

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 [for information.](#)

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
© 2024 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

February 2024 Selection – Lie(s)

Lie
By Ed Scheffler

It is Byron Katie who said:
Don't believe everything
You think.

Something in which I am
guilty of.

Whence upon a journey -----We came to a bridge.
It was an unstable rickety bridge over
the river.
With a warning posted on the bridge saying in bold yellow
lettering:

CLOSED DUE TO REPAIRS.

Taking notice that the rickety bridge was
leaning as if ready to collapse
I proclaimed...

“Well, it's probably an architectural design.”

In which I assured my friend, Wilbur, that with
self-confidence, sound reasoning and trust in
the Almighty you can do anything.

CROSS OVER THE BRIDGE
AND LEAVE YOU RECKLESS
PAST BEHIND YOU

“And should you...I mean, when you get
to the other side, I will follow you.”

To assure him that nothing can go wrong,
Provided he submit to the bold step of faith,
I offered him my Saint Christopher metal.

###

A Simple Lie
By N. Stewart

It was a simple lie. Or so she thought. One might say it was even a little white lie that does no harm. But is any white lie harmless? She thought this one was.

She had told her parents that she was going to her best friend's house to watch television and would be home later than usual. After all, she had turned 18 several weeks ago and she thought she, as an adult could make her own decisions. Her parents didn't need to know that she was meeting Brad, and she knew that her parents would not approve of her seeing someone 15 years older. But love doesn't know age and she was comfortable with him. He was so mature and so unlike her silly male friends at school. She and Brad hung out together at the park or at the little roadside bar somewhere a few miles out of town.

She carefully put on make-up, styled her hair, and applied perfume. Her outfit was casual with tight jeans and a white crop top, tan swede jacket and boots. One last look in the mirror and she was ready.

She climbed down the stairs, and yelled goodbye to her parents, as she opened the door. Voices from the kitchen were heard, telling her to have a good time with Joan and don't be too late. She heard “Goodbye Liz, we love you” as she walked out the door.

She drove her car to the pre-designated corner, parked her car and waited for Brad. He arrived soon after and hopped out of his car and joined her in hers. “Let's go down to the beach,” he said “to watch the stars.” A thrill went through her at his words and she started her car, heading in the direction of the water. They held hands as she drove. She was giddy and feeling carefree and very adult.

Once there, she turned off the car, opened the windows, and they watched the waves roll in. The sound of the rolling water was mesmerizing and soothing. He put his hand on her shoulder and drew her into him. She slithered over and sat on his lap. They stayed like that for some time when he whispered that he loved her and then started gently kissing her face and neck. She was overjoyed and at a loss for words to explain her happy feelings at what he said. Is he the one, she thought? He must be. Why else would I feel this way? She felt her cheeks blush. They had known each other for only a few weeks. She snuggled into his arms and looked directly into his dark eyes. The light from the moon shined into those eyes.

She shifted in his arms. Eyes don't lie she thought, and what she saw in his frightened her. They were dull, dark with no love sparkle what so ever and seemed to show a wickedness that she had never noticed before. She wasn't comfortable with the situation and moved further away from him. He grabbed for her, pulled and held her tight against his body. She looked over his shoulder out the window and saw a very lonely, isolated spot on a beach where no other cars or people were around. Her parents thought she was safe at her best friend's house, but she felt anything but safe now with Brad. She knew this might be trouble and she had to think fast.

She kissed him quickly, and said, "I'm hungry. Let's go get something to eat." She quickly moved to the driver's seat, buckled up, and started the car before he could respond. Without waiting, she drove away from the darkened beach area into lighted streets. She took in a deep breath. A Mc Donald's Drive-In restaurant was the first place she saw that was open with a well-lit parking area. Pulling in, he heard "...go inside," and watched as she raced out of the car. He was slow to follow and looked confused. He called, "Lizzy, what's with you?"

