

An Interstate Sketchbook - 2023
Texas Rivers, Roads and Ramblings



Christopher M. Brinson

“Townes Van Zandt is the best songwriter in the whole world, and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in my cowboy boots and say that.” – Steve Earle

Only In Texas

Fun fact. Camels are native to North America. They thrived here until relatively recently- about 10,000 years ago. Then humans arrived and the camels went the way of other large prehistoric land mammals. Fast forward another 8,500 years to 1856 and some Texans along the Gulf Coast thought it would be a great idea to import some camels to do what horses and pack mules had been doing quite adequately for at least 500 years. The camels landed around Indianola after a three month boat ride from Northern Africa. This experiment lasted ten years with mixed results and after the Civil War, the camels were auctioned off to various private individuals. The last confirmed sighting of one of the Texas camels was somewhere in Arizona in 1891. The local Hoop And Holler ¹ Chapter of Big Foot Hunters International, however, swear on their mother's graves, that they've seen a herd of camels in their vicinity of Liberty County but other than that, there haven't been any credible camel sightings in over 125 years in the state.(alas, they HAVE NOT spotted Big Foot either).



¹ Look it up. It's a real place

an interstate sketchbook

crackling asphalt
another gulf coast town
faded yellow lines painted
upon these side roads
salt hand mixed with humidity
street vendors riding
three wheeled cycles
selling frozen shrimp
twelve dollars per pound
taking refuge beneath
the freeway as another
rouge thunderstorm
erupts high in the
texas skies.

yeah, but it's all mine

seventy-two payments later
forty thousand dollars
one hundred sixty thousand miles
that's once around the earth
every year without ever having
left the houston petro-plex
a few stains and scratches
that one big dent where my
daughter tried to drive under
railroad crossing bars
trade in value negligible
runs good and a.c. still cools
nevertheless
none the worse for the wear



memory lane

these brick paved streets
where rows and columns meet
hand placed one by one
beneath the southern sun
cracks filled with mud
mortar tinted by blood
warped with time
shadows etched into my mind.

the dairy queen no more

rusty columns
rotted wood panelling
cracks in the brick veneer
repurposed over and again
across the decades
currently home to susan's
twenty-four hour
flower shop
bouquets and bonnets for
all occasions or no occasion
cash only no credit
sorry for the inconvenience
by you know how times are
god bless.



the rapid unscheduled disassembly

ten miles above the gleaming
south texas padre island
coastline the largest rocket
ever built explodes in the clear
morning sky while a room full of
engineers and spin doctors proclaim
the incident a resounding victory
as they watch billions of dollars
in flaming fragments plunge
into the gulf of mexico.

matagorda morning

moon
sand salt
water
carve this
coastline
come
sunrise
our beach
reclaims
only
remnants
of
what the
night's tide
has taken
away.



Brinson At A Place Called McElroy Springs

Just down the road from my grandfather's house, only about 300 yards or so-along this red dusty path, there is a cemetery. In that cemetery, perhaps up to five generations of my family are buried there depending on which branch you are looking at. I am probably related to half of the people there. That's quite interesting to live so close a family burial ground as my grandparents did. So many times as a kid I would walk down the road and carefully read all the names on those markers. For some of these names I could find a photo to connect them to. So I would try to imagine what these people sounded like, what they would say to me if they were standing there. Afterall, it was the 1970's and decades before the advent of cell phones and the internet. There was one T.V. station that you could tune in sometimes and at other times, the T.V. was just 13 channels of snow and static. A fella had to use his imagination to pass the time of day, you know.

pine island bayou

they say she sings
beneath the bridge
while the tide is out
by the dimness of
a gulf coast new moon
during pre-dawn hours
strumming her guitar
humming the same tune
awaiting for the
water to return.

rio grande

flows flood feast famine
takes no sides
though she divides
brothers sisters
mothers fathers
knows where they go
trickles drops
down and dries
mud cracks
earth bakes
and rocks sit
waiting for rain
that might not arrive
though they never die.

san jacinto river double dare

i gingerly step
recalculate
take another breath
do the math
step again
i do not look down
maintain balance
upon these rails
make it to the other side
train whistle getting
louder heart beating harder
I know I won't be twelve
forever but I sure as hell
want to make it to
be thirteen.

