

## Vintage Mooney Group - Toys For Tots - Paso Robles 2010

### The Planning Segment:

There was a VMG Toys For Tots fly-in scheduled for today and I knew about it a long time ago. In fact, Sandy emailed me over a month ago that she wanted to come with me. What a welcome surprise. She had gone flying with me 4 times before including destinations in bitter cold wind at Lancaster and terrible heat at Porterville. We also went to Big Bear one day. Then, well over a year passed since we had flown together or seen each other. Sounded like a good day was coming.



The screenshot shows the website for the Vintage Mooney Group. On the left is the group's logo, featuring a white eagle with wings spread, perched on a red and white striped base with blue stars, and the text "VINTAGE MOONEY GROUP" above and "WESTERN USA" below. To the right of the logo is a navigation menu with links: [Home](#), [Past Fly-Ins](#), [Members](#), [Destinations](#), [About Us](#), and [Links](#). Further right, the event title "Toys for Tots at Paso Robles, CA" is displayed in blue, with the date "December 4, 2010" in red. Below this, there are links for "Register Here" and "View the Registration List to see who's coming!". The main content area has a light blue background and contains a message to "Dear Vintage Mooney Flyers," followed by an invitation to a fly-in event. It mentions a lunchtime speaker, "Captain Mark 'Mutha' Hubbard, Commander Strike Fighter Wing Pacific," and provides a link for his bio. Below this is a "Schedule of Events" section for "SATURDAY" with two time slots: "10:00am-2:00pm" for general arrivals and toy collection, and "11:30" for a free BBQ lunch for pilots. To the right of the text is an aerial photograph of the Paso Robles airport.

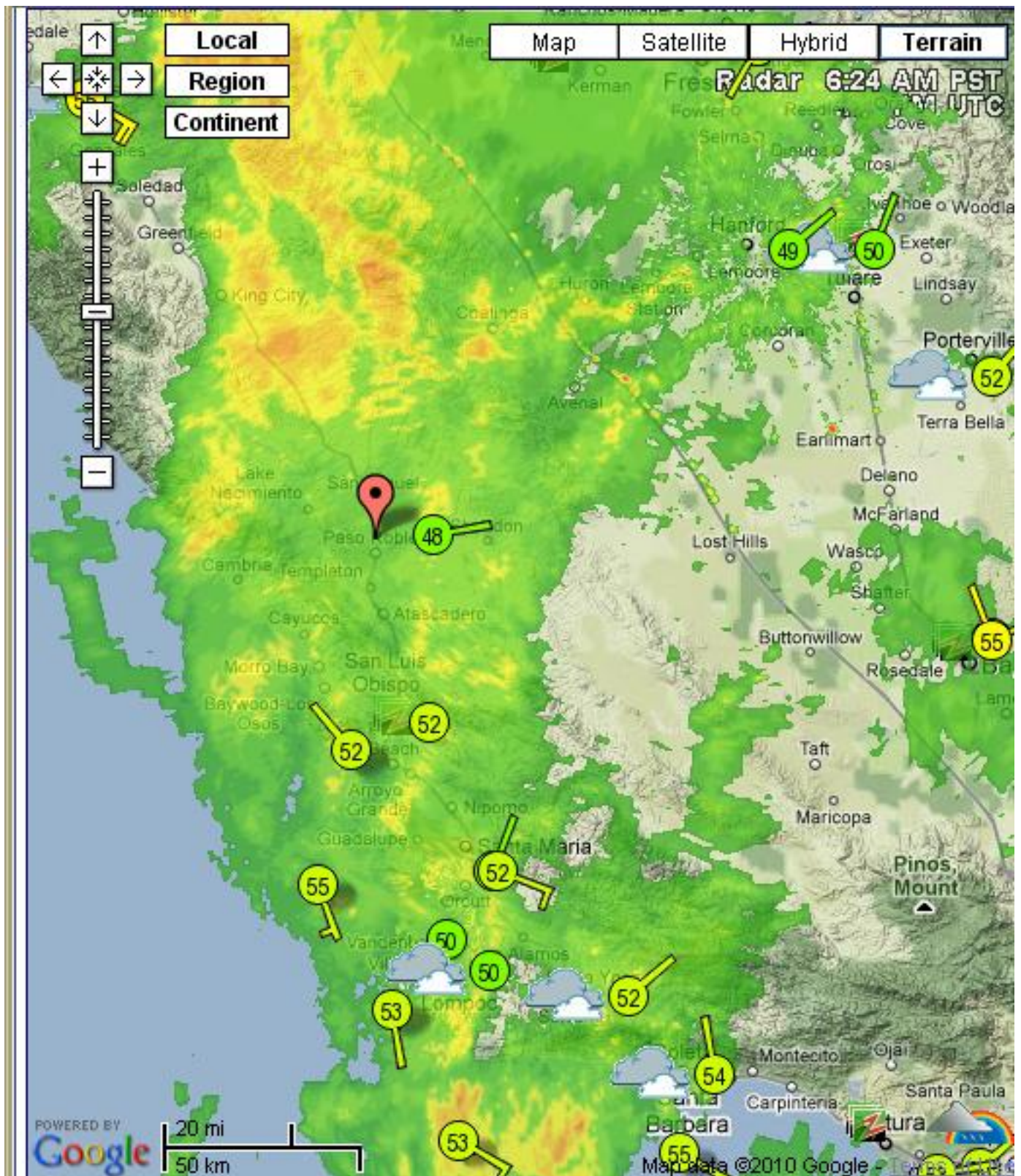
From The Vintage Mooney Group Web page about today's activities

