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Southern Reader

AN ONLINE MAGAZINE ABOUT LIFE IN THE SOUTH

Freight Train to Winder

An 11-year-old's 1961 trip
from Atlanta to the unknown

Drive Time

Life after retirement

Tracking Down a Dream

A couple of train stories all rolled up in one

Bacon and Egg Pas De Deux

Sometimes love is over easy

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The Real McCoy

Moonshine and fast, fast cars



David Skinner

Tracking Down a Dream

I took my first train ride when I was in second grade. It was a rite-of-passage in our little elementary school, a field trip that was widely heralded by the older kids and widely anticipated by the newbies.

We boarded the train in Nashville and took it north to Gallatin. It was the late 1950's, and we were all too excited to notice that Union Station, the grand old lady that once was the crown jewel of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, was in decline and fighting for her very life, not to mention the lives of her children, the proud old trains that once brought presidents and future country music stars, as well as the untold masses of everyday people, to our fair city.

Besides carrying class after class of second-graders from McGavock Elementary, that stretch of track between Nashville and Gallatin had seen its share of history. During the Civil War, that track was the main supply line for the Union forces who had unceremoniously captured and occupied Nashville after Fort Donelson fell to U.S. Grant.

However, Confederate General John Hunt Morgan, a folk hero to war-weary Middle Tennessee, never tired of disrupting that supply line, and Gallatin figured into one of his spectacularly successful plots. There were two tunnels on the line, just north of Gallatin, and Morgan and his men captured the tunnels as well as a supply train. They piled logs and explosives deep inside one of the tunnels and loaded the train up with explosives. They

then backed the train up several miles, got it headed toward the tunnel with a full throttle and a full head of steam, and stood back and watched the excitement. Not only did it provide them with a great deal of entertainment, it made a terrific mess that the Union troops had to clean up, and shut down their supply line for an

**Sometimes at night I would
hear a ghostly train whistle
screaming through the darkness.**

extended amount of time.

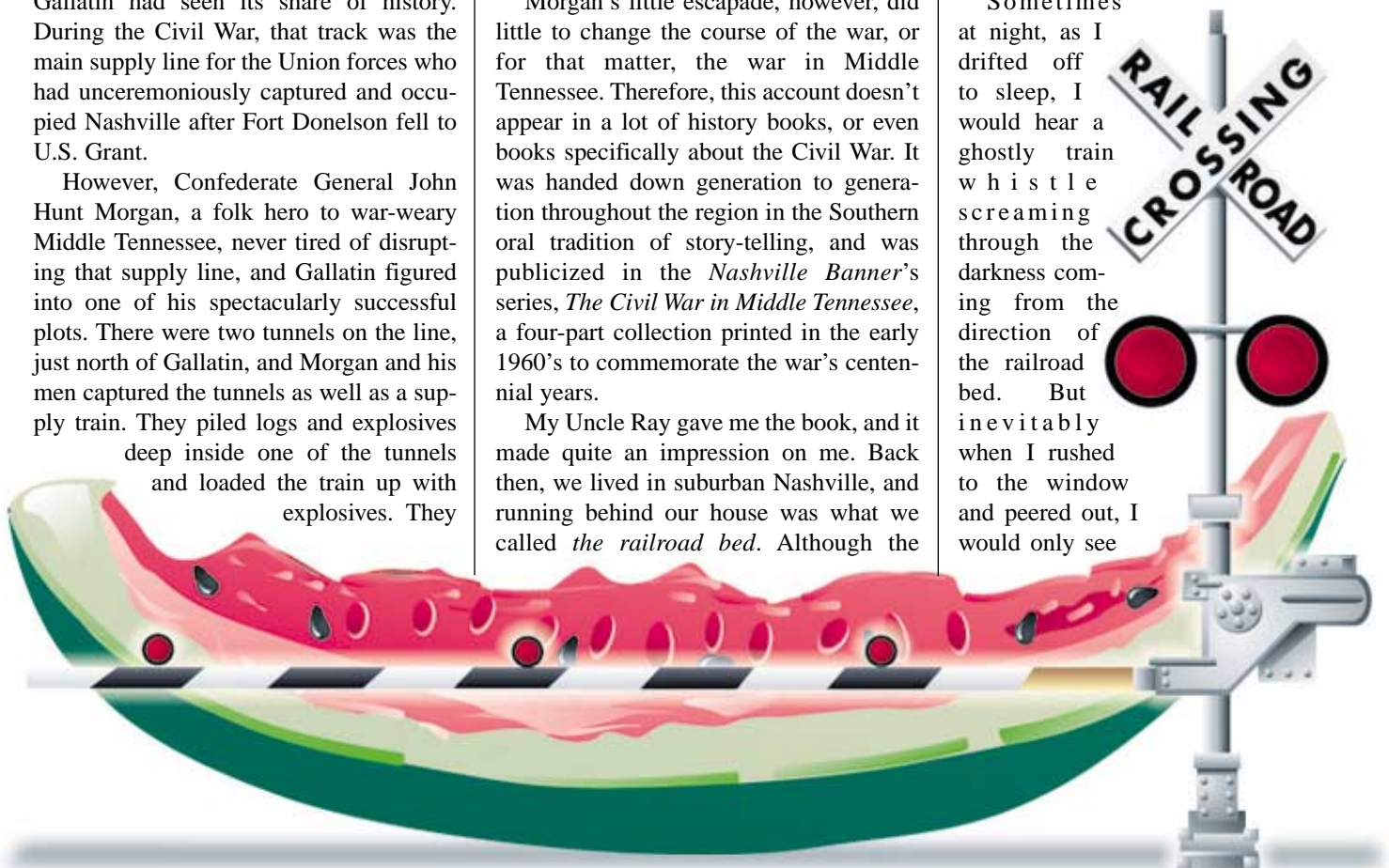
Morgan's little escapade, however, did little to change the course of the war, or for that matter, the war in Middle Tennessee. Therefore, this account doesn't appear in a lot of history books, or even books specifically about the Civil War. It was handed down generation to generation throughout the region in the Southern oral tradition of story-telling, and was publicized in the *Nashville Banner's* series, *The Civil War in Middle Tennessee*, a four-part collection printed in the early 1960's to commemorate the war's centennial years.

My Uncle Ray gave me the book, and it made quite an impression on me. Back then, we lived in suburban Nashville, and running behind our house was what we called *the railroad bed*. Although the

tracks had long been removed, the ground still bore the scars and indentations of years and years of countless trains. It lay in a secret valley that cut through our neighborhood. On one side was a steep slope that met the uppermost end of our neighbors' backyards; on the other side, a forest lay at the top of the steep hill, and beyond it was the pond and lavish grounds of an estate. The railroad bed was the perfect playground for a suburban Nashville kid of the 1950's. Hidden away from the world, it provided a convenient, if adventuresome, shortcut walking home from the elementary school, and on weekends it housed homemade forts and provided endless forest adventures. And, once I received the book from my Uncle Ray, I became convinced it was where Morgan and his men conducted their daring

raids on the Union-held rails.

Sometimes at night, as I drifted off to sleep, I would hear a ghostly train whistle screaming through the darkness coming from the direction of the railroad bed. But inevitably when I rushed to the window and peered out, I would only see



And that was the joy of riding the rails...just the sheer exercise of dreaming about how it used to be.

a dark and distant tree limb waving as if a train had just passed. I later learned that it had been the main eastern train route from Nashville to Lebanon, and Morgan and his men very well could have conducted raids on that very line.

As for the twin tunnels north of Gallatin that Morgan had so handily dispatched, as far as I know, they are still in use. A few years ago I observed them from the outside, after parking my car and walking up the tracks and waiting for a freight train to emerge from the northernmost tunnel.

But I also observed them from the inside. One Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1975 (before they closed down passenger service), I took an Amtrack train out of Nashville to Chicago on my way to Seattle, and eventually, Portland. The train ran along the same route that we had taken as elementary students twenty years before, although this time, it only slowed down and blew the whistle as it swooped through Gallatin. There were also no roommothers waiting for us with their station wagons at the depot.

As the sun began going down, we blew through the first tunnel north of town. *Where was Morgan?* Once we cleared the second tunnel I chewed on a hamburger from the dining car and pretended to be a Union officer trying to figure out exactly how I would deal with Morgan and his crazy rebel-yelling band of banshees once they boarded the Amtrack train.

Who are you and where are your tickets? I would ask. Wait a minute, they would reply, you're one of us!

And that was the joy of riding the rails...just

the sheer exercise of dreaming about how it used to be. Also, there was the unique perspective of seeing the countryside from inside out. The train tracks divided pastures and towns, and stopped what seemed to be the busiest of highways. The closer we got to Chicago, the more impatient the drivers appeared to be as they waited at the crossings for us to get out of their way.

All these years later, I'm still obsessed with the history, romance and excitement of railroads and trains. (My only hiatus from this obsession was my two-year stint as *Literary Guild* Art Director, when I commuted via the Long Island Railroad from my home in Brooklyn Heights to Doubleday in Garden City...the LIRR can suck the life out of any romantic obsession.)

A few weeks ago I took my son to a railroad museum to climb on board, and even ride, some of the aging trains, and I saw the germ of an obsession growing in his young eyes. And, sometimes at night I have cascading dreams. One night I dreamed I was back in the little house of my youth, and once again, I heard the ghost whistle from the train beyond the old railroad bed. I awoke to hear the tail-end of the real enough-sounding train whistle, but there are no train tracks near where I now live. I pulled back the blinds, and in the bright moonlight as I began to wake up, I could almost make out the faded image of the old railroad bed and a dark and distant tree limb waving as if a train had just passed.

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Freight Train to Winder

a childhood memoir by William J. Brotherton

Growing up in Atlanta in the sixties was like growing up in a medieval kingdom. Adventure was always around the corner and my younger brother, Steve and I always managed to find it.

Back in those times, on days that you weren't going to school, boys would leave their homes in the morning and not return

until suppertime. In those glorious days, parents weren't concerned that someone would snatch your kids, and children were

expected to stay outside all day, out of your parents' way. At age 11, I had a paper route that required me and my brother, Steve, who was 10, to meet the newspaper distributor on Sunday mornings at 3 a.m. so that we could pick up our newspapers, put the final Sunday paper together out of bundles of separate sections, including the

comics and all the advertising inserts, and then deliver it to all our customers by 6 in the morning. With that kind of responsibility, my brother and I weren't afraid to wander and explore new areas.

We had a buddy our age, Walter Huber, who lived in the neighborhood and served as an altar boy at Christ the King Cathedral with Steve and me. We also went to school together at Christ the King Elementary, where stern nuns constantly warned us of the dangers of the world. It was a scary time, we were constantly cautioned, because the Russians could start World War III at any time and atomic bombs would rain upon us. Outside our classroom was a yellow triangular sign that told us a fallout shelter was in the basement of the school.

We regularly had drills where we marched in a somewhat orderly procession into the fallout shelter, with the nuns admonishing us to hurry because we never knew when the bombs would drop.

Several of our neighbors were putting in home fallout shelters, evidenced by dump trucks hauling tons of dirt out of their backyards. No one in our blue-collar neighborhood could afford a swimming pool, but a fallout shelter, now that was a different thing. It could mean the difference between life and death for your family.

Besides the nuns and the neighborhood fallout shelters, there was also Nikita Khrushchev. There he was staring down at us from the cardboard advertisements inside the Atlanta Transit System trolleys and buses. "We will bury you," he scolded us with an angry Russian grimace and the picture in the advertisement always showed him banging a shoe. We assumed it was one of his shoes. This was, as I recall, shortly after the Cuban missile crisis, when we really came close to nuclear war. We were saved by President Kennedy, the nuns told us, and we were continually reminded that he was Catholic, too.

So, as we boys thought, if we were all going to die in an atomic conflagration, or, as the nuns constantly reminded us also, we were going to hell for impure thoughts, then why not have some adventure? And

adventure meant railroad tracks, just across from dirty Peachtree Creek that ran near our neighborhood.

We used a two-foot diameter clay sewer pipe to cross over the creek. We knew where to negotiate the creek, because we had come down to the area before to shoot our BB guns at the giant Norwegian rats in the creek. I don't think we ever hurt them, but it was great sport anyway. There was an ancient stone trestle support that dated back from the War Between the States. The local story was that Sherman, the hated Yankee general that burned Atlanta, had also set fire to the wooden trestle to stop the Confederate trains. All that survived were the stone supports. We boys would climb up the 15 feet or so to get to the top of the support and it would provide a commanding view of the creek and the trains nearby. The

"What if," my brother asked, "this train never slows down?" Worry, something highly unusual in my 11-year-old brain, began to creep in.

support was right below the Southern Railway double-track trestle so that we looked up to the Southern trains as they rumbled across the trestle. The view from the support looked over the creek and onto the tracks of the Seaboard Coastline Railroad. When trains came by on either track, we could hear them from miles away as they blasted their horns approaching us; then it felt like a tornado as they rushed past us and the gritty wind from the train blew into our faces.

