

**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](mailto: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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**September Selection - Fail/Failing**

**Slip, Not Slide**  
**By Kelly Tansor**

"It happened again."

Morgan's hands shook in her lap as she sat across from Dr. Williams. She refused to meet his gaze.

"What happened again?" Dr. Williams asked casually.

Morgan shook her head. "I just...I couldn't do it. It was right in front of me, it looked *amazing*, so I took one bite – I was shaking the *entire* time – and...I don't know, my heart started pounding out of my chest, and I just immediately ran to the bathroom and..." Morgan's voice trailed off. She knew what her next words would be.

Dr. Williams nodded. "You relapsed."

Morgan's eyebrows creased. She finally looked up at him. "That's such a weird word. *Relapse*. Isn't that for drug addicts or alcoholics?"

Dr. Williams smiled and leaned back in his chair. "Well, it's meant for any kind of illness, whether it be physical or, in this case, mental. Yes, drug addiction is an illness. So is alcoholism. And so are eating disorders."

Morgan rolled her eyes. “So, I guess this means I start over, huh?”

“Not necessarily,” said Dr. Williams. “Here’s the thing: Relapses happen. It’s not fun to talk about, but they happen. But instead of thinking of it as, ‘Now I’m back at square one,’ we should really think of it as a slip. We’ve all slipped and fallen before, right?” Morgan nodded. “It’s human nature. No one’s perfect, and no one’s *recovery* is perfect, either. The important thing here, Morgan, is to make sure this *slip* doesn’t turn into a *slide*.”

Morgan folded her arms. She was never fond of the jargon Dr. Williams used with her – relapse, recovery, slip, slide, etc. - but she could see where he was coming from.

“So how would this slip become a slide then?” asked Morgan, playing into Dr. Williams’ language.

Dr. Williams smiled at her. “It sounds to me like you’re already keeping that from happening.” Morgan looked at him, confused. He went on. “You’ve already noted that this was a slip, and you do not want to continue this. You are already taking the right steps to make sure your eating disorder does not take full control of you.”

“It feels like it already has,” Morgan admitted.

“But you were able to take that control *back*,” he said.

“But I failed!” Morgan blurted out. “It was a simple task and I failed. All I had to do was eat a stupid sandwich. Anyone can do that!”

Dr. Williams folded his hands on his desk. “You know, I had a client who said the same thing about an apple. Another one said that about spaghetti. Just last week I had someone say that about a pineapple.”

Morgan blinked. Where was he going with this?

“My point is,” he said, “we cannot compare ourselves to others. We don’t know anyone else’s struggles in life. Not only that, but by doing that we are invalidating ourselves and our *own* struggles.”

“So, I’m not failing?” asked Morgan.

“I wouldn’t use a strong word like that,” he replied. “Like I said, this was a slip. That doesn’t mean you can’t get back up and keep going, right?”

Morgan nodded. “Yeah, but maybe not a sandwich next time.”

“That’s another thing I wanted to mention,” said Dr. Williams. “Now, it’s not like a teacher told you to eat a sandwich or you’ll fail school or something. You challenged yourself to eat the sandwich. That’s commendable, and I’m glad you at least tried. But now we know that maybe we should take a few smaller steps before we get to that point again. But again, that’s not failing. That’s learning what your boundaries are.”

Another one of Dr. Williams’ therapy words. *Boundaries*. But he had a point.

Morgan sighed. “Well, if this really is just a slip, I might need some help getting back up.”

Dr. Williams threw his arms out, as if to present himself. “And that’s what I’m here for.”

###

**It's Only Just the Beginning**  
**By Katy Coakley**

He was only a Eastern European man trying to make a living  
He was leaving his home country under communist rule  
The family did not have enough money  
The airports were crowded as everyone was trying to get out  
There was only one lucky ticket left  
Looking out the gray sky, he felt he was no longer Eastern European  
When the plane landed, he stepped foot in Chicago  
Couldn't speak a single word of English  
Bought a small home in Rosemont  
Tried to apply as a professor  
He was declined  
He came home and ate pierogies and borscht  
The next day, he studied English as much as he could  
He struggled with some words  
As time went on, he applied again  
They accepted him, but he was nervous  
He felt sick  
He knew he would fail  
On his first day, one student called him out on his English  
He then told him: "Well, like you, I'm here to learn"  
At this moment, he knew he was getting better.

