

ONE-PAGE STORIES

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My Ocean Liner

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I WANTED AN IMPRESSIVE BOAT. A boat I could “sail” in a feeder brook of Jonathan Creek, which was just up the road a quarter of a mile from Grandpa’s summer cottage. And my Grandpa August Dornbirer was good at building stuff from wood. He had even designed his big frame house in Columbus sometime around 1903, and he had built the wooden shelving in many rooms of that house once it was also the religious book and supply store of his daughter Edith in his later years. Now in retirement in the late 1940’s and ’50’s, he was generous in letting me and/or my brothers stay with him for a few weeks sometimes. At the age of 8 or 9, it was idyllic to be in summertime Perry County, Ohio – gentle rolling farmlands and woods.

He found a chunk of wood that suited the ship-building job at hand, and went to work. When it was finished – hull, superstructure and funnels, about a foot long from stem to stern – he painted it a light green. (I wonder now whether this was some leftover “milk green” paint, the kind that was a common paint for utility furniture in those days.) But the color didn’t matter to me. I had my version of an ocean liner! In the course of a few days, I suppose, I carried it proudly down the gravel driveway from his cottage, then on to the blacktop curve of Ohio State Route 204 to the culvert bridge over the brook, and down the bank to the brook’s edge. I launched my little ocean liner into one of the pools of the stream that were deep enough to keep my boat from grounding in the mostly shallow trickle of a current.

It floated! But, oh, no – it listed to starboard quite noticeably! I was, at that age, sadly but typically so disappointed that my ocean liner was imperfect. My feelings were centered on myself, with not a fleeting thought about Grandpa’s kindness in finding the block of wood, crafting it into an attractive toy ocean liner for me, and painting it. I kept it and took it home with me, but probably never played with it again. Over the years, it disappeared at some point. If I still had it, I would give it a place of grateful honor on the mantle, in remembrance of my Grandpa August Dornbirer.



My ocean liner, as best I recall.

The Magic Crystal Jar

BY PEGGY ZORTMAN — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

IT SAT JUST OUT OF REACH at the back of the small kitchen table under a window where a stray sunbeam could catch the globe-like knob and send rainbows around the room. Grandpa said it was magic. It was in the house where he and Uncle Bill lived.

A trip to Grandpa's was always an adventure. There was the hand pump at the sink and the large, always warm, coal cook stove in the kitchen. The porch swing where, if my brother and I tried hard enough, we could touch the ceiling with our toes — if no one caught us. The spring run in the basement kept milk and children's toes cool . . . and there was that Magic Crystal Jar.

Grandpa was crippled with arthritis by the time I was old enough to remember him. His fingers and toes were becoming twisted out of shape, but they worked just fine as far as I could tell. He never complained.

It was he who gave me my first fishing pole (his) and it was he, along with Uncle Bill, who included this little girl on fishing excursions to the creeks and streams near home. As a former player and avid fan he encouraged me to play baseball, but advised I would probably never play for the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Grandpa smoked a pipe filled with Cutty Pipe tobacco as he spoke his words of wisdom, laughed at my shenanigans, listened to my stories and doled out the treasures held in that magic jar.

As he aged his arthritis got worse but yet at the age of ninety, with badly disfigured hands, he used a hand saw to cut and stack the wood from a tree that had fallen in a storm. Uncle Bill wouldn't have to do it when he got home from work Grandpa explained.

Grandpa passed away many years ago at the age of ninety-four. But now and then my imagination can smell Cutty Pipe tobacco. Perhaps he's checking to see if I'm taking care of his magic crystal jar — keeping the lid tight so the treasured soda crackers inside stay crispy.



What's That There, On the Street?

BY HAROLD W. CHENEY — REYNOLDSBURG, OHIO

I GLANCED OUT OF THE FRONT WINDOW. What's that, going on over there? A flatbed truck was parked there, and a cart was hauling a loaded pallet onto the neighbor's driveway by their garage. This went on until all pallets were unloaded and deposited. Then the truck drove off.

Huh? You ask, what business is it of mine, what's going on ... on the street? Curiosity, I confess. It all goes back to . . .

It was late December in 1967. It was the one day that I got off, every other week. I was in the hall by my room in the BOQ (Bachelor Officer Quarters) in Cholon, a neighborhood of Saigon. I just happened to have looked out of the second-floor front window, aroused by the strange noises coming from the street.

The street was crowded with a chanting mob. In their midst, a number of extremely large floats were being pulled along by men and boys, in a lengthy procession. I turned to a fellow officer and asked, "What's the fuss all about?"

