

There aren't many of the little old country stores left in our area. There was a time when there were plenty of flourishing establishments of this kind, the type of general store that took care of most of the needs of the surrounding rural population. One of these markets, a fixture in the community for years, was Raymonds' Store several miles south of Bristol. That corner is empty now, but there was a time when all kinds of activity took place there. There was a farm equipment dealership on the premises, a general store with a meat market, and Saturday night "free show" movies. Raymonds' Store was, in many ways, a community center.

Sometimes, these small entrepreneurs ran specials, had unique promotional activities, and tried to attract business in other ways. One year, Raymonds' Store had a contest. They had a big cloth sack filled with flour on display, and customers were encouraged to estimate its weight. After a specified length of time, the sack would be weighed--on a Saturday night--and the person who had made the closest guess would win the entire bag of flour. Most women baked much of their families' bread, and that bag of flour was a coveted prize.

My father, like many others, wrote down his estimate. On the Saturday night when the flour was weighed, however, we did not go to the store. The next morning, my uncle sat in our kitchen having an early morning cup of coffee. "Well," he said, "did you pick up your flour?"

My father was dumbfounded. He had not had the slightest hope of winning the bag of flour. When he went to the store to claim his prize, he found that the sack had weighed in at one hundred eighty-seven and a half pounds, just a half pound more than he had guessed. We youngsters were in awe of his ability to estimate weight.

My mother, though, was more interested in using the prize than in talking about it. That sack of flour, if used entirely for bread, would have made well over one hundred fifty loaves. Luckily for us, a good share of it went into dough destined to become tasty, fragrant cinnamon rolls, feather-light raised doughnuts, and the thin, butter-brushed rectangles we called thinbread.

I don't think my father ever won another thing. He was not much

interested in the prospects of something for nothing. But, he chuckled over that sack of flour for years to come. The tale of that contest is just one short chapter in the chronicle of Raymonds' Store.