

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 document of no more than 1000 words (approximately 2 pages). 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 for information. [The Pen & Ink Writer's Group returned to the Eisenhower Library on July 18, 2022.](#)

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
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October Selection - Hollow

Hollow Feeling
By Carol Karvon

Amy was having a hard time figuring out what was bothering her. She thought she was living her dream. She had a job she loved. Her new apartment was everything she'd hoped for and had looked forward to for so long.

When she lived at home with her parents she couldn't wait to be on her own. Looking back, she hadn't realized how lucky she had been until she was truly on her own – totally responsible for herself.

Her family was wonderful. Besides her mom and dad, there was a younger sister and brother. She always knew they would help her if she ever needed anything. They were very supportive of her need to exert her own independence and helped her move and even decorate her new apartment.

The family got together with her friends and gave her a surprise apartment shower. As a result of everyone's generosity, she had a well-equipped place to live. It was so nice and comforting to come home to her own place after work.

Amy had graduated with art degree and had interned at an ad agency while going to school. Now she worked in an agency that produced the sales promotion materials for their client firms.

Most days she was a happy young woman, but lately something was eating at her and she didn't know what. This was a new feeling for her. If she could describe it, she'd have to say she felt hollow. She felt like she was drained and empty inside – so, yes, she thought, this must be what hollow feels like.

Over the past weekend, Amy had met her best friend, Beth, for coffee at the local coffee shop. It started a few years ago and had become a regular Saturday morning outing they both enjoyed.

Last Saturday, Beth told Amy she had accepted a new job in another city several hundred miles away. Amy knew Beth was job hunting, but always assumed she'd stay here in their hometown. Amy felt devastated she was losing her best friend. At least that's how it felt. Beth tried to reassure Amy that they could still text each other or keep in contact by phone. There was even an e-mail option.

Beth reminded Amy that her family wasn't moving – they were still living here in town and she'd be back to visit everyone as often as she could. Amy was not reassured. She had experienced loss of a friend in the past.

She knew that they'd stay in touch for a while but as time went by, they'd find other interests. New friendships and relationships would evolve and they see less and less of each other. That thought saddened Amy, but the reality of the situation was that she had no control over it. She could not make Beth stay. She wanted to be a good friend and wish Beth the best of luck in her new life.

Amy finally realized this was not about her and she should feel positive for her friend.

It just felt like Beth was abandoning her and they'd drift farther and farther apart until in the end they'd have little in common. It seemed like a death knoll to their friendship.

Amy knew she was becoming melodramatic and decided she'd try hard to feel good for Beth, congratulate her and wish her good luck. It would be difficult enough for Beth to move to a strange city and start a new job without Amy burdening her with her sadness.

So, having come to terms with her own hollow feeling of loss, Amy put aside her sadness and decided to have a “going away” party for her best friend. She would invite all the people she knew who were in Beth's life and ask them to keep it a secret. The planning helped her to accept the reality that this was a good thing in her friend's life and she'd be happy for her, just as she'd want someone to be happy for her in the same situation.

###

Improperly Motivated **By Vick Elberfeld**

I wanted to write the great American novel, but I was too lazy
I wanted to compose my bucket list, but I lacked the will
I wanted to clean my house, but I was too tired
I wanted to call my doctor for a checkup, but I didn't have the energy
I wanted to write my relatives, but this seemed futile
I wanted to call my friends back, but I was ultimately too lazy
Now the week is nearly over, and I'm up for a nap
That I can and will do!
How about you?
How was your week?
Are you lazy too?

Oh, I dearly hope you are! This may sound cruel, but I hope that you, too, have had some bouts of procrastination at the very least. I don't want to be alone in my sloth, beginning my weeks with such ambition, making promises to myself that I'll likely never fulfill. There is so very much to do just to get this one poor life in order. The older and weaker I get, the less I feel inclined to do my errands, errands which will reappear anyway once my house is re-cluttered and I run out of food. And those are just the indoor tasks. Depending on the weather, I am outside shoveling snow, mowing the lawn, or trimming the foliage, all Sisyphean tasks which, if completed, won't help me advance in life, but if left undone, I won't have much of a life, and all my neighbors will hate me.

