, concluding that since Pholcidae hadn't been in the room at the time of the killing, he couldn't be sure whether or not the house spider had gotten in my way.

"Thank you, Mr. Pholcidae, you've been very helpful," Latrodectus said. "I'd like to summon my next witness, if I may."

"Proceed," Judge Recluse said.

"I'd like to call up Ms. Musca."

A low-pitched buzzing echoed off the walls, and a shadow passed over the court. Everyone looked up, and some of their fangs dripped. It looked as though they were drooling. Suddenly the buzzing stopped, and a housefly appeared on the stand. Her huge, segmented eyes scanned the crowd, and she trembled.

Latrodectus rubbed her front legs together, and even she appeared hungry. Then she straightened, businesslike, and addressed the witness. "Ms. Musca, have you seen Mr. Smith before?"

"Y-yes," Musca buzzed. "You're not going to eat me, are you?"

"No, of course not. None of us are here to snack on you. We only want justice to be served." The housefly tensed, obviously not comforted by the black widow's words. "Now, Ms. Musca, were you present on the day Mr. Smith killed an innocent

spider?"

"Objection!" called Tommy. "Conjecture."

"Sustained," said Judge Recluse.

"Let me rephrase that," Latrodectus said. "Were you present on the day Mr. Smith *allegedly* killed a spider?"

"Y-yes," stammered Musca.

"Could you tell us, in your own words, what happened?" the black widow asked.

Musca's wings twitched. "I was crawling up the bathroom wall, trying not to choke on the fumes from Mr. Smith's cleaning products. I got as far as the ceiling when I saw him grab a wad of toilet paper and advance on something crawling around the bathtub."

"Then what happened?" prodded Latrodectus.

"Mr. Smith squished it. I didn't see that it was a spider until he opened the paper."

"And?"

Musca hesitated. "The spider was, well, flat. It wasn't moving."

A gasp came from the crowd followed by a cacophony of voices. At that moment I knew there wasn't much hope left. Even Judge Recluse had flinched at Musca's testimony.

"Order!" Judge Recluse yelled. The arachnids quieted. "Thomisus, do you have any questions for Ms. Musca?"

"I believe so, Your Honor," Tommy said. He slowly approached the witness stand. "Ms. Musca, you mentioned that you were 'trying not to choke on the fumes from Mr. Smith's cleaning products,' is that correct?"

"I did," replied Musca.

"Is it possible that these fumes affected you in any way?"

Musca's eyes focused on Latrodectus, whose fangs hadn't stopped dripping. "Um, maybe."

"And if these fumes affected you, isn't it possible that you're not a reliable witness?"

"Yes. No. I don't know."

“And if you’re not a reliable witness, how can you be sure you saw Mr. Smith killing a spider?”

“I don’t know!” Musca wailed.

Tommy turned to the jury. “Ladies and gentlemen, I rest my case.”

“The jury will now deliberate,” said Judge Recluse.

The jury exited the courtroom. I had to admit I was impressed by Tommy’s handling of the last witness, but was that going to be enough to free me? I said a silent prayer to the arachnid gods, promising that if I was proven innocent I would never squish another spider.

After what seemed like hours, the jury finally returned. All eyes were on them as the forespider stood. My heart raced, and my hands felt clammy as Judge Recluse addressed him.

“What is your verdict?”

The forespider cleared his throat. “We, the jury, find the defendant guilty.”

“Mr. Dan Smith, I sentence you to a lifetime of living as a spider.”

My heart sank. I didn’t know exactly what the verdict meant, but it was sure to be bad for me.

“Ooh, tough break,” Tommy whispered. That was the last thing I heard before my vision blurred, and I blacked out.

When I awoke, all I could see was white. As my eyes focused, the blue tile floor of my bathroom came into view, but it looked strange. I lifted my hand to rub at my eyes and realized that in its place was the hairy nub of a spider leg.

I tried to scream, but what came out of my mouth was more like a high-pitched squeal. I scurried around the floor, aimless, until I was out of breath.

“Okay, Dan,” I said to myself. “No big deal. You’re just a spider now. You can adjust.”

The bathroom door opened a crack, and a huge white paw emerged, followed by the rest of

my cat, Miles. I dashed up the wall as quickly as I could and didn’t stop until I was on the ceiling. Miles stared up at me, his tail twitching, and meowed. How would I ever adjust to this?

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Emily Buckner is a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association and has a piece published in Flash Fiction Magazine. She is a teacher in the Milwaukee area who enjoys making music, reading, and taking walks.

## DULL DAY

Jeffrey Sears

Nothing seems to rise above the plain.  
The road ahead diminishes and points  
Nowhere but to a vague horizon line.  
A grey sky sits on the empty fields.

Then there come the patchy fog and rain:  
A chill oil drops from heaven and anoints  
Me prophet of the scenery’s decline.  
My old car’s rusty chassis shields

Me from the cold. Not the day, it seems,  
To stir my eager heart to lofty dreams.

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Jeff Sears' poems have appeared in *Great River Review*, *Lyrical Iowa*, *The Rotarian*, and *Touchstone* (Viterbo College). He is the author of *The Worth of the Harvest: James Hearst and His Poetry* (Final Thursday Press, 2022). He is a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association.



## HUMMINGBIRD

Elizabeth Gramz, Waukesha

Lewis can hear the words from his wife's mouth like it was just yesterday, "I have cancer, stage 3, they want to start treatment this week." He can vividly see the tears, he can remember the feeling of his heart being squeezed in his chest, and the fear of their two sons and eighteen-month-old daughter never knowing their mother. He can't believe they made it to the other side of the battle.

It's been three weeks since her last MRI, and one of her tumors was undetectable while the other was a fraction of the size it had been before. Treatment has done everything it was promised to do. Emma had taken her diagnosis head on, and Lewis did what he could to take care of her and the children. It wasn't easy, and the house is a disaster, but they made it through. She made it through.

On the week of her last chemotherapy treatment, he found she had arranged with a friend of his for a getaway weekend. His best friend, living in Florida, had booked flights for him to visit from Wisconsin. She had mailed a box of goodies for them to help enjoy his time away. At first he refused, saying he couldn't leave on her last week of treatment, but she insisted, saying, "This is happening to you, too. One of us can get a break from it. Take it." She made arrangements for her brother to stay the weekend to help. In the end, he gave in, went to Florida, and truly had an amazing time.

Now, he stands in the center of his father's back lawn holding a bottle of cold beer, watching his eight and six-year-old sons Max and Cole play

baseball with a yellow plastic bat and ball, and his wife, Emma, walking hand-in-hand with their now two-year-old daughter toward the patio. He removes his red ball cap and runs a hand through his salt and pepper hair, attempting to cool his head from the sun beating down.

It's a warm day in April, uncharacteristically so. The sun shone brightly against Emma's practically bald head, slightly sprinkled with sweat beads. The colorless, fine hairs are just beginning to sprout on her scalp, giving the illusion of a halo around her head. Her navy, floral print maxi dress is dragging just barely on the ground as she moves. Their daughter, Olivia, is forcing her into a crouch to accommodate her short stature and their clasped hands. Olivia's romper matches the pattern of Emma's dress, which doesn't surprise Lewis. Emma has been buying matching outfits for the two of them since they discovered Olivia would be a girl.

Despite the weight of the last six months, the day has him feeling relaxed. His wife is feeling well enough to be outside even after all the complications of chemotherapy, his daughter is happily walking around her grandparent's yard and dragging her mother with, and the IPA in his hand tastes great.

Suddenly, Emma stands straight up, looking sharply to her left. Something caught her attention, but at his distance he can't see exactly what it is. She releases Olivia's hand and takes a step closer to one of the two towering arborvitae trees. She stands between, which separate the back lawn from the patio. Both trees are draped on their outermost layer with fine netting to prevent deer from feasting on the soft, green branches. Lewis begins crossing the lawn to discern what she is doing.

In the few seconds it takes Lewis to reach Emma, his mother Amy and father Dave have both joined her to also examine the tree. His mother reaches down to pick up Olivia. She envelopes her in her arms, brushing her strawberry blonde hair from her face, and kissing her forehead. "Oh no," the grandmother says to Olivia.

Olivia, giggling, repeats “Gigi, oh no!” as she twirls her grandmother’s shoulder length, umber colored hair in her chubby, toddler fingers.

As Lewis approaches, he sees what the fuss is about; a small, bright green hummingbird has entangled itself in the netting. Its body and legs are both entrapped by thin cords that make up the nylon net. Emma is gently working her fingers in the net, trying to free the bird. It twists and turns, the sound of swiftly flapping wings filling the air around them. The entire scene strikes Lewis as odd, given that Emma is afraid of anything with wings, birds and butterflies included. She catches his eye, noting the look of confusion on his face.

“It’s stuck,” she begins to say. “It needs help to get out or it’s only going to get more tangled, Louie. Why is this net on here, anyway?” She turns her attention to her father-in-law, Dave, adding a questioning “Hmm?” Her tone is sassy, but her smirk tells him she’s just teasing.

Lewis can see her hands shaking. From the few times they’ve been at the zoo aviary, he knows the sound of wings buzzing near her ear gives her goose bumps and sends chills up her spine. He is shocked at her disposition regarding the trapped bird, and yet he sees her taking her time trying to free the animal. One step at a time, she had repeated the mantra for the last six months every time her doctor had some new treatment or appointment for her. Each step was an attempt to move closer to the end goal: remission. He turns away from the scene, afraid the tears now forming in his eyes will spill over. The bird is trapped in the net, the way Emma was trapped in her own cancer-ridden body.

Dave replies, mildly defensive, “I don’t want the deer eating the trees.” He guiltily doesn’t meet Emma’s eyes and turns his attention to his wife and granddaughter.

