

The old slab by the frozen food plant once was the floor for a red brick building operated as a garage and filling station. The reason the garage and filling station could be added is that sometimes the management stopped a dice or card game long enough to fill up the family cars.

Ones of us down the street working as shine boys and porters in the barbershops knew to be on watch toward the garage. Many an "erupt-us" broke out, as fist fights were called in those days. Doctor Deal delivered a sermon along with the lips and lids he stitched up, especially if the smell of beverage alcohol prevailed, which it nearly always did.

Around the shine stand, there was enough talk to handicap the fights. Some 'ol tobacco chewer who couldn't spell shoe, much less have a shine, would move about two feet from the stand and offer to bet 'ol Jim Smurl would whip Willis the next time they drank Red Frambo's home brew and shot dice at the garage.

Now understand, no one around the barber shop would have voted that they wouldn't have a fight if they became indisposed on Frambo's homebrew. Red's beer deserved support two important ways: one, with two yeast cakes to the crock; two, with a nickel a bottle tax by the sheriff.

We liked to think about how easy the sheriff got his nickels compared to the dimes we earned shining shoes.

Old Dave, my partner, would say "Gawd-a-mighty, think, Monte, how many nickels that must be all over Mertzon, Barnhart and Sherwood. He gets to ride around in a big car. Gets to carry a .45 pistol in case somebody forgets to give him a nickel; before they even swallow, he shoots 'em."

Dave's barbershop closed at dark. He'd come over and help clean up. Maybe shine a pair of shoes with my stuff if I was tired or behind. To show the kind of guy he was, the night the old man shot at his lady friend's young suitor three times across the street in front of the post office, the boy who worked at the drugstore and me ran the other way. Dave ran toward the shooting to see who was killed. (no one)

For a long time after we started day working on the ranches, Dave and his brother Milton had their checks made out to their mother. I think I told you once how Gertrude could graft a leg from one pair of blue denims to another pair as good as Levi Strauss. The bookkeepers over in Angelo must have thought Gertrude Farrington was a good cowboy, because she sure worked on a lot of places until shearing season was over ...

We never went inside the garage unless someone sent us. None of our shine stand customers hung out there. Each group had a place – the drugstore bench, the Texaco station, Doc's billiard and domino hall, and the Harkey garage.

Abby West, Mac McCarty, and "Sweet" Davis, no surprise, hung out at Davis Garage, Abby's Restaurant and McCarty's Hotel on the south end of Main Street. They didn't have fights. Mrs. West made good hamburgers. She often threw in potato chips on a ten-cent deal.

I wonder why our mothers allowed us to work down in all that street mess. They didn't drink home brew or bootleg whiskey. Until the Monopoly game became popular, they wouldn't have seen a pair of dice. When did they see a pool cue if women were forbidden to go into pool halls where a dime cue paid the cover charge, profanity fumed in the air, and tobacco smoke cast a haze?

"Doc" is gone, but his pool hall building still stands as a locker plant. Livestock bones and skulls take the haunt out of buildings. After all these years of slaughtering, the place is no longer haunted. You walk in and immediately think of peppered bacon and ground hamburger meat.

Next door, the floor of Harkey's Garage that's left over still tremors. After all these years I can remember where the old cash register sat on a desk. I can tell when I pass through the door by the way the concrete feels. There's a difference in the driveway and where all that gang used to hang around up front inside in the winter, discussing women in Fort Worth and whiskey over in Angelo.

It's no fun to have all those old dice-shooting, homebrew spirits stimulating your hind legs. It's just plain as that day I heard Bill holler "eight-ta from da-kata, the county seat of Wise." Were Dave around, he'd take up for me. He and I were good partners.