

# Writing Group ~ No. 6, 2021



## Editorial

The virulent third wave of Covid-19 washing over South Africa and the ongoing drought that is devastating our province leaves us all feeling drained, so we need some balance. This is an edition that aims to reflect the sadness of those who have lost friends and relatives but celebrates the tenacity of those trying to make light of their lives.

### PROBLEMATIC WORDS

by Nancy Tietz (rmt)

English is a funny language. There are many words which are often used wrongly. Let's have some fun with these 'problematic words' and test our understanding:

Problematic words fall into three categories:

- A. **Homophones:** Words that sound the same but have different spelling and a different meaning, e.g. be and bee, waist and waste.
- B. **Homonyms:** These have the same spelling, same sound, but different meaning, e.g. Let's play scrabble. He wrote the play.
- C. **Homographs:** Although these words have the same spelling, they have different sounds and a different meaning, e.g. tear the page, and shed a tear, tear off in a hurry.

Here is our challenge for this edition:

Can you find at least three examples of each group, identify into which category each group falls and give examples? (A dictionary will be helpful.)

- Group 1: Doe, Doh, Dough
- Group 2: Die, Dye, Die , Die
- Group 3: Bear, Bear, Bare
- Group 4: Fit, Fit , Fit
- Group 5: Fair, Fare, Fair, Fair
- Group 6: Mush, Mush, Much
- Group 7: Vain, Vein, Vane
- Group 8: Peer, Peer, Pier



Losing a loved one hurts forever. It makes no difference whether it is a parent or a beloved friend. We never forget.

Jenny Alcock expresses her sorrow in a poem:

### **Covid Sadness**

My Mother, Our Mother  
Always near and dear.  
Readily available.  
I wipe away a tear  
How come, our Mum  
So hastily you went?  
Peaceful though to the end  
You were only lent.

We miss you Mum.  
It hurts to think  
Of memories that close  
Of all the years,  
Midst salty tears  
Of Mother we can boast.

Lots of love, with God above  
Deserving of this peace  
And happiness, we'll meet again  
And joy will never cease...

### **SERENDIPITY** *by Sobhna Poona*

The day was consoled by a light breeze billowing off the ocean. To escape the heat, we all sought refuge under the huge oak trees lining the path. It was a quiet and moving ceremony. Aunty Lilly had delivered a beautiful eulogy. She told stories and anecdotes that made us laugh and cry. After the last handful of sand was gently scattered across the ground, we all returned to the house for tea. Although very sad, the day was far from sombre. People laughed and talked in small groups. Others sipped tea and looked at old photographs. I gazed at the large portrait that graced the entrance of the house, and I knew what Aunty Lilly would say, "gone but never forgotten".

I was suddenly drawn to exuberant sounds in the kitchen, where laughter and the tune of the whistling kettle conjoined. I peered in and saw a very animated Aunty Lilly.

"I remember it all as if it was yesterday", she said. "It was the first day in my new job. The rain was bucketing down and I was running late. As I crossed the road in front of my office block, bag in one hand, umbrella in the other, I was literally swept off my feet." She laughed. "I must say, I never saw it coming. One moment my shoe splashed a puddle, and then I was knocked to the ground kissing a puddle. I lifted my head, squinting through a sheet of water, and all I saw were long brown legs and a very distinctive coat disappearing across the bustling pavement. I was fuming. Then came the shock and horror of a loud bang. I froze. Just seconds before in the same spot where I was standing, there now was a body and mangled bicycle." She paused then spoke slowly. "My anger dissipated into feelings of great blessing and gratitude. He had saved my life. I had to find him." She sipped her tea holding everyone's attention.

"To celebrate my new job, my best friend Robyn had invited me to dinner. Despite my aching body, I was determined to celebrate. When I arrived at her place, I got a huge surprise. The first thing I saw languishing on the couch, were two outstretched long brown legs in that unmistakable coat. They were actually quite beautiful. Then he caught my eye. He had the most exquisite, soft and gentle brown eyes. I felt my heart expand and I knew I was in love. I had to have him. We had a future together. Robyn's voice interrupted that magical moment, and I heard her say "Meet Riley".

"Riley," I repeated, "Wonderful to meet you." We had a great evening, and yes, you guessed it, Riley and I went home together. Oh....it was sweet dreams.

Life was wonderful. Do you know we travelled to eight countries together? Riley had charm and sagacity. He could read my moods. He knew when to comfort and console and when to just leave me alone. We hardly ever had any disagreement and I understood his every bark. He certainly has left huge paw prints on my heart."

