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I Remember Normal, Memphis, 1973

James A. Wallace

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I Remember Normal

James A. Wallace, M.D.

To my wife, Elizabeth Ann; my daughter, Ann Ashford; and my son, Jim Jr. They like Normal, too.

Memphis

April 1, 1973

I REMEMBER NORMAL

The modern day American is characterized by considerable movement, sometimes in various directions. Perhaps it is proper that we pause occasionally and examine what has happened in the past. As a long-time resident of the Normal community, I have been impressed by the many changes that have occurred there. When I mention "Normal" to newcomers to Memphis they seem quite puzzled and wonder if I am describing a type of mental condition that is the opposite of abnormal. The old timer, of course, will remember Normal as a community that gradually became a part of the city of Memphis as the city extended to the east.

My brief description of the town and some of its people will be of chief interest to those, like me, who had the good fortune to grow up there.

The omission of certain people is not intentional and should be blamed on the fuzzy memory of a middle-aged psychiatrist as he thinks back to fifty years ago.

In 1920 our family moved to Southern Road east of Goodlett Avenue and north of what is now Audubon Park. My family composed of my parents, Dr. and Mrs. Walter R. Wallace, my sister, Annie Rose (now Mrs. Leslie Buchman), and my brother, the late Walter R. Wallace, Jr. My father purchased sixteen acres of land and built the Wallace Sanitarium. This hospital had been in operation for several years in downtown Memphis on South Fourth Street and was the first private psychiatric hospital in the Mid-South area. We lived next door on Southern in a white frame house. After living there for five years, we moved to the old Perkins home at the corner of Poplar Pike and East Cherry Circle.

THE TOWN

At that time, the town of Normal was composed of a depot and several stores in the vicinity of Southern and Echles Streets. The oldest store was a brick grocery owned by the Brooks family which apparently had been there for a long time. Fletcher Harrison operated a small barber shop on the opposite corner of Southern and Echles. He charged twenty-five cents for a haircut and fifteen cents for a shave. Later Scruggs' Grocery and Dunagan's Grocery opened for business. The streetcar from downtown Memphis came to the depot and circled for the return trip. The fare was seven cents for the ride to Main Street. We called this area "old Normal" to differentiate it from the new commercial development at Highland and Southern.

There was a barber shop, post office, and drug store (Normal Drug Company) located at the corner of Patterson and Walker near the south entrance to the college. This structure was known as the Prescott Flats. My uncle, P. Y. Ashford, and my father owned Normal Drug Company.

The extensive commercial area now located at Highland and Southern was nonexistent. The only store in this section was Madison's

Grocery located at the southeast corner of Highland and Southern. Dr. A. G. Hudson's home was located on the opposite corner and the Prescott home at the corner of Walker and Highland. The Prescott home was a large white frame house with a large porch surrounded by shade trees. Prescott Street, Prescott Flats, and Prescott Baptist Church, the first church in the community, were named after the Prescott family. Two of the streets in the town, Mynders and Brister, were named after early presidents of Memphis State University. For some reason Peachtree Street located just west of Highland was changed to Ellsworth Street.

NORMAL DRUG COMPANY

Soon after the opening of Normal Drug Company at Prescott Flats the structure burned to the ground, and the store was reopened in 1925 at Highland and Southern. On one side there was a Bowers Grocery Store and McLaurine's Bakery on the other side. As time passed, many other stores were built and the commercial area extended north on Highland.

My uncle, P. Y. Ashford (Uncle Perse), was a good druggist and a good man. He had no children of his own, but always showed considerable interest in me and my friends. His work day began at 7:00 a.m. and extended to 9:00 p.m., but in spite of hard work he had an excellent sense of humor. He learned that one of the delivery boys had altered a charge slip with a pencil. Uncle Perse reprimanded this lad, told him to sin no more, but gave him the nickname "Pencil"!

Normal Drug Company was a focal spot for community shopping and visiting. My father, Dr. Hudson, Dr. S. N. Brinson, and Dr. Carl Humphreys frequently met at the drug store in the morning before beginning their day's work. On these occasions there was considerable talk about fishing, hunting, and the value of their respective bird dogs. Later, when I worked as a "soda jerker" at Normal Drug Company I would listen to some of their stories. I never heard these gentlemen tell an off-color story and have always remembered their evaluation of a man. This evaluation was simply, "He's okay, I would take his check." Dr. Humphreys was the first dentist in the community. Drs. Hudson and Brinson were dedicated and busy general practitioners. Dr. Brinson was an active, energetic man who worked hard but enjoyed a good fishing trip. His office was located in the rear of the drug store. Dr. Hudson maintained his office in his home and also served many years as school physician at Memphis State University. He was a pleasant, courteous man who fitted quite well the old adage, "A Southern Gentleman".

