

A Sequoyah Elegy

Jim Bonds, '63-67

I am driving down Ream's Creek Road. "Desolation Row" is playing on the CD, up pretty loud. Moonlight is dappling down through the trees, ghostly on the road. "Cinderella is sweeping up on Desolation Row," Bob is hammering out the chords. Ream's Creek Road is twisting in front of my hood. My mind is a blender -- the images of the 60's and now Bob is well into the "Times They are A Changing," except I swear I hear him sing "The times they are un-chaaaaanging".

Now I'm across the little bridge to Beach, the Black Berry Inn sign is caught in my headlights and then, hard right into the deeper darkness, where not even the smallest drop of moonlight can touch. My heart is beating faster and I'm feeling a little ill. I'm dreading going back, like a tooth extraction. It's been 35 years. You know how it is -- you don't know what to expect -- and the trails and friends and creeks and pools and mountains, bluffs, and rocks and mossy dirt, ferns and pots, packs, pocket knives, fires and stars and rain and one more hill and one more bend in the trail and I smell like a gorilla and I am dead tired, and my legs are deep on fire and I am filled with the greatest sense of beauty and sparks from my fire are going up to heaven, And I got to pitch this tent and I'm coming up on the gate and Bob is singing "The times they are un-chaaaaanging".

July 29, 2004 11:28 Pm, 65 degrees, I undo the chain. I've turned Bob off and am motoring on up through the hemlocks -- you know the ones. I am driving at a stately pace. The trees are opening and the moonlight is back. Another 200 feet ahead the dining hall is gray in the darkness and the smell of hemlocks and when I get out, the sound of gravel crunching under my Nikes. The "city of the missing camp" is quiet dead. This "deserted city" with a missing purpose, is a million miles back in time and dreams and visions. But the creek is still making that sound.

In front of the lodge, there are five chairs of various types; one is plastic -- and a gray worn wooden bench up against the wall. Also, a folding table with a big chrome coffee pot on it like the kind they have at a church. The chairs are placed for conversation and left there by their ex-occupants. The table with the coffee pot is littered with empty coffee cups and some fruit and a bag of blueberry bagels. Inside the lodge, which is lit up like big pumpkin, is a table with 4 old Sequoyah brochures -- there is a Dell under a small desk with a monitor and HP scanner. It's over against the wall on the creek side. On one end of the lodge is the stage, on the other, the sandstone fireplace where chief gave the "Sex Talk" and later the orchestra played.

I'm standing, shocked -- staring down the length of the lodge and thinking how little it had changed. The old frame that held the words to the camp songs was standing alongside the stage, exactly where it stood 35 five years ago.

Later the next night, Saturday night, Crump lay down on a long blue bench in front of the stage. There were two of those benches. We had the guitars out and had been singing and playing till Crump gave out and lay down. We had played: "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere," "Like a Rolling Stone," "Stewball" and some songs Crump's brother wrote, and we realized the benches were the

ones in the old Blue 1½ ton stake-body farm truck we climbed into the back of on a chilling morning and Pop plowed us out into the Blue Ridge, and in the back we were frozen like fish in a freezer. And came back even colder from the descent into Lynnville Gorge, now men -- when we left as boys and still under the stars on the Blue Ridge and some shot across the sky and faded into purple. The truck was big double wheeled and loaded with it's frozen cargo; came up the same gravel road through the dark hemlocks and out into the open. Thirty or more of us climbed down (some total strangers when we started), one by one. Then our dark silhouettes spread across the softball field, up into the cabins, on to exhausted sleep.

Now 35 years later, the remnants are back; the tribe is together. I see their tents. I pitch mine. It's after 12:00 pm and no longer the 29, but now the 30th. They are asleep under the same purple sky. The creek is making that sound. The tribe is back. It is good.

This is my account of the reunion on the 80th anniversary of Camp Sequoyah.

I'm 54 years old. It's time for a checkup. It's time for a deep look. I need to check myself and correct my path. As Chief states in his Letter to Parents, "Perhaps your deepest concern for your son is that he may become a man of integrity and great usefulness. Such a life is possible only for the man who has a true sense of values and a sound philosophy of life." Chief goes on to warn that a false sense of values has wrecked the lives of many promising young men. "Damn straight Chief -- Right on!" And it's never too late. So Chief and Bob are both right, the times they may be changing but what counts is not.

Someone asked what the C in C Walton Johnson stood for. Crump said he always thought it stood for Chief. At least he was convinced of that when he was 8 years old and he did not see any reason to change his mind on that subject now. Chief was born to be a Chief, and in his chiefly wisdom he knew that there was a Desolation row – a garish Carnival out there – a trap that would lure a young or old man in, and he did not want any Sequoyans to end up there. Sequoyah founded 80 years ago is more relevant now than ever before. So these are some of the things tumbling through my mind as I bedded down.

I went to sleep in my boxer shorts. I forgot how cool it gets in July in the Craggies. First I put a towel on my legs and by 2 am I pulled a hoodie over my chest. And when I woke up and bald knob was covered in a cloud, I was wearing my entire wardrobe including my boots -- the hoodie was pulled over my head bow tied under my nose.