Notable Events in a Purpose Driven Life – Filling Gaps

Karl E. Peace, PhD

Senior Research Scientist & Professor of Biostatistics

Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health

Georgia Southern University

Fellow, American Statistical Association (1991-)

Georgia Cancer Coalition Distinguished Cancer Biostatistician (2002-)

Inaugural Public Health Fellow, VCU School of Public Health (2026)

GPHA Sellers-McCroan Award for Improving Public Health through academic and laboratory advancement (2011)

Honorary Doctorate Degree, Ismail Qemali University of Vlora, Albania (2025)

Title: Notable Events in a Purpose Driven Life – Filling Gaps

Abstract: Karl E. Peace traces his life from its humble beginning in Baker County, located in southwest GA. Born to tenant farmer parents with little education, he presents vivid accounts of sharecroppers' existence in the 1940s and 1950s. He became the first in his family to earn a high school diploma and later a college degree. Upon earning a Ph.D. in Biostatistics, he became the first (and only) individual from rural Baker County, Georgia to claim such a lofty educational status. After a career as a classroom instructor at the college and university level, he accrued a long career in the pharmaceutical industry and made major contributions in the areas of research and clinical development of pharmaceutical compounds. He then founded the CRO: BRCI, and after giving it to his wife, he returned to his undergraduate alma mater to develop a degree program in biostatistics (Master's) and founded the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health – both firsts in the University System of Georgia.

This presentation is an account of a man's life that recognizes achievement under difficult circumstances and the importance of helping others. Notable other events that represent filling needed gaps are highlighted.

Overview

I. Background (Geographical & Personal)
II. Chronology / Positions held (Primarily PI Jobs)
  A. The Early Years
  B. High School
  C. Undergraduate Days at GSC (1960-63)
  D. Master's Work at Clemson (1963-64)
  E. Teaching Mathematics at GSC (1964-67)
  F. Pursuing the PhD at Clemson (1967-68)
  G. Teaching at RMC & VCU (1969-73)
  H. Pursuing the PhD at MCV & Teaching at RMC, MCV & VCU (1973-77)
  I. Senior Statistician, Burroughs-Wellcome (1978-80)
  J. Manager, Clinical Statistics, AH Robins (1980-82)
  K. Director, Research Statistics. SK&F (1982-86)
  L. Senior Director, Gastroenterological Studies & Clinical Operations, GD Searle Pharmaceuticals (1986-87)
  M. Vice President, WW Technical Operations, Parke-Davis/ Warner Lambert (1988-89)
  N. President, CEO, CSO, CFO, Biopharmaceutical Research Consultants, Inc. (1989-2000)
  O. Georgia Southern University (2000- present)
III. Post Pharmaceutical Industry
IV. Some Advice to students
V. Final Thoughts
Appendix: Jobs through undergraduate school