Aunty Lilly looked at Riley's photograph and sighed. "Gone but never forgotten."

Gordon's beloved pet, Chloe,  
makes sure she leaves a worthy  
successor...

## THE BATTLE FOR THE IRON THRONE

*by Gordon Johnson*

Greetings and salutations, all my dear friends who contribute to this most illustrious forum on a regular basis. Yes, it is I, Chloe, your intrepid Staffie who mounts her soap box once again to share her experiences with you.

A '*Game of Thrones*' scenario is developing in our abode. Kietsie-kat, our domesticated once feral feline, Peter the peacock and a ginger feral feline, are competing for the Iron Throne of Johnson-fell, which will become vacant when I leave this temporary abode. The competition is fierce. Kietsie-kat seems to have the upper hand at the moment, and I will not be surprised if she emerges as the powerful Mother of Dragons. She is also small in stature and I can assure you, she does not suffer fools easily, and she will ruthlessly rule with an iron fist from the Iron Throne in Johnson-fell.

She will, however, have to hone her diplomatic skills if she desires to build a 'Queendom' of loyal followers. She has a short temper that inhibits her ability to create loyal followers. I say this, because the most altercations begin at her food bowl. She cannot stand it if Ginger and Peter partake of the contents of her bowl. Mom is partly to blame for these confrontations because she fills the bowl for Ginger and Peter when they come a-calling for sustenance.

I have to have a serious talk with Kietsie-kat, before the sun finally sets for me, because I do consider her a worthy successor. She will also be a worthy companion for Mom and Dad. She joins them in bed every morning and fusses about until Mom gets up to feed her. She is very fond of Dad and sometimes licks his head before he gets out of bed.

This brings me to the conclusion, which I announce from my soapbox, that we are not irreplaceable. Succession is inevitable; we just need to ensure that those who succeed us are worthy to continue our legacy.

I bid you au-revoir from my rickety soapbox as the storm clouds gather.

## Drought

*by Laura Maynard*

Clouds shape  
Then dissipate  
Dust devils  
Whirl and twirl  
Withered leaves  
Fall off trees  
Rivers cease  
To flow  
In mire  
Hippos wallow  
The arid plains  
Crave  
In vain  
Rain

Timed writing is a way of focusing the mind and creating a complete piece in just 5 minutes. Here are some of our attempts:

### **GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBOURS** (*Robert Frost*)

I was sick and tired of Joanne continually popping through the *Eugenia* hedge whenever she wanted company. When we first moved in next door to her I had felt sorry for her and so I had made the mistake of not being firm about when she could call. She often caught me unawares, still in pyjamas or busy with something I needed to focus on. It did not matter to her that the time might not be convenient for me. She would come into the house calling "Co-ee, where are you?"

I complained to my husband often, but something only got done about it when Joanne caught us one Saturday afternoon settling down for a long overdue cuddle! My husband was furious! I was embarrassed, but didn't want to talk to her about it, trusting that she had learned a lesson. She hadn't. She was back again on Monday as though the incident had never happened.

On Wednesday morning contractors arrived and put up an eight-metre fence in front of the hedge between our properties. Smugly, my other half stood admiring it. "Good fences make good neighbours." he quoted.

I could only agree. My life is much more pleasant. I still have a friend next door, but she always phones first. Better still, my husband and I can cuddle in peace.

*Noreen Burton*

I love the fence my neighbour and I share. It bears witness to good times and bad.

The last time an armed intruder entered our backyard, our neighbours heard the commotion, quickly contacted their security firm and stayed with me for the rest of the day. From their double storied home, they have an excellent view of ours. They reassured me they would make sure I was not accosted by anybody when leaving or returning home. All I had to do was message them if I felt insecure. We immediately agreed to put spikes on our perimeter walls. My pottering around in the garden or splashing in the pool reassure them that all is well on my side.

Our neighbour's quavadillos grow over our wall and our hibiscus and jasmine trail over theirs. Any excess lettuce, curry leaves etc. are easily shared over the wall. We don't talk to each other daily over the wall but call or WhatsApp to check in; let each other know when the man selling Indian veggies has arrived, who is having a discount on butter or oil, or share any other news.

The advantage of good fences is that it results in positive vibes which grow into very positive relationships. My children would often play next door with their kittens. We know each other's children and take an interest in what they do and share in their achievements and disappointments. When I accidentally locked myself out of my house, I felt more than comfortable spending the afternoon with my neighbour.

