

*Backpack Adventures Series*

# *Texas: 1867*

*by*

*Marguerite Swilling*

*Produced through the Partnership for  
Environmental Education and Rural Health,  
Texas A&M University*



**Marguerite Swilling**, author of the Backpack Adventure Series, has loved reading, writing and science all her life. From writing and directing an original play in sixth grade, she advanced to essay competitions in high school and published poetry at Texas A & M where she majored in English and minored in Earth Science. Although she is a certified secondary teacher, Mrs. Swilling has spent the past twenty-three years in the business world and has written and presented training seminars on a variety of topics. Mrs. Swilling lives in Georgetown, Texas with her husband and two daughters.

## **Backpack Adventure Series**

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For information regarding these materials contact  
[vhardy@cvm.tamu.edu](mailto:vhardy@cvm.tamu.edu)

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1        Travis seemed mesmerized by the bat's aerial  
2 maneuvers till a dog's sudden bark echoed off the  
3 hills and broke his reverie.

4        "Rowdy. I've got to check on Rowdy. We  
5 better head back to real time, Roman. The museum  
6 looks closed now, anyhow. We can come back  
7 another time."

8        "Yeah, any time we want."

9        Travis felt in his pocket for Nettie's ribbon.  
10 "Even 1867."

### **An Introduction to Backpack Adventures:**

Welcome to the coolest club in middle school! Of course, no one outside the club can know just what makes this group so different. The secret is in the backpack.

**Roman Castillo**, a young teenage technology whiz, developed a powerful mini-computer that can transport people through space and time. He controls the computer with a wireless keypad complete with a screen that displays the co-ordinates for the time and space travel destination. He shared his invention with his best friend, Travis, as well as four others.

**Travis Allen**, Roman's best friend since kindergarten, is the son of a veterinarian and loves animals, the outdoors and math. He wears western jeans and boots that highlight his long, lanky profile. He has a short temper except with his stepsister, Summer. He's very protective of Summer and doesn't like having her travel with the BPC as the group has nicknamed their awesome device.

**Summer Martin**, Travis' stepsister, is two years younger than Travis and Roman. Her bright blue eyes are as merry as her laugh and her blonde hair is cut short and sassy. She loves to read and has a great memory for history and geography. She uses a wheelchair due to a terrible, traffic accident when she was five. Travis and his aunt built a motorized chair for Summer, and she can participate in just about everything with her two best friends, Connie and K.T.

**Connie Castillo**, Roman's sister and Summer's best friend, has long, silky black hair and her dark brown eyes are framed by thick, black lashes. She loves her brother, but sometimes questions the use of the BPC. Quiet and reserved, she is a serious student. Science is her favorite subject and dance is

her favorite pastime. She and Summer have a mutual best friend named K.T.

**K.T. Watson**, is an only child who loves her best friends, Summer and Connie, like sisters. She wears her curly, jet-black hair in dozens of tiny, tight braids so she'll look more like her favorite athlete, Venus Williams. K.T. is full of energy and courageous. A natural leader, she often instigates the adventures with the BPC. She loves soccer and cheerleading. She helped form the Backpack Club and brought in its newest member: her neighbor, Jace.

**Jace Long**, classmate and neighbor to K.T., grew up in China and moved first to California and finally to Texas. He loves soccer like K.T., is a whiz at math like Travis, and is especially close to Summer. As the newest member to the Backpack Club, Jace is the most reluctant to use the BPC for travel, but he thinks it's a great tool for communicating between the members and is the first to try the device for help with homework.

1 fence that connected to two corners of the building  
2 making a small enclosure.

3 Travis pulled the door shut again and  
4 followed his friend to the street side of the fence.

5 There were several tombstones in the tiny  
6 graveyard.

7 "Aunt Letha, Aunt Eliza," Roman murmured  
8 the names. "No dates."

9 "Nancy Lea," Travis read, "That's Nettie's  
10 grandmother."

11 "Margaret Lea Houston," Roman read, "I'll  
12 bet that's her mother. Look at the dates: April 11,  
13 1819 till December 3, 1867."

14 "December 3. That's just three days after we  
15 last saw Nettie. Three days after her mom collapsed.  
16 Wonder what..."

