

# ONE-PAGE STORIES

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# Hitting My Stride

BY DON LUCK — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**A**S A KID, I WAS AN ATHLETIC KLUTZ. My gangly “skinnymarink” body was significantly uncoordinated, but it didn’t matter in prepubescent years. There was no need to impress girls or find one’s place in the male hierarchy.

But with the surge of teenage testosterone, all that changed dramatically. Other boys’ bodies sprouted musculature curvature. Mine continued to look like a starved Ichabod Crane. Varying proximity to being a young Adonis and degrees of notable athletic achievement were the cachets of high school admiration. So it was appropriate that when we ran laps in gym class, I was in the rear of the pack. My dad was a three-letter athlete in high school, but somehow I missed out in the gene pool.

Playing baseball was particularly frustrating. I loved the game but was radically inept. I could clearly see the ball as a grounder, popup or target of my bat, but somehow it never was where I saw it. Later as an Air Force ROTC cadet in college, I discovered I have a severe astigmatism that compromises my depth-of-field vision. No wonder I batted .005!

There was one athletic exception. My buddy and partner in wrestling class Dave Richards was significantly heavier than I yet I usually pinned him rather than the reverse. I was skinny but wiry, but the crowd couldn’t see my modest achievement like they could on football field, baseball diamond or basketball court.

But I finally found my athletic calling. My first winter in Minnesota, I was stir-crazy, cooped in by temperatures below freezing. So to get outdoors in the second I took up cross-country skiing.



*(Credit: blog.shepsports.com)*

At last! My lanky frame was an asset! I loved it. I even remember looking at snow falling in mid-April and regretting that it probably was the last of the season. It had taken years, but by golly I had finally hit my stride.

# Fowl Indebtedness

By DON LUCK — COLUMBUS, OHIO

THE ARTICLE I READ WAS TITLED, “The Bird That Conquered the World.” And the subject in question? The chicken.

It started off pecking at seeds and bugs on the floor of southeast Asian jungles. Then its domesticated offspring spread across the Eurasian landmass but not before turning south and engulfing all of Africa. Eventually it hopped aboard ships bound for the New World and soon was at home in both continents.

Where would we be without the chicken? Colonel Sanders would be a mere buck private. Hamburger joints would have to be 100% pure beef and stop sneaking chicken nuggets into their menus. And what about their breakfasts?

Yes, the chicken egg! From brawny lumberjack breakfasts to delicate cheese soufflés, Belgian waffles, Italian frittatas, birthday cakes, bar-topped pickled eggs, the list goes on. Eliminate chickens and their eggs and the *New York Times Cookbook* would shrink by a third.

I have personal reasons to be grateful for chickens. As a kid, I discovered my pillow was stuffed with chicken feathers when occasionally one would poke its way through the seams. But my deepest gratitude is for the idyllic summer I spent on a chicken farm in Maine owned by my mother’s cousin.

Farm chores were a novelty for a city kid like me. I brought chickens their feed and refreshed their water troughs. But some interactions were totally unexpected and memorable. Braving the glaring eyes, sharp beaks and long-drawn warning caws of laying hens, I learned to grab each under a wing, fling her off her nest and get at the eggs beneath. And after decapitating old layers for Sunday dinner and letting go of their feet, I saw chickens literally running around with their heads cut off — even for only a few steps.

But now my connection to them has taken a new turn. A gel made from cockscomb is being inserted into my left knee to alleviate the pain of bone on bone. And since I ate chicken feet when I lived in Hong Kong, I can now say I am indebted to chickens — from head to toe.

# Hairy Injustice

BY DON LUCK — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**I**T'S NOT FAIR. I STILL HAVE TO PAY FULL PRICE for a trichologist to coif my thinning locks. Okay, let me put it in plain English: to have a barber cut my continually thinning hair. It's to the point that I speak of having my hairs cut; and when it gets to just a few of them, I'll give each a name.

I am one of the one-third plus men who are bald. It starts to show up before we are 21. By age 35 two-thirds of the male population have some measure of hair loss, but my half of that number keep on losing our cover crop. Yet our haircuts remain at full price. But the injustice doesn't end there. The roots of follicle loss are found in genes of female origin. So now that my two sons have joined the ranks of the *capillum*\*-challenged [\* check a Latin dictionary], I have told them "Don't blame me, blame your mother." Women pass on the condition without sharing it. They have to choose to be bald. And some do.

Some models shave their heads to draw dramatic attention to themselves as they stride down the fashion runway. And there are a few women who believe a bald head expresses a liberation from social convention and its sexist underpinnings. An admirable reason for women's shaved heads is the expression of loving solidarity with the effects of a friend's treatment for cancer. Brava!

