

# MY LIFE AS A REDNECK GAS STATION ATTENDANT

by

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prologue:

**JULY 4, 1953-- "MAMA, LOOK DOWN THERE. PLEASE MAMA, COME HERE, DONT YOU SEE THAT BLACK SMOKE! MAMA, THE SIRENS ARE GOING OFF! -- THE BIG SMOKE IS GETTIN BIGGER. THE PHONE IS RINGING MAMA"!! MAMA BOLTED OUT THE BACK DOOR CRYING-- "MOTHER, WHY ARE YOU CRYING"--- "BOBBY, GET IN THE CAR RIGHT NOW. WE ARE GOING DOWNTOWN." THE BIG BLACK SMOKE WAS MORE THAN FLAME AND FUMES. IT WAS A FLESH EATING DISFIGURAMENT, A BEGINNING OF HUGE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL AILMENTS OF OUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY THAT LEFT LASTING SCARS.**

**MAMA DROVE OUR BLACK 1951 CHEVROLET SEDAN WITH NANCY, MY INFANT SISTER AND I TO MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE ACROSS FROM BERRY' S CLEANERS. AFTER LEAVING US WITH GRANDMA BOBO, MAMA HIT THE ACCELERATOR HARD TOWARDS THE SMALL McNEASE CLINIC-HOSPITAL ,A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY. SHE FOUND DADDY, MY OTHER SISTER, DIANE WITH 1ST, 2ND AND 3RD DEGREE BURNS ON 60% OF THEIR BODIES, A GORY SIGHT INDEED.**

**THE BIG BLACK SMOKE WE SAW OVER A MILE AWAY WAS CAUSED BY A GASOLINE PUMP EXPLOSION AT MY FATHERS GASOLINE STATION. THE CAUSE WAS BELIEVED TO BE A ELECTRICAL SHORT IN THE HIGH TEST GAS PUMP. THIS BEGAN A SUMMER AND FALL OF TRAGEDY FOR OUR FAMILY. SOME CONSIDERED DADS VERY SLOW PHYSICAL RECOVERY A MEDICAL MIRACLE. IN 1953 HE WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE LIVED, SOME SAID. DAD HAD MANY SURGICAL SKIN GRAFTS TO HIS BURNS. DIANE, AGE 4 WAS A BRAVE LITTLE GIRL WITH HER BURN INJURIES AND GRAFTING. DAD WAS NEVER THE SAME MAN BUT HIS LOVE ENDURED.**

**I NEVER GAVE THE IDEA OF PERSONAL FAME MUCH THOUGHT UNTIL THE OTHER DAY. I DECIDED THAT IF THE NAMES MENTIONED BELOW EVER BECAME HOUSEHOLD WORDS IT WOULD HAVE TO BE SOMETHING THAT BORDERED ON A FORM OF NOVELTY. THATS WHEN IT SUDDENLY OCCURRED THAT MY ONLY CLAIM TO FAME WOULD BE AS A CHARTER MEMBER OF THE GAS STATION ATTENDANT HALL OF FAME. CONSIDERING THAT THE OCCUPATION IS OBSOLETE, PERMANENTLY DELETED FROM THE LATEST EDITION OF THE DICTIONARY OF OCCUPATIONAL TITLES , I FELT COMPELLED TO WRITE A STORY HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED IN GREASY, DIRTY, FUME LADEN, EXTREME TEMPERATURE CONDITIONS, JUST TO GET BY TO WORK ANOTHER DAY.**

**THERE ARE MANY "BUBBA's, NO PUN INTENDED, THAT I COULD NOMINATE FOR THIS "AUGUST HONOR". SOME OF THE NAMES I WOULD NOMINATE ON THE FIRST**

**ROUND WOULD BE MY OLD FRIENDS: NUBBY, SWEET EYE, LONG JOHN , SWAMPY, SACKHEAD, FINE DAY , WASHRACK AND RAG MAN. WITHOUT A DOUBT THEY WOULD BE CHARTER MEMBER FIRST ROUNDERS. YES, I KNEW MOST OF THEM, THE GREATEST REDNECK GAS STATION ATTENDANTS IN THE GREAT STATE OF ALABAMA. THESE GUYS FROZE THEIR BUNS OFF, SWEATED PROFUSELY AND ENDURED THEIR ACHES TO SEE THAT SAFE TRANSPORTATION BY AUTOMOBILE OWNERS WENT FORWARD IN THE 1940s TO THE 1980s. IT IS TO THESE GUYS AND MANY OTHERS LIKE THEM THAT I DEDICATE MY STORY.**

JULY 23, 1954:

VAUDIE PEPPERS, DADS BEST WORKER LEANED OVER AFTER WE WASHED, YES, DRYED DOWN THE ALABAMA POWER TRUCK. IT WAS ALWAYS FULL OF RED MUD. WITH A BIG GRIN ON HIS FACE VAUDIE SAID, “ LITTLE MAN, GO IN THE CAFE AND BRING ME ONE OF THEM HAMBURGERS WITH EXTRA EVERYTHING-- I HOPE YOU ARE AS HUNGRY AS I AM TODAY, HURRY BACK”. YOU SEE, VAUDIE WAS BLACK AND IN THOSE DAYS HE WASNT ALLOWED IN THE CAFE. HE COULD GO AROUND TO THE BACK DOOR OF THE CAFE TO ORDER FOOD BUT WAITING TIME MIGHT BE LONGER. THIS SIMPLE REQUEST OF A WHITE 10 YEAR OLD BOY WAS PROBABLY MY FIRST REAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE SEGREGATED SOUTH AND HOW UNFAIR IT SEEMED TO ME EVEN AS A CHILD. “ BE RIGHT BACK VAUDIE, PUT YOUR MONEY BACK-- I'LL GET EXTRA FRIES TO GO WITH IT”.

WELL, I HAD LEARNED HOW TO OPERATE DAD' s LARGE CASH REGISTER THAT HAD A SLIDING DOOR SELECTOR KNOB ON THE TOP. IT WAS A FLOOR TO HEAD LEVEL TYPE MODEL REGISTER, A REAL PIECE OF FURNITURE ACTUALLY. I OPENED THE CASH REGISTER, TOOK \$1.35 , WENT IN MISS SUE s PAN AM CAFE AND CAME OUT WITH THREE HOT CHEESE BURGERS, FULLY LOADED, A HUGE ORDER OF SALTED FRENCH FRIES ENCASED IN ALUMINUM FOIL. I HAD ENOUGH CHANGE LEFT OVER TO GET TWO RC COLAS FOR VAUDIE AND I.

VAUDIE AND I WERE GREAT FRIENDS. ONE OF THE MORE SALIENT MEMORIES ABOUT HIM WAS THE DAY HE SAID TO ME, “ LITTLE MAN, ONE DAY YOU GONNA AMOUNT TO SUMPIN”. YEARS LATER IT DAWNED ON ME THAT WHAT HE WANTED FOR ME WAS NEVER MAKE FIXING FLATS AND WASHING TRUCKS MY LIFE'S WORK. VAUDIE WAS A GOOD MAN WHO NEVER ENTERED THE FRONT DOOR OF THAT CAFE TO EAT A MEAL IN PEACE. THIS WAS BONDAGE AT ITS WORST I FIGURED. YES, LIFESTYLE-- HABITATION WERE SEPARATE AND MY MEMORY OF THOSE DAYS INDICATED IT WAS NOT EQUAL, NOT BY A LONG SHOT. EVEN A 10 YEAR OLD KID LIKE ME KNEW THIS COULD NOT LAST.

I BEGAN MY CAREER AS A GAS STATION ATTENDANT EARLY IN LIFE. AT AGE 10, I BEGAN TO SPEND TIME AT MY DADS PLACE, A PAN AMERICAN STATION NEXT DOOR TO MISS SUE BEE'S CAFE. FOR ME, IT WAS THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE BECAUSE OF ALL THE INTERESTING CHARACTERS PASSING BY. ON DAYS WHEN THE WORK WAS SLOWER THAN USUAL, DAD 's WORKERS WOULD HOLD COURT SITTING IN USED RECAP TIRES OR ON THE CONCRETE STEPS NEXT TO THE CAFE. RECAPPED TIRES WERE

STACKED ABOUT THREE OR FOUR HIGH. I WOULD SIT ON THE OIL STAINED TIRES WITH MY BACK AGAINST THE WALL SO AS NOT TO FALL INTO THE TIRE DONUT HOLE. IT WAS THIS VANTAGE POINT THAT I MET MOST OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE, PREACHERS, DOCTORS, LAWYERS AND MERCHANTS THAT PASSED BY OUR GAS STATION ON THE WAY TO HAVE COFFEE OR LUNCH AT MISS SUE BEE'S CAFE NEXT DOOR.

MY FATHER, ROBERT L. MADDOX, BOUGHT THE STOCK IN THIS PAN AM GAS STATION IN 1952 FOLLOWING SEVERAL YEARS EMPLOYED AS THE TOWNS UNDERTAKER AT SHORT FUNERAL HOME. SHORT FUNERAL HOMES IN FAYETTE, HALEYVILLE, HAMILTON AND JASPER WERE OWNED BY MR. SPEGNER OF TUSCALOOSA. SINCE DAD WAS MOVED FROM ONE FUNERAL HOME TO ANOTHER IN WEST ALABAMA BEFORE I WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD AND WITH NO ONE ELSE TO ASSIST HIM EXCEPT MY MOTHER, HE DECIDED TO BUY OUT THE GAS STATION and BEGIN A NEW CAREER. THE FUNERAL HOME BUSINESS WAS DIFFERENT IN THE 1940 s and 1950 s BECAUSE THE JOB REQUIRED AMBULANCE SERVICE FOR CAR WRECKS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL PURPOSES. TRANSPORTING DECEASED PERSONS WITH THE USUAL EMBALMING, BODY-HAIR COSMETICS AND FAMILY REQUESTS WERE NORMAL FUNERAL HOME DIRECTOR DUTIES. IN ADDITION, ALL ALABAMA COUNTIES REQUIRED A CORONER AND THE LOCAL EMBALMER WOULD BE THE NATURAL, APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR. SHORT FUNERAL HOME WAS LOCATED DIRECTLY NORTH & ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE PRESENT UNITED STATES POST OFFICE ON TEMPLE AVENUE. YEARS LATER, THE BUILDING BECAME THE HOME OF WWWF RADIO STATION BUT WAS DEMOLISHED ABOUT 1966 AFTER IT BECAME A VACANT EYESORE ON TEMPLE AVENUE.

