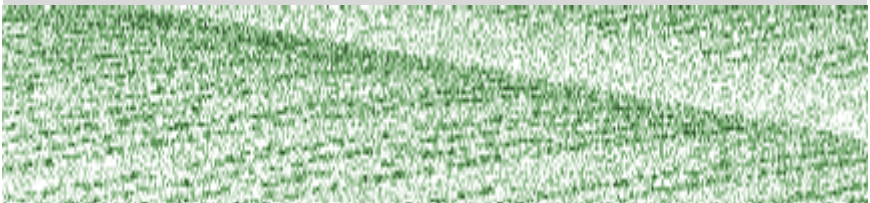


ONE-PAGE STORIES

No. 9 — DECEMBER 2020

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Silent Night

BY DON LUCK

AFTER A BRIEF STINT AS AN ASSISTANT PASTOR, I was called to a stagnant mission congregation. Even after twenty years, it had no permanent building but instead utilized a now-obsolete option known as a “house-chapel.” An unattractive turn-of-the-twentieth-century duplex had been purchased and remodeled to serve as a parsonage on the second and third floors and to house all church requirements on the first. Walls were eliminated on one side of the duplex to create a kitchen-now-chancel and a “nave” holding about 60 folding chairs.

This unsuitable arrangement was matched by a questionable musical program centered in a sweet but limited organist whose taste betrayed her love of schmaltz. Along with her came an electronic organ that sounded like an over-sized accordion. Clara’s limited abilities were wedded to a highly nervous constitution that would have her gradually pick up tempo each time she made a mistake. “High holy days” made her more nervous than ever. So . . .

That particular Christmas Eve my sermon called attention to Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth that notes it was the heavens that were filled with celebration and song. The earth was silent. So this Christmas we need not focus on our celebration of the coming of Christ, as wonderful as that might be, but rather sense the unsurpassable joy of God’s heart reaching out to us. Hence it is appropriate that for most of us our most beloved Christmas hymn is “Silent Night.”

You know the drill. Just before the benediction and recessional, the light of Christ is passed to waiting candles, the lights are dimmed, and we quietly sing that hymn. By this time, however, after a growing number of clunkers, Clara was like the horse that smells the barn. She was ready to bring it to an end. She launched into the first verse. Bad enough, but her foot also had the swell pedal pushed to the floor. The speaker was blaring as we rounded the bend into the second verse: “Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the...” POW! The organ blew up—except for the squeaky flute stop. Wide-eyed Clara soldiered on to the end and past the benediction to a less than rousing “Joy to the World.” A member was heard confiding to his wife, “God couldn’t take it anymore.”

Hello Dalai

BY DON LUCK

I HAVE NO IDEA WHO SUGGESTED ME, OR WHY, but I was asked to be a representative at an international inter-religious conference in India that was themed “Toward a Global Social Ethic.” My training was in systematic theology, not ethics, but since it was the National Lutheran Council that asked, I agreed and said I would do what I could.

After dealing with the labyrinthine and plodding patterns of Indian bureaucracy that exceeded their British colonial roots, my anxiety was relieved when I got my visa the day before my departure. I was on my way to my first experience of Asia, namely, in Madras (now Chennai) and the Gurukul Lutheran Seminary found there. The organizer of the conference was the seminary’s systematic theologian from Germany, Michael von Brueck, who incidentally is a direct descendant of Martin Luther himself. His personal friendships insured the presence of the two featured speakers, Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama. At the last minute, a famine summoned away the founder of the Sisters of Charity but the Dalai Lama was scheduled for the closing evening.

The less than one hundred participants were a very uneven lot. Most were academics like myself, the majority of them Roman Catholic. There were a few activists like Thai advocate for the poor Sulak Shiveraksa. A number were simply local laity from different traditions. The whole of Theravada Buddhism, for example, was represented solely by two monks. I don’t know how much the conference achieved or I was able to contribute, but it introduced me to inter-religious dialogue that eventually had me become one of the first members of the Society for Buddhist /Christian Studies.

After the Dalai Lama spoke at the closing session, as he walked down the center aisle of the auditorium, we all watched him with our heads slightly bent over two hands palms together – the widespread Asian form of respect. As I looked at him intently over my fingertips, he suddenly stopped, looked squarely at me, pointed a finger and said, “Do I know you?” I shook my head in the negative. A few moments later, recalling the Buddhist notion of re-incarnation and his hearty sense of humor, I should have said “Not in this life.” I bet he would have loved it.

