

Vol. 1, Number 2

Winter 2002

SouthernReader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

Winter Blows In



Sudden Familiarity

A bucolic story set in black & white

Sprung From a Southern Rocker

A granddaughter's memoir

Fair

It's not easy being the new kid

The Beverly Hillbillies

What we learned from them

David Skinner

A Brand New Issue for a Brand New World

Last September, we were gearing up for the Christmas issue of *SouthernReader* when, in the course of a few hours, the world as we knew it came to a terrible halt. In the aftermath, all the zany Santa Claus stories in the works didn't seem so funny anymore.

Ironically, just the week before September 11th, I had been in the studio putting the finishing touches on a song that I had written about my dad and where he was on December 7, 1941.

For him it had started as an ordinary Sunday morning in Jordan Springs, a small farming community just west of Clarksville, Tennessee, on the Tennessee-Kentucky border. They had all gone to church that morning, then after the service my dad had headed to the woods with his best friend to get in some afternoon rabbit hunting. With a little luck, they'd be feasting on rabbit stew that night.

Little did he know that the events that were happening on the other side of the world at the same time he was looking through his rifle scope would change his life forever...three years later he would be surrounded by exploding flak looking through another scope as a tailgunner on a B-24 in the South Pacific.

As I was writing the song about that December Sunday in his life, I was trying to imagine how it must have been. When he returned to the house that afternoon, there was a crowd of neighbors and kin-folks gathered at the house. In 1941, electricity and running water had still not reached most of Jordan Springs, but my

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grandparents had the luxury of owning one of the few battery-powered radios in the community.

As citizens of the 21st century, we no longer have to wait days or hours to get the reports on what's happening in the world...now, it's instantaneous. We don't have to drive or walk a few miles down to the neighbor's farm to hear the latest on a battery-powered radio; with the internet the news is literally at our fingertips. That being said, however, the more things change, the more they remain the same.

I no longer wonder what that December afternoon that changed the world felt like. This past September I'm sure I went through all the emotions my dad must

have felt--shock, anger, and fear for how life would never be the same. But just like my dad and his generation who wiped the tears away and did what had to be done, I believe that, for the first time in a long while, this country will once again show the world what it's made of. And as much as I value my southern heritage, I value my heritage as an American even more.

Just like my dad.

David Skinner
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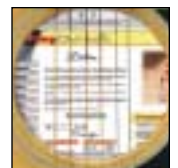
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'Come and Listen to my Story...' by Nelda Hill When *The Beverly Hillbillies* came to the small screen we were happy just to hear someone on TV who sounded like uspage 16



Re: Chickens, Camp Meetings & Biscuits

Dear *SouthernReader*:

I do believe you have outdone yourself with your story *Big Chicken*. Although I have long known of big chicken stories, it is always impressive to see the spoken story translated to the written word.

In fact, at the tender age of six I, myself was forced to lay waste to a pet Bantam rooster with a piece of pipe over just such an attitude toward other chickens, humans and dogs. You got to catch it quick or it will spread all over the barnyard. It is a sad story and one that can only be addressed with the most barbaric of measures.

I guess chickens are just that way, but rebellion is always the same. The hook and the sword are the only sure cure.

I also know about the Methodist and camp meetings. Every September the town I grew up in does just that--moves out to the wooden tents for a week of revival and reveille.

Anything you want you can get, from religion in front of the tents...to a drink or a toss of the dice (or a toss of self) behind the tents.

Finally...what can be said about the art of biscuits, save, *it is an art*. Now how about some fresh butter on those biscuits and little of that crab apple jelly...ain't but one thing better...and I haven't seen her in years.

Steve Batson
Travelers Rest, SC

Dear *SouthernReader*:

Thanks for steering me to your magazine. I just read *Big Chicken* and was quite entertained. Made me think of some chicken stories from my past. My family used to buy little colored Easter chickens at Sanderson's in Donelson (an eastern

suburb of Nashville), usually four, one for each child.

Then after Easter we would let them grow up in our back yard until my Dad would eventually wring their necks so my mom could fry 'em up for Sunday lunch. Donelson zoning was a tad loose.

We had hens and roosters, and I was always amused to see the grown roosters, always white, but tinged on the feather edges with the Easter colors of purple or

ring up the memory banks. Keep me on your email list. I'm already a fan.

Bob Goodwin
Fairway, KS

Dear *SouthernReader*:

I enjoyed the first edition of *SouthernReader* but wonder how much was fiction and how much was not. I can

certainly relate to the *Big Chicken* 'cause Mom and Dad had an old rooster that used to chase my sister and me, and Mom had to take the broom to fight it off while she walked us to the outhouse.

I was pregnant with my daughter, Debby at the time, and I was really afraid of the old bird. He got so bad that we finally had him with dumplings one Sunday for dinner.

And, your camp meeting story (*Loosening the Bible Belt*) reminded me of when we lived in California. Every six weeks or so we would visit Yosemite National Park, and one summer we had our own "camp meeting" in the park with people from all over the country.

As for biscuits (*The Rising Popularity of Biscuits*), they can't be beat, though I never could make them like my mom, grandmother and aunts.

Even so, there's nothing better than a biscuit with a thick slice of tomato on it or some butter and homemade peach preserves or a hunk of

country ham, or just sopping some brown gravy or sorghum molasses with one.

Keep up the good work!

Fran Trice
Clarksville, TN



"It is a sad story that can only be addressed with the most barbaric of measures. I guess chickens are just that way, but rebellion is always the same...the hook and the sword are the only cure."

pink or lime green or orange. Did they look strange!

And those roosters were very aggressive. They took no crap from anybody or anything. Especially not from the dogs. Just like the Big Chicken.

Again, thanks for the story and for stir-



Sudden *Farm*iliarity

a short story by h. hugh waddell, jr.

There is such tranquility living on a farm. The smell of stacked burlap bags. The power of the merciless bush hogging blades. To flow with the golden fields of oats and barley, dancing to the whims of the wind. Gray and weathered barns of magnitude, made of gracefully-aging, long, red oak boards. Barns and sheds and coops and cribs full of hay, tobacco, corn feed, dust, spider webs and human toil. Hefty, rusting gate hinges nailed on leaning chestnut trunk posts succumbing to the pull of ancient, yet unyielding, strands of barbwire. The soothing distant hum of a worn Ford 2000 diesel tractor, as those large, rear, treaded wheels dig effortlessly into the freshly tilled soil...

Check it.

Enough of the surreal crap. I have got too much time on my hands. The pace here is dying and the life feels deceased. Same old...Like the seasons are the only things that really change and even then, it's one extreme to the other.

Hot, cold. Ice, flies, ice, flies, back and forth. I like the outdoors and for me, that

is a good thing. Let's get to it. I do not mind being black. Check it. I am black

Old "tight and white" McPherson, that white dude slacker who owns this farm, is as tight as they come.

and so what of it?

