

Vol. III, Number 3

Winter/Spring 2004

# Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

## The Road to Terlingua

*An excerpt from a Texas chili diary*

## Tracker

*Not just another dog story*

## Shape Note Music

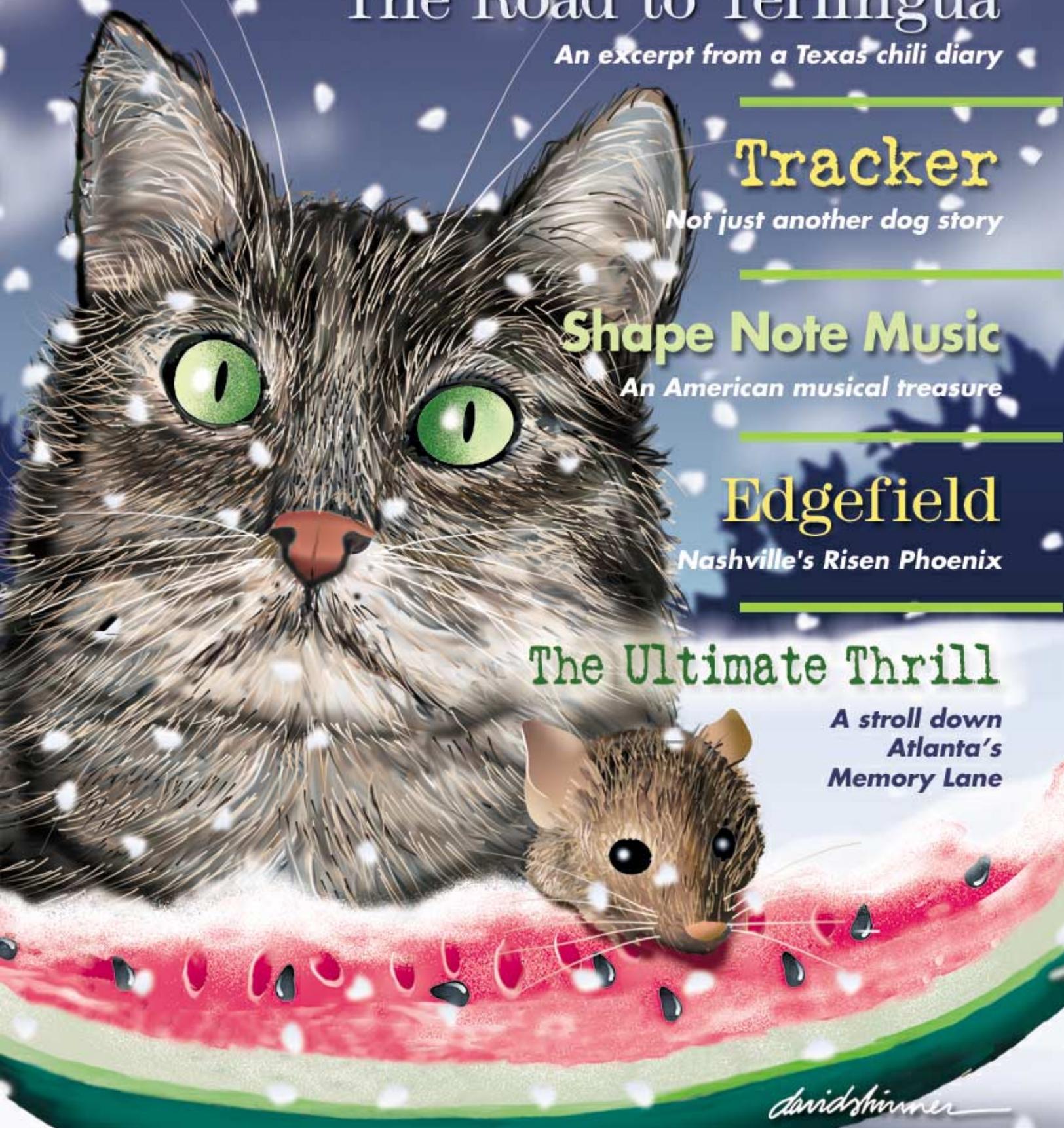
*An American musical treasure*

## Edgefield

*Nashville's Risen Phoenix*

## The Ultimate Thrill

*A stroll down  
Atlanta's  
Memory Lane*



# What I Like About the South

**T**he South has often been called a diverse and unique part of our nation, but I've always been both amazed and amused at the sheer volume and range of diversity and, well, uniqueness that thrives here.

On the northeastern side of the region you've got the music, accents, and peculiarities of the Appalachian Mountains. On the other side, the south-western side, you've got the cowboys and their particular way of talking, not to mention their spicy brand of music and food. And we small-town city slickers, Nashville cats, and Georgia country boys fall somewhere in between.

This issue of *Southern Reader*, with its range of topics and authors, reflects that same diversity. One of this issue's articles is a piece I received from Texas publisher Andy Hardin about his journey to the infamous Chili Cookoff in Terlingua, Texas a few years back.

Although I've never had the privilege to experience the actual cookoff myself, Andy's journal account set off some interesting flashbacks to my checkered past.

In the mid-'70s I was quite taken with Jerry Jeff Walker's album, "Viva Terlingua," not only because of the songs, but also because of the laid-back way the music had been recorded—live, in front of a non-studio audience in a little town called Luckenbach, Texas. The album's cover even reflect-

ed the casualness of the music with a cowboy's hand pointing to a concert poster nailed to some weathered timbers next to

a "Viva Terlingua" bumper sticker pasted at an angle on a reinforcing two-by-four.

In 1976 I was writing songs with

(Lee's father was famed country songwriter Doodle Owens, and he knew everyone in the world, not to mention everyone in Texas).

One of the festival's officials that year was Hondo Crouch, a talented and eclectic cowboy poet and chili aficionado. After the festival, Hondo invited us to visit him in his "little town," Luckenbach, popula-

tion three. "Hondo owns the place," Doodle said as we drove into the informal city limits. Most of our visit was centered around the main building in town, what Hondo called "the post office/general store/beer joint." There were several songwriters that had gathered, and we took down the chairs that were hanging on the wall of the beer joint part of the place and sat by the woodstove passing the guitar around and trying out new songs. Some of the songs that were floated that afternoon ended up on country radio stations a few months later.

As the sun began to set on Luckenbach, and a full moon began to rise, Lee, Hondo and I took a walk around the little town.

"I wanted to show you my buffalo," Hondo said, "But it's gonna be too dark."

"That's okay, Hondo," we said, trying to feign disappointment.

"Actually," he said, "He's a bison, not a buffalo." Lee and I looked at each other and shrugged.

But then, on the side of one of the buildings I discovered the "Viva Terlingua" bumper sticker on the angled two-by-four, glowing in the Texas moonlight. "Hey," I said,



The album cover even reflected the casualness of the music with a cowboy's hand pointing to a concert poster.

Nashville songwriter Lee Owens, and early that bicentennial year we were invited to play at San Antonio's River Festival

"This is my bison, Tennial"  
 --Hondo Crouch, March 1976

"That's on Jerry Jeff Walker's album cover!"

"Yep," said Hondo holding up his right hand, "So is this!" But before we could respond, Hondo posed his finger like he had for the album cover and spun around and pointed to the rising full moon.

"Look at that moon," he said, pausing for impact, "Pretty big moon for such a small town."

An hour later we said our goodbyes and drove off with the big moon in our rearview mirror. A few weeks after we got back to Nashville, I got a package from Luckenbach. Inside was a book of Hondo's poetry along with a picture of a buffalo. The inscription read: "This is my bison, Tennial—Hondo Crouch, March, 1976."

That following September, Doodle and Lee called with the sad news that Hondo had died of a heart attack.

A dozen or so years later, I heard about a new TexMex restaurant chain called "Chili's," and when my friends and I dropped in to check it out, Hondo's smiling face beamed from a framed eight-by-ten on one of the walls. "Viva Terlingua!" I thought, "Hondo lives!"

On the other end of this issue's spectrum we have an interesting (yet factual!) article written by Joe and Karen Holbert about an old style of music that is still

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sung in parts of Appalachia called *Shape Note Singing*. Joe and I were in rival folk bands in

college (I used to tease him about playing his mountain dulcimer with his teeth), and we later joined forces, in the late '70s and early '80s, to perform together when I lived in New York and he lived just down the track in Philadelphia. One night when we were playing the Bothy Club in downtown Philly, Karen (the article's co-writer and Joe's wife-to-be) showed up backstage, introduced herself and asked if she

could add some harmonies. They've been singing and writing together ever since. But that's another story for another *SouthernReader*.

This issue also features a look at Nashville's historic Edgefield along with two different perspectives on *thrills...* David Clark's poignant look back at once-in-a-lifetime moments and Ron Burch's walk down Atlanta's sideroads and memory lanes.

Enjoy!

