

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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May 2021 selection – Stage

Coffee Table Stage
By Jeremy Tibus

Oh, if all the world were a stage but in this case the living room coffee table was the stage. I am the younger brother who was always trying to keep up with my sister's accomplishments. I remember a few of these being her learning to read and write then learning multiplication and cursive writing. This story has been passed down to me as I was too young to remember it.

My sister Jennifer was one day using the coffee table as a stage for dancing on. I was too little to get up onto the stage. Oh, how she probably enjoyed being able to get on that table and dance and I was only starting to walk. I tried as I might but I could not get onto the stage.

So, one day my mom Janet was going through some old boxes and organizing things probably for moving into a new apartment. She stepped away for a phone call and I seen my chance of getting onto the stage. I lined up two or three boxes in ascending order and crawled on each one until I reached the stage. I stood up on the coffee table and started my dance. My mom returned from the phone call and was surprised and startled that I was standing on the table. She quickly grabbed me and put me on the couch. It was only a few minutes later that she realized that I had used the boxes to get onto the table.

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The Unkillable Koro Sensei **By Mark Moe**

March 2019

An unknown force destroyed three-quarters of the Earth's moon. The governments of the world both investigated the occurrence and destroyed the remaining remnants of the moon to prevent meteor strikes. A three meter, yellow, talking octopus took credit for the attack on the moon. He claimed he would destroy the Earth in a year, but first he wanted to teach a class of low performing students at Kunugigaoka Junior High School.

April 1, 2019

After the governments of the world tried and failed to take out the yellow octopus with various methods, they agreed to let the octopus become the teacher of class 3-E at Kunugigaoka Junior High School. A local representative of the Japanese government, Agent Kurasama recruited the students to become assassins with a lucrative sum in the amounts of billions of U.S. dollars to be paid out if they take out their teacher. The government provided special weapons that were found effective at least causing some damage to the smiling octopus.

April 15, 2019

Our first day of class with this strange, new teacher was definitely eventful. Just as Agent Kurasama had informed us, the octopus had a permanent smile on his face and stood three meters tall. He also had incredible reaction time whenever he was attacked. If I had to guess, he reacts within 100,000th of a second. Agent Kurasama, said that his top speed has been clocked at Mach 20 or just over 15,000 mph. We as a class also grew tired of addressing him as "sir" and gave him the name Koro Sensei which translated from Japanese means, "unkillable teacher."

May 6, 2019

My classmates continue trying to use ambush attacks on Koro Sensei with no avail. You would think that I would stand out being one of the shortest guys at 5'2 with azure-colored eyes and the only one in class with light blue hair, but I do not like to draw attention to myself. I think it makes my own assassination attempts on Koro Sensei more authentic and increases my chances of being successful. I am also going to document his weaknesses in a notebook as well.

June 3, 2019

We gained another guy in the class and he is a complete psychopath. His name is Karma and he has been one of the most almost successful in the amount of assassination attempts on Koro Sensei. Koro Sensei has even retaliated against him by treating him to a high-speed grooming session with the four active tentacles he uses as arms. He now looks like a boy band member instead of the rebellious, spiky, magenta hair he had previously. The girls in the class became quite irate at Koro Sensei for messing up Karma's bad boy appearance and sought to do another ambush assassination attempt using special knives and smoke bombs. He managed to escape, but he clearly did not anticipate the girls' strong reaction to what he did to Karma.

June 17, 2019

We have midterms coming up, but before that happened, Koro Sensei tricked one of the girls into making a “poisonous substance” for him to drink. Manami Okuda with black-purple hair and glasses used her expansive knowledge of chemistry and Koro Sensei’s suggestions to make a potion to supposedly breakdown his cells. Instead, it gave him more abilities like being able to turn his body into liquid form. He still retains his insane speed, but now has a new way to dodge attacks. It is like he leveled up like those characters you see in roleplaying videogames.

