

Oak Ridge Adventures

10/8/95

Our whole family was looking forward to the adventure of Paul's sabbatical. For some time, we had been planning what to pack to take with us and what to store in order to vacate the house for the California couple who were planning to rent our house while we were gone. The day after Christmas we had a flurry of packing the two cars and a small trailer, all we needed since we had a furnished house to live in. I wonder if we would have been so enthusiastic if we'd known what kind of adventure awaited us on the way to our new home.

To start with, our Texas weather had turned unusually cold and damp, with a fine coating of snow on the ground. Because the Highway Department told us that all roads from Dallas through Tennessee were clear, with a warming trend, we started out without worrying. When we reached the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas, the up-and-down-hill highways turned slick and promised more slickness from the falling snow. When we came to the top of a long, steep hill with trucks and cars stalled at top and bottom, some off the road, we pulled into the shelter of an abandoned filling station and began putting chains on the wheels, chains we had foresightedly bought but never before used. We were aided by a young man in a pick-up truck who was patrolling the highway to help people like us. Proceeding slowly, we went on to our first night's planned stop at Little Rock.

Early the next morning the weather forecast continued to promise a warming trend, but we kept the chains on the car because the highways were still snowy. Soon, as we neared the end of our Arkansas journey, we encountered freezing rain. At the big, high bridge over the Mississippi River, Paul, in the leading car with Roland beside him and the trailer behind him, was stopped by a Highway Patrolman who cautioned him to drive slowly across the bridge. He stopped me with a similar caution but also delayed my starting until Paul had reached the middle of the bridge. By then I had observed the giant blocks of chocolate-colored ice which covered the entire expanse of the river and had stopped all river traffic. It was not a reassuring sight; blocks of ice, even chocolate colored, don't look the least bit soft and welcoming. The windshield wipers and defrosters were barely clearing a fan-shaped opening for me to peer through. Then, with George beside me, I had to follow Paul. Every now and then I would see the usually stable trailer I had been following from Texas swaying slightly behind his slow-moving car. And I was supposed to drive behind him, not knowing when half my family would slip into that ice-jammed river. Somehow, I did.

On the Tennessee side, the radio repeatedly warned of worsening weather conditions and urged all traffic to stop. We pulled over for a conference and decided to stop for the night as soon as possible. We crept along the slick streets in Memphis until we saw a small Holiday Inn. It proved to be the original Holiday Inn but, more importantly, it had a single vacancy which we promptly rented. The neighborhood was not one we would ordinarily have chosen for a night's stop. We hastily unpacked necessities for the night and went to a restaurant for lunch. Then we visited a nearby grocery store for supplies for

our evening meal and breakfast. If necessary, we supposed we could get more supplies the next day.



After picnicking on the floor of our room, we soon turned off the television, which gloomily predicted the sleet and snow to last several days, and went to bed, lulled to sleep by the sound of the sleet beating on the windows and the cars in the parking lot.

Around three o'clock, I was wakened by a strange sound, really the absence of sound. I looked out the window and beheld a marvelous sight – softly falling rain which had already melted the ice on the cars and parking lot. By three thirty, after Paul removed the chains from the tires, we poured reluctant boys and the baggage into the cars and struck out in the dark on our cautious way east toward Oak Ridge.

Always a lover of mountain vistas, I enjoyed sights of the Cumberland Mountains as we made the slight climb across Tennessee. Everything seemed to be going well until we turned off the main highway to approach Oak Ridge. The snow began again, building on the snow which was already there. In town, we stopped for directions to our rented home, discovered it was on one of the highest ridges that gave Oak Ridge its name, and prudently decided to have the chains put back on the tires.

