

# ONE-PAGE STORIES

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# How to Eat an Elephant

BY AUDREY HARKONEN — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**I**N MY EARLY 30's, I WAS PROMOTED to department director at an inner-city hospital. The vice-president who promoted me, Miss Carmen Santin, was easily 25 years my senior and began her career, as I had, in nursing. We'd both pursued master's degrees in business/finance for greater opportunities in healthcare administration.

Miss Santin's mentoring began with weekly meetings in her office. She sat behind a substantial desk surrounded by pictures, awards, memorabilia, and file folders. As our meetings began, she would take a moment to sip her coffee and review my file. I was so nervous she'd ask me a question and I wouldn't have the answer. I didn't want to disappoint or make her regret bestowing this new title upon me. As weeks then months passed, I learned how to manage my department and staff through the meetings with Miss Santin. She focused on data, evidence, and direct information, not gossip, hearsay and emotion. I learned that preparation, planning, and open communication were the keys to successfully managing a department of 23 staff, many older and years more experienced than me. Most importantly, I learned my job was to ensure the staff had the training, tools, technology, and support they needed to do their jobs. And Miss Santin would guide me through how to make that happen.

We began each meeting with a review of reports, stats, errors, unresolved issues. We didn't find fault or blame; we were looking for remedies and solutions. Over time, I learned to come prepared with ideas, not just the problems. Many times, those solutions were directly from my staff as they had amazing perspectives and insights.

During our first months together, she gave me permission to call her "Carm," the nickname others in leadership called her. I never could. I had too much respect for her to be so casual.

My skills and confidence grew, and our weekly meetings became monthly. I did my research and prepared potential plans for her review. We talked at a strategic level; she left the day-to-day issues with me. But after presenting Miss Santin with a particularly challenging problem, she would say to me, "So Audrey, how are we going to eat this elephant?" She had also taught me the answer –

"One bite at a time, Miss Santin, one bite at a time."

# Small World

By JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

I USED TO TEACH THE AARP Driver Safety Program. I really enjoyed the 122 classes that I taught, as it was fun interacting with the senior students. I also established an email relationship with two of them, which is going on for more than fifteen years.

Recently, I was in a medical clinic waiting room waiting for my turn to see the doctor. As was the procedure, an assistant stood at the front of the long waiting room and called the name of the next patient to be seen, Jerry Maloy. Upon hearing the name, my ears perked up as Jerry is one of the two email friends who I have stayed in contact with over the years.

Surprisingly, two men stood up, answering the call for Jerry Maloy. Now my problem was that since I hadn't seen my friend since he graduated from my class, I didn't have any idea what he looked like. Both gentlemen appeared to be around the same age, confusing me even more.

My dilemma was that I couldn't think of what to say to determine which of the men I knew. It was short lived however, as the medical assistant ascertained the real Jerry, who promptly disappeared into the mysterious confines of doctor's offices. I still couldn't figure out what to say to the second Jerry, who was sitting well beyond normal speaking distance, so I let the encounter slide.

When I got home, I emailed Jerry and asked if he had been to the particular clinic where the episode occurred, to which he replied that he had. When I explained my dilemma, he told me how disappointed he was that I hadn't spoken up. We determined that he was the first Jerry called so even if I had asked the remaining one if he knew me, the answer would have been no and I think I would have felt a little foolish.

Unfortunately, I only go to this clinic once a year so the chance of another surprise encounter is almost nil. I will however, check with the real Jerry before my next appointment in December.

Las Vegas is a city of about two million people so meeting like we almost did is against high odds. I wonder if any of the casinos here would have taken bets on it!

# A Day in the Life of an Old Guy

JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

HE AWOKE IN THE MORNING (a good thing). He used the toilet and they both worked as advertised (even a better thing). He started dressing himself, grateful he could still do that, being careful to place each foot in the proper part of his underwear. He remembers that he once put both feet in the same side and went hobbling out to his wife to determine why he couldn't walk right.

After breakfast, he got his walker and proceeded to the bus stop. He could no longer drive, a big disappointment in his life. He climbed aboard the bus, struggling as always to get the walker on with him. The driver greeted him and tried to assist him but he was a stubborn man who refused to accept help from anyone, except from his wife of some sixty plus years.

