



## Group Writing: So, How Old Is That in Dog Years, Again?

December 13, 2019

This is an update of a post I wrote exactly three years ago, when the answer to the question posed in the title was a mere “42.” I hope my long-time friends will forgive my shortcut here, and that my new friends will find it interesting. I celebrate the memories of all kinds that have formed our Ricochet lives, from the ageless [@midge](#) (even older than I am) and infants like [@joecombs23](#) (joined Thursday), to absent friends and loved ones, those who, for one reason or another, are no longer part of the site. Here’s to us all.

Today, December 12, 2019, I’m celebrating my ninth Ricoversary. In dog years, I’m 63, which isn’t exactly my age in human terms, but it’s close enough for government work. Nine years ago today, I squared my shoulders, girded my loins and, for the first, but far from the last, time in my life went to war with the Ricochet subscription and billing apparatus, and its very determined ideas about auto-renewal and subscription status, and I signed up for my first month as a member. There were no levels. No Coolidge, Thatcher, or Reagan. Just a monthly fee, which the site told you far more often than you cared to know, was tied to the cost of a Starbucks latte.

The price of admission at the time included three benefits that I couldn’t get by just visiting the public site: one had to do with the podcasts (I’ve never been an avid consumer of the podcasts, so I can’t speak to them with any detail, but I believe that for some time most of them were behind the member paywall); a second granted me the ability to comment on posts; and the third allowed me to actually create my own posts and publish them on the member feed.

It was not always thus. By the time I came along, Ricochet had been in existence for seven short months, and for six of those months, the main feed was the only feed, and it was populated only with posts from founders, admins, contributors, and editors. Very early member-adopters such as [@scottr](#), [@moriturite](#), [@duaneoyen](#), [@bryangstephens](#), [@nickstuart](#), [@tabularasa](#), [@aaronmiller](#), [@jimmycarter](#), [@pseudodionysius](#), and many, many more, happily and civilly commented among themselves with only rare eruptions of ill-humor. (Notable among those, a spirited debate about whether a reference to terrorists’ “excretory habits” violated the Code of Conduct, or was even suitable for discussion on Ricochet.) I promise you I did not make that up. I can’t find it again, though. You know how the search engine is. It should surprise no-one that [@claire](#) was involved in sorting it out. (Thank you, Claire, for doing your best to keep us civil, present, and correct, for the first few years of my Ricochet experience).

I found out about Ricochet from another of my favorite blogs, PowerLine, where, on August 9, 2010, in a post called [Moonlighting at Ricochet](#), John Hinderaker had written:

Ricochet is a fun site operated by our friends Peter Robinson, Rob Long, Mark Steyn and others. You can register at a nominal price and join in via comments, if you are so inclined. I've participated in several Ricochet podcasts, and they invited me to spend this week as a guest poster.

I did my first Ricochet post [here](#), and reminisced a bit about the history of this site. Over the coming days I will probably cross-post a few observations and do some original material at Ricochet, too.

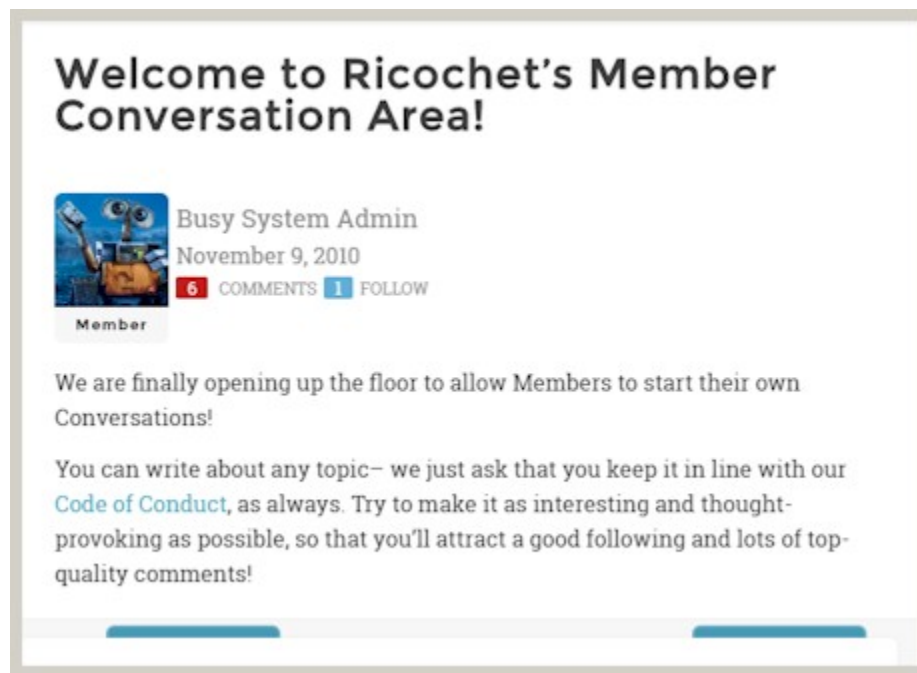
There are lots of good conservative sites on the web, and we're happy to refer our readers to those we especially enjoy. Please do check out Ricochet...

