

Auto Biography + Diary of James A. Vincent

I was born in Talladega, Ala. July 14, 1915. I can remember only a few of my early experiences. One such experience was my father coming home from the candy shop, he owned in Bessemer, Ala. My early childhood was about normal for that day and time.

When I was five years of age, we moved from Bessemer to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We moved into an old home place, called the "Hudson Place". The place had been arranged for by a family of Salthene's, who had formerly lived in Bessemer + knew my folks. The place was located about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Gulfport, Miss. in the Orange Grove Community. The old place had many Pecan trees + some fruit trees. My mother + Dad cared for the place, remodeled the house and began truck farming. We had a couple of cows, raised hogs for our own use + chickens for eggs and food.

I remember going with my Dad on Saturday to Gulfport and selling turnip greens, eggs and what ever vegetables we had. This was our only source of income. We of course went to town, as we called it, in a wagon. Very few people had any type of automobile in those days. We would

get up and leave home around 3 a.m. so we could be in town about day break. Everyone was beginning to start their day as soon as it was light enough to see. I remember we would sell between \$5⁰⁰ & \$10⁰⁰ worth of produce. We would then stop by the grocery store and get what staples, (as we called it) for our needs. We bought feed for our cows at times also. We would get home just in time to milk the cows and feed the chickens, eat & go to bed.

We purchased our first car (Model T Ford) in 1926. It was a second hand car, made in 1925. My dad paid \$500⁰⁰ for it. This car enabled us to leave home around 5 A.M. & get our selling done, then get home before 3 P.M. most times. We kept that old car about 7 years before getting another. It definitely served its purpose.

I started my schooling in Orange Grove school when I was seven years of age. I had to wait until I was big enough to walk nearly 3 miles to school. I got my first shoes when I started to school. I had one sister and two brothers. We boys had a wardrobe, consisting of 2 pair of overalls, 2 home made

shirts (made by our mother) 2 pair of heavy cotton underwear and one pair of perogah shoes. If any of these garments were out in a year, that was too bad. We got ^{shoes} close once a year. I remember one year getting a football for Christmas. I wore the toe out of my right shoe, kicking the ball & I went to school with my right toes showing. I never wore my shoes out again that soon.

As I look back on my childhood days, I realize that I was very fortunate in some respects. My mother and Dad loved one another very much. They loved all of our children. I had two brothers and an half sister (Edna). She was 8 years older than I. My 2 brothers were Clarence, who was 5 years older and Eugene who was nearly 2 years younger than I. We were very close as a family. I remember my attitude about my mother. I felt that she could solve any problem I might have. Particularly if I was sick, I knew she could get me well.

I loved to hunt and trap when I was about 8 to 14 years old. I remember catching a coon & opossums one year, that I got enough money for the fur to buy a 22 cal rifle. Believe me, I was afraid of that gun.

We moved from the old Hudson place, as it was called to the Nugent community where we ran a Dairy for Dr. McDevitt as I remember it. I knew I had to get up every morning at 3 AM & milk seven to ten cows, the milk was bottled in quart glass bottles & 1/2 gal. bottles. We sold the milk on our milk route for 5¢ per quart or 15¢ per gallon. Butter milk was 10¢ per gallon. We sold butter also. I don't remember what we got for it.

I was in the eighth grade in school when we moved to the Woodmarket community. I made a lot of friends in the wood market community. The name "Woodmarket" was known by that name because in earlier times people from Wallingburg south brought their sheep to this area on the Biloxi river. Then they sheared their sheep and sold the wool to wool buyers who came on the boats from distant cities. Some from Houston Texas and from the New England states. I remember finishing the eighth grade at Woodmarket school, because I was told that I had the highest grades of anyone at that time. There were only 18 in the class.

I regret that I did not study more, because when I finished high school, I was salutatorian (2nd from top).

