

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.

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group © 2015 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

July 2015 selection – Tapestry

Tapestry of Life By Susan J Wilfong

Our world is a Tapestry.
This statement is definitely true.
Nothing in it is black and white.
There are hundreds of other colors too.

Chicago has been called
“The Great Melting Pot.”
Not only by skin tone and culture
But by those that have and have not.

Wouldn't it be awesome
To see our world's Tapestry as art?
Something that binds us together
Instead of something that pulls us apart.

To see our differences as gifts
And not something to be feared.
To me, that sounds great.
To the rest of the world, it sounds weird.

I know, art is subjective.
Everyone likes different things.
But everyone wants to be accepted.
To experience the feelings that it brings.

I wonder what it's like to be color-blind.
To see everything in shades of gray.
I wonder if anything would change.
I wonder if hatred would go away.

I'm not looking through rose colored glasses.
I know our world is going to pot.
So many people are dying.
So many children are shot.

Yet I have learned these two things:

With its snags and rips and flaws,
Our world is a Tapestry
And if I want things to change,
I have to start with me.

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I'm a ButterBurger Baby
By James Smetana

The last time I saw Leonora she was pulling her possessions in a leaf bag down Lincoln Avenue. I'm going to marry James Taylor, she said. Anytime soon? I asked her. He's busted up with Carly Simon, so now's the time to make your move. I'd been hearing this forever, ever since I'd first known her. It was her mantra, her monomania. SOMEDAY I'm gonna learn how to play the piano. SOMEDAY I'm gonna walk on the Great Wall of China. SOMEDAY I'm gonna learn yoga. With Leonora it was J.T. I'm sure she had his album when she was in high school: the one where he looks like Jesus. A rock and roll Jesus with a cowboy heart. The sensitive singer-songwriters were never for me. The inward-looking navel-gazers: Joni Mitchell, Carole King, James Taylor, Dan Fogelberg, the list goes on. And on. And on. That stuff makes me want to blow the dust off the ficus leaves, and say, COME ON, PEOPLE! GET WITH THE PROGRAM! Even Neil Young my hero got into that bag--but then he started rocking with the Horse. I always liked guys like Billy Lee Riley or Wynonie Harris--guys who sounded like it was a matter of Life or Death if they cut this two-and-a-half minute record or not, their very lives depended on it and you can STILL hear it in the grooves. After all, it's not everyone who sells his soul to the Devil so he can play guitar.

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**My Tap Pest Tree Story or The Dog in the Tapestry Shop or
Whatever Else You Wish to Call This Ridiculous Tale
By Jamey Damert**

(Put down onto paper by Jamey Damert, dropped & upbrung in Illinois (i.e., Ill & Noisy), a fellow who puts much down, but never enough)

Once a time upon there was a silly little dog, a Corgi by design, named Nothing Particular, a suitably silly name for a silly dog, who took a good look at the world and decided he had all the characteristics of a squirrel, and therefore he must be a squirrel. A furry body, a head, and a tail seemed to be the points he reckoned were important in making this decision. And, of course, squirrels by their nature naturally took to climbing trees, among other things.

So Nothing Particular, who all his known life dwelt in *The Tapestry Shop*, founded and run as best he could by Alton Whistcolme, owner and sole proprietor, by all accounts had a good life, a life to be admired by dogs all over the world and into the far reaches of China. But was he satisfied? Indeed, is any dog ever satisfied? And how would you ever know, for that matter?

Anyway, the thing of it is that, beings how Nothing Particular fancied himself akin to a squirrel, which was a foolish thing to do any way you look at it, he took it upon himself on many occasions to endeavor every which way to climb up a tree. His success at this was minimal at best, of course, and as a direct result the poor silly dog often found himself severely injured by his futile attempts.

What possibly could be done to alter Nothing Particular's flawed thinking in the matter of what sort of animal he was? Could he maybe be hypnotized and convinced that he was a tortoise rather than a squirrel? That would slow him down and make sure he was far and away from being a tree-climber. Or maybe acupuncture could be the key? Who knows? Certainly Alton Whistcolme would have done anything to alter his dog's queer way of thinking.

As it was, Alton Whistcolme had all the trees by his home and *The Tapestry Shop* cut down and removed to Lord knows where. But Nothing Particular needed to be taken on walks, and it was not feasible to have all the trees removed from his sojourning routes, so he still had many chances for exercising his penchant for attempting to shinny up timbers, causing never ending damage to paws and sinews among other things and attendant frequent visits to members of the veterinary persuasion, who were always happy to see him walk in the door.

