

For the Joy of the Journey
A personal memoir

My brother, Chipper, was born December 28, 1949. He was also delivered by Caesarean section probably explaining why there no further children. Our move to Tennessee came after I completed the second grade, the summer of 1950.

I do not remember moving to Waverly as a traumatic event. If there was any trauma it came as we drove Highway 13 through middle Tennessee to get to Waverly. It was a narrow winding two lane road that had more than its fair share of deadly accidents.

Waverly, the county seat of Humphreys County, located about 60 miles east of Nashville on highway 70, was a small city of under 2,000. Dad's new job was at the TVA Johnsonville Steam Plant located on the Tennessee river west of Waverly. The plant's construction precipitated an economic and population boom in the area causing a housing shortage. We moved into a small rental house on the main highway East of town. It was a asbestos singled box, probably 900+/- sq.ft with two bedrooms, one bathroom and a living/dining room. We were located very near the highway with railroad tracks across the road. The noise of the trains and traffic required some adjustment. It was an austere setting, no shrubs or trees, with a short limestone gravel drive.

In retrospect, I suspect the move was traumatic for mother and dad, particularly mother. Leaving their home place and family was a challenge I didn't understand. The transition was made even more difficult when mother went downtown to shop. As she walked past, a "good ole boy" in conversation with others on a bench, he turned and accidentally spit tobacco juice on her. She was mortified and I'm sure it left a lasting first impression.

As an enterprising eight year old, I was undeterred and found opportunity to satisfy my thirst for adventure. I had receive a Daisy pump BB gun (ala Christmas Story) for Christmas. There was an open field, bordered by Trace creek, behind our house, which I explored regularly. The winter of 1950 was bitter and we had considerable snow. Taking my BB gun I set out in the snow to hunt for prey, whatever I could find to shoot. Encountering a beautiful snowbird, I took careful aim and shot it. It seems that I did not connect shooting with killing. I remember realizing that beautiful creature was dead, and feeling profound sorrow and regret.

Roaming Trace creek had it perils. On one occasion that winter, I slipped off an embankment into the freezing water. Fortunately the water was not deep but I was throughly soaked and thought I would surely freeze to death. I made it safely home.

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Our proximity to the railroad tracks provided new opportunity for adventure. There were other kids in the neighborhood and we were fascinated with the idea of placing pennies on the tracks for the train to run over. It was a thrilling prospect, particularly since someone suggested the possibility that the train would be derailed with disastrous results. We finally got up the nerve to place pennies on the tracks and ran to hide so that we wouldn't be associated with any derailment. To our relief, the train was not derailed and we retrieved our deformed pennies as proud souvenirs.

An additional adventure was discovered in the summer when persimmon trees on the hillside behind the railroad tracks were laden with fruit. I'm not sure how the idea came about. Green persimmons are firm and make great missiles. With handy pocket knives, supple limbs were obtained and one end sharpened. An appropriate sized persimmon was skewered on the end of the limb and to facilitate it as projectile we would whack the limb against a convenient tree . The result was impressive. With a little practice, our distance and accuracy improved drastically. Naturally, such a weapon deserves a worthy target. On high ground and with traffic on the highway below, we had an arcade of moving targets. It was delightful. There were several hits with out any indication that people noticed. Then things took a left turn. A car passing with the passenger window down took a direct hit through the window. Swerving wildly, the car pulled over and the driver exited, obviously irate and looking for perpetrators. We all fled into the woods and hid until it was safe to go home.

It was around that time that I began to develop interest in baseball. There were no organized opportunities to play, so I began practicing hitting in our driveway. Tossing up convenient sized limestone rocks from the driveway, I would hit them with my wooden bat. Standing in the driveway and hitting parallel to the highway, the rocks soared and went, in my mind, out of the park. There is an unforgettable memory of making a perfect hit and watching the rock flying and curving into the roadway, striking the windshield of an on-coming car. The driver swerved but was able to maintain control, stopping, to my dismay at our house. I do not remember any corporal punishment that could ordinarily be expected. The victim was properly compensated. Dad really wanted me to be a good baseball player.

During the time we lived at our first house there was an incident that impacted me deeply and awaken me to mother's faith.

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Being a nine year old in Waverly, Tennessee there were opportunities of all kinds. In particular, I remember the small general store next to the post office, separated by an alley. It was a great place to browse. Reading the comic books and occasionally buying one. Soft drinks, especially NuGrape, were a special treat. The owner was tolerant of kids and the store was a warm and inviting place.

