

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

© 2020 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

October 2020 – Crossroads

Crossroads

By Edward J. Scheffler

The dullness of things,
which needn't they be.
If only I look, and
sometimes I see.

Slight alterations,
a second glance to
be said:

Threshold,
adventures,
crossings ahead.

The turns to the left.
The turns to the right.

My choices are to go
that of pace, or of flight.

###

Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire (part 2)

By Carol Karvon

Lionel “the liar” was at a crossroad in his life. He needed to make an important decision that could affect the rest of his life.

After working as an assistant to the alderman’s office manager for only a few months, he found himself increasingly frustrated and feeling used. His willingness to do any task, no matter how menial, made him so sought after that he was constantly busy; so busy he had almost no free time to pursue any other interests. And frankly, he was bored most of the time. The routine was tedious. The job didn’t challenge him at all. At times he felt like a glorified “go-fer”, and he didn’t like that feeling. Sometimes it made him feel unimportant and even invisible. His ego would not allow that. He couldn’t continue this way.

Lionel became aware of an election coming up in less than six months for a place on the local school board. He approached a teacher friend already on the board to get more information about the vacant position. Secretly, he thought the position was beneath him and his talents, but he had to start somewhere. If he did well and impressed the right people, it could mean moving up the political ladder. The right people could become influential sponsors who offered mentoring advice and financial support.

After talking with his friend on the school board, Lionel decided this was a good first step in his goal of achieving a higher political office in a few years or sooner. A place on the school board would give him time in his long-distance plan to make his name known to the voting public.

Being familiar with the inner workings of an alderman’s office and believing he was capable of doing a good job of managing one himself, he decided to challenge the current alderman for that position in the future when he came up for reelection. Actually, he believed in his own mind that he could do a better job than the alderman. But for right now, he would serve just enough time on the school board to make his mark and endear himself with voters. He would bide his time.

He had no remorse about getting into a race against the current alderman. His practical experience was a plus and he would stress that point in his campaign. Should the incumbent seek to retain his office, Lionel decided to challenge him anyway. Lionel’s life-long habit of embellishing his accomplishments and bolstering his own ego convinced him he would be the better man for the job when the time was right. All he had to do to ensure his victory was convince enough voters he was the better person for the job.

So being at this crossroad in his life and having made a decision about his future, he began planning his strategy. He was young, presentable and handsome, or so he’d been told, all assets in his eyes and he hoped with the voting public. Time was on his side. He promised himself he could and would accomplish anything he set his mind to.

Considering all these things, starting the climb up the political ladder to bigger and better things became his priority. The first step would be winning that seat on the school board. He was psyched and ready to put his plans into action. Let the games begin!

###

“Flames of Castlevania”

By Mark Moe

Fifty years after the death of his father Alucard, Gabriel still resembled both his father and his grandfather, Dracula. The jet black, long hair and sharp angular facial features marked him as part of the House of Dracula. He often worried that his almost historic image would get him into more trouble than it does. Like his father, he was also of vampiric descent and he had concerns that the next generation of Belmonts would be hunting him as well. The Belmont family had ended the reigns of Dracula and Alucard first from Simon Belmont and then later on with a younger cousin named, Trevor.

Castle Dracula used to be able to fly and magically teleport to different locations but now, it permanently rests over the Belmont Armory. “Well at least I do not have to worry about anyone coming to the Belmont Armory unannounced,” said Gabriel to his giant man-bat servant. The bat servant nodded his head in agreement and went to fetch his master a new glass of red wine. Gabriel watched as the giant bat dressed in a tuxedo shuffled out of the throne room and headed toward the kitchen.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Transylvania, Mary Catherine Belmont the daughter of Trevor was going through her daily training regimen. The Belmont family has always fought against the forces of darkness for centuries. They always had to be in peak condition when dealing with supernatural creatures who were often at least twice as strong as normal men. This of course did not even count for women. Despite her disadvantage of being the fairer sex she quickly became one of the greatest supernatural hunters of the House of Belmont. She tended to kill more “fuzzy butts” or as everyone else called them, werewolves than many of the other hunters.

Her father and her second cousin had killed the most difficult creatures of the supernatural realm, namely vampires. “Someday, I will also kill a vampire and make my name a legend in our family,” she thought. For now, it was time to stop training and clean up for lunch. A couple of weeks later, Mary Catherine would receive her chance to hunt a vampire. It turned out that Dracula’s grandson had moved into Castle Dracula after it had been left behind once Alucard had been killed by her father. Trevor had long since retired and now did more practical learning and weapons training with younger members of the Belmont family.

Trevor walked to tell Mary Catherine in person of the opportunity and give her the Book of Tactics which would be here guide to dealing with the Dracula clan. It was written by Simon

Belmont and it detailed the struggles between their families and the type of powers that Dracula and Alucard had used.

After Mary Catherine had planned and executed her assault with her team, she awoke in a strange, comfortable bed wearing a luxurious, light blue silk nightgown. Her long, chestnut, naturally curly hair was meticulously brushed and the rest of her smelled clean. Her hunter clothes and weapons were nowhere in sight. She realized that she must still be in Castle Dracula and that his grandson, Gabriel must have survived the attack. Her team had taken out a small group of giant man-sized bat servants ranging from cooks, maids and butlers. She did not remember much else after that.