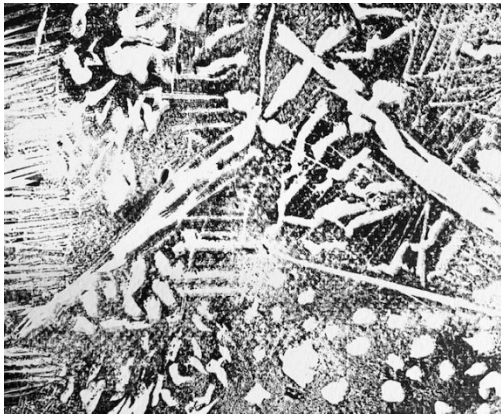


trade days devotional

flags flying
pink blue purple
hot chocolate and
coffee
donuts or deep
fried oreos
open early
get yours now
before crowds arrive
looks like my crappy
cloudy day just took
a turn for the better
a win is a win
grab it if you can get it
brother.

big thicket

the settlers, lumberjacks
cotton farmers and cattlemen
arrived each time cutting
the forest down
dancing with dollars in their
pockets
but the trees always
grew back wiping away any
trace these interlopers had
left upon their sacred ground.



(Original art by Thomas Brinson)

neches river lullaby

oil tankers are carefully
guided downstream as a group
of fathers cast fishing lines
children chase seagulls waving
at tugboat captains while mothers
sit under shade sipping chilled
wine on this day where all the
jagged little shards of gulf coast
life fell into their proper places
if only for an afternoon.

Brinson's Houston Hideout in Hermann Park

Circumstances have brought me into H-town today with nothing but some time on my hands waiting for said circumstances to change. It is the most insanely beautiful, mild and gentle day in the city. What this translates to is that a million people have spring fever and have all driven in from every suburb of Harris county to partake in all the nation's 4th largest city has to offer. Somehow, I got lucky and have happened on an under developed not-so-traveled corner of Hermann Park on the east side of Bray's Bayou beneath an oak tree dripping with an infinite amount of strands of Spanish moss. The wind is pleasantly blowing. The medical center is there before me about a mile across the bayou. I can see traffic but cannot hear it's roar. I can hear myself think. It is good to hear that voice now and again. A few people close by are walking their dogs, but other than that, you won't find me and I won't find you and that's about as good as it gets on a Saturday afternoon in Houston, Texas.



Brinson Gets His Priorities Straight

It was two and a half years ago on “The Great Big Brinson All-American Vacation Number Three”(thus completing our mythic trilogy) as I was driving through the emptiness of Michigan’s U.P. that I concocted the idea of getting a small camper in my head. The goal of this dream was to travel more instead of doing extra work for the company on my personal time. Since I have no plans of ever retiring, the work will always be there so I should then use my vacation time more wisely. Luckily, before we made it home to Texas, I was able to get Anna’s “buy in” to the plan. So we picked a Casita and then waited 14 months for it to be delivered. We have had it for 6 months and by the end of the year we will have been on 9 camping trips already. It has proven to be the cure for Brinson’s restless spirit. Yes, the projects at work are piling up since I am working less at home but the work will be there waiting for me. However Saturday October 7, 2023 will never happen again and I best do something with it now while I have it in the palm of my hand. The open road awaits....



Texhoma to Brownsville Driving Music(partial list) ¹

1. Buddy Holly
2. Kris Kristofferson
3. Janis Joplin
4. Willie Nelson
5. Townes Van Zandt
6. Waylon Jennings
7. The Big Bopper
8. Sir Douglas Quintet
9. Freddy Fender
10. Fever Tree
11. Steve Miller
12. Guy Clark
13. 13th Floor Elevators
14. Lyle Lovett
15. Selena
16. Robert Earl Keen
17. The Flatlanders
18. Freddy Fender
19. George Jones
20. George Strait
21. Stevie Ray Vaughn
22. Jimmie Vaughn
23. Leadbelly
24. Blind Lemon Johnson
25. Blind Willie Johnson
26. Old 97's
27. Gatemouth Brown
28. Flaco Jimenez
29. The Moving Sidewalks
30. Miranda Lambert
31. Kenny Rogers
32. Roy Orbison
33. Kacey Musgraves
34. Bob Wills
35. Harry James
36. Gary Clark Jr
37. Ernest Tubb
38. Tanya Tucker
39. Scott Joplin
40. Mance Lipscomb
41. Megan Thee Stallion
42. Asleep At The Wheel

