

ONE-PAGE STORIES

No. 42 — March 2024

A Cooperative Journal for the National Amateur Press Association

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Edited & Published by Bill Boys, Columbus, Ohio

The Flight Attendant Was Pale

BY CHUCK STRAUSS — NELSON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

I DID A LOT OF COMMERCIAL FLYING back in the '60s and '70s. Every year we had the opportunity to visit beautiful San Francisco in March. (I have wonderful memories of seeing the clouds rolling over the hills as we rode the bus from the SFO airport to the Sir Francis Drake, our favorite hotel in the City By The Bay, as well as those beautiful yellow mustard flowers in the Napa vineyards.)

Not infrequently, the travel was to and from Chicago, twice or more often each year. Usually there were three or more fellow staff members of our organization on the trip.

One spring day we were on our way back to Philadelphia; the weather in the Windy City was okay, so the pilot told us we should arrive in Philly on time, perhaps ahead of schedule as there was a nice tail wind. At some point, fairly early in the flight, we experienced a strange movement of the airplane as the Fasten Seat Belt signs were illuminated. Now, we, the four of us had gotten an earlier flight than originally booked. Fate?

I knew enough about aircraft to appreciate different plane attitudes and movement — pitch, roll, yaw and etcetera. Our aircraft seemed to experience these various motions simultaneously. Our seats were in the very last rows of the airplane, the smoking section in those days. I recall it was a DC-8, a very long airplane so the back of the plane was at the maximum movement cycle when erratic motions started.

The flight attendant for our section came to check on us. I noticed she was very pale and acted nervously. Asked why we were experiencing what was going on, she admitted the plane's hydraulics stopped working so the pilot was manually flying the aircraft because the autopilot was not available. She added that he would also have to land the aircraft by hand. Oh, boy!

Silence descended. I heard the stewardess (that was PC in those days) crying with her associates in their space behind us, including a statement that we were all going to die.

Long story short: Our pilot was an experienced professional, and we all landed safely at PHL. Phew!

Taken to the Cleaners

By MARY J. DEMPSEY — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I COULD NOT BELIEVE MY EARS! \$25.80! I had this coat that with a good cleaning I could use for a few more years. I liked the coat. It was large enough that I could wear a sweater under it. I had another coat, a better one, but this older coat was a good backup.

I put it in my car to take to the cleaners. So, the other day, was the day; I take it to Caskey's Cleaners. I put the coat on the counter and ask what the amount would be for a cleaning. When the clerk said \$25.80, I told him it didn't have a separate lining. It did have a hood attached, but no other details that needed special attention. Very basic. He quoted the price again at \$25.80! Well, I looked at him like he must have lost his mind on his way to work. I very politely reminded him that I could probably go back up High Street to the Salvation Army Thrift Store and purchase two coats at that price,



and have enough money left over to buy my favorite lunch at White Castle – a cheeseburger with everything, extra pickle, small coffee, extra cream – and don't forget my senior discount! I would be going home a happy camper with two new coats, a full belly, and change in my pocket to spend another day.

I picked up my coat from the counter and left. I will take it downstairs in my retirement home to wash and dry at \$1.75, and I will have a clean coat to wear a bit longer.

I remind myself to keep my good coat clean, but maybe it's cheaper to buy slightly used from a thrift store as to get one cleaned.

My First Friend in German Village

AUDREY HARKONEN — COLUMBUS, OHIO

GROWING TIRED OF A 2+ HOUR DAILY COMMUTE from the suburb of Delaware to the city of Columbus, Ohio, I sold my home and rented a place in the posh and trendy downtown neighborhood of German Village. This neighborhood has historic buildings, restored houses, brick streets, popular eateries, and lots of charm. It is, however, adjacent to a very economically challenged neighborhood. My new daily commute, albeit much shorter, took me through this area.

On my way home each evening at about 5:30 p.m., I turned off Parsons Avenue to Whittier Street heading to my new house several blocks down. From the very first evening after moving to my new place, I saw a gentleman sitting on the bus bench at the intersection. He was 50, maybe 60 years old, and very disheveled. He held a paper bag that contained a beverage, I assumed. He caught my attention with a big smile and a wave. I waved back.

Spring turned to summer and almost every day my new friend was there on that bus bench waving and welcoming me home. Some summer evenings with my car windows down, we would say “Hi” to each other. His voice was deep and gravelly, his laugh was warm. Occasionally I spotted him in the parking lot of the local convenience store. He staggered slowly, his shirt was worn, torn and pants were soiled front and back. In the fall, as the weather turned cold and rainy, he wore a thin jacket over dirty clothes and no socks, but he still smiled and waved as I drove by.

