

Paul (Dusty) Pless Jr. and Kathy Bowman

Side 1:

Their father just went into the hospital with a heart condition. He was due to be released tomorrow. The phone rings constantly about hospital plans. I meet with his son "Dusty" instead. Sister Kathy was there also. Both Dusty and Kathy were born in Asheville and attended T. C. Roberson School. [Paul Joe Pless Sr.]

[Paul Joe Pless Sr. was on City Council in 1981 as "Joe" Pless. He served one term, ran for the second and lost to a friend by two votes.]

[10] In 1947 their grandfather decided to open a drive-in theatre and leased land which held over 700 cars. The lot was packed every night and was the largest drive-in in the Southeast. There was also a miniature train, miniature golf course, merry-go-round, Ferris wheel and a small zoo with caged animals. A dance pavilion was added in the mid 50's. Most tourist dollars in Asheville were taken between the park and the tunnel. Wink's, Maloy's and Buck's Drive-In were popular (see Buchanan tape). The Starlight Drive-In was up the street. [Paul Jennings Pless]

[29] Recreation Park also had a drive-in. Route 81 was a busy thoroughfare going east to west with numerous produce stands in the summer. There was a carnival atmosphere in the area. He remembers produce stands with crafts, souvenirs, toys and stuffed bears. Friday and Saturday nights were busy times up and down Tunnel Rd.

[47] She remembers traffic backed up the streets. She always worked on weekends. The movies couldn't start until it was dark and they were repeated three times, ending at 2 or 3 a.m. She remembers the first concession that was built. It is now a stand with picnic tables.

[64] They have no pictures of the early period. They were lost in the flood.

[69] In 1947, the Dreamland area was in the country. The city grew up around it. Lights from the Asheville Mall spoiled the quality of the picture on the screen. When VCR's became popular people stayed at home to see programs. The film companies didn't allow the drive-in theatres to get showings before the walk-in theatres and by the time the drive-ins could get them they were already on VCR's. The market was drying up. Once they gambled \$25,000 for a first run on a film, gambling on the weather. It "bombed" and, of course, the money was not refundable. At best, Drive-Ins could have two or three shows in an evening whereas the walk-in theatres could show 5 times a day and were not affected by the weather.

[109] The switch from a movie to flea market came about when a man wanted to rent the area by the day. They didn't know what a flea market was. He got started and quit so the Pless family took over.

[119] Their family life was changed. They ran the market by day and movie at night. Kathy's boyfriends always helped out. It was a long hard day.

[130] The concessions changed over the years from dinners and milk shakes to bacon and egg sandwiches, hot dogs, and hamburgers. Kathy boxed 1500 to 1700 boxes of popcorn a day. Fifty pound boxes of corn was sent from Charlotte. They were stacked high - 600 to 800 bags at a time.

[149] Film rental was high. Eighty to ninety percent of the profit came from the concessions, which explains why a box of popcorn costs \$4 a box. The old times weren't concerned about cholesterol in coconut oil.

[162] The family ended by running two businesses at one time - selling spaces for the flea market after the movie.

[168] With the lights from Tunnel Rd. it was hard getting good quality on the screen. Revenue from movies was dwindling. Other drive-ins started closing. They did not know about Rosie Teague's Market on River Road. Penland, across the river is an auction establishment

[199] The Pless children went to college. Dusty taught school for three years but, when his father told him that he would have to hire someone to help with the business, he gave this up and joined him.

[205] Dusty has three children. His wife's name is Judy. Kathy [sister] taught school for four years but stayed home after the children were born. She started dating her husband Mack in 1973. He still likes popcorn.

[225] In 1990 the family made a complete change over to a flea market only. The sheds are new.

[235] The Buncombe County Baptist Association had a spot in the market for years where they handed out tracts. They asked to hold Sunday service and this year they built a church. (see photo)

[246] This year a funeral was held in the church. Dusty didn't think it was appropriate and refused; however, the funeral director pleaded and the mother of the person who died called hysterically. He finally gave in, specifying that it be held after business hours and a van, not a hearse, be used. The body in a hearse arrived while the area was still busy but most people didn't realize what was going on. The Baptist Association representative came stating that this was their church but Dusty told him that the land was theirs and he was allowing this to take place. He will not allow another funeral during working hours.

