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Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

A vibrant illustration of a young boy with light brown, wavy hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a tan fishing vest over a blue and white striped t-shirt. He holds a fishing rod with a yellow and black handle. A slice of watermelon is attached to the end of the fishing line, which is looped around the rod. The background is a soft, greenish gradient.

Summer's Here!

Pinkham Ridge

*A Civil War Story set
in the Summer of 1962*

Flying South

*The joy and terror of
a pilot's first time*

The Other Side of the Door

*A glance back at
Nashville's issues
of desegregation*

David Skinner

In the Valley of the Serendipity

It's been a little more than a year since we hatched this crazy scheme of launching an online magazine about the American South. A while back, I got an email from a reader who claimed to love the idea and the format. After going on and on about how unique and how "new millennium" it was, he asked, "Why on earth are you doing it, anyway?"

For the *serendipity* of it, I answered.

Let me explain. My first encounter with serendipity was with the word itself. In 1964 when I was 12 years old and already addicted to AM Top 40 radio, there was a folksy pop song called "Don't Let the Rain Come Down" by a group that called itself *The Serendipity Singers*. In 1964 there was still the chance that folk music would rule the airwaves until, of course, *The Beatles* came along and cleaned its acoustic clock.

At any rate, being the proverbial perpetually curious pre-teen, I eventually looked up the word "serendipity" expecting to find that it had something to do with "rain," "folk," or "Top 40," when to my surprise, yes, *serendipity*, I discovered that the word was defined as: "*The faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident.*" What's more, it was coined in 1754 by Horace Walpole, a frustrated folkster born 200 years too early to cash in on the acoustic airwaves.

Since that moment of discovery, I have always had a soft spot in my heart for all things serendipitous. One rainy Sunday afternoon in early 1974 (ten years after "Don't Let the Rain Come Down"), I was driving back from Nashville to my East Tennessee Baptist college when serendip-

ity once again reared its lovely face. We were traveling east on I-40 through the Cumberland Mountains, a hardy range which neatly separates Middle Tennessee from East Tennessee just east of Cookeville. My car at the time was a black 1964 (there it is again!) Ford Falcon with a trusty AM radio centered in the middle of its red leather-and-chrome dash.

Having made the trip many times, we were painfully aware of that particular part of the journey...it was the place we called "*The Valley of No Radio.*" Although many of my friends at the time had solved the dilemma by simply installing 8-track tape players in their cars, I instinctively knew my Falcon would have rejected any such unit, and most likely somehow would have found a way to punish me in the process. So I had become resigned to the *Valley of No Radio* as one of the necessary evils of traveling back and forth to school. Typically, we left the radio on and let the white noise of the static serve as an audio backdrop to our recaps of the previous weekend's activities.

That particular rainy Sunday, however, was the exception to the rule, and it proved to be a sort of hillbilly *Twilight Zone* episode. In the middle of my description of a new band called *Lynyrd Skynyrd* that had played that previous weekend at Muhlenbrink's in Nashville, the static radio sprang to life.

"Huh!" the voice said. "I'm telling you good people--huh!--that this here family--huh!--sings with the voices of the angels--huh!"

The voice was a minister that used a style of preaching known as *the Holy Grunt*. It was a cadence of sorts, always punctuated by the "huh!" at the end of each phrase.

"Bless their hearts--huh!--here they are--huh!--the *Singing Luther Family* with 'Walk Around Me Jesus'--huh!"

The music that followed was sparse, static-y, Appalachian and quite beautiful. Very serendipitous.

And, there you have it...that's why we're doing this. So maybe on a rainy Sunday afternoon somewhere in the *Valley of No Internet*, some weary e-traveler's browser brightens up with obscure writers gushing about all things Southern.

Very serendipitous.

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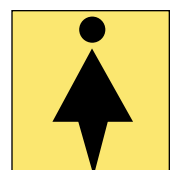
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Flying South

an aviator's memoir by Ron Burch

I'm certain most everyone who aspires to be an aviator faces their first solo cross-country flight with a mixed bag full of emotions...excitement, anticipation, apprehension and--regardless of the amount or quality of training--mortal fear.

My earlier flights had passed without incident. Still, I found it hard to believe that I was going to actually fly away from the confines of my local airport northeast of Atlanta--all by myself. So, on the afternoon of May 20, 1971, the adrenaline was pumping, and I faced the prospect of "going it alone" with sweaty palms, tight muscles and a somewhat dry throat.

I had discussed the details of the upcoming adventure with my flight instructor the night before. He had signed-off my logbook, authorizing me to make the flight, but asked that I call him for an approval of the weather and other flight conditions just before taking off.

"Bama," as he preferred to be called, had taken up flying to escape the doldrums of a desk job and an engineer's slide rule. A typical engineer, he saw everything

in black or white, there were no shades of gray. He was particular, precise and demanding. Either the airplane was centered on the white stripe that marked the middle of the runway, or it wasn't. On course, or off course. This guy didn't allow for any margin of error in his flying, or that of his students. As far as he was concerned, "close" only counted in horseshoes, hand grenades and dancing. In flying, close didn't count at all.

"You'd better be more careful flying than you were with that coffee."

On this particular day, I secretly wished that he would say that I wasn't ready. Or that the aircraft was in the shop; or that the weather wasn't good enough for a stu-

dent's first solo cross-country flight--anything. However, my 26 or so pre-solo hours, along with another five or so practicing maneuvers over the training area--plus ten hours of cross-country instruction--should have had me more than prepared.

The little two-place Cessna 150 aircraft I would fly had just completed a 100-hour inspection, and the weather was good following the passage of a late spring cold front that was now far out of the way, stretching northeast to southwest across the Carolina's and the southeast Georgia coast.

Before leaving home, I picked up the phone and dialed Bama's number at work.

To my chagrin, he answered on the first ring and quickly OK'd the weather conditions and the flight.

"Hey, man...you're ready. Call me when you get back and we'll talk about it."

According to the flight plan I'd filed with Flight Service, N7289S was set to depart the DeKalb-Peachtree Airport at 5:30 p.m. local time. The expected route

of flight was east to Athens, some 55 miles; then northwest to Gainesville, some 40 miles; and back to Atlanta. A total distance of 135 miles as the crow flies.

The flight was to be conducted under “visual flight rules,” i.e., separation from other aircraft would be the pilot’s responsibility. Navigation was to be by “pilotage.” The flight’s progress would be measured by visual reference to natural and manmade landmarks the pilot could see from the air. The estimated time en route was one hour and 30 minutes and the aircraft was carrying enough fuel for about three hours.

Legal, authorized and ready, with flight case and maps in tow, I made my way to the local aerodrome. I parked the car next to the fixed-base operations building at the airport, walked inside and deposited two coins into a coffee machine. Plop. The cup dropped and coffee started to spew. I reached for the cup and dumped its contents right down the front of my shirt and best flying slacks.

“Having problems, Ron?” inquired one of the corporate jet jockeys.

“Nope...trying to get a cup of brew under my belt before starting on a little cross-country flight this afternoon.”

“Well, you’d better be more careful flying than you were with that coffee!”

“I will be. By the way, what’s the wind doing?”

“Right down the runway at 10 to 15 knots, last time I looked. You shouldn’t have any problems today!”

Thus reassured, I strode out on the ramp to where the little green and white Cessna trainer N7289S was parked.

“You’re a good bird,” I thought to myself as I patted the chrome spinner and started

a meticulous pre-flight inspection. Satisfied with the results, I climbed aboard and arranged the small cockpit of the two-seater just so.

“Let’s see. I’ll keep my navigation log in my lap on this clip board...the chart should be within easy reach over here on the right seat...navigation plotter in my shirt pocket...flight computer between the seats...pencils. What did I do with those stupid pencils? Ah, got my pen...great!”

Seatbelt cinched and buckled, I leaned over and shouted, “PROP CLEAR!” out the tiny window above the left door--a

common practice to alert any passers-by that I was about to start the engine. After a couple of turns, the little Lycoming 4-cylinder wheezed once, coughed twice, then sprang to life--shaking the entire plane like a wet dog after a bath. All of the preflight tension soon disappeared, as I became 100% absorbed in what was happening. After months and months of training, I was finally the pilot in command of this flight!

Unclipping the microphone, I cleared my throat, mashed the push-to-talk button and announced, “Peachtree Ground



Control, this is Cessna Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra...rear Executive ramp...ready to taxi.”

“Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra, Peachtree Ground. Taxi to Runway Three

After months and months of training, I was the pilot in command of this flight!

Four. Wind is three-two-zero at one zero, altimeter three-zero-zero-two. Use caution, as the area behind the Executive hangar is not visible from the tower. Contact tower on one-two-zero-point-niner when number one and ready for departure.”

“Eight-Niner Sierra.”

