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Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

A Quiet Hero

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So many people were involved, both civilian and military, that it was virtually out of control.

While a patient at a hospital in Berlin, Dad met Mom.... a young German doctor working for the U.S. Army. They hit it off, and in 1947 Mom came to the U.S.

They were married in Dad's neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY.

In 1960 Army life eventually brought them to the small city of Huntsville, Alabama, along with many other families.

Also in this issue: The Nu-Way Restaurant; Bicycle vs. Train; Dementia and Grief; Alabama National Guard; Old East Clinton School; Harvest Home Place; The Cucumber Crash; An 1887 Bird Story; Sweet Desserts and much more!

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Donnie Lewter

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A Hardware Store....
The Way You Remember Them

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A Quiet Hero

by Ken Owens

My Dad, I'm proud to say, was Lt. Col. Charles F. Owens, a decorated veteran and a career military man with the U.S. Army, whose career spanned two wars and three continents.

I'm betting he didn't initially plan it that way, though. In 1941, well before the U.S. became involved in World War II, Dad was a normal, 24-year-old fun loving guy, living at home with his mom in Brooklyn, NY, and holding down his job as bartender at the Hotel Taft in New York City. His dad died a few years earlier, widowing his mother, so the burden was on him and his 3 brothers to make ends meet for the family.

The Selective Service Act of Oct. 1940 was actually the nation's first peacetime draft, so in Feb. 1941, Dad got his "Greetings" notice and within days was aboard a troop train, off to basic training at Ft. Benning, GA.

After basic, Dad was assigned to the 4th Infantry Div., 29th Field Artillery, at Camp Gordon, GA, for specialized training in artillery and transportation. Showing above average ability, he was quickly promoted to corporal, then "buck" sergeant, all within 6 months. To Dad, all this was a bit overwhelming, because he couldn't see why he was any different from the other soldiers and singled out for promotions. In fact, when he was promoted to sergeant, he avoided putting the stripes on his uniform until his CO finally told him, "Owens, either get those stripes sewn on your uniform, or lose them!" Needless to say, the stripes were on in record time.

In July 1942, Dad was recommended by his CO for Officer Candidate School, which he attended at Ft. Sill, OK. After graduation in Oct. 1942, he was commissioned as a 2nd Lt., and was now officially a "90 Day Wonder". His assignment was the 78th Infantry ("Lightning") Division, 903rd Field Artillery Btn., at Camp Burner, NC. His specialty was the 105 mm howitzer. In March 1944, Dad earned his promotion to 1st Lt.

The Division, and Dad's unit, continued their intensive train-

"I was under medication when I made the decision to burn the tapes."

Richard Nixon

Old Huntsville
History And Stories of the Tennessee Valley

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ing and maneuvers until early 1944, when the 78th was relocated to Camp Pickett, VA. Everyone knew this was the final step before deployment to Europe. And sure enough, in Oct. 1944," Dad was aboard ship in a convoy headed for France.

When Dad arrived at the European Theater, the situation there was convoluted. Much of the Third Reich was already crumbling, and Allied forces were pushing (or attempting to push) their way into Germany. But the Germans had plenty of fight and some major surprises left in them for the Allies.

The German offensives late in the war were more vicious because the Wehrmacht was desperately fighting to defend their homeland. Dad's outfit saw a number of these fights, including action in the Hurt-gen Forest and the Ardennes, engagements near the Siegfried Line at the towns of Schmidt, Lammersdorf and Kesternich. His outfit was among the first of the artillery batteries at the Remagen Bridge, crossing the Rhine into Germany.

Dad was able to meet up with 2 of his 3 brothers during this time, all of who were also in the service. He saw Joe, an Army Engineer, at Remagen and Jim, an Army MP, at Honef. The meetings were brief but welcomed. (Dad's third brother, Richard, was in the Navy and had recently been badly injured in the Pacific theater, but later fully recovered.)

In 1945, Dad was awarded the Bronze Star medal.

Toward the end of the war, with all German towns surrendering, two major problems cropped up: Too much idle time for the troops and fraternization. At first, strict non-fraternization regulations were implemented, but were later relaxed. Increased drills and training partially helped the first problem,

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Dad had another big decision to make in 1947. He was honorably discharged from the Army, and had already secured a job working for the City of New York. The military had treated him well; he foresaw a good future for himself and his family with the Army. So, in July of 1948, he volunteered for recall to active duty with the rank of Captain, was accepted and assigned to the 9th Infantry Training Division at Ft. Dix, NJ.

His job at Ft. Dix was training new recruits, but it wasn't long before another international conflict erupted: Korea. Dad's experience in artillery and munitions got him assigned, in 1950, as the CO at the U.S. Ammunition Depot at Sasebo, Japan. Although stationed in Japan, he made trips to "hot zones" in Korea to logistically plan and forecast ammunition and artillery needs for the U.N. forces.

The family joined Dad at his new assignment in Yokohama in 1952, when peace talks in Korea looked like they might pan out. His assignment in Japan ended in July 1953 and we returned to the US, this time to the Ordnance Ammunition Center in Joliet, IL. In September 1953, Dad was awarded the Oak Leaf Cluster for his Bronze Star Medal, due to his accomplishments in Korea.

After Joliet and one more brief assignment at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, MD, Dad's orders came through in Nov. 1956 to report to Kaiserslautern, Germany, as the Supply Officer for the 57th Ordnance Group. Once again, the family was privileged to accompany him. I always felt this was the trip of a lifetime. In

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1957, Dad was promoted to Major and his assignment ended in Oct. 1959. Next stop: Redstone Arsenal, AL!

Standard military ocean transportation for our return trip was not available for some reason, so we left Bremerhaven, Germany, aboard one of the most luxurious ocean liners of the day: the SS United States. The week's journey across the Atlantic was nothing short of a fairy tale.

Dad's assignment at Redstone was with the U.S. Ordnance Missile Command, right at the time when the area was heating up with missile defense and space exploration activities. These projects were all so important that they prompted 2 visits by President John F. Kennedy: one in 1960 and again in 1962. Dad was present for both visits.

The year 1962 also marked Dad's retirement, in August. We all attended the ceremony at the Redstone parade grounds, when Dad was promoted to Lt. Colonel and awarded the Army Commendation Medal before his departure.

Now was the time for a huge decision. Dad had to weigh out what to do next. Find a job, of course... but where? Serious geographic contenders included Arizona, Louisiana and even New York. Thankfully, though, after careful consideration, Dad and Mom decided to stay in Huntsville. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Dad secured a good position in the Quality Assurance Division of Thiokol Chemical Corp. at Redstone Arsenal. There he stayed for another 20 years, retiring in 1983.

At age 92, Dad died in Feb. of 2009. It was one of the saddest days of my life. Most of who I am, what I am, I owe to Dad. He never "pushed" the military on me, just because it was the best route for him. I recall how concerned he was for me during the sixties, when Viet Nam occupied most of the headlines. Looking back on it, I see why he became upset when I got poor grades early on in college: He was looking out for me, because I was 18 and too stupid to look out for myself. Fortunately for me, though, the light finally came on, and I straightened up.

I've talked with a lot of veterans, many of them World War II veterans, and without exception, they share one amazing trait: They never brag. In fact, if heroics are ever the topic of conversation, they will never take the credit... it's always someone else who deserves it.

Dad never talked much about his war experiences and when he did, it wasn't a long conversation. All I know is they don't hand out Bronze Star Medals (and in Dad's case, with Oak Leaf Cluster) for just showing up.

But that's a veteran for you. And that's why you'll always see a flag flying at my house, Veterans Day or any other day, for my Dad and all the other veterans, past and present, who did so very much for all the rest of us.

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Lost Highway

by Bill Alkire

It was a bleak, cold, snowy and dreary New Year's day, Thursday January 1, 1953. The cold air penetrated every inch of one's body. The high temperature was to be in the low thirties. Snow remained on the ground, having accumulated over several days.

Making matters worse, my best friend Ronnie's family had lost their gas furnace overnight. He was going to his Grandmother's house. We had planned to watch a game at his house. Ronnie said to me "Oh! By the way, a performer that you like, I cannot remember his name...died this morning in Oak Hill." I had not heard of any performer dying and could not guess who he could be referring to.

It was decided I would go with him to his Grandmother's, where we could watch the game. I packed what I needed to stay overnight. The radio in Ronnie's Dad's 1950 Ford was on, however only bits and pieces of the breaking news could I make out. A well-known male singer had died of a heart attack in Oak Hill, West Virginia was all I could understand. Sammy Kaye dance music was playing on the radio. Not the kind of music twelve-year old's listen to. The station also gave the weather, as if we were not aware - it was cold, and more snow was expected.

The sky got darker, with total cloud cover blocking out any sun. The wind was blowing from the northeast making it more miserable. As we entered Ronnie's Grandmother's house, they were talking about the death of Hank Williams. I was stunned and shocked at what I heard. Hank was one of my favorite singers. I recently began listening and following Bluegrass and Country genre music. The tent revivals with their Bluegrass Gospel and Frosty Jones with his fiddle intrigued me.

To understand Hank William's tragic death, one must look at the days preceding. The fatal trip began in Montgomery, Alabama on Tuesday, December 30, 1952. Hank was staying at his Mom's boarding house. He had scheduled a gig in Charleston, West Virginia on December 31, 1952 and a gig in Canton, Ohio on January 1, 1953. He was unable to drive himself because of recent back surgery to relieve pain from the spina-bifida, an abnormal spinal con-

"Happy Birthday! You look great for your age - almost lifelike!"

What you WON'T see on a Hallmark greeting card

dition he had been born with. He asked a good friend's son Charles Carr, 17, a freshman at Auburn University who was home on Christmas break to drive him to Charleston, West Virginia. Hank told Charles he could drive his 1953 Baby Blue Cadillac convertible.

When Charles and Hank left Montgomery, it was rain turning to ice and snow. A heavy drinker since his late teens, Hank bought a six-pack of Falstaff beer before they left. They only made it to Birmingham, that night, Tuesday December 30, 1952, because of the weather.

The next morning the state had cleared US 11 and the two left for Chattanooga, Tennessee. Stopping in Fort Payne for gas, Hank bought a pint of bourbon. It was snowing when they reached Chattanooga. Hank attempted to get a flight to Charleston; all flights were cancelled due to the weather. The two of them drove on north, arriving in Knoxville, Tennessee on Wednesday night December 31, 1952. They were able to get a room about 7:00 pm at the Andrew Johnson Hotel downtown on Gay Street, where Hank fell ill.

They were notified the show in Charleston had been cancelled. Hank's contract however, required him to be in Canton the next day.

Hank had been taking "Chloral Hydrate" to sleep. A doctor came and injected Hank with B12 and Morphine for his constant back pain. At 10:30 pm that night the orderlies wheel-chaired Hank to the car. He was dressed in a Robin Egg Blue suit with his signature white hat. The two drove off into the night, driving as fast as the road would allow.

Charlie was stopped by the police in Blaine, Tennessee. After paying the fine they proceeded north traveling US 11 to Abingdon, Virginia where they picked up US 19 to Bluefield, West Virginia, stopping there for gas.

Hank got out and stretched his legs. He refused to eat saying he needed to sleep to get ready for the show in Canton. They proceeded on via US 19 into Beckley, West Virginia. While passing through Beckley, Charles notice Hank was not covered by the blanket. Pulling off to adjust the blanket, Charles perceived that Hank was unresponsive. He pulled into a gas station and asked the attendant where the hospital was. By this time, it was getting daylight.

The Hospital was six miles away in Oak Hill, West Virginia. Pulling into the ER the hospital techs came out immediately. They informed Charles that Hank had died. The cause of death was a drug/alcohol-related heart attack.

At 29 Hiram King Williams (Hank) died, January 1, 1953. His legend lives on. A lifesize statue of him holding a guitar stands in Montgomery, Alabama, across the street from City Hall, the site of his funeral. Hank is interred near downtown, 300 meters away from the Alabama State House at Oakwood Annex Cemetery.

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A Northern Lady Comes South to Teach in Alabama

by Dale Lone Elk Casteel

Can you imagine a highly educated, sophisticated lady from New York City coming to Alabama to teach at a country school? The first day of school, this lady walked into her sixth grade class to teach country boys and girls after they had all gotten acquainted. She asked the students in her new class, "Let's talk about some of the words you use down here that we might not use up north."

The class was quiet for about a minute then Billy Bob spoke up and said, "I knows one. Hankering."

The teacher asked him to use this word in a sentence.

"I was not hankering to get up this morning and come to school"

An amazed look came upon the teacher's face. "Does anyone else have a word?"

James Earl spoke up and said, "I have one—grateful."

The teacher responded, "We use that word a lot, but go ahead and make a sentence with it."

"If you want to keep your house warm make sure you're grateful." A big smile came across James Earl's face.

The teacher again asked if there was someone else with a word. From way back in the back, Betty Jean said, "I knows one. 'Sinsuwas'."

The teacher replied, "That's not even a word. How would you use that in a sentence?"

Betty Jean said, "My dad used it many times talking to my mom. Sinsuwas up bring me a cold beer out of the frigerator."

The teacher said, "There has got to be a lot more of these senseless words."

Katy Belle stood up and said, "I got a gooden."

The teacher said, "Let's hear it."

"Usetocould. Since I broke my leg I don't dance anymore but I usetocould."

Someone in the back of the class yelled out, "Over yonder. We live up on this hill but my Grandpa and Grandma live over yonder."

The teacher asked the class to make a sentence using the word sophisticated After much thought one boy said, "This city boy is so sophisticated that he don't know how to pee off the front porch."

The teacher said, "I have to leave for a few minutes. Can you tell me where the restrooms are?"

With confused looks on their faces, one of the children finally said, "We don't have a restroom."

Another little girl spoke up and said, "Sometimes the teacher will lay her head on her desk for awhile"

The teacher asked, "What if you had to go to the toilet?"

Tommy said, "We don't have toilets. We have outhouses." The teacher remarked, "What in heaven's name is an outhouse?"

One little girl spoke up and said, "It's where the boys go to smoke if they have the makings."

Another girl told the teacher that the girls outhouse was away from the boys as she pointed down yonder. This New York City lady wasn't at all impressed about having to go to the outhouse.

