

Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

In Case of Rapture

Fiction by William Dockery

Lefty Frizzell

A story of a one-of-a-kindness

The Way 'Twas

A memory captured by a snapshot

Elizabeth and Hazel

The women behind the picture

A Flying Family Reunion

Families that fly together...

Northbound Single-Lane

A collection of Southern poetry

Brush With the Law

Non-ignorance of the law is an excuse

Daddy's in the Closet

...and that's where he's going to stay

Lisa Love's Life

Where humor and reality hang out

Kids and Politics

Why Daddy drinks

California Itch

Go west, young man

David Skinner

with apologies to Norman Rockwell





California Itch

I found the above picture tucked inside an old college yearbook. It featured the original members of *Contents Under Pressure*, a band that we hastily assembled in September of 1970 for a freshman talent show at the East Tennessee Baptist college we attended.

The only member of *Contents* not pictured was (Dancin') Dan (the Man) Schlafer; he had joined us in early 1971, and by the time this was snapped—in the autumn of 1974—he was well on his way to being a responsible citizen, unlike the three of us pictured here.

The backdrop for this picture was the 40-acre farm in Wear's Valley that I shared with Mike Copas and Stephen Kling, two Opryland caricature artists that I had worked with the previous summer. The truck actually belonged to Copas, but I loved it and the way it made me feel when I rode in it.

The picture was taken by my sister, Jann; she had ridden down from Nashville with Paul Dunlap—that's him with the leather jacket and red mod cap. Filmore (actually, Millard Filmore Strunk, Jr.) is the one with the flannel shirt and Tom Mix 10-gallon hat. I'm also wearing a flannel shirt, along with a pair of bell bottom jeans that my grandmother patched (this

was before holes in jeans were cool). BoatRamp, the farmdog, was trying to imitate my stance and smile for the camera. He was a very talented dog.

I can't remember what all we did that weekend, but I do know that it involved at least two things—playing music late into the night (early into the morning) and talking about the *California Trip*.

The *California Trip* had its genesis a few months earlier as a group of us sat around an off-campus apartment trying to figure out what we were going to do with our lives once our impending graduation had come and gone.

Copas and Kling had driven down from Nashville. "Let's go to California, or maybe even Gatlinburg," they said.

We could be in Gatlinburg in an hour or so, we decided, but California—now *that* was a genuine state of mind. "Yeah, but we could draw caricatures in Gatlinburg," Copas said.

"Why California?" someone asked.

"Because you can't go any further west," someone else said.

"Can't go no further—this here's injun territory." Copas said, quoting the California *stream-of-consciousness* comedy troupe, *Firesign Theater*.

All of us were fed up with our particular circumstances. Kling and Copas were bored with Nashville, and those of us finishing up our college careers were anxious to trade all the hassles of collegiate life for a big adventure.

I was finishing up my tenure as editor of the college newspaper and had managed to get myself in hot water with the administration through a series of activities and articles. Some people just have no sense of humor.

A week or so after the initial *California Trip* discussion, I received a note from Bill Dockery, a former staff member of the college's newspaper who had graduated a few years earlier and had gone on to have a *real* job at a *real* newspaper in the Gatlinburg area. He said that he liked what I had done with the college paper, and if I was interested, he would introduce me to his publisher. *It's not close to California*, I thought, *but it is close to Gatlinburg*.

Graduation came and went, and we

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all scattered back to our hometowns, taking our individual pieces of the *Big Adventure* dream with us. But, we promised each other that, at some point, we would meet back up and bring our respective pieces to assemble the big puzzle that would be the *California Trip*.

In the meantime, Copas and I decided to try our luck in Gatlinburg, and we found an old farmhouse to rent in nearby Wear's Valley. By day, we drew caricatures in Gatlinburg, and at night, we played bluegrass in the town's bars, along with Michael Thornburgh, a fiddle player we had met on the porch of his family's hillside cabin. Because we didn't have a name, a table of intelligent and articulate drunks at

The Shed (a main street watering hole at the time) named us *PigFish BoatRamp*. We liked the name, so we kept it and even used a piece of it to tag the stray we brought out to the valley to be our farmdog.

In the meantime, Kling had not forgotten the dream. He had packed up his car and was on his way to California. He stopped off at the farm on his way to say goodbye, and got sucked into the East Tennessee beauty.

However, before the interview with Dockery's publisher could be arranged, Kling and I got job offers from his newspaper's rival, the weekly *Sevier County Times* (in addition to being a crackerjack caricature artist, Kling was an incredible photographer).

We're not giving up the dream, we rationalized, we're just going to be able to save up some money to fuel it. Besides, one by one, everyone else from that initial *dream planning session* had found some sort of distraction—graduate school, fulltime jobs and even marriage.

The *Sevier County Times* turned out to be an interesting job. Because the

paper was a young upstart, we could be more daring with our stories and

she said, "go easy on the starch." Anita and her teenaged sidekick, Rod, traveled through time in *The HelenMobile*, a craft that eerily resembled a modern-day PT Cruiser, only without tires.

That winter was extremely cold. The farmhouse didn't have running water or electric heat; it only had the living room fireplace and a woodstove in the kitchen. At first, we cut firewood on the weekends, then we resorted to burning the unsold papers that we had picked up over the past months. Eventually, we would just drive around until it was late enough to go home and jump into bed. It kept me dreaming about California. The dream of the *California Trip* however, began to flicker. It was much too comfortable to have a weekly paycheck.

Spring came and went, and the warm temperatures turned the winter hardships into a distant memory. When summer rolled

around, *the dream* started gnawing at me again, and I started thinking about leaving the *Times* and heading west. During the Fourth of July weekend, I met up with some of my college friends at a Middle Tennessee bluegrass festival and tried to resurrect the old passion for the great adventure.

"It was a nice dream," someone said after one banjo breakdown.

"I've got commitments and responsibilities," one of my friends said.

"My wife says 'no'," said another.

"Do you even know anyone in California?" another one demanded.

"I've got relatives in Iowa," I said.

"Yeah, well, I've got relatives in New Jersey, but that doesn't mean I'm headed to Canada," my friend said.

"It's just a crazy itch," I said.

"Don't they make medicine for that?" he asked.

As I drove back to East Tennessee, I felt defeated. *Is this how life is going to play out, I wondered, dreaming up*



coverage than Dockery's more established paper. Dockery usually beat me to every scoop, anyway, including the scene of the county's first ax murder.

Working at the *Times* gave me the chance to write sports copy, handle local stories, and offer editorials; it also allowed me to contribute illustrations and editorial cartoons. Kling and I would also deliver the stacks of papers to some of the various convenience stores in outlying areas of the county, and pick up the papers that hadn't sold from the previous week's issue.

At some point, Kling and I (along with production guru Kerry Brown) came up with the idea of featuring regular original comic strips. My comic was *Tales of Space Helen*, a strip about a time-traveling superhero whose secret identity was Anita Ficks, a salesgirl in a local Chinese bakery/laundromat. The first episode featured a customer coming into the shop and ordering a birthday cake—"...and, Anita, dear,"

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big adventures and making plans and then abandoning them?

That Sunday afternoon as I drove up the long dirt driveway to the farmhouse, I noticed a stranger sitting on the front porch steps.

"Are you the *Space Helen* dude?" she asked me as I got out of my car.

"Guilty," I said.

"That's some bizarre stuff there," she said. She explained that she had been backpacking in the Smokies and had gotten a serious case of poison ivy—bad enough to take her off the trail and into Gatlinburg. A man who ran a shop on the main drag took pity on her, and he and his girlfriend took her to their home so she could recover. While there, she came across his collection of "*Tales of Space Helen*" that he had clipped out of the *Sevier County Times*.

"I know the guy that draws those," he told her.

"I have a friend back home who is an underground comic book publisher, and he would love these," she told him, so he dropped her off at the farmhouse.

"Where's *back home*?" I asked.

"California," she said, "My comic-publisher friend is back in San Francisco."

A few weeks later, she was back on the west coast. It took me about a month to wind things down at the paper, but toward the end of August, I got on an Amtrak in Nashville, and took it to Chicago. After a four- or five-hour wait, I boarded a west-bound train to Seattle, and then down to Portland, where she was getting ready to start school.

The plan was to hitch down to San Francisco and meet up with the comics publisher. We got a ride from a crusty old Cadillac cowboy just south of Portland, but when he found out I was from Nashville, he suddenly became friendly. He was playing country music on his AM radio, and every time I started talking about Nashville, he nearly teared up. "I've always dreamed about going there," he said. Just then, Moe Bandy's voice twanged out of the box.

"Doodle Owens wrote that!" I told him. Doodle was my friend, Lee's dad. When I was at their house a few months earlier, Doodle had played the song for Lee and me on his old Gibson. When I relayed the story to our driver, he told us he'd take us all the way to Salem.

"It's out of my way," he said, "but it's worth it just to hear about Nashville."

As soon as we exited the Cadillac in Salem, a kid in a Corvair screeched over to the side of the road and threw open the passenger door.

"Bay Area?" he asked.

And so, the *California Trip* began. We ended up hitching all through

Then I noticed policemen with rifles on the roofs of several of the buildings. It's a riot, I thought. But the mood was festive...maybe it was a happy riot.

California, from the Bay Area to L.A., up to Fresno, over to Santa Cruz, and back up to San Francisco. The comics publisher was as interesting as you might imagine; he lived a few blocks from Height and Ashbury, not too far from Golden Gate Park. He was amused by *Space Helen*, but said that it needed nudity. I didn't think we could pull that off in East Tennessee. *Maybe Space Helen should move to California*, he said.

I called up the kid in the Corvair, and he came and picked me up in the city and took me out to meet his parents in the Bay Area. They initially invited me to stay a few days. Then, his father (who was from the South) asked if I could stay with them indefinitely; he said he wanted a southern influence on his kids.

And so, I moved in. Their house was in the suburbs, a few miles from the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), so during the day, I'd hitch over to the station and take the train into Berkeley or San Francisco. It didn't feel dangerous, but there seemed to be tension in the air every day.

When I had been down in L.A., there was an assassination attempt on President Ford in Sacramento by Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme. And, the historic events just kept on coming.

One day I went over to Berkeley to see if I could find the apartment complex where Patty Hearst had been kidnapped. When I stopped at a Berkeley newsstand to ask directions, the owner shushed me and pointed to his radio, which was screaming some sort of news story.

"Patty Hearst!" he said, "The feds just captured her, over in the Mission District!"

Like I said, there was tension in the air. Less than a week later, I thought I'd take in the San Francisco Museum of Art (now called the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). In 1975 the museum was located more in the center of town, a few blocks off of Market Street. That Monday morning, I hitched to the Concord BART station, took the train into the city, then

took a bus to the museum. However, to my surprise, the museum's front door was locked. I then noticed the "Museum's Hours" sign that chirped, "MUSEUM CLOSED ON MONDAYS."

I was incredulous. It had taken me over two hours to get there, only to find it closed. To try and salvage the day, I decided to treat myself to a late Chinese lunch. Keep in mind, in 1975, there were not a lot of Chinese restaurants in Tennessee. In fact, the only time I had eaten Chinese food was when Kling took me to visit New York City.

I didn't have a map of San Francisco, but I knew that Chinatown was north-east of the museum, so I guessed that if I went one block north, then one block east, then one block north, I'd eventually reach that part of town. Plus, I figured I'd get to see some parts of San Francisco that were not included in the tourist guides.

As I got closer to Union Square, which was between the museum and Chinatown, I noticed more people on the streets and sidewalks. I thought I must be approaching some sort of major bus stop. But as I got closer to the square, I saw that it wasn't a bus stop, it seemed more like a mob of people waiting for a parade. Then, I noticed policemen with rifles on the roofs of several of the buildings. *It's*

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a riot, I thought. But the mood was festive...*maybe it was a happy riot.* Trolley stop? Happy riot? Parade?

Making my way up the sidewalk by the St. Francis Hotel, I noticed that every 20 feet or so, there was a San Francisco police officer standing guard. I ambled up to one of the police guards.

"Excuse me, officer?" I said.

"Yes?" he said, not really rudely, but not exactly politely.

"What's going on here?"

"The President," he said with a pitying look, as if I had crawled out of a cave and wandered into town, "President's here."

"The President of the United States?" I asked.

"That would be affirmative," he said, with a hint of condescension.

"Wow," I said.

"Excuse me?" he said, this time actually looking at me as if I could be some sort of threat.

"Oh...I was just kinda lost, on my way to Chinatown," I said, trying not to look suspicious, "and here, I wander into the President of the United States. I've never seen a President in person."

"Okay," he said, "move along."

"Thanks, Officer," I said, tipping my thrift store Stetson.

I pushed my way through the crowd to the front of the hotel. It was wall-to-wall people, so I crossed the street and stood beside a street light, about a half-block away from where President Ford would exit the hotel. His limo was idling in front of the entrance, surrounded by black cars and police motorcycles.

I can't remember how long I waited; I just remember the electric charge that surged through the crowd, along with a cheer when the doors opened and President Ford emerged into the California afternoon. That brief moment of excitement, however, was short-circuited by a gunshot from across the street from where President Ford stood, and the crowd's cheers turned into screams. It was almost as if someone had dropped a large

stone into the crowd—right where Sara Jane Moore, the woman with the gun, was being wrestled to the ground. The crowd erupted into frantic ripples, running in panic from the shooter in all directions. I fought back my initial reaction to run—I had a half-block head start—and I instinctively jumped up onto the concrete base of the streetlight where I had been standing. My second impulse (after the first one to run) was to protect myself from the stampeding crowd. I saw people being

a lawn-mowed anthill.

I continued on my journey to Chinatown, where I bought myself a late lunch and proceeded to write up the story in the dim light of the restaurant. "Take that, Bill Dockery!" I said to myself and a bemused Chinese waiter. I found a phone booth and placed a collect call to the *Sevier County Times*. I knew it was coming up on the weekly's deadline, but I figured they'd make room.

"Have I got a story for you," I said when the publisher, Tim Pollitt got on the phone.

"Wait a minute, let me get my recorder plugged in," he said.

"First of all," I said, "I want the byline to say: 'by David Skinner, San Francisco correspondent to the *Sevier County Times*.'" I then proceeded to dictate my story. After I finished, Tim asked me, "What's California like?"

"Don't get me started," I said, but I must have gone on for ten minutes before hanging up.

That following weekend when I called home, my father sounded irritated. I told him about moving in with a Bay Area family, about

the comic book publisher, about Patty Hearst, and about the almost-assassination of the President.

"I didn't know you talked ugly," he said, and handed the phone to my stepmother.

That was certainly perplexing, I thought as I hung up the phone after the call. *Talking ugly?*

A few months later, I was back in Nashville, writing songs with Lee Owens. I was going through a stack of *Sevier County Times* papers, looking for a particular *Space Helen* strip. My dad had a subscription to the paper and had carefully saved all the back issues. I came across the issue with my assassination attempt story, just as I had dictated from that Chinatown phone booth. It was then that I realized that Tim had kept the tape recorder rolling, because, on the jump page,



The brief moment of excitement, however, was short-circuited by a gunshot from across the street from where President Ford stood.

knocked down, and all I could think about was how cowboys knocked off their horses during cattle stampedes managed to not get trampled. They usually used trees; all I had was a streetlight.

As I looked over the heads of the frightened crowd I saw that a group of police, bystanders, and plainclothes cops had picked up Sara Jane Moore like she was a roll of dining room carpet. Then the crowd, not hearing any more shots, reversed itself and tried to close in on the shooter. In the meantime, the President's motorcade, sirens blaring, screamed out of Union Square. It was controlled bedlam. I ducked into a five-and-dime and bought a notepad and a pen, and went back out onto the street and tried to talk to some of the police officers who were scurrying around the St. Francis like ants out of

below the continuation of the story was yet another story. The headline read: “Reporter Calls California Crazy as H***” The story consisted of my rantings about the, well, *intensity*, of the California scene.

The following week, Lee and I went into a Nashville recording studio to demo some of our songs. I had just finished a new one (about a Tennessee boy having this weird obsession to travel west) called “California Itch,” and Lee demo’d a beautiful song of his called “Finding Annie Gone.”

So—what happened to all the characters in the story? President Ford finished out his term. Sara Jane Moore served a 32-year prison sentence and was released in 2007. I lost touch with some of them, but as for the ones I’ve kept up with, Stephen Kling moved back home to New York and went on to do ads on Madison Avenue; Michael Copas became the woodcarver to the stars, teaching Jane Fonda how to carve and creating pieces for Hollywood notables; Paul Dunlap became a music teacher and he, my sister Jann, Michael Thornburgh, Kerry Brown and I still play music in a band called *Dog & Pony*; Filmore Strunk is now an Anglican priest in Charlotte; Dan Schlafer became a Tennessee *Coach of the Year* and is now a Federal Programs Director; Tim Pollitt got out of the newspaper business and into something that was actually profitable; and as for Bill Dockery, Lee Owens, Jann, and me—we’re all busy writing pieces for and working on this issue of *SouthernReader*. Hope you enjoy it!

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SouthernReader

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Reading Up A Storm

Dear ePublisher:

I really meant to write sooner, but the week I downloaded the Summer 2011 issue of *Southern Reader*, my folks' house was hit by lightning, just as the old barn had been hit 20 years ago. And, for the record, a chicken house was also fried when I was about five. In fact, if I allow myself to go off on a tangent, I could speak about the six white oak stumps and the black oak stump that can be seen from the east end of our house—all struck by lightning in the last 10 years. But I'll not go there.

Anyway, the electrical charge that came into the folks' house snuck over here, (next door), unobserved, on one of the many wires that connect the two houses...at least that's what the fire marshal told us next day. Can you guess which electrical component took a direct hit here in this house, leaving it disabled and me unable to communicate my good feelings about the recent emag I had just perused? The bottom line is that, without an implement of inspiration, it just took me a little longer to write this letter about the issue.

That being said, Lisa Love is still my favorite "*Southern Reader* Writer," but I enjoy Ron Burch nearly as well. Most guys don't like to talk themselves down—for any reason or under any circumstances—but he does it so *gracefully*. I also liked Anthony L. Holt's reminisces, Marshall Lancaster's lesson in wisdom and Jasper D. Skinner's account of the war. The *ePublisher's Story* was also very good—a bit more solemn than usual, but maybe it just touched me in a tenderer spot.

Anyhow, I liked it.