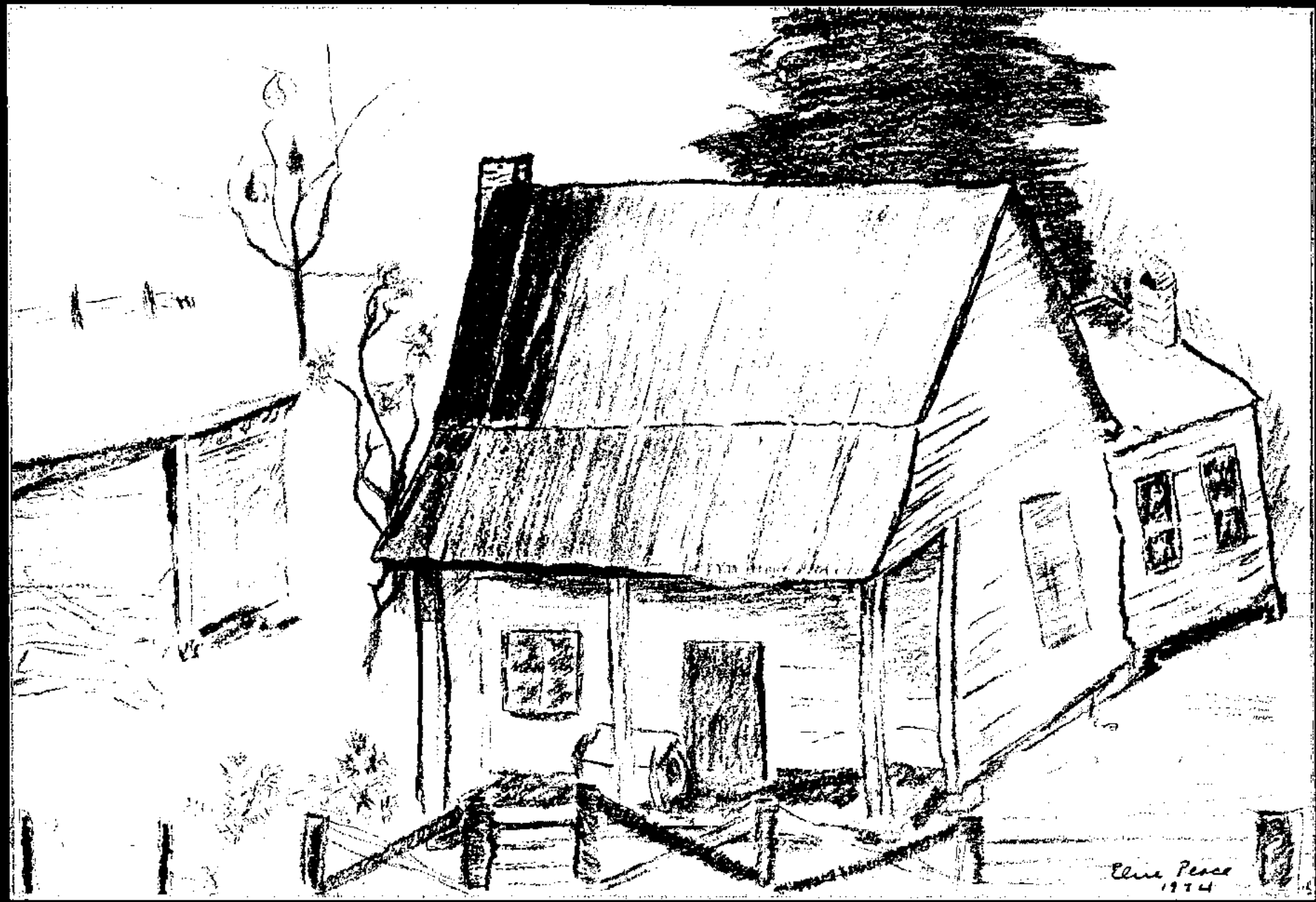
I. Background
A. Personal

- I grew up a member of a share-cropping, mule-plowing, farming family. In a share-cropping arrangement, the landowner provided the land, mules, farming implements, a house for the share-cropping family and the seeds and fertilizer. The family provided the labor to produce and harvest the crops – for a share of the sales. In addition, the landowner provided a monthly loan (of $50 for a family of 6) to the share-cropper that had to be repaid from his share of the sales of the crops – in addition to paying the landowner for 1/2 the costs of seeds and fertilizer.

- Sharecropping was an itinerant existence. By the time I was five, we were living in our fourth of nine houses. The typical tenant farmhouse was unpainted and contained two rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom, a front porch, and a roof capped with sheets of tin. The house had no electricity and no running water and no indoor plumbing. A fireplace provided heat, and a wood burning cast iron stove was used for cooking.

- Water was obtained from an open, deep well. Often the water had to be strained (to remove mosquito larvae, called 'wiggle tails') and boiled before human use. The outhouse was located about a hundred feet from the northwest corner of the house, a proper distance from the deep well.

I. Background: Mom's Sketch of House of Birth



I. Background
A. Personal

- My Mother went to school 3 years and finished the sixth grade. My father quit school in the second grade. I am the first person on either side of my family tree to graduate from high school and go to college. I may be the only native Baker County Georgian to have obtained a PhD degree.

- When I graduated from high school, with assistance from Principal, Joe Vines, I obtained a loan of $532 from Bill Shepherd in Leary, Georgia to prepay tuition for the first two quarters at Georgia Southern College. Thereafter, with the assistance of a Georgia State Teachers Scholarship and income from 7 part-time jobs, I was able to complete the BS in Chemistry while providing support to my younger brother, sister and Mother, who was a cancer patient.

