

Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH



A 1937 Football Story

*The Big Game
the way
it never was*

Getting Hosed

A look at cheap, green fun

The Holiday Inn of Last Resort

Reservations remembered

Up In the Air

Night flying over Georgia

Practical Spirituality

An article by David Clark

David Skinner

Learning How to Take the Fall

Every fall finds me at some point flashing back to my bittersweet college days. It was the dawn of the bright and polyester decade of the '70s, and I had chosen Carson-Newman, a small Baptist college in the hills of East Tennessee, to serve as the esteemed institution where I would pursue my quest for higher knowledge, learning and power.

I had picked Carson-Newman for two specific reasons: *One*, because I had been raised Baptist, and I naively thought I had a pretty good feel for the so-called "lay of the land;" and *Two*, because even though the school was small, it had a football team, and what good was autumn without a hometown college football team?

Back then, as well as now, every college football team in Tennessee took a back seat to the giant orange shadow of the University of Tennessee's gridiron heroes. But I didn't care. I wanted to attend a school where things were more accessible. And that's what I got, with a warm and fuzzy time warp to boot. As early-'70s Carson-Newman students, we were privileged to see what college life was like in the '40s and '50s. While your average college students were protesting the war in Vietnam and attempting to burn down their administration buildings, we sat on the grassy hill overlooking the main drag and watched the homecoming parade wind through the little town and occasionally complained that, as students at a Baptist college, we were forbidden to dance on campus. Then, we headed over to the stadium to catch the game. This is not to say we were oblivious to what was going on in the world. I just think that most of us figured reality would come and bite us soon enough.

In the autumn of 1972, in the midst of

football games and homecoming parades, I became editor of Carson-Newman's student newspaper, *The Orange and Blue*. Because of the irregular printing schedule of the newspaper, we decided to focus on our strengths and diversities rather than on timeliness and being up-to-date. One of our experiments was a regular comic strip called "*The Adventures of Owen Bee*." Owen, who got his name from the abbreviation of *The Orange and Blue*, sampled everything from dancing to scuba diving, gradually turning into a callous, if world-savvy, existentialist.

On the more journalistic side, we ran editorial cartoons poking fun at not being able to dance, we wrote satirical articles about the joy of innocence against the backdrop of the world's problems, and we offered up pseudo-serious articles about the installation of sidewalks and traffic lights on campus.

But most notably, there were several students on the *O & B* staff who liked to write and were good at it, and they were featured as columnists. These included Nelda Hill and Ben Greene, both of whom have contributed articles to *SouthernReader*.

Also, at some point, I had written a paro-

dy to try and capture the smalltown college ambiance of fall and football that we loved so much. I had all but forgotten the details until about a month ago, when I unearthed a yellowed copy of the story. I had written it in September of '73, and I originally inverted the numbers, setting the story in '37 and called it "A 1937 Football Story." We thought that it would be a kick, so to speak, to run it in this issue of *SouthernReader*, thirty years later.

As for Carson-Newman College, it has gone on to greater things. This autumn they will celebrate the 20th anniversary of their football team's first National Championship. They have also flourished academically—the school has recently been selected by *U.S. News and World Report* as "One of America's Best Colleges 2003." And, they gave me some wonderful gifts—a unique and well-rounded education, a lifetime supply of the best friends anyone could ever hope for, and a special place in my memories, full of football games and golden leaves, where I can travel every autumn.

David Skinner
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SouthernReader

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Re: Watermelons, Shaggs and Bigfoot

Dear Editor:

I read your most recent issue “cover to cover” as soon as I saw it. I thoroughly enjoyed the articles, especially “Me and My Big Foot” (<http://www.SouthernReader.com/SouthRead4.5.html>). I



haven't heard the expression “Ah, foot!” in years, and no, never outside the South. Excuse me, I'm going back to reading the *Reader* editions I have missed. Please accept my lifetime subscription.

Oh yeah...love the watermelon!

Scott Yarbrough

Madison, WI

Dear Editor:

Thanks much for doing this...super high-end fun and style on the South. I have taken the liberty of forwarding to friends and family. Keep up the good work!

Jeff Kryder

Atlanta, GA



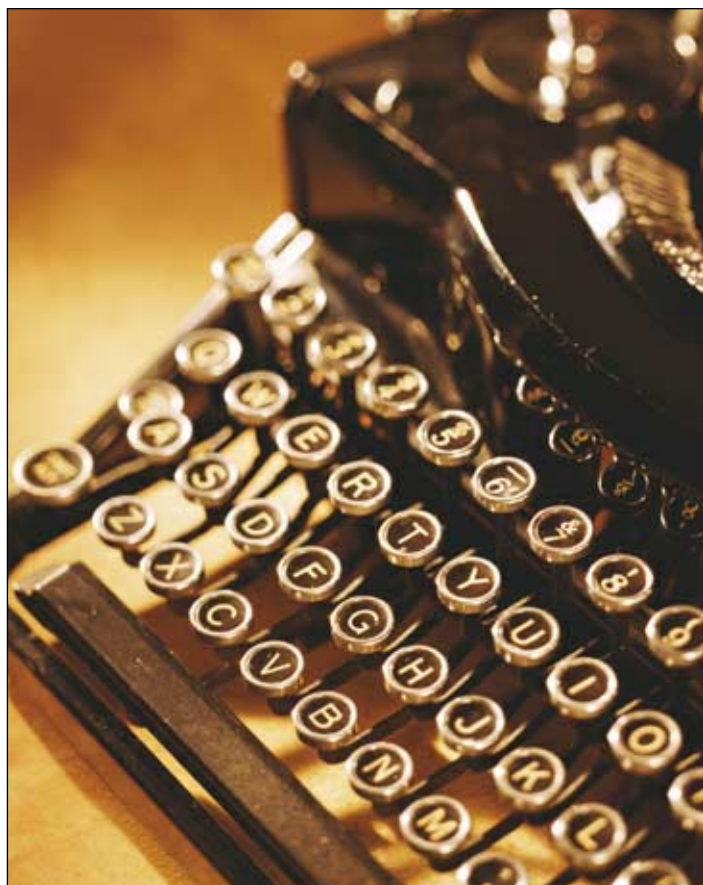
Dear Editor:

Thanks much for the *Southern Reader*. I really liked David Clark's article, “The Crow Stands for Law” (<http://www.SouthernReader.com/SouthRead4.7.html>). It is something I believe as well, and it's not a popular view to have—whether about your own kids or about your animals or anything.

Ron Burch's *forty-to-life* article, “The Girl Next Door” (<http://www.SouthernReader.com/SouthRead4.5.html>) also was wonderful. You have a great medium, and I thank you for including me in the list.

Linda Sinko

Kingsport, TN



“I haven't heard the expression, 'Ah, foot!' in years, and no, never outside the South.”

Dear Editor:

Tell me, is your article on *the Shaggs* (“Philosophy of the Shaggs,” <http://www.SouthernReader.com/SouthRead4.4.html>) fact or fiction?

