

Writing Group ~ No. 4. 2021



Editorial

In this edition, we share stories that might remind you of your childhood, those youthful worries and those fishermen's fantasies – brought to you by Neela Dhaya, Caroline Selkirk and Gordon Johnson. Nancy Tietz shares a few entries from her personal collection of quotes and sayings which may encourage you to do the same. And, just for some fun, we look at the limerick as a genre.

Were your school holidays ever spoiled by the anticipation of your school report arriving in the mail?
Read on...

The Report

by Caroline Selkirk

It had arrived! Peter heard the creaking wheels of the postman's old bicycle stop outside the front door. The post was pushed through the letter box flap in the door. It landed in an untidy heap on the carpet. Envelopes scattered. Lying among the brown envelopes, with their little windows was a lone white envelope. It bore a crest with a lighthouse and the words "*lux, veritas,*" in blue underneath.

Peter knew what that envelope contained. His parents would not be pleased with his marks. He had failed History outright and his other marks were dismal. He had spent too much time enjoying himself in the back row of the class, chatting to pretty Sarah Masters. He could almost hear his father's stern voice saying, "These marks are very disappointing, Peter. You will be gated for the school holiday so that you can apply yourself to your books."

That wouldn't do at all. He had great plans for the holiday, plans which included Sarah Masters.

He heard his mother coming into the hall. She would see the letters lying on the carpet. He only had a few seconds and he had to act quickly. With a smooth movement, he swiftly bent down and scooped the envelope containing his report into the pocket of his hoodie.

He was just in time. His mother came into the entrance hall, saw the post lying on the floor and said, "The post has arrived. Please pick it up for me, Peter, and put it onto the hall table for your father."

He picked it all up, placed it neatly onto the table, smiled at his mother and sauntered off to his room. Once there, he shut the door and ripped open the envelope.

"I wonder what old Beaky, my Grade Head, has to say about my marks. Bet it isn't complimentary. He doesn't like me."

He drew the single page out of the envelope, puzzled. It didn't look like a report. It was just a letter, typed on the school's letterhead. His jaw dropped in horror as he read:

Dear parents, this letter serves to inform you that we will be sending your children's reports by e-mail from now on....

The writers were asked to compose a limerick in 5 minutes. Here are some examples:

The Limerick

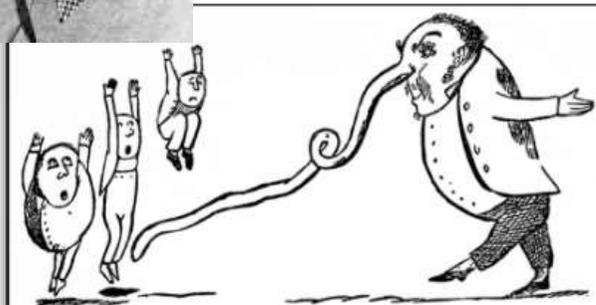
I'm sure we all learned some funny Edward Lear limericks when we were young. But have you ever tried to write one?

A limerick is a humorous poem with either four or five lines, depending on how you want to lay it out. The first line always starts, "There was a ...". Lines 1, 2 and the last line must rhyme and should contain 8 or 9 syllables each. The middle two lines must rhyme and contain 5 or 6 syllables each.



EDWARD LEAR, 1812-1888
Artist, musician, author and poet.

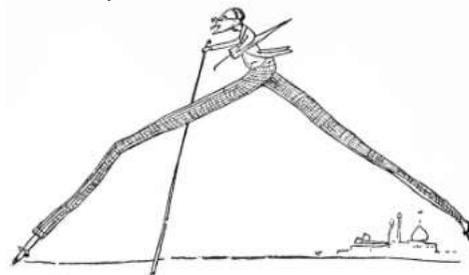
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/c/ce/Edward_Lear_1866.jpg/1200px-Edward_Lear_1866.jpg



There was an Old Man with a nose,
Who said, "If you choose to suppose
That my nose is too long, you are certainly wrong!"
That remarkable Man with a nose.



There was an Old Man in a tree,
Who was horribly bored by a Bee;
When they said, "Does it buzz?"
he replied, "Yes, it does!
It's a regular brute of a Bee."



