

**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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**January 2021 selection – Raw**

**The Beginning**  
By Vicki Elberfeld

My friend believes she is protected from the common cold as well as other, more serious viruses. She also thinks she is preserved from even scarier illnesses such as cancer and heart disease. Her secret lies in what she eats, a raw food diet which allows her nothing but vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds and to eat or drink nothing heated above 115 F. Her name is Evangelina, though she wants us all to call her Eva. I've noticed how important people's names are to them, so I comply with my friend's wishes when I address her. In my heart of hearts however, she will always be Eve, First Woman. I picture her gathering nuts and berries in paradise, the Garden of Eden, long before there were grocery stores, long before the discovery of fire.

Eve's food choices, or perhaps her food choices and her personality, often make it hard for her to fit into contemporary society, or at least into contemporary omnivore society, so perhaps she should simply swap out her friends for those with a similar diet. She orders salad when we go to restaurants, but as most of the eateries we frequent offer salads as the course *prior to* the entree, the small combinations of lettuce with the tiny additions of carrots, onions or tomato don't provide her with much in the way of nourishment and are never satisfying. She is always hungry. She'll ask the waiter what dishes he recommends, prodding him to describe them in the minutest detail. Then she'll ask questions about other items on the menu, always asking him if the items are fresh and what kind of oil is used for cooking the food, food she will never order as it isn't on her diet. She will hang on and savor the waiter's every luscious word. Once he

concludes his exhaustive descriptions, the end result is always the same. Eve will order a large bowl of lettuce and a glass of water.

But there is always more to her sit-down restaurant meal than just lettuce. Once her bunny food is delivered, she takes out her magic bag. This bag is loaded with delicious morsels including cashews, avocados, olives, pecans and sunflower seeds. And dressing! I don't know what is in this dressing, but it is certainly raw and non-dairy. Fortunately, she has brought along a large spoon and fork to toss all the goodies in with the lettuce before adding copious amounts of dressing. She tears into it with the enthusiasm of a starving castaway, newly rescued and returned to civilization. If our waiter notices he doesn't say anything, probably feeling she's already wasted enough of his time and casting his attention on other, more lucrative customers. She does tip a large percentage of her bill, but 25% of her \$3 lettuce bowl is still pennies. The rest of us tip well and order more than we can possibly eat to compensate, but is it any wonder we never go with her to the same restaurant twice?

Even if we don't go with her to a restaurant, food can be a problem. I arranged to meet her on the lawn at Ravinia just outside the Pavilion for Garrison Keillor's variety show. Eve was happy that she'd now have the opportunity to prepare a picnic for us. I don't enjoy food preparation, so I bought a bag of pistachios and two pounds of cut fruit from the salad bar as my share, along with a pb&j sandwich for myself alone as Eve's meals invariably leave me hungry. But she was late as always. She had agreed to meet me there two hours early to reserve a good spot and consume our picnic prior to the concert, but the performance began with no sign of her. I spent the whole first act unable to appreciate the comedy as well as the sound effects of a radio show performed live; this was particularly sad as I had never before had the good fortune to be part of such an event. My eyes were too busy looking around, scanning the horizon for my errant friend, to relax and enjoy one of my favorite storytellers.

Eve arrived during intermission with little apology, explaining that her food preparation, her slicing, dicing, blending, pressing and peeling had caused her to be so late. At least she didn't have to slave over a hot stove! She immediately opened her magic bag filled with baggies of various salads, seaweed crackers, and pasta made with zucchini only, no flour, altogether uncooked and quite bland. Oh! And bean sprouts. She also shared her thermos of almond milk, and I was reminded of the comedian who said, "If it doesn't come from a tittie, it ain't milk." I do not like almond milk, but I politely sampled the seaweed crackers as I began to rethink picnics with my friend and even to reconsider our entire relationship.

Not long after the Ravinia debacle I had a potluck and barbecue at my house to which Eve was invited. I served real food, grilled meats and yummy vegetables for kebabs and my friends brought chips, dips, salads and desserts. Eve said she would bring durian fruit; I didn't know what that was and didn't choose to ask. What she brought stunk so horribly I wanted to erase the experience as quickly from my mind as possible, and now I can't recall how to describe it. Like most people, hopefully, I have never been in a field of decomposing bodies on a hot day, but I would imagine the smells to be similar. I have read it described, and I'm cleaning it up a little, as a combination of the smells of pig excrement, "...turpentine and onions, garnished with a gym sock," and it has also been compared to the stink of a heap of dead civet cats or vomited

onions. And the taste? I was told you don't want a durian fruit that is over ripe or it will taste "like BO and vinegar" and under ripe would taste "like metallic scrambled eggs," but Eve assured me that she knew what she was doing. Not surprisingly, I and many others were hesitant to taste it, but a gentleman whose judgement we trusted offered his stamp of approval, and he suggested it might be quite some time before we'd get another chance. Perhaps because I suspected the worst, realizing that Eve's tastes were not mine and that I had been let down so many times in the past due to her enthusiasm for the bland and the unpleasant, or perhaps because it is considered a delicacy with good reason, I was both relieved and thrilled with my sample taste and only wished she had brought more. The durian resembled the creamiest, sweetest most delicious custard I had ever had the pleasure of tasting. Who knew that such a spikey, odiferous fruit, a fruit banned from certain Asian public places and mass transit systems due to the stench, could taste like such ambrosia? And how lucky I was to have been introduced to such an exotic culinary adventure from what seemed to be a most unlikely place.