She paused before entering the restaurant. She wondered if she had misread the situation, now that she was feeling less troubled and much safer. Had she been watching too much television and made all this up in her head? What had frightened her about him so much that she had to get out of that secluded place? The voice in her head said, "*Go with your gut, Girl.*" She tried to ignore it, but it wouldn't stop. The words circled and circled around in her head. She heard him talking to her, but she couldn't grasp the meaning of his words.

After ordering and sitting down at a table, they ate hamburgers and fries and drank cokes. Her mind slowed a little. Liz was feeling better about the situation and about Brad. He said he loved her and she had heard that. He did love her. He had said it in the car. She believed it, but ...that's when it started. He was using love to get more than she wanted to give. Tension began to build again.

Just then, her phone buzzed, she startled, and grabbed it to answer. It was her friend, Joan. "Your mom called, looking for you here. I didn't know what to tell her, so I told her you were in the bathroom. She seemed to know you weren't here. Call her, she seemed upset." Thanking Joan, Liz hung up. She knew she had been caught in the simple lie she had told earlier.

"We need to leave now," she said harshly, grabbing her purse and heading for the door. He quickly gathered everything from the table and followed. "My Mom knows I'm not where I said I would be. Something is up with her and she is very angry. I have to go."

She drove Brad to his car. As he exited he paused and said, “I don’t think this is going to work out for either of us. I’m done,” and he slammed the car door.

She locked the doors and drove off before he had reached his car. She placed the call. The guilt in her shaky voice was evident as she said, “Hi, Mom. Joan said you wanted me to call. I’m on my way home. See you in a few minutes. I love you.”

###

Death Café
By Vick Elberfeld

I’m not gonna lie to you. It took some persuading to get me to the Death Cafe. Here is the event description: “At a Death Cafe people drink tea, eat cake and talk about death.” I had recently written a piece for the writing group, Pen and Ink, entitled “Pondering Mortality” which opened with the words “I am afraid of death. Something in me instinctively recoils whenever I approach the subject.” My friend read it and thought I would benefit from discussing the subject along with her and a room full of strangers. But it’s bad enough, isn’t it, that I have to die, hopefully as far off in the future as possible. Do I really have to talk about it as well? Proceeding on the maxim that everything is worth doing once, except for incest and folk dancing, I said to myself, “How bad can it be?” After all, sometimes externalizing our fears weakens or at least softens them, and I was curious.

I arrived rather early after learning no one more than 10 minutes late is admitted, and I talked with a very friendly gentleman who was the first one there. At first I was disturbed to see the chairs being arranged into a large circle, so there would be no place to hide if I wanted to zone out and just sit and doodle. Shortly after the posted opening time we all sat in the circle after pouring ourselves some comforting warm tea, and we idly chatted with the persons next to us. Most of us were elderly, typically in our sixties or seventies, but the leader appeared to be a youngster in his twenties or thirties. I wondered what had led him to want to work with mostly seniors facing end-of-life issues. He opened our session with a deep breathing exercise. Then he went to a coffin shaped box, shuffled the cards inside, and read the question from the card he drew. The card questioned what sort of funeral or memorial service we’d like to have and whether we had discussed this with a family member or close friend.

We took turns answering, and it seemed the others had already given far more thought to the question than I had. That I had not had any discussion with someone close to me about a memorial service, and also that I haven’t made out a will, or designated someone with power of attorney, made me realize that I might have some serious catching up to do. After listening to some 18 people, including the leader, sharing their ideas for themselves and memories of services they’d formerly held for their loved ones, I had much to ponder before it was my turn. Many shared thoughts on the persons they wanted to speak at their funerals and the music they’d like to have played, as well as on the settings, whether in religious venues or outdoors in places of natural beauty. Challenges were explored on how to make everyone at our memorials feel included, even though there might not be time for everyone to speak. I witnessed considerable

empathy and vulnerability and a whole lot of humor in my very first meeting, and I can't remember when I've sat with such engaged and respectful listeners.