July 10, 2019

Midterms start next week and Koro Sensei has “leveled up” several times. He can now make dozens of copies of himself and is able to teach all the students both individually and at the same time. He has become one of the most dedicated teachers we have ever had. On some level, it gets hard staying motivated to kill this guy. He goes to such great lengths to design tests to each student’s strengths and weaknesses. He does not take it personally most of the time when we try to kill him and even offers suggestions for better success the next time. This classroom has become quite the “**stage**” not just to become better assassins, but as a lesson for living our best life.

###

So, you wanna be on stage!
Carol Karvon

Some years ago, I found myself having lot of time on my hands. My job had been eliminated thus my daily routine of many years was disrupted. My main focus now became dealing with the unemployment agency and finding employment. It was almost a full-time job. My kids were nearly adults by now and didn’t require my constant full attention.

I desperately needed to find an outlet for my pent-up energy, other than looking for a job. That’s when I came across a listing for an acting class in the program calendar for a local city college.

Aha! I always wondered if I’d be a good actor. Now was my chance. The next day, I walked over to the school and registered and paid my fee for the class. It was to start the following week. It was so exciting to do something creative. I couldn’t wait for class to start.

The day of my first class finally arrived. We were to meet in the school’s auditorium, which I eventually located with the help of another student. It was huge and archaic, like something out of an old movie. The rows of theater chairs were ganged together and had hard wooden curved seats with metal legs. The seating defied any attempt at comfort, but I didn’t think we’d be sitting there very long. Hopefully, we’d be emoting up on the massive stage.

There were about a dozen other people sitting in the auditorium when I got there. After a quick scan of the group, I saw people of all ages. They were chatting with each other and it seemed to be a congenial group. I felt like I had come home.

The teacher, Mr. Mike, arrived and after introducing himself, asked us to do the same. He not only wanted us to introduce ourselves, but also asked that we give a brief explanation of our reason for coming to an acting class.

After all the introductions were finished, Mr. Mike told us what we could expect of the class. He said he was actually an actor and this was his first time ever teaching acting. Seems the school had approached him to teach this class after he appeared in a local play. His goal for us was to prepare a short play to be presented to an audience at the end of the school term. He had a comedy in mind and asked if anyone had any stage experience. A few people mentioned participating in high school or grammar school presentations. Most of the people thought this class would be fun and were eager to explore the depth of their talents.

We met every week and several of us became friends and continued seeing each other on various occasions over the years.

The teacher introduced us to improv. He also taught a four-hour class on Saturday mornings that turned out to be a lot of fun. He would toss out a word, a suggestion, an idea, whatever he happened to think of on the spur of the moment and we would act out something related to that. Sometimes, he might even single out a particular person to do the improvisation.

One of our acting exercises was to dress in something offbeat, ride public transportation and notice any reaction of the other riders, maybe brought about by approaching them by speaking or just making eye contact. If we were unkempt, people might move away. A few brave souls would actually stay put and either ignore the strange person sitting next to them or converse with them, probably out of curiosity. The whole purpose of this exercise was to develop our attention to detail; to judge someone's reaction and make us more aware of others and our surroundings.

Well, we did put on a play in the Spring and I learned a lot about myself during this time.

I found out I liked working behind the scenes much better than being on stage. I enjoyed handling props and managing ticket sales more than acting. After I performed in the play, I realized that once you learn your lines, then it's a matter of repeating them over and over and over. While adlib was a lot of fun, being on stage was not. It wasn't spontaneous enough for me. So, I guess I won't be winning any awards for acting anytime in the future.

###

Goin' West
By N. Stewart

"Ma'am, the stagecoach from Mountain View will be here shortly. Why don't you step out of the sun and come into the depot?"

"I'm good," she said, pacing.

"First trip out west?"

"Yes, I'm on an adventure, sort of," she said nervously. "I was tired of living in the city and agreed to a marriage proposal ad in the newspaper. He said he was lonely and there weren't many women folk around. He needed a young, healthy woman to come our west to be his wife. He seemed nice from his letters and he wasn't bad looking on his picture either. I said I'd come.

My family was dead set against me doing this, but I'm no beauty and somewhat sassy so I have been told. I can't be a "yes dear," "no dear" sort of woman. I have mind of my own and I can use it. I can ride a horse, shoot a gun, cook and clean, too, so I figured why not?" She said, continuing to pace up and down in front of the depot.