- 43. Kings X
- 44. Dead Horse
- 45. Pantera

¹ *That's 885 miles. Slightly more than Orange To El Paso (852 miles)*



lovely rita

the hurricane was coming and
this time it was the big one
i could see the fear in the
weatherman's eyes as he told
us to grab our loved ones and
get the hell out of houston
but in doing so we created the
largest traffic jam ever recorded
so much so that hundreds
died of heat exhaustion and
accidents on the interstates
alas in the end, the storm
veered east and missed our fair
petro-plex all together and
space city received nary a drop
of rain. and so it goes.

victim of the pines

he got a college degree
said goodbye to the city
moved into the woods
let his hair grow long
raised emus(yes, emus)
stayed on lake rayburn
looking for bigfoot
and listenting for aliens
wrote us letters on a
smith corona typewriter
but when the missives
got few and far between
we got the message quite
clearly that he just
wasn't ever coming
back to reality again.

they called it the eighth wonder of the world

it's still there on the south side
two decades now abandoned
nestled between skyscrapers
and chemical plants
just another eye sore
rotting leaking crumbling
and never a politician
with enough clout and courage
to blow the damn thing up
and be done with that
chapter of history.

round top rusty relics, inc

sewing box
stitched leather
broken latch
creaking hinges
made in dallas
contents include
thread needle thimbles
buttons spools
fingerprints
mends jackets
socks blankets
sometimes broken hearts
owner forevermore
displaced seeking
new caretaker for
eternity
thirty-five dollars
or best offer.



she had an answer for everything

no tv no radio
no problem
shell peas

no city no lights
no problem
shell peas

no friends no phone
no problem
shell peas

don't gripe don't groan
don't grumble
shell peas

get up get out
get going
shell peas.

the road to rehab

side o' the road
local honey
raw
unfiltered
comb encased
sealed in mason jars
dripping with
morning dew
glistening golden
sunshine
clover
orange blossom
lavender
take a pint
take two
pay now
pay later
don't pay
at all
leave happy
come again
if and when
needed.

Brinson Visits Stone Henge

We drove from Davis Mountains to Monahans Sandhills State Park this morning. To tell you the truth, I haven't spent that much time in West Texas north of Interstate 10(not including the pandhandle- to a lowlands SETX guy like me, the panhandle is North Texas). So, my first time in extreme West Texas very much north of the Mighty Ten. It's very interesting and quite amazing how much of a geographic line of demarcation the interstate is out here. South of the interstate is an endless array of magestic mountains which seems untouched by the hands of humans. But as soon as you get north of the freeway, the landscape immediately flattens out. For about 50 miles, I could still see the Davis Mountains in the rearview mirror but on my immediate left and right for as far as I could see it was only a flat horizon with hundreds of oil pump jacks, truck stops and dozens of paved RV parks where all these oil patch workers live. We did happne upon this life size replica of Stone Henge, but I miss the mountains already.



the back forty

uphill
downhill
across cold rivers
and dark gullies
through rusty
barb wire fences
that sink their
teeth into sweet
gum trees
beneath their leaves
hidden by layers of time
rest the bones that
ask more questions
than they will
ever answer.

ms. ida eng

fifty years ago fled
vietnam in a rowboat
turned twenty-one
within a refugee camp
finally found a way
to houston texas where her
first job was flipping burgers
learned the local language
especially how to say
honey sweetheart and y'all
became owner of two dozen
mcdonald's restaurants
sold her interests then retired
has put her father, husband
and son all in the ground
two time cancer survivor
met a stranger at hermann
park today who is a
stranger no more.

park road eighteen thirty-six

sixteen miles east of houston
in the midst of a hundred
chemical plants that pump
out alkyls and olefins stands
the world's largest monument
(of course, slightly taller than
the one in washington)
and when visitors come from
far away as places like
singapore and ask what that
funny smell in the air is
the park ranger politely
replies, "well friend, that
there's the smell of money"



bygones

pressed flowers
between pages
red yellow blue
shuffled packed
unpacked put back
upon a shelf
four different houses
twenty-five years
still looking
still longing.



(Original art by Victoria Kingston)

rockport

those live oaks
up on the shore
shaped by centuries
of gulf winds
their veins full of salt
bark seasoned with sand
stronger than concrete
reinforced with steel
barricading this city
from everything the
sea has ever sent it.