Advancing the throttle ever so slowly, N7289S pitched forward and started to roll. I made a right turn out of the parking area and joined the yellow-striped taxiway that would take me southeast toward the warm-up pad adjacent to Runway 34.

Once there, I secured the brakes and carefully recited the pre-takeoff checklist, just as I had been taught, and had done so many times before.

Confident everything was a “go,” I reset the radio to the correct frequency and called the tower. “Peachtree Tower, Cessna Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra is number one and ready for take-off at Runway 34. Ah, requesting a right downwind departure, east bound.”

“Eight-Niner Sierra, cleared for take-off...right turn on course approved.”

“Eight-Niner Sierra.”

Throttle full forward, the little Cessna anxiously wobbled down Runway 34 and gradually picked up flying speed. At 65-mph, unfettered by Mother Earth, she hummed lazily toward a high, blue sky.

“Wow. This is great! No bumps at all. 400 feet, 600 feet...right turn to 250 degrees...800 feet...right turn to 160 degrees...1000 feet...left to 115 degrees to depart the airport traffic area. What a day.”

As the miniature artifacts of the northern Atlanta suburbs slowly slid beneath the wings, I had little idea of what was in store for me the rest of the afternoon and evening.

“First check point. There it is, right on time. Stone Mountain at 5:45 PM.

Now all the sightseeing was about to create a problem for Eight-Niner Sierra. The intended en route course of 085 degrees had increased to 120-130 degrees

as attention was diverted. The critical first checkpoint--Stone Mountain--was far too large and prominent to be of much value as a visual cue, if course correction was needed. (Stone Mountain is the largest piece of exposed granite in

the world. It stands close to 700 feet above ground level. It is almost a mile long and close to a quarter mile wide. On a clear day it is visible for 20 or 30 miles.)

Undaunted and ill informed, N7289S winged its way onward and upward.

“Second check point: Lawrenceville, Georgia. I think I see it at my two-o’clock position and about six miles. Must be a few minutes behind schedule. Wait a minute, gotta be sure. The chart says Lawrenceville should be about 10 miles off my left wing. Hmmm, that one’s off my right. Water tower? Yep. Main road

through town? Sure looks like one...although I don't remember an Interstate highway...still it must be Lawrenceville."

"Third check point: Winder, Georgia. There it is, maybe ten miles left of my course. Where's the lake? Gee, that looks smaller than I remembered. The airport should be well east of town, but it looks more southeast. The chart shows several runways and I only see one...but gosh, it has to be Winder."

By now, three serious mistakes had been made in less than a half hour. Each one was taking the aircraft farther and farther south of the intended course. The pilot had failed to firmly establish the correct heading for the first leg of the flight, close to point of the departure. He had not positively identified either the second or third checkpoint and mistook Covington and Monroe for Lawrenceville and Winder. Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra wasn't headed for Athens; she was headed for the Savannah River valley and for trouble.

Muffling a yawn, I thought to myself, "Cross country flying is so relaxing," as I fixated on the farm and pastureland passing slowly underneath my wings.

"Should be getting close to Athens soon ...ought to be able to see something in a few minutes. Let's see, altitude looks good. Engine? Smooth as silk! Heading? Oops, better turn left a little. Ah, 085 it is."

6:20 p.m. "Gee, I should at least be seeing the outskirts of Athens by now...hmmm, maybe a right or left 45-degree turn will help. Gosh, nothing."

"Perhaps I should be talking to someone. I know, I'll call Flight Service in Anderson. They'll get me pointed in the right direction."

"Anderson Radio, Anderson Radio. This is Cessna Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra, over."

"Cessna Eight-Niner Sierra, Anderson."

"Anderson, Eight-Niner Sierra...student pilot...first solo cross-country...a round robin from DeKalb-Peachtree direct Athens direct Gainesville direct Atlanta. I have reason to believe I'm a little off

course. Could you assist me with a course correction to Athens?"

"Ah, negative, Eight-Niner Sierra. No direction finding equipment at Anderson. Give me your present altitude, heading, airspeed and last known check point."

"Affirmative Anderson. Present altitude is thirty five hundred feet; heading is 085 degrees, indicating 105 mph. Last known check point was Winder."

"Eight-Niner Sierra, can you climb to fifty-five-hundred and maintain Visual Flight Rules? Atlanta may be able to help you if you are higher and may be able to make several 360's for identification."

"Roger, Anderson. Climbing now. Will



Anderson's radio transmission came through loud and the meaning was clear. I was hopelessly lost and no one on the ground had been able to find me.

advise on reaching fifty-five hundred."

"Understand, Eight-Niner Sierra. Anderson Radio standing by."

I advanced the throttle to full climb power and gently pulled back on the yoke. As the aircraft entered the climb, the airspeed slowed, and the cool air that had been whistling through the cabin diminished to a hiss. I alternately cupped each hand over the left fresh air vent, hoping to dry my sweaty palms.

Obviously, the stress and apprehension of earlier in the day had returned. Not panic, mind you, just an uneasy feeling evidenced by occasional deep sighs, and increasing cranial and ocular pressure.

"Anderson Radio, Cessna Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra. I can't climb above forty-eight hundred due to broken clouds. I'm beginning a sequence of 360-degree turns to the left at forty-five hundred. Please advise."

"OK, Eight-Niner Sierra. Understand you cannot maintain Visual Flight Rules above four thousand, eight hundred. Continue circling."

I circled and circled and I circled some more. For what seemed like an eternity, the radio was eerily silent. Then I heard, "Eight-Niner Sierra, can you advise us of any landmarks?"

"Negative, Anderson. No towns, no power lines, no highways or railroads, no distinguishing features of any kind. I thought I saw a mining quarry just before I contacted you, but I can't be sure."

"Roger, Eight-Niner Sierra. I suggest a heading now of 050 degrees."

"050. Got it. Thanks, Anderson."

Feeling a little better, I rolled out of the next turn onto a heading of 050.

"Cessna Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra, this is Anderson Radio. Please advise us your fuel situation?"

"Roger, Anderson, should have better than an hour and a half of fuel remaining...probably close to two hours."

"OK, Eight-Niner Sierra. Continue to fly that heading of 050 degrees.

Your radio transmissions are getting stronger here."

"Understand, Anderson. Eight-Niner Sierra."

At this point, Cessna N7289S is flying over

one of the most desolate parts of the state of Georgia. The errant flight track had taken her some 30-40 miles south and 50 miles east of the intended course. She'd been airborne for an hour and a half, and had been communicating with the Flight Service Station in Anderson, South Carolina for the past 45-50 minutes. As both fuel quantity indicators bounced around the big "E," and the pre-daylight savings time sun sank slowly behind the tail, the radio came alive once again.

"Cessna Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra, Anderson Radio. Try again to climb and circle your present position. Repeat; circle your present position. We're

asking Atlanta Air Route Traffic Control radar to look for a primary target in that area. Atlanta Flight Service has been unable locate you with their direction finding equipment--you must be out of their range."

Anderson's radio transmission came through loud, and the meaning was all too clear. I was hopelessly lost and no one on the ground had been able to find me. With the sun hanging low, the tension and anxiety had piqued and the tightness I'd been feeling in the back of my head and neck, and behind my eyes, was now a blinding, skull-piercing throb.

Like a lamb being led to the slaughter, I followed the instructions and started once again to circle and to climb. As I banked the aircraft into the second series of turns, a reflection from the setting sun caught my eye.

"Anderson Radio, this is Eight-Niner Sierra. I can see a large body of water off my right wing, maybe eight or ten miles.

"Wait! I've got something else...an airport! Anderson, there's an airport with a paved runway and hangar visible to me just across the water! I'm descending to take a closer look. If it is an airport, I'm going to land!"

"Roger Cessna Seven-Two-Eight-Niner Sierra. Please advise us via landline (telephone) of your status and position. You may call us collect at Area Code 803, 555-5501...I repeat Area Code 803-555-5501."

"OK Anderson. I'm circling the runway and descending to pattern altitude now. I'll keep you advised."

The landing was fast but safe. Cessna N7289S was on the ground in one piece. Somewhere I'd gotten lucky.

Taxiing the aircraft back up the runway, the hangar that had looked so good from the air, turned out to be a barn with a dilapidated Aeronca Champ tied down beside it. A rusty sign nailed atop the barn door read, "CHESTER MEMORIAL AIR--" The sign had obviously been used for target practice by some of the locals and was missing some of its original letters. There wasn't a pay phone or services of any type. Not even a restroom.

There was, however, one bespectacled farmer-postman-aviator sitting with the door open in a yellow J-3 Cub, near where

N7289S finally rolled to a stop.

"Howdy," greeted the postman.

"Not worth a darn!" I replied.

"Is there a phone around here?"

