

A WALK THROUGH BAXTER, PUTNAM CO., TN
By Jerry Tammer "Gus" Denny

Introduction: No records. Legal or otherwise were used in this composition. This is truly a recollection of the authors' sixty years ago.

The writer apologizes for any omissions or names, spelling or any other many errors that a sixty year memory span could result in.

Further it is with the deepest regret that this was not done years ago when many of the people mentioned were alive and could have found out that there were people who cared about them and knew they existed. To those I say it is nice that they live today in a lots of peoples memory.

As I write this I think what a shame that children back then weren't knowledgeable enough to get to know the older people of the community at that time of their life. We knew the older ones only as old, mean, strange, but mostly as sue or johns' mother or dad. On the other hand it was a shame that the older people didn't get to know the kids better. Was it because they were too busy, didn't care or that was just the way things were supposed to be? I think back: some of the ones we labeled as mean or strange might have been the sweetest and the best people on earth and were just too busy trying to survive and raise their family. Of course some of the children didn't make it any easier on them with some of the wild things we did. I would be proud now to say I knew those older people and they were ok. Also some of the older people could probably say; I knew those kids were going to make something out of themselves. Now the only thing I have left is that my children's' friends can say; you know Tammer and Gloria dad and mom weren't bad people at all "to be as old as they were.

To the new comers to Baxter over the last 60 years, welcome.

Some of the following names lived somewhere in Baxter, but they have a vivid spot in my memory. John Neal, the Massa, Jared's, Hunter, Hooten's, Ford's, Fesmire's, Virgle Whitehead (a story of its own. God rest his soul). Is it true that you, Charlie Hughes, did really have money buried in your back yard, that you checked on each morning at four when you got up to blow your bugle on that pole? Is it true that either Charlie legion or tom askew didn't understand bay rum. Some say that Tom thought it was for drinking and yet others say that Charlie put it on men after a shave. I don't know as I was not shaving at the time.

Once upon a time, a walk in Baxter.

Downtown Baxter is about the size of four football fields. Each stadium would had only to seat less than a hundred people to take care of the population of Baxter. The total gross income of Baxter would not exceed today's salary of a second string nation league tackle so lets kick off to the greatest game ever played, that being life and growing up in Baxter. I wrote a short account of going to "Baxter Heaven" not long ago but my time in that dream was limited; so thru the grace of god and a vivid imagination I was permitted a longer visit with lots of the people that made up the population that was seated in the above stadiums.

Today we have football fans visit a game with numbers exceeding 100,000. Each one feeling the closeness to our team and the feeling of love and knowing those in orange colors. As we cheer we never realize we don't know personally the people seated next to us but we are all for them vols. So are we in our small stadium of life and the football fields of Baxter. So this tour gave me one more chance to relive in memory and share my feeling to the people i grew up with and cheered for Baxter and at that time never realizing that I didn't know some of the people sitting next to me.

It was a beautiful day at the time of my revisit; so a walk seemed the order of the day. It might as well been a walk because sixty years ago a very few people had cars. If you got off the greyhound bus at the lower Baxter cross roads the walk to Baxter was one mile. As you hit the ground you got your legs shaken

out from the ride in from where you don't know. At this cross roads, believe it or not; Baxter had a hospital operated by Dr. Millis. I knew his son James and started to grammar school with him. His life was already cut for him. To be a doctor. And he is. His parents might as well been from china. They were like the guy seated next to me at the 100,000 fan stadium. (I was amazed as I traveled thru Baxter how many more cases would be just like this). I didn't know them. The Keislars lived across the road and the older folks were also from china in my knowledge, but their son bud was and still is loved by me like a brother. Legs now under control I began my trek to Baxter. There were some fields and blank spots. Back then people didn't build houses so close that they were in other peoples' yard. Maybe it was a blessing as everyone seemed to know everybody's problems without hearing them first hand thru the thin walls.

There on the porch at the next house sat Mr. Wade with his sons Lester, Gerald and a younger one named James. Not too far was the McBroom family. I knew him by reputation but his relatives Callie and John went to school with me. They were like me being not too much blessed with the wealth of the nation that came other peoples way. There was no need to rush down the road because over the years I had done enough of that and it had taken its toll on my feet and legs. The stone house on the right housed the Winfree's, Leo, Alvin, Clarence and maybe more. As in most cases I knew Leo and them had parents but as a kid you didn't really have any business knowing the older folks. Across the road the McReynold brothers houses were located. I like Sam and Everett as they were "neat" looking guys and back then that was enough. A few steps away stood the Halfacre house which houses two beautiful daughter and a great son Popeye. On down the road were the Waller's, Austin's (Ernie was my hero as a base ball player) then the Bullards, Woodrow Scarlett and the Stanton's who were blessed with Charlie, Bill and my favorite girl Madge. If more people were like her we would have no more wars because they would have been afraid of sister Ruth (what a doll) Mrs. Phillip and Evely. Frand and "Miss" Hannah Hall. Miss Hannah was one of the few grown ups that I really knew as her decision was whether you went on to the second grade or not. I slipped by her and made it. Well we made it to the top of the hill and now must decide to turn right or left on highway 56. Ok lets turn right and run down the road for a few yards.

