

5-8-94

Purefoy Road

In 1948, Paul and I completed our master degrees at Southern Methodist University. He was accepted for graduate work in the Department of Mathematical Statistics at the University of North Carolina and had a part time appointment as an instructor in the Department of Mathematics. I had an appointment as instructor in the English Department.

We packed our books, records, clothes, and some kitchen equipment into our 1938 Oldsmobile and made an uneventful journey through Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina to Chapel Hill. With some difficulty we found the house we had rented sight unseen on Purefoy Road - a road that was then out in the country from town, now swallowed up in the middle of the medical school complex. The key was said to be with a neighbor. Our first try was at the log cabin next door. We were met by a bloodied F. W. Brawley who had just hit himself in the head with a hammer. (This was a good introduction to F.W., who was always busy improving their house which he had created out of an old log cabin and was always hurting himself.) He thought perhaps the Caldwells across the street might have the key, but they weren't home.

We went into town to get some lunch, trying a corner drugstore which, like most drugstores then, had a lunch counter. Paul ordered a bacon, lettuce, tomato sandwich to the apparent bewilderment of the clerk behind the counter. My order, whatever it was, didn't seem to bother her. In a few minutes she came back with my sandwich and three sandwiches for Paul - a bacon sandwich, a lettuce sandwich, and a tomato sandwich. Paul was hungry enough that he ate all three.

Back on Purefoy Road, we found the Caldwells, George, Henny, and eighteen-month-old Chuck, at home. They had the key, helped us unload the car, along with their cat Brandy-dog, and we began a wonderful, long-lasting friendship.

The house was a white pre-fabricated cottage with three concrete steps leading to the front door which opened into a living room with a floor furnace. The kitchen was furnished with an apartment-sized range and a refrigerator and was somewhat larger than the kitchen in our first apartment in Portland. There were three doors in the living room, one to the bathroom opened off a slight ell of the room and one door to each of the small bedrooms. The floor throughout was composed of four by eight pieces of plywood, a source later of wonderful entertainment.

Paul's math professor at SMU had a brother in Chapel Hill who proved a good friend and quite a help. He lent us a small table, two chairs, and box springs. We bought a mattress, got apple crates from the grocery store to serve as bookcases as well as shelves for clothes. With the addition of a card table for a desk for Paul (mine was the kitchen table), we were in graduate school business. Oh, yes, we owned a vacuum cleaner. George Caldwell across the street was a graduate student in Mathematics and his neighbor Mike Eubanks was a graduate student in History. With the Brawleys next door, we found

ourselves in a friendly, helpful neighborhood, and had a great time getting acquainted in the few days before school started and we got down to serious hard work.

When I applied to teach in the English Department, I had no idea how scarce women were on the faculty. There were four of us females in the large English Department and perhaps two or three more scattered about the campus. Except for a few Chapel Hill residents, there were no women students. Inadvertently, I had stumbled into being a pioneer of sorts. I was invited to the first English Department faculty meeting to be introduced, and that was my last glimpse of the faculty as a whole. My office in Saunders Hall was in a large fishbowl with the other three women and ten men. Everyone in that room was companionable and helpful. It was a marvelous learning experience for a new instructor. Paul had been notified of his part-time instructorship on a postcard signed by Dr. Archibald Henderson, the outgoing head of the Mathematics Department. We were later advised to save that postcard for Dr. Henderson's signature as a semi-famous biographer of George Bernard Shaw (self-appointed). It represented a rare piece of correspondence from an office that boasted no secretary, thereby being unique in its scarcity.

But back to Purefoy Road. F.W. was an upholsterer. His lovely, hardworking wife, Ruth, learned that she needed to pick up his weekly paycheck before he did, for he generally walked downtown to the record store and spent his entire week's wages on Beethoven records. They had two small children, who, for some reason, Ruth thought deserved milk and other food. He wasn't a mean man, just thoughtlessly eccentric. He had a concert organist brother in Boston who occasionally sent F.W. a record of some composer besides Beethoven - like Mozart, for example. Beethoven's was the only music F.W. would listen to. When he learned we loved music, he gave his brother's records to us, always un-played and always gratefully received.

George Caldwell was going to school on the G.I. bill, and Henny was such a marvelous manager that they lived on the standard thirty dollars a month G.I. stipend. Their old house had a vacant living room with a slanting floor where Chuck could sit in the corner, throw a ball, and have it roll back to him. Their cat was called Brandy-dog because he thought he was a dog and wouldn't climb trees. He did like cars, however, and gave us quite a fright when he jumped into our front seat from the back where he was hiding, after we had driven halfway to school one morning. Chuck also gave me my long-lasting nickname when he tried to say Mary Frances and it came out *Mosse* (rhymes with *posse*). We attended many Math parties in the Caldwell's empty living room and held many Statistics parties in our equally empty living room. They were great for dancing, when the plywood floors bounced mightily, or for sitting on the floor to talk or play games. We collected a great store of anecdotes and lies that have lasted us all our lives. For instance, one night Cloyd Goodrum left the Caldwell's at about midnight to investigate Nat Macon's claim that a town named Ossipee on the road to Asheville was the only place in the country with outhouses visible from a U.S. highway. The next day he confirmed Nat's allegation.

