

Dude Todd -

The man who cared.



This is not the sheriff of Deadwood.

This is the sheriff of Routt County
Mr. Ernest "Dude" Todd.

The title tells a great deal about this man. Mr. Todd is unique. His stories tell a lot and his broad grin tells of his life and the things he holds highest. His memories of true friendship and honesty are remarkable.

"I think perhaps you'd like to go back to when I was just a little guy. Well, I was born in Oklahoma, on July 30, 1903, and lived there just long enough to be called an 'Okie'. After that my parents and an older brother, Dennis, moved up to Toponas, Colorado, and then on over to Yampa. The only way to travel in those days was by the stagecoach, and since I was only a few weeks old I don't remember much of the trip.

"I can remember I used to dress up in my jeans and a bow tie to try to impress a cowboy that lived up around Toponas. I was really pretty small, I always used to like the bow ties and that sort of thing. So one day Rob Byrd, a cowboy that used to herd his cattle around the Toponas area, named me 'Dude', and the name has been with me ever since.

"In the days that I went to school we had to walk, and sometimes a long ways. I went to school at Juniper and at Oak Creek and at Morrison Creek. Then, you walked all the way, no buses or cars. The classrooms were all small.

'Little Red School Houses' they used to call them. Of course, one teacher used to have all eight grades. There were these little school houses dotted all around the territory, and this one teacher would have all eight grades. I liked school and all of my teachers. One teacher I liked in particular was Mina Smith who lives down stairs here now. Then her name was Mina Larmar. I never had a teacher or a class that I didn't like. The reason I liked Mrs. Smith so well was that she was a good person, and she had a good philosophy and gave me something to do. That is, she was just a mighty nice lady.

"Team sports were just starting then, you were on your own. You had to finance the sport yourself; there weren't any school programs. Then, all the school did was give you an education.

"When I was around fourteen or fifteen, I used to go to dances. On some occasions we would dance all night and stay to breakfast in the morning before coming home the next morning. All of these dances were either at kids' homes or at the school house. Then, there were always dance contests. When I was sixteen or seventeen I would go to them in Salt Lake City, San Francisco and Boise.

"Other than the dances there always used to be movies. They used to be quite the thing. All of the young people would congregate at the movies and it's always been like that. There were recreation halls and pool halls with the pool

tables and beer parlors just like today. The young folks would always go to all of them. Then, a movie only cost you fifteen cents. I can't tell you much about the movies. I only went to see the young girls, I suppose there was a movie going on, but it's always been that way, boy and girls.

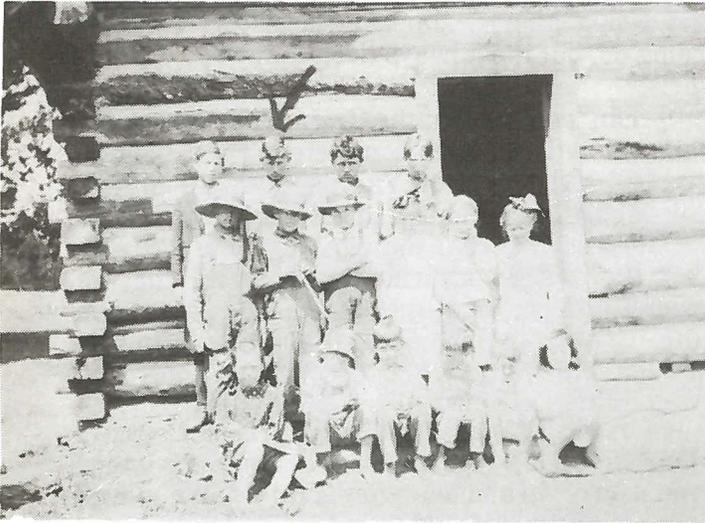
"I can remember the train ride when the railroad had just been completed. They used to give us all rides from Yampa down to almost Phippsburg. I remember that everyone used to get a big thrill from the ride. The only reason that they let us all ride was mainly for the publicity. Everyone would ride because at the time it was a big thing. I recall that the train was nothing like the trains of today, then it only had two or three coaches.

"Our first ranch was on Morrison Creek. I spent my younger years there and in the winter I would go down and work in the mines. We moved there in about 1919 and soon I started working at Mt. Harris Coal Company. I was young then, and, believe it or not, then I worked using a horse and a mule driving full loaded cars from the mine and bringing in the empty cars while there were men building the entries. At the time the mine was fairly good size and all of the work was done by a pick and a shovel, so there were seven or eight hundred men. Now they only have one hundred and fifty men and lots of machines.