It wasn't long before a blow of dust appeared off in the distance and the thunder of hoofs could be heard and felt, shaking the ground. She watched as the coach in the distance and the cloud of dust moved ever closer. Now, perhaps a little too late, she wondered if she was doing the right thing.

Arriving in front of the depot, the driver halted the horses, still puffing through their nostrils and stamping their feet. The lady backed into the shadows, watching as the passengers got out. First a woman, followed by a young boy and then a lone man appeared. She thought that was him. He was shorter than she expected and a little on the chunky side. He wore a string tie and had a rawhide jacket over his shirt. She could see the silhouette of a gun that sat on his hip under the bulge in the jacket. The unkempt bushy beard and long stringy hair stopped her cold. She couldn't imagine getting close to that. Not quite what she dreamed he would be, but a deal is a deal and she boldly stepped out of the shadows.

"Are you Tom Barker?" She asked.

He looked surprised at his name being called out, noticing the direction of the sound. He sized her up from her head to her feet. She was a tall one and he gawked at how skinny she was. "Yes, I'm Tom Barker. You must be Annabelle Simons?" He asked.

"Yes, I'm your bride for better or worse," she said, attempting to smile over her feelings of fear.

"Nice to make your acquaintance, Ma'am."

As he approached, he gently took her arm and guided her into the depot. Inside he chose a table and offered her a chair. "Let's talk before the stagecoach back home arrives." They sat. He explained that he had arranged for a church service in two weeks' time and until then she would be staying with his Aunt Bea. He asked if any of her people would be coming to the wedding. "Forgive my manners," he said. "Would you like to have something to eat or drink?" She nodded and he ordered for them.

She felt herself relax. He was polite and caring and he wasn't that short after all. Perhaps in time for the wedding, he would shave off the ugly beard and cut his hair. She would ask him politely. They continued to generally talk about themselves, waiting for the west bound stagecoach to arrive.

Finally, the stagecoach arrived to take her to her new home. He gathered her belongings, handed them to the driver to put on the top of the stagecoach, and helped her into the coach, stepping in after her. Whatever adventure happen from here on out she thought she was ready. The coach door closed, the driver cracked his whip, and the horses took off for Mountain View Wyoming.

###

"View from the Windmill"

By Sherry Avila

I open an envelope I received in the mail from my cousin, and I look at a 70-year-old photo of me standing on the stairs on the side of a tall, majestic windmill that seems to touch the sky on my Aunt's farm in southwestern Nebraska.

The windmill in the photo transforms into a time machine as the blades turn around and around with my memories turning around and around. Every year, my Mom, Dad, Aunt, Uncle, Sister, Brother, and I make a pilgrimage from our small duplex rental in Peoria, Illinois to visit my average sized, slightly heavy, calm, dark haired Aunt Blanche and low-key, soft spoken Uncle Vilner on their farm in Nebraska. We cram into a small car to drive over 600 miles from Peoria over hills in Iowa, prairies in Nebraska, and past silos, barns, cows, horses, and many, many fields of soy beans, corn, and wheat.

Coming from a divorced family with many challenges and much anxiety, I shakily climb a tall, majestic windmill that seems to touch the sky at my Aunt's farm in Nebraska. How did I get up there? Did my mischievous cousins persuade me to climb the windmill? If my cousins can climb up this windmill, so can I! I am tightly gripping the vertical bars of the stairs. The bright sun burns the fair bare skin of my face, arms, and legs since I am wearing a short-sleeved shirt and shorts with no hat. The wind blows into my face and messes my hair. Below me, the whole world seems a stage of re-enactments. I hear the motor of a tractor moving around down below. I smell the strong odors of the "Outhouse" with its spider webs and creepy crawlies where we had to go to the bathroom outside day or night. The farm smells of cow and pig manure, decaying potatoes, rotting plant residue, hay, rich soil, apple trees, and flowers permeate from the ground up to my sensitive nose.

