

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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May 2022 Word Selection – Rattle

Earthquake
By Kelly Tansor

I grew up in a small house across the street from a set of train tracks. The tracks weren't for commuter trains – it was only for freight trains. They always came at random times. Sometimes 11 AM, sometimes 3 PM, sometimes even 2 AM (those were the worst because they always blared the horn and woke everyone up). My house was a cozy two-story home, a good size for my dad and me. Even though the siding was torn up, the windows were drafty, our basement was noisy from the pipes, and our sizable lawn seemed to always have weeds, the foundation was strong. If we were inside, we never heard or felt the train roll by – except, of course, when they blared the horn at 2 AM...

When I was a kid, I would play outside and feel rumbling underneath my feet. Soon after, I would hear the train horn from the distance. I would look up and see a thick cloud of smoke in the distance. That's how I always knew the train was about to come. My friends and I would make a game out of this. We would be playing outside, and I would be the first to notice the rumbling since I knew exactly what it felt like. Then I would call out, "Earthquake!" Then my friends would feel the rumbling, too, and join in shouting, "Earthquake!" We would grab

anything we were playing with and start rattling them, as if our toys were actually in an earthquake. The closer the train came, the louder we would yell and the faster we would shake our toys. I always had the biggest grin on my face, knowing I was the first one to notice the train and start the earthquake game.

That was a long time ago, though. I've since grown older, got married, and had two kids. And we don't live anywhere near train tracks. My wife and I moved out to the suburbs, somewhere quiet and spacious to raise our children.

However, my life took a turn last week when my dad landed in the hospital. He'd been sick for quite some time, but we didn't realize how serious it was until the day he collapsed in the grocery store. Luckily, a kind stranger called an ambulance and he was able to get to the hospital safely. When I got there, the doctors informed me that my dad would need round-the-clock care. That night, I packed my bags, said goodbye to my wife and kids, and moved back into my childhood home to look after my dad, not knowing how long I would be gone.

When I got to my dad's house, I unpacked my things in his guest room. My clothes, work-from-home setup, and chargers would be set up in the guest room, but I kept a futon in my dad's room in case anything happened during the night. My dad insisted it wouldn't be necessary, but I wasn't going to take my chances.

Every day since moving in with my dad has had the same kind of routine. His doctor wrote down his medications for me, so I know exactly what he takes and when he takes them. I work from home in the guest room while my dad sits either in bed or in the living room, watching TV or sleeping (or both). I check in periodically to see if he needs anything – food, water, help to the bathroom, etc. At around 3:30 PM, I wake my dad up so he and I can Facetime with my wife and kids. As much as the kids are happy to hear from me, they're always more excited to see their grandpa. He has a hard time talking most days, so he'll usually just sit and listen to the kids' stories, smiling the whole time. Like he's trying to lock in a memory. After that, I'll go back to work until about 5 PM, when I make dinner for us. My dad's neighbors are aware of his situation, and they often bring food for us – which makes my day a lot easier! After dinner, we'll sit and watch TV together. He'll usually put on either the news or some historical documentary. Either way, politics inevitably come up, whether I like it or not. When he dozes off, I carry him to his bed and call it a night.

That was the same routine we followed today. I gave him his morning pills and told him, "You know, your doctor recommended you take this with food. Do you want a bagel or something?"

He waved his hand. "No, no, Raymond, that's fine," he said. "Too much food for me anyway."

"Maybe just half a bagel?" I asked.

He nodded his head back and forth, considering this. "Yeah, maybe. But don't put anything on it. Just a plain bagel is fine. More than enough."

I went in the kitchen and cut a bagel in half – half for him, half for me. My dad doesn't eat much, but I try to feed him as much as I can. I returned with his bagel half and noticed his glass next to him was empty. "I'll get you some more water."

"Raymond," he said, grabbing my hand. "Don't worry, I can get it." He tried to stand up from his bed, groaning. I softly put my hands on his shoulders to sit him back down. "Don't worry, Dad. I got it." I re-filled his cup of water and set it on his nightstand.

