

**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 2018 selection – Profile**

#### **Her Face By N. Stewart**

He watched from across the hospital cafeteria room as she sat down at a table to sip a beverage. She sat on the chair that presented her left facial profile toward him. He watched as she put the tea bag in her cup and mindlessly dunked it up and down, finally withdrawing it and putting it aside. Her hands cupped the tea, looking for the warmth she needed he supposed. She stared straight ahead, looking out the window. Her thoughts appeared to be deep and hidden, far from the day to day world that was going on around her where people were hurrying here and there and the din from the low-humming chatter and the clatter of dishes was ever present.

From where he was seated, he could not see what drew her attention to the window, but thought it provided some sort of protection or insulation for her. He thought he saw, or maybe it was what he felt, that a tear had fallen down her cheek. He wasn't sure. She wiped at something on her cheek with her napkin though. He thought she was pretty and that experience and character shown in her face; perhaps mid-50s. Her hair was dark and her skin was paled. She looked tired even exhausted as her body sank deeper into the chair.

From where he sat, he raised his hand and with an extended finger he mimicked the outline of her profile. He moved down her forehead to her eye level and then on to

her nose. His finger traced her pert little nose and he laughed as he thought of his own bulbous schnoz in comparison. His finger continued down the outline of her face, reaching a now quivering upper lip, and there he paused. He sensed pain radiating from her. This was too personal and he felt he had no right to further invade upon her privacy. He withdrew the finger that was drawing her features and dropped his entire hand to the table top, continuing, however, to keep her in his view.

The way she quietly sat, looking out the window, holding the cup of tea continued to intrigued him. He wanted to know more about her. He watched as she finished her tea, got up from the chair and picked up her scattered belongings from the top of the table. She walked out the cafeteria door.

His finger again traced her features in the air. He took a pencil out of his pocket and began to properly draw her facial image onto the paper napkin in front of him. He didn't know why but he needed to capture her face on paper, and he knew he needed to do it before the experience disappeared. First, he sketched her forehead, then the side of the eye, the cute little nose next, and finally that sad quivering lip. He filled in the chin and neck line, drew the shape of her head and completed her hair.

He sat back and looked at his work. Who was she? Why had her face captured him so completely that he had to immediately draw her image? He carefully folded the napkin and put it in his shirt pocket along with the pencil. Why was she here in the hospital? What in life had made her seem so sad? He realized he would never know the answer to his questions or ever see her face again, but he would remember every time he saw her image on that paper napkin. He softly touched his fingers to his shirt pocket.

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### **Profiles** **By Elvira Castillo**

Poor Charlie Brown  
Really, truly a sad fellow,  
Overcoming self-doubt is making him mellow.  
Foolish decisions seem to be his downfall,  
It makes him all the more sorrowful.  
Lucy Van Pelt is certainly no encouragement,  
Even friend Linus can't lift Charlie's discouragement.  
So, Merry Christmas to all and to all a good life!

###

**Profile**  
**By Edward Scheffler**

Joseph Kennedy said, "It's \_\_\_\_\_ what people think you are."

Obviously, the framework of a shallow supposition. As an initial profile is receptive to distortions.

"It is a luxury to be understood."

As Emerson said:

*"That the silhouette against a backdrop may be obscure. Yet, we must start somewhere. For even an artist begins with a sketch. Only the wise are judicious and discreet reserving opinions. Avoiding pre-mature analysis till the test of time has revealed a clearer picture of trust and of credibility."*

I was over-dressed in a three-piece suit while applying for a position in the Warehouse. The Interviewer quickly took notice of my appearance, stating the job was below my status.

"Ohhhh no," I insisted. "I am far less competent than I may look."

These times whence we try to be truthful...  
And regardless to our efforts people won't believe us.

A private life of individuality retains uniqueness,  
While blending in with the crowd offers advantages as well.

As this Age of Informality has not  
Diminished the Standards of propriety  
But,  
Re-enforced it.

The power of influence shall rest in the dogma of conformity.