When we got to Overlook Drive, our destination, we discovered that it led us up a steep hill to the top of the ridge and that, even with chains on the car, Paul could not pull the trailer up the steepish hill to our home. He parked car and trailer at the side of the street and drove with me to the top of the crest. We drove into our carport at the side of the house. The driveway ended abruptly with a low brick wall overlooking our backyard, some fifteen feet below the carport, and the valley beyond. I experienced a brief heart-stopping moment at the thought of that abrupt drop-off. Then we got busy and unloaded the car into the house. Paul and the boys returned to the parked car and trailer at the

bottom of the hill, unloaded as much as possible from the trailer into the car and returned to the house. After three such trips, they were able to get the trailer up the hill.



After the final loads were deposited in the house, we realized that some kind person had turned on the heat to welcome us. In addition, there was a note inviting us to dinner with Marie and Don Gardiner. I was amazed at how quickly we shed the tension and anxieties of the two days of slippery travel in the warm environment of the Gardiner's home. The evening was a harbinger of the pleasures of our stay in Oak Ridge.

Oak Ridge, Part 2

10/14/95

The day after we arrived in Oak Ridge, Paul had to go to work, but the Christmas school holiday meant the boys and I could stay home and get fully moved in. They were happy to be able to play in the snow which they seldom had seen in Texas. They immediately got acquainted with Jim Manning, about George's age, who lived next door. That association quickly led to a visit from Esther, Jim's mother.

Esther and I settled down over a cup of coffee to talk about Oak Ridge and get acquainted. She turned out to be a wonderful neighbor and friend. She had lived in Oak Ridge almost since its beginning and could tell me about life in Oak Ridge then as well as the early days when it was a mystery to people outside.

After Esther went home, I loaded the dishwasher with our coffee cups along with the other dishes we had brought with us. The dishwasher did not work. I called the agency from whom we had rented the house, and they sent out their recommended repair man.

He soon had the machine in parts on the floor and left for lunch. After lunch, he continued to study the various parts. After Paul came home from his first day at the office, we heard the repairman exclaim, "Oh, I see the problem. There's no motor!" He put the parts back into the dishwasher and left, apologizing and promising to bring the motor in the next day. After dinner, I enlisted George and Roland in the dishwashing and drying operation, a chore with which they were unfamiliar but which they seemed to enjoy.

The next day the calls between our house, the repair shop, and the rental office began a saga which was to continue throughout our stay. Eventually, the repair shop traced what had happened. The owner of the house had called them to repair the machine while he still lived there. They discovered the defective motor and ordered a new one. By the time it arrived, the owner had left Oak Ridge without leaving instructions about the dishwasher. Eventually, the motor had been returned to the manufacturer. It was now reordered, but did not arrive while we were there. However, we did get almost weekly visits from the conscientious repairman, who kept apologizing and promising the repair as soon as possible. Meantime, George and Roland discovered that the novelty of drying and putting away dishes was merely a chore. Old timers assured me that our dishwasher experience was typical of most repair experiences in Oak Ridge – lots of good intentions and good will, but not much action.

We visited the middle and elementary schools the boys were to attend, taking along the papers and report cards from Dallas. The middle school principal was appalled to discover that the Dallas schools were every bit as good as the California schools that in his experience were the only schools superior to the Oak Ridge school system. He wanted to put George in the eighth rather than the seventh grade which he had only half completed. However, since we were to return to Dallas, we felt George should not make this move. He enthusiastically enrolled in the Oak Ridge High School band. He enjoyed the marching experience in the band, as well as the contests in playing the clarinet which he participated in around the state.



Roland's entry in the elementary school caused some rearrangement because in Dallas his class had been studying Spanish instead of the French taught in Oak Ridge. The principal thought he would be handicapped by entering the second half of the class, and because his reading skills were higher than those of the fourth-grade level, he was put in a fifth grade reading class while his homeroom studied French. Both boys settled in quickly and enjoyed their new schools, especially since they were so comfortable in their studies that we felt we could take them out of occasional Friday classes so that we could explore the surrounding areas with short trips suggested by the Gardiners and other friends.

