

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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April 2022 Word Selection – Martyr

The Martyr and Impatience
By Carol Karvon

Have you ever known or just met someone who defies normal description, except to be described as a “martyr”?

You know who I mean. They wander through life with a “woe is me” attitude. Nothing ever goes right for them, ever.

I think of a martyr, outside of the religious saintly martyrs, as people who think everything revolves around them. I feel they think everything is an irritant in their lives and have no qualms about letting you know how good they are at handling these problems without so much as a whimper. Or, that no one understands what they're going through and they're all alone.

Maybe they're related to you and you allow them to wallow in their martyrdom because to do otherwise would be to disrupt family relations.

Maybe they're a good friend and you simply do not want to hurt their feelings so you keep your mouth shut when they utter some preposterous statement you know to be untrue.

Maybe they're the person who acts helpless and everyone around them feels sympathy for how hard life treats them, but how well they cope with their situation.

Maybe it's only their need for attention and sympathy.

Or in the best scenario of all, maybe they're a casual acquaintance and you can simply ease them out of your life. You don't have to see them if you don't want to. You don't have to sit by and listen to their tales of woe. You do not have to confront them or try to reason with them. You can just let them be to face life on their own terms.

Do you think that the martyrs among us in our everyday lives even realize the impression they leave behind them?

Do you think people take an honest look at themselves and see how the rest of the surrounding world views them? Or for that matter, do any of us truly see ourselves realistically?

I've recently had conversations with people I think of as martyrs and am always reminded how irritated I can get. Maybe that's one of my shortcomings – impatience.

As I get older, maybe I'm less willing to waste precious time listening to someone else's woes. I don't want to be hard or unsympathetic to someone with a genuine problem. But, at this stage in life, I don't want to waste valuable time listening to someone else's predicaments, especially when I don't have the answers and can't change things for anyone but myself. If that sounds cold and unsympathetic, so be it. I'm only responsible for my own feelings.

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Reflections on the Military Operation In Ukraine
By Vicki Elberfeld

You did nothing to deserve this
Brave Ukrainians.
You border the country of Dostoevsky
Who posed the question
Why would an omnipotent God
Permit innocent suffering?
I said he posed the question
And it is a good question
But he did not answer it.
What answer could there be?

In the beginning of Russia's February, 2022 invasion of Ukraine, I felt sure Zelenski would be martyred. So did he. He mentioned in a speech that he and his family were prime targets for Russian bullets. Now as we approach mid-April, Zelenski's wife and children are in hiding, while Zelenski himself looks quite healthy, despite only getting about two hours' sleep per night, at least in the beginning of the invasion. Perhaps he has gotten used to the intolerable and unthinkable, with civilians being targeted with bombs and bullets, their living spaces reduced to rubble, mothers raped and killed in front of their children, city dwellers and villagers with their hands tied in back of them, executed by bullets to the backs of their heads.

Last night I watched the news and the spokesman for that devil incarnate, Putin, claimed Russia shouldn't be blamed for this loss of life; the Ukrainians were faking these deaths to make Russia look bad, although Russia looking bad is quite the understatement. Horrible as it is, I am nonetheless grateful to the brave photojournalists who risk their lives to provide audiovisual evidence of the results of these invasions, providing solid evidence refuting the lies told by Russia.

Sometimes there are moments of grace. Just a few moments ago I received an internet notification of a kitten, no larger than my hand, rescued in Borodyanka, so adorable and baffled, so innocent of the devastation going on all around him. But happy news stories are few, and only lift us for moments from our war induced feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair.

Still, Zelenski has not fallen into martyrdom, not yet anyway, and I am beginning to feel he will not. I am told he is a better wartime president than a leader in peacetime. He says he will not cede territory to Russia in any compromise, for he would have to put any demands to the Ukrainian people who have become a more formidable foe than the Russians ever anticipated. They want their freedom and will fight to the death for it.

I find such willingness to defend one's country very difficult to relate to. Is it that I don't love my country? I think it's more that my country isn't being threatened, not yet anyway. It has been here throughout my life and way back to my great grandparents' lives, and I don't see it going away. The US is strong, a superpower, although a nuclear war with Russia could defeat us. The wars fought during my and my parents' and their parents' and even their parents' parents' lifetimes all took place on foreign soil.

Some friends have said that if they, the civilians in Ukraine, can endure this, we can bear to at least look at it. Yet my therapist has suggested that I moderate my viewing of war news. Ukrainians can't get away from the war, but we can, and for our own mental health we must take breaks from the catastrophic reports.

