



No. 275

JANUARY 2016



Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

MA MILLER'S BOARDING HOUSE COMING TO HUNTSVILLE IN THE LATE 1950S

As we drove up the back side of Monte Sano on Highway 431 - a narrow, 2-lane road that becomes Governors Drive, the road peaked overlooking a breath-taking view of Jones Valley. The sun was almost setting and I thought I had died and arrived in paradise.



Also in this issue:

Remembering Hurricane Creek

Lewter's Hardware Store



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The Way You Remember Them

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MA MILLER'S BOARDING HOUSE

by Billy G. Broach

On a late Sunday afternoon in February 1958, I, along with a friend and fellow student at Auburn University, Gene Cooper, were at the end of what seemed like an eternal trip driving from the Auburn area in my 1950 Chevrolet to Huntsville. I had been accepted in the Redstone Arsenal co-op program. As we drove up the back side of Monte Sano on Highway 431 - a narrow 2 lane road that becomes Governors Drive, the road peaked overlooking a breath taking view of Jones Valley. The sun was almost setting and I thought I had died and arrived in paradise.

Huntsville was very different in those days and a place to stay was very scarce. Gene was ahead of me and had been here two quarters back and knew of Mrs. Miller's boarding house (affectionately known as "Ma Millers"). We found our way on a street by a small hospital known as 5th Avenue Hospital and the then small Huntsville Hospital. We end-

ed up by twisting and turning on small narrow streets and found Clinton Avenue close to downtown. We arrived at a small Trailways bus station, which was our landmark to "Ma Millers". Next to the bus station stood three large 2 story antebellum style houses in bad repair. Aside from the look of something from Alfred Hitchcock, we had arrived at what was to be my new home for the next 3 months.

You have to understand that other than my 17 mile trip from my home in Shawmut, Al (now known as Valley, Al) to Auburn, I had never been far from home. And Huntsville seemed like it was on the other side of the world to me.

We parked on the side of one of the houses and walked on to the porch of the middle house where we were told that Mrs. Miller lived and rang the doorbell. A middle aged, heavy set lady answered the door and asked if she could help us. We explained our plight and Mrs. Miller said she could help us.

Her offer was simple. She would provide a bed and two meals a day (breakfast and supper) for \$15.60 a week. That seemed a little high but what else was available? Living space was rare in Huntsville at that time with the building boom just starting. The Parkway was just a small 2 lane road that went from north to

"The biggest lie I tell myself - I don't need to write that down - I'll remember it."

Sam Keith, Huntsville



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(256) 534-0502

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(Website) www.oldhuntsvillemag.com

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Advertising - (256) 534-0502
Sales & Mrktg. - Cathey Carney
Editor - Cheryl Tribble
Consultant - Ron Eyestone
Gen. Manager - Sam Keith
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south and was not finished in areas. We accepted her terms. After paying the first week's fare in cash she would show us our accommodations.

Mrs. Miller led us from the small hall through a dining area which had one large table which seated about 15 people and three large refrigerators or freezers at one end of the room. I mention the refrigerators because each unit had a large chain around them with huge padlocks on the front. I assumed that the purpose of the chains was to discourage hungry college students from partaking of a midnight snack.

We went through a kitchen with three large gas stoves and ovens. This was where the gourmet meals were prepared. She opened a door at the end of the kitchen. There was a staircase going down to a shallow basement that held about 18 to 20 iron bunks spaced about 12 inches apart with a narrow table between each bunk.

I was lucky. My bunk was an overflow bunk against the stairs with a fabric wall. I

looked later behind the fabric wall and discovered a bare dirt wall with the house's foundation at the top. A pure luxury accommodation. At the far end of the room was a small separator wall.

Behind that was pure luxury. A commode, a sink and a metal shower stall with a plastic curtain. I knew I had arrived. I was puzzled as to how 18 people were going to be able to do the morning bathroom chores and be able to make the 10 miles to the Arsenal in time for work.

It became obvious that showers were after work time and the schedule was based on space available. Sometimes "available" meant several days apart or very late at night. The commode was a different thing. Many times several necessary functions in the morning were performed as a group activity outside, with the shower drain as an emergency back up. Somehow we made do.

My first day at the Arsenal was handled by a wonderful lady named Helen Broadway who took care of all the

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administrative functions and got me to my first assignment with a gentleman by the name of Steve Johnson. He was well known at the time and was for many years after I graduated.

I was somewhat preoccupied with my thoughts of supper when I returned to "Ma Millers" to dine. I had skipped breakfast the first morning and was beginning to concentrate on food rather than engineering.

When I arrived back at my new home, I learned the lesson of true patience. "Ma Millers" was the temporary home to about 50 to 60 souls that had visions of Huntsville being the mecca of success or the pinnacle of a new phase of technical excellence which an 18 year old want-to-be engineer from Auburn aspired to pursue. It also represented a means providing the money necessary to remain in college. "Ma Millers" was the central temporary quarter-by-quarter residence of numbers of co-op students from the colleges and universities all over the south. My roommates were from Alabama, Auburn, Georgia Tech, Virginia Tech, Florida and many other colleges. A melting pot of want-to-be engineers.

I had a car so it was full as a taxi service when we went to work at the Arsenal. Now back to my learning curve of supper. As I said before, the dining area was one large table seated with a dozen or more hungry individuals. Supper started at 5

p.m. and went till all were finished eating.

The front entry hall was full of co-ops, laborers, contractors and the like that occupied the three dwellings. The supper meal went something like this. The hall and porch were full and there were about 15 at the table. As one would finish, another would take the vacant chair and begin to enjoy the horn of plenty which was pinto beans, and/or white beans with corn. A meat was always provided (fried pork chops my favorite). There was always plenty of biscuits and cornbread and light bread if you liked. The bowls were kept full by Mr. Miller and his helpers. The meat kept coming as they finished cooking it until the supply ran out.

The supply was usually less than the demand. You dipped your own from big bowls and ate till you couldn't eat any-

more. Desserts were not at the table but were for you to pick up and carry with you. Plenty of cakes and pies were for the taking. The next in line was always anxious for the next chair to come open so one did not linger at the table.

A highlight of the day while waiting your turn to be fed was a 17 inch black and white television in the hall where as many as could fit would gather and watch a snowy picture. My memory of this pastime was the "Amos and Andy" show. It was on every day and amused all the hungry that waited and took your mind off your growling stomach.

I didn't say much about breakfast because time prevented eating many days or you would be late for work. The breakfast menu was always hotcakes and fried bologna with scrambled eggs occasionally. The staple breakfast was




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Joey Willis, Arab

hot cakes which were far from light and could be weighed on a cotton scale and stayed with you for countless hours after got to work. Or sometimes they would exit the way they went in.

To envision the location of "Ma Millers" in the 1958 time frame, Woody Anderson Ford and the Coca Cola Bottling Company were directly in front on Clinton Avenue and the Trailway Bus Station was next door toward downtown. Meadow Gold Dairy was just west on the same side of Clinton Avenue. We spent a lot of time at the bus station reading what we found in the magazine racks.

There was not much after hours activity in Huntsville at that time. The Dwarf Restaurant was about the only thing on the so-called Parkway.

None of us had any money anyway so activity at night was limited. Huntsville downtown at night was dark and scary with no activity.

Time and progress took over and "Ma Millers" fell prey to

the big project of the Von Braun Civic Center. When I attend an event there nowadays I always try to picture where I am in reference to where I spent my first night in Huntsville.

After completing the co-op program and graduating from Auburn I returned to Huntsville and made my career here as an electrical engineer.

It has been some 57 years since I first laid my eyes on that beautiful valley. I've traveled all over the world and always returned to my home sweet home — Huntsville, Alabama.

Boy have things changed in the last 50 years but it's always progress forward. Never one regret. And "Ma Millers" is where it all begin.

It is not known how many people passed through those three houses next to the old Trailways Bus Station on Clinton Avenue before they gave way to the progress and growth of the Rocket City, but one thing's for sure, a new beginning and career for many was born at that location and lasted a lifetime.

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LOCAL NEWS IN HUNTSVILLE JANUARY 1911

Rain Storm does much damage

The continued rain from Saturday night thru Sunday flooded the lowlands of the city and did considerable damage in the way of flooding the lawns and washed away many footbridges. In the Patton Grove neighborhood the waters were especially high. The spring branch was way out of its banks and so was Pinhook Creek. Likewise this was true in east Huntsville, where ditches and other low places were under water.

Chimney at the Dement Residence Blown Down Last Night

During the early hours of last night, while the rain and wind storm was at its worst, the north chimney of the residence of Mrs. C. C. Dement on West Holmes street was blown down. The occupants of the home as well as nearby neighbors were greatly frightened at the noise. Fortunately no one was hurt.

Cave-in of Dirt at the Residence of Mr. Newt White Last Night

The building that was said to be one of the old time ice houses, built underground, caved in last night at the residence of Mr. Newt White on Adams Avenue. It happened approximately at midnight and the sound woke many nearby. The cave-in was on Locust Street and went to a depth of about 10 feet.

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Scottsboro - Duel on Streets

J. S. Clay, a well known merchant and Frank Randall, a clerk in a clothing store, engaged in a sensational duel with pistols at the front door of Clay's residence on Oak Street on Sunday.

Randall is in the hospital probably fatally wounded, a pistol ball having passed through his head and tearing away a large portion of his right cheek. The doctors treating him said they not seen an injury of that type in their experience.

Clay received two wounds; one in the shoulder, the other bullet striking him in the mouth, shattering his teeth and almost cutting his tongue in two. He will recover but the doctors are telling us it is a miracle he survived and he will have a very long recovery. He will not be speaking for some time.

Randall went to Clay's residence and demanded an explanation of an alleged insult to Miss Maude Ledford, his fiancée. She remains in shock as to the severity of the incidents.

Clay was arrested and held on bail of \$5,000 awaiting the outcome of Randall's injuries.



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Old Childhood Memories

by Cathy Morse

My Dad had a house built in northwest Huntsville back in the 1960s. I was born on a cold winter day in 1966. It was spring of 1970. I played in the woods a lot, and this time a wonderful thing happened. Deep in the woods I walked, and at a special moment I looked up and saw thousands of Monarch butterflies. They were everywhere, I decided to go get my mother. I walked her through the woods and said "Close your eyes". We walked a little longer and I said "Open your eyes".

"Cathy, how did you know?" She said.

"I wanted you to see them," I said. We stayed for a while. They flew and landed on us. She said "Let's not disturb them." We walked home. She brought Dad the next day but they were gone. What beauty. They are the Monarch butterflies in 1970.

When I was about 6 years old, I played at a creek called Pinhook Creek. My friend Raymon found an arrowhead. My older brother hooked a very big turtle. One day I was standing on the rocks. I looked down and picked up a very interesting rock, about two inches long. It had teeth marks and two eye sockets. It was fossilized, it was a dinosaur head. Awesome find. I looked at it for a while and threw it in the running water. I guess that's

where it belongs.

When I was a small child, my brother teased me a lot. One day I had enough. I hid a 100 Grand candy bar in the couch, a big one. Time went by, he started it up again. He was teasing me about having a candy bar. I said "No you don't, because I have one right here." I reached deep in the couch and grabbed it and said "Look, I have one right here," and started eating it. He said, "Mommy, will you go to the store and buy me a new one?" "No," she said. She was laughing so hard, Dad missed it. It was a very funny moment.



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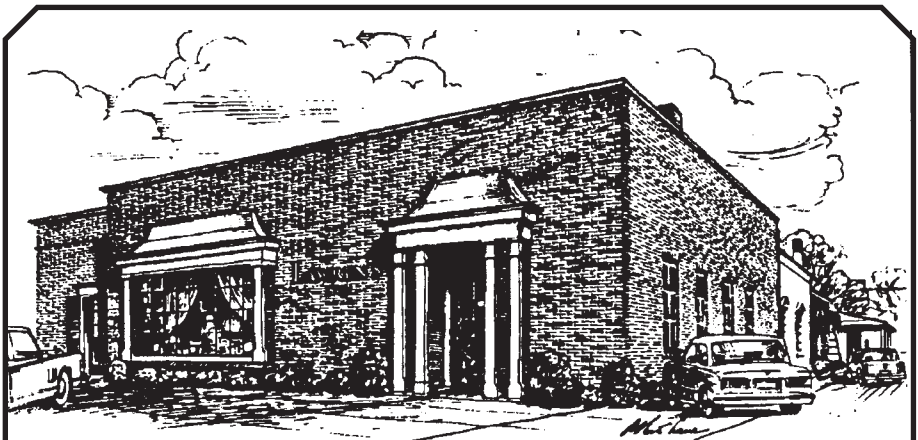
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Phyllis Diller

Our pony was named Honey. Mom paid 25 dollars for her. This was in northwest Huntsville back in the 1970s. Mom and Dad built her a shelter and Mom shoed her with horse shoes. We fed her well and loved her so very much. She gave pony rides to the kids. My Dad loved her so much. She would get away, and people would call and say "Your horse is in our backyard."