The Last Stone Standing

Between May 1840 and June 1841, hundreds of stone markers were placed between the newly formed Republic of Texas and the United States Of America along the Sabine River to demarcate where the one country ended and the other began. Fast forward another 175 years or so and only one of these markers remain. It's nowhere even near a major(or even a minor) Texas Highway, But it is still there- about 3 miles down a dead end dirt road, somewhere off of FM 31 it is standing there still perfectly perpendicular in the Earth-the only physical reminder that Texas was once it's own country. 30 million Texans cannot agree on much, but we all like to whip that fact out of our knapsack of trivia from time to time.



indianola

the hurricane pulled the
lighthouse into the sea
and by the time her winds
calmed, the ocean never
returned those souls
it had claimed
all that's left now is an
old fisherman standing
waste deep in the tide
casting his line while
recounting these ghost
stories to me.



the bull nettle

my home
in the sand
under the sun
alone
blazing heat
without rain
i've grown
feel my bite
feel my pain
down in
your bone.

Brinson And Brinson Visit ATX

Field notes from the Westin Hotel in downtown Austin(*oh so overpriced for the minimal services received*). Drove over here yesterday afternoon to see the band “Sparks” at The Austin City Limits Theater. I was pretty excited because I have always wanted to see a concert at ACL. Sparks...what an interesting band. Thomas is a big fan. They have never been overly famous. They’ve been around since the seventies. I had never heard of them until Thomas introduced them to me. We were comfortably back in the hotel by 10:00 pm (short concert only about 80 minutes, apparently Sparks likes to be in bed at a normal time like Brinson does). Woke up about 5:30 am, went downstairs, walked around downtown a bit. Took some photos of some old historical houses and other strange things. Now it appears we are headed to a Lego place and then meet Eric for lunch. After that we will drive back home. What a day.



there was a crooked man

rough around the edges
soft inside his soul
out on this tightrope
trying to repair his holes.



tricia

she's got ten hours
of highway behind her
and a dozen more to go
until she gets to home
but then again...
no idea of what
kind of crisis awaits
at her door
so it's another waffle house
another cup of coffee
waiting for sunrise
before heading west
for that final stretch
of asphalt.

Brinson And Oliver Get Lost

It was the eighties, the very early eighties, summer of 1981 to be exact. There were no iphones. For better or for worse, kids played outside and stayed away from the parents inside while parents were doing “whatever it is parents do”(still haven’t figured that one out). This “free range” lifestyle was quite functional and idyllic but sometimes the system failed. Such was the case that day that 11 year old Brinson and Oliver set out on a hike with their Daisy BB guns in the rolling hills of LaGrange, TX on a hot humid summer morning. I don’t know how many hours we were lost-it had to be more than 10 because when we finally found our way out, the sun was beginning to set. Possibly one of the two or three moments in my life that I have felt true panic and terror. And of course, yours truly, during this mis-adventure, lost his glasses. The parents were looking for us. We met them on the way out once we had found the road home. This story has now achieved a somewhat mythological “lore” status among the family.

open range

crescent moon sets
darkness falls
through the trees
silence calls
outlines melt
memories return
prolonged moments
of fires that still burn.



The Great Texas Freeze of '21 Chili Recipe ¹

Ingredients

- 1 pound of “something”(beef, turkey, pork, soy, etc)
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- 1 big onion, chopped(the bigger the better)
- 2 bell peppers, chopped(3 would be even better)
- 4 stalks of celery, chopped
- 1 can of diced tomatoes
- 1 can of Rotel tomatoes(must be Rotel, ok?)
- 1 can of tomato paste
- 3 Tablespoons of Chili Powder (hey, I did say it's for really cold day!)
- 2 teaspoons of Cumin
- 1 teaspoon of paprika
- 1 teaspoon of black pepper
- 3 cups of water
- 1 can of Pinto Beans (optional...calm yourself down, I said optional)

Directions

1. Big pot over medium high heat, put a little olive oil in there, just a splash.
2. Put in all the chopped vegetables, let it brew for about 10 minutes.
3. Put in your “something” of choice. Stir thoroughly until it's browned.
4. Now put in all your canned ingredients swirl it around some.
5. Sprinkle all those spices in there now. Swirl it around some more.
6. Pour in the water.
7. Bring that pot to a boil, put the fire down to about low-medium-ish and cover
8. Give it a good stir about every five minutes for at least 30 minutes.
9. Continue to cook and stir longer if you desire a thicker more robust concoction.
10. Now eat that chili.