Of course, Nothing Particular would one day die; death always happens to the best of us, including dogs and squirrels and sundry other beasts and fowl. Alton Whistcolme had that to look forward to, but actually he never had that thought on his mind. Indeed, he would rather have had *The Tapestry Shop* catch on fire and burn completely to the ground than for silly Nothing Particular breathe his last. A tapestry shop could be resurrected, but never could the same thing be said of a Corgi. Nothing Particular, with all his abilities and quirks, is eerily irretrievably irreplaceable, and that's a mouthful ready to be regurgitated.

© July 2015, Jamey Damert "Remember: It's never too late to be early." 567 words

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Tapestry **By Valerie Collins**

I can imagine no more rich a tapestry than that bestowed upon us by nature. It is a tapestry that embraces all of our senses. The obvious sight of colors and patterns cascade one onto another, blending, billowing, bunching while producing a palette at once both unique and familiar. The scents fill the air with fragrant perfume-like aromas, piney whiffs and savory allure all carried along on the back of a breeze or gently hanging in the air with sweet appeal. Can we taste that which is freshly grown, anchored by the earth and fed by the elements? Of course we can! And let us not ignore that the texture rich adventure embedded in the variety of growing things is so vast and grand.

To behold and observe this finely woven design is to truly appreciate the richness of the gift. It may begin with the young child walking in the woods with her father as he points out nature's fine creations. An assemblage of stately trees here, a cluster of greenery there and look...a lady slipper bedecked in shades of powdery pink! When he tells her the tale of the forest fairies waiting till midnight to put on these lady slippers then go to the fairy ball the tapestry comes alive. Add to this scene the child helping her elderly neighbor plant petunia seeds then observing the colorful display unfold over time. These experiences are surely magical and these images are carried in memory that, when woven together, add rich strands of embroidery to the canvas.

Now let us look to the firmament and see the ever-changing palette that colors the very mood of our tapestry. Morning sunrise creeps in with soft hues that grow in intensity as our sun star slowly dials up its light. The day may keep this light and illuminate all that is below or clouds may filter the radiance hence softening nature's work of art. As evening approaches the sky goes into its dance of swiftly changing hues and shades, transforming earth's tapestry once again. Now the night brings yet another aura to our woven wonder. Here the effect of the moonshine illuminating in a darkened sky sprinkled with the twinkle of stars settles on the earth and its intricate designs.

Yes Nature's hand-woven textile is surely simple pleasure created in complex design. The weave is of magical essence and the tapestry itself whispers "miraculous."

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The Weaving of a Tapestry **By N. Stewart**

Life gathers threads along the way of all colors and textures. They can be delicate, soft, bright, scratchy, dull or harsh. We traipse along our designated desired path and along comes a huge object directly in our way. Do we step over it, go around it or let it stop us dead in our tracks. Based on each such decision, the threads begin to form the pattern of our life, weaving a tapestry.

Janie never gave any of that a thought. She stepped on what was impeding her progress with the stride of one foot and continued on her way, landing on her other foot. Life was to be challenged. She was not going to be like her parents and be afraid of everything. No, she was braver than brave, stronger than strong. She could even scale tall

buildings if she wanted, she could run for miles, and a little bitty stepping stone wasn't going to stop her. Nothing was ever going to stop her. She stepped on the rock and never looked back.

Janie wandered around the country side for awhile, stopping to listen to the birds, to hear the babbling of a brook, and to hear the wind as it swished through the leaves of the trees. What a pleasant day she thought. Sitting down on the bank of the brook, she opened her backpack and took out an apple. Biting into the apple, she saw a green worm, sticking out at the top. "Ew," she said and tossed the uneaten apple away. She sat a bit longer and then got up to walk west toward the setting afternoon sun.

A goose was on the path up ahead; Janie decided the goose would have to move and she walked on. The goose wasn't going to put up with any guff and started to peck at Janie's feet and ankles. She took a slice of peanut buttered bread out of her back pack and set it down in front of the goose. While the goose's attention was drawn away, she slipped by and went on her way.

Night was quickly falling. "I am not afraid of the dark," she said with a strong emphasis on the word afraid. Just then an owl hooted. Suddenly off in the distance, a coyote howled, and Janie felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. For a minute, she envisioned her warm room and comfy bed back at home. The needles, she thought, under that fir tree over there would make a soft place to sleep tonight.