Those trips remain among the highlights of our sabbatical. Because we had such spectacular vistas from our house, south and east to the Smokies and northwest to the Cumberland Mountains, our first trips took us to those mountains. After a trip west to explore the nearby Cumberlands, we next went to the Collegiate All-Star Basketball Game in Lexington, Kentucky, not too far from Oak Ridge. We saw the game with one of Paul's SMU students (Dave Sigmund) who had been an All-American basketball player and how had gone on to distinguish himself in graduate work in Statistics at Columbia University. Both boys were ecstatic over seeing the game with such a wonderful guide. We also visited Berea College and several other beauty spots in the Cumberlands, despite the frequent appearance of unrestored coal mining sites which had destroyed much of the beauty and utility of the terrain. But the atmosphere in the Adolph Rupp Coliseum in Lexington was undoubtedly the highlight of that particular trip.



We had numerous trips to Knoxville, always enjoying the scenes on the way there as well as the city, particularly the dogwoods. Once we took George to the University of Tennessee for a band contest. The band director had cautioned the band not to keep time with their feet because of the liveliness of the music hall they played in. The music sounded wonderful despite an occasional thump from an unwary musician, and the band director was pleased with their showing. We had another trip for music purposes, this time for solo clarinet contests, to Maryville, Tennessee, south of Knoxville. The little city was lovely, nestled into the hills, and we learned that one of our heroes, Sam Houston, first President of the Republic of Texas, had lived there.

Our longest trip took us down through the Smokies in Tennessee into North Carolina. We were enchanted with one vista from the highway into Maggie Valley, a beautiful spot consisting of a few white dwellings, red barns, and grazing cattle, at that time undiscovered by tourists. When we ventured in that direction recently, we discovered that the Maggie Valley had become a busy tourist scene, a transformation undoubtedly good for the pocketbooks of the valley but destructive to the beauty of the quiet, isolated place we fell in love with that afternoon.



The purpose of the trip back then was to investigate Brevard College as a site for the summer statistics conference Paul was to direct for the Southern Regional Education Board the following summer. The location in the North Carolina mountains seemed remote but was close to transportation, both highway and air. It was a beautiful little college with all the amenities the conference needed – dormitory rooms, a good cafeteria, handy meeting rooms, and varied, convenient recreation facilities. When the conference met the next summer, George, Roland and I did not go, but we could remember what the area was like.

Perhaps our most memorable trip was to Cade's Cove in the Smokies, inspired by a recent National Geographic photographic essay and suggested by Dave Gosslee, one of the men Paul worked with. Cade's Cove was a fascinating place, preserving some of the early history of isolated settlers in the mountains. The valley had been settled in the first half of the nineteenth century and was so remote and self-sufficient that the hundred or so families eventually living there were isolated from the rest of the country, retaining their language and way of living. When it was "discovered" in the 1920's, it was a well-preserved vestige of the early eighteenth century. It was made a national park and the residents were encouraged to remain and maintain their way of living. About twenty-five

families were pleased to remain. Consequently, people in the second half of the twentieth century could visit a century-old way of life, making it a delightful example of living history. By the time we arrived in 1966, the area was still being preserved by five of the remaining inhabitants. After we had driven around the peaceful, neat Cove, seeing the log cabins preserved from the days of its isolated existence, we were attracted by a sign pointing to a waterfall, half a mile away. The sign neglected to say that the trail went straight up a rugged mountain – a very exhausting climb. Moreover, we soon doubted that the trail was only half a mile, but we persisted. Along the way, our city children had their first experience with an outhouse, wrinkling their noses and causing them vocally to appreciate their nice bathrooms at home. Paul and I were amazed that we had allowed them to be so unaware of a rural environment. They did enjoy the mountain streams as well as the trees and plants along the trail and the lovely promised waterfall, deciding that there had been some advantages to living in those former “backwards” times.



We didn't spend all our time traveling while we were in Oak Ridge, but the trips were certainly memorable. We also enjoyed daily life in a small town and the friends we made. Several years later when we traveled east from Texas, the boys requested a stop in Oak Ridge with the opportunity to see the Mannings and some of their other friends.