

# Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

## Hunting Bear in the Delta

*An excerpt from the book  
by James T. McCafferty*

## Just Shy of Crossing Over

*An excerpt from the  
latest from Niles Reddick*

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*An attorney shares several  
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*David Skinner*

# Drawing on a Dream From Long Ago

By David Ray Skinner



When the guidance counselor met with me my senior year in high school to discuss my college plans, I told her that I like to draw pictures and that I wanted to attend Carson-Newman, a little Baptist college.

She was apparently underwhelmed, because she immediately began trying to talk me into finding an appropriate “commercial art” school. Call it a gut reaction or Divine Providence, but the word “commercial” set off all kinds of bells and whistles in my teenage brain, because I was *fit and determined* to attend Carson-Newman for two main reasons—it was a Baptist college (and I was a Baptist boy) and it had a football team (why should I give up the excitement of college football on Saturday afternoons?).

In retrospect, I now realize that my reaction to my guidance counselor’s suggestion was pretty ironic, because the graphic design that I do these days really does coincide with the “commercial art” that she was pushing way back then. She wasn’t wrong in trying to direct me to a commercial art school—it’s just that she wasn’t totally right, either. That’s because what we learned at Carson-Newman was more than what could have been taught at a conventional school of design.

Whether it was the school’s theology courses and required chapel services, the extracurricular activities or even the lengths that we took to get around the college’s ban on dancing, somehow we learned more about life than how to paint landscapes and specify fonts and Pantone colors. In fact, I really credit my art professor, Dr. Earl Cleveland, with teaching me how to think creatively with nary a mention of a single Pantone color. Throughout my career, I have used the same thought process that Dr. Cleveland taught us on my design, advertising and marketing projects, whether it was creating Glock’s first four-color ads (<http://www.bridgital.com/NewBridgitalWebsite/ads>), or designing and illustrating the 20-foot bas relief sculpture for the University of West Georgia’s football stadium (<https://davidrayskinner.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/big-chief-2>).

Somewhere in the middle of the Eagles’ “Desperado” album, I put my head down, and a strange concept crawled into my brain.

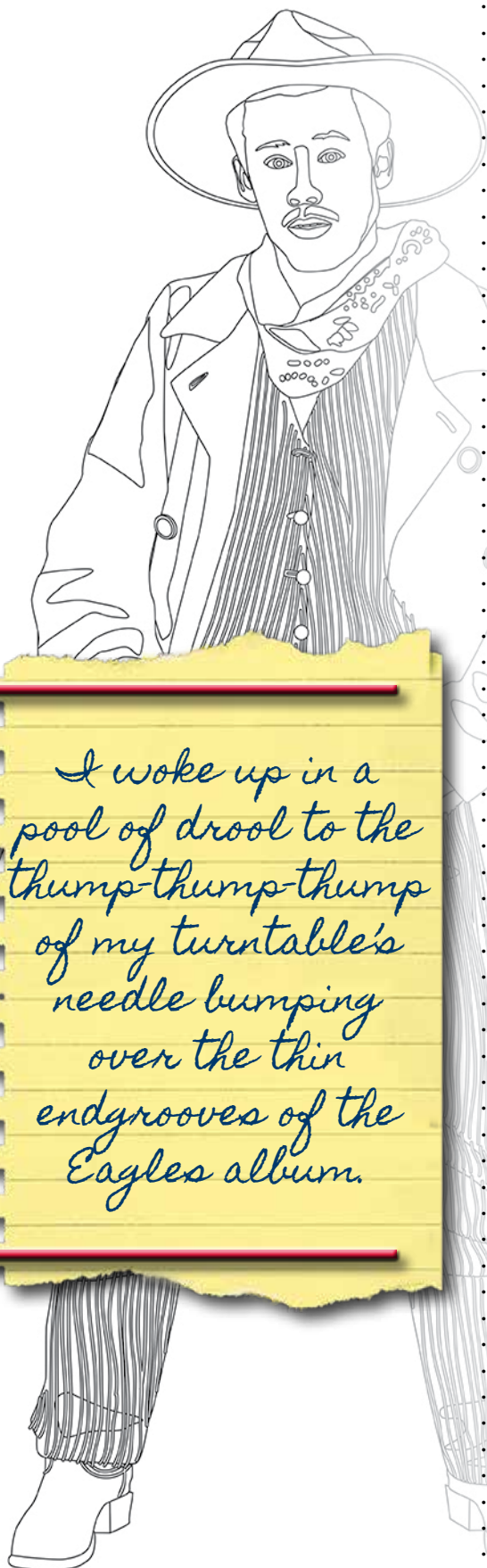




The above illustration of the gunfighter ties together the old and the new, and the conventional with the digital. I called the illustration “*Last Second*,” and I just recently finished putting the final touches on it—using my Mac. My intent (other than to use it with this article in *SouthernReader*) was to properly update a piece that I initially submitted to Dr. Cleveland back in the spring of 1973. It was the second semester of my junior year and the project was done for a mixed-media course.

Dr. Cleveland had given us a specific (and reasonable) number of projects to complete as the requirement needed to pass the course, but at that point in my college career, I was juggling a number of projects and circumstances, and I found myself going down to the wire to complete them. Realizing that I would have to pull an all-nighter to finish them all, I laid out all my paints and brushes and cranked up the stereo. Somewhere in the middle of the Eagles’ “Desperado” album (which had just been released), I put my head down, and a strange concept crawled into my brain. Would it work?

*It took me all night to complete the illustration, but I was truly amazed at my ability at handling the airbrush... I had never seen one before.*



*I woke up in a pool of drool to the thump-thump-thump of my turntable's needle bumping over the thin endgrooves of the Eagles album.*

It needed to be an airbrush rendition, but I had never attempted any airbrush illustrations.

To my amazement, it all fell into place. Not only was the concept innovative and *off-the-beaten path* (if not strange and unusual), the colors were bright and inviting. It took me all night to complete the illustration, but I was truly amazed at my ability at handling the airbrush...*I had never even seen an airbrush before, much less utilized one!* I stood back to admire the finished piece, but something was wrong...it smelled like spit. *Was that the way airbrush paints were supposed to smell?* What's more, it was all over my mouth.

I woke up in a pool of drool to the *thump-thump-thump* of my turntable's needle bumping over the thin endgrooves of the Eagles album. There was no painting, there was no airbrush (it would be years before I would actually use one), and there weren't even any rough sketches. ***It had only been a dream!*** However, there ***was*** a concept—after all, I had worked on it all night in my sleep.

The idea was one of a gunfighter who was about to die. The look on his face was to be one of puzzled surprise and fear. The reason the viewer would realize that the gunfighter was about to die is that the vantage point of the picture was from the barrel of the gun that belonged to the cowboy who was about to kill him. It was a “*you are the bullet*” concept, and it was to be a picture created as if there was a tiny little camera in the nose of the .45 bullet that was about to exit the victor's six-gun and drill its way into the bosom of the surprised gunslinger, whose gun had yet to be elevated into position. Oh, those crazy dreams...too much pizza, milkshakes, and Eagles.

Unfortunately, the project deadline was still there, and obviously, using an airbrush was totally out of the question. So, I created the piece as a pen, pencil and watercolor *black-and-white* painting. So much for the vibrant colors. Through the years, I have always felt like it was an execution (so to speak) that didn't live up to the concept.

But now, here we are, living and working in the digital age. This time around (43 years later), I used a mouse and Adobe Illustrator and then dropped the layers into Photoshop to refine and “airbrush” all the details. Plus, once again, I listened to the Eagles’ “Desperado,” only now, I have it stored in iTunes, along with the rest of their albums.

Sadly, and coincidentally, it was while putting the final touches on the illustration that I heard about the death of Eagles co-founder Glenn Frey. That only underscored the poignancy (and my perceived importance) of reproducing the artwork. I have to say that I find it interesting and ironic at how fast technology is advancing; and yes, it seems to be moving at the same rate of speed at which some of us are winding down. 🍉



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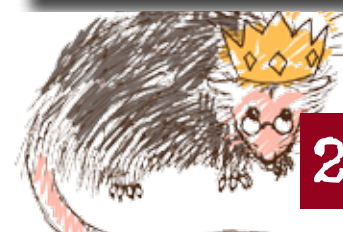
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# The Long Distance Call

An embarrassing recollection by Lisa Love

We Southern girls are just raised differently than our Yankee counterparts. We are taught from day one to respect our elders.

And that means always shake the preacher's hand after the service, say "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am" to the ladies, and never, ever sit down in a public rest room (okay, I veered off topic on that one, but you get the idea).

As you can well imagine, we belles can be a little intimidated by our authority figures. And there was a time, not so long ago, (before cell phones and instant messaging) when long distance calls were a rare and expensive treat. Let's say crazy Uncle Stan from Memphis called one Sunday night to tell us that he had given up on women and was getting a dog.

Well, we all would gather around the phone, jockeying for position by the receiver, straining to hear or be heard. As is the law of the jungle, it was survival of the fittest, so we little ones (if not trampled by the stampede to the phone) were usually forced to the extension in the hall where we were repeatedly told, "Quit breathing so loud—we can't hear!"

Mr. Selser was  
Mama's boss and a  
stern, no-nonsense  
man, devoid of  
humor or patience,  
and he was calling  
Long Distance!



For about three minutes our world was reduced to the size of a phone focused on the voice of a loved one from far away. I kinda miss Sunday night phone calls—the *specialness of it all*. To this day I have to remind myself to sit down, take a deep breath, and relax when someone from out of state calls (now living in the age of unlimited long distance it's not quite so exciting...a shame, really).

One rainy Saturday afternoon years ago I made an error in judgement...I answered a ringing phone. In our kitchen, to be exact. If Caller ID had existed at the time, this whole nasty episode could easily have been avoided. But alas, I innocently lifted the receiver off the cradle and said, "Hello."

*First mistake!*

"Is your Mama home?" I heard a gentleman ask.

"No sir," I politely replied with a smile (being raised right and all).

"This is Mr. Selser (he was Mama's boss). I am in Washington, D.C. right now, and I really need to speak with her immediately."

I told him that she had gone grocery shopping and would he mind calling her back later?

But No-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o! He said that he would be in and out of his hotel all day, so could I just take a message?

*Take a message???* My eyes frantically darted back and forth looking for a pen. Nope! A pencil, maybe? Crayon? No! A lipstick? Nada! I was well aware that Mr. Selser was WAITING! Long distance! Herein was my problem—Mr. Selser was a stern, no-nonsense man, devoid of humor or patience, *AND* he was calling *LONG DISTANCE*! An authority figure on long distance...the clock is ticking...I am pacing to and fro as far as the perpetually tangled telephone cord would let me go. Just as I was contemplating slicing my finger and writing in blood on the fridge, I hear an annoyed, "Are you ready yet?" *Oh when will this nightmare end?*

Now here is where the Southern thing kicks in. Any normal human being would have just said, "Excuse me while I go get a pen." Not me, though. I panicked! To put down the phone and look for something to write

with would take time and being long distance and all (as we learned earlier) *time was of the essence!* No pen, no paper, just my memory. Well, how bad could it be? So assuming he just wanted to give me the number where Mama could reach him, (knowing surely I could remember that) *AND* wanting to please to the best of my ability, I bravely mumbled, "Yes Sir, I am ready."

*Second mistake!*

"Okay, here it goes." Those were the last words I can clearly recall Mr. Selser saying to me that rainy afternoon. It all became something of a blur after that. Because without fanfare, my Mama's boss started speaking...slowly...word after word. Not a phone number. Not something easily memorized, but *a letter! A LETTER!* Gamely at first, I tried to burn into my brain the words he was saying. I remember thinking if I could just get the gist of it and relay it to Mom as soon as she walked in the door, then she could call him back and straighten it all out.

But as he kept going on and on, I realized there was no way that was ever going to happen...I was in over my head—*big time!* He just kept going on and on, sentence after sentence. So I just figured, what the heck, I gave up. A full white flag surrender. I didn't even bother to listen to his words anymore. The sound of his voice became a bee buzzing in my ear. I thought to myself, *I'll just tell Mama to call him when she gets in and he can dictate it all over again to her.* Yeah, that's an idea! With a plan in mind, I started to relax a little, and my heart rate started to return to its pre-phone call rhythm.

As my fog cleared, I could still hear him droning on, syllable after syllable. *My, he is wordy,* I recall thinking! While he spoke, my thoughts wandered...*Would the rain ever stop? What's for dinner? Will there ever be peace in the Middle East?* (Just kidding...I just threw that in so y'all would think I was deep and to make up for the stupidity that follows!)

Back from my reverie—Mr. Selser had been going on about a minute—when I start getting a bit bold. Wanting it to appear as if I really was taking down the message, I start to interrupt him. "Excuse me, sir. Is that a capital 'r'?" Or, "Should I start a new paragraph here?"

I start to have a little fun with this, and with this man who made my Mama's life so miserable on a regular basis. I am actually sitting down now, feet propped on the fridge door (and remember, I never sit during long distance calls!), filing my nails and throwing out some suggestions to help make his letter a bit more interesting. Imagine my delight at playing editor to my Mama's hellish boss as he dictated to me a letter I was pretending to take down.

