

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
© 2016 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

******In Memoriam******

**Our member and friend, Jamey Damert, passed away on January 30, 2016.
He was known for his inventive and quirky stories,
his twist to the ordinary, and his sense of humor.
We will dearly miss him.**

**“When through one man
A little more love and goodness,
A little more light and truth
Come into the world –
Then that man's life has had meaning.”**

January 2016 selection – Year

I Am the Years By Val Collins

I am the years of time passed on... the years that shaped and fashioned the person that was to be. This was a time of formation and design, of parental influence and innate essence. The growing, stretching, reaching years filled with wonder and marvel soaking in the world with a thirst for more. Always more for there is such a space to be filled. These are the years of experience both good and bad. They teach, they equip, they strengthen the spirit and expand the age of innocence. These are the years of memory, of making the memories that preserve time...the memories that spill over the years and into the decades, filling the heart and soul with warmth and sometimes perhaps pathos yet always with the satisfaction of endurance. The years of the past are the learning years, the years to gather information, assimilate what is learned then integrate into knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom carries and ripples along as on a flowing stream, collecting, amassing then emerging into something larger, into a river force, growing, changing never stopping.

I am the years of present time...of the here and now, of the moment. Life in the present holds acute awareness, engaging all the senses and assigning them to the whole of human experience. The years of the present borrow from those of the past, giving meaning to the journey. All aspects of experience must be encountered in order to understand and appreciate new ones faced along the way. We live in a relative experience...needing to know bad in order to understand good, sadness to appreciate happiness, pain to value comfort and so on. The present years are alive, vibrant, and electric. They are the big screen cinema with surround sound. They are animated and nourished with the innocent hope of immortality. These years are a compilation of all that is now and all that has gone before.

I am the years of the future, the unknown years, the mystery years. Imagination runs wild when contemplating these yet to come years. What is to occur, to ensue? An optimistic hope lies ahead for a future that evolves from knowing, from living from experiencing. Yet I enter the years of the future with a degree of trepidation for it is the unspecified that gives pause to the fate that lies ahead. These years slow the body and mind, stealing its strength and vitality, leaving recollections and gaps where loved ones should be. These are the push aside years for who has time to spend with the aged? Life is too busy, too complicated to sit down with the one who is now in the years of the future. Nevertheless these years bring a wisdom accumulated from all the years that were, a self-confidence that only the experience of living can deliver. And these years bring a lifetime to full circle pleasing and satisfying the spirit while whispering “job well done.”

I am the years of the past. I am the years of the present. I am the years of the future.

###

The Little Plant
By N. Stewart

The weather finally began to change and the temperature of the soil increased. After a long winter's nap, the little plant began to push its head up through the soil, sending a shoot just barely about the ground to test the air. The sun felt warm, so the little plant put forth two tightly curled leaves and felt them unfurl to welcome spring. Some evenings were still quite chilly and the little plant was glad that the bricks from the big house were nearby, providing some extra warmth at night. As the days got longer and warmer, the little plant continued to grow above the ground and climbed high and straight, heading toward the sun.

The weather changed again and during the day it got hot and humid. The night shadows and the evening breezes cooled the little plant. Reaching for its tallest height, buds formed on the tips of the branches where soon flowers would appear. When the time was right the buds opened to show their brilliant red colored petals. The flowers waved back and forth with the gentle air movements, providing a delicate fragrance. Occasionally, a flower or two in full bloom was plucked off the plant and soon another would grow in its place.

This went on for some time before the air began to cool and the little plant's leaves began to turn from green to yellow. The brilliant red of the flowers began to fade a little more each day and the heads began to droop. Recognizing the signs, the little plant began to store water and food in its roots and stopped providing nourishment to the leaves and the flowers. No more flowers would be produced. The leaves would continue to fade, going from yellow to brown and would become very brittle, eventually falling upon the ground. Something big and sharp would cut off the dead and crumbling part of the little plant as the weather became colder and the winds grew more aggressive.

All snug and warm below ground, the little plant hunkered down to wait out the frigid cold and the snow that piled high from the winter storms. When the weather warmed once again, the little plant began to send up a shoot as it had the previous year and would begin its cycle anew.

###

A Thought for the New Year

By Susan J Wilfong

There once was a man from Nantucket
His name happened to be Eugene.
He was a strange little man
Not very tall and not very lean.

Many people laughed
At this little round man.
But he remained strong.
As strong as anyone can.

As Eugene aged
And changed through the years
His mind would wander
For he had many fears.

One day he decided
That he had had enough.
He packed a small bag
And left in a huff.

He gave up on people
Because they were mean.
And for many years,
Eugene wasn't seen.

Then came the day,
When Eugene returned.
He wanted to see if people had changed,
And this is what he learned.

People can be selfish,
Hurtful and cruel.
Many people are
But that's not a rule.

He thought people might be different,
If they knew what they were doing.
How many people are hurt,
While their own pleasures pursuing.

If people would just stop
And think of the other guy
Then think how they would feel,
And ask themselves, "Why?".