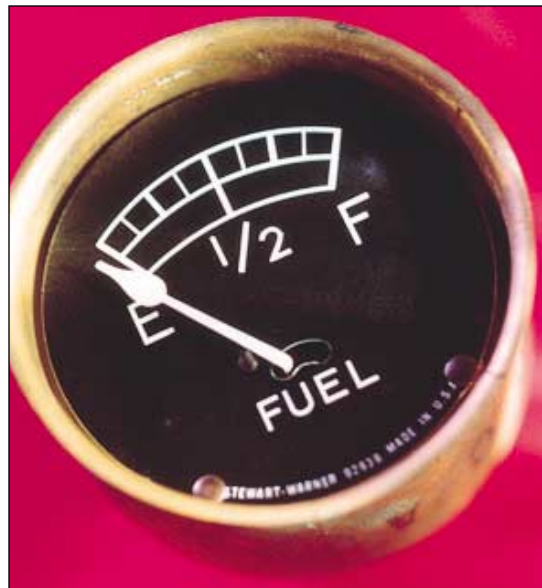
"There's one at the gas station on the main road, if they ain't closed."

"Could you give me a lift?"

"Well, I was going to fly a little."

Climbing down out of the airplane and swinging on the strut, I introduced myself while shaking his hand.

"My name is Ron, and I'm a student pilot whose been flying around lost for



most of the afternoon. I really need your help. If I don't call Anderson Flight Service and tell them I'm 'OK' and where I've landed, they're going to be out looking for me!"

"I'm in the adverti--uh, printing business, but I'm a Special Deputy Sheriff in DeKalb County," I told Officer McManus.

"OK, Ron, let's go make that call. Hop in my truck while I lock-up the plane."

With my navigation plotter in my pocket, Rayban aviator's sunglasses still in place (even though it was now early evening), charts and navigation log under my left arm, and seven dollars in my pocket, I made my way toward civilization and a telephone. Unfortunately, the road leading from the airport to the main highway wasn't paved, and the truck badly needed shocks. Each bump sent yet another pain reverberating through my aching noggin.

Running from the truck into the gas sta-

tion, I must have been a weird sight for sure. Once inside the door, only an outline remained of where a pay telephone once hung. Now without a pay phone, the guys who were busy closing and locking-up were somewhat reluctant to allow me to place a long distance phone call on their business line. However, after much assurance that they wouldn't be charged for the call, they gave in, and the flight plan for N7289S was officially closed ... not in Atlanta or Athens or Gainesville, Georgia, but in Cedar Bluffs, South Carolina, on the eastern shore of the Savannah River.

Later that evening and many, many collect phone calls later, help was on the way. Bama, my flight instructor was out-of-pocket for the evening - off somewhere flying a simulator. The president of the flying club, and the owner of the rented aircraft, suggested that I get a good steak and a hot shower at a nice motel, spend the night, and fly home the next day.

Only my faithful wife, Valerie, understood my plight. Sometime after 9:00 p.m., after tracking down and picking-up a pilot-friend and his wife, she set out to drive the 160 or so miles to effect a rescue from the only establishment open past 9:00 in Cedar Bluffs...the police station.

"Whatcha do in Atlanta?" inquired Officer McManus.

"Oh, well I'm in the adverti...uh, printing business, but I'm a SPECIAL DEPUTY SHERIFF in DeKalb County!"

"Ya are? How 'bout that. Guess you folks have lotsa crime down in Atlanta."

"Well, ah...we have our share, that's for sure."

"Ain't got much here in Cedar Bluffs. Have had a burglary ring operating 'round

here though."

"Really?"

"Yep. They got a bicycle from old man Miller's boy and somebody stole a shotgun from the Reed's place. We'll get 'um though. Me and Bill--Bill's the night watch officer...he'll be here soon--just got, wait...I'll show ya."

Officer McManus unlocks the chief's office and comes out with a 2-watt Citizens Band walkie-talkie.

"See here, boy? Bill and me both got one of these. Heck, on a good night we can talk all the way to Albertville on this

thing. And, ya see here? This switch is a "private line." Throw that switch and just me and Billy-Boy is all that can talk to each other. Nobody else can hear a word we say. What 'cha think of that, Ron?"

"That's something else. All the way to Albertville, huh?"

"Yep. We've got a breath analyzer here, too. Well, ain't exactly here...it's in Green Springs. That's the county seat. Look here."

Officer McManus unlocks the file cabinet and pulls a card file containing every DUI booked during the past year.

"See here, Ron? This fella was a point-one-oh. That means his blood was 10% pure alcohol. And this one here...he was a point-four-oh...doctors said that's enough to kill a body.

"Bet y'all use 'signals' and 'codes' down in Atlanta. We have some here, too. We say 'ten-four'--that means 'I understand,' and 'ten-twenty'--that means 'where are you,' and 'ten-ten'..."

"Officer McManus, is there any place I could get something to eat? I've got a terrible headache and my stomach thinks my throat's been cut."

"Sure, Ron. When Bill gets here, we'll get him to run you out to the Dairy Bar. They've got some serious barbecue sandwiches."

"Great. Where's Bill?"

"He'll be along any minute now. We'll call him on the radio."

"Car 12?"

"Car 12, go ahead."

"Car 12, come by the station."

Then to me: "We ain't got a code for that yet but the chief's working on it.

"While we wait on Billy-Boy, come on in the chief's office. I've got something else to show you.

"See that plaque on the wall? Well, our chief got that for attending a special school up at the Green Springs Fire Station given by a genuine FBI man. And that one over there, well it's for the 'Young Man on the Go' in Cedar Bluffs. And this one here...hey, come back here, Ron...this one's for helping out the sheriff in Chester County on a manhunt. And, oh shucks, there's Billy-Boy. Guess you better go on and get some supper before they close up. Heck, it's time for me to go home, too."

"Yeah. Sorry about that, Officer McManus, but I am starving."

"That's OK, Ron. Get a good meal. Bill

Stevenson, meet Ron Burch. He's a student pilot. Got lost, almost ran outta gas, and landed here at Cedar Bluffs. Ain't that something?"

"Sure is, McManus. How're ya doing, Ron?"

"Starvin' to death, Bill."

"Hop in my car, son. She ain't pretty but she's the fastest car in the county."

Satisfied by a barbecue sandwich, a chocolate shake and a bag of chips, I returned to the airport with Bill to check on the airplane. For the first time all day, I felt almost peaceful as I unlocked the door, made sure the control locks were in place and that the master electrical switch was turned off. I shined Bill's flashlight all around the cockpit and rearranged the seatbelts, crossing them in each seat just so.

On the return ride to the police station,

"What happened, Sky King-- lose your map?"

Billy-Boy demonstrated the siren and the passing gear performance of his 1970 Chevrolet police car. White on the outside, gold and black hardware-store stick-on letters officially labeled each door, "CHESTER COUNTY POLICE."

Back at the station, Bill explained that he would have to go out on patrol. I declined the offer to ride along and opted instead to hang around the station, just in case there was a telephone call from home.

"That's fine, Ron. You stay here, and if the phone rings, it's okay to answer it. Just say, 'Police Station.' If you don't answer it in three rings, they'll answer it up in Green Springs. Make yourself at home, and if you need anything, call me on the radio. I'm Car 12 you know."

"Gotcha Billy, Car 12."

Sitting down at the desk, I kicked back as best I could. I took the airplane stuff I'd carried around all day out of my shirt pocket and took one last look in disgust at the chart. The course line I'd drawn depicting the planned route of the flight was on top; the actual route and Cedar Bluffs lay folded and hidden underneath. Laying my weary head on the desk, I was startled by the chimes that announced a telephone call.

"Police Station," I used my most authoritative voice.

"Billy-Boy?" queried a female voice.

"No Ma'am, this isn't Bill."

"Who is this?"

"My name is Ron Burch, and I'm just a visitor here. May I help you?"

"Ron Burch...where are you from?"

"I'm from Atlanta."

"Atlanta? What in the world are you doing here?"

"Well Ma'am, I'm a student pilot. I got lost on a trip, ran a little low on fuel, and decided to land here."

"You mean you fly those little Piper Cubs and things?"

"Yes Ma'am."

"And your airplane ran outta gas and you had to land here?"

"Yes Ma'am, sort of. It did and I did."

"Lord have mercy! You runnin' outta gas in one of those little airplanes and landing here...and Governor Wallace gettin' shot...I just don't know what this world's a comin' to. What time did you get in?"

"Oh, I landed about a quarter to seven or so."

"Bet that was it."

"What Ma'am?"

"My TV."

"Ma'am?"

"Yep, I was watchin' the TV about that time and it started just a flickerin'. Bet it was you."

"Me?"

"Sure. See every time old Peterson (the flying postman) goes out flying, he makes my TV flicker and I'll bet you did, too."

