

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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November selection – Simple

Is the Simple Truth Really Simple?
By Carol Karvon

Clare was having a momentary lapse of conscience. She was having a dilemma of telling her best friend the simple truth about something or ignoring the matter entirely. If she was totally honest with Penny, it might destroy their friendship forever. If she were to ignore what she knew, then that might also alter or even destroy the friendship. Supposing Penny found out Clare knew something important and didn't tell her, she might feel hurt and ask Clare why.

Clare was a firm believer in honesty, most of the time. She also believed that if total honesty with someone would cause them harm, then it was wrong and should be avoided. If total honesty couldn't be avoided then a fib would be acceptable in Clare's mind. This was very difficult for her because she was raised to be truthful and her parents taught her that even a "little white lie or fib" was unacceptable. They lived by a very strict moral code themselves and imposed it on Clare and her three siblings. Sometimes, she, her sister and two brothers agreed with their parents and but then did whatever they wanted to do anyway. Life was just easier that way.

Clare had witnessed someone doing something she considered wrong involving a third party and if she told the simple and honest truth, the people involved might be hurt by her action. That's what was causing her anguish – to tell or not to tell. What to do?

On the other hand, if someone else knew something that would affect Clare's life, did she want to know? That was just one of the questions that was haunting her. She just didn't know, but decided that it would probably depend on what someone wanted to tell her and who the source was. She had been burnt in the past by supposedly well-meaning friends wanting to unburden themselves of gossip they'd heard. She tried very hard not to feed into gossip and certainly not to even listen to it when she had a choice. She reasoned with herself that if she didn't listen to gossip, then there was no temptation to spread it. Sometimes, though, it was just simply unavoidable.

Clare decided to sleep on the information she knew and make a decision in the morning. Sometimes things looked clearer in the daytime. Now that she made that decision, she hoped to get a decent night's sleep and not toss and turn all night.

The next day, having made a decision, she called her friend and invited her to lunch. Since they worked in the near vicinity of each other, Clare thought they could go to the little Chinese restaurant they favored. She knew what she wanted to tell Clare, but wasn't quite sure how she was going to do it. The matter had to be handled with delicacy and even then, might backfire and cause irreparable damage to their close relationship. They almost thought of themselves as sisters. The friendship was very important to both of them.

The morning went by too fast and before she knew it, Clare was headed to the restaurant to meet Penny. The day was a pleasant fall day, perfect for a walk. Clare asked for the rest of the afternoon off, not being sure how well Penny would react to what Clare was going to tell her.

After they exchanged greetings and hugs, they placed their orders and Penny asked what the occasion was. They hadn't been to lunch together for several week, since both of them had highly demanding jobs and seldom left their desks for lunch.

“Clare, this is so nice to have lunch out with you, but I know you and you don't just decide to meet me for lunch. What's going on?” asked Penny.

“Penny, why don't we enjoy our lunch first and then I'll tell you why I asked you out this afternoon. Okay?”

“Sure, I guess that's alright, even though I'm dying to know why you're being so secretive. I hope there's nothing wrong with you or your family. Is Jim okay? Are your kids okay? How about your mom and dad?”

“They’re all fine. It’s you I want to talk about. I’ve had a very difficult time deciding what I want to say to you and I really hope I made the right choice. It’s been one of the most difficult decisions I’ve ever had to make. But, if it were me, I’d want my best friend to tell me.

I’m sure by now, you’re really wondering what I’m going to say. I hope you know how much I care about our friendship and would never willingly do anything to harm that. But, after a sleepless night I decided the simple truth was the best way to tell you what I’ve learned. This isn’t gossip, I witnessed it myself.

Last week when I was out of town for that conference, I ran into your husband, Ron, at a restaurant my group was dining at. It was just by chance and at first, I thought I was mistaken, that it was someone who looked like Ron. There was no mistake. He actually came over to our table and said hello. And, Penny, this is the shocker, he was not alone. There was someone with him who he introduced as his “wife”. This has been eating at me all week, since I got back from the conference. I knew Ron was out of town also, but never in a million years did I expect to see him there. I hope you understand how difficult this was for me. I debated with myself, whether to say anything and in the long run, I decided I wouldn’t want to be the last to know. I only hope I did the right thing in telling you, if not, can you forgive me?”

“Clare, this is really shocking and will take me time to absorb it all. We’ve been having some minor problems, at least I thought they were minor. I guess I was wrong. But I do appreciate someone telling me. I’m not sure what I’m going to do about it. Right now, I just want this day to end. And, maybe I’ll just stick my head in the sand for a while.”