In my particular case the inequity is compounded by my north European genes. Strange things keep cropping up on my cranium thanks to the lack of a summer hat over the years. I complained about these "barnacles" to an African-American friend and she said, "You're just melanin deprived." Yes. An African-American colleague had as much hair loss as I, so he shaved off all of it. He looks quite handsome as a result. If I did that folks would say, "Look at that billiard-ball white guy." Don't believe me? Just compare Michael Jordan and Tim Bezos. For all his billions (how shall I put it?) Jeff "pales" in comparison.

When will the injustice stop?

Women patronize "salons" so "beauticians" can "style" their luxurious locks. Well, la-dee-dah! Meanwhile I have to head to an establishment and pay full price for what amounts to a trim. It's not a barber shop. It's a clip joint.

# They'll Know You've Arrived

BY ANDREW JANTZ — ARLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

**T**HE GENIUS OF GREAT CORPORATE ADVERTISING is that it can convince us to buy something we don't need. Indeed, even things we'd never even heard of or considered before.

This is not to disparage the principle of marketing in general. You might never have bought a can of Campbell's Chunky Soup if you hadn't seen that hungry NFL player chowing it down. Or the new sandwich at McDonald's. Or even a movie. My point? Only that advertising is often an arbiter of American taste, even desires. Sometimes it's even intertwined with the American Dream of "the Pursuit of Happiness," which can be as simple as having the latest and greatest luxury sedan.

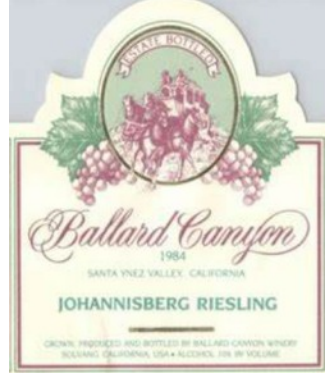
The endless pursuit of status and prestige, the golden rings some of us jump through in order to demonstrate that we are better than others, or at least have more money, only confirms our elevated status. Who we are becomes a function of what we have, and others don't have. Who we are becomes a function of slick corporate advertising. A group of execs sitting around a conference table seeks to dictate your sense of self-worth. This 1958 Edsel ad is a beauty because while it is almost humorous now because the Edsel was such a disaster, it shows how they tried to appeal to Americans seeking status in the eyes of everyone else ("They'll know you've arrived..."), as if, again, a person's self-worth should be dictated by an ad campaign. The joke's on us. When someone buys a diamond crusted Covid mask for \$2,000,000, they are trying to make a statement. And what statement? That they are obscenely rich, and you aren't, as if they think their mask will inspire envy, and even awe. Which, unfortunately, is what too often happens. American youths will pay hundreds of dollars for blue jeans that are ripped, torn and faded, provided the brand name is visible. I understand it when people from other parts of the world criticize us for being in the shallow thralls of money and consumerism. Buy, buy and buy. Then shop, shop, and shop some more. It's all about status and exclusiveness. And that, to me, is very, very sad, even if it is a part of the American Dream.



# That Stagecoach Has Departed

BY BILL BOYS – COLUMBUS, OHIO

VINEYARDS GREEN IN THE SUNLIGHT, an inviting patio to sip wine, northern Santa Barbara County, California – it was our first trip to California wine country. My wife, Ruth, had a business trip to Santa Barbara and I took vacation time, so we visited the nearby Santa Ynez viticultural area. On a country road north out of Solvang we visited our first winery, Ballard Canyon. Compared to the wintry weather back home in Knoxville, Tennessee, that balmy day was Elysium.



First impressions last. Although we visited other vineyards on that and later trips to the area, Ballard Canyon endured. *Ballard Canyon's stagecoach label.* One of their late-harvest whites was so sweet and lovely I brought several bottles back home to share with the congregation I was serving, using it as sacramental wine the first Sunday back. (It was well received!) At that time Knox County was dry and there was no

shipping allowed of California wines, either. I knew, because before our trip I went to the state liquor agency in town and inquired if there was a way to bring back some wines by paying the state tax. No, there wasn't, but believe it or not the agent said, "Well, just carry it back with you on the flight.



*Their patio view today. (Credit: Rusack Vineyards)*

No one checks." So that's what I did. I don't know if that amounted to running moonshine, but I hope that the statute of limitations is past by now. Anyway, we live in another state's jurisdiction by now.

Years later we re-visited Ballard Canyon Winery. It was closed and for sale. (We even inquired: a million dollars.) [*Cue laugh track.*] Later, Rusack Vineyards bought it and runs it now, but it will ever remain Ballard Canyon to us, even though that stagecoach has gone.

