

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](#).

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
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November 2023 Selection – Eye(s)

Surroundings
By Kelly Tansor

Mindy and I jog around the block a few times. Despite this being the same neighborhood I have lived in all my life, I feel nostalgic, as if I were seeing an old friend for the first time in years. After spending last night (and most of this morning) holed up in my room hiding under my blankets, I had forgotten how bright the daylight was. In fact, I had never realized how tall the buildings are or how much sunlight reflects off the windows. There are more children playing outside than I had ever seen before, probably because summer vacation has started for them. The grass appears greener and the flowers bloom brighter. How does this all seem so familiar yet so new all at once?

Soon, Mindy and I decide to jog around the park. It would be my first time going to that park without Edwin in two years. I remind myself that Edwin isn't my sole connection to that park, though. Mindy and I grew up playing there all the time. It was where Mindy taught me how to pump my legs on the swing. Our dad taught us all how to ride a bike near the grassy areas. In middle school, it was my go-to hangout place with my friends. As we approach the park, those are the memories I keep at the forefront of my mind—not my memories with Edwin.

As we jog past the playground and approach the baseball diamonds, a couple holding hands pass us in the opposite direction. I feel a slight pull in my heart at the sight of them. They have

something that I don't have anymore, and there's nothing I can do about it. I land my feet harder as we pass them.

Mindy and I keep pressing forward. As I keep jogging, I feel all my tension in my shoulders melt away. My body feels lighter than air, and my legs move almost effortlessly. All I can hear is the sound of my heartbeat as my feet hit the pavement. The feeling of peacefulness overwhelms me. The only thing on my mind is the rhythm of my heartbeat and the sights around me—the city, the people, and my sister.

We pass the same hill that Edwin and I went to all the time. The same hill that he told me he would be leaving. It is then I realize that not only was Edwin telling me he was leaving for college—he was leaving *me*. But without *actually* leaving me. He kept me dangling on a line because he was too scared to—

“Louise?” Mindy’s voice brings me back to earth. My pace has stalled without me noticing. Mindy and I slow down to a stop. “Should we turn back?” she asks.

I stand tall with my hands on my hips, allowing my breath to catch up. I keep my eyes on my surroundings as I remind myself that I’m no longer in that moment with Edwin. I’m here now with Mindy, and there’s nothing bad happening to me in this moment. I deeply inhale the crisp, clean air around me. The air feels intoxicating, almost healing. I exhale, feeling the tightness leave my lungs. “No, I’m good now,” I tell Mindy. We continue with our jog.

###

Thanksgiving Day Comes First **By N. Stewart**

Thanksgiving Day is a time, or at least it was, a time to be thankful for what we have. A time to be glad to gather with family and friends, to enjoy the bountifulness of nature with all its trimmings. It has gotten lost in the Pre-Christmas rush that starts even before Halloween, selling merchandised items to the masses. There’s *Jingle Bells* played over the store’s loud speakers in early October, followed shortly thereafter by flashy Christmas trees drawing our eyes to their site, and the oversized ornaments atop display cases and dangled before us from the ceiling. We are driven to buy more and more merchandise each year to appease our perhaps unappeasable family members and friends that already have everything. I try to ignore all that hub-bub until after Thanksgiving Day.

Thanksgiving is for remembering with gratitude what we have been given over the past year. I am grateful for what I have, who I am, and my place in life. I am especially grateful that my feelings remain alive.

As time approaches, I can see the colors of fall as I walk the path through the forest. I can pick out the reds, oranges, yellows, browns, and fading green leaves of the trees as I pass. I can

clearly see the distinctive, individual faces of my friends and family as I invite them to my house for dinner, remembering all the times we have been together.

I can hear the birds that remain and winter-over. Yesterday, a red cardinal sang as his mate sat in my crabapple bush, eating the ripened red berries off the branches. Then he changed places with her and ate to his fill, providing both sight and sound for my eyes to behold and my ears to hear. I listen and learn what family and friends have to say as we share our stories.

The cooking aroma on Thanksgiving Day is undeniable: turkey roasting in the oven, filled with homemade onion-sage stuffing; the potato water boiling away, putting moisture into the room and steaming up the windows; the smell of fresh baked pumpkin pie with its spices, lofting in the air throughout the house. Ah...the smell of fresh brewed coffee. It smells so good.

The taste of Thanksgiving is an utter delight as dinner is served and we begin to eat. The turkey tender to the tooth; the gravy, sliding its way down the throat; the tartness of the cranberries taken with each bite, refreshes the palate; the acorn squash with the sliced apples and brown sugar filling oozing out is the perfect texture; and here comes the pumpkin pie and freshly whipped real cream, followed by homemade cookies and chocolate candies. I'm stuffed. It was so good. Perhaps, just room for a little spoonful more. Better not though, for tomorrow there will be leftovers to savor.

