

Otis S. McCollum

Excerpts taken from my Memoir titled "Straight outta Pacolet."

The Early Years

I was born on May 24, 1946 in [Pacolet](#), South Carolina. My mother told me I was born on a Friday. My parents were Walter David McCollum, Sr. and Mary Louise McCollum. We lived in a 5 room wooden framed house with a tin top. I had an older brother named Walter, Jr. and a younger sister named Doris. The house belonged to my grandparents, Lather & Katie Anderson. The house had a kitchen, living room, 2 bedrooms and a den that served as an extra bedroom. There was no running water. We had an outhouse and we burned coal and wood. In looking back it felt like we had plenty of room during that time.

Although My grandfather worked, he was also a farmer. We had chickens, hogs, a mule and a cow. He also had several gardens where he grew corn, peas, beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, okra, collard greens and sweet potatoes. Next to our house, we had a smokehouse where the meat was stored and cured. Oh yes, I vividly remember the smell of country ham and red-eye gravy every Sunday morning.

I don't have many recollections of my childhood prior to my entering grade school. But there are some things that are still vivid in my mind. I remember going to Sunday School with my mother and my siblings every Sunday. I even remember my first Sunday school teacher. Her name was Mrs. Ella Hardy. She taught the beginners' class. We attended the [New Salem Zion Baptist Church](#) in Pacolet.



[New Salem Zion Baptist Church](#) as it appears today.

My father was born on March 28, 1924. He was a very quiet man, some folks considered him somewhat shy. He only had a six grade education. He worked for the Draper Corporation in Spartanburg and retired after 44 years.

My mother was born on May 12, 1928. She was an only child. She and my father were married in 1944. The first job I remember her having was at Woolworth's 5 & Dime in Spartanburg. By the time I was in elementary school, she was working at Mabry's Dry Cleaners in [Pacolet](#). She worked there throughout my high school years. I can remember on Monday mornings she would have her arms full with clothes to take to the cleaners. Getting our clothes dry cleaned for free was definitely a plus back in those days. My mother was the one who checked the clothes in and out for customers. She practically knew everyone in Pacolet and they knew her.

We lived in the rural outskirts of [Pacolet](#) approximately 2.5 miles from the center of the town. Our house was located at the fork of Hwy 176 and the road going toward [Whitestone](#). My Grandfather owned over 5 acres of land that he purchased in 1942. He always said that his monthly mortgage payment was \$18 and he said there were months he was hard pressed to make the payment.

I really enjoyed my childhood living in the [Pacolet area](#). I enjoyed playing with my brother and sister. We had plenty of space to ride our bicycles and play on the swing set that our parents bought us. We would play games that were popular during that period like marbles, hopscotch, dodgeball, jumping rope and jacks. Card games were popular at that time with "Old Maids" being the most popular. During the summer and on weekends, we would have other children to play with. We had a lot of cousins that would come to visit.

We had a natural spring on our property where we got our water. In the early years, we had to bring water from the spring to the house in pails. By the time I was 5 years old, my grandfather had the water pumped into the house. That was about the time we had a bathroom added on to the house. We got our first TV in 1951. It was a Motorola console TV. I remember the year because it was the year that the Giants' Bobby Thompson hit a home run in the bottom of the ninth inning to beat the Dodgers in the playoffs.

I started grade school in August of 1952 at the Zion Hill School in [Pacolet](#). The school had no plumbing. We had to use the outhouse which was about 25 yards from the school building. There was a big black pot-belly stove in the middle of the room that provided heat during the winter. I brought my lunch to school in a brown paper bag. The environment was not the best in the world. I thought the conditions that existed then were going to be the norm throughout my elementary school years. But things changed in 1953.

The [Benjamin E. Mays Consolidated School](#) opened in August of 1953 and was located in [Pacolet Mills, S.C.](#) When the school opened, I was in the 2nd grade. The school provided educational opportunities for students in grades 1 through 12. Also, grades 7 through 12 included students who graduated from Ralph J. Bunche Elementary School in Cowpens, S.C. The consolidated school consisted of over 400 students. The school was unique in that it provided academic courses of study for elementary, middle and high school students at the same location.