From time to time, I can't resist the urge to create a to-do list. I always begin with something extravagant such as "develop a cure for cancer" or "write the great American novel" or even "bring about world peace." Because these tasks are so far out of my league, I find they don't intimidate me; I can have a little fun with them, and relax myself into the task ahead. But proceeding down the list, I find the need to become more serious and statements such as "do the dishes and laundry, vacuum the living room, file your financial statements, call AT&T to dispute a charge" pop up, and I begin to feel very stressed, so stressed in fact that before I have even finished the list, I find myself wandering off and beginning a Sudoku puzzle, turning on the TV, or both. I have even drifted off to sleep while in the very process of creating a to-do list.

I struggled with clutter and procrastination even way back in college. My roommate was an absolute minimalist, who owned only a few tops, two pairs of jeans, and a couple of pairs of shoes. If an unexpected classmate entered our room, she'd apologize profusely for leaving our place such a mess, even though all she had out of order was one of her tops slung over the back of a chair. Of course, my half of the room was the real mess.

But whenever I called myself lazy, this kind roommate would insist I had it wrong. "You aren't lazy at all," she'd comfort me, and going on she'd conclude, "so stop putting yourself down. You are merely...improperly motivated!"

Improperly motivated, eh? So that's my problem! While not much of an excuse perhaps, this did make me feel a little better about myself, but it still didn't point the way to a solution. And retirement, which supposedly gives me more time to work on my deficiencies, also gives

me more time to indulge them. Friends now call me at all times of the day, and I distract myself by eating out with them, even hunkering down for hours over coffee. So, my windows remain unwashed, and ground cover is spreading out and ruining my lawn, even trespassing into my neighbors' lawns. I thought for a moment my heat wasn't working, but I refused to call a repairman, anticipating he'd trip over the clutter on my floors, and I'd be humiliated, not to mention liable for his medical bills! Often my mail goes un-sorted or even un-looked at, and as I'm still too primitive to set up payments online, who knows how many deadlines I am missing?

Little things add up. We were told as children, "a stitch in time saves nine," and I am way behind in those stitches. Sometimes I just stare at the clutter on my floor, not lifting a finger to move it, sort it, or throw it out, and I can see my life eroding before my eyes. Catastrophe looms due to the pile-up of all of the things I have left undone. Due to my many sins of omission, my life is unraveling, as I stare into a grim future. With a nod to T.S. Eliot for his poem, *The Hollow Men*, I'll say without any drama whatsoever:

This is the way my world ends
This is the way my world ends
This is the way my world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

The end.

###

It was Hollow
By Pauline Bastek

I always looked forward to Easter. My birthday was in early April so growing up it was a double celebration. The new dress and coat with matching hat and shoes was sure to be topped off by birthday gifts. We finally could see the green shoots coming out of the ground and warm breezes instead of northerly winds.

There was only one thing I did not want to get. A large chocolate Easter egg, beautifully decorated with pink and white frosted flowers and often my name written in icing on the top of it. I pretended to be pleased when I got one and tried to put it away saying that it was too pretty to break. The truth was that it was hollow, all empty, inside. The first time I discovered this, I remember bursting into tears and crying out that there was nothing inside. It was so pretty to look at and so disappointing inside. It was just a shell. I thought of how the best part of an egg is its inside and the chocolate egg had nothing inside. You ate it and it was gone. Now so many years later, I only buy solid chocolate Easter eggs and am happy to say that my life as well is as filled on the inside as fortunately it looks on the outside. A lesson learned many years ago from the hollow chocolate Easter egg.