"Thanks, son," he said somberly.

"No problem. Let me know when you want to move to the living room." He bit his bagel and shook his head. "I don't know about today. I'm too tired." I took notice of his hand shaking as he held his bagel. His skin had been looking lighter, his hair thinner. The frown on his resting face looked noticeably longer.

"That's alright," I said brightly. "We can have you stay here as long as you want." We smiled at each other forcefully.

I went to work in the guest room after that. My dad's room was right down the hallway, so I was able to look over at him from time to time. He called for me once to take his half-eaten half bagel, and once more a few hours later to use the bathroom. Aside from that, though, he slept for most of the morning and afternoon.

At 3:30 PM, I walked in on my dad as he was waking up. "Dad," I asked, "do you want to Facetime the kids today? I know you're tired, so we don't have to."

My dad rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "Well, is there a way to Facetime them in here?"

"Yeah, definitely!" I ran into the guest room to grab my laptop and charger. I then went back in my dad's room, plugged my charger into my laptop, and sat next to my dad. "We'll just do it this way." I dialed my wife, and she answered right away.

"Hey, Lindsay," I said.

"Hi, Raymond," she said. Her smile got wider. "Hi, grandpa!"

"Grandpa!" Gianna and Anthony exclaimed. They sat on either side of Lindsay, waving their hands in front of her face.

"Hi, kids!" my dad said, smiling the biggest smile I had seen from him all week.

"Are you in bed?" asked Anthony.

I explained, "Yeah, we usually talk in the guest room, but Grandpa's tired."

"Ohhhh," said Anthony.

Out of nowhere, we heard the train horn from outside. My dad and I jumped. The kids' eyes widened.

"What the heck was that?" asked Gianna.

"Ugh, the stupid train!" said my dad.

"That's so weird," I said. "They usually don't use the horn in the afternoon."

"Daddy, was the ground *shaking* by you?" Gianna asked excitedly.

"Nope," I said matter-of-factly. "The ground only shakes *outside* when the train comes. Inside, we're safe."

"It's just loud," my dad said softly."

“Stupid train!” said Anthony.

“Yeah, stupid train!” Gianna agreed. My dad laughed along with Anthony and Gianna. It was then I realized I hadn’t seen my dad laugh this whole time.

We kept going with the call. The kids just *had* to tell us every little detail about what they and their friends did at school. The whole time, my dad smiled that same smile at them. I’ve heard these stories a hundred times, but he wanted to remember this. I know he did.

My dad was still tired when we had dinner that night – lasagna from the woman across the street. I cut my dad’s lasagna for him and we ate in his room. We had the news on TV, but I wasn’t paying too much attention. At one point, my dad dropped his fork. He cursed under his breath and tried to reach down for it.

“Don’t worry, Dad, I got it.” I sprang to my feet and picked up his fork. “I’ll grab you a clean one.”

When I came back from the kitchen with a clean fork, my dad was sitting up at the side of his bed, leaning on his nightstand.

“Raymond, wait,” he said. “Watch. I can stand up. Watch.”

My dad lay both hands on the nightstand. I knew there was no stopping him when he was this determined, so I stood there holding my breath. He grunted as he pushed off the nightstand and stood to his feet. He then carefully removed one hand from the nightstand, then the other. “Check it out!”

I walked over to his side. “That’s great, Dad, really,” I said. “But let’s just take it easy for now. I think you can have some more lasagna.” I sat him back down and gave him his fork and plate of lasagna.

“I’m just trying to show you I can do some things on my own,” he said.

“I know,” I said, sitting back down next to him. “But while I’m here, I’m going to help you with the things you *can’t* do on your own.”

He rolled his eyes. “Raymond, I’m your father. For thirty years, I watched you grow into the man you are today. Now it’s like the roles are reversed.”

I sighed. “Well, Dad, now it’s my turn to help you out. It’s the least I can do.”

He rubbed his head. “I feel like such a damn burden.”

“Never,” I reassured him. “You’re never a burden.”

He sighed. “If you say so.”

