

Bascom "Bap" Little Wolfe
1914-2002
by Louise Pettus

When I think of Bap Wolfe he is standing alongside a road with his thumb up, ready to get into a car or pickup, or, indeed, any vehicle that would stop for him. I see him in overalls and the look of a workman. I remember his crippled hand that made it a bit difficult for him to pick out the correct change to pay for the Pepsis that he loved.

Often, Bap did not have to pay for the Pepsis. Someone would likely be around who would say, "Bap, I'll buy you a Pepsi if you'll sing me a song." And Bap would oblige. I don't remember the names of the songs, but my brother Hall remembers him singing "Down by the River." Hall says Bap never stuttered when he sang. I had forgotten him stuttering but now remember it. It was not an extreme stutter but it was there.

I remember the time that Odell Ashley was in the store at the same time as Bap. Odell was recalling something about Bap and the school at Osceola. I wish I could remember all but out of it I remember that Odell was trying to get Bap to tell what it was like. Recently I said that Bap said that he went to school to Miss Fannie Niven and that he was almost a man when she taught him how to "parse" a sentence. Now, when I think back on it, I believe that it was Odell who said Miss Fannie taught him and Bap just shook his head in agreement. It might be that Bap wouldn't, or couldn't, have remembered her name. One of the things about Bap was that he didn't call people by their names (at least when he was around me) and there are a number of instances where he did not seem to know who it was that picked him up they were people in the community he should have known if he were an ordinary person.

Bap was something of an "idiot savant." I say "something of" because he would not rank with the most severe cases that are written up in psychological literature. Idiot savants have unusual and narrow capabilities far beyond the abilities one would expect of a person who is illiterate (an idiot savant can't learn to read and write) but can do such things as remember long strings of numbers or listen to a long piano concert and duplicate every note. Bap was able to do square roots and liked to demonstrate that ability. He would see a number and start mumbling and come up with the square root of that number or tell you that it didn't have a square root. He told me that when I stopped and picked him up once. It was on Fort Mill Main Street and I drove him to Rock Hill. When he got in the car I asked him what he was thinking about and he said "Square roots." So, I gave him a few numbers and he demonstrated quickly that he could handle them.

That takes me back to his ability to "parse" a sentence. To parse is to be able to tell the parts of speech of each word in the sentence. He could also diagram sentences. In the store one day I wrote a long sentence down (wish I could remember the sentence but I can't) and he looked at it and told me the

parts of speech but he wouldn't take the pencil to diagram it. He said he would tell me how and for me to write it and he would tell me what the words were. As far as I could tell, he knew exactly how to diagram it and he got all the parts of speech correct. I think he had his eyes closed as he was thinking through the steps and telling me but he did look at what I wrote and said it was right.

J. R. Wilson, Jr. told me an interesting story about his picking up Bap in Augusta, GA. Bap was thumbing on a street corner. J. R. brought him home to his place in Osceola and when he was starting to get out, J. R. asked Bap, "Do you know who I am?" Bap said he didn't know him but thanked him for the ride. J. R. just shook his head over the fact that Bap had no curiosity as to who it was that had given him the ride or, even more curious, Bap had no question as to how J. R. knew exactly where to take him.

Lindsay, Hall and myself were recalling "Bap stories" at our Christmas dinner and Kelly, Hall's wife, said that she too had given Bap a ride when he was thumbing. Hall said that you could pick Bap up and take him, say, to Fort Mill and when you hurriedly visited a drug store to pick up something quickly and came back to the car, there would be Bap standing across the street thumbing to go back in the direction he came from.

We all agreed that Bap was "harmless," likeable and our encounters were all pleasant. He was a figure that none of us would ever forget.

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