###

A Man of Wisdom **By N. Stewart**

From the park bench where I sat, I watched the distinguished older man, sitting on a bench a little way down and across the lane from me. He let the sun shine full on his face and let the wind play with his full head of grey hair. He was dressed well and looked as if he cared about his neat appearance. I thought maybe he was in his late 70s or early 80s.

His image drew me in and I wondered what kind of life he had. Certainly, he had a filled life for he is still very good looking and carried himself with self-confidence. Was his life one of youthful, daring adventures, and now of gracefully growing older or was it a life where he fought misery and loneliness, having to learn a lesson? Charm and charisma exuded from him and I was intrigued.

He very slowly got up from his bench and stood for a moment to straighten out his spine before taking a step. He took one cautious step and then another until he regained his balance and then walked steadily toward my direction. I was slightly embarrassed that he might have seen me watching him and quickly looked down at the papers I had in my hand. He stopped. As he turned to face me, I saw something in his eyes that made me stop pretending that I wasn't paying attention to him and I stared directly into his eyes. They were azure blue, bright, and focused. I shaded my eyes from their brightness. I could see his eyes looked to the future rather than the past.

"Hello," he said, when directly in front of me. "Nice day isn't it. I saw you observing me and I thought you might be seeking some company."

"It is." I said. "Nice day, that is." I immediately became nervous and began mindlessly chattering. "I come here often for the peace I feel when I'm here and to listen to the soothing sounds of nature with the birds and the wind rustling through the trees. It's such a restful place for the many thoughts swimming around in my head and it gives me time to think through them... Sorry, I'm prattling on a bit. I could use some company today. Please, join me," and I pointed to the seat next to me.

He said without any small talk or preamble, "Life is good. Don't you agree?"

"Yes and no," I answered. "I'm alive and that is good. But as I've gotten older, life seems to lose the fullness it once offered and now I feel hollowed out on the inside. My spirit is withdrawing from its whole, leaving a shell that is being refilled with physical pain and emotional hurt. The outside remains intact with the exception of a few glitches delivered with aging but the desire, will, and energy I once had seems to be waning."

"I believe it's all in the way we look at life," he said. "We can still have new adventures, be positive, and learn new ways of doing things. There's much more available out there to us if we search for it. Try something new, or something that you always wanted or needed to do. Yes, we need to do them differently than we once did. Slower paced, for sure as we are not as quick nor are we as reckless about ourselves as we once were. Healing is not as fast or as promised as it formerly was. Forethought and caution is a must now for the aged.

We're no different than any other object in nature. Look at that tree. It was a sapling once, swaying in the wind and struggling to grow to maturity. Now, here it is with a thickened trunk to withstand storms, to live strong and straight until its time when its center also weakens and begins to hollow out. Throughout all the countless years, it stood against the wind, and even though its abilities to be a vibrant tree lessened or weakened and some parts of it died away, it endures. It functions as best as it can with all the imperfections and limitations of age until along comes a fair-minded wind. The tree succumbs to its hollow center and its weaknesses and falls to the ground, having served its purpose. No different than we are. We're born, mature, and die. That's life. But while we are here, we need to readjust, to appreciate what is offered, to make the best of what we have left of our life, and to not get bogged down by the prevailing winds of aging.

I won't take up any more of your times, he said. Enjoy the rest of your visit with nature. I must move on for it is getting late for me and I have more to do. Have a great day, my dear. Believe in what you can do and not what you can't do." And with that he slowly got up from the bench, straightened, turned, tipping his hat to me, and walked on down the lane.

I watched as his image faded at the far, far end of the lane. He was a philosopher, a man of wisdom, and stirred up some deep thinking within me about my struggles with aging.

I sat on the bench for quite a while longer and began to wonder if the man was real or an image of my mind, playing a trick on me when I relaxed and perhaps nodded off. Did my dream state conjure up the figure of the old wiseman or did we talk in real time? Either way I hoped to see him again and learn more from his aging wisdom.

