

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
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April 2018 selection – Alias

Aliases

By Phyllis Babbs

When I looked up the word “alias” in my dictionary, it said false name. When I looked up the word “false” in my dictionary, it said “not true or incorrect.”

Based on those definitions, my name is an alias. Although, my birth certificate names me as “Phyllis,” my baptismal certificate has me listed as “Felicia.” Because I was the caboose kid on both sides of the family and each family already had a Phyllis, it just seemed logical to me to me that my parents should gone with Felicia. But they didn't. As things turned out, I became “Baby.” It started out with “watch the baby, feed the baby,” etc. And somewhere along the line “the” was dropped. I hated that name. Fortunately, I wasn't teased. But when it came close to time for me to go to school, I staged a strike. Unless you called me by my name, I refused to respond.

After my mother died, I went to live with my older uncle and next door was my younger uncle. Because of my mother's illness, I had missed a lot of classroom time. My uncles spent a lot of time with me. So began my stage of whys and hows. That was when I received a couple of different names---WINDY and GABBY.

My favorite cousin was the youngest son of the uncle I lived with. When he came back from Europe, he gave me a “pet” name. FATTER THAN ME. It was during my pre-pubescent time. But he did motivate me to watch the consumption of bread. It only took me a couple of months to get to the correct weight. He received quite a tongue lashing

from his girlfriend's mother when he introduced me as "his little cousin FATTER THAN ME."

From my experiences with my family, it was clear to me that if I wanted an alias, I would have to come up with own idea. When our first grandchild was about to be born, I began trying on, names. This grandchild would come into the world with a set of Grandparents, 2 sets great grandparents and one set of great, great grandparents on his father side of the family. So I really had to get my act together.

After due consideration, I decided on Nana. And after all these years, when the phone rings from out of state and a small voice says "Nana, can you listen to me read?" When the college student comes home in the middle of the night and pokes his head in my room, "Nana, I'm home." Gives me a kiss and tells me to go back to sleep, Nana is in heaven. Better than winning the lotto.

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**A New Name for Johnny
By N. Stewart**

"Agent Brock, come in. I didn't expect to see you so soon or so early," said John.

"John something came up with the trial and we need to secure you and your family. You have 15 minutes to pack some clothes for a 2-3 day stay, oh and your passports and then we have to leave. Please call your wife and children downstairs. Leave all cell phones and electronic gear here. No one can use the phone or call anyone for the next few days. Two agents have been assigned to stay at your house until it is safe to return."

"Wait a minute. I need some further explanation. Why are we being taken out of our house and where are we going? This sounds serious. Is my family being threatened?"

"No, we just want you and your family to be safe. You will be going to a safe house for a few days and we will be transporting you back and forth to the trial. Please call everyone down. We need to hurry."

"Somehow I don't believe that there isn't any trouble. Honey...you need to come down here now."

"John. What's wrong?"

"Nothing I'm being told this is cautionary because of the trial. You need to pack a few things for 2-3 days and we can't take any phones or other electrical gear.

"The kids aren't going to like that."

“Honey, please go. We need to hurry.”

“Mom, what’s going on? Are we going on a trip? Why are you taking my phone?”

“I’ll explain later. Everyone downstairs.”

“Who’s she? Said Johnny.

“That’s Agent Brock. She’s going to take us to a new place to live for a few days.”

“Awesome! A real FBI agent! Can I see your gun? Are we going undercover? Am I getting a new name, an alias? Let’s see what name will I be...Bugsy...Al...Truck. “

“Truck? Ok, that’s enough questions. Let’s go.”

“May I have the phone you are hiding under your jacket Johnny? Asked Agent Brock “

“You’re good. How did you know? Dad can’t I keep it? Please. Please.”

“No. Give it to her. That’s her job to be thorough. Get in the car.”

“Dad, this place is a dump. No TV, no radio, no phones! What are we to do?”

“Let’s make the best of it. It will only be for a few days. Go play cards with your sister, read your book, or go make up another name for yourself, Truck.”

“John, he’s right. This place is a dump. Why did you have to be the guy that testifies at the trial anyway? Couldn’t you have just looked the other way? No, that’s not you. Is it? Now the whole family is disrupted and involved with I don’t know what.”

“I’m sorry, Honey. I didn’t think there would be any trouble. Agent Brock has assured me that this is only cautionary and it will all be over soon.”

“And, then what? Do we get relocated and never see any friends or family again?”

“Let’s not jump ahead. I am going to testify at the trial tomorrow, this will be over and we can go back to our normal, boring lives. Ok?”

“We’ll see about that. This type of thing never ends well.”

###

Alias
By Vicki Elberfeld

It was a social club as well as an outlet for our creative talents, the Dapier Group. We met at bars, eateries, and dancing establishments as well as participating in open mics, even for standup comedy. Of course we dressed in costume before going out on Halloween or to the Bristol Renaissance Faire. We were nothing if not festive.

