

Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

**Murfreesboro:
A Town 'Captured'**

My First Ax Murder
A Sevier case of love & death

**Jordan Springs
Reunion**
Notes from a lost community

**Old Man of
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Cherokee fiction

Summer
2007

**You Can't Spell 'party'
Without a Little 'p'**
A childhood memoir

**A Thing Like
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Serving the King
*A sticky tale of
table syrup*

Sax and Violins and Fake ID's
Another memoir from Ron Burch's sordid past

David Shinner



Grab Your Fiddle and Your Ax

I was talking to one of my musician friends and trying to explain my convoluted “invisible silver thread” theory that I have developed, evolved and nurtured over the years. “Everything that we have experienced,” I told him, “is connected by invisible silver threads, criss-crossing and weaving the intricate patterns of our lives.”

I had called to give him a couple of personal news items that I thought would amuse him. He and I have been playing music together, off and on, for over 35 years, and I had recently finished writing and recording a couple of jingles—one for *King Syrup*, and another one for *Chicken 'n' Ribs Barbecue Sauce* that had been airing on the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights. “Think about all the times we dreamed of playing the Opry,” I told him, “I finally made it to the stage...or at least my voice did.”

Item Two was the re-appearance of our old friend, Bill Dockery, a big-time newspaper man, who had submitted an article for this issue of *SouthernReader*.

“Okay, I’ll bite,” said my musician friend, “Where’s the invisible silver thread?”

The invisible silver thread, I explained, ran through the 1975 Fourth of July weekend, traveling all the way from our little Baptist college in East Tennessee to present-day Nashville, via New York City, Atlanta and various colorful stops all along the way.

We had gone to college with Bill Dockery, who had graduated before us and was well on his way to a newspaper career while we were still playing coffeehouses and college parties. As my graduation drew closer and I was nearing the end of a two-year tenure as editor of the college newspaper, I received a note from Dockery written on the stationery of the newspaper where he worked in nearby Sevier County. He was complimenting me on my paper and offering to set up an interview with his publisher after I graduated.

I did end up in Sevier County a few months later, but not at the newspaper with Dockery; I got a job as a reporter for his newspaper’s competition, and Dockery and I started going head-to-head on everything from football games to county board meetings to the various sordid crime stories. Actually, the latter were few and far between; the most dramatic of them had featured the county sheriff setting fire to a ton of confiscated marijuana plants—since the owners of the plants were never found or arrested, the burning was the main event.

That is, that *was* the case until the 1975 Fourth of July weekend. That was when true crime came kicking and screaming into Sevier County in the form of an honest-to-goodness ax murder, and Dockery was there to record every detail, which he so thoughtfully shares with us in this issue of *SouthernReader*.

But *where*, you may ask, was the afore-mentioned, so-called *competition*?

Ah, good question! That weekend I had been with my friend (from the intro paragraph) and, along with our other musician friends from college, we were soaking in blissful bluegrass joy at the annual Smithville, Tennessee Fiddler’s Jamboree. Every year, in the center of the summer, the Jamboree was the perfect blue-

grass festival for a reunion of our tribes, and it was a great excuse to relax, camp out and just play music for an entire weekend.

My friends and I spent most of the time playing music on the lawn in downtown Smithville on the opposite side of the courthouse from the stage where the fiddlers and other musicians were competing. Crowds would gather around us, dissipate and then gather again like a listener ocean. Oblivious to everything and everyone, for hours on end we’d play everything from “Banks of the Ohio” to Monkee songs done bluegrass.

That year, the fiddling competition came down to two incredible fiddlers: the reigning 65-year-old local champ, Frazier Moss and a young, twenty-something fiddler from Triune, Tennessee. That evening, as they both fiddled their hearts out, we sat out in the audience and listened.

As good as Frazier Moss played, we felt like the kid from Triune had the edge. Looking back, maybe we were just rooting for him because he was closer to our age, but whatever the reason, when they gave the award to Frazier, we shouted our “No!” incredulity. The judges, however, were unswayed.

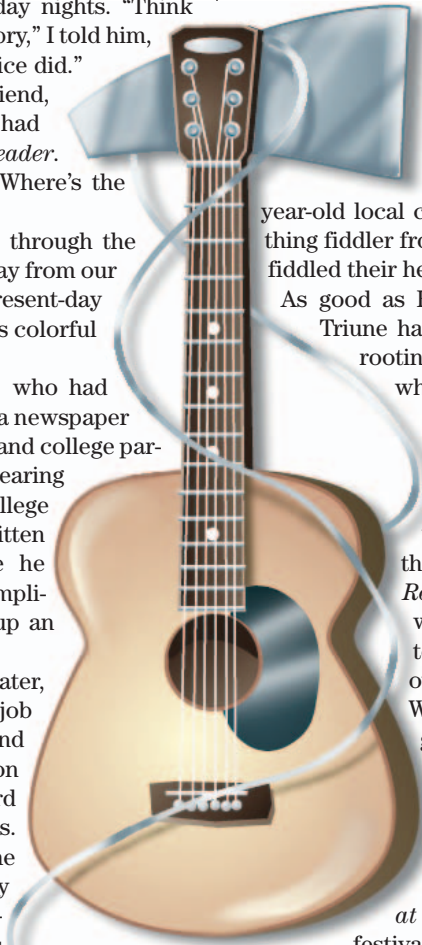
The next four or five years were a blur for me. I left the newspaper and East Tennessee, went to Nashville to write songs for awhile and then to New York City, where I went to work for *Record World*, a weekly music trade magazine. We wrapped up the magazine on Thursday nights and took the PATH train to Jersey early on Fridays to oversee the final proofs at the printer in Hoboken. We were usually finished by around noon, so we’d get back into the city by early Friday afternoon and have the rest of the weekend off.

One Friday afternoon, I returned to my place in Brooklyn Heights and settled down in front of the TV with a bowl of soup, and an item in the *TV Guide* caught my eye: “3:00 p.m.—*Showdown at the Hoedown*, A documentary about a bluegrass festival in Tennessee.”

“That’s cool,” I thought, “I wonder if it’s Smithville.” Sure enough, the camera caught the scenes on Interstate 40 leading to the cut-off road to Smithville, and then on into town under the “Welcome to the 1975 Fiddler’s Jamboree” banner.

There were taped conversations with the mayor, shots of the bands competing on stage, and a sidewalk interview with a cowboy-hatted guy who declared: “This is a great place to be, but the real music is what you hear on the lawn in front of the courthouse...” They cut to a shot of my friends and me, and there I was, red *Loggins & Messina* t-shirt and banjo, intent on finger-picking “Banks of the Ohio.”

At the end of the film, just before the “showdown” they interviewed the mayor one more time and he was saying, “This



Crisman boy from Triune doesn't have anything to be ashamed of—he played real good.”

“And he should have won!” I screamed at my TV from my Brooklyn Heights sofa, the old indignant passion flowing back into my voice. When they cut to the stage where they announced the winner, you can hear us screaming “No!” from the audience.

My friend stopped me at this point. “Yeah, I remember,” he said, “But what does Smithville have to do with Dockery’s ax murder?”

“That Fourth of July weekend, we were sitting around a campfire just outside Smithville, singing songs and getting ready for our big film debut,” I explained.

“Okay,” he said, thinking he had me, “How does your silver thread attach to your *Chicken ‘n’ Ribs* Opry jingle?”

“Thought you’d never ask,” I said, and then I told him the rest of the story.

A few weeks ago, *Riders in the Sky* were the hosts of the *Chicken ‘n’ Ribs* portion of the Opry that aired the jingle I wrote and sang.

I met the guys from *Riders in the Sky* a long time ago at *Record World*, the music magazine that I art directed. My editors brought me out to the lobby and introduced me as the art director and resident bluegrass musician from Tennessee (they also regularly used me as an interpreter whenever any Nashville recording artists visited our New York office). The guys in the band were pleased and invited me to join them onstage that night at their gig at the Lone Star Cafe down in the Village.

“I never knew you played with *Riders in the Sky*,” my friend said.

“I didn’t,” I replied, “The show was on a Thursday night, and I had to be at the printer in Jersey early the next morning. But, as a consolation prize, they gave me an album.”

“Okay, where’s the invisible silver thread?” my friend asked again.

I paused for effect and told him that the other night, when I was listening to *Riders in the Sky* introduce my jingle on the Opry (lead singer Ranger Doug said that he and his wife used the barbecue sauce in their hot tub), I went and found the album they had given me all those years ago and a bio sheet fell out from the dusty sleeve. And there, in black and white, was a picture of the band with their names and hometowns. Under the fiddle player (who I had always known only as “Woody Paul”), it said “Paul Woodrow Crisman, Triune, Tennessee.”

The silence on the other end of the silver-threaded line was the only affirmation I required.

David Skinner

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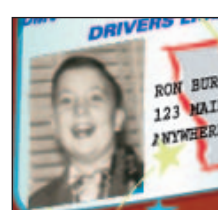
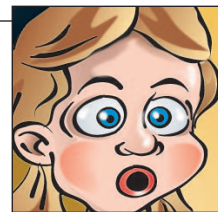
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AN ONLINE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

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You Can't Spell 'party' Without a Little 'p'

a childhood memoir by Lisa Love

I am sitting in the middle of a lake while waves gently lap at the side of my boat. Pure peace washes over me. Just then the boat starts to tilt—it's taking on water. I frantically try to right the boat—water inches up past my ankles. We are going down, surrounded by the dark, cold water. I quit struggling, relax and let go, sinking. Peaceful oblivion. I wish! Startled and wet, I wake up. My one coherent thought: "Oh no, not here. Not tonight! Please Lord, just let the earth open up and swallow me now!" What a shame, too—this day had started with such promise!

April 17, 1969. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. I was eight years old and floating (at least initially) on Cloud Nine, because I was going to be in a wedding. I remember twirling around in my brand-new, mint-green dress wearing my shiny, black patent-leather shoes. Mama braided my hair as she whispered in my ear how lovely I was going to look carrying my bouquet of flowers, walking down the aisle.

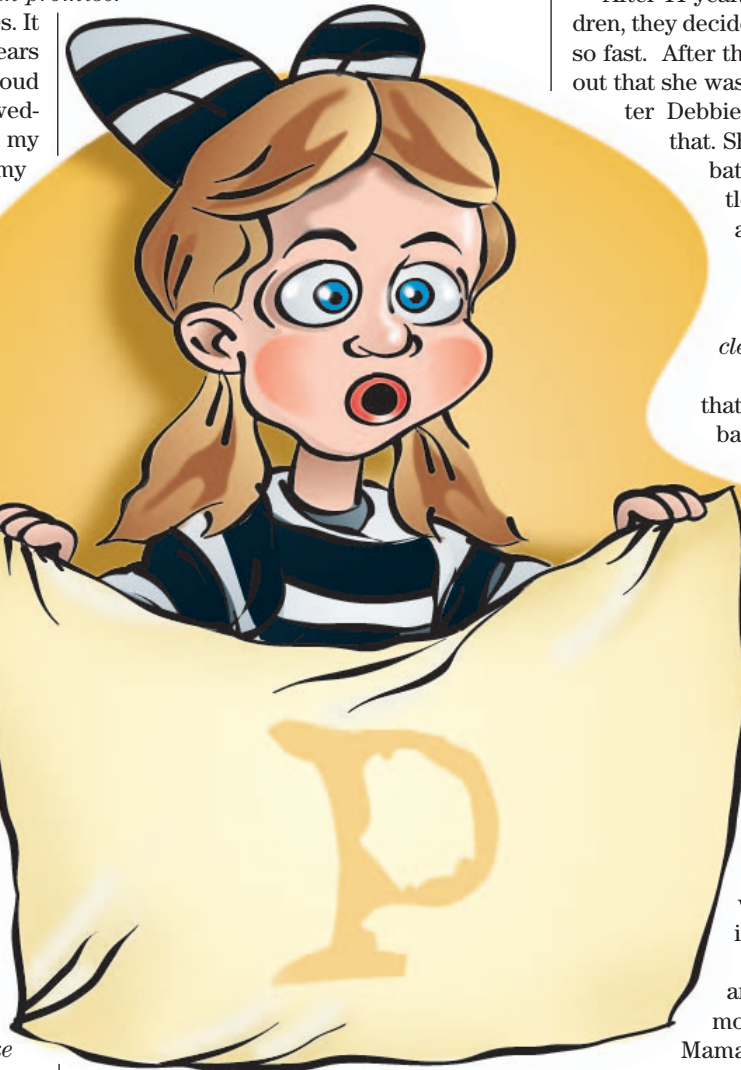
Visions of grandeur were swirling around in my head. For all of my nervous excitement you would have thought I was the bride! (At eight years old? Hello, this wasn't West Virginia!) No, I was going to be the flower girl at my Mama's wedding.

Therein lies the rub. Now mind you, I was totally *looking forward* to this wedding. From my child's eye, it sounded pretty much like a big ol' party to me. All of our friends and relatives were coming, and most importantly, there was gonna be *cake*. I'd go anywhere that there was even a hint of a promise of a slice of *cake*.

So I was tickled with the idea of the wedding; it was just the whole "Make Room for Stepdaddy" part of this program that I was having trouble wrapping my eight-year-old mind around. I couldn't shake this feeling that some seismic shifts were getting ready to occur in my world! Best of times, worst of times? Yup.

To understand my misgivings, you'd have to understand that I'd had it *really good* up until that moment. I came into this world the much-beloved mascot on a team that had weathered some pretty rough times (of which I would remain completely oblivious).

I entered the scene after the dust of divorce had settled; bitterness and recrimi-



nations were becoming faint memories, yet the loss and bewilderment that had touched the hearts of my older brother and sister was still a bit raw.

Mama and Daddy's divorce became final right after I was born. The way I heard tell it, my Dad had been in the Navy, and Mom said they got along beautifully as long as he was out at sea. He would pen volumes of the most beautiful love letters to her, describing the world and all of his adventures in it.

Mama would write back to him that all was fine at home, and the weather was

nice. I can only assume that I got my love of words from him.

They were both wonderful people separately, but a mismatch together from the start. Different temperaments, different faiths...and shall I say it? Yes, I must. He was a Yankee...born and bred! 'Nuff said.

After 11 years of marriage and two children, they decided to call it quits. Oops, not so fast. After they separated, Mama found out that she was pregnant with me. My sister Debbie actually takes credit for that. She said she would sit in the bathroom when she was a little girl, crying her eyes out and praying to God for Him to give her a precious little sister of her own to love.

And miracles of miracles, I arrived!

Of course she also says that after I was born, she went back into that bathroom, crying her eyes out and praying for Him to take me back, as obviously there had been some horrible miscommunication on her part. I can only assume a wailing, colicky newborn was not exactly what she had in mind. As I always tell her, maybe she should have been a wee more specific when petitioning Our Lord in prayer.

Before I was born, Mama and my brother and sister moved back home with my Mama's parents, Nana and Granddaddy, who, along with my Mama, were the most precious people on the face of God's green earth. At a time when they should have been enjoying their *Golden Years*, they wholeheartedly took to starting life all over again with kids and a new baby on the way.

Mama and my grandparents bought a lovely house in Suburbia, and with love and determination, they set about to make it our home. I was welcomed home from the hospital into pert-near Utopia!

When I was older, my Nana would tell me that some people might have thought my birth was an accident or not the best

timing in the world, but my arrival restored hope and laughter to my family. Mind you, I never got a big head from all of this attention...I mean—I was not under any delusions that I was the little Messiah come to save my family. No, I was just totally doted on by them all, and believe me, the feeling was decidedly mutual. I adored my Mama, loved my grandparents and pretty much hero-worshipped my big brother and sister.

I was somewhat awestruck being the “baby” in a multi-generational home, mainly because at any given moment of any given day, someone in that family adored me! Not all at once, mind you. I was, after all, a kid, and kids will be kids...meaning, I could be, in turn, charming, annoying, adorable, entertaining, or sometimes, just plain rotten! But for every second that someone in that house was annoyed with me, there was someone else that thought I hung the moon. Yeah, life was sweet!

Being raised a good Southern girl, I was taught to love God and Country (in that order, thank you), respect my elders, and be in church every time those doors opened. Who would have ever predicted that it would be in that very same Independent Southern Baptist Church that the world as I knew it would be rocked. For it was at that very same church that my sweet Mama met the man that she would marry that fateful night in 1969.

He was a gentle, handsome man that had tried in vain to get Mom’s attention for quite some time, but Mama had no intention of going down that road again (Honey, she invented the phrase “Been there, done that, got the video”). In fact, until I was seven years old, Mama had never once ventured into the dating world. She went to work, came home, tended the house and us kids, then went to church on Sundays.

She had so completely devoted her life to us that you can only imagine my “shock and awe” when she finally agreed to go with this man to Dunkin’ Dine for coffee after prayer meeting. Thank goodness she had the good sense to take me with her whenever they went out. I am sure this thrilled him to no end. They would sit and talk over coffee and pie about the preacher’s message while I sat across from them in the little booth eating (what else) *cake*.

I can only assume that my future stepfather used some kind of Jedi mind control over me, because I started looking forward to “our” little “dates.”

Eventually, he started coming to our house for Sunday supper. I must admit, he was a wonderfully-talented musician, able

to play the guitar and the harmonica beautifully. He also had a way with a story, sometimes making me laugh so hard milk would fly out my nose (I guess I always had a little trouble controlling my fluids).

Like water on a rock, he slowly wore me down and won me over with humor, music, and cake. Smart man. Then one day, Mama asked my brother and my sister and me what we thought about her marrying HIM. I didn’t really see the point—weren’t we all happy just the way it was? I mean, I liked him alright and all, but even at eight, I could tell he didn’t light up quite as brightly as the rest of my family did when I walked into a room.

I knew he liked me well enough, but I was pretty sure he didn’t ADORE me. While my family had always found me *precious*, I had the sneaky suspicion he thought I was a little more like *precocious* (if I had known that word at the time!).

We had always been a team; we always would be. Maybe we had just recruited another player.

But, wanting Mama to be happy, and with a quivering hope that maybe it would be kinda cool to be like all of my other friends’ families (mom, dad, 2.5 kids and a dog), I gave a tentative blessing to this union.

As the weeks past, I started to get a little excited as the wedding plans unfolded (every girl loves a party). It was decided that I would be the aforementioned flower girl, my brother would be a groomsman, and my sis would be the maid of honor! Coolio! Then the wheels came off this wedding bus the moment I heard Mama and my Nana talking about the honeymoon.

Honeymoon...well, this came out of left field! They were discussing hotel arrangements, and I piped up asking where we were going. Imagine my absolute disbelief when I was informed that I wouldn’t be going anywhere. *What?* Hey, hadn’t I been a part of this whole shindig up till now?

