

Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH



Ghostly Shade of Pale

A Southern Crime Thriller

Big Chief

A true Native American Hero

Bitter Harvest

A short story

Tale of Three Women

Cruising with three sisters

Lisa Love's Life

Where humor and reality hang out

Sea Song

Danger on the water

Stewart Iron Works

From the Panama Canal to Ft. Knox

Mountain Front

An East Tennessee WWII short story

The Unbroken Circle

Remembering a long-time friend

Around Here

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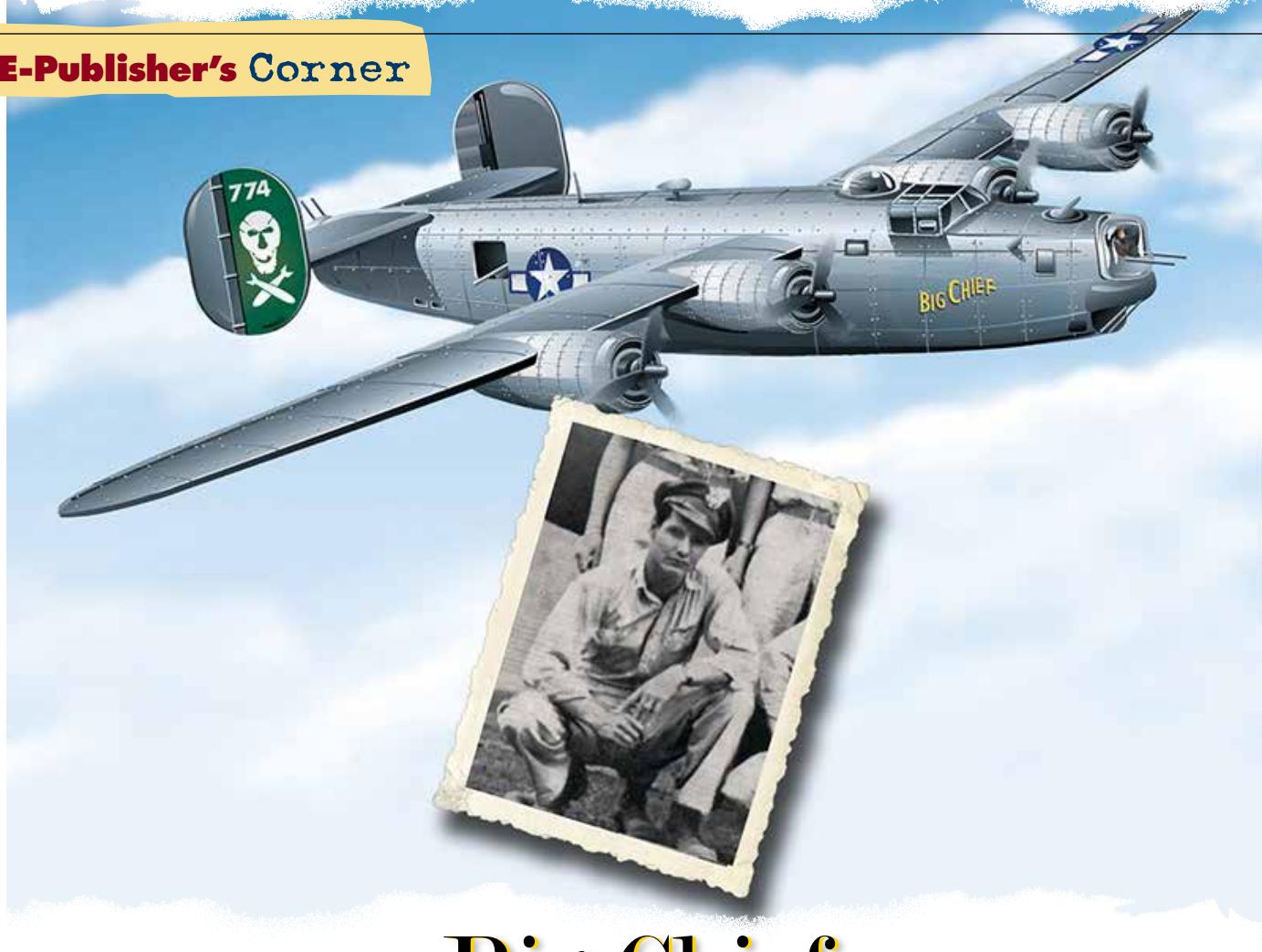
Fishing

Special times with PaPa

The Country Store

The original Southern grocery

—davidshinner—



Big Chief

A

fter my dad's death in December 1997, I began writing the songs that would eventually evolve into a WWII-based concept CD about him, his B-24 crew (*Jasper's Jokers*) and their heavy bomb group, the infamous *Jolly Rogers*.

In early 1998, I talked on the phone with the Jolly Rogers' historian, Wiley O. Woods, Jr., and he asked me if my dad had ever mentioned Captain Leaford Bearskin, who was a pilot in my dad's squadron. "If you're writing songs about the Jolly Rogers," Wiley said, "You may want to talk to him—he's got plenty of stories. Here's his phone number in Oklahoma."

Wiley was right; Leaford Bearskin was a treasure trove of adventures, and his life was a song just waiting to be written. All I had to do was make it rhyme. Bearskin had been born a Wyandotte Indian in the territory of the Wyandotte Nation in northeast Oklahoma. Right after high school,

he had joined the Army Air Corps (it would become the Air Force after the war). "I always wanted to fly," he told me when I called, "and I always wanted to serve my country."

To picture the mindset of America in the early '40s with regard to their impression of Native Americans, all you have to do is check out a black-and-white Western movie from that time period. The Indian warriors were so indispensable that Hollywood would often kill some of them multiple times during the course of a single battle with the U.S. Cavalry or heroic (if foolhardy) settlers. All you needed was a different camera angle and spliced together footage.

So, you can only imagine what kind of obstacles and prejudices Leaford Bearskin must have had to overcome to be able to command a B-24 warship. But he came from a tribe of warriors. Bearskin's people, the Wyandotte, were sometimes known as the Huron, and they had been fighting for their very existence hundreds of years before the war that he fought in. They were initially settled around the north shore of present-day Lake Ontario. Although they shared elements of their language with their New York neighbors, the Iroquois, there was definitely bad blood between the two entities; the Iroquois spent quite a bit of time trying to wipe their neighbors from the face of the earth.

The Wyandotte numbered in the tens of thousands when they first encountered the French in the early 1600's. However, they were soon decimated by European infectious diseases, such as measles and smallpox, to which

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they had no immunity. It's estimated that anywhere from half to two-thirds of their population died, and many of the survivors were forced out of the region and into the Midwest by hostile tribes. The Wyandottes were pushed westward to Michigan and Ohio and then, after the Civil War, even more westward to Kansas and Oklahoma. By then, their numbers had decreased substantially. In fact, there were only a few hundred that successfully sought reinstatement as a tribe in 1867.

Leaford Bearskin was born in 1921. When he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1939, he was initially assigned to Alaska as a crew chief, but after World War II broke out, Bearskin entered flying cadet school, received his pilot wings and went into heavy bombardment training. The war took him to the South Pacific, where he flew in the same squadron as my dad, the 321st of the 90th Bombardment Group

(Heavy), the "Jolly Rogers." He and his crew called his plane, "Big Chief." Like the other pilots and crews, they never knew if they would return from any given mission.

"There was one particular mission over Wewak in December of '43," Bearskin told me during our phone conversation, "Not only did we lose planes and crews, the flak was so thick, that I felt like I could just get out and walk on it." Fortunately, the "Big Chief" survived that mission, and Lt. Bearskin decided to stay in the service after the war and to make a career out of the Air Force. Leaford Bearskin retired from the Air Force as a Lt. Colonel in 1960 and then began a second career in Federal Civil Service, where he served until 1979. After returning to Oklahoma, his tribe elected him chief in 1983.

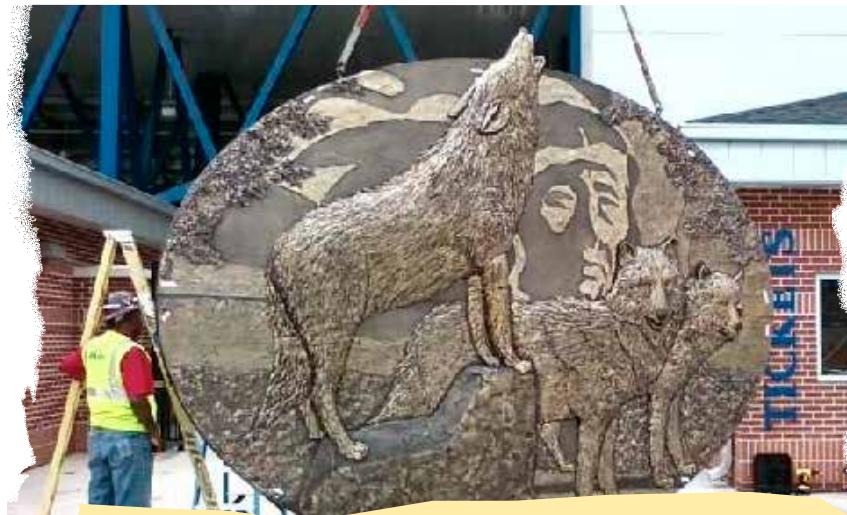
Once the album about my father

was completed, I sent the Chief some copies of the CD, so he could hear the song about himself, obviously entitled "Big Chief."

"That was a good one," Chief Bearskin told me, when I followed up by phone. "I like the part about carving into stone."

He was referring to the bridge:

"Through broken promises and about three hundred years, they have



True to his word, the Chief signed off on the sculpture, and it now adorns the entrance to UWG's new stadium.

stood the test through all their trials and tears. But the Great Spirit of the Wyandotte people never disappears; Blood and tears in stone relief—Big Chief."

A few years ago, my architect friend Ken Pritchard called me with a request. He was helping to design the new football stadium for the University of West Georgia, and they had hit a snag. The university was in the process of changing their nickname from "The Braves" to "The Wolves," and they needed something to commemorate the transition. The school had been built on land that had formerly been home to Georgia's Creek Indians, hence the initial nickname to honor the tribe, but UWG was moving their teams up into the NCAA, and that organization was concerned about the "insensitivity" of using a native American as a mascot.

The solution that we came up with

was a bas-relief sculpture commissioned by UWG supporter Bob Stone to go over the entrance of the stadium. However, the relief wasn't going to be in stone; we chose aluminum with a "bronzed" effect. Also, it didn't exactly feature blood and tears; we went with wolves against a clouded sky emboldened by an etched face of a noble Creek warrior to depict the old and the new, the future against the backdrop of tradition. I created the design on my little 12-inch Macbook; the digital illustration would then be used to engrave the various layers of the 20-foot relief sculpture.

There was one last request from the university. They wanted the illustration/design to be approved by a native American, one who was recognized and registered with a documented native American tribe.

"Who could do that?" the university representative asked me frantically. The clock was ticking on the completion of the stadium.

"Would a Chief work?" I asked him.

When I sent Chief Bearskin a print of the design, he was impressed and pleased to be part of the process. "It brings honor to a brave people," he told me, "It's good that they won't be forgotten." True to his word, he signed off on the sculpture and it now adorns the entrance to the University of West Georgia's new stadium.

That was the last time I spoke to Leaford Bearskin, this World War II hero turned tribal leader. He served as Wyandotte Principal Chief until his retirement in 2011 and passed away the following year at the age of 91, like so many warriors of his generation (we're losing a couple thousand WWII vets every day; in fact, as I typed this, I heard of the death of "Band of Brothers" hero "Wild Bill" William Guarnere, a month and a half shy of his 91st birthday).



Chief Bearskin made a difference, whether it was the office positions and agencies in which he served, or his B-24 crew (he always managed to get them home safely). But most importantly, perhaps his biggest impact was with his own people. Under his leadership, the tribe grew to over 5,000 citizens, secured self-governance, initiated cultural renewal and achieved economic success unlike any other time in Wyandotte history. I truly believe that the Big Chief would have been gratified to know that his legacy will be remembered for a long time, just as the legends and deeds of the great Wyandotte warriors have been shared by flickering campfires for centuries long gone.

David Ray Skinner

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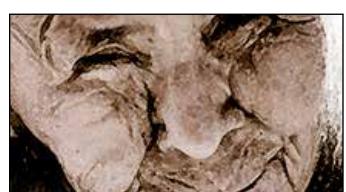
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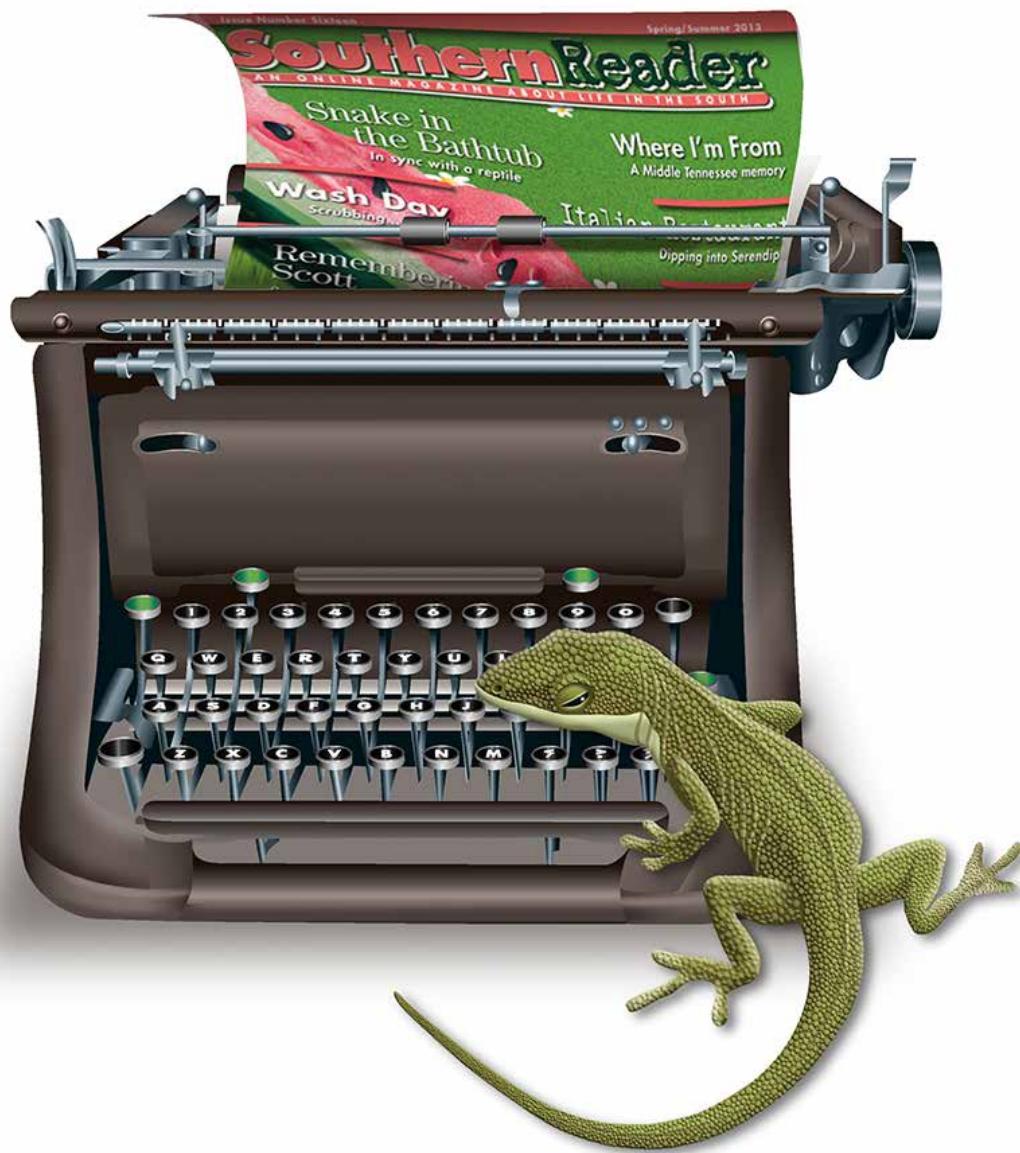
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Snakes, and Cats, and Squids, Oh My!