Homer, a countrified boy as country as buck grass said, "Do you mean that them city boys and girls poop inside the schoolhouse? Us country folk don't believe in doing that!"

The teacher made it through one day of school down here in the south and learned more about the bare facts of life than she could in a year up north. She said, "I am going to stick with this countrified living and show these southerners that I can handle anything that comes my way.

"I am not going to eat these things they call chitlins' or hog jowl or pig's feet. I am not eating baked opossum or catfish stew. When I find me a place to live, I will move over yonder like I am hankering to do, and yes I will have a bathroom in my house and no there will be no slop jar in my house."

Earlene's Turnip Greens

Get some ham skins and cook them til done. Wash your greens and put them in a large pot of boiling water. (Just enough to barely cover the greens.) Cook the greens and ham together for about 40 minutes. When almost done, add a few drops of Tabasco Jalepeno sauce (green) and fresh ground black pepper.

If you have some turnips on hand and wish to use those also, cut them into pieces and let them cook along with the greens, for about 40 minutes.

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Pools and Kids

by Elizabeth Wharry

I became a first responder/EMT in my fourth year of nursing. I worked every other weekend as a volunteer.

One bright Saturday afternoon in June, the tones sounded for the crew I was assigned to. The address was the country club. The dispatcher directed us to go to the pool - possible child drowning. Our hearts sunk, as we were all parents.

When we got to the pool, we saw a young girl in the water being supported by 4 adults. I recognized her from the neighborhood. She was about 12 years old. Her mother was in hysterics. The paramedic in charge told me to take care of the mom. In between her sobs, she told me that her daughter ignored the no diving signs painted on the pool deck, and dove head first into 5 feet of water.

We walked over to the area where her daughter was immobilized on a backboard. Mom asked the paramedic about her daughter's condition. He told her that life flight would be there soon. He also said that from his assessment, he doubted that she was going to be walking any time soon. The mom shook her head in disbelief. I was also stunned, but said nothing. Life flight arrived, and soon mom and daughter were loaded onto the helicopter and whisked off.

On the way back to the station, we were all in a somber mood. When we got out of the squad, I broke the silence. The paramedic told me it looked like she broke her neck, and was paralyzed from the chest down. I was close to tears. This child and my daughter went to school and often hung around together. Her accident really hit me hard.

A couple years later, I attended her funeral. She succumbed to a forrm of pneumonia. Shortly after that, I tendered my resignation. My heart wasn't in it any more.

Its been close to 30 years since then. After the accident, I would occasionally see the family around town. As the years rolled by, I saw them less and less. We eventually moved here. I used to wonder what happened to them. I don't think I will ever know.

(Names have been omitted out of respect for the family.)

"The leading cause of death among fashion models is falling through New York city street grates."

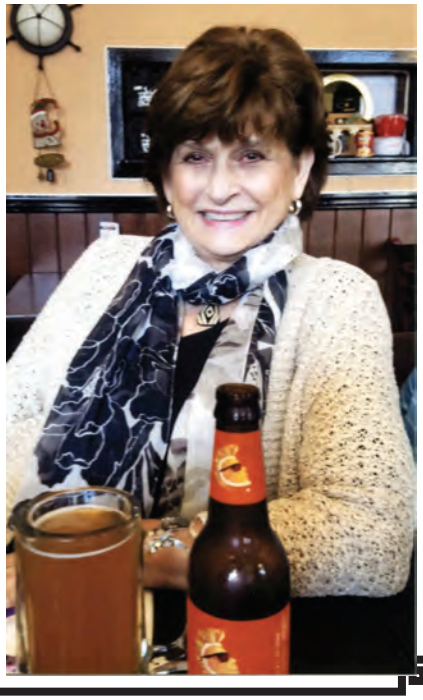
Dave Barry

When You Meet the Love of Your Life, Don't Ever Let Her Go

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JUDY HILL KEY, MY WONDERFUL WIFE OF 61 YEARS.
YOU DIDN'T TURN 80, YOU JUST COMPLETED YOUR SECOND 40.

SO HAPPY TO BE ON THIS JOURNEY WITH YOU.

BARRY



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The Huntsville National Guard in the Korean War

by Giles Hollingsworth

I enjoyed a recent Old Huntsville Magazine article by Dale Casteel, about the mobilization of the north Alabama National Guard in 1950 with the outbreak of the Korean War. He told of four Athens area boys taken from high school for a 13 month tour of duty in Korea, boys from the 1343rd Combat Engineer Battalion. I would like to tell more about that momentous event, and in doing so, name the other units involved, elaborating on the Huntsville units and individuals. I want to mention every one of them that I knew and can remember, which is about 50 guys. But I wish my list could be longer, because they all deserve personal recognition.

So I want to suggest something that may have never been done before. As I write about the tour of duty in this magazine over the next two to four months I want to ask you for your input. It can be simply the name of your relative, or it can be more. Maybe Dad, or cousin Bill told you about crossing the 38th parallel. We did that. Maybe Granddad told you about the bridges we built in Korea. They were made of wood, but I can assure you they were some of the best ever wooden bridges. Give a little or a lot of information. But at least, let's get that name printed in what can become a published memorial.

Of course for this to happen you Old Huntsville readers will have to spread the word to anyone you know who might be a relative of these soldiers.

I'll begin my account now, feeling a little selfish, inadequate, and humbled at the opportunity. I had lived in Farley during the late forties so I knew of lot of guys there, and as in Dale's case, several of us enlisted in the National Guard while we were still in high school, to earn a little extra money. That list included: James Denton, J.O. Jennings, Leroy Mefford, Everett Laur, Joe Lewis and me. Bill Jennings, John Day, Earl Ledbetter and J.P Freeman were past high school. (For this list and others please forgive my misspellings and other errors).

My enlistment was a late one, in May of 1950, so I was barely acquainted with our local training site, the National Guard Armory in Huntsville when the Korean war started, on June 25. Then on August 14 we were mobilized. With no option or grace period I went at once from being a senior in high school to a recruit in the army. I was in Headquarters Co. of the 151st Combat Engineer Battalion, which was part of the 1169th Group of Combat Engineers, also headquartered there at the Armory. Later I would learn there were two more battalions in the group, the 1343rd, which was spread across north Alabama, and the 1092nd in Pennsylvania.

In September we moved, lock stock and barrel, to Ft. Campbell, KY, about 60 miles northwest of Nashville. There we received our basic training, then a few weeks of specialized training. My best friend, J.O. Jennings, and I ended up in the Communications Section, which suited both of us to a tee. Our biggest task was learning to send and receive messages by Morse code, but we also learned radio maintenance and repair, and setting up field telephones. Our instructor was a WWII veteran, Sgt. Aubrey Drummond, who was a prince of a fellow, very good at his job and patient with us as we learned. I

have since wondered if perhaps he set out to prove that an Army sergeant doesn't have to be hard-nosed. He was sure different from our drill sergeant, Sgt. Willis.

I was amazed at the comradery, or brotherhood, that developed so quickly in my section, which included from Merrimac: Wilburn Newby, Don Hill, John D. Brown, and "Tailgate" Thomas. (Sorry, I probably once knew his real name. But he was a truck driver and "Tailgate" was all we ever called him). From the New Market area we had: Theo Hughes, Billy Kilpatrick and Edward (?) Pitts. Others were:

Grover Allen, Joe Lewis, James Ballew and Harold Geiger. I'm pretty sure Ballew and Geiger were WWII veterans, and Pitts and Hughes might have been, because they were probably in their late twenties. The rest of us were all 18 to 21 years old.

It's strange and fantastic how your mind works with God in mysterious ways, without you having an inkling of it happening. Not one of us ever gave conscious thought to literally being in a new family and we would never have described it that way. We would have said, yes, sort of, or peripherally. Truthfully we did not know our individual or collective depth of commitment, even at day one, let alone the depth at say, day thirty. While our normal beings were learning about weapons and the Morse code our inner beings were filling all our brains cells with unspoken logic, like "These are your comrades, and more. You will be together day and night for months to come. Become brothers and remain so". And we did that.

Another trait that grew rapidly was pride, and we were individually conscious of that, even though I don't remember it ever being discussed. First there was the pride that just naturally comes with donning a military uniform. It presents you to the public as someone who is serving his or her country in not just a willing way, but in a sacrificial way. And you feel honored and proud to be a part of the military tradition of your country. You appreciate the courtesies, the smiles and the looks of approval and appreciation you get from strangers, (And young soldiers especially appreciate the smiles of young ladies).

A second type of pride was one that was developed through rigor, sweat, frustration and hate. Yes hate! We hated Sgt. Willis's guts! And when I say "we" it means everyone under his command, as he drilled them. He was indeed our drill sergeant and in my ninety years of living I have never seen anyone take his or her job more seriously. He made stereotypical movie drill sergeants sound like Lawrence Welk. To him there was simply no excuse for ever making a misstep. I'm pretty sure he put a few guys on KP for making one, but mainly he just liked to hear himself yell and see how much fear he could strike into hearts. He did a lot of that.

But Sgt. Willis did the nearly impossible. He whipped a bunch of civilians who despised him into damn good marching soldiers, probably in record time, because we wanted to spend as little time as possible with him. Then, at the end of basic training, when we all marched, in perfect cadence, as an enormous group in lock step, parading before a group of brass that included at least one general, we had pride. We had pride that puffed our chests out a country mile. I don't remember thinking about Sgt. Willis during that show-and-tell, but I should have. That #$%@ did it! Bless you, Sgt. Willis.

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Summer officially begins Tuesday, June 21st, but as usual, in Huntsville, it sure feels like it's already here. Not all that long before the 4th of July arrives. Wouldn't it be nice to drive down a street and see Old Glory flying at everyone's door or yard? That's the way I remember it when Grandma was a little girl. Don't forget that Tuesday, June 14, is Flag Day. It commemorates the flag's first use.

Even with all today's current problems, I'm so thankful to be living in the United States, the best place in the whole wide world.

Like me, I'm sure you're concerned about the continued rise in the Covid variants. It was shocking news in early May that Covid's deaths exceeded one million in our country, and people are still dying. No one seems immune, even if vaccinated and boosted, like the Vice President, Kamala Harris. Thankfully, like others with all four shots, it was a mild case. I remember hearing of a daughter who'd had six family members die from Covid. She recalled that only 10% of those put on ventilators ever recover. So if you haven't had the most recent booster, please get it.

Turning to summer, it's time again for swimming. Most pools recently opened after Memorial Day. Unfortunately, there are still children who drown in home pools. If you have a grandchild that doesn't yet know how to swim, please get the lessons.

One of my granddaughters had a few lessons last year before she was two years old. At least she knows not to panic if being immersed in water and how to dog paddle to the surface. Once she enjoyed the water and held her breath, she learned how to swim a few strokes to her mother waiting for her a few feet away in the pool. The instructor was excellent with such young children.

Those early lessons not only help your grandchild enjoy the summers but could save their life should they accidentally fall into the water in the future.

I hope you will stay active in body and mind—exercise by walking or whatever you are able to do. Don't let your mind rest, either. Read, play challenging mind games like chess, checkers, bridge and card-related games, and learn new skills that challenge the mind. Remember the saying, "Your mind is a terrible thing to lose." It can help to ward off or delay aging diseases as well.

Say, "I love you" to family and friends as often as possible, and mean it. Someday you or they won't be here anymore.

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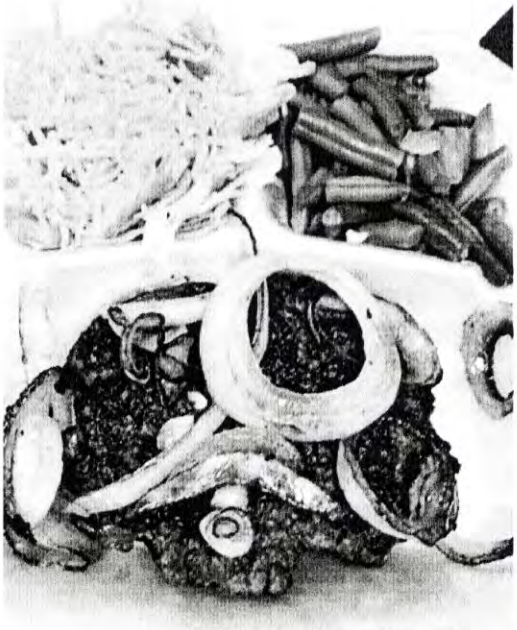

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Bicycles Vs. Train: Who Wins?

by M. D. Smith, IV

It's been twenty-three years since this happened, but my oldest son recently reminded me of an unforgettable bicycle ride. When two bicycles confront a long freight train pulled by multiple diesel locomotives, there's no question who wins, right? But there's more.

In 1999, I was still taking 20 to 30-mile bike rides on Saturdays, and this one on a hot, humid day in May, I met my son in Five Points, near his home in Huntsville, and we biked down Oakwood and out Meridian, planning to ride to Chase, see the trains and continue toward Ryland Pike. Passing under the Highway 72 bridge and nearing a business area, we turned right on Wholesale Avenue to explore what was down there. We realized it was a closed branch when we got to the end of the road at the railroad tracks. I could see another group of buildings further down, so I suggested we walk the railroad bed down and exit at the next road, but there was a ditch and no easy way back to Meridian Street when we got there.

"Dee, I know there's a place on Chase Road where the A&M road merges, and a dirt road crosses the tracks. We can walk down to it and cut off a lot of backtracking. Going straight will be a shortcut."

He agreed. At this point, the terrain was wide open, so we proceeded to walk our bikes up the tracks. The crossties were closer to the fill gravel in the center of the track, so that's the path we pushed our bikes.

As we continued, we didn't pay much attention when the track veered to the right, in the direction to parallel Chase Road, nor that the roadbed cut into the base of a mountain nearby. Not ten minutes later, Dee said, "Dad, there are walls on either side of us now."

He was right, deeper into the foot of the mountain, the cut in the earth left steep walls sloping out from the roadbed on either side. We were further into the curve and could not see back to the open area of the businesses. That's when we heard the blare from the diesel horn behind us. Crap. A train was coming.

"What'll we do?" my son asked in panic.