BY THE TIME I WAS 11 YEARS OLD, MY PARENTS ALLOWED ME MORE "HANG OUT" TIME AT THE STATION ON SATURDAYS. SUNDAYS WERE FOR CHURCH, FAMILY TIME AND RECREATION. WE HAD BLUE LAWS THAT FAYETTE MERCHANTS FOLLOWED AND IT WAS COMMON FOR STORES TO CLOSE ON WEDNESDAY EVENINGS. EARLY ON, I WAS TAUGHT HOW TO OPEN HEAVY HOODS, CHECK THE OIL DIP STICK, LOOK FOR SIGNS OF CRACKED WATER PUMP AND GENERATOR BELTS, WASH WINDSHIELDS AND SWISH BROOM THE RUBBER FLOOR MATS. IN THOSE DAYS CAR AND TRUCKS DID NOT HAVE CARPET. SOMETIMES I WOULD PEEL BACK THE RUBBER FLOOR MAT ON THE DRIVERS SIDE AND CHECK THE BRAKE FLUID LEVEL. DAD AND VAUDIE MADE SURE I DID THESE THINGS CORRECTLY SINCE OUR LIVLIHOOD DEPENDED ON GOOD SERVICE TO ALL CUSTOMERS.

I WAS NOT ALLOWED TO PUMP GASOLINE UNTIL I WAS ABOUT 12 YEARS OLD. INTERESTING ENOUGH, IT WAS A MYSTERY ON CARS OF THAT ERA AS TO THE LOCATION OF THE GASOLINE TANK AS WELL AS THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING THE LEVER TO UNLOCK THE HOOD. SOMETIMES THE GAS TANK CAP WAS LOCATED BEHIND THE REAR TAG OR IT MIGHT BE IN THE COMPARTMENT OF THE LEFT BRAKE LIGHT. SOMETIMES VAUDIE WOULD LAUGH AT ME WHEN I COULD NOT FIGURE OUT WHERE THE GASOLINE CAP WAS LOCATED BUT WOULD POINT TO WHERE IT WAS. ONE MORNING A INTERNATIONAL TRACTOR CAME IN. I PROCEEDED TO POUR OIL IN THE DIESEL GAS TANK. FORTUNATELY, VAUDIE SAW MY BLUNDER AND STOPPED ME FROM POURING THE ENTIRE OIL CAN INTO THE FUEL TANK. WE HAD TO CLEAN THE DIESEL TANK OUT BUT DAD DID NOT SCOLD ME IN SPITE OF THE EXTRA TIME AND COST OF CLEANING THE TANK. FROM THAT TIME ON I WAS REAL CAREFUL WHEN TRACTORS PULLED INTO THE STATION.

GASOLINE COSTS IN THE MID TO LATE 50 s RANGED FROM 13 CENTS TO 18 CENTS PER GALLON. WE HAD THREE TYPES OF GASOLINE, REGULAR LEADED, MID GRADE LEADED AND WHAT WE WOULD CALL " WHITE GAS" OR THE HIGH TEST. IN TODAY'S MARKET THE HIGH TEST WOULD BE CLOSE TO WHAT IS KNOWN AS AVIATION FUEL. THE "WHITE GAS" ACTUALLY LOOKED SILVER IN COLOR AND THAT IS WHY THEY CALLED IT WHITE GAS. I DON'T REMEMBER UNLEADED GASOLINE UNTIL YEARS LATER WHEN ENGINE CARBURATIONS SYSTEMS CHANGED. IF YOU HAD A AUTOMOBILE HOLDING 20 GALLONS A FILL UP WOULD COST NO MORE THAN \$3.50 MAXIMUM, USUALLY LESS. BY THE MID 1960 s GASOLINE WOULD RUN .25 TO .30 PER GALLON. OUR GAS STATION NAME CHANGED FROM PAN AMERICAN TO AMOCO, TO HUMBLE OIL FINALLY TO EXXON DURING THE 27 YEARS OUR FAMILY OWNED THIS BUSINESS.

"HI THERE, TWO DOLLAR MAN, THANKS FOR YOUR BUSINESS TODAY", DAD SAID. THE TWO DOLLAR MAN CAME IN EACH SATURDAY FOR TWO DOLLARS WORTH OF GASOLINE. WE PUMPED THE GASOLINE ON CREDIT AND LIKE CLOCKWORK HE WOULD BE IN EARLY SATURDAY MORNINGS TO HAND US TWO ONE DOLLAR BILLS, WHICH WE CREDITED ON A TICKET. ONE DAY, I WAS LOOKING AT DAD'S CREDIT LEDGER AND NOTICED THAT THE TWO DOLLAR MAN NEVER HAD A REAL NAME. IT WAS ENTERED AS THE TWO DOLLAR MAN, NO HOME ADDRESS AND NO PHONE NUMBER. DAD SAID THAT HE DID NOT NEED HIS REAL NAME OR ADDRESS AS LONG AS HE PAID HIS WEEKLY TWO DOLLARS. OCCASIONALLY, HE WOULD NEED OIL CHANGES OR OTHER AUTOMOBILE SERVICES BUT HE WOULD PAY FOR THAT IN CASH, NOT DISTURBING HIS TWO DOLLAR LEDGER BALANCE. HE WAS A GOOD NATURED MAN WHO SEEMED TO BE AMUSED IN THE NAME WE GAVE HIM.

DR. BRETHER WAS A REGULAR CUSTOMER THAT WE SAW SOMETIMES TWICE WEEKLY. HE WAS ALSO OUR FAMILY PHYSICIAN. DURING THE SUMMER DAD WOULD RENT A HOUSE ON PANAMA CITY BEACH FOR AT LEAST A TWO WEEK PERIOD. I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I SAW THE GULF OF MEXICO, I THOUGHT IT WAS MARVELOUS WITH CRYSTAL BLUE WATERS GENTLY LASHING THE WHITE SAND THAT STRETCHED FOR MILES FROM GULF SHORES TO OUR RENTAL HOUSE. I WAS 12 YEARS OLD AND THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME I HAD EVER LEFT THE CITY OF FAYETTE. GOODNESS, IT WAS LIKE I HAD GONE TO A FOREIGN COUNTRY. DAD COULD NEVER LEAVE THE BUSINESS OF HIS BUSINESS THOUGH, CALLING HIS MANAGER TO MAKE SURE THE GAS STATION WAS OPEN THE USUAL HOURS AND FUNCTIONING NORMALLY.

ABOUT 1 AM ON OUR 3RD DAY AT PANAMA CITY BEACH, THE WIND AND RAIN REALLY PICKED UP WITH SQUALLS PELTING OUR RENTAL WITH HUGE WHITE FOAMING WAVES VISIBLE ONLY BY LIGHTNING BOLTS. NEVER HAVING EXPERIENCED A SEVERE BEACH THUNDERSTORM OR A HEAVY SQUALL LINE LITERALLY SCARED US TO DEATH! WITHIN 15 MINUTES WE HAD GRANDMA BOBO AND ALL OUR BELONGINGS PACKED IN OUR 1951 CHEVY HEADED HOME. WE WERE UP THE BEACH 5 MILES WHEN WE STARTED SEEING STARS IN A CLEAR SKY. WE FELT SO SILLY LEAVING THE RENTAL THINKING THAT WE WERE IN A TROPICAL STORM OR HURRICANE. WE LAUGHED SO HARD AT OURSELVES IN THE PACKED CAR HEADED BACK TO OUR RENTAL HOUSE ON BEAUTIFUL PANAMA CITY BEACH.

DR. BRETTLER HEARD MANY STORIES ABOUT OUR BEACH TRIPS WITH DAD TELLING THE STORIES SO WELL. ALL OF THE MEN AT THE STATION GATHERED AROUND FOR OUR GULF BEACH STORIES. IT SEEMED LIKE THE SQUALL STORM TALE, DADS SEA SICKNESS EPISODE ON CAPTAIN ANDERSONS BOAT AND PA'S WATER SLIDE ACCIDENT AT PANAMA CITY BEACH WERE BELLWETHERS TO HEAR REPEATED ANYWHERE IN TOWN. THE STORY GOT OUT IN TOWN THAT DAD WAS SO SEASICK ON CAPTAIN ANDERSONS BOAT THAT HE DRANK A QUART OF BUTTERMILK LATER AT OUR RENTAL AND DIDNT KNOW IT WAS SPOILED. I KNEW THAT STORY WAS FACTUAL BECAUSE I WAS ON THE SAME "DEEP SEA MEAT BOAT" WITH 30 OTHER FISHERMEN HEAVING OR LEANING INVOLUNTARY OVER THE RAILS. DR. BRETTLER TREATED DAD'S SEA SICKNESS FOR WEEKS AFTER WE RETURNED FROM THE GULF THE SUMMER OF 1960. DR. BRETTLER NEVER TIRED OF HEARING ABOUT THE FISHING TRIP. I REALLY BELIEVE IT BROKE THE STRESS OF BEING A MEDICAL DOCTOR. EVERY WORKER AT THE GAS STATION KNEW THAT DOCTORS AND MINISTERS VEHICLES HAD TO BE READY TO GO AT A MOMENTS NOTICE. THAT WAS A CORE BELIEF OF THE OWNER.

ONE SATURDAY MORNING DR. RUGLAND CAME IN WITH HIS AMERICAN MOTORS CAR. THIS WAS THE FIRST CAR I HAD EVER SEEN THAT WAS NOT A FORD, CHRYSLER, OR ONE OF THE GENERAL MOTORS VEHICLES. DR. RUGLAND POPPED HIS TRUNK FOR US, UNWRAPPED A BOX THAT CONTAINED NYLON STRAPS AND OTHER METAL PARTS. HE SAID THEY WERE A NEW FANGLED GADGET CALLED SEAT BELTS. WELL, NOT ONE OF US HAD HEARD OF AUTOMOTIVE SEAT BELTS AND WE WERE TO INSTALL THEM. WE THOUGHT THEY WERE FOR AIRPLANES. HE WANTED US TO INSTALL THOSE STRAPS IN HIS AMC RAMBLER CAR. FORTUNATELY FOR US THE STRAPS HAD ALL THE PARTS. SACKHEAD DROVE THE GOOD DOCTOR TO THE CLINIC AND RETURNED WITH THE RAMBLER AMC CAR. THE STRAPS HAD TO BE BOLTED TO THE FLOOR REQUIRING DRILLING AND INSTALLING BOLTS/NUTS FOR THE SEAT BELTS TO DO WHAT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO DO. SO FAR AS I KNOW WE WERE THE FIRST BUSINESS TO INSTALL SEAT BELTS IN THE COUNTY. DR. RUGLAND WAS OUR CUSTOMER FOR A LONG TIME. HE WAS A TERRIFIC TALENT FOR THE McNEASE CLINIC STAFF. HE HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE BEST DOCTORS IN THE NATION AND I HAVE SUCH FOND MEMORIES OF HIM AND HIS FAMILY.

