

*L*IFE *L*ESSONS

from the

*H*EART

*The Writers, Illustrators
Editors and Publishers*

of

Missouri Writers, Ink.

2014

Introduction

Welcome to our world. Missouri Writers, Ink. was started in 2011 by four writers interested in sharing their work, their ideas and their lives.

In three short years we have grown to include other writers, illustrators, editors and publishers. Our members come from a 100-mile radius and meet monthly in Rolla, Missouri.

It seemed only natural to pool our talents into an anthology. But what to write about? After much discussion, one of our members said he was working on a book about life lessons: known and unknown.

The idea seemed perfect for us. Luckily, he was willing to share. (There are never enough life lessons to go around, you know.) We decided to put a twist on it—making it an Epistolary. So here are a few observations about the ‘known’ and ‘unknown’ lessons of our lives, written in letter form.

The book is both fiction and non-fiction. You may be surprised, even jolted, by what we say, and the way we say it. We were! Our letters may not be addressed to you—but they are for you. Each letter carries a message from our heart to yours. Enjoy!

*The writers, illustrators, editors and publishers
of
Missouri Writers, Ink.*

This book is dedicated to:

Individuals who read

Writers to Be

&

*All who don't mind ink
on their fingers*

Or

*Those who have dared
To learn a lesson... or two...
From life!*

Missouri Writers, Ink,
2014

*LIFE LESSONS
FROM THE HEART*

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Everyone has learned something just by living. Often we call it common sense when all it really is, is experience. Sharing those experiences might help others learn from them too. Here are some excerpts from some of the letters in the anthology:

E. Louise Baker

Dear Wanda,

You are one of the few friends that I am comfortable sharing some very sensitive and precious experiences. I just have to share with you an event that happened recently at a gathering of my father's family. It all began when my family started preparing for the big Christmas get together of my dad's family. As you remember, my dad was the youngest of 11 children. I can't even imagine a family with that many children. However, all we many cousins love getting together on these special holidays. The grownups have a good time catching up on events that are happening in their families and we cousins (33 in all) have fun playing games like 'kick the bucket,' hide and seek and many games that were original.

My father's brothers and sisters are all married and have families of their own. It is so ironic that most of them live within five or six miles of each other which makes 'getting together' an easy task. You will remember that I grew up in south central Kansas where all the sections of land are bordered by a country road. One uncle lives one mile south and 1/2 mile west. another aunt lives 2 miles east and one mile south. You get the idea, they are all located relatively close. The families all take turns hosting the Easter or Christmas gathering. The Easter dinner and annual egg hunt are usually hosted by those families that have limited interior space in their home. The Easter gathering, which could be held outside, sometimes reaches sixty in number. All the 'city folks bring their children for the annual Easter Egg Hunt making it the largest attended event. Christmas is always hosted by those families who had room to accommodate a crowd inside.

This Christmas was our family's time to host the event.

Dear Wanda,

This has been a very long and quiet day for me. Because you are so special to me, I knew you would not mind if I shared some very private thoughts. Thoughts that saturated my mind on this very special day!

Today is a personally special day for me. I'm sure you remember that this is my 57th Wedding Anniversary. Yes, it is this Sunday which happens to be August 17, 2014. I know you recall my husband and I were married on a hot Saturday afternoon in Kansas on August 17, 1957!! The 'number' coincidence (57 years) with a wedding date of that same number probably doesn't happen too often. Yes, you would think this was a very happy day for me!! Wedding anniversaries are to be celebrated. memories of past years' celebrations and eventful happenings are to be recalled. Remember how our families used to gather for occasions like this? The whole family would talk about the happy, sometimes sad, and sometimes cherished memories as food and drink were enjoyed together. This anniversary, however could not be classified as a celebration like that.

I am sure you have guessed that this anniversary was not un-like the last 27 anniversaries that I have experienced. This day quietly passed like the preceding ones. During Sunday's church service, I wanted to say "This is my 57th anniversary" as the minister asked for joys and concerns. That announcement would have left many questioning my sanity since I have been alone for many years. I look around the sanctuary and see the many 'couples' worshipping together. (It is so easy to take for granted a life together.) I know I should not feel envious of the relationship that they are still blessed to enjoy, but I must confess that I do. Very few folks are aware of the feelings I was experiencing or the private memories that were sheltered in my heart and mind. I quietly recall the happy memories of those precious previous anniversaries and sadly, but bravely, accept my current position in life.