There was a pause while I thought about that.

"You're not going to fly that little airplane home tonight, are you?"

"Yes Ma'am. My wife is driving a friend here to help me."

"Uh...you're married?"

"Yes Ma'am."

"Got any kids?"

"No Ma'am."

"How long you been married?"

"About nine years."

"And you don't have no kids?"

"No Ma'am."

"Well, don't y'all wait too long now, ya hear?"

"Yes Ma'am. Listen, could I have Bill call you when he gets in?"

"Well, no...see what I was calling about wasn't strictly business."

"Yes Ma'am. Could I tell him who called?"

"No, I'll call him back. You best be careful going home now, ya hear? I wouldn't get into one of those things for all the tea in China, but you be careful."

"Yes Ma'am, good-bye."

"Bye-bye."

Once again, I cradled my head in my hands on top of the desk, trying to sooth away the last of the dull ache that remained from the afternoon's head splitter. Just as I started to relax, a pick-up truck loaded with six or seven of the local good old boys pulled-up out front--yelling, banging on the doors and blowing the horn.

As I looked up, they yelled, "Hugo! Hugo!" They then waved their beer cans in unison and shouted, "Hugo straight to you-know-where, you S.O.B. We're going to kick your butt!" Only when they delivered these lines, they didn't clean it up so politely.

Uh-oh. Big trouble right here in Chester County! The end of a perfect day. Reaching for the radio, I pleaded, "Car 12?"

"Car 12, Ron...go ahead."

"Car 12, we've got some trouble makers back here at the station. Could you swing by and check it out?"

"That's a big ten-four, Ron. I'm on my way!"

Siren wailing and red light flashing, in under a minute, Bill pulled up to the curb with tires smoking, but the hoodlums had vanished. I relayed an account of their obscenities and the strange reference to "Hugo."

Bill laughed out loud.

"You see, Ron, Hugo is a new, part-time officer who fills in on weekends and holidays. It's kinda bad, but Hugo doesn't do much for public relations around here. He'll lock these boys up on Saturday night for having a few beers and they don't like that. Hugo has long hair, kinda like yours, sideburns...even wears Raybans. Now those boys thought you were Hugo and they were just razzin' you! They don't mean no harm."

Comforting, indeed. I told Billy-Boy about the earlier phone call and he laughed again. "One of the local maids a needin' breedin', " he said with a grin.

We spent the rest of the evening standing out on the curb in front of the police station, laughing and talking. The flying postman (who had returned to see how I was making out), Officer McManus (who

upon finding the happenings in town better than TV also returned), and Officer Whitten (the morning watch officer), and me. Each tried to outdo the other with stories of frightening flights and dangerous police work.

Just after midnight, the stillness of the spring night in Cedar Bluffs was broken by the rumbling of the dual exhaust pipes on my wife's 455-CID Pontiac GTO, as she turned onto Main Street, carrying my rescue pilot, Gary, and his wife, Phyllis.

At 24, Gary had been flying since he was sixteen. His dad was a pilot and aircraft-owner. Gary had grown up with airplanes and had accumulated quite a bit of experience. Phyllis was a cute and petite brunette who would pass for Sally Fields' twin in looks and dry wit.

"What happened, Sky King--lose your map?" Phyllis asked with a grin.

Everyone hee-hawed but me.

After making the appropriate introductions, we returned to the airport. Valerie, Gary, Phyllis, and I, in the gold GTO, led by a three-car police escort.

Since Chester Memorial didn't have a ramp, taxiway or runway lights, the officers agreed to position a police car at each end of the runway with headlights "on" to light the way for take-off. The third positioned his car to illuminate the little airplane.

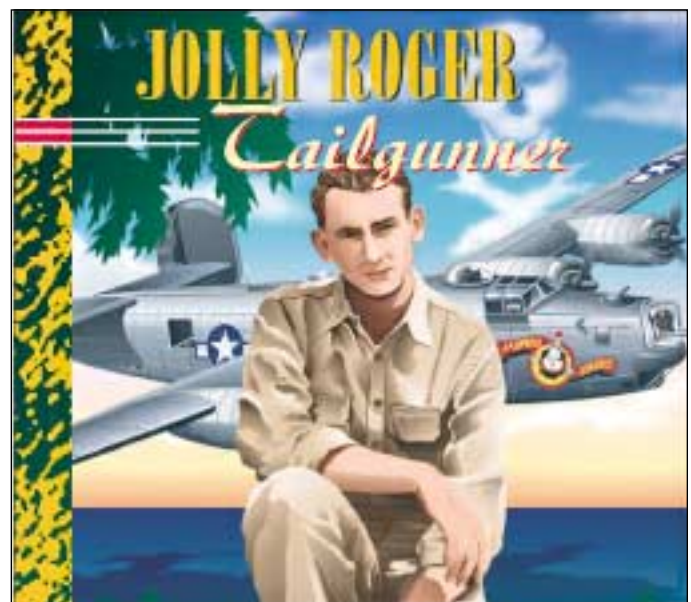
We quickly determined that N7289S was fine, and that we had at least enough fuel to fly as far as Athens, where gasoline should be available. After thanking everyone for their hospitality, Gary and I climbed aboard and prepared to takeoff. We back taxied to the end of the runway where the police car was parked, ran through the checklist,

and pushed the throttle forward. Because the night was cool, the ground roll was short and we were quickly airborne.

As we climbed through fifteen hundred feet and turned toward the west, I could still see the lights of the three police cars marking the little runway as it slid beneath our wings.

During the 30 years that have passed since that night, I have owned three airplanes and flown a dozen more. I've added ratings and well over two thousand hours to my logbook. I've visited hundreds of familiar and not so familiar places. Although I've never been back, occasionally, on a cool spring night, I find myself reflecting on my trip to Cedar Bluffs. I'll never forget the friendly folks there who opened their hearts to welcome this way-faring stranger who was lost in his funny little bird.

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Pinkham Ridge

a short story by David Ray Skinner

Winndrow leisurely dabbed his paper napkin at the small pool of Pabst that had collected on the oily surface of the checkered tablecloth. At the first strains of the violin, he shot an annoyed glance over at the jukebox in the corner of the dimly-lit bar. "If that's country music, then I'm a flying pig," he said.

Joycellen, the bar's owner, paused by his table on her way back to the kitchen, tucking the empty tray under her arm. "Give us a break, Winn," she drawled, brushing a red strand of hair out of her eyes, "What's so bad about that song? I like it. In fact, it's my nickel that's bringing your fit on. Whataya got to complain about, anyway? It's a beautiful day and you got good health and good company to share it with."

Winndrow jabbed out his unfiltered Camel in the table's glass ashtray and ran his other hand over his blonde crewcut. "Dog it, Joycellen," he said wearily, "It's 97 in the shade, everybody in this place is either drunk or asleep, I got the early warning signs of a powerful headache, and it ain't Hank Williams on the box, it ain't Kitty Wells, and it ain't country."

She glanced down at his glass as she continued on her kitchen route. "Trouble with you," she said, "is the mug is always half empty."

Outside, as the late afternoon sun baked the highway out of Dover into a hard goo, a brand-new white 1962 Ford convertible pulled off the road and into the gravel parking lot of the bar, the tiny stones popping under the hot tires. Once the man and woman had exited the car, they stood beneath

the half-painted, half-neon "Joycellen's" sign over the entrance and looked around nervously, surveying the strange environment they were about to step into. He

pulled open the heavy door, and they stood inside for a few moments to let their eyes adjust to the dark room. The cigarette



smoke hung in thick clouds lit by beer signs over the billiard tables as the window air conditioners hummed loudly in a cacophonous drone.

coat over his short-sleeved white oxford shirt and sensible, if expensive, brown slacks., topped off by a fashionable businessman's hat, which he had removed upon entering the bar. The woman was young and attractive with black hair and clear, blue eyes. She wore a comfortable yellow summer dress and canvas shoes. The two of them may as well have dropped in from another solar system.

Winndrow didn't notice them at first. He was slumped over the table peering through the half-filled mug and letting the cool sweat from the glass drip onto his sunburned forehead and roll down his face. He was in the complicated process of trying to decide whether he should go back to his trailer and get his boat and head down to the lake for some early evening fishing, or just order another beer or two.

"Excuse me..." the man said, still standing just inside the doorway as if a hasty retreat may be required, "is there a gentleman by the name of Winndrow Pinkham here? We were told back in town that we might find him at this location."

"No gentleman—just Winn," Joycellen yelled from the kitchen before anything had registered with Winndrow.

"I'm Pinkham," said Winndrow finally, as he shot a bemused "very funny" look in the direction of the kitchen.

