



*Artwork by Emily Isbell*

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

I'm writing this just after Spring Break, which was just after IBMA Leadership Bluegrass (causing me to miss SXSGrass). We have DonkeyGrass and the CTBA Band Scramble Garage Sale this weekend. Then, thankfully, we have a few weeks' rest before Old Settlers Music Fest and CTBA Memorial Fest. But what a glorious Spring here in Central Texas! (Aside from the incoming allergies, of course.)

More on all of that stuff below. But exhausted as I may be, the #1 thing I'm feeling right





now is gratitude for the truly unbelievable Central Texas Bluegrass community and - even more specifically - y'all CTBA members. As I said at IBMA Leadership Bluegrass (again, more below), leading a non-profit is a labor of love. And while I'd love nothing more than to play banjo the rest of my days, I can't do that without the extraordinary folks that make up this wonderful community. So here we go once more unto the breach!

I'll see y'all out there, and feel free to drop me a line anytime at [President@CentralTexasBluegrass.org](mailto:President@CentralTexasBluegrass.org).

*Jon Lundbom*  
*President, Central Texas Bluegrass Association*

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## JOIN THE CTBA!



We don't say it often enough - you (yes, you!) should **become a CTBA member** today!

The CTBA is a membership organization, we are able to do what we do only so long as our membership is

strong. CTBA membership is **cheap** - starting at only \$25/year - and comes with a **ton of benefits**. With even more benefits for **band** and **business** members! You can read about it all and sign up today at [CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join](https://CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join).

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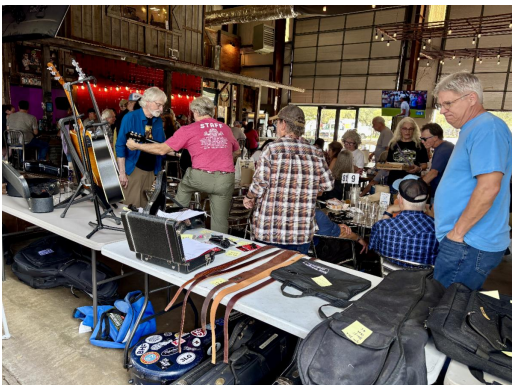
## CTBA BAND SCRAMBLE & GARAGE SALE RECAP

The 2025 **CTBA Band Scramble & Garage Sale** was an absolute blast, let me tell you what. We opened the Garage Sale around noon, and (once the rain let up), it was a party with four if not five jamming circles going. Central Texas Bluegrass Luminary Mr. **Eddie Collins** called the bands around 1:30PM, and by 2PM we had seven - SEVEN! - bands rehearsing for the Big Show. Word on the street is we had 49 (!!!) musicians participating in the **Band Scramble**, which ties the all-time record. Everybody performed their proverbial butts off, and the concert was just such fun.

As for the **Garage Sale**, we raised nearly \$1500 for the CTBA, which is of course fantastic. Many thanks to everyone who donated, and many thanks to everyone who bought some stuff! And keep in mind you can make a donation to the CTBA anytime at [CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Donate](https://CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Donate).



Many thanks to Eddie, Suds Monkey, and the entire CTBA membership for making it such a special afternoon. When I (it's me, Jon!) had to head home, there were STILL two big jam circles pickin'. And if that ain't a party, I don't know what is...



## CTBA MEMORIAL FEST

SAVE THE DATE!

Done, done and we're on to the next one! Which is **CTBA Memorial Fest 2025**, live and in-person at **St. Elmo Brewing Co. Springdale** (longtime CTBA business member, new location!) on **Sunday, May 18th**.



As in recent years, we're using Memorial Fest to highlight some **local performers**, some of the newer **CTBA members** and **CTBA member-bands** making a splash in the Central Texas Bluegrass scene.

