



No. 350  
April 2022



# Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

## THE BOOTLEGGER'S GIFT



**Also in this issue:** Redstone Arsenal Railroad Spur; Ed Hewlett, Gurley Grocer; South Parkway Storm Survey; Kiwanis Club Sunshine Special; Reuben Stone; The Butternut Tree; Depression Desserts and much more!

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*Mac Lewter*



# The Bootlegger's Gift

by Tom Carney

The year was 1959 and it was a cold, wintry day in Nashville when Teresa Haney received word that her father had died. Her first thought was "good riddance." Her mother and father had separated before she was born and for the past forty-two years she had heard nothing from him. Teresa had tried several times to quiz her mother about him before she died but had gotten nowhere. All her mother would say was that he was shiftless and sold whiskey. About the only other thing Teresa knew about him was that his name was Luke.

The only contact she had with her father's family was Uncle Bob, a cousin of her father. Actually, it wasn't much of a contact as she had never met him, but on every birthday, Christmas or special occasion he would send her a card and present. Although she never knew for certain, she always had the impression that Uncle Bob paid many of the bills and possibly, even her college tuition.

Once, while a teenager, she had written Uncle Bob a long letter asking about her father. She never received a reply.

Now, after all those years, he was calling about her father's death. "All the arrangements have been taken care of," he explained, "but I thought you might want to go through his belongings and see if there is anything you might want."

After talking for a few more minutes he gave her the address and said he would put the key in the mailbox. After hanging up she told her husband, Al, about the phone call. His first question was, "What do you want to do?"

The truth was that Teresa didn't know. Part of her wanted nothing to do with the man who claimed to be her father but had never so much as written her. On the other hand, she had a curious longing to know something, anything, about him.

Her husband settled the matter. "It's only a hundred miles to Huntsville. We can drive down there, go through his things, stop and have dinner somewhere and still be back home tonight. Who knows? He might have left you a million dollars."

The drive took longer than expected. A misty drizzle had begun falling and as the temperature dipped below freezing, sheets of ice began forming on the roads. By the time they arrived in Huntsville it was al-

**"Anyone who doesn't know what soap tastes like has never washed a cat."**

*Karen Maroon, Huntsville*



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Advertising - (256) 534-0502  
Sales & Mrktg. - Cathey Carney  
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Gen. Manager - Sam Keith  
Copy Boy - Tom Carney  
(in memory)

"Old Huntsville" magazine is a monthly publication. Annual subscriptions are \$50 per year for print copy and \$25 per year for digital. Copies can be found in boxes and machines throughout North Alabama.

For subscription change of address, mail new information to the above address.

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ready dark.

Finally, after searching for what seemed like an eternity, they located the house in a section of town called Boogertown. It was an older dilapidated house, the kind they used to call "shotgun" houses. Parked in front were two or three older cars in various states of disrepair, some on cinder blocks. A feeling of revulsion swept through Teresa as she realized this was her father's home. She had been raised in an upper middle-class family and had never experienced poverty such as she was seeing now.

The home seemed even more impoverished inside. A few pieces of rickety furniture and a coal stove in the living room and a bedroom with an older cast iron bedstead. In the corner was a dresser and on the wall was a row of nails where various pieces of drab clothing were hung. The kitchen was tiny, almost as if it was added on as an afterthought. There was a small table with a few wooden chairs and above the sink was a shelf where cans of food were lined up.

A quick walk through the tiny and barren house seemed to confirm the old stories Teresa had heard about her father. She had not known what to expect but had certainly been hoping for something better. "This is ridiculous," she said to her husband, "How could someone live like this?"

Meanwhile, Al had built a fire in the stove. Within a few minutes a roaring fire was forcing the icy chill from the room. When he went outside to get more coal, he returned in a few minutes with a grim look on his face. "We're not going anywhere tonight. We're in the middle of an ice storm."

Teresa raced to the front porch. It was true. A thick layer of ice covered everything in sight and more was coming

down. Realizing it was impossible to return to Nashville, she suggested that maybe they could get a hotel room. Anywhere but here.

"I don't think so," said Al. "I tried to make a reservation before we left home. There's only one hotel in town and it is full."

Suddenly they were interrupted by sounds at the front of the house. When Teresa opened the door there was an old man standing there. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"Hello" the old man said as he quickly brushed by her to the stove to warm his hands. "My name is Bob and I live across the street. I just wanted to come over and make sure everything is all right." Looking at Teresa for a long moment he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "You really do look like your father."

Teresa stared at the old man not knowing what to say. He was dressed in overalls and an old Army fatigue coat. There was a stubble of beard on his face. "This can't be Uncle Bob," she thought. Although she had never met him she al-

ways had an image of Uncle Bob being well educated and probably rich.

Finally she posed the question. "Are you Uncle Bob?"

The old man paused, as if searching for the right words before replying. "Well, yes, no - sort of. It's a long story." Someone pulled up an extra chair and as Bob sat down he asked Teresa, "What exactly did your mother tell you about your father Luke?"

Seeing a blank look on her face, he said with a bitter tone in his voice, "That's what I thought - nothing!" Talking in a low voice, almost as to himself, he began telling Teresa about her father.

"Luke was a fine man. He was my best friend for almost all my life. He came from a rough family who were all in the whiskey business. His father got caught several times and spent time in the federal prison. His mother was trash. When Luke was about nine or ten years old, and his daddy in prison, she took off with another man. Just left Luke with an old couple and took off. No one



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ever heard from her again."

"When Luke's daddy got out of prison he took the boy to live with him, but mostly Luke just raised himself. He was always doing odd jobs to make money. Luke was about sixteen years old when his daddy got killed. They said it was an argument about whiskey. He had sold a load to a bootlegger here in town and the man didn't want to pay. The bootlegger said it had been cut too much."

"A few years later Luke got his first car. It was an old beat-up Ford. If I remember right, he gave ten dollars for it. I had to help him push it home. You wouldn't believe what he did to that car. He spent months taking it apart, piece by piece and putting it back together. When he finished there wasn't a car in Huntsville that could keep up with it."


"Luke was the damnedest driver I ever saw. There was this road outside of town that was full of sharp curves. Most people slowed down to thirty or thirty-five miles an hour. Not Luke! He would push that old Ford up to about eighty miles an hour and would just slide around the curves. I saw him take a curve one day and I swear two wheels actually left the ground!"

"A lot of the bootleggers in town knew Luke because of his daddy and when they saw how he could handle a car they started asking him to run government whiskey. Government whiskey was regular store-bought whiskey, but you couldn't buy it in Alabama. Most people went to Kentucky where they could buy it at a good price. It was about a

three hundred mile round trip, mostly on narrow back roads. We would take the back seat out of the car so we could carry more cases. We always tried to time it so we would get to the warehouse in Kentucky late in the afternoon so it would be dark when we started back."

"After he had been running whiskey for a few years he decided to go in business for himself. Before then, when he was driving for bootleggers, they would have to pay up front for the load but if something went wrong they lost the money. Luke decided to use his own money and take his own chances."


"It wasn't as bad as you think. Huntsville was a small town back then and everyone knew everybody. And everyone drank whiskey. It wasn't nothing for a bank president to stop us downtown and order a case of Canadian Club or a couple cases of Jack Daniels. Luke probably supplied half the big shots in Huntsville! Luke was a good looking, young, personable man and everyone liked him. If he had a weakness, it was a pretty



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woman.”

“That’s when he met your mother, Mary. She was young, maybe 17 or 18 years old. I don’t remember exactly how they met but it wasn’t long before Luke told me he was in love with her and was going to get married. When her parents heard about it they threw a fit. Said they weren’t going to have their daughter married to a whiskey man. Not long after that she and her family disappeared. Some people said they moved to Chicago where they had relatives.”

“It was about this time when Mary discovered she was pregnant. I found out later that she wanted to get in touch with Luke but her family talked her out of it, saying the baby didn’t need a daddy that was going to end up dead or in jail.”

“It was about two years later when a friend told me about Mary being pregnant and having a baby girl. When I told Luke, it almost drove him crazy knowing he had a daughter but not knowing anything about her. He tried everything in the world to get in touch with her. Her father wrote him a letter saying that Mary was happily married and to never contact her again. She did not want her little daughter to be known as a “bootlegger’s daughter.”

“Luke tried writing letters but they all came back unopened. He sent presents but they too were returned. He told me he could live without seeing his daughter, or helping raise her, as long as he could know something about her.”

“That’s where Uncle Bob came in. I had been friendly with Mary so Luke got me to write a letter to her, not mentioning him, but just saying that I had been wondering about them and wanted to send an early Christmas present. Luke put a hundred dollar bill in the envelope. That was a lot of money back then.”

“That letter did not come back.”

“Luke waited for a couple months and then had me send them another note with another hundred dollar bill. That one did not come back either. Luke had me do the same thing every couple of months for about a year. I never actually wrote anything much - just said that I hoped they were doing well and signed it Bob. Of

course, there was always the money.”

“About a year had passed when Luke told me to write again, send more money, but this time I should ask for pictures of my ‘niece’. Two weeks later the pictures arrived and Luke was the happiest man in the world. After that it was easy. Every time I sent money I would ask for more pictures or about how you were doing. Later on I even got her to send me copies of your report cards and programs for school plays that you were in.”

Teresa interrupted Bob’s story to ask, “Didn’t my mother know who was really sending the money?”

“Of course she did. She knew I didn’t have any money and that I was not really your uncle. But she liked the money and knew her husband would not object if it came from a supposedly wealthy uncle. All she had to do to keep the money coming was to send things about you. When she would slow down Luke would stop the money and it wouldn’t be long before another package would come. You might say that Luke trained her!”

“Over the years Luke must have sent you tens and tens of thousands of dollars. When you got your first



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**“Some of us have to learn from the mistakes of others. The rest of us have to be the others.”**

***Louise Avery, Huntsville***



car it was Luke who paid for it. He paid for your prom dresses, your doctor bills and your education. The only thing he ever expected back was a photo or maybe a newspaper clipping mentioning your name."

"When you graduated from college Luke was excited for months ahead of time. He actually bought a new suit and was going to attend your graduation. He said he was going to stand in the back of the room and just watch without anyone knowing. At the last minute he backed out, saying you might find out and that it might embarrass you. He said you didn't need a bootlegger for a father."

"After you were grown Luke talked several times about trying to contact you but I knew he never would. He was a proud man and deep in his heart I believe he was afraid that you would not have anything to do with him. I knew he would never risk that."

The tiny house grew silent as Bob finished his story. As he stood up to leave Teresa asked, "If he had that much money, why did he live like this?"

"Because he gave all of his money to you," Bob replied simply. "Before I leave there is something I want to give you." Walking into the bedroom he pulled an old suitcase from under the bed. "Luke told me shortly before he died that this suitcase made him the richest person on earth. I hope you will understand why."

After Bob left, Teresa opened the suitcase. It was packed with hundreds of photos of her. There were copies of report cards, prom invitations and dental bills. There were newspaper clippings of her engagement and wedding. There were receipts for birthday presents and copies of her school's newsletters.

Teresa spent hours going through the suitcase. It was al-

most like a time capsule of her whole life pieced together over the years by a man whom she had never known.

Sometime in the early hours of the morning when the last photo had been replaced and the suitcase closed she was left alone with her thoughts. Her husband had gone to bed hours earlier and the only light in the room came from the flickering flames in the stove. Suddenly, as she sat there wondering how many times her father had sat in front of that same stove, she began crying.

She cried for the father she had never known. She cried for all the gifts she had received without knowing they were from him. She cried because she had never tried to contact him. Suddenly she felt her husband's arms around her. "Don't be sad," he said.

"I'm not sad," she said, still crying. "I just feel so lucky to have had a father who cared about me so much. I so wish I could have met him."

Teresa and Al never had children of their own, but the following year they adopted a dark-haired baby boy, whom they named Luke.

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# Reuben Stone of Bloucher's Ford, Madison County, 1808

by Mike Self



Five-Time Great Granddaughters of Reuben Stone: Cathy Giles Self (right) and Christy Spelce Crenshaw (left)

Most Huntsville Madison County (H/MC) residents are generally familiar with the John Hunt story of how Huntsville was established: first as Hunt's Spring in 1805, in a cabin overlooking the Big Spring. Having established his squatter's rights by application and permission, John returns to Virginia to secure funds to purchase his claim at the August 1809 land sale held in Nashville for those properties in Madison County, Mississippi Territory. He does

not return in time to make the sale, giving Leroy Pope the opportunity to purchase the land and rename Hunt's Spring to Twickenham. The then citizens of Hunt's Spring, not taken with the name Twickenham, were successful in getting the township name changed to Huntsville in 1811.

Meanwhile, thirteen miles northeast of Hunt's Spring, on a small slice of the Flint River which would eventually become known as Bloucher's Ford, one can today find the Stone/Fanning family cemetery, one of 314 family cemeteries just in Madison County, and one of thousands which dot the landscapes of counties everywhere across America! The oldest plots in the Stone/Fanning cemetery belong to Reuben Stone and his wife, Priscilla. Both are buried there. Of importance, Reuben is listed on the same squatter's list as John Hunt. Reuben moved to Madison County in early 1808.

It would not become Madison County, officially, until December 13, 1808, but formed prior to the August 1809 Nashville land sale wherein Reuben Stone purchased 160 acres along the Flint. Thus began Reuben Stone's unbroken chain of descendants who to this day can bear the moniker of a true

Huntsville/Madison County "Native".

