



## **AUTHOR'S NOTES:**

This is one of many stories I have collected over the years. I have written it as close as possible to how it was told to me, including the slang, and to my knowledge, every word of it is true.

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## **ONE OF MY UNCLE BOB'S TALES:**

**BY BARNEY BARNWELL**

It was the summer of '43 as I recollect because the chiggers was the worst I can remember. You couldn't even walk to the corn crib without a hundred of em latchin' on to ya dove breast much less be a workin' down in the woods like we was. I remember as a kid mama linin' all us younguns up, with not a stitch on, and dabbin' fingernail polish on 'em, to smother 'em so she said. Didn't smother us none though. Hell, you could hear us hoopin' and hollerin' in the next county, nine naked younguns doing the huckel buck. Looked like some kind of heathenistic matin' ritual.

Anyhow, they was this colored feller that worked with me by the name of Silas Jackson. Now I had knowed Silas since we was kids. So we had played, worked, got drunk, done time, and done 'bout every other fool thang you could thank of for most of our lives. He was a hard worker, tried his best to provide fer his wife and kids, and was as loyal as a Alabama Democrat.

Now me and ole Silas had spent the last two years building us up a purdy good business a makin' and distributin' our own white liquor. Everybody knew it, including the law, but it was hard times so everybody just kinda overlooked it. Everybody 'cept them federal boys. Course we had the local boys paid off. Times were just as hard fer them. Hell, everybody gotta eat.

It was about dinner time, 'cause I was bringin' the milk up from the branch when ole Silas came lankin' up in the yard with his shoulders all hunched over, like they get when ya been plowin' a mule most of ya life. He took a seat on the steps, looked out across the field and said, "they got me last night". I asked, "why the hell ain't you in jail?" Silas turned around and said, "cause they want you and they says if I don't help em get ya I'll be in there long enough to make up fer it". Well sir, me and ole Silas had been around long enough to know how things work. So I sit down beside him and we commenced to try and work things out.

Now the problem wasn't Silas or me going to jail. Me and him had done plenty of that, most everybody in these parts had. Hell, if me or him either one had a family reunion we would have to hold it at the County chain gang camp. The problem was keeping the business a runnin'.

By daylight, and a half gallon later, we had figured out what we was gonna do. Silas was gonna do his time and I was gonna tend to his wife and kids and keep the business runnin' best I could. In those days when ya got caught, if they knowed ya, you just went on down and turned yerself in. And thats what ole Silas done. First thing I did was go and buy Silas' wife a truck. She didn't know how to drive it, so I took her and the kids to buy groceries whitch I continued to do ever week 'til Silas' debt to them Washington Yankee somes a bitches was paid.

Now days, just like it was back in those days, ain't no different when it comes to a federal penatentury. They don't send no poor colored man to no place thats got a swimmin' pool. Besides this was a white liquor crime not a white collar one. So they sent him to the chain gang camp at Spartanburg. Now this was a good thing cause, like most everywhere else round here, I had connections there and favors owed. The fact I had me a cousin that was one of the guards didn't hurt none neither.

After a little meetin' with our beloved County officials and an exchange of laffin', liquor, and loot we was ready to go.

Every Tuesday and Friday mornin' 'bout five, Ol Silas and the guard would pile up in the county dump truck and head up here to Fangerville to pick up a load of liquor, haul it back to Spartanburg in the back of that official County dump truck, make all the deliveries in it and be back to the camp by noon. Now that worked out just fine until folks got to askin', what in the hell was that truck doing way up here in this part of the County. So we had to come up with a better plan.

Now my cousin the guard is kinda hard to figger. I don't know if he's got balls as big as mash barrels or if he's just dumb as dirt. I 'spect it's the latter, but he come up with the idea of building a still right behind the chain gang camp. I laffed about as hard as I did when my unsuspecting brother took a shit on a yeller jacket nest. Now sir, that was a site to behold. After I calmed down a mite I got to thinkin' 'bout it and it wasn't that bad of an idea. The camp was right there on the edge of town with plenty of woods to conceal it, and who in the world would ever think of lookin' fer a still at a chain gang camp.

So thats what we did. Ever night when they had lights out, the guard would come and let Silas out and we would make up and run that mash like they weren't no tomorrow. Nobody ever suspected a damn thing, we went right on makin that liquor from the back of that chain gang camp and makin' them deliveries out of the back of that old County dump truck fer almost a year. And I'm proud to say we never missed one delivery. And by God thats the truth if I ever tolt it. Which ain't been often.

