

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. Contact Nancy at nestewart@ameritech.net to zoom with us during COVID restrictions.

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
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February 2021 selection – Detail

Operation Rewrite History
By Mark Moe

In a small farm two miles from John Freeman's farm during the Fall of 1777, a severe electrical storm was developing in the barn next to main house. Prior to this excitement, French troops were using the hidden basement in the barn as a weapons supply area. They were part of the French army that was supporting the fledgling United States in their war for independence from Great Britain. As the electrical storm intensified, the energy converged into a ball growing in size on the inside of the barn. The bright blue and yellow electrical ball grew to the size of a horse drawn carriage with the six horses included and then exploded outward. It left a portal where nine heavily armed humans walked out into the center of the barn.

The French troops were currently delivering half of their built-up supplies to the Continental Army. It would have been too dangerous to empty the entire weapons depot in one trip. They had plans to bring another load during the next night. After the portal disappeared the leader of their squadron, Sgt. Fred Jones adjusted his trademark orange ascot so he could speak clearly and said, "We need to find the weapons that the French troops left behind so we can scan their ammo. We also need to scan their uniforms so we do not stand out in our current attire."

The squadron broke into their three-man teams. Fred led one of the teams and the other two teams were led by Daphne Blake and Norville Rogers. Daphne was the only woman in the group with long, fiery ruby hair which she kept in a French braid. Norville Rogers went by the nickname Shaggy although there was nothing "shaggy" about his hair or his clothes.

Daphne's team found the carefully hidden false wooden floor and led the other two teams down into the weapons depot to begin scanning their ammo and uniforms. The computer watches that each of them wore can transform clothing into the appropriate attire of whatever period they needed. Their guns also contain a similar metamorphic property but retain their futuristic firepower and accuracy. The ammo is multi-phasing and if it were removed from a victim, it would match the bullets of this period. The bullets also do the equivalent damage of a .44 caliber without the recoil.

After the soldiers changed their outfits and modified their weapons, they replaced the false wooden panel over the hidden weapons cache and left before the French troops returned. Shaggy was glad that they did not have a run-in with those French troops. It would have ended up badly for both groups. In order to save their future, it was imperative that this group of time-traveling soldiers secured one of the fourteen copies of the United States Constitution. Our history has told us that the last surviving official copy of the Constitution was destroyed in the government purge of 2030. As the United States transformed into the United Socialist States of China, all references and the "*details*" of previous U.S. history were erased. Their future needed one of the original copies to help set everything right.

"It is fortunate for us that the Founders are currently hiding one of the copies at a nearby farm. Now we can retrieve the copy while everyone is occupied with the Battle of Saratoga that will take place tomorrow. Then we can go home and overthrow the Chinese Emperor, Ming!" exclaimed Fred. The rest of the soldiers nodded and cheered quietly in agreement. They were too close to success to let anything stop them, but there were still unknown factors that lingered like the early morning fog outside of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool or at least the ruins of where it was located.

Early the next morning at 6:00 a.m., the group of future soldiers blended in with a part of the French army and were able to break away without drawing attention to their departure. Shaggy was the clever one who had convinced the local French commander the need to send their squadron up a different route to disrupt a supposed "supply line" from the redcoats. As they hoped the farm house was abandoned but, locating the copy of the U.S. Constitution proved more difficult. The Founders had it hidden in the back of a painting but to add more confusion, they hid that painting among a room full of paintings in a storeroom similar to the one they had come from to scan their weapons. They were looking for a painting that had no recorded title among an entire room of paintings stacked all over the place. It took some time to meticulously open the backings of all those paintings and they had to send Shaggy's team to watch from the door of the barn for anyone coming back this way.

