

## Wylie Benjamin Johnson Remembers:

I remember two or three of us taking baths together in that HUGE bathtub downstairs in the back of the house. There was also a shower installed in the room my family stayed in upstairs (in the back on the right) but I don't recall taking a shower there more than once or twice. I thought when I was very young that Montgomery was much colder than Birmingham because there was no heat in that room during the night. The gas heaters would be turned off before we got into bed and the room was drafty. We slept with many quilts in the winter, and you could see your breath in the morning when you got up.

Everything about that house was huge and special to a young child. The ceilings were high, especially in entrance hall, which had a long high staircase. We would slide down the banister from time to time if no grown-ups were around.

My older cousin Charlie Mac's cubbyhole, the area under the stairs, was one of the coolest places I knew. He had all sorts of fascinating stuff in there. Rivaling the cubbyhole in interest as we got older was the pump house. There was a wide variety of all kinds of tools and Charlie Mac could use them all. One night in there I accidentally knocked a lamp cord out of its socket and we were in the dark. I grabbed the plug and put my thumb and finger onto the two prongs on either side to guide it back into the socket by feel. As it went in, the electricity arced through the plug and all the way up to my shoulders. It was quite painful and I can feel it by memory as I write this.

I remember playing under the house when very young. Charlie Mac & I went there on the pretext of looking for eggs. I can't remember whether we found any there or not but I do remember gathering eggs on many occasions. The next time my family came down I was told they had seen a snake under the house and we couldn't play there any more. I'm not sure if that was the real reason, because I can only imagine how incredibly dirty we must have been when we came out after playing there before. Not long after that all of the entrances were sealed with chicken wire. There were holes in the linoleum in the kitchen floor and I worried that the snakes that kept us from playing under the house would come up and get us. I didn't like being in the kitchen alone.

Another memory is of one particular day playing in the hay barn with lots of cousins. The barn was huge, and at the time it was about half full with hay stacked at different levels which made for great hiding places. You could climb up on the rafters, jump down, and land in the soft hay below from your choice of heights. There were short jumps, medium jumps, & long jumps which satisfied all ages. We stayed in the barn all afternoon; there were no bones broken, and a great time was had by all. I played in

the hay barn many more times before it was torn down, but the conditions that one day were again never equaled.

My last memories of the house were of it being torn down while the subdivision was built. My father, the engineer, pointed out the huge beams that were part of the foundation, the old nails that were used, and we discussed construction techniques that were used before the War Between the States.

My final memory to share is of the first time my then girlfriend (now wife) Jessica and I went to visit Uncle Luke. He was very gracious as always and told many stories about my father and the old days, including that when it was time to get up in the morning, Papa Johnson would call from the foot of the stairs. If he had to come upstairs to get you out of bed, he carried a razor strop and anyone who was still in the bed got it, whether you were one of his children or just happened to have had the bad luck to be an overnight guest who didn't know the rules. At any rate, it made a good story and we laughed about it.

That night Uncle Luke showed us to our rooms. Jessica got Sharon's room and in the middle of the night Sharon's basset hound jumped up and went to sleep on the foot of the bed. The next morning Uncle Luke came upstairs bringing Jessica coffee and a newspaper (did I mention he was a gracious host?), but when he saw the dog on the bed he put the coffee down and started whacking the dog with the paper, which is how Jessica woke up that morning. ☺