

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
© 2017 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

July 2017 selection – Stamp

Stamp of Approval
By Elvira K. Castillo

Sometimes life can become rather routine with our daily activities. In our case, my son and I base our smooth, non-combative existence on so-called "routine," shopping on specific days, having pizza every Friday and fries and a beef sandwich every Saturday, watching movies on television with DVD's from the local library, listening to "Those were the Days," an old time radio show every Saturday, plus meeting doctor and dentist appointments, doing yard work, and attending household chores and responsibilities. We also walk a mile or more every day, unless it's icy or a thunderstorm. All very "routine" and may seem boring to some people. We take the capability of doing all these "routine" things for granted, until one day things can change in a second -- and I mean a SECOND!

On Father's Day, June 18, my son and I drove to Popeye's Chicken to pick up lunch. We were going to have a nice lunch while watching "The Grapes of Wrath," a movie about the Depression era in which the main character, played by Henry Fonda, reminded me of my father. In a SECOND, our plans were abruptly interrupted, yes, in a SECOND! After leaving Popeye's, we were driving in the left-hand lane north on Harlem Ave. towards Higgins. There was no traffic going south on Harlem, as the stop light was on at Higgins, so I decided to turn into the south lane and go back to Foster, when "BAM," barely out there an SUV smashed into the driver's side of my car. I did not expect someone to be in a lane next to me, going in the same direction, when I was already in the left-hand lane. Our two cars were hooked together and shortly thereafter we were surrounded by police, an ambulance, and a tow truck. We were in a state of shock and I could hardly think or talk amongst the maze of everyone talking at us, asking questions,

taking information, and the tow truck man anxious to take my car as it was not drivable and was in the middle of very busy Harlem Ave. The tow truck man looked at my car and immediately said I'd better start looking for another car as the fender was crushed in so far that the steering column looked broken. One of the police warned me not to let the tow truck man take my car as he called him an "ambulance" chaser, but I had no choice -- the car had to get off the Street and off it went - my beautiful 2008 Hyundai with only 16,144 miles on it, and the car I thought would be with me until I died. In a state of complete confusion, I removed whatever I could out of the car. The police gave me an accident report and drove my son and I home with our Popeye's chicken.

This was the beginning of many nightmares. I called my auto insurance and wound up having to call several numbers: First the insurance agent, the number to report the accident, the number to question if my car was repairable, the number of the person estimating the damage and recovery for my car which was confirmed as "totaled," and a couple of calls to the tow truck man. Besides these calls, two people called representing the other driver. One was a claims adjuster who checked out Harlem Ave. on his computer and informed me there was a median lane between the north and south lanes. He explained that his client was driving down the median lane before I entered it. I told him I was unaware there was a median lane and that I only saw a left-hand turn on the street which was barely visible as the paint lines were very light. He further proposed that if I didn't accept liability for the accident that his client could sue, and I might have to go to court to testify. I was most unhappy about this, but accepted it because I wanted no problems. After his call, my son and I took a walk to Harlem Ave. where the accident occurred to see if there was a median. We were surprised to see there was one, but it was really not clearly visible as the paint lines were so faded and no one was driving in the median. Meanwhile, the other driver involved was able to drive his damaged car away from the accident, and I had to get a rental car, accept the fact that my car was totaled and find another car within seven days, by June 30, as once your car is a loss; the insurance will only pay one week's rental car fees.

Although I spent hours on the phone, sleepless nights, and wondering how I'm going to handle all this, I have to say I am grateful to God that my son and I were not injured and that at my age (almost 82), I am still capable. Believe me, I spent many nights thanking God that we were okay and asking Him to help me through this. The following Sunday, June 25, I went to church service at the Salvation Army. We were having a luncheon at the Citadel as our Majors were leaving our corps to another assignment. At the luncheon I mentioned my predicament to some friends and said that I'd be going to a car dealer on Monday to look at cars. That evening God answered my prayers in the form of two fellow members of the Salvation Army, Barbara and Roger Scott. Barbara phoned and said that perhaps Roger could help me find a suitable car, as Roger is very knowledgeable about cars. Roger asked me what type of car I was looking for so he could check out cars on his computer. He later called me with a list of cars similar to mine, which were reasonably priced and had good mileage. His advice was to go to the dealership, look at the cars on the list, but not to buy a car right away. I did just that and also went to the dealership where I had purchased the 2008 Hyundai. I reported to Roger that my dealer only had cars with high mileage at a higher price, and the cars on his list were a better value. However, a couple of the cars on his list were sold and the sales person cautioned me that cars moved from their lot quickly. Roger offered to accompany

me to the car dealer on Friday, June 30, which was my deadline date to find another car and return the rental car. Fortunately, one of the cars I liked was still available and was really the best deal on the list that Roger had prepared for me. We both put our STAMP OF APPROVAL on the 2016 Hyundai Accent with only 6,600 miles on it, and after a test drive, and returning my rental car, I drove off in my new car and put behind me two very anxious and nerve racking weeks.