Carlena Biggs

November 11

Dear Santa,

My name is Danny B. I am six years old. My cousin Kelsey is writing this letter for me 'cause I can only spell some words like cat and dog. But she is twelve years old and real smart. She says she likes you too, even if her friends say she can't. I asked her to write and she says I can say anything I want. I am supposed to ask for toys and stuff, but that's not what I really want for Christmas. I don't know if you can do it or not, but Billy Trent says you can do anything so here is what I want.

My daddy came back from the war and he is very sick. Mommy says he has bad dreams and is real nervous so we have to be quiet all the time. I don't mind and if I just have to make noise I come over to Kelsey's where we can make all the noise we want, 'cept we can't get loud enough to make her neighbors mad. I see Mommy and Daddy crying in different rooms when they don't know I seen them. That scares me more than war does. Mommy says Daddy can't find a job and we don't have no money to pay the bills and so we don't have none for Christmas presents either.

Yesterday Daddy came home from looking for work and he screamed and hollered for hours and hours. Me and my sister could not sleep for all the noise. She was so scared that she came into my room and we slept on the floor. Then, last night Daddy left and Mommy told us this morning that Daddy won't be living here with us. Then she cried and ran into the bedroom and closed the door

November 28

Dear Santa,

I forgot to tell you about my friend Billy Trent. I told him that I wrote you and he was real mad 'cause I forgot to tell you what he wants for Christmas. He said to be sure and give you his whole name so you won't get him mixed up with his dad.

Karen GoatKeeper

Exit Doors

Dear Antha,

I've finally done it! I picked up that revolver that's been on the kitchen table for six months and put it away.

The minister showed me how by bawling me out yesterday. He didn't really bawl me out. He made me start thinking again.

But I forget. I haven't written you in months so you haven't a clue what's going on.

Money Curse

Dear Dave Ramsey:

You write a vey good and needed column urging people to get our and stay out of debt through budgeting and controlling spending. I wish I had known about your column many years ago.

I married a man whose idea of a budget was to get his paycheck on Friday, have fun for the weekend then pay bills with the leftovers. Being a bit old fashioned I let him handle our finances. Needless to say, we ended up deeply in debt, something I discovered when I called to have propane delivered and found the bill had never been paid. We took cold showers and ate microwaved food for six months. I do not like cold showers. Microwave food is edible and not much more. This was not the way I wanted to live. There had to be a better way.

Loretta Gorrell

Things I Remember As a Kid

I know most of my grandchildren and great grandchildren won't remember me or even know who I am, so I decided to write this letter of the things I remember as a child. Hopefully, by the time you get done reading this letter, it will give you an idea of the kind of child I was, and the life lessons I learned.

I remember we were a happy family, we didn't have much but we were so rich in many ways. There were six of us kids, and we always stuck together. If one of my sisters or brother got in trouble, I would feel their pain. We were often asked if we fought a lot. Well, no.....we didn't have anything to fight over. Thank God we had the creek behind our house. We loved that creek. If we weren't swimming in it, we were catching crawdads. There were a couple of deep holes in the creek and we had a good time swimming until Grandma Kempf's cows had the nerve to poop in the water where we would swim. So, being kids, we swooshed the poop down stream and went back to swimming. Oh what fun we had.

Designer clothes, never heard of them. Our clothes were all home made. Mom would cut out the material and Dad would sew them up. The material came from flowered feed sacks that chicken feed came in. Mom took the sacks apart, washed them

and then they were made into little flowered dresses. Our dresses weren't fancy but we looked cute in them and if you looked real close when we were playing, you might see "Laying Mash" printed on the bottom of our underwear. Yes, they were home made also. My brother Skip was lucky, he was the only boy and he always got new stuff. That's okay, I still love him.

Susan Jordan

A Morning Epiphany

Becky sighed as she sat in a chair with a cup of coffee. She gazed sightlessly over her green, summer yard from the deck on which she sat. Instead she focused inwardly on the past 20 years. She began with the birth of her beautiful son. She reflected on that first year of stress as he seemed to catch every illness that came along. She remembered the struggle to keep up with work and his care. Then he got healthier and things were better.

Andrew didn't speak as soon as her other two children. He was the youngest, so maybe he was just spoiled. He cried a lot. Music seemed to comfort him. He didn't do well at child check. The teachers who tested him assured Becky he was all right. He was happier and did well at daycare. He was active and wouldn't sit still to be read to or even watch TV. Until "The Lion King." He watched it over and over. He seemed to be a happy little boy.

