

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.

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March 2016 selection – Soup

Chicken Soup for the Soul By Elvira K. Castillo

I'm sure we've all heard this expression. There once was a TV show with this title which aired from 1999 to 2000. It dealt with heartwarming stories of individuals who received emotional nourishment from others in their time of need.

Chicken soup, especially Mom's homemade, in years past was considered a cure-all for many illnesses, and it probably worked, too. The soup was delicious, easy to swallow, made with love and caring, and I'm sure not only was nourishing physically but also mentally -- thus, "Chicken Soup for the Soul."

When I was a little girl my father raised chickens. It was during the Depression Era, and chicken was one of our main food staples, aside from the vegetable garden. Mom had to pluck the chicken and burn the pin feathers on the stove. We had chicken every Sunday for dinner and it was the best. She also made homemade chicken soup with real broth, carrots, celery, onions and rice or pasta if I remember correctly. I've tried to duplicate making her stewed chicken and chicken soup, but it's not quite like Mom's.

I don't remember when I last attempted to make homemade soup. It might have been when my Mom was in her last stages of life. She couldn't eat very well, so I made a huge pot of chicken soup, and divided it into small containers, so she could warm up a small portion at a time.

Today, my son and I have soup for lunch almost every day, especially in the winter season. We enjoy almost every type of soup available, except ones that are too spicy. I always vary the soups I serve each day between vegetable, chicken noodle, cream styles, and tomato as I like variety.

I keep saying I'm going to make homemade soup one of these days. Perhaps this will happen when I need some "Chicken Soup for the Soul."

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**Mi Linda Abuelita (My Lovely Little Grandma)
By Mercedes Martinez**

Little grandma, I would never have said that in English to my Abuela Eulaulia, who I might add was always larger than life to me. She raised a general (my uncle), a principal, a teacher and a doctor (my dad). Abuelita is fitting and sounds better in Spanish, it's a term of endearment, affection.

Hmm, grandma's soup! Her soup was the epitome of comfort food; forget chips, cake or dumplings. My Abuelita's soup was the best, hands down! Yes, have you had a bad day? Do you have the sniffles? Is your stomach upset? You look a little peaked, pale, did the teacher or your boss yell at you? Did the dog bite you or the cat scratch you? Dun da da Dun, here's grandma to the rescue. Come let grandma fix you up.

Thank God for grandmothers. Oh and if you don't have one of your own or if your's happens to be a remake of the Tasmanian Devil (the Tasmanian Devil is a carnivorous marsupial of the family Dasyuridae. It is only found on the Australian island of Tasmania). The Tasmanian Devil is on the endangered list but if you met a grandma like this you're the only one in danger. Don't worry there are tons of older, nurturing, loving ladies waiting to fill that void. "Come sit with me honey, chat with me, tell me about your day. Let me share a little of the wisdom God gave me." Life is difficult at time, even insurmountable but with a grandma the size of Texas at your side anything and everything is possible. The sky's the limit! Everything looks rosy and once again, even doable. My favorite soups were Caldo de Fideo (noodle soup) and chicken noodle soup. Although, Abuelas' chicken noodle soup did not come out of any can, thank you very much! It was made with 'beaucoup' lots of love (amore). Truly a gift from heaven above.

A shout out to all you grandmas out there! Abuelita, babcia (pronounced bahp-CHOch with the ci sounding like the 'ch' in chicken). Perhaps you had a Cuban grandma, 'nanna', or a German one, 'Oma', maybe even a French one 'Meme' or an Irish 'nanny'.

They're all full of lots of love and good homemade soup ('sopa'). Why the next president should make a special 'hug a grandma' day. Next time it would be grandpa's day, but then that's another story.

Ahhh grandmas. There are plenty of them to go around. Why, just visit your local nursing home. They're there waiting for you to visit, to listen to your every word. You will have their undivided attention because many of them, unfortunately, have long been forgotten by their own families. Let them tell you about their lives or the one that got away, or the one they caught. Maybe they can give you a few pointers and in turn your visit would make their day complete. Tell her that her silver hair never shined so brightly or that her wisdom is beyond her years. She'll love you for that eternally.

Come on, hug a grandma today, you'll be glad you did. Hug your Abuelita.

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Auntie Millie" Pets
By Phyllis Babbs

My Aunt Millie had been inviting me to visit her cattle ranch in Wyoming for several years. She said she knew I would enjoy the wide open space, the lush green grass. She said I would enjoy the birds and wild life. And she wanted me to see her pets. However, she never told me what kind of pets she had. Then one summer, after battling the traffic and heat, I headed out to Wyoming, to the wide open space and to see Aunt Millie and her pets.