Some people didn't like us having a pony and threatened us with the City of Huntsville. It lasted several years until one day Honey got sick with a bad cold. One morning I went into the living room. My Dad was crying, my Mom said Honey died. I ran outside to see her. She was covered up with a tarp. I ran back inside and started crying.

The whole house was mourning for her. My Dad had tears running down his face, it was the first time I saw my Dad cry. Mom asked our nice cleaning lady if she could help. Her sons came over with a big truck and took Honey away. We missed her so much. One day I walked over to where she died under the persimmon tree. I looked down and purple passion flowers were everywhere. God knew how we loved her and left another gift, the purple passion flower.

The time I wandered off, the phone rang and my mother was on the phone a long time. Everyone was outside playing basketball. I remember the basketball landing on top of my head. I fell to my knees and they said "Are you okay?" I got up and Dad rubbed my poor head.

I took off down Timbercrest Drive. The Bells had a pond, a natural spring runs

all the way through Pinhook Creek. My dog BoBo was with me, he never left my sight. He was a Basset Hound. I decided to take my clothes off so they didn't get wet. Naked as a jail bird, me and BoBo went down the hill into the creek. I used his tail to go up the other side. People found us and took me in and gave me a T-shirt to put on. BoBo stayed outside. They called the Police, Dad was outside with his boss looking for me.


They found me, I took Dad

and his boss' hand and walked across the creek. Mom embraced me and said, "Why did you run away?"

I was real quiet as I sat in the police car. The police car looked like Andy Griffith's. We never talked about it, they were just thankful I was OK.

Later, my BoBo was shot up with PPS and died. I remember asking my sister if I could feel his paw. I did it, it was so cold. The first time I learned about death. Life is an adventure and I have had a good one.

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A Dog Story

By Tom Carney

Almost anyone in the construction business has a thousand stories to tell and Phil Radzinski, of Alliance Building Corp., is no exception.

About a year ago Phil went to a lady's house to give an estimate on remodeling her kitchen. It was an expensive home with manicured lawns and shrubbery. It also had a dog.

It was a small dog, the kind that is too small to kick and too big to ignore.

Anyway, as Phil is ringing the doorbell the dog begins gnawing on his new Gucci shoes. (\$149.47 on sale) The lady answers the door, Phil goes in and the dog follows. He does his measuring and figuring, and all the time the dog is still chewing away. Now there's one thing that you have to understand about giving estimates ... the customer is always right. If it takes putting up with a dog that eats Gucci shoes for lunch, well, you do whatever you have to do to get on the good side of a customer.

After the preliminary figuring, Phil and the lady sit down to discuss the price. By this time the dog had finished one and a half shoes and had started on a pants leg. The lady looks at Phil with a weird expression on her face and says, "You really like dogs, don't you?"

About that time the miniature monster looks up at Phil, spits out two square inches of polyester, takes a leap, lands in his lap and begins chewing on Phil's new tie. (Christmas present)

"Oh, yes Ma'am, I sure do," Phil said as the dog began hungrily eyeing his monogrammed shirt pocket, "Why, I think everybody should have one."

Needless to say, Phil rushed through the estimate and left while he still had a few clothes intact. He's walking down the drive, back to his truck, when the woman comes to the door and hollers at him.

"Mr. Radzinski, don't forget your dog. And please don't mention bringing your dog with you to my husband, he doesn't allow pets in the house."



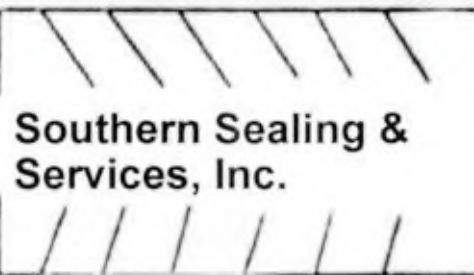
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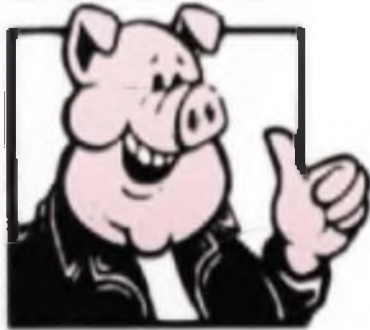
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Meridian Street Changes

by Jerry Keel

Some people take a good night's sleep for granted. Others, like me, can only hope to be able to sleep a few hours a night. Although the lack of sleep is bad, it has its good points. Many nights when the sandman eludes me and my eyes just refuse to stay closed I think of a lot of things that happened in the past. Most of these memories are good. The bad memories are quickly forgotten as my mind searches for some of the happier thoughts that lie hidden.

The human brain is a marvelous thing. So many memories lie dormant in the recesses of that amazing part of the human body. When I begin to think back all sorts of goodies pop up out of nowhere. Things that happened 50 or 60 years ago come to mind as if they happened only yesterday. It's funny that things that happened in the past two or three days are completely forgotten while the old memories seem as vivid as if they happened in the past couple of hours.

When I was a youngster my parents operated a small sandwich shop on Meridian Street in the area known by most as "Miller's Crossing". The exact location would be hard to pinpoint now because so many changes have been made in that area. Basically it was where the Southern Railway tracks crossed Meridian Street and included the area around the intersection.

When the interstate highway system was conceived it was regarded as a boon to automobile travelers both lo-

cal and nationwide. True, it did make travel by auto faster, safer, more convenient and so many more good things. But, as so often happens when progress changes the entire scenery, many things are removed, things that were so important in times past. This was what happened to the area where the small shop was lo-

cated. Many old landmarks were torn down to make room for the 1-565 road which was located between the Interstate 65 north-south highway system and the city of Huntsville.

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D. G. Foster's Mule Barn, John White's cafe, the Pastime Cafe, the original Star Market, and the namesake for the area, E. P. Miller's Feed and Seed, the cotton gin (which was owned by Mr. Miller), Hindman's Grocery, Joe Gunn's TV Repair and a knock-off of the Dairy Queen ice cream shop known as "Dixie Queen" and others which were affected by the highway construction were lost during this time.

The sandwich shop my parents had was sandwiched (pun intended) in a small triangle of land between the main railroad tracks and a spur that ran up Marion Street to a cotton gin and a large industrial area. The tracks were very seldom used at that time but must have been fairly important in earlier times. Anyway the tracks formed the southern boundary of the triangle where the small building was located. The southern tip of the triangle was vacant and provided a good place to sit and

watch the locomotives pulling 30 to 50 boxcars as they went by on the Southern Railway tracks.

I can still feel the cinders that fell from the air when the trains made their way north on the tracks. The fuel used for the train's steam engine was coal. A huge firebox was a main part of the steam locomotive. The coal was burned to boil the water carried in the engine compartment. More speed called for more coal to be burned to make the fire hotter so more steam could be generated. A slight rise in the elevation of the tracks called for more power so just before reaching the diner location more coal was shoveled into the firebox. Naturally the more coal that was burned caused more ashes to be discharged into the air.

As I sat there and marveled at the sight my hair would become filled with the small cinders and ashes that were a by-product of the coal that was

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burned. At the time that was the accepted method of propulsion for all trains. Somewhere during that time people began to become aware of the extreme amount of pollution that was created by the coal smoke being discharged into the air. It was realized that the pollution was harmful to the people as well as the environment.

The brilliant minds that were around at the time began to try to figure out a better method of propulsion that would not cause so much trash to be released into the air. I think the engineers at the General Electric Company came up with the concept of a diesel-electric hybrid engine. The small diesel engine would be used to generate electricity to power the monstrous electric power plant that would actually be the source of the power to pull the locomotive.

After several years of experimentation, the modern engine was perfected to the point that it could be used to power the locomotive. This was a tremendous breakthrough in the railroad's quest to be able to carry more freight with larger trains and to have no pollution to speak of.

I can remember the first diesel-electric locomotive that was scheduled for the Southern Railway which ran through Huntsville on its way to Chattanooga and points north. It was a festive occasion and many people lined up along Meridian Street at the aforementioned Miller's Crossing just to see the new marvel that was coming through Huntsville.

When the train approached the street a big cheer went up from the crowd. No steam

poured out, no loud noise from the steam engine, no soot and cinders flying into the air. Just the steady rumble of the powerful electric engines that pulled the train. I am glad I thought to count the boxcars that were pulled by that one engine system employed in the locomotive. Whereas the steam engine could only pull 30 to 50 boxcars, depending on the weight of the freight being carried, the diesel-electric locomotive pulled 130 cars.

Immediately the railroad companies could see that the huge investment they made in developing the new means of power would pay off in the long run. Being able to pull two or three times as many cars as before meant an immediate increase in rev-

enue for the railroads. Faster, bigger loads with little or no pollution was the way to go in the future. This was the standard for many years.

Also at that time the cotton gin was running full steam in the fall of the year when

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the cotton crops were harvested. Most of the loads of cotton were brought in by means of horse-drawn wagons. The wagons would line up down the small street as they were unloaded one by one. The huge vacuum pipe was moved around inside the wagon by the single man who climbed up into the wagon filled with raw cotton. As the cotton was sucked into the pipe it was carried into the huge machines that combed the cotton fibers to separate them from the cottonseeds and the small amount of trash that was unavoidable as the cotton was pulled from the bolls.

The ginning operation was loud. All the big machinery with all the moving parts as well as the air used to pick up the cotton from the wagons was like a continuous roar of thunder during a terrible storm. But it sure was exciting to an eight to ten-year-old kid. I was always afraid the man operating the suction pipe would be drawn up into the pipe himself.

Sometimes the horses would become nervous from the noise and were hard to control, especially in the close quarters in which they had to operate. In a few instances men or animals were injured but that was accepted as part of the risk of bringing cotton to the gin. The finished bales were bound and labeled with the owner's name and were sold to the various cotton buyers who made the rounds of the many gins in the area around Huntsville at the time. The price paid for the cotton was determined by the length and cleanliness of the cotton fibers. Many of the details of the entire operation have been forgotten but it was truly a fascinating time, especially for a youngster.

Those days are gone forever. Thanks to publications like Old Huntsville and others we are still able to learn about life in those days. Things were beginning to change and become what we have today — a rat-race in which everyone is in a hurry and no one has time to stop and smell the roses. It's a shame but that's progress. Progress in itself is a thing to be desired. The fact that so many things are lost is just part of the process through which change is made. Very few, if any, of the people who lived in that era would go back to things

as they were then if they had the chance.

That's what memories are for — to be able to recall those times and better appreciate where we are today. Those times are like the residents who are no longer among us — gone but not forgotten. I hope we as a city and as a nation never forget all the sacrifices that were made by our ancestors and others who paved the way for us.

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Heard On the Street

by *Cathey Carney*



The winner for the Photo of the Month award was **Faye Jones!** Faye, a Huntsville native, recognized the young boy in December's issue as **Johnny Johnston**, who writes great stories and worked at the old airport for many years. Faye finished high school with Johnny and said he hasn't changed a bit! Faye also worked for years with my Dad, **Chuck Owens**, at Thiokol Chemical Corp. here in Huntsville. She's retired now but loves to have regular lunches with the Thiokol ladies.

Here are a couple of great tips I heard lately on one of the morning shows. Most people have the iPhones and Androids and are adding to the music selection on their phones - either buying singles from iTunes or downloading CDs. The sound is not great when we play the songs. Simply get a song going on your phone, and drop it into a glass beer mug. (not full of beer of course). The sound is amplified alot. Time to Party!

Another is for us computer users who eat over or have pets near our keyboards, resulting in crumbs/pet hair in the keyboard. Simply take a super sticky note and poke the sticky side into the keyboard crevices above/below the letters, numbers etc. It's a really good way of grabbing those cat

hairs, crumbs from food, etc. Of course what I do also is turn the keyboard upside down and gently hit it on the palm of my hand onto a paper towel - that works too.