He arrived at the library at his usual time. The librarian, the older of the two, greeted him by name while he just shrugged his shoulder towards her. She was always trying to be nice to him but he refused to reciprocate. He went to the place where they kept the magazines, selecting a hunting and fishing one. He proceeded to his usual place at a table near a window, because the sunlight helped him see better.

He caught the five o'clock bus home, recognizing the driver when he said hello to him. He chose not to reply. He never did.

Arriving home, struggling getting his walker through the doorway, he called out to his wife, asking what's for dinner. She replied, "salmon," to which he answered with an ugly word. He hated fish and she knew it but she told him how healthy it was for them both. Actually, she prepared it in a rather appetizing way but he never told her that for fear she would serve it more frequently.

After dinner, he watched a little TV, he enjoyed the news but thought that most of the shows on the major networks were dumb. He refused to pay for any streaming services, something that his wife kept hounding him about, so his selection was limited.

He retired for the night about eight o'clock, his usual time, but he thought back to when he had been a night owl so many years ago. His last thoughts were that maybe awakening in the morning wasn't such a good idea after all.

# Mariol the Burglar

ANDY MARFURT — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**M**Y MOTHER HAD MADE ME THE EXECUTOR of her estate. After my brothers and sisters visited and picked out memorable items they wanted, it still left me with a house full of items to sell or donate. Living three hours away from Mom, I decided to hire a tag sale company. The intention was not to make big bucks, but rather to find an easy way to clean out the house!

Mom's best friend, Mariol (age 90), felt it was her job to supervise the tag sale, and the tag sale employees. So she stationed herself in the living room of mom's house and proceeded to tell all the customers how everything was overpriced. I know this because during the sale she would telephone me to share tidbits like: "Andy, these people don't know what they are doing! They have a \$2 price on the pie plate I bought your mom for \$1 at the dollar store!" Not content to sit idly by, Mariol then moved into the kitchen where she saw that the cups and saucers were on one counter and the matching plates were on another. So she moved them to be together. The woman in charge said, "No, we want to have them separate, please" and moved them back. So Mariol moved them again when her back was turned. This led to Mariol being invited to leave the premises! Mariol is the first and only person I have known to be blackballed from a tag sale!



Mariol.

Mariol called me from the front lawn to tell me what happened. Trying not to laugh, I thanked her for being there, and asked if there was anything she wanted, she should just take it. "Oh, I'm way ahead of you, Andy" she said. "Your mom promised me this little porcelain swan, so when they weren't looking I hid it way back on the top shelf in her bedroom closet! They'll never find it!" How was she going to get it out of house? "Easy," she laughed. "I'll come back at night and sneak in around 10 PM." "Are you sure?" I asked. "Oh yes, I have a key, and a flashlight. I'll be fine."

To this day, I picture Mom's best friend dressed in a black ninja-like outfit and headlamp, sneaking into a completely empty house in the middle of the night to liberate her ill-gotten porcelain swan.

# The Joys of Having a Pet

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“DON’T KILL THEM; THEY’RE OUR PETS!” Not long after we moved to our own house, my sons, Jeremy and Eric, uttered these words as I tried to rid a bedroom of ants. I suppose that was my first indication that these boys needed a pet. It wasn’t long before my older son was in second grade in a school that emphasized math, science, and the environment. Nearly every classroom had a pet of some kind; Jeremy’s classroom had a rabbit. Near the end of the year, that rabbit had babies – several of them. They needed to be distributed among the students (whose parents would allow a pet!). I was one of those parents; we had raised rabbits when I was a child – to be sold as meat to other people in town.

Most of the students wanted the lone black bunny, called “Bunny Jackson” in honor of the popular singer at the time. Jeremy received a lovely gray rabbit with long angora-type hair. Obviously, his name had to be “Fluffy.” This cuddly little rabbit was welcomed into the family with great joy (but not great enough that Jeremy would always remember to feed him). Mom naturally took up the slack. She (I) was the one to remind the boys at feeding time, and she was the one who brushed his hair to keep it fluffy. If it got too long and matted, she was the one who clipped the clumps of fur (but not too short, so that he would get a sun-burn). The long fur must have made him hot in the summer; he soon found the holes Eric had dug beside the garage so he could make clay pottery. On hot days, Fluffy would jump in the hole to cool off.



Eric with Fluffy.