"It's a long way back where we came—besides, we'd be heading for the train and we can't tell how far back it is." I glanced at the sloping walls ahead, disappearing in the steepening curve. "Let's go, and maybe we can ride on the crossties." Dee had his fat-tired mountain bike and was able to ride slowly in low gear. My skinny-tire road bike was terrible, and I worried about blowing a tire bounding across the square wooden ties protruding above the gravel.

"I gotta jog beside my bike, Dee. At your speed, I can about keep up with you." I dismounted, and so did my son.

The twin whistles of the invisible train behind us grew louder. No doubt it was closer, but we had no idea how far. It seemed very close.

Can you imagine how fast our legs were moving in a combination of a quick walk and jog as we held on to the bike seat with one hand and steered the handlebars with the other, scampering down the tracks? I glanced at the walls on either side of the deepening curve.

Then a terrible smell closed in on us of something dead and rotten. The first carcass we approached was the ruined remnants of a skunk inside the tracks, and not far beyond, we saw remains of two dead possums... eewww. We only slowed a bit to keep our feet clear. Almost stifling smells choked us, and we breathed gasps through our mouths to lessen

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what our noses couldn't tolerate. Still, we pressed on and left the putrid carcasses behind.

"There's no way we could scale either side of these walls, Dee. If the train comes upon us, we might be able to flatten our backs against one side, and the engines and cars might miss us, but it'll crunch our bikes for sure."

"I sure hope it doesn't come to that, Dad."

The whistle sounded again. Definitely closer. I am sure between the exercise and adrenaline from fear—my heart felt like it would jump right out of my chest. Dee had to feel the same way, but he was twenty-three years younger than me and in better shape.

Then the dirt walls turned to rock, big rocks with sheer walls on either side. If there'd been any chance of climbing out before, that would be impossible now. Over the noise of our running and bikes clicking on the crossties, we could hear the heavy lumbering sound of several diesel locomotive engines churning behind and the sound of a hundred or more sets of wheels running along the track. We still couldn't see anything, but we knew we were running out of time.

"Where's the road, Dad?" Dee asked in panic.

"It's got to be soon. I didn't think it was this far, but I remember how the clearing will come up on the left. So it should be any second now."

The train whistles now were overpowering, echoing down the canyon walls and the rumbling of the multiple engines and who knew how many cars behind. The train would have been slow going through town, but it was building speed now. We both snatched glances behind us every few seconds, ready for an emergency "wall-pasting" if that was our only escape.

Then, the clearing appeared ahead. I know we sprinted with our bikes as we jumped to the side of the widening roadbed on the left and the dirt road came into view. We screamed in joy that we'd made it and barely escaped with our bikes and possibly our lives. We dashed into the middle of the wide dirt road, well clear of the tracks, lay our bikes down, and both of us bent double, catching our breaths, laughing and yelling victory cries simultaneously. Our clothing was sweat-soaked, clinging like a pool swim.

The whistles grew louder, as did the sounds of the train rolling up the tracks. But no train. It was several minutes before the monster three diesel locomotives, nose to nose, and the freight cars behind came into view between the steep walls we could see from our vantage point. When it did, the sounds were deafening, and we had to clamp our hands over our ears. It was further away than we thought, but we had to assume the worst with a monster like that.

Dee was keeping a diary of significant events, and he wrote a detail of that bike ride. I used a photo of his actual pages for reference in writing this story. There is a lesson in all of this. We'll never walk down train tracks beyond a point of easy and immediate exit, and I don't think we'll take bikes with us, either.

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One Night at the Russel Erskine Hotel

by Charlie Lyle

One night at the Russel Erskine Hotel, a Senator named John Sparkman walked into the lobby. He said "Hey, Quinn, I need a room for the night and I will be back later."

Well everyone from Alabama knew John Sparkman as did many other people all over the country. Many streets were named after him, buildings etc. Many in Huntsville as well, in his honor. Jimmy Quinn was manager of the hotel.

The hotel was packed, in other words, there were no rooms available. So Quinn didn't want to let his good customer down. Well, Quinn and assistant manager George Roach had a plan. There was a friend of Jimmy's who had a room in the hotel that night and always insisted that Jimmy share a little of the juice in the hotel's Red Room. Well the guest didn't really know that Quinn could drink anyone under the table. So as one might surmise that is exactly what happened. After all, he told George Roach, the assistant manager, it's just a matter of mixing business with pleasure. The man staggered back to his room and virtually passed out.

Here is where the real story begins. Quinn and a couple of bell boys slid the man on to a portable bed and rolled him down to the laundry room for the night. They made up the bed & tidied up the room. So a little bit later they greeted the Senator with a smile and said "Sir, we have your room ready."

The next morning the Senator woke up and went on his way. When the man in the laundry room woke up, he was terrified. He went up to talk to the front desk clerk and told the clerk something strange happened to him last night, but suddenly realizing that he wasn't sure what he may have done last night. He turned in his key and he went merrily on his way!!

Note: As told by George Roach who now lives in Florence, Alabama.

One would have to realize that things were quite different back in the forties.

"A wedding is a funeral where you can smell your own flowers."

Jim Wells, Priceville

"Wouldn't it be great if a liar's pants really did catch on fire?"

Jack Dixon, Arab

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Old East Clinton School

by Alice G. Karas,
written in Aug. 2011

The old East Clinton school was built a long, long time ago. I started school there in 1937 in the First Grade. I remember my teacher's name was Miss Coons. We all loved her. She was strict with us but was very kind, I'll never forget her.

There was a fire escape on the outside of the building. I don't remember if there were two or three stories to the school. The inside entrance to the fire escape was in the school auditorium. There was a door on one wall where we went to the fire escape. From the outside of the building it looked like a huge metal round tube that was smaller at the top and gradually got larger at the bottom.

All the kids would play in it when we went out for recess. The Principal, Mrs. Woodall, had a strict rule. "Don't climb up inside the fire escape - it can be extremely dangerous."

Naturally, we kids had loads of fun trying to get all the way to the top where the door was. The metal was worn very smooth and was so slippery. I think I made it to the top only once or twice before I slid down with a loud bang onto the ground.

In the summer time the metal got very hot but that was all part of the fun.

I'm 84 now and I'm blessed to be able to relive these wonderful memories of old East Clinton school.

"Dear God, maybe Cain and Abel would not have killed each other if they had their own rooms. That's what mom and dad did for me and my brothers."

Kid's note to God in Sunday School

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Heard On the Street

by ***Cathey Carney***

Congratulations to **Judith Guy** of Huntsville for being the first correct caller to find my tiny hidden feather, it was on p. 47, bottom ad, bottom of the shirt. See it now? I outdid myself on this one. Judith is a retired LPN who worked over 30 years at Huntsville Hospital and was the first group of medical folks working at the Limestone Correctional Facility. Congratulations to you Judith!

Then our sweet little boy for the Photo of the Month was that of **Curtis Parcus** of Dallas Mill Restaurant - he owned that years ago. The first correct caller was **Rob Smith** of Woodville and he said he used to eat there alot and he always enjoyed talking with Curtis when he was at the cash register!

We have **Farmers Markets** open finally - we are craving fresh fruit and veges and just a few of them are Greene Street Market on Thursdays 4-8pm on Greene St. downtown; Latham Market every Tuesday 3-6pm plus food trucks; Lowe Mill Saturday Market from 11am - 4pm, Ayers Farmers Market on Cook Street behind Krispy Kreme hours Wed - Sat 8-4pm. I know there are many others but these are great to start with.

My nephew **Brandon Owens** came up with a good idea for a strawberry dip. He takes fresh strawberries and washes them. He takes about 20 Oreo Extra Stuff cookies and scrapes the filling out, puts in a microwavable dish. You can add a teaspoonful or so of milk to make it not quite as thick. But then he microwaves it 20 seconds at a time til it's able to be stirred and has the consistency of a dip. He dips his strawberries in there and I mean, it was delicious! I had to try it even tho I watch my sugar but this was a great original idea. Then have plain Oreos for later, or dip them into the dip too!

I loved it every year when the **US Postal Service** would have their annual food drive, and give us a couple of bags to put food items in for the Food Bank of North Alabama. They haven't been able to do it the past couple years because of Covid but they did it again this May and they say "It's the day your letter carrier carries more than the mail." It was a hot day too and I admire our letter carriers so much, specially the sweet young lady who takes care of Old Town, **Ashley**! Thanks to our postal workers who did this to help feed families.

One of our Texas subscribers is beautiful **Gladys Chunn**. She has lots of relatives in our area and just had a May 23rd birthday.

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Photo of The Month

The first person to correctly identify the youngster below wins a one-year subscription to "Old Huntsville"

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This happy toddler maintains the website for Old Huntsville Magazine, among many others.

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We want to say Happy Birthday Gladys and we hope you had a wonderful and peaceful Day!

Many younger school age people these days are going through some rough times, much because of Covid and not being in school with their friends. Being an older folk (73) I remember how good it used to feel to just get out in the woods and sit on a rock and look out over a beautiful view. We have that on Monte Sano! My suggestion - **put away those *$@## phones** and take a hike there or on Green Mountain. Just breathe in the fresh air and relax, take a few friends with you. Listen to the birds. You'll see what it was like to be kids back in our day.

Bennie Jacks let us know that the U.S. Army is celebrating its 247th birthday June 9, 2022. There will be a community-wide celebration at the Von Braun Civic Center hosted by the Association of the U.S. Army Redstone-Huntsville chapter. Call **Marie Arighi** at 256.551.2379 for time and details.

Billy Lenox, owner of Visual3D LLC and he is a website genius. He also loves old maps! Billy is celebrating his birthday on June 5 so Happy Birthday Billy and party in style!

Truist Bank on Church Street is of course our favorite because of the people who work there. One of them is **Lori Deutscher** who is having a birthday on June 27th so we want to wish her a Happy and Fun Day!

A wedding anniversary that we couldn't miss is that of **M.D. and Judy Smith**. On June 8 they will be celebrating their 61st anniversary and with that huge family they have, we know there'll be some serious partying going on.

I sometimes drink those vanilla flavored protein drinks that fill you up, and discovered recently if I make a cup of strong coffee, then pour it over ice in a large cup and add in the protein drink it makes a great iced coffee. You can sprinkle it with ground cinnamon, turmeric, almond extract - whatever you like. Really good and filling.

I was shopping at **Bennetts Nursery** recently when a bad storm came out of nowhere. Wind was whipping, heavy rain and lots of thunder etc. Well before you knew it a nearby transformer blew and everything inside got dark. Shoppers were lined up with their carts of plants and none of the cash registers worked. But what was amazing is **Jeff Bennett**, owner, took out his phone and started checking people out with no delay! It was daylight so we could see but the lack of power didn't stop the folks at Bennetts at all and after the storm had passed, everyone was leaving with lots of plants.

I have hidden a really miniscule **ladybug** in the pages of this magazine and if you're the first to call and haven't won before - call me to see if you're right. You win a $50 subscription to the magazine and we've had lots of very observant readers. Keep it up!

The **City of Huntsville Public Works Department** recently repaired badly broken brick sidewalks on Clinton Ave., Randolph and Franklin Streets. The bricks were replaced and are so straight - it is a joy to walk on them now and they did a fabulous job. That was alot of hard work done in sweltering heat, but the finished project is something we're very proud of.

Becky Richardson has written stories about her sweet daughter **Ivy**, and she let us know that Ivy will be having her 62nd birthday in June. Becky has an August birthday and will be 82 years young. We look forward to an update on Ivy and let readers know how she is doing.

Happy Father's Day to all our **great Dad's out there, and those in Heaven too!**

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Summer Sweet Treats

Sweet Dixie Cake

4 eggs
1/2 pt. heavy cream
1-1/2 c. sugar
1-1/2 c. self-rising flour
1 t. vanilla or almond extract

Break your eggs into a bowl and beat til light & foamy - at least five minutes. Add cream, beat another 5 minutes. Pour in the sugar, beat well. Blend in the flour and extract. Pour into a greased tubular pan and bake at 350 degrees for 50 minutes, or in two 8-inch cake pans for 30 minutes. Dust with confectioner's sugar.

Light as Air

3 egg whites
1/2 c. sugar
Pinch of cream of tartar
1/2 t. cinnamon
1/2 t. nutmeg
1 c. pecans, finely chopped

In a clean glass bowl beat the egg whites til almost stiff. Add sugar and a pinch of cream of tartar. Continue beating til stiff peaks form. Add spices and pecans, stir well.

On a cookie sheet that you have covered with parchment paper, place small dobs of the mixture with a teaspoon. Bake at 350 degrees for about 15 minutes, and the goodies have browned just slightly. Let cool.

Chocolate Cake au Lait

1/2 c. whipping cream
2 T. sugar
1 t. vanilla extract
1 oz. German sweet chocolate, grated (1/4 cup)
2 c. hot brewed coffee
Chocolate curls

In a small mixing bowl beat cream, sugar and vanilla with electric mixer on low speed til soft peaks form. Fold in the grated sweet chocolate. Pour the hot brewed coffee into 4 coffee cups. Spoon a fourth of the whipped cream mixture over the coffee in each cup. Top with chocolate curls and serve at once. This looks beautiful if served in a tall glass coffee cup with a red cherry added on top for color.

Peachy Cherry Crisp

4 c. sliced peaches
1 t. lemon juice
1 7-oz. can pitted dark sweet cherries, drained
1 c. rolled oats
1/2 c. brown sugar
1 c. chopped nuts
1/2 c. butter, melted
1/2 t. cinnamon

Grease an 8-inch square baking pan and preheat your oven to 375 degrees. Combine peaches and lemon juice in baking pan, top with cherries.

Combine the remaining ingredients, mix and spread over the fruit. Bake for 30 minutes and serve with whipped cream & vanilla or almond ice cream.

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Pineapple Brown Sugar Casserole

2 c. crushed canned pineapple, with juice
1 c. brown sugar, packed
3 eggs, beaten
1/4 c. milk
4 c. cubed day old bread

Mix all together and grease a 9"x 11" pan. Pour mixture in and bake for 50 minutes at 350 degrees.

