

THE DAYS OF CHARLEY AND EDITH

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Written in 1994*

It was in the summer of 1938 when I was about thirteen. The Edwards family lived in our neighborhood. They fell heir to some unexpected wealth. I didn't know much about the details. It seems that Andrew Edwards had come from the state of Indiana long ago when he was a young man. This seemed to be Andrew's share of his father's estate, which came as a total surprise to him. The Andrew Edwards family was very poor and had never owned a home of their own or one foot of land. They had lived in little run-down shacks around the countryside.

Andrew and his wife Mahaley Jane were about fifty-five years old at the time. Their grown son, Charley, lived with them. Charley and his dad worked around over the neighborhood doing most all kinds of farm work. But the inheritance money put a complete stop to all their farm work for about a year. They just couldn't seem to find the time to work in those fields anymore. The first thing they did was to buy Charley a new car with only 1200 miles on it. Then they went to visit some of their relatives in Arkansas and then on up to Missouri. After that, they went to Indiana to visit with Mr. Edwards' people. They came home after the long visit in Indiana. From that day on, the engine in their automobile never cooled off, day or night. Charley was on the go constantly for one reason or another. Charley soon became the neighborhood taxi. He would take anyone anywhere they wanted to go, day or night, and it didn't cost them a thin dime.

After a while, Charley met a neighbor girl. She was a nice girl and Charley seemed to take a great liking to her. I don't think she cared all that much about Charley, but at least she had someone to go with. Her name was Edith Batey. Charley was good to Edith. He would take her wherever she wanted to go. They went to movies, picnics, parties, and to anything that was going on in the neighborhood. Edith was twenty and Charley was twenty-three. After Charley started going with Edith, he became much cleaner and wore nicer clothes that were always clean. This was quite a change in Charley's life. Going with Edith had improved Charley's appearance so much that we hardly knew him as the same person.

There was a fellow in the neighborhood by the name of Williams who wanted to sell his crops due to illness among his people in Arkansas. It was about the first of

October, time to start gathering the crops out of the field. There were thirty acres of cotton and some sixty acres of corn. Times were hard and the Edwards' seemed to be the only people around that had any money. Mr. Williams talked to Andrew about buying his crop that was out there in the field. Andrew and Charley bought Mr. Williams' crop. Mr. Williams gathered up his family and left for the hills of Arkansas. We never did see him again. Well, that good crop of cotton and corn never did get harvested. It just rotted in the fields as the fall and winter rains came. Charley was just too darned busy up and down the roads going to parties and different gatherings around the neighborhood. He just didn't have the time to fool with gathering in that good crop of cotton and corn.

Charley had been going strong day and night for many months. There were some neighbors that just plain used poor Charley. They would get him to take them to town or wherever they wanted to go. This way they saved a lot of wear and tear on their own cars.

As time we on, I would see Charley's car on the side of the road every now and again...maybe out of gas, a flat tire, or the engine had stopped running. It looked like Charley and his dad had finally run out of money. The tires on the car were slick and worn out. At different times I would see Charley working on his car around the neighborhood. Charley always seemed to be mad and cussing when his car broke down. This was because he didn't really know much about an automobile engine to begin with.

One hot summer day, I came up on poor Charley. He had a tire pump and was pumping up a flat tire on his car. He was hot, sweaty and mad! He and his folks lived in a little two room log house down at the foot of a big hill. There was a little narrow road from their log house that crossed a little field, went down a steep creek bank, crossed the creek, and came out on the other side to the main road. The battery was down on Charley's car and it wouldn't start with the starter. He thought that if we could somehow push his car across that little field and down to the steep creek bank, that it would start. I was riding my saddle horse that day so we took a rope and tied one end to the car bumper and the other end to the saddlehorn.

Little by little my horse was able to pull the car down the narrow little road to the steep creek bank. Then Charley got in his car and I pushed it down the steep hill. The car was going fast. It backfired a few times but didn't start. He jumped out of it with a long automobile crank in his hand and started beating on the hood and beat off both headlights. Charley was mad and cursing the car like a crazy man. He beat out the windshield and ripped off one of the doors, cussing with every breath. I felt sorry for Charley as I got on my horse and rode away.

It looked very much like Charley's beautiful world had come to a sad end. He got to live out one happy year of blissfulness. But now, the parties were all over and the good times were gone. The good part of this is that Charley had gathered up enough memories of he and Edith to last a lifetime. Charley's car had run it last mile, never to start again. The car sat there in the dry creek bed until the floodwaters washed it away. The Edwards family was stone broke, not a dime to their name.

Charley and Edith didn't see each other anymore. Seems Edith had found another sweetheart to take her to the parties and movies. Charley lived with the sweet memories of what used to be and was very thankful for the time he got to spend with Edith. Charley lost most of his popularity around the neighborhood since he no longer had a car and was flat broke. He wasn't important anymore. Seems he went to being a nobody like he was before the inheritance money came along. From then on, Charley lived most of his life in poverty.

Charley was a good guy. He never did amount to much in life. He was my friend over the passing years and I liked him a lot. He was ten years older than me. Charley sat down to rest one evening but never woke up. He died all alone at the age of 71, sitting on the sofa at his home. They found him many hours later. I had visited him a few days before his death and he still talked of Edith.