

# Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

## Hunting for Major Bibb

*The search for a missing ancestor*

## The Wild, Wild Woman From Borneo

*What happens when the girl next door joins the carnival*

## Holy Spit

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*A stroke victim's story*

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*Rock 'n' roll comes to East Tennessee*

## The Peddler on the Mountain

*Shopping in the days before malls*





## And Now, a Word About One of Our Sponsors

Once upon a time in far-away New York City, there was this out-of-place, hillbilly kid hiding in the shadows of the art department of a music trade magazine. That was me. Maybe “hillbilly” is too extreme—after all, I was raised in the suburbs of Nashville—but, for the years leading up to my journey to the big city, I had lived on a 40-acre farm with no heat or running water.

The farm was located in a beautiful valley in East Tennessee and was roughly the size of Manhattan. When I left the valley, I suppose I took a lot of the southern mountain sensibilities (along with my Tennessee drawl) with me when I ventured northward to seek my fortune and fame.

At any rate, to my great surprise and disappointment, the Big Apple did not welcome me with open arms. What's more, my “dream job” for which I had left the sunny South was that of a lowly paste-up artist, hidden away in the corner of the art department. I was miserable, and I had already decided to leave the magazine and New York and to slink back south to Nashville. That decision, however was about to be changed.

Now, understand, the art department wasn't actually a department at all...it was really just a room, the art room. They probably called it a department because, being designed for art files and two art tables, it was slightly larger than most of the other offices. That's also why they most likely thought it was too large for me, the lowly paste-up hillbilly, to have all to myself. So, when they hired the new person, this radio guy named Neil McIntyre, they stuck him back in the art room with me until his office could be completed. They had hired him to help shore up the radio charts and to write a column for a weekly radio page. When he showed up for work the first day, everyone in the place seemed to know and love him. However, I was non-plussed; it was humiliating enough to have to share my dark little corner, but what made it worse was this new guy had nothing to do with art.

I tried my best to be politely rude to him, but as hard as I tried to be anti-social, Neil wouldn't let me. He introduced me to the non-stop barrage of visitors, both from inside the magazine and from the rest of the music world who were constantly dropping by. “Do you have lunch plans?” they'd ask him.

Neil would turn to me and say, “I don't know...what are we doing for lunch?” It was always funny to see the people who had looked right through me only the week before being obligated to invite me out for a sandwich.

Neil had grown up in Cleveland, where he first got into radio, but he made his name in New York, programming stations such as WINS, WPIX, WNEW and WKTU. Neil was at WPIX when the station switched its format from Top 40 to Album Oriented Rock. In an interview with the *New York Daily News*, Dennis Quinn



**Who Loves Ya, Baby?** left to right: L.A. MCA promotion man Pete Gideon, Neil McIntyre, Ted David, Telly Savalas and New York City MCA promotion director Ray D'Ariano all enjoy Kojak signature lollypops at WPIX-FM in NYC, circa 1974. Photo courtesy of Ted David.

recalled Neil having to explain what that meant to one of the station owner's corporate big wigs who didn't understand radio. “We're switching from little records with big holes to big records with little holes,” Neil told him.

He also worked with a bevy of radio talent such as Pete “Mad Daddy” Myers (who he knew from Cleveland and worked with at WINS in New York), Murray the K (New York's top-rated radio host at the advent of “Beatlemania” and dubbed “the Fifth Beatle” by either George or Ringo during their first New York visit), “Doctor” Jerry Carroll (New York

TV's “Crazy Eddie” in the late '70s, which was parodied nationally by the folks on “Saturday Night Live”), Howard Hoffman, Jay Thomas (a regular on “Murphy Brown,” “Cheers” and “Mork and Mindy”), and former CNBC anchor Ted David (who Neil hired as a DJ at WPIX).

I didn't know any of this about Neil when I first started sharing the art room with him. Over the next few years, I learned these facts little by little, but never from Neil, himself; it was always gleaned from the stories that his friends told over beers at the end of the day. I began to realize that everyone who knew him loved him, and he was one of the funniest people I had ever met.

After a few days in the office, Neil began to take an interest in the cartoon sketches I had drawn all over my drawing table. “What's this?” he asked, “Did you draw these?” I told him that I used to draw editorial cartoons and a comic strip for a weekly newspaper in East Tennessee. “How about if we start doing a cartoon for the radio page?” he asked. I asked him if we could really do that and he laughed. “That's what's so crazy,” he said, “it's my page, so we can do whatever we want to with it.”

And so, the *Record World* cartoon was born. Initially created as a radio-oriented cartoon, it ran weekly from 1978 until the magazine's demise in 1982, and somewhere along the way, it evolved into a more general, music-industry cartoon. It was something of a unique animal, a cross between a conventional newspaper editorial cartoon and a cartoon you might find in the *New Yorker*. It was a lot like Neil himself—although it poked fun at music icons and events, it was never mean-spirited. For example when Fleetwood Mac's 2-disc album “Tusk” was released, we did a cartoon of the band receiving a framed album and the presenter was saying, “Congratulations...your album just went ivory.”

The cartoon not only gave me confidence; it gave me credibility. Neil pulled me out of the shadows of the art room and threw me into the spotlight. Along the way, we had some great times. He was a walking comedy routine. Strolling down a New York City street with him was like watching a big-screen comedy with Neil as the narrator. "Uh oh, look at this guy coming," he'd say as an unsuspecting elderly businessman approached, "I think his mother dressed him this morning." And as the guy passed us, Neil would whisper to me, "Blindfolded."

Sometimes Neil's wife, Mary Anne, would be along for the ride, and she always added reason and perspective to his routines. After the three of us attended a "listening party" for Levon Helm's new album at the time, Neil and Mary Anne invited me out to dinner at the Palm. Neil wanted to show me their caricatures on the wall. Once at the restaurant, Warren Beatty opened the taxi's door so we could exit. "You can have our cab," Mary Anne said to him as she got out.

"Thank you, Darlin'," Warren told her, smiling warmly. "Oh, that's great," said Neil, "Now I'm competing with Clyde Barrow."

Another time, Neil and his pal, Ray D'Ariano (who was then an MCA Records VP), commissioned me to do a caricature of Elton John that they would present to him. Ray paid me with a "Beatles Reunion Tour 1979" satin jacket with "Pete" (as in Pete Best, their first drummer) monogrammed on the front. The jacket always got me a lot of attention on the streets of New York. Ray had also "borrowed" one of our *Record World* Elton cartoons, and turned it into T-shirts for Elton and his band.

The *Record World* cartoon was a big hit. Neil and I were constantly getting calls from managers and even from the artists themselves, wanting to buy the originals, or to somehow get reprints. We did special plaques with the cartoons for artists and bands such as Stephen Stills, Graham Nash, Billy Joel, and Led Zeppelin, just to name a few. It was a heady time, to say the least.

Neil died this past September, on 9/11. To say that it came as a shock is an understatement. I had talked to him a few weeks before, and he had told me about his cancer diagnosis, but true to form, he turned the news into a comedy routine. It led me to mistakenly believe that there would be more time to spend with him. I miss him and think about him just about every day. He not only shared his limelight with me, he gave me the visibility that provided me with the opportunity to become *Record World's* art director in 1980. As art director, I really came of age, career-wise. What's more, there are a number of magazines that I have designed and facilitated (including *Southern Reader*) that never would have existed were it not for Neil and his pushing and pulling me into the spotlight.

A while back, I got an email out of the blue from a man in England that I had never met before. He explained that he had recently purchased the office furnishings from Led Zeppelin's London office and that there was one of my *Record World* cartoons (from the late '70s) on the wall that was included in the deal. He asked if I had any idea how it had gotten there.

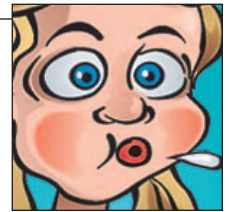
I replied, "Once upon a time in far-away New York City, there was this out-of-place, hillbilly kid hiding in the shadows of the art department of a music trade magazine..."

*David Skinner*

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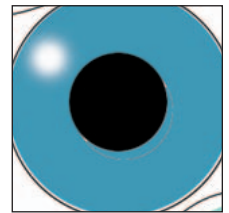
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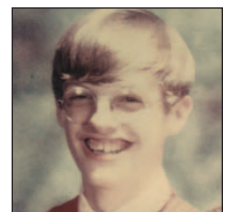


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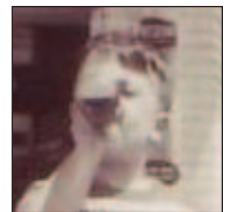
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# SouthernReader

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# Holy Spit

by Lisa Love

**N**O!!! Please tell me I am not seeing what I think I see on the side of my baby (*or as some insensitive types might call it—a “car”*). Pushing my sunglasses on top of my head, I drop my grocery bags onto the hot Georgia asphalt of the Kroger parking lot, and lean in for a closer inspection.

My heart drops—my deepest fears have come true. Like a skipping record, one thought repeats: “*I have been SO CAREFUL, I have been SO CAREFUL!*”

There are just some days it doesn't pay to get out of bed—this had turned out to be one of them. From the moment I open my eyes with a start, realizing that my alarm has not gone off—turns out I had set it for 7:00 P.M., NOT A.M. (at least I would have made it up in time for *Wheel of Fortune!*)—I began playing a game of *Beat the Clock* that would last the entire day. It was now 8:50 and church started at 10:00 A.M. sharp—so I pour coffee down my throat with a funnel, I shower and dress, then hit the road for my one-hour drive to church. With coffee mug in one hand, my Bible in the other, I clear my driveway a little after 9:00. Can you say *CRAZY, CRAZY FRENZY?*

Sliding a Gospel CD in for a much-needed *Divine Attitude Adjustment*, I pull out of my Neighborhood. Because of my mad morning dash, I seize every stop light as an opportunity to swipe on some makeup as I peer into my rearview mirror. I hit the expressway thinking that—timewise, at least—I was in the clear. Until I see it—the sign every Atlanta driver dreads: *Road Work Ahead*. On a Sunday? Traffic grinds to a halt long before any actual construction is taking place.

Welcome to the world of Atlanta drivers. Interstate 75 has become a virtual parking lot! My pulse takes off faster than Alice's mad hatter. I try to take a deep “cleansing” breath and crank up the volume on the CD player. Ahhhhh, sweet musical relief comes in the form of “Jesus, Take the Wheel” by

Carrie Underwood. Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor? I chuckle a bit as He snaps me back to my senses; there are much things worse in life than running a little late for church. *Attitude successfully adjusted!*

Though the sun is shining, I am startled by the sound of great claps of thunder. *Oh no, Lord, please, not bad weather!* I have recently acquired an irrational fear of being out in my car during storms. This bad weather phobia stems, not from a fear for my own personal safety—no, I am terrified for the well-being of my car. Let me assure you, it's not quite as neurotic as it appears at first blush. This car and I have endured one doozy of a year. As that lone black

storm cloud floats harmlessly away from us—*thank You!*—I remember it was a mere ten months ago that I purchased this car. I am a girl of logic and order, so I had done my research before I settled on this one. I gathered all the essential facts: price, resale value, mileage, and safety ratings.

By the time I finally drove my new car home, I was as excited as a teenage boy with his first Mustang—I washed and vacuumed her every week and I never parked near the other cars in a parking lot—even if it meant packing a lunch and hiking to the store's entrance.

As with all things in life, after awhile, the “newness” of the car wore off, and it became—as it should be—just a regular old, dependable means of transportation.

Ah, traffic is finally flowing again; I need to change lanes to make my way to Exit 41 on I-75. The sun is shining brightly, and my heart does a little “*the weather's good*” happy dance.

But, I knew that I would still have to drive like a maniac to get to the Sunday morning service on time.

To be honest, until six weeks ago, I had never considered the danger that storms pose for an automobile. Thankfully, I imagine, my cars had always been safely ensconced in a garage, out of harm's way, during bad weather, so I had never HAD to give it much thought. That is, until six weeks ago when I went to spend a weekend with my sister, Debbie (who will from now on be referred to by her Indian name—*She Who Dwells Without Covered Parking*).

Deb was recovering from rotator cuff surgery on a Friday; I went to her house to tend to her for a couple of days. The pain was tremendous—and, Deb didn't feel so hot either!

I kept her arm propped up at just the right angle, cared for the incisions, and kept the pain pills flowing; all the while a



drum line of visitors from our church kept the food flowing. The advantages of belonging to a small church—everyone knows you (*but LOVES you anyway!*), and they always arrive with platters of food at the first sign of crisis. It was on Saturday night, after the last visitor had left; I locked the doors and gave Deb her pain meds for the night—and then, the rain began.

I love a good rain—there is nothing like curling up on the couch, under a blanket with a good book and reading during a storm. However, this rainstorm took an ominous turn early—the wind was howling and the lightning was so intense, that the sky looked like noon for seconds at a time. I turned on the TV just in time to hear weather advisories for Deb’s county—tornado watches, then warnings.

