

the honor of riding along one night with the family as "Santa" made his rounds on County Home Road.

Let me tell you about a skinny 10-year old Smith boy that came to Sipe's when he was in the 5th grade. I asked Gerald what he remembered about his very first day at Sipe's. He said Mr. Odom brought him to his office and sat him down and talked to him for a while. Then he escorted him to the kitchen where he was given some of Mrs. Ceda Lail's "famous" (that's what Gerald calls it) spaghetti. Then he was taken, again by Mr. Odom, to the little boy's cottage and introduced to Mrs. Burgess, the houseparent. Before Mr. Odom left this skinny 10-year old boy in the care of Mrs. Burgess, he told him if he had any questions or problems, to call or find him, as he was available 24 hours a day.

I think it needs to be mentioned that "Pop's" family (wife Sally, sons Pat and Craig, and daughter Sarah) certainly were to be commended as they had to share this man with so many people. Craig died of cancer at a young age. During those last months before his death, Mr. Odom cared for him at home.

Some of the things Gerald made mention which you may remember, too, were:

One of Pop's favorite quotes was "How's your conduct, Smith?" Of which Gerald knew he'd better answer truthfully because Mr. Odom already knew. Also mentioned was how strongly Mr. Odom felt about "his boys" attending church and how this was a must under his tenure as you may well remember. Another thing Mr. Odom was a stickler about was that anytime the boys were going somewhere, he told them to be "neat and clean."

Our association with Mr. Odom continued even after Gerald left the home as we worked at Sipe's for five years when we were first married. Mr. Odom loved all kinds of cuisine. Pastor Jim has commented numerous times about the many cuts of meat Mr. Odom prepared on his cookers in his back yard - sometimes three were going at a time. I remember this, too, as every time I stepped out the door when he was cooking, the aroma was simply divine. (We lived in the house

behind him.) The first Thanksgiving after Gerald and I were married, Mr. Odom said he would teach me some of his grilling tricks and, true to his word, we prepared our first smoked turkey that year. I've continued the tradition to this day as we usually prepare several turkeys and roasts for gifts to friends.

The last time I saw Mr. Odom was exactly one week before his sudden death when he paid a visit to our home. My youngest son, Daniel, was 11-months old at that time. Mr. Odom loved to see our children and, as was his custom, to spoil Jesse and Daniel with goodies. He usually had a bag of Hershey bars, etc. when he came by. Till the day he died, he looked upon Gerald as one of "his boys," and I could see it in his face that he loved Gerald and he was truly his "father."

In conclusion, what can I say about a man as special as Papa John? Have you ever heard the song by Alabama entitled "Angels Among Us"? Papa John was one of those angels. He was truly one of those people who was a "servant of God" and he was truly "one of a kind." We loved him, and we miss him.

- Submitted in loving memory by
Vicki and Gerald Smith

PS - Gerald was at Sipe's from 5th grade until he graduated from high school.

PPS - John Gary Odom, Sr., was born on October 6, 1919 and died November 9, 1984. He was 65 years old and the longest tenured children's home executive in North Carolina at the time of his death. He served Sipe's for over 33 years.

Almighty God, we thank you for the examples of faith-filled lives you place around us. As we share our stories, help us also to serve as examples of your gracious love.

Amen.