

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 to zoom with us during COVID restrictions.

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
© 2021 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

March 2021 selection – Safety

Dakin Street Rowdy Raptors
By Dennis Johnson

One of the writers of our group wrote a poem that included a hawk in verse. This inspired memories of our dealings with Cooper's hawks on our property. We have assorted remembrances of them not only here, but in other places. Cooper's hawks seem to be the most predominant species in Chicago. Though, I have seen Red-tailed hawks in other places, outside of the city, and then growing up as a kid near the Wisconsin border. As I get older, the details about these sightings are now sketchy, but I know I did see them. Once, my wife walked out onto our patio and saw a hawk, sitting on our gate to our backyard. The hawk stared at her while she stared at it before it flew off. She was convinced that it was a Red-tailed hawk.

What we have in view now is of recent interest. We will look at the three 'kills' we witnessed on our 37 ½ x 123 foot city lot. The first was a squirrel carcass stretched out on our west fence. It was obvious that a cat didn't do this. It looked like the meat on the carcass was picked clean.

The next occurrence is when we went out into our yard and there were pigeon feathers scattered what seemed everywhere. A great struggle had ensued. The pigeon obviously had lost.

The most visible of them all was on a cool summer day when we had the central air conditioning in our house shut off. I was sitting in our living room when I heard a loud thump against an outside wall of our dining room. I walked over to the window where I thought the sound came

from. I raised the screen and looked out and then down. The hawk looked up at me with a pigeon carcass in one of its talons. It then flew away with its meal secured in a southeast direction.

But, our best story is when we had a family of them in the neighborhood. Actually, it was a nest of them in a tall honey locust tree at the end of our block. We watched the hawk build the nest what seemed to be day by day. And then she must have laid her eggs, because we would watch her just sitting up there. When she did fly, it was not far from the nest. Then we would watch her as she started flying in and out with pieces of meat in her beak. And as the time past we saw the babies heads bobbing in and out as she fed them with her catches. This went on for a couple of months.

But it was ‘flight training’ that would be the signature event of their stay on Dakin St. We think there were 2 eyas (tech. term for baby hawks) that survived the nest. They were landing on top of cars, scratching the paint jobs, screeching, and staring at people as they flapped their young wings. The cardinals that we would see on our property vanished from view. Either they flew to safer domains, or they were in the food chain for our young rowdies and their mom.

Before long, our hawks left for other destinations and the neighborhood was back to normal. We began to see our cardinals, finches, and others once again. The end. © Dennis Johnson 2021

###

Safety **By Edward Scheffler**

There is this story about a monastery in Europe perched high on a cliff several hundred feet in the air. With the only way to reach the monastery was to be suspended in a basket, which was pulled to the top by several monks who in turn tugged with all their strength. As the ride up the steep cliff in that basket was terrifying.

One tourist got exceedingly nervous about halfway up as he noticed that the rope by which he was suspended was old and frayed. With a trembling voice he asked the monk who was riding with him in the basket how often they would change the rope.

The monk thought for a moment and answered brusquely, “Whenever it breaks.”

###

Thanks to the Institutional Standards of O.S.H.A. caution had been prioritized. Thus, many ill-fated accidents are avoided. As the Bureau of Caution for Preventive Injuries (B.G.P.I.) has determined that most accidents are unnecessary

###

I Cannot Take You to Monkey Mountain
By J. Smetana

Ginger was tellin' me you guys used to ride between the L cars. That's true. Isn't that against the law? It is now but it wasn't then. Weren't you guys concerned about SAFETY? Well yeah but not to make a special thing of it. You know mostly we just wanted to get home and them cars was packed! They could not jam in more people if they had those Tokyo pushers. So between the cars was a nice option: a little elbow room and lots of fresh air! I cannot take you to the monkey mountain.

###

Is Anyone Really Safe?
By Carol Karvon

A few weeks ago, Patti's main concerns were getting to work on time and enjoying her weekend free time. Now, Patti's only concern was safety.