###

Pill Bottle Sculpture By Jeremy Tibus

The first project in sculpture 200 class at university was to take an object and make something out of it by taking it apart. The artist student could dismantle or break the object but had to use it again in the final project.

My object was a simple prescription pill bottle. I chose to use an entire bag of them. At first, I just stacked them up like a famous minimalist sculptor did with bricks. The professor and his grad student teaching assistants said that was not enough. So, I cut the pill bottles up a few different ways and made them into flowers and seeds. Then I cut some more and made a vine out of them. I attached the flowers to the vine and attached it to the ceiling of the sculpture room. I then placed the seeds at the bottom of the vine.

The center of the seed was the top of the pill bottle. For the leaves of the flower, I attached the warning label stickers that came on the bottles.

The professor and the graduate student really liked my sculptural solution to the assignment. I titled the piece “Medication Bloom” and explained that I take the medicine and they are

allowing me to bloom as an artist. They thought the narrative worked well with the sculpture.

They had one strong suggestion for the piece. They said I should have attached the pieces of the vine and flowers together without glue. I see how having the piece without glue would make the project more self-sufficient. I just do not think it would have worked technically.

###

Mobile Armored Strike Kommand: Recharged **By Mark Moe**

In an abandoned gas and car repair station just outside of Boulder, Colorado, a young motorcycle rider pulled into the lot. He killed the ignition and dismounted his bike. He removed his helmet showing a head full of short, brown hair and bright blue eyes. “Alright, T-Bob you can change back into robot mode,” said the young man. As he continued to stare straight ahead, the sounds of gears, hydraulics, and metal rubbing together continued for about ten seconds. Then the former silver, 2004 Kawasaki Ninja was replaced with a silver, gleaming robot complete with articulable arms and legs. “I don’t know about this Scott. Why are we at the old M.A.S.K. headquarters? We have not been here since Bruce Sato helped you upgrade my robot and motor scooter forms right before your dad married his fellow M.A.S.K. agent, Gloria Baker,” responded T-Bob.

“I remember T-Bob and your upgrades were a necessity since I was in high school and riding around on a small scooter meant for a much shorter person would have looked really silly. The fact that we finished the upgrades before their wedding was a bonus that dad and mom, Gloria appreciated. You looked quite sharp in the pictures. I also am aware that dad disbanded M.A.S.K. and its agents after Miles Mayhem the leader of Vicious Evil Network of Mayhem aka, V.E.N.O.M. suffered a major stroke and then a couple of months later died from a massive heart attack. Dad no longer saw the need to continue using the power masks that he designed although the minions of V.E.N.O.M were still out there,” replied Scott.

“Why did your father, Matt Trakker spend an enormous amount of money to remodel the outside of the base so that it is looked even more run down and worn out? Would it have been a better idea to just demolish the base or at least turn it into some sort of a museum to memorialize the contributions of M.A.S.K.?” T-Bob asked.

“Chalk it up to being an eccentric, multi-millionaire, but dad must have thought it was necessary for some unknown reason. Come on let’s see if we can power up the super computer and bring the base back online,” Scott stated as he walked towards the secret entrance inside the convenience store.

“Scott, I don’t think this will be as *“simple”* as you think it will be to get this place up and running. We don’t have the access codes to start up the computer. Not to mention that your

dad did everything to keep us out of all the missions that M.A.S.K. went on against Miles Mayhem and company,” responded T-Bob cautiously.

“T-Bob you are the access codes. When you were offline, Alex Sextor and I programmed into your computer sub-routines the codes needed to gain entrance to the elevator that goes down to the fast tram which takes you to M.A.S.K. headquarters. You also have a scanner that will activate when you get near the super computer and at least interact with the system enough to turn on the base power. The elevator and the fast tram work on a separate power source,” Scott stated.

As T-Bob followed quickly behind Scott, he never dreamed he could be doing something as important as being a walking access code to help his master. He normally was just comic relief and cracked bad jokes all the time. When they reached the elevator, T-Bob automatically knew what to do and went to a hidden USB port and changed one of his fingers into a USB stick and connected to the port. After a few moments, several lights lit up above the port and the elevator door slid open silently. The elevator lights came on and the two walked in and the door closed. The female computer voice came on to announce their stop to the fast tram. They boarded the fast tram and the voice came on asking their destination, “Vehicle Garage, or M.A.S.K. Headquarters?” “M.A.S.K. headquarters,” Scott replied. The turbo tram took off at a quick pace and within a few minutes they were at M.A.S.K. headquarters.