During the coldest winter months, I didn’t see him at all and hoped he had found shelter. With my friend in mind, I asked my annual Christmas Party guests to bring men’s clothing that I donated to the local shelter. As I dropped off the donated gloves, hats, sweaters, and coats to the United Methodist Church for All People on Parsons Avenue, I wondered if I’d ever see him again.

In the spring, he was back. But where had he been? So often I thought about joining him on the bench to talk but I admit I was afraid. Now I wish I had been braver because after that spring, I never saw him again. To this day, I still wonder what happened to my first friend in German Village.

Mama Carstone's Meatballs

BY AUDREY HARKONEN — COLUMBUS, OHIO

MANY NFL SUNDAYS WERE SPENT AT A FAVORITE pub with friends and fellow fans. My boyfriend and I became especially close to a middle-aged pair of empty nesters. Johnny and Fran Carstone were, by all appearances, a well-off couple. Johnny was a short, slight fellow with a wicked smile and bad hair piece. Fran, his wife of 30 years, was big. She had big, black hair, lots of makeup, bright colored clothes, and always wore high heels. Fran also had a big laugh.

One Sunday, Fran and I started talking about cooking. I told her I was envious of her vast repertoire of Italian dishes she learned as a girl in her grandmother's kitchen. Before I knew what happened, Johnny and Fran were inviting a gang of us to their house for the next Cleveland Browns game. Fran also announced that she and I would cook! My Italian culinary lessons had begun.

Next Sunday at 1 o'clock, we arrived at Carstone's house, which was quite an impressive piece of real estate. Living room, dining room, family room, media room, maybe a half dozen or so bedrooms and bathrooms. Johnny had done quite well in the "sanitation" business and Fran had been a stay-at-home mom raising their two now grown sons.

As the other guests gathered in the media room in front of the big screen TV, Fran and I retired to the kitchen. I had brought a notepad to take notes but as Fran floated effortlessly from sink to stove to cutting board to oven, all I could do was watch in awe. We sipped wine and talked as the chopping and stirring continued. Then it was time to make the meatballs. Fran placed a large mixing bowl on the counter and filled it with raw meat, spices, chopped garlic and other ingredients. With her sleeves rolled up, she plunged her carefully manicured hands with bright red clawlike fingernails into the bowl and began to squish, squeeze, mix, roll, and pat the contents into a dozen or so golf ball sized meatballs. And with those same red claws, carefully placed each meatball on a baking sheet that went into the oven.

At half-time, we set out the food buffet style and everyone helped themselves to the most delicious, authentic Italian dishes. While Fran tried to give me credit for helping, I had nothing to do with the meatballs. They are all Mama Carstone's.

My First Car, a '51 Hudson

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

BY SHEER LUCK AND GOOD FORTUNE, I GOT A CAR for free at age 20 before my school roommate Dwayne Schneider did. He wailed mightily about the unfairness of it all because he had been trying to get a car for years, but without success.

Mine was a 3-door 1951 Hudson, a gift to me by that angel of an aunt, Edith Dornbirer. Yes, 3-door. Not a typo. She'd been using it as a delivery vehicle for her home-based religious supplies and book store. One night as it was parked on the street in front of her house a drunk driver crashed into it, smashing in the left rear door. So she gave it to me with the proviso that I'd have to get that door replaced first. The car was green but the only door I could find at a junkyard was black. I had it put on, and drove it that way for a year or so.

At some point the speedometer failed. I was driving up Ohio Route 3 to Columbus. I zipped past a car without realizing how fast I was going, swerved, lost control, ran off the road, watched time freeze while a ditch, fence and cornfield lurched crazily into my windshield view and halted the car, knocking down a bit of the fence.

The car I passed pulled up behind me. The driver came up to see if I was okay. He said that he had told his buddy in the car, "Look out! Here he comes; he's going to pass us!" His speedometer was working, so he told me I must have been going 80 miles an hour.

I wasn't hurt, so they drove on. I had damaged the fence so I felt duty-bound to go to the farmhouse, confess, and promise to pay for repairing it. The farmer waved it off forgivingly, and called for a tow truck to come pull me out of the ditch. The car had come through without scratches. The engine started; there was no other damage, so I went on my way, chastened. I kept a better eye on my speed. Later, Edith's friend and neighborhood car buff, Bob Brundage, got a speedometer cable from the junkyard and installed it for me. I was glad to be legal.



Except for the white roof and no black left rear door, this '51 Hudson pic from the web will do.