ANOTHER MERCHANT, MR. KOLBY, THE OWNER OF RICHARDS THEATRE AND THE ROXY. THE RICHARDS THEATRE WAS LOCATED ON THE CORNER OF TEMPLE AVENUE AND COLUMBUS STREET, NEXT TO THE COUNTY COURTHOUSE. THE ROXY WAS LOCATED ON MARKET STREET ACROSS FROM ROSE MARKET. THE ROXY WAS KNOWN FOR WESTERN MOVIES AND THE RICHARDS THEATRE SHOWED MOST RECENT AND POPULAR MOVIES. A MOVIE ON SATURDAY, 1950's, WOULD COST .25 CENTS, LATER .50 CENTS IN THE 60s. AS TYPICAL OF ALL THEATRES OF THIS TIME IT WAS SEGREGATED WITH BLACK PERSONS CONFINED TO THE BALCONY SEATING AREA. THAT IS JUST THE WAY IT WAS IN ALL DEEP SOUTH THEATRES. MR. KOLBY MOVED TO BIRMINGHAM IN THE EARLY 1960s AND BUILT A THEATRE CHAIN THAT BECAME DOMINANT IN THE SOUTHEAST. HE WAS A TRULY NICE MAN, VERY FRIENDLY AND WAS A PROMINENT TOWN LEADER. HE WAS ALSO ONE OF THE REGULAR 10:00 am COFFEE BREAK MERCHANTS THAT WALKED BY OUR GAS PUMPS ALMOST EVERY DAY. THE RICHARDS THEATRE WAS DEMOLISHED IN THE LATE 1970's AND THE LOT BECAME PART OF THE

FAYETTE COURTHOUSE LAWN. THE ROXY THEATRE IS NOW THE HOME OF FAYETTE'S NEWSPAPER WEEKLY, THE TIMES-RECORD.

THE GAS STATION OPENED EVERY DAY AT 5:45 AM AND DAD WAS THERE TO DO THAT. THE FIRST THING TO OPEN THE STATION FOR BUSINESS WAS ELECTRIC POWER TO THE GAS PUMPS, THE SERVICE LIFT AND ALL INTERIOR LIGHTING. FAST FORWARDING TO CLOSING TIME AROUND 7 PM THERE WERE CERTAIN THINGS NECESSARY FOR ALL WORKERS. THE USED RECAPPED TIRES STACKED UP ON THE OUTSIDE HAD TO BE ROLLED INSIDE. NOW THAT WAS EASY TO DO EXCEPT WHEN WE WOULD HAVE AN AFTERNOON SHOWER, THE TIRES THEN WATER LOGGED. WE WOULD DRAIN THE OLD TIRES WITH A CUP BEFORE ROLLING IT INSIDE THE STATION, STACKING THEM AS TO SIZE.

THE STACKED OIL CANS NEXT TO THE GAS PUMPS HAD TO BE COVERED AND LOCKED INTO PLACE FOR THE NIGHT. THE METAL COVER WAS DESIGNED TO FIT PERFECTLY OVER THE CANS. THE OIL CANS IN THE 50's/60's WERE A LIGHT GRADE OF TIN, OPENED WITH A BEER CAN OPENER OR A OIL PLUNGER. ALL DISPLAY PRODUCTS LIKE WAXES, POLISH OR FUEL OIL ADDITIVES HAD TO BE BROUGHT IN FROM THE FUELING AREA AND THE SERVICE BAYS. CAR WASH MATERIALS/TIRE BRUSHES AND CLEANING CLOTHS WERE BROUGHT IN AND LEFT TO DRY AS NEEDED. AFTER THAT WAS DONE THE ENTIRE GAS STATION WAS BROOM SWEEPED, BATHROOM CLEANED, ELECTRICITY TURNED OFF AT THE PUMPS AND THE SERVICE BAY LIFT WAS CLEANED AND DISABLED. WE WERE THEN DISMISSED FOR THE DAY AFTER A TYPICAL 10 TO 12 HOUR SHIFT.

EVERY DAY AT THE GAS STATION INTERESTING BUSINESS PEOPLE and RESIDENTS WALKED BY WHILE WE WORKED. ADJOINING OUR BUILDING TO THE AFT WAS A ACCOUNTING OFFICE RAN BY MR. ROY JORDAN. YOU COULD COUNT ON ROY WALKING BY OUR CUSTOMARY TIRE SEATS FOR MORNING COFFEE AT SUE BEE'S PLACE. HIS APPEARANCE ALWAYS REMINDED ME OF A NERDY, PLEASANT BUT RESERVED MIDDLE AGED MAN. WHAT WAS SO SALIENT ABOUT HIM WAS WHAT HE SEEMED TO WEAR EVERY DAY TO WORK. FOR YEARS, I NEVER SAW ROY IN ANYTHING BUT BLACK DRESS SLACKS, WHITE SHIRT, BLACK TIE AND A PAIR OF BLACK HORN RIM GLASSES. I THOUGHT HE WAS A DOUBLE FOR MR. ROY ORBISON, A ROCKABILLY ARTIST JUST GETTING STARTED. SINCE I LIKED MR. ORBISON'S HITS, "ONLY THE LONELY"-- "CRYING, OVER YOU", -- "PRETTY WOMAN", "IT'S OVER" OR MY FAVORITE NUMBER- "IN DREAMS" - MY ACCOUNTANT FRIEND NEXT DOOR EVOLVED IN MY MIND AS A SURROGATE ROCK STAR, MR. ROY ORBISON HIMSELF. MR. JORDAN NEVER KNEW I HAD HIM PEGGED AS A ROCK STAR AND I NEVER TOLD HIM. HE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE GAVE ME A BIG SMILE AND PONDERED,"WHO THE HECK IS ROY ORBISON".

MR. JORDAN HIRED A REAL PRETTY LADY, MRS. POTTER THAT WORKED IN THE ACCOUNTING OFFICE. SHE WAS THAT, A REAL LADY IN MY OPINION. SHE WAS MARRIED TO A LICENSED ELECTRICIAN IN THE AREA. AS A MATTER OF FACT, MR. POTTER MAY HAVE BEEN THE MAN WHO INVENTED THE ELECTRONIC MOSQUITO

KILLER. THEY, AS A COUPLE ALWAYS MADE IT TO THE 10 O'CLOCK COFFEE BREAK MANY TIMES STOPPING TO TALK WITH ME. WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG, I FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR CERTAIN ADULTS OR AUTHORITY FIGURES TO MAKE PERSONAL CONTACT. I WAS NOT ALWAYS THE CLEANEST KID IN TOWN SINCE THE GAS STATION REQUIRED BEING AROUND GREASE, OIL STAINS AND DIRT. THOSE SHORT CONTACTS WITH THE COFFEE BREAK MERCHANTS DID A LOT FOR MY SELF RESPECT WHEN MY APPEARANCE WAS NOT FROM A PAGE OF "GENTLEMANS QUARTERLY MAGAZINE".

NEXT TO THE ACCOUNTING OFFICE WAS A LARGE STORAGE AREA FOR NEW CHEVROLET VEHICLES. NEW CAR DEALERS CARRIED LOW INVENTORIES IN THE 50's/60's. IT WAS VERY COMMON FOR NEW CAR BUYERS TO ORDER THEIR CARS OR TRUCKS. WE WERE DIRECTLY ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE CHEVY DEALERSHIP, SO DAD SECURED CONSIDERABLE BUSINESS FROM THE OWNER LIKE NEW CAR PREP, GASOLINE FILL UPS POLISHING, WAXING, FILL IN OIL CHANGES AND TIRE REPLACEMENTS/FLATS.

DIRECTLY, NORTH OF THE CHEVY CAR STORAGE WAS A INSURANCE OFFICE. IT WAS CO-OWNED BY TWO BROTHERS , THE LANDURS BROTHERS. ONE IN PARTICULAR WAS BILLY , A FORMER UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA FOOTBALL PLAYER WHO PLAYED WITH A FAMOUS COLLEGE FOOTBALL COACH, PAUL "Bear" BRYANT. OCCASIONALLY, I WOULD HEAR BILLY TALKING ABOUT HIS PLAYING DAYS OR CONTACTS WITH COACH BRYANT. MOST SUNDAY AFTERNOONS , 4 O'CLOCK IN THE FALL, MOST FAMILIES LIKE OURS GATHERED AROUND A TINY BLACK & WHITE TV SET TO HEAR COACH BRYANT TALK ABOUT THE LAST SEC GAME, STAR FOOTBALL PLAYERS & THE PLAYER' S PARENTS, OF COURSE. HE ADVERTISED GOLDEN FLAKE POTATO CHIPS AND COCA-COLA WHEN HE GOT THE TIME. THE TWO LANDURS BROTHERS WERE KNOWN TO BE CITY LEADERS, VERY HELPFUL TO RECRUIT INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE FOR OUR SMALL TOWN. THEY HAD REGULAR FRIENDS THAT JOINED THEM AT SUE BEE S CAFE FOR MORNING COFFEE, ONE A RETIRED GENERAL IN THE AIR FORCE , T. C. SMITHSON AND A FORMER DECORATED WORLD WAR II SUBMARINE OFFICER IN THE PACIFIC, MR. BO RENDFRO. MR RENDFRO WAS FAYETTE MAN OF THE YEAR DURING THE 1960s, A RESPECTED BUILDER/DEVELOPER AND HELPFUL IN INDUSTRIAL RECRUITING.