There was an Old Man of Coblenz,
The length of whose legs was immense;
He went with one prance from Turkey to France,
That surprising Old Man of Coblenz.

Here is one taking the mickey out of limericks:

There was a young man from Dundee,
Who got stung on the leg by a wasp.
When they asked, if it hurt
He replied, "No, it doesn't
It's lucky it wasn't a hornet!"

Anon

Linda Smith shared one which might resonate with some of our members and raise a giggle:

*There once was a lady named Jenny,
Who needed to go spend a penny;
She looked all around
But no place could be found,
Then she sneezed and her blushes were many!*

Nancy T has a naughty sense of humour. She shared this one, compiled while walking on the beach:

There was a young man from Alsace,
Who wanted to imitate Ace.
He made a stock-pile
From tenders on file,
And has rapidly fallen from grace.
rmt

Now it's your turn:

There was an old man from Nahoon
Who

Send your limerick to Nancy Tietz at: rmtietz@imagnet.co.za

Each month we are given prompts to help fire up the imagination. This short piece from Neela Dhaya will bring back delicious memories for many readers. The prompt was *The Smell*. It was a popular choice with a variety of likely and unlikely scenarios being offered, but who can resist this ...

SMELL

By Neela Dhaya

I've often blamed my inability to control my appetite for food and junk food in particular, because it smells and tastes so good. Of course, this was always the manufacturer's fault. I realised, however, this had to be a fallacy because as per Covid protocols I am always wearing a mask which blocks both eating and food smells... but I'm still craving. So it has to be a memory associated with the emotions created at the time of eating. One of my early memories perhaps better describes what I mean.

I grew up working in a General dealer store and one of my jobs as a child was to pack the chocolates on the shelf. There was one particular chocolate called CHOX. It had a thin red foil covering. One had to be extra careful not to accidentally tear the foil while handling it. The smell of that chocolate tickled the nose in such a pleasant way. I would hold each slim bar to my nose before packing, inhaling the rich scent as if it could magically leave the wrapper and enter my mouth. When opening my CHOX (my reward for packing), I would very carefully peel back the wrapper doing my best not to tear it. Then I would break off very small pieces; let the warmth of my mouth melt the chocolate, slowly savouring the rich creamy mixture of cocoa, sweet sugar and milk as it melted on my tongue. This memory and pleasant taste experience, even today, still has my brain enslaved and me addicted to Chocolate.

English is a wonderful language!
What is in a word?

STRIKE!

By R M Tietz

I remember once cataloguing a book with the title *Strike!* It is hard to imagine a whole book about strike and this one was all about angling in South African rivers. Strike has altogether too many meanings. One can strike a match, strike camp, strike a pose, strike a flag at sunset, strike a coin or even strike oil, in which case you strike it lucky! Disaster has also been known to strike.

When something strikes a chord with you, a vague and pleasant memory is brought to mind. In other circumstances you might say "Strike me down!" in an expression of disbelief. You can strike someone who has wronged you but it's safer to talk it through and strike a bargain with them instead. You can also strike back in argument, a verbal attack which might just strike your opponent dumb.

Combined with a preposition strike forces its way into many aspects of being. One may strike on something by chance, strike a professional from the register, strike out items on your shopping list, strike up like a band, and strike out in a new venture while the clock ticks away and will strike every hour on the hour. In all its shades of meaning strike seems to combine elements of force, suddenness and sometimes violence.

When 'Strike' was suggested as a topic for writing I'm sure the Post Office Strike which has been going on for months was uppermost in mind. No doubt the workers have good reason to lay down tools and strike in protest at conditions of employment that have dictated illegally their temporary positions for more than five years. Their strike has crippled our communications. Perhaps we too should protest. A hunger strike might be very beneficial before we indulge in the excesses of Christmas!

And, finally, a striking tale.

A SPARKLING CATCH

by Gordon Johnson

It was a chilly September morning. The haunting call of a Fish Eagle sliced through the air. A thin layer of mist skimmed across the Vaal River on the outskirts of Windsorton. Stompie van Tonder, aka Vislus, was sitting on a small pile of tailings, dredged from the bottom of the Vaal River by alluvial diamond diggers many years before.

