

Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

Snake in the Bathtub

In sync with a reptile

Where I'm From

A Middle Tennessee memory

Wash Day

Scrubbing...a mission

Italian Restaurant

Dipping into Serendipity

Remembering Scott

Ron Hart recalls a good friend

Disaster Hits Home

A true tale of too much rain

Lisa Love's Life

You're in big trouble...

Written Treasures

Memoirs from parents

Decade-Dance in A Drag-Knuckle Bar

Down a forgotten road out of Nashville

May Cats

The ones that didn't get away

The Girl with the Dolphin Tattoo

Technology can be a pain in the neck

David Skinner





Italian Restaurant

Ever since I was a kid, I've always loved the simple pleasure of discovering unexpected joys. Whether it was an exotic dish, new music, or a secret, hidden place where all of the points of the universe seem to intersect, I relished the serendipity of it all.

When I was about 10 or 11, I accompanied my father on one of his Saturday morning volunteer rescue missions to repair some sort of machinery in North Nashville. I can't remember if it was for a relative, friend, or even a friend of a friend, but it could have been any of the above; Dad was a mechanical wizard who could fix anything, and there always seemed to be a car, washing machine, radio, television or gizmo-at-large that needed fixing, tweaking or a swift kick in the assemblage. It was a cold winter morning, so he asked me to wait in the small warehouse on the property, while he performed his mechanical magic. "Don't touch anything," he told me.

I hustled inside to get warm, and as my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I beheld an incredible site. *Toys!* There were mountains of toys of all kinds—board games, electric trains, dolls (but who cared about that?), radio-driven cars, BB guns, model airplanes, and other wondrous playthings, all stacked to the ceiling in their shiny un-opened cellophane-wrapped boxes.

It was like the Nashville distribution center for Santa. I wandered around the warehouse, incredulously inspecting the contents (but not touching!) and rehearsing how I would ask my dad if I could have one (*just one!*) toy from the stockpile of boxes. "Don't even ask," my father said after he reappeared, once his mechanical task was completed. He knew me too well. I left the dingy warehouse empty-handed, but my heart was full of joy just to know that places like that little toy heaven actually existed.

As I got older and the *joys of toys* were replaced by the finer things in life, such as art, love, music and food, I still experienced the giddy thrill of serendipitous discovery from time to time, and it was always an unexpected and pleasant surprise. For example, in the early '70s when I was an art major at Carson-Newman, I attended a "*bring your blanket and sit on the floor*" concert in nearby Knoxville on the UT campus. One of the opening acts was an enthusiastic kid who had recently left his job in Nashville as a *Billboard*

magazine correspondent. His name was Jimmy Buffett, and he strode out onto the stage with just his guitar and harmonica. I left the auditorium still humming the melody to his song about a pencil-thin mustache, and to this day, I can't remember the headline act.

I can't remember if my fraternity brother, one-time bandmate and fellow CN art major, Ran Coney was with us at that concert, but Ran and I shared a love of music and art, and we introduced each other to all kinds of bands. He first played *King Crimson* for me, and I shared *Poco* with him. He also introduced me to a song called "Piano Man" (both Ran and I played keyboards) by an up-and-coming New York piano player named Billy Joel. I sniffed at the song's line "and the microphone smelled like a beer," but not too many years later, it suddenly made sense, as I sang for my life (or at least my supper) in the far corner of a dark little taproom in an East Tennessee Holiday Inn.

As songwriters, both Ran and I thought Billy Joel was a master of the craft. When Joel released his "*Glass Houses*" album (complete with a cover shot of him on the verge of hurling a brick through his real-life Long Island glass house), I was surprised when many of the critics panned it. At the time, I was art director of the music

E-Publisher's Corner

trade magazine, *Record World*, and I drew an industry-related cartoon every week. After one particularly scathing "Glass Houses" review appeared, I decided to fight back with the RW cartoon and turn the brick around on the critics. The cartoon depicted a rock critic's office where the brick had just been thrown through the lobby window. The critic's secretary was on the intercom to her boss, saying, "...I believe there's a Mr. Joel here to see you..." *People in glass houses, indeed.* Some of the guys at Columbia Records (Billy Joel's label) loved the cartoon, and they showed it to his people. A couple of days later, I got a call from the editor of the Billy Joel newsletter asking if they could re-print the cartoon.

I was more than happy to share the fun; I loved keeping the folks at Columbia happy. I actually felt like I owed them one; they had shared a secret with me—the name and location of an out-of-the-way Italian restaurant in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen, on 9th Avenue, between 38th and 39th. It was a little old storefront, only 25 feet wide, that you could easily walk by and never notice. The storefront sign said "Supreme Macaroni Company," and it was an ancient butcher shop that had been converted into an old-world pasta shop. In the front of the old store were wood-and-glass cases, all stocked with various sizes and shapes of pasta in their individual bins. The hidden pearl, however, was *Guido's Restaurant*, a small, tile-floored room at the back of the shop. It was a best-kept secret among members of the entertainment and music communities, and known only through word of mouth. At the far end of the front (pasta) room was a hall that led to *Guido's*, which was actually just a small room at the back of the building. The room held only 9 or 10 tables, all covered with red-and-white checkered tablecloths. There was an open door on the far wall, and it led to the modest kitchen.

Guido's was very reasonable but cash-only, and it featured the best

Italian food and home-made wine this side of Italy. The restaurant's walls (as well as the walls in the hall) were covered with framed, glossy black and whites of both family and celebrities; some of the pictures featured both. There was usually a line stretching from the front door through the front room and into the hall as the famous and *not-so-famous* waited their turn for a great meal. There was also an

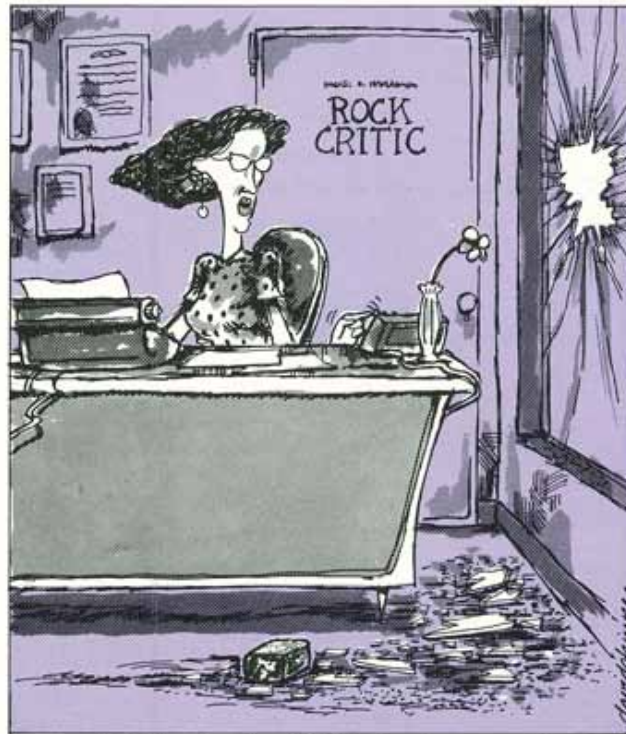
culture explorer, Ran flew up from Atlanta to visit me in New York, it was only natural to share Supreme Macaroni/Guido's with him. We filed past the elderly woman seated in the front room, and as we waited in line in the hall Ran took in all the photos. "This would make a great photography exhibit," he said. As we stood in the hall at the edge of the restaurant room, next in line to be seated, Ran asked, "What's good? Do they have a specialty?"

"Meatballs," said the guy behind me (I was going to say "lasagna"), as the hostess motioned us to follow her to our table. As she handed us our menus, we turned to thank the guy for his recommendation. It was "Saturday Night Live" alum Bill Murray, and he was grinning. I didn't understand the joke until sometime later; Meatballs was a *Guido's* specialty dish (and also one of Murray's movies).

We were seated at the back of the room, and my back was to the wall next to the door leading into the kitchen. "I feel like I've seen this place before," Ran said, looking around. Then he stopped, and his eyes grew wide as he peered over the top of my head. I turned to see what

he had discovered. It was a framed and autographed back cover of Billy Joel's album, "The Stranger." The back cover shot was a picture of Billy Joel and his band inside an Italian restaurant, apparently to pay off the album's track, "Scenes From an Italian Restaurant." It wasn't just any Italian restaurant; it was *Guido's*. It wasn't just any table; it was the table in the back, by the kitchen—our table. The only thing missing from the picture was the framed back cover of the album, but you know that old pesky space-time continuum thingy. We toasted Billy Joel; we toasted *Guido's*; and we toasted the crazy lives that we had led, from East Tennessee to Atlanta to New York.

It was one of those serendipitous events that I'll always remember, much like the Buffett concert and the mysterious toy warehouse. And so, the years have slowly moved along, much like



"I believe there's a Mr. Joel here to see you..."

elderly lady in a faded cotton floral-print dress, sitting at the front in a straight-back chair, sometimes shelling peas. After I had been there several times, I realized that she was in many of the pictures on the wall, posing with family members. In some of the pictures where she appeared a few years younger, there was an elderly man beside her, and you had to wonder if he was Guido, himself. Also, if you looked a little closer, you could discover pictures of the two as a middle-aged couple, posed with other family members. The closer to the backroom and kitchen you got, the younger the two were in the framed pictures on the walls. On one of the walls inside the restaurant area, there was a wedding picture of the two from many years before. It was as if you were moving back in time on your way to the restaurant area.

So, when my old artmate and fellow



the line for *Guido's*, slowly snaking through the front room toward the back. They did finally tear down the Supreme Macaroni Building to make way for a glittering 12-story, mixed-use hotel/condo. Billy Joel hasn't released a new album in 20 years, although he did play in the recent benefit for the victims of Hurricane Sandy. Ran passed away in the Spring of 1997, but he left a legacy of artwork, including a ceramic sculpture at an Atlanta MARTA station, along with a number of paintings and ceramic works in various collections.

And now, as the pictures from my youth move further into the distance, I often think about those special times when we were discovering new music and new places, and I try and keep the memories from fading. More and more, I find myself recalling people and places that are no longer here. I don't have a lot of regrets, but in retrospect, I do wish I'd tried the meatballs at *Guido's*.

David Ray Skinner

dskinner@SouthernReader.com

SouthernReader

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Table of Contents

Italian Restaurant

David Ray Skinner reminisces about toys, music and meatballs page 2

Letter to the ePublisher

One of our regulars talks back...again page 5

Lisa Love's Life

Lisa reminds us what Peru, Pruning and Perverts all have in common page 6

Where I'm From

Monica Lawrence Henry reflects on growing up in a small town in Middle Tennessee page 10

Snake in the Bathtub

Charlton Walters Hillis's account of her encounter with an unwelcome visitor page 11

Wash Day

Bettye H. Galloway explains why the "good ol' days" weren't always so easy page 13

Decade-Dance in a Drag-Knuckle Bar

Steve Newton's memoir about a down and dirty tour a long time ago in a faraway bar . . . page 14

They'll Never Be Another Scott Driver

Ron Hart remembers his best friend from college and life-long companion page 20

Written Treasures

Kim Megahee shares some memoirs from his parents page 21

Disaster Hits Home

J. Bryant Ray recalls his family's ordeal during Atlanta's historic "Great Flood of 2009" . . page 24

The Girl With the Dolphin Tattoo

Will Cantrell's account of neighbors, dolphins and new fangled technology page 27

May Cats

Anthony Holt remembers catfish and days in May from many years ago page 31



A Few Words About the Previous Issue

Dear ePublisher:

I really liked the previous issue of *SouthernReader*, so I thought I'd give you some feedback. Loved the cover with the watermelon; you are giving us an entirely new appreciation for these members of the gourd family. The ePublisher's story was not only entertaining, but it also helped me make the connection to the "Big Chicken" story in the very first issue of SR.

Lisa Love's article was great, as always. I think she will never let me down at this point. She is too intelligent, too witty, and too smooth with a pen (and/or mouse!), and I salute her.

The book review for David Margolick's *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* was very insightful and Dusty Bettis almost led us readers to believe he was up to no good in his article on weenie cookin'. A good story and probably a good thing you don't mention his whereabouts.

Although I don't read a lot of fiction, I really enjoyed William Love Dockery's "Rapture" story and would gladly read more of his writing in the future.

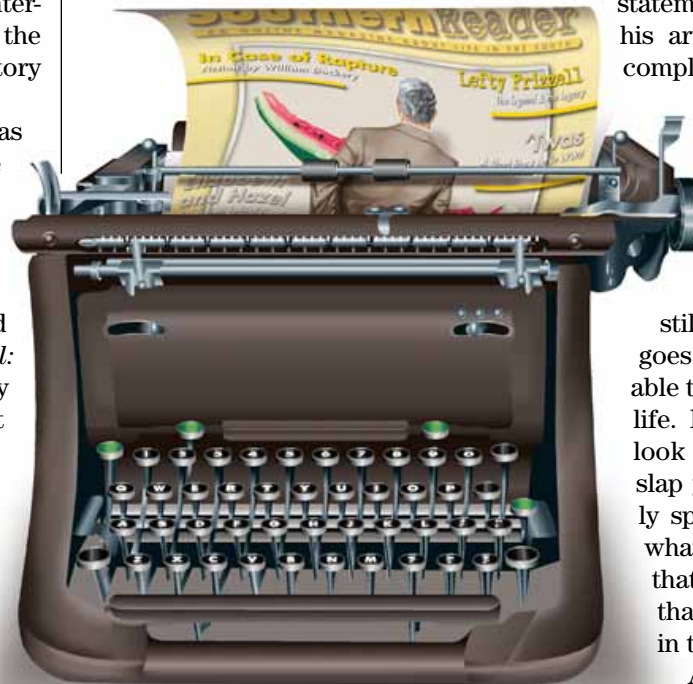
Ron Hart's article was plain good. He hits child-rearing and parenting right on the noggin and isn't afraid to call a spade a spade.

