

## **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**

#### **November 2014 selection – All That Jazz**

##### **And, All That Jazz By Elvira K. Castillo**

Jazz -- Not my favorite music. As I once heard someone describe Jazz: "Sounds like different instruments playing all different songs at the same time." In other words, a jumble of tunes mish-mashed together. A perfect description, if you ask me.

However, when you put Jazz together with the dance choreography and the song "And, All That Jazz" in the movie "Chicago" with Catherine Zeta-Jones, that is far more to my taste. The words "And, All That Jazz" are really all I can remember from the 2002 movie.

The movie "Chicago" was based on the 1975 long running Broadway musical starring Chita Rivera. Prior to this musical was the 1942 film "Roxie Hart" starring Ginger Rogers, which was more a comedy than a musical, and even earlier than that was the 1927 film, also entitled "Chicago," starring Phyllis Haver.

In the 2002 movie "Chicago," Roxie Hart is played by Renee Zellweger. Roxie is a ditzy character who shoots her lover and then hires a slick lawyer in Chicago to represent her in becoming a nightclub performer. Her idol is Velma Kelly played by Catherine Zeta-Jones. Soon Roxie finds herself getting lots of attention, taking the spotlight away from Velma Kelly. The setting of this movie was in the roaring 1920s, during the prohibition era and the popular "Flappers."

Jazz, according to the Webster dictionary, began about 1909 and is a combination of "ragtime" and "the blues" with varying degrees of improvisation and distortion of pitch--you can say that again! The Jazz incorporated with the wonderful choreography of

Bob Fosse in “Chicago” was very entertaining. In fact, it was so entertaining, the movie won several Academy Awards in 2002, including “Best Picture,” “Best Supporting Actress” (Catherine Zeta-Jones), “Best Editing,” “Best Sound,” “Best Costume Design” and “Best Art Direction.” But, in my opinion, they missed one award -- “Best Song” *And, All That Jazz*.

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## **Jazz** **By Carol Karvon**

I racked my brain trying to find something unique and entertaining that I could relate to *All That Jazz* and came up blank. Nada. Nothing. Okay, now what?

In an attempt to make something at least a little interesting out of *All That Jazz*, I went to that modern mega source of information, the internet, and discovered something called The Urban Dictionary. It defines *All That Jazz* as hit theatre and a film called *Chicago*. The song *All That Jazz* is a featured number in that musical.

Well that was pretty much what all the other listings said, but everyone knows about that! I wanted something different, more imaginative and inventive.

As I read further I learned that all that jazz can also be used at the end of a sentence or list instead of etcetera.

An example might be a conversation between two people:

The first person asks, “So, what did you do today?”

The second person might answer: “Well, I went to the store, fed my dog, cleaned out my closet, and “all that jazz.”

Used in that way, all that jazz can be a phrase that encompasses a variety of things.

Since I was now even more curious and still eager to learn exactly what jazz was and if there was anything unusual about it, I Googled jazz, not all that jazz, just jazz.

According to Google, jazz is a *Noun - a type of music of black American origin characterized by improvisation, syncopation, and usually a regular or forceful rhythm, emerging at the beginning of the 20th century.*

The definition also mentions types of musical instruments associated with jazz such as brass, woodwinds and piano. Occasionally even guitars and violins are also used. Styles of jazz include Dixieland, swing, bebop, and free jazz.

After reading all of that, the word syncopation in the definition is what really got my attention. I love that word.

Syn-co-pa-tion — the word itself even sounds like the sharp, choppy movements synchronized to the music in the musical number called *All That Jazz* with a whole lot of shimmying going on. At least that’s how I pictured it.

Now I wanted to find out if I was remembering the right musical number. I put a tape of the movie version of the musical *Chicago* in my VCR. The number *All That Jazz* is at the beginning of the movie and the word syncopation fits the action to a “T”.

Syn-co-pa-tion - that word almost makes you want to get up on your feet, move your arms and shake it all around in sync with the music. In my mind’s eye I can see the

dancers moving around on the stage shimmying and shaking with synchronized movements in time to the music's beat. Once you hear and see *All That Jazz* performed, it's hard to get the music and visual images out of your head. You too will be singing the song, *All That Jazz*.

It's perfect. It's syn-co-pa-tion. It's All That Jazz.

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### **Jazzercise** **By Sara Schupack**

“And turn, and kick and shuffle step, shuffle step...”