“But you’re a bird murderer if you leave them up. This is just going to keep happening if you don’t take down the nets. Poor thing,” Emma says as he steps away, not taking her eyes from her work. She composedly moves her fingers through and around

the thin net to free the tiny, emerald body. Her desperation is palpable in the air, and Lewis feels himself tense with her concern for the petite creature.

The bird uselessly flaps its wings in an excited attempt to break free, but only further ensnares itself. Its leg had been released, but now its neck is between the thin nylon net holes, and Emma makes a sound of frustration in her throat. “Hang on little buddy, almost there.” Her slightly sweaty brow is now dripping as her concentration increases.

Seconds later she frees the wings, and she begins twisting the net to also extricate his head. If she moves the wrong way she’ll strangle him, so she works even more slowly. Finally, after a few minutes of delicate twisting, turning, and stretching the net, the bird breaks free! For a fleeting second it hooks one of his legs in the net again as it tries to take off, but quickly liberates itself unassisted and flies away.

“We really should take these down,” Amy says to Dave. Then she turns to Emma. “Great job, I didn’t know if he was going to get out of there.”

“Me either,” Emma replies exasperatedly. “I was so afraid I was going to hurt him instead of helping him, but it worked out.” She smiles at Amy and kisses Olivia, who is still in her grandmother’s arms. Both women and the toddler begin to head back toward the patio.

Lewis looks at Emma’s face and can see the happiness from her victory radiating off her. He feels it, too. Her victory is his victory. Then, just like that, a painful day six months ago feels a little further away, his beer tastes a little better, and he understands how they made it out the other side of that war after all.

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Elizabeth has one goal in mind when she writes: to arouse the raw emotions that s many shy away from for fear of feeling vulnerable. When she’s not writing she can be found in a yoga studio, outdoors with her three children and husband near their home in Waukesha, WI, or in the kitchen baking something delicious and sweet that is inevitably filled with sugar and carbs.

## Margaret's Billy

Jan Wilberg, Waukesha

I was on my way out the door when Margaret moved in. Well, not literally out the door. I had three more weeks of rehab after breaking both my legs, can you believe it, in a fall down the basement stairs. It was a real project getting to where my phone was on the kitchen counter but that's a story for another time. I haven't even told my kids about it. But then again they didn't ask. Too busy telling me how I shouldn't go in the basement of my own house.

Margaret was rolled in to my room right after lunch and by rolled, I mean she was on a stretcher, which is a pretty grim way to come into a nursing home even considering all the awful things that happen to people. She was laid out under a sheet and white blanket, everything tucked in nice and tight, like she was being delivered in an envelope. I had to look really close to see the outline of her body under the covers, she was that thin and flat. She was awake though, alert, a little in that painkiller haze we all have coming in the front door, but pretty much with it. She waved hello to me and then turned to the nurse trailing the orderly pushing her stretcher up next to her bed.

"When can I see Billy?" This was said in a querulous manner (is that the right use of that word) like this wasn't the first time she'd asked. The nurse kept looking at the chart as if she hadn't heard the question but you could tell she had. You can always tell when somebody's faking not hearing. It's like fake sleeping. Your eyes might be closed but we know you're not sleeping. Anyway, Margaret didn't ask again, not right then anyway. There was too much else going on, getting lifted into the new bed, all situated, worrying that her gown was covering all her private areas. She seemed like somebody who would really appreciate a pair of nice pajamas. I had some I

wouldn't mind giving her but it seemed too soon, if you know what I mean.

Like I said, it was just after lunch, so, of course, the "powers that be," that being the nurses in their scrubs with the blue and yellow teddy bears, came through the room to lower the blinds and dim the lights. It was naptime, don't you know, for all us oldsters. There was no fighting it. Ever seen a five-year old win the "I'm not sleepy" stand-off with his kindergarten teacher? No. Because it never happens. It didn't happen here either. Naps were what came next in our day so it was lights out, friends.

"When can I see Billy?" I could hear Margaret whispering behind the thin slip of a curtain between our two beds. She asked a few more times then fell silent. The curtain moved slightly and I saw that her thin, doll-like hand was holding a fold of the fabric and moving it from side to side in time with her question. When—pull of the curtain—can—pull of the curtain—I—pull of the curtain—see—pull of the curtain—Billy—.

I figured Billy must be her son or her husband, betting he was a son. Maybe Margaret had a husband but she didn't have that kind of aura, you know. She looked like that part of her life was over. It would be just a matter of time before her son Billy showed up and took his mother's tiny hand in his and told her it would all be okay. Then, maybe, she'd stop asking for him. The curtain rustled again. "When can I see Billy?"

Three o'clock was wake-up time, time for all the old kiddos to roll up their little nap mats, rub their sleepy eyes, and ask for a cookie. Janet, the second shift nurse, came to roust us.

"Janet, my new friend here, Margaret, keeps asking to see Billy. I don't know who Billy is but maybe you can help her?"

Janet was one of the good ones. She didn't blow people off because they were super old or lopsided or having some kind of geriatric

embarrassment. She picked up the chart hanging at the foot of Margaret's bed, flipped a few pages, and said, "Yeah, it says here that she keeps asking for Billy."

"So, who's Billy, if I can ask? Is that her son or her husband?"

"Beats me. Chart doesn't say." Janet put the chart back on its hook and pulled her stethoscope from around her neck. "Just going to give her a little listen here." I waited, not wanting to talk over Margaret's tiny ceramic heart.

"Well, doesn't somebody know? Isn't there somebody to ask?"

"I don't know. Could just be somebody in her head. Chart doesn't have anyone as next of kin. So maybe Billy's the neighborhood cat. Who knows?" Janet wrapped the stethoscope around her neck again and reached for the blood pressure cuff.

"She's pretty deep end dementia. She just has those five words. If there ever was a Billy, she probably couldn't tell you who he was. Don't worry about it. She's only going to be here a few weeks until a bed opens up on the Memory Unit."

I liked this attitude of Janet's but didn't like it at the same time. She was matter of fact about things but sometimes that felt like resignation. If I was a long-timer here and not getting out in a few weeks, I'd feel so hopeless, I'd start knitting my burial scarf.

After the listening and measuring, Janet helped Margaret sit up and then moved her to a wheelchair which she then pushed over to the window. We were lucky to have a big window facing the nursing home's courtyard. They'd done a good job there, fixing it up, lots of flowering trees and probably a dozen bird feeders. Old people need that, you know, something to look at, makes them feel less like captives.

Margaret asked her question a few times and, each time, Janet patted her arm but never gave her an answer like "I don't know or I'll go see or

who's Billy?" I was perplexed at this but I'm not a nurse. My guess is that pointless conversation was considered a timewaster. Reassurance was what the playbook called for. Pats on the arm.

I decided to pull up a chair and look at the birds with Margaret. Only a minute passed before Margaret looked at me, her wispy white eyebrows knit together with what seemed like bottomless longing. "When can I see Billy?"

"Who's Billy, dear?" I decided it was time to confront this Billy business head on. "Tell me about Billy. What does he look like?"

"When can I see Billy?" Maybe Janet was right, maybe these five words were Margaret's last pieces of language.

"Seriously, Margaret, you can tell me. I really want to know who Billy is. Maybe I can find him for you. I'm about to get out of here in a few weeks plus I've got a phone, Google, all that, I could do some searching for you. What do you say?" Margaret's eyes never moved from the bird feeder, but I decided to keep trying.

"Give me some hints. Is he your husband? Your son? Neighbor? Friend? Cat? Is he ugly? Handsome? Do you love him? Does he love you? Come on. Let's figure this out."

Margaret looked at her hands in her lap. With her right hand, she traced the bones and veins on the back of her left hand. She rubbed the back of that hand with her thumb, hard like she was trying to loosen something up. Then she clasped her hands and wrung them together, almost like kneading bread. Finally, she brought her hands together to her lips as if in prayer and said, "He's not a cat."

Ah, I thought. Margaret has nine words! Were there more?

"So, you want to see Billy and he's not a cat. Is there more you can tell me?"

That was the end of the conversation. Margaret signaled this by closing her eyes, her

hands still in prayer mode at her lips and then slowly she dropped them to her lap, turning each palm up as if waiting for an offering of flowers.

I decided that getting 100 per cent more words out of Margaret was a big success but also resolved not to tell Janet or any of the other nurses. Let them do their own work, spend a little time having an actual conversation with a person instead of all that arm patting. It was amazing that even the best nurses started treated old people like pets after a while, doing what was necessary to keep them alive, doling out affection, collecting all their gratitude for the tiniest things. God, I was glad to just be passing through.

I tried many times over the next two weeks to get Margaret to say more. We sat by the window each afternoon after naptime. I pointed out different birds—we had a cardinal pair that was especially wonderful—and she liked that, sometimes pointing herself at a new bird but never saying another word. She stopped asking about Billy. There was no more “When can I see Billy?”

Maybe she was content now. Maybe she didn't need Billy anymore, that whatever she had here at the nursing home was enough, maybe having me around in the next bed, and bird watching with her every afternoon had taken her mind off Billy and the reason she needed to see him. But then I was discharged.

The day I left, with my daughter waiting in the hall with my bags, I sat down one last time and leaned in to talk to Margaret quietly so no one passing by in the hall would hear. “I've enjoyed our time together, Margaret. It's been very peaceful. You don't talk about Billy anymore but I hope if you're thinking about him that it's good thoughts you're having. I'll always have good thoughts about you.” I found myself patting her arm, it felt like I was giving her comfort and I understood a bit why this was Janet's reflex. But

at the second pat, Margaret brought her prayer hands together, kissed her fingers and reached up to cup my face.

“Billy is not a cat,” she said, stroking my cheeks and smoothing the hair off my forehead.

“He is not a cat. When can I see Billy?”

