



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Legacy Inscribed

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER BRYANT'S DEATH, HIS IMPACT IS STILL FELT.

BY CAROLINE GAZZARA



THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS

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ABOVE: Thousands of people lined up for Paul W. Bryant's funeral in 1983.

Nearly 3,000 people filled three churches in downtown Tuscaloosa and thousands more stood along the roadside to Birmingham to get a glimpse of a three-mile funeral procession, the day that Paul W. "Bear" Bryant was buried under a hickory tree on Jan. 28, 1983.

For much of Alabama, time seemed to stand still.

As many as 5,000 people, some say, gathered at Bryant's graveside at Elmwood Cemetery in Birmingham. Others still crowded around televisions to watch the funeral, including schoolchildren, who huddled with their teachers, paying their respects to a legendary coach.

It was a day of mourning, not just for the state, but for the country. "A coach is looked up to, but with Bryant, it was tenfold," said Taylor Watson, museum collections specialist at the Paul W. Bryant Museum.

Thirty-five years after his death, Bryant's impact on the Capstone is still very much alive.

REMEMBERING THE LEGEND

The legacy of Bryant is apparent everywhere in Tuscaloosa. From street names, to campus buildings, to the famed Bryant-Denny Stadium, the Bear's legacy lives on.

Shortly after his passing, people from across the state and country sent items like letters, artwork, memorabilia and more to his widow, Mary Harmon Bryant, and the University. The Bryant Museum still receives items from time to time.

"Bryant's legacy is as strong as ever," said Ken Gaddy, director of the Bryant Museum. "If you walk out the door, there's Houndstooth everywhere. It's like the third color of the University: Crimson, White and Houndstooth. It's a positive thing to have."

In the mid-1980s, the Bryant family donated a large lot of items to the museum. Still sifting through everything, Watson discovered more than 20 grade-school drawings from 1983. The drawings have sat in the Bryant Museum Library collections, waiting for their moment to shine.

April 27, 1983

Dear Mrs. Bryant,

The enclosed papers were done by some of the students in Mrs. Ann Downing's 2nd Grade Class at Green Valley Elementary School, located in Hoover, Alabama.

This was not an assignment, but rather, a voluntary out-pouring of the children's feelings. Mrs. Downing gave them the opportunity to express themselves in this manner because Coach Bryant was truly a hero to many of them. You may notice one or two Auburn fans' work by the inclusion of some orange and/or blue in their art work.

Please know that our thoughts and prayers have been with you since the death of Coach Bryant. We thank you and your children for sharing him with the public for so many years.

ABOVE: Mrs. Mary Harmon Bryant was sent more than 20 grade-school drawings from Green Valley Elementary in 1983 following Paul W. Bryant's death. This letter accompanied the drawings.



FROM A CLASSROOM IN HOOVER

Ann Downing was teaching art at Green Valley Elementary School in Hoover, Alabama, when she heard the news. An alumna of The University of Alabama, Downing was a huge Alabama fan, and an even bigger Paul "Bear" Bryant fan.

But on Jan. 26, 1983, Downing was heartbroken. The Bear passed away just a month after his last game, when the Crimson Tide won the 1982 Liberty Bowl against the University of Illinois. Bryant joked shortly after coaching his last game that he would "croak in a week" once he retired. One month later, Bryant passed away due to a heart attack at Druid City Hospital, now known as DCH Regional Medical Center.

It seemed that everyone, in some way, was affected by Bryant's passing.

In her final year of teaching at Green Valley, Downing was moved by Bryant's death—so much so, that Downing instructed her second-grade students to draw something that reminded them of Bryant, and to write a sentence or two about the famed coach. Downing then attached the drawings to construction paper and hung them around the school for a few weeks. In total, 22 second-grade drawings were hung with pride at the school. Later on that school year, Downing sent the drawings to Mrs. Bryant, where they sat in the Bryant estate for years.

"I'm an Alabama fan," Downing said. "Everyone knew of Bear's passing but we wanted to show support for Mrs. Bryant. It wasn't just the second-grade class; the whole school made drawings."

UNCOVERED DRAWINGS

It wasn't until 2012 that the drawings were uncovered at the Paul W. Bryant Museum. Watson, who searched for the students about five years ago, during what would've been Bryant's 100th birthday, said there's not much information about the drawings. "There was only (the letter) that was with the drawings, nothing else," Watson said.

Watson said the drawings were in a separate box from other condolence letters, meaning that Mrs. Bryant, or her daughter Mae Martin, thought they were important. "I just love these," Watson said. "They're just so genuine."

Some of the drawings have depictions of the Bear's famous Houndstooth hat. Others are decorated with footballs and elephants.

Emily Jolley, now an attorney in Guntersville, Alabama, was one of the students at Green Valley Elementary. Jolley's drawing includes rainbow clouds and the legendary hat. She also included the sentences "I will not forget the Bear. He was the best coach. The winningest college coach in history."