The day ends as it always does. It is time to say good bye to friends and family. A touch, a hand shake, a hug, or a kiss on the cheek and then, after all the comings and goings of Thanksgiving Day, the house is quiet again. The sights, the sounds, the tastes, the smells and the lasting touch of Thanksgiving remains, surrounding me. I'm grateful now to quietly sit and enjoy my memories of a thankful day.

The Christmas rush will come to me, but it needs to wait. Thanksgiving Day comes first.

###

Eyes **Carol Karvon**

Everyone always said Sally's eyes were her best feature.

Sally, herself doubted it, but just said "thank you," whenever anyone mentioned her eyes. Sally looked a lot like her mother even to her dark brown eyes. But she was never truly satisfied. She always wanted blue eyes like her dad and brother. She thought blue eyes had a special sparkle and brown eyes were just boring.

Nature had played a joke on her brother. According to everything Sally read if one parent had light eyes and the other had dark eyes, the children would usually have dark eyes. Dark would be the dominant eye color.

Sally's eyes had been compared to dark chocolate (she liked that one) and sometimes even black olives (she didn't like that one). Dark chocolate was one of her favorite foods and she always considered it a health food, even before it was recognized as such. She usually just smiled politely and ignored the person describing her eyes. Deep down she just wanted them to let her be.

What Sally had finally realized was that no one had any control over the color of their eyes and she learned to live with that fact.

Oh, sure you could get colored contact lens and they would alter your eye color to a degree. But she always thought looking out at the world through colored contact lens must be like seeing things through a colored haze and she didn't want to do that. She wasn't desperate enough and that seemed to be a desperation effort to change a part of her. She wanted no part of it. She had tried contact lens in the past and they just never suited her.

In the end, you still had the same eye color and were the same person when you removed the contacts. What really mattered was how your eyes saw others and the world around you, not their color. It was often said that eyes were "the windows of the soul."

###

Twin Shadow again flirts with '80s bombast, to better results
By J. Smetana

Hey man you got EYES on Bob?

No man I ain't seen that cat since Christmas Eve when he was perched on a stool in my kitchen singing Hey Jude.

Perched on a stool
in my kitchen
singing Hey Jude

That's almost a haiku!

Yeah almost. Anyway he'd smoked so much weed he was unable to move, unable to dig out Rosemary's car.

Wow!

Yeah that was the Christmas Eve of record snowfall...impossible to forget!

###

Return Gummi: Part 7
Mark Moe

Zummi removed another pouch of lavender-colored powder and recited a spell to open a portal to the past. A magenta-purple swirling portal opened and the Gummies filed in one at a time with the last to enter being Kylie. Before she went in, she waved goodbye to Edward and said, "Take care of Gummi Glenn while we are away. I hope to see you when we get back."

"That should not be hard, I do not know how to get out of here using the quick tunnels. So, I might be camping out here for a while."

Kylie laughed as she went through and before the portal closed, Zummi's arm shot back through and dropped a piece of paper with detailed instructions on how to use the quick tunnels to get back to the surface. "Keep it safe," Zummi called.

As the Gummies exited the portal, Kylie noticed immediately that they had arrived in a different room other than the Great Hall. "Zummi, I thought we were going to the Great Hall. You messed up your spell," Kylie replied.

"Actually, my dear, I did this on purpose because we do not know if Winthorpe left some of his Ogres to guard the Great Hall. We are in a storage room a couple of floors down from it. Although we need to check on the condition of the Great Hall, our main goal is to work our way undetected to the Great Seal. I can think of no greater surprise to the Ogres and Morgana than to summon the Gummi Army right under their noses," replied Zummi.

"Zummi, an army coming from the past seems unlikely that they will be able to arrive without being noticed and even less able to show up in a giant portal with the origin point of the Great Seal," responded Kylie.

"This is true, my dear and very inciteful on your part. I do not know how the details of this will work, only that we need the seven of us to do it. I think we should use the maintenance tunnels to avoid giving away our position. I am sure you realize how loud the quick tunnel coasters are when we use them."

Kylie nodded and said, "Lead on then, my friend."

The six Gummies followed their sorcerer down the rarely used tunnels to arrive at the Great Seal with only a few lazy, sleeping Ogres along the way, but mostly on the higher levels. Zummi went to inspect the condition of the Great Seal, while the others found brooms and brushes to clean the seven contact points on the Seal. Once the preparations were complete, each of them stood upon one of the contact points and waited for Zummi to cast the spell.

"Now everyone, I will need your help to cast this spell," he said as he handed out sheets to everyone with seven different spell components. "Just chant your individual parts when I call out to each of you."

