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I have been doing the math, and I realized I have known Steve for nearly 30 years. That's a long time to make memories and have adventures. Steve and I weren't in constant contact for those 30 years, but rather we seemed to fade into, and out of, one's lives from time to time. I may have never impacted Steve's life much, but he certainly impacted and influenced mine, and the course it would ultimately take.

I am figuring the 30 years by my first memory of his oldest son, Atticus. I remember Atticus in diapers popping out of the back door of the little house in Jonesborough on Bowman Street. In the front yard sat the fuselage of a Taylor Craft airplane. My association with Steve and airplanes was about to begin.

There are a lot of stories and memories to tell, but I will try to keep it down to just a few – if I can. That first Taylor Craft led to first flights, first airplane repairs, and nearly 20 years as an aircraft mechanic. But, as much as Steve was about airplanes and flying, there were other adventures as well.

I met Steve through Kevin Humpston. At that time he was Steve's brother-in-law. Kevin and I ran around together from the 7th grade through high school and beyond. If any activity led to Steve I was ready to go. He was without a doubt, the most interesting person I had ever met.

Sometime in the early 1970's Steve lived in Fernandina Beach, Florida. He taught Biology in a local high school and along with his family, lived in a two-story duplex on the beach. In those days people still went to Florida in the summer for vacations, but the rest of the year this part of Florida was pretty empty. That same Island is now a year-round resort and the snowbirds blend with the summer vacation crowds until it all seems like one long crowded season. The rent on the beach house was reasonable in the "off-season", but it went up significantly in the tourist season. When school was out for the year and rent went up, Steve moved back to Tennessee. Lucky for me that led to another first, and two big adventures. It would lead me to my first real exposure to the beach, the ocean and to seafood. At the end of a week or two on the beach, we would pack all their worldly belongings and head North to Tennessee for the summer, these were the true adventures.

U-Haul, I believe, claims to be America's movers and they also claim to provide adventures in moving. Let me tell you now that's wrong. Steve Hensley put the adventure in moving. The first year we moved him back to Tennessee he had two vehicles: an early model Ford van (mid engine type) and an even earlier model Ford Falcon two door sedan. If you knew Steve, you knew his vehicles were always unique and something to behold. Pre-trip arrangements always included trips to the local junkyard for spare tires and wheels, generators, water pumps, and any other part he thought might possibly fail along the way.

I think that first trip was in 1972 or 73. We loaded the Falcon to the hilt, attached a trailer, then did the same for the van. That first trip was fairly uneventful, except for the miles of traffic jams, overloaded vehicles being pulled and tugged every which way by passing semi's and long hard climbs over the mountains.

We reached Tennessee in about 20 hours. We were tired, dirty and seasoned travelers – true gypsies of the highway.

Sometime during '74 or '75 things were a little different. Steve had sold or traded the Falcon for a '64 Comet station wagon (one I later painted in Jonesborough – but that's another story). If memory serves me right, this trip Kevin and I flew down with Robie in a Cherokee 180. The trip down was fast and the day on the beach relaxing and fun. Then it was time to head toward Tennessee again. We loaded the wagon, the van, and two trailers. We looked for the world like depression era travelers from "The Grapes of Wrath" we just had slightly newer vehicles. This year Kevin and I drove the van and we had Black Dog for a rider. Atticus warned us not to let Black Dog drive because....."he has sharp hands." We took his advice, but the dog rode on top of the engine cover all the way home, and this trip was a little different than the last. For the most part, this trip went well until we hit the mountains of North Carolina. I don't know if you have ever crossed the mountains in overloaded vehicles full of all your worldly possessions, and six-cylinders or not, but I can tell you that rolling backward to the bottom crosses your mind often. As you get closer to Sam's Gap in Tennessee, the mountain roads got narrower and much steeper. Those little 6-banger engines were pulling for all they were worth that night and we could have walked faster than we were driving. I was driving and there was no greater fear in my mind than having to stop on these steep pulls and then try to restart up them without careening backwards instead to some horrible, crashing death, or worse. But, that's what happened.

We almost made in to the Tennessee state line. We had one more steep hard pull to the top of Sam's Gap. It was very late after midnight and darker than the inside of a cow. The van was following the Comet one step at a time toward the mountain pass and home. Then Steve slowed even more, and pulled off the side of the road. I stopped too, knowing in my heart that I would never get the over loaded van to go uphill again. We clamored out to see why we had stopped and Steve pointed to the left front tire on the Comet. It was flat. We had spares. The van and the Comet each required different tires, but we had some of each. A trip to the junkyard had secured relatively good "may-pops" for each vehicle. But of course, we had to dig them out of the trailers.

Somewhere during this rummaging for spare tires we realized it was too dark to see, and we had no flashlights. Well it so happened that this particular year Steve and Judy had spent a great deal of time making sand candles to sell at the upcoming "Jonesborough Days" celebration on the 4th of July. Out came the candles and lit the darkness and a circle of sand candles illuminated the night. Now I am not sure what a passerby might have thought if they had come upon this strange sight, but I am sure it wasn't every night that local folks saw long-haired travelers changing tires by candlelight in the middle of the night. It probably looked for the world like some pagan religious ceremony. The circle of candles lit the tire-changing altar for us that night. But that wasn't the last tire I would change by sand candlelight.

