

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.

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June 2015 – Choice

**Commencement
By Vicki Elberfeld**

The graduates were all smiles as they floated across the stage to accept their degrees. Wearing my cap and gown and sitting next to Grandpa in the spectators section, I was too fearful and angry to join them. The keynote address cinched it for me which I later heard described as “the generation without a future speech,” all about the lack of jobs that would greet us as we made our way into the working world. Long before that speech though, even before my senior year, anxieties about my transition from the safe haven of college into the so called real world overwhelmed me. I knew how to do school; what I did not know how to do was life.

My parents would never understand my perversity in cheating them out of their moment. But what I felt I understood and they did not was that a liberal arts degree was no ticket to even a modest income and that my victory in earning one was hollow.

And so I sat amongst the spectators next to my grandfather rather than my parents. Grandpa might be disappointed in me too, but he didn't have the right to take me to task for my behavior. My parents, however, had sacrificed to send me to college; therefore, they had that right.

For now though I felt relatively safe sitting next to Grandpa as, one by one, we watched my classmates receive their degrees, and I struggled not to think about the future.

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The Choice

By Valerie Collins

She was young, just in her second decade of life, and faced with a choice bigger than any yet presented to her. She met a man and her heart was captured for the first time with a feeling stronger than she ever thought possible. Was this love? All she knew was that she had to be with him. She never realized such happiness existed. When they were together all was right with the world. Nothing else mattered. And so the choice was at hand. Should she follow her heart and commit her life to him or should she take the easy path of following tradition and convention? You see there was much to consider in this looming decision.

The young woman was finishing a college career, which was very important to her. She did not want to abandon this dream if even for a little while, disappointing her family but even more importantly disappointing herself. Also this choice would move her far away from her family and friends and into a world unknown and foreign to her. Being raised as a small town country girl, she would now be thrust into big city life.

There was more to consider. This man, this kindred spirit, this once in a lifetime treasure was much older than her. How, she wondered, could she have fallen into such an unconventional relationship? But there it was. He was exceptional with a personality so big and joyful it lit up any space he entered. He drew people to him in magnetic fashion while remaining genuine and unpretentious. His remarkable sense of humor placed smiles and laughter on the faces of all he encountered. Most importantly, he loved her dearly, expressing his deep feelings continually through word and action. He wrote her beautiful verse, he showed kindness beyond measure and placed her on a pedestal in admiration. The young woman was never happier in her life and never felt so complete. Would their age difference matter as time went on? She could not imagine that it would. All she knew was that she was happiest with him and when not with him felt a deep longing to be back again in his presence.

There was still more to take into account. This man had a large family of six children, all of whom lived with him. How was it possible to enter a family such as this with ease? The breadth, and notion of the thought was mind boggling and the significant responsibility was daunting. Having met and spending some time with this family, the young woman was growing increasingly fond of them. They were warm, friendly and accepting, truly pleased to see their father happy. Indeed they were much like their father in many ways.

The young woman tossed and turned with the choice set before her. Advice was freely offered, the sum of which was to abandon the notion of marriage. She was told that the journey would be difficult, that she would be giving up an otherwise good life, that she would live to regret this decision.

In the end, the young woman followed her heart. She looked deep within her soul and chose to live the truth she found there. Many years later with grown children of her own gracing her life and a dearly loved husband now passed away she often reflects on those once upon a time years with great joy. She also remembers the years that followed, life happening as it will with hills and valleys but always with the sustenance of deep genuine love.

It was indeed a lifetime of happiness. No regrets. Only gratification. Yes grateful for the choice she made so long ago.

She recently came upon a quote from Oscar Wilde that held some significance for her...

“I won’t tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world’s voice, or the voice of society. They matter a good deal. They matter far too much. But there are moments when one has to choose between living one’s own life-fully, entirely, completely-or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in is hypocrisy demands. You have that moment now. Choose!”

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Unlimited Salad & Breadsticks

By James Smetana

Not everyone knows I met my wife Marge when we were marching with Dr. King. That civil rights jazz is a good way to meet women, believe it or not.

Are you hungry? I asked her.

Famished, she replied.

We stopped at the Hot Box for falafel sandwiches. I ordered a bottle of wine--I could’ve ordered a couple of glasses, but who am I kidding?--then a second bottle. I figured we were done marching for the day so I suggested we go see a movie next door at River East 21. “There are so many choices it makes my head spin!” exclaimed Marge. And sure enough, her head was spinning just like that little girl in “The Exorcist.” I had to grab hold of it with both hands to make it stop, and it was then that I realized what care Marge must take to make her hair so silky-smooth.

