

TRUE LIFE STORY OF

*Dallas and Marie*  
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*Bloomington, IN 47403*

*www.iuniverse.com*

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*ISBN: 978-1-5320-9254-1 (sc)*

*ISBN: 978-1-5320-9256-5 (hc)*

*ISBN: 978-1-5320-9255-8 (e)*

*Library of Congress Control Number: 2020901096*

*iUniverse rev. date: 01/23/2020*



*It began when I was* born on September 13, 1940, in Newman, Mississippi, on the Big Black River, where the Ku Klux Klan dumped the bodies of black people. This was why they called it the Big Black River. There were a lot of sinkholes in that river, and as far as I know, no one who went in survived. I remember a time when I was growing up, and Mr. Joe White's nephew was in a boat in the river fishing. That boat capsized. It was one of the worst times I can remember as a kid. It happened late in the evening. This was the first time in history that had happened. He'd lived right on the river.

My mother bought beer from him. He was considered a rich white man. He had many boats for people to rent so they could go on fishing trips on the Mississippi River. We had a babysitter who lived about 100 yards from my mother's.

One day, she left my sister and me at home while she went up the road to the store. I was playing with matches when I accidentally set the house on fire. We couldn't put the fire out. And the fire was so hot, we couldn't get out.

We were very lucky. The next-door neighbor, the babysitter, saw the flames coming from the house and ran over and saved my sister and me from the burning house. When my mother

returned from the store uphill, Ms. Karen Newman's, she fussed at me for starting that fire. She thanked the Carson girl for saving my sister and me.

We began school the following year at Oak Ridge Elementary School. We walked past an old lady's home every morning. One morning, we could hear her moaning. The next morning when we passed the house, we heard the same thing. We went up the driveway to the front door. The screen door was open. We saw an old lady lying in bed. We said someone needed to help her. She was groaning so loud you could hear her from the gravel road. This went on for about four or five days. Then one morning, we didn't hear her groaning. We knew then she had probably died. We found out the next day she had died from some form of cancer. This was 1945.

Three days later, we were going up the hill to Oak Ridge Elementary school. A white man pass us up coming down, the hill in a pickup truck. with what look like a rifle pointing out of the window, he slow up and shot at the truck coming up hill transporting gasoline, the truck busted into flame there was a lot of black smoke every were the driver manage to get out truck on the side of the road we watch the exploring for about five minutes, and continue on to school that morning we was so afraid we had to walk about three to four miles to get to Oak Ridge, Elementary school.

My mother was a teacher at the school. She got along well with the kids because she loved music, and the kids loved to see her dance at lunchtime. Man, she could really do the dance called the hut cut butt.

We really had a lot of fun at elementary school—until I went to graduate. I failed math, and that began to change my whole life. I didn't get the help I needed to pass. I failed and wouldn't move on to fifth grade next year.

Summer came, and my stepsister came from New York City to visit my mother. She had a son the same age as me. We loved to play together out by the outhouse. One particular morning, I went to use the outhouse. I was sitting there on the toilet when Waddell came in. The toilet was large. He pushed me, and I fell in all that flit—about three to four feet of flit. He ran to the house, which was about fifty feet away and got help. I was so frightened. I had to pull myself up out of that flit. I was covered in flit—from my clothes to my feet. I managed to get home, and my mother hosed me down with water and washed me with soap and vinegar. She dried my clothes out and burned them. My body stunk for about two weeks before for the scent finally went away.

My cousin's mother was angry with him and whooped him. And that was the last time she came to Mississippi. Boy, my mother was so angry.

The neighborhood kids—boys and girls—began to come around when Waddell and his mother didn't come back the next year. They would come to the back screen door in the backyard and ask my mother if I could come out and preach to them. I had a voice like a Baptist minister. They would sit under the cotton stalks for shade from the hot sun while I preached to them.

These kids knew I had a loud voice and liked hearing me talk. Two to three days later, they came again and asked my mother if could I come out and preach to them. She said yes, and we went to the cotton field, which was only a hundred yards from the back of the house. This time, these kids asked me to look at the sun, saying if I did, I would see the face of Jesus. They said, "Stare directly at the face of the sun, and you'll see him."

After they left the cotton field, I stared and stared, and then I saw the face of Jesus in the round, hot sun. From that moment on, I believed there was a god with long hair just like the pictures



of Jesus in the Bible. I was so excited I couldn't believe it. But I kept staring, and finally he went away. The next day, I went to see if I could see him again. I never saw his face again. From that moment on, I believed there was a god.

