

# This Old House

Mar 11, 2021

Betty Ruff Jackson has enjoyed living in the Crossville area for nearly 16 years. She is a graduate of Johnson C. Smith Univ. with master's studies at Ashland College.

Over a 28 year period, Mrs. Jackson contracted to teach high school English in 9 or more high schools in nearly as many states. This semi-national "tour" was due to the requirements of her husband Wilson's career. They moved here from Houston, TX. Wilson and Betty have two sons and two grandchildren.

**"WKDK-Newberry, SC- Home of 10,000 friendly people."** This was the motto regularly broadcast over the only radio station in my hometown; probably not too unusual for a quiet little town. The radio was a welcomed source of information: the obituaries, local chatter, national news, and of course, pop and country music warmed the wires! The two-story house on the corner of Boundary and Bess streets, about a mile and a half south of town, is long gone, but memories linger. This was the Ruff family's home for many years after they left their little farm in the country. Years later, married with two children, the elder child, my dad, told my brother and me about the hard times of the depression. He loved learning, which was evident as he welcomed my math homework questions, until I asked one about algebra. He had needed to leave school after eighth grade to work and help the family during those hard times.

Memories of that old house abound. One of its most vivid was when I was about 15. On a cool spring night, there was a knock at the front door. Dad went to answer it. Mama, my younger brother, "Skipper", and I, in the adjacent room with doors remaining closed.

After a few minutes, Dad asked Mom to come into the living room. Shortly afterward, he called for me! By now, we had all had a glimpse of the unfamiliar tall, white male visitor...at our home at night!? But Dad's voice sounded cordial. It was Mr. James Beard from Belk-Beard Dept. Store. Dad, and probably Mom, knew him. Dad told me that Mr. Beard had come to ask my mother to become a salesperson in their store on Main Street. My mother had declined. I, on the other hand, eagerly accepted the opportunity to work Saturdays and during Christmas shopping season when school was closed! Curious about what lay before me, and having my parents' approval, I felt up to the challenge and enthusiastic!

Mr. Beard gave me the tour, and initial introductions, he then introduced one mature, professional lady who would be my mentor. She was perfect! available, but not hovering. The others were available if she was busy.

Learning to use a 2' X 2' X 2' cash register? DONE!

Learning the protocol? DONE!

Learning Belk-Beard Department Store philosophy? DONE!

And Meeting and feeling totally comfortable with the mature sales ladies? –well, 75%.  
But seeing “light” ahead!

I worked part time for Belk’s for a few years, enjoying the experience. Only one customer was overtly offensive during that whole period! And I silently agreed with her: “No, you can’t help me!” she had gruffly said, passing me by, head held high.

Being a salesperson in Newberry was a challenge I enjoyed! Customers became familiar and accepting of me, and I of them. I respected those long-standing relationships with a particular salesperson who knew them and exactly what they wanted.

Lunchtime was not a problem as my Dad usually picked me up to have lunch at home, a few minutes away. When he couldn’t be there, I would bring a brown bag lunch, and eat upstairs at the store.

One Saturday in the spring of 1963 or 4, I was feeling pretty confident and energetic. The thought of the bag upstairs wasn’t appealing! I had read and heard of the riots and sit-ins in many of the larger cities where people were dragged out, even beaten, and jailed! But Newberry was not like that!? Not our city of 10,000 friendly people! Dad worked at Young’s Fruit Store on Main, and people knew and liked him! They should be familiar with me by now, also I am not a mob, out creating a riot or wanting to go to jail! I am “the girl from Belk’s walking to a drug store for a sandwich”, I told myself as I approached the block with the corner door facing me, growing larger with each step. I pulled it open and walked in. As I moved toward the counter, the waitress looked at me with curiosity. I may have had a similar expression as I asked for a cheeseburger and coke. Her stare said more than I wanted to imagine. Sliding onto a red stool, I tried to look relaxed and confident.

Before long, my food was placed before me, and unbelievable to me today, I actually ate it! There was one other customer, a man, sitting in a booth. But no looks, taunts or sounds came from him. I finished my meal, left a tip and walked through the doorway headed towards Belk’s. Wow! That wasn’t so bad, I thought. Newberry was very ahead of those other cities and towns!

Dad had to be away some time later and, you guessed it! Why not? The store owner knows I am not trying to cause a riot or any other trouble. Head high, I walked down the street and through the door! “They know me!”

Well, it was not exactly an open-arm greeting! – ALL stools and booths had been removed!!! **Anyone eating in THIS store would be standing!**

I placed my order “to go”, watched the preparations, paid for my “carry-out”with tip, and headed back to Belk’s.

Those early days of my working with the public taught me some lessons: one, give of your best self, expect the same in return, but be prepared for individualism. Mr. Beard had been a role model for expecting the best.