Later that night, I heard it. The train horn. That Goddamn train horn. It woke me from a deep sleep at around 2 AM. I hit my head on my pillow and willed my eyes to shut. Then I felt rumbling underneath me. “Earthquake!” I heard my 5-year-old self call out.

Something wasn’t right about this. For as long as I can remember, our house never shook like this when the train rolled by. Even when the train came earlier today, the house was perfectly stable. What the hell was that rumbling?

I turn my head and see my dad’s bed is empty. Dad!

In that instant, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a light turn on. I looked down the hallway and realized that it was coming from the bathroom. I rushed out of bed and ran furiously

toward it. I threw my head in the room and saw my dad leaning over the sink. “Don’t worry, son,” he said, pained. “Just getting a cup of water.”

“Dad, what are you doing?” I asked. Agitated, I hurried to this side and helped him stand.

“Well,” he groaned, “I needed more water. But...” He grunted as he stood. “I didn’t want to wake you up.”

“Dad, you can wake me up any time you need to,” I reminded him. I found his cup, which had fallen onto the floor. I grabbed it and refilled from the sink as my dad struggled to catch his breath.

“Here, Dad.” I held the cup to his lips. His face and hands trembled as he slowly drank. I watched intently.

“Earthquake!” my 5-year-old self whispered.

When my dad finished, I put my arm around him. “Come on,” I told him. “Let’s get you back into bed.”

My dad tapped my chest and pushed off me. “I got it, son.” He slowly stomped down the hallway back to his bedroom, huffing and puffing the whole way. I followed closely behind. I helped him to lay back down on his bed. “I’m putting your water right here,” I said as I put his cup of water on his bedside table. “Do you need anything else?”

My dad smirked up at me and shook his head. “Look at me,” he said, his voice soft but bitter. “*I’m* supposed to be the one taking care of *you*.”

I nodded. “Thirty years, Dad. Now it’s my turn.”

###

Bootchee-Fweet

By J. Smetana

Hey man did it RATTLE you when Stevie tricked you guys into going to a gay bar?

No man it didn’t RATTLE me. I just thought it was a dirty trick.

You weren’t tipped off by the enormous rainbow flag over the door or the gigantic banner reading, Beer For Queers — Celebrate Pride?

No man I just figured it was standard boilerplate. A distraction – just another brick in the wall.

But I’m gonna get back at him – just you wait!!

You been sayin’ that for more than thirty years

I’m just waitin’ ‘til he lets his guard down.

###

Spider-girls Across the Multiverse

By Mark Moe

“Let’s review, shall we? I was bitten by a genetically altered spider, gained super powers and now I fight crime as the Amazing Spider-girl! My best friend, Peter Parker is the only one who knows my secret. I thought I had a pretty good grasp on balancing my super hero life and being a normal teenage girl. Until one day, I discovered that I was not the only spider-based super hero.”

“The afternoon started like many others where I went swinging out through the city looking for criminals to thwart. Suddenly, my spider sense kicked in, but it felt different in the sense that instead of alerting me to imminent danger; it felt like a reflection of sonar waves rippling back at me. It felt like I had detected another person with their own spider sense. I was pretty certain that I was also detected by this individual as well. I decided locating this person could wait because, I was in the middle of chasing a group of bank robbers trying to escape capture by the police.”

“I mean I believe if we are supposed to meet, one of us will inevitably meet up with the other one at some point. As it turned out, I received the opportunity on the following day. Peter had dropped by my house to show me the latest pictures he sold to the Daily Bugle. J. Jonah Jameson is really obsessed with me and I was happy to take pictures of myself in action. The added advantage is that it helps Peter earn some cash in order support his Aunt May. Aunt May has always been like a foster grandmother to me and there is no question I would do anything to help her.”

While Peter was visiting with my mother in the kitchen, the doorbell rang. I went to answer it and was surprised to see Gwen Stacy waiting out front. As our eyes met, my spider sense went off again just like before. I said to her, “Gwen, I have never seen you dressed like a skater punk. I thought you only wore high fashion since you are a model.”