17 Just then a stiff breeze whipped the tall live  
18 oaks in the churchyard. The dry brown remnants of  
19 last season's leaves rained down noisily and  
20 skittered across the street toward the graveyard. The  
21 old bronze bell outside the church hall softly tolled,  
22 an echo from the past. The startled boys turned to  
23 the street where they noticed for the first time a  
24 small museum behind the church.

25 "Bet we could find a lot of answers in there,"  
26 Roman speculated.

27 Travis was staring toward the rooftop of the  
28 church where a dark creature darted and dipped in  
29 quick, jerky flight. Roman followed his gaze.

30 "Bat," Roman stated.

## Texas: 1867

1 “This must be Nettie’s grandmother’s burial  
2 vault. Look, the latch is open!”

3 Travis slowly pried the door open as Roman  
4 voiced his concern, “Wait a minute, Travis, this is  
5 somebody’s *grave*. We shouldn’t be messing with  
6 it! No telling what we’ll find in there...” His voice  
7 trailed off as he peered around Travis.

8 “Maybe it’s not what I thought,” said Travis.

9 Cobwebs adorned a wide, dirty shelf that  
10 stretched across half the tiny building. Boards  
11 leaned against the other walls and folding chairs  
12 covered with dust lay on the ground. A large,  
13 dilapidated wooden box sat on the rude shelf.

14 “Travis, let’s go,” whispered Roman. He  
15 knew his friend’s curiosity could lead them both into  
16 trouble.

17 “Chill out, Roman, if there was any *body* in  
18 here, there would be a marker or a sign and they  
19 wouldn’t leave the thing open.” Travis took a step  
20 inside the vault, stooping to fit under the low  
21 doorframe. The lid to the box was caved in and  
22 Travis could see the casket was empty. “It’s empty,  
23 Roman. You can come in now, Mr. Chicken.”

24 “Yeah, right,” Roman retorted and slammed  
25 the wooden door back into place, scraping up dust  
26 and enveloping Travis in darkness. Roman jumped  
27 back as the door flew open again and Travis leapt,  
28 gasping and sputtering, toward his friend.

29 “Cut it out!” Travis screamed. Roman’s  
30 laughter slowly died as Travis regained his  
31 composure. Roman began to walk around the iron

1 “Rowdy! Come back! Get back here,  
2 Rowdy!” Travis called to the Catahoula Leopard  
3 dog bounding uphill through bluebonnets and Indian  
4 paint-brushes. As Travis stopped to catch his  
5 breath, he watched the dog’s dark mottled coat split  
6 the brightly colored wildflowers like a zipper. With  
7 a leap, the disobedient dog disappeared into the  
8 grove of live oak trees that crowned the tall hill.  
9 “Ah, man,” he muttered to himself, “I’ve chased you  
10 across the rabbit-holed pasture and up this forever  
11 hill with this stupid backpack hanging on me like a  
12 sack of feed. Don’t you go hiding in those  
13 trees...Rowdy!”

14 His voice echoed off the hilltop, but the dog  
15 did not return. Travis struggled up the last fifty feet  
16 and turned to gaze out over the rolling farmland.  
17 Far below him, he could see pastures where cattle  
18 grazed on tall spring grass. A curving line of trees  
19 followed the meander of a stream separating the  
20 pastures from the hayfields that dropped smoothly  
21 toward Yegua Creek a few miles away. He thought  
22 he could make out black bits of Highway 50 that ran  
23 straight as an arrow through miles of cropland  
24 rectangles in shades of emerald, rust and gold. The  
25 Brazos River bottom is beautiful in the springtime,  
26 Travis thought. Too bad the rest of the Club  
27 couldn’t be here on this gorgeous April day.

28 Travis sighed and turned back toward the  
29 copse of live oaks that covered the hilltop. There

1 was no underbrush. The tall trees spread above him  
2 with massive branches intertwining, creating a  
3 shimmering ceiling of tiny leaves. Flickers of  
4 brilliant sunlight from an azure sky spiked the dark  
5 loam floor. As his eyes adjusted to the fluctuating  
6 light, Travis halted, surprised by what he saw.

7 Tombstones stood in rambling fashion  
8 between the rough trunks of the ancient trees. Here  
9 and there, rusted iron fences surrounded groups of  
10 graves. Tall monuments dominated the centers of  
11 some of these groupings while low stone vaults  
12 covered others. Rows of rusty iron crosses tilted  
13 like swords thrust hastily into the dark brown earth  
14 years ago.

