

Author's
BAZAAR
ONLINE

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Editor's note

BY DEAN REA

A wild balloon ride, a newspaper yarn, a love story, a trip to the doctor, a hillbilly songfest, a lonely tale, an illustrated cowboy story and a poem make this issue of *Author's Bazaar* a reader's delight.

Three short, short stories occupy much of the March issue of this online hobby journal. They are:

Dave Griffin's tall tale about a kid creating and flying a

balloon that he wrote in 2008 remains one of my all-time favorites. That's why I requested permission to reprint it.

"The Gazette" first appeared in the fall 2005 issue of *Oregun*, a letterpress hobby journal. The story reflects, in part, my fascination with the weekly newspaper before it was caught in the new media storm.

If you enjoy hearing music like "Hillbilly Heaven," you will feel at home in a bar while reading Clarence Wolfshohl's 2,800-word story. You also can hear Tex Ritter sing this song by turning to page 53.

Thanks to all of our faithful authors for sharing their work and to the more than 400 visitors to our website each month. The readership continues to grow as folks tell family members and friends about *Author's Bazaar*.

You are invited to join in the fun by submitting a poem, an essay, an article, a photograph or a short story. Our designer Mike O'Connor can find room for them all — in full color.



Balloon

By David Griffin

I told Mom the weather balloon I bought at the surplus store would come in handy someday. And the gas grill from our next-door neighbor's trash was a crucial find. But just as vital was the tank of helium I stole from the welding company on Lincoln Avenue. I'm sure the workers

still haven't missed it from where it sat on the back dock. George and I will return it with only a little gas missing. We are two resourceful 13-year-olds. Actually, I will be 14 this November 18, 1957.

I am ascending above the ground like an angel flying off on a training mission. The leaves rustle and the birds chirp and somehow these familiar sounds have a heavenly ring up here. We built our airship in the woods and dragged it out on the grass. Figuring it would carry only one of us, we flipped a coin. I won and climbed astride for my maiden flight. Up, up and away! As I rise, peering out from the assembled parts, I watch the trees slide down and away to reveal this perfect view of God's creation and the Valley View Golf Course. The damned contraption really lifted off, ever so gently. There's George down on the fairway, waving.

I should let off some gas and go back down. I really hate to. This was supposed to be a short test flight, but being aloft is so wonderful, even if it is quite breezy. Big white puffy clouds push their way across the huge blue sky. I'm traveling with them toward the city and the river. The club-house gets smaller and the fairway drops away as I head out over the valley. Back there, George is still waving, but frantically now.

This is fun, but I'm too high and the edge of the golf

course is coming up. If I don't land now, I'll soon be over the rooftops of the city's crowded neighborhoods. It would be dangerous to drop down among them and try for a landing.

For the hundredth time, I check the tightness of the old medical tubing that runs down from the balloon and snakes into the cooker between my legs. I lean to the right and reach down under my hip and let off a burp of helium by turning the dial from Simmer to Roast.

Whoa! I drop like a stone, and the wind whistles through the old fishing net that suspends me from the ancient U.S. government weather balloon. I'm going to crash! I don't know how far I plunged before leveling off, but far enough to scare the crap out of me. Much lower now, there are trees on one side of me and power lines on the other. Thankfully, nothing is in my path and I'm maintaining altitude. But as I glide past the edge of the golf course, I look ahead and realize I will hit the top of a rapidly approaching house.

I come sliding in across the roof, my feet touching down and dragging along the shingles. I try to skid to a stop, but I'm moving too fast. Lunging desperately to the left, I grab for the chimney. It's out of reach, and then I'm slipping off the far end of the roof, back into the air.

I see the homes below fall away as the street runs down-

hill and my height above the ground increases. My feet are treading air, as if they're hoping to find purchase on anything solid, like a drowning man in water over his head. I feel nauseated, but I'm in one piece, heart pounding in my ears. I don't know how to get this thing on the ground. It's moving faster than I ever imagined, and now I'm too scared to land. This is turning into a pretty dumb stunt! I could be home reading my older brother's copy of *Playboy*.

I look beyond the city and past the river to the gentle green hills in the distance. They seem so far! But if I make it over there, the other side of the valley will naturally rise up to my altitude and rescue me in a safe embrace. A field



of soft hay would be a welcome landing spot. That would be the perfect ending to my voyage. I could drop in on my cousins who live in that area. If I master the art of flying in the next ten minutes, I might swoop down and land majestically in their back yard instead of crashing into a neighbor's swimming pool. Or I could just give up sooner, when I reach the river. Pull the cork and hope to land in shallow water. I don't swim very well, so three feet would be just about the right depth.

However, I have an entire city to cross before I land anywhere. Beneath me, hundreds of rooftops drift under my toes in the afternoon silence, broken only by an occasional car horn or a bus roaring up the hill. Along James Street a woman waits for the bus near Zalatan's Grocery Store. She looks up at me and screams. I wave nonchalantly and force a devil-may-care smile. No need for her to worry, I've been reading up on aeronautics since I was twelve.

Damn! I think I'm losing altitude again, but I'm still going too fast and there's nowhere to land. If I can get past South Street, the terrain will drop down rapidly toward the river, a terrific glide path right into the water.

I sail toward the downtown center of the city and feel the heat rise up to meet me. The wind comes from a new direction, then another, as the tall buildings cause a confusion

of breezes. A moment ago, I was well away from the large gold painted dome atop the city's major bank, but now it's coming my way. It's hard to tell whether I'm slightly above or below the flag on its pinnacle.

I'm certainly relieved when a gust pushes me upward and away in another direction because crashing on a dome and not sliding off could be quite a challenge. Now I'm nudged east toward the twin spires of St. John's Church. They're quite tall and definitely in my way. Next to the church sits the high school where I'll begin the 9th grade this fall — if I live.

