

## **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**

#### **September 2014 selection – Wheel(s)**

##### **The Broken Wheel By N. Stewart**

The wheel was spinning and spinning, making Sarah dizzy yet she could not take her saucer-wide eyes off the object. A moment before it had been a whole red Schwinn two-wheel bicycle. Now it was broken and laying in two pieces.

A few weeks ago, she had gotten it for her 10th birthday from her mom. Sarah knew her mom, working two jobs would never have afforded a brand new bike, and she was happy with this used one. It had a little rust on the back fender and the seat was a little crooked. It was a girls' bike and she only had to slip her leg through the opening to reach the pedal, but she liked to swing her right leg up and over the seat just like the boys do.

It was a beautiful spring Sunday and she was out riding her new bike, practicing letting go of the handle bars, riding along with hands up in the air or straight down at her sides, as if saying look what I can do. She'd pedal as fast as she could and then taking her feet off the pedals, riding free as she called it, coast until the wheels slowed. And then, she'd put her feet back on the pedals and go as fast as she could, again riding free.

The forest preserve was not far from her house and she was allowed to go there. She'd ride for what seemed like miles through the wooded area, along the river, enjoying the sun and the wind against her face. A squirrel would startle and scamper out of the way of the bike path as Sarah sped by. Birds would sing in the trees and Sarah whistled her song back to them.

She was on her way home and only a few blocks from the house, still riding on the path. Wanting to cross the street, she steered down a curb, and the next thing she knew she was falling forward on to the street. With the bike split in two, the front wheel lay in the street spinning on its axle, she was also in the street on her hands and knees, and the back wheel and pedals were hung up on the curb. It had happened quickly. Stunned though she was, she picked herself up. After the spinning stopped she gathered the two big bike pieces, and started the encumbered walk home.

Carrying her precious birthday present in pieces into the yard, her mom asked what happened. Sarah just said she didn't know. It all came apart that's all, and she started to cry. Her mom wiped the tears away and glanced at her skinned knees, telling her things happen sometimes that we don't expect and it is no one's fault. Sarah felt sad and thought she would have to wait until her next birthday for another bike, but her mom said they would start looking for a new bike as soon as they could. Her mom hugged her tight and Sarah hugged back, breaking then into a big, broad smile.

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**Fermata D'Autobus**  
**By Jim Smetana**

Marge and I have lived in the same house for over thirty years. We moved in just after we got married. You can just picture the amount of stuff that's piled up in our basement. One wall is stacked floor-to- ceiling with boxes, most of them unmarked, unlabeled. I opened one and found it to contain dishes that once belonged to a person now long-deceased. I carried the whole box outside and dropped it into the garbage can. If I had any sense I'd toss them all out (unopened) but I knew if I tried such a stunt Dear Old Margie would never let me hear the end of it. So we made a crazy compromise: we'd sell each box for ten bucks--as is. With the money we made we'd send Junior to Bible Camp. Once we got all the useless junk cleared out, the basement looked a whole lot bigger. And the floor tile looked ten times uglier. Removing it was not a tough job--the adhesive had lost its staying power after years and years of springtime floods. Under the tile we found a huge circle, 8 or 9 feet in diameter, inscribed or INCISED into the floor. In fact it wasn't just a circle; it was a kind of wheel, one that could be turned albeit with some difficulty. But if it could be cleaned up and refurbished, somehow, it might just turn with ease. And that gave me an idea for a diabolical dinner party...

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**Johnny Boy**  
**By Phyllis Babbs**

"Come on Grandmamma," the young boy said urging her forward. "Daddy put a chaise right here so you could be in the sun. I'll help you." The young boy eased her onto the chaise and threw his arms around her neck. "I love you, Grandmamma."

“Loved you first,” she said as he ran off.

She leaned back, feeling the warmth of the sun leaching the pain from her bones. Her son handed her a glass of iced tea; she took a sip, sighed softly and closed her eyes. She could hear the family around her as they prepared for the picnic, getting the grill out, setting the table. Then she heard another sound, a rumbling.

She looked toward the sound and there he was, her Johnny Boy. He was pushing the old wheelbarrow, the heavy cast iron one with the thick wooden handles. The muscles in his arms rippled as he worked. He stopped suddenly, looked at her smiled broadly and waved. “Hey, Miss Jenny,” he said.

Jenny? Nobody called her Jenny any more. She wasn’t even sure if anybody even knew what her name was. “Johnny Boy,” she exhaled.

He talked to her this time.

“You didn’t let them change you, did you? Cause you were perfect the way you were. A beautiful free spirit.” The comment brought a smile to her lips.

“Were you happy, Miss Jenny?”