See, Mama had never been away from home without us before, so there was some major separation anxiety swirling around in my little head. But, Nana told me that we would have loads of fun while Mama was away, and then she reminded me that I had my best friend, Elaine’s slumber party to go to right after the wedding anyway.

It was Elaine’s 10th birthday party, and reminding me of it didn’t exactly allay my anxiety. When spending the night away from home, I had a tendency to get a little

homesick when it was time for bed. At home, after Mama fell asleep, I could tiptoe down the hall and crawl into Nana and Granddaddy’s bed to watch Johnny Carson with them till I fell asleep.

As the big day approached, my trepidations grew threefold; First, I was getting a stepdaddy (was that good or bad? I just didn’t know yet, but I knew our family dynamics would surely change).

Secondly, Mama was going on a vacation, or Honeymoon, if ya will, without me (ouch!) And thirdly, I kinda felt I was being sprinted off to this slumber party right after the wedding in a vain attempt to try and redirect my attention from the above-mentioned number one and number two trepidations.

When the big day arrived, with love in my heart for my Mama and my family, I decided to be brave and face the unknown with all the courage my little eight-year-old self could muster. I kept my head high, held my flowers proudly, and flashed a hope-filled, if somewhat tremulous, smile at my mom. She was my role model, my hero, and my soft spot to land in a hard world! We had always been a team; we always would be.

Maybe we had just recruited another player.

I got through the ceremony just fine (it was lovely by the way, thank you for asking), but at the reception, I started getting a little nervous thinking about Mom’s imminent departure and about this whole slumber party thingee.

Watching Mom and Stepdad pose for pictures, I started throwing back cup after cup of punch—drowning my sorrows in lime sherbet punch, I suppose. With my insides sloshing, there was certainly no room for cake! *Who’d a-thunk it?*

Finally it was time for the newlyweds to make their exit. Before I could burst into tears as I watched *that Man* drive away with my Mama, Aunt Barbara (who also happened to be Elaine’s mother) put her arm around me and directed me into her car. I told her I needed to get my suitcase, but she told me it had already been put in the trunk.

Talk about a quick getaway—honey, they had me out of there in a *flash*. Were they really afraid I was gonna grab onto the bumper of Mama’s car and let myself be dragged along the streets of Atlanta to the secret honeymoon location? Please!!! Well, actually I had thought of that, but the road-burn alone would have killed me long before we made it to the hotel.

So, off we went, Aunt Barbara and me, to Decatur for my first official slumber

party. By the way, Aunt Barbara was not *really* my aunt, but schooling ya in *all things Southern*, when a lady is a life-long friend of your mama's, she is crowned with the *Unofficial Aunt* title. She had been Mom's best friend for well over 20 years, and she loved me like one of her own.

As we got to her house, I asked who else from Church would be there, and she said I was the only one from Church coming to the party; the other eight girls were all from Elaine's class at school. Oh Lord, could this night get any worse? (Stay tuned—IT DEFINITELY COULD!!!).

Elaine and I didn't go to the same school, so I wouldn't know any of the other girls there. Oh that's just *swell*...I was to spend the night with eight veritable strangers. I'd have to pretend to be interested as they gossiped about people I don't know, all the while, in the back of my mind I'd be worried sick about my Mom.

At this point, I was starting to think that we didn't really know a lot about this guy who just took my mom away. Shouldn't we have done a background check on him?! You know, Ted Bundy seemed really nice at first, too. Oh, what had we gotten ourselves into? If you had looked up the definition of *anxiety* in the dictionary at this point, you'd have found my stricken face staring back at ya!

After some awkward first moments of trying to get everyone's name straight, it wasn't really so bad after all. The ice was broken a bit by making prank phone calls, painting our toenails, drinking sodas, eating popcorn, and watching old movies on TV (this was pre-VCR players and DVD's, so it was slim pickin's).

But even though I was still the outsider in the bunch, I think they all kinda liked me. I have always had a tendency to grow on people (yeah, just like an antibiotic-resistant fungus, I know, I know!).

I'd had a rather busy day, with the wedding and all the drama surrounding it, so when midnight came and it was time for bed, I didn't even mind. I was actually kinda sleepy. All ten of us crawled into Elaine's queen-size bed like a litter of kittens (or a family in the afore-mentioned West Virginia). I was snugly nestled in the middle of the pack, surrounded by arms, legs, heads and feet. The lights were all turned out, and I can still remember the moonlight shining in through the window, throwing shadows onto the walls.

I finally started settling in, not to the comforting familiar sounds of Johnny

Carson in the background, but of absolute silence, broken only occasionally by the sound of a few girls snoring. I began to drift off to sleep, but not before wondering what my Mama was doing (I am glad at eight years old that I had absolutely NO IDEA about anything in that department or I would have had to poke out my mind's eye with a rusted grapefruit spoon). Good night and God Bless us everyone!

I awoke with a start about three hours later. And yes, my first coherent thought really was, "Oh Lord, not here, not tonight! Please let the earth open up and swallow me whole!" Rest assured at about this time I was rethinking all those glasses of punch and sodas I had downed earlier because I WET THE BED! And I don't mean I just wet the bed, I mean I soaked it like I was a human soaker hose.

Oh why couldn't I have just been at

When we went to bed, I had thought how sweetly we resembled a sleeping litter of kittens; now they were going to wake up thinking they'd slept in the litter box.

home in my own bed when this calamity occurred? But, NO, I had just peed on eight Strangers! I can't really say for sure that it would have been any better or made that much of a difference if I had just peed on friends, but come on, STRANGERS!!

Help me, Lord! I was frantic at this point, absolutely frantic. My mind raced; I could hear my heartbeat pounding in my ears (so loudly that it almost, but not quite, drowned out the voices in my head).

RUN! ESCAPE! MUST GET OUT OF HERE! This was the litany going 'round and 'round in my head.

I tried desperately to think clearly and to assess the damage. Ever so gingerly I checked out the girl on my left—Sara, I think—or was her name Michelle? Or Patty? *Oh heaven help me*, it just seems the height of rudeness not to know the names of the girls you have just peed on, doesn't it?

Well, whoever she was, she was soaked. I checked out the girl to my right. Let's just call her Stephanie. Ditto. Soaked. And she didn't smell too great either, come to think of it. When we went to bed, I had thought how sweetly we resembled a sleeping litter of kittens; now they were going to wake up thinking they'd slept in the litter box. ESCAPE! MUST ESCAPE!! I crawled over the mass of sleeping bodies (couldn't help but notice that it wasn't just the girls right next to me that had gotten drenched. No

sir, my *Super Pee* had made it out to about three girls deep on each side of me. *Stupid punch!* The sheet was waterlogged and so were we.

I quietly untangled myself from the sleeping girls and made my way off the bed. ESCAPE! MUST GET OUT OF HERE! I crawled on my hands and knees on a cold, CREAKY, hardwood floor making my way to the bedroom door. I VERY SLOWLY pulled the door open and slithered out of the room (or should I say *swam* out of the room?)

I used my hands to navigate the walls of the hallway till I found the table where the phone was (this would not have been nearly as hard if cellphones had just been invented already).

My heart was pounding so loudly that I was sure it would wake the house. I lifted the receiver and started to dial the rotary phone. Of course our home number was rife with nines and zeros. The clickety-click sound of the dial was deafening to me. *This was taking forever! PLEASE! PLEASE DON'T LET ANYONE WAKE UP! I PEED ON STRANGERS* (like the voice in my head thought that I had forgotten that delicious morsel of news)!!!

The phone was ringing. My granddaddy answered. I hoarsely whispered, "Come get me NOW!"

Lord love him, he didn't even question why. He just said he was on his way! Then I had to make it down the stairs without making a sound. I slid down on my butt, one stair at a time (probably leaving a wet trail behind me). Finally, I bumped my way down to the last step, crawled across the foyer floor and struggled to unlock the front door. It wouldn't budge.

PLEASE!!! I stopped my struggling for a minute to assess my situation. I PEED ON STRANGERS! *Okay, got that already.* My suitcase and my eyeglasses were still up in Elaine's room. Leave 'em! Those girls upstairs were going to eventually wake up, and they were going to notice that I was gone and that they smelled like ammonia! Well, I couldn't worry about that at that particular moment, I just knew I didn't want to be there when that happened.

MUST GO!!! ESCAPE!!! I couldn't even imagine what they would think, but I was pretty sure I wrecked any chances of us all becoming BFF'S.

Stupid punch!!!

Embarrassment and shame flooded my heart. I was humiliated and I just wanted to run home. SANCTUARY!!! I saw Granddaddy's headlights in their driveway

and I pushed on the lock one last time with all my strength and it gave way.

I opened the door, and *it creaked loudly*. Bit-by-bit, I inched my way out onto the porch. I didn't even push the door closed. Too much noise.

I ran to the car, threw my arms around Granddaddy's neck and cried. He didn't ask any questions; he could see I was wet and the smell was pretty much unavoidable. I remember cuddling up next to him on that big bench seat (there weren't any seatbelt laws to protect me back then). He didn't mind that I was getting his pajama bottoms wet and stinky (yes, he came to get me in his pajamas) or that I was probably ruining his car's upholstery.

He told me everything always seems better in the light of day after a good night's rest. He knew how tired and utterly miserable his little girl was. I rested my head on his shoulder. We were the only car on the road at that time of the night; Glenn Miller played softly on the radio.

When we drove into the garage, Granddaddy picked me up and carried me into the house where he got me cleaned up and in dry p.j.'s. He then took me into the kitchen and fixed me his famous toasted homemade pimento cheese sandwich (not only a southern delicacy, a Granddaddy-and-Lisa tradition).

We were both bone-tired, and I don't remember a lot of conversation—just him patting my hand and smiling while I finished my snack. When we were done, we crawled into bed with Nana. She woke, and Granddaddy assured her that in the morning he would fill her in. I cuddled between the two of them. Safe. Secure. Unconditionally loved.

I felt so much better right then that I even hoped Mama was having a good time and not missing me too terribly—and maybe I had overreacted. Maybe it wasn't as bad as it had seemed at the time. It was, after all, just an accident, right?

NO, I PEED ON STRANGERS!!!

Yeah, it was still really bad! But I went to sleep with Nana and Granddaddy each holding my hands.

I was dreaming again. Oh No. This time I heard a doorbell ringing and the pounding of a door. And had I heard a phone earlier? Phones weren't in bedrooms back then, so



**Sure, I peed on strangers,
but was it really an
arrestable offense?**

if it had rung, it certainly hadn't jarred us out of our deep sleep. But the persistent knocking on the door was not subsiding, nor was it a dream after all.

Granddaddy finally got up and made his way to the front door. I peered around the hallway to see what was what. As he opened the door, I saw two policemen.

POLICEMEN?! Oh my Lord, sure, I had assumed there might be some repercussions coming after last night, BUT WAS IT REALLY AN ARRESTABLE OFFENSE???

My stomach clenched into a huge knot, and I was pretty sure that pimento cheese sandwich was going to be making a reappearance. Jail? JAIL?! I didn't know if they were at the front door because I PEED ON STRANGERS or because I left the scene of the crime. My knees were shaking as the policeman continued to talk to my granddad.

You know, at eight, my only real concept of prison was from the *Andy Griffith*

Show. Mayberry had a two-cell jail and Otis, the town drunk, was pretty much a regular in it. As I was pondering what my cell might look like and if all the other prisoners would be as friendly as Otis appeared to be, Granddaddy called me to the front door.

One of the officers told me that my Aunt Barbara had been scared to death when she woke up and found me gone. She had told them that my suitcase was right where I had left it and the front door was standing wide open when they all got up.

When she couldn't get anyone to answer our phone here at home, she felt it was her duty to call the police department and report me as *kidnapped*.

Waves of emotion flooded over me all at once. First, I was relieved that I wasn't being arrested after all.

I really didn't think I could handle the *Big House!* (After the previous night, I wouldn't want to be the inmate that had the bunk below mine, would you?)

Secondly, I was a little amused that Aunt Barbara would think a kidnapper would want to break into her house and take the little myopic girl in the middle of the pack *WHO HAD PEED ON STRANGERS!* Unless she thought the kidnapper had scared the pee out of me. *Hey, now that was a thought!* Maybe they would have believed—nah, too far fetched, even for me.

Well, *all's well that ends well*, I had always heard. Granddaddy explained the real situation to the officers and then went to call my Aunt to apologize for *everything*.

I stood at the door as the police officers walked back to their patrol car, bemused smiles on their faces. One of the officers said to the other as they climbed into the cruiser, "I guess we can just write this one up as a *One-eleven*."

"A One-Eleven? What's that?" the other officer asked, puzzled.

The first officer flashed a grizzled-but-understanding grin. "Piss and Run," he said as he put the car in gear, backing out of the driveway.

LisaCLove@bellsouth.net

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

My First Ax Murder

by Bill Dockery

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 (KJV)

As we look out on the world around us and try to “make sense of it,” as our mind requires us to do, we find that while some of it does make sense there is another part of it that makes no sense at all, resisting every attempt we make to put it in any light in which it would make sense.

Geddes MacGregor

Introduction to Religious Philosophy

In the mid-1970s, I lived in an apartment in an old boarding house in Sevierville, where I worked as a reporter on the local paper. The apartment had a shotgun layout, and I slept on a single-bed mattress and box springs in the middle room, between the kitchen and living room.

My bed sat atop the shag on the floor, and beside it a battered black tin footlocker held my reading lamp, a clock radio, and a phone.

On July 4, 1975, a little before 4 a.m. the phone rang, waking me from a deep sleep. The conversation that followed went something like this:

Hello.

Is this Bill Dockery?

It is.

This is Houser from the sheriff's department. The sheriff wants you to take some pictures at a crime scene. We've had the city police knocking on your door.

Sorry, I didn't hear them. What's up?

There's been a horrible crime. We've had a murder down on Chapman Highway. I knew Houser, an older man who served as a reserve deputy. The way he emphasized “horrible,” I could imagine his jowls shaking as he rolled the Rs.

OK, I'll have to go by the office and get my camera. What's so horrible about it?

A man killed his wife with an ax.

Oh. I'll be right there.

I took down directions, pulled on some clothes and, after a five-minute stop to pick up camera and scratchpad, was on my way down Chapman toward the place where Ruby Rogers lay dead.

At the time, Chapman Highway was the primary route between the Great Smoky



Mountains National Park and the rest of the world. To accommodate the hundreds of thousands of park visitors every year, it had been four-laned, but it still drove like a two-lane road, with hard turns and steep hills and unexpected dips that sometimes lured tourists and locals alike into spectacularly fatal crashes. That night in the hours before dawn on the busiest weekend of the

year, I had it all to myself. I drove a hand-me-down blue '66 Impala, and I pushed it as fast as the road would allow.

I was not, per se, a photographer. Like all the other reporters and ad salespeople, I carried a twin-lens box camera and a strobe flash, a foolproof setup that let the publisher avoid hiring a professional photographer. I had a pretty good eye and usually came back with a publishable image, but the quality that had made the sheriff send for me that night was much simpler—I made myself available.

The affluence of the '70s had brought a new newspaper to Sevier County to compete with the one I worked for. To make sure that I had the inside on breaking cop stories, I had volunteered to come out any time anywhere to take evidentiary photos

for the sheriff's department and the city police department. The offer was popular because, like my publisher, the local sheriff wasn't prepared to spend money on a pro. Over a couple of years, I had become the county's most in-demand corpse photographer.

Truthfully, I didn't relish the work. Many of the emergency personnel were what I came to know as adrenaline junkies: They flourished in a world of disaster and trauma. Without the possibility of a rescue or the threat of immediate death, they weren't fully alive. Some of the young deputies were motivated by something darker: a morbid energy they gained from the odds and ends of car wrecks and murders, generated, I suspect, by some unconscious notion that the proximity of death made their own life somehow more real. The old hands—the coroner, the sheriff—had from long exposure developed emotional calluses; the coroner was infamous for lighting up a rancid cigar while inspecting a death scene.

For me, however, each new instance of violent death was a little harder than the last. This time, as I took the curves on Chapman, I wondered whether an ax murder would be more than I could bear.

A second motive drove me to this gruesome volunteer work. Even though state laws required that police records be open

to public and press, in practice the authorities didn't normally make their dispatch logs and blotters available unless they saw some immediate political benefit. A reporter who wasn't present at the crime scene often found himself shut off from vital details of a case, unable to ask crucial questions that would help the reader make sense of the event. The circumstances produced a companionable mistrust on both sides, with neither officer nor journalists entirely comfortable conspiring with the enemy but both needing the products of that conspiracy for their own purposes.

Just a couple of miles short of the Seymour community, I came on a collection of flashing blue and red lights. The emergency vehicles were collected in front of a country market and gas station on a straightaway before the four-lane dipped abruptly into a hollow and climbed the steepest hill on the route. I stopped along the shoulder far enough away so that my car wouldn't be in the way and couldn't be blocked in. Camera in hand, I approached a huddle of deputies.

General Schmutzer is looking for you, one of them said, pointing up a gravel driveway that went up the embankment on the right side of the road. I climbed the drive toward a modest ranch-style house that overlooked the highway. Schmutzer, the district attorney general, separated himself from another cluster of officers and approached me.

We'll do the house first. He guided me into the garage, systematically pointing out details he wanted photos of. The bottom half of the door into the kitchen was wood; the top half was small panes of glass. The varnished wood near the handle was scored with several long shallow scratches. I focused the camera as best I could in the dim light and shot a couple of frames.

This is where the mother tried to get in to stop the fight. Schmutzer picked up a brush ax nearby. *This is the murder weapon*. The ax wasn't the typical wood-chopping wedge. Mounted on an ax handle, the blade was of thin steel, maybe eight inches long and five wide, built to cut through undergrowth without getting lodged in a thick sapling the way a traditional ax would.

I took more pictures of the blade.

Schmutzer led me past the kitchen to the bathroom. A hand mirror in a metal frame lay broken, and there were blood stains on it and around the lavatory. I shot photos, each shot punctuated by the whine of the strobe as it recharged for the next flash. We moved to the bedroom, which was in serious disarray. *Here is where the fight apparently started*.

We went out the back, where the screen on the bedroom was askew. *The mother tried to get in here*. Schmutzer turned. *Now let's go down to the road*.

Ruby Rogers lay crumpled in the middle of Chapman Highway. I had steeled myself for a grisly scene, with detached body parts and unimaginable wounds; but on the dark

frail old man with wispy white hair sat blankly in the backseat, not looking around, as if he didn't know what was happening to him.

The story the investigators pieced together was straightforward enough.