It was getting colder and she reached in her backpack for a thin blanket to wrap around herself. There wasn't much water left to drink and she was thirsty. The half peanut butter sandwich hadn't been much to eat and her stomach growled. Her teeth chattered from the cold. There was no fire to keep her warm as she didn't have any matches and she didn't know how to start a campfire any way. Caught in the light from the rising moon, a pair of yellow eyes appeared a little ways in front of her. "I am not afraid," she said with a strong emphasis on the word afraid for the 100th time as she slowly reached into her backpack for her cell phone. She wished to be safe at home with her family and she pushed the "1" on her phone. Lights came on in the house, the dog came out, and the yellowed eyed monster, her cat named Sammy, jumped into her arms. Having not gone far from her backyard, all gathered together only a few steps from her warm and welcoming house. Janie tightly hugged her mom and dad.

Janie was learning about life and building her tapestry although she didn't know it just then. She stepped over what she could, found a way around when needed, and knew when to give in and ask for help. She was very glad to be home and so were her parents, having secretly tracked Janie's progress all afternoon, using her cell phone. Sammy was glad now too as he had his favorite lap to curl up on.

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The Education of a Prince
By Vicki Elberfeld

"Mother, please. Can't you see that I'm perfectly capable of selecting a princess myself? You must cease and desist from meddling in my affairs!" Prince Florian

admonished for the one thousandth time. For it was a truth universally acknowledged that an unmarried prince must be in want of a princess.

“Now dear,” Queen Mathilde replied, “If I’ve told you once I’ve told you a thousand times that you are entirely too young to handle such matters.”

Prince Florian had only just achieved the tender age of twenty-seven, and his mother was not quite ready to part with him. What particularly irked Florian was the queen’s habit of locking the portraits of prospective brides in her bedroom drawer. She’d done this ever since he’d fallen in love with the likeness of the Princess Euphoria and forswore all joy until that lady was brought before him. He was heartbroken when Mathilde announced that Euphoria had died en route. Of course he didn’t actually believe his mother, unless she’d dispatched the girl herself, but what was a prince to do?

For a man who had never actually laid eyes on a princess, Florian had given them a good deal of thought and tried to learn all he could about them. “Just what exactly did they do all day?” he wondered. He’d seen his mother spend the bulk of her time embroidering tapestries as she gossiped with her handmaidens. The finished works were beautiful, but many a man’s - or woman’s — reputation was ruined in the making of them. She also spent a great deal of time trying on gowns, combing her hair, looking in the mirror and yelling at servants. No doubt a princess spent her days in much the same way. “What a waste,” he muttered, considering he spent his days fencing, hunting, studying military maneuvers, and discussing affairs of state with his father and prime minister. He also danced, wrote poetry, played the lute and, for variety’s sake, occasionally worked his mother’s tapestries.

Queen Mathilde was currently buried under towers of correspondence from anxious mothers seeking royal matches for their daughters. “What a horrible crop of princesses I have to work with at present,” she muttered. “I’m afraid poor Princess Hysteria is far too unstable to ever be queen of our fair land, and Princesses Nervosa and Cyclothymia are not much better. Princess Anthrax is too toxic. Doubtless Princess Bulimia has bad teeth. Of course everyone knows that Princess Anorexia is entirely too bony. What’s a mother to do?”

Meanwhile, Prince Florian was lost in thought, dreaming of what it must be like to kiss a princess. Sometimes the urge became so powerful, he’d stop whatever he was doing to envision himself tearing off on his white horse to a certain nearby castle, slashing through the thorny hedge surrounding it, and then searching through every room of the palace, not stopping until he found the sleeping princess and planted a big one on her.

But this is where his fantasy always took a bad turn. He’d visualize the princess, having been asleep for nearly a hundred years, as pale, lifeless, cold and stiff to his touch, and the flame of his desire would be extinguished as if by a damp mop. Sigh.

He went on to think of another princess, this one more spirited. She’d pretty much have to be. Her narcissistic stepmother almost had her murdered. (Prince Florian empathizes. His own mother is very like.)

And this princess didn’t spend her days looking in the mirror, gossiping or yelling at servants. She herself worked hard as any servant preparing meals and keeping the cottage neat and tidy. The prince liked neat and tidy. He imagined how the dwarves, after a hot sweaty day in the mines, must look forward to a meal served by this snowy complexioned woman as they shared with her the intimate details of their day. But what

other intimacies might they not share? To his credit, the prince did not dwell on this. But he knew his mother would never approve.