The second question we addressed became heavier as we were asked how we would least like to die and whether such a death could be prevented. My mind immediately darted to Edgar Allen Poe and images of being buried alive. My great grandmother told my mother tales of an exhumed burial plot in Czechoslovakia where scratch marks were found on the coffin lids of folks not quite dead when they were buried. But soon I calmed down and my thoughts led me to what I considered to be a more realistic fear. Before my mother died of her lung cancer, she had written very specific directives that she not be intubated. Her concern was that she'd live for years hooked up to machines with no quality of life. She had an episode, however, where her breathing became very unstable, sending her to the emergency room. Mom was lying on a gurney struggling to breathe when the doctor suggested putting in a tube. Seeing my distress at the thought of going against Mother's wishes, the doc hastened to reassure me. "We can take it out once her breathing stabilizes," but a nurse standing next to me urgently whispered in my ear, "They never take it out!"

And there I was, watching the person I loved most gasping for air, not knowing what to do. It is all well and good to plan for the end in an abstract sort of way, but watching my mother suffocate before my eyes was much, much more than I could handle. Luckily she soon stabilized without being intubated, and yours truly wasn't forced into an excruciating decision.

Fortunately I learned at the Death Cafe there is a third option, and that morphine plus Lorazepam or some other sedative can ease anxiety and stabilize the breathing. My own fears of being buried alive evidently stemmed from a terror of winding up in my mother's situation, and my experiences at the cafe helped me think this through. As a result, I felt more open and relaxed than I had in ages.

Would I go again? Why not? The subject is significant and complex, and cannot possibly be exhausted in one session. No one pressures you to believe or think in a certain way, and leaders are trained to deal with end of life issues and the people struggling with them. Questions of both a practical and emotional nature are discussed, and we're given opportunities to share our spiritual journeys along with other ever so human beings. Gathering together with beautiful people to share plans, hopes and fears for the future, regrets and satisfactions from the past, and heartfelt discussions in the present, is one of the most meaningful ways I can think of to engage with my fellow life travelers.

###

Deformis Canes, Deformis Populus
By J. Smetana

My twin boys Tom and Tim are alike in every respect except Tom always tells a LIE and Tim always tells the truth. What question could I ask them to tell me who's who?

###

The Big Lie **By Carol Karvon**

Mandy was just starting to realize the big mistake she had made the past few months. The lie started out to protect those she loved. At least that's what she told herself in the beginning. She wanted to spare them hurt and disillusionment. Looking back at her fabrications she knew they were to spare herself embarrassment.

Lately she knew deep down it would have been much easier to tell the truth. Once you started to lie it got more and more difficult to stop lying. That's just the way it was. One little lie (or fib as some people thought of it) led to more and bigger lies. Trying to keep it all straight was getting very stressful to Mandy. You didn't have to remember so much when you told the truth.

Friends and relatives were starting to ask her if she was okay. She was having trouble sleeping and eating. Some people even commented that she seemed edgier and others thought she'd lost weight and was thinner. That last was not such a bad thing in her opinion. In the past nothing much disturbed her sleep or appetite. Her family kept asking if something was wrong.

Her parents had always stressed the truth and taught Mandy and her siblings the importance of telling the truth. The advantage of being truthful was also that you didn't have to make up stories and then remember what you said and who you said it to.

How could she admit to anyone what was causing her so much anxiety without enduring a lecture or even worse their pity. She never felt like she fit in with her siblings – all had graduated college, some with honors and were set in their chosen careers. Her mom and dad boasted about their daughter the doctor; their sons - one an attorney and the other an architect. How could Mandy ever live up to them. She was in a dead-end clerical job with no hope of advancement, particularly now.

Mandy got up every day and dressed for work at the usual time. The lie was that she never told anyone that her job had been eliminated in a corporate downsizing a few months ago. She had been too embarrassed to tell anyone except her closest friend. Her family had long ago urged her to return to school and get a degree with the hope of getting a better job. She had resisted their pleas and that's what was eating at her now. She just couldn't face the "I told you so's" or worse yet their disappointment for her.

So, every day, as far as anyone in her family knew, she "went to work." In reality she spent her days at the public library. It was a peaceful place and better yet, a free resource.

She read the latest newspapers available and scoured the want ads. She updated her resume on the library's computer and actually submitted it on-line to positions that seemed to fit her qualifications.

