

THE ‘SHOBIE COUNTY FAIR

My first daughter and I have always been buddies. Whenever we were together, she was usually riding up on my shoulders. On Saturdays, our *thing* was to pile into my 1984 Ford Thunderbird and go on errands. In those days, there were no airbags, so little Courtney would sit in the front seat next to me, just as though she were another adult, although she was only four feet tall. We would visit the cleaners and the gas station and maybe run by the barbershop at Maywood Mart. We knew everyone in there and they had salted peanuts there for everybody to eat and you could throw the shells on the floor.

Conversation with Courtney was always interesting. I’d give a million dollars to remember it all, but memory fades. I do remember one day when she said, “Dad, what is a concealed weapon?” My draw dropped as I wondered where she had heard of that and why it was a topic of inquiry. I don’t remember what I told her.

One question I will never forget was, “Dad, are there Indians in this world?” Again, I had no idea where the inquiry came from, but the answer was, “Yes.” Her eyes got as big as saucers and her mouth fell open. “*Really!!*” She gasped. I said, “Yes, as a matter of fact, there are Indians right here in Mississippi.” I didn’t think her eyes could get any bigger or her draw drop more, but they did, as this revelation really shocked her five year old mind. Then, remembering that I was going to take the Chamber of Commerce Bus to the Neshoba County Fair for Jackson Day, I said, “Hey, would you like to go see some Indians?” “Yes” she said.

We piled on the bus with the rest of the Chamber of Commerce early one August Thursday morning. Our mission was to enjoy a little of the fair, hear the Jackson Day speeches and return home. All of the people on the bus were quite surprised to find a little one on the trip and impressed with me for bringing my daughter. But to me, it was natural, because she was my four foot buddy. People would say to her, “What are you going to do today little girl?” She would say, “I’m going to the Shobie County Fair and we’re gonna see some Indians.”

As we got closer to the Fair, Courtney’s excitement turned to a little bit of fear. She asked, “Will the Indians be safe Dad?” “Oh sure, Courtney, don’t worry. The days of Indians and Cowboys fighting are long over.”

As anyone knows who has ever been to the Fair, it is the most distinctive county Fair in the Country, unlike anything anywhere. We got off the bus and it seemed like it was already 100 degrees, even though it was only 10:00 in the morning. We walked down the long row of clapboard houses to the entrance. Courtney wondered, “where are the Indians?” I said, we’re gonna see some. Then she wondered what we were going to do. I said, “they have rides here.” “Great,” she said. This seemed like an unexpected bonus to her.

When we arrived at the carnival, we started going on the rides. There was the normal set of fair and we went on all of them. Of course, after an hour, we were dripping in sweat and full of red dust. Courtney wanted a drink, so we headed to one of the refreshment booths. On the way there, I spotted them. I said, “Look, Courtney, there are some Indians.” She looked around excitedly.

“Where?”

“Right there in front of you”

I guess she expected to see Eagle feathers and leather leggings and moccasins, but, of course, there weren’t any.

“Where, I don’t see them.”

“Right there Courtney”

“There! ‘Don’t look like much to me. They look just like us.’ She seemed disappointed.

I said, “Well, they *are* Indians. Maybe it will be good for you to remember that they *are* just like us.”

We got a coke and then wandered into the speaking square and walked around. I saw some people we knew and we were invited in for a veritable feast of food inside the cabin. If I remember right, there was a window air conditioner, but it was still hot as it could be. Speeches were going on outside, but Courtney was not interested. When I told her there were horses, she got excited, so we proceeded over to the carriage races. While we were there, Ronald Reagan himself came in and spoke to the crowd. I doubt Courtney remembers that.

Tired, hot and full of red dust, we began the trek back to the bus with the rest of the Chamber. As we walked down the last row of houses out to the gate, Courtney spotted a one dollar bill on the ground. Courtney had an incredible knack for finding money. She found a twenty dollar bill once, including the several ones and a five she found on other occasions. She screeched, “Look, Dad,” as she sprinted after it. Courtney was fast (she later starred in track and basketball at JA), but when she got to the dollar bill, it seemed the swoosh of her speed to the bill moved it. She grabbed again, but she missed it. What was going on. She grabbed again, but it move again, and again. And then I heard some laughter. There on a porch above Courtney was an old man with a fishing rod and that dollar bill was attached to the line of that rod. Suddenly Courtney realized what was going on as he reeled the dollar in. She was very disappointed. All the people on the porch and around us laughed. When the man saw the disappointment on Courtney’s face, he said, “Come mere little girl.” She ran up the porch and he put his arm around her and said, “You’re a pretty little girl and a good sport. You can keep this dollar.” She smiled and grasped the dollar and ran back to me. “He gave me the dollar Dad!”

Courtney grew up and went on to Ole Miss and later married her childhood sweetheart Sam Peters and they have set up house here in Jackson, where she runs a store called Mosaic in Fondren. Her marriage was the best day of my life, even though I had a knot in my throat thinking about those Saturday morning rides that were never to be again, as well as the visit to the Shobie County Fair.

I don’t think she has ever been back to the Shobie County Fair, but if she ever goes back, I’ll bet she’ll have her eye out for that old man and the fishing pole.