



wisconsin
writers
association

Creative Wisconsin

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

March 2024

WWA Events

**The Jade Ring
Competition
Opens March 1!**

**March 7
Self-Publishing
online workshop**

**Poetry and mystery
workshops coming
up in April and May
And a Book-to-Film
discussion in
November**

Save the Date!

**October 25-26
La Crosse
WWA Fall
Conference**

www.wiwrite.org

for specific information
and registration details.

In this edition:

Find news from our members and friends, our member spotlight on Maggie Ginsberg, upcoming events, contest news, book reviews, a memorial, a safari, a hidden gem of a story about gumbo, a visit to a cemetery, the wonder of the universe, and much more.

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, and the authors. Thank you.



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ISBN:

WWA Press Independently published

The cover: "In the Lake" is a collaboration between Joyce Feller and her adult son, William Feller. William uses airbrush, and Joyce uses paintbrush. This is a small section of a larger piece they made together in their basement studio in Middleton, Wisconsin.

Prompt: Write a one-page story or poem about what you see in this image. I'll print some in June.

From the editor

Lisa Lickel, Hillsboro



"Try to be a good literary citizen," Maggie Ginsberg shares in our interview (pg. 5). We can't be everywhere all at once: we can't press "like" on a thousand shared Facebook posts a day; we can't possibly read every new book and review it, or take every class or go to every conference, but we can usually manage to read one book, or two, in a month. We can figure out an hour to write a paragraph book review and post it a couple of places. We can usually find ten minutes to scour social media and comment somewhere. We can save to attend one conference every few years, or get online to support our typically free WWA Zoom programs that take place most months.

We can tell our book clubs or libraries or book stores about this great new book that came out, so let's read and discuss it, or please stock it. All of us in WWA are part of a great community of learners, writers in all stages of the craft, contest enterers, cheerleaders, encouragers, inspirers, promoters. You prove it every time you help WWA grow and improve, every time you show up at an event no matter where it's held, with each story or poem or picture you share with your fellow writers; every time you renew your WWA membership, and every time you tell someone else about a story you read, or wrote, or loved, or disagreed with, with every time you enter the Jade Ring Contest and wait for the results, hoping this year will be the one.

I'm pleased to share your stories in this edition of *Creative Wisconsin*. Many submissions came at the encouragement of critique group leaders. I love to see tales from those of you who submit regularly, and I'm truly honored that, for some, this is your first publication credit.

For the next edition, consider responding to a writing prompt, wherever you find it. For former Council for Wisconsin Writers members, consider sharing your memories of that great organization.



From the President of WWA



Hello Writers,

In January, I had the bad fortune to slip on the ice and break three bones in my ankle. I've spent weeks gazing morosely out the window and imagining various Rear

Window-inspired plot ideas. I've watched our Wisconsin weather go from snowy winter to tornado-inducing spring and back again. Regardless of our notoriously unpredictable weather, this is our March issue, and spring, at least officially, is almost here.

This injury has severely impacted my writing goals, and it's hard not to be discouraged, starting the year that way. But spring represents renewal, fresh starts, and new beginnings. If you're behind in your writing goals for the year, I'm giving you permission to begin again with renewed vigor. We're in it together.

As excited as I am for spring, I'm already picturing the beautiful fall we'll experience in La Crosse for our annual conference. Be sure to mark your calendars for October 25 and 26. You won't want to miss it.

In the meantime, I'm enjoying your responses to our survey. The most common themes for why you value your WWA membership are community, connections, and camaraderie. I hold those things dear as well. Writing is a lonely business, and it's soothing to remember we're not alone.

Many of you expressed a desire for more in-person events around the state. I'm brainstorming ways we might make this happen. Perhaps a half-day retreat, with networking, a craft talk, and an open mic night. And wouldn't it be grand to highlight libraries and independent bookstores around the state while we do that? If you have an idea of what that might look like in your neck of the woods, reach out to me at hello@wiwrite.org. Let's make your wishes come true and continue to find ways to inspire one another.

Peace, Luella

Around Wisconsin

HerStry

Workshops, contests and more at <https://herstryblg.com>



Ridges & Rivers Book Festival
April 26-27 in

downtown Viroqua, Wisconsin.

<https://ridgesandriversbookfestival.org/>

Driftless Writing

Offering Connect and Write sessions and First Friday Open Mics

More at Driftlesswritingcenter.org/events

Spoooner Wisconsin Poet's Group

Meets 2-3 p.m. at Spooner Library
Second Friday of each month

Beginner and experienced poets welcome
421 High St., Spooner, WI 54801



Washington Island Literary Festival
September 19-21

<https://writeondoorcounty.org/calendar>



Shakerag Alley Center for the Arts

Check the website drop down tabs (Calendar; Workshops) for upcoming spring and summer events Shakeragalley.org

18 Shake Rag St., Mineral Point, WI 53565

Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters

Poetry and the Natural World with U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón May 23, 7-8:30 p.m.
1922 University Ave., Madison, WI, 53726

Wisconsin Book Festival

Offering free public author events
See upcoming schedule at

Wisconsinbookfestival.org/event-schedule



Meet Maggie Ginsberg

Author, editor, contest judge, fun at book clubs...



author photo by Paulius Musteikis

CW: Welcome, Maggie. How long have you been a member of WWA?

MG: Since March 2021.

CW: What do you most appreciate about Wisconsin Writers Association?

MG: To be honest, that it exists. Writing can be a lonely business and I'm grateful for

all of the writers who volunteer their time to create community and shepherd programming and publishing opportunities.

CW: Thank you, Maggie. Tell us a little about what you write.

MG: My day job is writing and editing—I was a freelance writer for 15 years before going to work full time at Madison Magazine in 2020, where I am now a senior editor. However, my "new" passion, since 2017, is writing fiction. So I do all of that personal fiction writing in the early hours before work (typically 5-7a.m.). My first novel was published in September 2022 and I am steadily working on another.

CW: Can you share something about your writing process. How have you benefitted from WWA?

MG: I came late to writing professionally. I didn't publish my first newspaper article until I was in my 30s, after a first career in advertising sales. I then focused on learning the ropes of journalism, taking classes and joining related organizations. I feel like I came really late to fiction; I was 47 when I published my first novel last year. So I feel like I'm playing a bit of catch up now and probably haven't

taken full advantage of WWA membership, but I'd like to.

CW: There are a lot of good opportunities to work on craft and network around here. We appreciate your willingness to act as Nonfiction judge in the Jade Ring Competition this year. What advice do you have for aspiring and seasoned writers, Maggie?

MG: Learn your own mind and then build a practice that works best for you. It's easy to get caught up in other writers' processes or "rules" but you'll always feel frustrated or not good enough if you're trying to do what you think you're supposed to be doing (like, "you must write every day") instead of what works best for your specific style (like, maybe, "have conversations with characters in your head on daily walks and then sit down once a week to write it all out"). I'd also say—and I do feel like this is the hardest one for me—try as best as you can to separate the practice of writing from the possibility of publication. Do everything you can to create the best work possible before you do anything else, and then keep creating. So much of publishing is luck anyway, and if, as they say, "luck is where preparation meets opportunity," then you want to have your best possible work ready when that opportunity comes along. Three and a half years passed between the time I got my then-agent and the time I got my book contract, and for every rejection and revision that came in between, my manuscript got better—and so, even though it's the draft that got my then-agent's attention, I'm so relieved it wasn't the early version of *Still True* that was ultimately published. I think it's really tempting to get caught up in some aspect of the non-writing process (the agent search, overanalyzing the market, strategizing submitting to publishers, promoting a book you've already got out there, social media, networking, etc.)—but you have to keep writing. If your manuscript doesn't sell, you have to try again with another book. If



your manuscript sells, it won't be published for a year or two—and you still have to write the next book. Even in the most outstanding case scenario—Oprah pick! Movie Deal! A bazillion copies sold in 24 countries!—you still have to write the next book. I think we have a tendency to envision this finish line that means we've "made it" but that imaginary line will always keep moving. All roads lead back to writing, and that's the thing you need to prioritize above everything else (she said to herself).

CW: Excellent thoughts! Anything else?

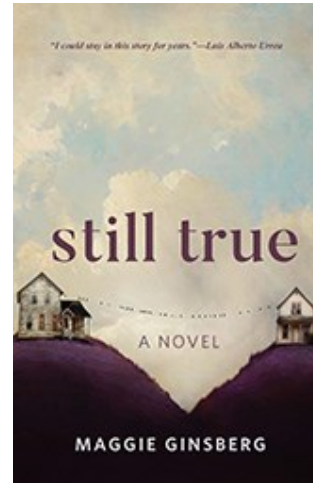
MG: I know we all have a finite amount of time and certainly financial resources (hello, fellow broke writers), but I think one of the most important things we can do is show up for each other as much as we can. At readings, events, classes, libraries. Read each other's work, share it with friends, review and promote and appreciate—just try to be a good literary citizen. We can't be everywhere all at once, and it's not possible for everybody. But if you want to benefit from a literary community I think you have to first make sure that community exists.

CW: Thank you.

Editor's Note: Maggie visited my book club virtually last summer, and she was a wonderful guest.

Maggie Ginsberg is a writer, editor and author in Wisconsin. Her debut novel, *Still True*, was published by the University of Wisconsin Press in September 2022 and won the 2023 WLA Literary Award for Fiction. It was also the honorable mention selection for the 2022 Edna Ferber Fiction Book Award, a finalist for the Chicago Writer's Association's 2023 Book of the Year, a 2023 Midwest Book Awards silver medal winner in the Literary/ Contemporary/ Historical Fiction category, and one of three finalists for the Women's Fiction Writer's Association's STAR Award for Outstanding Debut. Maggie is a senior editor at Madison Magazine, where she has worked full time since 2020 after freelancing for city, regional and national magazines since 2006. She

has published hundreds of articles throughout her career, earning numerous honors from the City Regional Magazine Association, the American Society of Journalists and Authors and the Milwaukee Press Club. She was mostly raised in Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, and now lives in Lake Mills with her family. Her work can be found at www.maggieginsberg.com.



In a family built on honesty, when does a secret become a lie?

One summer evening, Lib Hanson is confronted by her painful past when the son she abandoned as an infant shows up on her porch. Fiercely independent, Lib has never revealed her son's existence—or her previous marriage—to her husband, Jack. Married nearly three decades but living in separate houses, they enjoy an ease and comfort together in small-town Anthem, Wisconsin. But Jack is a stickler for honesty, and Lib's long-dormant secret threatens to unravel their lives.

When ten-year-old Charlie Taylor arrives at Jack's workshop shortly thereafter, he's not the first kid in town to need help with a flat tire, and Jack gladly makes the repair. Extending friendship and kindness, as well as introductions around the local café, Jack assumes a grandfatherly role. When the terrible events of a fateful evening threaten everyone's carefully crafted lives, Jack, Lib, and their new friends must each determine the value of truth for the ones they love.



The Jade Ring

Writing  Contest

Opens March 1, 2024, Closes June 1, 2024

Send us your best
poetry, short fiction,
nonfiction

Special open category:
What Wisconsin Means to Me

Judges: Max Garland, Christina Marrocco,
Maggie Ginsberg, and Jerry Apps
Fees apply; paid critiques available, prizes

<https://wiwrite.org/jade-Ring-2024>



MIDWEST Writers ROOM

Presented by the Wisconsin Writers Association

Midwest Writers Room encourages, educates, and celebrates writers of the Midwest. Meet fellow writers, discover new inspiration, get actionable craft advice, and learn about the publishing industry. Hosted by WWA members [Luella Schmidt](#) and [Ken Humphrey](#), the Midwest Writers Room published six episodes in 2023 and have more planned for 2024. Listen [here](https://wiwrite.org/podcast) (https://wiwrite.org/podcast) or through your favorite app. Have a question or comment? A milestone to share? Want to become a guest? Contact us through podcast@wiwrite.org.

Spend a Week with Your Book!



June 16-22, 2024

Two Tracks: All Genre and
Speculative Fiction

Located at the Siena Retreat
Center, in Racine, WI

<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

All-Genre track Bookcamp Instructors

Christina Marrocco, Jason Tanamor

Speculative Fiction track Bookcamp Instructors

Hank Schwaeble, Mary Anne Mohanraj

Retreat Mentor: SJ Rozan * Book Coach: Lisa Lickel

Visiting Pros from PS Literary, KT Literary,
Headwater Literary Management



WWA EVENTS PRESENTS

Self-Publishing
Zoom Session March 7
7:00 PM

Our expert speakers will explore the benefits, including creative control and higher royalties, and the challenges, such as marketing responsibilities and upfront costs. This session is ideal for aspiring authors and industry enthusiasts looking to understand the intricacies of self-publishing in today's literary landscape.

