

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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August 2018 selection – Stake

What's at Stake
By Sara Schupack

Picture putting up stakes, putting a pin in it, marking territory. The stake could be a big wooden thing with a pointy tip, weathered, splintering, with peeling paint or stain, but solid, not easy to dig up or knock down. Let's say the stake is a claim, an idea stake. By marking it out, you take a risk, showing the world that this matters to you, thus inviting ridicule or a fight over the territory. If no one else wants it, you don't need to fight for it, and might start to forget, spend less time there, let it dry up, fall to ruin. But even with a little pushback or other attention, you are driven to dig in. You stay put, and the accretion of grime and time, the building up of dust and memories and paring down from rain and wind, all become part of your history and thus your identity. You are attached.

What if, after you stake your ideological claim, you then want to pull out that stake and maybe move it over just a little, or throw it away and pretend you never planted it there so deeply and confidently? But it's stuck, with your fingerprints, or brand, or other identifiers all over it. You can only hope that by claiming this territory, you'll get visitors who, in their assertion of their territorial claims, will at least keep you company, appreciate your view, help you appreciate theirs- Maybe you hold onto your territory, but you often visit theirs, and together, you take even longer journeys to very different, potentially hostile territory. Since you're not alone, and maybe pick up additional buddies in route, you don't feel threatened. Nor do you present yourselves as threatening. You always bring a fresh pie.

Once you enjoy your shared experiences, softened into memories with a flavor of nostalgia, your rag tag group from different stakes develop a trust and fondness for one another. A once ugly face or tacky backpack start to grow on you. Familiarity can do that. You may even take to staying at each other's lands for extended periods of time. You start to adopt some habits and tics of your neighbors without noticing. You lose track, just a little bit, of some of the differences in your views. The stakeholders at the furthest territories who require treats to smooth the way may feel jealous or suspicious of the growing friendships across the other territories, or maybe just the growing size of the association scares them.

This is a crucial juncture.

Unfortunately, no one is going to agree to a massive uplifting of the stakes, whereby the territories are all reconfigured — and how would they be reassigned anyway? Divided up equally by the number of inhabitants? That won't fly. There are pieces of your territory that you hold dear. Maybe you value them most because others push the hardest against them. You can't be sure why anymore, but you can't bear to lose them and that's all you need to know. Nor will any of the countless other suggestions take flight that come up at friendly potlucks with amateur music, dancing, plenty of jokes and storytelling and booze, and then bickering and grumpiness and tired, downhearted participants dragging themselves home with headaches or stomachaches.

Homesteads in the farthest territories might form their own friendships. They have more in common anyway, and often disagreed with your choice of pie flavors when you picked them up towards the end of your journeys. If you don't worry too much about that new alliance building and building and eventually isolating you from the other direction, this could work as a way to ease tensions and develop a range of vacation spots and multiple views for all. But this isn't foolproof

What if weather or natural disasters throw their erratic traumas upon one segment and not another? And the pleas for help become too much, and the farthest neighbors don't feel attached or beholden enough to provide the amount of help needed, and the friendships fray, and everyone hunkers down. Survivors are left with bitter resentment tainted with guilt, making them more hesitant about taking road trips again with folks from distant stake holds.

Or, what if you are a homebody? You don't like to travel. You enjoy being cozy on the sofa with a good show or book and a cup of tea. You have no need for many friends. The couple of loyal old chums who have staked out their territory right next to yours are all you need. You find other views disconcerting or even ugly. Why should you venture forth or welcome strangers into your property? You might ask nicely for them to stay away, but if they keep coming, you resort to stink bombs or nettle sling shots. Then, of course, you've set precedent that can't be reversed. Even if you feel a little curious or lonely or needing help. You've annoyed enough distant neighbors that you've isolated yourself even more than you intended. Your inflexibility has become theirs.

A traveling circus or fair can always help, at least to serve as a distraction.

The territories will keep shifting. The friendships and fights will keep coming. This doesn't end.

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What's at Stake?

By N. Stewart

Sitting in the boat in Delavan, Wisconsin, I wonder what is left to my life. I'm decades old with limited adventures left before the inevitable aging disabilities take hold. Already, it is obvious to me that physical functions are slowing down, eye sight is dimming, ears don't understand the spoken word as easily as they once did, and words play a game of hide and seek on me.

