

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
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June 2021 selection – Bus

A Tale of the Three Witches
By Megan Moe

Once upon a time, there lived three witches deep in the forest. It was a green and scary moon on the day that the three witches were born. They all had raven colored hair and unusual colored eyes. Gothel's eyes were gray, Primrose's eyes were a sharp color of jade and, Hazel had deep violet eyes. Gothel the oldest followed by Primrose and Hazel. They all had different powers. Gothel had the power of super speed, Primrose had the power of invisibility and Hazel had the power of silence on people and animals.

The three witches lived in a cottage deep within the forest. As they grew, they sought to cause more mischief in the world. As teenagers, they stole a school "*bus*" from a near village and used it to run over grave markers in an old, unkempt graveyard.

When they reached their early twenties, they made their way from their deep forest just outside of South Hampton, England to the city proper. There they found out about a giant boat called the Titanic. This was a perfect opportunity for more mischief. They did not care that the final destination was going across the pond to New York City. They took advantage of their powers to steal enough money to buy three first class tickets on its maiden voyage. Gothel and her sisters entered the ship. They saw decorations, stuffed bears and elegant circles on the both ceilings and the floors.

As the boat left port, the three witches looked for every opportunity to sabotage people and eventually turned their attention to the ship itself. The course of the ship had passed near a few icebergs but the attentive crew had guided them away from any danger. Gothel suggested that Primrose use her power to make another iceberg invisible along the ship's path. The night when they decided to do it, the dense fog had done the job for them. The Titanic struck into the unseen iceberg and the damage caused the ship to start sinking. Unlike the other passengers, the two sisters clung to Gothel as she used her super speed to carry them away from the sinking ship and in the direction of New York City.

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Reprieve **By Val Collins**

She did not take the bus.

She preferred the walk. How else could she immerse herself in nature's beauty- blessings? For on this walk she would peer into gardens big and small and linger awhile to drink in the tranquility. The vibrancy of colors dazzling both eye and soul touched pleasure points that was beyond description. The many hues of green displayed themselves in the array of leafy plants and exuded an atmosphere of calm and peace. Here and there the water sprinklers and well-placed fountains dazzled as their droplets hit the sun rays resulting in bright sparkles of dancing diamonds. The smell of freshly overturned earth mixed with the sweet fragrance of rose and alyssum was caught in the gentle breezes and soothed the senses. She observed the many garden spaces in their varied structures and wondered how she could adapt some features into her own. Such was the pleasure of this walk.

She did not take the bus.

She preferred to linger as she strolled, suddenly finding herself where she was meant to be... in parks and forests immersed in nature's space. Bird song filled the air with melodic calls one winged soul to another. Unseen creatures buzzed and hummed as they happily went about their day. Again, gentle breezes floated through air cooling and caressing those fortunate enough to be in the way of such welcome pleasure. Except for delightful nature noises all was quiet and tranquility filled the space. The rabbits and squirrels and occasional chipmunks scurried or meandered through brush and field looking for delectable tidbits upon which to feast for cold winter days void of nourishment were a near forgotten memory. Food was now plentiful and there for the taking. Bellies full they romped and chased and frolicked in a lively carefree manner oblivious to watchful eyes. Such was the pleasure of this walk.

She did not take the bus.

She preferred to sit on a bench watching, observing taking in her surroundings. The people passing by some strolling some hurrying some jogging some walking hand in hand with partners some keeping up with children were all part of an evolving scene. What were their stories, where

were they going? It was a movie for the imagination. The children were of particular interest. They are so new to the world. Everything is a wonder in the eyes of the young. They see the details. They look for the details. They delight in the details. Energy abounds and is almost contagious. Their carefree delight in just existing and their wonder in the world is a pleasure to behold. This floods memory spaces of her own youth and childhood. Could it be so long ago that she was one of these exuberant creatures? The innocence and honesty of the young is intoxicating and she drinks in the experience. Such was the pleasure of this walk.

She did not take the bus. Tomorrow she will. Duty and responsibilities, promises that must be kept, life in its whirlwind pace will continue. She will return to routine and pick up where she left off. Time is of the essence and every minute is accounted for. Keep up the rhythm lest the score veers out of step, the symphony collapses.

But today... she did not take the bus.