The strangers stepped carefully across the room to the corner table where Winndrow sat, and they stood before him waiting

for an invitation to be seated. After a few seconds, the man realized that the invitation would not be coming, so he began his apparently well-rehearsed speech. "Mr.

"Trouble with you," she said, "is the mug is always half empty."

The man was middle-aged, maybe in his late 40's with a slight moustache and salt-and-pepper hair that was on its way to receding. He wore a smart, summer sport-

Pinkham, my name is Spriggs, Dr. Manuel Spriggs. I am a history professor and, in fact, head of the history department at the University of New Jersey. And this is my assistant, Miss Smithers."

The young woman smiled nervously, but Winndrow sat there with a blank expression which Spriggs took as a cue to continue. "No doubt you are familiar with the great American Civil War battle that was fought in and around the vicinity of the very area where we now are conversing. And though your own Southern army fought bravely and valiantly, nonetheless, it would be the Union army who would take the day under the leadership of U.S. Grant, a general who was not very well-known until that particular victory."

"Actually, our boys messed up big, the way I heard it," Winndrow calmly responded, "but that's about all I know about it."

Spriggs was a bit put off by the seated man's casual observation, but after pausing a second or two to collect himself, he cleared his throat and continued: "Noted. As I was saying, it was a bitter struggle that matched two great armies, and it was only by the whimsical nature of fickle chance and perhaps a touch of bad weather that led to the untimely defeat of your brave boys."

"Whatever," said Winndrow finishing his beer. The newness of the situation was beginning to wear off, and though he was curious, he was quickly moving into a stage of impatience. "Can I help you with something, partner? I mean, what's that got to do with the price of eggs, or more pertinent, me. I mean, here I am. You found me. Now what can I do for you?"

"Yes, hmm," said Spriggs. "You appear to be a well-informed chap. Are you familiar with a section of the Fort Donelson battlefield known as Pinkham Ridge?"

"Go on."

"Indeed. Pinkham Ridge was a high

slope of land overlooking the northernmost part of the battlefield, a few hundred yards west of the river. It has never been considered a vital part of what took place that day—it's not even really a part of what now is the national battlefield—but my research indicates that it was essential to the outcome of that particular battle."

"Well, whoop-de-doo, Doc. So?" Winndrow was becoming a little agitated. Why exactly has this queer duck been sent down to this little dive in the middle of



nowhere to deliver a history lesson to someone who couldn't care less, he wondered.

"I see," Spriggs said, nervously. "It's my understanding that that piece of land at that time, and for that matter, presently, is

"As we speak, the mysterious case is waiting for us only a few yards from here, secure in the trunk of the lovely convertible that you so graciously procured for us just yesterday at the Nashville Airport."

in the possession of the Pinkham family for which it was named." He paused for effect. "And that's why we're here speaking with you this afternoon. Would it be possible for you to join us tonight for a bit of dinner? We will be taking our lodging at the Dover Inn, and we have some charts and maps we'd like to share with you. If you could be of help to us, we could certainly make it worth your while."

Winndrow was listening to Spriggs, but his gaze was upon the fair Miss Smithers. "You said the magic word," he said final-

ly, "and it beats the daylight out of drowning worms."

"Hmmm." said Spriggs nodding as if he had a clue as to what Winndrow was talking about.

They all shook hands and said their goodbyes and leaving Winndrow in the bar, Spriggs and Miss Smithers re-emerged into the sultry parking lot. As they pulled the convertible back onto the highway to head back to town, Miss Smithers was at the wheel, and Spriggs

was frantically trying to crank down the passenger's side window to let out some of the pent-up heat that the car had collected during their brief encounter in the bar. He was irritated to discover, however, that the Tennessee late-summer air rushing in to fill the void was equally as hot.

"Blast it! Miss Smithers, I know that the airport in Nashville was beyond provincial, but weren't there any cool, dark sedans at any of the car rental agencies? What in the blazes possessed you to select a white convertible in the South in the summertime?" he demanded loudly. "It attracts heat like some infernal vacuum!"

"Actually..." Miss Smithers began, but stopped herself from correcting her professor and current employer. Rather, she changed the subject to inquire about a detail that was beginning to nag at her. "Professor, I noticed that back in the bar you failed to mention anything about Bobby Beau."

"Robert Beauregard Rutherford is of no concern to our friend Mr. Pinkham," Spriggs replied.

"But I thought that—that was the entire reason for this trip," she said with a puzzled look.

"My dear Miss Smithers," Spriggs said, with more than a little condescension in his voice, "do you know who I am? Do you realize what it is that I do?"

"Sir?"

"I am a tomb raider. In some circles I am, in fact, known as one of the greatest living American tomb raiders. There are stories told about me with hushed reverence, and some are even true, at least partially, as if that matters. At any rate, do not worry yourself about Pinkham. He is not on our team. He is not on our level. He is not in our circle of expertise. He is a map. He is a reference point. He is a guide. Nothing more, nothing less."

Although Miss Smithers admittedly did not know the professor very well, she was shocked to hear this sort of talk from someone that, up until that exact moment, she had held in high esteem. She hid her surprise, however, and clenched the steering wheel with both hands and stared straight ahead at the winding road leading into the business district of the small town of Dover.

The professor continued, his voice softening, "Miss Smithers, Miriam—may I call you Miriam? I realize that you are new to graduate school, but I have sensed a tremendous amount of potential in you. I expect a lot from you. You are not like the column upon column of wooden-headed droids that I am forced to deal with on a daily basis. You are special, dear. That is why I wanted you to come along on this little trip."

Miss Smithers did not like the path that the conversation had begun to take. Fortunately for her, something or someone distracted Spriggs, and he returned to his level of high irritation. "Look at these people!" he said motioning to a group of elderly men on the sidewalk just off the square. The men were all wearing overalls and blue or checked cotton shirts, and while some were whittling, the majority was watching the outcome of an intense checker game. "Look at what they're wearing! Look at what they're doing! They're hacking away at pieces of wood with their pocketknives! Look at the dining fares of their eating establishments...catfish, catfish, catfish! Who eats catfish?! Well I guess they do," he said, answering his own question.

"Sir, do you really think that there is a millionaire buried somewhere up on Pinkham Ridge," said Miss Smithers, trying to return the conversation to a more coherent level.

"Facts, Miss Smithers, Miriam. That's

what we deal with," Spriggs said deliberately. "I don't know if we'll find our Major Rutherford on Pinkham Ridge. But here are the facts: Robert Beauregard Rutherford was a millionaire many times over. He bought his rank at a time when the Confederacy was starting to hurt for gold, and gold was what he offered. He was given his commission in Jackson, Mississippi in late '61, and he never went anywhere without his wealth. And that included the battlefield. Even in civilian life, he regularly traveled with \$200,000 worth of gold. Now he had his trusted people to transport it for him, but it was never far from his side."

"But, Pinkham Ridge...?" Miss Smithers asked. She was pulling into the parking lot of the Dover Inn, and she put the car into park and turned up the air conditioner.

"My dear Miss Smithers, what sort of a tomb raider would I be if that were common knowledge?"

"Ah, yes, Pinkham Ridge. One of the things those poor Southern clods were good at was mucking up their own rosters. Robert Beauregard Rutherford, millionaire, major, heir to a Mississippi cotton dynasty, it was all for naught. He never returned from the fields of war. And he took his fortune, or, at least a piece of it with him."

"But didn't anyone miss him? Didn't they look for him?" asked Miss Smithers, incredulously.

"They certainly missed his fortune!" Spriggs said, chuckling to himself at his unintentional double entendre. "After all, there were hundreds of thousands of dollars at stake, and believe me, a hundred thousand dollars was more like millions a hundred years ago, especially in the war-wrecked South. So, of course there were some poor souls who searched for him, but only a few. Rutherford had no partners, he had no siblings, his parents were long dead, and he never married. And, as I said, they had a poorly-made roster to boot."

Spriggs laughed, "The poor schmucks who did look for him were turning over stones somewhere down in Georgia!"

"So I guess you're saying that this isn't

exactly common knowledge..." said Miss Smithers, grimacing from the weight of the circumstances.

Spriggs laughed again and reached over to pat her head. "My dear Miss Smithers, what sort of a tomb raider would I be if that were common knowledge!?"

Winndrow had returned to his trailer where he threw on a fresh, buttoned-down sportshirt along with a couple of slaps of Old Spice for good measure. He strolled into Dover Inn Restaurant with his signature Camel tucked behind his right ear as he casually scanned the dining room for a glimpse of the two strangers he had encountered that afternoon. They were not hard to spot. It was as if they sat at a spotlighted table; they were the bright and elevated point in the dark gray room, and the rest of the diners were leaning in close to each other, speaking in hushed tones and motioning at the two with their eyes and quick nods of their heads.