Many more details to come, but mark your calendars for **Sunday, May 18th**, at **St. Elmo Brewing Co. Springdale!**



## CTBA WILLA BEACH-PORTER SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE

It's been a few years (thanks, COVID), but we are absolutely thrilled to announce that we have awarded a **CTBA Willa Beach-Porter Scholarship** to Mr. **Gus Lovicott!**



Gus is an absolute monster of a young banjo player, well known to all of us jamming here in Central Texas. This summer, he'll be heading to **Bela Fleck's Blue Ridge Banjo Camp** in Brevard, NC. And, of course, we expect an entirely different level of excellence upon his return.

Have a great time, Gus, and don't forget to tell everybody there about your humble hometown Bluegrass club! Oh and, BTW, **congratulations!**

If you or someone you know is interested in **attending a bluegrass camp**, please consider applying for a scholarship! CTBA Willa-Beach Porter Scholarships are available to **any Texas resident aged 12-18**.

And we have **ArtistWorks** scholarships available, too! ArtistWorks scholarship recipients receive a **one-year ArtistWorks membership** to the study track of their choice from the 30+ courses offered through ArtistWorks. ArtistWorks scholarships are available to **any Texas resident aged 12 years or older** (no age limit).

To **learn more** and/or **apply** for any CTBA scholarship - don't wait! - head





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## CTBA BLUEGRASS GUIDE

We're trying something new! In addition to the jam and events [calendars](#) on [CentralTexasBluegrass.org](#), we've put together a [seasonal guide to bluegrass happenings](#) in and around Central Texas.



This is our first issue, so let us know if there are things you would like to see included in future editions. And, as always, please email [CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org](mailto:CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org) if you know of an event happening in our area that should be on our radar!

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# CAMP BLUEGRASS 2025

## Camp Bluegrass

July 13 – 18, 2025 in Levelland Texas

Join us to Learn, Jam, & have Fun



Camp Bluegrass 2025 is a six-day residential camp which attracts bluegrass musicians from across the nation. This year is our 38th year of providing world-class instruction on guitar, banjo, mandolin, bass, vocals, songwriting, dobro and fiddle. Perfect your skills and address your musical concerns. Classes include, sound reinforcement workshops, instructor led jam sessions and Master classes. Faculty concerts and the jams make this a week you do not want to miss.

**This is the Year of the Jam**

Visit [CampBluegrass.com](http://CampBluegrass.com) or scan ->>



Our good friend Mr. **Gerald Jones** is now in charge of **Camp Bluegrass** in Levelland, TX, to be held July 13-18, 2025. And Gerald has continued the tradition of offering a **Camp Bluegrass scholarship** to one deserving student here in Central Texas!

We are still ironing out some details, but if you are a Texas resident 13+ years old interested in attending Camp Bluegrass - please reach out to us at **[CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org](mailto:CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org)** ASAP. Our normal Scholarship requirements apply (see **[CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Scholarship](http://CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Scholarship)** for details), please **apply today!**

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## OLD SETTLERS MUSIC FEST 2025

Can you believe **Old Settlers Music Fest 2025** is less than a month away?!?! Get your tickets now at **[OldSettlersMusicFest.org](http://OldSettlersMusicFest.org)**, and we'll see you in **Dale** on **April 24th!**





## SXSGRASS RECAP

*By Hannah Giardino, CTBA Board Member*

Nine bands. 1000+ attendees. One big ol' unofficial SXSW bluegrass party. The second annual **SXSGrass** drew a huge crowd to **Radio East**, further highlighting the strength of our local bluegrass community and the resurgence in interest the genre has been seeing in recent years.

The line-up - featuring many **CTBA members** and **member-bands** - was a celebration of bluegrass new and old featuring: **The Bluegrass Outfit**, **Texas String Assembly**, **Valley Flower**, **Fennario Flats**, **Eddie Collins** & the CTBA Old Timers, **Sylvan River Band**, and **Strawberry Flats** ft. **Cast Iron Shoes**. When bands weren't playing, community jam circles kept the music going.





This full-day celebration of music and our incredible bluegrass community was a great way to kick off SXSW at one of Austin's most celebrated bluegrass venues. Shout out to Rose Lichtenfels, Hannah Giardino (that's me!), and Scott Stegall for their efforts in planning and executing a great event. And stay tuned for updates on SXSGrass 2026 by following [@SXSGrass](#) on Instagram!