Free Virtual Workshop

Register here:

<https://wiwrite.org/event-5606600>

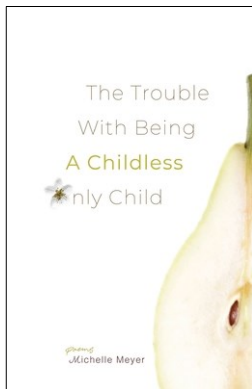


Book Shelf Reviews

Wisconsin Writers Association offers many benefits to its members. If you are a member and have a published book, you can request that it be read and reviewed by a WWA volunteer.

Contact Kathleen Waldvogel at waldvogelkm@gmail.com with your request and she will send you the information and guidelines.

Check out the reviews for February.
<https://wiwrite.org/book-reviews>

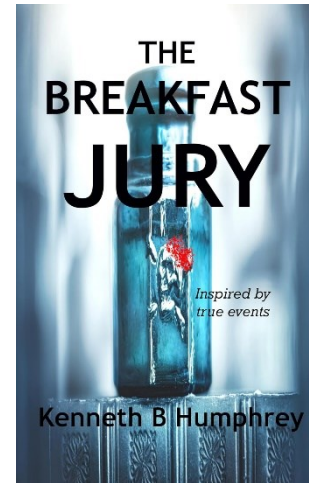


Michelle Meyer's book, ***The Trouble with Being a Childless Only Child***, offers poignant poems about her memories and thoughts about her mother's life and passing. These thought-provoking poems will stay with you

long after reading.

In her introduction, Meyer states ". . . I had to document, grieve, apologize, forgive, cope, and most importantly, I had to—needed to—remember."

Read more [here](#).



WWA member **Kenneth Humphrey** uses his personal experience of jury duty to create an intriguing mystery that will draw you in and captivate you until the very end.

The Breakfast Jury by Kenneth B. Humphrey is several books in one: a courtroom dramedy, an homage to The Breakfast Club, a fictionalized true crime account, and a redemption story.

The entire review can be found [here](#).

Wisconsin Writers Association

Coming this fall: WWA's 2024

Annual Conference

October 25-26

Stoney Creek Hotel, La Crosse, WI

Visit wiwrite.org for upcoming details and announcements



Craft Tips

Maybe...Or Maybe Not

Kim Suhr

In *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron advocates writing three pages of stream-of-consciousness writing daily, to clear our mental decks and make way for the day's creative practice, whatever that form takes. One day last fall, I started my morning pages in the usual way: writing the date at the top of the page. The fall equinox it turned out, but that's not important. Or maybe it is. I noted the time because I like to see how long it takes me to fill three pages each day. I'm usually not much of a data person. Or maybe I am.

Anyway, here was my first sentence: *I want to make this writing more "productive," maybe draft something for the TTW! book, do double duty on these morning pages.* Talk about a "Physician, heal thyself" moment—trying to multitask even during free writing time. Yikes!

I want to make this writing more "productive..."

What I wrote next, however, redeemed me: *...but maybe that's the wrong thing to do. What is wrong? What is right? Today is the fall equinox. Fifty-eight years ago, my parents were on their second day of marriage...* And I was off. No longer focusing on what great writing wisdom I could impart in a book, I was able to uncover overgrown paths that might someday open to new pieces of writing.

The writing meandered. It staggered. It stopped at a stone fence, then, through the magic of random association, picked up on the other side with an idea that was totally unrelated.

Or maybe not.

My words revealed memories I had forgotten or had intentionally repressed or had never before considered. Strange—and fresh—motifs appeared because I wasn't trying to make the writing coherent for someone else's eyes.

Of course, you see what happened: in the great paradox of the writing process, in *not* trying to find material, in opening to whatever my subconscious decided to reveal, I discovered paths I didn't know were there. I found something to say about writing itself. I learned there is productivity in not trying to produce, ideas in places where we aren't looking, and—sometimes—clarity in the dark thicket of our minds.

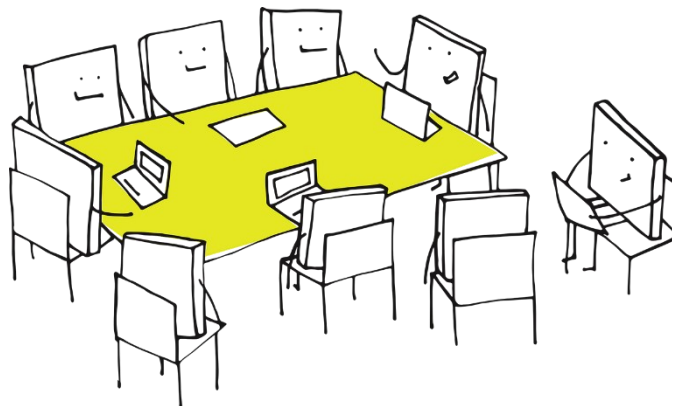


Writing Prompt: Begin with "Today is ..." You can write the date or some other descriptor (Election Day, my 472nd day without a drink, my great aunt Ethel's birthday). " (years, months, days, hours) ago,..." Add something that happened some time ago (could be in your personal history or in the wider world). This can be done as non-fiction or poetry, of course, but also in the voice of a fictional character or a narrator. Go!

Kim Suhr is the author of *Nothing to Lose* (Cornerstone Press, 2018) and Director of Red Oak Writing, an organization supporting writers at all places on their writing journeys. She teaches Time to Write! a weekly online class, which provides an opportunity to spark creativity and write in community with others near and far. Her next collection of short stories, *Close Call*, is forthcoming in November 2024, also from Cornerstone Press.



Submit your responses to the prompts to submit@wiwrite.org to be included in upcoming editions of *Creative Wisconsin*.



creative
writing
program

****NOTE: as of this edition of Creative Wisconsin, the March session is closed, but please watch your newsletters and the website for information on upcoming sessions.****

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. Registration Opens March 1! <https://wiwrite.org/event-5622352>
This is the current schedule:

Mixed Fiction and Non-Fiction with Laurie Scheer April – June, Wednesdays 6 p.m.

Strictly Fiction with Laurie Scheer April – June, Thursdays 6 p.m.

Poetry with Ronnie Hess April – June, Tuesdays 10 a.m. - Noon

Novel Writing with Lisa Lickel April – June, Wednesdays 10 a.m. - Noon

MUST 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

Beginning in March 2024, WWA offers a new Virtual Creative Writing Program. This first series focuses on a full spectrum of writing craft skills. The curriculum is designed in particular for emerging writers but will appeal to established writers, as well.

This is a survey course for both Fiction and Nonfiction writers covering the basic craft elements that all writers need to know and understand as they begin and proceed with their writing projects. The four 120-minute sessions will take place weekly during the month of March and offer participants the opportunity to interact with their writing peers and course instructor, Laurie Scheer, via Zoom meetings. Tuesday evenings.

The four sessions totaling 8 hours of instruction is being offered to WWA members for only \$80. (Non-member registration opens at the end of February at the non-member rate of \$120)

<https://wiwrite.org/Creative-Writing-Program>

Writing Encouragement

When Your Characters Start Talking Back

Deborah Wenzler Farris, Milwaukee

Am I in search of my characters or are they in search of me?

When I read Pirandello in High School I had no idea what *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was about, but it came to mind to revisit it as I was writing this morning. Now, of course, I'll have to pull it down from the bookshelf. That's a wonderful thing about good literature: it doesn't change, but we do, so it's always a new experience.

The characters in my novel are demanding not so much a new author as the real honest version of the one they already have. They are constantly asking me, "Who are you anyway?" And "What on earth are you doing?"

One of the most challenging things for me as a writer is coming to know and accurately portray a character or person who lives in my head.

I'm wondering how many of the characters in literature who we have come to know and love over the years are based on real people in the author's real life. Some own up to this, others do not, and still others use real people and put masks on them to make them unrecognizable.

Maybe the challenge is not so much about the author giving life to the characters in a story as much as those characters seeking out who the author really is.

Because as I write, I oscillate as my perception of the characters I'm writing about oscillates:

The Daughter,
The Seducer,
The Controller,
The Father,
The Mother, and
The Two True Friends.

These seven characters are each in their own unique way exploring the relationship between reality and misconceptions and deceptions.

My characters keep complaining that they are unfinished. They are relentless in wanting me to look deeper into what's real and what's not, into their relationships between themselves and God, between art and life and faith.

I'm not altogether certain my characters want me to remove their masks. If I do, I might have to remove my own.

Why, this has become Meta literature! A story has developed within the story.

This past week, I suggested to them that perhaps I am not capable, I want to protect them, and that now they *should* be in search of a new author who *will* tell their story for them.

The story itself has become a metaphor to answer the question of what's real and what's illusion within myself. Each of the characters are playing characters that are a part of me. As an example, what is authentic about the protagonist? Everything is a performance with her and therefore a distortion of who she really is. How will we find her? She is funny but she has no humor. She has lost her humor. She is on a search to find her humor but doesn't know it? She wears many masks.

The characters are teaching me to discern their minds and hearts in the certain ways they feel, think, and respond to what they experience.

They want me to make them more real, but they are also afraid of this. Truth can be both beautiful and ugly. Maybe too ugly. Where do I draw the line?

Each time I sit down I have a fresh image of these people. They are not static, and yet words on the page make them seem so.

This urge towards more depth pushes me to move from static pictures on the page to a rolling moving picture-film in order to comprehend their incessant movement from one place to another.



But the rolling picture creates even more illusion than the individual pictures I have of them. And what's more dangerous than to imagine the parts portrayed on the pages form the whole person, or the whole story? Isn't the true story—the testimony—of a life only truly known by God? Can I depend on my Muse—the Spirit—to reveal the deeper meaning to the reader?

I can only provide the diagram. If I try to do more, I overwrite. The reader will fill in what is not written. We are collaborators, you and I, reader and writer.

As I am new each time I sit down to write, you are new, so the characters become new and are seen with new perspectives.

We may never see the real character or person.

We may never arrive at the synthesis of a life.

We need to be cautious, therefore, about jumping to conclusions about the characters. And about jumping to conclusions about people. Art teaches us about life.

The characters help me see how superficial the assumptions are that I am constantly making—about them, people, God, myself, as they see with the eyes of cynicism or idealism or with love.

They are hurt again and again. What it is that draws us in or pushes us away, or tempts, should make us ask if we are able to know ourselves any better through those we have made assumptions about. And then let that help us create change and grow in understanding.

The very judgements we make about a character, or a person, prevents us from really getting to know them and ourselves. And God.

This story I am writing, the images it creates, the emotions it draws out, the thinking it instigates, all depend on your own complexities and how you might interpret it at any given time.

You can never be sure that the images I create through the characters, or them through me as the case may be, are any more truthful than your own.

If you were to ask my protagonist what's important, she might say, "to realize our real home is found beyond the death of our real selves."

But I don't know that for sure.
I pick up my pen and try again.

Following a 20-year career in theatre and dance, marriage brought Deborah home to Milwaukee in 1999. She lives in the house where she grew up with her very tall red-headed husband, their large red dog and sassy feral cat, and writes weekly on her blog to encourage hope in hard places (like in writing a debut novel).

This piece originally appeared at:
<https://www.debfarris.com/when-your-characters-start-talking-back/>
on January 12, 2024.

Lists

Silvia Acevedo, Milwaukee

Silvia says, "This answers a writing prompt from Gotham Writers Workshop to write about 'lists' in 280 characters or less."

"Slips of paper covered every surface,
scribbled with colored lines,
each a foot soldier to her fading memory.
Story ideas, all future literary masterpieces,
award-winners, classics. If only she would
ever sit to write them."

Silvia Acevedo is a Milwaukee-based children's book author and co-founder of Fantasy Art Workshop's week-long illustration retreat. Silvia is thrilled to represent Wisconsin in the upcoming anthology *THE HAUNTED STATES OF AMERICA* (July/Macmillan), available now for preorder.

Memorial

In the Afternoon

Sara Burr

A Tribute To Sara Burr

Marilyn L. Taylor

Sara, my poetry friend, I'm pretending that this is a letter—which is why I'm directing it specifically to you, if I may take that liberty. And the very first thing I want to emphasize is how much I admired you. Of course my heart goes out to Joe and the rest of your grieving family, and to your closest friends as well—but also, and perhaps especially, to the far-flung circle of creative people who had an opportunity to interact with you.

And now that you've left us, we're deeply saddened—and I'm looking everywhere for precisely the right words and sentences that will do some justice to that sadness. I think (and perhaps I'm not alone in this) that right now I'm in need of a cheerleader.

You yourself, of course, served admirably as a cheerleader, with unfailing tact, dignity, and good humor. I knew you only as one of the brightest lights in the classroom at Write by the Lake, and later, on Zoom, for WWA. I wish I'd known you well enough to have anecdotes to share and stories to tell, but I know others will do so brilliantly elsewhere. I'll close instead with these lines from Edna St. Vincent Millay:

*I am not resigned to the shutting away of
loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time
out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the
lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am
not resigned.*

In her honor and with her husband Joe Renville's permission, we publish the following poem written by Sara in 2023.