"Then in later years we moved to Oak Creek, and I went to work at the Moffat Coal Company. I remember I started working in 1919 and worked there most of the time until October, 1932. Believe it or not when I started working there I drove a horse and mule, pulling coal cars out of the entries while they were building them. Dick Byrd and Joe Hartmen were driving entries, and I'd pull the coal from them, taking out loads and bringing the empty ones back in. I recall that Tom Allen who was mine foreman at the time came up to me and asked me what they were giving us for the loads. At that time I was young and really shoveling the coal and I told him 50 cents per load. Mr. Allen had a very shocked expression and replied, 'No, more! From now on you get a dollar per load.'

"Later I started working at the Mt. Harris mine doing electrical work, and I finally got to be superintendent. I would go around with the foreman that worked the night, and we'd go into a room about three or four hundred feet wide, maybe just long enough to drive in and when the men went in, this foreman would open the lids of the men's dinner pails. If there wasn't two dollars in they would ask, 'Why no two dollars today?' 'Well, the wife was sick and so on.' 'That's no excuse. Tomorrow you better have four dollars in there.'





Dude, 1917 - Notice the log school house; also look at all that hair.

“Back when Oak Creek was beginning to organize it was really rough and tough. Miners are drinkers, but they are fine people. There are no finer people than the working people. Really that’s the good people. But then they do have this drinking problem, and then there are these few who give the whole bunch a bad name. It was pretty rough.

“In 1932 I was hired by the town of Oak Creek as Town Manager. This is just after I left Moffat Coal Company. At the time Oak Creek was one of the larger towns in the area. It was a real Boomtown. One thing that I am rather proud of is that when I went to the town it had the highest tax base in twenty-four counties on the western slope, and I am happy to say that when I left the town it had the lowest in the same twenty-four counties.

“There was a lot of skullduggery going on there. They were paying fifteen cents a kilowatt, the same that they are paying here and in Craig. The Power Utilities Company said ‘We’ll leave it at fifteen cents, if you’ll give us a farm machine for twenty-five years.’

“At night I used to read all the meters on this block and the next day read all on the next block. To be fair you know. We see where they could make money at ten cents so we told them, ‘Why didn’t you put in a municipal system? It wouldn’t cost much, with a one third reduction in power.’

“Oak Creek had a pretty tough name at the time too. Cheap crooks would just knock people in the head and take all they had. We would find them maybe lying on the railroad track. It took a lot to clean the town up, and that was my job.

“I also took part in some mine rescues. We had these gas explosions at Mt. Harris, and I was Town Manager of Oak Creek. I had training, so we were called in to serve. We were down there for two or three days straight, night and day, bringing those people out of the mines. It was quite gruesome, they were so torn up and burnt. It was such a violent thing, crunching mine cars up against the walls and pipes and rails. You spotted people slung up against the walls as if they were alive. They were literally plastered up against the walls. Their ears and eyebrows were burnt off. That was in about 1940.

“Then in 1942 I was elected sheriff of Routt County and held that position from 1942, ’43, and ’44. Crime was just about the same then as it is now. There was a little bit of everything. There was this place in Craig called the Blue Goose and that was the only place that allowed gambling and corruption. Nothing ever seemed to happen. When I was elected sheriff, the Moffat County sheriff came over to have a talk with me and said, ‘Why didn’t I set up a place like that here and they would cut me in on one third of the profits.’ I said that didn’t think that would work here, and I didn’t believe in that sort of thing.

“Mt. Harris also had a lot of strikes, and some of them were really bad. I remember one in particular, when I was sheriff and was called down there as a worker. I wasn’t there long before they had elected me the president of the union. There I was, representing the company, and I said to the superintendent, ‘These men are thinking of hiring me president of the union. What do you think of that?’ He said, ‘Sounds fine to me, all I want is a fair deal.’

“I told him some of the things that were going on, and he said he just couldn’t believe it. I said that it was the truth, and that it was so bad they needed to organize.



Dude and his mother in 1923

"At this time the daily men were making four dollars a day, and the others were making twelve. If there was no money in that pail the next day they would move them down to the bottom where the water was, and there they couldn't make any money. They had to buy the foreman to keep their job. The superintendent just couldn't believe that this was going on, but I had seen it with my own eyes. The men had to have some way to fight back or they could just fire you on the spot. They didn't even have to have a reason.