I'm a really good Catholic at times like this. I'm promising more rosaries than I could ever say in a lifetime. If I survive, I'll be on my knees until I'm 80. I might as well plan to become a monk and forget all those things I wanted to do with girls.

A persistent horn blares below me, but I keep my attention on the two steeples until I'm elated to find myself pushed between them unscathed. Then, I peer down at the scene below. It's George in his family's old Buick, driven by his mother. I didn't think she knew how to drive. She doesn't seem to be managing very well, and people are running in different directions as she slowly steers the car down the street, sticking her head out the window and

peering up at me, occasionally driving up over the curb. I feel bad she is so worried, worse to think what will happen when she catches up to me.

I'm moving north again, and soon I cross over the river and the New York State Thruway. I had thought about dropping into the water, but chickened out when I passed over it. It looked deeper than I expected. I'll wait for the grassy hill near my cousin's house. I suppose all of this might be worth the trip because they just bought the first color TV in their neighborhood. But if watching "Gunsmoke" in color was the goal, I probably should have taken the bus.

The land begins to rise slightly, and now I hear a hiss from the tubing. Helium is escaping from the balloon, and I'm losing altitude fast. I'll soon be out of gas and really out of luck. The winds are getting stronger and I see dark clouds on the eastern horizon. I'm blown west along Riverside Drive for a short distance, then pushed up a side street. I'm so low now I can hear kids yelling. A girl my age looks up and waves. She seems completely unfazed by a boy sitting on an outdoor grill flying over her house.

A ripping sound tells me the fishing net has begun to part. The balloon shifts to the left and the miniature airship starts a roll to the right. There's a field of corn below, and I spot my cousin's house close by on Trenton Road.

The gas is running out and the ground is now coming up fast. The homemade dirigible George and I spent so much time building — perhaps two hours — scrapes into the ground and with a fluttering noise mows down a thousand cornstalks. The craft hits a bump and bounces high, then suddenly drops, slamming the earth with a great thud. My teeth snap shut so hard my entire jaw will hurt for days, and I'm flipped off the cooker like a flapjack, landing on my back in the corn. Without my weight, the magnificent flying machine lifts up, struggles for air and soars onward. I jump to my feet and run away, but the backyard grill seems unwilling to call it quits. I'll discover its final resting place when I read tomorrow's newspaper.

My cousin is not at home, but my aunt welcomes me at the back door.

“Did you walk all the way from home?” she asks, incredulously.

“No, I flew.”

“Uh huh,” she says without a flicker of doubt. “Well, how will you get back?”

“I think a friend and his Mom are coming to pick me up,” I say. “But there’s no need to let them in.”

“You’re green all down your back,” she says with some concern in her voice.

“Rough landing,” I say. “I’m new at this.”

“Well,” she says, “come in and have a cookie while you wait. And do you hear sirens?”

“Yeah, I saw a flying saucer crash out back.”

“Ha, ha,” she said as she laughs. “You’ve got more stories.”

In the local newspaper the next day:

The *Utica Observer Dispatch*:

CONTRAPTION NOT FROM SPACE!

Launched By Persons Unknown, says sheriff

Astonished homeowner was asleep in hammock

He Will Keep Grill

“Not from Mars,” say local firemen,

“maybe from K-Mart.”

Copyright 2008 by David Griffin, and dedicated to my Aunt Toot, who believed everything I ever told her. So she said.

The Press at Windswept Farm Saugerties, NY

www.windsweptpress.com

FORT WORTH *Fungi*

By SHERYL L. NELMS

black umbrellas

cluster on
street

corners

like clumps
of dark

fairy helmets

sprouting
in the
rain



By Hugh Singleton

The doctor entered my little examination room, introduced himself to me and my son, then began a matter-of-fact explanation of what was wrong with my left eye. His manner was brisk and he exuded absolute confidence with every word of his diagnosis.

To be honest, I felt that he was gearing his explanation a bit too low on the comprehension scale, but I listened silently as he proceeded through the cause of my vision problem, what that problem was and how he would correct it for me. In a nutshell, my eye was shrinking because it was getting older and that shrinkage had resulted in a hole in my retina, which distorted my vision.

Simple enough. How this surgeon would fix my prob-

lem was not so simple. He put it this way: “We’ll take out vitreous matter and insert a gas bubble, which will press against the hole and cause the retina to repair itself.” Then came the kicker: “You’ll need to hold your head down for a while to ensure that the bubble stays in position against the hole.” I was immediately wondering how long “a while” was. His answer flowed smoothly, as if he was reading a line from a play: “Some doctors specify a week, but I have had excellent results with four days.”

Because I sat without speaking, he continued by assuring me that he routinely did this sort of surgery every week and that his goal was to give me back 80 percent of my original sight in the eye. As he left, he mentioned that the surgery would make it necessary to have cataract surgery as soon as the retina healed. I have had cataracts in both eyes since I was a teenager, but my vision was still okay at age 81 — now, by repairing a hole in my retina I would need two other surgeries in order to see!

This very common, very repairable problem was becoming a vicious, roaring monster, and there was nothing I could do to avoid it. My son finished with the attendant as I tried vainly to absorb the ramifications of what I faced. It was impossible. On the ride home, Bill kept reassuring me that I could get through the surgery, that the doctor was a

recognized surgeon, highly skilled in his craft and that we'd just take one thing at a time and all would be well. I felt like I'd been dropped into a well.

The day of my scheduled surgery came, and Bill and I drove to the hospital in pre-dawn darkness; he would stay with me and then I would stay with him and his family for the first week after surgery. It sounded awfully simple.