Out here, what color you are don't

mean nothin'. Well, not to me anyway. I accept this just like I accept the life that is all mine. Call it fate, destiny, karma, call it what you will. I have no hate or prejudice except, what does it matter? Check it. I am branded like everybody else here. Branded at birth and that will never be right. It's a human thing. Gotta be. We live with the rules we get when we are born. You are what you are and nobody gonna give you no slack less you got something special or they think you do. Nothing round here's gonna change nothing. Enough self-pity. It's not my nature to complain or get excited about anything. Check it. I'm not expected to do much of anything, so I don't. I have been the brunt of jokes for years. Ain't nothing to me. I've never been accused of being too affectionate, either. I consider myself real casual-

like. Sometimes hanging out on the farm under them old elm trees on the back-forty or sometimes just standing in the middle of a fescue field. Don't call me lazy. I mean it. I'm not lazy no more than you are lazy. Don't come with that. Check it.

I guess I do have it made. But you know, having it made does have a price. Of course, you hear guns go off, mostly at night. You figure a raccoon or a road sign got some lead. It's just the way it is. McPherson calls it "puttin' lead in their ears." Real funny! I hate guns and gunfire. I hate blood that comes when the bullets fly. You see that. That frenzy of death that keeps you humble. I had a friend that got shot up in

a drive-by. He was just minding his own, standing over there by that fence, and these white, young rednecks screech by with a deer rifle. Left him laying there dying as they drove off laughing. Now that was a sight you never forget. It does something to you and puts a certain order to things. You live or die and there's those that have control. Like

McPherson! Who is McPherson? Old "tight and white" McPherson, that white dude slacker who owns this here farm, is as tight as they come. He got money buried all over under dead tree stumps and stuffed in old canning jars. Yes, he is white. I am black. I'm just laying out with facts 'cause that's the real honest truth. He makes life around here interesting. He

owns the place. Round here you have and own or you don't have and own. That's the way it is. Old McPherson owns stuff. McPherson Farm.

Impressed yet? McPherson thinks he owns us. Thinks we think he's God or

dirt under them an earthworm would get off. He is foul that's for sure. Nasty, nasty man, that McPherson. Runs in his family. McPherson's grandkid, little Timmy, is O.K. O.K. for a punk. He jumps out the school bus door and runs up by the side

fence almost everyday. I notice him coming up, I walk over to check him out, and he freaks. I mean he freaks. Runs off shouting for his granddaddy, old McPherson, who charges out the house half-ripping off the cheap, rusted screen door like he's some kind of big bull, gonna take on a bull-fighter. McPherson the bull. He wishes. More like full of bull. He stands there on the porch



something. Everybody eats when and what he says or for all he really cares about it, don't eat. He has his favorites,

with them hands on his hips and then yells at that litter runt Timmy to shut up and get to his chores. It is just like McPherson to yell at everybody.

However, I cannot figure the kid Timmy out. Some of that dysfunctional home stuff. So what if I am bigger than him, but I ain't never hurt nobody. Never done a thing to make him not like me.

He's promised a bunch of us that we would go to town in that truck of his, as if he's doing us some favor just letting us think about it.

Goes back to what I told you earlier about the way things is round here. Why is that Timmy so scared all the time? Scared both of me and McPherson? Hey, but check it, he's just a snotty white kid and I really don't have any real important-like business with him no how.

Just the way it is. Like McPherson hates it when I'm in

yeah. No, I don't rate. Not with his crazy way of thinking. I'm always observing things out around here. Like, check it. He don't say much to me and tries communicating in his own dumb ignorant way. Communicates by hollering and waving them nasty hands around. Them hands with those yellowed fingernails. Those filthy fingernails with so much black farm

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his barn. He has got livestock like horses, goats and chickens that cover that place with the most God-awful smell of crap and pee. But don't you know McPherson is too lazy to clean a barn or a stable. He yells at me every time I come in that big barn. His barn. Thinks nothin' about anyone but his self. He don't understand how cold that early February wind is. 'Nother reason to hate him. Check it. You will not believe it but he'd rather put horses in the barn than me. That tells you a lot right there. No matter how cold, he wants me out of his barn. Walked in one time just to check things out and he gets all upset. He yelled and threw rocks at me.

I didn't mind the rocks hittin' me as much as that cold wind. It was biting cold. Sometimes to keep warm I still sneak in there to that barn when he is off to town. Oh yes, getting to go to town. Now there's one tale that should be handed down. How we might gets to go to town someday like McPherson.

He's promised a bunch of us that we would go to town in that truck of his, as if he's doing us some favor just letting us think about it. Check it. He keeps putting us off. Yes he does. Says it ain't time. And his truck. That truck. Trashy is all it is. Man can you imagine that truck in one of those big billboard advertising signs like out on the highway. One of those real high signs with that truck in the ad for coat hangers and tape. A big ad. Buy coat hangers and tape. Might lead to TV commercials. Tape and coat hangers is all that hold McPherson's truck together. Cheap-rigging, buy-nothing miser that he is. He won't fix a thing up right. Like an example is, his truck tires need a new truck. You think I'm trying to be cute or something. Think you got me figured out? Keep thinking. You ain't seen this place and don't know nothin'.

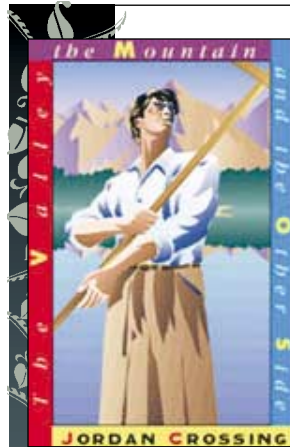
It's the way it is. I'm not that funny. Nothing funny about me. I'm always reminded of that. What happens and goes on round here is funny to me but nobody else gets it like I do. Listen to this. A girlfriend of mine and I was walking and talking one afternoon. Nothing special. It was a great day. Not much breeze and no McPherson around. When? Spring, I think it was. We was hanging out. You know, like I said, nothing special. A minute or maybe an hour of hanging out. Anyway, her little one-year old walks over and the kid looks kinda hungry. Real hungry. So

without paying me no mind, like I wasn't even there my girlfriend up and just starts feeding the kid right there. Wait a minute. You don't understand. I mean feedin' that kid with her own milk. I mean from her own breast, not a bottle or nothin'. Check it. Now that was a sight.

Picture this big black...well, anyway there's milk running down the youngster's mouth while he's making with that nurs-

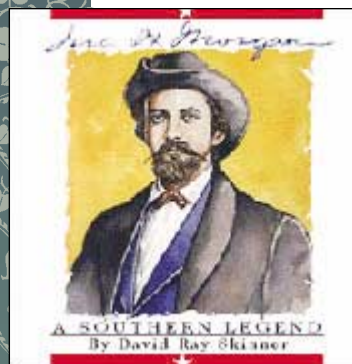
ing, sucking sound. You know. Loud and loud as any rooster crow or bellow or sound you ever heard on any farm. That was it for me. I could not help it. I really let go when I started laughing and my how I laughed. I mean it was something to see. But, my girlfriend, she goes and gets angry at me. In a big way.