Eugene was still angry
From his lonely, miserable past.
But he made up his mind,
"I won't let this last!".

He looked in the mirror.
He liked what he saw.
He sucked in his stomach
And stuck out his jaw.

He wanted to share
the things he had learned.
There was a fire inside him
That continually burned.

He organized a meeting
With those he once hated.
He was extremely happy
With the forgiveness and peace created

Eugene's thoughts and feelings
Stretched far and wide.
Everyone was touched
When Eugene finally died.

This little round man
Had something important to say,
And he didn't let anything
Stand in his way.

I'll think of Eugene
Every day of the year.
How he stepped out from his past.
To spread forgiveness and cheer.

May you think of Eugene
When you're having a bad day.
Or when you feel people are laughing,
And you want to run away.

Thanks Eugene

###

The Witchdoctor Song
By J. Smetana

Ray was a neighbor, if he was a co-worker I would've killed him and I'd be writing this from prison to my friend Norman Mailer. He used to be a number of things, among them a bartender and a wrestler. He had the scars on his forehead from his wrestling days. Back then you'd hide a piece of a razor blade inside the tape around your wrist. During the match you'd wipe your forehead with the side of your hand. It looked like you were keeping the sweat out of your eyes but you'd be slicing yourself. Your blood would drip down your face and the fans loved it. If you saw that Mickey Rourke movie you know what I'm talking about. I guess one thing I liked about Ray was that he wasn't quite "respectable"--then or now. One of his heroes was Gus Alex, an old-time Chicago mobster. Ray used to do some work for those guys. Nothing heavy, but still. Ray always said, "I know where the slots are." The slot machines had to be moved in a hurry, Ray probably helped carry them, and now he knows where they're hidden in someone's basement. Like a lot of people he had a kind of respect for the gangsters of yesteryear. He used to talk about the Gangster Code of Ethics. I thought he meant the 'omerta' the so-called code of silence. But the way Ray defined it it meant you wouldn't sleep with another guy's wife. That seems to be common sense, gangster or otherwise. Why ask for trouble?

Ray was always ensconced in a big chair on his back porch. Whenever I walked outside to get some air or just to be alone with my thoughts, Ray was there. He was ready for me. He'd hear the back door lock open and he'd perk right up. Someone to talk to! He lived alone; think he had a daughter somewhere who wanted nothing to do with him, the poor bastard. By the time I got to know him-- as a neighbor - he was completely insane. Even more than the Gangster Code of Ethics his obsession was the Napoleonic Code. (I always thought that was only useful in Louisiana. I remember Brando saying something about that in "Streetcar.") If I happened to share a little anecdote with Ray about something that happened during the day, maybe some beer truck driver tried to cheat us on the empty barrel count, he'd roar back, HIT HIM WITH THE NAPOLEONIC CODE! The day my apartment got robbed I had to find out from Ray just what he knew. What did he see? What did he hear?

###

Years 2015/2016
By Elvira K. Castillo

In the twilight of the New Year, 2016, I wonder what new "fears" lie ahead of us. I know I'm not looking forward to the first week of 2016, as on January 7 I am scheduled to have some basil cell cancer removed from an area very close to my right eye, and on January 8, a first for me; I will have plastic surgery where they removed the cancer. I'm fortunate to have a good friend, Nancy, accompany me to the doctors, which is not only comforting but much needed moral support. Nancy had the same procedure, so she understands what I'll be going through. By the time this story is read, it will be all over.

Getting back to our theme “Year,” let’s take a peak at 2015. Journalist Mary Schmich wrote an excellent poem in the Sunday Chicago Tribune December 26th, covering the events or “chaos,” as she referred to it, of 2015. She included bombings, shootings, protests, ISIL, ISIS, Syria refugees, the Paris tragedy, the shootings at a Charleston church and Oregon school, the killing of children in Chicago, the Laquan killing protests, and Rahm’s winning over Chuy for Mayor of Chicago. She went on to “more cheerful” subjects such as comedian Amy Schumer and singer Adele, and also changes in our society like the legalization of gay marriage and a better understanding of transgender through Caitlyn Jenner. Other categories covered were state programs, legalization of pot for medical purposes, sports, goodbyes, and politics, particularly the presidential election in 2016.

Thank you, Mary, for helping me remember all the 2015 events. Mind you, I have to be reminded, as to be honest I can’t remember what happened a minute ago. Your poem, as I said, was excellent, but I have to tell you that you have competition as a poet, as we have a wonderful and very entertaining poet in our midst, Susan. She is part of our Pen and Ink writers group and can write a poem lickety split on any word given to her.

I know it’s important to know current events, but personally I think the media is too repetitious in reporting the same news over and over, day after day. We learned just as much decades ago listening to our old Cathedral style radios with less stress implanted.

While we travel through the year ahead, with all the fears and triumphs, remember we have overcome every event in the past - good and bad - since Biblical times, so try not to let any future fear overcome us either personnel or Nationwide, and hope that our world will be as peaceful as twilight in the coming year.