It was a warm summer day in 1961, a Saturday afternoon, when we crossed over Peachtree Creek to inspect a stopped Seaboard Air Line freight train. We could see the locomotives far ahead, heading towards an area we had never explored. We were curious about where this direction of tracks went, so we climbed into an empty boxcar and waited. But not for long, because the train jolted to a start, and Walter, who was standing in the doorway, almost fell out. Being young, we didn't worry about being cut in two or losing an arm under the steel wheels of the car. We were fearless.

It was exciting to pass under the

Piedmont Road Bridge, a bridge we had crossed over many times. Always with my dad driving (my mom wouldn't drive) the family car, a 1955 baby blue Chevy station wagon that my mom called "Jess," after a favorite horse her dad had worked on the family farm in Vermont.

Beyond the Piedmont Road Bridge past the Spur Gas Station was the unknown. Adventure beckoned us.

What also made this trip different was that the trains we normally hopped into downtown Atlanta belonged to the Southern Railway, with F9 and E9 diesels painted in bright green, gold, and white livery. We were going on a different set of tracks today, they crossed under the Southern Railway trestle that spanned Peachtree Creek. The train we were on belonged to the Seaboard Air Line, with its diesel engines, all GP-9's, painted battleship gray. The GP stood for general purpose and they were ugly locomotives compared to the sleek F-9's and E-9's of the Southern. Southern Railway did have some GP-9's, but theirs were different from the Seaboard's.

The Southern GP-9's had the long end of the locomotive forward to protect the crew in the event of a collision. The Seaboard GP-9's had the short nose up front.

As we embarked on this Saturday day trip, I had told my little band that we would only go out several miles, jump off the train, and hike back in time to play some baseball at the park.

That was the plan anyway, to see where the tracks went, beyond Piedmont Road. The Seaboard Air Line had different plans for us, however, as the train built up speed. We could only sit in the boxcar, and wait. Wait for it to slow down enough for us to jump out. Several miles went by and it was obvious my plan wasn't going to work.

"What if," my brother asked, "this train never slows down?" Worry, something highly unusual in my 11-year-old brain, began to creep in.

An hour passed, according to my Timex watch that had been my Confirmation present. I quickly figured out that we would not be able to walk home. Looking over at Steve and Walter, their worried faces showed they realized the same thing.

We could hear the train's horn, two long notes, and one short, and then another long, as the train roared through the crossings. This train was in a hurry to get somewhere. It was exhilarating to sit just inside the doorway and watch the world go by. We went through small Georgia towns and waved at startled motorists at the crossings. We three were clearly somewhere we were not supposed to be and it was delicious.

As the train journey progressed, my brother found a piece of cardboard and swept our little area of the car. After all, it looked like we were going to be there for a while. It was no longer fun to wave at crossings and it was now past 3 pm. We had a dollar in change among us, enough for some nickel cokes and moon pies to tide us over til supper. If in fact we could get back for supper. Steve and I also started worrying about our dad, a firm believer in the use of the belt for major breaches of discipline. Our train trip

would clearly qualify as a belt offense if our Dad discovered what we were doing.

We felt the train lurch and the train began to slow down. The loud boom of the drawbars banging together as the engineer applied his air brakes, signaled it was time to get off the train. It was now or never, it looked like.

The train was coming around a right hand curve and ahead was a bridge on a slight incline. The train slowed down even more, but it was still moving.

The right of way sloped down to the creek the trestle crossed and the entire area was overgrown with Kudzu, a lush, green vine and an accidental import from the orient that had overrun the South. Trains had been known to stall on the tracks after the fast growing Kudzu had lapped over onto the rails. I hoped the Kudzu would cushion our jump.

The train continued to slow down. I

calculated it was going about 20 miles per hour, based on watching my Dad's driving and the speedometer. I addressed my brother and Walter.

"We've gotta jump!"

My brother started crying. After all, he was 10. Walter nodded his head because he knew we had no choice.

Who knew when the

must always be strapped in while riding in the family car, and generally eschew danger of any kind, unless it's part of a video game. It was different back in my childhood. We didn't have video games, or even TV, we certainly didn't wear bike helmets, and cars didn't even have seat belts.

But we survived somehow.

I fell hard into the Kudzu, rolled, and somersaulted 100 feet down the embankment. The

Kudzu was four to five inches thick and that helped.

We heard hollering and looked up the hill to see the conductor waving his fist at us out of the caboose cupola window. He was yelling, "Stay off the train!" He climbed down from the cupola and came out onto the platform, where the brakeman, who started hollering obscenities at us, joined him. We didn't understand some of the words, but it was clear that they didn't want us on the train.

"What if they call the railroad police?" Walter blurted out. The feared railroad police.

Walter sat down in the Kudzu next to me. None of us had ended up in the creek, which was fortunate. Not only because wet clothes would have been uncomfortable, and there was always the fear of moccasins, but also because creeks back then in Georgia were nothing more than raw sewage and industrial waste. We had

often seen pipes spewing the dirty water into the creek alongside the track on our normal route into downtown Atlanta. We figured it wasn't different anywhere else.

Steve had been lying flat on his back about fifteen feet away. He was whimpering. He sat up and hollered, "Damn you Bill! I'm not doing that again!"

I was startled. It was a word we had heard before, but none of us had used it in



train would slow down again?

We stood at the doorway and could see the diesels ahead as they passed clear of the bridge. There were four of them; it

**I fell hard into the Kudzu,
rolled, and somersaulted
100 feet down the embankment.**

was a long train and they began spewing thick, black smoke. The car lurched again, as the slack ran out. That meant the speed would go back up once the train cleared the hill.

I shoved my brother, Steve, and he landed in the Kudzu and rolled and rolled. Walter looked at me and jumped, yelling, "Geronimo!" I followed.

Kids today wear helmets to ride bikes,

our strict Catholic households. We weren't even sure what it meant, but we knew it was something bad. We had first heard "damn" used when a disgruntled fan behind Steve and I lamented another loss by our beloved Atlanta Crackers at Ponce De Leon Ballpark.

"Damn the Crackers!" he hollered, "They can't play baseball worth a damn." We had also noticed that the unhappy fan smelled of beer, and slurred his words. Some of his beer had sloshed onto me, and he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Sorry kid."

I asked my dad what "damn" meant, and he gave me a dirty look. "Don't ever use that word again!" he said and gave me that scary father glare.

"Yes sir," I said and I put the word in my memory bank. Now here was my brother using a forbidden word, but I couldn't be mad at him because I had talked him into our trek. And here we were with no way to get home, unless we hopped another train and I didn't know if I could talk even Walter into trying that, much less Steve.

"How are we going to get home?" Steve questioned me. He had an angry look on his face. Steve and I had always been close, not just in years, but everything else; we had a paper route together, we were altar boys together, and we were not just brothers. We were best friends.

Not that we looked anything alike. My mom was from Vermont, with dark features and jet-black hair. My dad, from Augusta, Georgia, was blond haired (before he became completely bald) and fair. I took after my dad, my brother Steve looked like my mom. He was so dark; I often kidded him about being from Puerto Rico.

He would get mad at me when I called him a Puerto Rican. But now, he was really mad. And he had reason to be. I had gotten us into a real mess.

"Let's move under the bridge and wait for another train," I said. The leader should have a plan and that was mine.

"What if the railroad police come?" Walter was still worried about that.

I replied, "At least they'll take us home." I wasn't so sure I wanted to get back on a train.

We got down under the bridge. Steve

had a cut on his right elbow, Walter's lip was bleeding, and I had sprained my right ankle. At least nobody had broken anything.

The Seaboard Air Line, unlike the Southern Railway, had a single-track main line. On the Southern, trains were going back and forth all day and night, it seemed, on the double track line. There was a Southern switchyard right near our neighborhood and the Southern trains reduced their speed to go through the switchyard, and then slowed to go through the Atlanta train stations: first Brookwood Station, a suburban station, and then Terminal Station. The Union Station was used by the Central of Georgia. The slow speed of the Southern trains made it easy to get on and off. But the Seaboard, as we learned, didn't have yards in the area to slow their trains down.

It was now 4:30 in the afternoon. We were hungry, but we were nowhere near a

I got a map of Georgia and we spread it out on a small desk. It might as well have been in Greek.

town. We all just wanted to get back home. We waited for a while to see if a train was coming from the opposite direction, but after an hour passed and there were no trains in either direction, we realized we would have to start walking. It would be dark in less than four hours. We then heard a train horn in the distance, going in the direction of Atlanta. We heard it again, much closer. It was going fast.

It was a passenger train and it roared over us as we crouched under the bridge. We hoped that no one flushed the toilet over us. Back then, the toilets discharged right onto the tracks, not into a holding tank. We saw feces and toilet paper on the tracks all the time. There was no Environmental Protection Agency in the 1960's.

A half-hour of walking along the tracks passed, and Steve and Walter looked at me for a new idea. At least, I thought cheerfully, the railroad police weren't looking for us.

"Let's hitchhike," I suggested. We had done it before when we wanted to save bus fare to get to the Techwood Theatre for the

Saturday double features.

It was a ten-cent fare to ride the Atlanta trackless trolley, which was Atlanta's name for its electric buses, down Peachtree Street to the Techwood Theatre. When we hitchhiked, though, it saved the fare and we could use it for popcorn and a coke. Or better yet, we could walk over to the Varsity Drive Inn and eat chilidogs and homemade onion rings, topped off by a frosted orange drink. No, hitchhiking had its advantages and it wasn't that hard to do.

To hitchhike, we just stood by the road and stuck our thumbs out. But we had never been this far out. We had no idea where we were. There were miles of track in both directions, and no sign of any civilization whatsoever.

No one said anything and we continued walking back towards Piedmont Road and our neighborhood. Several miles down the tracks, we came to another bridge, a highway bridge. A gas station sat next to the bridge; it was another Spur Station alongside the tracks. A path etched out in the red clay ran up to the station. I wondered why there would be a path.

"Let's see where we are," I said and started up the trail. Walter and Steve followed without argument. It was 5:15 pm. We were running out of daylight.

The station sat on a busy road, a good sign, and the gas pumps were busy. There were three attendants and they pumped the gas, washed windshields, and checked under the hood. Inside the small office, a Coke dispenser and a Tom's snack machine crowded alongside racks of oil and automotive products. Glass bottles of recycled oil were on the shelves along with cans of new motor oil.

We waited in the small office, hoping one of the attendants would point us in the right direction. I got a map of Georgia and we spread it out on a small desk. It might as well have been in Greek. We didn't know where to even begin.

An attendant walked in with the name Alvin stitched over his left breast pocket. "Hey," he hollered, "You gotta buy that map! It's a quarter." Apparently you had to buy the map if you weren't buying gas. It was obvious we weren't in a position to buy gas.

"Mister," I asked, with trepidation in my voice, "Can you tell us how to get to Atlanta?"

"Atlanta," he boomed, as another attendant walked in. His name was Fred.

"What's going on?" Fred asked.

"Damn Fred, these boys want to get to Atlanta." There was that word again.

"Are you boys runaways?" It was Alvin.

"No sir," I answered. We sure weren't runaways. We wanted to get back home.

"How do you aim to get back to Atlanta?" Fred asked.

"Hitchhike," Walter said reluctantly. I was glad he spoke up. This was getting out of hand.

"That highway out there," Fred pointed to the road out the office window, "it'll take you right back to Atlanta."

"Yes sir, thank you sir."

I stammered, as we all hurried out. There was a water fountain outside the office; we all got some water, and we hurried across the road.

We stuck our thumbs out and waited. We got quizzical looks from the motorists, as they drove by. No one stopped, however. It was ten til six. We knew our parents would be looking for us. It was almost suppertime.

They would be getting worried. Here we were, outside a gas station, trying to hitchhike home. We still didn't know where we were.

We found out where we were when a police car pulled up. "Winder Police," it said on the door of the black 1957 Chevy four-door Bellaire. I knew my cars. The policeman was white

haired with a pencil thin white mustache. He smiled at us and motioned for us to get in the car. Didn't say a word to us. I got in the front and Walter and Steve got in the back. Had the railroad reported us, I thought?

He had pulled off the highway with his red bubble gum light on.

"Where you boys going?" He asked.

"We're just trying to get home, sir," I responded.

"Are you boys runaways?"

"No sir." I answered emphatically and figured Alvin and Fred had called the police.

The policeman shifted the car into drive and turned around. He reported into the radio that he was "bringing

"Don't be doing that," the cop told Walter. Apparently there was a rule about being a prisoner and waving to people on the outside.

The policeman pulled into a parking lot and parked at a one-story brick building that was behind City Hall. He told us to get out and we followed him through a screen door, and he guided us into an office.

The door had a metal plate on it that said, "Chief of Police." There were two plain wooden chairs in front of the chief's desk.

Walter and Steve grabbed the two chairs. The policeman brought a metal folding chair in and I sat down in it. We waited until the chief spoke. It was getting dark outside.