Sandy had already purchased the toys and we both really wanted to go there for the annual Vintage Mooney Group Toys For Tots fly-in. I had planned the route and printed up my airport info page for Paso Robles. I was ready and waiting to again greet my good friend and fun fly-buddy.

No one will believe this, but I was up checking the weather at 5:15 and again at 6:25 this morning. Both times it looked really yucky. Paso Robles (PRB) was right in the middle of a rainstorm based on Nexrad radar. A big rainstorm, not a couple of showers. Paso Robles is pointed out by a red marker in the screen shots below thanks to <http://www.wunderground.com>. My flight plan is courtesy of <http://www.runwayfinder.com/>. What did we ever do without these great websites ~ Hmmm.

I later learned that this weather had deterred about 60% of the pilots that had signed up to fly-in today. This includes two of my good VMG friends from the nearby Chino airport. I missed you guys.

PRB at 6:24 AM



I sure hated to dash Sandy's plans but I never fly somewhere that I don't think is safe

I hit the pillow again even though I shut down quite early at 10 PM the previous night. I finally got up after 7 and checked the weather again. The rain had moved considerably to the northeast. I liked that, no umbrella will be needed there when we arrive.

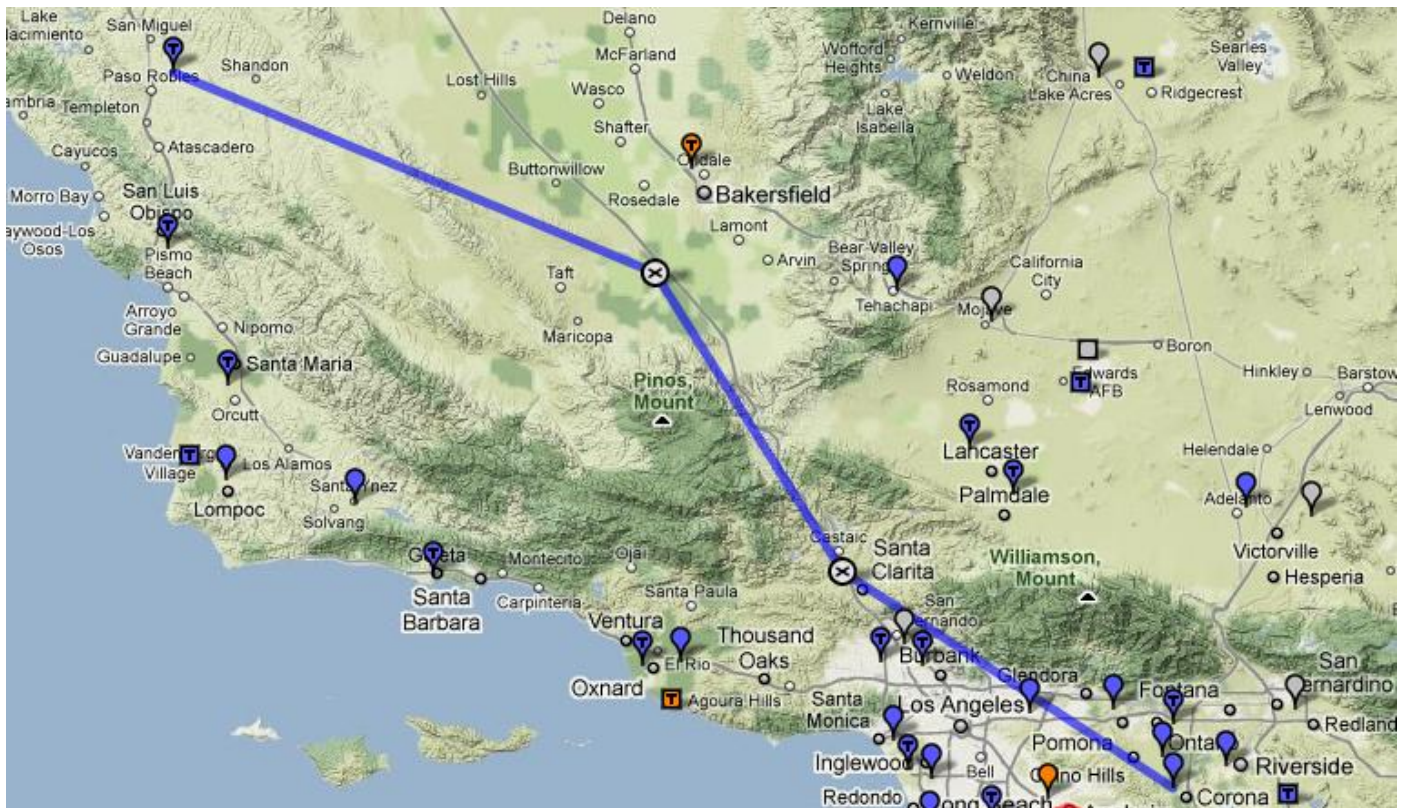


Time for coffee, we are going flying today, I think!

The Flying Segment:

I did my weather check with the FAA weather briefer and it sounded like it might work, but that rain was drifting to the Northeast and I was arriving from the Southeast so I still had to fly through it, right? Hitting rain at 170 MPH is just a free wash job, right? Plus, I had a plan B in mind if I didn't like what I saw in front of us later. So we launched. After 5 minutes, I pretty much had the airplane configured, trimmed out, and pointed in the correct direction to avoid Chino's Class D airspace while making my initial contact with Air Traffic Control for Flight Following. Today, I kept hand flying for a little while and watching all around for traffic (nearby airplanes, not the cars below).

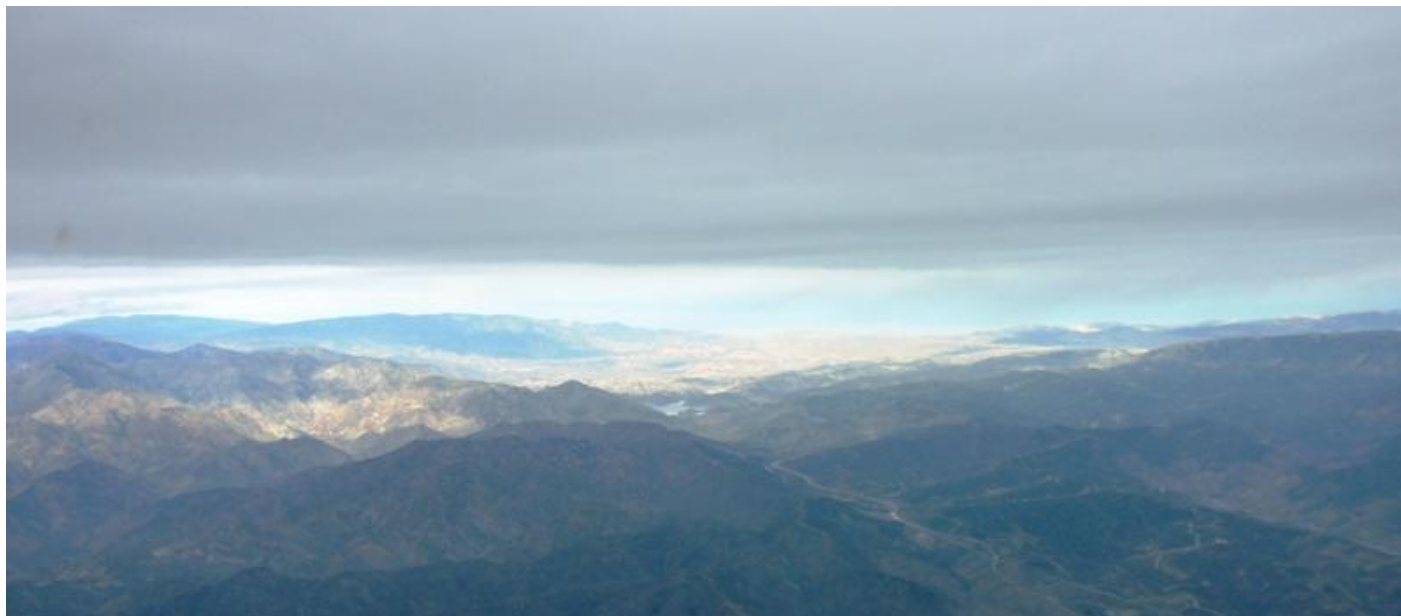
Up, and away towards El Monte and beyond. We skirted just south of the San Gabriels and leveled off at 8,500 feet above sea level. The Air Traffic Control radio was buzzing like a machine gun and I kept getting transferred to another sector every 10 minutes. I turned the auto pilot on. I was way more busy with the radio than with the airplane. It was crazy out there this morning. I hardly had time to flirt with Sandy. I was glad I had taken the time to put my flight plan into my GPS before departing.



