Issue Number Twenty-Six | Spring/Summer 2022

Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZ N THE SOUTH

Alex Leach

DJ/Bluegrass Wunderkind all grown up

WDVX @ 25

A classic anniversary for a classic radio station

Hydrapulper

A Summer job and a metaphor for life

Fruit Cocktail

A Summer memory

The Pest

The joys of Summer

Last Bus to Georgia

With time to spare, go by air

The Ancestor

An excerpt from Michael Meyer's book

An Absence of Memories

A memoir by Charlton Hillis

High Heel Sneakers

Steve Hyder's sole music

davidshinner

Hey Kid, What's the Frequency?

By David Ray Skinner

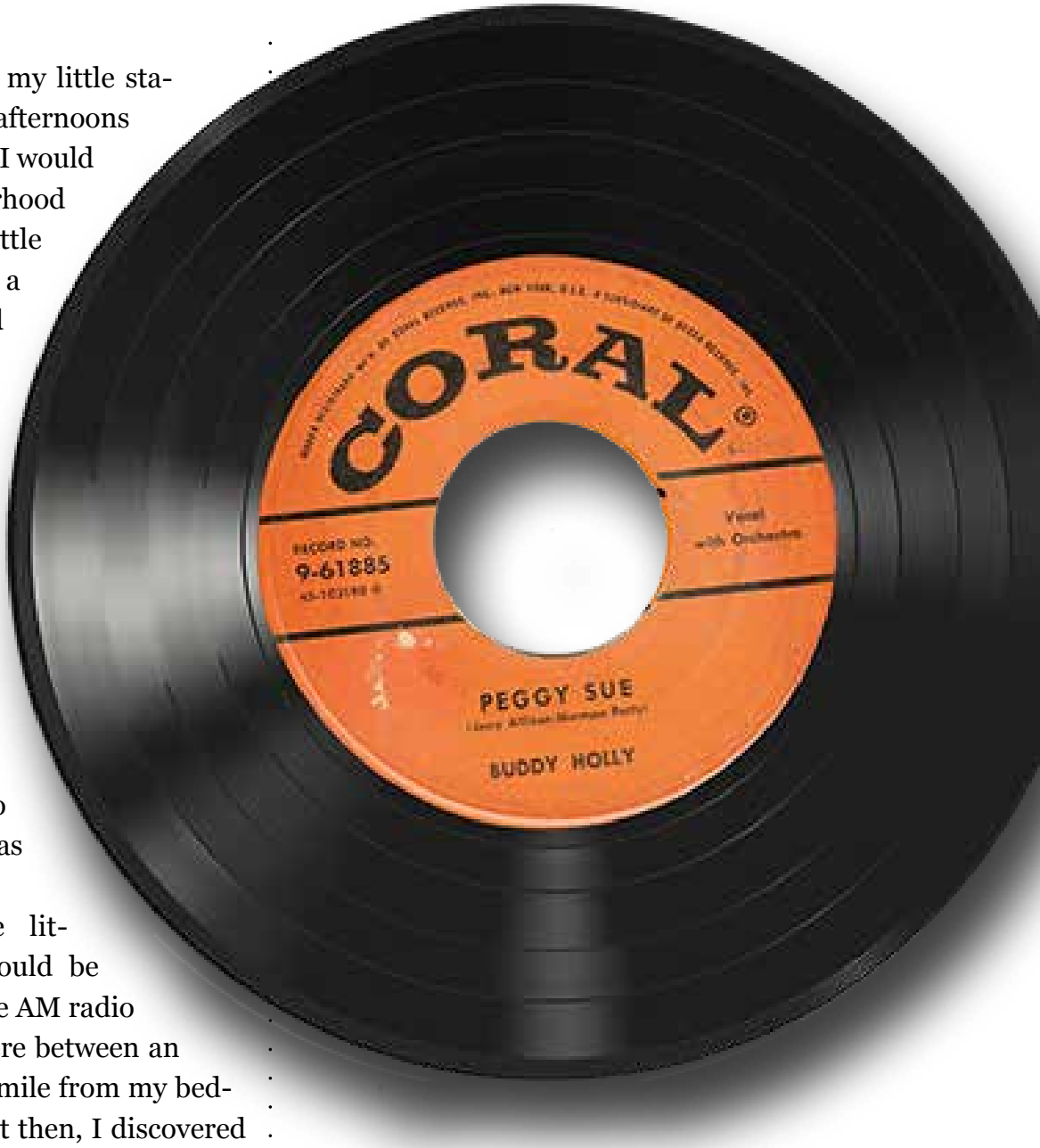
Long before my father was a B-24 tail gunner in the hostile skies of the South Pacific during WWII, he was a farmer's son on a small farm 65 miles northwest of Nashville.

As a kid, he had two passions: tinkering around, inventing machines and listening to the pure country music wafting through the Tennessee night from Nashville's Grand Ole Opry. There wasn't even electricity in the tiny farming community; my grandparents had the luxury of a cabinet radio that they would hook up to their pickup's battery every Saturday night when the friends and kin would come to listen to Bill Monroe, Roy Acuff, and my dad's favorite group, The Carter Family.

After the war, he and my mother moved to Nashville, and when I was born, I inherited one of his two passions; I never got the knack of inventing, but I loved that old country music. Actually, I loved music in general. One of my parents' friends was a Marine DJ, and he made sure I had plenty of promotional 45s to play on my 3-speed (78, 45, and 33 RPM) record player. It was not unusual for me to entertain my five- and six-year-old friends with playing Buddy Holly's "Peggy Sue," followed by Bill Monroe's "Blue Moon of Kentucky."

This inherited passion was not lost on my dad, and in the late '50s, he started working on a little invention for me that he called "The Radio Station." It was a tiny thing, around 4"x 3", machined out of sheet metal with tubes and transistors on the top and underneath and a simple on/off switch. Two sides were bent to provide "footers" for the device, and if you ever reached for the device with fingers sliding under one of the "unfooted" sides, the little transmitter would bite, punishing you with a semi-mild electric shock. My Uncle Ray had given me a little, portable reel-to-reel tape recorder (this was in the late '50s-early '60s, before cassette recorders) when I was eight or nine, and I used the microphone that came with the recorder and plugged it into "the radio station" to transmit my voice and the

records I played. I called my little station "WKID," and in the afternoons before I would broadcast, I would ride around my neighborhood on my bike with my little reel-to-reel. I would have a list of the records I owned and would show it to my friends and ask them to pick one to "dedicate" to someone (usually their mother or a sibling), and I'd tell them when I would be "on the air." After collecting the dedications, I would rush home, unplug the mic from the recorder, and plug it into the transmitter. Then, I was in business.

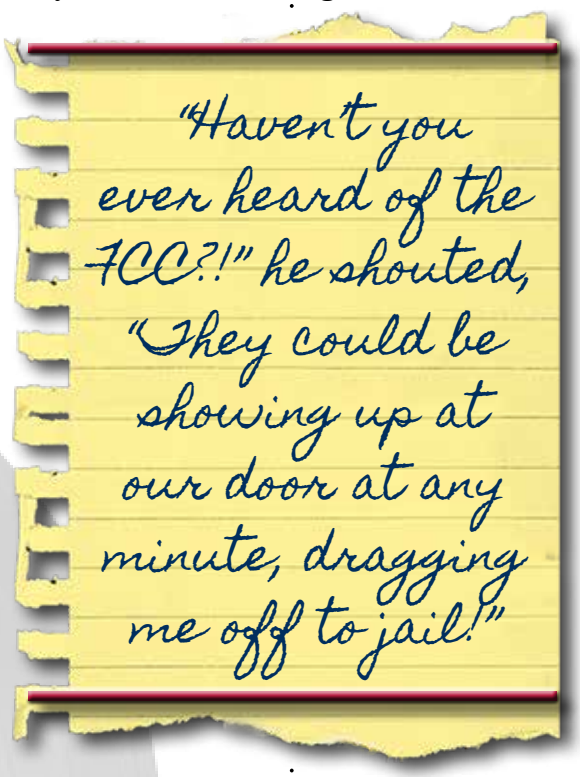


The signal from the little transmitter (which could be found on the far end of the AM radio dial) would reach anywhere between an eighth and a quarter of a mile from my bedroom in all directions. But then, I discovered something. When I hooked up the yellow-wire "antenna" that snaked out from underneath the transmitter to the screen in my bedroom window, it "supercharged" and extended the signal. Soon, listeners from further away than next door or a few doors down were able to catch my afternoon shows.

Now, as I mentioned, my dad loved tinkering with machines. That included washing machines, televisions, radios, and even cars. Actually, especially cars. Around this same time, he had this major project he was working on. He had bought two 1956 Ford Crown Victorias. A 1956 Crown Vic was basically a two-toned, two-door Ford Fairlaine with a stainless-steel band trimming the B-pillars (hence, "crowning" the roof). One of the Crown Vics my dad bought had been totalled in a highway crash, but the engine was in perfect condition; the other one had a unblemished body, but the engine was blown. My dad's project was to combine the two cars, repainting and re-upholstering the entire interior and dropping the good engine into the good body. Working in his spare time—on nights and on weekends—it took him about a year. The final touch on the Crown Vic was "The Wonderbar." The Wonderbar was the precursor to the scan function on the car radios of today. It literally was a bar over

the dial, and when pushed, it would find the nearest broadcasting station, it's tuning knob spinning as it looked. It was aptly named.

So, while my dad was putting together the Crown Vic, I was honing my "on-air" skills and trying to figure out how to boost my signal even more. Once he finished the car, he was able to drive himself to work (from our suburban home to downtown Nashville) and back. One late afternoon, on his way home, he hit The Wonderbar. He was about a mile from our house, and imagine his surprise when he heard my voice wafting over the AM airwaves: "Hey y'all, that's 'Everyday,' one of my favorite songs from Buddy Holly, who recently died in a plane crash." Actually, "Everyday" was on the flip side of my most favorite song, "Peggy Sue." and with my limited record collection, every side got a spin...every day.



As my dad gripped the big steering wheel on the Crown Vic, he almost had his own crash. A few minutes later, he was storming into my room, unplugging the transmitter and horrified that the antenna was attached to my window screen. "Haven't you ever heard of the FCC?!" he shouted, "They could be showing up at our door at any minute, dragging me off to jail!"

I can easily imagine a variation of this scenario happening to someone driving through Knoxville sometime around 1999 or 2000. They hit "scan" on their radio, and all of sudden this kid's voice jumps out of the speakers and he's talking about Bill Monroe. The difference is this kid, Alex Leach, was a real DJ and he and his station, WDVX, were actually licensed and approved by the FCC. Plus, he didn't have to drive around Knoxville on his bike with a portable circa-1959 reel-to-reel recorder.

This year WDVX turns 25 and Alex is not only still on the air, he also has his own bluegrass band and matching bus, and both Alex and WDVX's 25th are covered in this issue.

And while we're going with similar-themed articles, we have one by W.C. Wilkinson, Jr. and another one by Charlton Walters Hillis, which both deal with memories—both false and real.

We also have an excerpt from Michael Meyer's novel, "The Ancestor," which touches on a favorite theme of mine—time travel.

Marshall Lancaster—always a crowd favorite—talks about the Hydrapulper, a man-eating machine he had to deal with to get through his college summers.

Rounding out this issue is attorney Steve Hyder's time in the spotlight, belting out "High Heel Sneakers," and Ron Burch's "Last Bus to Georgia," a small-plane cautionary tale.

Hope you enjoy the issue!

David

David Ray Skinner
ePublisher

TableofContents

Issue Number Twenty-Six | Spring/Summer 2022

ePublisher

David Ray Skinner

Associate Editor

Jann Marthaler

Contributors

Billie Martin Dean Buckles

Charlton Walters Hillis

Stephen Hyder

Marshall Lancaster

Michael Meyer

Niles Reddick

Clifton Wilkinson, Jr.

SouthernReader

Hey Kid, What's the Frequency?
A look at what's inside this issue . . .page 2

Bluegrass Wunderkind All Grown Up Catching up with DJ/musician Alex Leach 6

WDVX Turns Silver
The "little station that could" celebrates its 25th anniversary . . . . . .page 12

Somewhere in Time
An excerpt from Michael Meyer's historical fiction novel, "The Ancestor" . . . . .page 14

Memories of Fruit Cocktails
A memoir from a past time in rural Georgia by Clifton Wilkinson, Jr. . . . . .page 18

The Hydrapulper
Marshall Lancaster's story of the terror of a summer job. . . . . .page 22

The Pest
Billie Martin Dean Buckles talks about a summer annoyance . . . . . page 30

Memories and the Absence of Them Charlton Walters Hillis's take on anamneses. . . . . .page 32

Steppin' Into the Spotlight Stephen Hyder's reflection on his rock 'n' roll days in East Tennessee. . . . . page 38

Last Bus to Georgia
Ron Burch's memoir about planes, busses and automobiles. . . . . .page 42

Alex Leach

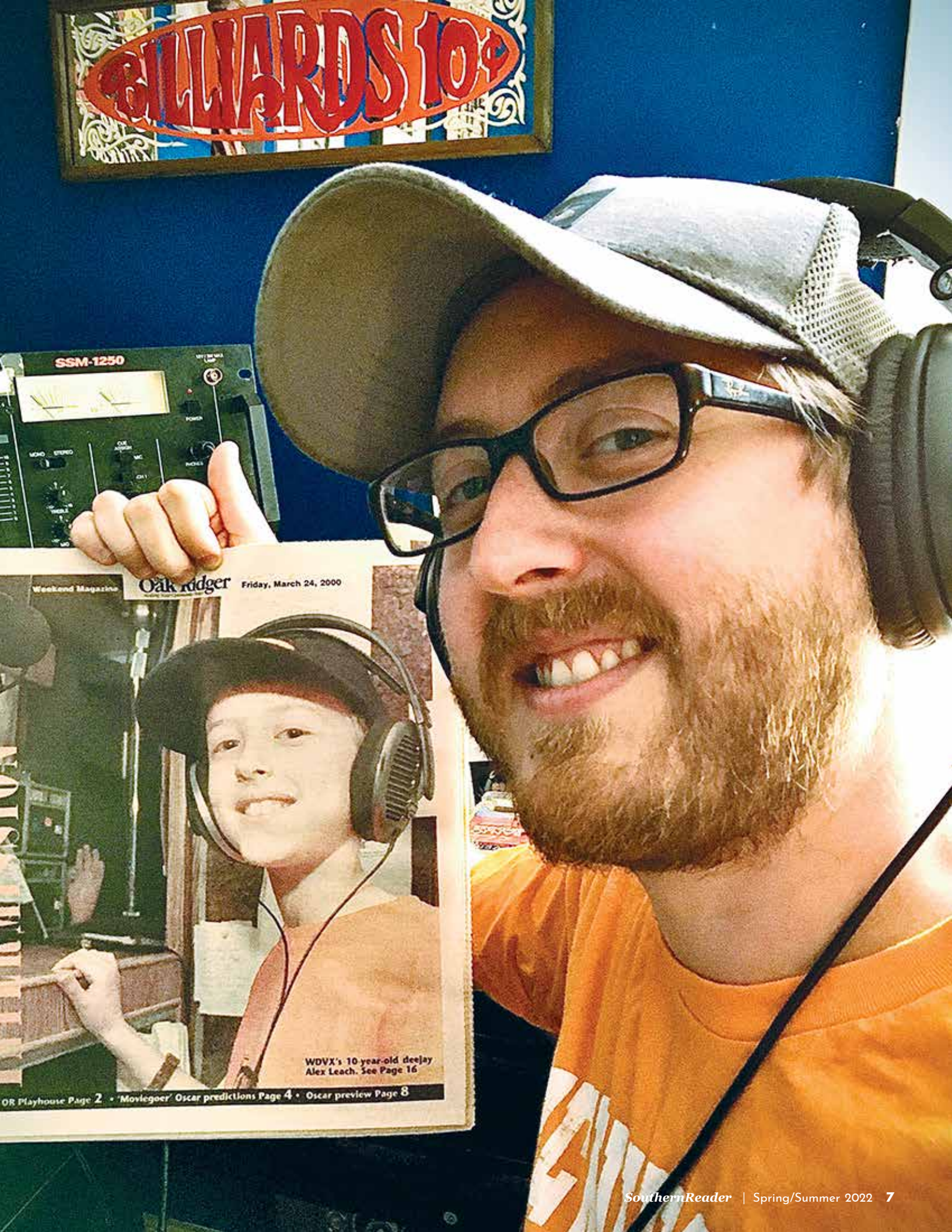
Bluegrass Wunderkind All Grown Up

by David Ray Skinner

Picture if you will (as Rod Serling would say on many a "Twilight Zone" intro), a work-weary tourist, motoring his way through Knoxville, Tennessee on a warm Summer Tuesday evening in 1999.

