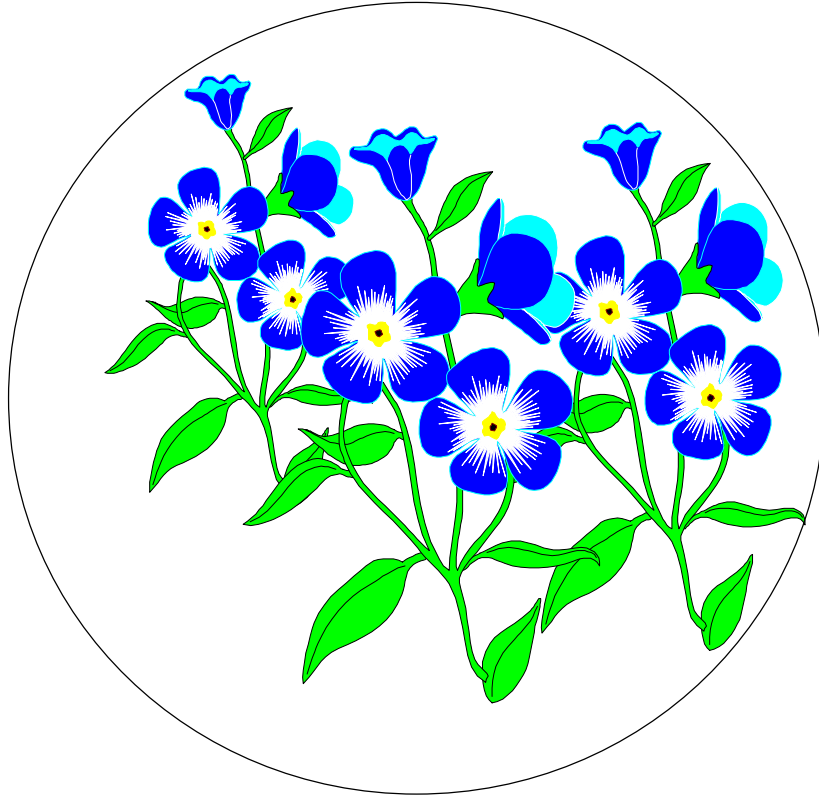


# Reminiscences



## My Old Kentucky Home

When I was a boy, I lived in a big old log house in the mountains in Kentucky. It sat on 1500 acres two miles out of Paintsville, Kentucky. It had six big rooms. It used to be a boarding house for coal miners and farm workers. Each room went out to the porch, so when we wanted to visit with each other, we had to go outside on the porch. Sometimes it was really cold!

It had six big open fireplaces, one in every room. It had two stone chimneys built at each end of the house. We didn't build any fires at night, so we kept warm by piling on blankets and quilts. It was hard getting by in the winter.

We had three big barns, one for hay and cattle, one for the two horses and the two milk cows, and one which we hung tobacco in. We had three open dug wells. Our two horses, Jack and Jule, pulled the wagon and the farm machinery. We managed to have a car to go to church on Sunday. It was a '37 Plymouth. The old truck was used for hauling coal and tobacco from the field. It was an old '39 Chevrolet flat bed truck. We also used it to go up in the mountains to get our winter's coal out of the abandoned coal mine.

When I look at pictures of the old house and barn, I feel like I'm missing something.

-- *Glen A. Baldwin*

## City of Excitement

In southeastern Europe, in the heart of the Balkans, Beograd spreads its hand to everybody; Beograd offers its heart to everybody; Beograd opens its door to everybody.

Many famous authors have written books about this miraculous city. Many songs are devoted to Beograd. Beograd lies in Avala's shade. Through its veins flow two rivers, the Sava and the Danube. Beograd has a soul and a heart. Kne Mihajla Street gives magical power to this beautiful city. This street is an art, culture, and fashion stage. Also, it is the most popular promenade in the country. In its cafes and restaurants begin many loves and many businesses.

Skadarlija and Kalimegdan are the oldest parts of Beograd. Both are beautiful and very interesting—Kalimegdan with its old towers and Skadarlija with its specific edifices. Newly built glass buildings make a contrast to old historical monuments. Many museums and theaters make Beograd's life more interesting.