*David Skinner*

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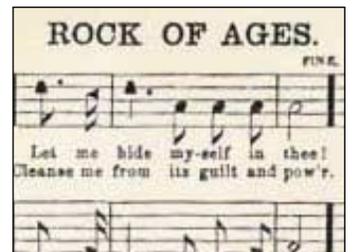
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# The Road to Terlingua

a journal excerpt by Andrew Hardin

## Thursday Morning, November 3

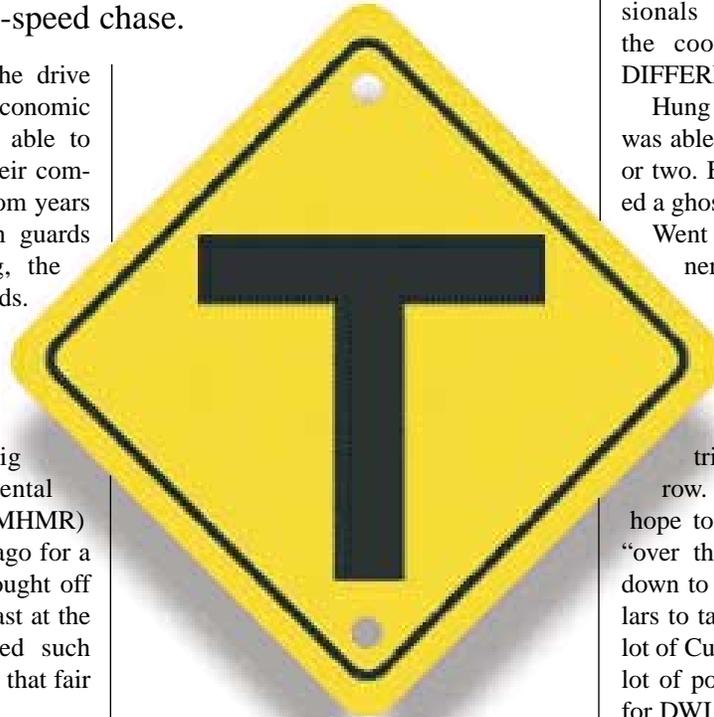
**H**ello from the road to Terlingua. After a six-hour drive Wednesday, we arrived in Monahans to prepare for the final assault on Terlingua. The drive was uneventful, as I was successful in eluding Texas' finest law enforcement officers in a game of high-speed chase.

One interesting site during the drive was near Colorado City. The economic development people there were able to have a State Prison located in their community. As we passed, a scene from years past greeted us. With about ten guards ("Bosses") on horses watching, the prisoners were working the fields. Picking cotton by hand still looks like hard enough work that I will continue to stay on the right side of the law.

We also passed through Big Spring where I joined the Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMR) Board about a month and a half ago for a meeting. It was difficult, but I fought off the desire to pull over for breakfast at the truck stop where I had enjoyed such scrumptious meals when I visited that fair city during September.

After checking into the Best Western in Monahans, I filled up the Suburban. I made it all the way from McKinney without needing a refill, 425 miles. All that on only 31 gallons of gas. This sleepy little town of 8,500 really takes you back to slower times. We found a nice little Mexican restaurant where the most expensive item on the menu was only \$7.50. It was also very good.

On the way back to the motel, we drove through "downtown" and kept noticing these boys standing on every corner. Finally, curiosity got the cat, and I had to ask. That is how they sell their local newspaper. As it said in the newspaper, "The Monahans News may be purchased from independent newsboys who sell their papers on the street corner—continuing an American tradition." Very bizarre.



The crowd is starting to gather, and it looks ugly... the crowd--not the weather.

Now we're packing up and heading to Alpine for breakfast. I've been told they fix a very nice plate. I'll be the judge of that and let you know my opinion later.

## Thursday Night, November 3

It's been a long day. Breakfast was not much to talk about—the drive was. It always amazes me of the truly majestic nature of West Texas. It's so flat and open, and you can see forever. The mountains (if you're from Texas) are really stunning.

Arrived in Terlingua about noon. Checked into the hotel, and then went by the cookoff sight. Note to MHMR friends: Next year we really need to move the Board Meeting to Terlingua because there is a real need for mental health professionals in this town—at least at the cookoff. There are some VERY DIFFERENT people here.

Hung out with some chili friends, and was able to find time to even drink a beer or two. Bought some souvenirs and visited a ghost town, but didn't see any ghosts.

Went to the Starlight Theater for dinner. Two glasses of wine, a draft beer and a margarita were \$7.50.

Dallas prices haven't found their way here—thank goodness.

We've decided to take a quick trip over the river to Mexico tomorrow. Took a few pictures today and hope to get some more tomorrow from "over the border." I'm told we just go down to the river and pay a guy two dollars to take us across in a rowboat. Not a lot of Customs people here, but there are a lot of police patrolling the roads looking for DWI candidates.

Now it's time to step outside and sip a glass of red wine and take a few puffs on a cigar. I'll update you tomorrow on the trip to Mexico, and my preparations for the big event Saturday.

## Friday Morning, November 4

Not much more to report.

It is beautiful here. Got some great pictures of the sunrise since I got up so early. Sleeping in is still not an option. You just can't believe how many stars you can see here at night. Getting away from the city lights allows you to see hundreds of stars that are otherwise hidden. Going to eat breakfast and then off to Mexico.

## Friday Afternoon, November 4

Before leaving for Mexico we stopped and had breakfast in the local restaurant.

On the way we stopped by the cookoff site and registered. The crowd is starting to gather, and it looks ugly. The crowd—not the weather.

The road to Mexico took us through Big Bend National Park. While its mountaintops are not as impressive as some in other areas of our nation, those here certainly make me proud to be a Texan. The speed limit (45 MPH) makes you stop and smell the roses even if you don't want to. Actually there are no roses, but it would be a nice touch.

We stopped a few times and took pictures, and then arrived at our Port of Demarcation to Mexico—Boquillas. Actually it is a wide spot on a dusty road at the southeast section of the Big Bend Park. Pulling up we parked at the end of the road and walked down the dirt path to the mighty Rio Grand River. There it is—about forty yards across and maybe five feet deep. Paying two dollars a head, a Mexican boy rows you across in his boat. It's a pretty good deal, since that covers each person's round trip.

On the other side of the river you have three options to get to the city (about two miles away). You may walk, ride a horse or hitch a ride in the back of a very old pickup truck. Taking the advice of friends who had made the trip before and were with us at the time, we opted for the pickup truck.

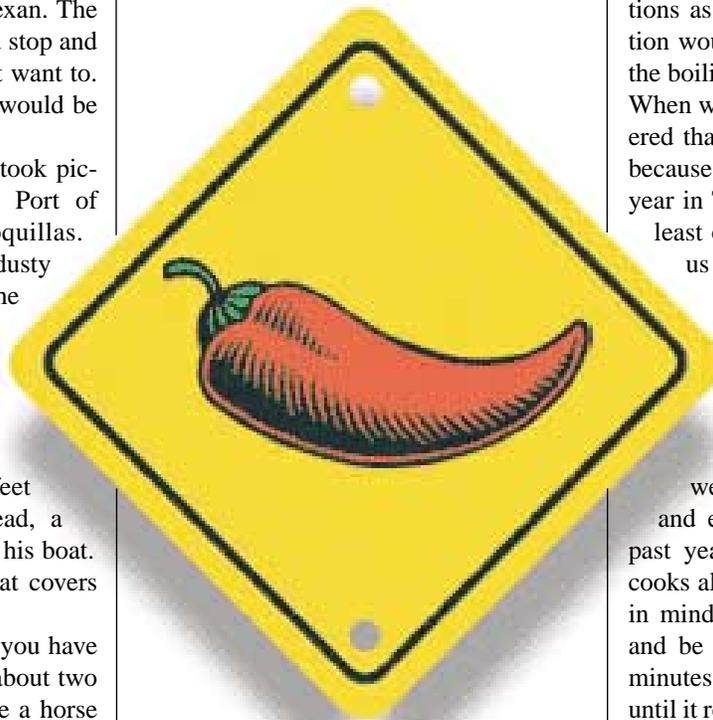
This was three dollars a head, but was, again, the round-trip cost and the best alternative, although the expenses are really starting to add up now.

After riding the two miles on what I would call an unimproved road, we were escorted into one of the two bars in town. As far as I could see, the two bars were the only businesses at all if you don't include the swarming children trying to sell us bracelets. It was a gorgeous day, and we sat outside in the open air with other chili friends who had arrived a few minutes before us.

We stayed about two hours drinking about two beers apiece and sharing three dozen tacos. Our total cost—about three dollars apiece. The expense of this trip is killing me! While the selection was very poor, we did buy a bottle of tequila. Good

news! We saved the tax because there is no collection station at the river. Never has been, and never will be.

We drove back through the park and back to the cookoff site. Hung out with chili friends again (hanging out is a major pastime for chili cooks), then went back to



We are hard at work with one goal in mind--to cook the best bowl of chili and be named World Champion.

the hotel to clean up before supper. Had fajitas for supper, and went to bed with visions of sugar plum fairies dancing in my head.