You come beside my bed to whisper love
as I lie weakened by my tumored nerves.
A feeling, a white swath of silk above,
floats on a breeze and touches me with curves
so briefly, what your words declare down low.
I know my mind and so my body's grief.
I lift my heart to your soft sound, inchoate,
and the silken hum your voice in brief
creates. Your murmurs dear inspire my hope.
I ask for pillows covered with blue silk.
I think I smell your body—cantaloupe—
a subtle scent with gentle orange tilt.
Towards the earth, away from heaven's
hunger,
I, on chiffon, glide. So, love's breath won.



Sara Garrigan Burr died on November 27, 2023, after losing her battle with cancer. She was a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association.

Ed. note: WWA expresses our sympathies to Sara's family. WWA members are welcome and encouraged to keep us up to date if you know of others who have passed on.

SHORT FICTION

The Kingumbo Seed

Joyce Feller, Madison

Author's note: The word "Gumbo" was derived from the Bantu word for okra. This historical fiction piece is about how okra seeds were brought to the United States through the Atlantic slave trade.



Aba stood there staring, but not looking, at the tiny dark kingumbo seed resting on her palm. There was only one left. The other two seeds had failed and now were lost to her forever. She was disgusted that they were now a part of this dirt so far away from her village. This place did not deserve what she had given, and it felt a gamble to chance the last of her inheritance. Back home, this seed produced plants taller than her mother, and the green pods provided for them daily. She had taken it all for granted; the smell of the foods cooked by her mother, the familiar traditions of the village and the warmth of home. She felt fortunate to be imprinted with these memories and felt sorry for the babies born here who wouldn't even have that.

The first two seeds were planted too early. The soil back home was always warm and seemed to have a very faint heartbeat. This dirt was cold and selective. More food would be needed this year with the additional relations visiting the big house and that meant less food for others. Aba wasn't sure if planting the final seed would be worth the sacrifice of letting it go. It had been her sustenance since the day the currency of her life was valued at twenty pounds.

The last time she had seen her grandmother felt like ages ago. "They will be coming for you soon, Aba, just like they took your mother," her grandmother frantically whispered. "Wherever they take you, you must survive. We don't have much time until they are here. Remember, just survive." Her grandmother grabbed a small reed and began roughly pushing something deep into

Aba's largest braid. The reed was sharp and scratched her scalp. It was only days later, on the boat, when Aba finally felt the pain of the scratch. She was thankful to feel something from home.

It was some time before Aba realized what her grandmother had stashed in the protection of the braid. Touching the seeds reminded Aba of home and the rhythm of life in the village. The kingumbo seeds were hers. All hers. The seeds were the last connection to a lost life and contained her grandmother's voice. They helped Aba keep those memories fade-proof and covered only deep enough for safekeeping.

Aba didn't mind the new rule that all braids were to be covered and hair bound under a kerchief. She felt it was another layer of armor to protect what was tucked safely in her hair until today. Her eyes slowly refocused on the orphan seed. She pressed it hard into her palm in hopes of imprinting the shape into her skin, and, as she touched it, she swore she heard the kingumbo seed whisper, "survive." The voice of the seed was not her grandmother's, but her own. The earth began to faintly pulse under her bare feet and started to feel warm. She picked up a sharp stick and began scratching open the soil.

Joyce Feller shares her work in a small Madison-based writing group that has no name. She lives in Middleton with her husband, Bob, who also inspires her to make creative messes in select areas of their home.



NIGHTCALL

Jim Landwehr, Waukesha

The blinding light penetrated Christine's eyelids and woke her with a start. She blinked away the dream she'd been having only moments before, and her eyes slowly adjusted to the stark change in light. When she finally fixed her focus, she sat bolt upright in her bed. In the corner of her room next to the dresser stood a figure about a foot and a half tall. Its skin shimmered and shifted between aqua green and a brilliant orange. Next to the figure was an egg-shaped orb, metallic in color that hovered in mid-air. A ring of lights rimmed the lower third of the craft and circled it slowly in succession. The orb emitted no noise nor gave any sense that it was idling or running. It simply held its place next to the figure.

Christine fumbled for her glasses on the nightstand to bring the scene into focus. When she did, she could see the figure had abnormally large eyes and a large head, given its short stature. It had arms and legs much like humans, but both seemed comically thin compared to the rest of the being's torso.

Christine and her intruder were stuck in a momentary stare-down. She wondered if the being was dangerous or simply curious. After a brief period of complete silence, the being reared back and sneezed. A wad of alien snot shot out of the two holes that Christine assumed was its nose. It sat on her hardwood floor glowing fluorescent orange.

Christine instinctively said, "God bless you!"

The being tilted its large head to one side like a curious dog.

"No. God bless you!" the being said. Its voice sounded electronic, like a bad automated phone system.

The being reached out and picked up the wad of glowing snot from the floor. It rubbed the goop into its skin at the abdomen where it was absorbed without leaving any residue.

"Excuse my expulsion. I think I picked up a nasty virus in the Aridani System. I've felt unwell for three light years," it said.

"Wait, you speak English?" she said.

"It is one of my three million languages, yes. The English language is a pain in the butt, though, to use a favorite phrase of your species. I mean, what's with their, there, and they're? It's a mess. As a language with all of its weird rules, possessives, and nuances, it's like it was put together by a bunch of drunk monkeys."

Christine laughed quietly at the analogy. She had to admit the intruder had a point. She was an English teacher at the local high school in Mercer, Wisconsin. Her students struggled with the same things the alien was talking about.

"Three million languages? How does English rate in relation to the rest?" she asked.

"It's towards the bottom, I'm sorry to report. My population and our culture refer to it as being among the cruder, 'Magnum Doofus' languages. I hope that doesn't offend you. It's just that we see and hear a lot of languages as we cross galaxies. Not unlike a Midwesterner like yourself visiting Louisiana, for example."

Christine laughed again. It was clear that this being was not only friendly but had a sense of humor to boot. Without provocation, the skin of the intruder turned a deep, warm blue. It struck Christine as being like a chameleon in the way it changed colors.

"So, what's with the color-changing thing?" she asked.

"It is a physiological response to what I am feeling. Each color equates to an emotional response."

"You're like a living mood ring! Well, I hope you don't perceive me as a threat."

"Yes, Christine, I have no fear of you based on the brain scan I did before your awakening. Your genetic makeup showed up with eighty-one percent positive attribution. Not bad for a human. Most humans are way worse than eighty-one. I had a guy last week that scored a twenty-seven! Talk about a crappy person!"

Christine readjusted the covers up under her chin and laughed.

"How about your population? How do they



score on this goodness scale?”

“Our race classifies entirely as one hundred percent good. You must understand we are a highly evolved population. Where we come from is twenty-seven generations into the future of your present day. It took all of those additional generations for our species to get to a state of one hundred percent purified goodness.”

Christine found that projection stupefying. The fact that humanity was twenty-seven generations away from true goodness was sobering. It gave her a sense of hopefulness, albeit a distant dream that she’d never see.

“So, the world has nothing to fear from you? Is that what I’m hearing?”

“That is true. We are only interested in helping humans to stop destroying themselves and the amazing planet Earth.”

The statement caused Christine to pause. She’d only ever thought about UFOs as spaceships with lasers capable of blasting cities out of existence. To dispel that perception and consider them as friendly stretched her mind.

“What do you call your population, or species, or race—whatever you are?” Christine asked.

“Well, our technical name is GuptaClowns.”

“Bahahaha! For real? You’re called the GuptaClowns? You have got to be kidding.” When the being did not respond, she followed up soberly with, “You are kidding, right?”

The GuptaClown’s torso transitioned from deep blue into a shade of brilliant red.

“I hate to spoil your mirth, but no. That has been our name for millennia.”

The two of them stared awkwardly for a few moments before Christine broke the silence.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you. It’s just I was expecting a much more scientific name for your population. Something like Xanars or Plutantias or something. GuptaClowns just sort of caught me off guard, I guess.”

The being’s torso began a slow transition back to its comfortable blue, although an unmistakably lighter shade. Christine assumed it was a change from blushing to a guarded sense of calm. Here

she’d gone and practically insulted an entire superior species within the first ten minutes of meeting one of them.

“So, you’ve never really introduced yourself. I know you know my name, but what is yours?” Christine asked.

“Oh, so sorry. My name is Fred.”

Christine struggled mightily to hold a straight face. Despite her efforts, the corners of her mouth did raise slightly. She was talking to an alien known as a GuptaClown whose name was actually Fred. Nothing unusual here!

“Well, then, hello, Fred. Does your kind have last names?”

“Yes, we do. Mine is Jaworski.”

Oh my god, I can’t even. Do not laugh. Do not laugh!

“So, Fred Jaworski. That is a great name. Do you have some Polish heritage?”

The being turned a brilliant shade of yellow and emitted a guttural burbling sound. It was an extended burble lasting nearly ten seconds. Christine stood, smiling, wondering what was happening.

Fred spoke up and said, “Indirectly, yes. You see, GuptaClowns are all assigned the name of a human, living or dead, as part of our coming of age. The only requirement is that the human is or was good and decent. That said, there are very few names we take from the lives of politicians.”

Christine grinned. “Well, that goes without saying, I think. Most are awful. So, what was Fred Jaworski famous for?”

“I never said famous. I said good and decent. There are plenty of famous people who are neither.”

“Of course, my mistake. We humans tend to like our idols,” Christine said apologetically.

“Yes, GuptaClowns favor everyday, unsung heroes like Fred Jaworski. He grew up in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, in the 1940s. He was a gentle man, a good father, and a supportive spouse. He worked in the Marina for forty-one years and was a beloved coworker and friend to many. He also volunteered at the Manitowoc County Food



Pantry and cared for his wife as she battled breast cancer for three years.”

Christine nodded. “Interesting. Might I ask where your population came from? I mean are you from the Milky Way galaxy or somewhere else?”

Fred pressed a small button on the craft and activated the lid. The hatch flipped open with a woosh. Inside, Christine saw a simplistic cockpit. Attached to the armrest of the seat there was a cupholder holding a Seven Eleven Big Gulp cup with a straw. Christine smiled at the irony of such technological wizardry alongside a plastic cup. The being reached into the craft pulled out a tablet and handed it to Christine.

“We are from a far distant galaxy you humans named JADES-GS-z13-0. You can see it highlighted relative to your own sun and planet on this display. Our official name for it is The Bronx.”

“The Bronx? Haha! Oh my god, The Bronx! You’re killing me, here! Haha!”

“You humans are easily amused,” Fred said.

Christine recognized her insensitivity. “Oh, there I go again. Sorry!”

Fred shrank to one third of his normal size. He hung his head momentarily, then looked up at Christine again.

“Whoa, what just happened? Why did you shrink?” she asked.

“It’s a long story, actually. Because we GuptaClowns are highly evolved, we are also highly sensitive. If we sense we are being laughed at, our stature becomes smaller. It’s a sensitivity response. Usually, mockery and ridicule aren’t an issue among our own. It is only an issue when we are among humans.”

Christine felt horrible. How could she have known that something as highly intelligent as an alien would have such intense sensitivity?

“I am so sorry that I laughed at the name of your galaxy. You see it matches the name of a popular borough in New York City, and I just couldn’t control my reaction to such a wild comparison.”

Immediately, Fred returned to his normal size and stature.

“Wait, there you go changing size again. What’s going on?”

“It seems your apologies are genuine and activated my self-esteem ingestors which fired up my pockets of growth and largesse that restored my stature.”

“Remarkable. But might I ask why you didn’t shrink when I laughed at the term, GuptaClowns?” Christine asked.

“During our encounters, every human we have talked with has laughed at our name. We’ve evolved our genetic code to not let that reaction bother us anymore. In the meantime, our fearless leader Empress Lydia is looking into renaming our race. We need a name that will not cause the human race to burst into laughter every time we say it.”

“Well, to be honest, never in a zillion years would I have guessed that one day an alien from ‘The Bronx’ would show up in my room claiming he was a representative of the GuptaClowns. In that respect, your leader is probably on to something,” Christine said.

Fred nodded and stood there dumbly. An awkward silence elbowed its way into the conversation.

“Well, I should probably get back to sleep. I have to work in the morning. But I have one more question for you.”

“Certainly.”

“What’s with the Big Gulp in cupholder there? Where’d you get that?”

“That? Oh, I got it at the Seven Eleven in Pewaukee about three years ago. It was during third shift when a clerk was out back smoking a cigarette. I slipped in and helped myself to a Grape Soda Gulp and kept the cup as a souvenir. It’s the perfect reminder of American excess, indulgence, and its affection for nutritionally hollow junk food.”

“Fair enough,” Chris said.

“Well, I should be going. Bear in mind I’ve seen to it that you will only have faint memories of this encounter in the morning,” Fred said as he stepped into the craft.

