

ONE-PAGE STORIES

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A Rainy Summer Day

By SHARON REIDT — MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT

IT WAS THE RAINIEST SUMMER OF OUR LIVES. Each day was fraught with precipitation, and life moved indoors as much as possible. Not that we minded; neither of us was outdoorsy. We were content to while away the hours inside.

We were in each other's pockets that summer. You had just received your driver's license and ferried me back and forth between our houses, grateful (or so you said) for the practice. We spent the bulk of our time at your house, which was large, comfortable, and free of other people



much of the time. There were occasional trips to the outside world: a quick trip downtown for iced coffee during a sudden sun storm; a brief, befuddled attempt at croquet in the sodden lawn in your backyard. For the most part these excursions were gratefully abandoned for hours indoors. There were long mornings spent in the dining room, where we drank endless pots of tea, ate soft-boiled eggs and buttered white toast, and you taught me how to play Russian Bank. Occasionally the sun would fitfully appear in-between bouts of showers, and the pale yellow dining room walls were briefly illuminated by streaks of crisp New England sunlight.

One day it was colder than usual, and the rain seemed ceaseless. Tired of the dining room, and yearning for a taste of outside, we moved to a screened-in balcony that adjoined the sitting room. We opened the windows to let the cool air and the rain in and brought down armfuls of blankets and comforters. Comfortably burrowed in our lair, we read out loud from a Penguin paperback of Saki short stories. You would read one story, and I the next, and we alternated our readings as the wind and rain streamed in around us. We were slightly cold, and slightly damp. It was exhilarating.

The day ended, and then the summer, and then we both returned to college. In those days I had a remarkable talent for losing friends and burning bridges. Our friendship burst apart, and I haven't spoken to you in years. Yet on rainy summer days I can recall that day, the happiest day I spent in your company, reading and laughing in our snug corner as the inclement weather enveloped us.

The Knitting Lessons

By SHARON REIDT — MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT

“These two movement, Knit and Purl, are the foundation of ALL knitted fabrics, simple or elaborate.”

Mary Thomas’s Knitting Book, Dover Publications, p. 50

KNIT. IN THE FALL OF FOURTH GRADE, I spent one afternoon a week with Fred and Kay. They were an older couple who lived down the road from my family. I’d been matched with them as part of an “adopted grandparents” program. Their children and grandchildren lived several states away, and my grandparents and step-grandparents were scattered across several U.S. states and one Canadian province. I was grateful to have them in my lives, and everyone in my family was fortunate to build lasting friendships with Fred and Kay.

That was in the future. In fourth grade, Kay taught me the knit stitch, which took a while, and resulted in dense misshapen objects intended to be potholders. I found knitting to be frustrating, and I’m sure I must have shown this frustration (I was not a tactful child). We soon abandoned these lessons, but I retained the knowledge of how to cast on stitches and how to knit the knit stitch. Every few years I would once more try my hand at knitting, and I became more adept at knitting simple potholders and scarves.

PURL. AT SOME POINT IN MY TWENTIES, I decided I was going to really learn how to knit. This meant that I would need to buckle down and master the purl stitch.

I’d tried to teach myself, reading directions from knitting books and magazines, trying to wrap my head around where I was supposed to place my right needle and how I was supposed to wrap my yarn. Frustrated by my lack of progress, I turned to my mother. She tried coaching me through the steps, but it was no good. I was all thumbs and felt flummoxed by the needles’ movements. I know that I showed my frustration (I am not a tactful adult) and no doubt I got snippy. My mother took the needles out of my hands and slowly demonstrated how to purl. At some point something clicked. The purl stitch, at long last, made sense. My mother passed the needles back to me and I tried again. Eureka! I was now a knitter, and ready to embark on a hobby that has brought me much enjoyment (tempered with the occasional frustration).

Old House?

By DAVE WARNER — LENOIR CITY, TENNESSEE

WE HAVE BEEN BROWSING FOR HOUSES in Lenoir City, Tennessee, ever since daughter Alice and her family moved there about five years ago. We even bought the house next door to them, bailing out after home inspection made it look like fixing it up might take us a decade or so.

The historic district of Lenoir City consists of a few square blocks of houses, most 100 years of age or older. Naturally, condition of these houses varies greatly. The nicer ones are truly wonderful, but no one ever moves; no one wants to leave. A buyer is left waiting for someone to die and find out if heirs are moving in, or if it will be sold. For example, daughter Alice's house had never been sold — it was originally built for the family, and had been inherited twice before it came on the market when they were looking.

We have a realtor friend of Alice whom we had look at a number of houses with us and others for us when we couldn't be there. It is very reassuring to have someone you can trust in the middle of such transactions.