Thank you for the work and time you put in to bring another issue. It seems like “the memoir” is taking over. It’s really become a popular genre. The graphics, as usual, were such a pleasure, especially the snake disappearing into the bathtub in Charlton Walters Hillis’ story, “Snake in the Bathtub.” I liked the story, especially the way her family acted like they couldn’t care less that there was a snake in the house.

I also learned from Anthony

Holt’s “May Cats” piece that there are more than one kind of catfish: whites and blues and flatheads. *Who knew?*

My favorite piece, though, was Steve Newton’s “Decade-Dance in a Drag-Knuckle Bar.” It blew me away. This guy’s really good. He said so much in such a short space, too. And the way he built the suspense was so well done. I enjoyed the whole KKK thing, because no one ever writes about it (as if it isn’t part of the South).

Now, the squid was a little weird. He had me going in the sudden trip to the beach. I’m no critic, but a squid? Really. But he managed to tie everything together so that by the time he closed, it all made sense, and the story worked. I hope he sends more.

Marsha Mathews

Associate Professor

Dalton State College

(Author of *Northbound Single-Lane* and *Hallelujah Voices*)



Cat? Scratch Fever.

by Lisa Love



Mama said there'd be days like this, there'd be days like this, my mama said." Actually, Mama NEVER told me about days like this—the likes of which I'd just barely survived!

In her wildest dreams, she'd never imagined what I'd had to endure that week (and that's saying plenty 'cause Mama lived through the Great Depression, World War II and Madonna starring in the film version of "Evita"). Granted, in the "*World According to Lisa*," drama and mayhem routinely make an appearance, but honestly, this particular week had taken the cake with *record-breaking snow, sickness and shaking...oh, my!*

It was a wonder I lived to tell the tale. Hyperbole, you say? I beg to differ; I survived this cat-astrophe by the skin of my teeth! You can stop rolling

your eyes now.

My tale began when a Polar Vortex descended on the Southeast with a vengeance. ("Revenge of the Polar Vortex"—*a new Stephen King novel, perhaps?*). In Atlanta, the newscasters almost ran out of—but, unfortunately, didn't—catchy, cutesy nicknames for the snow and ice storm that besieged our city: "Snowmaggedon," "Snowpacalypse," or how about "Snow Jam 2014"? The record snow and ice that overwhelmed us brought our roadways, schools and businesses to their knees. For a region that often gets mocked for emptying store shelves

of bread and milk at even the most remote possibility of a flurry or two, Atlanta was caught woefully unprepared for this past February's "Polar Express." (Another nickname. You're welcome!)

For three days, North Georgia residents hunkered in their homes, trying to keep safe from an Arctic blast of snow and ice that was so mind numbingly treacherous—1.5 million lost power and 22 fatalities occurred—it prompted Georgia Governor Nathan Deal to declare a State of Emergency.

The glacial weather may have caught many unprepared, but not me—no sirree! I was prepared; heck, I'm always prepared! Friends and family call me "Prep Girl" (or "Paranoid Girl," depending on whom you ask). In case of emergencies, I'm constantly ready to spring into action—with survival

Lisa Love's Life

kit in hand—at the drop of a hat (or the drop of the temperature). Hyper-vigilant as usual, when meteorologists first issued their warnings of impending doom—excuse me, *snowstorms*—I gathered my weather radio, flashlights, non-perishable food, water and practically all the AAA batteries the Metro Atlanta area had to offer.

Outside, the winter winds howled and ice covered the city; inside, though, I envisioned enjoying Atlanta's "Icy Wonderland" by a cozy fire, with a cup of hot tea in hand while my cat and adoring dogs nestled by my side. Best laid plans, right?

I know, you're thinking to yourself, "*But, Lisa, you don't own a cat.*" Well first of all, does anyone ever *really own* a cat; isn't it the other way around? And secondly, what an observant reader/stalker/fan you are. In fact, you are correct. I don't own a cat; however, Beemer was granting me the great honor of staying at my home, allowing me to feed him and clean out his litter box while his human parents were enjoying the Florida sunshine for two weeks.

My two doggy children, Buddy and Gibbs, were none too pleased with the whole cat-sitting situation. They barely tolerate *each other*; on any given day, they constantly tussle, fight and snarl at one another. Well, actually, Gibbs, my two-year-old Border Collie mix LOVES Buddy, my 17-year-old mutt. But old Buddy cannot abide young Gibbs' "love"—which consists of biting, mounting and hurdling him. OUCH! Hence, they are not BDF's (Best Doggy Friends), or at the very least, it's a one-way street and Gibbs is behind the wheel.

However, with the advent of a furry houseguest—one that they both considered a common enemy—Gibbs and Buddy began to foster a deep bond, based on their mutual disdain for the cat. Howling and pawing at the floor like—well—like *mad dogs*, they became territorial and let me know in no uncertain terms that they wanted

Intruder Kitty to go home. And trust me, Beemer was equally disenchanted with them; his hissing and refusal to eat were my clues. It became "The Dogs" versus "The Cat"—the animal kingdom's version of "West Side Story." If I didn't come up with a tenable solution quickly, there just might be a gang rumble (hopefully, set to music...*When you're a Pet, You're a Pet all the way, from the first treat you get, to your last dyin' day.*)

My bright idea to stop the fur from flying? Keep the animals as far apart as possible. Beemer was held captive—I mean, *beautifully ensconced*—in my guest room. Food, water, his litter box, toys and Fox News were provided for his enjoyment, and he was safely tucked away behind closed

It became the "The Dogs" versus "The Cat"--the animal kingdom's version of "West Side Story."

doors. The doggies had the run of the rest of the house (hey, *they were here first*).

Every morning, after I let the dogs out to play in the fenced backyard, I would go upstairs to Beemer's suite and play with him; I hated the thought that he might get lonely. After sitting on the floor in his room for a bit, Beemer would tentatively venture out from under the bed and deign to sit by me—always facing me, wary, ready to pounce. Trust takes a while to bloom, ya know.

It was on the fifth day of Beemer's captivity—er, *visit*—that the snow and ice attacked. Actually, I should say, snow and ice and coughing, congestion, sore throat, headache, fever and chills. That's right, gentle reader, *the very morning the "Snow Storm of the Century" attacked, I fell ill.*

I woke up thinking that Buddy (my sleeping companion of late) was scratching and forcefully shaking the mattress. But no, it was me that was shaking; chills were racking my body. Crawling out of bed, head pounding

and throat feeling as if I had swallowed broken glass, I opened the blinds and surveyed the neighborhood—a blanket of snow covered the ground as far as my eyes could see and layers of ice clung to the tree limbs and power lines.

Hearing the dogs whimper to go outside (little did they know, right?), I medicated myself with my first aspirins and Sudafed of the day. It was painfully obvious that this was not destined to be a fun "snow day," but rather a "just-keep-putting-one-foot-in-front-of-the-other-and-survive-it" kind of day. *Carpe diem, seize the day?* Hardly! **Survive the day** was my pitiful goal.

That Friday consisted of trying to coax the dogs outside to do their business. Then I would dry them (and me) off, tend to the cat, and listen to the "up to the minute" weather reports. This was all the while taking Tylenol or aspirin in a feeble attempt at symptom relief

for what I determined was a raging case of flu. (I am certified to self-diagnose, because I saw every episode of "House" three times).

The Tylenol wasn't really helping, but I was loathe to bring out the big guns—the NyQuil—just yet. NyQuil is like hard liquor to a good Baptist girl; I'm not sure if it really makes you feel better, or if you're just so goofy after drinking it that you don't care anymore. I knew that one swig of that stuff would put me out till Spring, so I stuck with the Tylenol and repeated my mantra of "one foot in front of the other."

After feeding the doggies, and with the last bit of energy I could muster, I went upstairs to Beemer's room to check on *Intruder Kitty*. Cleaning his litter box and refilling his food and water bowls took everything out of me. Shaking and sweaty, I laid down on the guest bed. Beemer was wary of me as usual; yet he jumped up beside me—eventually, relaxed and trusting enough to curl himself around my legs. So peaceful; I would love to think we

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had formed a deep connection, yet in actuality, Beemer was more than likely cold and just ingeniously using my fevered legs as his own personal space heater.

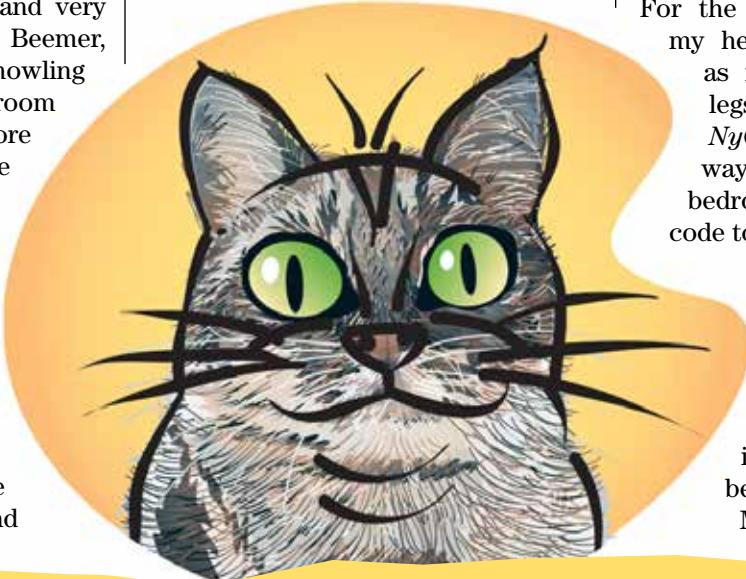
Usually, my one-on-one time with Beemer occurred while the dogs played outside; however, playing outside was definitely nixed for the duration of the storm. So, while I'm trying to enjoy this peaceful (and very rare) moment of bliss with Beemer, my very jealous dogs are howling and scratching at the bedroom door, begging to come in. Before they could bust a move on the door, I slithered out of the comfy guest bed, trying not to disturb the cat too much. With lightning speed (well, as much lightning speed as a middle-aged woman with the flu can muster), I quickly opened and closed the door to escape the guest room before the dogs could gain entrance and maul Beemer. *"Release the Kraken,"* indeed!

By that evening, I was officially DONE. Exhausted and sick, with two more Tylenol swallowed and an ice pack pressed to my aching head, I collapsed into the recliner in the family room. Surrounded by the dogs at my feet, I pushed the chair back and turned the television on for a bit of diversion. *"Captain Phillips"* was playing *On Demand*.

Engrossed in the movie (which was excellent by the way), I was able to put aside the stress of the day—ice storms, illnesses and pseudo animal whispering! For an hour or so, I was aboard a ship with a crew being hijacked by Somalia pirates. (I'm still not sure which of us had it worse!)

Just as the Coast Guard started firing on the hijacked freighter to free Captain Phillips, my chair started shaking. I quickly glanced down at my feet expecting to see the dogs scratching—no, they were fast asleep. The shaking continued. Was I shaking from

my fever? Only if my fever was causing the pictures on the wall to sway as well. *Are...You...Kidding...Me?* An earthquake on top of "Snowzilla" and influenza? I was horrified; I couldn't catch my breath. The earth shouldn't move...well, not when you're alone, anyway! It was over as quickly as it started—forty seconds, tops. Slowly my breathing returned to its pre-earthquake rhythm.



"What kind of demented degenerate would venture out into this kind of weather and brave a major earthquake JUST TO STEAL A CAT?"

My phone started ringing off the hook, as friends called to see if I had felt the tremor; they know I have a tendency to panic (hence, my prepping). Assuring them that after the initial heart-stopping terror, I was okay. Well okay, except for the flu, the feuding animals, and the ice storm. In fact, after the day I'd had, the earthquake was almost anticlimactic. Note I said *almost...*was that an aftershock I felt?

Right then and there, I made the executive decision that it was *NyQuil Time*. I forcefully slammed my recliner shut, grabbed an ice pack from the freezer for my pounding head (actually, there were no more ice packs left, so a bag of frozen strawberries had to suffice), and marched up the stairs, determined to find that green elixir of

comfort. "NyQuil, get me outta here," was my last coherent thought.

And the NyQuil did the trick; my first restful sleep of the week came quickly.

Too bad it had to be so rudely interrupted.

At 3:00 A.M., I was jolted out of my drug-induced slumber by the ear-splitting shriek of my security alarm and the thunderous barks of the dogs. For the second time that evening,

my heart jumped into my throat as fear gripped me. On shaky legs—*shaky from panic and the NyQuil, I presumed*—I made my way to the alarm keypad by my bedroom door and punched in the code to stop the deafening blast.

Even in my muddled, half-awake state, a thought occurred to me—*did I really want to turn the alarm off?* What if it wasn't a false alarm triggered by the icy weather; could someone be in the house?

My deliberations were interrupted by the ringing of the phone. Heart pounding, I answered it. ADT, my alarm monitoring company, was calling to check on me. After fumbling for a minute with my code word—*hey, I was sick and dazed,*

so don't judge—the ADT lady told me that Zone 5, the hallway, had been breached.

Oh my, this was for real! I asked her if she would stay on the line, while I checked out the house.

Even now—in retrospect—that sounds crazy to me, but that's exactly what I did. I laid the receiver down and grabbed the 12-gauge shotgun that enjoys its permanent residence by my bedside. Opening my bedroom door, I wondered to myself what kind of demented degenerate would venture out into this kind of weather and brave a major earthquake just to break into a poor sick woman's house?

Stepping into the hallway, I could see into the downstairs foyer; no signs of trouble there. I hoisted my shotgun

Lisa Love's Life

higher and glanced around the upstairs. From my vantage point, I could see all the doors to the bedrooms and the office. Oh no—the door to Beemer's guest room was wide open. I ran into his room, calling out his name. "Beemer," I implored, "Where are you, sweet kitty?" Thinking that perhaps the alarm had frightened him, I laid my shotgun across the bed and lowered myself to my hands and knees. Frantically, I searched under all the furniture for Beemer. Not one sign of him—he was gone! "But that's crazy," I thought, "What kind of demented degenerate would venture out into this kind of weather and brave a major earthquake JUST TO STEAL A CAT?

Then it came to me—I was the victim of a cat burglar. (I blame the NyQuil for that bad pun. You should, too.)

Rising to my feet, my head started spinning and I grabbed onto the dresser to steady myself. A coughing fit seized me, and with every cough, my head pounded more. I started to cry. Frightened, woozy and sick, I wondered how much more could I take. But this really wasn't the time for self-pity; I had a cat and possible burglar on the prowl.