On a Wing and a Prayer

BY DON LUCK

WELL, NOT A WING ACTUALLY, but an engine. Anyway...

Six of us, colleagues at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, were on our way to the annual professional conferences of our disciplines. Many thousands would be meeting in Boston that year so on a bright fall morning we boarded a plane at Columbus heading northward with an intermediate stop in Philadelphia. After a transfer of passengers there we took off, but in our ascent one of the two engines broke loose! The plane went into instantaneous instability.

One colleague in a window seat on the other side of the plane could see the engine dangling from the wing and then after a moment break free and fall like a bomb into what we later learned was a florist's field on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. The flight attendants were obviously unnerved and the captain came on speaker and gave us instructions for eventual landing. But we circled for the longest time, wobbling all the way. (Dumping fuel we later guessed.)

Sitting behind this particular colleague was a pilot working for Flying Tiger (Freight) Airlines. He shared some relevant facts. (1) Philadelphia has the shortest runways of all international U.S. airports. (2) Obviously the pilot could not help brake the plane per usual by dropping flaps and gunning the engines. And (3) he could not slam on the brakes because that would create friction sparks that would ignite fuel fumes still surrounding the plane.

Despite all this the pilot landed us safely much to our cheering. We had stopped at the very end of the runway met by a fleet of emergency vehicles! Later we learned (1) this was the third such incident in all of American aviation history, (2) ours was the only flight that survived, and (3) the pilot had practiced flying with only one engine the week before.

Two wings, one engine and lots of prayers.

Maestro

BY TOM DUFFEY

“IF SOMEONE GAVE YOU THIS ALBUM, you now know exactly what they think of you. If you bought it ... we got you again.” – the final words to the Walter Salb “Time Was Orchestra” album intoned in his deep mellow voice. (Search YouTube for “Walter Salb drummer”. His language is salty, so if you are sensitive to that – don’t go there. The music, however, is beyond beautiful.)

As a kid, I’d always wanted to play drums, my favorite instrument when listening to the greats like Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa. I finally got my first drum set at age 45 as a gift from my wife for Christmas. They came with the proviso that I also sign up for lessons because there would be no unschooled random banging on these beautiful brown wood-finish drums.

Through friends I met Mike Zack, who used to play drums with guitarist Nils Lofgren. Their music is also on YouTube, playing to 100 thousand fans in Wembley Stadium. Mike had Walter as an early teacher and advised me to try to get on with him, as he was then the first-call jazz drummer in the D.C. area. Luckily, Walter accepted me as a student! He taught me to read drum charts with a leaning toward classical jazz. I enjoyed this experience except when he was unhappy with my lesson and would rap me on the leg with a drumstick.

This was Walter teaching drums “His Way.” At one time he had been in a band backing Frank Sinatra. He was also on the Dean Martin show for two years. He told me they would rehearse Monday through Thursday and Dean would come in on Friday, already sure of what he wanted, and change everything around. Dean Martin was a “one-take” type of guy and did not like rehearsal.

In earlier times Walter owned a music studio and along with teaching musical instruments, he offered dance lessons. One instructor, in her teen years, was Goldie Hawn. He said she had that same goofy way about her even then, but was very sharp.

I still have the brown drums and played them with a country band for 15 years. We played weekly at nursing and personal-care homes and yearly at the County Fair and community Homecoming.

Walter died in 2006. I still have him in my heart and his lessons in my hands.

Two Lessons Learned from Danish Food

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER

I GOT SEVERAL LESSONS ABOUT EATING different foods, thanks to a junior semester abroad in Denmark during college.

Returning home to Iowa, I invited some friends for a foreign meal and prepared my new favorites: *Frikadeller* (Danish meatballs), *Rot kohl* (red cabbage), and *Rabarba grod med flød* (rhubarb pudding with cream). Heating the rhubarb, I added the amount of cornstarch called for but the consistency did not seem right. I added a little more but still it didn't seem thick enough. At least once more I added cornstarch. It still seemed too thin, but needing to proceed, I poured it into dessert bowls. My friends enjoyed the meatballs and other foods. Then I proudly set out the bowls of rhubarb pudding. It didn't take long to see person after person try to take a spoonful of pudding but each was unable to get a mere spoonful; the whole portion stuck together on the spoon, rather like rubber. Lesson #1: for cornstarch to thicken something hot, it needs to cool to reach the right consistency. It does NOT simply need more cornstarch.

