**WHEN DANIEL BOONE BOUGHT ME A BEER**

*The smiling sage repl’d*

*Come, my lad, and drink some beer.*

Samuel Johnson, 1777

This story actually took place on Christmas Eve Day, as they say down South—or the day before Christmas—on December 24, 1981, when I was traveling from Athens, Georgia, to Muncie, Indiana, on my way to attend Christmas dinner. I was looking forward to seeing my family and relatives once again. It had been, in fact, 25 years and about six months since I graduated from Royerton High School. I understand that several of my closest high school friends would also be joining us for a very special Christmas dinner. We were all to bring a covered dish. I had moved away upon graduation and had hardly seen any of my classmates since then. Perhaps I dreaded this time warp.

Did you know that there are only 9,125 days in 25 long years? Check my arithmetic!

Perhaps that is why I pulled off I-75 in Kentucky onto a back road to view the winter scenery and the slower pace of traffic, despite the fact that I-75 had been loyal to me since Atlanta. As I glanced at my odometer on the exit ramp, I noted that I had traveled exactly 459.3 miles.

I greatly enjoyed this relaxed rural setting, calmly driving and admiring the landscape known as the Outer Bluegrass. There were a number of fences built of the local slate, as a narrow slate belt encircles the more famous Kentucky Bluegrass region, known for its limestone underneath and its thoroughbred horses eating green grass (not bluegrass) above.

Suddenly, I came upon this rather elderly gentleman standing in the middle of the road, energetically waving me down. He was actually wearing bib overalls and a red plaid shirt. He asked if I could take him 3.2 miles down the road—“Otherwise,” he said. “I’ll haft to walk.” He certainly appeared harmless.

I was, in fact, somewhat lost and uncertain as to how to get back to I-75, so I said, “Jump in.” He eagerly obliged.

I then realized that his breath was about 86 proof, and I said to myself, “Welcome to Bourbon Country!”

Guess what. We drove down this winding road for exactly 3.2 miles, as he told me this story that he was a distant relative of Daniel Boone, that some of the Boones had always lived in this area, and that his father was 98 years and “nigh-on-to” three months old. He also said that Daniel Boone actually died in Missouri, where he was buried but was later dug up and reburied with ceremony in Frankfort, Kentucky, to help the tourist trade. He was right, of course, as I recalled from my fifth grade geography class, where I learned all the state capitals, but I didn’t learn that Daniel Boone had actually been “run out” of Kentucky.

He suddenly shouted, “Pull over, there it is!”

I obediently pulled into the “Dan’l Boone Tavern,” parking next to the only other car in the lot. It was after all, as I checked my pulsar watch, exactly 3:00 p.m. He said, “Come in. Let’s see if it’s not open.”

His ruddy complexion and his happy countenance allowed me to follow him inside.

The bartender was just setting up. He yelled, “Mr. Boone, you’re back so soon! You know you don’t haft no money to buy nothing here. So, you’ve brought a ‘friend,’” he said, derisively.

Mr. Boone replied, “Yes, he’s a friend. Please let me buy him a beer.”

“With what?” the bartender scoffed.

“With them,” Mr. Boone came back emphatically, and slapped six sharply crafted Indian arrowheads on the counter.

The bartender was astounded.

“Where did you steal them from? I’ll bet from your old daddy. That’s awful. Why, I bet the real Daniel Boone actually found some of them, or else maybe was probably wounded by one of ‘em. Stories in these parts are that your old daddy would never part with any arrows that Daniel Boone picked up or especially was wounded with.”

Mr. Boone calmly asked, “How many beers can I get with them-here six arrows?”

The bartender took his time to answer, “A case—Mr. Boone, 24 beers.”

Mr. Boone muttered dejectedly, “O.K. But that’s only four beers per arrow, though,” and now he perked up, “but when you think about it, it *is* 48 ounces per arrow.”

“O.K., then, give my friend here the first beer,” Mr. Boone said.

