

Regarding Hank

by Jason W. Stuart

"Well, that Hank Grady was a looker, I'll tell you. He caught some hell a bit for it, too. Mostly from old boys felt put out by him on account o' the way he dressed. See, he had that style to him, that flair. That's what you'd say. You know, he made a show to look like some of them sort of fellers you'd see in catalogs and such. You never saw Hank he didn't have on at least a good-looking shirt, 'cept, I guess, if you caught him without one at all ratcheting up that dern old car he drove. He turned a lot of young girls's heads, even a few my age, though, well, you know, it don't hurt to take a look here and there. And, stories went round he was free with the girls, though I can't say. I wouldn't doubt it, but I can't say. I did feel bad for that poor girl bore his children, though. I guess you've spoke to her, already. She was a nice girl. Lot of others lined up to take her place, her never knowing what was what behind her back. I wouldn't've lived that way. I guess that's why I never went after him myself. I was too old for that boy anyway. And, that's all he ever was, just an ol' boy never quite growed up. And that poor girl. I feel terrible about her boys going bad that way. Lot of people thought highly of that big one. Dern shame. I hope she's doing well, considering. But, Hank, yeah, he could dress hisself. That was one thing you could say about him."

Rita-Sue Gainey
Coalwater Resident

"Some folks used to swear up and down they'd seen Hank. Seen him tear-assing down the roads again in that old Chevy. More than one'll cop to it happening just here recent, back when his boys were kicking up such trouble. There ain't nothing to any of that. That's just folks talking. And, round here, people like to talk a lot out of school, if you get me. I mean, dead is dead. They ain't no coming back. See, I had knowed Hank. Knowed him pretty good, I'd say.

Helped me out of a bad way one time. This was back there in, I remember in '86. Got down with my leg and couldn't get to work up at the mill. They closed that mill year later anyway. But, I couldn't work. And, Ginny, she couldn't get no work. Mrs. Agnes, down at the store, she let her come in a few days and sweep up and do a few whatnots about the store and paid her in trade for a few groceries, you know. That's how come Hank got wise. I guess he seen her down at the store one time he happened to blow in to town and put two and two together, as they say. And, he'd been running loads for SouthernLand Chicken back and to up to Detroit or someplace—along with all manner of other sport he could muster along the way. Hank was bad to run contraband, but I'll not speak a word against him for it. Ginny, she come by early from Mrs. Agnes', said to get my hobleg to moving. I come out there and she's got a trunk just loaded down with them SouthernLand Chickens. Just about a winter's worth. Told me Ol' Hank just stole 'em all right off his truck before he left going up north. Just tossed 'em all down into the car. Give her twenty dollars, she said, to help keep the stove going to cook 'em. Apologized, she said he did, that he couldn't do no better. Apologized, she said. It near 'bout broke me down right there. It was the shame of this country when he died. And, that oldest boy tried to jump in his boots, but the world ain't the same no more. Hell, this whole country's changed completely. You wouldn't recognize it you saw how it was then. But, Hank was one hell of a feller, his boys, too. Won't speak a word against 'em. Car trunk stunk like bad chicken long after, but I won't speak a word against 'em."

--Rance McCinnis
Liberty Resident

"That boy, it was like he could talk to the machine, or it to him one, however you want to call it. The Boy Who Talked to Cars, some called him. It was like he could hear what they said to him and yeah, he could look down at an engine while enough and have it figger'd out in short hurry and man, that fool could drive like you

don't want to know about it. I seen him slide off a gravel trail coming out of nowhere and skate it onto the highway without losing an inch of speed and then he'd squall all the way out of sight. And, I seen him with a gang of highway patrol barking up his ass headed up 11 at a clip and you knowed he was just funnin' 'em. I bet they thought they had him, no doubt called up a roadblock right at the edge of Old Laketown [Coalwater]. Well, you know Hank. He had a deal with the devil when it come to driving. He slid off into them Black Woods—you know highway patrol couldn't go up in yonder. Wasn't they ju'sdiction—and one of 'em tried to foller him. That was a hoot. Them trees would swaller Hank up like he was their own child. Ease him in the rocking chair, as you say. You might reckon you could spot a beaming red and yellow screaming Chevrolet but you'd be wrong. They had to come in and find that patrol man. He never could find his way out. Ha. And they ain't room enough in two books to write down half the things that man could do in a big rig. Hell, son, he was everything you heard of and twice again more. And to hell with the damn newspapers. His boys is kings in my book, still. Kings. Fuck them damn police.”

--Nathan “Hickory” Lickletter
Liberty Resident

“Who Hank? Naw, they never could catch Hank. Well, actually, I take that back. They did get him once with their helicopter. Shit. Yeah, I remember that'n. He'd so bad outrun the policeman tryin' to run him down that he'd just gone on and forgot the whole business and parked in his yard. Next thing he knew the trees was bending over an' he could hear the 'whup whup whup' o' them copter blades. Wrote him a ticket and everything, right there. Course, this was way later on. I don't remember what year, but it was when he was in that red pickup. They'd long since wrecked that old car, the Killafella, he called it. Shit, who the hell names a racing car after a damn snake? He never once got pinned when he was in that old buggy. Shit, he could have two or three on his tail and hop

off in the State Forest and that'd be that. They got to where they wouldn't even foller him in there. Not after Wayne Frizell got lost a whole day and even run out of gas after chasing him into them damn woods. It was like the trees and hills would just swoller him up and then spit him back out the other end of the county.

"But Hank wasn't really a bad feller. Naw. I mean, he caused us a bit of trouble, but in truth no more than half a dozen other less decent sorts. He did more good for people than probly anybody ever knowed. He'd give out meat or produce off the back his truck if he happened by folks needed it. He didn't go out of his way, I guess. Shame when he died. How he did. I guess you know about that. Some say he'd got the cancer, but I don't know about that. Said he's got too close down to where they shot that bomb. Lot of cancer up there, but I don't know about that. Government men said it was safe. But, Hank didn't go from no cancer. He took a spill off that Monteagle grade. Funny thing was, he was hauling back then for that Smokehouse Meats outfit. Load full o' froze pork chops and tenderloin. Sausage. Sliced ham. Poor folks live out by that gradeway. And it was already cold up yonder. They was folks digging out fatback and ribs from that wreck for days In dying, I guess he fed probly half a county through the winter.

"But, that was Hank a'ight. Only fella I ever knowed that got pulled over from a helicopter."

--Walter Baylor

Lathan City Mayor, 1977-1984

