

ONE-PAGE STORIES

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Our Card to Jimmy Carter

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

DEAR PRESIDENT CARTER, you have decided to receive hospice care, as we learned yesterday (Feb. 18, 2023).

Years ago we happened to be in the overflow crowd at your church in Plains. We stayed for your Bible class. You taught on 1 Thessalonians, and like everyone else there we laughed at your introductory quip, seeing the packed house: “I didn’t realize how much interest there is in 1 Thessalonians!”

Let me quote a smidgeon of it back at you today, in view of your decision, and mindful of the fact that the universe has spun on almost two more millennia since Paul wrote: “We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers constantly, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you”

Paul was mistaken in expecting the return of Jesus in his lifetime, but not in his “steadfastness of hope,” which we too feel. We credit your and Rosalyn’s personal lives and your work through The Carter Center for encouraging people like us today to maintain steadfastness of hope that amidst the crises and toils of our times God is still bringing forth a hope for goodness, love and care for all people and for all existence.

We add another smidgeon of 1 Thessalonians for you: “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do this.”

Your friends, who commend you
in that steadfast hope,

Bill and Ruth Boys

Andy Was Really Scared

BY RUTH MURRAY — ROCKBRIDGE, OHIO

I SAW HIM BEFORE I HEARD HIM. Across two cow pastures he came as fast as his little legs could carry him, waving his arms, calling “Ruthie, Ruthie, you’ve got to save me!” I saw neither man nor beast threatening him. Andy was 10 and I was 14, so in big-sister fashion I yelled, “From what, Andy?” He wailed, “I’m in trouble and you have got to help me.” He was really scared. “You’ve got to come and see the trouble I’m in! I took Daddy’s traps and put them in the creek to catch muskrats, and I’ve caught one!”

“So what am I to do besides tell you that you are in a lot of trouble when Daddy finds out his traps are out there?” Andy said, “You don’t understand – I caught it and it didn’t die! It’s only caught by its leg and I can’t let it loose!!!” Me: “And you expect me to do that for you?” Andy: “You’ve got to. I can’t get anywhere near it because it hisses and snarls at me.” Me: “And you think it won’t do that for me?” Andy: “Yes, it will, but you are bigger than me and you can put it out of its misery.” Me: “Andy!! You know I can kill chickens when they are ill, but a *muskrat*? Oh, I just don’t know if I can.” But I had no alternative but to go with him. I picked up my baseball bat and over the pastures and fences we went.

As we got near the creek, I couldn’t see anything remotely like an animal but it didn’t take long for me to hear it. It was an adult. True enough, as I approached, it hissed and snarled at me. I could see how frightened it was, almost as afraid as Andy.

Andy’s problem was two-fold. First, he had taken Daddy’s traps out and put them in the creek without permission, and out of season, too, which made Daddy responsible for Andy’s behavior. The traps had a metal tag on them with Daddy’s name and address, so it wouldn’t take a genius to track down the culprit. Second, Andy had caught an animal that didn’t die, causing it great pain and suffering.

I will spare you the details of the execution. It was not something that I wanted to do but Andy’s neck was in a noose so what choice did I have? Afterward, I told Andy to pull all the traps, clean them up and stow them back in the barn where he had found them.

My parting words as I left the crime scene were “You owe, Andy, you owe me!” Did I ever collect? No, I never did.

My Nemesis

BY CAROL BENCK — FOREST HILL, MARYLAND

EXCEPT FOR QUIET AQUARIUM FISH, pets were not an option when I lived in a city apartment (over the landlord). I did not know what it was like to *not* have pet fish (even dragged them along to college). So when my husband and I bought our first home, it wasn't long before the fish fetish grew up into outside ponds. A circular 4 ft. x 8 ft. diameter one, a concrete 3 ft. x 8 ft. kidney-shaped one and a sunken bathtub. (Yes, an old white enamel bathtub, plugged of course.) The ponds and their goldfish occupants are great except for one thing: they are outside and therefore subject to nature – and my nemesis.

Each spring and fall I have visitors to my ponds: the Great Blue Herons. For about two months they arrive for their snacks and I lose a number of my fish. For years I have tried to figure out ways to thwart them, many of which, I am sure, give my neighbors thoughts of sending the men in white coats to visit me.



