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First Days in Chapel Hill

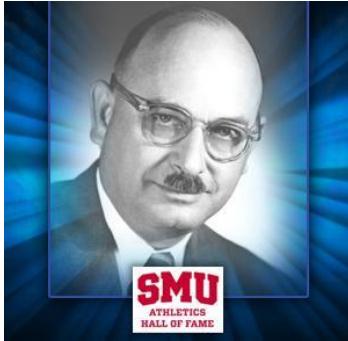
By the time we arrived in Chapel Hill in 1948, we had moved several times, from mid-America to the Pacific Northwest to the east coast and back to Texas. I enjoyed moving, back when we had few possessions consisting mainly of a collection of records, some books, our clothes and household linens, with enough kitchen equipment to keep us moderately well fed, plus the pride of our possessions, a vacuum cleaner; getting settled was not a big chore. And there was adventure in getting acquainted with a new geographic area, a new culture, new acquaintances, new activities; in short, a new life. Of course, there was the wrench of leaving familiar places, familiar people, and familiar activities, but the adventure was exciting and made up for the losses.

Chapel Hill promised to be an exciting place because we were embarking again on a new phase of our life, in a part of the country new to us. We had a place to live, arranged for us by the Statistics Department, where Paul had been accepted as a graduate student. We had rented a modest two-bedroom cottage, totally unfurnished save the kitchen stove, a refrigerator, and a floor oil-burning heater in the living room. We had received a letter from Olin Mouzon, brother of Paul's chairman in Dallas, welcoming us to Chapel Hill and offering to lend us a kitchen table, two chairs, and a box spring. Olin was Professor of Economics at the University. Paul had a teaching assistantship which was unusual in that it was in the Department of Mathematics rather than the Department of Statistics. We also hoped that I *might* have an instructorship in the English Department, for which I had applied but had not heard about. It did come through, fortunately, though I heard only at the last minute.

After we moved our possessions into the house on Purefoy Road and evicted a large, friendly tom cat from our car, we drove to Franklin Street in downtown Chapel Hill seeking a late lunch and directions to the Mouzons' to get our "furniture." We chose the corner drugstore with its lunch counter and there we had our first adventure. Although we ordered something routine, Paul got a puzzled reaction from the waitress; "Bacon, lettuce, and tomato?" she inquired. He confirmed his order; it came in a few minutes - three sandwiches, one bacon, one lettuce, and one tomato, three of them all on one plate. We didn't laugh, and Paul ate all three while I enjoyed my grilled cheese.

When we returned to our car around the corner, we found a policeman putting a traffic citation under the windshield wiper. The citation said we were parked on a line, but we were not. Paul pointed this out to the friendly cop, who said he could not cancel the ticket because that would be "fixing it." He pointed to his headquarters across the street, where we could register our complaint. The Chief of Police himself tore up the ticket and welcomed us to Chapel Hill. We found the Mouzons' home and greatly enjoyed getting acquainted with them. Olin was quite different from his brother Edwin in Dallas, more reserved, though friendly. For one thing, Edwin had the typical male-pattern baldness of a forty-plus man whereas his brother was completely bald and wore a rakish red wig which we later discovered was one of several, each of which fit whatever activity Olin was pursuing: a wind-blown yard-work piece, a chic Sunday rug, four neat professorial styles

which seemed to grow until he needed a haircut. It seems that when he was a young boy, he lost all his blond hair and elected to replace it with red. We enjoyed knowing the Mouzons who were very kind to us while we lived in Chapel Hill. We returned their table, chairs, and box springs when we moved to the Carolina Inn a year later.



When we returned to Purefoy Road that first afternoon, we discovered that the tom cat was "Brandy," belonging to Henny and George Caldwell across the street. Brandy thought he was a dog and was usually called "Brandy Dog." He felt it was his right to ride with anyone in their car. The Caldwells became our close life-long friends. The attempt of their two-year-old son to say my name gave me the nickname, Mosse (rhymes with Posse), which has followed me all my life.



George and Henny Caldwell and children Jack, Chuck, Paul B

Paul soon settled in to being a typical graduate student, frequently studying with a group of fellows at night. I used that time to grade papers and to catch up on the small amount of housework I had. One night I set up the ironing board in the little kitchen, with all the windows open to the fragrant Carolina night. My peaceful occupation of ironing, far from my favorite, was interrupted violently when a whippoorwill suddenly became vocal outside the kitchen window. I had never heard one, but it announced its name in unmistakable terms. I never heard it again after that one night, but its signature has lasted me until today.

We had a more cordial relationship with a cardinal which we fed from a tray outside Paul's study window. When spring came and the inevitable bugs sought the bird seeds, we discontinued supplying the tray, only to have the male cardinal rap on the window pane early every morning for a week, demanding food.

Purefoy Road was unpaved. Although not many people lived on it, after a lengthy dry period, the dust became a problem for Nell Eubanks who lived next to the Caldwells. Paul and I came home for lunch one day to discover Nell's husband, Mike, driving repeatedly up and down the street with a large oil barrel attached to his rear bumper. The barrel was perforated in several places on its bottom so that it sprinkled the street. Periodically he would stop at their house to refill the barrel with water. He had devised a temporary way of sprinkling the street so that Nell could breathe better. When Mike abandoned his dissertation on Senator Bilbo the next year and they moved away, someone discovered a stack of GI Bill checks in one of their drawers. Other students in the neighborhood, including Paul and me, marveled at a financial status that could let them ignore those monthly checks. One afternoon toward the beginning of winter, I came home from my classes in time to see Paul in the living room with the vacuum cleaner. He was holding the wand in the air, waving it about, apparently randomly. He had fired up the floor furnace for the first time. It was erupting with undigested puffs of oil which stained the floor when they were allowed to settle. He solved the problem with the vacuum cleaner, catching the blobs of oil as they descended, before they touched the floor. I don't recall any other problem with the heater, which kept us nicely warm throughout the winter.

We never did get the cottage furnished, but the entirely vacant living room, with its wall-to-wall floor, made a wonderful party room. Graduate students badly needed parties and frequently held them in our living room. The floor consisted of four by eight pieces of plywood, unattached. They made a wonderful floor for the forties-style dances we liked, with enough bounce to give us gracefulness but not enough to make us feel that we might crash through and land on the ground below.

During that year, the Eubanks returned to Mississippi, the Caldwells moved into Victory Village, and we got an apartment in the Carolina Inn right across from the campus, in walking distance of Phillips and Saunders Halls where Paul and I spent most of our days. The year had been a wonderful introduction to life in Chapel Hill, but we enjoyed being closer to our work and having the opportunity to explore many other entertaining and unusual aspects of life in the village of Chapel Hill.