It can't be fact...can it? I have bookmarked *Southern Reader*. When you are really in a pinch for copy, can I send you some great Tennessee legislative proposal?

Doug Overbey

Maryville, TN

Doug Overbey is a Tennessee House Representative (R.—Maryville, District 20)





A 1937 Football Story

Fiction by David Ray Skinner

It was fourth down and fourteen to go. Hank Clough tugged at his large jersey as he barked out the signals. “Eighty-three!! Twenty-four!! A plus B equals See, Seen-yore!! Boogedy, boogedy, boogedy boo!! Yoo-hoo, yoo-hoo, forty-two!!”

He took the snap and spun around, but before he could take a step backward, the brute tackle had him flat on his back and, eyeball-to-eyeball, was breathing down on his face with a rancid stench that could only be interpreted as that morning’s breakfast of raw meat and Malt-O-Meal.

The Buttering fans went wild. It was their ball on their own 45-yard line. Clough picked himself up and grumbled through his gritted teeth. “Dadgum,” he complained to nobody in particular, “I told you it wouldn’t fool ‘em. It didn’t fool ‘em before, and it sure wadn’t gonna fool ‘em this time.”

Coach Marvis shook his head in disgust. “Here it is the champ-ship playoff,” he muttered, “and the best player this conference ever seen is sittin’ in his dom-itory room problee listenin’ to the fool game on the radio as we sit here on the verge of git-ting our helmeted heads handed to us by a bunch of straw-chewing farmboys.”

Although he had started his statement quite calmly, by the end of his announcement, he was screaming like a banshee. He glanced up at the scoreboard. It read, “Buttering U.: 6; Lapel Tech: 0.”

Elbows Nilden came off the bench. Behind them the Tech cheerleaders des-

perately tried to rally the crowd. “Go-o-o-o-o, Mammals, go! Fight!! Gr-r-r-r-r-r!!”

“At least our defense is holdin’ ‘em, Coach,” Elbows said as he put on his helmet. “This game would be a lead-pipe cinch if Jimmy was out there.” Behind him, however, there was an understated gloom of silence in the stands.

Meanwhile, in a Tech dorm room on the other side of the university campus, Jimmy Ringley sat silently listening to the static-y radio. He chewed on a bright yellow pencil as the broadcast wafted in and out of the almost-empty dorm. “Well folks, it’s Buttering’s ball, third down and two,” the announcer chirped. “There’s the snap—it’s a short pass—complete!! First down for Buttering University, and there’s a timeout on the field.

“Yes, folks, it looks like we got ourselves a ballgame! And, yessir, it’s a beautiful day for football here at Mammal Stadium. Buttering is leading Tech six to nothing. But this game hasn’t been without its dramatic twists and turns, and it’s far from over. As every one of you within the sound of my voice probably knows by now, Tech is playing under an extreme handicap without their star player, Jimmy Ringley. Ringley was suspended this week for cheating on a pop quiz. Lapel Tech president Ralph Flushing commented on the suspension earlier this week, saying...”

Jimmy jumped up and turned down the radio. “Darn it, Brains,” he said to his friend, “If I could just prove that I didn’t cheat on that silly test.” But Brains was deep in thought and didn’t appear to hear him. He was totally focused on examining a green vial at the mini-laboratory they had hastily set up in the corner of the room.

“Hold on, Jimmy,” Brains said carefully, “I’ve almost got it. Just one more ingredient...”

“Then what?” asked Jimmy.

“Well, to be exact, just one more mixture, and we’ll successfully prove your innocence. We’ll prove—beyond a shadow of a doubt—that it wasn’t your fingerprints on that cheat sheet. In fact, it’s a scientific impossibility that you were cheating!” Brains looked out from behind his too-big glasses and arched his thin neck. “Here, hand me that test tube.”

“Aw, Brains, it’s no use. It’s too little, too late.” Jimmy leaned back and turned up the radio.

“Yessir, folks,” the announcer sputtered, “Buttering is really moving the ball. They’ve got their eyes on that goal, folks, but they’re running outa time. There’s only six seconds left to play in the first half...three, two, one and there’s the gun!

Be sure you stay tuned for the halftime fun as our own Beebow Charles gives you a blow-by-blow on the fancy footwork of the incredible Mammal Marching Band. Plus, we’ll have some gardening tips from our ol’ buddy...”

Jimmy snapped off the radio, but before he could say anything there was a brief “Poof!” and a wisp of smoke from the makeshift lab in the corner. “Eureka!” screamed Brains, “And this just in from the Office of Redundancy Office—I found it!”

Brains snapped his fingers. “Hey, it’s halftime! President Flushing always leaves the game at halftime to go home and wind his grandfather calendar clock. Maybe, just maybe...Quick!! To the Jalopy!!”

President Flushing had already finished winding the clock and was scratching around the umbrella holder when the boys arrived. Mrs. Flushing answered the door, and Brains spoke first. “Mrs. Flushing! Is the president about?!”

“In here, boys!” President Flushing waved from the den. “How about a cup of tea?”

“Thank you, sir, but no sir. Go ahead, Eddie, tell him,” said Brains forcefully.

“Well, uh...it’s like this, President Flushing. I think we’ve made a terrible mistake. Jimmy wasn’t the one who was cheating. It was just a big dumb

misunderstanding.”

Brains joined in. “Exactly, President Flushing. I was watching Jimmy all through that quiz, and, in fact, I saw him *not* cheating. And, I have the proof. I have gleaned fingerprints from the notorious cheat sheet that was used to try, convict and condemn Jimmy. Would you like to see the results?”

“No, no, Brains, that won’t be necessary. Jimmy, we’ve got to get you to

that game!”

But as they ran out of the president’s home to jump into the Jalopy, they all stopped in their tracks. “Someone has let the air out of all of the tires!” they moaned in unison looking back at President and Mrs. Flushing.

“Maybe you’d better re-think that cup of tea,” said President Flushing.



They were interrupted by a tentative knock, and when Jimmy opened the door, Eddie Scath cautiously peered inside. “Anybody home?” he asked.

“Exactly, President Flushing. I was watching Jimmy all through that quiz, and, in fact, I saw him not cheating.”

Brains glared at him. “What do you want, you villainous rat? You’ve certainly got a lot of nerve showing up here...especially today. Hope you’re satisfied, getting Jimmy in trouble and all!”

“Look, guys, I’m sorry,” Scath said sheepishly, “It wasn’t Jimmy that was cheating. It was just a big dumb misunderstanding. I just came from the game. It’s halftime, you know. Jimmy, they need you out there. I mean, they *really* need you.”

It was late in the fourth quarter. Incredibly, the Tech defense had held. Coach Marvis, however, had lost all hope of winning the game. He had been vaguely optimistic even after Elbows fumbled twice on the five. He lost his remaining optimism when Hank Clough took a hand-off on the one yard-line, spun around and pitched the ball to a Buttering lineman. Marvis quietly put down his clipboard and

**"Mister Referee," said Jimmy, calmly,
"The ball did not fall short of the
goal. Isn't that right?"**

sat down on the bench with his head between his hands.