Why had Rhonda signed up for this class, and why was she wearing this ridiculous zebra striped leotard, just because the slim, young saleswoman had said that the diagonal stripes were thinning? She hated it when she behaved foolishly. Her smarts were her best feature. She caught a glimpse of herself in the wall-length mirrors, the flesh squishy and lumpy around every elastic opening, and at the waist, where she had convinced herself the tight stretchy fabric was holding everything in. She was the third fattest person in the class, and that wasn't a good thing. The other two were wheezing before they even started, and were a full measure off in the steps. Rhonda had chuckled to herself when she saw them, as well as the tidy, younger women with their giggles and painted nails. Then she herself fell behind in the routine.

Why did they have to call it Jazzercise? The music was not anywhere near jazz, and that depressed her even more. She didn't dislike Madonna or even Earth Wind and Fire. There's a time and a place. The newer stuff that she couldn't name, Beyonce maybe, Kesha, that's a name she had heard, or the boom boom boom repetitive stuff, even those were okay. Some song with 'shake your booty' in the lyrics, made her feel silly like some animated rhinoceros who thinks she's all that, but her slipping pink tu tu brings laughs to her audience.

Why were mirrors never her friends? Either she felt dowdy and frumpy, but a mirror showed her someone with confidence and some appeal, or she was feeling good, thinking she had just the right cut and color in her outfit, and then found everything off and old. Why did she always expect to meet her younger, more vibrant self there in the mirror? Why did she keep forgetting how skin aged?

Later, at home, Rhonda banged a fist once against the mirror. Where did all of this rage come from? Maybe if she had fully smashed it, she would feel that at least she had carried through with something. There was a little crack across the middle, like something dirty or incomplete. As she showered, Rhonda pictured pounding and pounding until shards scattered by her feet, and then she picked up a knife-shaped shard, handily pointed in just the right, dangerous way, and then she pictured blood. Whose? Maybe her own. Maybe the cute Jazzercise instructor with the perky voice who was so condescending. She hated it when young people put on a baby voice when they talked to her, as if she was some doddering, senile old ninny. Or else they used that 'you go girl' chummy talk, as if she was supposed to feel giddy at being welcomed into their young person club, albeit only temporarily. The older you get, the more respect you should be

given, not less. She wanted to say to the teacher, as she reminded Rhonda to turn to the right, not the left, good for you, you know the steps to this asinine dance to music that you are too young to have ever heard in a club, and you have no idea how we older women have lived; you're not even curious.

She could have quit. No one was forcing her to continue with the Jazzercise. But the next Wednesday, there she was, finishing up work early so she could get to the gym by 5:00. And the next week, too. By then, she had given up on the leotard and went for sweat pants and tee shirt. She had learned most of the steps, and was embarrassed by how proud she felt at this accomplishment. She did not enjoy how Miss Chipper congratulated her, like she was a kindergartner bringing home a macaroni sculpture, but she tried to accept the compliment graciously. She was only doing her job, and she cared enough about it to want Rhonda to succeed. That's saying something. Rhonda hated it when people didn't take pride in their work.

Rhonda found herself relieved on Wednesdays to leave work early. She had had it with her boss Floyd, who was so insecure he had to steal her ideas one day and seek affirmation from her the next, or her colleague Sally, who was so afraid of offending anyone that she wouldn't speak out against even the most ridiculous request or criticism. Rhonda pulled in over 40% of the clients. She was rated second in all reviews. But she hadn't seen a raise in five years. She wasn't good at small talk and walked away from gossip. She caught on quickly and had no patience for those who didn't. There was some secret to success that she hadn't learned. But then she didn't find relief in the Jazzercise either. She noted the clique of women who complimented Chipper each lesson, as if somehow her youth would rub off on them, or they'd 'get a good grade' if they coozied up to the teacher? There was one woman in the class who seemed more like Rhonda, savvy, appreciative of irony, and not easily fooled, but then her dully, monotonous voice became such a turnoff that Rhonda ended up keeping her distance; she was too depressive or something.

Walking past the bad mirror again, Rhonda noticed an empty space; it was the weapon-shaped shard that she had fantasized about. She had to do a double-take, checking her hand, like a cartoon crazy. Was some other self holding a weapon and about to slice up someone without her knowing? The hand was empty. Then the mirror was whole again, save the first sad little crack that she had made before.

The next morning, she woke up bleeding, with a gash across her lower thigh. She couldn't find any sharp objects in bed, but changed the sheets just in case. She ended up limping most of that day, with the pain coming in sharp waves as if some poison or infection targeted the wound.

