

THAT'S THE WAY IT WAS IN 1954

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'Writer's Corner'

It was 1954 and we watched June Clever on TV and did not even question why she wore pearls around her neck, high heels on her feet, and an apron around her waist when Ward came home for dinner – we wanted to believe that world and wanted to be part of it. We



watched Uncle Miltie perform on the Texaco Hour, dressed in drag every week and did not question his sexual orientation; in fact we would have likely not known what that meant. Watching Red Skelton turn his hat upside down and be a little boy, or get dragged under the curtain every Sunday night never ceased to be funny. Some moms worked outside the home but most stayed home and took care of the kids.

We took our cars to filling stations (or service stations) with big covers for us to drive under and the man who ran it came out in a uniform and filled the tank, checked the oil and water, put air in the tires, and tore off some green stamps which your mother could trade for toasters, and electric skillets. Lots of mothers could not drive and no self respecting man would ride in a car with a woman driving – it was unmanly. A good-sized house was 2,000 square feet and often less, and a farm could be bought for seven thousand dollars. Rock and Roll was just hitting the radio, but Your Hit Parade was what everyone was watching on TV. No one thought Rock and Roll was here to stay, except the teenagers – Frank, Perry, Rosemary, and Dean were where it was at on the music scene, and the other was just a passing fad.

Words were used differently and a hoe was what you used to chop the garden, if you were gay you were only lively and happy, no one thought regular people would ever become dope-eaters. Alternate lifestyles, live-ins, and Johnny has Two Mommies were meaningless phrases and most of us were without a clue concerning those things and wished to stay that way. People could be pro-choice and pro-life both then; they were not mutually exclusive terms.

When I was growing up in Carthage, we went to prayer meeting on Wednesday night and no coach or drama teacher would dare schedule any school event on that night lest they incur the wrath of our mamas. Bread came in two distinct groups, that which you made at home which included corn pone and hoe cakes or biscuits and yeast rolls or you could eat loaf bread from the store. We had Arsh (Irish) potatoes and sweet potatoes with dried beans – never white beans or great northerns.

Adie made teacakes (cookies) every Saturday and we kept the milk cold in the frigidare. When we went to the store we had things put in a poke, never a bag like now or sack like up north. Old men wore shoes through the week, but slippers on Sunday. Everyone went

to the grocery store to get food, and not one went to a supermarket. On Halloween we had a punkin and pumpkin seemed pretentious. We got dog tried and my grandmother said you were bilious when your stomach hurt.

The few cars that had turn signals we said to have blinkers and I suspect my grandchildren will never know what fender skirts were. Our fathers took a turn of corn to mill and our grandmothers kept flour in the flour barrel. When we were sick, we went to the drug store and bought patent medicine. In those days no one had ever heard of NASA, and the moon just might still be made of green cheese. Cars and homes didn't have air conditioning and businesses that did advertised "come inside it's cool." Pantyhose was not known as a single word, and women going into public barelegged was as unthinkable as a preacher wearing a Speedo in the pulpit. Church houses in the country did not have pews, they had benches, and a sanctuary was a place birds were kept.

No one had ministers, or pastors, but everyone had preachers and that was their main job description. Businesses had calculators and comptometers and Dell was a valley, Gateway was something you walked through, and Apple was something you ate. People dressed up to go to church and wore ties to go shopping downtown. Women wore white gloves on their hands and girdles on the rest of them. Everyone read the comic strip every day, and almost everyone could tell you what Mutt and Jeff, Beetle Bailey, Snuffy Smith, and Dick Tracy was doing the day before.

Sitting in the shade was a favorite pastime and no one ate cantaloupe but everyone had mush mellon. You went down to the cellar to bring up a can of green beans your mother had canned last summer and out to the smokehouse to cut off a slice of middlin for breakfast.

No one had bathrooms but everyone had a toilet and people burned their trash in the burn barrel in back of the house or threw it on the trash pile at the end of some country road.

Cokes were 6 cents and came out of a red and white box with water and ice inside and giant Baby Ruth Bars were a dime. If you picked up bottles from Co colas, you could get a penny for them from the store. Milk came in glass bottles, and freezers on the ice box were roughly the size of two shoe boxes, which was ok because not many frozen items were available at the store.

People we knew didn't eat in restaurants except when there was no other choice and they were called cafes – unless of course it was an automat like the one in Cookeville.

The only thing I could never understand was why that slice of cherry pie looked so plump, ample, and fresh behind the glass and was dry, shriveled, and chewy when you took it out. One of the great mysteries of life I guess. Have a blessed day and may all of your slices of pie be just as you thought they would be.

Author of the books: *Pioneers, Preachers and Patriots: The Chaffins of Roaring River, Jackson Co., TN and Ridin' the Blinds.*

*Read more about Robert Rogers Chaffin in the Chaffin files and read more Writer's corner stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>