I can't tell you how grateful I am to God and my friends Barbara and Roger Scott for stepping up to help me. It was something I never expected and truly appreciated. I'm glad that my son and I are okay; we can put this experience behind us, and get back to the "treasure" of life's "routine." May I close with a quote from Mary Schmich, a columnist with the Chicago Tribune:

"Accidents, if you're spared injury, have a way of waking you up, making you realize that you are, indeed, lucky, that you've made it through the day again."

Thank you Jesus and my friends at the Salvation Army!

###

The Sealed Letter **By N. Stewart**

I stamped and sent the letter off not knowing what would happen next, placing SWAK on the back of the envelope. Distance has a way of making things look far different than when they are up close. He was back home and attending Florida State and I stayed in the Midwest to finish my senior year at Northern Illinois University. We were so close in summer at Camp Wandering Rock, being with each other every day and talking about everything and anything.

Before the first group of campers arrived, the staff introduced ourselves and at twilight we proceeded to the official first campfire of the season. As fate would have it, I ended up sitting next to him at the campfire. We sang camp songs, roasted marshmallows, ate s'mores, listened to guitar music, and as darkness came and silence took hold Chief Dancing Moon danced around the fire and told the story of the camp.

The sky was black and crystal clear with a million stars appearing above. "Look," someone exclaimed, "a shooting star," and before I knew it he kissed my cheek. After the campfire and walking side by side on the way to our assigned tents, we held hands. Parting, I went to the right to my tent and he went to the left to his. The stars were not only in the sky that night for my eyes seemed to be glowing, too.

The next morning at breakfast I had a kitchen assignment. I was one of the beverage servers and he was one of the cooks. I ran around filling glasses and cups and didn't have any time to think about the previous night. When the other staff members finished, the kitchen staff could sit, eat, and relax. I found myself sitting right next to him again.

The first batch of campers appeared after breakfast and the other staff counselors checked in the arrivals, took them on tours of the camp, gave them instructions and provided schedules for the next day. Later in the day, the kitchen staff prepared hot dogs with all the trimmings and sliced the watermelons for dinner, taking everything down to the campfire site for the hungry campers to eat. Hot dogs were then roasted over the open fire and the sliced watermelon was eagerly eaten. With the fire blazing, Chief Dancing Moon came out in full dress and welcomed the campers, wishing them a good stay and told his story.

Staff scheduling changed ever so often and I was assigned to be a lifeguard at the beach and he was assigned as canoe master. I watched him from the shore, instructing the campers. Some campers were more adept than others and some were just prone to end up in the water, splashing and yelling for help. He would calmly paddle over, help right the canoe, and make the panicked campers get back in. My heart raced as I watched him.

As the summer progressed, we spent more and more time together. After the nightly campfire, we would go to our respective tents, wait an hour or more, and then quietly meet up, heading for the woodsy North 40s. Sneaking through the woods, avoiding other fellow staffers also looking for some alone time, and slapping at mosquitoes put an element of adventure into the clandestine rendezvous. We sat on a beach towel on the grass and listened to the soothing night sounds of nature. He would put his arm around me and we would kiss and touch under a moonlit sky. When taps sounded in the distance, we hurried back to the campgrounds before we were missed.

The rest of the summer camp was just as wonderful. The last of the campers left in mid August. The staff cleaned up the camp and readied it for next year. All staff got together for a closing party, promising to return next year, and to always value the friendships we had made. He and I vowed to keep in touch and were keen to see where life would take us.

But, way too soon life returned to normal. At first, calls and letters arrived almost daily. Then, the letters became further and further apart and the weekly telephone calls eventually stopped all together. I was so sure this was the one and only love of my life. My thoughts ran rampant at the absence of any contact with him. Perhaps tragedy struck and he was unable to write or call. Or school became too difficult and he had to focus solely on classes. I still had feelings for him. Did he for me? Had I been naïve? Was I played? Was it just a summer romance? Would he even answer my desperate letter that I foolishly sealed with a kiss? I need to be patient and wait it out. Or, perhaps, it would be best to just move on now with my life and chalk this experience up to a lesson learned. Time will tell which direction will prove to be true.

(To be continued – August 2017)

###

The Emoji Stamp

By Pauline Bastek

It could be a postage stamp, a Forever Stamp, insuring that it will transport by first class, whatever it is affixed to, at the rate you paid at. The time of purchase, even should the current rate be tripled, quadrupled or whatever the esteemed congress feels the traffic will bear without revolt. Revolt highly unlikely but abstention, substitution, replacement seems imminent.

Clap you hands, stamp your feet, our team can't be beat. Remember that cheer from you school days? Who doesn't, along with the vibration of the bleachers from the stamping of hundreds of feet.

The sound of our mother's voice daring us to face dire consequences if we should stamp our feet one more time.

