

# the WRITERS' EXCHANGE

An Anthology of Creative Writing from North Central Wisconsin

Issue 115

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The Writers' Exchange is a group of people who enjoy writing. The purpose of this Anthology is to promote the art and spirit of writing as a pleasure, to share literary ideas and expressions, to stimulate and encourage writing, to consider publication opportunities and to contribute to the community arts. We invite writers of this area to contribute to this Anthology and to attend our meetings where we share our works, and encourage new ideas. The Writers' Exchange meets on Thursday, usually twice a month, at the Pioneer Bank, 200 Miner Ave., Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Our next meetings are **October 8 & 22** from 2-4 PM. For more information call Bill Fucik (715) 532-6606, wolfhill@chipvalley.com, or Ruth Ralston (715) 532-6815, slograndma123@gmail.com.

## *Writing Challenges*

My Favorite Season – Autumn  
Light Up the Night  
Yellow-Gold Cup



*Quik Thots* - My First Classroom

*Fractured Nursery Rhymes*



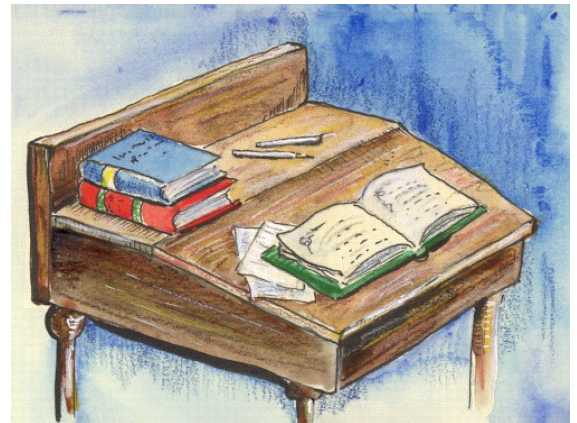
*Karen Wiltrout* - White chalk dust floating down  
to cover the brown wood floor;  
Sister with wooden brown pointer taps on the chalk board;  
Eight rows of children seated in alphabetical order  
Raise hands to answer Sister's question.  
Angelus bell rings, children stand, prayers are said.  
Children quietly walk from the classroom,  
Clamor down the brown wood stairs.  
Voices released, play starts.



*Joe Willger* - Our Lady of Lourdes School had five grades in one room.  
Being in first grade, I really loved hearing what everyone else was learning.  
This opened my life to life's learning.



*Ruth Ralston* - My first classroom was at my mother's knee - when she had time.





## Wonderful Fall

*Audrey J. Riphenburg*

Fall  
Colored leaves  
Raking Autumn's bounty  
Scent of burning leaves  
Seeing smoke curls  
Shorter days  
Fall

Fall  
Crops stored  
Cattle well housed  
Time for farmers' rest  
Cool winds whisper  
Taste apples  
Fall

Fall  
Last tomatoes  
Basement shelves heavy  
Mason jars hold bounty  
Even maple syrup  
Winter ready  
Fall



## Autumn

*Nancy Kuester*

A soft and relaxing name, it even sounds tranquil to me.  
I love its diluted sapphire skies, unblemished by fluffy clouds.  
A myriad of colors is displayed on every horizon,  
As each tree has donned its finest for Nature's final fling.  
Colors that were chosen from an unsurpassed palette  
All entwine unselfishly to please my eye.  
I hear the crackling of fallen leaves breathing their last  
As they bid me farewell until next year.  
I drag my feet, reluctant to leave the orchestration.  
Overhead I sense movement,  
Suddenly explained by flapping wings of geese.  
They are practicing their flight pattern for the long trek south.  
I see the somewhat imperfect "V" formation  
That aides them to their destination.  
A circling smoke pattern rises from the neighbor's chimney;  
The chilling nights demand the warmth of a fire.  
All is quiet now as the hustling squirrels have called it a day;  
Their coffers are overflowing with the acorns they have confiscated.  
Lights twinkle in the surrounding homes  
As children bend curly heads over today's assigned homework.  
Soon, I, too, must leave this milieu – so pleasing to my senses –  
For my favorite football team is about to kick-off the new fall season!



