

Doug Taylor is known as the Ann Landers of the general aviation world. His 'Dear Ace' column in GENERAL AVIATION NEWS is read by 35,000 people in the aviation industry and his HOW TO PILOT AN AEROPLANE was published by General Aviation Press in 1973.

About himself, he writes, 'Now a freelance zeppelin pilot, makes his home on the banks of the Mississippi River, which runs through the central United States. His works are well known by several readers of the NEW YORKER, COLLIERS, AMERICAN MERCURY, and DAEDALUS.'

This is another episode of MEMPHIS WRITING.

— David Bowman / Series Editor

TAILS OF THE ARKANSAS WOOD / C. DOUGLAS TAYLOR

My mother could have been Maid of Cotton in 1931, but at the last minute she gave it all up, took holy orders, and moved to a convent in the foothills of Arkansas. Being from a high-type Eastern family, though, she soon tired of her daily devotions and began to miss the more earthly pleasures of her youth. So, soon after my arrival in the spring of '32, she decided to introduce her fellow Sisters of the Silent Oblation to the noble art of fox hunting.

The sisters of this order having vowed silence for life, it was perhaps difficult to tell whether or not they approved of this worldly innovation by so new a member of the order, particularly the rather liberal interpretation she gave the vow of silence: the cry of 'Tally-Ho!' being a yell, not talk, and therefore permissible.

Not having a suitable supply of foxhounds or a decent mount, Mother decided to do the only sporting thing, give the fox a break. So instead of a pack of barking curs, she used an enthusiastic but mannerly razorback hog named Snout, and in place of the usual thoroughbred jumper she substituted the convent's aging mule, Stir.

Training a hog to chase foxes is, under the best of conditions, a trying experience, even for the devout. But when hampered by vows of silence, long flowing robes, and hog apathy, it can be nigh unto impossible, even with the cooperation of the fox. And this last condition, too, was to be denied her, for no foxes had been sighted in the area of the convent for at least twenty-five years.

My mother, however, was no unusual woman. The same innovative genius that was to envision the world's first silent Dial-A-Prayer soon saw that the convent must Rent a Fox, since all were averse to owning anything of this world and buying one was thus out of the question. After a few happy months of renting a most splendid specimen from

an Eastern fox house, she agreed, on behalf of the order, to keep the animal on a long-term lease agreement. There was no objection from the others.

After the arrival of the quarry, old Snout suddenly took his calling as huntspig seriously. Sometimes he'd trail that critter for three hundred yards without stopping, and on one morning in 1940 he got so carried away that he had that fox treed in a juniper and was halfway up himself before my mother arrived on Stir and called him to heel.

This incident brought worry into Mother's life, for her mule was getting old and unreliable, and she didn't want ol' Snout actually catching up with that thirty-five dollar a month fox unattended. There followed some trying months, in which she thought of giving up her vows and returning to the world, of returning the fox and claiming her damage deposit, or of getting herself a new hog and starting all over again. But she was really too fond of ol' Snout to do that, and besides, she needed him to find hush-puppies for her.

She used Snout to root out hush-puppies, the way the French do with young pigs and trifles. Only she didn't keep them all to herself the way your Frenchman does; she gave a commission.

'Thirty percent, Snout,' she would say, when he located a fresh colony of hush-puppies, or 'forty percent' if it had been a long day and he was tired, and she trusted that pig so much that she never once checked his figures.

But in time, all good things must end. In 1946, the fox was sent back East, and ol' Snout was given into the care of a farmer, who secretly wanted to fatten him up for bacon. Fortunately, this plan failed totally, for the farmer's place was fast by an Army post, and every morning when the bugle sounded reveille, ol' Snout would leap the fence of the pig sty with the grace of an Airedale and be off into the hills looking for fox. He would return at dusk, tired and lean, but happy; he'd have a large plate of hush-puppies for supper, and he'd retire early, if there was nothing good on TV. In time he fell in with a travelling pack of razorbacks from the Ozarks, who had known his people in the old days. Though they were all unschooled to the chase, he agreed to go with them and train them, hoping to make Christians of them as well, I suppose, perhaps even to start a new Order somewhere.