After an hour of answering the same questions for several different members of the surgical team, I was ready to go under the knife. I had previously made a pact with The Almighty and had given Bill some final instructions. So, I was resigned and ready. As my bed was guided along the corridors and the overhead lights flashed by, I thought of the old television show Ben Casey. The thoroughly competent surgeon appeared at my head and informed me that I was being given anesthesia and that everything looked good.

My next awareness was of foggy lights overhead and my surgeon holding a conversation with someone. I could see movement as the doctor worked, but felt nothing. Wait. Something felt like a stitch being pulled tight. I felt pressure, which began to have an element of pain as the doctor went merrily about his procedure. Good Lord! The anesthesia is wearing off; I jumped as something hurt and the



doctor said,

“Did you feel that?” From far, far away I heard my answer: “Yes.”

“Are you feeling pain?”

“Yes.”

“You are more sensitive than most patients.”

I said nothing, but as the doctor called for additional anesthesia, my mind was screaming, “Just stop the pain; I don’t care about ‘most patients,’ just stop the pain!”

I became aware that my left cheek was becoming numb,

but every touch to my eye was still painful. One more swab of my eye, one more shudder of my body, and I heard those wonderful words:

“We’re finished.” My relief overcame my desire to verbally assault my surgeon. So, I kept quiet as he came with me to the recovery room, assuring me that the procedure went well and that my eye looked good.

Now I faced four days of living with my head bowed down. After my escape from the operating room, that prospect seemed like a small obstacle — and it was.

Hugh Singleton: htsman1102@aol.com

THE GAZETTE

By Dean Rea

Arthur Bennett III parked his four-door Studebaker beside the red sports car. He winced as he opened the door and stepped to the pavement, blaming arthritis and a half-century of living in the extreme weather of a rural western community. The tarnished brass-plated key slid smoothly into the lock, and Bennett opened the door to his weekly newspaper at precisely 7 a.m.

Bennett normally wrote his editorials on Monday before starting to call on local stores to solicit advertising for *The Gazette*. He had in mind to scold the Bureau of Land Management again for hiking grazing fees. His ranching friends had complained to him after the Sunday morning church service. While his father was alive, he had reminded Bennett that an editor should always pay attention to his readers, especially to those with property, those who paid taxes and who advertised in their weekly newspaper.

"I thought I'd brew a cup of coffee for you," the newest member of the staff said as she entered Bennett's office and set a mug near the Royal manual typewriter. Bennett

jerked back as the red bandanna woven into her ponytail brushed against his cheek. She was dressed in tailored, tight-fitting designer jeans, a square dancer's checkered shirt and black leather riding boots. Bennett had dropped hints about what he considered to be proper attire and behavior the day she joined the staff earlier that summer. But she didn't respond properly, he thought, and he had spent several sleepless nights debating how he should handle the problem.

"Thanks," Bennett said, miffed over the interruption in the train of his editorial thought. "By the way, Miss Bly, I want to talk to you." Bennett was unable to bring himself to address Nellie by her first name because of a long-standing



practice followed by three generations of Bennetts.

Despite Nellie's easy-going demeanor, Bennett was determined to maintain some semblance of formality. He feared that his reputation already had suffered because of Nellie's penchant for showing up for work an hour before his 7 a.m. arrival. No doubt townspeople had gossiped about the two of them being alone for an hour before the receptionist and two printers reported for work. But he maintained a respectable distance in the office and in their conversation.

"Okay," Nellie replied. "I'll be done with my fishing column in just a jiffy, but you remember I've got to cover the Ladies Aid Society's prayer breakfast at the Grange hall."

Bennett recalled how he had become acquainted with the daughter of the town's leading grocery store owner. She had excelled academically in high school, was the homecoming queen her senior year and always won the barrel race at the county rodeo. He had written stories about her and had half-listened to her father brag about her accomplishments for years when Bennett "picked up" the full-page advertisements each week for publication in *The Gazette*.

What Bennett hadn't known until six months ago was her intention to follow in the footsteps of her namesake, a

flamboyant New York newspaper reporter in the late 1880s. Bennett was most shocked when he learned that Nellie planned to launch a career in her hometown after graduating from a prestigious Southern California university. But that seemed so long ago and so unreal to Bennett as Nellie entered his office.

“Now look here, Miss Bly,” Bennett began after she settled in the antique oak chair beside his desk and flashed a smile. “We don’t dress the way you dress at this newspaper,” he blurted. “I thought I made that clear when I hired you.”

“You hired me by telephone, Mister Bennett. You never said anything about what I should wear. I’ve been wearing these clothes for years. That’s what everyone wears around here.” Bennett shuffled uneasily in his swivel chair, the color rising in his face and across his balding forehead as he fought to control his anger. Impertinent, disrespectful young pup, he thought.

“That’s not the point, Miss Bly. You’re not a man, a buckaroo rounding up cattle. You’re the first woman reporter in the history of this newspaper, and I won’t have people talking disrespectfully about anyone who works here because of the way they dress.”

Bennett watched as Nellie stifled a reply, bit her tongue and feigned a smile. “Okay, Mister Bennett,” she said as she

stood and walked toward her desk. "I'll wear dress shoes rather than boots." With that, she smiled, picked up her Stetson and walked to the door. "Gotta go now. The Grangers probably are waiting to start their meeting until I arrive."

Bennett found his hands gripping the arms of his chair, his teeth grinding and his heart pounding as Nellie departed and as the receptionist arrived for work. He heard Nellie's sports car start with a roar. The sound faded moments later at the end of Main Street.

Bennett knew his father would never have approved hiring Nellie as a reporter. Maybe she would have been okay as a receptionist to greet the public and to accept classified advertisements and social notes. Bennett had to admit that townspeople of all ages seemed to like Nellie as much now as they had when they elected her Miss Junior Chamber of Commerce as a high school senior. He hadn't counted on her being so headstrong, however. Some things you never know about a person until you have to associate with them daily.

