

Tarpley Greathouse: Story of a Ridiculous Typewriter Man*

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (March 2025)



Tarpley Greathouse is a ridiculous man. This is what some of his neighbors and associates say.

“Mr. Greathouse is a ridiculous man. Why should he think of himself otherwise? What kind of man does not like cats?” Tarpley once overheard two ladies congratulating themselves.

“There must be something to this,” Tarpley told them the next time he saw the ladies at the local grocery, “if a man lacks the ability to see himself from within, and others can verify this, then I guess I am a ridiculous man. According to you, Tarpley must see himself reflected in the sensations of other people. What do you think I am missing? What is it that I can’t see, ladies?” he asked, trying to hold back a smile. Since that day, the two ladies avoid him.

Besides being considered a ridiculous man, Tarpley is also a humble man.

Once he walks outside his modest brownstone, Brooklyn takes on a joyous face for him. That is, if a city or neighbor ever reveal their true face.

Walking on the sidewalk, Tarpley greets neighbors amicably, says hello to ladies and male friends going about their daily chores. He greets people walking dogs. He is equally congenial to people as he is to dogs. The people he meets on his walks are friendly to him, so are the dogs. Some of the dogs that people walk up and down his block are young, friendly pups that haven’t got to know Tarpley yet.

Well, all except one toy dog name Mini, the darling of a self-absorbed, cellular phone-carrying hipster of about thirty-five who never takes notice of any neighbor.

On rare occasions does a neighborhood dog growl or bark at Tarpley. Except, Mini. Tarpley, the ridiculous typewriter man, never takes anything personally. He entertains himself by trying to figure out the reasons why people and dogs do what they do. This is a kind of sport, an amusement for Tarpley. He merely smiles and goes about his walks.

On Mrs. Witherspoon's 78th birthday, Tarpley found himself in Mrs. Witherspoon's living room, in the company of her friends, of which he only knew a few. Tarpley's wife remained home with a slight cold.

The party guests are Mrs. Witherspoon's neighbors and friends, most who live in Mrs. Witherspoon's apartment building, the building next to Tarpley's.

"It was a skip and hop getting here," he told one of the party guests, "I like this kind of gathering. If only all parties were this..." Tarpley was interrupted by an overfed boy of about nine years of age.

"Mr. Tarpley, do you—" In turn, the boy was interrupted by his mother.

"Matthew, please. He is Mr. Greathouse."

"Ok. Mr. Greatstreet are you—"

"—Mr. Greathouse," the boy's mother corrected him.

"Yes, I said that. Are you older than my mother?"

"Matthew, please be polite. Mr. Greathouse is our neighbor from down the block."

"Yes, but is he older?"

Now it was Tarpley's turn to interrupt: "Your mother is a lovely young woman."

"Mother..."

"Yes, Matthew," the boy's mother said, her countenance turning a shade redder than her face showed several questions back."

"Mama, why is Mr. Greatstreet—"

"Greathouse. The boy's mother corrected him again."

"Yes, that. But mama, how come he is older than dad?"

Getting up from his chair, Tarpley asked the boy: "Would you like more cake, Matthew? I can get you some."

"Cake, yeah. I want more cake, the boy said looking at his mother. While Tarpley walked away the boy turned to his mother: "Mama, why do they call Mr. Greatstreet the typewriter man?"

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Tarpley has lived in the same apartment since 1972, where he and his wife Margaret raised their two boys.

Greathouse Machines, Tarpley's typewriter repair shop, is three city blocks away on the same sidewalk from his apartment.

The little bells that hang from the doorknob rang; a visitor to the shop opened the door. A man in his late sixties, wearing a New York Mets baseball cap, walked in holding a case.

"Hello Tarpley. How you been?" the man asked, placing the case on the wooden counter.

"Hello Alfredo, Tarpley said. "Still going, as you can see. Which one you have for me today?" Tarpley asked the tall customer.

"The Remington Quiet-Riter. Nothing major, I think. A couple of keys are sticking," the man said.

"Let's take a look. This is a solid machine, Alfredo. Well built. It's as good as they were made. It's been a while since you brought me this one. Let's dust it a bit."

After cleaning the typewriter, Tarpley placed a sheet of paper

in the platen roller, rolled the paper in, and began to type:

*The cat jumped over the stone two times in half a minute.
Why did the cat jump over the stone? Well, we'll just have
to figure this cat to be a fool.*

"Not bad Alfredo. The 't' and 'h' keys are sticking. I can take care of that. I'll have to clean the type slugs. I think that should do the trick. Remember, no heavy oils; only rubbing alcohol or mineral spirits for these loyal machines." Tarpley said, adjusting the margins.

