

THE PIT

I wanted some Oklahoma bar-b-que. I always do when I come back to my hometown. The three of us (Pat, Anne, and me) went straight from the airport to the small bar-b-que place, on the corner of Greenwood and Marshall in Tulsa.

As we walked through the door at the small cafe, the sight of it brought back memories from my earliest days as a boy. For me, this is where my education in life began.

My cousin Pat, picked me up at the airport and we waited for my lady, Anne, to come in from Chicago. Her plane was to arrive in less than an hour after mine landed, we were rendezvousing in Tulsa. I'm just getting back from Europe, and I'm treating for the meal that I have a taste for. This is my ritual as soon as my feet land on Oklahoma soil.

Pat nearly died, when he realized, that "my lady" was the tall, blond stewardess who came running towards me, as soon as the plane door opened. He appeared even more nervous when we embraced and we kissed. He still had that separate race mentality thing happening, and he feared the worst could happen if someone didn't like the fact that I was meeting this lady of another color. After all, we were still in the southwest, and not that far removed... from the Emmett Till tragedy.

I am a musician and a world traveler having seen many things like this. So, I knew that times had changed somewhat, at least for me. By now, such thoughts were the farthest things from my mind. I just want some bar-b-que, and to have a great time with my lady.

REVELATION

We discovered we were related (Pat and I) when we competed against each other on the baseball diamond. His mother, Miss Ruby Norton, saw me one day when Pat took me home with him, and she asked me; "Boy what's your momma's name?" I told her my mother's name was Georgia Barnett, and she told me in no uncertain terms: "Boy, you my brother Lonnie's boy. Your daddy's name is Lonnie Gaines. You look like he spit you out."

I had never wondered who my father was, nor, had I ever asked my mother. When I went home and asked, momma said nothing about this then, and never did, for the

rest of her life.

This revelation set off a chain of events in my life, that led to a lot of confusion about who I was, who my father was, and so on. Another time, another story. For now, it's just about getting some bar-b-que.

I grew up eating bar-b-que in Tulsa and there's something about coming home that always makes me want my first meal to be a plate full of different kinds of meats that I remember so well. I can taste bar-b-que before the plane lands at Tulsa's airport.

EDUCATION

Brother Alec's Bar-B-que Stand was located at the corner of Greenwood and Marshall streets. My education about life, and my fondest memories of bar-b-que started here. The bar-b-que stand, (named after my uncle), belonged to Uncle Alec and my Aunt Margie. They were the original owners of the small café that had the "Best bar-b-que in town."

The place has changed hands and names several times over. Now its called Colman's Bar-B-Que. However, I can remember as far back as 1944 or 45, sitting in my aunt's place, just eating bar-b-que and listening to the rhythms of the day.

Uncle Alec, died in '48 or '49, I can't remember the exact year. That is just about the time I went to help my mother's older sister in the bar-b-que stand. Actually, it was a café, but for some reason, they were called bar-b-que stands.

MOVING THE PIT

The eating establishment had been located a few blocks south when I was even younger, before the move north to the corner of Greenwood and Marshall. I can remember helping to move the parts of the place, chairs, pots and pans, the wood and all, to the new location. The new address was 1178 North Greenwood, right across the street from Ramsey's Drug Store.

What I remember most about the move was that I got a chance to help my uncle,

and several other men, move the pit. It was the moving of this pit that set the next stage of my young life, and is still etched in my mind. Helping grown men to move something as important as the bar-b-que pit, was like the coming into manhood for me. I was being allowed to do what grown men did and I was proud. I must have been all of eight, or nine-years-old. Time has erased the actual year, but I remember it well... just like it was yesterday.

THE CEREMONY

After the pit was safely in place at the new address, there was a ceremony for its reconstruction. The bricks from the old pit were broken down and rebuilt in the new place, one brick at a time. I stood amazed seeing how they could take old bricks and make them look so new again. When they finished, it was a work of art, as they placed each brick in the exact spot that it came from. It was a sight to see; artistic masonry at its best.

HISTORY OF THIS PIT

Now, the pit itself was something else. It was a heavy cast iron, half-moon shaped thing, that looked like it was one-half of a huge barrel. It had two doors that could be lifted up revealing a heavy two-sided grill. One side was for the cooking, (or the “queing) and the other side was for the meats already bar-b-queed and awaited hungry mouths.

THE CROWN JEWEL

The pit was the “Crown Jewel” of Brother Alec’s bar-b-que stand. It was deeply crusted with probably thousands of pounds of meats that had been cooked in it for ages. The memory of the succulent aroma makes me salivate to even think back that far back.

I surely didn’t do much in the way of carrying the pit that day, but I know I was there and I had my hands on it, so, for me, I helped as much as the other men. After it had been placed in its permanent spot we “blessed it”, with a beer for the men, and a big R.C. Cola for me. I felt like a full grown man.