I have been thinking of my relationship with Eve and rethinking my responsibilities. Perhaps the next time we go for dinner, my friends and I should look forward to Eve's choice of restaurant as she must be so tired of our picks. Choices will be limited of course as there aren't many raw food establishments in the Chicago area. And the raw food diet is by no means the most challenging. There are fruitarians who eat a diet of 75% fruit and 25% seeds and nuts. I understand that actor Ashton Kutcher wound up in the hospital after a very short time on such a diet. And then there are the breatharians who believe they should live only on air and sunlight. The only major problem is that for those who strictly follow that diet, the rather quick result is death.

And, of course, it wouldn't hurt me to develop an open mind and try something new every once in a while. If not, however will I learn that what at first may seem to be utterly revolting can turn into a delightful and delicious surprise?

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## **Raw** **By Pauline Bastek**

For the love of me, I cannot remember selecting this word when we were choosing words for the following year. The pandemic had not yet begun. We were still in normal mode, comparing feelings and behavior prior to the March 2020 lockdown to the present seems absolutely surreal. We sat around the table in a conference room of the library, listening to each other's stories, and on the night, Nancy designated, we all wrote our word selections for the following year. I do not remember hearing this word. I'm sure I would have remembered it because I can barely look at it even the anagram of it is frightening, WAR.

I can suddenly visualize a picture of a lamp shade. It was in an issue of the now defunct "Life" magazine shortly after World War II ended. I was about 12 years old and on a vacation in

a suburb of Cleveland by my aunt and uncle. My cousin Andy who had been discharged on a medical from the Army was sitting on the porch with me and my aunt. Curious about what I was so absorbed in, my aunt took the magazine from me and turned pale. I asked how they could make lamp shades from people's skin. Before she could answer, Andy started laughing and got up from the porch swing saying, "I'll show you how." He came back with a metal olive green box that looked like a fishing tackle box. Sitting down, he opened it. It was filled with pictures. Before Aunt Josie or I realized what was happening, he shoved a 5X7 black and white print in my lap, saying that's how! I found myself staring at what I assumed was a large Butcher Block table with a large hunk of meat on it. I had seen similar tables at the neighborhood butcher shop while I waited at the meat counter to pick up my mother's order.

Andy suddenly grabbed a stack of photos and stuck it in my lap saying, "You never saw this a Kowalski's Meat Market, did you?" I still remember the dark hair hanging over the edge of the table. I don't remember seeing any arms or legs, just a large piece of raw meat. They skinned them. Just like we skin a deer. He grabbed the box and slammed his bedroom door shut. We could hear him locking it. Aunt Josie put her arm around me and said, "We're going to the Drugstore and get a milk shake and forget all about this." And so, we did, chocolate milk shakes

The next day, cousin Andy went back to the V.A. Hospital. Aunt Josie made a long-distance call to New York to cancel her subscription to "Life" magazine. We never talked about it, you didn't in those days. I'm not really found of chocolate milk shakes and I do avoid that word. Especially now when we are in a state of its anagram and I see fellow citizens wearing shirts with Auschwitz printed on them. Cousin Andy spent many days at the V.A. Hospital. He never went back the University to finish his last year of pre-med. His sister got him a custodial job at the school where she taught. He married, but it wasn't happily.

Who picked that word?

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### **Alex Rogan Returns By Mark Moe**

Thirty years have passed since Alex Rogan beat the solitary arcade game in his trailer park and defeated the forces of Xur as the last starfighter. He did go back immediately after to pick up his girl Maggie Gordon, but he has not returned to Earth since then. Maggie and he were married on the planet Rylos and had a few children of their own. Their children have lived among the various alien races that called Rylos home. The kids have learned about their home planet, but never been there.

While he was lost in his thoughts, Maggie called his name and he came out of his reverie. "Alex, I know you have responsibilities with the Rylos Starfleet Legion. We have managed to stay connected to Earth through the secret transmitter in our old trailer park, but we need to go home to Earth. The kids have never experienced their home planet and we could really use a vacation," she stated.