Zummi returned to the center contact point and began the spell. The room once again lit up and incandescent glow from their contact points started out as white and changed to the color of magic by each of the bear's individual magic. For Kylie, it was bright pink, Zummi was lavender, Grammi rose pink, Cubbi cobalt blue, Tummi orange, Sunni golden yellow and Gruffi crimson red. As they each chanted their parts in tum, the seven Gummis found themselves teleported to a faraway hillside about five miles from Gummi Glenn. %ere a multitude of magic portals opened at the base of the hill and the Great Gummi Army emerged from them armed to the teeth with full plate armor, swords, axes, several contingents of archers and cavalry, and one thousand Gummi wizards. From the last portal, the legendary Gummi General, General Roggi appeared on a horse and looked around for the Gummis who summoned them.

The seven Gummis quickly made their way to the bottom of the hill and went to speak with him.

He dismounted from his horse to greet them. He stood slightly taller than Tummi, but unlike Tummi he was quite muscular in his physique. He had a large red, blue, and silver shield on his back with the Gummi symbol in the center. His armor looked like modern day Kevlar, but still some sort of enchanted metal. He had a serious look upon his face, but an easy smile appeared easily as he greeted them.

"My name is General Roggi. You must be the seven Gummis who summoned us back to the living world. Please introduce yourselves and tell me about the threat we face."

Zummi stepped forward and introduced the rest of the Gummis and then said, "My dear General Roggi, we face the threat of a powerful sorcerer named Morgana who is working with an army of Ogres led by Lord Winthorpe. She has magically enhanced the Ogres so that they deal greater physical damage with every hit and increased their pain tolerance. Between these two villains, they have driven us from our home in Gummi Glenn. have also threatened the nearby human kingdom who is one of our allies."

General Roggi looked out in the distance as he contemplated the information. When he refocused his attention on them, his blue-gray eyes gleamed like sharpened steel.

"Morgana is a name that I had hoped to never hear again. The Ogres are not the problem because they are brainless half-wits. We defeated her before long ago, but this time, she will not get the luxury or mercy of escaping the justice she deserves. We will be ready to move out in a few hours. Be ready my friends, because the Gummis will stop her whatever it takes!"

###

Eyes
By Edward Scheffler

The eyes of the LORD
Go to land fro...
In search of
Whose HEART
Is open to Him.
(2 Chronicles 16:9)

And for what purpose are we given eyes,
But to observe those things around us,
Gazing intently.

Our eyes behold scarlet shades in twilight sunsets.
Our eyes see the majestic splendor of snow capped mountains,
The placid scene of wooded tree-lined lakes.

Yet it's the pleasing fairness of the heart
In the eyes of kindness, awareness and of
Understanding which surpasses all
Forms of comeliness and endeavor.

###

Pondering Mortality
By Vicki Elberfeld

I am afraid of death. Something in me instinctively recoils whenever I approach the subject in writing or in speaking. Writing feels like an opportunity to express myself and discover who I really am. Death would seem to be the opposite, for it annihilates that very self. Given the Grim Reaper's inevitability, I feel the best I could do would be to ward it off for some few months or years. But there are no guarantees. My dad was diagnosed with diabetes in his mid-sixties. Mom was a nurse, and she worked hard on her shopping and cooking and meal planning to prepare tasty meals that would also keep his blood sugars low. Dad fully cooperated, and between the two of them, his numbers were beautiful. Nevertheless, a year after the diabetes diagnosis, he contracted pancreatic cancer and died within six months.

I'm told I do not need to fear my own departure in and of itself. After I'm dead I won't experience pain, and I will feel much as I did before I was born, for that was a time there was no "I" in existence to feel anything at all. Mark Twain once said, "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."

Apparently I am not alone in my inability to imagine myself dead. Whether our brains are shielding us by preventing us from going there, or whether we can not imagine ourselves experiencing a total lack of consciousness, the endeavor feels frustrating and futile.

I find the phrase "time passing" to be disturbing as it brings me closer to the inevitable, and I wish time would just slow down already and stop hurtling forward. It seems I've always suffered from FOMO, a Fear Of Missing Out. On those frequent occasions when an event conflicts with another, I attempt to go to both, and while I'm at the one activity, I tend to torture myself by imagining what's going on at the other one.

But here's the thing. In death, I'll be missing out on not just a meeting or two but on absolutely EVERYTHING! I'll need to say good-bye to everyone and everything I've ever loved, assuming I am not caught unawares. I hope I will always feel profound joy and gratitude for the days I am living as well as the days still to come. I believe Phil Ochs said it best in his song entitled *When I'm Gone*, and I am particularly moved by a few verses:

*I won't feel the flowing of the time when I'm gone
All the pleasures of love will not be mine when I'm gone
My pen won't pour a lyric line when I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here*

*All my days won't be dances of delight when I'm gone
And the sands will be shifting from my sight when I'm gone
Can't add my name into the fight while I'm gone
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here*

*I guess I have to do it,
Guess I have to do it while I'm here.*

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