

## **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**

#### **November 2015 selection – Character**

#### **STOP!**

#### **In the Name of...**

#### **By M. Martinez**

Character, it sounds like 'care' and 'actor'. Leaders of our time and before our time were considered "Characters." Were they considered characters because they acted upon that helpful, thoughtful caring? Why did Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi take on the responsibility to lead people to liberty, when they knew it would lead to their ultimate demise?

Do we have any 'Characters' in our mist that would take on these lofty goals of service to mankind, with the utmost honesty and integrity, instilling hope to the hopeless and faith to the lost? They gave us the wonderful gifts of Faith, Hope and Perseverance.

Martin Luther King, an African American clergyman stated, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their 'character.'" He quoted, 'Darkness cannot drive out darkness only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.' He went on to say, 'I've decided to stick to love, hate is too great a burden to bear.'

I wonder if the terrorist in Paris had met M.L.K. for tea and deep conversation, if he would have acted on his 'hate' in such a devastating manner to snuff out the many brilliant lives that touched so many other lives. Are we there yet, Martin Luther? Are we even close to the ideal you died for?

Mahatma Gandhi, a political figure of the twentieth century led India's drive for independence from Britain. Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth president of the United States freed the slaves. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, thirty-fifth president of the United States inspired a new generation of optimism in American with many accomplishments, including civil rights during his 1000 days in office before his assassination.

Are we a better country because these men acted on their caring thoughts? I'd like to think so. Variety is the spice of life. Wouldn't your salad be a little less appealing if it was just lettuce? Don't we need the croutons, the tomatoes, the raisins, the almonds, the beans, soybeans for our physical wellbeing?

These men all embodied the, 'Je ne sais quoi,' a quality that cannot be described easily. As an example, the same price of gas in 1980 that got us to Aunt Sophie's and back to our home, barely gets us around the corner now. These men have more value now in death than ever, because they inspire those that would be inspired, to be their very best.

Who are the 'characters' in your life that need support to be all that their called to be? Do they care? Do they act? Do you? Mustering up all the honesty, integrity and service to mankind that's so very much needed at this time in history?

Shakespeare was quoted as saying, 'To thine own self be true.' Shouldn't we at least try that on for size? We might be pleasantly surprised at the outcomes we are able to believe we can achieve and do, for the sake of mankind. Or perhaps we can fake it till we make it.

###

### **A "Real" Character By Elvira K. Castillo**

Although I am not a fan of today's television programs, I probably watch more TV than my friends. I must admit I do not watch any of the new shows. I don't even give them a try. Just watching the ads for the new shows completely turns me off. To be honest, I don't see any creativity or imagination or characters that I can relate to - good or bad. This is strictly my opinion, but I find the characters of by-gone TV far more to my liking.

One of these characters, who's rather grumpy and troublesome, that I truly enjoy is Fred Sanford played by Redd Foxx, on *Sanford and Son*. Fred and his son Lamont run a junk business together. Either his character was based on Foxx's real personality or this guy is a very good actor as his character portrayal is quite real. He plays a conniving, lazy,

insulting, grumpy, trouble maker, and let's not forget faker. Whenever Fred feels wronged, he fakes a heart attack coming on by holding one hand over his heart and the other hand lifted towards Heaven and calls out, "Elizabeth I'm coming to join you." Elizabeth, of course, was his diseased wife. He also is not the greatest father or friend. Yet he is lovable and always forgiven for his many transgressions. As son, Lamont, once said to him, "The only thing wrong with you is your personality."

Fred's nemesis on the show is Esther, his sister-in-law. Some insulting barbs he's thrown at Esther are: Brillo Pad Face, Mighty Joe Young's sister, Queen Kong, etc. However, she is no fool and strikes back at him, especially when she calls him a "snaggle toothed Jack Ass." They'd go back and forth. For example, she once called him a "sassy fool" and he responded by calling her a "sessy pool." Esther, however, was just as quick as Fred and could come right back at him no matter how big the insult. Their banters were the best part of the show and they were both genuinely unique and funny characters.