The chief said, "Your folks must be getting worried."

"Yes sir," all three of us spoke. There was no getting around it. We needed help to get home.

"I'm gonna have to call your folks. How long y'all been gone?"

"Since this morning," I said, "but we didn't run away. We just hopped a freight train and went too far. We weren't running away."

Steve and Walter both piped up with, "That's right," and the chief and the officer exchanged glances. I wasn't sure they believed us.

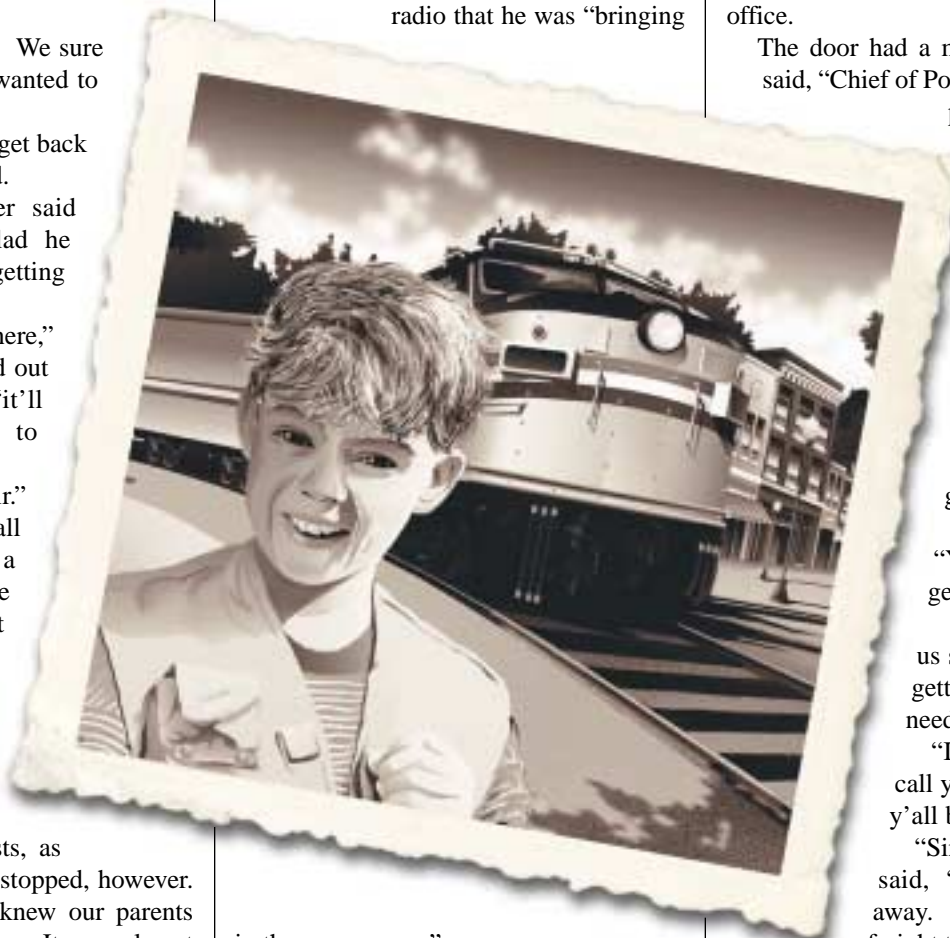
"Well, let's call your folks. What's your phone number boy?"

The chief looked at me. "Cedar7-0248," I replied.

"Cedar7-5502," Walter said.

The chief looked at Steve. Steve pointed to me and said, "He's my brother."

The chief snorted, "Y'all sure don't look alike." He picked up the phone and dialed my home phone. I cringed as the chief waited for an answer. The chief identified himself and told my dad he had



in three runaways."

"We're not runaways," Steve cried. This wasn't turning out good. Not only would we get whippings, we would never

We found out where we were when a police car pulled up. "Winder Police," it said on the door.

be let out of the house again!

I turned and looked at my brother and Walter. I was kind of excited, as this was my first ride in a police car. Walter seemed to be enjoying it in a way, too. He waved at a middle-aged couple staring at us who were in a '58 Cadillac.

Steve and me in Winder. He then asked if we were runaways.

"Humph," he said, "they sure look like runaways."

More questions by my dad, apparently as to how we got there. The chief told him we had caught a train.

There was silence on the other end as my father absorbed all this. Then my dad must have asked for directions because the chief rattled off the best way to get to Winder from Atlanta.

"Should take you about two hours, just come on out 316," the chief said. He hung up the phone and called Walter's dad.

All we could do then was wait in the chief's office. The chief told us not to touch anything. My father arrived, and he and the chief had a long private talk. We were herded into Jess after the chief and my dad shook hands. It was a long, quiet

drive back home. Thankfully, Walter rode back with us and my dad really couldn't whip us in front of Walter and it gave him time to cool down.

After our punishment had been meted

About the author

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Northern Adventures: Railroadng in the Days of the Caboose." For more information and to order the book, go to www.Bnrailstories.com.

**Thankfully, Walter rode back
with us and my dad really
couldn't whip us in front of Walter.**

out and we were allowed to venture outside the house, we never caught a train in that direction again.

But there was no way I was ever giving up my quest for adventure, and trains.

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Bacon and Egg Pas De Deux

A short story by Penny Dyer

Henry ate two eggs over easy, side of bacon, side of toast. He ate it every day, rain or shine, high cholesterol or not, sopping up runny egg yolk, literally wiping the plate clean with dry toast. Henry didn't actually like eggs.

What he did like was Martha, liked watching her liquid arms pour his coffee, clear his plate and smile at him all in one graceful, fluid motion. Maybe in some past life she was a dancer, Giselle meant for a loftier place than the Sand Dollar Cafe. He was mesmerized by a string of blond hair that refused to be placed anywhere except over her left eye, the sun-washed strand calling attention to a woman who shouldn't stand out at all. Martha rarely spoke, but when she did, her voice was quick-silver, deliberate, as if the words were chosen for economy, enough, no more—like his plate of eggs.

"What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" he wanted to ask, and though cliché it was, it summed up Martha perfectly; she was a fish out of water, a mermaid on dry land. How she'd ended up in this greasy-spoon-of-a-diner on the wrong end of Skidaway Island was anybody's guess. *None of my business*, Henry thought, *and Martha isn't saying*. He came here to be served by the prima donna of this biscuit-and-gravy ballet, brushing her soft hand with a ten-dollar bill in payment for a breakfast that gave him indigestion. She placed three dollars

and seventy-three cents change in his calloused, middle-aged hand, three dollars and seventy-three cents which Henry

never returned to his Levi's pocket.

Martha had his eggs ready when he arrived every morning at eight-thirty. "Henry's here," she said to Butch, the short-order cook, who replied with only a nod, cracking two eggs with his right hand, left hand perched on aproned hip, twitching the toothpick in his mouth. He

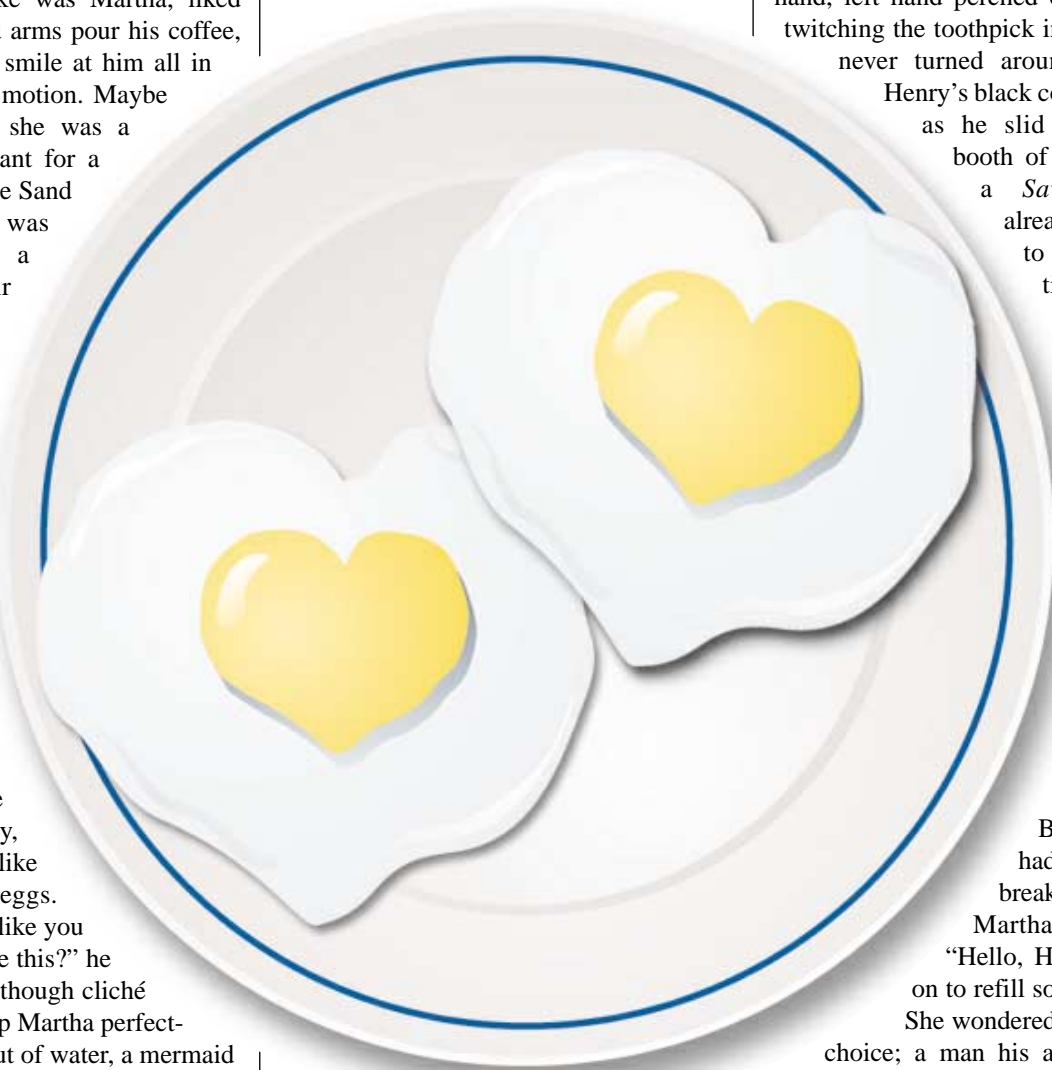
never turned around. Martha set Henry's black coffee before him as he slid into the back booth of the little diner, a *Savannah Times* already folded back to the sports section. She never

said, but tricked customers into thinking the table was taken by leaving the newspaper open, accompanied by a half cup of cold coffee which she removed as Henry opened the diner door.

By the time he had settled in, his breakfast was served, Martha had said her "Hello, Henry" and gone on to refill someone's juice.

She wondered at his breakfast choice; a man his age ought to be looking out for his heart, but he ate the eggs without comment, cleaned his plate like a good boy, then returned with the tide of each day. She imagined him as a construction worker, though he was never coarse-spoken like the bandanna-headed men

who spouted crude comments with their B.L.T.-stuffed mouths. She put those boys in their places instantly when they got out



He came here to be served by the prima donna of this biscuit-and-gravy ballet, brushing her soft hand with a ten-dollar bill in payment for a breakfast that gave him indigestion.

of line; she was old enough to be their mother and wasn't about to put up with nonsense from a bunch of half-grown kids.

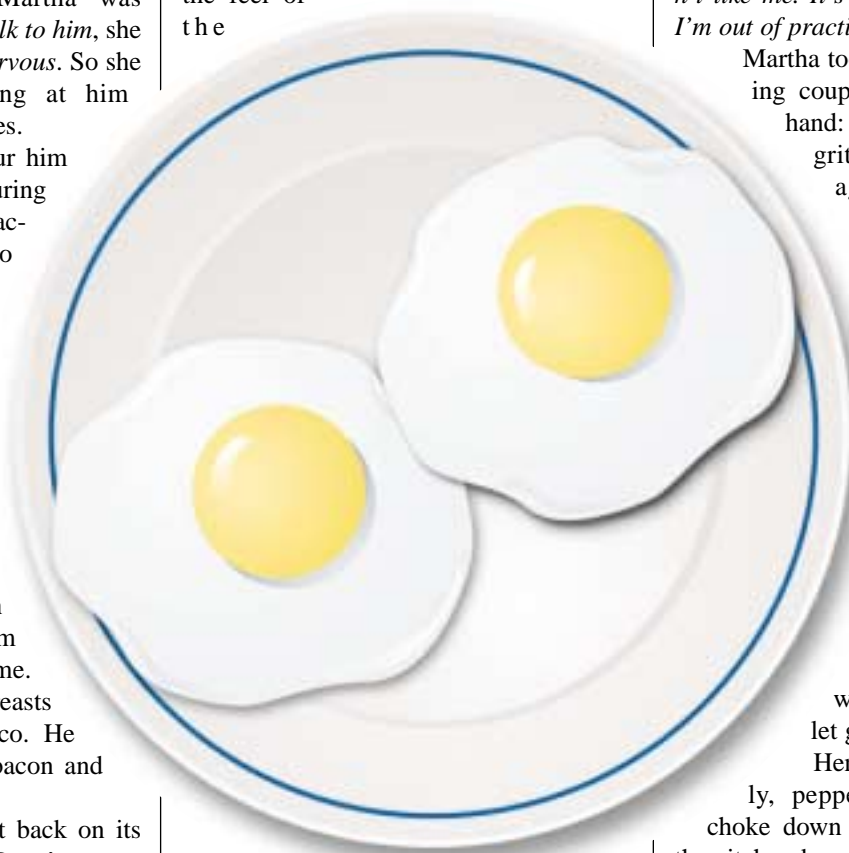
But Henry was no boy. His silver-tipped hair coordinated with his hard-work hands; his fingernails were always clean. Henry was different, though, because around Henry, Martha was tongue-tied. *I wish I could talk to him*, she thought, *but he makes me nervous*. So she kept her distance, glancing at him through hair-veiled green eyes.

