

January 3, 2003

I've bragged many times in this space about the wonderful experience I had while growing up in the family drug store, beginning as a mere car hop at the tender age of six years and finally working my way up to the esteemed level of a Soda Jerk in my senior year at Perry High. It was a marvelous introduction to real life. Some of the lessons learned there, taking customers' orders and trying to deliver them without spilling a drop, have stayed with me all this time. I guess the ultimate thrill came in mixing a chocolate malted milk and collecting the 30-cent charge that customers willingly paid for those rich, creamy diet-busters. It was the highest priced concoction we had at our white marble fountain in the City Drug Store on the north side of the square.

I was proud of that title, Soda Jerk, because at the time I was still pretty much a barefoot boy with cheeks of tan. I dreamed of one day owning my own drug store and still working behind the fountain, stirring up sodas, cherry Cokes and chocolate root beers to the applause of the customers that I assumed would flock to our place of business. Prescriptions would be filled in a dark, cavernous room at the rear of the store by registered pharmacists wearing green eyeshades, laboring anonymously and wishing they could be seen by patrons out there under the bright ceiling lights at the fountain. They would wish they were doing what I did with so much artistry and panache instead of trying to decipher the endless (but very welcome) handwritten orders from doctors. That bubble, and my aspirations, ended when the Great Depression forced us to close the City Drug Store forever. That's when I resurrected another lifelong dream - journalism.

But I never really got over it. Just the other day someone with a long memory asked about the derivation of the term, Soda Jerk. How did it begin, and so forth. I had to admit that I had no idea, but I went directly to my dictionaries in hopes of finding the answers. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* was not much help, stating only that a Soda Jerk is "a counterman who dispenses carbonated drinks and ice cream at a fountain." At least, it is not a term of derision because the "jerk" merely refers to the act of drawing various flavors from the fountain's array of chilled chrome and china pump dispensers. In more recent years, a stupid, foolish or unconventional person is referred to as a "jerk," but not the kind that labors behind a soda fountain. That has a different definition.

Funk & Wagnalls' *Standard Encyclopedic College Dictionary* tells us that "soda jerk" is American slang for "a clerk at a soda fountain." It adds that just a plain jerk is slang for a "stupid, ineffectual, dull man." That was not an acceptable description back there when I was proudly whipping up banana splits, Dr. Peppers, four hundreds and other delicacies at the City Drug.

I may give the matter further study, but as far as I'm concerned, the dictionaries pretty well sum up the definitions. Perhaps one day I will check out the library's more exhaustive reference books, but that's all for right now.



January 7, 2003

Here s a followup to that recent information about the little Santa Claus house that has been placed in the courthouse park by the Perry Chamber of Commerce for several years. You'll recall that the original feature story in this newspaper

said the miniature structure is just about past the stage of usefulness and it may have to be replaced. It was built more than sixty years ago for the young daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Cress, who lived in the 800 block on Jackson street. Later it was acquired by Mr. and Mrs. W.K. Leatherock for their young daughter, Marianne, and moved to the back yard of their home at 901 Jackson street. It remained in that yard for several years until it eventually became property of the Chamber of Commerce.

Now we learn that the little house was structurally renovated when it was moved to the Leatherock yard. Don (Pud) Edwards and Darrell (Smoky) Pricer, two local carpenters who worked for P.J. (Pete) Cordes, a well-known general contractor, installed windows and repaired the roof after it was moved to the Leatherock home. Pud, who still lives here, remembers the project quite well, but Smoky has changed vocations and now lives in Tulsa. So far, I still don't know who built the original house or whether Mr. and Mrs. Cress bought it, ready-made, for their daughter. Maybe a reader can shed more light on this subject.

Both of our fine Perry banks are involved in improvement projects. The Exchange Bank & Trust Co. has installed a handsome four-faced clock mounted on a tall pedestal near the main entrance to their building at Sixth and Delaware. The bank also has had concrete poured for a portion of the sidewalk in that area and there may be a change in the architectural landscaping at the entryway itself, I'm told.

One block up the street from there, the First Bank & Trust has purchased residential property on the west side of their parking lot. The home at that location has been razed and some dirt work has been done to fill in the basement and lower the sloping area at the front of the lot. For now, the First Bank folks have not fully decided what to do with the property but it may become an expansion for their parking lot. More space is needed there.

More things are happening in Our Town. The mayor, city councilors and the Perry Economic Development Authority have received a letter from Busch Properties, Inc., formalizing that company's plans to build a 60,000 square foot warehouse/distribution center here, and it will employ some 30 people. More jobs and a new payroll are always welcome, particularly in this time of economic uncertainty throughout our country.