What makes our story most remarkable is the sheer number of Reuben's descendants who remained in H/MC and remain so to this day, either buried or still living! As one example, Reuben is the six time great-granddaddy of several Madison County born and raised residents.

In considering the following census information one grows to appreciate how very rare it is to find true H/MC natives: As recently as 1950 Huntsville was only the 13th largest town in all of Alabama, after Birmingham, Mobile, Gadsden, Tuscaloosa, Anniston, Bessemer, Florence, Phenix City, Selma, Dothan, Decatur and Pritchard. Huntsville's population in 1950 was only 16,406. Madison County's total population only ranked it seventh largest in the State at that time.

Today, Huntsville is the largest city in Alabama with a population over 215,300, and a county-wide population of over 390,000.

Reuben Stone was born in Fauquier (faw'keer) County, VA, in 1755. Fauquier County is in Northern Virginia, its county seat is Warrenton, and today the county is a part of the Washing-



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ton metropolitan area. It is one of the highest income counties in the United States.

Reuben himself was descended from a politically connected Stone family tree; a family heavily involved in the creation of the Colonies, and eventually, the United States. That influence started as early as being able to trace Reuben's heritage to Jamestown in 1623. Reuben's four time great granddaddy was William Stone, governor of Maryland from 1648-1654.

More significantly Reuben's granddaddy Thomas Stone was also David Stone's brother. David's first wife was Sarah Elizabeth Hanson. They had one child, Thomas Stone, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence from Maryland.

At age 18-20 Reuben moved with his parents to South Carolina, to the area which would eventually become Laurens County. Laurens County is in the northwest tip of South Carolina and is today in the metropolitan area of Greenville. Laurens County "hosted" more battles during the American Revolution than half of the other twelve colonies.

It would not officially become Laurens County until March 23, 1785. Its namesake was Henry Laurens, President of the Continental Congress during the Revolutionary War.

Prior to his Revolutionary War service Reuben joined the colonial militia of SC. Records show he served with a Captain Benjamin Raney's Company as they dealt with the Cherokee Indians. On the 5th of August, 1777 he volunteered to serve in place of Thomas Childers, who had volunteered in zeal to serve but had a sickly wife and family, so Reuben "stood" in his place.

Reuben served a total of 5 years, 9 months in the Colonial Army of South Carolina, with 3 years and 2 months of that time serving in the Revolution-

ary War. During that time he was an active participant in military campaigns against the British in Savannah, Stone Ferry, Charleston and St. Augustine, FL. He was captured by the British upon returning to Charleston from St. Augustine, but managed to escape. His enlistment expired and he did not re-enlist, due to poor health.

As previously discussed Reuben moved to Madison County in 1808 where he remained the rest of his life. He settled here with his wife Priscilla Fowler, and their five children; Jesse, Polly, Reuben Jr., John and Joel. Reuben Jr., would settle in Tennessee and John would return to Laurens County, while little is known about either Polly or Joel. Hence Jesse's lineage became the major lineage working its way down to today's living H/MC "Natives".

Jesse/Winnie's progeny generally cluster around the surnames of Stones, Fanning, Crim, Pettys, Rays, Siscos, and Giles. Sharon Brakefield (a living native of Madison County) is descended from Reuben, Jr., and his descendants' surnames tend to cluster around Stone, Kilpatrick, Oldfield, Whitfield, Thompson, Jacks and Morgan.

Reuben Stone lineage to today's H/MC Natives:

Reuben/Pricilla Fowler Stone - Stone/Fanning Cemetery, Madison County, Al. Children - Jesse, Polly, Reuben Jr., John and Joel

Jesse (son of Reuben/Pricilla)/Winnie Stone - Stone/Fanning Cemetery, Madison County, Al.

Children - Didimia, Drucilla, Frances, Lucinda, Nicy, Susan Ann, Stephen Jackson, William Mapp, Selena and Winnie.

Stephen Jackson (son of Jesse/Winnie)/Fanny Stone - unknown burial cemetery, probably Dallas, TX. One child, Cue.

William Cuedellas (Cue) (son of Stephen Jackson/Fanny)/Mary Rebecca Brown - both buried in Rice Cemetery, New Market, AL.

Children - William Lee, Edward, Charles and Blanton.

William Lee (Poppa Stone) (son of Cue/Mary)/Lou Ella Eaton - both buried in Cameron Church Cemetery, Gurley, Al.

Children - John, Myrtle, Neva, Minnie, Winnie, and Sue.

At this point (early 1900s) since Poppa and Granny Stone had five girls, the Stone family tree splits into a wide range of surnames: Stone, Ray, Petty, Sisco and Giles, many of which are today buried in Cameron Cemetery (Gurley), Locust Grove Cemetery (New Market) and Maple Hill Cemetery (Huntsville).

There are five additional generations of Stones descended from just William Lee (Poppa)/Lou Ella who call themselves true "Natives" of Huntsville/Madison County, Alabama.

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# All of God's Creatures

by Cathey Carney



He was struggling for life when she found him - a very small bird in a very large pond. He was just a baby, a little brown bird with a yellow beak, completely submerged except for one eye and part of his beak.

After she scooped him out of the water he was very still in her hand, though one eye was half opened,

She cradled the limp being in her hands, trying to support the tiny head. The warmth of her hands gradually revived him somewhat. Occasionally, he would open his eyes and look at the giant who was now patting his feathers with her blouse, trying to dry him off.

"Come on, little bird," she thought to him, "You can do it."

As he tried to right himself, all he could manage was to flex his feet slowly, one at a time. Soon the warmth of the sun began drying his feathers, and he lifted his head. Wrapping each foot securely around her finger, he began to rock back and forth, slowly, weakly at first then a little stronger.

He was able to open both eyes now, and was getting a bit stronger. It was a warm breezy day, as she sat quietly in the sun with the little baby. The back courtyard was a haven for birds of all kinds, feasting on seeds, nuts and fruit. That's how the bird had run into trouble in the first place, balancing on the fountain and trying to get a drink of water.

By now the baby, fully dried and no longer shivering, had traveled from his place on her chest to her neck - he seemed to like her hair and nestled there, listening intently to the chirping of the other birds.

She kissed the tip of his little yellow beak and he seemed surprised but allowed it. "I'm happy you are doing better," she thought. "You were almost gone."

She lifted him from underneath her hair and he looked up at her from his perch on her finger. He was getting stronger. He tried out his wings, then was gone. She watched him fly from branch to branch of a small tree in the courtyard. "Watch out for cats, little bird," she said. "And ponds."

Maybe it was her imagination, but as she turned to go into the house, it seemed as if the birds were singing much louder than normal.

**"When I finish eating I have to show both my hands to my dog, like I'm a blackjack dealer."**  
*Brandon Owens, Huntsville*

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# Local News in 1880



- Last Saturday night some malicious scoundrel killed a horse belonging to Mr. H.W. Helm, the well known blacksmith. The horse, a very fine one, was in the pasture bordering the spring branch and was killed by being struck just above the eye with a brickbat. We trust the perpetrator may be discovered and appropriately punished.

- Yesterday, in the Big Cove, a man named Stewart Wishard was shot and mortally wounded by a man named R.S. Buford, who was arrested. The trouble arose about a dispute in regard to crops. Wishard was cropping on Buford's place. It is thought Buford was justifiable.

- We understand it is reported through the country that yellow fever is in Huntsville. This is untrue. There has not been a single case of yellow fever in Huntsville up to this time.

- Mr. Timothy Murphy, of this city, received a dispatch last Friday from Canton, Miss., conveying the sad information that his wife, daughter and granddaughter were all down with yellow fever. Mr. Murphy left on the next train for Can-

ton, and it is reported he has been seized with the dread disease.

UPDATE. Since writing the above we have been informed that all of Mr. Murphy's grandchildren have the fever, and that one of them has died of the disease.

- Appeal to Mothers - Clothing partially worn or outgrown, sheets or bedding of any description, remnants of calico or domestic, such as always accumulate in families - any of all these articles are earnestly solicited for the Orphans of the plague-stricken city of Memphis, and will be thankfully received and immediately forwarded if sent to Mrs. S. R. Cruse, Adams Avenue,

- Miss Kate Erskine will open a School at the residence of Mrs. S. C. Erskine, on Frank-

lin Street, on Monday, the 2nd of September. The patronage of the public is respectfully solicited.

- Charles Rice, the one-eyed man who lives in Little Cove, was tried on a complaint before Justice Figg last Saturday, charged with an attempt to rape Linda Beasley, aged 10 years. Rice was arrested after an investigation of the facts committed. He came from Jackson County.

- Wanted - 10,000 pounds dried fruit for which the highest price will be paid. T. J. Humphrey, Hotel Building

**"My boss told me to  
have a good day, so I  
went home."**

**Ty Willis, Gurley**



# LAWREN'S\*

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**Ask  
Grandma**  
*by Mimi*

April showers bring May flowers. So lovely to see the spring flowers coming into bloom. People are starting to get out more and travel after being cooped up for two years. Be sure to support local restaurants and shops. They certainly need our help.

Easter is just weeks ahead on the 17th. Children really enjoy the special day. Besides church activities, they love to dye eggs, shop for their special Easter outfits and baskets. If you think ahead as I did for my children, I would line their Easter baskets with foil, then topsoil, and finally sprinkle with grass seeds, water, and leave in a sunny spot. By Easter, when little ones are going to egg hunts there will be natural grass growing in the baskets. I've seen white eggs that look so real at WalMart that they are suitable for dyeing. Children can have the fun of picking out the dye colors, and if they drop one, it won't break.

One unique idea for an Easter theme birthday party was what I did for one

of my children. I cut down several tree branches and placed them in a large pot full of dirt, sprayed them pink and hung decorated eggs with favors inside on the branches. These were used for party favors when the children were leaving the party.

Back in my day, long ago, it was so much fun going to the Lyric Theater on Saturday afternoon for the Kitty Club. On the Saturday before Easter, a man outside would sell baby chickens dyed pink, blue, yellow, and green in cages and baby rabbits in another.

One Easter morning, when I got up, there was Floppy in his cage just waiting for me.

- Please remain vigilant of the pandemic. It is getting better, but not quite over. Six million people worldwide have died so far from this terrible virus.

- The Greene Street open market on Eustis Street will be opening up again soon. Lots of fresh vegetables and some crafts will be available. Check them out. I'm sure you will find something to suit your fancy. They even have someone to sharpen your scissors and knives.

- If you can donate anything to the Ukrainian people. Check with your local church as many are collecting money and personal items being sent to Poland and given to the refugees. A million children need our help. It breaks my heart to see them suffering as they leave their homes, fathers and friends.

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# Severe Weather and Wichita

by Joe Cadotte

Nebulous lightning illuminated the sky above the old Radio Ranch, on Old Lawrence Road, in Wichita, Kansas. It was the summer of 2014. The sky was purple and red with what looked like hundreds of cloud-to-cloud lightning bursts.

Being practically a penguin where I'm from, it was some kind of Kansas northern lights event to me. The word "nebulous," came from a colleague the next day who said something along the lines of, "It's undocumented if it happened, and a once in a lifetime sight." It's been nearly eight years since then and I recently asked a meteorology friend what it was. He said it could have been a visual distortion of something common like intracloud lightning where lightning inside single clouds can light an entire sky in a sheet of light.

I'd like to think it was an extremely rare nebula of static electricity. Regardless, surreal weather is an honor to see. In Kansas, it's the sky. Nothing really happened that night though. All-hands-on deck severe weather lasted maybe a couple hours. It didn't become dangerous outside. There was no quarter-inch or dime-size hail smacking the windshield during nonstop, live coverage. There were no overturned semi-trailers or broken debris across highways empty of responders.

It was just a cosmic looking treat.

On the theme of outer space, I was driving home one night as a large, albino possum crossed Old Lawrence Road. I stopped the car and froze for about 30 seconds. The possum probably wasn't a hypnotist, rather extreme looking for sure. I thought it was some kind of mythical creature or alien. Being the most northern of northerners, I had never seen a possum before and didn't expect it to look like an escaped Roswell alien.

In the two years I was a reporter in Wichita, the possum incident was one of a few times I was scared to the point of shock.

I was raised to be stoic by my father. He helped raise 25 kids and was a main driving force behind the employee assistance program at Duluth, Minnesota's Post Office. Summer of 2010 held the worst flood in Duluth's recorded history as paved streets were ripped down its ancient mountain range. I told my dad to evacuate as the hill he lived on was falling apart. He was irritated and kept saying, "I'm fine."

Despite the world falling apart around him, he was fine.

A childhood friend recently challenged what I mean when I say I'm "stoic like my dad". Staying calm during chaos is part of that definition.

The second state of shock I experienced while working in Wichita came as I was driving towards an area where a large tornado was expected to touch down. There were kids in a fast food drive-through window making fun of me because I was in a news vehicle. I took my food and

looked up. The sky was uniformly rotating in every direction as far the horizon stretched. I sputtered out a live report about how people shouldn't be where I was, and waited for something to happen.

The tornado touched down about an hour and 15 miles later, carving a 300-foot wide path



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across Sedgwick County, Kansas. A trailer home, where two women lived, was picked up and thrown across a field. One woman suffered minor injuries. The other had a broken leg. There were no serious injuries besides that, and no fatalities.

KFDI-FM, in Wichita, deploys reporters and anchors to breaking news, weather and crime. News coverage is integrated with live music programming. That's rare for commercial radio. It's also rare to be able to interrupt songs with a citizens band radio.