Spriggs had ordered tea for both of them—iced in a glass for her, hot in a cup for him. He sighed with resignation when the waitress brought two glasses of the sweet, iced tea, but before he could protest, he noticed that Winndrow was crossing the dining room heading for their table.

Spriggs stood up and extended his right hand when Winndrow approached the table. "Ah, Mr. Pinkham," he said, "Thank you for joining us! I trust you had an agreeable rest of the afternoon!"

"Pabst," he said to the waitress without looking away from Spriggs. "Evening, Miss Smithers. Okay, Doc, let's cut to the chase. What do y'all need, how much you gonna pay to, as you say, make it worth my while, and, not that I care one way or the other, is it legal?"

"Mr. Pinkham!" said Spriggs with an expression of mock horror. "Of course, it's legal! Who do think we are, anyway?"

"Well, I reckon I don't know who you are, and I 'spose that's the point, ain't it?" Winndrow shot Miss Smithers a quick grin just to see where she stood in the conversation.

Spriggs waved off the waitress and withdrew a folded map from his briefcase which he proceeded to unfold and spread out on the table. "Here's a map of the bat-

tlefield. We're right here, by the way." He pointed to a small penciled dot below the word, "Dover."

He let his finger come to rest at a spot above the town, flush with the Cumberland on the map. "This is Pinkham Ridge," he said.

"Right where I thought it was," said Winndrow, reaching for the beer on the retreating waitress' tray.

"Am I correct in assuming that this land is still in your family's possession?" Spriggs asked.

"I'm all that's left of the famous Pinkhams," said Winndrow.

"Fine. Then, let's get down to brass tacks. As I mentioned when we spoke this afternoon, I believe that your piece of land figured in heavily to the outcome of the battle that made this town famous. But, it is a little-known fact. That's why I'm here. To put your little piece of land in the history books and to set the record straight."

Winndrow seemed nonplussed. "I'm listening," he said, "but I still ain't heard no cash register ding-ing."

"Oh, yes, of course. We're proposing to pay you one hundred dollars so we can conduct our research and investigation on your land."

Miss Smithers began to fidget in her chair. "What is this 'we' business," she thought.

Winndrow squinted as he let that piece of information about the money digest. A hundred dollars was more than he could make in a week working at the Highway 79 Gulf station. Still, something didn't seem quite right. "What does your so-called research and investigation involve?" he asked finally.

"Well," said Spriggs, trying hard to hide his agitation, "it just means we spend a couple of days going over your land with a metal detector and comparing landmarks with my charts and maps."

"Maybe I'm being stupid," said Winndrow, "but why would you need a metal detector?"

"Excellent question!" said Spriggs, his finger on his mustache. He shot a glance over at Miss Smithers who seemed as anxious as Winndrow for an answer. "As you

are probably aware, not every Confederate regiment surrendered to Grant at Donelson. Forrest, in fact, took his men and escaped over the swollen Lick Creek rather than surrender. And there was one



particular Confederate officer who gave the Union forces some valuable information that he had stored in a metal ammunition case in exchange for getting his men out alive and without being captured. It's

As they rattled down the driveway, they caught a glimpse of Spriggs on the hill beyond the clump of trees. Something glistened in his hands.

our belief that the information was critical to the outcome of the battle, and that particular exchange occurred in the vicinity of your Pinkham Ridge. The metal case was never recovered, and it's my belief that it's still buried somewhere up there. More importantly, I believe that the evidence inside that case, will...ahem, make our case."

To Winndrow, something didn't seem quite right...Spriggs' theory didn't seem to fit what he had always heard about the behavior and honor of Fort Donelson's officers, although admittedly, his involve-

ment with the battlefield had been limited to loaning his boat to one of the park rangers and helping him fish a few cannonballs out of the river below his trailer. But, he thought, a hundred dollars is a hundred dollars.

"Okay, Doc, you got yourself a deal," he said finally, "but I want the money, cash, up front."

"Splendid!" said Spriggs, although inside he was bristling at the notion of paying this ruffian up front. "We'll begin bright and early tomorrow. Now that we've got all of that out of the way, what's good on this establishment's menu? We're famished!"

"Try the catfish," said Winndrow.

Spriggs made eye contact with Miss Smithers. "Yes, of course," he said.

The following morning was a Saturday, and it looked to be a carbon copy of the scorching day before. Spriggs had suffered through a restless night (blast these cornhusk mattresses!), and was a bit annoyed at seeing Miss Smithers' chipper mood when they

met for breakfast in the restaurant. "Coffee," he said to the waitress, holding up two fingers.

"What exactly do you want me to do today, Dr. Spriggs?" asked Miss Smithers.

"Simple, dear. Your job is to distract our young Mr. Pinkham while I explore his property with the metal detector."

"Can I ask you another question, Professor? If

Pinkham Ridge doesn't really figure into any of the history books, why do you think Bobby Beau Rutherford is buried there? I mean, what or who led you to believe that?"

"Ah, excellent question, my girl," Spriggs replied as he produced from his briefcase a worn and dusty leatherbound book with the initials "HDA."

"Introducing the personal diary of one Private H.D. Amberton. One of my former assistants stumbled onto it at an estate sale in Indiana," said Spriggs merrily. "She paid a few dollars for it, and dullard that

she was, turned the treasure over to me for a few dollars more, plus an 'A' or two in her American History class. This Amberton chap was apparently one of Rutherford's junior officers who served at his side. But what's interesting about this diary is, not only does it tell about Rutherford's death, it also tells about burying his body along with his wealth, estimated at \$250,000. And, there's a map,

"I mean, Professor, isn't this the same as graverobbing?"

albeit a rough one, that shows where he's buried."

"So why didn't Amberton come back after the war and claim the treasure?" asked Miss Smithers.

"He was killed in battle and the diary was shipped home to his widow who kept it under lock and key and upon her death, it was passed down again and again to children and grandchildren who didn't have the slightest interest in the stuffy old Civil War. Apparently, none of them bothered to pick the lock on the cover to read what was inside."

"One other question, Dr. Spriggs...will your metal detector pick up the remains?"

The professor sighed, "My dear sweet Miriam. Major Rutherford's sternum wouldn't necessarily set off the detector, but his gold certainly would."

"Yes, but isn't Mr. Pinkham expecting you to find some sort of metal ammunition case? If you do find what's left of Bobby Beau's remains, won't he be suspicious if he sees you digging up human bones?"

"Bingo, my dear," said the professor. "Again, that's where you come in. Your job, again, is to distract our Mr. Pinkham. And just so he won't be disappointed, I did pack a convenient metal ammo case among my luggage, along with some bogus maps of Pinkham Ridge which have all sorts of mumbo jumbo jotted down on them, designed to confuse even the most knowledgeable, which of course, does not include our Mr. Pinkham. As we speak, the mysterious case is waiting for us only a few yards from here, secure in the trunk of the lovely convertible that you so graciously procured for us just yesterday at the Nashville Airport. That is what Pinkham will see me unearth, not the remains of Major Rutherford, nor his

alleged fortune."

"This is beginning to sound more like Treasure Island than the War Between the States," Miss Smithers said as she sipped her coffee. "I mean, Professor, isn't this the same as graverobbing? And isn't that a little bit against the law?"

"How very droll, Miss Smithers. Don't you worry your pretty little head about it. You leave the legalities to me. Great

American tomb raider, remember?"

Winndrow was relaxing in the big swing on the screened-in porch enjoying his morning's fourth cup of coffee and third cigarette when he heard the convertible struggling up the dirt driveway to the trailer. After exchanging the necessary pleasantries, Spriggs handed him an envelope engraved with the UNJ logo. When Winndrow opened it, he was pleased to discover a crisp, new hundred dollar bill, something he had rarely seen, if ever. After a few minutes of small talk, Winndrow noticed that Spriggs was growing impatient, so he pointed to a hill in the distance which was framed by a clump of tall oak trees. "That's probably where you want to start," he said.

Spriggs said a quick goodbye, and after sliding behind the wheel, cautiously nosed the car through the front pasture gate, through the kudzu, and on up toward the distant clump of trees. "Watch out for the alligators!" Winndrow yelled at the car, though it was unclear if Spriggs heard the advice.

"It would have been much easier to have just took my truck," Winndrow said to himself as much as to Miss Smithers, who had settled down on the porch in one of the kitchen chairs. "We're probably gonna have to drive up there directly anyway and haul that fancy car out of whatever gully that fool ends up in."

He joined her in one of the other chairs on the porch, and together they watched as the convertible disappeared into an orange cloud of dust just beyond the front pasture. "Cup a coffee?" he asked, finally.

"Thanks."

"How you take it?"

"Cream and sugar. And Mr. Pinkham, I wasn't aware that there was an alligator problem in Tennessee."