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My Choice: WGN Classical

By Jamey Damert

(A hapless tale with a lot of words thought up and put down painstakingly by Jamey Damert, a sometimes normal fellow)

My Choice(s) for this month is(are) to not write about Choice(s), but rather to go in a completely contrary direction not in any way remotely having to do with Choice(s). If this is not universally acceptable, I’m afraid that cannot be helped. Some things we just have to learn to live with—however grudgingly. This is one of them.

When WGN Radio lost the rights to broadcast the Cubs games, those in authority thought it prudent to make a few other changes. Noting the success of WFMT-FM, the mostly all classical music station, WGN made the sudden move to be the only AM classical music station without making any massive changes to their basic broadcasting format. What follows is a sample of their new daily programming format [with bracketed notes of explanation strewn here and thereabouts].

“Hello, fellow friendly folks. This is Dannyell Bewn, your freethinking broadcaster of the best of the best in classical music programming from 9 to 5 in the a.m. We’ll begin this first hour with the first half of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. Then, following news, [several commercials], the traffic report, Your Money, sports, and the weather report [and, of course, a few more messages from our sponsors], you’ll hear the second half of Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition without interruption.”

At the conclusion of all the things referenced to in the last paragraph returns the dulcet tones of Dannyell Bewn letting WGN listeners know what will be coming up in the next segment of the broadcast.

“Dannyell Bewn here back in the saddle again. We’re going to start off with a rare recording of Sibelius’s Finlandia played backwards on instruments of the Renaissance. Following that will come the usual [paid commercial announcements], news, traffic, sports, and weather [including a few more commercial messages]. Then we’ll be blessed by a hearing of Wagner’s Forest Murmurs and the ever-popular Siegfried’s Funeral March. If you’ve had the misfortune of tuning out, you’ll not get the chance to hear any of this and our being on the air will have been rendered pointless.”

At the conclusion of the gallimaufry alluded to in the paragraph just ended, [déjà vu] Dannyell Bewn returns triumphantly to announce the upcoming wonders that will bring an end to his exhaustive day’s work.

“I have returned. Dannyell Bewn will bring you up-to-date on the coming attractions in this classical time-slot. First you will hear (unless you aren’t listening) Ravel’s Bolero—with only a few brief interruptions—in a recording made in 1914 by the New Old Fullerton Orchestra under the direction of Sir Russell Hudson, who incidentally would have been 145 years old on this very day had he not blown his brains out in a freak hunting accident while fishing on the Missousoulli River in upstate Maine in 1922.

“Following that we will have our daily contest, wherein lucky listeners can win valuable gift cards. And on this day the 35 caller with the correct answer will be awarded a \$22 gift card to Lew Malnutt’s Pizzeria, where they’re featuring on the menu a new pasta sensation consisting of linguine, tortellini, and henry mancini. In the very rare event that there are two simultaneous 35th callers, each one will walk away with an \$11.00 gift card, a rarity in itself.

“And to bring to a veritable end my part in this classical heyday in classy way and on account of the Fourth of July is just around the corner, we’ll be broadcasting Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture in its pulchritudinous entirety. After that Kathi & Judi will take over for the next five hours or so and they’ll do their level-headed best to keep you entertained in the fashion to which you’ve become accustomed as classical music aficionados.”

And there you have it. Or at least that is all I intend to tell you about WGNs bold and dramatic change. 98.7 FM, eat your heart out. Now you’ve got competition you’ve never had to deal with before. Who will garner the masses in the upcoming months and years to come: AM classical or FM classical? It’s the battle everyone’s talking about. As for me, I really don’t care one way or the other as long as they keep paying me big bucks to keep reporting this buncombe. That’s just the way I see it. And with that I bid you a fond Goodbye.

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My Choice
By Susan J Wilfong

What should I write about?
I guess it is my choice.
There are so many things I'd like to say
For those that have no voice.

I would speak for the animals
Both big and small,
And all the sizes in between
For God has made them all.

I would speak for the abused.
Animals and people, too.
Neither should have to experience pain,
The way so many do.

I would speak for the little babies,
Who are born addicted to drugs.
Who deserve nothing less,
Than constant kisses and hugs.

I would speak for the people
That are living on the street.
That struggle every day
Just to get a bite to eat.

I would speak for the seniors
In the later stages of life
Who are often overlooked,
And rarely thanked for all their strife.

I would speak for the parents,
As they bury their son or daughter
That have become a victim
Of the nightly street slaughter.

Yes, it really is my choice,
To keep silent or to speak.
My spirit is willing,
But my flesh is weak.

