

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

May 2014 selection – Fare/Fair

**Fair
By Elvira K. Castillo**



Drawn by Elvira K. Castillo

What is fair in life? It seems, at times, circumstances or incidents truly do not seem fair. This question came to mind very recently with the sudden death of a close friend, whom I've known

since Kindergarten. Joanne and I went through 8 years of grammar school and 4 years of high school together.

In high school it was popular to be in a "club," and Jo and I, of course, were in the same club called "The Pandas." Our club was composed of small groups of friends from different grammar schools. Joanne, Charlene, Kay and I came from the same grammar school joined by Jeanne, Noreen, Shirley, Doris and Gert from another school and finally Lydia, Edith, Nancy and Betty from a couple of other schools. It was customary in high school for the club members to locker next to each other, which made it convenient to see one another between classes. The most popular club in our high school (Steinmetz) was "The Sweets." They were the prettiest and most popular girls in school. Our club members were attractive, but more ordinary than beautiful. I do have to say that Joanne was the prettiest girl in our club.

After graduating high school we all kept in touch with each other as much as possible, but life led us in many different directions. Joanne for one, moved to California and then later to Texas. However, she was faithful in keeping in touch with her friends, especially Charlene and me. She also managed to come in to attend our 40th and 50th high school reunions and it was so great to see her.

Joanne never failed to send birthday cards to my son and me, and she always sent a \$20 bill in my son Scott's card, and would write this note: "Take your Mom out to lunch." If she wasn't up to writing, she sometimes surprised me with a phone call and we'd talk for at least two hours. She didn't care about the cost.

Joanne has three daughters, Ten, Colleen and Lynette. Each were married and she had 12 grandchildren. One daughter lives in Texas, but the other two live in California and Florida. She loved her daughters so much and their children, and would often travel to see them. She always wrote to me about them and sent photos along with her letters. Even though Jo lived miles away, I felt very close to her as all her friends did. Her passing was quite a shock to us as it happened within a week. She had a stroke on February 7 and died on February 13. I know her daughters were devastated and are still trying to cope. She was the "core" of her family and had so much to live for, and it just did not seem fair.

But, again, what is fair in life? None of us know when our time will come, fair or not. All we really have is today -- and don't forget it! Joanne and all the other loved ones I have lost will always be with me in my heart, and their precious memories will always delight and enlighten me. I can still see Joanne and me painting a beautiful mural for the wall of our grammar school, sharing the joy of both being on the "Super Honor Roll" and just remembering all her kindness and concern.

As they say in the Salvation Army, Jo has been "Promoted to Glory," and SHE surely has, along with all the other loved ones that remain in my heart. I'm sure "Glory" will welcome Jo and treat her very fair.

###

Building a Family Tree By Phyllis Babbs

Working on family trees or researching genealogy requires you to be part detective and part puzzle solver. And you need to possess infinite patience and fortitude. As I had begun working on our family tree, someone from a different branch of my husband's family was creating his own family tree. He sent me a packet of the materials he had accumulated.

As I was reviewing what he had sent me, I found some of the anecdotes he had included. The one I liked the best was about the uncle who had a butcher shop.

Uncle Buck gave the local priest meat on a regular basis. The last time priest had visited the butcher shop, the priest had commented that he felt Buck and his wife, Tillie, should not have more children. The priest felt Tillie getting was too old and she needed to be mother to the five children she already had. This advice was given to Uncle Buck in front of group of people. So Uncle Buck had a hard time living down this advice and he muttered and sputtered about “mindin’ hes own buzyness and who’s he ta tell me how ta live ma life” for several days. Then seeking revenge became his mission. And when a farmer came into the butcher shop asking for help, Uncle Buck began to hatch his plan.

One of the farmer’s dairy cow had been hit by a truck and he wanted to see about having it butchered. “Know not all the meat will be good. Figured y’d know how best to take care of that and I know y’ll charge me a fair price.”

“Tell ya what. Give me the utter and I’ll do for ya.”

‘The utter?’

“Yep.”

“Okay. But what’s it gonna cost?”

“The utter. I’ll do fer the utter”

“Beats the hell atta me. But ya got a deal.’

