

The Claxton Enterprise

OPINIONS

Some of ours . . . some of yours ... and some others

A wartime love story

A box of yellowed letters post-marked in the 40s, a marriage license and a Purple Heart medal from World War II, accompanied by the dusty scent of the passage of time. It was the kind of thing that immediately sparks my interest - investigative antennae fully engaged.

The box arrived in my hands circuitously and I was asked to help locate potential family members for whom the mementos could be of priceless value. So, my investigation of the contents of the box began with a very specific purpose - to scan the documents for information: names, places, dates.

But then, as I was skimming through randomly chosen letters from

the box, I began to get glimpses of a fascinating story. A love story to be sure . . . maybe even more than one . . . dotted with humor, family drama, and the special kind of heartache that only a war can bring. The hook fully embedded, I was reeled in by the story at my fingertips.

The snippets revealed a wartime marriage between Charles and Elizabeth, the newlyweds wrangled apart as Charles went North for further training with the Navy before shipping out. Later, the expectation of a baby to arrive, but Charles, then at sea, did not know if he was yet a daddy. Family drama arose and Charles had to take sides between his bride and his mother as controversial rumors threatened his young family. There was a hint of a dangerous mission to come, and then, no more letters from Charles.

My curiosity now fully piqued, I

began to organize the letters in the order they were sent and read them one by one. But as I read the letters, nagging me in the back of my mind was the marriage license. Dated for December of 1946, it named Elizabeth and another man.

Charles and Elizabeth were newlyweds when the letters first started in January of 1944, married for only a few short weeks and already separated by miles and the constraints of war. Charles, a sailor in the Navy, was finishing his training before being sent to sea. He wrote to Elizabeth daily and sometimes twice a day.

He shared with her the mundane details of the life of a sailor not yet aboard his ship. He wrote about the movies he saw, being on night watch, and his utter disdain for the city of Norfolk. He also wrote of his love for

See **LEEANNA TATUM** Page 5



LeeAnna Tatum
Staff Writer

Something to think about ...

"You can get everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want."

Zig Ziglar



"How come nobody ever told me heroes are even more exciting in books!"

Book recounts a weird moment in Georgia history

We live in a state where strange things can happen in politics, but you won't see anything stranger than the time Georgia had three people who all claimed to be the state's chief executive.

This was the "three governors controversy" of 1947, an incident that made Georgia a national laughingstock and shaped the state's politics for years.

As we near the 70th anniversary of that scandalous event, Charles Bullock of the University of Georgia, Scott E. Buchanan, and Ronald Keith Gaddie have co-authored "The Three Governors Controversy," and it is a book that is both hilarious and excruciatingly painful to read.

It all started with the 1946 governor's race, an important one for a state that was just starting to confront the massive changes of the post-World War II period.

Gene Talmadge, a hard-drinking, race-baiting populist who had dominated Georgia politics for two decades, wanted to win one last term as governor. He was op-

posed in the Democratic primary by the more progressive Jimmy Carmichael, a Cobb County businessman.

Talmadge ran a racist campaign in which he warned voters that if they didn't elect him, "the Negroes will be riding the same coaches, sleeping in the same Pullman cars with white people, stopping in the same hotel, eating in the same restaurants, and pay the bill to a Negro cashier." He didn't always use the word "negro" when talking about the black population.

It was an effective strategy for that era of racial segregation. Although Carmichael received 16,000 more votes, Talmadge won the pri-

mary by carrying more rural counties under the county unit system that would remain in effect until the 1960s.

Talmadge was assured of winning the November general election because he had no Republican opposition, but his people wondered if he would live long enough to be sworn in. Years of heavy drinking had made Talmadge seriously ill.

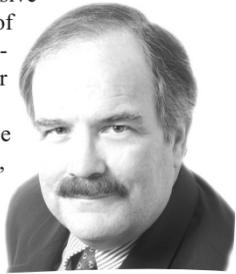
Talmadge's advisers hatched a plan to have write-in ballots cast in the general election for his son and campaign manager, Herman Talmadge. They hoped to exploit a state law that provided for the Legislature to elect a governor if the governor-elect died before taking office.

However, Georgia voters also elected M. E. Thompson as lieutenant governor, an office that had just been created as part of the new state constitution.

Gene Talmadge did indeed pass away on Dec. 21, triggering the chaotic events that followed.

The General Assembly elected Herman Talmadge in January 1947, but the Atlanta newspapers exposed the fact that the ballot box in Talmadge's home base, Telfair County, had been stuffed with fraudulent write-in votes cast by people who had actually died prior to the election.

See **TOM CRAWFORD** Page 5



Tom Crawford
The Georgia Report

Dixie Divas

When Mama planned on dying

For at least 20 years, maybe 25, Mama planned her home-going to heaven. Not a week - and sometimes not a day - went by when she did not use her impending date with mortality in some way.

One day, when I had picked her up to go on a weekend trip, we got in a terrible disagreement over, of all things, chicken and dumplings. She was in rare form so no matter what I said, she sassed back with something.

