

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.

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group © 2015 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

May 2015 selection – Ball

The Mirror Ball By Elvira K. Castillo

The Mirror Ball -- Guess everyone who watches “Dancing with the Stars” on Monday nights, Channel 7, television knows what a Mirror Ball is. If not, I'll tell you it is a huge ball made up of small mirrors, which sparkles like a huge diamond, as it spins in the center of the ballroom ceiling sending star-like visions all around the room.

On the “Dancing with the Stars” program, the winning trophy is a replica Mirror Ball on its own stand. The competitors on the show are celebrities from show business, sports, perhaps a war hero, or just a well-known personality. Professional dancers train and choreograph the dances they are to perform each week. All the competitors have admitted that this is one of the most difficult things they've ever done in their life. However, they fiercely compete, often with injuries, for that infamous Mirror Ball trophy.

I am a devout fan of this show, never miss it, and also write my own critique of each dance and keep score of the points they receive. My pen pal and friend, Gloria, also does this, and we include our critiques in the letters we send each other each week.

Oddly enough, Gloria and I both remember a Mirror Ball that we skated to when we were teenagers. Actually, I think we became friends when we both skated at the Hub Roller Rink on Chicago's Northwest side. The Hub Roller Rink had a Mirror Ball in the middle

of the roller rink ceiling, and when they turned the lights down, the spinning Mirror Ball reflected star-like images all about the room, while we waltzed around the floor in our skates. It was really quite beautiful and dreamy, and I shall never forget the beautiful Mirror Ball and the organ music that we skated to.

I know my friend, Gloria, has even warmer memories than I, because she married her skating partner. Guess she won a Mirror Ball trophy of her own, one of the best skaters at the Hub.

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It All Depends
by: Susan J Wilfong

You can tell, just by looking at me,
An athlete, I am not.
But questions about sports,
Of those, I have a lot.

In some sports,
Endurance is a big plus.
In others, brute strength
Is definitely a must.

Since this month's chosen word
Happens to be "Ball"
I'll focus on the sports that use them
But I cannot name them all.

First, I'll look at golf.
A golf ball is relatively small.
It's covered with little dimples
Yet it's one of the hardest balls of all.

A racquetball is a bit bigger.
It bounces off the wall.
It's made of very hard rubber
And is the bounciest ball of all

A tennis ball is bigger.
It's fuzzy like a peach.
It bounces on the ground
But not on the sand at the beach.

Now, comes a regular baseball.
One we all know and love.
But don't try to catch it with your bare hand
It's safer with a baseball glove.

A softball is a little bigger.
But to me, it's still quite hard.
I remember spraining my finger
Trying to catch one in my backyard.

There are soccer balls and volley balls
Basketballs and balls for rugby too.
Bocce balls, Croquet balls, Bowling balls,
Just to name a few.

In my humble opinion,
The strangest ball isn't even round.
You can't predict where it will go
When it hits the ground.

I don't know what shape to call it.
You all know the one of which I speak.
Some people call it the "Pigskin".
I guess that's part of its mystique.

I think I have answered one of my own questions,
Even though I'm not athletic.
A different ball for a different sport,
Somehow, just seems..... poetic.

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Spring Cleaning **By Sara Schupack**

It was only as I was showing Kathy around that I realized my apartment had become a museum of balls. I had thought I was decorating in a playful, kitschy kind of a way, but now, through the eyes of my spontaneous guest, I saw that it was time for a change.

I had my beach ball, hanging from the ceiling like a demented chandelier. It used to make me think of childlike innocence, youthful joy. It captures the expression having your cake and eating it too. Even if you toss the ball in the air or to a partner, it will come back. Even if a feisty breeze, beach bully, or other unforeseen forces snatch the ball away later, those events don't exist, because you're only in now. Or any fun you're experiencing is like having that bright, cheery, playful ball, being in a state of frozen time, not losing or wanting a ball. No regrets or missing a ball you once had. No past or future at all.

Kathy seemed to have that kind of cheery innocence, which is why I agreed to her stopping in for a cup of tea. I don't make friends readily.

I felt sort of silly giving her a tour of the small place, one bedroom, kitchen slash living room, but isn't that what you do when you have a guest? As I pointed out my various knick-knacks and collectibles, she offered little murmurs of encouragement and wore a smile that I couldn't read. I can never tell when people are being sincere. I guess I wanted to keep her there longer than it would take to boil water and sip at a cup of tea, having such little interaction with people, especially women, who seem cautious around me or I am unsure and so put them off. I always used to envy those giggling, whispering groups of girls who seemed to breathe in unison. Well, I envied them and they crept me out. So, I led the stupid tour, pointing out my Chinese balance balls, meant to increase stamina and concentration, except that I never mastered them and mainly just looked at them and let them collect dust.

Any word becomes funny if you say it over and over or think about it too much. Why do men who are brave have balls while we women have what? Guts, I suppose. And I guess that means we can stomach things; we don't get queasy over messes, like dishes encrusted with old food or hair in the drain, or spilled blood and yes guts, even if the spilling is our doing.

I like the expression "having a ball," singular. You're not only at a ball, invited to it, celebrating at it, but you are the queen or king of it; it's yours. You have it, or by association, you're having so much fun at what you're doing that it feels like you're the king or queen of the best party ever. I can't remember ever feeling that way.

Maybe at the beginning with Jin, maybe one moment or two with Michael, and never with Simon. I kept waiting for that to happen and it didn't. I suppose you could have a ball, singular, when you hold one testicle in your hands. You have one, then the other, then the funny, twitching, dangly thing in between, then the man attached to these delicious goodies. You're thoroughly enjoying yourself because it's all yours, at least for

this moment. His pleasure is at your command, his appreciative sighs and moans, and his reciprocal strokes and kisses and licks are yours.