And so the utter rested in the refrigerator, waiting for the priest to come back. Uncle Buck had a look out stationed in front of the shop watching for the priest. And when the lookout saw the priest coming down the street, he gave the sign. Uncle Buck then took the utter out of the refrigerator. He unzipped is pants and placed the utter inside.

When the priest came in, he went to look at the display case.

“Ya know Father, been thinkin’ about what ya said. And I think y’re right. Me and Tillie shouldn’t have no more kids.” And having said that, Uncle Buck unzips his pants grabs hold of the utter, puts it on the chopping block, slams a meat cleaver on it cutting in two.

With that, the priest passed out, hit his head and had to be taken to the local hospital where he was revived several hours later. That was the last visit the priest made to the butcher shop.

There was a footnote—

This was the first example of birth control in the family.

###

Walworth County Fair
By N. Stewart

At the end of every summer on Labor Day Weekend, Walworth County holds their County Fair at Elkhorn, Wisconsin. Guest artists, mostly Country Music, perform at the Grand Stand each afternoon and evening. The area is mainly rural and agricultural and 4H¹ Club participation is everywhere. One fair grounds building houses the latest in farm equipment. Another building holds the prized cows, sheep, pigs, and bulls. Many of the animal owners are 4H members, having raised their animals from birth, taking special care to feed and groom them, and hoping to

win a ribbon or sell their animals for a profit. The animals are groomed to perfection and 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and Honorable Mention ribbons hang on the walls of the stalls. The cows moo, the sheep and lambs baa, the pigs oink, and the bulls snort as rural, country, farm, and city folk wonder through the barn buildings.

My favorite building houses the crafts where intricately designed quilts hang up high and the hand stitching is so tiny and neat that it can barely be seen. Needle point and crewel scenes come alive in vivid colors and appear more like the brushings of oil paintings than yarn pulled through material. The hand sewn cross-stitched samplers speak of proverbs of old like "Do unto others...."

Many, many years ago and on the Friday nights of the Fair, the five city teenagers, summering in the country packed into my Hudson Jet and took off for the Fair. We were dressed in our best tops, and our shortest shorts with long hair styled in pony on the cob. As the evening our summer homes a few miles away. With the passing of the years, the Fair continues to be held each Labor Day weekend, but I no longer go. I guess it would be appropriate to say "been there, done that" and it no longer holds the interest it once did. Still, there is always a new crop of people eager to go and have fun at the Fair, and so the Walworth County Fair continues to live on year after year.

¹ 4H Clubs are a youth-oriented (ages 5 to 21) nationwide organization (6.5 million members) under the U.S.D.A. Food and Agriculture Dept. designed to develop citizenship, sponsor healthy living, and utilize science, engineering, and technology programs. The four Hs stand for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. Their pledge is: "I pledge my head to clearer thinking/My heart to greater loyalty/My hands to larger service/and my health to better living/for my club, my community, my country, and my world."

###

Vicki Meets Someone By Vicki Elberfeld

So you're thirty, you say? A fine age. I was thirty once. I remember it well. With your whole life ahead of you, you hardly know where to turn or which direction to take. But that's a small price to pay for the opportunity to be anything you want to be in that great, vast future: actress, writer, scientist, philosopher...

What's that you say? That it's not easy, that you've been in school forever and now your parents, your professors even, want you to leave college and get a job already.

Oh, but you've plenty of time for that. Why not just continue your studies, whatever they are? And just look at all you have to be grateful for! There's not a wrinkle in that face of yours. It's not fair that you should be thirty while I must endure being sixty plus with aches and pains, a general slowing down and, what's most painful of all, the loss of friends. What I wouldn't give to trade places with you!

Again you say it's not easy. I don't understand you. Stop complaining already! You grouch it's hard to find a mate, hard to find a direction, and that you worry about money all the time.

Alright I'll admit it. Those are my problems too. They've always been my problems. It'd be funny if it weren't so sad. Hm. Apparently being sixty and being thirty aren't so different in some respects.

Actually, when I say I remember what it was like to be thirty, it's not true, exactly. But I do remember well the eve of my thirtieth birthday. I was headed downtown on the subway and

having the most amazing pity party, thinking this was the last day of my youth, the very last few hours I had remaining to me as a young person, and that tomorrow half of my life would be over (sixty being too ancient to live).