###

The Ghost Rider of Sleepy Hollow By Mark Moe

The shadow demon made his way through the floors of the Inferno Hotel working his way to the top. In the Penthouse Suite, on a raised platform sat his boss, Mephisto the archdemon on a petrified oak throne. His fiery red skin stood in contrast to his onyx nails and wild, long hair. As the shadow demon approached, Mephisto turned his piercing gaze towards him and said, "Report my shadow demon."

"Yes sir, I have found a new candidate to be your next Ghost Rider." Mephisto interrupted the report by saying, "Does he have a romantic interest that I can exploit?" The shadow demon responded unfazed by his boss's interruption, "Yes he is quite enamored with a young, blonde elementary teacher named Katrina von Tassel." Mephisto stroked his black goatee with one hand as he asked his next question, "So what is his name and does he have a rival who might take his place by the side of the fair elementary teacher?"

He responded, "He is called Ichabod Crane and his rival, Abraham VanBrunt. In my opinion, VanBrunt would actually make a better Ghost Rider. He is physically strong for a human and it would be more powerful as a Ghost Rider. The only thing this Ichabod has going

for him is a strong sense of gullibility in the supernatural and witchcraft. Mephisto who had turned his eyes to stare at a nearby wall in contemplation, returned his stare to his servant to ask one more question, “Where does Ichabod reside?”

The demon smiled with his jet-black mouth and replied, “He lives in Salem, Massachusetts.” Mephisto’s smile spread from ear to ear showing a mouth full of sharp, ivory teeth as he said, “It looks like I am going to Salem then!” The shadow demon bowed his head and disappeared into the shadows of the dimly lit hallway outside of the Penthouse Suite.

As he rose from his throne, Mephisto changed both his clothes and physical appearance using his magic. He changed his height from 6’5 to 5’8 and his clothes changed from his usual attire to that of a merchant you would see walking around the early 1600s in Salem. He finished the transformation by changing his hair color to brown and the appearance of his sharp teeth. “Ichabod Crane, prepare yourself to become my servant!” he yelled to no one in particular as he created a magical portal to take himself to Salem.

He traveled between his realm and the human realm almost instantaneously. The purple flames created another portal for him to finish his transit between realms. Mephisto had chosen a location just a few miles outside of Salem. While he adjusted his bearings and verified that he was alone, he used magic to create a wagon full of cured meats and cheeses complete with a gray mare to pull his cart into town. Once inside the city limits, he headed to the Merchant Quarter where he paid for a booth to sell his wares. He did not care about the profits because, Mephisto was more concerned with spreading gossip. Hopefully, it would lead him to his future Ghost Rider, his personal Spirit of Vengeance. Knowing that Ichabod was drawn to tales of witchcraft and other supernatural events, Mephisto gladly spun many tales both real and false to all his customers in the hopes of luring the overly curious human into a “chance” meeting.

A few days went by, Mephisto was ready to give up and go looking for his query directly. He was patient, but he needed a Ghost Rider to maintain the balance of rogue demons and other evil entities who tried to usurp his rule. He turned to unload a large wheel of cheese from his cart so that he could offer it to another customer and he saw a man that resembled the shadow demon’s description of Ichabod Crane. “Could that be him?” he thought. So, he called out to the man, “You there, young man might I ask your name? You look like a knowledgeable fellow who could help me with a complex math problem that I have encountered while selling my meats and cheeses in this marketplace.”

“How did you know that I am a math teacher, sir? Was it my glasses I wear that gave it away?” The man smiled and said, “Oh, I have been around these parts for a long time and I recognize intelligent men when I see them. My name is Charles Daniels and you are?”

“Ichabod Crane, my good merchant. Now what is this complex math problem you need my expertise on?” The pair talked until the sunset and Charles got him to talk about everything including his romantic rival and the young, blonde, wealthy Miss Van Tassel. He finally gave him the push to action he wanted by asking, “From what you have told me of Mr. VanBrunt he is quite the specimen of physical strength and charm. How worried are you about losing Miss Von

Tassel to this massive, muscled, chiseled man?” The look of panic on Ichabod’s face made Mephisto smile inwardly.