Also, the article on Dallas Frazier was interesting. Why is it the public never hears so much about song writers like they do song singers? I hate

like her "Chickadee." It would follow us around like a dog, but if we'd try to pet it, we always got nipped. Getting nipped by a goose isn't like being pecked by a chicken. You probably already knew about that hangy-down hook do-hicky on the end of a goose's beak that they can twist and pull with.

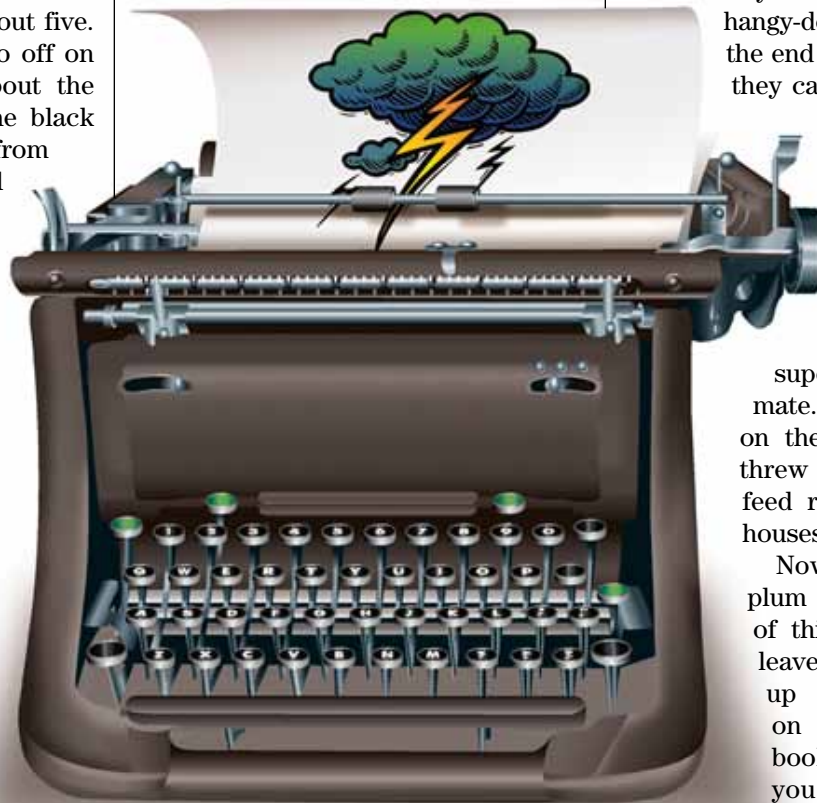
And she'd twist and pull the skin on your arm or the back of your hand and it would smart like all get-out. Didn't take long for us to realize she was only a supervisor and not a playmate. She also used to sit on the bad light bulbs we threw on the floor in the feed rooms of the chicken houses, trying to hatch them.

Now I have rattled away plum down here to the end of this email, so I should leave you alone. I do pull up *SouthernReader.com* on occasion (I have it bookmarked), and I hope you are being flooded with good reviews. I have passed the address on to some of my family and friend (that's singular...I have *A* friend) and hopefully, the dastardly lot of them

pulled it up and appreciated what they read.

Have a good day; take care and all that other stuff we say when we sign off, and congrats on the issue. Very entertaining.

Sincerely,
Doug Combs
Olney, Illinois



It didn't take us long to realize that our goose was only a supervisor and not a playmate.

to admit it, but I had never heard of Dallas Frazier and yet, I now know I've been enjoying some of his music for years.

Diane Kimbrell's confession of being a coulda-been murderess was good. It's a friendly reminder that people can't be too careful. And Bettye H. Galloway's tale about her pet chicken was interesting. We had a goose, when I was a kid, who behaved about



Occupy This: Where Reality and Humor Hang in Downtown Atlanta

by Lisa Love

Diane,

Honestly, I still haven't got a handle on what just happened, but will attempt to write out my recollections while they are fresh in my mind to ensure that **A REPEAT OF THIS DAY NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN!** You didn't answer your home or cell phone, forcing me to resort to emailing you in a feeble attempt to A) appear *occupied*—oops, I mean *busy*, as I sit at a table in the food court of the CNN Center; B) avoid the curious (and sometimes pitying) glances of onlookers silently wondering why I am surrounded by four Atlanta Police officers finishing up my paperwork, and lastly, C) anxiously await the call from my tow truck guy. "Atlanta Police?" you ask. "Tow truck guy?" you query. Sit back Di, as I give you a tutorial in *Lisa Love's Life Lessons Learned the Hard Way*, or *No Good Deed Goes Unpunished*.

Where do I begin? This Friday actually got off to a rather great start. David, Jann and I met with a prospective client for lunch; since the guy had just arrived in Atlanta from Ohio (code word: *Yankee*), your suggestion of Mary Mac's Tea Room was right on the money. As you said, "Nothing says *Welcome to the South* quite like Mary Mac's on Ponce." You know, it had been years since I last stepped foot in the place—*my bad*. From the minute we entered the door, we were greeted with such warmth and genuine friendliness that it served to remind me why it's been an Atlanta landmark for almost 70 years. Today, one of the waitresses, Flo, was retiring after 39 years serving at Mary Mac's; we couldn't have chosen a more perfect day to be there—*such a spirit of celebration*. And the food...oh yes, *the food!* Sweet tea, mac and cheese, collard greens and banana pudding—so fine you want

to slap your mama! (Actually my lunch consisted of salad and unsweetened tea. Though a Southern sacrilege, it would have made Dr. Atkins proud—well, proud if he hadn't been dead for about ten years, due to a probable massive coronary blockage! Yeah, "*they*" say he died from a fall; don't go trying to confuse me with facts!) Our prospect seemed thoroughly enchanted with both our business acumen and a good dose of Southern hospitality; I declared lunch an unofficial hit.

After lunch, we all went our separate ways—David and Jann headed back to finish the proposal for aforementioned prospect, while I headed downtown to the Atlanta Day Shelter for Women and Children on Ethel Street. Oh my, they do such great work there. I don't know if I mentioned them to you before, but it's been around since 1984, and the shelter helps get homeless women and children back on their feet, offering

food, clothing, and training. They bless over 5000 people a year, and the ladies of my church and I gathered gently-used clothes together to donate; we jam-packed my largest rolling suitcase with clothes for me to drop off this afternoon.

On my way to the shelter, a light rain began to fall. You know how I detest driving in the rain; I reminded myself *it's all for a good cause*. When I turned onto Tech Parkway, my fretting officially became abject fear. The road was blocked, and detour signs were posted. On my best of days, I'm directionally challenged and find it difficult to navigate Atlanta roads—a plethora of one way streets and pot hole-ridden roads, not to mention about 100 different Peachtree Streets (with nary a single peach tree to be found!) And today of all days, I was heading to an unfamiliar destination in the rain, facing road blocks, detours AND, no GPS—let my sister borrow it.

Excellent! I decided to just follow the cars in front of me (what are the chances that they too were going to the Shelter? Nil, I know, I know!) After obeying about three consecutive detour signs, I got all twisted and turned around into complete disorientation. I think I ended up on Marietta Street, perhaps? I also noticed that traffic was becoming more and more congested.

Then as the bottom fell out on the storm, I hit the most atrocious bumper-to-bumper traffic I'd ever had the undiluted pleasure to be in. This was not just your average Friday afternoon, trying to get home from work, heading out of the city traffic—this was gridlock. Now for the cherry on the top of this cake—while I pondered the cause of this traffic jam, the Highlander—my very first brand new car ever—stalled on me. Di, do you think the lemon law is applicable after two years? Yep, it went belly up; dead as a doornail—even the steering wheel locked. With heart pounding and fear escalating, I unsuccessfully tried to ignore the

honking of angry motorists behind me. *HEY, I'M SORRY!* What should I do? Thank God for cell phones!

I dialed information and asked for Triple A (I specifically said TRIPLE A to the operator, 'cause with the way my day was unfolding, chances were just as good that AA might send me out two recovering alcoholics with a screwdriver and jumper cables). AAA said they'd get me in touch with a local towing company to come haul my hunk of...I mean the Highlander, to the place of my choosing. My sweet Highlander—always reliable. Always dependable. Oh how I had loved her. Till then. Once beloved SUV, our love affair officially ended the minute you broke my heart by dying on me, during a torrential rainfall. Oh, and did I men-

I even daydreamed for a minute that I was walking a red carpet runway of a movie premiere, and Ryan Seacrest stopped to ask me, "Lisa Love, who are you wearing?"

tion, *I WAS LOST?* When the tow guy called, he let me know there would be a substantial wait time, due to rerouting of streets by Atlanta Police to accommodate the *Occupy* protesters this weekend—he calculated that it might take upwards of four hours to reach me. Ah, the reason for gridlock was discovered! Reason number 143 to despise the *Occupy Movement!* I told said tow guy that I would just call a friend to come get me; he—*quite logically*—told me that they too would not be able to get here any quicker, due to the road blocks and grid lock. I was past caring at this point, Di. I told him where he could put the car—I mean where he could tow it. He said he'd call me when he was near the location of my stall.

I thought I'd just sit in my car and wait for him, but gave up on that idea, as it was growing increasingly impossible to hum loud enough to drown out the blaring car horns and angry insults hurled by the frustrated drivers I was blocking (though, Lord knows, NONE of us had moved in over 30

minutes, anyway!) I decided to brave the rain and make a dash for—well, *anywhere*, really. Maybe I'd find a coffee shop or restaurant to hide out in till SOMEONE—ANYONE—could find me in this week's episode of "The Streets of Atlanta," an *Occupy Movement* production.

The rain had slowed to just a sprinkle, and as there was no umbrella in the car, (well of course not!) this would be the optimal time to make my move. I checked what was needed to take with me to make my escape—my portfolio, laptop, I-pad. I had the brilliant idea to stash them in the rolling luggage, thus keeping them safe AND dry; I also didn't want to leave all of those precious donated clothes in my abandoned (for now) vehicle. Okay, valuables stashed. When I opened the luggage, I saw a yellow rain slicker. Oh, that would have been perfect. But alas—size two. Not in this lifetime. There was, however, a matching rain hat. Perfect, but what could I use

to protect the rest of me? I thought and thought and thought. Dangerous, right? You better believe it, 'cause what I found under the passenger seat after a quick inspection was a black plastic garbage bag. *Eureka!* I tore two holes for my arms and one at the bottom for my head. Pulling the yellow vinyl rain hat firmly over my hair and donning my homemade rain coat, I grabbed the rolling luggage and made a dash for the curb—amid much honking and finger gestures. Road rage is hell! Safely on the sidewalk, I turned to the angry mob behind me and yelled a quick "I'm so sorry, but my car is dead and the steering wheel is locked, so what on earth do you want me to do?" What are the odds that it'll have wheels on it when I return?

Scurrying down the street to dodge the rain drops—well, as best you can scurry, rolling a 40 pound suitcase—I swore I heard drum beats—native, tribal drum beats. The closer I got to Centennial Olympic Park, the more loudly and distinctively the curious sounds grew. When I drew within 100

yards or so of the park, I realized I wasn't hearing drum beats, but the sound of human chanting. It dawned on me—this must be *Ground Zero* for the *Occupy Protests*. In the distance, on a platform, I could see a man with a megaphone. He would shout a phrase or two to the seemingly jubilant crowd; the enraptured throng would then scream it back at him. I stopped at my vantage point across the street and stared; the chanting was so rhythmic it was almost hypnotic. I stood there, in the rain, transfixed; perhaps 15 minutes passed as I intently studied the protest and the protesters. What I recall most as I write this, were the smells...a pungent, almost nauseating combination of rain, sweat, urine, and marijuana. Yeah, some in there were partying a wee bit more than they were protesting. As I scanned the group, mostly young college kids, it occurred to me that I could swing a cat by the tail in their midst, let it go, and not hit a single soul with gainful employment. Cynical? Judgemental? Definitely. Guilty on both counts, but I was cold, wet, tired, hungry, frustrated and car-less. I'd put the blame of this dreadful day firmly at *Occupy Atlanta's* feet. I could have been home had it not been for roadblocks and detours and traffic. I blame you, *Entitlement Generation!* Stand back, Diane, Mama's preaching now! I'm tired of the perpetual whining of coddled kids who scoff at paying back college loans and personal responsibility. They were holding up banners decrying the evil corporations while with my own eyes, I watched them "protesting" as they clutched their Starbucks iced mocha lattes in one hand and their I-Phone in the other, all the while Nike, Aeropostale and Abercrombie and Fitch were emblazoned across their sweatshirts. Look in the mirror, kids. You may see the enemy and he just might be you. Oh Di, I went off on a tangent didn't I? I'm absolutely worn out. Bad day. Sorry.

I'd had all I could stomach of this gathering (and by the way, if you're pro-*Occupy*, that's fine by me. What is so great about this country is our

cherished right to have differing opinions—though, honestly, you'd be really whacked if you agreed with those people. Just sayin'.) I continued walking on my journey to find dry shelter. As I rolled my luggage along the sidewalk, I noticed glances—not just a quick glance, but sometimes a double or triple take—from people passing by me. Yeah, I looked weird in my impromptu rain gear, but my mama would have been so proud of me 'cause I just stood straighter, held my head higher and plastered a big old fake grin across my face. I even daydreamed for a minute that I was walking a red carpet runway of a movie premiere, and Ryan Seacrest stopped to ask me, "Lisa



Love, who are you wearing?" Proudly I would reply, "*Hefty Glad Bag, Ryan. Fall Collection 2011.*"

After walking two more blocks, the lightning and thunder began. I was scared. I crouched down in a doorway of an office building, huddling behind my suitcase for a modicum of protection. Here is where my last thread of good humor evaporated. I started balling my eyes out. Minutes passed as I cowered, sobbing in that doorway. Then I felt a gentle hand on my shoulder. A beautifully dressed lady was bending over me and she whispered, "Things will look up, Honey. Here's a little something for you. There's a food court up ahead in the CNN building. You have just as much right as the next

person to go in there and get a bite. Now go on. You'll be fine." She left as quickly as she came, without giving me a chance to respond. I looked down at my hand and saw a folded five-dollar bill. Oh my word. She thought I was destitute; part of me was humiliated. I cried harder. However, in the midst of my tears, a small voice in the back of my head—I call her my *evil twin*—whispered that this could be a really cushy gig. I could probably bring in a pretty penny if I came down here once or twice a week and...no, *stop it Lisa!* There but for the grace of God, go I. As mortified as I was, it did my heart good to have such a great personal reminder that there are good, decent people in

the world. And when these people perceive a need, they still selflessly step in to help. God bless you, my beautifully-dressed phantom lady. You are my hero.

Well, she did give me a grand idea. I decided to splash my way down to the CNN Center. I know, it's like walking into enemy territory for me (I'm a Fox News gal) but ya know the saying—*Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.* Truth told, they're not exactly my enemies, just left-leaning, a tad misguided and a smidge ill-informed. However, most importantly, there was a food court to be considered. My Mary Mac salad and unsweetened tea were but a distant memory at this point; I was so hungry, my teeth were crying! Putting aside

my frustrations of the day—*dead car and being dreadfully lost and rain soaked*—and I marched purposefully towards the CNN Center, *a woman on a mission.* When I got closer, I stopped and gazed at the building. Wow, I had forgotten how massive this complex was. I smiled to myself as I flashed back 30 or so years to a time when I would come here regularly with family and friends (always chauffeured by parents, safely ensconced in the backseat, oblivious to street signs—NEVER LOST OR ALONE IN DOWNTOWN ATLANTA!). The CNN Center used to be the Omni Hotel Complex, and I actually stayed here a night or two with my family for Amway conferences Mama attended. (Yes, I

said Amway! But they did make some fine soap and NO, you don't have to come to the meeting!) As a little girl, I remember being enthralled with the Atrium—standing in the hallway outside our hotel room on the 8th floor and leaning over the balcony railing, wondering if I jumped would I survive the fall? I have always been slightly twisted. Diane, do ya remember the ice skating rink in the center of the complex? And the movie theater? We saw *Gone With the Wind* 20 times! And Sid and Marty Croft productions? It seems a lifetime ago—such great memories!

Before I entered the lobby, I attempted to brush off the rain droplets from my “coat” and luggage, then took a second to assess my situation. You know how I love a good plan. First off, MUST. FIND. FOOD! Secondly, wait out the rain in CNN—in, *what I noticed through the glass doors*, was relative splendor, girlfriend! I figured I'd just stake out my claim on a table in the food court till my tow man swooped in for the save. Standing there, I placed a quick call to tow guy for his ETA. He told me he was still at

least two hours from getting to me. It was official—there was gonna be some major time to kill here.

I walked into the building and was awestruck by the crowd; thank goodness the place was vast, or it would have been bursting at the seams. I headed for the food court with my suitcase rolling along faithfully beside me—come to think of it, this luggage had become my travel buddy for the adventure; clocking in at over an hour and a half so far, we had been joined at the hip! My constant companion—faithful and true (kinda like a really docile German Shepherd on a leash). *Should I name it?* I wondered. Yes! I would call him *Samsonite!* Obviously, at this point, my blood sugar was dangerously low, and I was getting a tad looped! Standing in the middle of the food court, I did a complete 360 degree rotation, studying all of my choices. Ah, I spied a Chik-fil-a, and

I almost broke out in song. Hallelujah, Hallelujah! I'LL GET ME SOME CHIK-FIL-A! Samsonite and I made our way to the rather long queue at the counter. I studied the menu, but heck, I knew what I wanted—an original sandwich and waffle fries, YUM! As I waited my turn to order, I took the opportunity to truly observe the Atrium. It was awesome—the glass elevator, rising eight stories—so grand. If I remember my facts correctly, it is in the Guinness Book as the largest free standing elevator in the world, having supports at only the top and bottom. I was so taken with it, that I pulled out my cell and started snapping pics. I took tons of shots—I will forward them to you. Breathtaking. While I was pulling amateur photography duty on the elevator and its surroundings, I overheard the girl in front of me (said girl, *by the way*, had poured her size 14 bottom into a size 4 jeans—I swear she was overflow-

of this fine architecture (I told ya—I loved this building!) Before one bite of delicious chicken had reached my lips, tow guy called. “Just want to let you know, I'm still 10 miles from you. Traffic is at a stand-still. It's gonna be another couple of hours or more, lady.” I was fit to be tied (low blood sugar had reared its ugly head). My voice rising, I told him to forget the whole thing. “I'll just blow up the Highlander and make CNN my permanent residence.” I hung up on him, then realized I didn't really want to live at CNN, so I immediately called him back, apologized profusely and told him I'd be waiting. And waiting. And waiting.

