

ONE-PAGE STORIES

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Gabbie at the Gates

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

IT NEVER FAILED. IF GABBIE WAS AT HOME and we closed our front gate, however softly, she would hear it from anywhere inside their house and sound off, alerting Ken and Tim, her owners, and anybody else within earshot, that she *heard*, she definitely *knew*. (“You don’t think I didn’t *notice*?!”)

Gabbie, and her late companion, Monty, lived next door to us. On occasion we would have reason to ring their lovely old-fashioned twist door-bell, which operated like an antique bicycle bell with a more sonorous clamor. Gabbie reacted as if a five-alarm fire had been signaled, and she were called upon to rush to the door, let all the world know that she understood, would raise the alarm, and do whatever was necessary to control the crisis.

But if, as was sometimes the case, we were inbound for drinks or for dinner, she soon assumed her role as hostess and chief welcomer to the festivities. She circulated among us guests, receiving stroking, ear-scratching, cooing and any other form of human affection available. If we were a little remiss or forgetful, we might find two small, silky paws gently laid on our leg to remind us that she was there and was open to the idea of being petted.

Ken and Tim told us that when they boarded her at the doggy daycare during any of their trips, she was best friends with a dachshund the owners had, and she acted as if her mission while there was to supervise the entire facility and its inhabitants. They called her “the boss.” I don’t doubt for a minute that she did just that!

Today we got this email from Ken and Tim, “Gabbie died last night. Woke up and found her deceased. Only 10 years old. Sad for us.”

We wrote back with our shock, sadness and condolences, of course. Then I got to imagining her arrival at the Pearly Gates. I hope they make just the right sort of “clang” when they open and close, for if they do, I know Gabbie will have plenty of satisfying, necessary and fulfilling work to do while she waits for the day when Ken and Tim finally show up.

Our Russian Houseguests

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

FOUR RUSSIAN CITIZENS HAVE BEEN GUESTS IN our home at one time or another. I think of them now because of Russia's (Putin's) invasion of Ukraine, the sanctions imposed on Russia as a result, the clampdown on free speech in Russia, and the uncertainties of where this war is headed.

They were guests of a U. S. State Department program called Open World, a program to bring Russian teachers, government workers, environmental workers, journalists and similar citizens in occupations that might welcome a chance to visit America for two weeks and learn about America and its citizens. We were members of Friendship Force International's Knoxville, Tennessee, chapter at the time and our chapter was one that volunteered to host these folks in our homes during their two-week program.

Our particular guests, two at a time, were three women and one man. This was twenty years ago. The visits were very pleasant, person-to-person. In addition to putting them up, we were responsible for giving them breakfast each day. I can't recall ever discussing politics with them. They were quite busy during the daytime with scheduled events set up for them that familiarized them with U.S. institutions that were counterparts to their occupational specialties. But mixed in among those events were recreational activities, too, such as a day-trip to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a talk by a Cherokee elder, group parties with our host families, and some time for shopping.

In light of Russia's new laws against protesting the invasion and the war against Ukraine, which could result in prison sentences up to fifteen years, I am withholding the names of our houseguests and their home towns. Not so much because I know what they think about the war (I don't), but just so there is no chance that it might draw unwanted attention to them.

We contributed to a fund for Ukraine relief. As a retired Navy chaplain I watched with interest one interview with the senior Ukrainian Orthodox military chaplain. I wonder what the Russian Orthodox church leaders feel about the war on other Orthodox Christians. I wonder about our Russian houseguests and how they are faring. And . . . I wonder where this is all headed.

A Diaphragm? Really?

By KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

IT WAS MY FIRST DATE! A Thursday night in November, my junior year in high school. I was going to see *Swan Lake*. The Royal Canadian Ballet was to perform at Wartburg College, fifty miles from my hometown. I was excited; anxious to be on my way.

Although my parents had not set a “minimum age” for dating, it was not difficult for them to agree. They knew John because he had been a junior counselor at EWALU Bible Camp, where I spent my summers. I had even talked to my basketball coach because it would mean breaking training rules: I would be out past curfew. But he too agreed. Dressed in a wonderful blue suit I had sewn, I was ready!

John came to pick me up — driving his father’s ambulance. OK! No matter. I was looking forward to the ballet. We stopped before leaving town to pick up Emma Belle; she would meet her date at the performance. An hour later, we arrived and found our seats in the auditorium.

The lights went down. I was entranced! As the ballet continued, I was getting a little warm. I tried to unbutton my oatmeal-colored coat, but the loop at the top must have gotten twisted because I couldn’t get it undone. I was too unsure of myself to ask John for help, so I watched the entire performance with my coat on. No one was able to see my beautiful blue suit.