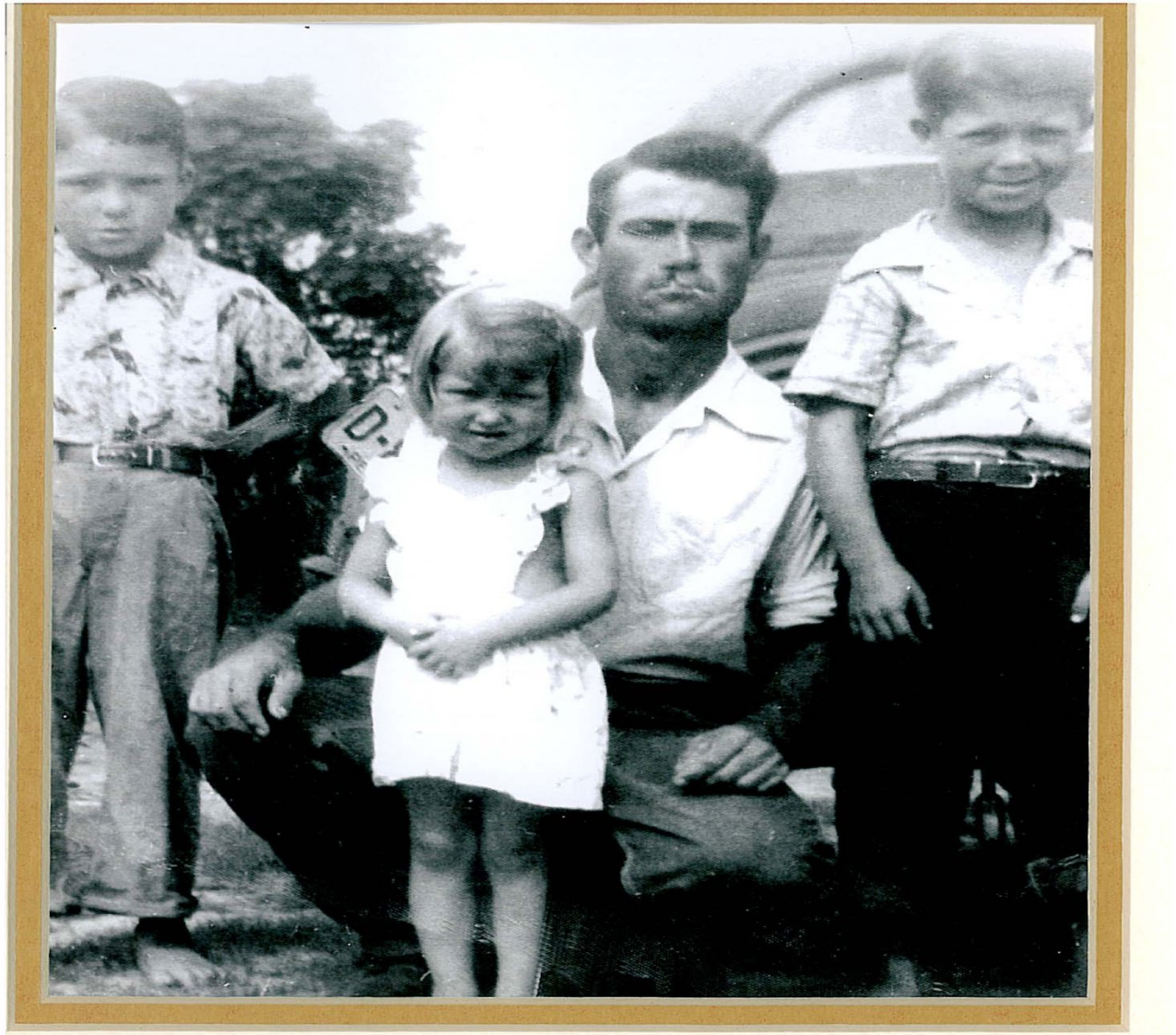
Last of 9 Tenant Houses in which I lived