January 10, 2003

Events of the past few weeks have necessitated changes in some things that once seemed to have high priority in the life of your humble servant here, so I apologize if you have noticed that certain topics were out of balance or non-sequential, but I guess that's par for the course we're all traveling. Let me add a few more nuggets.

Laura and I made the trek to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl Parade and, of course, the football game that afternoon. Unfortunately, we did not see any other Perry folks at the game or along the parade route, but we did see some 86,000 strangers. The Rose Parade is even bigger than our Cherokee Strip Parade, if you can imagine that. I'm glad to hear there were some other representatives of Our Town in Pasadena that day. We were proud of the Oklahoma University team, not only for winning the game but also for their good sportsmanship and that elusive quality, CLASS. We made the trip on a charter flight that for some reason always had an early departure time. That was pretty much the story of the whole week - an early departure for every scheduled event, but, usually, lots of spare time after we arrived at our destination. Hurry up and wait. Hey, I thought the Army had exclusive rights to that.

We made one side trip on our own. That was to the J. Paul Getty Museum nestled on a beautiful mountain aerie overlooking some of the most expensive real estate in the U.S.A. We had a limited amount of time to tour the facility, mostly the art gallery, but it was an exhilarating experience. One thought kept nagging at me, however. Wasn't J. Paul Getty an Oklahoman? If so, how come we don't have a facility like that inside our state's borders?

The return trip to Oklahoma City from LAX, the huge Los Angeles airport, also required an early arrival. I'm talking about a 4 a.m. wakeup call. One of the reasons, aside from the flight time, was the newly instituted security check for luggage. This includes an X-ray scan with the owner standing nearby, and no locks on the luggage. Some were chosen for an open inspection. I saw several unhappy campers watching their carefully packed underwear, socks and so forth being checked by federal agents, who were just doing their job. Personally, I am all for these airport safety checks even if it does mean a pre-sunup reveille. Rather than another would-be shoe bomber.

You probably watched the game on TV, and it's quite likely that the camera had a better view of the teams and the playing field than we did. Our seats were not bad, and we could see most of the action throughout the afternoon. It was my first up close look at the Rose Bowl and it is just as majestic as the sportswriters say. Most of the band members from both Washington State and Oklahoma stood in dressing room tunnels throughout the game, and the OU musicians acquitted themselves extremely well. We thought the Big Red band from Norman must have given their team a lift by playing frequently and punctuating all the good things that happened. The halftime shows by both bands were almost worth the price of admission by themselves.

The event may or may not have been a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but it will last us for some time to come - at least until the Oklahoma State Cowboys get their turn on that fabled field. 'Ray Sooners! Ride 'em Cowboys!



January 14, 2003

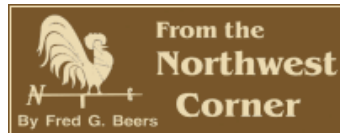
Friends here have learned belatedly of the death of Mary Frances Render Golston, a colorful lady with family ties to early day Perry and a crusty but warmhearted former nursing director at Perry Memorial Hospital from 1953 to 1955. Mary Frances, who was 84, died last November 2 at the West Branch Regional Medical Center in Lupton, Michigan. She was born in Norman, the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. L.O. Render, but grew up here. Her father was a dentist and a bit of a free spirit himself. Her grandmother, who largely reared Mary Frances, was Minnie Keith Bailey, a poet and women's club leader in this community for many years. The Bailey home, a regal-looking two-story Victorian frame structure, still stands at Ninth and Delaware.

In the mid-1930s Mary Frances graduated from Perry high school, where she had been a candidate for football queen, among other honors. She then chose to pursue a professional career as a registered nurse. It was one of the few fields then open to women. She served in the European Theater of Operations during World War II as a member of the Army Nurse Corps. On one occasion in England she was invited to tea with King George and family in Buckingham Palace, a sign of goodwill by the King to thank the U.S. military contingent serving there. Mary Frances felt honored to be invited to tea with the royal family, but such social affairs were of little consequence to her.

In 1953, a few years after World War II, she returned to Perry with her young daughter, Nikki, and served two years as director of nursing at the newly opened Perry Memorial Hospital. She was a good administrator and a caring nurse during

her stay there. Patients and doctors alike came to appreciate her no-nonsense approach toward healing and it was always mixed with a generous measure of good humor. In her off-duty hours, she was a member of the hospital's team in the Perry Bowling League. Eventually she moved on to another position in the health care field at Leavenworth, Kansas, and for the past 21 years she was a nurse in the same sort of healing at Lupton. In addition to Nikki, who lives in Lupton, she is survived by a grandson, Andrew Golston, also of Lupton. Bailey Render, an older brother, preceded her in death.

