

**The truth is...**we gather on the Third Monday of each month (except January and February where it is the fourth Monday) 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.

**Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group**  
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**January 2024 Selection – Cloud/Cloudy**

**How to deal with nerves**  
By J. Smetana

CLOUDS in your coffee and you're so vain...  
Peaches are you doing karaoke?  
Yeah man can you dig it? I wanted to do hip hop but Aunt Judy says it's beyond the pale.  
Wasn't that last month?  
Never mind – where's Tipper Gore when you need her and her bold campaign to clean up popular music. She went after hair metal bands for double entendre but since the obscene filth now comes from Negroes she's dropped that project like a hot rock.

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**Icarus**  
By Kelly Tansor

His mother said that from the moment he first opened his eyes, he was always drawn to the light. If any room had a ceiling light or a lamp turned on, that's what his eyes fixated on. When he could walk, he would try to reach toward any light he saw. His parents had to keep him from climbing onto the counters, lest he tried to climb his way to the ceiling light. He loved the light, and would stop at nothing to reach it.

As he grew older, he shared his love of the light with others. “We can all reach it together,” he would say, “as long as you help me.” He gathered a group of followers to help build an empire that would ultimately reach the light. Many were on board, but some had suspicions. Those who were skeptical began to see shadowy figures emerge out of him. They would alert him of these demons, but he wouldn’t listen. There *were* no demons, he would tell them. Besides, if there were demons, these people clearly deserved to see them.

He told his followers how much he loved them after working so hard, saying how important they all were—unless someone stepped out of line or talked back. They would quickly be cast out, now that they no longer mattered. If any follower grew too tired, he would cry and plead to them to continue pushing. “Please don’t kill my one and only dream,” he would say. Fearing alienation, his followers bent over backwards for him, yet some of them just couldn’t meet his demands fast enough. He turned a blind eye to them. They didn’t do enough—therefore, they didn’t do anything at all. His demons were continuing to incur their wrath, even if his followers could not see.

People warned him. “You’re flying too close to the sun.” “Your head is getting too big.” “You’re growing mad with power.” “You’re becoming an Icarus.” He dismissed them all. Naysayers. Doubters. Bullies. Villains. All of them.

Their empire grew weaker since there were now fewer people to help maintain their base. In-fighting, poor organization, and lack of resources began to take their toll. The whole operation was chaotic and barely holding together. Still, he promised them they would still be able to reach the light. “Don’t lose hope,” he’d tell them. “I know we have less people on our side, but they were wrong. They didn’t believe in us. They didn’t do enough for me—for *us*. I *know* we can do it.”

After much trudging along, the day finally came when he would climb to the light. His followers were ragged, weak, and hungry. Still, they asked, “We’re coming too, right?”

“Of course not,” he told them. “This was *my* dream. You all helped me to achieve it, and I’m grateful. But I must go on my own from here.”

His followers stood aghast.

With his back turned on his old life and his eyes fixed to the light, he began his ascent. He whisked past the birds and sauntered through the clouds. He dove through the atmosphere and flew beyond the sky. He reached heights that common men only dreamed of—but more educated men had cautioned him against. But the light was *right there*. It was coming closer to him.

Soon enough, the light was so huge that it was all he could see. It grew more bright and intense as he came closer, but he felt himself sinking. The demons he had kept hidden were now exposed to the light, and they weighed him down tremendously. Just as he was able to reach his hand to the light, his sinking turned to plummeting. He cascaded further and further down until he crashed in the place where he had begun.

He never took his eyes off that light.

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**Clouds**  
**By Edward Scheffler**

The sky, a sea  
A flotations floor of cumulous  
crystal vapors pour.  
Airlifts of jetstreams,  
updrafted flow.  
Blues awash in oceans indigo.  
Air stratosphere of frosted froth.  
Here a speck slithers slowly,  
silently aloft.

A speck, a slender thread with trails  
so drawn. Its needlings luster of silver  
tailings prong.  
Four thousand maiden voyages,  
These flights, with wings,  
With wishes quest, ascend  
to heights.

These corners of our compass round.  
For to, for fro, lo heavens bound.  
Bliss of solitude, supreme domain.  
Toast princely Pegasus, of laurels,  
and legends, where lofty pilots reign

(Source) Aeronautics: U.S. A.F. Academy

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**Third Act**  
**by Vicki Elberfeld**

Until quite recently, I didn't realize how many pluses and minuses there were to retirement and old age. First, the good parts. When I went to bed in the early morning today, my outdoor thermometer read -10 degrees. No worries. I didn't have to do the dreaded getting up early Monday morning thing. Even if my insomnia kicked in after hitting the sack at 3:00 am, I'd be just fine. My insomnia actually did kick in a little, but that was no problem as I slept until noon, yet I still didn't bother to get out of bed until 1:45, just a few minutes before my writing group began. No having to dress up or even bathe first, no facing the cold, and never any driving at all during rush hour. Got some writing done during my Shut Up and Write Meeting, and I stole a little time to warm up my steel cut oatmeal with mandarin oranges for breakfast. I felt like a lady of leisure.

