

## In Search of the Obsolete

Obsolete... According to the definition, obsolete means no longer in use, outmoded in style, design or construction. Recently, I went in search of something that unbeknownst to me had become just that... obsolete.

It all began a few months ago when I was going through a box of on-air checks on cassette from back in my radio days. I borrowed a cassette player from my mom in order to listen to them. As I began listening to one of them, I quickly realized that it wasn't my voice, but the voice of my mother talking to her mother, my Mee Maw Lawson. As it turns out, several years ago, the answering machine that we had at my parents house was the type that would keep recording if someone didn't answer it before the beep. Somehow this cassette had gotten mixed up

with the hundred or so other ones in that box.

I rewound it and listened to it from beginning to end. I laughed and I cried. It wasn't the typical Saturday conversation between my mom and my Mee Maw Lawson. We had just moved and my mom was giving our new phone number to Mee Maw and also telling her about the troubles she was having at her job. The company she worked for was being bought out by another one and big changes were happening. My mom was confiding in her mother about the amount of work that was being piled up on her and the threat of the company shutting down. Bear in mind that this is a conversation from about fifteen or more years ago, although it sounded as if it could have been a conversation from a few days ago.

As the conversation went on, Mee Maw began to talk, in her strong Southern draw, about the "mess of maters" (a large amount of tomatoes) and the bushels of "okry" (okra) and corn she had picked from my Aunt Polly's house a few days earlier and the several gallons of juice that she had canned from the tomatoes. She was persuading mom to take some off of her hands because she didn't have anymore room in her freezer to put everything that she had gathered that day.

Then the conversation turned to the new washer and dryer that we were getting and the "great ol' big boxes of warshin' powders" (laundry detergent) that Mee Maw had bought at the Bargain Barn. Mom was wondering if my uncle Jerry had been by to visit Mee Maw lately because she was wanting to know if he could help deliver the washer and dryer to our house. Mee Maw said he hadn't been by in several days, probably because he couldn't afford the gas. Mom said before long, no one would be able to afford to buy gas. It was \$1.50 cents a gallon (expensive to many back then) and Mee Maw said, "It's gonna go higher, before long they're gonna have a war over there. They'll be fightin' this time next week probably." (Mee Maw called that one.) Not much else was

discussed other than my mom asking Mee Maw what time she wanted her to come over and take her to the grocery store, then the call ended.

This recording may not seem like much to many, but to me and especially to my mom, it is more precious than the finest diamond. Mee Maw Lawson passed away at age 81 in August 2004 after a long battle with Alzheimer's. After listening to this conversation that was recorded when her mind and body were strong, I wanted to make sure we always had this wonderful memory of her.

When I gave my mom's cassette player back to her and told her about my discovery she said that she wanted a copy of the tape and I told her that instead of making her a cassette copy, I'd convert it to a digital MP3 file on the computer and also burn her a copy of it to a CD. Little did I know, this was going to turn out to be harder than I thought.

I didn't have a cassette player of my own so instead of borrowing one again, I decided to buy one for myself. I went to Wally World, where they had only one model and it was \$50. Not wanting to pay that much for a cassette player, I decided to take my search elsewhere. I must have gone to every store in town and each one I visited did not sell them anymore. In-



By Tonya Brantley

stead, all I could find were CD and MP3 players.

As you can imagine, I was starting to get very frustrated and not only that, I was beginning to feel old. Now I know how my grandparents must have felt when records went to eight tracks, and how my parents must have felt when eight tracks went to cassettes. I made it through the cassette to CD conversion thinking that at the time, it was an awesome change.

Now as CDs are being tossed to the waste side by digital MP3 players and I-pods, I'm starting to think, what's next? I think it's bad enough that the FCC is forcing everyone with analog TV to buy a digital television converter box in order to watch "not so free" TV. I'm one of the few who still use "rabbit ears" (TV antenna) to watch television. After all, why should I pay for cable or satellite if I only watch television for the morning and evening news. With today's economy, I believe in spending my hard earned dollars wisely. I have, however, already purchased my DTV converter box, but unless you can tune in the signal strong enough, you'll still have trouble tuning in certain channels. But at least I'm ready for the big switch

to digital TV on February 17th.

My search for a cassette player led me to thrift stores and even antique shops in hopes to find one. Everywhere I went with the exception of Wally World I couldn't find one. Refusing to spend \$50, I ended up borrowing one again in order to hook it up to my computer to convert the precious cassette audio to digitally re-mastered audio using editing software to save it as an MP3 and also burn it onto a CD for my mom. Its good to know that my DJ-ing skills still come in handy.

Cassette players, like record players and eight track players, have become obsolete. So if you happen to still have one of these remarkable devices, hang on to it. Who knows, it may become a collectors item someday. And I'm sure in the not so near future those CD players and MP3 players we all have will too.

Do you have questions or comments about Tonya's Tales? If so, e-mail Tonya at: [people4news@aol.com](mailto:people4news@aol.com).



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