The mistake, Bennett agreed, was hiring someone who may have picked up some liberal ideas at a university and had lost touch with a conservative community. She had graduated at the top of her university class, and several journalism professors had given her good marks in rec-

ommendations Bennett had received. She might fit with some metropolitan daily newspaper staff but not as the only news reporter in a rural weekly. No, sir, Bennett said to himself. She just wouldn't accept her role here at *The Gazette*. "My father was right," Bennett said to himself aloud. "Women don't belong in newspaper journalism."

The suggestion that Nellie be hired had come from her father while negotiating the Bly Merchantile Co.'s annual advertising contract. Bennett knew the importance of the contract, which represented 22 percent of the paper's annual income and spelled the difference between profit and loss.

"Listen to your advertisers," Bennett's father had said. "Don't rile them. The paper needs their support." As Bennett turned to his typewriter and began to write the Bureau of Land Management editorial, he wondered if his hasty decision to hire Nellie had been based on his wish to keep *The Gazette* healthy financially.

Bennett's first attempt to dissuade Nellie — or to encourage her to find work elsewhere — came during a later conversation with her father before her graduation.

"This town is no place for a person like Nellie to invest her life," Bennett had argued. "She should find a job on a metropolitan daily or even with a TV station. She's an at-

tractive woman, spirited as I recall, someone who could make her way in the big city.”

The gentle hint had backfired. Nellie’s father, flattered by Bennett’s assessment, had reported the conversation in a letter to Nellie. She immediately forwarded several suggestions on how *The Gazette*’s stories and layout might be improved based on a study she had made in a journalism class. Bennett had braced himself and had vowed to make Nellie’s career at *The Gazette* a short one.

For openers, Bennett had assigned her to write obituaries, police news and business briefs and to report social events. Leave her alone for a few weeks, and she would quit out of boredom and disgust, Bennett surmised. The problem, however, was that Nellie appeared to thrive on what he considered the grist of journalism. She had volunteered to write a fishing column and to cover weekend events. And he often heard praise of her work during morning coffee sessions around town.

Bennett’s determination to terminate Nellie’s employment had waned several days ago when he heard her praised by the pastor’s wife at the First Conservative Church. “Never has our Missionary Aid Society meeting been written about so magnificently and wonderfully,” the town’s leading matriarch had told Bennett. “That young



lady is an upright, God-fearing woman," she said.

What the pastor's wife didn't know then and what Bennett learned later was that Nellie had moved out of her parent's home and had moved in with Jim Jackson, a recent college grad who had inherited a 2,000-acre ranch 20 miles south of town.

Bennett's rage at being betrayed by a member of his staff had been fanned by the preacher's sermon branding the younger generation as "being caught up in self-gratification and living together in mortal sin." At that moment, Bennett knew what his father would do. He would dump

Nellie faster than a wrangler could rope and tie a calf. Bennett knew he couldn't legally fire her for what he considered unacceptable moral behavior, but he could require her to live in town. That move, he knew, would solve *The Gazette's* problem.

The next day was a Monday, and Bennett was determined to have it out with Nellie. Sweat rolled down his face and his undershirt stuck to his chest and back as he waited for Nellie to enter his office. I should invest in an electric fan, Bennett thought. The summer heat is bothering me more than I can remember. His mental debate ended as he faced Nellie.

"I have to draw the line," Bennett said, his eyes shifting away from her face in confusion and embarrassment. "I, uh, I don't know how to put this properly, but you have to live in town if you want to be a reporter. You have to be available on a moment's notice to cover a fire or an auto accident. That's been an office policy for three generations. My father always said...."

"I agree, Mister Bennett," Nellie interrupted. "Jim and I have discussed the matter, and he has agreed to move to town with me. He will do the commuting, and I'll be available on a moment's notice to cover news for *The Gazette*."

Bennett was speechless. Before he could gather his

thoughts, Nellie excused herself, saying she had to complete an interview with a childhood friend about a favorite recipe that would be reported in Thursday's *Gazette*.

He knew he should have been more decisive, should have ordered Nellie to clear out her desk and to leave the paper like his father would have done. People at the church were talking behind his back, Bennett knew. How could he maintain his standing in the community, and especially in the church, if he employed a woman who flaunted the religious and social conventions of a community over which he presided through his editorial and news columns each week? He would have to brace himself as his father would have done and have it out with Nellie. But how?

The mayor hadn't helped Bennett's dilemma. Damned fool got himself arrested by the state police for driving under the influence of alcohol. Must have been a new trooper, Bennett surmised. Nobody who knew about the mayor's drinking problem would arrest and jail him. It was an unwritten rule that everyone in the community followed. Everyone, that is, except the trooper and Nellie.

"I've got a great story," Nellie announced the next morning as she swept into the office, greeting the receptionist before sticking her head into Bennett's office. "The mayor's been busted for drunken driving. Spent the night in jail.

His wife bailed him out as I arrived at the police station. Gosh, I feel sorry for her. She's lived with that lush for 50 years. Why do people elect such guys?"

"Miss Bly," Bennett shouted. "Come into my office." He hadn't intended to raise his voice so that the receptionist and the printers could hear, but he couldn't restrain his anger. "Listen, young lady, we don't report that kind of news in *The Gazette*."

"What kind of news?" Nellie asked, her hands on her hips, a frown forming on her face.

"About the mayor getting into trouble. That's a personal affair. He didn't hurt anyone, and we don't intend to embarrass him," Bennett said as he thumped his right fist against his desk, scattering a stack of news releases and editorials on the floor.

"But that's playing favorites," Nellie argued. "It's in the public interest to know how its leaders are behaving."