The blades of the windmill where I stand turn to a memory of my kind, thoughtful Aunt Blanche driving her car with me on a country road to return to her farm house. I am impressed that my Aunt Blanche drives a car since my Mom does not drive a car. All of the sudden, I look forward and see a tall, swirling dark funnel cloud approaching us menacingly. I have heard about tornadoes and studied them in school, but I never saw a real tornado up close before. Terrified, I scream, "Aunt Blanche I think there is a tornado coming at us!" I point my finger forward! She looks up, squints her eyes to see, purses her lips, and then drives deep into an empty ditch alongside the road. I look down at my shoes. I need Dorothy's Magic Ruby Red Slippers to take me to the Wizard of Oz far away from all this scary stuff. Wait! Could my Red Hair take me to the Wizard of Oz far away from all this scary stuff? I guess not. Apprehensively, in eerie quiet, we wait for the tornado to pass over us. Then, we hear a very loud roar as it finally passes over us. I am shaking with fear. The country road remains empty of cars for what seems like a long time. Aunt Blanche helps me to be strong, calm, and composed until Uncle Vilner arrives driving a pick-up truck to help us.

The blades of the windmill turn around and around through many other challenging times in my life. The tornado reminds me of the chaotic life I had with my alcoholic Dad. However, the tornado I saw in Nebraska lasted for less than 10 minutes. I will be forever grateful to my Strong Aunt Blanche for mentoring me to become a Strong Woman on the farm in Nebraska, and to learn, "**This too shall pass.**"

What Next?
By Vicki Elberfeld

Must there, can there, be such a thing as life after COVID? I don't want people to die, surely. I'm not a monster. But I feel as if I've merged with my home; its bones are my bones, its skin my skin, its air my breath. I have sent roots down, deep down, into my couch, and it would be awkward and painful to extricate myself. The temperature is perfect. No winds buffet me, no snow falls on me, no sun burns me. I can see the sun from my living room window, from my couch in fact. I enjoy viewing its brightness, but soon it will be summer, and I only want to watch it then, not feel the heat on my skin.

Few cars are on the road. The air is becoming clean again. It is not so hot yet that folks ride with their windows down, so I don't have to hear their blaring radios. I step out onto my porch and hear the songs of the birds. I understand we'll have cicadas this year, and I love the sound of their sultry humming. Sometimes I take a walk, and I see all I need to see: bunnies looking for cover, squirrels digging and digging up, trees beginning to bud, tulips, daffodils and, on rare occasions, a brilliant magnolia bush. I look forward to extending my walks to the park where the pond will be alive with fish, turtles resting on a log, and perhaps even the swan with the injured wing. Maybe a few young lads will have ridden their bicycles there and be ready with fishing nets and rods. How I hope the frogs return this year. I miss their throaty songs.

I don't want to go back to a world of traffic, noise, and rushing here and there. Life has become so simple for me. I only shop once a week and do laundry once a week. How many clean clothes do I need for Zoom meetings? Unless it's work or a meeting where I socialize, I'm not even on camera. Someone joked in an email that it was time to exchange my daytime jammies for nighttime jammies. But why bother to change for bed? Mornings I take a warm bath to ease me into my day, and then I change into different jammies or tee shirts. Good times!

And who needs Zoom bottoms? Of course, it's important then to avoid rising from your chair in full view of the camera during a Zoom call. And while walking around the house, I find I feel less naked wearing Zoom tops that are unusually long.

And then there's my student. I'll call him Charles. I tutor him in medieval history. Well, I don't actually tutor him, but that's what I'm scheduled for. I'm supposed to be helping him with writing, but he doesn't have any writing to do, so he reads his chapters aloud to me, and sometimes we talk.

Charles is excited to be living through an historic period. He firmly believes that when he's an old man, he'll be invited to speak to young folks about what it was like to live now. His enthusiasm is admirable, and I would hate to burst his bubble, but everyone his age and even younger will have lived through the same endless pandemic. Couldn't the young folks just ask their parents or grandparents what it was like? Wouldn't they already have suffered through sufficient tales of trying times from their elders? And would they really care?

But back to the present, I fear one day I may be expected to leave my cocoon and go some places, do some things, and even interact with some people. I know! I know! It sounds utterly impossible. Do any of my social skills remain, any at all?