My bowl of marbles, also reminiscent of some playful free childhood that wasn't one I knew, also just sitting there on display collecting dust. Those were the hardest to get rid of, as I started clearing out all of the useless stuff. But I was on a roll, pardon the pun. Kathy oohed at these in a way that seemed enthusiastic. I pictured us much younger playing a game of marbles in a dusty backyard. Maybe Kathy reminded me of the big sister I longed for. Betty lived next door to me when I was ages 5-7. I watched her from my window, sometimes the front porch if I dared, as she chatted happily with what seemed a new friend every day. There was a confidence and eagerness to her voice that indicated the nicest kind of bossiness. Her laugh was loud and gurgling, never a shy or demure giggle. I wanted her strength and her success, or at least for her to pay attention to me and boss me around a little.

My magic 8 ball had mocked me for years. I was ready to dump that. A silly teenage toy that I actually made wishes on, though I never really believed. Kathy reached towards it in a longing way that made me a little disappointed in her. Luck is a dumb thing. How did the 8 ball become "magic," I wonder? Maybe from some famous pool player at a high stakes, highly competitive game. He or she might have been Chinese, because 8 is a lucky number in Chinese. The word is a pun on good fortune. Jin was Chinese. I learned some things. Hong Kong Chinese people can be really gutsy or ballsy gamblers. I picture this lucky pool shark asking the 8 ball, "Will I win?" and when it rolls a certain way he bets his house, his car, and his daughter on the game. He wins of course, getting from his opponent the first offspring of his purebred dog of some rare breed, or a racing horse of refined pedigree, or a one of a kind luxury watch, something fabulous and almost priceless, because he doesn't have a daughter.

Why are there men's names that connote penis but none for balls? We have Peter, Lance, and of course Dick. How about Testi or Sacko?

My mistake with Kathy was to show off what I suppose it is not so appropriate to call my piece de resistance: 3 pairs of pickled balls. Yes, I mean the real thing, human male testicles. Jin's, Michael's, and Simon's. She turned quite pale and I knew I couldn't make her understand. I don't hate men. I quite enjoy them, as long as they behave. Jin and Michael bled to death. Simon lived through it, and is the worst off, I imagine, which is as it should be. I quickly laughed as best I could with a rusty laugh box, and said, just kidding, they're special Chinese medicines for my condition. I knew to lower my voice and look down, so she'd think I was either shamed or in agony over this unspeakable illness that should not be discussed.

I think she rushed her tea; poor thing probably even burned her tongue. She said she would like to help me. I assumed she meant with the cleaning I had mentioned, but I'm much better off tackling a task like this on my own.

I'm not going to switch to collecting purses or Georgia O'Keefe flowers, and not cats either — not porcelain ones or the living things. I'm no cat lady. I might go for a diner kind of a look, bright colors, maybe a juke box and lots of chrome and plastic. I do make a good cup of tea.

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Old Lady Walsh **By N. Stewart**

It certainly was not taking place on the sandy beaches overlooking the Pacific Ocean. And, we were certainly not clad in the skimpiest of bikinis, but all six best friends were playing volleyball. Not in a California TV tournament, but in the side yard of Old Lady Walsh's house in Wisconsin. We played often, hanging the net between two trees in what was a grass and weed-covered undeveloped road in our subdivision. Each time we played, the old lady came out, telling us to get off her land and the pre-teen brats that we were just thumbed our noses at her, continuing to play volleyball, laughing, and now making as much noise as possible. We knew we were in the right for being there because our fathers told us that the undeveloped road belonged to the subdivision. Therefore we claimed it for ourselves.

One game, the score was tied at 15 all when Barb, going way back in an effort to return a pass tripped over a tree root, snaking its way in the grass and down she went. Linda, the when-I-grow-up-I'm-gonna-be-a-nurse ran over and looked at it. The ankle swelling started immediately. Linda ordered Barb to take off her sock and shoe, yelling that Barb won't be able to get her foot out of the shoe and they'd cut it off. She immediately corrected herself that the shoe not the foot would be cut off. We gathered around Barb, helping he get up from the playing area and looked toward the old lady for help. Standing in her window watching, she let the curtain slowly fall back across the window and turned her back to walk away. What a mean old lady for not helping us. What's her problem? We never bothered her. We never did anything to her yard and besides we were just having fun.

Shoeless Barb with one of us supporting her on either side began the slow walk home. Linda the whole time was chatting about what had to be done — “put some ice on it, place the foot above your head (giving us another chuckle as Linda certainly had a way with words), I meant above your heart,” and on and on. The sharp stones were cutting into her bare foot as Barb limped down the path. She would step down, yell it hurts and then kinda hop along on the other foot. Linda trailed along with the shoe in one hand and the volleyball in the other.

We were only a block or so away from home; Barb's mom was waiting for us. She put Barb in a chair and slowly helped Barb put her foot and ankle in the bucket of ice water. A towel and Ace bandages were right next to the chair. Strange that her mother was prepared to help even before we could tell her what happened, but mothers just know

things somehow. After drying off the foot and ankle and bandaging them up, Mrs. Foley told us that she thought it wasn't broken but she would take Barb to the hospital emergency room in town to make sure it was only a sprain. "By the way," she said, "Mrs. Walsh on the next road over called to say Barb had fallen, hurt her foot or ankle, and that you were bringing her home. Wasn't that nice of her?" We sheepishly looked at each other. We owed Old Lady... ah. . . Mrs. Walsh an apology.

The five said goodbye and left, tracing our way back along the path. We needed to say thank you to Mrs. Walsh for helping Barb and to apologize for being such obnoxious brats. We rang the bell, apologized, thanked her, and Mrs. Walsh invited us in for a visit, offering homemade cookies and pink lemonade.

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