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It's a Matter of Choice **By N. Stewart**

Come on in and sit awhile. The water for tea is just about to boil. I really appreciate your friendship, you've been a dear friend, and I need to discuss something with you. I been healthy all my life, but as I get older I worry about getting sick and by that I mean really sick with no cure around the corner. Don't get alarmed. I'm not dying or anything. But as I get older, I realize some disease will take hold or a crucial body part will fail and it's all over. No one lives forever. With all the heart disease, different types of cancer in my family, and my Mom's dementia, I won't escape unscathed.

Sure, I've tried to eat right, exercise, drink plenty of water, but I noticed the older I get the more or I should say the less effort I make in doing the "right" things. Going to the doctor is scary as I reach the age when my parents and other family members were told what they'd never expected and never wanted to hear. As I dealt with different terminal health problems with family members, I realized having Hospice is a good thing at end of life situations. At least that effort supports the easing of physical and mental pain for the dying, unlike the medical profession, supporting life at all cost. But I'm not sure that Hospice would be enough to comfort me with untold pain and suffering ahead.

I've always said when the time came; I'd pull the plug on my boat, get in, and drive to the middle of Delavan Lake, surrounded by cool breezes and sunny skies (providing it was summer), turn off the engine and let the boat sink slowly into the deepest part of the lake. Did you know that circus elephants that died wintering in Delavan were placed on the ice until spring and with the thaw they sank? My bones would be among their bones and together we would create a place for fish to swim and breed, seaweed to grow, reaching eternal peace.

So, I've been doing some research on physician assisted suicide (PAS) should the need arise. There are complications and issues, of course. I'd have to move to a new state and become a resident before I would be considered for PAS. What would my family and friends think about my choice to end my life early and what would they think about my mental state? Would it be something they could accept my decision and live with it? Or am I causing them more grief and agony? Or would they even care? Would I be strong enough in character as well as physically strong enough to actually swallow the prescribed life-ending medication? Which of my friends or family would be caring and devoted enough to sit with me while we waited for the pills to end my life? Would I change my mind at the 11th hour, crying out to stop the action, or would it be just too late to change my mind? There are too many unanswered questions that need pondering.

I've taking beloved pets to the vet at the end of their lives and I've been strong enough to see it through, holding on to them, caressing and kissing their little faces until they were gone. I was even strong enough to sign the DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) order for my Dad and Mom when their time came. Didn't made it any easier, sitting waiting, watching. Still I didn't want them to have to die again. Could I do it for myself? Could I make the decision to end my life?

The practice of modern medicine requires that life be extended for as long as possible. But for what? The result is the same — death comes in the end. Why not allow the terminally ill person to make the decision of time and place, ending life with dignity,

compassion, and potentially with a lot less suffering of pain and mental anguish? Death would be easier with some control over the outcome. Before I get too morbid, I'm not asking you to sit with me and watch me die or anything. That's not why I invited you. I'm far from ready for that. I value your opinion, knowing that you have strong religious beliefs I wanted to hear your thoughts on assisting with ending a terminally ill life.

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Choices **By Elvira K. Castello**

Choices, Decisions, Choices, Decisions - Every day there's choices, decisions - big or small, they still tack the brain, at least for me, Miss Organized all-the-time!

We make choices or decisions all our lives, starting as a baby when we refuse to eat something, go to sleep when we should, etc.

Being an organized person and wanting my day to go smoothly, I generally plan what I'm going to eat, wear, and do the day before. These may be simple or small choices, but it's the way my brain operates and helps me accomplish things easier. Of course, there are times I have to change my choices, and sometimes several times a day, due to things like the weather or other unforeseen circumstances that may occur. With the unpredictable weather we have in Chicago, I can't tell you how many times I've had to change clothes in a day to be comfortable - it's either too hot or too cold!

I've simplified my eating habit choices or decisions, if you will, by having certain things like pizza for supper every Friday and French Fries and a sandwich for lunch every Saturday, so I don't have to think of what to prepare for these meals, and my son and I actually look forward to this weekly habit, especially the Pepperoni pizza! I no longer ever have to think about breakfasts because every other day we have cereal or a breakfast sandwich during the week and on Sunday waffles. Now this may sound boring, but it does simply the question of what should we have for breakfast.

We all make big choices or decisions in our lives which, whether good or bad, can affect our entire life and future. I often say, I wish I had the brain of a 40-yr. old when I was 20 or perhaps I should have taken advice more seriously from my elders. I don't think any of us know really if all the choices we've made throughout our lives have been the right ones or the wrong ones. All we can do is learn from our experiences and go on, hoping we make mature choices that will lighten and brighten our lives.