Friends

During my growing up my mother taught us about friends. Even when a stranger come to your house, treat them as a friend. She would all way say, Never turn down a friend or turn away a stranger. The one you turn away may be one of God angels.

During those early days my family would meet at another one house at least once a month. Families would get together from miles around. If someone had no way to go, someone would pile every body up in their car and off we go. We would sing, pray, play cards and dominoes, find out what each other needs were. If any body need food or clothes, they got it that night or the next day. One thing I remember about a good friend is they were all way there when you need them. They were there, white or black folks, rich or poor. Friends were friends.

I had many good friend while growing up. Those who were closest to me, we stuck together no matter right or wrong. We spend the night together even if we had to walk miles to the other house. We fight together and we fight each other, but we protect each other. These I call day to day friends that soon fade away when they family move on to another area.

Another friend was a white boy name Frank Pannell. Still is a friend. Saturday and hollerdays and summer days when we were not in school or working, we would get together and play, or go hunting and fishing. They stay down on the Harrington farm along Preston Road and we stay on Ray Haggard farm. He had a gun and I had a gun. So we would go hunting, kill rabbit or squirrel. And then we would split them up. He take half and I take half. We once climb a tree and capture three baby squirrel. He keep two and I keep one. We brought them home and feed them bottle milk from the cow. Finely I gave my one to Frank and he raise them and keep them for I don’t no
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how long. He is still a lover of small animal.

Because in my growing up days there just weren't that many boys around where I lived, I hung around grown up men a lot. My cousin Almond Drake was older than my dad and never did marry. He live with Uncle Ronney and Aunt Emma all his life. I would think he was a lonely man. We became attach to each other as we work together and I spend a lot of time with him in the field driving his team while he pull corn. We become like a older brother taking care of a young brother. By the time I was eleven or twelve, I move in with him. He cook and clean. And he carrie me every where he went. I stay with Tank until we move away from Ray Haggard place and then almost every Friday night he pick me up and I spend the week end with him until I went to the army.

As a boy I got to know some of the land owners I work for
on the west side of town. Whin I left for the army at eighteen year old, I had no idea that some twenty-five or thirty year later whin I return home as a sargeant, I would become involved with the same men. As a man I was able to go one on one with them and we were able to understand each other feelings and needs. Life gave me a chance to no how they felt about me as a black man as well as me about them. I grant you all men were not as easy as some. There were still that superiority some had in ther heart that being Black was still under that slave mentality and no matter what you did, if you were white, you were right; if you were black, get back. And there were some just as eager to see you get ahead and have a fair share and were willing to do more for the Black if they could, only to find out that if they did they would become an out cast within famley and other peers.

Then there were some men that I and them got close enough to each other we were like brother—men like Willie Carpenter and John D. Wells. These were a special breed of men, especial to me. I shall write about these men and tell what feeling we had for one another as a black and a white man. I hope some day peoples will understand that time, places, peoples, and the enviroment changes and it up to each individual to search ther own heart and become a part of this world that God has made for all men equal. This is my own opinion about what I feel about these men and the life we share together.

I look on Ray Haggard as a head em up, move em out cowboy who sat tall in the saddle as he rode his horse Robbin. He was a farmer as well as a horse, mule and sheep breeder. He raise my dad from twelve year of age and gave him twelve acres for share cropping. He was my famleys source of survival. To me he was all way a welcome site whin he would ride up or drive up to my house.
Ray cared for folk. We may not have had stake and potatoes every day, but he made sure we all way had some bean, flour, and meal in the kitchin and I'm thankful to this day for men like Ray back in those days.

John D. Wells was a man I may not be able to put down on paper the way I feel in my heart. He was a father to the fatherless, he was a mother to the motherless, a brother to the brotherless. He could make you sad with tears at some thing that had happen and he could perk you up whin you were low in spirit with just one or two word.

I met John as boy whin he gave me a job in order to help ends meet for my famley. Later he gave me a job as a man because he trusted me to do the work he needed did. We share many hour together riding up and down the road and on rainy day whin I could not work the field I would drop by the office and we would talk. Every time we have a long talk the name Willie Carpenter came up because John grew up with Willie and by this time I had a strong relationship with him too.

John all way make sure you had plenty of food to eat. And he would fix food and bring it to the field to you. He all way ask me how was my famley doing and especial how was my Dad, Pete, doing. He all way had fruit for you at Xmas and on hollerday he would all way say to me, Have you got enough food? You better take off and spend the hollerday with your famley. And he would all way tell you to go to church if you want, even whin we would be bog down and behind in the farming. John was the type of man that had the gentleness of a mother hen with all her bittie chicks, yet he was a man like a stone monument.