Hank trotted off the field muttering, "I told you it wouldn't fool 'em. It didn't fool 'em before, and it sure wadn't gonna fool 'em this time."

Buttering completed three twenty-yard passes and bulldozed their way to the Tech's fifteen yard-line.

Suddenly, Jimmy emerged from the shadows onto a sunny patch of the field at the far end of the stadium. He walked slowly, but deliberately over to where Coach Marvis sat on the bench and calmly announced, "I'm going in, Coach."

Brains quickly followed on his heels. He handed Coach Marvis a sealed envelope. "It's the fingerprint proofs, Coach."

When Jimmy ran out onto the field, a confused hush came upon the crowd. The quiet was immediately followed by a joyous thunder. The clocked showed less than a minute left in the game, and Lapel was still down six to nothing.

"It's Jimmy!" screamed the crowd. "Jimmy, Jimmy, Jim-mee-e-e-e-e! Go-o-o-o-o-o, Mammals, go!"

The Buttering quarterback took the snap, faded back, and passed into the end zone. Within a fraction of a second, however, Jimmy came from out of nowhere, pulled down the ball and was happily galloping toward the opposite goal.

The noise inside the stadium was deafening. As the clock ran down to a single second, Jimmy dove into the end zone. The game was all tied up.

When Jimmy ran over to the bench, Coach Marvis was busily scanning his playbook. "Jimmy, have you ever tried to kick an extra point?"

Jimmy smiled as he trotted back onto

the field. "First time for everything, Coach," he said looking up at the clock. There was one second left.

The center snapped the ball to Hank who was holding for Jimmy to kick the extra point. The ball was snapped perfectly, but when the single second remaining in the game rolled down to zero, the final gun went off, and Hank, startled, juggled the ball uncontrollably. Jimmy, however,

was unflappable. With his eyes closed, his foot connected perfectly with the spinning ball in Hank's hands. The ball sailed smoothly through the air, hit the goal post, bounced three times and balanced perfectly on the bar.

The Buttering coach ran out onto the field. "It didn't go over, Ref! It didn't go over!" he yelled frantically.

"Mister Referee," said Jimmy, calmly, "The ball did not fall short of the goal. Isn't that right?"

The ref looked over at the Buttering coach. "The boy's right...it didn't fall short." The referees conferred and then walked over to Jimmy.

"The best we can do is give you a half a point."

Jimmy removed his helmet and looked around. "Well, I don't know."

A loud drone of anxious anticipation from the crowd whirled around the stadium, and the referee began to look around nervously. "Okay, okay!" he said, "Three quarters of a point, and that's our best offer."

Jimmy kicked at the ground. "Well...okay. It's a deal."

The referee signaled the press box, and one of the officials climbed up onto the scoreboard with a piece of chalk and carefully drew a big "3/4" after Tech's score. As the Tech fans spilled out of the stands onto the field with reckless abandon, Coach Marvis looked over at Jimmy. "Thanks, son," he said, "I don't think we could have done it without you."

"Thanks, Coach," Jimmy said, smiling. As he turned, he saw the massive wave of the oncoming fans. Brains was in the middle of the onslaught, his big glasses bobbing on his shiny nose. He was grinning

and yelling something that was hopelessly indecipherable. Brains held up a hand-drawn poster with a football and an elaborate mathematical equation with directional arrows, and Jimmy responded knowingly with a thumbs-up.

And then he saw Doris.

She was running toward him, still holding onto her megaphone, laughing and crying at the same time. "Oh, Jimmy," she mouthed. When she threw her arms around him, a tiny bright reflection of the late afternoon sun followed her hand and caught his eye.

She was wearing his ring again.

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Getting Hosed

A childhood memoir on cheap, green fun by Brett Reichert

There was an article in *Consumer Reports* a few months back about the dangers of drinking from the common garden hose...or, what we used to fondly call the “water hose.”

When I was growing up in south Georgia, a few miles from the Florida line, we just called it the “hose.” The garden is the thing in the back yard where you grow tomatoes and peppers. And since a hose can be in the front, back, or side yard, the term *garden hose* is really inadequate, linguistically.

Anyway, as I sat here in my Seoul, Korea office thinking about late summers past in south Georgia, I was inspired to write the following action alert, with *your* best interest at heart, of course.

I was talking with Mr. Gilbert, a British colleague here, about the fact that when I was comin’ up in rural Georgia, I typically ran around barefoot all summer, fixed everything with masking tape, (including cracked window glass), and drank my fill from the cut-off end of the cheapest water hose available at Woolworth’s or sometimes Rose’s discount store (we’d go to Rose’s if grape jelly and Raid bugspray were on sale).

I’ll get back to why the end of the hose was cut off...

We were discussing the theoretical underpinnings of modern masking tape, as well as its historical origins as a fix-all adhesive. Mr. Gilbert seemed amazed by my explanation of the myriad of uses of masking tape—including fixin’ the leaks around spickets and all the leaks in my family’s cheap water hoses.

Before I knew it, I was off on a tangent about the euphoric joy I had the first time

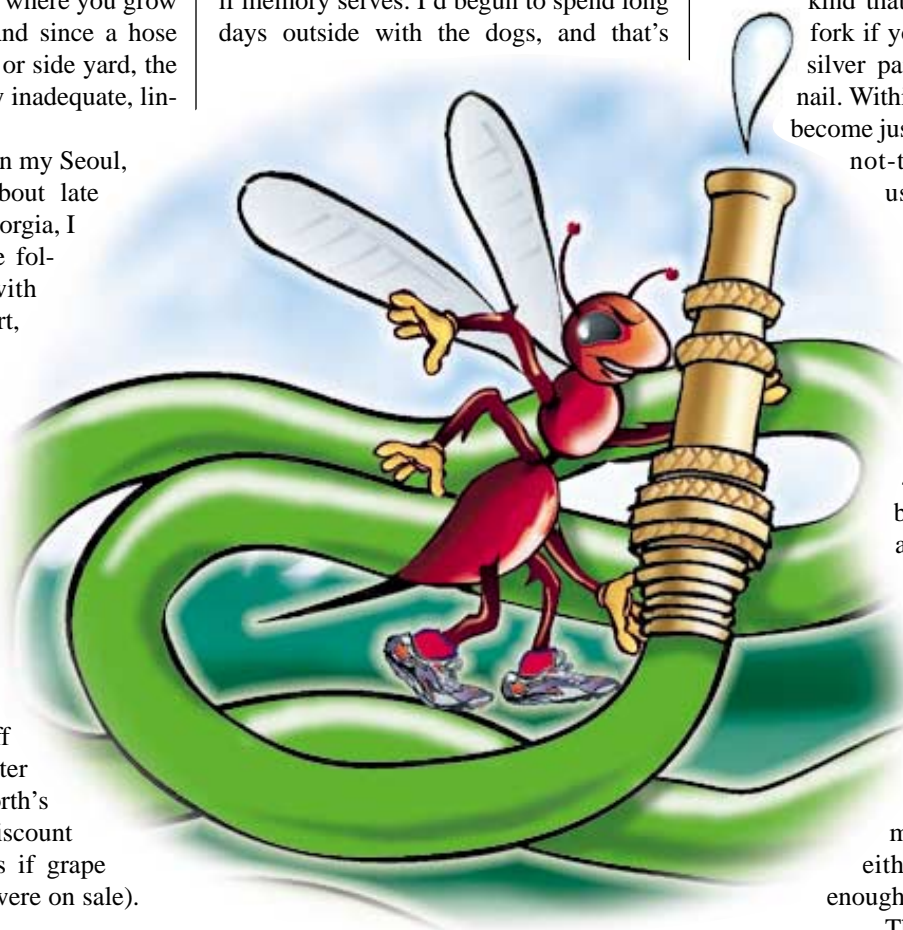
we got a real spray nozzle that screwed onto the end of a not-yet-cut-off hose. It must have been the summer of ‘76 or ‘77, if memory serves. I’d begun to spend long days outside with the dogs, and that’s

