

[The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

[Home](#)[About Us](#)[Announcements](#)[Interviews](#)[Fiction](#)[Poetry](#)["Our Stories" non-fiction](#)[Writers' Craft Box](#)[Book Reviews](#)[Writers' Contest!](#)[Exploration of Theme](#)[Submission Guidelines](#)[Professional Services](#)[Indie Bookstores](#)[Feedback & Questions](#)[Archives](#)[Commentary On Two Years](#)

Come in...and be captivated...

Writers' Contest!

As we are nearly always up for trying something new, for this edition of the Writers' Contest, we did a non-fiction challenge this time around as opposed to the numerous fiction contests we've had in the past.

The rules:

Submit a piece (3,500 max) based on an unusual object that you often keep with you and most importantly tell us why you keep the item (luck, memory, etc...). For Gentlemen~ search pockets and wallets for inspiration. For Ladies~ do a search and rescue of your handbags for ideas. You might be surprised at what you find, previously unaware of it, and if so, include that in your piece.

The Winning Entry was "Clowning Around" by Jack Wheland, who will receive a \$10 gift certificate to Barnes & Noble bookstore. Read his charming featured story below. Thank you

to everyone who submitted! We loved reading about your mementos!

Clowning Around

By Jack Wheland

Dedicated to Lilly ;)

Crowded in with credit cards, video store memberships, my license and fold-out pictures of my wife and kids, there's a sticky, faded clown face on a white piece of cardboard. It tells the story of the better part of my life and I can't see going without it in my wallet everyday. As I have no secrets from her (I couldn't even if I wanted to) my wife knows it's still there. I let the image slip out sometimes if we're out somewhere after we've had an argument; like magic, this talisman negates the tension with light-hearted humor. She smiles, catches my eye and winks. I give her a grin as we silently reminisce about the night we met.

In bleached denim jeans, a white, broad-shouldered blazer over an embarrassingly bright lime sherbet tee-shirt, I impatiently shoved my way to the front of the line. My loud-mouthed high school buddies in tow, our "gang" looked like a cross between Miami Vice cast-offs and The Breakfast Club.

"Hand," the fairground worker demanded. About five of us stuck out our fists at once to get stamped so we could get in. The woman rolled her eyes, slamming the stamp on the backs of our hands as fast as she could to get rid of us. We barreled into the fair, spread out and pointing to which rides we wanted to try first. The 'cool' guys did the roller coaster first- it was a test of bravery and the best place to meet girls. It was the summer before my senior year and I thought I was slick with

my over-gelled hair cut into its weird, geometric shape that I still can't define. I'd just gotten my driver's license and my old man had let me drive his car to the fair. Feeling supremely confident, my eyes scanned the crowd. Much to our disappointment, most of the girls there that night were either paired up already, 5-10 years old or full-grown women.

The huge Sunday dinner I'd just scarfed down came to mind; was the roller coaster worth the risk with no one to prove anything to? A wave of relief came over me as I turned to step out of the line for the ride. But then I saw her.

Tall, curvy, volumes of teased bleach-blond hair a la Debbie Harry, leaning carelessly against her jock boyfriend, looking bored. My foot pivoted back into line- now I had something to risk peace of mind and dinner over. I gave the signal, THE CODE, to my friends. They made a lot of noise, channeling their obnoxiousness until she looked directly at us. Super suave, I was the one who told them to knock it off, pretending to be disgusted at their immaturity. We locked eyes for a minute; I smiled and shrugged my shoulders in apology. Her expression indicated that she was wise to my scheme but she no longer appeared bored. That was something.

Her boyfriend called us idiots even after the group of us had quieted down. We had some choice words in return but were willing to turn our backs and end it. He persevered even as my dream girl tugged on his arm and told him to back off. It was when he told her to shut up and accused her of being on our side that I got angry.

In chivalry, I approached at her defense. Before I could think of what to say, his fist collided with my jaw. A male worker broke us up before I could reciprocate. My future wife scolded her escort and told him to get lost. She said she wouldn't go on

the roller coaster with anyone but me. Those were the words that healed my jaw and wounded pride. I held her hand the entire time.

After the ride, my stomach lurched and I had to run out of sight for a moment. Instead of being understandably grossed-out, she waited and brought over fresh napkins for me to wipe my face. I was burning with shame and my friends were bursting at the seams with laughter. It seemed nothing could save me when she pulled out a little white piece of cardboard with a clown face tattoo on it from her purse. Yes, I was an idiot- did I really need it tattooed on my forehead?

“Here... My, hmm, friend won this for me earlier; it’s the only thing I had to write on, but I put my number on the back.”

Shocked at my unlikely good fortune, I took it from her hand and put it into my wallet.

Many years and wallets since, I keep my good luck charm close by because it helped me get the woman I’m happy to be a clown for.

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