

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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April 2017 selection – Why?

No Buts about It
By N. Stewart

“But why?” Jeremy asked.

“Because I said so. That’s why. Now eat your dinner. Let’s not hear any more about it.”

The cold silence at the dinner table lasted about 30 seconds until Jeremy broke it, “But Mom why can’t I go with my friends to the concert? It’s an early show and like I told you Jim’s Dad is driving us there and he’ll pick us up later. All the other kids can go. Their parents are ok with it. So can I go? Please?”

“No, and that is final,” said his mother with a stern look on her face.

Raising his voice just a notch Jeremy said, “But I don’t see why I can’t go with my friends. You want me to be an outcast? A pariah? A social misfit? I won’t have any friends. Come on, Mom. They will make fun of me for not going. I’ll be the only kid that can’t go to the concert because my “Mommy” said I couldn’t go. Call Jim and ask him if it is okay with his parents that I can go. We’re just going to listen to the music. How much trouble could we get into anyway at a rock concert? Really, Mom.”

“Don’t push it, young man. You’re only 14 and I’m responsible for you. I said no you can not go...and that is final. Do you get that?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Can I be excused and go to my room now? I have homework.”

“Of course and...,” before finishing her sentence, Jeremy abruptly departed.

He ran up the stairs and grabbed his cell phone. “Hey Jim. She won’t let me go for now, but I’m going anyway! I’ll meet you at the corner around 9. I’ll sneak out if I have to. You good to go? Ok, see you then.”

Shortly after his conversation with Jim, his mother called from the bottom of the stairs and said, “Jeremy. Jim’s Dad just called to tell me Jim will not be seeing you tonight. He can’t go out.” And, Jeremy’s mother continued, “He overheard your conversation with his son and wanted me to know that he was never going to drive you and Jim or any one else to the concert. In fact he didn’t know anything about the concert. That is different from what you told me at dinner. Can you come down here right now so we can have a little chat?”

“Oh (expletive deleted),” said Jeremy. “I’m probably in for it now. That weasel Jimmy, I knew he would wimp out.” Stalling for time Jeremy innocently said, “But ...but Mon I’m doing my homework and I know how important that is to you. Can’t it wait until later?”

“Right now, Son I’m waiting!”

“Okay, okay, okay I’m coming,” and Jeremy continued mumbling under his breath all the way down the stairs. *Don’t know why it is such a big deal. It was just a little concert, some loud music and perhaps a little smoke. Why would she possibly want to chat about the concert again? No way she changed her mind and is letting me go. But then just maybe she will.* “Here I am. Now, what did you want to chat about?”

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Many Whys
By Elvira K. Castillo

Why? All by itself, it is a big question, one that we can especially relate to in tragedy, sadness and heartbreak.

Sometimes we ask ourselves, when possibly feeling depressed or sad, “Why was I born?” I know there’s a song with this title, but I don’t think the author has any claim of originality on it

Today, unfortunately, we hear the question “Why?” far too often when we see mothers on the television news crying in despair at the death of a child through the totally senseless killings by guns, guns, guns!

We can ask “Why?” to every tragic, bad, or wrong thing that happens, but I don’t think we can get an answer to the question. However, we can turn the negative “why” into something positive. For example, when a child is born with a disability and if we accept the “why” positively, that disability can also be turned into something positive.

All through life and the many mistakes, wrong decisions, or right things that didn’t turn out good can be tagged with “Why?” Since we’ll never know “why,” the only thing to do is move on as best we can and hope there won’t be too many more “whys” in the future.

After I wrote the above, I went for my daily mile walk with my son, Scott. We pick up debris as we walk along and bag it. I thought to myself, “Why are people so disrespectful of our country by throwing garbage all over the streets?” As we walked along, an ambulance went by. I then thought, “Why do ambulances constantly blow that ear wrenching siren when there are no cars on the street in their way?” Covering my ears doesn’t soften the noise and I’m afraid of losing my hearing. After our walk, I came home to watch a DVD movie. My “why” in this respect is, “Why is the printing on the DVD packet written in squeezed-together letters on a dark background?” You can’t even read it with a magnifying glass, and there are many, many other things printed the same way - like the expiration dates on coupons. My-o-my I ask WHY? Guess I have an answer for these “whys.” They want to make me deaf and blind!