Fun isn't the word. Severe weather is the financial buoy for newsrooms across the Midwest. In Wichita, it's part of the fabric of the community. Weather is an institution there. Having been part of that for two years, honored isn't the word.

In Huntsville, it's TV. Meteorologists drive around during severe weather events in the Tennessee Valley, reporting what they see for television broadcast. The reports are rebroadcast live on some radio stations. That's a few times per year. Appropriately so.

Like Hollywood portrays, tornado chasing in Kansas is glamorous. People from all over the world have second homes in Kansas and intentionally live there during severe weather season.

Yes, intentionally. Visibility makes tornado chasing possible across the plains.

In Alabama, it's about staying safe and staying alive. Across the south, in places like the Tennessee Valley, dangerous weather can pop out of nowhere amidst mountains, trees, hills, waterways and civilization.

The COVID-19 pandemic fast-forwarded the viewership, readership, listenership "cliff," anticipated since the Great Recession. From villages to cities, daily newspapers vanished and became digital. Turning on the radio and knowing what's going on with weather, traffic and crime, in real time, year round, is a powerful convenience.

If I had a magic wand, I'd make a live radio news team, like the one in Wichita, in every city.

Reporters and mainstream media will probably never completely vanish. There will always be a "news authority," to some extent.

As the spring severe weather season approaches, we may not have our own KFDI.

We do have phones with cameras, recorders and keyboards. Whether it's sending pictures,

video and information to local media outlets and the National Weather Service, or being trained as an official spotter, technology gives us all the power to pitch in when weather gets terrifying.

The National Weather Service is always looking for spotters. I'd encourage anyone interested to contact their local NWS office for educational materials and ways to become an official spotter.

Amidst an often confusing, emotional and chaotic media landscape, weather is objective.

Or so I pray.

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# THE BUTTERNUT TREE (1956)

by Bill Alkire



Let me start out with a confession. Boys and the male population in general can do dumb things. Okay! I have admitted this in writing. However, there are a few of you who will not admit it publicly. That said, one of us will do something stupid tomorrow, if not today. Right? We can leave it at that, just a secret between you and I (and anyone who reads this story). Let me not go astray or argue the point further. Let me tell of an event in my life - and you can judge me.

A neighbor's granddaughter came to visit for the summer from the city of Atlanta, Georgia. Being a nice southern gentleman (do not laugh) it was my duty, if not my responsibility to welcome her. I knew she would need to have someone to show her the importance of living in a small town. Did I fail to mention, she

**"My wife's jealousy is getting bad. The other day she looked at my calendar and wanted to know who 'May' was."**

**Rodney Dangerfield**

was an incredibly attractive young woman. Like I said, I felt obligated to protect her and to make sure she enjoyed her visit.

The only problem I encountered was with my brother, who had developed a nickname for her, Suzie "Buggerweed." Looking back, I guess in a way that would be funny - however, at the time it made me angry, it did not seem to bother her (much). I was doing my best to impress her. There were sev-

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eral teenagers and we all played games that by today's standards were quite primitive. She was having an incredible time and genuinely enjoying herself.

Once I fell into Ms. Jones' Peonies - which I had promised to avoid. I did not damage them too bad, but during the event, ants got on me, biting me. While we are about me doing dumb things, I will convey the major gist of this event, which I started to tell you the reader.

I tried to show "maturity" and demonstrate my various talents, like the ability to climb a tree. Unfortunately, I chose the wrong tree. Let me explain. To show my skills, going barefoot, and dressed only in shorts (it was early spring), I proceeded to climb a "Butternut" tree. I will boast that I was remarkably successful. I climbed all the way to the top of that Butternut tree and gave out my best Tarzan impersonation. I know Suzie was impressed (do not laugh).

The rest of the day was uneventful, it was hard to top an achievement like climbing a Butternut tree. That evening the realization of my stupidity hit and hit hard. Red splotches of rash began to appear and itch like crazy. I was covered on both arms, chest, legs, feet, everywhere with "poison oak"

I took cold oatmeal baths. I covered myself with Calamine and Benadryl lotion from head to foot. My groin area was by far the worst with blisters oozing fluid. The heat added to the misery. My body was one big red itchy blob. The doctor prescribed liquid Benadryl along with a topical medication. He gave me a shot as well to help with the itching. He told me his youngest daughter about my age had gotten into a patch of "poison oak," but not as bad as what I had.

It was a challenge to prevent the spread of the blisters into my eyes as the rash moved from my chest and arms to my neck and face. It took a week before any relief came. I was also unable to eat because my lips were swollen with the rash. I was one sick "puppy" and whimpered and cried in distress.

The scars from the poison oak remained for 6 months and the rash would reappear occasionally on my legs. Suzie went back to Atlanta, Georgia. We communicated for a while - she sent me picture for her 16th birthday. Most of this story is lost in time and memory - except for the poison oak trauma. I think I will remember that the rest of my life. It may not have been the dumbest thing I have ever done... if not, it must be a close second.

**Dad, are we pyromaniacs? Yes, we arson.**

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# Heard On the Street

by *Cathey Carney*



Our picture in the March issue for Photo of the Month was artist **David Nutall**, a talented man who works out of Lowe Mill and is known by so many. The first correct guess came from **Jan and Fred Dieterich** of Huntsville. Fred is owner of Datatech and Woodtech here in Huntsville. Jan told me they have known David for years and love the maps that he draws. Congratulations to you!

Then were you able to find the little hidden daffodil I put in the March issue? It was on the last page, p. 48, towards the right bottom. See it now? It was really tiny but **Mary Harris** was the first to find it and call. She lives in New Hope and was thrilled to be the winner. Congrats to you Mary!

Old Huntsville magazine has been seeing price increases in paper and printing for several years now, like most all publications.

We tried to absorb it and not increase prices but we have made the decision to sell the magazines for \$2 starting in April and Subscriptions are \$50/year. We have not had an issue increase in many years but now in order to stay in business, we have to. We hope you our readers understand and hope you continue loving these stories. Many are opting for digital subscriptions which are \$25/year - and you get a new issue in your email each month. Times are changing so fast and each day brings something new. Please help out our local businesses, everyone is hurting right now.

**Phyllis and Billy Lawrence** are two of our sweet subscribers from Murfreesboro, TN and she called to tell me they will be celebrating their wedding anniversary in April. She said they will have been married for 48 wonderful years on Apr. 27. Phyllis will be having a birthday on April 19 so Happy Birthday to you!

**Steph Troup** came up with a great idea for retirement homes - and this may be happening in other states - but wouldn't it be great if colleges could be associated with retirement homes? Even a small community college on the same campus as a retirement home. That way the older folks could still attend classes, and mixing older folks and younger people would be uplifting to both I think! I think they do that in parts of Europe but I'd love to see that in Alabama.

Here's why it may be a good idea to **drink more lemon juice**. It can help balance uric acid levels

because it makes the body more alkaline. Uric acid is what collects in the joints and causes that severe pain with gout and arthritis. According to the British Medical Journal, lemon juice causes your body to release more carbonate. The calcium mineral bonds to uric acid and breaks it down to water and other compounds. This makes your blood less acidic and lowers uric acid levels in your body. I tried a tablespoon of lemon juice in a cup of water with a little honey and not only was it tasty, in a few days I could tell I had less joint pain. Maybe coincidental but I'm sticking with it!

SO excited that **Lowe Mill Concerts on the Dock** starts up again April 22 from 6-9pm then every Friday evening thru May. Bring your chairs and pets and drinks of choice for some amazing music on the dock. We LOVE it. 2211 Seminole Drive off Governors Drive.

We wanted to wish a Happy Happy 76th Birthday to that handsome **Roy Graham**, on March 4. His dear friend **Pam Gasser** of Cullman called and told me that he doesn't mind turning a year older and is one of the nicest peo-

## Photo of The Month

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

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ple you'll ever meet. So we want to add to that and send LOVE to you Roy!

Special greetings to our dear friend **Mary Jane Miller** who lives in Grand Prairie, TX. She is one of our nationwide subscribers who looks each month for the hidden item and occasionally finds it. I'm doing my job!

Did you know that there is a really good **Creative Writing class** offered at the Senior Center? So many people would love to write down their memories or even just try their hand at fiction stories but don't know how to start. These classes are FREE for those 55 and over Thursdays from 1-3pm. Just show up, visit and sign in if you like what you see. Experienced instructors teach techniques the first hour, then the class reads short stories the second hour. Email [mdsmith@hiwaay.net](mailto:mdsmith@hiwaay.net) for more info.

Because of the age group that frequents the Senior Center, their policy is that anyone who comes in needs to have had Covid shots.

Our Senior Editor for Old Huntsville, **Cheryl Tribble**, is the lady who catches all of my typos and grammatical misses - She is ruthless about the number of errors she finds and corrects. Happy Birthday to this sweet lady who celebrates her day on April 27!

When you meet **Ianthia Bridges**, who works at the teller window at Truist/BBT bank on Church Street, you would think she's in her early 30s. I was shocked when I found out recently she will celebrate her 25th year of work at the bank, on Aug. 18 this year. That can't be possible, I want to find out what vitamins you're taking! She told me she is celebrating some important dates in April:

Her Grandmother, **Helen Ramsey** (in heaven) has an Apr. 14 birthday; her aunt **Margaret Ramsey** (lives in Camden, Al) has an April 14th birthday as well and her cousin **Tina Ramsey** of Birmingham will be partying on April 19th! A beautiful family and Happy Birthday!

**Sam Keith** and I recently ate at a little historic eatery called Honey's that's been on the square in Fayetteville, TN since 1923. When you go in there it's like stepping back in time. Booths along the wall with a diner atmosphere, walls full of old pictures. I talked with the owner **Lee McAlister** and he said they get people from Huntsville often and he appreciates all his customers!

If you love burgers, Honey's features the Slawburger. What is a Slawburger you ask? Years ago, Lee's great grandfather had the brilliant idea of putting his mustard-based slaw on top of his grilled hamburgers, and the rest is history. The slaw adds a sweet and sour flavor that is definitely unique. In fact, once a year it is celebrated at the annual Slawburger Festival. Google Honey's for their hours.

You know I hid something tiny in this issue of Old Huntsville. Of course it's a bunny

right? If you happen to find my baby bunny and haven't won before and are the first to call - you win a \$50 subscription to the magazine. But to shake it up a bit I have hidden a **tiny heart** in this issue also - because we could all use more love now. So you have to find BOTH in order to win. But I won't get any calls, it'll be way too difficult for you to find both of them.

A happy birthday wish to **Gale Nichols** who lives in Athens. She turned 75 on March 13 and says that sounds old. To me that sounds middle-aged these days! We hope you had a happy day.

Have a warm and fun time this Easter. Remember those who may be going through bad times and not want to share it. Be kind to others and be especially kind to yourself!



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**MARIA BELLO LLERENA**

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**MY WIFE MARIA IS THE LOVE OF MY LIFE. I DIDN'T GET TO BE WITH HER AS LONG AS I WANTED, AND I MISS HER EACH DAY. HOLD YOUR LOVED ONES CLOSE, NEVER MISS A MOMENT TO TELL THEM HOW MUCH YOU LOVE THEM.**

*Oscar Llerena, Huntsville High  
Class of 1966*



# Depression Recipes

## Southern Yam Pie

1-1/2 lb. yams baked til soft  
 1 c. sugar or syrup  
 1/4 lb. butter  
 Nutmeg

Peel cooked yams. Beat all ingredients til well blended and pour into 8" pie shell. Bake at 350 til crust and filling are lightly browned. Serve with whipped cream and sprinkle with nutmeg.

## Easy Hot Dish

Into a casserole, crumble 1 pound lean ground beef. Add 5 medium potatoes, sliced; 2 medium-size onions, chopped; 1 cup green beans, seasoning as you go. Pour 1 pint tomato juice over, cover and bake 2 hours.

## Fresh Corn Cakes

6 lg ears of corn cut from cob  
 Add 1/2 c. flour  
 1 egg

1 T. oil  
 Salt and pepper to taste  
 Mix well and bake on hot griddle 10-15 minutes. Serve for breakfast or hearty lunch.

## Leather Britches

On a heavy thread and needle string green beans. Hang in a warm place to dry. Can be placed on a screen to dry. When completely dry store in a dry place for winter.

To cook, place amount desired in boiling water - add good piece of jowl of bacon, salt to taste and cook til tender.

Apple slices can be dried this way and eaten all winter as snacks for the family.

## Bread Soup

2 c. water  
 2 T. olive oil or bacon grease  
 2 cloves garlic minced  
 Salt to taste  
 1 mint sprig  
 2 eggs

4 slices white bread

Bring water, oil and salt to boil. Poach the eggs in the boiling water. In serving bowl place bread and mint. Pour boiling water and eggs over the bread, cover and let stand a few minutes to soak.

## Cockeyed Cake

1-1/2 c. plain flour  
 1 c. sugar  
 1 t. baking soda  
 1/2 t. salt  
 3 T. cocoa  
 3 t. oil  
 1 t. vinegar  
 1 t. vanilla  
 1 c. cold water

Combine dry ingredients with a wire whisk. Make 3 wells and pour oil, vinegar and vanilla separately into each well.

Pour cold water over all and mix well with wire whisk. Bake in 9 inch pan 30 minutes at 350. Cool and frost or leave as is. Your family will love this.