###

## **A Crime Story?** **By Dennis P. Johnson**

Stuart and Melanie were all excited about their upcoming move in the two weeks to come. They were moving into a foreclosed house that they had purchased of which they had obtained a really great price. Their going back and forth from New York City to their new upstate town was coming to a close. No more leaving their two-year-old son, Michael and their German Shepherd, Princess with Melanie's parents as they would travel on weekends to their future home on the Hudson River to apply elbow grease for the sweat equity that would make this house the place, they wanted it to be. They were looking forward to their move to Brice Ferry.

Michael had two mothers it seemed. There was his real mom Melanie and then there was Princess. Princess was attached to him ever since Stu and Mel brought him home from the hospital. As if Michael was her puppy, very protective of him as he was over the rest of the family. A shepherd's natural instincts were a little notch higher when it came to Princess.

It had just turned Spring on the calendar and their moving truck was all loaded up on that cold morning with a chill in the air and some frost in the back yard of their Brooklyn town house. Stuart and Melanie would leave early with Michael in his car seat and Princess right next to him in the 2<sup>nd</sup> row of their SUV. They wanted to get ahead of the professional movers they employed so they could be there at their new home before they arrived.

This house was of recent construction, a product of the building boom of the 2000's after 9-11 when interest rates were cheap and the corrupt lenders were throwing mortgages at people with no money down and little or no qualifications. This house sat empty for a few years in suspended animation, so to speak, after the original owners left because of their loan default. Stuart was not going to mind the train commute to his job in Manhattan. Mel and Stu were just tired of the compressed life of the big city. Melanie had plans for a garden in the back of their yard and she was pretty excited about that, a big yard where Michael could play and Princess could run around. This sure beat the postage stamp sized accommodations of their townhouse in Brooklyn.

With the truck unloaded and the movers enjoying a few beers with Stu and Mel, this long day was over. The Reese's had landed. Brice Ferry had been captured by them and the somewhat rural life had just begun. Thoughts were rolling around in Melanie's head about where in the back of their big yard she was going to put her garden. The garden would face the sunny side but what corner?

Warmer weather finally came and the west side of their back yard and Michael's swing set on the east end was the final decision. Stuart and Melanie drove into the quaint little downtown of Brice Ferry to the lawn and garden center. There they rented a rotor-tiller to break up the soil. It would be better for the back than using a pitchfork and a shovel. It was mid-April and the ground was pretty easy to work with. They thought that 12 feet by 12 feet would be a good start. And as they were finishing one section of their dig, Princess was showing some interest in the dirt near the fence that separated them from their neighbors.

Princess wasn't paying much attention to little Michael as he was playing with his toys in the middle of the yard. The shepherd's devotion was to the hole she was digging near the

property line. Michael laughed at her as the dirt was flying up in the air and the hole was flying up in the air and the hole was getting deeper. Stu and Mel were amused as well. And then Princess had a bone in her mouth. She trotted over to Stu and Mel and plopped the bone right down in front of them with a large, proud bark "Good girl!" said Mel. Stuart picked up the bone and examined it "Mel, what kind of bone do you think this is?" he questioned Melanie. "Well, it's too small to be a horse or a cow's and maybe to recent to interest the paleontologists. " Mel responded with a sly looking grin on her face. It was closing in on nightfall and Stuart wanted to get the tiller back to the garden center before it closed so he wouldn't be charged for an extra day of use. After they hosed down the blades of the machine, they hoisted it into the back of their SUV and then they sped off to the downtown with Stu, Mel, Michael, Princess and the bone all accounted for. Jasper Hawkings, co-owner, and in charge of the hardware dept. of the company, was at the rental desk, ready to receive the Reese's return item. "You folks new in town?" "We just moved here about a month ago from Brooklyn." was Stuart's reply. "Well, welcome!" with a big handshake from Jasper. "Jasper, what do you think this is?" as Stuart pulled the bone out of a plastic bag. "Well, it doesn't look like any kind of livestock that we have around here." was Jasper's reply. "Maybe Dave Bray could tell you. He's over there in one of the hardware isles. Hey Dave, what do you think this is?" Jasper yelled over to him. Dave walked over to the rental desk and introduced himself to the Reese's. "I live here in Brice Ferry, but I'm a detective with the Nyack police dept Let's see what you've got." Stuart took the bone out of the plastic bag again and handed it to Dave. Dave examined it in a very thorough fashion, turning it all different ways as if it was a baton. "It actually looks human to me." was Dave's response as Stu and Mel looked on with surprised looks on their faces. "I'm going to take this to the lab. Our guys will tell us what's up. I'll give you a call. Here's my card and welcome to Brice Ferry, " Dave added as he petted Princess and gave Michael a little handshake, The Reese family piled into their SUV and headed back to their place. Stu and Mel wondered what Princess had discovered on the way home and as they pulled into their driveway.