“safely” target a softball-sized wasp nest under the eave of the roof and have a good chance of knocking it down with a precise hit; wasps won’t return to a downed nest. They just get madder and savvier and build newer, bigger nests.

Well, never mind that our shiny new nozzle was the 99-cent aluminum alloy kind that you could bend like a fork if you wanted or scrape the silver paint from with a fingernail. Within a few weeks, it would become just another addition to the not-to-ever-be-thrown-out, useless, rusty, random items that don’t work, but which you might wanna fiddle with again someday pile.

Long before back-to-school circulars would begin to litter “Rural Route 6, Box 403,” the washers in both the spray nozzle and the cheap hose would dry out and disappear into the universe that was our yard on Cassidy Road. From that point, water would spew everywhere, and no amount of masking tape could fix either connection well enough to knock over a bucket. The solution was simple: lose the nozzle, cut off the end of the hose and stay away from the wasps. After all, late fall would take care of them.

So naturally, the wasps endured, but target practice with the short-lived water nozzle was fun and certainly more environmentally friendly than the previous anti-wasp technique used by my brother, Joey. He was master of the over-the-head gasoline toss-and-run like the dickens technique. It had proven ineffective many times, not to mention deadly to the grass.



With decent water pressure and this amazing new tool, I could “safely” target a softball-sized wasp nest and have a good chance of knocking it down.

when we discovered I was terribly allergic to wasp stings.

A trip to the ER for a shot of Benadryl was such a bother, so a water nozzle was sure to provide a better defense against my tormentors. With decent water pressure and this amazing new tool, I could

Amused, perhaps *confused* by the anecdote, my English colleague continued to indulge me, eyebrows lifting, as I recounted a favorite summer-time activity with

The hose should droop over like a dead rat snake--the ones you hoe to death before leaving them out as dog toys.

that water nozzle. In our special times together, just the dogs and me, I would play "rocket launch," barefoot near the spicket jutting up from the ground at the edge of my father's shop. This involved spewing the water point-blank, directly at the ground at maximum water pressure while making blast-off sounds.

Eventually, the explosion of mud from the blast site would reach crater-like proportions, but I'd always lift off and zoom around the yard as far as I could get, tethered to 25 feet of cheap green fun. Pound dog of the year or whichever pair or trio of canines we had laying around (incessantly snapping at flies and panting in the shade) were always nearby, watching with spectacular disregard for such activities. Unless the hose was being used to clean or fill a bone-dry water bowl or make the water gravy, man's best friends could not be bothered to play with me. (*Recipe for water gravy: scoop up enough dry, discount dog food for one good dog, add water, let sit for 5 minutes, stir and serve up to all three dogs in one bowl, usually the water bowl, but stand clear. They don't like petting while lapping up water gravy.*)

But I digress. The gist of the *Consumer Reports* article was that these cheap hoses are lined with lead. If you drink from them like normal folk sometimes do after yard work (when you're too dirty or thirsty to track inside), they can be toxic to you, your barefoot kids, cousins, grandkids, and miscellaneous other little people who come up in your yard during the hottest weeks of summer.

The more expensive kind of hose, the ones that curl up on stainless steal racks behind Tuxedo Drive homes like cool, flat water moccasins are lead-free. But you can pay \$10 bucks (or more) extra for those. Maybe that's why my older brothers still have hair and I don't; I drank gal-

lons of water from our skinny, lead-lined, taped-up cheap hoses.

Here's my advice: If you can't roll that thing up again as easily as it sprang loose from the plastic wrap, you probably got a cheap one. Or, if a two-foot segment of the one you got from a bin next to the check-out

counter pokes out like a broom handle, you really got a cheap one.

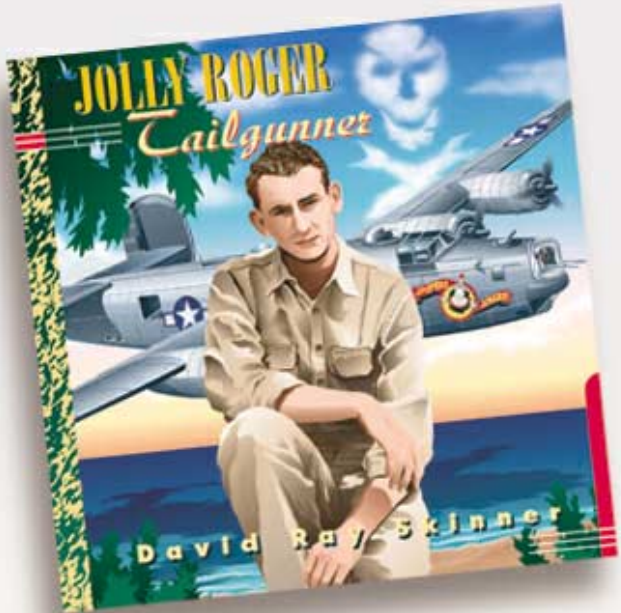
It should droop over like a dead rat snake—the ones you hoe to death before leaving them out as dog toys. Finally, if the hose comes totally unraveled again after you spend 10 minutes wrestling it back into a spiral the width of a hoola-hoop, because you were told that left unspiraled, it looked like a snake laying in

the grass and that snakes were sinful, then I'm afraid you got a cheap one too.


I concur with *Consumer Reports* on this one. Upgrade your water hose today with haste! Spend a little, save a lot, don't drink lead, reduce your risk for cancer and eliminate the elbow cramps associated with man-handling the cheap, skinny, pathetic, plastic kind. If you're truly ready to invest in a good hose, why not go ahead and get a good stainless steel spray nozzle too? Avoid thumb rot and the finger cramps you get after washing your car with the same cheap cut-off hose you drink from and play mud games with! Your fingertips and your local hardware dealer will thank you.

brettreichert@yahoo.com

Brett Reichert is an English Instructor in Seoul, Korea with the Samsung Globalization Management Institute.