Tropical Pina Colada Cake

1 20-oz. can crushed pineapple
6 eggs
1 c. sugar
1 c. plain flour
1/2 c. butter, melted
1 t. vanilla extract
1/4 c. dark rum
1/2 c. whipping cream
3 T. powdered sugar
1/4 c. shredded coconut
1/4 c. toasted coconut

Grease two 9-inch layer cake pans. Drain your pineapple, squeezing out the excess moisture. Reserve 1/4 cup of the pineapple juice.

In a large bowl combine the eggs and sugar til blended. Set the bowl over a saucepan containing 2 inches of hot water for 8 minutes until the egg mixture is lukewarm. Stir, and don't allow the water to boil. Remove this from the heat, and beat with your mixer at high speed til the mix is tripled in bulk and looks like whipped cream. Fold in the flour, a little at a time, then blend in your butter and vanilla.

Turn out into the prepared pans and bake in 350 degree oven for 25 minutes and cake pulls away from the sides of the pan. Invert immediately onto cake racks to cool. Combine your leftover pineapple juice with the rum, and sprinkle evenly over both cakes.

Whip the cream with the powdered sugar. Mix 1/4 of the whipped cream into the pineapple and untoasted coconut, spread over one of the cakes. Top with second cake and frost the entire cake with the remaining whipped cream. Sprinkle your toasted coconut over the top of the cake, refrigerate.

Chocolate Nut Truffles

1 c. Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk
4 oz. chocolate chips
2-1/2 c. powdered sugar
1 t. vanilla
1 c. chopped pecans

Melt chocolate on top of double boiler. Add condensed milk and let it cook two or three minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from the fire, add sugar, stir constantly, bending thoroughly the sugar with milk and chocolate. Add vanilla and nuts. Shape as desired. Candy may be dipped.

Granny's Squares

1 can Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk
1 c. chopped nuts
1 c. chopped dates
1 c. toasted coconut

Mix all ingredients together in a bowl. Pour into a 9x9" square pan.

Bake for 45 minutes at 350 degrees or until edges along side of pan are golden brown. Let cool, cut and serve.

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"The Times are Changing"

by John Michael Hampton

In the last article I wrote about 2004, I had told the story about my grandfather Robert who was in the hospital and how he had gone into a coma. I will now pick up the story on June 3, 2004 as we started the day.

After finding out that my grandfather had been sent downstairs for dialysis, my mom asked the hospital how long it would be before we could come back and see him. They told us that dialysis took around three hours and he would be in his room around lunch time. Mom and I decided that we would take grandfather's check to Athens to pay his bills and then return to the hospital.

We dropped by the house to grab the mail, including the checks. We then got ready to go to Reliance Bank in Athens, which is where my grandfather had his bank account. My mom was driving.

As we got close to the Lake Ida area east of Athens on Nick Davis Road, the phone rang. It was the hospital and I took the call. The nurse told me, "I am sorry to tell you this, but your grandfather died during dialysis. Please return to the hospital at once so we can make arrangements about where to send the body."

My mom started crying before I hung up the phone as she just knew why the hospital had called even before I told her. We drove back to the hospital, where we made arrangements for a graveside service, organized through Hazel Green Funeral Home, that would be held at Charity Cemetery just before my grandfather was buried.

The service was held on June 6, three days later on a Sunday. I was sad that I would never see my grandfather on earth again, but was pleased to know that I believe him to be in glory.

Three days later I would be married, starting a new life. I would miss my grandparents, but I knew that my grandfather was in a better place. My grandmother, who would pass three years later in the nursing home where she spent the last eight years of her life, would also join my grandfather in that better place.

There have been many challenges for me and my family in the many years since I lost my grandfather. However, my faith in God is strong and my love for my family is strong, as well. I know that there will never be placed on me or my family more than the Lord can help us handle.

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Jim McBride is a member of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. He moved from his hometown of Huntsville, AL to Nashville to write songs full time after Conway Twitty took his song "A Bridge That Just Won't Burn" to #2 on the country charts.

Jim's first #1 came the year he moved to Nashville when Johnny Lee recorded "Bet Your Heart On Me".

In 1983, His song "Dixie Boy" was on the CMA Album of the Year "The Closer You Get" by the group Alabama.

The 1980s, 90s and the first decade of the new millennium brought dozens of chart singles and album cuts for McBride including "Rose In Paradise", Waylon Jennings' last #1 song.

In 1987, McBride began writing with a yet to be discovered Alan Jackson. Their collaboration resulted in 4 #1 songs for future Country Music Hall of Fame member Jackson and another dozen album cuts for Jackson and Randy Travis.

Jim McBride has been awarded 14 BMI and ASCAP Awards including the 1994 ASCAP Song of the Year for " Chattahoochee". He earned 3 awards from the Nashville Songwriters Association International as well as 4 Music City News Songwriter Awards.

In 1995 McBride received the Music Creators Award from the Alabama Music Hall of Fame for his contributions to the music heritage of his home state.

McBride has reaped 5 Song of the Year nominations from the Grammys, the Country Music Association and the Academy of Country Music for his songs "Chattahoochee" and "Angels In Waiting" a hit for Tammy Cochran.

In 1994 "Chattahoochee" was named the CMA Song of the Year.

Jim McBride songs have been recorded by Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson, George Jones, Reba McEntire, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charley Pride, Travis Tritt, Toby Keith, Dwight Yoakum, The Oak Ridge Boys, Keith Whitley, Crystal Gayle, Gene Watson, Trace Adkins, Luke Bryan and dozens of others.

20 members of the Country Music Hall of Fame have recorded His songs.

McBride has had numerous hits on gospel, bluegrass and foreign charts. His songs are on over 70 million records sold worldwide.

"I looked up my family tree and found three dogs were using it."

Rodney Dangerfield

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The Lyric

by Bill Goodson

When I drive downtown these days on Washington Street between Clinton and Randolph, I am always surprised at what I see. There it is, on the east side of the street, a vacant parking lot where the Lyric theater used to be. The peculiar thing about it is...it's so small! I recall going to movies there as a kid. There were four movie theaters in Huntsville - the Lyric on Washington St., the Grand - B movies - on Jefferson, the Center on Triana, and the Princess - on Church street.

We bought our tickets (ten cents) at the window on the right and then walked to the entrance with a ticket-taker standing guard. Once I crossed that portal, I was in Wonderland. I had passed through the Looking Glass into another realm and it seemed a vast space to me; dark enough, I guess, so that the true dimensions were a mystery. Just as the movies themselves transported me to another world, so did the space. I recall exiting in tears after seeing Bambi for the first time.

By the time I reached Junior High age, Saturday movies became a part of my life ... timed perfectly with the arrival of male hormones surging through my veins. At school on Fridays, I would summon the courage to ask one of my favorites - Jeanne or Anne or Nancy or Linda - if she were going to the Lyric and if I could sit with her. I rarely was turned down.

So I'd take my obligatory Saturday bath, slick my hair with Brylcream and ride the bike downtown, only twelve blocks away. After parking at the bike rack, I'd wait for the object of my affections to purchase her ticket and we'd stroll in together, sitting on the left side down front where our crowd tended to gather.

Anyone in for some serious smooching would sit in the balcony. I think I peeked at it once. The rest of us did some serious hand-holding. The anticipated consummation began with her hand resting on the seat's arm between us, followed by my sweaty one creeping along the arm until it reached its destination, hoping against hope that she would turn hers palm-up to welcome the climax of the drama.

Be still, my heart! There we sat through the unchanging series that consisted of previews, Movietone News, cartoon, serial (Captain Marvel was my favorite) and finally, the Westerns. (Roy Rogers was the best, though Gene Autry wasn't bad). Hands were clenched throughout. We kept the bag of popcorn (my treat) between us so we could reach with the other hand and not break the spell.

Right here is the place for my confessional. Every Saturday during those blissful hours I wondered if the girl would tickle the palm of my hand. Everyone knew what that meant. It never happened, and thank God for that. I would not have had the faintest idea what to do next. I would be too embarrassed to ask for instructions, so my life of romance would have ended abruptly and I would have taken myself to a monastery.

So much for that.

The other feature of the Saturday Lyric experience was the Kiddie Club, a monthly talent show for little kids. The host was a local radio personality, Grady Reeves, and he would welcome six or seven kids, one at a time, to the stage to perform. America's Got Talent, Lyric Theater style. After all had finished singing, dancing, baton-twirling, playing an instrument, or reciting, he would call them all back up and have the audience applaud for each in turn. He would judge the favorite (no applause meter then) and award the prize. Five dollars, I think.

When my baby sister was five, I taught her to play the ukulele and sing songs such as "Ain't She Sweet", "Five Foot Two", "Hey, Good Lookin", and "Slow Poke." Pat readily agreed to take the stage and won every time she performed... EXCEPT when her neighbor/boyfriend, Little Joe Walker, performed against her. Joe was crippled with a shortened leg from polio at an early age, and all he had to do was limp up to the microphone and he would win. Cute as a button - both of them.

That ghost-space on Washington Street harbors a wealth of memories.

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The Old Days

by Don Broome

We moved to Huntsville on July 19, 1952. I remember because that was my 5th birthday. We lived behind Farley School in a little community of makeshift housing. In the middle of my 1st grade we moved to those small houses on the left side of Drake Avenue across from the Mill Village houses. We lived on Marks Drive which was only one block from Drake.

So what was life like back in the fifties? First I guess I need to say my mother was an old farm girl so she thought nothing of letting us roam all over. As long as we were home by supper it was all good. I was allowed to go downtown by myself (at age 7). My brother and I mowed lawns so we had loads of free money to spend. For a dime you could spend all day at the Center Theatre on Triana Blvd. There was a penny candy shop attached and we would load up on that, buy ourselves a drink and popcorn and we were set to watch Tarzan or Hopalong Cassidy or maybe it was Gene Autry. There would be cartoons and news reels and then it would all be repeated. We could stay all day if we wanted. We could walk to town or for a nickel we could ride the bus and go to the better theatres like the Lyric and the Martin.

I remember there were places where you could buy 5 hamburgers for $1 or 6 hot dogs for the same. About once a month Mom would buy a dozen tamales and that would be part of our supper. There was a man with a cart selling them.

It was impossible to get lost in Huntsville back then. If you knew whether you were North or South of Governors Drive and East or West of Whitesburg/Meridian then you could find your way home.

Brahans Springs Park was real swampy and we used to catch turtles there and Big Springs Park downtown had a big swimming pool that the spring water just flowed through. It stayed cold all the time because it never stayed in the pool but just flowed through. I remember one time sneaking over to one of the duck islands and stealing a duck egg. I was going to cook it but it turned out to be rotten and stunk up the whole house.

I went to Joe Bradley School until after the 5th grade. It was built by the Mill next door and I think they supplied our heat in the winter. We always walked to school regardless of the weather. Having an older brother had an advantage because everyone soon learned that to mess with one of us you got us both. We never started any trouble and usually didn't have any. At lunch we could go home to eat or we could go across the street and eat at one of a couple of places. They sold chili dogs and fries and sodas. There was a rooming house across the street that parents would sometime arrange meals for the kids. Also at recess the school had the end of a hall with a board blocking part of it and they sold chips, drinks and candy. We could go out and play on the swings and other playground equipment.

It's funny things you remember, that stick in your mind. In the fall walking down Triana Boulevard there was a line of maple trees and the leaves would rustle as you walked through them. We always called it the Boulevard and it was later as an adult that I realized it was actually Triana Boulevard.

"Thou shalt be struck down if you steal the copper tubing from this AC unit."

Seen on sign outside local church

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OSCAR LLERENA

WITH LOVE TO THE HUNTSVILLE HIGH CLASS OF 1966

In the Beginning

by Robert B. French, Jr. PC

Nothing much was happening on Friday, September 15, 1933. The country was in the 4th year of the terrible economic Depression. Other than the Civil War, it was the worst time in American history. The country was in a vicious downward spiral from which it could not extricate itself. People could not buy because they did not have any money. People didn't have money because they could not find jobs. Jobs did not exist because manufacturers and retailers could not sell their products. They couldn't sell anything because no one was spending money. And so it went, a vicious cycle creating a desperate time.

Times were especially hard in the South. Contrary to common knowledge, the South was still recovering from the Civil War. In addition, the carpetbaggers had visited their own kind of hell in the area. Although the rest of the country was suffering, the South was near desolate. Alabama did not survive the Civil War until after WWII.

The 15th was a clear day. The crisp fall air poured in through the driver's window of the gray 1932 Chevrolet. There were two brothers in the front seat, and a tall beautiful sister in the back.

They were traveling North on two-lane Pulaski Pike, out of Depression-smitten Huntsville, Alabama. They were bound for Winchester, Tennessee.

The sister, Nina Lois Sibley French, had been married to Robert B. French for almost 6 years. Now, after years of trying, she was finally 9 months pregnant and wanted to see her husband.

Robert had left the Tennessee Valley Bank as Vice President when it closed on Black Friday. Now in hard times, he was working as a lineman hanging telephone wires across Southern Tennessee. It didn't utilize his college education in Finance, but it was good-paying work, and that was hard to come by in North Alabama. Nina had asked her brothers, Arnold, the driver, and Ira, Jr., to borrow their father's car and take the day off from the dairy to drive her up to see her husband.

Motels had not been considered and there were no hotels nearby. For overnight travelers in the country, people took in roomers or borders. There were boarding houses and rooming houses in every small town. Robert had been boarding with the Mapes family in the small community of Howell, Tennessee. Nina had not seen him in more than 6 weeks. Hanging the lines went on 7 days a week - often daylight to dark.

When the trio arrived at the Mapes farm, it was a little past mid-day. Robert would not be free until dark. They had found him, ridden by, honked and waved to let

"If a man watches four football games in a row, he should be declared legally dead."

Erma Bombeck

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him know they were there. He was wearing huge tan leather gloves, pulling wire off a large wooden spool on the back of a truck. Nina hoped he might get off a little early. Although the car had good lights, they didn't want to travel at night.

While the brothers smoked, leaning back against the car, Mrs. Mapes, who was very kind to Nina, took her to see the horses down at the barn. Nina was a horsewoman and was very interested to see the saddle horses that the Mapes raised and trained.

