

Dave's Place

remember the large, wooden pickle barrel and how Dave would lift

the lid. It was a little neighborhood grocery and meat market, the kind that existed before the advent of supermarkets, and the proprietor's name was Dave. Everyone called him by his first name, even the little children who couldn't see over the counter tops. I called him Dave then, too, and it always made me feel important. His store was always opened, seven days and nights a week, because he preferred it that way, and besides, he lived right over the store.

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That store was Dave's pride. You could sense it by the way the baskets of fresh turnip greens, and stringbeans, and boxes of apples, oranges, and pears were displayed, with never a rotten apple or spotted banana to mar their orderly, beautiful appearance. If there were no customers, you could usually see Dave through the big pane-glass window, scrubbing his butcher's block with a huge wire brush. He always wore a hat while he worked; he told me it would bring him good luck, but I knew from having seen him mop his brow with his handkerchief, and lifting his hat to do so, that he was beginning to go bald on top. In the winter he bundled warmly in a checkered flannel shirt, and his long underwear, buttoned to the top, peeked out from his opened collar. Over his clothing, he always wore a clean white apron--the kind that slips over the neck, ties at the back, and reaches almost to the floor.

Dave was right in his element in that store. It had a comfortable quality, that kind of made you feel right at home. I think he always felt a little remorseful when a customer picked one of his favorites for his Sunday dinner. Dave would

remember the large, wooden pickle barrel and how Dave would lift the lid very ceremoniously to allow you to choose your own pickle. Salt mackrel fish were sold from enormous wooden casks, and there really was a cracker barrel in that store. You could buy cookies, two-for-a-penny, out of a cookie box with a see-through window, but you were never allowed to touch the one you picked--not until it was paid for and Dave handed it to you in a piece of waxed paper. He always did this with a smile, but said that he didn't charge for his smile. Sometimes, if he was in a good mood, he didn't take the penny, but gruffly said, "Beat it, kid." *of business* At the back of the store was a walk-in refrigerator, the kind with a door and windows in it. You could see sides of beef, and a whole half of a lamb hanging in there. Little noses were always pressed up against the window glass to look at the wondrous world within. Dave's wife always shouted, "Put on a sweater before you go into the cold box," but he never did. He must've been the strongest man in the world. His wife used to say he was a "stubborn mule." She also used to say he was "stock happy," and it was probably true, because there wasn't a space in that store that wasn't filled. As soon as a hole appeared in the rows of cans on the shelves, it was filled with a replacement.

But the best thing of all in the whole store were the chicken coops, filled with cackling roosters and hens, and sometimes, during holiday seasons, turkeys and ducks. All colors and sizes, they were fascinating to watch, and Dave used to talk to them. I think he always felt a little remorseful when a customer picked one of his favorites for her Sunday dinner. Dave would

Millie Schwartz  
English 12 at 9:00 a.m.  
Theme #11  
April 1, 1970

fearlessly put his hand inside the coop with its bevy of pecking chickens, and bring out the customer's choice for her to pinch and blow on the feathers before deciding to buy. Sometimes I would overhear Dave giving his favorite recipe for chicken soup or lamb stew to a customer. He commiserated about high prices, too, because if they were high for the customer, they were high for him, too. He used to tell me that he had to bend down four times to get four quarts of milk from the cooler to make one penny profit. Of course, that was a long time ago. It's too bad stores like that don't exist anymore, because it was more than just a place of business--it was a meeting place and a place where you knew you could always find your friend Dave.

*Very good, specific details.*

*A*

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