"I see you're still writing about foolish cats," Alfredo remarked, "no 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' for you, eh?"

"That's typewriter repairman lingo. It's too predictable. It's a pangram, a sentence that contains all the letters of the alphabet. That sentence is used to test the keys, also to teach people to type. I prefer to have fun with cats and the meaning of words. Some ladies that come in the shop do not like it when I write about cats, especially younger ones that don't know me. They tell their friends about me writing about cats. You can only imagine what happens next. Do you know how much fun I have with this? You know, human nature. I think it says much about cat owners," Tarpley said. "Not long ago," he continued, "one of the ladies took offense and asked me if I could type something else. I did. I typed another pangram about drinking: 'Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs.' She thought that one was funny."

"Can't imagine the customer," Alfredo said, laughing.

"Stay here a while and see what happens. Let's type a little more and see if I took care of the problem":

The cat was a first offender. Mischievous, wily. What else

can I say? Cats come in all shapes, sizes. But why make the cat ladies angry? Cat ladies are a different breed; closer to cats than humans, some people suggest.

Type something, Alfredo. Tarpley said, turning the typewriter to face its owner. Alfredo let out a chuckle:

You're still numero uno, Tarpley. A class act cat.

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After Alfredo left, Tarpley began to repair and clean some typewriters that he placed on the counter. A 1952 Royal Quiet Deluxe needed light lubrication and a 1964 Smith Corona Sterling 12 that belongs to a local writer needed cleaning and a new ribbon.

Tarpley enjoys working on all typewriters, but he has a soft spot for sturdy standard typewriters that were the workhorse of writers and secretaries during the first half of the twentieth century. Some of his favorites are the Underwood Model 5 from the beginning of the twentieth century and the mid-century Smith Corona Secretarial.

Tarpley looked out the front window. Light rain began to fall. No customers came in the shop for the next hour. Once he finished working on the typewriters, Tarpley began to type to test them. Through the years, this practice led to his writing of short passages that he eventually elongated into short paragraphs that he likes to call 'ridiculous disconnected tales.'

All of Tarpley's ridiculous disconnected tales have a theme. He has written about wild mavericks on the plains and sailors who never want to see another port, desiring to stay out at sea, in addition to scrappy baseball players from a previous era. Though, his favorite and most enjoyable ridiculous disconnected tales involve typewriters, playing with words, and cats.

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Tarpley began typing on a 1961 Smith Corona Coronet electric typewriter. He loved the rapid-fire clanking sound of the electric machines:

The old dog cannot keep up with the young cat. The old dog tried running after the cat. The dog wanted to smother the cat with play as best as an old dog can smother a young cat. But, to no avail. The old dog was out of his league. The cat was wound up, electric, you could say. The dog turned his head, as if thinking: I've never seen anything like it, folks. Cats are crafty creatures.

Don't think for a moment they are stupid. The young cat was a real cat, he.

Well, I think this machine is cured of its ills, Tarpley thought.

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Saturday morning. The bells on the front door rang. Tarpley looked up. A woman that looked to be in her early thirties

walked in holding a portable black typewriter.

“Good morning, sir,” said the customer, “are you Mr. Greathouse?”

“Yes. Good morning,” Tarpley greeted her, “welcome.” The woman was a new customer.

“My name is Maria Fernandez. I was recommended to you by Charles Pritzker, the Principal of Saint Michael High School, just up the street.”

“Oh yes. Charlie is a typewriter enthusiast. He comes by regularly. Are you a teacher at the school?”

“Yes. I teach Spanish and Portuguese literature. I bought this typewriter at a consignment store several days ago. I’m really excited to type on it. I wonder if you can look at it and tell me how it’s working. Some of the keys are sticking.”

“Of course,” Tarpley said, placing the typewriter on the counter. “This is a beautiful machine. Remington Noiseless Model Seven from around 1938. You must like the old ones.”

“I have an Adler Tippa 1 my father gave me. When I saw this one, I knew I had to have it.”

“Yes. These are built to last forever. Let’s take a look.”

Tarpley left the two typewriters he was repairing on the counter, the papers he typed on were visible to the young woman. She looked at the papers, turning her head slightly to better read them.

“Cats. You like cats?” she asked.

“Cats? Oh, cats,” Tarpley reacted, looking up at the customer. “Not necessarily. I love dogs but enjoy writing about cats. Cats are too distant for my temperament.”

“I prefer dogs also. I have a small one. Though, I once had a

cat. Somewhat aloof.”

