

Growing Up at Pollard's Delicatessen in Glendale - by Ted Pollard

They called me "Little George." There was really no "big" George because my father, George Pollard, had lost some height in a crippling he'd suffered in a traffic accident in New York City, where he lived as a young man.

It was the customers of the delicatessen he opened in 1932 in Glendale who gave me that moniker as I waited on them or chatted with them, while they looked over then bought the myriad merchandise in Pollard's Delicatessen in the Thirties and Forties.



I learned the value of a dollar, and was handy with arithmetic far before I even learned how to spell the word at Glendale Grade School. And, without even knowing it, I learned to understand the elements of profit and loss years before attending business school at OSU. I learned how to make customers think they were "always right," even if they weren't, and I learned at a very early age how to tell a colossal fib when "the suits" showed up.

It wasn't by accident or a mistake in words that my father had called his store (at Sharon and the B&O tracks) a delicatessen. In naming it he'd referenced the delis he'd known as a young man in New York, places that sold all kinds of food products for families to take home and cook, but also provided prepared food on the spot.

For the many years George Pollard owned the business (until about 1960 when the property was sold to the Cripe family). He held not only state licenses to sell food products, but also prepared foods to serve in-house, in addition to beer and wine licenses, both for carry-out and in-house consumption. It wasn't uncommon for some customers to eat a salami sandwich and drink a beer at the bar, while telling me what groceries they wanted to take home.

As a child, like Glendale kids before and after us, our "gang" enjoyed playing in the park areas, especially baseball in Lake Park, swimming at St. Edmunds in summers, and sledding down Wood Ave. from the park in the winters. I remember too marching with the middle school band - I played cornet - in the Village Square.

But one of the most fun occasions I recall was the annual Halloween costume judging party held at Town Hall, when apple bobbing was still considered hygienically correct. After my costume, hand-made by my mother, had been picked as the blue ribbon winner in four or five consecutive judgings, my mother (Edna Suttman Pollard) was politely asked by the judging committee to please refrain from entering future contests. She (with me) had won too many times. I had been a turnip, a banana and a dice cube. I was happy they'd asked my mother to decline any further awards, because the following year I would have wound up on stage as a mushroom.

I was born in 1933 at Maple Knoll, which at the time was known mainly as a home for unwed mothers, though my mother and father were married by then. A day or two after I was delivered, I was brought home to 275 E. Sharon Road where, working with my parents, I gained an on-the-job education few youngsters ever experience.

During my years in the deli my bedroom, until middle school, was located in back of the store. As I look back over those years both in the store and outside, I find that, indeed, it really does “take a village” to raise a child and, of course, I’m forever grateful, though there were a few pitfalls and embarrassments along the way.

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Standing in front of the deli on a Saturday morning (in the late 1930s), I could hear the man shouting as he drove a horse and wagon down the hill on Sharon Road headed east. By then it was unusual to see a horse in town since most residents had a car to drive.

“Rags...Rags,” he yelled, stopping whenever a resident would flag him down as he approached my father’s store.

Not always, but sometimes my father would shout to me to grab an armful of some old clothes and shop rags he’d gathered, and hand them to me to give to the man with the wagon. I recall the man handing me a handful of pennies and other small change which I would give to my father.

I don’t recall ever asking my father why the man would want all these dirty rags and old worn-out shirts and underwear, and he never bothered to explain the transaction to me, or maybe I never asked. I just went on doing the same thing when the man I called “the rag man” came again. Only when I was older did I discover why anyone would want old rags, worn-out aprons and the like. An employee of the deli explained that the man who collected the rags would in turn sell his wagon load to a paper mill in Hamilton for use in paper production. Paper that would ultimately be sold as high quality “rag content” paper for use in pulp, then and now, for high-grade stationery or for other documents.

One childhood mystery would be solved but there would be others.

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Although it was years before I ever heard the word “recycling,” at a very young age I was up to my knees in it, so to speak. I was introduced to recycling early at Pollard’s Delicatessen, deep in the dark basement of the nearly 100-year-old red brick building, I was later told by my mother was called “the red onion” by her generation of Glendale residents.

In those days all soda pop bottles were glass (in the 12-ounce size; I recall no 2-liter bottles, plastic or glass). The vendors who delivered each week’s new supply of Coca-Cola or Pepsi would pick up the empty bottles from earlier deliveries, presumably empty after satisfied consumers had enjoyed the contents. Then the local Coke or Pepsi distributor or bottling plant would wash the returns for refilling. But the job of returning the empties wasn’t easy for bar owners and owners of grocery stores like my father’s place. Each soft drink vendor’s trucker would only take back the same brand bottles he’d

brought, meaning that all the Coke bottles had to be separated from all other brands before pick-up. Thus, whenever my father would shout to me “The Pepsi man is on his way,” that was my signal to head to the basement and start sorting through hundreds of mixed-up empty soda bottles into the various-branded 24-bottle wooden cases that had been randomly scattered (mostly by me) around the cellar floor after customers returned them. They’d returned them because, unlike today, buyers got refunds on returned bottles. As I recall, it was a nickel per bottle, which they’d paid on purchase.

