

ERNEST JONES
BORN IN GRINNELL, IOWA 1927

When he was 5, he cut his hand on the lid of a coffee can and his mother called the doctor. When the doctor arrived and stitched up the cut, with no anesthetic, he also gave Ernie's mother a very stern lecture about letting a kid play with a sharp can lid. She hadn't let him, he had found it, but the doctor continued his tirade. That day Ernie's mother had a heart attack and died.

There were five kids and Ernie's dad said they'd stay together somehow and they did.

During the depression Ernie's dad was on the WPA and his job was to measure the gardens of WPA workers. If you had enough ground, you were required to keep a garden. Poweshiek County had a packing plant, really just a big cooker, said Ernie, and the canned goods went to WPA families.

The WPA also supplied light tan corduroy coats to families, so when kids at school had the coat everyone knew they were on WPA.

The Rock Island and the M&St L railroads ran through town and Ernie and his friends would hop a freight car

for a ride. They had to be careful to get off before the train accelerated too fast. Once Ernie hung on too long and when he jumped he tumbled down a bank coated with cinders and still has a black mark in his leg. Another friend thought he'd wait a little longer and ended up in Marshalltown. His parents had to go get him.

The Rock Island came into Grinnell at 60 mph, usually late and when the engineer put the brakes on, the big driving wheels formed circles of fire all the way to the depot. The train came in about the time people were going home from work and at least four different cars were hit. One time, Ernie and friends heard a big bang! and they turned to see the Raleigh Products Model T pickup with the box on the back literally explode as the train hit it. Raleigh Products were still raining down all around the wreck. The driver was killed.

The streets in Grinnell were paved with cinders from the coal burning power plant (Talbot and Olds?) That plant was separate from the college power plant.

Ernie had a paper route for the Grinnell Herald. He made sixty cents a week and each week he spent a dime for two raisin buns. The remaining fifty cents went for his payment to buy a \$12 bicycle on time.

A two car train, like an inter-urban, ran into Grinnell twice a day. They called it the Toonerville Trolley. One car had a diesel engine and blew a diesel horn every night at nine. Ernie's dad said he had to be home five minutes after that horn blew. Ernie said his dad never spanked him or the other kids, but they knew he would and so he didn't have to.

There were two movie theaters in town, the Strand and the Iowa. Ernie cleaned the Iowa and could watch movies in return, Fu Manchu and Laurel and Hardy among others. Virgil Adams, a quarterback and very popular kid, cleaned the Strand.

Ernie was a bellhop and shoeshine boy at the Monroe Hotel. He wondered why the place didn't burn down. It was all wood and a terrible firetrap. He remembers the silver dollars in the floor.

There were stories of a tunnel from the hotel to the depot but he doesn't know if they were true.

Ernie's dad became a foreman at the Grinnell Washing machine Company and when it was closing down, he was night watchman, going around to the clock stations. Sometimes he took Ernie with him.

When the Washing Machine Co. did close, they told his dad that if he would put together three complete machines, he could have one.

Somebody in Grinnell invented the automatic release mechanism so that if a hand got caught in the wringers, the rollers would release.

Ernie has donated to the Grinnell History Museum a working salesman's sample of a Laundry Queen. Ernie says he remember washing handkerchiefs in the little scale model.

Ernie's family kept a cow, a pig fed on table scraps and chickens. Lots of Grinnell families did. Ernie milked the cow each morning and when the neighbor decided he didn't want the job with their cow, they hired Ernie, So, two cows each morning and he had to pump water to fill the tank for the neighbor's cow, eighty pumps of the handle to fill the tank.

Alleys ran behind most houses and Sam Berman came along with his horse and wagon looking for scrap metal. He'd check the alley and then go to the door and ask if he could take the 'scrap iron.' Ernie said Sam could barely pronounce it, but years went by and Sam Berman had a couple box cars on the siding and he'd fill them with scrap metal and send them to market.

Ernie and his friends went to the Uncle Sam's Club where he learned to dance, from his friend's sister and to box from a boxing instructor. The instructor wanted Ernie to go to Des Moines for a Golden Gloves tournament but he was too young. He could only go if his dad would sign and his dad wouldn't. The kid who went in his place came back with a broken nose and a black eye. Ernie knew he could beat the kid who went, but he also realized his dad may have been right.

Don Crawford, who lives in Grinnell now, boxed heavyweight and won three bouts, maybe more.

Lake Nyanza was a reservoir for the steam engines, with a tower where they took on water. A couple time, Ernie and friends climbed up to the top and went inside. They watched the water level go down as the trains took on water and then watched as the tank filled up again. Once some kids pulled the water pipe down, thinking when they let it go, it would go back up and stop the water. It didn't. The tank drained and washed out some ties. The police were at the Davis school the next morning.

Red Tew was the ice man and it was a treat to get chips of ice in the summer. A standard joke in town said that if a kid had red hair, Red Tew must have been there.

Rusty Taylor lived at the old brickyard, actually in an old kiln. He was a hermit who hated women, said their perfume smelled like skunk oil. Rusty was a good mechanical repairman but he never washed or changed his clothes and they were caked with grease.

One time he must have slept too close to the fire because his clothes caught and he burned to death.

Years later, Ernie bought a 1928 Model A for \$100 and decided to have the antifreeze checked. When it didn't check at all, he learned the farmer he got it from had used Kerosene. Worked but it was tough on rubber hoses.

Ernie joined the Navy on the V-6 program, in 'til 6 months after victory. But the Navy had a complication. They could keep petty officers longer so they would just classify a guy as petty officer.

He was on the battleship Pennsylvania when it was torpedoed in harbor three days after the first atomic bomb. If they'd been at sea, that torpedo plane could never have gotten that close but it came over a hill and got them. Ernie was taking a shower and discovered that he was sitting on his butt and didn't know why, really, until someone shouted Torpedo and he ran past his bunk grabbing some clothes hoping for a shirt and pants. Twenty sailors were killed and

the ship disabled because the torpedo hit back near the propellers. That was the only plane but Ernie was at his station, ready to load guns, duck behind an armor plate or plot his swimming route to shore.

Ernie was on a gun crew, loading the shells. The guns were directed and fired from fire control, higher in the ship. Later, with nerves heightened, they got the call to load the guns which were trained right across the ship docked next to them. Men dove out of the way as the guns fired and hit a truck that came up over a hill.

The driver escaped and the ship later received a mock commendation for
'killing one truck.'

After the war, Ernie managed the Singer store in Grinnell and then became a representative for a carpet and floor covering firm in North Carolina.

He lives now in Newton.

Many people in Grinnell still had outhouses when Ernie was a kid. The outhouses had a sort of trough that pulled out from the side and a man called Bull Durham came round with a big barrel in his horse-drawn wagon and he'd pull out the trough, clean it with a shovel and put the results in the barrel and go on to the next one.

Ernie's family lived at 616 High Street. On Saturdays his dad drove the car into town and parked it on the street. Then that night they'd go and sit in the car and watch all the people who came to town .