I ate. I people-watched. I refilled my Pepsi cup three times. I cleaned out my purse. I made a grocery shopping list. I gave Samsonite a fry. (Nah, just wanted to see if you were still with me.) After

I dumped my trash in the container (tray in one hand, Samsonite in the other !), I strolled around the Center, walking to stretch out the kinks I'd gotten from having been sitting at the table for so long. How long? Checking

Should I name it? I wondered.
Yes! I would call him Samsonite!

ing those suckers like a popped can of Pillsbury biscuits!) boast to her friend that she had just been promoted to greeter at Longhorn's. She whispered, rather loudly, that she'd had to “date” the owner for this new position. Oh my, Diane. That really does put the “ho” in hostess, doesn't it? I needed something to eat—fast. I was getting snarky. *Judge much, Lisa?* Honestly, who was I to critique her fashion choices, as I was wearing a yellow plastic rain hat and black garbage bag! Sheesh! Finally, I got my food and located a table with a terrific view of the entire food court Atrium. For the next couple of hours, I was just going to quit worrying about the things I couldn't control (traffic, dead cars and tow guys) and take full advantage of a couple of hours of down time in my otherwise crazy life's schedule. Yup, I planned to savor my chicken sandwich with unlimited free refills of Diet Pepsi, and capture some shots

my cell, it had been over two hours since I ate humble pie with tow boy. Oh well, he promised to call when he was near. Samsonite and I kept walking; I was fascinated with the crowd—so many people. I assumed some were from *Occupy*, but I also heard many talking about getting a bite before going to a basketball game at Phillips Arena later tonight. People were scurrying about, coming and going—like they actually had somewhere to be—as opposed to me, strolling aimlessly, just killing time. Killing time? At this point, I had darn near slaughtered the poor thing. For amusement, Samsonite and I rode the elevator, over and over again. Up and down, Up and down. When people got on, I started asking, “What floor, please?” and then pushed the buttons for them. When that ceased to entertain me, I decided to go back to my table. A problem had arisen. It seemed that although my Glad bag—

which yes, I was still wearing!—had kept my clothes dry, my socks had gotten damp, and my feet were beginning to freeze. I planned to go get to a table, open Samsonite and see if perhaps some sweet lady had donated a pair of socks or two for the Atlanta Day Shelter. Remember them? Trying to get there was how this whole fiasco started. Not their fault, of course—*Occupy Atlanta* was to blame! Anyway, I navigated my way back to the food court and spotted an empty table. By the way, with all that walking, it appeared that Samsonite had injured his back paw—I mean, *wheel*. It started sticking rather badly, not wanting to roll. Well, he had served me well all day...*hold on old boy, just a bit longer*, I told him.

(After all we'd been through together, it would be a pity to have him put down!) When I got to the table, I tried to open the luggage, but it was just too cumbersome to do in the amount of space I had. I tried undoing

the zipper a bit and sticking my hand in, but I couldn't really see anything that I was grabbing for. I decided to head for the restroom and go through Samson—besides the four 32-ounce Pepsi's were calling!

Hold. On. One. Minute. DIANE! This fascinating narrative of my day is being interrupted so that I can forward to you a pic I just snapped of the girl sitting at the table next to me. She is the dirty blonde in the torn "I'm the 99%" T-shirt. OMGoodness! I swear I was not trying to eavesdrop, but it couldn't be avoided as Agent 99 was SCREECHING into her cell phone. I heard her bellow, "Look, I don't know what your problem is. I hunted up and down that aisle and all I could find were Kotex and Always with Wings and Stayfree Maxi's. I even bought you Tampax. Well excuse the heck out of me, BUT THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY S.O.S. PADS!!" I kid you not, Pepsi, flew out of my nose. *Hey Agent 99, your IQ test results are in; they came back negative.* She put her cell down, looked at her equally disheveled com-

panion and said, "Come on Tiffany, let's get back to the protest. We're going to make history."

And that, Diane, is a glimpse into the future. Best case scenario, these are the people who will be deciding what nursing home we get put into in our old age—a nice one with carpet and parquet flooring or the one with urine-soaked linoleum. Worst case scenario, they will be sitting on our death panels. Shivers.

I wheeled Samson into the ladies room and chose the middle stall. I maneuvered his unwieldiness in there with me, sat down and unzipped him. I gingerly placed my laptop and I-Pad in my lap as I tried to sift through the contents of the case. YAY! I saw socks! I stripped off my shoes and pulled on

There, in the hallway by the restrooms at CNN Center, the undercover female detective asks if she can see my cell phone...

the donated ones. So much better. I repacked the bag, putting everything in nicely and then wrapping my laptop in a sweatshirt before placing it in Sam. Footsteps came and went. The door to the rest room opened and closed repeatedly.

A knock on my stall door almost jolted me out of my new gently-used socks. "Occupied," I said loudly. Then proceeded to finish up my business—Pepsi's, ya know. Another knock on my stall. Come on, there were ten toilets in there and half of them were empty when I went in. I saw the top of a pair of black pumps peeking at me from under my stall's door (over-active bladder issue?). "This stall is *Occupied*," I said once again, exasperatedly. As I was getting ready to unlock the door and exit my stall, a third even louder knock. COME ON! I swung open the door, wheeling Samsonite out with me. I was now face-to-face with the over-active bladder lady. And beside her on a leash, was a German Shepherd. *A real one!* Honestly, he could have been Samson's long lost twin. Ohhhh, Diane you know

how I am about puppy dogs—even fake ones; they melt my heart. Deciding to forget how rude and impatient his owner had been, I knelt down to pet him. She jerked his leash back. It dawned on me that this lady must have special needs and this was her service dog. Why else would CNN let a dog into its facilities? I immediately apologized. "I'm so sorry. He's a service dog isn't he, and I should have known better. You aren't supposed to interact with service dogs. Forgive me." She just gave me a curt nod—her only acknowledgement that I had even spoken. On that note, I straightened back up to leave. Her dog started sniffing Samsonite—okay, okay, *my suitcase*—up a storm. She didn't pull him back from the luggage, or correct him in any way. I decided

to just get the heck out of Dodge, so I marched to the restroom door and pulled it open. HUH?!?!?!? There, in front of me, were four Atlanta police officers with their hands on their guns yelling at me to get down. "Get

down on the ground now," they yelled. I dropped like my life depended on it. Actually, it did! Just then the lady with the dog came to my side and told the officers to "Stand down." She offered me her hand and helped me to my feet. WHAT IS GOING ON???

She turned to the officers and said, "Her luggage is clean. He didn't hit on it." My head was swirling. As with many other times in my life, I wonder if I am on *Candid Camera*. Or being *Punk'd*? There, in the hallway by the restrooms at CNN Center, the undercover female detective asks if she can see my cell phone and the notes I'd been writing all day. What? Too scared to argue or question, I immediately handed them over. She asked me to follow her to a windowless office about 100 yards down the corridor. I walked after her in a Zombie like trance. After she motioned for me to sit, she scrolled through my texts and my photo files and then looked over my grocery shopping list. She called the other officers into the office and they huddled in a corner, while I

shook. I heard snatches of their whispered conversation...words here and there floated across the room to my ears. "Bomb." "Threatening." "Blow up." "Suitcase." "Scouting location with a camera." "Suspicious." You. Have. Got. To. Be. Kidding. Me!!! I wasn't just terrified at this point; I was *ANGRY*, as well. I sat. I seethed. I waited. Twenty minutes later, with a sheepish smile on her face, she leaned over and whispered to me that I would more than likely be free to go as soon as the officers did a little more follow-up on me. The officers stared at me. Undercover police over-active bladder lady stared me down and asked/demanded I explain my peculiar actions of the day to her. EXPLAIN? PECULIAR? Briefly, the day flashed before my eyes—the clothes, the shelter, the traffic jam, the stalled car, the storms and the beautifully dressed phantom lady. How could I explain all that to these stone-faced human statues?

And then my anger boiled. I stood to my feet, trembling, and faced them. I thought of what I wanted to say, no—*YELL*—at them. YOU THINK I LOOK SUSPICIOUS? I'M A PERSON OF INTEREST? PECULIAR? Oh, really? Not 200 yards from here there were HUNDREDS of pot-smoking, flag-burning kids peeing on cars and spit-

ting on authority. In this very Atrium, there was a girl who would go as far as prostituting herself to be a hostess at Longhorns! And I didn't want to mention this, for fear of being crass—but since they thought I was a danger to civilization anyway—I would love to tell them that the ladies room in the CNN Center had smelled like a bucket of carp that had been left out in the hot summer sun all day at a Willie Nelson concert. *SO THERE!!!* I imagined this was going to be my finest *Norma Rae* moment...standing on a desk, demanding I be heard. Demanding my rights! But then...*a flashback*. I remembered the quick glimpse of my reflection in the ladies room mirror as I stood up from trying to pet the German Shepherd less than a half hour before. In my mind's eye, I clearly saw the yellow rain slicker hat, the glad bag rain coat, the mascara puddled under my eyes like a rabid raccoon as I clutched my pretend dog/suitcase. Hmmmm. Nevermind. I sat back down, folded my hands in my lap and talked. And talked. And talked.

An hour later, they—*Four Officers and a Lady* (a Disney production coming soon to a theater near you!)—walked me back to a table in the food court. I had, using every last bit of Southern charm and manners I had in me, politely enlightened them on all my "peculiar"

actions of the day (I even explained away my pretending to be the new CNN elevator operator girl—that one made undercover bladder lady laugh and prompted her to admit that I would probably be a hoot to hang with. If she only knew, right? A HOOT INDEED!)

While the officers finished up their paperwork that would release me, I thought about the totality of the day, and one thing struck me. Never one to leave well enough alone, I felt compelled to share my final observation with the female cop and the officers. "You know, this would have NEVER happened to me at FOX News Center. Just sayin'."

And so, Diane, that's why, *with good behavior*, I will probably be out in 3 to 5. But, not to worry—me and my cellmate, Big Doris, are putting the finishing touches on an absolutely brilliant plan for an *Occupy the Rec Room* movement scheduled for this Tuesday. If anything, I'm a quick learner.

Love,
Your BFF

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

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Elizabeth and Hazel—*Two Women of Little Rock*

by David Margolick

Yale University Press

A Tale of Two Women

On September 4, 1957, a little over three years after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* landmark decision declaring the establishment of segregated schools to be unconstitutional, Little Rock's whites-only Central High School became ground zero for the compliance and implementation of the ruling.

The ground troops selected to face the predictable onslaught were nine, carefully chosen students from Horace Mann and Dunbar, two all-black schools.

The plan for that first day of school had been for all nine of the students to arrive in a group. However, one of the students, Elizabeth Eckford, found herself all alone, totally engulfed and surrounded by a swirling mob of angry and defiant white students and parents, with reporters and photographers thrown into the mix to record the historic event. *Arkansas Democrat* staff photographer Will Counts was to capture one of the more dramatic shots from that historic morning; it featured Elizabeth clutching her notebook, head held high, stoically walking amidst the threatening throng. The photo also spotlighted a contrasting figure to the brave and solitary black girl—Hazel Bryan, a white student the same age as Elizabeth. Following a few paces behind, Hazel's face was contorted into a frightening mask of hate and unbridled rage. The iconic photograph of the two of them—surrounded by a mad circus of angry onlookers—was to become a lightning rod and rallying force for the fledgling civil rights movement.

David Margolick's literary documentary, *Elizabeth and Hazel* brings the photograph out into the bright light of

the 21st century and peels it layer by layer with thoughtful detail to expose the blood, soul, life and breath of each of the women behind the image. Because, as Margolick illustrates in the book, the photograph was not to be the real story of Elizabeth and Hazel, but rather the capturing of the starting point of a life-long emotional, if not turbulent, relationship between these two Southern women from two totally different worlds of Arkansas.

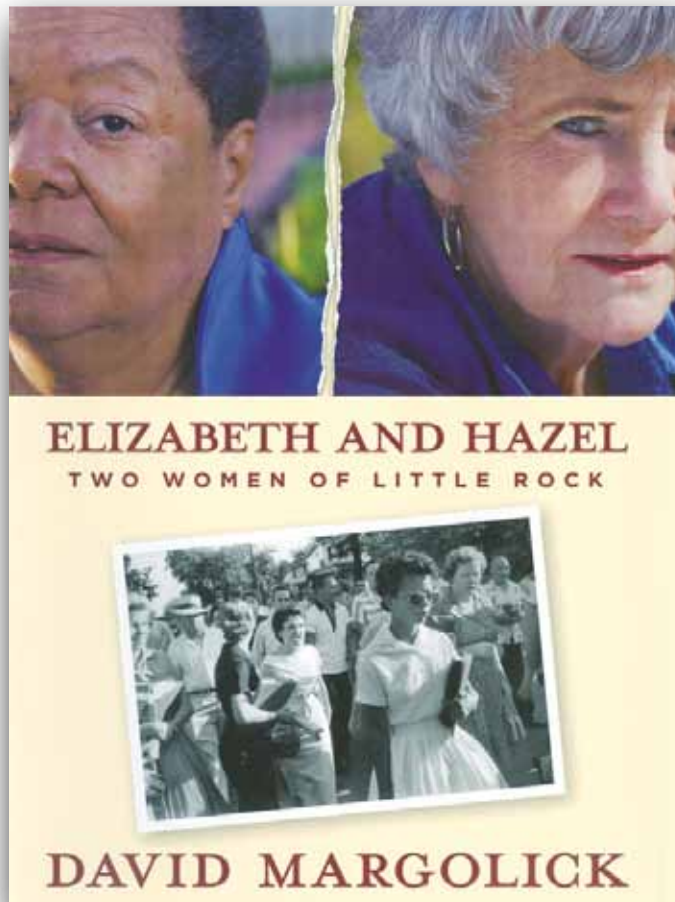
Several years after the picture was snapped, Hazel begins a jour-

ney of atonement, and the path leads straight back to Elizabeth and that fateful September morning. *Elizabeth and Hazel* chronicles the up-and-down story of the two women as they deal with the aftermath of the event, both separately and together. Margolick does a brilliant job of telling the story. He underscores the fact that change, even necessary change, is often painful and messy; and when you stick your finger in the face of the status quo, it's more than likely to be bitten off.

That being said, Margolick skillfully avoids delivering the message with a preachy or condescending tone; he simply lays the facts out in an accessible manner that makes for a great read. The book is insightful with regard to the early days of the civil rights movement, but without being judgmental. That's not to say he lets the offenders off the hook; he just treats them fairly and lets their actions speak for themselves.

The only disappointment is not the book, but rather the message itself, albeit an honest one. It comes down to more than scraping and collecting the essence off a 50-year-old photograph; *Elizabeth and Hazel* actual serves more as a microcosm of the racial divide that we still face as a region—and as a nation. Forgiveness needs to be a value as importantly embraced as tolerance and compassion. Until we, as a people, get to that point, pictures like the one from that September morning will continue to be snapped, and only the mobs and faces and victims and oppressors will continue to change.

—David Ray Skinner



Hot Dog, A Brush With the Law!

By Dusty Bettis

Well, the fire marshal finally left, along with those nice guys who were kind enough to bring by their shiny new fire truck. And it was quite an event, but now all the neighbors have gone inside. The show's over, folks, now get along home.

We eventually got everything cleaned up and all the tools and implements of destruction all put away, so I thought it would be appropriate to collect my thoughts and put them into the form of a thoughtful observation.

Note to My Friends and Neighbors: *It is ILLEGAL to have a brush or trash fire in this county after April 15—especially without a permit.* However, it is LEGAL to have a “recreational fire”—that is a campfire—provided it is less than 3' wide by 3' tall.

The county fire marshal wouldn't tell me if the “3' tall” meant the fire or the wood. I suppose it's up to interpretation. So be it. It's just one more loophole to throw on the blaze.

That being said, nothing could keep me from pushing my luck, not even the possibility that the woman up the ridge (the one I called the cops on back in December because her cur dogs were barking all night) most likely carries a heavy grudge. Actually, come to think of it, after living here as long we have, most of our neighbors probably have some sort of hatchet (if not an ax) to grind, and would love to see me in some sort of hot water, legally or otherwise. I suppose they figured that our little brush burning would be the perfect chance to seize the opportunity to make their little vindictive dreams come true.

As my own personal “recreational”

fires go, it wasn't that large—maybe 10' or so high at the peak of the flames. Okay, well, maybe 15'; it was too large and too close to measure with a tape measure. However, it was well-managed and discreet, and always



restrained by the rake and the high-pressure water hose I keep handy.

It wasn't my intention to smoke up the whole area, but my buddy Dan, who lives across the street and had come in from the lake a few minutes after the peak, told me that the “word on the street” is that there had been a house fire in the neighborhood. As I mentioned, Dan had just come in from the lake, so I wrote that off to “beer hysteria.”

What saved me was the brevity of the fire, along with my little camping table with the hot dogs and the buns all laid out. And number two son, Andrew, who was innocently loitering off to the side in the near-dark, conveniently obscuring the 5' pile of brush which represented the rest of our fire materials.

By the time the fire officials got there, the fire WAS (barely) three feet wide. They asked me if I was aware that it was illegal to have a brush fire after April 15, and I responded that I was, but this was a hot-dog-cooking fire. The fire marshal gave me an “Oh, sure it is” look, and then asked to see the alibi. I politely directed him to exhibit “A” and “B”—a pack of Oscar Mayer hot dogs and some buns. We even offered him (as well as the seven fireman in the fire truck) a sizzling dog fresh off the grill (as it were), but they declined. They also declined our offer of beer...though I think at least some of them might have accepted under different circumstances.

Anyway, they all drove away and so we had our cookout, just to make it official. And Andrew learned a valuable lesson: “While ignorance of the law may be no excuse, knowledge of the law can be a GREAT excuse.” And, a well-thought-out investment (hot dogs) can reap great rewards. As my beloved Boy Scout leader, Dr. Evans always said, “Be Prepared.” Thank you, Dr. Evans. And especially...thank you, Oscar Mayer.

Dusty Bettis is a talented and well-respected citizen of a major Southern municipality which shall go nameless to protect the innocent.



In Case of Rapture

A Story by William Love Dockery

No headlights showed in the rearview mirror, only dust roiling red in the taillights and vanishing into the black. The Chevy's slanted back window was thick with dust, making the view even more cloudy and vague.

The road went up a steep hill and Pettigrew nudged the gas. Gravel pinged on the undercarriage like shot against a tin roof. A low spot in the road sent the load in the trunk banging against the springs with a thud that shook the whole car.