# Delightful, Delicious, Splendid Springerle

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**S**PRINGERLE WERE TRICKY FOR ME TO MAKE. I love their scent and flavor of anise, the lovely ivory color, and I especially marvel at the holiday designs they typically display, such as the high-molded “Twelve Days of Christmas” theme pictured below, courtesy of the King Arthur Flour website.



*Springerle cookies and molds. Credit: the King Arthur Flour website.*

The challenges for me were threefold: getting the dough to the precise consistency to receive a crisp, exact imprint from the molds, neither too soft nor too firm; then getting them to release from the mold without distorting the embossed image; and finally to bake them so they are just right – not too soft, not too hard, but *just* toothsome and dippable in one’s coffee, hot chocolate or even wine.

I never had my own molds, so I borrowed them. One I borrowed in Knoxville, Tennessee, was Gerry Troy’s – an entire rolling pin with several designs engraved into the circumference. Or I’d buy the springerle. When Jürgen’s Konditorei was still in business here in the German Village historical neighborhood, Rosemarie Keidel stocked springerle at Christmastime. Oh, so lovely and tasty!

Springerle, for me, summon such delightful memories.

# Bank of Memories

KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**A** FRIEND RECENTLY WROTE TO ME that she spends lots of time in her “Bank of Memories.” I had to agree. At this time of year, I spend time thinking about Christmases of long ago. The religious underpinning of the holiday was foremost in our family, but there was secular thrown in as well. Off and on during my childhood, there was a theater open in my small town. During December particularly, there was a “child-friendly” movie shown on Saturdays, a convenient baby-sitter for the children. It seems the admission price was 25 cents; I was given an additional nickel for a snack: my favorite was the Necco wafers. (I saw some in a store recently: they cost a great deal more today!)

My father was the Sunday School superintendent, which meant he was responsible for providing the “sacks” that were given to all the children after the Christmas Eve program. I (and perhaps my siblings) helped fill the sacks (yes, just a brown bag) which were set on a table in the basement. We dropped in a handful of peanuts, a few hard candies, a couple of “mountains” (I have no idea their correct name but there was a solid white filling covered by a chocolate shell), a candy cane or two, and an orange. In the early 1950s, oranges were really a treat.

On Christmas Eve we had oyster stew for supper: we kids ate the stew; only Dad would eat the oysters. Then we were allowed to open one gift, chosen by our parents. Most often that gift was an item of clothing that we could then wear to the Christmas program.

I remember specifically a white “long-haired” sweater which was a favorite. Another adored outfit (but not one I could wear to the Christmas program!) was my Annie Oakley shirt, hat, and holster. Notice how well the leopard-print skirt matched the plaid shirt!



*We kids opening gifts on Christmas. That's me in the Annie Oakley cowgirl outfit.*



# A Contrary Writer's Tell-tale Departure

By KORELOY WILDREKINDE~MCWHIRTER — South Toe River, North Carolina

**T**HE STORY I WRITE DOES NOT ASPIRE to greatness, only to the kind of bevel-edged brevity that shoe-horns itself into the worn-out winged-tip shoes I cannot walk another foot in; for I have come too far to go on, unless I render myself shoeless, at last. And, this story has just the careful, specifically-focused extremities to undo the frayed and knotted laces that have held the tongue at-bay, thus far. Such a story could tell all, in a tea-time-sized time-frame.

My mother would have said, “This story is too long; and, since it makes no sense to me, you might as well not have written it.” My father would have advised, “If you keep insisting upon drawing outside of the given lines, you ought to, at least, do so in the usual ways; in order to make something recognizable of yourself.” My siblings would say nothing, as usual; they only read the usual things.

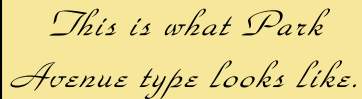
The story I write has all the hall-marks of the kind of tall tale that stoops to conquer; that flies under the laundry-lines; that lands, barely, on a wing and a prayer. But, I cannot foresee an audience for such a willfully-wayward story; a story that seems to have a purpose all its own, with a desire I can no more see into than I can fathom the hopes and intentions, of the readers and writers of other-people's stories.

After this story, which has pretty-much written itself, has said all that it has to say – and in the sort of nut-shell that Thumbelina could have fit herself into, with room to spare for the mole, the mouse, and the swallow – I will have you read it aloud, back to me. My story will not fall on deaf ears. But it might re-enter my mind by a rut more traveled than the one it is taking on its way out. Upon hearing my story as a thing too frail and strange for this whirled, I may set a match to it and watch it dissipate. I hope my story knows how to find her own way home.