(Web image: Langbein Wildlife)

My kitchen window looks out over my ponds and I can see if the bird is there as it stands its statue-like vigil, to catch its prey. I used to try to scare the herons off with raucous drama – I tried the “erupt from the backdoor, banging pots with spoons and yelling” routine. (I don't want to actually harm the birds – they've got to eat too – *but not my fish!*)

That tactic didn't work at all. They wait until I'm about 15 feet from them and calmly sail off. At this point, I am sure my neighbors are considering if I'm sane or not. But this year I decided to try a new tactic: the silent approach. When I spot one there, I quietly open the back door (many times in robe and slippers) and silently, s-l-o-w-l-y, creep up on them in a zig-zag pattern until I am almost 15 feet from them and then I use the “wave your arms and yell” routine. That doesn't work either – they gently glide off to return when their “rude annoyer” goes back inside.

I have even tried nets over the ponds but the “Great Blues” manage to find a way to lunch!

The Battle of the Lemons

By MARY J. DEMPSEY — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I WAS EMPLOYED AT ROCKWELL INTERNATIONAL on Fifth Avenue in Columbus, Ohio, in the mid-1980s, as a utility worker in the gantries. Those were huge waist-high milling machines used to make parts for airplanes. You could walk around them and on them, almost as big as a football field.

To sweep, clean up messes, roll up hoses, and put things back in their proper places, it would take me a full eight-hour shift just going from one end of our building to the other.

Of course, if I happened to hear a good joke, I would certainly stop by and tell the machine operators, adding a bit of humor to their boring job of sitting and watching a machine all day.

Our supervisor was a person of very small stature. He reminded me of a Hitler type. Very production-oriented, always concerned about numbers. He was always on a person about production or attendance. He would go from one person to another about it. “Your production was not *high* enough!” or “Your attendance was *bad*!” He would always end up like an agitated coach or umpire at a baseball game, arms flailing; a shouting match.

Once, we were closing down for the Christmas and New Year holidays. Someone in the canteen had set out a case of lemons. Well, someone eyed them and proceeded to have some fun by tossing them to or at someone else – a mill operator or another machine operator. The supervisor knew what was happening. The machine operators would make a supreme effort to lob a lemon in his direction and then busy themselves, looking the other way. Of course, this was a reason for cheers from onlookers, especially if it was a close hit.

Well, of course any lemon had to be thrown back at that person or at another person! Well, this went on for quite a long time – until the whole crate of lemons was in flight!

I’m sure they had “fun”! I would smile and have a little laugh myself, much later on, when I would find lemons in the most remote places during my shifts! Shriveled and dried up, but I knew it was a lemon. But this was March, almost April! Just how long did this battle go on?

The Necklace

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

I WAS SEATED BEHIND A GIRL WHO WORE a thick necklace with white beads in the 2nd grade at Belle Stone School, Canton, Ohio, in 1949. The baubles were about the size of a marble and were joined by snaps to one another. They were called pop-beads. I was interested in fussing with this thing and was probably a genuine pest. She would then squirm around in her seat, which got the attention of our teacher, Mrs. Fritz.

Mrs. Fritz came up with a creative punishment for my bothering my classmate. She stopped the class and called my name. Her next move caught me by surprise. She said “Since you are so interested in that necklace, you can wear it.” I thought, “OH, NO!”

She came to my desk and put the necklace around my neck and fastened it from behind. I wanted to drop through the floor.

By the time she made her way back up front to her big desk, I was throwing up all over myself and my desk. It was dripping on the floor. All my classmates around me were getting up and moving away from my mess. They were also very vocal with sounds of revulsion. Mrs. Fritz had a classmate go and find the janitor and explain to him that he needed a bucket and a mop. By this time, the room was empty. They had all moved outside, looking through the windows at me and pointing and laughing. I then knew that I would be really talked about. Buzz buzz.

I don't remember his name but the janitor was a nice guy and took pity on me. He cleaned me up some and took care of the desk and floor. He asked me where I lived and so the front office called my Mom to let her know I would be on my way home, driven by the custodian, who covered his front seat.

When Mom saw me, naturally she wanted to know what the heck happened. I did the best I could to put a better face on the reason why I upchucked my breakfast. It didn't go well when I heard – “Wait 'till your Dad gets home.”

I Can See My Toes!

By KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

GOING TO INDEPENDENCE, IOWA, to purchase shoes for the next school year was one of the end-of-summer highlights in my childhood. I grew up in a small town so going to a bigger town (yet fewer than 6,000 people!) was a real adventure.

We would all pile into the car: the three girls in back and Mark in front with our parents. We drove west to Oelwein, then south. In this area we would often see horse-drawn buggies: many Amish families lived here. Eventually, we would get to Independence, and the “J and P Shoe Store,” our destination. (How long did it take me to realize the store was named after its owners: Janice and Paul?)

In the store, Paul would take time with each of us, first measuring our feet with a “steel-ruler” to see the size needed and then letting us try on various shoes. Sometimes we needed both shoes meant to wear to school and shoes for leisure (i.e., tennis shoes).

