

**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**  
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**December 2016 selection – Treasure**

**The Tragic Gunshot That Ruined Lucille Ball's Childhood.**  
**By J. Smetana**

All boring people are dull but not all dull people are boring, is how Marge starts our Christmas letter. Not meaning to change the subject but not wanting to embrace it either I ask her if she wants the last of the nut log. I know what the answer is but I think I should ask anyway. Our civilized behavior towards each other is one reason we enjoy such a strong and steadfast marriage. The telephone rings when I get in the kitchen. It's Marge's sister Rose calling. We don't have Caller ID but I can tell who's calling just by the ring and Rose's ring always has a very strong Rose vibe. Yellow, I answer. Rose talks on the 'phone like Bobby Fischer plays chess. If you show any weakness you'll be destroyed. You won't even see it coming. I CAN'T HEAR YOU, I shout. Actually I can hear her just fine. ARE YOU IN A TUNNEL? ARE YOU CALLING FROM INSIDE A TUNNEL? WAIT A MINUTE, LET ME TRY ANOTHER-. Then I hang up on myself. Therein lies the beauty of my never-fail method: No one expects you to hang up on yourself! By now I think everyone knows we met in Wednesday night Bible Study class. One night I waited with her for the number 11 bus. That's when I invited her to the Art Institute museum, our first date. Be in Gallery 221 on Monday at high noon, I told her. I've learned not to leave things vague. I got to the museum early thanks to the CTA. I'd have time to focus and take a few deep breaths in front of Georges de La Tour's masterpiece. That's when I realized I was wearing my pants inside-out.

I thought of running downstairs to the men's room then I remembered the Art Institute toilet was notorious for "cruising". Even if I ran downstairs as fast as possible I still might miss Marge. If she popped her head into the gallery and didn't see me she might go home, take an overdose of pills and leave an incriminating suicide note/confession it would take me years to shake off. Time to go to Plan B: the gallery next door holds a treasure trove of Northern European art no one ever looks at. Adam and Eve, sad-looking and way-too-thin, miserable even BEFORE they got their skinny asses kicked out of the garden. The true beauty of it is no one ever enters this room. You could take off your pants, you could even get a massage, nobody would know. If you put a \$100 bill on the floor when the museum opened it would still be there when it closed.

In less than 30 seconds I did what had to be done. I was back in Gallery 221 when Marge walked in at 12 on the dot. "On the way here, I saw a priceless Rembrandt," she said.

"The greatest treasure in this building," I told her, "is you."

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### **Treasured Memories** **By Phyllis Babbs**

When I moved in with my daughter and her family, I had enough experience to know how quickly children grow up and that I needed to appreciate the time I would be sharing with my two youngest grandchildren. And there were things I wanted them to see like Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon and assorted other small wonders.

One day as we were at the intersection of Higgins and River Roads, Nick, the younger of the two said "Nana, someday can we go by that water fall?"

"Does anyone have a practice or commitment?"

"No."

"Okay, then let's go now." I pulled into the McDonald's parking lot and off we went.

We had planned adventures and spur of the moment treks. We went for a hot air balloon ride and visited the Illinois Presidents' homes; Lincoln, Grant and Reagan. When we went to Niagara Falls, we took a ferry from Milwaukee to Michigan. We watched part of a Cardinal's game from the Arch when in St. Louis.

We went downtown often: To the Bean, Navy Pier, to a taping of the Wheel of Fortune, Buckingham Fountain, for a carriage ride, to the Rain Forest Café. There are so many things we did that bring happy thoughts. But, there one experience was really special for me and I hope for the boys.

A dear friend, Elroy, has a farm west of Elgin. We would go to visit in the summers. The boys would gather eggs for us to bring home and feed assorted animals. One summer, when we went out, there was a new addition to the menagerie, a small dog named Lady. She had a sweet disposition, a winning smile and could almost talk. She clearly understood what was being said to her. And she adopted us. It was my habit to carry dog biscuits in my car trunk as so many of our friends had dogs. But the dog

biscuits I had were for larger dogs. I apologized to Lady and told her next time I came I would have special biscuits for her. There were some broken pieces in the box which I gave her and she seemed content with them.

A year later, we went back to the farm and Lady greeted us warmly. “She remembers us, Nana!” Vinny said excitedly. Lady went and stood by the trunk of the car. She looked at me expectantly and waited patiently as I opened the trunk. I handed her a small biscuit, which she dropped at her feet and looked at me. Obviously, wanting another treat. When she had her treats, she took them to the barn to eat. When she was done eating them, she came out to play with the boys.

Because of school and band and sports and scouting, our summers were very full and we could only manage one trip a summer to the farm. But Lady never forgot us. And one summer when we went for visit, Lady had had a litter of puppies the day before. Elroy took us to the barn to see Lady. One of the cats followed us and Lady began to growl. Elroy shagged the cat out of the barn. Then in comes the other dog. Again Lady growled and the dog was sent away.

When it was just us, Lady sighed and looked at us. She was so contented and so proud of her family. Elroy reached down slowly and took one of the puppies and handed it to Vinny. And Lady seemed more pleased by that action than Vinny was. It was a unique moment. Lady was so clear about who could be near her babies. And it wasn't the animals she lived with. It was that group of folks that came out from Harwood Heights, once a year.

Vinny is in college now but when he comes home on break, I will ask him if he remembers that day and how he felt holding Lady's puppy. I hope he has a positive memory of the experience because it warms my heart every time I think of it.