“You know my dear Ichabod I could remove him from your equation. Would you be interested?” Ichabod nodded his head yes and replied, “What do I need to do?” Charles went to a small, locked chest on his cart and unlocked it. Once he opened it, he pulled out a paper contract from a golden tube and laid it flat on a near table. “If I remove VanBrunt, you shall become my servant, the Spirit of Vengeance, my Ghost Rider! Do we have a deal?”

Ichabod produced a pen out of his pocket to sign the contract, but as soon as he placed his hand upon it, a sharp edge drew his blood. One large drop of blood landed on the signature line. “Oh, that will do, my good Ichabod.” Ichabod stumbled away after signing the contract with the echoing sound of Charles’s laughter in his ears. He managed to find his way to the stable where his horse was being kept. He fell over next to his horse in the stall. As he tried to stand, he noticed that smoke started to appear first at his joints on his arms and legs. Then it spread by his neck. His whole body felt like it was on fire and his skin started to turn bright pink. The fire sensation was no longer just a sensation, but a reality as flames erupted up and down his body. His hair and skin burned off leaving a skeleton wearing his clothes and consumed by flames. His eyes became glowing orbs of fire as he finished his transformation. His faithful horse had remained by his side and surprisingly not bolted. The new Ghost Rider reached over to the loyal animal and forced a transformation from a normal brown horse to an ebony nightmare complete with flames consuming its hooves and matching flaming orbs for eyes. After that night, Ichabod Crane was never seen again, but the Ghost Rider lives on during the night in Sleepy “*Hollow*.”

###

Hollow, Too **By Kelly Tansor**

Almost all of the tables in the cafeteria were already full. I sat at our usual table near the back, which was still empty. I pulled my lunch out from my brown paper bag – a peanut butter sandwich, a bag of reduced fat potato chips, and a bottle of water. As I unscrewed the cap off my water bottle, I felt several students in the cafeteria turn their heads toward me. I looked up and noticed a few of them looking at me, but they would quickly turn away as soon as I made eye contact. I took a sip of my water as I scanned the room for Claudia. She was now paying for her lunch, with no one but the lunch lady looking at her. I felt jealous.

I unwrapped my sandwich from the plastic as Claudia made her way over to me. There was a spring in her step as she smiled at me. I politely smiled back, envying how she practically floated through the cafeteria.

“Same lunch as usual?” she asked as she sat across from me.

I held up my sandwich. “You know it.” I took a small bite and observed Claudia’s tray. She had a breaded chicken sandwich, a small salad, and a banana.

“Oh, so I have to tell you how my presentation went today,” Claudia said excitedly. She went on to describe how hard she had studied her notes and how much time went into her PowerPoint. Claudia knows how much I hate lunch, so she always tries to keep things as light-hearted and positive as she can.

I tried to smile and nod at all the appropriate times, but I was only half-listening. All I could think about was all the eyes on me. Any time I was about to take a bite of something, more heads would turn and more eyes would be on me. None of these people paid much attention to me before, unless it was to make some snarky comment about me – my appearance, the way I walked, the way I dressed, how my hair looked, etc.

But since coming back from treatment, it felt like all eyes were on me. More people would look at me, almost like they had seen a ghost. Yet no one would *talk* to me. They’d rather watch me from afar.

“Morgan, you okay?” I heard Claudia ask.

I blinked. “Sorry,” I said. “I’m just...really in my head right now.”

“What’s wrong?” she asked as she took a bite of her sandwich.

I sighed. “It’s like...okay, I’ve been back for about three days now. I was hoping by now that things would feel...I don’t know, *normal*, I guess. But people are still acting weird around me.”

“How are they acting weird?”

I scanned the room, glancing at every awkward face staring at my direction. “It feels like everyone’s afraid of me.”