Dabbing at my eyes with the sleeve of my nightgown, I glanced up and caught a glimpse of my reflection in the dresser's mirror. *Good Lord, my head and neck were covered in blood!*

My panic mode ratcheted up into high gear once again. Had I been attacked in my sleep? *That cat burglar must have really meant business!*

I moved closer to the mirror and started to run my fingers over my scalp. Hmmm...it didn't feel like blood. Bringing my wet fingers to my nose, I realized that it didn't smell like blood either. The red goo smelled like...strawberries. I put my fingers to my mouth; *it tasted like strawberries too!*

Strawberries? Thru my NyQuil haze, I faintly recalled visions of a makeshift ice pack. My fruity ice pack obviously exploded during the night,

covering me in that strawberry ooze. Thank goodness, with one faux crisis averted, I was back on my initial "Mission Impossible."

Still determined to find out who had breached my security system and taken Beemer, I headed down the curved staircase to my foyer. Shotgun at the ready, I glanced out the window, scanned the front porch outside, and checked the front door; the deadbolt was still firmly in place. Good. Next, I checked all the other exterior doors and windows; all were shut tight and bolted, and there was no movement on my back porch or side yard. Relief washed over me as I realized that no one had broken in.

Or was my relief premature? What

I glanced up and caught a glimpse of my reflection in the dresser's mirror. Good Lord, my head and neck were covered in blood!

it they had broken in and relocked the doors, hiding the keys so that we were all trapped in here together? What a morbid thought! (I know, I know—I might need to curtail my "Criminal Minds" and "NCIS" television show addictions.)

Common sense made a rare appearance as I remembered that I'd seen no footprints in the snow around the house—*there had been no break in!* But I was still as confused as ever; the fact remained that *Intruder Kitty* was missing, and he certainly didn't open the door himself—or did he?

Just then, I heard muffled whimpering coming from the family room, and I became scared all over again. With a death grip on the shotgun, I made my way into the room. "Beemer," I called out, "Beemer is that you?" My query was met with shrill barking—in the family room—from the recliner.

WHAT?

A pitiful barking—a yelping really—drew me deeper into the room. *That was definitely not coming from a cat.* I dropped to my knees and pushed

the recliner open. The footrest popped open, and out crawled BUDDY! I was bewildered; I had been looking for a kidnapped kitty, yet I found my sweet old dog? Wait a minute—hadn't he been in bed with me when the alarm went off?

Hmmm...maybe not. I mentally retraced the events of the night. *Had this precious old pup been trapped in the recliner since I ran upstairs after the earthquake?* My poor baby.

I beg you, dear readers, please don't call PETA or the ASPCA on me. In my defense, I was sick, scared, tired and drugged. It seemed Buddy wasn't holding any grudges; as I knelt beside him, he forgave me with precious doggy kisses, lapping ferociously

at my face. When he started chewing on a strand of my hair, it dawned on me that he was trying to eat the strawberry goo off of me. Oh well, good dog, good dog, anyway!

With the barking silenced, I closed my eyes for a sec-

ond to regroup. I was definitely thankful that Buddy was not injured, and that there was no burglary in process, BUT, where was that cat? Shhh. *I heard something.* In the quiet of the predawn, an unmistakable hiss was coming from the kitchen.

Quickly taking Buddy upstairs before I attempted to capture *Intruder Kitty*, I made sure my doggy was safely tucked in my bed (which looked like the scene of a mob hit—that bag of thawed strawberries had really done a number on my sheets).

Back in the kitchen, I traced the direction of Beemer's hissing; he was hiding behind the fridge. Lying down on the floor, I tried to coax him, soothingly, out to freedom. Clearly traumatized, he was having no part of it. I cajoled, I begged. I prayed. Ten minutes passed. Twenty minutes passed. He was determined to stay behind the fridge and I was equally determined that he was coming out.

While the coolness of the kitchen's Mexican tile did feel rather pleasant against my fevered body, the tile floor

Lisa Love's Life

wasn't my bed. Impatient to get back into that bed, I made the rash decision to storm his fortress and force him out of hiding. I shoved at the fridge with what little bit of pitiful strength I had.

Blindly, I thrust my arm as far as I could behind the refrigerator and made a grab for Beemer. OUCH! He hissed, he snarled and he scratched at me. Great! *Cat Scratch Fever* on top of everything else! I sat up, rubbed at my arm, and tried to recalculate my options; that's when the doorbell rang.

I was past being scared at this point; I was frustrated, angry, tired and let's not forget, *sick!* Oh, and remember, *it was still the middle of night.*

Grabbing my shotgun, I strode to the front door, unlocked it and yanked it open. On my front porch—in pajamas, raincoat, and ball cap and shivering against the cold—was my neighbor, Robert. After 23 years of friendship and neighbordom, he knows me well enough that he found it only *SLIGHTLY* odd to find me covered in sticky red goo and holding a shotgun

on him. "Hi Lisa," he said, "What's new?"

Sensing my distress, he calmly suggested that we get out of the cold. As he walked me back into the foyer, he took the shotgun from my hands and began telling me what brought him to my house. Since he is the emergency contact for my alarm company,

Robert said the police were on their way, but they had gotten delayed because of the icy roads.

they called him when I didn't return to the line with the ADT lady. *Oh yeah, I'd forgotten about her.* Robert said the police were on the way, but they had gotten delayed because of the icy roads.

We sat down in the family room and Robert patiently waited for an explanation. Rushing through my head were fleeting visions of fever, headaches, chills, snow, ice, earthquakes, a NyQuil buzz, a cat burglar, and Buddy trapped in what would forever be referred to as Lisa's "Bark-a-Lounger."

Not knowing where to begin, I just stared blankly at my friend and frantically gestured, pointing upstairs and to the foyer and finally, to the refrigerator.

Finally, after several moments of this, to break my silence, Robert asked, "Cat got your tongue?"

At that moment, as if on cue, *Cat Houdini* chose to shoot out from behind the fridge and jump on the kitchen counter, which he used as a spring board, spinning the blender in his wake. In a blur of fur, Beemer flew up the stairs to his room and slammed the door behind him.

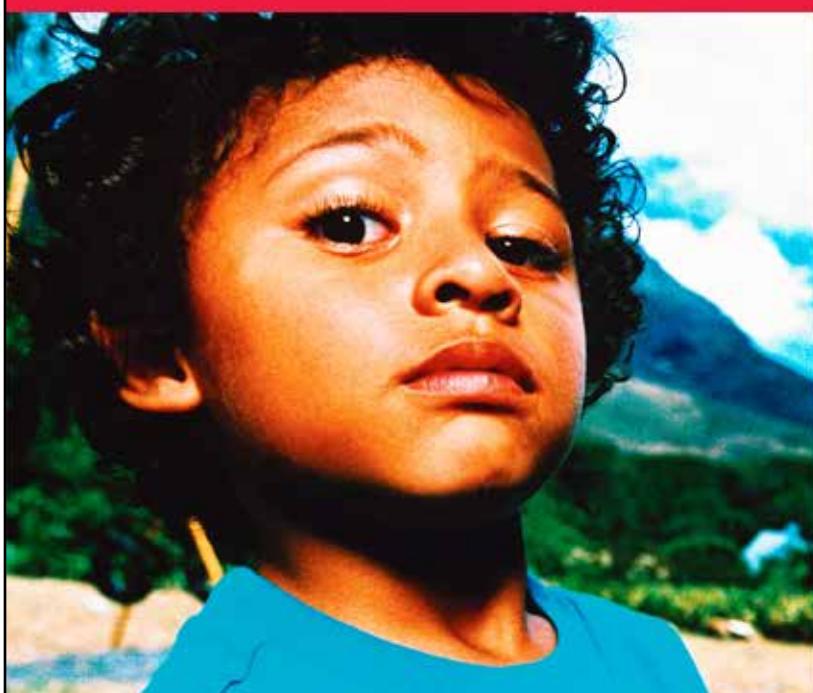
"Okay, would you care to join me in a shot of NyQuil?" I calmly asked, as Robert watched the blender slowly spin to a stop.

"Make that a strawberry NyQuil daiquiri," Robert said, "And keep 'em coming."

Lisa Love, a talented and insightful writer with a skewed sense of humor, looks for, and often finds the absurd masquerading as the mundane.

LisaCLove@bellsouth.net

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The Country Store

by Bettye H. Galloway



nyone who grew up in the rural South prior to World War II knows that every small community had a name.

Most of them had a gristmill and a saw mill, some of them even had a post office, a school, and a doctor.

But without a doubt, all of them had a store which was the hub of the community.

The store in my community sat at the intersection of the crossroads, a long, narrow frame building with a packed dirt porch held up by cedar posts bare of bark, but with stubs on the posts where limbs had been cut with a handsaw.

On a hot summer day, resin would still ooze from the posts. The porch had never been floored, but the dirt had been packed hard by years of work shoes traffic.

The porch was the heart of the community, the place where farmers gathered to meet and greet, to discuss the weather and politics, to discuss the state of the crops in the field, to trade knives, and to play dominoes and checkers with soft drink caps on a hand-drawn cardboard box. It didn't matter that no purchases were made, or needed; the men simply needed to "go to the store."

The porch was furnished with nail kegs—one for the boards for the checkers and domino games, and the others for seats for the players. In one corner of the porch was the gasoline tank with its glass upper tank holding and measuring the gasoline as the handle pumped the desired sale. On a porch post beside the gas tank was a flat board for use when a tube had

to be patched—usually with a "hot patch," which required a roughening of the damaged area. With the patch, material in a tiny flat pan was lit, allowed to get hot, and then applied to the tube to seal the hole.



Ah, but the inside of the store was a treasure trove! Always dark and gloomy because no electricity was available, there were delightful items everywhere. On one side of the aisle, the shelves held canned goods in a very limited supply, because the locals grew and preserved all their needed fruits and vegetables. But tea and coffee were staples that had to be purchased, and the counter always held a round block of cheese along with, wonder of wonders, jars of stick candy and packs of gum. The shelves on the other side of the aisle were dedicated to pots and pans and other household goods, as well as work shoes and denim pants and shirts.

A corner in the rear of the store was partitioned into a small, floored interior room where flour, meal, sugar, and animal feed were kept. It was completely lined with a metal screen to provide a barrier to keep mice out.

The center part of the store's rear held a wood heater in a box filled with sand which heated the store in winter, and where the checkers and domino games were held after the crops were gathered.

Unlike modern day grocery stores, customers did not help themselves to anything. The store clerk retrieved the requested items, carried them to the cash register, took the payment, or in some cases, entered them, *item by item*, into a ledger and had the customer sign the page for future payment. Also in the front beside the door, stood a massive red box which held icy cold Nehi peach sodas and *Grapettes*. If I had been exceptionally good, I would have been given a shiny coin to purchase one of the cold treats.

A way of life was lost when country stores were replaced by Krogers and WalMarts. I learned a lot about life on the porch of a country store, including pumping gas, slicing cheese, and other similar things which formed the basis for my future. Checkers, anyone?

Bettye H. Galloway was born, reared, and educated in Oxford, Lafayette County, Mississippi. Retired from Mississippi state service (primarily the University of Mississippi) and as executive vice president of a drug testing laboratory.



The End of the Trail Motel sign has long been a Broken Bow icon. From Broken Bow: The First Century by Bob Burke

Around Here

by Charlton Walters Hillis

I

recognize the café; it once went by another name. My parents and I are out to eat in downtown Broken Bow, Oklahoma on one of my trips back home, circa 1995.

A big old white refrigerator stands by the cash register like an accomplice beside the woman who runs the place, arms folded across a wide white apron, gray hair done up in a tight, elaborate, crown-like do, eyes like scanners keeping track of friend and foe alike. The jukebox is silent today, the same one that once played "Hello Darlin'" when I was suffering from a broken heart in high school. Each table boasts

a Coke bottle with a fake pink flower stuck determinedly down its neck. The one dessert of the day is plopped down first and without comment. Our catfish dinner is brought to us on green plastic cafeteria plates. Every catfish dinner sold around here comes with pinto beans, as well as slaw and fries. We're here today because my father prefers their beans. The catfish is excellent as well.

Living in one place most of your childhood, leaving and then coming back as an adult can affect more than an outlook; it can seriously affect the eyesight. On my first visit home from college, the roads had shrunk. I don't mean the trip home seemed shorter, but the gravel roads leading out to our place were just smaller. It was the oddest thing, and to my amazement they were to remain shrunk for every visit to come, although never to such an alarming degree. The big hill up which I trot to meet the school bus and down which I coasted my bike was no more than a...small hill. It was the same place through a different lens.

Southernesque Towns

In a distant state I once asked a woman if she was from "around here," and the answer was a definite no. She was from the next town ten miles down the road and thought she was a stranger in a strange land. *Around Here* means different things to different people.

Around Here for me is Broken Bow, a little place in the southeast corner of Oklahoma. Just a bit further west, the land flattens out, but here we still boast trees and hills. McCurtain County's nickname is *Little Dixie*. It's an ambiguous little Dixie, though, enamored of western things: cowboy hats, rodeos, and small ranches. Just a bit further south and west the ranches expand enormously and sprout oil wells like shameless heirs.

esses wearing all their jewelry at once.

Singer/songwriter and actor Hoyt Axton, whose father John coached Broken Bow football, said, "There are three main industries in McCurtain County: Weyerhauser, moonshine, and welfare."

Hoyt Axton wrote "Joy to the World" and "Never Been to Spain," and his mother Mae, who was a Broken Bow High School teacher, wrote "Heartbreak Hotel" for Elvis. And this is the place of which native Gail Davies sang haunting tributes. *Around Here* we're proud of all that.

There's no welfare for poverty of the imagination, nor architects capable of designing the kind of beauty with which Davies filled her old galvanized bucket of memories.

I hear there are places with gated subdivisions, where the residents are protected from every vestige of danger and poverty. And of local color and history, too. A child of a gated subdivision would not have in her head (as I do) a persistent picture of an old green house, owned by two fat bachelor brothers in bib overalls, being driven off on a truck to make way for her new house. Neither would this be forever engraved on her brain: a strange name, *TEBO*, deeply and unevenly knife-

scratched into the soft old wood of the barn door, perhaps the name of one of those brothers.

More pictures which would not be in her head. A cottonmouth sunning on the island of dry ground in the creek she just jumped, touching down lightly before he was spotted. Big iron wash pots resting against a fence by the creek nearest Choctaw neighbors. A two-room shack in the pasture, rented by another Choctaw family and then standing vacant for years. A straw-backed kitchen chair sitting on the bank of the nearby creek.

**Around Here for me is Broken Bow,
a little place in the southeast
corner of Oklahoma...
an ambiguous little Dixie.**

Collecting snake skins in that vacant house. Beating out a grass fire with tow sacks, a family affair. A graveyard of livestock bones among the leaves on top of the hill thought to be an Indian mound. Priceless pictures all, because they are unique to *Around Here* and every one a story.

The town itself remains basically unchanged. Unlike my gravel roads, the two main streets are wide. I never really noticed this until my children were old enough to make comparisons. They were reminded of an Old West town, pointing out the wide streets. Did Old West towns really have wide streets, or did we just often see them widened by the camera's angle during gun fights?

Thirty miles east is a strip of beer joints which has marked the Oklahoma border for longer than I've been in the world. I pass them on every trip home. They can claim neither beauty nor usefulness. Time, however, has molded and softened those old structures, each unique in its own homeliness. They've blended into the landscape so that, were they razed, it would be startling to see.