He smiled at me. "It is a funeral ceremony. Someone important is getting his final sendoff. Those floats are pretty fancy ... big ... aren't they?"

I watched as they were hauled along. They disappeared farther down the street; the mob was gone with them. So I was off to enjoy my day off. Next stop, the main post exchange to see what new had come in.

General Westmoreland had a MOOSE program – Move Out of Saigon, Expeditiously. My unit moved out of Saigon. A building with larger and newer computers was newly built for us at Long Binh.

We were there when, a few weeks later, the Viet Cong launched their Tet Offensive. We were then told that those funeral floats that we had seen were not of that purpose. The Viet Cong had used them to smuggle weapons and munitions into Saigon for their Tet Offensive.

I shoulda been more curious then, at what was going on ... on the street.

Stuck in the Mud

By JIM HEDGES — NEEDMORE, PENNSYLVANIA

ON AN UNPAVED ROAD IN IOWA – that’s where the farm our family owned was located in my high school years. Now, in most parts of the country, “unpaved” means rough and stony, but in the Midwestern “corn belt,” the deep glacial soils which grow such good crops also mean that dirt roads become mucilaginous quagmires when wet. A common expression was: “I’ll be there soon as I find the bottom of the road.”



An Iowa dirt road (Madison County, 2016).

(image: iowacountryroads.org)

Our farm lane was at the top of a hill. On one side of the hill, the road was graveled and (usually) passable. On the other side, it was bare dirt; driving at night, by the time the headlight beam came back to earth after cresting the hill and a driver could see that the gravel ended, it was too late to stop. You and your car were in the mosh pit.

One rainy evening around supper time, a stranger’s car came flying over the hill and sank.

Neighborhood policy was that, if somebody made it to the bottom of the hill, he would go the next farm to borrow a tractor. If he got stuck before reaching the bottom, he would come to our place, which was closer. This unfortunate didn’t make it very far down, and soon he showed up at our door, wanting a tow.

Our little tractor couldn’t get him loose, so he used our telephone to call a tow truck from town. The tow truck couldn’t get him, either, but the tow driver managed to get himself back up the hill to the gravel.

The stranger then asked to use our telephone again – to call his wife and feed her a story about why he would be home late and why, when he did get there, he would not have the family car with him. And then he and his girl friend got into the tow truck and rode back to town.

Visiting Blenko Glass for Iowa PBS

BY LINDA L. SHIVERS — DES MOINES, IOWA

IT ALL STARTED IN 2014 while at the Iowa PBS Blenko fund-raiser event. Melvin asked one of the Blenko family if they would be interested in him submitting some designs for the next year's Iowa promotional piece. The Shivers have been going to Milton, West Virginia, to the Blenko Glass factory since 2015.

The project resulted in the Iowa PBS crew coming to our house to film part of the program for later viewing. Then the crew and the Shivers went to the plant in Milton. Being on the floor of the plant looks like chaos, but a pattern emerges. Everyone had something to do at a certain point, in a certain place. It took seven guys, seven different operations to complete a piece of art glass. To see the design on paper, watch the guys go rhythmically through the different stations and processes, then hold that vase at the end of the day is an honor beyond compare. If you ever want a thrilling experience, go to the plant and get a tour. The plant is over 100 years old. Seen from the outside you'd never guess that beautiful art glass comes from it.

The Shivers drive to Milton — a great road trip with lots of pretty scenery, rolling landscapes. The visitor center at the plant is fun, too, with lots of gorgeous pieces to buy. The second floor is a museum with displays of Blenko work that go back to the 1900's, and now includes a display cabinet with Melvin's work.

Other sites along the way are more down-to-earth, like the sign on a semi: "God is Great, Beer is Good, People are Crazy." The Shivers are creatures of habit: stay at the same hotels, eat at the same restaurants, like Bob Evans. Another eatery is Fat Patty's, in Huntington, West Virginia. No, not a reference to a fat person, or a person named Patty. It's a hamburger place, with fat patties. Get it?

Melvin on TV is a hoot. He knows exactly what to say to promote Iowa PBS and Blenko. It's fun to be in the studio audience. Viewers at home don't get to see the camera operators, booms and other equipment; and the producers waving their arms giving directions. It's a show in itself. The footage taken at the Shivers' house, and at the plant was all edited as a documentary and shown as part of the Iowa PBS fund-raising event.

