

By **MARK LEE**

I was 5 years old in **Ms. Alice Barbie's** Kindergarten on South Tarver when **Gaye Baird** hired my mother,

Dorothy Lee

, to be a secretary in the Admissions office at Cumberland College. Gaye Baird,

Charlie Gregory

,
Bonnie Fakes

,
Merlin Sanders

,
Dean Howard

,
Dean Robinson

,
Kenneth Hawkins

,
Mary Templeton

,
Mrs. Imogene Ahles

,
Dr. Ernest L. Stockton

...the names and faces are etched in my memory. You see, I was a latch-key kid back when you could let a 5-year-old walk across back yards to school. We lived on Cleveland Avenue, a block away from Cumberland.

The following year as a 1st grade student at McClain Elementary, I continued to walk to school, but it was after the last bell rang that things would get interesting...

Around the block and down South Hatton I would walk to Memorial Hall. It was there, every afternoon from 3:15 to 4 p.m. when mom got off, that I made my rounds of the Admissions Office, the Dean's offices and the financial office where Mrs. Templeton and Mr. Hawkins carefully counted the debits and credits of Student accounts. The only office I didn't wander into was Dr. Stockton's. Mrs. Ahles guarded the President's Office in her polite and efficient manner and when Dr. Stockton would chance on me in the halls, he would politely say "hi" and keep about his business of running the school.

I had the opportunity recently to have some business with the current President, **Dr. Harvill Eaton**, and in his office I told him that it was the first time I had ever been in the President's Office. I felt like a kid again, allowed in some forbidden inner sanctum.

In those days, the Library was in Memorial Hall and took up the entire South wing of the first floor. Nobody seemed to mind me being around. In fact, they all made me feel important and welcome. I've explored every inch of Memorial Hall, including the mysterious basement, but to this day, I haven't been in the clock tower.

It was at Cumberland where I learned to think about a world bigger than me; where exchange students from Iran went to school with us and the Shah was still in power. When \$10 could fill up your tank, buy a pack of cigarettes, a six-pack of beer and the drinking age was 18; where we could smoke in the classroom if the professor did; where teaching legends like the Colonel and **Lucy Scott Brown**, **James Dressler**, **Dr. Donna Dykes** and **Boone Swain** taught us History, Algebra, English, Sociology, Sciences and the Liberal Arts while still allowing time to get to know us as persons, also.

Many of these men and women would end up being high school teachers and college professors of mine. They were my family. Cumberland was more than a Junior College to me, it was my second home.

From about 1964 until her retirement some 20 years later when Cumberland once again became a four-year University, Mom guarded the hall in the North wing of Memorial Hall. She was not just my mother, but a substitute parent and mentor to countless students. It was here that my father graduated Law School; it was here that my brother and Law partner, **Bob Lee**, began his college and career; it was here that my brother, **David Lee**, was about to graduate when he lost his life in a fatal car wreck; it was here that I graduated with an Associate degree in Liberal Arts and dodged my mom's gaze as I sneaked in a cigarette in the student lounge or darted out of Chapel on Fridays.

This is the Cumberland I knew and loved, the Junior College years. It has grown and prospered and continues the incredible Academic Tradition begun in 1842. During the weekend of Oct.

5-6, Cumberland is honoring the alumni of those Junior College years during Homecoming. I will be there.

For more information about homecoming festivities, visit
<http://www.cumberland.edu/homecoming/home.html>.