"No, it isn't," Bennett blurted. "I consider it a private matter. My father established that policy, and we've lived by it for 50 years."

"But we can't ignore this story," Nellie pleaded. "It's news."

"No, it isn't news, and you no longer have a job at *The Gazette*," Bennett blurted, astonished at his reaction and words. But he had made a decision, a decision his father

would have made.

Bennett was so upset he left work immediately, two hours before his normal 6 o'clock departure. He would finish balancing the books the next morning before he began sorting out Nellie's assignments so he could complete them in time for Thursday's paper. Granted, he may have been hasty, he thought, but he had to act in the best interests of *The Gazette* even though he grudgingly admitted that Nellie's work had been surprisingly professional for a beginner. He would have to figure out how to offset the backlash from Nellie's apparent growing circle of news and feature sources.

The night did not go well for Bennett. He overslept and arrived for work an hour late. He hadn't missed opening *The Gazette* at 7 a.m. for years, except the time the newfangled electric alarm clock failed to ring because of a power outage. He parked his Studebaker and was halfway across the sidewalk before realizing that Nellie's sports car was parked in its usual spot. He steeled himself against over-reacting while he prepared mentally to watch Nellie clean out her desk and pack her shorthand pads, pencils and personal belongings. This had been a crossroads he had dreaded, something he vowed never to repeat as long as he ran *The Gazette*.

A “Hello, Mister Bennett” greeted him as he entered the office and noticed the office staff clustered around a woman dressed in a tailored robin blue business suit, white blouse and high-heeled shoes.

“I said, ‘Hello, Mister Bennett,’” Nellie repeated.

Bennett, mouth agape, knees trembling, stammered, “Uh, oh, um, what are you doing here?”

“Oh, I’ve come to tell you that dad’s made me an offer. He’s retiring, and he wants me to manage the store and to handle the store’s advertising. I told him I would rather be a reporter and work for *The Gazette*, but I apparently don’t fit in here.”

The muscles in Bennett’s throat tightened, his face turned red, his fists formed into clenched knots. He swallowed, hesitated, his thought racing wildly in search of help. Nellie, manage Bly’s Merchantile Co.? handle the advertising? What would his father do? What would he say?

“Uh,” Bennett croaked, stalling for time. “Well, you see. Ah, I’ve been upset lately. The heat and all. I know things haven’t gone well for either of us here at *The Gazette*.” He paused, took a deep breath, his voice taking on a new resolve.

“But, I’ve decided that we’ve protected the mayor long enough. We’re going to publish your story on the front

page this week. And I want you to continue working at *The Gazette.*"

"Golly, Mister Bennett, that's great," Nellie said as she hugged him. "Dad can find someone else to manage the store. You and I'll be a great news team."

Bennett, his face flushed by Nellie's gesture and the applause from the office staff, followed her out of the office. He watched as she climbed into her car, waved to him and drove away as the power generated by the V-8 engine roared out the exhaust.

A breeze carrying a hint of fall chased a leaf across the street as Bennett walked to the Studebaker and wiped dust from a fender. It's been a great car, he mused, but maybe it's time to trade for something a bit more up to date, something more sporty.

The Loner

By Paul King

He was a head shorter than most men. With his unkempt, tobacco stained beard, knitted cap and heavy cane he could be seen walking the two miles from his shack on the river into town most mornings. He would head for the Red and White grocery to replenish his perishable groceries, and then return, limping, by the same route to his home.

Will Kratzner kept to himself and few knew much about him. It was said that he served with Carlson's Raiders during the war and that he had nearly lost a leg when he stepped on a land mine. He often muttered to himself as he walked. He frightened small children although he was never known to touch or harm them.

He was always surrounded by a sour and musty odor,

which caused others to speculate on whether his shack contained modern plumbing. His steely blue eyes beneath massive eyebrows could transfix anyone who attempted to talk to him.

One day Will failed to make the walk to town. It was not long until the county sheriff visited his shack and found him slumped over his kitchen table. He died as he lived, alone, an enigma, feared and friendless because he was unlike his neighbors.



BRADLEY'S LOVE LOGIC

By Kathleen DesHotel

As the baby crawled across the den floor, he touched everything along his path. Crawling for the first time outside his playpen offered new independence and experiences. From inside the confines of his playpen everything outside the white mesh attracted his gaze. Feet shuffled past on missions unknown to him. When the mama person would pass, she'd stop and make sing-song sounds. She frequently repeated the word "Bradley."

"Hello, Bradley. I love you, Bradley. Where's your binky, Bradley? Why are you crying, Bradley. Ew, did you poopie, Bradley? Is my Bradley hungry? Does Bradley want mama to hold him?"

On this day of crawling independence, he realized that he was Bradley when the mama person shrieked, "Bradley, let go of Poochie!!!" There was a certain ferocity to her sound, and it scared Bradley as well as Poochie, who also made a shrieking sound and ran a safe distance from Bradley.

Bradley pondered this new sound that the mama person made, and he associated it with Poochie. "Poochie made Mama shriek. I wonder why. The black furry thing must be

something bad; I don't think I will touch it again."

As Poochie peeked out from under the coffee table, Bradley wondered why such a dangerous creature lived in his home. Suddenly he found himself rising up. It was the mama who picked him up held him close and then said, "Don't hurt our Poochie. We love him."

He thought, "Hmm. She loves me, and she loves Poochie. I have learned a lesson. I am good, and the furry one is good." Mama hugged him, and he thought, "Love, ahh." And so, Bradley acquired important data about love and logic. From that day forward, he was gentle with the black furry one. "Mama loves me, and Mama loves Poochie. Therefore, I love Poochie too."