The stamp of approval, do we not all still look for it, while behaving oh so nonchalantly. The stamp of disapproval, we risk behavior that might bring it forth at the peril of rejection.

Such a simple five letter word, two consonants, one vowel, two consonants, impossible to misspell. But now we have a use for it that supersedes anything we could have imagined. A stamp known in electronic text communication as an Emoji.

No need to say thank you, just fine the Emoji with a smiley face are you sorry, the Emoji with the down turned smile will say it for you. Do you want to show your support for a person, event, take your pick of Emoji, you need not deliberate, no sure, sent two, maybe three EMOJI. Better yet, create your own Emoji. Commemorative stamp, commission your own commemorative Emoji.

Words, who will need them. Pictures, oops sorry, Emoji I will do it. We have gone back to the Hieroglyphics; spelling bees may become as extinct as vinyl recordings. But, wait a moment; I see in the New York Times that there is resurgence in the popularity of vinyl records.

Do we dare hope that the stamp called the Emoji will bring back actual words to express feeling, to communicate. Do we need to wait a decade, a score, or will the use of the stamp called the Emoji continue to make life communication skills just a matter of selection an Emoji, i.e., Japanese word for small images, icons, symbols.

Is this not a stamp, what a powerful stamp, and still only five letters!

###

Stamp You Fragile

by: Susan J Wilfong

I want to share a story with you.
It happened back when I was a kid.
It's something kind of funny
That my brother did.

We were both quite young,
But he's 15 months older than me.
But he was the "Big Brother"
And he reminded me constantly.

We would be lying on the floor
Watching the TV.
He would roll me across the floor
And he'd be following me.

It started out as a game.
Just rolling around on the floor,
But then he would pin me against the wall.
It wasn't a game anymore.

I was stuck against the wall
He would put his feet against my side.
He'd start stomping me
And threatened me if I cried.

He came up with this little rhyme:
"Stamp you fragile, is what I have to do.
And if you cry or tell on me,
I'll really get back at you!"

Mom and dad never found out
What "Stamp you fragile" meant.
Good thing for me,
He never left a permanent dent.

Now, when I ask him if he remembers
What "Stamp you fragile" means,
He'll roll his eyes and then he'll smile,
Like he's reliving those old scenes.

I know that he remembers,
But now, it's just a joke.
He asked me why I never told.
I said, "Because I feared your next poke".

But now, my brother
Is my best friend.
And we have each other's back
Until the very end.

I Need to Change

by: Susan J Wilfong

Rude, crude with a bad attitude,
Is this what our society has come to?
How are we supposed to fix it?
What do we need to do?

Those are hard questions to answer.
It's easy to blame the other guy.
Especially when we hear
Another innocent child had to die.

Hatred feeds upon itself.
It gets bigger with each bite.
It also gets stronger
When added with anger and fright.

Our economy is stuck in hard times.
Our politicians are at war.
People seem to be heartless,
Or rotten to the core.

Shortsightedness adds to the problem,
For we live one day at a time.
We tend to not think of the future.
Our reactions change on a dime.

One minute, we're calm and accepting.
The next, we're ready to kill.
We do and say things that we regret.
Until...

What comes after the "until"?
Can we separate ourselves from the anger?
Can we get back to a calm place,
Where we wish we could languor.

Each one of us is responsible,
For what we do in our society.
And I think each person's life
Adds a great variety.

But it's so hard, in this day and age,
To get people to see their own worth.
And the value they can add,
From the first day of their birth.

I'll get off my soapbox now.
I know this world is rough.
Things won't change unless we change ourselves
And that, is the change, that is tough.

Where Did That Thought Come From

by: Susan J Wilfong

Isn't it said,
"Curiosity killed the cat.?"
But since I'm not a feline,
I won't worry about that.

We have to be curious,
Because that's how we learn.
But things that we bury,
Will, undoubtedly return.

I've been told to be curious
When my thoughts seem to race.
I need to get away
And find a quiet place.

I go to my room
And close the door,
Take a deep breath
And try not to think any more.

I think I've done it!
Oh..., but wait...
A thought sneaks in.
A thought that I hate.

Where did that thought come from?
It happened long ago.
Why am I remembering it now?
Why do I have to know?

One thought leads to another.
But they all seem to be from the past.
Are these things that I have buried,
Finding a voice at last?

How did they escape?
Why are they coming now?
I don't want to deal with this.
I don't think I know how.

I don't want to think these things.
I want my brain to rest.
But that isn't happening,
So curiosity will be my quest.

So, now I know that my brain won't stop,
Well, that might be OK.
At least I know I'm still alive
And that's how I want to stay.

Well, so much for my quiet place.
So much for being alone.
So much for turning off my brain,
For my thought are all my own.

I guess I'll keep being curious
When those thoughts from the past sneak in.
If I can deal with them, in a calm place,
I may have peace within.