

## H AULING WATERMELONS FOR GRANDPA BROWNLEE



I was in high school when this occurred. Grandpa Brownlee had raised a fine crop of watermelons and wanted someone to haul them to Atlanta and surrounding vicinity, i.e., Stone Mountain, Clarkston, Avondale, Decatur, and East Atlanta, to sell. Daddy agreed that I would go haul them for Grandpa. I was not too enthused. Loading, selling and unloading watermelons is hard work



I arrived early in the morning and we drove to the field in the pick-up truck. I should mention our truck at that time was a 1940 Chevrolet Pick-up, dark blue with black fenders and black running-boards. There was an old field road to the watermelon field (it was more of a “patch” than a field). Grandpa began to select the melons and I began to carry them to the truck and load them. Then I noticed something. These were “yellow-meated” rather than the normal “red-meated” melons. Oh Lord, we can’t sell these things I thought to myself. “Grandpa”, I said. “These are yellow-meated watermelons”. “Sure are”, he said, “ain’t they fine, yellow-meated melons are sweeter”. “But Grandpa, people won’t buy these, they want red-meated watermelons, that’s what they are used to seeing”. “Oh they will love these”, he said, “soon as they get a taste of em”. I realized I was not going to get anywhere trying to talk him out hauling those melons to town to sell.

We loaded-up pretty quickly and were on our way. We had a very heavy load. Watermelons loaded two to three high in a pick-up truck make a heavy load. We were on the old US 78 Highway that used to go through what is now Stone Mountain Park, we had passed the Mountain and was heading for the junction of the Main Street to downtown Stone Mountain City when I began to feel the truck weave. I knew something was wrong so I pulled off as soon as I could safely get off the road. We had a flat on the rear of the truck. There we were with a load of watermelons, an apparently ruined tire and no spare tire. This was shortly after the WWII, and although they were no longer rationed, tires were still scarce. What was I going to do now?

I decided to walk to the nearest service station, which was about half a mile from where we had parked. I remembered that Dad had stopped in there several times when I was with him on the milk route, so I hoped they would remember him and would help me out. I had no money with me, and Grandpa did not have enough with him to buy a new tire, even if they had one. I had to roll the wheel with the ruined tire by hand the whole way. The owner did know Dad. As I remember he sold me a good used tire on my promise that Dad would stop by and pay for it the next week. I rolled the wheel and tire back to the truck and put it on. We were on our way again. I was worried since we did not have a spare tire in the event we had another flat, but we made it.

We by-passed Stone Mountain and headed for Clarkston. We first went to the residents of the mill-worker section of town. Clarkston and Scottdale were known as “Mill” towns. I parked the truck and we knocked on a few doors. We sold a few, but

they were not moving like they should. So I suggested we go to the colored section of town. Grandpa agreed and when we arrived I parked the truck in the street in the shade of a tree. I could see a few people sitting on the front porches. So I yelled “Watermelons – watermelons for sale”. I had heard other peddlers do that in town before and it sometimes brought people out to the truck. It worked for us.

Soon there were two or three people around our truck, thumping our melons, gently rolling them over, and asking the price. We had melons for twenty-five, thirty-five, fifty cents and a few choice large ones we ask 75 cents each. One husky fellow was talking “dese rat purty watamelerns, yas suh, b’lieve I could ave one of dese heah”. “How much dis’n heah”? One of us said, fifty cents. “Dat look lak a thurty-five cent’un to me, you shore hits fi’ty cents”. “Its fifty cents”, one of us said. A couple of other people were thumping and looking over our melons while we were dealing with the big guy. He said, “OK, I’ll take dis’n heah”. I started to pick it up for him, while he was paying Grandpa. “By da way”, dis heah ain’t no yeller watamelern air it”? I looked at Grandpa and he looked at me, “why it sure is, and the sweetest thing you ever tasted”, Grandpa said. “I don b’lieve I wan it den” the husky fellow said, while putting his money back in his pocket. Grandpa tried to convince him they were as good or better than ‘red-meated” melons, but he just kept backing off. “Don lak dem yeller watamelerns, don look rat, don tase rat”, and he turned and walked off. The other people around the truck were backing off as well. We tried to convince them to try the melons; they just shook their head no, and also walked off. “Well I declare”, Grandpa said, “they just ain’t willing to try them, I bet if they tried them they would like them”. We waited there few minutes longer, but could not interest anyone in them. The word was out and nobody wanted “yellow-meated” watermelons.