“No. My heart broke when they sent you away and when you died, I didn’t know how I could go on without you.” She was quiet for a moment. “They married me off to old Jake. He gave me his land and my son a name, your son. The two best things he did for me right before he died. And I learned how to be contend.”

He looked at her intently and then he held out his hand.

“It’s time to go Miss Jenny. I’ve been waiting for you for such a long time.”

She hesitated, wondering how she could get off the chaise, how she could go to him. But with every movement she made, she became more agile. And then she was running to her Johnny Boy.

He took her hand and they walked toward the orchard.

The woman on the chaise dropped the glass of iced tea. “Mother?” a man called out. “Oh, my God. Call 911.”

But Miss Jenny and her Johnny Boy were already gone when the EMTs arrived.

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### **Wheel/s**

**By Elvira K. Castillo**

The wheels are always turning in my brain -- thinking, thinking, thinking, planning, planning, planning. Sometimes I wish I could stop the “wheels” from spinning, spinning, spinning. Following are some wheel-spinning brain revelations I’ve experienced:

I don’t even have my eyes open yet in the morning, and I begin thinking about what to make for breakfast. I cut this wheel-spin short when I devised a menu for the entire week, so no more wheel-turning decisions regarding breakfast. During the week my son and I have cereal or a breakfast sandwich every other day, and on the weekends either waffles or pancakes. The only problem with this is I have to figure out what day it is and what we had the day before.

Now that I'm older, the wheels have to be given a little push to remember if I took my medication and if I put my eye drops in? My medication has to be taken a half hour before eating, and if I don't put my eye drops in first thing in the morning, I'll forget to put them in at all.

I usually arrange my clothing the night before, so I don't have to think about what to wear. And, I keep my calendar filled with activities for each day, but just hope the wheels will lead the brain to the calendar

As I said, the wheels turn and turn into so many thoughts, I sometimes think I have attention deficit disorder. I don't really know what that is, but I'll explain what I mean. When I'm listening to someone speaking, my mind wanders off. In order to concentrate and understand what they're saying, I have to stop my wheels of thoughts and repeat every word they are saying to myself. It is my only solution enabling me to concentrate. In this regard, I have difficulty reading. The material has to be of great interest to me and the writing clear, otherwise my wheels turn again and I have absolutely no idea what I've read.

Getting to sleep is another problem. The wheels really start spinning once I hit the pillow. I've controlled this problem somewhat by listening to Old Time Radio programs at bedtime. Again, I concentrate by repeating the dialogue to myself as I listen and eventually just pass out.

Unfortunately, at my age, the wheels seem to stop when I'm trying to think of someone's name or "words" when trying to express myself. I took a course a long time ago on remembering names by association, but now I can't even remember the association, so how am I going to come up with the name? Just recently a couple of words fell under the wheels. I had to call the plumber because the water in my sink didn't drain. I called the plumber and had difficulty explaining what I needed because I absolutely could not think of the word "rodding." The plumber understood, as at least I could tell him the water would not go down the drain. The other word crunched under the wheels was a vegetable. My neighbor left a small bag of vegetables by my doorway while I was at the dentist. It was two large beautiful red tomatoes, a cucumber, and a zucchini. Later I wanted to write a "thank you" note and while writing I couldn't think of the word "zucchini."

I can't tell you how frustrating it is to be unable to get the wheels going when you need them and to not be able to stop them when you don't need them. Guess we all have to expect the "wheels" to slow down, however, I am grateful that my wheels are still turning somewhat, regardless of the frustrations and too much thinking, planning, and spinning. Guess I'm fortunate in being able to find ways to control the wheels, unlike some people, like Robin Williams for example, who are never able to find some inner quiet and calm, unable to stop the buzzing in the brain.

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**Wheels – to the Best of My Ability**  
**By Jamey Damert**

I confess that I do not have a story in the usual sense, just a few reflections. Recently our Craftsman lawn mower, which had given us great service for many years (in contrast to our sad snow blower), came to its end. To begin with, my dear wife suggested we have the blade sharpened, for in her view the grass was not so much being cut as pressed down. And she was right—as usual.

When I discovered what having the blade sharpened would cost, further investigation revealed that a new blade would cost only a slight bit more, so off I went to Sears to buy a new blade. I turned the lawn mower upside down to install the pristine blade. When I uprighted the machine, I discovered that it would not start. To make a long story short, I ended up putting fresh oil into the mower and purchasing a new spark plug. Eventually the lawn mower started up, but it gave off massive amounts of smoke, and I feared the engine was burning up. I let it cool down and started it again. After several of these procedures, I managed to take care of most of the back yard, but eventually the thing died completely and leaked out all its new oil.

