

THE DEATH OF NOSTALGIA,
OR THE FINAL DEPARTURE OF CAL LUTHER FROM RACER ARENA,
OR ''ANDY VERSUS BARNEY'', HOW DID THESE GUYS GET IN CHARGE?

MARCH 5TH, 1998

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THE GENESIS OF THIS PAPER CAME ON A LAZY MID-WINTER SATURDAY AFTERNOON, WHEN MY SON BOBBY SUGGESTED THAT WE DRIVE OVER TO MURRAY AND WATCH THE MURRAY STATE RACERS IN THEIR FINAL SEASON AT RACER ARENA.

FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS, BOBBY IS A THIRD SEMESTER SENIOR AT MURRAY STATE, WITH MORE TO COME.

HE FREQUENTLY SPENDS WEEKENDS AT HOME BECAUSE HE LIKES IT HERE, GETS HIS LAUNDRY DONE FOR FREE, AND CLOSELY--AND PERSONALLY--FOLLOWS ATHLETICS AT HIS ALMA MATER, HOPKINSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL.

I READILY AGREED, SINCE IT WAS MY FREE WEEKEND FROM THE NEWS DEPARTMENT AT WHOP--AND I HAD NO SATURDAY SHIFT AT THE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER, WHERE I WORK PART-TIME AS A DISPATCHER TO SUPPORT MY BEER, GOLF, AND ''CORVETTE'' HABITS.

I LOOKED FORWARD TO A HIGHLY-CHARGED AFTERNOON IN RACER ARENA--HOME TO MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY BASKETBALL TEAMS SINCE 1954.

A NEW ''REGIONAL EVENTS CENTER'' IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION ON THE MURRAY STATE CAMPUS, AND WILL OPEN WITH THE 1998-99 BASKETBALL SEASON.

IT WAS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED TO OPEN THIS YEAR, BUT CONSTRUCTION PROBLEMS, WHICH SEEM TO BE A TRADITION AT MURRAY STATE, SET THE OPENING BACK ONE SEASON.

AS FOR THE ''TRADITION'' OF INEPT CONSTRUCTION, SOME OF YOU MAY RECALL THAT MURRAY STATE ''BROKE GROUND'' ON A NEW FOOTBALL STADIUM FULLY TWO YEARS AHEAD OF U-K, BUT BOTH ROY STEWART STADIUM AND COMMONWEALTH STADIUM WERE DEDICATED THE SAME SATURDAY IN THE EARLY 1970'S.

OUR IMAGE OF KENTUCKY WAS THE ONE PORTRAYED IN THE MEDIA--THE ''BEVERLY HILLBILLIES'' SCENARIO OF COON DOGS UNDER THE PORCH AND A WASHING MACHINE SITTING ON IT, WHICH PERSISTS TO THIS DAY THROUGH THE MONOLOGS OF JEFF FOXWORTHY, WHICH IS EVERY BIT AS UNFAIR AS THE THEN-PREVAILING PERCEPTION OF CHICAGO AS A HAVEN FOR GANGSTERS WHO RANDOMLY SHOOT EACH OTHER--AND ANY INNOCENT BYSTANDERS--ON A DAILY BASIS.

WE HAD COME TO MURRAY DURING THE CHRISTMAS BREAK OF 1965 TO LOOK FOR A PLACE TO STAY, WITH OUR FIRST PROBLEM BEING THE ''LANGUAGE BARRIER''.

WE WERE NOT ACCUSTOMED TO THE LEISURELY PACE OF THE AVERAGE KENTUCKIAN'S SPEECH, AND HUNG ON THEIR EVERY WORD, IMPATIENTLY WAITING FOR THEM TO COMPLETE A THOUGHT.

WE ALSO TOOK GREAT DELIGHT IN RIDICULING THE QUARTERS OFFERED, THOUGH IT MAY HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED IN AT LEAST ONE CASE.

AS UPPERCLASSMEN WE WERE NOT REQUIRED TO LIVE IN THE CAMPUS DORMITORIES, SO WE LOOKED FOR PRIVATE LODGINGS, WHICH WERE DIFFICULT TO FIND AT MID-YEAR.