I didn't understand how great I had it with opportunities to educate myself, loving parents, friends, and a whole lifetime to solve whatever little problems I had. I wish, I just WISH, I could talk to my earlier self and say how good thirty looks when you're staring at sixty-five.

You don't say! You...are my former self, and you want to talk to me too? Ooh! But I don't recognize you. You look so thin and energetic, your skin so smooth. How wonderful of you to come and visit me! What did you want to talk to me about?

Advice? You want my advice?

But I don't have any advice. Besides, I have my own problems. Didn't I just tell you we have the same difficulties in life? On-line dating is available now, but I don't see it as any improvement over the past when we met at school, church or work. Divorce was high then and now. The economy is a mess just as it was the first time you graduated college. Remember how you then went back to hopefully educate yourself in something more useful than literature? Well, now folks are losing their jobs, their homes, and looks like I'll even have my tiny pension reduced.

So don't listen to me! I'll just tell you to stay in school, I'll always tell you that, because I used to be so happy there, happy to be learning, even if what I learned wasn't considered by my parents or others to be "practical."

Talk to someone else, anyone but me, about your future. Perhaps that someone will advise you to choose a career with some stability. Maybe then when you reach my age you'll be able to retire with a serious pension at least.

Oh, now you're angry that I won't help you. You think age brings wisdom? What idiot told you that? Besides, it all goes by so fast. One day you're young or almost young. You snap your fingers and you're old, or almost old, and you still don't have the answers.

But I don't have to tell you that. You'll find out for yourself in no time at all.

So visit whenever you want, but resist the urge to criticize me for want of wisdom. You won't understand until you've been through it.

I go too long without remembering or thinking of you, and today I didn't even know who you were. I'd very much like for us to know each other better, so please come back soon.

And thanks so much for dropping by.

###

**"I Said No to Game of Thrones"
By Jim Smetana**

If you want to go downtown to see the picture of that Swinton broad I suggest you take the CTA. Get the 81W bus in front of Allegretti's and ride it to the end of the line. The fare is two twenty-five or something like that; you better have exact change 'cause the driver doesn't make change. Don't try to pay your fare with a fifty or a hundred; I know you like to carry large bills. Get off at Jefferson Park and ride the Blue Line downtown to Adams or Monroe or Jackson--I don't remember what the stop is, Just keep walking east (past all the wig stores and chicken shacks) until you get to the Art Museum. Climb up the steps and go right in. Go right to the guard and

show your pass and you're in. Don't bother to wait in any lines--your pass precludes all that. The Swinton broad's picture is on the second floor, gallery 237. Climb the stairs and ask a guard for directions. (If you need to use the toilet it's downstairs next to the pay phones)

After you see the Swinton broad if you're really ambitious I'd recommend the Joe Jackson, the Willem Defoe and the Franz Biberkopt all on the north side of the building--a half mile hike if you don't mind walking a little out of your way. By now you'll probably be hungry--I know I would be--so I recommend Panda Express on Adams just across the street. The price is right if you don't mind bad food and for a dollar more you get an extra scoop. Sit in the window if you like to "people watch" but just remember if you can see them they can see you if you're wearing one of your short skirts or even those cargo shorts.

###

A Fair, A Fare or Affair

By: Susan J Wilfong

Language is a funny thing,
Though we all do use it.
Our English language is hard to learn,
And so, we just abuse it.

We create new words,
To suit our needs.
New words bloom as often,
As the ever-present weeds.

I have been speaking English,
Every day, my whole life long.
Still, there are those "Special" words,
That I continue to get wrong.

Like, can a Bazaar be Bizarre?
And isn't a Bazaar a fair?
But we don't pay a fair on bus,
But we have to pay a fare.

If we wear a diamond ring,
Its size is measured in Karats.
But in our tasty salads,
We find carrots but not karats.

And please don't get me started,
On the things I need to do.
Like paying those silly bills,
That seem, are always due.

There is write and right,
And to, too and two.
So, as for difficult languages,
English is one, that's true.