Finally, finally thanks to retirement, I can indulge my night owl tendencies. I love not having to rush to bed when the world is lovely, dark, and quiet. I love being able to write late at night, share texts and emails with elderly friends who are also night owls, or just lie back and think. I take a certain guilty pleasure in watching late night movies. During the afternoons and early evenings I socialize with friends, join them for luncheons and matinees, and share the occasional long, heartfelt phone calls. It isn't the most exciting life in the world, and I really can't remember when last I had a hot date or went to a nightclub to dance the night away, but my friends keep me busy enough. And as an effect of the Covid shutdown, I have several zoom meetings per week providing discussions on philosophy, film, books, and writing.

But though my life is rich with social, cultural, and intellectual diversions, there are some clouds on the horizon. One of my friends fell and broke his hip last winter, and he's been living in a rehab center ever since. He is unhappy he isn't getting enough visitors or phone calls, but as so many of my friends are either ill or injured, I can't possibly keep up with them all. Like this friend, my cousin has also had to give up driving, and cabs and Uber are rarely affordable. Covid struck down two of my elderly acquaintances, and cancer is having a field day with some of the others. I have outlived my parents, both cancer victims, and I find myself frequently brooding on this deadly disease. Three out of four of my grandparents also succumbed to cancer. A close relative tells me he has a health problem he can't share with me, and I think anxiously, could this be the big bad C?

A number of my friends have become extremely frugal, for we fear outliving our money. Those of us who still drive limit our outings, as expenses for car repairs, tolls and gas cause us to think twice about driving very far or very frequently.

Attending discussions and programs online is not only efficient but wonderfully economical in terms of transport. Restaurants, where I tend to do most of my socializing, are becoming more expensive, but as a retired person, I enjoy being available for breakfast and lunch, both of which are economical alternatives to dinner.

I haven't worked in over a year, and I often reflect on my prior life. I used to tutor students at Oakton College. I miss my students, and I miss the staff. Some days I felt I was more helpful than others, but even on my worst days, I felt I helped at least one person. Now I lack that built in purpose for my life along with the built in personal connections.

"Growing old is not for sissies" is a quote I believe originated with Bette Davis. Loss of friends due to extreme illness or death, health problems, financial problems, and mortality itself are all challenges faced by those of us in life's third act. This wouldn't be tolerable if it weren't for the pluses. Providing myself with purpose and social connection is more of a challenge than it used to be, but at least I now have the leisure to attend to this. And I have the camaraderie of many others in my same situation. I always want to keep my mortality at the forefront of my brain, for as I approach the end, I find I value my friends, family, home, laughter, art, and nature more than ever.

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## **Little Things to Chase the Clouds**

**By Carol Karvon**

Sandy woke up feeling better than she had in a long time. Maybe it was seeing the sun shining for a change. That always lifted her mood. Lately her thoughts seemed to be as cloudy as the weather.

The much-needed rain has finally come down, and down, and down. Once it started there seemed to be no end. Needed, but depressing! It seemed like it would never stop. She tried to remember that it was January and the rain was better than snow and ice that usually occurred at this time of year. The local weather forecasters repeated the dire flood warnings over and over again, like we could really stop the flooding, Sandy thought.

I suppose if you lived near a flood site, you'd know what precautions to take, she thought to herself. It wasn't that she didn't sympathize with people getting inundated with water but she had other things to worry about. She was glad that wasn't something that concerned her personally at this point in her life. Perhaps that was a selfish way of thinking and she didn't say it out loud to anyone.

Up to now her thoughts seemed to be in a foggy cloud that prevented her from getting some needed things done. She just couldn't seem to act. It was wonderful to wake up feeling positive energy for a change on this golden day instead of the gloom and doom shield she'd been under lately.

Her self-imposed challenge on this day was to make the most of the time. She decided to do something fun for a change. She didn't want to waste this precious wonderful time doing household chores, even though they needed doing. They could wait for another cloudy, gloomy day to accomplish. No one would come in and steal the household tasks away if she were gone for a while. They'd be waiting and tomorrow was another day. Today was a day made for fun!

One of her favorite things to do was call a friend and see if they were free for lunch. She didn't care where they went; just getting out would be a treat.

She was lucky to find her sister and best friend available and agreeable to an afternoon out including lunch and shopping. Window shopping together was a treat and Sandy always felt refreshed when they parted and each went their separate ways until the next time.

They chose one of their favorite cafes and agreed to meet there in an hour. Once they had ordered lunch and were settled with their coffee, the treasured sharing began; and perhaps even a little gossip. They updated each other on their own family events and other family members.

