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The Saga of LBJ

Ken Patterson
Western Michigan University

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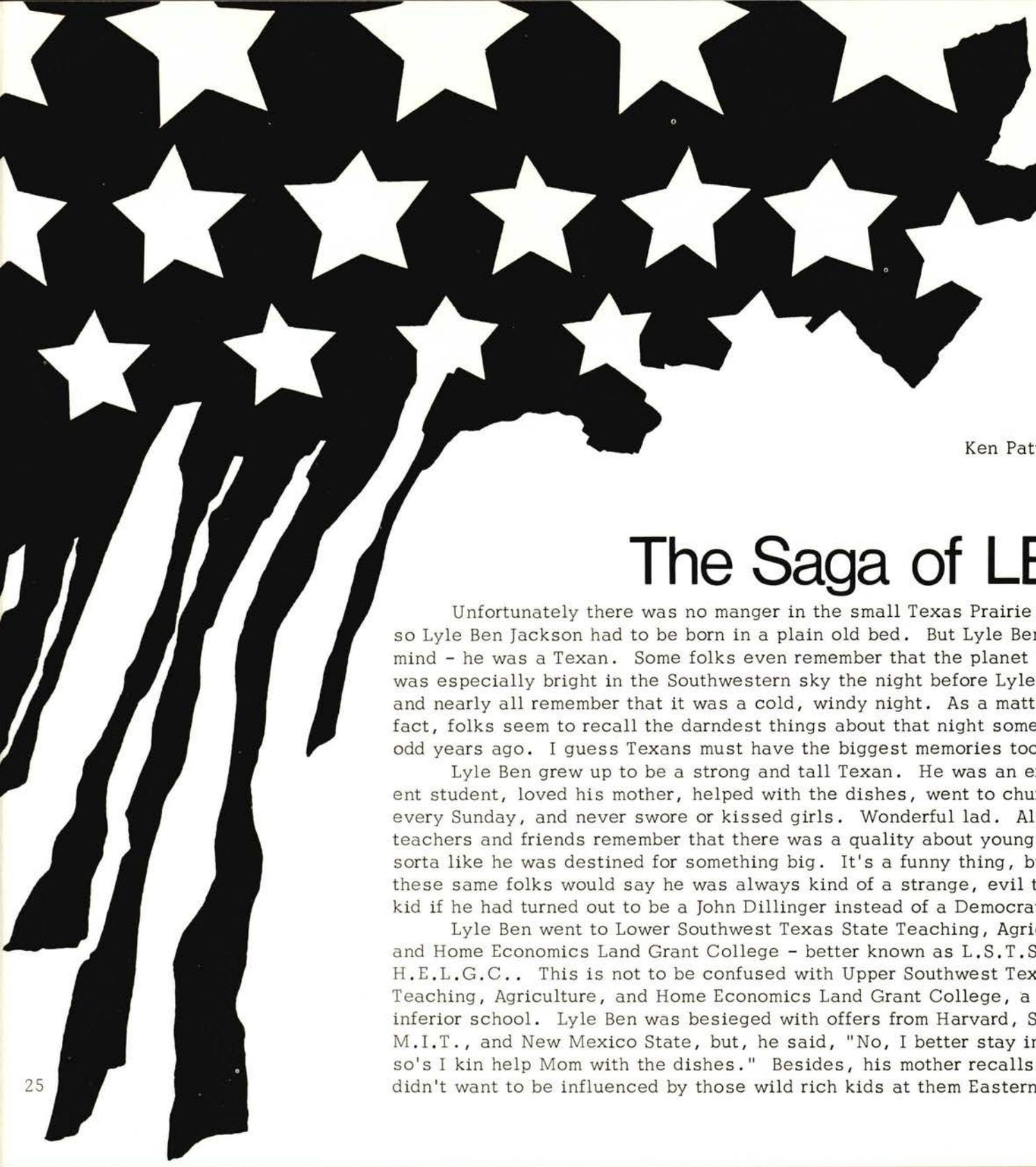
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Ken Patterson

The Saga of LBJ

Unfortunately there was no manger in the small Texas Prairie town, so Lyle Ben Jackson had to be born in a plain old bed. But Lyle Ben didn't mind - he was a Texan. Some folks even remember that the planet Uranus was especially bright in the Southwestern sky the night before Lyle's birth, and nearly all remember that it was a cold, windy night. As a matter of fact, folks seem to recall the darndest things about that night some fifty-odd years ago. I guess Texans must have the biggest memories too.

Lyle Ben grew up to be a strong and tall Texan. He was an excellent student, loved his mother, helped with the dishes, went to church every Sunday, and never swore or kissed girls. Wonderful lad. All of his teachers and friends remember that there was a quality about young Lyle - sorta like he was destined for something big. It's a funny thing, but I bet these same folks would say he was always kind of a strange, evil type of kid if he had turned out to be a John Dillinger instead of a Democrat.

Lyle Ben went to Lower Southwest Texas State Teaching, Agriculture and Home Economics Land Grant College - better known as L.S.T.S.T.A. H.E.L.G.C.. This is not to be confused with Upper Southwest Texas State Teaching, Agriculture, and Home Economics Land Grant College, a vastly inferior school. Lyle Ben was besieged with offers from Harvard, Stanford, M.I.T., and New Mexico State, but, he said, "No, I better stay in Texas, so's I kin help Mom with the dishes." Besides, his mother recalls, he didn't want to be influenced by those wild rich kids at them Eastern colleges.