When they stepped out of the tram, a large metal door slid open to the control room of the super computer. As they walked toward the door, the hidden scanner on T-Bob emitted an electronic signal and all the lights turned on in the room. The female computer voice came from a nearby control panel. “Please provide your biometric left-hand print on the scanner and then your right hand after that.” Scott stepped up to the scanner and allowed the system to scan first the left hand followed by the right hand. It then responded again, “Please provide the vocal authorization access code provided by Matt Tracker.”

“I told you we would not be able to access the base. There is no way your dad would have given you the vocal access code when he did not want you to follow in his M.A.S.K. footsteps!” exclaimed T-Bob.

“Oh, you mean this code: Mobile Armored Strike Kommand Mainframe Power Sequence 012A-HK4Z-THX6-M73V,” Scott replied confidently. All the controls lit up from the various monitors and the female computer voice came back on and said, “Welcome, Scott Tracker! M.A.S.K. headquarters and supercomputer now back online. Awaiting further instructions...”

“How did you know the access code? I thought for sure that your dad would not give it to you. What are you up to, Scott? Why would you want to bring the base and the supercomputer back online?” questioned T-Bob.

“T-Bob, dad may have not wanted me to follow in his footsteps but that was when I was younger. He gave me the choice to pick up his mantel or to do what I wanted with my own life. That is why I waited until I had gotten my Bachelors of Science in Mechanical Engineering before I made any decisions regarding M.A.S.K. The remaining agents of V.E.N.O.M. are not the true threat anymore or at least the motorcycle thug Sly Rax and the one-eyed Cliff Dagger. We might still have to worry about Vanessa Warfield though. I have a feeling she will just be a

reoccurring nuisance because, she was never one to design any schemes on her own,” replied Scott.

“What kind of threats would you use the base to go after, Scott? Would you even try to use the original agents that your dad recruited? No offense to them, but they seem kind of too old to go on missions like they did thirty years ago. I would keep them around like some sort of Jedi Council thing for advisement personally,” responded T-Bob.

“I think you watch too many Star Wars movies, T-Bob but all the previous agents including my dad had already pledged to help out anyway that they can. In some sense, they might be acting in that role,” Scott acknowledged. He turned his attention toward the computer and said, “Computer bring up the status of the current M.A.S.K. vehicles and any upgrades or repairs that are outstanding.”

The female voice came back on a few moments later and said, “All vehicles have been kept in working order due to Agents Dusty Hayes and Buddy Hawks. Recommending new tires, system flushes of all fluids and M.A.S.K. software upgrades for vehicle software. Estimated timeframe for all services will be two weeks. Would you like to enable the auto repair sequence?”

“Confirmed. Computer access personnel database and look for new recruits based on original agents input preferences and suggestions. Cross reference any children of original members who would also be suitable recruits. I want to form a new M.A.S.K. team that focuses on the criminal underworld outside of V.E.N.O.M. Finally, show me the condition and charge level of all power masks,” Scott responded.

The computer acknowledged his orders and went to work on his requests. It would take time to make a new team and they might have to train together for a while before they are ready to deal with new threats. This time though, the one left behind would have to be T-Bob. “I don’t think T-Bob would appreciate being shot at by ruthless underworld criminals, unless I upgrade him with some weapons to fight back. Then again, I made him and he pretty much does whatever I want him to do, but giving him some offensive weapons might make him feel more important,” thought Scott.

###

Simple Pleasures **By N. Stewart**

It is so easy to overlook the simple pleasures in life with the busy, complex world we have created for ourselves. Everyone is hurrying, running hither and yon, struggling to do more in a lesser amount of time. Every action taken is attempted as if it were a competition with another and that the other must be beaten. What we lose, by continuing on this way, are those simple pleasures in life.

When was the last time you stopped to look, really look, at the sun setting in the west and its gorgeous display of reds, oranges, golds, pinks and shades of lavender? You didn't have to go anywhere or do anything but watch as day turned into night and the world darkened and quieted.

When was the last time you saw a sunrise with its magnificent colors and the breaking of dawn against the night sky? Silence broken by the stirring of the activities of the day.

When was the last time you sat outside on a chair on a porch or a deck and took in the fresh air, listened to a robin sing, watched as butterflies flitted from colorful flower to flower drunk from the nectar, or startled at the shadow of a swooping hummingbird crossing your body?

