



SACRED GROUND

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The occasion was Tony Spumoni's first visit to Augusta National Golf Club and the second round of the 1996 Masters, compliments of the Great Muddy Golf Course Superintendents Association. For several months he was becoming aware of the magnitude of this event as he visited with friends that are golf fanatics. As the event drew closer, Tony began to gloat. He even had the chance to proclaim his excitement on Great Muddy Public Radio with Carlson "Cottage" Grove.

Tony had bittersweet feelings running through him as the day approached and the plans were firmed up. He knew this would be one of his last functions as a member of the Great Muddy Turfgrass Program. He told me, "I can think of no better way to depart a place I loved than to have it associated with one the great events of my professional life."

Still, there were rules! "If your late, they will leave without you!" cried Jeb Granford. "Blue will leave you at the gate if you don't get there on time." Also, Tony was warned, "No cameras!" However, he did learn that the modified rule is no camera not small enough to be smuggled in by the esteemed trip leader.

The trip coincided with packing day at the Spumoni house in preparation for the move east. There was an eerie feeling of closure that day because he knew upon his return, he was literally, "homeless". He coached a soccer game for his daughter's team, picked up Jeb and they were off to the Super 8 in Milwaukee.

Now, Jeb Granford was interesting fellow. A man deeply devoted to his profession, his University, his family, history, and the Great Muddy. The flip side of this passion was his disdain for all things liberal; taxes, long hair, and men with earrings to name a few. He is a fiercely loyal man. A

veteran of the Ugly War. Still, "Granny" as he's known to his friends, came home with dignity and honor for stepping up when asked serve.

Now, Granny and Tony made it to the flight on time, joining up with their old pals; Bogey Calhoun, Tom Morris, Billy Flagstick, Eddie Middleton and Ole Swenson. A classic Great Muddy breakfast was served on the plane and Tony objected, "How come every time we go anywhere we have to have some variation of smoked sausage, cheese, and that stinkin' leftsaboo."

Ole responded, "Hey Tony, you can always put the leftover grease in your hair."

"At least he's got some hair, Ole," quipped Billy.

This trip was beginning to remind Tony of a jaunt they took in "Steady" Eddie Middleton's minivan last year to the model train show in Luck. Tom and Ole insisted we stop at the Norske Nook. Once they were served, Tom, Ole and Granny broke into a verse of "Ode to Lutefisk".

*Oh Lutefisk, Oh Lutefisk
I love thy dense aroma
Oh Lutefisk, Oh Lutefisk
You put me in a coma.*

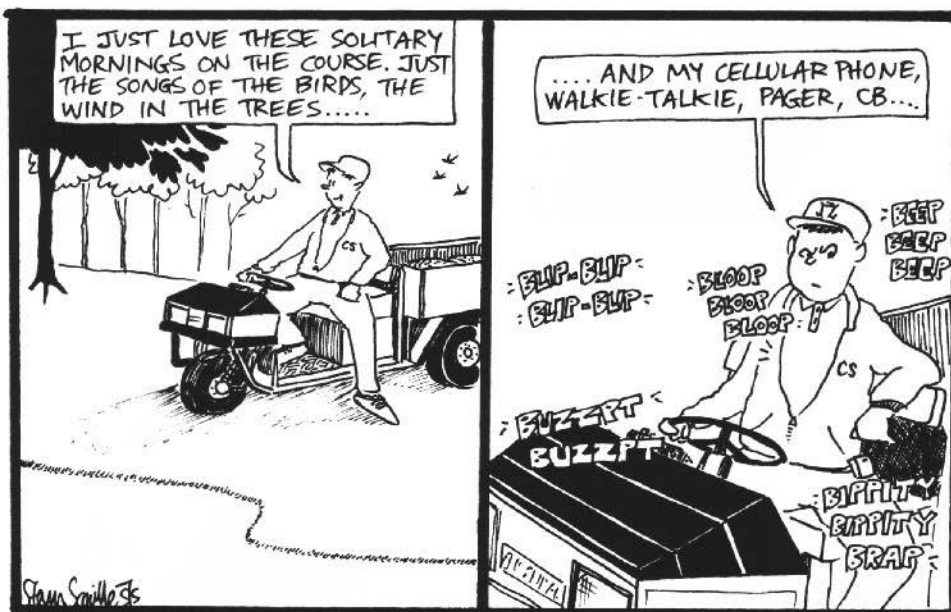
The plane touched down in Georgia and a brown haze covered the red clay soil. The southeast was experiencing a dry spring. Little did the visitors know how this would make Augusta that much more stunning.

As they arrived at the club, Tony could hardly contain himself. "Tony, I haven't seen you this excited since Field Day and EXPO last year." observed Bogey.

"Yeah, the last time he was this excited was when Granny gave him that earring" remembered Billy.