SADDLE UP

At the large unpainted barn, smelling of hay and animals, Mr. Mapes was grooming a chestnut mare named Susan. She was a beautiful tall horse and spirited. When Nina admired the mare, Mapes said she rode like a rocking chair. He was going to saddle her up and ride her around the white-washed three-board training ring a few times for exercise.

As he cinched the saddle girth strap, Nina, who had been quietly rubbing Susan's muzzle, while feeding her from her other hand, said, "Let me ride her."

Mrs. Mapes, standing nearby, said, "You shouldn't do that, Mrs. French; you are in a family way." "It won't hurt. Mr. Mapes said, "She rides like a rocker."

After tucking her dress between her legs, Nina struggled to get her pregnant belly up behind the saddle horn as her brothers arrived.

"Nina!" Ira Jr. exclaimed, "What are you doing?"

"I'm just going to take her around the ring," she responded, as she made a clicking sound with her tongue, and urged Susan forward out of the barn with her heels.

When the horse recognized the ring, she broke into a gallop. Nina loved it! She did ride like a rocking chair. She urged the mare on lightly with the excess bridle. Susan responded, and away the horse and rider went, full gallop around the white-fence enclosed training ring. Her long brown hair was flowing out behind her as she and the mare joined that rider/animal relationship where they are almost one.

After four rounds, Susan broke a sweat, and Mr. Mapes walked to the edge of the training ring. As horse and rider came by, he told Nina that was enough.

She guided the horse back into the barn, and with the help of all in attendance, she dismounted.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Mapes. Susan is a beautiful animal."

In the semi-light of the barn, Nina sat on a feed sack and watched as Mapes exercised two more horses. As he finished, Robert arrived early from work.

"The foreman let me and my 'ride' off early, knowing my wife and brothers-in-law were here."

"I would like to apologize to anyone I have not yet offended.
Be patient - I'll get to you shortly."

Butch Emmons, Athens

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A Bicycle Wreck

by Catherine Cameron

It was 1946. My parents were share-croppers, raising cotton & corn. The landlady got every fourth bale of cotton and every third wagon load of corn. We had 2 Jersey cows which produced milk for our own use and Mother made butter to sell. Mother had a standing agreement with a country store in a small town about 2 miles away to buy her butter and they resold it. Her butter-mold had a pineapple shape on it, so customers would recognize it as being hers.

My mother and I had saved our pennies, nickels and dimes for a year to buy a bicycle with a basket for me. She wanted the bicycle, so I could take the butter, along with some well-wrapped eggs to sell to the store in exchange for the goods we needed.

One day, my Dad came in from Paint Rock, saying the Postmaster had told him there was a large COD package for Mother. She got my brother, who had a car, to go to the Post Office to pick it up. I remember the price being close to $50. My brother, who had just been discharged from the Navy, put the bicycle together for me. I still have this J C Higgins bicycle that came from Sears, Roebuck and Co. It is not in good condition, but I am in the process of putting it back like it used to be.

I was the most excited kid in the neighborhood, riding everywhere. Since we lived in the country, the roads were always in bad condition. I wasn't allowed to ride on the highway except when I was transporting butter & eggs. The road was paved with 2 lanes, having big ditches on each side with blackberries growing in them.

We had cotton fields at least a half-mile away. When cotton-picking time came, I rode my bike. Mother and my cousins were walking. One day, I was riding my bike on the highway. I felt sorry for my mother, who was trudging tiredly along. My cousins were walking on the railroad tracks. At the time Mother was about 40 years old and weighed 190 pounds. I stopped and asked Mother to ride, (there was a seat on the back fender) and she accepted. I had barely got the pedals moving before we went into that deep ditch. I thought "I have surely killed my mother*.

We lay there, In the middle of the blackberry briars, both of us scratched all over, except where our clothes covered us. I looked at her and asked, "Are you all right?" She replied, "Yes, are you?"

Then we started laughing. We lay there laughing for at least 5 minutes. When we stood up in that deep ditch, our cousins saw us. They said they had been wondering where we had disappeared so fast.

Many years later, Mother would tell this story with glee and explain "I got hold of the handlebars to help her steer."

Mother worked hard helping my Dad scratch out a living, so she didn't laugh or smile a lot. She lived to be 98 years of age and she loved to tell the grandchildren and great grandchildren this story, always with laughter.

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The Nu-Way Restaurant

by Buddy Esslinger

I was born and raised in Madison County, just east of the Big Cove Community. My two older brothers, {Bobby and Neel) and myself, lived with our parents, Marvin and Bessie (Sherrill) Esslinger on the farm located on what was then called Gurley-New Hope Pike. We raised cotton, corn, wheat and chickens and had several dairy cows. We basically provided our own food but occasionally went to town (Huntsville) to purchase staple goods and take care of other business.

Most of the time going to town was done on Saturdays. This was in the 1940's era. We all (five) would pile in the truck and would be gone most of the day. Sometimes Dad would drop Mother off at her mother's, (Maude Sherrill, "Big Mama") home. She lived on Whitesburg Drive, where "Old Bull Dog Antiques" used to be located.

Dad, my brothers and I would go downtown to get haircuts, etc. I remember Dad would give us fifty cents or maybe a dollar with instructions not to spend it all in one place because there wasn't any more, so we learned to spread it around. Also we were told what time we would meet to go back home. This was usually somewhere around the old Courthouse.

There were two movie theaters ("Lyric" on Washington Street and "Grand" on Jefferson Street) that we could go to for ten cents each. We would get to see the main feature, cartoons, serial (to-be-continued), news around the world and previews of coming attractions. I would go over to "Tom Dark Drugs" and sit on the floor and look at comic books (usually I would buy one or two for five cents each) and get an ice cream cone.

The one special place I enjoyed going to was my Grandfather Sam Sherrill's (Big Daddy) cafe, called the "NuWay". This was located on the North Side of the Square.

When Big Daddy opened the "NuWay", hamburgers and hot dogs were seven cents each; coffee, coke, sweet and chocolate milk were five cents each; and two fresh eggs with bacon, toast and coffee was thirty-five cents. Later prices had increased to ten cents for hamburgers and hot dogs.

As you entered the "Nu-Way" there was a pay phone on the left that cost five cents to make a call. The counter was lined with stools from one end to the other that were stationary to the floor and would swivel.

I remember my Big Daddy would take his long enamel pan over to Hill's Grocery Store on the east side of the Square to buy fresh ground beef. This was 100% pure beef. He would go back to the "NuWay" and sit down in his office taking an ice cream scoop to form balls of ground beef, stacking them on a tray. They would put the ground beef on the grill and flatten them with a spatula.

He also served some of the best homemade chili prepared by Mr. Russell Bennett. People working downtown would frequent his cafe, because service was pretty quick, food was real good and reasonable. Others coming into town to do business would also eat there. I never went there when it wasn't busy.

When Big Daddy retired he sold the "NuWay to his son, Glenn Sherrill of Chattanooga, who co-owned the Krystal Company chain, and the name changed to "Krystal".

Several years later, the "Krystal" in Huntsville was sold to Mr. Means and thereafter became known as "Snow White". It was where the "Wild Rose Cafe" was located.

At that time two hamburgers and a coke were only twenty-five cents.

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Alzheimers or Dementia, and Grief

by Tanjie Kling

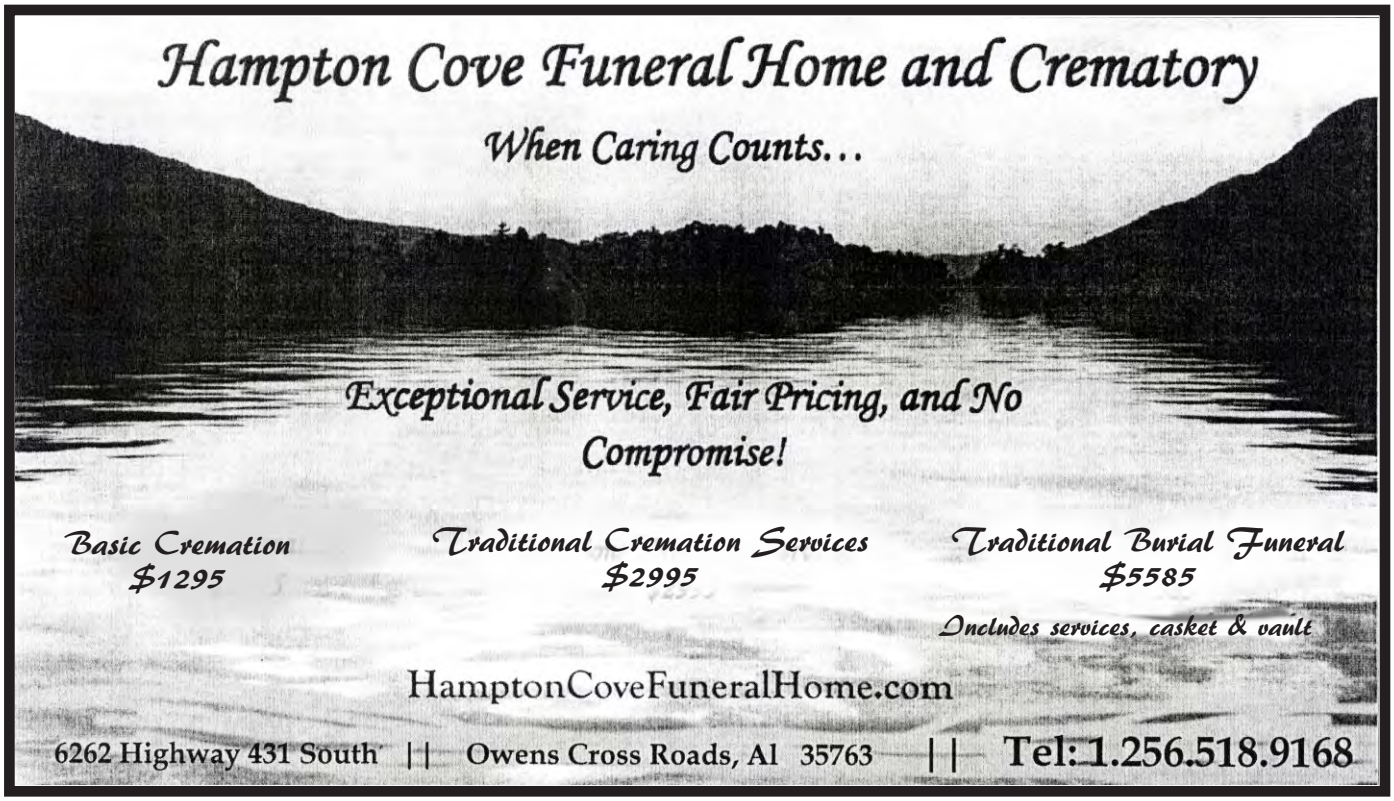
I was going to keep this personal experience to myself, but I recently communicated with a friend who just lost her mother to this terrible disease. I think it may help others, so I will share.

For those of you who have walked through the journey of Alzheimer's or dementia with your loved ones, I know that it is a hard journey. If you have not had to walk this path, you are fortunate.

After your loved one passes, you will of course feel grief. If their diagnosis was early, (and you have experienced their decline daily and their journey was prolonged) you may wonder days, weeks and even years after they have passed if you have "grieved enough" for them.

This has been the case with my mother, who I still grieve today. We all grieve the loss of our parents, but the one with Alzheimer's or dementia, we grieve in a different way.

The loss of my dad was profound. The loss of my mother was hard. It was a difficult grief with my father because I was forced to relive his death every day. My fa-



ther passed first, and my mother remained. I spent a lot of my time caring for both of my parents; especially my mother. Due to her Alzheimer's, she forgot he had passed away. She asked me every day where he was. It got to the point where I would tell her, "I'm not sure where he is. Did he tell you where he was going?" Or "He went to see his parents, but you will see him again soon." Or simply a therapeutic lie, "He's in the shower."

One day she even said to my sister, "Your dad sure takes a lot of showers."

We learned not to tell her he was in the garden because she would park her chair next to the window and watch for him to come through the door.

After my mother passed, I could finally grieve for them both. But the grief was different in regards to my mom. I almost felt guilty. It seemed I cried for my father more than my mother.

That I did not grieve enough for her. But the truth is, I actually grieved longer for her throughout her long Alzheimer's journey. Like:

The times she would get angry with me because of things she imagined that I had done.

The first time my mother forgot my name and every time after.

The day she actually forgot that I was her daughter.

The time she told me that she thought she heard Tanjie crying and she needed to go check on her but couldn't find her, and asked me to help her find Tanjie. In parallel, it hurts to try to find yourself, and yes... you do lose a part of yourself when caring for someone with this disease.

The times my mother forgot my birthday, and especially the week of my 50th birthday when she was dying. On my last birthday with her, my dear friend Sarita gave me a birthday card with a Chick-fil-A gift card in it, and signed her and my mother's name. It took me a year to actually spend the gift card. I had another dear friend, Mary Jane, who actually prayed for me during that time; that my mother would not die on my birthday.

So, if you ever feel a different kind of grief or guilty because you feel you haven't grieved enough, rest assured: You have. You have grieved every day since their diagnosis, because every day you had with them was different and nothing will ever be the same. You have endured this journey and walked along side your loved one, and experienced loss every day that they have declined. Probably, you have grieved so long, that when the time comes that they pass, you will have no more tears left.

May God bless you all that are walking this path, and those that have already walked it.

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Grandma's Button Box

by Janice Depew

Grandma Galloway at the age of 70 would soon have to move in with her son Loran and his family because of her arthritis and fading memory. How they dreaded it. Everyone knew how bossy she could be especially with the grandkids. She'd always ask them if they cleaned their nostrils every time they washed their face, "Because you know we live in coal country and we all inhale coal dust."

Yes, they knew and they'd get away from her as soon as possible. Then she'd ask Loran and his wife again about where her button box could be. "It's the one my brother Fritz gave me years ago with a rum cake inside. I miss it as much as the crown of feathers from my son Charlie's deathbed. The feathers in his pillow formed a crown around his head as he lay dying. Rest his soul; he doesn't need it now."

