

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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May 2017 selection – Curiosity

**Dandelions & Neighbors
By Sara Schupack**

A neighborhood is a weird thing. Forced proximity to strangers, boundaries as subtle as the line between a well-kept lawn and weeds. But you never pull up the weeds of a neighbor's lawn, inches away. I don't keep up my house or yard as well as some, but I don't let it completely go either. Mine is a neighborhood with some pride. Dandelions are the tricky things. I try to pull mine up as soon as I notice them, because as sweet as dandelions can appear, they grow and spread with great speed and stubbornness. I don't want to be the one contaminating others with dandelions.

Just around the corner is a yard full of weeds. I don't know what others think of it. All of the clover and dandelions and these purple flowering weeds, whatever they're called, look pretty to me -- wild and playful, a yard finding its own meaning. A weed is

only a native plant that goes against your yard plan. I admire those residents' free spirit, although I've never seen them, not once.

Will one of my neighbors become a friend? Or at least an acquaintance whom I can feel comfortable borrowing sugar from or asking to watch for the FedEx delivery for just an hour while I pick up the groceries I forgot to get yesterday? On one side, there's the guy with his very fussy approach to yard care, who seems to linger too long on my messier yard with disapproval. He has an "I call 911" sign in his window, which could be fine, could indicate that he's a caring citizen, or could connote a vigilante mentality. Maybe he owns a gun. Maybe he believes in capital punishment. Maybe he shares none of the beliefs that are most important to me. Does that exclude him from my cordial acquaintance list? What if he is generous with his sugar and very respectful of parking spaces? On the other side are I believe 3 young people with lots of others coming and going, to the point where I'm not entirely sure who actually lives there. I've seen some of the residents/visitors wearing flowing flower skirts or indie band tee shirts. I may have smelled pot coming from that vicinity, or maybe I imagined it or caught a whiff from somewhere else. Mr. Tidy Lawn could smoke medicinal marijuana for his glaucoma or arthritis, for all I know. The hippie hip neighbors might vote more like I do, but they also might be so youth-focused that they couldn't imagine wasting ten minutes in a conversation with a middle aged oldie like me. Maybe they can't keep track of their sugar, having asked someone who asked someone to pick up the supplies last time. I have noticed trash in my front yard more than once, and wonder, could it be they, who have decided that garbage too is a communal free-for-all? Unless Tidy Lawn is sending me a secret message – you treat your yard so badly, I might as well do the same. I don't know any of them, and so can imagine the worst when I'm feeling unappreciated or put upon by the world.

I've introduced myself to both sets of neighbors. Mr. Immaculate is actually named Tom. I can't remember his last name, but I seem to recall that it starts with a Mc or a Mac- He remembered my name after one try, which was impressive (I had to ask him a few times). He also remembered some disconcerting details, like that I had arrived home very late the previous Saturday or that I usually mow my yard every other weekend, but skipped a weekend 2 months ago. On the other side, I think one of them is Cindy, the larger woman with frizzy hair, and one of the guys is Jan (pronounced Yawn). The darker guy with long lashes whom I find sexy in spite of myself, is Marc. Two of them have called me ten different names, none of them the correct one. Marc is the type to fit my name into almost each sentence, to emphasize the fact that he remembered and is connecting with me. Marc also remembered that I'm originally from Florida and that I work in "Human Resources" but don't like the work or the title. I do feel pleased about that.

I'm not sure if my curiosity about my neighbors comes first – a basic, nose, human impulse, or if it's primarily my need for some support in this lonely lonely world, and the curiosity follows. Why does Cindy seem to always be home, but talk about her stressful job? Is she a genius stock trader who works from home and manages countless hedge funds? It's better that she doesn't look the part. Maybe she meets her clients in person only rarely, and when she does, her airy way is so disarming that her successes with their money seem even more miraculous and worthy of praise and further funding. Why does Tom wash his car every weekend? Was it a gift from his dearly departed mum,

and she was more of a neatnik than he, so he does that to honor her and not risk the wrath of her disgruntled ghost? I wish I hadn't felt so flattered by Marc's presence in conversations over the fence of our adjoining backyards or on the sidewalk as we both happen to be heading for our cars in the morning. Maybe he's a spy or a sociopath. He does have an uncanny ability to comment on something that matters to me, like his reference to pet rescues or Hitchcock films. There's something about his smile that doesn't match his eyes.

The hippie hipsters seem to keep very different hours from me, and/or they are not at all interested in getting to know me, because I have only had a handful of conversations with them over the past two years, maybe actually zero exchanges with Jan; he might speak a different language. That at least adds a nice exoticism to my imaginings of him. Maybe he's a translator of rare Icelandic poetry or a scholar on Swedish history between the great wars. While I make guesses about them, I have this perverse impulse to appear mysterious to them, so that they'll wonder about me. It took a few hints and half-sentences before I came out with the fact of Florida (sunshine, warmer climate, enjoying being near the ocean). Am I sabotaging the friendship I crave? Or wanting people to work for it, so I know it's real? And when they don't, I can add them to my long list of people who have let me down.

Because Tom seems to notice more, I want to reveal less. I've even lied to him. I told him that I've been in my current line of work for 15 years (not the actual 3, coming after a desperate career move out of the lousy, surprisingly cutthroat world of non-profits). I also told him that I have no children. How could I deny Lee that way?! It pains me every time I think about it, but of course, that's not a lie you can take back. "Oops, when I said I had no children, I meant to say yes, I have one, but she hasn't spoken to me in a year and I miss her terribly, so I forgot to mention her." It was probably guilt that fueled that one, wishing the repeated pain upon myself, in self-flagellation that I'm secretly hoping will somehow earn back her love and trust. Maybe it's easier to imagine lives of neighbors and possible friendships that will never materialize than to deal with the real relationships that I seem to be failing at.

