

# ONE-PAGE STORIES

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**Scaredy Cat ..... 2**

BY CAROL BENCK

**Beyond the Sheet ..... 3**

BY FRAN SCHNEIDER

**Moeller Park . . . Who Knew? ..... 4**

BY FRAN SCHNEIDER

**Broken Spring, Two Flats ..... 5**

BY MARY DEMPSEY

**Committal ..... 6**

BY PRUDENCE COCROFT

**The Day I Gave Something Away ..... 7**

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER

**Deceitful Youth ..... 8**

BY HAROLD W. CHENEY, JR.

**My Happy Place ..... 9**

BY SUE WATSON

**My Happy Place ..... 10**

BY BILL BOYS

**“ONE-PAGE STORIES Is a Beautiful Zine” ..... 11**

BY BILL BOYS

**Writing Guidelines; Want PDF Copies?.....12**

BY BILL BOYS



# Scaredy Cat

CAROL BENCK —FOREST HILL, MARYLAND

**I**T WAS TIME! IT HAD BEEN A YEAR SINCE my beloved kitty, Thea, had left this earth and I needed feline companionship. So, I went to our local shelter to see who was available. I studied everything there but nothing called out to me.

As I was leaving, one of the volunteers crooked her finger at me and said “Come with me!” We traveled into the inner sanctum and she opened a cage that was not on display for public viewing. There was a small sanctuary box in the back of the cage with a fist-size opening. I could tell that something was inside but all I could see was a tiny patch of white fur. I sat down on the edge of the cage and talked to the white fur but nothing came out to investigate. I talked till I ran out of things to say, then I tried singing. Nothing happened either. Being brave and not knowing whatever temperament was inside, I placed my hand on the opening. Nothing happened but I kept singing and just as I was making the decision to leave, I thought, “Well, just one more try.” This time a white paw patted me gently on the hand and disappeared completely. That did it! And sight unseen, I took care of the paperwork and made arrangements to pick up my kitty the following day.

As per instructions I kept her confined to one room so she would get used to her new home. She pushed out items from a shelf and lived back in the corner for several weeks, coming out at night only, for food, etc. Women, one by one, are entering her zone of trust but it is rare that any men are even able to see her, let alone get near her. Fortunately, her vet is a woman! It has been a long but loving five year journey to gain her confidence. She has become my welcome shadow – love always wins out in the long run. “Mia” now has learned that people are her friends and doesn’t even mind a belly rub now and then. Love wins out in the long run.



Mia. (Drawing by Carol Benck, 2016)

# Beyond the Sheet

By FRAN SCHNEIDER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**T**HERE IT WAS . . . THE SHEET. It was the same sheet every year. The overwhelming anticipation of the next couple of days began with the hanging of the sheet. It totally blocked the view into our living room. None of us children were allowed behind the sheet, and NO PEEKING either!

Our imaginations ran wild with the thought of the happenings there. We could hear conversations about where to move things and the sounds of furniture being moved around. When the front door opened, the cold air and the welcome smell of pine came wafting past the sheet. The tree is here!

This was beginning of a very long day for us kids. The sheet remained up from the time we got out of bed on December 23, until after Christmas Eve dinner. The living room was strictly off limits and it was “just too bad” that our only TV was in there. Of course, we were too excited to watch TV anyway. Our minds were busy imagining the food, fun and gifts of the season. After all there were things like bicycles, baby dolls, basketballs, ballerinas and baked goods in our near future.

Occasionally, if we were strategically located, we could get a peek behind the sheet, when one of our parents had to exit the room. One year, if you sat on the second to the top step of the stairs, you could actually see OVER the sheet. That view revealed my Dad on a step ladder, adding ornaments to the top of the tree. We knew all the good stuff was happening on the floor, where my mother sat wrapping gifts. Our excitement grew, hour by hour, and sleep was sporadic, at best, that night.

Christmas Eve day could not move along fast enough. Dinner marked the beginning of the end of our unbridled excitement. There was no lingering over dinner plates. The faster we ate, the sooner the sheet came down. This year was very special, as it was my turn to pull down the sheet, in spite of my older brother’s protests. This was going to be the best Christmas ever!

Finally, it was time to remove the sheet. I took my position and gave it a mighty pull. Down it came. The reflections in our wide-eyed faces were seldom captured on camera, but continue to live on in our memories.

# Moeller Park . . . Who Knew?

BY FRAN SCHNEIDER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**A**T ABOUT 9:45 AM, ON ANY GIVEN MORNING, he showed up religiously. He could be seen walking the perimeter of his property, which was the size of an entire city block. He carried a long stick, slung over his shoulder, as if he were walking guard duty, toting his rifle.