Being writers we overall tended toward introversion, although we felt entirely comfortable with one another. Performing standup comedy stretched some of us beyond our comfort zones. At such times we relied on a particular strategy, the development of an alter ego. My girlfriend was, for the most part, a quiet, respectable Catholic girl. But when she performed standup, she summoned her alter ego, Biker Babe.

Channeling Biker Babe, she wore black leather from top to toe, including a stylish leather cap. Her forearms were covered in fake serpent tattoos. She never swore, but Biker Babe had a mouth like a sailor which she put to good use in her comedy. And Biker Babe was her annual Halloween costume as well. At the Renaissance Faire, she substituted her black leather pants and jacket for a low cut gown and corset, but Biker Babe retained the same personality.

I had to rack my poor brain to create an alias. As I consider myself neither wild nor tame, my issues were not her's. My head is not too securely grounded and often goes on outings as far away as possible from the rest of my being. My relationship with portable objects is entirely dysfunctional. I never wear jewelry as I consider myself fortunate to find keys, shoes, and purse before venturing out of the house. And I lose sleep beginning in early March every year, not that I do my own taxes, but I always dread the search for receipts before facing my accountant.

Therefore I created the alias, Rita Kent. She is crisp, efficient if somewhat abrupt, and knows her way around a file cabinet. And when my life is in shambles thanks to disorganization, Rita Kent can come to the rescue.

She set up a filing system for me and regularly cleans my house before parties. She'd rather die than find herself on a comedy stage, however, but that's not why I need her. After all I myself am an exhibitionist, a shy one yes, but a shy exhibitionist all the same, and enjoy the rapturous sound of applause, a reward I never receive for cleaning my own house or filling out forms.

Though Rita will balk at the ordeal, I've sometimes succeeded in begging, cajoling, or persuading her to organize my purse or refrigerator. I've yet to convince her to undertake the organization of my car or basement. Perhaps such daunting tasks should be left for another lifetime.

Now that I've ceased going to the Dapier Writers Group, I catch myself thinking of Rita with somewhat less frequency and often forget to summon her when I am at a total loss. This is most unfortunate as my need for her is no less intense as the years go by.

In a couple of years, I will round out my seventh decade on this planet. From my perspective this life is far too short to squeeze in all that I want to do and see. But given that I'm only possessed of two hands, two eyes, one brain, and one short life, why would I choose to live it out in disorganized fashion as only one oh-so-limited individual?

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Alt Candy **By Sara Schupack**

Candace stood paralyzed with disgust and shock, as the woman dragged her son and the bedraggled little dog back out the store. As usual, after the fact, Candace thought up all sorts of snappy or sharp responses that she wished she had delivered to the absurd request of a return and refund for the dog. Wallace should be his name, Candace decided, as his eyes met hers over the woman's shoulder. She had weakly made a few suggestions of rescue organizations. The boy looked as disheveled as the dog. But Candace felt for the woman too, whose red-rimmed eyes and nicotine stained teeth spoke of desperation and defeat. She had a musty, dirty clothing smell, not of being homeless, but of running out of the time, energy, and/or quarters to keep up with laundry.

Candace's alter ego, also named Candace, or Candy, would not have waffled or wavered. Candy can get away with the cuter version of the name, because she is a badass. There is nothing cute or sweet or hesitant about her. Candy knows kung fu. Candy is wiry and limber and has tattoos of animals up and down both arms, a string of lady bugs around one ankle, and a leopard on her lower back, tail curled up around coiled body, ready to pounce. Candy refuses the term 'tramp stamp'. She calls this her leopard spot. Unlike Candace, Candy is not too understanding. She draws a sharp, clean line between good and bad and never doubts herself. The worst of the bad, for whom she expends not a second of sympathy, are animal abusers. She serves up justice as a pet P.I.

Candace likes her job and her life. She made the mistake once of sharing her alter ego fantasies with a friend, and the look of worry and pity on Maggie's face was enough to dissuade her from ever again sharing this aspect of her inner life. The low-stakes, sometimes boring aspect of her job in the chain pet store is what allows her time and energy to daydream about Alt Candy. She has good benefits, gets to interact with some wonderful animals and some pretty nice colleagues. She does enough rote work or busy work not to feel the strain of over-commitment. There's just enough of an annoying bureaucracy to prevent Candace from developing too much passion or workaholism. Work is work. It isn't everything. When she leaves at 5:00, she has no lingering thoughts of the place, unless she is hanging out with Sam and gossiping about colleagues over his homemade Mojitos and her homemade nachos. Most days she changes into ugly sweat

pants and a cozy tee shirt or sweat shirt, walks her two dogs, makes a simple supper, cuddles with her dogs and cat and binge watches or reads mysteries and crime stories. Once in a while she'll go out to a movie or supper with friends. She has had boyfriends and doesn't want one at this moment. People at work call Sam her "gay boyfriend" and she and he both just shrug. She is content.

