

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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August 2021 selection – Firestorm

Patsy's Own Firestorm
By Carol Karvon

Patsy always thought of herself as a reasonable person. For most of her life, she was a content and positive woman. People would ask her what her secret was. She seemed to cope well with anything life handed her. She lived her life on an even keel and was a tolerant person, never quick to anger and always willing to see another's viewpoint.

Lately, she felt anything but reasonable. She was even beginning to have doubts about her own sanity and it was very troublesome to her. Many nights even her sleep was affected. That was a new wrinkle in her life. No matter what had happened in her day, she had always been able to put that aside and relax in the comfort of her own home.

Up to now, she had enjoyed her home life. She considered a peaceful home at the end of the day, her reward for having survived another day in the corporate jungle she went to eight hours a day, five days a week. Not that she didn't like her job, she did, but some days were more difficult than others. Most days, she used to feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day. Those days were getting farther and farther apart.

Now there seemed to be a firestorm brewing in her brain. There was so much negativity in the world and it was affecting her thinking. You couldn't turn on the TV or radio, or even go on the internet without some reminder of man's inhumanity to man. There seemed to be no end

to the daily bad news. Oh, every once in a while, someone would report something good that one person or a group had done. And, the sad thing was, that instead of that being a common occurrence, it was so rare, it rated a special mention on the news. It would be wonderful, if it were the other way around – lots of good news and only an occasional smidgeon of bad.

A raging controversy was taking place in the world and sometimes in her life. She didn't like it one iota. It made her uncomfortable and she wanted it to stop. But she wasn't sure she knew how to change things or even just cope for her own survival. Sometimes she thought things in the world had tilted so much out of kilter, she didn't know if normalcy, as she thought of it, would ever return.

Life used to be so simple. You grew up, hopefully in a loving environment with a supportive family beside you. Maybe you got married, maybe you chose the single life. Maybe you traded off a marriage and family for travel and adventure. You probably got a job and spent many years at it. Maybe you retired and took up a hobby, or maybe you embarked on a second career. You had options. Perhaps this was boring to some people, but to Patsy it was pretty simple and straightforward. You had a good idea of what to expect out of life.

People used to be responsible for their behavior and actions. Now some of those same people felt empowered to do whatever they wanted in the cause of their own personal freedom and possibly at the expense of others. Patsy felt it just wasn't fair. But she was only one person. What could she do? The more she worried about it the more her own personal firestorm raged.

Nowadays, everything seemed to be a raging controversy. Even the smallest matters were thrown way out of proportion. For everything someone wanted, someone else felt bound to protest or demonstrate against it. At times it seemed people protested just to get attention or make a reputation for themselves. Sometimes a protest was over something so trivial, Patsy had to wonder why they even bothered. Surely, the time and money spent could be put to better use.

Some days, Patsy wanted to stay in bed and cover her head with a blanket. This was a new feeling for her. She always felt capable of handling anything that came her way and actually welcomed a challenge. Now there were days when she felt overwhelmed. Things were changing and she wasn't ready for the changing times. Some people might call her a "dinosaur", but she didn't care. In a few more years she'd be able to join that group called "retirees" and her time would be her own. She prayed some semblance of normalcy remained out there.

Maybe she'd retire to a remote island with no news, only her dog, books and music as her companions and leave the rest of the world behind.

Or, maybe she'd become an eccentric artist living off the land. It was something to think about. She had time. First, she had to survive the firestorm.

###

Season of Rage
By Carol Hauswald

The edges of leaves discolor, then dry out
Be the wind whips through like a poisonous snake
Through every cell and pulsating nerve.

Fires of anger are white hot heat
Spasms of outrage that consume
the path I walk on.

My backpack is heavy
But, if I can get to the other side
I can pinch the flames
Before they spread.