¹ This chili is best enjoyed when it is 12 degrees Fahrenheit outside, 60 degrees inside with the heat on, 75% of Texas has lost their power and you are hoping like heck the flickering lights mean you ain't about to lose your power. But hey, I like it on a hot summer day of 100 degrees too.



counterparts

the owl sits
atop her perch
a barren sycamore
branch on the
northern banks of
the trinity river
talking to the
flickering reflection
of a harvest moon.

monahans

wind howls
sands shift
dunes move
textures change
as footprints
are erased from
this ancient sea
only that big sky
remains.



the chaplain's wife

married to the man
married to the military
married to their god
three years here
three years there
montgomery alabama
boise idaho
and now abilene texas
all quite nice
all quite adequate
but none quite home.

marfa

mystery lights
cowboy ghosts
tumble weeds
rusting movie
marquees
hippie chicks
slacker dudes
sun wind dust
pioneers pilgrims
and poets.



Brinson And The Last Supper

In my grandparents house at the farm hung a painting of The Last Supper. It was a “paint by the numbers” painting. Of course I didn’t know that at the time. And it looks like a few of the disciples have sunglasses on. I used to lay on their couch and stare at the picture and wonder why some of the people at Jesus’ last supper had those sunglasses on? Did they have sunglasses in Jesus’ time? Now, fast forward about 40 years, my grandparents house is vacant and caving in. Anna and I pilfered that painting from the house along with several other items(even though we don’t own the house anymore). We brought it home and it sat in our closet for about 5 years. And suddenly this morning, Anna decided to bring it out into the light of day, buy a nice frame to go around it and prominatly display it among other family photos in our front room. And swear to God, those three disciples on the far right hand of the table look just like the rock band ZZ Top to me. What a long strange trip it’s been.



the cowboy

sits outside the presidio
county courthouse adjusts
his boots, wipes the years
off his wind worn sun burned
face, stands up, walks away
and then disappears into
the currents of time.

the scuppernogs

untended
neither mended
nor pruned
unused
some die
on the vine
others tumble
then crumble
into the ground
eternally bound.

Hurricane Emergency Evacuation Biscuit Recipe¹

Ingredients

- 2 cups of flour
- ½ teaspoon of baking soda
- 3 heaping teaspoons of baking powder
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 Tablespoon of sugar
- 6 Tablespoons of vegetable oil
- 1 cup of buttermilk (maybe a bit more)
- Some butter

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees
2. Put all the dry ingredients in a big yellow pyrex bowl. Whisk it together pretty good
3. Put the buttermilk and vegetable oil in a small red pyrex bowl and whisk that together until it is blended.²
4. Pour the wet ingredients in the dry ingredients.
5. Mix with a fork until it barely comes together. If it needs a bit more wet stuff, splash a little more buttermilk in there.
6. Throw a palm full of flour on your kitchen counter.
7. Pour the biscuit mixture onto the flour.
8. Work the dough just a little bit, 30 seconds or so. *No need to get carried away. This ain't no loaf of bread you are making.*
9. Flatten it out to where it's about ½ inch thick.
10. Cut your biscuits
11. Put the biscuits in a pan that you have sprayed cooking spray in or rubbed a thin film of vegetable oil on.
12. Put a bit of butter on top o' each biscuit
13. Bake for 15 minutes
14. Eat with butter, eat with strawberry jam or eat with honey. Or...eat them plain.

¹ *Whip up a batch of these right as the killer hurricane is coming into the Gulf of Mexico and the local weatherperson has told you that you better get yourself as far away from Houston as you can. You will need something to munch on during that 15 hour drive from Houston to Dallas. What's that you say? Don't want to wait around for the next hurricane to enjoy some biscuits? Then, any old Sunday morning will do.*

² *Yes, Pyrex. Bowls must be at least 60 years old. Results may vary and cannot be guaranteed if colored pyrex bowls not utilized.*

enchanted rock

darkness falls
old friends
seven stars
silence begins
mind clears
open range
heart soars
as seasons change.

