

2010 Writing Contest Winners

In poetry the winners were:

Carol Drummond, 1st place; Mary Beth Lundgren, 2nd place; and Larry Stiles, 3rd place.

In fiction the winners were:

Dayna Harpster, 1st place; Anita DeWeese, 2nd place; and Larry Stiles, 3rd place.

In nonfiction the winners were:

Jan Nieman, 1st place; David Hauenstein, 2nd place; and Lewis Knickerbocker, 3rd place.

First Place Poetry

But I Did Not Truly Look At You

Oh, Geese

You're flying north

Or is it east?

But anyway

You're leaving

Now that winter's over.

Come back!

Yes, your necklace in the sky

Is lovely silver filigree

But I did not truly look at you

These months that you were here.

Come back!

I want to pay attention

Now

To where you go at night.

The way you gather on the ground,

How you flock and

How you bend

Your regal neck of onyx

Or is it agate?

And when you lift your mighty wing
Don't fly before I peek
To find the color of the gray beneath.
Perhaps it's tinged with violet
Or blue or rose or pearl.
I want to pay attention
Now
To its flap, its flutter
Your silence.
Come back!
Does God use you in His choir
As wind instrument -- His trumpet?
Glissando, gracioso
Crescendo, concerto.
I want to pay attention
Now
To your call, your cry
Your invocation.
I should have loved you better.
Please come back.
-- Carol Drummond

Second Place Poetry

COLD SNAP

by Mary Beth Lundgren

I named my cat Flame since Florida's hot,
has fires that run wild—as if they have feet—
and sunsets with skies turning red, purple, pink,
and gold like Flame's fur. He loves heat.
So most days we're hot, but not
today when Flame is ice in my lap.

But the sun is warm through the window. He yawns
and stretches, curls up for a nap.
My sister Marie loves bikes and her cat,
Bob, who loves her but hates frozen toes,
so they're back. Burrowed deep into quilts,
she sighs, he purrs, and they doze.
I ran with my kite all that day at the beach.
As wind tugged the string, the kite swooped
and dipped, backward-flipped, flew high over waves.
Home now. Flame near. Eyelids droop....

Third Place Poetry

What Makes Little Girls Scream?

What makes little girls scream?
Where do they train to screech so like a bird of prey?
Is it at their mother's knee, or learned some other way?
Is it just an accident?
a chain reaction that occurs when
too many pony tails and pinafores
are gathered in one place?
Or, absent any master plan,
is it — just because they can?
When do little girls scream?
Does it spring from boundless glee
that follows every child's surprise?
Is it from that special thrill
that comes from excess speed downhill
as on a roller coaster ride?
Or does it come from primal fear,
a hairy touch in a haunted house
one feels at Halloween?

Why do little girls scream?

Might it be a practice for those later times in life
when nothing else will do except to just release a squeal?

Like meeting up with long lost friends
to celebrate a ring?

Or holding tight a broken child
who, for a moment, seems beyond the reach of earthly things,
but then returns and smiles and squirms,
and softly tries to sing?

What makes little girls scream?

Do they in subconscious minds look far beyond their years?

Can they see some distant time when
their exalted role as Mom has passed
and they can revel in the birth of each grandchild?

Or somehow sense a somber time
when fifty years of love and dreams becomes
a pound or two of ashes in an urn?

Is this, then, after all is done — is this
what makes little girls scream?

-- Larry Stiles

Faye and Mr. Fusser

By Nita DeWeese

Today was the worst day of Faye Haverfield's life. If she had to work with that man on that stupid computer one more day . . .

That was exactly what she told Millie, her closest friend at the Village. They shared the day's events over coffee.

"You don't think you'll like the job?" Millie asked as she placed a plate of coconut cookies in front of them.

"Only two things wrong with it. The boss and the computer." Faye had put on a few pounds the last five years but that didn't stop her from reaching for a cookie. "If I'd ever thought I had to go back to work . . ." A loose strand of her wavy, silver bangs drooped over her left eye. She took a big breath and sticking out her bottom lip, blew it out of the way.

"You haven't got the hang of it, yet? The computer, I mean?"

"No, I keep forgetting to wiggle the clicker twice and I lose the files."

"Lose them where?"

"Hell if I know. They're just gone!"

Faye, widowed for nine years, sold her Florida condo that was too big and too much work for one person and used the proceeds to buy into a nearby plush retirement community that boasted security, medical emergency buttons in each apartment, a full service dining room and housekeeping. And, plenty of other widows for company.

Everything went along nicely; she walked every morning, although not as briskly as she used to, and swam every afternoon, but not too many laps. Activities abounded, off-site trips kept her involved in the community and, of course, she had Millie.