Then we found a house on a web site, built on a vacant lot where the original house had burned down decades ago. We were familiar with the lot and even toyed briefly with having a house built on it, but decided the custom house build was more hassle than we wanted.

The house pictures were stunning. The exterior matches the style of the 100 year old houses in the neighborhood, but the interior is open concept with all the latest features. So we called our realtor. It was Tuesday — he said there was an open house on Saturday, and I said: “no, there won't be, you are going to wrap this up for us today.”

A few hours later we had a contract to purchase the house, contingent only on a home inspection. Our realtor looked at the house in detail for us, and reported back: “I have some news about your house — it's way better than the pictures let on.”

The home inspector cleared our only contingency a couple of days later; his 30 page report could be summarized as: “I have never seen even a new house in such good condition.”

And so the adventure began.

Just Another Sunday

BY HAROLD W. CHENEY, JR. — REYNOLDSBURG, OHIO

I WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD. I had spent two weeks that past summer at a Boy Scout camp up in the Adirondacks but I was still a Tenderfoot. Couldn't swim so couldn't go up a rank. Doing well in eighth grade at St. Mary's Academy, in Little Falls, New York.

I was supposed to be assembling with my class for the procession to the church for the 9:15 Sunday mass. But I had a paper route and was excused. I had gone to the 5:30 mass, gone for breakfast, and then to the cigar store to pick up my papers.

By 8:00 I was on the way with my wagon filled with copies of the *Utica Observer-Dispatch* and other out-of-town papers, such as the *New York Times*. My route mostly covered the east side of town. Little Falls is very hilly, so I was pulling my cart up one steep street and down others. I collected as I went, so each stop took a while to complete.

It was just past noon when I got home, in time for what we called "dinner."

My Father had just brought home the December issue of *Amazing Stories*. It had a picture of a sinking German submarine on the cover. I hadn't read that story, yet. Besides, I wanted to first read the werewolf story in his *Weird Tales*. I lost track of time; even forgot to listen to the New York Philharmonic on the NBC station, WGY, Schenectady, New York.

Evening came on, and our neighbor from across the street came over to us, as we sat on the front porch. She asked us if we had heard about the Japanese having bombed Pearl Harbor.

I asked her, "... where is Pearl Harbor?" A question that I first asked on that day 80 years ago ... and never had to ask again.

My oldest daughter recently visited the USS *Arizona* Memorial in Pearl Harbor. She noted that – 80 years later – there were still some small oil slicks about the protruding, rusted, hull parts. She was told that the Navy will *not* seal off those submerged oil leaks *until* the last survivor of the USS *Arizona* has died.

Bronx Park When I Was a Kid

By JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

BRONX PARK WAS MY FAVORITE once I was old enough to go places on my own. It had a play area close to the entrance but I don't remember ever using it; I was probably too old by that time. What I do remember was the long hill that we used to sled down in the winter whenever it snowed. I would spend the hours after school and before supper there, always coming home tired, cold and wet but I'd usually go back the next day for more.



A winter scene in Bronx Park.

This park is very large – a little over a square mile – and contains perhaps the only original forest still standing in any of the New York City boroughs. Within its borders are the Bronx Botanical Gardens and the Bronx Zoo. Besides hiking through the woods, which was a big deal for this city kid, we used to enjoy both the botanical gardens and the zoo. It was such a pleasant walk to the zoo, probably under an hour, observing all the natural beauty including plants, wildlife and imagining when Indians lived there.

The hothouses of the botanical gardens contain plants that I had never seen before or since. One of the houses was tropical – hot and humid, and in the winter this was a place we used to look forward to visiting. It was just as I imagined a jungle would be. In one of the buildings was an indoor pool with floating plants and tropical fish.

We went to the zoo on Wednesdays because the admission was waived. Because we didn't have any spare money to buy animal food from the dispensers, we would spend the day trying to feed the elephants things they didn't want, which they would blow out through their trunks. They must have hated for us to try to fool them but we were kids. We spent what seemed like hours, watching the seals beg for fish. There was a very large, older one that was always taking the food away from the smaller ones. We always felt bad for the ones that didn't get any of the fish but I'm sure they didn't starve.

It appears that those days are over for today's youths as anyone under the age of seventeen must be accompanied by an adult in the zoo. Perhaps we were better behaved or maybe the elephants ratted us out?

Class of '57

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

THERE USED TO BE A FARMER'S MARKET every Tuesday morning 'til noon in our small town of Reynoldsville, Pennsylvania. It was a chance to pick up garden-fresh produce and enjoy some good fresh untainted conversation. These folks are salt of the earth.