It took Poochie another day to tap into the same logic. When Bradley and Poochie next crossed paths, Bradley discovered the soft texture of the fur, and he learned to pet a dog with love and respect. From the logic came love, respect, mutual good feelings, and lasting friendship. Bradley was so enamored with the feel of the fur that he traveled over to the pooch's bed and crawled in with him for a nap.

When the mama found them together, she smiled and sighed to herself, "My Bradley has gained from the experience of gentle love. I pray that his life will be filled with it; time will tell."

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The Best of Both Worlds

By Gordon Rouze

I'm a city boy. I love the noise, the crowds, the shopping centers, the professional sports teams, art galleries and new restaurants that spring up daily. As corporate gypsies, my wife Gloria and I have moved around the country, living in metro places like Des Moines, Kansas City, Detroit and now a suburb of Houston, the nation's fourth largest city. But I have been blessed by experiencing the best of both worlds in my lifetime: the big city today, the boondocks in another life.

I grew up in a small farming and ranching community in Western Nebraska. We lived in town where my father owned a hardware store. But his first love was his small

ranch where he spent most of his spare time. The other ranch of my childhood was my grandfather's Bar-C ranch, which grew to more than 10,000 acres at the time of his death. I was an unpaid hired hand at both places.

The Bar-C Ranch was located in the rolling prairies called Sand Hill Country, where, with a modest amount of rainfall, the luscious grass grew bountiful and provided feed for a sizeable herd of cattle — always Herefords. No additives were introduced into the feed of these critters whose beef would be labeled today as "all natural." Each year's production of market animals was sold to buyers who could depend on their quality.

The ranch was located in the path of the Western Cattle Trail. In the years after the Civil War, demand grew for beef in the northern states. This led to a shortage of beef cattle. Texas ranchers began moving their cattle north. For nearly 20 years thousands of men drove millions of Longhorn cattle to shipping points as far north as Chicago.

Seven routes of the Texas Trail led through Nebraska. One route cut through southwest Nebraska very near where the Bar-C is today. It was firmly established by 1876, when the Union Pacific Railroad moved its cattle-loading pens west to O�allala. Cattle drives could only advance about 20 miles per day before needing to stop for rest and

water. The stop along Spring Creek Branch of the Stinking Water River was the ideal resting place before the last 40 miles to Ogallala. Stone corrals used by the drovers are still visible today.

My buddies and I played many a game of Cowboys and Indians where the good guys were the cowboys moving the Longhorns along the cattle trail, and the Indians, the bad guys, were always trying to attack and steal the cattle. I know this would probably not be considered politically correct today, but don't try to tell that to a bunch of kids just having some fun.

I learned how to milk the Guernseys, saddle up and ride the old horses, build fence, check the windmills, muck out the stalls and take care of the 4-H calves that Dad gave me. He was an expert cattle showman who took his prized Herefords to the Denver Livestock Show every January. I became well schooled in showmanship as evidenced by the many blue ribbons from the County Fair and the Nebraska State Fair. When my calves were sold, the proceeds were welcomed into my college-fund bank account.

When I finished at the university, I left the rural life behind. Photography has always been an important interest. Fortunately, during my years at home I produced a number of images of ranch life that help keep the memories

of those growing-up days alive. My all-time favorite is the one in which the show-off lights his cigarette with a branding iron during a cattle-branding session at the Bar-C.

Those were the days.



A cowboy using a branding iron to light his cigarette remains the all-time favorite image photographed by Gordon Rouze when he worked as a young ranch hand in Western Nebraska.

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Hillbilly Heaven

in memory of Doug Sahm

By Clarence Wolfshohl

“Play ‘Hillbilly Heaven,’” someone shouted.

The singer shook his head in mock weariness and began “Jealous Heart.” Five couples danced around the echoing hall, staying close together although there was room for ten times their number. But only ten people danced, holding tightly to each other for warmth as much as romance. Four of the men were dressed in plaid shirts and jeans, but one wore a western cut suit that was an amber sheen when caught by one of the two weak spotlights that sliced the dance floor. His partner’s dress was forest green velvet, and she resembled the Indian women around the plaza in Santa Fe far to the south. The dancers circled the floor, drawn into an ever-tighter pattern around the pot-belly stove on one side of the room.

A second stove blazed as the bartender stoked it with several chunks of wood. It was in the bar area, where another nine or ten people stood at the bar and huddled at tables. At a small table between the stove and the door a woman sat, knitting half-heartedly as she hummed to the band's song. A quilt draped over the half of her body away from the stove. No one had entered for fifteen or twenty minutes, so her knitting had not been interrupted for her to take admission and the room had heated up enough so that the five of us at our table had relaxed our shoulders from their freezing hunch. Even with the overhead incandescent lights, the bar was dim and glowed like the flame of a kerosene lantern, a comforting spot from the surrounding darkness but not hot enough to warm the chilled skin of nose, fingers and ears. Outside in Potlatch, Idaho, it was a late January 15th, and the sky-blue Quonset hut called the Timber Tavern and Dancehall sat like an iceberg adrift in the dark forest sea.

The five of us around a table half covered with empty longnecks and shot glasses were graduate students from the University of Idaho at Moscow, twenty miles down the highway from Potlatch. Earlier in the week, we had debated coming out on such a night when we had heard that Johnny Bond was to play here. But when Bond had to

cancel his appearance because of snowstorms further east and Tex Ritter, who for some godforsaken reason was in Spokane, agreed to step in for Bond, the debate ended.

We were going to see Tex Ritter. We were the kind who would drive those twenty miles or even farther to see Tex Ritter. Way before Willie sang it, our heroes had been cowboys, those on horses or those with guitars. We preferred “High Noon” to “Casablanca,” so we were somewhat misfits in the English graduate program. Others listened to Bach and Dvorak, or perhaps to cool jazz when slumming. They brought up existentialism in seminars weekly and used words like bourgeois whenever possible. We watched “Hullabaloo” because the Sir Douglas Quintet sang on it once, and we could assume a sophisticated British air when talking about Sir Douglas, even though we knew that he was actually Doug Sahm who was from the eastside of San Antonio, Texas, and had once played with Hank Williams when he was only seven years old. When we talked about Dylan, the others thought we were speaking of Thomas and went to his collected works to find such titles as “Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat.” We meant Bob.