A few years later in Montana, I fixed *Frikadeller* for a church potluck. I was near the end of the line and when I got to my dish, I could tell that *not a single one* of the meatballs had been taken! I was disappointed, but helped myself to several of the little delicacies and sat down. The pastor looked at my plate and asked, "Do you know what those are?" I said, "Yes: Danish meatballs." He just laughed and then asked, "Do you know what people here think those things are?" I just shook my head. He continued, "Rocky Mountain oysters." It was my turn to be confused. What were Rocky Mountain oysters?? He explained as delicately as possible: a bull's testicles. How would I know that? I didn't live on a ranch. Once the other people there saw me take and eat some and the pastor eat some as well, a few were willing to try, but it seems there were plenty left for me to take home and enjoy. Lesson #2: make a label so people would know exactly what they were or maybe, more importantly, what they weren't!

Want to try authentic-style Danish meatballs? Check this Food.com recipe: https://www.food.com/recipe/danish-meatballs-frikadeller-381211?nl=email_share.

Further Lessons from Danish Food

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER

LIVING IN DENMARK FOR A SEMESTER during college opened my mind – and stomach – to different foods and ways of serving it.

Back home in Iowa we would often have sandwiches for lunch, typically bologna or peanut butter and jelly. In Denmark there was no such thing as a typical sandwich. The Danes elevated that genre to elegant Smørrebrød (think smorgasbord). The bread was most often a dense rye, covered with a variety of foods: a piece of meat or fish, cheese, spread, or garnish. For example, after we had Frikadeller for dinner, we could generally expect one of the open-face sandwiches our Danish mother fixed for our lunch the next day to be made with a meat-ball. “Mor” (mother) usually sent us off to our



Examples of Smørrebrød – from the web.

classes at the university with four varieties of sandwiches: cheese, salami, herring, etc. One day I opened my lunch to find what I learned later was a codfish-egg sandwich. I took a tentative bite: crunch! Eww! It felt like sand in my mouth. After the second experience chewing sand, I asked Mor to please not give me any more. Two cheese sandwiches would be great. I was afraid that codfish eggs were very expensive and I didn't want to waste them.

For someone who does not have a very good sense of smell or taste, texture and presentation are the determining factors. I remember vividly the evening we had tongue for dinner. I had heard of it back in Iowa, but I was totally unprepared to see a huge cow's tongue on the platter – whole and still looking very much like a tongue. To be honest, I don't remember if I actually ate any of it or not, but the presentation was startling.

Perhaps the most enduring lesson learned from Danish food was not necessarily a specific meal but the fellowship shared around the table as we grew to know and love each other as a family.

BEMNT

By HAROLD W. CHENEY, JR.

ANY GI WHO SERVED IN GERMANY during the Cold War will recognize that BEMNT refers to “Beginning Early Morning Nautical Twilight,” the time of morning when the sky first becomes noticeably lighter than the earth at sea level.

And why is that important?

That was the time of day/night when the Red Army’s plan of battle would launch an offensive military action. By the time their troops and equipment were on the roll, the morning’s rising sun would be shining into the eyes of their enemy. . . . Or so they believed.

Thus, battle units of our army practiced deploying in our defensive positions, ready to repulse “... 50,000 T34 tanks pouring through the Fulda Gap.”

So much of the field training of combat units involved an alert being sounded sufficiently before the current BEMNT to allow the units to deploy to their pre-assigned defensive positions.

In the summer of 1961 I was a staff sergeant in the Firing Battery of the 2/82 Missile Battalion. We were armed with the then-current long-range guided surface-to-surface Corporal missile. I headed the Doppler station that sent the signal to shut off the engine at the precise time that its velocity and location would then let the missile glide to its target.

The Corporal carried a nuclear warhead and had a range of seventy miles. At that range the expected circular-probability of error (CPE) was within 1,200 yards of the targeted site. If you look up the Corporal missile on Wikipedia, it tells you that it was really not quite as accurate as specified.

Regardless of that, our tactical nuclear missiles that could impact within Red Army large-scale armored formations, or on their staging areas, would do quite a bit in blunting and reducing their offensive capability.

We’ll never know. But it remains clear to me that knowing that we had such a capability played some role in the Red Army never trying to make that push.

“Achievement” – a Medal for That?

BY BILL BOYS

THE JOURNALING GROUP I BELONG TO gets “writing prompts” from our leader. This month, “Achievement” was one of them. I first thought: No, I won’t use that one. It might seem vainglorious. Or something you’d get a certificate for in 5th grade?