Many friends and former patients will remember Mary Frances and her hard-boiled demeanor, always blended with a dose of down-home good humor. She was an interesting lady. We can always use her kind of attributes. She will continue to bring pleasant memories for years to come to those who knew her



January 17, 2003

Some recent columns have led several readers to their own recollections of events from the recent past. The death of Homer Thompson, the barbecue king, on Christmas Eve, 1961, was the basis for one Northwest Corner a few days ago. It also reminded David Payne, now a retired Ditch Witch engineer, of his close association with Mr. Thompson more than forty years ago. David writes:

"I did a significant part of my growing up under the influence of Mr. Thompson's B-B-Q. We lived about two hundred feet to the west of the restaurant and every day of my life during that time, we had the aroma of his food drifting across our yard. I can't really say whether that experience contributed to my taste for B-B-Q or if I built up an immunity to the stuff. I do really like B-B-Q, though.

"...On that fateful (1961) Christmas Eve, I was asleep, in our living room because I had relinquished my bedroom to my brother and his family who were visiting for the holidays. I was awakened by the gunshot but did not become aware of what it was until the next day. I knew Homer personally and that night we all experienced a great loss. Besides his son Donnie, Homer had a crew who raced GoKarts and I also raced. I even drove for him for a short time. I did well with my own Kart in the 'affordable' class of Kart racing but Homer had Karts for all classes, a total of seven I believe.

"My Kart ran around forty miles per hour and he wanted me to try out in the top brackets that ran around one hundred miles per hour! I practiced on one that had three engines and then raced it but never won a trophy in those classes. I would eventually 'lose it' on a turn and go skittering out across the grass and lose my place in the race. During one of the practice sessions, Homer came up to me after a run and complimented me on my driving and said he had been clocking me with his stop watch and that I was averaging 105 mph on the straight-away! I always wondered how accurate his timing methods were but I could tell I was going way faster than I ever, had before.

"Homer had a mechanic (DeBord?) who would build, rework and tune the engines and his Karts won many, many trophies. I once asked Homer why he painted his engines a different color every week and he said, 'It makes people come up and ask me what's different about my engines.' He said he enjoyed talking to people and that was a good way to start a conversation. It worked. One weekend I witnessed one of his engines go ballistic while screaming down the straightaway. It sprayed parts high into the sky. The next week the same engine was back in the race with a big Bandaid appropriately stuck over the freshly welded patch in the crankcase.

"...The clock from Thompson's Barbecue now hangs in the Kumbback and Craig Kemnitz has a lot of memorabilia from the restaurant. I don't know what happened to all the GoKart trophies that lined the walls of the restaurant in the 1960s. The stuff that Craig has was given to him by Homer's son, Donald."

Many thanks to Dave Payne for his interesting recollection of another facet of Homer Thompson's life.

Perry's popular dining place, the Homer Thompson Bar-B-Q, is shown in this file photo, taken before the death of Mr. Thompson on Christmas Eve in 191. The business was at the intersection of Eleventh street and the old U.S. Highway 64 route on the south side of town.



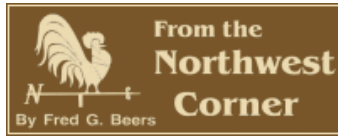
January 21, 2003

Bud Grim and Sheryl Mandeville have come across a bit of memorabilia from the early days in Perry and they are hoping to find some help in clarifying its origin. The piece is an eight-inch tall clear glass bottle with this information engraved on it in raised letters in an oval shape: "Perry Steam Bottling Works, Perry, Okla." The earliest city directory I have is from 1910-11 but it contains no listing for a firm by that name. The bottle may have been used for soda water or perhaps for locally brewed liquid refreshments. Thus far we have no clue. My 1910-11 directory has only one listing for a bottler but it is for "O'Rourke Bros., end of 6th and Santa Fe Ry." That really doesn't add anything informative. Perhaps a reader can provide Bud and Sheryl with something about the firm whose name appears on the bottle. It is in excellent condition with a tapered neck where a cork probably plugged up that end. Give them a call if you can help out here.

