

ONE-PAGE STORIES

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The Minute That Changed My Life

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

TOO TERRIFIED TO SCREAM, I watched in horror as a falling woman materialized, hit the umbrella over one of the postcard stands, then bounced to the stone courtyard at the Leaning Tower of Pisa.



Even the beginning of this 1972 trip was inauspicious: we drove to New York through constant rain (the next day, those roads were flooded) and checked in early for our flight — the day following a general strike to protest the rash of hijackings. (We learned of the Watergate Break-in only on our return.) We spent the first night stranded in a Paris train station. Two years after our wedding, so two years of seminary training for him and two years of teaching seventh grade for me, my husband and I set off on this camping trip in Europe. After months of planning and saving, we anticipated a wonderful holiday.

It was a rainy summer in Europe, but when we got to Pisa the day was bright and sunny. Because I had climbed the Leaning Tower during a semester abroad program, I did not need to do that again but thought my husband should have the experience. We postponed breakfast to get in line. He began his ascent: the tower is not level; the stone is worn. I waited at the bottom, idly noting the little postcard and trinket stands surrounding the tower and occasionally looking up to try to see him. Suddenly I saw colorful fabric floating toward the ground. Could that possibly be a person? No, that was not the downward-sloping side of the tower. But it *was* a person! After her body hit, immediately some people rushed to cover her while the proprietor tried to pick up the postcards that had been scattered. Thankfully, there was nothing in my stomach.

When my husband exited the tower, we went into a chapel, taking several minutes to get composed. Little did I realize how many years that would take. A few weeks later we returned to Luxembourg, a city of bridges and valleys, for our flight home. Partially mesmerized by the thought of floating down to the valley, I told him to hold onto me as we crossed a bridge. One summer I sat on a fence with my feet dangling over the Grand Canyon; the next I could not look up at a smokestack without becoming nauseous. How my life had changed!

Lithium Poisoning? I Don't Eat Batteries!

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“**Y**OU NEED TO SEE A NEPHROLOGIST,” the doctor said who first saw my test numbers, in my new hometown in Utah. It seemed possible I was being poisoned by lithium. Soon it was replaced with a diagnosis of polycystic kidney disease, based on my family history. Since PKD carries a risk of brain aneurisms, if I had one and it erupted, it would probably mean at least a stroke, maybe death.

Time for an MRI of my brain. On my birthday that year I learned there were no aneurisms, but now I was told to see a neurologist because there was a growth in my head the size of a golf ball. The neurologist had me hold out my hands, palms up, and close my eyes. Immediately my left hand started “drifting.” His diagnosis: a growth in the lining of my skull. It was pressing on my brain, interfering with certain motor skills on the left side of my body. It needed to come out. At surgery time, my younger sister came to take me to the hospital – and update family and friends throughout the three-hour surgery. My older son arrived to sit with me, and buy a walker for when I went home. When I was discharged, my supervisor and his wife took me to their home – I was not to be alone, in case I fell. My younger son arrived when I returned to my apartment: he washed the hair on half my head and counted the staples on the other side. The meningioma was benign. It had probably been slowly growing for years. In a month, I was back to work half-time. Annual MRIs show there is still a void where the growth had been. I can still feel exactly where that hole in my head was cut. I am amazed that I could have a hole cut in my head – and come out normal.

I grew up in a small Iowa town. I didn't know about other doctors. After all, Dr. Andersen delivered me, set a few broken bones, gave me a physical before college, and a premarital exam. Here in Columbus I heard people talk about cardiologists and internists. By the time I had seen all those -ologists in Utah – plus the random dermatologist and ophthalmologist along the way – I wondered if the number of -ologists one needs is infinite!

I realized how very fortunate I was to have family members who would come halfway across the continent to be with me and new Utah friends who would provide food and companionship until I was well enough to be on my own again.

Is This the End?