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Jan Wilberg is a long-time member of the Red Oak writing community where she has received kind support and guidance in moving from nonfiction blogging to writing short stories. The stories she tells now aren't true, but she hopes they ring true to readers.

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## Holy Cow

Chris Marcotte, Deer River, MN

I was born in northern Wisconsin, but from then until the summer I turned twelve, I'd lived in Indiana. My mother wasn't well after my birth, and it was easier for her if I stayed with the Phelps. In 1940 my foster dad was dying, so they sent me back to my mother and father. I was in the fifth grade and I felt like an outsider. I slept on the couch and didn't seem to do much right in my father's eyes.

It took me well past Halloween before I had found a friend, Jimmy Osborne. He was in my class but was almost two years older. I ironed creases in my trousers, and he wore stained overalls. I wore my hair neatly parted and his was finger combed at best. But no one else picked us for ball teams, so we picked each other. He got me through a tough year, and although I didn't see him again after school let out, I never forgot the scrapes we got into. I helped Jimmy with his schoolwork, and he told me what life was like in Stone River where his folks had a tavern. He shared stories about his pa that made me content with my lousy family.

During Christmas break Mother suggested I have a friend over. Father didn't want to have anything to do with Old Man Osborne and that included his son. When I told my father I'd be able

to cut twice as much wood with Jimmy's help, he relented. Neither of us had a telephone, so I walked the four miles to Stone River. The tavern was the lower half of an unpainted two-story house. Sure, he'd come, he said. His pa was gone. His ma smiled and said leave before he returned.

We cut wood all afternoon so we could have the next day to do what we wanted. Mother made pancakes and asked about our plans. We looked at one another and shrugged. I hadn't a clue. Don't get into trouble she cautioned with a chuckle.

Jimmy did have a plan. "Let's go to the old creamery," he said when we were out of earshot. The winter wind howled as we pulled up our collars and slipped on work gloves. Jimmy led me to a dilapidated brick building at the end of town. "It's been closed for years. But there's some neat stuff." He sensed my apprehension. "Come on," he said. He punched me in the arm.

I grinned. I'd have a story to tell my Indiana buddies. My heart pounded as I crawled through the open basement window. I'd never been in an abandoned building before. Each step made me a little braver. As we climbed to the first floor, light filtered in from the outside. The huge pieces of machinery had rusted, and the hoses were worn through in spots. Rodents scurried at the sound of our footfalls.

We climbed another set of stairs that led to a couple offices and a large room. We stood just inside the threshold, our breath visible in the unheated space. Pictures of important looking men hung in the front, wooden folding chairs lined one wall, and two old bureaus stood beneath the windows, a beveled mirror between them. As I followed Jimmy across the wood floor, I felt I had entered a forbidden place.

Jimmy stood at the window. "We used to live over there, before the fire." He pointed to a lot where the remains of a foundation were somewhat visible under the snow. "Pa went to

meetings here and I could see the top floor lit up from my room. Sometimes the lights were out before I fell asleep, but Pa never came home until breakfast."

"I always wondered what happened up here, what the meetings were about." Jimmy said. He ran his finger through the dust on the mirror. "I never came in this room 'til now. Guess I needed a friend with me."

It felt good to be the friend Jimmy spoke of, but I was beginning to think we had been there too long. A screech from a drawer he opened startled me.

"Bedsheets," Jimmy said, peering in drawer after drawer. "Just bedsheets." He tugged the handles of a drawer in the second bureau. Jimmy shook out what looked like a pillowcase, but it wasn't.

It was a hood. With eyeholes cut out.

I backed away and knocked over a stack of chairs.

"You scared of a ghost costume?" Jimmy taunted.

"Holy cow, Jimmy!" I grabbed the hood from him and threw it to the floor. "It's...it's from the Klu Klux Klan."

In the mirror I saw his look of fear matched my own. He kicked the hood under the bureau, and we hightailed it out of there as fast as we could.

We were a mile away before the pounding of my heart settled. I looked sideways at Jimmy.

"My pa." He shook his head. "He's ornery when he's drinking, but I never knew."

I shrugged. "Yeah, I guess we don't always know everything about those closest to us."

Jimmy kicked at a clod of dirty snow. "I sure wish I didn't know what I do now."

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Chris Marcotte, a member of WWA, Lake Superior Writers, and Lakes Area Writers Alliance, writes historical fiction and nonfiction. She writes a column for the local newspaper, and published in several regional journals.



## Calving Glacier

Margot McMahon, Oak Park, IL

Metal teeth of crampon tips strapped to his hiking boot bit into the crystal twenty-foot-long ice bridge. There was no way I was coming this far and not crossing that bridge! My harness secured to a rock, I belayed Mike with a line carabineer'd to his harness so that I could stop his fall. His ice pick was ready. The arching bridge didn't break! I was belayed from that side. With skepticism, I cautiously stepped on crampon tips over a two-foot-wide blue bridge that was thirty feet above fluffy white snow. What if he'd weakened it? If I could cross that, I could do anything. Exhilarating and terrifying. Once across, there was no way I could go back. The traverse under the rise was a wonderland of ice bridges and drifted snow canyons.

Knee-deep in fluffy snow, we arrived at the base of Athabasca's face. Of the five of us who set out before dawn, only Mike and I crossed the bridge. Thank God they gave us their food and water. The sheer cliff rose to the left of the active and moving Columbia Icefield.

Athabasca rose in Jasper Park, Alberta, Canada. We'd traversed from the Midwest in a Beetle named Athabasca and camped at the snow line. Headed for a light day of alpine climbing, we carried snacks and water.

Two, eight, twenty rope-lengths, we repeatedly belayed one climber above the other to ascend with tenacious ice pick holds. I chopped the pick tip into ice to pull myself up with crampon tips kicked into slick ice like ladder climbing. I reached Mike's belay spot, then climbed a rope's length above to clip onto a chock wedged in the rock. The line between us was held behind my hip in both hands, allowing me to arrest his possible fall. The deceptive mountain face had a sloping, bowed wall. Each of our rope

lengths looked like the last one to the summit. This climb was too sheer to reverse.

"I'm not going down that face! How much further?" Mike said.

"It should only be a few more rope lengths to the top?" I said.

"Let's go!" My energy increased with the adrenaline, the beauty. I recognized myself on this sheer rock face. I'm supposed to be here. I was fooled over and over again by the bowed perspective. It was a nightmare of not reaching where you were going.

At the far end of the valley, tour buses stopped for viewers to add a quarter to the binoculars and watch our ascent. They could see how far we had to go.

Every twenty rope lengths, I nibbled on a power bar for energy. I was sustained from the magnificent snowy peak under a summer sun. The views were mental oxygen. We rationed water and food. Eight, ten rope-lengths higher. The summit lured us. We were the only climbers.

At sunset, we reached the razor-edged crest with wind whisking up from a several-mile-deep back side. I was made to climb mountains—who knew? We added a rock to a cairn that symbolized the peak of Athabasca in red reflections of a waning sun.

We dared not take a break. I added snow to replenish my water. Ahead, the Columbia Icefield was a slow river of frozen ice. I should not have said, "It has got to be easier to crisscross a glacier." A nearly full moon reflected off the snow with a bright glow.

He said, "Let's keep descending by moonlight." Darkness set in. The wind calmed. Fatigue ruled. We chocked our harnesses to a crack in the cliff above a scree-ledge leveled for rest until dawn. My toes no longer warmed up. While rummaging Mike's pack for food, I pulled out two fist-grips with alligator jaws.

“You slip this side of the juniper onto your rope and when you pull down the grip tightens.”

One juniper was put in my pack. Too soon, the expansive warming sun shone over the colossal glacier. Slowly we wound our way across and around crevasses. I came to a light, fluffy area in the snow along the scree bank. I signaled back. Poked at the spot. I hammered it, kicked it. Mike dug in with his pick. I signaled back and took a step. Silence.

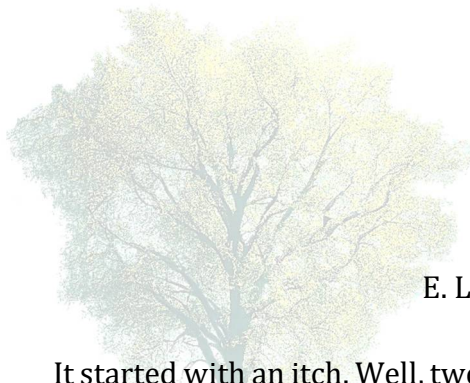
No sun, no wind. Kaleidoscopic. Effervescent rainbows of every shade of purple, red yellow, orange vibrated in midair and unfathomably deep into blueish tones, blurring vapor and reflections in solid ice. I was mesmerized with wonder. Disoriented

“Margot!” Mike called. Where was he? Above? I looked up through two blue-ice walls. My pick dangled several feet above. A broken hole above that. My crampons tips were stuck above a vertical chasm hundreds of feet below me. This is a crevasse. A person lives fifteen minutes in a crevasse before hypothermia sets in. Think fast. The juniper! I slipped it on the taut line and pulled myself up to my ice pick. With the ice pick, toe holds, and the juniper, the climb out was possible.

Mike kept my line taut. I climbed out a freshly opened hole and sheepishly said, “I know, I’m not supposed to exit another hole, but I’m out.”

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A lifelong environmentalist, Margot McMahon sculpts, writes, and paints the interconnectivity of forms of nature. The Smithsonian and the Museum of Contemporary Art collected her sculptures, and her books have won national acclaim. Margot’s fourth book with Aquarius Press is being released at UIMA this January-February 2023: *RESIST! A Visual History of Protest*. She and her husband live in Oak Park, Illinois.



## Mother Elm

E. L. Winters, Madison

It started with an itch. Well, two. One physical, the other metaphorical. Both almost drove me completely round the bend.