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## Applesauce Cookies

- 1-1/2 c. brown sugar
- 1 c. apple sauce
- 2 egg whites, frothy
- 1/4 c. heavy cream
- 3-3/4 c. flour
- 1 t. baking powder
- 1/2 t. baking soda
- 1/2 t. salt

Cream sugar and applesauce. Add egg whites and beat well, add cream and beat again. Whisk dry ingredients together in bowl. Stir well into creamed mixture. Chill for an hour then roll into walnut size balls, flatten with hand and bake 10 minutes at 375.

**Frost with Browned Butter Frosting, follows:**

- Browned Butter Frosting**
- 2 T. butter
  - 2 c. powdered sugar
  - 1/4 c. skim milk

Brown butter in small frypan. Stir in powdered sugar with enough milk to allow easy spreading. Spread over cookies while still warm.

## Chewies

- 1/2 t. vanilla
- 3/4 c. brown sugar

1/2 c. flour  
1/8 t. baking soda  
Whisk egg lightly, add vanilla and brown sugar and whisk to blend. Stir in flour and soda with spatula. Spread in 8" oiled pan and bake at 350 for 20-25 minutes til golden. Cut while still warm and loosen from pan after 15 minutes.

## Sausage Hash

1 onion, halved lengthwise, then sliced crosswise  
4 oz. sausage  
1 lb. red potatoes, uncooked, unpeeled, sliced thin  
Layer in a buttered pan in order given. Cook, covered, on medium-high, turning to brown evenly, about 20 minutes.

## Home Fries

2 T. bacon grease  
2 T. butter  
6 medium-sized potatoes, sliced  
1 medium onion, diced  
1/2 c. finely chopped celery  
1/2 c. green pepper, chopped  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Dash garlic powder

Heat your bacon grease and butter in a large skillet over high heat. Add the potatoes, onion, celery and green pepper. Lower heat to medium and cook, stirring often, til the potatoes are browned on all sides. Season them with a half teaspoon each salt and pepper.

Cover with a tight-fitting lid, cook for 20 minutes or well browned. Stir, taste and add more seasonings as you like. When crispy and brown, remove potatoes from pan, drain on paper towels and enjoy.

## Pecan Candies (More Recent)

For a different kind of pecan dessert, take some Kraft caramels, unwrap them, put them in a microwave bowl and heat til melted, about a minute or so.

Take some large pecan halves and dip them in the caramel, covering only half the pecan. Place on waxed paper that has been greased with butter, cool and try to save some for later.

You'll find yourself eating most of them right off the waxed paper!



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# The Adventures of Young David

by *Iolanda Hicks*

We all have so many stories to tell. Some are funny, some are sad and some are just happy. Last year I shared my story of how my childhood sweetheart, David, came back into my life again (A New Beginning). After fifty plus years of being apart and living our other lives, we are now together as one. The following is a short story of my David when he was a little boy, living in Buckroe Beach, Virginia. It is such a neat story so I wanted to share.

David was actually a very precocious young man. During the early fifties, he grew up without a sibling until he was eight years old, David managed all kinds of ways to explore, make friends and get into mischief! He was rather a free spirit and roamed around his neighborhood with little fear. His mother, Mary, earned money by sewing for the Army (officer)wives living at nearby Fort Monroe. David's Dad George was the storeroom manager at the Chamberlain Hotel on Old Point Comfort there at Fort Monroe. George usually worked from one in the afternoon until nine at night, with one day off a week.

Mary would save the money she made from sewing and twice a year, traveled to Richmond to buy clothing for herself, David and George. She would shop at all the fine stores, like Miller and Rhodes and Tahlhimers. Since George was an employee at the Chamberlain Hotel, he and his family had free accommodations at any one of the hotels in the chain.

Mary would reserve her room for four or five days at a time

at the Richmond Hotel, whenever her shopping trip came up. When it was time for Mary's trips, George, on his way to work, would drive Mary and David to the train station in Phoebus. In later years, when it was more affordable, a second car was added to the family's transportation: a 1953 Dodge with a powder blue bottom and a navy blue top. Then the trips to

Richmond were by car, with Mary driving.

David loved the train! It was a steam locomotive train of the Chesapeake and Ohio Line and boy did it go fast! The train would make a half a dozen stops along the way, but it made the ride longer and David loved it. Almost immediately, on his first train ride to Richmond, David made friends with the baggage car master. David would, from then on, with every trip, make his way to the baggage car to ride with his good friend. David had a magic with people, at least most that he met. He never met a stranger and with his sunny smile and energetic enthusiasm, he was always welcomed where ever he went. Mary didn't mind, since everyone that met David loved him and watched out for him. He was such a friendly and good spirited boy. When David visited the baggage car, he would make sure he had plenty of his favorite gumdrops to share with his friend. That man loved gumdrops too.

Once in Richmond, David and his Mom got a taxi to the Richmond Hotel and upon arriving, received all the amenities as they would have had, had they been paying guests. Dicky, the doorman, greeted David by name as they entered the hotel. David always felt like a grown up at the Richmond and so special.

There were two bellboys that David got to meet. One was Clarence, who got on well with David. But the other bellboy, Booker, just didn't like him. David could never figure out why, since he considered himself such a friendly fellow. Another friendly employee at the hotel was Mamie. Mamie was one of the housekeepers. She doted on David. Many times, she would slip him a dollar and tell him to go get himself something sweet, which he did of course!

Mabel was the elevator operator and David always enjoyed the ride to the hotel room. Mabel, in no time at all, through the sweet coaxing of David, began to show him how the elevator worked. It wasn't an easy job to get the elevator to work and to stop on each of the floors. There was a handle you had to move back and forth

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and then stop it just so, to get the elevator to the right floor. David was in wonder of the person named Otis, engraved on the elevator wall. He knew that man must have been a very smart person to have created such a fun ride.

After a time, Mabel let David try his hand at running the elevator (with her watchful eye), when it was not busy. On one of those days, a man got on the elevator and began talking to the "boy" elevator operator. To Mabel's dismay and David's delight, this man was the president of the chain of hotels of which the Richmond Hotel belonged, Mr. John Pascale. The Chamberlain and the Jefferson Hotel were part of that chain. Mr. Pascale had one of his offices in the Richmond Hotel and was on his way to his office that day.

Of course, from then on, David and Mr. Pascale became fast friends. Any time David went down to Mr. Pascale's office, he was always welcomed. Mr. Pascale would sometimes order lunch for the two of them. In fact, on one occasion, Mary could not find her son. After checking with the bellboy, she was told that David was with Mr. Pascale in the executive dining room. David was being waited on and ordering from the menu. I know he felt important! You can imagine all the interesting conversations David probably had with Mr. Pascale! As far as David knew, Mabel had not been fired.

On some of the days that David had some free time, after an exhausting day of shopping with his mother and trying on clothes, he would explore. He wandered into one of the other hotels nearby, probably the Jefferson, and made fast friends there. One of them was Fritz the chef. Fritz would set a small table up just for David on those Richmond shopping trips. When David showed up, Fritz would make David grilled cheese sandwiches with frilly toothpicks adding pickles, potato chips to his plate and coke in a bottle to drink. What feasts David enjoyed with Fritz!

On another leisure day, while sitting on a bench at the nearby park he frequented,

David became enthralled with feeding the resident squirrels. This park was across the street from the Richmond Hotel and in the area where the Virginia governing bodies resided. The legislature and the governor's mansion were located nearby. Soon a well-dressed man sat down next to him and David, being the friendly kid he was, started a lively conversation with the man. Surprisingly, the man was the governor of Virginia, who was taking a brief break during the lunch hour. David now thinks it was Governor Thomas Bahnsen Stanley who was governor from January 1954 until January 1958.

The governor was so impressed with David that he invited him and his mother to the governor's mansion that night for a visit. Once David's mother got over the shock that her son had met the governor and got an invitation for the evening at the governor's mansion, they went!

David had so many adventures during his early years. He never had a problem making friends. Even today, David still has a way with people. An image of that precocious, smiling little eight year old boy pops up, in my mind, when I watch David talking with a stranger or when he is on the phone. Even though he is no longer that eight year old little boy, David still has that magic!



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# Redstone Arsenal Railroad Spur



Arsenal Rail Spur  
Timer pile trestle spanning Huntsville Spring  
Branch (a.k.a) Pinhook Creek

by **Bob Baudendistel**, painting and story

On July 3, 1941, The Huntsville Times Extra Addition featured a headline with perhaps the biggest news ever to hit town. Huntsville had been selected for a new \$40 million dollar chemical warfare depot in response to President Roosevelt's proclamation declaring the U.S. in a state of military emergency. The Federal Land Bank of New Orleans proceeded to purchase and/or condemn over 32,000 acres of land which would become today's Redstone Arsenal.

U.S. Army personnel met with members of the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis (N.C. & St. L.) Railway in Huntsville to discuss plans for a new arsenal spur. A site was selected near Byrd Spring where a topographic ridge allowed the proposed corridor to effectively bypass nearby wetlands. Grade work commenced along the existing railroad north of the current Martin Road/Memorial Parkway interchange. Proceeding west, the new roadbed required minor cuts and fills over the first 1-1/2 miles leading to Pinhook Creek where a timber pile trestle was built. The arsenal boundary was 1/2 mile further out. Proceeding onto the base, a staging yard was once located near the current Sparkman Center where the arsenal's rail network branched out all across the base.

At the peak of World War II, the installation included 75+ miles of active rail line running on a 24 hour timetable using 3 off-post rail connections. Carloads of munitions being

transported required double-header steam power with trains exceeding 60-70 cars. Highly sensitive movements were protected by armed guardsmen and carried out during the late night hours to thwart enemy detection.

The missile defense and space era throughout the 1950s and 60s brought expanded rail traffic. Incoming coal continued to supply fuel for steam furnaces until natural gas was later used. Smaller rockets, missiles, heavy artillery, and tanks were transported with U.S. Army DODX rail equipment. Testing of NASA's rocket propulsion engines required specialized rail cars equipped to safely transport liquid fuel produced by Linde at its Hobbs Island plant.

In 1967, the U.S. Government sold/quit claimed external portions of its Farley rail spur over to the Industrial Development Board. The rail spur near Byrd Spring remained active until 1974 when a fire razed the Pinhook Creek trestle. This left the entire installation at the mercy



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**Saturday, April 30, 2022**

Even if you cannot make the reunion, we still would like your contact information. You never know who might want to reach out to you and make your day!

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of one remaining rail connection near Gate 9 and adjacent to the airfield. Liftoff into the space age with the shuttle program brought a sharp decline in the demand for rail service as the arsenal trended more toward research and development. Most remaining track across the base was then removed and sold for scrap.

The rail spur near Byrd Spring carries quite a history in its tracks. After construction of the Memorial Parkway corridor in 1955, Vermont Road was extended over a right-of-way immediately adjacent to that of the arsenal rail spur while providing access to the city's wastewater treatment plant. Properties along the road were then developed with light and heavy industry including a rock quarry, a ready-mix concrete plant, asphalt mixing, and recycling services; some of which were serviced by rail.

Out west of the creek and south of Chelsea remained a small farming community spared from the arsenal land acquisitions. Cousins Danny and Jerry who grew up off Triana Boulevard toward Merrimack shared some interesting stories with the arsenal spur. The trestle provided them with a convenient pathway across the creek where in addition to ruffle hunting, they would visit Fleming's Lake to go frog gigging.

One day while fishing from atop the trestle, an approaching train forced them to run for cover. The times they spent along the rail spur were even more adventure-some at times. One day a train was stopped outside the arsenal gate when the boys climbed a freight car riding out onto the base only to be apprehended by military police who escorted them back into custody with their parents near Chelsea. Thankfully, no charges were ever filed.

With so much history riding these rails and their 30+ years of active duty, it is intriguing to pause for a moment and reflect back on its ties to the historical significance with the Arsenal. It included the active military personnel for which it served at home and overseas and to the brave men and women who piloted the United States into the space and missile defense programs; many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice protecting our nation and its freedom.

For what it's worth, the year was 1996 where an adult soccer league was comprised of teams with affiliations to local aerospace and defense contractors including Intergraph, Nichols Research, Adtran,

NASA and others. Our Intergraph team was playing for a division championship against an opponent from Decatur. Kickoff was scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on a warm spring-like Sunday afternoon at the Rick Cooper Memorial Park (aka Rugby Field) off the southern end of Triana Boulevard behind Jordan's Place.

Just minutes before game time, the referee called over both teams stating, "We have a problem." Turns out, the netting with each goal was loose and in order to meet league rules, the nets would have to be fully secured and anchored to the turf enabling game officials to make an accurate determination with any scoring. Everyone struggled to find a solution as the nearest hardware store was 30 minutes out.

While studying the former arsenal railroad in a nearby wooded area, midfielder Bob said "We got this!" as he summoned two team members. Like warriors, the three trampled through overgrown blackberry and honeysuckle where buried beneath the brush they uncovered rail spikes hidden within a mixed layer of coal cinders and ballast. Minutes later, they reappeared out of the woods in full (soccer) uniform carrying 8-10 rail spikes each. Bob also reclaimed a large rock previously used for rip-rap near the former creek trestle using it for a hammer driving in the rail spikes to secure the nets.

After the referee gave things a final inspection, the game was on with no questions asked. At halftime the score was tied 1-1. Intergraph's head coach approached Bob asking, "How did you know about these spikes?" Gasping for air while sipping on Gatorade, Bob replied, "Never mind, it's a long story!"

Soon, the whistle blew kicking things off into the second half. The final score was 3-1 with Intergraph claiming victory and the division championship.