He and his family are on their way to a cabin in the Smokies that they've rented for the week for their annual Summer vacation. As they pass the Knoxville city limit sign on Interstate 40, his wife is fiddling with the "scan" button on the radio of their rental car. There's a brief moment of modern country, a few seconds of hip-hop, and heated talk show argument, but then, from seemingly out of nowhere comes the voice of a young boy talking about Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys and when Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs were a part of the band (the two would leave Monroe and his band in 1948 and form the Foggy Mountain Boys).

...from seemingly out of nowhere comes the voice of a young boy talking about Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys...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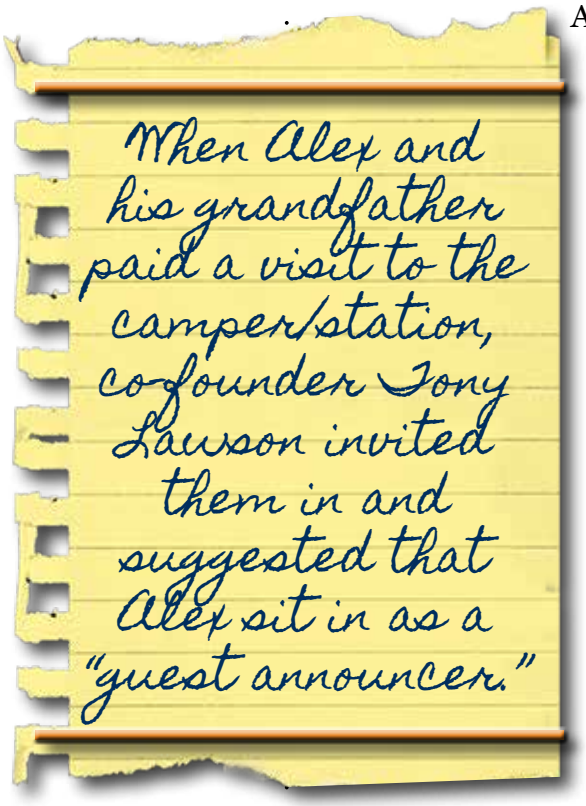
Oak Ridger
Friday, March 24, 2000
WDVX's 10-year-old deejay
Alex Leach. See Page 16
OR Playhouse Page 2 • 'Moviegoer' Oscar predictions Page 4 • Oscar preview Page 8

The wife stops the scan and they listen. Who is this kid and where is this coming from? And...how does he know all this stuff? Then, as if on cue, the kid enthusiastically says, *"You're listening to 'The Bluegrass **Spay-Shul**!'"*

Then, the familiar strains of the theme from the "Beverly Hillbillies" fills the rental car. That's followed by Monroe's "Blue Moon of Kentucky." The kids in the backseat are either nonplussed or asleep, but the man and his wife are simply mystified. They both watched the "Beverly Hillbillies" as young children, themselves, but the only version of "Blue Moon of Kentucky" either of them had ever heard was from their parent's Elvis collection.



The DJ prodigy behind the mic that night was Alex Leach, a 10-year-old from Jacksboro, Tennessee, a small town just up Interstate 75 from Knoxville. The station that the car's radio scanner had captured was WDVX, and the show was being broadcast from a humble 14-foot camper parked at the Fox Inn Campground, also just off I-75 in nearby Clinton, Tennessee.

Alex had grown up surrounded by his parents' hard rock and country music (including Guns 'n' Roses and the Grateful Dead), but when he clicked on the *"bluegrass"* entry in his computer's *Encarta Encyclopedia*, the Bill Monroe version of "White House Blues" that jumped out of the computer's speakers was a whole different animal. Monroe's 1954 recording of the traditional song was about the assassination of President McKinley, and not only did it tie history and bluegrass together in a tight little bow, it reached out and captured the imagination of young Alex.

Plus, his coal-mining grandfather, Scobey Asbury, was more than anxious to encourage him to dive into the bluegrass pool. He had a turntable, and his record collection was full of bluegrass chestnuts.

"I was probably eight years old," Alex said (in WDVX's 20th Anniversary Collectable book), "and my papaw told me about this little station in a camper about 20 minutes from us."

When Alex and his grandfather paid a visit to the camper/station, co-founder Tony Lawson invited them in and suggested that Alex sit in as a "guest announcer."

Not long after that, Tony invited Alex to become a regular DJ.

"Tony tutored me," Alex said, "It was, 'Here's the CD player, here's the microphone, here's the board and controls. I'm going to go out and have a bite to eat, so it's sink or swim...'"

Now, over 20 years later, Alex is still on board and behind the mic every weekday morning for *"Rize & Shine,"* and every Tuesday night for the *"Bluegrass Special."* But, as an

The Alex Leach Band *(from left to right):* ***Zach Russell*** *– guitar & vocals;* ***JT Coleman*** *– bass; Miranda Leach – vocals;* ***Alex Leach*** *– guitar & vocals;* ***Baker Northern*** *– banjo;* ***Kasey Moore*** *– fiddle & vocals*

added attraction, some of the songs that the station plays were written and performed by Alex and his band. He first picked up the mandolin, and later added the banjo and guitar and started writing songs in high school. Gradually, he became proficient with all three instruments, as well as songwriting.

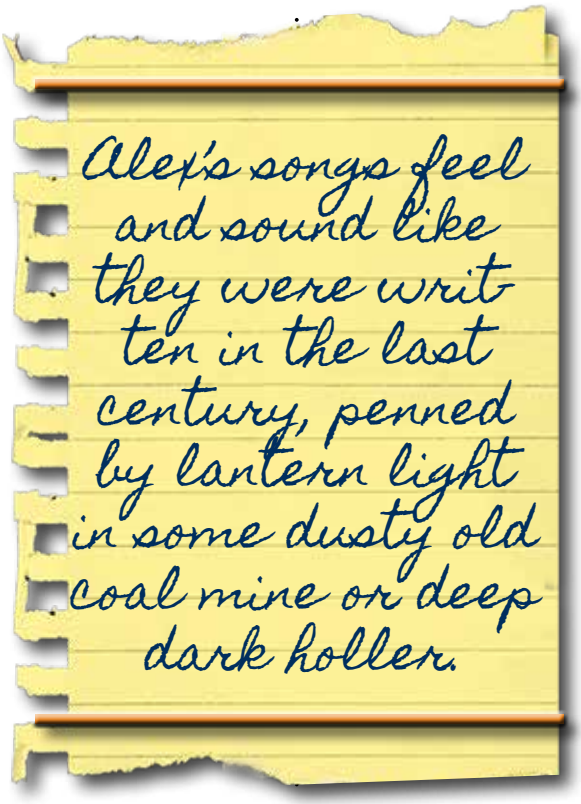
"I was a Freshman in high school, and we were taking a math test," Alex recalled. "At some point, I realized that I wasn't doing so well on the test…so, I figured I may as well be somewhat productive, and I started writing my first song."

By the time he was finishing up high school, Alex's stage experience and his songwriting had begun to attract notice. His co-written song, "Mountain Heartache," sounds as if it had sprung from the dusty song journals

of A.P. Carter, himself. The song is about a mountain boy born "in the year of '33." The listener than learns that after the death of the boy's parents, his brothers try to raise him but that "awful war" takes them, too.

He has to go to work in the coal mines, but there's a light at the end of the mine's tunnel; he meets and marries a "city woman," and they have a child.

But, alas, the light turns out to be a train—a rich city man steals away his wife and child, leaving him alone, yet again, and watching as his earthly time runs out. It's classic Southern Gothic set to a 2/4 bluegrass beat.



That's the genius of Alex's writing. Much like the music of Gillian Welch, whose dark songs are reminiscent of old Appalachia, Alex's songs sound like they could have been played on Saturday nights at the Grand Ole Opry, circa 1935.

Although he cites his influences as being as varied as the 1960s Beach Boys and the present-day, free-country, avant-garde band, Lake Street Dive, Alex's songs feel and sound like they were written in the last century, penned by lantern light in some dusty old coal mine or deep dark holler.

That's not an isolated opinion, because other bluegrass bands have also covered "Mountain Heartache," including Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper, whose version went to #1 on the Bluegrass Today chart. The tune fits into a set quite nicely sandwiched between "Blue Moon of Kentucky" and "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" and could very well become a bluegrass standard in its own right in years to come.

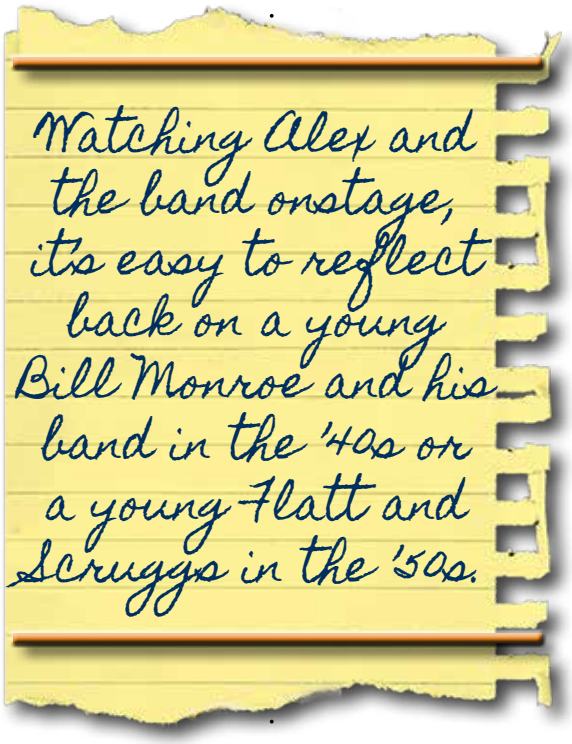
That's no accident. Alex's writing reflects his time and experience on the road, playing bluegrass throughout the country. For a number of years, he played banjo and sang harmony with Ralph Stanley II and his band, and in 2014, he also sat in with Ralph's father, the legendary Ralph Stanley, on the Grand Ole Opry, playing mandolin and singing harmony. He also appeared onstage with Marty Stuart and The Fabulous Superlatives.

Then, at a festival near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Tennessee boy, Alex met Miranda Yochum, who had grown up in Seneca Falls, New York (which is believed by some to be the inspiration for the fictional town of Bedford Falls, the setting of the Christmas classic, "It's a Wonderful Life"). Although their geographical backgrounds were totally different, they discovered common ground, musically.

Miranda turned out to not only be Alex's future bandmate, but also his lifemate. In 2018, they were married in East Tennessee, and the following year, they started putting together The Alex Leach Band. Everything was falling into place. But, just as in "Mountain

Heartache," the light at the end of the tunnel turned out to be a train called COVID.

The band patiently waited it out. Alex continued hosting WDVX's *"Bluegrass Special,"* only he had to set his mic up at his home in Jacksboro and broadcasting from there. Miranda began concentrating on graphic design and her business helping women entrepreneurs, the Miranda Leach Collective. They were also able to record "I'm Happiest When I'm Moving," their debut album on the Mountain Home Music label (which was produced by the legendary and all-around good guy, Jim Lauderdale).



By 2021, as the pandemic began to subside, they were burning up the roads, playing gigs and festivals from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast, and everywhere in between, and the band began gaining traction and attention.

So, now it's a new year, and hopefully, the hurdles have been jumped and the pandemic and masks can be left in the dust...*ladies and gentlemen, put your hands together for the Alex Leach Band.* In addition to Alex and Miranda, the band features Kasey Moore on fiddle and vocals, JT Coleman on bass, Zach Russell on guitar and vocals and Baker Northern on banjo.

Plus, they've traded in their old shuttlebus for a Silver Eagle, which will make it easier to arrive at and play for their various scheduled American and Canadian concerts. They'll have to use something completely different for their prospective European tour, Alex added, but as always, they'll go with the flow.

Watching Alex and the band onstage, it's easy to reflect back on a young Bill Monroe and his band in the '40s, a young Flatt & Scruggs in the '50s and a young Del McCoury in the '60s. And, after all, that's really the point. In this day and age of pomp and flash and polished plastic pop and country, it takes a hard worker to embrace tradition and make it their own...and make it look easy in the process.

And yes...it takes someone like Alex Leach to make bluegrass...well, ***spay-shul***...both on the air and on the stage.

For more information about ***Alex Leach*** *and his band, and/or also for a list of their upcoming concerts, please check out the band's website:* ***thealexleachband.com****. For information about* ***Miranda Leach,*** *you can also check out her website at* ***mirandaleachcollective.com****.*

The *'Little Station That Could'* Turns Silver

by David Ray Skinner

Twenty-five years ago, on November 5, 1997, after a few days of being off the air, WDVX – FM lit up the East Tennessee airwaves, beamed from a 14-foot camper at the entrance to Fox Inn Campground in beautiful Clinton, Tennessee.

The station had been cobbled together by Tony Lawson and Don Burggraf, and the camper actually was a huge step forward for the station; it was at least *home* for the time being. Burggraf called it *"Radio in a Can."*

> ...no longer was the "little station in a camper" being listened to by East Tennesseans, they were attracting listeners and fans from as far away as England and Australia..