Next came a sound that I will never forget. *HAIL!* Hail was pounding the trees, the house, the windows, and with horror of horrors, as I ran to the window to watch—*MY CAR!* Well, Debbie’s car, too, but that was beside the point. Golfball-size rocks of icy destruction were pummeling my car from all sides. *The inhumanity of it all—this was my new car.*

Crazily, I thought about taking the comforter off Deb and throwing it over the car to cushion it from the blows. I had never been in a hailstorm in my whole life; the ground covered completely in what looks like a blanket of snow—in *August!* If my car hadn’t been the victim of its fury, I might have been able to enjoy the remarkable site. The storm ended as quickly as it had begun. Trees were down, the power was off, we were okay—but *my car...?*

I later found out that the storm was one of the worst to hit that county in years, but closer to home, what I discovered that night was that it had left my car dreadfully mangled—it *even took out a taillight!* I was heartsick.

As I surveyed the damage as best I could with a flashlight, I tried to list all of the reasons why my sister was to blame:

- The storm hit while I was at her house
- I was there because of her surgery
- She didn’t have a garage

You get the picture. My family is closer than most—always there when needed, but let us get angry or scared, and we can turn on each other like a pack of wild dogs! I have, however, long since forgiven her for the audacity of having “that kind of weather” occur at her home. An incident like that is the reason they invented auto insurance.

I submitted the claim and four weeks (and \$6800.00) later my car was even better

than before. The insurance company replaced and painted everything—hood, trunk, door panels, and taillights. My car looked showroom new; however, ever since that storm, I have reverted back to my hyper-vigilant car protection mode! My new mantra: *“Forget diamonds, Honey—garages are a girl’s best friend!”*

But, I digress...back to my maniacal Sunday Morning Indy 500. After an hour and a half drive, I am finally pulling into the church parking lot. As I open my car door, I can hear the Praise music wafting out from the little country church. Leaning across the passenger seat to grab my Bible, I manage to knock the coffee mug out of its holder and into my lap, spilling the half-filled cup of brown liquid all over my pants.

*JUST GREAT!* Looking for small favors at this point, I thought to myself that at least the coffee was stone cold—I’m not riddled with third degree burns. But my

**My family is closer than most--  
but let us get angry or scared,  
and we can turn on each other  
like a pack of wild dogs.**

right leg is sopping wet! I lean over to the back seat and grab an old beach towel, dabbing ineffectively at the stains on my pants. “Late” has become a relative term at this point. Oh for goodness sake, I give up and just head for the church.

As I open the door to the sanctuary, I hope to get to my seat as unobtrusively as possible. Easier said than done. Do you remember the show “Cheers?” Everytime one of the bar’s regular patrons would walk in, he would be greeted with a shout of “Norm!” With that in mind, as I open the door, every head turns my way and whispers “Lisa.” I think the “*You’re late*” is implicitly implied.

As I quickly slide into “our” row, the pastor asks us to turn to Ephesians 1:1. My sister, Debbie, whispers into my ear, “You smell good.”

“Maxwell House,” I reply.

Then she leans closer and says, “Put your mascara on in the dark?”

I whisper back, “Rearview mirror, stoplights!”

As the preacher quotes the Scripture we will study today, Deb grabs a tissue from her purse, spits on it and leans toward my face. *I DO NOT THINK SO!*

I flashback to just about every Sunday when I was a little girl, when invariably on the steps of the church, my Mama would grab my chin in her hand and scan my face

to find the tell-tale dirt on her little tomboy. She would proceed to take out a Kleenex, spit on it and swab me down. I loved my Mama, but I loathed this ritual. My seven-year-old self would try to reason with my Mama that this seemed mildly unnecessary and highly unsanitary (not in those exact words—I was only seven!). I told her that I didn’t think people should just go around spitting on other people—she reminded me that Jesus once spat in his hands, mixed it with mud and healed the blind man. I piped up, “But Mama, that was *HOLY SPIT*, and *YOU ARE NOT JESUS!*”

Well, here we are—I am all grown, and my sister is trying to scrub mascara from under my eyes with the same family recipe. Two things cross my mind simultaneously—one, Debbie *IS NOT MY MAMA* and, two, I don’t ever recall Mama making any noise when she delicately put the Kleenex to her lips before she swiped me. My sister is making sounds over there like a truck driver (I can only imagine how much saliva she thinks is necessary to accomplish her mission). I figure it would be rude to deck her in church, so with a churning stomach, I let her finish. To be fair, I guess spit really is just

the Southern woman’s equivalent of “409” or “Spray and Wash.” And now, let us pray. After the insanity of the morning, this sermon was just what my heart needed—“*a word in due season.*”

My Spirit refreshed, I am looking forward to our regular Sunday dinner at Debbie’s house. My sister lives just minutes from our church, and all the kids, grandkids, nieces and nephews gather there after Sunday service to reconnect with each other after a hectic week. I need to stop by Kroger and pick up a dessert or two for after supper.

Telling everyone I’ll meet them at Deb’s in about half an hour, I head to the grocery store. It’s just a couple of blocks away—I’m there in no time flat (I had plenty of practice for speedy arrivals this morning). To my dismay, it looks like everyone else had the same idea as me; the parking lot is packed.

I drive up and down, row after row, trying to find an available spot. I spy one and gingerly pull my car in, trying not to get too close to the car on either side. My cell phone goes off—*could I get some ice and tea bags, too?* Well, sure!

Trying to make a mental grocery list, I get a shopping cart and head in. It was easy enough to find everything we needed, but the lines for checking out started at the cash registers and ended halfway down



aisles 3, 5, and 7. *Mercy, I am going to be a whole lot longer than 30 minutes here.*

I hate waiting in lines, so I try to find ways to amuse myself—either by making friends with my fellow line dwellers or by grabbing a magazine off the stand and perusing it until it's my turn. After about 20 minutes, it's finally my turn at the register. The ice I'm buying is a little worse for wear, but there might be some cubes left for the tea if I can hurry up and get out of here.

As the cashier rings up my stuff, I open my purse to get out my wallet. I'm rifling through it, but to no avail. I can't find it—I empty the entire contents of my purse out onto the counter—not there.

Then it hits me—I *changed purses last night and I left my wallet out to write my tithe check*—it's probably still on my desk at home. **SO not only do I not have any money, but I was driving all day without a license.**

Frantically, I open zippers in my purse to see if there is ANY cash in there. I am now holding up the people behind me who, though patiently waiting in line until now, are looking decidedly restless and as if they might attack at any moment (I'm assuming low blood sugar from hunger, probably).

Then bless his heart, the man behind me says, "Let me get this for you."

"Thank you, but no, I can't let you do that," I reply.

The elderly gentleman smiled as he leaned and whispered in my ear, "Listen, Sweetheart, you better let me. There's rumbling in the line behind me that they are going to drag you to Frozen Foods and stone you to death with frozen New Guinea hens."

*Can you say, "Clean up on aisle 13?"*

How could I refuse his kind, generous offer? I thank him profusely and ask for his name and address to return the \$12.46. He says, "No thanks, just pay it forward."

*Chivalry is alive and well in the South!*

I grab my shopping bags and head for my car with thankfulness for a stranger's kindness and MUCH embarrassment at my own stupidity! How could I leave the house without my wallet? Then again, how could I set my alarm for the wrong time?

While we are on a roll here, how could I knock coffee all over my new black wool pants? In addition, let's not forget, I let my

**"There's rumblings in the line behind me that they are going to drag you to Frozen Foods and stone you to death with frozen New Guinea hens."**

sister spit on me in church.

But now, I have another dilemma—*how do I get home without my driver's license?* Should I just risk it and drive myself home after dinner? I decide I'll go ahead and drive the short distance to Debbie's house where I can calmly collect my thoughts—then I'll figure out my next move.

I am walking up to my car when I spot something on the back door, passenger side. Is that a scratch? Oh come on, this isn't funny—the ONE TIME I have to park next to other cars, this happens? I drop my grocery bags to the ground, push my sunglasses on to the top of my head—just in case it was just a reflection from the lenses—and get right on top of the scratch.

*Or is it a scratch?* The car is covered in road dust, so—as I learned at the feet of my Mama—I spit on my fingers and rub. Oh,

it's a scratch all right. Well, not really a scratch, more like a gash...and it keeps going and going up the whole passenger side of the car.

I spit on my fingers again and rub some more. **MORE SCRATCHES**—some superficial, but some like they were carved into the paint. *What is happening here? I just came to get tea bags and pie! Who would do this to my car?*

I keep spitting and rubbing, spitting and rubbing. I am about to cry; this was deliberate. I spit one last time onto my fingers and rub the scratches traveling up the passenger side front door. Will they never end?

Just then, the window on the passenger side door slowly rolls down and the man sitting in the driver's seat looks me up and down and says, "Excuse me?"

My mind goes blank. My heart races. Time stands still. I take a breath and look

more closely at the car. Close, but no cigar. This is not my car! Relief floods through me on one hand; on the other hand, for the last three minutes, I have been licking a stranger's car.

With as much dignity as I could muster—given the day I just endured—I hold my head high, look him square in the eyes and say, "Just a few more minutes, Sir, and I'll be finished with this side!"

I gather my shopping bags (melted ice and all), go to find my real car and think to myself, "Holy Spit!"

**LisaCLove@bellsouth.net**

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







# The Wild, Wild Woman From Borneo

A short story by David Ray Skinner

I met Ramona in the second grade. She was the girl next door. She hadn't always lived next door; old man Schlotz used to live in the little frame house there on the property. The only thing my little brother and I ever heard him say was, "Hey you kids, what do you think you're doing?"

Sometimes it was because we had ventured into his yard to retrieve an errant baseball or glider; other times we would be in our own backyard, playing army or just digging in the dirt with our tanks and dumptrucks, and we'd hear him scream,

"Alright, you kids, I'm warning you!" My dad told us to steer clear of him. "He's a little eccentric," I overheard him tell my mother. That must mean loud and mean, I told my little brother.

One day toward the beginning of the

autumn of my second grade year, however, it dawned on me that we had succeeded in rescuing an overthrown football only a few yards from his back porch without the old man's vocal alarm going off. Not long after that, I awoke one Saturday morning to the growl of a huge moving van backing into Schlotz's driveway. When I got down to the no-man's-land ditch that separated our properties, I first saw Ramona. She was wearing denim overalls and loudly chewing bubble gum. She had braided pigtails and intense brown eyes, and she watched my

approach with an unemotional interest.

"Mr. Schlotz doesn't like anyone on his property," I said, trying to seize control of the situation, "Especially big ol' trucks," I added, gesturing toward the moving van.

"Mr. Schlotz has moved far away," she said solemnly, pointing upward with her thumb, "This is our house now." Before I could protest, she looked at me and smiled knowingly. I think I will never forget that smile. In the gray matter filing cabinet that is my memory, it is safely locked away and labeled, "Ramona: first smile." The reason I tend to dwell on it is that it was so typical of what I would come to realize over the years as being the pure essence of her—it was so Ramonaesque, if you will. It was her major weapon of choice, and I often observed her overpowering countless others by her prudent and discerning use of it. It certainly disarmed me that Saturday morning. Thinking back on it now, I feel fortunate that she valued our pending friendship enough to share it with me, or at least, use it on me, at our introduction.

The following Monday, I was pleasantly surprised when my second-grade teacher, Mrs. Clancy, introduced her to our class. "Boys and girls," she said, "This is Ramona. She is our newest student. She and her family have moved here from another state. Please make her welcome."

At this point in this sort of circumstance, one of the boys would usually snicker and say, "Another dumb girl. Big deal."

Or, one of the girls would say, "I don't like her dress, do you?"

But Ramona smiled at Mrs. Clancy and then at the class, and any rude remark was rendered dead or obsolete before it could be formed in their mouths.

That afternoon, in what would become a daily ritual, Ramona and I walked home together. The following Friday, as we hurried home to begin the weekend, she casually asked if I had ever been to the circus. Before I could answer she said, "It's simply the best thing in the world. I especially love the wild woman from Borneo. She's so mysterious and beautiful, but mostly mysterious. I bet she knows everything about everything."

"Uh..." I said, not really knowing how to reply to such a profound and definitive declaration, "the wild what from where?"

"Wait a minute," she said, suddenly stopping, "I've got a splendid idea! Let's fix our backyard up and put on a circus! Do you have any money in your pockets? I just

happen to have a five-dollar bill that my Aunt Button gave me. Let's go and see what we can unearth at the five-and-dime!"

Rupert's Five-and-Dime was on the end of the block of where our little town's downtown area began. It was about a quarter of a mile out of the way on our walk home, but with the weekend coming up, a big plan in the works, and Aunt Button's fiver burning a hole in Ramona's change purse, it was not so much of an inconve-



The following Friday, as we hurried home for the weekend, she casually asked if I had ever been to the circus.

nience as it was a grand opportunity.

Rupert was stirring the peanuts in the candy bin when we creaked down the rich brown wooden floors to the back of the store to where the costume jewelry, feathers, rubber masks and miscellaneous and off-the-beaten-path products were almost apologetically displayed. The store always smelled like a combination of chocolate, plastic, dust and fabric. That afternoon, there was an air of anxious joy that was thrown into the mix of smells for good measure and for good reason. We were going to build a circus.