As we grew older, my brother James and I went to the top of the mountain—Big Black Mountain—which was directly behind the cotton field behind our house. Some of the strangest trees were there. These trees looked to be hundreds of years old, with moss about five to six feet long hanging like a plant from the tree and touching the ground. They were old gray moose trees, and the whole mountain was covered with them. You had to climb about a hundred to two hundred yards to get up the mountain. We tried it many times.

Finally, one day my brother and I made it to the top of the mountain. And those old moss trees were what we discovered. It was one of the most exciting moments of our lives. We had made it to the top.

The next day, we got a rotor, and we made roller coasters with wheels and rolled down the mountain. From then on, this was our playground. We would hike up and roll down. We used this playground until we moved to a place called the Seabed, way back in the Seabed Woods.

We found beautiful mountains there, too, with lots of wild horses. They would come to the foot of the mountain every spring, looking over at the houses and animals in the pastures and prancing around. A black horse was leading the pack. The rest, of all colors, would stand and snort as they watched.

The place where we lived, Seabed, had a large backyard with big china ball trees and small name Willi smith pecan trees in the backyard. They would bear fruit every year. About three weeks later after moving to the sea ben we were still going to oak ridge elementary it went up to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I

met a friend name Willi Smith, the Smith family lived across the street from Oak Ridge School they were a large family, Willi an I was the same age. We decided to go to a place we always won't to go Name Egypt in warren county were my dad and uncle had dyamint and cut down many trees tried to clean up the land for home stading, this was on the Mississippi river this was bottom land and the river would over flow every year, and leave a lot of dead fish and other sea creates, this land was real black soil you could grow anything there my dad and mother had a garden there they would grow some of the large wallomelion, and cabbage you would every see. We went fishing on the bank of the Mississippi river, and discovered a wreck ship and we explodes father and found a long rusty trunk two feet deep and three feet long with a big rusty pad lock on it, we went to my dad shed he had built, and got tools and busted the lock, we hadn't seen so many red pennies they was all cake to gather from the flood water, we believe this came from the may flower ship wreck in the flood there was clothing furnisher scatter on along the Mississippi river flood Willi and I decided to keep this a secret we hid the trunk until we get older. then return to get the trunk full of pennies it must have we weight about 30 to 40 lbs. my parent moved to ca. 1953 Willi dad bought 300 hinder acre of land after we moved to ca, his dad had about 14 or15 kid

My dad left me in Seabed with seven dogs. There were all types of dogs—greyhounds, German shepherds, pit bulls, and small dogs. I turned one corner of the yard into a poop area for the dogs. The dogs pooped every morning just like humans. When it came time, I trained them to go to a certain corner of the yard, rather than having them poop all over the yard. It took me about a week to train them one by one. And it worked

perfectly. It was easier for me. Otherwise, they would poop all over the yard, and I would have to pick up the poop every morning. So I was happy once I'd trained them to go to one corner of the yard.

I also had a pet steer bull named Old Bill. He weighed about six hundred pounds. I raised him from the time he was a small steer. I would go and get him from the pasture, which was about fifty yards away and put him in our large backyard. Every day, I would go and get him from the pasture and wash him down with soap and water. Then I'd put krill oil all over and brush him down. He would look so beautiful. He was brown all over with a velvet white face. Everyone loved him. Old Bill was well trained. I trained him myself. When I would tell him to kneel on his front legs so I could ride him, he would kneel. He was very gentle.

Everyone liked Old Bill. The white folks told my mother to take him to the FHA at the Jackson Mississippi Convention, and she did. Believe it or not, we won first place—which was worth \$500. After we'd won, everybody wanted to buy him, for studding or as a pet.

When my dad sent for us from Mississippi to move to California, my mother told me she would have to sell Old Bill. Man, was I heartbroken. She said we needed the money to move to California. I still remember him.

I was one of the crazy boys. You can imagine. I was nine years old when we moved to the Seabed. I was not afraid of anything. I liked to run with my brother and his friends. We went to a big lake, and his friends dared me to jump in the lake with all those alligators and snakes. Being the crazy kid I was, I jumped right in with them. I was not afraid of anything or anyone. My brother was older than me, and his friends dared me to do a lot of things. I didn't even know how to swim, but I jumped in anyway. My brother jumped in

the lake and saved me from the alligators and rattlesnakes. I didn't get one bite. And I mean there a lot of alligators and snakes.