Mike Eubanks's wife Mary suffered from many allergies, dust being high on the list. Purefoy Road was not paved. In the summertime, the dust was dreadful. Mike partially solved the problem of Mary's dust allergy by collecting used oil from the filling stations. He attached a barrel to the back of his car, punched a number of holes in the underneath surface, and drove up and down Purefoy Road until he had fairly well covered the surface dirt with oil. It worked. Once, all of the neighborhood was amazed when Mary found three of Mike's G.I. bill checks buried in a drawer, too old to be cashed. For those of us on limited incomes that was an incredible oversight. Then, we found out that Mike was working on his Ph.D. as a hobby, not that he ever intended to do anything with it!

One day I witnessed a strange happening which became part of our Chapel Hill lore: Paul had been home studying while I met an afternoon class. As I drove onto the driveway, I could see him through the open door of the house wielding the vacuum cleaner hose back and forth in the air in the living room. It was a weird sight but had a logical explanation. It seems that his studying had been interrupted by several small explosions from the oil-heated floor furnace in the living room. The explosions were accompanied by sizeable flakes of soot. He was catching them before they reached the floor, where they became almost impossible to remove. It looked pretty silly, but undeniably it was a practical solution.

Another story from that period came from my resolution to be more efficient in cooking. Before breakfast I put two eggs in water in a pan to hard cook for a salad that evening. We left in our usual flurry, causing me to forget about the eggs. That evening we found the little pan on the red-hot burner, with no bottom. The walls and ceiling were peppered with tiny imbedded pieces of eggshell, many of which remained when we moved away a year later.

When Christmas time came, all of our friends and a good portion of the rest of Chapel Hill packed up and left town. Paul and I were too poor to manage a trip home for Christmas, so we stayed in town to celebrate alone and maybe catch up on some of our school work. On Christmas Day when we drove to town, we met no cars and no people on the street. It gave us a different look at the town, and we found that we rather liked it. When we got back home, Ruth and F.W. Brawley had returned from a visit with their family. They invited us over for my first taste of applejack. Come to think of it, that was my only taste of applejack.

The Caldwells moved into Victory Village, where the rent was much more affordable, the Eubanks moved back to Mississippi, the Brawleys moved to Durham. We found an apartment in Carolina Inn and left Purefoy Road, too.

1-25-95

More Purefoy Road

I have already described our first house in Chapel Hill, as well as our neighbors there on Purefoy Road. But I find myself being haunted by other incidents from that time and want to record some of them for my own peace of mind. I hope the reader will enjoy

them, too. Certainly, our years in Chapel Hill were both productive and under stress but surprisingly and extraordinarily carefree. And none were so extraordinary as our residence on Purefoy Road.

Moving in had been as simple as unloading the car and stashing the records and books in neat rows on the floor. We set up our card table in one bedroom to serve as Paul's desk. Our clothes went into the closet of the other bedroom. Olin Mouzon, brother of the chairman of the Department of Mathematics at SMU, and his wife Kay lent us a box springs and a kitchen table with two chairs. The table would serve for dining and for my desk. After sleeping on the box springs one night, we set forth the next day to add the necessary mattress. Voila, we were established, happy campers. The living room was no problem - we left it wall-to-wall floor in anticipation of some interesting parties.

I was introduced to the faculty of the English Department at a departmental meeting as "sometime instructor of English at Southern Methodist University." That was my first introduction to the archaic use of *sometime*, and the only time I've ever heard the word used in that sense of *formerly*. It was also my introduction to the English faculty and the only time I was invited to a departmental meeting. Instructors were allowed to teach but not to vote on departmental business; consequently, they were superfluous at meetings.

My office was in a large fishbowl in which some eight other instructors and assistant professors worked and held student conferences. Some of those people, notably Dr. Hugh Holman, who later became chancellor of the University after serving successfully as chairman of the department, are worth separate stories. They were a remarkable lot, and I learned a great deal from them during my four years in that office.