“Wait, what?”



“Go Pack Go,” Fred said as the lid closed. The ship quickly shrunk and shot through the open window.

Jim has four full-length memoirs, six poetry collections, and has been published in dozens of journals and magazines. He is semi-retired and lives in Waukesha, Wisconsin, with his wife, Donna.

A Big Hairy Secret

Joan Pahl, Madison

Glancing down through a nearsighted fugue last January I noticed that my feet looked dingy, puzzling me since I had my usual hot bath the previous evening, and, upon further examination, noticed not grime, but a thin layer of fuzz (like my grandson’s forthcoming mustache) which, as the day matured, darkened into fine reddish-brown hair about a quarter inch long and extending from tip of toe to ankle bone.

My feet—no glass slipper contests in my past or future—were befitting a plough girl and now further knobbed by age, are not part of my paraded body parts, but I was disturbed by this change and tried both depilatory and shaving, but by the next morning, the glossy hair already grown back, possibly a little thicker and bristlier, poking through my socks instead of laying down, and I realized I must not let my husband see (he has always been squeamish, unable to look at surgical scars or to eat a papaya because it looks like a “uterus”) and this will be a secret; nonetheless, I should tell someone I can trust to observe that there are no other related changes, and indeed I have not developed any superpowers or desire to eat unusual food (excepting pickled tomatoes from the Russian grocery), and if it is hereditary it should be known...so I tell my sister and we go shopping for a wardrobe of socks and tights and boots, which, feigning modesty, I keep on even at night and in the doctor’s office, and I quit water aerobics.

A year later now, my husband who is susceptible to cold feet, asks me if mine are cold too. No, I say with a secret smile, they are not cold at all.

Joan Pahl is a lifelong resident of Madison who has always enjoyed writing, singing, and gardening. Now retired from her work in corporate finance, she is pursuing her interest in creative writing and giving up singing since she was never very good at that anyway. She is married to Douglas Pahl Sr., who is a wonderful person but does not share any of these hobbies.





Table Etiquette

Russ Hanson

As Margo and I were breakfasting, chewing each bite 32 times like our mothers taught us, I got to thinking about that 32 C/B ritual. A breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast and a banana has at least 100 bites and so that adds up to 3200 chews estimating one chew per second, giving 3200 seconds which converts to 53 minutes. Breakfast in retirement while sipping coffee can last an hour with conversation, although the chewing chews up most of that time.

My 2024 New Year's Resolution included a major change in lifestyle with a plan to move to 16 chews per bite, cutting the number in half. So far, after two weeks of chewing less, having 30 minute instead of 60-minute breakfasts, I am still healthy, regular, and have noticed that my jaw and teeth are feeling much better.

That got me to thinking if there were other mealtime habits that changed in the name of efficiency, rules that came from Mom but needed the light of rational inquiry shined on them.

Mom insisted we wait until after grace to start, we be seen but not heard, use please and thank you to pass the salt or butter, chew with our mouths shut, not talk while chewing, not gulp our food, leave the last piece of anything on the table for company, don't place elbows on the table, don't eat with our fingers, even chicken, use a napkin rather than shirt sleeve, don't spill, don't reach across the table, don't stuff your mouth, sit up straight, and worst of all, even with spinach, clean our plate before having dessert or getting up from the table, primarily to please those poor starving kids in China.

I learned table manners well from Mom. I don't saucer my coffee like Grandpa, I quietly spoon instead of slurp my soup, I keep my napkin on my lap, and strain anything that looks suspicious through my mustache. I don't play with my silverware, don't drum it on the table, I don't pick my teeth and I do brush them after every meal with at least twelve up and down strokes. I wash

my hands before meals and if necessary wash my face after spaghetti.

However, sometimes I stick in my thumb and pull out a plum and exclaim "what a good boy am I."

Russ Hanson is retired and lives on a farm in NW Wisconsin, gardening, making maple syrup, and sawing lumber. His writing is a daily Facebook post that acts as a diary and his memory. He is the Secretary/Treasurer of the Northwest Wisconsin Regional Writers, now celebrating their 57th year of monthly gatherings.



A Secret in the Rye

Terri Karsten, Winona, MN

In 1971, the high school basketball team in the township of Cream won State and the whole town threw a big party in Agatha's Café. Neighbors brought coleslaw, homemade applesauce, and fresh brownies. Agatha McArdle made her famous ham and cheese sandwiches, using the best rye bread from the local bakery. Harold Shimskey brought his accordion, and folks danced in the street well past midnight.

Agatha woke the next morning to an ear-splitting screech. Bleary eyed from the late night, she peered out her bedroom window in time to see Emily Winfield screaming like a banshee as she raced, naked, across the lawn. Agatha rolled over, pulling the pillow over her head. Emily, at four years old, often escaped the confines of both house and clothes.

But when Emily's screaming trailed into hiccupping sobs right under her window, Agatha sat up. Emily's mother usually caught up to her. What was keeping her? Agatha went out to investigate. Emily was curled up under the hydrangea. She paid no attention to Agatha's stern command to stop this nonsense, so Agatha picked her up and carried her next door.

Mrs. Winfield sat at the table, her eyes wide



with fright.

"Mary?" Agatha plopped Emily on a chair.

Mary kept staring at the table. "Don't let it get me," she pleaded, swiping frantically at nothing.

Mr. Winfield stumbled into the kitchen. "Get out," he yelled. "The walls are coming down!"

Agatha backed quickly out of the kitchen, disgusted. There was no excuse for imbibing in that much moonshine. She might have expected it from Mr. Winfield, but Mary? Agatha vowed there would be words at the next fellowship meeting. She didn't hold with gossip, but such behavior was inexcusable.

Back at home, Agatha decided there was no point going back to bed, so she dressed and opened the café in the front part of her house. If Mr. and Mrs. Winfield were any indication, a lot of folks would need coffee this morning.

As she lifted the shades she saw old Mr. Barkley swinging on his gate like a six-year-old. "You're going to break your leg with such nonsense," she shouted to him.

He paid no attention.

Agatha stepped out front to shout louder, figuring he'd forgotten his hearing aids along with his sense. Before she could yell again, she saw Matilda Marks, the second grade teacher who lived in the boarding house next to Mr. Barkley. Matilda balanced on the sill of the upstairs window, flapping her arms like she intended to fly.

"Get down from there at once, Matilda," Agatha called in alarm.

Matilda jumped out the window, landed on the porch roof, and tumbled to the grass. Agatha ran to help her, but Matilda rose from the lawn still flapping her arms.

This couldn't be moonshine! Matilda was a teetotaler. Something was terribly wrong. Agatha herded Matilda back inside and told her to stay right there. Matilda crossed her heart, nodded solemnly, and giggled.

Agatha ran to the townhall get help. The cinderblock building at the end of the street served as both post office and jail. The post office was closed, and she found the sheriff had locked

himself in the cell. He crouched on the bunk, mumbling gibberish about snakes on the floor.

He was too far out of his mind to offer any help. Agatha backed out of the office and ran smack into Jeremy Bates, one of the high school basketball players. They eyed each other suspiciously.

"You aren't planning to fly, are you Mrs. McArdle?"

"For heaven's sake, no! Are you having problems with snakes or falling walls?"

Jeremy shook his head. "What's going on? Mom started chasing me with the pancake flipper when I asked for breakfast. I had to work last night so I missed the big party. I'm starving."

Agatha took Jeremy's arm and led him back to the café. "We'll call an ambulance. I don't know what to do about everyone else." She made a sweeping gesture indicating the whole town. "But I know how to feed a hungry boy."

Jeremy pushed aside the morning paper and sat at the counter.

The wall phone behind the cash register was off the hook. Agatha remembered taking it off during the party because it kept ringing on and on while she was too busy to answer. Someone suggested she should get one of those new answering machines, but she couldn't see the point. If it was important, the person would call back. Now she hung up the phone, let it reset, and then called for help. "Send the police," she said after explaining the situation to the dispatcher in the next town. "And an ambulance." She thought about it a minute, then added, "Make that at least three ambulances."

The dispatcher wasn't sure how long it would take to get even one ambulance there, but promised help was on the way.

Agatha poured two cups of coffee and set one in front of Jeremy. She drained her own cup in the vain hope the brew could help her figure out what was going on.

"It's like everyone is tripping out on LSD. They're all higher than a kite." Jeremy put a couple of spoonfuls of sugar into his coffee. He stirred; then added three more spoonfuls.



Agatha removed the sugar bowl. “Just what do you know of LSD, young man?”

Jeremy's ears turned pink. “Nothing... really...I've got a cousin in San Francisco.”

Agatha frowned. Bad enough people ran around getting drunk. Now she was supposed to worry about drugs too? She set a plate of the last few sandwiches leftover from the celebration in front of Jeremy.

“Maybe someone drugged the town well.” Jeremy took a bite of his sandwich. “Or a crop duster flew over and poisoned everyone.”

Agatha's stomach growled, reminding her she had been too busy to eat last night. She reached for a sandwich. “If it was the well or the air, why aren't we affected?” As she spoke, her eye caught a small headline just above the fold of the paper. “Local bakery...” she read aloud. She paused, sandwich halfway to her mouth, and turned the paper over to read the rest of the headline.

“Maybe we're just resistant?” Jeremy finished off the first sandwich and picked up another.

With a cry of alarm, Agatha knocked the sandwich out of his hand and threw hers in the garbage. She swept the plate off the counter, watching it crash to the floor.

Jeremy leapt to his feet. “Mrs. McArdle, has it got to you too now?”

Trembling, Agatha clutched the counter for support. The town had been drugged, but not through the water. “Recalls flour,” she finished the headline. She looked at poor Jeremy, who stared at her as if she'd grown horns. “It's the bread. Ergot mold in the rye flour.”

“What are you talking about?” Jeremy backed away.

“Ergot.” Agatha repeated. “It's like a drug. It causes hallucinations or worse.” Agatha stared at Jeremy. “I'm so sorry,” she whispered. “Now I've poisoned you along with the others.”

“Poison!” Jeremy eyes widened and the blood drained from his face.

Agatha rushed to help him into a chair before he fell. “No need to take on so,” she said sternly. “The effects only last a week or so.” She squared

her shoulders and took a deep breath. The trouble was her fault, so it was up to her to help her neighbors, starting with Jeremy.

“I'll make you a fresh sandwich,” she said briskly. She tied on her apron and began figuring how many loaves of new bread she'd need to feed everyone for a week.

Terri Karsten lives in a 100-year-old house in Winona, Minnesota, between the Mississippi River and the bluffs. Terri's short stories have appeared in several anthologies, including *Under A Brass Moon*, *Easy Nickels*, *Joining Forces*, and *Rattlesnake Valley Sampler*.

Blankets

Valerie Shaw, Platteville

Snow swirls around my head
Thoughts churning as I
Contemplate life and the
Curveballs it's thrown.

Shake it and watch
The snow spins around
The glass globe is lit
My head pounds.

Trees covered in white
Quietness that is deafening
Like the quiet in my house
After he's gone.

Snow stretching out
As far as the eye can see
A blanket of comfort
With memories sweet.

Valerie Shaw is a member of the WWA. She taught English Learners for 15-plus years and has continued her work with school districts to support English Learners and their families in Southwest Wisconsin through her role as ESL Director at CESA 3.



Good News

WWA Members DeSmet and Williams Script in Film Fest

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

Add your event! Email hello@wiwrite.org

Events

Mark your calendars for **October 25 & 26**

Annual Fall Conference

La Crosse! Featuring keynote speakers

Samantha Chang & Ann Garvin

Agent pitches, panels, workshops and

Master Class with Ann Garvin

Jade Ring Banquet

with contest winner reveal!

Open Mic follows

March 7 - Join in online for a
Self-Publishing Discussion with

Sean Little and Phyllis Dixon at 7 PM

April is Poetry Month – watch for a
program hosted by our own
Ken Humphrey

May is Mystery Month! TK Sheffield will
host a special program for you!

In September, Laurie Scheer will guide us
through what to expect at the
Fall Conference

November: Nick Chiarkas hosts a
discussion on **Book to Film**

December: Open Mic Night hosted by
Barry Wightman

~Christy Wopat, Events Committee Chair

The Stone Carver, a short film written by WWA members Christine DeSmet and Peggy Joque Williams, was accepted into the Door County Film Festival held on February 16.

Peggy and Christine are scriptwriting partners of many years, and this is their first produced film. Fun to know: Both authors write novels separately and have mystery novels set in Door County. As MJ Williams and writing with her sister-in-law, Peggy penned *On The Road to Death's Door*, and Christine is the author of the Fudge Shop Mystery Series set in Door County, including *Holly Jolly Fudge Folly*—book 6 in the series.

