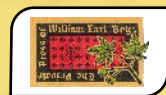


ONE-PAGE STORIES

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Edited & Published by Bill Boys, Columbus, Ohio

Balance Is Crucial

KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“**B**UT, MARK, IT WIGGLES!” My younger brother seemed to be having so much fun on his skateboard (sixty-five or so years ago!), that I wanted to try it as well. However, I didn’t have much luck. I could ride a bicycle easily, I could walk a balance beam on one foot (and 2 crutches), but I couldn’t get that skateboard to cooperate. Mark probably responded to my distress with something he often said to me, “You’re funny ... but looks aren’t everything.” How was I to know that a skateboard needed to “wobble” so that the rider could steer it?



Jeremy (left) with his Ferrari; Eric with his Lamborghini.

Not only styles but fads seem to be cyclical. By the time I had sons, skateboards were back in style. I don’t remember how often my boys used the boards, but they certainly had fun decorating them. Jeremy called his board “Ferrari” and Eric’s became “Lamborghini.” (Eric especially liked classic cars at the time – one of his Pinewood Derby cars was shaped like a Rolls Royce.)

A few decades later, balancing on wheels was once again popular. For Christmas Eric and his partner got roller blades. Eric had ridden a bicycle for years so probably assumed it would be easy to balance. They went out to try their new toys, not thinking about wearing protective gear, like pads and helmets. Unfortunately, the roller blades did not have handbrakes. Trying to stop, the rider headed towards the curb and fell on one elbow. Not ready to give up, he got up and tried again. It didn’t take long until he went down again – on the other elbow. The emergency room sent me a photo showing Eric with a different kind of protective gear – and matching casts.



Eric with two casts.

My Nesting Dolls

SUE WATSON — COLUMBUS, OHIO

“We are all nesting dolls, carrying the earlier iterations of ourselves inside. We carry the past inside us . . . wherever we go.” — Maggie Smith.

MY LITTLEST NESTING DOLL IS CHILDHOOD. I was quiet, solitary, but many things occupied me: pets, the woods, the man (and his animals) who rented one of our barns, church and Sunday School, and the patient woman known as “Mom,” who taught me letters, numbers, basic arithmetic, reading, etc. The only dark spot was my alcoholic dad and even he wasn’t mean to me. Many of my coping mechanisms come from that period of my life.

The next doll is the teenager with the usual angst. Oh, I always had a good-sized friend base and boyfriends, but the insecurities of teenager-hood were always there. I learned to be more outgoing and social during that time.

Next is the wife and mother, then single mom, then a remarried mom. I held that last role for nearly 30 years. During that time I was also a full-time working mom. I came through a lot of changes and challenges, and I managed to do it confidently and competently, but more important, I kinda like myself during that period.

Doll #4 is me as a single retired woman. My adult daughter ended up living with me, which turned out well in the long run. Also, I found plenty to occupy myself for a few years and had a couple of buddies to run around with, so I had no complaints. This doll’s time is shorter than the others, but she was still one of my favorites.

Finally, the ‘present day’ doll, holding all the others. She is the one who married a third time, in her seventies. Her husband and her daughter are in poor-to-moderate health. We don’t talk about the health of the doll herself; she is just trying to keep it together to take care of the other two people – oh, and two dogs, one of which is OCD and the other is ADHD.

So my nesting doll holds all of my selves. If you could see her, you’d notice that she’s pretty bedraggled, showing wear and tear, and the concerns for her loved ones. But look past the cracks in the wood and faded paint – she is still smiling that hopeful lopsided grin that has carried her through all these iterations.

I just don’t know if the doll is me, or if I am the doll.

The Goldilocks House

SHARON BLOMQUIST — POTSDAM, NEW YORK

WHEN MY HUSBAND AND I RETURNED to Vermont in June 2022 we planned to buy a house straightaway. We didn't want to encumber my parents with our presence for too long, and we longed to establish roots. The real estate market in the area had heated up since Covid, but we assumed we'd be able to find something in our budget that met most of our criteria.