(I'll just note that John Hinderaker was one of a rotating selection of "Guest of the Week" columnists. I thought that was a great idea, and hope to see such a thing reinstated, although "Guest of the Month" might work better. Such a feature brings new life and voices to the site, and doesn't impose too much of a burden on the guest, who's only in it for the short-term).

As a result of that Powerline post, I began my short, unacknowledged, and anonymous, career as a Ricochet lurker.

I loved it.

And I knew I was going to love it even more on November 9, 2010, when I came across this post:



Remember [@busysystemadmin](#)? I think he's been replaced by [@max](#). Is Max just as busy? I don't know, and I won't speculate. Not here, at least.

This post decided me. I was going to sign up. Because, by heavens, I love to write, and, right or wrong, I often think I have something to say. And here was a perfect opportunity—to say whatever it was to a group of complete strangers, where it wouldn't really matter if I horrified, bored, or frightened them. And where I could be assured of a readership that was, at least in theory, politically and thoughtfully on approximately the same page as I was. In other words, a complete no-brainer (something, as many of you have helpfully pointed out over the years, I am really good at, and eminently qualified for), and a win all-round.

So, here I still am. Happy Birthday to me.

And if you'll indulge me for a trip down memory lane, I'm going to take you through my first day at Ricochet. It's been a bit of a research and linkage nightmare. I hope everything works. Here we go:

\* \* \*

The day kicked off with a post from member [@kervinlee](#), titled [Attorney General Holder to visit Millbrae to talk to Muslims About Hate Crimes](#). The more things change, the more they stay the same.

But what do we have here in the comments? Intimations of “cheap shots,” “sarcasm,” and “mocking” each other. Are we about to have a food fight, Ricochet 2010-style?

Rats. No. The offending member backs off. Wow. It's Kenneth. Our Kenneth. The whole thing practically ends up in a big Rico group hug.

Next, we have a member post on [Internet Bullying](#), and how the computer is becoming an “analog parent.” This was when cyberbullying was “new,” and before people really understood the trend.

And, [a post](#) from Claire on the main feed, and two others, [one](#) from Paladin, [another](#) from [@stuartcreque](#), on the member feed, on a ‘failed’ (because only one poor person died) terrorist attack in Stockholm.

And look! [@peterrobinson](#) had a conversation with Matt Ridley on “Uncommon Knowledge,” and [created a post about it](#), because before this, we had to go to another page to find out what was on the podcasts. (I know. This may be an example of the “Law of Unintended Consequences” when it comes to clogging up the feed with podcast information. But in December of 2010, this was thought to be a convenience, and a great advancement).

Ha! [Here's a cynical post](#) from [@thedailycaller](#) about how the President's tax-cut deal with Republicans is turning into a Christmas tree of gifts for lobbyists and lawmakers. Something else for “the more things change the more they stay the same” pile.

And, [here's a lovely, and interest-piquing, “education” post](#) from our own [@sawatdeeka](#). How she's kept this sort of thing up for nine years, without any diminution in quality, is a marvel.

