

## 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

#### March 2014 selection – A World Apart

#### Journeys with My Mother By Vicki Elberfeld

*Why won't the earth tremble  
At the imminent death of my mother  
And the skies drain themselves in soft pity?  
Why will the sun still shine  
On the passing of my mother  
And the earth still spin in its sun-hugging orbit?  
Why can't the universe feel  
For one moment my heart's loss, my anguish  
And weep blood tears from a darkened sky?*

In that one word, "mother," lies so much - tenderness, compassion,  
Love - adventure too.

We cruised the Nile and the Amazon,  
The Nile in a big boat, the Amazon in a little.  
We fought ferocious mosquitoes in the jungles of Peru,  
Our first aid kit but two band-aids, mercurochrome,  
And no radio to anywhere.

We walked through Inca ruins above the clouds  
Through tombs where pharaohs hoped to rest for all eternity

Ransacked, robbed of precious gold and jewels  
Saw monuments to man's glory and to his end,  
And we looked on and felt ourselves a part of it.

I had my spiritual crises in Morocco and Guatemala,  
Mother her enlightenment in Indonesia.  
In Morocco, the skinny cat the concierge wouldn't let me feed  
For fear of bringing on a plague of cats  
*And starving people everywhere.*

In Guatemala, the dog whose skin hung loosely on his bones  
Who tried to lick my hand for giving him my sandwich, but  
I backed off in fear.  
My brother, with more courage, ran his fingers through the mangy  
Coat, petting the head, the neck, the back, and  
That poor creature, starved for love, paused in his feed, relaxed  
Into my brother's gentle stroking, closed his eyes, and  
For those moments was a dog again  
*And starving people everywhere.*

And I thought — if this life is all there is, how much some people  
Suffer and for what?  
And I thought — surely no god could be so cold — to be so kind  
To some and cruel to others,  
And I thought — if justice lies in man's hands alone, how heavy  
Is the task to right the balance,  
And I thought — if justice is what I want, how much *I'd lose*  
By throwing in my lot with all the others,  
And feeling weak, and scared, and guilty,  
Then coming home to turn my thoughts away from dogs and cats  
And gods and starving people  
Except...sometimes.

But while I pondered, Mother gave to all who asked  
And with great subtlety to some who didn't.

One year her journey led to Indonesia, Central Java, Borobudur  
To a mystic place where earth and heaven meet  
To a temple built in honor of the Buddha  
Where art and nature wonderfully blend.  
Mom tried to slow her pace against the tourists,  
Tried to stop her ears against their noise.  
As she progressed she felt the world fall from her.  
She circled 'round until she reached the top.  
The Buddhas there were hidden from her vision.  
She looked out upon rice paddies, saw the sun

Setting o'er the fields in all its glory.  
The people seemed but ants far down below.  
The world of chaos kept its distance from her.  
She found a peace that few will ever know.

But our trips were not all mystic contemplation.  
We had our irritations, our lighter moments too.  
One fellow traveler, having spent a full ten minutes at the Louvre,  
    Wailed, "Can't we just see the Mona Lisa and get outta here already?"  
Our Galapagos guide believed in God -  
    But shut the door on Darwin.  
We walked the streets of Lima wearing T-shirts, speaking English.  
"Now how do they know we're tourists?" Mother asked

As vendor after vendor showed his wares.  
Of course we carried shopping bags from tourist places.  
Our tall, big-footed bodies towered over everyone.  
Mom's unennaed hair gleamed silver in the sunlight.  
We looked out upon a sea of red/brown heads.  
"And what do they do with old folks 'round here anyway,"  
    She laughed, "Lock 'em up?"

Our last trip was to Mexico in March.  
Mother, on her crutches,  
    Took her place upon the drifting sands  
    And watched the waves come in.  
She listened to the gulls, watched the dolphins swim,  
    Made new friends, and took fine photographs.

But then the day came, as come it must,  
    When she knew she would never travel more  
    Throughout this wondrous world  
And so she wept, and thought on happier times.  
And while I raged at cold, indifferent nature  
    For paying no attention to our grief,  
    Mother, as always, took a gentler tone.