Countless mornings, sitting in my St. Leo grade school classroom across the street, I watched this same scenario play out. I always wondered what was going through his mind. He usually paid

no attention to anyone, unless, of course, you were to touch the six-foot high fence that surrounded (protected?) his property on three sides. He had been known to tear across his yard, yelling and waving his stick at the bold culprit who dared taunt him, encroach on his property or (God forbid!), touch his fence.



The Moeller property; St. Leo Church and School, lower left. (Undated photo.)

My mother, along with all the other neighborhood mothers, said to just leave him alone and that he was “shell shocked” from his service in World War I. Most of us neighborhood kids just stayed away, and if one of us inadvertently ran our fingers along fence on our way home from school, the others just hurried across the street to avoid any kind of scene. Within the fence there were a couple of large cinder block outbuildings (remnants of an old elevator factory) and a large brick farmhouse, in which the three siblings had lived for decades. They maintained a well-kept vegetable garden and a row of peony bushes that one could smell even from the “safe” side of the fence.

Eventually the city obtained the property and dubbed it Moeller Park, after the long-time residents. Today this is an active, well-kept park, thanks to the care of a few tireless neighbors, who strive to keep it beautiful. I walk this park several times a week. My mind always goes to the Moellers. I wonder if they would like what has become of their property. As I walk the same path, I can almost see Mr. Moeller pacing with his stick on his shoulder.

# Broken Spring, Two Flats

BY MARY DEMPSEY — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I SMELLED SOMETHING, SAW SMOKE, AND FELT something at the same time. I'm having a flat tire! A friend and I were on our way to Great Southern Shopping Center, but as a former driving instructor I got off the road ASAP, turning at the first street and into a large parking lot. We are at the corner of S. High at Dolby Rd., in the Iron Workers Union Local 179 parking lot. I call AAA right away, tell them my name, membership number, location and that I have a flat tire. I even spell D-O-L-B-Y. I assure them we are safe. "Please send someone." I open the trunk; empty it to make it easy for the tow driver to get at the spare. We wait. After a while, another AAA dispatcher calls and asks our location – the tow driver called in and said he was there! I look -- no driver around here. I repeat: "We are at S. High St. at Dolby, in a large parking lot. Trunk open, doors open! You can't miss us! We're the ones with the flat tire!" So, more waiting. After a while here comes my hero, an AAA driver. (He was sent to 179 S. High Street!)

He starts to change our tire, then calls me to come look. A broken spring under the car had rubbed against the tire. He says if he puts the spare on, it will eventually cause this tire to go flat, too. If he had told me it would be unsafe to drive I would have respected his call, but he just said "drive slow!" So I turn on the flashers and we go *very* slow! In two or three blocks – Bang! Another flat! I'm at Loxley Dr. and S. High Street now. Again I call AAA. This time I need a flatbed wrecker because I don't have *two* spares! I call my brother to help, retired Columbus Police Sgt. Jim Dempsey. He looks at the shredded tire and asks, "If the tow driver saw what the problem was, why did he even put the spare on and put you back on the road, knowing this was going to happen again?" (I surely didn't know.)

But finally, we get home safe! I cherish my AAA membership. But this could have been a very bad situation. I don't think we should have been put back on the road. I think my experience as a driving instructor saved us.

I wrote this all up and sent it to AAA, saying I felt they should accept partial responsibility for the expense of the second flat tire. I'm without the use of my car while repairs are made. Due to the poor judgment of the tow driver, this has been a traumatic experience for me. (In the end, I'm happy to report AAA *did* pay for the second flat.)

# Committal

PRUDENCE COCROFT — WAUKEE, IOWA

**T**O SPREAD MY HUSBAND, JOHN'S, ASHES my daughter, granddaughter and I went to Wyoming in May, 2021. My husband had been a commercial driver. He had driven in all forty-eight of the contiguous United States and Canada in a tour bus. One time he wanted to show me some of the western states that I hadn't been in and so we made a trip to Idaho. On our return we went through Yellowstone, and then south towards the Grand Teton Mountains. Because of our timeframe I didn't get to see too much of the Tetons except through the van's window. So after his death my daughter and I were trying to decide where we would spread his ashes. Because his name was John and my daughter's name is Jenny we decided the ideal place would be on St. John's Mountain in the Grand Tetons at Jenny Lake.



St. John's Mountain (on the right) and Jenny Lake.

We drove from Iowa, where we all live now, to Wyoming. The nation was just opening up to travel after the pandemic and there was not much traffic, and hadn't been for over a year. Leaving South Dakota and entering into the east side of Wyoming we were surprised to see all the signs warning us of road hazards: watch for elk, buffalo, bighorn sheep, bear and cowboys. Okay, we laughed! Like there's going to be cowboys on the road. But there were, or at least they were just off the road. In fact we saw everything they listed except for bears, but there were lots and lots of some of the animals on the road, in motel parking lots, crossing the road, and just standing roadside watching us. No wonder there were flashing lighted signs warning us.



But we made the trip safely, and felt John's committal site was fitting, both for him and for us.

# The Day I Gave Something Away

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“**W**ANTED: A WOK. DOES ANYONE HAVE ONE they are no longer using? PM me.” “Games and puzzles on the curb. PM me for address.” In the last few years on the NextDoor app, there has been an abundance of ads wanting to give away — or obtain — a specific item. I usually do not pay much attention to them, until I saw someone requesting a “dress form” so she could make a dress for her out-of-state mother. Voila! I had a dress form! Now, how do I “PM” someone? I finally simply made a comment and gave my contact information. I soon received a text and we planned to meet at church, a neutral location. She was late, but after several more texts, she arrived, and I handed her the form. I told her that she could keep it if she had an ongoing use for it. The only thing I had used it for in the past 25 years was to hold one of my sons’ *Wanderhut* (“wandering hat”). Besides, the form had been given to me in the first place. She was ecstatic! My pastor came by about that time. I explained the situation, and he gave me the title for this story!



Typically, I tend to keep everything because “it might come in handy someday.” Intellectually I know that is *not* the reason to keep an item, yet my house is full of such things. I also do not like to throw things in a landfill, so I simply hold on to them. This transaction somehow liberated me. In addition, my brother had recently died, and I am beginning to feel my mortality. What else could I give away?

My congregation provides Advent desserts before an evening prayer service. I presented the cookies I had made in a cute little snowman cookie bowl, hoping someone would comment on it — and be willing to take it home. That too had been a gift, but I hadn’t even gotten it out of the box in at least 15 years. Success!

What else? What about the knit pillow cover I had started nearly fifty years ago? Would one of the “knitters” at church be able to use the yarn? How about a sweater I had been knitting for a friend in 1968? The body was nearly finished but the sleeves had been left in a youth hostel somewhere in Switzerland. Maybe someone could use that yarn. I probably just need a hundred more years to empty my house of “things that might come in handy someday!”

# Deceitful Youth

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

**A**FTER A “DEPRESSED” YOUTH (The Great Depression) in 1942 the thirteen-year-old Harold Cheney, Jr., was going to get a bicycle. There was, however, a problem. There were NO bicycles for sale in any stores. Production was cut, and the meager output went to war-related needs. (Messengers in huge sprawling aircraft plants.)

But then, a classified ad in the local paper had a bike for sale. I looked at it. It was not new ... it did not have “balloon” tires (with tubes). It had wooden rims for its wheels, with old “high-pressure” tubeless tires cemented in place on the rims. Okay. I got it. In only a few weeks of its new use, the aged glue gave way. The tires twisted and the air valves were torn from the tires.

(Again, “but....”) This was in Little Falls, New York (Mohawk Valley). Home of the H. P. Snyder factory – producer of ... *bicycles*. (Most of them sold as a “RollFast,” by Montgomery-Ward.) I asked at Snyder’s about old tubeless tires. They had some still, deep in their stock rooms. I wheeled the bike to the factory and they took it in.

Just a few days latter I was called to come and pick it up. My father gave me strict instructions. “Do not ride the bike home. We must give the new glue time to cure!” With that admonishment, I went for the bike. When I had paid the bill and started to walk away with it, the factory guy called to me: “You can ride it. The glue is completely firmed!”

Oh, my gosh! Here was a pair of completely-in-disagreement instructions! What to do? Well, I could not resist the opportunity! I hopped on and pedaled homeward. As I got to about a block from home, my assurance gave way. I hopped off, and walked the bike for the rest of the way. Father was out, and saw me, as I arrived.

At 13 I kept my deceit to myself. Let me tell you ... with every passing year, right up to my ninety-third, that “little” deceit has gnawed at my sense of self-respect.

Don’t deceive. I don’t believe it is ever worth it.



# My Happy Place

BY SUE WATSON — COLUMBUS, OHIO

OVER THE YEARS, OUR HAPPY PLACE CHANGES with circumstance. When I was a little kid, anywhere my Mommy was, was my Happy Place, and she was my sole source of soothing. As a teenager, Mom was still critically important, but I found my Happy Place was my bedroom. I could close the door and close out the world; then I was free to read, or draw, or practice dance steps, or just daydream.

As a newly married new mom, my happy place became anywhere the baby was.

During my working years, usually my car was my happy place, where I was solely responsible for myself. It was my respite after work, where I wasn't the purposeful employee and before I got home to start the purposeful housewife stuff. I could sing loudly if I wanted, or sometimes cry, or maybe even just enjoy the silence. The traffic never really bothered me . . . I wasn't responsible to do anything but stay alert and stay in my lane.