Oh, dear. [@washingtontimes](#) tells us that [Bernie Madoff's son hanged himself](#) with a dog leash in a NY city apartment. Ugh. Poor guy.

And [@newyorktimes](#) (I'm sensing a pattern here, although I missed it at the time) remarks on a [rise of secularism in traditionally Catholic Poland](#).)

Here's Claire again, [this time critiquing the New York Times's \(the real one, I think\) reportage](#) on a few stories dealing with Spain, Russia, and Switzerland. Always the cosmopolitan, our very own Claire.

What? [@politicsdaily](#) tells us that [Obama's campaign magic is fading](#). Huh? Apparently, there's a poll.

And here's the comment winner (120) for the day: [A Powerful Argument Against Drug Prohibition](#) by Michael Labeit. The argument posed, which is drawn from a Cato Institute audio recording, would make for some interesting discussion, were it to be layered into recent BLM and police brutality posts, I think.

Someone calling himself Trumpus Maximus Meridius Decimus Abacus (I don't think that was your name then, [@pseudodionysius](#)) [wrote a post](#) (which was mostly a quote. Heh.) citing Theodore Dalrymple on the matter of legalizing drugs. This created some discussion, and 17 comments.

ThirstyArtist's [little post](#) on his amazing discovery that the top 1% of us have more money than all the rest of us put together (which he attributes, probably tongue in cheek, to conspiracy) generated a healthy discussion. [@franco](#) told a funny story, and a few folks tried to impose some reason and rationality.

And Kenneth wrote a post on how he's not a Libertarian, he's a libertarian (sadly, that one doesn't seem to be available anymore). Crystal clear, as usual. As with many of Kenneth's posts, discussion was active (40 comments), and centered around what distinguishes libertarians from conservatives. (It used to be that we liked conservatives, and we weren't sure if we liked libertarians. Now, many of us don't seem to like either of them very much. Or so it appears to me.)

[@franco's post](#) offering some mild criticism of Sarah Palin didn't get much in the way of a response, but he made his argument well, that Palin often "validates her critics" at the same time that she is "dismissing their charges." Will she ever make a comeback? I guess we'll see.

The Mugwump's post, [Cats and Cherubs Don't Mix](#), wrote about his difficulties in beginning a career as a painter of religious art in Santa Fe, NM, all the while being "helped" by his cat, Gus's insistence on chasing the flying cherubs that have moved into, and populated, The Mugwump's place. Hmmm. Don't know how his career choice worked out, but I hope he's doing well, as do those who commented on his interesting post.

Here's [@claire](#) again, this time [hoping for a change of climate](#), from frigid Istanbul to sunny Cancún. She didn't get much sympathy, and apparently her research was a bit faulty, because [@billwalsh](#) pointed out that it was only in the 50s in Cancun. Naturally, there were jokes about all the global warming summits cancelled due to chilly weather.

On much the same subject, [@davecarter](#)'s post on [Decision Points](#) takes on the tricky business of negotiating treacherous winter roads in Illinois and neatly relates it to upcoming decision points in Washington DC to do with tax rate extensions and card check programs for not-so-secret votes by members of employee unions. The post ends with an admonition to us all to stay vigilant and on our toes, because, as he says, "decision points don't take holidays." Sage advice, Dave, as usual.

[@patsajak](#)'s post on [That Presidential Look](#), starts out with the always relevant sentence, "One of the biggest challenges facing someone running for the office of President of the United States is looking 'presidential.'" (I think I've heard that again, more recently. Someone help me out here).

His post was prompted by the sight of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama standing together urging Democrats to pass a tax compromise, and it's clear that, in Pat's estimation, Mr. Obama suffers significantly in the comparison.

***Whoa! What is this? Comment #2.*** Some Ricochet member named "She." ***Her first comment? On her first day? The saucy wench!*** (It's also notable that She had mastered time travel at this early stage in her Ricochet life, as She responds to [@funeralguy](#)'s comment (#3) before he even makes it. Clever folks, those running this site. And the members, too.

