

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

December 2015 selection – Twilight

The Old Man's Boat and the Old Man's Dog

By James Smetana

One of my friends, Sean McCabe, is a professional chef and he told me about this thing called "mise en place" which means everything in its place, or at least things are going to be where you expect to find them. And that's a useful concept for the cooking game. You can't start searching in a drawer for a wooden spoon when the stove-top fire is raging. You've got to have everything right there, at the ready, or at least know where it is so that you can just turn on your heel and grab it. Another thing Sean was pretty hep on was music. He and some of his friends made up a rock combo called Fatt Finger. I thought the name was a steal from Badfinger but I didn't say anything. They played a few times at Lilly's on Lincoln Avenue. Lilly's used to be a hotbed of barrelhouse blues piano players. Every night they'd have a different one: Pinetop Perkins, Sunnyland Slim, Detroit Junior. They're all gone now. Fatt Finger was what they call a cover band: they played songs made famous by other groups--they didn't write their own original songs. That's got to be a limitation: You'll never be known as innovators--just imitators. I always thought that the Searchers could have been as big as the Beatles but they could only do a fine job interpreting existing songs--they were unable to write their own. You're a songwriter or you're not. Some people can do it and some people cannot. My dad used to get mad every time he saw Simon and Garfunkel on TV. "The little guy does all the work!" he would say. I tried to explain that Paul was a writer and Art was not, and no amount of

coercion would ever change that. Art “trying” to write a song would be like Paul “trying” to be tall.

John Fogerty could do it and his brother Tom could not. John always seemed to hold a grudge against his brother and the other two guys in the band (quick: name them!) because they weren’t holding up their end as composers and lyricists. Believe me, it’s not because they didn’t want to. Who wouldn’t want to collect the composer royalties? You’d make money even if Ike and Tina Turner massacre your song! It seems like every successful band gets to the point where everyone hates everyone else, and they won’t even ride in the same bus--they only see each other when they (have to) perform concerts for their cheering fans. When CCR got inducted into the Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame, Fogerty would not appear on the same stage as his brother. And his brother was dead! Cremated and in a jar! Bad moon rising indeed.

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Starlight, Twilight, the Eclipse for Your Eyes Only!

By Mercedes Martinez

I’m nearing my twilight years, yet it’s way too soon! I’ve so much I’ve yet to experience, God willing. If I had no responsibilities, for example, paying a mortgage, taxes to boot (thank you senator legislators), punching the clock, tending to my two sons, checking in on my young beautiful daughter (making sure her boyfriend does right by her or else Uncle Guido will have to make a visit, just kidding, well...). Then of course there’s my loyal dog, Gordo and my son’s cat, Thomas (I haven’t thrown him out because my son IS fond of him). Oh let’s not forget the ‘triple pay cable’, my kid’s student loans, then of course, my own student loans. Ugh! It’s enough to make a grown girl cry.

Retirement in our twilight years should be a reward for time well spent, rearing children and doing the right thing...etcetera, etcetera.

Lord, all I ask is that I go quietly, quickly and without pain, of most importance. Dear Lord may I never end up in an underfunded, poorly managed, sweat shop of a nursing home. The kind where nurse Ratchet and her buddies work where staff just check in with a mindset of, ‘Where’s my real cheese? Oh, and who’s this clown think he is, telling me, moi, what to do?!

Alas, let’s look at the positive side. Is there one? Yes! Yes, there is! I won’t have to deal with road blocks, ambulances, police sirens, or the occasional flat tire as I attempt to make it to my job, that still receives enough funding from the state budget to pay for my occasional trip to the spa and of course the basic necessities of life.

The word twilight conjures up yet a much more positive evening I had at the Soarr Foundation, where I had the honor to meet ‘Mr. Moses Brings Plenty.’ Who, you say is

Mr. Moses Brings Plenty? Only the most inspirational actor you'd ever want to meet. It was in Naperville, of all places. The Naper Settlement, preserved for years to come. It is a detailed staged western town of days gone by, where old cowboys hustling, horse riding and trading with the indigenous people of that time occurred. A real throw back to the Western Era.

Well, it was approximately 8:00pm as my mom, brother and I were warming ourselves by a beautiful camp fire. Jim, the caregiver of the camp fire, took extra effort and pain to align all the smooth rocks side by side in a perfect circular formation. Such perfection mimicked heavenly encounters. Surrounding the inner circle of stones was another perfect circle of herbs. Jim showed us a pot of tobacco and herbs. One would throw in a handful of the herbs and tobacco in the fire when praying for that loved one to turn his life around. When they hit the flames, it sparkled like the Fourth of July fireworks in the pitch dark night. I had met Mr. Moses Brings Plenty earlier. I was taken by his powerful, calm yet serene, tranquil voice that uplifted so many as he spoke to a huge crowd of families and friends gathered to come hear him speak. The indigenous youth were particularly uplifted by his emphasis on standing strong and knowing your history to pursue your highest potential.

