

ONE-PAGE STORIES

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Trains and Woolworth's

BY KATHI CLARK WONG — RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

MY MOTHER HATED THE TRAINS, but I loved them. In 1959, Momma would pick me up at the Episcopal kindergarten in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, which let out at precisely 11:30, and then she would try to get across the tracks near the church rather than drive into town to do so. A train came down the Fourth Avenue tracks at precisely 11:40. We had to cross the tracks to get to Woolworth's, where we ate lunch every day. (Momma always hoped for a booth but more often we got stuck at the counter.) I would find little ways to delay leaving school or getting into the station wagon to thwart her plans. It was often hot, so the windows would be rolled down, and if I was lucky, my reward for dawdling was hearing the tell-tale *clang, clang* of the warning signal before Momma had even started the car. It was the best if we were the *first* car to be stopped at the tracks, so timing was crucial on my part. I loved watching the signal arm come down with its flashing red lights to save us from sure death had it not prevented us from going on the tracks.

Everyone knows the more engines there are on a train, the longer it is, so I would count them, always hoping for a bonanza of at least three. The trains slowed down in the city, so it was possible to look for the Kilroys without getting too dizzy as we sat behind the barricade. But the very, very best thing, was when the train actually *stopped*. Mom would sigh; I would look angelic to assuage her. I don't know why trains stopped in our town, but I imagined somewhere along the line someone was hooking up or de-hooking a train car full of valuable merchandise, like hankies or hammers.

I loved when the train started again. It would be silent there on the track; no hint of when it would move on. Even the warning signal might go quiet. Then there would be a belch-like shudder that would run down the train from the engines to the caboose. Another shudder followed, then another and another. Finally it crawled forward, but if it was a three-enginer or more, the engines would be out of town by now, free of in-town speed restrictions. The final cars would *fly* down the tracks and the cabooseneers would wave good-bye as they went on their way to somewhere exotic, maybe Hawaii.

Mom would re-start the car, but it would still take a few seconds for the arm signal to determine it was safe for us to cross. And then it was off to Woolworth's, where we would be too late to get a booth.

My Tether, My Lifeline

By KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

GONE ARE THE NIGHTS when one might find me cleaning in the kitchen at 2 a.m. when I can't sleep. I am connected to a dialysis machine and my tether is not nearly long enough to get me to the kitchen. Neither is it long enough to get me to the living room where my current book "lies waiting silently for me." It barely gets me to the bathroom. What can I do but lie in bed and think.

One night not long ago I contemplated my "tether," the catheter and tubing that is a part of my life currently. I am impressed by the flexibility and strength of the tubing. My custom has become to set up my "cycler" in the late afternoon or early evening so it will be ready when I decide to go to bed. I know I must be in bed at least 7 hours and 28 minutes because that is the length of my "treatment." That night I decided it was time to go to bed, so put on my face mask, sanitized my hands, and connected my catheter to the tubing of the cycler. I read through the previous four years of diary entries, wrote 2023's entry, and waited. The cycler gave me a message: "Draining slowly." That had happened previously, so I pushed "OK" for 5 seconds, then "Bypass current phase." The next screen showed the little cup starting to fill. Everything seemed fine, so (after throwing the tubing over my shoulder ["like a Continental soldier"]), I crawled into bed, ready for a good night's sleep.



Beep Beep ... Beep Beep. What? I got up and looked at the monitor: "Filling slowly." I checked everything I could think of: the connection was made, the blue clamp was open, my catheter clamp was open. What could be wrong? I wiggled the tubing a couple of times, but nothing happened. Finally, I decided to call the "help line" at the after-hours number. The answering service attendant took my name and number, then repeated the message I wanted him to deliver. I must have jiggled the tubing again because suddenly the cup on the monitor started filling at a normal rate. The attendant asked if I still wanted to deliver the message, but I said "No" and thanked him: the problem had been rectified. What a relief to have someone to call when a problem arises since I am dependent on the fluid that the cycler supplies.

Clearing Out Junk

BY LINDA L. SHIVVERS — DES MOINES, IOWA

GETTING RID OF STUFF YOU HAVEN'T USED in years and years? Not too long ago the Mr. of the house went on a tear; lightening the load, getting rid of junk. Literally. Not down-sizing, heaven forbid, just clearing out. It started when our son was home for a weekend. He went through his collection of stuff going back from high school and college.

It all had been stored in an upstairs closet. Not really a closet, but that weird space under the slope of the roof where you can bang your head on the ceiling if you're not vigilant.

Our son spent hours sorting and reminiscing, boxing, and tossing. The house breathed a sigh of relief when boxes left the upstairs and filled the back of his car. That closet space isn't totally empty, yet.

So, after he left, mom and dad went back to it, going through seven or eight apple boxes full of cards and letters going back to 1978. It was fun and nostalgic; even found a couple of 5-dollar bills in two of the cards from our parents. The house breathed another sigh of relief; and the free space is still just that, free space.