Finally, I said, "Okay. That's it! This is the last trip we're going on together. The Last Trip."

She turned her nose up and pulled the corners of her mouth down then replied, "I'd be ashamed if I were you. What if I died and this really was my last trip with you. You'd feel really bad. What would you say then?" She smiled smugly. Mamas always think they have the upper hand when they use doom and death over their children.

Quick as a noon whistle at a mill, I replied, "Then, I'd say that I'm a prophet."

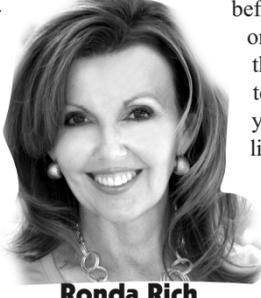
That didn't end the argument. As I recall, we stayed mad for a day or two before simmering down and moving on. Other than all the times she threatened to up and die just to teach me a lesson - "That'd show you a thing or two, little girl" - she liked to plan out her funeral.

When one preacher didn't show her the proper respect by visiting as he should have, he was marked off the list as a participant in her final goodbye. "He'll miss that hundred dollars, I guarantee you," she proclaimed.

As I recollect, he neither officiated nor attended. I guess that showed us all a thing or two.

But there are two things, in particular, that I think about often when I think of Mama and her look toward the grave. It was around Thanksgiving when we were driving past a grocery store and saw a sign that advertised Duke's mayonnaise "Two for \$3". I hit the brakes, pulled in and said, "That's a deal. I've got to run in and get some."

See **RONDA RICH** Page 5



Ronda Rich
Columnist

The Whole Truth or Thereabouts

Those trees will never die

Earlier this spring I saw one of my high school classmates, Morris Scheider, who I hadn't seen in 35 years. That, along with all of the vibrant, new greenery brought forth by the trees this spring reminded me of our mutual efforts in extramural forestry competitions.

In the spring of 1959 Claxton High School was selected to host the first regional FFA forestry meet. It would be a tournament of forestry-related activities, and was to be held at our school's forestry plot near the fire tower.

Mr. McElveen selected Morris and me for the tree identification contest since we had both done well in that part of our forestry classes. In preparation, Morris and I virtually lived in the woods that spring. We reviewed and honed our skills in identifying all of the leaves. Pines were easy since they were available year around, but some late budding species of deciduous trees definitely tested our patience.

When the contests rolled around in late April, though, both of us had become highly proficient in recognizing the native trees of southeast Georgia. The examination at the forestry meet consisted of identifying about 15 different leaf samples. When I finished I felt confident that I had done well.

When the winners were announced, Morris and I outdistanced the other participants. Mr. McElveen was very pleased, and

we all were delighted when Claxton emerged as the winning school.

There was no further level to compete in that year. However, the next spring a statewide tournament was set up for the schools that won their regional meets. SE Bulloch High School was our regional host, and it was held in the woods somewhere near there. Morris and I again took tops in tree identification, and good old CHS emerged as the winning school for the second straight year.

Consequently, on a Friday in early May, our eager team arrived at Rock Eagle in central Georgia. We were all naively unaware that it was to be our initiation into the advanced level of state competition.

When the tree identification trials began it quickly dawned on me that two things were dreadfully different. First, we had to identify living trees instead of only their leaves. Next, there was a number of species up there that I had never seen outside the guidebook.

Most of the trees had crowns so high it was difficult to make out individual leaves. The worst specimen had only one little limb with leaves about ninety feet up and very little bark on its lower trunk. I knew my score was low even before I finished. Seeing Morris's glum face told me he had fared no better.

Mr. McElveen then asked me

to participate in an exercise called selective marketing. Somehow we hadn't been notified about that category, and it had never been included in our regional meets. My knowledge on the subject was limited, but Mr. McElveen hurriedly gave me some tips. Then he told me to just do my best and not to worry about it.

That exercise consisted of selecting substandard trees to be removed from a stand of numbered pine trees. As I progressed, I began to feel strangely confident that I was picking the correct ones.

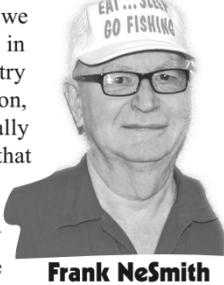
At the awards banquet that night it surprised neither Morris nor me that the tree identification category was won by a boy from central Georgia. However, I could have been knocked over by a light breeze when I triumphed in the selective marking contest.

It was my first encounter with the fickle ironies of life. I had studied leaves and trees until I dreamed about them. I subsequently prevailed at our two regional meets; however, I couldn't even get honorable mention at state. Yet, I wound up winning a category in which I had absolutely no experience.

Collectively, CHS's team didn't do well at state, but we all felt fine on the way home. We had won our region's competition two years in a row and made it to the first state forestry meet. Besides, everyone knew there was always next year. That is, except for the seniors like Morris and me.

I last saw Mr. McElveen in

See **FRANK NESMITH** Page 5



Frank NeSmith
Columnist

The Claxton Enterprise

"AN AWARD WINNING WEEKLY"

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