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What is Practical Spirituality?

by David Clark

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The phrase “*Practical Spirituality*” reminds one of other gems such as military intelligence, jumbo shrimp, and government efficiency.

The word *practical* concerns everyday life experience. It implies acting sensibly about material things: balancing one’s checkbook, stopping at stop signs, or looking both ways before crossing the street.

The word *spiritual* concerns another part of us that’s harder to define. The spiritual part of us is not of the material world. The Hebrew usage indicates that spirit is like the wind. The Greek definition also describes wind and air, but adds the idea of the human spirit serving as God’s instrument. The use of the word spirit in both languages is a mysterious usage. It is fitting that the word “spirit” takes advantage of the beauty of language. It breaks free from nailed-down definitions.

Practical spirituality seems to be a contradiction in terms.

How can one act sensibly in matters of air?

No one doubts the sensibility of balancing one’s checkbook or stopping at stop signs. The reasons for following practical advice in these matters can be visibly seen. Checks bounce,

and if they bounce enough the check-writer can go to jail. Drivers running stop signs usually wind up getting mauled by oncoming traffic. This sort of argument cannot be doubted.

But now, it’s easy to doubt spiritual principles like the need for reverence, the reason to love others, the power of turning the other cheek, the importance of being honest, of forgiving others, of acting with compassion. We’ve all seen examples of

people running roughshod over these principles—sometimes it doesn’t seem like they suffer at all. In the business world it seems that people ignoring these principles are the ones who get ahead.

When one considers the idea of spirituality, one is almost bound to consider the idea of God. And God is one of those ideas that’s widely disputed. Some folks say God doesn’t exist. Some folks say God is an angry old man in a chair intent on

smashing us flat like a bug.

Members of western culture want proof of what they believe in. No one doubts the proof offered by a car that’s been hit by running a stop sign.

Modern society is highly influenced by the scientific world’s measurements and proofs. This one-sided influence presents a problem for our culture, because the ideas of spirit and God defy measurement and proof.

No one must actually experience getting nailed after running a stop sign in order to understand the practical aspects of stopping at stop signs.

But the idea of spirit and God are something one must experience in order to believe in. One can see the value of practical things before the need for the knowledge arises. And if one follows the practical advice—such as stopping at stop signs—then one doesn’t suffer the consequences of failing to live a practical life.

Paying attention to practical matters is to be in control of one’s life.

Most folks encounter spirituality as a need and a hunger resulting from their life’s journey.

We fool ourselves into thinking we are in control of our life’s journey,

but life consists in much more than stopping at stop signs and balancing our checkbook.

Things rock along. We develop a sort of arrogance. We begin to believe we have our hands on the great steering wheel of the world.

It is usually when we believe we are most in control of life that we discover how uncontrollable our journey really is.

Our culture denies what it cannot mea-



Practical spirituality seems like a contradiction in terms. How can one act sensibly in matters of air?

sure. Our culture thinks success is measured by countable piles of hoarded money. The journey of our lives teaches us that success requires an invisible currency that's countable only when it's given away.

No one experiences a loved one's death without coming face to face with the unmeasurable but undeniable hunger for a way to act sensibly in matters of air.

The idea of practical spirituality sounds like an oxymoron. It is more correct to say that practical spirituality represents a paradox.

A friend of mine who teaches Greek tells me the word paradox is formed from the Greek words "para"—which means "next to," and "doxa"—which means "praise and glory." My teacher-friend says a paradox can describe being taken from the realm of the practical and put us right next to the realm of the spiritual—and our initial urge is to praise God.

My dictionary says paradox literally means "unbelievable, or beyond what is thought."

A paradox seems self-contradictory and absurd to the overly-scientific man, but in reality the paradox expresses truth.

The only way to feed our soul is by feeding the souls of others.

The only way to love ourselves is to love others.

Forgiveness is more powerful than anger.

The indescribable thing called *God* is *love*.

The way to truly live one's life is to be willing to lose one's life.

The journey of one's lifetime is lived brand-new each day.

These are all statements of important spiritual truth. But what do they mean on a day-to-day basis?

This is the quandary of Practical spirituality.

This is the challenge of acting sensibly in matters of air.

It is tempting to list certain things to do, but the spiritual journey cannot be laid out like a recipe—but then it can, in a sort of way. It's just that one must understand one's own ingredients.

Our culture loves checklists and "How-to" books. There's a book on how to do

busy take the time to be still and know that God is God? I cannot tell a person how to be still. I can only say they must be still. Telling a person to be still is very practical advice, from a spiritual standpoint. But being still isn't very practical for a busy person's life.

The spiritual journey demands that certain choices be made. It is like an automobile journey. One must take certain exits off the busy interstate if one is to reach one's destination. One must choose to take certain exits on one's daily spiritual road.

When one considers the pressures of living and working and tending to one's various duties, taking the time to be still seems like something that can wait. The best way to illustrate the importance of making choices based on spiritual needs is to offer the reminder that one day we will all take the exit marked "death."

Our culture doesn't like to think of dying. We think it's a horrible thing.

The spiritual point of view says that dying is simply part of life—a graduation into the next stage of life.

The spiritual point of view says dying is simply a change of address, so to speak. We move to a world known only to God.

The spiritual journey is all about making sure we've got a home to go to.

Practical spirituality implies that we build that home every moment of



The only way to feed our soul is by feeding the souls of others.

everything from tuning up one's car to building a house.

One could say the spiritual journey is like tuning up one's car every few minutes.

The notion of a practical approach to spirituality implies there are things one must do. Sometimes there are indeed things one must do. But it is just as likely that there are times when one must do absolutely nothing. One of the basic ideas of spiritual growth is to be still and know that God is God.

How can someone who is extremely

every day.

The urge to make practical choices is easy. That is our culture's way.

What's difficult is making spiritual choices.

Sometimes these choices don't seem to make sense. How do we choose forgiveness when we have a perfectly good right to be angry? I cannot tell one how to forgive. I can only tell one that forgiveness is stronger than anger, and that when one forgives one grows in a place that cannot be measured. When one forgives, one has learned a little bit about acting sensibly in

matters of air.

A very real part of the spiritual journey are the places where we don't know what to do. We yearn for someone to tell us the right thing to do. It is in those places that no one can tell us what to do. We have to decide for ourselves, whether we like it or not. No decision is still a decision.

It is as if we were suffering from a deep thirst.

The Greek says that to thirst is to eagerly long for those things by which the soul is refreshed, supported, strengthened.

Our culture says to drink a soft drink or a beer.

The spiritual answer is to drink of the living water. What is the practical way to find this living water? The most practical thing I know sounds very impractical: ask God for it, be still and know that God is God. If one asks God for living water, then God will give one living water.

And you ask: "But how do I do this on a daily basis?"

My answer remains the same. Ask God, and be still—be still down in the part of your mind that is always thinking of what you need to do next. Be aware that God moves in mysterious ways. Pay attention. God will put living water right in your path. If you're not too busy—or too proud—you'll see it.