Brinson And The \$6000 8-Track Tape

1976-1986. I grew up in the back of a station wagon. That thing was huge, man. I bet it was as long as 2 Honda Civics. And it was “very 1970’s” too. It was 2 tone “wood panelling color.” The model was “Ford Country Squire” We used to haul a pop up camper all around Texas and back and forth to Arkansas a couple of times. I remember my entire cub scout troop piling into that thing. But what I remember the most about it was the 8-Track Tape player. And more specifically the “8 track tape” that came with the car to demonstrate it’s “audio dynamic range”. I remember several songs off that tape too – “Memories Are Made of These” by Dean Martin(ah, good old Dino), “Send in the Clowns” by Judy Collins and “Theme From Mahagony” by Diana Ross. My father called it his “\$6000 8-track tape”. Imagine that, a brand new car in 1976, costing only \$6000.



north of amarillo south of nowhere

open all night
under neon lights
got chocolate pie
while there's supply
country music blaring
while lovers sit glaring
hitchhikers gawking
waitresses talking
snow begins to fall
highway starts to call
so i walk away
from another roadside café.

Brinson On The Road Again

Willie Nelson. What more can you say about that guy that hasn't already been said. A Texas Original. An American Original. Ninety years old and he just got inducted into The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. That old pot head got up there on stage with his famous beat up Martin gutiar and played for everyone. Possibly the only thing that all Texans can agree on is Willie Nelson. Everytime we'd head out on a trip in the Station Wagon, we'd listen to "Stardust" on 8-track. It must have gotten thousands of plays. My government teacher at Lee College, Dr. Roberts, had grew up with Willie in Abbott, Texas and would remind of us of the fact weekly. Back in 2009, Anna and the kids were in New Zealand and Willie was playing on a triple bill at The Woodlands Pavillion with John Mellancamp and Bob Dylan.¹ I figured I better go see him while he was still alive. That was 14 years ago. He may not be going as strong as he used to , but he is still going nonetheless. Hope I'm still going that strong when I hit 90 years old.

¹ *Willie was the opening act. He played about an hour. Mellancamp played about an hour too. I enjoyed his set. I gave Bob Dylan a chance, I really did. I stayed for about 3 songs and then left. I couldn't stand the torture any longer than that. Love Dylan's records, but he hasn't been able to sing a note since about 1984. Anybody who sang as badly as did that night would have been crucified. Alas, they are not Bob Dylan. I digress....*

an exit 553 thanksgiving

red and yellow
autumn leaves tumble
lonely souls
gather
none of us attached
this highway runs
east to west
and
on either side
an ocean awaits
us.



on the dark end of the street

abandoned and rusting
ceramic letters pelted
with decades of rain
faded red and green trim
metal flapping with the wind
in every tiny city
from orange to el paso
where popcorn was once made
and movies once played.



lost in liberty county

not a sign

not a cemetery

not a dot on the map

not even a ghost town

leveled and razed

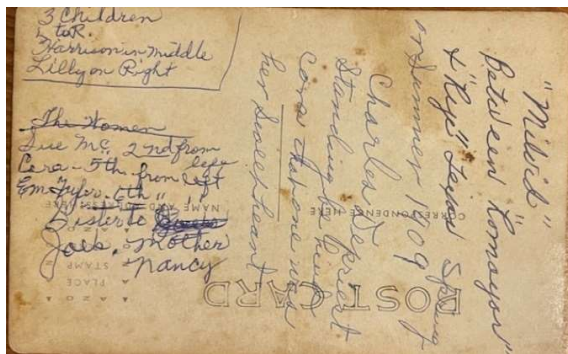
forgotten

all that's left is a postcard

of century old faces

and a list of names

she had written on the back.



a life...well, lived

lists made
items crossed out
red black blue ink
blood sweat tear
stained
rinse and repeat
turn the pages
fill the journals
stack the shelves
forgive but never
forget.



our daily bread

behind closed doors
memories on the floor
dreams rearrange
landscapes so strange
locked in sleep
my soul to keep
another daily grind
washed from my mind.

taqueria montenegro #4

turquoise blue box truck
propane vent fumes flying
into another hundred degree
texas afternoon nevertheless
customers line up single file
by the dozen upon this
sizzling texaco parking lot
handing over crinkled dollar
bills for those world famous
tacos and glass bottles of
icy topo chico every day
until midnight only cash
accepted no credit or debit.