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## DONKEY GRASS RECAP

Man, was Donkey Grass a blast or what?!? We had such a great time hanging out, meeting fellow 'grassers, jamming, listening to the world-class music, etc... Highlights included sets by Peter Rowan, Billy Bright, and San Antonio's own Righteous Intonation. Amazing stuff!





Many thanks to CTBA Business Member Cabin 10 for having us as a part of it, and here's to next year!!!

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## IBMA LEADERSHIP BLUEGRASS 2025

*By Jon Lundbom, CTBA President*



Last month, I (rear center) had the incredible privilege of attending IBMA Leadership Bluegrass in Nashville, TN. Officially, Leadership Bluegrass is "three days of panels, presentations, and teamwork to better understand the current industry landscape and foster leadership in the bluegrass community." And I don't disagree with the official description.

But it was also a chance to sit in at a few Nashville gigs with a few Nashville cats (friends). It was a chance to attend some of the world's most famous Bluegrass jams. It was the opportunity to play a half-dozen 1930s five-string Gibson Mastertone banjos. It was the chance to forge friendships and business relationships that I hope last a lifetime. Oh and on the way home, it



was a chance to (finally!) visit the American Banjo Museum in Oklahoma City, many thanks to our friends Alan Tompkins and Lucas Ross.

I am (as I said above) incredibly grateful. And should anyone out there be interested in applying, I would encourage you to apply early and apply often.

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## BUSK: JULIAN ROOT

*"BLUEGRASSER YOU SHOULD KNOW"*

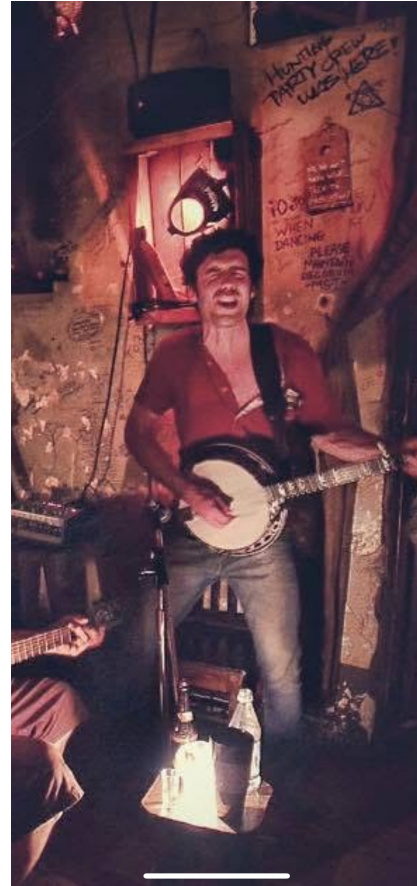
*By Simon Waxman, CTBA Vice-President*

At this point, you probably *do* know **Julian Root**: banjoist, leatherworker, CTBA board member, KOOP "Strictly Bluegrass" host, and usual author of the BUSK column. But maybe you didn't know about his experience picking in Guatemala, or about his deep affinity for punk rock. In this edition of the newsletter, I interview the interviewer.

*(This interview has been condensed for brevity.)*

### **You weren't born into bluegrass. How'd you find your way to it?**

I found the banjo before I found bluegrass. I have no origin story of a love affair with the music, or any insuppressible desire to imitate Earl upon hearing "Foggy Mountain Breakdown." In fact, as a fully formed punk rocker discovering the instrument at the age of 23, I was frustrated by the "corny" songs I had to learn. I spent about two years playing the banjo as fervently as I avoided bluegrass. Instead, I thwacked away on folk songs from the likes of Woody Guthrie, Phil Ochs, Utah Phillips, John Prine, et cetera.