So far, only a few companies had responded with requests for phone interviews. That was proving bothersome since she couldn't make the calls from her house someone was always there. She resorted to going to the nearby park and using her cell phone to make calls though the

reception was sometimes spotty. Sometimes there were planes overhead; sometimes landscapers were cutting the grass; sometimes even kids were playing in the park.

Mandy decided one really depressing day to “come clean” and tell the truth about her job situation. That night at dinner with her mom and dad she confessed her job had been eliminated and she was too embarrassed to admit it to them. She was sorry she had been untruthful and evasive every time one of them has inquired how she was feeling. But she assured them, and this was her truth, not a lie, she was busy looking for a job and doing everything she could to find one soon. She told them so far she had been able to pay her bills using accumulated savings when they offered monetary help. She thanked them sincerely and said she appreciated their moral support and was learning a valuable lesson – tell the truth.

###

Burning Bridges **By Kelly Tansor**

He gave me some advice early on, “Don’t burn bridges.”

I’m not a very trusting person. I have a very small number of close friends, and that’s about it. When I let him into my life, though, he told me to give people a chance. Be more trusting. And most of all, don’t burn bridges; don’t completely write someone off the moment something goes wrong.

So I tried. I put myself out there more and tried talking to more new people—namely the people he knew. I tried making new friends with his friends. Not much changed, though; I never got the vibe that any of these interactions would lead to anything more. I ended up not walking away with any more friends than I already had.

When he ended things, he said it would be just a break. Just some time away to give us space. It’s only temporary, he said. I clung to that “temporary” word like a life raft. I felt absolutely broken without my person, and the loneliness cut me like a hot knife in butter. But surely, he’d be back. I wasn’t sure when, but I had to believe he would. He’s the one who told me not to completely write someone off just because one little thing went wrong, so I held out hope.

Daily texts turned to weekly. Then once every other week. Soon enough, three months passed and he went silent. How much space would he need? How long was this break supposed to last?

The day of our would-be anniversary came and went. My birthday passed and he never reached out. Not long after that, I saw him at our favorite restaurant with another woman.

Just a break. Space. Temporary.

He did something worse than lie to me—he gave me false hope.

Don’t burn bridges, he had told me.

When I returned home, I noticed a picture of us still hanging on my wall. Why had I kept forgetting to take it down? I grabbed it off the wall and took the picture out of its frame. In the picture we’re smiling and embracing on the beach. How could I have known what was to come?

I hung the empty frame back on the wall. I found an empty box and put the picture inside, along with all of the things that reminded me of him. Flowers, pictures, love notes, movie and concert tickets, restaurant receipts—all in the box.

I walked outside to my backyard, dropped the box on the grass, and began setting up a bonfire. As I gathered firewood from the garage, all our moments together ran through my head like a supercut. All the movies we'd seen, the concerts we'd gone to, the meals we'd shared, the trips we'd gone on. At the time they were the most enriching moments of my life, filling me with life and love. Now they all felt hollow to me. I never knew any of these would be our last movie, concert, meal, trip, etc. He didn't give me a chance to say goodbye to any of it. I had no chance for closure.

So I was making my own closure.

With the sun setting and the fire burning, I took everything out of the box and dropped it in the fire one-by-one. Each single piece of memorabilia tossed aside and gone forever. All our moments together were now reduced to ashes. As the smoke floated to the sky, so did the weight of all my time wasted waiting for his return.

I wasn't just burning bridges. I was burning us.

###

Back to the Dark Age **By Mark Moe**

After the new Dark Age, Tony Stark was able to bring the world to the modern era within a year. He effectively gave free energy to the world and had a new power grid based off his arc reactor technology that was now heavily resistant to the effects of electromagnetic pulses. Now even the poorest of countries have enough energy for all their citizens. There was one individual who could not benefit from Tony's free energy because he is an ancient being who relies on absorbing mutant powers and draining from ancient power sources. He was the reason that the world was plunged into another Dark Age and after his defeat by all the heroes of the world, Apocalypse managed to flee to his pyramid in the sands of Egypt.

