



Life Group Stories

By Loretta Smith

Our family joined Dawson in July 1966. We each attended Sunday School classes for our age group for a year. My husband, Wayne, attended a men's class, and I attended a lady's class, both in the same department. Then, in 1967, Betty Pittman, our Education Director, asked Wayne if he would be the director of the Adult One department (Young Adults) and asked me if I would teach one of the women's classes. We both agreed to take on the new roles and served alongside the other teachers in that department.

We worked all year long trying to get young couples to come to Sunday School. They had many excuses: one of many was they didn't want to be separated into different classes. A typical statement might be, "My husband is a Methodist, or he doesn't want to go in a class where he doesn't know anyone." Our outreach efforts (we visited, wrote cards, etc.) did not seem to reach many people. We decided to have a meeting with Betty to get some advice. Her suggestion was for us to go to the Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina and see if we could learn any ideas that might help.

We took the family and went to Ridgecrest Conference Center that summer. Wayne took the course for directors. I took a course for teachers. My teacher was Peter Ray Jones. He had some connection with Dawson, and so his name was familiar to me. On the first day, he talked about how people expected other people to look and act at that time, and that future generations would not fit the same mold. And he said that we, as Baptists, needed to get ready for that change. Then he asked the question, "Have any of you tried having a class when the young couple can be in the same class together? We then discussed the advantages and disadvantages. Each day, I would share with Wayne all the information that I had learned in class. By the end of the week, we were both sold on the idea of trying a couple's class at Dawson. Now, we had to sell Betty Pittman. And we did!

At the beginning of the new church year, we began a class for young couples and had 30 prospects. The church had purchased an old house near the campus. They took out some partitions in the house so we would have enough room for a class, and that's where our class met. Years later, that house was replaced by the first missionary house.

Wayne and I did team teaching, and we taught this class a little differently. To prepare, we both studied all week, and then on Saturday, we worked together to see which one wanted to take what part of the lesson, introduction, Scripture, and closing. On Sundays, we had the couples sit in a circle so that everyone could be seen. We had a kitchen in the house, and on the first Sunday of the month, we brought food for lunch and had fellowship. Often, we'd invite the class into our home for additional fellowship. By the end of the year, we had 100 attendees on our roll.

We also had several non-Sunday activities. We'd take the church bus and go to nearby parks. We played volleyball on Wednesdays after the service, and we even had an overnight retreat, with activities planned by the young people. At that time, all classes were promoted each new church year in the fall. Our class was promoted, and so we started a new class. Soon, other classes decided to become a class for couples, and we've had them ever since.

Leading Dawson's first couples' class was a great blessing for my family. We loved every couple and thank the Lord for each of them. This special time for learning and fellowship was a wonderful way to start a marriage and their new life together.



Loretta Smith has been a Dawson member for almost 60 years. Throughout that time, she has served in many areas of the church, including Life Group Leader, Missionary House Team, and the Dawsonaires. She has also served on multiple mission projects.