Martha bent down to pour him another cup of coffee, pouring low to the cup with the practiced hands of someone who had made a living of being careful around children, careful not to intrude, careful not to make a splash. She had no cleavage to speak of. Henry found that even more attractive; she didn't need that extra display of femininity. He thanked her, watched her graceful sashay of porcelain limbs glide away, leaving him in a wake of lilac perfume. Henry imagined freckled breasts beneath her thin, blue calico. He forced his attention to his bacon and eggs.

Martha set the coffee pot back on its burner, took the Bandanna Boys' money, wished them a nice day. She shut the cash drawer with an elbow, already reaching to clear the dirty table. Henry never left a mess. He always stacked his dishes, laying across them his knife and fork, brushing crumbs off the tabletop. He was never any trouble. She sometimes wished he'd make some, spill something, anything, give her an excuse to descend on him with a dishtowel, laugh at him, tell him no need to cry over spilled milk. Martha let out a ragged sigh, set glasses of water before a tourist couple, dealt them weary menus. Henry watched her, each movement an empty arabesque.

Although he didn't look the part he loved ballet, giving generous donations to the *Savannah Dance Company*, but he hadn't attended performances since his

wife's death four summers ago. He had even let their box seat go. But he liked the idea of supporting something Mary had loved and it sure didn't hurt to have a tax deduction on his shrimping business. The boys mostly ran that now, though Henry made his sons take him out on one of the boats from time to time, just to remember the feel of the



Henry thanked her and watched her graceful sashay of porcelain limbs glide away, leaving him in a wake of lilac perfume.

hoist ropes and nets. It was grueling, satisfying work that Henry once enjoyed, but he no longer had the heart for it. He missed Mary's caress when he had come home exhausted, embraces given while he was still salty and smelling of dead fish, teasing touches of mock disgust, returned with mock remorse. He considered Martha in one of Mary's designer gowns, but the two women were simply cut out of different cloth. A fantasy of toe-shoe ribbons crisscrossing Martha's legs forced him to stare into the wishing well of his

coffee cup.

Still, if he couldn't watch Martha perform in a ballet, he'd settle for taking her to one. *Maybe I should just ask her if she used to dance. But what if she didn't? She might think I'm calling her old. She might think it's just a come-on line. Maybe she doesn't even like ballet. Maybe she doesn't like me. It's all too complicated, and I'm out of practice.*

Martha took and gave the vacationing couple's order in café shorthand: Two scrambled, no hash, grits side. Butch nodded again; he'd heard. She scooped up the water pitcher, noticed Henry rooting around for a missing pepper shaker, grabbed one from the counter, floated toward the booth.

"Thanks," he said, taking the shaker. He couldn't think of anything else to say.

"My pleasure," she ventured, face heating up. She looked away, willed her hand to open, let go.

Henry cursed himself silently, peppered the eggs, tried to choke down another bite. Martha set the pitcher down, fished her pocket for the check, attempted to tuck the wayward hair strand behind her ear. Her hands trembled as she wrote the total, taking much too long for a number she already knew, wrote every morning. *Stupid*, she thought, ripping the paper from its pad, intending to

hand it to Henry, snuff out any further sparks, be done with this adolescent nonsense. But she caught the edge of the pitcher, splattered ice water down the front of Henry's cotton shirt.

Martha whispered her apology, snatched a dry towel from the counter. She sponged off his chest, then blushed; ice had dropped onto Henry's lap. She hesitated, her hand resting against his wet shirt. She felt the warmth of his skin against her fingers. Henry put his hand over hers, stilling it for a brief moment before he took

the towel from her.

He smiled and raked away the ice. "It's just water, Martha. Don't worry about it." He searched her face expectantly, but it had clouded over. Henry wasn't sure how to read this kind of weather. "Been trying to find a way to break the ice anyway."

"Ma'am?" someone called. "Can we get a refill over here?" Martha cocked her head at the intrusion, pressed her lips together, and turned away from Henry.

He watched her go. It took a long time for the anchor in his stomach to hit bottom.

Martha delivered an impolite cup of coffee to the couple, and delivered their food to them. But then she returned to Henry, and the storm had passed; her eyes were a clear Caribbean sea. It was a little nod she gave him, but he moved over, and she settled in beside him. Somewhere between courage and caution a tentative, impromptu dance had begun, *une faille changement, pas de bourrée*--the pair giv-

ing way.

"I think it's all melted," she said.

Quiet had overtaken the café. Butch looked up from the griddle, twitched his toothpick. No ice machine-fill of water glasses. No plates clattering. No new

**Somewhere between courage
and caution a tentative,
impromptu dance had begun.**

orders of hash browns or sausage had been hung on the roundabout. He studied the room.

"Can I get a check, buddy?" the man at the counter said.

"On the house," Butch said, turning off the grill. "We're closin' up. Have a nice day." The last customers hurried out. Butch locked the door, then removed the signboard from the window, erased *Today's Special*.

He wrote two words on the blank page, replaced it in the dingy window, then began to clear the dishes from the empty

back booth. Discarded eggs marked the end of Act One.

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Penny Dyer is an author from Chattanooga, Tennessee. She recently completed a fiction manuscript, "Salt in the Wound." Her work appears in "Original Sin: The Seven Deadlies Come Home to Roost" (The Paper Journey Press), "Rosebud," and is forthcoming in "BackHome Magazine," and "Cup of Comfort for Women in Love" and the 2005 "Chattanooga Writer's Guild Anthology." She is contributing writer for the "Pulse" and co-editor of the "Chattanooga Writer," the CWG newsletter. Penny likes to write in a variety of fiction genres, including mysteries, historical fiction and Chick-Lit. She writes both short stories and novels, but is also at work on a poetry collection.



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Drive Time

by Joseph E. Schild

When I gave up the daily grind, you know, *the Job*, I little understood what retirement really meant until that first Monday morning after the last official work day. I planned the event carefully, for I wanted it to be memorable.

My electric radio/clock was set to go off at the usual five-thirty in the dreary a.m., the coffee maker was set to start the brewing, and my business warrior's uniform was hung on a hook.

For those who may not know what a warrior's uniform is, let me expound. It is a dark blue suit, white shirt, red necktie and highly polished black shoes with black socks. You see, I was trained during the dress for success era and the IBM

image was everything. There were no casual Fridays and it took me three years to get permission to grow a mustache, and only after I made the boss a couple of million.

Before I go further, let me explain that I took an early retirement at fifty-five and to this day, the company muckity mucks still disbelieve I did it. With weeks of accumulated vacation time, I came in on January 2nd, promptly told them I was

going on a trip and not to expect me back for five weeks. The boss groaned and I really thought he was going to cry when I also told him to have my retirement package ready when I got back. Talk about blank stares and his face would be beside it in the list.

Okay, so you now have the image. I am sawing the Z's and having wonderful dreams. The electric beast shatters my dreams as it screams for me to get out of bed. I reach down and grab the monster's tail, yank it from the socket and throw the animal of my nightmares into the trash bin. I promptly roll over instead of rolling out and drift back into the soft arms of Morpheus. My dear wife of thirty-two years at that time hardly moved.

A funny thing happens. I awaken after

about an hour and I can't stay in bed. After an hour of trying, I swing my legs over the edge of the bed and curse the early rising habit as I sit there trying to decide what next to do. I hear the last gurgles from my coffee maker and decide to get a taste of the brew.

After a brief visit to my reading room for a morning pit stop, I pad into the kitchen. Shoot, I could have found the coffee blindfolded by following the fragrance. A funny thing happens around the homestead when all of the children are out on their own. The house becomes a home where one may scratch when and where ever one wishes and I like to sit around in my skivvies and a tee shirt. Now this image you may try to expunge from your mental gray matter, but it's too late. Sorry.

For almost a half an hour, I sat there drinking coffee and savoring each sip. During that process, I came to realize that one thing would not be missed from the daily grind. It was the drive to and from I hated most. When we first moved to our rural abode, drive time was about twenty minutes. In twenty-three years, it grew yearly until that time was at least forty-five minutes of pure hell on wheels. A single fender bender could make it an hour without half trying and most days were like being in the middle of a demolition derby.

After three cups of the brew, I thought I would dress and step outside to see what was going on in my landscape. Landscape is just a fancy ten-dollar word for yard. Since this was my first day of retirement, I went to great lengths to not have it planned and chose to wing it. I looked in my closet to see what I was going to wear and realized I had few true work clothes. You know, the kind you don't mind getting dirty as you garden or turn the compost or some other grubby chore.

"You have a new set of khakis in the closet," I hear my wife LaShon say.

"Oh, sorry to wake you."

I find the khakis and dress, liking the feel of new material, but hesitant to break them in with a lot of grime. I guess it is like a new pick up truck, not broken in until a load of manure is hauled in it. At least that's what my dad always said.

"What you going to do today?" she asks.

This should have been a clue of things to come, but at that moment, I was enjoying the day too much and was trying to be clueless to the mind of a woman, a wife in particular. She gets out of bed and stretches, letting the knots of the night ease from the muscles.

"I am just going to wing it today."

"Well, if you don't have anything planned, we could drive to the mall," she replies as she pads into the bathroom.

Shoot! "What for?"

"New drapes."

"There's nothing wrong with the old ones."

I glance up just in time to see her steely eyes glaring at me and realize I made my first mistake of my retirement. I think,

Third note to gray cells... never ask a sensible question when she is shopping.

take a note, gray cells, always have something planned, even if there is not anything. You would think that after thirty-two years I would have learned something, even through osmosis.

So help me, she got ready faster than I ever saw before. In an hour, we were back in drive time, fighting the traffic to go across town to the big mall, not the one closest to home. I mumbled and I grumbled about the construction, traffic and the idiot drivers.

By the time we arrived at the mall, my frustration level was peaked and so I dropped her off at the main door and searched for a parking spot. Ten minutes later and three hundred yards from the door, I pulled into a slot.

"What took you so long?" she asks as her foot taps the floor with impatience.

"Lot is almost filled."

"There's a spot right there," she says, pointing to a car pulling out of a spot within fifty feet of the door.

Second note to gray cells, don't roll eyes over a stupid comment. This retirement thing is getting more complicated than I first thought, as I watched her wheel around and head into the mall in a huff. Except for Christmas time, I usually avoid the malls like the black plague.

Tagging along with wife as she shops is on the same level as having a root canal

without Novocaine--painful. With no intention of buying an item, she will examine it for long minutes before moving on to the next item.

After fifteen minutes of this foolishness, I usually make some excuse to go to another store to get out of the painful exercise in futility. "Hon, I'm going to the shoe store for some sneakers," I say.

"No, I need you to look at the drapes."

"Okay, why we looking at picture frames?"

Third note to gray cells, never ask a sensible question when she is shopping.

"I...I just don't know about your retirement. Come on," she snaps as she headed for the drapery department like a bullet shot from a gun and me in tow.

"May I help you?" a tall, leggy saleslady asked.

"We just want to look at the drapery fabrics," wife replies and looks over at me as I vacantly eye the lady and her too-

short skirt.

I snap back to attention with an elbow in my ribs. For thirty minutes, we feel, we touch, we look, and we even smell the materials.

"What do you think about this one?" wife asks, as she holds up a roll of floral fabric.

I was beginning to learn about my answers to her. "Hmm, it's nice, but what about that one?" I point to another roll.

"Too vivid for the living room."

An hour later, we are back to the first roll, exactly where I mentally predicted we would be.

"Okay, I think you're right. That one will look good," I say.

"You aren't just saying that, are you?"

Forth note to gray cells, never raise hands and roll eyes at the same time in exasperation.

Except for the road noise and my grumbling about the traffic, the drive home was as quiet as a tomb. Wife sat so close to the passenger side door I thought she was doing a Vulcan mind meld with it. If my truck had a back seat, she would have been in it, and the temperature in the cab felt near zero.