Brinson, Four Otters And The Unicycle Juggler

For ten years I lived in a suburb of Houston. It probably looks like any other suburb of any other major North American city. It is called Kingwood. It was very convenient and “planned”. There was one thing that I really liked about living there. On the very edge of the ‘burb, as it were, was a wilderness preserve nestled up against the San Jacinto River. It is called “East End Park”. There are a lot of trails to wander there. Many Fridays while the kids were at school and Anna was at work, I would go out to that park and go running. Sometimes, I would just take my guitar, walk to the most faraway bench overlooking the river and play to nobody at all. On one of my walks by the river, some creatures popped out of the water. It frightened me to death. I thought it was an alligator, but it was four otters playing with one another. And...on that same walk, I passed a guy riding a unicycle down the boardwalk while juggling. No joke. So far, both events a first and only time for me. And to think, I saw it all in East End Park.



the school bus graveyard

endless rows and columns
one hundred shades
of yellow
ashes to ashes
rust to dust
weeds vines trees
growing through gaps
between
faint voices still echo
buy one buy all or
just drive on by.

last will and testament

our footprints tracked by blood
became fossils covered with mud
those secrets locked in stone
now an inheritance made of bone.

the lost maple lovers

the fires were ablaze that day
layers of thick pungent
smoke rose to the sky becoming
entangled in the clouds
nevertheless we drove on through
that sulfuric haze looking for
the sun two dreamers caught in
a dream chasing down another
dream that refused to be caught.

to preserve and protect

bottom line
broken frame
lost memories
unfinished dreams
bits of glass
upon this floor
sweep it up
hide it in a drawer.

will the circle be unbroken?

hand me down clothes
hand me down shoes
hand me down traditions
hand me down news
hand me down fables
hand me down views
hand me down fallacy
hand me down blues.

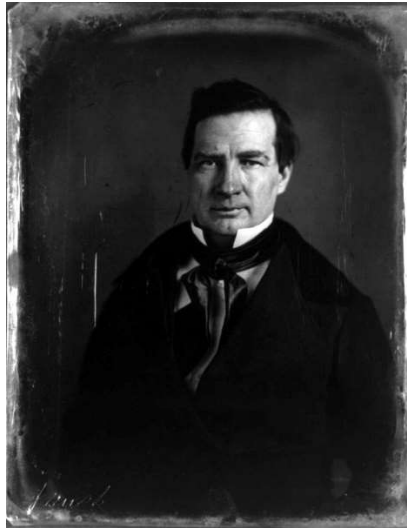
the 7-11 grand opening

the fact that an alligator
had taken up residence in their
retention pond was coincidental
but tourists came nonetheless to
buy gator merchandise and fill
their tanks with super-unleaded
business was so great, that the
key corporate suits in dallas
pondered the possibility of
providing a gator for every
gas station grand opening but it
is rumored that this idea didn't
quite translate to the home
office in tokyo japan and the
thought was dropped all together.

the power of silence

broken by the wind
weathered by sand
polished with rain
frozen in time.

A Texas Ghost Story



Even though his name gets muffled out a bit in the annals of Texas history by the likes of Houston, Austin, Travis, Bowie and Crockett, this dapper looking gentleman is right up there in the Big Names of our Big State. His name was Thomas Jefferson Rusk. He held various government positions in The Republic Of Texas including Brigadier General, Secretary of War and Chief Justice Of The Supreme Court. And once Texas was admitted to The Union, he served (along with Sam Houston) as one of the first two Senators to the U.S. Senate from Texas.

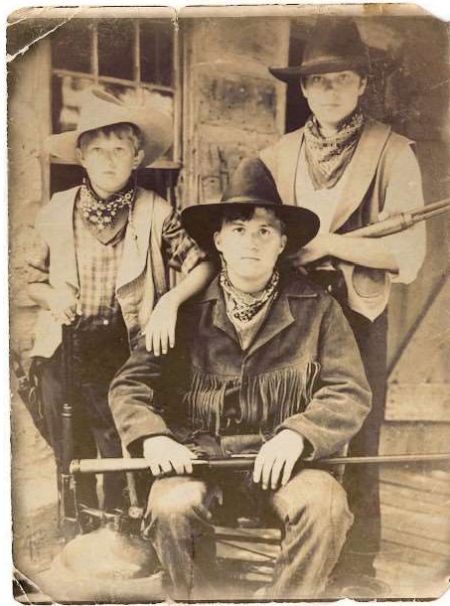
Alas, his life fell on hard times when his beloved wife, Polly, became ill with tuberculosis and died shortly thereafter. Rusk couldn't bear the thought of life without her and just months after her death, put a pistol to his own head and committed suicide. Legend has it(*well, myth...really*), that St. Peter denied Rusk admittance to heaven due to this final sinful act on earth and thus banished his spirit to forevermore roam the East Texas Piney Woods. It is said that Rusk's ghost haunts those woods in constant search for his wife.