We were able to choose the shoes we liked (although I am sure there was some guidance from our parents to make sure the shoes were appropriate). We were asked how the shoes fit: if they felt good and if there was room for our feet to grow. Paul would push on the toe of the shoe to ascertain the same information. Then, when we had decided on the shoes we liked, we got to go to a machine in the middle of the store, step up on the platform, and stick our toes into the hole in the machine. When they were situated, Paul would push a button. He, one parent, and I could all look in “binoculars”: I could see the bones in my toes! I was fascinated! Through the machine, through the shoe, right to my skeleton! Paul and my parents could then tell the shoe fit but gave me room to grow.

When each of us kids had chosen shoes (and checked them in the “magic machine”), Dad and Paul would go to his office to do some negotiating. Paul happened to be a stamp collector – and Dad worked in a post office so had access to “first day of issue” stamps, prized by philatelists. At the end of the day, everyone was pleased.



Fluoroscope shoe-fitting machine
(image from the web)

My Flim-Flam to Snap a Scam

By JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

WHEN A VOICE SAID, “HELLO, GRANDPA,” I KNEW this was a scam call. I’ve received calls starting this way before. I enjoy playing along as the victim because I like to lie and to me acting is lying. An actor is trying to make his character believable and I think I’ve become pretty good at doing it.

I replied, “Agnes (I always have a fictitious name handy), I’m glad you called. I’ve been meaning to call you.

“Grandma has left me, joining Mary – you remember her, right? She went to Cuba. She wanted to meet Fidel Castro but of course he’s no longer with us. However, she was able to enjoy dinner with his brother, Raoul. She said that she had a great time and that Raoul took a shine to her so I don’t think she’ll be coming home anytime soon. In fact, I don’t think that the State Department will permit her to return after the radio and TV broadcasts that she made denouncing her U.S. citizenship.

“I don’t really miss her that much because I’ve taken up with a young lady, and I do mean young, who told me she was nineteen but I later found out that she was actually only fourteen. She certainly looked older than fourteen and when her two brothers, rather large dudes, find me, I’ll tell them that I thought she was older. I think her siblings are bad enough but I hear that her father has threatened to shoot me if he ever finds me. Since he’s an ex-con I don’t think he’s allowed to have a gun, so maybe I’m safe on that account.

“The bad thing is that Harry – remember my next-door neighbor? – doesn’t like the way I take care of my property and has threatened to turn me in to the police as he’s seen my new friend coming and going at all hours of the day. I told him that she is my cleaning lady but I don’t think he bought it. I’m going to have to tell her to not wear such provocative clothing. She does like to show off her young body; I guess that’s one of the reasons that she fooled me.

“So, Agnes, is your dad still in prison for child porn? I wonder how the other cons are treating him since they don’t usually take kindly to that sort of hobby?”

That’s about when I heard the click disconnecting the call. Maybe I should have been an actor?

Starting at “Atomic City”

BY RUTH BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

MY WORK AT OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE, in the 1980s and 1990s came flooding back to me after reading *The Girls of Atomic City*, by Denise Kiernan. After we moved to Knoxville I submitted resumes to both the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and to Oak Ridge. I had positive responses from both and decided to follow up first at Oak Ridge. It would be a 45-minute commute but that was no problem. I was relatively young, only a novice computer programmer, but had a good educational background, so off I went. After a positive interview I was hired, with some conditions, the major one being I had to get a ‘Q’ security clearance from the government. There was extensive paperwork called PSQ about my background, list of relatives, jobs I’d had, etc. They wanted addresses of all the people mentioned and indicated that the FBI would contact some of them. Finally they wanted to know where we had lived in the past fifteen or so years, including addresses and directions. That happened to cover the time we lived in rural eastern Nigeria. We smiled in giving directions to that home: “Turn off the paved Oron-to-Eket road, onto the dirt track to Ikot Usekong’s open-market area; our house was the cement block house near the big banyan tree on the northwest edge of the market area.”

While the PSQ was in process, I was hired and told that until I got my clearance I would work in a trailer alongside the building where I’d eventually have an office. I had to go through the official gate around the building, run my badge through the badge-reader, get approval from the guard, and then walk back out to the trailer.

For the next 4-6 months I walked to my trailer and did some work. Although it was a big trailer set up for several people I was the only one there for the entire time I was waiting for clearance. I used a computer where I spent 95% of the time, learning as much as I could about COBOL, the programming language I would be using. It was not connected to the computers in the building nor was there any real work for me to do besides learning COBOL.