It didn't take long to get noticed. Its freeform brand of broadcasting (Abba to Zappa, Bluegrass to Beatles) caught the attention of both the media and scores of local and nationally-known musicians. Included in the bevy of musicians who loved the station was iconic songwriter, John Hartford, who had penned, Glenn Campbell's monster hit "Gentle on my Mind." Hartford even hosted his own show on the station. The show, *"The Anderson County Mobile Home Companion,"* was as unique as Hartford's blend of music. Tracks off his ground-breaking album, "Aereo-Plain" are still being aired on the station today, as is his *recorded-live-in-the-trailer* performance of *"The Flood of 1997,"* which is his *brilliant-but-biting* commentary on government red tape and political correctness, written and performed in John's uniquely eclectic style.

In 2000, WDVX expanded their radio footprint by putting their programming online. The world noticed; no longer was the *"little station in a camper"* being listened to by East Tennesseans, they were attracting listeners and fans from as far away as England and Australia. The BBC, CBC, PBS News Hour and others featured WDVX and its mission to change

East Tennessee radio. Then, after an article about *"the station in a camper"* in Americana magazine, *No Depression* and a front-page article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* by Drew Jabera, and after a story ran on ABC, the station began capturing fans from throughout the world.

In 2003, WDVX got a boost in power with the addition of a second broadcasting tower, but the camper was starting to show and feel its age. So, in 2004, the station moved to a more permanent home in downtown Knoxville in the Knoxville Visitors Center. It was a win-win for the station, the listeners and the city of Knoxville. Plus, not only did the station finally have a *real bathroom,* it had a stage for live performances. This allowed the station to host *"The Blue Plate Special,"* a live, noontime daily radio show which featured two bands every day from both East Tennessee, and again, the world. The acts have ranged from local part-time bands like Sevier County's *"New Mountain Grass"* to seasoned artists like Marty Stuart, Sam Bush, and Ricky Skaggs and everyone in between, including artists and bands known, unknown and up-and-coming. In 2008, WDVX began producing the successful regular live show *"Tennessee Shines"* at The Bijou Theater in Knoxville, inspired by their very successful 10-year anniversary show in October 2007 (also at The Bijou). For two years, the show was broadcast live from The Bijou. Then, in 2009 and 2010, WDVX produced and promoted "Tennessee Shines at Bonnaroo."

Original photo by Amy Campbell Rochelson

Eventually, in 2017, "Tennessee Shines" moved to Wednesday nights at *Boyd's Jig and Reel* in Knoxville's Old City.

This Fall, in honor of the station's 25th Anniversary, there are number of events planned, including a 25th Anniversary celebration at the Bijou (in Knoxville) on November 3rd.

For more information and for updates, check out their website at WBVX.com.

To hear John Hartford's ***"The Flood of 1997"*** *click here:* **FLOOD**. *Written and performed live by John Hartford at his home (on the banks of the Cumberland River in Madison, TN) for his WDVX show, "The Anderson County Mobile Home Companion."*

'The Ancestor'

Somewhere in Time

by Michael Meyer

The following is an excerpt from Michael Meyer's historical fiction novel, "The Ancestor."

Daniel's finishing his morning shower routine. He walks past the den with the big screen TV blasting CNN to the empty room, into the kitchen looking fresh and awake, wearing his full-length robe.

The sunshine is breaking through. He pours his usual cup of coffee and opens the doorway out onto the balcony, then steps outside. He looks out as he is about to take a sip and freezes like a deer in the headlights. His eyes widen and his face has an expression of astonishment. He's startled by the panoramic view in front of his eyes.

Panning back and forth, almost encircling him, reveals the entire back acreage across the creek is encamped by hundreds of Confederate soldiers.

Most are dressed in uniform, but some are not. There are layers of smoldering campfires among the dozens of tents. Many horses are neighing, exhaling the cold air. Some men are cooking, others washing clothes by the creek, even one is bathing in a heated tub. Many lay sleeping on the ground under wool blankets. Others are cleaning rifles, while some are tending wounded.

The breeze picks up, blowing those same leaves, but a different setting below. Daniel sets down his coffee without taking his eyes off the scene beneath. Suddenly, a flock of honking geese fly overhead, forcing Daniel to look up and catch the identical formation from the previous day vanish into an invisible line in the sky, as if into another dimension.

He scurries downstairs and steps out onto the ground. He pauses and looks left to right, confused by the change of scenery.

He contemplates another shot of whiskey, but keeping clear-headed, steps into the back acreage of his yard and walks toward

the creek then stands at the bank. He spots three young boys gathered around a smoldering fire.

"What are you doing here?" he calls out, squinting if perhaps it was an illusion.

They offer no answer. From the creek's edge, he stretches one leg toward them, stepping on one rock, and then reaches the bank on the other side. His robe turns to a long wool coat in a mystical moment. He begins to walk through the tent area with trepidation. The men are going about their business, acknowledging him, but giving little concern. He walks with a bit more trust then approaches and stops by one soldier, a young boy, stooping and cooking with a pan over a fire.

"Is this some sort of reenactment?"

The boy glances up at him, but gives no response. He asks the other soldier, "How old are you?"

One boy stands and spits, eyeing him up and down. "Seventeen, sir."

Daniel, feigning a grin, and sensing relief exclaims, "You're a Scout troop, right?"

The third boy sharpens his knife, but says nothing.

"Learning survival skills. That's good," Daniel juxtapositions a more cautious tone.

Daniel again tries to uncover this strange scene. "Seriously. What are you doing here?"

The one boy seems more talkative, with a strong country Southern twang; he is the first to explain, "Texas Brigade, sir. We're holding Sandy Creek til further orders."

"You're holding my back yard!" Daniel exclaims.

They all look at him. Quickly, cautious again, Daniel covers up his remarks, "That's good," as he looks around suspiciously. "Holding it from who?"

"Yankees! Maybe two days out. Got us on the run fer now. Waiting orders from General Hood where to ambush 'em."

"Yankees! Maybe two days out. Got us on the run fer now. Waiting orders from General Hood where to ambush 'em."

The third one, sharpening his knife, chimes in barely understandable, "That yorn house yonder? Yuz got any chickens?"

Daniel turns back and sees his house, as it would've looked 150 years ago. He now looks back to the soldier with a crazy expression. "Yorn? You guys are good. Really, what's going on?" It's all incredulous to him.

The Rebel boy cooking holds out a frying pan after taking a sample. "Take ye' some. Darn tasty, bein' brown tail."

Daniel looks about questioning as his thoughts try to rationalize what his eyes are seeing and his ears are hearing. The friendlier Rebel boy spits again. "Squirrel meat," he pauses. "You ain't got nothin ta worry about, sir. We won't bother yer house."

Daniel decides to look around more. He pets a horse on the face, then glances further. He notices two officers looking over a map outside a tent with a table. He then walks up to them.

They stand straight and look his way. The

first uniformed officer looks up and notices a somewhat nervous Daniel approaching.

With an educated tone of comfort, he assures him "We won't be needing your house, if that's what you're seeking."

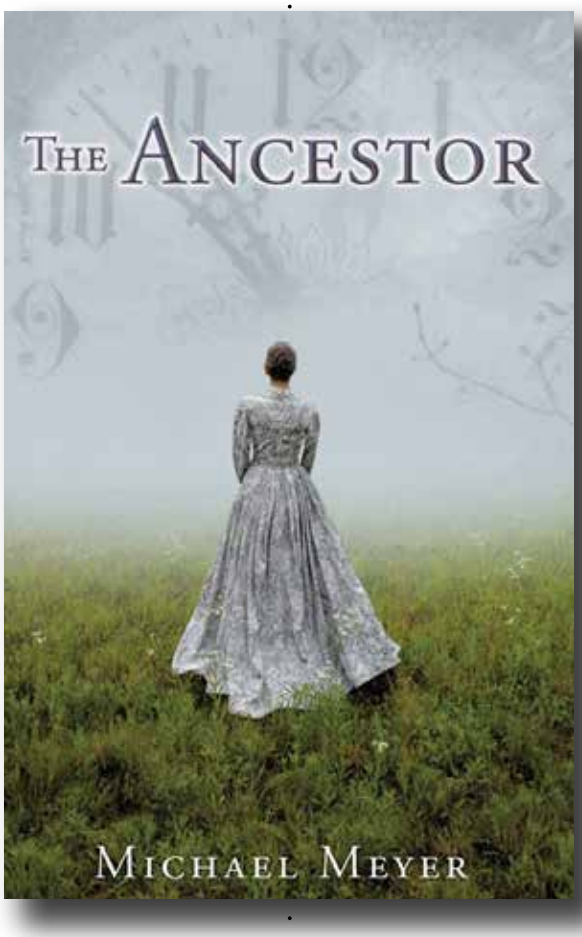
"Well, that's a relief."

He looks at the map with puzzlement. "You're lost, right?"

"No sir. This is Sandy Creek Ridge, yonder is Sugar Hill. Cavalry scouted the area a fortnight back."

The other officer looks over Daniel then, with a deep good ol' boy voice, "You seen any Yanks?"

Quickly, a civilian rider pulls up and slides off his horse with a saddle bag full of mail. He dumps it out on the table. Then he hands the officers specially tied letters.



The rider is out of breath, "Y'alls lucky I got through. Yanks everywhere twixt here and Atlanta. No more mail, Lieutenant. This is it."

They hand him some water and food. He hops back on his horse and rides off. Daniel's mouth is open.

The second officer grimaces, "That settles it."

They go back to their map.

"Agreed. Hood ain't comin'. We'll retreat further south."

Daniel walks around unnoticed to where he can see the mail. He picks up an envelope and reads the postmark: "AUGUST 19, 1864."

He then picks up a post card, dated the same year, with perfect cursive handwriting.

"My dearest beloved husband, the war can wait. Our children are hungry and crying for their father. Please come home. Your devoted wife, Martha May."

Daniel sets it down in awe, completely perplexed. "Excuse me. This is dated August 1864. These letters are all dated…"

They chuckle and look at each other grinning "That's only a month late. Least it's the same year." More laughter. Now Daniel looks around in disbelief. He makes one last attempt at clarity.

"In that case, could I borrow your cellphone? Mine's dead."

They look at him with blank stares and dead silence. Daniel politely dismisses his request, "Never mind then."

He looks at his wrist, but there's no watch. "It seems I've lost track of time."

Michael Meyer *is a Georgia (by way of Kansas and California) author and screenplay writer. His historical novel, "The Ancestor," is based on his ancestor who fought for the Union and died at Andersonville. His book, "The Ancestor," is available on Kindle, iBooks, and other online platforms.*

Memories of Fruit Cocktails

by Clifton Wilkinson, Jr.

It doesn't happen very often. Maybe it's because we're all so busy these days—working, grocery shopping, picking up laundry, or *fill in your chore here*. However, when I have one of these flashbacks, it tends to stop me in my tracks.

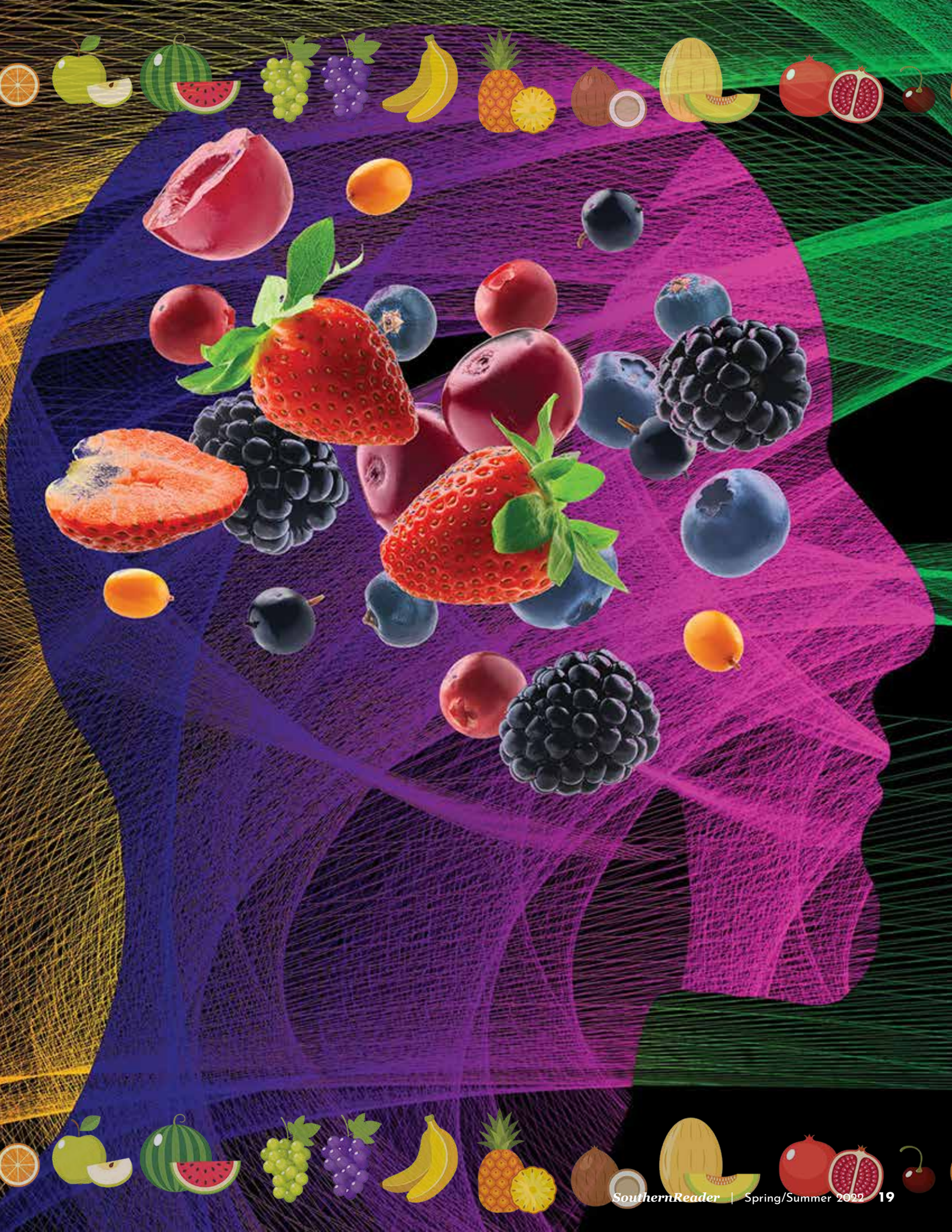
Whereas, minute details seem to go unnoticed, such as driving through an intersection and not remembering if the light was green (I'm sure it was—I mean, *nobody crashed into the side of my car*). On the other hand, every now and then, I see something that fires off cerebral neurons. Immediately, I have visions of an old friend, a pet, or an event that happened years ago. I guess it's like what my friend, Jonathan told me. Whenever anyone around him mentions the James Bond movie, *"Dr. No,"* he is reminded of Emily—his ex. Professors I know say that this is a psychological phenomenon know as *"hypnagogic regression."* But to simplify it, I'll just call it *cerebral flashback*.