Of course, Fred always stuck his nose in his son's personal relationships and criticized his friends. He also always treated his own friends in a demeaning manner. Yet his son Lamont loved his "Pop" and Fred's friends stood by him, too. But, again, it's all in fun and, again, Fred and all the characters on the show are not only funny, but are real people that you can relate to. I have to admit though, I would not like a father or a friend like Fred, but I still loved him on the show. Yes, Fred was a "real" character.

Further, to prove how "real" his character was, my Mother took the personalities on TV very seriously -- like this was really "them" and not acting. Therefore, she truly did not like Fred Sanford and often criticized me and my son for watching the show. Mom felt this way about many other characters on TV, so you're not alone Fred.

###

### **The New Tristano** **By J. Smetana**

The idea of mise-en-place was explained to me by Sean McCabe a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America. The CIA. We worked together at the Growler & Grinder. He was a bartender and I was the office manager. Basically all it means is everything is in its place. It's a useful concept for the art of cooking. While the stovetop fire rages you can't call "time out" while you hunt for the garlic press. When I make anything at my mom's house I have to completely recapitulate the kitchen. I have to toss out her mise-en-place and install my own. And no, in case you were wondering, I don't re-install hers when I'm done. But I do wash all the dishes, left piled up on the "dish drainer" looking like an assemblage inspired by Dr. Suess.

To establish one's mise-en-place it helps to clear everyone out of the room. If I can find a wholesome movie like "The Music Man" on the TV I'll herd everyone into the living room with refreshing beverages and salty snacks. Then I'm left alone to work my crazy

magic. That's the way I like it. Sometimes people bust in on me pretending they're looking for a glass of water or maybe they wanted to compare the kitchen clock to the living room one to make sure they agree--you wouldn't want to miss anything! OUT OUT OUT OUT OUT! I tell them. I say it five times so you know I mean business.

Everyone has an opinion--you know that old joke. "Can I make a suggestion?" my sister will ask in the heat of battle. Well, no, not now. Maybe later or during the post game analysis. No one ever questions the end result but getting there, that's another story altogether. I've taken to leaving spices and herbs on the countertop that I have no intention of using. Marjoram?! What are you doing with marjoram?! You don't want to monkey with that stuff! And I hope you're not putting in too much of that cayenne pepper, you know I don't like hot spicy food...They don't call me Ned Pepper for nothing!

Sean McCabe was also a musical personality. He was a member of a rock band called Fat Finger. The name comes from the typing mistake you make when your finger hits the wrong key on the keyboard. But really I think they took their name from Badfinger.

###

### **A Curious Day By Valerie Collins**

How the wind blew in hearty gusts sounding human-like voice whispers through the air. This day was entirely autumn with the sunset hues of reds and oranges, the mid day brilliance of yellows and hints of summer passing in the many shades of green. It was these bursts of wind though that sent the gingerly hung leaves flying off their tree anchors and setting an aura of mystery and intrigue in the tone imparted. Valerie had come back to her childhood home surrounded by deep pine woods and little else to indicate human life was in the near vicinity. There was a small house not far away but must have served as a weekend getaway as it remained mostly uninhabited. Other places were scattered up and down the road but on an evening like this they all seemed inconsequential. She had agreed to house sit while her brother and sister-in-law who continued to reside there went on an extended trip through New England, mixing business with some pleasure. In fact she relished the thought of spending some quiet time in this place that was so packed with memories of long ago. Now, as night was fast approaching and darkness promised to prevail, she was beginning to wonder if staying alone in this big old house with no one in the surrounding area was such a good idea.

The day began in good spirit for it was autumn in full glory. The autumnal colors were a feast for the eye. Morning dew that lingered on the rusted red-brown leaves of blueberry bushes cast diamond sparkles in the emerging sunrays, setting the forest alive in welcoming the new day. Valerie set about planning the hours to come with coffee comfort in hand while strolling the long porch that wrapped around this house. The delicious scent of the season permeated the air and danced in the breezes that fanned her

face and twirled her hair. It would be a day of long leisurely walks, catching up on reading long neglected, putting knitting needles to yarn and perhaps an afternoon nap on the outdoor lounge.