The greatest thing about our fence is that it is a good one. Literally it divides our two plots and allows each of us our own space and privacy which is mutually respected (thankfully none of us scream, shout or play loud music), and yet figuratively it can be torn down at a moment's notice if either neighbour needs a sympathetic ear.

*Neela Dhaya*

The parties would go on from early afternoon until late and when the Klippies and Coke took hold, it was no holds barred. The bad language was frequent and loud. A high fence took care of the acoustics. –

*Gordon Johnson*

The two men stared at each other across the fence. They could almost reach out and touch each other, or perhaps even punch each other. But each neighbour understood that the fence was meant to keep them apart and also keep the peace. For thirty years they had annoyed each other as they went about their lives on either side of the imaginary fence. Neither wanted to spend money on it and so the troubled years passed. To keep the peace they built the fence in their imaginations, and constantly reminded themselves that good fences not only make good neighbours, but keep your neighbour from straying across and punching your lights out. Both men were now deaf and almost blind but knew exactly where the fence line was just as they had imagined it for so many years.

*Sobhna Poona*

We had a good response to writing an ending for Ed Smith's story. Which one do you like best?

... The vehicle swayed perilously then toppled into the cold water, and the swollen river slowly swallowed them. Water rushed into the cabin. Alan opened his eyes. He sucked in air as the rising water splashed against his face knocking off his spectacles. Jennifer's coat floated past him. He needed to get out ...fast. Alan glanced at his wife. She was buckled in, unconscious. He hesitated. All his memories of her flashed through his mind. He exited the cabin, taking one last look at Jennifer's serene face, her hair like tangled kelp swishing in the water. Alan felt his heart hammer against his ribs. There was a momentary silence. Suddenly a voice boomed. "Cut," the director shouted. "Good work everyone. Let's have a break before the next take."

*Sobhna Poona*

The car was thrown onto its side, smashing a window before landing in the river. The icy water brought Jennifer to her senses as it rapidly filled the car. Her first thought was for Alan. He was slumped in the front seat, unconscious. Without thinking Jennifer forced her way past the rapidly deflating air bag, exited the window and reached for the surface. To her surprise she found she could stand with her head above the water. She couldn't help laughing. Sucking in air she went back to rescue her husband. She needed to get Alan out of the car before he drowned. Could she do it? She opened the door, released the seat-belt and with straining lungs heaved his inert body from the vehicle. Gasping, Jennifer dragged Alan to the river bank.

Anger took over and she shook him. "Idiot! You idiot!" she screamed. "Wake up!" Nothing. Cold fear. Was he dead? Her nursing instinct took over and she began CPR. "Please wake up." She sobbed. "I can't lose you over a stupid fight. I love you." No response. With streaming tears Jennifer worked on. "What will the children do without their father? Come on! You can't leave us. Who will make us laugh? Who will love me when I'm sad? I'm warning you, I'll find another man." "I won't let you," whispered Alan as he regained consciousness.

*Noreen Burton*

## DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES

*By Ed Smith*

Summary:

Alan and Jennifer's marriage is in trouble and they are driving in Alan's new high-powered vehicle to a highly-recommended mountain resort to try to work out their differences.

Then tragedy struck – the car engine caught fire and Alan ordered Jennifer to climb into the back seat. He then gunned the engine and drove off the causeway into the river.

All went blank for the passengers as the 4x4 hit a rock and turned over...

... Jennifer was terrified, hanging upside down in her seatbelt with a stream of icy water entering the car and already her long hair was touching it. Alan was silent and barely visible in a mass of deployed airbags. She fumbled with the seatbelt catch and released it, crumpling up in the water in the roof of the car. Her first reaction was to get out. She saw that the car doors had unlocked when the car crashed. She tried the door nearest her but it was dented and wedged with an ominous stream of water entering.

She shuffled to the other backdoor. It seemed undamaged but the weight of water outside prevented her opening it.

Her thoughts turned to her husband. Their marriage was almost on the rocks and the thought of his actions that had brought them to this predicament made her furious. Buying this monster in the first place was wrong, but endangering their lives on their first trip was the last straw.

Without time for further thought, Jennifer squeezed between the front seats and saw that Alan had bumped his head on the side of the car where there was no airbag. He was a big man and she could not undo his seatbelt. She screamed at him in frustration and terror. The water was rising. Suddenly Alan stirred and became aware of the situation. He quickly unclipped his seatbelt and eased himself upright.

"We have to get out, now! He screamed. "We have one chance."

Using all his strength, he forced open his door. Freezing water poured in and filled the car. Alan grabbed Jennifer's arm and they both popped out of the wreck like corks from a bottle.

*John Stoddard*