Steve Newton's poem brings our mortality to the surface. I catch myself doing the same thing with the first chorus of frogs in the spring as he does with the migrating geese and, worse yet, with each full moon. I always throw an (unobserved) tantrum when the sky is overcast, and I always wonder if this full moon will be my last. These thoughts are morbid, and I should stop being such a realist. We should also tell Mr. Newton it isn't healthy. What we must also tell him, though, is when a piece can rouse such feelings in the breast of those who read it, it is a good piece of work.

"Daddy's In The Closet"...is it even safe for me to comment on this article

(let alone say I got such a kick out of it)? *SouthernReader* must attract these kinds of stories. So many twisted writers and so little time. I wish I lived around people like that who can have such fun with basically everything.

Becky Swopes is a very good writer.



While I consider her story a sad one, ironically, I think her work is actually a "feel good" story. Regardless of how you tag it, it was well written, and my hat goes off to her.

Martha Mathews was a wicked little girl. Who ever heard of injecting dye into a grasshopper? But her last stanza...that's profound. The poem means so much more after you've read those last lines. I aim to look seriously into getting one of her books.

Lee Owens' personal recollection of Lefty Frizzell was very interesting. But, on top of this, his knowledge of country music in its earlier days left my head spinning—he is a walking encyclopedia when it comes to first-hand knowledge. Another thing I enjoyed was his reminiscences of early childhood. And when he states that he "grew up in a household very different from most middle-class homes," I had

to nod my head in agreement. I also grew up isolated from the world and had no idea that my friends' fathers went off to work each day. Unlike Mr. Owens, however, I grew up on a farm, and *no one* was in and out of our house. But there was one other statement he made further on in his article that I could relate to completely: "By the time I was a teenager...I had manufactured a reality that wasn't very congruent with true reality." And I agree that can be a head-scratcher when you find yourself

turned loose in the world. I still scratch my head, so my hat goes off to Mr. Owens for being able to make sense out of his own life. Plus, to have someone you look up to, *like Lefty himself*, slap you on the back (figuratively speaking) and say, "You have what it takes, son," I would think that it would be more priceless than all the Christmas presents in the world.

And then there's Ron Birch and his "Flying Family Reunion." Again, my hat goes off to him—as well as my shirt, my shoes and my overalls if I ever have to fly somewhere with him in a small plane.

Overall, I felt like the Spring/Summer 2012 *SouthernReader* was the best, yet. But, alas, no publication is perfect. All have their blemishes. Sadly, the same must be said of that issue. Whereas, I loved all of the articles and poems, I must take issue with the writer of the "Letter to the e-Publisher." He claims to be well-informed, but he comes off as a pompous know-nothing. And for the writer (and the reader's) information—the *hangy-down hook do-hicky* he speaks of, found on the end of a goose's beak, is technically called a "nail."

Sincerely,
Doug Combs
Olney, Illinois



Days of Whine and Roses

by Lisa Love

Heaven on Earth! Taking full advantage of one of those rare chilly nights we're blessed with here in Georgia during the Spring, I savor a steaming, hot cup of coffee while curled up in front of a crackling fire (well, as crackling as gas logs can muster).

Come to think of it, I'm hearing more of a distinctive hiss than a crackle. Is that gas I smell? *Note to self:* Change the batteries in my carbon monoxide detectors! But, I digress. Gazing into dancing flames (I know, they don't dance. They're *gas* logs. *I get it, I get it!*), the chill of the night melts away. It's almost impossible to recall that just a few months earlier, Atlanta endured a heat wave that had shattered all records. Hotlanta, indeed! But weather was the least of what made "Lisa's Summer of 2012" excruciatingly memorable! (And yes, I address myself as Lisa when reminiscing!)

Slathering Benadryl cream into the faded marks still covering my legs, I vividly recall the day in August that, for me, will live forever in infamy! Closing my eyes, it seems like only yesterday! (*Cue dreamy background music*).

It had started ordinarily enough, a lazy day at home (a rarity that blistering summer), and I'd intended to catch up on outdoor chores. By the way, there's nothing like the thrill of yard work on a 100 degree summer day... SAID NO ONE EVER! Don't get me wrong. It's the heat I abhor, not the work! I rather enjoy the monotony of

mowing, edging and pruning roses. It grants me some much coveted down time, and I relish the quiet (well, quiet except for the mower, the blower and the weed whacker!). While working, I mentally flesh out ideas for articles, make abstract to-do lists or more likely than not, chat with the Lord (kind of communing with God in nature). That Friday, I was looking forward to nothing more than tackling the yard while getting in some cardio—ya know, two birds, one stone.

Since the local weather man had predicted rain later that day, noon was my narrow window of opportunity for lawn beautification! Armed with bottled water, straw hat, sunblock and OFF![®] insect repellent to ward off mosquitoes, I ventured into the front yard.

It occurs to me NOW that no fair-haired, green eyed Scottish-Irish-

English girl should have been out at that time of day. To be honest, I'm not just fair skinned. No, I'm downright translucent! A tad too late, I recalled one of my Nana's favorite quotes, "Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun." She recited that to me all throughout my sun-worshipping teen years. Being young, I, of course, never fully appreciated its sound counsel.

Fast forward thirty years and if I'd had a lick of sense, I'd have been ensconced in my air-conditioned digs catching up on DVR'd episodes of "The Real Housewives of New Jersey." Hey, stop looking at me; I feel your judgment (I only watch cause I'm eerily fascinated by big hair and Orange-Glo Faux Spray tans!).

At any rate, I'd been out of town for weeks, and my yard reflected my absence. It was OCD (Obsessive Curb-appeal Disorder) that drove my insane compulsion to tend to yard work while everyone else in the neighborhood had the good sense to stay inside—or head for the beach (my street looked like a deserted ghost town in an old cowboy movie).

With only the sound of the mower and the voices in my head to keep me company (AND to distract me from the suffocating heat), memories of the mission trip from which I had just returned played across the movie screen of my imagination.

Ah, Peru! From Chincha to Chiclayo, Lima to Mira Flores and everywhere in between, the people of Peru were filled with love, kindness and hope. In addition to sharing the Gospel in local churches, our mission team also set up feeding stations and provided medical clinics throughout the region. The mission to help seemed insurmountable—their endless needs versus our limited supplies!

When visiting the children at "Shama House" for boys and "The Hope House" for girls (two homes that provide food and shelter for children that would otherwise be homeless and hopeless), my heartstrings were

definitely tugged. I remember the pure joy on the little ones' faces when we played with them, or held the babies or handed the children a little sack containing soap, toothpaste and a toothbrush. It wouldn't be deemed much of a gift to kids here at home, but every child there was so grateful, showering us with love and thanks!

The Peruvians had so little in way of material possessions, but were filled with palpable joy despite their circumstances. I intend to hold all the lessons I learned in South America close to my heart forever, but that's the one I'll treasure the most—joy despite my circumstances.

I was nudged back to reality by the sound of the mower shuddering its last breath. Since I'd just made my last pass

I bent down to gather my sacrificial roses—innocent buds cut down in their prime by my thoughtlessness! "Murderer!" they silently screamed up at me.

over the lawn, it was an opportune time to run out of gas. As I returned the mower to the garage, I noticed I was getting a wee bit sunburned—even with the block on! After gulping down some water, I immediately reapplied OFF![®] and the sunblock (perhaps it hadn't worked because I was sweating like I'd just run a 10K—in *Hell!*). Oops, Southern girls don't say *hell*. And we don't sweat. We glisten. Well honey, I was glistening like a PIG!!

Mowing done, I turned my attention to the rose bushes, which were begging to be pruned. As I made my first snips with the shears, my mind once again drifted to Lima. I remembered the flood (yes, our hotel flooded the first day there, sparing only one room—the room that housed all the supplies for the children that had been generously donated by folks back at home. Thank you Lord!).

I remembered the 5.9 magnitude earthquake that jolted us one night in Chincha (if you knew my fear of, well, *EVERYTHING*, you'd know that I certainly questioned God's sense of

humor on that one).

And finally, I recalled the seven-hour plane ride. Unusual turbulence, screaming babies and a horrifying lightning storm occurred on our return flight. However, by then I was so bone-tired I couldn't even work up any terror. I just remember praying if lightning did hit the wing, please Lord, let me be killed instantly. I didn't want to walk away from a horrendous plane crash paralyzed! Oh, you know what I mean.

But through it all, God supplied us with the stamina (and in my case, the courage) needed for serving. From the moment we landed in Lima, we hit the ground running and went non-stop for almost two weeks. Two weeks in Peru filled to the brim with hard work, laughter, sorrow, hugs, tears, and tremendous joy! I can't wait to go back.

Admittedly, with all my daydreaming, I wasn't paying as close attention to my pruning as perhaps I should have. When a neighbor

stopped his car to congratulate me on sculpting my rose bush into a Disneyland-worthy topiary (I guess it did kinda resemble Goofy from certain angles), I was jolted back to Earth!

Horrified, I studied what I had done. I had hacked that poor bush to death, and dozens of perfectly beautiful blooms surrounded my sandaled feet. What had I done? I fleetingly remembered the guy at the nursery guaranteeing that no one could kill a Knockout Rose bush. "Hello, I'm Lisa. Have we met?"

I dropped the shears and started scooping up the wilted flowers thinking maybe I could salvage the cuttings in a vase of water. Root them, perhaps? Nope, doesn't work that way. I bent down to gather my sacrificial roses—innocent buds cut down in their prime by my thoughtlessness! "Murderer!" they silently screamed up at me. In fact, as I gathered the flowers, extreme pain came over me! Ouch! Ouch! OUCH! What the heck? My first thought was that the roses had turned the tables on me and were

on the attack. In quick succession my feet and then my legs were awash in fiery darts of agony. Did my sunburn go into warp speed overdrive and turn into this hellish pain that quickly? No, SUNBURNS DON'T BITE!

Frantically, I looked down and saw that my hands, my calves and my sandaled feet WERE COVERED IN SWARMING FIRE ANTS. HELP ME LORD! While daydreaming, I'd obviously disturbed their mound. The angry ants had declared war on me, and my body was their battlefield.

I raised the white flag of surrender by pitifully swatting at the biting ants as I jumped up and down, screaming to high Heaven! Let me assure you, this was TOTALLY out of character for me. Being raised in the proper Southern tradition, I'd rather die than EVER create a scene. I once told a friend that I could be robbed by marauding gangs and my home leveled by twisters, but if a news reporter shoved a camera in my face and asked how I was, I'd just smile and reply, "Fine, thank you for asking. Would you care for a glass of sweet tea?" Our family motto? Never let 'em see you sweat!

In my delirium, I was partially relieved that my neighborhood appeared deserted. Thank goodness my neighbors wouldn't see me sweat OR scream OR flail about "Harlem Shake" style!

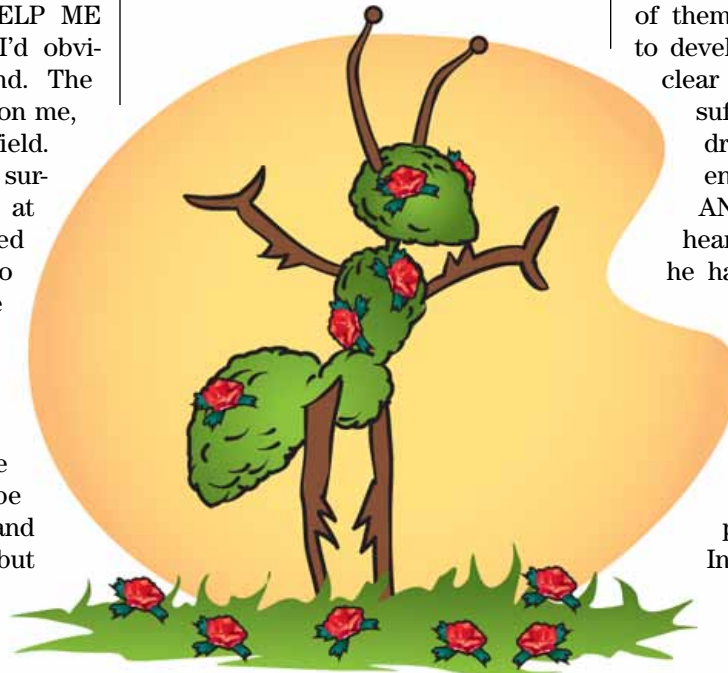
I'm still not sure if the sunburn made the bites more painful or if the bites were just THAT PAINFUL! As I desperately darted around the perimeter of the yard, I had a brainstorm. STOP. DROP. ROLL. Yeah, I know. "Stop, drop and roll" is the rule when you are covered in fire. Well, I WAS covered in FIRE ants, okay? I dropped to the grass and rolled around, trying to dislodge the stinging little monsters.

It was while thrashing about in the grass that three thoughts sprang to

mind. *One:* OUCH! *Two:* OFF may keep mosquitoes at bay, NOT SO MUCH THE FIRE ANTS. And *three:* I decided I needed a *Life Coach*. PRONTO! I mean, seriously, this stuff just doesn't happen to anyone else. It's me, right?

And that's how he found me—writhing in the Bermuda, contemplating hiring a Life Coach.

"Excuse me Ma'am. Can I help you?"



"You know, Ma'am, you're gonna be miserable with all that ant venom in you. It's a known fact that fresh urine neutralizes the sting from the bites..."

I kid you not. I looked around me to see whom he was calling "Ma'am."

Oh, *he meant me.*

That's when I stopped my whining and writhing long enough to look up (I was still lying in the grass). Hovering over me was a sweaty jogger, an older gentleman with kind, puppy dog eyes. He offered me his hand and helped me to my feet.

"Let's get you out of this grass, Ma'am!" The helpful stranger had to be in his sixties, and he insisted on calling ME Ma'am? NOT A GOOD DAY!

However, I was in turn 68% thankful that someone had stopped to help me and 32% terrified that I was about to be

robbed and left for dead.