I’ll start at the middle, starting at the beginning will take way too long and who has that kind of time anymore. About thirty years or so ago, yes this is the middle if you happen to be sixty-five years old, I began to notice a constant itch right in the middle of my upper back. Went to a few different doctors to see what the cause was because it was kind of distracting and unnerving. They, unfortunately, couldn’t seem to find any cause. After a decade you kind of get used to something as being “normal.” I stopped looking for a cure.

Fast forward fifteen years. I began a daily guided meditation practice, trying to evolve and grow spiritually as one does the closer they get to their expiration date. I was on a daily meditation streak of 253 days when I began seeing an eye while meditating. A female eye, not entirely human looking. There were times when it shifted from near human to reptilian, to insect-like, to bird, feline, canine, etc. ...always going back to that female eye. Large, almond shaped, long lush lashes, in various shades of green. It was annoying at first because I thought to be in a “pure” state of meditation one had to have a totally clear mind. The eye returned. Every. Single. Time. What could it possibly mean? I began researching Eye symbolism, reading everything I could find on the subject.

One day in meditation, She spoke to me. I know, you're thinking wow this must be the part where she went round the bend. Wrong. I took this in stride as I had come to think of the eye as a being separate from myself. I was almost right. "Remember" was all she said. It took me a while, but I finally remembered.

When I was a small girl from a far southern suburb of Chicago, I lived in a small tract home commonplace in the suburbs built in the 1950s. The best part was the yard. We had two large Elm trees in the back. Not sure if you know this, but there was a terrible time in history for the Elm trees in the United States in the early 1960s when Dutch Elm Disease struck. Almost every Elm tree died. I remember my dad standing on the roof of our garage with a garden hose attached to a metal container spraying our two Elm trees weekly to try to stave off the awful disease. Whatever he used in that container worked, as ours were the only Elms in that entire area to have survived. I later read that 90 percent of all Elms were lost due to that disease.

I used to spend a lot of time in one of those Elm trees in particular as it had some convenient lower branches for me to grab hold of. I spent hours up in that tree, reading my books, drawing, daydreaming, singing, telling stories. That tree kept me safe. I would lean against the trunk and I swore I could feel the branches close in around me to keep me from falling. It was my favorite place to be. I wasn't the only occupant of that tree; there were the normal insects and birds that lived there. There were also my "friends." For the life of me I can't remember one single thing about their appearance now, but I used to spend quite a bit of time playing with them and exchanging stories. Of course my mom said they were imaginary. Don't all adults say that? And seriously, what's so wrong about being imaginary anyway? It doesn't make them any less real, or important in a young girl's

life.

I was happy. I loved that tree. That's what I finally remembered after meditating. That Elm tree. It was her kind and loving eye I was seeing during meditation. I began to focus my meditations on her. I felt connected to another being like I never had before. Apologies to my dear husband here. But there are some relationships that go deeper than soul deep.

As I pondered this idea one day it hit me! Now, it may have already occurred to some of you out there who may be reading this, but it took me a while to connect the dots. That itchy patch on my back is the exact spot the tree connected to me and where I felt totally safe and anchored. I began to imagine I was turning into that tree. I am sixty-five, after all. Who knows what's causing my arthritis and stiffness of joints? Maybe I was becoming the Elm. Yes, this is the part where I'm beginning that trip round the bend.

I couldn't stop ruminating on this. It began to consume me. I decided I had to do something about it or commit myself to the local institution for those who believe they are trees. I can't be the only one, right?

Once I decided what to do about it, I told my husband I was embarking on a short solitary road trip. I was going to drive from our home in Wisconsin down to that suburb where I once swore "I'm never going back, no matter what." I had to see if the tree was still there. My mind doubted it, but my heart wouldn't let it go. As my husband indulges me in most things, he waved me off that August morning.

I parked in front of the third house from the end on the west side of the street. The house looked smaller. So old. And yet as I sat there looking at it, I got flashes of my younger self running in the house, letting the screen door slam behind me. I walked slowly up the cracked and buckled sidewalk and nervously knocked on the

door. A woman opened the door. As she juggled the screaming infant in her arms, she wearily said, "what?"

I stammered out, "I grew up in this house back in the late '50s early '60s. I've been thinking a lot about my childhood and was wondering if you wouldn't mind if I took a short walk around the yard?"

Trying to calm the baby, she turned and looked down. I saw a little girl, about five years old, tugging at her mother's shirt. The mother laid a gentle hand on the girl's head and said slowly and clearly, "Eva, do you want to take this lady for a walk in the yard? She used to live here when she was a little girl."

I was shocked, pleasantly so. But I mean, who lets their little girl, obviously precious to her, take a complete stranger for a walk in the yard? Then I realized the poor woman was probably exhausted. I remembered what it was like to have two little ones vying for my attention. I smiled at the little girl, putting on my very best Grandma face, and said, "I would love it if you would show me your favorite place in your yard. I used to have one. I wonder if they could be the same one?" The little girl looked at me with the biggest, most soulful eyes I've ever seen, then nodded at her mother. As she stepped out onto the front stoop, I saw that she was wearing a new looking dress and shiny patent leather shoes. I commented on how pretty she looked and she just smiled and took my old age spotted white hand in her smooth ebony one.

We walked slowly around the front yard, with me keeping a running commentary on how I remembered it. I kept giving her openings, but she never said a word. As we made our way to the backyard I glanced back at the house, I could see her mother keeping an eye on us from the screen door. I told Eva about the Elm trees, how I used to love climbing one of them, and how I spent my

days up there. We came around the side of the detached garage and to my dismay, but not to my surprise, I saw the Elms were indeed gone. I sighed. Eva looked up at me and squeezed my hand to show she knew I was sad at seeing that they weren't there.

She led me back to a patch of tall wildflowers. As we came around to the other side of the flowers I saw that there was a huge tree stump hidden back there, standing about three feet tall. There was a small collection of mismatched plastic teacups and plates neatly arranged all around the edge of the stump. On either side of it were two pieces of wood that stood empty. She took her place on one side and gestured for me to sit at the other. As we sat she began to hum and pour "tea" into the cups. We picked up our cups, and our eyes met properly for the first time. Her clear black eyes looked deeply into my old blue ones. There was an immediate connection. One that began at my feet and traveled up my spine, tingling at that spot on my back that always itches, and up to the top of my head. I smiled. She smiled back.

Then, well you're probably not going to believe this but as you've come this far with me already you may as well go all the way down the rabbit hole, in the center of the stump where the circles began the calendar of the tree, a small seedling appeared. It started out as just a shimmer of green in the center. We both saw it at once and smiled even wider at each other. We watched as the seedling grew and sprouted small branches, each with smaller leaves budding on them. It shimmered, and wiggled, and grew until it was about a foot high. It was brilliant! It was the most alive and verdant thing I had ever seen. And I knew. We knew. We were connected through that Mother Elm. She was alive in us. When I looked at Eva's sweet young face again, I swear I saw a green glint of light sparkle in her eyes. She

turned her head as if listening. And then I heard it. There was a soft rustling in the tall wildflowers, and I kid you not, there was tinkling laughter coming from there. That laughter was more magical than I remembered it being. My friends' laughter.

A few moments later we heard her mother calling her name, so we made our way back to the house. I told her mother what a wonderful hostess her daughter was, leaving out the whole miraculous seedling thing as I knew that this was our secret. I leaned down to hug her good bye and said, "Thank you for showing me your yard."

"You're welcome," she said.

Her mother gasped and fell to her knees in front of Eva. "What? What did you say?" Tears streaming down her face she looked up at me and told me this was the first time Eva had ever spoken a word. Eva took her mother's tear-streaked face in her little hands and said, "I love you, Mommy."

Before starting my car, I pulled down the visor mirror and wiped the running mascara and tears from my eyes. I was about to put the visor back up when I caught a spark of green light in my old eyes. Smiling to myself, I took off for home. I was about halfway there when I suddenly realized that the old itch on my back had turned into a small warm spot that reached all the way to my heart.

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E.L. Winters spent decades as a surgical nurse and caregiver. She now lives in Madison, Wisconsin with her husband. spending her days lost in her lifelong passion of storytelling.



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<https://wiwrite.org/WWA-calendar>

## EVENTS

Our 75th Year is shaping up to be an incredible one! First off – mark your calendars for **October 6 & 7**. To celebrate our birthday, we'll be having a writers' conference. There will be a lot more information to come, but trust me, you won't want to miss this.

Additionally, we've got some monthly events that will knock your socks off.

**March 23rd, 7:00 p.m.:** Kathleen Waldvogel is leading a free session on marketing your children's books.

**April 25th, 7:00 p.m.:** Dr. Dorothy Chan, along with FIVE other phenomenal Wisconsin poets, will be presenting a poetry slam for you to celebrate National Poetry Month. This session is \$10.

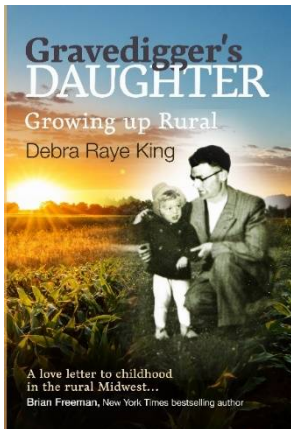
**May 11th, 7:00 p.m.:** Maggie Smith will present a free session entitled, "A Step-by-Step Guide to Launching a Book."

I cannot wait to see you all very soon.

Christy Wopat  
Events Committee Chair

## WWA Press

[www.wiwrite.org/WWA-Press](http://www.wiwrite.org/WWA-Press)



### ***Gravedigger's Daughter - Growing up Rural***

Debra Raye King  
Memoir  
November 1, 2022  
WWA Press

Available in hardcover,  
paperback & ebook

***Gravedigger's Daughter - Growing up Rural*** is a collection of short stories and essays based on actual events in the 1950-1970s in northern west-central Wisconsin. Little Elk Creek is a tightly knit community of Norwegian immigrant farm families who assist one another at harvest time and share their skills so all could succeed.

