I always lacked cash for Christmas gift. So in 1958 an old lady hired two teen-age girls. No, we didn’t make much. Our job was just two weeks while school was out. We sold to lots of “hicks” in the tiny town’s environs and county: toys, tools, screws, nails, saws. What a bounty of country loot was in that hardware store on Front Street. Men came in overalls. “I’d shore like to buy that boy ‘o mine thut bike up in the winder. How much?” “And them cups in that red package—thur. Wife ‘ud luv ‘um, I guess. Reckon I could put them on time?”

“Oh yes, I’m sure. Mrs. Hawthorne would let you. How many times can you come to pay?” (Do I try to get her price down for him? He needs it.) Other times I’d tell mothers, “Don’t buy that. I think it would tear up quickly.” (And we were also working on commission!) See, I had been taught sins of omission, too, in Sunday School. Not to speak up would glue you to hell later. So I told the truth as I saw it about those toys. I’d sleuth around that cold store looking at labels, guarantees, quality. I told no fables to Pearl River County customers. Mama, Daddy laughed so hard when I came home and said, “I told them, ‘No, don’t buy that one,’ when that fat old owner Mrs. Hawthorne wasn’t looking.” She could not hear well, so Jane and I said to poor people, “Oh no, 

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don’t do that. It wouldn’t be worth it.” Fun was not only selling but helping--with cold buns!

We’d warm them, backsides, by a big wood stove, the only heater in that tall-ceilinged cold cave of a place filled with necessary catches. She’d pay us extra to come early with matches to heat up the old room, before she entered. We felt important carrying keys. Centered around the wood, paper, and flames, we shivered, my friend and I, in our wool sweaters. We’re slivers of girls, age sixteen. Christmas Eve: Jane and I took all the toys left (Mrs. Hawthorne let us). We shook in the cold at every unpainted house we drove up to in my car my dad had blessed me with (one from his business) last year on Christmas Day…. Oh, inventory! New Year’s day was awful! We had to count each nail, twice, write the numbers down. But I remember now nice it was to walk down Front Street, see Daddy smile, late both Saturdays. My own earned money!