###

**The School Yard Fight**  
**By N. Stewart**

“Come here, son. We need to talk before you start doing your homework.”  
“I didn’t do it.”  
“Didn’t do what?”  
“Nothin.”  
“Your teacher sent an e-mail that she wants to meet with you and me about the fight you had with Nico today. Jack, what happened and I want you to tell me the truth.”  
“He started it,” said Jack  
“For now, I don’t really care who started it. I want to hear what happened from you. If you fail to tell me the truth, the consequences will be greater than if you told me the truth the first time. Got it.”  
“Yes, Ma’am.”  
“Go on. I dropped you off at school this morning and....”  
“When I got out of the car, I saw him standing behind the bushes, waiting for me. He gave me a finger. I tried to avoid him but he kept after me saying some bad things.”  
She said, “And, what kind of things did he say to you?”  
“Mom, I don’t want to repeat his bad words.”  
“Was it about you personally?”

“Yes,” he said with his head hanging down.

“It’s okay you can say the words. I understand how words can hurt. Was this the first time he did this to you?”

“No, almost every day for the last week he waits for me and then he yells that I’m stupid, slow, a wimp, a sissy and, sorry Mom, he says I suck. I walk away like you told me I should if someone says something to me but today, he grabbed the strap of my backpack and spun me around, knocking me down onto the ground. The other kids were all standing around us in a circle, pointing and laughing at me and yelling ‘fight, fight.’

I got up and I know I shouldn’t have but I took a swing and I missed. He threw his head back and laughed at me. That’s when I ran head first into his belly as hard and as fast as I could. He fell down and hit his head on the cement just as Mrs. Jones came out of the school to see what was happening. The kids pointed at me. She called for help and then took me to the principal’s office. I heard the ambulance siren and knew I was in trouble. I told Mrs. Jones that he hit me first. Later, they let me go to my classes, saying they were going to contact you. After school, I came right home.”

“Why didn’t you tell me what happened when you first got home?”

“I was afraid you’d be angry with me if I told you that I punched Nico in the stomach,” Jack said. “I was hoping they wouldn’t contact you and that it would all go away.”

“It didn’t. I’m not angry with you but I am disappointed in your choice of buying into a bully’s tactics. That’s what the bully wants – you to react so he or she can feel powerful and in control of the situation. If you don’t respond, the balance of power shifts back to you.

Jack, you will go with me to meet with the principle and you will explain what happened and how long this has been going on. We’ll straighten this out. It sounds like you tried to do the right thing by walking away from the situation, and although I don’t like fighting, this time you had the right to defend yourself when he touched you.

I asked for the truth and I believe you about what happened. I wish you had said something sooner about Nico’s behavior and not waited until this incident happened and I had to ask. There will be no consequence for telling the truth, but there will have to be for fighting. You will have to apology for your actions to Mrs. Jones and the principal, and you will also apology to Nico for hurting him.

How do you feel about that? What do you think should be your punishment?”

“I’m sorry, Mom. I didn’t mean to hurt him but he had it coming. I know, I know that’s wrong. Here’s my phone. You can keep it for the rest of the week.”

“Fair enough. There’s cookies and milk on the table if you want them, and then you can go do your homework,” she said with a growing motherly admiration in her voice.

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## **Nipsey Russell Roasts Don Rickles**

**By J. Smetana**

Hey man did you FAIL to get the Natural American Spirit butts for Jerry?  
No I didn’t fail, I didn’t even try. He’s never paid me for the Lucky Strikes I got him from the Swedish Tobacco Shop – and that’s when a carton cost ten bucks!

###

**Fail/Failing**  
**By Edwaard Schefler**

We will be judged on the  
splendor of our  
failures.  
(By William Faulkner)

One of the greatest of all novelist THEODORE DREISER  
Who wrote:

An American Tragedy,  
Sister Carrie,  
The Titan

Came from poor and humble beginnings,  
He was mocked and laughed at by the critics.  
His grammar was poor, and far below  
average in school.

