

Springhouse Ink

I was washing dishes and looking out the window to the east when a giant black bird with outstretched wings caught my eye. This bird was in a dead tree towering over Leavell Hill Cemetery.

The first thought was the Thunderbird of Native American lore was true and there it was practically in the backyard, waiting to snatch up the first toddler it spotted cavorting in the grass. The binoculars revealed a more mundane answer. It was a turkey vulture sunning its wings' undersides in the sun. Black feathers and distance seemed to magnify its size.

People sometimes spread their arms when taking in vistas that boggle the imagination, as though exaggerating their physical size helps brand this peak experience into their being. Perhaps this vulture was soaking in the glory of the day, and why not? The sun was out, the temperature was warm and there are enough dead skunks on the highways to keep vultures fat. It was a day to rejoice.

That vulture might have seen the daffodils spreading their petals and may have heard the buzzing of honeybees on the subtle maple tree flowers. That vulture may have been hearing the frogs chirping in the nearby pond. It might have watched the finches flit through the still-bare forsythia bushes, playing mating games and plotting nesting sites. These are some of the activities happening beneath the gaze of vultures. Those sage specters in the sky get their springtime updrafts. We ground dwellers get flowers.

It seems impossible that Christmas was three months ago. Christmas night brought another sort of Thunderbird wanna-be into our neck of the world. The night brought much discussion to our home after just arriving from a party in Owensboro, Ky. Stepson David Matthews had a gift worth becoming excited about. His grandma had given him a remote controlled drone that he could not wait to launch into the air. The night was full dark and it would be best to wait until daylight to fly the machine. That's what his mother said. David reasoned since the drone was lighted and easily visible at night there was little reason to wait for sunrise. As we unloaded the presents and leftovers from the vehicle, David set to assembling his drone.

This drone is not a professional model as some use to capture stunning aerial video. It is green and about the size of a Frisbee. The drone is made for fun, though it does have a camera to capture moving or still video. The machine does not do well in a breeze.

The drone zoomed though the field and over our heads and back over the field and to the north, toward Leavell Hill, where the trees at the fencerow were obscured in the night's black. And there the drone stopped. It was hung on

a limb about 50 feet in the air and had reached the end of its 7-minute flight time. When the battery power weakened the drone's steady, green light went into strobe mode, flashing several times a second.

It was Christmas night. Our neighborhood had its own mysterious star, not unlike the one beckoning the Magi toward Bethlehem. Travelers on state Route 1 could see it. Any roosting vulture could see it. The drone taunted all from its precipitous perch and we could do nothing about it. We went inside.

The battery lost its charge and the drone's flashing slowed. Before we succumbed to the beds' lure, the light dimmed to black.

The wind was high for days, but the drone remained hung. Calls for help resulted in little reassurance. Meanwhile, David's grandma was calling to ask how he liked the drone. The answer was always positive, if vague. The Shawneetown Fire Department and Southeastern Illinois Electric Cooperative offered the same solution: Contact a tree trimming service. The local tree trimmer said he would check it out, but the cost of his labor would only be worth it if he had another job in the area. So we waited, and reassured David's grandmother he was enjoying his Christmas gift.

A few days later I looked into the tree and did not spot the green machine staring back. The drone was on the ground, a few yards past the fencerow in the cattle pasture. The drone had evaded heavy hooves, so I climbed the gate and retrieved it.

The household was pleased to find the drone had survived freezing temperatures and rain. With benefit of daylight, David tested it in the yard until another breeze blew in from the west and hung it a few yards up in the white pine by the mailbox. A hoe handle retrieved the drone and it was again aloft until the wind impaled it in an upper branch of the maple tree, about 25 feet up. There it would remain for a few more days. This time a well-aimed Frisbee toss caused the branch to wobble and shrug the drone back to the ground. With a bent propeller and a history of hang-ups, the drone has remained indoors ever since. We await the subsidence of spring's wind before resuming flight.

Last issue, Vol. 32. No. 3, we carried the story "Is Anyone In Here With Us? Paranormal Probing at Saline Museum" about the Midnight Paranormal ghost investigation team's research at Saline Creek Pioneer Village and Museum in Harrisburg. Accompanying the story was a photo provided by the team that appeared just a little too good to be true. The photo depicted what appeared to be the spectral image of a woman - perhaps a bride - standing in front of the old Saline County jail cell with right arm outstretched. We

shared the photo with our area digital photography consultants who dug into the photo, going as far as to examine the file metadata for red flags of manipulation. Though our consultants shared the same hunch, that the photo did not appear to be honestly captured, none could find proof of manipulation being used to produce the image. However, when that issue went to press, someone found some evidence that mischief likely was afoot. This evidence was in the promotional image for a phone application called "Spirit Camera Ghost Capture." The image for this phone app shows a woman who may well be a bride in white dress with right arm outstretched, as though anticipating a groom's grasp or wedding ring. The image is shown below along with the photo we now regret having printed. It is our belief this spectral bride can be made to appear in front of any background with aid of the app called "Spirit Camera Ghost Capture."

Should you also wish to waste the time of a magazine of regional history, folklore, nature and esoterica, you can download the app for yourself, at the url address <https://www.apk20.com/apps/com.ghost.camera/> Don't expect to see similar offerings in this one any time soon.

In this issue we print the first of a series of stories regarding L.O. Trigg's Ozark Tours, a series of trips made by Trigg's friends and government officials starting in the 1930s to grow support for the creation of the Shawnee National Forest. Todd Carr has authored the book *Trigg's Ozark Tours at Shawnee National Forest* and has shared with us some of the sites visited along Trigg's winding path. Some of those are celebrated landmarks today. Others have fallen into obscurity.

John J. Dunphy provides insight into the history of areas along the Mississippi River taken from his now-out-of-print book *It Happened at the River Bend*. Among the topics are the Lincoln-Shields duel, novelist Inglis Fletcher and a castle near Hartford called Lakeview.

Dixie Terry offers recipes from the south we generally refer to as soul food. Pickled pigs feet infrequently appear on our shopping lists, but we are interested in the recipe for greens which are a favorite in our house.

We conclude John W. Allen's *Pope County Notes* and so Pope County's 2016 bicentennial celebration officially comes to an end. Those interested in a souvenir book published in honor of the bicentennial can obtain one at the Golconda Public Library at a reduced price of \$7.

We have revived the Springhouse Coloring Book with assistance from Southeastern Illinois College art majors. In the 1980s then-editor Bill Carr and son, Jim, created illustrations for readers to test their crayons or colored pencils. Taylor Cox of Eldorado has provided her drawing of the Muddy Tipple. We'll see if we can continue this feature.

While the wind blows we will enjoy the soaring vultures and occasional bald eagle and envy their circuitous flights. They look down at our upturned eyes and think, "Don't worry, we are here to pick up the pieces."

As we humans stress over politics, about the future of our health insurance, clean waterways and preservation of our public lands, the rest of the world enjoys the sunlight, the warmth and the yellow of our daffodils and forsythia. Venus glows in the west and Orion keeps chasing his wildcat.

Enjoy our natural world in this new season and resist any who threaten it.

The adventure continues...