Willie Carpenter was one of the most influential men in teaching me about farming after I come out of the army as a sargeant. And after teaching me, he and I set down to his dinner table and over a shot of whiskey he said to me, Sarge, I
think I’m going to retire and I want you to run the farm and take care of the hogs. This responsibility gave me the encouragement to learn more. I learn about hog marketing, grain and cotton marketing. I would keep books. The only thing Willie would tell me is where to plant and how many acres to plant. There were three peoples I would go to. If I want to know about hog, I go to Pat Cothes. If I wanted to no how much fertilizer to spread or seed to plant, I go to John Wells. Whin I need some help to work the fields, I go to my dad.

Willie was a friend and he would back you up as long as you were right. He did not see any color barrier. I never heard any racial slurres come out of his mouth. I did see him get angry at some one whin they use the word nigger. Frank’s girl Elizabeth all way had girl come out to visit. One was John Wells daughter Sarah. During summer months and just about all hollerday there were four or five girl running around the barn in the hay loft. Willie would all way tell me, Sarge, keep an eye on them gals in case they get hurt.

He had some of his friends over one day and Willie and them were all getting ready to leave. I was out in the shop. He told me where they were going and he would not be back for a while and told me to keep an eye on them gals, and his friend made the accusation, You mean to have that nigger watch over them white girls? Willie got angry. Said, You dam right. I trust Sarge to take care of any thing I got. So he told them they could go with out him. He just soon not go with a bunch of fool like that. And that put a seal and bond tie with Willie and I.

There is another thing Willie would do. He tell me whin I got ready to go fishing to take off. If I ever got sleepy or felt bad while working, find me a shade tree or knock off and go home. He and I would all way go hunting the first two or three days of dove season. This was good old Willie.

Miss Ammie Wilson was a strong hard core woman who had
some thing else going for her. She was a beautiful woman. But she did not let the beauty go to her head. You would have to look into her eyes and see the smile on her lips only to feel that behind those eyes and under neath that smile and down under neath that beauty, she had kindness, she had love, and she had care and concern about the peoples she came in contact with.

My mother was house cleaning for Miss Ammie with her friend Warnita who was with child. I drop by one afternoon after school to see Mother, and Miss Ammie was telling my mother she could not get any help. I ask her what kind of help she need. She said, I got farm work to do. I got a tractor that won’t run and no body to fix it. I ask her to let me try to make it run. She said, Have at it. I walk out in the field where the tractor was. It was park about the same spot where Wal-Mart is now. The tractor was a Molene. I tinker with it until I got it started, look it over good, got a feel of this type of tractor, and began to plow. It was a three disk braking plow. I plow the rest of the day.

The next morning by sun up I had fill the tractor up and was plowing. I don’t think she no that I was plowing for a day and a half. She walk out across the plow field, stop, put her hand on her hip as if to say, I just be dam. Anyway I finish up that field, come to the house, we sit down, had some thing cold and some cookies. Then she begin to tell me about her self and her sheep. Here I am, a seventeen year old boy and she would say, The Lord is sure good to me. She told me to come eat dinner every day. If she was not there Warnita would feed me.

Then she said, Let go to the sheep barn. She begin to tell me ther name, how old they were, and where they had come from. I remember she pointed out a pair of Hampshire sheep and said, I just got them from Australia and they are my pride and joy. I ask her how much they cost. She told me and I let out a sound like wowee. I had all way been getting up early in the
morning feeding the horses, cows and sheep when we work and live on the Ray Haggard place. So I ask her did she want me to feed her sheep. She turn and look at me and said, Hell no. Nobody feed or fool with my sheep but me. And that was that. No question ask.

Then she want to no about my schooling. She encourage me to get all the education I could. She would give me and keep me with a job, but don't skip school for work. I work for her about two year. She often praise me for my work and said I was the only one she could get any work from.

She was the one woman when I got ready to go to the army, told me, I would like to keep you but where ever you go or what you do, do it the best way you no how. And continue to get an education. She was a strong woman and was willing to give a person a chance to make something out of them self, black or white. While I was in the service she would all way send a hello by my mother and wish me well, and when I came home make sure I visit her. I would drop by and see her when I come home. We would have coffee or tea together and she would fix me a dinner.

I have no regrets about meeting this woman who kept her beauty hid under a straw hat tied down with a scarf, wore riding britches and carried a short whip. A woman of courage and compassion, yet a very strong and demanding woman who could touch your life in a way you could not help from loving. This was Ammie Wilson.

In recent months I think the closest friend I meet was T. V. Drake, son of Uncle Devil Horse. Knowing him all my life and a cousin, but in just recent years he and I become just like brother. We went to church together, we talk about farm and city life, and we work together researching information for a very memory cause: a state marker for Shiloh Baptist Church 100th birthday with the help of our friend Mrs. Frances Wells,
who has become a very close friend and a willing worker for a
great cause. Without Mrs. Wells help I would still be struggling
trying to do what I'm doing now, writing up this remembers of
my self. Where else can you find a friend who will take time out
for something such as this. T.V. thank her and I appreciate and
thank her.