

National Velvet

Memories of Boyhood and Graham Weathers (As Best An 83-Year Old Can Remember)

How we loved birthday parties. Almost all of them were inside. First, there would be about an hour of indoor games, then presents would be opened. After the last present was opened, there would be a birthday cake and ice cream. The good news is birthday parties were a lot of fun. The bad news was that there were so few of them.

I loved going to the birthday parties that Mrs. Weathers gave for Graham. We spent most of the time outside. There was a tennis court at the Weathers home. None of us really knew how to play besides Graham. The only other tennis court in Stanley was at the home of Gordon Hacker's parents. Mostly adults played on the Hacker court and about all we were able to do was watch. At Graham's house, we had the tennis court to ourselves. Graham played tennis at summer camp so he was the only one who knew how to play, much less how to keep score. We really had fun trying though.

As we were growing up, pitching horseshoes was very popular in Stanley. There was a horseshoe pitching tournament each year at Stanley schools. Everyone who went to school (grades 1-11) were eligible. All you needed was a partner. The good part was that all matches were held during school hours and you were excused from class to participate in your scheduled match. When the championship match came up, Mr. Kiser turned out all classes so everyone who wanted to watch could. I am very proud to tell you that one year Bobby Hawley and Billy Hawley won the championship.

There was a place to pitch horseshoes at Graham's but was it ever different from what we were used to. We were accustomed to driving two old pieces of water pipe in the ground and the shoes we pitched were actually old shoes that a horse had worn out (all different from one another) or shoes designed for a horse's hoof. The pits at Graham's had regulation stobs and were driven into the ground at exactly the regulation length from each other at exactly the right angle. The shoes were regulation and certainly weren't made for horses. Also, they were much heavier than the shoes we normally pitched. It took a while to get used to everything regulation. The horseshoe pits stayed busy and my right thumb was always very sore after pitching those shoes.

At one of our parties, while horseshoes were being pitched, a young John Lewis Weathers ran across the flight path of a shoe just as Ralph Morris pitched. The shoe hit John Lewis in the forehead and he dropped like he had been shot. Blood was flowing from his forehead. He lay so motionless we thought he was dead. Thank goodness, Dr. Weathers was at home.

Graham became a teenager in 1945. To help celebrate his 13th birthday, Mrs. Weathers took all of us attending his party to the Webb Theater in Gastonia to see the movie, "National Velvet" which starred Elizabeth Taylor. She was our age. The movie was stopped while it was going on. A man walked out on the stage and announced that President Roosevelt had just died while down in Georgia. Everyone in the theater was thoroughly shocked. He was the only President those my age could ever remember and the war was still going on!

A couple of days later, a special train came through Gastonia taking President Roosevelt's body back to Washington. The Gastonia Gazette printed the time the train would go through town. The train slowed to 10 miles per hour through Gastonia so everyone lining the tracks could see his casket. I was there. I am not sure about Graham.

Bill Hawley
August 2015