Now relishing the peace and tranquility that lay ahead, Valerie set about readying herself for this treat. A pleasant hike would be the opening event and she embarked on this adventure with relish. The crunching and crackle of leaves and acorns underfoot awakened her senses as she inhaled the woodsy wafts that filled the air. Thoughts swirled in her head and childhood recollections tiptoed in. There was a little boy, a man now, who lived somewhere in these woods. She should find him for old time's sake. After all they played together as children. Down the path that veered off the trail she went in search of his house. Just about when she was ready to call it quits, there, in the clearing, was the house. Now old but charming in its aged way she remembered it well. Her knocks on the door brought no sign of life so she went around to the side door with larger windows. Knocking there brought no good result either so peering in the windows was a tempting choice. Chaos lay everywhere and nobody was to be seen. But wait! What was that streak that flashed before her eyes so quick it could have been an illusion? Was it indeed inside the house or did it vanish out the back door and into the thick brush of the wooded property? Too freaked out to investigate further, Valerie departed in great haste nearly tripping multiple times in her attempt to get away. Once on the familiar trail again, she hurriedly finished her hike and headed home. It was probably this quiet country setting that stirred her imagination she reasoned and settled into her home away from home with great relief.

Night was now approaching for twilight was settling in. The wind's gusts slowly turned into wailing sounds that seemed to be calling in a storm. The evening proceeded uneventfully except for the brewing bad weather that surely was taking over the night. Valerie gathered candles to have at the ready in case electricity failed to deliver. Eventually she settled down with a good book. A mystery story of course! What indeed was she thinking? While sitting at the kitchen table and deeply absorbed in the story, a loud knocking, no pounding, startled her out of her wits! There in the window was a character if ever she had seen one. A man with piles of long graying scruffy hair tumbling onto an equally long and scruffy gray beard was waving to her frantically and beckoning her over. He looked as though he'd been homeless for a lifetime or it certainly seemed so from his grungy attire and general appearance. Valerie couldn't hide nor pretend she wasn't home for there she was big as life in her well-lit kitchen. Windows gave her presence away. Thank God I locked all the doors was her first thought! Who are you was all she could think of to utter. It turned out that he was a classmate of her sister-in-laws more than fifty years ago and what he wanted was for her to come outside and see the unusual flashes of lightening in the western sky. Actually he thought he would be delivering this message to the house residents, but it didn't seem to matter that Valerie was the recipient tonight. He was most animated in his description of the atmospheric phenomenon that was either occurring or about to occur and most insistent that she should experience its wonder. Valerie listened with appropriate interest and assured him she would make the effort to see it in a bit. With that assurance this character departed as swiftly as he appeared.

Heart now beating double time, Valerie did a quick but thorough house check to make sure all windows and doors were surely locked, the door going down to the basement included. It was time she thought to turn off all lights and go to bed. If this character should come back he would not see a soul and not be tempted to pontificate on weather wonders. Sleep soon took over and it was now deep into the night. Then, in mid slumber, there was a voice...an eerie voice that spoke, "HELLO VALERIE...HELLO VALERIE..." over and over again! She bolted up with such a start sure that a heart attack would soon follow! Listening carefully with heart thumping wildly she realized that the smoke alarm was sounding with the warning "LOW BATTERY...LOW BATTERY..." not HELLO VALERIE!

Of course sleep was out of the question now. Who could after such a day? The remainder of the night Valerie spent in catching her breath, mulling over the curious events of the past twenty-four hours, all the while thinking...and this is only day one!

###

***Good Golly Miss Molly***  
**By N. Stewart**

Molly, the ever-adorable Shetland Sheepdog is approaching four years old and finally...well...that's not the correct word to use, perhaps...using the phrase somewhat grown up would be better. Molly was 12 weeks old when I bought her and was a pile of fluff. Her breeder told me the puppy had a keen sense of curiosity and had no fear whatsoever. Once in her new home, everything was novel and she investigated it all. Never mind that she might get caught behind the refrigerator while searching for crumbs, or that she would get lost in the twisted branches of the bushes in the back yard and have to be rescued, or that knocking over the garbage cans and pulling smelly things out to savor was not a good idea. I thought given time she would mature into the well-trained companion. But alas she'll never be anything but her own dog. It's in her character to be so.