Finally, their persistence paid off and they acquired the copy. Daphne placed it in a special sealed glass case and placed it back into her backpack. They would have replaced it with something else, but luckily this was one of the fourteen copies that was lost mysteriously and never found after the Revolutionary War. Now they needed to head back to the previous farm house and leave from the same rally point they had initially entered from namely, the main barn floor. With the Battle of Saratoga now fully engaged, they needed to show caution in traversing back to their origin point. There were too many French troops, Continental Troops and Redcoats all over the place to make a direct shot for John Freeman's farm. Conflict was going to be inevitable at this point, but would their actions tonight save the future or ensure its demise.

###

The Story in Detail
By Carol Hauswald

New snow, new page
Ideas like boots
Trudge toward the feeder
The Morning is hungry.

Seed letters bounce
In bowl, tapped
Into words by sparrow beaks.
Words become lines

Lines spill over into
More lines that imprint
Snow with so many
Scissor toes

Even the Hawk notices.
He sits on the fence
Waiting
To end the scene.

###

Generation Divide
By N. Stewart

“Who cares about getting to the details? That is old-fashioned and a waste of time. Assume. Pick something. Move forward, apologize later if need be,” he said.

“It is one of the many things that I don’t understand in today’s world. Don’t you want to find out the facts on both sides of an issue before you decide what to do? It can be very dangerous to look only from the one side and irrationally move to decision based on a single point of view, let alone move based on someone else’s assumptions, thoughts or opinions and not that of your own.

There are always two sides to every narrative. You may not see something clearly at first but that doesn’t mean your peer has a clearer perspective than you and, in fact, may be totally opposite in his view. This world is built on duality in everything we do. It’s yes or no, hot or cold, yin and yang, right or wrong, alive or dead and so forth and so on. The rest of the material between is grey area and generally makes it more confusing or difficult to understand. Ultimately every decision is basically either black or it is white.”

“That’s a rather racist statement, Grandma,” said Jeffrey.

“What is, my grandson, using the words black or white to represent opposing thoughts? Why do you think you were given a brain, my child? You are capable of thinking through ideas, sorting out rational from irrational, truth from lies, and make your own choice and not merely repeat what you have heard on TV or read from your friends’ tweets. Everyone and I mean everyone has a right to their opinion and their right to express that opinion without being belittled or vilified or categorized because it differs from the group. Details on both sides of any issue need to be investigated and thought through before...”

“That takes too long, Gram. I don’t have time for that. Let the Internet do the detailing. Isn’t that what computers are for? To take away the mundane routines and allow for more time. I only need the conclusion so I can do other things, better things, more fun things with my time. I don’t want to read and sort through a bunch of useless and unrelated stuff.”

“You don’t have time? How comforting to think a future generation doesn’t have time to think for himself and is willing to merely follow any loud, brashest, lug head that spews forth momentarily popular trash based on nothing. Not everyone expounding on the computer screen is above board and forthcoming with truthful answers or answers that are for the good of us all. Many have personal hidden agendas and do not care about the rest. Do you want some other to do all your thinking for you? You want to sit back and play games, letting someone else do the work for you? It doesn’t work that way.

There are no free rides. We have to pick the best course of action for each of us. And that means making the best decision. This world has some serious issues and you have to take the time to seek the details on both sides to fully understand what is happening before you make that best decision or take any action. You are about to head off to college. You will have to study and read literature that you may not like and you may be expected to defend one position or another. That can’t be done without detailed information on both sides of the argument. It’s a...”

(Buzz) “It’s a text, Gram, I have to go meet the guys. Okay?”

“Sure, go ahead. Maybe we can talk again another time.”

“Good talk though, love you. Bye,” said Jeffery

“Love you, too, Honey.”

###

Will the Real German Please Stand Up? By Vicki Elberfeld

“You, you GERMAN you!” Mother screamed as she threw a book at me. It was our German tour book, a paperback true, but heavy enough to hurt me had I not ducked. All I had done was admit how much I was looking forward to leaving Italy and heading to Germany during our *If It’s Tuesday It Must be Belgium* tour. After all, I had studied German, was eager to practice it during my very first trip to its country of origin, and I was also eager to visit the fairytale castle Neuschwanstein high atop a mountain in Bavaria.

