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22 November 1963

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by S. Ray Granade
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Howard College, small and Baptist, had moved from the Birmingham, Alabama suburb of Eastlake, where its campus had been since 1887, to another, Homewood, just south of Vulcan's statue on Red Mountain, in 1957. The "new campus" on Lakeshore Drive, the school's third home, adjoined what had been the state's TB Sanatorium. As one turned into the Lakeshore Drive entrance, campus spread up the hill in Georgian architectural consistency. A small inner loop carried entrants to either the science building on the right (east) or the administration building on the left (west). A larger loop took one around campus outside the buildings that framed the central green space, or quad (a word we never used): going clockwise, the music building, two men's dorms, the cafeteria, two women's dorms, the Library, and the chapel complex. One men's dorm (A) and the chapel anchored the west and east ends of the green space respectively, and the Library filled one's vision on the north end as one entered. The campus flagpole rose just to the Library's right front at the edge of the wide walkway that defined the quad.

When I entered Howard as a freshman in the fall of 1963, the roughly 1,500 undergraduates attended classes in buildings new enough and large enough and few enough to house offices and classrooms for different disciplines in different buildings save for music (and art), sciences, and religion. The administration occupied the main and part of the bottom floor of "its" building while Psychology, Education, some History, and Foreign Languages (French and German) classes met on the top and bottom floors; English occupied the Library's top floor; and Sociology, some History (including Political Science), and Speech/Drama scattered among the various buildings.

Living arrangements for men depended on whether or not one wanted/could afford air conditioning. Men's Dorm B was air conditioned; Men's Dorm A was not. B was built as a cross, A as a squared "U" open to the west but facing east. B had interior halls resembling a hotel; A employed short halls connecting four two-person rooms and a bath at the U's base, while long halls paralleled the U's arms. My second-floor A room fronted campus, as did the bath and another room. Three of us hallmates were freshmen (John Davis, Michael Moore, and me), the rest sophomores (Harry Campbell, Teddy Jackson, Don Lytle, Stan Peterson, and Ray Williams).

My college beginning had an unusual twist to it. The week before college began, Mother went to a Montgomery hospital with appendicitis, which required surgery and confinement covering most of the week. In addition, Daddy was to preach a revival in Bessemer the week I started. We had planned for Mother to help me prepare, then Daddy to take and leave me and preach his week's revival before returning home. The best-laid plans..., as they say. I put together everything Mother and I had decided would go with me, packed it in our black Bel-Air's capacious trunk, and Daddy and I headed for Montgomery early Saturday morning. We would visit Mother in the hospital on the way up, go on to Howard and unload me, then Daddy would go to Bessemer for his revival.

We arrived in Montgomery early Saturday morning, an off-day from the usual commuter/school rush, sharing Norman Bridge Road with virtually no one. There was one other vehicle, which turned out to be an unmarked car driven by a high-ranking police officer. When I went through a yellow light, he pulled me over, offering me the friendly advice what while *he* would not ticket me, some of his officers would and so I should watch that even on such an early Saturday morning. Daddy sat there in the shotgun seat, looking straight ahead, and never brought it up even after we had seen Mother and gotten on the road again.

Schooling at the other end of the state from Evergreen, and doing so before I-65 was completed from Mobile to Birmingham, meant traveling along US Highway 31 at a maximum speed of 60 mph for most of the 180 or so miles, but slowing to at least 45 through most and stopping in

some small towns. Averaging 50 mph for a trip like that was a true feat, which meant about four stopless hours. Neither Ronnie nor I had an automobile, which reduced us to either finding rides toward home or taking the bus. That meant that we would not be going home until Thanksgiving when parents would provide transport. So we threw ourselves into the internal richness of college life: musical presentations (particularly choral), live theatre, football, finding a local church (most of our peers attended Dawson Memorial, with Vestavia Hills, Shades Mountain, and Mountain Brook actively pursuing college ministries as well), and spending time in the Library to compensate for what we considered inferior high school preparation. Rare was the evening that we did not invest much of it in the Library. Occasionally we dressed up and went into Birmingham proper for a movie (movie attendance when we were students entailed “Sunday dress”—gender-appropriate coat-and-tie or hose-and-heels—if it were a date, slacks and a nice shirt or a dress if one went with friends; few went alone).