In contrast, a formation of shiny aliens: a Walmart, a modern service station or two, a Pizza Hut, a McDonald's,

and the new high school, have precariously taken their places along the road leading south of town. This is the brazen new kid, who has the best clothes, the most toys and a semblance of fame, yet trembles at knowing he isn't yet liked for himself.

There is absolutely nothing new on the roads going north, east, or west of town. If silence can speak volumes, the sight of nothing new can be an intriguing picture. It's as if an agreement was made between *Around Here* and the *Agent of Change*. They sat at a table in the Charles Wesley Restaurant

and the former wore a straw cowboy hat, plaid shirt and sagging jeans. The latter wore a suit and spoke with a mid-western accent. After much haggling, A.H. agreed to give A.C. that particular strip of

road south of town with the stipulation she steer clear of the other three intersecting roads and the town itself. It's all there in the contract, binding for at least another twenty years. A.H. thought her unusually pretty for a liberated woman, but after she left, he winked at the waitress and said he got the better end of the deal, what with him making big bucks on that limited area while keeping up appearances everywhere else.

Broken Bow has not changed a whole lot in the last few decades, and I hope it never does. If you spend all or most of your childhood in one place, it's fixed forever in your mind as it was then, and changes jar your nerves. Those few years are as deeply and unevenly knife-scratched into the soft old wood of a child's mind as if they were a hundred years. The larger span of time that is the rest of her life is nothing by comparison. And for good or bad, no other place will ever be quite like *Around Here*.

Charlton Walters Hillis has a fine arts degree, but her first love is creative writing, primarily the short story. She has a nonfiction work in progress of an art buyer in the Voronezh region of Russia.



The Unbroken Circle

by Howell Clyborne

There are some schools of thought today that believe the universe resembles a fractal. Fractals are images that when reproduced at either a larger or smaller scale are exact replicas of themselves. It is a curious and interesting thought.

In my reflections through the years, I have come to the same conclusion. If that is true, it would lead me to believe that in every episode, there are all the pieces of life itself—the ups and downs are all mixed in with all life's paradoxes and illusions.

It is in this spirit that I share a very sad but impactful day for me. It came in the form of the death of one of my closest friends, Steve Batson, a contributor to this very magazine. It is another

twist of life that he wrote about his thoughts the day the space shuttle exploded, and he reflected on death

Batson was very atypical and lived his life very far from the world in which most of us live.

itself ("A Tribute to the Columbia: The Children of the Sun," *SouthernReader*, Issue #4, Spring 2003).

Batson was very atypical and lived

his life very far from the world in which most of us live. Although he was accomplished and very intelligent, he preferred to live in an isolated fashion. He had a few dear friends, and I was blessed to be part of that group.

That was pretty much it. In thinking about his eulogy, I was honored to take part in his life and value system, both of which are in stark contrast to what most of us possess.

There were four of his closest fraternity brothers at the funeral, with three taking part in the service. After the service, in the normal course of things, we would have gotten in our cars and driven back to the three states in which we live.

But as if we were pulled by some *Batson-esque* force, we opted instead

Southern Friendships

to go back to Steve's house. It was his wife, her sister and just the four of us. We talked, we caught up and Skinner, (*SouthernReader's* epublisher), brought in his guitar.

As if time never passed, there we were, once again singing together. We all love music, and have been—or continue to be—musicians even today. The words flowed, and the tunes that had been such a part of us never left us. At one point, we were singing "If I Fell" by the Beatles. The harmony in the song

is extraordinary. There we were—after all this time—*harmonizing*; it was so good. It was a mystical moment that was pretty overwhelming. It was so powerful that the concept of harmony is by its very nature, parts coming together for added emphasis and purpose. We were, from different states, different professions, different religions, yet all together. I believe in a more mystical sense, it was energies coming together as notes that bend and blend towards a point in time not to be repeated. The event itself was a convergence of so many emotions that it was almost paralyzing. It is funny

that we spend time with people and friends but never touch them.

I was struck by something Skinner mentioned. He said "that he never realized or appreciated the relationships and bonds, because it was assumed there would be plenty more opportunities and plenty more relationships that would be special," but there weren't. I

**Like my aunt used to say,
there are no friends
like old friends.**

think it is the blind side of all humans, that we tend to never fully appreciate things in real time. Like my aunt used to say, *there are no friends like old friends*.

It is true that most people wouldn't have bet money on any of us turning out very well, based on our college fraternity days. I mean, "Animal House" was sedate compared to us. But even then, there was the bond, and a unique spirit that brought us together and pulled us along the ever-bending river of life. It was invisible, yet strong, and it never let us go. And so it was that we were summoned together once again

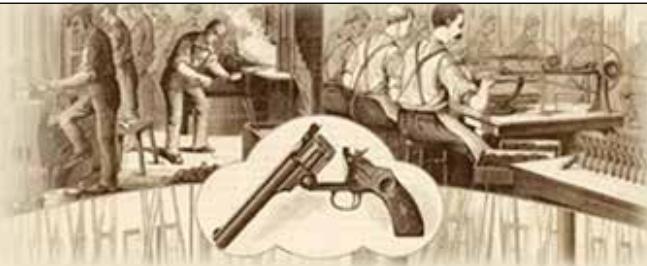
to celebrate the life of a brother and an everlasting presence on that long and winding road.

And so, I close where I opened. This fractal was a moment that had all of life wrapped up in it. It was profoundly sad, and it was overwhelmingly happy; there were songs in our hearts, there were mountains, there were valleys,

and there was the bond of kinship and shared experiences, all in the same episode. God was very good to us that day. Even with one not physically present, the circle remained unbroken.

And so it shall be—in the sky, Lord, in the sky.

Howell Clyborne is Vice President of Community and Governmental Affairs of Greenville Health System. Prior to joining GHS, he served as deputy chief of staff of the Office of the Governor of South Carolina and as a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives. He was also a Philomathean while he was a student at Carson-Newman College.
HCllyborne@ghs.org



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A Ghostly Shade of Pale

by Merle Temple

Southern Literature Publishing

A Southern Shade of Justice

by Lisa Love

During the '60s and '70s, drugs had become the symbols of youthful rebellion, social upheaval, and political dissent; we in the South were unfortunately not immune to the "*turn on, tune in, drop out*" mantra that was to shake the establishment to its core.

With the dawning of the Woodstock generation, a battle was brewing between the *powers that be* and the emerging counterculture for the very heart and soul of America.

In response, President Nixon declared his "*War on Drugs*" in June 1971 targeting dealers, suppliers and users by dramatically increasing the size and presence of federal drug control agencies, and pushing through mandatory sentencing.

One of the agents on the front line of

"...All that is necessary to lose yourself in this world is to turn around once with your eyes closed."

--Thoreau

this war was Tupelo, Mississippi native Merle Temple. As the first Captain in the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, he witnessed the devastation that the drugs and their handlers brought to the region. Now, over 40 years later, Temple brilliantly recounts this time in our history, sharing his firsthand

knowledge of fighting in the trenches of America's Drug War in the action-packed thriller, "*A Ghostly Shade of Pale*." This novel is the first in a trilogy of Temple's semi-autobiographical tales of betrayal, corruption, murder—and yes, eventually, redemption.

Depending on one's age, gender or socioeconomic status, the South in the 1970's could best be described as "*A Tale of Two Cities*." To me, an Atlanta high school honor student whose greatest concerns were grades, Prom and trying to copy Farrah Fawcett's iconic hairstyle, the '70s were the best of times. But to Merle Temple, it just might have been the worst.

As *Criminal Minds*' producer Jim Clemente wrote in the novel's forward: "*Ghostly* is a crime story as

Southern Books

literature. Merle Temple is a great storyteller, writing to all of your senses. He weaves a story so detailed and complex, yet beautifully sinister, that the reader is immersed in the feeling of absolute reality."

Just as an artist becomes one with his brush and creates beauty on canvas, author Merle Temple wields pen to paper and with the written word, creates a stunning portrait of "a surreal moment in time, a snapshot from an opera of insanity; where truth has no currency and justice means '*just us*'."

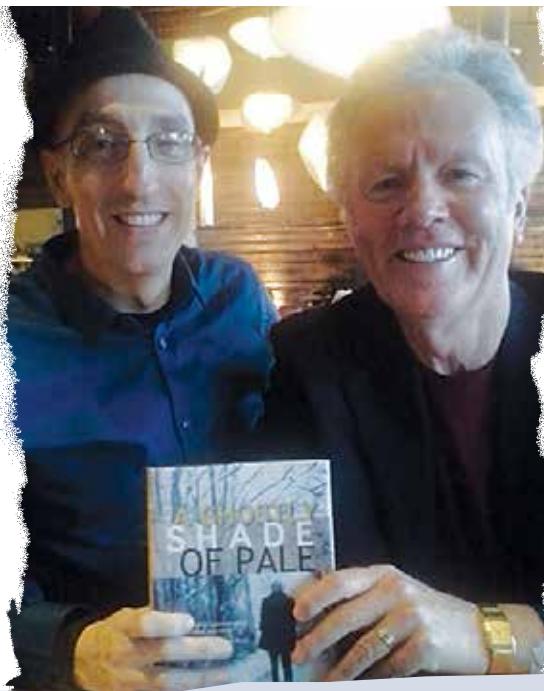
One expects violence and mayhem in an action/suspense/thriller about the drug wars—and they were all there, of course—but my heart was unexpectedly touched by the tenderness that also sweeps across the pages of "A Ghostly Shade of Pale."

Michael Parker, our protagonist and Merle's alter ego, has an unabashed respect for God, duty and his country. Within the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, he is an idealist, fighting on the side of the Angels, and he is obsessed with bringing to justice the evildoers profiting from the new drug culture. But in his private life, Michael Parker has the soul of a poet; a poet who would move heaven and earth for his beloved Dixie.

Dixie is the woman from his past who was once lost to him, but is now firmly entrenched in his heart. By chance encounter (or *Divine appointment*), Michael rescues her from a dive bar surrounded by the very criminals he is about to take down. More importantly, he gets her out of the clutches of Frank, a "charmer who elevated the broken bird with lavish attention, only to withdraw and heighten the savagery of the clenched fist disguised as the helping hand—a hammer to render her subservient." Awash in his forgiveness and compassion, Dixie blossoms under the tender mercies of Michael.

But it's Michael's gentle love for his grandmother, Pearl that plucks at the heart strings so poignantly. She

is his anchor, his touchstone. In a world fraught with danger and betrayal at every turn, Pearl is his constant, a fount of unconditional love. She's always at the ready with the soft peppermints that he's so tickled to get and she's just as tickled to give to her grandson—her love offering to him.



"Merle Temple is a great storyteller, writing to all of your senses."

--Jim Clemente, *Criminal Minds*

Of his sweet grandmother, Michael says, "She had a joy the world did not give her and that the world couldn't take away."

It was my honor to sit with Merle and his lovely wife, Judy as they made their way home to Tupelo after a very successful book signing in Augusta, Georgia. As we talked about "Ghostly" that afternoon, we kept one eye on the weather, because the Polar Vortex was descending, and the Temples were determined to beat "Snowpacalypse" home! (*As it turned out the meteorologists had not exaggerated—snow and ice shut the southeast down for days.*)

Spend any time with Merle, and

you realize that this man is not just a brilliant writer, but he really is a throwback to genuine storytellers of old. Our conversation ran the gamut from discussing some of the passages of "Ghostly" to our shared Southern heritage, and moved on to our mutual devotion to the Lord.

I was enthralled as Merle reminisced about his years as a field agent. Upon graduating from the University of Mississippi in 1971, he hit the ground running in the Narcotics Bureau—so young, so idealistic. Stings were successful and arrests were made; Merle and his team were so accomplished at taking down the bad guys that he became perceived as a threat to the status quo. In fact, it was as if there was a bull's-eye emblazoned on his back—not only was he a target of organized crime bosses, but corrupt politicians, as well. Over the years Merle realized that the bad guys didn't always wear black hats and the good guys weren't always so good.

As the *War on Drugs* dragged on, beliefs that had once seemed black and white began to fade into shades of gray.

Merle said, "I hope that "Ghostly" delivers tenderness amidst the darkness, the ten-

sion of monsters all about, a teetering view at the edge of the abyss, and a sudden escape route that is not temporal but supernatural. My intention is take the reader to a place they've never been, but one they've always dreamed of where the inhabitants are not strangers. I wanted it to be a fresh story—yet one as old as humankind that could be their own."

Merle is truly a Renaissance man, and at a time in his life when most men would be retiring to golf or to travel, he is working on "A Rented World," his second book in the trilogy. When he's not writing, Merle is criss-crossing the country from Los Angeles to Augusta promoting "Ghostly" on book-signing tours, meeting his enthusiastic readers and doing television and radio

Southern Books

interviews. "Ghostly" has stirred interest with the producers of *Criminal Minds*—Merle signed a book for the executive producer Erica Messer, and writer-producer, Jim Clemente, who represents Merle in Hollywood.

Additionally, he signed books for the cast of *Major Crimes*, and he also enjoyed a three-hour dinner meeting (in an industry and town where it's unheard of to get 15 minutes with a mid-level executive at a studio) with the producers of "The Patriot" and "Saving Private Ryan;" they are discussing ways to bring "Ghostly" to the big screen.

But Merle has certain stipulations.

"Ghostly" is written as literature to endure, not just another throw-away item in a throw-away world," he told me. "There is no profanity and no scenes of explicit intimacy. The words writers write today are like epitaphs on our tombstones. I don't want some-

one to stroll through the graveyard of my novels thirty years from now and remember me for language that does not uplift and edify."

Consequently, any production of "Ghostly" must also uplift and deify, or it just will not happen. Merle sees this novel as his ministry; get the book in

when he looks behind him in the darkest of times and discovers that goodness and mercy are still following him all the days of his life."

The snow storm was fast approaching,

and it was time for the Temples to start their journey home. We walked to Merle's car and noticed how bitterly cold the air had become. As I hugged them both goodbye, Merle turned back to me, and quoted what

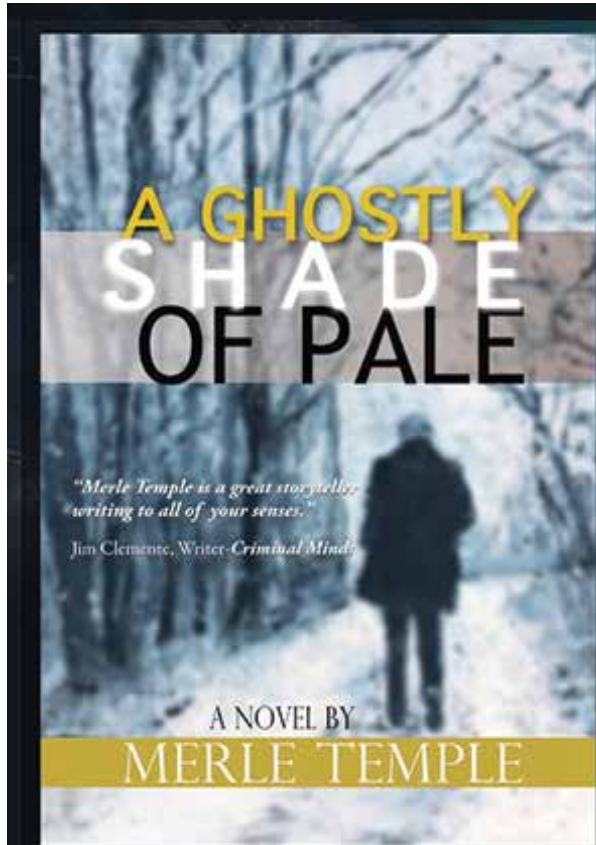
I had shared with him earlier was my favorite Michael line in the book. With a smile and a thumbs up, Merle said, "While I breathe, I fight."