Professors I know say that this is a psychological phenomenon know as "hypnagogic regression." But to simplify it, I'll just call it "cerebral flashback."

Recently, my father was in the hospital. Don't worry—it turned out well, and he's back to his old self. Plus, being in the hospital (as a patient or a visitor) can offer ample time to share stories and memories that once seemed lost. Dad and I discussed current public policies, while we watched a 24-hour news station. He joked with the nurses, and they seemed to enjoy hearing us relive how the biggest bass that ever existed got away. Some nurses are nice like that.

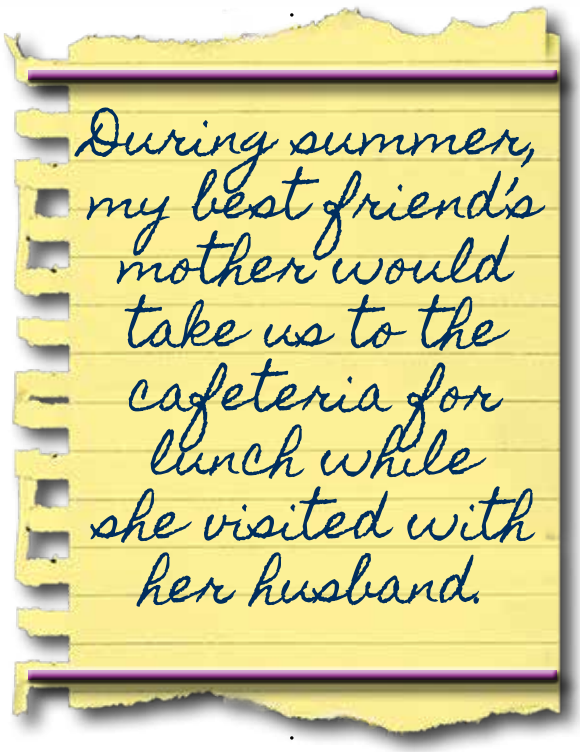
While my father was reposing, I decided to get a soda, so I casually strolled around the halls. In fact, I like to explore buildings, especially if I am staying overnight. Granted, it may be a natural safety mechanism to want to know my surroundings—the floors, the stairs, the exits. You know those Fire Escape diagrams posted on the wall near the elevators and stairwells of every floor—I am one of those people who read them. It always contains a bright red *"You Are Here"* dot.

I'm not sure why I have this propensity to always know *"where I am,"* but I don't believe it's because I fear impending disaster. I vividly remember my first stay at the Hyatt Riverfront in Savannah. The fire alarm woke everyone several times one night. Since I was on the front of the hotel, I could see the fire trucks twelve stories below at the hotel entrance—no fire, though. Later, Dublin Mayor Albert Franks (we were attending a Georgia Municipal Association conference) told me that the hotel was



new and they hadn't worked out the fire alarm "*sensitivity setting*." Mayor Franks had a calming way about him, but even the mayor could stop the stream of check-outs the following morning.

Anyway, while strolling along the corridors of the hospital, I decided to visit the cafeteria. A little caffeine never hurt. After several years of weaning myself from great southern sweet tea, I now drink Diet Coke—another southern drink. However, as if I cannot get all the Southern out of the boy, I must have ice with my Coke. Plenty of ice. In fact, the worst part about foreign travel is not the removal of shoes at the airport or the inane attitude of the TSA employees, but how little ice is provided with soft drinks. I remember while trout fishing with my father in Georgian Bay at Thornberry, Ontario, we grew tired of the extra charge McDonalds included for "ice." *What the heck?* Please don't misunderstand. I'm not talking about asking for extra ice in a separate cup. I expect to pay extra at a convenience store for the ubiquitous cups marked "ICE." However, at the Thornberry's McDonalds, they wanted an extra quarter for adding ice. *Go figure!* We were in Canada. You'd think being in such a northern climate with snow and ice present for most of the year, they would be happy to get rid of the frozen stuff. But ***no***!



While in the hospital cafeteria ordering a Diet Coke in a *to go* cup, I noticed their buffet. It was a regular cornucopia of fried chicken, pasta, fish, and vegetables. Then it happened. An item reminded me of a lunch from many years ago. I saw a cup of fruit cocktail. It looked just like the picture on the label of "*Libby's, Libby's, Libby's* Fruit Cocktail." The fruit was in a cup, which was a blue-green color that wasn't even available in the Crayola giant-size box. For the record, Crayola did have a crayon color called blue-green, and it was close, but not the actual color. Of course, if Crayola didn't have the color, then it really didn't exist, but that's another story.

Back to the fruit cocktail. Every time I see fruit cocktail, it reminds me of Claxton Hospital in downtown Dublin, Georgia, and lunch with one of my best friends and his mother. Claxton Hospital is gone now, but it was on Bellevue Avenue adjacent to the Henry Memorial Presbyterian Church. I thought that it always seemed fitting to have a church next to a hospital.

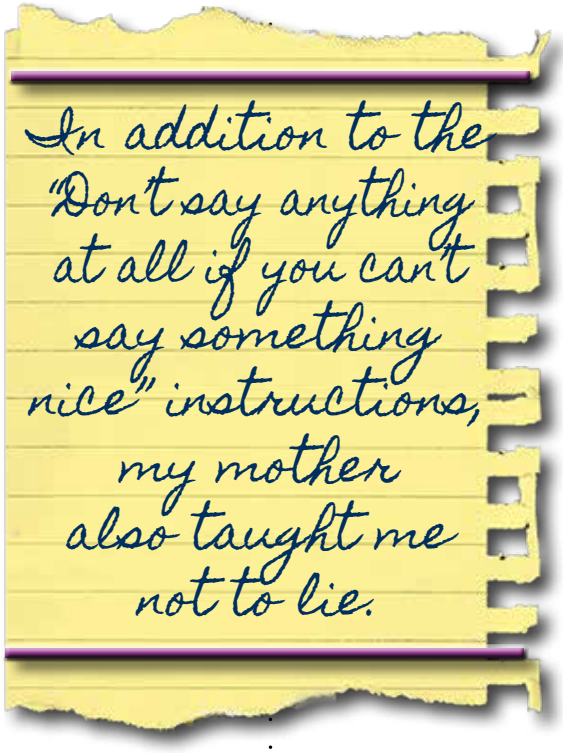
In fact, when we dream of an idyllic community, I believe we think of a place like Bellevue. A street lined with old oak trees and splendid homes. It even has a sidewalk—on *both* sides of the street. Claxton Hospital was a simple brick structure. It was not ornate,but it did seem sturdy—like a place to go if one needed repair. It was not too large, and not as ominous as the county hospital on the outskirts of the city (or most cities). Even with all the sickness, it somehow seemed—well, *pleasant*. It was quiet and calming. There were no elevators in this one-floor hospital nor loud intercom speakers announcing, *"Dr. X Line 4."* But, like most hospitals, Claxton had a cafeteria. During summer, my best friend's mother would take us to the cafeteria for lunch while she visited with her husband. He wasn't sick; he worked there.

Being the nice mother that she was, she would order for us and often ate with us. On the occasion I most remember, I had green beans, mashed potatoes, meatloaf, cornbread (*in the shape of an ear of corn!*), and fruit

cocktail in a little blue-green cup. Everything looked great and smelled better. The mashed potatoes even had a square slice of butter (not *margarine!*) on top that was beginning to melt. I had eaten the vegetables and meatloaf a couple of weeks before, but not the fruit cocktail. Normally, my friend's mother did not add items to our meal without asking if we liked it. As I said, she was a good mom, and, like a good mom, she could tell from the look on my face that something was wrong.

"Don't you eat fruit cocktail?" She asked.

Now, here is where I should have said *"Yes,"* and gobbled up the stuff, along with the rest of the meal. And that would have been it—it wouldn't have even been a memory that I would have recalled. However, my mother always taught me, *"Don't say **anything** at all if you can't say something **nice**."*



All of these thoughts were going through my mind. My family had often enticed me to try fruit cocktail. In fact, several times, they talked me into it with various bribes. It always tasted like medicine to me—I think it was the preservative syrup. Don't get me wrong; I love fruit, but fruit cocktail tasted like faux fruit. Imitation fruit.

However, in addition to the *"Don't say **anything** at all if you can't say something **nice**"* instructions, my mother also taught me not to lie. I didn't always listen to my mother, but this time I did.

"No ma'am."

"But I thought you liked fruit..."

"Yes ma'am. But not this."

There. The deed was done and the memory planted. My friend's mother had tried to make me happy. She knew that I liked fruit. It seems reasonable to think that someone who likes fruit would like fruit cocktail. But, in my defense, have *you ever heard about Christmas fruitcakes?*

Anyway, she was providing a meal she thought I would enjoy. If I enjoyed the meal, it would have pleased her and in turn, made both of us happy. Instead, I felt bad about disappointing her.

Now, older and wiser, (mostly older), I believe we try to help others. But, we feel personally rejected when our assistance is denied, and after several rejections, often, we quit trying. My friend's mother never quit trying to help us. Summers were full of activities—movies, swimming, and even out-of-town shopping.

However, just like in the cafeteria when my dad was in the hospital, every time I see fruit cocktail, I have a *cerebral flashback*. I think of lunch at Claxton Hospital on Bellevue Avenue, and I am sad. I wish I had told my friend's mother how much I appreciated her. As much as I disliked fruit cocktail, I wish I had eaten every slice—just that once. On the other hand, maybe it was one of those life-lessons that I needed to learn—like knowing my surroundings in case of a false fire alarm or learning to love sweet tea. Maybe the guilt that came with the lesson has helped me learn to appreciate those around me and to let them know that I appreciate them. It certainly wasn't to learn to appreciate fruit cocktail.

Clifton Wilkinson, Jr. *is a political junkie and Senior Lecturer of Political Science and Public Administration, Internship Coordinator at Georgia College in Milledgeville, Georgia.*

More Than a Summer Job

The Hydrapulper

by Marshall Lancaster

Many times in my youth, but maybe not often enough, my dad spoke up so as to ensure me of the imminent clarity of my future.

"First, you will go to college, just to see if you like it," he would say. "Then, you will get a job at the factory," he added, "and you can live right here in the house that you grew up in—can't beat the price."

I turned this over in my head several times, but the images remained fuzzy. *Why would I do that?* Shouldn't the purpose of an already much-maligned English degree be *to use it*?

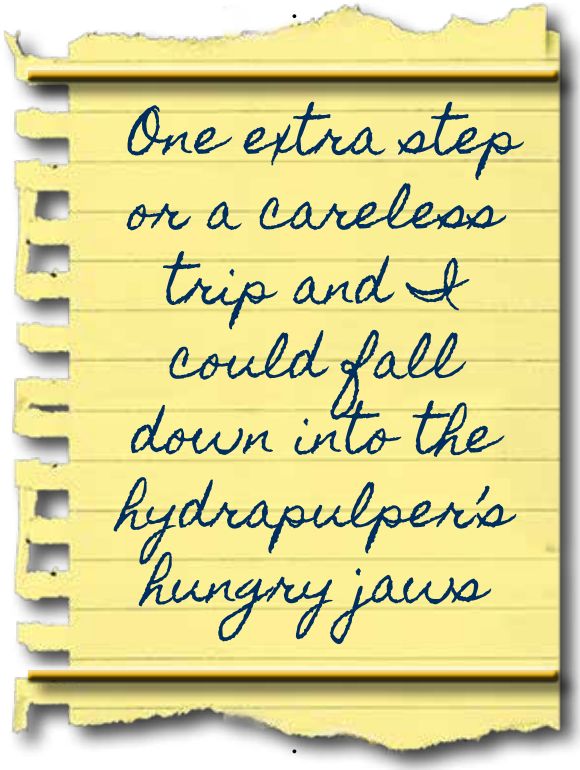
"Why won't you study business or even engineering? This way, big companies will court you," Daddy would ask. Dad may have had his dreams for me, but somehow English was not what he saw coming. For him, it was a language I already spoke. I showed up that first summer to work on the college callboard at a paper mill where my father invested over 30 years of his life. Since elementary school, I had heard horror stories—most of them short, two-three sentences in length—about the dreadful hydrapulper at the local paper mill, so I was not too thrilled.

Since elementary school, I had heard horror stories about the dreadful hydrapulper at the local paper mill.


CAUTION

My father would say, "Were you asking about Jenny recently? You know Jenny. She's your cousin. Her daddy fell to his death at the mill."

Before you could ask the question, *"What's a hydrapulper?"* he would rapidly change the subject, saying no more than "It was a bad fall," as if those words were more than enough to convey the tragedy. You would get no more than that out of my father, and we would ask for no more. *Which syllable was there to misinterpret?*



"When you go down there for work, *which you will certainly do,* things will be different. You might even find yourself doing office work. The pay is great." Dad opined.

We never pressed him for details. Whenever Jenny's name came up, he would reiterate my connection to her father: "Nothing could be done about her daddy. It was an accident. You were some kin to him through your mama."

This paper mill, the place of employment for thousands in the Roanoke Rapids, N.C. area, served as a metaphorical hydrapulper in my life for the decades to come. Would I escape the mill and its hydrapulper (about which I had heard so much), or would I return post-college to earn my living? What would it take to avoid the gaping jaws of the hydrapulper?

The mill employed dozens of aspiring college students on its college callboard. If you were lucky, you got a weekly assignment assisting a maintenance crew.

During my first summer of work on the college callboard at the mill, I mostly helped maintenance crews as a gopher. Late in the summer, however, I had my first encounter with the so-called hydrapulper.

