



Sunday Rat Killin’

My family were churchgoers—we went to the First United Methodist Church. Living in the Bible Belt was a big chore for most young folks, especially when you came from a small town. You were put under the microscope, plus there was a lot of competition in towns of this size because everyone knew what you wore, when you got it, and how much it cost. You might say it wasn’t a real Christian way of lookin’ at things, even though there were six to seven churches in the area.

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The First Baptist Church was the big one in the community, then you had the Pentecost which was big as well. The Baptist could sing but the Pentecost could raise the roof and shake the floor... Hallelujah! The Catholics had to drive to Malden, which was around ten miles to the north. We had two families in Gideon that made this trip every Sunday. Dr. Alan Gubin was our doctor and he was Jewish, so I've been to some bar mitzvahs in my life. This covers most of the bases of religion in Gideon. For the most part we all hung out together, but us Methodists were considered heathens. In our church basement we had dances and to top it off we had a pool table. Those Methodist are just playin' with the Devil ... 8 ball to the corner pocket.

On the other side of the coin, Gideon had no fewer than four to five bars, and some that were floaters—



El Morraco back in the day

the kind that would be here today and gone tomorrow. There was Murphy's Pool Hall that was across the street from the Gideon Anderson lumber company, and Gibbs bar which was right smack dab in the center of town and had a real pretty round window that was blue. The Idle Hour Club wasn't always idle—on certain nights it was hoppin'. Then, there was the El Morocco which was just over the train tracks on the north side and was the wildest place around. If you were a goer of the El Morocco you were for sure goin' to Hell. A few people of this era carried a pistol close, either on 'em or in the truck. You might have only one to two "killin's" a year, but alcohol and weapons didn't mix, and apparently neither did some of the women.

My mom filled me in on the weapons of choice. She was an RN and saw a lot of people come into the hospital with both gunshot and knife wounds. Some walked out, some didn't. Doctors McCoy, McKaskle, and Gubin were always on call.

After church we would go back home to eat Sunday dinner. Dinner was lunch to us and supper was dinner to farm families. If we were livin' high on the hog we might go over to Clarkton and eat at the Clarktonian Café—a three-mile trip for a real tasty meal. The Clarktonian was hooked onto a gas station on the south end of town and was known for its roast beef and mashed potatoes. The cost was \$2.75, and with a drink it was \$3.00 ...

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expensive but manageable. If you wanted to splurge you went to the Anderson House Hotel in Gideon. They had around four rooms that were rented out, but mainly it was kept open for Mr. and Mrs. Anderson when they came down from St. Louis. They owned the Gideon Anderson Lumber Company, which was the lifeblood of Gideon for years. When you ate at the Anderson House it was considered high cotton. They were known for their fried chicken, which was served family style, meaning all the trimmings were served in big bowls. Mashed potatoes, green beans, corn, baked rolls and cornbread would just keep comin' as long as you could shovel it in your mouth. The cost was \$4.25 and this included the drink, but dessert was \$.75 extra. It was worth it but it did stretch the pocketbook.

After a Sunday dinner there would usually be a short pause or a break. Once everybody got a second wind, my mom and dad would sometimes take a drive to check out the farm and in all probability take a break from my brother and me, the Gruesome Twosome.

It was a cool March day in the Bootheel. My dad did not like having rats around and he told Eric and I that we could have free rein on getting rid of the rat population. We were ages fourteen and thirteen and were going to make a mark on the agriculture community as rat exterminators. This would be a big mistake on Dad's part, but it ended up being worse on me and Eric.

We put our brains to work and agreed that two heads were better than one. To exterminate these critters we decided to use diesel, gas, and Fritz.

This was the experimental stage of our lives, so for two weekends on Sunday afternoons we took care of and killed all the rats over at the grain bins across the road. Our method was simple: we took five gallons of gas and five gallons of diesel, then poured them down the hole and waited for the rats to come out. Farm gas only cost about \$0.28 a gallon and diesel was even less, so for about \$2.50 you could literally have a blast. When a lot of rats would come out, that's when it got fun. Each of us carried a baseball bat or a machete, and when these suckers came out drenched in this concoction of gas and diesel, they would scurry around in circles, blinded. We'd beat the shit out of 'em or chop 'em up with the machete. Fritz got in the action too. He'd grab one and flip it up in the air or put it back into play where Eric and I could get back in the action. What a dog, he could really hunt!

On one particular Sunday, we were getting all the goodies together to go out to do some rat killin' when Eric said, "Let's go to the grain bins."

I said "No, I think we got all the rats over there."

"Where do we go then?"

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I paused and thought. "That's easy, the pump house."

The pump house was a small building, eight by ten feet. This was where our main water source was for the house. We put down a point well sixteen feet for our water supply, then built the house around the well. We heavily insulated the walls so it wouldn't freeze, and added a small door and a light that was always kept on to keep the chill out. Our pump house was right behind the garage, forty feet from the back door. Rather than having a long run, this would help keep the pipes from freezing and everybody would be happy.

Hum baby, were goina have a real good time; new huntin' territory and I was sure there were rats galore under the pump house. We dumped in five gallons of gas and five gallons of diesel down the holes. Fritz was in his ready position. Mom and Dad had just left for their Sunday drive. We really wanted to do a good job on this one since it was right next to the house. We didn't really tell our folks about the ten gallons of gas and diesel, or about the two previous excursions over at the grain bins. We had a 500-gallon diesel tank and a 1000-gallon gas tank—once again, this stuff was cheap. So, for less than \$3.00 we were goina have a blast. Well, sorta.

We were waiting for some action to happen, but nothing was falling our way. I told Eric, "I'm goina go

inside the pump house and see if they might have come out on the inside.”

The pump house light was on and I saw the rat holes. They were about the size of the calf on your leg. Some of these rats got pretty big so you definitely didn't want to get bit by one of these suckers. I could see why people ate these things in third world countries.

Hallelujah, I saw a rat stick his head up. He saw me and exited to the outside. I yelled out to Eric that a rat was comin' out. “Go git 'em!” But my voice was muffled from all the insulation.

Eric and Fritz were on the outside doing their thing and I waited for probably close to a minute to see if anything might come back my way. Finally, one fat sucker came scurrying back into the pump house through the door, and holy moly he was on fire! Literally. Flames were flickering on his hairy back and before I could stop him, he was scampering back down into the hole.

“Holy shit!”

Before I got the “-it out of my mouth, there was an explosion that blew me right out the door. Smoke trailed me right outside where I was on the grass holding my ears, my head ringing. Worse, my brother was rollin' in the grass laughin' his ass off. Brotherly love took over

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and I proceed to pound him. Fritz decided to join in as he thought this was fun time.

What had happened was my brother had decided to take out his matchbook. He started flipping matches at this fat rat that was drenched in this gas-diesel concoction. Well, he got lucky, and it caught the vermin on fire. The rat hit the side of the pump house running and fell down the hole we'd filled with gas-diesel. KA-BLEW-EE!!! I didn't have a chance.

My head got better as I got Eric on the ground and started swatting at him. The blast was over in seconds and the pump house was now on fire, quickly ruining our fun. Smoke was comin' out from underneath and on the west side where the rat went in for a kamikaze. The smoke was white at first, then it turned black.

My ass was grass at this point. Eric always got a free ride. We high-tailed it to the shop to get shovels and pick-axes and we turned the water hose on from the garden. Another great idea. Now we started putting holes in the side of the pump house. We were getting smarter, and decided we'd put dirt down the holes and put the fire out this way, by smothering it. Eventually we got the fire out and then Mom and Dad returned. This was not one of my better moments of life. Even Fritz knew when to exit.