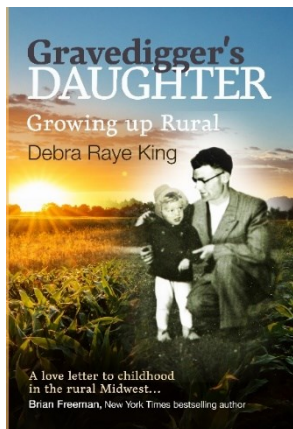
The Stone Carver is about a man who loses his wife to cancer and what he does to honor her memory as he moves on. The poignant film was produced by Living Storm Productions and directed by Jeff Blankenship.





WWA Press

Coming in 2024



Gravedigger's Daughter – Growing up Rural

Debra Raye King
Memoir

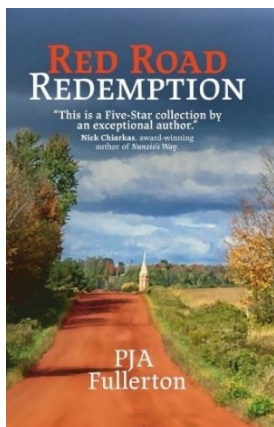
Available in hardcover, paperback & ebook

Gravedigger's

Daughter 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.

**Red Road Redemption
Country Tales from the
Heart of Wisconsin**

PJA Fullerton
Short story collection



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 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.

**My Homecoming Dance:
Reflections on Teaching in Wisconsin**

Sue Leamy Kies
Memoir
June 11, 2024

In her memoir, **My Homecoming Dance**, Sue Leamy Kies returns to her alma mater in Platteville to teach high school English. What's changed in twenty years since graduation? What hasn't? Her recollection of former classmates, students, mentors, peers, and lessons taught and learned provide a humorous, candid, behind-the-scenes look at secondary public education.

Fire Conditions

A novel by Thomas Malin
October 20, 2024

One magical summer in 1958 two young brothers learn the depth of family love and loyalty. Mike and Jimmy's mother needs a break from her troubled marriage and a budding arsonist, so sends the boys to her mother. Eccentric can't begin to describe the people who inhabit a town called Friendship. There's Aggie's Tap, where the boys will sleep, since Grandma's house is reserved for her spoiled dogs. They boys have adventures with the Big Fish People, learn outed family secrets, find first love, hobnob with a Hollywood stunt man, an acting sheriff, and a kidnapper, but most of all, they wonder if they will get to go home to an intact family.

We need you! Reviewers, word of mouth shoutouts, book clubs... ask for electronic copies in exchange for a review. Contact Lisa, press manager, at submit@wiwrite.org



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.

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

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. Questions to 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?
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- 1000 word complete synopsis
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Book News

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



Model Suspect

[TK Sheffield](#)

Mystery, Making Hay Press, November 14, 2023, 302 pp, Print and Ebook

Penny-pinching fashionista Melanie Tower is done with the drama of New York and returns to her hometown to open a craft mall--but is the drama done with her?

Mel's life becomes twisted as macramé. To find a

killer "poser" and prove her innocence, she must attend a week of holiday parties in her quaint village that resembles the Cotswolds. She embraces her inner Midwesterner while polka-ing at the Cheese Ball, judging entries in the Devils vs. Angels bake-off, and starring in a wacky reader's theater event at Midwinter's Night at the Library.

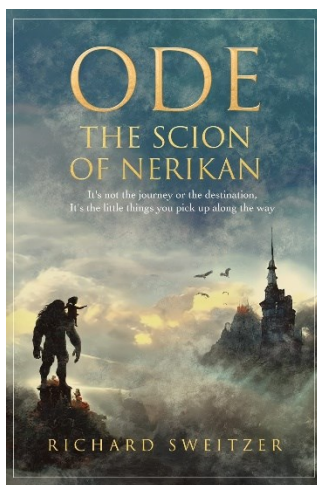
ODE: The Scion of Nerikan

[Richard Sweitzer](#)

Fantasy, Richard G. Sweitzer III, February 1, 2023, 434 pp; Print and Ebook

An immortal monster searching for a way to die, and the little girl who gives him reason to live...a little longer. This is the tale of *ODE: The Scion of Nerikan*.

A massive and hateful beast has been unleashed unto the world and is rampaging towns and hillsides. What it seeks, no one knows; but what it finds is a little girl who is not afraid. The bold child has one simple request of the monster: to help her find her home. An ode to timeless fantasy stories of long ago **THE SCION OF NERIKAN** is an adventure that redefines family and friendship on an epic scale.



The Breakfast Jury

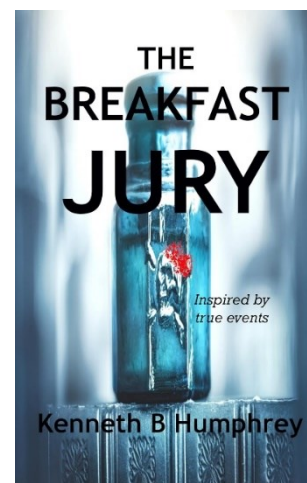
[Ken Humphrey](#)

Thriller, murder mystery, Wheatland House, January 17, 2024, 483 pp, Print and Ebook

In 1999, a jury of misfits is thrust into the case of the century. During the longest trial in state history, they form bonds stronger than anyone could have predicted.

One year later, a reunion turns deadly when they fall victim to poison.

Enter disgraced detective Aramis "Arch" White. The clock is ticking and as time winds down he finds that vengeance possesses a wicked sense of irony.

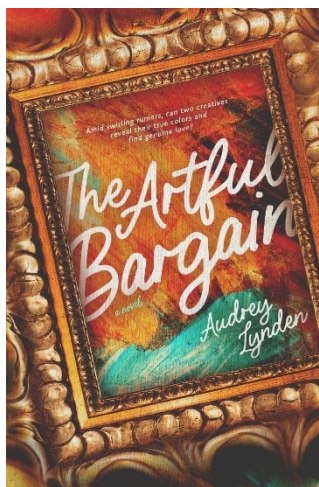


The Artful Bargain

[Audrey Lynden](#)

Penske Publishing, July 27, 2023, 336 pp. Print and Ebook

Amid swirling rumors, can two creatives reveal their true colors and find genuine love?



For curator Claire

Beaumont, her upcoming steampunk exhibition at the Lafferty Museum isn't just an innovative show, it's a chance to redeem her late father's reputation in the art world. All she needs is a metal masterpiece created by renowned sculptor Sinjin Reid. But when she arrives at his lakeside estate the sculpture is nowhere to be found. **THE ARTFUL BARGAIN** is a romantic adventure with a caper twist, an anti-heist, and a nod to the modern art world. It explores the challenges and rewards of trust, passion, and creative integrity.

Nonfiction

Belt Safari

Victoria Lynn Smith, Superior



I pull on my shorts and turn to grab the belt from the blue jeans I wore yesterday.

Empty belt loops stare at me.

I look on the floor, under the bed, and on the hook in the bathroom. No belt. I search the living room and my closet. No belt. I rummage through a load of clothes in the washing machine. No belt. I'm looking in places I know I won't find it, but I'm desperate. It's my favorite belt, and it's reversible—brown on one side, black on the other, an accessory with dual functionality.

I'm shocked that I can't find it. It's not one of those wide belts from the 1980s, resembling a four-lane highway, but it's still forty inches long and three-quarters of an inch wide—bigger than the earring I lost for two months, then found in the bottom of the dishwasher. I don't look for my belt in the dishwasher.

I wonder: *Is my brain short-circuiting? Am I in a Twilight Zone episode? Did my grandkids put it somewhere?*

I can't blame my grandkids because I was wearing the belt yesterday when their mom picked them up. But I want to; it would be easier. When I was a child, anything my parents couldn't find was blamed on my siblings and me. While this was occasionally true about the kitchen scissors or

pencils or the clean clothes we hid in my sister's closet because we hadn't folded them, it wasn't true about some things my parents couldn't find—like random pieces of mail from the stack by the phone. But unable to find my belt, I understand my parents' belief that the unexplained disappearance of an object must involve children.

My grandsons, Evan, almost four, and Charlie, almost two, arrive. The belt search must wait. I tell myself, Go about your day and the belt will reveal itself. I hope it doesn't take two months like my earring. I'm still not looking in the dishwasher.

Distracted by busy toddlers, I forget about the belt, for the most part. Still, in brief interludes, I search where I've already searched. The absurdity of looking again and again on the floor, under the bed, and on the hook in the bathroom isn't lost on me. I even look in the belt loops of pants I didn't wear yesterday. There's a line I won't cross—I don't look in the dishwasher. If I had time, I'd have a meltdown, but Evan and Charlie provide too many diversions.

"Look at this, Nana," Evan says.

"Hi, Nana," Charlie says.

"Can you read me a story?"

"Eat, eat."

"Can you put new batteries in my train?"

"Di-dy." Charlie's pooped his diaper.

"Nana, I hafta go potty."

"Me thirsty."

"Can I watch *Mickey Mouse*?"

Variations of these conversations go on all morning and into the afternoon. When Charlie takes a nap, my work load is halved, and I wonder about my belt.

"Evan, help Nana look for her belt."

"Okay, where is it?" he asks.

"It's lost."

"Why?"

"Because I can't find it."

"Why?"

Evan's interested in finding the belt, but he's asking *why* a lot more than he's looking. I open my junk drawer, find a small pen flashlight, and turn it on.

“Evan, take the flashlight and look under the couch for my belt.” I know he won’t find it, but I hope to slow his jabbering, so I can concentrate on finding my belt.

He accepts the flashlight like he’s Luke Skywalker and I’m Obi Wan Kenobi, and I’ve handed him a light saber. (Flashlights fascinated my siblings and me when we were little, and thinking about it, I remember my parents looking for those too.) Evan wields the light in corners, under furniture, and in closets. He keeps asking, “Why did you lose your belt, Nana?” He’s looking for my belt in places where it won’t be found. But the belt has inexplicably vanished, so maybe it’ll turn up in a place that defies logic.

While Evan brandishes the penlight, I retrace my steps from last night, hoping to jog my memory. Nothing comes to mind.

After fifteen minutes of looking everywhere, Evan’s fascination with his light saber wanes, and I can’t think of anywhere else to look. We pass the rest of his brother’s naptime with books, blocks, and Evan’s occasional, “Why did you lose your belt, Nana?”

When Charlie wakes up, he’s surly. The three of us go outside because fresh air improves Charlie’s mood. We walk across the deck, descend the stairs, and traipse across the grass on our way to get toys from the shed.

I spot a long, brown object stretched out tip to tail in the grass, sunning itself under the warm afternoon sky after last night’s cool rain.

“My belt,” I shout.

“Where, Nana?” Evan asks.

“There.” I point. “Sunning itself like a snake in the grass.”

It comes back to me, what I couldn’t conjure up earlier when I tried.

I dozed off last night while watching TV, and when I rose to go to bed, my dog decided she wanted to go potty. But I had to go first. When I finished, I pulled up my jeans but didn’t zip them *or* buckle my belt. I was tired and figured I’d just have to undo it again in a couple of minutes. I went outside with the dog, who piddled, then I went

back inside to bed, but not before my belt slithered onto the grass.

“Why is it in the grass?” Evan asks.

“It fell out of my belt loops last night when I took the dog outside.”

“Why did it fall out?”

I explain.

“Nana, was your belt really a snake in the grass?” he asks.

“Yes, a sneaky snake sunning itself so it could dry off because it spent all night in the rain.”

“But was it really a snake?”

“No,” I say, “but do you think it’s fun to pretend it’s a snake?”

“Yes.” His face grins in all directions. He asks me to tell him the story again. He wants all the details. I’m not sure what Evan learns from my experience, but he never laughs at me or asks me why I didn’t buckle my belt or zip up my pants.

I learned I should buckle my belt when I leave the house. And, I maintained some dignity—I never looked in the dishwasher.



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.



A Visit to Germany

Mary Schreiner, Humbolt



My Ancestors, a Quaint German city, and a Berlin Cemetery Provide Answers.

Many native Wisconsinites cannot locate Conover, Wisconsin. It is a tinier-than-tiny village at the northern border of our state. It is where I grew up. When asked where I am from, I am proud to respond, “I’m from Conover, Wisconsin.” At sixty-five years old, my small-town Wisconsin roots still run deep. However, growing up in a safe, comfortable small town has not shielded me from questions that have nagged me since turning sixty. Deep questions related to death and hope.

At times, I wonder if growing up in a small town has sheltered me from the real world—the “realities” of life. A recent trip to Germany has allowed me to re-evaluate my “sheltered” life. It has reminded me to draw strength from my ancestors, to learn from the accomplishments of another small town in Germany, and to encounter the ghosts residing in a Berlin cemetery. A cemetery tucked away within the bustling urban center of Berlin, half a world away from Conover.