I noticed a huge dandelion yesterday. They seem to pop up overnight, like a nagging self-doubt. I'll take care of it today. Maybe someone will appreciate my effort.

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Cars, Garbage Cans and Golf Carts

By N. Stewart

Molly is a curious sort. She likes things that are big, dark, and move fast — cars, garbage cans on wheels, and golf carts. Parked cars are fine, causing very little reason to investigate, but when the noise of the engine starts and then the big thing begins to move it is best to get out of her way. Molly must see what all the noise is about and tries to out-bark the dastardly thing moving within her sight. Barking alone is not enough for at the same time she runs as fast as she can in concentric three foot circles; always in the same counter-clock wise direction. Sometimes the circle she creates moves closer and closer, diminishing in speed, until she approaches the target at a walking pace and then completely stops and stands still. It is like watching the blur of a spinning top that eventually loses its momentum and topples. No amount of yelling “STOP IT” or “NO BARK” does a bit of good. I often wonder if she gets dizzy spinning or running in circles. But then I think she is a little dizzy to begin so who could really tell.

Another example, on Tuesdays when she hears “It’s garbage night,” she tears into the kitchen to wait at the back door for it to open. Out she goes and heads directly for the garage to wait for the big, black garbage can to begin its roll down the driveway and out to the front curb. Suddenly out of nowhere, and with much barking and jumping, the can comes under a full Moll attack. After killing it, she calmly walks away, sits down with an attitude of “look what I can do.” Early the next morning, she runs through the house barking at the audacity of the big, dark, noisy truck that is taking away the remains of the big black thing she killed last night. Later when the empty can is rolled back to the garage and has apparently come back to life, she again attacks.

And while sitting quietly on the above ground deck in Wisconsin with closed eyes and pretending to sleep, Molly perks an ear at the straining sound of a distant golf cart engine heading up the hill. She slowly stands and nonchalantly walks over to the railing, leaning her head through the opening and preparing herself with a low under-breath growling for what is to come. She sneaks a backward look at me to see if I heard what she heard. The first sharp, quick bark is a test, waiting to see what action I will take. Will it be the “No bark” command, allowing her to do what I just told her not to do, or will I sit there undisturbed. As the noise gets closer, she can’t help but ferociously bark until I get up from my chair and walk toward her, admonishing her for the noise and for scaring the startled and now screaming little kids riding in the cart. “Bad Dog” I attempt to yell louder than the barking. She stops, eventually, puts her head down and grumbles a bit as she goes to plop herself down in the shade of the outdoor furniture and waits for the next golf cart to pass the house.

Why does she do what she does? I have often wondered, but I have never been able to figure out the answers. Why does she do the same thing over and over even though the outcome never changes? Can’t answer that one either. Molly is Molly with all her quirks and idiosyncrasies and she isn’t going to change. And, I am never going to figure out what makes her tick.

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THE CURIOUS CAT

Can anything be more curious than a cat?

Under and over everything they go.

Romping about like a feather in the wind!

Isn't it a wonder how keen they can see.

Onto a mouse they so quickly can spring!

Seeing all movements no matter how hidden.

It boggles the mind as to what they are thinking.

Two eyes brightly shining with such concentration.

You watch admiringly the wonders of this creatures mysterious intentions.

Elvira K. Castillo

May 15, 2017.



Curiosity

By Pauline Bastek

Whenever I hear the word, curiosity, it is immediately followed by the phrase, “Killed a cat.” Cats are said to have nine lives, so was it the ninth life that curiosity killed? It had to have been, right? Did it mean that it was not curious during its first eight lives or curiosity did not lead it to that life. Curious, isn’t it.

When I was growing up in a very conventional Catholic household of the forties, curiosity was actively discouraged. In retrospect, I see why it was easier to tell a child that you don’t ask why it isn’t polite. It’s not surprising that we grew up accepting what we were told. Remember, father knows best.

So when I asked why Auntie Carrie had different uncles living with her at different times, I was told I was too curious for my own good. When the next uncle showed up, I mentioned it to my friend at school and she asked her mother who told us in no uncertain terms that we should mind our manner and that it was not polite to be so curious.

Well, when the next uncle showed up, we decided to ask Aunt Carrie why she had a new uncle living with her. She laughed and said she was curious about what people really like and felt she could best find out by living with them. She was a curios person. We accepted this.

It was years later, after Aunt Carrie died and her home sold that we found out just how curious Aunt Carrie was about the uncles or their finances for a widow living on social security, her nine brokerage accounts painted a very curious picture. We never found out what happened to the uncles, not a marriage license to be found, but going back it seemed as an uncles left a brokerage account opened. Her brokers said deposits were made from joint savings account into an individual account.

Curious, not really, they said men liked to provide for their loved ones in this way when there wasn’t a legal relationship. All within the law they said.

Mother said we asked too many questions, we should just be happy Aunt Carrie took care of us in her will and not keep asking about the uncles. If they weren’t curious about Aunt Carrie and the uncles who preceded them, why should we. After all, father said curiosity killed a cat and father knows best. .

Maybe so, but years later, I still think it would have been better for the uncles had they been a bit more curious about Aunt Carrie’s curiosity about their finances. Wonder what happened to those bachelors. Yes, I remember she said she liked quiet single men without a lot of curious relatives.

I’m really curious at time, but then I think of the cat and those uncles.

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