### Saturday—The Cookoff!

Well, the day I have prepared for (for the last year!) has finally arrived. I get up early and put on my finest chili attire. Don't ask—you wouldn't believe it if you saw it. It's 7:00 AM in Terlingua, and the sun is just now peeking over the mountains. Long colorful shadows beckon me to the desert to cook chili along with other chili cooks and thousands of spectators. I pick up my friend, John Strange, and we

head for breakfast to fortify ourselves for the long and arduous task that lay ahead of us. It is then that the wheels start to come off.

With the turn-in of our chili due at high noon, much discussion had gone into when we should start cooking. The higher altitude was also a factor in our calculations as we knew that this desolate location would require a longer time to reach the boiling point that our recipes required. When we got to the restaurant, we discovered that it wasn't open. You'd think that because this was the biggest day of the year in Terlingua, the restaurant would at least open on time. Guess they showed us just how really insignificant our presence really was in the overall scheme of things. Oh well, I guess we will do without breakfast.

We drive in and drop off our paraphernalia. At 8:30 AM we start cooking with all the skills and expertise we have accrued in the past year. Around us hundreds of other cooks also are hard at work with one goal in mind—to cook the best bowl of chili and be named World Champion. As the minutes click off, the activity intensifies until it reaches its zenith about ten minutes before the turn-in time. We each have a ritual that we perform during the last few minutes. Some in silence and some in boisterous squeals.

Mine is more a quiet solitude as I try to imagine the shocked feeling that would cover my body if I heard my name announced as the best. Each and every cook here has had to qualify just to set foot in the cooking area. There are no weak links. To just be named a finalist is as big an honor as winning other events. While the competition is intense, I always marvel at the sportsmanship that the cooks show to each other during the turn-in period. Everyone wishes each other good luck. It's very refreshing, because I think everyone means it. At this time we are all equal. We are all at the mercy of the judges.

After turn-in comes the bad time. Like a felon awaiting a jury to come back and tell him if he can walk away or if he is going to get the chair—we wait. The wait lasts hours. This is a big cookoff with a

record 309 chili entries turned in. It takes a long time to go through the judging of such a large number of entries. Some other time I will attempt to describe the dance known as judging. Suffice it to say that I think it is as fair as possible.

As each winner is announced,  
a scream is heard as they  
run to the stage.

During this time you now have time to relax and console your fellow cooks on the subtleties of your cooking. A little too salty. I hope they like it hot. My best bowl ever. Secretly, we all hope that we are holding the winning ticket, because today the winner will feel like he has won the lottery.

After awhile you start moving around and doing a little cleaning. Show teams

entertain the crowd with their street theater during the rest of the day. By the time the winners are announced, you will want to be able to just walk away if you haven't won. The announcements are exciting and quick. As each winner is announced, a scream is heard as they run to the stage. Finally, the first place winner is announced. Alas, I have not won, but I did have one heck of a time.

As I always tell the uninitiated, cooking chili is better than staying home and mowing the yard, and any sport that lets me drink beer at 8:00 AM is not all bad.

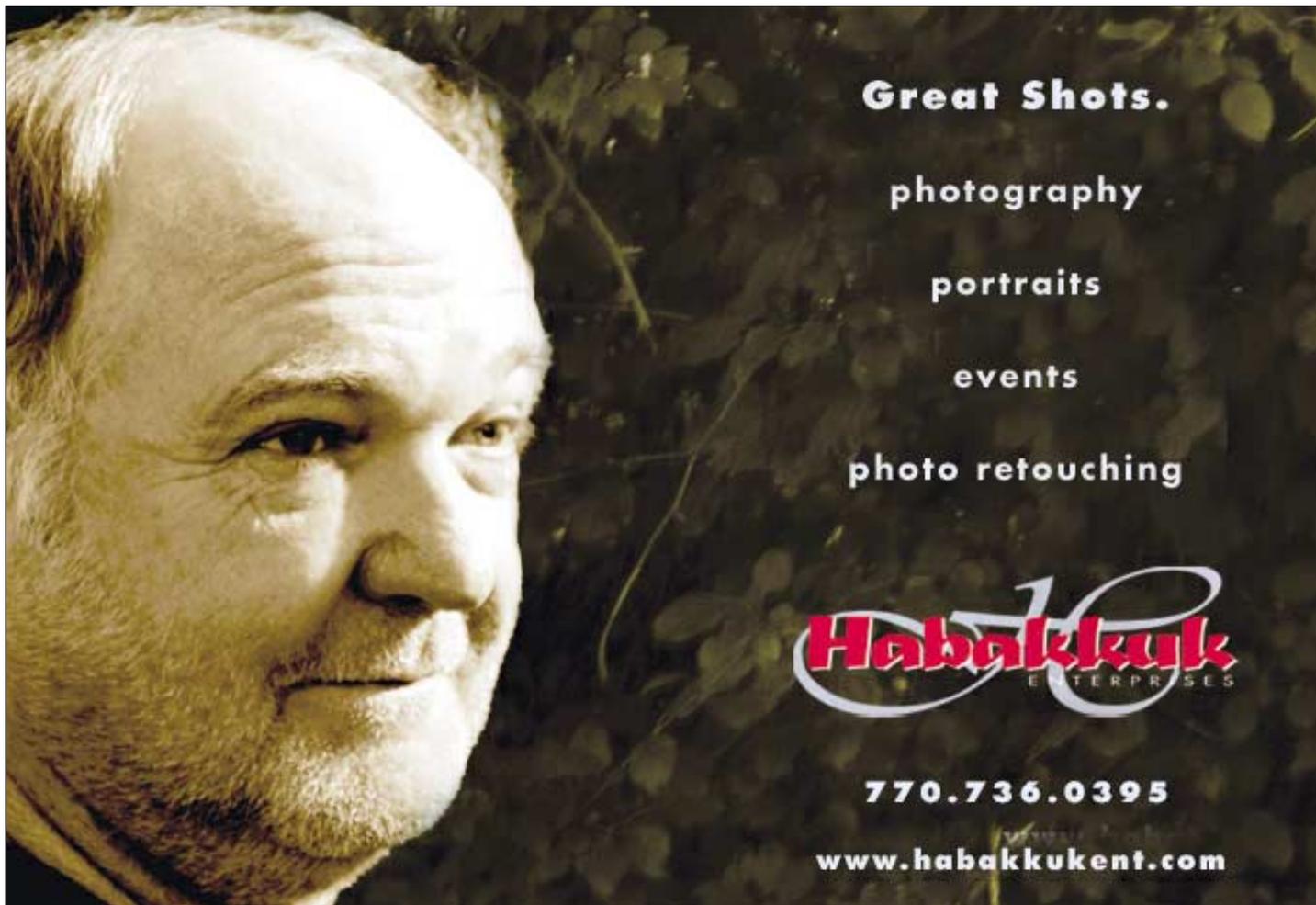
I am spent. I am tired. I am ready to go home. This has been fun, but I've about had all I can take. I go back to the hotel and crash. There is a whole other event taking place now. The craziness has taken over. Some have taken the challenge to see

just who can drink the most and act the most stupid. In earlier days I might have taken up the challenge, but not today. I don't need one more headache.

I chalk it up to maturity. You can chalk it up to my knowing that I have a nine-hour drive starting early tomorrow morning. I go to sleep not worrying about what might have been. I know my first trip to Terlingua was a winner. I had a great time. I survived, and I will be back.

*andy\_hardin@hotmail.com*

*Andrew Hardin is Publisher of Inside Collin County Business, a bi-monthly business newspaper. Collin County, located north of Dallas, is one the nation's fastest growing counties. He is also an avid chili cook and competitor having entered his award winning chili in numerous events across Texas since 1979.*



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# Tracker

by David Clark

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**T**wenty-five years ago, I had a bird dog named Tracker. He used to throw his head back and sing while my rock and roll band rehearsed. He preferred B-3 organ solos, and he even sang when the organist laid out of practice.

But poor old Tracker got hit by a car. I heard him hollering down at the highway, which was way off from the house. I went down there and picked him up and brought him home.

Tracker immediately crawled under the porch, which is the universal domain of dog health and recovery. Maybe they could do a study on sticking sick folks under porches. Maybe what sick folks need are a few fleas to suck the wham-beezle juice out of them.

If nothing else, it would cut down on the high-toned doctors who come around getting their Medicare and Insurance chits cashed in, because no high-toned man or woman in the world would crawl under the porch to see somebody, and the only people who would crawl under there would be real doctors.

And there would have to be something about the sheer energy involved in crawling under the porch, and I don't mean that crawling under a porch is necessarily a hard thing—it's not—watch any dog and you'll see—but there would be an energy released by the act of the Doc crawling on his belly in his little white getup with his body sticking halfway out in the flowerbed, dragging his little kit with whatever they have in there in there, flipping up his little whatchamacallit and holding a flea-bitten person's hand and asking: "How are you feeling up under here?"

Now of course a high-toned woman



Tracker immediately crawled under the porch, which is the universal domain of dog health and recovery.

would say: "I beg your pahdon, suh, under where do you mean?"