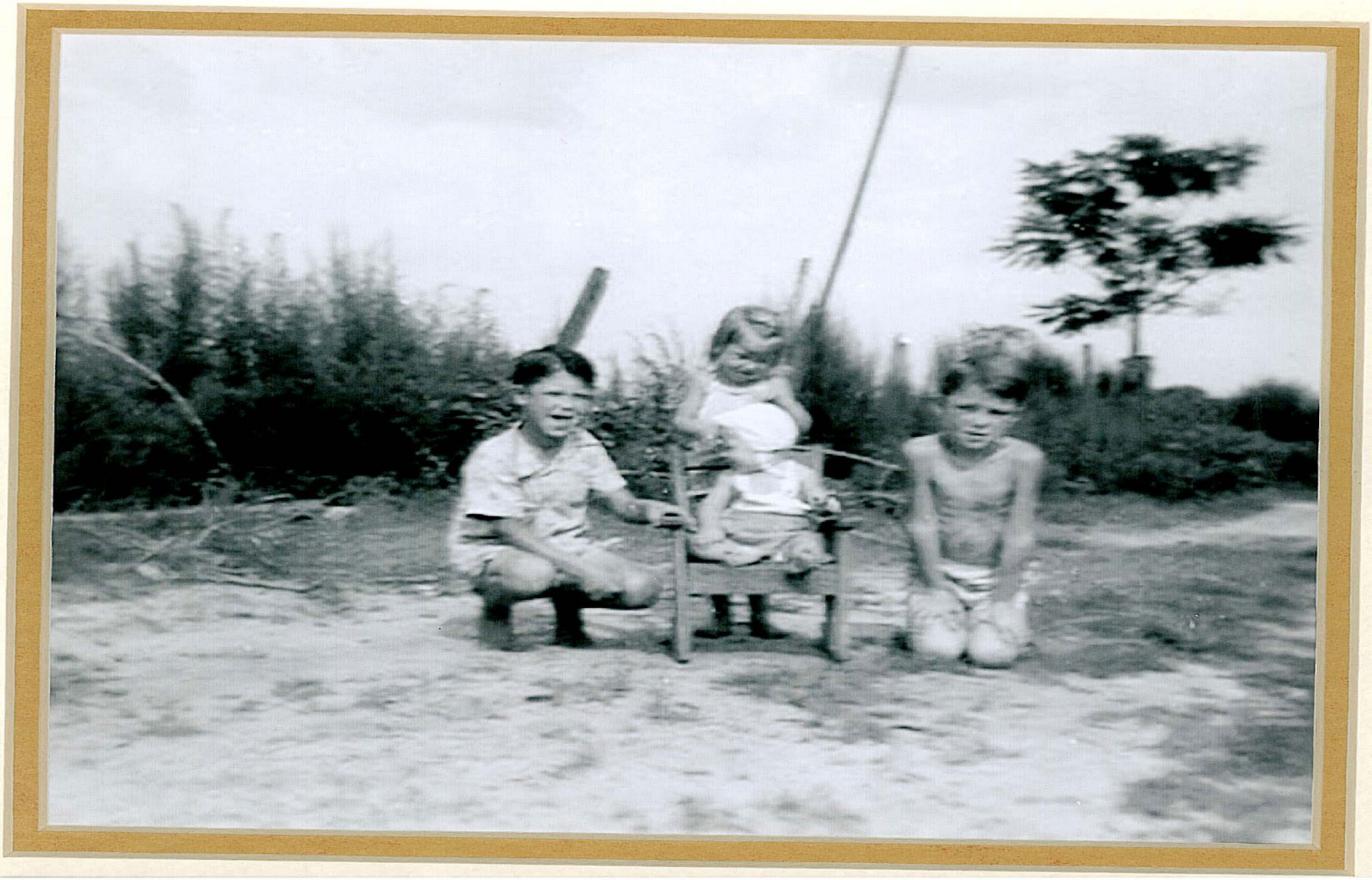
Three Oldest Peace Children: Note Dresses made from Flour Sacks



Three Oldest Peace Children: Note ‘Hand-me-down’ belt, pants, No shoes



Peace Children
Note signs of malnutrition



Alligator Creek showing Waterfall



Alligator Creek flowing to Notchaway



Notchaway Creek in Baker County



I. Background

B. Personal – Starting labor early

- In retrospect many of the tasks that I had to do while growing up have elements of research in them. Thus, one could say that my interest in research methods may have started at a very early age.

