

**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. Contact Nancy at [nestewart@ameritech.net](mailto:nestewart@ameritech.net) to zoom with us during COVID restrictions.

**Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group**  
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**December 2020 selection – Fantasy**

**Sprinkles the Christmas Elf: An Elf on the Shelf Story**  
By Mark Moe

Sprinkles the Christmas elf finally managed to get some much needed down time from her active human named, Tiffany. She could now report her observations about Tiffany's behavior to "Big Red" himself. Her report was overdue by a couple of days and she needed to make sure that this information reached the North Pole Behavioral Division which collects all the data that he uses in determining who is naughty or nice children. It has been so hard trying to sneak away unlike other Elves on the Shelf because Tiffany is constantly playing with her and even holds her tightly while she is sleeping. She does not honor the concept of placing her elf in one spot and leaving her there.

Sprinkles straightened her pink hat and outfit and pushed a button on her hidden wristwatch. A tiny metallic floating ball came out and started to create a holographic version of her image. The hologram would remain where Tiffany had left her until she returned from her trip. She then pulled a tiny control pad from her pocket and opened a miniature, shimmering, blue magic portal. The portal creates a miniature Einstein-Rosenberg bridge that allows almost instantaneous transmission to the North Pole. She stepped in and left the world of reality behind and arrived in a land of pure "*fantasy*." The walls and familiar objects of Tiffany's room were now replaced with the numerous buildings that compromised Santa's Village, the Toy Factory and the Elves Transportation Center. As soon as her feet materialized, she ran from the line of teleportation platforms straight to the highspeed walkway and exited it when the Behavior Observation Center came into view. She continued her sprint right into the elevator and hit the appropriate button for her floor.

As soon as she logged into her computer and opened Tiffany's file, an important message popped up from "Big Red." "Sprinkles, how is Tiffany doing in her behavior with her family? We have not seen your report in a few days. I need to see your report so that I can make my final assessment and hopefully put her on the nice list."

Sprinkles thought for a second and smiled as she typed a reply in the messenger, "See for yourself, Santa!" Santa watched as a detailed file of Tiffany's behavior appeared on his screen. He saw how she always goes out of her way to help others and how she always goes out of her way to help others and how she tries to take care of her family. He smiled as he saw how much joy she brings to her family and how well she plays with her older sister, Megan. He smiled and laughed heartily. He replied to Sprinkles, "Good work and in case you were wondering, she will definitely be on the nice list!" Sprinkles logged out and went quickly on her way to rejoin Tiffany in her bed.

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### **In My Fantasy World By Carol Karvon**

In today's world of chaos amid a devastating and complicated virus called CoVid19 sometimes everything seems bleak and dark. We can ask, "how did we get here"? It's a good question, but so far, I haven't read or heard anything definitive about exactly how this virus originated. Blame has been placed on one thing or another; one country or another; one leader or another; failure of one coping mechanism or another. Sometimes, a practice seems to be working, and then Wham! something causes that to veer away in another direction and things get even worse.

In my fantasy world, today's virus pandemic wouldn't exist so a need for blame would be non-existent; vaccines would not be necessary to stop this worldwide menace. In my fantasy world, politics would be simple. Elections would be final and we could move onto more important matters; people could agree to disagree; election results would not spur violent reactions among bystanders.

In my fantasy world, there would be Peace on Earth as proclaimed on cards and in song.

In my fantasy world, this Christmas season would be a time of rejoicing; a time of reflection; a time of prayer; a time of caring for others.

In my fantasy world, Christmas would not be the crass commercialism it has become.

In my fantasy world, people would be free, equal and welcomed to our land just because they wanted to make a better life for themselves and their families.

In my fantasy world, living conditions would be better for all; children would not go hungry; families would have decent places to live; parents would have jobs to go to and children would have schools to attend.

In my fantasy world, there would not be killings of innocent people just because they were in the wrong places at the wrong time.