*Holly Bertling* - We stored our books and belongings in cubby holes in my first grade classroom in Milwaukee.  
That's probably why I chose an old fashioned roll top desk for my home office.

## The Poor Woman of Atlanta

*Pegeen Snoeyenbos*

For many years my husband, Milt, and I had a home in Atlanta, Georgia. It was on the southern edge of Buckhead, Atlanta's most prestigious in-town neighborhood, and, while our area was technically called Collier Hills, we residents liked to refer to it as Bucktail. Unlike the stunning mansions that appeared about a half-mile to our north, the homes of Collier Hills were well-kept but modest, as evidenced by street names like "Cottage Lane."

Only ten minutes by car from downtown, our neighborhood had a definite country feel, with tree-lined, winding streets, no sidewalks, several large, lovely parks, and a beautiful stream called Tanyard Creek flowing through it. Many of the houses sat on narrow lots with deep back yards, where people grew camellias, azaleas, dogwoods, gardenias and a host of ferns and hosta. Wildlife was abundant, and raccoons, opossums, and red-tailed hawks were commonplace sights.

Collier Hills also had a fascinating history. Tanyard Creek was the sight of a significant battle in the series of battles that resulted in the fall of Atlanta during the Civil War. We learned that 3000 men had died during the struggle centered around our creek, and that a major part of the battle had been fought on and near the site of our house. It wasn't unusual to see people with Geiger counters combing back yards for war artifacts, and Collier Hills abounded in historical markers relating to the short but bloody battle.

But it was the people of Collier Hills who gave the neighborhood vitality. We were nothing if not diverse -- a mixture of ages, interests and occupations. On our street alone we had a newspaper reporter, two interior decorators, an airline pilot, a long-distance biker, a hurricane expert, three college professors, an international yoga expert, several business people and the world's best Italian cook, who quickly became our third mother.

In spite of, or maybe because of our diversity, Collier Hills had a dynamic civic association dedicated to building a sense of community and keeping the neighborhood safe, attractive and clean. And one of its annual projects was to sponsor a clean-up of Tanyard Creek and encourage all neighborhood residents to take part.

My husband, who was on the board of the civic association, had the job of rounding up neighbors to help in one of these clean-ups. Being naturally friendly and persuasive, he had little difficulty getting people to agree to come on the designated Saturday morning to lend a hand. "Just wear old clothes, old shoes with good grip, and bring a pair of work gloves," he'd tell them. "Everything else will be furnished."

I was going through my closet early one evening, picking out my rattiest old clothes and shoes to wear for the clean-up, when Milt came in grinning.

When I asked him what was so funny, he replied that he'd just talked with an impeccably dressed middle-aged woman who informed him she couldn't possibly help out with the creek clean-up because she didn't have any old clothes!

I offered to lend her some of mine. Milt thought maybe we could take up a collection for her. We chuckled a bit and forgot about it.

But on the morning of the clean-up my thoughts kept turning to the woman with no old clothes. In one way she made the right choice in opting not to join the work group. The bank down to the creek was steep and rocky -- not easy to navigate with a full trash bag. And the hot Atlanta sun can be unrelenting. Also, Tanyard was sullied by all kinds of trash and pollutants entering the stream through the city's drain system or at the hands of careless or uncaring humans. Cleaning up our beautiful, smelly, creek was a daunting task.

And yet, glancing at the people around me, laughing, joking, bonding while getting grubby as pigs, I started feeling sorry for the well-dressed neighbor who chose not to come. By doing so she had deprived herself of the chance to know some wonderful, even remarkable people -- people who didn't worry about the state of their clothing when helping their community. She wouldn't get to meet the energetic older man, wearing a torn tee shirt, baggy shorts and nasty looking sneakers, or know that he was the seriously ill, recently retired chancellor of the University System of Georgia. She wouldn't know that the young married couple looking like lovebirds even while picking up trash, hired a babysitter they could ill-afford in order to help out this morning, or that the tall, elegant woman who owned a home bordering the creek was masking her own illness and physical pain in order to help with this project. She wouldn't appreciate that many of her neighbors were giving up part of their weekend to help make a better neighborhood for everybody, including her. The more I thought about it, the more this woman I'd never met became to me the *Poor Woman of Atlanta*.