Sandy has missed this time with her sister but wasn't going to brood about it. She was determined to enjoy the few hours they had together before each had to get back to their own lives.

Sandy's sister had confided to her that she, too, had missed their fun outings and hoped they'd get together again very soon. With that, hugs were given and goodbyes said. The time together had gone by too soon, but they each said they'd look forward to the next time.

Sandy realized on her drive home that the cloudiness in her thoughts had lifted and her mood shifted to positive things and thankfulness. She hoped she could maintain this pleasant mood. It would probably help to change her attitude from a negative to positive outlook. At least she could do it today and maybe more, if she tried.

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### **As the Day Begins...** **By N. Stewart**

Melody sat at the front window, looking out on the snow that had fallen over the last two days. The sky was bright blue, she noted, and with not a cloud in sight. A cold sunny winter day, following a snowfall like this one is usual. It's a little tease that winter isn't so bad if you are inside and don't have to venture out. It was beautiful to see the bushes and trees covered with a light coating of snow. The sounds of day-to-day activities were snow-muzzled. It was peaceful, sitting, watching the world go by.

But work needed to be done so, she picked herself up off the chair and went to the linen closet for cleaning supplies. Those kitchen cabinets are not going to clean themselves she thought. Once a year she would go through her cabinets and dispose of all outdated food, and consider giving away serving pieces she no longer used or needed. The food cabinet is the easiest. Starting there she made quick work categorizing and organizing the cans, boxes and bottles. Moving on to the next cabinet, she started taking out the dishes and pieces she rarely used. The first out was the huge, colorful Italian serving bowl. She looked at it and remembered the last time it was used.

It was a wintertime dinner party with all her retired friends that had come to her house. Melody was grateful the snow had held off that day until after the gathering and everyone was back home. There had been 10 people, sitting around the dining room table. Melody loved to serve special dinners and went all out with different, yet pleasing foods. First course was salad but not any old salad, the ingredients were individually chopped and placed in rows, a line of small tomatoes, next to a line of radishes, next to a line of lettuce and so on. Her friends commented on how beautiful the display. Next, came the main course of Chicken Piccata served over Linguine Fini pasta with lemon sauce, garlic bread, and a side of fresh steamed broccoli. She visualized where everyone had sat at the table, talking about and laughing at all the good times they had when all worked together. Tiramisu for dessert came later with coffee and for an added international flare, Bailey's Irish Cream. What a fun-loving group they were. She washed the bowl with loving care and put it aside.

Looking out the window, she noticed the clouds were beginning to roll in and the sky was beginning to turn from blue to grey.

“I remember these,” she said out loud as she held up two champagne glasses with 2000 etched on them. “Gads, that was 24 years ago,” she mused. The world was going to fall apart because computers didn’t have the ability to handle Y2K and turn 1999 into 2000. She shook her head in the silliness of it all.

That was the year we went to Northern Wisconsin for New Year’s Eve, she remembered. We got snowed in and couldn’t get home for 2 days. It didn’t matter though. The owners of the B&B were very accommodating to us with free meals and a ”help-yourselves” to the bar full of liquor. Roads to anywhere and everywhere were closed until the snow plows could finish the main routes and start on the smaller streets. The heavy snow stopped 12 hours later and we declared a play day. We went outside to build a snowman on the front lawn of the B&B. We threw snow balls at each other, hiked through the deep snow and made snow angels. At night, we wrapped up, sitting before the wood-burning fireplace and sipped brandy. Melody washed and dried the glasses, putting them aside. Good memories she thought.

Next out of the cabinet came the three-tiered white dessert plate. When filled with various kinds of homemade cookies, fudge, and mini cream puffs and eclairs, the kitchen, living room, dining room held wall-to-wall friends, family and neighbors, celebrating the holidays. Everyone seemed to have fun and be enjoying the camaraderie of the season’s peace and good will. Every so often someone would wonder over to the dessert buffet, look around, and take a cookie or a piece of fudge. She chuckled at the thought of someone sneaking a treat when it was there for all to enjoy. There were conversations going on in every room. Strangers became friends. They talked about how they looked forward to seeing each other at the next Christmas party and catching up on personal news. There was always enough extra food and treats for her guests to take home a container or two for the next day’s lunch or dinner.

She carefully washed and dried the plate and put that aside also. She sighed as she thought about those long-gone fun holiday parties and the friends, family, and neighbors that came no matter what the weather – be it snow, ice, and freezing cold temperatures.

She reached for the kitchen light and switched it on without realizing what she was doing. The kitchen had darkened from the storm clouds that now covered the sky. The snow started to fall. Melody thought it was time to quit. Lost in all the reverie, she had cleaned and organized only one cabinet. She looked at the items she had set aside, picked them up carefully one at a time and placed them back on their shelf in the cabinet. The memories of good times had been too strong and she couldn’t let go of those keepsakes just yet.

