

Pen & Ink Writers' Group

The truth is...we gather on the Third Monday of each month to practice our writing skills. We listen and share in each other's work. We are small in number and our commitment is strictly to produce and foster creativity among our members.

We started in July 1999 and consist of adults that enjoy writing memoirs, commentaries, essays, poems, and/or prose. Our simple method each month is to use a pre-selected word or phrase as the basis of a story, an idea, an opinion, a derivative of, or an implied essence of and write a 1 to 1 ½ page document. We share our stories, comment, and in that way build up our writing skills through practice and presentation. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive, and the feedback is gentle.

Curious? Always wanted to try writing for fun, entertainment, or even profit? Come visit with us at any of our open meetings. Bring a sample of your work. Sit in and see what we do. If you like it, join us every month and become a member.

Works of the Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group © 2014 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

February 2014 selection – Gotta Dance

Gotta Dance By Theresa Bochnik

I sit in my kitchen listening to the radio station 98.7 FM. They play Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake." I recognized it, and this brings me to my childhood.

Since my early years I was interested in dancing. Folk dancing, ballet dancing, moving to the rhythm of music and allowing the fantasy to let me soar free and to create my own choreography and intricate steps. I was moved by ballet music such as "Swan Lake" by Tchaikovsky. I imagined being a princess, a white swan running away from the bad, red-bearded wizard and looking for my prince. I tip-toed and danced the steps. I knew the story and the music as I heard it on the radio. (At that time there was no television and going out to see the real ballet was practically out of question). Music and dance transformed the world for me. I was in a better world – a fantasy world. I was a princess. I was beautiful; that was my imagination and I felt better about myself. In grammar school I was in a dance club and we were learning folk dances. At one time I was in the lead. I loved it!

The love of music and dance stayed with me all throughout my life. After I saw, the musical "Oklahoma" I felt that if I was born again, I would be on stage in some musical theatre singing and dancing and having so much fun. I thought about these singers/dancers that this was the job they loved and they had so much FUN at it, while I

working at my desk job and had to maintain complete composure. No fun whatsoever!
No imagination!

Elvis Presley's music, songs and dancing on stage brought another era into entertainment. His rock-n-roll like "Jailhouse Rock" brought everyone to their feet. We thought that this type of music was also inside of us before, but he had to discover it for us, first.

My husband and I were going out dancing whenever we had a chance. Our favorite dance was cha-cha and rock-and-roll. When I heard "In the Mood" played by big-bands, I could not sit still. Then there was a disco era, the dances which were easy to dance. I felt free as I improvised my own steps to the fast-tempo of music. My husband complained that I tended to lead, but I did not care. I could be myself and it was OK. The music was intoxicating! All of it! And I just loved the "go-go" girls in their hot-pants and long, white boots. I wished I was one of them!

As the years were passing by, slowly our circle of friends going out to dance disappeared. Some said it was too expensive to go out, others simply got older and were not interested. Too bad! After I retired I had the opportunity to connect with dancing again. Although my husband was a pretty good dancer, I felt that we could learn more steps in waltz, tango, foxtrot, cha-cha, and other Latin dances and go out dancing with others again. I had several beautiful cocktail dresses that I never wore and it would be a chance for me to wear them. To start, I decided to sign up to a ballroom dancing at the local college. I tried to talk him into signing up with me so we could learn and dance together, but he would not hear of it. He is several years older than me and by this time, he developed a strong "couch-potato" habit. He had his favorite movies on television and nothing would get him out of the house in the evening.

So I signed up by myself. My first group lesson had mixed results. I was bad in English waltz but I was very good in Latin dances. I missed my lazy "couch potato" husband as partner in dancing. This was my last and only one dance class during retirement as I did not return to subsequent classes any more. I figured that after I learn all the new steps without him, I will still have to follow his lead in dancing the old way, so why should I continue with the class all by myself for nothing.

I was hurt and angry at him for a long time, but he did not worry about it. He thought it was a trivial matter. For me it was a missed opportunity to reconnect, to do something of fun together, to get out of the house and in a way to exercise. Gradually, I accepted the situation, and shifted my interests to different things. I also sadly realized that maybe this is too late for us, and as we are getting older we have to accept each other's shortcomings. This was not easy, but it was a reality of the situation. So now, whenever there is "Dancing with the Stars" on television, I gotta dance....and watch.