Somewhere once I encountered a blessing that went something like, "I wish you enough." And so I wish the *Poor Woman of Atlanta*, and anybody reading this, enough of everything you want and need to live life to the fullest -- including enough old clothes.



*Judy Heintz* - The only thing I remember about my first grade class is a big lifelike poster of a train called "The Great Northern Railroad." I had never ridden on a train and was fascinated by that picture.

## Intergenerational Mothers

*Ruth Ralston*

Mother's mother's mother.  
Great grandmother, Grandmother, Mother.  
What strength is there in ideas  
Passed down to each generation,  
Accepted by love or from duty.

Great grandmother,  
Wife of a puritanical preacher,  
Passes her Victorian gospel  
To daughter, my grandmother.  
Sin of baring body,  
Sin of heretical views,  
Sin of showing affection  
To each other or to children.

Dogma considered as truths  
By my mother:  
Children should be seen only in background,  
Not praised.  
Wives to live ideal lives  
Of practicing womanly arts -  
Clean house, sewing, cooking,  
Corsets, hats, gloves;  
Submissive to husband,  
Abstinence before marriage.

Now, I, as a daughter,  
Had early inherited convictions  
Altered on marriage  
By mate's own cultural ideas.  
Children openly loved and praised.  
I, not housewife, but office worker.

My daughter  
Raised her daughter  
In honesty and love.  
Producing strong loyal family bonds,  
Parental involvement in schools and sports,  
Open minded views on life.

Now daughter wonders -  
Will early inherited convictions  
Be influenced by media and contemporaries  
Imbued with attraction to body baring,  
Nose rings, purple spiked hair, tattoos,  
Changing of bed partners,  
One parent families?

Confusion, religious skepticism -  
What contrast between great grandmother  
And daughter's daughter's daughter?

## Those Who Die Old

*Meggan Meisegeier*

Her face is etched with age. But it is more than age that wrinkles her face. A thousand laughs, a million smiles. Days of weeping, hours spent hunched over in worry. The conversations she had, the advice she gave, and the hands that she held. All the time she spent reading, mind filling with wonder, questions and ideas nagging.

She has walked a billion steps. Years of fighting gravity have pulled her closer to the Earth and turned her hair the silver white of a halo.

She has traveled.

She has met. She has lost.

There has been joy and sadness and many moments in between.

Children and babies, smelling the softness of their hair, holding the closeness of the tiny bodies.

She has loved so deeply that it has pitted her soul, and cried as if to use every last tear.

And there have been lessons; many, many lessons.

That is what it means to be engraved with age.

Now she sleeps. Wakes and eats and sleeps some more. Her body cannot walk the Earth any longer. Her hands have lost their strength and her eyes can now only see the dimmest light. Does she dream? Does she see herself young again, only to wake up frail? Does she dream her children tiny, feel their hands in hers, imagine them in her care, only to wake to find the roles reversed?

Maybe she dreams of the ones who went before her. To the place beyond, into the gray and endless. They come to her in her dreams and tenderly touch her cheek. They tell her they will see her soon. Do not be afraid, they whisper, there are other worlds than this one.

She is not afraid. She is excited. That is the privilege of those who die old, those who die ready. They don't fear the end, they welcome it, cherish it - arms wide, heads up, eyes dry, smiles brightening their souls.

The next adventure begins.

## Where Is Everybody?

Thoughts on Fermi and Drake  
and the Search for Intelligent Life in the Universe

*Larry Johns*

The Fermi Paradox, for those who don't know, is Enrico Fermi's reply to the famous "Drake Equation" which assigns various mathematical probabilities to the existence of intelligent life throughout the universe. Given even the most conservative estimate of the number of possible habitable planets in the universe, scientists and astronomers generally agree there **should be** billions and even trillions of technologically advanced civilizations scattered throughout the cosmos - many, or even most, far more advanced than our own.

But in searching the skies we have found no evidence whatsoever of any intelligent life beyond our own planet. So in the words of Enrico Fermi himself we have to ask, "*Where is everybody?*"

Scientists gloomily speculate there may be a "great filter" - a point where any advanced civilization destroys itself one way or another, preventing it from expanding beyond their own home star and thus leaving any trace of their existence. This is tragic and sad news for mankind here on earth as it would be an indication of our future as well.