Now, even after all these years, that is too twisted for me to wrap my mind around. But the innocence of youth was on my side, at least for a minute. Once more I interrupted his train of thought to question the spelling of a word. "Thank you, sir. Let's see...that was T-e-n-n-e-s-s-e-e? I got it, Sir." Finally we were heading for the home stretch. I was pretty pleased with myself, thinking I handled the whole situation pretty well. Here it was, a *long distance call* on a *SATURDAY* from an *authority figure*. I had not thrown up, nor did I panic (well, not much), and I had been nothing short of charming and helpful to Mr. Selser, if I do say so myself. Heck, I practically co-authored his work!

So now as he is beginning to close what would have

been a two-page letter, I think to myself, *remember to tell mom to call him when she gets in*. Two minutes of Mr. Selser's non-stop dictation (albeit with brief interruptions thrown in for my own amusement) finally came to an end.

I said, "Okay, Mr. Selser, I will have my Mom call you if she has any questions when she gets in." And as I get ready to hang up the phone, I hear the words that will forever live in infamy: "Could you read that back to me?"

My world stopped, my heart went into my throat, and I felt as if I had been kicked in the stomach! **"COULD YOU READ THAT BACK TO ME?!!!"**

So, of course I did the only thing any self-respecting Southern girl could do. I threw the receiver to the floor and screamed at the top of my lungs, **"Oh my Lord, Oh my Lord, the kitchen's on fire!!!"**



**Publisher's Note:** "Long Distance Call" is a re-run. It was, in fact, the first piece that **Lisa Love** ever submitted to **SouthernReader**, back in 2006. This issue marks the 10th anniversary of its serendipitous appearance.

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



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# Older, Adventurous and Native Americans

## Drifting Too Far From the Shore

by Niles Reddick

Summertime Publications

**OLDER** Americans are becoming more numerous as a result of advances in medicine and the sheer tenacity of those of us who are gradually moving into the curious world of seniors. This journey is rich fodder for Niles Reddick as he explores that territory in his latest book, "Drifting Too Far From the Shore." Through the character of Charlotte "Muddy" Rewis, Reddick takes the reader on a literary excursion that is a bit like "Fried Green Tomatoes" meets "Forrest Gump." In the process, he recalls painful

milestones in Southern history such as the 1918 murder of Mary Turner, and the 1973 massacre of the Alday family (both in Georgia), as well as the national tragedies of Jonestown and the doomed flight of Northwest 255. Additionally, Muddy deals with the loneliness of losing her husband, the changing relationship between her and her adult children and the awkwardness of "dating" her (also elderly) neighbor, Fred Stalvey. It's a great tale in the spirit of Southern storytelling.

## The Bear Hunter: The Life and Times of Robert Eager Bobo in the Canebrakes of the Old South

by James T. McCafferty

**ADVENTUROUS** Americans have always had a thirst for danger and excitement; that's what led many to the new world in the first place. It doesn't get more dangerous or exciting than bear hunting, because, at the drop of a hat (or a rifle) the hunter can easily become the hunted. With this in mind, James T. McCafferty takes us on a series of hunts with the legendary Robert Eager Bobo

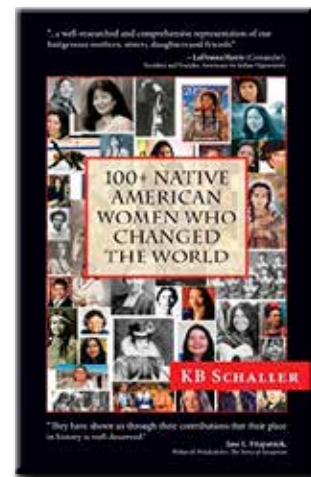
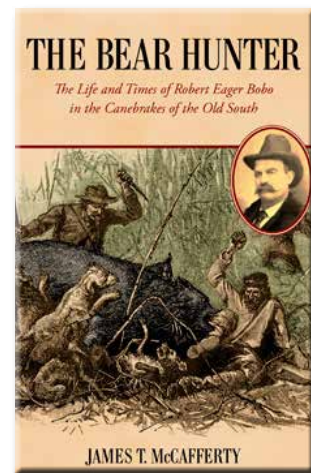
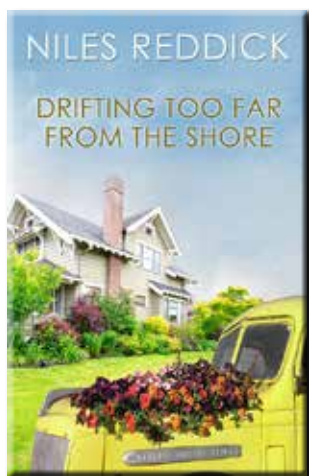
in the Canebrakes of Mississippi's "Old Delta" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Bobo wasn't just a local celebrity, he was highly sought as a hunting guide by the rich and famous and such notables as President Teddy Roosevelt and Chicago journalist/Western novelist Emerson Hough. These colorful tales of the "guts 'n' glory" *turn-of-the-last-century* outdoors that McCafferty spins not only harkens back to the South of yesteryear, they are guaranteed to keep twenty-first century readers on the edge of their seats.

## 100+ Native American Women Who Changed the World

by KB Schaller

Peppertree Press

**NATIVE** American women have traditionally been depicted in TV, movies and books with stereotypes ranging from timid and long-suffering to nearly invisible, lost in the shadows of their *noble warrior* male counterparts. In reality, there were numerous examples of strong and dynamic Native American women that made a tremendous impact on their family, tribe, and nation. Florida writer KB Schaller illustrates this with her latest book, "100+ Native American Women Who Changed the World." Using examples ranging from heroine Pocahontas to broadcaster Ann Curry, and Lewis and Clark guide Sacagawea to folk singer Buffy Sainte-Marie, Schaller presents a carefully-catalogued *Who's Who* of influential Native American women whose footprints blazed trails for America and the world. It's a must-read for cultural and history buffs.



# Just Shy of Crossing Over

By Niles Reddick

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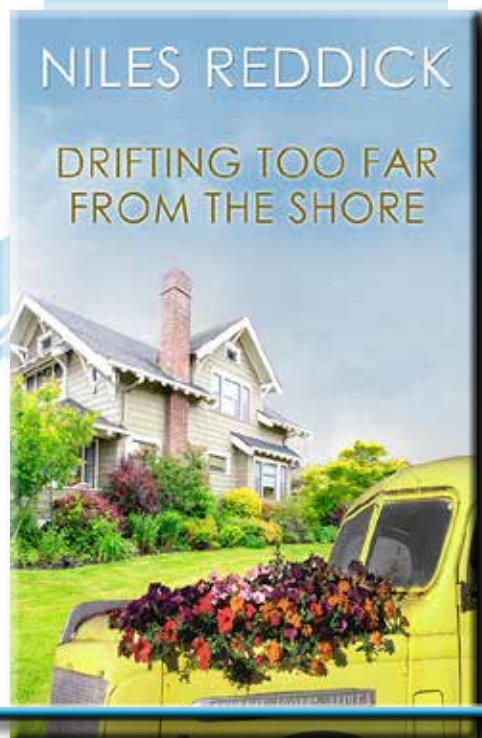
uddy and Fred Stalvey were driving back to Morven, and the sun was setting in the distance. There was coolness in the evening spring air, and to Muddy, it felt nice.

When they got to Barney, they turned left by the peach shed, and Stalvey said, "It's beautiful this evening."

"Yes, it is," Muddy said. The Thunderbird picked up speed, meandering its way through the pine forests of Southern Georgia. As they came into Morven, they passed the Methodist church, and Muddy thought about Claude, not so much about his grave and the corpse in the casket, but about him in his new form in heaven, and she imagined him just across the river waiting for her, standing and hugging her when she crossed. It was a positive image to her. She imagined going for her doctor's checkup in a couple of days, and she imagined bad news they might deliver: "Ms. Rewis, we are going to have to do by-pass surgery," or "We've discovered a mass that is pressing on your arteries and this is causing you to have the *kerplunk* sensation and we'll give you six months," or "We think the hardening of the arteries is not allowing you to get enough oxygen." She didn't want to hear any bad news. She had hoped just to close her eyes, fall asleep, and cross over to Claude. She didn't want to suffer. Her eyes were closed, her head was tilted back in the Thunderbird on the headrest, and the wind stroked her face as the antique car roared on. "*It's alright,*" whispered Claude. "What?" Muddy said to herself. "*It,*" said the whisper. Muddy wasn't ready for *it*.

"You fall asleep, Charlotte?" Fred always called her by her given name, rather than the nickname she had acquired as a girl.

"No, just resting my eyes. Past few days have about worn me out."



An excerpt from  
Niles Reddick's  
latest book,  
"Drifting Too Far  
From the Shore"







"You want to get an ice cream and ride around a bit? I'm enjoying this."

"Me, too, but I'm tired. Besides, I don't want an ice cream from the Suwannee Swiftly. I don't like going in there."

Stalvey chuckled. "Why not?"

"Stinks."

"Never noticed."

"I would appreciate it if you would just drop me off."

"Don't forget there's Bingo in Dixie tomorrow night."

"I haven't. I do have a check-up in Thomasville the day after, so I don't need to be out late tomorrow night."

"Everything alright?"

"I think so. Routine visit."

"Thomasville?"

"Yes."

"You want me to go with you, drive you?"

"No, I plan to stop by Anthony's, do a little shopping while there. I appreciate it, though. You need me to pick up anything for you while I'm there?"

"No, but I appreciate it. Thanks for inviting me tonight. It meant a lot." The Thunderbird pulled into the gravel drive behind Muddy's house, and Fred jumped out, sprinted to her door, and opened it, helping her out. Muddy thanked him again and headed inside.

Muddy walked into the back door, and Fred backed out of her driveway. When she got inside, she peeked out the curtain in the living room to watch Fred pull in his garage, and it closed behind him.

She saw lights come on, she sat down in the lift chair, and she turned on the headline news. Part of her felt silly about all of a sudden seeing about him when she had never given him a second thought before.

The Bingo and dance were nice the next evening, except for seeing Velma and knowing their date would be all over town. Muddy didn't care. She had a good time. The next day, Muddy was still

tired, not because they had stayed out too late. In fact, Fred had brought her home by 9:00 p.m. She had tossed and turned a lot, thinking about Fred, their slow dance and how it made her feel.

Muddy's doctor's appointment was at 11:30 a.m. in Thomasville. They'd told her not to eat, so she had her morning coffee and a little breakfast bar. She didn't consider that eating and she'd done it this way for years, and the blood work was always the same. She did like an 8:00 a.m. appointment, because she would be first and they wouldn't make her wait that long, except the doctor wasn't always

there at 8:00, due to hospital rounds and she didn't like sitting on that plastic pad with paper. She normally took a book to read and sat in the chair, but the chairs weren't comfortable either. She liked the 11:30 a.m. appointment better, though, because she knew they would all go to lunch at noon like clockwork.

She felt like they even rushed through some visits just to go eat lunch. She'd witnessed it many times through the years, and while she never revealed her secret to anyone about appointment times and getting seen quicker, she felt like there were others there

who knew as well.

When she got to Thomasville at 8:30 a.m., she decided to swing by Anthony's house to say hello and to see if he would like to go to lunch later in the day. She knew it was his day off. When Muddy rang the bell, she could hear some scrambling, and a woman wearing a bathrobe opened the door.

"Yes?"

"Is Anthony here?" For a moment, Muddy thought she may have gone to the wrong house, but looked about, noticed Anthony's car, his Georgia bulldog mailbox, his hedges all neatly trimmed.

"He's taking a shower. Is there something I can help you with?"

"I'm Charlotte Rewis, his mother."

"Oh. Oh my. Let me get him."

*For a moment,  
Muddy thought she  
may have gone to  
the wrong house,  
but looked about,  
noticed Anthony's  
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neatly trimmed.*



"May I come in and sit? Propping on my cane isn't very comfortable."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Rewis. Of course you can." She opened the door and held it for Muddy. Muddy mused Lily would really enjoy this scene even more than the scene she found her and Fred Stalvey in the other day. Muddy couldn't wait to see the look on Anthony's face when he came out of the shower. She just hoped he put something on before making an entrance. The comedy of it all was almost too much and she continued to giggle, not so much from an unknown woman in a bathrobe answering Anthony's door, but because it had been a woman. She kept saying to herself, *"Thank the Lord; thank the Lord."*

She even imagined announcing in her Sunday School class that she'd caught Anthony having an affair in Thomasville and to tell them to pray for him just to get their reaction. Anthony was so secretive about his personal life that Muddy had convinced herself that Anthony was probably gay, not that she would have minded so much. She just wanted all her children to live happy and fulfilling lives as she had.

She could hear whispers in the back, and she heard Anthony's voice raise and say, "What?" followed by a "Shhh," and in a moment, Anthony came from the back wearing short pants, a t-shirt, his hair combed, but wet.

"Mama, you should have let me know you were coming, and I would have been dressed."

"You *are* dressed, and you're right that I should have called. It was a spur of the moment thought that I would just stop by on my way to run errands, before my doctor's appointment, and see if you wanted to eat lunch. I called Lily before I left, but I didn't remember you were off until I was on my way, and you know I don't have one of those cell phones."

"So you met Kathy?"

"Well, not formally," Muddy said and Kathy

walked toward her and extended her hand to which Muddy replied, "Nice to meet you."

"Good to finally meet you as well."

"Do you work at the Piggly Wiggly?"

"Goodness, no. I work at the college."

"How did you two meet?"

"We met in class."

"Class?"

"Mama, I didn't tell you, but I've been taking classes to get my degree. Should have done it a long time ago, but it's been fun."