The lure of comic books and the scarcity of money were a toxic combination. I had, on numerous occasions, supported my addiction with money from the return of soft drink bottles for the five cent deposit. Unfortunately, the supply of bottles at my disposal was limited. The overwhelming desire for comic books generated, with the help of a friend, an elegant solution. The store owner, being a trusting type and short on storage space, stacked empty soft drink bottles in their wooden cases along the outside wall of the store in the alley next to the post office. To a comic book addicted nine year old, the opportunity was obvious. Thus began the regular and profitable process of retrieving bottles from the alley and selling them back to their owner. Because we were careful not be seen and judicious in the quantities of bottles returned at any one time, the operation continued without any complications.

My memory is not clear as to how long this enterprise continued. What I do remember is the day that I was sitting in the living room of our small house. Mother was there with me. She was quietly sewing. I recall thinking about her and what I had been doing. The sense of guilt was overwhelming; not so much out of fear but out the realization of how wrong I was and the disappointment it would bring to her and my father, not to mention God. I began to cry uncontrollably. I poured out my confession to my mother.

What happened in the moments and days that that followed would stay with me for the rest of my life. My mother, without sign of anger, embraced me and comforted me. I knew how disappointed she was but she did not condemn me, she only loved me. She did not offer to rationalize or minimize my wrong. Only when the affirmation of her love was assured did we talk about consequences. Later my father heard the story, accepted my confession (I am not sure that he didn't whip me, but if he did it was a relief) and took me to the store owner. When confession and restitution had been made we went home. I have no remembrance of those events ever being discussed again by either my mother or father. There was mercy.

Forgiveness was real. Love was unconditional. They cared more about me than the fact that I had wounded and embarrassed them. In that brief experience I gained a

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glimpse of God; for children are introduced to God, for good or ill, through their parents. That experience prepared me for the journey ahead.

Waverly is my first memory of going to church. There was a small church of Christ downtown. I believe that after we moved, mother began to go with Dad and me to the church of Christ. I suppose it was a convenient time to change having left Florence and her church ties there. I do not remember her attending the Methodist church after we moved.

I remember our time in Waverly as two chapters, The first being when we lived in the rental house on the east side of town. It wasn't long before Dad (I presume it to be his decision) contracted to have a house built in a new subdivision west of town. It would be the first home they owned in their married life. That was the beginning of chapter two in Waverly. The new house was located on Park Circle, a street that was horseshoe shaped intersecting the main highway on each end. Our house was at the bend of the road and adjacent to Trace creek. Much roomier, with an upstairs and plenty of yard. All of the homes were newly constructed, many for TVA employees. There were lots of children and little traffic, making the street our playground. interestingly, I have little recollection of the interior details of either house.

Our subdivision was on the outskirts of town and was surrounded by mostly undeveloped land. Trace creek which flowed year round was an opportunity for many adventures. Our house was close to the creek, which was just across the road and probably thirty yards down an embankment to its edge. The banks of the creek were mostly brush and tree lined with occasional access. As mentioned earlier, Trace creek flowed year around. It varied from shallow ripples to occasional deeper pools. It was prone to flooding, heavy rain would raise the water level 8-10 feet or more. Our house was never seriously threatened but I've wonder if over the years there might have been some problems.

The creek was the scene of many adventures. I fished often. The most plentiful and easiest fish to catch was carp. They could be sizable, maybe 4-5 pounds or more. I developed a special technique for carp. I discovered that carp liked fresh, white loaf bread. When tossed on the water, numerous carp would rush to feed. The easy and

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most effective way to catch them was to put one slice of bread on the hook, loosen enough line off the reel and sail the bread out on to the water. I was pretty proud of my ingenuity.

My rod and reel was not the best. Monofilament fishing line was not available, so nylon was used and worked well enough. The shortcomings of my gear became apparent when I went to fish for a particularly large carp I had seen up the creek from my usual spot. To gain some access and visibility, I decided to climb a tree over hanging the creek. From that vantage point. I was able to see the large carp and cast close to it. I was not prepared for the force of the strike, the carp was large, my fisherman brain says 10-15 pounds. I was nearly pulled from my perch and what line I had on my reel was quickly exhausted. Unable to climb down, I was left with no choice but to hang on. The carp resolved my dilemma in short order, breaking the line. I have never forgotten the thrill of hooking that fish and credit that experience for my love of fishing.

In addition to fishing, Trace creek was a great place for swimming and exploring. Wandering downstream, we located an old abandoned steam powered tractor lodged in the creek bank. There was much speculation about how it got there, it was obvious that it had been there many years. It was fun to climb on.