Off to the right was the Holmes, Starnes and other but this seemed like a sub-division to me away from the main flow. On down the road were the Sutton's (I came close to having one of them as a brother in law, but not to be) and Barr with Kenneth, S.N. and Gilbert. By then I was getting "pretty" far from home. I walked the railroad tracks back to town and experienced the thrill of walking the trussel. As a kid this was a frightful experience. I know you were over there on my right, Silas.

You know you are approaching the start of the "city" as the smell of the produce house (chickens) reach your nose and you hear Mrs. Philips answering the switchboard. Down the little slop the house that slanted a little due to the weight of Vaden Ditty and his dear pipe smoking mother. Next door the house contained two unknown adults (from china) but a house full of children that surely had to be the works of god. Bernice, Tommy, Leland, (what a great guy to carry the nickname of a dog, "Pup"), Miss Selma, and the love of my young life Gilma.

They were the Johnson's the baseball field the grammar school and the seminary. The seminary has to be another book to explain what it meant to Baxter. (This has been so well done, lately by Anita Cunningham Mitchum, the title 'All Roads Lead to Baxter'. Read it.) On out the road Mrs. Hall, Mr. Bain and his fine family including son Bill which was also one of the early life heroes. Sorry Jim you were much older than I. Way out the road, nearly in a foreign country, was Johnson nursery. But J.T. you live today in my memory and as age closes the gap Willard doesn't seem as old as he did back then. This is far enough from home base, so turn around and go back by Dave and Bonnie Maxwell. Fred I still see the horses and cows we herded playing cowboys. Another Mrs. Ditty and then Mr. and Mrs. Smith. What nice folks they turned out to be. Then coach Muncy, Nancy and buckshot. To you I owe so much.

Paul and Carmen Swallows lived in the neat house surrounded by Studebaker's. On the corner Mr. and Mrs. Green to me a stranger from china. But they had give to the world a thrill with their great children. Ruth, Jean, Charles, and Betty Ann. To Jean I never realized that teachers at the seminary could be young and good looking. You opened my eyes but as luck would have it. Elmer won out. Next to the Green's the Church of Christ and across from it Mr. Sadler. I always thought Mr. Green and Mr. Sadler owned the church but later on in life some of my friends that belonged to the Church of Christ informed me different.

Not too many steps there was Mrs. Richardson and her daughter Vada. I have often wondered how two people with hearts of gold lived in the same house. Orin Maxwell and Mrs. Louise along with kids Elaine and Buddy that kept the street on its toes. (Ok Buddie I believe you were not guilty of all those things you were supposed to have done) across the field lived Mrs. Thomas and in later years as we lived there I heard the thunder of world war two announced on that Sunday.

On up the road there was Mr. Brown and his beautiful daughter Junita. Jack Garrison ruled the upper end with the help of his sons, Carlos, Kenneth, Jack and the young one. This was about as far as I dared to get as foreign country was starting to close in on me. Back down the road one of the preaching brother named Harris lived and you could feel the vibes or his sermons on their way to his other brother down the road. There was Mr. Myatt and his family. Then the bang of the guns could be heard with Doc and Thomas along with their pretty sister. Mr. Sadler up on the hill was a nice man along with his wife. I always thought it was real neat that they had children from a far off to come to visit them in fancy cars. Back then Baxter knew of no such things as fancy street names or numbers. You turned on the street where Mrs. Phillips lived with her great son Johnny ray who hopefully has his car paid for by now. The Bradfords lived next door but he traveled to far off places like Monterey, Livingston etc sailing for W.R. Swell wholesale, but over the years his son Ralph keep their memory going.

Then the Gentry's with their grocery store, not as big as Campbell grocery but came in handy when possibility came that you were a little over due at Campbell's. The Alexander's were OK folks with their boys and girl. Quite but nice. Mr. Maddux rounded out the rest of the short street. His son Floyd gave us a chance for the freedom we enjoy so much today by carrying his mangled body for years. The next street over, to me was Alice in wonderland street because there lived the Mayor W.T. Swell his top lt. By marriage and in business Hop Lee. Erne Campbell had the biggest yard in Baxter. It took me 10 hours with a push mower and a lot of words which would have been cussing if I had know them then. But thanks the 15 cent per hours totaled up to a buck fifty and that would buy a lot of Paul Swallows hamburgers and Pepsi. Hardly anyone drink the dope 6 oz Cokes as that amount would not touch the 12 oz Pepsi, R.C., or Double Cola. On down the street Mrs. Austin and next Mr. Johnson (they were from china) next door was the hub of information, social gathers and some great people. John Lee and Carrie Sadle along with their daughter Ruth Lee, sons, Morgan and Hugh. Of all the heroes in Baxter it still would not have been the same without this family.