After the ballet was over, we went to the car. It wouldn’t start. John was a little flustered. Somehow, we got to a repair shop. We waited in a nearby coffee shop where John said he needed something strong to drink and ordered warm milk. Eventually the mechanic told us a diaphragm needed to be replaced. What? A diaphragm? Really? I had certainly never heard that term used in that context. I was not a mechanic, but it sounded rather fishy to me. Eventually, the problem was rectified, and we were on our way. I arrived home about 1:30 a.m., way past curfew but flushed with excitement and tired. It certainly had been a night to remember!



The suit no one saw.

A Frigid Winter in Montana

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED WE WERE IN FOR A LONG winter when, on September 25, 1972, we awoke to about six inches of wet heavy snow. I shoveled our short walk, probably for the only time that year. The rest of that winter it was so cold there was little snow which could be easily swept off the walk.

For his seminary internship, my husband was assigned to the Rocky Mountain Synod, specifically Miles City, Montana. In August we left the big city of Columbus and drove to the Big Sky Country!

The Montana temperatures were incredible. Early in the winter Elsa's gear shift snapped. ("Elsa" was our car.) We were told we needed to outfit the engine with a "something" to plug the car into an electrical outlet to keep the oil from freezing. We needed to order a new gear shift but lived so far away from any metropolitan area, it took quite some time to get it. (We borrowed a "clunker" from the pastor.) When the new gear shift and the part to heat the oil finally came, they were installed – but only after the repairman was shown how to open the hood on our Swedish car. What a blessing! The first ten days in December the temperature never got above ten degrees below zero! About that time, I got a job substitute teaching in the local high school. I would dress warmly and trudge off to teach personal typing and high school English. The other teachers helped me with lesson plans since my degree was in history.

Later that winter we were invited to spend a couple days with some friends in Jordan, about 80 miles north of Miles City. To remain a substitute, I needed to take one vacation day a month so taking a day off for fun fit our schedule well. When we got into the car, Elsa started easily enough (because of that electrical cord), but our lovely, upholstered seats were as unforgiving as an old buck-board bench. What a surprise! It was only 38 degrees below zero – *before* factoring the wind chill. We drove north, passing through Rock Springs National Forest (one tree beside the road) and Angela (population 8). Our host, Jim (a former intern in Miles City and now the pastor in Jordan), was acclimated to the weather along the "high line," as that area of Montana was called. The guys went ice-fishing; Sue and I stayed in the snug parsonage. Spring couldn't come soon enough for me.

Northern Illinois Is Closed

By KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

THE BLIZZARD WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING. My husband's first call was to a church in rural Illinois, six miles from Carthage. The first blizzard was December 31, 1978. January 22, 1979, we left for a pastors' conference a day early to stay overnight with another pastor's family. While the men went to the conference, the other mother and I went shopping in Peoria. It began snowing while we were in the fabric store. We had planned to stay that night as well, but then things got dicey. The only one who didn't need to worry about the amount of food available was my six-week-old baby when the weatherman aptly reported, "Northern Illinois is closed." My older son enjoyed the time immensely: his new friend had millions of Legos (or so it seemed). We got home the 25th, driving carefully on the plowed roads and looking out the windows *upward* at the piles of snow. When we got to the parsonage, we walked across the snowdrifts and reached *down* to the mailbox to retrieve our mail.



The church in January 1979. Mailbox whiteout.

Less than a week later, my baby and husband were sick. I had a touch of cabin fever, so took the nearly three-year-old to get eggs from a neighbor. I never got there: the farmer had to find me and pull the car out of a ditch when I didn't show up for the eggs. Thank goodness for caring neighbors.

Just a couple winters later, we had returned to Ohio. At Christmas time, we bundled up the boys and headed to my family's home in Iowa. About the time we got to Indianapolis in blowing snow, I said to myself, "We should not be doing this." Still, we kept going but didn't dare stop to eat for fear the choke in that car would freeze open and we wouldn't be able to get it started again. In Iowa the boys wanted to play in the snow but the time it took for them to get dressed and ready to go out was longer than they were able to stay outside in the sub-zero cold. Playing in the snow is intriguing, but one must dress for the weather.

My Time Around Horses in Montana

BY LINDA L. SHIVVERS — DES MOINES, IOWA

WE COULD CAMP AND DO “COWBOY” THINGS at the Montana ranch Rosie and I were visiting near her grandma and grandpa’s. One day we got to go horseback riding. The horses we got to ride were dark brown with long black manes and tails. I’m glad we didn’t ride fast. Rosie’s dad said they were trained to just walk when children were on them. That was okay because even going slow I bounced a lot.