Before I could say anything further, she interrupted me and spoke just above a whisper saying, “I am not the Gwen Stacy you know. I know what you are and need you to get your suit on and meet me on top of St. Sebastian Church and I will prove it to you. Be there at 4:30 p.m. this Saturday.” She pulled her hood over short, blonde hair and turned to leave.

Mary Jane was left in amazement at the cryptic nature of this Gwen not being her Gwen. She knew she would definitely meet up with her on the roof of St. Sebastian’s Church to find out what was going on. On Saturday afternoon, MJ got in her Spider-girl suit and climbed her way to the top of the roof. Then she saw another webslinger swing up to her location. Their spider senses reflected off of each other as they sized up the opposing girl. The other “Gwen” had a black, white purple and neon-blue suit with a hood attachment and a teal mini backpack on her back. The webbing was highlighted with the neon blue and ran down the sides and the back of her costume. “So do you go by Spider-girl as well?” MJ asked.

“Actually, I go by Ghost-Spider! Look down at the main entrance to the church,” Gwen responded. As MJ fixed her gaze upon the entrance, she saw the Gwen Stacy she knew with

blonde hair, super model looks and the trademark high fashion walking into the church with her parents for Saturday afternoon mass.

MJ freaked out and about fell off the roof in shock, but she was quickly grabbed by Ghost-Spider who helped to stabilize her.

“Now not to *“rattle”* you further, but there are three other webslingers that want to meet you. We agreed that it would be easiest to meet me first since you know a different dimensional version of me. The other three go by: Scarlet Spider, Spider-woman and Spider Punk-Girl.” She pulled her cell phone out of her mini backpack and dialed one of her contacts. After a short conversation, she hung up the phone and pulled her hood back over her face. “The others want to meet you as well. Why don’t we go somewhere more secluded? Besides if a few more people show up on this roof, it will become quite obvious to all the church goers inside. Follow me,” Gwen explained.

Spider-girl waited for Ghost-Spider to swing away before leaping into the air to follow her. She led her to the top of the Queensboro bridge and the pair did not have to wait long for the other three webslingers to make their entrance. The first one to arrive had MJ’s color scheme, but reversed and the blue in the outfit was part of a sky-blue hoodie. The second webslinger had a suit much like hers but, the color scheme was black and red. The last one also had the red and blue color scheme, but that is where the resemblance ended. This particular webslinger looked as if MJ had decided to go full punk rock girl complete with: a jet-black, five-point mohawk, a blue jean jacket cut in a jagged pattern and a rocking electric guitar shaped like a spider on her back.

“I can’t wait to hear this explanation about where you girls came from,” said MJ. Each of the newcomers removed their masks and took turns introducing one another.

“My name is also Mary Jane Watson but, I go by the name Maura Kelly. I am essentially a clone of you from another dimension. In my world, I took up the mantle of Spider-girl while you had disappeared for some time. When you showed back up, you helped me regain my memory and then I realized I was a clone version of you,” stated Maura.

“That is when you took on the identity of Maura Kelly, our Great Aunt and also why you went golden blonde, so that there was a visible difference between us,” MJ interrupted. “Sorry, I just got excited, I jumped the gun on your story.”

Maura smiled and said, “I call myself the Scarlet Spider for the same reason to prevent confusion. I’m not saying having two Spider-Girls was not cool, but it is definitely easier to have my own identity.”

The next girl introduced herself as Milana Morales. She had caramel-brown skin and short, curly, black hair. “I am Spider-woman from my dimension and was inspired by my version of Peter Parker to become a hero.”

“I really like your color scheme, black and red looks really sharp!” exclaimed MJ.

“Thanks, I like your colors as well. My Peter was always wearing red and blue shoes. Your colors are reminiscent of his favorite shoes,” responded Milana.

Finally, MJ turned to the most punk webslinger and said, “What is your story?”

“The name is Alice Nelson and I am a punk rocker who got bitten by genetically altered spider. Then, I became a super hero and I still tour with my new band between stopping criminals. In fact, I took a page from the group Daft Punk and all my fans have never seen my face. They only see me as the Spider Punk-girl!”