This was a faulty assumption, made clear as we saw our first house. The tin ceilings, built-ins, and remodeled bathroom were much to our liking. The bedrooms, alas, were tiny with limited closet space, and the yard was a postage stamp lot on a steep hill. Our agent told us the house had three offers on it and we'd need to decide within 24 hours.

We passed on that house and looked at more houses over the following weekends. One house had nice bedrooms and a fantastic yard, but the tradeoff was a small kitchen and a bathroom in need of remodeling. Another house had a great location and lots of potential but would need extensive remodeling. One house was far, far too big for just the two of us, while the next house we saw was much too small to accommodate us and our extensive book collection. In each instance we had little time to make up our minds, as each house was shortly snapped up by other buyers.

We hit the pause button on our search while we tried to figure out what we'd be willing to compromise on, while keeping an anxious eye on the increasing mortgage interest rates.

During our house search lull, my husband accepted a job in upstate New York. We started our search from scratch in this new area and were able to find a house to our liking. I've come to think of it as our Goldilocks House. It has the period charm we like, but a fully modern kitchen. Both the house and the yard are just right in size. After spending the last two weekends moving our possessions from two different states, my husband tells me that this will also be our Forever Home. Who wants to deal with the hassle of moving ever again!



Image from the web
(Fat Brain Toys)

Pedicures by Cosmetology Students

TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

A RECENT FRONT-PAGE HEADLINE in our local paper, the DuBois (Pennsylvania) *Courier Express* reads, “JEFF TECH COSMETOLOGY STUDENTS HELP DAHS LIFE SKILLS STUDENTS PREPARE FOR PROM.” It tells the tale of a very special group of local students who, as part of their high school experience, are provided with tools and skills for practical employment following graduation. The article has to do with the “Life Skills” program in Cosmetology. Jeff Tech High School draws students from several high schools in our area. They have a wide range of choices over and above the academic program. In this case, it was the cosmetology students visiting another large high school, to do hair, nails, and other activities to help further their own education while also making “masterpieces” for others to enjoy going to the prom.

Several years ago, my wife and I were invited to Jeff Tech for a special dinner sponsored by their Culinary Class. It was by reservation and we were treated to a very special dinner. I was so impressed by their earnest work in making us feel welcome to a first-class meal and service, including dessert, and beautiful ice carvings as well.

Fast forward to this day and age. I had the privilege of turning 81 this year and I can no longer bend over enough to trim toenails. My wife did this for me for a while but it was not a pleasant experience dealing with 81-year-old feet. I know of some friends who actually have to go to a doctor to have this done.

Lucky me. I discovered the Jeff Tech Cosmetology Class actually does pedicures. There is a nominal charge of \$3.50, plus tip. I had my second go at it last week and what a pleasure. The student showed a very professional attitude all during my experience. They have a special pedicure chair with water jets to massage your feet – the works. As you might know, when your feet feel good – you feel good as well. Happy feet! There were several steps to the procedure, each one contributing to the well-being of feet and nails. I am telling all my friends about this find because many of them have the same problem along these lines. The last thing you want is an ingrown toenail. This treatment will avoid that.

Our experiences with Jeff Tech have been “feel good” ones for us over the years (and now even for my feet).

Standing Guard

By KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER — COLUMBUS, OHIO

WHAT WAS THE FIRST THING THAT CAME TO MIND when reading the title? Was it the elegant but dour royal guards at Buckingham Palace? Or the soldiers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C.? What it means in this instance is much closer to home – in my back yard.

A few weeks ago, I saw a bit of blue shell on my patio. Yes, it was robin's egg blue. Then I saw more blue shell on the other side of the yard by the gazebo. Was it already time for eggs to hatch? Or had some predator found the nest and had a snack? I began to take more notice.