Three years Faye's senior at seventy, Millie still had a girlish giggle, and a reasonable figure. But then, she was five-foot-nine. Faye knew if she were three inches taller, she, too would have a reasonable figure. Of course the nightly sugar-fest didn't help.

"So, what's wrong with the boss?" Millie helped herself to her third cookie and freshened their coffees.

“He’s rude, shouts orders at me, has no patience and absolutely no sense of humor,” Faye said, using all her willpower to refuse a second sweet. “My late husband, Spencer? Now there was a man with a sense of humor.”

“So quit.”

“After only two days? I ran my own company for sixteen years! I’m not stupid. I just don’t know computers.” Faye blew her pesky bangs away from her eye again. “Besides, I can’t quit. At least not until the market recovers. I should’ve never let that financial planner guy talk me into buying stocks.”

Millie sighed. “They’ll go up again. They always do.”

The two women sat in silence for several minutes. Finally, Millie said, “My Ralph put quite a bit of our money into annuities. They won’t keep up with inflation, but at least I know how much to depend on each month.”

Faye groaned and stood. “Some retirement.”

Faye made up her mind she’d tame that blasted computer. And she did. Her index finger got the hang of the double click. Files stopped disappearing and she discovered a marvelous little command called Save. Every time she had to click on the little X to change programs, a message popped up and said “Save changes to—?” whatever she’d named the file. Handy little command. She had no trouble retrieving the file, intact, once it had been saved.

Next order of business, her boss.

“How’d it go today?” Millie asked when Faye had settled herself for their nightly coffee and cookie ritual.

“Computer-wise, fine.” Faye reached for her one self-allotted treat, chocolate chip with walnuts, her most favorite. “Boss still needs work, though.”

“What’d he do now?”

Faye closed her eyes, and mentally recreated her third day as bookkeeper/receptionist for the firm of All Media Advertising, Inc. She had gotten grid-locked in traffic and arrived exactly six and a half minutes late.

“Are you aware of the time, Ms. Haverfield?” Kurt Fusser, eyebrows drawn together, lips pressed into a thin line, arms folded across his chest, stood by Faye’s desk.

Faye sighed. “Yes, Mr. Fusser. It’s 9:06.”

“And what time do we open?”

“Nine o’clock.”

“I thought I made it clear that promptness was essential?” Fusser’s ebony eyes never blinked.

“I’m sorry, traffic’s constipated this morning.”

Faye towered over Fusser by at least three inches, even in her sensible shoes. Why, she thought, are short men always strutting their importance? Acting like they’re head of the Third Reich? And, what’s the big deal? Wait ‘til you’re sixty-seven, Buster. You’ll slow down, too.

“So leave home earlier.”

Faye hated Fusser’s voice. Born in New York, the remnants of a slight nasal twang remained and it irritated her, especially when he raised it loud enough for anyone within fifty feet to hear it. She felt her cheeks flush. A portion her bangs slipped over one eye and, forgetting her manners, she stuck out her bottom lip and aimed a puff of breath skyward to remove the hair.

“Excuse me?” Fusser said.

Oh good grief, she thought. “I’m sorry. It’s my bangs. They keep slipping.”

“Perhaps you’ve never heard of hair spray?”

“Mr. Fusser, is there something wrong with my work?” Faye asked. What she wanted to say was lighten up!

“No, Ms. Haverfield. Your work is satisfactory. But tardiness and slovenly looks reflect on me and I won’t have it.” Fusser turned and, arms swinging, power-walked to his office.

As she turned on her computer and retrieved the Accounts Payable file she’d saved yesterday, Faye said, very softly, “You rude, egotistical bastard!”

Millie, who had listened attentively to Faye’s tale of the day’s events, shook her head.

“Slovenly! What a cruel thing to say. And in front of other employees. I would have walked out.” She bit into her fourth cookie, a record for even Millie.

“Oh, I’ll walk,” Faye said. “Just as soon as my dividends pick up. But I’ll teach him a few people skills before I leave.”

On day four, a strange thing happened at All Media Advertising, Inc. Faye, at work on time, wavy hair neatly in place, finished printing an ageing report for Mr. Fusser. She clicked the little X and the ‘Save changes to—?’ message appeared. She clicked on the Yes prompt and the file disappeared from the screen. She decided to take a break from her accounting work and learn a bit more about the computer.

Opening a blank document, Faye typed in the word ‘pencil.’ Then she clicked on the font arrow. Again, she typed the word ‘pencil.’ The font, TypoUpright BT, displayed the word in a pretty, curlicued cursive form. pencil. Next she tried Allegro BT. Pencil. Interesting. She spent ten minutes fooling with different fonts, and different sizes of fonts, always using the word ‘pencil’ to view her handiwork. Before Mr. Fusser could accuse her of theft of service on company time or some such

nonsense, Faye used the command 'Save As. . .', named the file Pencil, and clicked on the X. The little box announcing 'Save changes to--?' emerged and she clicked Yes at the prompt.