I guess that sums up my fantasy or should I say fantasies? I know they're not all realistic, but which fantasies ever are? That's why they're called fantasies.

Let's try to have a good Christmas and Happy New Year despite everything happening this year. And, let's hope for a better year in 2021 for everyone, as long as I'm fantasizing.

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**By Ed Scheffler**

Lord Robert Webb-Johnston said:

“A neurotic is the man who builds a castle in the air.  
A Psychotic is the man who lives in it.”

Sir Edward John Scheffler said:

“Fantasy is an illusion.  
A figment of but a  
distorted imagination.”

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**Locked in the Cemetery**

**By N. Stewart**

I was running late. One more errand to go and I would be finished with Christmas preparation for this year. The Christmas letter was in the mail, the tree and house decorated and all the presents were bought and wrapped. The traditional Christmas nut breads were baked, waiting to be given to friends and neighbors. A verbal sigh of relief made its way out of my thoughts.

Every year I placed a Christmas wreath on my parents' gravesite. That's where I was headed, the cemetery. It's something I have done for a long time because of an off-hand comment made long ago by my mother. She said when you die and are buried no one ever comes to visit a grave. You are gone and forgotten, alone as if you never existed. It stuck in my head and I was determined to remember them each year for as long as I was able.

I arrived with gates open. It was starting to get dark but I would have time to place the wreath and then quickly leave. I juggled the wreath out of the car trunk and walked up the snowy embankment, looked for the three evergreens standing in a row and then turned left. The graves were snow covered but I was able to uncover the names and locate the sites.

The wreath was a little more difficult to put in the frozen ground than usual, and I spend more time than expected. Finally, the rods holding the wreath went into the ground and there it stood. I stayed to have a few words with my parents and caught them up with what was going on in the world, and with the family. It was cold as I stood there and my breath vaporized as I spoke to them. A simple prayer and it was time to leave the cemetery. On the way out, I stopped at my Grandmother's grave to chat a bit.

Rounding the corner and heading for Milwaukee Avenue, I was dismayed to discover the gates had been automatically closed at 5:00 p.m., according to the sign I missed on the way in. What if I am stuck here all night in the cold in a creepy cemetery. That's a pretty funny thought and I headed for the maintenance building. I rang the bell, knocked on the door with no answer. Certainly, there has to be someone on duty and I drove through the cemetery, finding no one. This could be a problem I guessed. I ended back at the main gate and saw a number to call in case of an emergency. That seemed like the appropriate next thing to do. I reached into my purse for my cell phone as an image raced through my brain of a cell phone, recharging on the kitchen table. After desperately looking, yes, I found that it wasn't in my purse. I didn't suppose there would be a telephone booth or an emergency phone around here somewhere for me to call for help. Panic started to set in. This was going to be a long night.

I didn't want to run out of gas so periodically I shut off the motor. It was getting colder and colder with the darkening of the night. My gloved fingers were getting stiff, my toes frozen, and my nose redder. I must have dozed off and I awoke suddenly from a commotion around me. A festive party was going on before my eyes. Adults in ragged finery were talking or dancing. Gaunt children were running around,

playing “You’re it.” Loud music was ringing from the Carolan on the hill. A Christmas tree was at the edge of the road all decorated with odds and ends taken from Christmas grave decorations. All looked to be enjoying themselves. I watched as an older man went up to an older woman and offered his hand. The women took the hand and together they danced around the tree. More and more joined in. This went on for some time when suddenly all of them stood very still as a car’s headlights approached from inside the cemetery some distance away. Everyone scattered, disappearing into what seemed to be the earth. The light came closer and closer toward me and finally stopped near my car.