Eventually, a mandolin-playing friend's passion for old bluegrass - namely, the Stanley Brothers - wore off on me. The essence was right there. Though these guys were among the most buttoned-up musicians I'd ever pored over, I sensed what I contextualized as a punk-rock ethos of eschewing the trickery of musical makeup: no studio magic or musical virtuosity was needed to compensate for an otherwise-mediocre song.

### **As a discerning listener, you've been known to keep your distance from certain popular bands. Let's turn it around. What are some bluegrass acts you admire that hardly anyone else knows about?**

I think this is at the core of what may appear to be an aversion to many popular groups: the playing is vibrant, soaring, impeccable; yet the songs have, to quote Ambrose Bierce, "not the vitality of a sick fish." I'd rather be convinced than fooled. It isn't for some self-righteous pursuit of "authenticity" that I prefer the type of music I do. I'm simply able to relate to it. It's easier for me to feel.



As for bands I wish were more widely known, well, they are wildly popular in Central Texas, but I wish bluegrass lovers everywhere were more hip to Country Gazette. I don't think any other group has so expertly navigated the demilitarized zone between traditional and progressive. Vernon McIntyre and Appalachian Grass had some great records, especially with Wendy Miller and Mike Lilly onboard. Dave Evans: a brilliant rebel of bluegrass. I wish more people knew more of the material Hazel Dickens did independent of Hazel and Alice. My all-around favorite bluegrass group at the moment is probably the Gillis Brothers. And if old-school banjo tunes are your thing, you need the McCormick Brothers. Oh, and Jim Eanes. There are so many gems of trad grass to be (re)discovered: Earl Taylor, The Dixie Gentlemen, Byron Parker, Larry Richardson, Dub Crouch, the Shenandoah Cutups...

**Punk rock can seem like the opposite of bluegrass. What do they share?**

Aesthetically, there aren't many similarities beyond tempos. However, there's definitely a connection between what I deem "true" punk and bluegrass in the distilled, unvarnished quality to both. Take the guttural, stripped-down rock sounds of early punk groups like MC5 or The Damned, and you have a raw feeling, an unbridled yearning, not spiritually distant from the plaintive moods of Red Allen or full-throated howls of Bill Monroe.

**Follow-up question: What's a Bad Religion song every high-lonesome troubadour should know?**

The clearest throughline between Bad Religion and bluegrass is surely the vocal harmonies. "Anesthesia" comes to mind. "American Jesus" has the sort of counterpoint style of singing you hear in much of bluegrass gospel harmony, where different lyrics overlap. Think of the chorus on "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies."





### What's it like playing bluegrass gigs in Guatemala?

It was a hoot. We described ourselves as “bluegrass with an identity crisis.” I think that was most perfectly exemplified by our A-minor medley: “Luna de Xelajú” - a classic Guatemalan folk song - into “Jerusalem Ridge,” closed out with a banjo/fiddle unison ride over Mozart’s “Rondo alla Turc.” People ate it up. We were on TV shows and would gather huge crowds of schoolkids when we’d play outside in the park. The most requested song - by a large margin - was “Coward of the County.” I don’t know. Don’t ask.

### If there were one aspect of the Central Texas bluegrass scene you could share with grassers everywhere, what would it be?

I am impressed by the balance of talent and humility. While there’s the inevitable gossip and spitting contests and all those baby games, the scene feels - to me, at least - remarkably inviting. Just because we have some world-class pickers doesn't mean we don't have the time for anyone else. If you want to get a jam together, or host a bluegrass night, you can do it. If you want to pick the brain of that guy playing circles around everyone else, chances are good he'll make time for you.

