

FIVE MINUTES WITH TOM MOOTY

(Column # 2154)

"MORE MEDICARE MINISTER'S MEANDERIN' MEMORIES"

"I ain't never made but one grammatical error in my life; and I corrected that 'un as soon as I seen hit" - or so my friend, Frank Bell, used to say. I said that to Mrs. Williams - my NGS fifth grade teacher - one day after attending a Theater Guild performance at Newport Grammar; and she was, to say the least, horrified. But I thought to myself - and told her - that I was able to write these columnistic mis-masterpieces because of the education I received from her and all the rest of my teachers.

It was a wonderful experience to walk through the Newport Grammar School building again; made even more enjoyable because I was accompanied by one of my grandchildren - Gracie - who looked wide-eyed as I excitedly showed her my second grade classroom. I think she was amazed that we even had classrooms back in the dark ages!

We looked in as many rooms as we could - my second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade rooms. I could still remember my teachers' names, much more to her surprise: McGaha, Horton, Wilson, Williams, Thomas, Butcher, and Freeman.

We walked down under the auditorium (something I never was able to do while a student there); it was the original "black hole" (before they ever found black holes in outer space). Imagine my surprise when I found a passageway to go into the old gymnasium from what used to be the "new cafeteria" (built when I was a third grader); there's a door there now! The old basketball court was still alive in my mind among all the "Day Care stuff" (computers and all manner of high tech equipment with lights blinking) - but it was always such a scary place before, winding around down in the basement.

We had music in the north-west corner room in that basement; and sometimes, we moved across the hall to a larger music room for "rhythm band" (I majored in sticks and triangles). Strangely, several years later (and several years ago now), when I worked for Mr. Jim Franks at Newport Utilities, I taught several classes on vocational electrical work in that larger "music" room. I am certain all those kids still remember those demonstrations with sparks flying, fuses blowing, meters spinning, and breakers tripping; and all the things to do and not to do!

I took Gracie to the first floor and showed her where the offices used to be; and saw the old "fire alarm" bell that used to hang right outside the office door. I showed her where the old stairwells used to be and how they went up to a landing, and turned and went up some more. "Where did they go?" she asked; and up the new fireproof stairs we went (progress is not only necessary; it is wonderful); and - voila! - another floor opened up before her excited eyes. Papaw went to school in these classrooms - oh oh, there was another one right here; but it's gone now (you know, making room for progress) - and the new stairs are where the cloak rooms ("What's a cloak room, Papaw?") were located.

I guess the cutest thing that happened was when I showed Gracie the door where I used to come inside the building. The very door; the very same door right beside my third grade classroom; and she looked out the glass at the seldom used driveway and asked, "Papaw, is that where they dropped you off?"

My mind went back to the number of times I was "dropped off" at school; and I had to smile as I couldn't remember a single time. I guess I had a "drug problem" as mom and dad "drug" me to church and the dentists and doctors, and a couple of times, they "drug" me out the door and pointed me towards the school; but I cannot remember a single time I was "dropped off" at school. Of course, it was only about four blocks over that hill from 905 Fifth Street; and while kids were walking across the Northport Bridge, and joining in a caravan coming up "Grammar School Hill"; we were doing the same from "Frogpond", "Jones Hill", "The Knob", "Eastport", and other exciting ports of call; and we all met on that driveway for a game of "hip" or tag or football; or what was really exciting in the

winter - sliding down that icy drive way on the two lanes in the snow that the few teachers' cars that came up had made!

The rock where we used to "dust the erasers" (remember that) is still there. Oh yes, those ole black boards! Why, shucks, I remember when they put those newfangled "green boards" in; but we still called them "black boards". Easier on the eyes, I guess (progress, you know); and "dustless chalk" (easier on the environment, I guess; and now, "white boards" and "dry erase chemical markers" and video projectors (progress, you know) - and I'm all for that!

I just enjoyed walking through that "old", modernized, well-kept, up-to-date building that has served us well since 1898.

The Gospel is "old" too; but the methods of presenting it have upgraded since Paul's day. I endorse and use these new methods - as long as the message doesn't change - the same as I hope for the education field.

Tom Mooty writes these columns for the Wednesday and Weekend Editions of "The Newport Plain Talk"; and appreciates your comments. Write to the editor, or contact Mooty at P.O. Box 851, Newport, TN 37822m or e-mail tommooty15@gmail.com. "Brother Tom" serves as pastor to Newport's West End Baptist Church.