So I will heed the good doctor's excellent advice and end on a somewhat lighter note:

"Putin at the fortune teller: He asks her, 'How long will I live?'
She replies, 'I cannot tell, but I know you will die on a Ukrainian holiday.'
'Which holiday?' Putin asks.

'Whichever day you die will be a Ukrainian holiday.'"

Slava Ukraini

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Papa Don't Take No Mess

By J. Smetana

Peaches, why are you calling me in the middle of the day? Why are you not in school? They kicked me out. I got my Second Amendment rights – they're tryna make a MARTYR outa me. Right to bare arms! I wore my AC/DC shirt you know the one without sleeves and Mrs. Klott sent me home.

###

Date Night with Gambit and Rogue

By Mark Moe

Anna Marie never learned her real last name, but gladly took her husband's last name, LeBeaux as her own. Both her and her husband Remy had complicated lives that led them down this crazy spiraling path to where they are now. Among the many things that they share as a couple, one of the most notable is that they are gifted with mutant abilities. Remy can kinetically charge objects such as playing cards and generate explosions equivalent to a grenade going off. She on the other hand, can absorb abilities, memories and mutant powers from whomever she physically touches. As X-men team members, they go by their codenames of Gambit and Rogue, but privately they are just Remy and Anna Marie.

For once in their lives, both of them finally had total control of their mutant abilities. It has been especially difficult on Anna Marie. Although they have been married for a few years, she only recently gained total control of when she chooses to absorb powers.

"I can't think of how many times I have drained Remy's ability during the middle of the night and caused something to telekinetically explode nearby. Thankfully we have great insurance with Professor X and Beast was able to develop an ability neuralyzer to control my power when I am asleep," she thought to herself.

While Anna Marie was busy reflecting on her thoughts sitting at their oak kitchen table, Remy walked in the front door of their shared apartment. He looked for his mostly red-brunette beauty with the definitive white stripe in the center of her long, curly hair. When he saw her, he asked, "What are you doing, mon cher?"

She looked up at her husband and gave him her most beautiful smile. He had just come from his Danger Room daily workout and was soaked in sweat. "Waiting for you, Sugar! Were you challenging Logan again?" she asked.

He brushed his medium length, brown hair away from his scarlet-colored eyes and replied, "No, the Professor sent him and Colossus on another mission."

Rogue shuttered at hearing the news and replied, "Wow! You know it is a deadly serious mission when those two are involved. Did you happen to hear where Professor X sent them?"

"No, mon cher. When the Professor sends out the two mostly invincible mutants, I would rather not know until they come back. Even finding out the details afterwards can be gruesome.

Don't forget we have an escort mission on Tuesday to South Dakota for Dazzler and Jubilee. Remember they are putting on a concert to help displaced mutants from the latest Brotherhood attack," he replied.

"Why can't we get an escort mission to Hawaii or some other tropical destination? I would love to enjoy some warmer weather and be able to spend quality time with my husband just doing what normal people would do. You could even try out those special contacts that Beast made to cover up your naturally beautiful red eyes to blend in, but it would be worth it."

"That is our luck, my sweet! We go where the Professor needs us. We don't all have the free reign like Wolverine," he said.

"Hurry up and get cleaned up. We are going out on the town tonight! I figured we could try Ohana and then go ballroom dancing!" she said excitedly.

Remy smiled at her and asked, "Will you be ready when I am or do you need two hours to get beautiful?"

"Never rush a lady, Sugar! Luckily for you I have already showered and shaved my legs. I just need to put on a sexy dress and do my hair and makeup. So, it is just an hour for you to wait. But I am worth it, right?" she asked coyly.

After Gambit was ready and dressed in a fine black tuxedo with a formal white scarf as an accent, his wife true to her word was ready an hour later. She came out of the bedroom wearing a red, sexy dress, white gloves that went up to her elbows and a pair of four-inch heels. The two X-men left their apartment and headed towards Professor Xavier's ground transportation garage where he had a fleet of different vehicles for his X-men to check out like books in a library. The size of the garage would dwarf Jay Leno's car collection by the length of two football fields. They selected a nice four door sedan entered their credentials into the computer system and retrieved the keys. This was tantamount to a rental agreement and the Professor expected everyone to fill the gas tank whenever they used one of them. The dinner and dancing were both fun and Remy did not bother wearing his special contacts. The people of Westchester, NY had grown accustomed to seeing mutants around. They did not even receive any strange looks because of his eyes and her distinctive white stripe.