"Have you seen my flowers?" she asked. "They are so beautiful  
    this spring, more lovely now than any other year.  
I have this notion — that will not let me go — that my flowers, in  
    Their own, special way are trying to say good-bye to me."

"Oh Mother," I groaned, "When did nature ever notice you  
    Or give one sign of thanks for all your care?  
Besides, you've worked hard this year,  
    Harder even than any other year.

And sun and rain were just exactly right.”

“But still,” she said, in all her wisdom paying me no mind,  
Her eyes caressing the purples, whites, and yellows,  
Standing tall in all their majesty in just the way she wanted.  
“I think my flowers, my precious flowers, are trying  
So very hard to say, ‘good-bye.’”

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### **Separate from the World At Large By N. Stewart**

I used to think that I was aware of what was going on around me and in the world at large. With the explosion of the Information Age, so much from so many sources is being thrown at me that I can't organize it fast enough so that my brain can process it.

Some useful and much more of it useless information is provided by the radio, tweeting, texting, TV, and the Internet. It all floats around and around in my head, looking for a quiet place to settle. Before I can determine what I want to keep and what I want to eliminate, more information is received and many times it conflicts with what I just heard or saw. I'm continually bombarded with meaningless, unconnected catch phrases, mnemonics and word bytes. I start to question: Should I know that? Do I need to know it? How does this relate to what else I know? Do I even want to know that? How, where and when does it all fit together? Or does it ever all fit together? Then I become selective in what I will let in and what I've filtered out as being useless, worthless, incomplete, inadequate, pointless, and in plain language a waste of my time.

On the news, weekend murders, serial killings, street gang violent activity, miles-away national and international weather disasters all make the headlines. There's so much destruction, so much damage, so much loss of precious life that it is difficult to comprehend the enormity of the situation and I shut down the news programs. I can't even watch a regular TV show without apocalyptic disaster entering into it, or in seeing the maiming of, or bodily devastation to, or the innards of dead people as they lay in the street or on a forensic table being cut open. And, how does knowing any of this provide entertainment for me as a viewer? How does it add to the understanding of what is human nature? So I stop watching those shows, too.

Why is it necessary to know every few minutes what the stock market is doing? Whether it's up or down a small number of points every few minutes doesn't mean a hill of beans to me. Investing in the Stock Market is for the long haul, and I'd drive myself crazy deciding to buy or sell based on a minute to minute fluctuation of the Market. Yes, I'd better sell...no wait a minute I'm glad I didn't...better to buy instead...but still. So I buy a newspaper and if I want to read about the Stock Market, I may and if not I can turn to a different page.

Do I have a need to speed? Does everything today need to move at warp speed in order for us to be in high spirits? Do I have to receive more and more transmitted information on the Internet faster and faster each year? Do I have to drive my car faster and faster at 70, 80, 85 m.p.h. as most drivers do even though the speed limit is 55 on the tollways? Thanks, but I prefer to drive at safer speeds so I can get out of the way of those driving under the influence of the now legalized marijuana or the still illegal substances like drugs and alcohol, and, of course, the person texting or talking on the cell phone. Do I need 100+ cable channels of television to surf when I can't find even one decent program to watch anyway? Do I need a Smart phone that does everything, including make coffee and wash the dog, but costs more monthly than all my utilities bills together? I'll continue to put my money where I get the best bang for my buck.

Perhaps I have distanced myself too far away by not accepting the way things are today, and, without any thought what-so-ever, merely going along with the flow. Perhaps I'm just too old to change my ways and things in the world are moving just too fast for me to even try to catch up. Perhaps I've already missed too much; too many things have changed, and I will always remain in a world apart.

###

**A Difference of Opinion  
By Phyllis Babbs**

When Johnny moved into our neighborhood from the north side of town, I was well acquainted with his reputation. Among other things, I knew about the retired marine officer who became a teacher but after having Johnny in his class for year, not only did he quit teaching, he also moved out of town.

My one neighbor, Midge, thought he was a sweet boy and I admit he did look like a choir boy, big brown eyes, curly black hair and dimples. But he was a sociopath, not that I understood the fact at the time. Then I said he was a troubled boy with a mean streak. So Midge and I were worlds apart when it came to Johnny. Even after we found our cat strangled at the end of our driveway and Johnny was shooting his BB gun at our house, Midge still felt I didn't understand him.