It was a dog leg route to avoid the higher terrain (darker green) instead of just a straight line. It is 189 nm instead of 183 nm for a straight line flight plan and that sure worked out for me today. First of all, an extra 6 nautical miles is only 2 ½ minutes in a Mooney. Second, with today's clouds, I could not safely fly higher. I was plenty high above the people below us. We just cruised along at 8,500 feet.



This gray blanket of overcast was above us and any higher would have put us in a really bad place



We went on and it got better, areas of sunshine were showing on the ground ahead

I have a subscription to real-time weather downloads on my 496 GPS which shows the same Nexrad radar images as above, or as you see on TV. It showed a huge hole in the rainstorm 50 miles in front of us. We flew through a little light rain for 10 seconds, and if I wouldn't have mentioned it, Sandy might have missed it. In just another five seconds, the windscreen was dry again.

We started to let down about 45 miles out for a gentle descent and found our way to an almost perfect landing, rolled out and turned left to Phil's hangar as we did the first time he held a VMG hangar BBQ years ago. There was no one around! Could the rain have scared everyone away? I decided to taxi almost a mile to the General Aviation ramp by the local FBO to get out and make a phone call. Just before I came to a stop, Sandy said something like "Look over there". I saw 5 - 6 Mooneys and someone waving at us from half a block away. We taxied over there and parked. ☺

#### The Mooney Arrival Segment:

Sandy got out and was immediately greeted by Phil. They had never met before. I finished my cockpit duties and soon fell out behind her. A handshake and a hug from Phil welcomed me to Paso. Phil's wife Linda was close behind with a grab bag of chocolates, a smile, and a VMG hug. We each took a chocolate and I put mine in my left front jeans pocket. Bad idea. Linda also told us that free coffee and doughnuts were over by the 'green awning' ahead. They helped us by carrying our toys inside. I held Sandy's shoulder for stability as we walked over to the group of 40 or more assembled in front of the 'Paso Robles Jet Center' FBO there. Oh man, that coffee was a great idea on that 55° day. Sandy chose hot chocolate. We shared a doughnut.

#### The VMG Ramp Time Segment:

I spotted Bruce and Cathy Smith from Las Vegas. I had shared a great day in Minden and Virginia City Nevada with them last summer on another great VMG fly-in weekend that I flew with Kent. I introduced Sandy, shook Bruce's hand, and hugged Cathy. That's how it works at our fly-ins.

We walked back out of the way so I could enjoy a smoke when a loud airplane taxied up to the ramp. It had a radial engine, a large wing, a tail wheel, two rudders, was designed and built in France in the World War II era, and only a few are left flying, especially in America. I grabbed my camera.



Instead of walking over, I zoomed in

Our Lunch Time Segment:

A local restaurateur had come out with his BBQ machine and was cooking for us right there on the ramp. The tables set up nearby would seat about 20 people. I knew from where we were standing in line that we would not make the cut. Turned out that was a good thing. There was plenty more seating right inside with comfy chairs and a warmer temp. They served veggies, salad, toasted garlic bread, beans, and awesome tri-tip cooked to perfection. All hosted for us. We were loving it.



At our lunch table, one of our table mates snapped a shot of us loving life today.