"Want some lunch?"

"No. Take me home."

"Why?"

I wanted to take that one back.

Fifth note to gray cells...do not agree with wife too soon, even when she has made up her mind.

"I'm going back to work," she states, as she gives me a sidewise glance.

I just look at her, not wanting to ask why again.

"I can't stand you at home all day long."

Let's see. I have been retired exactly six hours and twenty minutes and somehow she has arrived at that decision?

I ponder the possibilities, pushing the gray cells into high gear. She goes back to work, leaving me to my own devices. That's a positive.

She brings in a paycheck. That's another in the plus column.

I can get up or go to bed whenever I want. Oh wow, that's plus again.

There will be no crazy shopping with her. Great balls of fire, I'm on a roll in the plus side.

Her mood will be better. That is a plus.

I become a househusband. That's both plus and minus.

"If that is what you want."

"You agreed to that really quick."

It was the tone of her voice that sent shivers up my spine. Fifth note to gray cells, do not agree with wife too soon, even when she has already made up her mind.

"Well, I just realized you have given this some considerable thought and it is what is best for you."

Ooo, good one, with a little more practice I'll have this down pat,

my head.

Our drive time ended in the parking lot of a steak house restaurant.

I think.

"I'm hungry. Let's eat lunch."

With all the energy I could muster, I recalled notes two and four, and nodded

My cholesterol count is forgotten and I am celebrating.

joesfamily@mindspring.com

He is an older writer with a slightly twisted sense of humor who strives to be a soft curmudgeon. Joe loves writing about childhood adventures and many of his short stories are from that era.

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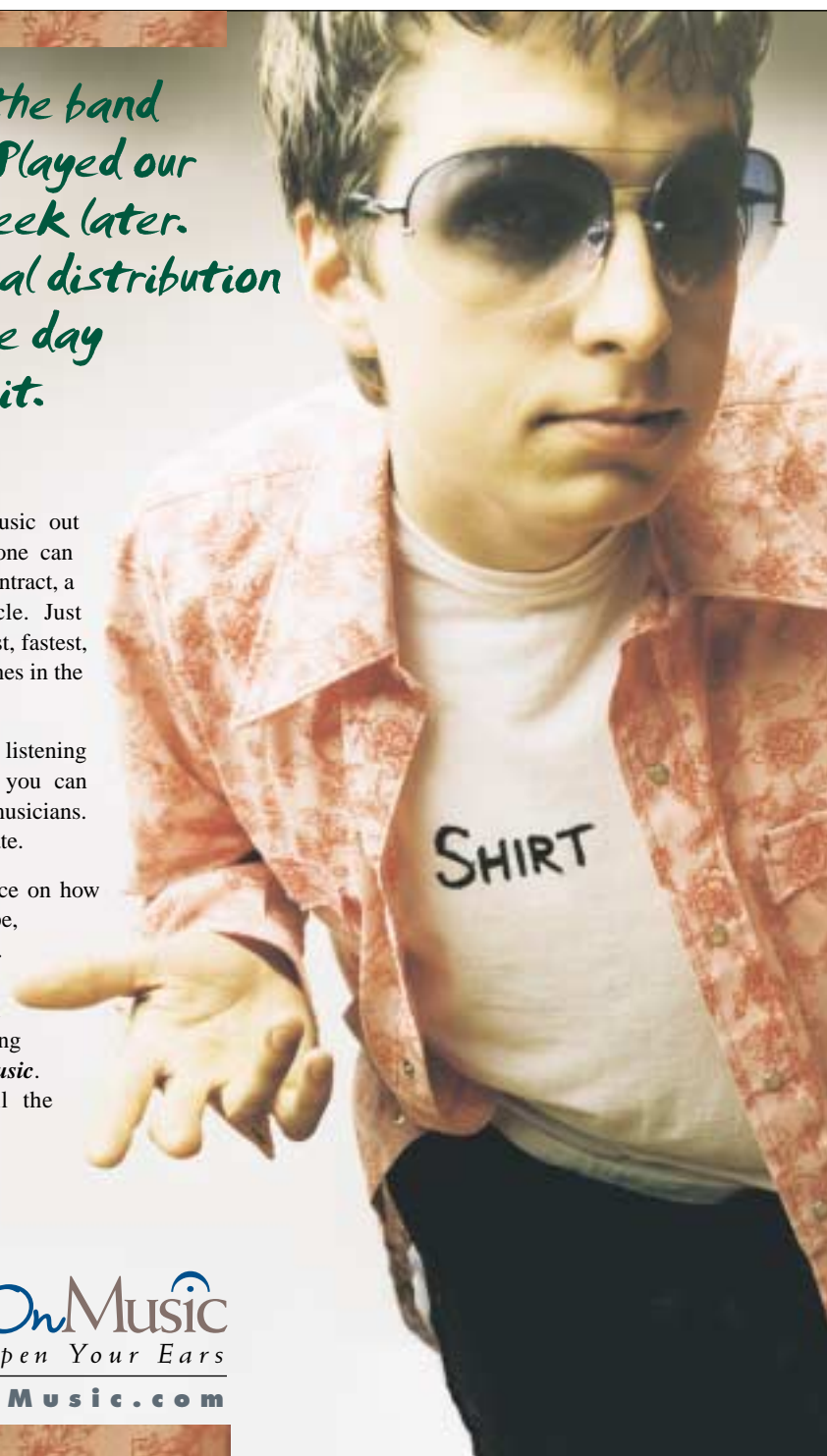
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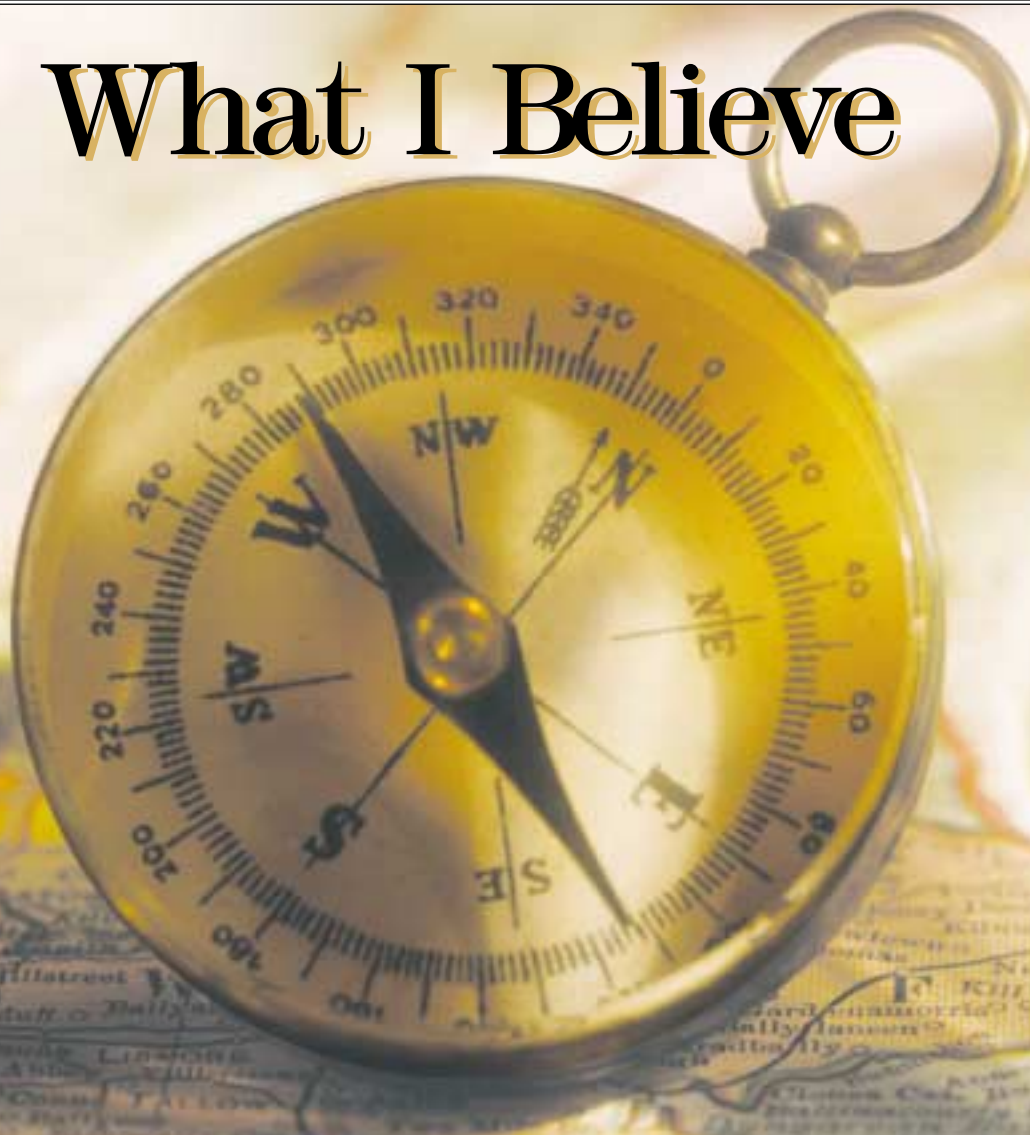


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What I Believe



by David Clark

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I have been asked what I believe, why I believe what I believe, and why I do what I do. This writing attempts to answer that question from this place on my journey.

I do not expect my beliefs to work for anyone else. If they do, so be it. But at the very least, I hope that anyone reading these words—whether they agree with me or not—will consider the question for themselves. I would encourage anyone to write these things down. It is a great experience to try to elaborate the unspeakable.

There will be those who will take issue with my talking about Bible characters the way I do. They'll say I'm adding to the Scripture, because I say certain characters did certain things not

mentioned in the Bible. My response to this is that I'm a storyteller and writer, not a scholar.

Some of strict Bible-thumpers will really jump up and down over my references to Chinese, India-Indian, African, American Indian, and other old lore. They'll say: "But these people were heathens." Well, that may be. But in most of these cases, the heathens and their cultures lasted far longer than our culture appears to have a chance of lasting, and I suspect if we could lay down our pride for a minute we'd stand to gain from listening

to the wisdom and insight of countless generations of untold savage peoples who built walls extending hundreds of miles, who survived under conditions that most people couldn't stand for an afternoon, and whose beautiful stories are told in a simple and breathtaking beauty. Aside from these simple qualifications, studying a Chinese text, for instance, helps me to see my trusty old King James Bible with a fresh eye, much like going to Japan when I was 31 years old caused me to see my old hometown of Macon, Georgia, with fresh eyes.

I want to know what works for me. My station is the roadside, not a testing-room. Or, perhaps more to the point, the roadside is the ultimate testing-room.

Scholarly documents about the authenticity of recorded and written documentation supporting or discounting the veracity of supposed historical possibilities and the account thereof bore me senseless. I respect the work, but I'd just as soon pull nutgrass.

Scientific-minded people will often ridicule me as simple-minded because I take on faith certain things which are unprovable, such as grace and healing. My response to that is simple: Get back to me after you've gotten out of the fire you will one day be caught in the middle of.

I offer these so-called justifications up front because I have heard them before and I know I'll hear them again. I just want to have it on record in the beginning that I'm not trying to get a degree, and I'm not trying to win the Nobel prize for scientific proof.

I'm simply trying to figure out how to live my life to the fullest amount it can be lived and to use any means at my disposal—which mainly consist of a good imagination and a willing heart—to gain understanding and meaning from what has worked for generations.

I know what I know because I've experienced it in my own life.

And I know that stories—my own and those from anywhere I can gather them—have helped me immensely.

And I know that our culture is in desperate need of something.

I say we need a story.

I've spent many afternoons in kitchens talking to old folks—old coal-miner wives, old farmers, old mechanics. They never had degrees or citations of greatness on their walls. They had pictures of grandkids, old pretty framed faded magazine covers that struck their fancy, and usually a picture of a dead spouse. These are the salt of the earth folks who don't worry their heads over silly arguments about fancy things. They have learned how to get through their difficult lives, and have emerged at the end of their fiery life with a smile on their face, hope in their heart, and a faith that glows like a well-tended fire. Every single one of these people had a well-thumbed Bible on their kitchen table, and they usually had a notepad with pencil next to it. At some point in our con-

versation, each one of these people—without exception—these people would have occasion to reach over and tap an index finger on top of that old Bible: "If you look in here, you'll find it."

The old hymns describe what I like about the God of my understanding.

These are great old phrases that tell more and more as I live my days:

"Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me."

"How I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain."

"And I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day."

"When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when

Scientific-minded people will often ridicule me as simple-minded because I take on faith certain things which are unprovable, such as grace and healing.

we first begun."

And I love this one:

"When the roll, when the roll is called up yonder. When the roll, when the roll is called up yonder. When the roll, when the roll is called up yonder. When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there."

Yes, sir, I will. Praise God for it.

And you ask, what do you believe?