Considered a failure at every job he ever  
had. Yet never discouraged he persevered.

Challenging all assumptions of who could,  
or should not qualify as a writer.  
His work combined dense textual detail.  
With all style and genre in the conflict  
of inherent structure.

Theodore Dreiser himself said:  
“I seethed to express myself.”

###

**A Marriage Failure or Not**  
**By Pauline Bastek**

Received a call from a friend yesterday informing me that her sister had moved out of state after ending her marriage of 41 years. She said it was a long story and proceeded to list reasons for the failure of a marriage of such a long duration.

I would hardly consider a relationship that produced three successful children two of them professionals and the youngest a successful artist despite a challenging physical disability. Also, their relationship was a material successful, enabling them to enjoy a life style, while not in the top 1% of the population, provided not only college educations but graduate school with vacations in addition to a second home.

If dissolving the relationship in order to proceed in separate directions is their choice, why not wish them well. I'm sure they'll be successful if their past is any indication. They've certainly earned it.

My friend would not hear it. All she kept repeating was that after 41 years, they were breaking up their family and they wouldn't be able to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. What would everyone say, implying that their marriage failed.

I couldn't listen anymore and told her I had an important call coming in and would get back to her. I had to get off the phone before I lost it and told her that if she considered ending a relationship of 41 years to be a failure simply because the parties decided to end it, she was a failure as a sister who should have been proud of the successes their marriage produced and not dwelling on its end.

My thoughts went to a recent golden wedding celebration of the cousin who was best man at my wedding and his wife. They had the most acrimonious relationship I can recall, and the kindest remark I could make about their children is that they had the strength left to escape the parental home sooner rather than later. They remained in their relationship, celebrating it with over 50 other couples at the cathedral and at a reception later at which they avoided looking at each other. Now that was a failure but it survived and so was celebrated.

I did not attend as I was happy after the end of my marriage, in the happiness I found after ending it.

I remember the words of my son at the time a friend was sympathizing with him on his parents getting a divorce. He smiled and said that his mom and dad were both great people but not together. I was not a failure if my son could recognize this.

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### **The Immortal Yellowbeard** **By Mark Moe**

Yellowbeards are never more dangerous than when we are dead. At least that is what I thought until my son, Daniel gave up his immortality to save my own. He said, "There is room for only one Yellowbeard. Father, I am giving you my immortality to fix yours. The world needs a Yellowbeard and who better than the original." After he said that, the unnatural green light that is a part of our immortal life force poured out of him and into me restoring my youthful appearance to that of a thirty-something man with a huge yellow beard. Afterwards, his body turned to blackened ash and blew away in the wind. "Don't worry lad, I will make you proud. I will collect so much treasure and so many women as trophies, your head would spin if you were here right now."

When I said that, it was two hundred years ago. The year is now 1848. Now I am still very much pirating and I have created both a legitimate and illegitimate empire. On one side, I have a built a great shipping and trading company called Anthrax Shipping that hides all my nefarious pirating. It has become more necessary to create this other income because, the sea has gotten more crowded with every country fighting to get a piece of the trade routes. Piracy has gotten harder because of all the naval escorts following what were previously unprotected, merchant ships. I might be immortal, but the rest of my crew is not so lucky. It takes a lot of effort to commandeer new ships and find able-bodied, hearty crew members. Every new adventure for piracy is costing me more and more resources.

Luckily for me, my wife Mrs. Yellowbeard, is the legitimate face of Anthrax Shipping and she has managed it quite well. She goes by the name she had before we were married, Lady Smith. If it were me, no one would believe it to be a real company because, who could see the notorious Yellowbeard

doing anything that was not blatant piracy. She has been quite clever too, since she has turned around and sold much of the mercantile items that we acquired as a result of piracy. The merchants are never wiser to the fact that we are selling them stolen cargo. The profit has been great and allowed us to buy a small fleet of ships for our shipping business, our own large island with a hidden cove for my pirate ships and a dedicated harbor for our merchant ships. The cove also holds my four pirate ships and has a special underground tunnel to bring the mercantile goods right to the shipping side quickly. In fact, the runaround time from when the goods come in on the pirate cove to the merchant side is usually about six to twelve hours depending on what is being brought over.