###

“Bigger Trouble in Little China”
By Mark Moe

Thirty-five years ago, the Chinatown section of San Francisco broke out into the all-out turf war between the Chan Xings and the Wing Kong. At least that was seen on the surface streets. Below the streets, a true, supernatural, *“firestorm”* was going on between the small band of warriors of Egg Shan and the dark army of the evil sorcerer, David Lopan. Evidence of the subterranean conflict was seen in the streets above, but no normal person believed it. Reports of large streams of bright, green flames shot up through many of the sewer man holes in Chinatown. The mayor and city officials downplayed this claiming some kind of chemical dumped into the sewer system along with a large gas leak that ignited as the cause of the eerie fire show.

Egg Shan and his allies knew otherwise because, the flames happened as a result of a last-ditch effort from the defeated and dying Lopan to take out everyone with him both friend and foe alike. He did succeed in killing most of his own force, but Egg Shan and most of his closest warriors had mostly escaped unsinged in the cab section of Jack Burton’s diesel Mackliner truck called, “The Porkchop Express” as it plowed out of a closed green wooden garage in Lopan Industries.

After thirty-five years, Lopan Industries remains a vacant and broken complex because, no one who knew of David Lopan wants anything to do with his buildings or the man himself. The interior of the complex including the secret levels leading to the Underworld were not completely destroyed or magically sealed off. Low level minions have been able to get through and have been working to repair the tunnels used by Lopan and his army. They were assigned the task almost immediately after Lopan’s death. They also sought to remove the magically sealed areas that the sorcerer Egg Shan created before he went to battle Lopan. In some cases, the minions had to dig out new tunnels around the magic seals because, they lacked the power to

remove Egg Shan's magic. When the minions' master, King Yan arrives, those magic seals will vanish in an instant. Thankfully for the minions' sake, King Yan is a very patient being. Perhaps that is because he has been around for over ten thousand years.

Finally, his messengers informed him of the completed repairs and he gathered his most trusted demon fiends to plan for a new assault on the world above. He stroked his long, jet-black beard as he thought about how his former servant David Lopan had been forced to serve him. The First Sovereign Emperor, a being of both the supernatural and natural realms subjugated Lopan to live without flesh and bones as a part of a curse. So naturally, Lopan would also have to serve the needs of the King Yan until he could end his undead, dream-like condition.

"What a pity he could not survive longer. I had such plans to expand the Underworld into other major cities in the next few years. It would have been glorious! Oh well, what is that expression I have heard the people of Earth say, "You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs," King Yan exclaimed.

###

The Witch from Little Witch Academia By Megan Moe

Hi! I am Akko from the Little Witch Academia. I am new to this school. I don't know how to use my magic with my wand. I work very hard learning magic, but I cannot hardly fly my broom. These are my friends, Sucy and Lotte. Sucy is the creepiest girl I know with an obsession of collecting poisonous mushrooms. Lotte comes from a family of magical potion creators who have a shop in a nearby village. She is also the biggest nerd I know. They are not only my friends they are also my roommates in the dormitory.

The best student in our school is Diana Cavendish. She knows every spell and she never messed up like me. She has long, blonde hair with tea green highlights and bright blue eyes. I consider her my rival, but she is sassy and comes across as snobby as well. My next test coming up is in magic spell casting with Professor Ursula. She told us that it would cover basic elemental casting. I want to really one up Diana and I am actually going to the library to look for a spell that will put Diana's demonstration to shame.

When I asked the librarian to direct me to a book of advanced elemental spells, she refused. She said, "Akko, you are not powerful enough to do these spells. Why don't you stick to spells like "Spark" or "Drip?" I got really frustrated and angry at her. When she went to help another student, I ran off with the advanced spell book. I will show her and especially I will prove to Diana that I do belong in this school.

When I got back to my dorm, I started to tear through the pages and found the perfect spell, "**firestorm.**" I worked hard to learn the words to the spell and get the casting components. The day of the test, Diana went first. She used her wand to cast a complex miniature tornado made up of fire, water and air elements. Professor Ursula had me go last because she wanted to

make sure that the other students finish their demonstrations before I blow everyone away with my great spell.