“Hummm, well what do you think we ought to do”, Grandpa asked? I thought for a minute and then said, “let’s go try to sell some of these to small grocery stores, but we will have to sell them for less”. Grandpa said OK, so we went to one of the individual grocery stores in Clarkston that Daddy sometimes stopped at to sell the remaining farm items he might have left after a day on the milk route. I suggested to Grandpa that he let me do the talking and he gave me a hard look, but agreed. We got the owner out to the truck to look over our melons. “How much you want for’em,” he asked? Well there are about three different sizes on here and we want a different price for each size, twenty-five cents, thirty-five cents, and fifty cents. He looked at me then at Grandpa. I said “how many can you use?” “Oh, maybe a dozen” he said, “how much for a dozen of these larger ones”? “Fifty cents each, I see you don’t have two many left”, I said, “maybe you could use the whole load.” “Don’t know if I could sell that many.” “Whata’ya want for the whole load?” Oh, I liked the sound of that. “Forty cents each for all”, I looked at Grandpa, but I didn’t get any response and that bothered me. “These were picked fresh right from the field this morning”, I said, “they’ll keep real well.” He began to check the stems. If a watermelon is fresh, the stem will still be green, and a little juice oozing out. Those picked more than a couple of days, the stem will have begun to dry and shrink. He says “I’ll give you thirty-five cents a piece for the whole load, and you off load them right over there.” I looked at Grandpa; he dropped his head then looked up and gave me a slight nod. I asked “you want to count them now, or after we unload them”? He said

“just come in and tell me how many after you finish unloading them, I’ll trust you.” Grandpa didn’t say anything the whole time we were unloading. I was sure wondering what he was thinking, and was he unhappy with me for selling the whole load. He paid Grandpa and we left real quick.

We headed back home; neither of us said anything for a few minutes. Then Grandpa said, “I was surprised you were able to sell him the whole load”. “ I was surprised too, Grandpa, I was hoping to sell six to twelve, but I was happy to unload all of them”. In a few minutes Grandpa said, “do you think we could bring another load today”? Oh me, I didn’t want to try to sell anymore yellow-meated watermelons – any day. “Well I don’t know, do you really want to try to sell another load today”? “Why I believe we can, you were pretty slick selling this load all at one place” he said. I knew that it was a lot of luck, but I was caught, so naturally I agreed to haul another load even though I knew we would be late getting back home.

We got back to his house a little after dinner (lunch), but we stopped to eat a light meal and then rushed to the field and began the same process of loading the truck. Grandpa began selecting the melons, pulling them from the vines and me toting them to the truck. We soon had a load, but not quite as big as the first load. I think Grandpa was afraid we might blow another tire, I was too as a matter fact. We headed for Atlanta.

Grandpa said, “let’s go by that feller’s store, he might have sold some of them melons and would buy some more”. “No Grandpa, we don’t want to go back there”. I knew the first melon he sold, they would be back to his store complaining, especially if he didn’t tell them they were yellow, and he couldn’t tell them because he didn’t know it until the first complaint he got from a customer. “Let’s try a different part of town,” I said.

“When you owned the dairy, didn’t you have several customers in the Kirkwood area” I asked. “Why yes” he said. “Well let’s go over there and try that area”. He seemed pleased. My hope was that he could convince them to try the yellow-meated melons. We began to sell a few here and there, some at some individual grocery stores, then I would move on pretty fast to a few streets away, because we never told the store owners what kind of melons they were, nor some of the individual customers that bought them either. Although I don’t remember all the details, by late afternoon we had sold the last of them. We headed home.

Grandpa talked some about how he thought we had done pretty good to sell two loads in one day. And about how he could not understand why people would object to yellow-meated watermelons, he thought they had a better taste and were much sweeter. After a while he got quiet, and then ups and asks me if I thought Dad would charge him for the tire we ruined. Of course I didn’t know so I told him to talk to Dad about it when he paid Dad for the use of the truck. He seemed a little worried about it.

When I got home it was late. Dad was already milking. I joined him in the barn to help finish with the milking. “What took you so long?” Dad asked. I told him we hauled

two loads. In a few minutes I told him we busted a tire and I had to buy one in Stone Mountain, and I told the man that he would stop by and pay for it. I told him that Grandpa seemed worried that he might have to pay for the tire. Dad just looked at me and didn't say anything. That made me uneasy too. I don't know how they settled up, and I don't remember getting anything for that days work – but that was not unusual, and as I look back on it, I probably wasn't expecting to get anything. That was life in the forties for a teenage farm boy.

Thomas H. Ewing  
(My Remembrance)  
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