My classes totaled seventeen hours and had me in most of the campus buildings, from PE in the gym (where we gathered for large-group events), our westernmost building, to Religion in the chapel, at the quad’s eastern end. English had the Library’s top floor, and my US History class met in the Administration building’s basement. On Friday, November 13, 1963, Ronnie and I lunched in the cafeteria (where we had all our meals) a bit early, as was our custom, to beat the noon crowd, then made our way to our individual classes, parting ways as I entered the Library and climbed the front stairway to English while she continued down the walkway toward the chapel. Being early assured us of getting the seats we preferred as well as a chance to glance over notes or book.

Class proved unimpressive, taught by Mrs. Hill, one of the department’s two workhorse Master’s holders who devoted all her time to introductory classes. She began precisely on time and ended a tad early. The hour’s lapse felt like freedom as we gathered our books and papers and headed back down the stairs to more scintillating experiences.

One entered the Library through large doors and immediately confronted a large divided stairwell that led upward while presenting an unobstructed view through a glass wall and multiple glass doors of the Circulation desk flanked by stacks. The arrangement allowed the Library to “zone” noise, keeping it in the front central part of the building. Still, it was unusual to see a cluster of people instead of the more common one or two at the Circulation desk. So coming down the stairs from class and noticing a knot of people in front of the desk, with workers from behind the desk right there as well, I turned into the Library proper rather than following the general flow down, to the left, and outside.

Passing through the door, as it closed behind me I could faintly hear an obviously broadcast voice ahead. Someone in the center of the group on my side of the desk had one of the still-rare transistor radios on campus with the volume low but readily audible from the doorway. The voice was reporting a shooting, and before many words had issued from the tinny speaker it became apparent that the victim was President John F. Kennedy, who had been rushed to a Dallas, Texas, hospital. Before I left to meet Ronnie on the sidewalk in front of the Library, Kennedy had been pronounced dead.

My father, a World War II parachutist chaplain and pastor in Evergreen as long as I could remember (we moved there when I was three or four), believed in strict separation of church and state. He taught me well that while Christians were citizens with civic duties, chief among them being political awareness and voting, politics had no place in the church. He would (and did) gladly pastor politicians; he would never speak a word of endorsement or denigration of any one of them, and certainly not from the pulpit. At home we would talk about morality and public policy and politicians, but I also learned discretion at an early age. I knew that telling others what my father and mother said in private could adversely affect his ministry.

Some of Daddy's parishioners felt no constraint when the Democratic party to which probably all of them proclaimed their allegiance chose a Yankee Catholic as its standard bearer in 1960. Alabama was solidly Democratic, a voting populace fueled by people who remembered the Republican Party as the Party of Reconstruction during what my grandmother always called "the recent unpleasantness." But I remembered sitting in a cottage prayer meeting service held at Miss Elizabeth Riley's house on the south side of Rural Street, where one man (a postal employee) went on at length about Kennedy being a Knight of Columbus who swore his first allegiance to the Pope—who would run the country through Kennedy were he elected. So I understood that not everyone in Alabama was happy about his presidency. And when Governor George Wallace "stood in the schoolhouse door" at the University of Alabama's Foster Auditorium the mid-June before I started Howard, I knew that most Alabamians sided with Wallace and few with the Kennedy administration that forced him to step aside and allow Black students to enter the University. Any remaining doubts about how many Alabamians felt about Kennedy's Presidency were erased in mid-September not a month after I entered Howard. The Black 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed not far from the John Birch Society billboard that greeted one's transition from Homewood to Birmingham with a purported enlargement labeled "A Photo of Martin Luther King in a Communist Training Camp in Cuba."

Television sets were rare on campus. The girls' dorms lobbies had them, though we rarely watched anything there (I only remember ever seeing "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." and "Batman" on them) and after we met on the sidewalk we went to Ronnie's dorm (Vail Hall) to follow the news until supper. After supper at our usual place, we returned until the lobby closed and I went to my own dorm room. By then, our flag beside the Library flew at half-staff.

Friday nights in the dorm generally proved good study times, for most of the others enjoyed Friday nights out. This night proved no exception until everyone who had gone out returned. It was late (girls had a curfew, boys did not; girls had to sign in and out, boys did not). But once everyone was in, there was a general gathering at the hall's end. Someone had written, on a letter-sized piece of paper which he taped above the doorframe into the bathroom, these words: In light of the recent shooting, we dedicate this, our most-visited edifice, as the JOHN Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial.

The sign stayed up over the weekend, then disappeared Monday, probably when our RA took it down. We went about our business pretty much as though nothing had happened. The one thing I can say for certain is that no one on the hall mourned the dead President. And I think that everyone assumed that the new President, Texan Lyndon Baines Johnson, would be more understanding of how Southerners needed to handle "the Black problem" and those pesky "outside agitators."