

*Tales from the Disputed Area*

**Presented by  
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On February 14, 1956, my family moved from Kenwood Drive into a brand new home on Roney Drive. Roney Drive was in the Owen Subdivision and was developed by Roy Owen of R.C. Owen Lumber Company (and Happy Higgins' uncle). Since Dad at that time was the Manager of Owen's Builder's Supply and had helped lay out the subdivision, Mr. Owen sold Dad a lot and a half at a reduced rate. My Dad and maternal Grandfather, Lacy Simmons built the new house over the space of a year, working on it after work and on weekends. The total cost: \$8,000 for a three bedroom, one bath attached carport home that had 1300 square feet of living space. We were the third home constructed on Roney Drive. (Incidentally, Roney Drive is named for Tom K. Roney, and Bob and Pam Ison and son Brad reside in his old home on Mooreland Drive today.) Since we had been living in an up-stairs apartment in my Grandparent's home on Kenwood, mother thought she had move into a mansion!

In 1956, this area was just being developed and had not yet been annexed into the city. The city limits at that time stopped at the underpass on South Main where Main becomes Cox Mill Road. Roney Drive was for many years gravel. In fact, was not surfaced until we were annexed by the city in 1959, just in time for the 1960 census.

It is this annexation and subsequent decisions by the Hopkinsville Independent School Board that have lead to the title of my paper: *Tales from the Disputed Area*.

For some of you this will be a familiar story, because some of you in this society are, like me, Disputed Area Kids hereinafter DAKS. Some of you, not being originally from here however have never heard the strange and sometimes amusing tale of us DAKS. It is an interesting study of how adults should not behave when dealing with the lives of children and how long held beliefs (and turfs) sometimes get in the way of good judgement. If any were involved in the decisions that lead to us DAKS and you are offended, as William Turner says, "you'll get over it!"

When we were annexed into the city, the Hopkinsville Independent Schools, as I stated made some interesting decisions with regard where we would attend school or where we would not attend as, you will soon see.

First a little background for you non-natives or those who do not remember any of this because it did not affect you. Notice I said "Hopkinsville Independent Schools." In 1881 the city of Hopkinsville established the Hopkinsville Independent Schools that were really the first public schools in the city of Hopkinsville. Prior to this several private schools had been operated by individuals, the most notable being a boys school run by Major Ferrell. Taxes were levied on all city property owners to support this independent school system. I use the term "independent" to distinguish from the Christian County School system which supervised the various schools that were located outside the city limits of Hopkinsville and consisted at that time of one room schools.

The first school was the old Clay Street school and eventually all students attended that school grades one through twelve. In a few short years, the number of students had

increased to the point that some grade schools for the lower grades were needed. Thus in 1907 Virginia Street and West Side Schools were opened. Virginia Street stood where the professional office building on the east side of Virginia between 20<sup>th</sup> and Twyman Square. If one goes to the ancient beech tree that still stands on that property, the initials of numerous students of old are still visible on that tree. West Side was in front of the Second Baptist Recreation Center. The older part of the building was torn down but because the gym was relatively new, it was spared the wrecking ball and converted to use as a recreation center by Second Baptist Church.

1912 saw the opening of Hopkinsville High on Walnut Street. It was a great source of pride that the city of Hopkinsville had such a large and modern high school building and it was believed, and rightly so, that the students at HHS received a much better education than those students who were attending one room schools in the county.

The Thirties and Forties saw the establishment of more modern schools in the county and the virtual elimination of the one room schools. During this era, South Christian, Crofton, Lacy, Sinking Fork, Lafayette, and Pembroke schools were built. These county schools offered grades one through twelve. These schools all had sports teams with the exception of football and great rivalries developed between not only amongst themselves, but among other area schools, including Hoptown.

After World War II and the resulting "baby boom" created the need for additional grade schools and in the Fifties there began talk of the consolidation of the county schools into one high school. This eventually came to pass and Christian County High School opened in 1959.

As stated earlier, it was at this time that the Owen subdivision and surrounding area was annexed into the city. Now this created a problem with the city school board. While we were city residents, and should have been able to go to the city schools for whatever reason my parents and others were told that we would be required to attend county schools; that we were in the "disputed area", whatever that meant.

As I began first grade in the fall of 1960, I was told by my parents that I would attend school at South Christian. Now, South Christian School was and is twelve miles from Roney Drive. The first bus stop of the morning was on Roney Drive, as was the last bus stop in the afternoon. This meant that I (and other DAKS) got on the bus at 6:45 A.M. and got off the bus in the afternoon at 4:15. Furthermore, most of the students at South Christian were farm kids and although I made friends easily, we DAKS did not have as much in common with the other kids. Because of an early November birthday, and the fact that my parents felt I was ready, I started to school when I was five. That first morning bus ride to Herndon seemed the longest I have ever taken in my life. Add to this that the people of South Christian (and at the other county schools as well) took tremendous pride in it being *their* school. To some, including some teachers, we DAKS were unwelcome outsiders who did not belong at South Christian.