Ever since her apartment had been broken into last month, she had an uneasy feeling that someone was watching her. Sometimes, she even felt like she was being followed. But, when she looked around, there'd be no one there. It was beginning to creep her out. The hair at the back of her neck bristled and she didn't like the feeling at all.

Since the night of her apartment being ransacked, Patti had been staying with her friend, Cara. She'd called Cara that same night and the policeman drove her over there after his inspection of her apartment. He wanted to make sure the burglar was no longer there and waited patiently while Patti locked all the doors and windows.

Patti was hoping there would be no further intrusion while she was gone from her home, but knew she couldn't be comfortable staying there, waiting for the other shoe to drop. She'd be a nervous wreck.

Patti stayed away from the design house where she was employed for a couple of days, until she felt less shaky and upset. She'd called in sick; no one questioned her, nor did she elaborate.

She had picked up the outfit from the cleaners and returned it to Dominique's Sportswear, without comment, the first day back at her job. Her boss was unaware of the drama that had occurred at Patti's apartment and she wanted to keep it that way for now. She knew eventually the police might want to question Dominique, but hopefully that would not be right now.

Patti was unaware that while she was away from work, Dominique had received an unsolicited offer to sell her design business. Dominique was puzzled as to why someone was making an offer to buy her out. She was on the verge of making a name for herself in the design world, but wasn't there yet. They seemed to be very interested in her recent sportswear designs, and mainly

in one particular exercise outfit; the one Patti had retrieved from the cleaners. How odd, she thought. She was proud of her design, but it wasn't very unusual, though she did use a trendy fabric, bamboo cloth. She had learned it was a renewable source, versatile and very strong, yet soft; perfect for sportswear. Maybe that's what they were really interested in.

Dominique decided to include that item of sportswear in the fashion show she was hosting the following week.

Everything was going smoothly, when an odd thing occurred backstage, the bamboo outfit was missing. No one could find it and everyone looked in every possible place. It had just disappeared.

Because of the possibility of designs being stolen a guard was posted at the door and he checked everyone's credentials before they could enter or depart. The doors could not be locked because of safety concerns, should there be a fire or some other emergency, for example.

Suddenly, a commotion arose at the doorway. A man and woman were demanding they be allowed to leave the show shortly after it began. They were carrying what looked like a garment bag and when the guard demanded to inspect it, the couple pushed him aside and ran out the door, headed for the stairwell.

The guard alerted the building's security team and the couple was stopped on the first floor before they could exit and merge onto the crowded sidewalk.

They were accompanied to the security office and questioned. The garment bag was opened to reveal the missing outfit. And, when examined closely, answers to the mystery became clearer.

It was discovered that one of the pockets contained a huge uncut diamond, which apparently, even the cleaner hadn't found. It seemed the cleaner had only removed the spot from the garment as instructed by Patti, and never looked into the pockets.

Upon further investigation it was learned that the couple were jewel thieves who had stolen the diamond from a jewelry and gem show. Since that exhibition was heavily guarded, there hadn't been an opportunity to take the gem from the building and sell it. It happened there was a fashion show of sportswear going on in the next-door ballroom. The thieves dropped in and literally dropped the diamond into the pocket of the exercise outfit, hoping no one would find it; planning to retrieve it from the designer's showroom. That's when things got complicated – the outfit went home with Patti instead of back to the showroom.

After this explanation, Patti felt much safer returning to her own apartment – thankful the nightmare was over

###

Safety

By Pauline Bastek

Safety belts in automobiles are recognized as an innovation that lowered deaths and serious accidents. I know this and I buckle up every time I get behind the wheel. And always check to see that my passenger, if I have one, is buckled up. When I am a passenger, I make sure that the driver has buckled up and I without fail am buckled up as well. I could be the poster girl for a buckle up and stay safe campaign but I shudder inwardly each time I do. Irrational, you may say but I know that a friend would still be alive if she hadn't buckled up.