Both boys enjoyed playing with Fluffy. The rabbit willingly let them put him in the carved-out jack-o-lantern. Fluffy hopped around the yard with them on Easter morning, helping them find the plastic eggs. When Eric needed time to think, Fluffy would just sit with him. We had a few rabbits over the years. It was a good idea for these boys to learn the fun and responsibilities of being pet owners – if a parent played backup!



That’s Fluffy in the jack-o-lantern.

# Have Passport — Will Travel

KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**W**ITH A GREAT DEAL OF EXCITEMENT on Eric's part (and no small bit of trepidation on my part), I took my twelve-year-old son to Port Columbus in August of 1991 to begin a flight to Bangor, Maine. A year earlier our family had returned from a year in Tübingen, Germany; Eric was familiar with air travel. This time, however, he was *alone*! He had been invited by Hauke, a friend he met in Germany, to spend two weeks with his family in Canada.

During the year in Tübingen, Eric met several children his age and younger – he had “girlfriends” from Chile and Japan. He enjoyed Hauke and his 3 brothers (and later a sister). He was much like a mother hen with the boys, all younger by several years. We lived in a student apartment building – the first attempts at communication were a child or two knocking at our door and holding up a soccer ball. It was exciting to watch as their German communication improved throughout the year. In the spring, Eric planned a Frühling's Fest (Spring Party), deciding on several games and inviting all the young people to come to the courtyard. He enlisted me to make some treats. He had really matured that year.

Yet I worried about this solo trip: Would he make his connection in O'Hare? Would the Hempels really meet him in Maine? Would they get him to his return flight on time two weeks later? (It was an eight-hour drive from their home.) We had given Eric a paper listing our names, the hosts' names, telephone numbers, and a “permission to travel” document. I had to give my child “wings” – but I certainly breathed a huge sigh of relief when Hauke's mother called saying he had arrived safely. Only later did we learn the thunderstorm that Columbus was having the day of departure caused his flight to be delayed by two hours and he had to run through O'Hare to make his next flight.

Eric returned with many pictures from around the Bay of Fundy, tales of birding, and playing on the beach. Later he confided that although he had enjoyed seeing Hauke and his brothers again, he felt he had been invited mainly to be a babysitter. How my heart ached for his disillusion.



Eric with Hauke and his siblings.

# Train Travel

LINDA L. SHIVVERS — DES MOINES, IOWA

A FEW YEARS AGO MY SIDE OF THE FAMILY, the Hamills, met up for a reunion in Winter Park, Colorado. The Hamills came from California, Arizona, and Iowa. The Californians flew, the Arizonians were already there at their condo where we all met up. The Iowans, Melvin and I, had decided it would be fun to take the train. Good ol' Amtrak. Six hours late getting into Fraser/Winter Park, and seven hours late getting back to Iowa. In-between was great family time, beautiful weather, gorgeous scenery, fun trips to Rocky Mountain National Park, and other places. Had fun hiking and keeping an eye out for moose, and sighting elk herds. Found a site on a hill that was absolutely full of shells. Yeah. Sea shells. Deposited millions of years ago during the ice age.

Had great food cooked by brother and wife, and at local eateries. The last evening us “kids” got up the Harriet Hamill Memorial Poker Game. No big wagers, just penny-ante; and a grab bag full of silly stuff that everyone contributed to.

Traveling by train is, well, weird. You meet some interesting, friendly (mostly) people. Oddly, we met the owner of a rental property just a few houses up the street from us. Always knew the different people who rented the house, but never met the owner. The food on the train was varied and good, and the staff were so polite.

Against common knowledge, trains don't go clickety-clack. They hum, and whoosh, and sigh. And stop. For long periods. Amtrak has to wait for the freighters to go through since they own the tracks. There was an extended stop at Lincoln, Nebraska, for no apparent reason. We waited and waited. Later we were told by the car attendant that a cell phone message had been intercepted and raised an alert that someone getting on the train was going to kill someone else on the train. That explains why we saw a few policemen strolling through our car, and then escorting someone off. Other than that, it was a nice ride, pretty scenery going out and coming back.



# What Do Readers Expect of Your Writing?

BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

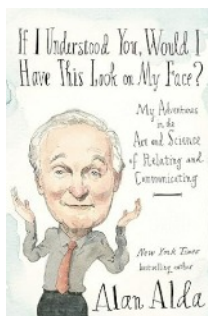
WHEN YOU WRITE, how could you possibly know how your readers will receive it? Alan Alda writes about this puzzle in his own book about communicating: *If I Understood You, Would I Have This Look on My Face?* Chapter 15 is a fascinating take on the expectations readers have when they read *any* kind of story or article.