Linda Kinney, the only woman in our group, returned from the bar with a tray of Rainiers and shots of bourbon, our own Palouse boilermakers. We downed the bourbon

with a “To the Singing Brakeman” and wiped our mouths in exaggerated imitation of old Western movies. This was our group, readers of Wallace Stegner and Robinson Jeffers, listeners of Buck Owens and Patsy Cline, and irritating midnight callers of Mr. James Evans, president of the Jimmie Rodgers fan club.

One equally or near equally as cold night in December, we had gotten into a debate about the lyrics of “I’m in the Jailhouse Now.” None of us knew the exact words, but we found Mr. Evans’s name and address on the jacket of the one album by Jimmie Rodgers that we had. Wanting instant closure to our debate, instead of writing, we phoned after some difficulty getting through to information. That was in the days of live operators. We knew it was late — around midnight — but we were up, so why shouldn’t Mr. Evans be up? Linda had been the spokesperson, and I guess it is somehow better to be awakened in Lubbock, Texas, at 2 in the morning by a woman than by a man because James Evans was courteous and generous, not only giving us the words but also thanking us for our devotion to the Singing Brakeman. He yodeled his good-bye.

“Play ‘Hillbilly Heaven,’ ” someone, sounding a bit drunk, shouted as Tex and the band ended a number. Tex looked back at his band, and they started “Rye Whiskey.”

One of us at the table humped, "Hillbilly Heaven?"

"Can you name all the country singers listed in it?" another one of us asked. We tried to name them, of course, Jimmie Rodgers, and Hank Williams, Johnny Horton, Eddy Arnold, but we weren't sure about others.

While they continued trying to remember names of dead country musicians, I thought of hillbilly heaven. Not the song but the idea of heaven and salvation because a couple of years earlier, on a cool but gentle spring evening in Alpine, Texas, I was almost saved by T. Texas Tyler.

I guess T. Texas had a number of hits, but the one I still remember and, according to family legend, latched onto when it first was released was "Remember Me" by you know, "Remember me when the candle lights are glowing, remember me at the close of a long, long day." My Uncle Ernie was still telling the story of how I used to try to imitate T. Texas Tyler's style. I was about six or seven when I first heard it on a jukebox. There must have been or to my young ears there was a guttural straining of the word remember because Uncle Ernie always worked the word constipation and phrases like bulging eyes and red in the face into his descriptions. Maybe the strain I imagined was real and finally got to T. Texas. All those years of dancehalls and road-houses across the country-western world — the

secular trail through places like the Stampede in Stamford, Texas, little country towns like Rhineland and St. Hedwig, dancehalls like the Silver Spur in Bandera or the Polo Bar & Grill in San Antonio. By the time I was a junior at Sul Ross College in Alpine, Tyler was on the revival trail and pitched his tent for a few days on the edge of town, out near the pastures and dry arroyos where the college students partied. I saw a notice of his meetings taped to the door of Bob's burger joint and thought about going one night.

Although I was an authorized heathen and none of my compadres wanted to go — they were Catholics and Lutherans and not very evangelically inclined — there was enough of some guttural straining of my own spirit to be curious. And when one day before education class I heard Georgette Snyder of the flaming red hair say she wanted to go, I decided I'd definitely go and even asked her if she needed a ride. She did. But most of all, I wanted to hear and finally see T. Texas Tyler sing, "Remember Me" to relive Uncle Ernie's story in some way. So, I picked up Georgette at her dorm that evening and drove out to the tent on the highway to Ft. Davis. As we were walking toward the tent, one of Georgette's friends saw us and fell in step. She had attended the night before and just couldn't wait to be inspired again.

I asked, “Is he still a good singer? Did he sing ‘Remember Me?’”

She looked at me as if I had been profane or, no, as if I had spoken in Swahili — more a blankness than offense. She didn’t know what “Remember Me” was, and he had sung only a few Christian songs; T. Texas Tyler was testifying to being reborn not entertaining at a honky-tonk for that is the way of life he had abandoned and was calling on others to cast off. I stopped and looked back toward the car. The breeze was so soft it made me think of childhood spring evenings. I asked Georgette if she still wanted to go in.

“Why not?” Her eyes showed a bit less bewilderment than her friend’s did a few moments earlier, but still it was there. Something else was surfacing in those green eyes. I wondered what it was, and I weighed the odds of her leaving with me if I just walked back to the car. As I hung there in calculation, the soft Davis Mountain spring breeze reeled away and a scythe of ice cut us in half, and I was back inside the Timber Tavern and Dancehall in Potlatch.

Frigid air shot into the room even though a short woman, hefty bundled in a large fur parka, and a tall, raw-boned fellow in a mackinaw closed the door as quickly as possible. When they slung off their coats, the pure cold

wrapped around them seemed to solidify and sparkle like ice shavings coruscating to the floor. For another moment I thought myself back to springtime Texas and sipping a beer with a Catholic and a Lutheran in a dry creek bed. The voice of T. Texas Tyler drifted across the highway to Ft. Davis, and Bobby Bare sang about Detroit over the car radio.

We shivered once or twice, and Kirk Hegbloom went for another round. He returned, we toasted with the bourbon, “To Luke the Drifter” and Linda asked me if Tex Ritter was still like he was when I had seen him fifteen or sixteen years before. We all looked toward the bandstand as Tex sang Hank’s “Cheating Heart.” He wore a dark suit, a Stetson and a narrow blue tie. We could not see him from the knees down for the railing in front of the bandstand. We assumed he wore boots but without the pants tucked into them. He was thick in the middle. The blue of the tie was the only similarity.