"Some say it's just a crock," Winndrow said without smiling, "and I'm just Winn. Mr. Pinkham was my daddy. And he and his daddy and his daddy's daddy are all resting up there on that yonder hill under those big oak trees. Resting for now, I should say. I don't know how much longer they'll rest once your nutty friend starts waving that crazy metal detector around."

"I see," said Miss Smithers, smiling.

"Really, I hope he don't get a wild hair and venture off past that hill with all the trees," said Winndrow.

"Yeah, I know—alligators."

"No, serious," he said. "That's where my property ends—at least now—and where the park property begins. The government down here takes a dim view of anyone who might want to remove pieces of its property, or mess with it for that matter. But smart man that he is, I'm sure

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the professor knows all that. Plus, he has all those fine maps to keep him straight.”

After an hour or so, the morning sun began heating up the porch, so the two of them went inside the trailer to cool off. “How about a picnic?” asked Winndrow. “I could throw some sandwiches together.”

“Sounds great,” said Miss Smithers. She was beginning to feel more comfortable.

The trailer’s kitchen was, in reality, a mere extension of the living room, so

“I used to walk to this creek and camp out right about here. Now I don't know who owns it.”

while she sat on the sofa, Winndrow began opening cabinets and retrieving items from the tiny refrigerator. On the kitchen side of the sofa was an end-table adorned with an old baseball trophy and a lamp made out of driftwood. The trophy consisted of a tarnished gold batter on top of an unpolished wooden base. In the center of the base was a silver plate with the simple inscription: “Winndrow Pinkham, Dover All-Stars.” Part of the bat had broken off, and it gave the effect that the small golden batter was powerfully swinging a billy club.

“Where did the name ‘Winndrow’ come from? Is it a family name?” she asked.

“Well, sorta,” he said. “Both of my parents were orphans—both of their daddies got killed in the First World War. Names were Winston Byrd and Woodrow Pinkham. They were best friends, in life and in death, I guess you could say. Probably seemed natural that their children would get along good enough to stay married. When I came along they couldn’t decide which one to name me after, so they split it, and added an extra ‘n’ somewhere along the way. Spelling wasn’t that important, anyway. It was the thought that counts. What about you? Miriam—you got a little Moses in your family?”

She looked up from the trophy quizzically. “I’m not following you. I must have missed something.”

“Oh yeah. You missed a childhood of Baptist Sunday School, apparently,” Winndrow said, grinning.

A few minutes later, he finished with the preparation of the picnic lunch. He had

made baloney sandwiches and had, to his delight, found some sardines and crackers in the cabinet. He took a couple of RCs out of the fridge and after opening them using the handle of the refrigerator, transferred their contents into a large thermos. Winndrow pointed at the red and chrome transistor radio that he had switched on when they first came in from the porch.

“That’s the country station in Clarksville,” he said. “At night we can pick up WSM. That means on Friday and Saturday nights, we have a front row seat

at the Opry.

Winndrow paused for effect. “I missed the Opry last night,” he said. “I was entertaining guests from up north. They came down here because they heard about our catfish.”

“What else is there to see around here?” she asked sweetly as she loaded the food and the thermos into a basket. She had begun to suspect that he was making fun of her, though she wasn’t quite sure.

“Oh, attractions.”

“What kind of attractions?”

“Oh, you know. The kind of things we Southerners are famous for. I’ll show you.”

They emerged from the coolness of the trailer to the harsh reality of the white-hot summer afternoon. She watched from the

porch as he backed his truck up to his boat and hitched it up. As they rattled down the driveway, they caught a glimpse of Spriggs on the hill beyond the clump of trees. Something glistened in his hands.

A few minutes later, they were pushing the boat into the river and jumping into it as it drifted out into the current. Winndrow awakened the old blue Evinrude with a quick pull of the rope, and they were off like a shot. She sat in the front of the boat, facing him with the basket in her lap. She smiled quickly as the warm breeze off the water played with her dark hair, twirling it around her face in flashes of black and blue. Winndrow smiled back and wiped the spray from the river out of his eyes.

They rode the waves for awhile, and then Winndrow whipped the boat around a large island in the middle of the river. At the far end of the island, hidden from the Dover side of the river, was an inlet which turned into a creek. The creek, in turn, split the island into two large, but unequal halves as it wound like a snake through the center. Winndrow deftly steered the boat around the first series of bends in the creek to where the island rose up on both sides, creating the illusion of isolation. It was easy to forget that the pleasant little creek was in the middle of an island in the middle of a river.

Winndrow beached the boat, and they stepped onto the shore. With the basket in hand, they climbed the hill and sat down beneath a fat and lush shade tree.

“I used to come here as a boy,” Winndrow said as they bit into their sand-



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wiches.

“So you’ve always had a boat?” she asked, reaching for the thermos.

Winndrow smiled. “No. This is the eastern end of Pinkham Ridge.”

She stopped chewing and looked hard at him to see if he was joking, but instinctively, she knew he wasn’t.

“They damned the river a few years ago,” he said. “I used to walk to this creek and camp out right about here. Now I don’t know who owns it. The government, I guess.”

“Maybe that’s all of us,” she said.

“Yeah, maybe,” Winndrow replied wistfully. “But, as I said, the government don’t like you messing with their stuff...whether or not you used to own it. Makes no matter.”

At sunset they were back sitting on the trailer’s screened-in porch when they saw the convertible’s headlights cutting through the haze of dust. Spriggs didn’t bother to get out of the car. He

rolled the window down and yelled up at the porch, “Could you get in, please?”

“I reckon he means you,” Winndrow said to Miss Smithers.

When she got in, this time on the passenger’s side, Spriggs stomped the accelerator and threw clods of driveway dirt all over the trailer’s casual lawn.

“That one’s got a nasty little temper,” Winndrow said out loud to himself as he turned off the porch light and went inside to switch on the Saturday night Opry. While the music played, he went to the trailer’s back bedroom and slowly went through a collection of assorted items on the floor of the bedroom’s tiny closet. When he emerged from the bedroom, he was carrying a good-sized army surplus duffel bag which he had stuffed with some dirt-covered, tattered clothing and an old satchel. He turned off the radio, stepped out of the trailer, and, after throwing the duffel bag up into the seat, climbed behind the wheel of his truck. After starting it, he sat for a moment in the darkness and let the old truck idle in the dirt driveway while he lit a Camel that he pulled from behind his ear. Then he cut the engine, climbed down out of the truck, extracted

the bag through the open window, and began walking down the long driveway through the warm summer night. The driveway sloped down the hill and ended at the county road, and once he reached that point, he paused at his rusty mailbox and felt around in the dark for bills and magazines. Finding the box empty, he adjusted the duffel bag over his shoulder and headed south on foot down the county road toward Dover. Through the trees he could see the town square’s flickering lights in the distance. Behind him was the thick blackness of the field leading up to his trailer, which was sharply silhouetted against the bright evening sky.

The old man squinted at the couple standing on the the other side of the padlocked chain-link gate. He glanced quickly up at the south Georgia sun and then at

Just under the papers were several dirt-covered remnants of butternut gray clothing that he'd never seen.

his pocketwatch before returning his gaze on the man and the woman. “It’s gonna be a hot ‘un,” he said, “and we don’t even open for another fifteen minutes. They’re still feeding the gators. I’ll tell you what, though. If you buy your admission tickets now, before people start crowding in, I’ll knock a dollar off ‘em. Then when we open up, you can just sail on through the gate.”

“Can you break a hundred?” Winndrow asked.

“Listen to you,” the old man said. “Not today. Not yet, anyway.”

“Okay, we’ll be back in a little bit...I guess paying retail,” Winndrow said. “Didn’t I see a little place back up the highway a mile or so? Do they sell coffee?”

“Yessir, that would be the 41 Diner. They got good coffee.”

“Well, I guess we’ll just go and get us some,” Winndrow said.

Although they had driven all night, neither one felt the least bit tired. They had ridden with the top down and her hair still smelled like the fresh southern night air. He had parked the convertible beside the brightly-colored sign in the parking lot so

they could get some snapshots to send to her friends. As they climbed back into the car she said, “I wonder what they feed those alligators?”

“Yankees and catfish,” Winndrow replied.

“Ha ha,” said Miss Smithers.

At that exact moment, back in Dover, Spriggs was rudely awakened by one of the motel clean-up ladies who was loudly tapping on the door. “Excuse me!” she said, “Housekeeping! Is this your suitcase, sir?”

Spriggs threw on a robe over his pajamas and staggered to the door, unlocking it with some degree of effort.

“Suitcase?” he said as he cracked open the door.

The woman stood back from the door with a suspicious frown. Spriggs followed the woman’s gaze to his feet. There, propped up beside the door was his metal ammunition box. “Thank you ma’am, I’ll take care of it,” he said as he quickly scanned

the motel parking lot and pressed a quarter in the woman’s hand.