The next day Melanie let Princess out into the yard to run around. And she headed right to the end of the property like a bolt to the garden. She ran around the garden, wagging her tail, inquisitive of every area that had been turned over and now bare of grass. She barked a few times and then started digging again. Melanie watched out of the kitchen window as the dirt was flying up from the shepherd's paws and as she was descending into another hole. After Melanie had given Michael his breakfast, she pulled him out of his high chair and they went to the garden area to investigate Princess' latest mining venture. With Michael in her arms, she peered over the shepherd's efforts. Princess had something again in her mouth. When Melanie saw what she had, she almost dropped Michael with astonishment. A skeletal wrist with hand and fingers barely attached, what seemed to be a gold watch around that wrist, and a moldy piece of clothing higher up on the wrist bone. Mel called Stu who was at work and told him about the find. "Sweetheart, call Dave Bray, we have his card" Stu responded in an elevated voice. "I am out at 3:00 and I will try to get to a train ASAP" Stu added with his voice still elevated. Mondays were usually short days at his CPA firm

Melanie took the new discovery with rubber gloves placed it in a double re-enforced plastic bag. She then called Dave Bray and told him everything with a worried tone. "Melanie, that bone you gave me is as I had thought-human. I will stop by your house

when Stu gets home. We dig for evidence almost like Princess, nothing is frivolous. See you later." Dave responded with a reassuring demeanor. Dave hung up the phone and the best thing he could do was call the FBI organized crime unit in Manhattan. He contacted Tom Jameson an old friend from college, and an acute investigator. "Give me the address and I will be there to meet you, Dave. There isn't much kicking in the office today anyway. " The two cars pulled up just minutes before Stuart got home. Dave and Tom walked in and Dave introduced Tom. "Can I see what you have, ma'am?" Tom was to the point. Melanie produced the heavy plastic bags and everyone walked out to the patio in the back. Tom with surgical gloves on, pulled out the 'evidence' and started to examine it. "Mr. And Mrs. Reese, you have a crime scene here. We have to bring a team in. We have to dig up that area. We will need to use back hoes and bring in more forensic help. " was Tom in a somber tone. Tom Jameson left for the day with the evidence in his possession and headed back to Manhattan and to the FBI lab that was there.

After Stuart and Melanie put Michael to bed for the night, neither one could sleep. Tossing and turning replaced the necessary rest that most need. Stu went to work that morning and Melanie did as she normally did, taking care of Michael and things around the house, but nothing felt right. Because few things were right to her in her mind. And Stuart started to feel like he was an orphan on his own property. Maybe a stranger was a better way to frame it.

On Friday of that week, the trailer with the back hoe pulled up to the front of the Reese's house. 'Property of the FBI' on the side of the Case tractor could not be ignored. Tom Jameson was right behind them in his Ford Crown Victoria which was government property as well and ready to be replaced. Tom went to the porch, rang the doorbell, and told Melanie that his supervisors had assigned him to the case right away. "How long will all this take?" Melanie questioned. "As long as it takes. We don't know what's buried there and how deep" was Tom's response in a sympathetic tone, Tom was involved in a lot of organized crime cases and he knew in his heart that this was one of them.