I got called in to work third shift on the Saturday night prior to my arrival at college as a freshman on Monday morning. I wasn't particularly thrilled about the timing, but the pay was good, so I of course went to work. My father and I calculated what I would be paid given that third shift paid a little more than first and second. It was the company's small way of compensating you for working inhumane hours. Throughout the night, forklifts mechanically proceeded to push paper into the long rectangular opening in the floor which housed the ruthless hydrapulper. *Whatever you do*, I thought, *stay away from the hydrapulper!* One extra step or a careless trip and I could fall down into its hungry jaws. It had a hunger for paper, and you wanted to keep it that way. No gigantic bale of white paper was worth risking your life over, regardless of the end product, which was usually fancy paper with a smooth, glossy white finish. Said hydrapulper had the power to break down a bale of white paper into tiny pulpy pieces resembling porridge. I figured that with it being my last night of the

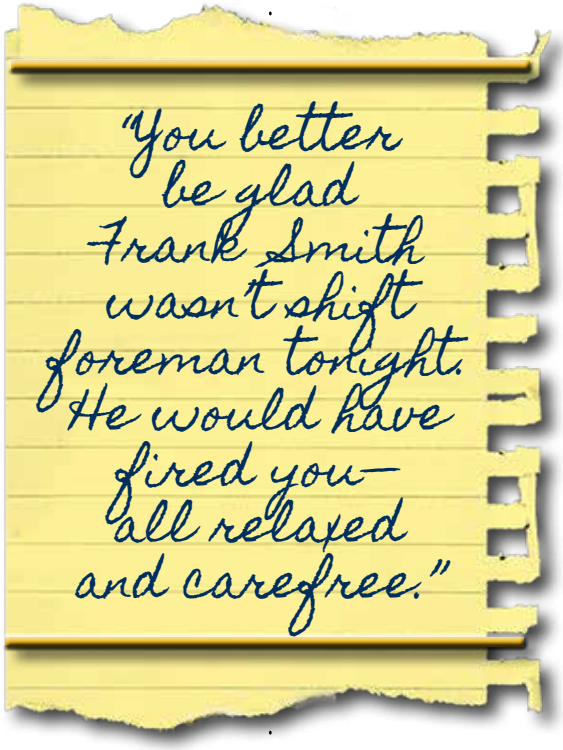
summer and with the promise of college awaiting, I was not about to do anything stupid. I had worked on maintenance crews for forty-hour weeks and was taking a considerable sum of money off to college with me for a boy who had never seen a great deal of money. I was not about to squander my life away by waging war against the hydrapulper on the penultimate night of summer before my arrival on campus. Imagine the headlines: *"Summer Employee Plummets to His Death a Day Before Classes Start"* or *"Deceased Worker Narrowly Misses First Semester."*

I didn't want any part of these, so I took a more pensive approach: *easy does it*.

Finally, a co-worker asked, "Why don't you get closer? You'll never make it in this business unless you show the bale of paper who's boss. Grab it in the right place and wrestle it in. Force it in the hole. Watch me."

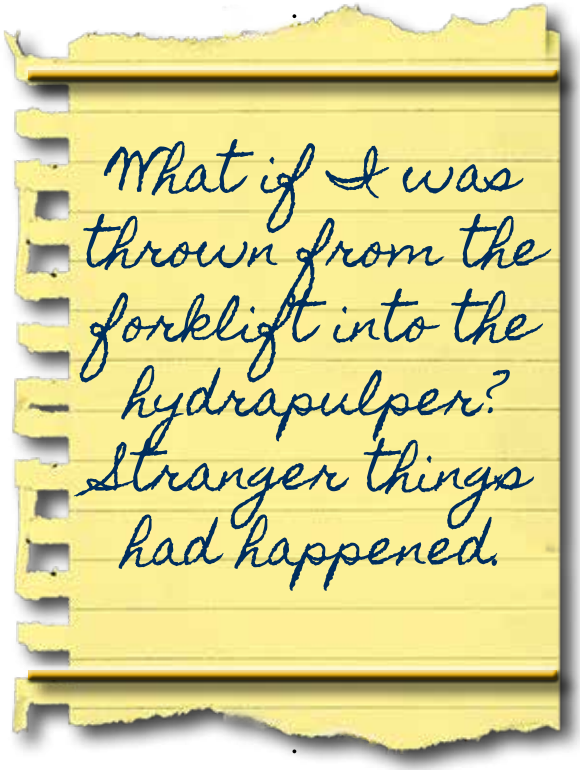
"That's okay. I'm fine right here!" I responded.

The cacophonous sound of loud voices (signaling a paper break), whistles, and the like were enough to add a certain terror to the night. If the hydrapulper were to swallow me whole, *who would even know? How long would it take for these guys to miss me?* A first-timer on the production floor, I was already new and inexperienced. Besides, I was the low man on the totem pole. Was I really going to win a summer award for risking life and limb to feed the machine? Nope. I had already heard my father's stories about accidents. And I had already seen the paper mill claim men who were once college-bound with a single generous paycheck. Many an employee had gotten used to this paycheck. Come August we often heard, "I think I'm going to stay on and earn more money to take to college—when I go." This rarely materialized in an appearance on campus. The new cars, engagement rings, and apartments came quickly, as college was not so much back-burnered as taken completely off the stove. The mill offered the best wages in town, a motivation for some people to accept an early version of the American Dream. Although I survived that nightshift, my ambitious co-worker said, "You better be glad Frank Smith wasn't shift foreman tonight. He would have fired you—all relaxed and carefree. A real college boy for ya."



I did not let him get under my skin as I packed my clothes and supplies for college and made the trip. My mother had written my name on every article of clothing I owned, as she feared that only disaster would come of ten young men sharing one bathroom in our suite. I guess I figured in the back of my mind I had defeated the dreaded hydrapulper temporarily. But a year of college flew by and I was again confronted with the dilemma of

what to do in the summer. I could stay in college and pay rent, or I could go home and reclaim my job at the mill and live rent-free. I picked the latter, and my parents were happy. Challenging though the work may have been at times, I always relished the fact that I could stay at home for free and save money. As for the meals, don't get me started. My mother was an amazing cook, and she'd also whip up food to be taken as lunch the next day. I had no overhead.

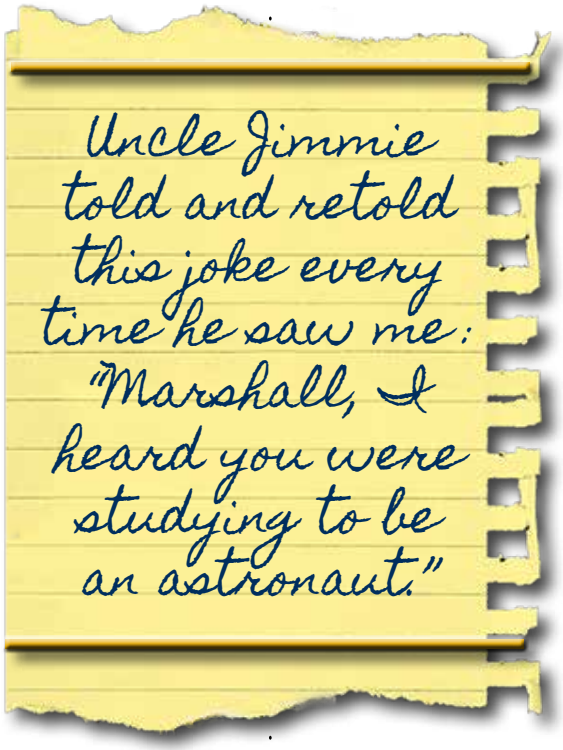


In the summer of '86, however, I faced a different hydrapulper of sorts. My crew was asked to spray several floors of black liquor (a by-product of the paper making process) into a drain. This would seem like no problem, but this liquor was known to burn human skin and a couple of drops would easily blind you without serious medical care. We donned our goggles and helmets, seeking the best protection possible. We worked three 12-hour shifts to get this done, and we were proud of our finished product. I worked with a crew which was usually assigned the tasks no one else wanted. The jobs were frequently dangerous and even life-threatening. We may have survived, but I remember getting a drop of liquor on my nose, causing it to burn for several hours. The rest of the summer had me making security rounds in various locations on an hourly basis throughout the mill. Most of the time it was out of sight and out of mind with the paper-craving hydrapulper. Many times when I passed through the production floor (*care-free,* remember), I didn't think of the hydrapulper as a destroyer of men. I was convinced that upon receiving my degree, I would seek no further employment at the mill. That summer at least the hydrapulper occupied very little real estate in my head.

However, the following year, I would face more direct battles with the hydrapulper when I worked the entire summer on the production floor. This was commonly called shiftwork, which meant rotating shifts on a weekly basis with a couple of days off between shifts. I got so bold at one point that I was pushing paper into the hydrapulper with the use of a forklift. I had been trained to drive it, and even got a certificate for *Best Practices*. Maybe the thought entered my mind every fourth day that *what if I was thrown from the forklift into the hydrapulper?* Stranger things had happened. All it would take would be a collision with another forklift. I wouldn't really say that this hydrapulper was an obsession—it was out of sight, out of mind, as before. I had a certain confidence that came with investing so much time on the forklift. I had again defeated the hydrapulper about which I had heard so much while working in its midst all summer.

Many days passed when I thought nothing of this hydrapulper. It had all been in my head although Dad would still occasionally bring up my unfortunate relative.

Once just prior to graduation and once right after, the hydrapulper loomed once again. My dad said, "I can get you a job here paying good money." I considered the possibilities. What possible use might they have for a graduate with an English degree? Not all of the poets in England could bring poetry to the day-to-day events at a mill whose chief job was to produce paper from pulp. As a student of English, —a practitioner of words—I might actually write on paper, but that would be the extent of its uses for me, right? Any decision to accept a job in paper, in my eyes, would have nullified many years spent at college studying English. Just prior to graduate school, however, the hydrapulper came calling again, as I accepted a job to make money for grad school and reside at home in my own bedroom before summer graduate classes started.



January of '93 would provide me one of the most humbling experiences of my life. I felt like I had eaten a whole bakery of humble pie when I, newly-minted college graduate, returned to the mill to earn enough money to attend graduate school in the months ahead. I worked the college callboard, but frequently wound up being the weekly janitor on duty. As my fellow high school classmate and close friend put it, "You're scrubbing toilets at the mill. Sometimes, technically, you work in securities." I could not deny that this was what it was. I had whiled away the time at school while peers at the mill earned the money to purchase their new cars while living with Mom and Dad. Peers who had studied drafting and business at the local community college had claimed jobs in the main office—fun jobs, well-paying jobs--while I kept toilet seats clean, gave the place a fragrant smell, and kept the required supplies in the bathroom. Frustrated, I often considered mailing my degree back to college, suggesting that they give it to someone who could get some use out of it.

In fact, I had been told by my miserly uncle more than once, "You won't amount to much with an English degree." In fact, he told and retold this joke every time he saw me:

Uncle Jimmie: "Marshall, I heard you were studying to be an astronaut."

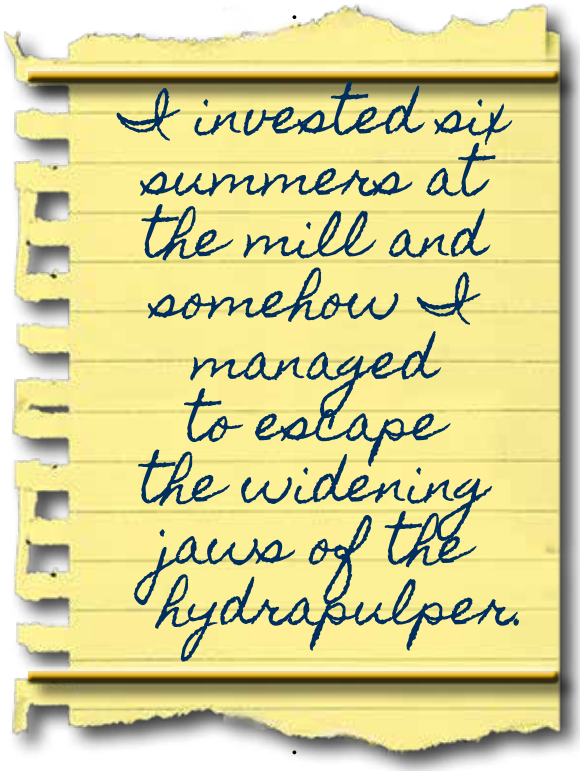
Me (befuddled): "No, who told you that? We don't have that major."

Uncle Jimmie: "Yep, I heard you were at college taking up space (roars of laughter at high pitch)."

A nosy older co-worker on a maintenance crew told me the same thing almost word-for-word as he chuckled when I mentioned my

major. I kept my chin up and swallowed my pride, again dining at The Bakery of Humble Pie. When I entered graduate school in English, I had wondered if I was taking on debt for which the returns would be scarce. There were no guarantees. After a year of graduate school, I was offered a teaching assistantship, and I felt like I had found my calling.

I earned the degree and went back to graduate school in medieval studies with an emphasis on literature. After the second master's degree, I found work as an English teacher at a Catholic school, where I have remained over the years. For me, one of the single-most important decisions was to attend graduate school. I may have had critics and naysayers, but there are few things I have been more right about in my life than my decision to go. One might say that I have dodged the hydrapulper now for thirty-plus years. I can't think of the mill without thinking of this ominous hydrapulper. Like a rogue shark, it had occasionally turned to feast on humans, but I invested six summers at the mill and I managed to escape its widening jaws. Sometimes, even today, I hear the whistle signaling shift change, or I even see maintenance crews ending their day at 3:45 and filing out of the gates and into the parking lot. I have a picture in my mind of the guy that I left behind in June of 1993—*myself*! I'm wearing steel-toed boots, a hardhat, an old pair of faded jeans, and a long-sleeve shirt.



Graduate school saved my life, rescued me from the nefarious hydrapulper in all its dreaded manifestations—the machine itself, a full-time job on the production floor, the potential of abandoning years of English studies, and the incredulous eye of my peers. It would appear logical that life would present me with new hydrapulpers but none so memorable as that one. Now, the hydrapulpers come in stacks of essays to grade, but believe me, I'm not complaining! I, at least, have some control of the size and frequency now, which takes away the dread. I have not really been able to officially escape paper, not even by reading things on-line. Paper has raised me to an extent, and even if I could fly essays to the moon, I would much rather have them in my lap—manageable, cozy, comfy, and blessed. To quote my father from the early 90's, "Paper has been good to you, boy. It has raised you."

Marshall Lancaster *is currently English Department Chairman at St. Vincent Pallotti High School in Laurel, Maryland.*

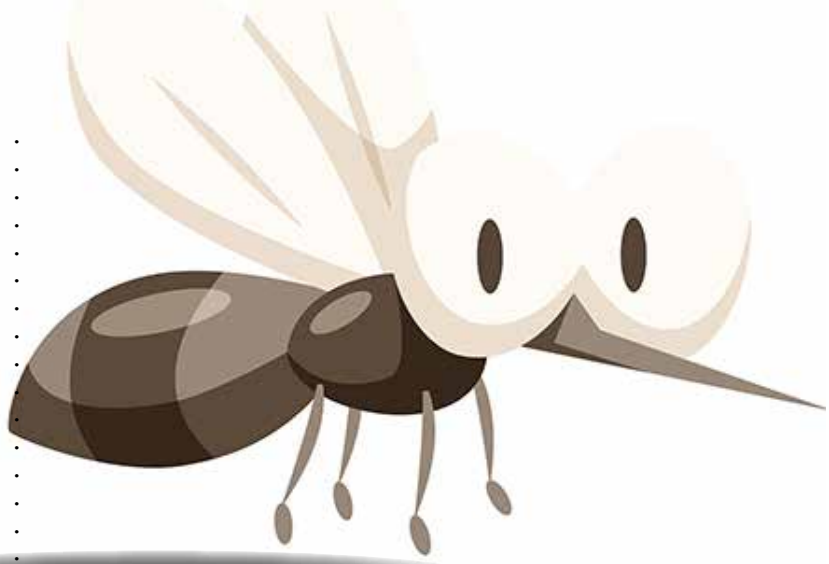
Heigh Ho Silver!