When we finally had a witness to Johnny shooting at our house, we were able to press charges against him. The court should have confiscated his gun but they gave him a pass because he and his parents were not aware of the law stating no guns could be discharged within the village limits. The fact that he was shooting at a house seemed to have been forgotten.

After the court episode, Johnny became more devious in his efforts to make our lives troublesome. One day, my youngest daughter, ran into the house followed closely by a

police officer. This was not a normal occurrence at our house but the unexpected had become the norm since Johnny was a neighbor.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes?” I said with a question mark.

“Didn’t your son just call pleading for help because Johnny was pointing a gun at you?”

I frowned. “No my son didn’t call. He isn’t home. He’s out with his father.”

“Okay,” he sighed. “Let’s get this cleared up.” He headed for the phone and asked me to write down our phone number. He was on the phone for a few minutes.

“I think I know what’s going on,” the officer said. “He is trying to build a case that you are harassing him. I don’t know why the judge ever gave him his gun back.” He turned to me. “How about a cup of coffee.”

“I only have instant. We really aren’t coffee drinkers.”

“That’s good. I just want to take some time. I’m sure Johnny’s watching and waiting to see what I’ll do. And here is what I’m going to do Mrs. Babbs. I’m going across the street. I’m going to grab him by his collar, look him straight in the eye and say ‘You little s.o.b. If you ever bother those people again, I’ll find you, where ever you are and beat the crap out of you.’” He took a swallow of coffee. “However, if you ever repeat that to anyone, I will have to deny I said it.” It certainly was a strange visit and I don’t know what happened after he left our house but I do know from that day on we never had another issue with Johnny.

But then Midge, for some reason, got on his radar. One day, high on both drugs and alcohol, he drove his car up on Midge’s lawn, chasing her and trying to run her over. All the time yelling “You freckin witch, I’m going to kill you!”

That last escapade got him arrested. The new judge wasn’t so lenient and Johnny was offer a jail sentence or time in the military. He decided on the military, a policeman drove him home to pack a bag and drove him straight to Fort Sheridan. We were finally rid of him. Calm reigned in the neighborhood.

As difficult as it was, I never told Midge, “I told you so.” But it really wasn’t necessary because Midge and I were no longer worlds apart when it came to our views about Johnny.

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**A World Apart from Society**  
**By Elvira K. Castillo**

I feel as though I am “A World Apart” from our society of today. I know my life is a continuous escape back to the world I knew as a child and as a young woman, as this is my only way of survival in what I consider an immoral, disrespectful and totally selfish world of today.

My home is my sanctuary where I am surrounded by everything I love and where I comfortably block the realism of our world from my life. I’m also grateful to be able to attend the Salvation Army Citadel every Sunday, which strengthens and reinforces my hope and faith that there is some day morality will return.

I certainly am not perfect and have made mistakes in my life, so I don’t mean to pass judgment, but I just cannot feel good about our world with the so-called new freedoms, which have resulted in 40% of women giving birth as “single mothers” and the sanctity of family and marriage being a thing of the past. Also, most of our entertainment on TV programs and movies are very sexually oriented and extremely violent and full of potty humor. I may be wrong, but I believe the media violence has created a disregard for human life. There isn’t a day that goes by without hearing on the news of someone being shot and killed. When I was young and heard news of an awful murder, it preyed on my mind for a long time and really disturbed me. The young people today are exposed to so many atrocities that they seem to become immune to them.

I could go on and on including the constant threat of terrorism, the failure of our schools to give a full rounded education to our children including art, music, cursive writing, physical education (gym), and the new fad of people communicating with each other by cell phones, Facebook, twitter, etc. instead of face to face conversations. I realize that friends and relatives who live far apart from one another in different states or countries might have a need to communicate by Facebook, but I visualize a future world of families not even talking to each other in their own homes, only texting. I also visualize people being round shouldered, slumped over, unable to speak or write, with huge thumbs and thick glasses walking zombie-like, bumping into everything while texting away. If you think I’m exaggerating, I have a young great nephew who already is all stooped over and round shouldered from constantly crouching over his iPad. I haven’t checked his thumbs yet, but he hasn’t spoken to anyone for half of his life. It has also recently been reported that 41,000 people were killed or injured by texting and walking.