ONE SUCH OFFERING WAS A GARAGE APARTMENT BILLED AS ''EXTRA NICE'', BUT TURNED OUT TO HAVE GREASE SPOTS ON THE FLOOR AS A RESULT OF ITS PREVIOUS OCCUPANT--SEVERAL TIMES REMOVED.

THE OWNER SAID THAT THE APARTMENT, WHICH CONSISTED OF AN OPEN SLEEPING-LIVING-DINING AREA PARTITIONED OFF FROM THE BATHROOM BY DOORS WITH TRANSLUCENT GLASS WHICH HAD NO DOUBT BEEN SALVAGED FROM ANOTHER ''EXTRA NICE'' ABODE, HAD HOUSED HIS DAUGHTER DURING HER SENIOR YEAR AT MURRAY STATE.

WE WENT BACK TO ELGIN WITH NO LEASE--AND NO PROSPECTS FOR LODGING WHEN THE SPRING SEMESTER STARTED, THOUGH WE WERE DETERMINED TO ENROLL ANYWAY.

WE SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND A SPOT IN A TRAILER COURT ABOUT 3 BLOCKS OFF CAMPUS, WHICH PROVED THE ''SMALL WORLD'' THEORY SINCE THE OWNER OF THE TRAILER WAS MARRIED TO THE SISTER OF A NURSE WHO WORKED WITH MY MOM AT ELGIN STATE HOSPITAL.

AFTER ENROLLING AT MURRAY STATE IN THE SPRING OF 1966, I QUICKLY LEARNED WHAT MAKES KENTUCKIANS UNIQUE AMONG AMERICANS.

IT ONLY TOOK ABOUT THREE TRIPS ACROSS CAMPUS ON FOOT TO LEARN OF THE FRIENDLINESS OF MY FELLOW STUDENTS.

AFTER HAVING SPENT 3 SEMESTERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AND BEEN IGNORED BY 20,000 ILLINI, I THOUGHT THAT I MUST BE A 'DEAD RINGER' FOR THE STUDENT ORGANIZATION PRESIDENT, OR SOME OTHER 'BIG MAN ON CAMPUS'.

I COULDN'T WALK TWENTY FEET WITHOUT SOMEONE SAYING 'HOW'S IT GOING?', 'GOOD MORNING' OR 'GOOD AFTERNOON', OR SOME OTHER SALUTATION.

I WAS GRADUATED FROM A HIGH SCHOOL WHICH ENROLLED SOME 2,000 STUDENTS, BUT I KNEW MOST OF THEM BY NAME AND FACE AND GREETED THEM DAILY.

THAT WAS ONE OF THE MOST DISTURBING THINGS ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, WITH IT'S REVERSE ONE OF THE GREATEST DELIGHTS AT MURRAY STATE, WHICH, RIGHTFULLY, BILLS ITSELF AS THE 'FRIENDLIEST CAMPUS IN THE SOUTH'.

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY ACCEPTED ME AND ALL 66 CREDIT HOURS I HAD EARNED OVER 6 SEMESTERS ELSEWHERE WHEN NO PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN ILLINOIS WOULD.

THE FACULTY THERE, PARTICULARLY IN HISTORY, WAS EQUAL TO OR BETTER THAN THOSE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AND ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE--AT CONSIDERABLY LESS EXPENSE THAN ILLINOIS.

I MET THE WOMAN I WOULD LATER MARRY THERE; WHILE ALSO MEETING ONE OF THE BEST FRIENDS I'LL EVER HAVE IN THIS LIFETIME.

YOU CAN SEE HOW MY LOYALTY TO MURRAY STATE GREW OVER THE 6 SEMESTERS AND 1 SUMMER SCHOOL TERM THAT I WAS ENROLLED THERE.

MUCH OF WHAT I AM TODAY--FOR BETTER OR WORSE--IS A RESULT OF MY EXPERIENCES AT MURRAY STATE, WHICH, LIKE MANY COLLEGE CAMPUSES BOASTED ONE OF VIRTUALLY EVERY PERSONALITY TYPE YOU ARE LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