As mom and I watched the fire flicker and shoot up flames, tall and splendid, with a crackle and several pops. Without warning, Moses Brings Plenty appeared with his wife and handsome nephew. True to his name Moses did Bring Plenty, plenty of inspirational songs and prayers to the 'The Creator'. He sang five songs, one to honor our creator, two healing songs and two gratitude songs. He beat a rhythmic tone on an authentic Indian drum made with a real cowhide. At first, dark clouds filled the sky but as Moses Brings Plenty finished his last song, the Red Moon Eclipse began.

As I watched the amazing eclipse, I could feel first hand, the immense love and reverence this man had for our creator, like nothing else existed in this life. A true love, true, honest, authentic worship of our creator. A soul connection on a level no human relationship could possibly provide.

The moments that touch our lives even in the twilight of our years come from our divine creator. Thank you, Soli Deo Gloria, to God be the glory alone. These divine, unexpected, extraordinary moments in life keep me going. What keeps you going on and on into the twilight years? Ti volgio bene, mi amore! This Christmas find the divine in your life and in those whom you love.

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Magic At Twilight

by: Susan J Wilfong

It happened at twilight
When Sophia gave birth.
God sent some precious Angels
To be with us on Earth.

It wasn't very easy
Since Sophia was a first time mom.
She did her very best
And just tried to remain calm.

First came Billy
A strong and robust boy.
We knew from the beginning
He would bring endless joy.

Then came Mark,
A little smaller in size.
His nickname would become
Little Bright Eyes.

Sophia kissed each boy
Right on top of their head.
And she softly cooed to them
As she rested in her bed.

This first time mom
Just had twins!
Two baby boys.
Now the chaos begins.

Sophia couldn't get comfortable.
She just could not rest.
What was wrong with Sophia?
Why was she in distress?

She turned her head
And closed her eyes
Gave out a big grunt
And look! A surprise!

A third little Angel
Was crying on the bed.
Sophia just took it in stride
And gently kissed its head.

But this was a girl!
Angel became her name.
But an angel, she was not.
For trouble was her claim.

For a first time mom,
Sophia did great.
But eight weeks later
Came a day I would hate.

Billy, Mark and Angel
Were taken away.
Sophia didn't seem to mind.
She was actually okay.

Billy grew up with a farmer
And tended to the sheep.
Angel was a charmer
And she just loved to sleep,

Then, there was Little Bright Eyes, Mark
He was a very special boy.
He became a therapist
And helped people experience joy.

Yes, Sophia was a little dog,
Just a mutt to you and me.
But she was a awesome first time mom
The best mom she could ever be.

Billy, Mark and Angel
Grew up to be just fine.
And I can boldly say,
For a short time, those pups were mine.

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Twinkling Lights in the Twilight

By N. Stewart

As twilight approached, the Christmas lights indoor and out came on all over the neighborhood. Molly and I sat by the window and watched the nightly occurrence as Christmas Day would soon be here. My tree was trimmed, the house decorated and the presents wrapped and scattered around under the tree.

As I sat watching the twinkling lights, I smiled remembering one Christmas when I was a little kid, waiting impatiently for Santa to come to our house. Late that Christmas Eve night I heard noise coming from the living room. Rubbing the sleep out of my eyes, I snuck out of bed and peered around the hall corner to see if I could catch a glimpse of Santa at work. Instead I saw Mom and Dad with wrapped and unwrapped presents and toys around them and wondered what was going on. But then Dad, seeing me directed me back to bed. He explained that Santa had dropped off the presents and asked if Dad and Mom would help put them under the tree because he, Santa, was running very late and still had many more presents to deliver to all the good little girls and boys.

I went back to bed but couldn't sleep. Morning finally arrived, running into the room I saw presents from Santa and from Mom and Dad piled under the decorated and colorfully lit tree. The milk and cookies left for Santa were gone, so I knew that he had been there and that I had just missed seeing him the night before. Tearing into the wrapping, I discovered doll house furniture, a paint set, a game, socks and underwear.