We knew each other through our 15-year-old sons. They were part of the same group in High school and her husband was active in the educational community as was I. Fifteen is that awful active age for parents and that wonderful age for children, the age of Driver Ed. We both had fifteen-year-olds in the late seventies who were careful to observe the rules of the road when we had them out practice driving. They needed to accumulate a given number of hours behind the wheel with a licensed driver to qualify for their license.

They say you forget your labor pains, it's a lie, but I never heard any parent say they forgot the terror of sitting as a passenger while their fifteen-year-old offspring is behind the wheel. I know I haven't. The terror did not abate with each of my four sons and driving with my two grandsons at the wheel only brought back memories best forgotten. I will not be around to the honors for my great grandsons who are two and four. Their parents will have that joy, i.e., What goes around, come around.

I do have a granddaughter who is fourteen and already an accomplished back seat driver when she is my passenger an all too frequent occurrence which dredged up a memory of the time when safety belts in automobiles were a new innovation and unfortunately had a tendency to stick. This was well known but the statistics were that the lives they saved outweighed keeping the off the market until the tendency of the locks to jam was corrected. Statistics, statistics, safety statistics.

Brad was just fifteen, driving when his mother reminded him to slow down at the upcoming railroad crossing. It was still slick in spots on the road from recent snows and he braked too hard and the car stalled with the front wheel on the tracks. Before they knew it the crossing lights came on and the guardrails came down. He remembered afterwards that his mother screamed at him to get out. He ran around to her side but her door was locked and he remembered that her head was down, trying to unlock her seatbelt. The freight train was almost on top of them when a bystander pulled him to safety off the tracks. They said in the report that the safety belt on the passenger side opened without a problem. But not for his mother or what was left of her.

When my fifteen-year-old heard what happened, he looked shocked, no he looked worried and he asked if I would still take him driving to practice. It's a wonderful age is fifteen, you feel invulnerable. My son never lived long enough to do practice driving with his sons. He died due to medical malpractice at 41 a year before his older son was ready to start practice deriving.

As my son and Brad went to different colleges, I lost track of him. I wonder if he ever had a son he took practice driving and if he worked through the memory of that safety feature, the seat belt that took his mother

For over a year after this happened, I refused to use my seat belt even when I was a passenger in a close friend's new car that had the additional feature of beeping for a good five minutes if you weren't buckled up. Eventually, I gave up and buckled up when it was time to take my next son practice driving

Those safety seat belts still stick and I still wonder why some auto industry profits couldn't be used to improve them. But I know that profits are what matter and lives seem to be expendable.

###

A Summer's Eve **By N. Stewart**

It was well after dark when the girls were sitting on the benches at the beach in View Crest Estates. Seven in various ages from 17 to 12 gathered here every night in summer time. The gentle waves of Delavan Lake rolled in to shore, creating ever-changing shadows upon the water and releasing its energy in a rhythmic cadence, sounding very much as a person inhaling and then exhaling. The song birds had quieted down for the night some time ago. The frogs actively croaked out messages to each other across the water way. The male crickets were chirping the air temperature with their wings rubbed together. The ducks finally settled on the water and after a few directive quacks remain silent.

Earlier, a fire had been lit for roasting hotdogs, and now the girls were making 'smares with marshmallows, graham crackers, and gooey Hersey chocolate bars. The stick ends flared red as the stacked marshmallows caught fire and blackened. A quick blow of breath and the encompassing flame went out. The melting marshmallows were added to the chocolate, covering the cracker and eagerly eaten.

As the fire died out, the conversation drifted easily to boys, dating, and giggles could be heard. Louise told of meeting a college boy, was dating him and thought he was the one for her. Some of the other older members of the group told of their dates with the counsellors from the Boy Scout camp located in the woods next to the beach area. Barb and Linda had double-dated with two of the counsellors. They had walked the 3 miles into town to see "*South Pacific*" at the one and only area theater. The younger ones were in awe of their older counterparts and took in every word that was said. Some day they too, would be doing those things.