A \$50,000 prize from Alabama Launchpad will allow a Huntsville entrepreneur and motorcycle enthusiast to possibly save lives with his invention. **Jeff Hammock**, CEO and Founder of MechOptix, was awarded the prize from Alabama's Launchpad Competition at Lincoln Mill. Jeff's company makes an **automatic brake lamp** called Stoptix that protects cyclists and other drivers from rear end collisions. When motorcycles downshift to slow down, instead of using the brake, lights don't come on and this results in many rear-end collisions, usually the car hitting the motorcycle. Stoptix lights up anytime a bike or vehicle slows down, reducing the chance of a bike rider being hit and possibly killed. The lamp is waterproof and self-powered and can be installed easily. Jeff says this lamp can be used for bicycles, motorcycles, autos and fleet trucks. The Stoptix will be available on Amazon as soon as they build up inventory. So proud of Jeff Ham-

mock - just another entrepreneur of our city!

Susan Wardynski was a military wife and moved all across the country with her husband **Casey** and their children. They spent many years in the West Point, NY area which she loved. She loved the military life and it took them all the way from California to New York and finally, to Huntsville, Alabama. Graduating Magna Cum Laude from Illinois Wesleyan University, Susan was an intelligent, strong, driven woman who loved her family above all else, and decided 30 years after getting her first degree to attend Nursing School at the University of Alabama/Huntsville. She graduated first in her class in 2014, despite having a re-diagnosis of breast cancer and receiving chemotherapy prior to her graduation.

Susan passed away on December 6, and her strength of character was obvious to all when she said, "Don't say I lost the battle to breast cancer. I actually won. I won by the way I lived and the way I was loved."

Susan is survived by husband **Ret. Col. Casey Wardynski**; children, **Chief Petty Officer Casey Wardynski (Katherine)**; **Captain**

Photo of The Month

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

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This sweet little boy grew up to be not only a judge, but a very good musician as well.



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(USA) Jennifer Wardynski; and 1st Lt. (USA) Christian L. Wardynski (Jacquelyn); Grandson Jack Anthony Wardynski; mother Inajean Chamberlain; brothers Michael Chamberlain, Jeffrey Chamberlain, Mark Chamberlain and John Chamberlain; and best friend Windsor Wardynski NS-DTR. The family's many friends & relatives will never forget this inspirational and loving woman.

Diabetes is a disease that can shorten lives and make life more difficult. Recently I read some natural ways of preventing or managing the disease. Don't sit for hours watching TV or spending time on the computer. Get up and move, break up the time you're just sitting there. Get your circulation going. Sprinkle your food with cinnamon - people who eat just a gram of this a day see a drop in blood sugar - I put it in my morning coffee and it's really good. Also regarding coffee, people who drink 3-4 cups of coffee a day have a 25% lower risk of developing diabetes. Stress less, go to the gym, limit red meat, eat citrus, dark chocolate, oatmeal and beans, peas & lentils. All recommendations in the latest magazine from AARP.

The Grace Club recently presented Mary Butler and Evelyn Wright with the 2015 Grace Award. Given biannually since 1979, the award is presented to women who have made a significant contribution to Huntsville-Madison County. Mary and Evelyn paved the way in 1955 for the opening of the Mental Health Clin-

ic, evolving into the Hsv/Mad. Cty. Mental Health Center in 1964. They founded the National Asso. of Volunteer Bureaus, Huntsville chapter and helped establish the Family Counseling Center, Day-care Asso. and Churches United for People among others. Grace Club President Eleanor Keith introduced the speakers who were Linda Riley (Evelyn's daughter) and Lillian Butler (Mary's daughter.) Congratulations to both women for this award!

Rosemary Leatherwood wants to wish her youngest grandchild a happy, happy birthday. Alex Leatherwood will turn 8 on January 31st.

The Christmas Luminaries downtown were just beautiful - the perfect warm weather helped as well. Thousands of people drove through the historic neighborhoods to see the candle-lined streets and the beautifully decorated homes. Really takes your mind off the bad things that are happening in the world these days.

A big congratulations to Old Town's Barbara Holbrook for being selected Huntsville City Schools Elementary Teacher of the Year! She is a 2nd grade teacher at Jones Valley Elementary School. The kids love her!

Lynda Hall, Madison County Tax Collector, was out and about recently, having dinner at Carabba's with her beautiful granddaughter Georgia May. Lynda makes the best grand-

mother ever, cause she's still a kid at heart herself!

I'm wishing a healthy and happy 2016 for all of you, and be sure and call your loved ones to tell them how much you care. Today's all we really have.

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- 1 c. sherry
- 1 qrt. vanilla ice cream
- 1 c. broken pecans

Crumble macaroons; soak in sherry 1 hour. Soften ice cream; fold in macaroons and nuts. Freeze. Some prefer adding bourbon rather than the sherry (use 1/4 cup).

Crème Brûlée

- 3 c. cream
- 6 egg yolks
- 3 T. sugar
- 1-1/2 t. vanilla extract
- 1/2 c. packed light brown sugar

Heat cream in double boiler. Beat egg yolks slowly adding the sugar. Remove cream from heat; slowly pour over egg mixture. Add vanilla. Pour into 2 quart casserole; set in pan of hot water. Bake uncovered at 325 degrees about 45 minutes and set. Sprinkle with brown sugar; broil about one minute and sugar melts.

Date Nut Custard Pudding

- 4 eggs
- 3/4 c. sugar
- 1 c. milk
- 1 c. chopped dates
- 1 c. chopped nuts
- 1/2 pint whipped heavy cream

Beat eggs and sugar, add milk, dates and nuts. Place in buttered glass baking dish. Place in pan of water and bake at 325 degrees for 45 minutes and custard is firm. Serve cold with whipped cream

Pralines

- 2 c. sugar
- 2 c. brown sugar
- 1 c. milk
- 4 c. pecan halves

Cook sugars and milk until it forms soft ball stage (234 on your candy thermometer). Add pecans; cook 1 minute longer. Remove from heat; stir til pecans are well mixed in the syrup. Drop by teaspoonfuls on

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waxed paper, cover and allow to cool. When hard and cool, store in air-tight containers.

Wild Rice Casserole

- 1-1/2 c. raw wild rice
- 6 scallions, chopped
- 3/4 c. sliced smokie links
- 1 c. mushrooms
- 1/2 c. butter, melted
- 2 cans chicken broth
- 3/4 c. white wine
- 1 t. salt
- 1/4 t. pepper
- Dash Tabasco
- Pinch of marjoram

Saute the first 4 ingredients in butter. Add other ingredients; put in 2-1/2 quart casserole. Bake 1 hour at 375 degrees.

Macaroni and Cheese

- 1 c. uncooked macaroni
- 1 c. grated Cheddar cheese
- 1 c. milk
- 2 eggs, well beaten
- 1/2 c. bread crumbs
- 2 T. butter

Cook the macaroni in salted water, drain. Alternate layers of macaroni and cheese in a

greased 1-1/2 quart casserole. Add combined milk and eggs and pour over. Top with buttered crumbs. Bake 1/2 hour at 350 degrees.

Beef Stroganoff

- 2 lg. onions, diced
- 3 lrg. cans mushrooms, drained
- 2 sticks butter
- 5 lbs. lean sirloin, cut into bite size pieces
- 2 cans tomato paste
- 1 t. garlic powder
- 6 half pints sour cream
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Tabasco to taste
- Worcestershire to taste

Brown the onions and mushrooms in 1 stick of butter.

Remove onions and mushrooms, add the meat and remaining butter. Brown the meat, cook slowly 15 minutes. Add onions and mushrooms back to meat. Add remaining ingredients, cover and cook slowly 45 minutes.

Do not boil after sour cream has been added. This is best made the day before.



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City News - 1911

Aimer Johnson, a prominent young man of Tracy, Minn, is here on a visit to his sisters, Mrs. J. De Stefano and Miss Johnson at their home on Greene Street. Mr. Johnson is a welcome visitor and an interesting and noticeable feature about him is the fact that he is perhaps the tallest figure in Huntsville, being 6 feet 11 inches high, weighing 200 pounds and is only 17 years old. He will likely make this his future home.

Temperature here ranged from 2 to 14 this morning

Last night was one of the coldest that has passed here in many years, but it was not as cold as it was when the soldiers were here. At 3 o'clock this morning the thermometer stood 2 above at Merrimack; a little later in the day it stood 3 above; from 6 to 8 o'clock throughout the city the temperature registered from 5 to 14 above. The coal dealers were taxed to their capacity today, supplying people with fuel. There was a great deal of suffering among the poor residents.

Robbers Poison all Dogs

In a community close to Huntsville last week nearly every dog in the place was poisoned and the residents came to the conclusion that a band of robbers were preparing to raid the town. Everybody put additional bolts upon their doors and windows and took other precautions and then waited. The robbers came early today. After attempting to hold up Strickland McCay, a wealthy citizen of the town, they broke into the railroad station.

The robbers blew open the safe but before they could get much booty they were frightened off. The station agent had taken the precaution of keeping but little money in the place - since the dogs were poisoned.

Fire on Steele

The fire laddies made a run early today to the home of Bettie Penney on Steele Street between Holmes and Clinton. The roof was burned and the household effects slightly damaged by water.

Lost - an amethyst ring on Randolph Street, between Butlers School and Grahams Pharmacy. Finder return to this office and receive an award.

50 year old woman arrested for bigamy

Deputy Sheriff Pierce today arrested Mrs. Josephine Shaw, aged 50, charged with bigamy. She was placed in jail and was released on \$500 bail today. Her husband C. L. Shaw of the Big Cove had her arrested for marrying a W. L. Barnett who lives near the Fairgrounds.

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Discovering Pinhook Creek

by Scott Nixon



It was the summer of 1980 and my friend and I loved to fish. I was ten years old and he was thirteen. He looked out for me and we always had a blast fishing. We fished at Broglan Creek and also at a creek near the corner of Grizzard Road and Mastin Lake Road. Broglan Creek was near Jordan Lane and Oakwood Ave. We used bacon for bait and caught alot of small fish that way. It was so much fun. We always took Kool-Aid and crackers for snacks. We both lived on Aspen Avenue off Sparkman Drive. We walked to these creeks at least twice a week. Man, I couldn't do that now!

Well we finally talked our parents into going to the lake at Brahan Springs Park on Drake Avenue. They would take turns taking and dropping us off by the Natatorium. They would drop us off around 6:30 a.m. once every two weeks, if we were lucky and they would pick us up around 11a.m. We never, ever caught one fish in that lake, but we kept trying.

One Saturday morning we were dropped off as usual. After an hour we gave up and just walked around behind the Natatorium just goofing off. We had our things and we walked along the tree line. There it was - a trail through the woods. We were really curious and walked until we ran into a creek, Pinhook Creek. There was a large pipe that went over it, about 6 or 7 feet above the water. We walked half-way across and sat down to rest on one of the concrete pillars. The water below us was really deep. We dropped our lines with bacon

straight down into the water. Jackpot!

We caught at least 25 bream! The hours went really quickly. They were biting one after the other! I took the stringer full of fish and we headed back out. SO Proud! When we went around the Natatorium there were many adults and children all the way around the lake. I thought it must be family day. All of a sudden, this man walked up to us and said, "Wow! What a catch, son. Let's take them to the scales!"

I tried and tried to tell him that I caught them in that creek, not the lake. My friend didn't say a word! He was just laughing his head off.

The man put the fish on the scale and said, "This is the largest catch of the day so far!" Other adults walked up clapping and patting me on the back.

"Son, you have won a large tackle box and rod and reel!" I still tried to explain myself, but they would not shut up. I gave up. A photographer was there taking pictures of me. I walked away with the prizes feeling sort of guilty.

You know what I was happiest about? Discovering Pinhook Creek!



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On Hurricane Creek

by Billy Joe Cooley,
published in 1998



Her name was Mary Riddick and she was one of the area's most beloved educators during the years she taught at the Hurricane Creek and River-ton schools.

She started teaching as a substitute teacher shortly after the second war, never having attended college. Almost a quarter of a century later, when the education powers to be mandated that a college degree was a necessity, the furor in the community was such that she was given special dispensation to continue teaching. Her students were special people to her. No child would ever enter her classroom with a dirty face, or perhaps with a tear in its eye, without Mrs. Riddick immediately taking notice and providing the comfort that a small child needed so bad. People in the community later said that she could have bought a new house with the money she spent over the years buying food and shoes for the children. She taught three generations, and they were all her children.

