

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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June selection – Battle

Everyone You Meet
By Vicki Elberfeld

"Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle" or "Be kind. Everyone you meet is carrying a heavy burden," variously attributed. Another variant is "Be pitiful, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle," which was attributed to an Ian Maclaren in a Christmas message to a religious weekly at some time before 1897. Here, the words "Be pitiful" meant "to be full of pity" as opposed to our modern usage of pitiful as pathetic. Whoever first penned this (and John Watson, Plato, and Philo of Alexandria have also been contenders), I see these as words to live by, for who among us does not need kindness, empathy, understanding?

Some people give us a view into their struggles, while others are very private. I often think of a statement by Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" as being one of the bitterest sentences of all time, coming so close on the heels of her brother-in-law and sister's deep betrayal. Although, come to think of it, being kind to strangers is often easier than being kind to family. I am well aware of the battles of my own family members. And I am so familiar with my relatives, I find it easy to see them frankly as being their own worst enemies when it comes to being the source of their problems as well as the victim.

This brings me to the very hardest persons to be kind to: ourselves! We intimately know our own battles, and we've often endured the SAME STRUGGLES for years, if not decades, without resolving them. Yes, we are, most of us, our own worst problems. And so, we blame ourselves, chide ourselves, and have a ringside view of the gap between our real and ideal selves.

Not long ago I enrolled in an online course from Yale called "The Science of Well Being." I'm beginning to learn about how the things we want in life won't necessarily make us happy, or at least not happy for very long, whether it's true love, a great body, wealth, etc. That we struggle with something called hedonic adaptation, meaning that the first bite of our special treat will taste much better than our last because we grow used to everything, and we are generally poor modelers and predictors of our own futures. That folks who win millions in the lottery are not much happier than those who have lost movement in both legs when evaluated a year or more after the event. And things I already knew or thought I knew about happiness are reinforced, in particular the benefits of mindfulness, savoring, exercise, good deeds, and a gratitude journal.

I regret to say that I'm running a little behind in my happiness homework and have some catching up to do on readings, videos, my gratitude journal, good deeds, and exercise. But I don't intend to punish or berate myself for these omissions. I think of the words, "Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a great battle," and this certainly applies to me as well as the rest of humanity. So, I am saying to myself, "Vicki, meet Vicki. Now you be nice to her, for she is fighting a great battle."

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Toe to Toe
By N. Stewart

They stood toe to toe and stared at the other. They had been standing that way for a very long time with neither seeming to blink or move. I had been watching from a shaded bench not far away.

A little girl approached one of the men, pulling gently on the jeans leg of the taller of the two. "Daddy, I'm hungry. When can we eat?"

"Not now. Go to your Mother," came a sharp, gruff voice. The little girl looked up at her daddy and tears flooded her eyes. She ran away from him and toward her mother's open arms.

The two men continued to stare. Both so stubborn that neither could look beyond their macho self-image and be the gentleman, begging off. There on the other side of where they stood was an outdoor grill for public use. That seemed to be the drawn battle line. Each had a bag of charcoal at his side and held tongs in a raised hand stance as if ready to strike. Their opposite hand held firmly to the pan of the grill, neither willing to let go. Over about ten feet from where they stood was another identical grill, sitting there, available.

Being a buttinski, I called over, “There’s another grill just 10 feet over there. Can’t one of you use that one?”

Both stood steadfast and did not move an inch. The shorter of the two yelled, “None of your effin business, lady.” At least he recognized I was a lady though the tone sounded sarcastic and the word choice was not what I would expect from a gentleman. He went on, “I was here first. It’s mine and I’m staying right here. He can go anywhere he chooses.”

The other chirped in with, “Not on your life, you Mother[bleep], I was here first not you. This is the grill I always use and I’m going to use it now, today. Out of my way you piece of [bleep].”

“Gentleman please there are children and ladies present, such language,” I said. “Do either of you have a coin to toss and we can decide this easily? Heads gets this grill and tails gets the one over there. Here I have one,” tossing it to the shorter one. The coin fell to the ground untouched. “Let’s see then. We could try picking a number from 1 to 10 and the closest to the number I select will have the right to use that grill. Sounds like something I would offer two children to settle a playground disagreement. Agree?”

“Move on lady.” And, they continued to stare at each other.

“Daddy, I want to go home,” came a tiny voice over by the picnic table. “This isn’t any fun. You’re scarin’ me, and I wanna go home,” the little girl said and started to cry again. Her mother tried to sooth her but the little girl wouldn’t have it, pulling away. “DAD-DY,” she pleaded.

Hearing the cries, the taller one looked over at the little girl, then at the woman’s face, and let go of the grill. He walked over to them, bending down as he reached the little girl. “I’m sorry, Honey. Sometimes adults do silly things and I got caught up in a very silly thing. Let’s move over there by the other grill. Do you want to go swimming first or eat?”

“Swim,” she said, wiping away the tears. He reached for her hand, motioned to the woman, picked up their things and moved to the area of the other grill.

I watched as the shorter man smirked, hanging tightly onto the embattled prized grill.

The taller one, holding the little girl’s hand saw the smirk, clenched his jaw, but let it go. As the family walked closer to where I was sitting, the man whispered that he was sorry for his display of immature attitude and for the language. I nodded and smiled at him, waving to the little girl.

A cease fire achieved, I continued to sit on the bench in the shade, quietly enjoying what nature offered on this beautiful day. I watched as the father took his little girl’s hand again and together, they walked to the water’s edge.