

Fifth Grade
Stanley, NC Schools
1942-1943

Good morning! My name is Bill Hawley. I was born here in Stanley and I went to the Stanley schools from the 1st through the 12th grades. After high school I attended Belmont Abbey College and had a 39-year career as an industrial engineer. I also served in the U.S. Navy four years during the Korean War. I live in Stanley now.

In 1943, some 66 years ago, I was in the 5th grade just like you are now. I thought you might like to hear about how it was to live and go to school back then.

I believe that each new school year begins in August now. Well, it was customary for the first day of school to begin right after Labor Day when I was a youngster. There was a good reason not to begin the school year earlier. You see, there was no air conditioning and the rooms were very hot. In fact, there was not a building in Stanley of any kind that was air conditioned, if my memory serves me correctly. Not one of us lived in an air-conditioned house. Once school began, we went almost every workday. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter were about the only time off.

A goodly number of students at Stanley schools lived on farms. Many of the farmers grew cotton to make some money. When the cotton had to be picked in late September or October, some of the children were given time off from school to help pick their cotton. Some of the schools around us completely shut down for a few weeks so the children could help pick. Our school stayed open and most of us kept going to school.

Now, I want you to do something for me. I want any of you who walked from your home to school this morning to raise your hand. Now, anyone who has ever walked from your home to school to raise your hand. When I was a 5th grader, the school bus did not pick up anyone who lived in town. Parents did not bring their children to school either. Do you know where the Stanley Rescue Building is? Well, our house was almost right across the street so I had to either walk or ride my bicycle. And yes, I walked by myself. I mostly walked to school for all twelve years.

Later on this morning, your class will probably go to the cafeteria for a nice lunch. Guess what! There was no cafeteria when I was in the 5th grade. The students who rode the bus had no choice but to bring their lunch and they had to bring something that would not spoil. Believe me, there were plenty of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Most of the jelly was homemade too. Those of us who lived in town were permitted to go home for lunch if we wanted to.

You might like to know what we wore to school. The girls wore dresses or a skirt and blouse. There were a lot of sweaters for cold weather. I bet you could never guess what most of the boys wore. How about *overalls*! That's right, *overalls*. There was no such thing as blue jeans. And, there was a trick to buying overalls. They were not preshrunk then. You had to buy them several sizes too large because they would shrink up so much when they were washed. If you were lucky, you had a good warm corduroy shirt. Boys and girls had to dress very warmly in the wintertime because the heating system was not very good.

How about our shoes? Well, there were no such things as sneakers then. Most of the boys wore what were called “brogans”. You would probably call them boots. There was mud and a lot of puddles of water all winter. We needed to keep our feet dry. In warm weather and for dress-up occasions we wore leather shoes and we had to keep them shiny. When you wore a hole in whatever kind of shoe you are wearing, you probably throw them in the trash and buy a new pair. We had to take ours to a shoe shop where a cobbler would put a new sole on them. Any shoes that we outgrew were saved to pass on to younger brothers or cousins.

Do you change rooms or teachers for different subjects? Well, I was in a split class. About half of the students in the room were 5th graders and about half were 6th graders. The 6th graders sat on the side of the room next to the windows and the 5th graders were next to the hall. Both grades were taught by the same teacher who stayed with us all day. The teacher would teach us a subject for a while and then give us an assignment while she taught the same subject to the 6th graders. I was also in split classes while in the 3rd and 4th grades.

I'm sure that you have fire drills every so often. Well we had them too! We had another kind of drill that I hope you will never have. It was an air raid drill! The United States had become involved in World War II when I was in the 4th grade. The war was not going very well and there was a real concern that we might be bombed by the Germans. We had drills so that we would know what to do if the air raid sirens began to sound. Those of us who lived in town also had air raid drills at night. Every light in Stanley had to be turned off both outside and inside. All doors were closed and all window shades were pulled down. The town had to be perfectly dark so the German pilots would have a hard time finding Stanley.

All children were asked to help with the war effort. We were asked to go to every house in our neighborhood and ask for any type of metal that was not being used. We brought the scrap metal to school. Some pieces were so big that we had to have help from our parents. You should have seen the mountain of scrap metal beside the school that we rounded up.

In 1943 there were two grocery stores and one drug store in Stanley. One thing you could not buy was a candy bar that had any chocolate in it. All chocolate was being used in the war effort. Every few weeks, the grocers would get a few boxes of chocolate candy. They would let their best customers have a few bars for the children. Boy, what a treat when you finally got one to eat. Oh, how I loved *Mr. Goodbars*. It's still the best candy bar made. Sugar was rationed, so your mother could not make home candy for you either. Things like coffee and gasoline were also rationed. There were no new cars because all the carmakers were building military vehicles. The government of the United States asked every family in the country to plant a “Victory Garden” to help with the war effort. Those of us who did not know anything about gardening sure found out very quickly what work a garden is.