As Sweaty Jogger helped me to my feet, he talked soothingly to calm me down. He seemed to efficiently assess my situation while simultaneously knocking the remaining ants off of my legs and feet. As he led me out of the grass onto my driveway, he bent down to take a closer look at the angry bites. There were dozens upon dozens of them. They were already starting to develop into burning, itching little clear blisters. They hurt, and I was suffering. After he sat me on the driveway, I was finally coherent enough to be grateful that ANYONE (albeit a stranger) had heard my cries. Thank goodness he had cared enough to stop and help—help what must have appeared to be a crazed woman, whining and rolling about in the grass!

Wow! A line from the movie, "A Streetcar Named Desire" by Tennessee Williams popped into my head just then. In the movie, Blanche DuBois says, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

Well on this day, I had depended on a stranger, and his actions confirmed my belief in the basic decency of people. There were still good hearted guys left in the world. Hmmm, hold that thought.

'Cause just then, he stood up, looked me in the eye and

said, "You know, Ma'am, you're gonna be miserable with all that ant venom in you. It's a known fact that fresh urine neutralizes the sting from the bites. If ya want, I could. Hmmm. Well, Ma'am, I could pee on your legs for ya."

"Excuse me?" Yep, that's what I actually said 'cause there was no way he had said what my ears had heard.

So he repeated it. "Fresh urine will take that sting right out, Ma'am." He said it just as matter-of-factly as I tell someone club soda will take out red wine stains! And dang it, the old guy insisted on calling ME Ma'am. (Friends later asked me if I would have let him pee on my legs if he had called me

"Miss." I would like to think *not!*)

Well, this time I knew I'd heard correctly and I, of course, answered, in my best Southern girl manner, "No thank you!" Eternally polite, however, I did refrain from adding, "But thank you for asking!"

Persistently, he offered a third time. Really? I can only assume he thought third time's the charm.

I again refused his—*kind?*—offer.

This time, I rebuffed him while backing up the driveway making a beeline for the safety of my garage. When he started to follow me, I coolly thanked the sweaty jogger for his help, insisting that my husband was inside

and would take care of the situation from here on. (He probably wondered what kind of a husband would let his wife do yard work in the 100 degree heat and not come to her aid when he heard her scream? I know, right?! Come to think of it, I was getting more than a little annoyed at my non-existent husband myself!! Good-for-nothing made-up spouse was probably inside drinking sweet tea, watching

"Real Housewives of New Jersey!")

With my somewhat curt dismissal, the stranger (in more ways than one!) waved politely and resumed his jog down my street heading for the main road. I hobbled to the garage door opener, hit the button and gingerly made my way inside to the living room. I looked out the window and watched him as he jogged up the hill; I watched till he became nothing more than a little speck in my field of vision.

me years ago (by the way, *eccentric* is polite Southern code for "off her rocker"). Flashing one of her rather wicked, conspiratorial smiles, she'd leaned toward me and whispered in my ear, "Trust me Lisa, there's a little "p" in every pervert!" Oh, indeed there is, Aunt Myrtie, indeed there is!

Obviously, this past summer has left an indelible mark on my heart (not to mention my feet and my legs, as well). And while it's been sweet and somewhat therapeutic reliving the memories, my cup of Maxwell House has now grown stone cold.

As I head to the kitchen to zap my coffee in the microwave, I start to giggle.

Hmmmm, Maxwell House and Sweaty Jogger Guy—both "Good to the Last Drop?" I'm just so grateful I'll never know! Excuse me y'all, I think I hear my Life Coach calling.

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

LisaCLove@bellsouth.net

Come to think of it, I was getting more than a little annoyed at my non-existent husband myself.

Now that he was gone, and I was safely locked behind closed doors, he didn't seem so threatening after all. Maybe he really was just trying to help. Maybe? Well of course! But then again, *ARE YOU KIDDING ME?* What on earth was that man thinking? *PEE ON MY LEGS?* Come on!

That's when it hit me. I recalled something my elderly, rather eccentric Great Aunt Myrtie once shared with

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Where I'm From

by Monica Lawrence Henry

I drive by the house occasionally. Miles away from where I now live, but I am pulled there, to that street, that house, that time. A two-story rock house that sits unpretentiously on a tree-lined street, surrounded by other houses similar in style.

It was the house that finally became home in 1956 when I was ten. The house that held the perfect number of steps for playing rock school. The front porch large enough for the green metal glider and chairs to sit comfortably and where my brother and sister laughed so hard while “gliding” they fell backwards off the porch, glider and all. The small black mailbox beside the front door, where in the summertime you always knew when Mr. Collier left the mail. And where every Easter morning the *Flower Basket Florist* would deliver carnation corsages from Daddy in pretty green boxes.

The front yard was large enough to play hide and seek, red rover and catch lightning bugs but small enough for my mother’s bed of scarlet sage, zinnias and red geraniums. The bridal wreath hedge grew along the side of the yard with its cascading small white blossoms spilling onto the ground. The sweet, delicate perfume permeated the

air. My sister and I would sometimes break off long lengths of the flowers and wear them around our neck or pin them in our hair.

The back yard seemed ever so big. A clothes line stretched across the yard where Mother meticulously hung her bright, white wash. She kept her clothespin bag on the clothesline, swinging along as needed, while she held one or two more clothes pins between her teeth. Daddy had built a wooden frame and hung two flat-seated swings. A rabbit hutch held fuzzy white bunnies until the neighbor’s dogs helped themselves one night. The detached two-car garage held one car, bicycles, a lawnmower and a dog house for Honeyboy.

Inside was large enough for comfort but small enough for coziness. The living room is where we would gather on the brown, tweed couch to listen to Mother read to us or tell us stories. There was a small den with a black and

white tv, a couch, a desk and a comfortable rocking chair where my mother would sit and read. There were three bedrooms and a bath. The kitchen was large enough for a Formica table and chairs for six. A wringer-washer on rollers sat in the corner. Upstairs were two large rooms used for storage and sometimes play.

I am from there. I am from 2¢ waxed lips and 5¢ ice-cream cones, rock school and red rover. I am from pink carnations and lacy socks folded under at the toe. I am from 30-minute playtimes at a friend’s house, screen doors, grape kool-aid and peanut butter and crackers. I am from *Rock of Ages* and Vacation Bible School, paper dolls, *Trixie Belden* (girl detective) and *The Pink Maple House*. I am from *I Love Lucy*, hickory nut pies and fried chicken.

I am from there—that house—that time.

Monica Lawrence Henry is a freelance writer and resides in Tennessee. She writes in several genres, including poetry, fiction (children’s stories, and short stories) while continuing to work on a non-fiction memoir.

Snake in the Bathtub

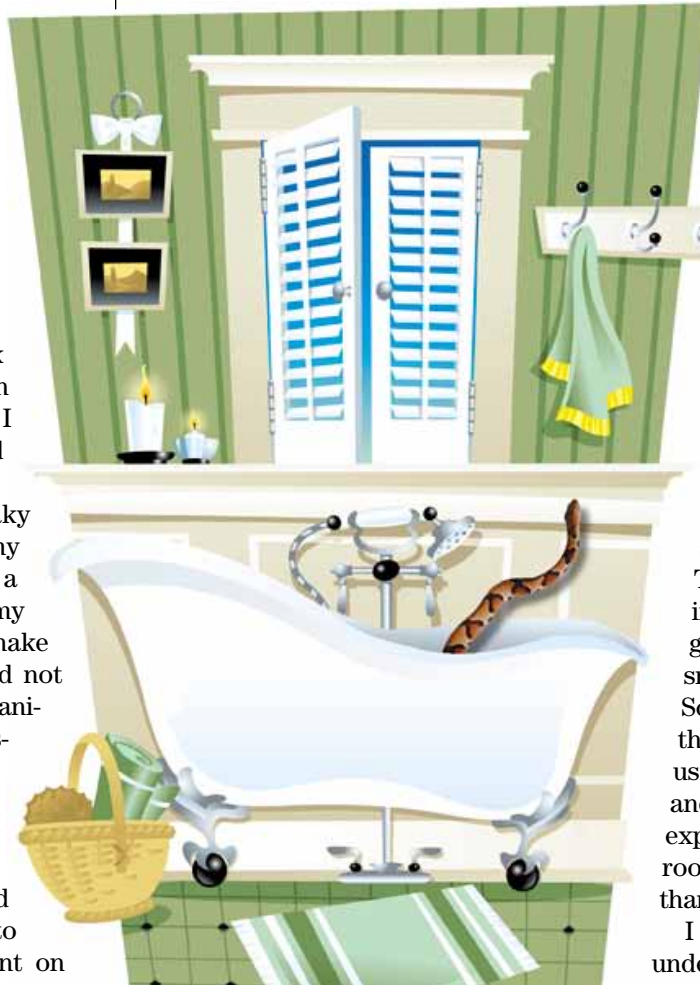
by Charlton Walters Hillis

I don't know if it was the time or the place or just my own family, but things used to be different back in McCurtain County, Oklahoma. My family are taciturn people, and tough. Most of them.

Sometimes I hesitate to speak of my past, because I'm afraid people will think I'm lying.

When I was small, Daddy took me out to the shed, but not for what you'd expect. He said he wanted to show me something. First, he warned me not to scream. Daddy had no patience with children who screamed. We peered in the doorway, and there was a great big black snake curled up and around on the rough wall. I screamed. I was immediately ashamed and never did that again.

In addition to that shaky introduction which sealed my resolve to face snakes like a man even if I was a girl, my big brother was a famous snake handler. Well, not famous, and not in the religious way. He liked animals of all sorts and did not discriminate against one sort just because they claimed an ancestor who made a deal with the devil. I watched my brother handle snakes and learned there was no reason to be unreasonably afraid. I went on to kill a lot of snakes and let more live, depending on how far it was to the nearest hoe and if they looked to be harmless or not. They were common out there on the ranch, and it was not unusual to see a big black snake wrapped in and around two or three levels of the recessed mortar in the bricks on the carport wall. I remember one in particular that stayed in that position for the longest time without moving; in fact, it never moved until I



gave up watching. Nonetheless, in all those years, we never saw one in the house.

Many years later after my mother had passed on, my sister Connie and I met back there for a visit with Daddy, who was then in his early nineties. He had not changed much; he was still short on patience. He went to bed early, and Connie and I sat up late before she also went to bed.

I read until around midnight and then went to take a bath, carrying my suitcase into the bathroom with me. After I got out of the tub I picked up the suitcase, and a copperhead slithered out from under it.

Now it was not the long, thick full grown snake you might at first picture. It was younger and smaller—a teenager—and that was a good thing for me. I was not even certain it was a copperhead but determined it most likely was and went with that. The next question was whether or not to wake anyone up. Daddy was very old and asleep and still short on patience. Waking Connie was out of the question, because she had somehow missed out completely on the snake lessons. So I looked around for a weapon.

There was a faded old yard stick propped up in a corner. That was all. If I went looking for a weapon, he might be gone when I got back (I call the snake a “he” without an agenda). So I thought to put him into the then-empty tub until I returned, using the yard stick to lift him up and in. It was more difficult than expected, as he raced around the room and raised up to strike more than once.

I finally managed to get the stick under him and flipped him in, having the presence of mind to have stopped up the drain first. Even then I was not sure he could not climb out. I stood my suitcase on end up on a chair in front of the tub, hoping he might think it was somebody watching him, and went out. I passed up the gun cabinet, not wanting to shoot up the tub or disturb anyone. The back porch usually had tools, but that night the only thing I could find was a hatchet. There was nothing at all with a longer handle,

Southern Wildlife

so back to the bathroom I went with it.

He was still in the tub. When he saw me he reared up a third of his body in a strike. I don't know if he had been doing that to the suitcase or not. There was no way I was going to be able to chop him with that short handle. No snake had ever struck at me before, but then no snake had ever cornered

me within four walls before. I was used to chopping the heads off flat ones with a long handled hoe. Then I saw that old yard stick again and got an idea. I waved it around in front of him with my left hand and got his attention turned in one direction while I positioned the hatchet with my right hand and chopped his head off. The old bathtub was no worse for the wear. I put the body in a bag and left it on top of the washing machine on the back porch and went to bed.

The next morning at breakfast I

said, "I killed a roach in the kitchen last night." Actually I said, "I killed a snake in the bathtub last night," but just as calmly.

My decision for not waking Connie

My decision for not waking Connie was reinforced by her reaction. She didn't scream, but she gasped and turned pale.

was reinforced by her reaction. She didn't scream, but she gasped and turned pale. It was Daddy's reaction that is worth noting. He did not even stop chewing. He asked, "What kind was it?"

Now we had never had a snake of any kind inside the house before, and I was still wrapped up with that novelty and not a little bit proud of my midnight feat, but I could see there was no glory coming. Just a half interested demand on my snake identification skills.

I said I believed it was a copperhead. We finished breakfast. I did ask if they wanted to see it, but no one seemed interested even in that. Did I mention we are taciturn people?

Not to let it rest completely, I put the bagged body in my trunk and took it home to Tennessee, where my husband confirmed it was indeed a copperhead. Further research told me

that young ones can be more venomous than adults, which gave me a bit of satisfaction that the whole thing was not so trivial.

Nevertheless, the next time I hope to encounter a ghost and get a little more story out of it.

Charlton Walters Hillis has a fine arts degree, but her first love is creative writing, primarily the short story. She has a nonfiction work in progress of an art buyer in the Voronezh region of Russia.

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Wash Day

by Bettye H. Galloway

Wash day was always Monday. At least it was always Monday in our little community in North Mississippi in the early forties.

These were the days before REA found us and provided electricity, which meant no electricity and no running water.

Dale, with her two smallest girls, would come up our hill at daylight on wash day, and by the time we got up and ate breakfast, she had already started the fire under the black wash pot. By the time we were allowed to go outside, Dale was busy carrying water from the pump to fill the three tubs lined up on the sawhorses behind the house, one for scrubbing, one for rinsing, and one with bluing water for the white clothes.