Only Beograd lives twenty-five hours a day

*-- Dragana Stevic*

## Reaching My Goals With God's Help

I never dreamed that I could be where I am today being successful, attending the LEARN GED program at the YWCA in Cincinnati, Ohio.

I was born in 1927 way out in the country on a farm. In my childhood we were very poor. There was one tragedy after another in my family. I lost my mother at age twelve. A year later I lost my sister Catherine because of a burst appendix. The next year my younger sister Viola (age nine) and I (age fourteen) were the only survivors of a fire that destroyed our home.

Viola and I had to live with separate relatives. The relatives that I lived with lived in a very small and isolated log cabin by the creek. When it rained there was only a narrow broken-down bridge to walk over. In the rain I had to cross this bridge alone and cut through the wet fields to catch the school bus. Then I had wet feet all day.

The people that I lived with were very cruel. They abused me by yelling, "You're no good for anything!" I didn't have any opportunities or privileges that I needed in my teen years. They also opened the door to incest, and I was used as a slave. I felt very alone and afraid. Although I was not "in hiding" as Anne Frank was, I felt many of the same emotions that she did.

At age 22 I made a decision to save my life. I decided to board at a place for single working women. There I felt safe and had peace of mind.

In my life I did all kinds of work in factories, stores, stock rooms, and nursing homes. I also cared for the elderly in their own homes. I was a bus girl in cafeterias and helped the customers with their trays. I am not working now, but I enjoy volunteering. The last place that I volunteered was in the library in a church. Even though I had never done this type of work, I learned a lot and gained confidence in myself.

In January 1998, I learned that the YWCA had a LEARN GED program. I took the test and was accepted for the classes. I was hesitant to begin and thought that I would not be able to change my lifestyle by being there regularly, but I'm grateful that I met such caring people who have helped me and wanted the very best for my future. Above all, I know that I have improved in reading, writing, and spelling. Now I'm thankful that God has opened this door.

-- M. Foltz

## Ramadan

Ramadan for Muslims is the time of year we dedicate to fasting, praying, and becoming one with Allah (God) and our family. This is also the time we refrain from things that are not peaceful or that will take you from a spiritual state of mind.

Ramadan takes place in the month of December and goes through the New Year. This month is chosen because December is when Prophet Muhammad (peace is upon him) received the first of the Quran revelations. It is also the time of year that brings the highest suicide rate, the most debt is accumulated, the time that the most alcohol and drugs are consumed and people are most stressed.

The adults fast from sun up to sun down as a sacrifice to God for the year of blessings. We read the Holy Quran every day to our children and ask them questions about what they're thankful for. We refrain from foul language, arguing, and spanking during this holy month. We make five mandatory prayers daily.

Ramadan has added so much to my life. I am so happy that my children are being taught that no material things such as gifts or a pretty tree can compare to the blessings of life, health, and strength that Allah (God) has given us to take us into the New Year. We end the month with a feast and celebration. Families come together in praise and humility to reflect on God's true mercy and divine guidance.

Happy New Year and God Bless

-- *Traci Cornist*

## What a Day

I'd just gotten home from a two-week stay in the hospital and wasn't feeling all that perky, but I decided to go ahead and have the family Thanksgiving dinner as we'd had for years. I phoned my two daughters, and they agreed to let me do it if they could bring something for the meal.

The day before the "big day" I made the traditional pumpkin pies and a black raspberry pie, which the girls were especially fond of. The homemade noodles were laid to dry overnight on a sheet of wax paper.

The "big day" arrived, and I got up early to get things done before the family started trickling in. It wasn't long before tantalizing aromas wafted throughout the house. The family started coming, and by one-thirty all were here. It was the usual chitchat and small talk.

It was soon time to get the turkey out of the oven when, you guessed it, the oven control was still on "preheat!" I was so embarrassed! And the teasing never stopped all the rest of the day. But a transformation seemed to take place. The card table was taken from the press, a deck of cards seemed to appear as if by magic, and a game of euchre was started. Knick-knacks were removed from the coffee table and the little ones got out Candy Land, a deck of Crazy Eights, and even Old Maid. But most of all, the conversation flowed like sweet wine. In no time at all, the turkey was ready. As I sat down at the table, I couldn't help but think of an artist's palette with the orange of the candied yams, the green of the green beans, the white of the fluffy mashed potatoes, the burgundy-red of the cranberry sauce, and all the different colors.