“Judging by your accent, you are British, right? And Punk Rock is definitely an interesting type of music. Who would have thought that a version of Spider-girl could be so cool?” MJ commented.

“You are right born and bred in London! God save the Queen! Punk is not dead!” exclaimed Alice as she threw her arms into the air and shook out her long, straight, jet-black hair. She definitely reminded MJ of a young Joan Jett.

Gwen cleared her throat and said, “Hey you are not the only punk rock girl here, Alice. I am also a lead singer in my own punk rock band. More importantly, we need your help MJ to deal with an interdimensional situation. We know at this point, you have not had to deal with any crazy, super villains as Spider-girl. Mostly lower-level thugs and some run of the mill weirdos, right MJ?”

“Oh yeah, tell me about it. Every crook and lowlife I capture for the police see me as a female and all of them keep asking me out on dates while waiting to be arrested. But what do you mean by supervillains?” MJ asked.

Gwen shook her head and said, “They are all mad scientists who experimented on themselves. They started out with noble goals and at some point, become extremely desperate. Then they became super-powered monsters.”

Before Gwen could go into more details about who and what the collective threats were, MJ jumped in and said, “I’m in! I don’t care what kind of super villains they became. I know that between the five of us, we can do this!”

Maura turned to Gwen and said, “Wow! That was way easier than I thought it would be! You still need to know what we face though. You might still want to back out after hearing about these guys. They are not pushovers!”

Gwen continued, “There are six of them and two of them are from my dimension. By the way all their nicknames are compliments of different versions of J. Jonah Jameson. Dr. Norman Osborn and Dr. Octavo Octavius are brilliant scientists who together found a way to develop dimension-crossing technology through the use of generated portals. We also refer to them as the Green Goblin and Doc Ock because, the first one made a flight suit and a glider that looks like some fantasy goblin from Lord of the Rings and the other one attached four mechanical arms controlled by an implanted chip in his spine. Then they recruited the other four super villains through their dimensional hopping. We have no idea about their end goal. It can’t be good for any of us though.”

MJ responded, “Well that explains how they met, but how did you girls get together?”

Alice chimed in, “I was fighting the Lizard when a portal opened and we were both sucked into it. We ended up in Maura’s dimension. Maura and I found each other because of our spider sense much like how Gwen and you detected one another. The Peter of her dimension

was a fancy scientist who had been studying dimensional anomalies. He was able to track Green Goblin and Doc Ock's machine by the radioactive isotopes it emitted when a portal was created. When we met up with him, another portal opened and Gwen came out of it. She explained to all of us the origin of these portals and then asked us to help her stop these bad actors in their tracks.

Milana added, "I was busy fighting both a strange, green bird-like man called the Vulture and an insane geneticist who was calling himself the Jackal. Then another portal opened and gave my two super villains a chance to escape from being caught. When I attempted to follow behind them, one of Doc Ock's tentacle arms reached outside of the portal and threw me away. I watched the portal close thinking that was the last I would see of them. I mean how often does the universe just literally make your villains disappear. A day later, a new portal materialized by my favorite reflection spot and that was when I met the other girls. They were led by Gwen who had as it turned was using the backup machine the Green Goblin and Doc Ock had made to recruit us. Finally, the four of us tracked the next portal to your world with the help of Maura's Peter who made temporal gps trackers. We believe that all the villains are looking for a crime boss who calls himself the Kingpin."

"So, this Kingpin guy is in my dimension? If every dimension has a version of me, would it not also have its own: Kingpin, Vulture, Jackal and all the other super villains?" MJ asked.

Gwen replied, "Each dimension has those super villain elements, but it seems like Doc Ock and Green Goblin were looking for the brightest versions of them. I am sure it speaks to a larger plan, but we just do not know what it is yet. So will you join us Mary Jane Watson in our quest to fix the multiverse?"

MJ was beaming ear to ear as she exclaimed, "Of course I will! With this many Spider-girls, how can we fail?!"