15 Travis' heart raced as he squeezed through a  
16 break in the crumbling fence that marked the edge of  
17 the cemetery. He struggled to free his backpack as  
18 it snagged on the broken wire. Suddenly, Rowdy  
19 barked, sending shivers down Travis' spine. A  
20 dozen wrens took flight, scattering tiny fallen oak  
21 leaves in their wake.

22 "Rowdy! Here, boy!" shouted Travis, at once  
23 self-conscious of being too loud in a cemetery.  
24 Wasn't he supposed to be respectful of the dead?  
25 What does it matter if I yell, he thought. It's not like  
26 anyone here's going to care. Just get the dog and  
27 go, a tiny voice inside him said.

28 He sprinted deeper into the shadows and  
29 followed the narrow drive that wound through the  
30 trees. His feet crunched on the gravel, and he felt he  
31 was again too loud in this silent, solitary place.

1 Travis clutched the black ribbon in his fist. "  
2 Ready or not, I think we need to go... Listen, the  
3 rain's stopped."

4 A shaft of low-angled sunlight pierced the  
5 breaking cloudbank and illuminated the simple  
6 stained glass panes. The reflection cast jewel-hued  
7 patterns across the dark oak pews. Brilliant sapphire  
8 and emerald, deep gold and crimson blended for a  
9 moment with the multi-colored flash that was the  
10 boys' return via the BPC.

11 In the sodden dusk, hundreds of hungry bats  
12 emerged, winging from the hills into the very center  
13 of Independence.

14  
15  
16 Travis and Roman stood at the intersection of  
17 Highway 50 and Highway 390. No traffic passed on  
18 the narrow two lane roadways as the sun slowly  
19 rolled toward the horizon. They had set their co-  
20 ordinates for sunset on April 21, 2002, when they  
21 knew the weather would be hot and dry.

22 The lot across the street from the church was  
23 vacant except for a small stone building atop a  
24 grassy knoll. Travis and Roman walked to the  
25 building and found the only opening on the opposite  
26 side from the street. The rough planks that formed  
27 the door to the weathered structure allowed little  
28 light and a limited line of vision into the dark cavity.

29 "Do you think we could open it?" ventured  
30 Roman. "I wonder what's in there?"

1 sick, I'll allow no one to let my blood. Papa had  
2 that done and I think that's what killed him finally."

3 Travis was about to ask what Nettie was  
4 talking about when Andrew burst into the church,  
5 skidding to a halt beside the pew, a wild look in his  
6 eyes.

7 "Nettie, I've been looking everywhere for  
8 you! Come quick!" Andrew struggled to catch his  
9 breath. "Mama collapsed."

10 Nettie's hand went to her mouth, a look of  
11 terror on her face. Without a word, she slipped the  
12 black ribbon from her hair and pressed it into  
13 Travis' palm. She rushed to catch up with Andrew.  
14 Roman and Travis watched them slosh across the  
15 muddy, rutted lane and into a two-story white house  
16 a block away from the church.

17 Travis looked across to the pew where Nettie  
18 had sat tracing the carved initials of her father. He  
19 traced the "S H" then walked to the far right aisle of  
20 the church, next to the east wall. A small sign was  
21 attached to the end of the pew. "Reserved for the  
22 Houston Family."

23 "Whoa, does that mean what I think it does?"  
24 asked Roman as he read the sign over Travis's  
25 shoulder. He looked at the carved initials and  
26 added, "As in Sam Houston?"

27 "Roman, we answered the mystery of the five  
28 tombstones, but we found a whole graveyard more."

29 "Yeah, and I think these riddles are best  
30 investigated from a safe, fever-free location—like in  
31 the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ready to go, Travis?"

1 "Rowdy. Come here, Rowdy," Travis called  
2 softly.

3 *A-w-o-o-o-o-o...* Rowdy's coyote-like howl  
4 sounded from behind a tomb. As Travis hurried to  
5 grab Rowdy's collar, the dog sat perfectly still, his  
6 tongue lolling out of his mouth.