Candy is never satisfied, because there is always another scumbag out there tiring of the puppy as it grows out of its fuzzy phase, running a horse down to skin and bones, making money off of brutal fights between dogs, chickens, even alligators. Or simply leaving a pet behind when moving, because it's an inconvenience. Candy has a team to operate the phone tips and help with surveillance. She has liaisons in the police force and the press. Once she gathers enough of a case, she and her team, all women, decide who best to leak the information to. For their own entertainment, they capture on film the downfall of the abuser. Candy has a dear friend, Jill, who runs an animal rescue and healing camp, where many of the liberated animals go. Ex-cons and people suffering from a range of mental illnesses stay at the camp and heal with the animals. Some of these people stay on as staff, so moved are they by the experience and so skilled at communicating with the animals. Skills that they had never before known they possessed. The longest term rehabilitated employee is Jack. There are many Jack and Jill jokes, because Jill is not so secretly in love with Jack, but he is oblivious. He does not yet feel lovable by humans. His animal friends are it for him for now. Jill is patient.

Sam has asked Candace a few times if she doesn't want more. She is so knowledgeable and talented with the animals. Why not get a degree in animal behavior? Or find an independent pet store where she can have more responsibility and autonomy, and stop putting up with all of the rules and monotony of the big corporation. Or the two of them can start their own business of pet care, pet sitting. She toys with these ideas, but is not sure she wants more work, more responsibility. She reminds him, with exaggerated hurt, of their mantra, "So few people understand contentment, that they don't even recognize their own." Besides, she has been through too many changes in the past and is happy to settle down and be able to look ahead to the next week or month without many unknowns. She was once that woman with smelly clothes. She has had her fun too, which at the time, she expected would do the double duty of entertaining her in her quieter years, but she has no need of that. She has come to appreciate the smaller surprises, like the new birds' nest outside her second-floor apartment, or the kittens that were born at work last week. She plays with them every day, and keeps hoping that the smallest grey one who she has named Diana will not be sold anytime soon.

Candy dropped out of college after one year. She had no patience for all of that convoluted theory to describe phenomena she already knew to be true, or to make excuses for behaviors that only deserve punishment, not analysis. She doesn't need to study biology to understand animals. They communicate with her directly through their eyes, breathing, skin or fur. She knew immediately that Mrs. Green next door was mistreating Henry, her parakeet, by his dull, thin feathers and the way he tilted his head and followed her with his frightened gaze. No one ever found out that it was she who snuck into the house and let Henry free. She knew he might not survive a long time out in

the suburban wild. But he might. And one day away from that cruelty was a better life. He lingered a while, chirping right outside her window as a thank you, and then he was gone. That was her first stint as pet P.I.

One day, Jean showed up at work and Candace got distracted from her Candy story. Jean had one of those arresting faces, beautiful-ugly, that you kept being drawn to. Candace wasn't alone; all of her colleagues vied for Jean's attention and shifts with her. She was skinny in a recovery way – been through the worst and is now stronger than ever. She had a gruff voice and small, sharp green eyes. She rarely made eye contact, so when she did; it felt like a gift and a danger. She was brusque and no-nonsense. She put finicky or annoying customers in their place.

Once or twice, she caught Candace watching her and sort of chuckled knowingly, which irritated Candace.

Then, a man came in looking for doggie clothing for his poodle. Its fur looked yellowish, not white, and had bald spots. The pink skin below looked inflamed and irritated. His big eyes looked from Jean to Candace, pleading. Jean said to the man, “No clothes today. That dog is having trouble. Have you not noticed? He needs to see a doctor. He needs hypo-allergenic shampoo, and I'm guessing his skin can't take the tacky nylon outfits you insist on forcing him into. Please go away. If I see you again, I sure hope to see that dog in better shape.”

The man's shoulders sagged as his mouth gaped. He turned away, holding his dog close to his chest and talking in its ear. Candace's stomach clenched. She found herself not cheering for Jean, but following the man instead.

“Sir,” she called.

He stopped and turned reluctantly.

“I'm sorry if my colleague offended you. We care very much about the animals here. But I can see that you love your dog.”

“He's my buddy.”

She talked with him for a good fifteen minutes about skin conditions. She almost sold him a special shampoo and brush, but managed to convince him to get the vet's opinion first.

Did Candy disappear from her life after this? No. But Jean did. She didn't last long at the store, having alienated too many people, including the manager.

Candy continued to rescue pets in distress. She had a love affair here and there and took a vacation now and again, to exotic animal preserves or safaris, to the Galapagos once. Candace and Sam got an apartment together, making a blended family with his bulldog,

her terrier, hound, and calico cat. There are all kinds of families. Now neither one has to worry about driving home after too many Mojitos.