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I NEEDED TO HAVE A HOLE CUT IN MY HEAD – I was struggling to comprehend what the neurologist was telling me. There was a meningioma, a growth in the lining of my skull the size of a golf ball, that needed to be removed.

This just was *not* in my plan. My plan was to go river rafting at the Flaming Gorge Reservoir in northern Utah with my friends from Mount Tabor Lutheran Church in four days. The surgery was scheduled for a month later, so I drove northward through some very barren land, trying not to think about what might happen.

I reached the turnoff to the campsite and began the descent into the canyon. Signs along the road noted what geological era I was entering. The campsite was primitive, but the companionship was delightful. We shared our food, sang songs around a campfire, and gazed at the dazzling stars.

Dividing into groups the next morning, we drove to the put-in area just below the huge Flaming Gorge Dam. The runs were marvelous. Floating on the Green River in large rubber rafts beneath a clear blue sky was fantastic! On Sunday for my final run of the weekend, there were two brothers who wanted to dive off a large boulder in the middle of the river. We stopped the raft for them. The sky was clouding over between the two mountain ridges. We needed to be on our way but one of the boys had trouble getting back aboard. The sky grew darker; it began to rain and hail. Eventually he got back into the raft but now we were hung up on the rocks. Casey, Duane, and I got out to push the raft free. Thunder crashed and lightning flashed. Here I was, thigh-deep in ice-cold water when it occurred to me, “Maybe I won’t need to have that hole cut into my head after all. I’m going to be electrocuted in this river!”



Rafting on the Green River.
Image: Bureau of Reclamation.

Fortunately, we finally got the raft dislodged, scrambled in, and paddled as fast as we could to the takeout point. I was alive – but still had the surgery to survive.

The Grammy Phone

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PA.

MY “JOB” WAS TO CLIMB THE chair during a ring and wait for Grammy to give me the OK signal that it was for our house and I could pick up the ear piece. Had to put extra stuff on the chair seat to make the reach. Whoever was calling didn’t want to talk to me anyway so I would hand the ear piece over to Grammy.



I was born in 1943 in Akron, Ohio. My father was a tire builder. My mom and dad divorced before I was a year old. Mom took me south to Cambridge, Ohio, where she had lived with her parents – my Grammy and Grandpa. She then went on to Wright Patterson Air Force base to help with the war effort.

One of my early memories in their home is of a huge wall phone that seemed to have an extra loud bell that would jangle for an incoming call. These were the days of party lines – special rings for each home. I dragged one of her wooden dining room chairs over where the phone was, so I could do my “job.” I liked being close to the action. I can remember trouble in the neighborhood because of others listening in on calls that were not meant FOR THEM.

I loved life there and they were so good to me in a spoiling sort of way. My Gram was born in 1880 and passed from this life in 1982. She would have been 20 years old at the turn of the 20th century. She was also friendly with some vets missing arms and legs from the Civil War on the Union side. She was in her sixties when I came to live with them.

I can still see her finger wagging no-no when the rings were not for our house. This was called a ‘party line’ – not meaning a good time – it meant several houses were on the same line. Many an argument was started because of nosy people listening in or those who would tie up the line way too long. Also, for sure, the friendly local operator was in on all the juicy stuff.

In Grammy’s honor, I built a small replica of the phone and we have it on our refrigerator. When it is remarked upon by a guest, I get to use the punch line: “We have it to ward off crank calls.” Ha!

Lady and Lucky

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PA.

TWO STRAY DOGS, THEIR RIB CAGES PLAIN TO SEE, slogged slowly up our brick sidewalk on a Labor Day weekend afternoon. One was an emaciated full-sized German Shepherd, followed by her flea-infested pup. They were on the verge of starving.

We followed them to let them know we were there to help. They seemed to sense that we meant no harm. There was a neighbor's fenced back yard right on our path and they were home. Out they came to open the gate and in went the two wanderers. They almost fell down with exhaustion. Bowls of water were placed and they both drank like crazy. Dog food was placed and they were ravenous.