Came running at me and of course, I had to defend myself at first. Not that I

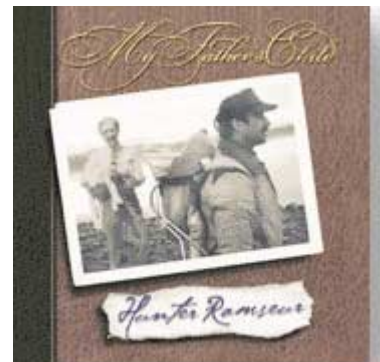
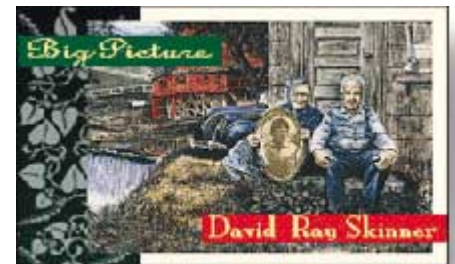


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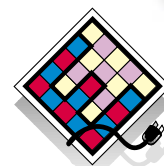
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was scared, it just shocked me, her reaction to my laughing. Then I just ran. I ain't that fast, but she ain't too fast either and her kid was hollering. Must have been a total sight. They were acting out like they was crazy or had that "mad cow" bovine disease we all heard about while back. Wasn't nothing. Just more of the crazy stuff I am telling you about. When something goes wrong or something ain't right here on McPherson's place, he goes into some kinds of control thing. I didn't mean to laugh at her. It was funny, I swear. Nevertheless, nobody forgets or forgives around these parts. Anyway she, "the real crazy momma" as we called her, and her young 'un went to town with McPherson a couple of weeks ago and I guess she had enough of him and his farm living. She did not get no ride back.

Guess she had enough, period. Enough of this place, for sure.

She didn't come back to the farm ever again and McPherson, why he never mentioned it, or her again, and nobody asked. Don't get McPherson started. We just always say about her "You go, girl!"

Rude a people as McPherson is. I tried not to look or listen. We was almost to town. Finally we stopped off at a few places, but we all had to stay in the truck. Of course, everybody except McPherson.

Guess he needed to get more tape and coat hangers to patch his ride. If you want to call that truck a ride. Anyway, we head to the south end of town and stop again. Finally, it's our turn. We can get out.

Everybody gets out. Finally. I gotta go real bad. My bladder is bustin'. But nobody cares. Just like on the farm. We hung around for a couple of minutes or something and then I got a whiff of this most horrible stench.

It was an odor like something I knew, but did not know. And where was we going anyway? We was all together and McPherson leads everybody down this alley way near the back of the truck where we all got out.

Who knows where we are headed? Nobody bothers to ask. It's 'cause McPherson acts like he knows where we are headed. I didn't know what was going on, so I figured I would check it out, you

truck crank up. That damned truck. Coat hangers and all. That is about the time I saw this large, muscular white dude with a rifle. I already told you what I think about guns. He was covered in blood. I now knew that stench. It was blood! He had "Butcher" tattooed on his blood go-stained right arm. He was coming at me. I froze. I felt a lump in my throat. I could not run. I was trapped. He raised his rifle. Dudes were yelling. The blood, fret and fears.

Then, at that very moment, I started laughing. Me. My laughing. Now that was a sight. Some timing. I had to laugh. Really, check it. Ain't pulling nothing over on me. It had just dawned on me what old McPherson was up to. I figured it out finally.

I may be pretty damn smart after all for just being a cow.

hughwaddell@home.com

Check it.

Hope where ever she's at, she ain't still mad at me. If I could drive I'd be outta here too, that's for sure. I don't got no truck or tractor anyhow.

Ain't never driven ever, if I did have one of them. Ain't that bad, though. If you wait long enough you will get your chance. Go when it's time to go. I finally got to go to town in McPherson's truck. Check it. It was so crowded and if you've ever seen a pick-up truck, you know that there ain't that, I mean that, much room. Anyway, not for all four of us. Five, counting McPherson. Yeah, you got it right. I am riding in the back. Don't you start judging me now. If it means riding on that truck hood to get outta here, I would. It must of been a go-slow day because it took forever to get anywhere away from that farm. At least it's away.

Everybody was passing us. And being 'bout as rude as I've seen.

They was giving us the middle finger and puttin' us down with things they yell from their car windows, holding their noses as they sped by.

know. Then, holy cow, what a shocker! Almost out of nowhere. Pow! I mean it. These big redneck white dudes with sticks came out from behind a big gate-looking door and started yelling. And louder than I ever heard McPherson yell. They are yelling at us. We freeze. I am not no chicken but they was too much to handle. I was scared like I never been before. They hit us. Then they hit us all on our backs, except for McPherson. Check it. He was smiling. Something's up.

We was hollerin' and they was yelling. Hitting and yelling. 'Cept McPherson.

Old "tight and white" done set us up maybe. Who knows what's goin' on. He ain't scared. He looks all happy and... heck, one of the dudes was giving him some money. McPherson was counting it in front of us as he walked back out the alley to the truck. These dudes made us go into these doors and down this path with hard, really hard floors. One dude was yelling and waving the stick like he was going to hit us again, some more. In the distance, we could hear McPherson's

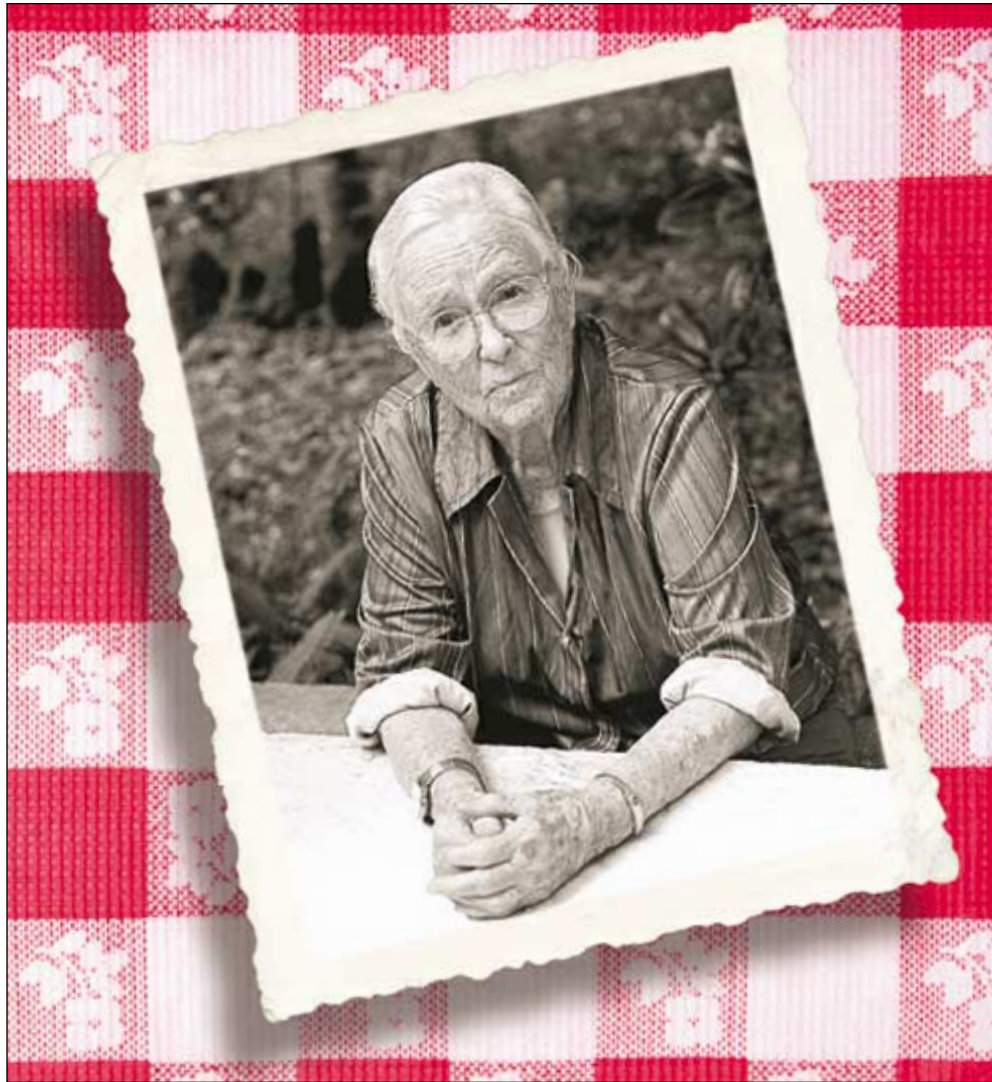
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A Southern Memoir