7 Rowdy turned to face Travis, his one blue  
8 eye and one brown eye regarding his master calmly,  
9 as if he was waiting patiently for Travis to reach this  
10 very point. Rowdy stretched out his front legs and  
11 placed his head between them.

12 "What is it, boy? What are you up to,  
13 rascal?" Travis squatted and scratched Rowdy's  
14 ear. The dog lay on top of a gravesite, his gaze  
15 fixed on the marker. Travis squinted to read the  
16 darkened engravings.

17 "Sam Houston, Junior. May 25, 1843 to May  
18 3, 1894. Wow! This must be the grave of Sam  
19 Houston. Or is it his son?" Travis' initial  
20 apprehension had given way to curiosity. The old  
21 graveyard seemed peaceful and calm now. Rowdy  
22 wouldn't be so quiet if there were anything  
23 dangerous here, now would he? Travis surmised  
24 silently. "I wonder if any other famous people are  
25 buried here?"

26 Travis wandered between the markers,  
27 running his hand over the roughly hewn limestone  
28 headstones, feeling the coolness of smooth marble  
29 monuments. Hoxey, Bryan, Clay, Coles. I wonder  
30 if Dad knows this place is here? thought Travis. He  
31 glanced at his watch. Only thirty minutes had



1 passed since he left his father and Mr. Clark from  
2 whom Travis was buying a show steer. When the  
3 two men began a discussion of tuberculosis and  
4 brucellosis testing, Travis decided to exercise six-  
5 month-old Rowdy, Mr. Clark's cow dog, by  
6 exploring the countryside around the little town of  
7 Independence.

8 On the way to Mr. Clark's farm, Dr. Allen,  
9 Travis' dad, had pointed out some ruins in Old  
10 Baylor Park. That was where Travis was headed  
11 when Rowdy changed the course.

12 Travis paused before a very old gravestone.  
13 The letters were faint, but Travis could make out  
14 "fought in the American Revolution." Travis let  
15 out a low whistle. "That is an *old* grave!" He  
16 zigzagged around the close growing trees to a row of  
17 graves in another section, reading aloud. "1867.  
18 Died 1867. Departed 1867. 1866-1867. That was  
19 just a baby. September, 1867. Died, age 15 years, 3  
20 months and 10 days, 1867. What was the deal in  
21 1867?" Travis checked his watch again. "I'm  
22 calling Roman," he advised the now sleeping dog.  
23 He tapped his best friend's number into the keypad  
24 of his backpack computer.

25 "What's up?" Roman's voice buzzed out of  
26 the tiny speaker. "You buy a Grand Champion yet?"

27 "Naw, man, my dad and Mr. Clark are still  
28 talking, so I took Rowdy, his puppy, for a walk, or  
29 should I say a chase. I finally caught up to him and  
30 found this really cool place. Roman, I want you to

1 camphor rag to guard against swamp gases." Nettie  
2 waved the little white handkerchief with its  
3 medicinal smell.

4 "But there's no swamp here," remarked  
5 Travis.

6 "The whole town is a swamp! Have you not  
7 noticed the ditches and the overflowing privies?  
8 The Brazos River has overflowed its banks all  
9 summer and the rain has not stopped more than three  
10 days in a row since June." Nettie looked wistfully  
11 toward the stained glass windows lining the west  
12 wall. "I think that's what I miss the most."

13 "What?" Roman and Travis asked  
14 simultaneously.

15 "The sun. Maybe if the sun would shine for a  
16 while, everyone could get well. I think sunshine  
17 makes people healthy, but we stay all shut up inside  
18 where the air is as stagnant as the cotton fields down  
19 by the river. Mama says the malaise enters your  
20 very bones till you can't lift yourself out of bed. Is  
21 it any wonder that some people let the fever grow  
22 until they get the black vomit or the jaundice?"

23 "Can't you take some kind of medicine?"  
24 Roman asked.

25 "There's quinine, calomel, castor oil, oil of  
26 black pepper, chlorine water—nothing that works  
27 for sure. No way of knowing if you'll be the one to  
28 burn for days and then awake with immunity, or  
29 take ill one day and be dead the next. I just know I  
30 can't stay cooped up all day and night. If I ever get

1 one of our house servants, too, but Papa let him keep  
2 all his earnings from his blacksmith job.”

3 “Did your father free him too?” asked Roman.