We're informed by the bard that all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. Covid-19 has kept me and many others away from people, off the stage, and out of the spotlight. I haven't gone to parties, dated or hugged anyone, let alone kissed, in a year and then some, but not a day goes by that I don't imagine it.

Perhaps life post COVID will have its benefits, as lately I have begun to experience a certain tingling which for me signifies stage fright. I have been waiting, along with the other performers, in the wings for far too long, waiting in suspense for the lights to come up, the world to reopen, and the curtain to part as, once again, we take the stage and perform our various parts.

###

Staging **By Pauline Bastek**

I just returned from a memorial service that was held for a former real estate colleague. A few months into the COVID nightmare of last year placed my real estate license in the inactive status. Business was good and I had hoped to stay active for a few more years but the thought of contracting COVID and ending my days in a nursing home isolated from family and friends was too frightening to contemplate and inactive I went. Several colleagues passed away this year and cause of death was often not mentioned. Memorials were scheduled at a later date. I was therefore not surprised to receive a general email stating that Marcie had suddenly passed away and memorial services would be held when restrictions on gatherings lifted so that the service could be held in the queen of staging and it seemed she had probably staged her own memorial service. Just leave it to Marcie.

Staging a property in real estate basically means convincing the seller to remove all their knickknacks as well as in many cases, furniture & carpeting to give the effect of space with a capital S and to do it without insulting their taste. It can make a difference in both the time it takes to sell and the sale price.

Marcie could do this and convince the sellers it was their idea. I watched her on several occasions when I brought her into listings I had that were in desperate need of staging. She wasn't everyone's cup of tea, and while I wouldn't want her controlling my life, I was happy to pay her to stage a listing, she proved her worth.

I got to know her while she was staging a listing for me, which was close to Valentine's Day and the owner had received 3 floral arrangements from her children, Marcie marveled at what they must have cost. She said she had a daughter who lived out of town and traveled and probably didn't even think of spending money on flowers. I tried to smooth things over and said her husband would probably make up for it. She assured me he would get her what she chose for all occasions.

I was happy to answer a call at that point and excuse myself. Wow, I thought she even stages her own gifts, I mentioned this to another realtor who had known her for a longer period and she assured me that Marcie would very likely stage her own funeral and guess what, at the memorial service I found out she did just that including the catering menu for the reception.

It was Marcie and it was faultless down to the background music she had chosen. I noticed that her daughter was there but only welcomed us on her late Mother's behalf, I didn't see her husband and thought that possibly he was ill or isolated as were so many. A friend sitting by me looked startled and asked if I hadn't heard that he had died. I was surprised Marcie hadn't held a memorial for him when he passed. She told me she would tell me about it when the service was over at the reception,

It turned out that he had tried to stage a suicide attempt with carbon monoxide poisoning by opening the vent in the bedroom above their garage after having given Marcie an overdose of his heart medication. Unfortunately for him a neighbor noting lights in the garage when he came home late and receiving no answer to his calls, he decided call the police. They came but it was too late for Marcie. He had tried to stage a suicide but it was obvious that it was murder. He was taken into custody but was found dead of an overdose in his cell. He was cremated and his remains were refused by his daughter, staging was not in her husband's repertoire. After all it was Marcie who was the queen of staging to the very end.

###

I Am Water
By Carol Hauswald

I am sentimental as rain
Cascading down the windshield
Of my mother's Oldsmobile
Beauty
Sentimental Beauty.

I am yielding as a summer creek
When it laps lazy around smooth
Bed bottom rocks and licks bare
Heels crossing summer's
Water yielding.

I am wild as a river
Storm born and stampeding
Muddy boundary banks
With a defiance
River wild.

I am persistent as pounding surf

Shaking its tangled mane high as
Moonlight and roaring
Against the shore
Surf and shore.

I am private as arctic ice
With a lifetime of secrets in
Sealed love letters, hidden between
Frozen walls of
Private ice.

I am newborn as a meadow marsh
Cradling ancient orphans beneath its
Slippery emerald skin
Womblike

Tomblike—beginning and end
Lamb and lion, wild and tame.

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