"Well, I don't know when I've been happier to hear such good news. I'm proud of you."

"Thanks," he said. "Well, what do you think of Kathy?"

"I think she's fine," Muddy said, smiling. "I guess I should get out of the way and let you two get ready."

"No, you're fine," said Kathy. "Can I get you a cup of coffee?"

"Sure," Muddy said. Kathy walked toward the kitchen.

"I'm a bit embarrassed," Anthony said.

"Nothing to be embarrassed about, Anthony. You're a grown man."

"I know, but still, it's awkward."

"I think it's great. I've often worried about you being alone."

"I guess you'll have to worry about someone else now, like Fred Stalvey."

"No, we're just friends. No one could replace your Daddy."

"I know."

Kathy returned with the coffee and Muddy took a sip.

"That's strong."

"It's Starbucks," she said. "It packs a punch in the morning, and it costs more, but I love it."

"I do, too. Maybe I could get some while I'm here. You sell this at the Piggly Wiggly, Anthony?"

"Yes, we have it there."

"I may need to stop and get some." Muddy sipped the last of the coffee and sat talking to Anthony while Kathy had slipped into the back and put on clothes. When Kathy returned, Muddy

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imagined announcing  
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class that she'd  
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for him just to get  
their reaction.*

could tell she was a cute lady, well-maintained through the years like Fred Stalvey's Thunderbird, except not quite that old. "I need to get going, if I'm going to run my errands before my appointment," and she stopped, propped on her cane, and said, "We'll be at the Bistro a little after 12 if you want to join us. Kathy, you're welcome to join us as well."

"Thank you, but I have an appointment at lunch. I appreciate the offer. Another time, perhaps."

"Yes," Muddy said, and she noted Kathy's use of perhaps and liked it, not because it indicated a "maybe not," but because it wasn't a word one would use if she was trash. She didn't look like trash, and she didn't talk like trash. For Muddy, that was a good indicator she wasn't and confirmation she had raised Anthony right.

Muddy ran her errands in town and then made it to the doctor's office about five minutes early. They handed her a form she had to update even though there were no updates, and she was called back quickly. Weight taken, blood pressure taken, blood drawn and urine specimen collected, Muddy sat in the patient room reading a book. She was just beginning to settle into it on the first page, when the door was

flung open and the doctor was there, saying how good everything looked. He was impressed and they would let her know about the blood work in a couple of days. He told her it had been five years since her colonoscopy, and she told him that it could wait another five as far as she was concerned. He asked her if she had been having any problems, and she told him about the *kerplunks*.

"Let me help you onto the table." He pulled out the extension and asked Muddy to lay down. He opened the door, asked for one of the nurses to get something Muddy couldn't quite make out, and the nurse returned with pads, chords. The nurse unbuttoned Muddy's blouse and told her they were going to take an electro cardiogram just to get a baseline heart pattern and the doctor

told her he might want to do a stress test. Muddy figured as much and a stress test would lead to something else and medicine or surgery, and the doctor would get richer, Muddy poorer, the state and federal governments poorer, and rates would go up even more.

"I doubt I need all that," Muddy said. "It's just every once in a while. In fact, it just did it."

The doctor read the EKG on a computer at the desk, which was next to a glass jar containing cotton balls and tongue depressors. "I see. This is not a big deal. Usually, this is caused by stress, caffeine, things like that."

"Well, I'm under stress right now, and I've had some Starbucks for the first time and I'm feeling kind of jumpy."

He laughed and told the nurse they had what they needed, and she began to remove the pads, which, to Muddy, felt like Band-Aids being ripped from her skin. "Mrs. Rewis, I'm going to write you a little prescription. This is something that will be in generic form, and it's just a small pill that will keep your heart-beat level and you shouldn't feel any side effects from it. Of course, if you lay off caffeine, that might help some, too."

"I'd rather take the pill," she said. "Giving up coffee now might kill me more than the *kerplunks*."

The doctor handed her the prescription, said he'd see her in a year unless something was wrong in the blood results. Muddy took it and thought she would get it filled if it stopped the *kerplunks*. She was relieved she didn't need open heart surgery or have cancer.

"Thank y'all," she said as she buttoned her blouse and the nurse helped her down from the table.

"You're welcome," the nurse said. The doctor had already gone out, either on to the next patient or out the back door to lunch.

Muddy drove through the Walgreen's pharmacy and told them she'd be back to pick it up and the

"I'd rather take the pill," Muddy said. "Giving up coffee now might kill me more than the *kerplunks*."



clerk told her it would be about an hour. Muddy drove on to the Bistro, where Lily and Anthony were waiting at a table.

"Did everything go well?" Lily asked.

"Sure did. The prescription he gave me will keep those little heart episodes from occurring. I'll pick it up after lunch."

"That's great," said Lily.

"Is Kathy going to join us?"

"I don't think so," said Anthony.

"I was hoping she'd change her appointment and come anyway. You'll have to bring her to the house for supper one night."

"Who's Kathy?" Lily asked.

"She's a lady I've been seeing some," said Anthony.

"What?" Lily asked.

"I hadn't heard this news."

"You know how he is," said Muddy. "Wouldn't tell you if he'd won the lottery."

"Good for you," said Lily.

"We met in class at the college, which is where she works," said Anthony.

"I'm proud of you finally going back to get a degree," said Muddy. "If I were a little younger, I'd go back and get one, too."

"You're going back to college?" Lily asked.

"Sure am, Lily. Best thing I've done for myself in a while." He turned to his mother: "Mama, you ought to think about it, too. After 65, it's free."

"What if it's after 75? Is there some other kind of bonus added?"

They both laughed. "You really ought to think about it. Get out and meet some more people."

"I appreciate it, but I don't want to drive all the way over here to take classes. Besides, Mr. Stalvey is keeping me plenty busy."

"Velma's telling others y'all went dancing last night, and I already had a call."

"Well, that's not entirely true, and you know Velma well enough to know that. Mr. Stalvey occasionally likes to play Bingo out at the old school in Dixie. They do have a country band that plays some, and some of the older people dance. So,

I went. No big deal, really, but it was nice to get out and do something. Of course, Velma was there and raised her eyebrows and spoke. I suspected she'd spread rumors. She always has. Some people never change, but you know, if the world didn't have stupid people, it might get pretty boring."

Lily and Anthony laughed and nodded. They all ordered salads and made small talk. They talked about Claude, how much they missed him and laughed at some of the things they remembered he'd done or said—his killing a rattlesnake that fell from a tree right next to him, his nearly burning the house down throwing gasoline on the fire when it had died down, his praying out loud in church and saying, "Lord, forgive them people in Washington for all this crazy s—."

Muddy hadn't heard it in a while from the children, and she hadn't heard it from anyone at the church in some time, but she knew no one had ever forgotten it. Of course, it had slipped out and Claude was embarrassed. He didn't use a lot of curse words, but that was one he kept on using.

They talked about church on Sundays, her fried chicken and macaroni and cheese lunches afterwards, naps in the afternoons on the front porch. They talked about

Disney World, beach trips, and yard work.

When there was a lull in the conversation, Muddy said, "We've had a good life. I don't believe I would have changed a thing if I had a chance to do it over."



**Niles Reddick** lives in Jackson, Tennessee with his wife and two children. His latest book is "Drifting Too Far From the Shore," and it is available on Amazon.com and in iBooks. For more information on the author, visit his website at [www.nilesreddick.com](http://www.nilesreddick.com).

*"...some people never change, but you know, if the world didn't have stupid people, it might get pretty boring."*

# Home and 'Que and Dovie's, Too

By J. Bryant Ray

**I**t was always good to go back home to Tomkinsville, whether it was that quarterly trek from college, laundry in tow (I seemed to manage about three months before I had worn all my clothes for as many times as possible), or if it was later, when I had a family of my own.

My maternal grandmother would invite us out to her place for lunch. A big spread usually consisted of fresh green beans, corn, mashed potatoes, pickled beets, cucumbers 'n onions, fried chicken, ham of some type, hot biscuits, real butter and a plethora of homemade jams and yes, pitchers of freshly brewed iced tea. All this was prepared in that little kitchen on that old wood burning cook stove. There was a hand pump at the sink, since there was no running water in the house. I was always amazed that this little woman, who practically raised me for the first six months of my existence, could at age 82, still turn out such a spread for the five of us.

She was so happy to have someone besides herself to cook for, and I never knew her to open a can or cook any "packaged" or "processed" food. All her ingredients came from either her big garden or her sister's farm, and you could rest assured that her biscuits, rolls or cornbread was lovingly baked by hand. In any event, that little freezer that sat in her kitchen was always full of whatever had recently been harvested or had "just come in," as she would say.

My girls never got used to the fact that "Mamma Minnie" still had an outhouse and they refused to even venture inside. Perhaps it was my tales of sitting in there in the summer watching wasps building massive nests, all the while, hoping that they had not chosen to build one under that old, well-worn wooden seat. Or maybe it was my recollections about middle-of-the-night forays during the cold winter, when I had to kick away snow to get the door open. Most of these stories were embellished a bit, just to see their reaction. "Mamma Minnie," being the more practical member of the family, simply kept a "slop jar" at the foot of her bed.

Trips home would normally require a tour of all my favorite places, such as Alex's BBQ on Friday or Saturday for true, southern, pit-cooked pork, chicken and ribs. Alex Tooley had prepared his famous

*I was always amazed that this little woman, who practically raised me for the first six months of my existence, could at age 82, still turn out such a spread for the five of us.*





BBQ in the same location for as long as I can remember. His pit consisted of a small concrete block, tin-roofed building that was enclosed halfway up with screen. His cooking pit consisted of a couple of oblong grills constructed from pipe and chicken wire supported by a concrete block at each corner. Underneath was a section of corrugated tin roofing to contain the cooking coals. Outside, he kept a fire of hickory wood going, and he would grab a couple of shovels of the hot coals from the bottom of the fire and gently spread them along the tin under the cooking grills, occasionally sprinkling a few around an old cast iron pot at the end which contained his sauce. He applied this concoction liberally using a stick with a piece of cotton cloth tied at the end. Alex's sauce recipe was a simple one: one gallon of white vinegar, one box of black pepper, one box of red pepper, one pound of lard and a bit of water. Secretly, I learned that he also added about a pint of local molasses and a pot of strong coffee. In any case, a rack of ribs, a half-chicken, three pork chops or a slice of ham slowly smoked over those coals and liberally "sopped" with his sauce, along with a generous portion of coleslaw and a couple slices of plain white bread made a fine meal. All for the price of \$2.50!

One other place that was not to be missed was a little nondescript white frame building on 4th street called "Dovie's." Throughout my childhood, I devoured dozens of the burgers that came out of those old cast iron griddles. You would have had to experience it firsthand to really understand the attraction. For many years, this establishment had been a mainstay of life in my hometown. Standing room only would be seen on most Saturdays, with a constant stream of walk-ins carrying away dozens of their famous hamburgers.

Dovie's is still there today. The serving area consists of a "u-shaped" counter with stools placed at intervals surrounding the cooking area where


a half dozen ladies are busily creating burgers—from raw patties to finished product. A "Dovie Burger" is a delicious concoction of ground beef, cooked in a bath of peanut oil, slightly crisped around the edges, on a very fresh bun that has been slathered with "dressing" and topped off with a couple of pickles and an optional slice of raw onion, all served up on a piece of waxed paper. Of course, Dovie's menu includes hot dogs, ham and fried-egg sandwiches, but by far, the burger is the most often ordered. You can also choose from a variety of soft drinks, coffee or milk, and a selection of packaged chips and sweet snack cakes.

These days, folks come from far and wide to order burgers from this landmark. A story goes that a displaced native came all the way from Hawaii with an empty suitcase with orders to fill it with as many "Dovie burgers" as could be safely placed inside.

Back home at my mom's, as soon as I would walk into the kitchen, she would turn to me, give me a little sniff and say, "You've been to Dovie's—I can smell the grease!"

Speaking of my mom's, dinnertime there was also a big affair. A typical meal would consist of fresh corn (cut off the cob and skillet-fried with a bit of sugar),

green beans with a piece of pork, "cooked down" to near dryness, boiled new potatoes, sliced tomatoes, deviled eggs, iced tea and a big pan of cornbread. There would always be a selection of homemade desserts, usually chocolate pie, coconut pie and maybe a cake of some variety.

Whether it was just me and the missus with a baby in our arms, or later, when the girls might have brought along a boyfriend or even a husband, a trip back home rarely resulted in leaving anyone feeling hungry. 

**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.

*A displaced native came all the way from Hawaii with an empty suitcase with orders to fill it with as many "Dovie burgers" as could be safely placed inside.*





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# In the Court of the Possum Queen

By Mellie Duke Justad

"D

oes 'possum' have one 's' or two?" my sister Kim asked, diligently working on her decorative masterpiece with our new dime store markers, while I hurriedly did the same.

"Two," I answered, putting the finishing touches on the curly-tailed varmint sporting a crown on my own work of art. "And make sure the lettering is big enough to read clearly," I instructed, giggling.

*This is your brain. This is your brain on TV.* And they say too much television stifles a child's imagination. On the contrary.

My sainted grandma, Georgia Fay was only five feet tall, but don't let her Hobbit stature fool you. She might have been "Queen of the Southern Shire," but she had spunk, having once out-manuevered a 13½ foot gator as a child while swimming in South Florida's notoriously reptile-infested Lake Okeechobee.