Molly loves to bark her opinion on just about everything her humans do or don't do. In the backyard, when a neighbor backs the car out of their driveway Molly barks at the moving car and at the same time runs in ever-faster circles in the yard, causing grass divots to fly in all directions. She has a wide range of voices. She can be very content, sitting on the deck, enjoying the fresh cool air and will suddenly put her snout in the air and mournfully howl, wanting attention or for some other reason known only to her. She howls inside the house, too. She starts low in a sort of growl or grumbling and then proceeds to the intensity of a lonely wolf, baying at the moon. It can be very unsettling in the middle of the night, and like the well-trained person I am, I go to her to see what she wants.

She runs on her own time schedule. Never mind that her person would like to sleep later in the morning. If Molly is up, everyone is up. When she thinks it is time to eat, she puts her head on my lap, presses down gently, and gives me the “look” with those ever-so-sad brown eyes. If too early, we have a discussion about how to read the face of a clock and how many minutes she needs to wait. She slowly walks away dejected, with a single, sharp bark plunks herself on the floor, and impatiently waits. After eating she plays rough with her dish, puts both front feet into the dish and slides it around until it tips on edge, and then she rolls the dish around the kitchen floor, using her nose or paws to push it, continuously barking at it. When it stops rolling, she puts both feet in the dish again and off she goes until the dish is taken away or she becomes bored with the activity.

Molly counts, too. The correct number of reward “cookies” must be given for an activity or she sits staring at the cookie jar until the matter is corrected.

Molly owns the bathroom. She claimed the cool tile floor from the start for her den. In the winter it gets cold at night in the house and she curls the bathroom rug and places her four feet under the rug for warmth. She is highly insulted and grumps if she is requested to vacate the premises for the need of her humans. Reluctantly with a sigh and a look of disgust she leaves. Upon her return, she makes it known with grumping that she was unhappy, circles, and then plops down.

She has fun playing with her humans; herding them by pulling on pant legs, running and chasing them around the dining room table; bringing a toy to them and watching as it is thrown and standing there as her humans go to fetch it; squeaking a toy to distraction, seeking the negative reaction of the scowling human’s face, and pulling out every toy in her box before merely walking away from all of them.

There are more unique examples of *Good Golly Miss Molly’s* nature, but enough for now. Molly is intelligent, an independent thinker, sticks her nose in all, and marches to the beat of her own drum. It’s in her nature and no amount of training is going to change her. Molly knows quite well who she is and so do her humans.

###

## A Character Riddle

by: Susan J Wilfong

This month's word is "Character"  
I think of this as I ride the train.  
To which of the many cartoons out there  
Should my "Character" pertain?

I'll have to think about this one.  
Which cartoon should it be?  
Or maybe not a cartoon at all.  
You'll have to wait and see.

There certainly are a lot of characters  
Riding this train with me.  
Should I write about them?  
How wild would that be?

I have made my decision.  
I know who I'll write about.  
I hope I've made the right choice.  
This will be different, without a doubt.

The character I have selected  
Is someone we all know.  
It has a lot of different names.  
They're thought about wherever we go.

This character may be a woman.  
This character may be a man.  
Yes, I'm trying to confuse you.  
That's part of my sinister plan.

Here are a few more clues  
To who this character may be.  
It may live in an apartment  
Or in a house down by the sea.

It may have two legs.  
It may have four.  
It may wear glasses,  
Or shed on the floor.

It may bark.  
It may fly.  
It may call your name  
As you walk by.

I think that's enough.  
Have you figured it out?  
Have you figured out the character  
That I'm writing about?

The character I have selected,  
Is none other than a FRIEND.  
Someone or something  
On which we depend.

They help us feel better,  
When we're in a bad place.  
They may give us a kiss,  
Or a big warm embrace.

A friend can be a person.  
A friend can be a pet.  
A friend is there for us,  
Whenever we're upset.

A friend is a character  
That anyone or anything can be.  
And I'm so very thankful,  
That you are a friend to me.

###