She never asked anything in return.

"Of course I talk to myself, sometimes I need expert advice."

Hartwell Lutz, Huntsville

Outside the classroom she set an example in compassion and caring. She was always ready to help the community's ailing, the poor, or just anyone that needed advice or a shoulder to cry on. For newcomers to the area, she would invariably bake a loaf of her mouth-watering homemade bread.

"You could tell when Mrs. Riddick was coming up the path by the smell of that delicious bread," recalls Margaret Frazier Tucker, who along with her husband J.B. are natives of the valley.

Time has a way of stand-

ing still, but only in our minds.

This was my thought the other afternoon as some of us drove up along Hurricane Creek, listening as we went to Tom Carney relate tales of his young years, many of which were spent in that scenic community on the northeast outback of Huntsville. Before the day was over we had visited with several old-timers, and a few new residents of the area.

While several prominent people have their roots - or graves - in this beautiful valley, few, if any, reside there today. Yet, there are still some characters living in this refuge of days gone by, and the memories of the community's mile markers are as vivid as the

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day they were made.

Mrs. Riddick's son, Frank Jr., followed his mother's inclination and became a public servant; Probate Judge of the County, to be exact. Buck Watson became a noted Huntsville lawyer. Alvin Blackwell attained several high chairmanships, including the County Democratic Party helmsman for many years. Herbert Ray went on to head one of the state's leading Ford dealers.

There were others who made their mark, of course, and to continue listing names would take more space than we have room for in this story. Such a list would certainly have to include the unsung heroes who have contributed much to the area while avoiding the illumination that often comes with good citizenship.

Gus Peavy, known to all the children as Uncle Gus, always had a smile on his face and a place in his heart for the youngsters living on the Creek. Tom told me that Uncle Gus never forgot the names of any children, and sure enough, while sitting in the front yard of some local citizens, he drove up in his old pick-up truck.

He immediately recognized Tom and called him by his name (which was Tommy in those long ago days on Hurricane Creek).

I later asked Tom how long it had been since he had last seen Gus. "Oh, about thirty five years."

One memory that likely would be better forgotten was the time Laura Jo Wilbourn, who is now Circuit Judge Laura Hamilton, participated in a pajama party with Linda and Sandy Tucker at the Tucker home during their pre-high school years. The future jurist and her confederates loaded a pan with marshmallows and put them in the electric oven for toasting.

The young ladies immediately launched into a session of girl talk, forgetting the marshmallows until smoke, fire and screams permeated the atmosphere. Fortunately, it was springtime and the windows could be left open while fans blew the odor out into the atmosphere, which, said Mrs. Tucker, could partially explain

the ozone problem we're having today. These were also the days when politicians would hold rallies and provide watermelon cuttings, barbecue cookouts and fish fries. They don't do that much anymore.

Hurricane Creek had other interesting happenings, like the time Elvis Presley's father, Vernon, brought his new bride to the Ray's ranch house for their honeymoon. Vernon wanted a place where he could get away from the press to relax and the valley was a perfect haven for the lovebirds.

During the heyday of moonshine, some mighty fine brew was produced in the area, but the Tuckers don't re-



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member anything about it, they being from proper Christian homes and all. "Some of the menfolks would go up to Jones Hollow in Lick Skillet to get 'likker'. They never caused no trouble, they'd just get together down on the creek and play cards and tell lies," said Tucker, who was born in 1922.

If Hurricane Creek ever had such a thing as a "town hall," it was Bobby Bragg's Grocery Store. Someone sitting on the old wooden bench in front of the store, maybe whittling on a piece of wood, would sooner or later hear of everything that happened in the community. The store first opened in 1903 as the J.H. St. Clair Grocery. Mr. St. Clair also owned the local sawmill, cotton gin and coal mine.

St. Clair was loved in the community, and often spearheaded movements to help widows and orphans, providing food and coal to them. His grocery, if hard times necessitated it, would operate on the barter system when people had no money. It would operate on the generous credit system when people had nothing.

This benevolence paid off in various ways. The least of which was for many years, some loyal people who left the community to live in other areas of Madison County would return to St. Clair's store to buy their groceries.

St. Clair's descendent, Betty Robertson Bragg and her husband Bobby, operated the store from 1952 until July of 1992. Forty years of hard work and providing for the community are now memories. Time passes on and fresh faces appear to create new memories. They have now leased the building out. It was originally a frame structure, but was torn down and rebuilt in 1946. This time as a concrete block building. The name was appropriately changed to Bragg Grocery in 1952.

Marriages were also big in the community, as they are ev-

erywhere, and make for good conversation on a hot afternoon.

"J.B. and I were married at the courthouse on a Saturday in the summer of 1946," recalls Mrs. Tucker. "Then he dragged me off to three baseball games and barbecue dinners at New Market, Hurricane school and Central School. He sure loves sports."

The couple, tired and stuffed with barbecue, finally collapsed in the Yarbrough Hotel for their first night of wedded bliss.

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Most of their years have been fun, but they did have a close call with marital disaster one night shortly after they started housekeeping. "We were clowning around and I picked up a stick of stove wood, acting like I would hit him with it," Margaret recalls.

"J.B. dared me to hit him on the knee, I gave him what I thought was just a little love tap, but it made a loud crackin' noise and he fell onto the floor, rolling around with his hands rubbing that knee. I started crying and told him I would pack my suitcase and leave. He said, no, that he would leave just as soon as he got his War Bonds."

"We finally decided to leave together and after riding around in the car for awhile, we realized how silly we were. We came home laughing."*

"I still get aggravated, though, when I think of him saying he'd leave if I'd hand him his War Bonds. Can you imagine, our love life was falling apart and he only thought of his War Bonds?"

Betty Bragg recalls the day she and Bobby were married in 1947 at the Methodist Church. They had their wedding supper at the Monte Sano Lodge, spent the night at a motel on Whitesburg Drive and got Bobby back home in time for work Monday.

"We had our share of rowdies, too," said J.B. Tucker with a laugh. "Some of us put a wagon in a treetop, of course that was on a Halloween night."

"And there was the time we put a heavy bale of cotton on the store's porch, also on a Halloween," said the man who is now Sunday School Superintendent and song leader at church. Tucker identified some of the long-ago culprits as Paul Holman and the St. Clair brothers, Clifford and Jimmy.

These days the folks in Hurricane Creek are just as varied in personality. As we were leaving the store, in walked our old friend Frank Sharp. He was an excellent cook who once prepared culinary delights for such luminaries as movie star Denver Pyle, psychic seer Doc Anderson and Texas oil tycoon John Shaw. We recognized him

"Some days the supply of available swear words is insufficient to meet my demands."

Diane Solters, Arab



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after all these years, having seen his picture in publications with the above celebrities.

"I got tired of the fast lanes in the city and moved out here to Hurricane Creek, where the living is easier, the people friendlier and the sunshine's brighter," he says proudly.

There have been some anxious moments on Hurricane Creek, too. Like the time a shotgun was fired through the store's front door. It was the result of a dispute between two feuding families, one member of which was inside the store buying groceries and the other outside waiting to waylay him. Patience wore thin for the ambusher, however, so he fired into the store, hitting nobody.

That was the most serious violence that ever occurred at the store, although Bob Blackwell, who was a deputy, once arrested a drunk who took the whole matter personally, The drunk returned that night and burned the Blackwell barn.

The store was also a voting place, which attracted more than usual interest. A common practice in those days was for unscrupulous candidates to pay for votes among the rougher elements. One voter, known for his close kinship with John Barleycorn, boasted that he sold his vote three times to various candidates. It was noted, however, that he got so plastered on "candidate whiskey" that he passed out before he got around to casting his vote for anybody.

Other remembrances among the residents reflect lives of good morality and of helping fellow citizens. Take Milam McGee, for example. He would stop his school bus every day at the store and let the children buy candy. Of course, he always used the excuse that he needed some tobacco. He must have had the biggest stock of tobacco in the county.

Hurricane Creek has changed a lot over the years. The old dilapidated homes, with privies out behind the woodsheds, are now being replaced with modern brick homes. The fields where whole families toiled in the hot sun, picking cotton, are now home to expensive hybrid cattle. The old wood stove is gone from the store, as are the kerosene lamps, overalls and candy counters. The school bus doesn't stop there anymore and men will never again gather at the store to swap hunting and fishing tales with Bobby.

We all grow up and most of us move away to pursue different careers. We spend our lives chasing a dream called wealth and recognition.

It's only when we begin to get old that we realize that the true dreams are about places like Hurricane Creek.

I stayed up all night to see where the sun went, then it dawned on me.

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A Cast Iron Skillet

by Ann LaForce (published originally in 1992)



One of our favorite stories about Huntsville's Police Department happened about twenty-five years ago when Shirley Frazier was still a young, naive radio dispatcher working the third shift.

Late one night, she received a call about a disturbance at someone's home and immediately called a patrol car in the neighborhood with instructions to check it out. The policeman pulled up in front of the suspect's house, and being duly cautious, radioed Shirley to get the exact location of the suspect.

"Just a moment," Shirley said, "I'll call and find out."

A few moments later she came back on the radio and in excited voice said, "He's on the kitchen floor! His wife just knocked him out with a skillet!"

In early 1967, Shirley Frazier started working at the Huntsville Police Department as a dispatcher. Over the years she acquired a reputation of being a hardworking, loyal public servant whose dedication to the Huntsville Police Department could never be questioned. She has seen many officers come and go... and they were all her friends.

In March of this year, Sgt. Frazier was presented a plaque for twenty-five years of dedicated service to the City of Huntsville by the Chief of Police, on the day of her retirement.

Shirley has seen a lot of changes in Huntsville in the last twenty-five years, (and survived alot of administrations). All of her friends were

sad when they learned that she would be moving back to her family home in Magnolia, North Carolina.

Shirley says to all her friends and the men and women in blue, "God bless you all. I love you and will miss you all. I'm gone fishin' now in North Carolina!"

From the City of Huntsville to Ms. Shirley, we will miss you dearly. You have been a good friend.

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"No Man Stands Taller than When He Stoops to Help a Child"

by Hugh Michaels

This phrase has been the motto for Shriner's since the inception of this world wide fraternity. Huntsville and North Alabama have been blessed by having this great fraternity as a part of their "Every Day" Life.

Shriners of North Alabama were properly authorized in 1970 to establish a Shriner's Temple in Huntsville. Forty-five years ago Cahaba became a part of a growing city. The first Potentate or leader was Bob Smith. Bob was a hard working individual. He was instrumental in the formation of Cahaba. Other men were very supportive in his efforts.

Many hours were spent by a group of dedicated men in an effort to properly prepare the Temple. Determination and willpower were on their side.

First of all a requirement for 600 signatures was needed in order for the Temple to be formed. In less than 6 months a total of over 700 signatures were obtained. \$10,000.00 was needed in order to cover the necessities required to cover such a difficult task. Over \$11,000.00 was obtained.

Many other issues were encountered. All of them were eventually resolved. Thank God for His blessing a Temple was established.

Helping needy children was foremost in the minds of these men, as they worked tirelessly to complete the project.

Shriners believe in God and that He created man to serve His purpose, among which is service to others in His name. They believe that care for the less fortunate, especially children, who suffer from burns and crippling diseases, is their institutional calling.

The location of the first Temple was at the intersection of Purlaski Pike and Winchester Road. The site for the Shrine Building has been moved to 1226 Blake Bottom Road. Shriners now meet at this location.

It was required that for membership in Cahaba you must be a Mason first. Masons came together in the formation of Cahaba. Determination, desire, cooperation, patience and willingness were absolutely necessary in order for the establishment of this great fraternity. Masons, in the formation of Cahaba, offered each other fraternal affection and respect. They supported each other in adherence to their craft, which was prepared many years ago.

Today there are 6,482 Masons in

"Burt Reynolds once asked me out. I was in his room."

Phyllis Diller

My bald spot just appeared out of thin hair.

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North Alabama. The oldest Masonic facility is located in Huntsville. Helion in Huntsville is the oldest. It was formed in 1812. It is one of the most active lodges in the State of Alabama.

It is considered an honor for men to become a Mason and Shriner. Many of our nation's greatest leaders were Masons and Shriners; George Washington, and Harry Truman were examples of dedicated Masons.