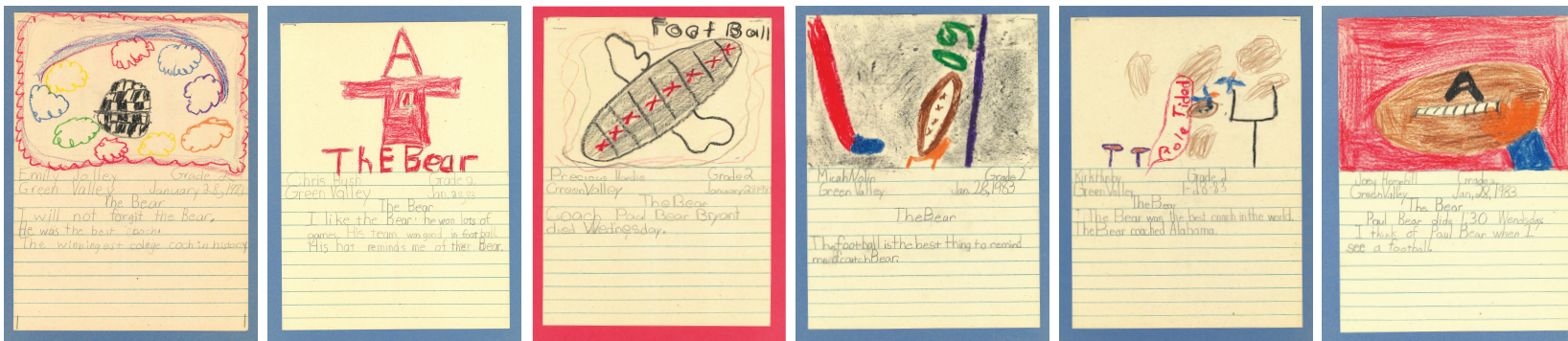
Although Jolley's spelling wasn't perfect, the sentiment is there: Bryant affected more than just the people he knew personally. "I do remember when Bear Bryant died; I remember us talking about it in (Downing's) class," Jolley said. "It was almost like if the president had died. It was such a big deal. I remember watching the funeral procession in class."

While Jolley doesn't remember what she drew, she remembers doing a lot of artwork in Downing's class. She also remembers the impact felt by Bryant's death. "It was kind of like, almost like when President Kennedy died, because Bryant was a hero and leader," Jolley said.

Those second-grade students were roughly 7 or 8 years old when they made their pictures. Now in their early 40s, those students reflect back on the drawings they created. Some were shocked to know their drawings are still around; others were filled with nostalgia.

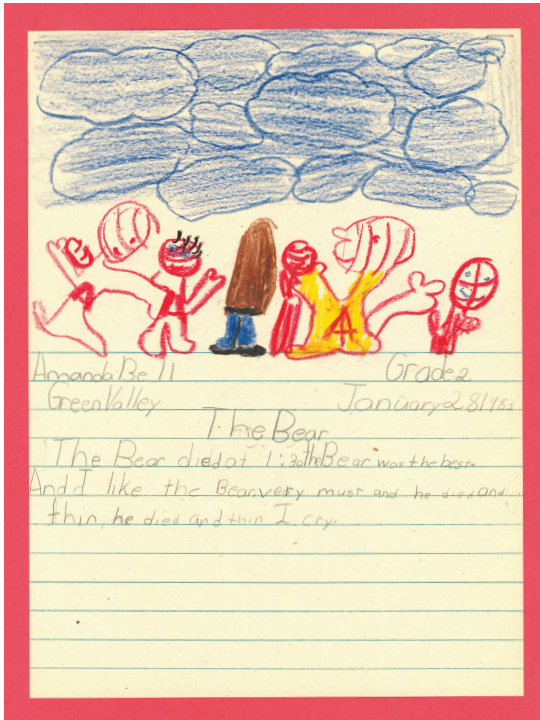
"It is definitely surprising to find out that this artwork is still around and is now in Tuscaloosa," Jolley said. "I mean, I can't believe that it would have been important enough for anyone to save, especially now that I'm 42 years old. It's cool to me to be able to look at something I did in second grade that is still around."

John Rives, a controller at B.L. Harbert in Birmingham, was also one of Downing's second-grade students at Green Valley so long ago. In his picture, Rives drew "The Bear" holding an Alabama football. Rives wrote about Bryant's death and his funeral

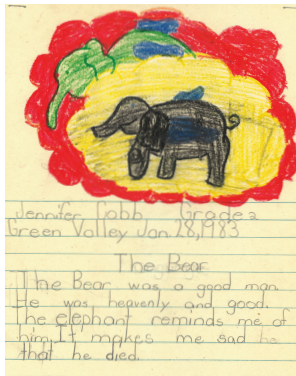


John Rives Grade 2
Green Valley 1-28-83
The Bear
Coach Bear Bryant died Wednesday. His funeral was Friday.

ABOVE: The student drawings were donated to the Paul W. Bryant Museum in the late 1980s, but were later uncovered in 2012.



Amanda Bell Grade 2
Green Valley January 28, 1983
The Bear
The Bear died at 1:30. The Bear was the best. And like the Bear, very much and he died and then he died and then I cry.