One of the basic choices one makes on a spiritual journey is to study spiritual writings. The basic spiritual text of western culture is the Bible. One who spends serious time studying this book will find untold guidance in its pages.

One can also find guidance from the texts of other cultures, and from more modern writings as well.

I have spent most of my study-time with the Bible, because it is the book I was raised on. While modern translations are available, I prefer the King James version

because its beautiful text is sometimes difficult to follow. This doesn't sound very practical, but taking the time to ponder the shades of meanings brings a depth to the words that is lost in the modern translations.

It is interesting to note that the word *spirit* appears 550 times in the King James version of the Bible.

speaking inside you.

The danger of practical spiritual advice is that it is human nature to mistakenly think that all one has to do is follow the advice.

While it is one thing to believe it is a good idea to not judge others, it is a completely different level of thinking to be aware of what one is doing and why one is choosing to not judge others. It is another matter yet again to choose to instead clear up our own problems.

Practicality implies a short-term return. While this is sometimes true in a spiritual sense, the true benefit of one's spiritual journey is not always readily apparent. Sometimes it takes time to see the reasons for following spiritual practices.

We are all children on our spiritual journey, and part of the journey is learning to be patient. How can I tell someone how to be patient? I can only tell them they need to be patient. They must learn their own way of doing this. How do they learn it? Ask God.

The word practicality is defined as having to do with practice or action. Practicality is concerned with ordinary activities and adapted for actual use. Practicality is mindful of the results of action.

While practicality and spirituality seem to be conflicting words, the actual truth of the thing is

that spirituality means nothing unless it is put into actual practice. The Bible tells us that faith without works is dead.

The problem with integrating practicality and spirituality is the inherent conflict of action and contemplation. We are a culture of action, and the spiritual journey requires some degree of contemplation. It is very practical to contemplate with reverence. It is very practical to pray. The stillness is food for the soul.

We are a culture of control. The urge to have a practical spirituality reflects that urge. We think if we can find some practi-



The beauty of parables is their ability to speak to the limits of the listener's ability to hear.

The word *practicality* doesn't appear a single time.

In the Bible stories, Jesus was constantly asked by the Pharisees to prove his word was true. Jesus almost always answered their questions with either a question or with a parable. The beauty of parables is their ability to speak to the limits of the listener's ability to hear.

A parable is maddening to someone who wants a concrete answer. Part of the point of a parable is to get over wanting concrete answers and learn to listen to the small voice of God that will

cal things to do, we will be in control of our spiritual journey.

We can be in control of our spiritual journey, but only when we let go of that control and place it in God's hands. Is this practical sounding?

One of the most important parts of one's spiritual journey lies in the act of giving of oneself to others. One will be presented with plenty of opportunities to give of oneself. What is important is to be aware of the opportunities, and to be willing to give of oneself.

You can ask: "Why is it important to give to others? What's in it for me, practically speaking?" I can name any number of reasons why it's good to give of oneself to others—it will make you feel good inside, it will help the world be a better place.

But the real reason one should give to others is because one's spiritual journey commands one to give. A vital part of the spiritual journey is to submit to the commands of the spiritual journey. The most important reason to submit is because it is the right thing to do. To follow a command because one expects a return for one's giving is the wrong reason. To ask why we should submit to a spiritual command is to be asking the wrong question.

Spiritual teachings would say only a fool asks why one should obey.

The Chinese spiritual teaching says to plant with no thought of harvest. This is the essence of the spiritual journey. It's not a practical sounding command, unless one understands that the teaching is intended to cause one to plant with all one's might and not be distracted by thought of reward. The whole point of the spiritual journey is to put all of one's being into one's actions. This is a practical thing to do, and ultimately it is the only thing to do. Why? Because we are commanded to do it.

It's a practical thing to say: Have faith in God. This is sometimes no easy task.

Are there practical reasons for having faith? Well, one can say it will lessen stress to have faith.

But the real question is whether or not

one can keep one's practical mind from raising objections to the idea of having faith when everything seems hopeless.

Jesus said: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

What does this mean? Does this mean to do practical things? Or does it mean that it's practical to believe as a child, without question?

Jesus said: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

What does this mean?

The Chinese spiritual teaching says to plant with no thought of harvest.

Jesus' closest followers were the first to tell him his sayings were hard.

There is no practical and logical way to say what Jesus said.

Spiritual teachings are presented in ways that are hard for the adult to understand, yet children sometimes see them clearly. Why? Because children haven't yet learned how to be "practical."

What does it mean to say that it's practical to not be practical?

There are at least two levels to the story: there is the story itself, and there is the meaning of the story on a personal level. We can memorize the story until we can say it backwards and forwards, but until the story has meaning for us through our own experience, then it's nothing but a story.

Our practical side wants to hear the story and to be warmed inside by the good news of hope the story contains. But the spiritual journey isn't about feeling good about the story. The spiritual journey is about taking the story inside ourselves and wondering about it so it will be lived out in our own lives.

One can believe all one wants that Jesus was born in a stable. But what does it mean to get to know those shepherd boys inside ourselves—the outcast and criminal part of ourselves? What does it mean to join one's mind and heart and

become the wise man? What does it mean to set out on a long journey to see that little child? How can I tell you that if you begin the journey you will see a guiding star? And how can I tell someone that if they find those shepherds, they will see an angel bringing good news?

How can I describe how to find one's internal shepherd boys? How can I describe how to become the wise man? All I know is that when one makes the journey and finds those shepherds and wise men, then one will find a newborn child in the most unexpected place—because somewhere inside each of us is a stable just waiting for a magical birth.

One can believe all one wants that Jesus was crucified and rose again on

the third day. But until one learns how to allow one's pride to die, then the story is just a story.

How does one learn how to allow one's pride to die? Read the story. Ask God. Be aware. The cross will come.

And then: the point is not the dying, but the rising again. That is the point of the spiritual journey.

The spiritual journey is not only practical. It is the only journey one can really make. The challenge in practical spirituality is as simple as acting sensibly in matters of air.

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Up In The Air

An entry from a night flight over Georgia by Ron Burch

It wasn't the kind of night I'd have picked for an instrument cross-country training flight. Hot, sticky and muggy, with no breeze at all. And while the ceiling was way above minimums, visibility was barely three miles with smoke and summertime haze.

The weather forecaster at Flight Service had advised that the possibility of thunderstorms existed all along our proposed route, from Peachtree-DeKalb in northeast Atlanta to Waycross, Georgia and back.

It was early August 1977, and I was nearing the end of my instrument flight training. Bama, my instructor, had accepted a temporary assignment at Lockheed-Martin in Santa Clara and would be leaving for the west coast within days. So we were accelerating the program to get me through. As a caveat for him spending

some of his last hours in Atlanta helping me, I had selected a route that would enable us to pick up his daughter, Gail at the Waycross airport in South Georgia and bring her back to Atlanta, in time for his

I'd hoped to refuel at the Waycross airport, but the service buildings were dark.

going away party.