Turning out the light, Melody left the kitchen and went back to the chair in front of the window to watch the snow as it fell.

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**Return to Gummi Glenn: Part 9**  
**By Mark Moe**

“General Roggi, what should we do with Winthorp and Morgana? We cannot leave them to recruit a new army and return to assault Gummi Glenn again,” commented Kylie.

General Roggi looked over to his two prisoners, Winthorp in a hanging iron cage twenty feet off the ground and Morgana in a transparent magic nullifying box. He responded, “Winthorp only has a handful of Ogres left, but he could find more. For him, I recommend a long-term amnesia spell and by the time it wears off, he will either be on his death bed, or too old to be able to come after you. As for the sorceress Morgana, you had already asked us to spare her life. My recommendation is to exile her to another dimension where she can live out her life in a magic free environment and have no opportunity to exact any revenge upon you.

Whatever you choose, it must be soon because our time is growing short. By sunset, we must return to the land of the dead and resume our rest until we are needed in the future.”

“Wait, you guys cannot stay alive past sunset? I thought once we summoned you, the Gummi Army would stay in the world and help to add more magic to keep the world safe,” replied Kylie.

General Roggi laughed and said, “My dear Kylie, we are an army of Gummi warriors and wizards. What would we have to offer outside of battle? The warriors have no training beyond being a soldier and the vast majority of wizards have focused on offensive spells. They have very few defensive and healing spells. It would take them a long time of studying to be useful to the general population. We must leave soon, but always remember to call upon us again if the need is great.”

Before Kylie could say anything else, Zummi interjected, “Those are great suggestions for dealing with our enemies. How soon before you can exile Morgana? Do you need my help? Do you want to teach me amnesia spell to use on Winthorp?”

General Roggi, noticed one of the wizards coming up to speak with him and held up his paws to calm Zummi. “General Roggi, sorry to interrupt sir, but Mardok is ready to cast the amnesia spell on your prisoner. He awaits your order sir. The wizard core needs a little more time to prepare for the exile of your other prisoner. We are trying to find a place with sufficient natural resources so that she does not starve, and it is difficult to find places that do not have magic as well.”

He looked over to his new Gummi friends and replied, “Keep me informed on the progress for Morgana's exile. My friends, do we make Winthorp forget his mission to get his hands on Gummi Bear juice or let him continue to be a nuisance until the end of his days.”

Zummi replied, “As much as I do not like him, he is too dangerous to be left alone. His charismatic, influential personality over evil creatures cannot be ignored. Make him forget so he can find a new purpose for his life.”

The wizard next to General Roggi responded, “I will let Mardok know your decision.”



"General Roggi, we have one more issue that needs your attention. Is there a way to change a Gummi Bear back into a human again? I am worried about Kylie. She sacrificed much to be able to help summon the Gummi Army back here. Can we do anything to help her," asked Sunni.

Roggi looked over to Kylie and stated, "As soon as Mardok is done with Winthorp, he can help you get back to your human form. He is the only one who still has the spell in his possession. We have not used it since before the Great War long ago, but it was created to punish the Gummi Bear who had betrayed us. We do not kill our own, but felt it was appropriate to disconnect him from our magic and the long lives we lead."

"You created a transformation spell to punish a fellow Gummi? What did he do to incur such wrath from all the Gummis?"

The pained look on Roggi's face said it before he responded, "His actions caused the Great War which resulted in twenty thousand Gummi lives lost. Let us not discuss this further. I will let you know when Mardok is ready to restore you to your human form."

General Roggi left and a few hours later the same messenger wizard brought Winthorp to meet the Gummi Bears of Gummi Glenn for the first time as a new man. They even gave him a new name. "My Gummi friends of Gummi Glenn, I would like you to meet Charles Riddiford. He is a passing traveler who the Gummis have taken after he was attacked by bandits and left him without any supplies on this "cloudy" day. We are giving him fresh supplies and a horse in the morning so he may continue his journey to London."

"Thank you for your kindness from all of you Gummi Bears. I do not know how I would have survived if not for your timely intervention. I wish your health and happiness for many years to come. I hope to meet you again." replied Charles.

The messenger also left a note for the Gummis to read after he escorted Charles away. It was from the wizard Mardok.

*Dear Gummi Friends,*

*We have sent Morgana to another dimension, but it is not without some magic. So, we cast a permanent magic nullification field, but it is only within a ten-mile radius of her position. Master Mardok awaits the one called Kylie so he can give her back her humanity. He must see her before sunset, otherwise she will remain a Gummi. Thank you again for all your help.*

Once Kylie finished reading the note she said, "You know what, as much as I want to stay a human, I would love to see how we can change the world with one more Gummi here in the past. My home is Gummi Glenn now whether it is the past or the future."

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