However, maybe there is another answer to Fermi's Paradox. It may simply be that **inner** space becomes more appealing and fruitful and accessible than the prospect of interstellar travel in outer space. The fantastic costs and level of technology necessary to travel even at a fraction of light speed in order to explore any celestial neighbors may far exceed the resources available even to an ultra advanced civilization.

Instead, could it be more likely a technological civilization would use their advanced powers to create **their own** worlds to explore? Electronic **virtual** worlds devoid of the hazards and harsh conditions of interstellar space? Devoid of the necessity for any more resources than a ray of light? Perhaps they have discovered that whatever they could possibly be looking for in the far reaches of space could be found in a world of their own making.

With our most powerful telescopes we search the skies looking for that tell-tale so called "carbon footprint" an active interstellar traveling civilization would have to leave in its wake, and when we don't see it, we ask, "*Where is everybody?*" Quite likely no one ever did leave a footprint in the sand for us to see. They never had the need. Before traveling to the stars they traveled above and beyond, to the **inner** worlds of their own creation. Above and beyond and so far inside we will never know them or where they are. The universe may be teeming with intelligent life. Maybe just not as primitive as our own.



## Light into the Night

*Ruth Ralston*

A sudden flash in the heavens lit up my window. No noise, however, so I knew the lightning came from a far distance. But my ease ended when the winds started to blow, becoming stronger and stronger gales. The tall trees bent over with a force trying to uproot them. The howling of those blasts around the corners of the house moved me quickly to find candles, for surely a tree would knock down the power lines somewhere.

Then it happened. With a snap, all the power and lights went off. I lit the candle, then placed it before a mirror to double the light. As I sat in almost darkness, I likened the dark to the state of the world which I had been thinking about a few moments ago. Yes, there was darkness. So much hatred, so much violence, so much greed and ignorance. So much stupidity. I was sad and despairing. But now, holding the candle, I realized that with a single candle, I could bring light. If I could find another mirror, someone who also held a candle, we could bring light into our small corner, perhaps inspiring other candles of hope and peace to join us to light up the night.



## Haiku

*Eileen L. Ziesler*

Beyond my bedroom  
Wee summer romance beckons  
Lightening in the night



## Autumn Joy

*Sandie Weiler*

While crisp winter white and summer-sweet purple,  
Spring saffron and new green enthrall,  
When crimson cascades and rich russet rustles,  
My favorite color is fall.



## The Yellow-Gold Cup

Our challenge was to write about a yellow cup placed before us at the Writers' Exchange.

In my workshop, "The Physicality of Acting," we explore the handling of props, such as a cup, to experience how we subtly externalize our thoughts or speech in a situation through our manipulation of the prop. - *Michael Doran*



Nowadays our cups are often plastic – like our prompt. But the one I love is china. It belonged to my mom and was trimmed in a strawberry design – fruit and foliage. It had a saucer to match. It's all very delicate. From when I was a tiny girl my mom told me how precious the strawberry cup was to her. She had it throughout her life – it's probably 100 years old - she passed away at age 98! It makes me think of people standing outside their house after a tornado, for example, had destroyed everything – pictures, records of their lives and keepsakes – perhaps a strawberry cup! - *Pat Bourne*

A coffee cup is a very important part of the morning meal. Some are small and funnel shaped, others are straight up and down mugs with a big handle and made of heavy material so the heat from the coffee doesn't come through and burn one's lips. They are big so they hold a lot of coffee. Morning is the best time to drink coffee but some people like it all day long. I, myself, do not drink coffee except in the morning. - *Bryce Coggins*

The first activity of the day is to have a cup of good coffee. It cannot be from just any cup. The cup must have character: ceramic! I prefer knowing the artist and how the cup came to my possession. The container is what gives the experience of drinking coffee its meaning and character. Coffee without a great cup, a paper cup or a Styrofoam cup makes the experience uneventful and frustrating. - *Joe Willger*

I like having a variety of mugs from which to choose as I enjoy my morning coffee. Some days I need a spiritual boost so I reach for "*In All Things Give Thanks*." If my cat amuses me, it's "*World's Best Cat Mom*." My family photo mug is one of my favorites. And sometimes it's just the feel of the mug that I go for. I prefer this to drinking from the same matched set every day. - *Holly Bertling*