Uncle Perse ran a busy store assisted during the period 1925 to 1935 by William Russell (now with Ellis-Bagwell Drug Company). He fostered a feeling of welcome to the customers which was carried on by his successor, Paul Burson. Paul recently retired after managing the store for forty-five years. He was a quiet, kind man who was always ready to support any worthy cause in the community as well as individuals who were in need. At the present time, Hoyt Wells is in charge of the store assisted by Lucille Russell.

I began working an afternoon or so a week at the drug store while I was in grammar school. I remember in the early days stamping cigarettes and plug tobacco by hand. There were four standard varieties of cigarettes, and they sold for fifteen cents until the two cents tax was added. Trade was good on my days at the drug store, as word circulated that I gave a rather well-packed cone of ice cream for a nickel.

The popular fountain items were limeade, Coca-Cola, root beer, chocolate soda, and a rare banana split. I made an occasional nickel or dime tip from "car hopping". Car hopping is rather rare now.

When working at the drug store, I usually ate supper at McLaurine's Bakery next door. Mr. and Mrs. L. L. McLaurine operated an excellent bakery with specialties such as chess pie, cinnamon rolls, and salt rising bread. Their bakery was the first place in Normal to serve meals to the public.

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

The West Tennessee State Normal School opened in 1912. This college was part of a national movement to establish training schools for teachers (normal schools) throughout the United States. Thus, the town of Normal was named after the college.

In 1922, I began grammar school and had the first two grades in the Administration Building of the college. The Demonstration School consisted of six grades and was directed by Dr. Owen R. Hughes, Professor of Education. The classrooms were located at the west end of the second floor. These rooms were spacious, comfortable, and accommodated about twenty-five pupils. My first grade teacher was Miss Clyde Trevathan, who later became principal of the White Station Grammar School. Mrs. Byron Lutman taught the second grade.

In 1922, the enrollment in the college was 652 students, and there were 186 in the Demonstration School. The buildings on the campus included the Administration Building, Mynders Hall (women's dormitory), and the President's home. The President's home was located on the site where the Patterson Building now stands. It was a large brick house with a green tile roof.

The growth of this institution has been impressive. A small teachers' college with several hundred students and three buildings has become a sparkling urban university. Today there are over 20,000 students, a multitude of beautiful buildings, and a wide selection of courses of study taught by a competent faculty. The growth and excellence of Memphis State University is due to the efforts of many people. However, it was Dr. C. C. Humphreys who set the course for this institution. After serving for many years in various capacities, he became President in 1960. As a result of Dr. Humphreys' competent leadership and administrative ability, the University became an outstanding institution. He resigned in 1972 to accept an appointment as Chancellor of the State University and Community College System of Tennessee. Dr. James R. Chumney, Associate Professor of History, is collecting material for a book that will tell the story of Memphis State University.

THE TRAINING SCHOOL

In the fall of 1924, I enrolled in the third grade in the new Training School located on the college campus. This was a one story building composed of numerous classrooms, office, and hallways built at a cost of \$50,000.

My third grade teacher was Miss Ellen Davies (Mrs. Ellen Davies Rodgers). Miss Ellen was an excellent teacher and was to become an outstanding educator, author, and community leader. Miss Mary Dunn taught the second grade, Miss Jonnie Slough the fourth grade, and Mrs. Joseph Fulcher was the sixth grade teacher. Among other teachers were Miss Virginia Hunt and Miss Mary Abels in English and Miss Dorothy Wilson in mathematics.

R. M. "Bill" Robinson taught history and stimulated my interest in this subject. He later was to serve for many years as Dean of Memphis State University. Joe Austin taught manual training and was director of the band. He was a good craftsman, strict in his discipline, and a good leader of boys. Dr. Nellie Angel Smith taught us Latin in the ninth grade. This distinguished lady also gave us some good advice on how to live. She was longtime Professor of Latin and Dean of Women at Memphis State University.

Among the Principals of the Training School were Miss Mamie Brown, who had been Principal of the Demonstration School, Elmer Gift and Andrew Holt. Dr. Holt was to become a leader in Tennessee education and Chancellor of the University of Tennessee. He was quite popular with the students, a good speaker, and had an excellent sense of humor.

In those days "big recess" was the noon lunch hour, and "little recess" was a short break in mid-morning. The recesses were periods of active physical exertion. Games with marbles were in order for boys in the lower grades and were of several varieties—"big ring", "little ring", "granny", "for fun", and "for keeps". When I discussed the "for keeps" style with my father he advised me to play "for fun" so my gambling career was nipped in the bud at an early age. Older boys played softball, soccer, and a rather vigorous game called "pop the whip".

The years 1924-1930 at the Training School were happy ones for me. The building was new, well equipped, and there was plenty of room. The teachers were a competent and dedicated group who maintained good discipline in the classroom and on the playground. This discipline was supported by the parents. There was an occasional case of "playing hooky" or other minor infractions. If a student was not properly prepared for a class, he was required to "stay in" after school to study for an hour or so.