So, with two flourishing industries, you would think that I am too big to "fail, " but I can't help but wonder what would have happened if Dan was the one to survive. What would he do in terms of running things in my absence? I am fairly certain, he would turn away from piracy and just be another damn, high-class merchant. He was only interested in piracy because it helped me. Dan without my involvement would have remained a simple gardener. A Yellowbeard as a gardener, who would believe it. I certainly would not have accepted it. Even if I was dead, I would come back to put a stop to that. For three generations, we Yellowbeards have been pirates and I would have wanted Dan to follow in our glorious footsteps. My father and grandfather were not so lucky to achieve immortality, but I found the secret and inadvertently gave it to my wife in a night of passion. Dan got it as a result of that as well.

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### **Then and Now** **By Vicki Elberfeld**

When I was a little girl, I thought it important to stay up all night on Christmas Eve so I could catch Santa in the act of bringing toys for me and my kid brother. I wanted to watch him drink the milk and eat the cookies we carefully laid out for him and his reindeer. I also wanted to watch Santa enter our home, since we didn't actually have a chimney for him to slide down into our apartment, and Mom and Dad never failed to lock our doors. In fact, we didn't own a house or a fireplace with a chimney until I was twelve years old and no longer believed in Santa Claus anyway. I would have been thrilled to see a carriage with reindeer flying through the air and landing on the roofs of our neighbors. But there was always a force much stronger than my desire to observe firsthand the events of the most magical night of the year. That force was nothing other than sleep itself.

And it was always the same story. I was never able to see the fairy fly into my bedroom, leaving shiny new quarters with glitter in a small wad of tissue paper under my pillow in exchange for a tiny baby tooth. It was really a pity I never caught the Easter bunny hopping into my bedroom with a basket full of yummy chocolate cream egg and leaving beautifully printed cards with ingenious clues on where to find colored eggs. I'd miss the bunny hopping, the fairy flying and Santa Claus placing heavy, beautifully wrapped gifts around our Christmas tree. And all because of stupid old sleep!

But all that was only because I was young. Now that I am old, I could summon any or all of these supernatural creatures to my home with little to no danger of nodding off. I would happily listen to their adventures traveling throughout the world, and I would be so glad of the company! But there's a major problem here. At this point in time, I may get presents from friends before Christmas, but no gifts appear under my tree Christmas morning unless I place them there myself. And at my age tooth loss is unfortunately no longer a cause for celebration. Unlike baby teeth, my grown-up teeth don't painlessly fall out, they have to be extracted, and no

fairy leaves me money for them. On the contrary, I pay exorbitant amounts to my dentist to remove them! On Easter I now have to boil and color my own eggs, and no delicious chocolate eggs appear in baskets for me Easter morning. But it's not only Santa, the tooth fairy, and the Easter Bunny who fail to visit me. Truth to tell, I cope with their loss reasonably well. Sadly, the most important visitor of all neglects me horribly which has a major impact on my life's quality. And that visitor is my long, lost sleep.

Sleep is one of the most powerful forces I've ever encountered and appears to have a mind of its own. As a child I lacked the ability to ward off sleep; it overpowered me when I wanted to put my attention on events, I considered far more interesting and important, and I hated those feelings of helplessness in the face of it. As an adult I feel helpless too, only for different reasons. Instead of failing to ward off sleep, it eludes me when I most long for it. I have tried on many occasions to convince myself that I can summon sleep if only I want it badly enough, but no matter how much I will it, sleep keeps me at bay. As a child I would have given most anything to stay awake only a very few nights per year. As an elderly person, I would give everything to sleep all night every night of the year. Without sleep my nights are filled with restlessness and anxiety and my days with exhaustion. What was once an unwelcome visitor is now most deeply desired.

It dawns on me that what was written in that old song is unfortunately true. You really "Don't know what you got 'til it's gone."

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