Because of the possibility of flooding, the local utility company had installed a cable bridge to provide a means to cross the creek to a substation on the other side when it flooded,. By cable bridge, I mean two 1" steel cables parallel to one another. One was 3-4' higher than the other. They spanned about 30-40 yards, 10' or so high over the creek at normal level. To negotiate the bridge, you grasped the top cable with two hands and with your feet on the lower cable you shuffled your feet, moving steadily across the creek. While crossing, it became obvious that the cables had enough flex that you could spring up and down, creating an unintended opportunity for enterprising youngsters.

As mentioned the creek was subject to some serious flooding. We had a fascination with what it would be like to ride those flood waters. At some point, exploring downstream, we found an abandoned plywood fishing boat. We drug it, with significant difficulty across shallows and rocks upstream as far as we could.

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Securing it so it wouldn't float away, we began to make plans to run the creek the next time it flooded. Paddles were found or borrowed and we obtained concrete blocks and rope to use as anchors. Not long after, heavy rains provided the opportunity we had been waiting for. (I keep referring to we, I remember there were others participating but I cannot recall names or details about them) Trace creek was at flood stage, the water rushing furiously. Seizing the moment, we hurried to the boat tied off upstream. Naïvely, we untied and pushed out into the rushing water. Terrifying is the best I can describe the following minutes/hours. Immediately it became apparent that paddles were completely useless. Careening down the creek at speeds not betrayed by watching from the bank, we quickly resorted to our anchors, tossing them over the side. I am not sure how we expected the anchors to help, but our answer came immediately, as the concrete blocks hit bottom and snapped the ropes. At that point, reality set in, we were completely helpless. Our only option was to hang on and hope the boat didn't capsize. Eventually, the creek widened and the water slowed enough for us to manage to get to a bank. Having traveled a mile or more downstream we decided to abandon the boat and make our way home. I have little doubt had the boat capsized, we would have most likely drowned. Despite it being a terrifying experience, the adventure made it worthwhile. Concerned that revealing that experience to my parents might result in diminished future opportunities, I chose not to do so.

Although I do not have any specific memories of sermons or religious teaching, I presume there was some, as evidenced by my earlier story of guilt, confession and forgiveness. I recall another experience that revealed some moral underpinnings. There was a gas station located on the main highway in walking/biking distance of our house. I regularly went there to buy soft drinks and candy. The cold drink box had a variety of bottled sodas. My favorite was NuGrape. There was a forbidden drink which I religiously avoided. Sold in brown bottles, it was called Root Beer. Friends insisted that it was okay to drink. I associated the brown bottle with real beer and, my conscience would not permit me to try Root Beer. I remember being fearful of the consequences should I drink one. In any case it was clear, beer was forbidden.

One day after school was over, I witnessed two boys from my neighborhood vandalizing a classroom. They pretty much turned the room upside down. I was

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scared and disappointed. Not wanting to be complicit in their actions, I went to the school office and reported them to the principal. They were promptly apprehended and were facing certain serious discipline. Living in my neighborhood, we rode the same bus home. Because I had been identified as the whistleblower, it was not a very comfortable ride home. When we got to our bus stop and got off, my discomfort quickly turned into pain as they beat the crap out of me. What happened was not a surprise and I survived without serious harm. I never doubted that I had done the right thing. As I look back, I see that as another marker of the moral underpinnings my parents had instilled in me. (I a have a special appreciation for whistleblowers)

The years in Waverly were memorable on several levels. Dad bought me a single shot 22 caliber rifle. I received a fancy Schwinn bicycle. Riding bicycles was a favorite activity. It was during that time, for reasons not clear to me, I began to notice girls. An older girl began hanging out with us. She had a mysterious attraction which compelled us boys to follow her everywhere. A girl at school, Beverly Dotson, became my first "real" girlfriend. It is noteworthy that I remember her name but not any other kid's names.

Surprisingly, it was at our new home that I got to know, for the first time, an African American person, or as mother would say, a negro. A black man lived in a makeshift shack across the road in the woods next to the creek. He had been living there before the subdivision was built and remained during the time we lived there. He was older, in my eyes very old, but, in reality he was probably 50-60 years old. He had no visible means of support, except for odd jobs around the subdivision. I remember mother taking him meals on a regular basis. I never felt afraid or threaten around him. He was an anachronism which I never understood. As I reflect upon the circumstances of that time, it's puzzling how he was accepted and allowed to live peacefully in a situation that would be unacceptable today.

Although, Waverly was a wonderful and timely experience for me, I am sure it was a difficult transition for my parents, mother in particular. I suspect with the new house and friends and neighbors, they were feeling increasingly at home. But, as is often the case, life brings the unexpected. Dad learned that he was being transferred

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to a new job in Paducah, Kentucky where TVA was bringing the Shawnee Steam Plant online.