

VIEWPOINTS

Both of them had a bad day

Mad cow disease is on a lot of minds. Regardless, it hasn't stopped people from eating steak. If you doubt that statement, try getting in one of the steak houses.

Now I am a chicken man; however I don't know of any fowl more unclean than a yard chicken, although not many of those are left. There will soon be less; in one of our eastern towns, according to the news, the town council banned yard chickens. None of those council members were reared in the country.

I am with the man who hadn't heard of the mad cow scare. He and his wife went to his favorite restaurant to have dinner. The waiter said, "Our specialty today is duck and shrimp."

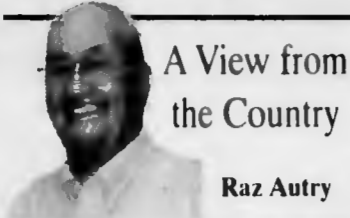
The man replied, "I don't want duck or shrimp. Bring me a steak." The waiter said, "What about the mad cow?"

The man remarked, "The cow can order for herself."

Irene and I celebrated our 53rd wedding anniversary January 12, and I didn't forget it. No wise cracks.

One simple statement: "Never leave your wife's anniversary present in a Wal-Mart bag."

Over the years I have had a considerable amount of dealing with the Veterans Administration — not for myself but in trying to help other



A View from the Country
Raz Autry

people. They give incompetents a whole new meaning.

Recently I called on behalf of another veteran. Finally, after going through the recordings, I reached a lady. I guess she was a lady; after our conversation I decided she came from the planet of the apes.

We didn't get off to a very good start. First she gave the impression that she was doing me a favor to even talk to me. I was really trying to reach another man I had spoken with earlier. He acted as if he really wanted to help.

She stated in a voice she would use on her husband if she was mad with him — although if she was married, her husband married the sister of the devil. I asked her to connect me with the man I was seeking. Since I had his number, one of my goats should have been able to handle that chore.

In a voice that spit with fire she said, "I don't have time to do that and I don't intend to do it."

My patience has never been great

and, unfortunately, it hasn't improved enough to deal with screwballs.

I relied, "Lady, and I use the term loosely, you folks are as incompetent as any one group I have every dealt with." Our conversation went downhill. She yelled, "Don't you raise your voice to me?"

I am sure I would have been in jail today if I had been across the desk from her.

I said, "I am 77 years old and I have earned the right to raise my voice."

She hung up the phone with a bang which I am sure could be heard all over Winston-Salem. If I had a ten penny nail nearby I would have bit it in half. When I cooled off and called back, I finally reached the gentleman I needed to talk to. He really helped and was very knowledgeable. He informed me that he didn't work in that office, he worked in the field. In all honesty, there must be some good people in the VA, apparently I have always contacted the ones, who not only shouldn't be in public service, they needed to be on an island where they can only deal with each other.

The veterans need a strong voice in this country, not promises which are broken.

My parting thought — You know you are growing old when the loud music you used to complain about, doesn't seem so loud anymore

From saving soles to saving souls

The upcoming 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education has me thinking about how things changed over the years. Recently, I have been remembering Warren McKissick, who died in Charlotte last month.

Maybe you never heard of him. But, 50 years ago, in my hometown Davidson, everyone knew Mr. McKissick. He operated a shoe repair shop at the intersection of Main Street, next door to the M&M soda shop, and just across the way from the college church.

These days, the shoe repair business is everywhere in retreat. So often people just toss their old shoes away when they wear out. But 50 years ago, Davidson people rarely threw anything away. Certainly not shoes, which, like winter coats, Sunday suits, wristwatches, and refrigerators, we expected to last a lifetime.

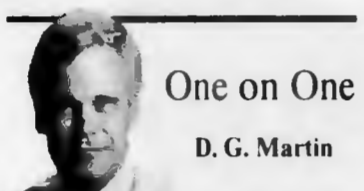
When such lifetime items wore out or broke down, there was a place on Main Street where they could be put back in working order. If I stuck my head in Withers' Electric, I would almost always find Bill Withers working on an old refrigerator or toaster rather than selling someone a new appliance.

Next door, standing on the outside of Moore Reid's Garage, I could see Mr. Reid, with a half-smoked cigar firmly in his mouth, attacking the engine of a disabled auto that was long past its prime.

From the window of his jewelry store, I watched Mr. Henderson, with his jeweler's glass against his eye, leaning down as if he were about to crawl into the working parts of the small timepiece on his table.

