

[Their Lists Long, Their Spreadsheets Lost](#) [1]

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Story by Judy T. Oldfield

Finalist for the 2016 Talking Writing Prize for Flash Fiction of the Absurd



On the day the office burned down and everyone died, a man in no-brand jeans came and finally fixed the wobble in the elevator door that had made everyone so nervous.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Jen—the one with the curly hair, not Tall Jen—laughed so hard at Penelope's joke that she spilled coffee on her dress and had to go home during lunch to change.

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Published on Talking Writing (<https://mail.talkingwriting.com>)

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Joe from Client Services put in a ticket to IT for a new wireless mouse, because he thought the wires made his desk too messy.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, the carpet needed vacuuming again already.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Sita's to-do list was 23 items long.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Cesar watered the orchid and the succulents on the window of Chris's office because Chris was in Puerto Vallarta on vacation. Cesar felt a draft coming from the window and knew that it was solidly fall and moved the plants over to Chris's desk so they wouldn't catch a chill.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Mike, the CTO, called Victor into his office and fired him, and while both made a fuss and angry words were exchanged, they both secretly thought this was the best part of their whole day.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Rochelle refilled the basket of candy on her desk with sour candies. That ungrateful prick Roger complained when his tongue turned blue.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, a sign in the tech bay read *It's been 16 days since the last royal fuck-up*.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Jane walked into Tony's office with confidence and precision and asked for a raise, and before she was even done making her case, Tony agreed.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Mark physically bumped into Valerie in the hallway for the third time that week. He did it on purpose.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Kyle looked out the window at the falling leaves and sighed.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, six inches of painter's tape still hung in the corner of Meeting Room C, left over from the coat of Soft Marigold that had gone up last year.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Owen tried to recover a spreadsheet after his computer crashed. It took him four hours to redo the lost work.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Jolene dropped one earbud in her cup of water and had to listen to the prattle of her officemates instead.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Sarah presented her analysis to Kai, the VP of Sales, who played with his phone during the entire meeting.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Rosh thought, "That's it, I'm retiring," for the forty-seventh day straight.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, the second stall in the men's bathroom sprung a leak.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Jake ate ramen for lunch rather than joining his team at the local grill.

On the day the office burned down and everyone died, Maureen, the CEO, announced that the whole company would go to the baseball game next week as a team-building exercise.

Art Information

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Judy T. Oldfield's work has appeared in the *Portland Review*, *Passages North*, *Gravel*, *So to Speak*, *Cleaver*, and many others. She grew up in the metro Detroit area and earned her B.A. in English and Comparative Religion from Western Michigan University. Since that time, she has lived in Seattle, where she is engaged in an ongoing battle with the invasive Himalayan blackberries in her backyard.

Visit Judy Oldfield on Twitter [@J_T_Oldfield](#) [5].

Of the inspiration for this story, Judy writes:

I wrote the first draft of this piece in a class on surrealism at the Hugo House in Seattle led by Jarret Middleton (author of *An Dantomine Eerly* and *Darkansas*). The prompt was to create an event and not address it. I'm fond of lists and experimental ways of storytelling, and combined those two restrictions. By focusing on mundane details, it's both a very relatable and very dark piece.

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