

MEMORIES OF MY DAYS AT BAXTER SEMINARY

By Bill Flatt

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'Cumberland Tales'

The article by Michael Whitehead, published in the *Herald-Citizen* on January 2, 2012, brought back many good memories of my days as a student at Baxter Seminary in 1950-1952. It was titled "Truth, Honor,



Bill and Louise Flatt.

Loyalty, Service: Baxter Seminary." The author took us from the beginning of the school in the early 1900s to its closing some 50 years later. I remember the two grocery stores, the pool hall, the drug store, the train and Depot, the hardware store, and other places that were mentioned. Cumberland Café was our primary hang-out. While waiting to see and be seen, you could listen to "I'm Moving On" by Hand Snow or "Love-sick Blues" By Hank Williams on the Juke Box if you had an extra nickel. Fifteen cents would buy you a hot dog, 20 cents a hamburger, 25 cents a cheeseburger, 50 cents a plate lunch, 20 cents a piece of pie, and another nickel would get you a nice big scoop of ice cream on top of the pie.

Most of my memories, however, are of Baxter Seminary. I remember the wholesome, accepting, affirming atmosphere.

They seemed to value all of us alike. I always felt as though I was "somebody" at the Seminary, and that helped me in my development at that time.

Students came from all around the western end of Putnam County. I remember students from Baxter, Buffalo Valley, Martin's Creek, Cedar Hill, Boma, Herren's Chapel, Silver Point, the Eighth District and Bloomington Springs, including the girl I have been to for 56 years, Louise Dyer Flatt, and her two brothers, Harold and Ernest Dyer. I was one of at least five students who drove in from Jackson County along with my two identical twin cousins, Layton and Litton Way. There were also students from Cuba who expanded our cultural education, including Marta Verdecia who often sang a love song in Spanish to us in chapel. I can still sing part of that song even though I don't know exactly what it means.



(Pictured: Bill Flatt, from the Highlander, Senior Class of 1952, Baxter Seminary. *'I cannot love one girl, I love them all.'* Class Vice President 4; Football 3,4; Basketball 3, 4; Who's Who 4; B-Letter Club 3, 4; FFA 3, 4; Vice President 4; Treasurer 3; Allied Youth 3, 4; President 4).

Chapel was always special, Dean Ethelyn P. Hill would keep us informed on what we needed to be doing and sometimes what we had done wrong. Dr. Harry L. Upperman, president, often had some words of encouragement for us. I remember his telling us that is we did our work well at the Seminary and graduated that we could go anywhere in the world and succeed. Employers and colleges would be impressed when we told them that we were graduates of Baxter Seminary. That seemed far-fetched to me at the time, but it did encourage me to start developing some dreams.

The teachers were not only good teachers, but they seemed to care about us personally and were continually encouraging. I especially remember Mrs. Harry L. Upperman, who often told me that I was smart, which I had not heard very often. Teachers in those days often criticized us, evidently to make us work harder and improve. I also remember Mrs. Iva Mae Cunningham, Mr. Arnold Brown, Mrs. Jean



Massa, and Miss Reba Smellage. Mr. Cecil Smith, our agriculture teacher, was special, always smiling, and saying good things about our work. I was on his judging team- judging cattle and demonstrating knot-tying skills. We won first place in Middle Tennessee.

(Pictured: Louise (Dyer) Flatt, from the Highlander, Senior Class of 1952, Baxter Seminary. *“Always a smile even when there’s rain.”* Science Club 4; Business Club 4; Beta Club 4; Annual Staff 4).

On one trip, as he drove slowly though Sewanee, TN, he told us that “this is the second foggiest place I have ever been.” When asked where the foggiest place was, he replied: “I don’t know. It was so foggy I couldn’t tell.” That kind of interaction with his students was enjoyable, and it made him seem very human and accepting to us. It was okay to joke around with his students at times.

Coach Gerald Muncy had a great deal of influence on me, believing that I was better than I was in both football and basketball. A very effective coach, “his boys” went undefeated in football in 1950 and even after he left in 1951. My senior year in 1951, we held six of the 10 teams we defeated scoreless while the other four teams only scored one touchdown each. Al total, we scored 127 points only five points behind the state leader, Johnny Majors, who went on to become an all-American running back at the University of Tennessee. Pat Fields and Robert Pippin were also effective runners for us. Bob Dale Maxwell was our excellent quarterback-could run the team well and also throw a soft and accurate pass.

The Baxter Bees also won the regular season conference championship in basketball. That same Bob Dale Maxwell led the way with 244 points; Frank Medley followed with 188. Our whole Baxter Bee Nation was very supportive and encouraging – coaches, faculty, players, cheerleaders and fans. It was very affirming to a teen-age boy who was not too sure of himself. Some of us from the undefeated football teams sometimes still get together for a meal at some restaurant in the Cookeville, TN, area. You should hear some of the football heroics we share! They get bigger and better with time! I’m just glad to re-connect with them after all these years.

Although Baxter Seminary was affiliated with Methodist Church, they did not attempt to indoctrinate us with their values and were able to establish that kind of atmosphere. This is reflected in their motto: “Truth, honor, loyalty, and service,” words that are street names on the Upperman High School campus today. Even though I was not a Methodist, I did not feel uncomfortable being there. In fact, the opposite was true; I felt very accepted.

As the article by Whitehead indicated, Baxter is in some ways “just a shadow of its former glory.” Yet, there are many positives as well with new businesses and a new Depot in process of being built, which will become a new center of activity for the city. Jeanie Lee and the Beautification and Depot Committees, working with city government, have made significant improvements around town – wrought iron benches, flower pots and barrels, Christmas lights, clean up efforts, Christmas parades and fairs, and numerous activities to promote Baxter.

They produced a Baxter flag which is to be displayed on poles along major entrances to the city. Efforts are being made to raise money for a statue of Dr. Upperman and a Seminary wrought-iron arch to be erected on Seminary grounds and a statue of Jere Baxter, who brought Central Railway into Putnam County, to be erected next to the new Depot. Metro Baxter has expanded from Baxter Crossroads to the I-40 Interstate and beyond. It is the home of numerous people. Educational institutions are alive, well, and expanding in Baxter with good elementary, middle and high schools. Upperman High School is well-

known for its quality education and athletic teams that are making us proud. It is about twice the size of Baxter Seminary when Louise and I were students there.

I have good memories of Baxter Seminary, yet life goes on and the future looks bright. Truth, honor, loyalty, and service are still words that guide us as we press on towards our goals today. With God's help, we will continue to be true to our mission and helpful to our family, friends, and community. Baxter Seminary laid a good foundation for all of this.

“Cumberland Tales” created by Calvin Dickinson and Michael Birdwell, and sponsored by the Cookeville History Museum, welcomes any tale of this region’s history. For more information, contact Calvin Dickinson at cdickinson@tntech.edu and Michael Birdwell at birdie@tntech.edu

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*Read more Cumberland Tales at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>