

Pen & Ink Writers' Group

The truth is...we gather on the Third Monday of each month to practice our writing skills. We listen and share in each other's work. We are small in number and our commitment is strictly to produce and foster creativity among our members.

We started in July 1999 and consist of adults that enjoy writing memoirs, commentaries, essays, poems, and/or prose. Our simple method each month is to use a pre-selected word or phrase as the basis of a story, an idea, an opinion, a derivative of, or an implied essence of and write a 1 to 1 ½ page document. We share our stories, comment, and in that way build up our writing skills through practice and presentation. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive, and the feedback is gentle.

Curious? Always wanted to try writing for fun, entertainment, or even profit? Come visit with us at any of our open meetings. Bring a sample of your work. Sit in and see what we do. If you like it, join us every month and become a member.

Works of the Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group © 2014 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

April 2014 selection – Penny

Penny Remembered By Elvira K. Castillo

Let's go to the Penny Arcade, I said to my friend so long ago. Remember the Penny Arcades in places like Riverview Amusement Park? They contained several coin operated devices where you put a coin in a slot to get a prize, candy, gum, or perhaps your fortune. Also, can't remember if we only put a penny in the slots, but it was always fun and exciting, and you did get your "penny's worth."

Like the phrase "penny's worth," there are other phrases like "Penny for your thoughts" and "Pennies from Heaven." You'd have to give me lots of pennies for my thoughts, which I doubt I'd ever reveal. And, I don't think pennies come from Heaven, because to me, they are a nuisance. I try to get rid of them as quickly as I can, which can be annoying to the store clerks. In fact, I thought there was talk of eliminating the penny altogether, but so far, no such luck. I believe the penny costs too much to make and thus the reason for the plans for elimination.

Another phrase comes to mind, "Penny wise and pound foolish." I think many of us can appreciate this phrase, as I'm sure we've all been guilty of being wise with small sums or matters and foolish in bigger amounts or decisions. I've also heard the term "penny ante," which is used referring to low stakes in game like Poker. Never even knew what this meant and always thought it was something cheap, of course, I've never played Poker.

Like Columbo on TV, just one more thing, does anyone remember the goofy grey looking pennies made, I think, during WWII? Don't know whether these are still in circulation, but I haven't seen any for a long time.

In listening to this composition, can you tell I didn't have the faintest idea of what to write about on the subject of "Penny?" One thing I do know, the penny was once worth more than it is today. As a kid, I could ride the bus for only four pennies, and enjoyed the penny candies you could get at the corner grocery store. Yummy! So much for the subject of "Penny."

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Penny for Your Thoughts
By Stephanie A. Tonn

The first time someone said the phrase "Penny for your thoughts," to me I was confused and said, "Penny for your what?" Followed by, "What do pennies have to do with my thoughts?" My boyfriend of now nine months smiled and kissed me on the forehead.

"It's just an old saying, babe. My grandmother always says that, and it just stuck." As I have gotten to know his grandmother, Gertrude, and she does use that saying among others all the time.

Last summer I saw Gertrude every day for a few months while I worked at the Rehabilitation Facility where she resided. Her name stuck out to me, Gertrude Olson, and I wanted to get to know her more. I soon found out that she was one of my co-workers mothers. We started talking each day in the dining room around meal times. Gertrude started a "ladies table" and I could tell in her eyes that she looked forward to meal times and interacting with the ladies which she began to develop bonds with each day. Gertie always commented on my outfit for the day and said, "Honey, what are you doing here with us old farts? You should be a model!" I would laugh and smile at Gertie and the rest of the ladies while they ate their meals.

Gertrude and I began to develop a close relationship and I would often give her a "free ride" as I pushed her in a wheelchair back to her room after meals. I also began to check up on her throughout the day. During the early afternoons she would surface in the reception area just to talk and get out of her room. I began to get to know her daughters too, as they came to visit Gertrude each day. Gertrude and her daughters would often congregate in the reception area, which provided great entertainment for me on those slow afternoons.