At the top of the hill Pettigrew had a long view down the valley before him. Half way down, the windows of a small church shone yellow, but nothing else broke the blackness. Then as he watched, there was a flash at the bottom of the valley, where the road ran along the Holston. Headlights rounded a bend and began bobbing up

the long slope. Nance's ferry was cut off. Damn.

Without thinking, he killed his own lights, gripped the wheel with both hands, and let up on the gas. The car slowed abruptly as he fought to steer by the whiteness of the gravel between the black fencerows. He checked the mirror again: Nothing.

The church sat in a saddle between two hills, where the road forked. The other car was coming up the left fork; to the right, Blue Hole Road dropped down a steep hollow to dead-end along the river.

The dust cloud caught up and passed

him as he approached the church. He considered pulling into the yard amid the cars and farm pickups but it was too obvious. He hated dead-end roads, but he steered right, clutch in, foot on the brake, rolling quietly past the frame building at little more than a walk. The windows were thrown wide and above the sound of his idling engine Pettigrew heard preaching, an ecstatic agony of shouts and hollers and rhythmic grunts. He shook his head.

"Lloyd, Lloyd."

When the car dropped below the crest of the hill, he popped it back into gear and sped up. At the bottom of the hill the road came abruptly to the river and skirted a large circular pit in the bank. Lights still off, Pettigrew passed the spring and headed for the Deacon's tarpaper shack fifty yards

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beyond. He swung off the gravel into the hard-packed yard and drove past the cabin toward a small barn that leaned into the hillside. He parked the car in the weeds on the side away from the road and climbed out on the uphill side, holding the door to keep it from slamming shut. He leaned against the rough-sawn boards.

The first patrol car came down the hill too quickly and slid in the gravel when it came to the spring. Without looking around the corner, Pettigrew watched the headlights splash whitely against the hillside as the car sped toward the end of the road a mile upriver. Minutes later the second car came down the grade, made the same skid at the spring, and careened after the first.

Pettigrew considered trying to break back to the main road and away before the patrol cars could turn around, but it didn't feel right. There might be other patrols about. If he had to abandon the car, he could still climb up the wooded hill and go home through the fields. If they didn't catch him with his load, they couldn't prove he was driving.

In minutes the cars came back, slow and deliberate, their spotlights playing around the fishing cabins and outbuildings and garden plots along the road. The sweeping beams threw giant shadows on the hillside pastures. Pettigrew hunkered in the weeds and began to pick a route through the briars and brush to the woods.

Both cars pulled even with the Deacon's cabin and the lights swept the yard. They focused first on the shack, throwing up sparkles in the imitation-brick tarpaper. Both spots turned in quick succession to the outhouse and the smoke house and finally over the parched garden to the barn.

Sharp blades of light flashed between the barn boards and raked the swept-back Chevy. Pettigrew stiffened into a crouch and got ready to run to the hill. Without warning, a two-way radio squawked. Pettigrew jumped. He could hear the deputies talking back and forth out the car windows. Abruptly, the spots went out and gravel flew as the cars lurched back toward

the spring and up the hollow. They wallowed roughly up the grade and went out of hearing over the gap. He slumped back on his heels, hawked a copper-tasting ball of phlegm into the weeds, and groped his shirt for a cigarette.

Pulling on the cigarette, he rose awkwardly. With the cruisers gone,



the singing and clapping and shouts carried down the hill in waves. He rubbed his nose and the raw smell of green liquor reached him. He ground the smoke into the grass and stepped to the back of the car.

The trunk was full of boxes. He struck a match and then another, looking for the source of the smell. Low on one of the bottom cases there was a dark spot on the cardboard. He propped a box on the side of the car and extracted a jar from the case underneath. A seep of liquid glistened on the side. He licked it, set the jar atop the car, and repacked the trunk. He moved to a hacked tree trunk beside the woodpile and set down the jar. A chip in the glass lip showed under the sealing ring. He took a mouthful, set the jar on the log, and lit another cigarette.

The uproar at the church soon died to a faint babble, punctuated by occasional bursts of laughter and revving car engines. Even that faded and a bobwhite started to call from a fencerow. Pettigrew was lighting another cigarette from the previous one when he

heard the gravel rattling on the road. He crushed the butt, pinched out the fresh one, and hunkered down on the log.

"...anyone who can read the Scriptures has got to know the signs are right..." It was Lloyd, talking earnestly. "The atom bomb, the Iron Curtain...women making up and wearing ear bobs and smoking, whorish-like...God just can't stand for much more of that."

The second voice was older, still firm but with an occasional quaver.

"Don't get tangled up with the end times, Son. You got a sweet message. People believe when you preach. Turn them to Jesus and to each other. God will handle the end times."

The rattle of the gravel ceased as the pair stepped into the yard. Pettigrew cupped his hand to relight the cigarette and tossed the match in a glowing arc toward the pair. Startled, they turned toward him.

"Here, Son, watch that fire. It's too dry." The old man stepped on the match. Pettigrew ignored the Deacon and turned to Lloyd.

"Save any souls tonight, Cousin?"

Lloyd grimaced. "What are you doing here?" He wouldn't meet Pettigrew's eyes. Sweat had plastered his white shirt to his back, and his dark, skinny tie was blacker toward the collar. He stripped the tie from around his neck and put it and a limber leather Bible inside the door of the shack. He turned and picked up a cane pole that was leaning against the wall.

"Here, Cuz." Pettigrew extended the jar to Lloyd. "Yeah, the night got a little too warm for me, too. I thought I might come down and wet a line with you boys till it cools off a little bit."

Lloyd turned away from the outstretched arm. Pettigrew tilted the bottle and swallowed. "Why didn't you bring a couple of Holy Roller gals with you? Can't you preach them into the ticking?"

Lloyd mopped his forehead with a kerchief and turned to the Deacon. "Let's go. I need to fish."

Pettigrew laughed. "If we can't hook a soul or roll one of them sweet little

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holies, maybe we can snag a bass.”

The Deacon put a hand on his shoulder. “Son, if you want to fish, let’s fish. If you want to talk like that, go back to your honkytonks. Leave him be.”

Pettigrew shrugged. He stood up and stretched, then stooped and retrieved a pole and tackle box from under the cabin. He followed the others across the road to the spring and down the bank to where the johnboats were tied.

The Deacon got in one with Pettigrew, and Lloyd took the other. They rowed easily downriver about a hundred yards to a high limestone bluff, where the bare, broken limbs of a sunken tree poked bonelike from the dark water. They tied up to the tree and the old man lit a kerosene lantern. He propped an oar at an angle and hung the lantern from it.

Pettigrew fished from the end of one boat, casting into the faster currents of the river. On the other end, the Deacon cast toward the bank in still water under the bluff. Upstream a few yards, close enough to take advantage of the lantern but out far enough not to tangle lines, Lloyd cast from the other boat.

For the first hour, no one got a bite. They sat without talking, the only sounds the river purling underneath the boats and the occasional sizz of a cast line. Pettigrew relaxed, taking a gulp of the liquor now and then and watching insects lured to the lantern fall onto the water. He liked fishing, the forced monotony that let the pressures ease off. His mind wandered to the fish deep in the water, streamlined, muscular shapes moving unseen among rocks and old logs, feeding, swimming, probing the currents, wary yet at home. He wondered idly what the fish thought when it bit a barbed scrap and was suddenly yanked into a strange world.

Balancing against the sway of the boat, the Deacon stood up stiffly to cast. The lantern jiggled and the circle of light swung drunkenly around the boats. Pettigrew saw the red plastic bobber disappeared from the circle of light. It plopped close under the bluff.

The old man reeled in the line and

cast again. Pettigrew grew glum. The man who had taught him and Lloyd to fish, and half the boys within five miles of the Blue Hole, was growing frail. No one had anything bad to say about the old man, except maybe these days they wondered why he kept fishing with Pettigrew.

Pettigrew was baiting his hook when



the lantern dropped with a hiss into the water. He grabbed for it instinctively. An abrupt darkness erased bluff and river, and the boat began to rock wildly. In the flurry of movement and darkness, he lost his bearings and slumped back, lightheaded and limp, toward the end of the boat. He felt buoyant and warm, like lying on a rock under a white sun, a blood-orange glow shining through closed eyelids. The night and the river dissolved into the radiance, and he sprawled unaware.

Cold water sloshing down his back brought him to the boat again. He tried to dampen the swaying and see through the blackness.

“Deacon?” He reached toward the other end of the boat. He could hear Lloyd’s oars upriver a short way, quick, panicked splashes growing more and more distant.

Pettigrew’s eyes began to see different shades of dark—the black, looming bluff, the charcoal sky, faintly reflective ripples on the water—but he could not spot the old man. He shook his head.

“Deacon!” Eyes wide, he stared over the water, looking and listening for

a thrashing figure or waves from a splash. Nothing. “Deacon-n-n-n.” The call bounced back from the bluff.

Groping in the bottom of the boat, he found and shipped the oars and sculled around the snag, looking for any sign of the old man. “Deacon-n-n. Lloyd. Lloyd, help me.” Without a light, the search was hopeless. He began to row upstream with frantic but steady pulls, aiming for the take-out next to the Blue Hole.

The boat bumped the shore and, as Pettigrew scrambled out to tie it off, his foot slipped backward and he fell heavily into a tangle of brush. He crawled out awkwardly, stinging from scratches on his arms and face.

As he pulled himself up the bank he saw the outline of a dark sedan beyond the spring. A Ford, he thought vaguely, ’53 or ’54. When he staggered onto the gravel road, a spotlight blinded him. A light atop the car began spinning, a red beam strobing on the overhanging trees.

“Stop right there. We need to talk to you.”

The probation officer looked up from his computer monitor and cocked an eyebrow at the old man sitting in a folding chair. “Rufus Pettigrew. Come in. Have a seat.”

Pettigrew stepped into the office and sat in a battered chair in front of the desk.

“You’ve been gone a long time.” The official’s finger traced details in the folder on his lap.

“Yes, sir.”

“Forty, almost forty-one years is a long time to be away from a place. You’re going to have a lot to adjust to.” He peered over the stacks of folders on his desk. “Some guys with long sentences find that the Walls seem more like home than the outside world.”

“Yes, sir.” Pettigrew returned the man’s gaze and waited.

“I’ve talked with your relatives and they are OK with this trailer on the river, but I still think you might be better off in a halfway house in Knoxville. I can arrange it.” The man swiveled his

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chair toward the phone on the table beside him.

"No, sir. No." Pettigrew leaned forward, almost put out a hand to stop him. "This cabin—I should be OK there. I'll be out of the way."

"Suit yourself. I guess there isn't much trouble you can get into that far back in the country. Remember, no liquor, no firearms. I'll check in on you next week." He tossed the folder onto a stack on the floor and stood up. "Come on. I've got you a ride."

Outside Pettigrew looked around. Downtown Dandridge looked the same—the old courthouse where he had been tried, the jail next door where he had been held, the drugstore across the street he could see from his cell. All summer while they searched for the Deacon's body, Pettigrew had watched the store, the customers coming and going, the shopkeepers gathering for coffee in the mornings, laughing and joking. Every morning the youngest counter girl in a frilled white apron and bobby socks would come out to sweep the sidewalk in front of the display windows.

"Over here." The probation officer motioned him to a dirty white van with a fading Department of Corrections logo on the side and opened the door. Pettigrew shoved his suitcase in and slid over against the window behind the driver.

"I'll see you next week. Uh—fasten your seatbelt." The official slapped the top of the van and the driver cranked the engine. Pettigrew swayed a little as it lurched into gear.

Little on the drive from Dandridge to New Market was familiar. Twisty State Route 92 that wrapped itself around the knobby hills and fields crossing Dumplin Valley had been replaced with a wide, evenly-graded highway that shouldered its way through the landscape. There was a brick high school campus that was new to him and a golf course where he remembered a dairy farm. Only the profile of Bays Mountain was familiar, but it was pincushioned with towers and water tanks.

Pettigrew was in New Market before he realized it. The van turned off the

four-lane and went through a narrow, arched railroad underpass. The Holston highlands looked the same, with cattle grazing acres of rolling pastureland and the occasional cornfield or tobacco patch. Some of the two-story frame farmhouses looked familiar, but the columned brick mansions now set in the middle of green fields looked



garish and out of place.

The van topped a rise and began a long downward grade. Far down in a line of trees, Pettigrew glimpsed the Holston. The church still sat in the saddle where the road forked; the front had been veneered in red brick, and a handicapped ramp angled down the side of the building. Like the road, the parking lot had been asphalted.

As he turned down the right fork, the driver spoke for the first time.

"I guess what they say is true, hunh?" The driver looked at Pettigrew through the rearview mirror.

"How's that."

"About returning to the scene of the crime."

Pettigrew looked hard at the mirror. The driver's eyes were crinkled, as if he were smiling. Pettigrew grunted and looked out the window again. The van began the steep descent toward the river. It skirted the spring at the bottom of the hill and passed a thicket of sumac saplings that almost hid a decaying tarpaper shack. Down the road, the driver pulled up next to a humpbacked trailer a few hundred yards farther

along the river. It was surrounded by a tin-roofed screened porch with a sprung door and dead leaves gathered in the corners.

"I reckon this is your cousin's place." The driver put the van in park.

Without looking at the man, Pettigrew climbed out and retrieved his suitcase.

The turbines at Cherokee Dam several miles upriver had been shut down, and the Holston had dropped. Small rafts of bleach bottles were beached in debris along the banks and tatters from plastic grocery bags fluttered from underbrush along the water's edge. Long rows of strata were exposed like broken dams angled across the river, and half a dozen gulls were feeding noisily on the exposed shoals.

Pettigrew was standing on one of the tilted, tablelike slabs, fishing a broad pool in its lee. He'd caught three bluegill and was pulling in a fourth when he heard a yell from the bank. A tall figure in tan was standing beside the white state van and hailing him.

"Pettigroo-o-o." The call echoed off the hill above the river. "Hey, Pettigroo-o-o-o."

He yanked the fish up on the rock, removed the hook, and added it to the stringer before turning to look back at the shore.

"Pettigrew!"

"Yeah!"

The man motioned him to shore. He picked up the fish and began to make his way back to the bank, tracing a twisty route, stepping from block to tilted block across flowing channels.

At the shore, the dirt bank was slick and he shifted the stringer and rod to one hand and steadied his climb with saplings on the bank.

"Rufus, I reckon you didn't recognize me the other day."

Pettigrew gained the roadway and looked at the man. He was tall and big-boned, graying, stout at the beltline, dressed from head to foot in a uniformlike khaki jump suit. Pettigrew searched for something familiar in his

features, trying to imagine the face as it would have looked 40 years ago. He prepared to extend his hand.

"It's Ray Townsend."

Pettigrew stiffened slightly and stifled the gesture. He turned and started walking up the road toward his place. Townsend followed. They passed a couple of rundown fishing cabins set on poles on the riverside. Pettigrew stepped onto his porch. Townsend followed him without invitation.

"What you need?"

"They sent me over to check on you.

How does it feel to be out, Rufus?"

Pettigrew put the fish in a bucket of water and turned to his visitor.

"How did it feel when they let you out, Deputy? I heard you did time yourself on marijuana charges."

Townsend looked away for a second and then faced him again.

"I suspect my time in federal custody was a pie supper compared to yours inside the Walls."

Pettigrew hung his fishing rod from a nail on the porch post. He didn't turn around. For a moment he could almost smell the cellblock, a complex mix of sweat and tobacco smoke, disinfectant and sour mop. Townsend sidestepped to get a better view of Pettigrew's face.

"I've come to clear up some things I've wondered about. I'm way past doing anything to you now. We found your car behind the barn, we found the liquor, but we never did find the Deacon. I just want to know what you did with the body."

"Nothing. I didn't do nothing."

"You didn't get the old man's money. I know. I took it myself after you had already gone to Brushy. He had it hid in a coffee can behind the smokehouse."

"I didn't look for it."

"Why else would you kill him? Pure meanness?"

"I didn't kill him. I don't know what happened to him." Pettigrew reached for a filleting knife. His hand trembled.

"Huh. You went out on the river with the old man. You come back without him. You told us that much your-

self." Townsend's voice was detached, matter-of-fact, as if he was explaining something to a jury. "I knew when the spotlight hit your face. Something scared the piss out of you. And you were cut up like you'd been fighting a wildcat. I always figured you left him in the deep water under the bluff; that's got to be the place. We couldn't snag him with the hooks. And he never showed up downriver."

Pettigrew glanced toward the door.

"Look, I didn't kill him, but I paid the state's price anyway. They let me go. Now you get out of here."

"Thank you, Mister. You were meant to be here today. God sent you to look after us."

Townsend paused in the door.

"They just let you go because you're too old to hurt anybody anymore."

The Blue Hole was about a mile from his trailer, and once a day Pettigrew walked to it along the river road. He had pledged himself to stay active. He always looked away when he saw the nursing home on the four-lane in Jefferson City.

A small, shiny foreign car passed him as he rested on the railing above the spring. The young couple inside were having a lively conversation, gesturing and laughing. The car had a decal from the Baptist college in the rear window and stickers on the bumper. He squinted to read: "God Is My Co-Pilot," "In Case of RAPTURE, This Car Will Be Unmanned."

Pettigrew walked briskly back to the trailer. By the time he got there, the car was parked in a pull-off just past his cabin. The couple was gone but he heard their laughter out on the river. He spied them on a blanket spread across one of the flat slabs at mid-river.

He busied himself, washing his breakfast plate, making the bed, and sweeping out the trailer. Then he moved outside and began to sweep

the porch. He was almost finished when he glanced to the rock where the couple were sunning.

Both appeared to be dozing; she was nestled under his arm with an open book shading her eyes. Water lapped at the bottom of their blanket, and the rock ridges were disappearing as the river rose.

"Hey," he halloosed. "Hey! You'uns! on the rock. Hey!"

They didn't respond at first but after a few moments the girl looked toward him. He heard a faint yelp when she saw how high the water was. Pettigrew

threw himself down the bank and began to make his way across the rocks toward them. The boy was gathering the blanket and their textbooks.

"Let it go! Let it go!" The boy paid him no heed.

The girl moved ahead of the boy from rock to rock. Pettigrew reached her as the river began to cover the slabs. With water flowing around their ankles, he guided her to surer footing. Clutching blanket and books, the boy followed as best he could. At the bank, a book tumbled into the river. Before it could drift off, Pettigrew pulled it out soaked and dripping. He helped them up to the road.

"That water'll surprise you when they start making electricity at the dam."