###

Rattle
By Edward Scheffler

We live within the confines of a routine
When occasions of unsettledness may rattle our composure.
As when a passenger in my car expounded upon the hazard
of driving on the expressway.

With a primary concern, should all four tires blow out,
Causing the vehicle to swerve into on-coming
Traffic
And if that were not bad enough
"It could happen," he said.

At which my imagination was now working on overtime:
Suppose the radiator over heats,
And the drive train with the transmission malfunctions.
I began sweating profusely
With the phobia of a near panic anxiety disorder.

Alas arriving home safely,
Kissing the ground in relief,
I resolved to swear an oath,
Never again to allow this ill-favored Fatalist in my car.

###

Totally Rattled
By N. Stewart

Almost two and a half years without COVID, and then it hit me. Where did it come from? That's an unknown answer. My activities were the same as always – yoga exercise three times a week, eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, get enough sleep every night, limit exposure for grocery shopping and other activities. So, how did it happen? Still don't know. Simply in the wrong place at the right time. It could have been anytime within the previous 14 days before I got sick that I touched, drew a breath, or was the recipient of air-born germs.

The story begins when we opened up the house in Wisconsin toward the middle of April. That day it was raining cats and dogs and unpacking the car and lugging boxes was to say the least a damp adventure. The puppy needed to go out, requiring me to take her out in the rain again and again. Too tired to cook, the local fish fry sounded good and we ate out. The restaurant was crowded but we have gone out many times before. The next day it continued to rain and we cleaned the inside of the house, disturbing the dust that had accumulated over the winter, and, of course, took the puppy out in the rain a number of times for a second day. A simple dinner was all we wanted. I admit between working on the house and dragging in box after box, and taking the puppy out, I was feeling exhausted. We meet and talked with some of the neighbors but we stood outside, while catching up on over-the-winter news. We finished cleaning on Sunday and were surprised when drop-in guests stayed for a couple of hours. It was apparent that one guest had a cough and we were advised it was a "cold." After they left, I fell into bed.

The tiny little sore throat started on Monday night after arriving back in Illinois and then the cough followed the next day. It felt like a head cold was coming on and I prepared to separate from the world for 14 days or 2 weeks whichever ever came first. In a couple of days with all symptoms present, I tested positive for COVID. I was totally rattled. So much has been said about what to do and what not to do that I was confused on what to do and what not to do now that it was my turn with COVID. My fever was low-grade at 99 degrees for a couple of days and

then it was completely gone. The sore throat never developed, but the cough became that throaty bronchial can't-catch-your-breath kind. I never felt as sick as I have in the past from the common cold or the flu but I tired easily this time. Must have been a false positive I thought and tested again with the same results – positive for COVID.

What determines wellness after COVID? No fever after 24 hours or after 3 days take your choice the experts say, contagion ends after 5 days or 14 or somewhere in between, wear a mask forever or only the first 5 days, test negative before stopping isolation but that maybe in 2-3 months' time as COVID can remain after symptoms subside.

I needed groceries, I needed to be part of life again. But I didn't want to make anyone sick or die because I got COVID and I didn't want to share my experience with others. Anxiety set in, leaving me in a state of quandary over every issue and I could not make any decisions. I panicked at the thought of going out in the public and I would begin to sweat. When I did venture out to buy groceries, it was from a basic need after using up what was in the refrigerator, on the cabinet shelves and in the freezer. I was fearful of infecting everyone in the store by breathing with my mask on, touching fruit or vegetables, or coughing, filling the entire store with my germs. Because of me, many people would get sick and some would die all because I didn't know or didn't do the right thing. I was a COVID spreader.

I went home, hid in my house, pulled the covers over my head and reasoned through my foggy brain it was all my fault. I was responsible for getting not only the people in the store sick but the entire world. Depression set in. COVID had me. I had to isolate again. I had to shut out the world. I drove myself crazy with worry over things I could not change or control, and vowed I would never go out in public again.