Donald and Ruby Rogers, both natives of the community, had lived quietly and apparently quite happily until that night. Donald, 70, had been a truck driver in Alcoa. He had a couple of grown children and had been widowed. By all accounts, he was known as a quiet, upstanding man. Ruby, an Ogle before she married him, was 49 and an inspector at Standard Knitting Mills in Knoxville. She had never been married before.

Sometime after they went to bed the night of July 3, a loud argument broke out. Ruby's mother, who lived in a singlewide trailer in a corner of the yard, was awakened by the row and came around the hill to help her daughter. Apparently alarmed at what she was hearing, she picked up a bush ax somewhere and ran to the bedroom window. She took a couple of ineffectual swings at the aluminum screen, bending it but not gaining entry.

Blade in hand, she hurried back to the garage. The kitchen door was locked so she swung at it

several times, again to no effect. She leaned the ax against the wall beside the door and started back to the bedroom window, but the Rogerses were moving in her direction.

Ruby burst out the door, followed closely by Donald, who reached out for the ax as if it had been placed there specifically for his use. The mother put herself between her daughter and her son-in-law in an attempt to stop the fight. Donald told her to move, that he wouldn't hurt her if she got out of his way. When she did, Donald chased Ruby down the drive. He caught up with her in the middle of the highway and killed her. When sheriff's deputies arrived, he was sitting passively on the steps of his small front porch. He had thrown the ax in the shrubs nearby.

Several of the deputies, including Houser's son, Steve, lived in the surrounding community, and the consensus was that the old man was a good man, and that she



I climbed the gravel drive toward a modest ranch-style house that overlooked the highway.

pavement she looked little different from victims of car wrecks and other less horrific violence. She was wearing a nightie and step-ins, and her chubby flesh, where it wasn't slashed, was an almost translucent white. The wounds in her arms and legs were deep, dark, red cuts that seemed to swallow light. Around her the asphalt was black with shiny, gelatinous blood. The flashing lights from the emergency vehicles increased the darkness through the viewfinder and, in order to focus the camera, I had to have Schmutzer train a flashlight on different parts of her body as I shot from a variety of angles, trying to render clinically accurate images of the scene.

The photos taken, I pulled out my scratchpad and pen and turned to a senior deputy.

Who did this?

Donald Rogers. Her husband. He's in the cruiser.

I looked toward a nearby patrol car. A

was a good woman. No one had anything bad to say about him, just that he was unusually quiet, a man of few words. The prevailing theory that he had simply gone off, that arteries had imperceptibly hardened until he was no longer living in quite the same world as the rest of us. A couple of us pondered the irony that, in taking the bush ax to the door, the mother had provided her son-in-law with the weapon that killed her child. It was all the more ironic that, if gaining entry to the house would have helped anything, all the mother had to do was break the glass in the door, reach through, and unlock it.

I wrapped up my note-taking and reached into my pocket for some ammonia. I had made smelling salts a standard part of my gear after covering an exceptionally gruesome Corvette wreck on Highway 66 and almost fainting on the drive back to town. Normally, my squeamishness was amusing to other regulars at these macabre gatherings, but Sandy, one of the sheriff's senior deputies, saw me pop and sniff the ampule. Sheepishly he held out his hand.

On the drive back to town, I decided not to go back to my apartment. I felt wrung out, convinced I should feel something but unsure what. With dawn close, I went to my parents' house. I let myself in quietly and lay down in the bedroom that had been mine and my brother's. I intended to sleep late, since it was a holiday, but was up at 7 a.m.

A 72-year-old man is being held by the Sevier County Sheriff's Department after the body of his 49-year-old wife was found in the southbound lane of U.S. Highway 441...

The *News-Record* was published twice a week at that time. The Friday edition had published Thursday evening the night of the murder, so the Rogers story couldn't run until the following Tuesday.

In keeping with the publisher's sensitivity to community mores, I underplayed the sensational details, and the story ran at the top of page three in the front section, trumped for page-one display by stories about the county school board's financial plans, the sheriff's seizure of 5,600 marijuana plants, a tentative property tax rate of

\$3.38, and the departure of a prominent physician from Gatlinburg.

Later that week, Donald Rogers appeared in the county's trial justice court for a preliminary hearing to determine whether there was reason to hold him for trial. His sons had hired a crackerjack local lawyer to represent their father. Jerry Galyon had roots in the Knob Creek community and had known the various Rogerses most of his life. Prone to a pompadour and big-plaid sport coats, Galyon made a more-than-comfortable living in tort liability suits, and a savvy counselor didn't often appear before the state bar.



Ruby Rogers lay crumpled in the middle of Chapman Highway.

Rogers wasn't in the courtroom at first, as Trial Justice Judge Edwards ran through more mundane DUIs, misdemeanors, and minor felonies. When the case was finally called, deputies led him in.

The old man was wearing slippers and light blue pajamas, possibly the pajamas he had been wearing the night of the murder, and his white hair was still tousled. Mentally I chalked a tick for Galyon—usually when defense counsel arranges for the client to be cleaned up and dressed presentably in slacks and a sport shirt, or even a suit. But Rogers showed little recognition that he knew he was sitting in a public courtroom in his nightclothes—or why.

The hearing was over quickly. Galyon didn't try to argue that Rogers hadn't killed his wife. Instead the lawyer asked for a psychiatric evaluation. Schmutzer, the attorney general, readily agreed to the need for the exam, and the judge ordered Rogers to Eastern State Psychiatric Hospital in Knoxville.

I caught up with Galyon after the hearing, knowing that he would have a version

of events favorable to his client. I wasn't disappointed.

He thought someone was coming for her, Galyon said. You know how old men get. Someone turned around in their driveway about three o'clock, and he thought they were coming to pick her up. That's what started it.

I can tell you the people who were in that car. I can tell you where they had been and where they were going next. They had nothing to do with it. He just went off. He thought someone was coming for her.

I left Galyon to visit the attorney general's office and deliver a piece of bad news. The

photos I had painstakingly shot had not turned out. One of the ad salespeople had messed with the synchronization on the camera I had used, so that the camera's shutter and the flash weren't working together. There was nothing of that night to see. *Don't worry, Schmutzer said. We're not going to need them. Besides, we took some shots at the funeral home after the coroner got her cleaned up. We're OK.*

Later I talked to the radio newsman who had shot the coroner's pictures. On the slab, Ruby Rogers had not looked like just another wreck victim. The ax had damaged her much more

than was apparent on the dimly-lit roadway. One blow had virtually cut off the top of her head a couple of inches above the eyebrows.

With no one seriously doubting the appropriateness of an insanity defense, the case quickly faded from legal and public attention. Rogers was sent off to Nashville's Central State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. After another year, I abandoned chasing police cars and went to Nashville, too, fading from East Tennessee journalism into a better-paying editorial position on a United Methodist devotional magazine. But the residue of that Independence Day remained with me—not in the physical horror of the butchery I had witnessed—but as a fundamental challenge to the way I understood the world.

I had grown up in Sevierville's First Baptist Church, where I had breathed in a piety that put God at the center of all history, the ultimate sparrow-watcher whose purpose was present, if not evident,

in even the most trivial incident.

By the time I was leaving high school, my devotion had begun to fray around the edges. At the Southern Baptist college I attended, I was forced to confront some of the contradictions inherent in a literal approach to Scripture. I was growing out of a denomination that, at its most literal, believed neither in dinosaurs nor in dancing.

I had already begun to question, at least in theory, the notion that everything works together for good. I had seen and railed against the injustices of the Vietnam War and was growing more aware of the six million Jews systematically killed by the Nazis in World War II. Still, on an emotional level, I think I still clung to the Sunday school notion of traumatic events—that for every overwhelming event there was some understanding of it that would redeem it for the people who survived it, some arcane knowledge or circumnavigation of logic that would make it just another instance of God's positive intervention in life.

Ruby Rogers' death made that approach untenable. It was difficult to imagine anything, *anything*, that might redeem for Ruby those moments when she ran screaming into the middle of a highway in her nightdress, a step ahead of a husband she thought she knew who was swinging an ax at her head. And there wasn't any more favorable interpretation of events that would comfort her family or her demented husband or his sons.

Oddly, the term that came to my mind soon after the murder was one I had learned in a philosophy course at the Baptist college. The Rogers event was nothing less than a *dysteleological surd*, a concept from "Introduction to Religious Philosophy," by Geddes MacGregor. A Scotsman, MacGregor was less a philosopher than a Christian apologist, someone we liberal undergraduates dismissed scornfully as less than rigorous.

But the term fit. "Dysteleological" meant "meaningless" or "without purpose," and a surd was an irreducible point, something which couldn't be parsed or dissected. There was no way my former Baptist brethren could explain away the suffering of the Rogerses that made it meaningful. The murder was a black hole of meaning, sucking in any explanatory moves toward redemption. I was free of the notion that all things work together for good. Hell, I wasn't even sure all things work *together*.

The murder also dealt another, although by no means the final, blow to my intrinsic trust of consciousness and rationality. In my life as a Baptist, I had lived confident that, if you knew the right, you could invariably do it. Once you had made a decision for Christ, once you were saved, all you had to do to live a righteous life was make the right decisions. It was easy. All the major decisions were open to conscious inspection and rational choice.

I had also spent some time in therapy, so I knew that neither the world nor the peo-



Donald Rogers lies just inside the gravel road that circles the older part of the cemetery.

ple in it were rational and that consciousness does not guarantee true seeing. Yet invariably I slipped back into the self-deceit that, if I didn't control the world, at least I controlled my self. The little drama played out between Ruby and Donald reminded me once more that I might be proceeding in my nice, orderly life, making wise choices and planning for the future, and still kill somebody.

Nature, it turns out, abhors a dysteleological surd. What first appears irreducibly meaningless will accrete significance the way a gravestone collects lichen. Thus my first ax murder has stayed with me, reminding me every time I pass a certain spot on Chapman Highway how very little I control.

I visited Zion Hill Baptist Church on a recent Saturday in February, a blustery

afternoon that blew hot or cold, depending on how often swatches of clouds blotted out the sun. The staff of Sevier County Public Library's genealogy department had pointed me to the cemetery of the church where both Donald and Ruby Ogle Rogers were buried, and I had come to pay my final respects.

The church is a solid-looking red brick structure on a knoll above the creek bottom with two terraced asphalt parking lots in a semicircle below it. A substantial flight of steps leads to the front door, and to one side an equally substantial but more recent concrete-and-brick ramp gives handicap access to the sanctuary.

The burying ground further up the hill predates the current church building by at least a century and a half. The older part, near the church, is dominated by a couple of tall cedars and an oak or two. Spread around them are the final resting places for whole lineages of Ogles and Galyons, Rogerses and Ballards, with an occasional Cutshaw thrown in for good measure. The birthdates range from for good measure. The birthdates range from the early 1800s forward, the more recent the birth, the farther from the church.

Donald Rogers lies just inside the gravel road that circles the older part of the cemetery. His rock is highly polished blue-gray granite with the customary scrollwork and flourishes that mark modern gravestones. He died on January 24, 1984, the stone says, and information from funeral records indicates that he died at Lakeshore Mental Health Institute in Knoxville. Beside him on his right hand lies Zack Ogle, evidently his first wife, who died in the late 1950s. Nothing marks the burial as different from any of the other graves around it. Whatever demons drove Donald Rogers are at rest with him.

There's no sign of Ruby Rogers' stone, and genealogists at the library indicate that she may be buried nearby in an unmarked grave.

Leaving the cemetery, I decided to visit the scene of the crime once more. I followed the same route I'd taken more than a quarter century before and soon came to the house and the small market across the road. More small houses and mobile homes dotted nearby hillsides and I gingerly

pulled up the steep driveway, hoping not to have to explain myself to an owner or neighbor.

The structure was pretty much as I remembered it. The brick had been painted cream and an ell had been added on the back that enclosed a patio. The porch on the front had been screened in. The one-car garage door was still there, as was the door beside it. I shot a couple of digital photos and started to leave.

Are you lost? Can I help you? A woman waved at me from the patio. Her voice had a Midwestern twang, the dialect that puts "CAHN" in the pronunciation of Wisconsin.

I put on the emergency brake and got out of the truck, keeping my hands in view. *No. I used to know some people who lived here. They were Rogerses. They lived here in the '70s.*

I've just been here five years. I heard there was a Rogers family. The place was in bad shape when I bought it. Are you a real estate agent?

No, Ma'am. I was just seeing what the place looked like after all these years. I knew the people who lived here once.

If you were a real estate agent, I'd run

you off. The real estate agents are always stopping by. They want to sell it for me. You're welcome if you are not a real estate agent.

I got back in the truck and rolled backward down the drive. At the bottom, I crossed traffic precariously to pull into the market parking lot. A nearby house had been turned into obviously unprofitable

Oddly, the term that came to my mind soon after the murder was one I had learned in a philosophy course at the Baptist college, "a dysteleological surd."

retail space, but the market looked pretty much the same.

I stepped to the edge of the four-lane and snapped off a couple of more shots. Nothing about the spot indicated the events that had gone on a quarter century ago. The red clay embankment below the house had become overgrown with trash shrubs and undergrowth.

I was getting back into the truck, when a man started stepping toward me purposefully. Thinking I was about to face another barrage of questions about my picture-taking, I got half way out of the truck.

Buddy, I just spent my last sixty dollars fixing my truck and my family's got a place to stay if I can get them to Maryville. His twang echoed that of the home owner on the other side of the road. Can you spare me a little money to help me get them there?

Marveling for a moment that I had just been panhandled by a guy from Michigan at a country store in Sevier County, I found a dollar bill in my pocket and handed it to him, grateful that peace came so cheap. Then I got back in the truck and pulled out onto the highway toward Knoxville, driving over the spot where Donald Rogers killed Ruby Rogers.

Bill Dockery edits "Scientia," the University of Tennessee's research magazine, and coordinates research information at UT. He has held various editorial and writing positions at the daily "Knoxville News Sentinel," the "Metro Pulse" alternative weekly, and the Mountain Press newspapers. He and Dolly Parton marched together in the Sevier County High School band's drum line in the mid-1960s.

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Jordan Springs Reunion

a memoir by Kay Ingram Bartberger

The first day of my "Creative Writing" class, we were asked to write a story about an all expense paid trip with our favorite person. Those who had been in the class for awhile chose famous people who they admired. Now, I can not think of anyone I admire more than my father. Every summer, dad would load us, four kids and mom, in the old Studebaker and away we would go on some great adventure. We never knew just where we were going, but somehow we always ended up on this dusty red clay road that led back to my father's roots. So, on my "Creative Writing" trip, I decided it would be fun to invite my Tennessee cousins, all eight of them, plus my sisters and me, to go back in time when Jordan Springs, Montgomery County, Tennessee was more than part of Fort Campbell.

The appointed time had finally arrived when we would all gather at Jordan Springs, Montgomery County, Tennessee. Frances Lorene, Royce Mitchell, Sara Kathryn, Martha Lou, and Nora Jean didn't have far to travel as they had all remained in Tennessee, but Charlie Millard, Dora Mae and Horace Edward had quite a ways to go, as did the three sisters.

Distance didn't put a damper on our spirits as it had been years since we had all been together. Taking a journey into the past was like a fresh bouquet of Floribundas waiting to open in full glory.

I can remember as a child, the excitement I felt in the pit of my stomach as we rounded the last turn on our long journey. The homestead would peek through the tall corn stalks and at last the split oak fence

would beckon us to enter. Giant Oak trees, where locusts would orchestrate their music, and sprawling Maples stood as sentries guarding the old clapboard place, which was actually a three-room wooden shack, but as a kid growing up, it was the most exciting place on earth.

Grandma welcomed us in her faded gray checked cotton long-sleeved dress. It reached down to her cotton stockings and

black leather slippers. A crisp white apron with a great big patch pocket, which held a tattered handkerchief, covered half her small body, and a crocheted shawl covered her shoulders. She made a great game for us grandchildren, coaxing us ever so slowly into the comforts of her home.

The front room was sparsely furnished with just the bare necessities: a big feather bed, two hickory-splint-seat rocking chairs and a daybed. There was a fireplace and kerosene lamps to work or read by. The youngest of the family slept on the daybed until graduating to the dormitory and where Grandma could tend the young one, if needed. The older children had a room all to themselves and in the cold of winter could snuggle down in their iron stead beds filled with straw mattresses overlaid with downy-like feather beds and handmade quilts.

The hand-hewn table, selected from a stand of trees on the northwest property line, ran the length of the eating room. I can still conjure up the aromas coming from the woodstove in the back of the house. There were always hot biscuits on the table

"Downtown" Jordan Springs consisted of two general stores and a wooden footbridge over the springs itself.

and plenty of fresh churned butter and country fried ham.

The mule-eared, rush-woven-seat chairs leaned up against the table, waiting for the family to gather for a prayer before devouring the sumptuous feast. If there were more people than seats, then they ate in shifts, the menfolk first, of course. A pine pie safe with punched-design tin panels in the doors, sat in the corner. It held the goodies of the day for us kids to nibble on at will. The trouble was the mice had gnawed a hole up behind one of the legs of this grand old piece and gobbled up our yummy morsels quicker than we could. Uncle Tom, however, put a stop to that by stuffing pieces of tin up in the holes. That same pie safe sits in my dining room today, but am sorry to say it holds no hot biscuits or country-fried ham, just my collection of treasures acquired over the years.

There were chickens roaming free in the back yard. The smokehouse, where the hams were cured and where we had our Saturday night bath, was near the open fire which held a huge iron pot where work clothes were forced to give up the remaining stains of the red clay. Close by was the deep well where we'd dip a bucket in the vast hole and to our great surprise, bring up fresh cool water.

To the back side of the place was the footpath to the outhouse. The smell of the wild flowers drowned out any unpleasant odors and yes, it was a two-seater, but I never asked anyone to join me. The pig pen was in the same vicinity, and you could hear those curly-tailed rascals squeal at one another as they fought over the scraps from the table.

Grandfather Terry arose every morning at 5:00 AM, and he believed if he were up then everybody in the house should be up, too. That didn't go over too great with my mom. She had been brought to this God-forsaken nowhere land of no indoor conveniences and left for the next six weeks to manage best she could, with four children, one in diapers. The following year dad arranged to have a room added on, with a separate entrance and peace reigned over the balance of our summers.

On the dusty red clay road into beautiful downtown Jordan Springs, my father's siblings had settled on farms of their own,

married, and raised families. Aunt Alice, the baby of the family, Uncle Ben and daughter Frances Lorene lived within a stones-throw of the homestead, but the rest of them had moved on down the dusty road. The Key family lived next door (when I say next door, I mean about a mile or so down the dusty road) and produced a fine young man by the name of Buford. He was my first love. I learned to blush when the kids teased me about him. Then Uncle Mack and Aunt Nora and their daughters, Martha Lou and Nora Jean were just beyond Pleasant Hill Road. At the bend of the road lived the St. Johns family. They were not kin, but we had some really good

times with their two youngest kids, Mary Jo and Billy. Aunt Murtha and Uncle Genie came next with their two young ones, Horace Edward and Sara Kathryn. Last but not least Uncle Henry and Aunt Ellie lived with the largest brood; Dorothy Marie, Charlie Millard, Dora Mae, and Royce Mitchell.