Mr. Prentice and Arthur Campbell finished out that side of the street. Back up on the right Mrs. Waller. Tom and Selma Swell were close to the knob of the hill. Jump over a street (there were only three so don't jump too high).there was the Scarlett's, Fleix and family, Mrs. Jo Anna Phillips and across the narrow road the Vicker's and Mrs. Nicholos. That pretty much made up the "metro area" except for the road (highway 56) that leads us back out to highway 70. There was a couple of off sprouts or divisions that at that time we did not travel too much. The road leading up by the wholesale was fronted by the house of Pennock Maxwell and the clan that he called his own. There was Ruth, Dan, Bob, June, Carol, Larry, Judy, (remember memory fades; there could have been another one or two) if there was ever one lady that deserved a spot in heaven it was Mrs. Jossie Maxwell because she shed enough tears here on earth to put out the fires of hell, but she left behind the greatest off springs that god rewarded her with for her many hours of labor.

I would be amiss not to mention two people in this clan Dan and Ruth who have such an impact on my life. Dan was my friend and still is after all these years. Ruth was my love, friend, and advisor she remains today all the above. Ruth also married my best friend Bud Keisler and they had a house full of their own which have spread to the four winds. One note in passing in the forties the government saw fit to dam the Caney Fork river with the Center Hill Dam and this created some migration to Baxter of people that we referred to as the dam people out of those dam people came a Mr. Wheaton who brought with him a young beautiful daughter named Betty. She and her husband Dan Maxwell have been the bed rock of Baxter for many years. On up the road (see I told you they didn't have street numbers). There lived Mr. Thomas with his son Charlie and the other son "Chig" which was the local sports hero. The godfather of Baxter Mr. Grace presided over most of the rest of the street except for a corn field and the block factory. Phillip young and his son Paul covered the rest.

Back to the last leg of our journey which is going to lead us back to heaven highway 70 which would lead us to Cookeville or Nashville depending on which way you turn left or right. As you stood by 70 if you looked north you saw unexplored lands of a foreign country. Some said there was a place beyond that point that was called Bloomington springs. But to me the world ended at Vickers service station and Mintons garage. Mr. and Mrs. Minton populated the earth with some of the greatest children and beautiful red headed daughters that was found anywhere. Well its back to town, down the road pass police Maynard's church of god, the Petty's and one of the modern marvels of Baxter; Jim Sewell and his family of Clarence, buster, bimbo and twins Jo and Jean. We were neighbors and spent many hours together. If there if another vacant spot near god miss Cora Sewell should be there.

Then the swamp where great crawdads dug their holes. Then the old stone place, this is where the Denny roots in Baxter were planted. There is no time to pause now as that was like so many other things. It had died and blown away with the winds of time. Members of my family flashed across my mind and tugged at it to tell their story. Someday I will. As I passed the little pond (actually a drain pipe from a ditch) guilt feelings grabbed my heart as it was there that I drown the kittens that mama had put in the paper bag. Beyond stood the great barn and house of Crave Patton and a true southern lady Mrs. Patton.

There they sold milk, butter, etc. But there was times we received and I never saw any money pass hands. Their daughter Marie was to marry Jess Stewart who kept us from freezing in the winter by the coal he hauled from the mountains. Taylor Dunavan had a brick house and then the field with Wade Sherrell place dotted with Millard, Peggy and Jim. O.S Harwell set on the corner and the big white house across drew a mystery blank. (they had to be from china) the saw mill with its huge pile of saw dust was a wonder to see. I thought of the people who toiled there. Who were they? How much sweat and tears was poured out there? Then one of the unique things for a small settlement. A settlement within a settlement, which was Wheller street ruled by Bob Wheller and his children and clan. There again I knew the children and went to school with most of them but the parents were unknown. What a loss that I missed so many experiences that could have come my way.

Across the street stood the Rev. Hale's house and I am sure I saw the glow from the many prayers said there. The Scarlett place, Parker Stewart houses all stood firm. Then a space and there set Charlie Maxwell and Miss Dora. I never forgave them for having to such beautiful daughters. One was to break my heart in the first grade. The mule yard of burr mill. Then the end as I stood on a spot where they unloaded box cars for the wholesale. If you were lucky some days you could pick up fifty cent unloading them. Looking neither right or left, just wondering where I had been and with a small gust of wind blowing—where was I going....

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