

SERMON IN SVE FOREST

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22 February 2021

I will get to the point after a long introduction.

My Dad, Milton, wanted to be an architect. Two formidable barriers blocked him. First, in the late 1930's, architectural firms did not hire Jews. Second, when my grandfather, Saul, went into a diabetic coma my grandmother, Rose, ordered Dad to join Saul's accounting firm to ensure the family's survival. I think it is an understatement to say that I don't think Dad ever loved accounting.

At the age of 50, Dad began painting. Over the next two decades he became quite good. He could do portraits and landscapes and seems to have loved still lifes the best. He joined classes at the Art Students League. One of my friends often came there and was great friends with the president. When they needed an accountant, my Dad got the job. He spent quite a bit of time there, at the Art Students League, earning a living and loving his life.

I too took an interest in art though from the academic side as a meteorologist. I became interested in how artists portrayed the sky, and, after my sabbatical year at Tel Aviv University finished in July 1979, we travelled back towards the USA slowly, seeing many of the major European art museums. Back in the USA, I continued my museum visits. I saw many beautiful paintings by many of the world's extraordinary artists in these museums, and could professionally evaluate their overall skill and genius through my narrow window of how well they painted the sky. And I noted that whereas the sky is the sky, different artists always found their own unique ways to render or select their personal favorites among its varied moods.

But I also saw mediocre works by mediocre artists of bygone times who, by the standards of today's fine artists, many unknown and unacknowledged but skilled and talented amateurs, or even struggling professionals, my father included, would never have had their works considered for even a moment to hang in museums. And that fact leads from this long introduction to the theme of this sermon, which is to highlight and praise the talents of the writers of the SVE++ Writers Group.

Now, here we are, an inconspicuous group of largely unknown writers. We might think our talents are mediocre, or at least not noteworthy. Some of us may have had a few works published, more than a few rejected, and even more than that never submitted. But it is my purpose to demonstrate how very good we are, for each of

us has exhibited impressive talents and wide-ranging skills as a writer. I'll prove this by pointing to individuals among us.

Start with Donald Silverman. He writes mostly memoir pieces. That puts him in a league with millions. But most of his pieces demonstrate his uniquely funny way of looking at life. Donald extracts the humor from countless experiences and memories, and the way we laugh or chuckle at them shows that his viewpoint resonates with something in each of us. Thus, Donald's writings possess two features that make for great literature. First, he has captured some human universal, and second, he has done it in a novel way.

The point is that Donald is not alone among us to possess those qualities, because the writings of each of us have exhibited these two qualities to some degree.

Mickey Komet is next in the circle. We know that Mickey doesn't consider herself a good writer. But her neighborhood memoirs evoke all our memories of the stores and places we loved as kids. And when Mickey decided to write outside the box, she created a short story we all thought was real. Impressive!

Suzi Lynch exhibits the dramatic flair to make the recital of a statistical report on farm produce sound like the Gettysburg Address. And her writings show a varied imagination, often with a wow-type surprise.

Gloria Stein is our poet laureate. Though several of us write poems, Gloria's rhyming is so simple, but so natural and catching it is startling. And her poems often illustrate general themes, for example, the year of the woman.

Agi Finkelstein thinks herself no writer because she doesn't multiply words. But there is strength in that simplicity and directness. Eric Hoffer once said that a person's first book is short and the author puts into it everything that he knows. Subsequent books are long and the author puts in them everything he doesn't know. Agi writes about what she knows of the worlds she has sojourned in and we all know and feel it.

Dave Thomas is a story teller. And his stories wrench a wide range of situations and emotions. He can portray in a sympathetic way winners, losers, sinners, and saints.

Doug Kane, another story teller, is perhaps the most imaginative among us, and his writings reek of intense feelings and longings. How to retrieve and magnify love

long gone and lost to all but memory may be his forte. And doesn't that resonate with all of us geezers! Doug could have written Ecclesiastes.

Jay Worsham is, hands down, our wittiest. We all have demonstrated wit to one degree or other, but Jay just has that extraordinary way of seeing irony clearly through the fog of sugary sentiment and caramelize it as poetry, art, or song.

Janice Lieberman has only been here a few weeks, but it is clear she is our word artist. When Janet describes a scene, we are there – we recognize everything – we get the picture. And her last piece did the same for history – it brought a normally difficult, abstruse topic to life and we stood with her atop the White Cliffs of Dover.

Steve Greenberg, the unassuming philosopher, is rejoining us at last, just as spring arrives up north. Steve's recounting of his work experiences sound like fables, but are both touching and humorous true accounts that rivet our attention.

Finally, there is Stan Gedzelman (that's me). I count myself our group's intellectual or perhaps the scarecrow, who only wanted a brain. Let me assure you that while Doug has confessed that he often doesn't understand what I write, neither do I. But I know that from time to time I hit upon universal truths that make life more comprehensible to me. That makes it all worthwhile to myself and surely it has the chance to resonate with others.

Do others in countless other writing groups share our distinctive talents? Sure, but only in their own unique ways. As just as our finer works have impressed us, so they would impress many others. We just have to summon the courage to recognize how good some of our writings are and give the world the opportunity to be touched and transformed by them. Who among us would have the nerve, the effrontery, the gall, and be so heartless as to deny others our truths, our tales, and our treasures?

I am certain, absolutely certain, that none of us could possibly be that mean and selfish.