

**IF YOU DON'T GET WHAT YOU WANT,
AT LEAST WANT WHAT YOU GET**

By Bob Chaffin

'Writer's Corner

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 13 February 1022, pg. C-8

It was just before 10 a.m. in Mr. Homer Lewis' eighth grade class and the old coal burning stove in the class room was cranking out the heat. I was nursing a sore shoulder because Lewis Roberts had knocked the fire out of me at recess, since I wouldn't let him get a better look at a signal book my Uncle U. L. Mabry had brought home from the Navy at the end of World War II. Our altercation had started with shoving and shirt pulling, and ended with the two of us knocking over a row of iron student desks which were not bolted to the floor as they had been intended, but were now placed on 1x4 slats of wood to give them a degree of stability. The old desks still had an ink well hole in the upper right side of the wooden desk top. (No we didn't use quills, as my grandchildren probably think, or even ink pens. Sometime around 1952, a guy by the name of Bick had introduced the Bic Ballpoint and fountain pens had quickly become a thing of the past.)

Lewis Roberts and I had both gotten the seat of our pants dusted by Mr. Lewis, a testimony that his desire for equity was right up there with his regard for corporal punishment, since he was my next door neighbor and I would have hoped for a little deference on his part. Friendship didn't seem to go as far as it once did. The common punishment had, of course, quickly forced Lewis and I to again become great friends, having suffered human rights abuse together at the hand of "the man."

In 1958, the seventh and eighth grade classes were in the "old school building" as was the band room and a few other odd classes. It had only been eight years since Carthage Elementary had been built but the school board had drastically underestimated the impact of the "baby boom" in Carthage (and in most of the rest of the nation) and we were already out of room. The "old school building" had been pressed back into service while the planning and funding for the first of two wings that would be added to the high school were in progress.

But for now, Lewis and I, along with Don Taylor, James Hinsley, Kemper Hailey, George Lankford, Danny Williams and other unwilling participants, were stuck here in the "old school building" suffering through the rigors of reading, writing and arithmetic under Mr. Lewis' watchful eye. Next year, we would be introduced to a whole new world when kids from Pleasant Shade, Defeated, Cox Davis, South Carthage, Forks of the River, Union Heights and other schools in the county came into the Smith County High School fold. They would be from places like Gravel Town, Pea Ridge, Peyton's Creek, Difficult, Beasley's Bend, Turkey Creek and other exotic points on the north side of Smith County and would open up a whole new world for those of us who had only known our own Carthage Elementary School classmates.

About 10 minutes after 10, a rustle went through the classroom and the whispering became loud enough that "Homer" (as we bravely called him behind his back) looked up from his desk and wanted to know, "What's going on back there?"

"It's snowing," someone said, "and it's coming down hard."

Sure enough it was coming down in big round half dollar flakes that looked like a dozen of the monsters might provide enough material to form a respectable snow ball. Within a few minutes the ground became white, and things started to look serious.

In 1958, weather forecasting was much more of an abstract concept, since satellite tracking was not yet possible. It was February and there had not been a lot of serious snow up to this point in the winter and it was supposed to be warming up in February. After all, tobacco beds needed to be worked and burned in preparation for planting the tiny seeds so there would be plants to set by May.

By noon, Mr. B. Clark Meadows had made the decision that school was going to be "let out early" and the bus drivers had been rounded up to bring the big yellow jobs up on the hill as quickly as possible. The bus

kids were loaded with dispatch, and the buses inched their way down the hill to head out for what turned out to be a long trip home for any that lived any distance from town. By the time the busses had descended the hill, the wet snow had become packed and “slick as a puppy’s navel,” as Daddy would say, and the teachers generally side down the hill in their big old rear drive cars which they, and nearly everyone else, drove in those days. A few ended up in the ditch or left their cars parked on the hill in favor of walking home or having someone pick them up.

For those of us who lived in town, it was the kind of day of which we dreamed. The math test scheduled for the afternoon had been avoided. Mr. Lewis had not had the time and presence of mind to give us homework, and each of us was headed out to get the conveyance of our choice and hit the slopes, which in our case was Fisher Avenue. By two o’clock there must have been a hundred kids of every size and shape, wearing every conceivable type of garb, sliding on anything from a piece of tin to a sure enough, 4 foot long, Western Flyer Sled with steerable runners. Dishpans, coal shovels, wash tubs, inner tubes, you name it, they were all pressed into service and several just used the soles of their shoes or the seat of their pants.

I’m not sure how much it snowed, seems like it might have been five inches, but it got into one of those rhythms where it seemed to snow every few days, just enough to freshen up the snow and make the roads slick enough for school to be out a week or two. I remember that we slid down some snowy hill nearly every day; and I drug my feet behind me until I wore holes in the toes of my boots. Mama was not happy – but every kid in Smith County was happy (and, I suspect, not a few teachers also). We roamed the streets looking for slick hills, and we roamed the slick hills looking for rabbits and squirrels to hunt. It was like life had been suspended for a week or two in favor of fun, and all of us given a vacation from the humdrum of life. Now it snows in great quantities up north, but it isn’t so magical as down south, everyone just gets up in the morning, starts their Toro Snow Blower, then drive off to work on the already plowed and salted streets.

So as I see these snow days outside my window, I try to see beyond the aggravation of this white stuff, beyond the knowledge that falling on ice at my age is not only a possibility, but might be a disaster, and beyond the inconvenience of certain events being cancelled, then try to remember the magical world these days provides for the young and young at heart who are, this very minute, looking at a world transformed by the wonder of snow. I view it all with the knowledge that things seen to even out in this world. One man’s trash is another man’s treasure; one man’s hardship is another man’s opportunity; and as Daddy used to say, “Things always equal out in the end; the rich man gets his ice in the summer, and the poor man gets his in the winter.”

Have a blessed day, and if the Lord doesn’t give you what you think you want, may you at least want what He gives you.

Robert Rogers “Bob” Chaffin is a 35-year veteran of the auto industry. His mother went to high school in Cookeville, Chaffin was born in Gainesboro and growing up in Carthage. In 1966, Chaffin went to Detroit to work for GM. He now resides in Lebanon.

Read more about Robert Rogers “Bob” Chaffin in the Chaffin files at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

<http://www.publishedbywestview.com/ChaffinRR.html>

Bob Chaffin was born in the Roaring River Community of Jackson County, Tennessee during World War II, but soon moved with his family to the nearby town of Carthage; where he spent the balance of his growing up years. He was graduated from David Lipscomb University and Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan where he earned an MBA. Upon graduation from David Lipscomb he took a job with General Motors' Financial staff and worked his way through varying levels of responsibilities in a number of GM locations. In January of 2001 he retired while holding the position of Finance Director for the Information Systems Division of GM and returned with his wife Janice Lafever Chaffin to his beloved Tennessee. Today, he lives in Lebanon, raises Black Angus Cattle, and serves as an Elder for the Maple Hill Church of Christ.