As my turn came up, I reread the spell one last time to make sure that I say the right words. I took a deep breath and held up my wand to cast the spell, but just as I was about to say the words, Diana interrupted me. “Wait! What spell are you about to cast? I can say that for the safety of everyone in here, a surprise may not be the best idea considering how you struggle with spell casting,” she explained. “I am going to cast a fire spell, Diana.” “Which one are you casting?” Diana asked with a very concerned look on her face. “A mini firestorm spell,” I replied. “That is a very dangerous spell to cast indoors Akko, especially since the school is only fire resistant in the larger auditoriums!” exclaimed Diana. Professor Ursula agreed and immediately cast a wall shield spell around the front and sides of the room. “There now she can show us how hard she has worked to learn an advanced spell. This shield should contain the blast, if it ends up being one,” stated Professor Ursula.

I closed my eyes and went back to concentrate for another moment. I could feel the energy from the shield spell forming near where I was standing. When I felt ready, I opened my eyes to see a complete pulsing, green energy wall in front of me and my classmates and professor on the other side. I held up my wand and said the words, “Fiori, Igniculus-Firaga!” A small flame combined with activating components and quickly expanded in size. Just as I was about to celebrate, I lost concentration on keeping it small and it got huge very quickly. I forgot about the wall shield and started to panic. “Oh, no! What do I do? What do I do?” I screamed. The proceeding blast roasted the test area around me and the shockwave after it crashed and broke the energy shield. All of my classmates were stunned, but otherwise not hurt. The shockwave managed to shatter all the windows in the classroom as well. When I looked over to see how Professor Ursula had fared, she too was stunned. She responded, “Honestly, I thought your attempt would fail out. I did not use the stronger version of the spell wall. I wish I had. Well now you can help me restore all these windows using Restoration magic, Akko.” “Yes, Professor Ursula,” I responded.

###

Fire/Storm
By Pauline Bastek

December 1, 1958 and I was home with my 5-month-old son, looking out the window to see if it was going to storm or if I could bundle him up to go next door by my friend, Pat, for a coffee with her and her soon-to-be year-old son, when the phone rang.

I waited for the three rings as we were on a party line, still waiting for a private line and the neighbor at the end of the block had a tendency to pick up on the first ring and then hang up if the call wasn't for her. Well, it kept ringing so thinking it must be my lucky day and Mrs. M was having her cocktail hour early. I answered it. I heard my cousin Lou on the line shouting that

my Godson, Gary, who had just that summer turned ten, was missing and that the school he was attending, Our Lady of Angles, was on fire. She told me to turn on the TV and I would see for myself. I remember saying that I had heard on the radio earlier that we might be getting a storm, she shouted, “Yes, a firestorm.” She was right I found out as I turned on the TV and the radio

I went back to the phone telling her that it was almost three and the kids would be getting out for the day. Let’s hope so, she said but it doesn’t look good. And it wasn’t good.

Gary was one of the lucky ones but he still rarely talks about the day. He had found himself outside and walked home to the two-flat on Avers where they lived and the landlady who lived on the first floor took him in. She wasn’t aware of what was going on until his father who was a mailman and had finished his routes and had been looking for him stopped off home to call his wife at work. The days that followed, we still don’t care to talk about it and not too much later, Gary’s parents bought a home out North in Skokie. Like so many others in the area they tried to get as far away from the scene as they could. Some things though stay with you and when I hear firestorm, I just think of the December day when I was concerned about the possibility of a storm only to find myself facing the horror of that fire on December 1, 1958.

###

Firestorm Within **By N. Stewart**

It started as but an ember covered by the news that I didn’t pay much attention to early in that year. It was a blurb and not much more. A few months later, I started to listen to what was being said and it seemed to be a made-for-TV life-ending movie plot unfolding. All were asked to cover their mouth and nose by wearing a protective mask for two weeks, saving us from contracting an unknown virus that had escaped from the animal world and transferred to humans in a deadly form. It was a polite request and then two additional weeks of masking were added to the request and also limiting the distance between people to no less than six feet.

