

I LOOK AT MY FATHER

By WILBORNE HARRELL

On a warm night fifty-five years ago, a young man stood watching an entire block of Edenton's business section go up in flame and smoke. He had been driving a horse and cart, and he now held the horse by the bridle to prevent him from shying from the snakes and rats and mice that slithered and scurried across the street to escape the fiery blast of the raging inferno.

Cheapside, a row of buildings and stores dating from the town's earliest days, was burning. And with Cheapside, being consumed in the holocaust was the young man's father's business—lock, stock and barrel, and all his goods and possessions.

The fire assumed in his mind the proportions of the famous fire of London, in which another, more historic Cheapside, had figured.

The young man was my dad, and he bore the rather high-sounding name of Barlow Horatio Harrell. And this was the second time that he had stood helplessly by and watched his father's (my granddad's) business go up in flames.

Now, today, after seventy-three years of a stormy life, these two catastrophes have lingered longest and wrought the greatest influence on his life. As though taking its cue from these fires, life since that fearful night has been a series of adverse incidents. But in all honesty, though, my Dad attributes most of his misfortunes more to the ineptness with which he has handled his own affairs than to the vagaries of fate.

Early in life, my father took up salesmanship, and in his long career of selling he has sold con-openers, duplex-hatchets, lightning rods, hardware, drygoods, groceries, insurance—or what have you. In fact, at some time in his life, he has handled about every article or merchandise offered to the public.

But, despite his many and varied set-backs, there is one commodity he has sold himself on: his abiding faith in life and his fellowman. As my Dad puts it, "I've sold everything. I've sold merchandise to a lot of people. I've sold myself on the idea that life is worth while, after all. But I haven't quite been able to sell myself."

As you have undoubtedly guessed, this is a story of a plain man, even as you and I, who has accomplished nothing spectacular, achieved no great deeds, or, as the world measures success, even made a success of life. He has accumulated few material goods. He owns no real estate. My Dad says that in the final reckoning, no man owns but six feet of earth, and can call his own only what he has given to others.

My father's bid for fame—although he has not the slightest desire for the uncomfortable role of a famous man—has his phenomenal success as a salesman; his sheer magic ability to sell a man anything, any time, anywhere. His "gift of gab", or his facility for arguing and carrying his point by the weight and flow of his words, had he the educational background, would probably have made him a good trial lawyer. But in my Dad's youth, education advantages were conspicuously meagre. He has read few books, knows little or nothing of modern or classical literature, but he has garnered a headful of "common sense", and has picked up an amazing amount of knowledge by observation and association.

The Pan-American Life Insurance Company published my Dad's sole literary effort. It was a small booklet in which he recounted his experiences throughout the depression years. The title, "Why I Am A Failure," was misleading, though, for my Dad was considered by the employers as one of their biggest producers. What the depression was doing to him, it was doing to thousands of

others. But failure during the depression years was not necessarily defeat.

Outstanding in my Dad's career as a salesman was his rejuvenation of a business establishment in Edenton that was slated for the rocks, and his repeat performance, later, in Elizabeth City. In the first case, in a little over a year he had put the business back on its feet, and the owner had a deed for the store in his safe. The second was a branch establishment of a well-known Elizabeth City department store. In a matter of months he had so increased the volume of business that the owner made him the offer of naming his own price, if he would continue the management. But the call of the open road was to prove too strong. In both instances he quit the job and went out on his own. My Dad preferred the uncertain freedom of the selling game to the permanence of an indoor job. He chose to call his soul his own—at less money.

My Dad had the knack of making money—both for himself and his employers. But he couldn't hold on to it. His generosity and freeness outran his judgement. It was "easy come, easy go" with him. He gave his money freely to whoever wanted it. He was an easy mark for spongers and chronic borrowers. Among the kids of the neighborhood, colored and white, he was known as "Mr. Penny Man"—because he gave them pennies and nickels.

Now that he is approaching the evening of his life, my father's chief occupation is making an occasional sale or two and watching over his birds. Every bedraggled sparrow and robin for miles around knows where it can find shelter and crumbs when the pickings are lean. A stray cat or two are also included in his menagerie of indigents. My Dad is no saint, and is certainly not overly endowed with saintly qualities, but he shares that much in common with the venerable St. Francis, whom we are told fed the hungry birds.

My Dad's creed is simple. He calls it his Golden Rule, and he has phrased it in the lingo of the salesman: "Life is not all a game of selling—it is also a game of buying. Remember, the other fellow has something to sell, too. Life is a game of buy and sell, give and take." Again, he says, "You can high-pressure a customer, but you can't high-pressure life."

Furthermore, my father says that his Golden Rule of the Road will eliminate a majority of automobile accidents:—"All of the road belongs to the other fellow." He also says that you can't give the other fellow

half of the road, because half of it already belongs to him. In driving, as in life, to give the other fellow a part of the road, you must give him some or all of your own share.

Delay Expected In Paying POW Claims

Eligible Persons In Chowan Should Contact J. L. Wiggins

Latest information received in the District Office of the North Carolina Veterans Commission indicates that the War Claims Commission may not be able to pay all prisoner of war and civilian internee claims for two or more years.

All War Claims Commission's expenses, as well as all money for claims, must come from liquidated enemy assets. Although about \$500,000,000 in assets has been taken over, less than \$20,000,000 of it is available to pay an estimated \$120,000,000 worth of claims.

Most of the rest is tied up in suits brought by former owners. About 140,000 former prisoners of war and internees are expected to file their applications.

Eligible persons in this area are urged to contact the District Office of the North Carolina Veterans Commission, 206 Kramer Building, Elizabeth City, North Carolina or Jasper L. Wiggins, Chowan County Service Officer, for information and assistance.

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Corporal Howard C. Bass, age 19, son of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Q. Bass of RFD 1, Edenton, completed ten months of service with the Occupation Forces in Japan. He is a member of Headquarters Battery, 82nd Field Artillery Battalion, First Cavalry Division Artillery, stationed at

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