He had worn a royal blue kerchief when my mother took me to see Tex in person at the old State Theatre on Main Avenue in San Antonio. I guess it was a premiere of one of his films, but it was after he had already started sliding out of the movies. The State was a B-run movie house, small and plain compared to the resplendently baroque Majestic and Aztec and even the art deco Texas, which all showed

first-run A films. My mother loved movies, which she took us to several times a month. She especially loved musicals, and I sat through more than enough dance scenes, trying not to squirm and never feeling the urge to dance like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers, or even Gene Kelly. This time, however, she took me to see Tex Ritter, and there he was in his blue kerchief with a cowboy-hero-of-the-movies costume the color of West Texas sand with scarlet piping along the yoke and pearl-studded pockets. His pants were tucked into his boots with their spread eagle wings tooling. And around his fifteen-year thinner waist, of course, was strapped his two six-shooter gunbelt. He gleamed. His horse White Flash gleamed, too. He sang some song from the film that played after his live appearance. I forgot the movie and the song because my mind had room for only the sun bright shimmer of Tex Ritter and White Flash.

And now here in Potlatch he sang across the dimly lit Quonset hut. A dark figure touched almost like a Rembrandt chiaroscuro with a weak shaft of light from a poorly aimed stage light. The song trotted to its end. Someone, sounding a bit drunk, shouted, “Play ‘Hillbilly Heaven,’” but the band took a break.

The dancers, now six couples with the arrival of the short woman in the fur parka and her man, came to sit by

our big stove and the men sallied up to the bar to buy beer or shots of whiskey or cokes. And a short way behind the dancers came the band, all aimed at the bar. Several then sat at a table next to ours and we greeted them, telling them how we were enjoying their playing. After talking with the bartender, who was owner-impresario of the Timber Tavern and Dancehall, Tex turned from the bar with a drink in his hand and began mingling among the tables, talking with the twenty, twenty-five people now fairly comfortable at the bar end of the building. No one had entered for about thirty minutes. Linda Kinney caught Tex's eye, and he came over with a smile. She pointed her bottle of beer in my direction and told him that I had seen him many years ago in a movie. At first he looked perhaps as bewildered as Georgette several springs ago, but I added, "No, not just in a movie. In person at a premier of one of your films."

"That must have been some time ago," he said and laughed.

"You had your horse, White Flash, with you on stage. My mother took me to see you. I think I was about eight. You, both you and the horse, glowed.

"I used a number of white horse. All were called White Flash. Where was that?" he asked, obviously trying to remember which one of thousands of appearances of his I

had seen.

“San Antonio, Texas. The State Theatre.”

“You from Texas?”

“Yes, sir. Born and raised in San Antonio.”

He shook his head slowly, then turned his head and shot his eyes in a rolling, all inclusive gesture, as if indicating the bar, the Quonset hut known as the Timber Tavern and Dancehall, Potlatch and probably all of northern Idaho and said, “Mighty cold place for a Texas boy.”

“Yes sir,” I said. He talked with us a bit longer, and right before his time to return to the bandstand, I told him how I had always liked his “Froggie Went A-Courting.” He smiled curiously and said he would play it.

The second song was “Froggie Went A-Courting,” and then Tex did a couple of his recitations like “Deck of Cards,” a song about a soldier who turns his deck of cards into a Sunday school lesson, which, by the way, was written and originally recorded by T. Texas Tyler. I guess the spiritual streak was always there. The dancers came to a halt with the recitations and just stood and listened to that deep Panola County, Texas, voice. Then Tex sang again and after the “High Noon” theme, someone, degrees drunker now, shouted, “Play ‘Hillbilly Heaven.’”

Tex Ritter was an amalgam of our cowboy heroes. He

was one of the classic-singing cowboys of the screen, able to whip more than his weight in outlaws and to sing a trail-riding ballad. And perhaps we were the last generation to have such heroes. We grew up as the singing cowboys were riding into the sunset. At one time the “Motion Picture Herald” and “Box office” released annual lists of the top ten cowboys of the movies. William Boyd, aka Hopalong Cassidy, and Gene Autry, and by the mid-40s Roy Rogers vied for top honors yearly, but Tex was generally in the fray until the early 1950s. The trade papers discontinued the lists in the mid-50s just as we were becoming adolescents, and after Dale Evans and even Judy Canova broke into the listings. Westerns, of course, were still produced, but they tended to be grittier, more realistic and then critically de-mystifying. The gleaming cowboy hero had to wait until “The Electric Horesman’s” Christmas tree lighting to gleam again, but then it was only an artificial aura. But my generation, or the small part of it hunched around that table in the Timber Tavern and Dancehall in Potlatch, Idaho, had been nourished in childhood by the cowboy myth, and here we were in audience to one of the icons of that myth.

The evening wore on, and slowly people started leaving. The dancer in the amber colored Western suit and his velveteen partner were first to leave. They sucked in their

stomachs and slid through the door, opening it as little as possible not to let in too much cold. A couple of the bar standers snuck through the door like sylphs. We drank our last bourbon, stood to judge our stability, put on scarves, coats and gloves and headed for the door. The band was finishing a piece that felt like the last encore played as the audience gathers its wraps and begins to shuffle to the exit. At the door, I turned to face the bandstand and Tex Ritter, who had his back toward us, and shouted one last time, “Play ‘Hillbilly Heaven,’” and stepped into the frigid Idaho midnight.



Here Tex Ritter
sing “Hillbilly Heaven.”
[CLICK HERE!](#)

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