One week later the team celebrated at a local roadhouse restaurant with trophies being awarded. Bob was presented his trophy as most-improved player after scoring four goals throughout the season. Over the cheers and applause the coach asked him, "Where ya' gonna put this trophy?" Bob responded, "We'll burn that bridge when we get there!"

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# Webster

by Catherine Cameron



I think this story is about an unusual dog. Through the years my family, consisting of my husband Robert, 3 children & me have had a lot of pets. This story started after the children had grown up & left home. My husband, Robert got home from work earlier than I did. In the summer afternoons he spent a lot of time across the street with our neighbors. Wade & Vivian Cowen. Sometimes he would help them shell lima beans or snap green beans. They were in their seventies and were newly-weds. Wade had brought his little brown dog into the marriage. They had both lost their mates. Anyway, Robert became attached to the dog, Webster, who was a very smart Heinz-57 mix.

Before long, Wade died and left Vivian and Webster alone. Vivian would spend a few days with her son & his family in Georgia. She would take Webster to the vet's for them to board him while she was gone. She wasn't real fond of the dog, anyway. She made a comment to Robert, that Webster got a kidney infection every time she left him. Robert asked me if I would mind if we kept him when she went away. I reluctantly consented.

The next time she went on a trip, we kept Webster for her. He was house-broken and

content to be with us. Robert told her if she ever wanted to get rid of Webster, we would take him.

One day, while I was at work, my co-worker, who is a neighbor, told me that Vivian had taken Webster to the vet for them to find another home for him. I was so angry, and I called Vivian and I was not able to control my anger when I asked why she had done that. I told her that Robert had told her we would take him. She remarked that she didn't think we needed another dog. (At the time, we had our son's black lab, that we were keeping until he had a place for her. She had a pen and dog house.)

I told her we wanted Webster. Because of his age, we did not think anyone would adopt him. He was probably 8 years old at the time. Vivian told me the name of the vet's practice where she had taken him, which was about 15 miles away and she gave me directions. She had taken him to the vet that Wade had always used.

I left work, using my lunch hour, to get the dog. I called the vet's office, and told them that I was on my way to get

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Webster. I was afraid they would euthanize him before I could get there.

When I arrived, he came walking out and came right to me. He put his front paws on my legs. These people always charge when you adopt a pet. When I asked them the price, they said that I did not owe them anything. All of the personnel were smiling. I think they were delighted that he was getting a home.

Without a problem, Webster went walking to my car, with a happy demeanor. I did not have to carry him. Did he know he was going home with me? He had never even been in my car. He went right to my car and hopped in when I opened the door. He got in my lap, so he could look out the window.

When we neared home, Webster got excited. He began to whine and his tail was wagging with excitement. Then he did some happy barks. I put a leash on him with a long chain & tied him to a tree, because I was afraid he would go across the street to his home. I had to go back to work.

Robert did not know what had had happened, as his work place did not encourage phone calls except in an emergency. When I got home, Robert had Webster in the house with him. After about 4 days, we did not put him on a leash. In those days, we could let a dog run loose. He never left the yard, unless we were with him.

Surprisingly, he never offered to go across the street to his original home. Robert commented that he knew I had rescued him. It seems that was the way he felt.

Robert had a vegetable garden, so one day he called Vivian and asked her to help him shell lima beans. Webster barely acknowledged Vivian. He acted as if he did not know her. We could not believe the way

he acted. He knew we loved him and he was very content with us.

As the years passed, Webster got arthritis and I had to carry him up and down the steps to permit him to use the bathroom. He was probably 14 years old at the time. He began to have a type of seizure. He would yelp and pass out for a few seconds. We did not take him to the vet, as we felt it was a part of his aging.

He began to worsen and Robert and I had to make the difficult decision. Robert would not go with me to the vet's.

I held this precious little dog that had brought so much joy to our lives and cried as he breathed his last. I would not

let the vet keep his body. I cried all the way home.

Robert buried him in the garden where he had spent so many happy hours following Robert while he was working there. It was a sad decision that we made, but Webster had gotten to the point he had no quality of life. He had been very happy with us for several years.

Ironically, his former owner, died a year after Webster came to live with us.

**"I'm not always rude and sarcastic - sometimes I'm asleep."**

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# EASTER BUNNY AND THE RABBIT FARMER

by M. D. Smith, IV



April 1970, we lived in the house we built on Monte Sano. It had a six-foot chain-link fence around our back yard, with maroon-colored aluminum privacy panels woven in the links. Perfect for both our growing family of three children and pets. From the first two kittens, Judy and I got in 1962, shortly after we married, we always had pets.

Now with our seven, five and one-year-old boys, Easter was coming. Judy and I visited a pet store, thinking maybe getting a few baby chickens like we'd both had as kids. Or perhaps a couple of ducks we'd let go at Big Springs in the summer, as we'd done the previous year.

Judy made the mistake of picking up a solid black baby rabbit, stroked its soft fur, put it to her cheek, and the decision for an Easter Bunny present was made—a bunny from the "Big Bunny".

Easter morning was squealing fun when the signal to "Go" sounded, and the living room egg hunt began. Then they noticed the cardboard box in the corner with wire and a weight on top. They loved the new baby bunny the Easter Rabbit left them. The kids wanted to know if he could have baby bunnies when he grew up, and we told them this was a "Daddy" rabbit. The name stuck.

A simple cage called a "hutch", that was all wire, with a sheet of tin weighted down with two bricks for a roof, worked fine. We'd open the door to change the water and add food, and the wire bottom, propped on bricks, let waste go out, and we could move the cage to new grass spots around the yard. Daddy Rabbit ran loose when kids were playing with him. Put him up at night because rabbits can dig under a fence like a dog.

Everyone loved the soft fur, and domestic rabbits are very tame, even more so if handled often. The subject of rabbits reproducing came up often, so when "Daddy" rabbit was full-grown and about ten pounds, a good-sized rabbit. We decided on a mate for him, and "Flopsy" arrived. She had long ears and was brown and white in splotches. She was a smaller breed, but the pet shop said it would be fine.

After just a couple of days in separate cages, we put Daddy Rabbit in with Flopsy. What you've heard about a pair of rabbits reproducing is all true. The male knows what to do, and in less than a minute, he flopped over on his side inside the cage, and he was successful and finished (I think he was smiling). Separate them again, and in 30 days, eight nearly hairless mouse-size babies were born in the straw-filled nest box. In a month, all the babies were jumping around inside the cage and starting to eat the Purina Rabbit Chow I had been feeding the adults.

That was so easy, and we sold the little ones for \$5 each, a lot of money in 1970. After that, it hooked me on the idea of breeding rabbits. I bought books on raising rabbits, found plans for building long wire cages (hutches), with room for three rabbits (and family) per section, and a wood frame to hold three stacked sections with the roof on top—a total of nine hutches. I could fill the automatic feeders from the outside, fill the water troughs, and never open

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a cage door. I bought breeding pairs of the New Zealand White rabbit whose fur and meat were in demand, New Zealand Reds with beautiful reddish-brown fur, Siamese Satins resembling a Siamese cat, and some white Angoras who have very long white hair. It gets tangled, and you have to brush the knots out. That was too much trouble and I didn't keep them long. I was looking at farmland in the country and thinking of becoming a rabbit farmer. Of course, I'd have to commute to my job at the TV station on Monte Sano, but someday, I might retire and be full time in my business.

Time passes, and it's a growing amount of work to shovel up the rabbit pellets from under the back of the cages that rolled down the tin sheet between tiers of enclosures to the ground. It's a wonderful fertilizer because, unlike any other manure, you don't have to compost it. You can put it right on the ground near plants, or better, mixed with the soil. It's terrific for flowers and gardens.

Judy remembers how green everything was at our house on the mountain. Doe rabbits can have four litters a year of babies and average seven per litter. One female produces twenty-eight babies, thus you can see how quickly you have more than you can possibly house. Remember, they "breed like rabbits".

Season's change, cold weather comes again, and by the fall of 1972, I had over a hundred rabbits in about 60 cages. You only need a couple of males, called bucks, I had bred many doe rabbits in November and little ones were in lots of the cages. By late December I'd run out of space to put the juniors when it became too crowded in the mother's cage. They wore me out building the wire cages out of 30" rolls of wire of 1" x 1/2" squares. I'd cut 90" long, for top and bottom of three 30x30 square cages that were 18" high. Mount latching doors (12" x 12" large enough for a wooden nest box to come in and out) and cutouts for food and water troughs.

My thoughts of me continuing to build the Smith Rabbit Empire lost some of its glitter. I won't go into the vet issues, having to give

my rabbits shots when they got sick, and everything you might encounter in raising any furry, warmblooded pet. You also have to keep track of mothers, brothers, and sisters for future breeding, so I had to tattoo a unique number in each rabbit's ear and keep records on them when time to breed the young ones. I tried to sell off the young males I didn't want to keep feeding, but sales are slow in winter,

Christmas Day arrives. After seeing what Santa brought to the kids, opening gifts, and putting the turkey on to cook, it was time for Farmer Smith to go out for feed, water, and shoveling rabbit pellets duty. It was sleeting, turning to snow, and a brutally stiff wind at thirty degrees whistled across the top of the mountain. As I pulled up my coat tighter and lugged a 25-pound sack of Purina Rabbit Chow out of the tin storage shed in the backyard near the cages, I looked up at the sky. I pictured myself doing this on a larger scale, every day of my life, for untold numbers of years.

Farmers don't get holidays off, like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, or any vacation. I didn't have any helpers.

I remember saying out loud.

"No more. I don't want to be a rabbit farmer anymore. I want to live a normal life."

In less than two months, I'd sold every rabbit I had except Daddy Rabbit and Flopsy, the only two that had names and were pets. All the others were just "a farm product" not to be handled, thus getting attached by my wife and kids.

I made a decent profit selling all the cages and many rabbits to another family that lived in the country and wanted to go into the business. I just smiled as their truck carried off the cages.

By that Easter, I was out of the rabbit farming business and have never been sorry. The Easter Bunny left only eggs and candy that year and not a single chocolate bunny.



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# PRECIOUS MEMORIES

by Elizabeth Wharry



My sister Jean married her sweetheart Don in April 1960. As I was growing up, they were always Jean, Don and the kids. I was just barely 2 years old. My niece was 3 years my junior, so we used to play together. Then came the three boys. All four were spaced 2 or 3 years apart.

Fast forward to April 2010. Jean and Don now have 4 children, several grandchildren and a great grandchild. Some things had changed in those 50 years. One thing had not changed. Their steadfast loving devotion to one another and their faith in God. Their special anniversary day started

out with a Mass at a Catholic church.

During that Mass, instead of the usual sermon that follows a reading from the New Testament, their children read the loveliest tributes to their parents. I saw a side to my sister and brother-in-law that I wasn't aware of.

Seeing my niece and nephews that day was a bit of a surprise. We had lost touch over the years. My niece had become a beautiful woman, and my nephews had grown into handsome young men.

After the Mass, there was a luncheon/reception at the reception hall that was on the church property. I finally had a chance to look at the original wedding pictures! My sister and her husband looked radiant in them. Fifty years later, the radiance was still there, along with maturity and wisdom.

A month or so later, they went on a "honeymoon" of sorts with their children, a daughter-in-law and several grandchildren. It was to be their last trip together. Jean was told by her doctor that she had Stage IV bone cancer and extended travel would be out of the question.

Sadly, my sister passed away in 2012. Precious memories remain.

**"He has all the virtues I dislike,  
and none of the vices I admire."  
*Winston Churchill***

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# Ed Hewlett, Gurley Grocer

by William Sibley

Thomas Edwin "Ed" Hewlett was born in Gurley, Alabama, in 1910 and was the youngest of four sons born to Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Hewlett. Ed was born in a two-story home located two miles from Gurley Grammar (Elementary) School, where he received his earliest schooling. Ed's home was heated by a fireplace and lighted by kerosene lamps.

Ed had farm chores to do each day before walking two miles to school, where he and another boy were janitors. Their duties included building fires each day in the four classrooms during the winter and bringing coal into the building to keep the heaters going. They also swept all of the classrooms each day. Their pay was \$7.50 per month.

When Ed reached high school at Gurley's Madison County High School, he had a strong interest in sports. He played some baseball, but he had a special interest in basketball and football. He was very fond of Tom Sneed, his football coach and played his heart out as quarterback on Coach Sneed's teams.

MCHS had some very good football teams in the 1920s, '30s and '40s, defeating some teams they were not expected to defeat, including Scottsboro and some teams from Huntsville schools.

I am quite sure that the team traveled by train when playing on Scottsboro's home field. On a humorous note, I was told by the daughter of a MCHS student who played football on the 1914, 1915 and 1916 teams, that the Gurley teams traveled by train to Scottsboro when they played at Scottsboro. One year the Gurley boys took one football to Scottsboro, but when

they returned to Gurley, they had two footballs. I was not told if the mystery was solved.

After high school, Ed and his brother, Roy, opened a cafe in Gurley and had pool tables in the establishment. The also had slot machines in the back of the business, but they removed them when they became illegal.

In 1936, Ed married Myrtle Payne of Scottsboro. In that same year he and his brother Roy bought a grocery store in Gurley from Ben F. Giles, who served as Sheriff of Madison County from 1931 to 1935. Business was booming in Gurley in the 1930s and 1940s. The town boasted four grocery stores, a bank, a drug store, a movie theater, and other businesses. Gurley also served as a train stop for people who were traveling to Huntsville, Scottsboro and Chattanooga.