Once I got used to the routine – long drive, gates, guards, trailer – it worked out okay. About a quarter mile away within the guarded facility was a cafeteria where I could go for lunch. I didn’t mind not having anyone to talk to or compare notes with. This was my start in “Atomic City.” After my clearance I worked there until 2004.

What Tempted Jesus?

BY BILL BOYS – COLUMBUS, OHIO

WHAT WAS IT THAT MIGHT TEMPT JESUS at the start of his ministry? It's a puzzle. The earliest surviving Gospel, Mark, says that Jesus *was* tempted, but gives no details. The Gospel of John omits it *entirely*. Both Matthew and Luke list three temptations, but scholars agree that a lost document called Q was the source of those details. Q was a collection composed in Greek likely 10 or 20 years after Jesus' death, and since, reportedly, Jesus was *alone*, no witness to jot it down, how did Q get such specific details?

The Tempter's three attempts to snare Jesus are:

1. **Eat!** Turn these stones to bread. Use your super-power to satisfy your own needs and desires. Everybody needs daily bread!
2. **Jump!** Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Show everyone that God will protect you, his Son, from coming to any harm whatsoever. That's even written in the *Bible*, man!
3. **Reign!** Rule over all the world's kingdoms *now*; just fall in with me and I will give you that, pronto! Be the triumphant Messiah!

I think a clue is: how do these temptations match the historical times Jesus lived in, what he preached about, and had to confront both among followers and opponents in his first-century homeland?

1. Eat! Matthew and Luke say Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights, and was famished. This was a temptation to prioritize his own well-being first. And breaking his fast would trivialize the whole point of his fasting: to discern the mission God was calling him to.

2. Jump! The disciples and many others thought that the Messiah couldn't possibly be harmed. Jumping would *force* God's hand. Jesus rejects that idea as putting God to the test.

3. Reign! The ultimate Messianic goal is to redeem Israel and bring all the nations to God. Can you trust the Tempter to make a shortcut so Jesus gets to be Messiah *right away*? Then neither Rome nor anyone else would have the power to kill or even thwart him. Jesus says "No" to putting his trust in any way besides God's way.

So as Q looked back at how the life of Jesus actually turned out, these temptations fill the bill. They reflect (and reject) popular hopes at the time. The season of Lent begins each year with this temptation story read on its first Sunday. Those who say they are followers of Jesus often face versions of those very same temptations, don't we?

The Shower

BY JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA*

THE ROOM WAS COLD AS WELL AS THE SHOWER, since he was standing barefoot on the cold tile but he knew this was just temporary. He turned the faucet all the way to the hot position and when the water started to feel warm on his hand, he stepped under it waiting for that instant when it would warm his whole body. He did this every morning. He stood under the hot water, adjusting the faucet handle a micrometer to get the water just hot enough but not too much to make him uncomfortable. He stood there waiting for the water to reach his legs for as always, they felt cold for the few seconds it took for the hot water to reach them.

He enjoyed this for just a moment and then reached for the shampoo. Although he didn't have much hair left, he still shampooed his head exactly as he had for these many years.

After rinsing his head, he picked up the washcloth. He had already put the bar of soap in the middle, closing the rag like a soap sandwich. This time it contained a new bar along with the remains of his previous one, something his mother had taught him as a youngster. He held this under the water waiting for the washcloth to become saturated with water but there were always a few spots that remained dry for just a moment. When the washcloth finally was wet enough, he moved it around with his hands to create the proper amount of lather.

He lathered his body and then switched the lever on the flexible shower head and let it pour on his head. Once he was certain that all the shampoo was gone, he enjoyed the hot spray all over the rest of his body which now felt very comfortably warm. Switching back to the overhead spray, he took a few seconds to enjoy the hot water before having to exit the shower into the cool room.

After drying himself off, he put on the terrycloth bathrobe, something he had bought himself some years ago, wishing he had made the purchase many years ago in his youth, as it did such a great job of absorbing the remaining water droplets and keeping his body warm.

Now he felt that he could start his day.

* I wanted to write about an everyday thing that we probably all take for granted. — J. O.



What's Your Story?

You can submit a story, too. You don't have to be a member of NAPA, although members are definitely invited. Here's an easy place to share your story.

NAPA member Ken Faig said, and I certainly agree — *something worthwhile can be written in a short format like this.* I hope the stories in this issue bear that out.

HOW MANY WORDS? About 350 to 400 words. (Less if you have an image to go with your story, and I encourage images.)

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. (Free.)

WILL I GET FEEDBACK? I'll 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 MY STORY? To Bill Boys, email at williamboys@att.net (preferred, to save retyping) or by postal mail to 184 Reinhard Ave., Columbus OH 43206-2635.

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