I got more horsey stuff when Rosie and I met the neighbor’s horses. We didn’t get to ride them, but Rosie’s grandma said it was okay to visit them when they were in the pasture. She said we could cut pieces of apples for them. They would see us coming across the back yard and come right up to the fence. The light brown horse we called Taffy. The other one was white. We called him Whitey.

One day after breakfast when we went out to see Whitey and Taffy we thought Rosie’s mom and grandma saw us get the apples, and would assume we were going to see the horses. After they ate their treats they wandered off. Rosie and I climbed over the fence and went to look inside their shed. We hadn’t been in it before. We had fun cleaning out the stalls, and we worked so hard we forgot about lunch! The horses even looked in every so often to see what was going on. We raked and swept, and cleaned up the shelves where we found all kinds of odd things. I told Rosie I thought the tools were for grooming the horses.

It wasn’t until we couldn’t find another thing to straighten or clean that we finally left the shed. Ohhh, the looks on everyone’s faces when we got to the house! We hadn’t checked in all day and no one knew where we were. They had looked everywhere in the neighborhood. They just hadn’t looked in the shed!

Taffy and Whitey’s owners didn’t get angry at us for going on their property without permission. Next time, we’d have to ask so everyone would know where we were. They said we did a nice job on the shed. It hadn’t been cleaned like that in years. Rosie and I could tell!

Oceanview – An Idea

BY KEN FAIG, JR. — GLENVIEW, ILLINOIS

MY FATHER DID NOT HAVE AN EASY PATH from this world to the next. He lived ten months after undergoing colon cancer surgery in Oct. 2002, and died in Aug. 2003, one hundred days short of his eighty-fifth birthday. He never staged the recovery that looked possible on paper. “It was just too much for him,” his former physician opined to me. “What did I ever do to deserve this?” my father asked me, and I could only reply, “stuff happens.”

He spent his final months mostly in nursing homes. One thing you learn fast in the nursing home environment is that your loved one acquires a whole new set of care providers — from physicians on down. One of my father’s best care providers in his final months was his Evercare nurse coordinator. (Evercare is a specialty Medicare Part C plan for nursing home residents.) I had the disadvantage of being halfway across the continent during my father’s illness, and could only visit monthly. The nurse coordinator was one of the few care providers who would listen to me and try to address my concerns. Some of the others seemed to be telling me implicitly, “It’s time to let go. Your father is on his way out of this world.” True statements, but not easy for a loved one to accept.

Anyhow, this nurse coordinator had the idea of a nursing / hospice facility built right on the ocean’s shore — call it Oceanview. Here the residents could enjoy the sunshine, ocean breezes and salt air on fine days. Otherwise, they could listen to the perennial rolling of the waves, the ebb and flow of the tides, the calls of the birds, and the mighty winds and thunder of the occasional storm. Not to argue that a human life is insignificant, but its span is nevertheless tiny by comparison with the natural world’s time frame.

I don’t know what my father would have thought of her idea for Oceanview. However, I think I would like to spend my own final months in such a facility. Sure, there would still be activity directors, television and other entertainment, but the time comes in one’s final days when one would just like to “unplug.” Why listen to artificial “white noise,” when Oceanview could provide all the natural aural background one might wish for on the journey to life’s end?

So I say thanks to my father’s nurse coordinator for listening to me. I do not know whether anyone will ever realize her idea for Oceanview.

A Lately Recurring Dream

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

TRUDGING ACROSS A CAMPUS and through buildings at some huge university, I am consumed with the realization that I am going to be late to a class or meeting. The campus is either unfamiliar, or else changed quite a lot from what it used to be. In other versions of this dream, I am consumed with apprehension that some paper or thesis is terribly inadequate, or I am woefully unprepared for the meeting, and I will be found out, exposed, humiliated and expelled.

Sometimes I am just trying to make it to class from my residence (an off-campus older family home subdivided into apartments). The class is either farther away than I thought, not where I thought it was, or the location has been changed and I've got to find out where the new location is without having any idea where to look. I wander through hallways, along campus walkways, through campus bookstores – I ask people on the way but nobody seems to know where the new location is. So I must keep trudging on, up hills and down, in buildings and out, all over campus, searching and searching.

Other times the dream centers around puzzling features in my home-turned-into-apartments residence. My apartment has several doorways and people who also have apartments in the building pop in and out, furtively, and there is an overall feel that something is vaguely wrong. Maybe it's got to do with the parking out back. Maybe it's got to do with maintenance issues with the building itself. I seem to be the only one in my apartment, but there are bedrooms there that look like they've been used but no one is in them. The light throughout is subdued, even though all the walls are white, as if dusk is settling in over the house.