**Debra Raye King** shares her remembrances from an era when her father was the local gravedigger at the local church cemetery and it wasn't unusual for a daughter to help shovel. Moms were mostly homemakers, dads wage earners, and the children attended Farmers Union Camp, 4H, and the Luther League when not in school or helping with chores.

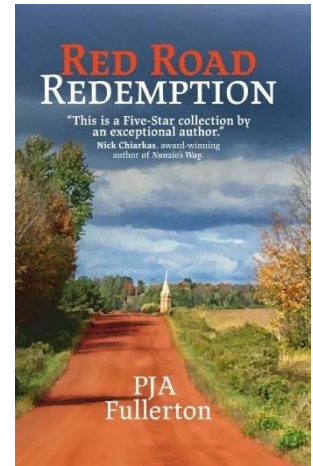
Experience the grit, heartache, joy, and innocence of growing up rural with these tales of one family farm in Wisconsin.

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PJA Fullerton  
Short story collection  
April 25, 2023  
WWA Press

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paperback & ebook



The iconic red gravel roads of Marathon County lead past idyllic farms and fields, across tall rolling hills and through forests of majestic white pines and ancient maples.

These stories are about the lives lived beside those roads; roads that may guide you to an Amish harness maker's shop, a local tavern, or a country church and its quiet cemetery. Roads which often lead to unexpected adventures for man and beast; that connect, but can also divide neighbors, and for some, can become rare paths leading to the redemption of dignity and spirit.

**Red Road Redemption** is more than just a captivating collection of short stories. They are tied together with love, humor, and heartbreaking moments that pull the reader in and circles back with a powerful "aha" ending that ties the entire collection together. Throughout, you are in the hands of an extraordinary storyteller. -Nick Chiarkas, award-winning author of *Weepers* and *Nunzio's Way*

**Pamela Fullerton** presents stories set in the heart of rural Wisconsin. These are the tales shared over the paddock fence by older, and much wiser, neighbors. They are funny or tragic stories that both fascinate and precisely capture a way of life that was becoming extinct, even as it was being lived.



## Wisconsin Writers Association Press In pursuit of the noble literary art

The Wisconsin Writers Association Press aids WWA member authors in following through with our organization goals to help writers learn, grow, and publish in the literary field. The Wisconsin Writers Association Press exists specifically for Wisconsin Writers who tell Wisconsin-themed stories and provides a publishing platform currently unavailable to Wisconsin writers.

### What We Publish

WWA Press welcomes original material of good quality that celebrates and explores all walks of life and for all ages, be it historical, fictional, nonfiction, lyrical, or speculative. Family friendly, please.

### Submissions

In 2023 we are open to non-WWA members. Authors should submit samples of new, original work in English that is complete. The work should be tied to Wisconsin in some way.

*Material published by the WWA Press will not be eligible for the Jade Ring or any other WWA contests.*

### Fiction

The Press will consider most genres or literary works. The best lengths for works in fiction is 60,000 - 100,000 words. If you have specific questions about your genre, please ask before submitting. Questions to [submit@wiwrite.org](mailto:submit@wiwrite.org)

### Nonfiction

The Press will consider work in all areas that focus on promoting Wisconsin life, culture, history, biography, poetry, essays, or combinations thereof. Full-length work of 40,000 - 80,000 words is preferred. Collections of poetry and essays or children's books will be considered on a case basis.

### How to Submit

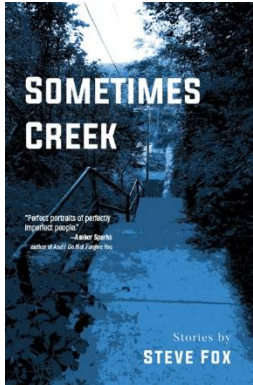
Authors should submit a one-page cover letter which includes the following information and attach the first 50 pages of your manuscript.

- Author name/pen name
- 200-word author bio (third person)
- How are you involved with WWA?
- Title
- Word count
- Genre
- Audience
- 10 keywords
- 50 word summary
- 450 word sample back cover blurb
- 1000 word complete synopsis
- Sales contacts and promotional ideas (Minimum of 10)
- Endorsers or writers of foreword/afterword ideas and contact information *if applicable*
- Know that you can provide the names and contact information of at least 5 reviewers who can review your book at the time of publication or soon after.
- Previous publications (if any).

Full Guidelines: <http://www.wiwrite.org/WWA-Press>  
Ready to submit? Email: [submit@wiwrite.org](mailto:submit@wiwrite.org)

## Book News

To publish your publication news, please send announcements to [hello@wiwrite.org](mailto:hello@wiwrite.org) for inclusion in the WWA website calendar and the monthly news brief. For inclusion in *Creative Wisconsin Magazine*, send to [submit@wiwrite.org](mailto:submit@wiwrite.org).



Congratulations to **Steve Fox** and his recent publication, **Sometimes Creek** 234 pages, Paperback Published January 26, 2023 Cornerstone Press

The seventeen unrelenting stories in Steve Fox's debut story collection,

*Sometimes Creek*, traverse a sub-zero trail of plausible magic and grit from a kaleidoscope of broken ice at a hockey rink in Wisconsin that coils through haunted rivers and around dangling legs of jamón serrano in sweltering Spanish bars and back again to a place where Kafka and Carver meet up on the page. Fox's clean prose takes you by the hand and weaves a tapestry of tenderness, dissonance, indifference, dystopia, and charm into that gauzy space that collectively takes shape in your hands as *Sometimes Creek*.

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## Wisconsin People & Ideas 2023 Poetry & Fiction Contest

Hurry to enter – closes in 2 weeks

WP&I annual fiction and poetry contests open January 15 and close March 15 cash prizes and publication for the work by Wisconsin writers.

This year's judges are Nikki Wallschlaeger (poetry) and Debra Monroe (fiction) Small entry fee

**Enter for poetry**

<https://www.wisconsinacademy.org/magazine/poetry-contest>

**Enter for fiction**

<https://www.wisconsinacademy.org/magazine/fiction-contest>

## Open submissions for online journals

*Note: most of these and others use Submittable and some may charge a small fee to cover the cost of that submission management platform.*

**Barnstorm** – accepts previously unpublished art, poetry, fiction, nonfiction

<https://www.barnstormjournal.org/>

\$3 for poetry and fiction

**Haiku Journal** – publishes 50 untitled poems a month, token remuneration

<https://haikujournal.org/submissions/>

**Maudlin House** – accepts unsolicited flash, poetry and fiction submissions by both emerging, and established authors.

<https://maudlinhouse.net/>

**Palette Poetry** – accepts unpublished work; small remuneration. Submit up to 5

<https://www.palettepoetry.com/>



# NONFICTION

## Minion Saves Halloween

Victoria Lynn Smith

My four grandkids come trick-or-treating with their parents. A grim reaper, a Pikachu, a hamburger with the works, and a firefighter.

And then I hear a small doctor (or maybe he's a nurse) who's about five years old.

"Trick-or-treat," says the wee medical professional dressed in blue scrubs, pinned with a name badge. He smiles and looks at me with anticipation, holding out a small white bucket. His mother is standing with my daughter-in-law.

"I don't have any candy," I say. I didn't buy any because I decided not to pass out candy. What I have in the house are four plastic zip bags with small toys, fancy pens and pencils, and lip balm for my grandkids.

The wee medical guy repeats "Trick-or-treat" because surely the lady who just told him she doesn't have any candy is confused. It's Halloween. There must be candy.

I go inside and grab the four bags of goodies for my grandkids. As I slip the goodies in their trick-or-treat bags, I keep apologizing for not having something for the wee lad in blue scrubs. His mother says that it's okay and explains to him that the lady didn't know he was coming.

The little boy's cheeks quiver, the corners of his mouth tilt down, and tears fill his eyes.

I'm so sorry, I say again. It's okay, the mom repeats.

But it's not okay. He's a little boy, maybe five. He doesn't understand. It's not okay that he's left out. And he's too young to understand that some lady doesn't have candy or something for him. He has done his part. He is dressed up. He has said,

Trick-or-treat. He has watched four other kids get a treat, but he is getting the trick.

I think about finding something for him. I think about my purse. I have things in my purse. It's like Mary Poppins's bag. But there is nothing fun in my purse for the little medical guy.

Because we're all standing in my driveway, I think about my van. Bingo. I have toys in my van.

"Wait a sec," I say. I open the sliding door and look at several small toys. I grab a Minion because when you wind it up and push down on its curl of hair, it vibrates. Perfect because the wee fellow in blue scrubs deserves something fun, something interactive, something to evaporate his tears before they slide down his cheeks.

I hold it in front of him and demonstrate how to make the Minion vibrate. I place the pulsating toy in his hands, and his face lights up like I've just handed him a beautiful beating heart.

I back up several feet and tell my grandkids and little medical dude to line up so I can take their picture. This Halloween my annual picture will have five children in it. I want that sweet little boy to feel welcome, not left out, so I only take pictures of all the children together.

Later I look at the pictures. My four grandkids are smiling at the camera. But little medical guy? In every picture, he is holding the Minion cupped in his hands, smiling at it like it's a newborn he just helped deliver. It's Halloween, it's a time of pretending, it's sweet spooky magic.

I'm glad I keep stuff stashed in my van. Medical dude doesn't know it, but when I look at the picture of him looking at his Minion treat, and I see his smile, it's clear that he gave me the better treat.

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Victoria Lynn Smith, a fiction and nonfiction writer, lives in northern Wisconsin. She is a member of Wisconsin Writers Association, Write On, Door County, and Lake Superior Writers.