When was the last time you walked in the woods and stopped to look up at a 200-year-old oak tree with its massive trunk, its wide-spreading arms, its roots fixed to the earth and thought of all the different people that might have stood on that very same spot? In the years to come, someone else, standing there may wonder about you.

When was the last time you were transfixed by a rainbow created by the garden hose as it sprayed water over the green grass or looked out of a window after a storm and saw a beautiful double rainbow in the sky? When was the last time you felt the eeriness of the greenish glow that many times accompanies a storm and waited for the rain to stop and the rainbow to appear, feeling safe again?

When was the last time you noticed the fall color change of the tree leaves from green to red, yellow, and gold before the leaves descend to the earth? Or, noticed in the spring when trees, bushes, and grass become glorious shades of brilliant green and everything feels renewed.

When was the last time you stood outside in the freezing cold, catching snowflakes on your tongue as they fell from the sky? Or made a snow angel in the deep, fluffy, white snow or fashioned a snowman in the back yard with last year's winter hat on its head and scarf wrapped around its neck, a carrot for a nose and charcoal briquettes for eyes?

When was the last time you paused to take a breath and enjoy these and other simple pleasures? Perhaps, now is a good time to cease rushing through life and enjoy what is simply out there.

###

**A Collection of Simple
by Edward Scheffler**

Teach us delight in simple things.
And a mirth which has no bitter springs.
(By Rudyard Kipling)

Less may be more...
Indeed enough to suffice.
(By Robert Browning)

That of humble origin is free from pretense and duplicity
And with the unobstructed life comes a settled form of contentment.
(By Robert Louis Stevenson)

Quiet minds...
Cannot be perplexed or frightened.
But go on in fortune, or
Misfortune
At their own pace.
Like a clock in a thunderstorm.

Nurturing a detachment from disturbances.
So that we may reflect on internal essentials
These things of enduring and permanent worth.
(By Edward Scheffler)

Simple **By Pauline Bastek**

So many thoughts come to mind with the word simple that I find it overwhelming. Simple Simon, the Pie Man from our nursery rhymes and my husband's cousin Peter who lived on the farm in Wisconsin and was always referred to as being simple. He ended up as owner of an automotive repair shop and retired to Scottsdale Arizona. Pretty good for simple Peter. He kept it simple by limiting his automotive repairs to pickups and farm equipment and locating his shop in an unused barn on the family farm which became available when they placed a hefty acreage of farm land into the Government Land Bank and used those funds to set up his shop. K.I.S.S., Keep it simple stupid sure worked for him.

It worked for the magazine called, Real Simple, which appeals to women who are not interested in what Paris and Milan or New York are showing in fashion but very interested in a simple functional wardrobe. This brings me to some happy memories of yesterday when young girls were taught to sew their own clothing in school in home economics class. What did they use as a teaching aid, not a textbook, but, remember Simplicity Patterns?

Oh, there were other pattern manufacturers, Vogue and Butterick, but the very name, Vogue, sent fear into a beginner seamstress and Butterick unfortunately gave a farm connotation with butter in the name and created an image of dresses fashioned from flour sacks. Nothing could have been further from the truth as Butterick patterns created very well-tailored garments but we heard "Butter" and saw farmers' wives in flour sack clothing. It's all in the name.

We saw Simplicity and we saw easy and they were just that. You could count on your freshman class to produce an A-line dress with set-in sleeves and darts to wear in the end of the year fashion show. The company did what its name implied, it offered simple patterns for novices and the success they experienced in the beginning made them continue as loyal customers as they progress from A-line dresses to jackets with bound buttonholes. There were patterns that were as detailed as Vogue and Butterick but the Simplicity customer was confident in simplicity which was their beginning pattern.

Yes, it's all in the name, K.I.S.S. Keep it simple, Stupid. Hear that Washington? The founders of our country limited bills to contain only one subject with very few exceptions but our leaders have made the exception the rule so that no one not even they, can explain what laws they are enacting and what bills they are passing. Voters have as much faith in our lawmakers knowing what the citizenry needs as Vogue and Butterick did in trying to appeal to novice seamstresses. Will someone tell Washington to take a hint from Simplicity and keep it simple.