###

Sock Hop

By Carol Karvon

When Sherry walked into the gym after 3rd period she saw a huge banner hanging on the back wall over the bleachers. It read, “Gotta Dance” and told where to sign up for the big dance contest to be held in the gym before this year’s Senior Prom. It was going to be three weeks ahead of prom. What a dumb idea, thought Sherry. There’s so much last minute stuff going on before summer vacation. Who needs this?

But, after school she and her girlfriends started talking about the “Gotta Dance” announcement in the gym and thought it might be fun and would give them a chance to practice for the prom without the pressure. “Gotta Dance” was going to be a contest, but like an informal old-fashioned sock hop, not a fancy dress-up dance. The kids were asked to bring suggestions for DJ’s to the office. The teacher in charge wanted a variety of music that could be danced to – but especially the old music with lyrics you could understand. Their parents could help out with this and might even have some old dance music at home. Parents were also invited to attend as judges and chaperones.

Another announcement soon appeared on the notice board in the hall. It invited anyone needing basic dance lessons to come to the gym after school the next day. Some of the teachers were volunteering their time to teach a few dance steps to anyone wanting to learn. They didn’t want grumbling and complaining from the students that they couldn’t sign up for “Gotta Dance” because they didn’t know how.

“Gotta Dance” was getting to be the talk of the school and everyone was wondering who would sign up and what to wear. Girls seemed to like this idea a lot more than the boys who really had to be coaxed to participate. Girls started putting pressure on their boyfriends to sign up for the event. Since it was to be an old-fashioned sock hop, the girls and boys started quizzing their parents about what sock hops were like in their days. Many a mom dug through her closet looking for that treasured poodle skirt that she just couldn’t bear to part with. Of course the girls needed a stiff crinoline slip under the skirt to make it stand out and twirl around when they danced. Then there was the top. It should probably have short puffy sleeves and maybe be white, like the all important bobby socks. After all what was a sock hop without white bobby socks? Someone in the past probably invented these dances in socks to protect gym floors. A little brightly colored nylon chiffon scarf tied around her neck would complete the look.

Sherry’s mom found her poodle skirt and altered it to fit her daughter. It didn’t need much and when she’d finished, it fit Sherry perfectly. Sherry’s mom couldn’t quite remember what the boys used to wear – she thought maybe dark pants and t-shirts, and of course socks to dance in.

The evening of “Gotta Dance” arrived and the rules were explained to the dancers. Each pair had a number pinned to their backs and would dance until the music stopped or they were tapped on the shoulder and asked to move to the side of the dance floor. There would be twelve songs in the competition, three in each of four categories, with a two minute break after each category. Then the dance floor would be open to everyone for

general dancing without competition. The four categories included waltz, jitterbug or swing, something Latin (perhaps a cha cha), and a free style dance. One couple would be declared the winner in each category, determined by the judges at the end of the evening and awarded their prizes.

Sherry and her boyfriend, Mike, had gone to the basic dance lessons at school and felt pretty good about the contest. They decided they were doing this for fun, not hoping to win a prize. The merchants in the area of the school had donated money to sponsor "Gotta Dance" and were listed in the program. The prize in each category would be a \$100 check per couple and a trophy. Any money left over would be given to a food pantry.

"Okay, dancers take the floor" said the emcee; "Gotta Dance" is officially open. Good luck to all and may the best couples win. Let's dance!"

###

"Lorraine Bracco And Penny Marshall Will Play Lesbian Couple In New Show" By Jim Smetana

When I told my sister I'd seen Nicole Kidman at Allegretti's Bakery the first thing she asked me was, "Did you get her autograph?" Well, no, I guess I didn't. Asking a complete stranger to write her name on a scrap of paper for no reason is not something I think of. It's a little awkward when you encounter one of these celebrity bigshots. You think you should say something, but you're not sure what. "Hey, Nic, I thought you were great in that Park Chan-Wook movie! And by the way, what was it like being married to a gay midget with a weird religion for so long? And before you go would you please sign my Sun-Times? Thanks!"