Sprung from a Southern Rocker

by Frankey Jones

Even in my tenderest years Granny Price was near death's door. How she managed to hang on twenty-five more years is a miracle. I can see the headline now...

Doctors Discover Secrets to Longevity

"In a study recently published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* researchers describe the habits of a small pocket of rural Southern Baptists who defy actuarial odds with lifespans exceeding one hundred years...Scientists say their long lives

may be linked to the consumption of six "co-colas" a day. Life-extending enzymes

With her tongue she could dice, chop,
mince and grind. And she sharpened
her tongue on the whetstone of
hellfire and damnation radio preachers.

sandwiches might aid in the metabolism of these miracle sodas. Sour dispositions and judgmental natures add decades as well...Despite debilitating diseases and "stove up" backs, these barrel-shaped old grannies in heavy black leather lace-up "sensible" shoes...Nobel Peace Prize winning scientists would conclude that small inaccessible mountain villages in Russia have nothing on the Deep South!"

Only her grandchildren saw this miracle as a good thing. Her grandchildren were flawless jewels misplaced in a

"It's a Christian's job to keep up with the evil in the world."

box of tacky, cheap rhinestones. Even her own children were in the rhinestone box. With her tongue she could dice, chop, mince and grind. And she sharpened her tongue on the whetstone of hellfire and damnation radio preachers. Her fierce blue eyes, magnified behind her bifocals, sent stray cats and ferocious dogs running.

Warm summer evenings Granny sat in her rocking chair, the one with the brass tacks, sitting by the window tsk-ing the neighborhood children and their parents for their wild ways and lack of supervision. She would punctuate her indictments with complaints about how she was "down in the back" or "full of nerves" or "having a sinking spell since last Friday."

"Jus' look at them children runnin' wild right in the parking lot and here it's almost dark. Their mamas don't even know where they are...probably don't even care."

I join Granny at the window to see a gaggle of noisy little girls arguing over who will turn the rope and who will jump.

Her chair squeaked as she rocked back and forth on the polished concrete floor. She took another sip of Coke. "Get you some milk, sweetie. You don't want your bones to get old and stiff like your granny's."

"Speakin' of mamas, where's yours?" She raised her lip in disgust. "Out with some no good man? Probably drunk in a bar...I didn't raise her to be such a hussy."

She closed her eyes and shook her head before leaning over to adjust the radio set, static in and out and in and out, until the exhortations to "get right with God" grew more intelligible.

"She was such a pretty baby. And so sweet." Granny stared off at some distant spot on the painted concrete block wall. I tried to find what she was looking at. I couldn't see anything. Looking over Jesus' left shoulder she ponders her children's failure to live right. Jesus' picture was the only decoration on an otherwise bare wall. The room was furnished austerely with a Goodwill dinette set and three ladder-back chairs, saggy basket seats wearing the prints of former owners.

"Bible gives us all three score and ten. No need to buy fancy stuff when you're livin' on borrowed time. I pray everyday God will take me soon." Granny said this at least once every visit inviting me to protest and tell her how much I loved her. Her imminent death kept her from accepting any gifts except an occasional *True Crime* magazine. "It's a Christian's job to keep up with the evil in the world."

The only nice thing she owned was the big radio set from Rich's. She arranged her day around evangelists from Waco, Tucson, and Biloxi.

I half listened to her critical litanies, hearing not words but the voice of *Granny love*—the only unconditional human love I ever knew. Jump rope rhymes hammered out by young rappers rose from the parking lot beyond the window "*Pepsi Cola hits the spot/ Turn it up and make it hot*" ...and the sky grew dark, one blue quilt thrown over another until the heavens were black..."one and a two"...now the radio begged listeners to send money in return for prayers or healing or riches to come.

"Them communists run the gov'ment, you know" she would declare, pressing her tissue against the base of her Coke bottle to absorb the sweat. "Hmm...what's a God-fearin' person to do?"

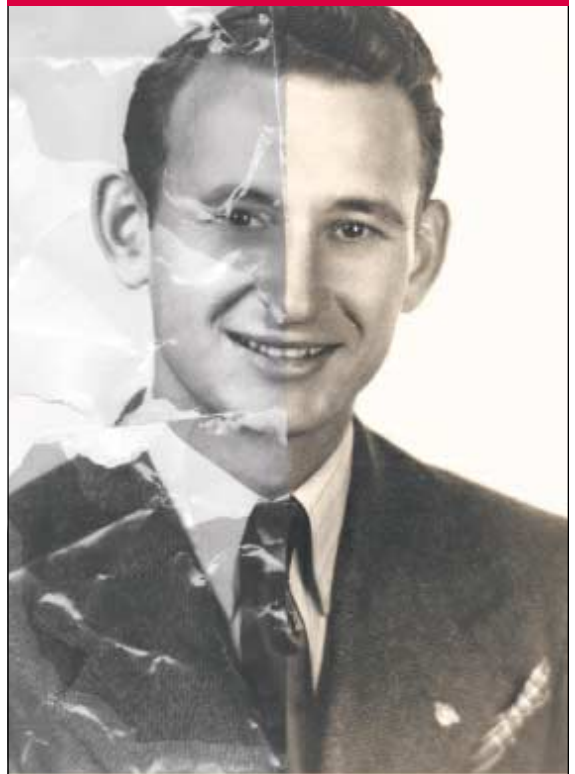
Today, Granny's homespun critique of the demise of the southern way of life would cut a wide swath across the paths of political correctness, but if anything, she was true to herself, and she had a firm opinion of how things should be.

And so, here I am years later, sitting in Granny's rocker by the bedroom window. I'm not that lit-

tle girl anymore, and Granny's prayers were finally answered. Her memories keep me warm. Granny's love got me through some tough times. Her love, bitersweet.