She focused hard on the fat spillover around her waistband that didn't seem to be retreating, as if her hard mind could make it vanish, or else she could make herself love it. She walked past the cracked mirror and called back the shard and blood fantasy, just to test that the rage was still there. Was she trying to build up to something grand, like a real murder or suicide or how about a mass shooting at the gym? She shook that thought away, more ashamed by its melodrama than its evil. She knew that she didn't have that kind of grandeur in her. She heard her mom's frequent remark, delivered with calm nonchalance, which made it all the more infuriating, "When you're done holding on to your bad mood, we'd love to have you back." It angered Rhonda because her mom was right, and because she wasn't at all shaken by her daughter's miserable behavior. She

knew that Rhonda's mood was a matter of choice, and she'd wait it out patiently. Did Rhonda need someone now to scold her out of her mood? It was 30, 40 years later, and no more mom to remind her of her own choices. She still missed her mother.

The next time she walked by the mirror, she saw a crabby, cracked old face. No fun in it. Was that really her? She gasped aloud. She continued to work hard at Jazzercise. She liked to achieve. What was she after? She wanted a different shape. Not just slimming here and there and being the same person but better. She wanted to look in the mirror one day and see someone new.

She dreaded, yet was drawn to, the hostile mirror. She found two shards -- one with a handle and a long, narrow tip, and the first shape, more like a blade -- cut out like cookie dough, neat edges, with the dirty scratched black backing like a nightmare revealed below. She spun around. Nothing. She stupidly checked her other leg for injury, patted herself down. Nothing. And then, once again, the mirror was restored to its regular state when she turned back to check.

The following morning, she woke up writhing in agony. The gash in her thigh had opened up again, and she felt a throbbing pain in her shoulder. There was a small hole, no blood. She barely dared look at it, it went so deep. She treated her wounds as best she could, and moved stiffly through that day. At times, the pain was so intense that she leaned over with dizziness and nausea. She couldn't concentrate at work; she felt her ratings and strong record slipping. She barely had an appetite for dinner. She was usually a good eater, disdainful of those who followed one faddish diet after the next, and couldn't simply enjoy food.

Rhonda started to avoid mirrors. She walked past hers quickly. Even in the exercise room at the gym, with one whole wall of mirrors, she faced forward or looked down, intent on the steps. Chrissy praised her one day, and she felt pathetic for how pleased this made her. Chrissy had noticed how hard she was working and said, "Rhonda, pretty soon, you won't even recognize yourself." She turned towards the mirror then, and instead of the grimacing goon from earlier, she saw a smiling face, but the smile was not warm or joyful. There was something very wrong with the eyes. They both burned and retreated into dull blackness.

She took to eating differently, in the mission to shape change. For reasons she didn't understand or explore, she cut out white bread, all sweets except dark chocolate, all alcohol except deep red, heavy wines that she could only consume half a glass of at a time, and all meats except beef very well done. She consumed a lot of mushrooms, and developed a taste for shitakes. She enjoyed their earthy, fleshiness, their sponge like softness after soaking as she squeezed the excess water out, and the deep forest flavor they added to whatever the dish was.

But she didn't feel any different. Her clothes didn't fit her differently. She felt the same simmering rage at what exactly, she didn't know. Did she look different? A quick glance at the mirror revealed a face that was a fist: powerful, imploding, the eyes not for feelings, the mouth not for communication. Now there were three weapon cut-outs, including something more like a saw, with a long, jagged tip, taking up almost the whole length of the mirror, something that could tear a body in half.

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## ***“It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing”***

**By N. Stewart**

Every February three of us gather at Elmhurst College for the annual Jazz Concert. We like to listen to jazz and find the various colleges that participate in the concert have a great understanding and love of jazz. Jazz music is a whole different animal: it’s loud, it’s smooth, it swings, it sounds disjointed at times but has recognizable melodies scattered throughout. That music makes my fingers want to snap to the beat, my feet to tap along, and my head to bob when feeling the syncopation of the rhythms as they play against each other. Jazz music is meant to be felt in the body and not just heard with the ears.

Jazz is American classical music. Born in the African-American communities of the south in 1910, it continues to the delight audiences today. Over the years, jazz has refigured itself into cool jazz, bebop, blues, swing, jazz rock fusion, smooth jazz, and other forms. I grew up listening to the piano playing of Ahmad Jamal and the cool jazz of the Dave Brubeck Quartet.

Jazz combines double bass, drums, piano/organ, sax, trombone, trumpet, clarinet and voice like that of the great Ella Fitzgerald for its unique sound. During the swing area of the 40s the clarinet dominated the jazz scene. Rhythm and Blues is very much alive today. Jazz infused with rock’s rhythms is played with electric instruments and uses amplified sound.