The bakery is usually pretty crowded on Sunday mornings; people want to get their stuff and get going. I had to pick up a couple of loaves of bread and I wanted to get some brownies or apple slices for the church thing so I wasn't paying any attention to the other customers--I was a man on a mission. I was mentally going over my game plan--the last thing you want to do when they call your number is start hemming and hawing; you think you know what you want, then by the time they get to you, they're out of some of the stuff you had your heart set on, so now you've got to think on your feet and make some last-minute changes--it's not as easy as it looks. They had some cute little dancing devil dolls on a tray--solar-powered, a buck apiece. Dancing up a storm. They looked like the dancing elves, reindeer and snowmen they had at Christmastime--of the same ilk. I'm guessing a red devil with a pitchfork in each hand has a Valentine's Day tie-in but that seems like a bit of a stretch. Now was the time to take the measure of my fellow customers: the usual Norridge/Harwood Heights denizens AND a tall Academy Award-winning red-haired lady in a fur coat who could be the next President of the United States. No, I don't mean America's Current Sweetheart Amy Adams--for one thing, she's not tall ("only" five-four) and she hasn't yet won an Academy Award (but she might by

the time you read this) and besides she was born in Italy which not many people realize, but rather the five-eleven Australian Ms Kidperson who was in fact born in Honolulu just like Mr. Obama, believe it or not. I didn't want to stare--though it was difficult not to--then Carol Allegretti called, "Number thirteen!" (Game on!) "Thirteen!," I replied, "Gimme a loaf of sesame seed bread, slice it please, and a loaf of poppy seed bread, slice it please, and a half a dozen of those brownies. And one o' them Diable Dansant Solaires--gotta dance!"

###

While Dancing...

By N. Stewart

"Hello?"

"Come in Cheryl. The door is unlocked."

"How are you doin? You look good, Marianne."

"I'm doing fine, not very mobile, but getting along."

"What happened?"

"It's a silly story. Do you really want to hear?"

"Yes, of course. Let me make us a cup of tea first. Okay to put the kettle on?"

"Microwave it. It will be faster. The tea's in the cabinet to the right of the stove."

"Here you go. I found Constant Comment if that's ok? So tell me the story."

"You've heard that music can stir the soul. Well, I was stirred a little too much. I was listening to a radio show that played old songs from the 60s, involving romance and dancing. My feet had already started to tap in time to the music from some earlier songs, and then Melody of Love came on. My head started to sway slowly from side to side and my legs just wouldn't sit still. The music carried me away and I just felt - I gotta dance - and stood up. I swirled and twirled around the room, going from one spot to another. Molly was watching me from half way under a dining room chair like I was a little crazy.

"Up on my toes, turning around and down again. I completed a one-footed spin. Back and up again on my toes, and suddenly Molly who was chewing her rawhide bone let out a small yelp as I started coming down on her front paw. Not wanting to hurt her, I tried to get out of the way, losing my balance and I stepped backward onto her bone. It being a round shaft, my foot rolled from toe through heel right off it and down I went. Butt first. Hit my head hard on the thick, wooden rung of the dining room chair, somehow landing with my left leg under me. When I got up off the floor, my leg hurt but I shook it off. I

was more worried about my head and a possible concussion, than I was about my leg. But I guess my head was harder than the bone in my leg and that's what broke.

“So here I am. Stick in the house with a cast, crutches and all. Molly is fine as you can see and is not willing to leave my side. She seemed to be confused when I yelled and swore at the bone, thinking I was yelling at her, I suppose, and couldn't figure out what she had done wrong. The look on her face was something to see when I reached down, grabbed the bone away from her, and pitched it into the garbage can with all the fury I could muster.

“What a stupid thing to do – dance around the room like I was a fledgling ballerina instead of some middle-aged old lady that should be quietly sitting in her rocking chair. It should be about 6 to 8 weeks before the cast comes off. And, then I'll probably have to have physical therapy before I'm up and good to go again. At least I didn't have to have surgery to fix it.

“Will you heat some more hot water for me for another cup of tea? Then I'll tell you the next part of the dancing episode as it unrolled in the E.R. This you're just not going to believe.”

###

Shirley Temple 1928 - 2014
By Phyllis Babbs

Shirley Temple was a force in my life as I was growing up. She was round and dimply and she could dance. She wore lovely dresses; she always smiled; she had a sweet personality. In short, she was a hard act to follow.

Just coming out of the depression, children who were round and looked well fed were a measure of success. I failed my parents in that area as I was rail thin. My mother tried, unsuccessfully to put weight on me. She put cream on my cereal; she made me peanut butter and butter sandwiches as in between meal snacks; she gave me “butter” milk at bedtime- butter floating on top of warm milk. To no avail.

Then in first grade, I thought I had a chance to redeem myself. I was asked to dance with the 3rd and 4th graders. I was going to be Shirley Temple that night. My mother crocheted a dress for me, like the ones Shirley Temple wore with a high waist. It was a dusty rose with a scalloped hem.