The ageing report in hand, Faye carried it into Fusser's office and placed it on his desk. He looked up, his black eyebrows raised high enough to produce a long wrinkle across his forehead.

"It's customary to knock before entering my office, Ms. Haverfield."

"Excuse me. Your door was open and I assumed--

"Assumed? Did you ever hear the definition of assume? It makes an ass of you and me. We don't assume anything here, Ms. Haverfield."

Faye didn't know whether to salute or bow, decided she'd be fired for either, opted for saying "Yessir" and returned to her work station. But in her head she fairly shouted, You miserable little jerk.

At her desk, Faye reached for her pencil to make a note to remind herself to call her doctor at her break. She needed a prescription refill for her sleeping pills. This job and particularly Fusser had robbed her of a decent night's rest. The pencil had vanished. Not in her drawer, not under her desk, gone. Sighing audibly, Faye turned to the computer and retrieved the Pencil file she'd been working on.

When the phone rang, Faye grabbed the pink 'While You Were Out' pad to take the message and there, in plain sight in the middle of her desk, lay her pencil. Maybe she was losing it, was too old to be working, should tighten her financial belt and weather out her retirement. The stock market would rally again, hadn't Millie said so?

Faye saved the Pencil file and retrieved the Accounts Payable file. Perhaps paying some of the company's invoices would take her mind off of her personal problems.

Fusser appeared at her desk.

"Ms. Haverfield, please make a note. I want to be notified at exactly 9:55. I have an important call to make at 10:00."

When Faye reached for her pencil to oblige, it was gone. Frantically, her eyes swept over the desk.

Fusser crossed his arms over his chest. "Well? Will you make the note? I haven't got all day."

"Sorry, I seem to have misplaced my pencil."

"Ms. Haverfield. Sloppiness is no way to do a job properly." The twang in Fusser's speech increased with the volume of his voice.

Faye pulled out her bottom drawer, reached into her purse and found a pen. She made the requested note with a hand that shook. She couldn't remember being yelled at so many times in her life, let alone in a week. Yesterday slovenly. Today sloppy. Better quit before Fusser dismissed her.

The company checks written, the phone quiet, Faye once again retrieved her Pencil file. She decided to pick an eye-catching font and design a professional letterhead for herself. To use in finding another job.

The missing pencil appeared again. Right where she'd left it. What's going on here? she thought. Tricks? Hallucinations? What?

All during lunch hour, Faye pondered the disappearing pencil. Why couldn't she see it? If it truly vanished, where did it go? What made it go? Determined to solve the puzzle, she decided to retrace her morning activities.

The discovery brought goose bumps to her arms and made the hair at the nape of her neck stand at attention. Every time Faye saved her Pencil file, the pencil left her desk. When she retrieved the file, it appeared again. The ramifications were scary. And marvelous. In order to test the phenomenon, she typed a solid page of the word 'pen.' Then, 'calendar.' Even 'stapler.'

Each time the file was named and saved, the item went missing. Retrieve the file and she retrieved the item.

Shortly before five o'clock, Faye prepared a page with the words 'Kurt Fusser' repeated over and over its entire width and length. At the stroke of five, she named the file and clicked on the X. With a secret smile of satisfaction, she clicked Yes to the "Save changes to—" prompt.

As Faye left the building for the day, she noticed Mr. Fusser was not in his office.

The nightly cup of coffee and plate of cookies assembled in front of her in Millie's kitchen, Faye related that she was beginning to like her job.

"No kidding," Millie said. "That's great. You get that nasty boss of yours straightened out okay?"

"I believe I have," Faye said, reaching for a celebratory second peanut butter cookie. On the drive home from the office she had remembered another computer command. One that she planned to use first thing in the morning. Delete.

The Break-in

by Larry Styles

I'm a fool. Michelle, my ex of two years ago, can still sweet talk me into just about anything. This time it's way beyond the pale. She wants me to break in to this guy's house, some new guy she slept with night before last, and retrieve her earrings. I don't know why women leave little trinkets behind, but they all do. Maybe it's a calling card, a way to force the guy to call back. I dunno. Or maybe it's some form of scent posting. I mean, it's always some distinctly non-male kind of thing that would be noticed immediately by another woman. Guys don't do this. One time I lost an old fountain pen in Michelle's bed, but that was different. She was real pissed when she found it in her washing machine – but let's not go there again.

"There's nothing to it," she pleaded. "He leaves his door unlocked all the time. He's a slob. He'll never notice you've been there."

"It's illegal," I protested.

"But they're MY earrings," she responded, "It's not like you're stealing them," and then I realized that she would never comprehend the legal distinction of breaking and entering.