Dale had mastered the art of wash day. She sorted the items from our hampers into three piles—whites, coloreds, and work clothes. The whites went into the first tub where they were soaked for a while, gently scrubbed on a rub board, and then carried to the wash pot and boiled while she worked on the colored clothes.

The whites were removed very carefully from the boiling water with a broom handle and carried to the second tub on the sawhorses where they were rinsed and transferred to the third tub of bluing water.

My sister and I were too busy playing with Dale's girls to pay much attention to what she was doing, but we were allowed to keep the fire

stoked under the wash pot and to hand her the clothes from the piles as she needed them. When the whites had soaked for a while in the bluing water to whiten them, we were allowed to help hang them on the clothesline holding them in place with wooden clothespins and being careful to space them so that there would be room left for the colored clothes.

The colored clothes, meanwhile, had been soaking in the first tub.

They were scrubbed on the rub board, boiled in the wash pot, and transferred to the rinse water. We then were allowed to hang them on the clotheslines with the white clothes.

The work clothes followed the same pattern with the exception of the trip to the clothesline. Usually the white and coloreds had filled the clothesline, and the work clothes (usually denim and khaki) were hung on the fence surrounding the yard.

After the wash was completed, Dale stripped us all and gave us a good bath in the wash water—her girls in the rinse water and my sister and me in the bluing tub.

We were filthy from playing around the ashes at the wash pot and around the tubs all morning. She then carried all the water, bucketful by bucketful, to the garden for irrigation. Water was scarce and nothing was wasted.

Toward noon, we watched Dale and her girls walk down the hill toward their house, and we waited with bated

breath for the next wash day—a whole week away!

Bettye Hudson Galloway was born, reared, and educated in Oxford, Lafayette County, Mississippi. She is retired from Mississippi state service (primarily from the University of Mississippi) and as the executive vice president of a drug testing laboratory.





Decade - Dance in a Drag - Knuckle Bar

by Steve Newton

The road began with a man in Nashville, Tennessee with blue cowboy boots. It was 1974. I was working as a janitor at a shopping mall outside of town. I was twenty-two years old.

The other two men on the clean-up crew at the mall were a squirrely old hillbilly who was always drunk on the job and a Vietnam War vet trying to make it in the country music business. There was a center court, with a fountain in the middle that was bordered by benches and planters. In those days large ashtrays were everywhere in the mall. A little longhaired man who somehow looked like he had seen some tough times—he had what Viet Nam war combat veterans called the thousand yard stare—would sit in the center court smoking, his sky-blue cowboy boots glowing in the artificial light.

The early seventies were the tail end of a golden era on Lower Broadway in

Nashville. Song lyrics were walking the streets. This was the honky-tonk heaven order of things in this heart-broke Mecca filled with low riding singers and Telecaster-slinging twang-masters, who were still, at this point, primarily from the south. It was deep-fried night-life with a grits and gravy heart, the last time this particular pure form of 20th century southern culture would exist in its original, unadulterated form.

This was, however, no shut-my-mouth, Beverly Hillbillies/Gomer Pyle Hollywood cornpone kitsch, doped with barbecue sauce and smoked with drawl. Lower Broadway was the dark end of the night, where platinum-wigged girls walked out of the shadows

and loud guitars rattled shot glasses on the banks of the Cumberland River. It was dangerous and true.

The rhinestone-encrusted soul of the street was the Merchant's Hotel, next to Linebaugh's Restaurant, across the street from Tootsie's Orchid Lounge and just around the corner from the Ryman Auditorium, home of the Grand Ole Opry. The Merchant's was hard-core country long before punk and tattoos had given hard-core a predictable and tame rebel identity. In 2013 the multiple layers of simulacra in "Y'alternative" music have led to a kind of music and culture now called Americana, which is as much Grateful Dead as it is Carter Family, an ever-changing search for authenticity through old guitars and songs, but it has also morphed into a kind of one-size-fits-all rebellious ethos, often represented by tattoos and rockabilly fashion, but just as frequently overlaid

Southern Honkytonks

with Steampunk Victoriana and 19th century American Gothic.

The time period when I was on Lower Broadway was the end of the original era, the time that the present scene harkens back to, and is patterned after. The bar of the Merchant's was a long, smoky room leading off Broadway. It was filled with late-night gamblers and working girls, whiskey drinkers and pig knuckle chewers. It was a hangout for fun-loving losers from all over Dixie in the hard-brawling diamond heart of Nashville.

Going to the Merchant's Hotel became a Saturday night ritual. A small group of us, usually me and two large friends, one of them the Vietnam vet from the mall with a black belt in karate, knives hidden in his boots and a pistol in his belt, would brave the rough and tumble, otherworldly Saturday night side-walks of Lower Broadway.

A couple of years before this, I had been a regular at a bluegrass bar around the corner from the Merchant's, a place called The Old Time Pickin' Parlor. The Pickin' Parlor was frequented by Vanderbilt students and other bluegrass and newgrass cognoscenti, and while we would put away many pitchers of beer, and we were only a block off Broadway, it never seemed as though we were in any kind of danger. This was still the known world, where the counter-culture met traditional music, a place where the music might have the spirit of The Rolling Stones shaking hands with Bill Monroe. As exotic as it may have been to an eighteen-year old hippie from upstate New York just recently moved to Dixie in 1969, shortly after watching Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper getting blown off their motorcycles down south, by shotgun-toting rednecks at the end of *Easy Rider*, it was still reasonable, and somehow familiar, territory.

The Merchant's Hotel was not the known world. Broadway was in its death throes, or at least it was at the lowest ebb it would reach before it started to move toward the gentrification it achieved in the ensuing years. At this point, there were massage parlors and smut shops and porno theatres

everywhere. This was Pottersville, the town where the angel Clarence showed George Bailey what life would have been like if he had never lived, in Frank Capra's classic Christmas film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. It was a sinister wonderland that spun neon lights and blared loud music long into the night, nudging its honky-tonk soul up against the dawn of Sunday morning.

The Merchant's Hotel was crucifix-



ion born and whiskey bred in the red dirt and gasoline pumping heart of southern life, with characters so outlandish, archetypes so exaggerated, that to walk into the Merchant's was like entering Federico Fellini's great film of the late Roman Empire, *Satyricon*, only transferred to hillbilly central, with revelers wearing cowboy hats and party dresses instead of togas, drinking bourbon instead of wine, but with the same come hither, spider-to-the-fly leers. These were the same faces that had cheered as the head of Louis XIV rolled off the guillotine and bounced off of the cobblestones in the Place de la Revolution. This was proletarian peasant nightlife immemorial, the Saturday night release of pent-up chthonic forces, and it must be said that this was also my own version of Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady listening to high-octane post-war jazz in Manhattan in the late 1940s. I was there at 2:00 in the morning, drinking shots of scotch and bourbon and chasing them with cold beers and unfiltered

Lucky Strikes and Camels. I thought I had everything under control. I had no idea how wrong I was.

Larry, the man with the blue cowboy boots, started coming with us to the Merchant's Hotel on Saturday nights whenever he was in town. He would periodically take mysterious road gigs with marginal country acts and be gone for a couple of weeks, and then he would reappear and hang out at the mall, smoking in the center court.

Larry always had inside information about the honky-tonk country music nightlife. He knew the tawdry world of the Merchant's Hotel in ways I could only imagine.

We would drink at the Merchant's until closing, watching the unteethered yahoos cavorting in their hard-luck dream rodeo, and then go next door to Linebaugh's, the last of the old-time greasy spoons on Music City's Lower Broadway.

The food was not all that great. It never was in those kinds of places, the all-night beaneries on American backstreets with Edward Hopper light shining out of their windows onto the night streets of mid-20th century down-

towns, the Tom Waits-imbued, cigarette smoking, coffee-wired, 3:00 AM streetlight nocturne of the soul, but I dearly loved the place just the same, perhaps as much for the atmosphere as anything else, with the intuitive awareness that this was a place and time that should be remembered, if only so I could call on the memories many years hence, the same way that Kerouac did when he wrote about cafeterias on Times Square in the 1940s.

Somehow at one of those early-morning, open-face-sandwiched, Budweiser-lubed sit-downs, the subject of an out-of-town gig came up. A country band needed a couple of guitar players for a week in Indiana, and for who knows how much longer, once the music started to kick and thrash. This was a ticket to the open road for someone willing to throw down and take it. Who knows where it could lead.

The lights of a romantic nighthawk 3:00 AM dream were calling from the glittering distance. One place that it might lead could certainly be right back to Nashville as a session musi-

Southern Honkytonks

cian rather than a janitor, or so it seemed at the time, so it made some kind of crazy sense. But in some other faraway place, my fate was being sewn up like the lips of a corpse.

Larry would play bass. There was a husband and wife team—he played drums and sang, she was just a singer—and they were the rest of the band. This couple was recently separated, and this gig was going to be a kind of trial get-back-together for them. In retrospect, the fact that she had just gotten out of a mental hospital might have been a sign that there were going to be problems ahead.

This couple lived outside of Nashville. The whole thing had been arranged by a booking agent that Larry had worked with. Every booking agent that I ever met in Nashville was a walking cliché, pushy and abrasive and coarse.

Larry was also a cliché, a certain kind of weirdo picker with a borderline nutcase personality, the kind of guy you could picture homeless if things did not go right, or in jail.

So the drummer and the singer were getting divorced, but they had decided to use this road gig to try one last time to see if they could make their marriage work. She had just gotten out of the laughing academy and he was fresh off of playing in some stripper dive in Palookaville. The bass player was blue boots Larry from the mall center court and Merchant's Hotel, and my friend Carter and I would complete the band. Carter would play rhythm guitar and sing and I would play lead guitar and sing—very little, but some.

We were to drive up from Nashville and meet the rest of the band in the little town of Granding, Indiana, a wholesome enough sounding farm town. What could there possibly be to worry about in a place like this? I thought that the worst that could happen there might be that one could die of boredom. I was now an experienced veteran of the honky-tonk life on Lower Broadway! This small town hick country bar in the middle of the corn stalks was not going to present

any kind of problem for a night-life veteran like me. It would be a good place to build up some chops and get some road cred. I wanted to put on the hard miles that I thought, at the time, were essential for any serious working musician. Ah yes...the innocence of youth.

I can picture a stretch of the trip from Nashville to Granding, a view of green fields on either side of the road with thick woods on rolling hills, the kind of countryside one finds all over the eastern US. We were on a two-lane highway, and this road was taking us north from Dixie into Indiana, a place that I imagined was filled with mid-western farm country, rural routes, and

They thought Larry was just the cutest thing, with his long hair and blue cowboy boots and his crinkly-eyed road-burned motel tan.

distant train stations, smoking with steam. Lightning was coming, silently flaring up the insides of blue-black clouds in the wet slate light of a summer afternoon storm, but the rain held, and we drove silently on a two lane highway through the radiant mystic green. The pieces were now all in place. Tickets had been sold and it was almost time for the show to begin.

It's interesting that I have no recollection of the name of the bar. I could call Carter and see if he remembers, but what would be the point? It would just be the name of a forgotten dive in a Midwestern farm town, the kind of place that a local historian might romanticize as having a kind of raffish charm that gave the town a little bit of much-needed color and at least partially rescued it from total babbity. It was, oddly enough, actually on Main Street.

We pulled up not knowing what we were going to be meeting up with, and we walked into a bar that smelled the way that so many bars do during the day, *or used to*, anyway, a combination of cheap disinfectant, cigarettes, unwashed people, and draft beer. They probably still smell the same way today. I'd bet money on it. It's the smell of life gone wrong.

The owners were husband and

wife, and they had taken to Larry. They thought he was just the cutest thing, with his long hair and blue cowboy boots and his crinkly-eyed road-burned motel tan. They confided in him, and he would pass some of the stories along, but there was one story that he said we had to hear directly from the source.

The band had rooms above the bar in the back of the building, and the owner's apartment was in the front, also above the bar. Shortly after we arrived in town, Larry got Carter and me up in the owner's apartment to hear something that he thought was very cool. The husband was a big man, not

very smart, though of course none of these people were exactly Mensa material, and the wife, equally dim, was about half his size, with an IQ somewhere between a tennis score and a houseplant.

We got up to their apartment and she started saying "Show them our lucky bullet, honey, show them our lucky bullet," and the husband, the big lug, was acting all shy and retiring, sort of shuffling around like a bashful sheepdog, and she just kind of unbuttoned his shirt and pulled out his prize bullet, which was hanging from a silver chain around his neck.

He had shot his wife. He had, however, not killed her, and when they took the slug out in emergency surgery they both decided that this was their special bullet, which the husband would wear close to his heart to remind them both of how lucky they were, since she had not died. There it was, a little deformed silver thing on a chain. These people were straight out of some grade-B hillbilly gothic, drive-in picture show, goober town potboiler, only even the most jaded, tire-squealing, trailer trash tornado bait script would not include something like this. It simply would not be believable.

The trouble started almost as soon as we began playing our first set of the first night. We had only been able to rehearse for a couple of days. It had been ragged at best, although not all that unpleasant. The drummer and

Southern Honkytonks

singer had not been at each others' throats and, everything considered, it looked like this might be a good run for a couple of weeks, and who knows where it could lead.

Then it was like someone waved a magic wand and everything turned to clay. It happened fast. On our first night, the singer was flirting from the stage with the single guys in the audience. At first it seemed like this was part of the act, and perhaps even to be expected from a sexy girl singer in a tough bar like this. The second night she kicked things up a notch. She was not only flirting, she was actually making out with guys at their tables while her husband sat in the corner and watched them go at it. We then would go back onstage and play a set with the two of them shooting bolts of hate at each other while we played. All night she moved around the room during the breaks.

This was not a situation of having romantically fallen for someone in spite of her husband. She was working the room to tick him off, table to table, kissing strangers in public, lighting the fuse and waiting for the bang. It was easy to see how she had just been considered fit for long-term residence at the fruitcake factory.

