

# A HOMETOWN BUSINESS



**BUTCH (R.) AND JERRY BENTLEY  
REFINISH AN ANTIQUE**

## Stuarts Draft-

After talking with so many of the older residents of the Draft, I decided to switch in mid-stream and do an article about someone who isn't originally from this area but who has no less of an interesting life story. Most everybody is acquainted with Butch Bentley who runs the Shenandoah Stripping business out on Rt. 340, but a lot of people are not aware of Butch's unique upbringing which turned from tragedy to triumph as he grew up.

Butch was the oldest of nine children born to the Bentleys in the "furniture belt" section of Lenoir, North Carolina. Although they lacked a prestigious lifestyle, the Bentley children always had the security that comes from belonging to a large family. But that security was shattered when at 14 years of age Butch's parents were killed in an automobile collision. The children were old enough to know what had happened and that they did not want to be further separated. With the help of relatives, who couldn't afford to take in all nine of the Bentley children together, the decision was made to send them to an orphanage which would keep them all together. Eight of the children went to the home run by the Church of God and the littlest one came when he turned two. Butch said the orphanage was a big adjustment after

coming from a normal family atmosphere but they treated all the kids fine and they all became just a larger family with all the other boys and girls who lived there with them. Butch's eyes rolled when he remembered the lady who cooked at the orphanage. "Man, that woman could cook!", Butch fondly recalled. The years rolled by and at 18, Butch graduated from Winecoff High School where he attended. One by one the other kids grew up at the orphanage and graduated too. Even now the brothers and sisters remain close even though the distance separates them.

Butch came to live in the Draft with his half sister, Helen Sparks after his graduation. He lived here for about a year and a half before entering the army. When he finished up in the service he came home to Stuarts Draft and went to work for Herbie Eavers as an equipment operator. Through his job, he met his future wife Sandra and in 1969 they married. Over the years Butch tried working at a lot of jobs but in February of 82' he bought his present refinishing business from Rick Mignerney. He got three days of training before tackling the whole project completely by himself. "There was a lot of furniture already in the shop so I had my work cut out for me", said Butch. But word spread of his excellent work and soon he had more jobs than he could handle. People who know him, trust him to refinish their most trusted and prized antiques.

Butch shared what is involved in the stripping process of a fine piece of furniture and I'd like to pass it on to you now.

The first step is to take the piece apart and separately strip each individual part. Then he lets it dry and repairs it if necessary. This type of stripping is called the "flow over" method and it is superior to the old-fashioned dipping method. Then the individual pieces are elect-

trically and hand sanded and a suitable finish is applied and it is re-assembled. Butch said that the reassembly is the hardest part of the job. It's then that glass has to be put back in or hardware matched to fit the furniture. He says it's always a big surprise to see what kind of wood lies under all those old coats of paint or varnish. When the bare wood is exposed, the piece always seems to go up in value. Unpainted furniture is Butch's specialty because the patina of the wood hasn't been damaged by the paint. It will take him up to two months to carefully finish an old Hoosier kitchen cabinet. The oldest piece of furniture he's worked on was a walnut secretary desk.

When he's ready to start the stripping process on a piece of furniture, he takes each part and puts it into a large stripping tank, which is nothing more than a huge shallow sink. Then a pump pumps the stripper up through a hose and onto a stiff brush which is scrubbed on the wood. As the brush is applied, the old paint and varnish wash off and the bare wood is exposed. Gloves must be worn through this entire process since the stripper contains harsh chemicals. Then it is washed down with pressurized water and taken outside to air dry. Recently Butch bought a wood lathe in order to turn out matching table legs and spindles. "So many of the pieces come in and are damaged. This allows me to create a matching part where it is needed."

When Butch gets busy another man named Ted Falls comes in and helps with the refinishing. From time to time his brother Jerry, who works for Southern Bell in Charlotte, N.C., comes and helps out too.

You can tell Butch is a man who loves his work and likes being his own boss, although at times he says it can be a drawback. But his reputation stands alone when it comes to turning out quality work and people come from miles away to bring him their family heirlooms to refinish. His pleasant manner and ever-present smile make him a pleasure to deal with and we are lucky to have such a valuable service right here in the Draft. Thanks Butch, and keep up the good work!

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