She removed her legs from the warm, comfy bed and placed her petite bare feet onto the wooden floor. She headed for the bedroom door on the other side of the room. As she was about to open the door, it suddenly opened a middle-aged servant woman entered the room. “I see you are awake, young lady. The master was beginning to wonder if your injuries were too severe. Come with me, Master Gabriel wishes to see you,” she said. Mary Catherine knew that there was little point in arguing even about her modest attire and followed her to meet her enemy, Gabriel. As she was walking, she realized that she was at a “*crossroads*” because she could escape her and find her weapons to finish off Gabriel, or she could listen to whatever proposal Gabriel offered her. One thing was for certain, she definitely would find some clothes that covered her more than this short nightgown.

###

Crossroads **By Pauline Bastek**

2020 started off as a good year. After finally evicting a deadbeat tenant, I had rented the second floor unit of the two flat. I became the owner of when I bought it from my third son so that he could relocate to a new construction colonial in Naperville. This was over the objections of my oldest son who felt I had come to a point in my life, a crossroads if you would have it, where I didn't need the aggravations of a landlord. However, my youngest son said that he and his fiancé would happily rent the unit his brother lived in and the second unit had a reliable tenant so I applied for a 15-year mortgage which was surprisingly approved. I say surprisingly since I was over 65 and self-employed as a real estate broker.

The two flat in question was owned by my late husband's family since the 40s and the memories attached to it played no small part in my decision to buy it and keep it in the family. Why I reached that decision I question to this day. When we come to a crossroads, we should pack our emotions in a trunk, and follow the money. In this case, I would have had a much easier time had I left my money in funds that were earning 14% and not cashed them in for a down payment. In retrospect, there were more unhappy memories connected with that two flat as I had divorced my husband but I followed my emotions.

So, moving along to the start of 2020, I had my reservations made for my biennial trip to Maui with my middle son and his partner. I had long term tenants on the first floor of the two flat to caretake the property, the new tenant on the second floor was a single man locally employed who was able to give a 2-month security deposit. The mortgage had been paid off that November. This was likely to be my final decade of independence and I was set to enjoy it. I had come to my final crossroads and I was taking the road to benefit myself. As I settled into my seat on the Saturday morning non-stop United flight to Mau, I was pleased to see that I had all three seats to myself. Miracle of miracles, this never happened before in all my years of flying to Maui on frequent flyer miles. I was rarely able to book a non-stop flight much less a weekend non-stop from O'Hare to Maui.

A few hours into our flight I noticed in my walk to stretch my legs that the flight was half empty. Later, the pilot came walking down the aisle chatting to us, here and there, and noticed me reading a book that had the Amazon ad on its cover and mentioned that he had written a book that was available only on Amazon. In all my years of traveling I had never had a pilot come by to chat with passengers, not even when I lucked into first class. I commented on how pleasant it was to be on a half empty flight and he said that it was only one-third booked. I noted that it probably wasn't great for United's bottom line but great for my comfort. He said he was retiring this year, so it wasn't his problem. We both laughed and the passenger across the aisle joined in saying he hoped it wasn't due to the new flu bug that the president had been questioned about that week. I remember saying that every year brought a different strain of virus and the pilot gave me his card should I want to order his book and moved along. In the weeks at the condo in Maui thru mid-February when I left our enjoyment of island sun was only occasionally marred by a mention of the virus called Covid.

The flight going home was filled and there was a stop in San Frisco, however the flight to O'Hare was about one-fourth empty. A month after coming home, life had again brought me to a pothole in the road I had taken. March 24 was a sunny day, a perfect day to ride out to Misericordia for lunch with Ginny and Rosaleen, my school friends, and to shop in their gift shop. It was the last time I would dine indoors and ride in an enclosed car with friends.

April was Easter but there would be no champagne brunch hosted by my daughter-in-law for the family at Drury Lane. She had to cut her 10 week stay in Maui by two weeks and come home not at Easter but at the end of March on a packed flight as the island was closing beaches, pools, restaurants. Her flight scheduled had been changed three times.

My birthday in April was celebrated by me with only two of my sons and granddaughter at home. Everyone else who had traveled was in isolation. A new word has been added to my daily vocabulary, Zoo.

When I came to the crossroads of my life as I wanted to live it is this decade, chose he road I would take not realizing that life would determine what would happen on the road as I traveled it. I paraphrase the Chinese curse, 'May you travel on an interesting road.'" I came to the crossroads in 2020 and the road I chose is proving to be an interesting one, is it not?

###

Four Same-Sex weddings and a Funeral
By J. Smetana

Hey man Jerry tole me you sold your soul to the devil so you could play guitar Peaches boldly asserted. Godalmighty Peaches I exclaimed I was tradin' barbed witticisms with Joyce Saxon at Crump Bunny when I heard Mozart's Symphony no. 40; I thought the London Philharmonic was here but I realized it was my ringtone. Thanks for interrupting Peaches and yeah that's true it was a long time ago at the CROSSROAD. So, them how come you're not very good? Be kind, Peaches! Can you play mixolydian mode in C as well as G? I thought not! Listen, the devil's a tricky guy – he didn't say I'd still have to practice!