Alex ran his hands through his brown hair while he thought about the logistics of bringing a modified Gunstar fighter ship to Earth while avoiding radar detection from the United States. As if the universe found an answer to his question, Grieg his navigator had just walked in on the conversation and said, “The Science Division has just perfected reflective camouflage and can install them within a week. The reflective paneling will block out location by Earth’s radar systems and render your Gunstar virtually invisible.”

“Grieg, what do you mean by virtually invisible?” Alex asked. He responded, “On a very bright, sunny day you will be able to see the outline of your Gunstar although it will remain completely invisible to Earth’s radar systems.”

Alex smiled and replied, “Maggie, tell the kids to pack their bags because we are heading home in a week!” A week past and after verifying how well the reflective panels worked on his Gunstar, the Rogan family and Navigator Grieg began the long journey of traveling to Earth. In the minds of their kids, the journey would seem quite long but with the stardrive it was incredibly short. As Earth came into the front viewport of Alex’s heads-up-display screen, he heard his navigator say, “Earth’s radar systems will be able to detect us in one minute. It is time to turn on the reflective panels, Alex.” Alex thumbed through his control menu and turned on the reflective panels. As he watched the outside parts of his ship disappear from sight, he wondered how well his kids would fit in with normal humans. Within a few minutes, Alex and Grieg began the landing sequence on the large barren patch of land just outside of his old trailer park. As he and his family walked down the landing ramp, they all breathed in the “*raw*” atmosphere of Earth. They were so used to breathing in much fresher air and it took them a few minutes to adjust to it.

Their clothes certainly look out of place to everyone but the Rogans themselves. They were so used to wearing the standard flight suits and uniforms that everyone wore on the planet Rylos. Maggie took one look at herself and her family and stated, “I think we need to find some different clothes so that we can fit in better.” Alex realized that Maggie was right and said, “Luckily, my mom already has clothes for all of us! I sent her our sizes in a transmission before we left.”

“Alex! Earth uses different sizes than Rylos! There is no way those sizes will fit us and the kids!” “If nothing works for the kids, we still have old clothes from the 1980s for you and me, Maggie. We can always go to this store called, Walmart that opened up on the other side of town for the kids, he replied. “Great, Alex I really want to wear my old flannel shirts and jeans again,” she retorted.

After Alex and Maggie donned their dated 1980s clothes, they rode with Alex’s mother to go buy clothes for their children, Logan their son and their daughter Remy. Logan was tall and lanky like his father and he is fifteen years old. Remy was also tall but the only one in the family who did not have brown hair. She is thirteen with golden blonde hair. Neither of their kids knew what to expect because they were so used to wearing either flight suits or some variation of the national Rylos uniform. They were used to neutral colors like beige or light gray and were expecting something similar to what they normally wear. Their parents came back with some neutrals, but the shirts had weird writings and designs on them.

Logan understood the need to blend in, although he would have preferred something more formal. Remy loved her outfits because she believed it matched more of her personality

which she felt had been stifled with the standard uniform requirements that she was so accustomed to wearing. “Mom, can we bring these clothes back with us to Rylos? They are so much more comfortable and stylish compared to what the Rylans wear. How long are we staying anyway?” she asked.

Maggie replied, “Grieg said the power cells that keep the Gunstar hidden can last up two weeks. After that, we would have to leave fairly quickly so as to not draw attention from the United States military. I am sure they would love to get their hands on the Gunstar! You can keep the clothes, but we have to maintain the dress code of Rylos when we are out in public. So, you can wear them around the house if you want.”

Remy replied excitedly, “This is so cool! I hope the rest of our visit here is just as awesome and fun! What is our dinner plans tonight?”

Maggie said, “We are eating at the Starlight, Starbright Diner at the top of the trailer park. It is a restaurant. Go tell your brother and dad to get ready.”

Remy bolted off to get her father and brother because she was always excited to try new food experiences. Their choices on Rylos are usually limited to a handful of food vendors.

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### **Raw** **By Carol Karvon**

Carrie was startled awake. She heard a noise outside and thought something was wrong. Wind was whipping through the trees and branches were hitting against the windows. The weather had changed and turned raw outside. She must have fallen asleep on the sofa, watching TV, waiting for her two oldest children to come home.

They’d convinced her earlier, against her better judgement, to let them use the family car for the evening, telling her they were going to meet friends. They promised to return in about two hours. It was long past that now and Carrie was getting worried. The weather report earlier had warned of inclement weather conditions. Sleet turning to snow was expected in the area by midnight. It was January and the weather could get raw at a moment’s notice.

Mike was 19 and Bella was just 17. Both had been driving since they were old enough to take the driver’s license test. They had driver’s education in high school and were safe drivers, but they were inexperienced, especially in dealing with freezing weather conditions.