###

Wir Tanzen den Leichten Fandanga
By J. Smetana

I had not been to Burlington, Wisconsin for over 40 years. My grandparents used to own a house there and every summer my family would spend a week or two reveling in the bucolic scene. The house fronted on Brown’s Lake. The lake was a wild place (we thought) full of snapping turtles and leeches. The first summer I owned my Harmony Stella guitar I brought it “up to Burlington” thinking that somehow the Nature Groove would help me discover my True Voice. Maybe the preponderance of wild bird calls, dragonflies and rusty water pumped out of a well would all conspire to put that key in my hand, the key to Getting Groovy. When I heard my favorite songs on the radio I thought it was just a matter of time before I sounded just like them. I knew the big boys played “electric” guitar and mine was certainly not, better not to get electrocuted strumming along the shores and sandy dunes of Brown’s Lake. I was unaware of the array of distortion devices that connected to amps, guitars, and sometimes appeared out of nowhere in the recording studio and gave those records the wild snarling sound I liked. One of the best songs of its ilk blasting forth from the Big 89 and Super ‘CFL was “Gloria” by Chicago’s own The Shadows of Knight. The song was originally done by Them-- a band from Belfast, Northern Ireland with Van Morrison as lead singer and composer of the tune. Even then Van had the crazy magic he was later celebrated for, but who saw it coming? It was a huge hit in the UK but the Chicago stations censored it. I’m thinking it was banned for the same reason “Louie Louie” was banned: Because the

singer was so hard to understand the Thought Police assumed the lyrics must be dirty. Well anyway the story goes that The Shadows of Knight recorded their version OVERNIGHT and had the 45s pressed and in the DJ's hands the very next day. At the same time another Chicago band The Dirty Wurds--there's those dirty words again--released their song "Why" on Marina records. It had the same greasy garage sound that The Shadows of Knight tune had. But "Why" was an original whereas "Gloria" was a cover. If I'm doling out the awards for Greasy Greatness I think originality gets the edge, all other things being equal. Top honors to the WURDS.

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A Notable Royal By Val Collins

My husband, our nine-year-old son and I expected to have a delightful holiday as we stepped off the plane in Hawaii but never did we imagine how memorable it would turn out to be. We experienced the tourist attractions familiar to all who venture into this paradise...the exquisite beauty of the land itself, the perfect sun drenched climate, the rich history of the region, and the enchanting culture of the people. Most captivating of all however was one person in particular, that being the King of Tonga. He was known by the name of Wai Fa. He was a man of enormous stature, jovial by nature with a cheerful booming voice that reverberated throughout the vicinity surrounding him. My husband who was a naturally friendly person took to him immediately and they soon became chums. We met Wai Fa at the Polynesian Cultural Center on Oahu where he represented his island of Tonga. He was eager to teach us all about his culture and his beloved island home. We soon learned that his entire family, consisting of his wife and fifteen children, was with him at the cultural center. Other relatives also graced his home at various times as well. Before we knew it we had accepted an invitation to his home for dinner. There we were, sitting at a massive table eating a dinner prepared by his wife. I can recall a large presentation of food but what most vividly remains in memory is the poi and the huge amount of sweet potatoes. In Tongan culture it is an accolade to serve great amounts of food and an even bigger compliment to consume such. There was nine year old Jimmy with heaps of sweet potatoes on his plate and encouraging words of "eat, eat" demanded of him! After dinner the family members took turns singing, dancing and playing instruments for our entertainment.

We spent many hours of our vacation in the delightful company of Wai Fa and when it was time to leave this paradise my husband gave him our address and phone number. He urged this King of Tonga to be sure and look us up if he ever got to the mainland, specifically Chicago. We returned home with fond memories of our island vacation. Some time had passed when one day, out of the blue, we received a phone call from O'Hare airport. The representative told us that a gentleman by the name of Wai Fa was there asking for us. He had needed help in dialing the phone. We immediately went to O'Hare and there before us stood king Wai Fa clothed in native dress and bare feet, carrying homemade gifts on his back, tappa cloth and carved wooden totem poles among

them. We welcomed him into our home as he had welcomed us. Our houseguest had a wonderful time as we now had the opportunity to show him a bit of our lives and culture. He was off to visit his daughter in Florida within the week and we bid him a fond goodbye. We heard from him through letters time to time and finally over the years lost touch. Never did we forget however this gracious king and extraordinary individual who touched our hearts and fondly lives on in our memories.

###

The Chair
By Susan J Wilfong

Now I'm sitting in the chair,
My knuckles are turning white.
I try to move, but I can't,
I'm paralyzed with fright.

"Open wide", is what I hear.
That's easier said than done.
I wish this visit was over,
But I fear, it has just begun.

X-rays and drills,
Picks and Novocain.
Oh, how I wish this was done,
I wish for no more pain.

My teeth are mostly silver now,
Some even have small posts.
These foreign objects are there now,
Where once there were just holes.

Well, I've been here for an hour.
My mouth and face are numb.
I get to do this all over again,
For, next week, to the dentist, I must come.

