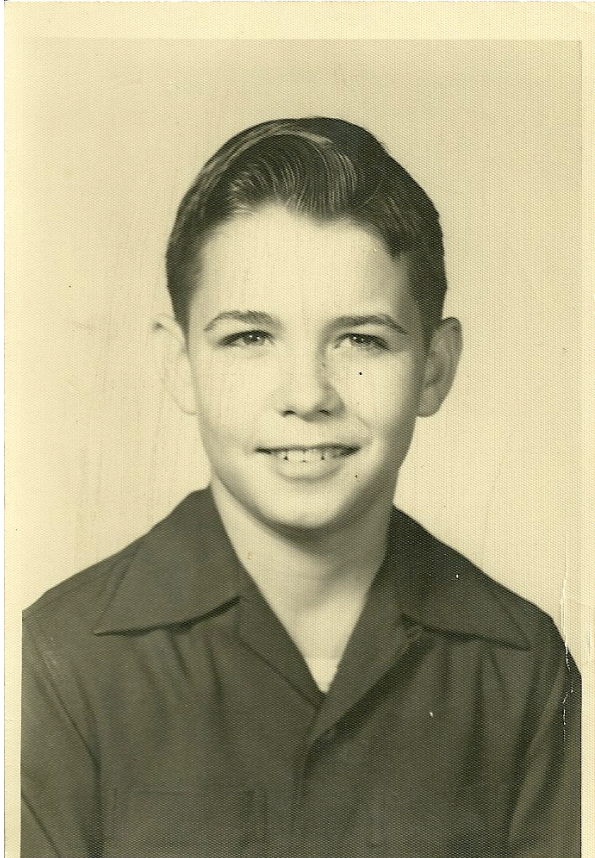


Homecoming

Chisholm Highway



I remember the news that Dad was being transferred to the Colbert Steam Plant being well received, especially by mother. My impression was that she had missed “home” deeply and was excited to be returning to Florence. I had great memories of Florence, but my experiences in Waverly and Paducah were good but moving when I was beginning sixth grade muted my enthusiasm.

Colbert Steam Plant was located about 30 + miles from Florence, requiring a significant commute for Dad but he was willing to accept that in exchange for living in Florence. Both mother and dad had grown up in Rogersville, Alabama east of Florence, but they had lived in Florence before and after they were married.

Dad reported to his new job immediately and we came later. He rented a house unseen by mother. My first memory of our return to Florence was arriving at our rented home. It was located on Chisholm highway, north of downtown in the “suburbs”.

The area had nice homes with generous yards and was inviting. Unfortunately, the house dad rented was an anomaly. Set back further from the road than other houses, it was a two story stucco home that looked like it belonged in the southwest. With its squared shape and depressing gray color it was a stark contrast to traditional homes surrounding it. It was one of those houses that when you see it the first thing you say is, “What were they thinking?” Mother was disappointed to the point of tears. Her tears turned to sobs when she saw the inside of the house. Dark and unappealing it was also dinghy and dirty. It was not a joyous homecoming.

I think dad was proud of his choice, perhaps rental homes were scarce and he didn’t have many choices. In any event, he was angry at mother for her response and ashamed when he realized what he had done. It was no big deal for me and I actually thought it was pretty neat. My bedroom was upstairs and the yard was big and there were plenty of opportunities for adventure.

I always considered Florence to be my hometown. Moving back in the 6th grade was a good experience. I attended Gilbert Elementary School. My first impression with my classmates was less than spectacular. Each day at lunch the teacher would choose a student to lead the class procession to the lunch room. Being new to the class, I’m sure the teacher thought it a good way to help me in becoming an accepted member of the class by selecting me. Unfortunately, I didn’t know where the cafeteria was located, but too embarrassed to ask, I promptly led the class to the girls restroom. The class thought it was hilarious, I survived the teasing and the fiasco was a plus for me. Attending Gilbert Elementary was a good experience. It was a neighborhood

school with lots of activities. Time on the playground are fond memories, kickball, scrub (baseball) particularly.

