

It was a quiet winter in Nashville, Kansas, my home town. It was February, and February is really something on the Great Plains, the wind is always there, snow may be blowing but beyond that, there is not too much else going on. One particularly dark and cold night, perhaps because of a sharp gust of wind, a local landmark was damaged. A small gilded concrete statue that has been up on the peak of the roof of the Figge-Bennet grocery store since, well, no one really remembers how or when the statue was installed. It's possible that some of the residents of Nashville may not have ever noticed the statue, the only one in the whole town, before. Possibly due to the constant wind or the rough sidewalk in front of the store, most people who come to town don't even look up. Among those who did notice one of whom was me as a young boy, got to see something very unusual on these God-fearing plains, it was a statue of a goddess, a nude goddess no less. She was CERES, the Greek goddess of the grains. She had a sheaf of wheat in one hand and sheaf of what might be oats in the other, and, well, not much else.

The morning after she fell from the roof there was the usual ring of older fellows in their heavy coats and the caps with the ear flaps down standing around sadly shaking their heads and trying agree upon the prognosis. The main thought was though, "Yep, she's all busted into too many pieces, there's just no way to put this thing back up". Some of them were not even sure that this glimpse of the other world was even an appropriate thing to have in such a Christian town, and town with two churches but only one bar. "Who knows, maybe she's some sort of bringer of bad luck?". They all agreed that it was really lucky that no one was walking down the sidewalk at the time though. Not that anyone has ever been seen on that sidewalk after dark, but that is another story. After all, old Red Lampe closes the only bar in town about 7 o'clock so he can go home and have dinner with his family. And a Kansas night in February in a town with narry a single streetlight is particularly dark.

No one knows exactly whether it was the darkness, or the particularly nasty cold of this winter, but my uncle Walter was feeling particularly bad this year so he decided to do something he had never done before. Get on an airplane to someplace warm. For no particular reason, he ended up with a ticket to New Orleans. Maybe he was wanted to go see the Mardi Gras before he passed away, but we all think that he got it because it was only \$125 and he is a very stingy person. As it turns out, things changed as they can do. Maybe he started feeling better, who knows, but he ended up selling his ticket to my uncle Herman, who really did want to go and who also happened to be feeling a bit lower than normal from the cold weather and snow.

During one of several layovers (it was a very cheap ticket) uncle Herman was reboarding the plane but got stopped by security. I think it was because he always looks sort of guilty, maybe it's a farmer thing, maybe a Midwestern thing or even a remnant of the German-American thing, who knows. By the time they let him go he had missed his no-frills, no-changes flight and it ended up costing him another \$432 to get there. But what he found in New Orleans made it worthwhile.

On a night visit to the French Quarter, he happened into a nightclub where an enormously large black bluesman was playing guitar and singing. This man had had just about everything bad than can happen in one lifetime happen to him. He sang about lost love, failure, bad times and too much drinking. Uncle Herman, who had spun the flywheel of many a John Deere A tractor, even plowed behind a big mule, had never seen a man with hands as big as his own. As he looked at the big bluesman, with his big belly and thick glasses, the man who WAS February incarnate, Uncle Herman realized something big. He realized right there and then what must be done.

When he got back home, he knew he was going to have to go out behind the Figge-Bennet grocery store and find all the pieces of that little statue. He didn't know why, but he knew that it just had to be done. That statue needed to be put back together, covered again with a new coat of gold paint, and put right back up there where she had always been. He found that in spite of the obstacles, even in February, life can, and must, go on. And that's the way it is in Nashville, Kansas where all the men grow wheat, all the women can drive the trucks and all the children learn to behave.