ACROSS THE STREET FROM THEIR INSURANCE OFFICE WAS FAYETTE AUTO PARTS AND THE FAYETTE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE, MANAGED BY A FINE MAN, MR. J.W. HEIRS. THE HEIRS FAMILY HAD OLD FAYETTE LINKAGE. I THINK J.W. REALLY LIKED ME, IT JUST SEEMED LIKE GREAT CHEMISTRY. J.W. ALWAYS HAD FUNNY STORIES TO TELL AND I CAN TRUTHFULLY SAY HE WAS A MENTOR FOR ME. I WOULD BRING THE INVOICES FROM FAYETTE AUTO PARTS FOR DAD TO REVIEW AND FILE AWAY. THE AVERAGE COST OF A FRAM OIL FILTER AT A PARTS STORE IN 1959 WOULD AVERAGE \$1.25 WHOLESALE WITH A BUCK ADDED RETAIL. ANOTHER FAYETTE BUSINESS LEADER DIAGONAL TO OUR GAS STATION ON COLUMBUS STREET WAS MR. BILL BEAMS. HE SOLD FURNITURE AND LOTS OF IT. VAUDINE TOLD ME HE BOUGHT SOME FURNITURE FROM MR. BEAMS AND INTRODUCED ME TO A NEW TERM--- "CARRYING CHARGES",

IN OTHER WORDS, "INTEREST ON PRINCIPAL". MY MOTHER, WINNIE MADDOX, ONCE ADMITTED THAT MR. BEAMS WAS HER BOSS MANY YEARS EARLIER WHEN HE OWNED THE "Trolley Diner". THE "TROLLEY DINNER" WAS A CONVERTED RAILROAD PASSENGER COACH CAR, REFURBISHED AS A CAFE. IT WAS LOCATED JUST A FEW STEPS NORTH OF THE OLD FAYETTE POST OFFICE

WE HAD A CIGARETTE MACHINE INSIDE THE STATION AND IT SEEMED TO ME THAT EVERY MAN IN TOWN SMOKED EXCEPT THE PREACHERS AND THE DOCTORS. IT ALSO WAS NOT UNCOMMON TO SEE A COUPLE PINTS OF EARLY TIMES CONSUMED ON SATURDAY EVENINGS. THE CUSTOMERS WHO CAME IN THE STATION TO "TAKE A NIP" ALWAYS HID BEHIND OUR LIGHT GREEN CIGARETTE MACHINE BEFORE PULLING OUT THEIR BOTTLE FROM THEIR COAT POCKET. MR. McBROWN, CHEVY DEALER, WAS ONE OF THE "NIPPERS" THAT I LIKED. I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT FUNNY TO SEE THEM HIDING BEHIND ANOTHER VICE, THE CIGARETTE MACHINE. IF DAD TOOK HIS "NIP", IT WAS ALWAYS LATE ON A SATURDAY EVENING. THE CIGARETTE MACHINE HAD PULL LEVERS BELOW THE HIGHLIGHTED BRANDS MOST PEOPLE SMOKED LIKE WINSTONS, KENTS, CAMELS, MARLBORO, OLD GOLD, LUCKY STRIKE, PICAYUNES AND CHESTERFIELDS. A SOLID QUARTER WOULD WORK WELL IN THAT MACHINE.

MY MOTHER ALWAYS SAID THAT SERVICE STATIONS WERE NOT A PLACE FOR LADIES TO BE SEEN IN, EVEN THOUGH SHE CAME IN WEEKLY TO POST DADS CREDIT AND DEBIT LEDGER. FRANKLY, I DONT EVER REMEMBER A LADY COMING IN OUR GAS STATION AS LONG AS I WORKED THERE. AS A MATTER OF FACT MOST LADY CUSTOMERS STAYED IN THEIR AUTOMOBILES WHILE WE PUMPED GASOLINE AND DID ROUTINE UNDER THE HOOD CHECKS. THEIR WERE SOME LADIES WHO WENT SO FAR AS TO STAY IN THEIR CAR WHILE IT WAS BEING LIFTED FOR OIL CHANGES, TIRE OR BRAKE WORK.

WHEN HUMBLE OIL COMPANY BECAME OUR DISTRIBUTORS SOURCE OF GASOLINE WE LEARNED OF PRIZE AWARDS BEING GIVEN OUT IN ALABAMA, MISSISSIPPI AND LOUISIANA FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE. THESE PRIZES WERE THINGS LIKE WASHING MACHINES, STOVES, REFRIGERATORS, CASH MONEY, FREE GASOLINE FOR A YEAR AND OTHER NICE PRIZES. THESE PRIZES WERE ONLY FOR THE SERVICE STATION ATTENDANT WHO DELIVERED THE PRECISE SERVICE LIST TO A UNIDENTIFIED HUMBLE OIL EXECUTIVE. DAD TOLD ALL OF US IN A MEETING THAT THIS CONTEST WAS TAKING PLACE AND TO BE DILIGENT WHEN VEHICLES CAME IN THAT WERE UNFAMILIAR TO OUR AREA. ALL OF US WANTED TO BE THE ONE THAT DELIVERED THE SERVICE TO THE EXECUTIVE AND WIN THE PRIZE OF THE DAY.

WELL, MY DAY DID COME. FORTUNATELY VAUDINE AND NUBBY WERE BUSY WITH SERVICING COUNTY TRUCKS AND SOME TIRE JOBS WHEN A CAR DROVE IN THAT WAS SUSPICIOUS. I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE MY LUCKY DAY TO WIN A PRIZE. THE DRIVER WAS A WELL DRESSED MAN IN HIS 40 s, A DARK BLUE 1957 FORD STATION WAGON, THE SAME COLOR AS THE HUMBLE OIL BLUE. DAD HAD GONE TO PICK UP ANOTHER CAR TO SERVICE SO I HAD THIS AUTOMOBILE TO MYSELF AND GAVE HIM THE WORKS.



I KNEW EXACTLY WHAT HUMBLE OIL WANTED THE ATTENDANT TO PROVIDE, THE ORDER THE SERVICE WAS TO BE DONE PLUS WHAT WAS TO BE SAID TO THE CUSTOMER. AFTER GOING THROUGH THE ROUTINE THE CUSTOMER GAVE HIS HUMBLE CREDIT CARD AND IT WAS NOT A COMPANY CARD. I BEGAN TO THINK MAYBE HE WAS NOT THE MAN I WAS LOOKING FOR AFTER ALL. WELL, HE DROVE OFF AFTER THANKING ME. AFTER ABOUT 45 MINUTES THE SAME CAR PULLED BACK IN WITH OUR LOCAL DISTRIBUTOR, BILL FOWLER, RIDING SHOTGUN. THE WELL DRESSED MAN WALKED UP AND HANDED OVER A LETTER FROM HUMBLE OIL STATING THAT I HAD WON THE DAILY PRIZE. THE PRIZE WAS A TOP OF THE LINE STOVE AND A CASH AWARD OF \$50. WITHIN A MONTH THE NEW WHITE GE STOVE WAS DELIVERED TO OUR HOUSE WITH THE \$50 CHECK MADE OUT TO ME. MOM REALLY NEEDED A NEW STOVE AS OUR OLD STOVE HAD SEEN ITS BEST DAYS FOR SURE.

THE \$50 I EARNED IN THE JULY 1960 HUMBLE OIL CONTEST WAS INVESTED IN MY FIRST CAR, A BLACK 1949 FLAT HEAD V-8 FORD. IT CAME FROM A JUNK YARD OWNED BY MY UNCLE, LEWIS BOBO. UNCLE LEWIS TOLD ME ABOUT THIS CAR THAT COULD BE SALVAGED IF I WANTED IT. DAD AND I PULLED IT BY CHAIN INTO OUR STATION. IT NEEDED BRAKES, REBUILT RADIATOR AND A BATTERY, USED OF COURSE. DAD SAW TO IT THAT THE FORD WAS SAFE TO DRIVE. THIS MODEL FORD HAD A THREE SPEED MANUAL SHIFT ON THE COLUMN, A PUSH BUTTON IGNITION SWITCH AND AM RADIO. WE HAD A RELIABLE MECHANIC WORKING WITH US WHO DID BRAKE, WATER PUMP AND FRONT END WORK THAT MY FLATHEAD NEEDED. THAT SUMMER I FOUND OUT THAT THE FLAT HEAD FORD HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN PRIOR ILLEGAL ACTIVITY. I ONLY KNEW THAT I WAS PROUD TO HAVE MY SALVAGED FLAT HEAD V-8.

LATE ONE FRIDAY EVENING I SAW A GENTLEMAN CIRCLING MY CAR ACROSS THE STREET. HE SAW ME SITTING ON SOME TIRES AND FIGURED I WAS WATCHING HIM. THE GENTLEMAN WALKED UP TO ME, "LOOK AT THE LEFT DOOR SON AND TELL ME WHAT DO YOU THINK". I SAID, "WELL MISTER, I POLISHED SOME OF THE DINGS ON IT AND THAT HELPED SOME"-- "WELL SON, THAT FLAT HEAD USED TO BE MY CAR AND I SHORE GOT MY MONEYS WORTH OUT OF IT"-- LATER THAT DAY, I TOLD DAD ABOUT THE MAN. HE TOLD ME THAT THE OLD FORD WAS OWNED BY THE SAME FELLOW, ONE OF THE BIGGEST MOONSHINERS IN SEVERAL COUNTIES. THE DINGS WERE ACTUALLY BUCKSHOT, "LAWMAN BUCKSHOT AT THAT"!! I COULDN'T WAIT TO TELL MY FRIENDS ABOUT THE MOONSHINE STORY. THE CAR SERVED ME WELL WITH DATES ON SATURDAY NIGHTS. WHAT ELSE COULD I ASK FOR, A GOOD CAR, A PRETTY GIRL SITTING NEXT TO ME IN MY BLACK 49 FORD COUPE? WELL, BLACK AND WHITE CARS WERE STILL THE DOMINANT COLOR EVEN THOUGH A NEW CAR COULD BE SPECIAL ORDERED IN ONLY A FEW COLORS. AIR CONDITIONED CARS WERE A RARITY & SEEN ONLY IN HIGH END VEHICLES. IF YOU WANTED AIR CONDITIONING IN YOUR CAR IN 1957, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE INSTALLED BY KIT OVER THE HUMP IN THE FRONT DASH.

THERE WERE SOME NIGHTS DURING THE WEEK I WOULD ROUND UP SOME OF MY FRIENDS, LIKE FRANKIE OR JIMMY O' AND CHASE RABBITS THROUGH "CREEPY

HOLLER” IN MY FLAT HEAD. WE THREE AMIGOS WOULD “MOSEY UP US 43, TURN RIGHT ON STAMPS ROAD” , WHICH WAS THEN DIAGONAL TO THE OLD JACK BUTLER PLACE. NOW CREEPY HOLLER WAS THAT TO ME, MYSTICAL, LOCATED IN THE SIPSEY SWAMP , NORTHEAST OF FAYETTE WITH 1930S TYPE IRON BRIDGES AND TINY TREE LIMBS THAT SWATTED YOUR WINDSHIELD. IT DID NOT TAKE LONG TO GET TO THE LARGE RUSTED IRON BRIDGE SPANNING THE SIPSEY RIVER. ON SOME NIGHTS, JIMMY O', FRANKIE AND I WOULD TURN OFF THE IGNITION IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BRIDGE, THEN TURN THE HEAD LIGHTS OFF. SOFT WHISPERING AMONG OURSELVES WOULD SOON BE SILENCED WITH EERIE “SCREAMING, HOULING, WAILING WILDCATS CLOSE BY, SENDING COLD SHIVERS UP YOUR SPINE. THAT WAS PART OF THE MYSTIQUE OF “CREEPY HOLLER”. IT WAS ALSO KNOWN AS A ROMANTIC SPOT FOR THOSE WHO FELT THAT A SWAMP WAS IMPORTANT TO THEM. I WAS NEVER THE SWAMP TYPE ON MY DATES, KNOWING THAT MOST YOUNG LADIES WOULD FEEL VERY MUCH OUT OF SORTS WITH WILD AND STRANGE ANIMALS LURKING CLOSE TO THE CAR WINDOWS.