I might add that beer bottles were no problem since all were the same (same shape and brown color). At that time plastic bottles were unheard of, at least by this young man or probably by anyone else.

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One spring day around 1939-1941, an elderly lady stopped her buggy-like automobile in the street in front of my father’s deli and motioned for my mother in the store to come outside. They were acquainted with each other because my mother, as a teenager, had served occasionally as baby-sitter to some members of the Procter family.

I watched my mother go outside and greet the driver of the car, Mrs. Jane Elizabeth Procter, the wife of William Cooper Procter, who at the time was president of P&G. About 10 minutes later my mother, Edna Pollard, returned - in the driver’s seat - and came back inside the store to tell me and my father, George, “Mrs. Procter wanted to show me her new car, and she let me drive it around the block. It’s an electric car.” The occasion wouldn’t be my last contact with Mrs. Procter but now it reminds me of



something the late Edgar Streithau, owner of the former LeSourdsville (Americana) Amusement Park in Liberty Township, once told me: “If you think things change, you haven’t lived long enough.”

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I don’t remember much about that day many years ago (about 1938-40, I think) except that I came home from school to find my parents looking concerned as they worked in the store, Pollard’s Delicatessen, and a customer telling me that a Kroger store had opened that day in Village Square (located at the north end of the strip of stores, a Rexall drug store at the south end). Later, my mother told me the new and bigger supermarket (not so “super” by today’s standards) store of the Kroger chain meant unwelcome competition, perhaps too much for our deli to survive. At the time our only competition was Newton’s Grocery just off the Village Square on the south side of Willow Avenue. The only other grocery store at the time was located on Congress Road, the present site of the Grand Finale.

Fortunately, about two or three years later the Kroger store closed. I was told later by adults around town, after I had gone off to Walnut Hills High School, the local population was probably insufficient to meet the profit levels needed by the growing Kroger chain at the time. Maybe, but I thought, and my father thought, his store's long day - from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and because he offered both credit for customers and delivery service - had something to do with the closing too. Kroger offered neither and closed each day at about 5 or 5:30 in the afternoon. (My mother delivered groceries by car until I reached the age of 14 when - to the envy of all my pals - I acquired a driver's license). In any case my father's mood changed for the better after Kroger left town.

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A railroad line and station offer obvious delights for residents in any town, particularly for the young people. I can remember spending weekends walking up and down the tracks of the B&O, especially to the north, to the woods and fields that today are the site of Tri-County shopping mall. We kids found it a challenge to see how far we could walk on the track itself. Later (at 10 - 12 years of age) we (contrary to promises made to mothers) would sometimes try to grab hold of a boxcar's side-mounted grab bars and hang onto a slow-moving freight train, making sure to get off before the train started speeding up. We would also go to the depot on Village Square. I don't recall now when trains would stop for passenger headed to Dayton or Cincinnati, but I do remember there was usually something going on there and the telegrapher was always busy tapping out messages in Morse code. One I recall was named Blaylock (or Blaylack) who would let me and other kids watch him sending messages.

People then and now would ask me how I could manage to sleep at nights, whistles blasting through the night, considering my bedroom (at Sharon Road and Greenville Avenue alongside the tracks) was only a few feet from the trains which passed by every hour or so. At the time I lived there I don't remember ever thinking about the noise and rumble of passing freight cars. I do remember counting the cars at night, by listening to the cars rattle as they passed over the Sharon Road grade crossing.

The best part of living close to the tracks was that I got to know the crews aboard the switch engines that moved north and south of town, taking sections of long-haul trains to various sidings where cargoes were unloaded. But the best part was what the crews would do when the engines would stop by near the depot after giving me a special signal with the engine's whistle, a brief "toot" after passing the Sharon Road grade crossing. That meant they wanted sandwiches from Pollard's Delicatessen and that meant I'd be the delivery boy and get to climb aboard with their lunch orders. My mother and father already knew what kind of sandwiches to prepare. I'd always get a tip, or something else. I was always anxious to get my hands on what we kids called "fuse-zes," the flammable short red stick-like flares that were used then and now by truckers and train crews to warn of dangers on the road or tracks. To us it was like having fireworks, though they only burned with the bright red flame.

So, though the depot now has long been quiet, for local kids it was a fun place to have around while it lasted.