Like Granny, I'm always right. I laugh at myself. Lately I've been having a sinking spell. Seems it started last Friday.

frankeyj@cannonchurch.org



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Fair

A short story by Ben Greene

Gerald Delaney blew what little chance he would have had of being liked, when he first showed up at Miss Bain's class on the fourth day of third grade with his copper-haired, high-heeled mother by his side.

This statuesque woman in the salmon-colored dress conferred unquietly with Miss Bain while her son, the new kid, stood to his mother's right, nuzzling her hand with his crewcut. His big, cow-like brown eyes gazed up into the classroom, fixing first on the red and yellow "New School Year" cardboard leaves which danced above the chalkboard (though out our windows the trees were a lush August green), then on the Miss Bain originals of Mickey and Minnie Mouse which beamed down from the boys' and girls' cloak-rooms, then on the portraits of George Washington and President Kennedy, in short on anything but us kids.

"Boys and girls," Miss Bain said, "we have a new member of our class: Gerald Delaney. Gerald moved here from Ohio. Gerald, you may sit in Row Five between Melanie and Tommy. No, wait, you're taller than he is, so you two switch."

I sat back down, still stuck behind a girl after all.

"Goodbye, darling. I'll pick you up right here at 2:30," Gerald's mother announced, to our astonishment. Gerald did not answer. I wondered if he could talk. He could indeed, I found out soon enough, for before our spelling lesson was over I heard him whispering to himself. I could only catch a phrase or two: "This is Private Delaney reporting. Private Delaney, come in."

I stared hard at Miss Bain, trying to

draw her attention behind me, but she either didn't notice, or was giving the kid some slack. At recess that day, I stood back to back with Gerald while my friends judged who was the taller. Carl Truett and Joey Blythe said I was. Others were diplo-



In October, when the World Series started, Miss Bain let us divide into two teams, the Giants and the Yankees.

matic and called it even, but some of the girls who were looking on said, no fair, I was on a slope, and that Gerald was half an inch taller.

"Why don't you go play with the girls?" I said to Gerald. "They're on your side."

By the end of September the height issue was inoperative. Miss Bain had decided that there were subtler dynamics involved in the ideal seating chart. Boy-girl-boy-girl was the new rule of thumb,

with "no two good friends side by side" weighing in heavily as well. Gerald Delaney was immune to the latter rule. His best friends were his mother and his lunchbox, and we all knew it.

Not to suggest that Gerald was plump. His face was pale, his jaw rounded and soft, and with the auburn crewcut and cow-eyes, his was a face that would have looked natural perched above a fat body. But the boy was simply short-legged and stocky. I called him "Fatty" anyway,

though my friend Joey Blythe was plainly fatter. The real reason that Gerald's lunchbox was considered his best friend was that he talked to it.

It was a Lone Ranger box, metal of course, and battered around the edges. Everyone else in class bought the school meals but Gerald invariably brought his lunchbox. "What do we got today, Tonto?" he'd say in his high-pitched whisper of a voice, the same one he used when he talked to himself. And everyday his lunch was different: deviled eggs, carrots, pickles, an apple and chocolate milk, or a roast beef sandwich and a banana, or crunchy peanut butter smushed between saltines along with a box of raisins and a thick slice of pound cake. The meals were

a source of great curiosity to us.

"What's in your lunchbox, Gerald?" somebody might ask when he entered the classroom.

"I don't know," he'd shrug. It seemed never to occur to him to pose that question of Tonto or "Lonie" till he'd sat down at the lunchroom table. He was susceptible to trades, too, though at first in a show of solidarity we all refused to make offers for his grapes or Baby Ruths or barbecue potato chips, no matter how tempting they

looked. One Friday, however, when we were having salmon croquettes, Lenny Russell's pride buckled, and he spirited some M&M's out of a blatantly imbalanced deal. From then on, Gerald's lunches were fair game. Luckily, he was always more than willing to trade. I never dealt with him directly, though I'd negotiate with one of his trading partners, so as to partake of the fruits of the transaction without sully my reputation. After Gerald's trades he'd sit silently awhile, then, when it became plain everyone was through talking with him, he'd nibble at his amalgam of school and homemade lunch, whispering now and then to Lonie or Tonto. Sometimes he'd cock his ear toward the box and nod a little, as if it spoke back.

In October, when the World Series started, Miss Bain let us divide into two teams, the Giants and the Yankees, and have a contest to see which would read the most pages of library books that week. She posted our teams' names to the left of the chalkboard, its crown of autumnal leaves supplanted by bright pumpkins, though outside now the maple and oak leaves were as vivid as the cardboard ones had been. Ironically, most of us Southern boys were eager to be counted as Yankees, that being the team with the greatest television exposure. I could recite almost all the squad's uniform numbers from Bobby Richardson on down to Elston Howard or better. During P.E. in the gym someone asked Gerald which was his favorite team. "Cincinnati Reds, I guess," he said.

"The Reds?" I howled. "Boo. The Reds, everybody. Boo!" Several boys joined in, booing the team that had opposed our Yanks in the '61 Series the year before. Our jeers rang out in the gymnasium, so we booed louder, now as much to hear the echo as to denigrate the Reds.

Mr. Lynch, the P.E. teacher, blew his whistle sharply. Startled, we all shushed. I looked at Gerald. He was talking to the collar of his shirt.

That Friday was the final day for the Yankees and Giants to report their library reading. We Yanks had forged a 106-page

lead, so I felt confident as I excitedly quizzed my classmates before the first bell. Nellie Ann Clayburn had read 99 more pages (the boy-girl-boy-girl rule had contaminated even the proud Yankee name, but by Friday that fact had paled in light of our greed for victory), and I'd quickly gone through the entire Babe Ruth story, 68 pages long, plus two-and-a-half chapters on the Civil War.

Joey Blythe, bitterly relegated to the Giants, was in the midst of an ethical dilemma. I'd appealed to his Yankee loyalties, and thus on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday he'd reported low totals despite the fact he was an avid reader.

But on Thursday he'd yielded to pressure from his teammates and to Miss Bain's vague hints of sweet prizes for the winners, and registered 82 pages, only three fewer than I.

Gerald Delaney was a Yankee, too, and I'd privately welcomed even his substantial contributions, just so long as they were lesser than mine. I'd been high man in

The fact that the real Yankees won the real World Series helped restore my sense of justice.

class three days out of four.

By carefully assessing the scores of my classmates who cared to divulge them, I was pretty sure we were a cinch to retain our lead, and capture the World Series of Library Books.

Of course, some of the Giants were being tight-lipped about the matter.

After the Pledge, we clamored for a quick conclusion to our game, but Miss Bain made us wait out Math first, and threatened us with Health, too, if we didn't settle down. We settled. Then she gave us a lecture on fairness, noting that it was more important to enjoy our reading and report it honestly than to win the contest, which she wouldn't even have started in the first place if she'd known we were going to take it so seriously.

That bit of baffling adult logic behind us, she took out her magic marker and began to tick off our names.

"Let's start with the Giants. Becky Hollifield."

"Fifty-three pages." (I had to stifle a snicker.)

"Very good, Becky. How about you, Tommy McKay?"

