

On the Road at Southwestern Middle School, Washington D.C.

By Don Tutt

Mr. Robert Milby was the principal at Southwestern when the Middle Schools format went into effect. DeLand Jr. High had for decades taken their 8th or 9th grade class to Washington, D.C. as part of their curriculum for U.S. History or Civics. Mr. Milby wanted the same for Southwestern Middle School. During the 1988 - 1989 school year Southwestern made plans to take their first trip to Washington, D.C. (Southwestern's 7th grade had started touring the year before by beginning a tradition of an overnight trip to Tallahassee as part of Florida history in the 7th grade).

Michelle Adams-Wamser, an 8th grade math teacher, was placed in charge by Mr. Milby. Mrs. Adams-Wamser made visits to and talked with DeLand Middle staff about their vast experience with the trip and decided to use that as Southwestern's model. That first year Mrs. Adams Wamser did all the leg work of a travel agency (that change would be used starting the very next year.) 42 students went that first year on a 47 seat commercial bus (very old). The other 5 seats were filled with chaperones Mr. Sal Campanella, Mrs. Adams-Wamser, Ms. Donna Staples, Mr. Dan Tompkins and Mr. Don Tutt. It was crowded and some would never again ride in such crowded, but socially active conditions. That '88-'89 was the beginning of a tradition that still continues to this day at Southwestern Middle School.

After that first year, Southwestern associated with Educational Tours, a travel agency with which there would be a long term relationship. The President of the company, Mr. Ed Lattin, became an integral part of our planning. When Mrs. Wamser moved with her husband to teach in St. Augustine in 1990, Mr. Milby passed the leadership to Ms. Donna Staples. Because of Southwestern's relatively small size, they consistently filled a single bus, usually the larger 58 seaters. The first 10 years or so of travel, we would often be on the road at the same time as DeLand Middle School. Many of those years we would be traveling with the same bus company at the same time.

This situation provided us with a few interesting situations. One year, while waiting at 5:30 a.m. for our bus to arrive, the small bus loop drive way at Southwestern was filled with the arrival of three Annett buses. We had a good chuckle thinking of DeLand Middle who must have been, at the same time, awaiting the arrival of those 3 buses, only to have our single bus arrive there instead. Through the years, on several different occasions, our students, or theirs, would wind up boarding the wrong bus, only to be redirected off their

mistake before leaving the curb. A day trip to the Gettysburg National Battlefield was a standard part of our itinerary. One year we arrived in the National Park parking lot to find it covered by about six inches of snow. DeLand Middle had arrived about 30 minutes prior to Southwestern and had enough time on their schedule to have a 15 minutes snow ball fight between many from both schools who had never seen snow (many never having been out of the state of Florida.) I believe all the teachers from both schools also enjoyed this cold weather break. Today, if you were to ask a former Southwestern student who had made one of these trips through the years to recount a memory, their responses would be extremely varied, and probably of a non-educational variety.

- Perhaps you might encounter the student recalling standing in the middle of the National Mall and saying out loud , "wow, I never thought I would ever see this".
- Or one of the students in the "peach orchard" on the battlefield at Gettysburg, after being told the story of the importance of this pivotal point of the battle, and having chosen sides on the buses (it fell to boys on one side and girls on the other); then having walked onto the site (peach orchard) in 8 inches of snow, were allowed to make and throw as many snowballs in a ten minute period as they could. They probably don't remember the importance but they certainly will remember their snowball fight.

One year Mrs. Sharon Hill, Assistant Principal, was traveling as a chaperone. Part of the routine of traveling was to be on time and ready to depart. The students almost always got this pattern down well after the trip got into high gear. This year there seemed to be a problem getting passengers out of the book stores at the battlefields, museums and historical sites. It was Mrs. Hill, who had a voracious appetite for all things historical and was constantly looking for more reading material to take home with her.

The trip home, on the evening of the 5th day, meant traveling through the night. We would stop at the North Carolina welcome station, change into something to sleep in, go to the bathroom, watch one last movie and then not get off until the Florida welcome station around 6 a.m. Some people still don't sleep well on commercial buses.

... more memories to come.