Of these Main Street repair shops, I remember Mr. McKissick's shoe shop best. I was hard on my shoes. So I was a regular patron. I was also a customer of the polish and laces he sold. When I opened the door to his shop, a sharp bell rang out over the clomping noises of the machinery, and the active scents of oils, leather, polish, cleansers, and glues enveloped me.

Mr. McKissick would turn from his machines, face the counter, smile



One on One
D. G. Martin

with a look of pleasant recognition and friendship say, "All right." It was a statement, but there was also a hint of a question mark.

Mr. McKissick was one of three African-American business owners on Main Street. The other two, Hood Norton and Ralph Johnson, operated barbershops.

In those days, these three men and their employees were my only contacts with independent professional blacks.

Today, that world of 50 years ago seems so upside down. The barbershops, though operated by blacks, were open only to whites. Ralph Johnson cut my hair from time to time. Sometimes, he would give me a dose of his complaints about the opportunities that had passed him by because of his race. Ironically, it was in his barbershop, where the complex norms of those times required him to turn away all black patrons, that he was the first black person to address me directly about the inequalities of segregation.

On the other hand, Mr. McKissick never complained. If I tried to prompt him, he replied with his inscrutable but very warm smile, "Well, that is the way it is."

Once I asked him if he were kin to the civil rights leader, Floyd McKissick. He said simply, "Yes, but not close."

He was uncompromisingly professional, careful, and kind.

I always admired him and thought that if times had been different he would have been even more — much more — successful.

As it turned out, times did change and he became very successful. He closed the shoe repair business and became the very successful pastor of the Greater Galilee Baptist Church in Charlotte, which grew from about

60 members to about 2000 under his leadership.

When I met him again during one of my political campaigns about 20 years ago, he allowed my mother to come to his church to testify to his congregation about what a good "little boy" I had been. It turned out for me to be one of those precious moments in hard politics that make all the rest of the experience worthwhile.

My mother teased Reverend McKissick that day saying that he had changed his occupation from "saving soles" to "saving souls."

I saw him in Charlotte last year at a breakfast place, picking up a quick take-out, hurrying to work at his church — but, stopping to greet me, and as always, giving me time, listening and giving me words of encouragement. He was then about 85 — going full steam saving souls. His wife told me that, although he had been ill, he preached every Sunday until about two weeks before his death.

Times have changed over the years since Brown v. Board of Education. The shoe shop is long gone from Davidson's Main Street. People of all races mingle in the barbershop. The doors of opportunity are open wider for people like Ralph Johnson and Warren McKissick.

But there are more changes to come, perhaps even more difficult than those of the past 50 years.

I wish there were more men like Warren McKissick to help us through the next 50 years.

Note: Two recent books tell more about Davidson's Main Street during times of change: Ralph Johnson's Memoir, "David Played a Harp," was published just before his death two years ago.

Also, James Puckett, son of a Davidson professor, has just published "Olin, Oskeggum & Gizmo," a charming book of his recollections of people and events in those times.

D.G. Martin hosts UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Sundays at 5 p.m. This week's (February 1) repeat program features Isabel Zuber author of "Salt."



We Get Letters

Wants class ring info

Dear Editor,

I need your help. My mother, Edith Mac (Ray) Palmer, daughter of the late Frank and Bessie (McFayden) Ray, recently passed away. While going through her personal belongings, I found her Raeford High School class ring, dated 1943, inscribed with her initials. Unfortunately, the ring was missing its class stone.

I am very interested in having the ring restored in my mom's memory. I have contacted, to no avail, various people and organizations to determine the color and type of stone for that year's ring.

Now, I am hoping through your assistance, you can inquire of your readers to help me accomplish my beloved gesture.

Anyone who can be of help is asked to contact Ed Clanton, (910) 904-1444.

Although, I have personally been away from the Hoke County area for many years, my roots and thoughts have always been close at hand.

I sincerely appreciate any and all of your help as well as your readers with my request.

Sincerely,
Margarie Palmer Lenczycki

Letters to the Editor policy

The News Journal welcomes letters to the editor and encourages readers to express their opinions.

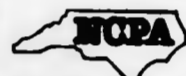
Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. The street address and phone number will not be published, but are required so we may verify authenticity. The name of the writer and, in some cases, the town the writer is from will be published at the end of the letter.

We reserve the right to edit letters for grammar, as well as those that exceed 300 words. We will not publish letters that we consider to be in poor taste or libelous. In some cases we may add an editor's note as a postscript when we believe a correction, explanation or amplification is warranted. We may also, at our discretion, limit the number of times an individual writer may submit a letter for publication.

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