Separation of Church and State

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

I HAVE LONG BEEN A PRACTICING CHRISTIAN. For 43 years a Lutheran minister, and for 32 of *those* years I was also a U.S. Naval Reserve chaplain. The interaction between religions and governments has been a thorny one for millennia. History is chock full of many benefits as well as many injustices and atrocities that each has on their records. We're wrestling with it now in the USA.

Last month a ruling by the Alabama Supreme Court on in vitro fertilization made such embryos legal “children” and created a furor. On that issue, backlash is still unfolding across the board, but especially among Republicans, alarmed it could add fuel to the abortion rights removed in the Supreme Court’s Dobbs decision. But a side issue arose because the chief justice opined (separately) that the people of Alabama adopted the “*theologically* based view of the sanctity of life” and said that “human life cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a *holy God.*” (Italics mine.) This part of the brouhaha raises issues of religion vs. government here in the USA.

When the U.S. constituted itself, we said that we shall make no law establishing any religion as America’s religion, nor any law prohibiting the free exercise of anyone’s religion. When I was a chaplain I saw how that affected worship services for military personnel. When religious services are held aboard ship, yes, the pennant that flies above our flag is called the “church” pennant, since Christian services were the earliest offered, but there are three “church” pennants by now, reflecting the free exercise of religion. On top of this, there’s a sleeve insignia specifically for Muslim chaplains so far, but I haven’t found if Muslim and Hindu pennants are approved (yet). Eventually will be, I expect. The freedom to exercise religion is shown in this way to military personnel; none are compelled to worship in a service not their own, or to worship at all.



Christian, Jewish and Buddhist “church” pennants at sea. (Various web images.)

Meow

BY MARY ELLEN KANGAS — KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

I HAD NO IDEA IT WAS THE START OF SOMETHING big when I bought a small cat figurine in a dime store. I was about 10 years old and my family was traveling to North Carolina to visit relatives. I liked to buy some little souvenir or memento when we traveled. Well, as the years passed and we traveled, I began to look for more cat figurines. The collection grew. Not only did I buy more myself, but others, especially family members, knew what to give me at birthdays and other gifting occasions.



My first figurine.

In time I was faced with where to put them all. Now I have about 75 cats on display, from many countries around the world including England, Germany, China, Japan, Mexico, Jamaica, Thailand, India, and Peru; in height from 1 inch to 12 inches. They are made of wood, ceramic, metal, wax, even a tall rope tail. How to display them? We found the solution at a church rummage sale – a glass enclosed china/curio cabinet.



Besides the figurines I have a coverlet with cat faces, note paper with cats, cat Christmas ornaments, framed pictures of cats.

Purrr-ty interesting, don't you agree?



Just Henry

JULIAN HUTCHINSON — SPARTA, WISCONSIN

THIS IS ABOUT A MAN, HENRY, whom I met in October 1951 during Combat Engineer basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I don't remember his last name. Anyway, we all called him just "Henry." He looked rugged and handsome: had ice-blue eyes that seemed to dance in their sockets, the face of a Chuck Connors, the physique of a Mohammad Ali, the brains of Dwight Eisenhower, and the personality of Rev. Billy Graham.

He never got tired, helped others make up their bed at 2 a.m. after a day of grueling basic training, always stood up for weak troopers, had a voice that could break wine glasses at 20 feet, treated everybody the same, and never swore like most GIs. On long forced marches, he carried extra candy bars to give to those needing quick energy.

I hated his guts. What an asshole! Always being the center of attention. Just because he looked so handsome and his uniform fit like a tailor-made! Always suckin' up! I couldn't stand him. He made me sick! Besides, who cares?

Then, it all changed on one extremely hot day during a 10-mile hike up Suicide Hill. I got a blister on my foot. A bad one. During a "take five," I sat beside the trail, experiencing searing pain while removing my boot and sock. While I rubbed the throbbing white lump, Henry stooped over me, hands on knees. I tried to ignore him, but he said in a sympathetic voice, "Hey, Hutch, that looks bad. I'll get some stuff."

He proceeded to find healing cream with a band-aid in his pack and applied them in just the proper place. When I tried to thank him, he said, "You're a good trooper, Hutch. My pleasure – pass it on," and walked to the next soldier in trouble. After that day, the asshole became a hero.

Later, after arriving in Korea, I heard he had been killed in a rice paddy rescuing a buddy during a firefight around Taegu. I pledged someday I'd write a book dedicated to him – and I did, *Henry*, self-published using Kindle Direct Publishing in 2022.