"I can remember some of the comical ones, and they needed to be fired. The superintendent was standing in the office one morning and this big stocky young fellow came up and the superintendent said, 'You go on down to the office.' The man said, 'I'll go, boss, but I think there is something I think you should know. I don't know a thing about office work.' He was being fired and was just making a joke out of it.

"As superintendent of the Mt. Harris mine, naturally we had to have some production. I could always work well with men, if I say so myself. I had been through the mill and I knew right from wrong. If you treat a man right, he'll treat you right, with a few exceptions. My duties covered everything from finding power to finding men to solve problems. It was really a heavy job.

"One of the major problems that I had to solve was power. In those days we didn't have power like we do now, and never enough. The plants were always undersized because they had been built before machinery had come in. Then along came mechanical mining. They used to mine with a pick and shovel, but the machines needed a lot more power. The power plants were always small, which means a power shortage.

"I first started working out at Mt. Harris in January of 1945, and, well, I was there for three or four years. Then they transferred me up to the mine at Streeter in Craig. When I first started there I was an electrical man, and I had taken a course in mine rescue and First Aid. A friend of mine at that time was the superintendent down there. I was a young man when he was with the Bureau of Mines under the Department of Interior. Since I was acquainted with the man, he hired me to help him with some of the problems he had.

"I had quite a life there because I went to the territory where all of those men had been for a long time. They were established in their ways, and, if I may say so, a lot of them were not doing their jobs. I have always felt you should give the best service you can and do the best job you can. In doing so you may step on other people's toes who just sit about the place and drink a few beers and never study or anything.

"There were lots of strikes when the men began to organize. Some of them were called for, and some were not. I always thought we should go ahead and mine, and then sit down and talk. Both should be able to present his side of the story. I think it should be done this way, get the cards out and put them on the table. That is where the miners made their mistake. They should have gone on serving, then they still would be.

"But, instead they quit mining so the people would have to do without heat. So, they found another method, gas business, and it took over.

"Strikes weren't always the miners' fault either. There was the case of bringing gas into the city of Denver. So what did they do? They apparently wanted it to look different on the face of things, so the gas people hired all these I.W.W.'s to come in and pull a wildcat strike. All the men had to do was come in and say, 'Here I am, here to serve you.' So they took over without firing any shots. If the miners had gone on serving that coal, they probably couldn't have taken over so rapidly. The gas companies paid the I.W.W.'s to come in and strike. At least that was the supposition. They kept saying we are satisfied with their deals, but when they cut us off without fuel, then naturally we're going to go where we could get it.

"I know of a case right here in this town. I'll only mention one name, Ray Monson, the District Attorney at the time, was in the barber shop getting his hair cut and needed some coal. And in come this little fellow that run a mine out of Hayden, see, he was producing this coal while the miners were off. And he come in and opened the door and said, 'What's the best bid I'll get on a couple tons of coal today?' One fellow says nine dollars a ton and another nine and a half, and so on. Then this man told them it's twenty dollars or nothing. Coal at that time was four dollars a ton. So what could Monson do? All he could do is put in something else. So they forced him. You get wronged either way.

"I have seen mining from both sides. I've seen it when the miners had nothing to say to now, when they have too much say. Supposing there was a mine accident. The first thing they would say is, was there any mules hurt, because they owned the mules. They were only worried about the mules and not a bit about the miners.

"Along come something with money in it. Big money, like billions, and along some underworld people come and see these funds piling up, and they move in and take over. Men are just trouble.

"When we were organizing down to Oak Creek they sent in national people to help us get set up. They (the superintendents) used to set up big flood lights that were moved around the camp as a lookout for movement.



“So they did elect me the president of the Local. Everything went smooth for a while, then a wildcat strike was called. There was a bad place on the mainline where they needed to get some timbering done and supports put up. They went on strike and I said to the miners, ‘The company would like to have three men tomorrow to go in and set timber.’ I thought they should do it and all they said was, ‘Don’t give them anything.’ But we had been complaining about that very thing.