Kennedy Smith somehow gets Mark Steyn, Kenneth Branagh, Harry Potter, and Dean Martin all into a very [short post](#) whose saccharine video link prompts a memorable reaction from [@midge](#).

The Ricochet Editor's Desk managed a post on [The Crisis of the Middle](#), bemoaning the high unemployment rate for those without a college education, and pointing out "a growing divergence between the fortunes of the college educated and the rest of the country, including proverbial Middle America." It contains what may be the first use on Ricochet of a now much-overused word, the "elites," and, in discussing an article by UVA scholar Brad Wilcox, talks of a "separation between the top and the rest, and a convergence between the middle and the bottom."

This post had no comments. Hint, [@ricocheteditorsdesk](#): This probably means no-one remembers it. It might be a good one to recycle, or you could just link to it and call yourselves prescient.

Well, we're nearing the end here. (Of the posts, I mean. Not of the world, no matter which side you're on, or what you think).

[@johnyoo](#) wrote [a short post](#) linking to his WSJ article on how the Left's myths about Guantanamo Bay are finally dying. Most of those commenting weren't buying it or had a different take. Nine years on, has anything changed?

[@thedailycaller](#)'s post, [New Jersey Senate vs. Chris Christie](#), discusses the mayhem caused by Christie's standoff with the state's Senate and Supreme Court. (This was when we thought Chris Christie was, unequivocally, one of the good guys. You know. Before [that beach photo](#).)

[@spin](#)'s post, [Is it Getting Any Better?](#) is a thoughtful take on an "Uncommon Knowledge" podcast with an aside along the way, to Kenneth's Libertarian post.

Member Robert Bennett, who is inactive, but whose profile reads "I am a poor, simple college student who reads books all day," (please can we get about 2,500 more just like him?), has a post on [Ballistic Missile Defenses](#), in which he expresses his concern that we have no effective defense for an EMP event. The four comments are interesting but challenging to read because the Ricochet Time Machine has been at work again.

And, *ta-da!* Here we are at the final post of the day, Steve McCormick's [America at its Best](#). I reproduce part of it here:

I was reminded yesterday of the sheriff in the central Idaho county of Custer. Small and out of the way. The sheriff's name? Stu Lumpkin. The county motto? "We are what America used to be." What an awesome name for a sheriff and awesome motto.

Indeed. Hats off to Stu Lumpkin (who's *still* in office) and Custer County, ID, where America's was always great, is still great, will always be great, and we don't need no stinkin' "Again" appended to our motto.

(I only quoted the first few sentences of the post, because the writer then spoils it by saying that Idaho is a horrible place to live. That may be a fact [I've never been there], but it doesn't fit my narrative. Therefore, in the best tradition of 21st-century journalism, I left it out).

So. There you have it. My first day on Ricochet.

What did I learn by going back and reviewing it, lo these many years later?

Well, I learned that at least one of my recollections was spot on. I signed up because of the member feed. Not primarily because of the podcasts, or who the contributors were, but because I enjoyed the daily give and take and because I wanted to write for an audience. Although people join Ricochet for many different reasons, I don't think I was unique then, and I suspect I'm not unique now. I didn't really care if the founders, or the editors, or the admins were five degrees to the left of center, or three degrees to the right of left. No one has ever stopped me from writing what I want to write, and I'm grateful for that, as I'm grateful for those of you who put up with, and read, what eventuates (as Howard Cosell used to say).

I saw that the content of the posts was wide-ranging, that it covered far more than politics, and that the members' posts were as interesting to read as those of the contributors and editors on the main feed. I noticed that most of the posts were not about pigeonholing people into one group or another, nor about defining their authors, in either the posts or comments, in terms of their political persuasions. They were explanatory, rather than tendentious; they were inviting rather than exclusionary. I liked that then, and I prefer those sorts of posts now.

I learned that the contributors, editors, and founders interacted quite a bit with members. That was nice to see, and I wish there was more of that in play today.