"Downtown" Jordan Springs consisted of two general stores and a wooden footbridge over the springs itself. One store was run by Uncle Tandy, my grandmother's brother, and the other was run by Uncle Albert, also my grandmother's brother. I suppose everyone in Jordan Springs, were related, or at least it seemed that way.

Horace Edward, my sister, Eleanor Lorraine and I would purchase our cheese and crackers and a small sack of tobacco and go out on the footbridge and smoke and eat and talk. Sometimes we would wade down in the cool water of Jordan Springs

and linger there until the sun laid long shadows on the dusty red clay road.

As I look back on those wonderful summers I always felt very special there, very loved and very safe. Those trips were probably the most meaningful of my life. To have such a wonderful big family who loved and accepted you no matter what, was very comforting and important to a young girl on the threshold of womanhood.

It is not possible to show my children or grandchildren the wonders of the dusty red clay road that led down to Jordan Springs, Montgomery County, Tennessee. On July 16, 1941, the United States Army selected 105,000 acres of that land by right of eminent domain and turned it into Fort Campbell.

And so, the children's paradise would be no more—but I do have my memories, which pour out of me like a rusty old pump that has been primed ready.

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Lone Goose

by Marsha Mathews



Believe me, it's not
what you want to hear.
Worse than thirty thousand tricycle horns
blasting you from sleep.

All that's quiet at Lake Santeetlah:
rain kissing dusk green water,
the purple sway of rhododendron,
pine scent, damp clay.

All that's serene, shattered.

Reminder
of everything lost.

Murfreesboro: A Town 'Captured'

by Shirley Farris Jones

Located in the exact geographic center of Tennessee, bounded by rivers, a railroad, and productive farmland, the quiet little town of Murfreesboro was affected by war much sooner than any of her citizens ever could have imagined when the Confederate flag was hoisted above the Courthouse in the summer of 1861.

Since the initial founding of Murfreesboro in 1811, the townspeople had enjoyed prosperity and a sense of well-being for half a century. Murfreesboro served as the capitol of Tennessee from 1819-1826 and was to host such well-known political figures as Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, and James K. Polk. Businesses flourished, educational landmarks were established, and the quality of life was good.

On July 4, 1851, the first successful train run from Nashville occurred. And, the first toll road in the state was soon completed between Nashville and Murfreesboro. During this decade the high point in agriculture, transportation, education, and the economy was reached.

In 1859, the completion of a grand new Courthouse, at a cost of \$59,000, was certainly a topic for conversation and by 1860 the residents of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County could well be proud of not only their prosperity but of the position of their county and city in state politics. Also, during this same year of 1860, political sentiment of the area supported Presidential Constitutional Union candidate John Bell, rather than pro-slavery candidate, John C. Breckenridge. With Lincoln's election, however, the legislature gave the people a chance to vote for or against secession and on April 12, 1861 Tennessee chose to remain loyal to the Union by a vote of 69,675 to 57,798.

The *Rutherford Telegraph* of Murfreesboro expressed the people's sentiment by stating, "Under the circumstances that now exist, there is no cause whatsoever for disunion, and he that favors it can be guilty of nothing short of treason to his country."

The firing on Fort Sumpter and Lincoln's call for troops changed the existing circumstances, and the legislature



voted again to submit the question of secession to the people. This time the state voted for secession by a vote of 104,913 to 47,238.

In Murfreesboro, Rutherford County, the vote was: for secession 2,392; against, 73. A local citizen sent the following wire to Nashville: "All excited and aroused. All united. Secession flag waves over us. All for war." It was said that based on population, Rutherford County furnished more men to the Confederate cause than any other county in the state.

With Tennessee's vote to join the Confederacy on June 8, 1861 as the last seceding state, the citizens of Murfreesboro never dreamed that they would ever hear the roar of cannon, the rattle of musketry, or groans of the dying. Much less in their own back yard! Nor that the devas-

tating financial losses incurred during enemy occupation would be theirs alone to bear.

Following the fall of Fort Donelson on February 16, 1862, the evacuation of Nashville a few days later, and the Confederate retreat to Corinth, Mississippi, Murfreesboro found herself under Federal occupation by early March. And with the exception of one brief reprieve, following Forrest's Raid in July until the Battle of Stones River not quite six months later, the town would remain in Federal hands for the duration of the war.

The so-called social highlight of the Confederacy, namely the wedding of Murfreesboro's own lovely belle, Miss Mattie Ready, to the dashing cavalryman from Kentucky, Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan, would quickly fade into history and that same, brand new Courthouse, only three years old, would find itself the target of a Federal cannon, aimed and ready to fire, in the event of Confederate intervention. The times—"they were a'changin'."

According to citizen John Cedric Spence, "On the tenth of March... the ears of the citizens were greeted with the sound of drum and fife, the rattle of artillery wagons, columns of marching infantry, advancing with glittering bayonets, flags, ensignia, and banners flying, prancing steeds, bearing riders with drawn swords, all pomp and display, headed by General Mitchell in advance... They rode around the public square and halted opposite a crowd of citizens who had gathered about at the approach of the troops. The General, straightening himself up, and in a pompous manner, addresses the citizens somewhat in this style—I am master of this place! And then goes on to say how he wishes matters to be understood and what he intends doing. His object was to restore the union, law, and order." And with that said, the Federals took formal possession of the town, hoisting the U.S. flag in place of the Confederate flag on the Courthouse.

General Mitchell then began to question various citizens regarding the Confederate retreat and the burning of certain bridges and the destruction of the railroad tracks

and whether it had been done with citizen consent or not. When he learned that “it was done with the consent of the people,” his reply was, “Well, if that be the case, I know what kind of people I will have to deal with!” House searching—supposedly for the purpose of collecting guns and ammunition—followed, although many other items of value “disappeared,” never to be seen again, despite citizen protest.

This was quite a change for people living in Murfreesboro who had never before even bothered to lock their doors. And, those who had locked up their houses prior to “refugeeing South” later learned that locked doors were not respected and collections of law libraries, silver, family heirlooms, and valuables of every description had fallen into dishonest hands.

Men, women, and children all were “insulted” by lewd comments and actions of a disrespectful army. Many citizens were also arrested during this time and sent to prison—without being given any valid reason for their incarceration, other than being a “disloyal subject to the United States.”

And businesses were not allowed to operate unless the owners had taken the oath and carried a pass, showing their compliance. Since many of the merchants had a son, brother, friend, or loved one fighting for the Confederacy, and very few people were willing to submit, merchants closed out their stocks and refused to reopen. Everything was in scarce supply.

But, as with any group of people, there are always a few who do not share the idealism, seeing instead the opportunity for making a lot of money. Such was the case with sixty-five businessmen of the town who wished to restore relations with the Union at any cost and therefore be allowed to conduct business as usual. A meeting was held, speeches were given, emotions ran high. Especially among those staunch supporters of the Confederacy who had loved ones fighting for *the Cause*.

Promises were made to those sixty-five opportunists that “their names would be transcribed in Bibles, to be handed down to future generations as a reproach on them and their children.” Obviously, Murfreesboro was a Confederate town!

Pressure was also placed on the Mayor and Aldermen, the government officials of the city, to likewise take *the Oath* “for the sake of peace and interest of the public,”



“Oaklands” is where President Jefferson Davis spent the night prior to John Hunt Morgan's wedding to Miss Martha Ready.

according to the Federal Provost Marshall, O.C. Rounds.

Total sympathy was for the South, but the question was *how could they remain a recognized corporation to deal with the Federal injustices being inflicted upon the citizens of Murfreesboro and still maintain their loyalty to the South?* Several Aldermen who could not reconcile their feelings to do this were replaced by some who would.

During this same time, General Mitchell desired a conference with Mayor John Dromgoole “on some business” and sent word asking where he could be found. The Mayor, being of a determined nature himself, understanding the implications, and wishing to evade the meeting, chose to go fishing instead. According to Spence's account, “On leaving with fishing poles on his shoulder, remarking, if Gen. Mitchell

wishes to see me more than I do him, he may come where I am fishing. I shall not go to him.”

From this day on, Murfreesboro was known as a “captured town.” In consequence, a town which is not surrendered to the Federal Army on their first appearance, and which is claimed to have been the duty of the Mayor at the time according to an act of Congress, shall be declared “captured”

as a failure to comply with this requirement. Had a proper “surrender” been tendered, the town and citizens would be protected in person and property during the time of Federal occupation, citizens being allowed compensation for rents and damages sustained by the army.

Two examples of war claims by prominent citizens of

Murfreesboro which were filed against the Federal government are listed accordingly.

In October of 1872, Dr. James Maney, owner of Oakland's Plantation, filed a claim in the amount of \$27,012.00 for damages incurred by the

Union Army during its occupation in 1863-64. Most of this was for timber and rails. Dr. Maney unfortunately died thirty-nine days after filing this claim and the burden for proving it was now placed on his heirs. Since the claim was in excess of \$10,000 it would be heard in Washington D.C., and the family would have to transport all witnesses to the nation's capitol at their own expense. Moreover, it would also now have to be proved that Dr. Maney had remained loyal to the Union, even though his son and son-in-law both served the Confederacy. “Oaklands” is the same 1500 acre plantation where General Nathan Bedford Forrest accepted the surrender of Murfreesboro from the injured Union General Duffield on July 13, 1862 and where President Jefferson Davis spent the night prior to General John Hunt Morgan's wedding to Miss Martha Ready on

December 14, 1862. It was also used as Braxton Bragg's private residence while he was in the city. The family was never awarded any money from the government for this claim.

Thomas Hord, anti-secessionist and owner of "Elmwood," a 1,000-acre plantation adjacent to lands where the Battle of Stones River occurred, fared a little better. Mr. Hord was also one of the sixty-five businessmen of Murfreesboro who had previously, but unsuccessfully, wished to restore relations with the Union. In a petition to the government for redress he wrote, "During 1862 I furnished the Federal army 500 bushels of corn and oats, five or six stacks of hay, for which I received receipts but they were defective...In August, 1862 my men were taken to work on the stockade forts here and in Murfreesboro until the army fell back from Alabama to Kentucky and they were taken off by the army. For their services I claim pay and for the men if not returned...On December 29, 1862 the Army of Rosecrans passed. That was on Monday and on Saturday I had nothing left

but 300 pounds of bacon. During the week of the battle [Stones River] a large number of wagons and teams were captured by the rebels, necessitating their being replaced as quickly as possible. I furnished 21 head of horses and mules, 37 head of cattle, 100 hogs, 900 barrels of corn, 35 or 40 tons of hay and fodder...The house was unexpect-

cross-ties for the railroad..."

When it was all over, Thomas Hord estimated his damages at \$59,124.60. However, only a portion of this claim was honored and it was not until 1911 that his heirs received a small portion in settlement.

To date, Murfreesboro has yet to surrender! And, in all probability, Mayor John Dromgoole had absolutely no inkling of the long-range ramifications his actions would have on the citizens of Murfreesboro when he picked up his fishing pole on that fateful spring day one hundred years ago in 1862. But, as Southerners have learned time and time again, the price of pride can sometimes be a very costly one indeed.

To date, Murfreesboro has yet to surrender!

edly and suddenly taken for a hospital and the wounded brought in so rapidly that there was not time or means of removing the carpets or furniture as of December 31, 1862...The wounded and dying were brought in, 500 or 600 of them, and laid on fine Brussels carpets...which became so soaked with blood as to be removed and thrown over the carriage house...In addition, between 80,000 and 90,000 fence rails were taken...Twenty-six houses, two barns, and the overseer's house were torn down to make three bridges, two stockades and

Shirley Farris Jones is a Civil War historian and community activist and is a direct descendant of two Confederate great-grandfathers. She is a life-long resident of Murfreesboro and currently writes a monthly column for "The Murfreesboro Post."



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Old Man of the Mountain

fiction by Michael Saunders



William Henry had lived on the mountain almost his entire life. He had been born on the mountain, in the back bedroom of his parents cabin. He and his brothers had grown up on the mountain, playing, working and learning.

By the time William was fourteen he could survive on his own in the woods, living on what the mountain gave him. He also had learned that every time the mountain gave, you needed to give something back. That was the way.

The only time William left the mountain for more than a day or two was when he was eighteen. He had been drafted into the army and went to fight in Uncle Sam's war. He served as a medic for the United States army. He spent three years away from the mountain. He saw lots of things and traveled to many different places. For someone who was being shot at all the time, he observed more than most people who were in the same situation. He didn't talk about that time much, but the years he spent away shaped his future more than even he knew. For it was while he was serving in the army that the healing spirits began coming to him.

When William was sixty-two years old, he still had more vigor and vitality than most men half his age. He had married a woman from the mountain. She had been with him for over forty years before she traveled on to the spirit world. They had raised three sons, one of which lived in the small town at the foot of the mountain. One had been killed in another of Uncle Sam's wars. The third lived in New York City. He was an actor and didn't talk much about his upbringing or his heritage unless it was to help promote a movie role.



The old man didn't leave the mountain often, but three times a year he would travel to the town below.

Willard, the son that lived at the foot of the mountain, was the only son who had married and brought grandchildren into the world. Willard's wife didn't care much for the old man or his way of life, but she never denied him seeing his granddaughters. Each summer they spent a few months on the mountain with him. And he had taught them much about *the way*.

The old man didn't leave the mountain often. Three times a year he would travel to the town below. Once in late fall he would take his hides and some canned herbs to town and trade them for the supplies he would need to get him through the winter. And in early spring he would travel to his son's home to visit his granddaughters. They were four years and two days apart in

age, and each March he would visit for their birthdays. Then when school was out he would meet his son at the road going up the mountain, and he would take his granddaughters home. At the end of summer he would walk them back to meet their dad. The old man realized that as his grandchildren grew older they would want to spend

less time on the mountain and more time with their friends. But for now, he taught them all he knew, and life was good.

One of the things he had taught his granddaughters was how to call for one another when the miles separated them. He taught them how to think about the person they needed to talk to in such a way that they would enter their heart and contact them.

That was what was happening now. The old man had been busy all day working on his traps and canning food. The first snows of winter weren't far off, and he was preparing what he needed in case winter was hard. He had been

thinking about his oldest granddaughter all day. She was in his mind and heart and as darkness began to fall, he sat by the fire in his cabin and he began to pray. He offered sage and covered himself with the smoke. He loaded his pipe and prayed that the creator would reveal to him why his granddaughter was on his heart. As he puffed on the pipe and fanned the smoke from it over his head, he began to sway. He stared into the corner of the cabin and saw Mandy, his oldest granddaughter. She was praying and he heard her words as if she was sitting beside him.

"Grandfathers, please hear my voice. My sister, Molly is sick. The doctors have done all they can. Grandfathers, please send Old Pa, he knows what to do. Send

him quick, grandfathers. Thank you for hearing my voice.”

After saying her prayer, Mandy threw tobacco into the fire and returned to the bedroom where her sister stayed.

The old man jumped up and without hesitation began placing bags of dried herbs and roots into his backpack. He filled a canteen with water and filled several bags with dried food. He knew if he traveled fast he could be at his son's home the morning of the third day. After packing all he needed into his pack, he rolled a sleeping bag and blanket together and tied them to the bottom of the pack. Then he filled his ammo belt with shells and cleaned his rifle. It was too dark to leave now, so he slept for a few hours and awoke just before dawn.

He walked to the creek that ran by his cabin and took off his clothes. He waded into the creek and faced the rising sun. He began to sing as he dipped his cupped hands into the creek. He poured water over his head in this fashion seven times. He finished singing his song and said a short prayer of thanks, dressed and returned to the cabin.

Once in the cabin he sat on his bed and removed his moccasins. He tied them to his backpack and put on his best walking boots. He grabbed his leather coat and tied it to his pack. He strapped two belts around his waist. The first had a knife sheath and knife on one side and a hatchet on the other side. The second belt was his ammo belt. He slung two leather satchels over his shoulder, each contained dried herbs. He tied his hair back and tied his bandanna around his head. He stuffed a fur-lined cap into the top of his pack and then slid his arms through the straps. He adjusted the pack on his back, grabbed his rifle and stopped at the door to turn and look around his cabin one last time to make sure the fire in the fireplace was out and that everything was in its place.

He stepped outside and began to walk down the mountain. He kept a steady pace and even though he didn't run he was walking fast for a man of his age. Living alone on the mountain, chopping wood, hunting, trapping and gathering medicine had kept him in good shape.

He had thought about making the walk to the old mountain road and then following it down the mountain, but the road went around the mountain and took over forty miles to reach town, and then he would have to walk almost another three miles to get to Willard's home. Going straight through the woods and crossing

the two small streams would be quicker.

He took an old deer trail that paralleled the mountain road for a short way. After walking for over two hours, the trail veered off and grew wider as it came to the first of the two creeks. This creek was fast moving and narrow. He stopped by it for a while to rest and drink some water. There was a pole in the ground on the bank where he crossed the creek. Attached to the pole were two leather ropes which disappeared into the creek. He pulled one of the ropes out of the water and grabbed the canteen that was attached to the other end, untied it, and attached it to his belt. The other canteen he would leave in the creek for the journey home. He trapped this area and had always left canteens in the creeks to keep a source of cold water handy.

After resting for a few minutes, he lifted his pack onto his shoulders and continued walking down the mountain. He knew it would take him two days of steady walking and a third morning to reach his granddaughters. He began thinking of Mandy and of telling her not to worry and that he was on his way.

"Don't worry, Papa," Mandy said, "Old Pa is coming, and he is bringing medicine. Molly is going to be all right."

The trail narrowed in places, and sometimes he had to use his rifle as a walking stick to get around the roughest spots. For most of the way, the trail had gone through the woods, but finally, it came to a clearing. He stopped at the edge of the clearing and looked up at the sky. It was overcast and looked like snow. He had noticed that the air was growing colder. He was walking fast enough to keep warm, so he decided to wait awhile before putting on his coat.

The field in front of him was covered with tall grasses and wild flowers. It was beautiful. He entered it and at almost the same moment heard a noise to his left. He froze for a moment and watched. He could see the grasses moving toward the far side of the field. He gripped his rifle tighter in case he needed it. Then he heard the sounds of wild hogs. They were looking for food, grubs and roots, he thought. He moved through the field, keeping his eyes on the direction of the hogs.