###

Waiting for a Bus By Pauline Bastek

Remember Dunning? If you grew up on the far Northwest side of Chicago you will remember it not as the neighborhood around Irving Park and Narraganset but as the looney bin or the crazy house. before we were taught to be politically correct, PC. The red brick buildings were behind a black wrought iron fence and on nice days you could see the few inmates walking around. Your parents would have told you that they were crazy and not to pay any attention to them.

On a nice summer day, my Aunt Christina was standing and waiting or a bus on the corner of Irving Park Road and Oak Park Avenue, trying to ignore a Dunning inmate who had walked over to the fence and asked her if she was waiting for a bus. She didn't answer him but he continued speaking, telling her that the bus stops across the street from where she was standing. She just ignored him after all he was crazy, wasn't he or he wouldn't be behind bars.

Eventually, a bus came and stopped, guess where, across the street from where she was standing, discharged a passenger and drove on before she could cross the street. The inmate called to her as she was crossing the street, "I told you the bus stopped across the street."

She crossed the street and ignored him as she waited embarrassed that a crazy man was right. At that moment, she decided never to assume who someone was because of their circumstances. She often shared this story with us and we all agreed that society is far more respectful of people and their rights these days.

We can be so smug and self-righteous and then a story hits you as the Britney Spears story did. For thirteen years she was capable of earning millions while in legal conservatorship benefiting others but did not have the right to have an I.U.D. removed.

The Dunning inmate was incarcerated behind wrought iron bars but Britney Spears was incarcerated behind the walls of the justice system and remains as much a prisoner as did the Dunning inmates of the fifties.

Yes, Aunt Christina, you were so right when you said that there are probably more crazies outside Dunning than inside, probably the ones who put them there.

###

Hop on the Bus, Gus!

By Carol Karvon

The word "bus" can bring back unpleasant memories of past days for me, if I let it.

There were the days I traveled by bus several hours a day to get to work and back home.

There was an instance when I witnessed a team of pickpockets targeting people getting off the bus at the back door and other passengers alerting everyone to watch their purses or wallets.

There was the day when my daughter and I were travelling to a Christmas time performance of "The Nutcracker" and shots were fired at our bus from the street. Seems an angry former boyfriend of one of the girls on the bus decided she belonged to him and if he couldn't have her, she was better off dead, so nobody else would have her either. We all ended up ducking down to the floor and thanking God no one was killed that day.

Our bus driver had to wait for the police to take his statement, but the rest of us were free to continue to our destinations on a substitute bus provided by CTA. We had some trepidation of getting on another bus to come home after the performance, especially it being nighttime by then and ended up hailing a taxi for the ride home.

For these reasons and others, I have made a pact with myself not to ride the bus, ever, if I can help it. If I can't get somewhere by car or foot, I'm not going.

But I realized I could relate the topic of "bus" for our June writers' group meeting to song lyrics that keep going around and around in my brain.

If you've ever been to Disneyland and ridden through the Small World ride, there's a theme song that maddeningly attaches itself to your brain. Once you hear it, you can't help but sing along with the words. You may know the song I mean. It's called, "It's a Small World, After All".

It's frustrating trying to get it out of your head once it's lodged there. It seems to plant itself in your subconscious and take up space there, rent free. You don't even realize you're singing along with this tune. And, at Disneyland the phrase is even repeated in several different language.

The same thing happens to me whenever I hear an old Paul Simon song from the mid to late '70's called, "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover". One of the lines I can't seem to erase from my thoughts is, "Hop on the Bus, Gus". That line is part of the chorus of a fairly long song detailing how to leave your lover, but it's that line that keeps repeating itself over and over and over in my head. For some reason "Hop on the Bus, Gus" just sticks with me of all the many lines in the song.

I printed out the lyrics from my computer and the first line of the song is actually, "The problem is all inside your head, she said to me". How about that! It's in your head alright. You can say that again, at least it gets into my head.

The Paul Simon song has 60 plus lines of lyrics. I can't help recognizing the creative talent of Paul Simon just reading these very interesting and clever lyrics. I think I read somewhere that he composed this song after or during divorce proceedings from one of his wives. I'm not sure how this song relates to their divorce, or if it even does. Maybe it was just meant to occupy his thoughts and time and distract him during one of life's most difficult periods for anyone.

On the other hand, the Small World song has only about six unique lines of lyrics and ten lines of the "small world" refrain. No wonder it sticks with me. It haunts me.