We bought costumes, feathers, large sheets of posterboard and whatever other supplies we could think of to set wings to our weekend dream. Back then, five dollars went a long way, and we had to borrow a shopping cart from Mr. Hatmaker, who ran the grocery store next door to Rupert's, just to transport all of the treasures. Mr. Hatmaker was one of my father's lodge

brothers, and he knew he'd get the cart back. We'd also spent our last pennies (from my pocket change) on some Co-Colas from Mr. Hatmaker's big cooler at the front of the store.

It took us most of that Saturday to put the show together and to make the posters to advertise our backyard circus. When my mother called me in for dinner, we both realized that the big event would have to wait until after church the following day, but the anticipation made it all that much more exciting. It also gave us the opportunity to invite some of our church friends to the event.

And what an event it was. Most of the kids on our street showed up, along with three or four from my Sunday School class. Some of them brought their parents and their younger brothers and sisters. My mom made popcorn, which she insisted on distributing free (over my protests that it could be a big money-maker).

I was the ringmaster and my little brother was a clown. We had given him specific instructions for him not to try to be funny. He was to be a silent clown; if he wanted to express himself, he would need to honk my bicycle horn (which I had duct-taped to his clown belt). Still, he couldn't help himself. "Knock knock," he kept asking the crowd. Some of the older kids in the neighborhood called him "Knock-Knock the Clown" for years after that.

We dressed our dogs, Bippy, Albert, Ralph, and Mr. Jingles in makeshift lion and tiger costumes and

had them jump through hula hoops decorated with paper flames. And we even worked Mr. Hatmaker's grocery cart into the act. We coerced the lion-dogs and tiger-dogs into the cart with pieces of Velveeta, and my brother, the clown, pushed them through the cheering crowd as he honked his horn. "That's my dad's cart," Bernard Hatmaker said proudly, as my brother honked his way up to the stage and behind the curtain.

But the star attraction, of course, was Ramona. We had borrowed the checkered curtains from our den and hung them over a rope strung across the staging area of our backyard. When we pulled back the curtains, she emerged in all her grandeur and mystery. She wore large hoop earrings and had wrapped her head in a magenta silk turban. Wild strands of hair from her aunt's black wig sprouted from underneath the turban, and her glued-on fingernails curled under her little hands like those of a tree



sloth. Ramona's outfit was equally as exotic; she wore an elegant silk top with bright moons and stars and a thick, purple velvet skirt. She clasped a Japanese folding fan in one hand and a vinyl 45 RPM record in the other. The most unusual touch, however, was the strange monkey tail peeking out from the purple velvet.

For that matter, maybe it was the monkey tail that caused the uproar, but for whatever reason, Tombo Tucker's baby brother shrieked in horror at the sight of Ramona gliding across the makeshift stage. This, in turn, set off the other babies like a tiny, backyard chain-reaction atom bomb. Ramona, however, was seemingly oblivious to the hubbub. She casually dropped the record onto my spinning antique turntable and turned the volume knob until it could turn no more. As the strains of "Night Winds of Borneo" filled the air, she moved hypnotically to the eerie music in a ghostly trance, and a strange, quiet calm fell over our backyard. Even the Tucker baby stared quietly at Ramona, his head swaying back and forth in sync with hers like a big-eared, one-tooth cobra. As the music rose in a dynamic crescendo, Ramona held her arms out and waved them at the audience in a smooth rotation, as if she were polishing an invisible windshield.

Then, as the music slowed to a graceful ending, the performance ended as smoothly, and yet, as unexpectedly, as it had begun, leaving Ramona in the center of the stage, smiling as she exited. The backyard broke out in waves of startled applause, and my mother waded into the audience to hand out paper bags filled with her popcorn. It was an event that would be long remembered as "that backyard circus day," with Ramona as the focal point of the memory. And, though we would conduct a backyard circus every summer after that initial one (sometimes we'd even have two or three in a single season), that first performance is the one that everyone from the old neighborhood tended to remember at our various reunions over the years.

The fallout from that first circus was both immediate and intense. Several mothers on our block forbade their children to play with Ramona, calling her "that circus child." Some mothers even kept their children away from my brother and me, as if Ramona's Wild Woman ways had somehow rubbed off on us. We were, after all, her next door neighbors and circus co-per-

formers. We also owned and took care of the lions and tigers on a daily basis. At our elementary school, the following Monday, some of the older kids on the bus began making chimp noises when Ramona and I got on at our regular bus stop. "There's the monkey girl," Rusty Phlamm, the red-headed hellion from two streets over, yelled from the back of the bus. It was obvious that he had been anxiously practicing his verbal ambush.

"Oh thank you," Ramona gushed, "It was nothing, really!"

Obviously, that wasn't the response



The carnivals and characters were all different. Some were neat and orderly; others were filthy and disgusting.

Rusty had expected, so red-faced, he sprang up from his bus benchseat and scratched his armpits with both arms like a gorilla. "Eep, eep, eep, Monkey Girl!" he said.

"Gracious, Mr. Red Rooster," Ramona said, smiling broadly, "We'll just have to find you a part in our next circus!"

I was always impressed and amazed at how she always took everything in stride, whether it was a compliment or an insult. She had the incredible ability to wrestle the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune away from her would-be attackers and seamlessly convert them into implements of courteous hospitality. Her intelligence and outgoing personality served her well during our formative years. We became best friends and confidants, although I always felt like I was one step behind her. I loved her strange and quirky ways, and in junior high we grew quite close. I suppose you could say we dated, but most of our so-called dates were strange and adventure-some outings that always bordered on circusdom, if not the out and out bizarre.

Going into our sophomore year, I got up the nerve to ask her to wear my ring. "Of course, silly," she said, "Just as long as I don't have to wear it on my hand all the time!"

We both laughed at that, but true to form, the following day she showed up at the busstop with my ring glistening in her left nostril. Even Rusty Phlamm was taken aback. "M-M-Monkey Girl?" he stammered.

One afternoon during our senior year, over milkshakes at the Rexley drugstore soda fountain, I had a wild thought. "Let's run off and get married!" I blurted out.

She looked up from her milkshake and smiled. "What? Before the prom? Don't be silly. Besides, your parents would be very upset."

She was right, of course...I hadn't even considered the ramifications of such a plan. Besides, the prom was only a month away. Anything can wait until summer, I reasoned. Looking back, I've often wondered if Ramona knew what was going to happen as we discussed our future that afternoon over milkshakes. Or, if I pushed her into the next stage of her life with my impulsive suggestion of marriage.

At any rate, by the time our prom rolled around, Ramona had been gone for several weeks.

To say I was frantic was an understatement.

Whereas her parents were upset, I was just this side of insane. Of course she missed our graduation; that was a given. My parents kept me as sedated as they could with the over-the-counter cough and cold medicines of the time until I could graduate. That night, after the ceremony, I put my fresh diploma on top of my dresser and packed a few days worth of clothes. It was already June and summertime was knocking at the door; as everyone knew, summertime was carnival and circus season. At dawn I was already on the road. I walked down to the main highway and hitched a ride with a trucker hauling watermelons to a city just over the state line. He wanted conversation; I wanted to find carnivals. I figured that Ramona would have joined a carnival rather than a circus because carnivals were the minor league warm up to the big time and big top. I assumed that she would have had better luck getting a job at one of the smaller venues; at least until she could hone her craft.

It took less than a day for me to find my first carnival. The melon trucker had

dropped me off at the city line and after waiting for an hour or two, I got a ride from a corrugated box salesman who was calling on a customer in a factory a few counties to the south. As we neared the county where the factory was located, I began noticing billboards advertising the county's annual carnival.

"Can you drop me off at the fairgrounds?" I asked the salesman.

"Sure," he said, "But I wouldn't have pegged you as a carnny."

"I'm not a carnny," I said, "I'm just semi-engaged to one."

"Trapeze artist? Animal trainer?" he asked, "Bearded lady?"

"Forget it," I answered, annoyed at his insensitivity. "It's a long story."

I wasn't sure what I was going to say to Ramona once I found her, and I naively thought that she would be at that first carnival we came to. Once the box man dropped me off at the carnival, I wandered around the sleepy midway, which at 2:00, was just beginning to wake up. "Where's the manager?" I asked the spin-a-roo operator.

"You a cop?" he asked, then he squinted in the afternoon sun and looked me up and down, "Nevermind. Ticket booth. Far end." He pointed with his thumb, and then went back to tinkering with the frayed wires of the spin-a-roo."

I found the manager and introduced myself. "Do you have a wild woman from Borneo?" I asked.

"Do you have frog legs?" he asked me back.

"I'm serious," I said, trying to look bigger, older and meaner than my eighteen years would allow.

"If you wear a dress, nobody will notice," he laughed. "Why? Do you want to audition?"

"I'm looking for someone," I said, suddenly frustrated.

"Ain't we all, kid," he laughed. Then, he went back to what he had been doing, and our conversation was over.

I walked up and down the midway and looked inside all the tents. I even jumped the fence and snuck around the trailers where the carnival workers eat, sleep and live, but there was no Ramona. This whole scene was repeated dozens, if not hundreds, of times in the coming months. The carnivals and characters were all different. Some were neat and orderly; others were

filthy and disgusting. Some of the managers were polite; others were surly with an undertone of danger and violence. However, the end result was always the same. I left every midway without finding Ramona.

The days turned to weeks and the weeks into months, and September was coming on. I had already made plans to go away to college, or, I should say, Ramona and I had made plans to attend a pleasant little college a couple of hours away from our hometown. As I sadly accepted defeat and decided to go home to prepare for the fall,



I arrived just in time for one of her performances, and in the dim carnival light I didn't immediately recognize her.

I hitched a ride just outside of Atlanta with a couple of frat cats who were headed north. Just outside a little town in Middle Tennessee, I saw a billboard advertising a county fair. At this point, I would have passed it up, but on this particular billboard, someone had crudely added an amateurishly painted footnote: "*Starring the Wild Wild Woman from Borneo.*"

I almost leapt from the car, but struggled to gain my composure. "Fellows," I said, "As much as I've enjoyed the ride and conversation, I just realized that I know someone in this town, so could you drop me off?"

"Sure," the driver said, winking at me in the rear view mirror, "We'll even drop you at her house!"

"It's a big house," I said, "Say, do you guys like snakes?"

That's how I found Ramona. She was in a sideshow at the carnival. This particular

carnival wasn't creepy, but it also wasn't neat and tidy. I arrived just in time for one of her performances, and in the dim carnival light I didn't immediately recognize her. But then, she spotted me in the crowd and smiled, and I saw Ramona through the makeup, fur, feathers and the Borneo-ness.

"I love you," I mouthed, tears in my eyes.

And then she looked straight at me and said something like, "*Gwahz-a-mooka-la!!! Chee! Chee!*"

She must have seen the shock and hurt in my eyes, because she repeated it.

"*Gwahz-a-mooka-la!!! Chee! Chee!*" she screamed, and then she looked to the sky (or in this case, to the top of the tent) and shrieked it again for effect.

After her show, I tried to get backstage (actually, "backtent" would have been more appropriate...the stage was a flat-bed trailer), but I was strong-armed by one of the carnival goons. "She doesn't want to see you," he said gruffly, "She said to tell you it was a career choice, and she's very happy. She said to tell you to go home. Go to college. Go crazy, but just go."

"Career?" I said, incredulously. "That's not a career, it's a sideshow!"

"Look kid," the goon said, "We have several choices here. We could call the cops, which is one of our least favorite options in the world, and one that we most likely will not exercise; we can

handle this ourselves, which is what we are leaning toward at this moment, and I can personally guarantee that you will not enjoy it; or you can be a good little boy and run along home. It's your choice, sonny-boy."

At that moment, I sadly realized that it was all over between Ramona and me, and knowing her as I did, getting myself arrested or beat up would not win her back. I could just hear her saying, "Don't expect me to feel sorry for you for not listening to reason...it's not hard to get your nose broken. Any fool can do it. In fact, maybe a broken nose can help you with your listening and reasoning ability."

But I didn't wait around for the beating or that painful chiding footnote; I ran. I ran from the tent, from the carnival, from the little town and from the state of Tennessee. A month later I was a college freshman. I didn't however, go to the little school a few



hours away from our hometown; I was afraid that it would have always reminded me of Ramona. Instead, I ended up at the university with the two frat cats that had picked me up outside Atlanta. I even pledged their fraternity and was elected frat president my senior year. My two frat brothers never mentioned our excursion through Tennessee, but they did insist on putting on a circus every year to raise money for our various house parties, and I was always the ringmaster.

My grades were good enough to get me into Harvard's law school, and I landed a cushy corporate law job immediately after graduating. By then I was married; my wife was an attorney as well. One thing led to another, and we moved back south and fell into Southern politics; it gave me an outlet for the mean streak that I had cultivated over the years as a result of the Ramona-shaped hole in my heart. But, even that healed, and I was incredibly successful, in spite of myself.

One summer, when my daughter was six or seven, I was scheduled to speak at a carnival a few counties over from Little Rock. After my speech and the obligatory photo

ops, my wife thought it would be fun to take our daughter to one of the shows. There were, of course, state troopers there to protect my family and me, and to keep things under control at the carnival. They even sat with us at the show, although I think that was out of curiosity rather than a concern over some would-be carnival assassin.