One week later, not too far from the big lake, we found my uncle's whiskey still. It was covered with green tree branches and was in underground 100-gallon drums. There were about six 100-gallon drums with lids on them. We boys opened the lids and pushed some of the mess back to drink some of the whiskey. We wanted to see what it tasted like. We also found five 100-pound bags of sugar covered up with the branches. This was a sight to see.

We drank the whiskey. After walking for about fifteen minutes, some of the boys began to vomit.

When my brother and I got home, my mother said something wasn't right with me. She asked my brother if I was all right. He said, "No. He's drunk."

When she asked how I had gotten drunk, he explained that we'd found Tom's underground whiskey still and drunk some of the whiskey. My mother told me to go sleep it off because I was so drunk I was wobbling and staggering.

About a week later, I went with my brother and friends. I was what you would call a hardheaded boy. I jumped in the pond. Now I know I'd just gotten rescued from the lake filled with all of those alligators and snakes, and I jumped into the pond after my cousin and brother dared me to do it. My brother jumped in again and saved my life. This was the second time he'd saved my life. He'd saved me at the lake from all those alligators and snakes. I was on my way down the third time when he jumped in and saved me again.

There was a creek about two miles from where we lived. That creek was full of small tadpoles and small catfish. Late the following year, my brother and I went down to the creek and

scooped up a lot of tadpoles and dumped them in the pond in the back of the house. Two years later, we had a pond full of fish. We weren't supposed to do that. When we'd first moved in, Mrs. Levelly Hardy had told us not to put fish in the pond. Before we left, the pond was filled with catfish. We didn't have to go far to fish. The rental agent, a rich black lady named Mrs. Levelly Hardy, lived in Jackson, Mississippi.

Continuing on with the story of Mississippi, we lived in this place called the Seabed. This place was about fifteen miles up the road from Newman, Mississippi, on Highway 12 and about twenty miles from Edwards, Mississippi. We settled there with our parents. They began gardening and farming, raising cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables.

By this time, my dad would get sick with pneumonia every year. He couldn't figure out why he would get sick every year. He figured it out one winter, and he told my mother, "Mabel, I'm going to have to leave here. The weather is too cold." He couldn't take it any longer. She had to wait on him night and day, and she would rub his chest.

My dad was a very smart man, especially when it came to farming and raising cattle, horses, and dogs. Finally he left, saying the land was too low for him—bottomland was what they called it. In Mississippi, there was bottomland.

He went back to Chicago to visit the place where he'd spent most of his young life, working as a waiter at Al Capone Restaurant and at a steel mill. As a matter of fact, he was working there when the St. Valentine's Day Massacre occurred on February 14, 1929.

After visiting Chicago, he settled in Bakersfield, where he got a job picking cotton by hand. Later, he moved to Vallejo, California. He got a civilian job at Travis Airfield Base. He was a

tall, very handsome man, and he was very thin, weighing about 130 to 140 pounds.

In the meantime, my brother and I had to grow up fast because our dad had left us with all that hard work. We were very small young boys. We knew we had to try to help my mother with the farm. My mother was a diabetic, and she would pass out on my brother and me. She was a strong, light-skinned lady with big hands like a man's. We had to hitch up the wagon to bring her home when she would pass out. She was so heavy we couldn't lift her. The next day, she would be right back out there in that hot sun, and she'd stay there until it happened again.

It was in 1953 when we settled in Vallejo, California. Vallejo was all projects and low-rent housing because of the Mary Island Navy and Marine Shipyard. It was the largest port on the West Coast at that time, and everybody worked there.

In 1956, my dad had seen enough. One Sunday afternoon, after we'd come home from church, word got around that there was a bad gang coming from Richmond, California—with several carloads of gang members, shotguns, baseball bats, and all types of weapons. We lived on the second-floor in an apartment at 135 West Lane. Most of the property at that time was owned by Italians. Black folks at the time could not afford a house in Vallejo—only low-rent houses.

We told our parents about this, and they told us not to look out of the windows.

When the gang arrived, they were shooting at everything in sight—cars, trucks, and apartment windows. It looked like a war zone. There was gang war between Richmond and Oakland, California. We would find out later that this happened all the time. They went from street to street shooting.

This was one of the worst gang wars in the history of Vallejo. It went on for about two weeks.

My dad called a meeting with the family and told us we were leaving Vallejo. It was too dangerous, and there were too many gangs.