Crowning Glory

By KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

WHY IS SOMEONE’S HAIR REFERRED TO as “crowning glory”? I wonder if Medusa would have referred to her head-full of snakes as her crowning glory? In childhood my hair was often long, then cut off, only to grow again. The cycle continued until forty-two years ago. After spending ten days in the hospital with my younger son when he was two, my hair was cut. I was never able to get it past that “awkward stage” again — until the pandemic. Staying at home where no one saw me, the hair passed the awkward stage and soon was shoulder length. I decided this was the time to have long hair once again. As the hair grew, my goal became to have it get long enough to be able to donate it, hoping that someone else could enjoy it as much as I did — being able to put it in a ponytail or just feel how it felt when I shook my head.

Hair is often an essential part of one’s self-esteem. For those with hair loss, the lack of hair — or just a bad haircut — may be devastating. I remember having my hair fixed in lovely ringlets for my third-grade class picture. Unfortunately, the picture came out half black and half white; it needed to be retaken.



Me in 3rd grade. No curls, but a typical style.

Another early memory was shaving Dad’s neck on Sunday mornings. It was generally straightforward, but on the days right after a haircut (or as he often said, “getting his ears lowered”), Mom would draw a line in the shaving crème for me to begin. One of the funniest memories of haircuts happened during college. My roommate volunteered to cut my boyfriend’s twin brother’s hair. Judging by the result, she had little experience. Unfortunately, that was the semester of swimming in gym. Ron needed a lot of work with an eyebrow pencil after each swim class to fill in some of the bald spots.

Over the years I cut my boyfriend’s hair and later my sons’ hair — sometimes the results were better than others. Now I am ready to have my hair cut for a donation so last week I stopped at a salon to inquire. I was disappointed to learn it is not yet quite long enough: perhaps in a couple months. Just 1½ inches to go!

My Hospice Experience

BY NANCY HEBER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“I HAVE DONE ALL I CAN DO FOR YOUR HEART FAILURE.” My cardiologist said this following a heart procedure, April 2021. This was shortly after my pulmonologist (lung doctor) told me I should enroll in Hospice soon because of the three different issues my lungs were challenged by, and for which there were no treatments available. My primary care doctor had also expressed his thoughts that I should be in Hospice. OK, then. Sounds like a consensus. I enrolled in Hospice Care on May 15 after my family and I did some research and talked to Hospice representatives.

“Hospice,” often seems to signify that it is about one’s “preparation for death or dying.” At first I felt a little uneasy about it and even a few of my family members told me that it wasn’t time; it was too soon. I was feeling pretty good at the time, so why now? When my lung doctor shared that Hospice is designed to help ensure one’s quality of life at the end of his/her earthly journey, his words gave me pause to think differently. He also said how important it is to join a Hospice program in sufficient time to let the folks there get to know and understand your particular situation and condition. Absolutely. My primary care doctor remarked many times how complicated my health issues are to understand and treat.

My Hospice team consists of a physician, a nurse, a social worker, a chaplain and an art therapist. There are weekly visits from the nurse, plus periodic visits from the other team members as necessary depending on the needs of the patient.

I am a photographer and once the Hospice team realized that, the art therapist gave me the opportunity to exhibit some of my canvas prints at Kobacker House (a short term care facility for those who need intensive assistance, but not in a hospital setting). Each patient’s room decor is like a home, not the sterile look of a hospital. About 20 of my canvas prints were hung in the long, open hallway leading to the patients’ rooms for around two months. They provided a sense of cheerfulness and serenity to patients, their families, visitors and to staff members, as well. What a sense of satisfaction it gave me to know that my art was providing a sense of peace and pleasure to those who needed an uplift.

I feel like the remaining time on my earthly journey has a real purpose. Amen.

Hot Soup – Is It Good Enough for You?

By KEN FAIG, JR. — GLENVIEW, ILLINOIS

HOT SOUP IS ONE OF OUR UNDER-APPRECIATED blessings. My favorites that I can buy at local grocery Jewel include:

Campbell's Condensed — Bean With Bacon, Tomato (I love the latter with a grilled cheese sandwich but my wife Carol just tears up strips of cheese and puts them in the soup.)

Campbell's Chunky — Sirloin Burger (for those times when a burger is not doable), Chicken Noodle (Carol consumes all the liquid before tackling the noodles. This is the same lady who when served succotash eats all the beans first, leaving her favorite corn for last.)

Progresso — Italian Wedding, Clam Chowder (Manhattan or New England).