The next night, we were playing to a full house with a dance floor packed in front of us. The singer had been working the room again, table to table, kissing strangers, making out with all of the inbred hound dogs that were circling around, now that the word had gotten out in this backwater puke-hole that there was a loose woman down on Main Street. It was late and the room was very drunk. The music was loud, raucous and then sultry, a train-wreck followed by tears, and all of this was happening in a kind of reddish-blue smoky haze of dancers in front of the stage.

Then the gun appeared. It didn't last long, in the air for a couple of seconds directly in front of me on the dance-floor, pointed at the singer in the middle of the stage, before it disappeared. The man with the gun was wrestled down by other men on the floor and then dragged out back to the parking lot. They took his gun away and roughed him up a little bit. The owners didn't call the police. They

didn't want the bad publicity. The man with the gun said that he was doing it for the drummer.

He had been sitting for the last couple of nights at a table with the drummer while the singer was putting on her table act, moving around the room, and finally he decided that this was enough. He was going to put the drummer out of his misery by killing his wife onstage.



And there it was, sure enough, waving in the air on a crowded dance floor, for a long, unstable moment, a pistol pointed through the smoky haze at the stage, and shakily aimed right next to me, as the singer was only a couple of feet away from where I stood with my guitar. Yikes. Hi ho Silver, buckaroos.

It didn't get any better after that. The next night, there was a group of old ladies sitting at a table in front of the band who, like the owners, thought Larry was cute and cuddly. They would tease him and make requests and ask him to sit with them during our breaks.

For no reason that I could ever discern that made any sense, Larry finally snapped. He stood onstage and began savagely berated these nice old women, calling them names, screaming at them, out of control, until they left. Not good. Bad for business, but then again, who cared. We were in honky-tonk hell.

"Larry come quick! He's got a knife!" The owner/husband's name was Larry as well. Some guy at the bar was threatening the owner/wife with a knife. The husband and a couple of other guys dragged the knife guy out

the front door, where they engaged in some sustained cluster-kicking of the knife man on the sidewalk, before they came back inside. That's just the way things were here.

A big man liked my guitar playing. He told me I should be playing with Merle Haggard. He insisted that Carter and I sit with him and his friends at his table during breaks. There was no contradicting this man. He was huge and solid. I was his new boy.

He told me that he would come by later that night, at closing time, and we would then go to an all night river-bank pig roast. They would roast a pig through the night on the banks of an Indiana river, drinking beer and whiskey, and party on through the next day. We were going. There was no debating this. He was coming for us. As he stood up to leave he pulled up his jacket to show me the pistol he was carrying, jammed into his pants. "You talk about big Klan, son, I'm it."

So we were going to a Ku Klux Klan meeting. That is what this pig roast was. It was a Klan meeting for about five counties of Klansmen. We got this information from the owners. It turns out that this town was an epicenter for Klan activity. One of the men in the bar was talking about interracial dating, and said that he had told his daughter that he had brought her into this world and he could damn sure take her out of it. He did not give the impression that this was an empty threat.

The Klan did not come to get us that night. They just didn't come and we never found out why. We did find out that Indiana was one of the strongest Klan areas in the country, and we were in the thick of it, drinking whiskey and playing music for these human retroviruses. In retrospect, they were calm and self-assured. The image of these people is usually one that sensationalizes them as monstrous, and while they surely were that, they were also very, very comfortable being who they were, in this place, this town. These were rock-solid racist thugs brandishing guns in bars and bragging about being big Klan. So when does it become clear that it is time to leave? How bad does it need to get?

The owners had a daughter, who must have been in her late teens

Southern Honkytonks

or early twenties. She was hanging around with a girlfriend of hers on Sunday night, and Granding was dry on Sunday. You could not buy any alcohol, and she could not even get any from her parents' bar downstairs. The parents were not around, but even if they were, they would not have sold it. Some people have standards, even if they do carry lucky bullets around their neck.

The daughter knew of a place where we could get some liquor. It was the mother of the daughter's girlfriend. We followed them over to the next town, to a clapboard house with peeling paint, next to the railroad tracks on the outside of town. There was vodka, but we were now officially in exorcist territory. Somehow we knew it.

The mother was not dressed, wearing some kind of nightgown, and her teeth were out. The two young women apparently had some kind of romantic ideas about my friend Carter, and their plan, as far as we could discern, was to take him upstairs, and leave me downstairs with the toothless harridan of a mother. We just wanted alcohol. When we figured out the rest of what was going on, we left in a hurry. Nothing happened. The next day we drove back to Nashville.

And that was that. After hanging out at the Merchant's Hotel I had thought that I was some kind of road warrior, when in fact I was nothing of the sort. In order to find out what is really happening behind some of these walls, you have to be ready to go all the way, the same way that you have to be ready to shoot if you pull a gun.

I was not ready to shoot. The people that I was drinking with, and playing for, obviously were not only ready, they lived for it. They wore bullets around their necks. They pulled up their jackets and bragged about being in the Klan. They told a bar full of people that they had threatened to kill their own daughter if she dated a black man, though of course using more colorful language. These people pulled

knives and guns, and I saw it happen from a stage far away from home, still somewhat protected by my youth and inexperience from the deep and raw corruption of what was happening in front of my eyes.

But there is no doubt that I was hurt. I was branded by the fire that I had reached out to touch, in this out-of-the-way place, this drink-sodden Hee Haw night-world. Something sprang up and wrapped my hands around a wire, turned on the juice, and watched me dance across the stage with the electric jolt. The town left scars in tender places.

Something sprang up and wrapped my hands around a wire, turned on the juice, and watched me dance across the stage with the electric jolt.

There were guns and knives and insanity. It was a long time ago. Nobody else on the planet will tell this tale. It all began in the center court of a mall outside of Nashville, Tennessee, with a little elfin man with his feet propped up, smoking a cigarette, surrounded by shoppers, his blue cowboy boots shining like ice in moonlight, and it ended in a railroad-hugging, crooked-floored, paint-peeling, upside-down-cake house on the outside of an Indiana town, staring at a toothless hag with a come-hither look, while two young temptresses flitted about, flanking her as they tried to ply the out-of-town men with alcohol. Maybe somebody was watching over us after all and helped us find the strength to leave.

We all know about decadence, but it usually is painted in glamorous colors, the opposite of puritanical black. This was as glamorous as looking through a pile of corpses for a ham sandwich. This was revulsion on a cellular level. We finally realized that these were alien life forms. It was time to go home.

We rode back to Nashville and have lived for another thirty-nine years. Carter married a beautiful girl from his hometown, and they raised two fine boys. I became a college professor who plays a little music at home. Neither one of us has ever had any desire to

go back to Granding, Indiana. There are just some places in life that are best to avoid. Summoning up these unholy ghosts has meant that they have become more real, however, than before this writing brought them forth. Perhaps they were asleep, or wandering in limbo, but now they are back in all of their filthy technicolor.

For what it's worth, it did not occur to me that I was also writing about the price we pay for just remembering the past. This becomes even more extreme, more dramatic, when writing about long-submerged memories that are dragged to the surface waterlogged, and which now have nowhere to go. Wonderful. As if I don't have anything better to do than conjuring up honky-tonk ghosts from beyond the curtain of memory's matinee and bringing them out onto the proscenium, where they can wobble around and act tough or scary or empty.

But these shades are easier dismissed as zombies than as the intractable haunting spirits that they truly are, kin to the sound of wind in the chimney, a line of vultures on a wire, or the look in the eyes of an over-the-hill musician doing the late-night heroin nod at a piano in an empty nightclub.

Long ago, there was a musician who was a hero of mine, and a junkie, though I didn't know it at the time. He came to my hometown when I was eighteen, and I went to see him play in a bar. He died of a heroin overdose years later. He played strange that night. He was always so out there, so vulnerable, so heartbroken, on his records and in his songs, that to see him like this—obviously loaded, and not even really playing, more like noodling around as much as anything—was hard. I went across the street during a break and got sandwiches for him and his wife, who was just as loaded as he was, and then a friend and I counted his money for him in the dressing room, after the show was over. He was too stoned, too junked out, to even count his own money. He seemed to have found his own Granding.

A callow young man was out of place. I should not have been sitting in a bar at

Southern Honkytonks

3:00 in the morning waiting for the Ku Klux Klan to show up, expecting truckloads of men with guns and clubs to empty out on the street and come walking in the front door. And now here they are again, ghosts milling around in my recovered memory, but with nowhere to go, as a 61-year-old man sits staring at a computer screen, still trying to come to terms with his past.

This all happened long ago, after leaving the shire and traveling to a faraway place. And then finally there is this. It was through all of these experiences that I came to know some things I could not have known through reading or television or movies. The honky-tonk threat when a gun is pulled, the gasp when a knife is drawn, the sound of a fist meeting a face—but this only tells part of the story.

We are all only aware of the smallest, infinitesimally tiny percentage of the cosmos, or even of the strange wonders of the small blue planet on which we live.

Giant squid, for example, wash ashore every now and then, but until very recently, one was never seen alive in its natural habitat, three miles down

in the dark, as alien as anything imaginable in a distant galaxy. They wash ashore only rarely, and, when they do, they cannot be kept alive.

Scientists and a very small percentage of the public know how valuable these rare sightings are, these appearances of a being that has emerged from a pressurized place of complete darkness and cold, where the tentacles of the squid grow to fifty feet long. Once out of the water, the squid are in another world entirely, as remote, to them,

The honky-tonk threat when a gun is pulled, the gasp when a knife is drawn, the sound of a fist meeting a face... this only tells part of the story.

as the far side of Jupiter is to us. They stretch out pink on the beach, tentacles streaming in the sand, or dangle from a net hung from the side of a boat.

In their home environment, in the pitch-dark reaches, they lash out with power and control and battle the sperm whales that come to eat them, wrapping their long tentacles around the whale's head and leaving long scars even as they are bitten in two. Scientists have spent decades hoping

to see giant squid in their home. They actually have mounted cameras on the heads of whales, hoping that this will lead them to the squid.

Sometimes the only thing to do is to go into the dark places yourself, the way that I did in Granding, Indiana, taking notes and paying attention. Perhaps one of the tentacled giants will appear, looming up close, passing spectrally through the highly-pressurized black depths, moving slowly in the cold, in the deep dark, tentacles stretching out, parrot beak opening wide, while the band plays the "San Antonio Rose" or "Waltz Across Texas" and smoke drifts out the door into the Indiana night, over the lights of Main Street and out into the fields, where

the corn is covered with mist and tassels hang from the tops of stalks in a patient line, waiting for the earth to turn, and the sun to come again.

Steve Newton spent part of his youth in Tennessee and is currently Associate Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey.

S O N G S O F T H E S O U T H



There'll Never Be Another Scott Driver

by Ron Hart

In the course of one's natural lifetime, it is extremely rare to have known someone like Scott Driver, because he was so much larger than life. I was lucky enough to be able to call him my best friend.

About a year and a half ago, Scott died of a heart attack at the age of 53. He was my best friend since college, and he was someone who made everyone feel special. At his funeral, a daughter of one of our friends summed him up best: "When Scott came into a party and you heard his voice, you smiled knowing he was there."

He went to California to play college football, but like many, ended up back home at The University of Memphis, where we witnessed each other coming into our own. He would always say, "Hart, you are a genius with a capital J."

Scott and I valued our collection of friends. To be one of those friends, a person had to make you think, laugh, or have your best interests at heart. Scott did all three.

Once we became old enough to know who we were and what we valued, the importance of old friendships grew to mean more than money, jobs and all that life threw at us. Our families and five others vacationed in the Destin area for 20 years; he loved the Gulf Coast.

Scott was the best kind of friend; he could be your strongest critic and your biggest proponent at the same time. He always admired you behind your back, but somehow you knew. A good friend will only get in your way if you are going in the wrong direction.

He grew up with rough and tumble brothers, so he could argue vehemently with you one moment and buy you a drink the next. He never held grudges; he forgave and forgot—an important human trait essential for



long-term relationships.

In the two weekends before he died, we went on golf trips; one with my son to Merion and another with a group to The Honors. In truth, it could have been a public, state park course; in fact that would have actually been more fun, since he would have been able to play his *Stone Temple Pilots* on his Putman-programmed iPod from the golf cart—*loud*—while we played, and he never missed the chance to belt out the lyrics he thought he knew.

Scott could hit a drive 300 yards and his 95-yard sand wedge just as far on his approach shot. In golf, he was only as happy as his last shot.

We both had ADD, but somehow we grew calmer in each other's presence. Memphians, fond of their hunting, would always try to get us to go with them to enjoy "their patient

sport." Scott would say, "Hunting is not a sport, Junior. A sport is where both sides know they are participating."

He loved his Memphis Tiger basketball. Coach Josh Pastner came to his memorial golf tournament at Chickasaw last year (an annual event to raise money for Street Ministries); Scott would have been pleased. He was visibly shaken when former Memphis coach John Calipari coached his way out of a 9-point lead with two minutes to go in the National Championship game. He said that for days he would walk down the hall, see his son, Gregory, and not be able to make eye contact.

During Tigers games, he sat behind the opponents' bench, riding the opposing team's coaches. His favorite was Cincinnati coach Bob Huggins, who always dressed like a lookout for a massage parlor. Scott would give him an old-fashioned tongue lashing, and then as the Tigers scored he would yell, "How about that, Mr. S & K three-piece suit?!"

It was amazing to see how people came together and attended his funeral. He used to say, "No matter how important you think you are, attendance at your funeral will depend a crap load on the weather." Scott would have said about his funeral in his faux-bravado, "This is not about me; it is about what you think of me."

Scott loved his wife, his family, and his friends, and he made Memphis a better place. He was a sweet soul. He always left the campground cleaner than he found it. I'll always miss him.

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.

Written Treasures

by Kim Megahee

The older I get, the more I've come to respect my parents, their lives and the sacrifices they made for us kids. I've also come to cherish the written treasures that they've given me over the years.