4 “Yes, even though it was illegal to do so.  
5 Mama says Uncle Joshua’s sons will be educated  
6 and do great things some day.”

7 “So you’re having to go to your sister’s  
8 because you’re poor? Why can’t you just stay  
9 here?” Roman asked.

10 “Mama says we’ll come back after the winter  
11 sets in. That’s usually when fever epidemics  
12 subside. Maybe we can finally stop wearing black!  
13 I’m sick of the rain and the mud and the stinking  
14 water. I’m sick of the hot black clothes and the  
15 camphor rags and the mosquitoes. I miss my friends  
16 from Galveston who are quarantined and can’t come  
17 back to school.”

18 “Why do you have to wear black?” Travis  
19 asked.

20 “Funerals every week. Some people we  
21 know, some people no one knows. Today we buried  
22 a family of five German immigrants. They had been  
23 on their way from Indianola to New Braunfels when  
24 they decided to detour to Waco. Mr. Cole said they  
25 weren’t quarantined long enough, but they had been  
26 waiting three months and were perfectly healthy till  
27 they reached Independence. They died within a  
28 week of becoming sick.”

29 Travis and Roman exchanged glances.

30 “Mama says they traveled after dark to make  
31 up time and got night vapors. That’s why I carry this

1 meet me here, but not now, I mean, I want you to  
2 come here now, but meet me in... in 1867.”

3 “In what?”

4 “In the year 1867. Here, in this spot. I need  
5 your help figuring out what happened.”

6 “What happened to who?”

7 “To a bunch of people. In 1867.”

8 “Travis, if I didn’t know you better, I’d say  
9 middle school was making you loony,” Roman  
10 teased. “I’ve got your geographic coordinates, but  
11 we’ve got to set an exact time if you want to meet in  
12 the past. You tell me when.”

13 Travis checked his watch. “Three p.m. Uh,  
14 let’s make it today, April 21, in honor of General  
15 Sam.” He tapped the time and date into his keypad.

16 Roman answered, “Three p.m., April 21.  
17 General Who? Oh, never mind. You can tell me  
18 later. Much later. 1867?”

19 “1867.”

20 “One–two–three, go!”

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23 When the colors stopped whirling around  
24 Travis, he could see Roman’s look of surprise. The  
25 trees were not as thick around as Travis had seen  
26 them at first, but they were well on the way to  
27 forming a “ceiling” of leaves. There were fewer  
28 gravesites, no perimeter fencing, and sprinklings of  
29 wildflowers in the sunnier spots. The hillsides were  
30 covered in tall native grasses that swayed and

1 danced in the stiff April breeze. Travis could hear  
2 the distant rumble of thunder.

3 “OK, Sherlock, what’s the big mystery? I can  
4 tell you what happened to each and everyone here.  
5 They died. Mystery solved. Can I go now? I  
6 thought we were meeting someplace *cool*, not stone  
7 cold. Let’s go!” Roman anxiously grabbed the  
8 keypad of his BPC.

9 Travis rolled his eyes at his best friend. “Just  
10 a minute, Mr. Chicken, there’s something missing.  
11 None of the 1867 tombstones are here. Let’s  
12 check...”

13 “Boo!” Travis and Roman leapt back as a  
14 teenage girl jumped from behind a six-foot-long  
15 stone vault. Her long, light brown hair was tied  
16 behind her head with a blue ribbon that matched her  
17 calf-length faded blue cotton dress.

18 “Oh. I’m sorry to frighten you!” the young  
19 girl sputtered between belly laughs. She held her  
20 sides and laughed so loudly, Travis thought the dead  
21 might wake. Composing herself, she smoothed her  
22 dress and folded her hands in front of her, looking  
23 closely at the two speechless youths.

24 “Do forgive my transgression. I thought you  
25 were my younger brothers come to torment my  
26 solitude. I’m hiding from the three rascals. You are  
27 surely dressed strangely,” the girl continued eyeing  
28 their backpacks. “Are you Yankee carpetba... Are  
29 you Northerners?” For the first time, the girl  
30 showed signs of unease, rocking on her feet like she

1 much now since our money is all gone, but we’d  
2 never let Eliza live alone.”

3 “You owned slaves? But I thought you said  
4 you were poor.” Travis was now the one to frown in  
5 confusion.