During the clear-out I decided to rip out the old, well-worn carpet runner on the steps. I found a piece of paper tucked under one of the treads. Turned out to be a letter written on a local high school prom card back in 1968. If that wasn't odd enough, it was written about someone we knew. How weird is that? To think that letter had been there for more than the 46 years we've lived here. It was to a fellow student about other classmates – rather gossipy and none too flattering. How that letter survived all these years under that carpet is so puzzling.

Going back to the purging ... not everything that gets tossed in the trash bin stays in the trash bin. Melvin forever changes his mind about lots of things. Guess who has to go out to that bin to rescue some needed item?

Santa Ynez Dreamin’

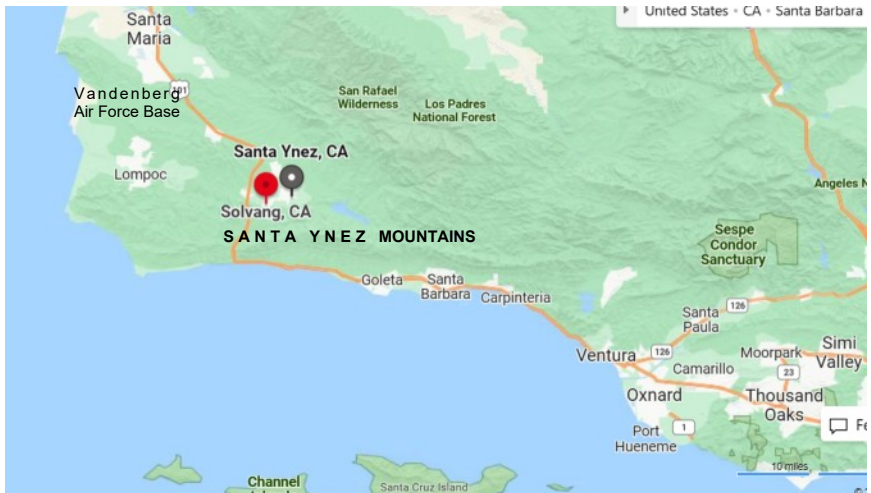
BY BILL BOYS – COLUMBUS, OHIO

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE ON EARTH, where would you choose? For this writing prompt I finally chose the Santa Ynez valley, in the northern part of Santa Barbara County, California. The town of Santa Ynez itself has one of the historic mission churches, Mission Santa Inés, founded in 1804 and still in use. And the Mission La Purísima Concepción, 1787, now a state park, is in the Santa Ynez valley, too.

Solvang, a neighboring town, is known for its historic architecture by Danish immigrants, and today it is popular as a tourist destination, capitalizing on its Danish heritage. And for me, there is the plus of its Lutheran Church and retirement home, as well as the winery where we had our first wine-tasting visit in California.¹ All around the Santa Ynez valley are forty vineyards, plus olive groves, ranches and small farms. In fact, it is a designated viticultural area, many of whose wines we sampled when we visited there. The drives and vistas throughout the area are resplendent and so peaceful.

To the west in the valley lies Lompoc, heart of a flower-growing region. The Pacific Coast Amtrak route goes right along the ocean at the far west of the valley, and just a bit farther up the coast is Vandenberg Air Force Base, where we can visit and shop since I’m retired military. To the east of the valley are the San Rafael Wilderness and Los Padres National Forest. Ah, yes, a memorable valley!

¹ See “That Stagecoach Has Departed,” ONE-PAGE STORIES, No. 30, Dec. 2022, p. 6.



Home Alone

BY BILL BOYS – COLUMBUS, OHIO

UNEXPECTEDLY, I FOUND MYSELF HOME ALONE for thirty days this spring. Not, I regret to say, due to missing a vacation flight to Paris, as in the movie. My wife, Ruth, found herself during the same month definitely *not* enjoying a vacation or even a staycation! She took a fall the evening of March 14th.

This brought the Columbus Fire Department EMS squad. Two squads, actually. I think there were a number of trainees sprinkled among the crowd of seven or eight. She then enjoyed (or endured) an EMS-driven ride to the Emergency Department at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. A fractured sternum! This explained the pain anytime she tried to use her upper body bones and muscles, which almost all seem to connect in some way to that bone. Strong pain meds eased her discomfort, and in two days she was transported for rehabilitation to the Ohio Living Westminster-Thurber Health Care Facility, at her choice. (It's part of one of the retirement complexes we've been checking out, so we got to see a new view of that.)