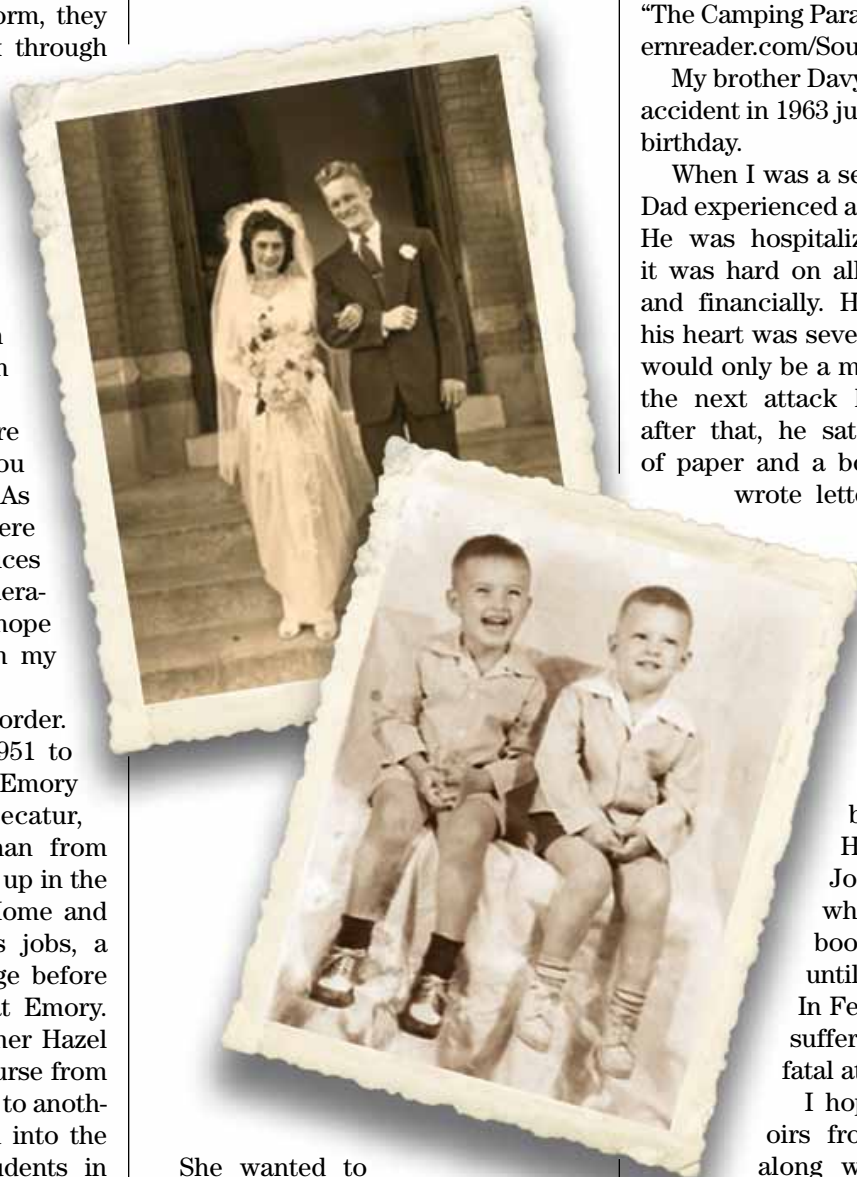
Recently, I came across two separate memoirs from my parents, and as different as they are in form, they both send me hurtling back through the years. One was my mom's "Daily Diary" from back in 1954; the other was a farewell note my dad left me. While we lost Dad over forty years ago, Mom is still spry and currently lives with my family. She's an avid Facebook user and often drops tidbits of wisdom on her many Facebook friends.

For those of you who are baby-boomers, I felt like you could relate to both pieces. As for you younger readers, there are some beliefs and practices that tend to transcend generational timelines, and I just hope these written treasures from my parents can make you smile.

A little background is in order. I was born in October of 1951 to Marc and Hazel Megahee at Emory University Hospital in Decatur, Georgia. Dad was an orphan from Coolidge, Georgia, who grew up in the Georgia Baptist Children's Home and struggled through numerous jobs, a stint in the Army, and college before enrolling in dental school at Emory. There he met Mom, the former Hazel Ruth Davis, a lovely young nurse from South Georgia. One thing led to another, they married, and settled into the difficult life of married students in what was lovingly called "Mudville" on the Emory University campus.

After I was born, Mom quit her job and became a full-time mom. A year later, my brother Davy came along and we were, I'm told, "all boys." The first treasure of memoirs from my par-

ents—her "Daily Diary"—was written during this period.



She wanted to make sure Dad knew she was putting in a full day watching the boys while he was off studying and working.

After graduation from Emory, Dad set up a dental practice in Warner Robins and bought a home on Dewey Street. From that little house, Mom and

Dad set about raising us and our new little sister, Laura. Part of being kids in Warner Robins during this time (and probably everywhere else) was the rage of camping out in the backyard. We were no exception and our first adventure with camping out is captured in "The Camping Parachute" (www.southernreader.com/SouthRead12.11.html).

My brother Davy was killed in a rifle accident in 1963 just before his twelfth birthday.

When I was a senior in high school, Dad experienced a severe heart attack. He was hospitalized for weeks and it was hard on all of us, emotionally and financially. His doctor told him his heart was severely damaged and it would only be a matter of time before the next attack killed him. Shortly after that, he sat down with a pad of paper and a bottle of Scotch and

wrote letters to everyone he cared about—to be delivered after his death. The second treasure of memoirs from my parents was his farewell letter to me.

Dad's favorite book was "Doctor Hudson's Secret Journal." He loved what he learned in that book and practiced it until the end of his life. In February of 1971, Dad suffered his second and fatal attack.

I hope these two memoirs from Mom and Dad, along with "The Camping Parachute," make you laugh and give you a sense of the personalities of the two amazing souls who brought me into this world and made it a better place for many others.

—Kim Megahee

Southern Memoirs

"Daily Report" 1954

Time	Note
5:45 AM	Cooked your breakfast - back to bed with the observation that from now on I'll have to eat breakfast with you if I intend to see you.
6:00-8:30 AM	Dozing at intervals
8:30 AM	Wide awake, dodging flying heels on the bed. Kim and Davy looking for "truck" and wanting me to cook "Brecktus" of "upper".
9:10 AM	Eating breakfast and watching cartoon on TV. Men working on back porch next door with much hammering and sawing. Kim and Davy trying to see out of windows and back door.
9:45 AM	Kim and Davy dressed and let out <u>Front</u> door with instruction <u>not</u> to go around in back yard.
10:00 AM	Kim and Steve seen in back yard, approaching men at work. Kim admonished with some heat to return to front yard. Davy still in front yard trying to catch cat.
10:30 AM	Washed dishes. Out in yard hunting children. Located them running around Mr. Bascomb's tool house. Davy brought back to front yard; Kim instructed to stay away from men working.
10:45 AM	Kim approaching back door "I've got to come inside." Allowed him to sit on back steps and watch men. Swept floor.
11:00 AM	Men finished job and left, after throwing scrap lumber over our back fence. I went out to check scraps for possible useful pieces. Not much luck. Kim and Mary playing on red hill by back steps.
11:15 AM	Davy lost - found on Barbara's front steps. Took him to back yard. Davy and Steve playing in sand pile.
11:20 AM	Kim quarrelsome and bossy. Mary went home.
11:22 AM	Kim advancing on sand pile - "Steve, you get outa my sand pile!" Begins to take over toys.
11:22:30 AM	Kim inside, forcibly, receiving lecture on selfishness and how to entertain company in one's back yard. Sitting in chair for five minutes.
11:45 AM	Cutting out material for chair cover - concentrating heavily.
12:00 Noon	Kim and Davy located in pool, fully clothed except for shoes (fortunately). Switched with hedge switch and brought inside.
12:15 PM	Fed, washed and put to bed two little boys.
12:15-1:25 PM	Put boys back in bed X 6 while hanging out clothes and eating my own lunch
1:25 PM	Sat in room with boys
2:00 PM	Davy went to sleep.
2:30 PM	Kim went to sleep.
2:30-3:15 PM	Dozing at brief intervals
3:15 PM	Davy woke up.
3:30 PM	Davy sent out to play in back yard.
3:40 PM	Davy back in house, lonesome.
3:40-4:10 PM	Cutting on chair cover. Davy playing quietly on floor.
4:10 PM	Kim awake - out to play
4:15 PM	You telephoned!
4:15-7:00 PM	Still trying to cut out chair cover. Little boys playing outside. In pool for 20 min.
NOTE	Mrs. Mew called and wants to know when you can take her - but not this week! She will call me tomorrow.
7:00 PM	Put meat in broiler
7:00:30 PM	Gloria called.
7:10 PM	Meat burned in broiler.
7:15 PM	Rescued Davy from ladder of Steve's gym set. Was herding boys toward home, when Kim, showing off, lost balance and fell backwards into Steve's pool.
7:20 PM	Drying and dressing Kim
7:30 PM	Supper
8:10 PM	Boys in bed (technically)
8:10-10:00	Washed clothes Ironed curtains Quieted boys X ??
NOTE	Call Bennie X 6 - from 8:30 -10:00 - Nobody home.

Dear Kim,

First of all, I want to say that you have been a model son, the kind that teachers call an ideal student. You have been a boy that did not like to fight but had the personal courage, born of integrity, that never let you back down when you could not honorably do so. This personal courage impressed me more than your many accomplishments. These made me proud, too. Thank you for being a great son.

But that is not all you must accomplish. You have a duty to the rest of the human race. I would be the first to say, "look after number one." But my next breath would be to say that you don't step on anyone's neck to get ahead. Do you get my point? I'm trying to say that even though you can't contribute financially to every solicitation for charity, you can sometimes hold out a sincerely friendly hand to someone in trouble. This, in my opinion, can at times be the greatest gift you can give. Lloyd C. Douglas wrote a book called "Dr. Hudson's Secret Journal." Read it or ask your mother what the theme was. The trick is in the doing and asking people not to let others know you are a "softie" and care for people.

I want you to always think things out, whether they be clerical or secular, whether they be art or science. Make up your own mind as to what is permissive, what is vaguely permissive, what has a chance of being wrong, and what is definitely wrong in your opinion. The Supreme Being who made us gave us the mentality and perspicacity to know what helps the human race and what lowers it to the level of a wild dog. Your 5000-word theme on World War II tells me that you know what a few brilliant mad men can do. It also tells me that you eventually win if you are in the right and have the guts to get up again and fight back.

My son (I've always liked the sound of "my son" and "my daughter"), I want you to know that I have faced death several times and was not afraid, but I have always been afraid that something would mar my sense of integrity. I have many faults which I would not like to see you emulate, but never think you can achieve perfection in this world, but can only strive for perfection. Remember that 95% of the people in this world are great, but there are 5% that has strayed. They will cause most of your trouble.

I laugh at death, but I cry for the world. Never let it be said that you did anything that made life in this world harder for people. Work with all that is in you, play with all that is in you, and love with all that is in you.

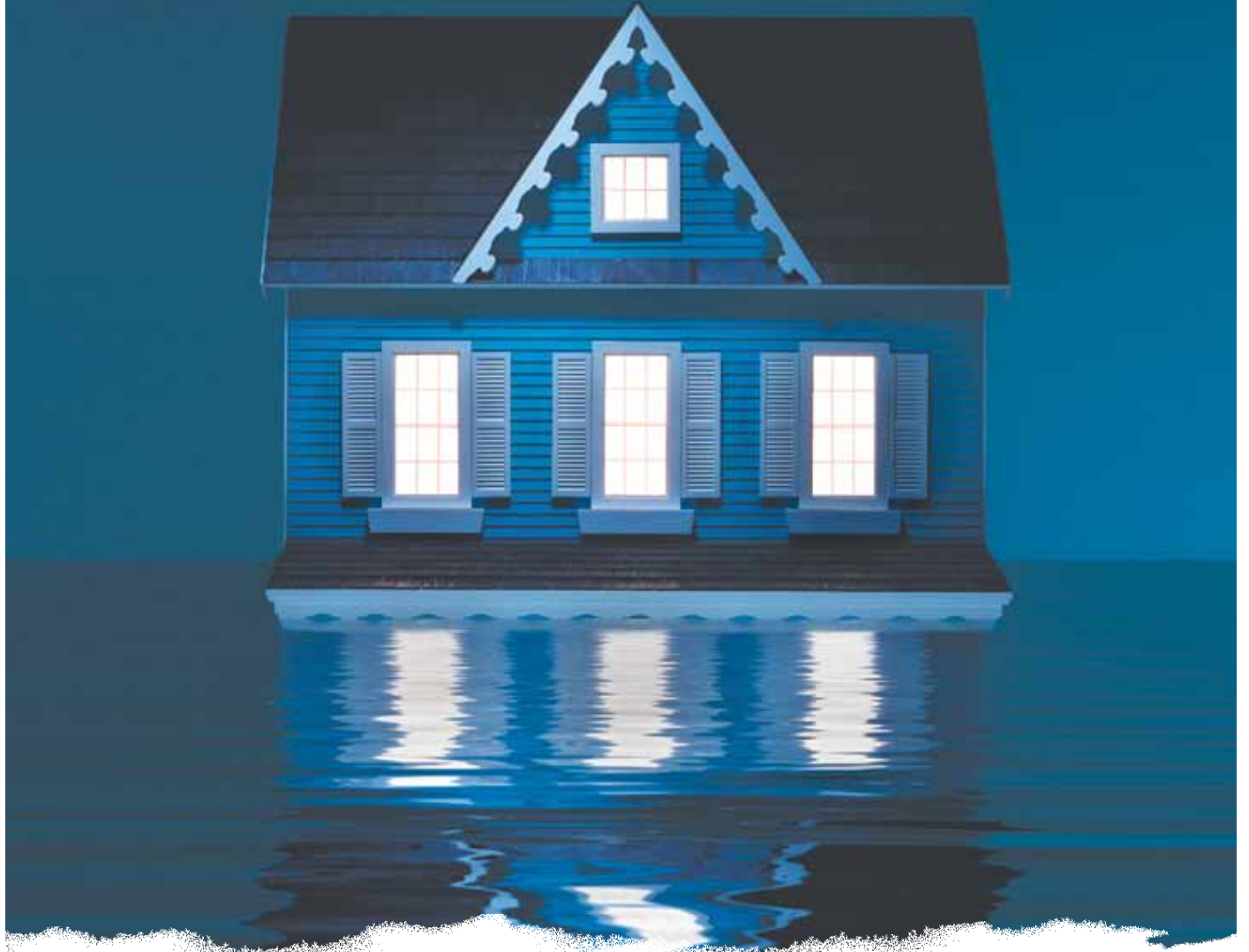
I have had more than most people simply because I have a few friends that were always there when the "chips were down". You too can have this by letting your natural love of people be above everything else.