I became interested in baseball and basketball. We moved to what was known as the Old Post place, which was about 2 miles from the school. I remember when I was in the 9th grade, a gymnasium was built where we could play basketball inside. I felt like I had arrived up town, I would walk to school and play ball every chance I got. I would rather play ball than eat. I suppose that is why I was called "Spinning Vines". I made the team when I was a junior. When I was a senior in high school we were invited (our team) to participate in a tournament in Covington, La. There was selected by invitation 24 of the best teams in Louisiana and 24 of the best in Miss. We beat Baton Rouge in the finals and won the trophy.

My whole life between the 9th grade and 12th was staying ball, fishing and helping my dad raise vegetables. That is until I was a senior in high school and then I discovered girls. That began to take up some more of my time.

I remember one instance as a youth. There were 3 of us boys & my brother Clarence was 5 years older than I, Eugene was 2 yrs. younger than ~~me~~. Clarence got the idea of building a sky ride with an old steel cable that a saw mill had left when they moved. We nailed boards up the side of a tall pine tree so we could climb up the tree. We attached the cable to the tree about 40 to 50 feet from the ground. We attached the other end to a tree about 200 feet away. We threaded the cable with a one inch lead pipe, about one foot long. We all wanted to be first to go down the ride, but Clarence was the oldest & biggest, so he had to go first. We never thought about the friction heating up the pipe. Clarence got about half way down and had to turn loose & drop about 20 feet to the ground. It took about a week for his hands to get well. We wrapped rags around the pipe & that solved our problem with the regard to the heat, plus some oiled grease on the cable.

Now I will relate some amusing happenings as a youth. When we first moved to the Walmarket area, I was about 14 years of age & we lived in an old house with various barn and chicken houses. We had purchased an extremely large mule to farm with. The Mule was deaf. He was a mean ole rascal. One day my dad asked me to take a sack of corn meal to a neighbor about a mile away. My dad bridled up the ol mule & when I got to my destination, there was a pond of water on both sides of the road & came up to the house. There was a gate that I had to open. The weather was very cold and ice was on the pond. I forgot that one had to jump off the mule or he would throw you when we stopped. I started to get off and that mule threw me about 10 feet out in the pond. The folks at the house saw me and came running out. They thought I might be hurt, but other than being cold, I was alright.

Another experience I had with that ol Mule was this: We were told by dad never to go near that ol mule as he would kill us. He was mean, this made things more interesting for my brothers & I. There was an old flat top chicken house

in the lot where we kept the old mule. Clarence & I cut a long pine pole & dug a hole in the ground & stuck that pole up about 10 feet from the building. We tied a rope to the top of the pole & we would get on top of the house & get a running start and swing way out in a circle & land back on the roof. This was fun. To have more fun we would cook the old mule up close to the chicken house, then sail out over the mule & land on his back & head, then land back on the roof top. The old mule would get so mad, he would kick his heels up in the air & bray. This tickled us so, that we would lay down & roll. There was ~~other~~ other times when we would pick at the old mule, by throwing sticks at him, then run in the nearest shed. One time while doing this, we ran in the shed & the old mule right after us. He was so mad that he turned around and kicked the door down & came in after us. I'm thankful there were rotten boards in the back of the shed because we made holes in the wall in a hurry and got out of there. There are many other instances with that old mule, but I've have related enough.

One time Gene (my brother) + I along with my older brother Clarence had successfully built us a bicycle. We didn't have money enough to buy one, but we found parts here and there at various places and built us a bicycle. We were able to find all the necessary parts except a chain. That chain we managed to buy. One time I told Gene I could out run him down a hill, with him on the bicycle. Of course I could take off a lot faster than he could, so I believed that I could get to the foot of the hill before he could, by him being on the bicycle. Just as I arrived at the foot of the bridge, Gene caught up with me and ran the front bicycle wheel between my legs. I found myself lying in a prone position, with my head in his lap. About that time I tried to jump off and we both went off that bridge into the creek below, bicycle + all. We were not worried about us, but about the bicycle. We had warped the front wheel, but fortunately we were able to adjust the spokes and straighten out the wheel. We never tried that again.