6 “We owned lots of homes and farms, you  
7 know, property. You can’t eat property. Papa was a  
8 Unionist even though he owned slaves. He lost his  
9 job when the War started. He was a heavy drinker  
10 before he married Mama, but I think he drank due to  
11 his war wounds. He was baptized into this very  
12 church when Andrew was born. After four  
13 daughters, he finally had a second son he could  
14 name after his hero, Andrew Jackson.” As she  
15 talked about her father, Nettie traced the initials  
16 carved into the pew in front of her. The dark wood,  
17 smoothed by countless rubbings, gleamed beneath  
18 her pale hand.

19 The little stone church was silent except for  
20 the steady drumming of rain on the roof. Nettie  
21 spoke so softly that the boys had to lean forward to  
22 hear her over the rain. “In here, tracing his initials,  
23 sitting in the pew that belongs to my family, in the  
24 church my mother and grandmother helped build—  
25 this is where I finally feel at home. I was just eleven  
26 when he died. He was seventy.”

27 A single tear slid down Nettie’s pretty cheek.

28 “So, we are poor now. Mama’s money was  
29 all in Confederate notes. Worthless. Uncle Joshua  
30 offered us \$2000 in gold, but Mama wouldn’t take  
31 it. He worked hard to earn all that money. He was

1       “Who’s Maggie?” Roman asked.  
2       “She’s the third oldest. She married Captain  
3 Williams last year in October and they live out in  
4 the country on a farm. When the fever started  
5 moving inland from Galveston and got as close as  
6 La Grange, Mama decided to vacation with Maggie.  
7 Now we’re only home long enough to pack to go to  
8 Nannie’s house for Christmas.”  
9       “Who’s Nannie?” Roman asked again.  
10      “Another sister?”  
11      “The oldest sister. She married Mr. Morrow,  
12 a wealthy merchant from Georgetown, last year in  
13 August. She had a baby girl this past June. Aunt  
14 Eliza moved to Georgetown to help her with the  
15 baby like she took care of all of us. Aunt Eliza was  
16 only ten when my mother was born and has lived  
17 with her ever since. Mama needs Aunt Eliza now.  
18 We all do.”  
19      “Well, sounds like you’ll all be with your  
20 mother’s older sister when you reach Georgetown,”  
21 comforted Travis.  
22      “My mother’s sister?” Nettie frowned in  
23 confusion. “Oh, you mean Aunt Eliza. She’s not my  
24 real aunt. She’s our house servant. My  
25 grandmother, Nancy Lea, the one who’s buried  
26 across the street, owned Eliza’s parents back in  
27 Alabama and gave Eliza to my mother. Eliza used  
28 to say my mother was her living baby doll. Of  
29 course, Papa freed all our servants after the war  
30 started, but Eliza stayed with us. We can’t offer

1 was ready to run, but was unable to overcome her  
2 curiosity.  
3       “We’re Texans, and we’re not scared,” Travis  
4 answered, drawing himself up to his full height of 5  
5 feet 10 inches. “In fact, my friend here’s related to  
6 Juan Seguin. His family’s been in Texas longer than  
7 mine.” Travis had been impressed with Roman’s  
8 family background ever since he found out Roman  
9 was related to a Texas Revolutionary hero.  
10      “Yes, and longer than mine too. Both my  
11 parents are from other states and they have both  
12 spoken highly of Senator Seguin. Please pardon my  
13 lack of propriety. My name is Nettie. And you  
14 are...?”  
15      “Travis.”  
16      “Roman.”  
17      The three teens stared at each other a moment  
18 in silence.  
19      “Aren’t you scared coming alone to a  
20 cemetery?” asked Roman.  
21      “No, I like this place. It’s quiet and peaceful  
22 and I can read and write in privacy, which is  
23 something I have little of at home. I live in town  
24 and go to school here at Baylor. We’ve lived here  
25 off and on since I was little. We moved back in ’63  
26 when Papa died so Mama could be closer to her  
27 mother. But my grandmother died the very next  
28 year. We don’t have much money, so we just stayed  
29 put for a change.”

1 Travis looked around at the tombstones  
2 wondering if any belonged to Nettie's kinfolk. She  
3 noticed and answered his unspoken question.