Often, I see birds in the yard as I stand at the kitchen sink washing dishes. This summer there were often robins – perched on the garage roof, balanced on the electric wire, or in the Japanese maple near the garage. They would fly to the dwarf Mugo pine and disappear. That must be where the nest was! I looked several times before I finally spotted it – and saw two little beaks resting on the edge of the nest. From my vantage point at the kitchen sink one day, I saw a cat stealthily making its way toward the thick pine branches. I tried to scare it away from inside, but that was futile. I went to the deck and tried to shoo it away. It looked at me, took a few steps, looked back again, but finally left my yard, looking back at me several times. A day later when I was working in the yard, I heard birds chirping and looked up to see two robins chasing a squirrel away from the Mugo pine. What protective parents they were! I tried to take a picture of the baby birds but had difficulty focusing on them amidst the branches— with all the cheeping going on. I left them in peace.



Today I had to mow the grass. I always start by heading toward the Mugo pine. Almost immediately, a little bird flew from the tree to the patio. “Oh, no, little one! Don’t do that! Don’t come this way!” It managed to hop to the other side of the patio. I tried to ignore where it went – but I am left wondering: will it be able to get back into its nest again?

Friends Gone; House Empty; For Sale

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

KEN HUNGER AND TIM MOORE LIVED NEXT DOOR at 180 Reinhard Avenue. They were friendly from the start, and immediately helpful in the first emergency we had, the very first weekend. It was a cold January day in 2013 as I was driving up from Tennessee. I knew I'd need to turn the furnaces on. But I was also thinking of the tiny gas leak at one furnace (the couple we bought the house from told us about it.) I called the gas company on the drive north, asking them to confirm that it was safe to fire up. They immediately shut the gas off! Now I was worried that the pipes might freeze before things got sorted out. I called Ken and Tim to ask if they had heaters they could loan me until the gas company could come evaluate the nature of the leak. Right away they brought over two portable oil-filled electric radiators. That was the start!

Over the years they've invited us to dinners in their lovely home, meeting lots of their friends in the process. We've helped out with checking their mailbox and watching for packages when they're away. After my stroke and during Covid, Ken took all my packages of ONE-PAGE STORIES to the post office for me. Several times Ken shoveled the snow off our front sidewalk for us. We've been invited over to their casual porch parties. We loved the late Monty and Gabby, and now Olley, their canine buddies. Ken walked our Foxy for us a few times when the snow hadn't been well-shoveled off along our dog-walking route past Brown Bag Deli. (That's how he discovered that Foxy "Sat" firmly by the side door of the deli and wouldn't budge until her bacon treat appeared!)

But they've moved. They let us know it was coming, and they're only a mile away in a one-floor apartment, so we'll still see them from time to time. (Our idea of including in their sales contract that the new owners had to invite the neighbors at 184 over for dinners, went nowhere, alas.) The for-sale sign just went up: "Coming" to market soon. Sometimes we see lights at night, so maybe someone stays over once in a while; or maybe it's just timers at work. But we never see anyone except workmen. Activity; yet sadly vacant. But what wonderful friends Ken and Tim were, and are!



My First Casualty Call

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

ON MEMORIAL DAY, A *NEW YORK TIMES* ARTICLE by Kenny Holston told of the death, transport, and funeral of Army Sergeant Kennedy Sanders, one of three killed in a drone attack in northeastern Jordan in January. He told how Sgt. Sanders' mother came home when her husband called her at work to come home right away. Mrs. Sanders said, "As soon as I got into the house and saw the two officers standing in the living room, I collapsed."

It recalled the memory of my first time, as a Naval Reserve chaplain, when the Marine Corps captain at the Naval & Marine Corps Reserve Center in Knoxville, Tenn., phoned to ask me to join him and his enlisted driver to deliver casualty news to a family in western North Carolina that their son had been killed in the bombing of the Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. (Oct. 1983.) We left very early the next morning – time is critical for casualty calls.