My wife noticed that people several blocks away were having a garage sale, and she thought she saw that they had a lawn mower possibly for sale. I went over and discovered that she was right again. The lawn mower obviously had something wrong with the left rear wheel; I was told that it needed a new wheel. For \$50 I had me a fine-looking Toro lawn mower. I walked it home on its three good wheels.

After looking into the matter, I quickly discovered that the wheel was perfectly okay. What was obviously broken was the height adjuster (officially known as the ‘spring arm assembly’). Off I went to Frank’s Lawn Mower and purchased the necessary part. The 1996 lawn mower is one that I call self-propelled, and its wheel assembly is far more complex than my old Craftsman, and it weighs easily twice to three times as much as my previous machine. I installed the spring arm assembly, and the lawn mower seemed to work fine for a little while. Then, for no known reason, the whole wheel assembly and its 21 parts just dropped away from the main part of the lawn mower. In my humble view, this was not a good thing. By the way, in contrast the same wheel assembly on the Craftsman consisted of only two pieces.

I was able to retrieve most of the parts from the mud. Upon careful examination, it occurred to me that the pivot arm assembly looked particularly messed up. So it was off to Frank’s again to obtain several pieces that I lost and a new pivot arm assembly, which had to be ordered. A few days ago I put the whole thing together again, and let me tell you I’m not too confident that all is well. If the weather is nice, I plan to try mowing the very long grass tomorrow. Wish me luck and pray for me.

More grim news I must yet report. On the ninth day of this month, Fred, our senior dog, a Wheaton Terrier, died suddenly. Little Molly lives on, a lost soul.

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Wheels  
by: Susan J Wilfong

I want to tell you a story,  
It may or may not be true,  
So I'll just tell the story,  
And leave that decision up to you.

It was a hot Fourth of July  
About thirty years ago.  
All the stores and restaurants were closed.  
A fact we've all come to know.

I decided I would take a walk,  
But where was I to go?  
I decided to walk to the East,  
And just go where the wind would blow.

I started in the morning,  
While the breeze was nice and cool.  
I figured I would outsmart the weather.  
I wouldn't be a fool.

As it turned out,  
I was a fool anyway.  
That nice cool breezy  
Quickly went away.

As I walked upon the sidewalk  
Along a busy street,  
Cars and busses started showing up,  
But a walking person, I never did meet.

As I walked my lonely path,  
A familiar tune popped in my head.  
"The wheels on the bus go round and  
round"  
Hmmm, should I take a bus instead?

No! I'm not a quitter!  
I continued on my way.  
With no destination in mind,  
I knew I could not stray.

The sun was beating down,  
Upon my little head.  
I was sweaty and overheated,  
And I know my face was red.

God, why did you stop it?  
That cool refreshing breeze.  
That caressed my sweaty face,  
And rustled through the trees.

I began to see things,  
Things I knew were not there.  
But they were so real to me,  
For this, I did not prepare.

I saw a purple gopher,  
Wearing a big pink hat,  
Talking to a goldfish,  
Where on the bank they sat.

At least that's what I thought I saw  
On that very hot summer day.  
As I continued to march on  
Along my lonely way.

After the purple gopher  
And his goldfish friend,  
I continued to see weird things,  
I wished the sights would end.

Then I saw a green giraffe  
And a spotted polar bear.  
Blue and orange stars  
Were floating in the air.

At least that's what I thought I saw  
On that very hot summer day.  
As I continued to march on  
Along my lonely way.

I continued to march onward.  
To where, I did not know.  
My walking pace had changed a lot.  
Now I walked quite slow.

I remember one more sighting.  
A woman with a young girl,  
Who's hair was perfectly straight  
Except for one little curl.

I told them of the things I had seen  
Along my lonely path.  
I told them of the gopher  
And the green giraffe.

They didn't laugh at what I told them.  
They gently smiled instead.  
They offered me some water,  
And a towel to wipe my head.

I wiped the sweat from my brow  
And drank the water they offered.  
I'm not ashamed to tell you,  
I really felt quite awkward.

As I turned around to thank them,  
No one could be found.  
I felt strong and refreshed,  
But, there was no person around.

My walk finally ended,  
At the Lincoln Park Zoo.  
My energy had been restored,  
I absolutely felt brand new.

I can't explain the things I had seen,  
On that very hot summer day.  
But I think God sent two Angels  
To refresh me in a special way.

The towel and cold water  
Could have only come from God.  
I never saw where the people went.  
I think that's really odd.

I got wiser on the way home.  
I took a bus instead.  
And softly hummed that tune,  
That kept playing in my head.

"The wheels on the bus go round and  
round."

As I look back  
On that very hot summer day.  
I guess, I never really was alone.  
God was with me all the way.