My husband and I started out in Freiburg, then spent a few days in Berlin. Freiburg is just a two-hour train trip from Alsace, France, the region where my paternal and maternal ancestors lived before immigrating to America in the 1840s. Letters they wrote to their family once they

reached America reveal their courage; their ability to take risks and to face change. Like my ancestors, as I grow older, I too must continue to take risks, to face changes.

Freiburg endured major damage during World War II. Unlike some other German cities, when the parents and grandparents of the current Freiburg citizens rebuilt the entire city, Freiburg “chose not to completely erase the memories of the past.” Joseph Schlippe, the Planning Director, “decided to model the reconstruction after the original medieval blue print.” The town restored the original cobblestone streets, the tiny shoppes, and the magnificent cathedral to replicate what it looked like before the war. Their “vision combines a deep respect for its cultural and architectural roots with an irreverent flair for the bold and unconventional...” Freiburg is breathtaking. This city’s goals of preserving the past and embracing a vibrant future handed me a blueprint. Like the elders of Freiburg, I must be bold. I must cling to hope, while remembering my past. Freiburg deliberately preserved some of the shrapnel damage, clung to parts of their past that were difficult to remember. In some ways, like me, like my past scars, the shrapnel damage reminds the citizens of Freiburg to never, never forget.

Shrapnel damage also peppers the Brandenburg gate and some of the buildings in Berlin. I ran my fingers over the damage and stood quietly for a bit. The museum pictures of Berlin in 1945, of the mountains of rubble, were difficult to look at. I tried to imagine what it would have been like to experience those atrocities but, growing up in a safe, small Wisconsin town, made it difficult.

It was not until our last day that the carnage of World War II felt real to me. Eighty years after that War, Berlin has become a vibrant city. I pulled my husband into what I thought was a small, quiet park to escape the crowds. It was not a park. It was a cemetery. All the gravestones in St. Marien und St. Nikolaifriedhof Friedhof Cemetery dated prior to



the nineteenth century, had lost their luster but were gorgeous—intricately carved, covered in moss, and weatherworn.

The beauty of these shrines was again marred by shrapnel damage. This small-town Wisconsinite was struck by a sad irony. Soldiers fought and died in this cemetery. I closed my eyes. The smell of machine gun smoke, the ear-piercing pings ricocheting off the crypts, and the cries of men as bullets pierced their bodies haunted me. As I wended my way between the headstones, admired the beautiful bouquets placed upon random plots, and appreciated this quiet oasis tucked away within this large vibrant city, I could not escape the gruesome truth, the evil, the realities of death...and life.

I lingered, reflected, and re-evaluated how I will spend the last quarter of my existence. It wasn't until we stepped out of that secluded cemetery that my deep questions were answered. People laughed, we dodged crowds, and everyone was engaged in life. Living. Most of these Berliners had great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents who had lived through WWII—the destruction and death. Yet on their faces, I only saw hope, an excitement for life.

My questions are important but it is more important to return to Conover, to remember, to celebrate my life, and to live.



Mary Schreiner is a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association and currently lives in Humboldt, Wisconsin. She enjoys gardening and writing.



Four Conversations

Pam Anderson, Wisconsin Rapids

A dinner conversation. The story my husband shared: he went to a wrestling meet, where he stood at the periphery of the mats watching pimply teens angle to pin one another. He studied the bulletin naming the schools and teams of his past—first as a star wrestler then later as a coach for twenty-five years. He identified the specific wrestler he had gone to watch—the grandson of a former teammate—but saw no one else who looked familiar. At the end of the meet, having spoken to no one, he drove home.

I sat for a moment, moving pieces of the puzzle around in my head. My husband loves to tell a story, and so I knew something wasn't right, because, well, this story had no real plot to it. "And..." I prodded, searching for meaning.

His forehead wrinkled with thought, "Where...where the hell...wow...where did fifty years go?"

My husband isn't one to lean in much, to look for emotional support. He's got a rough exterior; people in crowds note his large frame and thick neck and tend to move out of his way, even now, in his late-sixties.

The language of vulnerability isn't fluid for him. During our years together he's adopted the foundations of emotional-speak, bits and pieces, using it in broken phrases and with verbs conjugated improperly; it will never come naturally. A few years ago, he shared the news of the heartbreaking diagnosis of a friend with perfunctory terms but also with a panicked look in his eyes so foreign that I didn't know how to respond. More recently, he told me our longtime tax man had died, intoning flatly, "Monday he's



here, Tuesday he's gone," his eyes not tracking with mine, searching beyond me, as if looking for him.

Passing time and inevitable aging has been weighing on his mind for some time. Yet what he was sharing over dinner wasn't news regarding the disease or death of a friend—difficult, but not impossible to bear—but a different kind of ending, less definitive, less solid mass: the ending of who he used to be. I did not know how to offer comfort. This grief was—and remains—unmapped landscape.

A bedtime conversation. "If you die before me, would you want me to remarry?" I asked. I'd been reading a novel with this question at its core, the characters about our ages, having married later in life as we had. The question made me curious, but I also knew better; there is no reasonable answer. I asked anyway.

My husband isn't one to enjoy contemplating what-ifs, but he answered immediately, definitively: "Hell yes." He turned and looked at me with boyish sincerity but then deadpanned with a common-sense follow-up, "I won't even know. I'll be dead." We smiled.

I turned it around, asking if he thought he would remarry if I died first. "No. Absolutely NO." I assumed he meant it as a testament to his love for me, to being in a marriage that is solid and true. So, it unnerved me when he continued, "If you die first, I'd probably just drink myself to death."

Note to self: do not die first.

A lazy afternoon conversation. "It's weird to think of Parker ever getting old," my daughter said to me about my husband the other day. We were lying on the couch cuddling our thirteen-year-old dog Gerty, noting the fur on her face had gone white almost overnight. How my daughter's thoughts traveled from our aging dog to my aging husband—her stepdad—I didn't want to ask, but I told her I didn't think Parker would ever seem old, even as he sat in the other room wearing bedroom slippers and watching an episode of *Gunsmoke*.

I suppose I've constructed a sort of levee holding back the future in my head, hoping it can sustain the pressure of picturing my husband as anything other than vibrant and strong, even as his hair grays, his back aches, his knees creak.

A phone call conversation. "How'd it go?" I half-whispered into the phone in the hallway of a convention center. I was at a conference, away from home over a weekend that my husband went to a reunion-birthday party of his first class of wrestlers, the class of 1978. They were a tight bunch, as "firsts" tend to be, and although he's kept in touch with some of them individually, this group reunion was something new. "Good, good, good," he said, too much emphasis on the middle vowel sound for me to fully believe him. "But....? And...?" I led, giving him a place to begin.

"Everyone's...old."

I sighed, understanding the logic that weighed heavily in his tone. He was a young teacher when he began, only a few years older than these wrestlers. Even so...if they were old...what did this say about him?

Sensing the futility of any response, I murmured into the phone, into the hallway, into the void, "I know, sweets. I know."

I have no response to his original question—where does time go? In fact, I haven't been able to offer any reassuring soundbytes about the time-marches-on nature of life, even as I stand in his shadow, not young myself, but just younger enough to watch him blaze this trail for me. It seems it's not even so much about tiptoeing into the final decades of our lives, but instead about how life caught us up short, unprepared, staring at increasingly unrecognizable versions of ourselves, wondering where in the world we went.

After 30 years as a high school English teacher, Pam retired and decided to dedicate her time to her own writing. She completed her MFA in creative nonfiction at the U of Nevada-Reno/Lake Tahoe and currently lives in Wisconsin Rapids. Her work has appeared in *HEAL*, *Manifest-Station*, a Tolsun anthology: *The Book of Life After Death*, *Bookends Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, and *Chicago Review of Books*.



Joan

Joan Pahl, Madison

My mother gave this unlovely name. In all honesty, she first tried for Joni, which the priest nixed as not being the name of a Saint. “Joan,” a word beginning with “J,” the fourth least used letter in the English language, is articulated with a stop in airflow and then percussive release through the teeth into the coldest English vowel and lastly clipped by another airflow obstruction in the nose. “Joan” has no resonance, like a bell made of tin there is no music in it and it shares much in common with other unlovely words like “clap,” “jug,” or “pot,” yet it is harder to hear without the pronounced last letter. “Joan” is a short report assaulting one ear and passing through the other without so much as a knot to grab on to.

I have no quarrel with the meaning of the name and indeed many foreign variations are delightful. Johanna would be kneading bread with her plump and loving arms. Jean would be blowing smoke rings and drinking coffee in her morning gown. Juanita would fill the room with her lovely liquid laugh. Ivana would be admired for her thoroughbred grace and bearing.

Alas, a person named “Joan” would be a straight lipped, serious, starched creature of little mirth. Further pair that name with Margaret and you have a righteous double virgin waiting to lord it over the assembled multitudes on Judgement Day.

My dear mother-in-law was also burdened with an unlovely variant of “Joan.” Ione and I, only half joking, proposed that some family progeny be named “Ione Joan” in tribute to us. This never happened. But somehow, Ione overcame her moniker. She used a sporty and fun nickname almost exclusively that reflected her fun-loving nature. She was only called Ione at the end of her life by the memory care staff.

Why indeed did I not acquire a nickname? Could it be that the name “Joan,” unlovely as it is,

somehow suits me? Am I a stoic? It may be too late to resolve this question. Perhaps I should spend my days baking cupcakes, feeding the poor, meditating, and waiting for Hester, Pru, and Maude to join me in triumph at the End of Days.

Joan Pahl is a lifelong resident of Madison who has always enjoyed writing, singing, and gardening.

Now retired from her work in corporate finance she is pursuing her interest in creative writing and giving up singing since she was never very good at that anyway. She is married to Douglas Pahl Sr., who is a wonderful person but does not share any of these hobbies.

Seasons of Listening

Mary Ellen Orvis, Two Rivers

Then, winter cold seeped through my bones.
The sky promised no sun, no rain, no snow,
only dead grey reflections off the platform.
I stood, listening.

Winter morning arises with thick snow blowing,
whistling through blue spruce, showering us.
My lab sniffs claw tracks across wet white
covering, downed brown reeds and red pine
needles.
Across the paths, between the birches behind my
house,
quiet envelops our stroll while my cat jumps
from footprint to footprint,
listening.

Now, on the summer lake,
is it the short chop of waves, the call of loons,
or the hum of motors that lulls me to sleep
as deep as death?
Listen: everything we have is gone
none too soon
in this time of murmurs.

Mary Ellen is an award-winning poet, and published photographer and fiction writer, who divides time between Two Rivers, Wisconsin, and Sun City, Florida.



Mush!

(Just Kidding. They only say that in movies.)

Sue Leamy Kies, Platteville

“**Hey, do you** want to go dog sledding in Bayfield in January?” Cindy asked. It was a balmy summer day, and we were paddling our kayaks on the Little Platte River in Southwestern Wisconsin. “Amy and Joan and I are going.”

“Dog sledding? Here in Wisconsin? Sounds like fun! I love dogs!” I said. “But, it’ll be cold. I really hate the cold.”

Well, the irresistible photos of the dogs on the Green Edventures website reined me in. Cold be damned! I’m doing this! My friends Jilayne and Kaaren signed up, too, rounding out our six-woman group—Team Alaska.

On our drive north in January of 2023, six or seven inches of freshly fallen snow coated the pine woods above Eau Claire. From the warmth of the car, the landscape was beautiful, like a cake covered in fluffy meringue. The forecast predicted temps in the upper twenties. Cold, but not too cold. Now, if only the biting wind off the lake would behave for a few days.

The Bayfield peninsula, the northernmost

point in Wisconsin, juts into Lake Superior where the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore offers some protection from Nor'easter storms. When the lake freezes between the town and the islands, local authorities mark off a makeshift highway using discarded Christmas trees. It provides visitors with a convenient roadway across the ice to Madeline Island. But not this year. It was too warm, and I offered no complaints.

After a hearty lunch at The Fat Radish in the tiny village of Cornucopia the next day, we readied ourselves for our first of two dog sledding adventures at Wolfsong Adventures in Mushing. In a small shed on the property, Jen, the owner of the business, outfitted us with heavy duty mushing mittens and mushing boots that slipped on over our own boots. Lightweight and warm, this gear protected our feet and hands while driving the sleds.

The mushing trails were about seven miles away in the Bayfield County Forest logging area. Resembling mummies in our layers of clothing, we piled in our cars and followed Jen’s jeep to the trailhead where the dogs awaited. Their shrill barks and yelps of excitement greeted us as we parked along the roadside. They knew what was in store.

“Seventy-five to eighty percent of sled dogs choose to run until it’s time to die,” our guide Jojo told us. “They don’t want to retire. They live to pull the sleds. Maisey, one of the old ones, lives with me and is perfectly happy lying on the couch—but she’s a rare exception.”

