

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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September 2021 selection – Colossal

A Day to Remember!
Carol Karvon

“Step right up Ladies and Gents and kids of all ages. Come one, come all. See the colossal, stupendous, amazing show we have for you right inside the blue and white tent behind me. Just buy your tickets at the booth across the road and hand them to me when you go in to see the show. Remember, it's colossal!” So began the circus barker's spiel every year. We almost knew it by heart. We had come to the circus with our parents ever since we were babies.

The combined circus and carnival came to our town every summer between the end of June and the Fourth of July. School was finished for the year so most of us kids hung around the grounds from morning until early evening hoping to see some of the advertised attractions or go on a thrilling, death defying carnival ride. That's how the rides were advertised and we believed

the hype every time. We clutched our money tightly in our hot little hands deciding what to do first.

Our moms dropped us off and went straight to the Bingo tent where they stayed most of the day hoping to win the big jackpot. We stayed near the midway lolling around until our parents came hunting us down and telling us it was supper time. Time to go home.

My best friend was Mary Beth and she was fascinated with everything about the circus. She really thought she was in love with the lion tamer and his big cats. I felt the same way about the trapeze artists. Since most of them were European they seemed very exotic to me. I truly wanted to be one of them and fly across the tent over the net from one place to another. I wanted to soar above the crowd and take a deep bow when they applauded my magnificent feat. The thought I might fall down never occurred to me. I was born to be a flyer, or so I thought back then. The reality was that I was actually frightened of heights, but that was a minor detail.

The year we were twelve, one of the lions escaped its enclosure and scared us all, a lot. One of the animal keepers had accidentally left the cage unlocked. He thought he'd locked it and went to get the lion's raw meat. When he came back, Simba, the lead lion, was gone. He ran around calling him and finally gave up and went to find the lion's keeper to give him the bad news. By now half the circus people who weren't performing joined the hunt for Simba.

Mary Beth and I tried to act cool about it, but were scared silly. We tried to keep up a brave front. Neither one of us wanted to admit we were frightened. We actually went to the Bingo tent to be with our moms. Of course, they thought that was odd and asked us what was going on. We didn't want to tell them the lion was out there roaming around and we were scared. They might decide we all had to go home. It was still too early to go home. We hadn't even gone on a single ride.

Our dads have given each of us enough money for a ride or two, depending on what we chose. The more daring rides that we loved cost more. Sometimes we just went on the cheaper "baby" rides so we could go on more. Other times we got sucked into throwing baseballs at things hoping to win some tacky prize that we just had to have. Of course, hardly anyone ever won. But that didn't stop us from trying. We just knew we would win a doll or Teddy Bear.

A little while later we heard the missing lion had been found. Seems he was lonely and went looking for the other lions. His keeper said he was quite harmless since he was old and practically toothless. His size was the biggest threat to anyone in his path. He could easily knock someone down by swishing his tail and trample them. We were so relieved he had been found. Now we could stay at the fairgrounds and act nonchalantly like we weren't scared.

But that wasn't to be. Our moms were bored playing Bingo and decided it was time to go home. All our pleading and sobbing had no effect on them. They wanted to get away from

there. They still thought the old lion might eat someone if he escaped again. We weren't ready to head out and tried stalling.

"But we haven't even been on one ride. We haven't even thrown one baseball at the milk bottles, or had them guess our ages. We can't leave. Can't we stay a little longer, please, please, pretty please," we pleaded.

The way we whined and complained, you'd have thought someone was torturing us. Our moms were just trying to keep us out of harm's way. Finally, Mary Beth's mom offered a compromise. If we agreed to stop complaining, they'd take us for ice cream sundaes at the local ice cream parlor. That was a no-brainer and we quickly agreed before they could change their minds. When we got to the ice cream place seems lots of other moms had the same idea. There was a crowd waiting there to get seats and have ice cream.