Loran's family knew how Grandma Galloway had anguished for years over Charlie's crown of feathers and at last admitted she probably lost it when moving. Her treasured button box contained a collection from her young married life, with buttons from her kids' clothes, many colorful buttons friends had given her, and a large silver button from Grandpa's Mackinaw. She found the button after he passed away and she had given the coat away.

She moved in with Loran's family at the age of 74. She gave away all her household belongings except the huge cedar bed Grandpa had made for her and a large black trunk which she said contained her King James Bible, family pictures and her burial clothes. She told them she had specific "going way" plans. "Bury me in the clothes I laid out in the trunk; funeral at the First Baptist Church on Miller Road; Preacher Jon Bacon and not that heathen they've got down there now; bury me at Anderson Hill Cemetery on top of the hill with Grandpa and Charlie where we'll all be closer to heaven when the rapture comes...and no crying and carrying on. Oh yes, I want a pine box like Grandpa's and Charlie's and I'd like for the Hills Quartet to sing Amazing Grace, all the way through."

Things went smoothly for a while except she carried a nasty spit cup for her Bruton's snuff. It gagged the children arid she still questioned them about their dirty nostrils. She continued to nag Loran about looking for her button box. "It's very important!" Then she'd say "Who do all these, children belong to? Have you checked their nostrils? Did they get my buttons?"

Time dragged on for another ten years and wore on their nerves. The kids grew up and moved on to college or marriage

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For more information/questions contact Betty Owens at (256) 852-2594

and then it was just Grandma, Loran and his wife. Except for the nagging about the button box, Grandma's memory continued to fade. She thought she still lived in her house and worried about the strangers there.

The morning came when Loran and his wife started another day but Grandma didn't. She passed away peacefully in her sleep. She had gone to bed after telling Loran, "How good it is you moved into my house where all my memories are and ran off those strangers." She still wanted to find her button box and look at the buttons again, and she asked if the children had seen it. It held precious memories for her.

Per Grandma's instructions, they contracted with the First Baptist Church on Miller Road for the funeral, engaged Preacher Jon Bacon, secured a pine box like Grandpa's and Charlie's, and contacted the Anderson Hill Cemetery's caretaker to prepare the burial space. The Hills Quartet had a previous engagement but the choir would sing Amazing Grace, all the way through.

After preparing her body using the Honeysuckle soap she loved, they opened the large black trunk to remove her burial clothes. Her old long, hot petticoat and underwear were on top, then her favorite long blue-flowered dress with its matching sweater. She had remarked a long time ago that she didn't think her black hat with the red plastic cherries on top would fit in the "box" very well. Leave it off. She had also told them to be sure they put on her stockings, but leave off the shoes unless there's some law against it. Dress shoes hurt her feet. She didn't want to lie there with her feet hurting. And, "Oh yes, put one of my handkerchiefs with the tatted lace in my right hand."

Under the blue-flowered dress in the bottom right corner of the trunk lay a package wrapped in a green blanket. They recognized the blanket as the one on Charlie's bed when he died. Inside the blanket they found a ten-inch diameter tin cake box with a picture of a rum cake on top. The inside contained hundreds of buttons, one large silver one, and another package carefully wrapped in a piece of white cotton material. It contained Charlie's crown of feathers. At some time when Grandma could still think straight, she had decided she wanted to be buried with the button box and its contents. They followed her instructions including burying her with the contents of the large black trunk.

All these maneuvers didn't make a bit of difference now; she's still gone, but they meant a great deal to her while she lived and they were thankful they could fulfill them.

They found your button box, Grandma.

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A Lost Treasure

by Malcolm Miller, written in 2011

On June sixteenth this year I lost a good friend and Huntsville/Madison County and surrounding areas lost a real treasure.

Tom Carney, long time Huntsville resident and business man, passed away after a short illness. Leaving with Tom were all those great stories about this area that were in this great story teller and historian's mind never to be told. However, he did leave us with boundless stories that have already been published in the Old Huntsville Magazine as well as in other places. Needless to say he will be sorely missed by his constant companion. His lovely wife and business partner will take over and do an outstanding job making sure that this magazine, which is read by many thousands, will keep going and prosper in the coming years.

Tom and Cathey were still deeply in love even after twenty three years of marriage, you could just feel it when you were in their presence. And talk about culture and background differences; Cathey the daughter of a mother who was a physician from Germany and Father, a colonel in the Army. Tom was from Hurricane Creek community, now you just don't get more southern and countrified than that. However, opposites do attract and they were very much attracted to one another and made a great team both in their work and personal life.

Tom Carney talked the talk and walked the walk when it came to telling stories. He grew up during hard times and overcame many obstacles where lesser men would have failed.

Tom has had two books published; has helped several others putting together their books, he was a voracious reader who read on average two books every day. He did all this and still made time for researching history of Huntsville and Madison County and chatting with the many friends who would drop by their home in Old Huntsville, that's what I call that section of the city.

Tom was also a very generous person. I had an old shot gun that was rusty and scarred up, in a really bad condition. It had belonged to my Father and all of my six brothers and I learned to hunt with this gun. I showed it to Tom and he offered to refinish it for me and make it look like new. He did just that and would not take a thing for all the hours of work he put into refurbishing it.

Tom liked to talk about his experiences as a young boy. I recall one story he told me about riding with his uncle who was a Deputy Sheriff when selling liquor in Madison County was illegal. The sheriff was still on the fee system with a small salary and the deputies made even less. Bootleggers were everywhere and they needed protection from being fined or worse, sent to prison. Tom said his uncle would pull up to a bootlegger's place and the man would come out with a shot of whiskey and a sack full of money. Tom decided right then that he knew what he wanted to be when he grew up, but obviously as time went on he decided that wasn't such a good idea.

Tom Carney's writing didn't just stop with the publication of several books and writing stories for Old Huntsville. It is not widely known but he wrote several things for the famous comic and author Lewis Grizzard, also he wrote a Huntsville story for popular radio personality Paul Harvey's Rest of the Story broadcasts, that wound up getting read on his nationwide broadcast.

Cathey told me that on one occasion Paul Harvey called Tom and told him he should move to Chicago. Tom's response was "Sorry I can't do that, I would have to start wearing socks."

That was my friend Tom Carney and I'll never forget him.

(Editor's Note: Malcolm lived at Tut Fann Veterans Home when he passed away in August of 2017).

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UFO's
Beyond the Beyond

by Barry Key

You may ask, what do UFOs have to do with Old Huntsville? Since 1950, when Dr. Wernher Von Braun immigrated to Huntsville and put man on the moon, Huntsville has been the leader in research and development for unmanned travel into deep space.

My wife Judy and I have a goal, and that is to visit all the National Parks in the U.S. Just before the COVID pandemic, President Trump upgraded the White Sands National Monument, in New Mexico, to the White Sands National Park. Since the pandemic had slowed down and travel within the US had somewhat opened up, we decided that White Sands National Park would be our next adventure.

The National Park doesn't take that much time to see. It is, more or less, a 16 mile drive through 146,000 acres of brilliant white sand dunes, some as high as 60 feet. What makes this National Park unusual is the sand is not sand but a powdered gypsum, the same material that the sheet rock on your walls are made of.

Rain has leached the calcium sulfate mineral out of nearby Mountains for millions of years. A consistent and prevailing wind is what built and maintains the dunes. For us older visitors, a short leisure walk and a double handful of powder sifting through our fingers completed our trip of the National Park. However, there were hundreds of kids, of all ages, with sandboards that were taking full advantage of the high dunes.

Now, on to my story of UFOs. I think everyone has heard the story of the alien space ship that crashed landed in Roswell, N.M. I had read, with very high skepticism, various articles in tabloids and seen a few specials on TV regarding the phenomenon. I always thought this was just a story the city of Roswell instigated to promote tourism.

Since we were in New Mexico, and Roswell was only a couple of hours distance away, Judy and I decided to go see for ourselves what all the hullabaloo was about. As we expected, a lot of the businesses had taken advantage of the story to name their business or their product. There were numerous murals on walls and statues of the aliens that were killed in the space ship crash.

Although a humorous thought of aliens crash landing on Earth, we decided to go through the "INTERNATIONAL UFO MUSEUM AND RESEARCH CENTER". The museum tells you that they are not trying to convince a person one way or the other, but to tour the museum with an open mind. By the way, did you know that the U.S. government no longer uses the acronym "UFO", but a more technological synonym, "UAP" Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon.

The museum not only has information regarding the Roswell incident, but sightings by others such as commercial and military airline pilots. There are even a few people that claimed to have been abducted to what was considered a "space ship", gone through an examination and returned to Earth after a short period.

After a couple of hours of displays, videos, and reading testimonials of reputable people (military personal and government officials) that supposedly witnessed the crash site.... you can't help but leave the museum with a tiny bit of uncertainty. After all, who knows what really lies....Beyond, the Beyond???

Close Cucumber Call

by Gary Gee and Charles Malone

In Florida in the early 1950s, Greg's dad was a firefighter. But he had a second income from a couple of truck tractors that he used and - sometimes leased out - for hauling trailers loaded with cucumbers up north as far as such states as Connecticut and Delaware. Greg had learned his firefighter and trucking skills from his dad, and followed in his dad's footpath. He liked contributing to his neighbors in his fire fighting profession; however, he loved the independence of trucking vegetables on the side. And he described the latter this way: "Trucking was ingrained in my soul; while my friends went off to college to get their education, my education primarily came from seeing the world through the windshield of an 18-wheeler semi-trailer truck." Greg's tractor was his mobile apartment. One of his memories never left him - nor people in Huntsville - especially those living at the base of the west side of Monte Sano mountain.

Greg's solo trip in the trucking business was transporting a load of cucumbers from Florida to Delaware in an 18-wheeler. While he had heard of the possibility of "imbalance of brakes" with the tractor and the trailer, he had expected this to be a remote occurrence and quickly put it in his "things-to-learn-more about later" folder. But the "remote phenomenon" happened on his first solo trip, while ascending and descending Monte-Sano. This was his first major lesson learned from looking through a windshield.

Brake imbalance, reportedly, is one of the more common reasons for loss of brakes. It can result in jackknifmg or swingout, depending on which of the two braking systems have become too hot.

Reaching the crest of Monte-Sano, Greg began his roller coaster ride. He was shocked when he realized that his brakes had failed and that he and his cargo had entered a serious emergency. He knew the trail - that the highway intersected first with Longwood Avenue, then California Street and Whitesburg Drive. And he also was aware that Longwood terminated at the Madison Heights subdivision just west of Fifth Avenue Elementary School.

Under stress - and like a pro - Greg quickly chose to deviate onto Longwood Drive and try to avoid the traffic near Huntsville Hospital at the Whitesburg Drive intersection. He and his load of cucumbers sailed down Longwood Drive at over 80 miles per hour, and then through the next two busy intersections. Then Greg sped by Fifth Avenue School and plowed into Charles Malone's home at the end of Longwood and came to an abrupt stop - an uninjured and wiser man. Eleven-year old Charles was a student at Fifth Avenue School, where on this day many students were getting their education. Glancing through the classroom windows in response to Greg's laying down on his air horn - and flashing his lights - in warning of the cucumber emergency, their education today also was beyond the books. Charles' dad was a firefighter. His mom had a beauty salon in the family's converted garage. Charles has a great memory of the "cucumber event":

"This event happened around 1951. At that time Longwood Drive was the road going over Monte Sano Mountain. Governor's Drive (then known as Fifth Avenue) eastbound ended at Madison Street, next to Huntsville Hospital.

I was a student at Fifth Avenue Elementary, the back of which faced Longwood Drive. That day I claimed to be sick (sometimes it worked), but my mother sent me to school anyway. That likely made it possible for me to be telling this tale.

In those days truck air brakes that failed were then worthless. A truck carrying a load of cucumbers from Florida had topped the mountain and was headed down when the brakes failed. As I recall, the driver mentioned 80 MPH going through the Whitesburg Drive/Longwood intersection. Progressing west on Longwood he realized the road ended at what is now Harvard Road, requiring a right turn to go to 5th Avenue. Fearing he could not stop before

hitting a house (mine) he decided to try laying the truck on the side in the hope it would stop sooner. Instead, the truck spun around and hit my house going backwards. The truck trailer hit the corner of the house and veered into the area between houses, with the tractor rear wheels in my bedroom and on my bed. Going to school likely saved me.

My mother's metal clothesline posts were sheared-off at the ground, and my dog's house containing the dog was moved across the back yard. My dad had built the doghouse atom bomb proof (2x6 lumber covered with sheet metal), which likely saved the dog. I recall this because my mother used to laugh and tell the tale about how hard it was to get the dog to come out of the house.

My mother had a small beauty shop in our converted garage part of the house. She felt and heard the impact (it moved the house a quarter inch or so on the foundation) and thought Redstone Arsenal had blown up. Around that time the truck driver came to the beauty shop door and informed my mother that he had run into the house. Fortunately, the only thing that happened to him was his shoes were mysteriously removed from his feet. Shortly after this I was sent home from school. Not sure how that was caused to happen.

The back yard was pretty much covered with cucumbers spilled out of their bushel baskets. Many unopened baskets were also spread around. Neighbors (eventually a lot of townspeople) began showing up and gathered up loose cucumbers and unopened baskets and left with them for their own use.

By the time people left the back yard was covered with cucumber mush that had been trampled. Thankfully, the city Fire Department came and nailed up a tarp to stop people from touring my now exposed bedroom. We even had people walking in the front door (never locked in those days) and touring the entire house. Relocating the dog to the front porch stopped that. In all fairness I must say there were numerous people who later brought pickled cucumbers to us.

My room was rebuilt, the bed replaced and thus ends the tale of the cucumber truck event.

I also was a student at Fifth Avenue Elementary, and a friend of Charles Malone (still am). I remember Charles sitting on that pile of cucumbers in what was his bedroom. And selling them at "two-for-a quarter."

Charles also added the following: "The tarp the Fire Department put up on the house had a very small tear around eye height. Everyone who came along pulled on it trying to see inside my room.

The small tear became large enough to crawl through. For some reason I was in my room, playing with a large stuffed rabbit skin....when I looked out through the hole and spotted a kid staring up at it. I vigorously shoved the rabbit through the hole at him. I know he must have jumped three feet straight up and ran away screaming. I know, that was mean. Probably stunted his growth."