4 "Papa is buried in Oakwood in Huntsville and  
5 my grandmother had enough money to build a vault  
6 in town, across the street from our church. She  
7 always liked being in the middle of things."

8 A low roll of thunder seemed to announce the  
9 boisterous arrival of Nettie's brothers who were  
10 whooping and hollering for Nettie as they pulled an  
11 older teenage girl along with them. As the unruly  
12 troop reached the cemetery, their shouts fell to  
13 whispers as they surveyed the two strangers and  
14 their sister.

15 "It's well we came to look for Nettie, dear  
16 little brothers, for she seems to have forgotten she is  
17 fifteen, not five. It is unbecoming for her to be  
18 playing hide and seek in a cemetery," admonished  
19 the tall girl. Her beautiful auburn hair was pulled up  
20 on either side of her head in two loose buns.  
21 Though her tone was formal and severe, her eyes  
22 betrayed her concern for her younger sister.

23 "Mary, dear, allow me to introduce two  
24 steadfast Texans: Travis—I am sure named after the  
25 brave colonel—and Roman, a relative of Senator  
26 Seguin. Gentlemen, these are my siblings: my *elder*  
27 sister, Mary, a mature lady of seventeen, and the  
28 brothers of whom I warned you, Andrew, age  
29 thirteen, Willie, age nine and the baby, Temple."

1 A glittering rainbow of light seemed to fill the  
2 silent church, and Nettie lifted her eyes to watch it  
3 play across the white boards of the back wall above  
4 the oil lamps and the preacher's heavy wooden  
5 chair. The red, blue, green and yellow rectangular  
6 panes of the stained glass windows were dull with  
7 the gray pounding rain that had devastated the town  
8 for weeks. She turned in the hard wooden pew to  
9 seek the source of the light.

10 "Travis! And Roman! I...I didn't hear you  
11 come in," Nettie greeted the boys with a soft smile.  
12 She was dressed in a simple black cotton dress with  
13 her hair tied in the back with a black grosgrain  
14 ribbon. "How long have you been here?"

15 "Not long," replied Travis. "I was hoping I'd  
16 find you here." The relief in his voice was audible  
17 and Nettie looked at him with a questioning frown.  
18 He hurried toward her pew then remembered what  
19 she had said about wanting privacy. He hesitated.  
20 "Do you mind if we talk awhile?"

21 "Of course not. I may not be the best  
22 company just now."

23 "Nettie, is everything OK with you, with your  
24 family?" Travis asked.

25 "So far, but I'm really worried about Mama.  
26 Ever since we returned to Independence, she's been  
27 visiting the sick and grieving for her old friends  
28 who've died. She says we never should have gone  
29 to Maggie's farm in Labadie in September." Nettie  
30 held a white cotton handkerchief to her nose and  
31 sniffed. A faint smell of camphor lingered in the air.

1 leaves from atop the stone. He ran his fingers  
2 across the scratched surface. His forefinger traced  
3 the crude marks. Two parallel, vertical lines. A  
4 dash. Two small semi-circles— one on top of the  
5 other. A larger circle. A dash. And then the  
6 familiar 1867, the seven partially broken off in the  
7 crumbling edge of rock returning to earth. No name  
8 remained, not even one letter.

9 Roman leaned over his friend and helped  
10 gently lift the fifth marker from the soil. It came  
11 free with a soft sucking pop, but the bottom was too  
12 eroded to allow the boys to stand the stone upright.  
13 Instead, they carefully leaned the last stone against  
14 the gnarled branch that had protected it for so long.

15 “You don’t think...” Roman began, unable to  
16 finish the question they both feared to answer.

17 “November.” Travis wiped the dirt from his  
18 hand onto his blue jeans. “We’ve got to go back to  
19 November 30, 1867. I’ve got to know what  
20 happened.”

21 “Back to the graveyard? All we’ll find is  
22 these stones brand new!”

23 “No, I think we need to go into Independence,  
24 to that church Nettie mentioned. Dad and I passed it  
25 when we came into town. Can you set the  
26 coordinates for Independence Baptist Church,  
27 November 30, 1867?” Travis faced his friend, his  
28 face solemn, serious. “Will you go with me?”

29 “Couldn’t keep me away!”  
30  
31

1 “I’m not a baby! I’m almost seven!” the little  
2 boy with dark, wavy hair screamed as Mary kept  
3 him from punching Nettie for her teasing.