For one thing, Alan says (quoting George Gopen, Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric at Duke University), the reader expects thoughts to be laid out in a certain order, and that affects how the reader responds.

The reader expects the subject of the story to show up pretty early in the story. So don't delay too long with side-comments – especially if you're writing a short piece like these in ONE-PAGE STORIES. Alan uses an analogy from his point of view as an actor: “When the curtain goes up, the actor playing the leading part had better make an entrance pretty soon, or the play won't seem to be about Hamlet – it's liable to look like a play about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.”

Alan adds: “I think this applies to everyone, because we all write now. We're emailing, blogging, texting. And many of us still write in whole sentences. We're applying for jobs in business letters, or applying for love on dating sites. My guess is that even in writing, respecting the other person's experience gives us our best shot at being clear and vivid, and our best shot, if not being loved, at least at being understood.”

When I do my stationary bike-pedaling exercises, I've been listening and re-listening to Alan's own reading in his audiobook, borrowed from our public library. It's such a *treat* to hear that expressive voice I associate with Hawkeye Pierce, of M\*A\*S\*H, talking about clear and vivid communication. But even if your library doesn't carry the audio version, the print version has all the ideas and examples he uses in his efforts to help people – especially highly educated people like scientists, doctors, and researchers – be understood by lay people like me. And it's point-on help for *anyone* who wants to be more clear, vivid *and* understood.



# Tell Me a Story

BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

**Y**OUR LIFE IS FULL OF STORIES, EVEN IF YOU MAY NOT appreciate them as stories. When you tell a story, your brain and the brain of your listener gets coupled in very real ways. People have a harder time understanding what you tell them if you don't tell it as a story.

*Stories are a fundamental way  
in which the brain organizes information  
in a practical and memorable manner.*

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, quoted in  
*If I Understood You . . .*, by Alan Alda

All three sentences in the first paragraph are quotes from three different experts in communication, cited in Alda's book. As the editor of ONE-PAGE STORIES I'm very interested in finding better ways to write my own articles, and sharing what I learn with folks who write for this amateur journal, or might be thinking about it. Or about writing in general.

## *The Building Blocks of a Story*

So, what is a story? A story according to Aristotle should have a *beginning, a middle, and an end*. But you don't want it to be just a simple chronicle of events; you want it to deepen into some kind of suspense or problem in that middle, so the reader is engaged in wondering how that tension will be resolved – a touch of some kind of drama. What does the hero or heroine of the story want to accomplish?

Christine O'Connell, a scientist quoted by Alda, teaches storytelling as a 4-point arc. First comes the question – what the story is about; the set-up; the situation. But obstacles get in the way, and that's the second part; that's what creates suspense. Even just an opposing thought can provide that. Third comes a turning point, where the obstacle is met and dealt with, which leads to the fourth stage: the resolution of the drama within the story. Alda cites Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address as an example of a story with all four parts. (See page 11 for how I analyzed that 4-point arc.)

When our stories move along such an arc, they'll be more engaging and thus better at communicating what we want to say.

# The Gettysburg Address, for Example

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, NOVEMBER 19, 1863.

Delivered at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Pa.

**F**OUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

THE BEGINNING; THE SITUATION; THE SET-UP

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

THE OBSTACLE, THE PROBLEM, THE SUSPENSE

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

THE TURNING POINT

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

THE RESOLUTION

*(Notes in this sidebar are by Bill Boys.)*



# Contributors Welcome

You needn't be a NAPA member, but members are definitely invited. NAPA member Ken Faig said “*something worthwhile can be written in a short format like this.*” I hope the stories in this issue bear that out.

**WHAT KIND OF CONTENT?** Original prose – fiction or non-fiction. Personal narratives, anecdotes and memoirs especially welcome. Other genres considered except poetry. Must be your own original pieces, unpublished elsewhere.

**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](mailto:williamboys@att.net) (preferred, to save retyping) or by postal mail to 184 Reinhard Ave., Columbus OH 43206-2635.

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## What to Write About?

Looking for ideas about writing a one-page story? Search on YouTube for “writing prompts” as one source. Books from your library are another resource; ask your reference librarian. Not all suggestions will vibe with you, but there will be plenty that will.