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## THE PRACTICE OF PRACTICE

### BOOK REVIEW

*By John Downing, CTBA Board Member*

### "The Practice of Practice"

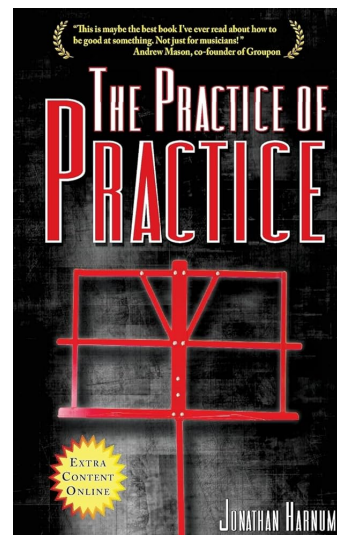
**By Jonathan Harnum**

Did you ever find yourself practicing a song over and over without getting better, whether that means playing faster or with better tone? This book can help. The author spent years interviewing musicians, scientists, artists, and many other masters of their craft. The author takes tips he learned from these interviews, and studies of the brain by neurologists, and creates a process for getting better.

Neurological studies have found that practicing creates pathways in the brain, regardless of whether they are from good habits or bad. 20 minutes of good practice can be better than hours of bad practice. If you practice your mistakes, your brain will learn them, and they will become difficult to correct. Focus on getting the difficult parts right before moving on, and faster speed and better tone will follow.

Here are some key points:

- Create a “flow experience” by creating a perfect balance between challenge and your skill level. Try to notice when you are feeling anxious and not in a good flow - might be time for a break.
  - **“Flow Experience” diagram**
- The unconscious brain continues the learning process after practice is over- turns out “sleep on it” is good advice.





- Have a functioning practice space with books, instruments, and practice tools within easy reach
- Have a plan and log your progress
- If a tune is problematic, focus on the tough parts, don't play over and over to increased tempos because you will be wiring your mistakes into your brain.

Here is a link to the book's website with excerpts:

<https://thepracticeofpractice.com/book-extras/>

Here are two other books that come highly recommended by music teachers:

- "Anyone Can Play Music - The Laws of Brainjo" by Dr. Josh Turknett
- "Effortless Mastery" by Kenny Werner

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## SPINNING WAX

*By Simon Waxman, CTBA Vice-President*

If you were to ask me who is my favorite Texas bluegrass, I'd first tell you I don't play that game. But twist my arm, and I'd probably settle on **Lynn Morris**. Actually, it wouldn't take much twisting. She's got the chops, the songs, the voice, and the fire. You don't need me to tell you that Lynn Morris is a special musician.

A surprising fact about Morris is that she never recorded three-finger banjo with her own band. A two-time winner of the Winfield "National" Banjo Championship, in 1974 and 1981, Morris a top-flight ripper, there is no doubt. And she recorded three-finger with Whetstone Run, before setting out as leader of the Lynn Morris Band. Yet, under her own banner, she recorded exclusively vocals, guitar, and a single very fine clawhammer banjo track on each of her five albums. The three-finger she left to others, like Tom Adams and Ron Stewart. This despite the fact that she had no compunction about slinging Scruggs on stage with the LMB.

So with this edition of "Spinning Wax," let's help ourselves to a sampling of the five-string virtuosity Lynn Morris curiously omitted from her band's recorded output. Thanks in advance to Mr. Zapruder.





Here we've got "Banjo Meltdown," with John Hartford on guitar, Benny Martin doing whatever he wants with the fiddle, and Mike Compton and his rattail gettin' jiggy with the mandolin. When Hartford is leaving the banjo to others, that's called an endorsement.



From the glory days of home video, the first half of an early 1990s festival set featuring Morris with David McLaughlin on guitar(!), a young and energetic Rob Ickes on dobro, and husband Marshall Wilborn on bass. The opening instrumental, followed by "Blue Skies and Teardrops," show off that skillful banjo.





Kicking off “Love Grown Cold” with power, on a 1993 TV taping in Frankfurt, Germany.



The LMB, here with David Grier on guitar, picking and singing at North Carolina’s Bass Mountain Festival, 1992. “Kisses Don’t Lie” is a controlled burn, and “Come Early Morning” has the bluegrass bounce. It’s a solid jammer, too. Who’s got it next Sunday?





Finally, check out Whetstone Run's "A Slim Chance of Loving You." Morris's band bent a little more toward trad, but this one exemplifies the 80s progressive sound. It features impressive banjo leads and backup to boot.