My eye caught site of a dollhouse over by the couch - not a fancy one like you can buy, but one made out of a wooden crate turned on its side with openings for doors and windows. The slanted roof was painted dark green and the outside of the house painted white. Each room inside was wallpapered, using a different pattern or painted a bright and cheery color. Cutouts of magazine pictures adorned the walls. The rooms all had ceiling lights that could be turned on or off with the flick of a switch. The kitchen, dining room, and living room were downstairs, two bedrooms and a bathroom were on the second floor, and the attic was a nursery with a crib, a playpen, and a little baby in a buggy. A mom and a dad and a little brother figures stood over the baby.

My Mom said that Santa had asked Dad to build the dollhouse and make some of the furniture for it. I took the furniture that Santa had given me and what my Dad had made and carefully placed all of it in the little house. The dining room table and chairs sat in the middle of the room and the china cabinet and buffet sat along the walls. In the kitchen, I placed the sink under a window and the refrigerator and stove along the opposite wall. A kitchen table and four chairs fit in the room also. The careful placement of the living room furniture with tables, lamps and TV followed. The bedrooms were filled next with beds, dressers, and mirrors. The attic came already finished.

I could have stayed there all day arranging and rearranging the furniture and making up stories about my new play family. But it was time to go to Aunt Ruth's house for

Christmas dinner. There would be time tomorrow and the day after and the day after that to play with my new dollhouse. I put my arms around Dad's neck and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, before running in to the bedroom to change out of my pajamas and into my new Christmas outfit.

The twilight had slipped into darkness while I had sat mesmerized with thoughts of that special Christmas when I received the dollhouse and of all the fun I had playing with it. All these years later, the wooden crate dollhouse and the furniture that remains sits in my basement. I just can't (or won't) let it and its associated memories go.

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Treasures or "Things"

By Elvira K. Castillo

Now that I've reached the age of 80 years old, I think about many things I've treasured for many years, and what will happen to them when I'm gone. I don't know how others feel, but I can't believe how quickly time passes, and that suddenly you are 80 and are faced with the responsibility of ridding yourself of "things" you've treasured --some almost all your life. On one hand, I do not want to leave the burden of disposing of things to my son and a few relatives, and on the other hand, I still enjoy being surrounded by my treasures.

I can remember when I was in my twenties, I still had the dolls I loved playing house and school with as a child that were stored in my Mother's attic. I can't tell you how many vivid memories I have of playing with these dolls. I had quite an imagination and often played by myself with the dolls who were great company, and I really didn't have to have playmates around. My dolls were my best friends. Anyway, getting back to the attic, Mom decided it was time for me to get rid of "things" stored in the attic. Reluctantly, I gave my little treasured friends to my cousin's two little girls. I knew the girls wouldn't take care of or love the dolls like I did, but they had to go. A year or so ago, I mentioned the dolls to one of the girls, who now is in her fifties, and she didn't have one recollection of the dolls and said her mother probably threw them out as she was in the habit of doing. When I think of this situation, I think of all the treasures I now have being thrown out and it makes me shutter. My problem is "attachment" and an inability to "let go."

I bought a house in 1972, which I also treasure, and since then I've accumulated many more things. For one, I've kind of replaced my childhood dolls, and display them around the house, mainly in my bedroom. They actually are decorations, because I dress them for every holiday and season. My brother John once called my house, "Elvi's Doll House." Elvi is the nickname my relatives and long-time friends call me. Suddenly, now that I'm in my eighth decade, I feel that I should start letting some of my little friends go! I think about this so often and wonder should I pack or bag each one individually with all their

personal outfits, shoes, socks, etc. and donate or sell them or should I just continue enjoying the dolls and not care what eventually happens to them?

It's not only the dolls that are my dilemma, but gifts I've gotten from my son, friends, and relatives, some of whom passed on, and I'd feel disloyal to my loved ones if I tried to let go of these things which were given to me with great love. I also have accumulated photo albums, stories I wrote, books and the inherited items from deceased relatives which bring them back to life for me when I look at them.

I don't know if I'll ever really begin to "let go," but within the last couple of months I did manage to take a hand-painted lemonade pitcher and cups to an antique store which they bought for \$50, and I donated a very nice raincoat and others items to a resale shop. At least it's a start.

Treasures, "things" --what to do with them and when? Wish I could bundle them up and take them with me wherever my soul goes, especially my doll Bonnie who's been with me for almost 70 years. But, truly I wish that whoever winds up getting them will treasure them even more than me. I just wish everything to be treated with love and respect and not thrown out like my childhood dolls.

As Oprah once said, "The best things in life are not "things." However, I say, "How about the things that are deeply a part of you?"

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