Oh yes, indeed! What had begun as chat with an author about his latest book ended with me knowing I'd been blessed with two new dear friends—the kind I'd give my house key to. Come back any time, y'all. I'll keep the light on.

"'Ghostly' is written as literature to endure, not just another throw-away item in a throw-away world."

the hands of readers, then share with them the story of redeeming grace and the God that bestows that grace so freely.

As we wrapped up our time together, I pressed Merle to tell me how he and (the "Ghostly" protagonist) Michael are most similar. Merle thought a moment, then confided, "Like me, Michael realizes that there are still battles worth fighting and risking everything for



Buy the Book...

The divergent elements of a Southern Gothic nightmare converge and occupy the same stage in **"A Ghostly Shade of Pale"** where all the history files on a bygone era are ripped open and rewritten. The violent and dark conflicts of a Mississippi in transition in the 1970s unfold as the players find themselves trapped in games of murder, betrayal, the macabre, and the supernatural. Michael Parker comes of age as the tranquility of the old South is shattered by the Vietnam War, civil unrest, assassinations, political corruption, and a wave of drug abuse that brings the first war on drugs to his front door.

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A Ghostly Shade of Pale

by Merle Temple

Southern Literature Publishing

A 'Ghostly' Excerpt

Dixie began to talk—haltingly, at first in little-girl whispers, punctuated by gasping, choking half-sobs. She spoke, she paused, she considered, reconsidered and she resisted before a final embrace of all that strained to come forth in a gut-wrenching emission of half-mocking laughter that deteriorated into a Nile of tears as she gnawed on her lower lip...reddening the left corner.

She rambled, avoided, retreated, and charged the ghosts of her life in a babbling self-interrogation and examination of things gone wrong, good and evil, wrongs to be righted, and people she desperately wanted a second chance to tell only that she was sorry—for what, she was not sure. Gone were her effervescence and affected nightclub charm. Only nervous, blue, vulnerable eyes peered out from behind a veil, dissolving with each passing moment.

As she talked, somewhere far away muffled sounds drifted in—arguments in adjacent apartments, pieces of television commercials wondering “where the yellow went,” a distant police siren, and the fluttering near the window of a sooty chimney swift searching for sanctuary, much like the tortured woman whom Michael watched now in the subdued lighting of the apartment.

Dixie spoke of family—her sisters particularly, reddish blondes who looked like her—her Baptist church, long since abandoned, and a pastor who seemed to be speaking to her every Sunday—too close to home. Brief smiles punctuated embraces of simpler times—a lifelong collection of butterfly charms...monarchs and swallowtails adorning her childhood bedroom.

Rambling, she asked him if he knew that she could type 100 words a minute now. She remembered and recounted whispers about her and Frank around corporate water fountains with yellowed handles.

Then, she scurried to safety behind stories of her gardens, gold and purple

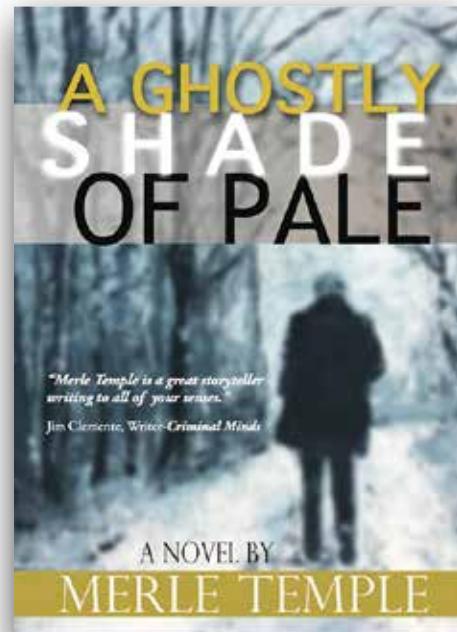
pansies in late Southern winters, and the fragrance of red azaleas that winds carried across gardens she tended so lovingly in the springs before she moved here.

Ancient tablets were brought forth from behind heavy doors that were rusted shut...concealing a gateway to a distant realm to which only she had the key—a key reluctantly used and now revealing smells and textures of darkness that made Michael want to retch.

This man, Frank, had become the long-dead man now reincarnated in some kind of twisted nightmare—the long-gone abuser of little girls who still preyed on the weak, now returned from the grave to tell the woman-child that she deserved no better—a male of no gentleness, a brute of lethal vileness, a thing and entity that reveled in cruelty. He was at once a charmer who elevated the broken bird with lavish attention only to withdraw and heighten the savagery of the clenched fist disguised as a helping hand—a hammer to render her subservient and unquestioning.

All attempts to extricate herself brought only a pounding of her self-image and a promise to get her fired from her new job due to his power—pure masculine power with no semblance of the feminine so essential to balance the delicate dance in a world he'd redefined as only the abused and the abuser—selective affection applied only as hot and cold partitions in a game of expendable gifts to exploit the terror in an expendable woman.

During that long, tortuous purge, the strangest and most wonderful



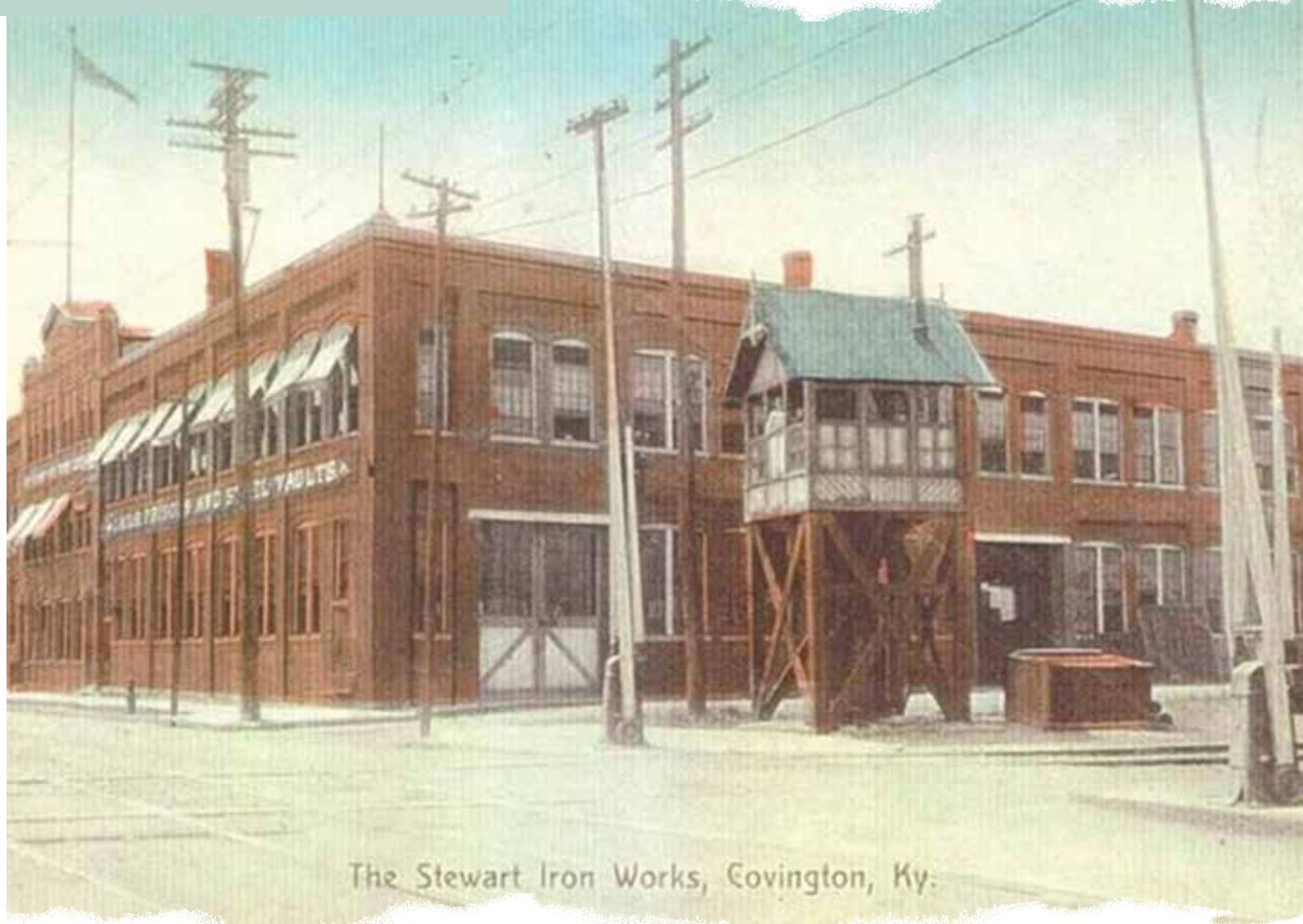
transformation began to take place. Michael realized that he was witnessing a long-overdue birthing process—a second birth. Dixie was emerging from a womb of sorts. The old Dixie melted away before his eyes as the walls seemed to close in on her where the pain seemed unbearable, just before she burst into the blinding light at the end of the narrow, dark tunnel ahead—born again, gasping in a fresh breath in a vivid new world where the grays and blacks gave way to a rainbow of bright colors.

She had calculated a false freedom when she first left him, but now she had taken her first deep, cleansing breaths as a free woman, once utterly and awfully alone in a rented world—now a butterfly come forth from the shell of the cocoon of despair and hollowness that had imprisoned her for so long.

The soft hum of the condo's air unit brought them gently to real time, and the gentle breeze moved the drapes around them.

There was almost an audible bump as the now rotten poison apple she had tasted so long ago fell away from her countenance to the grounds of a new landscape filled with fruit as in the original Garden. Distant hymns of redemption played.

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The Stewart Iron Works, Covington, Ky.

Stewart Iron Works

by Ricky Fitzpatrick

It's not uncommon to see iron fences around older cemeteries, particularly around a single grave or a family plot. And, in some locations, you may find that an entire cemetery is enclosed by an iron fence.

After observing these for most of my life, I recently felt compelled to learn more about these iron fences; particularly why my family and neighbors felt the need to fence in the dearly departed.

As a rule, these fences were typically either cast iron, wrought iron, or a combination of both. As for cast iron, the complete fence could be purchased fully-made and then assembled on site. These were catalog items (more to come on that, below).

The wrought iron fence was usu-

ally made by the local blacksmith and might include some commercial cast iron parts such as pinnacles and such. It could also be fabricated from commercial bar stock, a style not nearly as attractive, in my opinion. However, it's no small miracle that so many of these graveyard guardians remain, given the fact that many iron fences disappeared in the scrap drives of World War II.

Many of the fences I've discovered in the cemeteries of northeast Georgia are of the cast iron variety, and they bear the ubiquitous "Stewart Shield,"

which indicates they were made by Stewart Iron Works, a Kentucky iron manufacturing company. And after learning of Stewart Iron Work's lengthy and lucrative contract to sell fences through Sears & Roebuck (and knowing how much the Sears Catalog meant in our own home), I can only assume that many of the local cemetery fences were not derived directly from the shores of Kentucky (or Ohio), but purchased at the local Sears store (or ordered from the annual catalog, before it made its way to the family privy).

Nevertheless, regardless of from whence the fences came, Stewart Iron Works was forging them, and they were a *forge* to be reckoned with.

This history and curious relationship

Southern Fences

between Stewart, Sears & Roebuck and my own Southern ancestors was enough to start me digging. Online searches and ultimately, a phone call with company sales rep, Scott Wall, were more than enough to pique my interest all the more. It didn't take long to blow the rust off of some pretty fascinating iron fence (as well as Kentucky) history.

In the early 1800's, the Stewart family made its way from Scotland, to settle in Virginia and ultimately, Louisville, Kentucky. Two sons of Thomas Stewart became steamboat captains. A third, Richard C. Stewart—or R.C. as he was commonly known—learned the blacksmith trade. R.C.'s sons, Richard C. Junior and his brother Wallace A., followed in their father's footsteps; they learned the blacksmithing trade and eventually opened their own ironworks business. That company would become known as Stewart Iron Works and shortly would be producing wrought iron fence, furniture, ornamental pieces, gates, and even jail cells for the entire country.

Stewart was established in 1886, and it is the second oldest continuously operating

ironworks in the country. It has also been an important part of Covington, Kentucky history and is one of 45 century-old businesses in the state (as recently recognized by the Kentucky Humanities Council). At the turn of the (past) century, it was known as the "World's Largest Fencemaker." And, in 1904 at the St. Louis World's Fair, it was awarded the Grand Prize and Gold Medal Merit for iron fencing and lawn furniture.

During World War I and until 1928, Stewart also formed the United States Motor Truck Company and produced one-, two- and three-ton trucks for the U.S. Army. Although used mainly by the Armed Forces, the first truck off the assembly line went to

John Craig, a contractor and former mayor of Covington. Some were even reportedly delivered as far away as Australia.

Following the war, Stewart returned to fence products and sold them in the Sears and Roebuck catalog for 23 years. It is through this alliance that families around the country became aware of and became retail customers



The Stewart Shield can be found everywhere from the railroad entrance gates at the Panama Canal to more recently, the front gate at the White House.

of The Stewart Iron Works. This also included the rural parts of the country, such as my own area of north Georgia.

Upon a walking-tour of virtually any cemetery behind even the smallest of north Georgia churches, one is likely to find a plot or two, surrounded by low-rising, decorative iron fencing. And if you get close, amid the pine-tree pollen and years of rust, you're probably going to find the Stewart Shield adorning the gate on that fence.

The popularity of the Sears & Roebuck catalog and the density of small churches in the South, was the perfect combination for unprecedented sales of decorative cast iron fencing in Mississippi, Alabama, North and South Carolina, and Georgia.

In the 1930's a Stewart Jail Cell Division produced jail cells for most of the *high security* locations in the country. Places like Alcatraz, Leavenworth, Marion and Sing Sing were Stewart customers, as well as Fort Knox. Yes, the Fort Knox—they commissioned Stewart to craft the iconic front gates standing today at its entrance.

Stewart's Jail Cell Division has been arguably its most colorful and highest-profile, capturing many news stories, as well as the imaginations of the people. Folklore claims that in the early 1930's, a barge lost its load of jail cells headed for Alcatraz; some say they lie at the bottom of San Francisco Bay to this very day.

During the Second World War, Stewart again shifted to wartime production and provided portable landing equipment for the U.S. Air Force.

The Stewart Shield can be found on the railroad entrance gates at the Panama Canal, the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., the Lt. Governor's Office on

St. Thomas Island, the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Museum, the Taft Museum, The U.S. House of Representatives, and most recently, the front gate at the White House.

Plus, it can be found on grave fencing in all 50 states, including Hawaii and Alaska.

The history and heritage of the Stewart Iron Works Company is certainly rich with detail and notoriety, and it is a well-deserved cause for pride among the citizens of Kentucky. As for the north Georgia residents who have long admired and utilized Stewart's iconic fences—well, we feel privileged to have been a part of the Stewart success story, as well.

Ricky Fitzpatrick is a musician, author, worship leader, and photographer. He lives and writes in the tiny community of Apple Valley in northeast Georgia, with his wife, children and occasional lizard.



Mountain Front

A Short Story by David Ray Skinner

C

ara was fuming. From her perch in the rickety wagon seat, she was staring straight ahead, but her anger was directed at her carefree cousin in the seat beside her.

"Jimmy crack corn an' I don't care, Jimmy crack corn an' I don't care," Dwayne sang cheerfully, holding onto the reigns with one hand and screwing on his old, dusty, beat-up hat with the other.

"Idiot, idiot, idiot," she silently mouthed, "You are such a gall-derned, good-for-nothing, straw-for-brains idiot," she was thinking, but out loud she said, "Dwayne, you've got to hurry; they'll not wait for me, and there'll not be another plane to Atlanta until next week."

"Goin' as fast as Nell and Belle will take us," Dwayne said, good-naturedly, snapping the mules' reins. "Besides, Cara, there is a war on, you know. Did you already forget about the Germans and Jap-o-neeze? All of us gots to make sacrifices, Cara!"

"What in Pete's name does that have to do with—" she started to say, but experience stopped her; she knew there would be no confronting her cousin with logic. And to think, the day had started out so full of promise. She had sprung out of bed long before

dawn, thrown on her clothes that she had laid out the night before, and brushed her blonde hair before scrambling an egg that she wolfed down with a glass of milk. The old yellow suitcase waited beside the door. She had carefully packed, unpacked, and repacked it with several changes of clothes, along with the paperwork she would need to get into the science fair once she got to Atlanta.

It hadn't been easy, but she had persisted and prevailed and had even won over most of her detractors. She took first place in her high school's competition, and since her high school was the only one in the county, she was declared county champion. Then, however, she was thrown into the ring at the regional fair with other East

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Tennessee winners, all of which were male and some of which were just plain mean mountain farmboys, bent on winning the trophy and the trip to the Southeastern Fair in Atlanta. But Cara had won. She had overcome the sneers and condescending insults from her male opponents, and she had even survived the attempted sabotage that had backfired on the hapless clod from Soddy-Daisy, earning him disqualification and winning her the trophy.

But, as her aunt always said, there's always another mountain. The most recent one had sprung up as she pumped water over her breakfast plate. "Cara," her father said, creaking open the screen door into the kitchen from the back porch, "Sumpin' came up and Mr. Baxter needs to see me at the courthouse. I gotta go inna town and can't take you to the airfield."

Cara's mouth flew open, but before she could protest, her father continued, "Dwayne's gonna take you in the wagon, but you better leave early...summa the road's still a mud pit."

"Daddy," she said, "Dwayne? He don't have a lick of sense."

I can't miss my plane."

"He'll git you there, honey," her father said, pausing at the screen door, "Good luck in Georgia with that fair." And with that, her father was out the back door again, his boots thumping on the porch and out into the yard toward the barn. Two minutes later, she heard the old pickup sputtering and coughing down the dirt driveway toward the county road that bordered their farm.

It would be another half-hour before she heard Dwayne steering the team up the driveway. Dwayne's mother, Bonnice, was Cara's father's sister. Bonnice's husband had run off when Dwayne was a young boy. It wasn't that Cara didn't like her cousin; it was

just that he was always getting underfoot. And, although he was three or four years older than she was, for as long as she could remember, she felt like Dwayne never could quite grasp the context of any of their conversations. And, although most of his friends had been drafted or had volunteered, and were currently serving in Europe or in the South Pacific, Dwayne had remained behind.

"Dwayne's flat-footed," Bonnice would often tell the family, or anyone that would listen, "Couldn't pass the military physical."

"Flat-brained," Cara would always mutter under her breath, "Couldn't

ists to Atlanta was only a puddle-jumper, and not one of the "big-city" aircraft that she had read about in *Life* magazine. It was an old Ford Tri-Motor, and she had seen it many times when visiting the little airport with her school classes over the years. The small regional airline that owned the plane had its headquarters in Knoxville, and it had donated the flight as an additional "prize" for the regional finalists. And, although the plane was perfectly safe and adequate, it was far from luxurious. But, Cara was still excited about flying in it; not only would it be her first plane ride, she had based her whole science project on the aerodynamics and propulsion of airplanes.

She had compared a number of warplanes, American, British, German and Japanese, and had designed and built her own model. Although it didn't actually fly, it did have a working miniature engine and the wingflaps and rudder could be controlled by toggle switches on the underside of the model. She chuckled to herself at the irony that her boxed-up project—wings, motor, fuselage and all—was most likely already safely secured in the cargo



...the Ford Tri-Motor was perfectly safe and adequate, but it was far from luxurious.

pass the military mental."

Cara met Dwayne in the turnaround and threw the yellow suitcase in the back before climbing up into the wagon's seat. It was at least ten miles to the little mountain airport, and she could already see the first hints of the September dawn sparkling through the trees at the top of the ridge. Still, she figured that unless Nell or Belle dropped dead, or one of the wagon's wheels fell off, or a meteor fell in the middle of the muddy road, they would make it to the airport with a few minutes to spare. It was only then that she let herself feel the excitement and anticipation of the event.

She knew that the plane waiting to take her and the other regional final-

of the old plane, patiently awaiting her arrival as Dwayne's wagon slugged through the Tennessee mud.

By the time they were halfway to the airport, the morning sun had cleared the ridge and was beaming down on the old wagon. Cara was pleasantly admiring the late-summer/early-fall Tennessee mountain foliage when the meteor fell in the middle of the muddy road. Only, it wasn't a meteor; it was Grannyma Iris, and she was standing in the middle of the road and flailing her thin arms like a windmill. Technically, the old woman was not kin to the two in the wagon, but the whole county knew her as "Grannyma." Her husband had long since passed away and her children were grown and married with

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grown children of their own.

"Oh, praise the Good Lord, childurn! I din think en-body would ev'r come down dis road!" she said as Dwayne stopped the wagon. She was wiping sweat off her forehead with her bonnet. The tiny old woman leaned up against the wagon. "Old Bessie," she said, out of breath and pawing at the strands of thin grey hair caking her forehead. "My good milkcow...done...got...loose. An' I declare I can't fetch 'er back. You childurn go get 'er, please."

"But..." said Cara, looking frantically at her watch and then at the morning sun overhead.

"Yes'um," Dwayne said, bolting out of the wagon, "Come on, Cara! Jes' point us where, Grannyma."

"See 'at barn—?" Grannyma said pointing at the far end of the pasture. "Thas where she s'posed to be. See 'at door open? S'posed be closed."

"Cara!" Dwayne was jumping the fence to the pasture.

As Cara gazed down at her clean, traveling clothes, she realized that there was no sense in remaining in the wagon. The faster they could get the cow back into the barn, the faster they could be back on their way. "There's still time," she thought, climbing down out of the wagon. Besides, Grannyma Iris was looking at her, quizzically, her face asking, "What you waitin' on, child?"

By the time they found the cow—she was down by the creek, happily munching on wild onions—and herded her back to the barn, Cara realized that their margin for error for getting to the airfield on time had decreased substantially.

"Thanky thanky thanky, childurn, the Good Lord shore did send you as angels," Grannyma Iris said as Cara and Dwayne climbed back up into the wagon's creaky seat. "I can't pay y'all, but I's got some homemade pie an' a fresh glass o' milk for y'all"

"Well, Grannyma, that sounds won-

derful—" Dwayne drawled as he put his dusty hat back in place.

"—but we'll have to take you up on that later," Cara said sweetly, discreetly elbowing Dwayne, "We've got to be someplace, but thank you so much."

"Oh no," said Grannyma Iris, "Thank YOU, childurn."

"Dwayne!" Cara said sharply as the wagon got around the bend and out of the old woman's sight, "It's

field, it was fifteen minutes after the scheduled departure of the plane, but to Cara's pleasant surprise, she could see the old Tri-Motor in the distance, warming up. The old road went parallel to the single runway, but the tiny shack of a terminal was at the opposite end, on the far side of the field.

"Look, Dwayne!" she exclaimed, "They haven't left, yet!" But the words had scarcely left her mouth, when, to

her dismay, the plane turned abruptly to its right and rolled over to the starting point of the runway. They could hear the roar of the three engines wafting in waves across the field.

"Stop!" Cara screamed.

"They can't hear you," said Dwayne.

"I'm talking to you, you horse's butt!" Cara said, jumping overboard. As Dwayne slowed the wagon, she ran along with the wagon, grasping over the side for her suitcase. Finally, making contact with the handle, she pulled the suitcase over the side and ran desperately toward the field. The barbed-wire fence at the edge of the field was low enough for her to clear in a running leap, suitcase in hand.

"Thanks for the ride!" Dwayne yelled at her through cupped hands, but ignoring him, she ran toward the taxi-

ing plane. By the time she got to the edge of the runway, the Tri-Motor was already airborne, and sailing over her head. She saw some of the other students on board, peering out the plane's windows, looking down at her curiously.

For the longest time, Cara sat in the tall grass at the side of the runway with her yellow suitcase in her lap. Across the field, there were several dark green Army C-47's being loaded and unloaded by soldiers. "Life goes on," she said to herself. "The war goes on. The science fair goes on." Then, slowly, she got up, dusted the grass off her dress and turned to start her long walk back home. She figured that, with

The boy took Cara's irritated gaze as an invitation to begin singing again. "Jimmy crack corn an' I don't care, Jimmy crack corn an' I don't care," he brayed, "Jimmy crack corn an' I don't care, Jimmy crack corn an' I don't care." Cara stared straight ahead, too upset to even protest.

When they finally reached the air-



For the longest time, Cara sat in the tall grass at the side of the runway with her yellow suitcase in her lap.

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a little luck, she could make it by nightfall. She followed the fencerow until she found a gap in the barbed wire, and then she walked along the edge of the dirt road with the late-morning sun at her back. Dwayne and the wagon, of course, were long gone.

After a while, she began walking up the long, sloping hill that eventually led to Grannyma Iris's farmhouse. Grannyma's property reached all the way to the bottom of the hill, on both sides. The road split a dense mountain woodside; ancient oaks served as a majestic canopy over the road. As Cara started up the hill, she was startled by a man's voice coming from behind her. "Miss? Could you help me?" She spun around just in time to see a stranger stepping out from behind one of the oak trees. He had light, sandy hair and pale blue, piercing eyes. He was barefoot and wearing a pair of ill-fitting overalls over a dingy white undershirt. Something about him frightened her, but she struggled to not let her fear show.

"Yes?"

"Is the airfield down this road?" he asked, smiling.

Maybe it was his accent, or maybe it was his foreign looks, but a sudden chill hit Cara like someone was pouring ice water through the top of her head and it was draining quickly down to her toes.

"No. I don't know," she stammered.

"You're obviously going or coming from some sort of terminal. Hmm? Your yellow valise?" The stranger was still smiling. "It's a simple question. Are you coming from or going to the terminal?"

Suddenly, Cara recognized the accent and realized the situation she was in. The stranger was German, and his ill-fitting clothes meant that he had escaped from the P.O.W. camp in nearby Crossville. She knew that many of the captured Germans in the camp were officers, and some were Luftwaffe pilots who had been shot down. Then she remembered the C-47's and the soldiers on the field by

the runway. Without thinking—or hesitating—she spun around as quickly as she could—like a wagonwheel on its side—arms outstretched, and released the suitcase, sending it sailing toward the stranger's head. Oddly, her Sunday School teacher's Bible story of David and Goliath briefly flashed through her mind. Her stone was much larger and her Goliath was much smaller, so just maybe it would work.

As soon as the suitcase's handle cleared her hand, she was running as fast as she could, up the hill toward Grannyma Iris's farmhouse. She heard the "Ouff!" from the stranger as the suitcase found its mark, but she didn't dare turn around.

Halfway up the hill, he caught her, and grabbing her roughly by the arm,

"Heil, Hitler!" Cara screamed at the top of her lungs. It was the only thing she could think of to yell.

he spun her around. This time, he wasn't smiling, and there was an ugly mark on his forehead that had been made by the business edge of the yellow suitcase.

"Heil, Hitler!" Cara screamed at the top of her lungs. It was the only thing she could think of to yell. She figured screaming "Help!" would irritate him further, and maybe paying homage to his commander-in-chief would pacify him—after trying to take his head off. But, hopefully, maybe someone else in earshot would hear. She only hoped the German wouldn't realize that no ordinary Tennessean would dare scream something like that without being in serious trouble.

It actually seemed to work—the German was at first puzzled, but then began to smile again. Only, this smile was not as friendly as his first one, and it was accompanied by a 10-inch hunting knife. The blade gleamed in the afternoon sun.

"Let us start over, Fräulein," he said. "I think you were on your way to the airport...going on holiday, maybe? No? Your clothes inside your little yellow

'weapon' were clean and folded. Oh, not anymore." Suddenly, his face darkened and he grew serious.

"They all fell out in the dirt after your silly little stunt. Hmmm? So I think we are on our way to the airfield. So, march. Now!" He gestured with the knife toward the top of the hill.

"What are you going to do with me?" Cara asked as they started up the path to Grannyma's farmhouse.

His hand was still wrapped tightly around her arm and he calmly kicked at one of Grannyma's chickens as they neared the porch.

"We are first going to stop here at this cottage. I believe there is an old grandma who lives here. Alone," he said smiling, "I have seen her feed her animals. Maybe she can help us with directions to the airport. Hmm? Maybe she will want to go with us. What is it you say...the more the merry?"

"Then are you going to let me go?" Cara asked again.

"Somehow, I do not think that would be a good idea, Fräulein. Let's go see if there's anyone home."

"There's someun home, alrighty," Grandma Iris said, emerging from behind one of the trees guarding the old farmhouse, "She just ain't *inside th' home.*"

The tiny woman's sudden appearance startled both Cara and the German, but Cara immediately saw her chance to escape and skittered away, out of his reach. Grannyma Iris stood only 20 feet away from the man, her double-barreled shotgun pointed at his mid-section. "Drop th' Arkansas toothpick, son," she said.

Gone was the kindly old woman who only a few hours before had been frantically searching for an errant milk-cow. The ribbons from her bonnett danced comically in the wind, but her hardened face belied her seriousness, and, more to the point, her weathered old forefinger was wrapped confidently around the weapon's trigger.

The German, who had initially been totally surprised by the turn of events, quickly began to regain his composure. Cara was a safe distance away, and his

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focus was totally on the tiny woman. "Now, Oma," he said, smiling, "you and I both know you would not shoot me. I don't mean any harm to you or the girl." Still holding the knife, he slowly took a step toward her.

Grannyma clicked back the hammer. "Drop the knife, boy."

"Now, Oma..." he said, moving cautiously. He rubbed his knife against his overalls, but he didn't let go of it.

"Oma, yourself. I don't know who you are and I don't know who you calling Oma," Grannyma said. "Y'all people think you can just waltz in here and grab li'l gals by theys arms and pull the wool over the rest of us. Let me tell you somethin', boy, I may've been born at night, but it wasn't last night. This is what we're gonna do. First off, you're gon drop that knife and you're gon sit down, right where you stand, and we're gon figure out what we're gon tell the sheriff 'bout what you's up to. You ought be ashamed of yourself grabbin' that li'l girl..."

But the German had heard enough. Although he had pretended to politely listen, he had been silently calculating the distance between himself and the tiny woman. As she spoke, he slowly moved toward her, all the while assessing the speed at which she could react.

Smiling, he threw the knife into one of Grannyma's rosebushes. As her gaze followed the knife's trajectory, she lowered the gun, and the German seized the opportunity and sprang at the old woman. He was only five or six feet away when she pulled the trigger and the blast spun him around like an out-of-kilter top. When the dust cleared, the German sat sprawled in the dirt below the tree staring at the old woman in shock.

"You shot me!" he said, incredulous, "You shot my legs! Are you crazy?! You shot my legs!"

"Yeah, and that was jus' one barr'l, dearie, and half of it was wasted in the dirt," Grannyma said. "If you don't sit still, the next one'll blow a hole in your gut big enough t'throw one of my chickens through it."

Then, turning to Cara she said, "Are you alright, child? Did he hurt you?"

Cara shook her head no.

"I heard you call out. I don't know who 'Kyle Hibler' is, but it shore made me look out the winnder. You Kyle?" she asked the German. He looked at her openmouthed, still holding his bleeding legs.

"I jes' knew he was up to sumpin'. No good ever comes of pushin' a li'l ol' gal down the road with a big ol' knife. An' Papa's shotgun is always close at hand."

"I wasn't going to hurt her," the German said, meekly.

Just then the wagon crested the hill, and Dwayne jumped out with his own rifle.

"What in tha..." he said.

talked funny...I jes thought he was a Yankee."

Dwayne and Cara hopped up in the wagon and headed down the road to town.

It was nearly dusk when the sheriff got back to Grannyma's house. By the time he drove his black-and-white cruiser up the farmhouse's dusty driveway, she had bandaged both of the German's legs and brought him several slices of pie and a large glass of milk, all of which he had gratefully devoured.

She had taken great pleasure in slicing the pie with the German's former weapon that he had wielded against her and Cara. Plus, she had also tied him by his left wrist to her big oak tree using some rope and pieces of his stolen overalls that had been torn off and scattered by her shotgun. "Waste not, want not," she said to the sheriff as he walked up into the clearing and surveyed the situation.

"Afternoon, Miz Iris," the sheriff said

to the tiny woman, touching the brim of his hat, and wiping his sunburned forehead with his hankerchief. He was followed by two of his deputies and a doctor from town. The doctor set his bag on the ground and began examining the German's legs as one of the deputies untied him.

"Grannyma, you did an excellent job bandaging these wounds," the doctor said, opening his bag. "I think you're going to live, son, but I bet that shrapnel smarts a bit, don't it? You're just lucky Grannyma didn't aim a little higher."

The sheriff nodded his head. Then, stooping beside the German, he grew serious. "They's been lookin' for you, boy. How'd you get away from the camp, anyway? You didn't really think you'd get away, did you? Really?"

The German looked away and rubbed his legs as the doctor unwrapped the bandages.

"The girl said you wuz on your way to the airport," the sheriff continued. "You have your eye on one of them C-47s? He's a pilot for Hitler," he said to Grannyma. You do know you're in Tennessee, right? You think they's gonna let you take one of *our* planes? Now I seen it all. Can he walk, doc?"

**"German, you say?" Grannyma said,
"I knew he talked funny...I jes
thought he was a Yankee."**

"Late as usual," said Cara, "I would have thought you'd be home by now."

"I heard the shot," Dwayne said.

"Heaven's sakes, child," Grannyma said to Cara, "He ain't been gone from here ten minutes. He come by here t'claim his milk and pie, and I foun' a few more chores for him. Fact, I gotta 'nother un for him. Dwayne, honey, you take her on outta here and send the sheriff. Tell him Kyle here was prowlin' 'round, waving his big ol' knife—that un over there in my rosebush—trying to skeer us. An' you better bring the doctor, so he don't bleed to death."

"Grannyma," Cara said, climbing into the wagon beside Dwayne, "Will you be okay?"

"Lord, child, look at him," she laughed, "Kyle ain't gonna be runnin'—or walking—for awhile. As it is, I'm gonna have to fetch him some bandages to patch him up till the doc gits here."

"Grannyma, he's an escaped German from the Crossville P.O.W. camp, so you need to be very careful."

Grannyma's mouth flew open and her eyes got wide. "German, you say?" she said, clearly surprised, "I knew he

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"No, let's don't chance it. Can you boys pick him up? We need to get him to the hospital over in Crossville. Need to get him patched up and back to the camp."

"Don't worry, son," the sheriff said as he and his deputies picked him up and loaded him into the black-and-white for the trip back into town, "The war's not gonna last forever."

"Thanky, Miz Iris," he yelled out through the cruiser's rolled-down window as he backed down the driveway. "You did good."

"I would offer you some pie, Sheriff," she said, "but this boy's done eat it all up."

The sheriff laughed, "Well now Grannyma, next time you catch yourself a German, please remember to save me a slice!"

Cara didn't win the trophy at the Southeastern Science Fair. However, once the sheriff put the pieces of the

story together, he got in touch with the Knoxville airline, and they flew her down to Atlanta the next day—on the same Tri-Motor—in time to accept the Second Place award. She did take First Place the following year, and it earned her a scholarship. She went on to get her engineering degree, and she retired

"Well now Grannyma, next time you catch yourself a German, please remember to save me a slice!"

from NASA in the mid-'80s.

As for the German, after he recovered from the wounds to his legs, he was sent back to the Crossville P.O.W. camp. At the end of the war, he returned to his home in Munich, married his childhood sweetheart and became a commercial airline pilot.

In 1982, he and his grown son, Kyle, flew to Knoxville for the World's Fair. He rented a car at the Knoxville airport, and they drove up to Crossville. After asking around, he found Grannyma Iris's farmhouse and drove up into the driveway beside the house. Grannyma

came out onto the porch, this time with a broom.

At 104, she was feeble, and her eyesight was poor, but she recognized him immediately, probably because he still walked with a slight limp. Also, over the years she had told the story of that day to friends, relatives and anyone who would listen, so it was almost as if she expected him to show up again at some point in time.

She pulled out some folding chairs from her porch and they set them up next to her rosebushes, under the old oak in her front yard. They enjoyed several slices of pie and some tall glasses of milk, and talked about the World's Fair.

The Tennessee sun had already dropped behind the ridge when the three said their goodbyes. Pulling out into the still-dusty county road, they checked their map and pointed the rental car toward the interstate.

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A Tale of Three Women

by Kate A. Fields

In August of 2012, I had the distinct privilege of being called upon to drive for the Saturday morning yard-sale festivities of my Nana, Aunt Fannie, and Aunt Mary. Three sisters. The matriarchs of our family.

These sisters span very similar heights—all slightly teetering between the 4'11 and 5'0 foot mark. Born in Macdony, IL (*Macedonia* to those of us who are not lucky enough to have been born there) in the late 1920's into the mid-1930's, they have seen more than most us will see in our lifetimes.

Their family farmed as The Great Depression swept across America in what has become known as the worst economic crisis this country has ever experienced. When most everyone was lacking something, this family cultivated as much love as they did corn, tomatoes, and beans.

Each going into differing sectors of the medical community, the three sisters moved multiple times throughout their careers, but fortunately, upon retiring, they ending up living within 15 minutes of each other, in an area around Nashville.

For several years now, they have made the Saturday morning yard-sale ritual a reality. This is a very important process. One sister will scan the news-

paper and stake out the sales ahead of time; they will then congregate at one of their houses to drink coffee, trade vegetables from the garden, and dictate a plan.

You see, strategy is very impor-

yard-sale vehicle of the day to make room for more. Then, the supplies must be gathered. With the money bag full of quarters, dimes, and pennies in tow and any close-to-expiration grocery store coupons, they set out for the sale.

On this particular Saturday morning, I was awakened from blissful slumber to drive the three sisters on their weekly enterprise. After the pre-sale rituals were performed, we con-

gregated in my car, and then, *we were off!*

At the first sale we visited, a Johnny Cash CD was purchased for the wallet-breaking price of 10 cents.

So then we were set—four women hustling down the highway through the “Burning Ring of Fire” to the next sale, chattering away about what store has the best deals that week or who won the award for the most achy back that day.

Our plan was somewhat altered, because when each sister would see something that her grandchildren absolutely

needed, an early-morning call had to be made. More often than not, the grandchildren didn’t actually have to have that very specific thing that day, believe it or not.

So on we went to more sales, finding more bargains, making more new friends. We grew hungry after such



When most everyone was lacking something, this family cultivated as much love as they did corn, tomatoes and beans.

tant with this kind of thing. One must hit the correct sale at just the right time—when the good stuff has not been bought and the sale has not been deemed “picked over.”

Once the plan is made and the routes established, the excess junk must be cleaned out of the chosen

Southern Kinships

an eventful morning—but not to worry—McDonald's had their *Sausage McMuffins* on sale. This was a particularly wonderful sale item, because the top could be removed and eaten with jelly while the bottom half with the sausage could be eaten as a sandwich. I was honored to have been included in the senior coffee deal—55 cents off always helps.

As we sat eating and laughing, I took a second to reflect—I was in the presence of 80 years of love and faithfulness. They were steadfast. These sisters had been through it all together—the very happy moments and the very painful ones.

They had learned lessons that I hadn't yet experienced. They had seen beauty that I can only yet imagine. They had fought and cried together. They had shared each other's daily woes, responsibilities, and joys. They had cooked casseroles for each other through funerals and hospital stays. They had been honest with each other. They had hurt each other. And yet, they had held each other's hands through life and leaned on each other when it

was just a little too hard to stand alone.

I realized that not many people understand that kind of commitment. We live in a day and age that it is very easy to give up on people who make us

thing spiritual about not giving up on someone. There's this connection that binds you together and helps you sleep in peace at night. It's hard and it's heavy at the same time.

**...they had held each other's
hands through life and leaned on
on each other when it was a little
too hard to stand alone.**

angry, who don't share our views, who we are afraid of, or who we think just can't make us happy. We hastily commit to them when the times are good and happy and easy, and we quickly abandon them when the harder times roll in.

This sentiment is reflective of our society, which generally discards something that isn't pleasant, or fruitful, or immediately appealing. It's the easier way to go, but I think it's pretty detrimental. Detrimental to our work ethic, detrimental to our spirits, detrimental to our hearts.

See, there's something deep about sticking out that friendship, that relationship, that hard time; there's some-

thing spiritual about not giving up on someone. There's this connection that binds you together and helps you sleep in peace at night. It's hard and it's heavy at the same time.

Kate A. Fields is a biologist turned seminarian; she now studies theology through a biological lens. She is a lover of Christ, all things science, working for equality and mutuality in the church, a good cup of coffee, laughing until crying, and the triathlon. Though sometimes she can barely work a toaster, she enjoys writing about it and the joys and pains of the journey of life; she prays for a few traveling mercies along the way.

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Fishing

by Hazel D. Megahee

Since my grandfather, PaPa was still fairly young when I was born and I was his first grandchild, he thought he should teach me everything he could. I spent every summer of my childhood at my grandparents' home in the country, so he had plenty of opportunities.

Early on, he told me not to show my money to anyone because someone might try to rob me. He would give me a silver dollar and tell me to put it away. Years later, I still had some of those dollars.

He thought I should know more about "The Law," so he impressed on me what one should or should not do. He even took me to the courthouse in town so I could see the law in action.

We sat on the front porch after supper almost every night, watching the stars come out, and he told me many stories—legends, ghosts and folklore.

But—one of the best things he taught me was how to fish!

No one would have guessed we were going fishing as we walked down the lane behind the barn. PaPa wore his usual outfit of blue-grey work pants and suspenders, a blue, long-sleeve shirt, and an old black fedora. I was barefooted and wore a cotton dress (this was in the days before girls discovered blue jeans).

We went through the gate and walked across the green, velvety, closely-cropped pasture area and entered a path into the deep woods. PaPa used his walking cane to push aside briars, weeds, and palmetto fronds.



After a while, we reached a wide area where only low bushes grew. "This was once an Indian campground," PaPa said. "I picked up arrowheads here when I was a boy."

We found the path again and followed it to a wide place in a creek. This was our destination.

While I watched, he pulled his big jack-knife from his pocket and cut two slender, strong fishing poles from the nearby bushes. From another pocket he pulled out two corks with fishing

lines wrapped around them and hooks embedded in them. He unrolled them and fastened them to the poles.

From a back pocket, he pulled out an old Prince Albert tobacco can filled with live worms and baited the hooks.

He dropped one hook in the water and handed the pole to me. I sat there, staring at the cork as it lay there, bobbing in the gentle current.

Sometimes it quivered a little as fish too small to swallow the bait nibbled at it. At last, the cork jerked, went under and started moving away. I quickly raised the pole and yanked the line out.

I had caught my first fish!

That was years ago and since then, I have fished countless times, sometimes with more modern rod and reel outfits. But I still think it was more fun to watch a cork bobbing in the water!

Recently, after surgery, I was using a stick to help me get around. Then I found

a real cane in the garage. I grabbed it and started using it. My son saw me and said, "That's PaPa's cane!"

It was an honor to use it.

Hazel Davis Megahee has lived all her life in Georgia and now lives in Lilburn with her daughter-in-law and grandchildren. She has been a nurse and a housewife and has written stories and books all her life. Her book "The Madcap Heiress" is available on Kindle.



Bitter Harvest

by J. Bryant Ray

It was the summer of 1880. I shall try and remember the story as it was told to me as a young boy by the older ones. They spoke of a child who was called "Hotsko," a name which means "Owl."

One day Hotsko was in a field, gathering grain with her mother. A summer storm quickly came up, catching them away from shelter. The two huddled under the protection of a lone oak tree at the edge of the field. They were trying to stay dry, but the wind was blowing, the rain falling heavily, coming sideways so that the drops from the force of the wind were stinging their faces.

Hotsko was afraid and wandered away from her mother. Suddenly, she looked to the sky and cried out. At that moment, a large bolt of lightning came from the clouds and struck the ground nearby. The falling rain immediately turned into a fine mist tasting

of bitter salt, and the mother's skin felt cleansed of all impurities, as if she had taken a bath in one of the hot springs she had once visited.

Instantly, Hotsko was rendered unconscious, and she lay there for a time before her mother rushed to see if she was still breathing—*if she was, in fact, still alive*. Sensing a faint heartbeat and listening for the girl's shallow breathing, her mother picked her up and ran back to their village.

There, for the next several days, Hotsko lay unconscious. The tribal medicine man and the woman of herbs prayed over her. Her mother and father wept uncontrollably, as this was their only child. Others in the village offered

up prayers for the awakening of the little girl.

On the fifth day, in the early morning, somehow a miracle happened. Hotsko awoke and asked for a drink of water. She then told of the dreams that she had—dreams of a great famine of her people, a vision of hot, dry summers and failed harvests, and of brutally cold winters with no game. She had also been visited by a spirit from many years past; this spirit spoke to her of how the rains could be summoned but warned Hotsko that misuse of the gift she was to receive would cause much pain and hardship to both her and her people.

Later that night, in the comfort of her family's hovel, she told her mother and father that the spirit had also spoken to her of ways to cause the rains to come. She was given a simple prayer that could be offered with rain to follow in three days' time. However,

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she was never to reveal the prayer to anyone, not even to her mother and father, nor to the elders of her village, and she should never utter it aloud; *it was hers and hers, alone.*

The following spring brought new life, and soon it was time for planting. The men and women of the village were preparing the fields for sowing the seeds of corn and beans, planting the root crops of carrots, potatoes and beets and, of course, the grasses for their animals and the grains of wheat and barley for baking. They tilled the fields, making sure that no weeds were present, and they hoped for the rains of spring that would provide the moisture necessary for germination and young plant growth.

For some reason, that year, the rains had not yet come. Hotsko heard talk around the campfire. The older men spoke of the need for rain, but they saw that none was in the sky. That night, Hotsko, lying in her bed, quietly recited the rain prayer that had been given to her in her dream. Three days later, the rains came, not in a rushing downpour, but in a gentle falling rain, which lasted off and on for several days.

The villagers were excited and prayed to the heavens in thanks for the gift of the rain. All through the growing season, whenever she heard the elders speaking of the need for rain, the little girl would offer up her prayer. Each time the result was the same—gentle rainfall, lasting for several days, followed by growth of the crops. In the fall, the harvest was so abundant that the village had to construct additional areas for storage of the grain and vegetables for the winter.

This went on for several years with each season being the same; regular rainfall with abundant harvests, followed by the offering of prayers of thanksgiving for the rainfall. Several days following the most recent harvests, Hotsko actually overheard her mother and father speaking quietly of their wish to reveal their daughter's

secret. The little girl begged her mother and father not to tell of her gift for fear that the prophecy might come true, that somehow famine and hardship would fall upon the village as she had seen in her dream. However, her father insisted on telling the elders that it had been her and not the rain gods that they should be thanking.

Finally, one evening around the campfire with the elders of the vil-

lage after village. She would stay for a few days, and in the solitude of her surroundings, she would offer up the prayer she had been given. As before, three days would pass and the rains would come, followed by bountiful harvests.

As the young woman advanced into adulthood, she grew weary of this gift.

She wanted a life of her own with children and a family, but no man had asked her to be his wife. She had not received even so much as a second glance from the young men she would meet during her travels.

One day she had just completed a visit into a remote area of the territory, when she came upon a wagon train headed west. The guide was a young man named Billy Spence, who assisted her, providing repair to her horse's shoe that had become loose. During this brief encounter, the pair struck up a conversation. She learned that Billy was to leave the wagon train in the next town, turning them over to another guide who would take them on to their destination.

Billy learned that she was called Wuti-Yoki. She was so taken with him, and he with her that Billy agreed to come to her village to ask properly for her hand in marriage.

The next month, at the beginning of September, Billy Spence rode into her village. Everyone came out to meet him, and the young boys were excited to see this tall white man with the beautiful horse and the hand-tooled leather saddle. His dual six-guns hung from his belt and his fair hair and blue eyes were quite a novelty in the village. His skill with the six-guns amazed even some of the elders as Billy gave demonstrations of his prowess with both gun and knife. He challenged the young men to knife-throwing contests and bested them all.

After a dinner meal, around their campfire, Billy formally asked Wuti-Yoki's father for her hand in marriage.



The young boys were excited to see this tall white man with the beautiful horse and the hand-tooled leather saddle.

lage, her father spoke of his little girl's dream. He honored her wishes by not telling them of her ability to offer the prayer, but just that she had a gift that had possibly resulted in the rainfall the village had received for their crops.

The next day the tribal chief called the elders into council. It was decided that the little girl would henceforth be called "Wuti-Yoki," which translated means "woman of the rain." It was not long before word spread across the territory of the existence of this gifted young girl, of this so called Wuti-Yoki, and thus began the offering of gifts to her family in return for her bringing rain for their crops as well.

The years that followed were quite

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Amidst the cheering of the village, her father agreed to the marriage. This made Wuti-Yoki very happy; at last, she could have a family of her own and would no longer have to travel from village to village feeling used and lonely.

The wedding was planned for the following three days. It would be a tribal affair, and Billy had much to learn before their wedding day. The next days would be spent in talks with the elders and the medicine man about the ways of their life. They also insisted that Billy should not take his new bride too far away from the village, as Wuti-Yoki was a key to their survival. The elders also asked that she be able to return each spring for the planting ritual and to assist with the rain that was needed.

Billy replied that he had plans for the couple to live in the next town, only a half-day's ride from the village. There, he would become the proprietor of a feed and seed store. He told the elders that the couple would welcome family visits at any time they wished to make the journey.

On their wedding day, the village was decorated in the traditions of the clan, food of every description had been prepared, the bride had a new dress made by the women and Billy wore his best suit and a new pair of boots.

The celebration lasted all day and well into the night, as dancing demonstrations and singing of the old tribal songs were performed by most all of the women of the tribe. The men sat around the campfire, passing a pipe containing a smoke so potent that Billy was near intoxicated from only a few turns.

On the fourth day, the couple bid farewell to the village and rode away toward the town of Sweetwater. In the weeks that followed, Billy set up his store and built a cabin in the countryside beyond the hills and forest surrounding the little town. While Billy loaded and unloaded stock and made the deliveries, Wuti-Yoki provided assistance to

the store's customers. Billy was pleased and amazed by her ability to help with the chores around the store. While she could neither read nor write, she was quite adept at calculating, measuring and controlling the inventory, so that they were not long without adequate supplies to meet the growing demand from customers in town.



Sally rarely spoke of the old days of plenty, but she still yearned for the "gift" that was taken from her that fateful day.

There was a school in the town and with a bit of coaxing, Wuti-Yoki agreed to attend long enough to learn how to read and write. It was then that Billy suggested she take a "Christian" name. Wuti-Yoki agreed and the couple decided she should be called "Sally." Of course, she would always remain "Wuti-Yoki" to her village and her family.

The following spring, Sally became pregnant and immediately made plans for the arrival of their first child. It was early enough in her pregnancy that Sally made the ride out to her village to provide a prayer for the needed rainfall. As in years past, the rains came on the third day. After a week or so, Wuti-Yoki was making plans to return to Sweetwater when her mother asked whether she planned to have the baby at home or with her family in the vil-

lage. Her mother thought that it would be better if she returned to the village to have the baby there. Sally feared this would not sit well with Billy, and she and her mother quarreled about the decision. Leaving her village, Sally wondered if she should take her mother's advice and plan to have the baby in the village; after all, there was no doctor in Sweetwater and the nearest mid-wife was a good day's ride to the west. She decided that she would discuss this with Billy when she returned.

As she suspected, Billy was not happy with any discussion about her having the baby in the village, and no amount of pleading would change his mind. Sally told him that she had observed lots of births in the village, and not one time had a child been stillborn, nor had the mother developed complications during childbirth.

The two argued for days with Billy insisting that he would ride to the next town and fetch the doctor in plenty of time. Sally reminded him that childbirth was quite unpredictable, and that he could not foretell when the baby would come. Still, Billy wanted her to have the baby in their home. And, he told her that she

would not even be able to make the trip to her village after she became six months pregnant, and that he would forbid her to ride a horse all that distance.

The days and nights passed and Sally's pregnancy progressed. When Sally prematurely and unexpectedly went into labor in the middle of the night, Billy was away on a trip acquiring additional inventory for the store. He was only to be away from home for a day and a half, and he had thought that there would have been plenty of time before the baby was to be born.

However, Sally would have to give birth alone in their little cabin. She labored for six hours with no result. Early the next morning, a neighbor came by their cabin. Finding Sally near exhaustion and in a lot of pain, the

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woman assisted Sally with the birth. The child, a girl, was stillborn, the result of a difficult labor. The baby's cord had become wrapped around its neck, choking off the oxygen supply.

Sally was overcome with sadness, weeping uncontrollably, throwing things around the cabin and cursing the very god that had once saved her own life. She began chanting the rain prayer over and over. The rains came with such fury

that their cabin and the entire town was flooded beyond anything in the past. The thunder and lightning were so fierce that several buildings were set ablaze. Sally ran from the flooded cabin, looking skyward, and cursing the death of her child.

Again, a bolt of lightning struck nearby, only this time it was so severe, and so powerful that she was blinded by the flash, her hair singed and her flesh reddened.

Sally walked aimlessly for hours into the forest and across the fields, trudging through mud and undergrowth.

After two days of wandering, she finally came upon her village. The women and the elders rushed out to meet her. Taking her inside, they prayed for days over her shriveled and burned body as the one once known as Wuti-Yoki lay

Sally went on to live a long life, her eyes an eerie shade of blue-gray that looked as if they had been burned.

in a state of semi-consciousness. The medicine man used all his powers, and the woman of herbs applied all her skills, but in the end, it was time that would heal her.

Over the weeks and months, Sally slowly grew stronger. Still blaming Billy, she refused to see him, even though he repeatedly begged her family to intervene. However, she continued to refuse to speak with him.

Over time, Sally's eyesight slowly returned, but never as it was when she was young. And, she would never be called Wuti-Yoki again. What's more,

because of her actions that night in her grievous state, she had lost the gift she had been given.

Sally rarely spoke of the old days of plenty, but she still yearned for the "gift" that was taken from her that fateful day. She would, however, find comfort in the talks with the elders of the village. And eventually, she came to grips with the consequences of her promise that she had broken in anger.

Sally went on to live a long life, her eyes an eerie shade of blue-gray with a scaly covering that looked as if they had been burned by fire.

Whenever the younger members would ask about Sally in hushed tones, the older ones would reply that she was an old Spirit, from many years in the past.

J. Bryant Ray was born in the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains, and now lives in NW Georgia. He has published two novels and numerous short stories about life in the South.

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The Last Verse of the Sea Song

by Ron Burch

Mayday, Mayday—we have a ship in distress.”

The sun rose in the sky over the eastern Pacific peeking out from behind a thick wall of clouds, its filtered rays bouncing off an unsettled sea.

As the dawn became early morning, the moderate easterly winds increased to 20 to 30 knots with higher gusts. The four-foot sea became a six-foot sea, then an eight-foot sea. By mid-morning, swells grew to ten, then twelve, then fifteen feet. With each wave, the tiny 35' sailboat rose and fell and bobbed about like a cork.

Following a trip around the cape, the *SV Sea Song* and its crew of two were en route to the Galapagos Islands, a few hundred miles to the northeast. They were approaching the inter-tropical convergence zone where, for the next 24 hours, moderate to strong convectional activity along with

high winds and seas had been forecast by NOAA, the daily weather prediction agency.

Suddenly, an angry wave crashed over the bow. The forestay snapped. The mainmast sprang backwards and then recoiled forward. The boom swung around, hit the top of the weighed anchor, pushing one of its claws into the side of the vessel. The boom then reversed its swing, fell forward and dug itself into the bow. Larger and larger waves continued to pound the tiny boat. Water poured through the hole in the side where the anchor was impaled. The mainsail was useless. Facing such a stiff easterly

headwind, the most the diesel engine could make on its northeasterly course toward the Galapagos was about three knots. Sometimes they even went backwards.

At 1545 UT, the captain of the *Sea Song* sent an emergency message via HF radio to a group of ham radio operators on the 20-meter ham band. These guys meet each day and volunteer their time, equipment and efforts to serve and assist those in need of communications from foreign ports, and on the high seas. Through a network of rotating control and relay stations, this dedicated group offers virtually total coverage of the entire Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean, Caribbean and the eastern Pacific Ocean.

When they received the distress call from the *Sea Song*, the group immediately went to work. In very organized fashion and with links reaching halfway across the world, they col-

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lected and relayed information as to the ship's condition, present position, course, speed and the number of souls onboard to the Coast Guard in Miami. Once it was determined that the vessel in distress could remain afloat, but could not continue its course toward the Galapagos, possible rescue vessels were contacted and asked to render aid. The sailing vessel *Vliegend Zeil*, the Norwegian freighter *Kveld Sol* and the British freighter *Royal Dunbar* all responded.

The closest boat was the *Vliegend Zeil*. However, because of her size and the rough seas, the captain feared he would be unable to safely come alongside the *Sea Song* to transfer her passengers onboard his ship. He also lacked sufficient water and provisions to accommodate them for very long. That message was relayed to the Coast Guard. They advised the *Vliegend Zeil* to continue toward the *Sea Song*, but not to attempt a transfer—just stand alongside a safe distance away.

Alternatively, they suggested that the captain of the *Sea Song* deploy his dingy and row over to the *Vliegend Zeil*. However, the dingy onboard the *Sea Song* was trapped beneath piles of gear. When that news reached the Coast Guard, they warned that the passengers now onboard the damaged vessel would simply have to go into the water and be pulled from the sea as "man overboard."

All afternoon, ham radio operators (including yours truly) and ships' captains aboard other vessels joined the network of stations monitoring the situation. If the conditions for communications changed, all stood by to relay any information—the sailing vessel *Sea Song* called the *Stargazer*, along with hams in Michigan, Mexico, Jamaica, Toronto, San Francisco, Dallas, Atlanta, Miami and Los Angeles.

On the top and bottom of each hour, the control stations took updates from the *Sea Song*, and via other hams, relayed whatever news they had to the *Vliegend Zeil* and to the Coast Guard.

The amateur radio network, which normally operated eight or nine hours a day, prepared to stay on the air until the situation was resolved—*one way or another*.

Mid-afternoon, a Navy P-3 Orion aircraft was dispatched to drop a life raft and emergency supplies down to the *Sea Song*. However, because of the old 4-engine turbo prop's range and speed, it would be at least six hours before they reached the crippled vessel. That was an hour or so after the *Vliegend Zeil* expected to arrive and long after darkness would surround the helpless boat.

As the sun dipped below the western horizon, the hams relayed a message from the Coast Guard to the *Sea Song* asking the captain if he had flares

**...throughout the night,
the captain faced the harsh
reality that this would be his
last night as captain of his boat.**

on board. If so, how many and what color. Through the static, we heard the captain answer, "Red." Another message asked the captain about the ship's lighting—*did he have navigation lights and spreaders?* The captain replied that his navigation lights were damaged and inoperative, but that his spreaders were working. He was told that when he heard the Navy Orion approaching, he was to send up his flares so that the crew could hit their target somewhere in the darkness below.

In the meantime, ham radio operators on the east coast were attempting to gather contact information so they could get a welfare message to the family of the *Sea Song* crew—in Oslo, Norway. One of them agreed to make the call via landline. No one was home, but the committed ham operator promised to keep trying.

As darkness fell, the fifteen-foot seas of the morning were replaced with eight-to-ten foot swells. Via VHF radios, the captain of the *Sea Song* was in contact with the captain of the *Vliegend Zeil*. It was agreed that when

the first rescue boat reached them and stood alongside—albeit at a safe distance—the passengers of the *Sea Song* would remain onboard the crippled ship until one of the commercial vessels arrived.

Earlier in the day, the Coast Guard had sent a message advising the captain of the *Sea Song* that if a commercial vessel responded to his distress call, he would have to abandon his ship. The captain said he would, but asked if either of the freighters en route had the capability to tow or boom-lift the *Sea Song* and carry it home. They didn't. So throughout the night, in addition to his chagrin over the situation, the captain faced the harsh reality that this would be his last night as captain of his boat.

At 1630 UT the next day, the Norwegian freighter *Kveld Sol* reached the *Sea Song* and took her passengers aboard. Their new destination: not the Galapagos as was planned, but

rather through the Strait of Magellan to southern Chile where the crew of the *Sea Song* would have to arrange their own transportation back home to Norway.

The *Sea Song* was lost. But all in all, the story has a happy ending, thanks in large part to the members of the Amateur Radio Service. ("Hams" if you will—the same folks that have to fight homeowners' associations all across the country to erect their antennas and keep operating).

As the crew of the *Sea Song* abandoned the crippled ship, for some reason, he left the engine on the boat still running, her course locked on a north-easterly heading. By now, I'm sure she's dead in the water somewhere in the eastern Pacific southwest of the Galapagos. So, if you're looking for a sailboat on the cheap...

Ron Burch retired from a career in advertising and marketing and has since authored a number of published essays and magazine articles, in addition to a full-length novel.