Mandy and her father were sitting by the fireplace in their home. Mandy's mother was with her sister.

"Don't worry, Papa," Mandy said, "Old Pa is coming, and he is bringing medicine. Molly is going to be all right."

Willard looked at his daughter and smiled. "You know he's coming?" he asked.

Mandy shook her head. "He will be here day after tomorrow," she said.

The old man noticed more hog signs as he walked through the field. He knew that wild hogs could be unpredictable and kept his eyes open as he moved. He checked the chamber of his rifle to be sure it was loaded. At last he reached the woods again, and he looked back across the field one last time. He knew that he had several hours of daylight left and would be able to make the second creek before dark. That would be a good place to camp for the night. He also knew he would have to make a lean-to to sleep in for he was sure that it would begin to snow.

The old man reached the creek long before nightfall. He thought of going on but realized that this was the best place to camp for the night. He built a small lean-to out of branches he found nearby and started a small fire. He got a pot of fresh water from the creek to brew coffee and make a small pot of stew. He never liked eating a lot when he traveled like this, but he knew he needed to keep up his strength.

He sat listening to the sounds of the night as he drank coffee and ate. After eating, he hung his backpack in the tree by tying one end of a rope to it and throwing the other end over a branch. Then he tied the end of the rope to the trunk of the tree.

He placed his rifle, with the safety on, under the lean-to. Then he stretched out his sleeping bag so that the head of the bag was under the lean-to. He made a pillow out of his coat and grabbed his blanket and sat on the sleeping bag. He placed a few more pieces of wood on the fire and stirred them until he was sure that they would burn. Then he laid down and covered himself with the blanket.

He slept for several hours when a noise downstream woke him. He sat up and listened for a moment and heard the sound again, something big rustling in the brush near the creek. He placed more wood on the fire and prodded it until the flames leapt into the air.

He could hear what sounded like labored breathing coming from downstream, and it sounded like it was getting closer. He grabbed his rifle and moved closer to the fire. He held the rifle across

his lap and let off the safety. He had a good idea what was making the noise and was a little concerned that it was moving in his direction.

The bear had gone to the creek to get something to drink and smelled the food he had cooked earlier. He was worried about a possible encounter with the bear. He didn't have the time to dress out a dead bear and he couldn't shoot to wound it. A wounded bear would be more trouble than dealing with a dead one.

What he preferred was to avoid the encounter all together or to scare the bear off. While he was sitting there, thinking about his options, the bear helped him make up his mind.

The bear came into camp on the other side of the fire. Coming up from the creek. It roared and came in on its hind legs. The old man jumped to his feet and fired his rifle over the bear's head. He discharged the shell and brought another into the chamber. At the same time he picked up a branch with his free hand and stuck the end of it into the fire, holding it there until it began to burn. The bear walked upright toward the fire. The old man stepped toward the bear, holding his rifle above his head in one hand and the burning branch above his head in the other. He roared

out in his loudest voice as he approached the bear. The bear took a step back in the direction of the creek.

The old man didn't want the bear to feel cornered between him and the creek, so on his next step, he moved toward his right, hoping the bear would move off to his left, going upstream. He waved his rifle and the burning branch around in the air as he roared again. He came up on his toes to make himself even taller. Again the bear stepped backwards, pawing at the air as it did. The old man screamed with all his might and jumped at the bear. The bear dropped to all fours and turned upstream. It began running on all fours, and the old man chased it until he was sure it wasn't coming back.

The old man returned to camp and dropped what was left of the burning branch into the fire. He put the safety back on his rifle and leaned it against the tree. He dropped to the ground and sat back against the tree beside his rifle. It was then that he noticed that a light snow was falling. He placed more wood on the fire and looked up at the night sky.

"It's going to be an early winter," he said.

He didn't usually talk to himself, but the sound of his own voice seemed to relax

him. He rested against the tree trunk and soon fell back to sleep. The snow continued to fall, most of it melting as it hit the ground.

He woke early the next morning. There was a slight dusting of snow on the ground, but the sun was coming up and what snow was on the ground would soon melt.

He made a small pot of coffee and refilled his canteens and repacked his bag. There were no clouds in the sky. It would be a good day for travel, but it was a good ten degrees colder than it was the day before. He put his coat on and sat by the fire long enough to drink his coffee and eat a small piece of jerky. He wanted to get an early start. If all went well, he could reach his son's house early the next morning. He finished his coffee and placed his cup in his pack. He moved to the edge of the creek and cupped water into his hands, pouring it over his head seven times. He sang a song as he did this and then wiped the water from his face and head. He stood up and stretched out his six-foot frame. He pulled

He had a good idea what was making the noise and was a little concerned that it was moving in his direction.

his pack onto his shoulders and placed his hat on his head. He made sure the fire was out and then began making his way down the mountain. He didn't see any more signs of the bear and relaxed as he crossed the creek.

He had an uneventful day traveling down the mountain, and after awhile, stopped long enough to eat a good lunch of jerky and biscuits. He had made good time again, but he was also getting tired. Nightfall was approaching so he began to look for a good place to camp. He wasn't much more than seven miles from his son's house, and he knew he could make it before morning, but there was no need to rush.

Nothing could be done for Molly until morning anyhow.

He stopped by a large oak and removed his pack and set his rifle down. He repeated the procedure from the night before, gathering wood and branches for a fire and to build a lean-to.

He then made another small pot of coffee and cooked up the last can of stew before settling down. He had made a larger fire than the night before. It was much colder tonight, and he slept with his coat on.

He woke the next morning just before dawn. He said his prayers and drank the last of his coffee. He packed and was headed down the mountain to the road that would lead him to his son's house. Once he reached the road he would be at his son's house in less than an hour. As he came down the last hill before the road, he saw a black man sitting on a tree stump near the road.

It was the man who lived across the road from his son. His name was Henry, and everyone in town called him "Black Henry." He was a little slow, but he had a good heart, and everyone in town liked him, even if they did make him the brunt of some of their jokes.

Henry stood up when he saw the old man approaching. There was a huge grin on his face, and he was beside himself with joy.

"Miss Mandy said you would be coming this morning," Henry yelled, "and she asked me if I would come and meet you and help you carry your things in." Henry ran up to

the old man and made a motion for the man to let him carry his pack. The old man smiled as he swung his pack from his shoulders.

"Mandy told you I was coming, did she?" The old man smiled.

"Yes sir, she did," Henry

replied.

"Black Henry, how are you?" the old man asked.

"I'm doing good now that you're here, Old Pa," Henry said as he started walking down the road toward their destination.

The old man watched him for a moment and smiled. He walked fast to catch up.

"Tell me. Black Henry, how is Molly?"

Henry looked at him, but never broke stride. "She's bad sick, Old Pa, bad sick. The doctor said he done all he could do."

Henry had a sad expression for a moment, and then his face lit up again. "But, Miss Mandy said you were a-coming, and that you would make Miss Molly well. She's right, too. That girl, she knows. You can feel the *touch* in her."

The old man looked at Henry. It was all he could do to keep pace with him and talk at the same time.

"Molly is real sick, is she?"

"Yes sir, bad fever."

"Henry, what do you mean when you say that Mandy has the *touch* in her?"

Henry looked at the old man and smiled.

"She has the touch of God in her," Henry said. "Just like you, Old Pa."

The old man stopped and watched Henry walk on. He shook his head and

smiled. By the time he started walking again, Henry was a good ten feet ahead of him. He ran to catch up.

"Black—" the old man started and stopped, "—Henry," he said. "I do believe you have the touch of God in you, too."

Henry never stopped walking. "That's what my daddy use to tell me. My daddy was Cherokee just like you and Miss Mandy. He was. He used to tell me I was touched in the head by God, and that I would always be special for it."

"I think your daddy was right, Henry."

"When we gets to Miss Mandy's house, do you want me to gather wood for a sweat fire?" Henry asked.

The old man was startled by the question. Henry continued before the old man could speak.

"Miss Mandy and me, we built a sweat lodge yesterday for you. Miss Mandy said you would be needing one for Miss Molly. We even went down to the river and found seven good rocks. Miss Mandy said you would want seven good rocks for to sweat with." Henry looked over at the old man without losing a step. "Miss Mandy was right wasn't she, Old Pa?"

"Yes, Henry, Mandy was right. Seems you might be right about her, Henry."

"What you mean, Old Pa?"

"I think the girl is touched by God."

The two men reached the house in less than half the time it would have taken the old man by himself. Mandy came running out of the house toward the two men as they approached. Her father came out behind her.

"I told you he would be here," Mandy yelled as she ran down the road and into her grandfather's arms. "I knew you were coming, Old Pa. I knew you would be here." She hugged him tight.

The old man knelt down to hug his granddaughter.

"I got your message," he whispered into her ear.

She looked up at him. "And I got yours," she replied. "Uncle Henry and I put up the frame for the lodge, and we found seven good rocks. Uncle Henry chopped down some dead trees from across the road and drug them over here. They still need chopping up, and we still need to cover the lodge."

"You've done really good," the old man said as he stood up.

Henry had gone ahead with the backpack. He approached the steps going up to the house and sat the pack down at the bottom one. He looked up at Willard.

"This is Old Pa's belongings," Henry

said, "I'm going to chop wood for the sweat this evening." Henry was gone before Willard had a chance to say anything.

Willard walked down the steps to meet his father and daughter.

"I told you Old Pa was coming," Mandy said as they reached the steps.

"You sure did," her dad responded. "Dad, glad to see you."

The two men hugged.

"Son, how is Molly? I came as soon as I got Mandy's message," the old man said.

The three of them walked up the steps to the front door. Willard stopped long enough to pick up his father's pack. He was surprised by the weight of it.

"The doctors say they have done all they can do," Willard began, "Her fever is bad! Dad, Lisa and I are frightened."

"Me too, Son," the old man said, "Where is the girl?"

"This way, Old Pa," Mandy said as she opened the door. The two men followed the young girl down a hallway and through a door near the end of it. The room was large, about ten feet by twelve. There was a fireplace along one wall. There were no

**"William, I'm glad you came,"
Lisa said. She buried her face
against the old man's shoulder
and began to cry.**

closets in the room. The old man remembered the room being used as a diningroom at one time.

Now there were a few chairs and a table by the door. A small single bed was pushed against the far wall, just under the room's only window. There was a table by the bed with a basin and pitcher and glass resting on it. Molly lay in the bed and her mother sat in a wicker chair beside her. The sick girl had blankets pulled up to her chin and her mother was wiping her forehead with a damp cloth.

On the table by the door was a large bundle of sage, a large shell and a box of matches. Mandy pulled leaves of sage from the bundle and balled them up in her hand. She removed a match from the box and struck it on the table. She carefully brought the burning match to the ball of sage and lit it. She then placed the burning sage and match in the shell and began to smudge herself in the sage smoke. The two men did the same. Each one cupped the smoke in their hands and brought in over their heads and down their bodies. They each repeated the motion four times. Willard then fanned the smoke over his father's pack.

The old man gave Mandy a surprised look. "Dad's remembering lots," Mandy said.

William looked at his son and the two men laughed. Lisa turned from her sick daughter, and looked at the two men standing by the door. She had been wiping Molly's head with a damp cloth, and she placed it in the basin and rose from her chair. She walked toward the men.

William opened his arms wide as Lisa approached. The two embraced.

"William, I'm glad you came," Lisa said. She buried her face against the old man's shoulder and began to cry.

"Molly is going to be all right, so don't you fear," the old man said as he patted the woman's back. Lisa pulled herself away and looked into her father-in-law's eyes. She looked away.

"For some reason, hearing you say it makes me believe that it may be so," Lisa said.

"You keep on believing it," the old man said as he walked past her toward his sick granddaughter. The old man turned to Mandy. "Granddaughter, bring the shell and more sage over here."

The old man had carried his pack to the sick girl's bedside. He pulled an eagle feather out of a pocket on the front of the pack. Mandy carried the shell to the bed with the sage burning inside. The old man motioned for Mandy to stand close to the top of the bed. He used the feather to fan the smoke over the sick girl. As he fanned the smoke, Mandy moved along the bed.

When he was done, he nodded at Mandy and she returned the shell to the table by the door as the old man stood over Molly's bed. He placed his hands on the girl's forehead and held them there for a moment. When he removed his hands, he turned away from the bed and blew on them. Shaking his hands as if he were removing dust from them. He placed his hands on the sick girl's chest. He repeated this process several times. Each time he placed his hands on a different part of the girl's body. When he was done, he covered the sick girl with blankets and sat in the chair by her bed. He pulled the leather satchel from his shoulder and began to pull paper bags from it. He motioned for Mandy and she returned to his side.

"Granddaughter," he said, "Do you remember how I taught you to make herb teas?"

"Yes, Old Pa, I remember," she said.

"Good!" The old man lifted a small bag containing bark and handed it to Mandy.

"This is willow bark," he said, "A friend

from South Dakota sent it to me. Boil a small pot of water and use four good size pieces of bark to make a tea. It will help your sister with her fever."

Mandy took the bag and hurried from the room.

"Daughter," the old man called out.

"Yes, William," Lisa responded.

"Take a handful of the sage and crush it up in your hands. Wet it and fold it into the cloth you were wiping Molly's head with. Place it on her chest." Lisa followed the direction. The old man got up and let Lisa sit in the chair.

He moved to the far corner of the room and sat on the floor. He began sorting through bags of root, leaves and barks.

"All right Dad, don't leave me out," Willard said.

The old man looked up at his son. "Why don't you go out and help Henry chop up the wood. Then the two of you can cover the sweat lodge. You remember how to cover one don't you?"

"Yes. I think I do." Willard left the room.

Lisa sat and watched the man sorting through his bags. The old man knew she was watching so he started explaining what he was doing.

"I'm looking for plants we will need in the sweat for Molly," he said. "Bear-root to help all of us breathe, but especially her. Yarrow roots for the sickness that she has. Mullen for the spirits that come to me. They like mullen. And a mixture of mint and sarsaparilla bark.

And of course cedar to purify everything."

"Why the mint and sarsaparilla?" Lisa asked.

"That is what the spirits have told me she needs to make her well," the old man said. "Daughter, you will need to prepare a small meal for after the sweat. Can you do that?"

"I have a large pot of vegetable soup I could cut up a beef roast and add it to make a stew," Lisa said.

The old man nodded his head. "Very good," he said.

Lisa got up from the chair and started to leave the room. She paused at the door and looked over at William.

"She's going to get well, isn't she?"

"Good as new," William said without looking up from what he was doing.

Henry was chopping wood when Willard approached. There was already a large pile



Lisa got up from the chair and started to leave the room. "She's going to get well, isn't she?" she asked William.

of chopped wood laying next to the man. Henry looked up for a moment and then continued chopping. Willard didn't say anything. He picked up an ax and began chopping wood. It didn't take long for the two men to finish the job. Willard laid down the ax and offered Henry his hand.

"Henry, I want to thank you," Willard said.

"No need, sir," Henry said.

"Yes—yes, there is a need," Willard said. "There's a big need. You've been a good friend to my daughters and to my dad, and I've pretty much ignored you." Willard paused. "You know, my daughters call you *Uncle Henry* when they talk of you."

Henry smiled.

"The only thing people 'round here have ever called me is *Black Henry*," Henry said. "Don't reckon anyone ever called me *Uncle* 'fore." The two men laughed.

"I used to be one of those people who called you *Black Henry*," Willard said, "But no more." Willard paused for a moment. "Henry, what I'm trying to say is that you're a good man and it's an honor to know you."

"You're a good man, too, Mister Willard," Henry said, "You and your missus, too. You *have* to be to have two such fine daughters."

Willard looked at the frame of a sweat lodge that Henry and Mandy had built the day before. "Dad asked me to cover the lodge for the sweat," he said. He looked at Henry. "Do you think you could help me? I have the covers in the tool shed."

Henry looked at the lodge and then at Willard. "I sure would be happy to help you, Mister Willard," Henry said.

Mandy returned to the room carrying a cup of hot tea. Her mother was close behind her. William looked up as the two ladies entered the room.

"Good," the old man began. "Mandy, give the cup to your mother. Lisa, get the child to drink the whole cup. Have her sip it slowly, but get her to drink it all. Mandy, I need your help here."

Mandy handed the cup to her mother and ran to

her grandfather's side. Lisa carried the cup to Molly's bedside and sat down. She woke the sick girl and began to let her sip the tea.

Mandy sat beside her grandfather, and the old man began to push paper bags toward the girl. "I need you to put each of these in a separate bag," he said as he handed her a bunch of small leather bags with draw strings. "Use these bags. They won't get too wet while we are sweating."

Mandy watched close as the old man pushed the different herbs toward her.

"Once the sweat is ready, I will place them in the lodge where I will sit in an order so that I can find them when we need them." He looked up at the girl who was still watch-

ing him close. "Once we get into the lodge, you will sit by the door and place cedar on each rock as they are set into the pit."

Mandy shook her head, showing that she understood. "I'll fill the leather bags right now," she said.

The old man hugged her before she left. "Remember, the bag with the cedar is yours," he said, "You will put it on the rocks."

"I'll remember, Old Pa," the girl said.

"Well, I am going to see how things are coming outside. When you finish with the bags, just put them back into this leather pouch." He placed a large pouch on the floor next to the herbs.

Mandy shook her head in acknowledgment again and gathering everything into her arms, hurried from the room. The old man got up and walked outside. He was tired and walked slow. When he got outside, he sat down on the steps for a few moments and said a silent prayer. When he stood back up, he felt refreshed. He walked around the back of the house to find the two men finishing the lodge. They were laughing hard.

"So, you think the lodge is funny looking, do you?" the old man asked as he approached.

Henry and Willard turned to the old man. "No sir, Old Pa," Henry said. "Just that your son is funny." Henry started to laugh again. Willard was laughing, too.

"I was telling Henry about when you caught me smoking your tobacco," Willard said. He started laughing again.

The old man began to laugh, too. "You couldn't have been more than eight years old," he said.

"I was nine." William said, trying to stop laughing.

"I had you smoke until you got sick. Darn near smoked the whole pack."

"Yeah, I surprised even me, but I was sick as a dog that whole night."

"Yes, and your mother really tore into me for it."

Henry was laughing harder. "Mister Willard said he still thinks you came out the worse," he said.

"I did," the old man said, "I was out a pack of smokes and I had to sleep on the couch for three nights."

They were all laughing now. After a few moments William looked back at the lodge.

"It looks good," the old man said. The other two men just nodded.

"Henry," the old man began.

"Yes sir, Old Pa."

"Will you honor us by tending the fire, carrying in the rocks and watching the

door?"

Henry smiled and let out a little laugh.

"What?" The old man asked.

"Miss Mandy said you would ask me to carry rocks and watch the door," Henry said.

William looked at his son. "I think my granddaughter is a-know-it-all," he said. They all started laughing again.

Mandy returned to the room, wearing a sweat dress and carrying the leather bags. She carefully placed the bag containing the cedar into one of her pockets. She placed the bags containing the other four herbs into the large leather pouch. She pulled the drawstring tight and left the pouch laying on the floor. She heard her father and grandfather come back inside as she was getting up off the floor, and she met them at the doorway to the room.

"I have the herbs taken care of, Old Pa," she said.

The old man looked at her and glanced at the pouch on the floor. "That's my girl. You got the cedar?" He asked.

**While sitting outside the sweat,
Henry began to visualize little
Molly running and playing
with him and her sister.**

Mandy patted her pocket to let him know where it was.

"How is your mother coming along?" He asked.

"I'll go see," she said. She ran from the room.

Willard had walked over to Molly's bed and placed a hand on her forehead.

"She doesn't seem quite as hot," he said.

"Good," the old man said. "The tea is working."

Mandy and her mother came into the room. William turned to glance at them and then moved back to the corner on the floor where he had sat before.

"Now that we are all here," the old man began, "I will tell you what we will do in the sweat. I will go in first. We use a small bucket of water and just seven rocks. Willard with carry Molly in after me and he will lay her on the east side, opposite the door. He will sit next to her, between Molly and me. Lisa, you will sit on the other side of Molly. Mandy will go in last and sit by the door. I have asked Henry to carry the rock and he will stay outside." The old man stopped long enough to let anyone ask a question. No one did.

"Mandy will place cedar on the rocks as Henry is bringing them in. When the door is closed, I will place some bear-root on the rocks, before pouring water. We will sing one song and then open the door. The bear-root will help all of us to breathe while we are sweating. During the second door, I will put mullen on the rocks and call the spirits to come and doctor Molly. The third door I will use the yarrow and sarsaparilla and mint, like the spirits have shown me. After the fourth door, we bring Molly out." He paused again for questions. There were none so he continued.

"Mandy," He turned his attention to his granddaughter.

"Yes, Old Pa," the girl said.

"After we are out, I want you to come around to where I was sitting and pour the rest of the water on the rock and sing the thank-you song that I taught you last summer. Do you think you can do that?"

Mandy looked at her parents and back to her grandfather.

"Yes, Old Pa, but why me?"

"Because your prayers brought me and the spirits here. It's your prayers for your sister that is bringing the healing." He looked at his son and daughter-in-law. "After we sweat, we will come back inside and smoke the pipe. Afterwards all six of us will eat."

"Six?" Lisa asked.

"Yes," Willard responded before anyone else could.

"Henry too," he said.

"Now I need to load the pipe," the old man said. He didn't wait for Lisa to question her husband. "Mandy, could you bring me that shell and sage again?"

Mandy scurried toward the table, while the old man pulled a pipe bag from his back pack. Willard and Lisa walked together to the kitchen, while Willard explained the new relationship the family would have with Henry.

An hour later, they were all in the back yard. Willard was holding Molly in his arms. She was wrapped in a blanket. Henry was holding a pitchfork and standing by the fire. The old man had removed his shirt and shoes and crawled into the lodge. He placed a small stick into the ground where he was sitting. He arranged the leather bags beside the stick in an order he could remember so that he could get them in the dark.

When the old man was ready, he had the others come into the lodge. They lay Molly on the ground in the east side of the lodge. Her mother was rubbing her head as Henry

carried in the rocks. He brought in the first rock and placed it on the west side of the rock pit. Mandy and her father used deer antlers to move the hot rock to the right position and then Mandy placed some cedar on it.

The cedar popped and cracked and began to smoke. The process was repeated for each rock. The rocks were placed in different directions going clockwise from the west. When all the rocks were in place, the old man had Henry give him the bucket of water. The old man poured a dipper of water on the rocks before having Henry close the door.

Henry sat on the ground just outside the door. He sat near where the old man was so he could hear when he called for the door to be opened. Henry sat and he prayed. Three times he opened the door and three times he closed it again.

He could hear the hissing of the rocks each time the old man poured water onto them. He could smell the burning plants and roots as the old man placed them on the rocks. While sitting outside the sweat, Henry began to visualize little Molly running and playing with him and her sister. He smiled and gave thanks to the Creator for answering their prayers.

"Open the door!" The old man yelled.

Henry jumped to his feet and threw the covers back from the door. Steam escaped into the night air. Henry stepped back and allowed the old man to crawl from the lodge. He crawled out of the sweat and stood just in front of the door. He looked

up at the night sky and said a single word.

"Ani."

Henry repeated the word.

"Ani."

Willard handed Molly out to the old man and he cupped her into his arms. Henry wrapped a dry blanket around the girl. Willard crawled out and took his daughter back into his arms. Lisa crawled out and stood next to her husband and child. The old man bent over and looked into the sweat. Mandy was settling down at the door

air. Mandy crawled out of the lodge and stood.

"Ani," she said.

Her grandfather hugged her. "You did well, my granddaughter."

Before Mandy could speak, her father and Henry wrapped their arms around her.

"How is Molly?" Mandy finally asked.

"Let's go see," the old man replied.

Everyone started for the door. Henry began to cover the lodge door again. Willard stopped and looked back at him.

"Henry, come on," Willard said.

"Oh, no sir—" Henry started, but Willard cut him off.

"Henry, come on, Molly is going to want to see her Uncle," Willard said.

Henry smiled from ear-to-ear. "Yes sir, Mister Willard," he said.

The four walked together to the house.

Lisa carried Molly back to her bed and had already begun carrying bowls and silverware into the room when the others entered. They were all greeted by Molly's smiling face. She lay on the bed, and lifted her arms.

"Old Pa, it is you," she said.

The old man walked over to the bed and sat on the edge of it. He took his granddaughter into his arms and hugged her tight.

"Welcome back, my granddaughter," he whispered into her ear.

She kissed him on the cheek and wrapped her arms around him.

Her grandfather hugged her.
"You did well, my granddaughter."

and pulling the water bucket closer to her.

"You ready?" The old man asked.

"I'm ready, Old Pa," she said.

"Henry, close the door one more time," the old man said. Henry jumped to the task, and when the door was closed, he sat on the ground by the door as he had done all night.

Inside, Mandy began to sing a Cherokee thank-you song as she poured water on the rocks. Outside, Lisa took her daughter from her husband's arms and carried her inside while the others listened to Mandy sing. When Mandy poured the last of the water and finished the song, she shouted for the door to be opened. Once again, Henry jumped to his feet and flung the covers from the door. Once again, steam rushed out of the lodge and filled the night





Serving the King

by Jerry Barr

First of all, I must tell you, I never considered myself a table syrup expert—connoisseur, maybe, but certainly not an expert. I mean, I used to be one of those people that said, “Syrup is syrup.” But that was before I discovered King Syrup. I’m not trying to be dramatic, but that’s kinda like saying a Rolls Royce is just a car.

It’s not just about the syrup—it’s the legacy and the stories from the people who love King Syrup as much as I have come to love it. These people have the passion to hunt the syrup down when it’s not available in their local stores. What’s more, they all have a special story to tell, and that’s why my relationship with them has become one of the most satisfying experiences in my life.

Let me explain. King Syrup has become a way of life for me since 2004. Ironically, that’s exactly 100 years since it was first

introduced to tables in Baltimore in 1904 by the Mangels-Herold Company.

And, as much as I love the south, like King Syrup, I started out in the North—I

We always knew that we all could sit down together at the breakfast table and enjoy biscuits slathered with butter and syrup.

was born and raised in Illinois, it just took me living in the South to discover King Syrup.

Although the product was introduced in Baltimore, it is now loved throughout the country. So, it’s only appropriate that this story is going to take you on some journeys through my life and the lives of some of the legions of fans who love King Syrup—people from all walks of life.

But I’m getting ahead of myself, so let me get back to *my* story. My *quest*, as I like to call it, my particular *search* for King Syrup began in 2004.

Now, mind you, our children, Jenny, Jonathan and Christian were brought up with King Syrup on the table. When they were small, the syrup came in the 44-ounce tins, and it was manufactured by the Torbitt & Castleman Company, of Buckner, Kentucky. Torbitt & Castleman had bought the rights to King Syrup from Mangels-Herold in 1986.

My wife's parents lived in Tennessee, and when she would visit them, she would always bring King Syrup back with her when she returned to our home in Georgia.

Apparently, she couldn't get it in the Atlanta suburb where we lived, but I'm getting ahead of myself again.

Now, my wife, Casey, really *IS* southern. She was born in Asheville, North Carolina and raised in Tennessee. Her father was from Black Mountain, North Carolina, and her mother grew up in Wilde, Kentucky.

My wife remembers going to visit her grandma in Chimney Rock, North Carolina as a young girl, and King Syrup always graced the table. She would pour the syrup in a saucer and mix it with fresh butter, then slather the creamy pale gold mixture over the fresh steaming hot buttermilk biscuits her grandma would serve.

Our children were all born in Georgia and they grew up eating and loving King Syrup on their biscuits. And, even though I'm a northern boy, I suppose I've established some "*southern credibility*" over the years. At least, we always knew that we all could sit down together at the breakfast table and enjoy biscuits slathered with butter and syrup.

Now that we've talked a bit about the children, the wife and such, (it's a *southern thing*, I've learned), let's fast forward, *or backward*, if you will, to the fall of 2004.

My wife, Casey, and her father, Bill were sitting at the breakfast table with fresh hot biscuits. Bill had lived with us for some time at that point, so it had been awhile since Casey had been back to Tennessee. In other words, it had been awhile since King Syrup had been in the house.

Now Bill had been raised with King Syrup and Po-T-Rik, a dark molasses also made by King, and he had always put Po-T-Rik on his pancakes.

Well, Bill and Casey began a discussion about how nice it would be to have some King Syrup for their biscuits. You know how it is when you start craving something...it can easily turn into an *obsession*. With that in mind, these two turn to me, and, smiling ever so sweetly, they ask if I would go to the local Ingles store for some King Syrup. And, although I didn't know it at the time, *the Quest* had begun!

So, being the loving husband and dutiful son-in-law that I am, I say, "Sure, no problem."

Little did I know.

I'm sure this will come as no surprise to you, but there was no King Syrup at Ingles. "Stopped carrying it," said the manager,

unemotionally, "Don't know if and when we'll have it again." He goes on to tell me that he is not the one who orders it and he can't help me.

"Okay—so what am I going to do?" I thought to myself, "If I go home empty-handed, some special people that I love will be *very* unhappy...not to mention they could very well experience the extremely unpleasant effects of *King Syrup withdrawal*."

But I wasn't desperate, at least not yet—that would come soon enough. I was, however, *determined* to find the King. Several local grocery stores and a few hours later (not to mention traffic tension!), I was starting to get just a little frustrated.

I wearily trudged home—sans King—to admit my failure to my loved ones, all the while hoping that Google would help me in my new quest.

Breakfast had long since passed, of course, so I retired to my computer where I used the search engines to try to find King Syrup.

I soon learned that King Syrup had a

To my great relief, there they were,
on the shelf in the middle
of the Bi-Lo in the little town.

new owner—Carriage House Companies—but they still made the syrup at the plant in Kentucky. When I found their number and called them, they told me that I could only buy it by the case. They were kind enough to give me the names of stores that *might* carry the product, but they said that they didn't actually keep records on local resellers.

The closest store that they mentioned as a possibility was a Bi-Lo that was about 35 miles away. That was good enough for me, so off I went.

To my great relief, there they were, on the shelf in the middle of the Bi-Lo in the little town—bottles of the King, all adorned with that famous red label with the lion!

Filled with glee, I bought a bottle of the magic elixir and drove back home to present the treasure to the queen. All was well in Georgia that day! Casey and Daddy were happy; I was happy!

But the story doesn't end there.

As they say, all good things must come to an end, and that treasured bottle of syrup was no exception.

"No problem," I thought, "I have the keys to the kingdom—I know where they

sell the wonderful stuff!"

You don't have to be a student of foreshadowing to know where this train is headed. Sure enough, when I confidently made the 35-mile journey to the magic Bi-Lo, there was an unpleasant surprise waiting for yours truly. You guessed it. They no longer carried it.

Woe to the servant!

And so, it was back to the computer and the phone. Soon I was talking to the company that owns Carriage House, Ralcorp, in St. Louis, and after discussions about availability in local markets, I was directed to the sales department.

One thing led to another, and it wasn't too long before a very special business relationship was formed. The relationship not only solved my problem of running out of King Syrup, but as a happy bi-product, it has also helped many other like-minded people find the syrup as well.

In 2005 I formed a company called Barr None Distribution to distribute Carriage House Branded Products, of which the King line is only one.

I have also been able to fund an outreach ministry at my church with the profits. I feel like I've been richly blessed, both with the business and with the people I've been able to meet.

As they say, the rest is history—I now have all the King Syrup and Po-T-Rik I want, anytime I want. Both syrups are used to make *ShooFly Pie* and many other tasty treats.

For the last two years I have received calls and emails from people all over the country. All of these people had experienced the same frustrating empty shelves as I found, only I was able to give them hope, not to mention, *syrup*. So far, I've shipped the product to more than 30 states, including Alaska.

And that's how I've collected the stories.

For example, there's Joyce who is in her 80's and lives in the Ohio Valley area. She recently lost her mate of many years, but she was determined to carry on his tradition of making *carmel corn* for a local fair. He had been doing that since 1932.

Joyce remembers when King Syrup was made in a "clear white" formula—but since that hasn't been available for awhile, he had switched to the golden formula a few years back. "Actually," she said, "it gives the corn a richer color," and they really liked it better.

Then there was Mary from Virginia. Her grandfather used to poke a hole in a fresh hot biscuit and fill it with King Syrup. Then

he would give those to her and her brothers and sisters as a "special treat." What a delicious memory to grow old with and pass on to your own children and grandchildren.

While it was the Mangels-Herold Co. who originally coined the well-known phrase about King Syrup being "America's Finest Table Syrup," it is still used in recipes for main dishes, salads, vegetables, breads, pies, cakes, candies and cookies.

Putting King Syrup on pancakes still is a favorite of many families, both young and old. Both the Mangels-Herold and the Torbitt and Castleman Companies collected and published many recipes over the year, all submitted by their customers who loved the syrup.

Some of these prized recipe books can still be found along with various sizes of King Syrup pails and tins. These tins are valuable collector's items, since the syrup now only comes in the glass bottles.

By in large, the favorite use of King Syrup seems to be a deceptively simple, but deliciously satisfying, treat of pouring King Syrup on a saucer and mixing it with butter. This yellow golden gooey mixture is then spread on a fresh hot biscuit or just a slice of bread. I have even heard that people like the syrup over cheese!

Many people from all parts of the country use this same time-honored tradition of pouring the syrup over or in their favorite food for a fast and simple treat. An early cookbook from the 1940's extols the virtues of King Syrup being "rich in Dextrose, The Food Energy" and is even "recommended for Infant Feeding." It goes on to say "there is nothing more important than getting the baby off to a good, sound start." *Now that was marketing!*

But, no story about King Syrup can be told without the mention of its impact on the aforementioned sweet treat called Shoo Fly Pie. This pie's roots are in Pennsylvania Dutch cooking, dating back to the early 1700's.

I have been unable to determine exactly when Shoo Fly Pie and King

Syrup first made the scene together, but I do know that King Syrup and King Po-T-Rik Molasses are the syrups of choice when it comes to making this pie.

3/4 cup brown sugar
1 tbsp butter
1 egg, slightly beaten
1 cup King Syrup

1 tsp baking soda
1 cup hot water, divided

No story about King Syrup can be told without the mention of its impact on ShooFly Pie.

The earliest Mangels-Herold cookbook I have from the 1940's, "70 Famous King Syrup Recipes, Tested and Approved by Mary Mason of the National Broadcasting Company," has a recipe for the pie using King Po-T-Rik Molasses.

The camps of people who insist on King Syrup Golden (red label) or King Po-T-Rik Molasses (blue label) for Shoo Fly Pie are pretty evenly divided, so I guess it's just a matter of taste.

King Golden imparts a lighter flavor while the Po-T-Rik Molasses gives a stronger flavor and darker look.

Carol, who was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and lived there for 35 years, prefers the King Syrup Golden for her pie.

Her recipe is from *The Lancaster County Cookbook* and she points out that it calls for "molasses."

Here's the recipe:
1 cup flour

Mix the flour, brown sugar and butter together to form crumbs. Reserve 1/2 cup of this mixture for the topping. In another bowl mix egg, King Syrup and 3/4 cup hot water. Add this to the crumb mixture and mix well. Dissolve the baking soda in the remaining 1/4 cup hot water and add to the mixture. Pour into an unbaked pie shell and sprinkle with the remaining 1/2 cup crumbs. Bake at 375 degrees for 35-45 minutes, or until the middle is set.

Well, I could go on for hours (and actually have, more than once) about King Syrup and the great people that I have met and those that I'm still meeting.

It's the sticky tie that binds, I suppose. Also, I realize it truly is a southern thing...well, via southern Illinois, that is.

To contact Jerry Barr about King Syrup or other Carriage House Brands products, you can check out the Carriage House Brands website at www.CarriageHouseBrands.com, call Jerry at 678.349.2013, or email him at carriagehouseorders@charter.net.

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A Thing Like Birds Flying

by David Clark

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My photographer friend Frank wanted us to take a trip to Memphis. He wanted us to see Graceland, among other places, so we could work together on an article. My first thought was that it would be fun to take a trip anywhere with Frank. I thought it would be fun to ride a barge down the Mississippi.

Then I began doing some math. Let's see: 500 miles one way, 14.5 miles per gallon, almost \$3.00 a gallon. Yuck.

I really couldn't care less about going to Graceland. I realize not being interested in seeing the home of Elvis himself amounts to a sacrilegious statement, the equivalent—or perhaps worse—of saying that I wouldn't want to see the manger where Jesus was born.

I didn't want to drive that far to begin with, gas prices notwithstanding. And I could not afford to lay out of paying carpentry and painting work long enough to make the trip.

So I told Frank that we'd make a trip, but not to Graceland.

Four days ago, we set out on a journey that was much closer to home.

The day before we left, I was working with a man on his house. I told him I wouldn't be available for work the next two days. "I won't be around Thursday or Friday. I'm going on a little trip." I told him we were heading over to Andersonville.

"Hmm, Andersonville."

"We were talking about going over to Graceland, but I just can't see it. Too far, gas is too much. Wasn't much interested in Graceland, anyway."