Tony, another guide, introduced us to each one of the wagging, jumping, canines. “Say hi to Beast, and this is Dolly. And, oh, we can’t forget Ricky, Slate, and Rosie. And, this is none other than Meat Loaf.” We petted and talked to each dog, some black, some white, some a combination; some blue-eyed, some brown and one fellow with one of each. They were Seppala Siberian huskies, descended directly from Togo. He was the lead sled dog who braved the toughest part of the Great Serum Run of 1925 to get diphtheria antitoxin to the people of Nome, Alaska.



Jen gave us a lesson in mushing. Our prime concern, she said, was the use of our feet: first, to control the speed and, second, to keep our balance. Our hands were to remain on the handlebar of the sled at all times. "That is, unless you fall off your sled," she added. "Then, let go. Because the dogs will keep on running with or without you."

"Then what do we do?" Joan asked.

"You run like crazy to catch your dogs!"

The footboards extended in parallel fashion from under the sled where we stood, one foot on each runner, on the non-slip surface. The "drag," a rectangular piece of rubber, hung between the footboards. Depending on our desired speed, we would place one or two feet on the drag to slow down the dogs. Above the drag was a horizontal metal brake with hooks. Stepping on it with one or both feet allowed the driver to come to a complete stop. A large snow hook mounted near the handlebar and attached by a rope was used to anchor the sled in the snow so the dogs could not take off until the driver desired.

"When do we say 'mush'?" we wanted to know.

"Everybody asks that," Jen said with a grin. "The verbal command 'mush' is no longer used. Except in movies. But, sled drivers continue to be referred to as mushers and dog sledding as mushing."

Jojo and Tony showed us how to harness the dogs. While figuring out how to put the leather straps on Blatz, I looked over at Amy to see how she was doing. "Here you go, JimBob. That's it," she said, slipping his front legs successfully into the harness. JimBob took the opportunity to slide his wet pink tongue across her cheek. "Hey, I draw the line at kisses, okay?"

Once the dogs were harnessed, it was time to "two-wheel drive" them to their assigned places on the sleds, one or two at a time. This required holding them by their collars and leading them on their hind legs to their assigned gangline, or hookup. On four legs, they would lead us. The dogs had different personalities just like people and had preferred work and play mates, so their pulling positions were carefully assigned by Tony and Jojo.

They rared and yipped like kids clamoring for recess, anticipating their release. Jen cautioned us that they take off with such momentum the driver could be thrown off by the sudden yank. I stood ready on my blue sled, both feet on the drag as instructed. When Tony released the snowhook anchoring my sled, sure enough, the dogs lunged forward, and I was off!

I lifted one foot from the drag, then the other to pick up speed. The trails were slick and fast, allowing us to go about ten to twenty miles per hour. Whee!!!

Jojo's six-dog sled led our caravan, and Tony's eight-dog sled brought up the rear. Four of us drove our own four-dog sleds in between, while two of us took turns riding in the beds of the sleds driven by the guides. Sled following sled, we slid through the woods, down slopes, and into clearings. When rounding curves, I lightly placed one foot on the drag to slow down. And every so often, I dodged a twig hanging over the trail while making sure to maintain my balance. The last thing I wanted was to fall off and have to chase my dogs.

Whether it was adrenaline, proper clothing, or both, I was not the least bit cold.

At the end of the four-hour run, we unharnessed our teams and served them a well-deserved treat of turkey and water to provide protein and hydration. That night they would get their main meal of enriched kibble. Jojo looked the dogs over and massaged and stretched one of the older ones to help prevent injury. It was no wonder they were happy and healthy.

The next morning I took my turn riding in the bed of the front sled with Jen. From this vantage point, I got a ground-eye view of hard-working hind legs and furry butts, as well as an occasional plop of snow in the face.

"Gee!" Jen yelled for them to turn left and "Haw!" for right. "Good girls," she praised when they obliged. On the way back, she drove the dogs through a tunnel of snow-covered trees, the limbs kissing each other's white powdered lips over top of us.

I felt more confident on this second day. In one



of the level clearings, the team in front of me and behind me were out of sight. It was just me and my dogs in a globe of floating snow. Tilting my head back, I caught a snowflake on my tongue. All was quiet except for the “whoosh” of my sled’s runners, the muffled “pat-pat-pat” of paws, and the exhaled “whoof, whoof” of breaths.

Our ride came to an end, and again we unharnessed the dogs and fed them their turkey and water. Only today, Jen tipped our sleds onto their sides so we could sit on the runners and lunch on the hot pasty and hot chocolate she’d packed in thermal containers. We lifted our mugs in a toast to the day, the dogs, the guides, and ourselves. After all, not one of us fell off and had to chase our dogs. Puffy flakes continued to fall as we laughed and replayed our adventure as the dogs rested nearby.



Sue Leamy Kies, above in white coat, is a retired high school English teacher who lives in Platteville, Wisconsin, with her husband, border collie mix, and backyard chickens. She enjoys time with family and friends, growing flowers and houseplants, kayaking, walking, cooking and eating good food, listening to music and dancing, and reading and writing stories.

Josephine's Aprons

Beatrice Q. Keller, Verona

The origin of the apron pattern is unknown. It seems all the women in the neighborhood had used it many times. Small checks, polka dots, apple blossoms, forget-me-nots, pansies, or geometric designs of one hundred per cent cotton were favorite fabrics. The cloth bags containing fifty pounds of Robin Hood Flour were favorites of Mama's. Double-faced bias tape prevented the edges from fraying.

Mama's pattern sported shoulder straps that crisscrossed in the back. Mama didn't have time or the patience for hitching the straps back onto her shoulders. They had to remain in place during her busy day. Strings, sewn waist high, tied in the back.

In the social order, the purpose of an apron was to protect one's dress while working in the kitchen or in the garden or while tending children. In Mama's case, the apron concealed the condition of her dress. A bright new apron covered a tear in the skirt or a ripped pocket. She donned a clean apron when the Raleigh or Watkins man turned into the driveway.

The pockets were useful for carrying a plain or lace-trimmed handkerchief, clothespins, pennies, a thimble, a button found on the floor, or a pretty pebble. Safety pins often decorated the bib of the apron.

At the end of the day, Mama's apron was dotted with flour from kneading bread, a spot of chocolate cake batter or a blackberry jelly stain. In a single day, Mama used her apron to wipe her brow or water from her chin after a refreshing drink at the spring. She may have wrapped a baby as protection from a cold breeze or wiped a tear from a child's eye. Her apron doubled as potholder or a basket for eggs. It covered her head when she was caught in a sudden rain shower, protected her hair from bats, her face from bees. She shooed the chickens into the coop by fluttering her apron whether it was decorated with pansies, checks or stripes.

Mama enjoyed strolling through the woods,

Creative Wisconsin



often returning with morel mushrooms, gooseberries or hickory nuts cradled in her apron. Just pick up the corners and tie them in a knot—voilà—a handy basket. In the spring, walking along the creek on her way to visit Lila, she gathered Johnny-jump-ups and bleeding hearts, cradling them in her apron as she climbed the stile.

Baby chicks found in a nest where the setting hen was hiding in the rhubarb patch were escorted to the brooder house in Mama's apron. It was used as a sling or as a tourniquet.

The long apron strings were a hazard, tangling with other clothes or wrapping around the wringer of the gas-engine Maytag washing machine. Pegged out on the line, they fluttered in the breeze or froze into stiff boards, depending on the season.

I learned to iron using the flatirons heated on the wood-burning kitchen stove. We ironed on a flour-sack-wrapped board placed on the kitchen table or supported by two chairs. Mama touched her dampened finger quickly to the bottom of the iron heating on the stove. If the water sizzled, the iron was ready. The strings of the apron were ironed first, then the shoulder straps, then the body of the apron, carefully pressing the edges of the bias tape flat.

Sometimes the aprons became as worn as the dresses they covered and then they were finally pressed into service as cleaning rags for dusting, window washing, or floor scrubbing. Some were cut into strips, sewn together, and then rolled into balls for making rag rugs.

Mama may have created the "Don't leave home without it" motto. If she wasn't wearing her best apron on an outing, she tucked one in with whatever she was delivering to a neighbor or one of her sisters. "You never know when you'll be invited to help out in the kitchen," she'd say.

It's hard to recall when Mama's use of her wrap-around aprons diminished. Perhaps it was after she moved to town. Perhaps it was when she was more affluent because of her "mad money" collected by taking in laundry, cleaning for the banker's wife, or babysitting.

Many of the remnants from Mama's aprons

and other sewing projects were included in quilt blocks for church quilting bees. The ladies often traded fabrics, borrowing a blue or a green needed to complete a "Rail Fence" or "Mother's Flower Garden."

There must have been a lengthy argument if St. Peter insisted on Mama leaving her aprons behind. Mama and Joseph are probably comparing the colors in his coat and those in her aprons. I bet Mama has more! She's probably flapping her apron creating a breeze to cool the angels. Have you noticed those wispy tails on the cirrus clouds? Those are shadows from the long strings on Mama's aprons.



Twenty-five years ago, I inherited a "Dresden Plate" quilt top that Mother pieced, using remnants from her cache of apron fabrics. "Finish Mother's quilt" has been on my to-do list for many years. In December 1999, I purchase the batt and the backing fabric, using a Christmas gift certificate.

The prewashed fabric begged my attention, but a decision about how to finish the quilt was



elusive. Introducing more colors for a border would detract from the many colors in the Dresden plates. Maybe prairie points of the same color as the background would add dimension without detracting from the design. I've been wanting to try prairie points.

When the quilt is finally completed, I'll display it on my antique clothes-drying rack. When my grandchildren visit, they may snuggle with the warmth of Great-grandmother Josephine's aprons tucked around them.

Bea, 93, has been an educator for many decades, is a WWA member and lives in Verona, Wisconsin. Her book, *Bea's Books: Growing Up in Southern Wisconsin from the 1930s to 2000* will be published later this year by Fulton Books.



Were you a member of
Council for Wisconsin Writers?

We'd like to pay tribute to CWW in
the June edition of *Creative Wisconsin*.

Send your recollections,
remembrances, essays, pictures,
anecdotes for consideration to Lisa at
submit@wiwrite.org by May 15, 2024.

An Oasis of Enlightenment

Alissa Kiedrowski, Muskego

"Here, stay warm and text me if you need anything," said my husband as he pulled the hat firmly onto my head, kissed my nose. He stood back to survey my ensemble: boots, parka, thick gloves, a pair of binoculars dangling from the Frabill lanyard around my neck. I gripped the tripod foot under my Nikon, made heavy with a 600mm lens with my left hand. In the other, I clutched my Yeti, sealed for the journey with hot coffee, cream, sugar, and a bit of Baileys for entertainment.

I hesitated briefly and he jumped for the save.

"Are you sure you don't want to wait until it's light out? Sunrise is in half an hour. I'm sure it won't matter if you go later."

"No!" I said with a little too much gusto. "The instructions said to start at 5:30 a.m. and finish by 7:30 a.m. I don't want to be late." According to the microwave, it was 5:17.

My sleepy husband half-shrugged in support. "Okay, then. Off you go...for science."

I laughed, raising my Yeti and turning on my headlamp. "For science!"

As a first-year volunteer for the 45th Annual Midwest Crane Count, I was overly eager to do my part. Birdwatching had become my way of coping with all of the angst of 2020, but I had only experienced the hobby as a solitary one, tromping through woods and marsh alone, learning from apps and a handful of kind birders who would correspond via email.

Even though I was heading out alone, I pictured hundreds of us, all donning hats and gloves, clutching binoculars and hot coffee on the same April morning. Today was not just about counting cranes. It was joining the

community of crane-watching citizen scientists across the Midwest.

I picked my way across the deck and lawn and onto the path that joined our yard to Big Muskego Lake. While it wasn't completely dark, it was impossibly quiet. No dogs barking, neighbors stirring, bugs chirping. I was out before morning song. And while I often admire the dissolution of day into night, it's the rare occasion when I arrange my schedule to welcome the return of the light.

A Canada goose, unhappy with its mate, finally shattered the silence. I could just make it out on the edge of the island. As I watched the pair's shenanigans, a great blue heron came gliding in. It chose to land a bit too close for Mr. Goose's liking and they squabbled briefly before the heron moved on. A half-dozen blue-winged teals had just drifted into view when I heard the first crane call.

Sandhills have an unmistakable call, a startling trill with notes of sax, tuba and trumpet. It ruptures the silence with the earnest intensity of a jazz solo, then trails off in a rattle of somber melancholy. It's a voice they've earned as one of the oldest living species of birds on the planet. Fifteen crane species inhabit the world today, but only two can be found in North America.

Reaching for a sip of coffee, I dutifully marked my tally sheet, then picked up my binoculars, hopeful for an actual sighting. Instead, a deep, damp chill descended on me, settling into the marrow of my bones like it descended on the branches and grass around me. Except I didn't twinkle in the early morning light like the rest of the landscape. The colorless, weightless blanket of frost absorbed something from deep within me, this fourth dimension of stillness quieting all the

stories my brain was telling me about what had happened and what was yet to come.