Take care of your mother, because you could not have had a better one. If you should be in school when I leave you, drop out and take care of your mother for at least six months. Make her realize that I would be very unhappy if I knew she were grieving needlessly. Remember, we cry for the lost ones because we miss them. The lost ones aren't hurting a bit. They don't have to make all the same decisions that come before the living. I hope you will miss me a little, but don't let it spoil your mother's life. Make her get out with people.

Son, I could go on writing until I died, but then I wouldn't be able to say what I want to others that are dear to me.

Thank you one more time for being a son that has made me very proud. I only hope that my grandchildren will make you as proud. Please do not grieve for me too long. You are now the man of the family, and it isn't manlike to grieve when you should be happy. I'm sure that you will accomplish what you set out to do. Don't falter in times of adversity, just lower your head and charge again.

I love you,
Dad



Disaster Hits Home

A story of too much rain by J. Bryant Ray

By now, I suspect that many have seen or heard some of the stories coming out of the Atlanta area about what was referred to as the “Great Flood” of 2009. What follows is my own personal account, and what we experienced was by no means as serious as many of the stories that followed in the weeks after the flood. In some places, the Chattahoochee River measured water levels at a 500-year flood level.

The rain and thunderstorms began on Saturday, September 18, 2009. It wasn’t a wholly unexpected event for that time of the year in Georgia. Heating in the afternoons, along with a moderate flow of moisture up from the Gulf of Mexico contributed to the sometimes daily thunderstorm activity. There was no indication presented by the weather forecasters that this

would be any different from many storms of past years.

Since this same storm had brought significant flooding to areas west of us, especially in Texas and along the Gulf coast, I was surprised that local forecasters were not predicting a stronger weather pattern. In fact, some of the computer models took the storm in a more northern direction, perhaps

missing the Atlanta area all together.

The record drought of the past few years had led to watering restrictions and extremely low reservoir levels; therefore any predicted rainfall would be a welcome sight—or so we thought. There had been the typical odd/even address system in place for outdoor watering, with many of the 17-county metro areas under a total outdoor watering ban. Ongoing discussions were being held with the governors of Georgia, Alabama and Florida over who had rights to what water, and even which creatures downstream should be protected. All of this during a time when water was being regu-

larly let out of our ever-decreasing lake levels to maintain water flow and levels downstream.

The rain began early on Friday evening, with a typical off/on pattern of mostly scattered showers. The local news reported a weather watch advisory as a low pressure area approaching from the northeast was expected to collide with the larger weather system from the west. "A recipe for heavy rainfall," I thought. As Saturday approached, the rainfall became much more regular, and by Sunday, we were experiencing steady, heavy rainfall with intense lightning and booming thunder. Wave after wave of storms passed through the county, with no respite between, and the local weather forecasters were not able to count all the cloud-to-ground lightning strikes.

I was modestly concerned, as our home sits on 2½ acres, bordered to the south by Sweetwater Creek, a tributary of the Chattahoochee River, Atlanta's major waterway. The "Hooch" eventually makes its way south along the border of Georgia and Alabama, merging with the Flint River and flowing south into Lake Seminole, eventually reaching the western Gulf of Mexico.

By late Sunday evening, I began to see residents' cars slowing to a stop as they attempted to leave the neighborhood; most of them backing up and turning around in our driveway. As there is only one entrance and exit in our development, I decided to investigate the situation. In our development—a group of some 90 homes—there is a system of three lakes, each one flowing into the other until they reach Lake Loraine; from there the water flows into Sweetwater Creek. Lake Loraine was created by constructing an earthen dam approximately ¾ mile in length and is the roadbed for the main street into and out of the development. My home is located directly across the street from Lake Loraine.

Upon my inspection, I noticed that

quite a stream of water was flowing over the dam and across the street to reach the creek. It was this flowing water, along with the nighttime darkness, that had deterred neighbors from attempting to cross the roadway. In years past, on several occasions, I had observed the overflowing of the creek, but at no time had the water level ever approached what now appeared to be flood stage. I went to bed at my normal time, setting the alarm for 6:00 AM. By this time, it had been raining steadily—sometimes very heavily—for the better part of 24 hours.

I was awakened at 3:10 AM by a rapid ringing of our front door bell! "Bing-bing, bing-bing, then BING-BING-bing-bing!" It was my next door neighbor. With the aid of my flashlight

We rushed downstairs; at the bottom of the stairs, we stepped off into approximately three feet of flowing water. My basement was now part of Sweetwater Creek.

and in my still partially sleepy condition, I saw what was to become my worst fear! The lake had overflowed its banks, and water was rising alongside the western facing wall of my home. We rushed downstairs; at the bottom of the stairs, we stepped off into approximately three-feet of flowing water! My basement was now part of Sweetwater Creek. It was at that time that I realized the seriousness of the situation. Outside, the rain continued to fall; inside, we quickly turned off all electrical power to the downstairs levels, along with the natural gas supply to furnaces and water heaters.

We now had nothing to do except wait for sunrise to more adequately survey the situation. The time was 4:15 AM, and I turned on the coffeemaker. By 6:00 AM, we had lost electrical power. Still, it was about an hour and a half before first light. We sat in the darkened den of our home sipping coffee and trying not to panic.

It was about 6:45 when we heard a very loud noise outside. Looking out into the still-darkened night, I saw a

powered vessel of some description adorned with several high-intensity lights rapidly approaching. My first thought was that it was some type of amphibious craft. It turned out to be an airboat, a very large airboat that had been pressed into service by the local County Emergency Management Team. Their plan was to evacuate anyone wishing to leave the neighborhood for higher ground. After seeing the amount of water present in my basement, I immediately had concern for others along our side of the street, as most of them were located at lower elevations and on much smaller lots. For the next several hours, we watched as the boat made trip upon trip, ferrying homeowners and emergency crews to and from the neighborhood.

I would hear the massive engine come up to speed and the boat would drift away; after two or three minutes I could no longer hear the engine. Fifteen minutes would pass, and yet again, I would

hear the noise of the boat returning; I am quite sure this Good Samaritan was a most welcomed sight for some of my neighbors!

For the better part of the day on Monday, all we could do was watch, hope and pray that soon the rains would end. My family watched from the screened porch at the rear of the house as the creek continued to rise at an alarming rate. Eventually, we began to see some relief as the rain slowly tapered off. I continued to hear the airboat enter and exit the neighborhood for the next several hours.

By mid-afternoon on Monday, I ventured down to the dam and spillway where I met a cadre of personnel from the county and a structural engineer from the state. He was concerned about a breach of our spillway, which would take out the only exit from the development. I asked him what caused his concern, and his reply was a weakening of the entire structure of the dam from the pressure of the water. The swollen waters of Sweetwater Creek had already taken out the bridge leav-

ing us with only one way out of the development. In addition, the dam on the upper lake was perilously close to failure, in which case the concern for Lake Loraine remaining intact was multiplying by the minute. Total evacuation now seemed eminent. I was not aware at the time that another lake yet further up the highway and to the west of us was about to give way.

The proliferation of these “home-made” dams and small ponds had been rampant during the mostly unchecked development of the mid-1990’s. Our county was among the fastest growing in the nation during these times. We had abundant land available, close proximity to Atlanta and a short ride to the airport. In brief, our county was prime real estate just waiting for development. Anytime you could advertise land at \$20,000 an acre, then add a water feature, the land value would easily double, leaving the developer a handy profit for a modest investment. Unfortunately, this was all too often the case; poor construction techniques and a lack of proper physical inspection would lead to disaster.

The local EMC worked around the clock attempting to restore power to hundreds of thousands of homeown-

ers in the affected area. Our power was restored by late Wednesday, much too late to salvage anything from our two abundantly-stocked refrigerators and freezers. The following day, we began the task of evaluation and clean-up. For three days, we labored alongside a crew of debris-hauling trucks to finally rid the lower floor of our home of what just days before had been a finished basement with a large communications room, workshop and gym complete with a dry sauna and Jacuzzi.

The next day we began to fight our way into the outside storage building with its myriad of power tools, lawn and garden equipment, chain saws and one John Deere tractor. My family followed for the next two days in salvaging what they could of the cartons that had not been totally submersed in water, while I began the task of drying out all of what I thought was salvageable in the way of power equipment.

My next door neighbor had a similar amount of interior damage; however, he also has a 25 x 35 in-ground pool which was covered by over five feet of water. We worked side by side, occasionally greeting each other with shrugs of “Oh well, it’s only STUFF!”

It took a week or two, but we slowly got back to a starting point; I say

starting point, because we had been working around the clock with dehumidifiers, fans and brooms to get all the moisture out of areas where mold would quickly grow. Reconstruction and restoration would take months to complete.

Valuable lessons learned are:

- (1) Fight for your ability to obtain insurance coverage for disasters not covered by standard Homeowners policies.
- (2) Have a game plan in case of the worst possible disaster.
- (3) Don’t be a “pack rat;” if you haven’t used it in a year or if you haven’t seen it since you moved in, throw it out.
- (4) Be thankful for good neighbors and your county emergency response teams, especially the fire, police, EMS, FEMA, local churches and The Salvation Army.

We still have our family, our health and our home, and my neighbors were right—the rest was only stuff!

J. Bryant Ray was born in the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains, and now lives in NW Georgia. He has published two novels and numerous short stories about life in the South.

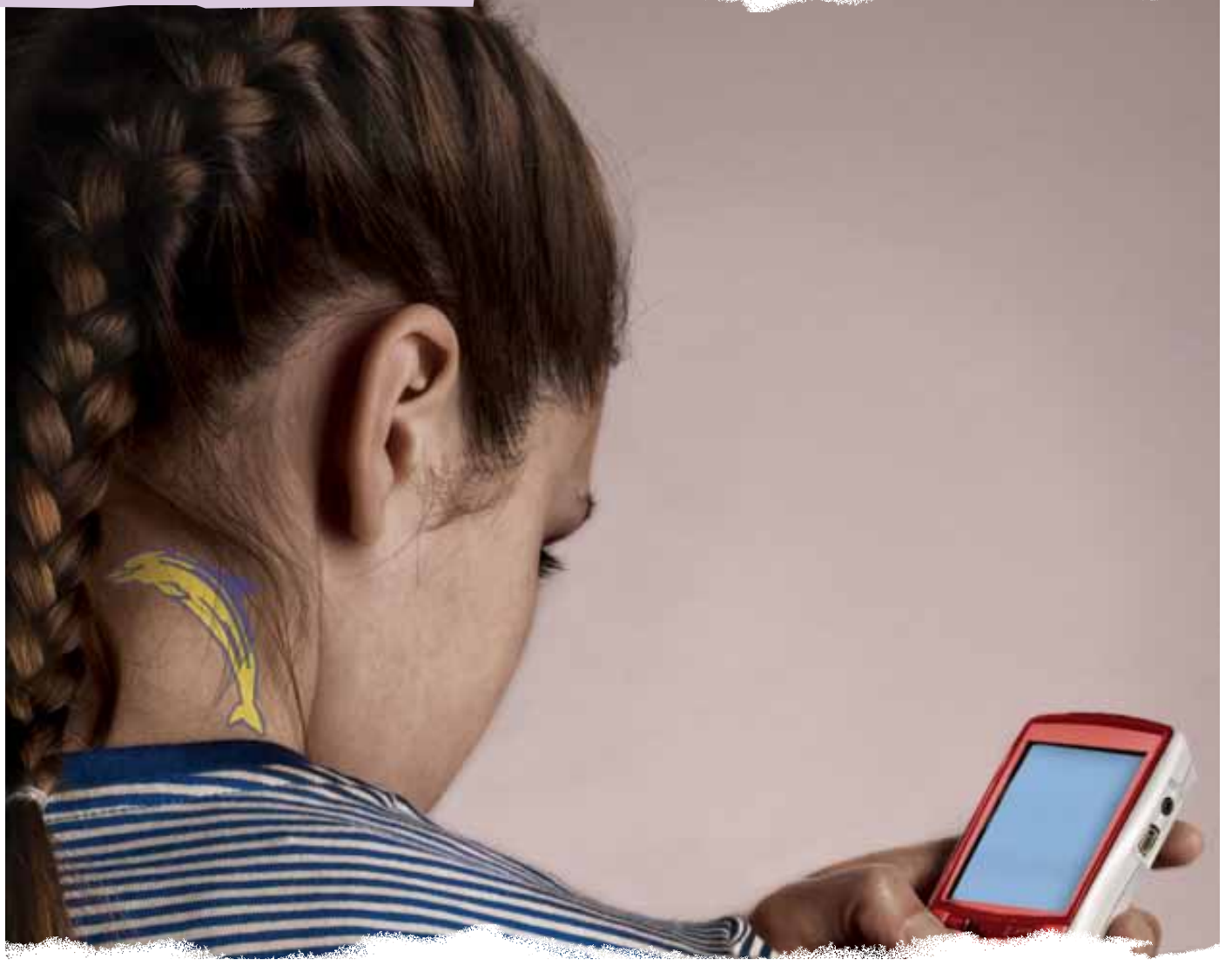
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The Girl with the Dolphin Tattoo

an urban tale by Will Cantrell

I'm not proud of myself. I capitulated. Caved. Folded...like a raggedy lawn chair caught in high wind. Pffft! "Never," I'd said, "won't ever catch me doing it."

