

MY FATHER'S BRANCH

The Paynes

Our neighbors across the street were the Paynes. The family consisted of Mr. Payne, his wife, grown sons John and Gerald, and a grown daughter, Marietta. Since Marietta was grown when we moved to 5th Avenue, I heard her described as an “old maid” even though she eventually married after I was grown. The Paynes had a large lot that covered half of a city block and was enclosed by a fence with concrete posts, with huge concrete posts at the corners. That was unusual to me. I had never seen a fence with concrete posts before. In the fenced-in area and in a small shed, the Payne’s raised goats and milked the goats and sold goat milk. In that day and time it wasn’t a violation of the law to have some livestock in town. Raising pigs in town was against the law, but raising goats and selling goat milk was okay. Experts say that you can’t think about an odor and sense it in your mind like you can think of a song and hear it in your mind. That is good because many of us would be miserable all the time thinking about unpleasant odors. I remember the smell of those goats and the goat milk. The thought of drinking goat milk or eating goat cheese is still revolting to me.

We didn’t have too much interaction with the Paynes, but we were usually friendly with them. I say usually, because they did get upset with Dad and Mom once, but we will talk about below.

The Dishman boy older than me, Jimmy Don, and another neighborhood boy, Doug Bell, had a habit of getting into mischief, and the Paynes were often the target. The Paynes had four metal chairs that sat on their front porch. Jimmy Don and Doug loved to stealthy slip up to the Payne’s porch late at night and carry the lawn chairs to the corners of the Payne lot and hide them behind the big concrete posts. On more than one occasion the Paynes called the police and showed them what had happened. I’m sure the police talked to Mrs. Dishman about Jimmy Don. I’m not sure they ever talked to Doug’s mother, because she was a nurse and was almost always working it seems. I think on one occasion Jimmy Don actually had to move the chairs back to the porch. Things would get better for a while and then the prank would happen again.

When Jimmy Don and Doug weren’t moving chairs they got into other mischief, like shooting out the corner street light with their BB guns. When I got into a little trouble at home, usually a minor transgression in the scheme of things, Mom would say to me, “You don’t want to end up like Jimmy Don, do you?” That was enough to get me back on the straight and narrow.

One day the man that owned the property that the Paynes lived on came by the house and asked Mom and Dad if they would object to having a church on part of the property that the Paynes lived on. Mom and Dad said no, and that upset the Paynes. It wasn’t long



Figure 241 - Doyle (circa 1948)

The Depression, War, and Retirement

before the property was sold and the Paynes had to shut down their goat operation. They eventually moved over one street, to 4th Avenue. The Paynes didn't like it that Mom and Dad agreed to have a church in the neighborhood, but the neighbors felt like a church would be a better neighbor than the goat operation.

Groceries

The late 1940s and early 1950s were, of course, different from today in many ways. The day of the supermarket had not yet arrived. The norm was to have small grocery stores spread over the town, some occupying only a room in a private home. We had a store like that in our neighborhood, just a half a block from our house. It was in the home Charley Wilson and his wife Mattie. The store was small, even by the standards of that day. A fond memory I have is of going into Mr. Wilson's store and buying a Grapette soda for a nickel.

Mom bought a few things from Mr. Wilson, but she did most of her shopping at another store, two and a half blocks away, run by Shack Pittman. Mr. Pittman, as I recall, worked for Oklahoma Gas & Electric Company (OG&E) and supplemented his income with the neighborhood grocery store, which his wife Mabel ran when he was at his job. Mr. Pittman may have started his store in his house, but it wasn't long before he moved it into a separate new building next door to his home. Since it was larger than Mr. Wilson's store, it carried more items. I am sure that is why Mom shopped there.

Mom would walk to the store almost daily. There were no automated ways of checking out in those days. Since Mom bought almost everything on credit, Mabel would laboriously write down each item and its price as she removed it from the shopping cart, making a carbon copy list that she gave to Mom. Each month, when the check came from Old Age Assistance or when one of the older boys sent money home, Mom would go to the store and pay her bill. Mom had a gift for managing the family's money. She would borrow from time to time, as at the grocery store, but she never let the family's debt get out of control. She always paid the family's bills on time.

The Iceman

Even though we were living in a modern house, that did not mean we had a refrigerator. We did not. We had an icebox. It was literally a box that one put a block of ice in to keep the food cool. Of course the ice melted over time, so there was a continuing need for more ice.

About three times a week the iceman visited our neighborhood. He worked for the local icehouse and drove a small truck on his delivery route. When we needed ice, Mom or Dad would put a card in the window, provided by the icehouse that told the iceman how much ice we wanted. The iceman would get the block size we had requested and, using some sharp ice tongs, carry the block of ice into the house and put it in the icebox. This was a great convenience in the age before most people had refrigerators.

Some time in early 1950s our neighbors the Dishmans got the first refrigerator on the block, and it was cooled by gas. I wondered how that could be that a fire could cool. Now I know, but at the time it really puzzled me.

The Mailman

Another striking difference between that day and now was the mailman. The mailman would deliver our mail and put it in our mailbox on the porch. We did not have to go to the street to get it. When the mailman made a delivery, he would blow a whistle to let the people