I was part of a local band here for over 15 years and one of my bandmates, Lee Love, was rhythm guitar player. I always referred to him as Buddy Lee. He was also a farmer. Part of his farm table would be covered with what he would call frying peppers. My wife would fry them up in bacon grease and add fresh-cut "taters." I can still taste this, one of my favorite dishes.

Lee used to ride and stable horses "for real," wore genuine cowboy boots to go along with his persona and referred to any kind of food as grub, as in, "This is some Good Grub!" I always used to wonder why the toes on cowboy boots came to such a sharp point. He explained to me that they were pointed for ease of mounting the horse and they would better slide into the stirrups. Makes sense.

He was versed and trained in Animal Husbandry. In later years he also managed a large working ranch for a prominent doctor.

We also liked exchanging jokes at his table to pass the time. I made up one and worked it on him but, in the end, he had the last word. He told me he was valedictorian of his graduating class and the year was 1957. I asked him "Do you know what big deal happened in 1957?" He said "No" and I came back with "That was the very year the '57 Chevy came out." It became a classic. Giving me a quizzical look, he said in earnest "No Kidding!" Drum roll please! Then he proceeded to tell me about the Statler Brothers recording of "Class of '57." It's on YouTube under – Statler Brothers Class of 57.

It is so touching that I cannot listen or watch it with a dry eye. It's almost like attending an actual "Class Reunion."

Buddy Lee passed in May of 2020.

May You Rest in Peace my friend. Now you can mount up with Johnny Cash and "Ghost Riders in the Sky."

Do Not Fold, Spindle or Mutilate

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

I WAS DISCHARGED FROM THE ARMY IN 1964 after serving three years. My Military Occupational Specialty was “Personnel Administration Specialist.” Other soldiers had a name for this: “Paper Puke.” I enlisted for this specialty because I wanted to work at a desk with a phone.

After discharge, I decided to move on from my hometown of Canton, Ohio, to California. “Go West young man.” I rented a small apartment in Anaheim, two blocks from Disneyland. Had a view of “Magic Mountain” from one my windows. I was driving a newer VW convertible I bought in Germany and shipped back to the States. At the time of purchase, the exchange rate was four of their dollars to one of ours. Even a private could live pretty good over there. I found a job in a sheet metal shop which made welded honeycomb for heat shields on early satellites.

Every day I would pass a billboard: “West Coast Trade School,” located in downtown Los Angeles. “Find your future in computers.” I signed up for morning classes since my job didn’t start til late afternoon. The drive into Los Angeles was about 30 miles and it took two and a half hours one way in the morning. My ride home at noon was a little less than a half hour. I was so pleased to be learning an actual skill because my hands were all cut up working at that sheet metal shop. Now I was learning to deal with those ubiquitous punch cards. I was learning to program boards for the sorting and merging machines and the tab printers which would print reports and such. The boards looked like the old-fashioned telephone operator boards with jacks. I was not cut out for this. Not a math whiz.

When you received a bill in the mail, the warning would always be printed as a caution and it was a stern command – no “please” at that: “DO NOT FOLD, SPINDLE OR MUTILATE.” Reminds me of the “hanging chads” scandal, Florida election recount of 2000.

Because of my training and work station in the Army, and training from the West Coast Trade School, I was able to get hired at the world's largest manufacturer of natural latex surgeon’s gloves, in Massillon, Ohio. I had complete charge of their payroll department and then production scheduling and control. Pretty good positions for a young guy looking to become established..

My Most Famous Solo

By JIM HEDGES — NEEDMORE, PENNSYLVANIA

U.S. MARINE BAND TOURS WERE NO DIFFERENT than touring with any musical group – they quickly became “old hat.” The halls and the hotels changed from day to day, but the music and the routine were always the same: pack, sweep the room, check out, get on the bus, bounce along for two or three hours, new hotel, new room, new hall, play the matinee, find a nearby greasy spoon, play the evening program, back to the hotel, wash your socks in the sink, and grab some sack. Repeat, *repeat*, *REPEAT* . . . every day for nine weeks.

The players did not usually memorize their parts, but as the tour wore on they would pay less and less attention to the printed pages on their stands. I would doze along, listening for cues in the other parts and play mine when the time “sounded right.”



The author, ca. 1962.

One night though, I got too careless. We were in Hammond, Indiana, playing the selection “Sons of Veterans” march. There is a 16-measure drum break before the trio – eight bars and repeat the eight. I was half asleep, I felt my horn slipping from my grasp, I awoke groggily, grabbed the horn, heard the drummers playing the break strain, and thought they were at the end of the break.



U.S. Marine Band emblem.

And so I blasted in with my tuba, eight measures too early and all alone (except for the annoyed drummers).