Here is the short version:

1. I believe that God hears our prayers and moves in our lives.
2. I believe the 12 steps are a valuable guide to one's life.
3. I believe there's a dark time coming and we need light-givers.
4. I believe that as humans, we are all deeply wounded, and for the most part, ignoring it by burying our head in the various types of sand.
5. I believe we can begin to heal these wounds in different ways—by expressing appreciation to Vets, for instance; and by talking to old folks, for instance. These simple-sounding things will break down our stout walls of shame and we will make connections with one another.
6. I believe—I know—that I have a call-

ing to do the above, to live the above to the best of my ability, to trust God moving in my life and bringing things together in ways I cannot understand. And I have a calling to speak and sing and write about these things so that other people can hear at least one person say it. And sometimes, that's all it takes, and sometimes that person who hears me speak begins to work on being a light giver.

7. I believe there are two forces—fear and love. When I look at the world through that lens, then it helps things become clearer—sometimes.
8. I believe there is a level at which we are all alike, and that level is described by the great myths, whether they be the Bible, or any other myth.
9. I believe we are desperately in need of a myth—a great story expressing great truth—to work with.

10. I believe our country spends too much time whining, and part of what I do is to challenge them to grow up and begin living. Some people don't like this aspect

of what I do. Matter of fact, some people hate me for it. I can't help it.

11. I believe that I love playing the guitar, and that I love doing my stories and my concerts. And though I have not seen economic windfall as the result of "following what I love" I have seen a great amount of peace and clarity in my mind as a result of it. I feel very lucky. I am one of the few people I know who loves what they do. And that's one thing people say after my concerts—they love watching me because they love to see a man who loves what he's doing, because it gives them some sense of hope that it is possible. In that way, I inspire others—to what I do not know, but if they're inspired then God can act in their lives.
12. I believe we are all children of a higher power that I call God, and that God loves us more than we can understand. God's love is only limited by our ability to receive, which I have learned is often quite limited because of our fear.

Now, the long version:

I was raised in a Christian setting, in

the good ol' Southern Baptist Church. The preacher who first made a deep impact on me was a storyteller of the first order. He talked about Bible characters as if he'd gone to grammar school with them, instead of that dry, far-off description one so often hears that sounds like it's a weakly convincing argument about a historical character who may or may not have lived in some undetermined time. This preacher made these characters come alive.

Having departed from my upbringing in various ways along the way, I have come to understand that the Christian story is my story. My brand of Christianity doesn't always fit in with what is popular and accepted, but that's not my problem.

I have studied the Christian story from many angles, with the point being of what it means to me. It continues to be an ever-growing source of living meaning for me. The more I study it, the more alive it becomes, because I see more and more of the story in my own life.

The most important way—perhaps the only way—for this or any other story to have meaning is on a symbolic level. The historical truths have been debated for years and I find that they are all irrelevant.

I do believe there really was a Jesus, but I don't have to prove to anyone why I believe that. I do believe he was the living son of a living God, and I don't mind saying so. But I am not interested in debating my truth about it with those who would like to try to tear it apart. And in my experience, this might just as easily be a "Good Christian" as it would be an atheist. Come to think of it, it would more likely be the "Good Christian."

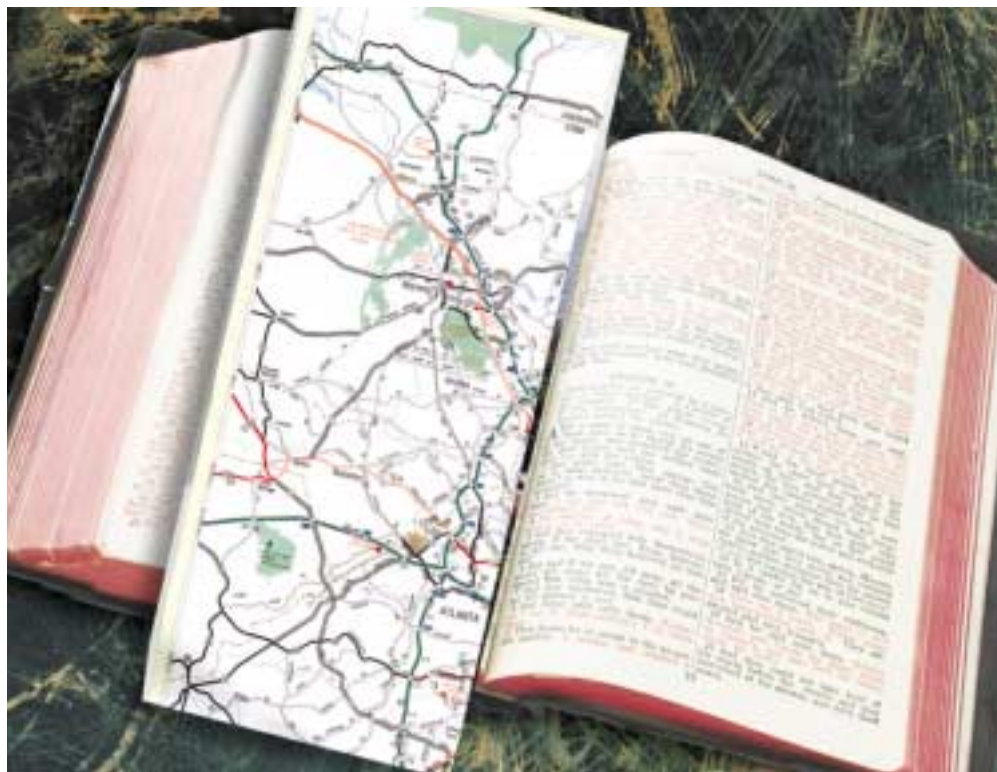
This last comment makes it sounds like

I've got something against Christians. I don't. I am one. But I know of no commandment that says thou shalt feel compelled to argue with a fencepost.

I just believe.

And sometimes, you just have to believe.

The intellectual-minded person might make fun of that seemingly naive belief.



The preacher who first made a deep impact on me talked about Bible characters as if he'd gone to grammar school with them.

My response is that all the intellectual people I knew hauled ass when my Mama got Alzheimer's, and I had to go that road alone.

That's where I learned to listen to intuition and learned to just believe. I reached that place Jesus talked about when he said "except ye become as little children." I was a child in my understanding and power over Mama's situation, and that was when I began to see God's hand move with power in my life.

I like Peter, for instance. His story is one we could all stand to pay attention to. He was a working-man. He cussed. That tells us enough right there—if we use our imagination, and look in the mirror, per-

haps—for us to come up with the rest of Pete's description. He was coarse and clumsy in polite company. He was quick to tell a man to go to hell. Peter was quick to use his fists. He was a braggart and loved to talk about what he would do when confronted with a situation. He would fit right in these days as so many people talk about how they'd turn the sands of Iraq to glass.

You have to know Peter was proud. That's why he stepped out of the boat to walk on water. Pride is the perfect reaction to the fear all the boys were feeling as they were huddled down in the bottom of the boat during the storm.

We're not told who it was that first saw the ghost-like figure walking on the water. And in the old sailing legends, which are the oldest of leg-

ends anywhere, the sight of a ghost on the water meant the sailor's number was up. They were done for.

So you take a situation that was frightening to a bunch of men who had seen many storms in their lives as

fishermen.

Then you add to it the appearance of the death angel coming to get them.

The adrenaline was high.

And then—Peter shouts out: "Who is that?" He was going to shout down the angel of death, and why not? He was going to die anyway, might as well die shouting.

If we can own what our own reaction would have been if we had been in these wet shoes, we can understand Peter's joy when Jesus spoke while sauntering across this body of water that seemed certain to swallow the boat: "Hey, man, it's just me. Don't worry."

And who wouldn't have immediately

The story of Peter is like a looking glass into my life. I have been on a couple of different sides of that story.

said: "Hey, I want to do that."

I've heard it said that Peter took a stand right then, to walk on the water.

For my money, I say Peter wasn't close to taking a stand. He was scared out of his wits, and was reacting with the arrogant pride any human feels when confronted by mortal danger.

And Pete did ok, as long as he was walking towards Jesus, keeping his eye on this ghostly figure still approaching through the mist.

But then it ran through Peter's mind that maybe it was just a trick by the death angel.

And when he started thinking, he looked down—which is what we all do when we start thinking about grace instead of just accepting it—and saw that he was walking on the water. His first thought was probably that he had already died.

His shield of pride melted, leaving only his fear. And fear is a heavy weight on a person. And so, being overly burdened with his fear, Peter just naturally began to sink into the swirling chaos of water. Isn't it easy to see the symbolic meaning of this part of the story?

And then, for the first time in his life, according to our account, Peter reached out.

Can't you understand that story? I can. It makes perfect sense to me. I see myself all over it.

And can you further understand that when Peter reached out, there was Jesus, taking his hand. And suddenly, they were at the boat, and the storm was gone.

There are, I suppose, many points to this old story. But for me, the main point is not the storm, the fear, the boat, the walking, or the sinking.

The main point is that when Peter finally reached out, Jesus was there. And suddenly, they were at the boat, and the storm was gone. The storm was gone.

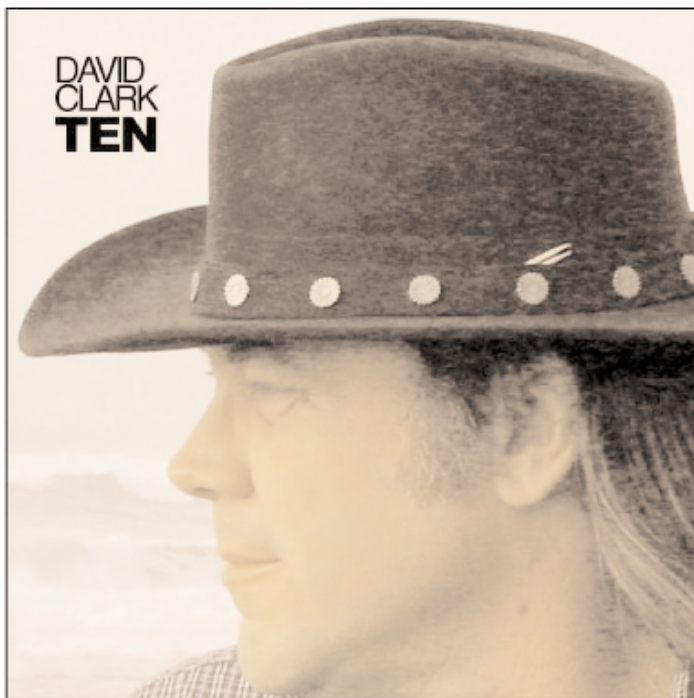
What this story tells me is that if I will reach out, Jesus will be there. I know from experience that is so. And I know from experience that suddenly, the storm was gone.

I share a lot of Peter's qualities. A key difference is that I don't fish. I like to ride in a johnboat on the river, but fishing bores me senseless. It's too much like work to have to fool with all the stuff, the equipment, the worms, the line, the poles. And then, what if you catch something? Then you have to clean them.

As far as fishing goes, I've found it to be far more sensible to have friends who fish.

But the rest of the stuff—the cussing, proud and arrogant, clumsy in polite company type of guy who was willing to tell a man to go to hell—I know all about that. I've never used my fists, though. I used words instead.

The story of Peter is like a looking glass into my life. I have been on a couple of different sides of that story.



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When Mama got Alzheimer's, I became her caregiver. This is a quaint-sounding term for the person who has to make decisions that one would just as soon not have to make—life and death stuff, monetary decisions, working with medical people to try and find the right way to help a woman being carried off by a grinning and evil monster.

To add to this wondrous experience, it was pure poetry that I didn't like my Mama most of my life. And I don't think she liked me. We loved each other, but we didn't like each other.

I'm not the only person who understands this odd relationship.

So, here I was, 39 years old or so, suddenly becoming charged with the welfare of a woman I didn't like. And this task took over my life. Mama needed help immediately. Daddy didn't know what to do. My brother had had a stroke and couldn't help make the decisions, though he was a great moral support throughout the experience. My sisters lived far away and weren't available.

As Winston Churchill would say about Generals serving in lands far from England during World War II, I was "on the ground."

We got Mama situated. I was going to visit her every day in a Personal Care Home on the outskirts of the little town where I live.

She was pulling her hair out by the roots, screaming all the time, tearing her clothes, hitting people. All these are typical actions of a person with Alzheimer's, but this was new territory for me.

It was overwhelming.

Almost every day, Daddy would ask me why this was happening.

And you have to understand: I loved and greatly respected my Daddy.

He had an unshakable faith throughout my life, and this experience had shaken him to the core of his being. And he was turning to me for guidance.

I became afraid. I don't know why, exactly. I just woke up one morning like any other day, but before the day was half over I was paralyzed with fear.