When we arrived in the town, we did not find the family at home. We learned that they had a restaurant there, so we had no choice but to go there to find them, and by then it was midday. As we entered the busy place, I was keenly aware of how conspicuous it was for a Marine Corps officer, a Navy chaplain, and an enlisted Marine to enter and ask for the owners. I was nervous; my first time as a Casualty Call Team member. The captain was well trained, and asked the parents if there was a more private place to speak with them other than on the main floor of their restaurant. They took us upstairs to the restaurant office. One of the family members, I think it may have been a sister, was part of this entourage. She worriedly asked me on the way, "Is *he*" all right?" I muttered something that I thought was fittingly non-committal, since I was not the lead officer.

After we got in the office, the captain delivered the tragic news to the family – the worst possible news, of course: not that he was *wounded*, or even *missing*; but that he was confirmed *dead*. The sister upbraided me for what I had said to her, thinking that I had implied he was all right. I had to let that pass, though, because it was more important to offer what sympathy, prayer and other support I could. Fortunately, the family was church-going, so I could use their office phone to call their minister and ask him to come to them, knowing that our Casualty Call Team would at some point have to leave to return to Tennessee. (I ever remember that day.)

For the Love of Airplanes

By JACK OLIVER — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

I ASSUME MOST BOYS ARE ENTHRALLED with airplanes at an early age, as I was. I was a young lad during WWII, which enabled me to see military planes flying over on occasion.

DC3s/C47s, weren't that exciting but seeing a bomber was. I remember B-25s in particular as they had a double stabilizer. I thought that was old fashioned as I preferred airplanes with single vertical fin. Little did I know that B-25s were relatively modern, especially compared to the B-17 which had a single stabilizer. I also saw biplanes on occasion, and once again, I thought they were old planes, which they probably were. In the summer of 1944, I spent a week at a farm/resort in New Jersey. On the way home, I was fortunate to see a P-38 on a flatbed truck, probably just coming from the factory. At the time, the P-38 was one of our frontline fighters. It was the closest I had ever come to a real airplane, let alone an airplane that was taking the skies away from the axis powers. I was thrilled. It was just a year later that a B-25 crashed into the Empire State Building and I saw the aftermath, at least the ground debris.

Fast forward to 1957. I was an air traffic controller at Moody Air Force Base outside of Valdosta, Georgia. As we were a training base, we had squadrons of T-33s, F-94's, F-89s and, lo and behold, my now favorite plane, B-25s, used for instrument training.

One day, the tower called down to me in the barracks, asking if I wanted to fly to New York (my home town) in a B-25. It was a Saturday and I was told that they'd be flying back the following day. I jumped at the chance and after being fitted for a parachute and a box lunch, I boarded through a hole in the bottom of the fuselage. Before taking off, the crew chief informed me that if there was an emergency, there'd be a bell. I was to lift the panel out of the floor and to bailout if there was another bell. Sounded alarming and it was. After landing in New York, the pilot asked who had relatives here, (I did), and did I want to call them? I told him that I thought we were staying over night but he said that wasn't true. I tried calling my folks but no one answered. I got back on the plane and flew back to Georgia, a little disappointed.

Fortunately, the pilot never rang the bell. I often wondered how I would have handled jumping out of a plane. However, I did get to fly on a B-25, not something a lot of others can say.

The Black Widows

BY TOM DUFFEY — REYNOLDSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

I FELL INTO THE WRONG CROWD DURING MY early high school years: low-slung pegged jeans and rolled-up tee shirts with a pack of cigs; the works. This was before “the Fonz” on TV. From on high, the school laid down the law that there would be *no* cigs under the shirt sleeves. We were looked upon as total losers.

I always had part-time jobs after school and during the weekends. That is how I could afford my own clothes and, at 17, my own car, which I bought from my grandpa. It was a very nice '54 Heavy Chevy which I turned into a really slick-looking semi-customized version which Grandpa would not recognize.