Suddenly, there was crack, sounding much like a stepped-on branch disturbing the quiet of the night. Their heads flew up and each cocked an ear, listening. Probably nothing was the consensus, but then another loud crack, closer this time. Someone said that it might be Sasquatch, roaming the woods; that a sighting had taken place in the town of Elkhorn only a few miles away.

“Who or what is that?” asked one of the girls.

“You know, Big Foot,” came the answer. “The ugly ape-like creature that eats people. Maybe it’s in the woods and coming this way.”

“Let’s get out of here,” they screamed all at once as young girls will.

Maybe they had stayed too late this night, each gathered their belongings and rose. Leaving the beach at once, they formed a single line as they did every night across the width of the road, linked their arms and headed up the big high hill toward their homes. No one wanted to be at either end of the line this night. There was some jostling for the safety position in the middle in case someone or something attempted to grab one of them. Barb won the middle and the rest scurried to find a place as close to her as they could get. As usual the two youngest weren’t quick enough and took up a position at each end of the line.

The edges of the dark road they walked were covered with over-grown bushes and the moon produced grotesque shadows from the limbs and trunks of trees on to the pavement. To keep evil away, they loudly sang “100 Bottles of Coke on the Wall” and steadily climbed the hill. Another loud branch snapped. The girls screamed and began running further up the hill, holding onto each other. They made it to the top of the enormous hill, stopping to take a breath now that they could see the well-lit houses along the road. The eerie shadows pulled themselves back from the road and became bushes and trees again.

Settling down, they walked until reaching Louise and Linda’s house where all said good night. Continuing along the road, one more climbed stairs and was safely home. The four remaining walked on down the road to the wooded vacant lot and stopped. Leaving the foursome, one ran to her house and reaching the open door yelled out that she was okay. The three remaining headed back down the road. Living next door to each other, the three parted at the property line and ran home, each yelling okay upon reaching their door.

On this summer’s eve, if in fact it was Big Foot snapping branches and roaming the woods, it would have to look elsewhere for prey as the girls were all safe at home.

###

The Escapades of Miles O’Brien By Mark Moe

In the county of Kildare, Ireland there is a pub that has been around for over 1100 years. One of the patrons has been around since the original owner and namesake “Sean” first opened it. Most of the owners loved this patron although, they did not realize he was the same guy over the centuries. Oh, the joys of being a shapeshifting magical leprechaun that has been around for almost two thousand years. Miles O’Brien unlike many leprechauns had enough gold to be able to increase his size to what the humans would call a dwarf. Supposedly, there was a leprechaun by the name of Colm Meaney who lived in Dublin and had so much gold and magic that he was able to reach the height of 5’11. The story goes he even became an actor and was in some sci-fi series called Star Trek but, that was ridiculous. Miles refused to believe it.

It was a week before St. Patrick's Day and Sean's Pub was already really busy. Miles overheard a phone conversation between Jack Kelley and his cousin Brien Kelley who lives in Chicago. Brien much like Jack owned a bar in Chicago's Northside. As he listened, Miles became really excited because the Americans go crazy for St. Patrick's Day and even dye their river a great emerald green. He thought to himself, "I would very much enjoy having a less somber St. Patrick's Day celebration. The locals around here barely have a drink in honor of St. Patrick and no fun shenanigans. It is settled I am going to Chicago!"

As soon as Jack was off the phone, one of his regular patrons, Miles O'Brien came up to him and besides asking for another pint of Guinness asked, "What would you think about me going to America to visit your cousin at his bar in Chicago on St. Patty's Day?"

Jack told him, "Miles you can do what you want you know that. You don't need my permission. I have known you for years though and as far as you traveled was to the bar and down the street in a drunken stupor. Why the sudden interest in going to my cousin's bar in Northside Chicago?"

Miles responded, "I think it would be fun to see the river green and I hear there is a huge parade as well."