In addition to having great artistic skills, Charles is one humorous guy. I may have been the kid who jumped.

The Governors Drive intersections with California Street and Whitesburg Drive have become much busier. Of course, traffic there has increased along with the expansion of Huntsville Hospital and growth of the City's Medical District.

One law firm specializing in semitrailer-truck brake failure accidents, which are rare occurrences, sums up the following about the problem today: "Most large trucks and tractor-trailers not only have an air brake system but also have a secondary braking system to prevent devastating accidents that occur when a truck cannot slow and stop properly. Despite the backup system, and despite the fact that air brakes are generally considered to be a very reliable braking system, vehicle accidents involving a truck's braking problems do happen."

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Useful Tips from 1894

* You can drive nails into a board easier and without bending them if you first dip the nails into lard.

* The pulp of a lemon, rubbed on the roots of your hair, will stop ordinary cases of hair loss.

* In laying away of fine white gowns for any length of time, they should first be wrapped in blue paper, then in a sheet or in muslin wrap of some kind.

* Cornmeal and salt, mixed well, make one of the best brighteners for carpets during sweeping.

* Stale bread will clean kid gloves.

* Gloves can be cleaned at home by rubbing them with gasoline.

* A lump of soda laid on the drain pipe will prevent the pipes from becoming clogged with grease; also, flood the pipes once a week with boiling water to which you've added a little soda.

* White marble can be cleaned up with water and soda. Bread crumbs will cleanse silk gowns.

* A little Vaseline, rubbed in once a day, will keep the hands from chapping.

* To remove mildew from clothing, soak in sour buttermilk, spread out in the sun.

* Powdered borax dampened and pressed under the finger nails, allowed to remain for a short time, will bleach nails.

* To keep sandwiches moist cover with a damp cloth. Wring cloth as dry as possible.

* If you re having a dinner party, the guest of honor, a lady, sits to the right of the host. The gentleman sits to the right of the hostess.

* After washing lettuce, tie in napkin or cheesecloth and place on ice. It will drip and crisp. Lettuce tied in cloth and hung in draft will crisp as well as when placed on ice.

* If you can't see in the dark, eat blueberries in season. They can help restore night vision.

* A quick picker-upper is 1/4 teaspoonful of cayenne pepper in a cup of water. Drink it down and get a second wind.

* Slowly drink two teaspoons of olive oil to relieve a scalded throat.

* Dark shoe polish can make an excellent finish for wooden frames - it adds color as well as a waterproof shine.

* Use an old waiter's trick - if you have a water spot on wood, put a pat of butter inside a cloth napkin and rub.

* An extra bread box will hold all the tools you'll need to take care of any household repair.

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Pet Tips from Angel

Miscellaneous Tips - Dogs and Cats

* Add some lemon juice or vinegar to your pet's rinse water after a bath. This will cut the soap scum along with getting rid of the odor. Or, add some baking soda to your pet's rinse water after his bath. This will get rid of that doggy odor and will give him a soft & shiny coat!

* When you don't want to bathe your pet in water, rub her down weekly with disposable, pop-up baby wipes with lotion. The lotion eases her dry skin and she's clean!

* A good flea deterrent for cats or dogs is Brewers yeast supplements. Sprinkle the powder on their food - fleas hate the taste and won't be biting anymore!

* Another natural remedy for fleas for cats is to slice a whole lemon very thin, peel and all. Add to a pint of water and heat this mixture to boiling. Take off the heat and let it sit overnight. In the morning gently rub the mixture into your cat's fur & skin, just dampen. Do this once a month - fleas hate this!

* Train your puppy to let you know when he has to go! Hang a bell by the back door. Each time you take your puppy out for a "pee", ring the bell. As he gets older he'll let you know himself by ringing the bell!

* When you have a new puppy and find chew marks on your favorite furniture, try rubbing the furniture with clove oil. The bitter taste & smell will keep him away!

* If your cat jumps on a chair that you were prefer she doesn't do, just cover it for a week or so with plastic film, and to go even further apply some double faced sticky tape on it. Cats don't like this and will get out of the habit fast!

* When your cat does something that you don't want her to do, just keep a spray bottle of water handy and squirt her each time. She'll learn.

* Macadamia nuts can really cause bloating in dogs and they could become extremely ill.

* Ear mites in your cat or dog's ears can be solved with simple olive oil. Just steep the oil with a couple of garlic cloves overnight, then use a few drops in each ear. Repeat every other day for a couple of weeks. The oil will smother the mites and will moisturize the skin inside the cat or dog's ear.

* If you have an anxious pup when you leave the house, put a bit of peanut butter into a dog toy. The yummy toy will keep your pet occupied & busy til you return home.

* Your dog wants to play with you! Try hide and seek, with one person hiding while another stays with the dog to keep him from following til you're ready.

* If you have a long hallway in your home it's perfect for fetch. Make it more interesting by getting your dog to sit or lie down, then throw a ball as a reward.

* Set up weekly play dates with your friends who have pets. You could even set up a "Yappy Hour" with your friends who have pets with a little adult beverage for the adults, while the dogs socialize.

* Using Johnson's Baby Shampoo during your pet's bath is a gentle way to help rid dander and excess hair. This will lessen the amount of allergy-causing dander and shedding.

* When other pet owners don't clean up after their pets and you find the remnants in your yard, just try sprinkling the grass with cayenne pepper. The pet will get the message very clearly.

* If you have a dog that barks, put some unpopped popcorn kernels into an empty soda can and tape the opening. When the dog barks, shake the can. He won't like the sound.

* Any lily plants are deadly to cats - remove!

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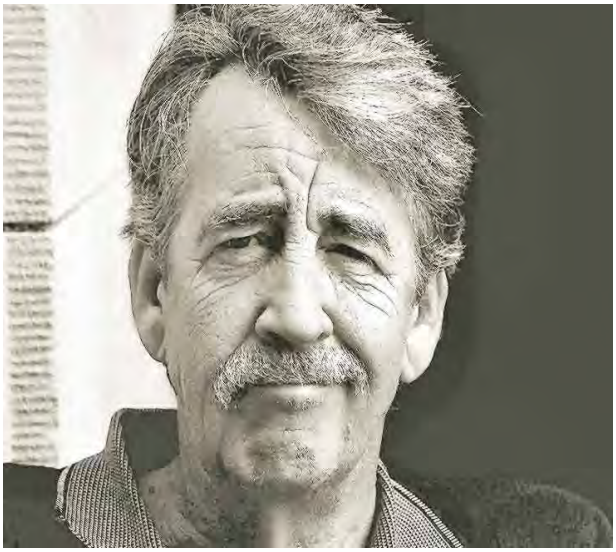
by Tom Carney



"A man is on top of the Russel Erskine Hotel and he's gonna jump!"

Within minutes all the citizens of downtown had heard the news. Eagerly, almost morbidly, they rushed to the scene of the impending tragedy. The street in front of the hotel became a mass of swirling humanity as crowds jostled for a better look.

"Someone said he works at the Arsenal and he just got a letter from his wife saying she is leaving him."

This news, by some unidentified source, was quickly consumed and spread by the four winds to the crowds who were now grasping at every morsel of new information.

Suddenly the still night air was rent by the screeching sounds of police cars arriving on the scene. Emerging from their cars, the policemen began pushing the crowds back with night sticks, trying to establish some sense of order.

"Be careful. He's got a gun," yelled a voice from out of the darkness.

The crowd ran scurrying for cover and the policemen quickly ducked behind their automobiles for safety.

When a few minutes had passed with no shots being fired, the throng, now prompted by the latest developments, began surging forward. The crowd numbered in the hundreds and was growing larger by the minute.

While the police were frantically working to regain control, the sounds of a woman screaming emerged above the noise of the mob. The crowd had inadvertently pushed her into a storefront window, breaking the glass, and now she was running hysterically down the street with blood streaming down her arms. Before the police could reach her, another woman began screaming. This woman had been knocked down by the crowd jostling for a better look.

Sensing that something had to be done, and quickly, the brave officers of the Huntsville Police Department drew their pistols and resolutely began making their way to the front entrance of the hotel where the unseen assailant lay in wait.

There was no hesitation in the purposeful stride of the policemen on that cold day in 1944. This was their town and this was their job. Someone had to take charge and they were the ones.

Cautiously, with their guns drawn, they took the elevator to the top floor. The men were silent, probably thinking of their loved ones and the danger that lay ahead.

History does not record the name of the first policeman to exit onto the roof, ready to do battle with the fiend lurking in the shadows. Nor is there the name of the man who, after receiving the dear John letter, tried to commit suicide.

You see ... It never happened. There was no Dear John letter and there was no man on top of the hotel.

Some unknown person in that year of 1944 had started the rumor and within minutes downtown Huntsville had been caught up in a frenzied state of anticipation. Every rumor became fact and every fantasy became reality, in a matter of seconds.

And with every passing year the story became even more exaggerated. To this day there are people who will point at a spot on the sidewalk in front of the old hotel and tell you that it is where the "Dear John" jumper ended his life.

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My Brother, Buddy Fuller

by Sara Fuller Williams

I am the oldest of four children, born to Smith C. Fuller & Johnnie D. Searcy Fuller of Huntsville, AL. My parents have since passed on, along with my brother, whom I write about in this article. My sister Elizabeth is known to everyone as "Sis" and still lives in the Five Points area of Huntsville.

We live in Ocean Springs, MS. Now not far from New Orleans, but I will always miss Huntsville. There are so many good memories from our childhood there in Huntsville. My brother was named for my father but was known as "Buddy".

He was just 17 when he approached my parents with his desire to join the U.S. Army. WWII had not been declared and he still had not graduated from high school, so this was a major decision for them. As he was not of age they had to give their permission in writing, after much urging from Buddy. The boys were being called up and Buddy wanted to serve his country, and enlisted. He wanted to be a paratrooper and was assigned to the 101st. Air Borne Division, known as the "Screaming Eagles" of WWII.

He fought on the front lines, was wounded twice, the first time on D Day and during the breakthrough of the "Battle of the Bulge." His friends called him "Sarge."

After the war was over he returned to his home in Huntsville to a peaceful life and in pretty good shape, with the exception of his feet which had been frozen during the frigid winters overseas.

In those days, when the men and women returned home from the war, there was little recognition for them, like there is now. WWII was called the War of all Wars, and so many brave men and women died for their country. Buddy never wanted to talk about the war, even though I'm sure he could have told many stories.

Buddy took a job with the Huntsville Postal Service as a mail carrier. At that time, the mail was delivered on foot, there were no mail trucks. He never complained but I always wondered if this was a problem for him, with his feet having been hurt.

After a while he missed his friends in the service, and re-enlisted. This time he was assigned to the 82nd AirBorne division, where he met his death. It was called a freak accident. I recall the book "Band of Brothers" when I think of my brother. It was so important that they all banded together.

Our family was told that it was during maneuvers, and Buddy was riding on top of a tank, clearing ground, when a tree snapped from the top, striking Buddy on the back of the head. He died within the hour. This was so devastating to our family, and all who knew him.

At the D Day Museum in New Orleans there are pictures adorning the walls of many WWII fighting men, my brother is one of them. He would be so proud, if he were alive today, that his family thought of him as a hero.

His name appears on a roster at the Madison County Courthouse in Huntsville. He is buried in Maple Hill Cemetery, next to our parents. We miss him so much.

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The Home Place at Harvest

by Jean Brewer McCrady

It was December of 1943 when Daddy got a "Greetings from Uncle Sam" letter and Mama explained to us four kids what it meant. Daddy would be going away in a few days and it would be a long time before we would see him again. Our ages ranged from Ray at 14 months to Net at 12 years, with me 10 and Buzz 4 in between. We lived in a rented house on the Harvest rural route near the Madison/Limestone County Line road, the last in a long line of rented houses that had been home to the Gordon Brewer family since he and Vera Swafford married in February of 1931.

That letter set Daddy on a fast-paced search for a house he could buy and move the family into before his shipping-out date. He succeeded. He paid $1,000 for a farm house on a 3.5 acre lot at the corner of Wall Highway (later named Wall Triana) and a dirt road that was later named Brewer Road. It would have been in the city limits of Harvest if there had been any.

That was the first and last house Mama and Daddy ever owned. He died there in 1985. Mama suffered a grass fire burn in '87 while cleaning the yard and she never fully recovered from it. In '89 she decided to sell the place and move to the Wyndham Park Retirement facility on Max Luther in Huntsville. Her first night there was when the Airport Road tornadoes wiped out the south of Huntsville.

Our "new" house at Harvest had 3 large rooms and 2 open porches, with a wide hallway through the house connecting the two porches. We had beds in both front rooms, on each side of the hallway, and one doubled as the living room. It led to the third large room which served as the kitchen and dining room, by function not by design. It had no built-in cabinetry, counter tops or appliances. The wood burning cook stove connected into the chimney which served the living room fireplace on the other side of the wall. There was no electricity, no indoor plumbing, no central heat and there were cracks in the floor you could see through. The joke was, you could walk through the house and count your chickens.

The outside amenities consisted of a fenced lot with an open-front shed where our two cows were fed and milked; a hog pen with feeding trough where the kitchen slop bucket that collected table scraps and dishwater was emptied every day; a tin henhouse, where eggs were gathered daily until time to let the hens "set" on them to hatch chicks; a smoke house for curing meat after the November hog killings; a well with a windlass and chain for drawing water; clotheslines, a coal pile and a black wash pot for heating wash water, cooking out lard, and making lye soap; a garden spot and potato patch; and a tiny outhouse behind the smokehouse with a worn-out cotton sack serving as the door covering, until a new one was built at the end of the garden path, with a real door that latched and a shelf for the Sears catalogue. (A bit of trivia I remember well is, that "new" outhouse was torn down and hauled away the day I graduated from high school in 1951.)

Over the years, the house underwent several waves of improvement, and the first one started immediately after Daddy left for the Navy, just days from our moving in. Grandpa Swafford, who was a carpenter, brick mason and literal jack-of-all-trades, came to stay with us for a few weeks to help Mama make the most-needed improvements for livability. (If you'd like to know more about Grandpa Swafford, there's a story about him in the March 2020 issue of Old Huntsville.)

