

How an Old Can of Grease Started a Friendship

Time is an unusual commodity. It slips by so casually that the passed portion is not always easily measured. That is the case with this story. How many years ago was it that I first met the friend of this story? All I can say is that it was quite a few. Let me trace my footsteps and recall a treasured memory. Having succumbed to a disease called Collecting many years ago, I like flea markets and antique shows. Someone told me about one being held in Brookfield, New York on a certain weekend. To get the jump on the crowd I was told to go on Thursday. Unfortunately, when I arrived no one was there but me because the show did not start until Friday. It was early in the morning and the question was what I should do for the remainder of the day. About then I remembered an old time gun collector and dealer that I had met just after World War II ended. His name was Glade Keith. I had met him and his friend Ralph Holdridge at gun shows many times through the years, but had never been at Glade's house. Now I was only a few miles from North Brookfield where he lived. Part of that day was spent in an enjoyable visit with that long time friend. It was time to head home. Our local bank had a branch office at Edmeston. I had never been to that village and now it was on my way home. The hills in that area some thirty or so miles south of us are picturesque and dotted with quaint villages. Soon I came to one of these villages. The village was South Edmeston. On the right side of the street was an old store with the surrounding residents and had succumbed to that, which some call progress. That old store called to me from the past and I just could not go by without stopping. When I went in, I met one of the most congenial men that I have had the honor to know. His name is Wallace "Wally" Lidell. Three Lidell generations of his family had owned the store. It was sort of semi-operating and doubtless a shadow of its former self. The amazing thing was that the shelves were still laden with boxes of merchandise, which spoke of generations of yesterdays that had slipped away. It was like a time capsule. The greatest thing about the store was Wally. We both liked to visit. He is eight years my senior and that eight years saw Wally in the Second World War. He served just as had succeeding generation of his family in earlier conflicts. On that first visit, I took inventory of that old store so to speak and Wally welcomed me. A shelf in the small storeroom still held old ammunition, bullet molds and dozens of interesting other things. Then I found a few small square tin boxes of axle grease. They had a picture of a whale on them and the product name, "Whalene". These cans had survived on that shelf from the Horse and Buggy days. As a collector of horse related artifacts, I really wanted one of those cans. I asked Wally if he ever sold anything. He said he very seldom did, but these were something he really did not want to part with. We spent some quality time together that day. When I got ready to leave, he gave me one of those cans I wanted so badly. I treasure that can today, but not as much of as I do Wally's friendship. I went there as a stranger that day, but through the ensuing years Wally Lidell and his wife Sally have become my very special friends.

Skip Barshied

April 26, 2006