Finally, Blue passed out the tickets and they were off. On the bus, Eddie suggested that they should all head down to "Amen Corner" before the crowd gets there. They took the advice and wandered down the pine forest path. As the scoreboard came into a view, a brilliant shade of green was reflecting in the eyes of "turf

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guys". It reminded Tony of the opening scene of "The Sound of Music" with Julie Andrews in the field and the camera sweeping over her to show the Alps. He fell to his knees, completely overcome with the beauty of the Azalea hole (#13).

Granny looked down to him, "Tony, you okay?"

Tony murmured, "This is sacred ground."

"It seems funny that I am so entranced with a game that I have always worked around" reflected Tony. To break up the reverence that began to permeate the crew, Tony tried to get Granny's gander, "it sure is beautiful, but this is a homogenous portrait of an elite, white guy establishment that does not reflect the true nature of America."

Granny glanced over; trying to avoid launching a full scale conservative attack on social programs, taxes, and Clinton's character; he shook his head and sighed, "you'll learn".

Nevertheless, all agreed that the beauty and nostalgia are as deep as the Great Lakes. It is the history of the Masters and reverence for the

land that permits even the most stalwart liberals to look past the "snobbi-ness" and feel the beauty of a spring day in Georgia, at the most prestigious of golfing events, on the most beautiful course in the world.

Progressing around Amen Corner, Golden Bell #12 and White Dogwood #11, the crowds began to grow. At Camellia #10 green we noticed Clancy McSorley, a big shot with the National. Immediately, Granny seized the opportunity on this fine spring day in Georgia to knaw on a piece of Clancy's ear. The dreaded "affiliation agreement" reared its ugly head. The only breaks in the discussion came when golfers were putting. Freddy Boom Boom sunk a beautiful 15 footer for bird, and as the crowd erupted, Tom Morris joined the discussion. Tony listened.

The whys and wherefores were expressed. The only consensus reached was that sometimes men of unquestionable integrity and honor must agree to disagree. Each man shares the common bond of working toward a vision of a better profession in the best interests of the individual members.

Bogey begins to eavesdrop and notices Tony is not engaged in the discussion. "Tony, how come your not mixin' it up with those guys". He looks closer and detects that Tony is "glazed over."

"Bogey," Tony whispers, "my heart won't allow me any distraction today; I'm walking on sacred ground on a glorious day. If my family was here it would be a perfect day."

The group continued up the 10th until they came upon "Ike's Cabin". At first, Tony just stood there and tried to imagine the days when Ike would wander out to the practice green. Then Billy asked if Tony was okay. No one had ever seen Tony so quiet or spellbound.

"Billy, I am overwhelmed with the sanctity of this place," Tony remarked. "You know, this entire course except for the greens is perennial ryegrass, but I love it anyway." Tony continued, "I worry about the impression the lightning fast greens and perfect conditioning makes on the average golfer and subsequent pressures placed on superintendents to provide these conditions, yet I am still impressed."



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We looked again at Ike's Cabin and Ole asked if Ike was a good president. Tony responded, "I'm not sure, but I think he was considered, moderate except for his alignment with "Tricky Dick" Nixon." Tony should have seen it coming.

"What do you want a spineless, draft-dodging, womanizing, no-character liberal like we've got now," Granny fumed. "When he was asked to step up he didn't!"

Tony replied, "I'm voting for Ralph Nader this November." Granny shook his head and smiled at Tony like he usually did when Tony would say something outrageous and they all headed to the gift shop.

A mass of humanity awaited them at the gift shop where a each day \$1 million was collected. Granny wanted books, Billy wanted a shirt, Ole needed a hat, Tom wanted a calendar and Tony was looking for stuff for his kids.

They gathered their things and headed back out to the course. Arnie was finishing #18 with a birdie and the crowd erupted. Tony was honing in on Greg Norman, about to begin his second round with a 6 shot lead. No one could have foreseen the destiny awaiting Norman, however, Faldo had the eye's of a tiger as he practiced his chips with his caddie Fanny. Practice, practice, practice appeared to be the key to his eminent success.

Occasionally, the game would take over the conversation, yet, for Tony it was never more than a moment. He was fascinated by the divot repair crew, the guys pulling hose to water the sand bunkers, the guys mowing the greens with 7 feet of elevation change that roll upwards of 14 feet. Tony learned that even the fairways stimped at 9.5 feet.

The day began to wind down and the crew from the Great Muddy began to head for the bus. It was a

relatively uneventful day of scoring as the leader board remained unchanged. However, all the turf guys knew that Augusta would give a little before she began to take. And now we all know how cruel she can be to even the brightest of stars.

Still, the star of any day at the Masters is the land, sacred ground. Tony had learned that today and will carry the reverence he felt today with him always. 🌿

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