The first thing I appreciated was the quiet. Aunt Millie's ranch was miles away from populated areas. There were no hot rods with stereos blaring, no lawn mowers and no jet planes to saturate the area with their sounds. You could clearly hear the birds and the insects and sometimes I thought I heard the grass growing. But I wasn't seeing interaction with any of the animals to indicate they were Aunt Millie's pets. "Your pets?" I asked after a few days.

"Oh, don't worry. You'll meet them when the time is right."

The next day, Aunt Millie was going into town to buy groceries for a special meal she was cooking that evening. I opted to stay home. "You'll be just fine," she said. "My pets will take care of you. Don't usually have strangers come around but if some do, the 'kids' will keep you safe."

After she left, I began to wish she hadn't had the "pep talk" with me. Because I began to realize just how isolated the ranch really was. I tried to keep myself distracted by doing chores around the house and then I went on to do some baking. While a cake was in the oven, I opened a can of soup, popped it in the micro wave, was just ready to sit down and eat when I heard a car pull up in the driveway.

Suddenly, I began to hear my heart pounding in my ears. I went to the front door and two men got out of their car. They slammed the doors shut and then I heard some movement coming from under the front porch. A parade of skunks walked out and formed a line across the sidewalk. When they were all in place, they all raised their tails in a salute.

“You lost?” I asked.

“You want to call your skunks off?” one of the men asked.

“No, not really. See no reason to do that.”

“We musta took the wrong turn. So we’ll be leaving.”

“Goodbye.” I waved as they flew down the driveway.

When Aunt Millie came back home, I was still standing at the front door. The back door slammed shut and Aunt Millie called out “You into eating cold soup?”

Before I knew it, I was telling Aunt Millie about the men and the skunks. “How in the world did you ever train them?” I asked.

Aunt Millie began laughing. “It’s just the durndest thing. A few years back, folks in this area decided they didn’t like skunks and started to put out poison. Your Uncle Bert was still alive then and we figured the skunks weren’t hurting anybody. So we found out what they liked to eat and started to put things around the property for them. Well, before we knew it, a family just moved in. Never bothered us. But when Bert died, those skunks started to protect me.” She stopped for a minute. “They figured out that friends would go to the back door. And anybody coming to the front door was a stranger. Slamming a door or jumping off the back of a truck—well it seemed the vibration would set the skunks off. And they formed an “honor guard” across the sidewalk. Durndest thing I ever saw.”

Aunt Millie put my soup back in the microwave. “Understand now about my pets?”

Yes, I understood about her “pets.” There wasn’t a pit bull in America that could protect my Aunt Millie any better than those skunks. She was safe and could talk about her “pets” till the cows came home.

My Conundrum... Duh
by: Susan J Wilfong

I brought a can of soup to work.
It was going to be my lunch.
I'm really not a fan of soup.
I prefer food with a little crunch.

My mom loved soup.
My dad did too.
But it never did a thing for me.
I like food that I can chew.

Well, back to my conundrum.
It happened just this way.
I actually had a taste for soup,
So I took a can to work that day.

I went to the store on my way to work
To pick my soup for that day.
But what flavor should I get?
There was such a big array.

I settled on a can of chicken and stars.
To me, that sounded good.
It reminded me of a good time
Way back, in my childhood.

I had to stop my day dreaming.
It was getting late.
I had to get myself to work
For it was nearly eight.

As I sat at my desk
I could just taste that soup.
But I had to get my work done.
My thoughts, I had to regroup.

Finally, it was time for lunch.
I opened my little brown bag.
There sat my chicken and stars.
But my lunchtime hit a snag.

How could I have been so stupid?
How could I have been so dumb?
I forgot to bring a can opener!
Suddenly, I just felt numb.

I ran into the kitchen.
I searched through every drawer.
I couldn't find a can opener.
But I had to search some more.

Every kitchen has a can opener,
Except for the one I was in.
Maybe if just poke a hole in the top,
My lunch could soon begin.

What could I poke a hole with?
The thing would have to be tough.
Tough enough to poke a hole in a can,
But would that really be enough?

After trying a bunch of things
That I thought might make a hole,
My lunchtime was half over
And opening that can was my goal.

I sat down at a table.
I stared angrily at that can.
Then, into the kitchen walked my hero.
A kind and gentle young man.

He asked why I looked so angry.
So I told him the story of this can
And those chicken and stars inside
And my totally ruined lunch plan.

He looked at me with pity.
Then he looked at the can.
Then he looked back at me and said,
"I think I have a plan!"

My mouth began to smile.
My taste buds started to dance.
Would I finally taste my chicken and stars?
I had to take the chance.

He grabbed that can of soup
In a strong and masculine way,
He glanced over at me
But not a word did he say.

He looked to the sky.
I think he said a prayer.
He flipped the can over,
And then he said, "There."