So here I am, standing in the bushes just beyond the reach of the security light, waiting for this unsuspecting victim to leave. Finally, as the night chill starts to stiffen all my joints I hear the door open. I crouch down to remain completely hidden, tensing up and holding my breath, when the automatic water sprinklers kick in. I suppress a reflexive yelp. Man, that's cold, but no choice – I have to squat here while my khakis get soaked right up to the crotch. Now I have a second reason to avoid being seen. At last, I hear a car start and risk a quick peek. Sure enough, all the lights are out and it's time to move in.

Right away I detect a flaw in Michelle's intelligence report. The door is locked, deadbolt and all. There's no way I can "card" this door the way I could at my first apartment. Plan B: Check all the windows. At last my luck is changing. He's left a window open at the back of the place – just low enough to slip in. All I have to do is get the screen off. Should be easy with this old, wood frame screen. Just bend the external hangers down and the screen should drop right out of the window. Left hanger, no problem. Rusty right hanger, snaps in half; and sure enough the screen drops right out – right onto my

head. I'll worry about how to get the deformed screen to stay up later. Right now I've got to get in and get out before this guy returns.

I lift the window just a bit further and hoist myself into what appears to be his "man cave" or den. Argh, what a stench – probably why Michelle changed her mind and wanted the evidence retrieved. My eyes are still adjusting to the pitch black interior as I start to tip toe across the room. This guy really is a slob. CDs are scattered around the room along with dirty dishes – and still that smell. Finally I reach a door and slip into the kitchen. Moving with a little more confidence as my eyes adjust, my foot tips the edge of a glass bowl with a faint clink. As I start on across the room my movement is suddenly impeded by a twenty pound weight on my leg. An image of black and white stripes with a ball and chain briefly flashes through my mind, but no, the claws imbedded in my calf tell another story. My careless tapping of its food bowl, without the obligatory filling of same has probably driven this flabby tabby to total madness. I briefly consider just trying to pry kitty loose, but someone has weaponized this cat's appetite and I can't risk leaving any of my DNA lying around. So I look for the bag of crunchies, or better yet some cat treats. That way there won't be any suspicious leftovers. A quick peek in the cabinet comes up empty; nothing in the pantry either, except dust. Think a minute – where would a total slob leave the cat treats? Under last Sunday's paper, of course. Finally a box of Crazy Kat Treats and with one shake of the box my leg is free again. Kitty is happy; I'm happy. It's on with the search for the truant earrings.

Bedroom at last. Fortunately a faint light comes in through the window and navigation is a little easier. I can't believe Michelle actually spent the night in this room. His clothes are scattered all over the place, half read magazines of dubious distinction stand in several piles and the sheets are probably firmer than the mattress. Gross! I reach over the unmade bed and quickly retrieve the pair of earrings – two loops with a small diamond at the end of the little chains dropping from each loop. Nice. I can see why she wanted them back before they got tossed out with last week's pizza box.

I decide to avoid the kitchen for my exit. I ease my way down a dark hall back toward the den. And then I find the source, the fountainhead of the dreadful smell. I also discover that when the litter box is no longer tolerable, cats will poop in front of it. Right in my path. Sure enough, as I am holding my nose at that most intense olfactory moment, I feel a slight slippage of one foot, a slippage not normally associated with a carpeted floor. A whispered, "Awww Shit!" slips between clenched teeth -- and describes the situation precisely. What to do? I certainly don't want to leave tell-tale shoe prints of cat poop on the formerly white carpet. Shoes must come off and with extra care I head for the open window, watching for additional land mines. I toss my shoes out the window first, then ease myself out

and down the side of the house. Unfortunately the offensive shoe has landed "jelly side up" and my sock clad foot manages to find it in the dark. If I am stopped, I have no idea how I will explain what a grown man is doing walking around barefoot in forty degree weather, wearing wet pants covered with cat hair, carrying visibly soiled socks and a pair of diamond earrings, but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. Right now there's the issue of the broken screen.

Time to improvise. I bend the good left hanger back up, hook the screen over it and force the frame into place. It will almost stay on its own. If only I had a little glue or something to keep it in place for a few days. And then it hits me. I ease the right side of the screen back out an inch or so and then scrape the sole of the offensive shoe over the top edge. Every cloud has a silver lining. A gentle push and the crippled screen looks almost normal. If he notices the odor he'll just blame it on the cat, and he'll probably blame the bowed out shape on the cat, too.

Finally, I get home and start to thaw out my feet. I give Michelle a call and she pops over right away to retrieve the precious earrings. She is very appreciative, much warmer than she normally is. And then I reach into my pocket and display the prize. She stares at them intently for several seconds before picking them out of my hand. Her eyes close briefly and when they open they are welling with tears. "Nice," she says softly, "But they're not mine."

Larry Stiles

First Place Non Fiction

What's In a Perfect, Unremarkable Summer Day?

By Jan Nieman

The boxes labeled “KEEPERS” were filling up faster than those marked “GOODWILL.” All in all, organizing attic jumble was satisfying, a noble effort with noticeable results. On this occasion, it produced a curious item requiring deeper scrutiny.

“Well, well, well,” I murmured as, photo in hand, I scooted to a comfy rolled-up carpet and plunked my back-side down. I squinted through the dust motes at the yellowed picture. There we were – posing in front of the Packard – me, a skinny seven-year-old, squeezed between six-foot-two Grandpa and plump four-foot-eleven Grandma.

The snapshot was taken that unsettling summer of 1946 when Mom worked at the former Nash plant (retooled for Jeep production) and Dad, still fuming he hadn't been discharged, was based at Guantanamo. I, an only child, was shuttled from relative to relative until school began. My favorite landing spot was at Grandma and Grandpa's.

That photographed day had been typical for a Milwaukee August – hot and muggy. But it didn't stop Grandma from her daily baking. She and I “worked” together rolling out dough to form flaky butter horns and after they popped out of the oven, drizzling sweet frosting over them – bowl licking allowed. Later, we listened to Helen Trent, One Man's Family, and The Guiding Light and I, under Grandma's direction, chopped spinach and onions in a wooden bowl (“Don't forget to add a pinch of nutmeg, Pumpkin”) until the mixture was creamy and glistening.

Just before supper Grandma said, “I'm going to show you how to make iced tea. It's going to be your job to have it ready every afternoon.”

Ooh, the trust in me to boil the water, steep the loose tea, strain, add more water, sugar, lemons, and when ready to serve, pour over ice.

Kitchen routine with Grandma was fun and reassuring, but the real excitement was skipping to the bus stop to greet Grandpa at the end of his workday. As soon as he stepped off the bus, he spotted me. His eyes crinkled and his mouth worked its way into a lop-sided grin. My matching off-centered smile, caused by several missing teeth, widened as he handed me his black shiny lunch box to carry home – more responsibility.

“What did you do today, Pumpkin? What’s for supper?”

“I played with my dolls and we’re having creamed spinach.”

Grandpa patted me on the head. “Did you help make it?”

“Uh-huh, I chopped it, and Grandpa, I fixed the iced tea for tonight, too.”

After supper he folded his hands behind his head, and balancing on his chair’s two back legs teased, “Grandma, this is the best spinach I’ve ever eaten,” as though he’d forgotten I helped, “and the iced tea – I don’t have words for it.”

I protested, “Grandpa! I made it!”

The evening was still humid and sticky and Grandpa suggested, “How about we take a country ride?”

Their neighbor, experimenting with her new Brownie camera, snapped the three of us next to the Packard coupe. We hopped in and settled into our customary seats. My place was smack in the middle of the bench seat with my knees straddling the gear shift. Grandpa backed the Packard down the driveway, Grandma crooked her elbow out the window, and we left Milwaukee behind.

Our first stop was Zehnder’s Grocery where Grandma transformed herself from housewife to detective and, giddy with pleasure, scanned the shelves for previously rationed, but slowly appearing, German specialty foods. While she uncovered new items, Grandpa and I snuck over to the candy aisle.

He whispered, “What do you think, Pumpkin, how about some of those big jaw-breakers or a pack of candy cigarettes?”

“Not tonight, Grandpa. I think I’d like those syrup filled little wax bottles and maybe some Wrigley’s Spearmint Gum.”

We debated the merits of each sugary item, but both understood the winner would be the longer-lasting twisted peppermint sticks.

Grandma waggled her eyebrows as we, treats secreted behind our backs, sidled to the cash register. She huffed, “What did you two get? Candy?”

“Nah,” Grandpa said, “just looking,” and as Grandma transferred her purchases to the car, he winked, and paid for our contraband.

We resumed our evening adventure as the sun dipped behind the pine trees and a cooling breeze puffed through the open car windows. Grandpa turned off the main highway and maneuvered the Packard around the pot-holes in the dirt lane. The “L” shaped weather-beaten farmhouse at its end, enveloped by gnarled apple trees gone wild, could have been spooky, but not for me. This was a stop of

comfort and my mouth already watered with anticipated treats. I giggled at Shep, part hound, part collie, racing alongside our car.

While Grandma and Mrs. Lemke caught up on family news, Mr. Lemke revved up his green and yellow John Deere. Grandpa hoisted me onto the flat hay wagon and legs dangling off the rear, we sucked on our smuggled candy. Mr. Lemke drove past the new apple orchard and steered the tractor to the cornfield's far corner. He and Grandpa debated as to the ripest ears, picked half-a-dozen cobs of sweet corn, and swaddled them in newspaper. Grandpa and I each nibbled on complimentary ears on our ride back to the farmhouse. Raw sweet corn tasted so good.

Meanwhile, Grandma had selected huge "Rutgers" plump tomatoes, pickles the size of cucumbers, and golden, fuzzy-skinned, free-stone peaches. She turned to me and said, "Guess what you and I will be doing."

I nodded, already daydreaming about tomorrow. Shiny canning equipment would emerge from the cupboard, and after peeling, slicing, and stuffing our produce into Mason jars, Grandma, with a steady practiced motion, would lower them into boiling water. My job was to place the cooled red, green, and yellow vegetable-filled jars on basement shelves.

Mrs. Lemke's warm apple pies fragranced the farm house and Grandpa pointed to one. "Mabel, don't you think we should get one of those for supper tomorrow?"

The pie was added to the largess and Grandpa, removing his wallet, asked, "How much do I owe you?"

As usual, Mr. Lemke said, "Nothing, Walter. Your money's no good here."

What did that mean? As the Packard bounced back to the main road, I asked, "Grandpa, why don't we pay Mr. Lemke?"

"Pumpkin, we go back a long way."

That didn't answer my question. Grown-ups were so mysterious. Was our visit a mutual treat?

Our last, but my least favorite stop, was Mr. Schneider's butcher shop with its sawdust-covered floor. I wasn't sure what purpose wood shavings served, but figured it had something to do with cutting up animals. Uneasy, I nibbled at a small slice of summer sausage while Grandma scrutinized the meat case.

Grandpa, envisioning future feasts, hovered over her shoulder. "Mable, don't forget a few links of Bavarian bratwurst and some blood sausage."

Did I hear “blood sausage”? Already jittery, my mouth gaped as I spun around to see what Mr. Schneider was holding. Holy Toledo! The sausage I loved was made from blood? I was never eating it again!

When the butcher finished wrapping the meat in white butcher paper, Grandma lowered her head, eyes peeking sideways at him, and whispered, “Would you have any extra soup bones?”

Mr. Schneider turned the chrome handle of the huge white cooler door and a mist drifted out. Eyes wide, I spotted skinned pink slabs of meat swaying from hooks. My terror level soared, but mesmerized, I continued peering through my fingers while back-peddling toward the door. Grandma’s flirting might have produced a few free bones, but next time I’d stay in the car and skip the butcher shop.

A white full moon accompanied us as, sheltered and dozing, I snuggled up to Grandma while Grandpa pointed the Packard home. It was simply a perfect, unremarkable, summer day, but everything an unsettled seven-year-old needed, and I tucked its smells, sights, sounds, and tastes into memory.

I backhanded the moisture away from my cheeks and returned the snapshot to the “KEEPERS” box. Navigating the rickety attic stairs, I promised myself I’d steep tea leaves for tonight’s iced tea – Grandma’s old-fashioned way. Maybe I’d dig out her wooden chopping bowl and teach seven year old Susan how to make her great-grandma’s creamed spinach.

In fact, after supper would be an ideal time for us to abandon dirty dishes, leave behind computers and cell phones, and pile into the car for a summer ride ... must remember to include the camera and capture our own moment in time.

A Moment in Time

by David Hauenstein

When I began what would become a 30-year radio news career in the mid 1960's, Garrison Keillor had not yet brought back old-time radio. His A Prairie Home Companion was first broadcast on July 6, 1974 in St. Paul, Minnesota. These days 4.3 million people hear the weekly program on 600 public radio stations.

For me, the most important of Keillor's live radio broadcasts was the one I witnessed on June 12, 2005 from what's called the Great Auditorium in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. This Methodist Camp Meeting community has thrived at the Jersey Shore since the first tents were erected there in 1869. About a hundred of the popular summer-only tent houses remain in use today. Two-and three-story Victorian-era houses predominate in this one-square-mile town on the Atlantic Ocean. This is the setting for the 1894 all wood 6,500-seat auditorium in which Garrison Keillor and Ocean Grove fell in love with each other. Here, in the present tense, is how I saw and heard it happen.

With general admission tickets in hand, another old radio guy, his wife and I mount one of the exterior wooden stairways to the auditorium balcony. We seek out three wooden chairs close to one of the 20 large paneless windows in hopes of receiving whatever natural breeze might waft its way into this summertime-only building. A woman seated next to us describes her balcony view under the sloped wooden ceiling as looking like the bottom of an upside down Noah's arc. I imagine I'm sitting inside a giant cello. The instrument in this auditorium is the 1908 pipe organ — 10 thousand pipes and growing — which dominates an immense, acoustically inviting space with its vast range of sounds. The organ console is covered for this occasion.

Promptly at 5:45 p.m., Garrison Keillor appears in his trademark red sneakers and accepts applause with his "Shoe Band" and assorted regular and guest performers arranged behind him. The first order of business is the singing of the National Anthem led by Keillor, accompanied by his small band and featuring the swelling voices of six thousand now standing in the hall. Their patriotic spirit is ignited by the electrified American flag, switched on only for the singing of patriotic songs. Yes, this star spangled banner must be seen to be believed. For Sunday services, the 15-foot Stars and Stripes is removed to reveal a Christian cross, then reinstalled for secular concerts the rest of the week.

Keillor introduces an Ocean Grove functionary who says a prayer, which Keillor then calls “remarkably non-specific.” He does some pre-show warm up, including having the audience “practice for sound level” by singing one of the two Methodist hymns he’s written for the show. Would that the vast radio audience, soon to tune in, could have heard the full-chested singing of the National Anthem.

At six o’ clock, the red “on-the-air” sign flashes on, network theme music plays and this old radio guy tries to swallow the lump in his throat.

The Guy Noir melodrama is a hilarious spoof of a “Sopranos” couple that has built a garish revolving house on the outskirts of quiet, quaint Victorian Ocean Grove where they can be close to the “Hooters” restaurant they want to open in the Grove. Guy makes the case for the Grove’s Historic Preservation Society: There’s no room for the Sopranos couple or their dream restaurant here in what’s fondly called “God’s Little Acre.”

Keillor sings his song “The Methodist Blues.” In it, he has fun with a series of good old fashioned religious references to Ocean Grove Methodists, comparing them to Lake Wobegon’s dour Lutherans. Another of his written-for-the-occasion songs compares the Methodists to Unitarians, Baptists, Jews and Buddhists. So ecumenical, this man.

Especially those of a certain age can fully appreciate what’s about to happen — a return to the halcyon days of live radio storytelling — by remembering themselves sitting or, better yet, lying in front of that favorite piece of furniture that once stood as tall as they: the front room family radio.

Keillor suddenly grabs the wireless microphone and heads down the right aisle, saying into the mic that the house lights will not be needed. Those lights are turned off, leaving him spot-lighted at the back of the cavernous hall. He gestures urgently with one hand to kill the spot light, too — and the 111-year-old auditorium is plunged into darkness. A surprised audience — now with nothing to look at — listens in the dark, for the latest episode of happenings from Lake Wobegon, “my home town.” In this memorable moment, they are joined with the millions at home, also listening in anticipation on their radios.

Keillor tells us about the message given to the June graduating class. The commencement speaker admonishes the graduates to think and dream, as Keillor puts it, “lessons they were never taught in their classes.” The monologue then reminisces about how, when we were students, we drew our joy from smoking and drinking. Somehow it morphs into a story about Richard Nixon drinking in the White House and how Henry Kissinger grows afraid to let the president talk on the phone. Finally, 90

succinct seconds from Keillor on how one should be wary of righteous leaders with their “no-doubts” wisdom for where they are taking the nation. Several thousand hands are clapping after each statement.

Keillor continues to honor a cardinal custom of radio performers by seeming to address each, individual member of his mass summertime audience. In his memory-filled baritone, he regales each of us with descriptions of home-grown things...like “pulling a fat tomato off the vine, flicking the dust from its shiny skin and biting into it so the juice runs off your chin.” He ends his mesmerizing monologue with a nod to Lake Wobegon’s God-fearing Lutherans whom he remembers as rating what they see as the four most important things in life. As I recall, he says “first is love of God, second is the one you all thought was first, third is family and the fourth is sweet corn. You snap it off the stalk, shuck it on the way into the house, drop the yellow ear into boiling water for four minutes, then slather it with butter and sprinkle it with salt...and just enjoy it more than most words can say.”

Then some more music takes us up to 8 p.m. when the connection with American Public Radio is ended and the on-the-air sign goes dark. As the Shoe Band breaks into recessional music, barely audible under thunderous applause, we balcony babies climb down the wooden stairs and step into the still, 77-degree summer evening, richer for having been both eye and ear witnesses to a not-yet-forgotten kind of radio storytelling — a true moment in time.

March 19, 2003

by Lewis Knickerbocker

The day started in Morzine, a tiny village in the French Alps. My lady and I were there for a conference that was notorious for its dull agenda. Thankfully, time was set aside for frequent breaks so attendees could escape the overheated meeting room and revel in the late winter sunshine.

We shivered in our thin-soled shoes and cardigan sweaters as we sipped cups of hot chocolate that steamed in the cold air. Our attention was on the ski slope where rooster tails of powder snow marked the progress of skiers descending toward us. We watched with envy as the skiers schussed down the slope and skidded to a stop on the village's main street. We felt a bit giddy, standing there surrounded by towering mountains, colorful chalets, and red-cheeked athletes hurrying to find something hot and tasty. It was like being in the middle of a picture postcard and the ABC Wide World of Sports at the same time.

After the last morning session, everyone went their various ways. We made a beeline to Paris for an overnight stay before our return to the states. A very pleasant four-hour train ride on the 150 mph bullet train delivered us to Gare de Lyon station in Paris.

Our pulses quickened. We were now only hours away from a fabulous meal. After three days of the calorie-packed Alpine cookery more suitable for youthful athletes than sedentary executives, our palates yearned for the subtle flavors and velvety sauces of Parisian haute cuisine.

In Paris, the best neighborhood restaurants are hidden in the alleys and side streets of the 1st Arrondissement, also called Louvre, and near the Paris Opera House. One such restaurant was on Rue Cambon off the Rue de Rivoli, near the Louvre. I had found it years earlier when I lived in Paris.

"Chez Flottes," I ordered the taxi driver. "And hurry!" With luck, it might still be possible to get a reservation for dinner.

The taxi waited as I rushed into the bar at the front of the restaurant. It was a relief to see nothing had changed. There was still the grand mirror behind the long dark mahogany bar and giant paintings of nudes on the opposite wall. The bar stools were still occupied by beautiful young ladies enjoying an after-work or after-shopping aperitif. It dawned on me that these young ladies might be the

daughters or even the granddaughters of the beauties who initially attracted me to the bar at Chez Flottes.

The maitre d' greeted me and even pretended to remember me from forty years earlier. He entered my name on his book with a flourish, all the while assuring me a very good table would be ready for us at eight o'clock. Breathing easier, I rejoined my lady in the taxi and we proceeded at a leisurely pace to the hotel, settled in, and then went out for a stroll.

We turned a corner onto Rue de Rivoli and saw hordes of people surging toward us. They filled the street from sidewalk to sidewalk. It was unnerving but we were curious and wanted to see what was happening. We pressed ourselves tight against the building to watch.

It appeared to be a good-natured crowd. Most people were laughing and talking. A few marchers were excited; some were flirting with the people around them. Others just strode along with impassive faces as if on assignment. Looking deeper into the crowd, we saw many were swinging signs at their side, large posters affixed to short lengths of wood. Clearly they were preparing for a protest of some sort. But what? And where were they going?

As they rounded our corner, a cry went through the crowd. "Tee Vee!" As if on signal, everyone hoisted signs in the air and began waving them. Those without signs raised clenched fists in the air and scowled, shouting "Yankee go home."

We hurried around the corner to see where they were headed. Police barricades were in position to halt the marchers where Rue de Rivoli met the Place de la Concorde. On the other side of the barricades were trucks, minivans, station wagons, all with satellite disks on their roof. It became clear. The march was scheduled for the television news cameras.

As we watched, the marchers in front reached the barricades. They shouted mightily and waved their signs. The camera crews rushed around getting shots from different angles as the journalists interviewed several protesters. An impromptu cheerleader jumped on the hood of a minivan and cued the crowd to increase or decrease their volume according to the needs of the photojournalists. It was over in seven or eight minutes. The journalists drove away in their vehicles, the police began stacking the barricades into waiting trucks, and the crowd dispersed. The marchers wore triumphant expressions as they retraced their steps back to our corner.

I couldn't restrain myself. I stopped a group to ask in French what the protest was about. A young woman eyed me in amazement. "Monsieur, at this very minute – the Americans are bombing Baghdad."

Shocked and awed, we tottered off to a sidewalk café. It was time for a drink. While we were tucked in the idyllic village in the French Alps, America had gone to war. And we knew nothing about it.

An hour passed, then two. We hailed a taxi. War or no war, dinner was at eight.

We were escorted to our table and handed English language menus. We perused them carefully. Our plan was to order different meals so each could taste more dishes. However, the decisions were not easy and we were agonizing over choices when the waiter appeared to take our orders.

In my still passable French, I asked which of several choices he would recommend as a memorable dinner for two people who loved French food and seldom had opportunities to enjoy it. His eyes nearly popped out. He snatched the menus out of our hands and skittered away.

What had I said? Was he insulted by my rusty French?

He returned moments later with more menus, this time in French. The new menus had an extra sheet listing the day's specials. The prices were about half what we had seen in the English version.

He said, "Please forgive my mistake. When you came in, I thought you were Americans." He continued in a conspiratorial tone. "You must understand we now have different menus. One for the Algerians. One for the Germans. One for the Americans. And naturellement, this one for us."

It was quite a day. As I went to sleep that night, images floated through my mind. Plumes of snow chasing skiers down the mountain. A protest march timed for the six o'clock news. A half price dinner that was fit for a king. Our country at war halfway around the globe.

To paraphrase Walter Cronkite, it was not a day like any other day. We were there.