But how many high-toned women would be laying up under the porch getting flea-bit? Not very dang many, I bet, and not for long, anyway, even if it did cure cancer. People would tend to get well pretty fast, I would bet.

So a poor little old regular person would be laying up there, having given up scratching the fleas because they had

achieved the state of mind a dog achieves when he's been hit by a car and just lays up under the porch without moving for several days. And that certainly must be some sort of elevated state of consciousness, which of course the thinking and rea-

soning man will say is pure malarkey, but I say: Have you ever watched a dog lay up under a porch for a few days after being hit by a car?

I don't mean to ask if you've just sat there and watched him, because if you had done that you'd be dead now from pure boredom and wouldn't be reading this.

But what I mean is have you ever watched how they will handle their own business, and no, I don't mean the business of licking themselves in the places dogs lick themselves, which they always manage to do when the preacher comes by to invite you to church. And of course that has nothing to do with the dang preacher but simply what a dog will do when he has nothing else to do, which is most of the time because dogs don't do much, really.

But a dog will lay-up, and look pitiful, and every once in a while he'll just sort of breathe out in a "oh, this hurts so bad" sort of way, and they breathe that way even when they're not hurt so I

believe this method of breathing has nothing to do with pain but rather is the dog's way of chanting "om" or something.

But old Tracker crawled up under the house and laid up. And I crawled up under there, and he wouldn't even look at me, which was a fine how-do-you-do considering I was on my belly with my legs hanging out in the place where a flower bed would have been if I'd-a had one, but I didn't because I was 18 years old and

stoned as a bat most of the time and besides that, the land I lived on was covered with these big round rocks.

The place was known as Rock Hill. There used to be a grocery store on the corner of the property. I know it was called Rock Hill because the old man I rented from had the grocery store sign leaning against a tree down by the drainage ditches where the black folks dumped the entire contents of my house back when the old man who once lived there died.

And one time it snowed pretty good, which in Lizella, Georgia, was not only a treat but just dang shy of a miracle. If some gal had gone walking into town that day they would have thought she was an angel appearing out of some sort of divinely inspired dream.

Of course all the gals were stuck at home because there was enough snow to where people couldn't get out of their driveways.

But the boys from over in Macon found a way to get out there. They were teenagers and didn't have enough sense to know they couldn't drive in the snow. They just figured they'd get stoned and drive on out.

And they did. They had the whole highway to themselves.

And we took that Rock Hill Grocery sign and hauled it around to the front of the house. That sign was a big piece of sheet metal. I guess it was probably 4 feet by 8 feet, like a sheet of plywood, so it was heavy as rip and cumbersome as could be, particularly for four stoned teenagers.

But we weren't lifting a heavy, cumbersome thing.

We were lifting an idea.

And the idea was that we'd take this sign, bend up the front one foot of it just fine—and we had a little debate about which end looked like it ought to be the front, which sounds ridiculous now because the sign part was facing down into the snow and so what we were looking at was just a danged old piece of gray metal laying there. But we noticed that one end was already sort of bent a little, and after trying it we found that any sort of bend was a good one and so we took advantage of that bend and raised the front one foot of that piece of metal along the four foot way, and bingo: we now had a big sled.

So carrying that big heavy, cumbersome thing was not hard at all. We weren't carrying a piece of sheet metal. We were carrying a great idea, and if the idea worked then we were going to have a mighty big time because right in front of the house was this big hill, and as luck would have it, it was going down, and I mean it went way down.

Now this hill was covered in tennis ball size round rocks and piles of cowpoo, but over all that, for the time being anyway, was a nice thick covering of snow.

And so we drug that metal to the end of the yard, and slid it under the barbed wire fence. And then we eased her—and I say her because this thing was as much a ship as I'd ever seen—out onto the beginning of this hill. Now you have to realize that this snow had a little ice in it.

The part of the hill we were on was curved and sloped and had little gullies in

many gals that was holed up in the community, stuck in their parents' house and not able to get out of the driveway because of the snow and even if they could their parents wouldn't let them because on the face of it they were afraid their daughter would get hurt driving, which is fairly ridiculous since they wouldn't have drove fast enough to get hurt though they would have probably run the car off in the ditch and Daddy would have had to get the tractor and chain out and go get her. But what I know nowadays is that Mama and Daddy knew she would go see those boys she knew who played in that rock band over on Rock Hill, and both Mama and Dad were thinking of what they would have done at that age and probably did do when it snowed for the first time in that period of their life and they were together without adult supervision.

And so we stood there grinning, looking at the metal and each other and finally realizing how steep this hill is and how far down it goes. And then Billy, the smart boy of the bunch says: "Sure is gonna be a long way to haul it back up."

And Bobby, who's dead now, said: "Oh, you can handle it." And that was Bobby's way because he wasn't much on helping haul metal uphill, if you know what I mean.

The trick was how to get it started. That seems ridiculous when you think of it, because we were on the part of the slope where we could hardly stand up it was so steep, and the tin was pitching and bucking like it was some squashed-out flat kind of horse that just wanted to run away from us.

And so Billy, the smart one, says: "All we got to do is sit on it and she'll take off with us on top of it."

So we all sat down, except the last person (whose name I can't remember) held on to the pitching and bucking squashed-out flat horse while everyone else got on.

And we were laughing and nervous, and the person holding on was having a hard time of it because the metal was heavy to begin with and then three growing boys got added to it, and Tracker was running around the metal as best he could in the snow, barking and wondering what the rip was going on.

So we put Tracker on there with us. He

And we took the Rock Hill Grocery sign and hauled it around to the front of the house.

it, which were not really visible since the snow was sort of piled up there. And so we drug the metal out there, and it was just like we were walking it out into the sea almost, though I think our anticipation level was much higher. If that had been the sea, particularly if it had been sloped like that hill was, I wouldn't have gone out into it. But this was just a pasture hill that I walked in all the time and there wasn't nothing out there but round rocks and cowpoo and I knew it, so we finally got the stupid piece of metal situated without busting too much of our butts and without letting go of the stupid thing, which almost happened once but we quickly realized that the piece of metal just naturally wanted to go down that hill, gravity being what it is and all, and apparently pieces of metal just naturally love to slide on the snow.

And then, we stopped and rested.

And we were all squatted there grinning, looking at our piece of metal and holding on to a bit of it, our ship for sailing snow, our cruiser, our Cadillac, where the only thing missing was Santa and a bunch of presents or even better one of the

was one of us, after all, and he knew all the songs we knew, and besides that, his barking was breaking up that amazing silence that covers the world when a good snow has fallen and none of us had ever heard that silence but maybe twice in our whole life and never while we were stoned, so the silence was even louder, which makes sense if you're stoned. So I called Tracker over and he hopped right on and put his head in my lap.

So we were all set and ready to go, and all we lacked was for the last person to figure out how to get on without letting go of the thing and having it slide out from under him.

So the three of us sort of pitched our hands down into the snow. I'm sure most of us, me, at least, plunged their hands directly into a pile of cold cowpoo—which in a case like this is better than a pile of warm cowpoo—but I didn't care because I had already learned to wear gloves in questionable situations and this was a questionable situation if I ever saw one and that was before the cowpoo came into the picture.

So we plunged our hands down through the blanket of snow, through the cold and almost frozen cowpoo, and tried to figure a way to pitch our fingers into the ground to hold on or at least brace the thing for a moment so the last guy could get on. Somebody said: "Let's count and you jump." So we plunged our hands and counted one, two, three, FOUR, and the last guy jumped on and we let our hands up at the same time, and that big old piece of metal squatted down in the snow and sat as still as the sound of the world.

That boy's weight was the critical mass, you might say, which is weird to think about now, because we were all skinny as a rail back then.

And there was a moment there, right after the last guy jumped on, where we all stared into space, because we were waiting for the great whoosh of downward movement.

Then there was another moment right after that where we were all sort of embar-

assed and looking around to see if anyone was watching us.

Then there was the third and final silent moment where we were casting our eyes towards each other and all of us noticed Tracker sitting there looking at each one



To all the snow-experienced in the world this will sound silly in its obviousness, but one must remember that we had zero experience in propelling ourselves through the snow.

of us in turn, because the counting had startled his head off my lap, and Tracker had that look that a dog will get that just plainly says: "What the hell are y'all doing, exactly?"

And all of us were sort of jiggling our butts forward, trying to get that metal to take off, like a person who stomps the gas pedal when they're trying to crank a car that's out of gas.

After the third and final moment of silence and the little butt-jiggling attempt, we finally all caught each other's eye at the same time, and we exploded in laughter the way people will do when they're stoned. This outburst scared Tracker and he leaped from where he sat and out into the snow and he began barking again.

So we just sat there for a little while because we were laughing too hard to move, and then we sat still because

we were tired out from laughing deep down in our gut.

And Billy, the smart one of the group, said: "Well, I guess that didn't work."

And he was very serious, of course, because Billy was a thinker and an analyzer of data, so to speak.