## Lakeside

Anthony Braza, New Berlin

My wife's family on her dad's side have a reunion every five years at a house on Wind Lake, just outside of Milwaukee, and the itinerary appears to have remained the same for decades. People arrive around ten, spend the next six hours playing lawn games and catching up, gather for mass in the yard at four, then eat dinner and have a softball game.

The mass is presided over by Jen's cousin, Bob, who is a Catholic priest, and a very good one at that. He married Jen and I, and pretty much every one of the couples in attendance who have gotten married in the past twenty-five years. When we were swapping stories on one of our first dates, if not the first, Jen shared a story about these reunions; specifically, about the mass. She said that Bob has been known to stand behind the makeshift altar, look at the hundred or so people gathered, and say, "Put out your cigarettes and put down your drinks. It's time for mass." That story stuck with me, as I thought that any priest who was comfortable saying that, and any family that needed to hear it, was okay in my books.

"That's the kind of family I could see marrying into," I thought at the time. Little did I know I would be married into it fourteen months later.

Jen and I have been married eight years, and I am now the proud alumnus of two of these reunions, the second happening last August. I am still trying to learn everyone's name and where on the trunk of the family tree these branches meet, but I have a firmer grasp of the history and lineage of the property and the parties.

Piecing together all the historical morsels I could gather, I see so much has remained the same over the years. Where it is held. The invite lists. The stories shared about Uncle Gene, the original owner of the property. And yet, like so many things in life, new chapters have been written and changes have been made to reflect the times.

The kids in the oldest versions of the stories I unearthed are now the elders in the family with their own grown children, and that generation is bringing children of their own. A not inconsequential addition of around fifteen young bodies, about half under the age of seven, has impacted many other elements. There are now swings and children's play areas set up in the yard, and, depending on which garbage can you look in, you may see as many empty juice boxes as empty beer cans. The pier has been updated to keep their little feet from slipping through the cracks. Conveniences like catered meals and golf carts have replaced potluck and hoofing it 200 yards down the hill to the lake.

My family never had a lake house, but we made enough visits to a few places that they felt like they had similar history and lineage. One was Mauthe Lake Recreation Area in Campbellsport, about an hour from Milwaukee. It was a park we used to frequent but hadn't been to in about thirty years. Three years ago, we had a picnic there to celebrate my mother's birthday, and we quickly flowed into references and jokes from days past like the gap in time was closer to six months or a year.

One element of our tradition is a two-mile walk around the lake, which we loved as kids and our father always looked forward to each visit. Jen, the only current member of the family who hadn't been there before, suggested we go around the lake in a clockwise direction, and she might as well have asked me to punch my mom in the face.

"Nooo. No," I said, somewhat confused. "That's not how it's done."

Of course, other families came walking past in her suggested direction, but that is not what we did. There is a sequencing to this walk—walking past the pier where Dad loved fishing with his cane pole, the tall orderly collection of pine trees, the three

bridges, ending by the beach house, and the stories that accompanied each—and anything that varies from that part of the tradition is just plain crazy talk.

That park meant a lot to all of us, but it especially meant something to my father who loved it all—the hike, the softball games we used to have with our cousins, the fishing. Just being able to drive to this beautiful park and spend the day with his family. He had been dead a few years already when we made that last visit, but we all knew he was looking down and watching. Laughing at the continuation of our ongoing jokes. Making sure we did the hike in the correct direction.

While I know more and more of the facts of the reunions Jen's family holds, I don't know the personal stories. The emotion their Uncle Gene must have felt when he realized he could provide this wonderful place for them to use and enjoy. If his children had favorite places to hang out or inside jokes that they share. If they are still searching for something they hid in the house in 1962. Maybe I'll learn these someday, and maybe I won't.

When Father Bob gave his homily at the latest reunion, he said that "our ancestors would be smiling to see us all gathered here," and I knew he was right. They were that day, just like my dad was when my family met at Mauthe Lake.

My mother, who is 92, doesn't hear as well as she used to, but she can have an absolute blast at a family get-together just watching her children talk and laugh. I will ask her afterwards what she heard, and she'll say either it was too loud to hear much, or that she doesn't remember, but she knows she had fun.

"It is wonderful to see all my kids continue to get along," she'll say. Apparently, the fact that our mouths are moving, and we continue to smile during that moment makes her life feel full. Complete.

I'm guessing my dad is the same way from his further view up in Heaven, as are the ancestors of those gathered at the reunion. I can barely connect the names to the faces of the live ones, so I'm not

going to pretend to know the names of all the dead ones, but who knows. Maybe they met my dad up there and are swapping stories. Maybe he's getting some skinny on Jen from her mom, Barbara, or chatting it up with Jen's Uncle Gene and Aunt Lorraine about how cool it is to watch their children continue to enjoy the traditions they started back around the time the country first landed on the moon.

I'm guessing they aren't holding the stereotypical conversations about aches and pains and a lack of bowel movements, but just sitting together next to a lake, perhaps toasting with a glass of champagne.

"I created that reunion agenda forty-five years ago, and it is still going strong."

Clink! Clink! go the glasses.

"I got them to walk around Mauthe Lake counterclockwise, and they never gave in to the pressure to change."

Clink! Clink!

"We did well. Look how they continue to get along."

"Amen," they all say in unison. "Amen!"

And as they grin from ear-to-ear in response to that last one, I suspect the clouds broke down by us and the sun came out. Or perhaps the food arrived, or someone found another cold beer at the bottom of their cooler.

"Thank goodness I didn't open this right before mass," he thought. "I would've had to put it down, and it would have gotten warm."

---

Tony Braza is an essayist from New Berlin, WI and is a member of The Moving Pens at the Medical College of Wisconsin and participates in groups with the Red Oak Writing community. He writes about the parts of life that make him smile or laugh.

## Siblings and SpaghettiOs

June Groshek Czarnezki, South Milwaukee

“Only” children were once idealized. But for all their privileges, these children never knew the joy of sharing a room with a sister.

An invisible line ran down the center of the bedroom I shared with my sister Faye in the 1970s. The dresser drawers were divided equally. We each had two shelves on the book case.

The windows nearest our respective beds we claimed as our own. If it began to rain, I would run to close mine yet leave Faye’s window wide open to rain all over her Donny Osmond record collection.

Her posters were on her side of the room and mine were on mine. When friends came over we routinely removed each other’s posters to avoid embarrassment. Everything in our bedroom was separate yet equal.

In the closet, a piece of electrical tape divided her side of the clothes rod from mine. The problem began when I, being two years older, began to acquire more clothes and my need for closet space increased. This was the start of my closet expansion project.

When Faye wasn’t around, I would slither into the closet and carefully unwind the electrical tape, moving it over in my favor. This went on for several days without incident. The Pink Panther Theme played in some dark recess of my mind as I continued the ritual. Soon her clothes were pressed as tightly as if they were in a vice. Drunk on my daring, I truly thought she would never notice.

Why then was I surprised the day I found my clothes scattered across the room, my stereo heaped on my bed. Faye’s fourteen-year-old rage had gotten the better of her upon solving the

“Case of the Moving Electrical Tape”—our own personal Watergate break-in.

Angered by her actions (or perhaps because I hadn’t been as clever as I thought), I proceeded to fill the pocket of her purple winter coat with the best thing I could find—some leftover SpaghettiOs crusted over from a pan on the stove.

Laughing like a mad man, I pictured the scenario. Faye is walking to school and puts her hand in her coat pocket. A scream to curdle the blood of Chef-Boy-Ardee ensues as calcified SpaghettiOs attack her hand.

But weeks passed and surprisingly, retaliation never came. Soon, I realized she no longer wore the purple coat. Mom had donated it to the Goodwill store—SpaghettiOs and all. No one, except perhaps an incredulous Goodwill employee, ever discovered the secret of the pocket.

Despite our quarrels, Faye and I shared some good memories. There were times when friends would stay over, sleeping on the canyon floor between our beds, and laugh until dawn. Or better still, when we worked as a team to annoy our brother in the next room. We’d pound on the walls and wail until Dad yelled at us to knock it off. Ahh, those were the days.

Needless to say, “only” children need never fear a can of SpaghettiOs.

---

June Groshek Czarnezki is married, retired and mom to two adult sons. A member of Wisconsin Writers Association and SCBWI-Wisconsin, her articles have appeared in magazines such as *Highlights*, *Reminisce*, *ReMind*, *Reunions*, *Country*, *Good Old Days* and *Our Wisconsin*.

## **The Yearly Teeth Cleaning: A Reflection on the Passing of Time**

Victoria Lynn Smith, Superior

My dogs, Cabela and Ziva, stand by the door in the vet's exam room. Tired, they sway on their feet like a couple of soldiers who've just returned from a lengthy skirmish at the front. Cabela has been through more, and she struggles to keep her butt in the air and her back paws planted on the smooth, slick floor. They look at me, their superior officer, and wait to be told, "At ease, girls, dismissed." I look at the vet; this is her briefing, so my dogs and I wait.

They haven't really come from a battle, but from having their teeth cleaned. They were anesthetized and X-rayed. Neither of them had to have teeth pulled.

My dogs watch me watching the vet. We all seem to know the drill. Be quiet, listen, nod. The more efficiently we can do this, the quicker we can go home—Cabela and Ziva because they're worn out, me because I want to cry. My dogs are fourteen and eleven and a half years old. These days the sand trickles faster through the hourglass.

Cabela had a benign cyst, the size of a small rubber ball, removed from her left hindquarter. She has a two-and-a-half-inch incision and a dozen stitches. The vet says Cabela shouldn't lick her incision. I head off any discussion of her having to wear a cone: "I have a pair of shorts she can wear." Medical treatment with dignity.