What started this reverie of seemingly uselessness of old age? Perhaps it was from a single thought that I could be of value to the community by being on the board of directors at my summer home owners' association. My mistake and I recognized it right from the very first meeting. Trouble was at hand as a number of association directors suddenly resigned within a short period of time. I had been a director before and had knowledge of the procedures and had trust in my ability to utilize the written word so I offered my services. I was selected to fill one of the vacancies and elected as secretary. Unbeknownst to me some of the remaining directors had a covert plan to disassemble the status quo and move their agenda forward, snowballing requests not theirs and overstepping authority. Same issues time and time again had to be dealt with and were time consuming, allowing for no progressive movement. Nasty e-mails were circulated and false accusations were made against me that I was breaking the by-laws of the association and was ineffectual in my role as secretary. All this, I realized later was a diversion to cover their planned hostile takeover. I stood alone in my attempts to settle the ensuing chaos and to right the failure on the part of my cohorts to abide by the established rules and regulations of the association.

I had to sit back and take a look at what was at stake. I had spent many personal hours, doing what was necessary for the task, yet was underappreciated for the effort, wrongly accused, and challenged on everything I did. I had let them take over the way I viewed myself, assuming I had failed. I went from a tactful, helpful person to a mean, rude and downright disagreeable one in a matter of a few months. Was it me? Or...was it them? Reflecting, I realized it was not ever going to change, I would remain the minority opinion and the worst of it was the realization that I had allowed myself to become upset and angry about what I couldn't possibly ever control.

I wasn't going to ruin my health over this. I wasn't going to ruin relationships with summer time friends and I certainly wasn't going to ruin the rest of my summer hiding

away because these people had their own agenda and nothing - not rules, regulations or by-laws were going to stop them from obtaining their way.

Decision made, I resigned. Yet once I resigned, I couldn't let go and continued to dwell on the negative aspects of the experience. How much was I to blame? Was my age a factor? Were my unique life experiences coloring my perceptions? Why did it go so wrong? Who is to blame? The experience had a bad outcome, but it need not and I will not let it continue to color my remaining time. There was nothing more I could have done to change the outcome of the experience. It remains what it was.

Several weeks have passed. The bad experience is over, though I fear it will never be completely forgotten.

Today, as I sit in the boat, I hear the joyous laughter of children as they dive off their boat into the cool water. I hear loud music coming from a pontoon party boat over there where I'm sure the beer and hard cider flow freely among the participants and everyone seems to be having an abundance of good times. I see a fisherman near shore, pulling in a catch and see the glee in his body actions. I see a jet skier, bouncing over the biggest waves he could find, leaving a high tower trail of white spray, jutting out from both sides of the machine. I taste the salt on my lips from the potato chips I ate and feel the coolness of the bottled water as it goes down my throat, quenching my thirst. I touch the lake's refreshingly green water and it feels cool to my cupped sun-warmed hand. These are truly the things of summer, the good experiences in life to enjoy, to linger over and to relish and not the occasional bad one.

Nothing else need be said except I need to finally let go and to move on.

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Stake By Ed Scheffler

Those of us familiar with camping are aware that stakes are required to secure a tent from the wind. As all structures need elements of support. A safety net of sorts. As we would stake out our possessions and property. With boundary markers as fences, walls, and hedges to protect us from unwanted intruders.

Quote from Thomas Gray:
We use takes to establish boundaries...

For those of us who cherish privacy from the strife of the maddening crowd.

I feel at ease around people. Enjoying the environment of social outlets. Yet crowd orientated with its limits. For in quest of breathing room. To stake out territory at picnics

and concerts on the fringes. Arriving early and leaving early. Seeking secluded hours at favorite restaurants and theatre engagements.

I am not an isolationist. Coming from a family of extroverts. Not stand-offish only a little reserved not to get too close. So as there may be the time and setting to observe and reflect upon the things around us.

Likewise, I respect others
In their right for privacy as well...

Only perhaps too cautious
concerning the intrusion
upon others...

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