

# my Personal side

By Craig Hastings



## It's strange what I can find to do around my house when I'm bored.

I stay up past midnight most every night so I'm always looking for something of not much to do to pass the time. For many years now when I'm in my garage I can't keep from staring at the scattered collection of nuts, bolts, washers, screws, misc. fasteners, nails, brackets, automobile fuses, wire, and a host of other odds and ends. I have this stuff scattered and separated in three different nut and bolt storage cabinets, boxes, bowls, jars, and some just laying about my work space. I went to work for Jim and Kay Higgins at the Western Auto store downtown in I think 1972. I was thirteen at the time. It was in the summer between my 8th grade and freshman years in school. I was hired to wait on customers, stock the shelves, unload inventory from trucks, sweep the floor, whatever I was needed and capable to do. I really enjoyed my new job. After all, I was being paid \$1.00 an hour! What thirteen year old wouldn't be happy!

At the time I was hired, a guy by the name of Kenny Nelson was working in a one car garage out back behind the store as Jim's mechanic. Kenny was in charge of working on lawn mowers, chain saws, and automobiles. If you didn't know him, Kenny was the most wonderful person you could call your friend. He also had his own independent wrecker service he operated on as an as needed basis when he was working and full time, all the time, after he was off work. I was thirteen and already car crazy soaking up all of the knowledge I could about the mechanics that moved cars down the road. Not only what moved them but what could be done to make them move faster. I had been a subscriber to Hot Rod and Car Craft magazines since I was eleven years old. I still had every issue I ever received, some doubles if they had pictures in them I wanted to cut out. When I was hired I had no idea that the business worked on mechanical things. It didn't take me long to come up with any excuse I could to get out in the shop with Kenny.

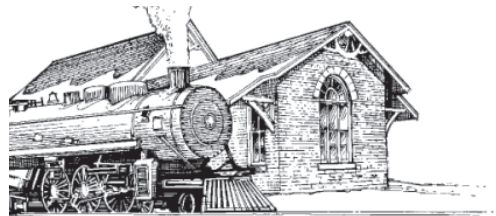
Yeah, I got yelled at a time or twenty by Jim when he caught me hanging out with Kenny longer than it should have taken to deliver parts to him. I was like a sponge when I was in the shop. I was absorbing all the knowledge I could from Kenny. Fortunately for me the business took off and expanded quickly. In just a year or two Jim purchased the old East Tower Dodge facility on South Carico and Wilson Streets. It was a huge facility. Once being the John Deere dealership I believe. It was the same building where I bought my first car, a new 1973 Roadrunner. That's when East Tower Dodge sold Dodge, Chrysler, and Plymouth vehicles. However I believe Jim bought the buildings from Paul Flock. Paul ran Flock Electronics out of the facility and had moved to his new Rt 36 facility. Anyway, I could go on for hours about the car dealerships we used to have here. That's its own trip down memory lane. Jim had really big expansion plans for the business when he bought the East Tower Dodge facility. Fortunately for me that meant I would be going from gopher and stock boy to mechanic's apprentice under the tutelage of Kenny Nelson. I would even get to wear uniforms to work instead of jeans and t-shirts. Kenny was the best instructor a kid could ever hope for. He taught me everything he knew the best he could. If I messed up he rained down the rath on me too. I'm not complaining. Trust me, it only took once having Kenny in your face to learn not to do the same thing wrong twice. My main priority at the new shop was lawn mowers and chainsaws. In a short amount of time I also was given the responsibility

of mounting new tires on cars, trucks, and semis. I had my very own workspace in my own building and I was allowed to set it up however I chose. Jim was generous enough to allow me to use the automotive garage for my own cars after work and on weekends. We now had a real vehicle lift! I was sixteen years old and had free reign to use a lift! That was a big deal!

Back to the nuts, bolts, etc. I was fifteen when I started working on everything and anything I could at True Value Automotive. Yes, our name changed from Western Auto to True Value Automotive. The Christmas of my sixteenth birthday my parents bought me a Craftsman tool box stocked with new Craftsman tools. This was a large mechanics chest that stands about five feet tall. I still have it to this day and still work out of it and others. I was in heaven. No longer would I have to borrow Kenny's tools or use the hit and miss junk tools I managed to scavenge wherever I could. It was when I started working in the shop I started keeping, not collecting, every type of fastener on the planet. I never threw any of them away. In fact when some machine was broken beyond repair and needed thrown away, I'd strip as many nuts and bolts and any other do dads I could find on it before I threw it out back for the junk guy. Over the years working for Jim and after I stored these treasures in three different nut and bolt organizers. When I started working for the police department here, I eventually took over the installation of new equipment in all of the new police cars and the tear out of the old ones. Once again I was hoarding every single nut and bolt I wasn't using in the installs. I still have all of these leftovers fifty years later. The plastic drawers are broken and overflowing. By now there is a mixture of different fasteners in different drawers.

Two weeks ago I ordered two new very large matching organizers. When they came in, one at a time, I took them into my own garage and poured everything out of the old organizers onto my workbench. Slowly and carefully I sorted through thousands upon thousands of misc nuts, bolts, etc. Out of the old and into the new. What a sense of accomplishment I have now that the sorting and storing is done. But something else happened I didn't anticipate. As I'm sorting and storing all of these fifty year old treasures into their new homes memories flooded my brain. Some of these things, small things, are such oddities that I can remember exactly where they came from in the old shop and why I had saved them! It made me think of old times with Kenny Nelson, and Mike Fortney. Mike hired on as a mechanic after the new facility was operating. I believe Mike came on board while he was attending Parkland College. Mike and I working together is another story all its own!