4 “Wow!” exclaimed Travis. “Five kids.  
5 You’ve got big family, Nettie.” He reached to shake  
6 the hand Andrew extended.

7 Andrew, almost as tall as Travis, assumed the  
8 role of family spokesman. “Yes. We’ve also two  
9 recently married sisters and a brother who is a war  
10 hero, wounded at Shiloh. He’s studying medicine  
11 now. Someday, I’m going to be in the military. It’s  
12 in my blood. I like a good fight and...”

13 Nettie interrupted. “Andrew is especially  
14 good at shooting. Shooting off his mouth.”

15 “Oh, what do girls know about men’s affairs?  
16 Say, Travis and Roman, how would you like a bite  
17 of beef jerky?” Andrew pulled a thick salty chunk  
18 of dried beef from the pocket of his gray, threadbare  
19 trousers.

20 “Good grief, Andrew, have you salt pork  
21 too?” Nettie scolded. “Let’s invite these two visitors  
22 down to the house to have a real meal. Mary, what  
23 do you say? Mother wouldn’t mind at all. Aunt  
24 Eliza could bake a blackberry pie and biscuits. And  
25 we have that fresh rabbit and the mustard greens.”

26 Before Mary could answer, a flash of  
27 lightning and instantaneous clap of thunder sent  
28 little Temple rushing into Mary’s arms and Nettie  
29 scurrying for her book and tablet that lay behind the  
30 stone vault.

1        “We must go home before the storm breaks or  
2        Mama will be worried,” commanded Mary, her arm  
3        around Temple to lead him swiftly down the hill.  
4        Andrew and Willie raced past them hollering as if  
5        they led a cavalry charge.

6        Travis looked at Roman and shook his head.  
7        Turning to Nettie, he spoke quickly. “We’ve got to  
8        be on our way. Go home, be safe. It was nice to  
9        meet you.”

10       “But...” Nettie hesitated and then smiled.  
11       “Will I ever see you again?”

12       “It’s possible we may return,” Travis said  
13       with a glance at Roman, “in the future.” They  
14       could smell the rain now.

15       With a sudden sound like falling coins, the  
16       clouds burst open in a torrent of nickel-sized  
17       raindrops, pounding the spring soil into mud before  
18       Nettie could reach the bottom of the hill.

19       “You coming back with me?” Travis shouted  
20       over another thunderclap.

21       “Well, I’m sure not staying here!” Roman  
22       replied as he grabbed Travis’ backpack to tag along  
23       for the trip back to the future.

24       The next lightning flash was not from the  
25       storm.

26

27

28       Travis and Roman would have been surprised  
29       to find themselves dry and surrounded by brilliant,  
30       late afternoon sunshine had they not had so many  
31       prior experiences traveling with the BPC. No matter

1       the weather or time of day when they returned, they  
2       could always get back to the present place and time  
3       as if they had never left. Even Rowdy still lay in  
4       contented sleep on top of Houston’s grave.

5       “At least we figured out this is not General  
6       Sam, but his son,” Travis commented as he began to  
7       walk Roman through the older sections of the  
8       cemetery. “Here’s where I found a lot of the 1867  
9       tombstones. Let’s see if they give actual months or  
10       not.”

11       Roman and Travis began to examine the  
12       markers more closely. Markers from years other  
13       than 1867 had more information than those for 1867.

14       “It’s like they were in too much of a hurry to  
15       really engrave much on the headstones. I’m really  
16       curious what happened.” Travis ran his fingers  
17       across a rough limestone marker that had weathered  
18       so badly only the faintest trace of the year remained.  
19       1867. Beside it, another was just the same. A third,  
20       identical in shape, stood close beside the other two,  
21       completely blank. As Roman tried to lift a fourth  
22       marker that had fallen beside the others, Travis  
23       stood up to view the stones from another angle.  
24       That’s when he saw the fifth plain marker nearly  
25       buried beneath the drooping branches of an old live  
26       oak tree.

27       “Roman, isn’t it kind of strange to have five  
28       identical markers in a row?” asked Travis, a  
29       sickening knot growing in his stomach.

30       Travis knelt beside the fifth marker, lifted the  
31       old branch away, and brushed the dirt and withered