“I remember another time. They were using coal in the school, but with the strike they had no coal. The train came with a load of coal and dumped it, and when they came back there were two men just lying on the track who wouldn’t move. Their brakee got out and told these fellows, ‘You win this time, but in the end you lose.’ They were, of course, talking about the diesel engines and were playing right into the hands of these men. The two guys on the track said ‘You have already received your pay for the coal so give it to the schools. Then the brakee said, ‘Let them freeze. It will bring them to their knees faster. This strike was in 1950.

“Mt. Harris ended in sort of a strange way. Coal was getting competition from cheap gas, and Mt. Harris was getting further in and more expensive to mine. The superintendent notified them that if there wasn’t a profit this year the mine could close. None of the men believed it and just kept on working right up to the day it shut down.

“There was this gambler over at Phippsburg, Albert Backhoe, got into this gang with this guy named Charlie Fraiser, who was the professional gambler. One night Albert caught this professional cheating and it really made him mad. He had his knife with him and tried to cut Charlie’s throat, got a whack at it, but didn’t go deep enough.

“I brought him up here for trial. The judge told Albert it would be seven hundred and fifty dollars in costs and if he didn’t have the money to jail he went. Albert said that he had the money in the Phippsburg Post Office, so the judge put him in jail. I quickly said, ‘Judge, may I say something?’ ‘Of course, Mr. Todd.’ ‘Would you accept my check for the money?’ ‘If you are dumb enough to write it I will take it.’

“So I wrote the check and told Albert to go get his money, and when he came back to come over to the sheriff’s office. Albert came back later that night and I told him to go over to the Court House and get my check and a receipt for his money. He came back a few minutes later and said, ‘Boy, you really got me in a heap of trouble.’ ‘How’s that?’ I asked.

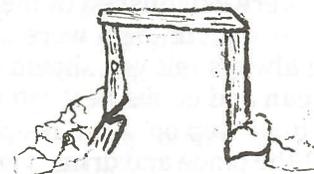
‘Well, that judge told me to get out of town by dark and never show my face again or he would put me in the pen for ten years.’ ‘I watched and that seven hundred and fifty dollars never did enter the public funds, so the judge must have pocketed it.

“After all of this I spent a few years in Steamboat as the manager of the swimming pool. The only big difference was then they were having money problems, and I worked for several years with no salary. They were sorry and all, but I didn’t mind. Then I had some heart trouble and was forced to retire.”



Dude and Dorothy, Thanksgiving, 1945.

“Confidentially, I sorta like this gal.”



"The union was the only way you could get the men to organize and to fight for what they thought was right.



*Dude and his four children, 1942,
near Seattle on a vacation to the Northwest.*

"Four good reasons why my wife and

"In case the men would work all day and come out one night and the superintendent would be standing at the window of the office, where they had the boarding house, and he would have a dinner pail, a full one, and he'd tell them to get their lamp and go back down and work with so and so. He didn't say would you, he just told you. You had no control over your own life. See, they could and would work twenty-four hours before eating or anything else. The men had to have some recourse.

"There were some union strikes too. I can tell you one of my own personal experiences. There were these men who were thinking about organizing. This is supposed to be a free country, but you didn't dare say to meet at John's house and talk about a union thing. You had to hide. If anyone found out about it they would tell the boss and you would lose your job. We had a meeting at Phippsburg. The next day I was running the rotary converters inside, and that was a nice job and well paying, we brought in A.C. (Alternating Current) and ran it through two big converters and changed it into D.C. (Direct Current) for the trolley motors. The foremen

Would say to the young people of today,

"Get it all together; give it your best shot.

pay good dividends throughout your lifetime.

came up to me, and we went outside. He asked if I liked my job. I told him I did; it was a good job. Then he asked if I would like to keep it. I said yes, I would. He said then don't attend any more meetings like the one last night. You see, someone had tattled on the meeting. I told Mr. Butler that I was under the impression that this was a free country. We should have the right to meet and not have to hide. He said, he needed men to work, so they didn't fire me. He did fire several of my friends. Once one mine had fired you, all the other mines blackballed you too. So we all had to pitch in and help until there was a change, until we could get jobs somewhere else.. So, you see, it was pretty rough on these men. Something needed to be done. You had to ban together and have some sort of protection, or it got too bad. Once the men did organize, the superintendent had to ask them if they would work late and not just tell them to.

"I remember I worked one week straight and never saw daylight. You have to have some time off in your life to just get out and live. Then, free time was really needed, and now I feel it has swung too far the other way.