Since the death of our cat, Isabelle, last September; and then that of our dog, Foxy, in February; and now with Ruth in rehab for almost four weeks, I had the eerie experience of living at home absolutely alone. (Well, there were the backyard bird feeders I had to tend now, so I did have avian and squirrel visitors. Even one raccoon.) I had the whole bed to sleep in by myself, discovering in the process that it really *was* me who was pulling the covers my way at night. But I carried on, doing laundry, making chocolate chip cookies, and drifting around the premises. I kept up my neighborhood walks, and all the neighbors, including the Brown Bag Deli staff, asked me to pass on well wishes to Ruth. I soon enhanced my daily visits to Ruth by smuggling in chocolate bars and cookies, insulated tumblers of freshly brewed coffee, and get-well cards that came to the house.



I brought her home a few days ago. It is well, yes, it is well.

Stringing the Fraudsters Along

By JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

“I’M IN TROUBLE, GRANDPA!” I look forward to calls that start like this. The first time I got this type of call my granddaughter was sixteen.

“Hi, Grandpa. Have you heard that my girlfriend won a trip to Mexico and I’m down here with her?” (This was the clue that it was a phony call as there’s no way her parents would let her go anywhere, especially Mexico.) Me: “Great.” (Waiting to see what the call was actually about.) She: “We were having a great time but we got into a small car accident. They’ve arrested us because I had a little to drink but they’ll release us with just a fine of \$1,300. Please don’t tell my parents as they’d be really angry. I know I can count on you.”

“Of course,” I responded. “What do you want me to do?” She replied, “Please go down to the Western Union office and wire me the money in care of the attorney representing us.” (They limit the amount of money to under \$1,400 to avoid questions from the government.) Me: “I’ll hop right down to Western Union and send the money.” (I questioned the name and address of the so-called attorney to make it seem like I was really going to follow through.)

I went back to working on my computer; the phone rang about fifteen minutes later. She: “Grandpa, did you send the money?” Me: “I’ve thought about it but decided I’ll just fly down there in the company jet and take care of this problem. I’ll be there in the morning.” (I figure they’d think I had big bucks.) She: “But I’ll have to spend the night in jail,” she pleaded. Me: “Ah, come on, remember the time that we were partying and got arrested? We had fun that night that we spent in jail. We’ll just fly back in the morning and party on the plane.”

Of course, she didn’t like this idea because it was all about getting money. Finally I “agreed” to send the money. The bottom line is that they called me four more times asking about the money. I said that I had sent it, so they wanted me to check on it. But then it all ended because it just so happened that I was changing landline companies and to keep my old number, they had to disconnect my number for a couple of weeks. I was disappointed in losing the contact with them because I wanted to see how long I could string them on.

Trying to Understand Telemarketers

BY MARY J. DEMPSEY — COLUMBUS, OHIO

NORMALLY, I DON'T ANSWER "UNKNOWN" phone calls but on occasion I inadvertently pick one up. I'm quickly reminded of why I don't usually answer them.

It's like listening to a 33 rpm record played at 78 rpm. The person on the other end is assaulting my ears with a stream of words about something I do not want, didn't ask for, and do not want to hear about.

It will usually be about something "free," a "program" or "benefit" I didn't know about or even knew it existed. And I have no idea what they are saying at such a high rate of speed. If they have a definite foreign accent, it would not be easy to communicate what they want to. But even some who have no foreign accent and evidently come from right here are the same way, talking way too fast.

I blurt out that I do not understand what they are trying to say. At that point they will slow down and ask me "Is this any better?" It's usually not.

The caller hesitates for a response, and I miss my opportunity to butt in with "I think you must have the wrong number," or "No one here by that name." Maybe I should say "That ship has sailed" or "Elvis has left the building."

I try to be patient, to put myself in their position, to try to understand how they must feel. And then I think of the person that hired them to do this job. Did they not talk to them, to see if *they* could understand what they are saying?

If you have something to say, it shouldn't be too much to ask to do so in a manner that the other person understands. My ears are as old as I am. They just can't hear that fast!

I worked in production a long time. At one place I worked, there was a sign on the wall that I haven't forgotten: "Why is there always enough time to do the job over, and never enough time to do it right the first time?"

Pine Cone Christmas Trees

By MARY J. DEMPSEY — COLUMBUS, OHIO

LITTLE PINE-CONE CHRISTMAS TREES are fun to make, and it gives me something to do besides watching TV. I took a class on how to make them years ago, when the Golden Hobby Shop was still located in the old Third Street School building in German Village, here in Columbus. They are something small and handmade that I just give to friends.

One of my friends thought it made a cute Christmas tree, and she told me she saw on the internet where someone took egg shells and glue to make the trees look like they were covered with snow. I thought this was interesting so I started collecting my egg shells, put them in a jar with a lid. (They smelled!) I also bought some glue and a small brush. I only needed one but I had to buy a whole bag for \$3.00.

To break the egg shells down enough to look like snow rather than just egg shells I put them through a strainer. So now I'm ready. I start applying glue, strainer at the ready. Dab on glue; shake strainer. But this isn't working; they still look like egg shells on a Christmas tree.