When coupled with the fact that the city school system in the fall of 1960 opened Indian Hills Elementary school, literally within a stones throw of my house on Roney, one begins to see the incredible stupidity of what was taking place. I have a friend, whom some of you know, Mark Lee who lived on Blane Drive literally across the street from Indian Hills, who with the rest of us DAKS went to South Christian that year. Had he attended Indian Hills he would have had a fifty foot walk to school. Incredibly the closest child that was allowed to attend Indian Hills was at least three quarters of a mile from the school! We were practicing busing in Hopkinsville long before it became popular, except we didn't bus; the city schools did not provide bus transportation.

The following year, 1961-62, the powers at be decided that we DAKS could go to Indian Hills, which I thought was great because I would not have to ride that bus back and forth to South Christian. I could either walk up the hill or ride my bicycle and I would get home early enough that I could actually go out and play. On top of that, I had a fresh-out-of-college teacher who was pretty to boot! Some of you may know Nancy Freeman. I cannot remember not reading; I was reading before I went to school. One of my favorite subjects to read about was dinosaurs!! I knew them all, what they looked like, their names, and whether they were plant or animal eaters. This knowledge, I might add came in handy with my three sons, who also were smitten with dinosaurs. Nancy, however was not as pleased, as she later confessed to me; she knew absolutely nothing about dinosaurs!! Apparently I forced her to learn about dinosaurs.

For third grade, it was decided that since the Christian County School Board was constructing Millbrooke, a half mile southwest of Indian Hills, that we DAKS would attend school there. Now, Millbrooke was the county school's answer to this whole disputed area problem. Millbrooke would serve the disputed area, take some of the strain off South Christian and Sinking Fork, and the city kids no closer than three quarters of a mile away would attend Indian Hills. And the city schools would forever have a school that was built within the disputed area but that DAKS could not attend, unless their parents paid tuition to attend, even though their parents paid city school taxes, because they lived in the city limits. Are you all following this? Further, the kids who lived no closer than three quarters of a mile had to walk, ride a bike, or have their parents bring them to school, because the city schools did not provide bus transportation. But if a DAK lived across from Millbrooke on Millbrooke Drive they could ride a bus, if they choose to, about 100 feet each way!

There was one small problem at the beginning of the 1962-63 school year; construction of Millbrooke was not completed! So as a stop-gap measure it was decreed that all DAKS forth grade and below would attend school for half a day in some classrooms in the parking lot of Second Baptist Church and the fifth through the eighth would attend all day classes on the stage at Christian County High School (now Christian County Middle School). And we would continue this way until Millbrooke was completed, which we were told, would be shortly after Christmas break.

For once they got it right, because after Christmas break we moved in to a brand new Millbrooke Elementary school. There was only one small problem; the school was

designed for 800 students and enrollment was 1,100. So, they immediately set up portable classroom trailers to accommodate the overflow. There, however was only one third grade class. We had forty-three students in that class. Mrs. Dorothy Winders is certainly in a special place in Heaven for putting up with us. They almost immediately began planning to add an addition to almost double Millbrooke's size, which was accomplished in two years, thereby relieving some of the strain.

So, in three years, I had attended school at four different locations and had lived in the same house during that entire time! But this is not the end of the story of the DAKS, oh no! there is more!

Other changes took place with the opening of the new Hopkinsville High School in 1964. The city schools took the very progressive step of making the old high school into a junior high school, named after long-time city school superintendent, Gladstone Koffman. This school placed under one roof all city seventh, eighth and ninth graders, and tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders attended HHS.

There was still some of the old feeling of some that the city schools were superior to the county schools. As, stated before, a DAK (or any county resident for that matter) could attend city schools as long as the requisite tuition was paid. Thus many DAKS and their parents opted that they attend the city schools.

I, on the other hand, was told in no uncertain terms, that Millbrooke was just fine thank you and more importantly, it was a FREE public education. So, I left this issue alone until my eighth grade year at Millbrooke. By this time I had gotten involved in football. I was the starting center for the mighty Millbrooke Cardinals my seventh and eighth grade years. We won the county grade school championships both years with a combined record of 14-0. Now, I faced the possibility of going to Christian County High School who had first fielded a football team in 1962 and in the intervening six years had *maybe* won four football games total!! This was *way* before the County State Champion teams of the Eighties. One memorable loss came in the first ever meeting between County and Hoptown; final score 82-6! Coach Fleming Thornton threw everyone in but the water boy, even tried field goals to keep from running up the score, but to no avail. Even the fifth string scored at will against the hapless Colonels. And of course, I was one of many who followed the Hoptown teams of 1965 and 1966 which recorded back-to-back undefeated State Championships. Two of the Society were on those teams, Happy Higgins and Ben Fletcher.

Having experienced "the thrill of victory" I was not too keen on attending CCHS and facing "the agony of defeat" that to that point had been the hallmark of their football program. Therefore, I began a campaign to wear down my Dad, and cough up the tuition. I utilized every tactic and turn that I knew at that young age. "But Dad, *YOU* went to Hoptown, don't you want your son to graduate from there too?" "Don't you want your son to continue his championship winning ways?" But, alas, if any of you know Granville Adams, he can be as stubborn as any mule ever thought about being, and he would not budge on this issue. (I have had people tell me, "No wonder you made a lawyer, why living

with Granville, who would argue with a stump, had to give you a real leg up on the competition!")