We finally had our ice cream and then couldn't wait to get home and tell our dads all about the lion escaping and how brave we were.

I don't think we went back to the circus the next year. It would have been anticlimactic. How could an escaped lion be topped? Our local newspaper even ran an exclusive article including interviews with local people. If we'd hung around a little longer, we might have been in the newspaper. You just never know. It sure was a grand day we would always remember.

###

One Saturday Afternoon **By N. Stewart**

It all started one Saturday afternoon while we were out in our 16 ft Maximum boat on Delavan Lake. It was a beautiful, sun-filled day just made for a ride around the lake and maybe doing some fishing off shore. Unfortunately, everyone else had a similar idea. Our bay where the boat is docked is a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) protected area and no one is allowed to drive over the "no wake" speed limit so not to disturb the bottom of the lake where fish lay eggs. Boat captains stop their boats just short of the entrance to the bay and sit idly by for hours and hours. As time goes by, the number of boats become larger and larger as they congregate in that same small area. Adults, kids, and their dogs lounge all day on their boats, sun bathing, drinking, playing and floating around in the water to cool off. The bay entrance becomes clogged with boats and inflatable toys. Getting to the main body of water causes us to maneuver around the many boats, people and other obstacles floating in the calm water.

Once on the main body of water, the sailing is good and cruising speed can be reached. The shore line doesn't usually change very much from year to year, but it is interesting to see what changes have been made. New houses are built from where existing houses stood

majestically for 75 years along the shoreline. To go with the new houses, “the bigger the better” boats sit at the docks.

After finding our way through the flotilla of sun worshipers, we hit the open water and opened up the motor to give it a run. Traveling about one third the way up the North shore, we ran into gigantic waves running in all directions at once, creating a whirlpool of sorts. We bounced, rocked, and rolled, watching the bow of the boat dive into the watery unknown. One series of waves would ebb and we would start to move forward again when a huge boat would pass to the right and sent us rocking from side to side while at the same time bobbing up and down. It wasn't any fun that day and certainly wasn't an enjoyable ride around the lake. Along with dodging the waves from the boats, jet skiers in considerable numbers were out jumping the wakes left by the big boats. They are fast and quick, turning in all directions, stirring up the water even more and are not afraid to come close to any boat.

Our Maxim is 30 years old and much has changed in style, size and shape of newer crafts. The boats are taller, faster and sleeker. We had to look up to see people as the boats passed us. Sitting in the boat, felt like we were a kid's little toy boat, floating in a very large bath tub surround by very large toys. Our little boat was out-numbered and out-gunned. Turning, we high-tailed it back to our dock where it was safe.

Snapping the canvas to cover the boat from the weather, I causally mentioned that we needed a new and different type of boat if we were ever going out on that lake again. Perhaps, kiddingly I said we needed a pontoon boat that was bigger and steadier in the water and made for old folks like us. An unconscious reaction was triggered and the next thing we knew we were looking at pontoon boats at the local marina. We found one we thought might work for both cruising and fishing, but decided that was really a silly idea and we didn't need a new boat at this stage of life. The following week, however, we stopped at the marina and asked a few more questions and picked up some brochures to review. The third time, stopping at the marina was the charm and we bought the 20 ft. Manitou pontoon boat for spring 2022 delivery.

Good grief! Was this experience similar to a mid-life crisis where one goes out and buys a cute, little red sports car, hoping to feel young? We're not mid-life by any means but well beyond. Is this our “swan song” or our “last hurrah” before the “final curtain” closes where we can no longer do or want to do these things? Is this an expensive, colossal blunder that we will regret having done in the future? Only time will tell.

###

The Journey to Find Mother By Mark Moe

In an age of interstellar space travel even robots are motivated to explore the stars. One of the most well-known is the one referred to as Demon King Ziggy. Ziggy is also often called the King of the Robots and resided on the entire robot planet called, Granbell. He created a ship that would help him transverse the known galaxy with four special robots which he called the Four Shining Stars to help maximize the powers and abilities of the ship. The ship looked like a

large freighter with a distinctly massive horned head that resembled the head of its creator, Ziggy. While it appeared large on the outside, it was even more “*colossal*” on the inside. He named the ship Eden Zero.

