

***An  
Attic  
Article  
Curiosity***

***By  
George G. Story***

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Gloucester, Massachusetts

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# An Attic Article Curiosity

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The quaint Queen Anne, built in 1863, was my first experience as a homeowner. We moved in toward the end of May of 1980. Like any hopeful young couple we had grandiose dreams and plans for our new home and, just as typically, wallets filled with as many cobwebs as the filthy attic had accumulated over the previous one hundred and seventeen years.

The place to start, so my dad advised, was to use our meager resources on becoming energy conscious, batten down the hatches, so to speak, in anticipation of harsh New England winters and the high cost of heating fuel; in this case, piped in natural gas.

In this effort I begrudgingly found myself, on a sweltering August Saturday, inside the dingy, dusty and cobwebbed infested attic. The solitary window was really square but made to look circular from the outside and, to make matters worse, there was no way to open this dirty portal, so the attic was void of proper ventilation and light.

The project consisted of raking and fluffing, by hand, settled Rockwool type insulation, then adding more where needed, with a modern equivalent of the settled and thinned gray insulating material to fill voids between the ceiling rafters. After a few hours of this steamy work, I found myself thirsty, overheated, exhausted and itchy. I did not wish to climb back into this hole a second time, so I was determined to complete my mission and get the hell out of there.

Midway through, with my feet dangling over the edge of the solitary opening, I rested and hoped to find cooler and more breathable air passing up through the small hatch opening. I was smudged with dirt and insulating gunk from head to toe; I was also sinus blocked and incredibly uncomfortable, as well. Not one to sit idle for too long, while I sat resting I unconsciously continued to fluff Rockwool in the area closest to me.

In an effort not to disturb hidden old knob and tube electric wiring, I worked slowly and carefully dipping my gloved hand deep into the Rockwool like a garden hoe or trowel and pulled apart clumps of the gray insulating stuff. I moved material around, continually fluffing, and then smoothing it over. I broke up the clumped matter as I went along the edge of the joists closest to me. I worked my way around the opening I sat on, adjusting my seat as I progressed so that I eventually encircled the opening on all four sides.

When I found myself back where I had begun, I noticed I had taken all the Rockwool from one area and “fluffed” it into another, so that now the framed area closest to me was void of insulating material all together. All that remained visible now were the newspapers lining the joists. I still do not know what service these newspapers provided. Nevertheless, the front page of The Boston Traveler from 1947, presumably the year the Rockwool was originally placed there, stared up at me. **WOMAN VANISHES**, it read.

Headlines such as that are designed to catch your attention. It caught mine and I delved deeply into the article turning from page one to page three and following along onto pages four and five where there was a two-page picture layout. The pictures were of the woman’s home, her children, her husband and her abandoned car sitting on the side of Route 3 in a rest area located within the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Over the weekend before this published 1947 issue of the Traveler, a woman had, without explanation, disappeared from her Boston home. The disappearance of the lady seemed quite mysterious. There did not appear to be anything missing in her house, no one had seen her leave and there was no one who had seen her since early that morning. The piece was written in a very “matter-of-fact” reporter’s style.

Looking back on the type of news focused on in 1947, for example; the Roswell UFO incident near Roswell, New Mexico and the disappearance of Navy Flight 19 and a few hours later the disappearance of the search and rescue P B Y seaplane looking for that Flight 19 group of planes off the coast of Florida into the Bermuda Triangle, it is not hard to understand why a modern newspaper, with the lack of World War II news,

would play this type of unexplained disappearance for all it could. The headline worked in 1947, and then it grabbed my attention thirty-five years later in 1980. I found myself absorbed in every line of the story. "Officials are diligently investigating what may have happened to this woman." was all it said in conclusion of the article.

