

# Beaumont Enterprise Daily Newspaper

## **“Store Robbery Remains Vivid Memory of My Boyhood”**

September 4, 2004

By JESSE DOIRON, Bridges to Life Volunteer in Beaumont, Texas  
Beaumont Enterprise Daily Newspaper

Growing up in the 50s, in the north end of Beaumont, I thought every kid in the neighborhood was a first or second cousin. I had aunts and uncles on both sides of my house, around the corner, and at the end of the street. Eisenhower was president, and “As the World Turns” was as edgy as a TV show could get.

Back then, franchising hadn’t hit yet, so most convenience stores were mom-and-pop operations called “groceries” or “markets” or “corner stores.” In our neighborhood, an old Italian-American ran the local shop. He and his family attended the Catholic church where I was baptized. That made him “church family,” so when he asked, “How’s it goin’ Sonny?” I knew he really meant it even though he didn’t know my name.

I saw the old storekeeper pretty often because that’s where my dad would send me off to fetch him a pack of unfiltered Chesterfield Kings. I got to keep the change from the two bits I got off Dad, though I usually blew it all on Lickamade, bubble gum, or little wax figures filled with colorful nectar. The dangers of tobacco and poor dental hygiene were muted in those quaint years.

One Saturday afternoon, I was at the store to pick up a pack of smokes for Dad and cash in some returnable bottles I’d scavenged from the deep, steep-banked ditches along Concord. I noticed the friendly old proprietor was all bandaged up and looking nervous from behind his till. He didn’t say “hi” like he usually did. He didn’t say much at all to me. He was talking to another man who looked concerned, angry, and sorrowful. I paid my meager debt as if to a stranger and left thinking something grown-up-odd was going on. That kind of aloof transaction happened several more times before I mentioned it to Mom, who then revealed to me the terrible reason why our neighborhood store was closing down – robbery.

The happy old man who sold me sweets had been hit pretty hard by the bandit. The crime had lasting effects on the old storekeeper. He couldn’t handle the long days at the counter anymore, and the occasional stranger dropping in for a quick purchase made the once avuncular merchant visibly tremble as he counted out change.

As a child, it never occurred to me that a “stick up” would be scary. After all, I’d seen lots of violence on “Gunsmoke” and “Highway Patrol.” The bad guys always got what was coming to them – “Ten-Four!” The shows ended in music with a king-size cigarette commercial signing off the hour. I never thought about how difficult it must have been for him to go to work wondering whether somebody might kill him just to get the day’s receipts. He got worse at counting change. He never called me “Sonny” again.

Now, as a grown man, I know what happened. His brutal memory beat him down every day until, in the end, he just gave up and quit, closed down, and let go of the business.

Since then, the neighborhood store's become a florist shop. Almost all of my aunts and uncles have died. There are only a few cousins left in town. I live in the west end, now, and rarely visit the boyhood places where I played cops-and-robbers with cap guns and cousins. When I do, I remember that store robbery and how much it changed things.

Guest columnist Jesse Doiron will be master of ceremonies for the Jefferson County Coalition for Victims of Crime 16th Annual Crime Victims' Candlelight Vigil on Thursday at 6p.m. in the Jury Impaneling Auditorium at the County Courthouse. The event features John Sage, founder of the Bridges to Life program, as keynote speaker.