**I realized that, at that instant, the old Ramona-shaped hole in my heart had been re-opened, and I also knew that this time, it would never heal.**

It's interesting how your mind shuts down unpleasant memories and allows you to be overtaken and surprised by the past. Seeing Ramona was absolutely the last thing on my mind that August night in Arkansas. I was too busy thinking about how the local press was going to spin my speech—I had inadvertently referred to one of my ever-present political opponents as a habitual communist. I had meant to say "columnist," as in a newspaper writer, because he was always sending in unkind letters to the editor about me to whatever rag would give him ink. Unfortunately,

what I intended as a gentle poke had turned into a major puncture wound.

Suddenly, however, there was Ramona. She had apparently spotted me before I had a clue as to what was going on. Her show was fabulous, feathers, fur, tail and all, and her smile was as brilliant as ever. Although it was quite a shock to me, as far as I could tell, my wife never made the connection

between her husband and wild woman up on the stage. I was amazed that she never suspected a thing, or if she did, she was either letting it slide or saving it for some future retaliation.

However, I realized that, at that instant, the old Ramona-shaped hole in my heart had been re-opened, and I also knew that this time, it would never heal.

As we exited the tent after the show, in a moment of weakness, I almost confessed and blurted out my feelings. But just as I opened my mouth and my prisoner-brain began forming the electrical impulses that would be converted into audible words, my daughter looked up at us and smiled happily. "I love the wild, wild woman from Borneo," she said.

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# Granddaddy's Country Store

BY SYLVIA A. NASH

I stood on tiptoes, stretched both arms, but the fish bowls full of candy on the counter were just too high for me to reach alone.

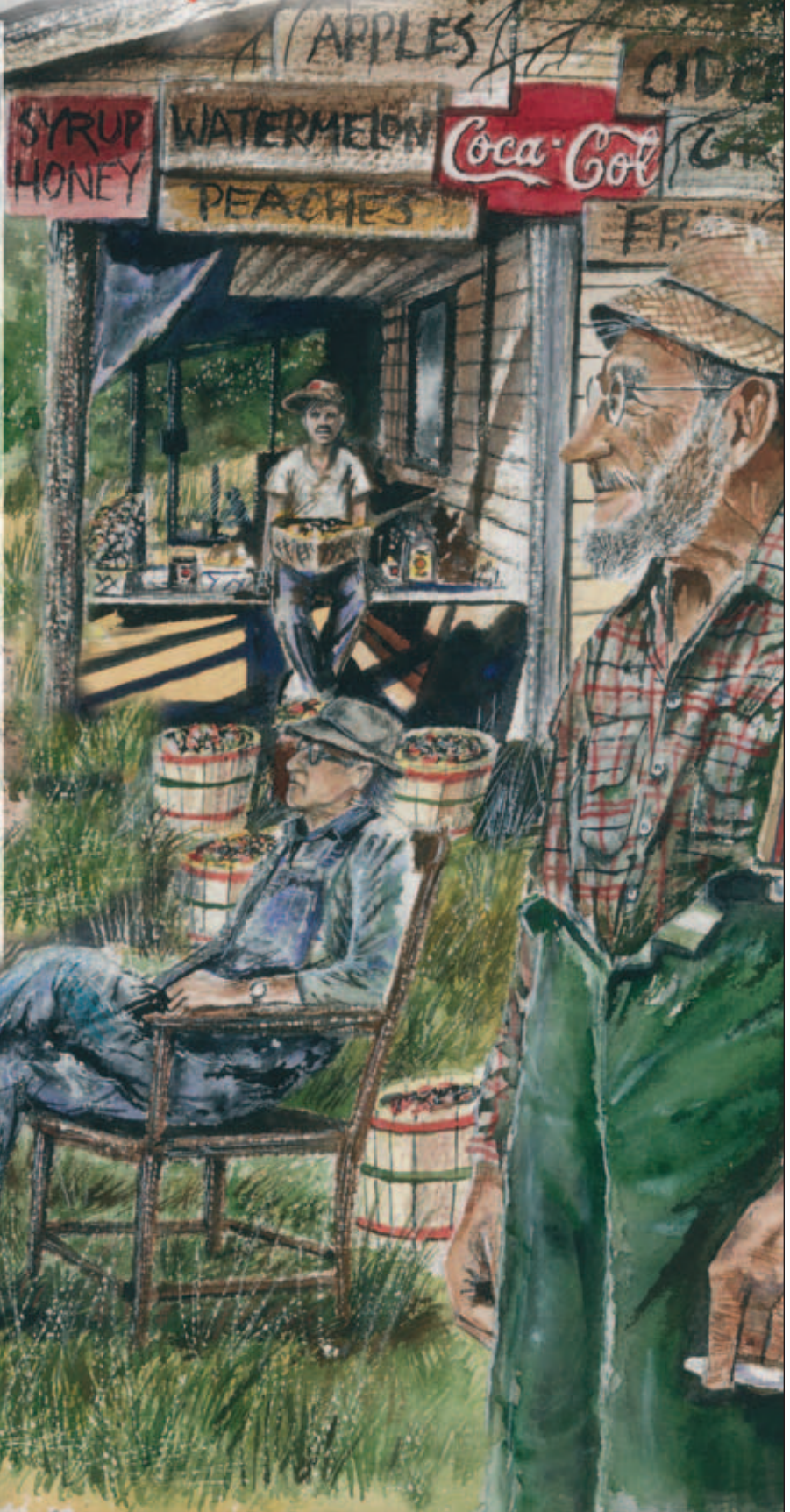
Then Granddaddy came and reached them for me so he and I could have a peppermint while we both drank our Chocolate Soldiers.

Other times a nickel Coca Cola with crackers and thick-cut rag bologna were our treats.

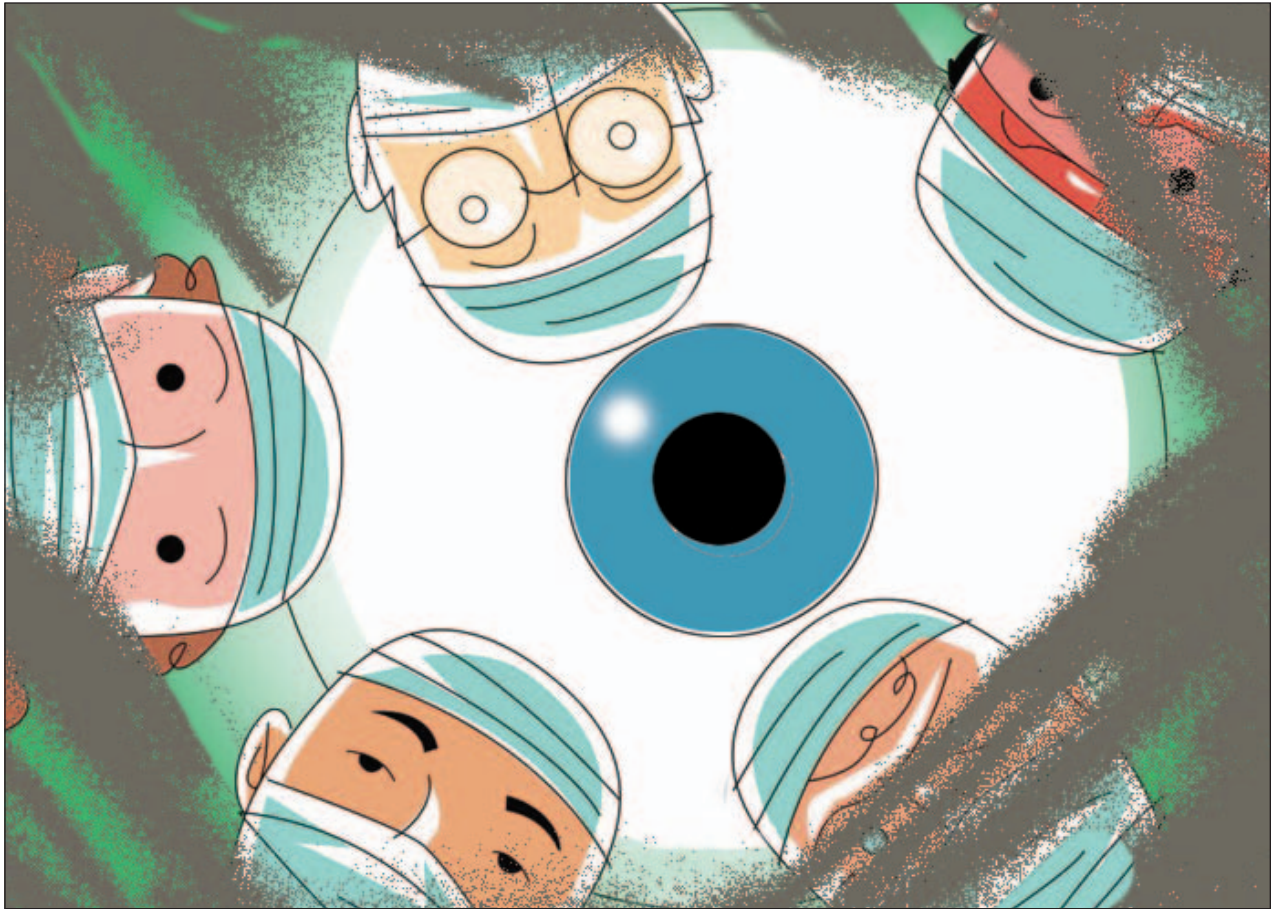
We sat in the cane-backed chairs on the old porch where bales of hay now rest, stacked next to the trough of dirty water for the donkeys watching me take photos.

The Coca Cola sign still hangs out front, but the door is locked to children wanting peppermint.

I leave the donkeys drinking and drive back down the empty, dusty road, wishing for a cool Chocolate Soldier to wash away the lump in my own throat.







# The Painter

A stroke survivor's memoir by Paul Dunlap

**I**'ve never considered myself to be a painter; I've always preferred making music to slinging a brush and covering walls. What's more, I've also never had a beef with a painter, and, for that matter, I had never been intimidated by them. That's what made my encounter with this one so curious.

It was late March in Tennessee, and it was already warming up for Spring. That Sunday evening, my wife, Connie and I were home talking about the upcoming summer. We were planning a trip to Cabo San Lucas on Mexico's Baja Peninsula.

Summers are wonderful here in Tennessee, though, especially in the woods of the mountains. We love the mountains, and with that in mind, we considered vacationing in Montana. But after going back and forth from beach to mountain to beach, we finally decided on Cabo. It would be our first time out of the U.S.—to an exotic tropical beach paradise, no less.

That Sunday, I had a headache all afternoon, which was unusual, because I never had headaches. It hurt on the right side under my temple—a constant, dull ache. Because I very rarely took any medicine, I

didn't take anything for the pain, thinking I would just tough it out.

Connie's phone rang, and she went into the kitchen, out the back door, and down the steps off the deck, to the area where the cars are parked. I walked into the kitchen following her, but I didn't go outside. It was already dark, but the porch light was on, so I could see her.

Then I noticed something odd. I could clearly hear everything she was saying. I thought, "I could never do that before." Then I noticed I could clearly hear the person she was talking to on the phone. I got very excited, because I had been a musician all my life, and I thought, "This is great—God has suddenly blessed me with super hearing. I will be able to hear things in music I have never heard before." Connie came back inside, and I told her the

great news. She looked at me like I had maybe lost touch with reality.

We eventually went to bed, and I slept well through the night, waking up at my usual time of 4:30 A.M. I took my shower, went back into the bedroom and picked out my clothes. I raised my right foot to put it in my trousers, and I immediately fell in the floor. Connie was awake in the bed, and she asked me if I was already drunk that morning. We both laughed at that. Then, suddenly serious, she asked if I was okay. I told her I had just lost my balance, but something didn't seem quite right. Connie wanted to call 911, but I told her to just let me rest on the bed a minute, and I'd be okay.

"Now your speech is slurred," she said, becoming alarmed, "I'm calling Joe." Joe was our neighbor.

Since I was struggling and couldn't seem to get up off the floor, I told her "okay." Connie called both Joe and 911.

Joe came over immediately and started joking about me being in the floor. We all laughed. Then Joe tried to help me up, but even with our combined efforts, I couldn't get up off the floor.

The ambulance arrived, and two men came in. They looked at me struggling in the floor and knew immediately that I had had a stroke. I was picked up and put on a stretcher, and then I noticed that I couldn't keep my left arm up on the stretcher. Someone laid it across my chest and told me to hold it with my right hand. The ambulance guys put me in the back of their rig, one got in with me, and off we went.

My first stop was Middle Tennessee Medical Center where an MRI was done of my head. The doctor confirmed that I had had a stroke, but there was nothing he could do to help me. Connie and my son, Josh were both there, and Connie called Vanderbilt University Hospital in Nashville and spoke with a doctor who knew a procedure that could help. It was pouring rain, and life-flight was not running, so it was back to the ambulance and off to Vanderbilt, and we got there in no time flat.

I was beginning to see that something very wrong had happened. I was taken from the ambulance to an elevator. I don't know if we went up or down, but when the doors opened, I saw what looked like a cafeteria. There were five men in white coats at the closest table. They immediately got up and came towards me. I noticed one of them had a syringe in his hand.