Preflight complete and with the engine running, we were "cleared as filed," but after taxiing into position on the active

runway, we were told to hold in the run-up area, pending a release by Air Traffic Control. We held our position—window and doors open, the prop blasting us with welcomed hot air. The heat from the day steamed off the tarmac and seared the underneath side of the airplane.

As sunset approached, I turned on the interior lights, the red and green navigation lights, and the white position light atop the tail. Roughly twenty minutes went by before we were cleared for takeoff. I acknowledged the clearance, nodded at Bama, turned on the landing and taxi lights, and pushed the throttle forward.

As our in-flight visibility was nil, he wasn't requiring me to wear the "hood," a device used during instrument training that limits a pilot's vision just to the air-

plane's instruments.

We departed Peachtree-DeKalb around 8:30 p.m., and were vectored around the Class B airspace at Atlanta's Hartsfield International on the east side. I was expecting a turn more toward the south when Departure Control advised that center radar was painting several cells from just north of Macon, south to the Florida line. The controller suggested we continue to fly a southeasterly heading and look for a possibility to navigate around them.

Just under two hours later, we were passing over Jesup in the southeastern corner of the state when the controller advised that he was showing a strong cell over Waycross, moving southeast. He asked if we could see any lightning. I rolled the airplane slightly to the right to take a look. Nothing. No sign of any bad weather at all. In fact, it appeared clear in the direction of Waycross. I acknowledge his report and asked for vectors to the Waycross airport.

We flew from somewhere southeast of Jesup to Waycross without getting the wings wet.

As I overflew the field on an outbound course for the standard procedure turn back inbound, I saw that the windsock was stiff and the tetrahedron was pointing straight across the active runway.

Inbound on the approach, I held in enough aileron and opposite rudder to keep us straight, and held it all the way to touchdown. On the rollout, I noticed that the windsock was now limp even though the tetrahedron remained in a crosswind position.

I'd hoped to refuel at the Waycross airport, but the service buildings were dark.

Since aviation was still feeling the effects of the oil crisis, many small airport operations closed at sundown. No problem, we'd refuel in Macon on the return.

We visited the men's room, had a soft drink out of a vending machine, and walked back toward the airplane, now crouching silently on the ramp. I did a quick preflight check of the oil, the fuel, and gave the undercarriage a quick glance. Gail climbed on board first and settled in the back seat. Bama took the right front. I secured Gail's baggage and both doors, then buckled-up in the left seat. We lit the

turn to our en route heading toward Macon.

Thirty miles south, we contacted Macon Approach Control and were given vectors for an ILS approach to Runway Five at Wilson/Middle Georgia Airport. Inside the outer marker, we were handed off to the tower who asked our intentions after the instrument approach. I advised it would be a full stop landing for fuel. After a noticeable hesitation, the controller asked about our fuel status, explaining that all facilities had closed at 10 p.m.—no fuel service was available in Macon, either.

Bama and I shared a quick glance. Then I asked the controller to hold the phone as I begin calculating: Engine start was at 7:50, takeoff at 8:25. We landed in Waycross at 10:40. It was now 12:15 a.m. I estimated we'd burned two gallons of fuel for taxi and takeoff at Peachtree, another two gallons leaving Waycross. I added another

two gallons for the climbout and ten gallons per hour for 3.9 hours. That totaled forty-five gallons. The aircraft carried sixty gallons—fifty-eight were usable. That left thirteen

gallons—good for the 45 minutes flying time back to Peachtree with a 30-minute reserve, more or less. I was sure we'd be okay.

I advised the controller of the situation and requested the most direct route to Peachtree. For the next half-hour, all was quiet in the cabin. As we approached Hartsfield, the controller there asked again about the fuel and offered Atlanta/Hartsfield as a landing alternate. I checked my watch and since we were a few minutes ahead of schedule, I declined the



"Man, with our fuel situation, if it were my airplane, I'd fly a much tighter pattern."

fire, turned on the lights and the radios and recited our pre-takeoff checklist.

As we taxied out to the runway, we contacted Flight Service and amended our instrument clearance to include a stopover in Macon.

Gail was tired after working all week managing a Hallmark Gift Shop, and she quickly curled up in the back seat. After takeoff, I dimmed the cabin lights and put on a communications headset so she could rest. We were still climbing to our assigned altitude when Center gave us a

alternate and pressed on toward Peachtree-DeKalb.

Once over the city, Gail yawned, stretched, and asked how close we were to home. As our nighttime visibility had improved, I was able to point out the green

the fuel to my credit card. The office manager reached into my folder and pulled out two tickets:

"You've got two tickets, Ron," she said.

"Really? Should just be one from last night."

I gasped and broke into a cold sweat.
Then somewhat reluctantly, phoned
Bama and gave him the news.

and white airport beacon at Peachtree just off the nose, ten or twelve miles ahead. Approach Control broke the silence and cleared us for a visual to runway 20-left at Peachtree.

Landing on 20-left meant we'd have to fly a few miles farther north in order to land back toward the south. We were on a high, wide midfield downwind parallel to the runway when Bama tugged at my shirt and said, "Man, with our fuel situation, unless you don't mind hanging your butt in one of those pine trees down there, if it were my airplane, I'd fly a much tighter pattern."

I turned toward the airport and tightened up the approach. Then, even with the numbers on the approach end of runway 20-left, chopped the power, yanked in 40 degrees of flaps and landed. Once the wheels squeaked onto the tarmac, I slapped Bama on the knee and said, "See, partner? I told you we had plenty of fuel."

We taxied to the parking area and shut down the engine. Bama was out the door in a flash, popping open the fuel caps. I helped a sleepy Gail deplane and grabbed her luggage from inside the baggage compartment. Bama was shining his flashlight first into the left, then into the right wing tank. Unable to see any fuel, he stuck his hand in as far as it would go and drew it out dry. He shook the wing, and when nothing sloshed, he said, "It looks pretty empty to me, man. We cut it close."

When the fuel truck arrived, we both watched the meter as it recorded the amount of fuel it was taking to fill the tanks. When the valve on the pump shut-off, I asked the attendant for the total. He said 53.8 gallons.

"See there, Bama? We had 25 minutes left. I told you I knew this airplane." He chuckled in disbelief, got in his car, and drove away. The next day, as was my habit, I returned to the airport to charge

She studied the tickets for a moment and then remarked, "Oh, I see what it is. Alan misread the meter last night and we had to fix it this morning. Instead of 53.8 gallons, your airplane took 56.5 gallons."

That meant, when we shut down the engine, we had less than ten minutes of fuel remaining. Ten minutes—all that separated us from a night landing in the trees!

It brought to mind some advice another pilot had given me a few years earlier. When asked about practical emergency

procedures for an engine-out night landing in a single engine airplane, he had advised, "Apply carburetor heat, turn on the fuel boost pump, switch fuel tanks, then switch magnetos. If the engine doesn't re-start, cut off the fuel valve, and turn on the landing light. If you like what you see within 45 degrees of the nose, leave it on. If you don't, turn it off."