Ross Malone

Grandpa's Trailer Park

Don't ever give up on your dreams and always look for ways to make them come true.

Dear Friend,

My grandpa is a great guy! He's fun and full of life. He has so many ideas about what to do and how to have fun. I love to visit him at his little trailer park and hear the silly stories that he and his old friends tell me. They're all old like Grandpa and he claims that to live there, you have to be at least 100. For a time I believed him because he did own the place and I was pretty young. It is true that, to live in Holstein Acres, you have to be someone my grandpa thinks will get along with everyone else. He says that common memories are the foundation for good friendships. so all kinds of people there with one thing in common – they are old.

Mom and Dad both love Grandpa as much as I do. But Mom said he is "a silly old man." Dad says he's "unique." "He's eccentric," Dad explained to me one day. I think Dad understands Grandpa better. I just know that Grandpa is full of ideas that other people don't have. That's why he's fun to be around.

I never could understand why Grandpa isn't a millionaire. He always has so many ideas for making money!

Danielle Norris

Dear Michelle,

I am writing you because you are old enough to understand this now. My hope is you will glean something from it, maybe it will help you to steer clear of the same pain I've experienced. I write this with the hope it can make your/our story a little clearer.

It was the best summer of my life, but it came with many challenges. I was in the stage where you're not in high school anymore, but you are not ready to be a full-fledged adult. I opted to go to work instead of college. I had big dreams of falling in love and settling down. After a short engagement in high school, I knew what I didn't want. I was searching for the feeling. The one like no other that could move mountains and make you feel weak at the knees. A fairytale, where your heart fluttered at the sound of their voice and where you felt like you could melt into their embrace.

I was a tomboy through and through, with the same passion for horses as I have today. I worked hard on the farm helping my father. All my friends were guys; I would steer as far away from the girly drama as I could. A strong-willed girl who was just one of the guys, I wasn't afraid to gut-punch them if they got a little too ornery. By telling you this, it's my desire that you understand who I was. I wasn't a pushover. I remember one of my guy friends telling me that my theme song was a song by the title of Headstrong. I embraced that, I always did the right thing and couldn't be budged on my beliefs or my decisions. I was in church for several years by this time, and I loved God.

Brenna Swoboda

Note to Self:

Sometimes a little girl needs something soft and warm to hold. There are times when she needs a little confidante who won't gush her secrets to the world. A little girl has treasures to tell and secrets to share, but no courage to tell anyone else. So, she could use a solemn confidante who would never betray her fears or wonders to the rest of the world. A little girl needs a friend whose level of courage matches her own.

Craig Wagganer

My dearest grandchildren,

Learn to encourage others.

Your great grandmother, Ruth, was an encourager. She was always writing notes to people to say thank you, to let them know they were being remembered, or for whatever reason she could find. With the electronic media available now, and who knows what you'll have access to in the future, snail mail and hand-written notes are becoming a thing of the past. It may be up to you to keep it going. I encourage you to.

As I mentioned, your great grandmother, my mother, wrote notes as a form of art. Written communications were so important to her, but as she got older, it became more of a burden to write notes and keep up with the individuals she loved that were a distance away. You can imagine her excitement when she learned about something new and revolutionary – email!

Through talking with others and TV, I suppose, she learned about email and thought it would be a wonderful way to stay connected with her friends and family. It would also make writing notes easier and less costly than buying cards and postage. She was so excited.

She purchased a computer and took some basic classes at the local high school. She asked a neighbor to come over and set her up with an email account and give her some basic instruction. She got signed up and was ready to go.

K.S. Wuertz

Dear Chloe,

Every moment we draw breath, we draw life. As a young woman, I could barely sketch my life. Today, I'm so much more, and less, than my younger self could ever comprehend. I speak with love for my young self, who lacked the vision that living offers.

If we are put on earth to learn our own set of life's lessons by experience alone (which I suspect), then the following won't be of much help to you. So this really isn't about me teaching you anything – It's about opening a conversation between us.

I draw on the life lessons of those before me to help me understand a basic and certain truth: I'm not alone. We all struggle, we all love, we all serve, rule, cry, laugh...It's who we are. This is some of what I've tucked into my Life's Lessons backpack at middle age. (If only I could live them all consistently!) I hope this letter helps you to understand how much I love you – and to know you are not alone. If you get any ideas from it all, 'eh, all the better!