I learned that we were tolerant then, as most of us are tolerant now, of each other's idiosyncrasies and foibles. And that perhaps we were a little quicker to assure each other of that, at an earlier point in Ricochet's life cycle. Perhaps we didn't know each other quite as well and so we were more careful, perhaps our positions hadn't hardened as much, perhaps there hadn't been as much water under the bridge, perhaps we just didn't think the stakes were as high. In general, though, we seemed a little kinder to, or at least amused by, each other.

I learned that my recollections of a few small things from my earlier Ricochet life have been a bit off base:

1. I wouldn't have thought that, nine years ago, there would have been about 28 posts on any given day, on both feeds. That's many more than I thought there would be. (I'm a little leery of stating a definitive number, as I think the Ricochet wayback machine is a bit flaky.)
2. About 29 (see comment on "flaky" above) of those posts were identified as "member" posts. That was a higher proportion than I expected for the time (remember that three of the approximately eight remaining posts on the main feed were by Claire).
3. I would have sworn that the "ripped from today's headlines" posts were a fairly new thing. But I see several of them on that day, nine years ago.
4. The same is true for posts that are really not much more than a link to another page, or to a video (sometimes, they're very entertaining). There aren't as many of them as there are these days, but there are several. That was eye-opening to me.
5. And I see that the duplication on posts of the same topic between the main feed and the member feed isn't something that just started happening recently.

I was heartened to see how many old-timers have stayed, and I enjoyed visiting again, even if only for a short time, with those I miss. I'm glad those of us — who survived the upgrade to Ricochet 2.0 which was unbelievably traumatic (we didn't appreciate the two guys in Estonia, or wherever it was, with the hamster-powered server until they were gone), the 2012 election, the upgrade to 3.0 (better, but still disruptive), the same-sex marriage wars, and most recently TRUMP! and preferred personal pronouns — are still here. We should try and keep it that way. I'm glad of those who have joined up in the intervening years, and I hope they stick around, too. And that new members come on board, for all the reasons that they have in the past, and perhaps for reasons we can't yet see. Here's hoping we can be kind to each other and that we can learn a little, even from those with whom we most vehemently disagree.

On the subject of “being kind to each other,” I’d be fibbing to you if I said my entire Ricochet life has been “beer and skittles,” as my countrymen like to say. My two-and-a-half years as a moderator were rewarding, but sometimes challenging. On many occasions, I found myself wishing that I actually had the superpowers that some members attributed to me. It’s a pretty thankless task, really. Until someone thanks you. And then the world lights up.

My interactions with a vanishingly (!) few number of members have been more difficult than I’d like. And I’d be fibbing again, if I said there hasn’t sometimes been some distress about that. It’s not always possible to articulate it while it’s happening, but if I had to net out what I’ve learned, or what we might have taught each other, in hindsight, from those very few experiences, it would be something like this:

One’s investment in an online persona, whether or not it matches reality all that well, should never become paramount in one’s interactions with others. Above all else, we should treat each other as people, and not as a means to an end, as tools for amusement, or as vehicles to entertain and prove ourselves to others. Losing sight of the fact that there are people behind the avatars and the screen names sometimes renders one oblivious to the collateral damage that is caused to flesh-and-blood human beings as we pursue our personal agenda and fun.

I love the fact that Ricochet members put so much effort into the meet-ups, and into establishing IRL relationships between and among ourselves. After nine years on the site, and although it’s difficult, given personal circumstances, for me to travel much, I’ve met dozens of members. I love you all. And I assure you that I am well aware of, and pay attention to the fact that, although one’s online life isn’t actually real; one’s real-life friends, actually, are. I care for you all, cyber-buddies and IRL friends. But my IRL friends, especially. And I hope to make more of you in the years to come.

In retrospect, after nine years, I still think there’s only one significant thing I didn’t realize going in: I thought I was interacting with, and writing to, and for, strangers. I never expected so many of those strangers to worm their way into my affections, to become those people I’d actually meet in real life, and to become those people who matter so much to me. Thank you [@peterrobinson](#), [@roblong](#), and [@blueyeti](#), for launching this grand experiment which has changed lives.

We are the Ricochetti.

What happens to the site over the next nine years is largely up to us.

Let’s make them count.