Afterwards, they decided to go for a stroll through downtown Westchester. Everything was going well until, a group of Brotherhood mutants used a gas grenade to render Gambit and Rogue unconscious. Gambit woke up in an alley about thirty minutes later. Rogue was not near him and. As he realized that he would not find her, he activated an emergency tracker to alert Professor Xavier and the other mutants who were not on a mission.

Rogue woke up an hour later, but found herself locked in a room and now wearing her old uniform when she was a Brotherhood mutant herself. A voice came through the intercom and she recognized it immediately. "I see you finally woke up Rogue. As you can tell, you are back in your Brotherhood uniform and yes Quicksilver changed your clothes as if there was any doubt. Now you are ready to become a *"martyr"* for our cause."

Rogue laughed and responded, “Why would you’ll want me as a martyr for your cause? Don’t you’ll have enough active Brotherhood members to select from, Mystique? I don’t see why you need me.”

Mystique stated nonchalantly, “Why use one of our own current members when a former member will do just as well? Powerful mutants are expensive to find, the dead cost nothing. Bye the way, I am sure you have noticed that we have fused your gloves to your sleeves for the obvious reason of preventing you from using your powers. Avalanche will escort you to what will lead us to a major victory and your untimely demise. It has been great to see you again, Rogue!”

As Avalanche opened the door and started walking toward Rogue, he saw her kicking off her boots.

“You guys never realized why I never wore socks with these boots. You’ll were so focused on preventing me from using my hands that you forgot one important thing about my power.”

“And what is that?” asked Mystique

“It doesn’t have to be just my hands! I can drain powers from any contact with my skin!” she exclaimed.

Before Avalanche could react, Rogue flew up to him quickly and kicked him square in the face with her bare foot. As her foot made contact, she drained Avalanche’s seismic generating powers and managed to stun Avalanche for a few minutes. She heard Mystique screaming into the intercom to send in reinforcements.

“I hope I drained enough of your powers to bust out of here,” she said. “But just to be sure,” she kicked him in the face again. Now she could feel the power coursing through her and she focused his ability on the nearest wall sending visible blue waves of seismic energy towards it. The wall held up but a moment before a large portion of the wall and a substantial portal opened to the summer night air.

Meanwhile, Gambit was picked up by another X-man to debrief him with Professor X in their mission room back at the mansion. He was informed by Jean Grey that Rogue’s tracker was still intact and transmitting her location. He looked visibly relieved upon hearing the news about his wife. He was invited to sit in on the rescue planning mission and Professor X approved adding him to the roster.

After Gambit provide the team with his version of the attack, Jean Grey gave the rescue plan for Rogue.

She stated, “When we first received the emergency signal from Gambit, we immediately made efforts to locate Rogue. Everyone was well aware you two were on a date night. We tracked her location to an old apartment building commonly used as a safe house for members of the Brotherhood. At this time, we do not know which Brotherhood faction took her or why they took her.” She clicked through some screens on her tablet and sent the building schematics to the 3D holoprojector. A general outline of the building sharpened to the specific floor as she said,

“Rogue is currently being held on the twentieth floor. Let me ping her location again just to make certain that they have not moved her somewhere else.”

As she reset the tracker, Rogue’s location showed her moving at a steady pace away from the building. When she zoomed in closer, she could tell that Rogue was not trapped in any sort of aerial transport and clearly was not running on the ground.

“Apparently, we just need to bring her home. She must have escaped her captivity somehow and since she is not on the ground, she must be flying. We will send the X-jet to meet up with her.”

Gambit smiled and said, “That is my wife for you! Not even the Brotherhood of Mutants can keep her contained for long!”

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Martyr’s Beer and Pub

By N. Stewart

It was a great game at Wrigley Field (*CUBS win, CUBS win!*) but it lasted longer than expected. On the way home rather than stop at The Cubby Bear, we decided to try a new place on Lincoln Avenue between Addison and Irving Park Rd. called Martyr’s. I had been reading about it and thought it might be an interesting place to visit. Different live bands played all weekend, changing throughout the evening and playing late into the night.

When we arrived, the street parking was very limited and, therefore, non-existent, so we ended parking several blocks away and walking through the residential neighborhood. I used to work not far from here at Irving Park Rd. and Western Avenue when it was called North Center. It was an old German area with lots of restaurants and old buildings that were starting to become rundown. The area has certainly changed over the years, and it’s now the in-place to be. The neighborhood is slowly being renovated and the 3 flat buildings are being converted into single family homes worth upwards of a million or more.