A man in uniform got out and came walking over to my car and said, “Ma’am. Are you okay?” I managed to open the window a crack and explained that I had been accidently locked in and that I was fine just a little unnerved. He said there had been an after-hour report of a car left running on cemetery property. “Please follow me,” he said. I began to follow. Looking in the rearview mirror, I saw some people starting to cautiously reappear onto the road. Two figures waved at me as they grew smaller and smaller in the mirror. A notion crossed my mind and I wondered if they could be my mom and dad.

Reality or fantasy, it didn’t matter. I wanted no more of the cold, creepy cemetery. I simply wanted to get out of there.

### **Theresa Choske My Christmas Story**

When it comes to writing biographies of some notable women and men of Ireland or America, I don’t have to worry about spontaneity. I usually start out doing some internet searches and, if available, a reading of a biography book of that notable person. I jot down some notes on various scraps of paper and from there, hopefully a chronology evolves and I’m good to go with my writing. By the same token, I am hardly ever able to be spontaneous when it comes to doing some of my own creative writing essays. Especially the essays that call for my Irish nostalgia memoirs that refuse to jump start my brain. There are hours and days I sweat bullets on any flashbacks as to how it was back in the Ireland of my youth. These sorts of writings are anything but spontaneous.

For example, I recently got a phone call from Paul Dowling the Director of the Irish Community Services that deals with seniors of Irish extraction. His request was humble enough when he asked if I could write and submit an Irish story on what it was like for my family at Christmastime. He also wanted the story within the next couple of days. I didn’t jump at the opportunity but told him I would think about it, but that was a lie. Secretly I was hoping he would ask someone else, so I could dismiss the thought of me doing the penning. When I didn’t respond the next day, he made a follow up call and did a little more elbow nudging.

Paul truly is a gentleman and a scholar, who works very well with seniors, spending a lot of time organizing and doing various kinds of monthly programming, keeping them involved so they remain active in the outside world. Obviously, on this Irish memory essay, he wasn’t taking no for an answer, and was adamant with this day’s follow up emailing and phone call. Finally, I relented and said I would give this short essay a go with what little youthful Christmas memories I could muster up. I stared at the blank sheet of paper for quite a while before I made some frantic phone calls to my two older siblings to see if I could muster up some Christmas memories from them. Since Christmas in our 52 Dublin Road small four room house with 13 inhabitants certainly didn’t have all the bells and whistles or foofaraw to make a glittering Christmas, I hoped I could pick the brains of my two siblings.

With all the mouths that had to be fed in our house, Mammy would say that she would have to be out robbing the way we ate her out of house and home. But it was our sister Betty

that was a great help and the one who most definitely could make something out of nothing when it came to baking. She didn't need to write the ingredients down as she had memorized every recipe she could scrape up from anywhere and everywhere. She never left out a pinch of any food item she set out to make. Her culinary efforts couldn't be matched when it came to boiling a plum pudding, making a Christmas cake with almond icing, minced pies, her 'to die for' raisin scones and her soda and brown bread. When she graced our kitchen table with these baked assortments, they would get legs and there wouldn't be a morsel or a crumb left over to throw to a dog.

My oldest brother Joe said he never remembers that we ever had a Christmas tree before the 1960s. He definitely did recall going down to pilfer bunches of holly and ivy from the Protestant Church gardens, so they could grace our mantlepiece that was over the fireplace. This 'thou shalt not steal' sin for which, without a doubt in Mammy's mind, Joe would have to make some sort of reparation, be it saying three rosaries or making his confession to Fr. Jeremiah Murphy. Mammy herself would buy a tin of Jacob's biscuits, a box of Cadbury's chocolates and all the assorted baking ingredients from one of the local shopkeepers. She would put them 'on the docket' with a promise to the shop owner when she 'sold the cow' she would be able to pay the money she owed her. Then Mammy and the shop owner would have a fine laugh because they both knew there was never any cow to sell.