In 1947, my mother gave up religion for geography, and went on a diet of pure water and alfalfa tablets. On a visit to Memphis, Tennessee, in 1970, she drank of the waters of that city and immediately succumbed to floride poisoning. Her bones are interred there, in Confederate Park, on the river front, not far from the Tomb of the Unknown Jazz Band.

RETURNING THE RAKE

Hull and I were driving over to the Franklin's past a dry ditch laden with wild roses. I sat on the tractor fender steadying the rake Hull had borrowed that day for hay baling. The stuffy complexion of June changed as darkness settled around us; the cool evening touched our arms and faces as we moved slowly through it.

To walk into the Franklin domain, into the Franklin kitchen, you'd think the place had just suffered a good shaking by an earthquake: nothing was squared, everything was ajar neither completely open nor closed. Cousin Joe, who usually cooked those rolls and meats famous up and down Stillhouse Hollow Road, was suffering from 'bilious' — this condition was not unusual for an 87-year-old man whose doctor didn't even know what the word meant. Paul had to cook; we could hear a furious sizzling and boiling on the stove. Paul was put out at having to cook after working in the fields all day. His two-toned arms and forehead were exposed and the white portions beamed clear across the room; his large ears, nose and smile, pedestaled on a long neck with a huge Adam's apple lodged in the middle, stood in solid relief against his sweaty gray work shirt and overalls.

When we stepped in Joe was bent over the large linoleum-covered table in the center of the room with his head on his arms. His dirty bare feet were planted flat on a dingy linoleum floor. No sooner did we get seated than Joe started talking about his biliousness and what he'd been eating all day to combat it. All the while Paul dipped the pot lid into the skillet of ham and the pot of boiling potatoes to check them for readiness before going out back to hunt for another egg — seems some 'dern' animal had been snatching their best hens in broad daylight.

Joe leaped at the least provocation to give his thoughts and tell his stories on other topics of conversation. 'Oh, the boys were lookin' for polecats several years back,' — his voice modulated with a high-pitched emphasis placed on the first syllable of every other noun — 'Cap'n started pokin' around in a hole in an ol' sugar tree and found it full of honey. They ran home and got two tubs and a saw and sawed right through the middle of that tree. They brought that honey home full of sawdust and dirt. Once, they were trying to rob a swarm of wild bees in a tree; somehow they knocked the whole thing down to the ground. When Milton run home he could hardly catch his breath; he said last time he saw Cap'n he was running and jumping over the hill, waving his arms like a swimmer without water.'

After Paul took out the baked potatoes and held them in his hands a minute he set them on the table and sat down to eat. Cousin Joe picked up a pack of Sweeter artificial sweetener and poured its contents into his cold water: 'I wish they'd go on and ban this dern stuff so I could go back to sugar and go ahead and die.' He asked if we wanted to eat, but Paul quipped, 'They got women at home; they don't want to eat with a bunch of knot heads like us.'

On the way home the road was barely visible, but that wouldn't have been helped by the tractor headlights, since one of them was out and the other dimmer than the sky. The tractor handled easier though, and we only had a few curves between us and home. I soon discovered a wad of mud had been thrown off the back wheel onto my jeans. When I told Hull he started laughing uncontrollably and said, 'Mud? When it hasn't rained in six weeks?' He laughed all the way back down the gravel road between the creek and the front pasture. He howied when he looked back and saw me wiping the seat of my pants with a handful of hay before I got into the pickup we'd left by the mailbox.

— G. Murley

MEETING

*somewhere
beyond the dawn's slide west
it is still night*

*and there
in a house with no windows
you wait for me*

*your silence moves by moonlight
through empty rooms
like a widow with her worries*

*and I listen
to this darkness before dawn
gather in final pools
beneath your footsteps
falling
bare and white
like the words of a regret
I remember
but can no longer name*

*once more
I wake
as though some voice
has tried again to speak to me
and find myself
returning for the last time
to that place
which has no place
turning with the earth
beyond this body with its griefs
like sleepwalking weightless*

*the horizons of my heart
rise to you
as though I dream again
of falling into the last fall
that
rises
always rises*