

## REMINISCING

By

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While in Southeastern Ohio last fall on business, I stopped at a roadside mom and pop diner for lunch. It was very reminiscent of the little store where I used to eat lunch as a junior high school student in Pratt, West Virginia. While standing at the counter placing my order I was transformed back to the summer of 1956, a thirteen year old boy spending the lazy days of summer along the banks of the Kanawha River.

The rushing waters of New River and the Gauley meet at Gauley Bridge, W. Va. to form the Kanawha that meanders north through Charleston to finally meet the Ohio River at Pt. Pleasant. The little town of Pratt sits at the mouth of Paint Creek where it empties into the Kanawha. (The next time you travel the West Virginia Turn Pike count how many times you cross Paint Creek.) Pratt Junior High School sits at this juncture with two sides of the schoolyard sloping gently down to the banks of these two streams.

On the sand bar formed at the mouth of Paint Creek was the favorite place for churches without baptisteries to hold their baptisms. My father was baptized there on a cold, rainy day in the early spring of 1956. The rain swollen waters of the Kanawha looked treacherous as it rushed past the roily waters of Paint Creek, anxiously waiting to make its entrance into the mighty river. Just a foot or so below the surface of these dark murky waters rest the sand bar, or so says the preacher leading the next candidate out from the safety of the creek bank. To my knowledge no one ever drowned during one of these baptismal services.

Across the road from the school was the football field. There were no bleachers, just a pasture field with goal post. But on fall Friday afternoons it was transformed into the center of my universe.

A young man named Jack Greynolds, newly graduated from Alderson Broadus College in Philippi, W. Va. was hired as a teacher and our coach. He taught me lessons in the short time I knew him about never giving up and to always keep trying, even in the hard times that have served me well through my life.

Like most football teams in late summer we met for two a day practices. I lived far enough from the school that I had to stay all day eating lunch at the little store. I usually had enough money for two hot dogs and an RC Cola.

In my mind I can still hear the slam of the screen door and feel the coolness of the concrete porch as I sit there eating my hot dogs. I savor the smell of the cold damp air escaping from the pop cooler as I slide back the lid, reaching into the ice cold water I feel for my RC nestled somewhere between the block of ice and the Nehi orange and the Nehi grape. My hand is nearly frozen before I can pull the dripping bottle from the ice-cold water.

After eating I walk back down the road to lie under the giant oak trees that graced the front yard of the school. I lay there watching the clouds move lazily across the sky. Just a boy, watching and dreaming, content, knowing all is well.

The End