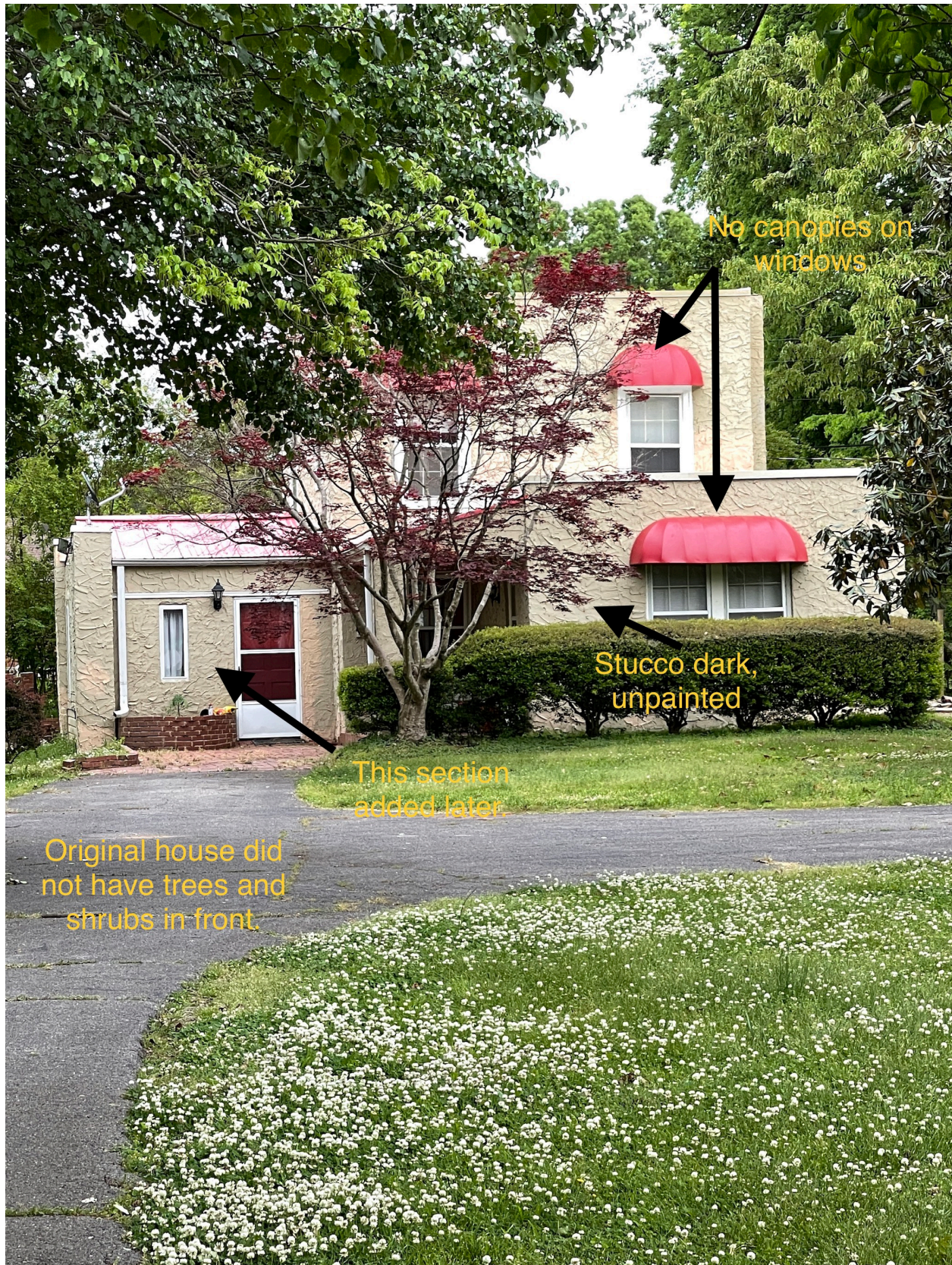
Shortly after our return, I met Hugh Chester Boston (Chetty) who lived down Chisholm Road a few blocks from our house. We remained friends through high school and later in college. He was very smart but not athletic. I spent a lot of time at his house. His parents were divorced. His dad owned a local business and had a reputation as a womanizer. He had a beautiful sister who was 8-10 years older. His mother, Geneva, was attractive and very proper. Their home was very nice and elegantly furnished. They seemed very well off. Chetty was a perfectionist in every way. He had his own room and had more clothes than needed. I was impressed by the gallon pickle jar in his closet which was filled with coins he had saved. His mother had a housekeeper and Chetty's underwear was always pressed and folded. He tolerated my unsophisticated manners and actually coached me a bit. He was the one who taught me to dance. We practiced to Bill Haley and the Comets, "Rock Around the Clock". Chetty was an outstanding student and went on to become a successful orthopedic surgeon. Occasionally I felt that he might be envious of my intact family. As a result of some political horse trading with the senior favorites in high school, Chetty was selected as "Most Popular". ironically, I was named "Most Likely to Succeed". I was neither most popular or most likely to succeed. Chetty went on to be a highly successful orthopedic surgeon.

Soon after moving to Chisholm Highway, Dad bought a home on Lewis Avenue in a newer neighborhood a mile or so from our rental home. A small modest two bedroom, one bath house sitting on a corner lot it was a welcome change. We had good neighbors and a place to call our own. Our house stood out because the large rocks bordering steps to our sidewalk were painted bright red, green, blue. In retrospect they were weird but we never

repainted them. The Lewis Avenue house was home until Dad built a new house before I graduated from high school.

A year or so later Dad added an enclosed side porch to give us more living space. He built a tree house in the backyard which was a delight. Mother hung her wash on clotheslines. Some years later Dad decided to add a garage/basement. One side of the house was on the slope of our lot making it possible to remove a section of foundation, excavate under the house to create an additional room and a one car garage. Unfortunately it was DIY project and took considerable time to complete. Much of the excavation was done with pickaxe, shovel and wheel barrels. I was expected to work on it whenever available which meant everyday in the summer. Alabama red clay does not lend itself to extraction and I hated the work. Dad would call everyday from work to be sure I was up and working. Burned in my memory is removing the 2x2x10' section of concrete foundation. In the process of loading two pieces on a trailer, one rolled and caught my finger, ripping out my fingernail. Sympathetic but undeterred, Dad had me drive myself to the doctor. Eventually the project was completed and I claimed the new room as my bedroom. There are many fond memories of Lewis Avenue. It was a great place to be for my junior and senior high school years.





Chisholm Rd House





Lewis Avenue