Along Lincoln Avenue, Martyr’s takes up three connecting store fronts that was once the local Post Office. The door of the Pub opens to a large area with a well-lit bar. We paid a general admission fee and entered. A huge sign bearing John Lenon’s likeness as well as other well-known dead musicians look directly at us. To the right is a large platform used as a stage with a 3-piece band currently playing hard rock. The noise level was astounding. A few tables for eating were scattered throughout the floor but most people were standing or milling. The menu appeared on a blackboard over the bar and was limited to New York style pizza (sausage or cheese, or a specialty of spinach and garlic), a myriad of on-tap beers was available, a few red and white wine options, and for those with a more refined taste several malt scotches. Beer was for us. We ordered and circulated through the crowd, listening to the music.

At long last, the group finished with a symbol crash and a lengthy ear-shattering guitar slide. Silence descended on the place but neither of us could hear a thing. It wasn’t long and another group began setting up. This one was a 5-piece jazz band. More to our style of music. We ordered another round of beer from the bartender and asked “Why the name Martyr’s.” The story goes she said in 1994 the owner wanted a place where dedicated, musicians could give “their life to their art,” by being given a chance to perform on a regular basis either solo or in a band and to experience live audience participation. The opportunity to hone their skills was a

given. Many return again and again to this stage as they matured as musicians. She continued that over the years many bands have played here and some bands and some of the band members have gone on to be very successful, naming a few that neither of us caught the names of or knew. Some, however, learned a cruel lesson here and found it was better to go on to other things in life. She left us to attend other patrons

Smooth jazz began to play. We could hear again. The band announced themselves as all students of music from Elmhurst University, practicing their jazz skills as a band and as solo artists. The sound was satisfying and rhythmic with each member taking the lead in turn on their instrument of preference. At one break, the leader explained that most of the music they played were written by one of them. Other pieces played were familiar or well-known pieces and had us humming along. "Another round of beer?" the bartender asked. No thanks. They're finished with the set and so are we. We headed out the door for our walk to the car and then home.

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Making of a Martyr By Pauline Bastek

I feel we have all met a martyr. Those of us who will not see 60 again, can recall friends and acquaintances of the female persuasion, being referred to as being martyrs for their families and seeing them admired for their selfless behavior while thanking the powers that be that better them than us.

Marie was a born martyr or was she made one by circumstances is still open for debate.

One of seven children born to a tenant farmer in the Midwest. She remembers that they each had only one pair of shoes. One night when her sister proceeded to be sick all over Marie's shoes, she had to go to school that morning in wet shoes as the second floor of the farmhouse where the children slept was unheated. Despite these conditions her father served on the local school board and all seven children received at the least a Bachelor's degree from the state university. Her mother suffered several "nervous breakdowns."

She went on to marry an only son of an adoring mother and lived with them until he received his law degree and passed the bar, supporting them with her position as a Home EC teacher.

Unable to conceive a child, a situation she accepted as being a failure on her part, they proceeded to adopt a child, follow by a set of twins. She felt that it was meant for her to take care of these children who were unwanted by their biological parents and accepted her "barren state" as the Lord's will. We felt it was probably a result of her husband's extracurricular sexual activities that culminated in him being found asleep behind the wheel of his luxury model car in the early hours of the morning while waiting for the light to change.

After being hauled off to the hospital as the local police wanted to be assured that he was not suffering a heart attack, she was notified the next morning by the hospital that he was well if hungover. When she arrived at the hospital, she found he already was being cared for by his drinking companion of the previous night.

He dismissed her and she left to go to Sunday mass to offer her prayers for his soul and offered her sufferings for the poor souls in purgatory.

He died of a massive heart attack in court, prior to the finalization of their divorce leaving her with creditors with the IRS topping the list to remember him by. She saw him off with a full

funeral and would not hear a word against him when friends suggested a cardboard coffin and cremation would be appropriate

She is at present recovering from a broken hip suffered in a fall while walking the oversized dog her daughter has her caring for in her early nineties. Yes, her martyrdom continues as she lives with her divorced daughter and cares for the son of said daughter adopted who speaks to his grandmother in a manner that would eliminate him ever having dental problems should he address me in that fashion. He would not have a tooth left in his mouth. Marie, just offers it up with a long-suffering smile.

She has given up walking the dog, but only because her daughter was concerned that the dog might bolt and get hit by a car as Marie was not reliable.

Was the pattern for a martyr created when the little girl went to school in cold wet shoes and told to offer up her discomfort for the souls in purgatory, or was this genetically predetermined?

Does anyone believe in purgatory anymore? Just ask Marie, I'm sure she does.

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