

## My Old Friend Robinson

*Donald Robinson Died February 7, 2022*

I am Shelby. Shelby is my last name. Everyone called each other by their last name in our Southern Bell work group where I met Robinson, and we never changed. It has always been a symbol of when we met and how long we've been friends—Robinson would say many times, "You are my oldest friend."

Rita, my girlfriend, and I left Birmingham for Atlanta where we moved in with her friend who lived on St. Charles. She worked for Southern Bell and advised me to apply, which I did and they hired me within a week. My first assignment was pole-climbing school, and after that, they assigned me to the Buckhead installation group. When I walked in that first morning and introduced myself to everyone, I never thought I began a lifelong friendship.

Robinson and I hit it off right away; we became good friends. Robinson was friends with everyone, but to be his "good" friend meant a lot. Although he was four years younger than me, he wanted to be my instructor; he wanted to explain the phone business to me because he knew everything—he had been there six months. We both enjoyed phone work, but being in Buckhead as young, single men in 1970, there was much else that captured our attention. And, if that excitement didn't capture us we would go hunting for it.

After a couple of paychecks, Rita and I moved out of her friend's apartment and we got our own in Buckhead on East Paces Ferry Rd. It was a couple of blocks from Grandview Ave., where the work center was. Being so close—or convenient—Robinson and a couple of others would pick up a six-pack and come over almost every night. This resulted in Rita asking me many times, "Is this going to go on forever?"

Ralph was his name. Rita and I were in a large department store, Arlans I think, on Piedmont and Lindberg, when I walked down the pet aisle. There he was, a squirrel monkey just staring at me, and a few seconds later I knew he wanted to go home with me. How could I say no? Now it was Rita, Ralph, our nightly guest and me.

Ralph stayed in a cage in our living room until the nightly beer drinking began. Robinson would come over and before he could get two sips down, he would say, "You think we should let the monkey out?" Ralph was fast and on target: he would jump from the cage to someone's lap, hop to someone else and then jump to a curtain rod to get his bearings. After making his rounds around the apartment a couple of times, he would settle down and perch on top of the door just staring at us for the rest of the night.

One day after work, I invited Robinson over for a drink "a drink" of Wild Turkey Bourbon. He and I drank the whole bottle. For fifty years, he reminded me of the risk in inviting him over for "a drink." Forty years later, he gave me a bottle of Wild Turkey and said, "We are even."

Time moved on, Rita move back to Birmingham, Robinson married Dyan and they moved back to Carrollton, I left the phone company and was involved in motorcycles and traveling. Our adventures in Buckhead became those old "Buckhead Stories"; they were constantly told and retold for fifty-two years.

After I left Atlanta, I lived and worked in Virginia Beach, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile and Jupiter, Florida. This was a time before cell phones, so keeping in touch wasn't that easy; however, Robinson never failed to find me. If he didn't know where I was, he would call my mother and ask for my telephone number. His effort caused us to remained friends for so long.

In our middle years, he was working and taking care of his family, and I was working and starting my business. Later when we had more money and free time we started riding motorcycles together. On One trip, we left Georgia, rode through Tennessee, Kentucky, touched into Ohio, through West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and back to Georgia. He would always laugh at me for looking at a map when we stopped—I just wanted to know where we were—I would laugh at him because he had no idea where we were—he would say "We are just riding around." Sometimes when we came to a fork in the road or intersection and I would look puzzled, he would pull up next to me and say, "Go on down that road, it'll come out somewhere."

I want to say these names of our old friends, some are dead and others lost from contact but not from our memory: Larry Anderson, Doyle Tudor, Jim Gullege, and Charlie Fawcett. I also want to give relief to Dyan and Pat, my wife: those old Buckhead stories will forever remain silent.

Robinson, when I leave Carrollton, I'm going to Buckhead. I'm going to visit some old places we used to know and see regularly. I'll stop at a bar on Peachtree and have a "Wild Turkey." And you, well, you go on down that road—it'll come out somewhere.