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Oprah and Me

I wouldn't have believed it myself, if I hadn't been there.

In 1987 I was on the Oprah Show. Yes I was, and I still can't get over it.

I don't know what I did to Oprah's national ratings, but my mother thought I was great. Even my kids—then teenagers—were impressed!

The Oprah Show didn't really want me, you understand. They really wanted the late, great Lewis Grizzard. He couldn't go, so his managers told the Oprah folks that Ralph Hood would be great. You can't really appreciate your friends until they lie for you like that.

The Oprah folks called about noon one day and asked if I could be at their Chicago studio by 8:00 the next morning. Could I? Could the Sphinx sit still? Could Will Rogers grin? Could Bear Bryant coach football? Of course I could be in Chicago tomorrow morning. Nothing to it.

I spent exactly 56 minutes in a bed that night.

First I drove to Winfield, Alabama, where I spoke to a group of bankers. Then I drove bug-eyed to Atlanta, where I crawled into a motel bed at 3:04 in the morning. Fifty-six minutes later I got up and caught the red-eye flight to Chicago.

(I wasn't sure I could still get by on one hour's sleep. I did it in college but hadn't tried it in 20 years or so and had my doubts. I did it but didn't recover nearly as fast as I did in college.)

A man met me at the gate in Chicago and took me and my luggage to a waiting limousine. I'm not talking Econoline Van limousine, here, I'm talking *limousine*, as in the way *Elvis* rode. I'm talking telephone, tinted windows, glass partition, and a "yessir" chauffeur. There was even a little jar of Grey Poupon.

You should have seen me laid back in that limo, trying to act like I was used to that sort of thing. (I don't think the chauffeur was fooled. I probably shouldn't have offered him half of my sausage biscuit.)

We did the show. I was supposed to be a typical southerner, and I guess I left the whole country believing that all southerners are baldheaded, wear glasses, and weigh too much. Even at that, I looked better than those two flakes they had representing California.

Everybody asked me, "What is Oprah like?" Heck, I don't know. I was only in the room with her for a little over an hour. During that time, however, she was friendly, pleasant, and above all, professional. I was impressed.

It was what Oprah said *after* the show that made my day. She said, "Ralph, you are a funny man." Obviously, the woman has exquisite taste, and she definitely knows talent when she sees it. After all, who am I to argue with Oprah Winfrey?

Afterwards, I flew back to Huntsville, arriving in time to watch the show in the lobby of the Executive Inn in Madison.

I looked fat.