"I thought I was a goner when Mama screamed, 'gator,' but I just kicked and prayed, and the good Lord saved me," she laughed, recanting the nail-biter tale as Kim and I sat mesmerized at her kitchen table sipping hot tea over Christmas vacation.

"Weren't you scared?" Kim asked, wild-eyed with a mouthful of Gramma's homemade biscuits.

"No, not really. I knew the good Lord was swimming in the lake right with me," she said, as I tried to visualize them doing the back-stroke together, and wondering what type of bathing suit Jesus would wear. I was certain He wasn't the GQ, Speedo sort. That thought seemed almost sacrilegious, but a floral pair of pious pantaloons embellished with the Three Wise Guys Hanging Ten seemed plausible. "These sized-four feet might be tiny, but they're strong as a duck's," she said proudly, a fact I didn't dispute, as I recalled how quickly she used to pedal up the driveway on Kim's oversized Velocipede tricycle (and leaving us in the dust when the mood struck). Yes, my grandma definitely moved in mysterious ways.

"I thought I was  
a goner when  
Mama screamed,  
'gator,' but I just  
kicked and prayed  
and the good Lord  
saved me,"  
Gramma said.





Deeply religious and painfully shy, unless, of course, it pertained to the subject of the Bible—and *didn't everything*—she quoted scripture from dusk until dawn, sermonizing from soapbox pulpit putting Jim and Tammy Fay Baker to shame.

"You know, girls, if you are in God's will, you can sing like a tea kettle, even though you are up to your neck in hot water," she'd preach knowingly, removing her whistling pot from the antiquated stove.

She could also make anything in a snap, rivaling the Ford Motorcar assembly line in Detroit. She turned out draperies, dresses, dumplings, and the occasional 539-page religious dissertation without as much as a pattern, recipe, or printing press.

With a *"talk quietly and carry a big spoon"* persona in her youth, she packed a subdued wallop when cornered. This was best illustrated with the story of how she gave both my prankster granddaddy and a nosey, pistol-packing, game warden the *what for* during the Depression.

When the imposing government official came snooping around her tiny Everglades cabin, she took him on with her trusty spoon. She didn't budge as all six feet of him loomed over her, brandishing his badge and pistol. His size didn't intimidate her, nor did the fact that she had out-of-season venison stewing quietly on her stove, and the humid air was full of it.

It was an act that could have landed both my grandparents in the slammer for some time. "Sorry, but I can't let you in, Clyde. It's for your own good. My husband and baby are sick. Down with swamp cabbage fever maybe, or gastrointestinal gator gout. I'm boiling up a homemade poultice for them now," she fibbed, knowing darn well why the warden was there. The delicious deer gravy that dripped slowly from the hand-carved cypress utensil that she clutched two inches from his nose was the only thing standing between her family's freedom and certain starvation. "You come back tomorrow, and maybe I can let you in. Now, let me get back to my work. Oh, and be sure and make it to church on Sunday," she said hur-

riedly, before bolting the door tightly behind her while Granddaddy breathed a sigh of relief from the kitchen table where he sat happily sopping up the heavenly sauce with his biscuit, having made a most sudden and miraculous recovery.

"Never dispute the power of the Lord," Granddaddy chuckled, walking into the room pouring a tall glass of buttermilk.

Or the poultice.

He was a Georgia native, 12 years her senior. And like her, he was a teetotaler with one small exception—he was also a former bootlegger. I'm not sure how he made such good "shine" without ever trying it, but he did. Perhaps he had a good

sniffer, sampling his brew by osmosis, or an official taster, who was paid in 200-proof pints and was contented, *when he was conscious*, knowing that with every sip taken, if it didn't kill him, he could forgo a tetanus shot for at least seven years. I'm sure that would be one job position during Prohibition with little turnover.

I hear his sour mash was so delicious that he was running his competition, the Bass Brothers, Jed and Amos, and the enterprising Holcomb Boys—Dub, Junior, and Rutabaga—out of business. The family patriarch, Big Daddy Holcomb, feeling the heat, nipped Granddaddy's little enterprise in the bud

right quick, sending the county constable with an ax in hand to Granddaddy's backyard still.

"Okay, Sheriff Holcomb, you got me," he confessed, when the redneck lawman came 'round, catching him red-handed, just as Granddaddy was corking a few bottles. "Just let me run to the back porch for my coat before you take me in," he said, when the jig was up.

"Hate to do it, but there's been complaints from the Ladies' Auxiliary, and it's my job as the law in these here parts to clamp the lid on moonshining in this county as I see fit," the sheriff replied, gulping down some of Granddaddy's fine homemade hooch before he took his official ax to the still. With a "ka-pow," the metal head of the ax plunged into the massive copper drum, spewing its precious corn nectar ten-feet-high, like krill from a

*The government official's size didn't intimidate her, nor did the fact that she had out-of-season venison stewing quietly on her stove, and the humid air was full of it.*



whale. *Thar she blows!*

Granddaddy was nobody's fool. The Ladies' Auxiliary. *Ha!* They were some of his best customers. This had the sheriff's cousin, Big Daddy Holcomb, written all over it. So when Granddaddy ran for his coat, he kept right on running, all the way to South Florida, where he soon met my Gramma, where else, but in church. With his moonshining behind him—*Gramma saw to that*—they set up house in what is now Big Cypress Seminole Reservation in the heart of the notorious Everglades, famous for its gators, crocs, and quicksand.

My grandma had everything a young pioneer woman about the swamp could want; ferocious panthers, venomous snakes, bloodthirsty mosquitoes, and her very own souped-up, *only-paddled-to-church-on-Sundays*, 1929 dugout canoe. Maybe if somebody had invented "Critter Be Gone" or at least a bug zapper, she might have thought twice of giving up her daily guest spot on "Wild Kingdom," but when Granddaddy's cousin Clancy Pratt wrote saying Sheriff Holcomb had up and died on a bad batch of the Bass Brother's white lightning, Gramma packed up her spoon and they skedaddled up to Georgia and never looked back.

"What are we going to do today, Gramma?" I asked, as she cleared the table, the icy sleet clicking on the roof above, keeping us inside for the day. "Can we please make something on your sewing machine?" I asked, eagerly, peering into her workroom where the highly coveted Singer sat like a shrine, surrounded by the endless bolts of colorful fabrics of every pattern imaginable, nearly equaling the alterations department at Cohen's where she worked part-time as a seamstress. Sewing was our very favorite activity to do with her. Not only did she have the patience of a saint, she possessed enough extra-strength double-flow teabags—better known in our family as *Gramma's nerve tonic*—to get her through a massive mental breakdown, or a mile-long crazy quilt.

"Of course we can make something, but doesn't

your Mama sew with you girls?" she teased, knowing full-well that my Mama couldn't stitch her way into pre-school, hemming our jeans and dresses with duct tape and spit. Must have been one of those things that skipped a generation like buck teeth, kleptomania, or gopher juggling.

"Gramma, I'm so sorry. Looks like I broke another needle on this silly thing," I confessed an hour later, after putting the pedal to the metal on her expensive machine as if it were a Corvette, the vibration shaking that poor old bobbin to its core. Gramma smiled weakly, clearly nervous at my driving. Kim snickered and quietly embroidered her pillow, a talent that would eventually surpass the master.



"Perhaps it would be better if we worked on your cooking skills today instead," she said while freeing the nearby curtains from my patchwork pocketbook creation, again.

"Can we really cook something?" Kim asked, excited at the prospect of tackling Mama's favorite childhood cookbook we'd found while treasure hunting up in the attic the previous day.

I have to say I did fare a little better in the kitchen, though Granddaddy, who became our unwilling guinea pig, might beg to differ, as he was partial to food that was plain, or in the

very least, recognizable. What we lacked in expertise, we made up for in unbridled enthusiasm when we proudly dished up a most unusual pork chop recipe for supper.

"Sugar, what's this stuff?" he annoyingly grumbled to Gramma, while poking at the purple meat and sniffing his plate where sat the unidentifiable entrée slathered with a healthy portion of fig preserves and Piccalilli relish.

He wasn't a big talker, but everybody knows grunting speaks louder than words and where he was concerned, preserves and Piccalilli were best served with cornbread.

Winter nights in Covington, Georgia were a lot like nights in Cedartown—slow. Like slurping a plateful of spaghetti topped with thick, sorghum syrup. There were funny stories of life in the

“olden days” and television. Lots of it. We relied on it to survive like oxygen and red-eye gravy. *Green Acres*, *Andy Griffith*, and of course, Gramma’s favorite, *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

“I can’t wait to see that Mrs. Drysdale’s face when she discovers Granny making lye soap out by the cee-ment pond. It’s going to ruin her garden party with those eye-watering fumes for sure,” Gramma laughed, as Granny sparred once more with her snooty neighbor, Mrs. Drysdale, something that my soft-spoken, Christian grandma would never do.

I think Granny was her alter ego. She’d get such a kick from watching the tiny, feisty, meticulous woman spring-clean her house from top to bottom, believing like herself, cleanliness was next to godliness. But unlike Gramma, Granny didn’t think twice about chugging down a few belts from her jug containing her infamous, 180-proof homemade “rheumatiz” tonic before wrestling whatever life tossed her, in this case, a boxing kangaroo that she mistook for a giant jackrabbit. It was one of our favorite episodes, and I thought Gramma was going to drop her own version of homemade tonic, a strong cup of Lipton’s finest, right off her lap.

“Go, Granny! And look out for those giant feet!” she hooted, dodging and ducking like a prizefighter as if she was in the ring herself, fighting that giant marsupial up on the big screen in full Technicolor. But it was the following night’s episode that really brought down the house, consequently leading to the real day that “the lights went out on Georgia.”

“Hurry up, girls,” she called from her favorite rocker. “It’s almost time for Granny. It’s going to be a good one.”

This particular night’s program happened to be my very favorite. It was the famed “Possum Queen” episode. We were laughing hysterically as the Clampett clan hauled Granny around Beverly Hills in that awful old eyesore of a truck, decorated with signs, “Granny for Possum Queen.” And “Vote Granny!” Kim and I sat curled in our pajamas in front of the small Christmas tree, singing

that ever-popular campaign carol, “Who’s the One Possum Queen? She don’t drive no limousine...” In hindsight, Gramma would have been better served if we’d just turned off the TV and sung “Silent Night.”

I wouldn’t go so far as to call it a “Christmas Miracle” when the idea came to me, but if you consider that Gramma didn’t end up on a shrink’s couch and that I wasn’t grounded for life, then I suppose it was a miracle. Of course, it could have all been avoided if Mama had given me Tinker Toys like I’d asked for, and I’d not been tempted by the sins of sitcoms.

The next morning Gramma sat innocently under the dryer down at “Mamie Nell’s Beauty Parlor.” Kim and I sat, not so innocently at the dining table, decorating giant campaign posters.

“But we have to drive her through town,” I said, finishing. “It won’t be any good unless everybody sees her. How will people know she’s thrown her hat into the ring?”

“I know, let’s tell her that we want to go uptown for candy,” Kim said knowing she’d never refuse us.

We’d never been able to pull it off had it not been for Granddaddy, who loved a good joke and thought the entire plan was hilarious. First, he took us to “The Handy Andy” for art supplies. Then he helped her into the

car when she returned home with her new do, escorting her into the car in such a way that she never saw the colorful streamers or beautiful banners that we’d spent an entire hour decorating.

Reeburg’s Sweets was normally a ten-minute drive into town, but that gray morning it took 23 minutes, as we meandered at a millipede’s pace all over town. The shop sat adjacent to Cohen’s Department Store where Gramma worked, and next to the old courthouse clock tower and Confederate statue of General Robert E. Lee up on the town square. Granddaddy was a real peach, circling not once, but five times around (*five times’s the charm!*), while passing motorists blew their horns and curious pedestrians smiled as our royal procession continued.

Kim and I sat in the backseat giggling almost to

*“I can’t wait to see that Mrs. Drysdale’s face when she discovers Granny making lye soap out by the cee-ment pond,” Gramma laughed.*



the point of a hissy as Granddaddy finally parked the old Chevy II in front of Reeburg's. Astonished folks—her future voters, who were clearly not used to such commotion—gathered 'round the old beige car, waving and laughing as Gramma, clueless, emerged from the front seat in her tiny pumps and out to the curb.

"What's going on? Why is everybody staring and honking?" she finally sputtered, clearly confused, her dainty manicured hands planted firmly on her ample *Cason family* hips.

A logical question. The answer, not so much. She wasn't out of the car two seconds when she turned and the first poster stared at her from the passenger door, plastered in bright orange, block letters, "Gramma for Possum Queen." Her mouth and brown eyes wide, her fragrant, Este Lauder pancaked cheeks now greenish like her Christmas coat and it had nothing to do with *Ho-Ho-Ho*. That sign might as well have read, "*Rest in Peace*." She gasped and clutched her favorite yellow crocheted purse as she silently orbited the decorated car that resembled Times Square on wheels. To her horror, the snickering crowd that encircled her included the preacher's wife, Mrs. Scroggins.

"Uh, Miss Fay, are you really running for uh, Possum Queen?" Mrs. Scroggins briefly choked, trying to keep her Christian composure. "Just like Granny, eh? I saw that episode last night, too," she laughed, along with several spectators wondering if my otherwise timid grandma (and president of the Women's Society of Christian Service) had lost her marbles and come out of the *Campaign Closet*.

I was convinced she'd succumbed to the vapors for sure as she wavered slightly, grabbing hold of the stoned-face General Lee monument for support.