As he traveled, he heard the legend of Mother, the benevolent space goddess and wanted to locate her outside of the known galaxy. It is said if you find her, she will grant you one wish. Many have tried to locate her without any success. He was determined to be the first to find her but along the way, he found a young human boy named, Shiki whom he adopted as his grandson. It was not long after that he decided not to continue his quest for Mother. He took Shiki back with him to live on the planet Granbell. He would instead instill Shiki with the knowledge of his own type of magic, his gravity-based Ether gear. Some of the abilities of the gravity Ether gear allowed Ziggy to increase the density of gravity for both people and objects making it slow down opponents and ships. He could attack with gravity-based martial arts and also go on the opposite end of the spectrum and reduce or eliminate the effects of gravity.

Shiki felt honored and in awe that his grandfather would teach him to use his own Ether gear. “Grandpa Ziggy, that is so cool! I promise to work really hard!” exclaimed Shiki. Ziggy Laughed a deep, resonating laugh and replied, “I know you will do well. You are my grandson after all. How could you not with the Demon King as your grandfather?!” “Grandpa! You are so silly. Let’s get started right now! I want to make my dream come true of having lots of friends!” Shiki responded excitedly.

As years continued to fly by, Shiki grew more powerful in using Ziggy’s and now his own Ether gear. No matter how much he tried, he still could not beat his grandfather when they sparred together. “Grandpa, why can’t I ever beat you? I do all the things you tell me and I practice using my Ether gear all the time. When will I be strong like you are?” Shiki questioned. Ziggy responded, “You will reach my level when you have some real human friends and not just a planet full of robots who are not emotionally capable of being friends.”

“When do you think humans besides me would come to this planet? Maybe we should make our own starship so I can hurry up and find some human friends. Then I can beat you for sure!” Shiki replied.

Ziggy ran his metallic hand through Shiki’s black, spiky hair laughed and said, “You never can tell what will happen in this crazy world we live in. Just remember when your chance comes that you have to grab on with both hands and hold tight!”

One night while Shiki was asleep, Ziggy gathered all the robots in the city to address them regarding Shiki. “My fellow robot citizens of Granbell. I have gathered you together to ask that you watch over Shiki in the coming years. I have reached my end of time as a living robot with powerful Ether gear. The auto-repair function will not sustain me for more than one more cycle. I will soon die, but before I go, I wanted to make sure that Shiki gets the opportunity to leave this planet and live his life. To that end I have created digital messaging campaigns to try to lure other humans here so that Shiki could join up with them and have a life outside of us pretending to endure Shiki trying to fix us. He means well, but the auto-repair system works quite effectively until we reach the limit for ourselves. So, when and if any humans come, you will throw a grand welcome for them and then you will turn on Shiki. You will drive him to leave with the humans. Our power source that has been based on my Ether gear will now switch

to Shiki's Ether gear as of tomorrow morning. Shiki's Ether gear will continue to provide power although he will not be conscious of it. Once he leaves, all the robots of Granbell shall cease to function. Granbell will be known as the planet of dead robots instead of the robot planet."

A week later, Ziggy's life expired and Shiki was totally devastated. Shiki tried to fix his grandfather, but was unable to do so. His robot friends tried to support him and even continued to send out digital ad campaigns throughout the interstellar network to try to lure humans here. Finally, a young, blonde, curvy girl along with her talking blue robotic cat came along and the robots were successful in driving Shiki to leave the planet Granbell and begin his own adventure in the stars. They fulfilled Ziggy's wish to give Shiki his freedom and in so doing accepted their fate of being permanently shut-down. Shiki had no idea that Ziggy had a starship out there that one of his friends was keeping for him to find when the time was right.

