

My Dog River “Daze”

By Art Watkins

Most of the books, booklets and articles I write and print concern Bible doctrines and Bible issues, but this article is a small insight into my past history. My past history is not important because I am not, but there is a point in this short story of my life in Mobile, Alabama and how God changed my plans, so please read to the end and I will try not to bore you.

When I was a young boy and even when I became a teenager I had many friends and we all lived very close to Dog River off Dauphin Island Parkway (DIP). Some of their names were; Robert Stringfellow and his sister MaryAnn whose folks owned Fulton Road Florist. Jimmy and Danny Collier. Jack Siebert whose father owned Siebert's grocery on the corner of DIP and Military Road. Jack's uncle owned a fish camp (Jims Camp) on Dog River and his mother Ruth probably caught more fish in Dog River than anyone alive. Farris Cole, Jimmy Davis and his sisters Martha and Sue. Jerry Beuk and his sister Nancy Beuk. His mother was my SS teacher. Kenneth Lange and his sister Cindy whose father was Roy Lange the pastor of Forest Park Bible Church where many of us went to church in those days. Jimmy Gammage and his sisters Wanda and Norma. Norma married Percy Peters a preacher friend of mine who lived off DIP near the river. Buddy Boatwright and his sister Pat Boatwright and his cousin Johnnie Boatwright. David Mason and his brother Larry whose yard we played ball in. Billy and Gary Fessler who lived at the end of Forest Lane a few yards from Dog River. They fished a lot on Dog River. Tessie Woodruff and her brother Ronnie. Her daddy (southern for father) fished up and down Dog River too. Butch Pierre who lived across the street from Fulton Road Baptist Church. Wendell Erdman who lived on Erdman's creek that flowed into Dog River. His father sold crickets and worms for fishing and he rented boats to fish in Dog River. Wendell and I spent a lot of time on Dog River in his daddy's boats. We would turn them over and get under them. I know it's crazy but we did. (I never realized I had so many friends in those days until I wrote this article).

Most of my friends spent a lot of their early years on Dog River. We all spent a lot of time fishing, swimming and water skiing on the river. We were skiing barefooted before it became popular, especially Robert Stringfellow who could ski on anything, even a boat paddle. We skied up and down the whole river to the big bridge and also Halls Mill Creek and Rabbit Creek and even over to the “bluffs” behind Braswell stables. Many of us boys hunted in the swamps and went frogging at night on Dog River when the tide was low and the frogs sat on the banks. We would go along the banks in a boat and shine bright lights in their eyes and gig them. We shot Coons and Squirrels and Ducks in the swamps of Dog River and trapped Muskrats and skinned and sold their hides. We set Squirrel traps in the swamps and caught and sold Flying Squirrels for 50 cents. (Saw an ad recently where they sell for \$40). We carried them in our top pocket to school. We used to jump off the train trestle that ran over the river near what is now 1-10.

I went to Greystone, Maryvale, Adelia Williams, Hollinger’s Island, Barton and Murphy to school. When I got home in the afternoon I would take off my school clothes and put on a bathing suit and run to Dog River. In the summer time the only thing I wore was a bathing suit. My life in those days revolved around Dog River. My main ambition in those days was to spend the rest of my life on Dog River, swimming, fishing, skiing, frogging and hunting. I had no desire to live anywhere else. I wanted to stay as close to Dog River as I could. To me life was living on Dog River.

I used to think I was the only one who felt that way, but a few years back I was amazed to hear my brother Joe say the exact same thing about himself. And then when Percy Peters preached in my church he opened his sermon with a story about his life on the river and said the same thing about himself too. I knew exactly what they were talking about.

But as they say, “the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry”, for I ended up Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Tennessee and Louisiana and now Coden/Bayou LaBatre, Alabama as a preacher and pastor. I now live in Magnolia Springs on the other side of the bay from Dog River. My brother Joe ended up in the Philippines for 30 years a missionary and later in

Indianapolis where he died a year and half ago. Percy Peters moved away to Montrose, Alabama across the bay from Dog River and now lives in Grand Bay. God had other plans for the likes of me, my brother Joe and Percy Peters and many others who lived along the river.

As far as I know most of the friends I had that spent so much time on Dog River all moved away with a few exceptions. I think about the river every now and then and all the good times we had in those days. When I drive over Dog River Bridge, which is not often anymore, I always look at the river and not the bay and when I do a lot of good memories come back to me, but the memories I have in preaching and pastoring in the states God led me to are far better. I am glad God changed my plans. I am now 70 and it's strange how all these memories come flooding back to me at this age. Where did they come from and why? I guess they never really left my mind.

How about your life? How did it turn out? Did it turn out as you planed and hoped for? Very few do. But maybe God did something much better with your life by changing your plans. I hope so and I hope you are happy where you are in life now and I hope this article didn't bore you.