As the English language
Continues to grow and change,
The words that we create,
Can really be quite strange.

Frenemy, cyberstalking, and LOL,
Texting, skype and tweeting,
Are words, now commonly used,
But really not worth repeating.

Yes, English is a crazy language.
Even the English don't use it.
And yes, as it has grown,
We certainly have abused it.

But I think it's safe to say,
When all is said and done,
Anything new is hard to learn,
Even though it can be fun.

Homonyms and Acronyms
Antonyms and Synonyms too,
Are things we just have to learn,
To get us, each day through.

###

A Rip-Roarin', Rootin'-Tooin; Tale of the Old West By Jamey Damert

Of late I have been having an extraordinarily difficult time putting words together to make up a story. Difficult times are upon me these days and are not in the way of helping matters. It brings to mind a little verse I wrote years ago that I ask your indulgence to let me recite now. At least it has brevity to speak for it, being a mere 24 words long and not a word longer. Here goes:

Writing for me isn't easy;
Writing for me isn't fun.
Why do I write then? You're right:
I do it to get something done!

The story I present to you now contains mostly dialogue, making it appropriate methinks for tonight's meeting. Although I wrote it years ago, I believe it will not have been heard by most of the present members of the Pen & Ink Writers Group. And it's being read this evening is not out of keeping with this session's topic, for indeed it is by all measures at the very best but a **fair** tail.

A Rip-Roarin', Rootin'-Tootin' Tale of the Old West



written by Jamey Damert



"You Tex?"

"Yeah, I'm Tex, born and reared in the great state of Texas. Where you from?"

"Mississippi."

"It don't seem rightful somehow, but I reckon I should call you 'Miss.'"

"Them's fightin' words. Get ready to draw."

"I'm the fastest gun in the South, Miss. Prepare to die."

"The fastest gun in the South, eh? Unlucky fer you, yer in the West now. And call me what ya like, varmint."

I'm Piss Pistol Percy Page, sheriff of San Guajara and regions hereabouts. Get ready to draw, Tex."

The two gunmen, one a depraved, savage killer, the other an upright, law-abiding killer, hauled out their firearms.

BANG! BANG! Two shots went off almost simultaneously and reverberated over the valley of San Guajara. Tex stood stunned as he stared at his Remington Derringer, fragmented and smoking as a result of Piss Pistol's bullet meeting Tex's head-on before it had a chance to emerge from his gun's barrel.

"Yer finished, Tex. Step over t' the jail an' be my guest. Tomorry you'll hang. Critters like you don't deserve t' die easy."

No sooner was Tex caged up than another miscreant, a brigand wanted in eight states, rode into town. The dusty street was quickly deserted, except for Piss Pistol and the newcomer.

"Yer Big Black Jack, ain't ya?"

"Yeah. I reckon ya seen my black clothes, black hat, and black horse. Asides them, I'm big an' my name's Jack."

"Murderer, thief, cheat, and all around deviant—they's yer points. I'm generously sick o' lookin' at yer *WANTED* posters, an' I'm itchin' t' clear the air some by seein' you buried deep."

"That's one itch yer gonna have trouble scratchin', Sheriff Page."

"Dismount, desperado, pluck yer musket, an' pray. Ya got any last request?"

"Yeah, t' see you dead. This region's had about as much sheriffin' as it can stand."

"Request denied. Draw, Black Jack."

"I'd be rightly obliged to, but I cain't draw, Sheriff. I play a pretty tolerable flute, though."

"No kiddin'? Ain't that coincidental. I play the pianer. You familiar with Vivaldi's flute sonatas?"

"Know em' well. Also the latest Stephen Foster songs."

"Amazin'. My wife sings them Foster tunes all the time. Why don't ya c'mon over an' we'll do a melody 'r two?"

"Don't rightly mind if I do. Musicians are hard t' come by here in the wilderness."

And so everyone lived happily ever thereafter, excepting for Tex, of course. The trio of Nola, Percy, & Jack made a big splash performing in saloons when they weren't called upon to do weddings, bar mitzvahs, revival meetings, and executions.

640 words (including all the introductory falderal)

Happy Anna Verse Sir Airy (words lovingly penned to my wife upon our twelfth anniversary)