The Ghost has been known to frequent the tracks of The Texas State Railroad between Palestine and Rusk(the city that is his namesake). Over the years, passengers have reported many occasions of old T.J. waving as the train cars pass by. It was one of these visitations that was blamed for the "The Great Christmas Train Disaster of 1975". The engineer spotted The Ghost right in front of the locomotive standing in the middle of the tracks beckoning that the train stop. The engineer, a man by the name of Casey Jones Simpson, attempted to come to a complete stop, but in the process, the passenger cars flew off track and flung several dozen tourists from Belgium into the sweet gum and pine trees. Miraculously none of them were seriously injured.

Yours truly once met up with The Ghost while deep in the bottom lands of Anderson County back in the summer of 1982. There I was fishing on the northern banks of Boxes Creek with my trusty rusty Zebco rod and reel when I peered across to the opposite side and there we was just as plain as day grinning at me ear to ear. "Excuse me, young man, " The Ghost said in a booming baritone voice, "Have you seen my fair wife, Polly?" I tell you this-I did not stuck around to answer. I left my Zebco and string of fish there in the creek, ran like hell across the county line to my aunt's house and attempted to recount my supernatural encounter to her. "Hush!" she commanded. "What you need is a piece of pie."

She shoved a big slice of coconut meringue in my face and said, “Here...eat!” And so I did. And so it goes...

A Small Texas Tale



This is the only known photo of The McElroy Boys Gang from left to right Luke, Clyde and Dud. It was taken on April 25, 1868 shortly before their one, only (and unsuccessful) bank robbery. Noted Texas historian, W.F. Gray (with tongue firmly planted in cheek) has given them the moniker "The Not So Wild Bunch". Gray does record, however, in his locally award winning book, "Another 1001 Useless Facts About Texas History" that the boy's father, Joe Henry, had walked all the way home to Texas from Virginia after The Civil War only to die on the door steps in his wife, Olivia's arms, as their sons helplessly looked on. Olivia, stricken with grief, wandered out into the woods and died just a few hours later from a broken heart.

It was at that moment, the orphaned boys were left to fend for themselves. They eked out a minimal existence by eating wild berries and hickory nuts but soon turned to a life of petty crime. This eventually led to that fateful spring day where they walked into the Nacogdoches Wells Fargo brandishing pistols demanding all the money in the vault. Things quickly went from bad to worse as Luke dropped his rifle on the floor. The gun misfired, shooting Dud squarely in the backside. The bank president's dog woke up from his nap and with a satantic possessed look at his eyes, lunged at Clyde and took a huge bite out of his arm. As quickly as it had begun, the bank heist was a bust.

The McElroys scattered in separate directions running across the brick paved streets into the woods just the other side of the river. The local sheriff pursued them into the forest but soon figured that a hot dinner waiting for him at the house was way more important than catching those three McElroy morons so he shrugged his shoulders and gave up pursuit. That's where the paper trail ends on the McElroy Boys Gang.

There was however, a brief reference in a letter found in a safe deposit box in an old Fort Worth warehouse in 1933. The letter is addressed to a "J.H. McElroy Jr". The author begins the letter "Dear Brother Dud..." and is only signed, "With Warm Regards...C." Were we to believe that this was indeed a letter from Clyde to Dud, then it might appear that after their aborted robbery, Clyde made his way down to Galveston, stowed away on a ship and sailed half way around the world to New Zealand where

apparently, he found love, lived a long life and was modestly financially successful as a gold prospector and brewer of craft beers. But, alas, we will never know for sure.





Christopher M. Brinson
cmbrinson@gmail.com
<http://talesfromthetyper.blogspot.com/>