We gave them names due to their circumstances: Lady and Lucky. Little Lucky could get no nourishment from his mother. She was empty of milk.

We called our vet's office and since this was a holiday we got a message for an emergency vet who told us to bring them right in. We went down to the public kennel where the neighbors had placed them because of a large dog of their own. They were overwhelmed by fleas. They also had thrown up some of their food along with a match-book cover and some other inedible junk. We drove them to the vet and she commenced the work that would save their lives. She told us the next day that they used up every towel in her hospital with them throwing up. The good news – they were much better. The local shelter then went to the vet's hospital and took them to the large shelter to gain some weight and enjoy a recovery.

A few weeks later they were put up for adoption. In the meantime, we took care of the charges on the vet bill. The neighbors who had opened their back yard to them called and wanted to share half the bill. This was small-town life at its best.



Lady, recovered.

Lady and Lucky were adopted by two different good families. We were hoping they would go together but it was not to be. Life did get better for them. Little Lucky was adopted so quickly that his photo never appeared on the shelter's website.

Skate Boy Redux

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PA.

MY SKATES ARE GOING UP FOR SALE. With some help from my wife, Susan, common sense has now prevailed. You probably know someone who has broken a hip. It's not pretty. It could entail using a walker or even worse, being committed to a nursing home. We know people who this has happened to. Some actually never go home again. No thank you, please.

“Being two years away from eighty, a fall would not be good. I look forward to my next go 'round.” These were the last two sentences in my last story titled “Skate Boy,” in ONE-PAGE STORIES, No. 14, June 2021. I still have such good memories of years ago and going smoothly around to music to skate or dance to. I also relished the far outside position on “crack the whip.” One of my favorite numbers was listening to the Limbo song and watching some of the most unlikely and tall skaters contort to get under the limbo stick. Always, there are a few spills and falls but getting down to around two feet high is a feat in itself. Listening to Chubby Checker sing that song always reminds me of the Twist for which he became famous. That's nothing I would dare try now.



Young ones go like a bat out of Wuhan, zipping in and out super recklessly. Trying to dodge them is a trick in itself. Don't mean to sound “preachy” but things can and do go wrong in a New York instant. Also, I felt slightly embarrassed hugging the wall the whole way around the rink. Try walking on ice sometime. Well, don't try this at home but that is the sensation that I experienced.

So, I will be putting the skates up for sale. They look practically new. I am now a casual spectator wearing my slip-on loafers with feet planted firmly in comfort on the floor.

My Secret Life as a Rock DJ

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I WAS CAUGHT OUT BY MARC BROSEY. He, Alice, and their son, Elijah, were driving home one night from Florida to Tennessee, through Georgia. Marc was getting sleepy so he scanned for radio stations with good, loud stay-awake music. By sheer coincidence he found me on an FM station near Macon as I was DJ-ing a late night classical rock program.

Naturally, since they've known me for decades as a minister, Navy chaplain, amateur printer and publisher, now retired in Columbus, Ohio, Marc quickly deduced that I must be secretly exercising a rock music passion and, to avoid detection, broadcasting remotely on a Georgia station where no one would ever discover me. Little did he know the background that when I was in junior college in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the mid 1950s, I was president of the Concordia Falcons pep band. We played at home basketball games and we had livened up our repertoire with numbers by the new rock and roll sensation, Elvis Presley, and other early stars of this exciting genre. But it proved a little *too* exciting for some, and one day President Stuenkel called me and the director in to say that he had had complaints from the Ladies Auxiliary. They did a lot for the school and students, and Pres. Stuenkel was a good guy. I told him I certainly didn't want to get him in trouble with the Ladies Auxiliary, and we'd cut out the rock and roll numbers. And we did.