Daddy was discharged from the Navy just before the War ended in '45, and while working as a Post Engineers carpenter foreman at the Arsenal and then as a free-lance house builder, he used his off time upgrading the house. When electricity came available in the area, he and a neighbor, Mr. Tab Yarbrough, wired the house, and the first lighting was naked bulbs hanging from the ceiling with an on-off switch built into the bulb socket. Years later water was piped inside, the back porch was converted to a bathroom (plumbed by another neighbor, Russell Walker Steelman) and washer/dryer space. This replaced the clothes lines and wringer washer in the outside washhouse which had replaced the

galvanized wash tubs and rub boards in the back yard.

The fireplace was replaced by a coal-burning Warm Morning heater that would retain red coals all night, thus the name "Warm Morning." (Getting up on cold mornings to a warm room was a life changer.) Daddy built a new back porch off the kitchen door, enclosed with louvered glass all around, and Mama finally got built-in cabinets, a sink, and an electric stove to replace the oil stove that had replaced the old wood stove.

The kitchen and dining room gained their own space when the large room was divided by a waist-high bar. When Ray was about 15, he helped Daddy upgrade the outside of the house by installing faux brick asbestos siding, which was all the rage at that time. ("Brick" houses were popping up everywhere.) Years later the "brick" siding was covered over with white vinyl lap-siding which it still wears. The smokehouse was enlarged to add an indoor washroom and was re-sided with ammunition box boards from the Arsenal. It was later replaced by a cement block structure that doubled as a garage and Daddy's shop.

Mama and Daddy's focus in life was to continuously improve our living conditions, to make sure we never went hungry, and to save enough money that no matter what happened, such as a 30s type Depression, we would not be dependent on government support. In their day, welfare was thought disgraceful, not a benefit to be sought.

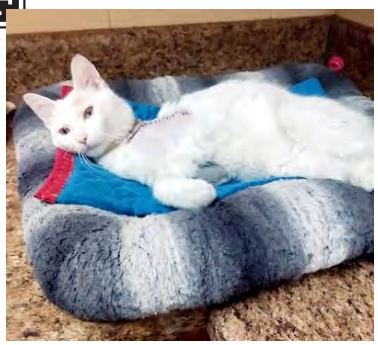
Regarding feeding the family, they went to extreme lengths to have food on the table. It was customary to have fried chicken for Sunday dinner (which did not come in packages from the supermarket). They would go to the back yard, catch a chicken and either wring its neck or remove the head by hatchet. The carcass would be immersed in very hot water to make an easy job of plucking the feathers (that was usually my job). You can picture the steps involved from there to the frying pan.

Chickens played other important roles in country life other than providing Sunday dinner. They kept us in eggs, they sat on nests to produce new generations of chickens, they shared the backyard with the kids as playmates, and sometimes became special pets. When Ray was 5 or 6 years old, a hatchling became his pet Rooster. They bonded in a special way and Rooster would obey his every command, such as "sit" when Ray instructed and would not move until given permission.

Rooster was Ray's prized companion, until—during one Sunday dinner, it was revealed that the chicken on the platter was Rooster. I don't know how long Ray mourned the loss of his friend, but I do know that if the rest of us kids had had a say in the matter, we would have all opted for beans and fried potatoes. Tradition or not, breaking a little boy's heart was too high a price to pay for a family Sunday dinner.

This home place, memories and all, is still there, on the corner of Wall Triana & Brewer Road. The Baptist Church, whose property joined the garden spot of our house, bought the place when Mama gave it up in 1989. It has been used by the church for various purposes over the 30+ years since, and I have not wanted to see the inside. But I'm thinking strongly of asking permission to do so.

Fay Porter's story of "Our Old Homeplace" in the April Old Huntsville has created some urgency for that visit back to the past while it's still possible. Something she sadly can no longer do. Thank you Fay for sharing your story and inspiring my revisit to the Harvest home place.



BUDDY

Hello, my name is Buddy. You can see that I only have three legs and I have a lot of stitches. That's because someone shot me. I don't know why that happened to me because I'm a friendly guy and am not mean to anyone. I was taken to the Emergency Vet Clinic and they had to remove **my leg. The doctors there fixed me up** and saved my life. Then I was brought to the Ark Animal Shelter to recover.

I'm healing up nicely and everyone here loves me. I'm super friendly and have been taking it easy while my leg heals up. I like to rest in a bed on the counter in the laundry room and get up and down using a step stool. I **get around very well and use the litter box just like my other four-legged cat** friends. I am a beautiful white color with a few buff spots. I love people that are kind to me. Rub my ears and I am your friend for life! I would like to be adopted by nice people who will never let me go outside again because it is too dangerous out there for friendly fellows like me! Will you come to the Ark Shelter and ask to see me? Please come visit me - I'm Buddy.

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Electric Motors Run Diesel Locomotives

by M. D. Smith, IV

Have you ever wondered what's inside the multiple diesel locomotives that pull the long freight train you're waiting to pass at the railroad crossing? The monster providing the force is mind-blowing.

Passenger and freight trains have used diesel power since the early part of the twentieth century. But the diesel engine only provides electric current to run the motors powering each axle (wheels on either side).

A sixteen-cylinder monster sits in the middle of the typical freight or yard diesel. Each cylinder has twice the displacement of your entire standard 4.5-liter V-8 engine in a large car. Large diesels work best at around 1,000 RPM, not much over idle speed for your vehicle. In trucks, they are many gears that power the wheels, which is not practical for trains. So the huge engine powers massive generators and alternators to provide electricity for each motor, coupled to the axle of each set of wheels on a locomotive.

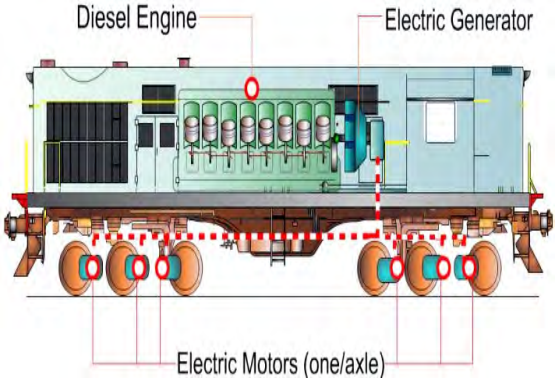
The typical sixteen cylinder, 3,500 horsepower diesel produces the drive power for a massive generator. Think of 1.5 million watts of electricity. That would power a lot of homes, wouldn't it? That's what is contained in the 4,700 amps of electric current fed to the wheels of a diesel locomotive. As power is applied to the diesel's electric motors, it gradually moves the train. Engineers increase the voltage to make it go faster, not totally unlike the accelerator of your car, but it is a hand lever the engineer uses.

The smaller 4-axle, eight-wheel diesels used around Huntsville for switching and small loads (photo shows #9554, the one generally at 119 Woodsend Street just off Clinton) may only weigh 100 tons and have four sets of wheels and motors.

I talked with one of the Huntsville Railroad Authority's train mechanics, Wanice Brigman. He said #9554 is an early 1970 model, now over fifty years old. Its diesel-driven alternator generates DC voltage, driving the "traction motors" directly via a speed switch. Brigman's replacing one of the authority's diesel engines this week with the help of a crane because the weight is about 40 tons. Its companion alternator is about 7 tons.

But larger freight haulers and passenger diesels have six sets of wheels and double the weight because everything is bigger on the very large ones. You may have seen up to three diesel locomotives pulling a long, 100-car freight train. The total weight of everything is hard to imagine, like picturing how far the universe reaches. No wonder it's "hard to stop a train."

If you want to learn more about diesel locomotives, visit here: https://science.howstuffworks.com/transport/engines-equipment/diesel-locomotive.htm.



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A Noble Instance of Devotion

From 1887 Newspaper

"War does not determine who is right, war determines who is left."

Chinese Proverb

L. Page and son cutting wood near Decatur noticed for several days that a number of birds remained constantly upon a tree near them, some going and coming from time to time.

Upon cutting down the tree they discovered a limb with a hollow cavity, two feet in length and three or four inches in diameter, in which were two full grown birds of some goodly sized species.

There was a small aperture through which the birds were supplied with food from their mates. The limb was cut and the birds liberated. They were neither of them able to fly, having evidently never been out of their imprisonment.

How they came inside is the question. It is probably that the mother bird was small and though able to make her nest in the hollow of the tree and rear her young, could not extricate them, and they did not gain strength enough to help themselves until the hollow had so closed that escape was impossible.

Those who examined the birds think they are about two years old. They have been fed from their birth by their bird fellows through the aperture in the limb of the tree. A nobler instance of devotion the human family never exhibited. Mankind could greatly benefit from the lessons of these feathered friends.

"I gave up jogging when my thighs kept rubbing together and setting my pantyhose on fire."

Mildred, Brownsboro

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My Sheltered Memories

by "Blossom Wood"

I was five years old and the year was 1966. At that time, the city of Huntsville was inching toward the mountain to the east. California Street was once the continental divide between the small town metropolis and the uncharted territories gingerly crossed by the real estate pioneers four score and some odd years prior. This area became the new suburb as the city kept pushing onward toward Fagan Springs, as if the reverberating booms of rocket testings were vibrating Huntsvillians away from its epicenter.

From the front yard of our house on Owens Drive, I could look to the right - up the hill to the bend beyond which the big houses stood on their rocky ledge pedestals, and to the left where all the other houses that looked just like ours - fresh and new - rambled for what seemed like miles. Those clean, well-lit abodes all seemed the same, and granted, at my age I knew more about the pets that lived there than I did about the people who owned those manageable mortgages. I came to realize that each was different in a way that was permeated by voices, smells and furnishings.

It is a cliche to say that our lives were simpler then, because that is just how this era will be fondly referred to in the future, but to a five year old it is the simplicity that brought the joy. The sixties will always be, to me, the beginning of the age of manufactured happiness. Cheap, clean and simple was what was strived for and what was easily obtained. Plastic items were plentiful, and pretty things could be bought with S & H Green Stamps. A few coins in our pocket would transfer us into the most master of manipulators, with us giving our all to convince our parents for a jaunt to Murdock's for a holiday of wonderment, joy and impatience as we would scour the shelves, trying to get the most from our meager budget.

Owens Drive was the fairly new thoroughfare from which the avenues of three-bedroom-ranchers fingered from at planned intervals. This was the place where newlyweds started their lives, homes and families. Where girls with last names that had been in the town for generations would change them to those strange and exotic last names of the clean cut newcomers brought here for military purposes. Where the housewives would preheat their pristine electric ovens, trying to make cheese straws and biscuits that were just like their Mother's, but never were as good. Where the husbands would try their best to emulate their fathers by joining the Acme Club and hunting dove on the weekends.

There was a swimming pool. Certainly not at our house. The only private pool I remember as a child was one that my Grandmother would take me to, nestled between huge trees at someone's house on Adams Street. I would swim with other children my age while our grandmothers chatted, smoking cigarettes in cat-eyed anonymity, whispering most of their stories so we wouldn't be able to hear. But between their gasps and laughter, we would listen, hear and learn.

Our neighborhood pool was alongside the "big ditch", a place of designated rules and the sound of bright whistles - with straight lines and distinctive colors of blue and green. I can still feel the Coppertoned oiliness on the skin of the tanned lifeguard as she carried me from the deep end, frightened after my first attempt at solo-swimming. She knew my name. I had no idea who she was.

On the other side of the "big ditch" was the school my older sister attended. It had a style that mimicked the pool - straight lines, clean - a temple to orderliness and good manners. It was with awe that I once watched the "young adults" there, some as old as eleven, wind and dance their

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way around a sky-high flagpole - each with a different color ribbon until the first (and only) Maypole I was privy to was completely dressed in its woven, bright colors.

In our world of red-bricked, carported castles, there was a definite division of generations. The children ate separately from the parents, went to playschool as our Dads went to work, entertained our neighborhood friends as quietly as possible, and felt safe between our boundaries of Big Cove Road and Hermitage Street. While we dined on our Chef Boy-Ar-Dee boxed pizza, our parents busied themselves dressing in their dark colors getting ready for a late dinner at Boots, having the scent of perfume and face powder trail my Mother as she came into the kitchen looking for something with an intent purpose. My father would smell of British Sterling and look just as he did when he went to work, only happier. These nights meant something fun would happen - we would have a baby sitter.

Baby sitters were my introduction into what was, and still seems, cool. They were usually Huntsville High School teenage girls who would put on a show without even knowing it. I would drink in their every move, word and essence of style. To me they were Super models - movie stars - even more famous in my eyes than H. D. Bagley and almost as glamorous as the waitresses at the Waffle House.

Before they would tire of me and my sister and put us to bed, they would include us in their world of music and knowledge of which I thought was all-encompassing. Suddenly, our world of Benny Carl and Fantasy Playhouse would seem trite and passe and we would catch a fleeting glimpse into what would be in store for us when we too could wear clothes from The Snappy Turtle.

Huntsville was a magical place for us tail-end baby boomers to grow up - beyond the miracles of the escalator at Pizitz, the smiling midget on the tall stool holding court over the cash register and balloon room at Britlings, and that bright colorful Maypole. There was a comfort level there that I'm not sure is in the minds of the five year olds of today - the soothing sheltered lack of knowledge of why we were so lucky, yet we didn't even know that we were.

In the other areas of our Huntsville there was poverty and racial unrest - as there was, and is, in every city. I was unaware. People of color other than my own were nice and sweet to me - not only because they were compensated to be in my life, but more because they had my attention and respect. I was under the wing and ward of Arnelle, my grandmother's house was filled with the joys of Bella, and out on our farm there was strong and smiling Cletus and large and hug-gable Dora - all just as much a part of my life as everyone else.

My life was good, and they were instrumental in making it that way

What will the five year olds of today who are lucky enough to be raised on those well-heeled street remember when they surpass their own forty-year mark? It is a much more complex world now and there are different concerns with daily changes of fear. Youthful innocence is a prize that is encased without a lock. Premature maturity is a viable threat, and a constant fear. But tucked in tight, in the next room, sleeps tomorrow's newlyweds who are having sweet dreams - blanketed by the comforts of Blossomwood.

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