I wonder if I'll have Cabela, the oldest one, put under anesthesia for a nonemergency surgery again, or perhaps any surgery. The older she gets, the riskier surgical procedures become. Today I worried—more than in the past—that one of my dogs might not wake up. I chose the option to have the vet call after each dog's teeth cleaning

was done instead of waiting until they were both done.

The vet explains Ziva has bone loss in her jaw, but she still has enough bone to avoid having teeth pulled—this time. Cabela has bone loss too, but less than Ziva's.

The vet relays all this to me and shows me X-rays from this year and last year.

I trust the vet—I don't need to see the pictures. But I don't say this. I stand at attention, and pull myself up as tall as I can, perhaps to make up for my dogs who sag under the lingering effects of anesthesia.

The vet clicks an icon, and ghostly black-and-white images of Ziva's teeth parade across the computer screen. I feign deep interest, but I want to go home. My dogs' noses are nearly touching the exam room door, willing it to open.

The vet wants to explain the medical stuff—like a fourth root on one of Ziva's molars that she hadn't seen before. She sent the X-rays to a veterinary dentist for a consultation. I tell her that's fine. I knew her before she was a vet, and she's been our vet for over twenty years. She's doing her job, taking time with us, treating us with respect.

She asks if I have any other questions, and I don't. She can't tell me how long Cabela and Ziva will live. She can't tell me how long I have before I sit in front of doctors who explain age-related medical stuff to me.

I watch my dogs and see my future.

---

Victoria Lynn Smith, a fiction and nonfiction writer, lives in northern Wisconsin. She is a member of Wisconsin Writers Association, Write On, Door County, and Lake Superior Writers.

# POETRY

## Simple Poems with Skin

Ryan Schaufler, Milwaukee

6.  
Change in Season:  
She stood alone.  
Her brown body draped  
In a lonely towel dripping  
With mixture of ancient tears,  
Cold & heavy bathtub droplets,  
& years of exhaustion  
Wrapped in warm shadows  
Of her drafty home,  
As the bulky phone  
Rang  
A dreary chirp  
Of lost longing.  
A challenge!  
Evicting dreams  
Lingering in  
Charred remains  
Of a distant child.  
She whispered  
A weak response  
To the thick empty air,  
“It used to be mama — mama  
Callin’ me throughout the day.  
Now – Well, now – All that here  
To keep a somebody comp’ny –  
It just be the bill collectors.”  
She glanced at an old photograph.  
Jim wouldn’t be coming home.  
She knew. Not ever again.

---

Mr. Schaufler received a BFA from California Institute of the Arts in Acting. He is a professional actor, special education teacher, theatre teacher, playwright, director, photographer, artist, and a father.

## The Old Poet

Thomas Cannon, Oshkosh

With slow hands,  
he unfolded the poem from his pocket

*We had the drive once  
Desire tucked us in  
to obscurity.  
We keep on  
We’re glad we do  
yet we more than a suspicion  
that it won’t mean anything.*

and read to me  
fluid worlds  
static dreams.

*Our legacy, the words  
clay, earthy  
crude, beautiful  
tell more than a story  
though we shuffle dirt down on them  
with wistful feet*

He collects his words,  
sprinkles them where he can  
hopes someday posterity will see his  
forest.

---

In August of 2021, Thomas Cannon was selected as the inaugural Poet Laureate of Oshkosh, WI. He is the author of the books *Shattered* and *The Tao of Apathy*.

## My Love

Leoma Retan

In emerald Eire we met; you took my hand.  
We trod the fields together from morn to night.  
You spoke of fairy rings and magic might  
And charmed me with each tale of that ancient  
land.  
We flew away together, in love so grand,  
To where your fair green isle was far from sight.  
The California sun shone hot and bright;  
Bound as one, we raced to the life we planned.

But plans are made of hope; your demons came.  
And hope is not a plan, or so they say.  
Those demons filled us both with fear and shame;  
Raised a hundred thousand walls to block our way.  
Just when we thought we beat them, He called  
your Name.  
When your heartbeat ceased, it froze mine that  
winter day.

## Nothing is given

Yvette Viets Flaten, Eau Claire

not this morning  
nor tomorrow night  
not sunrise for our eyes  
nor the next full moon.  
A crane loses her mate,  
the doe her fawn, a husband  
his wife of a lifetime.

The only remainder  
is the keen, the lament,  
or the great vast constant  
silence of loss.

## My daughter, collecting her beliefs

Yvette Viets Flaten, Eau Claire

from every corner of the universe,  
told me, seeing me trace the flaw  
in a carved wooden box at the  
Dollar Store

to savor the error  
to study it, accept it  
bring it closer to my heart  
and see it as a mirror of my  
own soul's imperfection.

I bought that mirror for one dollar  
and have it still, where it calls me  
daily to finger the flaws in my own self,  
to assay my words and my actions  
on a fine scale of conscience, accepting  
neither the tilt up nor the tilt down,  
striving only for balance.

---

Yvette Viets Flaten lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She makes it a point to write daily, either prose or poetry, and she also makes sure she spends some time outdoors, observing nature, walking her cocker spaniel Daisy, and listening for the phrenology notes of this coming spring.

## Haiku

Thomas Dunne, Koshkonong

your immortal years  
are not as long as you think  
don't wait to be kind

## Clouds Are Ephemeral, Not So the Moon

Margaret Rozga

In the still dark sky over the snow-mounded  
ground,  
a waning moon powers through cloud,  
but half is enough to infer the whole.

The moon in my photo looks smaller  
than it does, than it did, to my naked eye.  
Believe in what you see and what you don't see.

Clouds shape-shift in currents of wind. I walk  
in snow-plowed streets, my way brightened  
by snowbanks, streetlights, and the remaining  
moon.

---

Margaret Rozga served as the 2019-2020 Wisconsin Poet Laureate and the 2021 inaugural artist/scholar in residence at the UW Milwaukee at Waukesha Field Station. Her fifth book is *Holding My Selves Together: New and Selected Poems* (Cornerstone Press, 2021).

## Haiku

Thomas Dunne, Koshkonong

up north Wisconsin  
is not geographical  
but a state of mind

---

Thomas Dunne was born at Black River Falls, raised in Pewaukee and resides Koshkonong, Wisconsin. He spends time writing, walking and writing (mostly country) songs.

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Victoria Lynn Smith, a fiction and nonfiction writer, lives in northern Wisconsin. She is a member of Wisconsin Writers Association, Write On, Door County, and Lake Superior Writers.

## The Red-wings Are Back

Thomas Dunne, Koshkonong

Long journey,  
home to nest  
the Red-wings are back



Clinging to their cattails,  
swaying with the breeze  
like plastic cactuses  
clamped to car antennas

A million murmurations herald  
another rapturous cacophony of courtship;  
a million shrills and trills  
a million little pinwheels  
spinning deliriously

Springtime is arrived  
the Red-wings are back

## True Love Is . . .

Victoria Lynn Smith, Superior

. . . when you squat down to get a frying pan out of the cupboard and rip your one-and-only pair of awesome flannel pants (which you've had for fifteen years) from mid-shin to mid-thigh, a split so long and jagged you can't mend them, sending you on a search for a new pair, but only finding fleece (so second-rate) or flimsy flannel (so short-lived), then your husband joins the quest, and after searching online he announces that the outdoor retail store where you bought your awesome flannel pants still carries them, so you drive to the store and purchase a velvety-soft, blue-plaid pair; returning home, you slip out of your jeans and into the softest caress of flannel, and you know true love isn't a bouquet of flowers, but a husband who wants you to have dreamy flannel pants.



## She, He, They, I

Margaret Rozga

### Limit Less

Doris Green, Spring Green

Caution appeared, I shudder  
to shoulder tasks undone. On city's  
sea, I swim circles on old roads  
to keep worry afloat, at bay.  
Until a raccoon runs at car:  
inscrutable Hari Kiri.

I flee north where Kitchi gami  
scatters agates, where copper knives  
slipped between strata of northern  
lives reveal ancient ways. I sit,  
drowse on studded beach. Truth squeaks in,  
speaks between layered wake and sleep.  
Earlier wisdom reawakes.

Manoomin lured first peoples west,  
harvests filled canoes, winter cured.  
On rough skerries cormorants called.  
Inland, indigenous folk found  
spiritual nest with eagles.

Naked in rest, I ride creation's  
crest, slide down a foamy funnel  
to dream inside a furling wave.  
Lake, land, sky tremble, tumble, mix.  
Roar in rhythmic composition.  
Shore winds blow genesis. Behold,  
unlimited Superior.

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Doris Green is a longtime Wisconsin communicator and author, focusing lately on genealogy and speleology. Her most book is *Minnesota Underground: A Guide to Caves & Karst, Mines & Tunnels*, with Greg Brick, published by Henschel Haus, Milwaukee.

*What? What did you say?* she asked.  
*No, it was this way,* he said.  
*Well, I should think...* the third said.  
And a fourth: *Think again. Go deeper.*  
So many ways to close, or to open, doors.

Their voices, among others, scamper  
through my mind like the congregation  
of squirrels chasing around my backyard,  
up trees, flinging themselves from branch  
to roof, for a while out of sight, then back.

This may be what is meant by eternity,  
the silent echo of words long after we  
think them stilled. *I think them stilled.*  
I can't be certain of the plural *we*.

Nevertheless, I am more  
than me, more than singular,  
what with all these voices within me.  
Maybe mine out there as well.

### Haiku

Thomas Dunne, Koshkonong

let us plant two trees  
one for you and one for me  
that's two for the birds

*We leave you with a final short piece of fiction to  
count toward spring...*

## **Do We Stand**

Thomas Cannon, Oshkosh

Do we (you and me) have enough times  
in our lives where we stand  
with mouth set firm  
so we don't cry  
With our hand on someone  
Have we enough times  
we stand resolute  
for what we know to be good  
against what we know to be bad

We need those times  
Where we speak  
with halting voice  
Those times the words  
come to us  
it is a matter of forming them  
not backing away  
From the podium  
From the office desk  
From the kitchen table.