The bartender said, “All right, Mr. Boone, and here’s yours too, but I’m gonna keep track of how many you drink, ‘cause you are gonna lose count in a little while.”

Mr. Boone boasted, “I *never* lose a-track of my arithmetic!”

I drank my Pabst Blue Ribbon beer as quickly but as politely as possible, as I needed to be on my way.

As I thanked Mr. Boone for his hospitality, I also asked him his age. He said, “I’m a proud 72 years old today. I’m the Great—I need to say it *five* times—grandson of Daniel Boone. He died exactly 158,765 days ago. But, I’m here to celebrate my 26,280 days alive.”

Mr. Boone was now enjoying his second beer—costing one half of an arrowhead.

I then asked, “What are you going to have for Christmas dinner tomorrow?”

“My old daddy and me are the onlyest ones left here abouts, least ways that we claim as kin. Every year the dog—he don’t half no real name—chases down a yard bird for us and we fry it up. We half sliced bread and maybe an eight once can of vegetables or two. It’s always a right nice time. The dog, he gets the bones. Then we generally takes us a nap.”

As I thanked Mr. Boone and diplomatically attempted to get up to leave, he said: “You know something, that there Colonel Sanders guy—he’s dead now and buried in Louisville 83.6 miles from where we’s a-sitting, as the crow flies. He thought he stole my daddy’s chicken recipe, they say was handed down through the family. My daddy claims it come from Daniel Boone when he killed a turkey or maybe it was a bar. You see, when we had them’ens Sanders over for Christmas dinner in 1937, which will be 16,060 days ago tomorrow, this here Colonel guy, he hung around the kitchen when mamma was a-cookin’. Well, a few months later he opened that Sanders place down there 27.1 miles south from here.”

Mr. Boone was now signaling for his next beer, which, counting mine, was worth one arrowhead. He took a deep swallow and continued, “But guess what, he stole the wrong recipe. I don’t care if he did go national. I’m gonna eat the real chicken-batter thing tomorrow!”

Mr. Boone was quite intoxicated by now, as I considered what he might have consumed prior to our roadway encounter. He reached in his pocket and produced a pencil and proceeded to write on the napkin.

He said, “This here’s the original chicken recipe: Enjoy it, but don’t ever tell no body where it came from. Daniel Boone, he’s sleeping 38.6 miles from here, he wouldn’t half never want to ate no Christmas dinner that was taken commercial, you might say, ‘special that one in 1937, ‘special when that Colonel guy wasn’t as smart as my Mama, who done fooled him right bad!”

Somehow I found my way back to I-75, at the 19-mile marker, feeling much better about time warps. I hardly even noticed the lovely Kentucky Bluegrass region, with its limestone basement and its horsey-people on top. I did reflect upon Daniel Boone in the tourist basement in Frankfort, Kentucky, which I recall from the fifth grade was the capital of the Bluegrass state. But:

I was destined for Christmas dinner in Indiana, a state in the United States, named after Native Americans, because Mr. Columbus, in 1492, thought he was in India, which is actually approximately 12,500 miles away from Indianapolis, which is the capital of Indiana and also named for Indians. Mr. Columbus made his mistake in geography 489 years ago.

And I though just now that *I* had been lost.

I memorized the napkin’s contents and littered it on I-65, appropriately in *Columbus*, Indiana, but not before shredding it into bits as well as checking for police cars, as I was averaging 84.5 miles per hour.

As soon as I arrived in Muncie, Indiana, I bought five un-cut chickens at Ross’ Supermarket, and some things. The next morning I expertly prepared them. It was a wonderful Christmas dinner, thanks to the boasting of Mr. Boone.

But, think about it, Daniel Boone bought me a beer on December 24, 1981, even though he died on this same day in 1820. That was exactly 58,756 days ago. Mr. Columbus made his error exactly 178,559 days ago today.

Merry Christmas, Mr. Boone!

Merry Christmas, Mr. Columbus!

And Merry Christmas to *all*!