One of the men told me to count backwards from twenty—he said by the time I got to one, I would be asleep.

So, right there in the elevator I started 20...19...18...all the way to one. Then I panicked and thought, "I'm at 'one,' and I'm not asleep! Something has gone wrong!"

Then, I woke up lying on my right side and immediately opened my eyes. The room was totally dark. Not a bit of light anywhere. A deep male voice came out of the dark very close to my head and said, "You have had a bad stroke."

I thought, "How did he know my eyes were open?" It was too dark to see anything. I fell back to sleep and when I woke again and opened my eyes I saw a nurse with her head turned the same as mine and just about a foot away, staring into my eyes. She said loudly and with surprise, "You look good!" I saw that I was in a bed in a brightly-lit hospital room.

The doctor came in with a wheelchair and got me out of bed to show me around. I couldn't even sit up without help. They put me in the chair and rolled me out of the room and down the hall.

This is when I encountered the painter. He wore a short billed white hat, a white t-shirt and white overalls, and he was a tiny man. And when I say "tiny," I mean he was

small enough to come crawling out of my tear duct.

The painter crawled over into my right eye and stood up laughing quietly to himself. "Hee hee hee," he chuckled. He had a paint roller in his right hand, and he began to methodically paint a stripe of gray from top to bottom across the center of my vision.

## The painter crawled over into my right eye and stood up laughing quietly to himself.

I thought, "No, please don't do that—I won't be able to see."

But he just laughed, "Hee hee hee!" Then he disappeared back into my tear duct in the corner of my eye. I was afraid he was going to get more paint. Soon the painter crawled back out and went right to work painting a horizontal stripe across the center of my vision from right to left. I thought, "No, please stop. I won't be able to see!"

He turned towards me with his left fist on his left hip and his right fist still holding the paint roller on his right hip. He leaned back a little (still chuckling quietly, "hee hee hee!"), and then turned back to his work, painting a stripe from the top right to the bottom left.

The next stripe from the top left to the bottom right finished defining a box, and the painter then started filling in the holes between the lines. I was still saying, "No-o-o-o-o-o, I can't see through that!" Soon each hole was covered and the tiny man disappeared back from where he came.

Fortunately, the gray square on my right eye doesn't cover all my vision. In that eye. I can still see doorways going by in the hall with my peripheral vision, but if I looked at anything directly, it was covered by the gray box. I wasn't screaming though, because the doctor who had saved my life was pushing me down the hall. I couldn't

see him, but I knew he was there.

Finally I said, "Dr. Kirshner, I have gone blind in one eye." He came around to the front of the chair, to my right side so I could see him.

"Which eye?" he asked, calmly.

I said, "My right eye." Then I told him about the painter. He smiled as if he understood and disappeared behind me to resume pushing my chair down the hall. The doctor's seeming lack of concern for my story calmed me. So I relaxed and watched the doorways and walls of the hall roll by. The doctor took me back to my hospital room and got me back into my bed. Soon, I was asleep again.

When I woke up, my vision was fine...no gray paint nor tiny painter anywhere. I was in my bed, in my hospital room, laying on my right side with my left side paralyzed. Connie and Josh were there. "Don't worry," they said, "In six months you'll be past all this."

There it was...*hope* from the people I loved. "God," I prayed, "Thank You. Thank You for hope and love." Hope will keep me going, but it's the people I love that will keep me *hoping*.

**pauldunlap@comcast.net**

**E-Publisher's Note:** I met Paul Dunlap in September of 1974. It was the first week of our Freshman year in college. I was sitting in my dorm room playing my guitar, and he asked if he could join me on guitar. We started a band that night called "Contents Under Pressure," and we've been playing music together ever since. Since his stroke in the Spring of '07, he has slowly been regaining the use of his left arm and leg and is currently relearning how to play his music. To hear a track which features him on saxophone, go to [www.southernreader.com/LevidLady.mp3](http://www.southernreader.com/LevidLady.mp3). We recorded it in a New York City studio in the late 1970s.

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# Hunting for Major Bibb

by Charlton Walters Hillis

**M**y mother's parents died before I was born. We were limited to stories about them, pictures, and letters, as with long deceased generations. As a child I thought of them that way, as people from another time.

It did not occur to me that had they lived to be old, they would have been a part of my life the same as my Grandma Walters. At some point in my adult life, I began to wish they had lived longer just so I could have known them.

My grandfather was an East Texas lawyer, and in spite of that, he was a man of high principles, known for his honesty and well respected in Marshall, Texas. Leisure time was spent in fishing and hunting at his beloved Caddo lake, and he was an environmentalist before his time, fighting to preserve the Caddo Lake environment against encroaching developments.

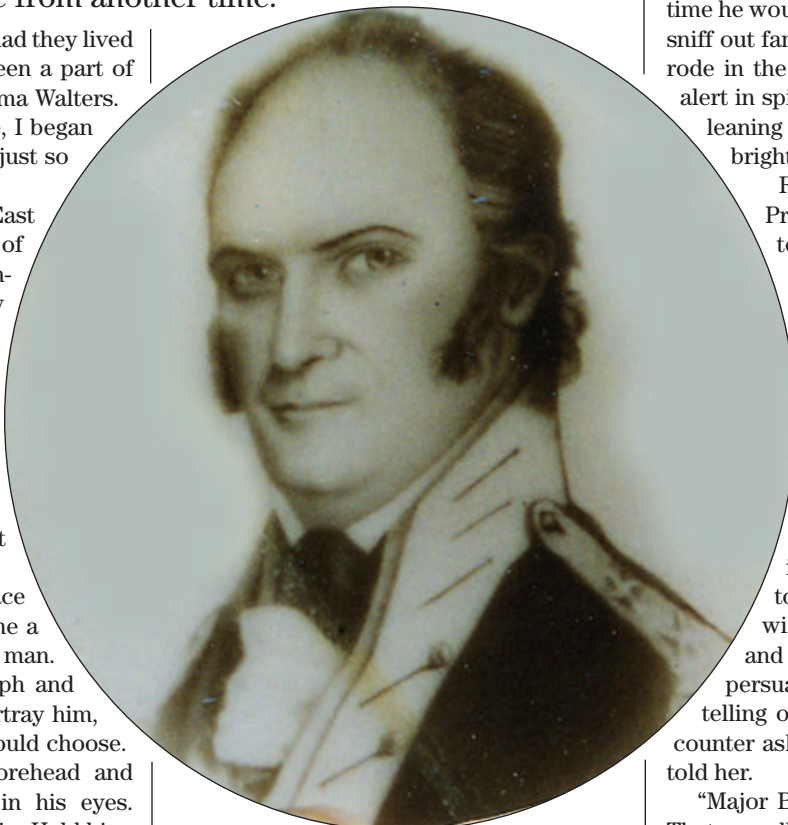
Grandfather Bibb's very face in the old photographs is to me a perfect representation of the man. Had I never seen a photograph and had to choose an actor to portray him, that's just the sort of face I would choose. His was a visage of high forehead and straight lines. Direct look in his eyes. Brushed back, thick brown hair. Held himself like *he was somebody*, as we say down South.

My sister Connie is seriously into genealogy. With her down for a visit, we decided to take a day trip up to western Kentucky, to a spot she had long wished to visit. A great-great-great-great (count them, four greats) grandfather on the Bibb side had made his home in Russellville. He was a Major in the Revolutionary War. Something penned decades ago told us that there was a house in the area; whether it was still standing or not, we had no idea. Thinking of that brought scenes of ruins rising out of tall grass in some desolate place outside town, long forgotten by all but grazing cattle.

Among my Grandfather Bibb's papers is a letter to his brothers and sister recounting a trip he took to Kentucky as a young man in 1905. He wanted them to know the results of his research on family history. Being the sort of man he was, he first cautioned them in exactly this way: "If they

(his younger siblings) find in this anything that will tend to create vanity, I hope that they will realize that though a just pride in the deeds and breeding of our ancestors is not only permissible but is to be admired, yet at the same time we must realize that no credit is due us and the world owes us nothing for their qualities, and that the man who attempts to rely upon his ancestry for a place and position in life, or who appears to demand recognition and expect subserviency from others by reason of his ancestry, is generally the most contemptible specimen of humanity."

On that trip he had visited relatives in both Frankfort and Louisville, but never made it to Russellville. Discussing it, we wondered why he had not just zipped down through Russellville on his way home to Texas. No doubt it was not so easy with train schedules to reach all the spots he would have liked. In that letter he gave the basic facts of Major Richard Bibb. That was about the extent of our knowledge.



With the admittedly irrelevant tune of John Prine's "Paradise" running through my head, we set off. I had the odd yet comforting feeling that we were taking Grandfather Bibb along with us, that this time he would make it to Logan County and sniff out family history right beside us. He rode in the back seat, sitting straight and alert in spite of advanced age, sometimes leaning forward in expectation, eyes bright with anticipation.

Russellville isn't backwards like Prine's Paradise, but a pretty little town with historical markers and statues taking advantage of the shady square. Here it was evident we were in a town deeply into its history, although we didn't recognize any names on the square. Our stop at the Chamber of Commerce almost didn't happen, because Connie's experience is that the chambers are interested in business, not history. There was a sign on the window reading "Tourist Info," and I, a novice to ancestor hunting, persuaded her to go inside. Upon telling our business, the woman at the counter asked for a name. "Bibb," Connie told her.

"Major Bibb?" was the quick response. That was all it took. Major Bibb, it seemed, was as well known in Russellville as the current mayor. She whipped out brochures about his house, which, it turned out, is not only still standing but is a museum and one of the town's chief historic sites. She brought out books and helped in every way she could think of but was sorry to inform us the historical society did not currently have funds to keep the museum open to visitors. When we asked if there might not be a chance of calling someone who just might show us through anyway, she jumped on the phone until she found someone who would indeed meet us there.

This woman proved to have once lived in the house herself for a short time so took a personal interest in it. She hailed from Monroe, Louisiana, just down the road from Marshall, Texas, which my mother and Grandfather Bibb called home. Like the Chamber of Commerce worker, she could not have been more congenial. She showed us through every room and told us much we did not know. In the Greek

Revival style, brick originally red and now painted white, the house on Eighth Street is large and wonderful, as such old houses always are.

She told us about two tunnels, now sealed off, beneath the house, the purpose of which no one is certain, but most suspect to have been used to hide runaway slaves. For Richard Bibb was known first not for his military service nor for his wealth, but for being an emancipationist.

As an old man in 1829 he stood on the shaded lawn of that very house (the event included both tears and singing, according to the words of a young black lad who saw the whole thing and was so overwhelmed he ran inside and hid under a bed), asked a divine blessing on them and freed twenty-nine of his slaves, sending them to Liberia. It is recorded that the ones chosen for this journey were those without spouses and those he deemed to be troublemakers.

Sending freed slaves to Liberia was being attempted at the time by others, with results varying.

The remaining fifty-eight were to be freed at Mr. Bibb's death, which occurred ten years later. From all accounts, it was a long cherished dream, a carefully thought out plan, a response to a moral imperative. He did not leave them unprepared to fend for themselves. He left them some 1,500 acres to farm, with all of his livestock, tools and wagons, as well as a trust fund to be doled out over time by executors. The rural area where they settled is still known as Bibb Town, many having taken his surname. The will laying out his wishes for them can be seen in the Logan County courthouse.

Now much could be said about the details of the whole thing. Once having decided to free slaves, why pick and choose some to go and some to stay, why make some wait until after his death? Why own slaves in the first place? Considering the time and place, the society and culture and upbringing involved (many were inherited from his own father), we can only say the decision must have taken much initiative and courage. In such a setting, even if one began as a child thinking to himself the original thought, "It is not right to own slaves," it must have taken many years to reach that point at which he would actually take steps to revoke slavery in his own family. He had several children of his own and left them a good inheritance as well. The best thing he did for them was to leave them no slaves.

We went to the library next. A small

woman in a crisp, plaid cotton dress with full skirt and sensible shoes came over to the genealogy section to ask if she could be of help. With her soft voice and neat gray perm, she put one in mind of home-baked pies and iced tea, front porches and newly mowed lawns with flower beds. She bore the scent of genteel small town life. Her volunteer librarian's name tag said "Helen Mayes." She produced a whole file on our man, but in the library, as with the house, there was no picture of him. The only one known to exist, a portrait miniature, belonged to our brother. Connie had once taken a photograph of that and offered to send a copy to the library, to Mrs. Maye's delight. She volunteered to drive us herself in an attempt to find the old cemetery which was next on our agenda. Major Bibb was not buried in the town cemetery but in a small family graveyard on his farm and near the chapel he had built, for he was

**She told us about two tunnels, now sealed off, beneath the house, the purpose of which no one is certain, but most suspect to have been used to hide runaway slaves.**

also a Methodist minister, a dissident in a long line of Episcopalians.