The yellow coffee cup brings to mind thoughts of...Melmac. When I was in my first decade of life the mothers in our neighborhood were happy to let their little girls have pretend tea parties using Melmac cups, saucers, and plates. Melmac dishes were as plain as long underwear, but they didn't break, were cheap to replace if pieces got lost, and we girls thought they looked wonderful when we served our mud pies. - *Peggy Snoeyenbos*

Whether it be called plastic, or ceramic, it didn't matter – it was nearly unbreakable! This was a necessary quality needed in our house in the early years. The children were ages six, four and one. Each wanted to drink from a cup like Mom's and Dad's. Inevitably 50% of the time that these cups were the vessels of choice they would end up on the floor. With their quality of being almost non-breakable our number of cups never diminished! - *Nancy Kuester*

This cup reminds me of when my children would miss the school bus and I would drive them to school. Of course, I'd call my neighbor lady to see if she needed a loaf of bread or something. She'd say, "I need a dozen eggs, for sure!" So off we'd go, singing "*On the Road Again*". After dropping the kids off we would head straight to the restaurant and drink coffee, tell stories, and laugh until noon or so. When we got home we would go ninety miles an hour to make it look like we'd been slaving away all day. - *Judy Heintz*

The cup reminds me of mustard on a hotdog! But, then again, the cup is small and I wouldn't use it for my morning coffee. Does my cup runneth over? No, my cup of life is just filled to the brim! So there!! No "cuplets"! – *Bill Fucik*

The plastic golden colored cup was filled overfull with air, the same air we were all breathing. I wanted to drink it down again and again – the golden elixir of indoor air conditioned air, not the soggy humid outdoor air that I was drinking down my lungs while walking into writers' meeting. - *Gary Hetty*

The cup reminds me of the many times I had an upset stomach and my mother would make me hot milk with nutmeg or hot tea with cinnamon, neither of which I liked. The cure was worse than the stomach ache – especially the hot milk and nutmeg! Ugh!! - *Char Lovely*

## Death's Door

*Jerry Gillis*

I, Jerome Francis Gillis, was almost killed back in 1958. I remember parts of that day because, at the time, it was the most violent and tragic day of our family's life. I was about 10 years old and I was still called "Baby Jerry" by my four siblings.

Although I don't remember in which month it happened, I do remember it was a bitter cold morning. It was a school day and for some reason, even with a mom and dad, one older brother and three older sisters, I was all alone.

Would I be late for school? Being late for school was disrespectful, and the nuns at St. Rose of Lima School in Milwaukee could be very cross with impertinent children, so I came up with a plan. Instead of going the old way to school I would cut across Merrill Park, about 20 grassy acres with several softball and baseball fields on it, then kitty-corner to Clybourn Ave. and cross at the old Library on 35th Street. From there it's a straight shot down Clybourn Ave. to 30th Street and into school and my 5th grade classroom.

As I was getting ready to leave, I knew that I had two tall metal "Century" fences to climb over. There wasn't barbed wire along the top, but they did have those sharp and strong metal forks along the ridge. But I knew that in my black-top tennis shoes this boy held the record for climbing to the top of those fences and jumping over without a scratch.

There were no plastic bags, book bags, or back packs in those days. You just tied your books together with anything you could find and hope for the best. I tied mine with one of Paul's laces from his football spikes. (I think football was over or maybe just starting.) Anyway, wearing my corduroy pants and a flannel shirt, I donned my newer "tennies", and because it was so cold, I slid my feet into my oversized black winter boots. After latching the five buckles, I put on my warm winter, fur-edged, hooded jacket. I zipped it up and put on some old mitts and hurried out the door. I ran back in, grabbed my books and ran out again. I walked toward the park at a slow pace because I knew I was NOT going to be late.