- **Example 1:** To the best of my recollection, at age 3, my father gave me the task of removing the ears of corn from the stalks in a row of corn.

  - **Objective**: Remove the ears from all the stalks of corn in the row of corn
  - **Methods**: Since I could not reach the ear, I had to figure out a way of getting to the ear. I pushed each stalk over, and then wrung each ear from the stalk, piling them in a central location
  - **Results**: I accomplished the objective in about half a day

Harvesting Corn



Laying off Rows



Picking Cotton



I. Background

C. Making my own toys

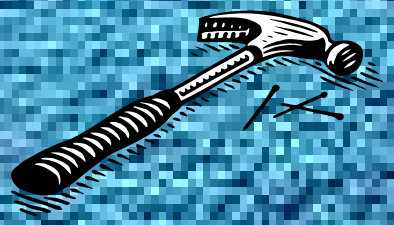
- By the age of nine I made my own toys (I never had a store-bought toy); for example: a Flying Jenny, a wheel roller and a green persimmon thrower. I'll recount one of these as it reflects Operations Research ideas.
- **Example 1:** Building a Wheel Roller

  - **Objective:** Build a functional wheel roller

  - **Materials**: An oak or hickory stick about 1 inch in diameter and 2-3 feet long, an empty Prince Albert tobacco can that has been flattened, two 8 penny nails, a hammer, a saw, a plane, & an iron wheel about 6" diameter Materials (except tools) were found from scrap piles or the woods.

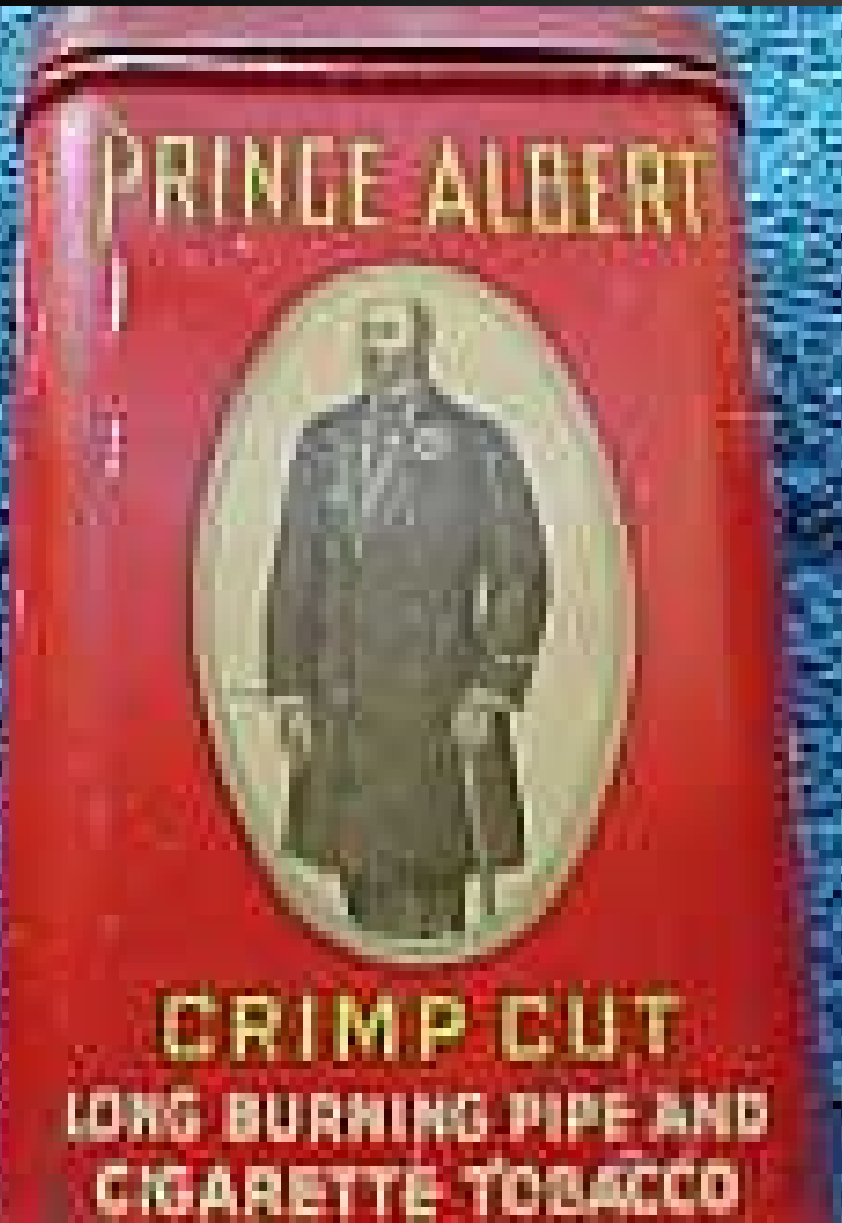
  - **Methods**: Center the tobacco can flush with the bottom of the stick and nail to the stick. Then turn up the edges of the can (looks like an open box with front and back sides missing) in an optimum manner (you don't want too much 'play' about the wheel when in use, nor do you want it too tight about the wheel). To use, one stands the wheel on edge, then places the stick so that the tobacco can is centered about the wheel and then runs pushing the wheel in front.