In 1942, twin girls Joan and Janet were born to Mr. and Mrs. Hewlett. While this was a happy occasion for the Hewlett family, a sad event occurred that same year when Ed's brother, Roy, passed away. As a result of Roy's death, Ed became the sole owner of Hewlett's Store. Ed renamed the store Hewlett's Grocery. He also

sold dry goods, including work pants, shirts, overalls, shoes made by a local cobbler and cloth for making garments.

One day I was in Hewlett's Grocery and I recognized a local lady who was grinding sausage. I was disappointed when she told me the sausage was not for sale, but was for one of Mr. Hewlett's customers.

Many of Ed's customers were farmers who bought items on credit until harvest time. Ed proudly reported that nearly all of the farmers paid their debts in full.

When Ed's customers came into his store on Saturday afternoons in the fall, they could usually hear the University of Alabama football games on the radio.

After being in the grocery business for 53 years, Ed sold his store. Ed spent his entire life in Gurley, and in his latter years, he said of his hometown, "No better place to live."

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turn to the experts

# The Kiwanis Club's Sunshine Special

by Giles Hollingsworth



About the first of June, 1939 we moved into Lowe Mill Village, renting a house near the south end of First Street, just around the corner from the Lowe Mill building, which at the time was a cotton warehouse.

I was a little curious about the mill and the Village. I was born in Merrimac Village and lived there for the first seven years of my life, so my idea of a cotton mill village was a humming mill and look-alike houses, a company store, a recreation hall, and a high school auditorium that served as a movie theatre on Saturday night. In Lowe Mill there was variety in the architecture, especially on First Street, the mill was deadly silent and there were no recreational or shopping facilities.

So our new village was different. Quieter. Less bustling. That was fine with us. The place was filled with good people, good neighbors, most of them quite poor, like us. We learned that their mill had gone out of business two years earlier. It had been the last textile mill to open in Huntsville in 1902 and the first one to shut down, in 1937.

**"It was so cold in my house my teeth were chattering all night, and I wasn't even wearing them."**

**Maxine**

Some of those good neighbors were the ones next door; the Daileys, and Jimmy and Betty Dailey were real nice playmates. Jimmy was about my age and Betty a year or two younger.

A late June day was already heating up when, at about eleven o'clock a flat bed truck with side-boards stopped in front of our house. Attached to the side-boards was a large white oil-cloth banner displaying a Kiwanis Club logo and lettering that read:

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"Sunshine Special". A young man hopped off, came to our front door, met Mama there, and proudly announced that the Sunshine Special was a Kiwanis Club project, offering Lowe Mill kids, ages five through ten, a ride to a free picnic at Monte Sano State Park. That meant Bobby, who was five, and me. I had just turned eight.

Mama was at once both somewhat amazed and a little uneasy. She probably wasn't worried about me. I had been walking to and from school already for two years. But Bobby had scarcely been out of her sight before. But the young man was convincing and re-assuring, so Mama said okay, and we climbed aboard. As we did, he said, "Just call me Mister Bill".

If that Kiwanis crew had a quota it didn't take long to fill it. By the time we reached the third block the truck was loaded with kids. So off we went, about twenty-five of us, standing, holding tight to the sideboards, with three Kiwanis members watching us closely, making sure we did hold tightly, with no horsing around. And to fill the time Mister Bill lead us in the singing of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm". He stretched it out to last all the way to the park by adding a bunch of jungle animals, calling for strange sounds. I had no idea what a rhino or a giraffe sounded like, and I don't think Mr. Bill did either, but he offered his versions of their sounds and it was pretty funny.

When we reached the park there were about twenty-five more kids waiting for us. They had come up ahead of us on another Sunshine Special truck, one that had traveled Eighth Avenue.

The picnic was fantastic, with an endless supply of great food, including as many Dixie Cups of ice cream you wanted. The park was, of course, fabulous! Especially so to a kid who was seeing it for the first time. That would be me and probably most of the other kids. It was to be a day of still more "firsts" for me, including the first time I ever had a panorama view from a mountain top. It was breath-taking.

But the first thing that I remember most is this: it was the first time I had ever eaten a potato chip! In fact it was the first time I had ever even seen one! But there they were, on my cardboard plate, beside the two char-grilled hot dogs. And there was no doubt whatsoever about me liking them. They were delicious! Delicious enough, surprising enough, and unique enough to create one of my most durable memory cells.

Now a logical thought is: "That kid really was underprivileged, too poor to have potato

chips until he was eight years old." Well, I met the criteria for being that poor alright, but believe it or not, potato chips were new to just about everybody there that day.

For you to understand why, you need to go to Wikipedia, etc. and read about potato chips. Although they were "developed" in 1853, there was a bagging problem that kept them out of stores. Plastic bags were far in the future, so paper bags had to be used, and they got pretty unsightly from the grease.

But in the 1930s a North Carolinian named Herman Lay gave them a jump start by selling them out of the trunk of his car to grocers across the South. (He founded Lay's Potato Chips). Anyhow, somehow the Kiwanis Club got a batch of them and introduced us to them.

Now I won't claim that I have thought of the Kiwanis Club every time I have eaten potato chips since then, but I can say for sure that I have done exactly that at least hundreds of times during the past eighty-two years. I remember vividly, and fondly the Kiwanis Club, the Sunshine Special, Mister Bill, Monte Sano Park.

And discovering those strange looking, wonderful, tasty, salty, flaky, appetizing, delicious, scrumptious, mouth-watering, acceptedly greasy, golden potato chips.

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# The Troop Trains Don't Stop Here Anymore

by John Hughes, Athens, Al

During World War II in the 1940s troop trains frequently came through Madison. This was an exciting event for 9 to 10 year-old boys who might have been in downtown Madison and noticed the trains.

One summer Sunday afternoon a troop train limped into town and stopped. It was apparent to the engineer that train would be there quite a while. Normally, a soldier was not allowed to get off the train without permission. To do so he would have been considered AWOL. The commanding officer apparently let them off. They needed relief from the crowded, sweltering and unairconditioned cars.

My father's drug store was the only store open on Sunday. A few prescriptions and lot of hand-dipped ice cream cones and fountain drinks were sold. My father would not charge for them.

It seemed like every kid with a bicycle rode their bikes downtown where the troop train had stopped. They loaned their bikes to the troops who surely needed exercise from being pent up on the train. A soldier would ride up and down the street and would then let another soldier ride.

Madison girls were part of the welcoming committee. The girls' bicycles were welcomed by the troops also. Madison addresses were given freely. The soldiers could only give names. They had no addresses except for an APO (Army Post Office).

When the train whistle blew for the soldiers to again board the train, tears flowed like rain.

Peaches were ripe in our orchard and my Dad and two other men went to the orchard and picked several baskets. The train was pulling out when they got back to Madison. They had to run beside the train with the baskets held high while eager hands pulled the baskets aboard. Hopefully each soldier got a fresh Alabama peach and always remembered it.

I never heard if any of the girls who promised to write, received mail in return. Censorship regulations were very strict during WWII.

I do know that Madison was very quiet that afternoon after the train had left.



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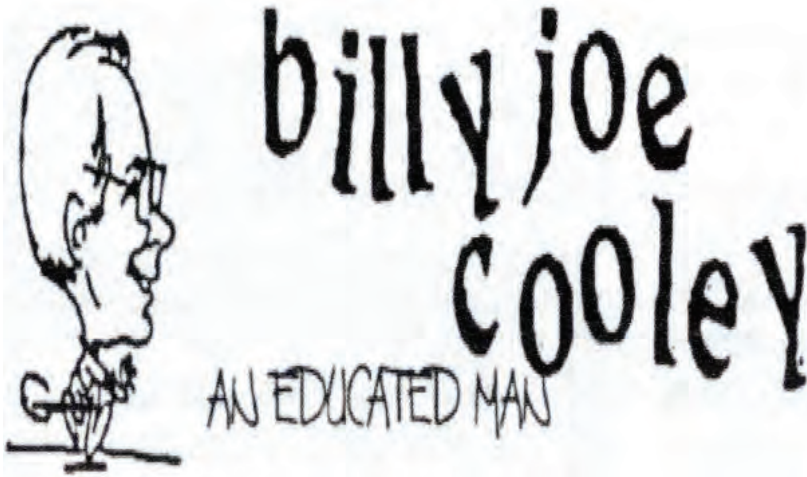
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*From Old Huntsville in 1994*

Race car driver Greg Hannah was happy to pose the other day with Gov. Jim Folsom during the Governor's stop at Eunice's breakfast tables before his election loss. Meanwhile, the widow of Lewis Grizzard, Dedra, stopped in for breakfast after a book-signing here. "Lewis always talked of Eunice's," she cooed sweetly.

Walt Anderson of Hughes Hardware in Madison brought his Glenda to a Bud Cramer political gathering the other week at the Hilton.

Finnegan's Pub daytime bartender Robert Schumann spent a week of batching while his Karen was in Memphis opening a new "Things Remembered" store.

Johnny Tona's Family Billiards was a grand place last week when carloads of Methodist youths invaded for an afternoon of billiards. Johnny doesn't allow drinking or smoking in his parlor.

Bandito Burrito's second location across from Haysland Square on S. Parkway, is going great guns. Jeff Milligan even came home from Colorado Springs to manage it.

Floyd Hardin was the first person in line at his polling place on election day. Then he hurried to his Jackson Way Barbershop to tell everybody else how to vote. Nobody listened.

That was a fine post-election gathering we had at Bill Webster's place on Bell Factory Road the other night. David Worley drove up from Birmingham. Joe Whisante's friends Ricky Hornbuckle and Carl Hudson showed up, smiling over Joe being elected Madison County Sheriff.

Webster and his sons Bert and Jed have a special talent for hosting. Skip Adkins was in charge of roasting the turkeys. The guest list included everybody from Barbara Reed and Jeff Boshers to ex-weatherman Ken Rainey and Boeing's Ron Shepard. Kelly Robinson

showed up, as did Dr. Jane Douthit and husband Jim (she has the animal clinic in Madison). His mama Louise (she of Krispy Kreme fame) hosted our gang in Jacksonville.

The Golden K Kiwanis club is now meeting every Thursday at the new Senior Citizen's center. Now, they can cross the hall and take dance lessons after their meeting.

Welcome to Huntsville! Joe Owens, brother of Chuck Owens and lately of Sun City, Arizona, recently visited our fair city and was so impressed that he has now become a permanent resident. Oh well, one more Yankee can't make that much difference!

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# RANDOM THINGS REMEMBERED

by David Dickson

As I drive around Huntsville there is rarely a block that I don't have some memory from the past.

I spent most of my preschool and early school days in the early to mid 50s with my Aunt Kay in Lincoln Village. During that time I made some lifelong friends such as "Duke" Dunson, Benny Wilbourn, Greg Coffey and others. We spent a lot of time shooting marbles and any other thing for entertainment.

I learned at this time that it was not a good thing to throw dead cats in the creek. That was as close as I would ever be to severe punishment.

We would go to the Dunson's and watch wrestling on TV, all the way from Nashville. It was as much fun watching Thurman Dunson and my Uncle Robert as it was the wrestling.

I want to visit Lincoln School one day and see my old classrooms. I still remember each room from each grade. My first and second grade classes were in the basement. So was the cafeteria where the smell of rolls baking would starve you to death.

Whatever happened to Patrol Boys? Ms. Chapman always had them perfectly in step. Of course she expected that of everyone. She was the

teacher that everyone feared until she was their teacher, then you loved her.

Mr. Anderson, the principal, was a nice man until you crossed the line. He kept a small leather strap in his pocket. I never knew of him using it but knowing that he had it was enough.

Across Meridian Street was the Dr. Pepper Bottling plant. Sometimes they would leave the side door open and we could watch them bottling. It was an amazing process for a young boy. I had made the big time when I got to join the Boy's Club. The club was in a big old house with lots of room for activities. We had arts and crafts which I thought I did rather well at until I saw the work later in life, no prizes there. There was a boxing ring in the basement that we used as a "rassling" ring.

My first experience with organized sports was at the Boy's Club. I got my first base-

ball uniform there, they put my name in the paper a couple of times and the coaches really cared that you learn and grow. This is why I still support the Club.

My time at home with my parents could be very in-

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John Purdy  
Loretta Spencer  
Sarah Chappell

**Gossip is just like a grapefruit. In order to be really good, it has to be juicy.**



teresting as well. I have two mentally challenged older brothers and this was always a strain on my parents. They provided as best they could and searched for what was best for my brothers. It was a blessing when an organization was formed that was the beginning of what is now The ARC on Washington Street. The "School" had several homes over the years. They were at East Clinton School, West Huntsville YMCA and several other locations before finding the permanent home they have now. They have grown from a handful of children to opportunities for children and adult clients as well. They are partially funded by the United Way so remember them in your pledges as it is so worthwhile.

We had a black family that lived next door to us at the time. We lived near where Drake Technical College is today. There were several children in the family. They were the Williams and we were good friends and playmates. I wonder what happened to them. Gregory was my age and we spent a lot of time playing outside during summer break from school. I never understood why he went to one school and I had to go to town to Lincoln. Later I learned of segregation and desegregation. It caused a strain between black and white families that were living in harmony. Peer pressure and publicity caused us not knowing what to do and ended up splitting up friendships.

How about Saturday trips to town? Mama would shop, usually making me go with her and Daddy hung out around the Courthouse. He always found someone he knew and would usually end up at The James Steakhouse. Funny but I never saw a steak served there. There was Wimpy's, City Cafe and so many other good places to eat. If I happened to be with Mama, we ate at W.T. Grants or SnoWhite. It was fun to hang out around the Courthouse. We would sit on the

chains surrounding the building. I remember a man that was always there with his guitar playing for change.