Even today, when I have a family dinner, I notice Mike, a son-in-law, always glances at the oven setting. It was one day I'll always remember.

*-- Helen Wiggins*

## Impressions

I've been in the United States for one year. The first time in a new country is the most difficult time for immigrants. But, step by step, everybody overcomes this period and builds a new life. The same has happened with me during this year. I got my driving license (my husband and father-in-law spent a lot of their spare time teaching me how to drive a car); I began to work; my son went to kindergarten. Every one of these events was very joyful, exciting, and new for me. All of them let me understand more about America, to learn something new. But nothing can compare with two different impressions that I had this summer and in the beginning of September. And I'd like to share them with you.

The first one is about our trip to Russia. We went there to visit my family. Anxious things happened during this year in my country. All our American friends and my husband's relatives tried to dissuade us from going to Russia. But my husband made the decision in spite of everything. "We must go because you miss your country and your family so much." Yes, that was the truth. I really missed my homeland. It is a beautiful country with friendly and hospitable people. For two weeks I was so happy. I could understand every single word; I could speak without thinking about mistakes and grammar. I met relatives and friends. I was happy to tell them how my life had changed since I came to America. I think everybody understands those feelings, when you go back to your native land after a long time of absence. Every small thing becomes so important to you and makes you so happy.

My second impression was a trip inside America to Virginia Beach. That was my dream – to see the ocean. In September it came true. The season was finishing when we got there, so there weren't too many people on the streets or on the beach. We arrived in the evening at our hotel. I was waiting all day and like a child I asked my husband all the time on the way to this place, "How far is it? Where is the ocean?" You can't see it until the very last moment. During the time when we filled out our papers in the hotel I still couldn't see the water, but you can feel something huge, vivid, alive, and incomprehensible. It fascinates, makes you wait for something, and finally it comes. After a while we went to our room. The blinds were closed. My husband opened them, and the greatest view of the ocean stopped all my words and feelings – only the delight which was growing with understanding that it is something inexplicable and beautiful, excellent, and you are next to this. The water wasn't quiet. High waves came and went. The ocean was breathing. I felt that I had touched the eternity of ages.

The nature in American has given me a lot of good feelings. I enjoy the really beautiful pictures, but the ocean is the strongest one for me.

-- *Natalya A. Stare*



## Years Ago

I wonder what it would be like  
Living years ago.  
Using horses, pulling plows  
To ready fields to sow.

The work of pulling endless weeds  
And hoeing in the sun.  
To reap the fruits of harvest  
When the work is done.

Drawing water from the well  
To do the daily chores.  
Bathing, washing, cooking,  
And scrubbing dirty floors.

Hunting, fishing, chopping wood,  
The work was never done.  
Mending, sewing, baking,  
For each and everyone.

I wonder what it would be like  
Living years ago.  
They worked and toiled from dusk to dawn,  
How hard I'll never know.

-- Carol Rudder

## Sharecropping

I was born in Abbeyville, Georgia. I was raised on a farm, without a father. I was my mother's sole means of survival. In the state of Georgia you didn't start school until the age of six. And I was taken out of school at the age of seven. I had to work – I helped as a man – in a man's place from the age of seven. This is why I go to school now. I am trying to learn to read and write better.

I moved to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1956. I got a job my second day in Cleveland, as a truck driver. I drove a truck for 18 years. I couldn't read addresses, so I would take the first two letters of the address – names of the companies – and I would compare the name of the company with the name on the bill. I couldn't read it, but I could compare letters.

And I had to stop in restaurants, truck stops, and eat. I couldn't read the menu, so I would always order hamburgers. When I got tired of eating hamburgers, I would jive the waitress, "What do you have today that you would like?" "Oh, we have smothered liver and onions, we have steak and mashed potatoes, we have chicken with two side dishes of vegetables." So, after naming what she would like to eat from the menu, I would order what I thought I would like, besides hamburgers!