"While I was working in Oak Creek they started to think about the union. The owner, Bob Perry-his wife was Ferry Carpenter's wife later. They got a bunch of guys down there to help them organize the union. These guys got the idea that it would help if they would kidnap Perry and collect a little ransom money. So they kidnapped him and took him up on the hill and they got to drinking too much wine, and first thing you know he got away. After that he was afraid, so he would have someone to go with him. I was a young guy so Perry selected me to go to these mines. They had three different mines. He knew I was going to be 21, and said, 'You will be 21 soon, and I suppose you'll be a good Republican.'

"I said, 'No I won't, because I just see too many men being treated unfair.'

While I was sheriff the mine at Mt. Harris had a strike and I was called down there as a worker. I wasn't there long before they had elected me the president of the union. There I was, representing the company, and I said to the superintendent. 'These men are thinking of hiring me president of the union. What do you think of that?' He said, 'Sounds fine to me, all I want is a fair deal.'

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Get all the education you can -- it will

"As a child I remember that things were just about the same as they are now. I mean it doesn't matter whether you spend a dollar on shoes and only make a dollar in wages, or make five dollars in wages and spend five dollars on shoes, or ten dollars, it's just more money interchanging hands. I think that I had better luck raising my family in what are now ridiculous wages. But see, a hamburger was a dime, and it was a real hamburger, and a piece of pie was only a nickel. So you see it's all in comparison. It just takes more money changing hands to buy the same commodity. I remember I bought a car, a brand new Plymouth from Claud Luekens down here. I bought it for seven hundred dollars, and it was fully equipped, a sports model. Today ;the same car costs six or seven thousand dollars. This was in 1934 or possibly '35.

"When I was young the thing that really impressed me was the fact of how friendly all ranchers were. I remember that one old fellow was down with a heart condition, and all of the other farmers and ranchers in the area got together and put up his hay for him. Whenever there was work to do you could always depend on the other farmers and ranchers in the area to help. Then they would try to help whenever possible just to lend a helping hand not thinking how much they would get out of it. Neighbors' doors were never locked to anyone who needed help.

"During the winter I would sometimes worry about the old fellows in the community. I would get on my skis and ski down to their places and bring them food of some kind or just to help them. There were no roads. The trails were due to the snow. I remember that one day I went over to one old bachelor's, Al Todd, place and found that he was down with pneumonia. So I went outside and fed his cattle and opened up the water holes, and then I heated some old rocks and built him a fire. Then I found an old toboggan and put him on it and hauled him out of there. I took him to Oak Creek where the hospital was, and he lived. Then in later years Mr. Todd passed on and without saying a word he left all of his property to me. The ranch was about one hundred and sixty acres, and I raised hay and grain on it. Then I sold it to put myself through electrical school in Chicago.

'Course I worried about the other old fellows in the community. It was much different then than it is now. Now they have a pension of some sort for the old people, then their cupboards would literally be bare. So I would gather up a sack of vegetables or chunks of meat and put it on either side of a horse and take it to them. I often wondered how the old people would make it through the winters, and I guess a lot of them didn't.

"I remember that the two people that had the most influence on me and the way I do things now is my dear mother, who taught me love and respect through the way she treated me and all the people around here. The other, Al Todd, (no relation) always talked about the future and how to act and about being a good citizen.

"Both my mother and father passed on when they were sixty from a stroke. Then there were not all of these fancy medicines that there are now, so then there was not a lot we could do.

Mr. Todd's philosophy on life is quite interesting, "I am not jealous of anybody, just as long as they come by what they got honestly and fairly.