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To a kid from a modest home (at the rear of Pollard's Deli, now the Cock and Bull), I was always wide-eyed when I and my young pals were invited into some of Glendale's large, well-appointed and sometimes legendary homes, though at the time we didn't know the history of any of the homes and probably wouldn't have cared anyway.

I just remember lots of wood paneling and wood flooring, large kitchens, grandfather clocks taller than I was, spiral staircases with polished wood bannisters, sun rooms at the back of some homes, full-shelfed libraries, near ceiling-high mirrors, artwork, and what I later realized were recreational rooms with billiard tables and elaborate bars. Some homes had (probably still have) immense flowering garden areas. In one case a greenhouse in the back yard.

One home was especially exciting to visit. It was likely the home of a big game hunter, a wood paneled room was heavy with the heads of stuffed wild animals with horns. I recall a bear and (I think) an elk head with horns. The home owner once invited me to sit on a foot stool that once had been an elephant's foot. (I think the owner's name was Galt – perhaps.)

Another home my friends and I never were able to go into, but served as a frequent subject of conversation. The home, on Congress Avenue, I think, boasted tall columns in front and a gazebo in the back yard. The childhood talk was that a tunnel once existed from beneath the house to the gazebo, years ago used as a safe haven for fugitive slaves headed north out of Cincinnati on the Underground Railroad.

My mother (also a Glendale native) said she had heard tunnel stories too when she was young. She claimed another tunnel was said to have once existed beneath Sharon Road extending from the Town Hall to the brick former water tower across the road. The tunnel stories may only have been a bit of urban legend, but for young people just hearing such stories was the stuff of excitement.

The attics of some homes seemed as large as ballrooms to me, and only later did I learn that some had been used that way in the past. But for me and my friends, some of whom lived in these homes, the attics were great for playing hide and seek and other games. A maid interrupted a group of us one afternoon, breaking up the party and threatening the brother and sister (offspring of the home owner), saying she would tell their mother we'd all been playing spin-the-bottle in the attic.

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Coming home from high school one day in the late 40s, I found an unusually busy store full of customers buzzing about something and crowding the bar area. It turned out that my father had purchased a television set, one of the very first in town, and everyone wanted to see what technology had brought to Glendale's world. People were saying the TV was the first they'd ever seen, and my father said it was likely the first in town (it had come via a vendor who did business with our store). Maybe it was the first in town, but all I remember about it was what the screen was showing that day to the anxious crowd - wrestling in black and white - and lots of "snow" on the screen as my father adjusted the dials after placing the TV set on the bar.

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Prohibition ended in the year I was born - 1933. And that was the same year or a year earlier my father, George Pollard, opened Pollard's Delicatessen at 275 Sharon Road (by the tracks).

The deli had licenses to sell beer and wine for on-premises consumption, or to carry out from the delicatessen, but none to sell spirituous alcohol - gin, whiskey, etc. - by the drink or in any other manner. Of course all other grocery items were available in addition to sandwiches, fresh meats and, curiously, books from an in-store lending library, and even a jukebox with the latest music hits on the radio.

And, as far as I knew as a youngster, the deli didn't offer for sale any whiskey except at the holiday season my dad would keep a bottle of booze beneath the counter and sometimes would offer old customers a drink along with a "Merry Christmas" or some other salutation.

At my age - from about 9 to 15 or so, as I remember, I was not legally permitted to handle the sale of beer or wine to customers, although I calculated bills and checked out customers for all other products in the store from the time I was only seven or eight years old. But sometimes when the deli was very busy my father would let me sell beer to an anxious customer. And I could pop a cap off a bottle or draw a glass from a keg without spilling anything as swiftly as any oldster but, of course, that wasn't legal at my age. In those years, before quart bottles were marketed, customers would often bring empty "pails" - large tin cans with coat-hanger wire handles - to the store to be refilled.

Then and now the State of Ohio regularly keeps an eye on bars and shops to make sure everyone follows the rules. I called them "The guys in suits" when men in black suits and ties and wearing brimmed hats showed up at the deli. My father would spot these agents parking outside and rush over to me saying "The men in suits are here. Run up to the (public) library and I'll signal to you when it's time to come back." I would run up Sharon Road a hundred yards or so and wait until the agents had checked the store for violations like hidden stashes of whiskey, and my father had come out to the front of the store and signaled to me that it was safe to come home.

Occasionally the agents (looking, I later realized, like Elliott Ness, dressed up in suits and brimmed hats on the TV shows) would come into the store before my dad could warn me. I recall one very tall agent looking down at me one day - I was probably only about 9 or 10 - "I'll have a glass of beer, sonny." I remember trying my best to sound truthful when I responded "No sir, I'm too young to do that. My daddy says that's not legal." The agent persisted with "Oh, c'mon, son, you can get it for me." I resisted again and he let me alone, and he and the other state agents eventually left the store.

