

Tiger's Delivery

During World War II, I was one of the white boys who held a delivery job at Bobbitt's Drug Store.

With the War taking young men, it became necessary to hire "colored" boys. I knew a young man who stopped by our marbles playing games from time to time. Tiger wanted a job. After some hesitation, I recommended him.

"We'll see. Bring him in the back door and I'll look him over." Mr. Bobbitt, the owner, was a stern no nonsense man.

Tiger struggled in learning numbers and street names that matched addressed packages. But after one trip to a customer's house, he never forgot. When stumped, I gave him directions in private.

We answered the "DELIVERY BOY --!" like soldiers responding to reveille, while waiting between deliveries in our dimly lit back room, which was crammed with wholesale-sized jugs of medicines and racks of empty bottles ready for filling.

One infrequent job involved taking ammonia from a huge glass jug and pouring through a funnel into small bottles.

"Tiger," I said one day, "help me fill these ammonia bottles." I pulled the cork from the jug.

"Whew!" He objected to the strong odor, even from a distance.

I said, "I bet you can't take as many deep breaths as I do over this jug."

Leaning my head over the open jug, I pretended to take a deep breath by straightening my upper body and raising my arms. I shook my head, indicating a struggle to breathe the fumes. My con-act worked.

Tiger jerked his head back before completing his first try. Tears filled his eyes as he gasped for fresh air. The fumes were strong, but so was Tiger. He tried again. His reddened eyes glanced at me, bewildered because he could not breathe as much as I seemed to be doing. The odor penetrated his shield of fading determination.

Two weeks later, I told Tiger of my deception. I owed him much more than that. I had helped him get a job but he gave me the memory of innocence, determination, and ambitious hope.

Tiger was a friend and a good one.