Shriners are constantly transporting crippled and burned children to a Shriner's hospital. These hospitals are located in Greenville, SC and Cincinnati, OH. The travel time to Greenville is 7 hours.

Shriners care for children but also for others as well. They believe their fraternity is the world's greatest philanthropy. They believe that Shriners support the "Temple of Mercy" with spirit, time, talent and means. They look beyond their means. They also look beyond their needs in order to serve others, especially children.

On June 4, 1986, a youngster named Zachary Mitchell of Rainsville, Alabama was pouring gas on leaves when he was burned badly. Over 86% of his body was badly burned. Zachary survived this terrible accident and lived to tell his story. He spent 9 months in the Children's Hospital in Cincinnati, OH. He was treated by the Shriners until 2008. Zachary not only finished high school in Plainview, Ala, but he graduated from Athens State College. He was able to accomplish these tasks through much help from the Cahaba Shriners.

Zachary became a Shriner in 2014. He joined in order to help pay back what the Shriners had done for him. A really great story.

Shriners stood tall when they stooped to help this young man. Proud men helping a precious child!

The Temple consists of 8 units. They are the Buffoons, Color/Provost Guards, Directors Staff, Fireballs, Legion of Honor, Motor Corps, Recreational Vehicles and a Temple Band. Perhaps the most recognized units are the Clowns and Buffoons. These units participate in nearly all parades.

"I don't enjoy assigning fault to others, but if they don't voluntarily take the blame what else am I to do?"

Steve Jacob, Athens

Cahaba is Headquarters for 10 Alabama counties: Lauderdale, Limestone, Colbert, Madison, Morgan, Jackson, Franklin, Lawrence, Marshall and DeKalb. In the Cahaba Jurisdiction there are 1300 Shriners.

Recently Cahaba was awarded the prestigious Gold Award. This award was presented due to a net gain in membership for 2014. This highly regarded award was presented to Cahaba at the Imperial Session meeting in Houston, Texas earlier in 2015. This Temple has had effective leadership throughout the years. It is recognized throughout the United States and the world. Cahaba will never rest upon its laurels but will continue to work with good leadership.

Different functions are held throughout the year to raise money for the cost of operations. The events are auctions, dinners, paper sales, gun and knife shows, fish fries and barbeques. Other events are sponsored by various units. Recently the Temple revived the popular Bingo get-togethers. This activity, which meets every Tuesday evening, is one of the biggest fundraisers in the Temple.

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An Amazing Man

by Malcolm Miller

Sitting high on a shelf among the tonics and hair dressings in Jerry and Bill's Barber Shop on Governors Drive is a large painting of three clowns. At the bottom of the painting are the names of the men depicted as the three clowns. There is Jerry Brazier and Bill Tipton, the shop owners, and the other clown bears my name, Malcolm Miller. This painting has been on this wall for twenty something years and it stands there as a reminder of the artist that did this handiwork. This multitalented man was none other than my friend, the late Dick Sasnett, one of the most controversial and interesting people I have ever known.

Just about every morning a group of men gathered at the Big Spring Cafe on Governors Drive and occupied the only table in the place. The regulars were Avery Lee "Abe" Daniel, Jerry Brazier, Louis Robinet, Ray Owens, Dick Sasnett and yours truly. Every morning we covered every subject from world peace to politics to religion and usually the center of all the controversy was Dick Sasnett. He loved a good argument and he and I usually disagreed on almost everything. In fact a few times he made me so mad that I would get up and leave. When this happened he would always make up by bringing me a gift of some kind to the barber shop. You just couldn't stay mad at him.

Dick passed away in nineteen eighty-nine at the age of 81 and it really hurt me. Dick was Irish to the bone and loved to sing "Danny Boy" in that high tenor voice of his and before he passed away he requested that I play "Danny Boy" on the harmonica at his funeral. I stood out front and played "Danny Boy" on the harmonica while Susan, his step daughter, and Tony My-

ers, a friend that sang with him when he was living, sang behind the curtain. Dick also wrote his own eulogy and had our friend Ray Owen read it.

Dick told so many stories of things that he had done in his lifetime that I used to laugh at him and tell him that if he did all the things that he claimed he did he would be over three hundred years old. He said he was once a world putt-putt champion and a golden gloves boxing champion. He painted signs for Ringling Brother's circus and held over three hundred jobs in his lifetime. I only wish Dick were alive today because I owe him an apology. You

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**The Huntsville mother of three notoriously unruly youngsters was asked whether or not she'd have children if she had it to do over again.
"Sure," she replied, "just not the same ones."**

see a few weeks back I was talking to my next door neighbor Wayne Smith and he mentioned Dick Sasnett. I was totally shocked. I said did you know Dick and he told me that Dick was his wife Susan's stepfather and furthermore he confirmed that all those tales that Dick had told me over the years were true. He said that he and Dick were going to play a game of putt-putt and Dick gave him ten points and Wayne being pretty good at the game took him up on the bet. He said that Dick soundly defeated him using the neck of a Dr. Pepper bottle for a putter.

Susan told me that Dick had really lived a rough life growing up, having to quit school in the first grade and go to work picking cotton to help the family of eight children survive after his Mother left them and their Father. The eight children all shared a bed with Dick in the middle, making it very crowded but cozy. Susan also told me that Dick spent some time as a hobo riding the rails. To be perfectly honest Dick still looked like a hobo with his long hair and scruffy beard, but he was far from it. When the movie "The Ravensers" was filmed in Huntsville Dick had a part as a cave man.

Dick and his wife Marge had a very successful sign painting business when he passed away. Marge went to work with Dick in the sign painting business. Dick taught her how to paint signs and together they operated a very successful business. Marge also played on the putt-putt circuit with him.

The old saying "you can't judge a book by its cover" was certainly proven true by my friend Dick Sasnett, He looked like a hobo,

"Happiness is being served with a paternity suit on your 78th birthday."

Jeremy Stone, Gurley

however inside was a heart of gold and more talent than I ever imagined.

Knowing Dick enriched my life and I will always remember the talented, controversial, interesting, successful, man, husband, father and business owner.

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Huntsville's Own Jackie Reed Featured on "The Today" Show



looking for losers. Yep, people who have tried and never given up, and kept on trying.

She said they had interviewed the NFL guy from Nashville, Tennessee who was not picked, The Miss America's runner up, who lost. When I asked how they found my phone number, she said AL.com, and Steve Doyle gave her my number and hoped a producer could

Jackie Reed was featured on NBC's "The Today Show" on November 29, 2015. She has also been honored by a song written about her by Mr. George Wells, producer and song writer, "The Legend of Jackie Reed" in 2012. Here's how it happened, per Jackie.

"When I came home from work recently, the phone was ringing, and the voice says "Have you got a minute?" I said maybe! (I get many unnecessary calls, as we all do).

The lady continued, "I'm calling from 'The Today Show', in New York City!"

She said they found my name in the computer, that I had run and lost in the run for City Mayor 7 times and they were

come to Huntsville to interview me.

On Monday, Todd Cross emailed my daughter, said it's official, we are coming to Huntsville. Todd came to my work, went to the City Council with me and interviewed me at my daughter's. They were filming when I announced at City Hall that I would be on the ballot again next August as a Mayoral candidate.

Mr. Cross stayed Thurs-

day, Friday and on Saturday morning the NBC producer, my family and I and George Wells all had a great breakfast at Gibson's.

Songwriter George Wells wrote a song about me in 2012. He is from south Huntsville, and he has written over 50 songs. He said he had been following me for years and already had the words. You might find it on the computer and if not it's also on <http://cdbaby.com/cd/georgewells> for .99 cents.

Also, he made a CD with this picture on it! The proceeds all go to him, his wife had been very sick. Firefighters paid \$5.00 for CD's and a big thanks.

I was also honored with the 'Rosa Parks Woman of Courage Award' from the Huntsville/Madison County Branch Association (NAACP).

You can see the Today Show on AL.com Jackie Reed, Huntsville on Channel 48, who aired the show.

I have also been blessed by writing a column, "One Woman's Opinion" in Speaking Out News for over 15 years, thanks to Mr. William Smothers.

God, family and friends have been so good to me and my family. I get my strength, faith, love and determination from God. I'm so appreciative.

I love you all, and thanks to Old Huntsville Magazine."

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"We can endure an extra pound of pain far more easily than we can suffer the withdrawal of an ounce of accustomed pleasure."

Sydney Harris

Role Reversal

by Rev. Houston Hodges

I went to Philadelphia to visit my second son, Christopher, and wound up in the hospital. I got to experience the Emergency Room of the enormous Jefferson Hospital for eleven hours one day, got repaired the next morning and was paroled just after noon. So it turned out fine.

But what I noticed, while this was going on, was an unusual degree of solicitude by that aforementioned son. When we went by cab to the hospital, he got right testy with the driver, who couldn't find the ER and had to make an extra round of the block — and he kept reaching for my things to carry them, and saying, "Here, let me, Dad," which made me want to grab things back.

Then it began to sink in. What we had going on there is

the same thing I observed when my beloved mother came to live with us when she was 88 and could no longer do it on her own. For the next five years, until her death, we reversed the stages that began our life together, from when I was a wordless, squirming mass of vulnerability until I was a first-grader. She started at about the first grade level, then proceeded to jump the hoops back down that obstacle course until she could jump no more.

So that's what I was seeing, and feeling. My son did not ask for extra duty when the original three days stretched to a week, and his schedule changed markedly. It included some middle-of-the-night quick deciding when you're dead asleep, some telephone calls when you don't have the information and have to make half of it up, some explanation to his siblings of why he'd let me get hospitalized. He responded marvelously. He switched gears from what he was supposed to be doing to

what he had to be doing, waited for my uncertainties to pass, comforted and clucked like a mother hen. I need to ask him if he knew what was happening — that role reversal, as I'm becoming the Caree, he the Carer. He was the one that drew this duty, among his three siblings: but if this is the way the rest of them respond in the future, I think things will be done pretty well.

It felt strange. Well, it felt awful. No, it felt wonderful, to be cared for that much — and to see that mature, capable, self-confident guy being so tender.

Rev. Houston Hodges is on the staff of the Big Cove Presbyterian Church in Hampton Cove (all are welcome). Rev. Hodge's writings appear on the Sundial Writers Corner on WLRH-FM (89.3).



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The Elephant Ride

by Judith C. Smith

It was a beautiful sunny day in June 1984 and the Circus was in town. Allison and I were going to ride the lead elephant to the Civic Center since one of our employees at Channel 31 had decided not to ride it. Since riding an elephant was on my bucket list, I jumped at the chance. I had envisioned a blanket under a wicket basket but to my surprise, I was placed directly on the elephant's bare back. I wanted to ride an elephant with large ears to hold on to but as luck would have it, I got an Asian elephant with short ears. With Allison being only six, she wasn't allowed to ride.

I was doing just fine until the handler started slapping the elephant and laughing as he shouted "Umugauta". With this the elephant began to trot and I began to scream. All I could do was scream "Let me down, let me down!" but that wasn't going to happen.

I didn't think we would ever get from the train station to the Civic Center. When we arrived, I had lost one shoe and the joint on my left hand was bleeding from holding on so tight and rubbing against the elephant's rough skin. I found out that the hair on an elephant is like a tough bristle brush as well.

When the circus came to town this year, M.D. asked me, "Honey, don't you want to ride an elephant again?" He was laughing as he reminded me that he had video-taped the whole process.

He said that I really had everyone entertained with my screaming. Well, that's off my bucket list - no more elephant rides for me!

After I had ridden the elephant to the Civic Center that June in 1984 and after going to the doctor to get my left hand bandaged where I had held onto the elephant for dear life, rubbing the thumb joint to the bone, I decided to go shopping for a new car. I had been driving a Toyota and thought I would try another make of car.

I ended up at the Cadillac dealership. When the salesman came out to greet me, he took one look at me and said "What happened to you?"

With the straightest face I said, "Oh, I've been riding an elephant." He gave me a look like, lady you're really nuts. I told him I wanted a blue Cadillac. He had it brought up front. Then he asked how I would like to pay for it. I told him I would write a check. Now we seem to get off to a great start and shortly thereafter I was on my

way home.

Upon arriving home M.D. asked where had I been and I said I just bought a car. Of course he goes outside and comes running back in and said "You bought a Cadillac!" Yes, I guess that is what I bought.