And so I resigned myself to my fate. Even though several of my DAK friends would be attending Hoptown, I would be attending Christian County. Once again I would be attending a school that was further away than the closest school, where I knew only those other DAKS that were in the same boat with me, playing football for a losing program.

I was not entirely excited to go to school that first day of classes in the fall of 1968. When I go there it was even worse than I could have ever dreamed in my worst nightmare! If I had thought Millbrooke was crowded that first year, I had not seen anything!! For those of you who may not know, Christian County High School was housed from 1959 to 1969 in what is now Christian County Middle School. When I started in the fall of 1968, would you like to hazard a guess as to what the enrollment of Christian County High in the fall of 1968? ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED SCREAMING, HORMONES OUT OF CONTROL KIDS!! IN HALLS THAT WERE ABOUT SIX FEET WIDE!! AND THEY ONLY GAVE YOU FIVE MINUTES BETWEEN CLASSES!! It sometimes took me five minutes to move ten feet in the mass of humanity that was the hallways of Christian County High School. By the time I got to football practice, I felt like that I had already been through several "flipper" drills just getting through those halls during class changes. And, oh yes, Millbrooke was the first school in the county to be air-conditioned and Christian County High School was not. Unless you were in class in one of about ten portable classrooms that had been placed at the back of the school to accommodate the overflow. On top of that, County had been constructed with lots of glass which let the sun in. The windows opened; however in September, those windows being opened let just enough breeze in that it felt as though someone was blowing their hot breath on you. I was taking salt tablets just to go to school!! We DAKS had been spoiled by Millbrooke!

The fall of 1969 brought relief as the new Christian County High School opened its doors. The hallways were over fifty per cent wider; one could actually walk to class and not have fifty other people pushing and shoveing on you. Best of all, the new school was air-conditioned!!

Football was a good news, bad news kind of situation. Lynn Colley, my old coach from Millbrooke, had move to County with us and was coaching the freshman football team. The bad news was two-fold: our equipment was hand-me downs from the varsity some of which must have been 1940's vintage and we only won two games. We got absolutely clobbered by the Koffman Junior High Rebels, but I had resigned myself to my fate; my colors were to be the red, white and blue of County, not the orange and black of Hoptown. My predictions were prophetic; Christian County's over-all record during my varsity years was 3-27-1, the tie coming the final game of my senior year against Lone Oak. The score-0-0.

In fact many of us DAKS actually began to bleed red, white and blue, even going so far as to taunt our fellow DAKS who had gone to Hoptown. We got into the whole cross-

town rivalry thing. We just accepted that Hoptown would clobber us every year in football and we would get our revenge on the basketball court in the winter.

It, in fact, was a basketball court, or more correctly an entire gym that brought the whole sorted story of the disputed area and the DAKS to a close. In the late 1960's Hopkinsville High was still playing their home basketball games in the old gym on Central Avenue behind, then Koffman Junior High. Also, the Hopkinsville High Swim Team had captured back-to-back State Championships in 1969 and 1970 and they were having to drive to Clarksville to practice in the Austin Peay pool. One of our own, Wynn Radford was on those teams and I'm sure remembers those days well. So, the city school board decreed that old HHS would have the finest basketball gym and indoor swimming facility in all of western Kentucky, with the gym having a capacity of 5,000 and a twenty-five yard by six lane heated racing pool.

And it *was* nice!! I remember vividly going to the very first HHS verses CCHS basketball game. It was bigger than any high school facility I had ever been in!! Then I saw the sign that some of the Hoptown students had placed all across one end-zone balcony. It read in large orange and black letters: PIG FARMERS, WELCOME TO THE PALACE!!! Now there had always been the usual taunts that we both traded back and forth, but that crossed the line!! County responded that night with a 101-51 drubbing of the Tigers and I didn't feel so bad about the sign anymore. We might be pig farmers but we could play basketball; and besides basketball is the state religion of Kentucky, isn't it?

But that gym proved to be the undoing of the Hopkinsville Independent School System. As I understand it, the city school board had over-committed itself on the gym and pool and as a result in the summer of 1971 it was announced that the Hopkinsville Independent Schools would merge with the Christian County Public Schools. The surviving school board would be the Christian County Board of Education. Now, by this time I'm a rising senior, a Colonel through and through, and my first question is am I after all this time going to have to go to Hoptown? The answer for my class was "no". The board stated that the class of 1972 would be allowed to graduate where they had started, even if they lived out-of-district. However, many of the DAKS in the classes after 1972, who had opted to attend Hopkinsville, found themselves at Christian County and there was no recourse. Ben Fletcher's wife Ann, among others found herself in this predicament. That is also why the 1973 classes at HHS and CCHS have always had joint class reunions.

And that, my friends, is the story of the disputed area kids. It is a little known story but one I hope you have enjoyed. In closing, life as its little ironies, does it not. For guess where my two oldest sons, James and Will attend high school, have played sports (soccer and swimming respectively) and sung in the advanced choir and chamber ensemble? You guessed it!! GO TIGERS!!!!