I guess we had reached a little calm spot in the storm, perhaps, where I had a chance to realize that everybody in the local family was leaning on me. Mama

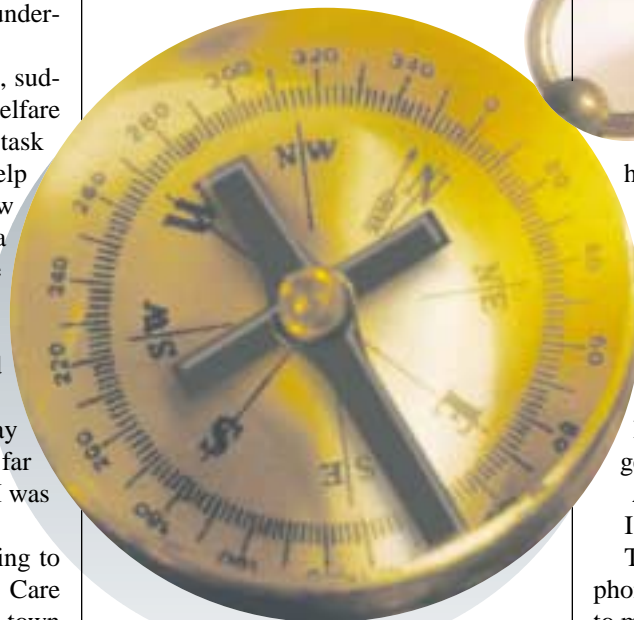
depended on me. Daddy depended on me. My brother depended on me. The people at the Personal Care Home were calling all the time with various problems, and they wanted me to fix it.

I had been praying, or so I thought.

I had mostly been asking why.

As far as the task at hand of talking to medical people went, I was doing fine.

I was doing ok at helping Mama calm down when I was with her. I was learning a new language—the language of heaven's edge. I didn't think I was much help for Daddy.



"Ah, doesn't God have a sense of humor?" said this little leprechaun of a man.

I felt quite guilty over this.

I was alone. Alone. I had no one to talk to, no one to hug, no one's shoulder to cry on. And I was scared.

I was in my office in town. I called a friend of mine who lived in another state. I told her I was scared. She was at work, and it really wasn't the time to talk about it. She said: "Well, pray about it."

And I slammed my fist on the desk. "I have been praying. To hell with a bunch of prayer. God ain't listening to me."

My friend was startled by this outburst, I'm sure. But she said again: "All I know to tell you is pray."

I repeated my fist banging statement. "To hell with a bunch of praying, I tell you. God ain't listening, God ain't

listening."

I was crying. I had my head on the desk and was banging my fist on the desk.

Then, suddenly, there was a knock on the locked door. And I said to my friend: "Hold on, some sonofabitch is at the door."

I looked through the peephole on my office door. There stood a retired priest I had met some months before. He didn't know anything about my situation. I didn't feel like talking to anyone. I was afraid. I was exhausted. I was angry.

I opened the door. "What is it, preacher?"

"Ah, I was just riding by, saw your truck, and I turned around to come back by to see how you were getting along."

And here was this little leprechaun of a man, with his little baseball hat on, looking up at me.

But I heard what he was saying. Even though I didn't want to admit it for a second, I knew God had sent my own personal sonofabitch to knock on my door to see how I was getting along.

Angels come in all shapes and sizes.

I slumped against the doorjam.

Then I remembered my friend on the phone. I told the priest to hold on. I went to my friend and told her I'd call her back.

I went back out to the priest and told him what had just happened. I told him I had been telling God to go to hell. I told him I had been banging my fist on the desk. I told him I was convinced that God wasn't listening to me.

And this baseball-hat wearing sonofabitch busted out laughing.

Laughing!

And I bowed up, and said: "What's so damn funny, preacher?"

"Ah, doesn't God have a sense of humor?"

"What's so funny about all this?" And I burst into tears.

And this wonderful little man, who subsequently became a dear friend, reached up and put his hand on my shoulder. I looked at him through tear-filled eyes and said: "What?"

He said: "Don't you see? You finally gave up, and God finally had room."

Writing about this experience carries none of the fire and high drama of the moment. But if you think about your own life, you can fill in the blank of your own drama, your own fist shaking, your own doubts in a God hearing you.

This experience is the men huddled in the bottom of the boat. The intense fear I felt is the death angel walking on the water. I was determined to shout down that death angel. I was making good progress at handling everything, until suddenly, I became afraid in a way I've never known afraid. And I started to sink, sink, sink. That's when I called my friend. I argued with her good advice—the same advice I would have given.

But I don't believe I had ever truly prayed in my life until the moment when I banged my fist on the desk and hollered out: "To hell with a bunch of praying. God ain't listening to me."

This was no impress-them-with-eloquence prayer. This was what I've come to learn as honest prayer.

And I guess ol' God was watching, and just about the time the water was around my chin, ol' God said: "Alright, boys, let him up. He's had enough."

And in preparation for this event, my priest friend just happened to look up from his driving to see my truck parked on the side of my building.

And my priest friend just happened to turn around, right about the time I was banging my fist the first time. By the time I was banging and hollering the second time, he was walking to the door.

Some people would say the whole experience was a coincidence.

Nah.

God heard my prayer. God's hand moved in my life.

My banging and hollering and telling God to go to hell was the equivalent of Peter reaching out a desperate hand to Jesus.

All I know, is that after my priest friend and I talked for a few minutes, the stormy seas inside my heart were calm. And though I had many a tense moment with Mama for the next thousand or so days of her life, I was never afraid again.

It was Peter's bragging that gave him such a prominent place in the gospel story, because he set himself up to be standing

by the fire when Jesus was in hot water. He set himself up by promising to follow Jesus to the death, and then bailed at the first chance of trouble. Where was Peter at the crucifixion, anyway? He had skedaddled.

But he heard that rooster crow, and he wept bitterly. I imagine he was still weeping for a while, too.

I relate to Peter, because I have denied my friends in front of the fire. I have been the one who's been denied, too. I have heard the rooster crow from both sides of that story. But look at what happened to Peter. The fire of the Holy Spirit lit on top of his head and stayed there like a July mosquito. And that man—that coarse, cussing, gutless man we know and love and can so easily identify with—he became a man who God used as God saw fit.

It was Peter's bragging that gave him such a prominent place in the gospel story, because he set himself up to be standing by the fire when Jesus was in hot water.

What I figure is this: If God could use Peter, he can use me. I don't know that I've walked on water, but I have dang sure sank in it a few times, and the main point being that when I could not make sense of things—like when Mama was sick—I would reach my hand out to a ghost on the water, and suddenly we were at the ship and the sea was calm.

Having said that, I will tell you that I believe God hears our prayers and moves in our lives. At least, I know God moves in my life.

I believe that modern denominations and what is called "organized religion" is probably one of the most harmful things in this country today, and has been for at least several centuries.

At the same time, there is a huge value to the community it offers, so like most great things it is both bad and good.

But the only religious belief that means squat to me is the one a person finds by going through fire. The worst of the Organized Religion folks will let you off that hook if you give money. I don't have a hook nor way to let people off it. I just know that at some point each person has to know why they stand, or why they grovel

in the dirt.

And the point is, that when a person chooses to stand, he is given a power to do so.

I quite frequently reference the 12 steps and that program. Sometimes people mistakenly think I'm a drunk or a drug addict. I'm not.

I began going to see a counselor after Mama died because I could not cry. My retired priest friend recommended the only local counselor we had in the county. He turned out to be an addiction counselor.

He was a good fit for me because he worked by using conflict, and thus got at my fears (which was my addiction if I ever saw one) and shame (ditto) and basic humanness.

In experiences at a weekly group meeting of addicts (not a 12 step meeting) I saw that what worked for these courageous folks fighting the uphill battle was also working for me just trying to make sense of my life.

That was an eye-opening experience for me, because I could easily see I had no excuses for not being free and for not being able to fulfill my abilities and talents. At least these folks have the burden of their addiction as a hindrance.

I had no excuse whatsoever, other than stubbornness, which kept me from "receiving the gift." And to the extent I have been willing to receive, it has been bountifully given.

I had already become somewhat familiar with the 12 steps because a recovering junkie friend had written me and remarked that my columns sounded like 12 step material. I didn't know what my friend meant and thus the explanation began. This was before the work with the counselor began...so the original light of the steps was shone by just one person—which is exactly how it's supposed to work.

This translates into the work I presently do. I'm just one man and I might only touch one person but that is the work I have to do.

Now I know, after working with it, that I was writing about the 12 steps before I knew them, because the 12 steps are based on the Beatitudes of Matthew, which is one of my favorite passages.

But then, in the counselor's office, I mentioned this to him, so we began exploring how the steps could be used on a wider basis than just for folks recovering from drugs/alcohol.

So I spent time studying all this and how it tied in, using not only the steps but the Bible, and studies of Carl Jung's writing, the I Ching, American Indian stories, and Uncle Remus stories.

In light of that, what do I believe?

I'm powerless over my humanity and have to turn that power over to a higher power as I understand that power to be.

When I do this I am ok. When I don't I get in a boggyhole.

The short version is to say I believe God hears my prayers and moves in my life.

And I believe that if I write and speak and sing about these things that other people will remember they believe this, too, and they will learn to love themselves so that they can better love their neighbor. And if we loved ourselves and each other we might have a better world. Why do I go on the road and do this when I could just stay home and get a job and forget it? Because I have a calling that I have to answer to.

Why? I don't know.

I just know I have to go and do, I have to stand, and when I go and do, when I stand, a power is given to me to do that.

It doesn't make me perfect. It doesn't make me right for everyone. It doesn't mean my bus windshield wipers don't sometimes quit working in the rain. It just means that when I go and do, that there is a power that comes into play, and things work out.

I greatly appreciate freedom, and have exploited the stew out of my freedom to live my life in the past few years. I travel around—freedom of movement, and gather people together—freedom of assembly; and speak my mind—freedom of speech. And no one asks for my papers or tries to stop me.

And I talk about this every night, even though it sounds corny, but to remind people of freedom, so they might tell their kids about it, and by telling their kids about it they will remember what they know and might sharpen their eye, so they might be concerned when they see civil liberties being taken away little at a time,

that they might be willing to rise up and stand if it ever becomes necessary to defend our homes against any sort of enemy.

I believe we are beings capable of light.

And I believe there is a dark time coming, and much more quickly than most people know—because most people never go anywhere and have no source on input but the news media—and this dark time is going to not only be dark but difficult. And this country will be in great need of light-givers—people who know how to stand, how to make sure others are fed, guided, cared for, people who act with love in times of trouble.

Knowing human nature, dark times will bring out darkness in people, but mostly it will cause people to simply cower in fear in the beginning. And anywhere there is a

I believe there is a dark time coming, and much more quickly than most people know.

light-giver, that fear can be abated and love can be present in that situation.

Sounds corny, don't it?

A dark time is coming, and much of it is already here. Our eyes are slowly adjusting to the light and so we don't realize that we are already being taken in and taken over by this darkness.

Our country is dying in its sleep. I am trying to wake their ass up.

We are suffering from some huge cultural wounds. Some are so old I don't know if we'll ever be able to rebalance the karma of it all—the way we treated Indians and slavery are good examples.

But there are other wounds which are more present that we can address. The simplest I know of is the deep wounds on my generation and the one just before me over how the Vietnam vets were treated—think of the urine-bucket greetings to returning soldiers. So I say "Welcome Home" at my concerts to Vietnam and Korean vets. Each night at least one man cries in my arms afterwards because he says I'm the first person to say this and he's been home for 25 years.

We can heal this wound, and I'm trying to spread the word to do it.

We are suffering from a lack of guidance in my generation. We desperately

need to talk to the old folks—the WW II generation. With any and all their flaws they are our guide into the next phase; their wisdom and what they've learned through their hard life's trials could really serve us—especially in the dark time to come—but my generation is too busy working and watching the ball game to talk to them. They're also too busy working and watching the ball game to talk to their kids, too.

I realize that some of this energy is because I have lost both my parents and so thus appreciate that era greater than I did when my parents were alive and healthy.

So, I speak to this, so that anyone in the audience who has any sensibility will have that encouragement to go do something about it.

I believe that in many ways we are lost, mainly because we're so comfortable that we haven't had to pay attention. We no longer have any sense of what is important because we think the only thing that matters is ourselves. We

don't know how important food is because we've never gone hungry. And you can go down the line with the various ingratitude one sees around one.

And so, the culture is unhappy.

And so, the cultures tries to escape by drugs, alcohol, working, and spending money.

And I'm trying to remind people of what they know to be true—that our selfish behavior is not right, that we shouldn't run over others to get what we want, and that we need to join together and be together. We did this in the days after September 11. I was out on the road at that time watching it happen. It was remarkable.

And so last year I thought I'd go out and remind people to do it again, over and over, to get together just because, without having to have a catastrophe.

What an idealistic dummy I was.

What I think I learned is that people don't give a damn about being together, and it will take a catastrophe for us to change, just like it takes a junkie having to hit the wall before he'll get clean.

We are an addictive society, and so anything that applies to the individual junkie also applies to the society.

And we will have to hit the wall.