The colonel was not pleased(!), and I made a point of staying awake for the rest of that tour.

Waiting in the Dark with a Gun

BY BILL BOYS – COLUMBUS, OHIO

HERE IS A 60-YEAR-OLD MYSTERY. It involves a girl about my age, but my now-wife, Ruth, says it was not her (as I had long assumed it was) so I am not sure who she was. A friend? A date? A neighbor? I'll simply call her "Mary."

It was dark; I was driving. My mother was in the car, as was Mary. I think we were bringing my mother home after a stop at the home of the Carnes family, close family friends two or three miles away. Something was amiss, of that I am sure, but cannot precisely recall now. Anyway, as I drove into our yard, for some reason I had the foresight to park across the little run and next to a shed, turn off the headlights, and ask Mary to go into the darkened house to see if my dad was there, and then come back to the car to report.

She did, and came back a few minutes later, a bit shaken. She said yes, my dad was waiting there in the dark and he had a gun. He asked her where my mom was. Mary had the presence of mind to say that she didn't know, and then she got out of the house and came back to the car. She said she thought my dad had been drinking.

So we knew Mom should not enter the house. But she also should not stay in the car with us, in case dad came looking for her. Mom decided to quickly walk through the dark to the old cement-block chicken shed that earlier farm owners had built, and hide inside.

Dad did come out to the car, I think, because I vaguely remember giving him some story about mom possibly visiting the Carneses. I said I'd drive over there and see. So Mary and I drove away, leaving mom hiding in the chicken shed.

When I got to the Carneses', I told Mr. Carnes what had happened, and I used their phone to call the county sheriff to tell them what was going on; that I was going back home now to check on Mom, and Dad as well; and to please come check our home if I had not called them within an hour to tell them the situation was resolved. My memories of the rest of the evening are a blank. Nobody was hurt, thankfully, but Mary disappears from my story. (Was she one of the Carnes daughters, perhaps? But Carolyn says it wasn't her.) I called the sheriff's office back and they said they had no record of my prior call! (Why not?!) And who was "Mary"?!

Jumping for Academic Joy

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I REALLY DID JUMP FOR JOY and pump my arms in celebration as I walked homeward across The Oval at Ohio State University that day in 1968.

I had completed a year of graduate study in Linguistics, taking advantage of unexpected time back in the States as the Nigeria-Biafra civil war was erupting there. My graduate advisor, Dr. Catherine Callaghan, had just told me she would like to nominate me for a three-year National Science Foundation grant to pursue Ph.D. studies in Linguistics if the Board for Missions of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod would give me a leave of absence for that long from my call as a missionary.

I anticipated that the Board for Missions would probably agree since advanced linguistic studies would certainly benefit my assignment to analyze the unwritten language called Eket whenever I returned to the mission field. At present the Nigeria-Biafra civil war was raging, preventing my return for awhile anyway. And the NSF grant would provide income for Ruth and myself, freeing the Board for Missions from paying my salary during that time.

Personally, too, I was elated. I love to study and learn. I had even asked Concordia Senior College, the ministerial preparatory college where I earned my B.A., if I could take an extra year of studies there before going on to seminary, in St. Louis, Mo. (They said No.) My grandfather, Rev. August H. Dornbirer, had an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, and I loved and admired him. Others among my kin had a few advanced degrees in Law and Medicine, but I didn't know if any of them had a Ph.D., which I imagined to be the pinnacle of learning. To think that I might actually aspire to such an accomplishment was heady stuff!

The request went to the Board for Missions; they agreed; the NSF grant was awarded; and my academic program began in earnest. But then twists of fate came along – when the war ended Nigeria refused us visas to return; I left the Board for Missions entirely, therefore, and entered ordinary parish ministry. I did not complete my dissertation and defense of it until 1979 (Ruth urged me on, bless her), and at the spring commencement ceremonies in Ohio Stadium, I received my Ph.D. diploma. When I walked across the stage to receive it, Dr. Callaghan cheered from her seat among the faculty!



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 comments on any of the stories so I can pass them on to the writers. They appreciate it.

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 – Get a Good Start

Sizzling Starts: 6 Ways to Start your Story! | EasyTeaching, YouTube, Oct. 22,2020. Length: 5 min., 59 seconds. Nov. 16, 2021.

For some reason – and I fall into this myself – contributors of short pieces often start their stories blandly. Usually this is introductory material – sort of how we might start if we were *talking* to someone face to face, where we have the listener's attention already. *Writing is not like that*; we have to snag the reader's interest because we *don't* have it right away. We have to earn it. Check out this video for ideas on how to get your one-page story off to a good start!