Several weeks later, however, I felt good, the anxiety, the depression and the foggy brain gone, and no sign of COVID symptoms, feeling normal again. I had made it. I lived through the COVID experience. Can't blame anyone for my becoming sick. It wasn't my fault either. It simply happened.

###

Shake Rattle and Roll

By Pauline Bastek

I hear those words and I'm back in the fifties. I see my 21 yea-old self in the showroom of the Seeburg Corporation staring at the display of jukeboxes with flashing lights as though they were crown jewels.

Until then, I had only seen Jukeboxes in the bar sections of restaurants and never paid much attention to their make or style, just checked the playlist, put in my coins and waited for my selection to play.

I found myself that day on an interview for a secretarial position with the Assistant Sales Manager of the Seeburg Corporation they manufactured coin operated phonographs, on the near North side of Chicago.

I had been sent on an interview by the employment agency on a Friday afternoon after answering their newspaper ad on a whim. That morning I received the news that the insurance

company I had worked at after high school and through college would be relocating within a year from their location across the street from the Medinah Temple to downstate Illinois.

After a very brief interview with their personnel manager, I completed a basic application, and was invited to meet with Tom Herrick, the assistant manager, who would be my boss. I remember so well his pleasant welcome as he presented me to these coin operated phonographs and hearing Bill Haley and the Comets rendition of their signature song. He asked me what I thought and without missing a beat, I said I didn't like that music. He laughed and said he wanted me to meet the sales manager's secretary and relayed to her my comment. We chatted for a few minutes and before I knew it, I was offered the position at a salary substantially higher than I would ever receive at the insurance company.

At home the phone was ringing with the employment agency asking why I hadn't called to tell them I accepted the position. I told them I wasn't aware I should as I had never worked with an agency. Once they realized that I was serious and taking the position they congratulated me and I never spoke to them again.

Two weeks later I began my new position and more than that, the happiest, most rewarding time of my life. I stated working as a totally inexperienced 21-year-old product of the catholic school system, and was introduced to the kindest mentors I could had desired.

I soon became familiar with going in the corporate limousine to the Golden Ox for lunch, to getting my hair styled at the Palmer House salon, to appropriate business clothing. I literally ate it all up.

I became comfortable speaking with our district sales managers and field engineers and most important of all, I learned to keep my silence and opinions to myself after seeing a field engineer terminated for sharing his less than flattering comments about the latest model of coin operated phonograph while he was having coffee with the sales manager's secretary and me. She reported his comments to her boss and I was asked to verify them. She later married her boss, becoming his second wife.

At Christmas my gifts from the distract managers and field engineers were 14K gold personalized jewelry and cashmere sweaters.

After a year, my marriage seemed to stabilize and we bought a home in River Grove. The transportation time increased by two hours and I was dependent on my husband driving me to the bus on his way to work and waiting to pick me up. When Wilson Sporting Goods came to River Groove, my husband insisted I apply as it was walking distance from our house. I did and I was offered the position of secretary to the merchandise manager at the lower salary. My husband told me I had to make a decision, it was either our marriage and working at Wilson Sporting Goods or divorce if I wanted to remain at the Seeburg Corporation.

I accepted the offer at Wilson and sadly offered my resignation to Seeburg. I hated working at Wilson and was pregnant with my first son that spring. Whenever I hear the word rattle it's not a baby rattle image that brings a smile to my face, but that huge colorful image of the Seeburg jukebox with Bill Haley and the Comets blaring their signature song and the happiest employment I ever had. I often wonder what my life would have been like had I stayed at Seeburg.

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Limbless Reptiles

By Vicki Elberfeld

I never had a snake as a pet, but my brother did. And I suspect he had more than one given that his pregnant garter snake escaped into our basement. It's a large, cold basement with many places for a snake to hide with her babies, and we never did find them. The whole episode made our mother nervous as she feared even harmless snakes and spent several weeks in terror of having to go down in the basement to do laundry.