I made it to the first fence and knew I couldn't climb it with my school books in hand so I threw them over the fence and, lucky-for-me, my brother's laces didn't break. After sticking my gloves into my pocket, I grabbed the fence reaching as high up as I could, then I went to stick the toe of my "tennies" into the square in the fence and my foot slid back down the fence like there was grease on it. Damn, I forgot I had boots on. I sat down on the cold hard ground and unbuckled the boots, slid them off and tossed them over the fence. Almost before they hit the ground, I was over the fence also. I don't remember any other problems other than I had to run while carrying the books and boots to the next fence. When I got to the last fence, everything worked like I planned.

They had recently put up a Stop & Go light on the corner of 35th and Clybourn and I ran toward it holding my boots and books. I was eager to run across but I knew better. A city bus was approaching the interchange and it was coming to a complete stop. As there was no "bus stop" there, I thought the light must have changed. I took off in front of the stopped bus.

I was told I flew, tumbling in the air with books and even boots scattered, as a big coal truck, having a GREEN light, passed the bus on the left. The huge dirty coal truck blasted me up in the air and tossed me quite a way down the street. No one knows why the bus stopped at a green light but now, at least, I had a good excuse for being late for school.

I guess I was out cold and close to death because some kind of an ambulance came and got me. There weren't paramedics back then, or anyone with EMT training. I don't know if I went to County Emergency Hospital right away, or somewhere else. I found out later that a priest came and gave me my last rights. After many long and scary hours went by, I was told I woke up puking; then I passed out. When I woke up again, I was at Children's Hospital in downtown Milwaukee, but at least I woke up.

I was getting a lot of attention from people I didn't know. I do remember my mom and dad sitting next to me and touching me while they had tears in their eyes. I think I was trying to say something or make a joke but I was too busy puking and then I passed out again.

As usual, my thoughts about this time are kind of vague and scattered.

I believe, on the inside, I had a fractured skull, a concussion, punctured ear drum, fractured pelvis, and fractured collar bone. On the outside, the only thing I had was a cut on one of my fingers and blood coming out one of my ears.\*

\*(To borrow from Paul Harvey, come back next month for "the rest of the story...")




*Michael Doran*

Tom Blatt drank beer on tap  
His wife drank from the bottle  
Regardless of their preference  
They both picked up a waddle.

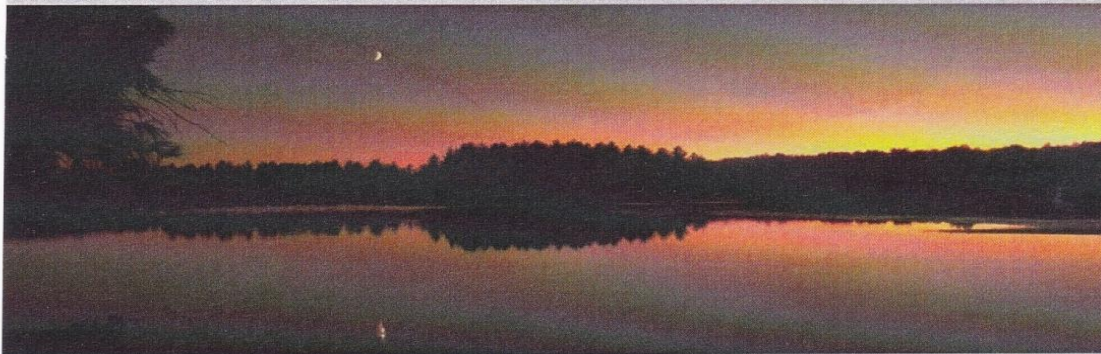


*Sandie Weiler*

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary,  
Why are you at the bar?"  
"Well, Cinderella stole my fella,  
Riding all night in his car."



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## ARE YOU A WRITER?

*Audrey Riphenburg*

Would you rather write than eat?  
Do you get up in the middle of the night to write?  
Does the muse strike when you are visiting with friends  
and you go into a blank stare?  
Do you search frantically for a scrap of paper  
before the muse escapes?  
Do you pull over to the shoulder of a road to record  
a thought before it takes leave forever?

Do you ever scribble on an envelope  
while you are driving? (shame on you!)  
Do you ever go to a favorite restaurant  
to eat alone and write?  
Do everyday surprises send you to paper and pen?  
Do you dream of publishing but never take time  
to get your "stuff" in order to do so?  
Are you the one in the family who actually writes letters?  
Then you are a writer!

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