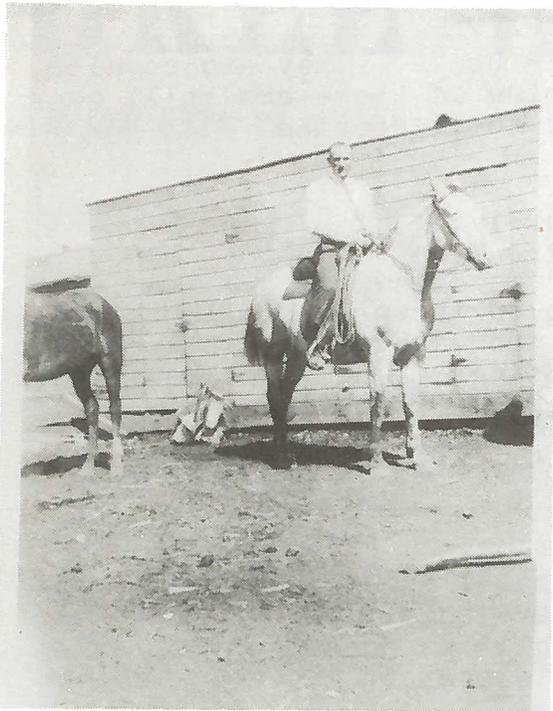
"Friendship is great! All of my life I've tried to help others, and, of course, others have always tried to help me too. I remember a time I was going to Steamboat from Oak Creek quite late at night, and there was a man alongside of the road who had a flat tire and looked rather helpless. So I stopped and backed up to see what was the matter. He couldn't get the jack under the car. So I helped put the jack under the car and jacked it up and discovered that his spare was also flat. So I took the man to Oak Creek where the tires could be fixed, and then took him back to his car and put on the tire and replaced the spare. When I was done the man tried to pay me, and I refused the money. He asked why I would not accept the money. I said one day I would need help and someone would help me, and that would be payment enough. The man then went on to ask if I knew who he was and I said that I didn't. He said that he was the president of a university, and thought I knew who he was and that is why I had stopped to help him. I said no, I stopped because he was in need of help. Then he said, 'Let me tell you something...If you continue to help others throughout life, you'll live to bury enemies and have a long and useful life.'

"I remember a few years back when I had a bad heart condition. The doctors were afraid to get me to Denver in anything other than a pressurized plane. So help me, a friend called his friend in California, and this man flew up here and took me to Denver in a special plane. When I was ready to come home the man flew all the way from California to fly me back to Steamboat. That's what you will see when you help others through life.

"I have always been a great believer in honesty. You run into quite a few problems and sometimes friends that will forsake you. You sure stand alone when you stand up for what you believe in. It's too bad that everyone can't be good, honest, and decent."



"I always liked pretty women and fast horses."



*Dude, riding "Paint", 1919.
Dude rode in parades along
with all the fancy chaps, etc.*

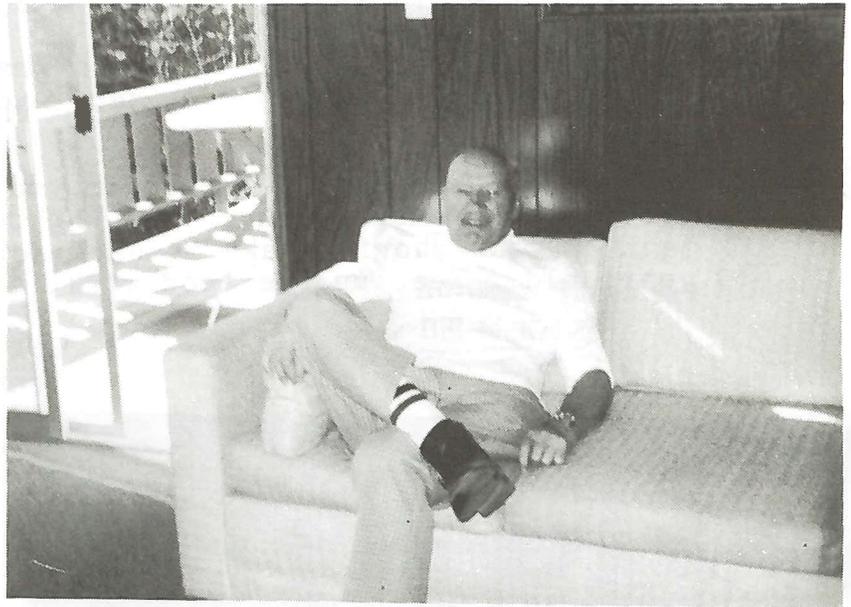


Dude's first car.

"I have owned 22 cars.

A closing thought, "People have to get involved in their government. You have to get out and get all the education you can. Stand up for what you think is right and take part in the government. Who knows who the future leaders of this country will be? People have to get out and vote, it is really up to us to elect the people we want to represent us. You have to stand up for what you feel is right and true. Stick to your

*Who knows who the Fords, Carters,
Loves, Carpenters, Scotts, and Sauers
of the next 200 years will be.*



*Always take time to stop and give a
helping hand to your fellow man.*

A very special thanks to Sharon Kelly who took special time to help get this done. I never could have it without your help.



*Believe it or not, I have never smoked; was never "soused", and my health
may be better for it.*