I gleefully reported my 95, gallantly unconcerned when fellow Yankee Nellie soon surpassed me. But the Giants had some surprises for us. Mike Fletcher had read 102 pages, Joey Blythe 114, Charlotte Sue Hayes 126. Our Yankees countered with some new personal bests. The room grew noticeably tense with unspoken accusations of a fixed Series when Walker Waters, that sleepy Giant, told of his 194 pages.

Yes ma'am, he was sure. His mom had added up the books for him.

We were down to each team's final two players. According to my private tabulations, which I surreptitiously flashed to my teammates, the Giants had forged a highly suspect 66-page lead.

Sandra Banks topped Rynthia Clags, chipping the Giants' lead down to an even fifty. Little Glen Goodwin, the last Giant, said he'd read "a hundred pages," which, knowing Glen, meant he'd read a little

longer than he'd ever bothered to read before, unconcerned with the mysteries of any digits beyond his ten grimy fingers.

"Gerald," Miss Bain's voice always

softened when she spoke to him, "and how about you?"

"I read a hundred and forty-four pages, Miss Bain. All these books right here," he said, holding them aloft.

"Very good, Gerald. Did you enjoy them?"

"Yes, ma'am," Gerald grinned. "I like books about horses and dogs."

"That's good, Gerald. So do I. Well, boys and girls, you all did an excellent job of reading, and I'm very proud of both teams. I hope you'll continue to enjoy our library. The final score, as I'm adding it here, looks very close. It's..."

But she didn't have to say. I knew Gerald had to have over 150 pages for the Yankees to win. Surely he must have known that, too. He'd let us down.

"Y'all cheated," a fellow Yankee told Walker Waters at recess.

"Nobody can read that much in that time," I said.

"Y'all are just jealous," Charlotte Sue said. I noticed Gerald seated on a swing, apart from the rest of us. He was reading

an oversized yellow book called *Cathy's Collie*. "Fatty," I said, under my breath. Then, once more, a little louder, before I turned away.

The fact that the real Yankees won the real World Series helped restore my sense of justice. And a week or so after that came another healing charm, the middle jewel of autumn's glittering triad which had begun with the Series and would end with Halloween: the

Piedmont Interstate Fair came to town. On Monday of Fair Week, after carefully ascertaining that we all planned visits there, Miss Bain let us paint pictures of what we thought the Fair would be like. I wasn't a very good artist, so I concentrated on a big Ferris wheel and smiling square-shouldered people marching about holding snow cones and cotton candy.

As we sat painting, we talked of our impending visits to the Fair. "I'm going today," Glen said.

"Today's too soon. They won't have everything ready," I answered.

"I'm going Friday," said Rynthia Clags.

"Friday and Saturday are too crowded," I said, though, of course, I'd never been on either day.

"I'm going Tuesday," said Joey. There were plenty of "me too's."

"I'm going Thursday," I stated. Others chimed in to indicate likewise.

"I'm going Tuesday and Friday," Charlotte Sue bragged.

"You must be rich," someone told her.

"When are you going, Gerald Delaney?" Nellie Ann asked. The girls, more amused by Gerald than we were, usually called him by both names.

He looked up from his painting. "Wednesday," he said.

"But Wednesday is..." Joey began.

"Shhh!" I insisted. "Wednesday, huh. That'll be a good day." A couple of the girls giggled. I walked over and looked at Gerald's painting. He was not nearly as skillful as Sandra Banks or some of the



other artists in the room, but his picture was distinctive. In bold primary colors and liberal swatches of black he'd rendered a giant merry-go-round. However, instead of riding horses and

the Fair. This was the first year for both the double-Ferris wheel and Baby Flo, and I, being as yet uninitiated into these mysteries, couldn't decide which was the more intriguing. Glen Goodwin had gotten a

good glimpse of the Hootchie-kootchies on Monday, but they were in the realm of the giggly and unfathomable, whereas colossal rides and half-ton ladies were something I could clearly imagine. Joey's mentioning of the more familiar wonders--candy apples, bump cars, pickup ducks, fireworks, and adults who actually relished the livestock exhibits--brought back vivid

sensuous recollections that got me all tingly with anticipation.

Gerald Delaney sat alone, listening. "Are you still going today, Gerald?" I asked.

"Umm-hmm. My mum is taking me straight from school."

"You'll have fun today, Gerald Delaney," I said, and grinned at the thought.

"I know," he answered me.

When I went home after school that day, I told my mama about Baby Flo.

"She weighs half a ton," I said.

"I'm sure she's fat, but I doubt she weighs a half-ton. That's one thousand pounds," she said.

"But can we go see her?"

"I don't know. We'll see." My spirits sank. I knew "we'll see" too well. "It might help me stick to my diet, though," she added.

"Some kids' mothers are picking them up at school to take them to the Fair."

"Well, you can walk on home, please. It

On Monday of Fair Week Miss Bain let us paint pictures of what we thought the Fair would be like.

camels and such, the children on the carousel were perched on cotton candy, oversized peanuts, tiny Ferris wheels, ice cream cones, two-headed creatures, fat ladies, and dollar bills.

I was kind, and didn't tell him what a stupid merry-go-round he'd painted, Maybe he'd never been to a fair, and just didn't know.

On Wednesday morning as we sat in the gymnasium, awaiting the morning bell, Joey regaled us with descriptions of

won't kill you to wait ten more minutes. The fair will still be there." It was amazing how, in my mother's world, things always stayed patiently put.

"Gerald Delaney went to the Fair today," I said.

"He did? And he's in your class?"

"Yes ma'am. He went on Nigger Day."

"We don't say that in this house, Tommy."

"But that's what it is. White people don't go to the Fair today."

"I know, but don't use the word 'nigger.' Say 'Negro' or 'colored people.' It's Colored People's Day today."

"Yes ma'am." I slurped thoughtfully at my glass of milk. My mom looked up from her sewing.

"Where's Gerald from, by the way?"

Thursday, Gerald was absent from school. I didn't know quite how to react to this. I'd wanted to poke a little fun at his ignorant mistake, but now I wondered just what had happened. Had he been hurt? He was probably the only white kid at the Fair. Maybe they'd ganged up on him. I'd heard that colored boys were really good fighters, and I knew Gerald Delaney was no match, and a choice target to boot.

My own visit to the Fair was splendid, as always. The double Ferris wheel was impressive but, unlike my schoolmates, I wasn't an aficionado of that sort of thrill. I'd never even ridden a single Ferris wheel, except for the miniature one at Myrtle Beach, so the sight of the Double, lit up orange and green, plummeting from, and simultaneously rolling back up into the autumn night sky was dizzying enough for me. I didn't get to see Baby Flo, but I did stand outside her tent and gaze at her portrait, which was enough to evoke sufficient awe and pity, and burnish into my mind a juicy nickname with which to bedevil my unfortunate neighbor, Dottie.

I did ride the bump cars for the first time in my life, and had a riproaring time of it, sideswiping a freckled lad, and pinning a pony-tailed blonde to one wall, till some big kids, sixth graders, I think, climbed into their cars, and my mother

signalled that it was time for me to get out.