###

Friends Let You Down
By Sara Schupack

When you’re suffering a crisis, friends and family will let you down. It’s inevitable, and for the most part, they can’t help it, but you also can’t help feeling deeply disappointed and even more alone.

Take for example, a terrible illness in a child. Let’s say that it’s something that you thought might be depression and you even had a therapist seeing him and while she was sending some sort of reporting to the insurance company, she never shared with you a particular diagnosis. Suddenly he ends up in an emergency room, totally mute, having cut himself with about eight pretty deep parallel lines across the forearm. Then, as things are spiraling out of control and he and you are both passive cogs in a health care wheel of a health care machine, with all sorts of procedures and costs and terminology and decisions spinning and churning beyond your grasp or comprehension, you feel lost and confused and for the first time in your life, you don’t have an appetite.

He ends up in a psychiatric ward, although that's not what they called it. What was it? "In-patient treatment." Treatment for what? Nothing is quite labeled or explained to you clearly, but that day in the hospital you are coached to say and then later hear echoed back the phrase "suicidal ideation without a plan" and you're not sure how exactly that phrase attaches to your son; no one explains that to you, least of all, him. But you keep reassuring yourself by repeating the second half "without a plan, without a plan."

And then, after he has been released from one hospital and admitted to another, the only difference being that he comes home at night, and you are finally aware of yourself and your surroundings enough to taste the food that you force yourself to eat and remember to turn off the teapot before it burns the enamel off its surface, you decide to reach out to friends, most of whom live far away. You overcome the worry of betrayal, as this is your son's business and he is ashamed. You convince yourself that it's your life too, that your friends care about him and care to know things like this. And you're so tired of being alone with this huge burden.

And because the burden is huge, so are your expectations. They are just waiting to be disappointed and deflated, like cheap balloons that wear their sad destruction in their very first, bright moments. Some friends send back platitudes that only frustrate and annoy. A few get the tone and message just right, and you try not to like them the best; they might just be better with words. It doesn't mean they're better at friendship. Some don't reply at all, which does make you doubt their status as friends. How is it possible to hear something so painful and not bother to pick up a phone or tap on a keyboard for ten minutes, maybe even five would do? The worst are the ones who make it about themselves. Also par for the course; you know this intellectually, but you're still not sure you can ever forgive it even when you notice the same tendency in yourself. You are sorry that your friend lost a parent or a job or is struggling with some sort of health issue, because they are less available to you. Or you're sorry that they're suffering and you can't do more for them, and you need reassurance that you're still okay to them. Bottom line, you need them to reassure you that you're a good person, right and loveable.

But you're the one suffering now. You get to be the one who judges. And you can't contain your bitterness at one friend who feels guilty for being far away, and needs to feel needed, and sends you about six text messages a day, not appreciating how much effort every single act of communication takes for you, how you're already expending more energy than you have with about ten phone calls a day to insurance company, hospital, school, and various personnel at each one of these institutions, just so you can keep your son safe and understand immediate next steps, because longer term realities are just too vast and scary to begin to understand. And those people rarely even pretend to care, as they only answer exactly the small questions you've figured out to ask, in some cruel guessing game, or they quote a rule or fine print message at you as if they are robots and you are dirt. You do not have it in you to answer many cheery texts from a friend, least of all, one that comes in at midnight, when sleep is already an elusive, precious commodity, because you hadn't answered the sixth text that day and she was afraid you might be mad at her.

Or the one who pushes and pushes you to call back, because he really needs to talk to you, and then you finally give in, because it feels easier than having to explain yet again that you're in survival mode and often just can't handle another phone conversation, you're literally not sure you'll be able to crawl upstairs and get yourself into bed after one more emotional exertion, and he spends half of the call fishing for acknowledgement and thanks about the gift he sent. "Wait, what did the card look like again? Can you find it and describe it to me?"

The friends who say "Let me know if there's anything I can do" maybe get it a little better, but when you are wondering whether or not you should hide all of the knives in the house, and rush to his room after work when your son hasn't answered the text message right away, to make sure he only fell asleep and is still breathing, you're not in any shape to be able to figure out what it is exactly that you need. Sometimes, if the friend genuinely cares about being a good friend, not just checking 'friend duties' off the list, they should go ahead and decide for you. They can drop off a bag of groceries or stop over and clean or take out the garbage and then leave, or send some gifts to your son, who, regardless of how pained he is, is still a teenager who is going to be happy, even if fleetingly, with new music, candy, or an interesting gadget or gizmo.

When you're in crisis, you don't have it in you to reassure everyone else that you're okay or that what they have offered you is enough. Nor do you have it in you to accept any more disappointments, including the inevitable ones that your friends will dump on you, like reused gift wrap that will never again have a full or pure purpose, but needs to go somewhere.

Perhaps when the crisis subsides, the disappointment just fades and the friendships live on. Does it take half a year, several years? I wouldn't know. I can only hope.

###