But he said that, and we gave him about a split second to follow it up with some bright idea, but he didn't, because he was just making the initial observation a stoned person will make.

And we all busted out laughing, Billy included, because there we were, after having worked on hauling this tin for a half hour and worrying about busting our butt on the side of the hill, and Billy states the obvious, which is sometimes the funniest thing a man can say.

After the laughter calmed down, somebody said, real serious-like: "Nope, Billy, it doesn't look like it did." And we all busted out laughing again.

Well, these were good moments and all that, but the whole point of the thing is that we drug this big-you-know-what piece of tin up the hill and

across the pasture and through the pines and under two fences so we could slide down the hill, not so we could sit out there and laugh like a bunch of nincompoops shouting at a sideways tent revival.

So we crawled off the piece of metal.

And then we sort of squatted down beside it, pondering our great dilemma.

We all thought the other was holding it, and little by little we sort of let it go. We were able to grab it quick, but the great truth hit us: all we had to do was run, sort of bent over double-like, push like the dickens and then jump on.

Now to all the snow-experienced in the world this will sound silly in its obviousness, but one must remember that we had zero experience in propelling ourselves through the snow. The last time it had snowed we were all so young we were just happy to be alive and besides that, it was

mostly flat in the places where we lived. But this was later on and we were grown, sort of, and this was Rock Hill and we were stoned as a bat. So it took us a minute.

But the minute was over quickly, and we leaped up as the unit that we were and ran bent over double-like, which has got to be a comical thing to see, and we ran and pushed and hauled and Tracker was barking and trying to get on because he was a smart dog in his way and part of the gang and all and he had figured this drill out after having watched our miserable failure to begin with.

And we ran and pushed for about twenty feet, and somebody hollered something and all of us dove onto this big piece of metal, which really meant we all dove for the center of it and this meant we all hit each other square on but it didn't matter because now we were immediately flying. I think it mattered just a bit to Tracker because he followed us in the dive, and he got sort of squished but someone grabbed him by the flappy part of his neck and we all squirmed around and found a place and by the time we looked up we were going down this hill very, very fast.

And I truthfully think that if we could have stopped everything right then and taken a poll, all of us would have agreed it was too fast. I know for a fact Tracker would have just soon been watching from a stationary position.

But you just don't stop a big-ass piece of metal from going down an icy snow-covered hill once it gets going, so we held on and hollered and held on and flew down that hill just like we were experts at the thing.

Gravity has its advantages.

It was one of those times when everything is going in slow motion while it's happening, like the way it happens when you go into a spin during a car wreck.

About halfway down the hill, which means we were moving at a good clip, we hit a sort of raised up part that was really a little bitty cliff. We all knew that place was there but I think we all were operating under the mistaken illusion that we would be able to steer this stupid thing somehow. I know that sounds dumb, but we were stoned and that's just how folks think when they're stoned.

And we went off that little rise and up through the air and it was great fun until a second or two later when that big piece of metal with six hundred pounds of young men and dog came flopping down on the cold hard ground and rock and cowpoo. It dang near knocked the wind out of all of us, but not quite, which was good because the hill veered off there and got even steeper and the rest of the way down that hill was as much fun as I've ever had in my life. It was long enough for each of us to look at each other in that way you look at someone when the world is perfect and a goal is reached and you all know you have defied gravity together.

The funniest part was when we finally hit the bottom where it leveled out, and it sort of clunked to a stop. Old Tracker went rolling across the snow like a cattywhompus basketball dumped out of a basket. We laid in the snow and laughed hysterically

The Monte Carlo's horn honked and he sort of swerved, but he even never slowed down.

for a long time. Then we had to drag that dang big-ass piece of metal back up the hill.

Then we did it again and again and again all afternoon long. And Tracker rode with us every single time.

Now all this happened before Tracker got hit by the car.

When he got hit by the car, he laid up under the porch without moving for about three days. Then he finally crawled to the edge and ate a bit and crawled back under the porch. And I ground up brewer's yeast and zinc and vitamin C, and put it on his dog food. And he got well in about two shakes after I did that. A week later you'd never know he had been hit by a car going 70 miles an hour.

And another year went by and one year later, almost to the day, I guess Tracker had to go down and celebrate his survival of the highway.

Tracker and I were sitting on the porch. And all of a sudden Tracker jumped up and bounded off the porch and over the bushes, and I watched Tracker jump all of

a sudden off the porch and run across the yard and under the fence and down the hill like he heard some sort of cosmic dog whistle.

And Tracker ran down the hill and past the old well house in the bottom where our big-ass piece of tin ended up every time, and he shinnied under the fence the way dogs will do, and he bounded up the embankment.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see a maroon Monte Carlo heading west, and I sat forward in my chair and then stood up, because I had a bad feeling about this whole business all a sudden.

And Tracker bounded up that embankment as fast as he could go, and the Monte Carlo headed west about 70 miles per hour, and I'll be danged if I didn't stand right there and watch Tracker, the great old singing dog who was smart in his way but dumb in others, I watched Tracker run

full throttle right into the right front fender of that Monte Carlo. The Monte Carlo's horn honked and he sort of swerved but he even never slowed down. And Tracker tumbled down U.S. 80 like he was falling off the

big-ass piece of tin.

I hauled butt down there in the truck, crying my eyes out and running the stop sign coming off my dirt road and almost getting hit by a woman from Crawford County.

And getting out of the truck was another one of those slow motion things like the sled ride and the car wreck, because I was approaching my best friend in the whole wide world laying there with his head cut dang near all the way off by the sheet metal of the Monte Carlo fender.

He looked at me one more time with that "what the hell?" look, and then he died with his head in my lap.

I buried him out back in the garden.

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# Nashville's Risen Phoenix

by Sandra Rhodes Parker

**A** stroll through the streets of Historic Edgefield, Tennessee's first historic district, is like taking a step back in time—but that is not all. It is also one of Nashville's most quirky and diverse neighborhoods, which has something to offer almost everyone.

Because of the tenacity of its residents, both past and present, the area is booming, property values are soaring and young people are flocking to this neighborhood to provide a home for their young families.

Located on the East bank of the Cumberland River, just blocks from downtown Nashville, the Courthouse and the Tennessee Titan's Coliseum, its prime location offers urban living at its best. This is true today, as it was when Edgefield was an independent city from Jan 2, 1869 until it was annexed by Nashville on February 6, 1880.

For this reason many of the movers and shakers of the 1800s developed this neighborhood.

The founders of Nashville's premier businesses, doctors, governors, educators, and even Jesse and Frank James called Edgefield home. It is purported, and some claim documented, that Jesse attended and taught Sunday School at Tulip Street Methodist Church, which still stands today and is an integral part of the community. Jesse's home is also still standing, as are many of the original homes and churches. This is extremely remarkable when considering the tragedies and obstacles which these residents have overcome throughout the decades.



On Wednesday, March 22, 1916, Edgefield's first major disaster struck. Around 11:47 a.m., a fire started in a mill

**The founders of Nashville's premier businesses, doctors, governors, educators, and even Jesse and Frank James called Edgefield home.**

located on the banks of the Cumberland. Heavy March winds, with gales from 44-51 mph, fanned the flames through the

streets of Edgefield consuming most buildings in its path. This great conflagration was brought under control around 4:30 that afternoon but only after taking the life of one person, destroying 648 homes and businesses, and leaving over

3,000 homeless. Many residents took flight across the river to newer neighborhoods, but many other stalwart individuals remained in Edgefield to rebuild. Cottages and bungalows were the vogue in 1916, and many examples of these styles are found today interspersed among the older Victorian homes.

Edgefield recovered and continued to rebuild; however, tragedy again struck. A tornado of monumental proportions hit the neighborhood in 1933 and many of its existing buildings were destroyed and/or damaged.

Once more Edgefield fell on hard times. Following WWII many of its lovely old homes were turned into boarding houses or converted into multiple apartments. By this time few of the original families remained and the problems were greatly compounded with the emergence of Urban Renewal. In the 1960s many more old homes fell victim to the wrecking ball.

Entire blocks were leveled and more of the beautiful old mansions were lost. During this age when America was in love with all things modern, many forgot the beauty and importance of historic structures.

Thanks to the efforts of a few gutsy people, many homes were saved. One brave lady even stood in her doorway with

a shotgun and dared anyone to come near her home. That home, which has housed both a governor and a mayor, is still standing today.

History does repeat itself. In April of 1998, another tornado took the same path as the tornado of 1933, and again wreaked havoc on Edgefield. Homes and churches were greatly damaged and even more devastating was the loss of trees and flora. Aged trees were actually ripped from the ground by the roots and dumped across streets.

Only minutes following this last catastrophe someone climbed high atop the steeple of Tulip Street Methodist Church and "Amazing Grace" began to resound throughout the neighborhood. This proved to be very prophetic. The neighbors of both Edgefield and the greater Nashville area joined together and worked for months on clearing the streets and providing assistance for those neighbors in need.