Besides, he'd have to meet her in even a worse state than Sleeping Beauty was in. She'd be comatose, what with her stepmother giving her a poisoned apple and all. The prince did not like pale, wan, lifeless. He demanded that his mother find him a princess halfway conscious, at the very least.

"Well," Mathilde replied, "Princess Xena is spirited though she might be hard to cuddle with in all that armor. You seem to have issues with Sleeping Beauty, but Ennui and Insomnia have problems of their own. As for Dyspepsia? Well.... Of course either of the twins, Dysphoria and Melancholia, might bring down the morale of our entire palace. And as for Princess Aphasia, that girl is always at a loss for words."

"So, dearest, we'll have to go with Princess Narcissa, a girl after my own heart."

In the weeks following, Prince Florian anxiously awaited Narcissa's arrival while the queen was busy making preparations. When the girl finally arrived, she only had a couple of opportunities to adjust herself in the mirror before being whisked off to her bedroom. There she was helped up a ladder to rest herself atop a stack of twenty mattresses beneath which rested the tiniest of peas.

In Mathilde's kingdom the test of the pea or TOP, as the queen liked to phrase it, had devolved into an empty ritual. Each and every princess knew from birth that if she didn't express intense discomfort due to some sort of "boulder" after spending the night on twenty mattresses at the home of her intended, she could forget about marrying the prince. Nine year old princesses made a game out of practicing their reactions, sometimes grabbing a shoulder, sometimes a hip or a neck and moaning, "There's something hard in my bed. Ah, how I suffer," in a weak and trembling voice. They practiced so well that everyone passed, and a saying soon emerged, "No princess left behind."

But Princess Narcissa had come from a far distant kingdom where the TOP was never practiced, never even heard of. And Mathilde worked hard to arrange a "morning after" breakfast, not only for her houseguest, but for all the surrounding royalty. She wanted witnesses to Narcissa's failure so that she herself might continue to reign in her son's affections.

But when the visiting princess was asked how she spent the night, she answered haughtily, "Who could sleep? Your cold room was death to my complexion," and she held up a mirror so that she could confirm the diminution of her beauty. "And it was noisy," she continued. "Your serving people are so very vulgar. I could hear their every word through your ever so thin walls. And there were creases in the sheets and particularly the pillow cases which mussed my hair. My serving maids took over an hour to comb out the tangles, and I fear I've lost some strands in the process.

And as to breakfast, my fruit was rotten, my toast burned and my egg was too runny. I'll have another, and this time, boil it the full three minutes or your cook will be wearing it!"

The advantages of a comatose princess were slowly beginning to dawn on Florian.

The servants were terrified, but guests and friends of the queen were thoroughly impressed by Princess Narcissa's command. They couldn't definitively determine whether or not she'd claimed a boulder in her bed — some said she'd steadfastly maintained it and others that she'd never mentioned one at all — but all agreed that had

there been a pea anywhere in the bed, she'd have felt it and would not have suffered in silence.

The prime minister remarked, "Not since the reign of your great grandmother, Queen Hubris the Good, have I seen a woman with such exquisite sensitivity, who could express herself so royally. Our noble prince must marry her forthwith."

But "our noble prince" had truly had enough of princesses. And he thoroughly despised this one. And he didn't care one whit if he embarrassed his mother before all her guests.

"That girl never stops complaining. She'd be the undoing of any man who started with a semblance of sanity. And really Mother, what were you thinking? A pea? That's how you tested her? With...a...pea? Pardon me if I'm wrong, but isn't she expected to bear royal children? How ever will she bear the pangs of childbirth if she can not even tolerate one pea?"

And he stormed off, vowing never to marry.

Now some folks say he left the palace never to return and that long afterwards, he became a monk. Others say he took to the high seas, only having to do with women on those rare occasions he was in port. And which of us could blame him?

But I shall tell you what really happened.

First of all, you must realize that vows of a young man are made to be broken. And second of all that the call of love is quite powerful. One day our hero learns of a tender lady much oppressed. Much like the girl of the snowy complexion, she'd worked hard for others and would know first-hand the sufferings of servants, the ingratitude of superiors, the value of a kind word. She would know and understand his people for, unlike a foolish princess, she had lived as they did and therefore would be most qualified to reign by his side.

The prince wishes to meet her. He invites her to a ball. On that night she is transformed so that her outer beauty matches her inner, and she dances the night away with her prince. They talk. He finds her sensible and kind. He learns that she has never, ever, embroidered a tapestry.

Now if only, he muses, she could learn to keep track of her shoes...

The End

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