###

Crossroads Along the Way
By N. Stewart

Whether life's path is long or short, we all encounter crossroads along the way. Some crossroads when approached are easy to decide which way to go, but some are more difficult, requiring thought and preparation. And, some we have no choice but to move forward or to lose everything.

Judy sat on a park bench, reviewing what had happened over the last few months. Plans were in the works for a trip to Galena in the new camper, enjoying the fall colors. Galena, located in a picturesque valley in Illinois is a quaint town that seems to have survived floods, storms, and society's ills. Each fall a special color display is produced by nature in the trees of the surrounding open-air country. Guests and visitors from all around come for the unique shops, the outdoor activities, the wine, the general ambience, and to stay a day or two, relaxing among nature's splendor. Judy had fond memories of Galena from all the time she spent there, growing up, and coming back to visit family and friends. It remained near and dear to her. This year she would not be going and that made her sad.

It all began suddenly, as most things do, unexpected chest pains lingered far into the night, necessitating a midnight run to the hospital. Hospitals can be so overwhelming with strangers coming and going, nurses triaging patients, children crying, and the seemingly endless hours of waiting. Because the incident continued with chest pains, the nurse immediately waved them in to the ER area. Gowned, the monitors were hooked up, blood drawn, temperature taken, and a myriad of questions asked. Time moved slowly as Judy sat in the chair next to the bed anxiously waiting. Finally, the doctor came in to discuss the diagnoses. Shock appeared on Judy's face as she listened to the doctor. A crossroad was reached. Without open-heart surgery, the prognosis was damning. With the surgery, a more positive outcome could be anticipated. But open-heart surgery? Agreement was reached for the need to have the surgery. Decision made, the road was crossed and additional tests were scheduled.

Judy was again sitting at the bedside of her beloved husband, waiting for results, when a different doctor, not the cardiologist, but an oncologist as indicated on his jacket pocket arrived with a computer tablet in hand. Judy tensed. The doctor introduced himself, explaining that

during the scheduled tests prior to the surgery a believed-to-be malignant spot appeared on one lung and would require future treatment. Judy heard no more and withdrew from her surroundings into herself. Her mind raced. Not one major health problem but now two. She saw their plans and their life, their trip to Galena, dissolve before her eyes. She imagined the terrible physical pain he would have to endure and she saw the anguish he would bear to get well. She saw herself alone without the comfort of his companionship for the rest of her life. She wondered what life would be like after.

There was little choice but to move forward and together another road was crossed. The open-heart surgery went well and with an extended recovery period at home all was progressing. The cancer treatment would start later.

Judy sat on the bench, overcome, thinking about all that had happened, how far away they were from life expectations of a few short months ago, and how far they had yet to go for hopefully a full recovery. She was frustrated and miserable that she couldn't have done more to stop the pain and the suffering from the surgery or that she couldn't snap her fingers and simply make the cancer disappear. But she couldn't do either. She felt guilty because she needed to take time to get away from illness, sitting in the park alone and taking comfort in the beauty and the serenity of nature.

She drew in a deep breath, gathered strength, and carefully rewrapped her exposed, raw feelings. Judy cried a little then in this place where no one that mattered would see the tears, and then wiping her eyes, headed down the road back to her home.

###

At the Crossroads By Theresa Choske

The crossroads have played a very important role in the folklore of many cultures. In Ireland, the crossroads were looked upon as a place thought of being neither here nor there. It was a place beyond the real world where normal rules did not apply. It was no-man's land belonging to no one.

A feature of Irish country life was the custom of holding dances at the crossroads. It was during the 16th and 17th centuries that dancing became popular. In the 1800s, the priests and nuns controlled the education of most of the Catholic population, which led to the good priestly fathers condemning crossroads dancing. They were concerned that 'such activities provided fertile ground for wild oats to be sowed.'

Crossroad dancing was a type of social event popular in Ireland up to the mid-20th century. Usually held in summer, people would congregate to play music and dance at these crossroads. Fiddle music was by far the most popular. Other instruments included the flute, the tin whistle, also call the pennywhistle and bodhran. But the question most always asked, 'what would an Irish get together be without the sounds of the fiddle floating in the air'? Rural and townspeople would congregate at the crossroads to play music, dance and do some storytelling. These dances were usually held in the summer months and could be done in sets or a solo

person. After a little bit of encouragement from the fiddler, the dancing, singing and storytelling would commence.

It was the Irish ballads that expressed the joys and sorrows of love gained and lost. There were also songs about Ireland's political struggles and their dead heroes. The thinly veiled lyrics were all about old Ireland, and the passion ran deep in these ballads, as we learned the names of those who had died for Ireland's freedom.

The crossroads dancing declined in popularity in the mid-20th century, due to musical recordings and restrictions on all crossroads dancing. Eventually it was the Gaelic League that introduced the first Ceili in 1697. This led to dancing indoors, under relegated supervision to licensed establishments.

###