But back on Purefoy Road, adventures were unfolding, too. One of the first came on a warm September night when Paul was studying at school and I was doing a bit of ironing. All the windows in the house were open. As I've described elsewhere, we had only three neighbors, in a log cabin next door and a couple of cottages across the street. Otherwise, we were surrounded by undeveloped land consisting of trees and bushes. On this warm night, the silence was profound, and, for a change, I was enjoying my ironing. The silence was suddenly broken by a loud outcry that nearly caused me to drop the iron. It was a sound unlike any I'd ever heard. For a heart-stopping moment, I was sure that I was being threatened by some otherworldly creature. Then the cry was repeated and I could recognize actual syllables that meant something to me, although I had never heard them before. There is great value in reading, after all. "Whip-poor-will...whip-poor-will!" Over and over. I was no longer frightened, just delighted and intrigued. Now, I too could record a whippoorwill in my mental list of birds. I've not heard one since, but it remains one of my favorite bird stories. The idea offends me that in Europe the bird is known as a "nocturnal goatsucker."

As we became acquainted with Paul's fellow graduate students, both in Statistics and in Mathematics, we discovered that our Purefoy Road home was an ideal party house. That wall-to-wall floor in the living room could accommodate as many friends as cared to gather in it. It was comfortable for sitting and talking endlessly, along with a drink or two.

It was even suitable for dancing. The floor consisted of four-by-eight-foot pieces of plywood which bounced satisfactorily to whatever rhythm the music inspired in the dancers. Apparently, each piece was well enough braced that no one was in danger of falling through to the ground underneath. Graduate students always share whatever wealth they have in coffee, beer, or what-have-you. None of us had very much money. In fact, Paul and I were probably the most affluent, for he had a small graduate assistantship and I was employed full time by the University. My thirty-six-hundred-dollar-a-year stipend went a good distance in keeping us fed and clothed. But none of us was concerned about such mundane matters. We liked to hear George Caldwell recite all of "Dan McGrew" or Nat Macon read expressively from Emily Post, or just the sound of our own voices discussing whatever was new at school or town or state or nation. We learned that Archibald Henderson, retired chairman of Mathematics and unofficial biographer of George Bernard Shaw, had been mock-challenged at the polls by a Political Science graduate student. When asked if he could read and understand the constitution of the state of North Carolina, Dr. Henderson replied, "No, but I can understand 'potions' of it when read 'tew' me." And other such nonsense.

At the kitchen table, I used my portable Underwood to type the entire sixteen pages of Nat Macon's PhD dissertation. It was my first experience with mathematical formulae and notations and my lack of experience plus my usual ineptitude at the typewriter did not produce a flawless manuscript. Those were the days when the eight required copies of a thesis were produced by making seven onionskin carbon paper copies. Any typographical error required many tiny bits of paper to mask the erasures as I worked my way down through all eight copies. It was a time consuming and tedious job. Nat's solution was typical of his way of thinking. In addition to having a brilliant mathematical mind, he had – still has - a beautifully logical approach to life. He had read that additions to the formulas could be legally achieved by use of India ink. Consequently, not only did he fill in the usual mathematical symbols such as Greek letters and long brackets with hand-written symbols but he also made many corrections of my typos in India ink too. When a member of his examining board objected to the appearance of his manuscript, he quoted chapter and verse of the official rules, and his dissertation was accepted with no more ceremony. Later, when I typed Paul's much longer Statistics dissertation, we found that we did not have Nat's comfortable philosophy. So, together we managed to turn out a much better looking manuscript.

We had a bird feeder outside one of the windows in Paul's "office." A male cardinal was our most faithful diner at the feeder, a simple platform attached to the window sill. When warm weather arrived, we dismantled the feeding station because we reasoned the birds no longer needed it and the bird seed attracted insects. Our cardinal friend thought differently. For several days after the platform continued empty, he drummed impatiently on the window sill. We finally gave him his food on the ground below the window.

The most traumatic incident on Purefoy Road concerns the heating which was achieved with an oil-fired floor furnace. Most of the time, the heat was adequate for the entire house, but there was one prolonged cold spell that resulted in our bedroom being decidedly chilly. At that time, Martha Jordan, secretary of the Department of Statistics,

asked us to keep her black cocker spaniel, Catherine of Aragon, while she was out of town for several days. We knew that Catherine was accustomed to sleeping with Martha. We also knew that Catherine's long black, silky hair tended to shed and cover whatever area she occupied. She was a delightful animal, but we were determined that she would not sleep with us. Our coldest night happened on her first night with us. With all the blankets, quilts, and coats we could muster, we found that we were still too cold to sleep well. Catherine suddenly became a desired companion. The contest revolved around whose side of the bed she would occupy. Catherine solved the problem by sleeping between us. We loved it.

When our lease expired, we were able to move into student housing. We were granted a one bedroom apartment in Victory Village, the housing of which consisted of former units originally intended for the United Kingdom in World War II and then "surplussed" to educational institutions to help with G.I. Bill housing. All of our neighbors except one had left Purefoy Road, and we welcomed the chance to move into a more densely populated neighborhood, nearer our classes and much cheaper. Thus opened a whole new chapter in our living experiences.