I dropped that issue of the paper and began looking for the next day's string in an effort to find what twenty-four hours turned up concerning the lady's mysterious disappearance. Had she been kidnapped, had she met with foul play, had she been picked up by aliens like Betty and Barney Hill had claimed years later, right from that same White Mountains' location her car had been found at, had she been murdered and if so by who? My curiosity tweaked, I had to find out more.

I followed along each ceiling frame one at a time searching through each piece of newsprint the floor gave up. By some extraordinary chance, or better stated as coincidence, whoever insulated that attic area originally in or around 1947 saved in order, then used in order, (whether going forward or backward I do not know) this pile of newspapers; starting in one corner of the open attic and laying them out chronologically through to the opposite diagonal corner, appearing to be approximately three weeks worth of 1947 midsummer news from the Boston area, complete with classified and store display ads, the comics and the day's radio program listings. The newspapers were in mint condition and I was able to read every word without effort. Protected from harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun, the pages had not even yellowed, as one would have expected over such time.

As I searched for more knowledge of this 1947 occurrence, my work now seemed to pass with less effort than it had previously and at a greater rate of speed.

Due to placement in the paper, without any change in writing style, it became apparent the incident had become less important to the general public, or, at least, to the newspaper editors. Suspicion toward the missing woman's husband was of course mentioned, but facts, which were few, could not bear up a case. The same held true for every family member and known family friend in turn. It is very hard to make something from nothing but the reporter worked quite hard at it; his efforts did not help.

With every avenue of investigation encountered there seemed no rhyme or reason to the case. No motive, no corpus delicti, no opportunity, no blood stains, no hidden lint and no reason to look for foul play except that her car was abandoned and she was nowhere to be found. As I read on there was simply nothing to be learned. The newspapers focused, from lack of substantial information, even about the woman, on her small children who obviously missed their mother terribly. Pictures were printed daily of the worried family.

By the time I reached the final corner of the attic, quite a few hours later, I had flown through six or seven days of 1947 with painstaking care. I held out those newspapers and that night, my mission in the attic now accomplished completely and forgotten, I again reread the news accounts. I even took to cross checking other stories within those dailies in the hope I would trip over some other loose connection to the main feature. As far as I could make out there was nothing else to find. Notably, as nothing fresh was learned, the story slipped from first page news to third page news, then fifth, then fifteenth. The story was still reported and recapped daily with equal writing style and care as before, however it was not going to be solved and was daily slipping further away from front page view.

My newspapers had ended, as well. Five or six days of news which took place five years before I was born, even though it was still interesting, dried up because there were no more newspapers to be found in my attic.

Sunday was hell for me. No matter what I did that day my mind kept slipping back to the accounts I read the day before. I do love a good mystery, but once I hear of one I hate not getting to the bottom of it. To say I lived within a daze that Sunday might be taking it a bit far, but I certainly was a little distracted. At times of irritation or unsettled thoughts, I have learned to simply realize that, "there is much I do not know about what I do not know." Most generally that thought helps me to remember there is always a side of things I am unaware of, but that Sunday, considering the discomfort I had been through the day before, it galled me more to not know what I did not know.

Monday lunchtime I slipped out of work a half hour early to sit in front of a microfilm machine at the local library. I learned a lot that day about newspaper microfilm storage and cataloging of that time. Each canister of newspaper microfilm holds three months worth of daily and Sunday newspapers, starting in January, April, July and October. I also learned that if you have never operated one of those two crank wheeled machines you

cannot fully appreciate the work involved. The older machines seem to work, logically speaking, backwards and, as well, moves back and forth, in and out and run both left and right to be able to cover the whole open pages of the paper two at a time. The machines also have the ability to magnify and print out copies of articles on standard size copy paper, as well.

At first, I had to wait because the *Boston Traveler* had not been published since I could remember, and the microfilm was not readily available. It had been placed in deep storage and had to be located. Once found, the reference librarian and I had to find a machine working properly, a machine without a blown bulb or jammed cranking wheels. As it turned out that was a larger task than finding the microfilm.