When the feeling lifted, I was changed. I had found an oasis of enlightenment, a respite from a difficult chapter. The early-morning frost had painted over my broken parts, washing my dread and doom into the lavender and peach wisps of dawn.

Four more crane calls broke the stillness in the next hour. Then, with just three minutes left in our official counting window, I looked up to see three sandhills in flight. They had set their sights on true North and were traveling with sure, steady wingbeats, long necks and legs fully outstretched. They carried nothing with them and never looked down.

At 7:37 I set my own compass for home on wings of community and renewal. My light had returned.

Interested in volunteering for the Midwest Crane Count? Visit their site for more information:

<https://savingcranes.org/learn/annual-midwest-crane-count/>

Alissa Kiedrowski is a proud member of the Wisconsin Writer's Association and the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. She lives near a lake with her husband, son and the most spoiled pets ever.





The Wonders of the Milky Way

Rose Bingham, Reedsburg

I am swallowed up by a feather tick comforter which is wonderful in an unheated bedroom, until you have to slide out from under it an inch at a time, dreading your feet touching the cold floor. Mom is saying, “Rosie, wake up. I have something special to show you.”

Opening my eyes, I say, “It’s still dark.”

“Hurry, I’ll help you get your socks and shoes on. We’re going outside.”

“In my nightgown?”

Mom knelt by the bedside, my feet sticking out from the covers and the rest of me not wanting to get out, and slipped on my socks and shoes.

“Let’s go.”

We went downstairs into the kitchen. Mom grabbed my coat, holding it open ready for my arms to slip into the sleeves. She placed a cap on my head, giving an extra tug over my ears, put on her coat, and out the back door we went. A kerosene lamp setting on the ground illuminated Grandma and Grampa huddled together looking up at the sky. Mom bent down, her head close to mine and pointed upwards. It was like magic—a hazy highway across the sky. I learned later in life this “highway” is a galaxy made up of several billion stars, including the sun. I don’t know if it was late evening or early morn, how the grown-ups knew the Milky Way would be visible, but it didn’t matter. What mattered was they gave a small child a rare glimpse of our amazing universe.

Rose Bingham is the author of a memoir, an inspirational, and prose and poetry book. She resides in Reedsburg, WI. She is a member of Wisconsin Writer's Association, Chicago Writer's Association, and Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.



Lucky Us

Rosie Klepper, Hinsdale, IL

I met one of my very best friends eleven years ago today. We met at a PetSmart back room on February 3, 2013. She was quasi-running around the room while barking, often stopping for a treat doled out by her foster mom. The rescue group didn’t have a shelter, so all the available dogs stayed with foster families. The dog’s name was Rosanne, but I heard her foster mom call her Rosie every so often. That was disconcerting. My full name is Rosanna, but I’ve always been known as Rosie. There was no way I would keep that name. Two Rosies would be too much. So I thought of the name Zoe. She was overweight at forty-four pounds, which is a lot for a beagle, but she was beautiful. Soulful brown eyes and striking markings all over. She was black, brown, and white. I wasn’t sure she liked me. I kept asking the foster mom if she thought the dog liked me.

“Oh, she likes you for sure,” she said. And so, it was with that declaration that Zoe became part of my family. The foster mom kept Zoe occupied while I went out into the store to shop for dog essentials. I needed everything: crate, leash, food, collar, dog treats, poop bags, toys. But the one thing I didn’t need was love. I loved her immediately. I had waited for her for a long time. I had a dog while



growing up; Milton, an English bulldog who was my “brother,” as my parents put it, and as an only child. I was hard-pressed to find a difference between a canine brother and a human brother: on occasion, he smelled, he would take my side of the car, and he passed gas with aplomb; all traits I heard associated with your standard issue brother. He was one of my best friends but died when I was thirteen. He came into our family when I was two and my heart ached to have another dog.

I waited until my remaining parent, my dad, passed away. It was too much to have a dog while I was caregiving for him. Dad died in July of 2011, and by February of 2013, I was ready to welcome a new friend.

As the foster parents kindly helped me load my car with my provisions that sunny, brisk day, they handed me a dark green ratty fleece blanket that Zoe used at their house. With a quick hug and an exchange of phone numbers and email addresses, Zoe and I headed home.

The first thing I did after unloading all the supplies was to take her on a long walk. A good dog is a tired dog, everyone said. Determined to start out on the right foot, we went out for a fast forty-five minute walk. She kept right up. We hardly stopped to smell anything. I can only imagine what she was thinking. Probably something along the lines of, “When is she going to stop?”

Prior to her arrival, I had done a lot of reading about how to take care of your dog and how to be a good owner. I assumed she would sleep in her crate at night. That delusion lasted about a week. She made such a ruckus when I put her in the crate, we both weren’t sleeping. I am so glad I relented. One of my greatest pleasures is having her by my side at night, listening to her soft snore. It is so relaxing and peaceful. Reading books is fine and good, but sometimes, you have to listen to your heart.

She is, though, a bit of an enabler. She has always been a serious sleeper, relishing all naps and any horizontal surface she could lie on. Part of me thinks that is why she has remained such a stunning beauty. No wrinkles. When she jauntily

trots down the hallway, white tipped tail wagging, it’s as if she’s saying, “C’mon, let’s go have a lie-down...it’ll be fun.” And, of course, I follow.

I had tried without success to adopt from a local animal shelter, but as soon as they found out I worked, they wouldn’t let me go any further. It was frustrating. This beagle rescue group was different. In order to become an adoptive parent, the rescue group sent a person out to your home to check things out and to interview you. I remember how nervous I was about the home visit. I tidied up the house. I flossed. I checked my library card for fines. After a successful home visit, they would then recommend a dog they thought would do well with you. The woman who came was very friendly and she brought her own beagle, Bogart, who promptly fell asleep under the kitchen table. She asked all sorts of questions and took notes. If I worked outside the home, if I had a fenced-in yard, if I planned to have a dog walker while I was away at work. She was here about an hour and a half. Some of my job interviews haven’t been as long. Luckily, I passed with flying colors and that was how I found myself meeting Zoe. They told me that she had been with a family in Michigan, but one of the toddlers became allergic and the doctor suggested they get rid of the dog.

While it is a shame the child developed allergies, I am selfishly grateful. Otherwise, I never would have known Zoe and I can’t imagine my life without her. About her weight problem, I think Zoe was taking advantage of toddlers walking around with food in their fists. She takes food very gently and I could see where she probably carefully got a half sandwich there, some goldfish crackers here, and maybe some cookies there, in addition to her dog food. Beagles are food-motivated.

The vet thought she was about two or three years old, more likely three, and she should weigh between twenty-five and twenty-eight pounds. I have a lifelong career as a weight watcher and I knew I could help her. Where there is love, you can do anything. I ignored all pleading stares, measured her kibble scrupulously and only gave her reasonable amounts of vegetables or fruits for



treats. And we went on daily walks. I am happy to say we were successful. Currently, she's a svelte twenty-eight pounds.

She has brought so much quiet joy to my life and I have learned so much from her. She perseveres and is brave. Now in her senior years, Zoe sometimes aborts her leap to my bed, but in no time she tries again and lands triumphant in an audible thump.

She taught me that loyalty is a rare gift bestowed up those we love. Zoe saw me through two knee replacements, going so far as to supervise all of the in-home physical therapy appointments and she kept me sane during the long siege of Covid.

Finally, she taught me that every day is a new day, full of things you haven't seen, or in her case, smelled. Perhaps her greatest lesson will come when we reach the final goodbye. She will teach me how to come back from an unthinkable, inevitable loss, how to carry on and how to cherish her in my heart forever. But for now, it is time to savor each day and continue learning from one another.

Rosie Klepper is a writer and editor, as well as a proud member of WWA. Based in Hinsdale, Illinois, her work has appeared in the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times and on NPR.

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with Other Writers**
Check out WWA's website at
wiwrite.org/regions
to find a writing group in your area.



Poetry

Gnarl

Patrick Tibbits, Janesville

Bowed and broken, gray with moss,
Cracked limbs count the winter's loss.
As much dead and brown and bare,
As greens and blooms in bright spring air.

Yet the old tree paints its ancient story,
In blazing purple sunlit glory.
And wakes me wond'ring from my gloom,
Today I saw the redbud bloom.

You mustn't say it's busy dying,
I know that isn't true.
Each leaf and petal ever vying,
So much I want to do.
I want to do.

Patrick Tibbits is a survivor of a 1960s adolescence, an atypical neurological organization, graduate study, and the past four winters in Janesville, Wisconsin.



WISPS OF SOUNDS PRAYING

Beth Good

The tattered violin
waited expectantly
for the bow
to caress its strings
after having been freed
from the decades-old black ash
imprisoned in the creases of its case.
The haunting sound, lifted in prayer,
beckoned its new audience to remember
those adorned in yellow stars
who once played before
destined carnage

Beth Good is a musician and evolving writer and member of the Wisconsin Writers Association who spends retirement at her lake home in northern Wisconsin.

Haiku

J Ellis Blaise, Edgerton

A delicate pace
Lived into beveled edges
And shards tumbled smooth

J. Ellis Blaise lives in Edgerton, Wisconsin. His first novel, *Treasure In A Field, The Fullness of Time*, was released in March of 2023 published by Ten 16 Press.



Once Upon A Hallowed Time

Thomas Dunne, Fort Atkinson

Morning sun beat like drum
Bent men walk with thirsty tongue
Screaming whistle pierced the air
Even Raven paused to stare

Smokestacks billow black like coal
Steel-clanged echoes down the row
Time clocks count paltry lives
Phone lines buzz with news-full wives

Gnarled fingers to the bone
Scars on hands, cause unknown
Walk together down machine-gray halls
Walk alone when Heaven calls

Started young with certain plans
Sturdy men with workin' hands
No more war, home to stay
Wife-to-be so young and gay

Day to day, plans went well,
But turned into a living hell
Near the end, no time to spare
At the end, no more despair

Thomas Dunne was born at Black River Falls, raised in Pewaukee and is now retired in rural Fort Atkinson. He enjoys writing, walking the country roads, photography, and writing (mostly country) songs.



The Great Outdoors

Natalie Reiter, UW-Stevens Point

Hot as hell and humid too
Heat that strikes through the shade
And the wind that decided to take the day off
August weather that would be better spent
Not in the midst of a blackberry patch

Forced to wear jeans so the thorns don't scratch
Forced into the car as I long to go back
My brothers and I in the silence brew
While my dad sings along to an old country tune
How he's so excited for the hell we must endure
I never knew

The patch is off of three dirt roads
A place that is so overgrown
You have to fight your way through
To the small blackberries that innocently await
For us to pick them clear of the land

And old ice cream bucket is what we use
And it only smells a little of mildew
I stake out my own piece of land
Pretending to pick phantom berries
To restrict my movement in the summer sun

Joey screeches from far away
As Tom knocks his bucket astray
Dad bellows to be quiet
Because he's not completely sure
If we can be here or not
I stand and look up
At the cloudless blue sky
And thinking for the millionth time
How unfair it was to be alive

Natalie Reiter is originally from Tomahawk where she spent her youth experiencing nature by picking up anything that moved and going for long walks. She is currently a senior at UWSP and is member of the Cornerstone Press.

The Suburbs

Lorisa D. Wiedenheft, Wauwatosa

Tall stately oaks
line up in rows
alongside the road
like sentinels
standing guard against
outsiders.

Manicured lush green lawns
exempt of leaves.
Color coordinated flowers
adorn brick monstrosities
showing off their elitist
facades.

I drive slowly down the street
examining each one
wondering what lies
hidden behind
those large reflective windows.
Wondering:
What is required to belong?
What must I acquire to belong?

Living in Wauwatosa, Lorisa D. Wiedenheft has self-published two collections of poetry *Love Complications* and *Reflections* and is currently working on a middle grade novel-in-verse. She is a member of Wisconsin Writer's Association and Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.



Painting by Shoshauna's father

HOW YOU LIVE ON
--- *For my father 1926-2017*
Shoshauna Shy, Madison

The painting of a blue
1950s Chevy pickup
between a pinyon pine
and an abandoned shed
under a New Mexican sky
mounted above a mantelpiece
in a Midwestern town
reminds me of your oil paintings

and I nearly grab my phone
to text you a snap of it
as if you were in Santa Fe—
bearded, bereted in your
brown suède shoes walking
to the brokerage on Marcy Street—

till I remember you died
six summers ago

Shoshauna Shy, a member of WWA, is the founder of Woodrow Hall Editions and the Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf program, and in 2022, “This Is You in the Sundance Catalogue” was longlisted for the Fish Publishing Poetry Prize. In 2023, the poem “Not Wanting to Meet My Birth Mother” was a finalist in the annual contest of *Naugatuck River Review*.