From time to time, the 5th graders were given the name and address of a serviceman. We were given time in class to write them a letter. Mostly, we told them that we were thinking about them and hoped they would be able to return home soon. Also, from time to time, we were also given the names and addresses of children in foreign countries (mostly England). These children were our age and were having to live with German bombs dropping around them on a regular basis. We were also given time in class to write them and try to cheer them up. One of my classmates, Doris Cope, now Doris Rhyne, heard back from a girl that she had written to. The girl was from England. They began writing each

other on a regular basis and became good friends. They still write to each other. Doris and her husband, Bud, have been to England to visit her friend from 3,000 miles across the ocean. The English girl, Betty Quance and her husband, Brian, have visited with Doris and Bud on the Hickory Grove Road.

My teacher in both the 5th and 6th grades was Mrs. Pichette. Her husband was in the Army and stationed somewhere in Europe. One day our principal, Mr. Kiser, came to our class and asked Mrs. Pichette to go out in the hall. He told her that a telegram had just arrived which said that the Germans had captured her husband, Pierre. He was all right but in a prisoner of war camp. We had a substitute teacher for a few weeks until Mrs. Pichette felt like coming back to work. All the students in the class wrote a letter to Mr. Pichette. Thank goodness, he was freed when the war was over.

When I was in the 7th grade our family received the bad news that my uncle, Simon Rhyne, had been killed on an island named Iwo Jima in the South Pacific. The American Legion Post here in Stanley is named after Simon.

When you go home from school today, I'm sure the first thing you will do is your homework ... right? After snacks you may watch TV, play some computer game, listen to an I Pod or the like. When I arrived home, I had a number of chores to do before dark. There were ashes to carry out and wood to carry in. Like most everyone else in town, my mother cooked on a wood stove and our house was heated with a wood or coal fireplace. So carrying in wood was an everyday job, even in warm weather. Two or three times a week, I would have to go to the grocery store before Mother could cook supper. I did my homework after supper. I always made sure I was through in time to listen to "Amos and Andy" on the radio at 8 o'clock.

Well, guess by now you are very happy that you are in the 5th grade now rather than in 1943. It has probably sounded to you like we did not have very much fun. It is true that we had very little in terms of material things. But, you know, I bet we had every bit as much fun as you have now!

Now, I would like to tell you a little about the building you are in right now. In 1943, Stanley schools consisted of three buildings. The gym that is right here beside us was there then. There was no kindergarten then and grades one through six were located in the elementary school building, which was just across the street from the gym. Grades seven and eight plus the high school were in a building about where your multi-purpose area is now.

In March of 1947, I was in the ninth grade. One very windy day, I could see through a window in the high school building that the elementary school was on fire. Black smoke was coming out of the windows and flames were coming through the roof. It was a school day and the building was full of kids, including my sister. Even today, it is hard for me to believe that everyone managed to get out of that building safely. Did those fire drills ever pay off! All the floors in that old school building were made of wood and about every two weeks the janitor would spray oil on them to keep down dust. With the wind blowing as hard as it was and with all that oil in the floors, you can just imagine how fast the fire spread. The Stanley Volunteer Fire Department was called and guess what the fire fighters found when they arrived at the fire station. All the tires on the engine were flat! The Mount Holly fire department was called and they were actually at the school before the Stanley fire department. They hooked up their hose to the fire hydrant, turned on the hose and found that there was no water. A

tanker engine was called but by the time it had arrived, the building was totally gone. Some of the churches in Stanley allowed the school to use some of their Sunday school rooms to serve as classrooms until something could be worked out. The school buses would bring the kids to school and the whole class would walk to the church where their classroom was. The school board decided to build temporary classrooms until a new building could be designed and constructed. A number of buildings were built to house one class each. They were not very well constructed but they did keep the children dry and reasonably comfortable. A coal stove heated each building. Lots of kids had fun carrying out ashes and bringing in coal. The students called the buildings "chicken coops".

The building we are now in was completed in the spring of 1949. In the fall of 1949, all twelve grades of Stanley school began the school year in the new building. You can't imagine how happy we were. We even had a first-class cafeteria. I am very proud to stand before you today and tell you that my high school graduating class of 1950 was the first to graduate after a full year in this building.

After listening to me telling stories of long ago, you are probably just like my grandchildren who tell me, "aw grandpaw", when I tell these stories. Make no mistake about one thing. My class enjoyed our time together as much as any class that has ever been at this school. Each year we have a reunion to celebrate the remembrance of our years together. We enjoy being together today as when we were eleven-year olds.

Some day, about 66 years from now, you will be telling your grandchildren about your days in the 5th grade at Kiser School. Your grandchildren are probably going to tell you, "aw grandmaw" or "aw grandpaw" just as mine have done. I am going to suggest to you that you take a good look at your classmates. You don't know how happy you will be to see them about 50 or 60 years from now!

In closing, it is my wish that your life will be as blessed as mine has been.

Thanks for having me!

Bill Hawley
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