I started at the next day's publication of the last date I had found in the attic. In that follow up story the police revealed that they had uncovered a suicide note. They had found it in the ashtray of the missing woman's car.

Suicide! The police had held out the existence of a suicide note hoping she could be found still alive. At first, I felt cheated. Suicide? Had I gotten all worked up over a suicide? I am glad I did not throw the machine through the large open library window I sat near before I finished reading the rest of the day's story. The police did not believe the note and that was the biggest reason they had held it back from the public. Simply put, no one wanted to accept that as a way for this woman to be thinking. "She doesn't fit that bill," investigators frankly answered when asked by reporters.

I read an entire week's worth of newspapers. I had traveled back in time to mid July of 1947, Monday through to the following Saturday, each report getting shorter and shorter. When I started reading again at the next Monday the story was not in the paper at all. I sat at the machine aghast. I rushed through Tuesday, then Wednesday, slipping without hesitation on to Thursday and Friday and found no mention of the woman's disappearance.

I was getting ready to try the *Boston Globe* microfilms and see if they had treated the story differently than the *Traveler* had. Though I was frustrated, and late getting back to work, I hung on and twisted the cranks of the viewer again and boldly jumped into Saturday's news, most of which were recaps of the week's biggest stories.

On page sixty two, beyond the classified advertisements, the help wanted section and just before the sports sections, which, by the way, seemed to cover the American League Boston Red Sox action in far greater detail than they did the National League Boston Braves standings, I found a short article scantily reprising what had been earlier reported a whole week before. I took my time and read the entire article. As I was reaching the end of this summation I had a feeling I was not going to be satisfied with the outcome of it all; I was right. Two days before, on Thursday of that week, the woman simply showed up at home. For some reason she needed a time out from life, a "get-a-way", and not knowing what else to do, simply left; leaving house, car, husband and kids behind to fend for themselves.

At the time all this activity took place, 1947, a woman packing up and leaving her family, to run and hide, got completely different treatment than it would today. I experienced two reactions from this news. Though I suppose I was relieved that the woman had returned alive and well, the sensation seeker in me felt resentful by the outcome. However, as I sat there looking at the viewer screen, I remember feeling for the woman. But, what did I feel exactly? I did not know and putting it into words, even now, would be difficult.

1947 – it was 1980 when I was looking over these events and it was with 1980 responsiveness that I was judging what life must have been like. In 1947 outhouses were still in common use in many places, trains were the preferred way to travel, supermarkets were still a few years from coming into vogue, hardware stores were the hub of the community and places where knit knacks, nails and guitar strings could still be found under one roof and women did not simply leave their homes and families, not even with good reason.

What was I feeling? I sat in front of that viewer screen staring at it as though I did not have a place to be and a day's work to accomplish. My world had stopped for the moment. What had this woman's life been like for her to muster that courage to walk away from it; was she sick, abused, depressed? The newspaper never summed up the account adequately. I feel very much the same today as I did then; I am embarrassed for my gender. Oh, I can fix stuff and mow a lawn, build a set of stairs and add insulation to an attic that needs it, but so can any woman. I do agree that women and men look at life a little differently and our priorities differ at times from one another's, but in the big picture our important values are greatly the same, though I would not want to generalize beyond that, because there are always exceptions to every rule.

It is odd that the mystery I tried to follow up should lead me in another direction completely. It was a simple distraction in life. It dragged me, willingly, to be solved. How easily we can be driven from our paths. It is easy to see that the situation created a new awareness in me. Like tumbling dominos, one thing leads to another. I suppose I will never find out what happened to the poor woman in the story and maybe that is the way it is supposed to be; I do not know. However, I can say with certainty that I am glad I happened on the story and that it gave me the opening to see and think and feel something differently. There really is more than one side, or truth, to all sorts of circumstances.



**Let me Know what you think.**  
Either leave a REVIEW with AMAZON.com  
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