

I had never visited the southern states very much before about 20 years ago. That was when my husband's sisters retired from Chicago to the tiny rural town of Horseshoe Bend located in northern Arkansas. We started to drive from our home in Colorado to visit them there each summer.

Dave's one sister, Patti, had a next-door neighbor at that time, Bob, who was born and raised in that town in Arkansas. The year I met Bob he was just beginning to run for the position of Mayor. He was talking up a storm with anyone who would listen, practicing for his campaign trail. Bob is a thin, handsome, outgoing, and jovial guy. His southern drawl and accent is so thick it was often hard for this Yankee to understand what he was saying! At first, I thought he had a ridiculous way of speaking the English language and I would absentmindedly repeat his words with my own version of a drawl with exclamation. Patti would purse her lips and shake her head slightly at me when I did this. I learned quickly not to make fun of what I was hearing. Repeating everything Bob said to my husband, even if lighthearted, was perceived as an insult. I wanted to keep things friendly and not antagonize anyone, so I decided to make my sincerest effort to do some active listening for content rather than accent, and to get to know Bob better - even if my side of the conversation did require a translator!

My Friend Bob By Kit Dwyer

It was an effort at first, to not have the corners of my mouth curl up in humorous amusement while he was speaking. Sometimes Bob would ask me a question and I would stare blankly back at him in silence, not having the slightest clue what he had just asked!

For example, Bob might ask me: "You got a new lot out thar by y'all's rig?"

"Some property?" I'd say, trying to be respectful, yet clarify the question.

If I glanced over at my sister-in-law, she would step into the fray to help me when she could.

"Bob is asking if you have a light in the street where your truck is parked." She'd relay quietly.

"Oh! Thanks" I'd lean and whisper to Patti. Then kindly to Bob, "No, I don't know if that light is new."

It didn't take long for Bob and I to become friends. I found him to be a very personable guy, even after hearing the startling story he told us of the bodies that were never found after three Yankees went into the woods outside of town looking for a moonshine still.

Not only were Bob's words drawn out in different sounding syllables, but he also had some quirky Bob-isms which still make me chuckle today.

If I told Bob something new that he hadn't heard of before, his responses was often: "The Hell you say!", or "Are you tell'n the truth?"

Bob's description of a person getting excited about a topic might be: "Yup, he's locked and loaded."

When Bob described his ex-wife, he'd say "When it comes to high society, she's top dog at the trough!"

I learned that it pays good advice to keep as many friends in your corner as you can!