Vislus was a retired rail worker who received a small pension and had to augment the protein on his dinner table with freshwater fish. Hence the nickname 'Vislus'.

Urban legend has it that this stretch of the Vaal river produced rich harvests for the intrepid Yellowfish anglers and Vislus was rather partial to the taste of Yellowfish, particularly freshly caught Yellowfish.

The dry Magaliesberg tobacco sparked as he drew the flame from a match into it. He cradled his fishing rod on the arm that was holding the battered McNab pipe. The tip of the rod suddenly dipped and the reel started to screech. A flock of startled guinea fowl noisily left their overnight perch and the McNab fell from Vislus' mouth as he jumped up to commence battle with whatever was on the hook at the end of the fishing line.

Yellowfish are feisty fighters and Vislus had to adjust the drag of the reel precisely or else the fish would live to fight another day. But Vislus was an experienced angler and the one and a half kilogramme Yellowfish soon lay gasping at the water's edge. He delighted at the thought of feasting on this tasty morsel straight from the pan.

Vislus laid the fish on a flat stone, took his trusty Okapi knife out of his pocket and proceeded to gut the fish. He felt something hard when his hand scooped inside the fish to remove the entrails. It felt like a pebble. It was shiny like a piece of glass and sparkled when held up to the sun. It looked as if minute flashes of lightning were coming from it.

Born and bred in the Northern Cape, Vislus knew what diamonds looked like, and this was no doubt a diamond. Vislus picked up the McNab, knocked the tobacco out on a stone, refilled it with Magalies and thought, "No more Magalies for me. From now on it will be Boxer mixed with Rum & Maple. Finish and klaar!"



The writer's Notebook

Anyone who wants to be a writer should write every day, so that the words begin to flow from your pen or your fingers on the keys. There are several opportunities for daily writing. Possibly the most regular form is to keep a diary of the events in your life. Or you could write a journal which is similar but more about your reaction to events, your thoughts and feelings about the people you meet, an achievement, a new experience or your response to situations.

The Writer's Notebook is altogether different. This is an informal note book which accompanies the writer where ever s/he goes. Mine is 10 x 7cm, with a jazzy cover and is either on my desk or in my handbag. In it I write down anything I want to remember because it makes me laugh, makes me think. Thoughts that inspire, intrigue, and ring true with me are all written down and generally incite reaction.

A selection of entries in my note book includes:

- ❖ *Unattended children will be sold to the Circus* - Notice in Chamberlain Square parking area. [Waiting in the wings, which means I haven't used it but may yet do so.]
- ❖ *To write is human, to get mail, Divine!* - Susan Lendroth, quoted in The Daily Maverick. [Used it in an e-mail to the U3A EL Writing Group indicating that a response is needed.]
- ❖ *Sangoma: Ancestors are on Strike!* - Masthead from The Daily Sun. [Waiting in the wings.]
- ❖ *My Husband's Surprise Wedding* - Masthead from The Daily Sun. [Used in a short story about affirmation of wedding vows on a 50th Wedding Anniversary.]
- ❖ *...well known for his pertinent impertinent remarks!* - Said of one mutual friend by another mutual friend. [Used in an account of attendance at a banquet arranged by the Department of Recreation, Sport, Arts and Heritage.]
- ❖ *"Count your age by friends, not years. Count your life by smiles, not tears."* - John Lennon. [Used in a 70th Birthday card for a friend who hated the thought of getting older.]
- ❖ *Nothing about us without us: creating a society for all* - Taken from the notice board in REHAB to indicate that beneficiaries of REHAB want to be included in all fund-raising projects as part of a REHAB family. [Waiting in the wings.]
- ❖ *...stand up for our ideals and our values. Let's not throw up our hands when it's time to roll up our sleeves. Not now. Not tomorrow. Not ever.* - Kamala Harris , VP of USA.

You will have noticed that most of the quotes / my notes reflect the lighter side of life. Perhaps it is because I, like Charlie Chaplin, believe 'A day without laughter is a day wasted.'