Being located next door to a college was an interesting and stimulating experience. The student teachers from the college performed well under the supervision of the regular teachers. We attended some of the programs in the Auditorium of the college.

In the eighth grade we were taught a course in agriculture by Pro-

fessor Jerry Fitch in the basement of the Administration Building. We particularly admired the ingenuity of the college men ("big boys" as we called them) when a large truck appeared in the lobby of the college Administration Building one Halloween.

In 1930, after completing the ninth grade, my class left the Training School. Most of us entered the tenth grade at Messick High School in the fall.

TRAINING SCHOOL — CLASS OF 1930

Monroe Barron	Wilford McClure	Irving Stone
Tom Barron	John Michael	Dancy Thompson
Myrtis Black	Tom Michael	Annie Rose Wallace
Ruth Black	Brody Pope	Jim Wallace
Howard Burkett	Virginia Roane	Martha Weinrich
Irma Crump	Vadine Russell	Jerome York
Frank Ebert	Jamie Stewart	
Jim Guy	William Stewart	

THE TRAIN

Prior to the rapid expansion of Memphis to the east, Buntyn, Normal and White Station were separate towns located along the route of the Southern Railway. There were also small waiting stations at the Cherry Road crossing and at Ridgeway, the old Poplar Pike crossing. At our home on Southern Road, we enjoyed seeing the numerous freight and passenger trains pass. Our favorite was the Memphis Special, a crack passenger train, that passed at 8:30 p.m. This train was later replaced by the Tennessean.

An interesting train of the early period was the "Newsboy", a strange-looking, single car train that passed our house at 5:00 a.m. daily. According to Paul Coppock, this train carried the **Commercial Appeal** and ice cream to nearby towns and made connections in Grand Junction with other trains. On the return trip it brought milk to Memphis.

In 1935, I boarded the Memphis Special at the Normal Depot for the trip to the University of Virginia. In 1943, I left Normal to go to Pennsylvania to enter the Army Medical Corps in World War II.

In those days the Normal Depot was a busy place with an active passenger and freight business. As a rule, it was a pleasant place as people looked forward to a trip on the train. However, during the period of World War II, there was a feeling of sadness at times at the Depot. On these occasions hospital trains composed of numerous coaches carrying wounded soldiers arrived at the station. A fleet of ambulances carried these patients to the nearby Kennedy Veterans Administration Hospital.

TROOP 40

The Boy Scouts of America, which was organized in 1910, was modeled after Lord Baden-Powell's successful scout movement in Great Britain. Scouting came to Normal in 1927 when Joe Austin, of

the Training School faculty, organized Troop 40. His junior leaders were Radford Rosebrough, Hugh Burkett, and Edgar Gift. Weekly meetings were held in the Training School. Later, the Troop moved to St. Luke's Methodist Church located at the corner of Highland and Mynders. Troop 40 has been in continuous operation longer than any troop in Memphis and has maintained a strong organization throughout the years. Boys at the Training School looked forward to their twelfth birthday so they could become scouts.

An important part of the scouting program were the weekend camping trips to Camp Currier at Eudora, Mississippi. My father and several other fathers collected money to build a cabin at the camp. Austin supervised the building of the structure, which was made of split cypress logs, and it is still there today. Friday nights were set aside for scout meetings, and the boys looked forward to this program. At that time there were no distractions such as organized grammar school athletics and television as exist today. When Joe Austin moved to Fort Thomas, Kentucky, Harry Madison served well as the next scoutmaster.

There was healthy rivalry between Troop 40 and Troop 8, which was sponsored by the Buntyn Presbyterian Church. Miller Johnson, who owned the Normal Hardware Store, served as scoutmaster of Troop 8.

THE PEOPLE

I have mentioned several of the interesting people who lived in Normal. Among my other favorites were Henry "Shorty" Prater, Al, "Mr. May" Mayfield, and John Stock. Shorty was a gentle, slightly-built black man of indeterminate age who did yard work. He was a familiar figure in the community as he traveled to his jobs on a bicycle. He was a good yard man and a good philosopher. I see Shorty occasionally at the drug store. He has retired and still maintains his optimistic attitude about life.

Mr. May delivered for the Normal Cleaners. He was middleaged, talkative, and quite courteous to his customers. One citizen asked Mr. May to take six or seven inches off his new pants because they were too long. Mr. May, with his usual effort to please the customer, carried out this man's wish! He had his ear to the ground and knew most of the news in the community. In the winter he protected himself from the cold by wearing a heavy wool cap, overcoat, and leather leggings. He was a bachelor who was so busy helping other people that he never had time for a family of his own.

John Stock owned Stock's Garage which was the first service station in the community. It was located on Highland across the street from Dr. Hudson's home. Stock, a transplanted Northerner, was an active supporter of community activities. He was a likeable man who seemed to enjoy dealing with his customers. We enjoyed listening to his northern accent as he described his satisfaction with Normal and the South.

Summing Up: Normal was and is a nice place to be.