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### **A Treasure Beyond Measure By Val Collins**

My treasure is of great value, is precious and cherished and is whom I am privileged to call mother. Not silver or gold nor exquisite jewels could equal the value of this dear woman. She is called Amelia and she is a woman of God. That would define her best for her faith is big and strong and mighty. She is a witness to all around of her devotion to God and His unfailing love. Indeed she keeps a prayer list, an actual list on paper, of who needs prayer and for what. She attends to these requests daily asking me from time to time how the individuals I tell her to pray for are doing and if they should remain on the list. She wants updates. Living in another state, she has not met many of my friends yet she speaks as if she knows them well. They do likewise asking me how Amelia is doing often followed by “Tell her to keep me on her prayer list!”

Amelia is of Italian descent and was born and raised in upstate New York. She was one of seven siblings and number six in that line. She was always independent and worked her way through college, determined to earn her degree. Indeed she reached master level status. When she married her husband, my father, he like many men of that

generation did not want his wife to work outside of the home. Little by little she convinced him to let her substitute teach once in awhile. Now her foot was in the door and she would soon land a full time teaching position. This would prove to be a blessing for when my father died too early at the age of 42 and my mother was left a widow to raise two young children she had the security of a job to support her family. She endured many hardships in life including the death of her baby Joanne 18 months of age. She prayed for another girl and along I came. We remained very close throughout our lives. Her independent nature and fierce determination carried her through many hurdles and she was all the stronger for them. From her I learned to be strong in the face of adversity and to strive for excellence. My marriage brought me to a state far from her but we talked often on the phone and visited each other throughout the year. Always a supportive presence, she was present after the births of my children and there with me after the death of one. She put her social life on hold until my brother and I were on our own then found love a second time with my stepfather Charles. I would visit her every summer and together we would run all day and into the evening doing things like picking apples to make sauce, visiting neighbors, sewing, knitting and crocheting. Charles would often ask if we ever were going to come down for a landing.

Amelia now lives with my brother and sister in law, with caregiver assistance. I go to be with her often, every three months or so. We have a wonderful time chatting and reminiscing, watching TV movies together and walking along the wrap around porch. She often says, "My life was like a puzzle...everything that has happened in it fit together in the end. It was all in God's plan." I think how lucky and blessed I am to have this treasure, this mother still with me at the age of 99 ½. It is a treasure beyond measure and a gift to cherish.

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### **The Memory Box** **By N. Stewart**

Karen was alone in the empty house on a bitter winter morning. Reaching up for the carved wooden box on the shelf, her fingers caressed the indentations along the lid and her thoughts flew far away to a safer, more settled time in life. She opened the top slowly and as she did she sat down. There in the velvet-lined floor of the box rested memories of her life.

She picked up the silver signet ring and ran her finger over the R, the S and the small diamond in between. It was her father's ring. Never wanting to wear a wedding band, her mother gave him that ring as a gift when they wed. He never was without it. Karen bought a silver chain the Christmas after he died and gave it to her mother so that the ring would be always close to her mother's heart. The chain was still attached but now her mother's wedding ring was there, too. She thought about when her mother was still healthy and dementia hadn't yet taken over her mind. Her mother had taught her so many things about life: love, compassion, the process of aging gracefully, accepting life as being good, and to be grateful for the chance to live it. Karen held both rings in her

hands and thanked her parents for being who they were. A tear fell from her eye and slowly rolled down her cheek.

Wiping the tear and putting down those rings, she picked up another ring. This one spelled out *Love* and had the tiniest of diamonds imbedded in the “o.” They were so young then and he was her first and only true love. It was so exciting to receive the ring with its promise of forever after. She placed the promise ring back. The promise kept, her life was filled with love.

There was the pink and white beaded “Baby Girl” bracelet that Karen wore until she went home from the hospital. Her mother had saved it and given it to her years later. A Girl Scout pin was in the box, a National Honor Society pin from high school, class ring, trinkets from “atta girl” awards at work, Phi Kappa Phi pin from college, and the gold summa com laude tassel that she had worked so hard to earn.

All treasures one and all. She closed the box and placed it back on the shelf, smiling to herself. Not all treasures are kept in a memory box she thought. Some treasures like friendships stay with us as we walk through life. Then there are those special friends, when the need arises, become more supportive than even family members. There were exceptional teachers she reflected that guided and encouraged the development of natural abilities. There were some extraordinary corporate and community leaders that voluntarily acted as mentors, passing along wisdom, experience and knowledge gathered over their respective life times. Those past and present living treasures would never fit in any manmade memory box, but did deserve to be honored and remembered. They would be kept, not in a wooden box, but in the forever memory of her mind.

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My Dad  
by: Susan J Wilfong

My dad was a flea-market junkie.  
He loved garage sales too.  
Of everything he got from them,  
Nothing was ever new.

He'd come home with weird things.  
Sometimes we didn't know what they were for.  
But every Saturday and Sunday  
He would bring home more.

He would try to explain to us  
How the weird things were used.  
He would simply shake his head  
When we looked back at him confused.

Once he came home with an oat bag.  
Now, why would he buy that?  
We didn't have a horse at home.  
So on a shelf it sat.

Then there was that tapping thing.  
It turned out to be for Morse Code.  
Now, why would he buy that?  
It wasn't made of gold.

Yes, dad brought home some weird things.  
And these weird things brought him pleasure.  
So I guess the old saying is true,  
"One man's junk is another man's treasure,"

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