But Mother didn't feel as I did at all, and it didn't help matters that our tour guides constantly referred to any and all Germans as Nazis. Furthermore, Mom didn't enjoy packing up and getting ready to leave her beloved Rome with its magnificent gardens and art museums, delicious food, and overly enthusiastic (from my standpoint) people. Mother was Slovak, yet I was beginning to see her as a volatile, temper tossed Italian who didn't much relish visiting the land of stodgy Germans.

But still, she had never explicitly called me "German" before, and I am only part German on my father's side anyway, so what exactly did she mean by that? Fortunately, I had the good sense to wait until she'd calmed down to ask, "What do you mean by German, Mom. What is a German like?"

She paused a moment and answered, "It seems to me Germans are very, very detail oriented and scientific. They're also industrious, punctual. Oh! And of course, obsessed with order."

To me these were all good qualities, though I wondered if she'd left something out, cleaned it up a bit as she didn't actually want to insult my heritage. Still, what she said didn't make me feel any better. How could it? I didn't possess a single one of those traits. "But Mom," I wailed. "None of what you said describes ME."

I'm rarely on time. My life is utter chaos. I have a totally dysfunctional relationship with objects, never remembering where I put any of them. I must confess that for the last several years I have been a member of a 12-step group called Clutterers Anonymous where we share our stories of being too ashamed to invite anyone over, witnesses to our drowning in a sea of clutter. And if you wanted to torture me, you'd give me a form to fill out. I wouldn't care if it were a job or insurance application or my income taxes. I'd procrastinate until the very last minute and then turn it in with a ton of mistakes such that I'd have to do it all over again. So, I guess I can't claim affiliation with a fatherland notorious for its thoroughness about paperwork.

"Well Mom," I continued, "so what are Italians like then, since you seem to like them so much?"

A slow reflective smile spread across her face. "Italians are dreamy," she responded. "They aren't obsessed with being on time or with working themselves to the bone. They're a creative people, inspired, you might say. They know how to relax and how to savor the good things in life."

My mind immediately went back to a couple of decades in the past when Mom also called me something in anger, only this time it had nothing whatsoever to do with Germany or Germans. She was explaining how to load the dishwasher properly and my eyes glazed over; she knew from my expression that I was miles away, not catching a single word. She raised her voice and said, "Look, there are doers and dreamers in this world, and you and your dad are dreamers!" And then she stormed off.

I'm convinced Mom liked dreamers much better than she liked doers which is probably why she married Dad in the first place. He introduced her to the beauty of classical music as well as ballet and opera, and she convinced herself he inhabited a world above and beyond the mundane.

She herself was perfectly comfortable with the mundane and was, by process of elimination, the doer in the family. Upset by Dad's relaxed approach to bill paying, she took over the task and no bill was ever again late. She painted the house, telephoned repair persons when needed, and did all the research for major purchases. Like Dad she worked full time, but while he studied calligraphy, fencing, painting and gourmet cooking, she returned to school to study chemistry, biology and anatomy to advance her nursing career.

The journey Mom and I made through Germany exceeded both of our expectations. While she undoubtedly preferred Italian food, Mother quickly became accustomed to Kaffee mit Schlag, coffee with whipped cream, and Apfelstrudel. Evidently, she had forgotten that all of her favorite composers were German, and we enjoyed concerts every night we were there. My favorite photo of our journey through four European countries is of Mom in her element sipping Kaffee mit Schlag at an outdoor cafe, the castle of Neuschwanstein looking down on her.

###

Detail **By Carol Karvon**

In the beginning one detail bothered Patti, how did the burglar get into her apartment? She always made sure she locked the door and checked the windows, even though she lived on the fourth floor.

She'd come home last night from work and found her apartment in complete disarray. There was stuff scattered all over the place, even in the kitchen and bathroom. Someone had pulled clothes out of her closet and thrown them on the bedroom floor. It scared her to think someone had been in her home and might even still be there.

She quietly went out the door and down the stairs before she used her cell phone to call the police. She was told not to go back inside and they would be there very soon.