[319] During the drive-in days, Kathy said they could always spot cars with people hiding in the trunk by the way it rode. They would then go up beside the car and wait - and of course, sell the hide-away a ticket. There was very little trouble with drunks. The poles for speakers (to be placed on cars for sound) are still in the ground and the lot could be reactivated for film if desired.

[350] The land has been used for political events, concerts have been held and \$8,000 was raised for the Mission Hospital not long ago.

[383] Dusty's children are too busy with school activities to be involved. Kathy brings children to work with her. Emily likes working there.

[413] Most of the people who sell at the market are local, though a few are summer people from Florida. Some people collect items to sell, some sell new goods and a few shop for bargains to be sold at a higher price.

[424] Twelve or so years ago, Kathy, her husband, her sister and her husband wanted to go to Hawaii. They took the Iwanna paper, buying items to sell, got spring plants, apples from Hendersonville and anything else they could think of that would sell. Four couples made the trip to Hawaii. [Debbie Pless Harris, Mike Harris]

[450] Dusty's wife Judy is good at pricing and gave the following advice: don't put a price on an object but have in mind what you will accept. If asked, give a price and be willing to come down. In this way both sides are happy.

[470] One half of the renters are on a monthly basis and the others on a yearly basis. The rest buy a ticket for a day. Some have permanent spots, a few are in houses where their merchandise can be locked and ready to be opened for selling. The hours are 7am - 4:30pm Wed, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

[510] People know about the flea market by word of mouth. The convenience store and the concession stand are all part of the same business. Merchants in the permanent buildings are long-timers. They don't usually come on Wednesday.

[535] January and February are always slow. It is hard to be that dependent on weather.

[553] Everything was lost in the flood of 1977. The family had been making plans to have twin drive-in theatres. It was shelved and later given up. The store was moved to higher grounds.

[577] The recent flood on Jan 14 and 15 did a lot of damage (see enclosure) They still don't have the concession stand back in operation as the 6 feet of water ruined the equipment. They are in the process of getting the paper work together for the insurance company. The flood damaged the chain link fence, and mud and silt covered the gravel area. They helped the vendors by hauling off their ruined merchandise to the dump.

Side Two:

There are numerous interruptions. Kathy's son Grant stays but does not talk. Dusty says he must leave soon to drop off some tapes at school for his daughter.

[2/8] They helped the vendors as much as they could following the flood. Some lost everything but some items, such as metal tools, could be washed off.

[2/17] The insurance doesn't cover damage to the grounds and, of course, income is lost. There was water up to the chair rail in the office and it took 80 man hours to clean. Their grandfather's

desk had recently been refinished and, after the flood it looked as though it had exploded. Only the top could be salvaged.

[2/33] If the IRS comes calling there won't be any papers to show. However, pictures document the damage.

[2/42] Rental spaces are on a first-come, first-serve basis. Some vendors have favorite spots and in the height of the season it is necessary to book 10 days to two weeks ahead.

[2/58] There is no pick up or delivery service offered. Electricity and tables are supplied in the sheds. Outside nothing is provided but the space. [off tape Kathy said that a 20 ft. open spot rented for Wednesday \$4 all day, Friday \$5 all day, Saturday and Sunday \$8 all day. 16 foot table 2x8 ft in shed. Wednesday \$4 all day, Friday \$8 all day, Saturday and Sunday \$11 all day. Garbage, dumping and maintenance are provided.]

[2/69] The most unusual event (aside from the funeral) was finding a lion tied beneath a bus. The chain was short but the lion large enough to cause trouble. Dusty had it put inside the bus. They try to discourage all pets.

[2/87] They anticipate no changes in their business in the future. They do not want to start another market though they could fill another field of the same size. They sell all space during the height of the season.

[By phone - the funeral held at the flea market was for the man in the photo shown washing lamps following the flood. He was in the passenger seat when his mother put the car in reverse by mistake. He was thrown from the car and she struck him, and he later died of injuries.]