With the looming time difference between Chicago and London, and the deadline for the publication of my page and a half story, my feeble and addled brain finally started to work its magic. I recollected Mammy, from her hard-earned shillings, giving a few of us four pence each to go to Tom Flynn's Cinema in the town square to see the imported American Christmas films that came into our small town of Tullow. Bing Crosby's 'Holiday Inn', 'The Bells of St. Mary's', 'White Christmas', and 'Going My Way', with Crosby as Father Chuck O'Malley and Barry Fitzgerald as Father Fitzgibbon. Crosby's songs, 'To-Ra-Loo-Ra', the 'Ave Maria' and 'White Christmas', still to this day never fail to light up my mind and soul.

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**It's Magic!**  
**by Sherry Avila**

(Song Sung by Doris Day & Written by Julie Styne & Sammy Cahn)

"Wham! Wham! Wham!" The Near Westside Marcy Newberry Center (1539 S Springfield Avenue) children take turns hitting the green piñata with the bat. The children's eyes glitter in anticipation of the candy that will tumble out of the piñata and scatter all over the floor. "Wham! Wham! Wham!" The piñata opens up to pour out candy. The joyful children eagerly grab the pieces of candy wherever they can find them.

After directing Vacation Bible School at Kelly Methodist Church on the South Side of Chicago for the summer, I tell my children's church hostess, "I have decided not to go back to Peoria." She suggests, "Why don't you apply to live at Methodistowned Esther Hall Girls' Club, 537 West Melrose, on the North Side of Chicago? It would be a safe place for you to live. The young women come from various cities in the Midwest just like you. You would probably want to go back to college after two years at Bradley University, and you could apply at Chicago Teachers College which is \$20 a semester tuition. If you need a job, you could go to the State of Illinois Employment Agency."

As part of a Methodist Outreach Program for needy children, we work together in the parlor of Esther Hall Girls' Club where we live to create a piñata. We cover an inflated balloon with paper mâché made from flour and water and glue strips of newspaper on it.

Suddenly, there is a commotion. I hear unfamiliar footsteps and loud voices. I look up to see several handsome young men entering our parlor. These young men know some of my Esther Hall house mates.

In the meantime, we add colorful strips of green, yellow, and red tissue paper to cover the newspaper and bring our piñata to life.

I particularly remember a young man named Frank partly because of his beautiful smile and partly because he says strange things. I am wearing a pink top and blue shorts.

Frank says, "The color of your eyes match the color of your outfit."

I look down at my clothes and perplexed say,

"But my eyes are green, and I am not wearing green."

Frank laughs. Ha. Ha. Ha.

I say, "Are you color blind?"

He says, "No. Why?"

Then Frank earnestly says, "My Mom and sister Theresa make pinatas. I could show you some of the pinatas they made."

Frank asks, "Where are you from?"

"Peoria."

"Oh, you're a Hillbilly!"

"I am not from the Southern United States. I am from Central Illinois. What are you talking about?"

"Anybody who is from south of Chicago is a Hillbilly."

I am thinking, "Who is this nutty guy?"

"Where are you from?"

"I live a few blocks away in the neighborhood with my Mom, three siblings, my Grandfather, and three boxer dogs whom I am helping to support."

"How are you helping to support your family?"

"I am working as a Civil Engineer."

"I love music! My Dad and his family loved to sing all the time"

"I love music, too! My Dad played bass fiddle in a band. I played piano for 10 years and trombone for 6 years. I played trombone in the marching band at Harrison High School."

"WOW! I am very impressed. I never had any music lessons. The radio, TV, and record player provided my music."

"My Dad and Mom are divorced. I felt so sad about their divorce."

"Oh! My Dad and Mom are divorced, too."

We place handfuls of delicious wrapped hard candies inside the piñata.

I look deeply into Frank's big, brown eyes to try to understand him, and I sing: "The stars desert the skies, And rush to nestle in your eyes. It's magic!"

Who would ever have dreamed that we would celebrate 55 years of marriage with three wonderful children, four grandchildren and traveled all around the world and the USA? And, we broke over 55 pinatas!