

Split family to reunite after 36 years

Texas man finds his 'home' at last

BEAUMONT (AP) — Some years back, a wealthy couple adopted 8-year-old Travis Persall Jr. and folks at the orphanage near Corpus Christi where his three older brothers remained told them he'd never want for anything.

Travis Persall Jr. became James Franklin Sanders when the adoption went through 36 years ago, and he remembers having plenty of food, clothes and toys when he was growing up in his adopted home in Arkansas Pass.

But the folks at the orphanage were wrong. What Sanders wanted most were the three brothers he'd left behind at Boys City, the brothers who'd been his companions until the time of his adoption.

"I guess I've lived like a ghost all these years, wondering if I had a family anymore," says the 48-year-old Sanders of Mauriceville. "I just wanted to be with my brothers, to know who I really was or that they even cared if I was alive."

He didn't know they'd been looking for him, too.

Thinking his brothers might be somewhere in Texas, Sanders contacted the *Beaumont Enterprise*.

Ron Seabridge, a martial arts instructor in Lumberton whose wife's family he located several

years ago, read the Dec. 24 article and called Sanders.

Sanders is flying to California on Feb. 2 for his mother's 74th birthday.

"Sometimes I'd think I could remember what my mother

"Putting something like this together is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. There's that one critical piece, and when it fits, the puzzle all comes together."

— Ron Seabridge

looked like, but then I'd tell myself it was just my imagination," Sanders says. "When I called her, she called me by my nickname, 'Dumplin.' No one has called me that for years."

Sanders talked with his mother on the telephone for the first time earlier this month after Seabridge found her in a small town south of San Bernardino, Calif.

Armed with a pen, paper, road atlas and telephone, he tracked Sanders' family from Corpus Christi to Cullman, Ala., to Redlands, Calif., in five hours' time.

All he asked Sanders was the price of the 30 or so phone calls.

"Putting something like this together is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle," Seabridge says. "There's that one critical piece,

and when it fits, the puzzle all comes together."

The critical piece in Sanders' case was one Penny Wise in Commerce, Calif. He got her name from a woman in Cullman, Ala., whose memory had faded with

the years but who believed she was Sanders' aunt.

Wise, who is married to Sanders' cousin Rayburn Wise, remembered her husband telling about the days when the Persall boys stayed with him while their father, now dead, was in the army.

She remembered that Sanders' older brother had hurt his hand in an accident, she remembered the nicknames, she remembered the stories of standing in line for the boys' meat during World War II rationing days.

"I asked her, 'Is there any other thing you can tell me about the family?'" Seabridge says, smiling. "She said, 'Yeah, his mother's still alive.'"

From his mother and other

new-found relatives, Sanders pieced together what had happened. His mother and father divorced, and his mother, Charlotte Persall, obtained legal custody of the children, which also included two sisters and a younger brother Sanders never knew he had.

But Sanders' father snatched the boys, his mother told him, and took them to Alabama, where he worked in a shipyard until he was drafted into the army.

He left his sons with their aunt, Wise's mother Elsie, but took them after he was discharged early because of medical problems. Those problems also included drinking heavily, Rayburn Wise says, and he believes Sanders' father abandoned them after he brought them to Texas.

Sanders, at that time about 6 years old, says he remembers working in the fields for meals and running from the law until he and his brothers were caught and sent to Boys City.

Then he was adopted, and he believes his other brothers eventually ran away from the orphanage.

Two of Sanders' three brothers are dead, and family members are trying to contact the other one where he lives in Washington. They want him to be there and finally see the brother for whom he searched so long.

Committee suggests Supreme Court rulings caused crisis for Texas

AUSTIN (AP) — Limiting court judgments and attorneys fees will help Texas recover from a crisis in liability insurance caused in part by the Texas Supreme Court, a special legislative committee said Thursday.

"We are convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that the crisis is real," Sen. Grant Jones, D-Temple, and Rep. Mike Toomey, R-Houston, co-chairmen of the Joint Committee on Liability Insurance and Tort Law said in a joint statement.

"It is causing tremendous harm to business, health care, governmental and charitable activities in Texas," they said.

The committee made a 245-page report to the Legislature Thursday after a year-long study.

The report was signed by eight of the 10 committee members, and Sen. Kent Caperton, D-Bryan, said a minority report will be made later.

Jones and Toomey said they found no single cause for the crisis but that the problems uncovered in the study must be attacked on three fronts — tort law reform, insurance law reform and stronger medical discipline.

"The study produced conclusive evidence that fundamental changes in tort law over the past several years, largely through decisions by the Texas Supreme Court, have

eroded the ability of insurers to accurately predict the frequency and magnitude of their losses," the statement said.

Toomey told reporters he felt the time had come "to find out which body makes law in Texas. People must decide whether it's the Legislature or five men on the Supreme Court who make the laws."

The majority report said damage awards in personal injury suits should be limited to \$250,000 for non-economic losses such as pain, suffering and mental anguish.

It recommended no limit on measurable losses in personal injury lawsuits, including medical bills and lost wages.

The report urged that state law be changed to limit punitive damages to \$100,000, or three times the actual economic damage, whichever is greater. The person filing the suit would get 25 percent of punitive damages, his attorney 25 percent and the state 50 percent.

A plaintiff's attorney would be able to charge a fee limited to 40 percent of the first \$100,000, 33.9 percent of the second \$200,000, 25 percent of the next \$200,000 and 10 percent of any amount over \$500,000.

The majority report made 30 recommendations for changes in state tort laws.

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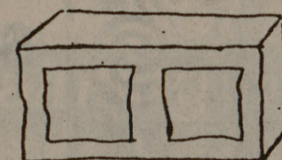
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