I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT TIRE SERVICES AT GAS STATIONS. IN THE 1940 s/1950s. ALL NEW TIRES WERE WRAPPED IN TAN PAPER. THE PAPER WAS IN 3 INCH STRIPS AND IT TOOK THREE OR FOUR MINUTES TO UNWRAP A SINGLE TIRE. PAPER WRAPPING EACH TIRE REDUCED DAMAGE OR BLEMISH AFTER BEING TRANSPORTED FROM THE FACTORY. IT USUALLY ARRIVED AT THE SERVICE STATION IN PERFECT CONDITION. I NEVER SAW A TUBELESS TIRE UNTIL ABOUT 1960. PRIOR TO THAT TIME ALL TIRES WERE INFLATED WITH TUBES TO A CERTAIN PSI OR POUND PER SQUARE INCH. WHEN A CUSTOMER CAME IN WITH A FLAT TIRE TO FIX, THE TUBE HAD TO BE VULCANIZED WITH A PATCH. THAT MEANT THE HOLE IN THE TUBE WAS SANDED SLIGHTLY, A VULCAN PATCH WAS LIT BY A MATCH AND IT CURED THE HOLE IN THE TUBE WITHIN A MINUTE OR SO.

WHEN I FIRST STARTED HELPING FIX FLATS WE HAD TO BREAK THE TIRE DOWN AND REMOVE THE TUBE SO WE COULD PATCH IT. THEN LATER WHEN TUBELESS TIRES CAME ALONG WE USED RUBBER PLUGS WITH SPECIAL BONDING GLUE TO PENETRATE THE TREAD AND THEN PULLED IT BACK SO THE PLUG WOULD SHOW ON THE OUTSIDE TREAD. WE WOULD THEN TAKE A KNIFE, CUT OFF THE EXCESS PLUG RUBBER, AIR THE TIRE UP, LISTENING FOR THE TOP RIM TO POP.. THEN WE TESTED IT FOR AIR LEAK IN THE WATER TROUGH. IF WE DID NOT SEE BUBBLES IN THE TROUGH WE KNEW THAT THE PLUG HELD AND THE TIRE COULD THEN BE RE-MOUNTED ON THE CAR. WE WOULD FIX FLATS ON PASSENGER TIRES FOR LABOR AND MATERIAL AT \$1.50 TO \$2.00, TUBE TYPE OR TUBELESS FOR MANY YEARS. THE MOST DANGEROUS TIRE JOBS WERE FLATS ON 18 WHEEL TRUCKS. ONCE, I SAW VAUDINE ALMOST GET KILLED WHEN A RIM CAME OFF AFTER INFLATING. IT BARELY MISSED HIS HEAD, THE RIM GOING 50 FEET IN THE AIR AND LANDING ON THE ROOF OF OUR GAS STATION. NOW IF THAT DON'T GET YOU A DAY OFF WORK, NOTHING WILL.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT CARS OF THAT ERA HAD WIDE WHITE SIDE WALL TIRES. THE ONLY WAY THAT THOSE TIRES COULD BE CLEANED WAS WITH A WIRE BRISTLE BRUSH USING COMET-- AJAX CLEANER PRODUCTS, A REGULAR SOFT

BRISTLE BRUSH, LOTS OF MUSCLE POWER AND A HIGH POWERED WATER HOSE. NOW THE WORST JOB PERTAINING TO WASHING CARS WAS WHEN A CAR CARRIED FENDER SKIRTS. THE CADILLACS, PONTIACS AND CHRYSLER CARS SEEMED TO BE THE WORST TO REMOVE AND REPLACE. MOST OF THE TIME IT WOULD TAKE A YEAR OR SO TO LEARN HOW TO ADJUST THE RODS UNDER THE FENDER SKIRT. THE RODS HOLDING THE SKIRT TO THE CAR REQUIRED A "TOUCHY-FEELY" TECHNIQUE. NOT DOING THAT CORRECTLY COULD MEAN THE FENDER SKIRT FALLING OFF ANY TIME. IF THAT HAPPENED, THE GAS STATION HAD TO REPLACE A EXPENSIVE PART ON THE CUSTOMERS VEHICLE.

WORKING IN THE WASH RACK WAS A DREADFUL WINTER JOB, GETTING SOAKED IN FREEZING WEATHER. WE USED A LOT OF COMET CLEANSER TO CLEAN NOT ONLY THE TIRES BUT THE FRONT GRILL. REMEMBER, FRONT CAR GRILLS HAD LARGE CHROME BUMPERS, CHROME HEADLIGHT COVERS, CHROME INSERTS AND VERY LITTLE PLASTIC LIKE TODAYS VEHICLES. THE HIGHEST PRICE FOR A COMPLETE HAND WASH JOB I REMEMBER WAS \$2.00 IN 1964. DAD WOULD SEND ME OVER TO ROSE MARKET NEARBY TO BUY COMET OR AJAX CLEANER. MR. ROSE PRIDED HIMSELF IN HIS MEAT PRODUCTS BUT CARRIED A SMALL LINE OF GROCERY AND PRODUCE THAT COULD BE DELIVERED TO A HOME IN THE CITY. IT WAS SAID THAT MR. ROSE, A LARGE WHITE BEARDED MAN WAS A HONORED VETERAN OF WORLD WAR I. HIS BUSINESS WAS LOCATED DIRECTLY ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE ROXY THEATRE AND GULLETS DEPARTMENT STORE. MR. ROSE OWNED ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VICTORIAN HOMES IN FAYETTE, WHICH TODAY IS KNOWN AS ROSE INN BED AND BREAKFAST.

DELIVERY SERVICE WAS COMMON PRACTICE IN THE DRY CLEANING BUSINESS IN THE 1950 s. WE USED BERRY DRY CLEANERS, LOCATED IN THE BLOCK SLIGHTLY NORTH OF McNEASE CLINIC. AT THAT TIME FEWER PEOPLE OWNED CARS SO DELIVERY SERVICES WERE COMMON. I REMEMBER TWO TAXI COMPANIES THAT LOCATED NEAR THE POST OFFICE OR THE CITIZENS BANK ON TEMPLE AVENUE. THEY TOOK THEIR PHONE CALLS ON A TELEPHONE BOX MOUNTED ON A WOODEN UTILITY POLE. IF YOU WERE WALKING BY THE POLE THE SUDDEN LOUD RINGING NOISE WOULD LITERALLY "SCARE YOU TO DEATH". ONE OF OUR NEIGHBORS, MR. ROLEND ON PINION STREET HAD A TAXI SERVICE. IT SEEMED THAT HE ALWAYS DROVE MINT GREEN PLYMOUTH CARS IN HIS TAXI BUSINESS. TAXIS WERE ESSENTIAL SERVICES FOR MANY PEOPLE WHO HAD NO OTHER WAY TO GET TO AND FROM TOWN. BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS IN A SMALL TOWN WERE MORE PERSONAL AND THE EMPHASIS WAS ON SATISFIED CUSTOMERS, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS TO GO AROUND WAS LIMITED. THE ORDER OF THE DAY WAS IF YOU DONT MAKE YOUR CUSTOMER HAPPY, SOMEONE ELSE WILL.

NOW I CANNOT GO ANY FURTHER BEFORE I MEANDER INTO A REAL HOT TOPIC ISSUE IN MODERN DAY AMERICA, REALIZING WE ARE NOW IN A NEW CENTURY AND FAR REMOVED FROM THE DAYS OF REDNECK GAS STATION ATTENDANTS. I PROBABLY SHOULD LET THIS "DIE RIGHT HERE AND NOW" BECAUSE WHAT I AM GOING TO REVEAL IS SUFFICIENTLY DISGUSTING ENOUGH THAT A CHEROKEE INDIAN SETTLEMENT COULD FILL A "100 GALLON BUCKET OF TEARS".

THIS ISSUE IS NOW CALLED “ENVIRONMENTAL”. SO, HERE GOES FOLKS!! FROM MY OBSERVATIONS BETWEEN 1955 AND 1961 WHEN I LEFT FOR NASHVILLE, THE CITY OF FAYETTE AND/OR THE COUNTY COMMISSION OWNED A GARBAGE/LANDFILL SITE DIRECTLY NORTH OF THE FORMER SHELBY DIE CAST PLANT AND MAYBE 60 YARDS NORTHEAST OF THE COLISEUM ON STATE HIGHWAY 96.

IT WAS COMMON AT THAT TIME FOR BUSINESS OF ALL TYPES, INCLUDING GAS AND OIL COMPANY ESTABLISHMENTS TO “UNLOAD WHAT NOW WOULD BE CALLED HAZARDOUS WASTES” AT THAT PARTICULAR LOCATION. I KNOW FOR A FACT THAT I WAS A WITNESS TO CONTAINERS OF USED MOTOR OIL/LUBRICANTS COLLECTED, THEN DUMPED AT THAT SITE.

GOING A LITTLE DEEPER INTO THESE EVENTS I WITNESSED 25 GALLON CANS OF USED TAR BLACK OIL DUMPED, OCCASIONALLY THE LID BREAKING LOOSE WITH THE ENTIRE CONTENTS SPILLING ON THE GOOD EARTH BELOW. PLUNGING A LITTLE DEEPER SOME OF THESE LUBRICANTS WOULD ACCIDENTALLY FIND ITSELF DROPPED INTO A STORM SEWER TRAVELING ALONG A PIPELINE TO “ONLY GOD KNOWS WHERE”. GAS STATIONS WERE NOT THE ONLY VIOLATORS. RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS WOULD BRING ALL KINDS OF THINGS TO DUMP SUCH AS TUBE TYPE TELEVISION SETS, RADIOS AND MEDICAL WASTES. THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING EXCLUDED FROM BEING DUMPED FROM WHAT I COULD REMEMBER WITH ABSOLUTELY NO ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY ON SITE.