"Land sakes alive, you two little dickens," she replied, which I surmised was a close to calling us 'devils' as her Methodist background would permit, as the amused crowd stood laughing.

It had never occurred to me until that day that just because Gramma had birthed a woman like

my Mama who thought nothing of making a spectacle of herself in public, that the idea of parading around town announcing her candidacy for the *Road Kill Queen*, might not be her cup of tea. Needless to say we didn't make it into the store that day; we barely made it back into the car, which had become quite the tourist attraction, with one lady even posing for snapshots. I knew things were bad when Gramma skipped her hair appointment the following Tuesday choosing to don her furry, Russian Czar hat instead, a sure sign we'd gone too far.

Luckily, she had a good sense of humor and forgave us in spite of being the hot topic down at Mamie Nell's for the next few weeks. That's not

to say we got off the hook for our deed. Gramma made sure we repented and were punished through the very airwaves that corrupted us. Thus the remainder of our visit was spent watching nothing but the Gospel Channel featuring a Divine Doubleheader: "The Billy Graham Crusaders" and a "Tammy Faye" telethon, from which I learned the evils of non-water-proof mascara.

When Mama picked us up, she had a conniption to top all others when Granddaddy laughed, telling her what we'd done.

"You girls! How could you do that to my Mama!

To humiliate her like this? How will she be able to show her face again?" Mama scolded. "All I can say is you'd best not think of trying anything like this on me. 'I'd NEVER do this to anybody.'"

Ha! *Never?! Never—my communion wafer*. Mama wasn't so innocent. Not by a long shot. She was "The Master" and lived for these kinds of things. Kim and I should know. *Public Humiliation Tactics 101...we learned from the best.*



**Mellie Duke Justad** is a native of North Georgia but has spent the last twenty-five years in South Florida, or as she fondly refers to it, "*The Land of the Southern Impaired*." When not writing, she is actively engaged as a teaching artist in the Palm Beach County School system.

*"What's going on?  
Why is everybody  
staring and  
honking?" she  
finally sputtered,  
clearly confused,  
her dainty  
manicured hands  
planted firmly  
on her hips.*

# Hunting Bear in the Delta With Robert Bobo

By James T. McCafferty

“A

n invitation has been extended by Governor Longino, of Mississippi, to President Theodore Roosevelt,” the press announced in June 1902, “to take part in a grand bear hunt in the Yazoo canebrake...”

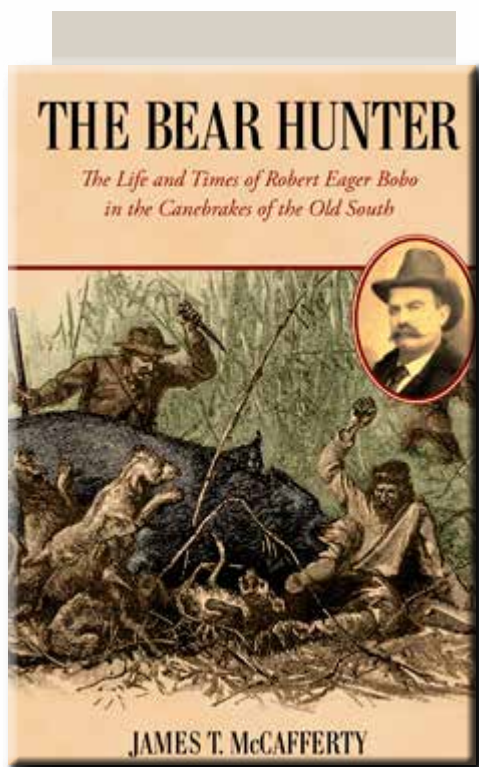
...The Hon. R. E. Bobo, of Bobo, Miss., “will be master of ceremonies if the President accepts.”

The President accepted. The hunt was set for November of that year. The big day came. The presidential train rolled into the little Mississippi Delta plantation depot called Smedes Station. A host of dignitaries, including a United States senator, a presidential cabinet secretary, a future governor of Louisiana, and a railroad president were on hand, but Robert Eager Bobo was not present. He had made other plans and did not accept his invitation to the hunt.

Some called him “champion bear hunter of the world.” Robert Eager Bobo, though, was not the kind of man who required titles, especially those bestowed by others. He knew exactly who he was and what he was. Plenty others knew, too. Illinois Central Railroad agent Thomas A. Divine knew. Chicago journalist Emerson Hough would soon know, as well.

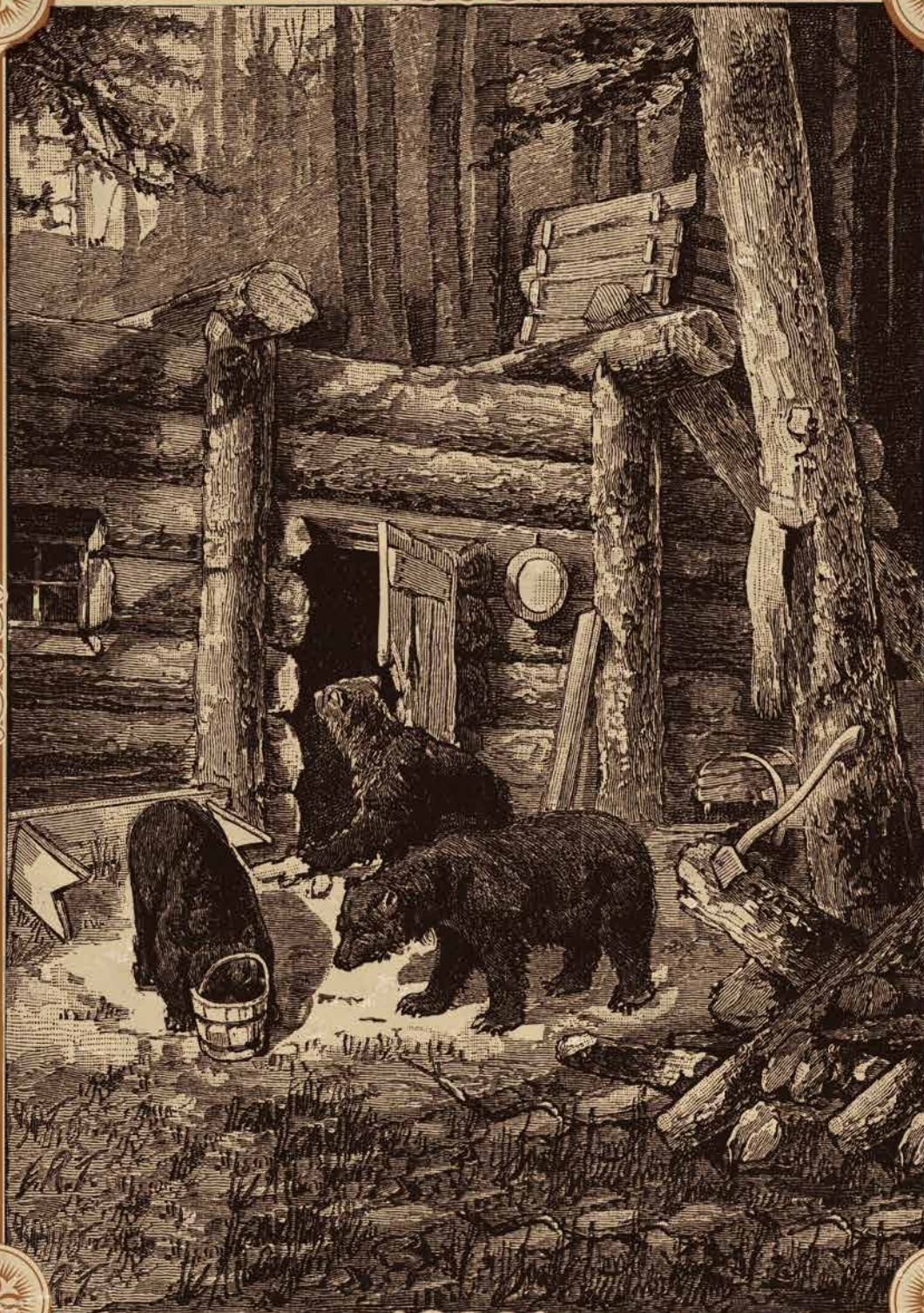
The three men sat together in Tom Divine’s Memphis office. It was the opening week of November 1894, almost exactly eight years before Bobo would fail to appear for the presidential bear hunt. Hough had met Divine for the first time only a few days earlier. Like any regular reader of the sporting press, however, Hough already knew of Bob Bobo—the man reputed to have killed 304 bear in a single year. For more than twenty years, articles trumpeting Bobo’s bear hunting exploits had appeared in publications around the country. It was Divine’s intention, Hough learned, that he go bear hunting in the Mississippi Delta with Bobo.

Hough, Divine told the writer, would leave Memphis on Monday, November 5, 1894. Then, he would stop off in Coahoma County “just long enough to kill a bear,” hunting a second day, should it be neces-



An excerpt from  
James T. McCafferty’s  
latest book,  
“The Bear Hunter:  
The Life and Times of  
Robert Eager Bobo in  
the Canebrakes of  
the Old South”







sary. The bear hunting party, Divine told Hough, would likely wander far from Bobo Station, Hough's initial destination. Consequently, Hough would need to carry all his gear on the hunt. As soon as he got his bear, Hough would board a train for New Orleans at the nearest Delta whistle stop. The whole bear hunt would be accomplished that simply, Divine assured him. Hough easily would be finished in time to rendezvous with Divine and his hunting comrades in New Orleans on Thursday, November 8. Tom Divine, to his employer's good fortune, was a far better settler of claims than a predictor of bear hunts.

The meeting was over quickly, and the three men went their separate ways. No doubt they little expected that Hough would soon make Bobo the backwoods celebrity of the 1890s and, in the process, would help spell the end of the glory days of Delta bear hunting. They probably had even less of an idea that Hough would become, like Divine, Bobo's fast friend in the bargain.

Notwithstanding his doubts about what he called "this railroad fashion of bear hunting," Hough happily set out for Bobo Station. Along the way he found the Delta to be "a land of luxuriance, of big trees and heavy corn and cotton." Almost nowhere was bare ground visible, so dense was the vegetation. Quoting Memphis newspaper editor Gus Matthews, Hough called the Delta a land "where the trees grow big and where the wildfowl come to the lakes among them, and it seemed a country meant for a man to live in without fretting out his heart." It was, Hough concluded, "a country of breadth, not of narrowness; of liberality, not of sordidness; of generosity, not of avarice and selfishness." For the moment Hough "pitied the city dwellers, and rejoiced that for a little while (he) had left the city far away."

Bobo's plantation manager met Hough at the railroad station and escorted him to Bobo's residence, which Hough described as "long, low, and wide, one storied, with wide galleries all about it, a typical plantation house." Homes of the hired hands, smokehouses, storerooms, barns, and other out-buildings surrounded but did not

crowd the main house.

After giving Hough a tour of his plantation, Bobo went into his house and came out holding a hunting horn. "I will show you a few dogs," he said, in what was the first of numerous understatements Hough would hear during the course of his Delta sojourn. The planter loosed a blast from the horn "at which there came a great confusion of tongues, and the bear pack came running in from every direction" and from every hole and recess within sound of the horn. Hounds appeared "from under the house and out of the house and behind the house," wrote an amazed Hough. The barns and the outbuildings likewise poured forth canines, and the yard filled with "a howling, jumping, baying lot of dogs," more than Hough had ever seen "in one pack before."

"This is only a few of them," Bobo told Hough. Bobo, Hough learned, had dogs scattered about the countryside. His friend and hunting partner, Felix Payne, kept a substantial number of the Bobo dogs, as did numerous farm hands throughout the area. All told, Bobo estimated his pack at between 60 and 80 animals.

Talk swiftly turned to Bobo's hunting exploits. For a few years, Bobo told Hough, he had kept a record of the number of bears he had killed, but that tally was

lost in a house fire. As to the total number he had brought to bag over his career, Bobo could not estimate, other than to say, "many hundreds, surely." In earlier years, he explained, "you could kill bear like hogs. The bear were everywhere...I have killed seven bear in one day, and six the day following, and very often three or four in a day. Once I killed in three days fourteen, three, and six bear...Felix Payne and I kept count one year, and we jumped 151 bear and killed every one before one got away." Bobo and his brother-in-law, Nels Harris, sheriff of Coahoma County at the time of Hough's visit, once bagged thirteen bear on an overnight hunt. On another such brief hunt they "brought in nine, all large ones." Of course, in Bobo's best year, as was often told, the hunter slew "304 bear." Hough reported that Bobo also

*The barns and the outbuildings likewise poured forth canines, and the yard filled with "a howling, jumping, baying lot of dogs," more than Hough had ever seen "in one pack before."*



killed in that same year “52 deer (and) 13 panther.”

Hough’s bear hunt, scheduled to have begun the day of his arrival, did not commence until the next morning (Tuesday, November 6). The writer continued to be a bit nervous about his time constraints, noting that he “had one day in which to kill my bear and catch a train.” To make such a schedule work, he believed, required that he leave his baggage, including his press camera, at Bobo Station to be placed on the night train for New Orleans. That, of course, was against the advice of Tom Divine, who had told Hough to keep all his gear with him at all times.

