

Gertrude

by W. Scott Bowlin

The box the UPS man dropped yesterday is sitting in the garage there in the corner near the table where I write in the evenings while the sunset glares across the lake.

Apples. I can smell them. Jodeen sends apples every season.

Tuesdays are for driving. Get up at 6:30, on the road by 7:30. Arrival in Gainesville by 9:30. Sit in the lobby at Shand's Hospital and wait your turn.

When we were young and small we played in the orchard. Mom made apple pies and fried apples, caramel apples and apple sauce, apple cider. Grandma's apple butter recipe. We would clean up the old apple press in the barn and crank out gallon jugs of apple juice.

The lead pot carefully lines up on a couple of tattoo marks to ensure proper alignment. I'm sure those tattoo marks are not given out to the living.

There's an envelope of pictures inside the box. One of them is me and Jodeen. We are small, freckled kids with sandy blonde tow heads. The picture is old and cracked, and we are standing on either side of the apple press- Gertrude, we called her Gertrude.

The machine lowers to the lead pot and makes a non-noise, unseen fingers battling a body that has short circuited and begun producing cells that don't belong.

I joined the army because I wanted to see the world, and by the end of the war I had seen more than I wanted, but it was too late then. Dad died while I was away. Jodeen took the farm because she was oldest

Back home, I pick up one of the granny smiths, hold it to my nose and breathe deeply. Maybe dad called her Gertrude. I close my eyes and I can hear the squeaking of the gears as we take turns cranking

*the handle and Gertrude chews up apples and spits out the juice. I
can hear the sound.*

end