# Park Avenue

BY JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

I ONCE WON A NEW COMPUTER in a raffle that I didn't want to win. About thirty-five years ago a computer store opened in the shopping center across from where my wife and I ran a retail business. To announce their opening, and to generate a customer mailing list, they were going to raffle off three software packages and a 286 computer. I already had a 285 computer so winning a new one wasn't very exciting but one of the software packages was a word processor which included Park Avenue type. As a teenage hobby printer I was awed by all the specialty type faces available and wanted them all. But with limited funds this was just a pipe-dream. When I decided that my little printing business could use a script face, I chose Park Avenue, which I still think was a wise choice. I was anxious to win the word processor primarily for this type face.



*This is what Park Avenue type looks like.*

The raffle was going to be held on the Saturday after their opening and you had to be present to win. When I submitted my entry I noticed the sign that stated: "One Entry Only." I arrived excitedly at the store about ten minutes before the scheduled drawing. While standing around I decided to break the rules and submit another entry.

I figured that they would save the computer until last since it was the grand prize but they surprised me – they drew for it first and called my name! Yes, it felt good to win . . . but then I became concerned that if they drew my second entry for one of the software packages, I would be disqualified for both. But my luck held out and others won the software that I coveted.

I returned to my business and the first thing my wife asked was "Did you win?" I told her the truth that I had won a computer but knowing me, she thought I was lying because I was being so nonchalant about it. I slowly pulled out the confirmation slip they gave me, as I had requested some upgrades and wouldn't receive it until they were installed a few days later. I had the last laugh on her. In hindsight, winning the computer and not the software that I wanted was a better deal for me because shortly after this I obtained software that contained not only Park Avenue but many more interesting faces.

# Been Naughty? Been Nice?

BY BILL BOYS – COLUMBUS, OHIO

**Y**OU KNEW THAT “*HE’S MAKING A LIST, checking it twice; Gonna find out who’s naughty and nice.*” Yes, it’s that pop theologian who flies a sleigh with reindeer and knows what we have done, both evil (“naughty”) and good (“nice”).

Say, why is there evil, anyway? The most ancient literary book, the *Enuma Elish*, lays it to a bloody cosmic battle between two gods, in which evil has a reality, resulting in our material world. Later *Genesis* says no, creation by a lone God is good but the first woman and man yielded to a snaky tempter and ate forbidden fruit. Other theories emerged as the millennia passed. Greek playwrights and philosophers weighed in. In western Christendom there were the likes of Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Jewish rabbis; Muslim thinkers; secular philosophers, weighed in, too.

How to account for evil, both natural (floods, earthquakes, famines, and so on) and man-made (wars, murder, genocide, plunder, hatred, lust and every imaginable crime and brutality). In Europe the Black Death took away a third to a half of the population. Was this God punishing us for our sins? Was there a Devil who rebelled against God and so devastated us humans?

At the Middle Ages morphed into early modernity, Martin Luther and John Calvin show up. (As a kind of Lutheran I perked up.) Luther taught that *all* our good works cannot redeem us from the bad. The devil is real enough all right, but immaterial, Luther thought. (Luther was reported to have thrown an inkwell at the devil, though.) He prowls around seeking to deceive the pious, but he does this *inside our minds*. He presents it to us as the good, the true, the noble, the pleasant – what’s so bad about that? (He doesn’t have to tempt the blatantly evil ones; he already has them.) With lies, deceit and crafty temptations he convinces the “good” people to follow “good” suggestions. Every one falls. God’s unmerited grace alone stands as the fortress of our ultimate redemption. We carry on under that grace as best we can muster, holding to faith in God.

And I haven’t even gotten to Milton and our times yet. You may have guessed it: I’m watching a course, “Why Evil Exists,” 36 lectures by Prof. Charles Mathewes (University of Virginia). The Great Courses, Course 6810, The Learning Company, © 2011. One of the best lecturers, I’d say. Lots to think about, very well presented.



## 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. (But no poetry, please.) 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 either by email at [williamboys@att.net](mailto:williamboys@att.net) (preferred, to save retyping) or by postal mail to 184 Reinhard Ave., Columbus OH 43206-2635.

## What Do You Do about “Writer’s Block”?

I'm curious . . . what do you find helpful to get you through “writer’s block”?

I'd really like to know. I've browsed YouTube videos and haven't found any that I'd recommend to writer's of short pieces. Some videos I looked at were for children, others were aimed at writers of longer works, like novels, and other aspiring professional products. I think our kind of hobby writers, who are in it for enjoyment, need something more appropriate. Thoughts?