So young, tall, stout Lyle Ben went to "Lower" - as "in" Texans called it, and became a fine, upstandin' teacher of the young. And all of the youngsters he taught remember Old Lyle Ben as just a wonderful man and a great inspiration to them to continue their education - through the sixth grade, so they could pick cotton in the "high class" places. And they all send their kids and grand-kids to Lyle Ben Jackson Memorial Elementary School on Jackson Boulevard, corner of East Lyle Street, in Jackson, Texas.

Lyle Ben felt a calling for bigger and better things. For a while he thought about law school at Upper Panhandle State but instead he again felt the need to help his fellow man and went to Washington - as a Congressman. Now freshman congressmen are supposed to be kind of meek and quiet, but not young Lyle Ben. This young, tall congressman called immediately for Federal aid for his constituents back in Texas. Like damming up the Pedernales River so the people would have a lake to swim in - if they could get by Lyle Ben's cows who were using it for a water hole, among other things. And he got the F.C.C. to declare Jackson to be a one station area - WLBJ.

Before long Lyle Ben started getting ambitious again. He figured one man in ninety-six was better than one in four hundred and thirty-five, so he ran for the Senate. And he won. Meanwhile, Lyle Ben had married a beautiful young Texas flower named Lily Bird. And while her husband was busy with pork barrels and such, Lily Bird entertained Washington with her charmin' barbecues. It wasn't long before Lyle Ben was majority leader in the Senate, and he was fighting hard for all Texans when he led the resistance to those nasty civil rights bills. Just imagine! - they wanted to let all of those dirty Mexican kids into Lyle Ben Jackson Memorial Elementary School. Lyle Ben said that some of his best friends were Mexicans, but---

And then it was 1960, and Lyle Ben was in the running for President. But he needed a campaign slogan, and the best he could come up with was "Where or when? Now, with Lyle Ben!" So he called Lily Bird and she remembered when she had run for student president at "Upper", she had used "All the way with LBJ", and as long as the initials were the same, she let him use it - for half his radio station. But Lyle Ben lost and had to settle for Vice President. And he distinguished himself - acting as Presidential emissary to such key trouble spots as Tahiti, Outer Mongolia, and Hannibal, Missouri. And he had constant high-level conferences at home with famous people like the Vice-Mayor of Great Falls, Montana and a camel driver from Pakistan. He even invited his mother to Washington - and helped her with the dishes.

But then tragedy struck and Lyle Ben was suddenly President. He took over the reins of government without a hitch and found the saddle comfortable. He pledged to carry on the good work. After a year he had to

worry about another election. He chose Harry Humphrey Hubert Horatio as his running mate. Harry used the campaign slogan "You can have your K.K.K., we've got H.H.H.H." He had an easy time in 1964 because the Republican candidate was old shoot-from-the-hip Larry Rainwater. He proposed wild things like bombing North Viet Nam, and, besides, his children were good-looking, and everybody knows that the President's children have to look like "just plain folks."

And Lyle Ben's "just plain folks" family was certainly very much in the news after his election. Lyle and Lily had been blessed with two vivacious daughters, Lizzy Ben and Lucious Bird. Lizzy was rather a large girl, (one Republican spoil sport even said "horsy"), but she was an all "A" student at the University of Texas (where else?), and was very popular with the students there, at least the female ones. In mid-1966, however, she met a glamorous Hollywood movie star, George Gotrocks, known to his friends as "Pearly Whites", and rumors started flying. Lucious Bird had most of the publicity, however, for she was to be married in the White House, and, with the help of a battalion of hair dressers and haute couture experts, was the most beautiful bride in...uh...her father's eyes.

In 1968, L.B.J. ran again, and this time he didn't use L.B.J. or H.H.H.H. in his campaign slogan - he just used "Father knows best." He was elected again over some Republican car maker from Michigan. And everything was just wonderful for the Amurrican people: the average income was twenty five thousand dollars (and each dollar worth about 3 cents); U.S. troops were still "containing" Communist expansion (in the outskirts of Stalingrad and Peking); 43,000 U.S. soldiers were killed in fighting in one week (compared to 74 million Reds in the same week); and the population explosion was under control. Due to the new technical achievements, the Brookhaven National Laboratory had come up with a new super-size barbecue pit and L.B.J. was inviting the entire Amurrican population to a barbecue at the ranch - state by state. But most important, the Congress had repealed the Presidential Succession amendment, and L.B.J. was already laying plans for 1972, when he was planning to run as just "plain old Ben" - and wear square, rimless spectacles.

Of course, Lyle Ben Jackson was a name destined to go down in history. Jackson, Texas has named almost everything after old Lyle Ben. There were highways, schools, bridges, and babies - just about everything except the Pedernales River - because the folks were just getting so they knew how to pronounce it and it seemed a shame to change it. One of L.B.J.'s aides had even said that he was sleeping much better because L.B.J. was his President. L.B.J. knew he was going to be an historical figure, and he not so secretly hoped that some twenty-first century Carl Sandburg would come along and write a biography of L.B.J. - maybe call it "The Panhandle Years."