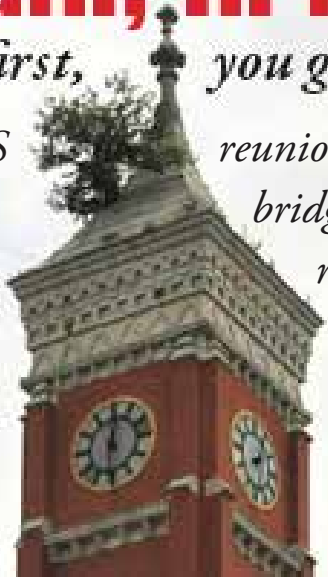


Back Home Again, In Indiana.

It's all that they say it is but first, you gotta' get there.

Clawing my way back to my fiftieth HS phones, deactivated debit cards, missing station cum archeological site and some Or, my tribute to the copywriter who great line, 'Getting there is half the fun.



reunion over dead cell bridges, a filling really bad radio. penned that

My 50th high school reunion was coming up. I was not popular back then and I was, and remain, an acquired taste. But, still, I didn't want to miss it. I sent in my money and hoped for the best. Using a Ouija board as an investment planning tool didn't pan out all that well. It showed up in the form of a boost from my younger brother, Jon, so I would be on my way or, so I thought.

For possibly the first time ever, I was packed and ready the night before. Got up at 5, loaded the car, did one last search, picked up my keys and phone. No phone. It was there, but dead. Stone dead. As if to add insult to injury, it would light up just long enough to say "Goodbye". That would piss off a dead man.

I had to wait until 10 for the AT&T store to open. Patience is not a virtue I possess if, in fact, it's a virtue at all. Who has the time for it?

I was at the AT&T store when they opened their doors. They confirmed what I already knew, DEAD, but to an extent that didn't expect. It was too dead to retrieve my contact info. So, I had to buy a new phone. There was no manual with it as the manual is in the phone's system. You know, the system that's described in the manual. WTF? Try that with an airplane. The guy hooked it to up to the Bluetooth in the car and I hauled ass.

I had decided to find an alternate route as the countryside between Little Rock and Nashville

makes West Texas look like a visual feast. It was wayyy longer than it looked. Shit. And, on top of that, Nashville has the worst radio on earth. Maybe Albania is worse but I'd bet, not by much. To confirm this, I hit 'scan' on the radio and heard "Wrecking Ball" three times on three different stations simultaneously. Hot Country Hits, indeed. A steaming pile of audible dog crap, IMO.

With hillbilly heaven in the rear view mirror, I was looking forward to getting into bourbon country and stopping by the distillery to pick up a bottle of 10 year-old Evan Williams Single Barrel. When I tried to make a phone call to see if I could pick up anything for the folks back in Texas while I was there, my brand new phone was dead. 4% battery, Goodbye. Again. WTF? Elizabethtown, the very heart of bourbon country was the next town likely to have an AT&T store so I hit city hall and asked for directions. I got there with my phone and receipt, explained what had happened and after he couldn't get it to charge either he said, "Sorry sir but, we can't exchange your phone. You see, you bought this at an AT&T retailer and we're an AT&T corporate owned store." Say what? I had him call the store in Texas where I got the same answer but, with a different accent. Are you shitting me? I headed to the car to fetch a satchel charge when another rep, who had overheard most of our exchange, came over and said, Let me have a look. I hung out for about 10 minutes and the guy came back and said it was charging. I watched it go from 4% to 12%, thanked them and hit the door. Having pissed away too much time there, I blew off



That's the courthouse in Greensburg, Indiana. The logo was designed by Randy Harris, a classmate.

my trip to the distillery. Just as well. In my state of mind, I'd have spent too much time in the tasting room anyway. Cheers.

At a rest stop, I thought I'd check my bank balance on my fancy new phone. All was well and it asked me the breed of my first dog as a security question. ?? It never asked me that before and that wouldn't be the question in any case. The only dogs I ever had were dogs, a couple of which were barely recognizable as a particular breed. That, *I am soon to be fucked again*, feeling began creeping up the back of my neck. It was right on. The next message was that my account was blocked because of an unauthorized attempt to access it. Great. Sweet, now I get to run up some much-needed credit card debt.

When I got to Louisville, they were undergoing bridge reconstruction and there was a long detour around it. Unfortunately, that was just a warm-up.

Indianapolis is always a pain in the ass to get around and no exception was made for the return of this prodigal son. I jumped in amongst 'em to ride it out. After all, I'd come this far. After sitting in traffic a while, my low fuel light came on. A few minutes after that, I had to pee so I figured I'd hit the next exit and kill two birds.

The next two exits had no gas stations. Lovely, here I am in the middle of the motorsports capital of the *fucking* Western Hemisphere and I can't find any fuel. At the next exit the sign said that there was a gas station but only one. There used to be a shopping mall down the road so I figured I'd have plenty of options. That knowledge created a considerable amount of anxiety in my bladder. I crawled to and finally off of the exit and I could see the sign ahead. Oh, Thank you Jesus.