Another experience I had that could have been real serious, or at least the consequences could have been real serious. I was about 10 or 11 years of age and my father + mother had gone to town and left us boys at home. They had told us not to bother the horse that we owned. They knew we liked to ride him. They also knew it was dangerous for us to try to catch the horse by ourselves. Of course I could see no danger in riding that horse so I decided to put a bridle on him. He was in a pasture so I drove him up to a corner of the fence. When I would start to bridle him he would turn + run away. After cornering him 2 or 3 times and he got away, it made me mad. So I hit him with the bridle. When I did he let go with both feet right at me. I still remember seeing those feet coming at me. I ducked, but one hoof caught me a glancing blow on the top of my forehead. It knocked me to the ground and I could see only stars for a while. When I got up and felt of my head and there was a lump that felt as big as a hen egg on my head. My eyes were black + blue + full of blood shot for some time. I know now, I had a concussion. I told everybody I fell + hit my head on a stump.

Another instance that I can relate as a teenager. Sunday was a day we played together. On one occasion, one Sunday night, we knew that an older Husley boy who was a cousin of the boys we played with, was dating a girl who lived at the top of the hill about a 1/4 mile from where we lived. He would go date her each Sunday afternoon and stay until about ten o'clock. He would then leave and walk home. One night my brother + I along with the two Husley boys (our play mates) decided we would scare him. We got an old 55 gallon steel drum + tied an old white sheet around it. We hid in some bushes off the side of the road until he had passed us walking down the hill. We knew he carried his 38 caliber pistol with him, so we would have to be careful. The night was dark. We eased the drum out on the road with the sheet around it and started it rolling down the hill toward him. Since the road was gravelled, the steel drum made a noise as it rolled along. When we got the drum started, we dove in the ditch. When old Ted saw that drum coming toward him, he pulled out his gun and pumped 3 or 4 shots into that drum. Since the drum didn't stop rolling after he shot it, he took off

running. He came back over the next day, as we found out later, to see what kind of animal he shot at. We later told him about what we did. He said he was going to skin our hide, but of course he never did.

When I was a senior in High School (Wabamook N.S.) I played basket ball and had made the team as I have previously stated. My Mother + Dad moved to North Bidoxe, about 5 miles out of town. The school officials got a lady by the name of (Mrs Annie Edwards) to let me stay with, so I could finish H.S. and of course play basket ball for the school. My job was to milk 2 cows and feed the horse + chickens in the evening. When we had a ball game out of town (or a distance away) I would have to get Mrs Edwards's older daughter to do my chores. This worked very well for all parties concerned. I remember that winter being very cold. Of course there was no heat in my room where I slept. I slept on a big feather mattress for the first time in my life. I remember sinking up in that mattress and with about 3 wool quilts, I slept very well.

At the end of that school year I graduated, I then went to live with my parents out in

North Dixie. That Summer I helped my father farm and mainly received some compensation for rounding up cows that was owned by a fellow by the name of Peries. Most of the cows got screw worms in their backs. My job was to either drive them up where we could catch them and doctor them or some time I would rope them on the open range and doctor them. I thought I was a cow boy.

Along toward the end of the Summer I wanted to go to college. I didn't have any money or my folks didn't have enough to help me either. The principal of Woolmarket N.S. wrote a letter for me to the Superintendent of Perkinson Jr. College and asked him to help me if it was possible. I was fortunate enough to be ~~Senior~~ ^{Senior} of my senior class. I went up to the school (Perkinson Jr. College) and had a conference with Mr. Cooper J. Darby, the Superintendent. The school could do nothing for me. When I was going out the door I met the coach of the school. He recognized me. I did not know him. He asked me if I was that forward who played basket ball for Woolmarket N.S. I told him I was. He then asked me what I was doing up there at the school. I informed

him I wanted to go there to school, but I had no money. He said to me, if I would go out for all sports (Football, basket ball + Track) that he would give me an athletic scholarship. I took him up on it and I signed up that day. ~~My~~ Everyone who got any kind of scholarship had to have a job also. My duties were to fire a boiler in the gym, so we could have hot water to bath in, after all athletic functions.