Back in the van I believe I broke out in a cold sweat. I really wasn't sure the heavily laden van would pull out and go up that mountain. It was hot and we were tired. It had pulled and carried this load all day. The difference was that all day we had gotten a running start at all the hills we had crossed. This time we had to go up, from a complete stop. Steve eased the station wagon back onto the road and I slipped the clutch out on the van. Slowly, painfully slow, it began

to creep forward. One mile per hour, two, then five, and finally we were moving. I didn't want to stop again for anything. No such luck. Smoke was now coming from the front of Steve's Comet. We continued on to the top of the mountain and finally reached Sam's Gap. The smoke continued to billow from the station wagon. As we topped the mountain and began the decent on the other side, Steve began to look for another place to pull over. It was possible; this side of the mountain was even darker than the other side had been. We pulled over, stopped, and turned off the engines!! At least now we were pointed down hill.

"I forgot, some of these tires are bigger than the others," Steve informed us, "we'll have to put that spare on the back and that tire on the front. Out came the sand candles. The flickering light encircled the car once again. We removed the spare, but then we had another problem. How to keep the front of the car up while jacking the back of the car. And...we had to do this with one jack!

"Rocks", Steve said, "We'll let the front down on some rocks, then jack up the back. We searched around in the dark for large rocks. During that search I noticed the very distant sound of a creek off the shoulder to the right. A *long* way down off of the right shoulder. We didn't want to fall over that hillside. It was long way down.

We stacked the rocks and began lowering the jack. So far, so good. As we began to jack up the rear of the car it slipped. We all caught our breath, but it didn't fall, at lease not completely. We hurried up, pulled off the tire, made the switch, and then re-jacked the front. We put the tire on, removed our rocky jack-stands, and lowered the car. Once again we were on our way.

We rolled through Erwin (TN) and on to Jonesborough tired and happy this trip was over. I can't remember exactly what Steve had to say during the hairy moments of that last tire change, but I do remember he took it all in stride. It was just part of the adventure, and we had certainly gotten our money's worth.

If you tell any story or stories about Steve, you always have to talk about flying sooner or later. Steve absolutely loved to fly and he was a natural pilot. If there ever was a living, breathing human version of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, it was Steve. I sometimes thought he must have been born flying. Steve took me on my very first flight and I will never forget it, or the last time we flew together. In the course of my own aviation career I flew with a lot of professional pilots in some pretty sophisticated airplanes, but I never flew with a better pilot than Steve Hensley.

The last time I flew with Steve was in his Cub, and we flew off the farm. We pulled the Cub out of its hangar, climbed in, and fired it up. Away we went bouncing over the humps and bumps and through the grass until one last bounce left us airborne. Steve flew me all around Limestone and Chuckey pointing out Huffacker's hill, Robie's house, and everyone else's house as we flew over. At some point in the flight I looked up and noticed the airspeed wasn't working. Now, for most of the people I had flown with professionally that would have been a bad thing. Some might even have panicked or in the very least landed immediately, but not Steve. I pointed to the useless indicator "Awe, what's that anyway?" Steve replied and smiled and laughed. I suddenly realized it didn't matter. Steve really didn't need that instrument to fly. In fact it was him flying not

just in an airplane, but truly flying. He wasn't frightened by the lack of instrumentation, he didn't need it. I relaxed. I knew there was no need to be concerned. I also realized that every time I had ever flown with Steve I had never been nervous or frightened. He was simply the best I had ever flown with bar none.

We finished our flight and I looked toward Steve's pointing finger. He was showing me the grass strip we had left from minutes ago. I thought it looked small and rough. How could any of the other pilots I had ever flown with land in such a spot? I don't think most could have. We glided in, and Steve touched us down on that grass like a feather. A perfect landing and a perfectly normal and routine act for Steve. I just sat and marveled at his skill – his touch. We taxied back to the hangar, pushed the little Cub in, and said our good-byes. "Come back, we'll do it again." Steve said. "I'd love to", I replied.

Much to my regret, I never did. I'll always wish that I had. I flew many times with Steve. In an Aerocoup or two, In Cessna 150's, a Stinson, Tri-pacers, Cubs, Cherokees of various models and one Stearman that I shall never forget. It was a beautiful airplane, and I flew it with Steve. Everyone should get to feel the wind in your face in an open cockpit bi-plane at least once. Everyone should have had the chance to do it with Steve. He absolutely loved to fly that airplane.

We all helped Carson Baker (the A&P mechanic who worked at Johnson City Airport years ago) work on and re-assemble that Stearman. Carson had lovingly restored her to original Blue and Yellow glory.

My first flight with Steve, we took off from Johnson City and headed toward anywhere. I was thrilled, amazed and in awe of the overload of sensations I was feeling. Then he did it. He always had a way of getting you. He turned the Stearman on her back. I looked up at the ground. I grabbed for anything I could hold on to. Then I relaxed. This was great. Steve righted the plane and we flew some more, then all too soon we landed. When I could see Steve's face he was grinning from ear to ear. I truly loved that smile. He had surprised me, and he knew it, but I didn't care. I'd do it again tomorrow in a minute. I wish that minute would get here.