• • •

I lived in such an apartment when I was in grad school in Linguistics at Ohio State University from 1967 to 1972, but the dream scenery and real events don't match, although I did fail one course in that time (it was Old Church Slavonic) and I failed my Ph.D. exams the first time I took them. (I drew a blank on the details of the great English vowel shift, which was the single question on one whole part of the exams.) But why has this dream, even if it's related, waited til lately to crop up – half a century later, during a pandemic?!

“Window in the Sky”

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

THE PLANE WAS BOUND TO CRASH. John Gilbert was piloting his private plane on a business trip with three passengers, but the weather turned really bad and he couldn't make it to the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon Airport, near Wellsboro. He would have been able to land the plane under power, but when checked, both tanks were empty.

John was the lead singer/guitar player in our band, Country Pride, in 1971. A very personable guy who used to be in the upper layer of management for the 84 Lumber Company.

Another band-mate named Lee Love, who passed in May, 2020, wrote a song that tells the story of the crash and survival. Lee put a melody to it, John learned the words, and we made it part of our program.

*As I was flyin' home one day, the clouds came over me,
My fuel was low, my heart ran wild. And I could not see.
I headed for a nearby strip where I could land this plane.
Arrivin' there to my despair, the view I got was the same.
Out of nowhere in the darkness came a voice, and the Lord
Said, "Carry on John, John carry on."*

*It was then I started thinkin' of nothin' but the worse,
A long cavalcade headed up by a big black hearse.
I told the passengers to say a prayer and to hit the deck,
For without a doubt, we were surely goin' to wreck.
Suddenly, I saw a WINDOW IN THE SKY, and the Lord
Said, "Carry on John, John carry on."*

*Lookin' down I saw this beautiful cornfield below,
So, I thought that I would drop in and say Hello!
I brought her down amid the corn in a belly-slidin' deal,
With me ol' John still froze behind that wheel.
She slid along until we started plowin' up the mud,
And then up on her nose she went goin' over with a thud.
As I looked up to the WINDOW IN THE SKY, the Lord said,
"You carried on John, John you carried on."*

It has often been said that Country Music is three chords and the truth. This was a ballad truly experienced by John Gilbert.

Memorial Oration for *C. carolinensis*

BY JIM HEDGES — NEEDMORE, PENNSYLVANIA

WHAT SEPARATES A WRITER FROM A REPORTER is the ability to inflate a sentence into a story.

“Dog kills cat.” A plain and simple fact. Now, a good reporter would fill in the complete background, the who / what / where / when / why of the cat’s demise: “My neighbor’s vicious dog fatally wounded my beloved gray feline in the side yard Monday morning.” But that’s still reporting, and it comes nowhere near to filling the page I have been assigned to write.

Actually, it wasn’t a cat which the dog did in, it was a squirrel, a cute little gray squirrel, a fuzzy little ball of energy which ran incessantly through my yard, all winter, doing whatever squirrely business needed to be attended.



Eastern gray squirrel.
(Image: Wikipedia)

Mostly, it was hauling walnuts from Point A to Point B. My house is surrounded by walnut trees. As I sat here by the computer, writing, I could see it out the back window, coming through the yard, under the clothes line where wind had swept the snow away.

Soon thereafter, it went past the side window, going from tree to tree, pausing on a stump to get a clearer view of its territory.

My cat loved to sit on the window sill and watch it, alternately sitting, standing, and meowing. I, too, would pause and take in the action.

And then, a few days ago, we came home to find friend squirrel lying lifeless by the side of the road. It did not appear to have been hit – the carcass was not deformed. We surmised, my wife and I, that it had wandered too close to the neighbors’ chained dog, had been bitten but not immediately killed, and had dragged itself to the roadside before expiring.

And now robins hop through the yard, and mourning doves call from the woods, but the cat no longer watches from the window sill, and I type lonely at my computer keyboard.

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Write for ONE-PAGE STORIES?

You don't have to be a member of NAPA to submit pieces, but members are definitely invited. (It's a good place to hone and present your short-short story writing.)



HOW MANY WORDS? About 375 - 400 words. (Less if you have an image 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 – Please send me comments on any of the stories so I can pass them on to the writers. We all like that.

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

“Take Notes; Everything Is Copy”

Everything that happens to you in life can be subject matter for your writing. What better way to encourage you to write a one-page story and offer it for publication to this journal? Especially if you've never submitted anything for fear that it wasn't “important enough” to write about.

Tom Duffey, a regular contributor to this amateur journal, first put me on to this quotation. I googled it and found that it is attributed to the romance and comedy writer Nora Ephron, and she says she got it from her mother. (Reach for your pen now??)