The most recent issue of *Commerce Folio*, the official bimonthly news publication of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, contains a feature story and photos of the Charles Machine Works, Inc., manufacturer of the Perry-made Ditch Witch line of underground construction equipment. The eight-page slick paper publication also contains many stories about the continuing expansion and addition of new industrial plants throughout our state. The Folio is lavishly illustrated with color photos and stories about new plants going up in Oklahoma. The Ditch Witch article includes a photo of Ed Malzahn, inventor of the Ditch Witch service line trencher, standing beside one of the earliest models produced in the late 1940s, plus a photo of one of today's products, a Ditch Witch RT90 tractor working in rugged country. The article calls attention to the centennial observance of the founding of the Malzahn blacksmithing and machine shop in 1902 and notes that CMW received the 2002 Journal Record "Innovator of the Year" Award for Continuing Achievement.

A portion of the article reads: "The Ditch Witch organization specializes in the design and manufacture of high quality underground construction equipment. This includes being the one-stop source for trenchers, vibratory plows, pneumatic piercing tools, backhoes, electronic locating, mapping, tracking equipment, directional drilling systems, drill pipe, vacuum excavation systems, and other downhole tools. This product line represents the most complete range of equipment for installing utilities underground. The Ditch Witch brand is the leading name in underground construction equipment."

Perry is indeed proud of the international recognition CMW has received. Congratulations to Ed Malzahn and the men and women of Ditch Witch who have been responsible for the positive reputation they enjoy in the world marketplace.



January 24, 2003

This year is getting off to a bad start. Already we have lost individuals who were part of Perry's history for different reasons and some who were just good friends. The comfort comes in knowing that each of them made a contribution in some significant way to move Perry forward during their lifetime. We will miss them, but we thank them for the legacy they handed down to the rest of us by example or simply by being good friends. They were not necessarily wizards of industry or business tycoons. Just plain folks, if you will, but special to all of us for different reasons.

Two of the most recent examples were Doris Gregory Brookhart and Betty Munger Beasley. They were Perry girls, although Doris had lived in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and Betty had been a resident of Monroe, Louisiana, for several years. They both wanted their final resting place to be Grace Hill Cemetery here in Perry. Both of them died within the past few days and I'm sorry to say I never had the chance to tell them how much I admired them. I will always remember them as beautiful young women, with talent, poise and intelligence. We were not the same age, but we were products of the same generation. That would be the trying times of the Great Depression, in the 1930s and beyond into the era of World War II.

Doris was the daughter of Ernest Gregory, a shoe repairman who operated a shop on the south side of the square. Betty's Dad was Tom Munger, a businessman and a member of the House of Representatives in the State Legislature. The wives of Mr. Gregory and Mr. Munger both were active in church, club, school and civic affairs.

I have a special interest in Betty because she was a former reporter for this newspaper, and she was largely responsible for getting me started here on a career in the newspaper business. When I was a senior at Perry high school in 1941, Betty announced her plans to leave *The Journal* and to become, the bride of Arthur Beasley, a good-looking Perry boy. Betty was perhaps the prettiest girl in town and I remember that most of the local bachelors believed Mr. Beasley had won a real prize. At the time, Betty rented a sleeping room in our house, which was less than two blocks from The Journal building on Elm Street. She saw me struggling to do a good job for the high school newspaper, where I was "science editor," and she knew of my interest in the field of journalism. She recommended me to W.K. Leatherock, publisher of the PDJ, as her successor. I did not know of her recommendation at the time, but he hired me and I spent part of a lifetime working for him.

Doris was an exceptionally gifted musician. She played trumpet in the PHS band under Professor Leopold Radgowsky and later under Bill Sharp. With Ellen Butler, another top-flight cornetist, she frequently played for the enjoyment of local clubs and other gatherings. Doris had an abiding interest in the arts and in time she became a professor at a university in Siloam Springs. Both of these ladies made an imprint on this community (including me) as they were growing up. Also from the same era was Bob Berger, whose death in California was just learned here. Bob had many attributes, including a love for flag and country that was exemplified by his career in the military. Bob was a retired Army colonel. Before launching on that career, Bob and his dad, the late Jim Berger, were two of Perry's finest carpenters. Many hearts are heavy as we remember such people. Perry can be proud of them.



January 28, 2003

My recent quandary over the derivation of the term "soda jerk" has produced a wealth of information from helpful readers who understand my dilemma. This came up in a column that recalled the growing-up years in the City Drug Store, our family's business until the Great Depression claimed it as a victim. Somebody asked me where that job term came from, and I didn't have a clue, although I was proud to be one. Thanks to some friends out there, I now have a lot of answers.

David Bazzell did what I should have done – he called up information on the internet, then referred me to the same source. So now I can tell you how the U.S. Department of Labor describes my childhood occupation. Along with that is a reprint of offbeat news from the reliable old Associated Press, but the AP does not allow such material to be redistributed so I can only tell you in general terms what the amusing little article contains.