The graveyard had apparently not been kept up over the years, and no one seemed to know the exact spot. It was thought a sign had recently been put up, but even that was uncertain. Helen Mayes, though, knew both the area and the people and was most interested in the history of Logan County and Richard Bibb in particular. This brave woman had no hesitation about taking into her nice automobile two strangers (and one she could not be aware of, for Grandfather Bibb climbed into the back seat with me). To her credit, there was an unmistakable hat pin ominously stuck in the driver's seat by her, on the side next to the passenger seat. She drove us down more than one country road and inquired of more than one local before we happened upon a small green sign on Echo Valley Road, reading "Bibb Chapel Cemetery." It was hard to tell who was more excited, our driver or ourselves.

The people who farmed there turned out to be former next door neighbors of hers, who informed us it was "just right down that way." We walked down a lane until we finally gave up and turned back, not finding any semblance of a cemetery. While Helen walked back to ask more specific directions, Connie and I decided to

enter a wooded area we had at first passed up, enclosed within a rusty and leaning fence and gate which were barely visible for the foliage. It certainly looked like a place for a graveyard, but it was so overgrown that one could see nothing but trees and high weeds. Poison ivy quite literally carpeted the ground. Only after walking a while could a trail be made out. Even then there was no sign of headstones.

We were quite a ways back into the place and wondering if our guide would think us lost, when she came ploughing through the undergrowth behind us for all the world, as if she were dressed in full hiking gear instead of dress and hose. She had done this before. We were impressed. And, she had been told, in the right place. Bibb's Chapel had been right in here until burning down. Somewhere in the area had been a house. We later found only a few ticks, it being May and too early for them to be out

in full force. Mrs. Mayes said her hose could still be worn under pants in the winter, but Grandfather Bibb fared the best, being unencumbered with such mortal concerns. After we branched out from the trail, delving into deeper

and deeper brush, we began to find the old stones like children hunting Easter eggs, first one and then another, never more than two or three in sight at one time and usually no more than one. But no matter how many we found, there was not one Bibb name to be found. We finally left, after having searched the area quite thoroughly.

Back at the library, we discovered there were actually two cemeteries, the second described as being "across the pasture" from our find. (That could be in either of several directions.) It was too late in the day for Mrs. Mayes to continue with us, so we parted and after eating a bite in town, decided to go back and hunt for the second cemetery on our own. This one is called the Bibb-Lewis or the Bibb, Lewis, Slaughter Cemetery. A newspaper article had given directions, but the writer who had researched both had never been successful in finding the Major's stone. She did give specific road names and a mailbox number, as well as the name of the people who had lived on the farm.

Again on Echo Valley Road, all we found was the rusty skeleton of a mailbox at a lane where by rights that number should have been. There was no sign of a house, only an old barn in the distance. It looked as if any residents might have long since packed up and moved away. We drove up



the lane anyway, and on the other side of a curve and a hill was an old, two-story farmhouse with a three-year-old boy playing in the yard. In spite of his young age, he seemed to size us up with a dubious eye, totally unafraid, but not about to be taken in by anybody.

His grandparents answered to the name given in the directions, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Slaten. They were pure country and as different from the people we had been meeting all day as might be imagined, but they were every bit as hospitable and more than willing to help.

They not only knew the exact location of the cemetery but had themselves cleaned up some of the stones at one time. An extra thrown in at no charge was first being shown their Watussis, a wild looking African breed of cattle with enormous horns, recently purchased, apparently just for the novelty of it.

They took us there (directions for future generations: just up from the old barn, past peacocks on a fence and red, horned cattle—not Watussi—on the hill in a grove of trees). Mrs. Slaten said the peacocks' nocturnal cries often sounded like they were calling her husband: "Hey, Earl! Hey, Earl!"

The stones here were mostly visible, but many were flat on the ground, broken, and strewn about. Here was my scene of ruin and desolation, complete with cattle. The

four of us dug through weeds and bushes, finding more hidden stones, brushing off mud with our hands and rubbing on flour Mrs. Slaten had brilliantly brought along, to bring out inscriptions which could not have been otherwise read. Some still could not be read. The cows joined us, curious and shoving their way around through the

**The Slatens had seen the Major's grave with their own eyes when they first moved to the place.**

bushes as if trying to help. Mr. Slaten in gray khakis was lying prone on the ground at times, giving his all to pulling away growth from fallen stones. Amid her own efforts, his wife kept passing out flour and yelling at the cows to shoo. Connie and I were standing, balancing in see-saw fashion, on top of the lids of the box-like tombs, many half off and revealing empty tombs.

Here there were many Bibbs, but try as we might, we could not locate Richard, only his two wives (on the old tombstones the wife was sometimes referred to by the curious term of consort) and several children. The Slatens, however, had seen the Major's grave with their own eyes, when they first moved to the place and did some brush clearing. They thought to find it again but could not on this day. It was reas-

suring to find someone who had actually seen it and to be able to know for certain we were in the right spot. It was getting late in the day, and we finally separated to go home. We'll be back.

Grandfather Bibb, in that aforementioned letter, quoted an elderly cousin in Frankfort. "Dear Joe," she had written. "I have copied out the record from the family Bible for you, so you can see what nice people you belong to. I think it is very well to know these things; not to depend on them, but to make us wish to live worthy of those who have gone before."

So it was the next county down from Muhlenberg, and it wasn't, thankfully, hauled away by anyone's coal train. But there's a similar longing to go back in a lot of us, and something deeply satisfying about retracing the steps of those who came before us, of finally seeing with our own eyes the scenes of all the old stories. And it just might in some way inspire us to be better people.

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# The Peddler on the Mountain

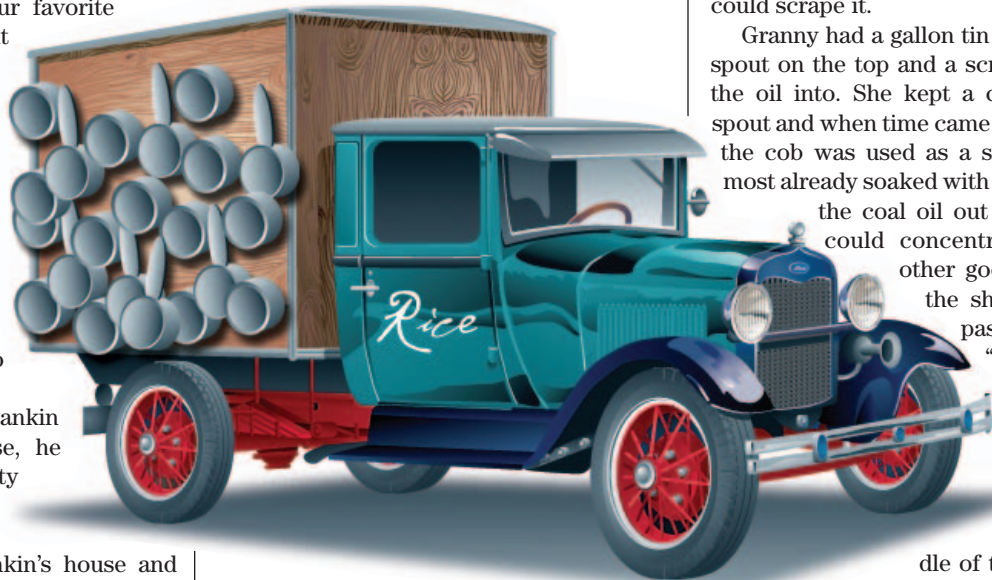
by Judy Ricker

**A** little ways down the road—about 60-70 years down the road—was a wondrous and memorable icon in the White Rock section of Madison County, North Carolina in the form of Mr. Earl Rice's rolling store, better known to us as "The Peddler."

Wednesday became our favorite day when we could sit out on the porch and listen for him to make the turn from the main road and start up our remote, rocky and bumpy road. As he came by Jesse Wallin's house, he had to change gears to start up the hill. The engine would roar and the gears would grind as he shifted into "bulldog."

By the time he got to Rankin and Emily Wallin's house, he was coming on pretty strong. There was a huge rock that crossed the entire road between Rankin's house and ours that years of rain and wear had made quite a step up if you were coming up the road. When it rained, the water would stream down the road over that rock and make a small waterfall that fascinated us into standing barefoot and letting the cool water splash over our feet. But when Mr. Rice's truck hit that rock, it started a racket that you could hear for miles.

Galvanized pots and pans were tied to the sides of the truck on nails and they would clatter and clang together as the truck jolted from side to side. The chickens that were in the coops would squawk and cackle, and we knew we would have time to get from the porch to the road before he stopped in front of our house. Granny never seemed to be filled with such a wonder as we were, and she kept on working until she heard him stop. Then she would come on down to the road with her trading goods. She had a little black leather change purse that she kept in her apron pocket. It was worn from many years of opening and closing, and we knew we were in for a treat when she opened that metal clasp on the top that opened and closed it. I think she knew Mr. Rice wasn't



All the wonderful smells and aromas, filtered through the lens of childhood, make me think of soap and camphor and horehound candy and peppermint and leather all rolled up together.

going anywhere with a bunch of youngun's standing in the middle of the road yelling and waving like a bunch of banshees.

That truck was so filled with wonders that it would be impossible to list them all without leaving something out. The bed was all weathered wood with a tin roof, so tall it swamped the low branches of the trees as it swung by. On each of the outside walls hung galvanized pots and pans of all sizes and shapes. They were hung on nails and tied with hay baling string. There were cast iron skillet and stove eye lifters, shovel handles and axe handles.

The chicken coops were tied to the bottom where there was a small running board that he could walk down and get things off the side of the truck, or to put a chicken in a coop if someone had one to trade. Mr. Rice had enamel pots, but he kept them inside as they were easy to chip and everyone knew an enamel pot would leak after it

was chipped. As we came nearer, the more wondrous the smells became. There was a big wooden 55-gallon barrel of coal oil that he had strapped to the back. The coal oil was used to start fireplace fires and wood cook stove fires and huge fires at hog killing time to heat the water that scorched the hair off the sides of the hog so you could scrape it.

Granny had a gallon tin can with a little spout on the top and a screw lid to pump the oil into. She kept a corn cob in the spout and when time came to build the fire, the cob was used as a starter as it was most already soaked with oil. Once we got the coal oil out of the way, we could concentrate on all the other goodies that lined the shelves once you passed through the "golden" door that was swung wide to display all his wares.

There was an aisle down the middle of the truck with a wooden floor. The floor planks were wide oak with tongue and groove, sturdy to hold all the weight of the goods. Shelves lined each side from bottom to top with the back of the shelf slanted downward to keep the wares from sliding off in the floor

as he made his way across the rough and rocky roads of Shelton Laurel.

All the wonderful smells and aromas, filtered through the lens of childhood, make me think of soap and camphor and horehound candy and peppermint and leather all rolled up together. There was a 25-pound cake of hoop cheese. It came in a round wooden box with a lid and *special people* got first choice of that box when it was empty. Granny had two of them, one she kept her yarn in and the other was filled with quilt scraps.

Flour came in 25-pound sacks, sugar in 100-pound sacks and salt usually in 10-pound sacks. The sugar came in bigger sacks because sometimes the sugar was used for more than just making cakes (especially when mixed with corn). Mr. Rice also had various kinds of animal feed, like cow feed and horse feed in 100-pound sacks, but we usually grew our own feed,



kept in the corn crib beside the barn. In the winter time, Granny would add a cup of molasses to the corn to give the cows and horses a little extra energy to weather the snowy days. The flour and sugar sacks had special cotton prints that were saved and sewn into aprons and pot holders and dresses for some. I remember one lady who had made a dress out of a feed sack and it had "100 pounds net weight" written right across her behind.

Below the bottom shelf on the floor were wooden kegs with screws, nails, horse shoes, horse shoe nails. Mr. Rice also had a keg of crackers that he sold by the pound. That was before saltine crackers came in a plastic tube inside a square box. There were jars of liniment, tins of salve and various tins and bottles for all cures and ailments.

Granny did the bartering for most of the goods. She would have a big fat hen already caught with its legs tied together to trade. Mr. Rice would take the hen and hook the legs on a hanging scale to tell how much it weighed so he could give an equal amount of goods for the weight of the hen. Granny had already crossed the chicken's wings and tied them so she wouldn't flop about and squawk. Mr. Rice would then put the hen in one of the cages on the outside of the truck if there was room, but he also had a trap door in the middle of the aisle that led to a coop beneath the truck, and sometimes he would put the hen in there.

Granny had big fat Dominecker hens and also had several red hens—Rhode Island Reds—but we laughingly called them *Red Island Rhodes*. She kept these hens because they laid big brown eggs with thick yellow yolks that made the cakes richer and gave a golden color to her pound cakes. If we had been especially good (and Granny always led us to believe we had, even though we knew we hadn't), we would each be given a big brown egg and Mr. Rice would trade the egg for a bag of candy. But first, he had a

rolled-up tube of paper—it was kind of like a modern-day paper towel holder. He would hold that tube up to his eye, hold the egg to the other end and hold it up to the sun to see if it had a chick in it. Of course, he couldn't sell an egg with a chicken in it, so Granny always made sure our egg was fresh and wouldn't be hatching out a baby chick when someone was getting ready to bake a cake.

