

By Betty Sherill

When the Toxaway Resort was at its lowest ebb, the year the majestic Toxaway Inn was torn down, a small enterprise catering to tourists was just beginning. That was 50 years ago.

Today the family of Vincent Owen continues to operate the little souvenir stand that Vince started in 1947. The Toxaway Falls Stand is a landmark at Toxaway Falls.

Vince's Stand, as it is known locally, began as Vince's response to some hard luck. Blood vessels at the back of his eyes began to rupture, causing him to lose about 80% of his vision. His daughter, Jonnie Fordyce recalls, "he said it was like seeing through red spider webs when they ruptured."

Vince had worked as a mailman, a log truck driver and at a pipe mill in Brevard. But all those jobs required driving and Vincent knew that he now had to find another way to support his wife and six small children.

He came upon the idea of having a souvenir stand near Toxaway Falls.

Owen was able to lease a small piece of land from the old Lake Toxaway Company. "I believe the Jennings estate still owned that land at the time," Jonnie said.

The original stand was located on the west side of the falls where the Toxaway Company sales office is now.

The Lion's Club bought a "drink box" cooler for soft drinks and Owen soon learned to make change by feel. He sold Cokes, candies and small trinkets. He had help from his children, some who worked there weren't even old enough to see over the counter.

Fordyce began walking to the store to help her Dad on the weekends and holidays when she was six years old.

Eldest son, Jack Owen remembers: "We walked from home on Slick Fisher Road to the stand each day, a distance of over two miles."

The family also helped out by "making" crops, milking the cow and putting up food.

Bad times weren't yet over for the Owen family, though. In 1953, Jack Owen took his mother, Elizabeth, to visit Jonnie at the Transylvania Community Hospital, where she had undergone an appendectomy. While there, Elizabeth began to feel unwell and leaned against the wall, holding her chest. Jack wanted her to be checked by a doctor, "but I



## Toxaway Falls Stand operated by Vince Owen and his family for fifty years.

guess she didn't want to make a bother,"

About a week later, while milking the cow, Elizabeth Lee Owen perished at the age of 42. "She fell while the cow was still standing there," recalled Jack.

Vincent and Elizabeth Owen had eight children at that time, six of those children were still at home. Jimmy was the youngest, at three years old, and Jonnie was the eldest at eleven.

Buying supplies for the little stand was an arduous task. Because of his damaged eyes, Vincent could not drive to pick up his goods. "Daddy would catch a ride at

truck to take him the next day to pick up his purchases.

Jack had been hired by his dad the day his mother died, and was able to buy a Chevrolet in 1954. "I traded it with Daddy for my grandpa's old place where I live now," he said.

"Daddy's eyes were a little better so he could drive to the shop but not out on the main roads," Jonnie says her father had a restricted driving license.

The old adage that lightning never strikes twice at the same place was proven untrue at the Toxaway Falls Stand. The first or second summer the fury of Mother

rag rug over her head and peeked out to see yellow smoke. "I was so scared that I ran out in the road and flagged down a big black limousine. It was a family and they got out to try to help us close up the stand.

The front was folded up and latched. The occupants of the limousine took the two drenched, terrified little girls to the old McNeely store. From there they walked home after the storm passed.

Later, when Vincent returned home, the family went back to the stand to check out the damage. The fuse box was blown out of the wall, the drink box was destroyed and the front of the stand where it was latched shut had fallen open leaving the inside open to the weather.

"Of course, Daddy's biggest worry was getting repairs made to reopen his store for the next big weekend," said Jonnie.

Vincent also had his own encounter with nature's pyrotechnics at the stand. Lightning came down a post from an electrical outlet and struck him on an upraised arm while he was outside talking to a customer. "It knocked him out," remembers Jonnie.

"We took him home and put him to bed. Then we called the doctor who said "if he's still alive, then there's nothing I can do for him."

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the "Junction" (intersection of NC 281 and US 64) on the Ecusta bus which picked up employees in those days, to Brevard," said Jack.

"In Brevard he would catch a Trailways from the bus station on Caldwell Street near where Charlie's Tire is now." Vincent rode to Asheville where he selected the items he needed. After returning home, he would have to find someone with a

Nature paid a visit.

"I was about six years old and my sister Joann was eleven when a storm came up," said Fordyce. "Daddy had gone to the doctor and left us alone with the stand. The lightning struck a tree and a ball of fire came down the rock and hit the building. It knocked a big hole into the wall right next to where I was sitting."

Jonnie had a braided

I'm sure he just went back to work the next day," laughed Jonnie. Vincent had a very strong work ethic and raised his children on that principle.