There was nothing to worry about, Bobo assured Hough. The party would strike out in a south-southeasterly direction, hunting along the Sunflower River toward Bobo’s logging camp, somewhere between the present community of Bobo (the old Bobo Station) and the current site of the state penitentiary at Parchman. “We will put you on your train,” Bobo said, “at the nearest station on the road this evening.” Then he added: “If we don’t (get a bear today), we’ll go on down to the logging camp on the Sunflower, and there we are sure of a bear tomorrow.” Hough was taken aback. “But, my dear sir, what will Mr. Divine do if I don’t show up on board that train tonight? I’ve promised to be there.”

Bobo found no problem with such an interruption of the Divine plan. “I reckon Tom Divine knows what sort of man you’re with,” Bobo said. “(H)e can take care of himself; and you’ll be getting plenty to eat yourself.” Then Bobo added something that let Hough know precisely “what sort of man” he was with: “Does he think I’m going out after bear and not get any bear? No bear, no train, my boy, so you might just as well be cheerful over it.”

Hough, though somewhat concerned that his delay might disrupt the plans of the hunting party that would be waiting in New Orleans, “wanted the bear as badly as anybody.” While he would have sacrificed a successful hunt for the sake of keeping his scheduling commitments, Hough

admitted that he “was not absolutely filled with grief to see the matter taken out of (his) hands thus decisively.”

The law of the hunt established, the participants, each riding a horse or mule, proceeded into the Delta woods. Hough had the good fortune to be mounted on Coleman, an experienced bear hunting horse supplied by one of the locals. Besides Bob Bobo and Hough, there were Bob’s son, Bob, Jr., and Bob, Sr.’s, nephew, Frank Harris (the sheriff’s son). Also along were three of Bobo’s plantation hands, Tom, Pete, and Bill, and all were veteran bear hunters.

A pack of 53 bear dogs accompanied this “cavalcade,” as Hough described the group. “We might kill more bear,” Bobo said, “by taking the six or eight best, but we have to be continually training the young ones to keep up the pack.”

Shortly past mid-afternoon the hunters came out of the cane “into open woods.” To their left threaded “the dark and sluggish waters of the Sunflower River,” one of the chief streams of the Delta. Then, as now, the Sunflower was flanked by high banks. Hough estimated the distance down the incline from the crest of the bank to the water’s edge to be at least 100 feet. The party proceeded to ford the river.

Hough found the sight of the hunters and hounds

crossing that wilderness stream almost rhapsodic. “A more spirited hunting scene would be hard to find,” he wrote. “The deep banks, shaded thick with its many tints of green, were lit up by the evening sun which made bright the broken water.”

Some of the hounds entered the stream immediately, swimming the river in a long line. The mounted hunters followed, single file, rifles held across their saddles. A few dogs, afraid to swim, lingered, “crying to be carried over,” as the “whippers-in” herded them toward the water. Meanwhile, the first dogs across were shaking themselves dry on the opposite side. “It was a pretty picture, that one at the ford,” said Hough, and he supposed that the artist who could capture such a scene on canvas “could achieve a lasting fame.”

The party worked its way through the dense



cane via game trails, dried up bayou courses, and old “hacks,” traces arduously cut with cane knives by hunters, loggers, and travelers who had passed that way previously. Fortunately for Hough and the other hunters, many portions of the canebrakes in which they were hunting already had been crisscrossed with such hacks.

Even so, finding one’s way through the Delta wilds required an almost supernatural sense of navigation. There were no mountains or hilly ridges in the canebrakes that could be climbed for a lookout or used to mark one’s bearings—just flat land with only the slightest changes in elevation. Even if one knew his directions and where he was going, unless he could find one of the hacks, which Hough described as mere slits in “the wall of green,” that knowledge was useless.

Hough’s mount, Coleman, knew his way around the woods and was “an expert at taking cane.” It was Coleman, Hough assured his readers, who deserved all the credit for not getting lost. “I just stayed with the horse,” he later wrote, and the horse stayed with Bobo.

Fortunately, Bob Bobo had an instinct for negotiating canebrakes cultivated by a lifetime in the Mississippi wilderness on par with Coleman’s. “The rest of us didn’t know where we were going,” Hough confessed. The only thing Hough knew for certain was that he “wasn’t going to catch any train that night.”

While the hunters in the Bobo entourage enjoyed fireside fellowship their first night in the Sunflower Wilderness, the camp laborers were tending to the dogs. There being no Purina® Dog Chow® in the canebrakes in those days, hunting dogs were generally fed a homemade concoction called “dog bread,” the recipe for which varied from hunter to hunter. Typically, the base was cornbread with meat broth, meat scraps, or other additives.

The hired hands were unaccustomed to feeding 53 hungry hunting dogs at one time, and the dog bread cooking was running way behind the hounds’ appetites. Consequently, as the food was dished out, the pack’s pecking order decided who

ate first. The bear dogs, being by nature and nurture a pugnacious lot, did not always agree as to what the pecking order was, and it was generally determined on an ad hoc basis. As a result, there were groups of dogs fighting for a propitious place in the chow line all over the camp. The scrapping hounds, Hough wrote, would fight anywhere they happened to be—by the fire, under the horses, or “between someone’s legs.” The hunters, whenever possible, broke up the fights, often with stout cudgels from the firewood stack.

Hough did not conceal his sympathy and admiration for the bear hounds. He would later pen something of a tribute to the bear dog in general and to Bobo’s dogs in particular:

*His life is short,  
but full of action,  
as that of the  
warrior should be,  
and while he lives,  
he walks through  
his daily round  
of activity with a  
continual chip  
on his shoulder.*

The life of the bear dog is one of war and tumult. His training is of the rudest, consisting mostly of a half-killing with a club when he is caught running anything but bear, and an entire killing when he is afraid to run that. In the bear chase, it is his duty to fight the bear, and if he be not wary as well as bold, he gets killed or crippled there. After the bear is dead, he gets his reward—if he can lick all the other dogs which jump on him as soon as he gets a mouthful of liver or other tidbits in his jaws. At the camp his wounds have small attention and he must fight in spite

of wounds. He will not be fed too highly there, be sure, for cornmeal bread is thought enough for him to run on. For this also he must fight and for place at the fire, he must fight, being ware the whiles that he escape a swift and nimble foot if he gets in the road of the human beings who engineer his destinies for him. There are few such caresses for the bear dog, as there are for the bird dog. He knows no kindnesses and no comforts. He grows up rough, unkempt, shaggy, surly, suspicious and highly belligerent. He will fight anything on earth with the greatest of pleasure, from a buzz saw up, and if he gets a grueling you never will hear him complain. His life is short, but full of action, as that of the warrior should be, and while he lives, he walks through his daily round of activity with a continual chip on his shoulder.



Not only did a bear dog face almost inevitable death at the jaws or claws of a bear, it also ran a very real risk of being killed by a bear hunter. In the chaos and close quarters of the hunt, when man, dog, and bear often quite literally were colliding with each other, a bear dog could easily be struck by a bullet or blade intended for a bear. Early Coahoma settler Asa Bell Edwards lost one of his favorite dogs, "Old Rapid," to the "unlucky knife" of a hunting companion who was "blindly striking" at a wounded, attacking bear. One of Bobo's pack intercepted a bullet intended for a bear.

While on an extended hunting outing in 1888 with the settlers along Jones Bayou, which runs through the present city of Cleveland, Mississippi, in Bolivar County, surveyor A. B. Wingfield learned an unfortunate lesson in the dangers a bear dog faced from the hunter as well as from the bear. Wingfield had been invited on a bear hunt with one John Jones, John's Uncle Zack Jones, and some of the other residents of the Jones Bayou country. Uncle Zack, one of the patriarchs of the vicinity, and his wife were the proud parents of "four grown sons and a yard full of (nine) sandy-haired girls," one or more of whom Wingfield was "sparking."

Along on the hunt and essential to it was the old man's pack of 27 bear dogs, most of whom were the progeny of Uncle Zack's favorite hound, old Mark Anthony, a "registered, pedigreed beagle," and his equally noble consort, "Cleopatra."

Uncle Zack, on his own, could never have afforded such well-bred canines as Mark Anthony and his mate, which, even in those days, were worth hundreds of dollars. Wingfield joked that, had the opportunity presented itself, Uncle Zack would have been willing to swap all nine of his "sandy-haired gals" to acquire such hounds, "and he would almost have been willing to have thrown in his old woman for good measure." Fortunately such a trade had not been necessary. The beagles were gifts from a wealthy and appreciative St. Louis cotton factor Uncle Zack once had hosted for a bear hunt.

No doubt Mark Anthony, like his owner, had gotten a bit gray about the muzzle in the time since he made his first appearance in the canebrakes of Bolivar County. Uncle Zack's love for the old dog, however, had not lessened one whit, but, in fact, had increased following Cleopatra's death in a bear fight the preceding year. However Mark Anthony's coloring may have changed over the years, he was no less game in a hunting scrap.

At the outset of the hunt, Jim Pyron, one of the neighbors of the Jones clan, gave Wingfield some advice. The Jones boys, Pyron told him, "were young and strong and knew every trail and short cut through the cane and would beat (Wingfield)

to the bear invariably." If the surveyor wanted to kill a bear on this trip, Pyron said, he would need to get with "one of the Jones boys and tip him pretty heavy..." Otherwise, Pyron continued, "one of the Jones boys was sure to kill" any bear the dogs brought to bay. Wingfield, flush with confidence after having killed a Delta bear elsewhere some weeks before, boasted that he "was something of a woods-man" himself and would take his chances with the Jones boys.

The pack struck scent and in short order had a bear backed up in the thick cane. Pyron and Wingfield raced their mounts toward

the sounds of the fray, but were too late. Before they could even get to the dogs, a gunshot announced the end of the fight. "Jim brought out an oath that would make Pluto blush," Wingfield wrote, "and said, 'I told you so...them durn Jones boys (are bear) hogs every one of them!'"

Another bear, though, was started within minutes. Again, one of the Jones boys killed the quarry before anyone else could get to the scene of the action. Wingfield finally admitted he was out-classed and realized he would have to take Pyron's advice if he hoped to kill a bear in Bolivar County.

The party spent the night at Uncle Zack's place. To maintain good relations with the Jones clan, Wingfield, over the previous weeks of his Delta stay, had given John and his kin "many a hundred of Winchester cartridges and many a fancy hunt-



ing knife or drinking cup or cartridge belt" that one of them had taken "a fancy to." Before they started into the woods for the next morning's hunt Wingfield "quietly slipped a five-dollar bill into John Jones's hand with a hint that if he wanted any future favors" Wingfield would need to "kill the bear that day." Jones valued Wingfield's patronage and did not want to lose it. The deal thus made, "John went off and held a consultation with his three brothers."

The dogs quickly struck scent and bounded away in full cry, old Mark Anthony in the lead. John told Wingfield to stick close to him if he wanted to kill the bear, and off they went.

Wingfield and Jones were tight on the heels of the pack, quite a bit ahead of the other hunters, when they "heard just ahead... the awfulest, most blood-curdling row that man's ears ever listened to." Fearing the worst, John, picked up his pace. "Come quick," he told Wingfield, "they have got him cornered, and he is mad as a Mexican bull...(He) will kill every dog in the pack if we don't git thar in a hurry."

Wingfield "instinctively stuffed two or three more cartridges into the magazine" of his Winchester and followed, satisfied that his five dollars had been well spent, for "John was big and strong and broke the way through the cane," making the going much smoother than it otherwise might have been. The young Delta man was "the best bear hunter" Wingfield had "ever seen."

The trail to the bear fight quickly led to a "thick and stiff and matted" canebrake that even the strapping John scarcely could have penetrated had not the bear and pack bulldozed something of a path before him. As it was, the hunters could only get through the brake by crawling.

After about a hundred yards on their hands and knees the two men came to an opening wherein the large cane had been burned out by fire and replaced by smaller, new growth "switch cane." Circular in shape, and not 30 yards across, the clearing formed a sort of natural arena in which the dogs and the bear were contending like warriors in

some ancient gladiatorial contest. John, who had promised Wingfield the bear, shouted to the surveyor to take his shot and to "not shoot the dogs."

Wingfield waited for an open shot. When it came, in hopes of stopping the bear's "terrible forepaws" and protecting the pack, he "planted a ball in the (bear's) foreshoulders." The bruin loosed "a howl of rage...bit his shoulder several times, then turned his attention" in Wingfield's direction. Both hunters knew a charge was imminent. "Look out! Look out!" Jones shouted.

Wingfield realized it would take only "about three seconds for (the charging bear) to cover the 30 feet intervening between" himself and the enraged beast. He began to shoot and lever and shoot as fast as he could, no longer concerning himself about hitting the dogs, but simply trying to save his own hide.

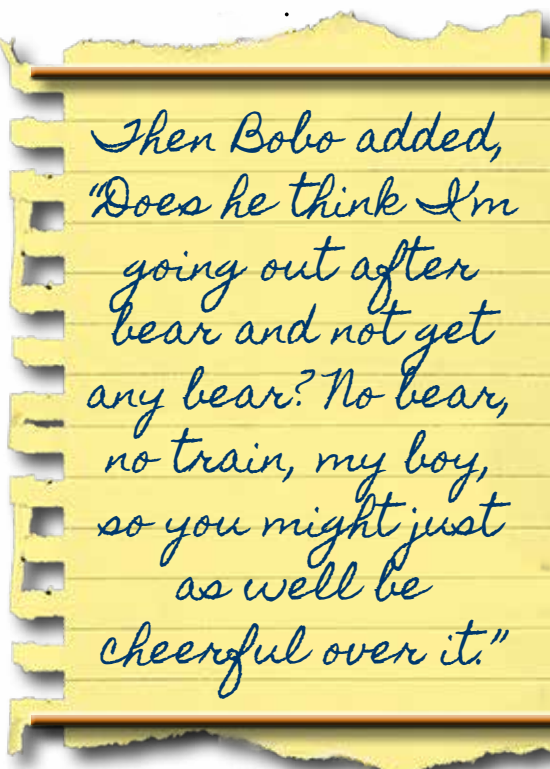
Jones, who was not the immediate object of the bear's attention, thought it something of a joke to let Wingfield, who previously had staked his claim to this bear, handle the furious bruin on his own.