I think anyone who has ever been to Disneyland and ridden the Small World ride will probably come out of there humming or singing the Small World theme without even being aware of what they're doing. I know I have every time I've been there. When I became aware of what I was doing, I've had to make a conscious effort to cleanse my thoughts of this addictive song.

It's been many years since I visited Southern California and Disneyland, but even to this day, I can still visualize the three-dimensional multi-cultural animated mannequins you pass during the journey through the small world ride. They're dressed in their native costumes and represent the many different cultures that are part of our shrinking world. And, they are in harmony with each other. Food for thought! Just a smidgen of moralizing here.

###

Busing Tables By N. Stewart

The busboy cleared the table, removing all the leftover glasses, silverware, and used napkins. He then cleaned the table top, putting the salt and pepper shakers back and new silverware and a crisp napkin down. I pulled out a chair and sat down at the table. There was nothing of interest on the menu and I quickly settled on a hamburger and fries, ordering with the server. I now had time to sit back and people watch. When traveling for business, it can be lonely, sitting at a table for one at dinner time and watching gives me something to do beside playing with the silverware. I caught motion near me.

It was the same busboy, cleaning off the table next to me. He looked to be about 15 but I can't tell ages of young people so he may be older. His blonde hair was neatly cropped in a pony tail, he was clean shaven with large dark eyes that sparkled. He glanced over at me, probably sensing that I was watching him. Catching his eye, I asked him about high school; was he able to attend in-person classes or was he still only working from the Internet. He said he was in his last year of college before going on to get his advanced degree in biomedical engineering and, yes, he was working from the Internet but hoped to be on campus soon.

I've spoken with many adults about the impacts with the COVID restrictions but never to a young person directly. As he continued to work clearing trash from the table, he said he had his career planned out when he entered UW and steadily worked toward it. He said he wanted to design devices and equipment that would replace body parts that wore out or were damaged from war or accident. His uncle toured in Afghanistan and came back whole but some of his Army brothers didn't. His uncle volunteered at the VA, helping those with the greatest needs and took him along. He said how hard the patients worked to overcome their handicaps, and how amazing it was to see all the specially designed equipment and devices that were used to assist the patients that had lost part of themselves. He said he always wanted to be an engineer, but now he was certain what kind of engineer he would be.

Then, last year, he continued as he worked cleaning the table, everything changed, there was no control over education. He couldn't work his internship with the doctors at the VA hospital and wasn't able to get first-hand experience on specialized treatments for wounds and healing or on the mechanics of the unique devices used as body part replacements. Classes were suspended, learning and interaction with others was curtailed. He said he found himself floundering from boredom, starting to get lazy and surprisingly he started giving up on his life-long dream. He nodded and excused himself, moving to a different table to clear. He was young, I thought, and had many years and opportunities ahead of him, making this set-back merely a momentary blip. Perhaps, he had drifted a little off course but certainly he had the will to salvage his dream. He needed to take a breath and maybe busing tables was it.

I continued to watch how methodically he did his tasks. They were precision-like movements as an engineer would use to go about finding a solution to a problem. The glasses were lined up, the plates together by size, the silverware at the end of the tray, everything balanced. Off he went, coming back to clean the table top and set up for the next customers. He seemed content enough, smiling at the customers and occasionally stopping briefly to chat. It was obvious to me that he hadn't lost his desire to assist people.

I finished my meal and he came over to remove the used dishes. I wished him well in school, asked to shake his hand, saying that we needed more young people like him that have the desire to care for others. He extended his hand and I took hold, slipping him a twenty as I did. He looked at me to refuse, but I motioned that it was something I wanted to do for him, to recognize how special he was. I left the restaurant, feeling a little better about the day.

###

False Friends and True By Vicki Elberfeld

What distinguishes false friends from true has nothing to do with loyalty, for at this moment I am talking about languages. My father, a lifelong student of languages, first alerted me to this phenomenon in relation to Spanish (and to French, German, and Sanskrit...you name it). False friends are those words which sound very much like English words yet have entirely different meanings. For example, when I first saw the Spanish word, *embarazado*, I was happy about its similarity to embarrassed. It's a good thing I looked it up prior to attempting to use it, as it means pregnant, or I might have used it entirely inappropriately. A female acquaintance might be complaining about her recent weight gain. Telling her not to be pregnant certainly wouldn't help matters.