After Lunch:



The comparatively few of us this day still brought along a great assembly of Toys For Tots



The FBO's sign on a curved wall is classy



Phil's M20S(#2), my M20J, and good old airplane watching & ramp chatter when pilots congregate



### The Departure Segment:

We said our goodbyes and with smiles and hugs, and departed our good friends again. Puddles remained from the morning's rain but mostly everywhere was dry. I assessed the sky 'over there'. Looked better, at least from the ground. I walked around, checked fuel, usual stuff, & with a boost, I was again launched up upon the wing of my trusty steed, and inside I fell, landing in my seat. How fortuitous. After 3 tries, the engine fired and we were off to runway 19 after waiting for a CHP Cessna taxiing the other way. Trim and flaps set, mags and prop checked out, we launched again. I was planning on an initial cruise at 7,500 feet above sea level, but upon reaching 5,500, I knew that the clouds close above us dictated otherwise. The terrain below was low and so I was comfy at 5,500 for a while. It was time to get back on the radio with ATC for Flight Following again. Another 15 seconds of rain on the windscreen. And so it went until I saw a thick gray rain shaft over there.





It was sort of eerie with the sunlight shining at an angle

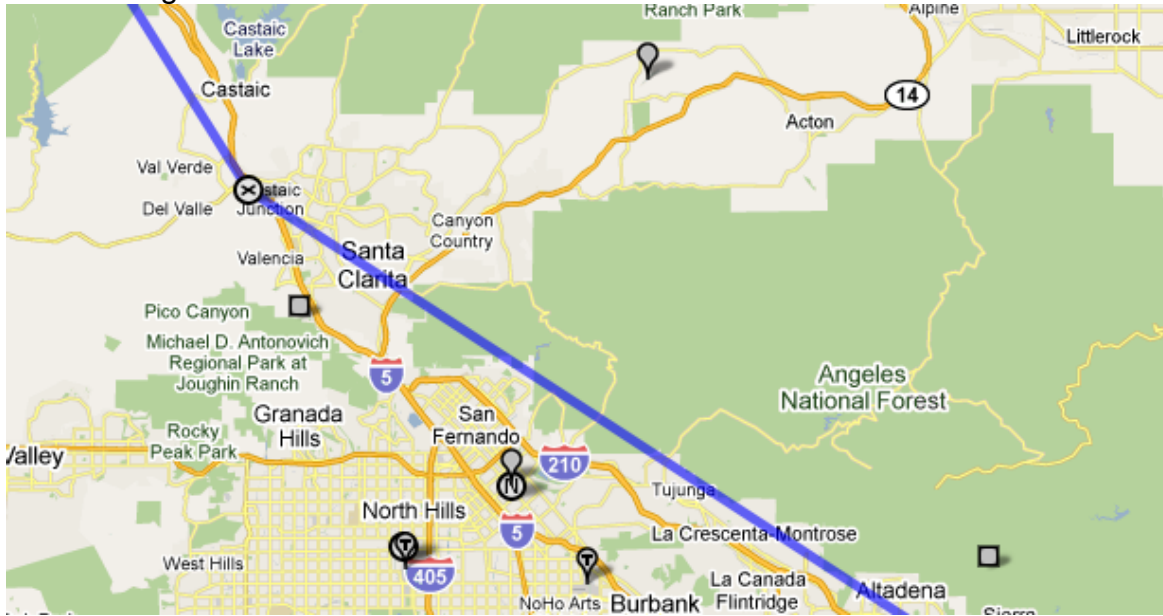
Bad News and Good News:

In a while, we would be coming up on the area all drivers know as The Grapevine, and I knew I would have to climb higher than 5,500. The good news is that the overcast clouds were higher over here which easily afforded us room to climb and still be safely under them. Once we were at 7,500, we were high enough to easily cruise through the area, and on to home.



The clouds started to break up but it sure was hazy down there in the southern San Joaquin Valley

## The last Leg:



Just before Santa Clarita, it was time to turn left to a mag heading of  $121^\circ$  and soon we could start our descent as the terrain fell down to the LA Basin floor. From there, Google maps shows a driving time of an hour and a half to 2 ½ hours or more depending on traffic. My GPS displayed an ETE of 13 minutes to Corona at 210 MPH. Another great 460 mile round trip VMG fly-in. Thanks Sandy.



Thanks to Linda and Phil Corman, our hosts for the fly-in, kneeling in front  
Group shot from Phil's collection, more here <http://picasaweb.google.com/philcorman/VMGToysForTots#>

**Dedicated to the memory of Kent Harclerode, personal friend and fly-buddy of mine.**

Ed Shreffler

12/4/2010

Email me at: [eshreffler@sbcglobal.net](mailto:eshreffler@sbcglobal.net)

More of my stories are at: <http://www.mooneyevents.com/shreffler.html>