The younger man held his fire and laughed. Wingfield levered yet another shell into the chamber of his Winchester and shouted across the opening: "Shoot, you infernal fool! Are you going to stand there and see him eat me up?"

Apparently, he was.

"After my rifle had belched fire four times," wrote Wingfield, "there were two hounds dead on the ground from the bullets..." The bear, hit by "at least three of the balls...but still full of fight," rose up on his hind legs and again started for Wingfield. "My jaws closed like a steel trap. I have never had my nerve tried quite so hard since that time," said Wingfield. "I was like a person drowning. I thought of everything mean I had ever done since I was born."

Just when Wingfield was certain he was done for, old Mark Anthony, Uncle Zack's highly-prized pet, "sprang in front of" the bear "and grabbed him by the throat." Now John quit laughing. He "sprang forward like a tiger to save old Mark, but he was not quick enough...with a quick slap of his power-





ful forepaw,” the bear “sent old Mark a bleeding, mangled mass into the edge of the cane.”

At that very instant, John and Wingfield leaned into the bear and fired simultaneously, their rifle barrels almost touching the bruin’s head. “The bear,” shot in the skull and neck, “rolled over as dead as Hector, after Achilles had dragged him four times around the walls of Troy.” It was, though, said Wingfield, “a dear bear,” having cost five dogs—two killed by Wingfield’s Winchester, and the venerable Mark Anthony and two others slain by the bruin.

Old Uncle Zack quickly arrived at the scene of the deaths. “The sight of old man Jones bending over the dead body of Mark crying like a child” was a sad one indeed for Wingfield, who felt more than a little responsible for all the canine destruction. “I hed a powerful sight sooner a give the whole balance o’ the pack an’ a kept this one dog,” the old hunter said.

“I did not until then know,” confessed Wingfield, “that a man ever formed such an attachment as that for a dog.”

Wingfield “offered to pay Uncle (Zack) right on the spot for the two dogs (he) had killed” and explained that it had been “necessary to save (his) life.” Uncle Zack would not take so much as a penny from his guest. He did give “John a terrible abusing,” Wingfield wrote, with some obvious satisfaction, “for not trying to save the dogs and not taking a hand in the row sooner.” John tried to blame Wingfield, saying the surveyor “hed gi’n him a bran new \$5 bill for the ’tunity to kill that bar and he wanted me to get my money’s wuf.” The backwoodsman “wanted to get the laugh on me,” said Wingfield, “but he didn’t get it and lost five hounds trying it.”

Problems for the bear dog were not limited to those encountered during the hunt. They also could come from quite unexpected quarters. In camp Emerson Hough got an object lesson in the random perils faced by the bear dog when, during the endless fighting that went on among the dogs when they were not hunting, one particular hound went for another right at Bobo’s feet. The planter

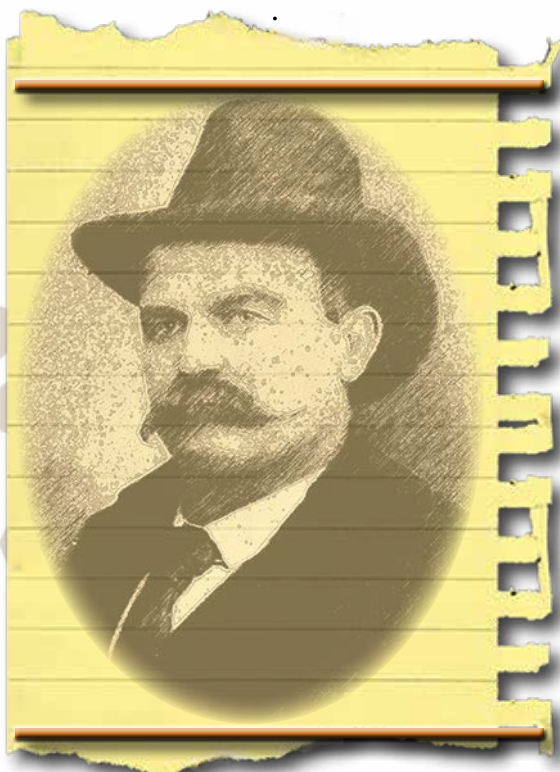
reacted in a manner that not only “illustrated the headlong and impetuous character of our hunt and hunter in chief,” Hough said, but demonstrated the man’s impatience with dogs (and, no doubt, humans, too) that forgot their station. Without a second’s hesitation, Bobo reflexively kicked the offending dogs, catching one hapless hound “just right” to lift “him clear off the ground and (send him) back downward right in the middle of the big log fire!” Fortunately for the dog, he landed in a burned down area of the bonfire and escaped with only his dignity wounded and his fur singed. Unfortunately, he raced up under one of the cabins where the foul smell from the burnt hair so

irritated the hounds already there that immediately another fight ensued. For a short time, Hough said, “we had the biggest and most universal and loudest dog fight I ever heard or witnessed.”

The empathetic Hough felt sorry for the singed hound. Although “the dog was not hurt much...” Hough later wrote, “I did not envy him his lot. To be kicked about in two, roasted alive, and then jumped on by your neighbors is what you might call hard luck, especially when it all happens in less than fifteen seconds, and right when you’re not expecting it.

The cold-eyed Bobo betrayed not a hint of concern. He continued to talk without “changing a muscle of his face.”

Hough also met an especially interesting character by Bobo’s campfire, who, oddly enough, or, perhaps, not so oddly, was not mentioned by Hough in his subsequent narratives of his time with Bobo. His name was Lamar Fontaine, and to call him merely a fascinating man would be the grossest of understatements. Slightly more than six feet tall with a beard and a head of hair as thick as any bear’s fur, he was an impressive man by his looks alone. His personal history was almost unbelievable. Born in a tent on the prairies of Texas in 1829, Fontaine lived four years with the Comanches, sailed to the Arctic on a naval vessel, traveled throughout China, served as a Texas Ranger and fought the British as a



Russian soldier during the Crimean War, all before his 27th birthday.

When the Civil War erupted, Fontaine enlisted in the Mississippi Rifles, Jefferson Davis's former regiment that had distinguished itself at Buena Vista during the Mexican War. Despite suffering horrendous wounds early in the Civil War, Fontaine served throughout the conflict as a scout and sharpshooter. He also made a name for himself as the author of the lyrics to "All Quiet Along the Potomac," one of the most popular of Civil War era songs.

By the 1880s Fontaine had settled in Coahoma County where he worked as a surveyor and became fast friends with Bobo Bobo. "Not too many moons" before Hough's 1894 visit, in fact, Fontaine may well have saved Bobo's life.

One morning while Bobo and Fontaine were hunting from a backwoods camp the pack, led by Bobo's then premier dog, Dublin, jumped an exceptionally large bear—the biggest Fontaine had seen.

As the bruin broke from a canebrake and crossed an open glade, Fontaine "sent a Winchester bullet into the great beast," slowing him down enough for the dogs to catch up.

The old boar fought the pack off but not before Fontaine "staggered him" with a second shot, which caused the bear to turn to engage the dogs once more. Bobo arrived at the fight just as the bear caught "two of Bobo's favorites" in his grip.

The Bear Hunter would not risk killing his dogs by firing his carbine. He charged the bear, knife drawn, to put an end to the contest. The remainder of the pack, "encouraged by his presence, made a fresh attack." In response, the bear rose and with one swipe of a powerful paw "knocked Bobo's knife away...splitting the back of his hand severely" in the process.

As Fontaine later told the story to the newspapers, the bear, still erect, "drew Bobo toward him." As the big animal's "huge jaws flew open to grasp" the Bear Hunter's head, Fontaine said, "I raised my rifle and sent a ball crashing into (the bear's)

mouth. Bobo's head was not more than three feet from the muzzle of my gun and in a line with the bear's head."

The bear and Bobo collapsed to the ground. As the sound of the shot died away, for a moment, even the dogs were quiet and still. Fontaine was sure he had killed both Bobo and the bear. To Fontaine's great relief, however, Bobo rose almost immediately, dazed from the concussion of the blast and with "his normal ruddy complexion... pale," but otherwise in good shape except for some singed whiskers, powder burns on his face, and a hand badly cut from the bear's blow. Since that close call, Fontaine later wrote, "I have cared little to join in the sport" of bear hunting."

Fontaine's presence in camp during Hough's hunt with Bobo, however, proved the Confederate veteran continued to enjoy the company of bear hunters. At the time of Hough's 1894 visit Fontaine was 65 years old, still a master of the rifle, and "famous throughout the South as soldier, jurist, sportsman and poet." What's more, as Hough would learn, as a "practical joker" Fontaine had "no superior in the world."

During the course of the evening, Bobo appeared to drift off into sleep at his seat by the fire. The rest of the party, perhaps full of adren-

alin after "a hard day's hunting for bear," stayed awake, but in a "contemplative and reminiscent mood..."

During a lull in the conversation "Fontaine arose from his seat, donned his hat, and then with the most nonchalant air picked up a .22 cal. rifle..." After testing the gun's action and appearing to find it satisfactory, Fontaine moved away from the fire toward the darkness.

Though no one else seemed to notice, Hough, all the while, watched with unconcealed interest. Finally, his curiosity overcame him, and Hough asked Fontaine what he planned to do with the .22.

"Going squirrel hunting," came the reply. Hough must have thought he misunderstood something crucial. "Squirrel hunting! What, this

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dark night?"

Fontaine, with a "tone of indulgent tolerance," as if "informing another (gentleman) of facts (he) should know," replied, "Of course. Our very best squirrel hunting is in the darkness of the nighttime at this season of the year..."

Fontaine further explained that "the best weapon, in fact the only successful one for night hunting, is the rifle." Then he added, "Don't you really know anything of this lovely sport?"

Hough could not quite take in all he was hearing. "But how do you see to shoot?"

"Oh, it has to be learned by experience," Fontaine answered, the terse nature of the reply betraying, perhaps, growing impatience with the Chicago writer's inexperience.

With that, Fontaine walked off into the blackness of the Delta night.

The other hunters said nothing. They merely continued their contented gazing into the blazing campfire.

Within a few minutes the sharp crack of a .22 broke the silence. "That's a dead squirrel," said one of the men. Another short while went by and, again, the rifle sounded, this time with three quick reports from a different quarter of the woods. That squirrel "was running," piped up one of Hough's companions.

"It's dead now, anyway," a third hunter said. "Wonderful gift for a man to have," chimed in another. "It is no wonder he was so famous for night work in the army."

The sporadic shooting continued out in the dark woods for another thirty minutes. Then the group heard footsteps coming toward the fire. "Mr. Fontaine, bunch of squirrels in hand, walked in with the matter-of-fact bearing of the man who has done the deed so many times that he has ceased to think of it with any warmth."

Except for Hough, none of the hunters appeared surprised or even very much interested.

Hough, on the other hand, was amazed. He "praised (Fontaine's) skill and commended his success." When his fellows failed to marvel at Fontaine's incredible feat, Hough roused the sleeping Bobo to discuss Fontaine's night time hunting.

The great bear hunter "woke suspiciously easy, and said, 'Sonny, you have told us that you killed grizzly bears in the Rocky Mountains, shot all over Louisiana, and yet you break in on my slumbers to have me admire a bunch of squirrels which are cold and stiff and perhaps fly-blown, for they were killed three days ago with a shotgun.'"

"A singular merriment thereupon pervaded the party." Hough knew he had been had. Meanwhile, "the New Orleans express was speeding southward," and Hough "had quite forgotten it."



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**Jim McCafferty** was born in Tupalo, the son of a Methodist minister, and he grew up in the Mississippi Delta. Jim's work has appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *Mississippi Magazine*, *Field & Stream*, and *Outdoor Life*, and he has received numerous awards for his writing. Although "The Bear Hunter" is his first full length book, McCafferty is also the author of two children's books, "Holt and the Teddy Bear" (the story of Holt Collier, Theodore Roosevelt, and

the Mississippi Delta hunt that resulted in the naming of the Teddy Bear) and "Holt and the Cowboys." Both are true stories of Delta bear hunter Holt Collier and are recipients of the "Children's Crown Collection" designation. McCafferty holds a B. A. from Millsaps College, a Master's degree in Theological Studies from Spring Hill College and a law degree from the University of Mississippi. He practices law in McComb, Mississippi, working primarily in the environmental and education fields. McCafferty and his wife, the former Malinda Hamilton of Greenville, Mississippi, have five children and are communicants of St. Nicholas of Myra Byzantine Catholic Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.

# My Brush With Fame

by Stephen Hyder

**I**walked up to this employee of Wal-Mart, while he was arranging product on a shelf. I was taken aback by how much he resembled Eddie Murphy, the comedian (and I also had the crazy thought that it might just actually be him working on a comedy project for Jay Leno or David Letterman).