On the night of the performance, my mother worked very hard to curl my hair which was a major project. We put my dress on, my black patent leather shoes, then a bow in my hair and I was ready to go. I knew the teacher would be amazed at the transformation because even without dimples, I was beautiful.

We walked into the classroom and I was beaming. The teacher looked at me and frowned and said a disappointed “OH!” She took my mother aside and spoke with her for a few minutes. I saw my mother nod and then my mother came over to talk to me.

It seemed I misunderstood. We didn’t have to make our own outfits. There were mothers who made costumes for the dance. The mothers who did the sewing, made matching outfits for each couple. And the reason I had been chosen to be in the dance was because I had pigtails, just like the little Dutch girls.

So the dress and shoes came off, the curls were combed out and my mother began to make pigtails, all the while telling me I had to be a good sport. Everybody was counting on me. But I was not the dimpled darling. I wasn’t going to dance without my curls and my own dress. There was nothing further to talk about it as far as I was concerned.

Then Bobby came in; he was my partner. Bobby had known me since I was 3 and he knew how stubborn I was. He talked about our outfits, how nice they looked and how I needed to be responsible. “I know you’re mad but you gotta dance.”

“NO!! I don’t gotta dance!” I told him about my curls and dress and how I wouldn’t dance unless I was wearing that dress. He just sat there and let me have my fit. When I was done, he showed me a pair of wooden shoes. He helped me put them on, then bowed and said “May I have this dance?”

How could I resist? But as we danced, I manage to stick my tongue out every time my back was toward the audience which helped my frustration but drove Bobby crazy.

Bobby continued to bale me out until I learned to how to be more flexible. I know my mother would be proud of me now. As all my fat cells have become biblical and have increased and multiplied. And I believe Shirley Temple is receiving her reward for cheering the nation with her sweet personality. It was a heavy load for a little kid to carry. And she did it with a grace and charm beyond her years.

###

Gotta Dance
By Elvira K. Castillo

“Gotta Dance” -- That could have been my middle name from an early age through my young adult years.

Dancing is something I loved and enjoyed for many years. As a child, I dreamed of being a prima ballerina and admired Anna Pavlova of the Ballet Russe Monte Carlo. I remember writing a biography of her in grammar school. I fantasized being a prima ballerina, and when no one was home, I’d put the record of the “Saber Dance” on the phonograph player and danced to my heart’s content, pretending I was a famous

ballerina. I wanted to take dance lessons, but Mom couldn't afford it. One of my friends was taking ballet and she let me put on her toe shoes. She was surprised to see I could stand on my toes and walk across the room. Actually, I had been practicing standing on my toes with my bedroom slippers at home for a long time before putting on those toe shoes.

I begged Mom to take me to see "The Red Shoes" starring Moira Shearer, a tragic love story about an English ballerina. Moira Shearer was a beautiful dancer with flaming red hair and big bright blue eyes. At the conclusion of the movie, she put on the red shoes and couldn't stop dancing. She literally danced herself to death. Moira Shearer was so lovely she soon became one of my favorite dancers, along with Vera Ellen, Cyd Charise, Gene Kelly, and Leslie Caron. Of course, I also loved Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, but their films came out before I was old enough to go to the movies. I did adore later films like Easter Parade and Holiday Inn with Fred Astaire, and the Barkley's of Broadway with Fred and Ginger.

Later in high school they offered a dance class you could take instead of gym class. Since I still loved ballet, I decided to take the class. Don't know if I'd have been any better when I was younger, but I learned that ballet is not spinning around in the living room like I did as a child, and that it is very hard work and I was not really that talented. I decided I'd better take the gym class the next semester. It didn't bother me not to be a ballerina, but I still loved it and attended many professional performances. Swan Lake is one of my favorites.

One night I had a dream that I was in a ballet called "The Firebird Dance." Of course, I was the prima ballerina. All the background dancers had red costumes with red feathers on their heads, and I was in black. It was very exciting, however, I think this was the closest I'd ever become to being a ballet dancer, let alone a prima ballerina.

Anyway, by this time, I loved rock and roll. I went to all the high school dances and during my early working years, I attended many ballroom dances where you could slow dance, cha-cha, and rock and roll. I even joined the USO with some of my friends where we danced with the soldiers and sailors stationed in Chicago.

Dancing is part of my soul, and when I hear the right music, I "Gotta Dance" or in these days just move. Unfortunately, the most important men in my life never liked to dance. That's okay, I can dance without a man and still do, when no one's looking.