I eased over to the left lane and when I got to where I could see, there was an excavator there sitting next to a pile of rubble that used to be the gas station. I ran an excavator for a couple of years and I felt so betrayed. It just sat there facing the



nice cool basement sounded like Nirvana. I made a short appearance at the pre-reunion mixer and left to reconnoiter some of my old hangouts. Didn't know a single soul.

Kay and I made the rounds visiting the next day, the day of the reunion, grabbing a breaded tenderloin along the way and I made some visits on my own. Having to run on credit cards, I decided not to stay as long as I had planned. That and, I could only imagine what might be in store for me going back.

road as if to taunt me for finding a gentler way to make a living. Damn.

Now I had to pee with a vengeance. After a couple of excruciating miles with nary a gas station in sight, I hit a fast food joint to use the facilities. I mulled over peeing in the shrubs but I toughed it out. I explained my plight and asked where the nearest gas station was. They told me, I filled up the car and hit the road. From the edge of Louisville until I reached my home town, 182 miles, it took me 6 1/2 hours.

Finally, I made it to my friend Kay's house. She had offered me her husband Mike's basement man cave to stay in while I was in town. Sleeping in a basement? Coming from Texas where it was 105 a



Kay Tomlinson Chenowith at the Cumberland covered bridge. James Dean was my third cousin.

The reunion was great. Well planned and provisioned, and I believe a good time was had by all. Even though I wasn't close to many of my classmates, it's always good to see them.

After a post-reunion day of visits and naps, I was ready to get on with it. I was going to E. Tennessee, Jonesborough actually, to visit my visit friend Tom Maples with whom I'd transitted much of the country between Texas and elsewhere on motorcyces and even once in a car on what may have been the US distance record for a beer run. We went to Stevens Point, Wisconsin to follow up on a story I heard on NPR about Point Beer. They were right. Of course, we had to detour through Kansas City to sample the BBQ, Anamosa Iowa to the Motorcycle Museum and HOF and to Dickieville (for real), WI to see the Dickieville Grotto and finally a stop at Kueper's 3, a nearby beer joint, to sample couple of cold local beers.

I consider anyplace I've never seen a good place to go so I started out on a state road through the countryside, avoiding all of the bullshit I encountered on the way up. Serendipity took me through Greensburg, Indiana and the Decatur Co. courthouse which has a tree growing out of its spire. A old local fellow saw me acting touristy and came up and said, "Ever wonder how that tree gets watered?" As I'd just arrived, that hadn't occurred to me so I bit on it. "By the springs in the clock."

No incidents of any kind on the way to Tennessee. Had a nice visit with Tom and his sister came over to say, Hi. Thanks to a guy at the local AT&T store, again, he told us of a world famous BBQ joint up in the hills. Being big fans we had to give it a shot. It was interesting. They put cole slaw on top of the meat in a sandwich. It was delicious although the sauce was sweeter than what we get in Texas. My sandwich was the size of a VW bus. Barely halfway through it, I abandoned the bread. They also made their own Bleu Cheese, a little of which

made its way back to Texas.

Early on the evening before I left, my throat started hurting and I had an idea of what was coming. About an hour after lights out, it arrived. I must have woken up every time I swallowed. I was finally asleep when Tom came in at 5 to get me up. I managed to croak out, Let's go to the ER at the VA. There is a very nice, small VA in Johnson City and I was in and out in no time. So far, the crud stayed in my chest and throat and my sinuses were OK. Not for long. About an hour out, my nose started running faster than I could keep up with it. I needed a bib. As luck would have it, Kay had left a box of Kleenex in my car from our journeys. Things were looking up. Occasionally, my sinuses would close up completely, so that when I sniffed real hard trying to clear them, I sucked back a solid mucus casting of my sinus cavity. TMI? Maybe but you've been there.

Other than battling that, most of the rest of the journey wasn't bad. I looked at a map somewhere in Alabama and guesstimated that I would pull into my driveway at 11:13 that evening. A little road game I play in my head.

At about 15 miles from the house and, right on schedule I might add, I crested the last hill before my exit I saw before me about 3 miles of solid brake lights, 5 lanes wide. I should have gone catatonic but, I was almost home and this was mild compared to most of the shit that happened on the trip up. I took advantage of the extra time to blow my nose with both hands for a change. Blowing your nose with one hand is like juggling with one hand.

Finally the traffic cleared and I hit the home stretch, confident that were it not for some careless shithead, I would have been right on time. I went in the back door to a pack of happy dogs, the two happiest mine and my friend Kathie who sat the dogs and house for me. It's over. I'm home. All I want to do is go to bed. I brush my teeth and on the way to my bedroom, I grab a tissue. The last one in the box.