It seems this dark cloud did have a sil-



ver lining. Edgefield has once again rebuilt, is thriving and is again a lovely neighborhood of people involved with each other and their community. Much of this would probably not have happened had it not been for the tornado of 1998.

These are exciting times for Edgefield. The streets are buzzing with activity. On any given day you may find mothers with strollers, joggers, residents walking their dogs or on the way to the closest coffee house to meet a friend and there is also the sound of new construction in the air. New condominiums (with a retro look) have been built and many restaurants have

opened in the area.

Residents once called Edgefield Nashville's best kept secret but it seems the secret is out. Twice a year residents invite the community to join in celebrating their progress and to help raise funds for the continued preservation of this historic district.

On June 5th and 6th, residents will again open their doors for the 29th Annual Tour of Homes and on September 25th, they will host an annual wine tasting in the elegant gardens of one of its historic homes.

Information on the neighborhood and on both of these events can be found at [www.historicedgefield.org](http://www.historicedgefield.org).

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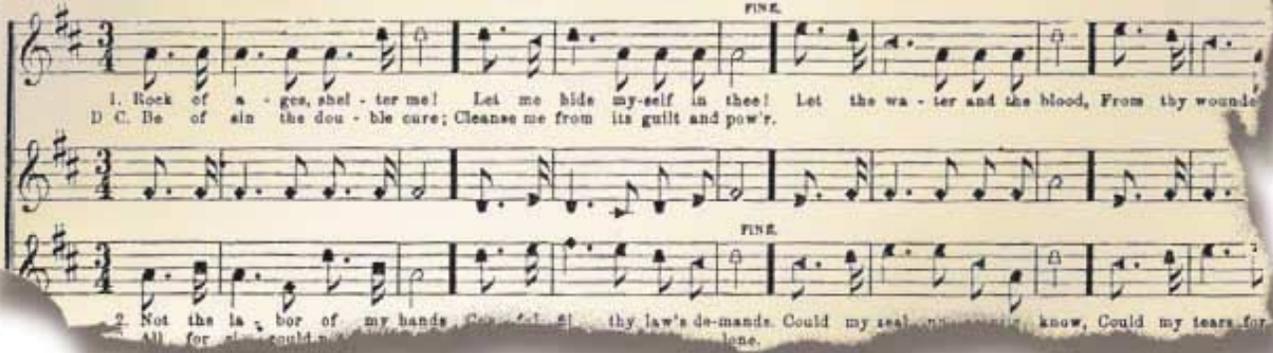


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## Shape Note Singing

# An American Musical Treasure

by Joe Holbert and Karen Holbert

**T**he first book printed in North America was a songbook. It was called the *Bay Psalm Book* and was printed in 1640. Early versions of this book contained the words to familiar songs but there was no musical notation for the melody.

Many believe this is because no one knew yet how to engrave printing plates with musical notes on them. Also, people sang songs in the book without instrumental accompaniment because most instruments had been left behind in the Old World. There was no room for them on the ships sailing to the New World.

Songbooks with musical notation began to appear 81 years later, in 1721. The first, *Grounds and Rules of Musick*, was written by Thomas Walter.

Unfortunately, most people of that time could not read musical notes so singing schools were established by itinerant singing teachers. This was the beginning of the Singing-School tradition. Singing schools flourished, first, in New England. The singing-school teacher went to a community and stayed about three weeks. The students paid the teacher to teach the rudiments of music and to teach songs from songbooks the teacher sold. When the singing school ended, the students continued their singing through their involvement in the church choirs of their commu-

nity. The teacher moved on to a different community but many times would return to teach new songs and to sell more books.

People enjoyed singing so much that, from 1720 to 1800, there were 375 different songbooks, or tune books as they were called, in print. Singing was so popular that many communities had their own "singing society." Although singing schools helped, many people still struggled with reading music.

Some believe that had it not been for southern shape note tune books, the original versions of folk hymns such as "Amazing Grace" would have been lost.

To address this problem, two singing teachers from Philadelphia, William Little and William Smith, developed and published a new notation system called *Shape Notes*. Each musical note was given a different shape (e.g., a triangle, a square.) The shapes helped singers tell the notes apart, thereby making the music easier to read and learn. Little's and Smith's book, *The Easy Instructor*, was published in 1801 and included the shape notation.

Others began to print their songbooks with this new and popular form of notation. Over time, however, singing became less important in New England as European instruments like the organ began appearing. People could learn the melody following the organ without needing to know how to read music. The itinerant singing-school teachers began to take their singing schools south and west, to where it was still difficult for an organ to travel.

In no time at all, other singing-school teachers from the south and the west began printing their own books using the shape notation. Some of these titles include: *Kentucky Harmony*, *Sacred Harp*, *Christian Harmony*, and *Harp Of Columbia*. Unlike the singing schools in the north, which were dying out, those in the south and the west were beginning to flourish.

In fact, many believe that, had it not been for southern shape note tune books, the original version of many folk hymns, including the well-loved "Amazing Grace," would have been lost. This was because, without musical notation, people learned songs through each other's singing, not from reading music. Without a written version to guide him or her, each person sang the song as he or she remembered it. As a result, each generation passed on a slightly different

version of the same song, to the point that, over time, the songs changed dramatically. In addition, when songs traveled from one community to another, the songs would also change.

Shape note music was not invulnerable to the effects of change. After 1945, for example, a number of changes occurred in the south, such as modernization, that resulted in people singing shape notes less frequently. Instead of participating in singing schools, people attended concerts of Gospel music and listened more to the music than participating in it. Despite these threats to its existence, shape note



Shape note music can still be heard today in little communities all over the country.

music survived because it had become a strong tradition in many communities. It still can be heard today, in little communities all over the country. Some communities have sung together for many years.

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*Joe and Karen Holbert are teachers and folk music performers in Western North Carolina.*

For example, just outside of Canton, North Carolina, shape note singers, at the Morningstar United Methodist Church, celebrated the 113th anniversary of their annual September Shape Note Singing, "Old Folks Day." Annual singings in western North Carolina also occur in Webster, Etowah, Pisgah Forest, and Black Mountain, just to name a few.

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# In Search of the Ultimate Thrill

by Ron Burch

**T**hrills: What are they? They're the things that make you tingle all over...make your heart flutter and perhaps even skip a beat...things that you anticipate for weeks or months in advance.

Things that make you wide-eyed, give you goose bumps, bring a smile to your face, and put joy in your heart. Remember 'em? I do.

And as I reflect back on a lifetime of many such experiences, I've discovered that often the simplest of pleasures have brought me the greatest joy.

## Ding, ding, ding went the trolley.

The year was 1944. My Dad was in the Army, having been deployed someplace in Europe. I lived with my mother and grandmother in a rented duplex in Candler Park, east of Little Five Points in northeast Atlanta. Mom was employed by the Public Health Service—my grandmother was a film inspector for United Artists. I spent my days at Moreland Elementary School, a facility that in those days doubled as a pre-K nursery.

When the weather was nice, we would walk the short mile-and-a-half distance between our home and the nursery on Moreland Avenue across the street from old Bass High. When it was inclement, we would use public transportation that even in those days was a work-in-progress. Beginning in 1937, the city fathers of Atlanta had begun the process of upgrading "streetcars" that ran on tracks, to "trackless trolleys" that didn't. These new trackless trolleys were best described as electric buses that drew power from a spider-web like maze of overhead lines.

In neighborhoods served by the old streetcar system, their steel tracks still crisscrossed the pavement in deep ruts. And while the womenfolk frequently caught their heels in the tracks, I thought the cars themselves were neat. They could



be operated from controls located at both ends of the car.

When he reached the end of the line, the motorman would simply change positions and go to the controls that would now be at the front. The wooden seatbacks on the passenger seats were also reversible. When the car changed directions, the motorman would flip them to the opposite position so that a boarding passenger could sit facing the direction of travel.

On our line, the trackless trolleys were beginning to dominate. However, especially during the morning commute, they would occasionally still run an old brown streetcar down the tracks. Whenever I got to ride to nursery school on one of these, it made my day! I squealed and jumped for joy whenever I heard the quintessential clang of the bell as the old rattletrap rounded the corner and approached our

stop. It was a simple pleasure that brought pure joy to a three-year old.

**Going fishing.** Following two-plus years in Uncle Sam's Army, once back home, my Dad focused on rebuilding the father-son relationship that the war had placed on hold. When Dad said, "Son, how'd you like to go fishing next Saturday?" I'd light-up like a Christmas tree in eager anticipation. So during the spring and summer months, whenever he had a free Saturday, he would take me fishing. Not deep sea fishing like the rich kids did; not fishing from a power boat or even from a row boat. Not fly fishing or fishing with the latest gear. This was simply a boy and his dad bottom-fishing with cane poles from a creek bank, or from a rickety wooden dock that stuck-out into a snake-hole of a pond.