Rebecca Bluegarden and her little mascot of a friend, the blue talking cat named, Happy had provided Shiki with a necessary escape. She also gave Shiki an overdue haircut. The robots whom he claimed to be his friends did not understand how to cut human hair because, they could not grow any themselves. His hair was quite unruly and reminiscent of those people who were shipwrecked on inhospitable planets that she had watched on the BTube network. Now his hair was short and spiky instead of a long, excessive, spiky mane. She would also have to help him adjust to being around humans again because, he was socially awkward. Every person he would meet, he thought was another friend he had not met yet. It might take him a bit to realize that not every person would care for his friendship. Now they were traveling in Rebecca's small bird-like ship together heading toward her home planet of Blue Garden. Shiki had no memory what traveling in space was like. The last time he was in space, he was a little toddler and had no idea of the wonders or terrible things associated with flying through space.

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Colossal **By Edward John Scheffler**

Friend Larry is impeded with the self-consciousness of his seven-foot frame, longing to be less conspicuous as he became the blunt of many taunts.

And yet this 'Gentle Giant'
is sensitive,
sincere and
posses
the
heart of kindness and understanding.

How unfortunate that an irregular abnormality of statue
is viewed with disdain, or with wonder.
To be seen on the outward appearance.

While others may see the inner depth
of the soul.

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Colossal (Continued)
By Edward John Scheffler

In Question:

The Egyptian Sphinx

Monument of Victory

(U.S.S.R. – Russia)

Statue of Liberty

(New York)

Statue Lord Bahubali

(India)

Shrine to the GOD of the Wind

(Luxor)

Shrine to Buddha

(Hong Kong)

Mt Rushmore

(U, S. A.)

Colossus of Rhodes

Do we worship such a massive edifice, or to pay a tribute of homage to them?

###

Sloths Rule
By Vicki Elberfeld

I must say I really enjoy sloth commercials. In one a sloth is, so to speak, up at bat during a game of Pictionary. He begins by slowly, slowly drawing a vertical line, as those on his team start guessing and words such as “a worm, uh...uh...a tiny sword, finger, bread stick, coin slot” are shouted out successively. All these guesses relating to the single line are wrong, however, and the sloth and his team mates have run out of time. “Tandem bicycle” is the astounding answer, but the lonely line the sloth only had time to draw doesn’t resemble the simplest vehicle, let alone a bicycle for two. The commercial ends with all the contestants shaking their heads in disbelief as a voice comes on saying, “As long as sloths are slow, you can count on Geico...” and it is hard for me to take my eyes off the adorable fuzzy sloth as it dawns on his teammates how much he has let them down.

Yet another sloth commercial went something like “Be like the sloth. Slow down. Conserve energy. It is not a sin.”

Yet sloth was indeed considered to be a sin, one of the seven deadly sins. Now it is thought to be a mistranslation of acedia, which is more of a spiritual than a temporal apathy.

But the animal sloths have likely been seriously misunderstood. Instead of being lazy or at least laid back, sloths have evolved to strictly expend as little energy as possible eked from their roughly 110 calories per day diet of rubber leaves. Their digestive system is so inefficient it can take them two full weeks to digest a meal. They move so slowly green algae even grows in their fur, camouflaging them against the green leaves of their tree from predators. The most adventurous part of their week? That is when they climb down and out of their trees to poop on the ground. That small journey is their big weekly outing! Do sloths know how to have fun or what? Their vision is so bad they are nearly blind, can see next to nothing in the brightness of daylight, and it’s clearly impossible for them to outrun their predators. So, they primarily remain in the safety of their trees, resting and eating leaves.

So, sloths have very good excuses for moving slowly and conserving energy. But what’s my excuse?

Sloth seems to be at the root of all my sins.