My extra-curricular activity was to join a group of guys known as the Black Widows. We had white silky jackets with a large web on the back in black and the name Black Widows across the top in Old English. Looked pretty sharp. Just to finish the outfit, we carried push-button stilettos. Just for show; they were never actually used. One of our favorite activities on Friday evening was to gather in the next town where there were several private schools. They would usually hold a dance in one of their gymnasiums. Our plan of attack was to wait until the admissions table was put up and then stage our entrance. We would walk in single file, trying to affect our best slouchy style, our jackets shouting our name to all looking our way. We would immediately be approached by the chaperones to ensure that there would be no trouble. We would assure them we would make only one circuit around the gym and leave. No trouble. All the couples would stop and stare at our little production. This was kind of like being part of a nervous theater. We were just there for the reaction. And, maybe, a little intimidation.

At the end of my third year, I did a serious self-evaluation and realized that I had one more year to gain something worthwhile from the general course of education I had signed up for: double shop. So I worked harder in shop, and I took an English class that wasn't required. The teacher assigned a paper on communication. I applied myself as best I could. Felt pretty good with the results. After handing it in, he picked some to read (no names). At the end, he read mine. I felt proud that he read it to the class. At the end the entire class stood and clapped. I sat and had a tear in my eye. High school days really matter for gaining traction entering post-high school life.

Sugar-Coated Try-Out

BY BILL BOYS — COLUMBUS, OHIO

ALTHOUGH I DON'T COOK MUCH, I sometimes watch cooking shows on You-Tube, like Jacques Pepin, America's Test Kitchen, The Great British Bake-Off, and the like.

I happened across a Jacques Pepin episode that was about candied orange peel, which I have seldom eaten and never tried making. But every day for years, I've made breakfast in bed for Ruth and myself, consisting of toast with peanut butter and jelly, decaf coffee, and a clementine or tangerine apiece. I always just threw the peels in the garbage. Jacques mentioned in passing that candied orange peels were expensive. Who knew? Never bought any. But that piqued my curiosity and so I saved my clementine peels for a couple of weeks and prepared them as candied orange peels since I had a recipe in *Joy of Cooking*.

My first batch was a total disaster – I left the pot on simmer and then forgot it as I went to the computer and got involved in other work – editing *One-Page Stories*, possibly! The batch burned hard and black to the pan, and was it ever hard to chisel off! (Did I mention that I'm not much of a cook?)

I didn't make the same mistake with my next batch. But I *was* appalled at how much sugar it took. (Maybe I was overdoing that part and could correct for it in later tries if the resulting candied peels tasted good.) Well, the results tasted great to me. Ruth said she thought they would taste more like oranges, but I didn't expect that, exactly, since the skins contain oils that aren't in the fruit inside.

So I kept on saving our breakfast peels and was astonished at how quickly a batch-full added up. Over the previous years I must have thrown away enough peels to make hundreds of batches! Are they expensive? Out of curiosity I checked online: Amazon sells a brand that runs about \$14 for a two-pound container, either diced or longer slices.

Nuts.com offers one-pound containers at \$10. Not Amazon's offering as shown on the web. exorbitantly expensive, but considering I could make them for basically only the cost of the sugar, I'm getting my third batch ready now. Cross your fingers.





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 fit in with your story, and I encourage them.)

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.

Connecting through Writing

IT'S HARD ENOUGH TO GENUINELY CONNECT with people when we're face to face with them, but at least we do get some immediate clues that can tell us how we're doing – the looks on their faces, whether they give appropriate verbal signs that they are listening, whether they ask questions, whether they make eye contact with us, or whether they walk out on us right while we're talking to them, heaven forbid!

Writers get none of those immediate clues. We don't know if or when they pick up our story, and whether they pass it up with just one glance, lightly scan it, or really get into it.

A suggestion: let a trusted friend read our stories before submitting them – a friend whom we implore to tell us honestly how well it connects with *them* (even if it hurts a little). Better *then*, than *after* it's out there for the world to see. Sometimes we may write just for *ourselves*, but we usually we write because we want to *connect with readers*, don't you think?