I said to him, "I don't mean to bother you, but has anyone ever told you that you look like Eddie Murphy?"

He just laughed. You know how Eddie laughs, so I then said, "And, you laugh like him, too." He didn't answer me, so I said, "He's my hero." He laughed again, so I just walked away.

Months later (having just re-entered the world of domestic duties, after a divorce), I was back at the store looking for those cheap, disposable dish rags that get all gunky after they've been used too many times, and I was in the wrong aisle.

So "Eddie" is hard at work and enters my line of sight. I didn't remember our earlier encounter, but he knew precisely where those dish rags were and escorted me to their location. I was impressed. After he was gone, I recalled, "*Hey! that was Eddie Murphy!*" I never again saw him on my return trips, but I often wondered if I had lost an opportunity for another "brush with fame." I have had at least one brush with fame.

Ronald Reagan had just been elected President, and I obtained an "inter-agency transfer" from TVA in Chattanooga to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Jackson, Mississippi—just under the wire because President Reagan put a freeze on federal hiring immediately after his inauguration.

This was the end of the Iran Hostage Crises, if you will remember, and the Iranians were concerned about Reagan's touted "Star Wars Technology," so the hostage release, after 444 days, was imminent. In a couple of months, The Chair of the EEOC, Eleanor Holmes Norton (appointed by President Carter), was replaced by Clarence Thomas, who eventually was to become a Justice





on the United States Supreme Court.

When he started with EEOC, Mr. Thomas made a point of visiting all of the EEOC offices, and one day he walked down the hall and approached me at my desk.

I stood and we shook hands and exchanged pleasantries, and the future Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court moved on down the hall shaking hands.

Fast forward five years. I had continued with the EEOC, but was then in Dallas as a Trial Attorney for the agency. Clarence Thomas was in town to make an appearance at a conference on employment matters (sponsored by our office) for ER people, lawyers and the like, and my boss (the Regional Attorney) told all the attorneys in the office that we could attend, if we wanted to.

So, I drove my 1985 flashy red Pontiac Fiero V-6 (with the wide tires!) downtown to the Hyatt Regency, a tall, glass building where the conference was being held. The best way to get there was to drive through the infamous Dealey Plaza. As I was driving up through there, I ran over a long exhaust pipe that evidently had fallen from the bottom of a truck, and it damaged one of my front tires and in fact, flattened it.

I was stuck. I had to go through the hassle of getting things taken care of, but I eventually found an employee of the Hyatt Regency who had witnessed the whole incident. I told him I would return the next day to get a statement from him, so that I could file a claim for the damage.

That was the last day of the conference, so I went back the following day and got the statement from the employee. However, before I left, I thought, "I'll just mosey up to the front of the hotel and see if I can see Chairman Thomas before he

leaves Dallas." I went out front and there he was, loading baggage into a deep purple sports car with some of his buddies, getting ready to head to the airport for the flight back to Washington. I was maybe ten yards away; I remember he was wearing an Izod sport shirt and looked really relaxed, so I called out (in rapid staccato just like the little boy in "A Christmas Story," when he asked Santa Claus for the BB gun), "Chairman Thomas! My name is Stephen Hyder, and you met me in my office when I was with the EEOC in Jackson, Mississippi."

His voiced boomed, "**STEVE! IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU!**"

I told him I was still with EEOC in Dallas, "I just wanted to say 'hello.'"

So he piled into the deep purple sports car with his buddies and headed out to Stemmons Freeway past the School Book Depository Building on his way to the airport.

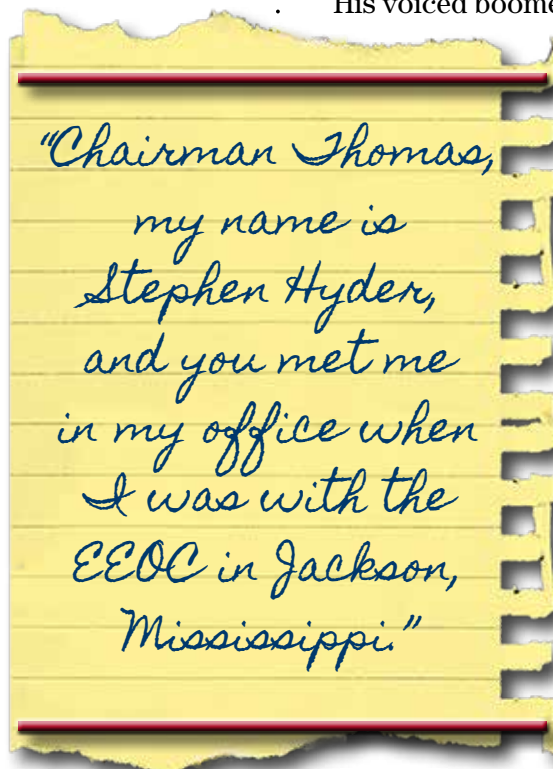
Later on, of course, President George H. W. Bush nominated him to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and thereafter to the United States Supreme Court. Now, of course,

the Honorable Clarence Thomas has been an Associate Justice on the Court for over 20 years and has a reputation for not talking or asking questions of attorneys during their oral arguments before the Court.

I suppose that if he did ask questions with that booming voice of his, he would knock the lawyers down to the floor or at least intimidate the heck out of them.



*Stephen Hyder is an attorney in Maryville, Tennessee who writes infrequently on a wide variety of subjects.*



# The Night that the Lights Went Out Over Georgia

By Ron Burch



*My friend  
wanted to go,  
but he was a  
white-knuckled  
flyer—even when  
he was on  
a commercial jet.*

ou know I'm a chicken." ■ "I know pal, but there's no reason to be afraid. It'll be fun." ■ "Are you sure?" ■ "Yep. It's a beautiful, clear night. There's hardly any wind, so we'll have a smooth ride. Besides, it'll only take us about an hour to get there."

"All the way to Huntsville?"

"All the way to Huntsville."

"But it'll still be dark when we arrive."

"Maybe. But it'll sure be dark when we leave. Not to worry, airplanes fly better in the dark."

"You know I've never flown in a small plane."

"There's a first time for everything."

"I don't know. Let me ask my wife."

"Okay, but tell her the prime rib at the Rib Cellar is out-of-sight."

My friend wanted to go, but he was a white-knuckled flyer—even when he was on a commercial jet.

I'd had my license for five years before I ever got up the nerve to invite him to go along in our little four-seat puddle-jumper, but after a long, hot summer, this mid-September evening was just perfect. A cold front had brought some clear, dry air that would be great for a night flight.

Our destination would be the Huntsville International Airport in Huntsville, Alabama. Federal money had built a wonderful facility to meet the needs of Redstone Arsenal. It had two 10,000-foot runways, every navigational aid known to man, and services 24/7.

The terminal building itself was an innovation. Built by the Hertz Corporation, they named it the Sky Center. The first floor housed airport operations and several restaurants. A luxurious hotel occupied the upper four floors, providing a bird's eye view of the runways. One floor down was a five-star restaurant that featured







prime rib and a signature six-course meal.

On this late summer night, that's where I wanted to wine and dine my good friend and arguably my company's best customer.

"Okay," my friend said, "Okay. But if I get sick..."

"Trust me, you won't get sick. Besides, the lights of the city are beautiful at night. I'll bet you've never seen them from two or three thousand feet."

Since our guests lived in Kennesaw, we decided we'd pick them up at McCollum Field in Marietta around six. We departed DeKalb-Peachtree a little after 5:30. We were in the landing pattern at McCollum ten or fifteen minutes after that.

"It isn't very big, is it?" my friend said as he ducked to walk under the wing.

I said, "It's big enough."

He peeked in the window.

"Where do I sit?"

"Why don't you sit up front with me? We'll let the gals sit in the back."

"Do you have oxygen masks in case we lose cabin pressure or I hyperventilate?"

"You worry wart. Just get in, will ya?"

Doors locked, seat belts fastened and noise-reducing earplugs in place, two turns of the prop and the 200-hp Lycoming bumped, thumped and sprang to life. After a short taxi, we were number two for take-off on Runway 27.

Once airborne, I retracted the electric motor-driven flaps and reached over and gave my buddy a pat on the leg. "See, partner, there's nothing to this." He smiled.

The strobe lights from the stacks at the power plant in Cartersville were dead ahead. We soon passed a little south of Rome. Further to the west, the sun dipped low over beautiful Weiss Lake before disappearing below the horizon.

I had filed a VFR flight plan and requested flight following (at night, if the weather was bad enough to require an instrument flight plan, I didn't go). At 6:24 Central Time, Huntsville approach said the airport was twelve o'clock and ten miles. Once in sight, I was to contact the tower on 127.6 MHz. We landed and exited the runway at the first taxiway intersection. A yellow tug with flags that said,

"Follow me" led us to the parking area.

"How long you gonna be here?" the driver asked.

"We're just here for dinner. We'll be heading back out in a few hours."

"Okay, in that case, I'll put you here in the transient area. The charge will be \$10...you can pay me now or when you get ready to leave." I reached into my pocket and slipped him two fives.

"That was fun," My friend said as he climbed out. He was grinning from ear-to-ear.

"See, I told you. You had nothing to worry about."

"I know. I know. But it was my first time."

"Did you get airsick?"

"No, I didn't get nauseated. But I was a little short of breath at first."

"Good, 'cause it's time to put on the feed bag."

As usual, the food at the Rib Cellar was fantastic. Appetizer, soup, salad, French bread, prime rib, baked potato, veggies, a gooey desert, followed by fruit and cheese. I paid the check and we waddled to the elevator. Once back outside, the crisp night air helped shake the drowsiness that had set in following such a big meal.

Our wives climbed into the backseat of the airplane to escape the cool evening air. My friend followed behind me as I performed a brief

preflight inspection and checked the fuel. "Okay man, climb in; let's get this show on the road."

It was a long taxi from the parking area to the threshold of Runway 36R. The tower offered an intersection take-off, but I declined. True, I would only need a tiny portion of the 10,000-foot runway. However, I planned to live to be old and grey by always following the old adage about useless things for pilots: runway behind you, altitude above you and fuel on the ground.

We did the customary engine run-up, checked all the instruments and then told the tower we were ready to go. By the time we reached mid-field, my sleek, little Cessna Cardinal was fifteen hundred feet above the ground. At ninety-knots indicated, she was climbing at almost a thousand feet a minute. Cold air was good for the

*I planned to live to be old and grey by always following the old adage about useless things for pilots: runway behind you, altitude above you and fuel on the ground.*



airplane and good for the soul.

No one talked much during the first part of the return flight. I was busy with the radio; our friends were busy looking out the window at the lights below.

Once we reached our cruising altitude, I leveled off and did a crosscheck of the instruments. The ammeter caught my eye. Normally, even with position lights, strobes, panel lights, radios and the transponder operating, it would indicate almost 14 volts. It read a needle width under twelve.

My buddy caught me doing some knob knocking—checking the breakers, cycling some of the equipment on and off.

“Everything okay?” he asked. I nodded and smiled and pointed to a commercial jet high above, streaking toward Atlanta’s Hartsfield International Airport. When he wasn’t looking, I cycled the alternator switch on and off once more. It didn’t make any difference. The alternator was defunct. The drive belt could be slipping or jammed, the alternator could be loose on its mounting, a bearing could have seized—any of these malfunctions could “86” the alternator and possibly present an even bigger problem.

A few moments spent monitoring the other systems convinced me that the alternator itself was the source of the malfunction. I picked up the mike and told the air traffic controller that N30415 had an electrical problem, and that I would be shutting down the radios to conserve battery life. My goal: to arrive at McCollum Field with enough juice left to operate the flaps.

As inconspicuously as possible, I clicked off the navigation receivers, the communication radios, the transponder, the interior courtesy lights and the strobe light on the belly of the aircraft. I left the navigation position lights on, as well as the panel lights inside the aircraft. I wanted to mask the situation as best I could. Now, with the electrical load minimized, the ammeter showed a reduced drain, but a drain nonetheless.

Forty-five minutes later, we entered the pattern at McCollum Field. I fessed up and explained to

my buddy that the alternator was on the fritz. We would be landing without a landing light. His eyes got big as saucers but he didn’t make any comment. Once safely on the ground, the grousing began.

“Why didn’t you tell me something was wrong?”

“Why? So you would breathe up all the oxygen?”

“Man, we could’ve all been killed.”

“Aw shucks, it wasn’t a problem. I just didn’t want to ruin a \$150 battery.”

“\$150 battery my butt! What about me?”

“Got your butt home safe and sound didn’t I? Now I’m going home.”

“You’re going to take off and fly back to DeKalb-Peachtree?”

“Yep...assuming she’ll start.”

“Why don’t you spend the night at my house and get it fixed in the morning?”

“Dude, I appreciate concern and the offer, but I want to sleep in my own bed. Besides, the dogs would wonder where we were.”

I took my flashlight and peered inside the engine cowl to make sure there was nothing loose, nothing hanging and nothing dripping. No broken belts or seized bearings. All appeared fine.

She started easily and we were soon on our way. We landed at DeKalb-

Peachtree a little after midnight. As I had promised, I called my friend to assure him that the eagle had landed.

Getting the lights back on didn’t require a new battery. It required a new \$680 alternator. My buddy loved to tell his other friends about the night the lights went out over Georgia. He also wanted to go again...anytime I would take him!



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

Any of these malfunctions could “86” the alternator and possibly present an even bigger problem.