"Ah, Graceland, now, well, yeah, me and the wife went over there once. It was, it was, well, it was, I don't know, it was something, you know what I mean?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it was good. You know, it was, well, hey, it was good, it was, well — it was sad, is what it was. But I tell you what, there's somebody puts fresh flowers on that ol' boy's grave every day, I tell you that."

"What did you like about Graceland?"

"Well, let's see. We saw that big ol' pink Cadillac Elvis had, that Jeep he used to film



Hah-wah-yah, and everything. Hey, when we were about to leave there, the ol' gal running the tour asked us if we had any more questions. I raised my hand and said, 'yeah, can you tell me how I can make my wife stop crying?' I mean she cried the whole time. It was sad, sad is what it was. That Elvis, he was something else, I tell you."

Frank and I rode in my old blue Ford truck. I hadn't taken it out on a long run before, so I checked the oil and transmission fluid and radiator, added a quart of transmission fluid and a gallon of water, and we took off from my little farmhouse in Cochran, Ga. We were about 30 miles west of my house when I remembered that I forgot to throw in the spare tire and jack. I didn't bring it up, figuring that would give

Murphy's Law too much power in the game.

The morning was already hot. We had the windows down, the floor vents open, and the door vents wide open. The late May air was dry and dusty as we headed west on Highway 26, across I-75 and into the territory where the Mennonites tend their beautiful fields.

We saw a young Mennonite gal cutting grass on a riding lawn mower. She was wearing her little hat and a long dress. She was bare-footed, just riding along. The mower was red, which struck me as funny because I've heard most of those folks insist that their cars are black. I wondered what she thought of Elvis.

Countless flocks of white cowbirds were flying over the fields and roads along our way.

The cotton was just sprouting in the fields. We saw nice stands of thirsty corn. The wheat was waving golden and ready to harvest. One man's irrigation pivot sprayed water on his corn. We crossed the Flint River; it was low.

After an hour of driving, we pulled through the gates at Andersonville. Frank said: "See if you can find a shady spot to park."

There weren't any shady spots. That's the problem with almost anything suffering what is known as "being improved." They tear out all the shade trees to make room for

the bulldozers and dump trucks, pave what's left, and then plant more shade trees that won't make decent shade for another fifteen or twenty years. It seems silly, but that's just how government does things, I guess.

The visitor's center at Andersonville is built to look like a prison stockade. This is so because it's the home of the National Prisoner of War Museum. Andersonville was the site of the notorious Civil War P.O.W. camp known as Camp Sumpter.

I'd been meaning to go over to Andersonville for years. After finally going the first time about two weeks ago while visiting a friend in nearby Americus, I knew Frank and I had to go there. I took the self-guided tour through the museum.

The thing begins with video footage of

gray-haired men with big wet eyes, talking about what it was like to be captured at gunpoint in Vietnam or World War II. What follows on the tour is a little journey into the experience — photos and video footage of men making the Bataan Death March, photos of Vietnam-era prisoners kneeling on the floor, sketches showing Revolutionary war prisons. The images were barbed-wire and shackles, bars and chains, whips and torture.

There were drawings made by prisoners in various camps from various wars, and items made from found materials by ingenious prisoners who just wanted a pair of delicate gloves, or a little toy, or a piece of art—anything to create some semblance of normal life.

You turn a corner in the exhibit and come to a replica of a bamboo cage used by the North Vietnamese. It was about the size of a healthy doghouse.

Seeing the bamboo cage reminded me of a man I knew quite well who had been a P.O.W. during Vietnam. His name was Bud. I rented a shop from him back when I was a mechanic in my 20's.

Bud had been one of the top students in his class at Georgia Tech. He was part of a nationwide group of top engineering students approached by the Army to take on a project of determining why the M-16 gun jammed in combat.

Each night the group of young men received 15,000 M-16's. They would disassemble the guns, measure all the parts, and reassemble them in time to hand them back in the next day, at which point they would get another batch of 15,000. They kept rotating these two batches of 15,000 guns until they figured out the problem.

When Bud signed up for the project, he was told he would remain a civilian, and his group would never be at the front lines.

"Yep, they were right—we weren't at the front lines, exactly. We were right behind them instead. We followed the army as it moved along the ground, and did our work in tents. It was a pretty good job—until the day I was captured by the North Vietnamese."

Bud was kept in a bamboo cage for 18 months. The cage was just big enough for Bud to squat or stand. He couldn't actually sit down or lie down. He wasn't let out to exercise. The cage was fully exposed to the weather at all times. Bud came down with dysentery, malaria, and a few other unpleasant things which I've forgotten in the 20 years since we talked about it in my shop.

By this part of the story, Bud was staring

into space, taking an occasional slug off a bottle of whiskey.

"So how did you get loose?"

Bud looked down at the floor. "Oh, I tricked one of the guards, cut my way out of the bamboo cage, and ran."

Bud didn't say so, but I had the fairly certain feeling he had slit the guard's throat.

"What did you do?"

"I ran. I ran for days and days."

"How did you know where to go?"

"I didn't. I just ran. It was all jungle, and I just ran. I was sick as hell, and weak as hell. But I was scared, so I ran." He pointed a trembling index finger in my face: "You'd be damn surprised what a person is capable of doing in those circumstances. The will to survive is a mighty powerful thing."

Bud climbed a tree to try to get his bearings. This was a crucial step, because he figured out he was closer to freedom than he thought. Then he fell out of the tree and broke his leg.

**"It was a pretty good job--
until the day I was captured
by the North Vietnamese."**

"I don't know how I did it, but I kept running as best I could. I ran for about six weeks altogether. I ate bugs, worms, anything I could find. I only slept a little bit that whole time. Every time I'd lay down to sleep, I'd hear something, get scared, and start running again."

Bud took a slug of his whiskey and stared into space.

"But how'd you finally make it out?"

"Oh, I came up to a road and saw a jeep. I had no idea if they were on our side or not, but I walked out in front of the jeep and passed out. Next thing I knew I woke up in a hospital. It turned out the men in the jeep were South Vietnamese officers, and they took me in."

It was strange how we began talking about all this.

In the three years I had rented from Bud, he would come by my shop every so often. He'd sit down with his bottle, and we'd talk about steel and gears and mechanisms. We'd talk about what I was working on and what I was learning, or what he was working on in his industrial machine shop and what he was learning. He'd tell me about growing up in his father's steel foundry in Birmingham. He'd show me a scorpion he had cast in gold using the lost wax process. One day he brought a bronze

casting of his right hand.

Once he had me sit in his car with him to listen to a tape of a guy playing bamboo Panpipes. We sat there, and Bud turned the tape up loud. He nursed his whiskey through a few songs, and then a song came where the music swelled and began to soar. He slammed the palm of his hand down on the steering wheel, and yelled: "Listen to that!" Then he burst into tears, and buried his face in his hands. After the song was over, he reached down and turned it off. Then he apologized. "I don't mean to be acting like a damn fool. That music just gets to me, that's all. It reminds me of birds flying."

I told Bud it was all right to cry. The first time I told him it was ok to cry, he just stared at me for the longest time with his big wet eyes. Then he nodded, took a pull at his whiskey, and said: "Well, it just reminds me of birds flying, that's all. I reckon I better go."

After the first crying incident, Bud began coming around the shop more often. He'd sit down on a stool I had at my workbench, and talk about metal or gears or how things worked. He would talk about the properties of different metals like he was describing the delicious beauty of some woman. His talking

always revolved around some problem he was trying to solve, and I guess he was working out his current challenges by expounding on the materials at hand.

Then one day, he came in while I was pulling an engine. I had the cherry picker set up in front of an MGB. The cherry picker's chain was attached to the engine, and I was all set to yank the engine and transmission out. Bud leaned against the cherry picker and operated the hydraulic cylinder's lift arm while I guided the motor and gearbox out of the car. The motor cleared the grill, and he moved the cherry picker backwards while I lifted the tail of the transmission over the front of the car. Bud leaned on the cherry picker. "Well, that part's done." I was wiping my hands on a rag, and kicking a pan underneath the transmission to catch the dripping gear oil.

Bud eased the cylinder down so the motor and gearbox would rest on the floor. I had just picked up my air wrench to remove the bolts holding the transmission to the engine, and Bud said: "Hey, let me tell you one I heard today." And he began telling me a Jerry Clower joke. Bud loved Jerry Clower, who was hitting his heyday at the time.

Bud said the joke's punch line and started laughing from deep in his guts. He was

leaning on the back end of the cherry picker, and I was squatting down, waiting for him to finish the story so I could remove those bolts and get on with my work.

Bud laughed for about five good seconds, and then suddenly he stopped and said: "Oh." His eyes closed, his lower lip began to quiver, and his grip began to loosen on his whiskey bottle. He made a desperate grab for the cherry picker. He held on for about two seconds—long enough for me to drop my air wrench and grab the whiskey bottle before he dropped it.

Then he collapsed.

Now, Bud was a big man. He was probably six foot four. I was a strong young man back then, but catching a man's dead weight was a surprisingly difficult task. I eased him down to the concrete floor.

This all happened in less time than it just took to type it out. Bud's body was sprawled over the cherry picker's cross-beams. His head was next to the leg of my workbench. I didn't know what to do, exactly. I checked his pulse. It was strong and steady. I yelled at him: "Bud! Bud! Are you all right?" He didn't respond. I leaned over his body to pick up the phone. Just as I released the long rotary-dial zero for the operator, Bud began to snore.

I put the phone down and turned back to look at Bud. He was snoring loudly and had his hands folded on his chest, looking for all the world like he was just taking a nap.

I shook him. His snoring didn't change. I slapped him. He just sort of grunted, but didn't respond any more than that. I was yelling at him: "Bud! Bud!" He didn't respond other than to snore deeply.

Four or five minutes passed by. I sat there, dumbfounded. Suddenly, Bud stretched out his arms, began yawning, and woke up. His eyes searched his surroundings before he lifted his head. He focused on the cherry picker standing over him. He looked at the bottom of my workbench. He squinted in the bright lights hanging overhead. Then he said: "Hmm. Must have went out."

I said: "What in the world are you doing?"

"Huh?" Then he looked up at me. "Oh, I wasn't sure where I was. Help me up, will you?" I helped him sit up. He looked over, saw his whiskey bottle, picked it up, and took a slug.

"Sorry about that."

"Well, it's alright, but what's going on?"

Bud was rubbing his eyes, like a kid who had just woke up from a nap.

"Aw, it's a long story."

"Well, how about you tell it. You come

down here a lot, and if you're going to be passing out in my shop you need to let me know what to expect. Are you drunk?"

"No, man, I ain't drunk. It's a long story."

Then he began telling me about the Army project and the bamboo cage. It turns out that the malaria and dysentery had given him a high fever for a long time, and from that fever he'd gotten narcolepsy.

"What in the world is narcolepsy?"

"Oh, you just saw it. I just go to sleep sometimes. Have to take Dexedrine every day so I can work, and by the end of the day it wears off."

"That sounds like a pain in the butt."

"Yep, it is. You should have seen how I found out about it. I was driving down to Tifton to check on a job, listening to a Jerry Clower tape that had just come out. I started laughing at one of Jerry's stories, and

soaring music that reminded him of birds flying.

Standing and touching the bamboo cage's stark reality helped me know to some small degree why music sounding like birds flying was so important to a man who had squatted and stood for eighteen months in a doghouse-sized cage, and why this loner artist of a metalworking genius who had made a forty-two day freedom-run through the jungle would often say, out of the blue: "Listen, most people just have no earthly idea how precious freedom is. They just have no idea. Whatever you do, don't forget that, don't forget, you hear?" Bud would take a slug of his whiskey, slam the palm of his hand on the workbench, and yell like he was a preacher: "It's precious, I tell you—freedom is so precious!"

Then he would burst out crying like he did when the birds-flying Panpipe music would swell, put his whiskey bottle down, and bury his face in his hands. Then he'd look up at me through his big wet eyes, and say: "Just don't forget, you hear?"

Don't ever forget—freedom is damn precious." Then he'd burst out crying all over again, and bury his face in his hands again.

You turn another corner in Andersonville's P.O.W. Museum, and there's a big concrete cross. It seems huge in the context of the little exhibit hallway. I wondered why it was there, and then I read the sign: The cross was made by men imprisoned by the Japanese during World War II. The head of the prison gave the prisoners concrete to make a memorial to their friends who had died. It was his intention that they would make a Buddhist type of memorial, apparently because of the indoctrination they were receiving. But the men made a big cross instead. Somehow or another, arrangements were made to bring that cross from wherever it was in the South Pacific all the way over to Andersonville.

Seeing that cross was the beginning of my tears in this museum. My impression of the exhibit from that point forward was that all the examples illustrated the change from a desperate grabbing at a semblance of hope towards the deep, smoldering fire of determination to somehow regain freedom. The next corner had a section of full-sized tunnels, with drawings showing different tunnels dug by prisoners through the years.

Then you come around the last corner, where a silent video shows Bataan Death March survivors being liberated—gaunt

Seeing that little bamboo cage made me understand why Bud loved the Panpipe's soaring music that reminded him of birds flying.

next thing I knew I woke up. But in the meantime, I had run over somebody's mailbox, up through their yard, and crashed through the wall of their house into their living room where they were watching TV. The man was sitting on his sofa yelling at me, asking me what in the world I thought I was doing. The woman was really ticked because I'd torn up her flower bed. The cops took me to a hospital, and that's when they figured out I had this narcolepsy stuff."

From then on, if Bud started telling a funny story, I stopped what I was doing and walked over close to him. One thing you could count on—if he began telling a funny story at the end of the day, he'd laugh for about five seconds, his lower lip would begin quivering, he'd yawn, and then he'd fall. He'd immediately start snoring. About five minutes later, he'd wake up refreshed.

I never saw Bud again after I quit being a mechanic. I saw his obituary in the paper a few years ago, and it made me sad to know I'd never taken the time to visit him.

Seeing the bamboo cage at Andersonville made me think about Bud, and put all my memories of him in a completely different perspective.

Hearing about spending eighteen months in a bamboo cage is one thing. Seeing what the cage looked like was a whole different ballgame.

Seeing that little bamboo cage made me understand why Bud loved the Panpipe's

skeletons of raggedly-dressed men with bony arms, sunken cheeks, ribs sticking out everywhere, wearing the biggest grins you ever saw, and big wet eyes filled with a joy that cannot be described.

The footage shows a gang of forlorn men sitting on the ground, and at the startling sight of a big American flag unfurling down the wall of a Nazi prison camp tower, the men spontaneously rise to their feet as one unit, all raising their fists in the air, and all jumping up and down.

The silent footage shows dirty, hollow men laughing and hugging each other, trying to somehow express the inexpressible. The black and white footage zooms in close to the faces of unshaven men wearing dirty caps, grinning and giving a thumbs-up to the cameraman.

Then a skinny somber man is walking out of an airplane, stopping to salute other healthy grinning men on the ramp, then walking stiffly down the airplane steps, and suddenly seeing a blur of dress and hair and outstretched arms bursting out of the lower corner of the footage's frame, he begins running towards the blur in a dress with her arms flung open wide, that blur

being followed by three more blurs of young children, and all of them clearly engulfing this skinny man with as much hugging as they can manage. Then there's a young black man with a look of pure won-

a man bawling his way back into a preciousness that my friend Bud said most of us cannot understand.

The self-guided tour ended here. I leaned hard against the wall, crying from deep in my guts, vicariously experiencing the unspeakable gratitude felt by these men and their mamas and daddies and wives and children at having recovered a thing they'd never fully considered holding until it was suddenly stripped from their unknowing grasp.

I was finally knowing how to grieve for my friend Bud and the tangled soul he unravelled in my shop.

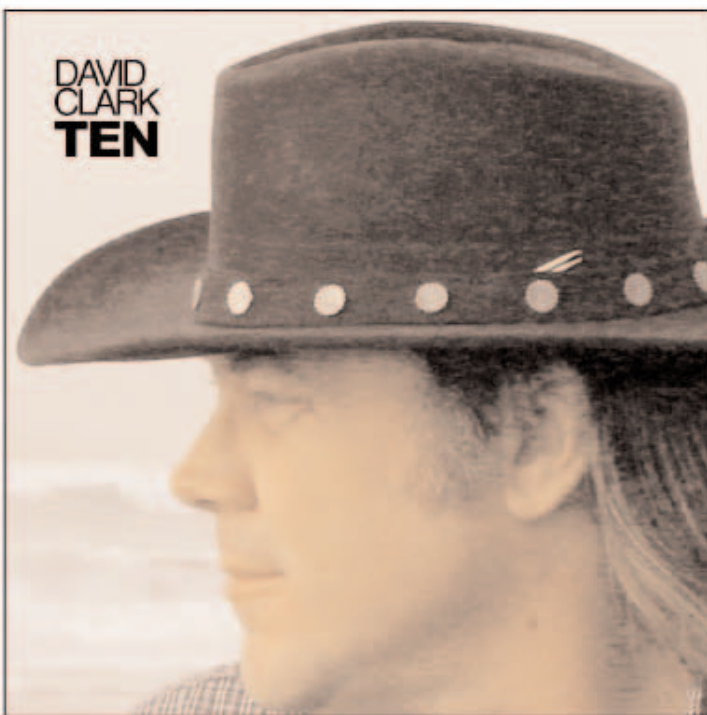
And I was acutely aware of that precious thing best described by birds flying, a thing I admittedly cannot begin to understand, a thing that in these days of warrantless wire-taps and increasingly unrestrained Homeland Security seems not only damn precious but astonishingly fragile.

This story is from David Clark's new book, "Simply America." You can order the book at Clark's website, www.outofthesky.com, or contact him at dclark@outofthesky.com.

And I was acutely aware of that precious thing best described by birds flying.

der on his face being smothered by his Mama who's kissing him back home while his gray-haired Daddy with big wet eyes stands behind her grinning so wide his face is about to bust. Then another skinny man leaves the plane, walking smartly up to a microphone but never managing to say anything, because he's swallowed up first by a woman's hugs.

This piece of footage zooms in to show just the head and shoulders of the man and woman, and the man's face contorts as he tries to maintain his manliness while rubbing his cheek repeatedly against the side of his wife's head as he runs his hands through her hair, and as his lips silently form the words "I love you," his contorting face explodes in the excruciating release of



Hear album samples at David Clark's website:
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"I grew up in the shadows of the Allman Brothers Band in Macon, Georgia," Clark says. "Around my hometown, you better burn up those guitar strings or sit quiet for the musician who can. After 35 years of playing, I'm not one to sit quiet."

David Clark is hardly quiet. Think Will Rogers with a spiritual kick in the ass.

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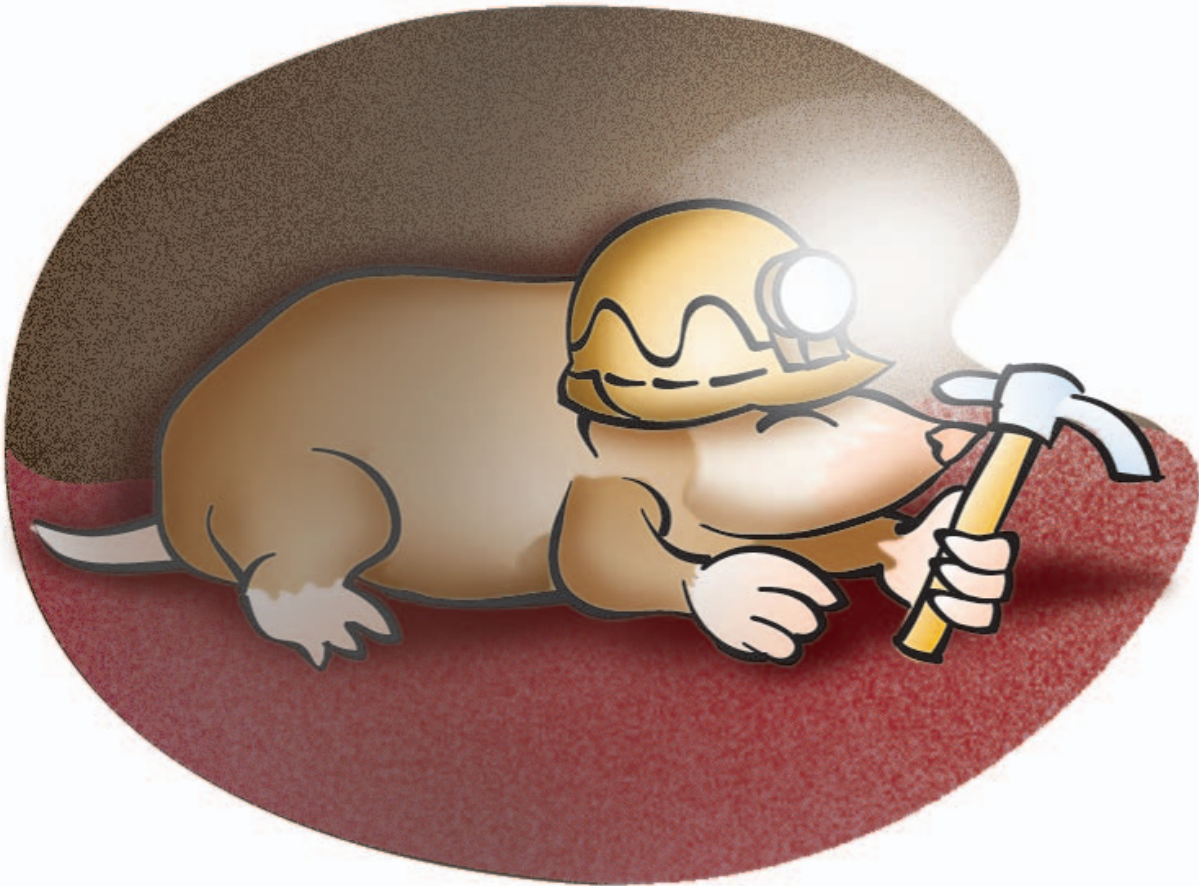
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The Mole

by Doug Combs

Ever wonder what it must be like to be a mole?
To spend a lifetime down inside a dark and dirty hole?
With short, fat legs and long thin nose—
All fur from head to tail...
He lives on creepy, crawly things like beetle bugs and snails.
He cannot see the damage done when he digs 'cross your lawn,
And yet it is quite visible to ev'ryone, come dawn.
So stomp his tunnels, set your traps—
He hasn't got a prayer,
And scream so loud the ground vibrates and curls his dirty hair.
He did not choose the life he leads, but does with what he's got...
Yet human nature leads mankind to hate and kill the lot.
Please show some admiration for this poor hard-working guy,
And thank your lucky stars God did not put us at his side.

Sax and Violins and Fake ID's

by Ron Burch

I was out in the garage, under the hood from the waist up, tuning-up my old Chevy. Suddenly, Dad yelled out the back door, "Son, there's someone on the phone that wants to know if you'd like to make a record. Do you want to speak with him?"

"Me? Make a record? You betcha!" I carefully laid the spark plug wrench on the towel I'd placed across the fender to protect the paint. I wiped off the grease, raced inside and grabbed the phone.

The fellow on the other end explained that his daughter wanted to become a rock singer and that he was self-producing a record in hopes of helping her to make it big. To pull it off, they were putting together a back-up group they would call the "Racket Squad." Although there was no money in the deal, if his daughter became a star, it would be as "Roxanne and the Racket Squad," and all would share. A group of musicians I performed with each Saturday night at the American Legion Post 65 had recommended me...did I want to try out for the group?

With fame staring me right in the face, I didn't have to think about it for very long. I said, "Sure, count me in. When and where do you want to get together?" The answer was their house next Sunday afternoon.

I left home early, but I still wasn't the first to arrive. The lead guitarist was there, so was the drummer. When the little blonde with the pouty lips came out of the kitchen, I learned that she played the violin.

Of course, Roxanne was there, too, but she was not nearly as pretty as I'd expected. She was tall, flat-chested and had curly brown hair. She was wearing a headset, singing softly into a microphone while her dad adjusted the mixer. She wasn't smiling—a good indication that she took herself and her singing far too seriously.

sic called "Honky Tonk."

Roxanne and her dad came down the stairs. She still didn't look happy. Her dad waved his arms and told us to cool it and started passing out the music. Roxanne's song was called, aptly enough, "Roxanne," and it sounded a lot like the Teddy Bears' tune "To Know Him Is To Love Him." My part was a short rift somewhere between the second verse and the chorus.

Pouty Ellen—the blonde with the fiddle—had a solo part. When it came time, she struggled through, albeit slightly off-key. I thought to myself, "it's too bad her violin doesn't have frets." Still, she was a cutie that I'd let play my violin any time.

We went through the song a half dozen times and agreed that we needed more work. Another rehearsal was set for the following Sunday at 2:00. I was just out of high school, about to enter college in the fall. I had a summer job as a proofreader at a large printing company where it took all the concentration I could muster to keep from screwing up. Still, that next week, I couldn't keep my mind on my work. I kept thinking about Ellen—the long blonde trusses, her pouty lips and that violin.

At our next rehearsal, we sounded a lot better. Not great, mind you, but better. I thought our lackluster accompaniment matched Roxanne's lackluster singing. (If it were happening today, she would never



...since we were both underage, we would need IDs of some sort to get in the door.

When the bass player arrived, we were instructed to go downstairs to the recreation room and get set-up. I took my old tenor sax out of the case and began to warm up. The dude on lead guitar joined me and so did the drummer. Soon we were belting out strains of the Bill Doggett clas-

have made it passed the first round on *American Idol*. She would also have driven Simon up a tree!)

By the end of Session Two, her dad was happy. He said that next Sunday, if we sounded this good, we would go live and cut the tape.

Before leaving, I asked the guitar picker what he knew about Ellen. He said she was a junior in high school, and that she dated some goon whose dad was a cop—I later learned he was actually a highway patrolman on the governor's staff. Anyway, he didn't think she was available, and his best advice was not to even try.

Now, when it came to girls, I always relished the joy of victory far more than I dreaded the agony of defeat. So about mid-week, I gave her a call. Didn't ask her out—just gave her a call. But when Sunday came, was it my imagination or was old Ellen warming up to the guy with the tenor sax?

After a couple of run-throughs, Roxanne's dad said we were good to go. He said, "Quiet on the set," and pressed the record button. Afterwards, we all shook hands and prepared to go our separate ways.

The lead guitarist, the drummer and the bass player said that they'd booked a job next Saturday night at a barbecue joint in Cumming, Georgia, twenty-five miles to the north. It was a grand opening that paid twenty bucks for a one-hour gig. We'd be performing on the back of a flatbed truck. Was I interested?

Why not? Back then, twenty bucks was enough for a date and gasoline for a week. The guitar picker said he'd call mid-week and give me the details. I felt bad that Ellen wasn't part of the group. I guess there wasn't much call for a rock and roll fiddle player, no matter how pretty.

I walked over to her and said, "Nice job on the solo...call you next week?" She grinned and that was all I needed. I drove away knowing I'd just scored a 9.95.

We dated for two or three months. All the while, I did my best to keep up the "Mister Cool" image. We went to the movies. We saw a couple of plays at *Theater under the Stars*. We spent a day at the *Flying S Ranch*, a lakeside get-away south of Atlanta owned by some family friends. On a weekday, for forty bucks, we literally had the place to ourselves—the horses, the lake, the pool, the bathhouse—whatever.

I wanted to take Ellen to see a nightclub act, a stand-up comedian known as "Brother Dave Gardner." However, since

we were both underage, we would need IDs of some sort to get in the door.

No problem. In those days, the printed form for a Georgia driver's license was available at any Post Office. Making it quasi official required typing in the information and somehow coming up with a replica of the authenticating red stamp that contained an outline map of the State of Georgia. Again, no problem—even for someone only slightly artistic like me.

So, outfitted with the fake credentials, we went down to the old Domino Lounge and spent a great evening with Brother Dave.

We were almost back to her house when I noticed a black Chevy in the rearview mirror, following close behind. I pulled into the drive and walked her to the door. Turning back toward my car, I noticed that the black Chevy was against the curb across the street, motor still running. On my drive home, whoever it was stayed right

"Son, if you're going to carry
a weapon, you'd better be prepared
to shoot it."

on my bumper. The driver kept yelling something out the window. But since there were three of them and only one of me, I didn't stop and ask them to repeat it.

The next day, I told Ellen about the incident, and she said that if it was a black '59 Chevy Impala, it was likely Cary, her old boyfriend. (I guess he subscribed to that piece of redneck culture that says, "If I can't have her, nobody can have her.")

Anyway, the next time we went out, there he was—stalking us and following me home. Each time he got braver. Each time he had more of his hooligan friends along for the ride.

Now there are a couple of things my old daddy taught me: never give a sucker an even break and always take care of yourself. He said when it comes down to self-defense, there's no such thing as a fair fight or should there be. So, the next morning before I left for work, I took the .32 automatic from his dresser drawer, slipped it into my pocket and later hid it underneath the seat in the car.

I'd no more arrived at work when Dad was on the phone. He asked, "Have you seen my gun?"

I answered "yep," and I didn't stutter as I told him the story of Ellen's old boyfriend and the gang of hoodlums. He asked if I'd taken any of his bullets. I told him, no, just the gun.

He was silent for a few seconds, then he said, "Son, there's nothing more dangerous than an unloaded gun. If you're going to carry a weapon, you'd better be prepared to shoot it."

That night I gave him back his gun, and he gave me a couple of pieces of pipe and a length of steel chain. He said, "Swing that chain the right way and you can take out all comers."

I placed the two pieces of pipe and the chain underneath the seat where the gun had been. Sure, 'nuff, the very next night the boys in the black Chevy appeared once more. However, this time I was ready. We were double-dating and my meanest, toughest buddy was along for the ride.

We pulled into a drive-in restaurant in Brookhaven, and before those clowns could get out of the car, we were in their face. Both of us gripping one of those pieces of pipe in one hand, pounding it against the palm of the other. After a heated discussion, it seems I'd been wrong about them.

They didn't want any trouble, just a hamburger and an order of fries.

A couple of weeks later, when I returned from making a delivery to a mid-town ad agency, my boss said the president of the company where I worked wanted to see me.

Me? Heck he didn't even know who I was. What did he want with me? I was soon to find out. I climbed the stairs and his secretary led me into a beautiful office, perhaps the largest I'd ever seen. Mr. Siegel sat behind a big mahogany desk, at least twenty feet from where I was seated in one of the guest chairs.

"Ron," he said, "I received a disturbing call from a Captain at the Highway Patrol this morning. Seems they're investigating a ring that produces fraudulent driver's licenses. He asked a lot of questions about the company and about our relationship with the state, also about you...now tell me, young man, do you know anything at all about this?" This time I stuttered big time. *Only eighteen and about to be a felon.* I told the truth and assured the man that I would take care of everything.

That night, I called the pretty fiddle player and laid it on the line—since she'd obviously told her old boyfriend about the fake ID, and he'd obviously told his dad, the gumshoe trooper, if she didn't return it to me immediately, I was going to tell her mom about our day at the *Flying S*.

The evidence arrived in the mail the next day and I promptly reduced it to ashes inside the fireplace.

But the story doesn't end there. Remember, I said I worked for a printing company—one that had a printing contract with the state to produce things like brochures, fliers, promotional materials and official documents, including of all things, *marriage certificates*.

One day, out of boredom, I picked up a proof of one of the marriage certificates and after looking it over, asked a couple of co-workers to help me fill it out. I wanted the certificate to say that Ron and Ellen were husband and wife. Old Chuck signed as the Ordinary of Paulding County, one "Rufus Crutchfield."

Noel found an embossed, star-shaped, gold seal left over from an insurance policy project. He stuck it on the bottom to make it look real and official.

For grins and giggles, I decided to mail it to my parents, knowing full well that they would open it before I arrived home. I was right. When I went through the door, Mom was wailing like a siren and Dad was stomping around like an old wet hen.

I did some fast-talking. I told them it was a joke and pointed out that the

embossed gold seal at the bottom said "*Life of Georgia*," not "*State of Georgia*." Finally, they bought in. Dad said if it was a joke, it was a bad, bad joke. But again, the story doesn't end there.

Following my Mom's passing some forty-five years later, my real wife, Valerie, and I were charged with holding an estate sale, a garage sale and cleaning out my par-

My wife said, "It doesn't matter, but why didn't you tell me you'd been married before?"

ent's old house. After several busy weekends, we were having a late dinner one Sunday night when Valerie said she had something to ask me. I looked up and replied, "Sure, what is it?"

She said, "It doesn't matter, but why didn't you tell me you'd been married before?"

"Married before? Me? You gotta be kidding!"

She reached over to the buffet, opened a drawer and pulled out the errant marriage certificate that I'd long since forgotten.

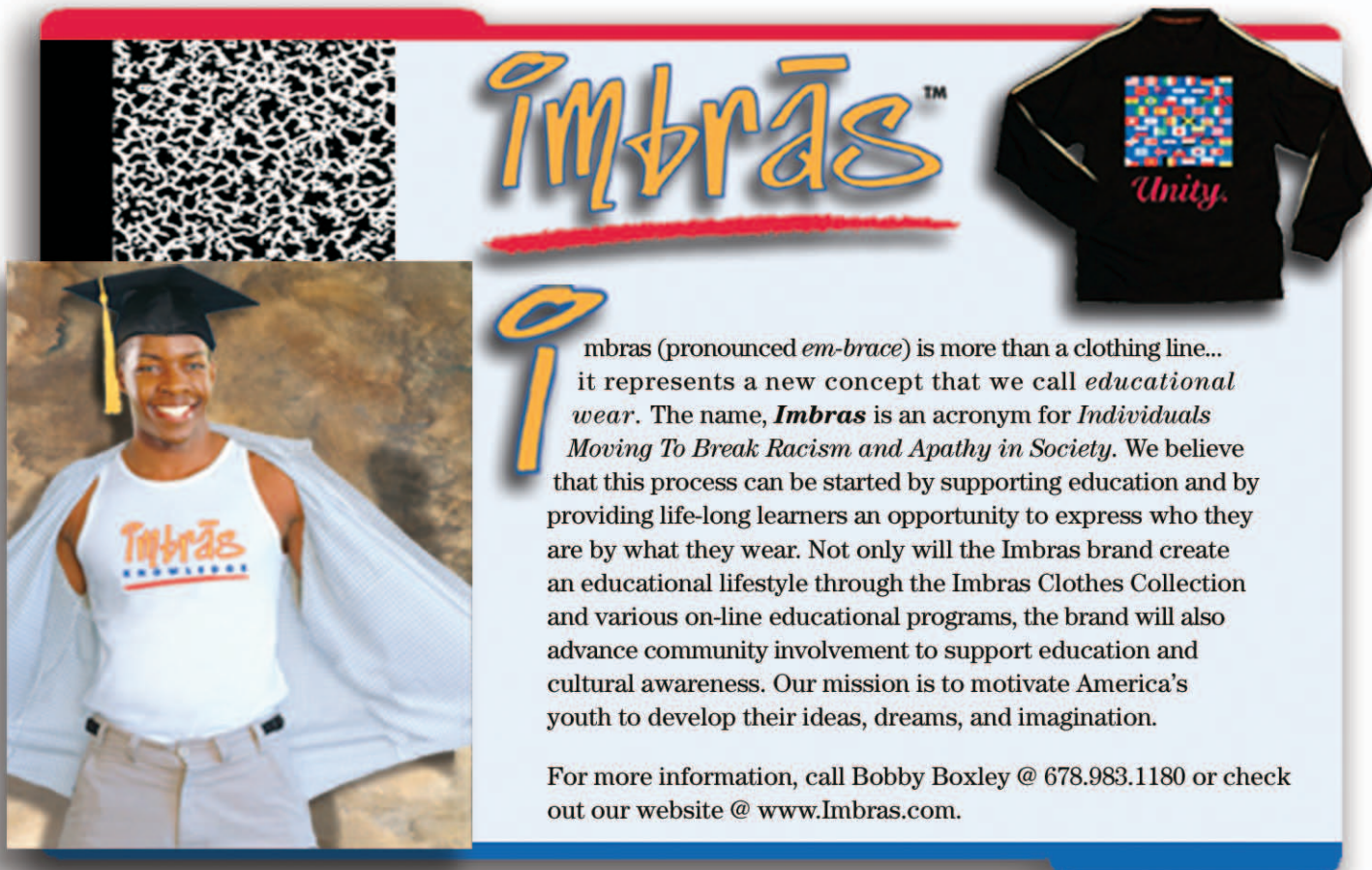
Unfortunately, when I pointed to the bacon-saving seal that I said read "*Life of Georgia*," not "*State of Georgia*," I discovered that after years of being packed away underneath God knows how many pounds of stuff, the embossing was flattened beyond recognition.

On the heels of that fiasco, it took a heckava lot more explaining in 2004 than it did in 1959 for me to get off that hook!

Although a few years too late, I've learned a valuable lesson and have sworn off counterfeiting and all the practical jokes. But not off rock 'n' roll. Matter of fact, on a summer night when the windows are open, my neighbors will still hear me rockin' out. With four synthesizers—two Kawai, one Yamaha and one Casio, an Alesis reverb and special effects unit, an eight-channel mixer, a powerful Peavey amp, four big Peavey speakers and a Leslie tone cabinet, it sounds pretty darn good if I do say so myself.

Well, pretty loud anyway.

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