Mother wasn't nearly as afraid of snakes as was one of my girlfriends with actual, diagnosable Ophidophobia. When I showed her photos of my trip to Morocco which included sword and flame swallowers and snake charmers, she threw down the photographs, claiming she couldn't bear to look at them unless I removed all that included snakes, and she turned her head away from me as I did so. I found it hard to believe she couldn't even view a two-dimensional image of a snake taken from thousands of miles away in safely controlled circumstances, but her fear was undeniable. Understandably our human brain is hardwired through evolution to fear snakelike forms, but most of us learn to distinguish the venomous or suffocating, constricting snakes which can kill us from those which pose no danger whatsoever.

I once entered a crazy costume contest as a belly dancer. Understanding that a belly dancing outfit was pretty ordinary and not crazy at all, I had to make it at least a little surprising, so I rented a python to really get the judges' attention. It cost me \$75 for two hours (back when \$75 would actually buy something) to rent Goldie the snake and her trainer who had to come along for the safety of this valuable golden python. She brought Goldie into my living room in her basket, and she and I posed for my photographer friend as Mother huddled in the kitchen, poking her head out just a little way to get a glance of it.

Then the trainer, Goldie the snake, and I drove to the hotel bar where the crazy costume contest was being held. I knew how to dance, but I'd never danced with snakes before, and there was no time whatsoever for rehearsal. In retrospect, I should have at least practiced taking Goldie in and out of her basket. After sipping our drinks briefly, those of us in costume had to line up onstage facing the audience, and Goldie and her trainer were right next to me. The emcee of the event gave us each a couple of minutes to say our names into the mic and show off our costumes; many just stepped out of the line when it was their turn, and then twirled around so folks could fully view their costumes. At that point the audience applauded, and the costumed person with the loudest applause won!

I was particularly impressed with the tall dragon guy and the real fire he shot from his right hand. Also impressive was the fellow wearing a small table on his shoulders leaving only his feet and his head, decorated like a centerpiece, showing. The table was beautifully set with a table cloth, elegant cloth napkins, silverware, and beautiful china. He and the dragon received much applause. However, when the trainer removed Goldie from her basket and draped her around my neck, there was total silence; no one clapped as Goldie, seeming curious about all those folks sitting and drinking, stretched herself out toward the audience. I believe everyone

was too stunned to respond, keeping their eyes on Goldie and leaning as far back as possible to avoid her.

Needless to say, I didn't win; the guy in the fire shooting dragon costume did. When the emcee reached the jeroboam of champagne consolation prize over to me, she too leaned back, avoiding, as much as possible, the python reaching forward into the air. Then finally, finally the audience applauded!

The show was over, but several young men came up onstage to get a better look at Goldie and question me. How long had I had her? What did I feed her? How much did she sleep? I referred all questions to her trainer, but looking back, I might have had great fun pretending she was indeed my pet and making up the answers myself. After all, the show must go on! Note to self: it's very easy to meet guys when you're traveling with a python, the greatest icebreaker ever.

My only other encounter with a snake fortunately occurred at a great distance. I was camping out at a spelunking convention in New Braunfels, Texas, not far from San Antonio. There were sessions on cave mapping and even dynamite safety for breaking through to inaccessible passages. As the demonstration took place near the parking lot, and one poor fellow's windshield was shattered, I doubt much safety was involved. After the sessions were finished, films were shown, and they were shown in an air-conditioned theater. I wasn't at all a fan of Texas heat and never would be! Ordinarily I would not choose to watch a film on rattlesnake bites and their treatment, but it was either watch the film or be outside in Texas hell. On the rare occasions we drove into town, I noticed not many Texans sported a tan; they had too much sense to expose themselves to the sun. I chose to watch gory images of snake bites in the cool over doing anything else in the heat. Perhaps I made the right choice.

Once the convention was officially over, some of us stuck around for a few days in order to check out local caves. Thirty or forty of us drove out of town to see a potentially beautiful desert cave. Our leader and two friends entered first, and the rest of us were prepared to follow. But then we heard it. The rattle!!! Our leader and his friends tore out of the cave which was obviously very well guarded.

As for me, I joined the others for a delicious lunch in a real restaurant. One rattler was enough for me, and I cut my trip short, unwilling to risk meeting another.

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