Of course, he was right. I gasped and broke into a cold sweat, then somewhat reluctantly, phoned Bama and gave him the news.

"What did you learn?" he asked.

I vowed, "Never again."

And I kept my word. A few days later, I saw a placard in the Peachtree Pilot's Shop. It read: "Three things that will never help you: runway behind you, altitude above you and fuel on the ground."

Amen, brother.

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The Holiday Inn of Last Resort

by Nelda Hill

JB. was the short-order cook at the Holiday Inn of Last Resort in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was a large man, coal black, and fond of waving his butcher knife in a way I suspect he did not learn on the job.

This was 1976, our country's Bicentennial and the year I graduated from college. I worked as a waitress at the Holiday Inn of Last Resort, showing up most afternoons in a red polyester A-line topped by a red, white, blue and gold star-spangled pinafore.

Up until the Bicentennial, the waitresses at the Holiday Inn of Last Resort wore hand-me-downs from waitresses at the other Holiday Inns in town.

Upon being hired, I was given a double-breasted polyester number that was the color of cantaloupe and a frayed shirt-

"White girl, I don't never
always do nothing."

waist that was the color of mud. Star-spangled pinafores were an improvement.

A lot of our customers were spill-overs

from other Holiday Inns, the ones that lived up to the HIA motto: "The best surprise is no surprise." Not that things weren't pretty predictable at the Holiday Inn of Last Resort. It was a safe bet that the motel manager would stay in her room drinking until the bar opened.

You could pretty much count on a lonesome guy they called Cowboy to put in his shift at the zinc mines then come on down and get a crush on whomever had time to be nice to him. You almost always knew that somebody was not going to show up, that somebody was going to get mad, that nobody was going to take it seriously, and that you were going to have a

For some reason corporate headquarters
had the notion we were not living up
to The Holiday Inn Standard.

good time.

A customer once asked me what I recommended, and I said that he go somewhere else. He asked to speak to the manager of the restaurant, but the manager couldn't be found, and I heard later he was off gambling, trying to win enough money to pay off another little debt he owed.

The customer settled down and eventually complimented the kitchen, saying he'd never tasted such well-cooked, second-rate meat.

There was nothing second-rate about J.B. though. He'd worked in the kitchens of some of the finest hotels in the South, the ones located downtown, the ones people came to when they wanted to eat really nice. Eventually, he came home to Knoxville. J.B. liked cooking at the Holiday Inn of Last Resort because it was close to his house.

J.B. disregarded most people by pretending they weren't there, but he had to notice the waitresses occasionally because we interrupted his head trip by not doing things as he wanted them done. "Two ways of doing it, white girl," he said about turning in orders once I worked my first breakfast shift. "You can put your little piece of paper up there on that spindle, and if I see it I'll look at it, or you can call out your orders as you come through the kitchen."

It was amazing the way he could keep dozens of breakfast orders in his head, never, ever, putting sausage instead of bacon, toast instead of biscuits, over-easy instead of sunny-side up. Once I called out a table of 20 and J.B. set up my orders. "Look it over, white girl, tell me what's missing." I consulted my tickets and determined that nothing was missing. "You wrong," he said gleefully, "you're short a bowl of grits."

After a few weeks on the job, J.B. decided he would call me something other than white girl. "Nelda" was too hard to get out, he said, so he experimented with variations but found none that amused him. Once, I misheard him and thought he called me "heifer" and that I was offended delighted him so, he thought that would be

what he called me. In the end, he decided that white girl fit about as well as anything, and he gave up trying to name me.

The best thing that J.B. gave me to remember about him was his response when I said, "J.B. how come you always wear purple nail polish?"

J.B. inspected the blade of that butcher knife, then looked up from it long enough to say, "white girl, I don't never *always* do *nothing*."

Every once in a while, the motel manager would burst forth from her room and say that Memphis was coming, shape up.

We didn't want to lose our sign. Memphis was corporate headquarters for Holiday Inns of America, and it was fond of dropping by to see how we were doing. For some reason, it had the notion we were not living up to The Holiday Inn Standard.

In those days, every Holiday Inn was marked by a huge harp-shaped green sign with Holiday Inn in orange italics. To screw up badly was to have the sign hauled off on the back of a flatbed and evidently that was a fate dedicated motel professionals did not want to encounter.

Sometimes the manager was given 24 hours notice of an impending inspection and she would call for an all-nighter, and the guys on the front desk would join the kitchen crew for a big scrubdown. What grime couldn't be scraped was spray-painted industrial gray. As far as I know, Memphis did not question why we painted our stainless steel.

If she had time, the manager would sober up, if she didn't, she called in her

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son to handle things. He was a handsome young man with charming ways. The restaurant manager put on his string tie and polished his cowboy boots, the bartender rolled her eyes and agreed to be flirtatious but not vulgar. The rest of us tried to stay out of sight. Memphis would shake its corporate head, give some stern warnings, but in the end, we kept our sign.

There was a Baptist church next door to the Holiday Inn of Last Resort, built on a hill with trees behind it. I would take a book sometimes and sit for a while under one of the trees, either waiting to go to work or to catch the bus to go home from work.

The hill was high enough that I felt removed from all that was happening on the ugly highway below. Old discouraged cars traveled the highway, the leg of the highway that took you out of town. Dilapidated buildings with hand-lettered signs were interspersed with garish fast food places with signs that stayed lit through the day.

But behind all of that, there were hills and trees, and on clear days I could see the Great Smoky Mountains in the distance. I remember once looking at it all and having the distinct feeling that really and truly, the earth is in charge here, that one of these days, those hills and trees will rise up and reclaim the land. Maybe it was being so close to the Baptist church but I imagined flood, fire, earthquake. It would take something big to get rid of the ugliness. I remember being rather shaken by my own prescience.

The Holiday Inn of Last Resort did lose its sign finally. It bore the signs of a couple of motels on further down the chain motel chain. I was long gone by then. It was, after all, only what I did until I thought of something else to do. What I thought of was going to graduate school, and when that didn't work out, I thought of working for the public library, and that's what I've done ever since.

Some of the shoutin' Christians

got a hold of it for a spell. It's not unusual, I hear, for new churches of the unaffiliated variety to buy an old motel and use it for their church. Makes sense, I guess. The building is vacant now.

I have no idea what happened to J.B. or most of the people who worked at the Holiday Inn of Last Resort. I daresay J.B. never spent a nanosecond of headspace wondering what became of me, yet I've wondered a lot what became of him. It's harder to burn bridges now than it was back then. Today, I would get his e-mail or at least his address. I'd send him a card come Christmas. I'd insist he be reminded

of me from time to time. I would not leave him alone to his head trip. But then again, just maybe I would. I've learned to never *always do nothing*.

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Nelda Hill lives in Knoxville, Tennessee. Besides writing she occasionally plays a mean mountain dulcimer in a bluegrass band.

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