This year, radio station WDVX turns 25 and celebrates its Silver Anniversary. And, no matter what's your musical cup of tea,—blues, bluegrass, vintage country and 78s, folk, rock, rockabilly, Americana—*or all of the above*—if you listen long enough in the day to WDVX, you're going to hear something you love. There's even live broadcasts, featuring both up-and-coming and seasoned artists. From its modest East Tennessee beginnings—*literally broadcasting from a camper*—listener-supported, commercial-free WDVX has broadened its horizons. It's no longer one of Knoxville's best-kept secrets on the radio dial; it's also on the internet, streaming its variety of music formats throughout the world, and for all we know, *the entire universe*. So, help us celebrate our Silver Anniversary—you'll be giving your ears a treat.

25

WDVX 89.9 fm

wdvx.com



The Pest

by Billie Martin Dean Buckles

As usual, I was in my office playing a bridge tournament on Bridge Base Online. This is serious business. You do not want to let your partner down and you absolutely want to win.

Enter Mosquito. He buzzed around my head, paying particular attention to hanging close to my ears.

I hate mosquitoes.

I swatted at him numerous times. He also flew back and forth, just below my computer screen. I have several floaters in my eyes, and I couldn't tell if the movement I was seeing was the mosquito or the floaters.

After duly trying to swat Mr. Mosquito while concentrating on bridge cards, I decided to take further action.

My dear husband, Bill, had just gone to bed in the next room and was watching television. I yelled, "Honey, would you come in here for a moment."

"What?" he asked.

Again, in my sweetest, *dripping with honey* voice, I said, "Would you come in here and see if you can kill this mosquito—he is running me nuts."

From the next room I heard, "What? What did you say—a mosquito?"

About this time, he showed up at the door of my office. Standing there in his PJs, with a quizzical, *maybe a bit miffed, but also just a hint of curious humor*, look on his face, he said, "Did **YOU** say...you want ***ME*** to kill a mosquito?

I readily admitted that was indeed why I needed him.

He said, "Honey, in all my years I have NEVER been asked to get out of bed to kill a mosquito!"

With that he turned and headed for the kitchen where we keep the fly swatters. He returned with one in hand and stood by my chair watching for that pesky mosquito. It didn't take long until it made another appearance and landed in the front part of my hair. S-w-a-t! He says the swatter didn't hit my head. It did just a tiny bit, or maybe, I was so startled that he had taken that opportunity to kill the mosquito that I just imagined I felt the swatter actually touch my head?

At least the mosquito was dead! My sweet husband returned the swatter to the kitchen, and I am quite sure I heard him mumbling as he passed my door on his way back to bed to catch up with that important ball game, "I cannot believe this...I am getting out of bed to kill a mosquito!"

I love my husband, but I *hate* pests.

Billie Martin Dean Buckles *is an Oklahoma writer who enjoyed a 24-year career in banking and finance. Her book about growing up during the Depression is called "Changing Seasons" and is available on Amazon.com.*

Taylor-Made Anamneses

Memories and the Absence of Them

By Charlton Walters Hillis

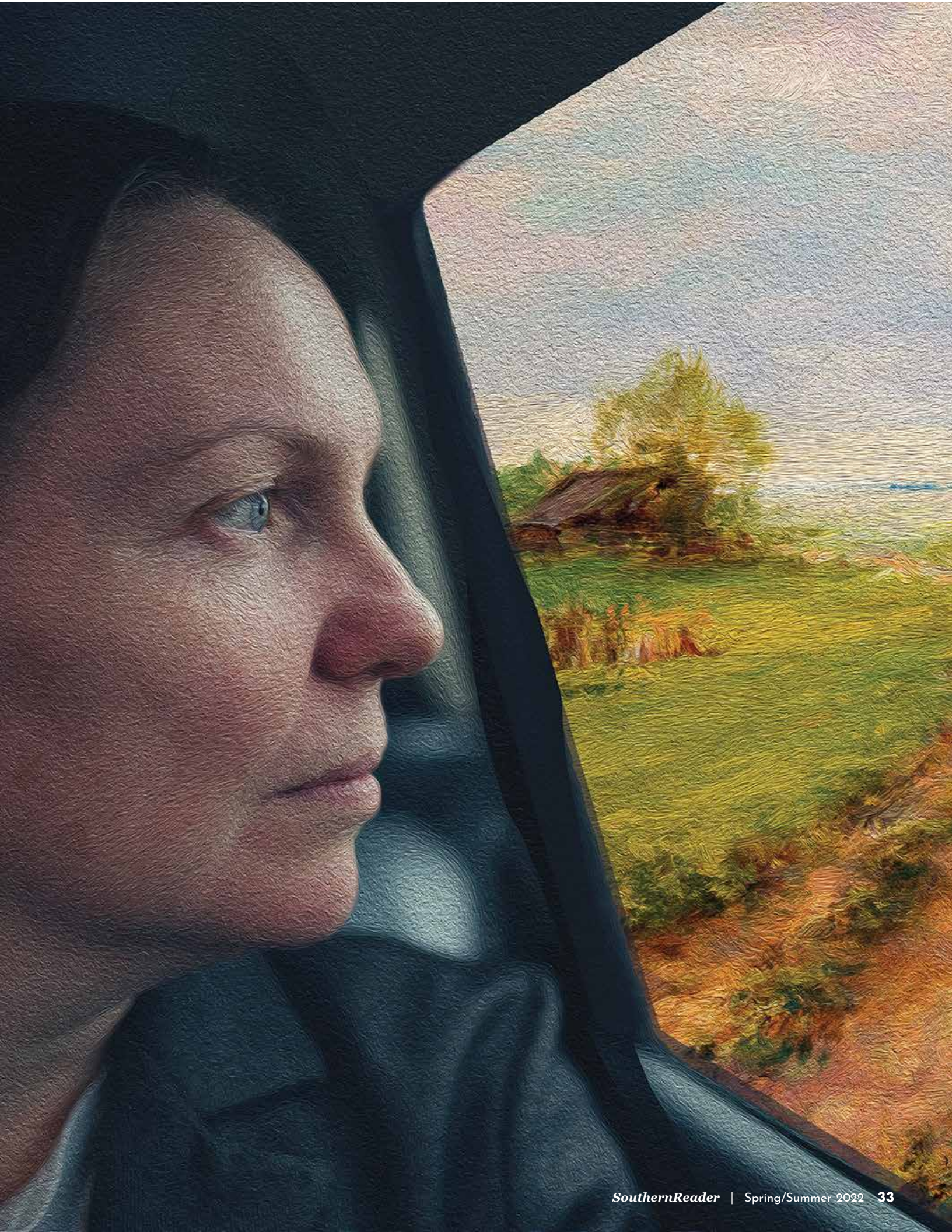
"In order to amount to something we must forget the scent of honeysuckle hanging in the heavy springtime air and any notion of an endless summer. We must not acknowledge the place where that whiff of perfume takes us or the recollection of a broken dream. We must refuse the lament. We must put away the longing to become more than what we are. To amount to something we must forget these things ... but that is to deny who we are and the story being told through us."

— Soren Kierkegaard, "Either/Or" (1843)

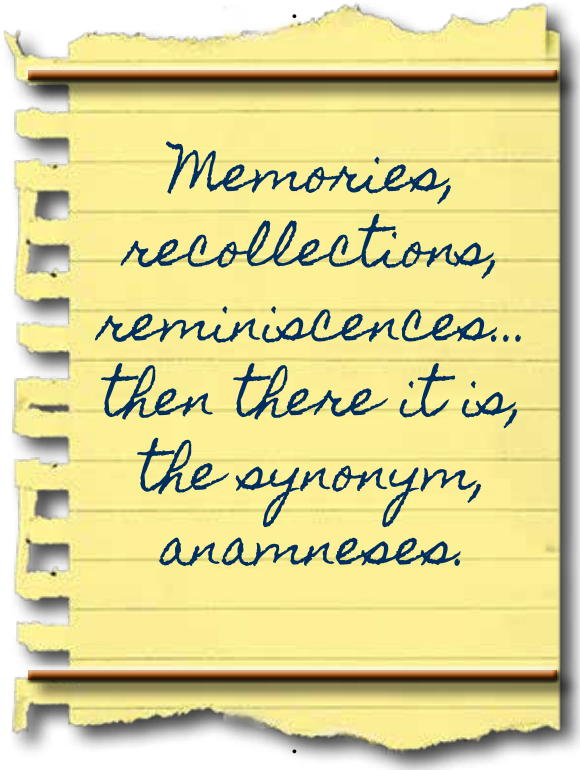
Between Texas and Oklahoma, there was Arkansas. In the fifties, ranchers were coming up from Texas and buying land in Arkansas, going after lower taxes and good river bottom land on the Cossatot and Mountain Fork rivers.

Some would run cattle for a few years then go back to Texas; others stayed as we did. Arkansas was where my first memories are buried, some too deep for the digging.

We left a ranch in Texas when I was almost two years old. While our house was being built in Sevier County, Arkansas, we lived on the Taylor place, property on the other side of town, bought by a man called Fudge. Back in Texas, he and my father were flying buddies. The Taylors remained down there until their children were out of school for the summer, and it was mutually beneficial for us to stay and care for their place.



Bobcats and buzzards are not relevant here but for the pictures in my head. Back then, people were hanging bobcat skins on fence posts; the county had put a price on them. They were killing too many chickens, and even sometimes calves. It was not uncommon for buzzards to be going after the calves, sometimes after a cow who had just calved, going for the eyeballs, the tongue. Ranchers shot them, law or no law. All this I heard later, after my memory kicked in, but a few of the tales and the remembrances overlap. I was, after all, present. Some things burrowed deep in my brain and became a part of me, complete with pictures. There are a few old photographs as well, but now and then the mental ones are sharper.



We all, to a certain extent, shape our own memories. You remember this, I remember that, yet we were both there at the same time. Some of that is due to the way we want life to be, the way we want our past to have been so that life will be as we want it to be.

Memories get a lot of attention in stories, poems, and songs, so much so that the word becomes trite and one hesitates to use it and goes looking in the thesaurus for a lesser used term. Most of them are too close kin for marriage even. Memories, recollections, reminiscences...then there it is, the synonym, *anamneses*.

Anamneses reminds me for some reason of *amnesia*, an opposite word. If you've ever experienced even just a bit of amnesia, you know how astonishing that is. The condition for me brings to mind Walker Percy's "The Second Coming," and his troubled and complicated main character, wrestling with bouts of amnesia, déjà vu, and traumatic memories.

Merriam-Webster defines *anamneses* as *"a recalling to mind, a reminiscence."* The word has both a medical and a religious definition, but this one caught my eye. *"The remembering of things from a supposed previous existence."*

You do not have to believe in reincarnation to empathize with that state of mind. My own memory has always been faulty and subject to remembering things which never happened. My habit of day dreaming has often led to supposed previous existences. The reincarnationists have nothing on people like me. Anamneses is a word you can run with and never be accused of sounding trite.

But back to my previous existence on the Taylor place. The house, the barn...and then that old house on the hill. Which brings on the question, how is it I have a memory of another house, an old house on a hill? This was not so far down the road, on adjoining land. A sloping pasture and that somewhat dilapidated structure out there on it, seemingly with no access road.

While I have no clear mental picture of the house on the Taylor place, where I lived for near to a year, there has always lingered in the recesses of my mind a picture of that dark, abandoned little house on that nearby hill. Why and how this persists or ever was so in the first place will never, ever be clear. They tell me there was a swampy area near and below. They tell me that once there was a news flash on the radio to stay home and do not go near the swamp. A dangerous criminal was hiding out there. I wish we had more to the story, but all we have is that he was found and captured.

The experts have a lot to say about repressed memories and childhood amnesia, which is a thing, meaning the normal loss of early memories. The experts do not have a lot to say about why I remember that little old house on the hill rather than the one in which I actually lived.

Later at our ranch on the other side of town my memory began to develop and take form. It is here I have woven stories more firmly rooted to reality. Some are complete, some only partial. The large open pasture seen from the highway has a long gravel drive leading to the house in the trees. Way back there. Dark in the trees. You can barely see it. Not our house anymore, not the modest house my father and brother built with their own hands, but a newer one, larger and fancier, one I would not recognize but for its location there in the trees.

If I were to gain permission to access the lovely iron gate later set at the entrance and make my way down the drive, I would be able to see the tree shaded yard where I played with my dog and my doll and my imaginary friends. It seems to me I ran loose on that place, as free as a wild thing, alone when my brother and sister were in school. A large barn was near the highway and another one out back of the house, where I ran unaware. It meant three stitches in my face when I ran into a newly-stretched barbed wire.

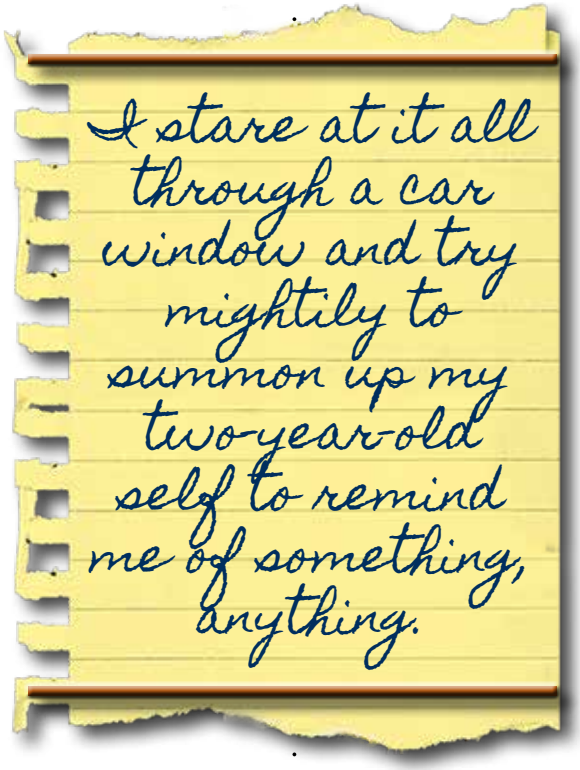
It seems to me I ran loose on that place, as free as a wild thing, alone when my brother and sister were in school.

When they cleared land to build the house, my father brought in cuts of cedar to use as stools. There were one or two of these in the big closet in my parents' bedroom. I was a strange little girl, as shy as a wild thing, and ran to hide if I saw a car coming down the long drive. One day some girls who lived on a hill beyond us made their way down through the woods to play with my sister and me. I did not know them and was afraid — running to hide, I sat on a cedar stool in that closet until I was found by my sister, drug out and made to play with the neighbors. It wasn't so bad.