And of course I rode other rides. Most of these were the kiddie stuff that Joey Blythe and Glen Goodwin disdained, for example the motorcycles which simply revolved with a tilting up and down motion while the riders twisted the handlebar grips to rev fake engines. Twice I rode the little roller coaster, which was respectable enough to mention at school, though easily humbled by harrowing tales

I was slowly coming to realize that the numbers on the ducks were not some powerful code which determined the prizes to be won, but that these rewards were subject to the whims of the man in the booth.

of the Mousetrap, and one time each I rode the Alpine and the helicopters, both of which made mild sport of my stomach, perhaps less so than did the foot long hot dogs, caramel apples, and sky-blue cotton candy I consumed.

In addition to the rides, there were sundry other pleasures, one of my favorites being the pickup ducks. This attraction consisted of a curved wooden trough flowing with murky water. A quarter would purchase the right to pick up three hard plastic ducks which floated there, and to hand them to the man who ran the booth. The man would somehow translate the numbers painted on their underbellies into one of the stuffed toys hanging above him, or more likely into one of the flimsier baubles hidden behind the trough.

I was slowly coming to realize that the numbers on the ducks were not some powerful code which determined the prizes to be won, but that these rewards were subject to the whims of the man in the booth. My budding sense of justice was not, however, affected to the degree that it overruled my nostalgia. As far back as I could recall the Fair, I could remember visiting this stall. Call it habit, call it simply the Fair; I was going to pick up my ducks this year, too.

I did so, choosing more discriminantly than did the five-year-old beside me, and walked away with an equally tawdry prize: some plastic handcuffs. Still, it was fun, a fruitful gambling of my parents' quarter. I got home that night later than my

bedtime, thought briefly of Gerald Delaney and his uncertain fate, then a bit longer of my princely day. I slept the sleep of the gods.

Gerald was back at school on Friday morning. "Where were you yesterday, Gerald Delaney?" Charlotte Sue asked as we sat in the gym, awaiting the start of classes.

"I had a bellyache. I ate too much stuff at the Fair."

"How did you like the Fair?" I asked, eager, now that I saw him unharmed, to hear of his discomfort there.

"It was fun," he said. "I rode the merry-go-round

three times and the boats and the play motorcycles. I rode the little roller coaster, too. I thought I would be scared but I wasn't. I enjoyed the livestock exhibition: very interesting. And look. Look what I won." He opened his lunchbox, and pulled out a tin badge with the word "Sheriff" emblazoned on it.

"Why aren't you wearing it?"

"My mum says it'll make a tear in my shirt. I pretend like I'm a detective, and have to keep it hidden."

"How did you win it?" Charlotte Sue asked.

"There's a booth where you can pick up little ducks, and win prizes," he answered. "I got numbers 11, 04, and 15, I think. 15 or 19. And this is what I won."

"That's easy," said Charlotte Sue. "I knocked over some milk bottles and won a stuffed monkey named Jabbo. And I didn't ride any baby rides, either. But you went on Wednesday, not yesterday, right Gerald Delaney?"

"Right. Wednesday," Gerald answered. Charlotte Sue's eyes twinkled. I knew what she was about to say.

"Let me see that badge again," I said quickly, and grabbed it, lunchbox and all, and admired it, moving steadily away from Charlotte Sue, hoping he'd follow me, but he didn't.

He just stood there and listened to what Charlotte Sue had to say, stood there without even a badge to whisper to.

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A Noted Site for Those Who Write

The Music Row publisher switched off the tape recorder and swivelled around in his chair, hands behind his head as if deep in thought. On the other side of the desk, songwriter Lee Owens waited for the inevitable verdict.

"This is Nashville," the man finally said, "the Country Music Capital of the World. Your songs are fine, son. Real good, in fact, but if you're going to be writing songs like this, you need to be living in New York or L.A., not the Country Music Capital of the World."

Ironically, a year or so later, a New York music publisher listened to the same set of songs and told Owens, "These songs are *country*. Have you ever thought about pitching them in Nashville?"

Owens had honestly acquired his diversity in writing, because though he had cut his musical teeth on records by the Beatles and other mid-sixties British invasion bands, his father was Doodle Owens, the renowned Nashville songwriter. Over the course of Lee's childhood and early adulthood, Doodle penned or co-penned such music industry standards as *Johnny One-Time* for Brenda Lee, *All I Have to Offer You is Me* for Charlie Pride, *Right Left Hand* for George Jones, and *Fourteen Minutes Old* for Doug Stone along with several hundred other cuts for artists ranging from Randy Travis to Elvis. So, one might surmise that good songwriting was in the genes.

The younger Owens had knocked around Music Row for over 20 years and

at one point had been signed to a major publishing company, as well as having

write and the songs that Nashville wanted to hear.

"My home was Nashville," Owens said, "but I felt like the market for my music was anywhere but Nashville." So he was determined to find a solution. The answer was an internet-based songwriter's music marketplace called *Key On Music* (www.KeyOnMusic.com). In late 2000 Owens, Nashville businessman Steve Haley and another partner put the fledgling business together in Nashville.

"The idea was to set up a new kind of on-line music source where anyone could hear and be heard," Owens says, "a place to swap licks and lyrics. A stage, if you will. It's a talent pool where artists still own their own music."

The site is a subscription-based service where songwriters can place ten 30-second song samples at a time. And, they can change their selections at any time.

Owens added, "Our marketing material says, '*They* decide what's hot. *They* decide what's not, and who's going to be the next big sensation, but *they* don't own us.' I'm sure *they* will know who they are. But that being said, we're really not trying to go up against the big boys or the music biz status quo...we just wanted to offer a viable alternative. As a matter of fact, we see the site as also being a showcase

where music labels and publishers can discover new talent.

"It really is a brave new world out



"We're not really trying to go up against the big boys or the music biz status quo...we just wanted to offer a viable alternative."

worked with 20 or so others.

The ongoing issue, however, was the difference between the songs he wanted to

"The main point that we keep trying to stress is the value of inclusiveness."

there, at least technically speaking. Technology has now made it affordable for people to record a quality CD on their own. This has resulted in literally hundreds of thousands of home studios that sound as good as the big ones.

Recent statistics say that there are over 100,000 plus ADAT installs in the world. It seems to pose the obvious question: Why can't those people at least have a chance to be heard?

Owens went on to say that the obvious goal of *KeyOnMusic* is to make songwriters accessible to *the whole wide world through the world wide web*.

"Here's one scenario," he says, "Imagine a bunch of college kids sitting around a dorm room somewhere in Alabama or Georgia playing guitars and banjos and writing songs. Let's say they go into a local recording studio, or for that matter even into one of their own home studios. They cut an album's worth of original bluegrass tunes, get an art student to do some sort of cover and then they put the whole thing together as a CD called something like *Appalachian Apple Pie*. Then they take four, five or even ten of the songs and put it on the *KeyOnMusic* website. Okay, then let's assume there's some independent film maker in Australia wanting to do an original film set in Appalachian America. He goes to our site, checks out the bluegrass listing and sees *Appalachian Apple Pie*, listens to the selection, clicks on the link to the band's website (which they now have) and orders the CD. Bingo! He now has a soundtrack for his independent film."

