

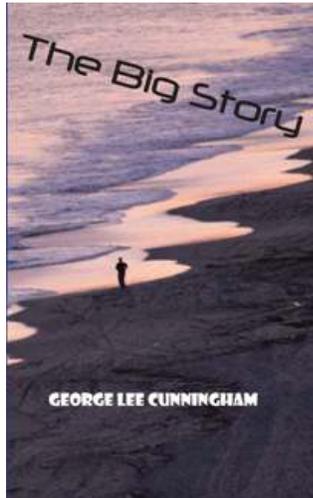
Taking a Second Look at ‘The Big Story’

By George Cunningham

What do you do when a piece of your past walks in the door and thumps you on the head? You can wince, lock it back in the better-left-forgotten file, and walk away. Or you can embrace it, get reacquainted, and make it a part of who you are now.

I thought about the first, but I chose the second.

The piece of my past that came back to haunt me is a trashy novel I wrote half-a-lifetime ago, but never published. I wrote it because I liked trashy novels, I always wanted to write a trashy novel, and I had an idea for a novel that would not only be trashy, but also funny.



I called it “The Big Story” and it was about a reporter who tracks down a big story about corruption, but can’t get his newspaper to pursue it. The reporter, Hubert Lee Cudahy, was a composite of a lot of the characters I worked with in the newsrooms of that era, including a little bit of myself. And I sprinkled in a lot of the color and stories that my fellow reporters and I would talk about over drinks after we turned in our copy for the day.

As I wrote *The Big Story*, I would sometimes find myself laughing out loud over the story and the characters in it. But after I wrote it, I began to have second thoughts.

You make up a story and you write it down and you have a vested interest in telling that story to other people. But what if they don’t like it? It’s like going to a pot-luck dinner and everybody is digging into other people’s offerings, but your tuna casserole is sitting there untouched and unwanted. I didn’t want “The Big Story” to be tuna casserole.

But even before you get that far, you have to convince a publisher to publish it. The more I thought about shopping my book around, the less I liked the idea. And I had plenty of other things to write about in my day job as a reporter, so I never did anything with my book after I wrote it.

I just walked away from it and went back to work. It was a stupid and cowardly thing to do, but that’s how it stood for more than 35 years.

Then, not that long ago, my wife Carmela was going through some old papers and found the manuscript for *The Big Story*. She dusted it off, wrapped it up in festive

paper, and presented it to me as a gift. It was a surprise and it was fun, but I still didn't seriously think about doing anything more with it.

Then I read it.

Pretty soon I started laughing as I read. It didn't feel like I had written it. It felt like it was written by somebody else, and in a way it was. It was written by a younger and less stuffy me. I enjoyed the story and beyond that I enjoyed meeting the young man that I once was, through the trashy and funny novel that he wrote.

Still, it never occurred to me to do anything more with *The Big Story* than read it, enjoy it, and maybe pass it along to some close friends to read. For one thing, it was terribly dated. It was written about being a reporter in the early '70s.

Cudahy wrote his stories on a typewriter. There was no internet to look things up on or any electronic database to check old stories. Spell check was a bright red copy of Webster's sitting on his desk right next to the glue pot and scissors that were used to move paragraphs around in a story. The stories were written on paper and edited with pencils. When Cudahy was out of the office he was out of contact unless he called in, usually on a pay phone. The newspaper library was still called the morgue and reporters signified that it was the end of a story by typing "-30-" at the bottom of the copy.

One of the people I shared the manuscript with was our 18-year-old niece, who noted very seriously that I must have done a lot of research to recreate in such detail how newspapers worked in the olden days. I took it as a compliment.

I briefly considered updating the story to the present time, but decided against it. It was written at a time when working for a newspaper was a lot of fun. It's not so much fun anymore.

Besides, the story was written by the young George. I like it, but it's not a story I would write now. If young George's story is going to be told, it has to be in his own time and place. And the time and place has a certain nostalgic charm to it.

We did clean the manuscript up. We corrected the typos and the grammar, we tweaked the language here and there to make it clearer, and we looked for inconsistencies. But we did not attempt to update the style or the atmosphere of the story.

Cudahy is no saint. He is full of himself. He is arrogant, and know-it-all, and quite a pain in the ass. In fact, he reminds me somewhat of young George.

If Cudahy worked for me, I would probably fire him just on general principles and hire somebody who did what I told them to do. But he was also the kind of guy I would probably hire back the next day.

I just hope folks enjoy reading *The Big Story* as much as I enjoyed writing it, walking away from it, and rediscovering it. Maybe books, like love, are better the second time around.

The Big Story is now [available for purchase](#) online at the Barnes and Noble website. It should be listed on Amazon shortly.

You can contact George Cunningham at george@readerpublishing.com be his friend on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=747454750> and read his tweets at <http://twitter.com/#!/GeoCunham> His novel, *The Big Story*, is due out this fall. To be added to the Reader Publication list for new articles and pictures, email george@readerpublishing.com and say "sign me up." It's free!