The police officers conducted a search of her apartment and reported it was empty. "Boy, what a mess – glad I don't have to clean it up," said one of the cops.

"Looks like someone was searching for something. Do you have any idea what they were looking for in here?"

"I can't think of anything. There's nothing worth stealing in here. Oh, no, wait a minute. I'm the assistant to a sportswear designer. Just a couple of days ago she gave me a set of exercise

clothes she had just designed and said to use them. I'm to let her know if they are comfortable for my exercise and yoga classes and how well they hold up.

I noticed a stain on the leotard and was afraid to wash it. I didn't want to ruin it, so I took it to the cleaners. Do you think that's what they were looking for? I heard there's big money in fashion knock-offs. My boss warned me about loaning the outfit to anyone or misplacing it. An unscrupulous manufacturer of second-rate garments will steal an original designer outfit and mass produce it. Then they can sell the garment as a designer outfit for less money and the customer is sure they got a great deal. My boss is always talking about industrial espionage and how careful we all have to be. She doesn't want her designs falling into the wrong hands. Especially since she's new in the profession and trying to establish herself as a serious designer. She keeps her original designs and the patterns locked away for safekeeping. If that's what the burglar was looking for, even though they didn't find it here, my boss is not going to be happy about this. I'm glad it's at the cleaners, but I'm worried they may try again. I'm not sure I want to stay here until this is over. What should I do?"

"Well, if it were me, said one of the officers, I'd stay with a friend or relative for the time being. Is there someplace we can take you to?"

"Yes, but let me make a call first, just to be sure. One thing has been bothering me. I can only think that someone rang a random doorbell and was buzzed in. Maybe they followed me home one day and noticed which apartment I lived in then came back when I wasn't here. I shudder to think what might have happened had I been here. But, then maybe the intruder wouldn't have broken in, or would they? I guess after you check for clues and if you find the person, we'll know more. Until then, I'll be just as happy not to be here. Can we leave now?"

"Just as soon as we have one more look around and check for fingerprints, though if this is a professional thief, I doubt we'll find any."

Patti felt violated and was getting angrier by the minute that someone would come into her home with criminal intent. Maybe the only good thing was they didn't find anything, maybe not. She just hoped her boss didn't think she was involved when she talked to her tomorrow. Anyway, she thought, things always seem better in the daytime.

###

Details, Details, Details - The Devil is in the Details
By Pauline Bastek

Oh, so true.

I was so flattered years ago when I was asked to be the maid of honor for my friend, Lee. Confused at first as I knew her older and only sister, Vi, was going to be the matron of honor. I didn't really know why she would need both a matron and maid of honor. I had already been asked to be a bridesmaid, one of five, and accepted. Lee and her mother and sister did tend to go

over the top but as far as I could tell, Vi and I would just be wearing a lighter shade of the same dress as the bridesmaids. I did ask her if being a maid of honor entailed anything I would need to do. She assured me that Vi as matron of honor would let me know if there were any details. I should be aware of and was obliged to do. She laughed and said not to worry about a few details, Vi would let me know, and did she ever.

Lee and I had been friends since childhood although we attended different schools but our families socialized on occasion and I was quite familiar with Vi's ability to do as little as possible. A trait my mother said she inherited from her mother. My mother said Lee's mother, Bessie, was very good about getting others to do everything that should have been her responsibility. She claimed that Bessie got her obstetrician to do an emergency c-section by screaming during labor that she couldn't breathe. My mother knew the nurse who was on duty when Lee was born and was happy to share the details but I thought my mother was in her usual sour grapes victim mode and ignored her.

It began with the Bridesmaids' gifts, the mother of the bride paid for them and as maid of honor I just had to take care of the details, details such as picking up the 7 necklace and earring sets, arranging them in their individual boxes, wrapping them in printed foil and matching metallic ribbon, bought at my expense and carting them to the rehearsal dinner. Marshall Fields gift wraps and deliveries for you while Cohn brother in the south Loop gives you a discount and the pleasure of gift wrapping you own purchases after picking them up from their dust warehouse. It was not a pleasure.