"Makes about as much sense as rubbing two sticks together to start a fire when you've already got matches in your pocket." I told her, "And besides, a fella's gotta stick to his principles about something in this world. Certain things a guy my age has earned the right to do; like speaking his piece on any subject. Or things he's earned the right to *not* do...like *not* running

to catch the bus; *not* dumping all the innards of his personal life on Facebook, if he doesn't want to. *And not texting!*"

When the concept of text messaging first came about, I dismissed it as another societal misadventure—like Nehru jackets, leisure suits and the Pet Rock. Remarkably, once it got a toehold, the concept held on like grim

death and spread like kudzu, especially among the Millennial crowd. Oh, you'd hear or hear about Boomers who texted, but for the most part, they were outliers. Tapping messages out on keys was something that was done by the younger generation, not mine.

The full-blown embrace of the "*I'd rather text than talk*" philosophy of life—along with the rise of the Kardashians and the emergence of Snooki—was, in my book, a sure sign the country was headed in the wrong direction. And while Obama's policies didn't bother me in the least, the fact the leader of the free world was a known Blackberry-carrying texter

made me raise my eyebrows. “What ever happened to just picking up the phone and dialing—er, uh—punching buttons?” I’d often wondered.

Of course, when it came to texting, or rather, when it came to *me texting*, I’d drawn a line in the sand. I’d been emphatic about it, too. I’d said the same thing to others—many others. But Lackawanna, the teenager whose family lived on the other side of the cul-de-sac, was my main audience. “Listen to me,” I told her one afternoon, “if you ever get any kind of a text message from me, call the police. Immediately. It means I’ve been kidnapped—*abducted*—and I’m texting from the trunk of some Mafioso’s car. It’s the only reason I’d ever text anybody.”

“OK, suit yourself, Mr. C.,” she said nonchalantly after listening to me rail. “Everybody does it though. At least everybody I know. It’s really the only way—”

“Not me—never.”

As I mentioned, Lackawanna is one of my neighbors from across the street. We encounter each other two—maybe three—times a week when she is on her way home from school and I am finishing my daily run of several miles around the neighborhood. My jogs help me to delude myself that, because I am doing something to improve my health, I can indulge myself with Smokey Bones and Rocky Road—with extra walnuts.

On most days, Lackawanna dresses in some variation of the same theme: long sun dress, sandals—showing toes with each one painted a different color—and an Army-green urban back-pack. She wears a constant ponytail and invariably totes a metallic red cellular device upon which her attentions—and *fingers*—are almost always ruthlessly focused. The sixteen-year-old also wears black horned-rimmed glasses and sports a blue and

yellow cavorting dolphin tattooed prominently on the right side of her neck. On those same days, as I complete my run, I’m dressed in a pair of dark running shorts, and my lucky-but-ragged T-shirt that brags “PROPERTY OF GEORGIA TECH FOOTBALL” in very faded letters across the chest.

At first blush, the generational divide would appear too great to allow us to do more than exchange just an occasional “Hullo” or “G’bye” as we enter or leave our respective homes. Over the past couple of years however, Lackawanna and I have developed an egalitarian friendship of sorts, one based upon the exchange of ideas and information about our own particular demographic. She keeps me abreast of the latest *urban-speak*, and she also

“...texting is really the same kinda thing dolphins do underwater. As a pod of dolphins is swimming along, they send signals to each other...”

does her best to answer my compelling questions. For example, *do young teen women really view teen males who insist on wearing their pants hanging off their butts as being eligible for friendship or anything else?* (She doesn’t, she says). She also explains to me such things as why people wearing nose rings should be taken *seriously*.

In exchange, I fill her in on the lore of my generation, such as *it really was possible to live in a world in which personal computers had not yet been invented*. And also, every Baby Boomer who swears they were at Woodstock couldn’t possibly have been. But more importantly, the sound of Young America—*Motown*—ran through *Detroit*, not *Liverpool*.

A few days back, as Lackawanna and I convened near my mailbox wrapping up a brief conversation that had us both scratching our heads (over UFO’s and Dennis Rodman), the subject of texting arose. (I’d wanted to discuss the joy of dolphin tattoo removal but thought better of it.)

“Texting is how I keep up with my

peeps,” Lackawanna explained.

“Peeps?”

“Yeah, peeps. You know, friends and associates, Mr. C. Anyway, texting is really the same kinda thing dolphins do underwater. We learned about it in school. As a pod of dolphins is swimming along, they send signals to each other that only they can interpret. It’s how they communicate with each other. Like I said, texting is really the same kinda thing ’cept it’s for humans, of course.”

“Dolphins? Signals?”Are you sure about this, Lacka?”

“You never learned about the dolphins, Mr. C? I guess they didn’t know that kind of stuff when you were my age. Or maybe you were too busy listening to that guy you told me about

last week. Whosis... whatshisname... uh...uh...er...James Brown?”

She looked at me, smiled, shook her head and then disappeared inside their family abode, presumably to do the things other

inveterate text messengers do. But I could only presume.

I’d remained steadfast on the matter. *Texting* rather than *talking* seemed like a step backwards. At some level, there’s mischief involved. It required you to learn code language such as TTYL (talk to you later), OAN (on another note), WYD? (what are you doing) or MYC (man, you crazy). The whole thing was too much like work if you asked me, especially when I considered that everyone I’d ever seen do it was multitasking—i.e. sending, receiving and composing witty repartee while doing something else entirely: walking, smoking, driving, or painting their toenails. “Heck, single-tasking is getting to be more and more of a chore,” I told myself.

Texting also ultimately brought up the matter of my own notorious track record: my penchant for technological disaster and disarray. The small size of any text screen, the age of my eyes

and the proclivity of my pudgy fingers to make inadvertent typos all on their own, especially when trying to punch tiny keys was a sure recipe for disaster—for me anyway. I could well envision a well intentioned text request of “Will you carry me?” being received as “Will you marry me?”—which is just not the same thing at all.

A day or two after me and Lacka had discussed that business about the “underwater dolphin signals as text messages,” and after I had once more restrained myself from bringing up the subject of prominent tattoo removal, I was out on my daily jog. The only thing I can surmise is that extra endorphins kicked in, and I found myself about six miles further from home than I usually go. I headed back in a homeward direction when a “partly cloudy” weather forecast turned into an angry deluge.

As a result of the high wind, the rain was falling in sheets and torrents. Suddenly I was ten pounds heavier because of the weight of the rainwater in my clothes and shoes. If this wasn't enough, the storm turned angrier and hail began to fall.

Heretofore, any hailstones I'd ever seen were “pea-sized” or perhaps “dime-sized.” The Weather Channel had never prepared me for the apparently “new and improved” model: the bullet-sized, projectile-shaped, armor-piercing hail pummeling me. It brought to mind what bad writers—the ones who wrote cheap dimestore novels and badly-produced TV melodramas—meant when they'd written about the hero “...being caught in a ‘hail of bullets’ or a ‘rain of gunfire.’”

The only refuge in sight was a McDonald's that appeared to be about a half-mile away. Blinding, pelting rain and hail must alter one's depth perception though, because as I sloshed, squished, and wheezed my way along, the Golden Arches didn't seem to be any closer—it must have been a mirage on the horizon and three counties away. Just after a bolt of lightning

senger-side window: “Mr. Ceeeeee,” he shouts, elongating my foreshortened last name. “You *are* Mr. C, aren't you? Well, aren't you? Get in, man. Get yourself in out of the rain.”

Pleasantly stunned, but soaking wet, I squished and wheezed my way inside. I don't normally ride with strangers appearing out of nowhere, but under the circumstances, I think I would have gotten into a car with a known serial killer.

The cabbie's name—*gospel truth*—as shown on the city permit on the sun visor over the driver's head, was “Noah.” He handed me a beach towel. “Here, dry yourself off—have you home in a jiffy,” he says.

“Thanks, but how did you know?”

“Lackawanna texted me, just after the storm came up.”

“Lackawa?!”

“Yeah, you know—the girl with the dol—”

“—phin tattoo,” I finished his sentence, and we both laughed. “Yeah, she's my neighbor.”

“She's a good kid, that Lacka is...said you'd be along here somewhere, and you'd be needing a ride about now. Said you'd be the guy in the running shorts and a T-shirt you'd obviously stolen from Georgia Tech.”

Minutes later, I was at my front door, asking Noah how much I owed and, as always happens in cases like this one, the rain had stopped and there was a bright



If the rainwater in my clothes wasn't enough, the storm turned angrier, and hail began to fall.

split a nearby oak tree (along with the flash of the first twenty years of my life), a yellow cab materialized out of the blue, windshield wipers throwing off rainwater in every direction. (Even now, as I re-tell this incident, I find it scientifically interesting!) This taxi just *appeared* as if it were beamed down from the Starship Enterprise or from the end of a wand waved by some unseen, unknown *Fairy Godmother*.

The driver powered down the pas-

bluebird sky directly above my house.

“No charge. It's complimentary. Lackawanna wouldn't have it any other way—at least for a first-time customer caught in the rain. I'm one of her peeps. Part of her network. You must be, too.”

“Network?”

“Yeah, like the dolphins. She's told you about the dolphins, hasn't she? Well, of course, she has. We all text each other, all day long. Cab drivers,

Southern Essay

waiters, pizza guys, bankers, pharmacists, doctors—and all our customers, too. We all know Lackawanna. She's got us organized. Heck, since she came

try te..te..te...texting on my own—as long as nobody I knew could ever see me doing it.

I wanted to thank Lackawanna for her consideration, and I thought, "What

The kid had just conjured up a Yellow Cab, out of the blue, one that likely saved me from catching pneumonia...

to town and taught us to text and network, my business has increased 237%!"

"TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY SEVEN PERCENT!" I repeated to myself a few minutes later as I wrung out my rain-soaked clothes and changed into dry ones. I couldn't help but think about how observant Lackawanna had been about the routine of my daily run. Mostly though, I thought how considerate she was to send Noah to my rescue. The kid had just conjured up a Yellow Cab, out of the blue, one that likely saved me from catching pneumonia...or worse. Maybe the girl with the dolphin tattoo was onto something. Maybe I'd even

better way to thank her than by texting her?" Cellphone in hand, I attempted to tap out, "THANKS FOR THE RESCUE CAB," but which my fingers somehow translated into "TANKS FO THR RESCU CAN."

Moments later, I was startled by a knock at the door. "Everything okay here?" the police officer was asking, "Your neighbor sent us...said the guy who lives here might've been kidnapped."

Will Cantrell is a writer, story-teller and spinner of mostly-true urban tall tales. He can usually be contacted at willcantrell1313@gmail.com assuming he's managed to find his way home and out of his latest predicament.



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May Cats

by Anthony Holt

I haven't walked beneath the Great Cow Oak during May since the Summer of 1998, the last summer Shelby farmed. During the years of my youth on Black River, it guarded the access to where we left the boat for a dozen or more years.

Eventually, it became impossible to leave the boat at the mouth of the old river behind Shelby's tractor shed for fear that someone would steal it or the motor. During those dozen or so years however, nothing ever went missing. On one occasion, we went to run our lines and nets one evening and found a five-dollar bill on top of the gas can. Someone had borrowed it to fish for a few hours and paid for the gas they had used. Different times, indeed. The great oak is still there, some five feet in diameter, although much has changed. Since my youth, the river has moved many feet to the west and the river bed is all but filled in during times of low river flow. The "cut-off" formed behind the tractor shed in 1958—or so J.Q. Harvey once told me—and since then, it has inched its way towards the great oak as rivers tend to do. I have feared for the tree

for a decade and a half knowing that at its current pace, the river would overtake it and the shed in less than another decade. The "race" now is that the river is about to cut a new course a quarter of a mile or so north of the tractor shed; this past March, the river was flowing through a new trace about five feet wide. Perhaps the tree and the shed will survive after all.

There are some times during May that I can almost smell the aroma of the home of my youth in the Bottoms. I can almost smell the flowering willows, the mud of the old river and the cherry and June apple blossoms



near Mrs. Zelpha's front porch, west of the tractor shed. The house, garage, fruit trees and about all else are long gone now, the results of unpunished arson some years past. All, though, are engraved indelibly in my memories. I can fondly remember skinning a five-pound flathead for Mrs. Zelpha as I had it tied to the overhead fuel barrel near her front porch. A picture of that celebration is somewhere. There were also countless squirrels I skinned for her there in the autumns of my youth.

I remember well the last week of May 1986. We had our nets out in the usual places. We had the "old yellow

dog" net, as Dwight called it, and two others, including one that I still keep as a reminder of those times. I vividly remember the places where the nets were tied, although I won't mention them by name, knowing that one day, I will hopefully return to fish them again. Several photos of fish caught that week account for the fact that it was our most successful May for catfish. One photo from May 30th shows me struggling to hold up a 22-lb. flathead and 30-lb. blue cat, although we called them white cat then. I found out later that white cat seldom get more than 5 lbs. in weight, so those of my youth—5 to 55-plus pounds—must not have been white cats. I remember skinning the big blue cat for the Kinder sisters as we had it tied beneath the falling Mulberrys in Dwight's front yard.

The great oak can testify to all of this—although I can assure you it will remain silent and keep these and a million other memories sacred—as it has kept watch in the place where it has lived for centuries, just to the north of where the tractor shed now stands. Perhaps one day, I will carry another 22-lb. flathead up the bank and beneath its massive branches and pause there long enough for it to add the record to the many more from so long ago.

Anthony Holt was born in Jackson County, Arkansas, and his family raised rice, soybeans, soft red winter wheat and grain sorghum. He has taught both high school and college courses and has also preached at two small churches in NE Arkansas. He currently teaches biology at the University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton.