

ONE-PAGE STORIES

No. 32 — February 2023

A Cooperative Journal for the National Amateur Press Association

Social Media Dilemma	2
BY HELEN WANG	
Perhaps My Last Computer	3
BY RICH HOPKINS	
RMS <i>Titanic</i> and Big Soldier Mine	4
BY TOM DUFFEY	
The Lemon War	5
BY MARY J. DEMPSEY	
Morning Massacre of the Taste Buds	6
BY MAX SCHWARZ-WRIGHT	
Treasure	7
BY PEGGY ZORTMAN	
Forbidden Foray	8
BY LINDA L. SHIVERS	
What a Tale My Scars Could Tell	9
BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER	
The Joys of Writing Just for Fun	10
BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (CHATGPT) AND BILL BOYS	
Can You Read This Page More Easily?	11
BY BILL BOYS	
A Response about Writer's Block	12
BY PEGGY ZORTMAN	



Social Media Dilemma

BY HELEN WANG — COLUMBUS, OHIO

SOCIAL MEDIA CAME TO OUR LIFE, AND BROKE the norms that we were used to. Before, people communicated with each other face to face, or through letters, phone calls, and later emails. Most of the time, the communication was one to one. As a default rule, we were supposed to keep each communication private.

Social media upends the world. New words are created every day: LOL, IMO, and ZZZ. I become illiterate again, and have a hard time to keep up. The world suddenly becomes so loud, and is dominated by Posts, Shares, Likes, and Comments. We created the problem of this noise, and now have to figure out ways to filter out the noise. In this way, only the right noise comes through.

Are we closer to each other because of the social media? Not necessarily. In 2015, I attended the 30-year reunion of my college classmates in Beijing. Many of us hadn't seen each other since graduation. It was a great time to sit down and catch up. During the group gathering, the organizer was showing slides of our old pictures, and shared the old stories. Some folks were sitting there, and using their cell phones. I couldn't believe it. Is the cell phone and social media more important than the reunion at that moment?

In a group chat, how should we treat each other? The code of ethics was not in place before the social media exploded, and nobody is prepared for it. Big ego is on a display in a group chat. Someone feels himself/herself is always right, and keeps pushing their own political views to the group. Others become so indifferent. They simply don't care, and keep silent, no matter what others say. Why are people joining a group chat? Is it because they want to communicate with each other, and to have some good discussions? If nobody communicates, except some people copying and pasting strangers' messages or videos to the group, then what's the point of having the group?

This is my dilemma about social media: I like it, as it helps to connect with friends. But I don't feel it's a good and effective communication tool. The silence, irrelevance, and nonsense suffocate me. I guess I'm part of the social media problem, too.

Perhaps My Last Computer

BY RICH HOPKINS — TERRA ALTA, WEST VIRGINIA

I HAVE JUST PURCHASED WHAT MOST likely will be my last “computer.” It’s a whiz-bang Samsung 360 Pro 2 in 1 with more bells and whistles than I can imagine. I paid less for it than I did my first computer in the early 1980s. Over the years I have bought perhaps 20 computers either for myself or for my business.

My first computer had to be assembled and came with a bunch of floppy disks containing the operating system, a word processor, and a spreadsheet program (all of which I had to install) plus a handful of thick manuals which I had to read over and over. I spent over a week with the computer spread out all over the dining room table trying to get it to work. Yes, I finally did.



Nothing accompanied this new machine. It is so light and thin it could be lost in a small stack of magazines. There was a tiny sleeve no bigger than a business card containing two one-page inserts. One, the legal gibberish about liability, terms and conditions. The other was labeled “Quick Start Guide.” In old times we alluded to tiny type as “6 point.” Well, these two sheets are surely 3 point. Who can read that? Most of the info was legal babble. The only help was a statement that a user manual was on drive C.

No need to tell you anything. It’s totally intuitive. This computer came with the operating system pre-loaded plus thousands of additional files containing wanted, needed, rejected, unnecessary and totally useless stuff — all pre-loaded and mostly impossible to get rid of. I asked my last computer how many files were on its hard drive: over four thousand. It’s anyone’s guess as to what all those files do. You are lucky when you find one you really could use, but how are you to know? A friend asked how I knew so much about computers. My answer: “I grew up with them as they developed. That’s how I know why it’s ‘Drive C’ instead of, maybe ‘A’.”

I can answer all those questions simply because I have toughed it out so often before. I hope I can master this latest gem. They keep changing standard things with new names, titles or whatever. So I’m struggling just to figure anew what I was proficient at doing just a day ago on my just-retired computer. It’s not much fun anymore.

RMS *Titanic* and Big Soldier Mine

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

TWO PIECES OF COAL ARE IN MY CURIO COLLECTION. Each is displayed in a clear plastic pyramid.

I lived with my grandma and grandpa until I was five years old. When I was age four, I had a fascination with her bookcase. There was one book in particular that had on the cover a portrait of the Washington Monument next to a large ship end-to-end. In real life, the monument was 555 feet high and the ship was longer at 882 feet. Gram would read to me from this book, show me pictures, and sometimes read the chapter again. I would try and understand the meaning of dates, numbers and such. She would use her hands to express distances and sizes. The ship was the Royal Mail Steamer (RMS) *Titanic*.

Fast forward to 1985; the wreckage was discovered after years of searching. An attempt was made in 1996 to raise a section of her rusted hull but this did not work out. However, there were many other artifacts that were located and raised to the surface. This included lumps of coal from her coal bunkers. Some of this coal was chipped into small dime-sized pieces and offered for sale for \$40 each, to raise funds for additional exploration. This also included a certificate of authenticity.

I also have another piece of coal that was chipped from a lump gathered from the Big Soldier Mine. It was located next door to my town of Reynoldsville.

The interesting thing about my Big Soldier coal is that it came from what was once the largest bituminous coal mine in the world. It is only fitting that the *Titanic* coal came from what was once the world's largest ship afloat.



The Big Mine piece is affixed to the card in this photo; the *Titanic* piece is on the small pedestal. (Photo courtesy of the Courier-Express, DuBois, Pa., Alex Nelson.)

They are neighbors in my cabinet.

My New Senior Living Apartment

BY MARY J. DEMPSEY – COLUMBUS, OHIO

JUST MOVED IN OCTOBER; secure in my new senior living facility at J. C. Arms Apartments, Columbus, Ohio. Everything is new to me. I rise early, 2:30 a.m., my favorite time of day. I love to read. Everything is peaceful and quiet. While reading, I decide to have a piece of toast. I proceed to the refrigerator for a piece of bread.

I thought nothing of putting the end crust into the toaster. Always was told as a young child to “always eat the crust! It will make your hair curly!” (Well, I go to the Free Market for groceries and their bread is sometimes not the freshest.) I always wanted curly hair! Not being one to sit and watch for the toast to pop up, I go back to reading.

You can not imagine my surprise at hearing my fire alarm to sound, loud and clear in my apartment! I had heard other alarms to sound, but not mine! Scared the bejeebers out of me! I call 911! I tell them *not* to come! “Do *not* send a fire truck!” (I have never, in my life, ever set off a fire alarm. I have never, in my life, called 911!)

I give my address, my name, apartment number. “Please do *not* send trucks! I am okay. I burnt my toast! Please! Do *not* send fire trucks!” Then the 911 dispatcher informs me calmly that she needs to transfer me to the Fire Department! “Oh, yes please! They do *not* need to come! I’m okay! I burnt my toast!”

Fireman answers. I give location, name, apartment number. “Please, do *not* send fire trucks! I’m okay! I burnt my toast!” The fireman calmly says, “If you have smoke in your apartment you could open a window.” “Oh yes! I’ll turn on the exhaust fan! Thank you! I’m so sorry! I love you guys! I’ll make you some cookies!”

Well, that is just what I did! I made a batch of applesauce raisin cookies the very next day. Went to the apartments’ office, confessed to what had happened and ask for the address as to which station to deliver the cookies. I marched right up to their door, gave my name, location, time of day this happened. Expressed my deepest sorrow! “I’m so thankful for your service! Please enjoy these applesauce and raisin cookies.” They were very grateful and said, “They will be gone within minutes!”

Well, now I know my fire alarm works!

Morning Massacre of the Taste Buds

By MAX SSCHWARZ-WRIGHT — WASHINGTON, D.C.

I OPENED MY EYES AND BLINKED. Sunlight streamed through my bedroom window and gently fell onto my bed. I thought: “What could get this fresh, new weekend off to a fresh, new start? Aha, I could make pancakes!” I slid down the banister, hopped into the kitchen, and before you could say flapjack, I was stirring the tan-colored batter in a big glass bowl.

However, batter-stirring was my least favorite part, and so it was a blessing when my little sister, Lexi, poked her snout into the kitchen. “Can I help?” she asked. I weighed all of the pros and cons; I ended up employing her, so we were soon oiling the pan with olive oil, then pouring the batter into the pan in three small circles. The room soon filled with the wonderful aroma of pancakes. They sizzled, popped, fizzed, crackled, and got all bubbly. Finally, we slid 3 golden brown pancakes onto two glistening white plates. “I want extra syrup!” said Lexi. “Well I deserve twice as much as you!” I retaliated. As we poured syrup on our fluffy pancakes we noticed that it seemed a little runny, but we ignored this.

I bit into my pancake: “Bleh! Disgusting!” And so was Lexi’s! What could be wrong? The only thing we could think of was maybe we put too much olive oil in the pan. We tried another batch but very light on the olive oil. Again with the runny syrup. However, when we bit into our pancakes, they still tasted disgusting! We decided to try one last time, after checking the dates on all the ingredients. This time, though, Lexi said, “I don’t want any syrup on mine.” When I bit into mine, it still tasted like one of those pieces of German chocolate laced with liquor crossed with some long-expired marzipan, but when Lexi bit into hers, a wide smile spread across her face: “It tastes great!” she exclaimed with surprise.

I tried hers to make sure that she was telling the truth, and sure enough, it tasted perfect (except that it was lacking syrup). What followed was five minutes of Sherlock-Holmes-class thinking. As I thought, I stared absent-mindedly at the syrup bottle’s label: “Christian Brother’s Brandy, Very Smooth.” Finally I realized what it meant! The runny syrup wasn’t syrup at all, but brandy! That was why our pancakes tasted so interestingly disgusting! And why Lexi’s last one was okay! After making more pancakes, with real syrup, we were one good story richer – which counts for something if you know Bill Boys!

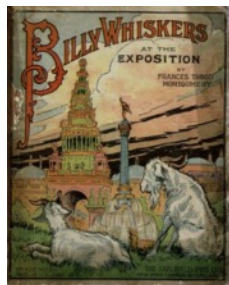
Treasure

BY PEGGY ZORTMAN — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

TREASURE MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT people. Some see Treasure in wealth or in power. Some discover a daisy in the field and feel they have found Treasure. A child hugging a lost teddy bear, or a family welcoming their first child, have all found Treasure. My neighbor found an old book lying in the center of a country road. The book, wet from recent rain, was otherwise in good condition. He picked it up and took it home where he did his best to dry it and preserve it. Knowing I am a writer, he kept it for me. “Maybe you can write a story about it,” he hinted.

I was thrilled! Not only with the book and the possibilities it presented, but with my neighbor’s confidence in me. Mark had saved a book then passed it on with the belief that I could bring it back to life — Treasure!

The book (copyrighted in 1915), *Billy Whiskers: At the Exposition*, sat by my chair for months. I finally picked it up to do some research — Treasure! Frances Trego Montgomery, the author, was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 15, 1858. She died at sea during a round-the-world cruise on April 5, 1925. She was a respected children’s book author. Frank J. Murch, the illustrator, was known for his paintings and lived near New York. The Saalfied Publishing Company was a major publisher of children’s books from 1900 to 1977. (Their library and archives were purchased by Kent State University.)



The book, as found.

This book is one of about twenty-five Billy Whiskers books. Billy is a well-educated goat with a wanderlust, a need for adventure, a sense of humor, and a sometimes-quick temper. The Billy Whiskers books (written in an old-fashioned formal style) remain magical and although out of print are still available if you look for them.

Treasure comes in many forms. For me, at this moment it is my thoughtful neighbor, a book, and the adventure they provided.

Inside the front cover is a name. It is obviously written by a young child. Perhaps I’ll try tracking down the original owner and return this family treasure.

Forbidden Foray

BY LINDA L. SHIVERS — DES MOINES, IOWA

MY FRIENDS AND I WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO LEAVE the block without getting permission, back in the day. There were also certain places that we weren't supposed to go to.

Like the creek. One day, my brother Billy, Merle, Karen and I couldn't resist the temptation. Billy assured us there was nothing to worry about. It was just a skinny creek, trees and the culvert. The rest of us didn't know what a culvert was. Billy said it was a tunnel-like thing that the creek runs through. He said Mr. Richards at the drug store said it goes clear across town, under streets and buildings, and comes out every so often as the creek. I wondered when Billy ever got there in the first place. Karen asked what do we tell our parents where we're going. Billy said we'll tell them we're going to the drug store for ice cream, which we could do on the way home. Wouldn't exactly be a lie.



Only Billy knew what a culvert was.

We rode our bikes the two blocks down the street. Slid down an embankment to the creek. We followed Billy into the gloomy culvert, straddling the narrow rivulet of water trickling down the center. It was just a drainage ditch for rain. It didn't smell very good. We could hardly see anything until Merle turned on a little flash light. It was cool down there and we felt the air current. Sometimes one of us would slip and splash water on everyone else. A few times we could feel the vibrations and rumbles from traffic overhead. At some point, Merle bumped into Billy and dropped the flashlight, and it broke. It was totally dark. We held hands and tried to keep going single file.

Eventually we saw light, dropped hands and ran, splashing more dirty water all over us. When we burst out into the open . . . it wasn't the way we had come. We'd gotten turned around in the dark. We climbed up the bank and discovered we were in the park, about six blocks from where we'd left our bikes.

We weren't going to have to come up with some idea to explain where we'd been. One look at our wet, mud splattered clothes would tell our folks we'd been somewhere we shouldn't have been.

Of course, we didn't get any ice cream.

What a Tale My Scars Could Tell

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“I DIDN’T BOTHER WITH SCARS; I went right to breaking bones.” This was my answer to an icebreaker exercise on the Milford Track hike, New Zealand, about twenty years ago. Later I realized I did have a very small scar on my left leg from an accident on my neighbor’s damaged slide – but I had broken three bones before I was 11. My, has that changed! Now I have five new scars and only one additional fractured bone.

The longest scar – approximately 12 inches – was from a craniotomy: a section of my skull was excised to remove a meningioma. Fortunately, the surgeon had carefully peeled back a section of my scalp and my hair continues to grow, covering that scar.



My longest scar – 32 staples worth!

The other four scars are all within a diameter of 8 inches, all appeared within one year, and all five are basically related to one condition. I was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease (PKD) when I moved to Utah in 2012. Since that condition frequently is associated with aneurysms, an MRI was ordered. No aneurysms were found, but there was a 3 mm growth in my head that needed to be removed (Scar #1). PKD can also be a contributing factor in osteoporosis. To see how far advanced that condition is, a small bone biopsy on my left iliac crest was performed (Scar #2). (I have learned LOTS of new words!) In the last month, 3 additional scars were added. The first (#3) was from an unsuccessful attempt to “place” a PD catheter, to prepare for peritoneal kidney dialysis. Scars #4 and #5 came from a successful “placement”: one small incision and a somewhat larger hole for the flexible tube that will drain the toxins that my kidneys are unable to do on their own. Hmm. Could that be considered a scar? The tube remains, protruding from my abdomen.

That certainly sounds like enough scars in one small area, but I am hoping that there will eventually be a somewhat longer scar in that same area, perhaps about seven inches long. A kidney transplant would be a way to have the tube removed. More importantly, a new kidney would help me live a healthier life, removing the toxins automatically. I would not constantly need to be thinking about how low my kidney function is. Oh, yes. What a tale my scars will tell!

The Joys of Writing Just for Fun

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO, AND
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE — OPENAI CHAT GPT — ONLINE

WRITING FOR FUN CAN BRING A SENSE OF creativity, expression and fulfillment. It provides an outlet for imagination, allowing the writer to escape reality and enter a world of their own making. It can also serve as a form of self-discovery and introspection, helping the writer to understand their thoughts and emotions better. Additionally, the act of writing can be a relaxing and enjoyable hobby, providing a sense of accomplishment and a break from the demands of everyday life. Overall, writing for fun is a wonderful way to tap into one's imagination, express oneself, and find joy and fulfillment through the creative process.

Full disclosure: from here on, I (Bill Boys), the human writer and editor, am the author. But the first paragraph was generated by the artificial intelligence (AI) app OpenAI ChatGPT. The instruction I gave it was: "Describe the joys of writing just for fun." It generated that paragraph *within two seconds*.

It reads well, makes valid points about the topic, and would do credit to any human writer who penned it, don't you think? If I hadn't alerted you to the AI composition of that paragraph I suspect you might have assumed it originated from me. (Indeed, the first reader of a draft of this page thought so.)

That, of course, is one of the alarm bells that are ringing these days – students could use this app to write their homework assignments, term papers, even theses, passing them off as their own work. Schools are scrambling to confront this possibility.

Now if only AI could do the composition and editing for me: setting the heading and byline in the correct font and sizes, two-line drop cap in the initial paragraph, and with a portion of the first line set in all caps. Wouldn't that be fine! Someday AI will reach that point, I have little doubt.

However, I carry on with old-fashioned desktop publishing. (I'm old enough to recall when *that* was new!) And I invite humans to submit contributions to future issues. But please, no AI-generated stories. I don't have an app for detecting them yet.

Can You Read This Page More Easily?

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

CAREFUL TYPEFACE CHOICE HELPS people read *more quickly and more accurately*, according to a *New York Times* article: “Citing Accessibility, State Department Ditches Times New Roman for Calibri,” Jan. 19, 2023. Several typefaces have been designed based on such research. One is called Readex; you’re reading it right now.

For example, capital “I” has small crossbars (serifs) top and bottom, to distinguish it from lower-case “l”. (In many sans-serif typefaces, like Arial and Calibri, capital “I” and lower-case “l” are almost the same – Arial: III, Calibri: III, but Readex: III). The lower-case “g” has an open tail whereas most serif typefaces have a more complex two-bowl design (Times New Roman: g, Georgia: g) and even some sans-serif typefaces do, too (Calibri: g). Periods and commas are heavier (Readex, Arial,), the dot over lower-case “i” is higher, line-spacing is locked in at increased spacing, and more such tweaks.

I admit I favor the classic look of serif typefaces. I’ll keep on using 11-point Georgia for ONE-PAGE STORIES. Besides, this 11-point Readex Pro Light only accommodates about 250 words for a one-page story, not 350. That’s some drop! But I am intrigued by scientific studies of readability and accessibility.

Maybe I’ll start an experimental journal and try out Readex.



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.)

As NAPA member Ken Faig said recently, something worthwhile can be written in a short format like this.

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 — 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, email at williamboys@att.net (preferred, to save retyping) or by postal mail to 184 Reinhard Ave., Columbus OH 43206-2635.

A Response about Writer's Block

“You asked recently, ‘What do you do about “Writer's Block”?’

When I get stuck, I play. I surf the internet looking for nothing. I pick up a book, newspaper or magazine and read. I do laundry, dust, do dishes or cook something unusual. In short I walk away, forget for a time, think of other things. When I go back I can usually move on. I guess my creativity just needs a break.” – Peggy Zortman