Not all good soup can be purchased at Jewel. One that I like is Mock Turtle, a rich beef-based soup which is a Cincinnati (my home town) favorite. If not carried in your local grocery, you can order the Worthmore brand from several online vendors.

One of the best-loved varieties of soup is homemade. Carol has a favorite minestrone recipe, which uses hearty conchigliette (shell) noodles. But watch out if any of the Three Stooges are doing the cooking. Vision-impaired Shemp was known to add concentrated soap (not soup) to the water with bubbly results.

Many restaurants offer soup as a first course. But don't overindulge and spoil your appetite for dinner. Matzo ball soup is one of my favorite restaurant soups but tends to be very filling.

Not all restaurant soup is recommended. Curly Howard's recipe for chicken soup involved pouring hot water from a kettle through a chicken into a waiting bowl. Probably the Stooges' most famous soup encounter occurred when Curly found that his oyster stew included a "live one" which kept eating his crackers. I think this episode was later redone by both Shemp and Larry. The Stooges always reused their best bits. How many times did one of them order "burnt toast and a rotten egg" on the plea "I got a tapeworm, and it's good enough for him"?

I like both soup and the Three Stooges. But enough words — let's get cooking. What's your favorite?

Baron, My German Shepherd

BY KEN FAIG, JR. — GLENVIEW, ILLINOIS

WE ALMOST HAD HIM FOR ONLY ONE DAY. The first night, a frightened Baron tore up the garage. My mother said, “Take that dog back!” But the kennel said, “Give the dog a chance!” Baron ended up primarily as my mother’s dog.

As a young dog he was athletic and loved to play rough with my father. He loved jumping up on the roof of his dog house, which had been made from an old laundry cart. He famously got into a waxed cardboard carton of cottage cheese, and ate it all, including the carton.

He almost ended up getting shot by the police. One night when my parents were out, Baron got away, dragging his chain, which became entangled in brush. He started howling, and the police were going to shoot him. But some neighbors knew what home he belonged to, so the police left a note on our door. My parents said Baron was sure glad to see them.

He had bitten twice; once more and he would have had to be put down. He bit a meter man and a neighbor boy but he never did a third bite. He was very gentle with my sister and me. He loved sleeping outdoors in spring, summer and fall, but inside at the foot of my mother’s bed in the winter. Woe to the intruder in that space!

He lived to be an old dog and to experience diseases of old age. Eventually he suffered a stroke which left his hind quarters paralyzed. He was lying on a rug, and the vet’s men carried him away in the rug to be euthanized. I considered him my best friend when I was a boy. I think I learned a lot from him — about happiness and sadness, wellness and sickness risks and rewards, love and loss.



*Myself, Baron, and my sister.
Baron lived from 1955 to 1968.*

Controlling the Airways

By JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

WHEN I WAS AN FAA AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER there were basically two types of facilities: control tower and air route traffic control center (ARTCC). In effect the centers controlled all the airspace in the country and delegated areas around airports to the control towers. The control towers separated air traffic within their airspace. Many of the towers also had arrival and departure control usually using radar. In that case, there was usually a “radar room” beneath the tower but not always. An example of this is the New York Common IFR (Instrument Flight Rules), where they have a mini center because of all the airports in the vicinity. Almost everyone refers to it as The Common I.

All the airports that I worked in had a radar room within the facility and all certified controllers could work either in the tower or the radar room. I enjoyed this arrangement because the tower work permitted me to see airplanes whereas when working in the radar room all we saw was blips on a radar screen.

Both types of work were interesting to me but I’m sure others had their personal preference. I enjoyed the change. Usually we’d work a day in the tower and then two days in the radar room as there was more positions in the radar room than the control tower. Sometimes we would work half a day in one and the other four hours in the other.

I was initially selected to work at the Atlantic City airport, which was to be a combined tower and center, but it never materialized. So I was trained as a center controller along with the rest of my class. Most of my classmates were destined for New York Center, and were envious of me going to a tower. One fellow even asked me to swap with him since I was from New York. I guess it would have been nice to be around family but I didn’t have any desire to work in a dark room for eight hours a day for twenty-five years.

In the thirty-some years since I retired, the FAA has created a bunch of “Common I’s.” I’m sure this system is more efficient along with saving money as they can have fewer personnel. I’m glad this didn’t happen while I was still working because I would have had a problem selecting which type of facility I would spend the rest of my career in.

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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.

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 – previously unpublished. Personal narratives, anecdotes and memoirs especially welcome, but other genres welcome, too.

DEADLINE: End of the month, for the next month's issue.

CAN I GET 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 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??)