We often fished Snapfinger Creek—it was closest to our home. Our fishing spot there was on the south side of the old wooden bridge, beside the old mill. But my favorite place to fish was

Sherrill's Lake. It was an hour's drive or so down old #78 highway, past the gray granite house with the yard full of purple thrift, to the little gravel road with a sign and an arrow pointing the way. We'd make a right turn on a gravel road, and then I'd hold on tight as we dodged the rain-washed gullies and drove several hundred yards to Mr. Sherrill's house on the left. My dad would pay the \$1.50 fee to fish a half-day. Afterwards, we'd jump back in the car and drive another quarter mile down the bumpy road to the path to the lake.

Once there, he'd take my hand and we'd walk together through the weeds, the briars and the honeysuckle, down to the water's edge—always carrying our fishing poles and our lunch. When the lake finally came into view—eager to wet a hook—I'd take off running. Dad would always yell for me to slow down and be more careful.

He knew he'd catch the devil at home if I fell in!

Mom would usually pack a lunch for me—a bologna or ham sandwich, sometimes with lettuce and tomato, sometimes not. Dad would stop at a country store along the way where he'd purchase fish bait; plus a can of sardines, a package of saltines, a chunk of cheddar cheese and a couple of Cokes. To this day, I wretch at the thought of him eating those smelly little fish and afterwards lighting-up a Chesterfield! In all the times we fished Sherrill's Lake, I can only remember two catches: a small bream that I insisted on taking home for Mom to cook for dinner, and a water moccasin that Mr. Sherrill came and shot with his shotgun. Still, it wasn't about the fish. It was about a joyful, happy time with my Dad at what for us was a very special place.

**To Grandma's House.** In the fall, we would travel north to east-central Tennessee to see my grandparents. They lived at 570 Freeze Street, at the corner of Maple Avenue. My grandfather was the Superintendent of Building and Grounds for Tennessee Tech; my grandmother stayed home to keep house, tend to the chickens, and raise a small garden.

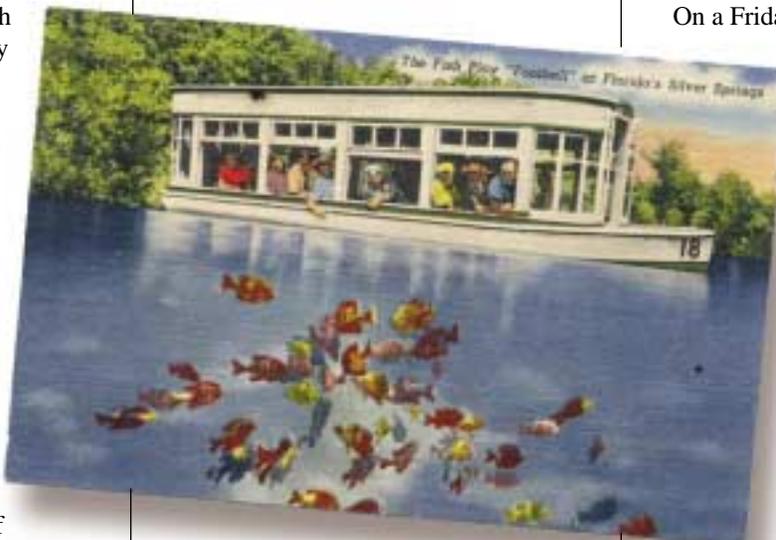
Dad came from a family of seven brothers and sisters. Each October, they would all gather at the home place for a visit, usually during the week of the Putnam County fair. During this time, breakfast at my grandparents' house was quite an event. A huge meal, often consisting of eggs, pork chops, fried chicken, fried apples, sliced tomatoes, grits, cottage fries and biscuits—it was always served at 6:30 am. Although she had a modern electric range, my grandmother still preferred to cook on her old wood-burning stove that she refused to have removed from her kitchen.

Since the oven temperature was impossible to control, sometimes the biscuits had a raw streak; sometimes they were a little too brown—perhaps even burnt on the bottom. My grandfather would look at his biscuit, and then look over at my grandmother, whose given name was Prudence. "Prudy," he'd say, "These biscuits should have stayed in the oven a while longer,

don't you think?"

Wiping her hands on her apron, my grandmother would answer, "RL"—she always called him by his initials—"I thought they were too brown yesterday so I decided that today, this was just the way I wanted them." My grandfather would grunt, nod and resume a full-cycle of chewing—sans dentures. I never understood why he took them out to eat. No one did. Regardless, seeing his entire face wrinkle and stretch as he chewed was the real "shock and awe" for me and the other grandchildren seated at the table.

After dinner, in the cool of the evening, everyone would take a chair in the front yard, or on one of two porches, and sit a spell. The men folk took delight telling their fishing stories and in frightening the



kids and their city-slicker wives with tall tales about life in the Tennessee hills—seeing Bigfoot, and buying illegal whisky from the moonshiners.

The biggest thrill in all of this for me was the county fair that each fall occupied a number of acres just down Maple Avenue. The sounds, the smells, and the lights up and down the midway spun a kind of magic for a kid. My cousins and I liked the rides best—especially the Ferris Wheel, where getting stuck at the top was always our goal. My grandmother, my Mom and all my aunts would spend their evenings at the fair watching various artisans displaying their talent at the potter's wheel, or at some other craft, tasting and buying homemade cakes, pies, jellies and jams. For my Dad, my uncles and my grandfather, it was a time for horse trading—watches, watch bobs, hunting knives, pocket knives, guns, coins, arrowheads, native-American jewelry—what have you.

They traded all evening long, and once back home, they would spread out their loot and argue over who made the best deal. Time with my grandparents in Tennessee brought me great joy. As an only child, it made me feel part of a bigger, closer-knit family—if only for a week.

**To the beach!** Summertime was coming and our elementary band had been invited to play in Daytona's Band Shell on the "world's most famous beach." This wasn't our first band trip—a musical group of some renown, we had been asked to perform before the National Music Educator's Association meeting for two successive years—once in Chicago and again in St. Louis. But the Daytona trip was undoubtedly the best.

On a Friday early in June, after Dad got off from work, we drove part-way to Valdosta, Georgia where we spent the first night and where I saw my first palm tree—ever. The next morning we were back on the road early. Somewhere near St. Augustine, I got my first peek at the ocean, over and in between the dunes that stretched all along the left side of the road. It was big and blue and absolutely breathtaking! That night, the beachfront highway called A1A was lit-up better than Christmas at Waikiki! It appeared every building was outlined in neon and every palm tree was awash with spotlights shining into their fan-shaped leaves. I'd never seen anything so tropical and so beautiful. Even though we couldn't afford to stay at a motel that was right on the beach, for this kid it was four days of pure heaven. Eating out every night, riding the rides on the boardwalk, swimming in the surf and making sand castles on the beach—peering through the glass-bottom boats at Ocala's Silver Springs, drinking papaya juice, and catching chameleons at our apartment a few blocks off the main drag on Grandview Avenue—what more could an eleven-year-old want?

For three nights our band performed flawlessly in the Band Shell where we played popular classical selections like Ravel's "Bolero," F. J. Rickett's "Colonel Bogey March," Albert Ketelbey's "In a

Persian Market” and the “1812 Overture” by Tchaikovsky. The sax-quartet, of which I was a member, literally blew their socks off with our rendition of Glenn Miller’s popular swing tune “In the Mood.” In front of God, my parents and everybody there, I was presented that year’s Achievement Medal for outstanding musicianship. I’ll never forget the excitement of that special trip to Daytona. All that we did and all that we saw are etched in my memory forever.

**Chillin’ in the Fifties.** Long before air conditioning made its way from commercial establishments, upscale retail stores, movies and churches, into the average home and car, surviving summers in the South presented a special challenge. Simply stated, “chilling out” and “being cool” required water or wind or a combination of both. Since water parks and subdivision swim clubs were unheard of, fortunately there were a number of public facilities where kids and adults alike, could cool down and splash away the hot, humid days and nights of a southern summer.

There were public pools operated by the city parks department. Also commercial places like Misty Waters, Venetian, Mooney’s Lake and Glenwood Springs. My favorite of all was Mooney’s Lake. Only here could you climb high up a tower, take-hold of a strap attached to a pulley, and sail down a taught, inclined cable into the water below. What a thrill it was! Best of all, after your first dousing—especially after dark—the evening breezes against wet skin was always good for a teeth-rattling chill.

When swimming wasn’t an option, our family would opt for an evening ride in the car—windows down. Of course, most of the air that blew in was warm and sticky, but it felt good nonetheless. Occasionally, however, especially at the bottom of one of Atlanta’s many hills, the outside air temperature would drop several degrees. Without fail, my Dad would exclaim, “Feel that? Boy, howdy!” And “Boy, howdy,” that cooler air sure felt good. To keep from heating up the house, whenever she could, Mom would do her baking early in the day. At night, she’d slice the ham, or chicken, or whatever and serve it at room temperature as part of a cold plate—always with sliced tomatoes and other garden veggies. On the weekends, Dad would cookout on

his new charcoal grill. I couldn’t believe how long it took him to cook the chicken, but it was always worth the wait. When I took my first taste of charcoal broiled chicken, it was a taste thrill that even today is unmatched. After dinner,



whether from the Miss Georgia Ice Cream emporium in Avondale, the one in Little Five Points, or hand-cranked in the freezer on our back stoop, ice cream was always a great summertime treat. Watermelon was my parents’ favorite. So much so that beginning in late June, our nightly rides to cool off would often include a trip to the Georgia Farmers’ Market where at the beginning of the season, watermelons would bring as much as a buck-fifty, even a buck-seventy-five. If it was a good crop, the prices would steadily decline throughout July and into early August. By then, the prices always dropped down to a buck, and two-for-a-dollar and three-for-a-dollar prices weren’t uncommon. One summer, after some bartering, my Dad got seven-for-a-dollar—certainly his biggest thrill of the summer!