In 1992 lightning struck yet again. Son, Joe, had come to help close up the stand. As he was carrying the last of the items in through the door, he was hit by lightning.

Workers in a telephone company truck saw Joe fall and called the 911 emergency number. "When the rescuers arrived, Joe was actually dead," said Jonnie. But they were able to revive him.

When Jonnie saw Joe at the hospital she said he had a burn mark running down his sock and out the toe where the lightning left his body. She said it was worse on her Dad seeing Joe hurt than the actual injuries were to Joe.

The Owen children remember when the movie

graph.

The children also watched the scene filmed where the frame of a car was blasted over the falls, to simulate a wreck at the end of a high-speed police chase.



Vince Owen in front of the Toxaway Falls Stand.

When there was still free access to the falls, many people went down over a trail to the bottom to swim in a big pool. However, there was

three orphan children.

The stand was Vincent Owen's life. "He was quite a salesman. The family was after him to close it down when he was in his 80's, but it kept him going," said Jonnie.

"He had a big bull whip, and he would pop it for kids. Then he would sell little bull whips. He also loved the women; always trying to impress them."

Vincent didn't give senior citizens a discount because he didn't believe in retirement. "He didn't believe anyone should leave the stand without buying something, either."

In later years, Vincent owned land near Yucca, Arizona. "We would take him and his truck there every year," said Jonnie. "He was a rockhound. He would hunt

for rocks, and he had the equipment to cut and tumble-polish the rocks. He would sell them at the stand."

When Lake Toxaway was rebuilt in 1960, the stand was moved to the east side of the falls. The Toxaway Company gave Vincent a lifetime lease.

About eight years ago, Vincent began to have heart trouble. He called Jonnie to help him with the October crowds and she continued with the stand ever since. "He was a very private person and handled all his business by himself. It was very hard for him to let others be involved with the buying and the books."

Vincent Owen died two years ago. Jonnie continues to run the stand and is very happy that it has marked its 50th anniversary.

## "That's how long daddy wanted it to last, 50 years"

"That's how long Daddy wanted it to last, 50 years." Jonnie said that the Toxaway Company has been really good to let the stand remain open beyond the lease.

the future will hold. I'm afraid that one day, the little souvenir stand will be gone."

And so will all the wonderful times that the Owen family brought to many visitors to Lake Toxaway.

## "He had a big bullwhip and he would pop it for the kids. He also loved the women, always trying to impress them" ..... Jonnie Fordyce

"Thunder Road" was being filmed in the 1950s. Their father was gone to town. "We ran out of everything, selling to the movie crew," said Jack. "I recall the star, Robert Mitchum laid over in the shade, real drunk, a lot of the time." However, Jonnie was still able to get his auto-

always danger for those who ventured out onto the bald rock cliff above the falls.

"Some of the algae is transparent and it's as slick as goose grease. The green moss is also slippery," said Jonnie.

"Many people have fallen and only one or two

cheese and crackers and apple cider, as if it were the best meal we'd had all week. And fall was always my favorite time of year because we could have boiled peanuts right out of the pot.

As the years rolled on, many of us learned how to drive and were employed to help papaw collect his numerous supplies for the shop. We'd drive to Saluda for cider, Flat-rock for nick-nacks, and the Farmers market for peanuts, and to a little hole in the wall place on a dirt road where a family made bird houses by hand. On one particular trip for the bird houses the family didn't have enough made, so instead of going somewhere else to buy them, we sat down and helped. We left with a truck load of bird houses and smiles on our faces.

As we got older, so did papaw. He began spending less time at the shop and more time at

home. On his porch, we had many conversations. Some were about money, others about friends, and still more about the good old days. We would talk about how he grew up in a small shack where his house stood and about the fire that almost took his life as a child. He would tell stories about the Lake Toxaway School and how he lost part of his index finger pumping from a well. He would gaze at Hogback and tell us he could remember when there were no houses there.

Papaw's porch always seemed to be a gathering place for family members. If one was there you could almost bet the others would stop by on their way home. Our love, respect, and admiration for this man was the glue that held us together, and now our memories of him help us get by with out him. But when we think of him, we always smile.

## Remembering Papaw by Terri Lee Owen

Everyone has people or places that effect their lives in wonderful ways. Things that you only need to think of and a pleasant smile appears on your face. My memories of papaw have that effect on me.

My Grandfather, Vincent Corbin Owen, made his living by selling locally made crafts and goodies in a small roadside shack for 48 years. He knew everyone and everyone knew him.

As kids, the grandchildren would always take turns helping him 'mind the store', and we were always amazed that he could add the prices of several items plus the correct tax in his head before we could add it on a calculator. We would snack on