Climate Change

JIM HEDGES — NEEDMORE, PENNSYLVANIA

BIG SNOW, HO, HO. DESPITE THE APOCALYPTIC forecast, we might have two inches on the grass.

Things have changed. When I first came up here 50 years ago with my outdoorsman band-buddy, the public road had crushed stone on it to the end of the school bus route, which was the last house where school children had to be picked up. The next house was mine, after I built it, but a mile further on. Beyond the graveled portion it was a bare dirt track through the fields, ending at a wide, deep creek passable only by farm equipment fording through it. In winter there could be six inches of ice at that ford. We had to ram our vehicles into snow drifts, load our weekend stuff into back packs and on sleds, and hike through knee-deep snow a mile and a half to our resort in the woods: 30 acres of rocks and trees, with half a mile of prime waterfront for fishing/canoeing/swimming.

Then, the local farmers began splitting off roadside lots for friends and relatives. The snow plow came further, closer and closer, as the years went by. And winters became drier and drier – there was less snow to plow. We began putting on tire chains and bulling our way through to our own driveway.

Then, one local farmer, who owned land on both sides of the creek, got himself elected to the township Board of Supervisors. He proceeded to obtain a state highway grant to build a bridge over the creek – the snow plow no longer was blocked there by ice. But it didn't matter, because each year there was less and less ice.

Then, he got our road blacktopped, and the snow plow came all the way through – we no longer lived on a seasonal road. Our lane still wasn't plowed (trees on both sides made it too narrow), but that no longer mattered: now there is so little snow in winter that we can engage the 4-wheel drive and come and go as we please.

The world's climate is changing, faster than most of us realize if we don't sit still a while and watch. The government updates its baseline every ten years, which masks the reality of climate change. This decade is not "normal," nor was the one before this, nor the one before that. Our beautiful Earth is slipping away from us, engulfed in a haze of statistics. Enjoy it while we can!

Night on the Stairs

BY JULIAN HUTCHINSON — SPARTA, WISCONSIN

IT WAS 1942. AMERICA HAD BEEN ATTACKED. Everybody worked. There was no time for me, a twelve-year-old, almost orphaned boy. I sat in the shadows on the bedroom stairs, listening to my aunt and uncles bicker about caring for my ill mother.

Aunt Leah stood in the kitchen doorway. Her voice quivered, “I’m so sorry, but my husband, Elliot, works from daylight ‘till dark, and we can’t continue to support Ethyl. You know I must look out for my own family first. I guess the only alternative is to send her to the County Farm.” When I heard those words, I began to cry softly.

Then my Uncle Paul, who was sort of my hero until then, said, “No place for her with me. Just have a cot in the back of my store.” I knew then that all was lost. Next, Uncle Ed mumbled, “My wife is poorly, and besides, we gotta’ move somewheres ourselves.”

Uncle Otho, the man with ears like bat wings, looked at me and yelled, “Quit your sniveling up there! Don’t you know what we are tryin’ to do? I wouldn’t turn a bird out of my house, but your mom is sick. Sick, I said! She has medical care here at Leah’s. Why move her?” He turned to his sister, “Leah, you have to let her stay.”

“I already told you, I can’t. The cost of her morphine increases every month. Ethyl is your sister, too, Otho! I’m sorry, asthma or not, she’ll have to go.”

Suddenly, I began to cry again. I couldn’t stand it – the Poor Farm? I’d heard stories about that place. Some called it an insane asylum. I knew what it was – a place where the poor, sick, and stupid folks were beaten because they cried out at night.

I don’t know what got into me, but I ran down the steps and wrapped my arms around my aunt. “Please don’t send Momma away!” I looked up into her eyes. “Please don’t. Please. I’ll do anything – stop eating – sell my clothes, but don’t send her away!”

Nobody moved or said anything. I hobbled back up the stairs, continuing to sob. In time, my uncles sent money every month. So, until her death three years later, my mother remained a medical addict, living at Aunt Leah’s along with her son, who loved her and had shown it the only way he could.



Contributors Welcome

You needn't be a NAPA member, but members are definitely invited.

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

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.

WHERE DO I SEND MY SUBMISSION? To Bill Boys, email at williamboys@att.net.

Want to read back issues? It's free at
www.AmateurPress.org/the-monthly-bundles

Writing Help? Got Recommendations?

Many of us who contribute to ONE-PAGE STORIES are amateur writers in the *original* sense of "amateur" – we *love* to do it. And if we found a resource to help us write better along the way, we were mostly self-taught.

So have you ever taken a writing class or workshop, or found some book or video that really helped? Pass along your recommendations. I'd like to share a list of them in a future issue. It may well help others.