The next day I got up to go to church. All dressed I went out to get into my new car to find my three year old, Martin, climbing up on the trunk, over the top and sliding over the hood, scratching paint as he went. All the way to church I prayed that I wouldn't do him bodily harm when I got back home. He seemed to understand that he better not ever do that trick again.

Well life continued on and three years later I bought another blue Cadillac on a Saturday. I go out to get in it on Sunday, now Martin was six and I assumed that maybe he had learned his lesson from three years ago, but boy was I wrong. He had done it again.

This time praying at church didn't help. Martin still remembers the yardstick and how fast I could run after him. The dealership was real nice when I took the car in to get the paint fixed as I had done three years prior on the other car.

So now when I get a new car I make sure it's locked in the garage and no little kids are around, but just in case I'll have the yardstick HANDY!

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The Goat Man

by Ken Owens

He isn't on the road anymore, but he was and it wasn't that long ago. In fact, a lot of people in North Alabama remember seeing him. Some even remember talking with him, listening to him and maybe making friends with him.

Not that he was that hard to miss 15, 20, 25 years ago. His name was Chess McCartney and he traveled much of the country in a goat drawn wagon, its cargo everything from pots and pans to lanterns and bales of hay.

In all the areas he visited, the clanging and banging of milk cans, tools and hubcaps heralded his arrival long before he got there. And when he appeared, what a sight it was. A rickety cart with metal wheels pulled by a mini herd of goats and driven by a most unusual pilot.

A crowd was always sure to gather, made up mostly of curious adults and bewildered children with wide open stares. Some of the adults bought a trinket or a postcard from him. Others had their pictures made with him. Still others expressed their disdain by making unkind or cutting comments to him, which they generally got back many fold. Still, he was free with personal and political perspective - all one had to do was ask.

It was maybe the children who were most impressed with the Goat Man. First, the animals were an attraction. He would often amuse some and horrify others by drinking copious drafts of goat milk that was as fresh and warm as it gets. Often times at night, he would read his Bible by the kerosene light until folks showed up. The campfire and lanterns reflecting off of all the metal cargo in his wagon gave almost a carnival atmosphere; garish and unreal... yet strangely provocative and welcoming.

And all of this with no modern conveniences. No air conditioning, no electricity, no running water, no fuel - and no bills. Not many, anyway. What little he did have to pay for was financed through money he got from people buying his needle threaders or postcards, or just contributions from generous visitors.


People who remember seeing him generally say he was cordial and polite, and rarely missed an opportunity to thank someone for visiting him - whether they bought something or not. He was carefree as could be and

obviously loved his life-style. He subscribed to the philosophy "Everyone is my friend," and often thanked God for providing him with "... a mixture of sunshine and water" during his travels and "abundant vegetation for my goats." Living simply and traveling extensively, he was never caught up in the appointment-filled world that was rushing by around him at breakneck speed. Truly, he existed in a different dimension.


His travel interest was initially sparked by the Robinson Crusoe novel, but that really only served as the igniter for the explosive wanderlust already contained within him. His travels began full time seriously in the 1930s, when he talked his wife into sewing goat skin clothes for himself and small son. He then designed and built two wagons, loaded them up and began a journey to... well, he wasn't sure where, exactly.

Having grown tired of these wanderings and maintaining this was no life for their son, his wife left him and returned to Iowa with their son. The Goat Man was on his own.

During the '40s through the late '80s, he traveled countless miles with his wagon and goats, throughout many areas, but mostly the Southeast. "The folks are just a mite friendlier here," he'd say. He made Jeffersonville, Georgia his "headquarters" in the early '40s and tended to radiate



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only a few hundred miles in any direction from that point.

He was often seen in north Alabama, and it was rumored Huntsville was one of his favorite stops. "Next to Georgia folks, Huntsville folks is the best they is." On two occasions he had radio coverage when he arrived and was interviewed like a celebrity. But life wasn't always easy on the road. When his home in Jeffersonville burned in 1978, he replaced it with an old abandoned school bus that he called home from then on. During his wanderings he was sometimes attacked, robbed, beaten and harassed. On one particularly vicious occasion, he was attacked by several youths who beat him, overturned his wagon and turned all his goats loose after killing three of them.

The worst and final incident of barbarity occurred in 1987, just outside Signal Mountain, Tennessee. Having made camp for the evening, on the way back to Jeffersonville, he was again attacked

and robbed. This time though, it took almost thirty stitches to close a gash on his head and face, not to mention other bruises he sustained. If that wasn't bad enough, eight of his goats lay dead with their throats slashed.

He was in the hospital a few days, recovered somewhat, then left and traveled to Conyers, Georgia, still trying to get home. That next morning, when he awoke, he discovered two more of his goats missing. One was partially found close by, on railroad tracks, shortly after the morning train came through. The other was never found.

That was pretty much it for the Goat Man's travels with his goats. Two incidents so close together, worst of all harming the goats he loved so much. Most of them had been with him a long, long time — one had accompanied him for thirty years.

The remaining goats he gave away. According to him, Disney World and another zoo in Florida

took them in. He wanted to be sure his companions were cared for.

He parked the wagon, but not his wanderings. "Too many places and people to see," he'd say. Recognizable by his walking stick, baseball cap and flashy wing tip shoes, he continued traveling on foot and in railroad cars for another few years.

He disappeared one time for over three months and turned up in a hospital in Los Angeles with more head injuries — attacked again. He said he had traveled there to find and marry Morgan Fairchild, bring her to Georgia and live happily ever after in the school bus in Jeffersonville. That just never worked out.

There have been plenty of rumors about his death for years. Happily, though in reality, he's alive and living in a nursing home in Georgia. Receiving a number of visitors daily, his schedule is almost too busy for him to spend much time with his new girlfriend - a retired nurse.



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Tweetie's Pet Trivia

MY LITTLE RAY OF SUNSHINE

by Cathey Carney

Tweetie passed away this morning while I was holding him, trying to make him feel better. I've been crying ever since then. He was my bright ray of sunshine when Tom was going thru his discovery of lung cancer, his chemo and radiation, his days at the hospital, his days at home when he was so sick after chemo.

I would come home from the hospital and sit in front of Tweetie's cage with him on my finger and cry my eyes out for Tom. I would talk to him about the latest that had happened. In the early days when Tom wasn't sick, every morning I would have the cage on the dining room table so that I could change the paper and feed Tweetie. Tom would walk by on his way to the kitchen and say "Hello Bird" in that deep voice he had. When he would try to put one of his hands into the door to let Tweetie sit on his finger, Tweetie would nip at his finger. He was a one-woman bird for sure.

It's amazing how such a little spirit can add so much to your life. Tweetie was a young male parakeet, bright yellow, given to Tom and I by our friend Sherri Williams seven Christmases ago. Since he was a male, I knew he could be taught to speak or to mimic speech. So I started saying words to him repetitively and in pretty short order he was saying, "I love you", "Pretty Bird", "Good boy", etc. I had bought him a little plastic penguin that was blue and yellow and just his size, and that became his best buddy. We called it his baby, so sure enough before long he would say "Pretty baby, where's the baby", etc.

He loved country music and would sing along at the top of his lungs. He loved to eat cilantro fresh from the store. He even tolerated Pumpkin the cat and wasn't afraid of him.

Now he's not here anymore, and there won't be any chirping or talking from Tweetie. I think animals that we



rescue or adopt or buy become part of our spirits too and I feel that I'll see Tweetie again in Heaven. We know when we get our pets that they won't live as long as we will, but it's so painful when they're gone, whether they're little birds or Great Danes or horses or cuddly rabbits. They all have their special personalities and they all love us no matter what.

My Tweetie isn't here anymore, but he'll be in my heart forever.

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From the Desk of Tom Carney

King of the Snuffdippers' Ball

by Tom Carney

Stories have been written about most of the historic places in Huntsville, but one you will never see in the history books is a place that carved its own niche in this city's history for over a quarter of a century. It was a place that a lot of people will never forget—and some people would like to forget. During this time Monte Sano Crowder reigned supreme, as King of the Snuffdippers Ball.

Monte Sano Crowder was born on the mountain that he was named for in 1914. When Monte was only six years old his mother died, leaving his father with a whole house full of kids, with very little money. Monte's father was a natural musician and often, when times were especially hard, would wrap his Sears and Roebuck fiddle in an old flour sack and "take off fiddling for a week or two, in order to keep food on the table."

Monte began fiddling when he was about ten years old. His dad kept his fiddle lying on the bed and while he was fixing supper, Monte would slip into the bedroom and saw very quietly on the fiddle. His dad came in one day and told him to "go ahead and play it, only don't break anything." From that day on, Monte was a fiddle player.

Like his father, Monte and his brothers were all natural born musicians. In 1928, Monte and his brothers began playing together as the Crowder Brothers. The oldest brother, A.P., was the manager of the band. A.P. Crowder later moved to Illinois where he became known as the top fiddle player in the state.

Monte recalls that back in those days people would plan barn dances sometimes a year in



advance. There would be cold drinks and ice cream and the street would be roped off with sawdust spread down for people to dance on. Sometimes the dancing would go on till the wee hours of the morning. The band tried to charge \$15 a night for the entire group, three or four dollars apiece was pretty good money in those days.

"Times were gettin' kind of lean back then and I was gettin' tired of chopping cotton, so one day I tell Leon my brother, I say 'Let's go to Texas or someplace where we can make music and make a little money, too.' Leon, he looked at me and laughed and said, 'We can't play that good!' 'Well, by Golly, we can at least try,' I told him. The next day we took off for Texas."

"We were hitchhiking and didn't have no money so we carried our cotton sacks with us. We

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figured that if we didn't make no money making music, we could still pay our way by picking cotton. It's a good thing we had them sacks, 'cause when we got to Texas, they had mosquitoes as big as birds and we had to crawl into those sacks to sleep, otherwise they would have eat us alive."

"Well, we got to Texas and we started making music on the sidewalks. We would stand there and play all the tunes that we knew and if we were lucky someone would put a little spare change in the hat, and then we could eat again. We had been doing this for a couple of days when this guy with a medicine show hires us to play for his show. We would make music, people would gather around, and then this medicine man would sell his goods. We spent that whole summer in Dallas making music. That's when we got to thinking that we were genuine musicians,"

Monte returned to Alabama, convinced that he could make a living playing the fiddle. In 1937, Slim Daniel gave Monte his first job in Huntsville. Word of the young man and his fiddle-playing spread throughout the Tennessee Valley, and it wasn't long before he was in great demand.

"Those were the days when a man put his heart and his soul into his music. I remember back in 1939, or maybe '40, when some guy by the name of Hank Williams called me and wanted me to make music with him. I played with him for a while, but he wanted to go to Louisiana and make some records. I told him that I didn't care nothing about being famous, I had everything I wanted right here in Huntsville."

Hank Williams went to Louisiana where he auditioned for the "Louisiana Hayride," the show that was to propel him into worldwide fame within a few years.

In 1941, a man appeared at Monte's door and asked him to take a job playing for a square dance. The man told Monte that they weren't making much money and couldn't afford to pay anything except a percentage of the gate. The square dance was commonly known as the "Snuffdippers Ball" and Monte was to play there for the next thirty-two years.

The Snuffdippers Ball was located

upstairs at the old Temple Theater, in a room normally used for union meetings, on Jefferson Street. The lot on which it stood is now a parking lot for the Heritage Club. Walking down the street years ago, the only evidence you would see of the ball was a narrow doorway and a long, steep set of stairs. No signs, no neon lights. You had to know what you were looking for in order to find it.

"You had to climb the steps, pay a fifty cents admission, and then you'd be in this big room. The room itself wasn't much to look at, it was just a big room with a few chairs on the side, had a place to sell potato chips and soft drinks, and yes, back in the old days it even had spittoons for people who dipped snuff or chewed tobacco."

"But it wasn't the room that made the ball, it was the people. Use to, most everyone lived out in the country and they had to work hard for a living, and Saturday night was the only night they had to have a little fun and let off a little steam. There would be people dressed in their Sunday best, their hair slicked down, and a Sunday-go-to-meeting shine on their shoes. And over there, against that wall, would be the boys that picked cotton all week, still dressed in their overalls. Grandpa would be back in a corner holding court with all the other men while the missus would be sitting there clapping her hands to the music. There'd be so many people packed in that smoky room that it was a wonder that the old wooden floor didn't just cave in with all that stompin' and dancin' going on."

