

Rural Route 4 Back to School



Phillip Burgess

Kids are heading back to school, and I've been thinking about those days long ago when I started back to school after a summer sabbatical on Rural Route 4.

No doubt things are quite different now than when I said goodbye to tromping in the woods with Pedro the Dog and said hello to the school classroom. Returning to school was always a big deal for Mama B. No doubt she was happy to have a few hours away from me and my siblings every day. But more importantly, Mama B had to make sure her kids had everything she thought they needed as they returned to the classroom. So, a couple of weeks before school started Mama B carried us to town for a back-to-school shopping trip.

The first stop was at Dobson's, her favorite clothing store. For reasons that still aren't clear to me, the first thing she put in the shopping cart for me was new underwear and T-shirts. Why? Was my teacher going to see my undies? Did she care if they were new? And why T-shirts? Why did I have to wear one under my shirt? Shoot, it was hot as you know what and our classroom didn't have air conditioners.

Then we walked over a couple of aisles to the jeans. They were displayed on big tables and were sorted by size. Not any brand would do for me, so Mama B made sure to buy Tuff Nutt jeans. Years of experience had taught her that I needed durable jeans with double knees. Mama B would never wash them before the first wearing, even though it was still scorching hot in North Alabama. And even after I had broken them in by wearing them a few times, she insisted on adding starch when they were washed. She then "stretched" them on aluminum forms. Oftentimes I would be eating lunch before they were loose enough for me to bend my knees! But back to the shopping spree.

Our next stop was the shoe department. With fall and winter only weeks away, Mama B insisted on buying me "work shoes," those orange-colored brogans with oil-resistant soles. No Crocs, or Nikes or Converse for me, no sir. Oil-resistant soles? Beats me. Maybe it was because I would be walking (more than likely running) through and around that red cleaning stuff the janitor sprinkled every afternoon on the wooden floors in the hall and pushed with his push broom.

(Continued on back)

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(Continued from front)

New socks were next on the shopping list. Coming in packs of three, Mama B would get me white ones that had red and blue rings at the top.

Leaving Dobson's Department Store, we crossed the street and entered Lynn's Five & Ten. This was my favorite store. Glass containers held every kind of candy imaginable, and there were multiple rows of toys.

Once inside we headed to the school supplies. On the shopping list was a pack of number 2 Eagle pencils, loose leaf paper and three or four spiral bound notebooks, usually in assorted colors like red, green, purple, and blue.

With our shopping done Mama B would give me a quarter. Twenty-five cents was enough for a white bag full of chocolate covered peanuts, or a Yo-Yo, or even a model car. Armed with multiple bags, we walked down the street to the barber shop. There I waited my turn to get a "flat top." Afterwards, we headed home.

School was starting, and I was ready to go.

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