“Your machine is in good shape. It needs minor adjustments. If you leave it with me, I can have it for you this afternoon.”

“Perfect. I’m in no hurry. This is a funny short about the old dog and the young cat,” she said looking down on the typewriter on the counter, “did you write it?”

“I like to amuse myself while testing out the machines. Somehow cats get the attention of some of my customers.”

I have to admit that Mr. Pritzter told me to ask you about your infamous cats. This is funny, what you wrote here,” she said nodding at the typewriter on the counter.

“My regular customers know my quirks. Pritzter is one of them. You too, I imagine, might do so in time.”

“I like how you describe the young cat as a ‘real cat.’ You mean the way Sinatra talks about cats?”

“Absolutely. Even a cat can be a real cat, don’t you think?”

“Sure. The world is full of interesting cats, I’d say.”

“Now we are talking. You caught the spirit of the cats that visit this shop.”

The young woman broke out laughing. “Do you consider Cervantes a real cat?” she asked Tarpley.

“That rugged Spaniard was a genuine idealistic cat. Though, Sancho was the worldly cat of the two.”

“Federico Lorca, was he a cat?”

“Nah. Lorca could never be a cat.”

“As a little boy, my great grandfather, Blas Fernandez, travelled with his father by ship from Valladolid, Spain to

Cuba. Great granddad was a selfless family man who worked in the same factory for over fifty years. What a cat he was. Speaking of Valladolid, do you consider Miguel Delibes a real cat?"

"I can't say I know him."

"Writer, hunter, bicycle enthusiast, and family man. A real character, the type they don't make anymore."

"I'll take your word he's a Spanish cat."

"Speaking of cats," the woman continued, holding back laughter, "what about dogs that turn out to be real cats? I had a dog like that once. Are you familiar with Machado de Assis, the writer?" the young woman asked, smiling. She seemed to be enjoying herself.

"Oh, yes. The philosopher who gets lessons about life and living from his faithful dog. That one?"

"Yea. *Philosopher or Dog?* Doesn't get more wonderful and funnier than that. That book introduced me to the idea that 'God writes straight on crooked lines.' I teach a few of these literary cats to my students. The best writers teach us much about the meaning of language, the importance of words."

"Absolutely," Tarpley said.

Anyhow, Mr. Greathouse, it's been a real pleasure meeting you. Thank you for the laughs. I'll return in the evening. I'll mention to Mr. Priztzer that I brought you the typewriter."

After the young woman left, Tarpley began working on her Remington.

She may be a real cat herself, he thought.

Looking good, Tarpley thought, beginning to type on the young woman's Remington:

The man that was a man's man and the cat that was a real cat made history. The man taught the Calico to swim upside down on the man's small pool. What kind of cat swims upside down? Not a fool, but a real cat. That's what I say. Some people may even ask, what kind of man teaches a cat to swim upside down? I guess both of them are heroes of the impossible. Real cats. How else to describe them?

Someone was knocking on the front glass window of the store. Tarpley looked up from his typing. The overfed boy and his mother from Ms. Witherspoon's party were waving at him. The boy's smile stretched from ear to ear, his cheeks round and ruddy. Tarpley waved back. He could hear the boy say, *Mama, its Mr. Greatstreet*. The boy motioned to his mother to turn back and enter the store. The woman held his hand and continued waving at Tarpley; they both walked out of view.

Tarpley returned to typing on the Remington Noiseless Model Seven:

Can an overfed boy ever become a real cat? Stranger things have happened in our world. First, the boy must learn the difference between a house and a street. That will teach him the meaning of words. Secondly, he will have to learn that words deliver us to what is real— people and places. Personality is real. All real cats have it.

*This story first saw the light of day on a 1979 Silver Reed 750 typewriter and was completed on a 1967 Smith Corona

Galaxie Deluxe.

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Pedro Blas González is Professor of Philosophy in Florida. He earned his doctoral degree in Philosophy at DePaul University in 1995. Dr. González has published extensively on leading Spanish philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno. His books have included [Unamuno: A Lyrical Essay](#), [Ortega's 'Revolt of the Masses' and the Triumph of the New Man](#), [Fragments: Essays in Subjectivity, Individuality and Autonomy](#) and [Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega's Philosophy of Subjectivity](#). He also published a translation and introduction of José Ortega y Gasset's last work to appear in English, "Medio siglo de Filosofía" (1951) in [Philosophy Today](#) Vol. 42 Issue 2 (Summer 1998). His most recent book is [Philosophical Perspective on Cinema](#).

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