And my point is not to stop us from hitting the wall, because I don't think I can do that. My point is to talk about light so that others who have that gift will respond to it, so they will begin preparing to shine it, because when this country hits the wall there will need to be some folks around who know how to put the pieces back together, or else it will be done by manipulative politicians and preachers, and we do not need that.

I believe that I have made more mistakes than anyone I know. I have done some stupid-ass stuff. But I have learned from all of it.

I was born with fire of music and leadership ability. I don't know why that is so. But now I know that Mama was a singer in her youth and I came by that talent honest. She was also a great organizer and could direct others, sometimes to a fault. My Dad was a great observer of nature and spirit and the quiet workings of God, and from his example I learned about faith, and when I finally came to the point that I saw how utterly powerless I was (when Mama was sick) I began to learn about my own faith.

And so here I am.

In the old days I would have been called a circuit rider.

One difference is that back then, people wanted to come hear a man who came to speak, because if they were listening to him it meant they weren't in the fields working.

Now it's not so easy because of a modern thing called the sofa.

Also, I can't just breeze into a town and have a "sanctioned" place to work, that has a built-in crowd.

I work mostly in theatres, not churches, in part because many Christian churches aren't really open to a man who isn't ordained or who doesn't have some dramatic crime/prison/got saved story to relate. Also theatres are not perceived by people as being a "club" they won't be welcome in, like so many churches these days.

But there is a similarity (ever notice how close similarity is to hilarity?): While I am riding a circuit of my own finding instead of one prescribed by some office somewhere, I am coming to town to stir people up.

My experiences with Unitarian

Universalists could be called a revival meeting of sorts, in that I challenge them to think about certain things, and because some people at the least get quite uncomfortable with what I say and at worst get angry, very angry—and any good preacher (or counselor, or 12 step sponsor) will tell you that's when you've hit home.

And when I get the chance to speak to a Baptist church, for instance, I make them uncomfortable, too, because I'm asking them to look close at the teachings they say they know and accept.

So, part of what I do is I am a preacher. I don't use that word in my descriptions because it conjures up too many images and preconceptions which are too far removed from where I am. This goes back to the organized religion thing in a lot of ways.

Also, I operate on a different playing field as just a guitar player than I would as a preacher. People hear me differently than they do a preacher. People have built in defenses against preachers.

I believe one of the questions we will answer in our last few moments of living will most certainly be: "Did you live?"

And then, part of what I am is a teacher, because I talk about the old stories and myths. Most people have never thought about it and once they begin hearing about it they are interested. But I don't call myself a teacher because it sounds boring.

Part of what I am could probably be called being a medicine man. I had only vaguely considered this until I was approached by one Episcopal priest I know. He asked me to come to his church to do a series about Lent. I asked him what he wanted me to do. He said: "Just come and be David Clark in the way you do that. It's sort of like we're going to have the medicine man visit, and then the people will have that point of view to work with."

And I take the notion of being a medicine man seriously, not because I'm Indian, but because I have my own sense of what the term means and has meant in all times and places, and because our culture doesn't really foster that type of person, and because I'm just as comfortable listening to someone talk about a dream they had as I am in talking about the Bible.

I do not tell people I'm a medicine man because it would sound crazy.

I'm not sure what one would call a person who encourages folks to believe that it's ok to be who they are, just like they are, but that is one of my central beliefs and themes. It's ok to be who you are.

All of us need to hear that, and there is much about our culture that speaks the opposite—"You're only ok if you buy X, or take X, or subscribe to X."

And I say we're ok just because we're here. That is one of the deeper parts of my calling, I think. Because if a person feels like they are ok, and not a worthless piece of crap—which is all the unspoken rage in this country to feel, then they can see the world differently. They can be a positive part of a changing world instead of constantly defending themselves from the world.

I talk about holy ground within us and between us. I talk about shields of defense and chains of holding a grudge. These are, at their root, basic spiritual topics that I believe in addressing, but I get at them in a sideways sort of way.

I have met many people who don't think their life has a purpose.

I have no proof that anyone's life has a purpose, other than proof for my own life from my own experience. But I would encourage anyone to give opportunity inside themselves to finding a purpose in all things they encounter. In my experience, this is an important step to finding that purpose—just to be willing to give the idea of purpose a chance.

What I have seen is that if we are willing, then a mysterious higher thing will use us for work beyond our understanding.

I believe we will all answer some questions in our last few moments of living. One of them will most certainly be: "Did you live?"

I intend to answer: "Yes."

David Clark's website is www.outofthesky.com. Feel free to write him at dclark@outofthesky.com, or at P.O. Box 148; Cochran, GA 31014. He is presently engaged on his "Passion Tour" throughout the country. See his website for a concert schedule.

The Real McCoy

by Ron Burch

There are quite a few theories about the origins of “the real McCoy.” Even today, we frequently hear the question: “Is this the real McCoy?” Over time, the phrase the “real McCoy” has become a popular reference for anything thought to have value.

Most people assume that the real McCoy has something to do with the famous Hatfield-McCoy family feud that enlivened the West Virginia-Kentucky border in the 1880s, but there's no solid evidence of such a connection.

Another popular theory traces the real McCoy to the prizefighter Norman Selby, who boxed under the name Kid McCoy. McCoy was bedeviled by imitators and so took great pains to assure audiences at his bouts that he was indeed the real McCoy. But while Kid McCoy certainly existed, there is no evidence connecting him and the phrase, *the real McCoy*.

Legend also surrounds the African-American inventor, Elijah McCoy. In 1871, he invented a device that lubricated the critical moving parts of a machine while it was still in operation. Many look-alike systems followed, but buyers insisted that their new machines have the McCoy lubrication system. They would settle for nothing less than what they called the real McCoy.

Yet another theory asserts that “McCoy” was originally “Macao,” and that the real McCoy meant pure heroin imported from that Chinese island. Again, there is a lack of evidence to support this theory.

Since it fits my story, I'm going to vote for the legend that traces the phrase to a Florida bootlegger named Bill McCoy. According to legend, he was once a rumrunner. His rum was so good that people started to call the good stuff the real McCoy.

Moonshine whisky itself is as old as America itself. It dates back to colonial times. Settlers from the old country brought their stills and knowledge of making whisky along with them to the new world. Even the father of our country,

George Washington, owned a still. It's on display to this day at his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Congressional passage of the 18th Amendment in 1918 prohibited the manu-



facture, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages. Twenty-nine states ratified the amendment the next year, and pro-

hibition became law on January 16, 1920. The demand for bootleg booze was on.

amount of support and power among those that believed alcohol was immoral and destructive to family life. And since the voice from the women folk was louder than the voices from the old men left behind, the bill passed.

However, neither soda pop nor fruit juice could ever quench a man's thirst for a strong drink. Sometimes called White Mule, Skat, Stump Juice, Mountain Dew, Fire Water, Painter's Piss and Rot Gut, moonshine became a sought-after substitute for legal whiskey in a dry nation. In Garrett, Pennsylvania—a town known as Moonshine town USA—people boasted that every third house possessed a still.

More of a problem than the secret manufacture of moonshine was transporting it to market. Moonshine was smuggled out of the towns where it was brewed in many different ways. In those days, no one dared open a casket to see a dead body. So a popular method was to simply fill a casket with moonshine instead of a body and ship it to its destination.

Bootleggers were the men that illegally ran whiskey from hidden stills to hundreds of markets across the South and into the northeast. Soon terms such as bootlegger, bathtub gin and speakeasy became household words. Perhaps the country's first manufacturers' reps, many bootleggers purchased the contraband from the brewer and drove their load down thunder roads at high speeds late at night, often with the police in hot pursuit. The penalty for losing the race was jail, the loss of their illegal inventory and their livelihood.

As bootlegging boomed, the drivers built faster and faster cars to elude capture. Soon they began racing among themselves to see whose car was the fastest. After attending church on Sunday morning, they'd race on Sunday afternoons at dirt tracks in Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Then they'd use the same car to haul moonshine Sunday night!

Since it fits my story, I'm going to vote for the legend that traces the phrase to a Florida bootlegger named Bill McCoy.

hibition became law on January 16, 1920. The demand for bootleg booze was on.

The nation was at war. Most of the men folk—especially the young ones—were off fighting in a foreign land. The president, Woodrow Wilson, was a sick man. As a result, his wife ran the government. She was also head of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. This group had a huge

Inevitably, people came to see the races. Racing the moonshine cars became extremely popular in the back roads of the South. Legend has it that this is where NASCAR was born.

The government's effort to regulate people's behavior soon ran into trouble. While Herbert Hoover called prohibition a noble experiment, enforcement of prohibition became very difficult. Gangs of hoodlums became more powerful as they trafficked in alcohol and prostitution. By the 1930s, a majority of Americans had tired of the noble experiment and Congress repealed the 18th Amendment.

In 2005, the glory days of moonshining are over, but don't count it out.

I once had a friend who served as chief pilot for the State of Alabama. It was during the administration of Governor James "Big Jim" Folsom. Known as the little man's best friend, Big Jim stood six foot eight inches tall. Despite his size and bravado, he was uncomfortable flying. Even though the airplane had the capability to fly high above the weather, Big Jim always insisted on flying low enough for him to see the ground.

The governor also had a penchant for strong drink. On one occasion, while entertaining at his summer place on an Alabama lake, he ran out of booze. He directed my friend Bob to accompany a state trooper to a nearby cabin, where they could purchase several gallons of moonshine.

They arrived at the cabin and knocked on the door. The door cracked open. When, the occupant spied the state trooper, it slammed shut. Bob blurted out, "We're not here to cause trouble. Big Jim just needs some whiskey for his party." The door cracked open again. A voice from the shadows whispered, "Wait right here."

Bob said he heard another door open, then a screech like a piece of furniture being moved across the floor, followed by the creaking of steps on a stair. In a few moments, the figure in the shadows handed them three one-gallon jugs. A voice said, "Now you tell the governor, Jeb said to have a good time." Bob always believed that if he went back to the cabin and somehow got inside, he could find the hiding place for the moonshine.

That isn't to say that the government has given up in its pursuit of moonshiners.

One chilly November evening a few years ago, my wife and I arrived back at DeKalb-Peachtree airport during the wee hours. We walked into operations to order fuel for the airplane and use the bathroom before driving home.

Several men stood talking in the lobby. They wore flack jackets with an ATF patch on the sleeve. They were also armed to the hilt. My wife asked who they were. They explained that they were an enforcement team from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. She asked what they did. They snickered and asked her if she'd ever heard the phrase "smoke on the mountains." She hadn't. It seems several times a month, agents from the ATF fly over the mountains in the

"There's nothing that more symbolically captures the essence of hillbilly culture than moonshine liquor."

predawn hours, hoping to spot the stills as the operators vent the steam.

So even today, the popularity of moonshine whisky is legendary.

In Kentucky, an enterprising mother of four is adding a special touch to potent corn whiskey to make what she calls moonshine jelly. The product literally flies off the shelves in gift shops all across Kentucky. "Oh, yes, it's popular," she says, holding up a small jar of the smelly jelly that goes for about \$2 per half pint. "People buy it up about as fast as we make it."

This entrepreneur is taking advantage of what some have described as a moonshine craze that is sweeping through Appalachia—again. This time, it's fueled in large part by tourists intrigued by the liquor's mystique. Working alongside her mother, this mountain lady makes moonshine jelly in a spotless 55-gallon cooker. They add store-bought corn liquor—the legal kind—to a boiling mixture of pineapples, water and sugar. She says the jelly, when spread on toast in the morning, is an effective waker-upper.

"We don't wear the bib overalls, the flannel shirts and the boots, like them old-time moonshiners," she says, "but after we make a batch of this jelly, we sure smell like 'em. The odor really gets in

your clothes."

An organizer of the Hillbilly Days Festival in Pikeville, Kentucky says tourists ask where they can find moonshine, saying, "They're looking for the essence of hillbilly culture." He adds, "There's nothing that more symbolically captures that essence than moonshine liquor." A Nashville, Tennessee attorney, who once worked as a state revenue agent, says there's very little homemade whiskey made now compared with the good old days. "There's always been a trickle of it; just enough is going on to keep it from becoming a lost art."

Tourism officials in Appalachia confirm that many urban visitors tend to equate mountains with moonshine. That has pushed the price of the black-market elixir to \$20-\$30 a quart. Some believe the demand has grown because communities suffering from job losses in the coal industry have begun to concentrate on heritage tourism and legacy moonshine as an economic base.

One modern-day moonshine buff offers this opinion: "History is a circle. With the increases in sin taxes and the restrictions on alcohol, moonshine is making a come back. Who knows, in time we may again experience a whiskey rebellion similar to the one that started when George Washington placed a seven-cents per gallon tax on it. That spurred a revolution in western Pennsylvania. Citizens there eventually called for secession from the union. It got so bad that George Washington had to send a militia of 13,000 men to subdue the uprising."

It's an interesting theory. But in my opinion, I suspect that the popularity of moonshine whisky, now as then, comes from what one old mountaineer said recently during a TV special. When asked why he drank the stuff he said, "I just like to get drunker 'n you-know-what."

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