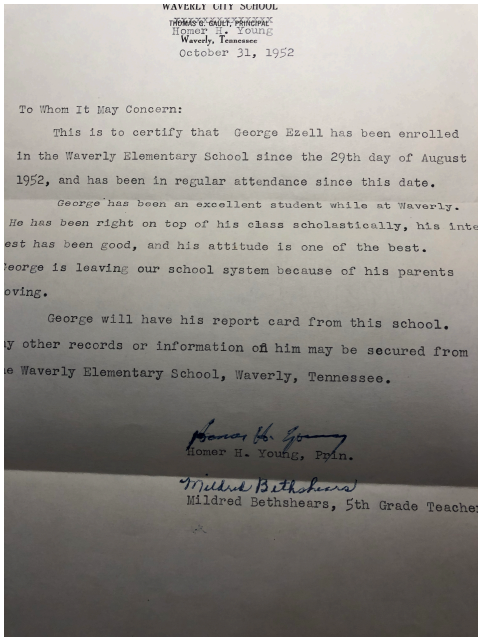


For the Joy of the Journey  
A personal memoir

## Chapter 4 - Wilderness - Paducah Kentucky



In October 1952 our family moved from Waverly, Tennessee to Paducah, Kentucky. Dad was transferred to TVA's Shawnee Steam Plant. My impression is that Dad was competent at his job. He had come the Johnsonville Steam Plant to help bring it on-line and Shawnee was being launched. His experience at Johnsonville created the opportunity to move from Waverly. I have no specific memory of the move, but I'm certain Mother was pleased. She did share my fond memories of Waverly.

Paducah is a river town located on the Ohio River near its confluence with the Tennessee River. Much larger than Waverly, it was definitely more urban and felt more like Florence. Our time there was brief, something over a year. I was in the fifth grade when we moved, we moved again before I completed sixth grade. Despite our brief stay, I have good memories of that time.

At the time of our arrival, the area was booming. In addition to the construction of Shawnee Steam Plant, a nuclear power plant was being built, creating a serious housing shortage. A new

development of duplex apartments was under construction. They were pre-fabricated homes that could be erected with a few weeks. We lived in a motel for a short time until one came available. Several of our neighbors worked at TVA and I remember the neighborhood as safe and welcoming.

There were two convenient outlets for my adventurous spirit. Bob Noble Park, a beautiful city park,



was within walking distance. A nice lake was its centerpiece, our family enjoyed outings there.

Closer to our home were the Fairgrounds. The Fairgrounds, in addition to being a location for the annual county fair, hosted harness racing. Numerous barns stabled horses being trained and/or boarded. I became a regular visitor and got acquainted with an owner who had several harness horses and a pinto pony. The pony was not particularly attractive. His coloring was different and his nose was covered with unsightly warts. His disposition matched his appearance. The owner permitted me to hang out and I volunteered for chores. It was my first experience around horses and I enjoyed it immensely. Eventually I had an opportunity to ride the pony. Embarrassed to tell that I had never ridden a horse before, I bravely saddled up and grasped the reins. The pony had no intention of going anywhere with me. Despite my pleadings and threats, he immediately swung

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around and bolted for his stall. Someone had left the upper stall door closed, not a problem for the pony. As he entered the stall, I was unceremoniously scrapped off his back. Lesson learned.

The fairgrounds provided numerous adventurous opportunities. The hay barn with stacks of hay bales was a great place to play. Unfortunately, climbing and building hiding places with hay bales broke down some of them. After being threaten with bodily harm, the hay barn was off-limits.

There was a small office building where owners and assorted others would gather. I was permitted to observe and listen. There were a many conversations on subjects unfamiliar to me, and I am sure my mother would not have approved of. On one occasion, an older man engaging me in conversation, asked, "Have you ever seen a thousand dollar bill?" Startled, I responded. "No." He proceed to reach in his shirt pocket and pull out a \$1000 bill. Mesmerized, I held it for a moment. The fairgrounds were a stark contrast to Waverly and Trace creek, but no less adventurous.

Paducah was the scene of some significant milestones for me. Elementary school was a good experience with one exception. The school had a chorus. Since I enjoyed singing at church and thought myself to be a pretty good singer, I decided I would like to join, confident I would be a valued addition. Unfortunately, the teacher was unaware of my singing talents and required me to try out. I don't remember the song I was asked to sing unaccompanied, but I do recall the terror and embarrassment as I stumbled and croaked. At the conclusion of my performance, the teacher, with a sympathetic voice, said, "I would like for you sing unison." Unison is the choral equivalence of being picked for the baseball team and assigned to right field. My dreams of becoming a singer were dashed.

I had my first date in the sixth grade. I asked a pretty blond haired girl named Virginia Green to go to the movies. I walked to her house, from there we caught a bus to the downtown theatre. I don't remember many details, but it was good time.



In Paducah, I was exposed to a bit of sophistication. Mother was always concerned about my appearance. Haircuts were important and my dad took me to the Irvin Cobb Hotel in downtown for haircuts. The barber shop was classic, housed on the ground floor of the elegant Irvin Cobb Hotel it had numerous chairs and a shoe shine boy. Straight razors and leather strops adorned each station. Shaving mugs and brushes produced warm lather for shaving. Clientele included businessmen and politicians. Visits there made me feel important. I was if I was entering some sacred place.

Church was a prominent part of our lives. The church we attended was the Broadway church of Christ. A large church, where I was baptized.

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*That's where my salvation story begins. I do not remember the exact date, but I was twelve years old and my family was living in Paducah, Kentucky. It was a Sunday morning worship service at the Broadway Church of Christ. The preacher was Brother H. A. Dixon. For reasons you might imagine for a twelve year old boy, I had been thinking a lot about my sinfulness and the prospects of hell should I die. As usual, the sermon concluded with an invitation to come forward and be baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of your sins and salvation from eternal punishment in hell and eternal life in heaven with God and Jesus. It was an uncomplicated and elegant solution to my angst. As the invitation song, probably "Just as I Am", was being sung a cappella by the congregation, I made my way from the balcony to the front of the auditorium. I was greeted by Bro. Dixon and, to my great surprise, my mother joined me to be baptized (that's another story for another time). I was properly baptized "I now baptize you In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins" and completely immersed. I recall the elation and relief I felt being saved. At least I thought I was. <http://www.georgeezell.com/2020/01/intersections-salvation-1/>*

I have only fond memories of Paducah Kentucky. Sometime during my 6<sup>th</sup> grade school year Dad was transferred to TVA's Colbert Stream Plant near Florence, Alabama. It was a return to the promised land and began the next major chapter of my life.