As the days past, the day finally arrived when Gertrude was released from the Rehabilitation facility. On her last day she asked me for my phone number and said she would give it to her grandson. I replied with a smile, "Gertrude why don't you call me

instead” I had forgotten I had given my phone number to Gertrude and sure enough the next day I received a call from a (708) area code that I did not recognize. The next second I looked at my phone I saw a mysterious text from this number. Gertrude’s grandson name is Chad, and we ended up going out for drinks that following weekend.

As the minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months pass I am eternally grateful that Gertrude passed along my phone number to Chad. Chad and I have developed a friendship and relationship I never imagined I could have. Chad and I talk about that first phone call like it was yesterday and it is a great story to tell about how we met. Gertrude just celebrated her 94th birthday and I celebrated with her and Chad’s family. I often visit Gertrude when I have free time to just chat over a cup of coffee or to make new gluten free desserts together. Now when I think of the saying, “Penny for your thoughts” I think of the bond developed with Gertrude and how Chad and I crossed paths into each other’s lives. The saying has a new meaning for me that has traveled through generations and influenced my life more than I could say.

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New Faces of 1952
By Jim Smetana

I could not recall if Hugh Bongo-Shaftsbury was a real person or not. As I was tracing him through the Google I found a listing for a BONGO drum playing group of senior citizens in Shatfsbury England. I thought something like this would be a good activity for my mom and others in the Norridge/Harwood Heights vicinity. I called Penny Blubaugh at the Eisenhower Public Library to ask her if she might be interested in presenting such a program. “Yeah, I think so, it sounds like a good idea,” she said. My next step was to find a qualified instructor. My neighbor Terry Reimer who is behind “World Percussion and Rhythm magazine” was the person to ask. She gave me a name – Kim DeVore – and when I spoke to Ms DeVore over the phone I knew I had the right person. She not only possessed the necessary drumming skills but had the right attitude which was just as important. The last thing I wanted was some hidebound marionette telling a bunch of old people, “You’re doing it wrong.” I told Kim to talk to Penny and my work was done. They agreed on a day and, a time and the program came off without a hitch.

###

And a Penny for Your Shoe
By Phyllis Babbs

Something old, something new,
Something borrowed, something blue
And a penny for your shoe.

In one of my dresser drawers rests a very old handkerchief with a tiny blue bow sown onto one corner—old, borrowed and blue. When I lend the hankie to a bride, I usually,

include a shiny new penny. For some reason, no matter the age of the bride, she gets all giggly when she opens my small box. The hankie will be tucked into the sleeve of the wedding dress and the coin will go into her left shoe.

I was curious about the rhyme, so I Googled it and I learned the custom began in Victorian times. The old represents the brides connection to her family and friends and her life as a single woman; the new, usually the brides attire, represents the new life she will soon begin. And one something new should come from the groom to represent the joy her future marriage will bring.

Borrowing an item to carry or wear reminds a bride that her family and friends are there for her should she ever need their help. Ideally, the item should come from a happily married woman so that her married bliss can rub off on the new bride.

Blue symbolizes faithfulness and loyalty. In ancient Israel, a bride's wedding dress was adorned with blue ribbons on the border and in ancient Rome, a bride wore blue to denote love, fidelity and modesty.

In England between 1551 and 1967 a sixpence was a silver coin worth six pennies. It was placed in the bride's shoe to attract wealth to her marriage. In order to achieve the best chance for financial security, the bride would put the coin in her left shoe.

There were some other interesting tidbits about weddings:

- * Brides now carry lovely bouquets of flowers but during the time of the plague, women clutched bunches of garlic and dill over their mouths in an effort to protect themselves from the disease.

- * Tossing the bridal garter became a way to pacify mobs, who in England and France, would try to tear a piece of the bridal gown for good luck.

- * Colorful bridesmaid dresses is also a change in tradition. In early times, the bridesmaids were dressed exactly like the bride to confuse troublesome spirits so they could not fixate on the bride.

- * A veil was worn to hide the bride from evil spirits. In arranged marriages, the groom didn't see his wife until after the ceremony and in some cases that saved some awkward moments.

- * Tying tin cans to a car became a substitute for a shivree which could be often be a raucous all night party and sometimes included kidnapping the groom.