When I retired nine years ago, I kinda missed the driving, because it was my 'alone' time, and I didn't realize how much I appreciated that. Then again, my bedroom became my soother, my "only me" place . . . except I didn't practice any dance moves anymore.

Now, today, it's still my bedroom that comforts me. I love being able to crawl into my side of the bed and get all cuddled up next to Tim . . . and one of our dogs, of course, who believes he should sleep sideways between us so we'd look like an "H" from overhead. But the idea of being held by a husband who loves me, and pushed around by a dog who also loves me, that's what soothes me. And then you throw in a really good book to read before falling asleep . . . that is the ultimate Happy Place for me!

Something I noticed when I started thinking about this: All of my happy places have been, for the most part, solitary times, usually with silence but sometimes with music of *my* choice. And they all felt safe to me, safe and secure.

In summary, my Happy Place is warm, cozy, quiet or with soft and gentle music, where there is safety, security, comfort . . . but don't forget the good book to read!

# My Happy Place

BY BILL BOYS – COLUMBUS, OHIO

“WHERE DO YOU FIND THE HAPPY OR SOOTHING times in your life?” This writing prompt from my journaling group was a good one. As I mulled it over, it surprised me that I settled on breakfast. I usually get up around 5 a.m. to go downstairs to make breakfast for my wife and myself, as well as to feed our pets.

After getting the pets fed, I start the routine – heating the coffee water, grinding the coffee beans, getting the Chemex set up to brew the fresh-ground decaf, getting the bread and jam out of the fridge, popping the bread in the toaster oven, putting non-dairy creamer in the coffee carafe, washing and peeling two clementines, and trying to keep pace with the hot water needing to go into the Chemex. I set up the breakfast tray with our mugs. By then, the bread is toasted, ready for the peanut butter and jam. This routine takes about half an hour. When all is ready I load the tray, balance it, and grasp the handle of the filled carafe with the same hand, and with one hand still free to grab the stair railing I carefully climb the stairs back to our bedroom. I wake my wife with a “Good morning, honey,” stack her piece of toast with two clementine halves on top, put it on her coffee cup, and carry this over to her nightstand. I put my own within reach, ditto. When we’re both settled back on our pillows with our napkins on our laps, we load the morning’s Great Courses DVD, and watch a half-hour lecture while we eat.

We find it stimulating, soothing, and sometimes profoundly engaging to continuously learn from the usually well-above-average professors and lecturers in these courses. Currently we’re viewing “The American West: History, Myth, and Legacy,” by Professor Patrick N. Allitt, Ph.D., of Emory University. After the lecture we can enjoy a couple of hours sleep before we need to “really” get up and go about the day’s activities.

And the day’s activity includes another and different Great Course downstairs after walking our dog, and while enjoying a homemade oatmeal raisin and chocolate chip cookie with our second cups of coffee; a breakfast extension. That one is currently “Why Evil Exists,” by Professor Charles Mathewes, Ph.D., of the University of Virginia. We have viewed over forty courses this way, and counting. This morning routine with lifelong learning is a “happy place” for us.

# “ONE-PAGE STORIES Is a Beautiful Zine”

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**K**EN FAIG, JR., EMAILED ME THOSE SURPRISINGLY appreciative words last month. This is their full context:

*One-Page Stories is a beautiful zine. I think there is a lot of merit in trying to condense one's thoughts to say something worthwhile in under 500 words.*

Would you agree? (Not necessarily with the “beautiful zine” part, but at least with the “merit in trying to condense one’s thoughts” part?) I ask myself: what does ONE-PAGE STORIES (O-PS) do that elicits such nice reactions from Ken and others as well?

One thing: O-PS is designed on purpose for short pieces – as Ken points out, a place for writers to see for themselves that “something worthwhile” can be crafted in a half-sheet.

Something else, too: O-PS likes stories of seemingly small, human events of daily life. By publishing such stories, O-PS affirms folks in sharing them, and readers do affirm their enjoyment in reading them. (Over forty-five people have contributed stories in the three years since O-PS first appeared; I haven’t kept track of how many times I’ve received appreciative comments from readers.)

Could a third point be pandemic-related? I happened to start O-PS one month before we all started going into lockdown in a global public health emergency. Maybe related to that, we put our eyes on more digital screens and lost ground with books and print – especially school children. Libraries, the *New York Times* reported, are embracing the post-pandemic value of both print and expanded digital services, so maybe by distributing O-PS also digitally in PDFs we’re doing the same and reaching more readers. (As of this writing, 111 PDF copies go out each month, on top of the 90 printed copies for the National Amateur Press Association plus 20 more printed copies going out by mail to others. Almost exactly a tie!)

Whatever – know that you are welcome to join in making this “a beautiful zine”! The guidelines for sending in *your* one-page story are on the back cover. I’ll be waiting eagerly!



## 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.



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<https://AmateurPress.org/the-monthly-bundles/>