FOR YEARS, I HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF HAZARDOUS WASTES THAT FOUND ITSELF IN WATER TABLES IN OUR COUNTY. SO NOW FRIEND, SINCE I HAVE SATISFACTORILY DETRACTED YOU FROM YOUR DINNER MEAL THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT TODAY SUCH ACTIVITY WILL RESULT IN A HUGE FINE AND MAYBE IMPRISONMENT. \* MY DISCLAIMER TO THE LANDFILL DISCUSSION ABOVE INDICATES THAT I WAS A WITNESS AND A MINOR TO THE EVENTS OF THAT TIME. I WILL LEAVE IT TO YOUR IMAGINATION WHAT IS BURIED BENEATH THAT SITE OVER 60 YEARS AGO.

ONE OF OUR CUSTOMERS WAS A PREACHER, BROTHER POLLEY. DAD AND MOM REALLY LIKED HIM A LOT AS WELL AS I. HE ALWAYS DROVE PONTIAC BONNEVILLES, THE WIDE TRACK TYPE CAR WITH THE BIG ENGINE. HE HELD A LOT OF GOSPEL MEETINGS IN RURAL CHURCHES WHICH MEANT HIS CARS CAUGHT MUD UNDER THE WHEEL WELLS. BY THE WAY, THE LARGE BONNEVILLE PONTIAC HAD FENDER SKIRTS THAT WERE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO WORK WITH. IN ADDITION, THE VEHICLE WAS SO WIDE AND LONG IT TOOK WHAT SEEMED FOREVER TO FINISH HIS CAR.

BROTHER POLLEY WAS A FINE MAN. HE HAD A PECULIAR TRAIT THAT I THOUGHT WAS AMUSING. HE WAS WHAT I WOULD CALL A “LAUGHER”. I MEAN JUST ABOUT ANYTHING SAID SEEMED FUNNY TO HIM, EVEN IF IT REALLY WAS NOT AS FUNNY TO THE REST OF US LISTENING. BROTHER POLLEY WAS OUR MINISTER FOR SEVERAL YEARS. HE OFTEN TOLD JOKES, THEN AFTER HIS MONOLOGUE WOULD ALMOST BEND OVER BACKWARDS, AS IF HE HAD TAKEN A HUGE DOSE OF LAUGHING GAS. HE WAS ALWAYS A “BAND BOX DRESSER”, FEATURING ARROW CUFFLINK WHITE SHIRTS, NARROW SOLID COLOR TIES, GRAY PIN STRIPE SUIT, NUN-BUSH WING TOE DRESS SHOES AND IT ALL MATCHED WELL. HE WAS A VERY WELL GROOMED MAN WITH

GREAT BODY MASS INDEX TO GO ALONG WITH IT.

I HEARD HIM PREACH MANY SERMONS BUT THE SALIENT “LAUGHTER-MERRIMENT” WAS NEVER THERE WHEN HE PREACHED THE GOSPEL. WHEN IT CAME TO PREACHING THE GOSPEL HE WAS SERIOUS AS A HEART ATTACK. HE ATTENDED TO OUR FAMILY MANY TIMES IN SICKNESS AND PRESIDED AT THE FUNERAL OF MY PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS AND LATER MY FATHER. HIS DAUGHTER, ELIZABETH AND I BECAME GREAT FRIENDS, BEING IN THE SAME CLASS IN HIGH SCHOOL. WE WOULD RIDE TOGETHER TO DAVID LIPSCOMB COLLEGE IN NASHVILLE AFTER WE FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL IN 1961. BROTHER POLLEY WAS ONE OF MY MENTORS I TRULY ADMIRER, EVEN THOUGH HIS BONNEVILLE PONTIAC FENDER SKIRTS WERE NOT THE WAY I LIKE TO REMEMBER HIM. BROTHER POLLEY THOUGHT I MIGHT TURN OUT TO BE A PREACHER LIKE HIM BUT I DONT THINK I DISAPPOINTED HIM.

I GUESS EVERYONE HAS A PHOBIA WHETHER IT IS AT WORK OR HOME. AT THE GAS STATION WE HAD A VEHICLE LIFT THAT WORKED ON AIR PRESSURE. WHEN WE LIFTED THE VEHICLE FOR SERVICING WE OPENED THE MAIN VALVE TO SEND PRESSURE TO A HYDRAULIC JACK UNDER THE LIFT. WHEN THE PRESSURE BUILT UP TO A CERTAIN LEVEL WE WOULD THEN PULL ANOTHER LEVER AND THE CAR WOULD START ITS UPWARD MOVEMENT. I WOULD THEN REVERSE THE SECOND LEVER THAT STOPPED THE CAR AT THE PROPER HEIGHT SO WE COULD CHANGE OILS/FILTERS, START BRAKE REPAIR, SWITCHING TIRES, ETC. THEN PRESTO!! MY WORST FEAR SET IN WITH THAT BANGING SOUND THE BIG HYDRAULIC JACK MADE WHEN IT STOPPED.

EVEN THOUGH I WORKED REGULARLY UNDER VEHICLES WEIGHING 4000 POUNDS, I ALWAYS HAD THE FEAR OF BEING CRUSHED IF THE AIR PRESSURE FAILED HOLDING THE CAR ABOVE MY HEAD. SOMETIMES, THE LIFT WOULD SHAKE OR TURN WHEN CERTAIN TIRE, BRAKE OR AXLE OIL CHECKS WERE DONE. I ALWAYS SET A 1 INCH PIN LOCATED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HYDRAULIC CYLINDER AS A SAFETY PRECAUTION. I NEVER FELT TOTALLY COMFORTABLE IN THE HYDRAULIC LIFT RACK AREA ALL THE YEARS I DID MY”GREASE MONKEY JOBS”. THE OTHER WORKERS NEVER SEEMED TO HAVE THAT PHOBIA AND NEVER PUT THE SAFETY PIN TO USE.

MR. MOON MULLENS WAS ANOTHER GUY I SAW ALMOST EVERY DAY AT THE GAS STATION. MOON WAS A SHORT, STOCKY FELLOW WITH A CREW CUT WHO PRIDED HIMSELF ON REPAIRING “ ONLY FRIGIDAIRE APPLIANCES”. IF YOU HAD A PHILCO, GE, KENMORE OR WIZARD REFRIGERATOR OR STOVE, “DONT CALL MOON MULLENS TO FIX IT”. HE WORKED FOR MANY YEARS FOR PLACES LIKE FOWLER HARDWARE ON TEMPLE AVENUE, LATER WORKING FOR HIMSELF REPAIRING ONLY FRIGIDAIRE APPLIANCES. HE REMINDED ME IN PERSONALITY OF A MARINE DRILL SARGENT LIKE YOU WOULD SEE ON THE TV SHOW, GOMER PYLE/USMC. MOON WOULD COME IN ALMOST DAILY, TAKE A SEAT IN DADS “EASY CHAIR” BY HIS DESK AND READ GRIT MAGAZINE ARTICLES FOR A HOUR OR SO.. YOU COULD COUNT ON MOON BEING IN THAT CHAIR IN LATE AFTERNOON, RAIN OR SHINE. WE TOOK GOOD CARE OF HIS SERVICE TRUCK. MOON ALWAYS PAID HIS BILL LIKE “CLOCKWORK” EACH MONTH, NEVER QUESTIONING ANY CHARGES ON HIS STATEMENT. MOON LIVED IN ONE OF THE OLDER HOMES BETWEEN THE OLD FAYETTE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND THE TEMPLE

AVENUE CHURCH OF CHRIST. MOON WAS A NEIGHBOR TO A BOY, A DISTANT COUSIN, WHO WOULD GROW UP TO LATER BECOME THE PRESENT MAYOR OF FAYETTE.

ON LATE SUMMER SATURDAY AFTERNOONS IN 1962, 1966 & 1970 WERE YEARS TO ELECT ALABAMA'S CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS. STATEWIDE RACES IN THOSE YEARS WERE DIFFERENT FROM TODAY WITH PRACTICALLY NO TELEVISION OR "CANNED POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS" LIKE WE HAVE TODAY. THE CITY OF FAYETTE WAS ELECTRIFIED WITH TALK OF GEORGE WALLACE COMING TO TOWN AND THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER- **THE NORTHWEST ALABAMIAN RAN A FULL PAGE ABOUT HIS ARRIVAL.** WORD WOULD GET AROUND VIA THE LOCAL RADIO STATION, WWWF, THAT A FLAT BED TRUCK WOULD BE SET UP IN FRONT OF THE BEAUTIFUL FAYETTE COUNTY COURTHOUSE FOR THE "POLITICAL SHOW" THAT FOLKS ALWAYS LOOKED FORWARD TO.

IN EARLIER YEARS, GOVERNOR "BIG JIM" FOLSOM BROUGHT HIS "STRAWBERRY PICKERS" BAND TO ENTERTAIN. THE "PICKERS" WOULD GET THE CROWD INTO A THRILLING MOOD BEFORE BIG JIM TOOK THE STAGE TO TELL ABOUT THE LARGE BANKERS AND RICH FOLKS IN BIRMINGHAM WHO WERE DESCRIBED AS "NOT MUCH BETTER THAN CROOKS", FINANCING HIS OPPONENT'S CAMPAIGN. BIG JIM FOLSOM WAS GOOD AT STUMP SPEAKING, WITH HIS METAPHORICAL "SWEEPING OUT THE CORRUPTION GOING ON IN MONTGOMERY WITH A COMMON HOUSEHOLD BROOM". HOWEVER, BIG JIM COULD NOT "HOLD A LIGHT" TO CLIO'S GEORGE CORLEY WALLACE, A MASTERFUL AND MESMERIZING SPEAKER, UNDOUBTABLY THE MOST PROLIFIC AND SUCCESSFUL POLITICIAN OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN THE GREAT STATE OF ALABAMA.

