

The Barber Shop



I grew up in a four chair barbershop near the main gate of the Standard Oil refinery in Baton Rouge. It was my father's shop. Business was good. Many men got a "trim" every week. Neatness was in.

The old original shop was on the same side of the street as the refinery in a commercial strip which included, north to south, a drug store, the barbershop, a saloon and a variety store. Across the street was a hotel, another saloon, a grocery, hardware store and a dry goods (don't hear that much any more) store. I loved the ambience.

As a child, I spent a lot of time down there. It was the 30's, those pre-war years. I have good memories of those years. But I was a child. I remember those times as happy times. They were not easy years for working class people. Soon the world would change forever. I heard talk in the barbershop. Looking back, nobody had a clue.

I learned later that it was a dangerous place. Baton Rouge was a deep water port and the refinery was the destination. There were shootings, knifings and fights. I was oblivious to that world. I felt safe. I would go into the saloon and stand on the brass rail and hold

onto the lip of the bar to buy a bag of Tom's Peanuts. They knew me. They knew my father. "Just one bag, Jerry?"

I loved getting a haircut. Often, as a teenager, I'd get the "works". That included a shampoo, cut, a vibrator massage and as needed, a dandruff treatment for my terminal dandruff. I also had a bad complexion. My father would occasionally treat me to a "mud pack" facial. Yes, you heard it right. He would smear this stuff all over my face and neck. As it dried, it would draw "impurities" out of the skin and I would walk out of there as rosy as a fall sunset and feeling all new. Of course, the price for all that was just right.

These days there is so little to do to my hair that I can hold my breath for the time it takes. I really miss it. Not just the hair (smiling) but the process.

I still enjoy experiencing constants that remain down through the years. The hair on the floor, the banter, the old magazines, the spinning striped pole. The general "maleness" of the place. It's one of the few places a man can go and be touched and feel good about it.