Many of the traditions we associate with weddings, have evolved from many different cultures over the years. But there is one thing that will not change. The moment when the presider says "I now pronounce you husband and wife."

###

A Pennyworth of Wit (costing 2 cents on account of inflation)

By Jamey Damert (with no help from no one other more in the past or yet ever again even, and that's the truth to the very best of my knowledge, so help me Moses)

That was the title of a short piece of music I wrote for the soprano recorder when I was a member of the Collegium Musicum at Northeastern Illinois State College (NISC). Or so the place was called when I went there; it's Northeastern Illinois University (NIU) now. I thought I'd use it again for this current piece of writing on account of it has a "penny" in it.

By the way, before I go any further, I figure I should warn you that "this current piece of writing" isn't likely to be going anywhere. I keep waiting for inspiration, and inspiration seems nowhere to be had. It's been this way for several months now, and I'm sick of it. But what's a fellow to do?

I knew a girl named Penny. I didn't know her that well, and I wonder now if her real name wasn't Penelope? Another Penny I know is a dog who lives at the corner of my block. When I walk my dogs, we frequently see her in her backyard. My dogs for some reason don't pay much attention to Penny, who's always on her best friendly behavior. They seem to prefer the pit bulls and such what that make every effort to bite their heads off. I make them keep their distance, of course, but they love growling and acting tough.

There was a fellow I knew who used to go for walks using a pedometer. He'd walk one mile before starting back—unless he found a penny. Finding a penny would somehow make it okay for him to terminate his jaunt prematurely. And very often he would find a penny, too, or sometimes even coins of greater value. He did this for years, and his accumulated finds he placed into a piggy bank. His robust pig is nearly full now. I wonder if he'll stop walking when the swine bloats over?

Then there were the neighborhood kids who banded together to form their own post office named the Penny Post, just like they had in colonial America, though I very much doubt these kids knew that. Anyway, they designed and made by hand their own penny postage stamps and advertised around their school and neighborhood. Delivery of letters was made by bicycle in about a seven-block area. No mail was ever lost or delivered to the wrong home during the brief period the Penny Post stayed in business. I often wonder how much damage its existence did to the U.S. Post Office?

My love of Irish music and interest in playing the recorder led me to play around with pennywhistles. I never got very good at playing them, though, and they certainly don't cost a penny, as I had naively hoped they would in my sainted dotage.

I'm rambling, I know I am, but I can't so much help it. Maybe it's due to age. I'm 70 years old now; that's older than I've ever been before, and I'm not all that sure I like being among the ancients. And maybe health factors are contributing to my having problems focusing. Not long ago, after cutting a piece of wood on our table circular saw, my hand slipped and my right thumb found its way into the ravenous blade. That was not

a good thing, but it's in the past now, and I'm resolved to live in the present from now on and into the future, as long as that lasts. [625 words, start to finish]

###

Penny

By: Susan J Wilfong

I saw you sitting,
Alone on the ground.
I didn't see anyone,
As I carefully looked around.

As I quietly approached you,
I could see your shiny face.
As you silently looked up at me,
Not moving from your place.

With nothing around,
But long grass and trees,
I walked a little closer,
Then I got down on my knees.

You didn't say a single word,
As by your side, I sat.
I tried my hardest, to figure out,
What you were staring at.

Since you didn't talk to me,
I decided, I would speak.
I didn't know what to say,
For this situation was unique.

Where did you come from?
Who left you here?
Why do you just stare at me?
Is life just so unclear?

You were so small,
As you sat on the ground.
Were you trying to hide,
By not making a sound?

As I stood up,
To walk away,
I heard a small voice,
Say, "Wait, Please stay."

I stopped in my tracks.
Slowly I turned.
There were no people around.
This, I quickly learned.

The sun was brightly shining.
It was getting very hot.
Was starting to freak out,
Too afraid to leave this spot.

Was I hearing things?
Was I losing my mind?
Was that the penny calling me?
The one I had left behind?

I slowly went back,
To the tall grass and trees.
And once again,
I dropped down on my knees.

Your shiny face was there again,
Still staring up at me.
"Quit looking at me!" I started to yell.
"Or at least, tell me what you see".

Once again, you refused to speak.
So I got up to walk away.
Once again, I heard those words,
"Wait, Please stay."

With the hot sun pounding
Down upon my head,
I needed some water,
I needed to be fed.

Once again I looked,
At the tall grass and trees,
And once again,
I dropped down on my knees.

All right you stupid penny,
I'm tired of being nice.
I'm tired of you staring at me,
Not only once but thrice.

You have lost your freedom!
No more tall grass and trees!
No more fresh air,
That comes with every breeze!

I'm tired of the heat!
I'm tired of the sun!
I'm tired of our conversation,
Once long ago, begun.

I, now own you.
In my pocket, you will live.
You will only see the sunshine
That I will choose to give.

I no longer hear those words,
"Wait, Please stay."
Coming from the tall grass and trees.
As I turn and walk away.

You may think I am crazy,
To talk to a penny, as I did.
I didn't want it to lose its freedom,
From the grass in which it hid.

But I am not crazy.
I think freedom is just grand.
For my name too, is Penny,
And I too, live on this land.

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The Candy Store Revisited

By N. Stewart

Shortly after dinner Linda and Louise left their mom and dad's house and started walking down the road. As I stood, waiting for them at the end of my walk, I put my hand into the left pocket of my tan shorts and touched the neatly folded dollar bill and a few pennies. Joining them on the road, I called out for Barb and Patti, my friends next door. As usual, Patti was not quit ready, needed just one more minute, and invited us to come in. Barb, her sister, standing before a large mirror in the dining room, was trying out a new hair style and glanced over to see what we thought. At last, all five of us left the house, chatting away and headed to the little grocery store south along County Highway 0.

We are all city girls, but in summertime we belong to the country. We hiked through the deep woods, picnicked in a daisy-filled meadow with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and grape Kool-Aid, swam in the cool waters of Delavan Lake, sun bathed on the beach, and watched for the teenage counselors from the nearby Boy Scout camp.

The small one-room grocery store was about 1/2 mile walk down the highway. At the store, we all gather around the glass display case and took turns pointing out our favorite penny candy. The hunched, gray-haired lady was patient as she waited for each of us to decide what we wanted to buy with our pennies, and then carefully put our treasures in tiny white paper bags. There were lilac, pink, yellow and white dots stuck on strips of narrow paper, miniature little wax milk bottles filled with different colored liquids, Mary Jane's at 2 for a penny, wax red lips and black mustaches, licorice wheels, 2-pack Lucky Strike candy cigarettes, and jaw breakers of many tints to choose.

This particular evening, in addition to buying a few pennies worth of candy, I pulled the dollar bill out of my pocket and asked for a pint of vanilla ice cream. The old lady bagged it, gave me my change, and with the tingling of the bell sounding atop the door we left. It was a beautiful, warm summer's evening, so we decided to extend our walk and took the beach road back. The water was very calm that evening, not a ripple to disturb the tranquility of the moment. We sat under the wooden pavilion at the beach and ate our horde of candy. We watched the Boy Scout counselors practice their canoeing techniques out on the lake. Barb waved and two of them waved back. We quickly looked down; giggling like the teenagers we were with our hands over our mouths and our feet kicking sand.

We watched for awhile and as it began to get dark, the canoes were paddled off the lake. I picked up the paper bag with the ice cream and we all start walking, singing as always when going up the big hill. Linda and Louise waived goodnight and went into their house. My house came next, and saying goodbye to Barb and Patti, I climbed up the stairs with the thought of having a dish of cold vanilla ice cream served with a homemade chocolate chip cookie or two.

Mom opened the screen door and I handed her the package. As she gripped the bag, she had a surprised look on her face. The bottom of the paper bag was wet and drippy. Opening the bag and then opening the carton, she started laughing as she tipped it toward me for a look inside. The cold ice cream, of course, had all melted away; leaving some milky white liquid residue at the very bottom of the carton. There would be no cold ice cream this night.

So let this be a lesson learned - Remember if hand carrying ice cream on a warm summer evening, it's best to walk directly home and not linger at the beach, gawking at teenage boys no matter how cute they may be.

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