I started out for football, but since I was six feet + an inch tall + only weighed about 140 pounds, I convinced the coach I would get hurt out there and would be no good to any one. I got out of football.

I made the team + played basket ball. we had an average Jr college team. I don't know what our win-loss record was. I made the track team. My part in track was the pole vault high jump and the 440 yrd dash. I wasn't to good at anything except high jump. I managed to get six feet or a little better a couple of times.

Since I had no money to speak of. I don't remember, but I know my ~~dad~~ Dad gave me probably \$5⁰⁰ when I first went up there. I didn't even have a suit case. I only carried my clothes in a brown paper sack. I did have a foot locker as I had managed to get in the National Guard at Biloxi, Miss.

My senior year in H.S. When I went home I brought my first locker back with me that was when I kept what clothes I had and my books. My allowance from home was 50¢ per month. There wasn't a lot of need for money. I ate in the school Cafeteria, I got my hair cut when I went home. My Dad cut my hair.

Since I was in the Mississippi Nat'l Guard, I was put up as a candidate for West Point Military Academy. I studied hard and passed the written exams, however I was too light in weight to pass the physical exam. I was over 6ft, 10in and only weighed 148 pounds. I was known as a skinny Vincent.

After Jr college I sold books and bibles and played basket ball, I earned enough money to pay my way to senior college (MS Southern University) also I received some financial help from my parents. I received my B.S. degree with a Major in Math.

It was here that I met and married Linnie Francis Bullard, the most beautiful girl in the world. She was a freshman at that time. She was a member of the Southern Bells that was later called the Dixie Darlings. They had an international reputation as half time performers at foot ball games.

I had seen her on the campus and one day I asked my room mate who she was. He said that she was already spoken for by another student. I said to my room mate, he was going to have some completion. I first met Janie in the library at 11.30. I of course wanted to meet her so I selected a book name and number and went to the desk where two girls worked. Janie was on of them. I took my book request to the other girl, as I thought Janie would remain at the desk where I could talk to her. Low and behold Janie took off and got the information from the other girl and brought the book to me. The first thing she said to me was, and you are James Vincent. She said to me, I have been wanting to meet you. I said I have been wanting to meet you. She said later that she said to herself, he is as big a liar as I am. Since I knew she lived 2 blocks from the college, I asked her if I could walk home with her. She agreed that was our first date. I asked her if I could come and see her the following Saturday afternoon. She agreed, so that was really our first date. We were married about 6 months later at Jackson, Ms. We went to the state fair in Jackson, Ms. We married Oct 14, 1938. I was to receive my B.S. degree in December. I had signed an agreement to teach math and coach at Columbia, Ms. However they cancelled the agreement.

When they found out I was married - They said
that two people could not live on \$100⁰⁰ per
month, so I would have to pay for my room
and board. I got another teaching job in
Kemper County, West Va. where I was furnished a room
to live in. My pay was \$65⁰⁰ per month. I
coached basket ball and taught Math.

Sept 29, 1981

I left home in Carthage + went to Cindburn, Ala. to talk with Bob + Carol. - I gave them rent money + then we went to Butler, Ga. + sold some knives. We went to Fort Valley, Ga. there we sold some knives + went on to Warner Robins, Ga + spent the night in the Statelite Motel (see motel). We intend to work here until noon + start home. We have done pretty good with sales. Bob + I sold knives off + on for about 2 months. We usually made 4 or 5 hundred dollars each per week, but I paid all expenses and by the time I got home, Bob was the only one making any money to speak of. We did enjoy our time together though. I concluded that I could do better by myself and give him some money than for me to work with him out of one car. All of my sons (3) were very precious to me. I only regret that I did not spend more time with them than I did.