We stared with wonderment at the ribbons, lace and thread and sometimes want-

Then Mr. Rice was off on up the road, and we were happy with our wares, our mouths all sweet and sugary.

ed to trade our egg for some of those just so we could look at it, but Granny said you can't eat ribbons and lace, so we didn't trade for that. She would trade shuck beans or "leather britches," 'cause some city folks didn't have the chance to grow beans for leather britches. Shuck beans are green beans that have been strung and broken into pieces and sewed onto a thread and hung in the attic to dry. It takes five pounds of green beans to make one "mess" of leather britches, but after they are soaked in water all night and cooked with

a piece of side meat, there is no other taste like it. She always said a green bean without a string on it ain't worth a lick.

Granny usually traded for a piece of camphor that she would put in a jar of alcohol and use to rub on your chest for a cold or sore throat. She would trade for some *Garrett's Sweet Snuff*, salt, and sometimes flour and baking powder, cinnamon and sugar.

After all the trading was done, Granny would buy some extra candy and take it in the house to hide from us so she could dole it out on special occasions, but we always found her hiding place and hoped she wouldn't miss the pieces we had taken.

Then Mr. Rice was off on up the road, and we were happy with our wares, our mouths all

sweet and sugary and blowing bubble gum bubbles that would burst and stick all over the front of our face. We'd see who could blow the biggest bubble, then reach over and make it pop all over their face.

We would be content just knowing that next week, Wednesday would eventually roll around, and it would find us on the porch, once again, waiting for the mountain peddler.

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# 597 A.D.

by Jerry Nash

The ruins of the abbey stretched out  
Before our small band of travelers  
Seven of us at war with ourselves and each other.

Awed by the grandeur of Canterbury  
Awed by what had been rather than what was  
We explored the grounds in pairs and alone.

A marker for Augustine  
On his own mission fourteen centuries ago  
At rest now in a foreign land.

Ancient rocks outlined hallways and sanctuary  
Remnants of archways framed an altar in the afternoon sun  
We scrambled over walls with cameras and wide eyes.

Pictures, scattered laughter, and silence amid lengthening shadows  
We sat on the grassy rise above the ruins in the cool, English summer afternoon  
Relaxing on the edge of history.

And for just that moment peace reigned  
Oblivious to the endings and beginnings that lay ahead  
For that moment we were truly alive, suspended in time.

No anger, no arguments, no fear  
Surrounded by our own company, the ruins in front, the hedges behind  
Another band of Chaucer's pilgrims finding shelter.

The train leaving soon for London  
We slipped out the gate quietly into the evening chill  
Peace lingered, though not nearly as long as the memory.



# The Hawkins County Invasion

by Stephen Hyder

**B**arry “Byrd” Burton was a true guitar hero—no, not with an “air guitar” or a toy—but with a Gretsch Country Gentleman, a semi-acoustic Rickenbacker electric 12 string, a Fender Stratocaster or even a Danelectro “short horn.”

He was so far above and beyond me in musical talent and accomplishment that it approaches a brash sacrilege to refer to me and him on the same musical planet, much less this article. Byrd passed away at age 61

with a rare form of cancer on March 10, 2008, at Vanderbilt Hospital, and he and his immense talent will be sorely missed by the artists in Nashville who benefitted from his work—Dolly Parton, Dan Fogelberg, Judy Rodman, Suzy Bogus, Nanci Griffith, Brooks & Dunn, Don Williams, The Oak Ridge Boys, Emmylou Harris, Crystal Gayle, Mickey Gilley, John Conlee, Judy Rodman, TG Sheppard, Bobby Braddock, Pinkard and Bowden, and Bobby Bare, to name just a few.

Barry grew up in my sleepy little East Tennessee hometown of Rogersville, where his first claim to fame was as a starting forward/center for the Rogersville High School Warriors basketball team. He was 6 foot, 5, and he attended Hiwassee College on a basketball scholarship for a short time after graduation. I say a short time, because it wasn't long before his high school buddies (who had started college at the University of Tennessee),

Terry Johnson and Doug Graham, coaxed him to get over to Knoxville so the group could get serious about their true passion—playing music. But excuse me, I am getting ahead of myself a bit.

The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the

Animals, Dave Clark Five, the Hollies, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Who, the Yardbirds, Them, Herman's Hermits, and a slew of other rock bands were a part of the “British Invasion” of America of the 1960's.



Everybody remembers the four consecutive Ed Sullivan Show appearances of the Beatles in 1964 probably as vividly as the moon landing in 1969.

America went nuts over the new musical phenomenon, and it generated an equal

number of talented, successful American groups: the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, the Doors, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Cream, Jimi Hendrix Experience, Chicago, Credence Clearwater Revival, and many others.

None of us were immune to the influence, and the Rogersville group of music-makers—led by Barry Burton—grabbed the brass ring of rock music at about the right time. These musicians started as “Terry & the Casuals,” and this was in and around Rogersville, but by the time they

began honing their craft in Knoxville, they had become “The Loved Ones,” and they were good...*real good*.

I can remember the one occasion that The Loved Ones played a gig at “The Barn” in Rogersville. The Barn was a former auto body shop/warehouse-type building turned teen hangout/dance place across the street from the First Baptist Church cemetery. The hangout was started by Ernest R. “Doc” McConnell, who is now a world-renowned storyteller and snake oil salesman, and whose traveling medicine show appears frequently at events across the country. At one time, Doc was my Scoutmaster at Troop 100 of the Boy Scouts in Rogersville, and incidentally, Barry Burton was an alumnus of that troop.

That night, I was standing in the middle of the concrete, oil-stained dance floor, staring at the band as Barry Burton strapped on the semi-acoustic Rickenbacker electric 12-string, and the band started playing

“Eight Miles High” by the Byrds. This must have been in 1968, but I remember it as clearly as if it were last night. I was frozen to the floor; I couldn't believe that anyone could play such a difficult guitar intro to a song like “Eight Miles High” and it be a

flawless rendition exactly as played by Roger McGuinn.

And Barry didn't just stand there and idly play the notes on the guitar with precision; he attacked the fretboard, punctuating the melody at the high points with a jerk of the guitar neck and rolling the instrument through the low notes. Not only did Barry and the boys know their music right down to the bare nitty-gritty, but they played their music with an unforgettable fire—lost in the passion for what they were doing. That moment is how I will always remember Barry Burton, and the influence of it was not lost on me or on my twin brother, David.

The Loved Ones were the first wave of the "Hawkins County Invasion," and in the popular vernacular, they ruled. The world may have had Eric Clapton, but Hawkins County, Tennessee had Barry Burton. I never knew all of the particulars of what ultimately happened to The Loved Ones, but I know that the group nearly secured a recording contract in New York City with Roulette Records. The deal fell through, but Byrd went on. He played lead guitar on "Third Rate Romance," the seminal, Grammy-winning hit for the "Amazing Rhythm Aces" and toured the world with that group for a while. He then settled into a prodigious career as a session musician within the vast recording industry in Nashville.

Our high school class had its rock music aficionados, too. In 1964 as eighth graders, Benny Wilson, George Rogers, my twin brother, David, and I made our first appearance in a Rogersville Grammar School-sponsored *4-H Share-the-Fun* contest. We billed ourselves as "The Missing Links," and we barely knew how to play music. George had a snare drum and an 8-inch cymbal. Benny had a black-sparkle Silvertone guitar with an amplifier in the carrying case, and David and I were playing twin bronze-colored Danelectro's through a small amp with a ten-inch speaker. We all wore yellow, short-sleeved dress shirts, blazing red vests with big gold buttons (which our mothers had sewn) and green-and-white striped denim bell bottoms. We played two original songs (we didn't know enough yet to "cover" someone else's hits): "Ruby," 90% of which was a Ventures-style instrumental and 10% Little Richard (the lyrics were: "Oh! oh! Ruby! Come on, baby!")

which Benny sang, and another little instrumental ditty which resembled the "Peter Gunn" theme song.

The crowd of pre-teens in the school auditorium went ballistically nuts. This was in the Beatles/Ed Sullivan Show time frame and it's easy to understand that anytime four boys got on stage with guitars and rocked 'n' rolled—or at least made the attempt—



the audience would respond accordingly. They did, and we were hooked. We were not yet even in high school, and we had—in our eyes—achieved rock star status! What's more, we won the purple ribbon, too.

Some of the crowd said, "You guys are better than 'The Loved Ones.'"  
I knew better.

For the next five years we played music, practiced, and played more music. Somewhere along the line, we became "The Trolls." Bill Rymer, now a practicing psychologist in Greeneville, Tennessee replaced George Rogers on drums. We brought in Mike Pyne to play the keyboards and Harold Walker to fill in at rhythm guitar.

We played at the Tennessee Valley A. & I. Fair (as it used to be called); a dance hall in Gate City, Virginia; "The Barn;" the Battle of the Bands in Knoxville; 4-H Shows; venues in Kingsport; East Tennessee State University frat parties; the local Fourth of July celebration (the high school marching band was not available so the organizers, wanting music in the parade, had us set up on the back of a flatbed truck. We were powered by, and drowned out by the roar

of, a gasoline generator); a county Democratic Party festival which filled a downtown parking lot; on television in the "March of Dimes Telethon" (I got my picture taken, with my bass guitar, exchanging pleasantries with actor Clu Gulager); and at the Pleasant View Community Club in Bulls Gap (after one gig there, we lost some transportation and had no way to get our gear back to Rogersville except to stuff it, and ourselves, in a 1962 Chevrolet Corvair. We had to strap the P.A. system speakers to the roof of the car).

And then there was the frat party at the University of Tennessee on the old "frat row;" we had borrowed an "echo box" for special effects, which had a tremendous impact on our rendition of the Doors' "The End." Some of the crowd said, "You guys are better than 'The Loved Ones.'" I knew better, but Benny Wilson was quite an entertainer, and he was the showman of our band. During one performance, he took his guitar and did a shimmy-shimmy dance with it by scooting it back and forth on his rear.

"Come on, Ruby," indeed! We were at least a ripple, if not a wave, of the second "Hawkins County Invasion."

Unavoidable circumstances removed me from guitar playing, but a countervail pushed Benny toward Stardom. He went off to East Tennessee State University, obtained a Bachelor's Degree in environmental health, and then became a country music singer. In the early '80s, while I was thrashing about in the trenches of the Federal bureaucracy in Jackson, Mississippi, the country band, Alabama,

came to town. Benny was a member of Janie Fricke's "Heart City Band," which warmed up the audience. He got me VIP tickets to the side of the stage. It was the same old Benny, and it was good to see him back on stage. Benny continues his rise to the top. He is now a popular act in Upper East Tennessee and has a huge following.

The Trolls' contemporaries in our rock 'n' roll high school days were the "Odds & Ends" from Surgoinsville. Johnny and Billy Greer, Alvin Case, and Sammy Manis made up the group, which originally wanted to call themselves "The Vandals," but Doc McConnell refused to allow them to play at the Barn with that name. "No prob!" they said, "It's not the name; it's the music!"

The Odds & Ends were better than the Trolls. Billy could play bass guitar better



than me, and he knew and understood what I failed to grasp—that even a mediocre bass guitar can sound great through a quality amplifier. While I struggled to make my Gibson EB-2 sound decent through a Fender Bassman with two 12 inch JBLs, Billy held onto an off-brand bass guitar, but ran it through a Sunn bass amp with a couple of 15-inchers. He also understood that the bass guitarist and drummer were the critical backbone of any band and that their respective performances had to harmoniously mesh in every respect in order for the group to have any sound worth hearing. A snare drum rim-shot, or any heavy beat, sounds great when accompanied by the low punch of the bass guitar.

But the Trolls' lead guitarist, my brother Dave, was an equal, if not a better, guitar player than Alvin Case. I must admit that when our Maker handed out guitar skills to the Hyder boys, I must have been behind the door, because David got them all. He still rocks 'n' rolls with bands in central Ohio. He was with "Contraband" during the Reagan administration and with "DotCom" in the late 80's. But, still, the Odds & Ends were a force to be reckoned with in our Hawkins County days, at least until Johnny Greer was drafted into the armed forces and the band folded.

Billy Greer found his way to Atlanta in the mid-1980's and was tapped to play bass for "Streets," a group put together by Steve Walsh, who had just recently left the mega-band, Kansas. After a couple of albums, Walsh and Billy became a part of the third Kansas and the group has been touring the planet ever since. Billy's huge success validates the third wave of the "Hawkins County Invasion." And that brings us back to Barry Burton.

On April 18, 2008, at the behest of Billy Greer, Kansas

took a break from their tour to give a benefit concert in tribute to Barry Burton at the Niswonger Performing Arts Center in Greeneville, Tennessee. Billy didn't just play at the tribute; he had personally promoted it by traversing the Tri-Cities area weeks prior to the event, meeting with local newspaper and radio staffs and thus generated significant publicity. On stage, he attributed his success to Barry Burton. It was the grandest of rock 'n' roll concerts

musical equivalent of the first time I saw Harrison Ford in "Raiders of the Lost Ark," the exciting twists and turns never stopped, and it kept my musical reflexes working.

After the show, my brother David told me, "Nobody does what they do," a compliment to Kansas' distinctiveness. All of Kansas' members are musical craftsmen. Their show left me both exhausted and exhilarated. Kansas is not your average arena rock band; they are polished craftsmen. As part of the third wave of the Hawkins County Invasion, Billy Greer has risen to the top of his craft.