"Lord, if that old building was still there, and if those

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walls could talk, there would be a thousand ghosts in that room, and they would all be tapping their feet to the memories of all the music that was played there."

With the new fiddle player taking the lead, the Snuffdippers' Ball became an instant success, with throngs of people lining up in front of the door hours before it opened. Its success created a new entertainment district downtown. No alcohol was served on the premises of the Ball, so bars began to spring up around it to cater to the thirsty crowds. An old-timer claims that "you could always tell when Monte took a break. When the music stopped, the people would swarm out of the Ball, like bees on honey, headed for the bars, but when Monte picked that fiddle up again, the bars would empty out and the sidewalks that were crowded with noisy people a few minutes earlier would grow silent."

By this time the Snuffdippers' Ball had acquired such a reputation that it was posted "Off Limits" to military personnel, as far away as Nashville, Tennessee. Ironically, this was one of the few places of entertainment downtown that did not serve alcohol, but a lot of people had bottles of "cough medicine" in brown paper bags, sticking out of their back pockets.

Monte recalls, "There was never no trouble inside my place. It was all outside. I would tell those boys that if they wanted to fight they could go outside and do it. I wouldn't put up with that in the Ball. Why, there were folks that would drop their kids


off with us while they took off to the bars!"

The fact that Monte was a professional wrestler undoubtedly helped persuade some of the local rowdies to keep the peace. He first stepped into the ring in 1937 and over the next 15 years would wrestle as a professional in over 200 matches, under the name of "The Breakdown Wrestler." Asked if he was any good, Monte replied, "I didn't win very much, but I made me a little money."

Earl Frazier, a retired Madison County Deputy Sheriff, recalls working Jefferson Street in front of the Ball every Saturday night. "We never had no trouble in the Ball itself, but whenever the band took a break we got ready. A lot of those boys would go outside and try their best to see how fast they

could get drunk. Most Saturday nights, we would arrest forty, fifty or maybe sometimes even sixty people on the sidewalks in front of the Snuffdippers' Ball. It wasn't really as bad as it sounds, most of them were the same people every week. The Sheriff's Department had regular customers back then.

"One night, me and Bulldog Daniels was working the sidewalks in front of the Ball. We had already arrested one drunk and had him in the car and we were putting the handcuffs on another one, when a third drunk staggered by. When I saw the third one, knowing that we didn't have any more room in the car, I reached over and tapped him on the shoulder and told him that he was under arrest. Just walk on down to the jail, I told him. We'll be down there directly to



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"Sure enough, in about 15 minutes, when we got to the jail to drop off another load of prisoners, there the guy was, sitting on the curb waiting for us to put him in jail. Something like that would never happen today."

Life was treating Monte pretty good in those days. Monte recalls, "I was married and had a son. I was making a little money and only had to work one night a week. Somewhere around 1947 or 1948 some guys come to me and asked me if I wanted to do a radio show. It was WHBS, and was down there where we pay our utilities at now. So I asked these guys, what was in it for me?"

They told Monte, "We are going to sell twelve sponsors at \$3 apiece, and you'll get \$12 and we'll get \$24."

"That didn't sound like too bad a deal to me so I became a radio announcer. I'm making twelve bucks an hour for sitting there talking just like I been doing all my life for nothing. I had this show called 'Crowder's Corn Crib' and I talked and played music. Only thing I didn't like was doing the weather. Most of the time the weather forecast back then was wrong, so they would give me this sheet of paper with the weather on it and I would go on the air and say, 'I don't believe a word of it, but this sheet of paper says that the weather is gonna be....'"

"Only thing was that this job was interfering with my fishing. Got to where every time they wanted me at the station, the fish would be biting. Well, anyway, they call me in the office one day and tell me that I have to choose between fishing and doing radio. That was a dumb thing for them to do, 'cause I had my fishing rod in the car all ready to go."

In 1972, progress caught up with the Snuffdippers' Ball. Nightclubs began selling drinks over the bar, a practice not allowed until the late sixties, and most had free entertainment. People who had been going to the Ball for years

slowly began to drift away, and Monte was forced to close it down.

Monte Sano Crowder, the King of the Snuffdippers' Ball, became one of the most well-known fiddle players in the Southeast, recording numerous tapes and records, with his music being used in two movies produced here in Alabama.

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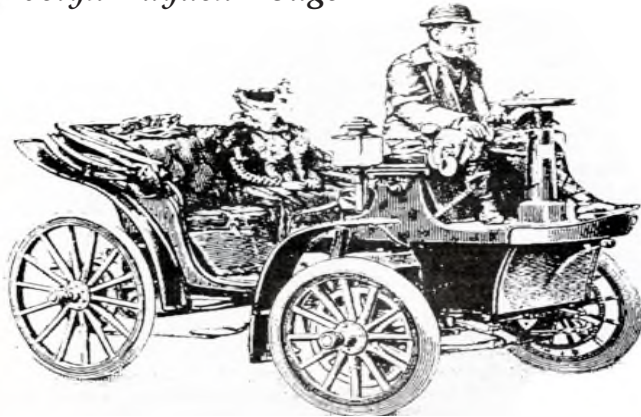
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Somebody Do Something!

by Evelyn Hayden Hodge



Back in the early teens and twenties the rural roads of this country were indescribably bad. Madison County and surrounding areas were no exception.

The county roads were made of dirt and large rocks and had two deep ruts down each one. These ruts were bad enough in dry weather but during the rainy season they were almost impassable: everybody carried mud-fighting equipment, including chains, tow rope and a shovel in their cars.

There was no heavy equipment to build and repair the roads, so it was done by manual labor. All males age twenty-one and over were required to work on the roads three days each year or pay \$3.00 for another to work in his place. Once or twice a year they worked on the roads but it didn't help much.

I have seen these men do what was called "fixing the roads" and this is how it was done. First, three men loaded each wagon with large pieces of limestone rock. One man drove the wagon and the other two rode in the back, one on each side. As the wagons moved slowly along in the ruts, the two men in the back pushed the large pieces of rock into their respective ruts.

This may have helped to prevent cars from getting stuck for awhile, but it just made the

ride rougher as the car wheels bounced from one big rock to another.

The road from above Nashville to Huntsville, through New Hope, Gunterville, and on south to Florida, as bad as it was, was called the Florida Short Route. Many tourists drove this route to Florida in the fall

and back to their homes in the north in the spring. The terrible condition of these roads was known far and wide.

Across the Paint Rock River into Marshall County there were some really bad places, and cars had to be pulled out of them. Some farmers in the area would hitch a pair of mules in the morning, go to the worst mud holes and stay there all day pulling out the cars as they got stuck. They charged from fifty cents to five dollars for their services.

There was one mud hole that

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looked worse than the rest, but it only appeared worse. People, familiar with the road, would drive through it without any problem. There was a short stretch of halfway good road on either side of this mud hole and it gave motorists a chance to pick up a little speed. A farmer in the neighborhood had a cow that died. He and a neighbor decided to have some fun. So they cut off the cow's head and tail and carried them to the bad looking mud hole. They waded in and set the head in the mud. Then back about the right distance they stuck the tail. Now it looked as if the cow had mired in the mud and couldn't get out.

Then the men hid in a little woodland beside the road to await the first car. They didn't have to wait long before a car of tourists came along.

They had gotten up a little speed but when they saw the cow in the mud hole they stopped for a better look. They pitied the poor cow and, seeing nobody making an effort to get her out of such a predicament, asked, "why doesn't somebody do something?"

About this time the men would come out of hiding and tell them it was just a joke. After a good laugh, the motorists pulled around the cow and were on their way again.

They left the "cow" in the mud hole the rest of the day and most cars that came their way stopped, for people were afraid to try to cross such a dangerous looking place. Before they learned it was a joke, most everyone would ask the same question, "why doesn't somebody do something?"

My father had a rather unusual experience one time when he got stuck. There was nobody around to pull him out and, to make matters worse, the motor of his car died. To keep from getting out in the mud, he crawled up onto the hood, where he reached over the front end and cranked until the motor started again. He finally made it out of the mud hole and on home.

He had a gold pocket watch which he wound every night before going to bed. On this particular night, when he reached into his pocket for his watch, it wasn't there. The only place he could think it may be was that it had fallen into the mud hole when he leaned over to crank his car.

Early the next morning he put on old clothes and drove back to where he had gotten stuck. He waded in with rolled up sleeves. He reached in the cold mud and began to feel around on the bottom for his watch. Surprisingly, he found it the first try

and it was still running. (Even in those days, he had a watch that would take a licking and keep on ticking.)

The condition of the roads in this country has improved immeasurably since those old times. Even so, we still enjoy thinking and reminiscing about old stories and happenings of the past.

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Dog Mourns at Casket of Fallen Navy SEAL



Navy SEAL Jon Tumilson lay in a coffin, draped in an American flag, in front of a tearful audience mourning his death in Afghanistan. Soon an old friend appeared, and like a fellow soldier on a battlefield, his loyal dog refused to leave him behind.

Tumilson's Labrador retriever, Hawkeye, was photographed lying by Tumilson's casket in a heart-wrenching image taken at the funeral service in Tumilson's hometown of Rockford, Iowa, earlier this week. Hawkeye walked up to the casket at the beginning of the service and then dropped down with a heaving sigh as about 1,500 mourners witnessed a dog accompanying his master until the end, reported CBS.

The photo was snapped by Tumilson's cousin, Lisa Pembleton, and posted on her Facebook page in memory of the San Diego resident. Tumilson, 35, was one of 30 American troops, including 22 Navy SEALs, who were killed when a Taliban insurgent

shot down a Chinook helicopter with a rocket-propelled grenade on Aug. 6th.

"I felt compelled to take one photo to share with family members that couldn't make it or couldn't see what I could from the aisle," Pembleton wrote on her Facebook page. "To say that he was an amazing man doesn't do him justice. The loss of Jon to his family, military family and friends is immeasurable."

Hawkeye was such a huge part of Tumilson's life that the family followed the dog down the aisle as they entered the service in front of a capacity crowd in the gymnasium at the Rudd-Rockford-Marble Rock Community School. Hawkeye then followed Tumilson's good friend, Scott Nichols, as Nichols approached the stage to give a speech. As Nichols prepared to memorialize his friend, Hawkeye dutifully laid down near

the casket.

The youngest of three children, Tumilson had wanted to be a Navy SEAL since he was a teenager. Friends and his two older sisters remembered a fearless soldier, and a Power Point presentation was shown that illustrated Tumilson's active life outside of the military, which included scuba diving, martial arts and triathlons.

"If J.T. had known he was going to be shot down when going to the aid of others, he would have gone anyway," friend Boe Nankivel said at the service.

As for Hawkeye, the loyal Labrador will now be owned by Nichols, Tumilson's friend.

There's an emotional YouTube video of this service for Jon Tumilson that you can see by going to www.youtube.com/watch?V=L-Out8oH130.

I promise you, it'll bring you to tears.



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"O BEULAH LAND"

by Glenn Grady

The Buttram house had been empty since the early 1940s. The last of the family, a very sweet spinster named Emily, had quietly passed away in her sleep, (or so it was hoped anyway), on a bright cold March afternoon. The estate was promptly settled, a sale quickly performed and the house closed. It remained closed and undisturbed for the next twenty-four years. Being located on the Old Wagon Turnpike and after the new highway was built which bypassed the house altogether, few visitors came by and as the years passed fewer remembered the house's existence whatsoever.

The house stood quietly in a patiently peaceful state in a somewhat pre-stage of regal depreciation on its wide-open pleasant setting. A few old oak trees with widespread thick limbs, a cedar copse, and a dozen or so mature maple trees defined the house's boundaries. A long unused well house with roof, crank, chain, cement base and bucket stood in the east corner. It had been sealed in the late 1930s when an electric pump station was added to the rear of house.

Having been solidly built in the late 1880s style, the old house had weathered the effects of time well. The house faced to the east and had a wide welcoming porch accessible by solid concrete steps. The covered porch surrounded three sides of the house. Its wide double front door opened into a foyer. The formal parlor was to the right, the kitchen the next room on the right; a graceful yet practical stairwell ran up from the center of the foyer to a landing with banisters. A less formal sitting room was on the left that led into the dining room.

Large open fireplaces were in each room.