Owens added, "Another goal of *KeyOnMusic* is education, and, although it sounds blatantly altruistic, it figures in big as far as what we'd love to accomplish with the site. We call this the *Housewife in Des Moines* factor. Picture a woman in Iowa who has always liked to play a little on the guitar or piano...someone who has, through the years, written a few songs. Maybe she's even played them at church or at school functions and has gotten some encouragement, or at least some positive response to what she has written. Where

can she go to get her songs listened to? Or, for that matter, how does she go about getting her songs recorded, or copyrighted? Or, if she's really serious, *critiqued*, so she can actually make them better? She can't just necessarily call the local record store or radio station and say, 'Hey, I've got a wonderful song that I've been working on. Is there somebody there who will listen to it?' Maybe there's someone who will take the time, but admittedly, that's a long shot. However, she can go and click on *KeyOnMusic* and there is a section there that can tell her how to get her songs copyrighted, how to get her songs recorded, and it can even give her some valuable information about everything from using the right vocal microphone to tips on CD artwork.

"The main point that we keep trying to stress is the value of inclusiveness as opposed to exclusiveness. Everyone can feel at home here. There's a place for everyone.

So, is this the future of recorded music? Owens chuckled at the suggestion. "We're not quite that presumptuous," he says, "but I will say this...it's a big world

of music out there, and *KeyOnMusic* merely wants to make it easier for people to hear some of the great music that would probably not be heard within the confines of the existing system."

The advertisement features a central image of an astronaut in a white spacesuit floating in space against a blue background. The astronaut is holding a yellow chain in their right hand. Above the astronaut, the text "You are what you wear." is written in a serif font. Below the astronaut, the brand name "IMBRAS" is written in large, bold, yellow letters. At the bottom of the advertisement, the slogan "Clothing for Mind and Body." is written in a serif font, followed by the website address "www.imbras.com" in a smaller, sans-serif font.



'Come and Listen to my Story..'

by Nelda Hill

Once upon a time the First Baptist Church of Rutherfordton, North Carolina called Wednesday night prayer meeting an hour earlier so everybody could get home to watch *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Rutherfordton lies at the foot of the Blue Ridge and was the center of the gold mining industry from 1790 to 1848.

It has maintained a population of about 3000 since the the 1930s. My friend, Jill grew up there. Her people are the stuff of Robert Morgan novels. Of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, she said, "We didn't know we were being demeaned. All we knew was there was finally somebody on TV who sounded like us."

Across the mountains, about 300 miles west of Rutherfordton, in suburban Nashville, the Hill children got bathed and jammied early so we wouldn't miss a minute of the Hillbillies. Our daddy particularly loved the shows when Lester

Flatt and Earl Scruggs appeared. From the Grand Ole Opry to Hollywood. Imagine that. I guess we didn't know we were being demeaned either.

The Beverly Hillbillies has been kick-

"All we knew was there was finally someone on TV who sounded like us."

ing up a ruckus for about forty years now. Northern critics hated it. Jack Gould of *The New York Times* said it had enough "twanging guitar, polka-dot gingham,

deliberate drawl, prolific cousins, and rural no-think to make each half hour seem like sixty minutes." Southern scholars didn't like it any better. James Branscome said the Southern sitcoms of the sixties had to be "the most intensive effort ever exerted by a nation to belittle, demean, and otherwise destroy a minority people within its boundaries." *The Beverly Hillbillies* is thought to perpetuate the stereotype that Southerners, particularly highland Southerners, are stupid, lazy, gullible, crude, moonshine guzzling no account fools.

Now I'm oversensitive to anybody picking on the South, particularly Appalachia. I think a lot of American entertainment, especially TV, is silly and stupid. I bristle to think of the truth in "a sucker is born every minute." I hate the

The Hillbillies gave a face to Appalachia, and it wasn't necessarily a negative one.

greed and consumption our society extols. Yet, I'm not sure *The Beverly Hillbillies* is as bad as all that. Besides, people loved it, particularly people in the South. Were we as stupid as the stereotype suggests? In its ten-year run, *The Beverly Hillbillies* was always in the top 20 most-watched shows, usually in the top 10, and often #1. It has been in syndication since the 1970s. Can 90 million people be wrong? Well, yeah. They can also be onto something. I think there's something in *The Beverly Hillbillies* the critics missed.

Sandra Ballard does too. In an essay called "Where Did Hillbillies Come From?" (in *Back Talk from Appalachia*, University of Kentucky Press, 1999), she traces the sources of the comic hillbilly. She found images that connect the hillbilly fool on back to Bible times. They are "mockers, truth-tellers, and mirrors of culture, subversive identities that overlap and intertwine."

She suggests that perhaps the reason a lot of Southerners and Appalachians buy into the perceived lazy hillbilly stereotype is because they "get the joke." The hillbilly takes his ease while all around him are working but to what end? Riches and glitter do not delude him. He remains himself.

It's possible that Americans watched *The Beverly Hillbillies* because they were malicious and mean-spirited and loved to see their "inferiors" ridiculed and conned week after week, year after year. It's possible that millions of Americans had the IQ of Jethro Bodine and couldn't do any better than think the Clampetts were funny. It's possible that their boorish sensibilities made them incapable of understanding anything better although they seemed to understand comedies like *The Dick Van Dyke Show* well enough.

According to *Total Television*, the eight most widely watched half-hour programs of all time are episodes of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Every last one of them was aired during the first three months of 1964, in the wake of President Kennedy's assassination.

Time went on and things got both wonderful and weird. Millions of Americans

cared enough to go to Washington DC and gather around to hear a black man from Georgia tell about his dream. Massive boycotts were behind him, the Nobel Prize and his own murder yet to come. The kids stopped cutting their hair and came home looking funny around the eyes. They started marching around shouting stuff like "Hell No We Won't Go!" Abbreviations like "DMZ" and "LSD" were banded like words. People wanted to get naked in public and have babies only if they wanted them. Horrible pictures of terrified kids from a place called Vietnam kept emerging. In the middle of it all, men walked on the moon. Then there was Watergate.

Through it all, people watched *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Who could blame them for wanting to escape? Maybe it wasn't escape at all. Maybe people sought comfort and guidance. Far removed from everything they'd ever known, the Clampetts never lost their sense of self or the knowledge of what was important to them. They cherished and respected each other. They were loyal to their friends. Week after week they demonstrated the old psychotherapeutic adage, "you can't control what happens to you, you can only control your response to it." As Faulkner might say, they endured.

If the characters of Granny, Jed, Jethro, and Elly May are one-dimensional, so be it. If you think about it, none of the characters in our mythologies are fully drawn. That's not their purpose. Their purpose is to entertain and enlighten, to teach us about ourselves. After forty years, the Hillbillies are surely part of our national mythology. They gave a face to Appalachia, and it wasn't necessarily a negative one. Those were the years of the Great Society when government reached into Appalachia and tried to help it pull itself from its poverty. VISTA came into the mountains like the Peace Corps went overseas.

Things got better. It wouldn't have happened without the people's consent.

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Southern Reader

It's what you like about the South.