There was only one solution for sleeping from mid-July through August—the ubiquitous window fan. Not a whole house fan or an attic fan, mind you, a window fan. One that installed inside an open casement window and that running at full tilt would draw the hot air from inside the house out into the night, while pulling the

cooler night air in through another open window or two. Without fail, sometime after midnight, that stiff breeze blowing across my bed would have me reaching for the covers.

### Who can forget their first kiss?

Not me. I was fifteen and her name was Alice. Since I was still too young to drive, it was a double-date with an older friend in his 1947 Chevy Coupe. We went to see the hit movie, “Tammy and the Bachelor,” starring Debbie Reynolds and Leslie Nielsen at the Fox theatre in downtown Atlanta. Afterwards we stopped for a snack at the Varsity Drive-in. Yep, on the way home, hormones raging, I sneaked a kiss. Not a kiss like the kids do nowadays, I’m sure. But a tingling, quivering, thrilling kiss nonetheless—one that I remember to this day. I sometimes wonder whatever became of old Alice.

**A real vacation.** My wife and I had been married a scant three months when we took our first “real” vacation, from our first “real” jobs. Even then, the Friday afternoon traffic leaving Atlanta was horrendous. All the way through town and south beyond the airport, it was bumper-to-bumper. Then somewhere between Jonesboro and Griffin, a little west of Lovejoy, the little two-lane called highway #19 became an open road. No cell phones, no pagers, no long distance cards—when we saw the sign that said “B. Lloyd’s Pecan Shoppe Just Ahead” we knew we had snapped the trap and really were “on vacation.” Nothing and no one could get us now! It was quite a feeling—one that I hadn’t experienced in years.

Following five days of serious beach time, on Thursday, May 17, 1962, we awoke early and drove down to Satellite Beach, near Melbourne, in anticipation of NASA’s launch of Mercury 18—Astronaut Scott Carpenter aboard Aurora 7. Along with hundreds of other spectators that lined the beach, we turned our binoculars toward the Cape and watched intently as the Atlas-D rocket was made ready for blast-off. On this day, however, it was not to be. Early in the countdown, the launch was postponed to allow some necessary modifications to altitude sensing instruments in the parachute deployment system.

We were disappointed, of course, having gotten up way before breakfast to make the 87-mile drive to Satellite Beach and

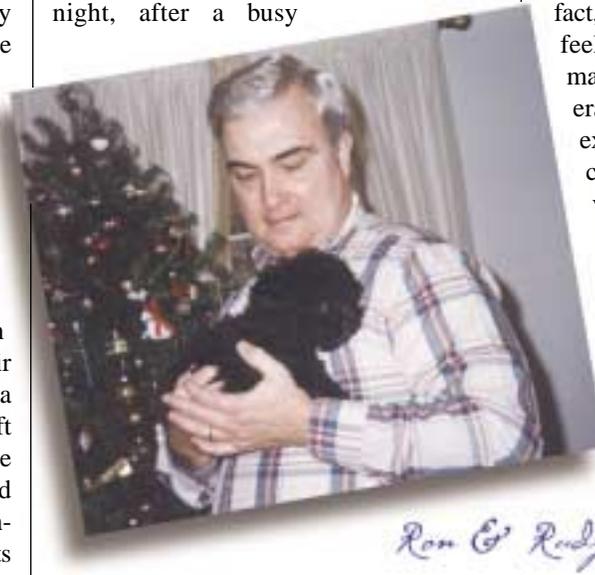
locate a good viewing position before the 7:30 am scheduled time for launch. However, early in our space program, delays were a fact of life. Another launch attempt on May 19, 1962 was also scrubbed due to irregularities detected in the temperature control device on the Atlas flight control system heater. When on May 24, at 7:46 am Carpenter finally got the green light to begin his suborbital flight that lasted 4.9 hours and spanned over 76,000 miles, like many of you, we found ourselves watching the event on television. Still, the space program was made more real for us since we had experienced a piece of it first-hand.

**Losing my shirt tail.** For an aviation enthusiast, nothing compares with their first solo flight. That tiny two-place Cessna trainer that had struggled mightily to lift my 240-lb. flight instructor and me into the heavens, now leaped off the ground and climbed like a Saturn rocket. The benchmarked numbers of those earlier flights were out the window as the airplane now went faster, climbed higher, and glided longer than ever before. After performing three “touch and goes” without any noticeable damage to the airframe, I taxied to the ramp, grinning from ear-to-ear and promptly lost my shirt tail. That was a thrill that for many years was unsurpassed, even by the 2,000 or so flying hours that were accumulated over the next twenty-five years.

**California Dreamin’.** As neat as the Atlantic Ocean had seemed in 1952, twenty-five years later, the Pacific outdid it. Not only that, it was mid-July and northern California felt like it was air-conditioned! The Golden State was a wonderland of things to see. From the peaks and valleys of Yosemite, to the ragged coastline at Monterey; from the Golden Gate down to the seventeen mile drive to Pebble Beach, California had to have the bluest sky and the bluest water I’d ever seen. Literally driving our car through a redwood tree at a national park near Santa Cruz, I had to pinch myself back to reality.

**Blessed with a wonderful dog.** Sharing some long days, Rudy and I have become best pals. We’re practically inseparable. The administrator at the assisted living community, where my Mom now resides, says in two years, she’s never seen

me without that little black dog. She’s right. That little black dog is my constant companion. He goes with me to the Jiffy Lube, the barbershop, the Post Office, and the bank, where he loves to eat out (dog biscuits from the drive-up teller are far superior to those we have at home). At night, after a busy



day taking four steps to my every one, he still claims the middle of the bed.

Rudy’s trust and loyalty are unmatched by any of my two-legged friends—his love as well is unconditional. He forgives completely and without questioning. Like me, these days he sleeps a little more and plays a little less. But at thirteen, he’s still going strong and he’s still a major source of fun and entertainment for me. Even as I pen these thoughts, Rudy is dozing at my side, on a huge poly-filled pillow that my wife made for him. If I asked if he wanted to “G-O,” he would snap to attention, race me to the backdoor, and stand like a Marine beneath his harness and leash that hang on a nail, outside in the garage.

**The list could go on and on.** And as I wax philosophical, I realize that the most pleasurable part of each experience has been the anticipation of what is to come. The thrill and excitement of each special event was great, but it didn’t compare with the anticipation. It was the watching, waiting, fantasizing, preparing and getting ready that was the most fun. It was having something to look forward to—another mountain to climb, another goal or dream to fulfill that kept me going. If we aren’t careful, like a runner’s high, the pursuit of things new and exciting can become an addiction. In mid-life, I know the more I had, the more I wanted, and yet I soon

learned that pleasure from “things” was short-lived. Adding to my frustration was a feeling that I had “been there, done that” and each year it increased in frequency. On the second and third trips to California, the ocean wasn’t quite as blue, the sky not quite as clear as I had remembered it. In fact, after the new wore off, there was a feeling of disappointment in a great many things. After a while, travel in general became a hassle. Instead of being excited over the purchase of new clothes or a new car, now it became very easy to be totally turned-off by the laborious process. Things that once provided a thrill and heart-thumping excitement have become more and more mundane and new ones more elusive. Indeed, for many of us, finding new thrills and the energy to pursue them, gets more and more difficult with time. My father-in-law was a wise and perceptive man. He found pleasure in simple things. At eighty-four, he had accepted the fact that “just rockin’ along” was pretty good, and that “taking the path of least resistance” wasn’t all that bad either.

**The thrill is gone?** Not by a long shot. Remember, the most fulfilling things in life come while traveling the road, not from reaching the destination. That road can be the Autobahn of Achievement or the Path of Least Resistance. I don’t think it really matters. Even though some days I have to look under every rock and behind every tree to find purpose and fulfillment, find it I must, and find it I do. I also have a new rule that I live by: nothing and no one is allowed to steal my joy. Supportive people are in; poison people are out. Like my father-in-law, I’ve learned to find happiness in simple things, and I’ve found that many of those lie close to home. Friends, family, a good wife, a wonderful old dog, baggy clothes with elastic in the waist, an old boat on the lake, food in the freezer, a good computer, and a sleep-by-number bed! Who could ask for more? Yet, who knows, the biggest thrill of my lifetime might be yet to come. I’d best go get ready. Perhaps you should, too.

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