But by odd coincidence, I actually *was* decorated with the Navy Achievement Medal at my retirement ceremony in 1993, ending 32 years, 3 months and 21 days as a chaplain in the U. S. Naval Reserve. The medal came as a surprise, even more so when I learned its precedence was only eighth lower than the Medal of Honor! (“Precedence” determines where it is worn on your uniform among other medals and ribbons you might have received.)

Surprising, because I didn’t think I was a particularly noteworthy chaplain. I just tried to do a conscientious job. I stayed active in the Reserve except for my first (clueless) year, and the one year I was in Nigeria, far from any place where I could participate. A number of years I accepted volunteer billets when pay billets were not available. I took some of the Navy’s many correspondence courses, which was not required but seemed useful learning for me. Eight of the years I filled Marine Corps Reserve billets. (That’s only normal – the Marine Corps draws *all* its chaplains from the Navy Chaplain Corps.) I served twice in command chaplain billets, once in a Naval Reserve command, once in a Marine Corps one. I gladly accepted one-day orders from time to time when the funeral of an active duty sailor or Marine was to be held near where I was serving as a civilian pastor, and distant from the availability of any active-duty chaplain. I helped on a few casualty calls. I was the senior chaplain in a Marine Corps landing exercise. The only unusual thing I did was translating some Russian on the side for the Navy Scientific and Technical Intelligence Command. But that wasn’t even chaplain kind of work, and I was barely adequate at it anyway. I did attend monthly Reserve weekend drills faithfully, and also did my two weeks’ Active Duty for Training each year, except for the two years mentioned before.

Thus my surprise to get a medal. But I will say that my Navy and Marine Corps service was special to me. It was an honor to serve; I worked with fine chaplain colleagues, sailors and Marines, and I learned much from my experiences in this part of our country’s military.



Adam Defends Eve*

BY KATHY PAUTSCH

“Adam, Adam, where art thou? Have ye eaten fruit of the tree which I commanded thee not to eat?”

“Yes, we have. Eve is not to blame.”

“The garden you have given us is truly wondrous. The animals, plants, and all creatures are indeed magnificent. Indeed, the woman you have made for me is truly a great companion. We have spent much time exploring all things, admiring and enjoying everything.”

“We have a good life here. We are happy. We have tended the garden, cared for the animals, and for each other.”

“But we have often wondered about that one tree and why you commanded us not to eat of its fruit. Eve kept telling me not to go near it, and I have tried to ignore it. But there is something about that tree that keeps tempting me. One time she went there alone and saw this serpent who even talked to her and said he couldn’t imagine why we were ordered not to eat of it. He said that you were being stingy and trying to keep us from total knowledge, the knowledge of good and evil.”

“Even the fruit on the tree looks so amazing and tempting. I took Eve there one day finally and we both touched one piece of the fruit. Nothing bad seemed to happen, so we both at the same time picked one piece of the fruit. Held it in our hands, wondering why it was so special.”

“Then we both at the same time took a bite. It wasn’t her fault. I helped her do it. I couldn’t help myself. I could have stopped her, but I didn’t because I wanted to learn everything I could about it.”

“Then when we found out what had really happened, we both ran and hid. It was totally my fault, God. And now we both are in this mess.”

* This thread of several stories imagining Adam defending Eve rather than blaming her, goes back to the August issue. The idea was suggested by Erich Fromm in *The Art of Loving* – he said that Adam’s blaming of Eve showed he did not yet love her, and he speculated about what Adam might have said to defend her.

Your One-Page Story Could Have Been Here

BY YOU

A personal narrative?

A fiction piece?

How about writing and
sending us one
for a future issue!

See p. 12 for how to.

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. No charge.

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

And a NOTE TO READERS – I welcome 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 – The Why?

“What is it you're trying to convey to your reader?”

Roxane Gay, a writer for the *New York Times* and a writing teacher, asks that question in a YouTube video, “Roxane Gay Shares Writing Tips: On Finding the Why | Class Excerpt.” (5 minutes, 13 seconds).

“Improve Your Writing – Show, Not Tell,” Benjamin [last name not given] (6 min., 8 sec.). Another video on YouTube that I offer as a suggestion.

And a third tip I picked up this month: Read your story out loud. This may help you identify bits that may be dull, too complicated, vague, or unclear. It may also help to hear others read *their* stories. And it may give you writing ideas, too.