It was only people I feared, not adventure. Once when quite small, I wandered all the way down that long driveway past the barn to the highway and was returned to my mother by some concerned workmen who spotted

me. When I was too young to know better, I put my puppy in the creek to swim in winter and nearly caused his death.

When it was known we were moving over the border to Oklahoma (lower taxes, plus downsizing the acreage), I told myself I would never forget three special things at that place, my own personal landmarks. Over the years, two have slid down the rabbit hole, never to return. The one still with me is a tree horse near the fence line at the edge of the front pasture. It was a dead tree stripped of bark, white and smooth, and it rose gracefully to look like a horse's neck and head, and I used to sit on the part just below and pretend to ride it. We had real horses to ride, but the tree horse was special to me at four, at five.



On a recent trip back to Arkansas, we return to the Taylor place. Driving past the chicken plant south of DeQueen, first on one road than another, we turn onto Red Bridge Road, a little curving wind through the woods and out again. Some miles further, there it is behind a white slat fence. A red tin hip roof that dwarfs the small white farmhouse with rocking chair front porch and a screened-in side porch where my older brother slept. Shade trees. Storm cellar.

There is a storm cellar in the yard on one side which figures into those stories/memories. I remembered it always...but have never known if that is just from the hearing. It had a pull-up door and steps going down inside. On the shelves were glass jars of food left from the previous owners, home canned tomatoes and beans and such. We used to play on top and inside and hide from each other down there. There's a big, weathered red barn on the other side of the house, a pond nearby and the field stretching out in the distance to meet tree line and low lying hills. I stare at it all through a car window and try mightily to summon up my two-year-old self to remind me of something, anything. She fails me utterly.

The Maker made the mind of man so complicated we will never fully understand it. Never fully know what's hidden in it from early childhood or how to dig all that out or if it's even possible. Nor do writers know what we can and should do with the great expanse of material generated by sublime forgetfulness, anamneses and simple, unpretentious memories.

Charlton Walters Hillis *has a fine arts degree, but her first love is creative writing, primarily the short story.*

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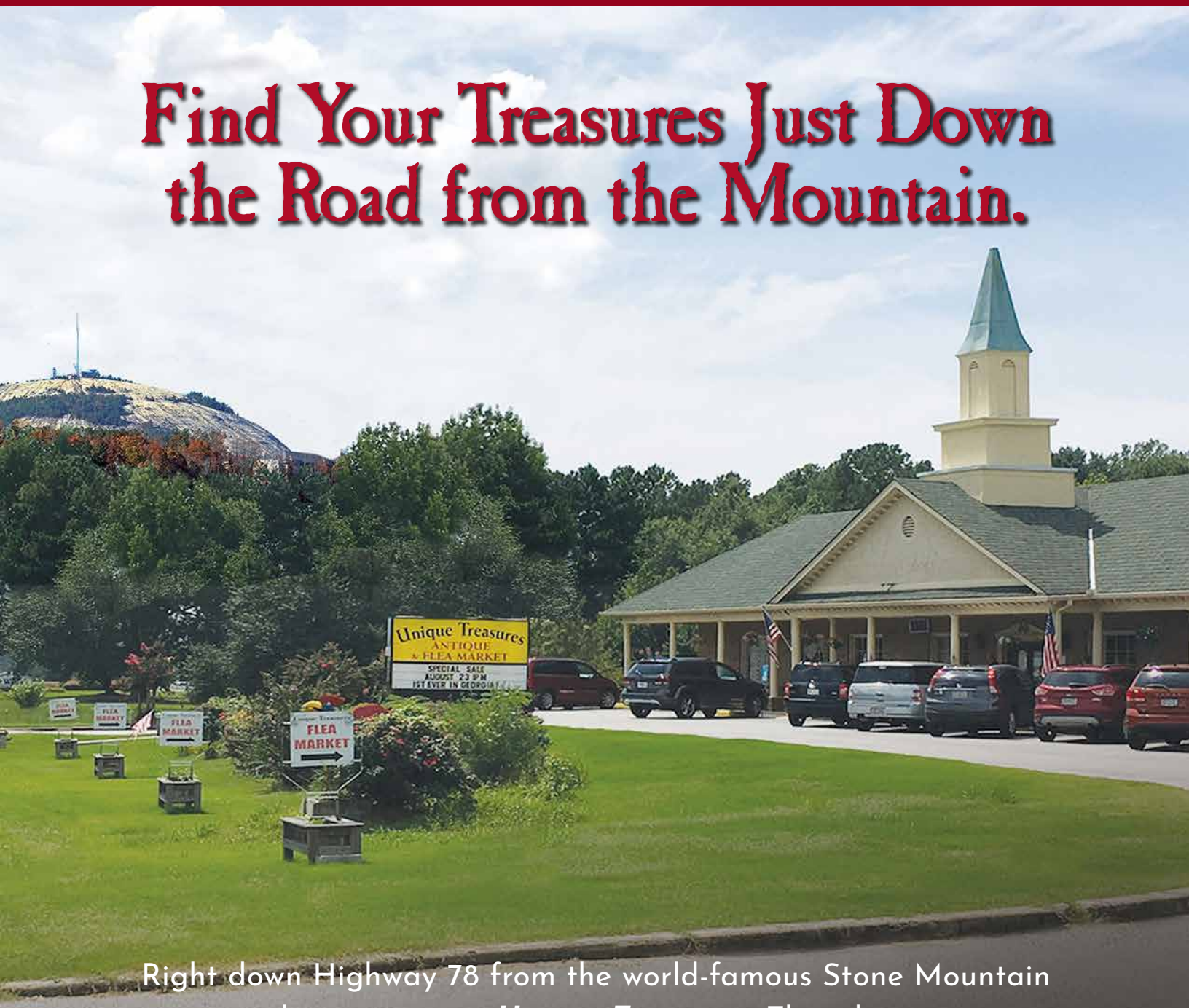

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That Sweet Sole Music

Steppin' Into the Spotlight

By Stephen Hyder

I recently read an article recently about John Lennon's favorite blues song. That song was "High Heel Sneakers," and he had it put in his famous mini-jukebox, which he took with him when he traveled.

As are most blues songs, it was fairly simple—three chords and a cloud of dust.

It was fifty years ago, or very close to it, that my band, "The Missing Links," first performed at the Fourth of July Celebration at the high school football field in Rogersville, Tennessee. We were a fledgling rock 'n' roll band with electric guitars and drums, and if it was simple enough to play, we played it. My brother, David played a cherry red Fender Mustang, Benny Wilson played a light blue Fender Mustang, I played a cheapo Kent Basin Street bass guitar, and George Rogers pounded a set of Ludwig drums.

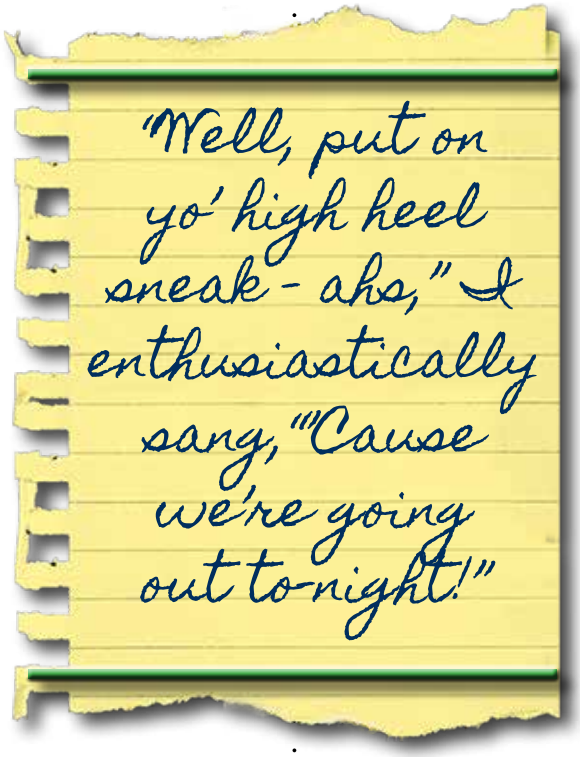
In those days, the annual event was hosted by the Hawkins County Rescue Squad and also, maybe, the "Pink Ladies" of the Hawkins County Memorial Hospital. It ended with a fireworks show...and still does today. I have no recollection of what other performers were on the bill for this celebration a half-century ago, but I remember having a bit of apprehension about being on stage, because Benny (who called the shots on songs) had delegated to me to be the vocalist on one song.

Now, if you've ever thought about it, singing a rock 'n' roll song is ***not*** like singing a hymn in church, where you have a host of other voices which can cover up your mistakes and your efforts to sing the third or fourth part harmony. I was used to that kind of singing. But no, indeed, if you sing on your own, you gotta make a statement with your delivery—even if you're barely in your teens and have never done it before. But, in this case it wasn't all that difficult, because the tune was fairly simple to grasp and it was back in the day when rock 'n' roll was in a basic, simple mode.

"Hi-Heel Sneakers" (also sometimes spelled High Heel Sneakers) was written and first performed by Tommy Tucker in 1963, and it has been described as an up-tempo, 12-bar blues song. Currently, it has been recorded by over a thousand artists.

We first heard the song as it was recorded by the British Invasion

group from Liverpool, "The Searchers." Some rock historians believe that Liverpool was "ground zero" for the direction that rock 'n' roll would take in the 1960s. But just as that other British Invasion group from Liverpool, The Beatles, were influenced by American-born rock and blues artists such as Buddy Holly (even their name is an homage to Holly's band, "The Crickets"), "The Searchers" got their name from the 1956 John Wayne western, "The Searchers." Also not only was "Hi-Heel Sneakers" a cover of an American blues song, it was the flip side of their cover of the American-born "Clovers'" record, "Love Potion No. 9."



And now the cover of the British band's cover of the American band's song was being covered by my East Tennessee band, those crazy rock 'n' rollin' "Missing Links." Benny had said to me before we went onstage, "Steve, you'll sing this one." I thought, "Sure!" but the reality hadn't quite set in.

But as the Summer Celebration grew imminent, I was devoting much thought to how I was going to do it. Obviously, I couldn't be shy, timid or withdrawn about it, or try to "be cool." I certainly did not possess the demeanor of Jerry Lee Lewis (or, to put it another way, I was not "possessed" like he was). I didn't have it all together, even when we loaded our gear onto the flat bed truck on the football field in front of the reserved seat stand filled with the summer celebrants. It was made a lot easier, though, when we warmed up with our usual song list. Then, Benny turned to me and whispered "High Heels, Steve," and it just hit me—I gotta just *Belt it out!*

"Well, put on yo' high heel sneak-ahs," I enthusiastically sang, "'Cause we're going out to-night!"

I unleashed my emotions in this performance and was immediately embarrassed, but, to my surprise, it engendered a lot of applause. I was still uncertain about it, until my older brother Joe, who had been chatting with friends in the audience, approached me after our set and remarked as to how his attention was diverted from chatting with friends and he exclaimed, "Is that my little brother singing that song? Ha-wow!" I got my older brother's approval, so that meant I had done well.

It was a different time in America back then, and certainly a different time in Rogersville. We were so much more innocent. At the time, I had no idea that it was a favorite of John Lennon's, but looking back, I feel like I did it justice. I remember looking out across the work-booted, loafered and flip-flopped crowd, many who stood with open mouths. I'd like to think that my band and I possibly introduced many of them to "high-heeled sneaker dancing," having a good time, and most importantly, the joys and freedom of rock 'n' roll.

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

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Last Bus to Georgia

(With Time to Spare, Go By Air)

By Ron Burch

"You're gonna what?" Bob peered at me over the top of his silver-rimmed bifocals. His look said it all...he thought I was nuts.

"Yep, right after I got my pilot's license, I promised my wife that if she'd go along with the purchase of an airplane, I'd fly her to see her mom and dad anytime she wished. Well, next Thursday is Thanksgiving and she wishes to spend it with her parents."

"They still live in Florida?"

"Uh huh, in Dunedin, just north of Clearwater. It'll take us about three hours in the Cessna Cardinal—ten plus if we drive."

"Ron, how long have you had your private license?"

"Four years last August."

"Do you have an instrument rating?"

"Nope, not yet, Anyway, I shouldn't need one. The weather looks great."

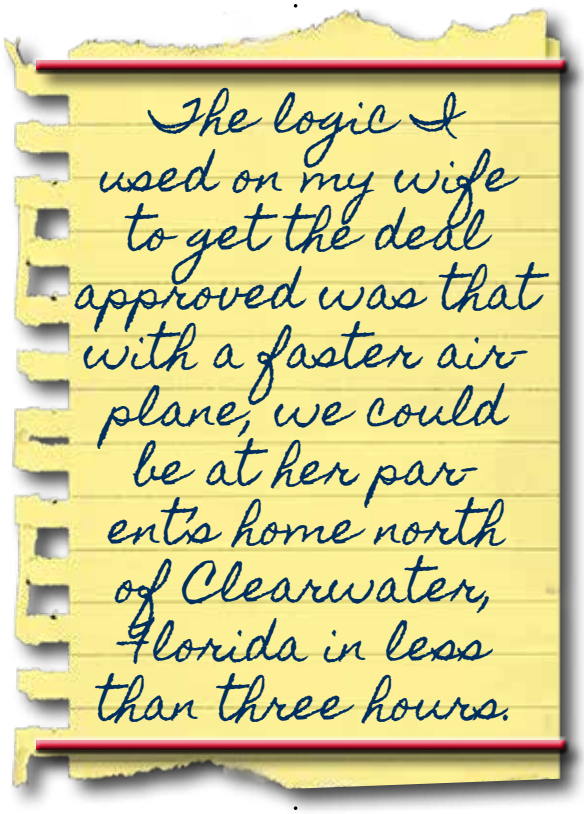
Bob shook his head. "Buddy, this is late November. The weather can turn rotten before you know it—heck, a slow-moving front can stall across north Florida and leave your butt stranded for days. Instrument rating or not, you're just asking for trouble this time of year."

"Aw, come on, Bob. You're just spoiled. Not every pilot gets to fly corporate jets with all the bells and whistles like you have on the Jet Commander."

Now, since this was the same guy that gave me fits about flying a single engine airplane at night, I brushed it off.

"Aw, come on, Bob. You're just spoiled. Not every pilot gets to fly corporate jets with all the bells and whistles like you have on the Jet Commander. Flying a 400-mph airplane with dual everything would spoil me, too."

Bob was my mentor—especially when it came to flying. Among other things, Bob had been chief pilot for the State of Alabama. Now he was head of the aviation department for a major utility company in Atlanta and the chief pilot of a sleek Rockwell 1121 Jet Commander, tail number N56AG.



It was 1976, and I'd been a private pilot for four years. We'd owned two different airplanes. The first was a 1962 Cessna Skyhawk, painted two tones of the ugliest green you've ever seen. Now, we owned what to me is still the best-looking, single-engine airplane Cessna ever made: a Cessna Cardinal.