"Thank you, Mister. You were meant to be here today." The boy shook himself energetically, almost dancing with relief. "God sent you to look after us."

"You're our angel." The girl threw her arms around his neck. She smelled of flowers and powders and softness. He coughed and waved a hand.

"Here's your book. I'm afraid it's ruined." He looked at the limp paperback in his hand: *Left Behind*.

The girl pushed it back at him.

"Why don't you keep that. You might want to read it. It's about the Rapture, when Jesus will come back for his chosen." She gave the boy a conspiratorial smile. He took her hand.

Pettigrew watched them get into the little car and drive away. He retreated to the trailer, turning aside to drop the

sodden book into the can where he burned his trash.

Pettigrew was fishing from an aluminum johnboat chained to the bank next to one of the other cabins. Upriver at Cherokee Dam, the turbines were turning, and the river was at full flood. The weekenders kept their boats chained and padlocked, but he could push out into the current as far as the chain would take him.

He had fished for four hours and was beginning to think he might have to open a can of Bush's beans for supper when he hooked half a dozen decent bluegills in quick succession.

As he pulled the chain and brought the boat back to the bank, he heard a car coming along the river road. He looked up to see a late-model sedan, slope-shouldered and shiny, pass slowly. He raised a hand automatically, but it wasn't any of the regulars who came to the cabins on weekends to fish and drink.

He took his fish to the back porch and cleaned them, scraping the guts into a bucket and putting the fish in a shallow wash pan. He slung the entrails back into the river, set down the bucket, and carried the pan inside to the two-burner gas stove. As he got out an iron skillet, he heard the car pass again, back the way it had come, still going slow. The oil was smoking in the skillet and he was rolling the last of the fish in seasoned meal when he heard a step on the porch.

"Ruff?"

Pettigrew started when he heard his nickname.

"Is that you, Rufus?"

He reached for a towel and brushed the breading off his hands back into the bowl.

"Who is it?"

"It's me. Lloyd. It's Lloyd." A balding, portly figure was silhouetted in the door. "Somehow, I knew I'd find you 'round here."

Pettigrew grunted and motioned

him into the trailer.

"How are you, Lloyd?"

"Not bad for a fat old man with too many debts. How are you, Ruff?" Lloyd seized his hand and reached out with his left to knead Pettigrew's shoulder. "I heard you'd come home. It's good to see you."

"Can I get you some supper? I was just about to eat."

"No, no, you go ahead. I got a touch of sugar and..." Lloyd looked at the fish sizzling in the skillet. "Well, I might eat a little."

Pettigrew poured oil into another small skillet and turned on the oven. He pulled a half gallon of buttermilk out of the cooler, brought out a canister of meal, and began mixing a recipe of cornbread.

"Let me have some of that. I haven't had any in years."

Lloyd poked through the cabinets

"Ruff, they'd lock up a Holy Roller as quick as they'd lock up a bootlegger. Would you believe it if you hadn't been there?"

until he found a couple of jelly glasses and poured buttermilk into them. He put Pettigrew's on the table and took a long pull on his.

"Brenda don't even keep sweet milk anymore. She buys that zero percent stuff. Tastes like chalk."

The grease splattered and popped when Pettigrew poured in the cornbread batter. He shoved the small skillet into the oven, then took up the fish, and opened a can of Bush's turnip greens into a small pot. When the smell of the bread began to drift through the trailer, he took it out of the oven and turned it onto a plate, sliding a table knife under it to keep the bottom from sweating. He moved the bread and greens to the table and got out vinegar and margarine.

"Such as it is, here it is," he said by way of blessing.

Lloyd cut the cornbread in pie-shaped pieces, then moved a slab to his plate. For several minutes they didn't speak as they filled their plates and ate.

Lloyd ate with relish, and Pettigrew ceded him four of the fish.

"Mighty fine, mighty fine. Puts Red Lobster to shame." Lloyd pushed back a little but then took another wedge of cornbread. "I don't fish anymore. Got all the gear and a nice bass boat, but I just can't make the time to get out on the lake."

Using the bread as a sop, Lloyd leaned over the plate to let the crumbs and pot liquor drop back onto the plate. Pettigrew put down his fork and pushed back, and they lapsed into a companionable silence.

"Do you ever think back about that night?" Lloyd looked up at Pettigrew from under bushy eyebrows.

Pettigrew gave a noncommittal shrug and let his eyes drift away from the table.

"Do you ever think about what we witnessed?" Lloyd was going to talk about it whether he answered or not.

"I'd preached it, shouted it, sweated it, breathed it in and out. God was going to come back soon and claim his chosen and leave the rest of the world to

the Tribulation. Ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh." For a moment Lloyd's voice became sonorous, cadenced. He looked at Pettigrew. "But now we do know—September 7, 1953, around 1 a.m. Eastern Standard Time. He came, just as he said, just as I said. Only he didn't take me."

Lloyd pinned Pettigrew with an earnest stare. Pettigrew glanced away and shifted in his chair. Lloyd looked to the ceiling.

"I was mad for a while, but pretty soon it was a relief. The emotion, the self-inspection, the details—all behind me. The last night of the revival I packed my duffle, kissed Mama, and moved to Dalton, Georgia." He reached into a back pocket and dragged out a red kerchief. "The carpet mills were hiring and I made a little extra trading cars. Pretty soon I had a small lot and was able to quit the mill. With a little help from Brenda's daddy, I bought a Chevy dealership." He daubed at his mouth.

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Pettigrew poured more buttermilk in their glasses. He looked up at Lloyd, caught his eye and held his gaze.

"Why didn't you step up for me?"

Lloyd looked at his plate and then around the immaculate trailer before he met Pettigrew's eyes.

"Ruff, they'd lock up a Holy Roller preacher as quick as they'd lock up a bootlegger. Think about it. Would you believe it if you hadn't been there?"

Pettigrew didn't answer.

"No, I knew then that my call was at an end. Now there's not even an echo left. I go to the Episcopal church. They put on a good show on Sunday mornings and they buy pricey cars. My youngest is a sophomore at Vanderbilt and, when she's finished, I'm going to sell the dealership and me and Brenda will move to Hilton Head for good. I've got enough to see me through to the end."

Both men were quiet for several minutes. Lloyd looked up.

"What about you? You were there, too."

Pettigrew let the silence rest between them.

"Did you regret going up for a man you didn't murder?" said Lloyd as the pause lengthened.

Pettigrew absentmindedly blotted up cornbread crumbs with a finger and looked down. His eyes lost their focus and he spoke slowly, as if trying to read a sign that was far off.

"I didn't hurt the Deacon but, hell, I was rough. I killed a bootlegger from Cocke County. We tied a couple of cinderblocks to him and threw him off Swann's bridge. I always figured I was where I was supposed to be, just not for the right crime."

Lloyd played with a fork and looked at Pettigrew.

"When I got to Brushy, I joined a prayer group. A lot of the new ones did. Hoping a jailhouse conversion would yank me out of that hellhole and back among the living. Later, when they moved me to the main prison, I did a lot of reading, but I never could find any record of people disappearing. But then 144,000 ain't a lot of people, even in 1953."

Lloyd nodded sympathetically but remained quiet. The sheet metal roof

gave a pop.

"It burned something out of me. It made me want things I'd never wanted before, things you couldn't have where I was. When you miss your chance, it's gone. This place is as close as I ever was to it." He looked around the tidy trailer. "As close as I'll ever be."

They sat silent a few minutes. Pettigrew began to clear the table.

"I appreciate the supper." Lloyd stood by the door and held out his hand. Pettigrew put a hand on his shoulder and guided him through the door to his car.

"You look after that diabetes." Pettigrew let a ball of spit fall from his lips to the pavement. Lloyd did likewise.

"We'll see you, Rufus."

The water was still up when Pettigrew went to the river in the morning. Fog rose in jagged tendrils from the surface, dancing crookedly against the brightening sky.

Downriver, the cliff beyond the spring was still in shadow. Setting his can and pole down carefully on a boat seat, Pettigrew looked at the bluff for a long moment, thinking about his supper with Lloyd. He stooped abruptly and picked up the chain that fastened the boat to the bank and gave it a jerk. Again, long and hard, he yanked at the chain and the boat began to move back toward the shore. Pettigrew strained,

and the muscles in his neck grew taut, but the padlock held, and the iron stob buried deep in the bank did not loosen. After another yank, he gave up and dropped the chain.

The boat swung downstream with the current, the water burbling underneath. Pettigrew studied the river's swell and play. Sometimes it dropped low enough for herons to fish the shoals mid-river and sometimes it rose high to gnaw away the bank, swirling around a snag, sweeping away refuse or carrying down treasures, supplying supper or denying, hiding secrets. Whatever it did, it was always there, a constant.

Pettigrew looked to the hills above him, terraced where generations of cows had cropped grass on the shaley slope. The top of a tall sycamore caught the first sun coming over the ridge. Across the river, a small hawk was patrolling the bottoms.

His head bent, Pettigrew put a hand over his eyes. He sighed, then lifted his shoulders and relaxed. He picked up the pole and baited the hook.

Bill Dockery is a native East Tennessee writer and journalist who explores the way religion, literature, and geography intermix in Appalachia. His day job is writing about research for the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. An earlier version of "In Case of Rapture" won a graduate writing award in the UT English Department in the mid-2000s.



Cozy up to the glow.



Kids & Politics—Why Daddy Drinks

by Ron Hart

W

hen you leave the hospital with your kids, you are given neither instructions on how to raise them, nor a receipt so you can take them back. Like most people, I viewed myself as a great parent—right up until I had my first kid.

Here is what I learned: *your kids always seem bad until you spend time with a friend's children.* Your first carpool or play date is one of the most reassuring events of parenthood.

Parents have to accept that they are indispensable to their kids one moment and an embarrassment the next. Kids roll their eyes in disgust, and then can be super sweet to you, usually right

before they ask you for money.

My dad was sent (he would say “*sentenced*”) to military school. Back then, you could tell a kid what to do and not buy him a car at age 16 without being arrested for cruelty by agents of Child Protective Services. On more than one occasion, I threatened my son with military school. I said it would not be one of them fancy ones, but one with a

checkered record that had to advertise in the back of *Southern Living*.

Every time my son left the house, I reminded him he could be tried as an adult.

Raising girls is different, and much easier. All a dad has to do is be willing, each month, to go watch a new movie set against the backdrop of competitive cheerleading with them. If you just do that, they will think it is the nicest thing one person has done for another since the Underground Railroad.

Buying each other gifts is also an important part of bonding. Kids are pretty easy to buy for, but I can prove *challenging*. My kids grapple each year with the question of what to get for a

man who only leaves the house to go to the liquor store.

The nightmare for a father is having a daughter who is a stripper—not the Buckhead, “*working my way through law school*” kind with a reasonable intellect, but the *out-near-the-airport* kind who has openly given up on life and harbors resentment toward her dad.

You do not want to instill resentment; that never ends. I enjoy reading the female same-sex marriage announcements in the *New York Times* and trying to determine which set of parents they are trying to get back at the most.

Parents have to treat all their kids equally. I have two beautiful kids. My wife reminds me that we have three total, but I like to keep one of them guessing. Though we “*love all our kids the same*,” we all know we just would not call 911 quite as quickly if a certain one of them went missing.

Parenting kids is very different today in this era of social media. Some twenty percent of parents punish their kids by keeping them off Facebook. I punished mine by “friending” them on Facebook. That worked better.

To complicate matters, studies show that increasing Facebook use results in kids smoking and drinking more. We grew up before the personal computer,

when we just hung out in a friend’s basement when his parents were gone and smoked and drank. It was a simpler time. Kids do not want to work at things anymore; they play hide-and-go-seek using Google Earth.

The good news is that a study found that fathers spend twice as much time with their kids as they did in the 1960’s. The bad news is that they do so because they are at home, unemployed.

I had my kids watch the excellent

our kids are not hireable. They have been shielded from reality by being taught in envy-based courses that if anyone else works for something, it is their lawful right to try to take it. If you aren’t vigilant, they will come out of college with a degree in bitterness and \$100,000 in student loan debt—or worse, a degree in Women’s Studies.

Blame starts early if you allow it. Teachers are even using dolls in first grade classrooms to help the kids point to the spot where Republicans touched the economy and ruined it.

Two things are sure in this world: *the earth rotates around the sun and kids will take the easy way out if you let them.*

And I am not so sure

about the earth rotating around the sun thing.

The best thing we can do for our kids is to instill in them a work ethic, not a sense of entitlement, and then let the chips fall where they may. Since kids are a perpetual personification of parenting, we all should do our best. And when in doubt, do what your parents did.

Ron Hart, a libertarian syndicated op-ed humorist, award-winning author & TV/radio commentator can be reached at Ron@RonaldHart.com or visit www.RonaldHart.com.

Teachers are even using dolls in first grade classrooms to help the kids point to the spot where Republicans touched the economy and ruined it.

documentary film on our education system’s decline, “*Waiting for Superman*,” while they were home for the holidays. In explaining to them what Superman did, I had to explain what a phone booth was and how Superman dashed into one to change into his tights to go out and save the world. Then my kids explained to me that no single man in tights of that age in New York would have a romantic interest in Lois Lane. So I guess parents and kids can learn from each other.

Since schools do not seem to teach facts much anymore, preferring to indoctrinate their students, many of

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Flying into the Past

by Steve Newton

There is a long skein of Canada geese in the October sky,
looking like outstretched fingers in a victory sign.

They honk as they fly south, flapping beneath evening clouds,
behavior that has been scripted since they emerged from their eggs.

And somehow they mysteriously mate for life, while flying
distances I can only dream of, watching from the ground.

Every year I hear this sound, and I wonder if this
might be the last time I will hear them pass.

One of these years it will be the last, the final time I see and
hear the fall migration of these beautiful birds we call geese.

Maybe that's part of the reason why, every fall,
they bring a haunting with their yearly farewell.

Now it's fall once more, the nights have grown cold,
and the geese are flying south again, as they always do.

And as always, I'm left with a mix of sadness and joy,
brought home once more by their flying and their sound.

But maybe it's because I once lived in the South,
the place where the geese go in the fall to get warm.

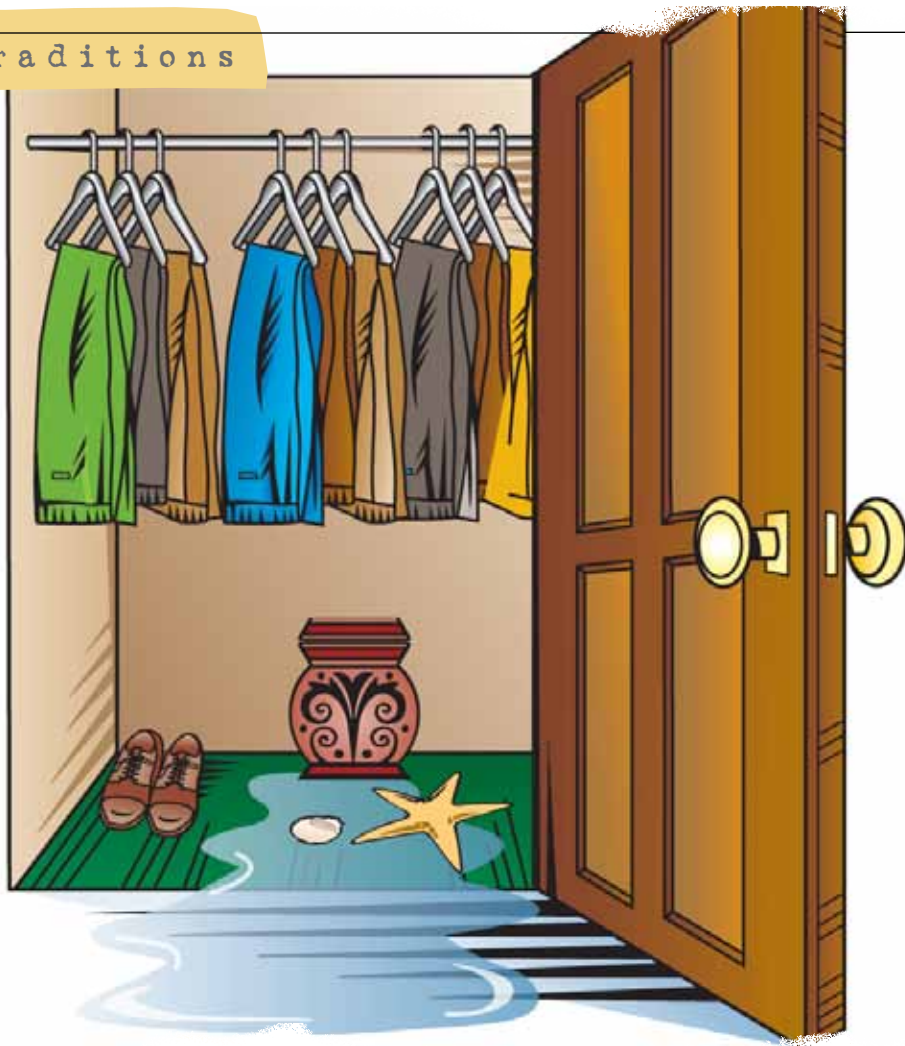
As a young man I lived a decade in Tennessee, and walked in fields
in October much like the Jersey fields these geese fly over now.

Now a man about to turn sixty, I look at the sky, think of those
Tennessee days long ago, and wish I could fly there now.

But even the geese can't fly back into the past, no matter how far they
go, but their sight and sound can bring it here, if only for a moment.

So briefly a man with a bald head and gray beard looks to the sky,
while his southern past, and northern present, join as the geese pass.

*Steve Newton spent part of his youth in Tennessee and
now teaches English at a state university in New Jersey.*



Daddy's in the Closet...

(...and he's staying there!)

by Idgie at the Dew

My daddy went to his glory ten years ago. Before he passed on, he told me he didn't want a funeral, and he didn't want a plot in a cemetery. He wanted to experience the same *going off* ceremony my mama had two years earlier.

But you see, he's still in a box in my closet.

Unnerves the heck out of my family at times, I'll tell you. I joke with them, and tell them that this way he keeps up on things, that I go in and chat about the day's activities while I'm deciding on what shoes to wear. He used to be on the mantle, but that made a few visitors nearly swoon and give me nervous looks. Last year, a recordable toy that you could leave your message on got lost in my closet after my son

had recorded some gobbledy-gook on it, and it kept going off. We were sure it was Daddy trying to communicate from the *Great Beyond*. Well, that was a little nerve-racking. Hubby was telling me to get my dadblamed daddy out of the closet right then! Luckily, we found the toy before we had to move Daddy to the garage—and before an exorcism had to be performed.