Spriggs shut the door, pulled the box inside the room and heaved it up onto his bed. Without thinking, he flipped the latches and threw back the lid. On top were the bogus maps and charts that he had prepared earlier in the week, but just under the papers were several dirt-covered remnants of butternut gray clothing that he had never seen before. Once he removed them from the case, he was surprised with the realization that the rags were, in fact, all that remained of a Confederate major’s uniform, held together by rotted threads and small clods of dirt. A tarnished belt buckled with the inscription, “CSA” fell out from within the tattered trousers. Under the uniform lay the grand prize: an equally dirt-covered, ancient satchel stuffed with thousands of wrapped bills of different denominations.

“Confederate!” he hissed. His next thought, however, was interrupted by the heavy pounding on his motel door by the huge fist of the county sheriff.

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The Other Side of the Door

by Nelda Hill

The elevator was crowded, I recall, and despite my urgent need, I tried to stand still, although I tugged at my mother's hand, lest she forget this was a crisis. I was not a reader yet, but I could decipher so when the elevator door slid open and I saw "WOMEN" on a door just beyond, I made a dash for it, darting in front of two black women about to enter.

My mother called for me to come back. "No, child," one of the women said. They waited until I got out of their way.

Back on the elevator, I felt the grown-ups winking and grinning above me. I was humiliated and not at all sure what I'd done. Even the black elevator operator stole a glance at me when she announced "the Ladies Powder Room." She pulled a large lever with her white-gloved hands and the elevator door slid open. My mother led me to relief through a door with a sign I could not begin to decode.

Going to downtown Nashville in the late 1950s was enough of an occasion that I was dressed in my second-best clothes and put under strict instruction not to whine, wander off, or get dirty. The payoff for good behavior was rich though: visits to the toy departments in the two major department stores, Cain-Sloan and Harvey's, and lunch that need not involve milk or vegetables at one of the department store lunch counters.

Unbeknownst to me, my humiliation on the elevator was slight compared to what black children experienced when they came downtown. They didn't get to drink *co-cola* at department store lunch counters because local law didn't allow it. If they had need of a restroom, there was no guarantee that one would be available because, again, local law didn't require merchants to provide restrooms for nonwhites. When you get down to it, desegregation was not about hamburgers, it was about the fact

that even black children were unable to satisfy their basic human needs in public places.

The smugness of those grown-ups on the Cain-Sloan elevator was about to be

Jim Lawson, a Methodist minister, held these workshops during the fall of 1959. In them, he taught the principles and practice of non-violent resistance and how it might be used to protest segregation. Most of the workshop participants were students at Nashville's four black colleges.

They weren't much more than kids, really, but it was plain as day to them that this emperor wore no clothes. The idea that you could tell a person where to eat, drink, or toilet solely on the basis of his

skin color was as outrageous to them as the notion you could tell a black's dollar from a white's dollar once it got in the cash register. It was pretty clear that black dollars were as green as white ones, in that 17% of downtown sales were to black people. Yet they could not sit down and rest with a cold drink at the very stores that took their money.

Under Lawson's guidance, the students decided to challenge law and custom at some of those lunch counters. They would go in, take seats and request to be served. Anticipating that the response would not be favorable, even tending toward the hateful, they taught themselves to let racial epithets and verbal abuse roll off them like water off a duck's back. In the event they were physically attacked, they learned to collapse and curl up in a fetal position so as to protect their vitals. Most of all, they thought long and hard about what they were doing and why they were doing it. Slowly, their outrage turned to

conviction, and their conviction turned to action.

The story of the Nashville sit-ins is splendidly told in *The Children*, a book by David Halberstam. Halberstam worked for *The Nashville Tennessean* and was principal reporter on the sit-ins. He wasn't much



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interrupted though. Little did they know that workshops were going on, maybe at that very moment, in the basement of Nashville's black First Baptist Church. Workshops that would change life as we knew it, not only in Nashville but also all over the country.

older than most of the people he covered.

The Children is a wonderful book for somebody like me, not only because it filled some gaps in that time when we didn't go downtown because of the troubles, but also because I have reached the age when I can get fretted by youth's impetuosity. Whereas kids proclaim *the king is naked, get the fool some clothes*, I've reached the age when one tends to recognize that while the king may be unclothed, there are surely extenuating circumstances surrounding the occasion of his nudity that need to be examined before he is dressed, thus avoiding the risk of upsetting organizational structures worthy of upholding.

In civil rights terms, that is the politics of gradualism. The idea that you shouldn't go too far too fast in terms of integration had some merit for a lot of people, both *black and white, but it begs the question, how slow can you go?* As Thurgood Marshall remarked, ninety-five years is about gradual enough.

While I doubt there was a black person in Davidson County who thought segregation was a good idea, a pretty good argument could be raised in favor of the devil they knew. Once the sit-ins progressed and the students started getting arrested and the white thugs showed up to beat the tar out of them, there was a pretty fair number of black Nashvillians who thought things might have gone too far. Here were these kids coming in from somewhere else, stirring things up, enraging the police and white establishment, with whom blacks had uneasily co-existed for lo these many years, and then they'd go on their merry ways and they, the upstanding black citizens of Nashville would be left to pay.

Then too, they feared for the children and themselves. 1310 Southern blacks had been lynched since 1882 and the image of 15-year-old Emmett Till's mutilated body surely sprang to haunt them. What the students were doing was dangerous. They were breaking the law and even though it was a bad law, only the Lord could help them if whites saw fit to take their revenge.

Kelly Miller Smith was minister of the First Baptist Church. It was he who allowed Jim Lawson to hold his workshops in the church's basement and he

who assuaged the anger and fear of his congregants. He referred to the students as *the children*, and he praised them for their courage, reminding the congregation, that "they were not alien blacks plunked down carelessly in this place, but the children of ordinary black people just like themselves and could easily be children of the congregation...and they were doing it for all the people of Nashville, all the people of the South" (Halberstam, p.177).

It helped that white officialdom was bearing down hard on the children, arresting them, jailing them, and allowing thugs to beat on them. How dare they treat these children like that? Black Nashville responded with an economic boycott. They refused to spend money downtown. White Nashville fearfully refused to even come downtown and so the boycott was compounded. By Easter, downtown merchants were beginning to see, if not the error of their ways, then the emptiness of

Mayor West said, now that he'd thought about it, that was exactly what he meant to say, and by golly, he'd say it again.

their coffers.

A solution was sought. Committees were appointed, meetings were held, and speeches were made. Nothing much happened. Then the thugs firebombed the home of Nashville's most prominent black attorney. He and his wife were not harmed but more than 140 windows in the Meharry Medical College were broken (Halberstam, p.228). There was a spontaneous, silent march by black citizens of Nashville to the steps of City Hall where Mayor Ben West stood waiting.

Now this is my favorite part of the story. Mayor West was considered a progressive, generally in favor of integration but a bit hamstrung by prevailing custom and local politics. At first things didn't go so well there on the steps of City Hall. One of the black ministers read a denouncement of the mayor for allowing things to get to such a point and both he and the mayor got a bit piqued. It was then Diane Nash, one of the student leaders, stepped in to calm the situation and bring matters to the point. She asked the mayor to speak as a man and not as a politician: did he feel it was wrong to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of his

race? Mayor West had to admit that it was.

She pressed on. So was he saying the lunch counters should be desegregated? Well yes, he guessed he was. That was it. The mayor had spoken and he was on their side.

Now here's the best part: *there was no spin*. None of the mayor's spokespersons came out to tell everybody what the mayor meant to say. In fact, Mayor West said, now that he'd thought about it, that was exactly what he meant to say, and by golly, he'd say it again.

Nashville had one of the smoother desegregation experiences. The student leaders went on to become major forces in the Civil Rights movement. Some became doctors and ministers. John Lewis is a Congressman and recipient of the 2001 Profile in Courage Award. Marion Barry was mayor of Washington D.C. The children did right well for themselves and I'm grateful to them for what they did.

The summer before I started college and about twelve years after Nashville desegregated, I took a job as a waitress in *The*

Iris Room at Cain-Sloan Department Store. I was told that whenever I was in uniform I was not to enter through the front door of the store but to come in through the parking garage. I was not to wear the white apron of my uniform outside the dining room and my hair was always to be two inches above my collar. Under no circumstances was I to use the customer's restroom but rather the employees' restroom on another floor. It seemed a bit much, but I needed the job.

One day, on break, I went to the designated restroom and I happened to notice that the word "Women" on the restroom door looked a bit cattywampus. I looked closer and discovered that someone had taken a paintbrush and swiped over the word "Colored."

Somehow, it seemed fitting.

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Nelda Hill lives in Knoxville, Tennessee. Besides writing she occasionally plays a mean mountain dulcimer in a bluegrass band.