Claudia put her sandwich down. “Well, it’s not everyday your classmate goes away for eating disorder treatment for two weeks. Maybe they’re worried, but they don’t know how to say it.”

“Worried?” I scoffed. “A month ago these same people would throw peanuts at me and call me Jack Skellington or Wednesday Adams. They would scream, ‘Eat a sandwich, eat a sandwich.’ And now, here I am eating a sandwich, and they’re all just *staring*.” I made eye contact with one boy sitting at the next table over who, of course, turned his head and pretended he wasn’t listening.

Claudia nodded. “It is weird how everyone kind of did a 360 like that.”

“180,” I corrected her. “360 is a full circle, you would end up right back where you started.” Claudia cocked her head. I bit into my sandwich, averting her gaze.

She sighed. “Regardless, you shouldn’t be focusing on everyone else. You need to focus on how *you* feel.” She leaned in and dropped her voice to a whisper. “You and I both know it wasn’t just the eating disorder you were trying to work on.”

I nodded. “Well, these people barely understand eating disorders. I guarantee they wouldn’t understand depression, either.”

“Dude,” Claudia exclaimed, “Tristan in Health class yesterday! Don’t even get me started!”

In Health class this week, we’ve been discussing depression and how to recognize it in our peers – which is proof to me that God has a sense of humor. Ms. Irving had asked us what were some ways we can help a friend who is opening up to us about having depression to the point where they thought about...well...Ms. Irving didn’t say the word, but we knew what she meant. Tristan’s answer had me baffled.

“I’d tell them to reach out to someone. Even if it’s someone you barely talk to, just be honest about it. It’s always good to know you’re not alone, as long as you make the effort, you know? And just try to stay positive. Not everything is all that bad, there *are* things in the world to be happy about. And maybe one day, you’ll find that one person that life is worth living for. That’ll make everything better, and feel like it was all worth it.”

“He clearly has no idea what depression even is,” I grumbled to Claudia.

“Like, sure, put *all* responsibility on the *depressed person* to feel happy,” Claudia said sarcastically. “Oh, and just find love! That’ll fix everything! Then you’ll be happy!”

“It’s not even just that,” I said, sitting up straighter. “Depression isn’t just *feeling sad*. It’s feeling sad and angry and worried and anxious and shameful and scared out of your mind – all until finally, you feel nothing. You’re just hollow.”

Claudia nodded and placed her hand on mine. I felt bad for how cold my hands were. “I know, Morgan. But hey, you’re already making *so* much progress.”

I shook my head. “How do you even know?”

She took her hand off mine and pointed at my plastic wrapper. “You ate the whole sandwich.”

I smiled. “I guess my stomach felt hollow, too.”

###

Hollow Dreams
By Edward J. Scheffler

In the idleness of emptiness
we muse ourselves in hollow
dreams

###

Ask Me Anything
By J. Smetana

Hey man did you have a HOLLOW feeling after you got your revenge on Stevie after all these years for playing that dirty trick on you guys when he took you guys to that gay bar? No, I felt great.

###

Behind the Library
By Katy Coakley

When I walked into the library, I wanted to take out all the books
I saw the shelves ranging from history to science fiction
As I read Fahrenheit 451, I suddenly hear a sound
I drop the book as it falls towards the ground behind the librarian's desk,
I saw a hollow in the wall
I take a peek and see a whole different world
I see many famous authors and they invite me into their world
I feel confused, but excited
Mr. Ray Bradbury introduces history to me
Mr. George Orwell discusses free speech with me
Mr. Issac Asimov shows me different kinds of robots.
Once they show books that have never been published, my jaw dropped
I wanted to take them with me, but I couldn't
They told me I need to keep them in their world for safety
But, they told that I can come back any time
When it was time to go back, the three encouraged me to keep reading
Bradbury said one of his famous quotes to me: "You Fail Only If You Stop Writing

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