###

No so Glamorous Ballet Lessons by Vicki Elberfeld

So good to see that my first ballet teachers, the teachers of my childhood and teens, made it on to the internet. Fortunately, the Chicago Dance History Project put interviews of both Christine, née Dubouley, and her husband, Richard Ellis, onto YouTube. I only listened to the first 45 minutes of the audio recording. but I'm given to believe there is much, much more which I will enjoy at my leisure. One simple answer which really stuck with me from the interview was Christine saying that ballet training leads to poise and good posture, even for those who don't become professional dancers. And Christine's posture was amazing! She lived to be 96, and her husband made it to 92, so I figure they both took pretty good care of themselves. After they concluded their performing careers, they opened a school, taught dance and basically kept on moving. I was really excited to discover a one-minute audio and video of Christine being interviewed by herself. Again that amazing posture at an age when many of her peers would be doubled over with pain and decrepitude.

Both Richard and Christine Ellis were very strict teachers and not just about our dancing. Once one of my classmates was so focused on her arm movements that she neglected to cover her mouth with her hand when she yawned. Mrs. Ellis immediately removed the child from class, and the poor girl spent the remainder of the hour watching us through a window and sobbing. "A lady never lets you see her wide-open mouth" is all our teacher said.

But the child who forgot her ballet slippers really suffered the greatest tongue lashing. “What on earth is the matter with you, you silly child?” bellowed Mr. Ellis. “Your dance slippers are your most important tools! Imagine if you were a doctor and left your medical instruments behind. You’d probably cut off someone’s head!”

This made no sense to me as, in that case, what would the forgetful doctor use to decapitate someone? A head can’t be so very easy to remove without the proper tools, can it? That girl too had to sit out the class and wait for her mother to pick her up.

On yet another occasion we were rehearsing for a recital when Mrs. Ellis stopped us and berated us for our poor posture. “Stand up straight,” she admonished us. “When you enter a stage, you must walk with a certain attitude to command the attention of your audience. You all look as if you were apologizing for being there!” Yet I felt she too should assume some responsibility for our poor posture. After all, she seldom left us with the feeling that we had a right to be on the stage at all or that we could command anyone’s attention for a moment unless it were to laugh at us.

The closest our teachers ever came to praising us were the words, “not too bad,” uttered with a certain lift in the voice. I strained and struggled mightily for my not too bads. At the most I received two or three of them during my entire career with the Ellises.

My biggest disappointment in my lessons began immediately with our class uniforms, although I don’t know if “uniforms” would be the proper word. When my parents took me to the Nutcracker Suite, Swan Lake, and Giselle, the dancers wore beautiful, colorful satin and chiffon tutus with sequins etc. embroidered on them, and I assumed I’d be wearing something similar for my ballet classes. I could not have been more wrong. Black leotards and pink tights were all we ever wore for class, and we had to put our hair up in braids or buns with ugly old hairnets. No tiaras or jewels for us!

But perhaps it’s just as well. Before beginning my classes, I had no idea how sweaty and sticky and smelly I’d become after a short one-hour lesson. If I’d worn anything actually pretty, my parents would have gone bankrupt with the dry-cleaning bills. But my feet were the worst!

I dreamed for years of getting my first pointe shoes; some folks referred to them as toe shoes. Wisely, our teachers wouldn’t let us dance on pointe until they thought we were strong enough; this didn’t happen for me until I was thirteen years old. I learned of my new dancing status the weekend after the Kennedy assassination, so I have mixed feeling about that time period.

I’d had no idea how hard and stiff those shoes would feel nor the horrible blisters resulting from the friction against them on my tender toes. These blisters would sting, and sometimes they would even bleed. On occasion the blisters also reduced me to tears. Furthermore, while we females were instructed in pointe work during class, the males would work on their leaps. So,

whether we wore pointe shoes or simple slippers, we girls were still earthbound while our brothers soared into the air.

During my lessons, I felt sweaty, sticky, and in nearly constant pain. Is it any wonder that once I reached my twenties, free of parental influence, I turned to Middle Eastern dancing, commonly known as belly dancing? Yes, I was earthbound, and my bare, spread out, comfortable feet loved the feel of solid ground beneath them. And the costumes? Jeweled, beaded, satin, and sequined with dangling gold and silver metals making pleasing tinkling sounds whenever I moved. And in addition to the music of lutes and drums, I played hand cymbals for further musical accompaniment. Beautiful, hand painted, gossamer veils also accompanied me during my decade long career.

Finally, finally I felt glamorous while dancing and performing for audiences of every age. Yet even more important?

I felt happy!

###

A Pot Over a Very Low Heat
By J. Smetana

Getting the lid off the stuff, Mrs. Lewis knew might mean she would save her son's life, so she worked at it.

You uncap it in extremis.

The doctor had advised her by telephone to give it to her son. "This will work if you say to him it will work."

Louella Stack always said it was a SIMPLE death, this kind, although unexpected.

###