

Blog Entry © Thursday, January 16, 2025, by James Pate Williams, Jr. My Elementary School Memories

Preface: I have been a scientist since I was about three years old. I was an incipient paleontologist. I would accompany my mother to buy groceries at the local A&P supermarket. She would buy me a plastic toy dinosaur that had its scientific name on its tail or body. My mother would pronounce the name, and I would memorize the paleobiologic name. I also, like other youngsters, was fond of firefighting and fire personnel. My mother was upgrading her teaching certificate at LaGrange College, LaGrange, Georgia. She would sometimes have to take me to her classes, or I would stay out in the college parking lot in our 1954 Plymouth automobile, and I would assemble a model. My mother graduated with a degree in psychology and a teaching certificate in 1960. I was seven years old when my mother earned her degree.

I was in elementary school at Dawson Street School, LaGrange, Georgia from 1959 to 1965. I distinctly remember the promotional tests in 1960. I recall Miss Sims, my first-grade teacher, announcing that only one student would skip the second grade. I thought it was going to be me, but it was my best friend, Scott Burton, who skipped a grade. Scott is now an entrepreneur and pharmacist. My second-grade teacher, Mrs. Beard, had me come to a single student summer reading improvement class. At the end of the course, she gave me a Revell model kit of a Pan American Boeing 707 airliner. I was only 7 years old, and I had been modeling since I was about 4 or 5 years old. Below is my timeline ages and school grade.

1953 – 54 0 – 1
1954 – 55 1 – 2
1955 – 56 2 – 3
1956 – 57 3 – 4
1957 – 58 4 – 5
1958 – 59 5 – 6 Kindergarten
1959 – 60 6 – 7 1
1960 – 61 7 – 8 2
1961 – 62 8 – 9 3
1962 – 63 9 – 10 4
1963 – 64 10 – 11 5
1964 – 65 11 – 12 6
1965 – 66 12 – 13 7
1966 – 67 13 – 14 8
1967 – 68 14 – 15 9
1968 – 69 15 – 16 10
1969 – 70 16 – 17 11
1970 – 71 17 – 18 12 Senior High School

I recall going down to the corner of Dawson Street and Greenville Street to watch the parade motorcade of John F. Kennedy prior to his Presidential election. All the students at my elementary school formed a line on the corner. In 1960, my father served a term on the LaGrange City Council.

I was in the fourth grade and nine years old when Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963. I was in Mrs. Vinings' fifth-grade class on that fateful day. My class watched Walter Cronkite's CBS coverage of the aftermath of the assassination. Later that evening my mother took me and my Burton best friends to see the movie "Jason and the Argonauts." That took away the gloom and doom of that infamous day.

Mrs. Vinings was my fifth-grade teacher in the year school year 1963 to 1964. I was ten to eleven years old. Mrs. Vinings would place a long division problem on the chalkboard every morning and the students would perform that calculation. I still use long divisions to compute the tips I give servers at the restaurants where I dine. I have a calculator on my cell phone, but I prefer to do the computation by hand.