So a little flashback is required here to see why he's still in the closet and probably will be for the foreseeable

future. As previously mentioned, two years before Daddy went fishing with the Lord, Mama headed that way first, to set up the picnic. Before she passed, she told me her last wish, and it was one which I found really odd. My mama couldn't swim, *she was actually quite terrified of water*, and she had once told me that she'd had a premonition that she would drown (she didn't). So her request was that her ashes be sprinkled over the ocean. Sure Mama, *whatever*—makes perfect sense to me.

We had the "funeral"—and all family members know exactly what I mean by that—a more whack job of a funeral I've never been to in my life, but that's a whole other story (let's just say Daddy had obviously found the liquor for the reception, early on). Relatives flew

in from everywhere for the shindig. First time in ages we'd all been in the same room. Death certainly brings you closer, doesn't it? On the spur of the moment, we all decided that we would wait until sunset, go to the ocean and take Mama's ashes out onto the jetty and let them go free to find the Lord. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it?

Well, we might have forgotten in our desire to please Mama one last time that this was actually illegal. *Oopsie*. We forgot that *sunset* also means the sun goes down and you can't see a dadgum thing. We forgot about the tide coming in. We forgot a lot of things.

We also forgot my daddy was blind.

We headed out in a caravan of cars and got to a nice spot by the ocean to spread the ashes. Then we realized that half of us were in dresses and to spread the ashes we would need to climb rocks to get to the "jumping off point."

Hubby took the lead. He had Mama in the box under his arm and was trying to climb up a rock cliff to get to the water's edge. Half of us finally managed to clamber up the rocks. The other half decided to remain on the beach and ask for descriptions later.

Suddenly, the people on the beach started asking how long this was going to take and had we noticed that the beach was disappearing under high tide (of course not, it was too dark!)?

Daddy was down there yelling, "What's happening, I can't see! Is she in the ocean yet? Anyone have a match for my cigarette?"

The family members on the beach quit waiting for the spreading of the ashes; they started getting all the kids off the beach before they drowned or some nonsense. Daddy wouldn't leave, he wanted to wait for me—*just great*. Hubby got to the top of the cliff, and we said a prayer and released the ashes. Guess which way the wind was blowing? That's right folks—Hubby got a bucket load of Mama in his face.

It was almost dark and we realized that below us there was really not much beach left to get back to, and we didn't want to stay on the rocks

to find our way back, that would have been too dangerous. Hubby threw the box down into the sea. It immediately came back and wedged into a crevice in the rocks. "Um, Hubby darling, this is illegal—what we're doing here." I told him, "There is now a mortuary box on the boulder where anyone can see it and track us down. It has our name on it."

Hubby heaved a big manly sigh, wiped a bit more of Mama out of his hair and headed down the ocean side of the cliff to get the box. The tide was getting higher, the wind stronger,

Hubby showed up wet and bruised with Mama bits on his face.

current nastier, and the dark was coming down on our heads. Someone told me to get my Daddy off the beach. He wouldn't leave till I came and fetched him though, so I left Hubby to the box situation and clambered on down the rocks to Daddy. As I was walking him off the beach, he was rambling on about his cigarettes and asking if the spreading was lovely or not—I told him to feel Hubby's face. We were then walking in water, tripping and stumbling on little rocks and heaven only

knows what else. Hubby was still on the wrong side of the cliff in the dark, and I started getting worried.

Suddenly, full dark came. I was yelling for the family to guide me off the beach. Still no Hubby. Finally, I heard harsh cursing and the clunking noises of a body falling in back of me, so I know that at least Hubby was on my side of the cliff, injuries notwithstanding. Daddy noticed nothing, he was blind after all, and didn't even know it was dark out. He just wanted a match for his cigarette before he expired from his nicotine addiction.

Hubby showed up wet, bruised, and with Mama bits on his face. He did have the mortuary box, though, so at least we wouldn't be arrested. We got to the car, exhausted; a few of us almost got swept out to sea or fell off the cliff, one or two of

us had ashes in our hair, and we were all wet. It was then that Daddy announced to all, "That was beautiful—I want the same thing done for me when I die."

That, dear friends, is why Daddy's in the closet!

Idgie at the Dew is the pseudonym for a very talented editor/writer who has an incredible "southern sister" online magazine called "Dew On the Kudzu." You can check it out at <http://www.dewonthekudzu.com>.





The Way 'Twas

A short story by Becky Swopes

I sat on the stoop of the old front porch of a dying house, sifting through a shoebox of old photographs. My Great-Uncle Jake sat in the rocking chair behind me, eyes gazing off into a far distance.

I'd come here this weekend just to clear up some final business after my father's death, and ran into Uncle Jake at the church on Sunday. He'd talked me into coming over to the old home place, so that he could tell me about my daddy as a boy, and a special story he'd been saving just for me.

The dark clouds hanging over the soybean fields held a promise of a

typical Carolina downpour. I looked up from the pictures, holding the one I'd found in the bottom of the box. "Uncle Jake? When did you take this?"

"Let me see that picture, girl," he said, suddenly sitting up in the rocking chair and holding out his hand. I handed it up to him, and as I'd hoped, the picture opened the floodgates. He told me the following story in his ram-

bling way, jumping around from person to person, remembering bits and pieces of that long ago day, and of one not so long ago.

Sitting on the front porch stoop, Jake reached into the past and began talking.

I didn't take that picture, child. But I do remember that the smoke of the cookfire lingered in the waning evening light, coloring the swamp river bank with the aroma of the frying catfish. Your Uncle Ike sat staring off into distance, attention drawn by the scream of a gator somewhere out there on the river. But then Ike was always staring

off into some far distance. His eyes sometimes didn't seem to see you, just looked right through you, like something more important drew his interest.

Then Ben put the spatula under one of the fish and turned it slowly in the old cast-iron frying pan they'd borrowed from Aunt Edna. Young Reese sat gazing at the camera his cousin Billy held, some new-fangled gadget he'd never seen before.

Billy held the camera just so, and snapped the picture, capturing the bemused look of Andy, who didn't really want his picture taken, not ever.

I recall that even at the school when he'd been a little boy, Andy'd turned his head quick when the picture taker called out, "Quiet! Don't move!" so that there was a blur where his head ought to have been. You could still see the small tie tight around his neck, the one Mabel had insisted he wear, even though he'd taken it off right after the picture

and thrown it down in the dirt by third base after school. He'd hit a homer, too. That's what he said, anyway.

Billy'd be leaving soon. This was his last chance at a normal Saturday afternoon fishing with his kin. Fishing for the fattest catfish, the biggest bream he'd ever seen in his life. Black River Swamp loomed around him, the moss hanging from the trees like the scraggly beard on his old great-grandpa James, in the picture hanging by his father's roll top desk in the parlor. James, who'd fought in the Civil War, stared down at him, frowning as if to say, "Go fight, boy, and make us proud." Billy shook off the morbid thoughts and looked at the boy sitting by the fire.

Eleven-year-old Reese looked back, his eyes older than his years, knowing this might be the last time he'd see Billy for a while, maybe forever. Billy crooked his finger at the boy and took him over out of sight of the others, on the other side of the old Packard. The boy squatted beside Billy and accepted the gift of the forbidden cigarette from his cousin.

No words passed between them; didn't need any. It had always been like this. Reese was several years younger than Billy, but you'd swear he was older. Maybe being the only baby that lived made him grow up quicker than the other boys his age. His mama, Billy's Aunt Edna Earle, kept the boy close as long as she could, but when he was about seven, he'd stood up to her. "Gotta be a man, Momma. Can't keep hanging around you women folk. I'm going off to school tomorrow and I'm gonna be a man soon. Gotta be a man, momma. Gotta try."

Billy'd heard it from Reese's father, Lucius the next morning, after the old rickety school bus had swallowed him up and headed off for town and the new school. Billy had stood with Lucius in

in a God who watched over him and kept him alive, and breathing, when the other two babies before him had breathed their last within hours, too exhausted from the birthing to bother about living another minute.

The scrape of the fish leaving both pans drew Billy and Reese back to the fireside, where they ate in companionable silence, sitting on the crumpled leaves of the late autumn evening. The cold hadn't quite come yet, but Billy could feel it crimping the back of his neck in the slight breeze that blew in from the river with the scudding clouds in the darkening sky.

All the men stood and stretched when they were done, Ben cleaning out the pans in the murky water of the river, keeping an eagle eye out for the sneaking water moccasins, the ones who'd slide up the river bank and bite into the meat of your finger before you could yelp, and you'd be dead by sunset. Always something hiding in the river, hiding

in the world, reaching out to pull you from your quiet, from the family you'd loved all your life.

But it was October 1942, and Billy knew he had to leave on Monday morning, heading for Columbia, where he'd be training, up to New York and then off to Europe on a troop ship. He'd come home from Basic just long enough to pull in the memories, memories he knew he'd hold close inside wherever he went from now on. The Army promised him he'd see the world, but he knew his world was really still right here, under the leaves, in the shine of the moon of the black water of the river, in the sounds of a frog leaping to avoid the gaping mouth of a gator, the tickle of the splashing rain drops that fell from the now darkened cloudy sky. He pulled his collar up around his neck and helped his uncle and cousins pull the boat back up to the back of the old Packard, hooked it up to the trailer hitch, and jumped into the back seat beside the boy. He put his arm across the back of the seat, barely touching the brown hair of

Eleven-year-old Reese looked back,
his eyes older than his years,
knowing this might be the last
time he'd see Billy for a while.

the cotton field, checking the bolls for weevils, praying there wouldn't be any, knowing there would be.

Times were hard in the back fields of Sumter County, but nobody complained. Everybody was in the same fix, even the so-called rich folks, 'cause they all shared the same passion: the earth—the *dark-rich-grab-you-by-the-throat-and-build-up-on-your-bare-feet* earth. They planted tobacco and cotton and soybeans, and corn, and other things, mostly to sell, some to keep, but they grew lives, and hope and despair, and sometimes Billy thought he would die from the need to get away.

But he was drawn back to this boy squatting beside him, this boy he knew like he knew himself. And he knew he'd might never see Reese again, not like this, not innocent and untouched by the outside world. Because from some place deep inside him, Billy'd told me he knew this boy was special, would turn out something incredible as he grew up, the outside world touching him, affecting him, but never stealing away the sure and certain belief

the boy's neck, and tried to hold this moment in his head.

"You going to church in the mornin', Billy?" came the whisper from the boy under his arm.

"Yeah, Reese. I'm going. Graham Baptist is giving me a big send off to the war after church, dinner on the grounds, the whole thing. You remember?"

There was a silence, then Reese said, "Yeah, I remember. I know if it was me, I'd wanna be anywhere but there. Even on Sunday." He looked up at Billy. "I don't think war is a very good thing, do you?"

Billy tossed his cigarette butt out of the open window onto the side of the old rock gravel road. "No, Reese, I don't think war is a good thing. But this one...this one's different. We gotta go over there and stop the Japs." He looked down at Reese. "You do know what's goin' on out there, don'tcha?"

"Of course, I know. I just thought..." Reese gazed away from his cousin—his best friend—the only one who knew he'd decided to be a preacher, and didn't say anything.

"I'll come back, kid. I prom—"

Reese shook his head. "Don't, Billy. Don't make a promise you can't keep."

The roar of the road noise changed as they hit the dirt again, turned into the trail to Reese's house. They'd promised to have him home before dark, for reading up on his Bible before his Sunday school class. When Reese stood up out of the car, in the open door, he turned back to Billy. "I know you

gotta go, Billy. I just don't have to like it," he said. Reese turned and ran up the concrete steps into the light of the open front door of the old farmhouse, the wrap-around porch echoing to his slamming feet.

Ben pulled the car back out onto the drive trail, dust billowing up behind the car. Billy turned and stared out the back window, as if he could see through the walls of the old house, wanting to see his cousin once more,

see him alone, explain to the boy why this was something he had to do.

The next afternoon, after a mornin' of Bible reading, and preachin', and singin' like his heart would burst, Billy sat at the picnic table in the church yard, and listened to the sounds of his family, eating, singing, playing catch out behind the church on the old ball field they'd made of the former parsonage back yard. The smells of fried chicken, corn on the cob slathered with butter, and the taste of his Aunt Edna's homemade jelly stack cake lin-



He'd come home from Basic just long enough to pull in the memories, memories he knew he'd hold close inside wherever he went from now on.

gered long after the afternoon had ended. The sounds were in his head as he lay on this bed that night, thinking of the long ride in the car in the mornin', the seemingly endless train ride up to New York and to the docks; then off to the troop ship and the looming ocean voyage.

The hoot of an owl stood him up, and he reached for his cigarettes on the dresser top, lighting one with a match from a pack he'd picked up at

a club in town. It was a club he wasn't really old enough to go into, but as the owner had said, if he was old enough to go fight, he was old enough to have one last good old American beer before he shipped out. He remembered the taste of that beer now. He'd not had enough nerve to tell the old bartender it was his first. Wouldn't be his last, not if he could help it.

He smoked, and thought of his young cousin, who'd be just young enough to miss this damn war if his luck held. If not...Billy shuddered. A cold wind blew in from the open window, wafting the curtains his mother had bought him for Christmas last year.

Billy knew he was headed for the Pacific Ocean. He'd be fighting some little country called Japan that he'd never heard of—at least until Pearl Harbor—and it was one he never thought he'd ever see short of a newsreel. Then he got drafted, and he went, 'cause that's what you did when your country called—you went, and you served, and you fought, and maybe poured out your life's blood on some damn tropical island somewhere.

He shook himself, putting out the smoldering cigarette in the ashtray on his dresser. Never smoked in bed, not in his life.

"Twas a rule, a rule he'd followed ever since his dad had caught him smoking out behind the big tobacco barn, twisting leaves of the cured tobacco into a cigar. All his dad had done was say, "Don't hide, boy.

Just be careful. You could've burned the barn down, and then we'd have no way of making a living." and they went to his store down the road that his Uncle Ed ran for him, the one papered in red tarpaper just like the shanty town they'd built for the farm workers, the ones whose black skin glistened in the heat of a summer day and smelled like a hard day's work to Billy.

Leaning back on his propped up pillows, he picked up his writing pen, and

Short Story

some paper, and finished a letter to his cousin. He put the letter in an envelope, sealed it, and put it inside of his desk Bible, the one he'd be leaving here. He'd take the little Bible they'd be giving him in Basic, the one that fit in your front pocket, right over your heart. No atheists in foxholes, indeed.

Billy dropped to his knees beside his bed like he'd not done since he was a little boy. Hands folded, head bent over them, he spoke to his God about a lot of things, but mostly about that young boy right down the road, the one he hoped would live to not fight in this war or any other, the one all the hopes of his kin-folk rested on. The one who would be a preacher, and lead a life of love and hope and glory, not of blood and guts and sandy beaches covered with barbed wire, where a man could cut himself to death just trying to crawl.

He stood up, stretching, got his clothes off, hung them on the back of the valet chair, and, in his undershirt and shorts, got into the bed, the cool fall wind blowing in on his suddenly shivering body.

Yes, I'm afraid, God. I don't want

headed downstairs to the front parlor, where his parents were waiting to say goodbye.

Uncle Jake paused and leaned back in his rocking chair still turning the old photograph over in his hands. "Years later," he said, "I watched Reese stand beside Billy's weathered grave-stone, watching his own father—your Granddaddy Lucius—being lowered into

the deep dark hole beside your Grandmamma Edna's grave. Your daddy's hair ruffled in the wind as he tried to think of something to say, but the tears in his throat stopped up his mouth. Somebody tugged at his jacket, and I saw one of your cousins holding up some flowers.

"Can I give these to Uncle Lucius?" she asked.

He'd take the little Bible they'd be giving him in Basic, the one that fit in your front pocket, right over your heart.

to go. But I have too. If this madness isn't stopped over there, it will come here. And nobody will be safe, not even Reese.

He slept in spurts and fits, and woke from a terrible nightmare of exploding armament and screaming dismembered bodies, and blood, and darkness growing over the earth. He shook himself, got cleaned up, and

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Short Story

"He just nodded and the little girl set them on the headstone. A bird sang in the distance as she walked back to her grandparents. Reese looked at them, and they at him. Then they all nodded, something unspoken in the air between them.

"Reese and your momma were walking toward the car with you kids; she wanted to get the air conditioning going so Kathy wouldn't start coughing and get sick again. He sighed, and turned to the tombstone at his side.

"The flag etched into the granite was looking a little worn and dirty. Reese took out his handkerchief and wiped the muck off the stone. 'I still miss you, Billy. You were right. War is a damned waste.'

"Then he looked up quickly to see if anyone heard the preacher cussing, and looked right up into my eyes. 'It's okay, Reese. I agree with you. Damned

shame that boy going off to fight a war and dying on the shores of some damn island before he even got a chance to live much. See you cleaned off the stone. His momma would've been glad for it. She's been gone from us for a while now, you know,' I said. 'Damned shame,' I said again.

"Reese put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed. Some things didn't need saying, but you said them anyway. It's the way things were. 'I know, Uncle Jake, I know. I miss him every day,' Reese said, 'Even with a house full of kids, and a girl off in college now, I still miss him. Always will, I guess.'

"He turned back to his father's grave. 'Tell Billy hello for me, Daddy. And I'll keep on going, and preaching, and trying to get people to listen to the Lord's way.'

"We walked back to our cars, Reese getting in beside your momma with the car full of all you kids, who were

yawning, your brother asking when were you gonna eat next. Our eyes met through the car windows. A nod of the head, a crank of the car, and I drove away.

"The drive to the old church took about ten minutes, by which time the hungry ones had settled down in the back seat, and your sister Kathy up front between your parents—right in front of the air conditioner—had quit coughing. When y'all got out at the church, your brother ran off with his cousins to play ball while Olga and you girls headed inside the fellowship hall. Reese stood and watched the boys playing and a stray memory of Billy and the Saturday afternoon of the fishing trip loomed up in his mind.

"And he remembered the conversation on the other side of the old Packard, and the next day, and the ball game where Billy let him make a homer, hitting the ball almost into



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Short Story

Old Lady Brogdon's back porch window next to the church. And the next mornin', as he watched through the back window of the old school bus, headed for the first day of his high school years, seeing Billy through the dust—as if from a distance of many years—knowing he'd never see him again, this side of Heaven.