Several years ago, Steve Allen wrote a book called “Vulgarians at the Gate,” which predicted the downfall of our society, especially by the media, through the disregard of all the standards that made our world a more wholesome and safer place to live. Well, the Vulgarians have broken through the gate, beyond what Steve Allen could ever predict, and our life is certainly “a world apart” from the one I once knew and treasured.

###

**A World Apart**  
**By Susan J. Wilfong**

*I knew a special woman  
For a very long time.  
I'll try to tell you about her  
In this little rhyme.*

*She was a very loving woman.  
Encouraging and gracious too.  
Whatever the situation was,  
She always knew what to do.*

*She knew what I needed,  
As I grew through the years.  
She was there when I fell.  
She would wipe away my tears.*

*We would tease each other.  
We'd laugh so hard we would cry.  
When times in my life got hard,  
On this woman, I could rely.*

*Neither one of us was athletic,  
But we certainly did try.  
We'd play Ping-Pong on the kitchen table,  
And watch the time fly by.*

*This woman taught me things in life.  
Things I would need to know.  
Things I still carry with me,  
Everywhere I go.*

*I learned that things,  
Won't always go my way.  
And, always play to win,  
Whatever game you play.*

*It doesn't hurt to smile.  
There are different ways to be strong.  
Tell the truth, even when it's hard  
Be brave enough to admit you're wrong.*

*Be kind to every living thing.  
Respect others, along life's way.  
Be thankful for the things you have.  
Count your Blessings, every day.*

*Well, I have told you a little bit about her,  
Here, in this little poem.  
This special woman was my Mom.  
But now, she lives at Home.*

*God has called my mother Home  
To be again, with dad.  
I know we'll be together some day.  
And share the love we once had.*

*Yet, as I walk here on Earth,  
We are not A World Apart.  
Because my parents are here with me,  
They're living on, in my heart.*

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## Constructing a Regular Heptadecagon By Jim Smetana

### FRAME 1

LinkedIn™

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Dori Knoff would like to connect on LinkedIn. How would you like to respond?



**Dori Knoff**

Program and Volunteer Coordinator at Marshfield Public Library

Confirm you know Dori

The first time I got an invitation from Dori Knoff I just ignored it. I figured it was just one of those weird Internet things that doesn't make any sense. I don't know any Dori Knoff; I don't even know any Doris unless you count one I met at the Grant Park concerts almost 25 years ago. I lent her my Chicago Bears seat cushion and I never got it back.

### FRAME 2

LinkedIn™

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Dori Knoff would like to connect on LinkedIn. How would you like to respond?



**Dori Knoff**

Program and Volunteer Coordinator at Marshfield Public Library

Confirm you know Dori

The second time I got an invitation from Dori Knoff I called over the Tech Support girl Weronica--who pronounces her name Veronica--hoping she could explain it. She told me that perhaps Ms Knoff and I have some common acquaintance; a kind of Cyber Kevin Bacon. Who could it be? That's the sixty-four dollar question: Cheryl Himmelfarb? Timothy Allen Dick? Fred Farkas?

### FRAME 3



**Dori Knoff** would like to connect on LinkedIn. How would you like to respond?



**Dori Knoff**

Program and Volunteer Coordinator at Marshfield Public Library

**Confirm you know Dori**

The third time I got an invitation from Dori Knoff I felt lightheaded and began seeing rainbows, butterflies and unicorns. I thought perhaps the Girl Scouts put something in my do si dos, but no, there was only one explanation: I had bcome forever linked to my true Internet Love Connection. Scoffers would say we're A World Apart and it'll never work, but I say "fie" to you naysayers. We'll soon be ensconced in a teeming Thomas Kinkade Painter of Light house with a dozen adopted children of various races. We'll be portrayed by Keri Russell and Skeet Ulrich on the Hallmark Movie Channel.

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