Jazz music is all about improvisation. In a performance, there are certain parts of a song that all of the musicians know. One player takes hold of a moment of inspiration and begins to express new or interesting variations to the piece, taking the solo lead. The others in the group interact; weaving the music around what is being created. When changing from one soloist to another, the ensemble returns each time to the same familiar part of the song before the next soloist invention begins. In jazz, nothing is written down. When sheet music exists, it is chord structure and melody only, leaving the artist free to create new sounds each time.

Yes, jazz is loud, and chaotic at times, and thrilling. When we leave the concert after the performances, I sometimes can’t hear the sounds of the world outside because my head is still vibrating from all that jazz.

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## **The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice**

**By J. Smetana**

I was driving to Spiegelhoff’s Pick’n Save when the telephone rang. I don’t like to answer the phone while I’m driving--heck, I don’t like to answer the phone, period. It’s never good news and it’s always a waste of time. Some complete stranger trying to sell me something? Good luck with that one. A friend of mine calling to get an answer to the New York Times crossword puzzle because he thinks I know something about “pop culture”? Please don’t waste my time. Or maybe it’s my lovely wife Marge calling for reasons known only to herself. “You’d better pick up some adverbs at Schimmelpfenig’s-

-and get some umlauts too while you're at it!' She knows as well as I do that they don't even sell adverbs at the Pick'n Save. If you want adverbs, umlauts and all that jazz you've got to go to the Moral Kiosk. Not that I mind going five miles out of my way if it'll make Little Margie happy! I don't even think we need adverbs. I found a big box of them last week when I was looking for the shutoff valve. And I sure don't like to waste money on umlauts because I've found that without exception the ones who really need them always bring their own. But I guess if Bjork or Zoe Wana maker shows up without, why, we'll be ready! We'll be ready for anything! Maybe the peace of mind is worth a few extra bucks. Years ago when we first started doing The Night of 1000 Billys it was more of an informal thing--a homemade backyard-type event we just did for fun. At this point we've become prisoners of our own crazy success. We've got a full-time staff plus a boatload of volunteers. Last year we introduced the Human Pyramid and it looks like we'll repeat it this year. But that's it, I told Marge. Let's go out on top. Leave them hungry for more!

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**All That Jazz**  
**By Susan J. Wilfong**

All That Jazz  
Who chose this silly phrase?  
I'm not a fan of Jazz.  
I cannot sing its praise.

I know that All That Jazz  
Was a movie and a play  
Directed by Bob Fosse  
Way back in the day.

I do remember the Bob Fosse Dancers  
When Carol Burnett was on TV.  
How I wished I had some rhythm,  
But that never came to me.

I cannot dance.  
I'm in horrible shape.  
And when I sing in church,  
I think everyone wants to escape.

But I have been greatly blessed  
By the good Lord from above.  
I have an awesome family and many friends  
All whom I dearly love.

So, Bob can have all the Jazz he wants.  
He can have all those dancers too.  
And I'll keep loving my family and friends  
And continue to do what I do.

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**Can I Be Frank With You?**  
**By Phyllis Babbs**

As Mr. Powers sat in the audience, at Chicago Fest, he had a sense of pride as he listened one of his former students playing. He remembered the day, years ago, as he walked down the school hall toward the music room. He had stopped and listened; someone was playing jazz; it was a saxophone. It sounded too professional to be one of his students. He felt the sound was too bold and brassy. *Must be a record.*

When he opened the door to the music room, he couldn't believe his eyes. It was no record; it was young Frank playing. When the playing stopped, he said "Frankie..."

The young boy stood up quickly. "I thought it would be okay to play. I didn't mean to disturb anyone! Did I need permission to be in here?"

"No, son, you didn't do anything wrong! I heard you playing as I was walking down the hall and I was just surprised to find out that all that jazz was being played by you. You sounded just great!"

Then he came out of his reverie as he heard his name being called. "Come on, Mr. Powers. Stand up!" Frank was calling from the stage. Mr. Powers stood up reluctantly and waved. "Mr. Powers was my music teacher in grammar school. So this song's for you, Mr. Powers."

After the performance, a man stood in front of Mr. Powers. "You must be quite proud. You did a good job."

"No," Mr. Powers said shaking his head. "When you have a kid in your class with that much talent, you just stay out of the way and watch." He paused "I thought his parents were into jazz but that wasn't the case. He just had so much music inside of him. I never could get over the fact that all that jazz could come out of one young boy. I am so happy for him that he is able to live his life as a musician."

The sax player walked over to Mr. Powers. Mr. Powers looked at him and said "Can I be frank with you?"

The sax player said "No but I can be Frank with you!"

"Our little joke," Mr. Powers said to the man. "Frank this is..." Then the men introduced themselves and they all shook hands. Instant friends because of their love of jazz.

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