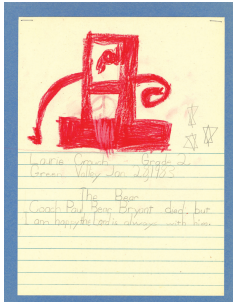
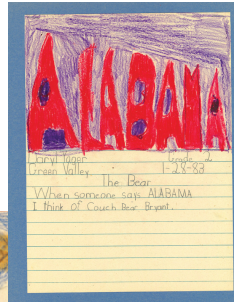
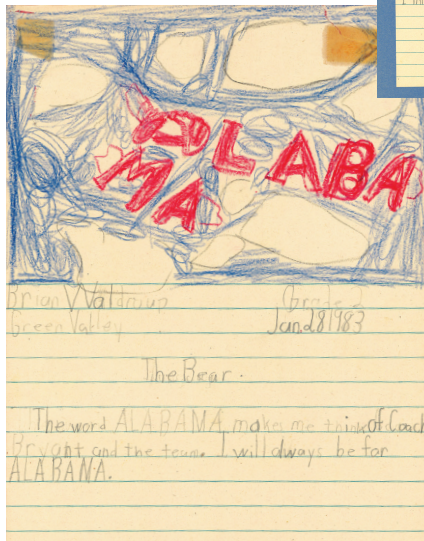


Jennifer Lobb Grade 2
Green Valley Jan 28, 1983
The Bear
The Bear was a good man. He was heavenly and good. The elephant reminds me of him. It makes me sad he died.

under his drawing. "I was just a kid in second grade when Bryant died," Rives said. "I remember it all was important and a big deal. I think the school somehow rolled out a TV to watch the funeral procession, which was televised. I just remember it being a big deal at school."

Rives, who ended up going to school at Auburn University and graduating from Birmingham-Southern, was unaware his drawing was sent to Mrs. Bryant back in 1983. But he said in hindsight, it was very sweet of Downing to think of her.

"I think it's pretty fun that it's at the Bryant Museum now," Rives said. "If you think on it, for a second-grade class (drawing), the teacher was thoughtful enough to send that in, to make (Mrs. Bryant) feel good. I think if I were in that



“When I was really young, I remember going to a game with my dad when Bryant was coaching. I was probably in first grade. I can’t tell you if they won or who they played, but it was at Legion Field. But I do remember when Bryant died.”

—BRIAN WALDRUP

situation, I would have appreciated it.”

Daryl Yager, one of Rives’ classmates in 1983, agrees. Although he doesn’t remember much about Bryant’s death, it’s special that the artwork is still around, years later, he said. Yager’s drawing features the word “ALABAMA” written in bright red crayon with a deep purple background.

It’s especially sentimental for Yager, now a client manager for health and welfare benefits, since he graduated from UA in 1996. His son plans to follow in his footsteps. “I grew up an Alabama fan as long as I can remember,” Yager said. “My time at Alabama was very positive. I have a rising senior son who is claiming he wants to do the same thing, and go to Alabama.”

Scribbled with sky blue and the word Alabama in the clouds, Brian Waldroup’s drawing may not be like the rest of his class’s art, but it’s still special. For Waldroup, a police officer in Texas, the word Alabama reminds him of Bryant. He also included that he will always be for Alabama.

This statement still rings true for him. Although he moved to Texas in 1984, Waldroup is still an Alabama fan. His father got him into the Crimson Tide.

“I don’t remember the project, but I’m still an Alabama fan,” Waldroup said. “My whole family still lives in Alabama. When I was really young, I remember going to a game with my dad when Bryant was coaching. I was probably in first grade. I can’t tell you if they won or who they played, but it was at Legion Field. But I do remember when Bryant died.”

For many people who were alive at the time, the day Bryant died is an emotional marker in time. For many Alabama fans, no one has had a larger impact on The University of Alabama Crimson Tide, no one else except perhaps Nick Saban.

Bryant’s memory lives on—one only has to step on campus to witness it—whether it’s his name on street signs, Bryant’s statue seemingly standing watch in front of Bryant-Denny Stadium, or a collection of school kid drawings at the Bryant Museum Library—Bryant’s legacy is lasting, 35 years later. **2**

10 of Our Favorite Paul W. “Bear” Bryant Quotes

1. **“If you believe in yourself and have dedication and pride—and never quit—you’ll be a winner. The price of victory is high but so are the rewards.”**

2. **“I ain’t never been nothin’ but a winner.”**

3. **“Sure, I’d love to beat Notre Dame, don’t get me wrong. But nothing matters more than beating that cow college on the other side of the state.”**

4. **“It’s not the will to win that matters—everyone has that. It’s the will to prepare to win that matters.”**

5. **“If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, we did it. If anything goes really good, then you did it. That’s all it takes to get people to win football games for you.”**

6. **“If a man is a quitter, I’d rather find out in practice than in a game. I ask for all a player has so I’ll know later what I can expect.”**

7. **“Mama wanted me to be a preacher. I told her coachin’ and preachin’ were a lot alike.”**

8. **“I always want my players to show class, knock ‘em down, pat on the back, and run back to the huddle.”**

9. **“If they don’t have a winning attitude, I don’t want them.”**

10. **“If you want to walk the heavenly streets of gold, you gotta know the password, “Roll, Tide, Roll!”**

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