Without wing struts, she was sleek as a '57 Chevy. Parked on the ramp, she sat low to the ground. In the air, she outperformed all the competition. The Cardinal was the first Cessna to use a laminar flow wing, so she didn't fly like the other Cessna singles. She also wasn't nearly as forgiving of sloppy piloting, especially during landings. Approach the runway too fast, and the Cardinal would float a few feet off the tarmac until she—not you or your passengers—was ready to land. If you tried to rush it, the Cardinal would stall abruptly and often without warning. If in the process, you hit too hard on the nosewheel, she would wheelbarrow down the runway, nearly out of control—a trait that ripped the firewall out of many such airplanes.

These bad habits earned the Cardinal an undeserved nasty reputation and lowered their resale value. Perhaps that's why I was able to buy this four-year-old airplane for less than the price of today's Mini-Cooper. The logic I used on my wife to get the deal approved was that with a faster airplane, we could be at her parent's home north of Clearwater, Florida in less than three hours. Heck, we could even go for short holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas!

So on the afternoon of November 23, 1976 we hopped in the Cardinal and headed south on Victor 97, the low altitude airway that stretches from northwest of Atlanta to southwest Florida. Thanks to a weak, slow moving cold front, the skies were clear, and at least over the northern portion of the route, we even had us a tailwind.

We landed at the St. Petersburg/Clearwater International airport in under two-hours and forty-eight minutes. My wife was impressed. And even though, after eloping with their teenage daughter, I wasn't exactly the son-in-law they wanted—so were her parents. After all, not one of their friends had children that

came to see them in their own airplane!

I was happy, too. Flying brought a freedom from the work-a-day world that only comes from total immersion. It was also something I could do that made me feel special.

On Wednesday, the day after we arrived, my wife went shopping with her mother, while I laid out in the sunshine at the motel. The holiday the next day was great. My wife's uncle, an experienced Navy flyer, was also there, and we had fun swapping flying stories. Good company, great food, a good football game—who could ask for anything more?

Then on Thanksgiving night, the weather forecast brought some unsettling news. The weak cold front that gently pushed us along our way on Tuesday was now backing up as a warm front. According to the forecast, the weather in Central Florida should remain good; however, rain and low ceilings were expected to develop in northern Florida and southern Georgia during the day on Friday, and remain throughout the weekend.

The holiday the next day was great. My wife's uncle, an experienced Navy flyer, was also there, and we had fun swapping flying stories.

Was Bob right? Was that knot in my stomach tension or the second piece of pumpkin pie?

Now, weather is a huge consideration for low altitude flying—especially when the pilot lacks an instrument rating. I was working on the rating; but without it, our flying was limited to visual flight rules—at least 1,000-foot ceiling and three miles visibility. The warm front could bring the clouds down much lower. Worse still, if fog accompanied the low ceilings, we'd be ground-bound for sure.

On the drive back to the motel, I noticed that the moon had a ring around it—a sure sign of increasing moisture in the atmosphere.

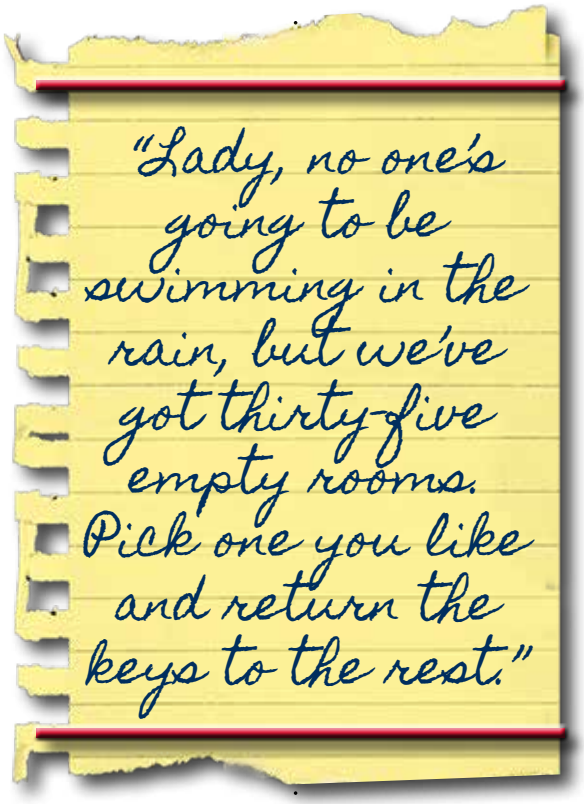
Friday morning in Central Florida dawned bight and clear. So far, so good. But to be on the safe side, I called Flight Service to see what the weather was like to the north. The news there wasn't so good. From Atlanta south to Macon and Valdosta, the clouds and visibility were presently still good enough for visual flight, but conditions were expected to deteriorate rapidly by early afternoon. The ceiling was forecast to drop to 800 broken with visibilities under three miles by 4:00 PM. On the hour, Jacksonville and Gainesville reported ground fog with visibility less than one mile and sky obscured; however, it was expected to burn off by 10 AM and become partly cloudy.

I made the decision to try and outrun the approaching weather. "We'd better head for home." I told my wife. She was disappointed to have to cut the trip short but understood my concern. An hour later, we'd said our good-byes and were airborne. Rather than fly the airway a few miles out over the gulf to Cross City in the crook of the panhandle, we decided to take a more easterly route—one that would take a bit longer, but one that had more places to land should that be necessary.

Before we ever reached Ocala, the clouds were on the increase. By the time we over-

flew the airport at Gainesville, the cloud bases were down to 2000 feet. As we crossed into Georgia, we had to descend to the VFR minimum altitude of 1000-feet to stay clear of clouds, and even then, wispy trails of lower clouds often impeded our view of the ground.

Radio chatter from the control tower in Valdosta confirmed our observations that the ceiling and visibility were dropping rapidly. Flight service reported the same conditions in Albany, Macon and Atlanta. Then, I heard a student pilot somewhere in our vicinity telling air traffic control that he was at 3000 feet over the Valdosta VOR—a high frequency navigational aid—and wanted a special VFR clearance to land. (A SVFR clearance allows operations in visibility as low as one-mile as long as you remain clear of clouds.)



We were scud running at 1000 feet, and the clouds above us formed a solid deck. There was no way that dude was clear of clouds at 3,000 feet, and I wanted no part of a mid-air collision.

At the time, Lake City was reporting scattered to broken clouds at 3,000-feet and visibility greater than five miles. With good weather behind us, we made the proverbial 180-degree turn and headed back.

The Lake City airport has a non-FAA controlled tower. As we approached, their landing instructions were like none I'd ever received: "Cardinal calling Lake City. You can land any runway you like—you're the only aircraft in the area. Hey Joe, get that forklift over to hangar five and load those crates."

A national motel with a restaurant was a short ride away, and one of the nice folks at the airport gave us a lift. We checked in, determined to make the best of it.

Our room smelled musty, so I turned on the air conditioning. As is the custom, my wife went to inspect the bathroom. When she returned, she informed me that the bathroom was alive with mold and mildew. She said, "THIS WON'T DO!" and wanted another room. That was okay with me, but she'd have to handle it. I was lurking by the magazine rack as she approached the desk clerk.

"Sir," she said politely, "you gave us a room on the front side by the parking lot. Since we don't have a car, it would be more convenient for us if we could have one that faced the inside."

The clerk looked perplexed but gave her a key to a different room. Accustomed to being the beast of burden, I loaded all the gear on my back and took it to the new room around the corner of the building. My wife was already there. As I reached for the door, she came out shaking her head. "This one's worse than the first one," she exclaimed.

It was back to the front desk.

"I hate to be a nuisance. But this room is right by the pool. With the kids swimming and splashing, I'm afraid the noise will keep us awake. Do you have something farther away?"

The clerk handed her a rack of keys. "Lady, no one's going to be swimming in the rain, but we've got thirty-five empty rooms. Pick one you like and return the keys to the rest." She did.

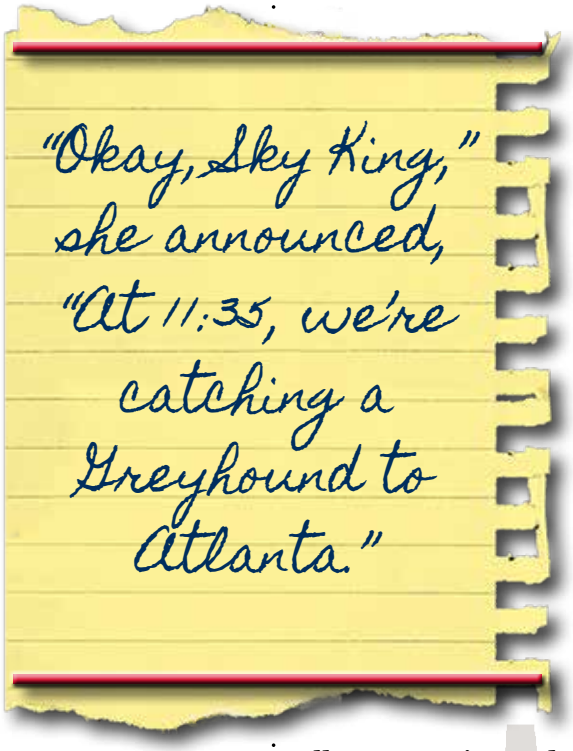
As night fell, we walked across the parking lot to the restaurant for dinner. The fog was as thick as pea soup. A Florida Highway Patrolman in the parking lot confirmed that the weather was bad all up and down the Interstate. A call to flight service before bedtime revealed that the entire southeast was socked in. The next morning, things were no better.

By afternoon, we began playing a game we call briefer roulette: In four years of flying, we'd learned that when I called Flight Service, even in marginal weather, I usually got an optimistic forecast, sometimes with just a hint of caution. When my wife called, it was all gloom, doom and foreboding. This time, neither of us got a forecast to celebrate. In fact, our frequent calls to Flight Service must have annoyed the briefer.

He told my wife, "Lady, if you'll give me your phone number, when I can get Eastern off the ground in Jacksonville, I'll give you a call."

At dinner, I asked my wife how she'd like to spend Christmas in Lake City. She said, "That does it. We're getting out of here."

She grabbed the Yellow Pages and the telephone and began making calls. "Okay, Sky King," she announced, "At 11:35, we're catching a Greyhound to Atlanta."



Traveling by bus was new to us. First, no reservations are required. Second, you can't request a window seat. Third, they only take cash—no checks or credit cards. Fortunately, none of this presented a problem.

Our bus was coming from Miami, and it was almost an hour late. Its final destination was Detroit. While we waited at the terminal, another passenger arrived carrying a brown paper bag. He nodded and quickly disappeared into the men's room. He emerged a few minutes later looking scrubbed and clean shaven and wearing a fresh shirt, albeit one with the largest palmetto bug my wife had ever seen perched on his left shoulder. Some of the other passengers that soon arrived weren't so neat and clean or so well-shaven.

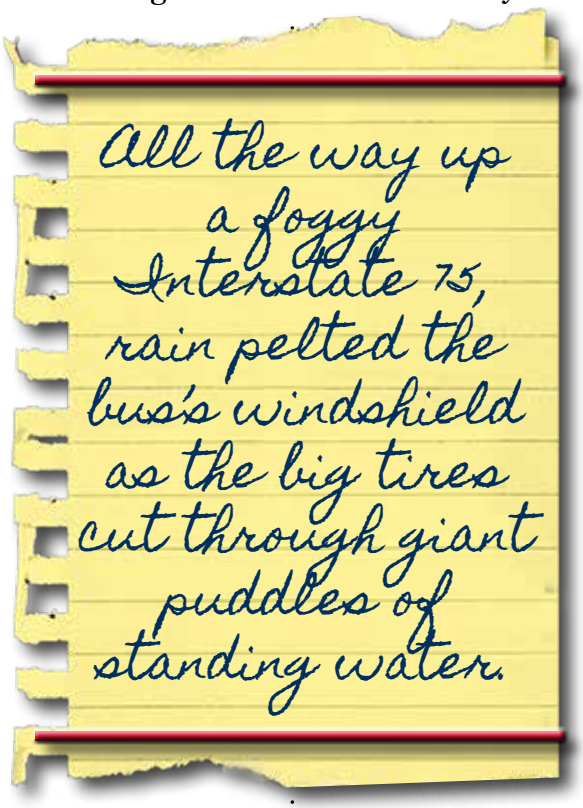
Soon the lights of the Greyhound bus lit-up the rain drops on the windows as she turned the corner and came into view. She slid into the diagonal slot out front marked "arrivals and departures." Filling the heavy night air with the smell of diesel fuel, she let out a loud gasp as she came to a halt. The door swung opened.

My wife and I climbed aboard and took a seat about half way toward the rear. As we walked down the narrow, unlit aisle, I noticed something sticky on the floor.

I heard a nasty cough coming from the rear of the bus. Was this to be the Midnight Cowboy all over again? I decided to try and get some shut eye. My wife however, remained wide-eyed and fully awake. It would be an

interesting ride.

All the way up a foggy Interstate 75, rain pelted the bus's windshield as the big tires cut through giant puddles of standing water. The terrible driving conditions didn't slow our driver at all. He was in and out of the right lane, passing everything in sight. The bus made off-interstate stops in Valdosta and Tifton and then had a half-hour layover in Macon. We pulled into Atlanta at 5:05 am, averaging far better than the 70-mph speed limit for the 322-mile trip.



Once inside the station, a trip to the men's room was the first order of business. Looking in the mirror, I realized that I now looked just like the rest of the bus riders—wrinkled clothes, bags under my eyes, in need of a shave.

My dad was an early riser, so we knew we could call on him for a ride home. My old man was like a gerbil on steroids—high energy and always on the go. In those days, he was in building material sales and drove a station wagon, usually filled to the brim with brick samples.

Long before we began looking for him at the curb outside the bus station, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was my dad. Faster than a Greyhound in the rain, he'd parked his station wagon in one of the empty slots in the boarding area out back. He said, "Hey folks, ready to go?" We were.

Three weeks later, a friend with a twin offered to fly me to Lake City to pick up the airplane, IF I paid for the gas. When we arrived, the weather was only slightly better than when I left. Still without an instrument rating, I flew most of the trip home at 500-feet directly over I-75. Between Macon and Atlanta, the weather cleared and the landing at Peachtree-DeKalb airport was uneventful.

I'd had enough of Florida in the fall. I'd also learned an expensive lesson: Fuel for my airplane cost $55; a rental car was $105. The motel in Clearwater was $177; the one in Lake City was $68. The bus ride home was $65. The fuel bill for my pal's 300-hp twin at 90-cents a gallon was over a hundred bucks. Parking my airplane in Lake City for almost month cost me $105.

Worst of all, Bob was right—again. With time to spare, go by air.

Ron Burch *is 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.*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