Inside the pyramid, he sat upon his ornate, stone throne that was covered in blue and purple glowing hieroglyphics slowly recharging his power. The last time he had used his sarcophagus to recharge himself, but that has since been destroyed by those wretched X-men. Now he is stuck relying on his throne which was only designed to keep his power at the maximum level. It transfers power to him at a snail's rate compared to the sarcophagus. One of the advantages of being an immortal being was learning the value of patience. Even now, his minions were scouring his library of ancient knowledge looking for another ancient power that he could drain. The previous one was a Celestial named, the Unmaker. If he could find someone like that, he would be all powerful.

Almost a year later, one of Apocalypse's minions came running up from the archives straight to Apocalypse still sitting on his throne. "Sire, I have found another Celestial that you can drain."

"Well get on with it, you pathetic excuse for a servant!" exclaimed Apocalypse.

"Yes, sire. There is a Celestial named Neptune that existed in the past. Before he died, he transferred his power to three gems. The gem of Cytorrak is in the present and under the control

of an exceptionally large man called, Juggernaut. He is a known enemy of those accursed X-men, so at least that is a positive in his favor. He will not give up the gem, but I believe he can be made to relinquish it and show him what a true "Juggernaut" of power can do.

The other two gems are in the past in the original Dark Age. We have been unable to locate them at the present time."

"Once I possess these gems, can I have the power of a Celestial and rule the world? Find me those other gems! Locate the Juggernaut so that I may rip his gem out of his possession!" He looked back at the servant now petrified to silence and asked, "You have more to tell me?"

The servant finally regained his courage to say, "The gems are not enough by themselves. They require Neptune's trident which we already have in the archives. When I mentioned that the other two gems are in the past, it was because they were destroyed by an unknown force in the 1600s. The only way to get the gems is to time travel back before they were destroyed and collect them."

Apocalypse's eyes flashed from his standard brick red to crimson red as he yelled, "Do you have any idea how much energy it takes to time travel? Do you think I can time travel like it is not a huge drain to my power? Fine. Then prepare my time chamber."

The servant bowed his head and ran away before he could receive any more ire from his mercurial master. Within a couple of days, the servants of Apocalypse located the Juggernaut and prepared the time chamber for their master. Apocalypse looked down he saw the same servant making his way near the dais where his throne sits and he said, "Sire, the preparations for time travel are complete. You have but to "lie" down in the time chamber and seal the door to begin your journey. Also, we have located the Juggernaut. He is hiding in a safehouse just outside of a place called Dallas, Texas. Which do you want to do first?"

"I want the sure thing. Take me to Juggernaut. I need the power of his gem."

"Here are his coordinates. Good hunting, Sire."

Apocalypse punched the coordinates into his arm teleportation device and opened an energy portal to go there. The next instant, he found himself outside of a small, run-down house with wood boards covering the windows and the front door. Whatever the Juggernaut was involved in, at least he had the sense to keep his activities outside of the public sphere of viewing. "Juggernaut, I order you to exit this dump of a house and face your ruin from me, Apocalypse!" His voice boomed and was easy to hear up two miles away.

An exceptionally large man wearing rust red body armor and a matching helmet came strolling casually to the front to see who was stupid enough to challenge the unstoppable Juggernaut. "I know you and I am not afraid of you like my half-brother, Charles and his pathetic X-men. Bring it fool and face the wrath of the Juggernaut!"

"I was going to just rip the gem from your possession, but now I think I will kill you for your insolence!" Apocalypse replied.

The two giants started close combat wrestling with each other and at first were evenly matched. As it dragged on though, the only one getting tired was the Juggernaut. Apocalypse then punched through Juggernaut's core ripping both the gem and Juggernaut 's heart straight through his chest. "In what world could you ever beat me?" Apocalypse asked as Juggernaut's now lifeless body fell to the ground with the remains of his heart thrown on top of him. Apocalypse wiped the gem clean on a clean spot of Juggernaut's armor and teleported back to his pyramid.

###