

POTPOURRI

February, 2016



GABBY AND THE BEDROOM SLIPPERS

In the past several weeks Gabby has become attached to my bedroom slippers. I've watched her chew contentedly on a of white leather bow, shove her head into the toe portion of a slipper, and even carry one across the room. Very often I catch her in just the position the photo shows, sitting possessively atop one or both of the slippers.



As with all rescue pets, it's fun to speculate about Gabby's history. When I found this picture among Gabby's toys, I wondered if it might be a photo of her parents.

I've decided to frame it, but I'm wondering if it would be better to place it on the mantel or hang it over the cat box. Opinions anyone?

WHAT I'M READING

THE FELLOWSHIP: The Literary Lives of the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams, by Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

This book was a selection of the non-fiction book club I'm in. I enjoyed reading it because I'd heard of the Inklings and was interested in how this group of Christian writers worked together. What I discovered is that it was a fluid group that lasted for 20 or more years, with Tolkien, Lewis, Barfield, and Williams being the four constant members. C.S. Lewis' brother, Warnie, was also a member, and it's from his notes of the meetings that we know most of what we do.

Group members had three things in common: their faith, their writing, and their love of debate. What they wrote ranged the gamut of genres: history, plays, fantasy, theology, poetry, and literary criticism. Like most British clubs of the day, the Inklings only allowed men to join, but Dorothy Sayers evidently participated in their discussions fairly

often. In their meetings one or more member would read a portion of his work-in-progress and the others would engage in debate about how well it was working. This procedure is still commonly used in creative writing classes today. The big difference is that popular wisdom today groups writers by genre for critique (short story writers critique short stories; poets, poetry; novelists, novels). The Inklings put no such limits on their critique sessions.

Because I (mostly) prefer to write fantasy and suspense rather than literary fiction, a brief commentary (p. 382) on escapist literature caught my attention:

"Lewis bristled at accusations that his writing was no more than escapism. He told the science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke that he had shed all worries about the issue after a friend (surely Tolkien) had pointed out that the only people who condemn escape are jailers."

WORD PLAY*

Review of our January Word: *hurple* [To shrug or stick up the back as an animal does in inclement weather when standing under a hedge.]

- Melody Plaxton (CA) sent this sentence using *hurple*: "When I entered the room and saw my arch enemy, I resisted the temptation to hurple, quieted my rattled sensibilities, and smiled warmly instead." Melody assured me she doesn't have an arch enemy, but we never know when we might unwittingly acquire one. Remember Holmes and Moriarty? Or more recently She-Ra and Hordak?
- I had a real life experience with hurpling. I was sitting in my recliner watching an ancient episode of *Murder, She Wrote* (I admit to owning all 12 seasons). As usual when I watch TV, Gabby was curled in my lap asleep. Suddenly my stomach started growling. Gabby jumped to her feet, hurpled, and hissed at me! Once we both recovered from the surprise, I got a snack.

February Word: *ninny-broth*.

Definition: Popular word for coffee; also *chatter-broth*, *saloop*.

Sample Sentence: I can't seem to think straight without my morning mug of ninny-broth.

Reader Challenge: Construct a brief dialog using two of the three forgotten "coffee" words. Email to suzannebratcher@gmail.com.

*From *The Word Museum: The Most Remarkable English Words Ever Forgotten*, by Jeffrey Kacirk (Touchstone Books, 2000).

MY OWN WALK IN THE WOODS



The middle of February was unseasonably warm here in Arkansas. One Monday when the temperature hovered around 70, I joined a group of the Ouachita Mountain Hikers to explore the newly reclaimed Cedar Creek Trail. (Last year a wind storm snapped the tops off of some trees and uprooted others, leaving the trail completely inaccessible to hikers). OMH is a serious club that offers challenging Thursday hikes of ten miles or more in places all over the state of Arkansas and easier Saturday hikes on the 25 miles of trails here in the Village. It was a beautiful day, and I really enjoyed being outside and just walking. I walked about a mile, rested on this bench a while, and then walked the mile back to the car. Quite a trek for me! The photo shows my good friends Becky and Jim Gifford with me (I'm wearing the lavender windbreaker. I leave it to you to identify Becky and Jim). Like me, Becky has MS, and we've formed our own support group (two members so far, but we're open to more). When people who don't know us see us together, they often ask if we're sisters. We've given up saying, "No, we're just friends who look alike." We've decided we're "bonus siblings," not from the same birth family, but sisters nevertheless.

MY WRITING LIFE

HOW TWITTERBIBLE CAME TO BE



Serious about Blogging

When my agent Jim Hart said, "If you're serious about publishing in the traditional market, you've got to get serious about social media," I was uneasy. When he added "especially blogging," I was dismayed. Then he told me "serious" meant blogging weekly. I panicked. I'd had a blog (Suzanne's Scribbles) since 2008. In seven years I posted a total of thirteen entries. My silence must have cried "Help!" because Jim emailed me a list of articles on blogging. *Oh my...*

Value Added

I started reading. The consensus of the authors was that successful blogs can be summed up with the phrase "value added." I was vaguely familiar with the term from discussions with my CPA daughter about the "value added" by her company's products

in foreign markets. As I puzzled through the connection, I began to understand that successful blogs offer content valuable to their readers. Travelers, for example, read blogs written by other travelers offering information about out-of-the-way restaurants, reasonable hotels, and little-known side trips. Quilters read blogs about fabrics and new tools. Cooks read blogs filled with recipes. *Hmm...*

Audience and Theme

I looked through Suzanne's Scribbles and found entries ranging from anecdotes of my trip to Australia to reflections on Multiple Sclerosis fatigue to directions for making a batik scrap quilt. So who was my audience? I might assume my family and friends would be interested in these mildly entertaining ramblings, but the real truth was that I was my own audience. I wrote and posted on the topic I was interested in at that moment. *Oops...*

A Different Way to Blog

I began to consider the audience I wanted to attract to my blog. Because my fiction is romantic suspense for the Christian fiction market, my readers are primarily women and predominantly Christian. I needed a theme this audience would consider valuable: content I could offer from my life that connected with their lives. I puzzled for a couple of weeks. Then one Sunday evening as I was preparing reflection questions for the verse-of-the-week Bible discussion I lead on Mondays, an idea popped into my head. *Maybe...*

TwitterBible

Could I blog on one Bible verse a week? My daughter liked the idea, my online writing partner liked the idea, and, best of all, my agent liked the idea. But there was still that pesky issue of social media. What if I posted the verse to Twitter and Facebook on Monday and the reflection questions Tuesday through Thursday? Friday my blog would appear on my website. I breathed a prayer and launched TwitterBible.

By the way, last Friday I posted the thirteenth blog entry—not in seven years—in thirteen weeks! Even better, the next three entries are ready to go. *Imagine that...*

*Blessings,
Suzanne*