This was followed by Vi expecting me to take candid shots of the bridesmaids getting dressed as she didn't think it appropriate for a male photographer to watch girls getting dressed. I found out later that what Vi didn't consider appropriate was the extra charge he tacked on for bringing a woman photographer so as not to offend Vi's delicate sensibilities.

By the time, I saw the devil, otherwise known as Vi I was developing a case of the trots and did not think I should be in charge of cutting up and wrapping the wedding cake. Miraculously a waitress was found to relieve Vi of the task at a charge, of course. I attributed my sudden recovery to Ginger Ale. When I agree to drive the bridal couple from the reception to the hotel as the Limo service was delayed, but I would need to take Vi's car as mine was being serviced and she had the same model car and I didn't trust myself to drive an unfamiliar model of car, the limo service was found to be available at the planned time of departure. I could go on and on but let's just say that it's all in the details. From a wedding to a funeral where pallbearers need to be provided with gloves, black ties, etc. but that's a story for another day and details.

###

Detail
By Edward Scheffler

Detail may become our master,
Serving its purpose onto completeness.
Or it may present
A bungling maze of loose ends.

As was the great pianist and composer Frederic Chopin
Who in his fastidious nature sent copies of his manuscripts to be reviewed.
With the understanding that the readers were white gloves.
So as not to smudge the papers.

As the challenge of any composer is
To establish an arrangement,
Blending a harmonic congruous structure out of clutter.

###

Detail may add to the taste of texture.
For what is life without color.

Only the beauty of embellishment
Is an adornment to compliment
What already is acceptable.
And what creative work
Doesn't delight itself in:
A little bit more of this...
A little bit more of that.

###

A Live Well Lived
By Val Collins

I believe it is the details that make life rich and meaningful. We can and must find details in the moments that crowd our waking hours. Living in the moment is an often-heard expression that describes well the idea of attending to detail. Attending to detail requires a serious act of slowing down. Giving pause to endless activity and mindless movement and noticing that what lies in our vicinity is both satisfying and exhilarating. In the seasons that come and go we can drink in the gifts that are ours for the taking. The gifts that nature offers are priceless. At the moment I am sitting in the soothing quiet of an unlit room gazing out the window as late afternoon shadows descend upon the day and tiptoe into an early evening. A thick blanket of snow covers ground and tree limb and all objects that are randomly placed here and there. Trees

stand nobly against the backdrop of sky and wind breezes cautiously sway light branches and flags. An occasional person will walk by swiftly for it is cold today. I do not see but hear the gayety of children's laughter somewhere off in the distance and can imagine the fun of playing in the snow, their perpetual motion and activity keeping them somewhat warm.

When we slow our pace we not only notice delightful details that might otherwise be overlooked but also enter into a calm that soothes and restores. Frantic motion is set aside and our thoughts settle in with clarity. There is more enjoyment in attending to tasks of the day when they are approached with full attention and carefully and diligently executed. Jobs that appear overwhelming are better completed when organized into manageable details and in a calm thoughtful manner. The benefit of full attention is realized and satisfaction follows.

Those who pursue hobbies know the importance of paying attention to details. Whether it be carpentry, coin collecting, painting or countless other pursuits it is the details that are important to the successful and satisfying completion of the project. Indeed the pleasure is often in the details. I am a quilter and never cease to be amazed at the detailed steps it takes to complete a quilt. Choosing fabrics that coordinate in appropriate shades from light to dark, cutting shapes with sharp accuracy, sewing with preciseness, sandwiching three layers {quilt top, batting and backing} keeping all centered, pinning these layers accurately to keep fabrics in place, quilting the layers together in various line designs, sewing a binding around all the edges and finally sewing on a label to identify the finished quilt. Details, details, details!

And so I suggest...take a deep breath, open eyes and heart to the details of your life and soak in the pleasure that ensues.