Jack laughed and said, "You are going to watch a parade and the greening of the river. 20 Euros say you won't see anything besides the bottom of a beer mug and the only green river you will see is the endless green shots and green beer that all the bars will serve. I will tell my cousin, Brien to expect you and that he should give you a discount."

Miles thanked Jack and went about figuring out how to acquire a plane ticket to Chicago. It was amazing to find out that he had an active passport. Money was not a problem when you were a magical being, but he had never flown in the belly of an airplane before. "I must be cautious and *safety-minded*" said Miles. Jack ended up helping the 4'8 Miles book his flight and had one of the other bartenders drive him to the airport. Miles decided to leave on the Wednesday before St. Patrick's Day.

As his ride pulled away, he saw the short man with the brown-gray hair and a full beard smile one last time before he turned and entered the airport. This gentleman was basically harmless in our small bar here in Kildare, but what was Jack's cousin thinking inviting Miles O'Brien to his bar in Chicago. "I sure hope Brien Kelley is ready for Miles O'Brien. I fear he will be a lot of trouble," replied the bartender.

At 7:45 p.m. Central Time, Miles had collected his luggage in Terminal 5 at O'Hare and arranged an Uber to take him to the Holiday Inn River North, his temporary home for the next few days. After getting settled in and stopping by the hotel restaurant for a quick meal, he headed to Brien Kelley's bar to introduce himself. Miles saw the resemblance to Jack Kelley instantly and went to meet his new bartender.

"Miles O'Brien I presume. My cousin Jack sent me a picture of his favorite barfly and told me to expect you sometime tonight," Brien said. Miles tipped his gray hat and said, "Aye, Brien I am Miles O'Brien local and now international barfly. So, when do they do the greening of the river around here?"

Brien responded, "I saw the city plans on it tomorrow morning at 8:00 a.m. My bar is one of the sponsors and I can get you a V.I.P. seating near the action if you like free of charge. The parade is scheduled on Friday morning at 10:00 a.m. on St. Patrick's Day."

"8 o'clock and 10 o'clock sounds a little early for my tastes, but I want to win that bet against your cousin, Jack so I will be there. I will of course spend time at your pub and would like to check out the other Irish pubs and bars in the area," replied Miles.

Brien gave him the addresses and names of the other Irish pubs here on the Northside as well as some drink and eating specials he knew about. He asked him, "When should I expect you to come by tomorrow? Around noon when my early bird specials start?"

Miles laughed and responded, "Aye, Brien your cousin's stories about me hold true. I will see you then."

The next morning, Miles woke up early and used some of his magic to make his clothes more festive to match all the other Chicagoans as they watched the river turn a very emerald green. Now he looked as most leprechauns do with the green suit and green bowler hat and the black boots with large golden buckles on them. He was repeatedly complimented on his "Irish" attire and many people asked to take selfies with him. They never suspected him to actually be a real leprechaun.

After watching the greening of the river, Miles made an appearance at Brien's bar and enjoyed himself until closing time. The next day he watched the parade with all the Irish music and dancing and then afterwards made his way to the first of the three pubs that Brien had recommended namely, Fado Irish Pub. The food and the atmosphere were great until he was challenged to a drinking contest by some really stocky, white gentleman. Miles was not the only little person in the bar. There was a group of midgets whom Miles thought might be leprechauns, but they dressed too much like Americans do on St. Patty's Day to actually be leprechauns. Miles responded to the challenge by saying, "Drink what you like, drink what you are able...If you are drinking with me, you'll be drinking under the table." The midgets cheered him on as he proceeded to put the gentleman in his place.

With the victory in Fado's, Miles went on to the next bar called O'Callahan's Pub and took part in another drinking contest but this one was sponsored by the bar itself. The midgets from the first bar had continued to follow him and were now glorified heralds proclaiming the greatness and the fortitude of Miles O'Brien. Miles used his magic to stave off the effects of the alcohol because, he felt that he could not let down his adoring public. He then repeated his performance in the last bar, Kerryman's Shamrock Club before returning to his room at the Holiday Inn to sleep it off.

###