My sloth begins the very first moment I awaken. I don’t immediately head off to make breakfast or get started on my daily errands. Instead, I fight valiantly against wakefulness. I close my eyes back up after first checking the clock to ensure that I’m not late for anything. Even though I have been going to bed earlier for a greater shot at sleep, this doesn’t lead me to arise any sooner. I keep opening and closing my eyes, staring at the clock while giving myself instructions to relax and fall back into unconsciousness, given I have both the time and the will, and I simply feel too tired to actively start my day.

Unfortunately, this doesn't work. I am only fooling myself if I think I really can fall back asleep. That is one ability the young have that seems lost forever to me: the ability to sleep until noon and then some.

And I'm afraid my slothfulness doesn't conserve much of anything. I merely lie around and waste time, dearly longing for unconsciousness and a dream state. And while lying around I am consumed with feelings of anxiety and depression, using what little energy I have to beat myself up over not doing my share, over not accomplishing anything and withholding whatever gifts I may have from the universe. I ruminate over opportunities lost in addition to the messiness I see all about me. My house must also be depressed, for it just stands there and never even attempts to clean itself. I want to scream at it to get busy, but I predict this would feel very much like talking to a wall.

And even with the colossal amount of time afforded me by the Covid shutdown, my house is full of books I still haven't read and notebooks which are totally devoid of notes. The house is chronically cluttered as I haven't yet discovered the energy to organize it. Or perhaps I simply don't have the will. I feel inclined to do less, not more. I want to be like the sloths, not the real ones of course who no doubt struggle to survive on so few calories a day and must live in terror of predators they cannot outrun, but sloths as we imagine them to be: slow, relaxed, luxuriously indolent, and always, always smiling.

I have to say, in many ways I am actually enjoying this pandemic and the excuses it gives me to not go very far or do very much. I am much like the sloth, only my diet is more calorie laden, my excretions more private, and I am far more sociable, even if the venues my sociability explores now consist of Zoom meetings, social media checks, and phone calls. I remain in my house and rest, breathe deeply, watch videos, do puzzles, and chat by phone and online. Oh well. Pandemics don't really occur very often, so I might as well simply relax and enjoy this one.

###

Colossal
By Carol Hauswald

Only the small know bigness
In its true form
Reptilian
Clawing its way across the sky
Across continents
Ripping away layers of mediocrity
To achieve crystal clarity.

Colossal is a metaphor, for sure.
We are all connected in a colossal dance
Of flight or fight.

Ann Hathaway found that out
Dancing in a playground one night
Creating monsters in Korea
That mimicked her movements.

You too can experience the joys of
Living in a nightmare.
Become small again.

###

Colossal **By Pauline Bastek**

I hear the word colossal and I'm immediately transported to the classroom of Sister Mary of the Rosary's freshman class in ancient history at Cathedral High School on Wabash Avenue in the late 40s. The old three-story building with cement steps leading to double doors no longer stands, having been replaced with a modern designed elementary school for those pupils whose families are able to afford the tuition, Mayor Lightfoot a case in point.

Our families also sent us there because they could afford the tuition which was a few dollars a month. The education I received there in that classroom in the Wonder of the Ancient World, the Seven Wonders and specifically the Colossus in the Harbor of Rhodes has caused me to be referred to by my family as a gold mine of useless information.

Not useless to me, it kept my sanity intact as I watched quiz shows on TV on family vacations, waiting for my sons and husband to get their act together in whatever motel we were staying at prior to our next move on our family vacations. Hearing me shout out the correct answers to obscure questions that many of the contestants missed caused a calm among the testosterone fueled action of five males in the confined area of a Holiday Inn motel room. Some of the information has even been retained by my sons.

The Colossus no longer stands in the Harbor of Rhodes and some say it never did, but to quiz show addicts and crossword puzzle fanciers it brings up thoughts of a civilization advanced

enough to create this marvel as was the marvel of the catholic Parochial System that provided an affordable education but also was not able to sustain it. But the memories of both remain.

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