Lesson learned: lie only if your welfare depends on it, but make it a bit believable.

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My young pals and I seldom got into trouble, but there was one weekend evening I remember well when I was about 8 - 10 years old (1941-43) that wound up with trouble for all of us.

We were running around the grounds of what was then the public library when we couldn't help but notice that a group of local couples were having a party across Sharon Road at Willow Avenue. We could hear the music as party-goers were coming and going in their cars to a home at the corner.

Somehow, as we listened to the music, a devilish idea arose from our group. What a great joke it would be, we thought, to deflate the tires on some of the party-goers' cars before the affair ended. Some of us sneaked cross the street, pressed valve stems and let the air out of a tire or two on a few of the cars parked around the home. As the homeowners' well-dressed guests began leaving we watched as the obviously inconvenienced couples found tires flattened and began the nasty job of replacing their flats with spare tires, all the while grumbling out loud.

We all thought it had been a lot of fun - until the next day. A young friend of mine (a female classmate) came to my father's store and I told her about our escapade. By that afternoon my father, after bawling me out, said he'd heard what my group of friends had done the previous evening and escorted me across the tracks to the police station. Police Chief Latta - a friendly man - had a brief caucus with my dad. They both accompanied me to the station's holding cell and closed the noisy metal door.

Lesson learned: don't do anything naughty, but if you do, don't tell your girlfriend about it. The impact of that half-hour stay behind bars stayed with me forever, all to good effect.

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Each of the big (and old) homes in town held something especially attractive to youngsters like me and my friends. I remember the home with hunting trophies - stuffed heads and antlers of wildlife on the walls of the owner's den. Other homes had large elaborate (console) cabinets holding radios when most other homes, like mine, had only small tabletop radios. What especially excited me was another home with a cabinet I thought held a record player (I think at the time we called them "Victrolas"). A crank protruded from the side of the cabinet. One day the lady of the house told me it was "just a big music box" as she opened the lid to reveal a wide-diameter (maybe 12-inch) spinning perforated metal disk, playing a waltz melody I recognized. Probably the biggest music box I'd ever seen, or will ever see.

The homes with in-ground pools were the most exciting to kids, drawing us like a magnet. In those days, of course, a home with a pool was very unusual and they were all permanent, in-ground pools, very inviting to kids in the dark of night. We swam in several every summer, always at night, of course, so as not to be caught, and always naked.

But there came one hot summer late afternoon when we decided that since it was lightly raining and the skies were overcast and dark, we should try the pool at the Procter home. No one would likely be around the pool on such a dreary day and with the rain still drizzling, no one would see us, we thought. And no one did - for maybe 15 minutes, as I recall. Then, from poolside came the voice of an adult female "Enjoying yourselves, boys?"

We didn't look to see who'd caught us but never have three kids spurted out of a pool so fast. And none of us bothered to put our shoes on that we'd left by the pool. Later we were just happy that we hadn't taken off our pants for the swim too that day.

I never knew if that woman's voice was that of the Mrs. Procter who I knew at the Episcopal church, or that of one of the home's housekeepers. I didn't want to know. On later occasions when I ran into Mrs. Procter I looked the other way and hoped she wouldn't say anything. But sometimes she'd smile at me in

passing and softly say, "Hello, Mr. Pollard." I'd nod, attempt a smile and hurry on with whatever I was doing, relieved that she hadn't started a conversation.

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Epilogue

So, looking back on those years, whether I was playing with a couple of the Sawyer brothers or with kids from other families in town like the Limbockers, Lehmans or Haydocks, or swimming at St. Edmunds or exploring at Claybanks or what were to us the "Mysteries" of Glendale Like Bethany Home, the Lyceum, or the Swedenborgian church. I'd have to conclude that, even considering its somewhat top-heavy skewed demographics, being reared in Glendale was about the best childhood venue anyone could ask for or be lucky enough to experience on either "side of the tracks."

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About the Author: T. S. Pollard was born in 1933 and lived in Glendale until 1951 when he graduated from Walnut Hills HS and went on to college. A graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University and the Ohio State University, he has been involved in public relations and the print media field for many years, principally serving as a writer and editor for major news organizations, including the Kansas City Star, (the former) St. Louis Globe-Democrat, and the Cox Newspapers of Ohio. He also served as adjunct professor in news writing for several years for Miami University of Ohio and has authored articles for popular and trade publications. He is the writer of a two-act stage play, "Grant's Wish: The Play" based on his novel of the same name. Now retired, he maintains a home in the Indianapolis, Indiana, area. *March 5, 2022.*