I looked at him.
Then I looked at the can.
He must have thought I was crazy.
Because out of the kitchen he ran.

Yes, he turned the can over
And there was the pull-top ring.
The label on the can up-side-down
And I never noticed a thing.

I'm afraid I'm getting older.
I'm not as sharp as I used to be.
This mixed up can of chicken and stars
Has proven that to me.

I enjoyed my can of chicken and stars.
That can of soup may have been my last
I prefer food that I can chew
And soup disappears too fast.

Make sure your soup's labels
Are attached the right way.
And, thanks to my hero,
I had chicken and stars that day.

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Are You the Next Mickey Fisher?
By J. Smetana

When the candidates come to town they always stop in at one of 3 places: Lou Mitchell's, Manny's or the Billy Goat. It used to be 4, the fourth could only be the Busy Bee. I never had a bad meal at the Bee. For years I'd be in there every night, ensconced on my regular counter stool, all the way in the back. Ruth, a serving assistant used to tell me I looked like Tim Robbins, or as she put it, the guy in the movie about the shoes. The Tall Blond Man with One Brown Shoe? I asked her. No, she'd say. The Tree of Wooden Clogs? I'd

ask her. No, she replied. The Red Shoes by Michael Powell? I queried. N000000 she gasped. It took days of steady detective work to ascertain that she meant The Shawshank Redemption, referring of course to the scene where our hero escapes prison wearing PRISON SHOES after digging a hole behind his Raquel Welch poster. But of course!

Like a lot of these old timey places the Bee always served a bowl of soup with your dinner and the flavor changed each night. Sometimes barley, sometimes beet, or maybe cabbage soup. The Bee's cabbage soup was better than Bev and Bob's. I know that's high praise--and you might look askance--but I stand by it. The Bee always served fresh rye bread, I don't know where they got it but it was first rate. When you folded it in half it was like a soft pillow in your hands. I could always eat a couple of slices just as a kind of amuse-bouche. One time they were running out of bread and Sophie's grandson had to make a bread run. I'm guessing he ran to a bakery, not a store. I ate at that counter long enough to see that boy grow up to become a Chicago police officer. Ruthie didn't know when to stop with her bread. She kept handing it to me throughout the meal. "Put this in your pocket" she'd tell me. Which I dutifully did.

One Sunday morning I'd left my winter scarf at the Bee. I'd probably hung it on a hook behind my chair or maybe it just fell off of my neck onto the floor. The next day, of course, it's waiting for me on the coat rack.

Days later I'd stick my hand in my pocket and pull out that now stale rye bread wrapped in a napkin.

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In the Soup By N. Stewart

Having never been to Canada, when my friend, Mary, asked me to go with her and her mother on a road trip, I jumped at the chance. First, since I was only 15 years old my parents needed to agree to the adventure. They were fine with it and got out my birth certificate for the border crossing. We were off to Windsor Ontario via Detroit. Since we were both too young to drive her mother did all the driving.

The border crossing was easy in those days. We were asked for proof of U.S. Citizenship hence the birth certificate, and asked how long we were staying. It was a quick trip, crossing Friday and returning on Sunday. We were waived on through.

Shortly after leaving Windsor via Highway 401, heading toward our ultimate destination of London, Ontario, we encountered fog as thick as pea soup. It was so thick we had to roll down the windows and stick our heads out to see where the white line was along the side of the road. We followed the taillights of a semi-trailer for many miles until the driver found an exit and unfortunately for us pulled off. We continued on, seeing nothing ahead but the hood of the car for hours and hours and driving at a very slow rate of speed. Since we were not familiar with the road, it was impossible to pull off to the side or to

find an exit, waiting for the fog to lift. We finally arrived in London in the very early hours of the morning. The trip took about 12 hours to negotiate the fog-engulfed distance instead of the expected three hours.

We slept for few hours at a friend's house before going shopping at a Scottish emporium which was the purpose of the trip. While there I bought a few items in Royal Stewart tartan plaid and some Scottish shortbread cookies.

On Sunday morning, we packed up the back seat of the car with our overnight things and packages, and headed to Windsor, driving in glorious sunshine. We made the U.S. border in three hours where the border guard immediately pulled us out of the car lane and asked us to park the car on the side of the road. The guard escorted us to the office and we watched the car being searched. It seems loading the back seat rather than putting suitcases in the trunk is a dead give away that something is amok. My friend's mother had been given young potted flowering plants to bring back and they were nestled securely in the trunk. We unknowingly were attempting to bring contraband into the U. S. from Canada. The guard pulled the plants out of the container, shook the dirt from the roots, walked over and handed Mary's mother the naked plants. We were then allowed to get into our car, cross into the United States where we thankfully headed for our homes after our Canadian adventure.