If you're looking for more of Lynn Morris on three-finger, there's "No Use Frettin'," the 1984 album from Whetstone Run. It can be heard in its entirety on YouTube.

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## MARKETPLACE

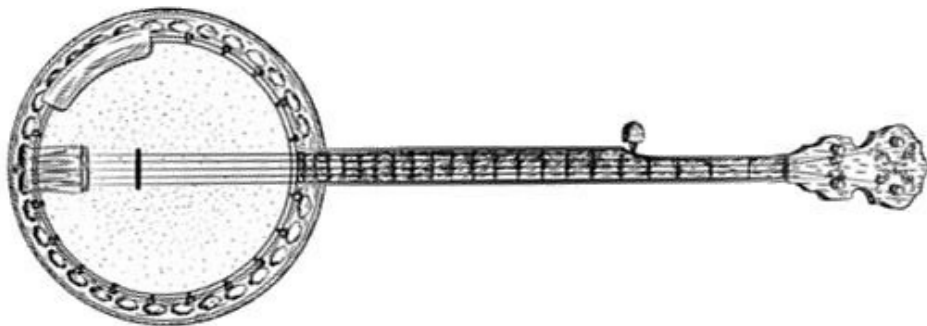


CTBA member Mr. **Gary Mortensen** has **microphones for sale!** Gary says they are "high-quality, used only for home recording (never gigged)." The complete list and Gary's contact information is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/zzhr4bcf>

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## CTBA MEMBER-BANDS

The CTBA is proud to have the following **bands** as members and wholeheartedly recommend them for all of your Central Texas bluegrass needs!





Bird Calls  
Black Diamond  
Bobby Giles & Texas Gales  
Dalton Harper Band  
Four Fights Per Pint  
The Greenlawn Rangers  
Gus Miller & The Buzz Killers  
The Hillsiders

Long Prairie  
Lost Patterns  
The McKinleys  
MoPac Traffic Jams  
Randy Collier & Grassland  
The Sieker Band  
Strawberry Flats  
Wayside Bluegrass

If your band is interested in becoming a CTBA member, please visit [CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join](http://CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join) or contact us at [CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org](mailto:CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org) to learn more.

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## CTBA BUSINESS MEMBERS

The CTBA is proud to have the following **businesses** as members, please consider supporting them as they support Bluegrass in Central Texas!



Barton Springs Mill  
Batch Craft Beer & Kolaches  
Cabin 10  
Country Guitar Online  
Old Settlers Music Fest

Shades of Bluegrass  
St. Elmo Brewing Co.  
Texas Bluegrass Music  
Vista Brewing

If you and your business are interested in becoming a part of the CTBA, please head on over to [CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join](http://CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join) or reach out at [CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org](mailto:CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org).



## 'Possum with the WiFi Password

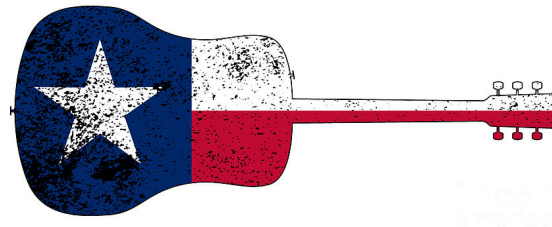
*By your editor, Julian Root*

*As my bipedal counterpart was responding to the prompts for this quarter's BUSK column, particularly about strong opinions on "good" bluegrass, reflections on purity tests and innovation streamed in between dusty Starday LP compilations and tattered Misfits shirts. This perturbed possum responds most viscerally to the rugged tones of traditional*



bluegrass, yet aims to be a player with aspirations greater than a carbon copy of famous dead guys. He yearns for a sophisticated palate, yet prefers to sup on the leftovers of a perfectly prepared chicken pot pie over the exotic flavors of any haute cuisine. He lives the paradox of a pair of Docs stomping around the dance hall. Dear reader, today I bring you no facts or angles or proofs, but rather a humble acknowledgment that while these visions of purity may just be copper underwater, the gold is somewhere between the black and white. Tails up; keep pickin'.

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