Driving home, my brother and I took pride in the fact that we had been a

small part of our home county's music legacy, and we were pleased and impressed that the legacy—and *invasions*—have continued into the new century and beyond.

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**Kansas took the stage, and it was easy to see the reasons that the band has achieved high acclaim.**

and the rough equivalent to Rick Nelson's "Garden Party:" people came from miles around, and everyone was there.

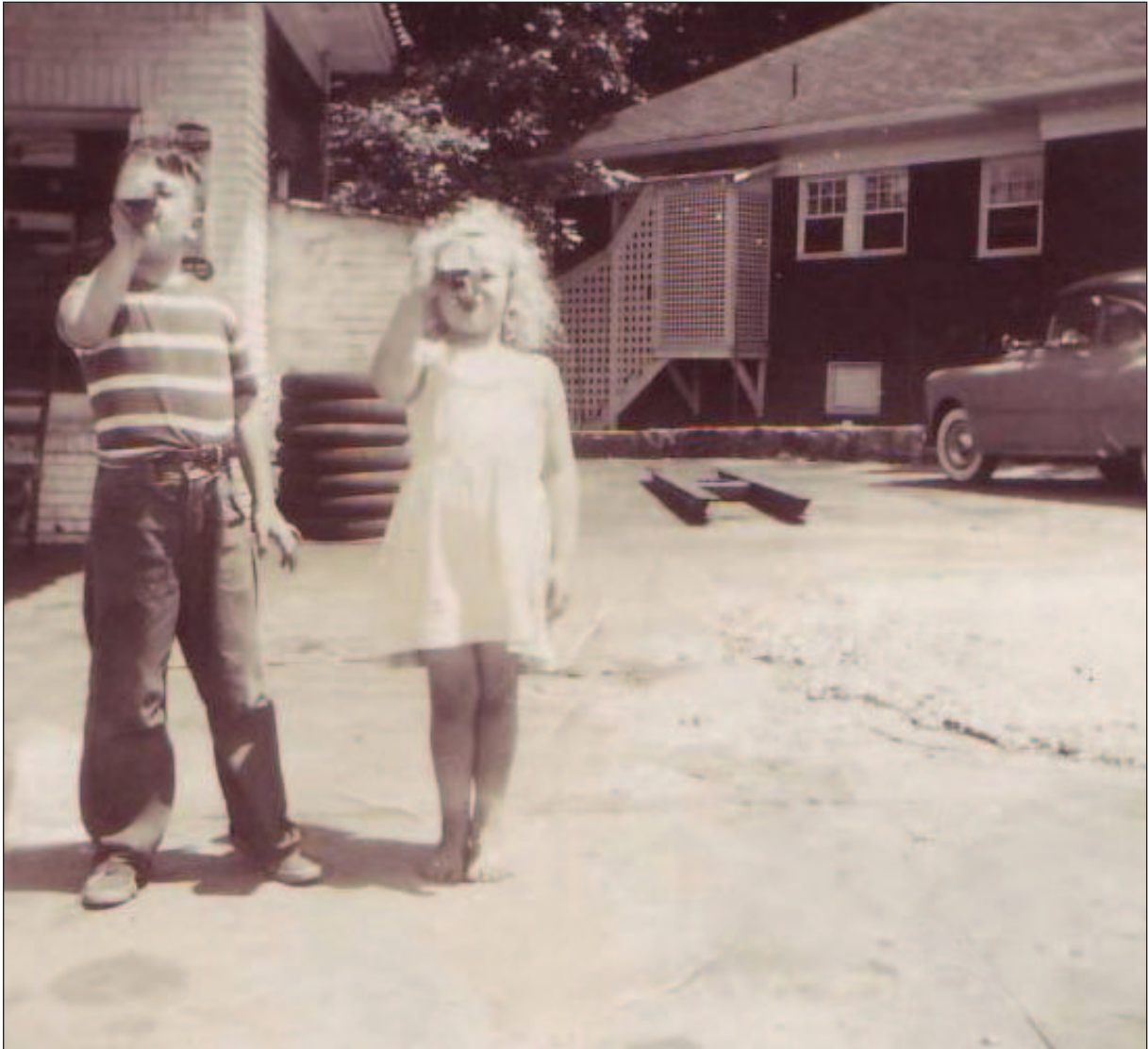
Maryville, Tennessee's "Dixie Highway" opened the show with blazing country and rock 'n' roll. The "B Team Blues Band," led by Terry Johnson (one of Barry's old buddies) followed. Kansas took the stage, and it was easy to see the reasons that the band has achieved high acclaim. They of course played their signature hits, "Dust In The Wind" and "Carry On Wayward Son," but they also played what I can only describe as rock arias—disciplined but tight, complicated rock anthems. For me, it was the

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# The Corner

by Ron Burch

**W**hen I was a kid growing up in Northeast Atlanta, we lived within walking or biking distance from Culpepper's Drug Store, Waller's Pharmacy, McMichael's Supermarket, Mr. Still's Pure Oil station, a Five-and-Dime and a barbershop.

We referred to this area as "the corner," and over the years, I made many a trip to the corner to purchase a pack of Chesterfields for my Dad, or sometimes a bag of flour or a quart of milk for my mom.

I could go to any of the stores on the east side of the corner. The stores on the west side were off limits, because going there would require me to cross over the traffic on busy McLendon Avenue. So afternoons after school, I'd often stop in at Culpepper's—the drug store on my side of the road—and plop twenty cents down on the old marble counter for a vanilla float or maybe thirty-five cents for a grilled cheese

sandwich and a Coke. If I was lucky, old Dr. Culpepper would sprinkle a handful of spicy, barbecued potato chips beside the sandwich.

When school wasn't in session, on many a hot, summer afternoon, I'd shake a coin or two from my piggy bank and head for the corner with my girlfriend where we'd both get a 12-ounce soft drink my Dad called a "belly washer."

I liked going to the corner. For a penny, the Five-and-Dime sold the tiniest little wax bottles, filled with a sticky, sweet syrup. To enjoy the treat, you bit off the top of the bottle and allowed the syrup to trick-

le out in your mouth before munching on the wax. It was there that I also discovered the power of the atom—a hot, cinnamon-flavored jaw-breaker that set my mouth on fire. It was also where I often spent my weekly allowance for a new baseball, or caps for my cap pistol, a water gun or a new holster.

Over at Mr. Still's gas station, air for my bicycle tires was free. If needed, he'd patch the tire tube for a quarter. Once McMichael's put in their bakery, it was worth a trip to the corner just to smell the doughnuts. And although not quite as good as the barber at the shop in Little Five Points, the barbershop at the corner gave great flattops. When the trim was finished and the top was flat, the barber in the first chair would use a wiggly electrical device to massage my shoulders. It felt so good



that years later when I saw one of these devices at the mall, I had to have one.

I wondered why my parents always shopped at Little Five Points and not at the corner—at the Colonial Store or the A&P and not McMichael's. Why they crossed over busy McLendon Avenue to get their prescriptions at Waller's, instead of at Culpepper's. Why, indeed.

One day my Mom explained. McMichael's Supermarket was okay for a couple of items, but their prices were too high—much higher than the larger chains. Their meat, bread and produce items also weren't as fresh since they didn't turn over as frequently. She also felt that old Dr.

Culpepper was not nearly as friendly and accommodating as Dr. Waller on the other side of the corner.

Not long ago, some fifty-five years later, my wife and I took a nostalgic drive through the old neighborhood—past Whiteford and McLendon where I picked up my newspapers before beginning my paper route. Past my grammar school and the park where I played as a kid. Past the Candler Park Swimming Pool and Epworth Methodist Church where I attended Sunday school.

Then we drove slowly through the area I knew as the corner.

Boy has it changed. Predictably so...sadly so. Culpepper's Drugstore is gone; so is Waller's Pharmacy. McMichael's Supermarket is now a video store. Mr. Still's Pure Oil station is a psychedelic motorcycle shop. The Five-and-Dime has morphed into the Flying Biscuit Restaurant. The barbershop is nowhere to be found.

A sign of the times? The effect of competition? Perhaps. There's no doubt that

highly publicized.

Not long ago, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* asked a well-known politician if it bothered him that the big box stores stood accused of causing mom-and-pop stores to close. He replied, "Well, the big box stores *did* run the 'mom-and-pop' stores out of my neighborhood. But you see, the 'mom-and-pop' stores are the ones that have been overcharging us for years—selling us stale bread and bad meat and wilted vegetables.

I think they've ripped off our communities enough."

You know, he was right. Close to what my Mom had to say about McMichael's and Culpepper's. Why? Because when it comes to supplying commodities, the

little guy can't compete with the big guy. Bad service anywhere is what opens the door to lower priced competition with more and better products.

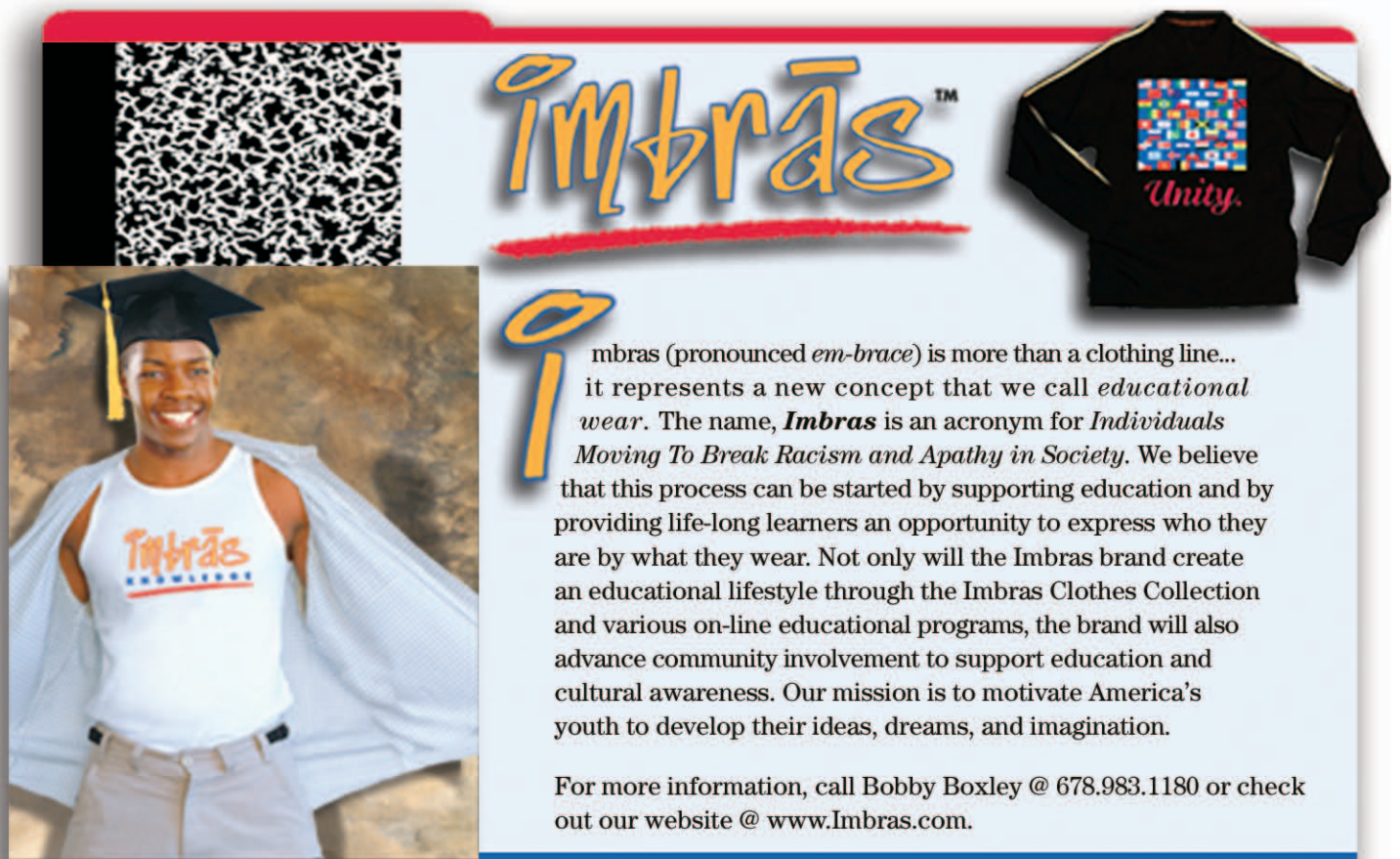
If my Mom were around, she'd have set 'em straight about bad products or service...*maybe before the big box got to the retailers on the corner.* She'd get nose-to-nose with someone and say, "The bread is hard as a rock, the lettuce is brown, the hamburger is gray and I ain't buying it!"

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## The Five-and-Dime has morphed into the Flying Biscuit Restaurant

buying habits have changed, and the big box stores have become the most powerful retailers in the world. Or that their rapid and widespread growth has transformed the retail industry, and along with it, generated a series of social and economic changes.

Folks criticize these retail behemoths for questionable labor practices, for driving the mom-and-pop shops out of business and wreaking environmental havoc. It's for sure their national and international growth has created a lot of homegrown opposition. Opposition that's loud and



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