

A.J. Ratliff

By Ken South

In 1947, the price of a new house was \$6,600, and the typical American worker made \$2,850 per year. A gallon of gas was 15 cents, and a new car cost \$1,300.

Some significant inventions that would impact lives for years to come made their appearances that year, including the transistor, instant camera, and mobile phone. The Cold War began in 1947 and lasted over four decades. Our Prime Gentlemen Man of the Month made his appearance that year, too, born in Ranger General Hospital, in Texas, on October 11. Three days later, Chuck Yeager would be the first to break the sound barrier. The world was full of possibilities...

Our Mr. January grew up with his younger sister in the house that his family occupied for over 70 years. His mom was a housewife, and his dad ran the local feed and seed store, in which our young mystery man often lent a hand. Ranger, Texas, became a boom town when oil was discovered in 1917, and that oil fueled America's efforts in World War I. The city had a population of almost 40,000 at its peak, but by the time Mr. J. was growing up, it had fallen to about 3,000 inhabitants.

J. was active in the local Methodist Church and its choir and youth group, and he had a girlfriend throughout his school days. He attended public schools in Ranger and graduated from high school in 1966 with only 45 in his class. He played trombone in the band, and was an "average student." Our man of the month was active in scouting, where he achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, attended two National Jamborees, and camped at the Philmont National Scout Reservation. After high school, J. lived at home and attended Ranger Junior College from 1966 to 1969.

During that time he worked for Ranger in various capacities ranging from volunteer fireman , emergency management coordinator, and fire chief. Our mystery fellow was the youngest chief ever in the local department. He even enforced the parking meters on Main Street, where he earned 90 cents per hour.

He then served as a police officer in Hamlin and Merkel, in 1970 and 1971. He always enjoyed law enforcement and attended the local police academy in Haskill. That led him to attend Sam Houston State University, where Mr. J. graduated with a bachelor of science degree in criminal justice in 1973. He was an "improved student, with a B average" and was active in the law enforcement fraternity on campus.

Upon graduation, Mr. January became a deputy sheriff for Hansford County Sheriffs' Office from 1973 to 1974. Then, he found his career employment in Gruver, TX, where he worked as chief of police, and later city manager, from 1974 to 2001. For many years, he was the town's sole employee. J. never carried a gun on the job, opting to leave it in his car "just in case." His proudest achievements were obtaining grants to improve the city's parks and overseeing the construction of the local airport. Our gentleman retired in 2001, leaving the municipality of 1,100 citizens a better place. After retirement, he sold his weapon at a gun show in a gay bar in

Amarillo! He was a board member of the Texas Gas Association for many years and was president of their education committee. This organization is a statewide association of gas companies, and Mr. J. traveled frequently throughout the state.

Our man of the month always knew of his attraction toward other men, but he rarely acted on that urge. Other than a few brief get-togethers over the years, his gay experiences were limited. He met Jimmy Shipp, of Fort Worth, in May, 1994, while attending a Texas Gas Association meeting in Dallas. They were together for 17 years. At first, they would fly between their cities every month to see one another. In 2001, the two settled down and built a home on the 46-acre property owned by J.

J. met his current partner in 11/2011, in Palm Springs, while attending a World-Wide Prime Timers Convention and dated long distance for a year or two, traveling between homes in Texas and Michigan. Now, the two reside in Wilton Manors, Florida, where they remodel and resell houses. Their beautiful home is always open to their many friends, and they host frequent parties and pool gatherings. Both are members of the Prime Gentleman, where they enjoy the events held by the local organization.