The ember flamed a little at the prospect of staying in our homes, not going to work, not going to school, not socializing with anyone outside the immediate family, not going to church or other religious affiliations, not visiting a loved family member in a hospital or in nursing home and not being allowed to say a final goodbye to a loved one. But, for the good of all, we carried it out. Then came the declaration to obey, no longer a polite request. Wear a mask even at home with each other. All must stay at home except for those needed on the front line or deemed essential. No in-person or personal care visits of any kind. No traveling anywhere and if travel was a necessity, then a 14 days mandated quarantine was a must upon return. Personal conversations revolved around the novel virus. We asked each other: Are you sick? Do you have a cough? Do you have a fever? How is your sense of smell?

Given the uncertainty of the situation, food, cleaning merchandise, and paper products especially toilet paper became in short supply or non-existent as people, looking out for themselves stocked up or hoarded supplies for whatever the next unknown, unfathomable

coming event might be. Arguments could be heard in the store over not wearing a mask or loading the cart too full with products others were seeking. If brave enough to go to the store, we shirked upon seeing another there and saw them, but not ourselves, as monsters, as evil people, spreading the virus that would not only make us sick but would kill us. Fear mounted with every passing day and the flame caught hold and burned brightly.

Rumors and unsubstantiated so-called truths flooded conversations with things like what do we do, what do we think, what do we believe in, what would keep us safe from the evil virus. Sanitize, sanitize, sanitize became the motto. Wash hands, wash face, wash store bought products, and leave the mail untouched for days then open it using gloves. We did all of it to protect ourselves and our family from getting the virus and from dying. Yet, the virus had its way and ran its own course. We sat inside, looking out as the flames of the unknown became bigger and bigger.

Phases of reentry into our world were set and administered based, perhaps, on a hunch rather than on verifiable scientific evidence. Data on COVID deaths smacked us every day in the face. Sometimes informative data seemed manipulated and, in some cases, missing all together. Slowly, ever so slowly we were allowed to gain some sense of freedom and return somewhat to a normal life. The restaurants, hair salons and barber shops were opened, fitness and yoga classes started up again albeit with many restrictions imposed on all. Schools remained closed except for on-line learning. The flame settled back down.

But then, the wind picked up and the flame swelled again with the fall “surge” and once more we were locked down and told to stay home, wear a mask in and out, and social distance. Restaurants closed. Small businesses closed a second time some never to reopen. No family get togethers for Thanksgiving and for the Christmas holidays. Winter came upon us as the wind continued to stoke the flame and the heat rose.

Spring and the COVID 19 vaccine arrived with many taking advantage, reducing the level of the firestorm as restrictions on personal freedom were again lifted. That lasted but a short time when the wind gusted anew, the flames rose and another variant of the virus arrived. As before, we were asked again to curtail our activities even for those that have been administered the life-saving vaccine. Wear a mask. Practice social distancing. Restrict indoor activities. Never mind the science, the facts, and the gained knowledge from the virus itself. Don't ask questions, do it for the good of all.

I listened and thankfully lived through all of it and now question whether this is the way to continue treating this virus or any other that evolves and travels around the earth for untold years to come. Do we need to destroy more lives or relationships, to keep loved ones apart, to delay our children from attending school, to make us live fearful lives in an attempt to control the uncontrollable and to avoid the inevitable? When will this current firestorm be extinguished and when will normal life return?

###

Brain Storm Versus Firestorm
By Jeremy Tibus

Brain storm the spark of creativity.
Firestorm the blaze of insanity.

Coming up with ideas and sketching them out,
Bursting with delusion from a scream to a pout.

Making a piece of drawing or painting.
Mind thinking so fast I started fainting.

Made some money or grade from my art.
The biggest breakdown is just the start.

###

Fire vs. Storm
By Joanna Zelkowska

In silence, noise of the thoughts comes uninvited.
Without asking, opens the door to more questions
Like fire, so brutal absorbs surrounding trying to swallow all belongings
If goes, comes back very shortly,
To burn with more power and no limitation
But then the storm of the words and emotions destroy the flame of stillness abruptly
They cannot exist together or next to each other fire will fight, but storm will destroy it.