"Shaking himself from the memories, he went inside to the others, where they held his hands, and fed his family, and he let go of the future for a while, remembering the *way 'twas of things*, things he'd never really forgotten, but hidden away.

"Reese could almost feel Billy watching over his shoulder as he watched his young family, his teenage son especially, and could almost hear Billy telling him, 'Don't ever forget to teach your son that killing is wrong, even when the guy on the other end of the gun is a total bad un, even when you know you gotta kill him or be killed, 'cause he's in the same boat you're in. And war is hell, boy, pure T hell. Don't let anybody

tell you different.'

"He turned his head to look out the window at the waning afternoon, and could almost see a body standing in a nearly transparent veil of something

He turned his head to look out
the window at the waning afternoon
and could almost see a body standing
in a nearly transparent veil...

over by the old oak tree on the church grounds. The figure lifted his hand, saluted, and settling his square cap on his head, walked off into the rising fog of the cold October evening."

Uncle Jake shook himself a little, and I pushed the old quilt up into his lap. He grinned down at me, and said, "Yeah, guess I got a little carried away there, didn't I, child? Reese used to come and talk to me a lot after that, you know. I guess we both wanted to remember Billy and Lucius and Edna and all the ones that're gone now."

I reached up and touched him on

the knee. "I know, Uncle Jake. Daddy talked about Billy a lot, at least to me. He told me and you both about that time at the church after Granddaddy Lucius's funeral, when he thought he'd seen Billy."

Standing to my feet, I leaned over and hugged him. "I'll see you in a month," I said.

He smiled, looking off into the distance. "Maybe, maybe not," he answered.

I turned to look where he was looking and just caught a glimpse of a khaki figure, insubstantial as smoke, walking away in the waning light of the evening.

Born & raised in SC, Rebecca Swope graduated from Carson-Newman College in 1974 with a degree in Theater Arts. A member of Mystery Writers of America, she now lives in Florida and works as Assistant Director of Worship Arts at First United Methodist Church of Boca Raton. She's also the proud mom of a Marine.

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Northbound Single-Lane

by Marsha Mathews

Finishing Line Press

A Poetic Travelogue of the Heart

Marsha Mathews's book of poetry, *Northbound Single-Lane* is more than an interstate journey; it's a guided tour through the tender hidden chambers of the heart.

Dr. Mathews, who teaches writing at Georgia's Dalton State College, begins the collection with "Grasshopper," a pensive look back at a childhood memory that foreshadows the oncoming storms she would come to face. With the doors to her emotional journey thrown open, she takes the reader by the hand as she shares her times of joy, loss and despair before discovering the acceptance of the travails of life.

The honesty that she employs is both refreshing and heart-breaking as she takes us through the breakup of her marriage—and *escape*—through the heavy hanging sadness of her father's death.

In "Breakdown" she writes, "*At the pool, troubles float. I sit back & forget our U-Haul trailer, everything we own that wasn't his in the weeds beside the Interstate.*" You can almost see the shimmering waves of heat refracting the eighteen-wheelers on the nearby interstate as she ponders both her past and her destiny, while her daughters splash happily in the Super Saver Motel's tiny pool.

As her journey progresses through the book's poetry, the reader is comforted in the fact that there is, indeed, an ultimate treasure that makes the



tears, struggles and breakdowns somehow worth the effort of continuing down all the interstates, highways and dirt roads. The glittering destination that Dr. Mathews finds and shares with her readers is the culmination of the little victories that she has managed to gather over the course of the journey—the little jewel that is *Northbound Single-Lane*.

—David Ray Skinner

For information about purchasing a copy of *Northbound Single-Lane*, visit: <http://www.finishinglinepress.com>.

Grasshopper

Clearwater, Florida

When I was ten,
I sneaked a hypodermic needle
from my mother's nursing bag,
filled it with red food coloring.

I went out on the back porch,
got the mayonnaise jar,
unscrewed the lid, slowly,
so I could get my hand in
to grab the grasshopper.

I injected him.

His straw color turned
the color of a tangerine
& every bit as radiant.
I ached for something
to inject myself with
to make *me* shine.

I took the grasshopper
to the meadow
back behind the creek,
& watched him hop away,
robbed of natural protection.
Same way lipstick and high heels
later did me in.





Illustration of Lefty Frizzell by Lisa Phillips Owens | ©2012 Lisa Phillips Owens

Lefty Frizzell: A Story of a One of a Kindness

by Lee Owens

I grew up in a household very different from most middle class homes. My dad never went to a regular job. He stayed behind closed doors in a converted double garage with other men armed only with musical instruments and their minds writing songs around the clock to supply many of the country music hits of the day.

Our existence was very removed from that of other families. I never once considered that people went to work and had regular lives. All I knew, through osmosis, was if your talent was good enough, you could make money with it. I was sort of “born to

the breed” someone said once.

People in show business came in and out of the house on a regular basis, and on many occasions, I accompanied my father on business trips into Nashville where so many adventures happened they would fill ten books. I

don't really like to tell tales on people, so I have kept my silence about most of them except in the circles of family and music business acquaintances. It is bad manners to gossip about people. The shelves of libraries are littered with a thousand *tell-all* and *mommy-dearest* books, and frankly, I find it a bit crass and tiresome. To be in show business successfully is an extremely unusual thing. It takes guts and a tunnel vision attitude that is not conducive to family life. That is just plain fact. In spite of this, many people manage to have families. Only some

manage to do so with what could be truly considered healthy family existences. I break my silence now at the urging of many friends because there is an interesting overview of which I had never thought. A duality to this story that is redemptive in many ways and insightful in many others.

The existence was rather like living in some sort of bubble isolated from many aspects of the real world. All of my waking hours were dedicated to learning another sort of music than the type with which my father had been associated. Like so many other Americans, I had been bitten with the guitar craze when the post-Kennedy British invasion of the Beatles had hit the U.S. with the force of a large hurricane. I was only seven then, and we were still a year away from living in Nashville, but it had affected me greatly. After that there was no turning back.

Having been a sickly and introverted kid, I had earlier been affected not only by literature (I learned to read at two), but by Hank Williams, Ray Price, Pee Wee King and His Golden West Cowboys, Frank Sinatra, and Frankie Laine. In short, I lived in my head. So by the time I was a teenager and my father had moved us to Nashville from Waco, Texas and truly carved out a career, I had manufactured a reality that wasn't very congruent with true reality. At that time I truly believed that if I worked hard enough to become a really good writer and singer, *I would get noticed* by the people in the music business offices and do it on my own. Looking back, I can definitely now see just how naïve this attitude truly was.

I knew many of my father's friends and was a constant source of amusement to many of them, because I was so dedicated to the cause at such an early age. However, I never got serious until my mid-teens as far as showing anything I had written to anyone, and I spent a good part of my early teens

lying like crazy, plagiarizing and telling my school friends that I had written songs I had in fact *not* written at all. I was pretty much abnormal in that respect. I think adolescence is a horrid time for pretty much everyone—we all crave *some* sort of acceptance. I took it to some ultra dramatic level, though. In retrospect, I think it was because no one in that circle of my father's friends—including *him*—would have ever understood or accepted the kind of music I was creating on my own, in secrecy. At 15, when I eventually did show some of my work, to my astonishment, people seemed to think it showed maturity beyond my years. This was incredibly untrue, but I enjoyed the praise because I rarely

To say that Lefty Frizzell has been imitated and literally copied by many is a huge understatement.

received any form of it from my father, at least directly.

This gets us out of background information and into my story. My father had many good friends and many co-writers. Some of the people who recorded his songs would even come to the house at times. One of these people was a guy named Lefty Frizzell. To say he is imitated and literally copied by many is a huge understatement. Vocally he is probably the most influential country singer of the twentieth century. This is obvious in the voices of Merle Haggard, George Jones, Keith Whitley, John Anderson, and George Strait, just to name a few. They have all literally copied or mimicked Lefty in some way.

Between 1950 and 1954, Lefty had 14 TOP TEN singles on the national country music charts. *He was huge*. It seemed no one could surpass him. His career had ups and downs in the late fifties but recovered in 1959 with the enormously popular Danny Dill-Marijohn Wilkin song "Long Black

Veil," which became a standard and has been covered by everyone from Johnny Cash to Bruce Springsteen. About five years later, he came back again with another hit that was written by Bill Anderson and Don Wayne (the recently deceased writer of Cal Smith's big hit "Country Bumpkin"). The tune was "Saginaw, Michigan," and it became a signature song for Lefty.

Lefty was such a force in country music that my father, A.L. "Doodle" Owens (<http://www.nashvillesongwritersfoundation.com/l-o/al-doodle-owens.aspx>) and his partner, Dallas Frazier (<http://www.nashvillesongwritersfoundation.com/d-g/dallas-frazier.aspx>) wrote a song in 1972 called "Hank and Lefty Raised My Country Soul" about the influence Lefty and

Hank Williams had on people. It was recorded at that time by Emmylou Harris, Stoney Edwards, Moe Bandy and many others. The original "hit" was by Stoney Edwards,

whose record was quite inspiring. Emmylou's version may be found on her first effort, "Pieces of The Sky" (although it didn't make the final cut on the first release of the record in 1972, it was released on the CD version in 2004 as a bonus track, having been part of the original sessions for the album). The song has since been covered by several other people. In the late sixties my father and Lefty became friends, and Lefty began recording many of my dad's songs. His last single before he passed away, "Falling," was written by my father and Sanger D. "Whitey" Shafer.

Much has been written about Lefty and a great deal of it unfortunately has dwelled on his problems. I am not here to criticize anyone else's ideas or remembrances. I just wish to tell a story in which he exhibited so much kindness, encouragement and compassion toward a young man it reminds one of an old Yiddish word that is almost overused. The word is *mensch*. It means a person of integrity and

honor. In my eyes he shall always exemplify that definition fully.

I met Lefty for the first time when I was almost 10. It was 1967, and he had just recorded a song of my father's called "Get This Stranger Out Of Me" for the Columbia label as a single. He was an extremely kind guy who would always take the time to talk to you if you were a kid. I had remembered his name from

a 78 rpm I had as a younger kid called "If You've Got The Money (I've Got The Time)." The record was in a stack of old 78's that my grandfather had given me (along with a hi-fi!) just after I had major surgery at the age of five. Lefty was from Corsicana, Texas, which was just up the road from our hometown of Waco, so there was always a good relationship between my father and him. Subsequently, he was very much fun for me to be around, as well. He

began to show up at the house when he was in Nashville, and I always enjoyed his visits.

There is a really funny story about Lefty and me that dates back to when I was 14. Much to the horror of my

"I am just showing him what not to do when he gets older," said Lefty, laughing uproariously.

mother, Lefty taught me how to spike a watermelon with a fifth of vodka outside of my father's music workroom. He cut a triangular plug out of one end of the melon and poured a quarter of the bottle into the fruit. He then replaced the plug and rotated the melon to the opposite side on the same end of the melon and did it again. The process was then repeated on the other end of the melon. Unfortunately for both of us, my mother caught the two of us

in mid-pour at the fourth hole with the stern, "Lefty Frizzell, are you corrupting my teenager?" She always used first and last names when irritated.

"Why, no Mary Ann, I am just showing him what not to do when he gets older." Then he started to laugh uproariously.

My mom couldn't help but laugh with him and then said, "You two get inside. I have dinner ready. Who wants pork chops, mashed potatoes and green beans?"

"Me!" I said.

"Me, either!" Lefty chimed in his unusual slang, and he carefully placed the watermelon in the rear floorboard driver's side of his car. The watermelon wasn't brought up again after that.

About a year later, I wrote my first couple of serious songs and people began to take notice. Soon after, I wrote two songs that I still like a great deal. To this day, I am somewhat surprised that they came springing from

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that completely unreal world of my head. One of the songs was about a guy who awoke to a startling realization in the morning. It was entitled “Finding Annie Gone,” and I sort of kept it under wraps. I played it for my dad and he sort of sat there quietly for about three minutes. I never could get a direct reaction from him unless it was critical. He told me Lefty was coming over the following day and urged me to play the song for him when he arrived. I told him there was no way I was going to do that. He asked me to trust him on this one thing. I really didn’t trust him and hardly slept all night imagining myself to be the object of great laughter and much derision the following afternoon.

About one o’clock Lefty arrived and I hid for about fifteen minutes. Eventually, however, I was summoned. When I slowly descended the four steps into the work room, Lefty said, “Play me a song, Pal.” (There were only two guys I ever knew who called me “Pal,” and both of them put me more at ease when they did it...one was Mickey Newbury and the other was Lefty.) I nervously sat at the piano and began to unfold my story as follows.

Finding Annie Gone*

I pulled myself out of a pleasant dream and slowly fell awake
 Keeping my eyes closed within that sleepy haze awhile
 And as I hid from the light,
 I felt for Annie’s body
 And the bedclothes
 were still quite warm on her side

The only vows we ever made
 were recited to ourselves
 And through the years I guess
 their meanings had increased,
 at least enough to let me find
 myself afraid to wake alone
 And afraid I’d wake one
 morning Finding Annie Gone

I got up and pulled my pants
 on and headed for the kitchen
 Stopping only long enough to listen
 to the morning rain

And Mary the housekeeper
 had breakfast on the burner
 And when I asked where Annie was,
 a question filled her face

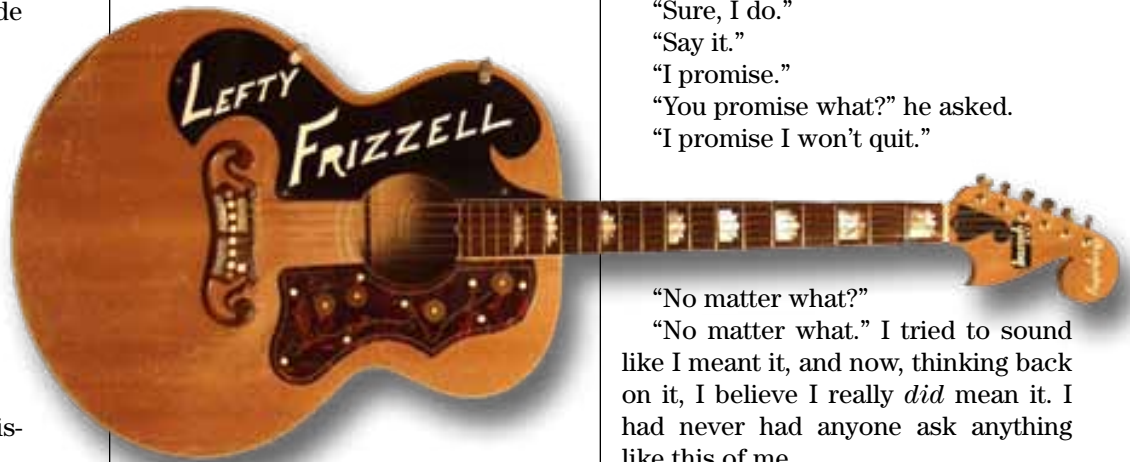
The only vows we ever made
 were recited to ourselves
 And through the years I guess their
 meanings had increased, at least
 Enough to let me find myself
 afraid to wake alone
 And afraid I’d wake one morning
 Finding Annie Gone

Then all at once it hit me
 my Annie wasn’t home
 And Mary said my nice young lady
 hadn’t been gone long
 And suddenly the rain cleared up
 and I looked up at the sky
 And it was the same shade
 as Annie’s eyes

The only vows we ever made
 were recited to ourselves
 And through the years I guess their
 meanings had increased, at least
 Enough to leave me wondering
 how I can go on
 Since I woke up this morning
 to remember Annie’s gone

I pulled myself out of a pleasant
 dream and slowly fell awake
 Keeping my eyes closed
 within that sleepy haze awhile
 And as I hid from the light,
 I felt for Annie’s body
 And the bedclothes
 were still quite warm on her side

When I finished, I nervously waited



a minute before I looked up. Then I looked directly at Lefty. He was openly weeping. I knew he had recently split with his wife, Alice, and he had loved her very much. What little I knew was it was a very private matter to him, and he had been very heartbroken over it. I knew this because he was very matter-of-fact about it with friends he trusted. We were rather like family to him, so we knew. I remember realizing that the song might have stirred up a bit of some of that, and perhaps it did, I don’t know. That is a matter that should be left up to what Jefferson Davis called the “picklocks of biographers.” Then he surprised me, and he wiped away the tears and said, “I want you to listen to me very carefully, and I want you to make ol’ Lefty a promise, now, you hear?”

I said, “Okay,” rather half-heartedly.

He said, “No, no, no...I don’t want you to blow me off, now. I want you to take this seriously and listen to what I am saying, now!” He said this with such conviction I just sat in resignation and nodded. “I want you to promise me that no matter what—*well, no matter what those bastards in those offices uptown throw at you to tell you that you haven’t got a lick of sense or a bit of talent*—that you will not quit playing, writing or singing. Will you make that promise to ol’ Lefty right now? ’Cause we aren’t leaving this room until you do.”

“But why?”

“Never you mind why. I don’t want you getting a swelled head. That was good work. You need to keep working, that’s all. Do you give me your promise that you won’t quit?”

“Sure, I do.”

“Say it.”

“I promise.”

“You promise what?” he asked.

“I promise I won’t quit.”

“No matter what?”

“No matter what.” I tried to sound like I meant it, and now, thinking back on it, I believe I really *did* mean it. I had never had anyone ask anything like this of me.

“Good...now we can both relax and get on with things. Don’t you ever forget this day, son.”

I always felt a little odd about that day. I was sixteen years old, and it was the summer of 1974. I never could figure out what the big deal was when I was young, but I was certain it was important to keep the promise. Consequently, in some odd way I clung to it through many troubles in my life.

I have kept the promise. There have been, however, *two* sides to the promise. One side can be called the dark and *rather alienated* side. This came from me attempting to deal with real people with functional lives. With myself having grown up in *the bubble*, I had little experience with them at all. It also came from dealing with executives in the music industry whose power madness is legendary.

The other side is the redemptive side. This allowed me to express myself and somehow get emotions out in a hopefully elegant and somewhat individual way when I was so accustomed to living in a world inside my head. In many ways, this provided a needed catharsis and sort of kept me from exploding inside myself.

Once again, from the darker side, I have been avoided, derided, and told to quit. I’ve been labeled “too British,” “too country,” “not country enough,” “too folky,” “too much like the Beatles,” “overproduced,” “too retro,” and generally everything the executives didn’t want.

On the personal side, I have been divorced, and I’ve watched so many relationships destroyed they are almost too numerous to count—all because I chose this path. In truth, I simply had no reference point for being able to relate to many normal people for many years. It has taken a very long time and many life lessons for me to integrate myself into normal society and break out from the “bubble.”