Wheel Roller Materials

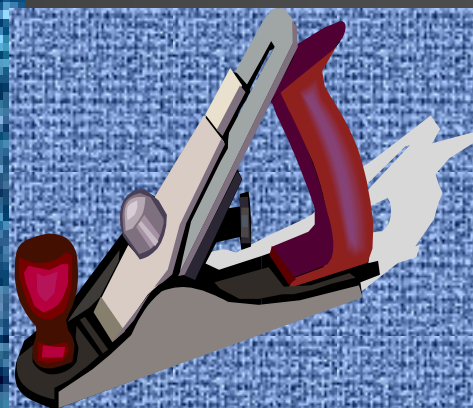












I. Background

D. High School

- I barely had a 70 average in the ninth grade, due in part to not knowing how to deal with ridicule and discrimination encountered as being one, if not the poorest kid in school. I had the proverbial chip on my shoulder (and part of it may still be there). In the tenth grade, my math teacher, Mr. Bill Tom Reeves requested my help in solving algebraic word problems and problems in trigonometry and plane geometry. In short time, he had me teaching some of his classes. This was a period of tremendous internal discovery and provided a way for me to feel respected. I finished the tenth grade with a 95 average, the eleventh with a 97 average, and the twelfth with a 99.8 average.

- In retrospect, I have often wondered whether Mr. Reeves really couldn't work the problems for which he sought my help (His degree was a BA in English). Perhaps he could and it was his way of providing me a platform of uplifting. Whatever the truth, I owe a lot to him and have established a scholarship endowment in his name for Baker County students who want to pursue mathematics or biostatistics at Georgia Southern. In fact, I've established 5 scholarship endowments at GSU, specifically for Baker County students – two named after Mr. Reeves and Mr. Vines.

I. Background

E. Undergraduate Days at GSC (60-63)

- I did a lot of experimentation, but I doubt that much of it qualified as scientific research. For example, I would distill CH_2CH_3-OH in the chemistry lab, inject it into oranges and take them to basketball games. 'Of course, when I sucked the oranges during the basketball game, many may have been impressed by my desire to ensure adequate levels of vitamin C!' – Early vision of PH?

- On a more serious note, taking an overload of courses each quarter and working 7 part-time jobs left little time to pursue research outside that necessary to master the courses I took. I do remember making a contribution to a chemistry lab chromatography experiment that the teacher, Dr. Darryl Lynch, for whom I had great respect, singled out.

I. Background

F. (63-77)

* **Master's Work at Clemson (1963-64)**
* **Teaching Mathematics at GSC (1964-67)**
* **Pursuing the PhD at Clemson (1967-68)**
* **Teaching at RMC & VCU (1969-73)**
* **Pursuing the PhD at MCV & Teaching at RMC, MCV & VCU (1973-77)**