Okay, I'm done – I trash the egg shells in the toilet. The glue and the brushes might come in handy some other time.

So now I'm looking at my cute little Christmas tree that looks like it has a case of head lice, with little white pieces of egg shell stuck to the pine cones. Oh, well, I will give it to a friend. Maybe they won't notice it, but accept it for what it is, just a little handmade tree of pine cones.

My friend who told me about this egg shell idea is the same one who suggested I mash up my peppermint sticks *before* I mix them in the white chocolate when I make my peppermint bark*. I have been burned twice by her "good ideas." I have tried her suggestions; now I have learned from my mistakes. Friendships can be difficult.

* That story is on page 10 in this issue.

My Peppermint Bark

BY MARY J. DEMPSEY — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I LIKE TO MAKE THIS AS A HOLIDAY GIFT, or Valentine's Day. After presenting a batch to my friend – she inquired about the recipe – I explained the process. I explained my process of trying to remove the cellophane from the candy canes in one piece, first, so as to not have a small piece of cellophane in your mouth.

Well, I'm not one to think my way is the only way to do something. I listened to her way, so I tried her way.

My way, I was sure of no cellophane; her way, not so sure! My way, take six candy canes, remove their cellophane in one piece, drop them into a gallon-size plastic bag, mash them with rolling pin, and add to the melted chocolate. Done deal!

My friend's way, mash the canes inside the bag first, then remove cellophane. I tried it. Never again. Your fingers become sticky from the peppermint, then when you try to remove the cellophane, it will stick to your fingers. I would stop and wash my hands. Try again. I must have stopped three times to complete this process. Yes, three-plus hours to do what normally takes 20 to 30 minutes! Trust me; remove the cellophane first, then mash after. Done deal.

Well, with the Christmas holidays and Valentine's Day all in the past, I was thinking my peppermint bark making was done until next year. But I found a bag of candy canes in the cupboard. Not wanting to leave them for fear of attracting unwanted critters, I would just make another batch of peppermint bark.

Well, when I first looked at the candy canes I thought they had their cellophane off, so I bagged them and started to break them into small pieces to add to the melted chocolate. But they were not breaking up properly. Oh, no, my worst nightmare – they are still in cellophane! I have already mashed them into finer pieces. Almost impossible to remove from their cellophane now. Hence a tedious situation of sticky fingers trying to remove sticky cellophane from the sticky candy!

I'll be happy to see this batch of peppermint bark finally go into the freezer, and I don't want to make another batch until next year!

My Attempt at “Hay Stacks”

By MARY J. DEMPSEY — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“HAY STACKS” SHOULD BE SIMPLE, I THOUGHT, since I’m familiar with chocolate-covered peanuts and peppermint bark. The recipe calls for chocolate; got that; also cashews, easy enough! Now, the Chinese fried noodles were new to me. So, I asked around. Sure enough, my Italian friend knew just what I needed. Didn’t find the 5 oz. can called for, but we located a container of just what I needed.

So, here we go, 8:30 a.m. Monday. I read directions. Sounds easy enough. I thought six squares of chocolate was a bit much, but there are quite a few noodles. I follow what is recommended. It says to heat noodles and nuts in microwave for 15 seconds. Okay, melt chocolate in microwave, check. Add noodles and nuts. I mix, stir, mix, stir, mix some more. This really seems like a lot! Maybe I should make a few hay stacks to lessen the amount in the bowl. I transfer some mixture onto a wax-paper-covered cookie sheet. I have three cookie sheets ready. I’m looking at the amount in the bowl, and what a lot I’ve made! At this point I need more wax-sheet-covered pans! And more pans! I only have three cookie sheets. Now I have a dilemma. This is way too many noodles! I had put in all of the Chinese noodles. The recipe did call for 5 oz. can, which I could not find, but we did locate Chinese noodles. I should have noticed this was a 9 oz. package. I probably should have added half of the package.

Well, not wanting any of this to go to waste, I spread the mixture onto another cookie sheet without trying to shape hay stacks now. I usually just eat my mistakes myself; they will be just as good, only not in the shape of “hay stacks.” I transfer this to the refrigerator to cool, later to break up and put into plastic bags to just snack on, not for giving to friends as planned.

At my impromptu birthday party recently by my Italian friend who helped me find the Chinese noodles, we had a discussion of the lemon peels of limoncello. She informed me they could be used to make candied lemon peels. This caught my attention. That may be interesting to make. I will definitely pay more attention to the recipe. My recipe for limoncello calls for the peels of nine or ten organic lemons. This is a lot of candied lemon peel! Surely enough to share with friends. I would hate to have to eat my mistakes with *this* recipe! I hope they will turn out better than my “hay stacks.”



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. 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. Do you have a short-format story to tell?

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.

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

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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