(Inspired by Jon Stewart testifying  
for 9/11 First Responders)

## **Cool Lemonade**

Yvette Viets Flaten, Eau Claire

"God, I hate her guts!" Buzz exploded. "Hate her,  
hate her, hate her!"

He was referring to his uncle Ray's wife, Aunt  
Margaret, who thought she could stand in for his  
own dead mother, who thought she could order  
him around and treat him like a slave, just  
because he was an orphan now and needed a  
place.

"Hate her!" His howl was lost in the growl of  
the new lawnmower. His uncle, his dad's older  
brother, was the bank president and could afford  
the best. So, this afternoon, Buzz was manacled to  
the biggest, reddest, shiniest lawnmower Sears  
handled.

And he had been dispatched to mow. Ordered,  
like his dad had been ordered, he supposed, on  
the 1942 Bataan Death March, where he had died.  
Buzz was now on the second round of the lawn—  
if you could call it that—of one of his uncle's rental  
properties.

"God! I hate this place!" Buzz shouted out. Why  
did he have to leave California? Leave his friends,  
the beaches—to come to this Po-Dunk, in the  
lousiest state in the union—North Dakota? The  
worst! The absolute worst place! He couldn't  
imagine his dad ever being born and raised here.  
But he'd escaped. Found his mom in the Golden  
State. His golden mom...

Buzz clamped his eyes shut. No more tears. He  
was going to be eighteen come Christmas. He was  
leaving the day he turned. To hell with graduating.  
To hell with the class of '59! He was going back to  
California—where his mom was buried—where  
he had friends. Beaches, swimming, and those

guys with the surfboards.

Buzz rounded the far corner of the property he was mowing. A little white house—maybe two bedrooms—sat in the center of a huge corner lot. No garage. One huge cottonwood tree draped some shade over the house. New people had moved in, his uncle had said. Air Force people. From the new air base, nearby. Aunt Margaret had volunteered him to go mow, saying it would be neighborly, but Buzz knew it was really for two other reasons. First, it would get him out of the house when she listened to her soap opera at one o'clock, and second, everyone in Po-Dunk, from here to Ash Street, would see this brand-new gas-powered cherry-bomb of a mower that they could afford, because of Uncle Ray being the Red River Bank president.

The hot, dry summer had pretty much scorched the grass into brittle stubble, but Buzz pushed on with his mowing. He turned the far corner, coming toward the street now, along the side of what had been last year's garden, left half-picked when the first frost came in September, and not turned this spring, either, when the renters had suddenly just packed up and vanished one night.

Uncle Ray was angry about that. He and Buzz had worked together to clear the house out. He didn't mind Uncle Ray so much then, like that, when they were alone together. He could see something of his dad in the old man, from the pictures in his mom's albums. It was just when Aunt Margaret got involved that things got prickly. She was always telling him what to do. "Buzzy, remember to go pick up the mail for me." "Buzzy, I want you to dig out those dandelions." "Buzzy, water my peonies." He hated those peonies. Full of ants.

He and Uncle Ray had started to paint the inside of the little white house, but the heat got too much for Uncle Ray, who had a "spell." He

wasn't in the best of health to begin with, so he hired an odd-job man to take over his part of the painting. That was fine with Buzz, except the odd-job man was a Pole, or a Czech, or a Slovak, some kind of war refugee—a D.P.—Displaced Person, whose entire vocabulary was *yes, thank you, and I no speak angielski*. He was a sad-faced man, whose eyes were vacant. When Buzz looked at him, it made him feel sad, too, and he wondered if the man—Joe, everyone called him—was picturing his old home, the way Buzz pictured the sunsets off Crystal Cove, where he and his mom used to swim.

Buzz turned the next corner. The mower hit a patch of dirt and spewed it into a cloud that was thick and loamy and full of grit, too, which shrouded Buzz, peppering his ears and eyes and scalp. He spat and wiped his mouth on the back of his arm, which didn't help much. He'd now made three rounds of the yard. This was going to take him all afternoon.

"Grrrr," he started to grumble, thinking of some miserable death he could imagine for Aunt Margaret. Make her into a bug and run her over with this machine. Chop her up with the blade. Crush her under the wheels. Yeah! That'd do! Serves her right, always ordering me to work. Always poking and picking on me. Calling me Buzzy, like I'm a kid...

The back door of the little white house opened. A woman came out, carrying a laundry basket on her hip. She walked toward the clothes line, set the basket down and, as she straightened up, she waved at Buzz and smiled.

That smile was like an electric shock to Buzz. It was meant for him, that smile. Just for him. And that wave.

Stunned, he pushed on. Aunt Margaret had said nasty things about the Air Force people who were looking for places to rent. "No better than Gypsies," she said. Rootless and fly-by-night

people, who just moved in and moved out, after a time. No better than that D.P. And most of them Catholic, to boot, probably, or worse. And then there's a Black family said to be asking about a house out on the last road by the grain elevators... A Black family!

Uncle Ray had broken his macaroon in half and dunked a piece in his coffee. Behind the mouthful he said: "Well, those air base people don't just run out in the middle of the night, off to nowhere. Uncle Sam tells them where they go. And they pay their bills. Uncle Sam sees to that, too."

But Aunt Margaret wasn't mollified and muttered under her breath words that sounded like "worthless" and "trouble."

Now, as Buzz rounded the next corner of the yard, he could see that the woman had hung up all the washing; sheets on the first line, towels and pillowcases on the third line, and on the middle line, men's underwear, and her...things. Buzz put his head down and pushed on, the roar of the mower covering the sudden, unexpected hammering of his heart, his face as red as the machine's paint job.

On the fifth and sixth rounds, he watched the house closer than he'd ever studied anything. The door was open, just the screen door stood between the inside and out. There was no sign of the woman.

Buzz wanted to see her again. That wave. It had been so spontaneous, so friendly. And her smile. Even half-way across the yard, he'd seen it and recognized its meaning. It was a genuinely happy smile, unfettered with concerns, on this bright summer day.

Round seven and round eight. Why couldn't Aunt Margaret smile at him like that. Even once. Like his mom used to. Why was she so sour and narrow-minded? About everything. About watching TV. One hour a night! Because of his

eyes. About going all over town after supper. No! Only troublemakers go to the Frosty Spot in the evening. After church, on Sunday, for a 10¢ cone, but not after supper. Not after dark. And his money—not an allowance—but his own money, from his dad's benefits. Well, when he was eighteen, it would be his to manage, not Uncle Ray's business to manage, anymore. Or hers. Always telling him what he was to do, always putting a stop to anything he wanted. Like when he mentioned State College.

Well, nuts to that! He was going back to California. Back to the beaches.

Round nine. Round ten.

He was getting closer to the house now, where the grass was thicker and a lot less dusty. In a few minutes, he'd be right up to it. Right up to the windows.

God, he wanted to see inside. What was it like in there? Not like Aunt Margaret's, he bet. No plastic on the sofa, so you couldn't move without her knowing it. Either getting up or sitting down. It was like she had to know everything he did.

He glanced in the window. A table, chairs. A mirror on the far wall. A davenport.

He was around the corner of the house. The next window. Bedroom curtains fluttered. A chenille bedspread. Yellow, maybe. Another window. The sun's reflection blinded him. He couldn't see anything. Around the side of the house. One more round to go. Then, he'd be done, and he'd have to push off home. Home? As if that place was home?

Buzz started on the last round. The far side of the house, then around to the kitchen side. He pushed the mower right past the screen door but the woman did not come out. He thought she might come out because of the noise. But no. Disappointment overwhelmed him. He turned the last corner.

She had spread an old blanket under the

cottonwood. In the thickest part of the shade.

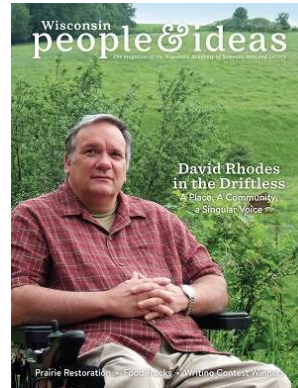
She was standing at the edge of the blanket, holding a plastic pitcher and two glasses. She was smiling.

Buzz stopped the mower.

“Here,” she said, pouring a glass for him. “Lemonade. For a hot day. Now, sit down and tell me everything I need to know about living in North Dakota.”

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*How we word our messages makes a difference.*



**David Rhodes** died on November 10, a couple of weeks before this Fall 2022 issue came out. It meant to celebrate his latest novel release, *Paining Beyond Walls*, but instead became a celebration of his life’s work. When I moved to

his corner of the state a few years ago, I didn’t at first realize I drove past his former home a few times a week. When we joined a community church, we hadn’t known he and his wife had been members. I unwittingly took up his recording pen at our business meetings. As I vacuum the space his wheelchair once occupied, I think about how I planned to sit at his feet when he moved back to Wisconsin. I had the chance to meet him only once, virtually, in my living room when he attended a session of the bookclub he helped found long ago. We hoped, when he and Edna returned, they’d come often.

Our bookclub members agree his writing is—was—esoteric. We writers occupy our own space and invite others inside, and we understand readers won’t always “get” it. But David’s fan base eagerly awaited his stories, gliding along the rails of the Rock Island Line, landing in places peopled with the odd and familiar. Whatever the story, the magical way his words flowed brought you into his world.

Appreciation is best done from a step back, like watching a sunset, viewing a mosaic, listening to the call of a loon rippling across a lake. Above all else I know of him, David was kind, and encouraging even as he fought infections and cancers.

That’s my takeaway from the life of David Rhodes: be kind. Encourage each other in this odd and vulnerable place in which authors exist. Leave an impression that matters.

And whatever else, keep writing.

*Lisa*