Upon ascending the stairs, the landing opened up allowing access to two large bedrooms with connecting doors on both sides. The master bedroom was on the right with a large connecting bathroom. A small narrow stairwell led to the spacious attic. The windows throughout the house were six feet tall. The ceilings were all ten feet. The house was bare. Nothing remained of the previous inhabitants. The real estate office in the nearby town of Hanson, located twelve miles distant, had shown the house infrequently. It would be difficult to heat and cool, would require complete wiring and plumbing and was isolated. It was exactly what the young Buxton family had been looking for.

Sarah Buxton, twenty-nine, college educated and with a four and seven year old in tow, knew the house was perfect the first time she saw it. Her husband had been transferred from out-of-state to a management position at the tire factory and his future looked very bright. Sara saw potential in the old house, plus she knew it would be very affordable.

The price was quickly negotiated which was much less than the asking, and the house purchased. After six months of hard dirty work, long difficult hours of labor, painting, plumbing, wiring and cleaning, the family moved in and was living the life Sarah had dreamed when she first saw the house. It was a cool March afternoon, there was much more to be done, but the air was clean and brisk. The

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family was young and healthy and the future promising.

The Old Wagon Turnpike ran past the house on the east side and wound into the woods beyond. At places its boundaries were clearly defined, at others much less distinct. Once one had the knowledge that it had been a road and viewed it as such the boundaries were easily seen. The turnpike had not been used for perhaps twenty-five years. If one was to trace its route, about two miles past the Buttram house the road wound past a small cove. Here another trace of a road led into the cove. Within this cove, located several hundred yards past the main turnpike, were the stone foundations of a building. Beyond the foundations, defined by a thick cedar copse and opening to the east, was a long forgotten family cemetery.

The two dozen or so tombstones faced squarely east. Lichen and moss covered those standing. Several were on the ground. The writing upon them was barely legible. There were many more grave markers in the form of arranged stones. Should one have had cause to read the tombstones they would have seen predominate dates of death were in the early winter months of 1919. The returning WWI soldiers from war torn Europe brought with them a virulent strain of deadly swine flu. Entire communities were decimated. The deaths were mostly the young. Because of this entire family lines ceased.

This loss to the small rural yet unnamed community was more than it could endure. After burying their dead the remaining stayed for a while and then moved on. The church was abandoned. With the exception of the Buttram house and maybe an old barn or two no dwellings remained from this tragic era. A new highway was built, the town of Hanson grew, and the old turnpike forgotten.

The church and many of the old houses were torn down for lumber. The cemetery was eventually forgotten as the few survivors of this tragic era died.

But at one time the center of the small farming community was the country church. It was built of pine with four windows on each side. Sundays were special. The congregation gathered in the morning, attended services, had Sunday dinner on the grounds, passed the afternoon in singing, and then attended evening services. Flaming pine knots illuminated the church at night. There was a steadfast security and rhythm attached to the church. The old passed and were buried, the young brought into the church community.

The most special day for the church besides Easter was Decoration Day. It was also known as Homecoming. The event occurred the first Sunday in May. The day began with many of the families leaving their farmhouses before dawn. Those with longer distances sometimes left the day before and camped in the oak grove near the church. The services this Sunday were special. Most importantly, the graves were all cleaned and decorated with flowers and fresh cut cedar boughs. The family visited the graves, spoke of the departed, cried, remembered the good and the bad times, and then entered the church for services.

For many families this was the only time they had been reunited since the event last year. It was indeed a very special time of reunion. The singing from the cove could be heard from far away. They sang the old songs. They sang with the passion that only those who truly believe could sing. What was perhaps lacking in formally taught musical skills was

more than made up with enthusiasm. After the evening services the families carefully packed their belongings, gathered their numerous children, and returned home. The music seemed to echo throughout the cove long after the last wagon had departed. The flu epidemic of 1918/1919 ended it all.

The Buxton family had now lived in the house for nearly two months. The house, once forlorn and abandoned, now was reborn in abundance with the explosion of spring and children and new paint. Two dogs slept lazily on the porch when not chasing rabbits, behind the house clothes were hanging purposefully on the line, and toys were scattered in the yard. A radio played a local station. A station wagon was in the driveway, and a substantial garden had been planted on the east side of the property. Red checked kitchen curtains

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blew gracefully in a light breeze. The Buttram house was again a home vibrant with life and activity. The Buxton family soon discovered the Old Wagon Turnpike. They walked along it as a family various distances on Sunday afternoons. Had they known of its presence they perhaps would have visited the old family cemetery. They had walked past the entrance to the cove several times. It was a pleasant walk. They wondered where the road led but it wasn't a matter of importance. They were grateful just to have a location for their family excursions.

Early one morning at about seven Mrs. Buxton stood in the kitchen at the sink and was cleaning up breakfast dishes. Her husband had left for some overtime at work. The children would wake up soon. It was Saturday and there was no school. Her oldest, Josh, attended the first grade at the elementary school in Hanson. As she did her work she absentmindedly hummed a light song. Later, when she thought about it, she couldn't remember what it was.

The kitchen was on the southeast corner of the house. One window faced east and another south. She stood at the sink and looked out the window to the east. It was a beautiful morning. The sun was up fully; the buttercups at the edge of the yard were bright yellow. In some places dew sparkled on the grass. The oak trees were sprouting their new leaves and from up in its thick limbs a squirrel chattered at the dog lying lazily in the sun on the porch. Sarah later realized she had heard the noise before she realized it was something different. It seemed to be natural. When her consciousness realized what it was the sound had already passed. Also, it was not something with which she was familiar. When she heard the voice she knew something was different.

The noise was a combination of faint squeaking, rattling, jingles, crunching, thuds, slaps, and clicks. When she later described it to an older gentleman, he knew it immediately as the sound of a farm wagon pulled by a team of mules. It was a harmonious blend of related sounds that all fit comfortably together. The voice she heard, the voice that woke her consciousness to reality, was of a male. He said " Hup, Buck, Hup Ben, Come on boys. Hup". As

she walked through the house to look out the front door the sound faded away. She opened the door, stepped out on the porch, and saw nothing except a beautiful spring morning. Sarah shrugged, her oldest, Jacob was awake, and there was work to be done. She put it out of her mind.

The day passed uneventfully. Sometime around midmorning she thought she heard another voice, this time a young girl, but it was indistinct. She was singing an old hymn. At about two in the afternoon Sarah knew something unusual was taking place. Her youngest, Jessica, was playing in the front yard with a dollhouse and several of her dolls. Jessica prattled incessantly to her dolls, asking questions, providing replies, talking about everything and nothing. Sarah was in the backyard hanging the flowered sheets on the line when she noticed that the tone of Jessica's conversation had changed. She was now speaking directly to someone. There was a pause and then Jessica would answer. Josh was in his tree house located in the maple tree to the east of the house. As Sarah was hanging out the last two towels she heard a rattling metallic sound. She hung up the towel, placed the cloth bag of wooden clothespins on the ground and walked to the front of the house. Jessica was playing contentedly with her dolls; Josh yelled something about attacking pirates and to man the cannons.

Sarah walked up to Jessica, looked up and down the road, saw no-one, shook her head then

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"Chocolate comes from cocoa which is a tree. That makes it a plant which means chocolate is salad."

Janet Brinkerhoff

as she was turning to leave hesitated and asked Jessica who she had been talking with. The nice man, Jessica answered. What nice man, asked Sarah. The nice man, she answered; the nice man with the red beard. He asked if he could get some water for his horses from our well. I said ok. He smiled and went away. Where did he go, asked Sarah. I don't know. He just went away. Sarah heard Josh holler for someone to walk the plank. She returned to the backyard. As she walked on the east side of the house, an uncomfortable thought entered her mind. She crossed the yard to the well house and stood up on its concrete base. The bucket was wet and water was dripping from the rusty chain.

Sarah told her husband about the experiences. He had no explanation. Sometimes strange things happen. Sarah wasn't sure he believed her but she had no answer for the occurrences either. Supper was served, the evening spent with the children, they went to bed around nine after obligatory bedtime stories and prayers, and the evening was quiet.

Sarah and Jim sat together on the front porch swing. It was a cool evening. Sarah brought an old army blanket with which they wrapped themselves. The moon was almost full. The stars were clear and bright. A whip-poorwill sang its sad lonesome cry, a hoot owl answered in the distance. The breeze was from the east. They both heard it at the same time, yet neither acknowledged it because of its sudden inception. It came with a sweet faintness yet possessed a crystal like clarity. It was singing. It was coming from the woods. The wind dropped

and the voices faded. Then the breeze began and again came the song.

They recognized it immediately by its simple direct thumping rhythm and repetitious lyrics. It was that Old Time Religion. It was faint yet distinct. Sarah and Jim didn't say anything for a while but just listened to the simple enthusiasm with which the people released their emotions into the song. They sang all the verses. The breeze faded, as did the singing. Thinking there must be a gospel tent revival close by and the wind obviously carried the voices, Sarah and Jim went inside, closed the windows and were soon asleep. They weren't aware but the singing went on late into the night.

The next morning was another beautiful spring morning. All were awake by seven, breakfast finished by eight, and it was decided that since the day was so beautiful and regular Sunday school had been cancelled this Sunday that the family would take a long early walk instead of attending church. The sense of adventure appealed to the children, as did the simplistic somewhat mildly sinful concept of missing church. The family left soon after. Jim carried Jessica on his shoulders. Josh wore a tri-corner black

pirate hat, complete with skull and crossbones of course, and had a short plastic sword available for immediate use stuck into his belt.

The family had walked perhaps thirty minutes on the turnpike, and with the exception of surprising a covey of quail and a rabbit running for his life from a determined yet not dangerous seven year old, the excursion was without exceptional mention. It was simply a beautiful day.

Sarah and Jim heard the music at the same time. It was louder and more distinct than the previous evening. Individual voices could not yet be determined, but the words to the songs were clear. They were the old songs, those not heard in church for many years. It must be the tent revival, they thought. This was the only plausible explanation so Sarah and Jim accepted it, enjoyed the music, and continued the walk. The songs were wonderfully sung, sung only the way that people


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who really want to sing and believe what they are singing can sing. "Onward Christian Soldiers", "Rock of Ages", "Bringing In The Sheaves", "I Love To Tell The Story", "Since Jesus Came Into My Heart". All were sung clearly and with true enthusiasm. The pace slowed as the walk brought the family closer to the singing. They were not really paying attention to their walk, but were listening to the songs and enjoying the Sunday morning. "Sweet Hour of Prayer", "Just As I Am", "Softly And Tenderly"; each was sung with the same intense emotion. Then there came a prolonged silence. Sarah and Jim, now realized they were near the entrance to the cove and this was the source of the singing. Before either could comment, began another song. The voice was mature and feminine - clearly untrained - yet magnificent. Both recognized the song's emotional beginning immediately:

"I've reached the land of corn and wine, And all is riches freely mine; Here shines undimmed one blissful day, For all my night has passed away."

Then came the chorus; the cove filled with the sweet resounding music.

"O Beulah Land, Sweet Beulah Land, As on Thy highest mount I stand, I look away across the sea, Where mansions are prepared for me, And view the shining glory shore, My Heav'n my home forever more."

The entire congregation sang the refrain in repetition. As the second verse began Sarah saw that Josh and Jessica had run ahead into the cove. There was no fear by the parents, just a strange curiosity that a congregation would be singing in the cove. Truth is they were stunned by the magnificent voice of the singer. They stopped as the next verses were sung, then realized both children were out of view. Holding hands, walking, and listening to the angelic melodious emotion filled song the woman was singing, they entered the cove. The song ended as the foundations of the old church came into view. There was

no one there.

The children came to mind first, Jim shouted for Josh and Jessica. Both immediately answered from the cedar grove below the stone foundations. They seemed to be talking to someone. As Sarah and Jim entered the cedar grove they had another shocking surprise. The cemetery was spotless. Fresh cut flowers and greenery decorated each grave. It appeared as a kaleidoscopic burst of brilliance against the dark green cedar trees. Sarah asked Josh to whom he had been speaking. The nice man with a red beard, he answered. He thanked us. He thanked us for visiting his family on Homecoming day.

The family visited each grave. They left. The years have gone by, Josh and Jessica are married and living lives of their own. Jim died of cancer and Sarah still lives in the old Buttram house. She sits on the porch, now with new dogs at her feet, in the evening. Yes, she still hears the singing on Homecoming eve and day. The visitors still come by the house every year. She doesn't speak of it. She frequently hums a favorite song to herself as time goes by;

"O Beulah Land , sweet Beulah Land..."



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