I remember driving down Church Street and the sidewalks being so busy. There seemed to be an air of excitement all of the time.

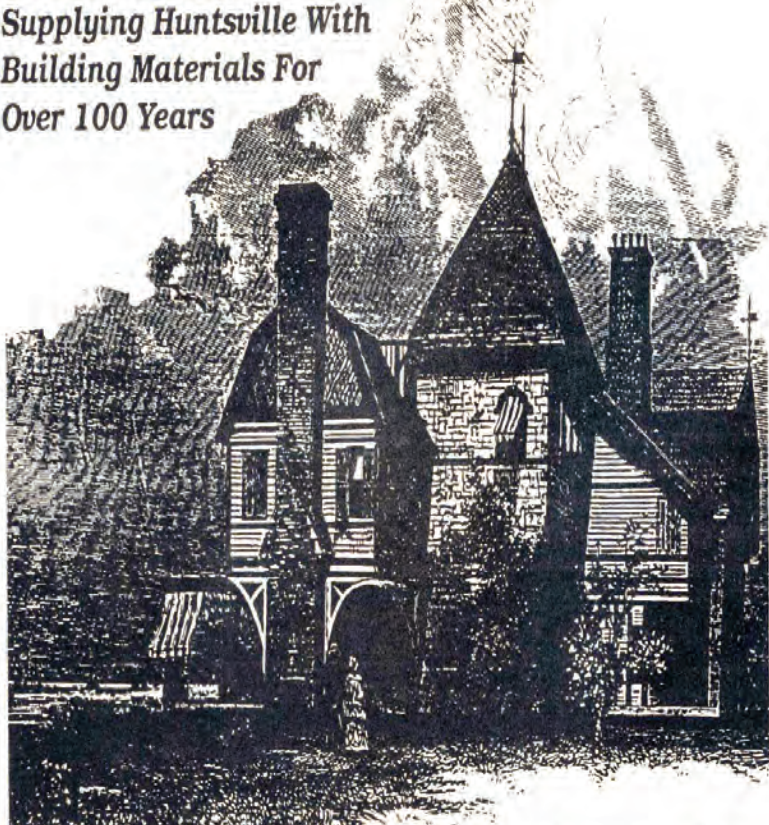
Every fall was an exciting time for car enthusiasts because the new cars hit the market at the same time. Why did the industry get away from that? I always heard that the dealers would hide the new ones in the country and bring them in on show day. My Uncle Robert and I would ride around on Sunday looking in the windows at all of the dealers on Meridian Street. What excitement!!

I have always loved Huntsville and brag about it every chance I get. It also makes me proud that most people that come to Huntsville never want to leave.



This Old Ad ran in Old Huntsville magazine in April of 1994. Not for advertising purposes.

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*From 1878 Newspaper*



A little girl, with tangled locks peeping from under a calico hood, clad in a dress of chintz, loitered behind as the great, dusty crowd moved out of the gates of the cemetery the

other day, after they had scattered their flowers and gifts to honor the dead. Dreamily she gazed after them, her eyes full of a faraway look of tenderness, until the last one had disappeared and the rattle of the drums had faded away.

Then she turned and vaguely scanned the mounds that rose about her, clutching still tighter the fast-fading bunch of dandelions and grave grass that her chubby hands held. An old man passed by and gently patted her blonde head as he spoke her name, but she only shrank back still further, and when he told a passing stranger that the little one's father was one who died on shipboard and was buried at sea, there was only a teardrop in the child's eye to tell that she had heard or knew the story.

When they were gone she moved on further to a neglected, empty lot, and kneeling down she piled up a mound of earth, whispering as she patted

it down and smoothed it with her little hand. "This won't be so awfully big as the others, I guess, but may be It'll be big enough so that God will see it and think that papa is buried here."

Carefully she trimmed the sides with the stray grasses she plucked, murmuring on: "And maybe it will grow so that it will be like the rest in two or three years, and then maybe papa will sometime come back and..."

But she paused as though it suddenly dawned on her young mind that he rested forever beneath the waves, and the teardrops that sprang to her eyes moistened the little bunch of dandelions that she planted among the grasses on the mound that she had built.

When the sexton passed that way later that night as he went to close the gates, he found the little one fast asleep, with her head pillowed on the mound and the little bunch of flowers.

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# PET TIPS FROM ANGEL

## *Be Cautious with Pets this Spring*



Spring has sprung, and with the change of season, our thoughts turn to Easter celebrations, spring cleaning and much-needed home improvement projects. Before you embark on seasonal chores or outdoor revelry, take inventory of potential springtime hazards for your pets.

### *Easter Treats and Decorations*

Keep lilies and candy in check – chocolate goodies are toxic to cats and dogs and all true lilies can be fatal if ingested by cats. Be mindful, kitties love to nibble on colorful plastic grass, which can lead to an obstructed digestive tract, severe vomiting and dehydration. Moreover, while live bunnies, chicks and other festive animals are adorable, resist the urge to buy them – these cute babies grow up fast and often require specialized care!

### *Screen Yourself*

Many pet parents welcome the breezy days of spring by opening their windows. Unfortunately, they also unknowingly put their pets at risk – especially cats, who are apt to jump or fall through unscreened windows. Be sure to install snug and sturdy screens in all of your windows.

### *Buckle Up!*

While most dogs love to feel the wind on their furry faces, allowing them to ride in the beds of pick-up trucks or stick their heads out of moving-car windows is dangerous. Flying debris and insects can cause inner ear or eye injuries and lung infections, and abrupt stops or turns can cause major injury, or worse! Pets riding in cars should always be secured in a crate or wearing a seatbelt harness designed especially for them.

### *Spring Cleaning*

Spring cleaning is a time-honored tradition in many households, but be sure to keep all cleaners and chemicals out of your pets' way! Almost all cleaning products, even all natural ones, contain chemicals that may be harmful to pets. Products such as paints, mineral spirits and solvents can

be toxic to your pets and cause severe irritation or chemical burns. Be cautious of physical hazards, including nails, staples, insulation, blades and power tools. It may be wise to confine your dog or cat to a designated pet-friendly room during home improvement projects.

### *Let Your Garden Grow – With Care*

Pet parents, take care – fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides keep our plants and lawns healthy and green, but their ingredients may be dangerous if your pet ingests them. Always store these products

in out-of-the-way places and follow label instructions carefully.

### *Allergies*

Like us, pets can be allergic to foods, dust, plants and pollens. Allergic reactions in dogs and cats can cause itching, minor sniffing and sneezing, or life-threatening anaphylactic shock to insect bites and stings. If you suspect your pet has a springtime allergy, please visit your veterinarian as soon as possible.

### *Pesky Little Critters*

April showers bring May flowers – and an onslaught of bugs! Make sure your pet is on year-round heartworm preventive medication, as well as a flea and tick control program. Ask your doctor to recommend a plan designed specifically for your pet.

### *Out and About*

Warmer weather means more trips to the park, longer walks and more chances for your pet to wander off! Make sure your dog or cat has a microchip for identification and wears a tag imprinted with your home address, cell phone and any other relevant contact information.

### *Poisoning*

If you suspect your pet may have come in contact with or ingested a potentially poisonous substance, contact your local veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center immediately at (888) 426-4435.

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# The Day They Roasted Van Buren

by Tom Carney

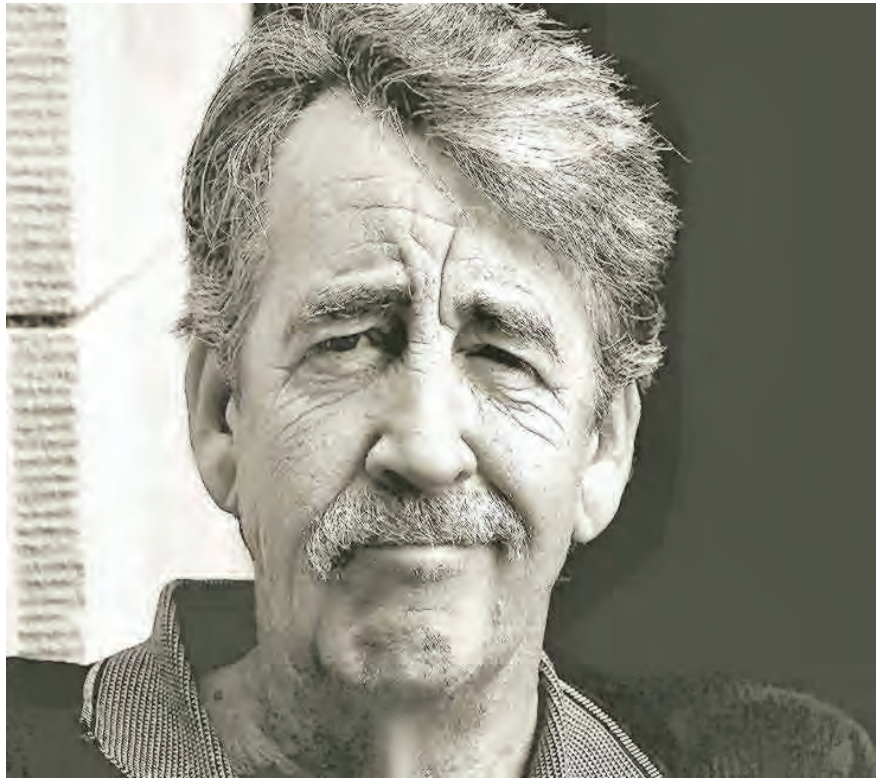


George Steele was not only one of the most successful contractors and architects in Huntsville, he was also an avid follower of politics.

In 1840, he backed Martin Van Buren for the presidential race and in anticipation of him winning, made plans for a large gala celebration. A huge ox named Van Buren, in honor of the candidate, was purchased to be cooked at the celebration.

Unfortunately for Steele, Martin Van Buren lost the election and ox Van Buren was delegated to the pasture, to fatten up until the next election. Ox Van Buren fulfilled his appointed task so well that he grew to gigantic proportions and a special pen had to be built for him.

Four years later James Polk was elected President and Steele, with no great remorse, decided it was once again time for ox Van Buren to become the center of attraction. Literally thousands of people, poor and rich alike, were invited to the feast. A large pyramid cake, almost four feet high was ordered from Nashville to grace the center table.



According to an account of the times, ox Van Buren was stuffed with turkeys, apples and assorted breads before being smoked for twenty-four hours. In addition there were lambs, barbecued pigs, broiled hams with accompaniments of jellies, sauces and breads.

A large stock of liquid refreshment served to insure that the new President would be toasted adequately — and often. After stuffing themselves with Van Buren, the guests were then entertained by a handpicked string band of fiddlers until the early hours of the morning.

Though there have been many political celebrations since, Huntsville has never seen another one like the day they roasted Van Buren.

**“A person may have more money than brains, but not for long.”**

**Johnny Johnston**

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## A SOLUTION TO OUR GARBAGE PROBLEM

by Ray A. McCrary,  
originally printed in  
1994 Old Huntsville magazine

Back years ago in our little cotton mill community in Huntsville, life was simple and seemed to have less problems than today's complex society. Our father worked at a regular job, we went to school through the week and did our chores around the house as expected, whether we wanted to or not.

Our mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers were at home working in the garden, which consisted back then of almost the whole yard except for a small portion in front of the house which was left to use for playing marbles, mumbly peg, stretch and various other games we played as children.

Canning food, gathering eggs, and milking cows were just a normal every day part of life. I remember our canned food was put up in Mason jars that were cleaned and saved for later use. I guess that eliminated a lot of tin cans. Our milk was also put in washable glass and can containers. That probably eliminated a lot of milk cartons. Eggs came directly from the chickens so I imagine that did away with egg cartons. The chickens also loved to eat bugs in the yard so I think that's why we didn't need any pesticides.

Our table scraps were taken up to the hog pens and they took care of that. Diapers back then were cloth so they were washed and reused over and over.

So there weren't any diapers to be put in the garbage. There weren't any cola cans and containers back then, either, because they were all in reusable glass

bottles. The milk we had to buy was also in reusable containers. The glass containers which mayonnaise and other condiments came in were saved and used for drinking glasses.

I mean, back then a good cold glass of tea was still tea no matter what it was in. The prettiest glasses I remember were the glasses that my grandmother and great grandfather saved from their purchases of Sweet Garrett Snuff.

Back then we just didn't have much garbage. There was one thing we had though that took care of the garbage we did have and that was "Ole Billy." Yes, some of us were fortunate enough to have a billy goat. There was nothing he wouldn't eat. Paper, cans, and anything in the yard left unattended he'd eat or chew into nonexistence. We didn't have to cut the yard either.

I think each residence should

be allowed one billy goat per family. A family with six or more members should be allowed an extra billy goat, as needed to correct the garbage problem. We could then look forward to a once-a-month garbage pickup at a considerable less rate than now.

It took me and my wife a week to decide what to do with our Christmas trees. We heard that the steam plant wouldn't accept them. One was completely dead by the time Christmas was over but we noticed the other one was still green so we elected to plant it and hope it grows roots. As the last shovelful was scooped around it my wife said, "What if it dies and turns yellow?" Well, then, we'll just spray-paint it green.

As of now it's still alive and growing so maybe next year we can recut it and use it again.

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# OUR OLD HOMEPLACE

by Fay Porter



February fourth dawned cold and gray. Low-hanging clouds threatened rain or possibly snow. In a few hours, our old homeplace would belong to someone else.