But as you may have guessed by now, another explanation is possible. The Bill Boys on air in Georgia and I are two people with almost-the-same names. He is William Talmadge Boys, I am William Earl Boys. We are first cousins. We did meet once at Little Rock Air Force Base when he was five. His dad, my uncle, was an Air Force pilot based there at the time. I and my wife, Ruth, remember little Bill Boys puzzling over the bizarre oddity that a man standing right there in front of him had the same name as him! He later went on to get a B.A. in journalism, with a sequence in radio and television. At some point he was the Operations Manager at Cordele [Georgia] Radio Network. Maybe he still is. Another cousin, Tucker Boys, tells me Bill is a well-known radio personality and DJ.

So if you're driving through central Georgia at night, find that late-night classical rock station and listen in. He's not who you thought I was. You do believe me, don't you?

Our Pious Chryso

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

CHRYSO LEANED OVER AND STOLE COMMUNION bread right out of Rev. Scotty's motionless, meditative hands.

He came to us, a big, gentle senior rescue Golden Retriever, with the name "Shaq" because he was so tall. Shaquille O'Neal was a famous, and definitely big and tall, professional basketball player. But I wasn't too keen on using the name of an African-American for a dog, lest there be a racist misinterpretation, and since I was a minister I cast about for a religious namesake. St. John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, fit. His Greek surname means golden mouth (*chrysos* + *stoma*); it came from his celebrated preaching. So "Chryso" became our new name for this sweet, old boy.

Sometimes we hosted clergy luncheons in our basement entertainment space back in Knoxville, Tennessee. We could accommodate up to sixteen. Before the meal the Dean would lead a short devotion, prayers, and sharing Holy Communion. It was relaxed, casual; surrounded by wine racks holding 400 bottles, walls decorated in a Tuscan style. The bread for Holy Communion would be homemade. Its fresh-baked aroma wafted throughout. The peacefulness of the setting even permitted us to let Chryso wander among the guests, getting lots of petting and schmoozing.

When it came time to celebrate the ancient and sacred ritual of Holy Communion, we'd arrange our chairs in a circle to make it easier to pass the bread and wine around. Chryso seemed to recognize that this signaled a special moment and he'd settle or sit near one of the ministers very patiently. One of our number, Rev. Scotty, customarily received the bread and would hold it in his lap, close his eyes and meditate briefly before consuming it. Chryso just happened to be sitting alongside Scotty this day, and as Scotty held his brief meditation, Chryso decorously, unobtrusively, stole the fresh morsel.

In this material universe, so fraught with struggle, good and evil, occupying great minds through the ages, I have faith that whatever the Divine Being may be like, he/she knows infinitely more than we mere mortals and canines, how limited we are in understanding. I take joy from the hope of God's love for all our creation. I smile to remember a gentle old Golden Retriever, with silent, pious, innocent sleight of mouth, join surprisingly in Holy Communion with us.

Now Posted on Village Connections Website

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

IN A PLEASANT SURPRISE TO ME, this amateur journal, ONE-PAGE STORIES, is now digitally available as PDFs on a non-NAPA website! (<https://villageconnections.clubexpress.com/>)

Village Connections is a non-profit organization serving members age 50 and over who live in several adjacent, historic neighborhoods of Columbus, Ohio, including my own neighborhood, German Village. I was regularly giving copies to the leaders, and in April they asked for permission to post PDF copies on their website so that all the members could read them if they wanted to.

ONE-PAGE STORIES started in Feb. 2020, right before the Covid-19 pandemic was declared and all the shutdowns and other restrictions went into place all over the world. The stories are mostly general-interest personal narratives with a few fiction pieces and other assorted pieces, too. All are original.

From the very first issue, the contributing writers have been about half NAPA members and half non-members. NAPA contributors so far have included Tom Duffey, Jack Oliver, Dan Wilkins, Milton Coleman, Don Bauer, Jessica Fox, Linda Shivvers, Nancy Heber, Frederick Moe, Michelle Klosterman, Carla Stephenson, Rich Hopkins, Susan Staus Duffey, Harold Cheney, Alice Stickler, Ken Faig, Jim Hedges, and myself. About a fifth of the total members!