Music, on the other hand, *and from the brighter side*, has always been somewhat of a saving grace to me. In retrospect, my promise to Lefty has helped me sail through the roughest times in my life. The opportunity to play and write music has introduced me to some of the most interesting and creative people in the entire world, many with whom I have worked. It has given me the ability to start with nothing but an idea in a recording studio and miraculously—six or seven hours later—to be able to emerge with a living and breathing musical entity.

Hopefully, I have come out of the difficult parts of my life with somewhat of a decent ability to express myself with what is hopefully a good

What it was like to hear him do it in person was so incredibly amazing, there aren't adjectives expressive enough for it.

amount of honesty and descriptiveness to get my point across succinctly. The only thing important (once again) is that *the promise* has been kept.

When I review this promise, my main thought is I did not think of Lefty as a “living legend” at that time. He was just a friend of my father’s who commanded respect, because he had success in the industry. He was an extremely kind man who had a sense of fun and mischief about him. However, his ability to bend a note with such feeling when he sang was indescribable, and I do not exaggerate when I say the following: *What it was like to hear him do it in person was so incredibly amazing, there aren't adjectives expressive enough for it!* I was always impressed with that. That really was something I cherish in my childhood in retrospect. I remember feeling so incredibly sad for him about the breakup of his marriage, because it was written all over him in every gesture and every note he sang. He was devastated by all of that. I just tried

to be nice to him and be his friend as much as a young teenager was capable of doing.

It is only with age that I am seeing the enormous honor it was to have had someone of Lefty’s stature ask me to make this sort of promise. I was just a kid. It was as if he could see my future. It is astounding he knew that many in the industry would not see it as a future for me.

I have been lucky enough to rub elbows with many well-known people in the music industry and even luckier to have worked with some of them. Most, if not all of them, have had a great love and respect of the music itself, first and foremost.

The second thing is my obsession to keep going, *no matter what*. I suppose Lefty knew that I had that, or at

least would eventually have that. I think he wanted the promise that he extracted from me to serve as sort of an advance gift—one to give me a leg up. He knew

I was too green to really see what he was saying, and it would take years and experience before I understood it fully. My life is all the better for it, in spite of all the ups and downs.

One important thought to remember about those of us that play music... *many of us can not help being removed from the realities of normal life*. Most of us try our best to stay grounded, but all too often, it is difficult to maintain any sense of normalcy with what we do. In the end, many of us find an answer in some sort of spiritual grounding. Frankly, and at the risk of being dogmatic, I think *that* is the best solution to *all* of life’s ills.

Einstein once said, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” For years, I thought there was something wrong with me because I didn’t know how to fit in with people who were not in show business. Perhaps my friend Lefty Frizzell knew this fact all those years ago, and that music

would be my saving grace. Perhaps he also knew I needed to keep my shoulder to the wheel and continue, and somehow, eventually this unreal Pinocchio would become a real boy, even if, at one time, it was just a block of wood. Admittedly, blocks of wood shed splinters, and splinters hurt, but most growth as a human being hurts, as well. I prefer to think of myself as a work in progress.

Lefty most certainly was a regular human being, and I am better for having known him. *The promise* I made to him has taught me many lessons, and I am brimming over with gratitude for that summer day in 1974 when music and personal growth really began to get very serious for me. He could sing, and he could think of others. Those are *both* extraordinary gifts. I suppose the biggest lesson of all in Lefty's *one-of-a-kindness* was that in thinking of others, we somehow find solutions for our own problems. This has most certainly proven itself through many difficult lessons I have learned in my time on this planet. It was grand to have a consummate professional there for me when I was so young.

Lee Owens

Hudson, Florida
22 Feb 2012

Author's Note: *Not too many years after I sat down at my dad's workshop piano and played "Finding Annie Gone" for Lefty, I had the opportunity to demo the song in a Nashville recording studio. (Click on www.SouthernReader.com/FindingAnnieGone.MP3 to hear it.) The informality of the performance, due to my teenage nerves in the recording studio, is a perfect example of just how green I was as a musician. What Lefty heard would have been even more raw. It underscores just how kind he was to take me seriously as an artist.*

Web pages for Danny Dill, Marijohn Wilkin, Bill Anderson, Sanger D. "Whitey" Shafer, Lefty Frizzell and Don Wayne are all listed in the Nashville Songwriter's Foundation

Hall of Fame as seen here and referenced before in the links for Frazier and Owens. It is alphabetical and is a great source of information. <http://www.nashvillesongwritersfoundation.com>.

I would be remiss if I did not tell you to look for the work of Mike Copas, Pete Cummings, Randy Powers, Dan Pelton, Rob Callahan, Steve Newton, the late Lee Davis, Steve Hill, Wade Seymour, the late Keith Palmer, Roger Ferguson, Billy Anderson, Dale Brann, the late Dave McCaskell, Chicago Charlie Fink, the late Stanley Hedges, but especially Butch Davis and the absolute genius of Sam Hankins wherever you see songs. I hope you find them. I have worked with or grown up with all these guys. They are all amazing musicians, players and artists. Look for and discover them.

A million thanks to David and Jo Frizzell for their generous time, encouragement and for keeping the sense of family that has run between our two (families) for many years in giving generous permission to write this article. Most of all, all my love and thanks to my dear wife, Lisa Phillips Owens, who did the stellar oil painting of Lefty at the beginning of this article. Some of her work can be found online where you can purchase prints in several different forms. Check out: <http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/lisa-phillips.html>

For the best information on Lefty Frizzell, read his brother, David's book, "I Love You A Thousand Ways." It can be purchased in standard book form or audio book @ <http://www.davidfrizzell.com/merchandise.htm> along with David's great CD's, as well. It can also be had at Amazon.com in book form.

For Lefty's music, in the mid-priced range I recommend two overviews: The best being http://www.amazon.com/Thats-Way-Life-Goes-1950-1975/dp/B0002MPQN2/ref=sr_1_7?ie=UTF8&qid=1333280017&sr=8-7 as a complete career overview of the hits.

The second being http://www.amazon.com/Look-What-Thoughts-Will-Do/dp/B000002AD4/ref=ntt_mus_ep_dpi_2 which is a very good look at his early and middle career. By far the best and most exhaustive collection is for the audio enthusiast; it has many songs that were actually unreleased that my father wrote, including my favorite from the late career; "I Wonder Who's Building the Bridge (Who's Getting Her Over Me)" for which I cannot find a release. The collection is the now out of print "Lifes Like Poetry" on the German Bear Family label which can only be found from the wonderful site www.gemm.com (These people can help you find anything). It is a 12-CD set and as far as I know covers everything Lefty ever recorded. Here is the link. <http://www.gemm.com/c/search.pl?field=ARTIST+OR+TITLE&wild=Life%27s+Like+Poetry&Go!.x=0&Go!.y=0&Go!=Search>. It is a wonderful collection.



The Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to honoring and preserving the songwriting legacy that is uniquely associated with the Nashville music community. Its purpose is to educate, celebrate and archive the achievements and contributions made by members of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame to the world.

nashvillesongwritersfoundation.com



A Flying Family Reunion

by Ron Burch

I spent much of my early working life as an account executive for several graphics production firms. In those positions, I assisted ad agency and corporate accounts alike in producing their ads and executing their print marketing ideas.

Success came from failsafe performance and in establishing and investing big time into long-lasting business relationships. Over time, some of these business relationships evolved into personal friendships. That was the case with my good friend Ronnie—one time, the production manager for one of the largest ad agencies south of New York City.

For many years, Ronnie and I had a standing business lunch every Friday. It was the age of unlimited expense accounts and we took proper advantage. Some Fridays we'd visit the hot spots. On others, we'd go back to a favorite. After ten years of spending nearly every Friday morning on the phone with the old boy trying to decide where we would go to lunch, we finally made a popular restaurant at the intersection of Peachtree and Spring Streets in midtown Atlanta our Friday default.

It wasn't the food that took us there; it was the friendly service and the

warm atmosphere—especially at the bar where we chose to put on the feedbag. We'd grab a stool, order a beverage and begin nibbling on an unlimited supply of cheesy Goldfish crackers that somehow tasted better than what we'd get at the grocery store. We'd chat with each other and with the other Friday regulars. Also with Shirley, the cute, dark-haired gal behind the bar, who took very good care of us.

We always ordered the same thing: a couple of sprucers, a bowl of clam chowder and a side of crab legs. At the close of the meal, our conversation would typically turn to the weekend and any special weekend plans.

That Friday in late July was no different. Ronnie said that that weekend, he and his wife were traveling to South Georgia to attend her family reunion. He was looking forward to the company and the food, but not the four-hour drive. I smiled and told him he should be grateful for family. As an only child,

my family members were few and far between. Matter of fact, we'd never had a family reunion. Even if we did, everyone eligible to attend could sit in our smallish den without us bringing in extra chairs!

Typical of the pal he was, Ronnie chimed-in, "Come on Burch, go with us—there'll be plenty of food—and there's an extra bedroom at my wife's aunt's house, where we'll stay. Come on, man, it'll do you good and it'll be fun." I thanked him for being so gracious, but declined. I felt family reunions were personal occasions—far too personal to be opened up to outsiders.

"No way," he exclaimed. You can bring your guitar and join in with my brother-in-law on Saturday night. My wife will sing; you can too. Believe me, it'll be a hoot." He was nothing if not persistent.

I thought about it for a couple of minutes and said, "Okay, sport. If you're serious, and if my wife doesn't have anything important planned, we'll go...on one condition: we'll take the airplane and eliminate the driving."

"Super," he said, "how long will it take us to get there?"

"Without looking at a chart, I'd say about an hour and a half. Beats the

heck out of a four hour drive,” I said reassuringly.

We agreed that we would meet at the airport at 8:30 am on Saturday morning. As we were slap in the middle of the summer’s worst dog days, I wanted to be airborne and into cooler air before the heat of the day began to build in earnest (small airplanes aren’t air-conditioned).

That night, I pulled out the aeronautical charts and planned the details of the trip. We’d depart Atlanta to the south and then fly a southeasterly heading until we were well beyond the Atlanta/Hartsfield-Jackson Class B Airspace on the east side. Once we were clear of Hartsfield-Jackson’s “big iron,” a course of 155° would take us directly to “FZG”—the airport identifier at Fitzgerald.

I measured the total distance point-to-point as being roughly 195 air miles—probably closer to 240 miles by car. With an average groundspeed of 120 knots (140 mph), our time en route would be 1:24—darn close to the hour-and-a-half I had estimated at the restaurant.

The next part of my pre-flight planning is what pilots call the “weight and balance.” In airplanes, big and small, consideration must be given to the load you are carrying and how it is distributed inside the aircraft. My little Beechcraft was a 200-hp, four-place airplane that had a useful load of 1,057 pounds. With full fuel and eight quarts of oil, we could carry roughly 690 pounds of payload—weight that could be allocated to passengers and luggage.

At the time, I weighed in at 180; my wife at 95. That left 415 pounds for Ronnie, his wife, and our combined luggage and gear. Now folks, these guys were big people. I estimated Ronnie’s weight at 210, his wife’s at 165. After a little fifth grade math, roughly 40 pounds remained for luggage, my guitar, the gal’s curlers and hairdryers.

With Ronnie and me in the front, the

wives in the back, and everything else in the baggage compartment, according to my calculations and the owner’s manual, the airplane would be at maximum gross weight and within the center of gravity envelope for take-off—barely. No sweat.

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear but very still. The air was heavy, thick; hot and sticky. By the time we arrived at the general aviation ramp



I was looking dead ahead when my wife said we cleared the roof of the K-Mart store just south of the field by less than a hundred feet.

airport, the temperature was already past 82°. Our guests were waiting patiently on the tarmac, already dripping a small puddle of perspiration.

As was my custom, I spent a good fifteen minutes doing a very thorough preflight—inspecting the exterior of the airplane and the control surfaces. I visually checked the fuel quantity, drained a fuel sample and looked for contamination. Ronnie followed my every move. He was looking at his watch for the third time when I unlocked the baggage compartment door and began to load the luggage. As I stuffed our belongings into the rather smallish space behind the rear seat, the bags seemed heavier than expected, and the thought of the weight and balance again came to mind.

Huffing and puffing, I said “Hey

Ronnie, last night when I did the flight plan, I calculated your weight at 210 and your wife’s at 165. Is that reasonably accurate?”

He broke into laughter. “You gotta be kidding? I weigh closer to 240 and she’ll only admit to 190. Is that a problem?”

I replied somewhat sheepishly, “Uh, no...uh, of course not.” Then when he wasn’t looking, I quietly removed my box of tools, a set of chocks and a couple of spare quarts of oil from the baggage area. “*It shouldn’t be a problem,*” I thought to myself, “*these little airplanes are pretty forgiving of a little excess weight...aren’t they?*”

I recalled one other such occasion when I still had my first airplane, a 145-hp Cessna Skyhawk. One brisk fall evening following a flying club meeting, three two-hundred pounders and me shoehorned ourselves into that little Cessna and went for a ride over the city. Sure, old N1644Y squatted low, moaned and groaned and creaked noisily as we began our taxi to the runway...

and the ground roll was longer than usual. But we made it out just fine...and since my flight instructor, who also went along, remained quiet, I figured it must be okay to push the weight and

balance past its limits—a least a little.

But that was then and this was now. That was on a cool fall evening and this was the hot, hot summertime. So to be on the safe side, I declined the 3750’ runway, 20-right and asked the controller in the tower for runway 20-left...over a mile of concrete, 150 feet wide...the longest runway on the field. I hoped 20-left would allow a margin for error.

Engine run-up and a check of the flight controls complete, we were soon cleared for take-off. I taxied into position at the north end of the runway, locked the brakes, and pushed the throttle to full power. In the humid, less dense air, I went ahead and leaned the mixture a bit in hopes of getting a few more horsepower out of the little Lycoming 4-banger.

A release of the brakes, and we started to roll—slowly, ever so slowly. At a position on the runway where I would normally be at 60-knots—the minimum airspeed for a safe take-off—the airspeed indicator was still resting on the left peg. It seemed not to be moving at all. A few hundred feet more down the runway, and it started to move up slowly—only about a needle-width past 40-knots indicated. We rumbled past mid-field still well below take-off speed.

As the white touchdown stripes painted every five hundred feet on the opposite end of the runway started to pass underneath the nose, I knew I was past the point of no return. In literally the last few hundred feet of concrete, I applied the slightest backpressure to the control yoke to see if, by chance, the airplane was ready to fly.

The nose rose slightly, the stall horn blared its warning. The airplane wobbled back and forth on the mains as the nose wheel gradually lifted inches off the runway. We over flew the grassy overrun at the end of the runway at no more than 50'. The airspeed was still critically low and our rate of climb was 'nil. I was looking dead ahead when my wife said we cleared the roof of the K-Mart Store just south of the field by less than a hundred feet. In the meantime, our passengers were quietly enjoying the view. I suppose they thought take-offs in small planes were always like this!

Riding a few thermals from the asphalt below and slowly gaining altitude, I kept saying to myself, "Airspeed...watch your airspeed...don't stall this sucker." We made what's called a right-downwind departure from the airport traffic pattern. As I turned tail to the field, I breathed for the first time in several minutes. We were now 800 feet above the ground, climbing at 200 feet per minute with an indicated airspeed of 75 knots.

At 1000' I blew-out a long "wheew," shrugged my shoulders, recycled my neck and tried my best to regain

my Captain's composure. Suddenly, I noticed a somewhat foul odor. I thought to myself, "Is it Ronnie or is it me?" I checked my armpits as guys are prone to do. You betcha, it was me. I was dripping wet with sweat and smelling like a goat! In ten minutes of terror, I'd used up four days, 23-hours, 59-minutes and 60-seconds of a five-day deodorant pad.

The rest of the flight was incident free but I was quietly thinking ahead. With a fuel burn of 11 gallons per hour and an allowance for take-off

The food was fantastic--a lot like funeral food, but even better and more of it.

and climb, we'd have used 18 gallons of fuel by the time we arrived at Fitzgerald. That meant we'd be almost 103 pounds lighter and within landing limits. However, the lesson of diminished performance from being over gross weight had not been lost on me. I decided that there would be no steep turns in my approach to Runway 1 at Fitzgerald, no sudden movements at all. I'd keep it high on approach, and if everything didn't look right, we'd go around and try again.

And go around we did. Twice.

On the third approach, we landed and I squeaked the tires onto the tarmac. We taxied to the parking area and somewhat weak in the knees, I climbed down out of the airplane. We loaded our gear into an awaiting car—a big black Lincoln—coincidentally being driven by the town's mayor and the uncle of my friend's wife.

As soon as we arrived at the mayor's home, I excused myself, went into the bathroom, and took what we in the South call "a spit bath." I borrowed my wife's roll-on and changed shirts.

The weekend and the experience of a family reunion in South Georgia was as much fun as Ronnie had promised. The food was fantastic—a lot like funeral food, but even better and more of it. Best of all, the pickin' and grinnin' on Saturday night was an

absolute blast.

If anyone knew that we weren't related to the hosts, they sure didn't let on. We were treated as family—kissed by aunts and hugged by uncles. We were welcomed into everyone's home and into every activity with warmth and friendship, southern style.

On Sunday, after sleeping in and making a few last-minute social calls, we returned to the Fitzgerald airport. We'd off-loaded all the spare gear and baggage to a relative returning to Atlanta in a big Buick station wagon.

Coupled with the fuel burn on the flight down, we were roughly 160 pounds lighter at take-off than we were in Atlanta—even considering a weekend of heavy eating,

Thanks to the extra lift supplied by the radiational heating from a hot asphalt runway and by a hot South Georgia cornfield beyond, the airplane literally jumped off the ground. Soon we were high above it all in a clear blue South Georgia sky, dotted with white puffy clouds.

Our return flight on that summer afternoon was a breeze. We climbed to 10,500 feet where the air coming into the cabin was a cool 44° F. Ninety minutes later, the late afternoon cumulous clouds in and around Atlanta caused a somewhat bumpy ride on the descent and approach into the airport, but no one seem to mind—especially yours truly. I'd been well fed, entertained and embraced by a big, loving family—if only for a weekend.

Oh, and I learned another lesson about flying that day: you can overload a Cessna, but you can't overload a Beechcraft! My wife noticed it, too and said, "Maybe that's why the doors on a Beechcraft are narrower than they are on a Cessna!" Yeah, right.

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