The school was named after Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays (1894-1984). Dr. Mays was one of the most prominent educators, social reformists and civil rights and religious leaders of his time. He was the

president of Morehouse College from 1940-1967. He also was a mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King and gave the eulogy at Dr. King's memorial services in 1968.

It was truly an exciting time for those of us who were there for the school's opening in 1953. The school was "brand spanking new." We were about to enter a new school that had plumbing, central air and heating and a cafeteria that served hot meals. We had all the bells and whistles which included a Library, Home Economics Department, Agriculture Shop and a gymnasium/auditorium that was one the finest in the district if not the state.

My memories of [Pacolet](#) were pretty vivid as I approached my teenage years. I had just begun to develop some skills in playing baseball and basketball. We always had outside basketball courts and baseball fields to play on in [Pacolet](#). After school, you could always find a pickup basketball game. It was on those dirt courts that I began to get a reputation as a pretty good player. We would always choose sides for the pick up games. If I wasn't the first pick, I was the second. Several white kids would join us in these pick up games and we became good friends with several of them.

Other fond memories of [Pacolet](#) included going to baseball games at the [Park](#) where the [Pacolet Black Trojans](#) played their games. The [ballpark](#) was a very nice field with wooden seats behind home plate that were 7-8 rows high. There was a wire screen behind home plate to protect the fans. I had three uncles on the team; uncle Dave Bailey, uncle Willie George Bailey and uncle Wallace Humphries. They were legends in [Pacolet](#) and in the surrounding areas. All three had played against some of the Black major league players when they were barnstorming through the south.

While in High School, I worked two summers at [Brown's Store](#) bagging and delivering groceries in the community. I remember getting my first line of credit at [Wilkins Esso Service Station](#). Mr. Wilkins allowed me to get gas and pay him at the end of the month. I have some fond memories of living in the [Pacolet area](#). After graduating from college, I accepted a position with the old "Humble Oil and Refining Company" which is now Exxon. I always loved coming back home to see family and friends. I've had the opportunity to live in several major cities in the U.S. over the past 50 years but I will always be proud of being "Straight outta [Pacolet](#)."

(Editor's Note: Otis graduated from B. E. Mays High School in 1964. As a senior he was editor of the school annual. A copy of this annual can be seen on this website at [The Panther](#).

In 2005, Mr. McCollum was a Co-Chairperson for organizing the Humphries-Bailey Family Reunion. As part of that effort, they produced a 57 page memorial booklet for the reunion. At my request, Mr. McCollum has furnished a copy of this booklet for the Pacolet Memories website. It can be read at [Humphries-Bailey Family Reunion Booklet](#).

I had the great good fortune to know and work with the late Mr. Willie George Bailey who is featured in this booklet. When I was a student at USC I worked in the summer with the maintenance department of Spartanburg School District 3 at Pacolet. Mr. Bailey, along with the late Frank Smith, and others were full time employees of the District. They were very patient with my inexperience and taught me a lot. I was reading the Family Reunion Book and came to Page 23

page about Mr. Willie Bailey singing. It reminded me of my time working at the Pacolet High School in the summer with Willie and Frank and the other maintenance workers. The thing I enjoyed the most was when we got together as a group to do something like painting a gymnasium. Sometimes, one would take up a song and the others would join in, often singing harmony. I remember that Willie had a strong voice and seemed to know many songs. It was just fantastic. In looking back I believe that I enjoyed those times working with them more than almost anything else in my work career.)



Pacolet Black Trojans

Front (left to right) George Wannamaker, Sam Shippy, Willie George (Pig) Bailey, David (Big Dave) Bailey, Isiah (Hankside) Porter

Back (left to right) Theodore (Blue) Rice, Frank Wannamaker, Tom Reid, Robert Johnson, Robert Hardy, Walter Sanders

(The Pacolet Black Trojans with Uncles Willie and Dave Bailey in the front row.)