The Chair Revisited
By Susan Wilfong

In this chair,
Again I sit.
I roll my eyes,
And wait to spit.

My tooth hurts,
I'm in so much pain
Please hurry up,
With that Novocain

The shot went in,
Now I must wait
My mind starts to wander,
Hey, this is great

The next thing I know,
The dentist enters the room.
My thoughts return,
And sense certain doom.

He says, "Open wide".
Wait! My mouth isn't numb!
So what do I get?
Six more shots in the gum.

I wait for a moment,
Now my mouth is frozen.
I'm very thankful,
For those extra shots I have chosen.

I must be drooling,
But I'm not sure.
But now I'm calm,
As the drill starts to whirl.

My mouth now feels like rubber,
But I know it will not last.
When the Novocain finally wears off,
I'll probably wish I were gassed.

###

Why
By Kathy Van Ormer

A word so small, and yet so deep
Only three letters long.
The mysteries of life, the secrets we keep,
Hiding the things that went wrong.

We question ourselves and those we love,
Whenever the unthinkable occurs.
We cry out in pain, want response from above,
Nothing is clear, only blurs.

We long to know, What's our purpose here?
Why were we born? Why do we die?
Why do we have to suffer, and endure so much fear,
Why is it that we must we cry?

Wouldn't it be better if we could all have good health,
Happy lives, abundance in all things?
Wouldn't it be pleasant to share our wealth,
Ensuring we all live like Kings?

So then why, why is our world like this,
Where things are so unfair?
Where some lead lives of beauty and bliss,
And others live lives of despair.

Why does one person lie and cheat,
While the other is always true,
Why does one revel in his own deceit,
And another is full of virtue?

Why does a productive youth
Meet an accidental early death,
While someone who never met the truth,
Lives many decades before his last breath.

Why do children in a primary school
Get gunned down while they play,
Why is this life so very cruel
And horrible things happen every day?

Three little letters—W-H-Y,
So many questions I've got.
So much I don't know that just makes me sigh,
...the response I hear is, "Why not?"

###

Writing a Short Story **By Nancy Stewart**

The following information was presented at the Pen & Ink Writers' Group April meeting where we discussed one definition of a short story.

Elements of Short Story

There are five elements to a short story:

1. Character(s) (who) - memorable person, persona, identity, or entity
2. Plot or storyline (what) - rendering and ordering of the events and actions of a story, particularly towards the achievement of some particular artistic or emotional effect.
3. Setting (where and when) - time and location in which a story takes place.
4. Theme and Conflict (why) - broad idea, message, lesson of a story, and internal conflict (within one's self) or external conflict (from without).
5. Style (how) – individual to the writer and created by point of view, story line, choices of grammar, punctuation, word usage, sentence structure and paragraph length, tone, use of imagery, and title.

Size

Novel is 25,000 to 150,000 words (75 – 450 pages), handling growth, insight, and change in main/minor characters and usually involves three changes or actions.

Novella is 7,500 to 50,000 words (22 to 150 pages) following a single character through a limited time frame in a limited locale and usually involves a single action.

Short story is 2,000 – 7,000 words (6 to 21 pages) with one sudden insight.

Short, short story is 1,000 to 1,500 words (3 to 4 1/2 pages) with one character change.

Flash/sudden story is 200 - 750 words (1-2 pages)

Possible Framings for Short Stories

When thinking about what to write, here are some framing ideas for possible stories:

- *A Day in the Life* presents a picture of a specific unit of time that may reveal an incident or an epiphany.
- *Aha Moment* presents a character coming to a realization, discovery, disillusionment, or revelation.
- *Journey* presents a character leaving an ordinary life behind and traveling forward adjusting to what happens along the road.
- *Visitation* begins with a knock on the door, a ring of the phone, car pulling up to the house and possibly requires the character to take immediate action.
- *Trauma* tells of a traumatic event, the catastrophe itself or the after math.
- *Last Lap* begins with the character at the middle or end of the event or climax and then goes back to fill in why the character is there.
- *Blue Mood* deals with unexplainable problems, world of magic, myth, and dreams and may not have a definitive end answer.

Getting started

The following are some steps that might be helpful in writing a short story:

1. Identify story idea before you start from journals, experience, observations, etc.
2. Decide what you want the story to do or to say,
3. Identify the heart of the story and stick to the core issue,
4. Do research on specific questions and/or clarify facts that are unclear,
5. Determine point of view for story,
6. Write/edit/rewrite/edit/rewrite/edit, and
7. Present or publish.

Don'ts

Don't start the short story with a lot of explanatory material or go into great detail.

Don't write a story that preaches to the reader.

Don't write about things you don't know about.

Don't tell many stories within the short story.

Don't have too many characters in the short story.