Currently the language I am attempting to learn is German. Or perhaps I should say re-attempting to learn. I studied it in college, but once I completed my general language requirement, I ceased studying this rather tricky language. I loved the essay entitled "The Awful German Language," in which Mark Twain notes that "In German a young lady has no sex, while a turnip has. Think what overwrought reverence that shows for the turnip and what callous disrespect for the girl" and he continues with a model dialogue:

"Gretchen, 'Wilhelm, where is the turnip?'

Wilhelm, 'She has gone into the kitchen.'

Gretchen, 'Where is the beautiful and accomplished English maiden?'

Wilhelm, 'It has gone into the dining room.'"

You might be excited to hear you'll receive some Gift from Germany until you learn that Gift is the German word for poison.

Don't assume you need to put a *Präservativ* in the jam you are making. The word you want is *Konservierungsmittel*. *Präservativ* is the German word for condom.

Likewise, if I tell you *Nimm meinen Rat nicht an*, I am not suggesting you refrain from stealing my rat, pet or otherwise. I am simply warning you not to take my *Rat* which is German for advice.

And if you learn you've inherited *eine Billion Dollar* be even more delighted to learn that *Billion* in German means trillion in English.

On the other hand you'll find in German a sufficiently long list of an English speaker's true friends to never be lonely, and don't forget to capitalize the first letters of your German nouns as *bus* is *Bus*, *auto* is *Auto*, *arm* and *hand* are *Arm* und *Hand*, and *house* and *mouse* are *Haus* und *Maus*, *computer* is most certainly *Computer*, and of course, Americans and Germans love their concerts and *Konzerts* respectively.

Also, *Viel Glück beim Sprachenlernen* or good luck learning a language!

High School Bus Tour **By Jeremy Tibus**

The years on the bus went round and round. It was my main source of transportation from the beginning of high school until after my first semester of college. When first learning about the bus I had to learn that sometimes the one on the street you were on was routed a certain way and sometimes not the way you wanted to go. A typical day of high school started with a bus ride down Addison Street to Lane Tech and ended with a trip back to Nagle. During my high school years, I also took the CTA and Metra trains. After school programs were near the loop which meant I took the brown line from Addison. When I was going to my best friends on the weekends, I took the Metra to Roselle. Those years went by so fast. I remember going to Freshman year and the Division teacher said high school would pass very fast and he was right. I graduated twenty years ago this Spring. Now as an adult I take the car wherever I go. Getting back on the bus a few years ago was rather nostalgic. Having to be part of a group getting on and off at random stops. I probably will not take the CTA again for a while but when I do, I am sure my high school years will be on my mind.

###

The Tale of the Spider Bite **By Mark Moe**

In September 2018, an AP Biology class from Midtown School of Science and Technology visited Oscorp Genetics Lab to learn about their groundbreaking work in genetic modification using spiders. They had created a new breed of spider that has: webs with the tensile strength of steel, the ability to jump great distances, intuitive “danger” sense and three times the strength of a standard spider. The lab currently has four of these spiders with different scientists focusing on the separate aspects. Unbeknownst to the researcher who was given the task of giving a tour of their facility to a bunch of high school students, one of them had escaped.

It almost landed on this nerdy, weak-looking photographer with brown hair and glasses, but someone sneezed and it landed on this ruby red, long haired attractive girl named Mary Jane Watson. The spider landed on her leg and promptly bit her. As she brushed it off her leg, she thought to herself, “I wish I could have worn jeans today, but not today because of my school’s dress up policy for all field trips. Now I get bit by some random spider. I hope I am not going to get an allergic reaction from it. I guess I will find out tomorrow. Note to self, take some Benadryl when I get home just in case.”

After the tour and the very informative lecture from Norman Osborn the CEO of Oscorp, Mary Jane and the rest of her class boarded the “*bus*” back to school. She was unable to take a better look at the spider bite again because of the skirt. She also did not want to put on a show for all the guys in her class. Those pictures would be viral in under a half-an-hour. Then she would have to listen to another lecture from her mother about how embarrassing this was to her mother and how Mary Jane was going to end up ruining her chances to get into an Ivy league

school for college. She did not need that with everything going on right now. From her AP classes, to her extracurricular activities and trying to have a social life, she was always responsible despite her mother's perceptions of her daughter.