Never ever would I have expected that such small and simple bits and bobs would bring back so many wonderful and meaningful memories of my past. Kenny, Mike, and I were very close. I couldn't have asked for a better group of guys to work with. Truthfully, I intended to throw at least half or more of these things away last week. After all and after fifty years if I hadn't used them by now surely I never will right? As the memories and connections came to mind I ended up throwing nothing away but the dirt that had accumulated in each of the small plastic drawers. How in the world could such insignificant "stuff" bring back my past to me like it was last week? However that works; I'm thankful for the trips down memory lane. These were some of the best years of my life.



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### 10 years ago July 17, 2013

ARTCo was preparing for their production of The Sound of Music. The production would take place at the Tuscola Community Building.

Tanger Outlet Center hosted a back-to-school scavenger hunt. The event was to assist with furnishing school supplies.

Father Delix Michel was welcomed at the First Christian Church in Tuscola. Around the same time, Reverend Robert Williams was assigned to Forty Martyrs Catholic Church in Tuscola.

Kayce Patton took her final walk as queen at the Moultrie-Douglas County Fair pageant. Kayce was the first person to be crowned Little, Junior, and Miss in the pageant's 52-year history.

Tuscom Little League 11-12 All-Stars defeated Champaign and won the District 2 championship. The All-Stars went 5-0 in the district tournament.

### 20 years ago July 8, 2003

Nationally acclaimed country singer Joe Nichols was headlining the Moultrie-Douglas County Fair this year. He was scheduled to perform July 16.

ARTCo (formerly known as Villa Grove Community Theatre) was planning a "family reunion" to mark its 25th anniversary of entertaining the area with plays and musicals.

Tuscola native Matt McCarty was named varsity basketball coach at Vernon Hills High School, with a student enrollment of 1,200.

The Tuscola Little League season came to a close July 4 with a championship game between IGA and Moose. IGA was the winner in the 8-3 contest. Team members included Tyler Luckenbill, Blake Stokes, Eric Kennedy, Darren Timlin, Trace Quinn, Kolby Clough, Shaheen Shabrou, Johnny Ervin, Dylan Walker, Matt Pflum, and Benjamin Cole.

### 30 years ago July 6, 1993

Tuscola Rotary Club members reflected on another year of achievement at its annual dinner, held June 29 at Liga's Restaurant. Outgoing club president Randy Bergeson handed over the gavel to incoming president Mike Yusko. Doug McCumber received a Paul Harris Fellow Award, and Rick Davidson the Frank Michener/Amos Albritton Community Service Award.

British industrial conglomerate Hanson PLC and Quantum Chemical Corp. announced June 30 that Hanson agreed to buy Quantum for \$3.2 billion.

Bill McCarty joined the board of directors of the University of Illinois Alumni Association at its May meeting.

Duncan McHugh of Tuscola was named as an independent contractor with broker Fred McDonald's The County Realtors. McHugh was also a special education teacher and girls track team coach at TCHS.

Tuscom Little League 11/12 All-Stars were Asif Azhar, Chris Brian, Travis Dallas, Kenny Donnals, Scott Groves, Andrew Hall, Brad Hornaday, Ryan McGinnis, Ben McGuire, Matt Moody, Brett Ochs, Matt Schweighart, Zach Waters, and Derek Wilkinson.

### 40 years ago

Dear editor,  
As usual I've read yet another fear mongering and specula-

tive laden "My Personal Side" article by Craig Hastings. I look forward to the day when he re-

tires from doing these articles that serve no purpose other than to give him a platform for

sewing fear and misinformation amongst our populace.

Christopher Gadomski

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**DO YOU RECOGNIZE this week's Back in the Day photo? If so, drop us a note at The Journal. Your efforts will be rewarded.**

### July 12, 1983

The Tuscola City Council failed to override Mayor Clarence Snyder's veto of a pay hike for city employees at a recent city council meeting. Had the increase passed, it would have granted an increase of 15 cents per hour to hourly employees and \$312 annually to salaried employees.

Bob Vukelich, Cabot shift supervisor, was recently presented his 20-year service award from plant manager Kong-Ling Yang.

Eighteen young ladies were vying this year for the title of Miss Mo-Do Fair Queen. They included Karen Melanson, Chris Maggio, Dana Pittman, Beth Chenoweth, Karen Oye, Tammy Fidler, Cheryl Drake, Teri Ashley, Renee Favre, Elizabeth Newman, Jodi Alexander, Cheryl Hale, Stacey Netherton Amy Cook, Ronda Hance, Joanne Bosch, Sharon Dyer, and Tamara Ellington.

Tuscola Little League All-Stars were still in contention in the double-elimination district tournament now underway in Tuscola. The local diamond men lost a 2-1 heartbreaker to Champaign Border in the opening round, but came back to eliminate

Marshall 7-3.

### 50 years ago July 5, 1973

Douglas Manor healthcare facility was slated for completion around Nov. 1. Owners George Barnett and Robert Gatschenberger estimated construction costs of \$750,000 for the 72-bed facility, which would also include a chapel, commissary, barber and beauty shop.

Standard Oil Co. was making inquiries about possible sewer facilities for a motel and Iron Kettle restaurant to possibly be constructed in conjunction with the Standard Service Station located east of I-57.

Retiring Rotary president Rick Marsh received a standing ovation from the membership in recognition of his excellent leadership the past Rotary year. Taking over the reins would be Robert Hastings.

The 43-year-old Douglas County Draft Board held its final meeting last week, with duties being transferred to Charleston. Current board members included Paul Kutz, Jean Albritton, Fred Hammer, Glen Smith, Neal Tay, and Dan Ponder.

## Letter to the Editor

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