Carrie stood at the window for a while watching the driveway and waiting for them to come back. She alternated between looking out the window and sitting on the sofa. Every little sound was magnified with the tree branches still slapping at the windows. She hoped the branches wouldn’t break the windows. So far, except for the wind, no need for alarm, it was still dry outside. It shouldn’t be slippery out there yet. She hoped and prayed that they would get home before then. And, they were in for a surprise when they got home. Carrie was still up waiting for them and, of course would check the time.

Carrie didn't want to start calling Mike and Bella's friends' parents yet. That might get all the other parents worried too. She didn't see the sense of everyone worrying. She knew if their kids were out meeting Mike and Bella, they might be doing their own pacing right about now. A mother rarely slept well while any of her brood were out and the other parents might be waiting at their windows too.

The phone jarred her out of thoughts of doom and gloom. She'd worried herself into a nervous state. She jumped up to answer the phone on the second ring before it could be picked up by the answering machine.

"Hello, mom", said her son, Mike, before she could say a word.

"Where are you? And, what are you doing? Where's Bella? Is everything okay?"

"Mom, we're okay, now".

"What? What do you mean, now?"

"Okay, mom, don't get excited, calm down."

"What happened. I want you to tell me right now and don't lie to me. I'll find out. A mother always knows. Why didn't you call me earlier? I've been so worried."

"Well, mom, we had a little fender bender, but we're okay, it wasn't our fault. We were on our way home, but the guy behind us was following too closely and when we stopped for a red light, he hit us. We had to wait for the cops to come, but they told us all to go to the police station to make our statements. And, that's why we're late. They let us use the phone to call you. My cell phone died right after I called 911. I guess I forgot to charge it, and Bella thinks she left hers in her other jacket. That's why we didn't call you sooner. So, please don't be mad at us mom. We'll come home as soon as we can."

"Well, Mike and Bella, I'm glad you're not hurt. I'll see you when you get home. I'll be up. There's no sleeping for me now. Please be careful driving home. I love you both."

"Bye, mom. We love you too."

###

**Raw**  
**By N. Stewart**

It started out like any other day for Robert Andrew Walker. That first morning cup was refreshing and tasty. The hot shower felt good after a sleepless night. Much had been on Robert's mind with the coming of winter and its preparations.

He tidied his bed, straightening the blanket and cover. Got himself dressed. He needed to venture into town to get necessary supplies for the coming winter. Candles and kerosene for the

lantern were a necessity for when the wind blew or a tree downed the electrical wires. There would be no TV, computer, or signal for a cell phone to distract. To fill the time, a selection of desired books and magazines for reading was a must while the snow piled higher and higher, day after day, cutting him off from the rest of the world. He would be on his own and he liked it that way.

For now, Robert needed to stock up on store bought food to supplement what he was able to provide with his garden and taken from the abundance of nature. All summer he collected potatoes and root vegetables from his garden and then carefully stored them in the cellar. He hunted for meat in the fall and smoked, brined, or cured it, storing that in the cellar also. Robert always liked to collect raw honey, but those pesky bees were not cooperating this year and he wasn't able to get near the hive. Honey sustained him through the long, cold winter months. A spoonful of honey in hot tea went a long way to comfort him.

He cut up downed trees and chopped their wood, stacking it neatly under the roof of his open back porch for use in the pot belly stove. Fresh water wouldn't be a problem as the snowfall accumulation usually ended up just below his windows sills and all he had to do was open a window or the door, fill a pan and heat it up. But for now, the inside pump worked and water flowed.

He set out for town in 'Bessie,' the Jeep. It's not far by country standards into town and once there he managed to get the supplies he wanted. Off to the library, he went for books before going on home. He was well-known to the librarian who had put aside a number of books for him. He selected several and then proceeded to wandering the stacks of the library, choosing other books and some magazines that would last throughout the numerous winter storms and the isolation of being alone in the cabin. Special arrangements as usual were made to loan him the books for the entire winter. With the pile of book loading him down, he entered the Jeep and headed home.

His thoughts roamed to a different life he had in the city. It was noisy and busy with commotion, din, and congestion. Everyone moved fast and people didn't care about one another. Here everything was slower and friendlier. He was happy he made the decision to retire to the cabin in the country.

Snow had started to fall as he arrived home. A young pup was sitting on the stairs, watching him. "Hey, little fella, where did you come from," Robert said as he approached. The pup slowly got up on skinny legs, and cautiously wagged its tail. Robert walked on by and carried the supplies in, closing the door. He had seen the pup hanging around the cabin for a few weeks as the weather changed and became colder. He heard a gentle whining sound, coming through the front door. Robert opened the door a crack. The pup pleadingly looked up at him and Robert looked at the loneliness in the striking yellow eyes and opened the door a little wider. The pup didn't hesitate, walked right in, and sat down. "Well, I guess I'm going to have your company for a while," said Robert. "You can stay if you don't cause any trouble." He then took out two bowls, filling one with water and the other with dog food he had just purchased from the store in town.