AFTER GEORGE'S COUNTRY BAND GOT THE FAYETTE COUNTY FOLKS IN A GREAT MOOD STANDING UNDER THE GOLDEN DOME COURTHOUSE, THE GREAT ORATOR WOULD HOP UP ON THE STAGE TO A THUNDERING ROAR OF THE CROWD ON EACH SIDE OF THE FLAT BED. ON THE FLAT BED GEORGE'S STAFF SET UP A OLD IRON BED WITH WHAT LOOKED LIKE A 1935 BOX SPRING AND MATTRESS TOPPED OFF WITH A SHEET AND QUILT. AFTER TELLING THE CROWD WHAT HE WANTED TO DO FOR THE STATE WHEN ELECTED, HE WOULD THEN START THE PROCESS THAT WOULD GET THE MOST LAUGHTER-MERRIMENT FROM THE STAR GAZED CROWD. HE WOULD MEANDER OVER TO A OLD IRON BED AND ONE BY ONE PULL BACK THE QUILT REVEALING WHICH POLITICAL OPPONENTS, LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE WERE IN BED WITH EACH OTHER. AS I REMEMBER THERE WERE USUALLY AT LEAST THREE NAME LABELED DUMMIES UNDER THE SHEETS. ONE SPECIAL DUMMY UNDER THE SHEET WAS A HIGH LEVEL STATE CONSTITUTIONAL DIGNITARY, WHO ACCORDING TO WALLACE WAS EXTREMELY LIBERAL ON ISSUES THAT WALLACE VEHEMENTLY OPPOSED IN STATEWIDE NEWSPAPERS, RADIO AND TELEVISION MEDIA OF THE DAY.

AFTER HIS FIERY SPEECH, WITH THE CROWD RECEDING, THE GOVERNOR OR GOVERNOR-ELECT WOULD MAKE HIS WAY EAST DOWN COLUMBUS STREET FROM THE COURTHOUSE, WALKING WITH ONE STATE TROOPER DIRECTLY IN THE PATH OF OUR GAS STATION. THE GOVERNOR WALKED IN THE STATION, LEAVING THE TROOPER OUTSIDE, SHAKING HANDS WITH EVERY WHITE AND BLACK EMPLOYEE, NOT LEAVING UNTIL HE SHOOK HANDS TO THE LAST MAN. THE GOVERNOR WOULD LOOK EACH ONE IN THE EYE, ASKING FOR THEIR NAMES. I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER THE LOOK ON

VAUDINE'S FACE WHEN HE MET AND SHOOK HANDS WITH GEORGE CORLEY WALLACE.

HE WOULD THEN PROCEED TO THE BATHROOM INSIDE THE GAS STATION, WHICH I PERSONALLY CLEANED , EXPECTING THAT HE MIGHT VISIT US. HE WOULD ALWAYS EAT SUPPER AT SUE BEES CAFE NEXT DOOR. MY DAD AND I ENCOURAGED EACH BLACK WORKER ON DUTY TO MEET THE GOVERNOR AND I DONT REMEMBER A SINGLE ONE WHO EVER REFUSED TO MEET HIM. ON ANOTHER OCCASION IN OCTOBER 1969, HIS WIFE, LURLEEN, THE REAL PAPER CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR WALKED IN TO MEET ALL OF US. WHAT WAS SO INTERESTING OR AMAZING FROM MY PERSPECTIVE WAS THAT GOVERNOR WALLACE ALWAYS REMEMBERED OUR FIRST NAMES WITH NO PROMPTING. HE COMMONLY WORE A DARK NAVY SUIT, LONG SLEEVE DRESS WHITE SHIRT WITH WELL GROOMED BLACK HAIR PULLED STRAIGHT BACK, ALWAYS FRESH SHAVEN. AFTER HE LEFT SUE BEE'S CAFE, I REMEMBER HIM WAVING HIS GOODBYES TO US AS HE HEADED BACK WITH THE TROOPER TO HIS OFFICIAL CAR.

OTHER THAN THE OCCASIONS ABOVE, THE ONLY OTHER TIME I SAW HIM WAS AT THE "SCHOOL HOUSE DOOR" EVENT, STANDING AT A CLASSROOM WINDOW ACROSS THE ROAD FROM FOSTER AUDITORIUM. FOSTER AUDITORIUM AT THE TIME WAS NOT ONLY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA'S BASKETBALL ARENA BUT WAS ALWAYS THE LOCATION OF ALL STUDENTS REGISTERING FOR CLASSES. I GUESS I AM ONE OF THE FEW WHO ARE STILL ALIVE THAT ACTUALLY SAW THE HISTORIC EVENT UNFOLD, EVEN AT A SHORT DISTANCE.

THERE IS ONE GENTLEMAN IN PARTICULAR I MUST MENTION THAT PASSED OUR GAS STATION FREQUENTLY TO EAT AT MISS SUE BELL'S CAFE OR LATER LOFTIS CAFE. LOFTIS CAFE SPECIALIZED MORE IN FAMILY TYPE MEALS AND WONDERFUL COCONUT AND LEMON PIES LOFTIS CAFE MOVED FROM THEIR LOCATION ON TEMPLE AVENUE ACROSS FROM THE COURTHOUSE AFTER "CAP" LOFTIS AND HIS WIFE PASSED AWAY. YOU COULD GET A GOOD MEAL WITH TEA/COFFEE FOR LESS THAN A DOLLAR AT LOFTIS CAFE. A BETTER BREAKFAST WAS NOT TO BE FOUND ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE AREA WITH HAM AND "RED EYE" GRAVY THAT I CAN STILL SMELL TODAY.

NOW THE MAN I REFERRED TO ABOVE WAS ONE OF THE TOWNS LAWYERS. HE WAS MR. CHARLES NEELON, ONE OF TWO BROTHERS WHO PRACTICED LAW IN FAYETTE BUT IN SEPARATE OFFICES. HE WAS OF INTEREST TO ME EARLY ON BECAUSE OF HIS WESTERN STYLE BOOTS, TAILORED WESTERN WEAR SUITS OR SPORT COATS. "YESSIREE BOB", HE WAS ONE DAPPER LOOKING LAWYER. SOMETIMES HE WOULD WALK BY THE GAS STATION, TIP HIS TAN STETSON AT ME, WALK IN THE CAFE OR HE MIGHT "HEAD DOWN" TO THE FORD DEALERSHIP. AS A KID, I NEVER KNEW WHY THE DEALERSHIP WAS OF INTEREST SINCE I NEVER SAW HIM IN A FORD VEHICLE. HE WAS NOT A REGULAR CUSTOMER BUT I DID FILL HIS TANK UP WITH "HIGH TEST" WHEN HE DROVE IN WITH A LATE MODEL OLDSMOBILE. I ALWAYS TRIED TO CLEAN HIS WINDSHIELD "SPIC AND SPAN" BUT NEVER COULD GET HIM TO AGREE TO LET US SERVICE HIS CAR. LATER, I FOUND OUT THAT HE HAD FINANCIAL INTERESTS IN A MOTOR COMPANY AND THEY DID THAT FOR HIM. DAD NEVER TOLD ME ABOUT THAT.

I DID NOT GET TO KNOW THIS MAN WELL UNTIL LATER IN LIFE WHEN OUR PATHS CROSSED PROFESSIONALLY. WE BECAME VERY GOOD FRIENDS IN THE 1970s. I WOULD

VISIT HIS LAW OFFICE OFTEN SOMETIMES JUST FOR SMALL TALK & TO MUTUALLY RELAX FROM FRUSTRATIONS OF THE DAY. I WAS VERY SADDENED WHEN I HEARD OF HIS SUDDEN AND UNTIMELY DEATH. HE WAS A YOUNG MAN IN HIS MID 50'S WITH A LARGE AND FINE FAMILY LEFT BEHIND. MY LAWYER FRIEND HAD ALSO BUILT VERY CLOSE CONNECTIONS TO GEORGE CORLEY WALLACE AND OTHER POWERFUL STATE POLITICIANS. IN OTHER WORDS, HE HAD THE "EAR OF THE GOVERNOR". IF HE HAD LIVED I WOULD HAVE BET MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE IN STATE SERVICE WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED. WHEN I VISIT FAYETTE TODAY, I STILL THINK ABOUT HIM AND THE FOLKS THAT WE JOINTLY HELPED ALONG THE WAY TO GET THE BENEFITS THEY DESERVED.

MY FATHER HAD A GIFT FOR BALANCING TIRES. AFTER MANY YEARS OF USING A BUBBLE TYPE MACHINE HE BOUGHT A HUNTER WHEEL BALANCING MACHINE. IT WAS THE MOST MODERN WAY TO BALANCE TIRES IN THE 50 s and 60 s. AFTER HE BECAME VERY PROFICIENT WITH THE NEW MACHINE, CUSTOMERS CAME FROM ADJOINING COUNTIES FOR TIRE BALANCING. THE WAY IT WORKED REQUIRED THE CAR TO BE JACKED FOR THE TIRE NEEDING BALANCING. DAD WOULD THEN PULL THE HUNTER MACHINE UP TO THE TIRE, SPIN IT, SOMETIMES TO SPEEDS OF 80 MPH, WHILE ADJUSTING THE MACHINES KNOBS. WHEN THE TIRE STOPPED SPINNING THE MACHINE PLOTTED WHERE TO PUT THE WHEEL WEIGHT AND THE EXACT OUNCE SIZE. TODAY'S WHEEL BALANCE MACHINES DO THIS BY COMPUTER SPIN BUT IT IS THE SAME PRINCIPLE DAD USED MANY YEARS AGO. WE ALSO CLEANED SPARK PLUGS ON A SAND BLASTING MACHINE. PUT THE PLUG IN A RUBBER HOLE, HIT THE BUTTON AND IN 10 SECONDS OR SO, THE PLUG LOOKED ALMOST AS GOOD AS NEW, READY TO INSTALL.

ONE OF THE MOST COLORFUL CUSTOMERS WE HAD WAS A BUSINESSMAN IN TOWN THAT OWNED LATE MODEL FLEETWOOD CADILLACS. FOR SOME REASON HE HAD A FONDNESS FOR BEING DRIVEN TO BIRMINGHAM OR SOME OTHER BIG CITY BY HIS PERSONAL CHAUFFER. I WILL CALL HIM PAULEY. HE SEEMED TO HAVE A DEMEANOR OF WHAT I WOULD CALL THE "A PERSONALITY". PAULEY HAD DONE WELL IN THE GROCERY AND MEAT BUSINESS THAT WAS STARTED BY HIS PARENTS YEARS BEFORE. HE WAS ALWAYS A FUN GUY TO TALK WITH AND HE ALWAYS HAD PLENTY OF NEW JOKES TO TRY OUT ON HIS FRIENDS AND CUSTOMERS. HIS PLACE WAS LOCATED ON TEMPLE AVENUE CLOSE TO A COMBINATION SHELL STATION AND BARBER SHOP, A FEW PACES NORTH OF THE OLD DOWNTOWN POST OFFICE. EVERYBODY SEEMED TO LIKE PAULEY AND THEY GOT GOOD VALUE FOR THEIR MONEY IN MEAT AND PRODUCE.