Flash Thompson the school's quarterback had just asked her to go with him to the Homecoming Dance. She was personally elated, but her mom would prefer someone like her close friend and next-door neighbor, Peter Parker. Peter was a very nice guy great at science, a wizard photographer and a master of technology, but he was far from attractive. He always seemed at a loss for words around her although, MJ was always nice to him and would never do anything to hurt their friendship. Flash on the other hand was athletically built and handsome. He was charming and successful in everything at least related to Football and was working to succeed academically. He wanted to be the next Tom Brady. MJ could live with being with someone like that, but she was getting ahead of herself because, it was just one date to a Homecoming Dance. He was probably just asking her as a thank you for helping him study in his classes. More importantly, the beautiful, blonde bombshell Gwen Stacy who was usually attached to him constantly, was out of town because of a family event.

She had to put this conversation on the back burner until she could convince her mother it was a good idea. She still had two weeks anyway until the Homecoming Dance which was plenty of time. When her day was finally done, she finally had the chance to look at the spider bite in the shower on the back part of her right leg just above the knee. Two little indentations were left by the creature and no sign of swelling as of yet. She finished her shower and after spending some time to review for her tests, she went to sleep.

MJ woke up the next morning feeling like she had the best sleep of her life. As she laid out her clothes for today and removed her pajamas, she was shocked at her appearance. She was fairly fit because she made time to work out, but she never had this much muscle tone and definition as she did now. Her stomach now has a well-defined six pack and her arms and legs were notably more toned. Even her butt was now hard. "At least I will have an easy time in P.E. later on today. I feel like I could run a marathon and not get tired," MJ said aloud to herself. She quickly finished getting dressed and went downstairs for breakfast.

Later on, when she changed for P.E., she discovered another ability besides the increased physical strength. Normally when her class played Dodgeball it was one of her least favorite activities mostly because she was never that good at the game. Also, the girls in her class were mostly on the Softball team and any number of them were quick to get all the non-Softball players out first. "Not today! It is like I have I heightened senses and super human reflexes. I also seem to have a "danger" sense about the incoming projectiles thrown at me. They cannot touch me and I have gotten them all out!" thought MJ. "I wonder what else I can do."

On her walk home from school, she always passed by several tall brick buildings and something intuitive inside her suggested that she should try to climb it. "Okay this sounds weird, but why not," said MJ to no one in particular. She went in the alley between two buildings and reached out with her hands toward the wall. As her hands touched the wall, she could sense and find crevices where she can pull herself up. With increasing speed and improved agility, she found herself at the top of the building in under a minute.

Another intuitive thought came to her and she took her two middle fingers on her right hand and pressed into her palm while moving her wrist back as far as she could. A stream of

webbing shot out and attached itself to another building across the way. “This is so cool!” exclaimed MJ as she started to swing to the next building. She almost crashed into the wall, but that “sense” from earlier kicked in and she found herself jumping and swinging to the next building. Normally, her commute from school to her house took about twenty minutes, but today she made it home in under ten minutes.

When she got home, there were two police cars in front of Peter Parker’s house. MJ knew that Peter lived with his Aunt May and Uncle Ben. They were both very sweet and nice to everyone. MJ loved them like her own grandparents and was shocked to find out that some lowlife car jacker had killed Uncle Ben as he was on his way home from his library job. “If I had been there, I know that I could have saved Uncle Ben with these super powers,” said MJ to herself. “That does it! I do not know how yet, but I am going to become a super hero!” exclaimed MJ. The next day, Mary Jane decided to let Peter in on her secret super powers. She felt that she owed it to Peter and he was really talented at creating artistic, digital drawings. Hopefully, he would help her design a superheroine costume that would both help her keep a secret identity and take advantage of her super abilities.

After his initial shock from learning her secret and a quick web-slinging tour around the neighborhood, Peter quickly made his first design for her costume. The colors seemed off to MJ because they were pink with a gray accents and silver webbing lines like a spider. She liked the idea of using the webbing throughout the costume, but suggested he change it to primarily red with blue accents and a spider symbol in silver in the center of her chest. She felt she also needed something to help filter her heightened eyesight by creating a special micro-mesh coverings as part of her mask. After a couple of days of their combined hard work, MJ had her new suit and it felt great. She started to get use to swinging around New York City and looking for crimes to stop. “I could get used to this,” said MJ to herself as she swung from top of one building to another.

This just in from the Daily Bugle, New York City has seen multiple sightings of a female masked vigilante wearing a red and blue suit with a spider symbol on it stopping crimes all over the city! We are offering a large monetary award for pictures of her vigilante tactics!

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