It had been 70 years since Dad and Mom built our new bungalow-style house in Huntsville. Some inside walls had no paint and the back porch had no floor the day we moved in, but Mom, Dad, my sister, brother and I loved it. We were HOME.

Situated on 5th Avenue, a place Mom referred to as "close to everything," our home became an oasis for family and friends to drop by for a cup of coffee and Mom's fried apple pies. While the adults visited, the kids ran to the backyard. Dad was a kid at heart and liked store-bought toys, but we had an equal amount of fun with those he made. Dad was a carpenter by trade, and made a see-saw, swings, and a slide. He also made a sandbox, but that was used mostly by the neighborhood cats.

On weekdays, we three kids walked to school. On Saturdays, we walked to Center Theater to watch Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and Captain Video. On Sundays, our family walked to church.

Summer evenings, before we had air-conditioning and TV, often found us on the front porch. The adults were in chairs or on the swing and the children were scattered about on the steps or chasing lighting bugs in the yard.

Everyone was hoping for a breeze. And we would sing. Some songs were old heartbreakers from Mom's childhood but they were usually followed by a joyful tune picked up from a movie we had seen. My young brother and his friends used one end of the porch for improvised antics that interrupted the singing and replaced it with gales of laughter.

As we grew, so did Huntsville. The quiet cotton town became bustling Rocket City. Two-lane 5th Avenue was widened to become six-lane Governor's Drive. Our home stood directly in the path of progress. We watched as it was lifted from its foundation and moved to a new location on the same lot. My mom, who bravely faced much in her life, thought it would be interesting to ride in the house as it was shifted back. As soon as the house started moving, it also started groaning. Mom decided it might not be a good idea after all and made a quick exit. When the house was safely on its new foundation, a sapling that had recently been near my brother's bedroom window at the back of the house was now nearly even with the front porch.

With the widened road, the low hum of a few passing cars changed to the steady roar of many. One by one, neighbors moved away, their houses replaced with commercial ventures. But our home remained and eventually became the last occupied single-family residence on Governor's Drive from 565 to California Street.



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We three kids grew up, got married and had houses and children of our own, but the bungalow was still home. After Dad passed away, Mom was often asked why she didn't move to an apartment. Her reply was "My home is close to everything."

Huntsville changed. It transitioned from cotton farmers and cotton fields to engineers and rocket ships but home remained the same. Three generations continued to sit on that front porch talking, laughing and watching the traffic. There were times when few cars passed and the lonesome sound of a distant train whistle could be heard. After Mom passed away, the old homeplace became more dear to us. It was our link to the past. We continued its care and maintenance, but the old home was getting older right along with us. We talked about selling it, but continued to hold on, not willing to let go. It held too many echoes of our history.

When we tried to discuss selling the homeplace, we ended up reminiscing. We recalled my sister standing in the living room with a puzzled look on her face after her nervous date walked out of the house without her and closed the door behind him at the beginning of their night out. Someone said, "If you're going to the movies with him, you'd better get going. If you leave right now, you'll probably catch him down around Wilson's Grocery." She actually found him in the front yard; he had been too embarrassed to come back in.

We talked about how the late afternoon sunshine streamed through the windows and cast a warm glow on the supper table. Mom spent many hours preparing meals for us, rarely using a written recipe, and they were delicious. We decided nothing could compare to her white cake with the flaky chocolate icing, except maybe her blackberry

cake.

Talking about those cakes led to memories of Christmas mornings. In the wee hours, Santa left five stacks of presents - one stack for each of us at our usual place at the table. He also left a plate of fruit, nuts and a giant peppermint stick along with the brightly wrapped gifts.

Though these memories made us want to keep it even more, we agreed it was time to sell the homeplace. A For Sale sign was placed on the property and an offer was made by a buyer.

After the sales contract was agreed upon, but before the new owners took possession, I walked through the rooms of the old homeplace. My son pretended to check doors and windows in rooms where I was not, but he was really giving me time alone to say goodbye.

I remembered how this had been a healing place. Within these walls, we healed from childhood scrapes and bruises caused from falling off bicycles. Later, we healed from heartaches caused from falling in love. It was where we started to heal ourselves after Mom and Dad passed away.

In the living room I paused just for a moment before turning off the lights for the last time. A verse from an old song came to mind: "Backward, turn backward / Oh time in your flight, / Make me a child again / Just for tonight."

The closing papers were signed. The For Sale sign came down. I felt like I had betrayed an old friend.

Our homeplace had stood for 70 years. It took only a few days to tear it down. Crushed walls and broken steps were loaded into bins and taken away. However, the spirit of the old homeplace remains with me always.



# Toby

Hello, my name is Toby and I am a male brown Tabby cat. I have been at the Ark Animal Shelter since August 2021. The vet thinks I was born in April

2021 so I will soon be a year old. I don't know why but some unkind people dumped me out of a car on a road and drove away. They left me on my own and I was very scared.

But a volunteer from the Ark Shelter saw this happening to me and picked me up and brought me to the Shelter and I've been here ever since. I've been well taken care of and I am a good cat with good manners and get along well with the other cats in the room. I have had all my shots and been neutered and am ready to go to a nice home where people will love me and take care of me forever. Will you come to the Ark and ask to see me? Please come and ask to see me.

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# South Parkway Storm Survey

by John Michael Hampton

For well over a minute, the car felt like it was on a roller coaster ride, jerking right and left. Suddenly, everything went quiet for about two minutes. Then, the storm continued to shake our vehicle, just not as bad as it had previously done.

Chris Lisauckis parked in a church lot on Capshaw Road, after the storm had passed. He stated, "Gentlemen, I purposely put you in the bear's claw. This storm was not tornadic, but had high straight line winds in it. The lesson here is to know which way you are heading, and to always leave yourself a way of escape. Knowing which way you are heading means to map out a path that will keep you away from the dangerous part of the storm, like we just experienced. Leave yourself a path to escape in case a storm that you are chasing decides to shift its track, as they so often do. You passed this test, because you did not get afraid, you did not panic and you remained on task observing the weather around you."

We started to make our way back to David Hall's house as we knew there were more storms coming our way. Just as we left the church lot on Capshaw Road, the tornado sirens went off. Chris looked at us, and turned on the radio to 96.9 FM, which at the time was broadcasting tornado coverage from WHNT-TV 19.

Dan Satterfield was talking on the radio. "The storm is currently over Triana and is producing a tornado according to Doppler radar. Areas in the path of the storm include Huntsville International Airport, Redstone Arsenal, Marshall Space Flight Center, and Joe Davis Stadium."

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Chris turned onto Old Railroad Bed Road and asked David to get ready to call in anything that we observed. "We are going to U.S. Highway 72 and try to get ahead of the storm so that we can intercept it around the South Memorial Parkway area. The interstate is way too close to the path of the storm and could get bogged down by traffic after the storm comes through."

So, we turned onto U.S. Highway 72, and were making very good time catching up with the storm...until we got to the hillside between Indian Creek Road (presently referred to as Providence Main Street) and Research Park Boulevard. The traffic was backed up all the way from Research Park Boulevard to the top of the hill (where the Target shopping center is at the current time). We could see south of us where the very angry looking storm was already very close to crossing Memorial Parkway.

Chris sighed. "I'm sorry, guys! We are not going to be able to catch up to the storm, due to the heavy traffic. We will still head that way to see if we can find any damage."

Thirty minutes later, we were at the intersection of Memorial Parkway and Lily Flagg Road. For about a block in either direction, signs of damage were visible, such as broken business signs, low hanging traffic light wires, and a power outage. Chris decided to go back into the neighborhood west of the Parkway, where we found tree damage, power line damage, and even some minor damage to a building. The November sun was setting, so Chris asked us to meet up the next morning to do a detailed storm survey.

David was unable to meet us the next morning, but Chris and I set out about 9:00 AM to South Memorial Parkway. We documented the damage west of the Parkway and what damage was visible on the Parkway.

We decided to look east of the Parkway for further damage. We found what appeared to be wind-whipped patterns in the grass next to Whitesburg Baptist Church, which led us to believe it was a tornado.

Ultimately, the National Weather Service declared the damage to be from straight line winds, not a tornado. However, I had my first taste of storm chasing and storm surveying, and I knew that I would be doing it again the next time that the skies unleashed the violent side of nature.

**"Doctors say that whiskey can't cure the common cold, but neither can doctors."**

**Joe Brooks, Woodville**

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# Requiem for a Lady

*Author Unknown*

*Originally run in Oct. 1994  
Old Huntsville Magazine*



She was once the Jewel of the South. The downtown area, with its stately buildings, and rich historical past, was the heart and soul of the Tennessee Valley's cultural, business and entertainment center.

President Andrew Jackson often visited the area, along with Davy Crockett, who later gained immortality at the Alamo. President Monroe was feted at an elegant banquet held downtown, while LeRoy Pope Walker, later Secretary of War for the Confederacy, practiced law in an office on the Courthouse Square.

Dred Scott, the slave whose quest for freedom ultimately embroiled this country in a Civil War, undoubtedly walked the same sidewalks as Jefferson Davis who often visited the downtown area, staying in one of its stately hotels. General Sherman, the scourge of the south, visited Huntsville while planning his devastating sweep through Georgia, and James Garfield, who later became president of the United States, presided at a court martial held downtown where he tried a fellow Union officer for the sack of Athens.

By the time Frank James, brother of the infamous Jesse James was tried downtown, many of the buildings around the old Courthouse Square had already taken on the patina of a timeless but graceful elegance. Though the area had been ravished

by the Civil War, the merchants took great pride in their buildings. Many of the establishments boasted fancy facades with intricate grillwork hand wrought by local blacksmiths. Peeling paint or rotten wood were items never seen by the thousands of people who everyday thronged the downtown area.

General Joe Wheeler reviewed his troops and was presented with a horse by the grateful citizens of Huntsville in front of the Courthouse during the war with Spain. These were the same streets upon which soldiers had marched off to fight in every war since Huntsville's founding. Many of the soldiers were sent on their way by their wives and girlfriends waving from the windows of the same buildings that still stand downtown today.

Part of what made the area a vibrant community were the people living there. Tallulah Bankhead, star of screen and stage, was born above the Schiffman building and Virginia Clopton Clay, known as the "Belle of the South," had an upstairs apartment on the other side of the square. John Beasley, Kenneth Howard and Lem Hawkins, all names lost to history, and countless others lived and worked downtown.

Downtown also had its share of human tragedy. During the First War, crowds would gather on the north side of the square at the telegraph office in dreadful anticipation as casualty reports were received from the bloody battles of France. Harold Smathers



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suffered a heart attack when he saw his son's name listed in the window of the telegraph office as killed in action. The report later proved erroneous.

Horses and wagons that were once hitched to the fence around the square began disappearing and automobiles started taking their places. Once again the downtown area began changing as it struggled to keep pace with modern technology.

By the 1960s the downtown area had reached its peak. People from miles around would bring their families to shop, and be amused by the constant stream of humanity that seemed to swirl around the Square.

Sidewalk preachers condemning the Godless and old men sitting on the benches patiently whittling on a piece of wood, all contributed to the carnival-like atmosphere.

Unfortunately the same things that led to Huntsville's explosive growth also led to the demise of downtown. As the space program grew, bringing thousands of new people to Huntsville, it became more and more inconvenient for people to shop downtown. Businesses that had been located downtown for generations closed their doors and began moving to the shopping malls where there was adequate parking.

Oddly enough, though most people cite parking as one of the primary drawbacks about visiting downtown, the most efficient branch of Huntsville's city government is the parking ticket enforcers, who in one year alone issued more than 27,000 tickets.

With fewer people shopping downtown many of the businesses were forced to close and the buildings began a rapid decline. The once stately structures, instead of boasting of their past elegance, began to take on a seedy look, with peeling paint and broken windows. Other buildings were boarded up with sheets of plywood and allowed to deteriorate. Rather than fix the properties up, many of the owners took advantage of a legal loophole, deciding that their own personal profit margin was more important than the community.

Strange as it may seem, there is no city ordinance requiring the owners to keep their buildings in good repair. Though an ordinance was presented to the city that would allow the city to cite the property owners for code violations, it soon became lost somewhere in the never-never land of City Hall.

This is not to say that the city does not do a good job enforcing code violations. In the average year it writes between 5 to 10 thou-

sand citations on residential properties.

By the 1990s the downtown area had become a source of embarrassment for almost everyone concerned. Many business owners took it upon themselves, with no guidance from the city, to renovate their properties. The staff of Harrison Brothers Hardware began sponsoring events around the square hoping to instill a sense of pride in the downtown area. A small group of volunteers, named the Downtown Pride Association, began making efforts to remove the graffiti from the buildings and to clean up the Big Spring.

In an effort to help, the city formed the Downtown Redevelopment Authority. Sadly to say, though it has spent hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars ... it has accomplished very little!

It meets every month in a beautifully furnished room, has authorized almost forty thousand dollars on reports and another thirty thousand on travel expenses, and yet many of its own members admit they do not know what their goals are!

Although the City Council has eliminated the DRA's appropriation from the city budget, they continue to receive almost \$50,000 a year in rent from property the city owns.

The talk goes on, the money keeps being spent, and parts of downtown Huntsville are still an eyesore.

Maybe it would be simpler, and more practical, to erect a marker downtown that would read:

"Here used to lie the heart and soul of a beautiful city, until it was killed by greed and petty bureaucracy."

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