ONE SUNNY SPRING DAY HE CAME IN WITH HIS FLEETWOOD AND SAID HE WAS GOING TO BIRMINGHAM THAT EVENING AND WANTED HIS CADDY WASHED, POLISHED,



WAXED, AND OIL/FILTER CHANGED. HE SAID, “ BOBBY, GET BEHIND THIS WHEEL AND TAKE ME BACK TO MY MARKET-- FILL IT UP WITH HIGH TEST ALL THE WAY TO THE BRIM”. WELL, THE CHANCE TO GET BEHIND A NEW FLEETWOOD CADILLAC WAS INTICING. I GOT A FRESH FENDER COVER, PUT IT ON THE SEAT AND WE TOOK OFF TO PAULEYS PLACE. NOW WHAT HAPPENED NEXT IS ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE THINGS I REMEMBER AS A GAS STATION WORKER.

PAULEYS CADDY WAS NOT DIFFICULT TO WASH BECAUSE HE NEVER DROVE IT ON GRAVEL ROADS PLUS IT WAS ALMOST BRAND NEW. HIS PART TIME CHAUFFER, ROBBIE, WHO WAS AFRICAN AMERICAN HAD A REGULAR DAY JOB AT THE CHEVROLET PLACE EMPLOYED AS A BODY SHOP HELPER. ROBBIE WAS WHAT I WOULD DESCRIBE AS A LARGE MUSCULAR MAN ABOUT 6 ' 3” AND 210 POUNDS. IF I NEEDED A BODY GUARD ROBBIE WOULD BE MY MAN ON THE PAYROLL. WHEN IT WAS TIME TO DRIVE PAULEY TO ATLANTA, NASHVILLE OR BIG TOWNS LIKE THAT PAULEY CLOTHED ROBBIE UP IN THE FINEST CHAUFFER SUIT THAT MONEY COULD BUY. ROBBIE WORE A SPECIAL MADE CHAUFFER HAT THAT WOULD BE SOMETHING A REAR ADMIRAL OR A FOUR STAR GENERAL WOULD WEAR, GOLD BRAIDING INCLUDED. BLACK WOOL PANTS, CHARCOAL SILK TIE, WHITE FITTED SHIRT, SPECIAL CHARCOAL COAT WITH BRAIDED CORD SLEEVES WITH MILITARY DRESS BLACK SHOES COMPLETED HIS UNIFORM. I HOPE YOU GET THE PICTURE OF JUST HOW GOOD ROBBIE LOOKED UNDER THE WHEEL OF THAT CADILLAC. ROBBIE WAS JUST A REAL “KNOCK OUT” IN HIS SPECIAL CHAUFFER OUTFIT.

WE WASHED THE CADDY EXTRA SPECIAL FOR PAULEY, INSIDE AND OUT , THEN WAXED IT TO A BRILLIANT SHINE. VAUDINE PUT IT ON THE GREASE RACK AND CHANGED THE OIL BEFORE WE TOPPED THE GAS TANK OFF WITH OUR HIGH TEST GASOLINE. WHILE THE CAR WAS BEING FILLED UP DAD INSPECTED IT VERY CLOSELY. WE WANTED TO BE SURE PAULEY WAS THOROUGHLY SATISFIED SINCE HE WAS ONE OF THE BEST PRIVATE CUSTOMERS WE HAD. DAD SAID, “ SON, TAKE THIS CADILLAC UP TO THE MARKET, PARK IT IN HIS PARKING SPOT AND RETURN HIS KEYS”. I DID JUST THAT, FOUND PAULEY IN THE BACKROOM OFFICE, HANDED THE KEYS TO HIM AND WALKED BACK TO OUR GAS STATION SATISFIED HE WOULD BE HAPPY.

ABOUT 45 MINUTES LATER, PAULEY CALLED FOR ME AT OUR STATION. “BOBBY, COME UP HERE, GET MY CADILLAC AND WASH IT AGAIN-- THIS CAR HAS GOT A LITTLE DUST ON THE TRUNK AND I AIN'T LEAVING TOWN WITH DUST ON MY CADILLAC--- HOW ABOUT GETTING IT BACK DOWN THERE AND WASH IT AGAIN.” – WE DID WASH THAT CADILLAC AGAIN, TWICE WASHED AND WAXED WITHIN TWO HOURS. AFTER REWORKING ALL THE GLASS WINDOWS AND LEATHER WITH NEW TOWELS, I DROVE IT BACK TO PAULEY AT HIS MARKET PARKING SPACE AND GAVE HIM THE KEYS AGAIN. IN ABOUT ANOTHER HOUR WE LOOK UP AND SEE PAULEY'S CADILLAC AT OUR RED LIGHT. ROBBIE HONKS HIS HORN FOR US. THEN, PAULEY IN THE BACK SEAT GIVES US A SNAPPY SALUTE AS THEY PULL OUT OF TOWN. PAULEY NEVER “BATTED AN EYE” ABOUT PAYING FOR THE EXTRA WASH OR TIME. THAT WAS JUST PAULEY.

“NUBBY” AND “SWEET EYE” SAW HIM COMING IN THE STATION BEFORE I DID AND THAT WAS ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF THEM. I AM TALKING ABOUT THE SNAKE PREACHER WHO LIVED IN TUSCALOOSA COUNTY SOMEWHERE DOWN AROUND YELLOW CREEK. SNAKE PREACHER HAD A LAST NAME, LEMON, AS I REMEMBER. HE HAD A FOLLOWING IN ONE OF THE NON DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES DOWN THAT WAY AND HAD A REPUTATION FOR HOLDING HEALING SERVICES AND THEN CONCLUDE THE SERVICE WITH CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH REPTILE CREATURES. I HAD SEEN THIS DONE BEFORE IN A CHURCH CLOSE TO WHERE I LIVED WITH A COUPLE OF MY FRIENDS . YES SIR, WE GOT OUT OF THAT CHURCH IN A “NEW YORK MINUTE”.

WELL WHAT GOT NUBBY' s AND SWEET EYE' s ATTENTION WAS ON A REAL HOT AUGUST DAY IN 1960 WHEN WE WASHED REVERAND LEMON'S CAR. EVERYTHING WENT REAL WELL UNTIL WE STARTED TO DRY IT DOWN, CLEAN THE WINDOWS, AND DUST THE INSIDE----THEN SWEET EYE SAW A CAGE IN THE BACK SEAT, “LO AND BEHOLD, JUST LOADED WITH SNAKES, HISSING AT NUBBY” WHEN HE PULLED DOWN THE COUPE s FRONT SEAT”!. WELL, THE NEXT THING I KNEW I SAW BOTH OF THEM RUNNING ACROSS THE STREET TO DOBBS AUTO PARTS -- HOLLERING, “ LET ME AT THAT PREACHER, HE IS TRYING TO KILL US ALL”. WELL, THE PREACHER CAME BACK SOON AND DAD TOLD HIM NOT TO COME BACK WITH HIS SNAKES OR HE IS CALLING THE LAW. HE DID COME BACK A FEW TIMES BUT SWEET EYE AND NUBBY EXITED THE BUILDING AND I CAN'T REALLY BLAME THEM. I WAS ALWAYS SUSPICIOUS OF THE SNAKE THAT GOT AWAY.

MY LAST DAYS AS A GAS STATION ATTENDANT WERE INTERMITTENT BECAUSE I WAS ENROLLED IN COLLEGE, GRADUATING IN 1965 FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION. WHAT I AM ABOUT TO TELL YOU INFLUENCED MY RETIREMENT AS A GAS STATION ATTENDANT. I TOOK A JOB AS A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER IN LAMAR COUNTY THE FIRST SEMESTER OF 1965 AND HAD JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH STUDENTS IN MY CLASSES. DURING THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1966 & 1967 I WORKED PART TIME AT DADS GAS STATION, EXTRA INCOME NEEDED SINCE I MARRIED A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG LADY.

SOME OF THE BOYS IN MY SENIOR HIGH CLASSES FOUND OUT THAT I WAS WORKING PART TIME AS A GAS STATION EMPLOYEE IN FAYETTE. SINCE MY HIGH SCHOOL WAS NOT FAR AWAY A COUPLE STUDENTS DECIDED THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE THEIR TEACHER WASH THEIR CARS OR ANY OTHER “GREASE MONKEY” JOBS THEY COULD HIRE ME OUT. THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY FOR THEM TO PULL THIS OFF WOULD BE TO TIME IT SO I WOULD HAVE MINIMAL HELP AVAILABLE AT THE STATION. THAT MADE ME MORE VULNERABLE TO WORK THE JOB THEY FELT WOULD BE THE “MOST FUN FOR THEM TO WATCH”. THEN THEY COULD GO BACK AND TELL THEIR FRIENDS ALL THE DETAILS.

I NEVER MENTIONED THIS EPISODE TO ANY OF THE KIDS INVOLVED AT THE HIGH SCHOOL, REALIZING IT WAS A SILLY PRANK THAT MOST OF THEM WOULD REGRET AS THEY GREW INTO MANHOOD. I DID TELL MY PRINCIPAL BEFORE I LEFT TO ENTER GRADUATE SCHOOL ABOUT THE INCIDENT WITH THE KIDS AND WE AGREED TO LET “BYGONES BE JUST THAT” SINCE I WAS LEAVING THE CLASSROOM. YEARS LATER, I

SAW MY PRINCIPAL SEVERAL TIMES AND WE LAUGHED ABOUT THE MISCHIEF MY FORMER STUDENTS WERE UP TO.

CLOSING MY LIFES STORY AS A REDNECK GAS STATION ATTENDANT MEANT MUCH MORE THAN JUST A DIRTY, GREASY JOB. IT PREPARED ME MUCH BETTER FOR LIFE 'S STRUGGLES WHEN THINGS DONT GO SO WELL, WHEN REAL SICKNESS COMES AND WHEN YOU FEEL IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP. AS THE READER, YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I MEAN. IF YOU ARE A LADY OR A ELDERLY PERSON, I KNOW THAT YOU MISS ME WHEN I GREET YOU, FILLING YOUR GAS TANK AND MAKING SURE YOUR CAR IS SAFER FOR THE ROAD AHEAD. SO, IF YOU CAN HELP TO NOMINATE ME FOR THE NEXT ROUND OF SERVICE STATION ATTENDANT HALL OF FAMERS GIVE NUBBY, SWEET EYE AND I STRONG CONSIDERATION.

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