The work started at 7:00 AM sharp that Monday morning. Melanie reached Stuart on his cell phone as he was headed to Manhattan on the train. "Stu, they had to take out part of the fence in order to back the trailer into the garden so they could unload the tractor." was Melanie in her own elevated voice. "Well, better than tearing up the lawn with those tracks. Besides they assured us they would make the necessary repairs. It's in the paperwork they gave us. Calm down baby." were Stu's words of peace.

More FBI agents showed up as the work progressed. The back-hoe operator took up the 12 by 12 garden layer by layer, a section at a time. Their honing devices had detected 2 large objects about 4 feet down. Stu and Mel's neighbors were growing more and more interested as the labors proceeded. Not quite the way to get to know one's neighbors. Finally, the back hoe struck something of resistance. The operator raised the hoe about 6 inches and skimmed above the area where the 2 objects were discovered. Well, the 2 bodies that were discovered 2 agents jumped into the trench and started to dig with shovels carefully around the 2 bodies. They motioned to the back-hoe operator and the objects were exhumed one at a time. The decayed bodies were placed in black body bags and taken to the FBI service van and off to Manhattan they sped. Other agents took their honing devices and examined the whole property over the next 3 days including the Reese's basement. Nothing! News reporters were showing up at different hours. One of

the agents was telling them that the whole property was off limits to them as the yellow crime scene tape surrounded the Reese's land completely.

Another week went by and the work was coming to an end. Not soon enough for Stuart and Melanie. Tom and Dave stopped by one evening and explained the situation to them. " We identified the 2 men that were buried in your garden by DNA and dental records. We will give you what we found before we talk to the news outlets. The one, Vito Scalise was a street captain for the Gambino crime family and the other was Anthony Marelli, one of Scalise's soldiers. They both disappeared about 31 years ago. The ones who committed these crimes, we think, were pretty smart to bury them here. At the time it was unincorporated. There was nothing here but open fields. It was at night, of course, but they didn't bury the bodies deep enough, only about 4 feet. They probably didn't have time. It looks like it was a fast job. I doubt that there were witnesses, but we will be asking questions around town. Our work is over here. It looks like your dog was smarter than them." "Mr. and Mrs. Reese, we are sorry about all of this. You will have to sign off on all the repairs to your property." were Tom's final remarks.

A couple of months had passed after the 'smoke and dust' had settled, so to speak. Peace seemed to have descended on their property. The garden was never planted and the swing set for Michael was never assembled. The FBI had made good on the repairs on their property using contractors that they knew.

One Saturday morning, a black late model Toyota Camry sedan pulled up to the front of their house. Melanie thought, as she gazed out her picture window, it might be an unexpected visit from the realtor because nobody had called. It didn't look like reporters. Thankfully those times were past them. It was a man and a woman together in the front seat and she was crying. She lifted her head off of the man's shoulder, opened the passenger side door, and started to walk to the front entrance, past the 'For Sale' sign. Princess started barking and Stuart worked on settling her down. This lady looked middle-aged, full figured, in a black dress, nylons, and wearing short heels. She had a Dutch boy hairstyle with shimmers of gray through her black hair. She had a tissue in her right hand that she used to wipe her tears from under her glasses. She walked up the porch and rang the doorbell. Melanie opened the door. "Mr. and Mrs. Reese, I am so sorry about what happened here." with tears streaming down her pretty complexion. "My name is Antonia Burke and one of the men that was buried on your property was my father, Vito Scalise. When I was 10 years old, he disappeared. I never saw him again. I am not a gangster, I assure you. I'm the mother of 3 kids and that's my husband that is sitting in our car." "I am so sorry about everything that happened." she continued, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Would you like to come in and have coffee with us?" was Melanie's response. Antonia motioned to her husband Jack to come in. He shut the engine off and joined them.

Antonia explained how her family had a simple graveyard service to bury her father's remains. The Catholic cemetery allowed the burial even though they knew his past.

Stuart and Melanie never sold the house. They live there until this day.

The End O Dennis P. Johnson 2018 (names are all fictional as is the story)