

Living Life outside the Limits

Until I was eight I'd never considered there might a world out beyond those 'Welcome to Shaw Mississippi' signs. The 61 highway came in one end, and left the other. Where it led, I didn't know. I guess that's why it came as such a shock that day when my mom loaded me and my brother up in her yellow Chevy Vega and put all we'd ever known in the rear view mirror.

I was scared, but I can only imagine what she must've been feeling. I can look back now and say, for Mom it was just the beginning of a life to be lived outside the limits.

We ran out of gas in Memphis, so that's where we spent our savings on a two bedroom apartment and a loaf of bread. The next day Mom hit the pavement running. She found a job within the week. Soon our sleeping bags were replaced with real mattresses and our little apartment began to abound with other garage sale furnishings.

The neighbors must've thought the pre-oil Beverly Hillbillies had moved to town! We took advantage of every freebee in the city, especially the apartment's concrete swimming pond, and the silent version of the drive in picture shows. (The one you watch from across the street.)

We also spent a good many nights outside of Elvis' gate. The day he died it about broke our hearts. We'd all set our sights on having him become our new step dad. Mom never did remarry.

After several years Momma was able to climb up high enough on the secretarial ladder to see past our little apartment, and bought our first house. We were so happy! It was just a little old thing really. We were still in the 'hood', and dirt poor by most standards, but just dumb enough not to know it. I'm glad. To us it seemed like a castle.

As I grew older I noticed Momma was counting down the days until my graduation. When it arrived she packed up and headed back to Shaw with my brother. I could almost hear the voice inside her saying, "There's more to life. There is greatness yet to be discovered!" Maybe she thought it was Mickey Mouse calling, because the day my brother left for college she loaded up her yellow Buick Century and took off for Orlando Florida.

Mom made quite a splash in Orlando over the next 15 years. She fulfilled her dream of working at Disney, but promptly resigned after finding out the mouse was actually just a little guy in a suit. From there she pursued her life long passion of law enforcement. She hired on as a secretary at the Orlando Police Department.

Mom also worked part time for many years as an usher at the Orlando O'rena. (She wanted to meet famous folks!) The O'rena turned out to be much more productive than Elvis' gate. From then on she sent us a regular diet of photos she had taken with a host of sports superstars.

In her private life Mom worked with so many charities she was twice given the City of Orlando's "Volunteer of the Year" award by the Mayor. She was also the first civilian to ever receive the "Chief's Special Award" from the Chief of Police.

A couple of years ago my brother and I went down for Mom's early retirement. We also helped her pack to move back to Mississippi so she could be near the grandkids. While we were there she was given two huge going away parties, and honored with heart felt speeches by some of the top dignitaries of the city, including the Deputy Mayor. She left with such accolades I truly thought our Ryder truck might be escorted out with a motorcade! Not bad for a single mom from Shaw Mississippi.

There are two lessons I have learned in the study of her truly extraordinary life. First, and most obvious, is that a person can reach their dreams with courage and persistence. We should never let the fear of failure or the fear of what others may think

paralyze us. Second, and not intended in any way to diminish her accomplishments, are the weighty Words of Jesus in **Mark 8:36**. (*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*) You see, despite all my mother had achieved in this life, she still sat beside me in that Ryder truck that day with an unfulfilled heart. The same small voice was still speaking to her, "There's more to life! There is greatness yet to be discovered."

Thankfully, the story does not end there. Momma went on to do something very rare for a person so successful and set in their ways. She humbly received the good news of the Gospel, and gave her life, and all of her glory, to Jesus. Yes, that's right, that small voice had been the Holy Spirit leading her to Jesus the whole time. Jesus was the true greatness yet to be discovered in her life!

But anyway- I doubt you'd be reading this column today if it weren't for Mrs. Guy Ann Sheffield. You see, not long ago she decided she wanted to be a reporter, so she ran down to the newspaper and got hired as a photographer. One week later she'd wormed her way into that reporting job and subsequently got me hired on as a columnist. She doesn't seem to take "No" very well.

-Guy Sheffield 4-17-06