Besides the leaders of Village Connections, I have been handing about twenty copies each month to neighbors as we walk our dog, and to Village Connections volunteers who drove us to medical appointments or picked up grocery orders for us at curbside express supermarkets during the lockdowns, to members of our book group and to our neighborhood Zoom group. In addition, more copies were going to personal friends and family members out of town. The current press run is 195 copies, and that, too, is about half for NAPA's Mailing Bureau, and half distributed to non-NAPA readers.

I am, of course, delighted that many folks get an exposure to amateur journalism this way, both as writers and readers. And I am gratified that so many personal stories of life's ups, downs, and quirks find a pleasant readership through ONE-PAGE STORIES.

I Give 5 Stars to “Write A Great Personal Essay,” by Rebecca Balcárcel

BY BILL BOYS

I *very* highly recommend looking at this YouTube video, and it’s only 12 minutes long. I’m only summarizing below; do watch the video to get the maximum benefit from her teaching! Very clear!

Balcárcel, Rebecca, “Write a Great Personal Essay.” Online Video Clip. *Six Minute Scholar*. YouTube, May 19, 2015. Web. June 5, 2021.

First, about topics. For topics, you might take an incident from your life and find the meaning that it had for you.

Examples. Make a list of the three worst and three best things that have happened to you. Places you’ve worked (you do have insider knowledge). Places you’ve traveled, trips you’ve taken, places you’ve lived. Hobbies you’ve had. What wisdom you’ve gained about life, and how did you come by it?

1. Start with action

2. Background

3. Development

4. Climax

5. The Change in you

1. Start with action. The first line, show some action; right in the middle of a high tension moment. Don’t just talk “about” the moment, put yourself in the moment. Include sensory details. Action, dialog, motion. Talk-talk moments are boring; you want to keep the reader’s interest.

2. After the first paragraph, put background next. That could be one paragraph or more. Here’s where you can help the reader figure out what’s going on in the action. Who are these people? What’s going on here? Help the reader not feel lost.

3. The next section should be development. Maybe even earlier background; maybe moving forward after the action. You should still have events in the development, but it always relate it to the story’s action.

4. Next is the climax. Not the climax of the story, but the moment you learned something about life you didn’t know before. This is how I’m different now.

5. The end. This needs to be an image, an action that shows the change in your life since then.



Write for ONE-PAGE STORIES?

You don't have to be a member of NAPA to submit pieces, although members are definitely invited. (Here's an easy place to practice and present your short-short story writing efforts.)

HOW MANY WORDS? About 350 to 400 words. Less if you have a photo or graphic to go with your story.

WHAT KIND OF CONTENT? Original prose – fiction or non-fiction. Personal narratives, anecdotes and memoirs would be especially welcome, but other genres would be considered as well, as long as they are your own original pieces.

CAN I GET SOME EXTRA COPIES FOR MYSELF? Certainly. Just let me know how many you would like.

WILL I GET FEEDBACK? I'll be happy to share with you any feedback I might get from others about your story.

NOTE TO READERS — Send me your comments on any of the stories so I can pass them on to the writers.

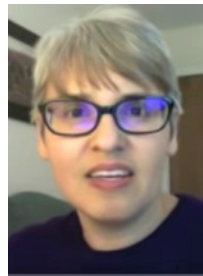
WHERE DO I SEND A SUBMISSION? To Bill Boys either by email at williamboys@att.net (preferred, to save retyping) or by postal mail to 184 Reinhard Ave., Columbus OH 43206-2635.

Tips on writing – Personal Essay

The best YouTube video I've come across yet about writing a personal essay (also called a personal narrative) is one that I describe in fuller detail on page 11.

The example Rebecca Balcárcel uses is quite a dramatic one, and most of our one-page stories are not so life-changing, but even so her advice on making a personal essay interesting is pure gold.

I have her advice in mind when I edit submissions to *One-Page Stories*, and when I write and re-write my own one-page stories, too.



Rebecca Balcárcel
(a clip from her
YouTube video)