Briefly, the piece tells about Mr. Richard Huckriede, age 73, a present-day soda jerk in Greensburg, Kansas, who currently is celebrating fifty years as master of the soda fountain at the Hunter Drug Store. So esteemed is he by fellow townsfolk that money is being raised for a life-size cardboard cutout of Mr. Huckriede for an exhibit at the Kiowa County Museum. (As a sidelight, I did some figuring. I was jerking sodas at the City Drug in 1940. If the store and I had both survived, I would now have been serving up sodas and cherry limeades for at least sixty-two years, not counting time out for Army service in World War II. Personally, I don't think either one of us, the store or I, would have made it. But I digress.)

If you are REALLY interested, let me share the Department of Labor's job description for a fountain server. But first, other titles for the same job are: Fountain dispenser, ice cream dispenser, soda clerk, soda dispenser and soda jerker. Years ago the trade publication, *Drug Topics*, tried to introduce a title that was more "dignified" than soda jerk. Their proposed term was "fountaineer," but somehow that never caught on anywhere. So now, here's the Labor Department's job description:

"Prepares and serves soft drinks and ice cream dishes, such as ice cream sundaes, malted milks, sodas and fruitades, using memorized formulas and methods or following directions. Cleans glasses, dishes and fountain equipment and polishes metalwork on fountain. May prepare and serve sandwiches or order foods. May verify and total customer's bill, accept cash and make change." So you see, we really had lots of responsibilities.

Ed Malzahn also passed along a copy of a book, *Horse Feathers & Other Curious Words*, in which the author, Charles Earle Funk, author of *Heavens to Betsy* and *A Hog on Ice*, gives us many examples of words or phrases that have mysteriously slipped into everyday English language, through no fault of our own. Soda Jerker is one of those. The author's definition pretty well agrees with the Department of Labor's description, but he adds that in the mid-19th century, a "jerker" was an habitual drunkard. Thank goodness we no longer have to defend against that.

Thanks to friends who helped clear up this curious phrase.



January 31, 2003

It's not much fun when one of these columns is devoted to the passing of someone of special interest in this community, but there are some things I feel should be said about Dorothy Ebersole. This gentle lady died the other day after several months in one of the local nursing homes. The circumstances were not what Dorothy would have chosen, but this is an instance where all of us who knew her can say with certainty that she is happier now than she has been in a long time.

Dorothy was surely aware of the loving care she received from the staff at the nursing home and the faithful attention provided by family and friends but she had known happier times.

She was the younger of two daughters born to B.J. and Effie Woodruff. Her brothers were Raymond and Marsh Woodruff, and her sister was Maxine Woodruff Mugler. The entire family contributed to the early history of this community. Her father was the operator of one of this area's largest stores, Woodruff's Dry Goods, at 631 Delaware on the north side of the square. (My Dad had the City Drug Store just up the street from there, and they were contemporary businessmen in the early years of this city.) Raymond Woodruff was a clerk in major clothing stores of this area for many years. Marsh Woodruff began a career as a professional Chamber of Commerce executive in Perry. Maxine Woodruff became the wife of John Mugler, scion of another early-day Perry family. All of those named in this thumbnail sketch of the Woodruff family are now deceased.

Dorothy was one of the brightest students produced by Perry High School. She graduated magna cum laude from the University of Oklahoma with a degree in journalism and began a promising career as a reporter for the *Ponca City News*. There she honed her skills as a writer under the tutelage of the Muchmore family, who owned the paper at that time. Later she was selected as managing editor of the Journal of the Oklahoma Medical Association, a prestigious job requiring knowledge of progress in the healing arts and relating them to health standards in this state. She greatly enjoyed her time there as a news writer and editor.

In 1940, Dorothy married Asbury Lockhart (Al) Ebersole, the manual training instructor at Perry High School where I was a student. At the time Mr. Ebersole was losing his patience regularly, trying to teach me how to create major projects, like bedroom furniture, dining tables and other large-scale examples of the woodworking art, but I was still having trouble making such simple pieces as bread boards and bookends. Dorothy was good for him. He soon toned down his frustrated efforts on my behalf and eventually we all became good friends and members of the same Sunday school class at the Presbyterian Church. Dorothy invariably had a sly, humorous clipping to share with the rest of us. We were the young married class," and Al Ebersole and Dorothy were two of the most faithful members. His untimely death was hard on all of us. Their son, Sam, his wife, Jeannie, and their family remain as living and loving links to the Woodruff family. But we will always remember Dorothy, her husband, her brothers, her sister, her parents and the rest of the early-day folks who helped give this city its personality and distinctive family flavor.