So now, as of today, I'm a student at Project: Learn. I am proud to be a student here. I enjoy coming to Project:LEARN.

*-- Harold Lester*

## Finding the Right Home

It was December 1996, and I was visiting Mrs. Washington, a gentle lady and new neighbor who lived on the next street. She wanted to give me a present for picking her up for a class at church. She invited me to sit as she apologized for the cat hair. Trying not to notice the smell, I said, "Oh! That's OK." There were cats climbing and jumping on the furniture, rubbing against my leg, and wanting to play. I inquired about the one with the limp, and Mrs. Washington started to tell me her story.

*It was late in the evening on a very cold day. I heard a thump at the side door, looked out, but didn't see anything or anyone. But for some reason I opened the door anyway. Looking down I saw a cat looking up at me. I pushed open the screen and asked, "What are you doing here?" The cat ran inside and went straight to the basement. While I stood there in surprise, the cat came back up the steps and out the door. I laughed to myself and went back to what I was doing. It was about 12:00 p.m. or after when there was another thump at the door. I opened it and the cat came in with something in her mouth. It was a kitten. She headed for the basement, and a few minutes later she was back at the door. Well, she continued her going and coming until there were three kittens inside. By now it was very late, and she stayed with them for a while. My guess was she was feeding them. Sometime before daylight, she made a noise to let me know she was ready to leave. I got up and opened the door, and off she went. Come morning I went to check on the kittens. Well, I tell you, that cat had found a soft, warm spot for her kittens.*

*Two days passed, and the cat had not returned. The cat was found dead two houses from my sister, who lives about a block and a half down the street. The house was empty, and it seems the family had recently moved away leaving the cat behind. I later saw that the smallest kitten had a limp. It had probably happened when the mama cat was dragging it through the snow. My family complains about the smell and thinks I should get rid of them. But I can't because the cat brought them to me. So, that's how I got these cats.*

Spoken with such compassion, you would think Mrs. Washington was talking about children instead of cats. "That's a wonderful story," I said. "Thank you for sharing it with me." We could all learn from that story. Love like that is missing from motherhood of the '90s. Lately, too many mothers are abandoning and abusing their children.

“Mrs. Washington, yours is probably the only kind voice the cat heard as she made her way up the street. Kindness is something all God’s creatures can understand.”

“Yes,” she said in agreement.

There were more than 25 houses the cat passed up before coming to your door. But she did not give up her search, sensing she would not survive much longer. I’m reminded of how Jesus compared a mother’s love to that of our Heavenly Father for us. Not equal to, but the closest we’ll see.

Mrs. Washington is no longer with us. She died in 1998. But I will tell her story of the cat as often as I can to remind us of a mother’s responsibility.

*-- Annie Bell*

## The Best Christmas Ever

The best Christmas I can remember was in 1990. The log house, the real Christmas tree, and all the home-cooked meals made it special.

My husband and I decided to go to the country for Christmas. We stayed in my mother's log house in Kentucky. We had to cut wood to heat the old log house; and, believe me, you will remember to get up in the middle of the night to put wood in the fireplace. If you don't, you will freeze to death.

The Christmas tree is a big deal down in the country. You cut your tree down yourself because Christmas trees are on the farmland everywhere. That is so neat -- to cut down a real Christmas tree, bring the tree inside, and make your own decorations. That means you don't have to drive all over town looking for that special tree. Instead, you walk the land until you find that special tree.

The cooking was all home-cooked meals. I loved getting up early and fixing homemade bread. All I can tell you is you'd better know how to cook because there is no fast food.

Times have changed so much. I wish my children knew what it was like to live in a log house, go out to cut your own fresh Christmas tree from the land you live on, and cook your meals at home. Maybe someday they will.

*-- Martha H. Brinker*

## Going Fishing with Uncle Leo

"If heaven isn't on the lake, I'm not going!" This was just one of Uncle Leo's many famous quotations. His wisdom and experience went to the outer fringes of his imagination and always put me in awe and envy. Opening my scrapbook releases a flood of memories of summer fishing trips with Uncle Leo. Uncle Leo, my father's older brother, was an ancient mariner who treasured life on the lake.

It was an odd thing, but Uncle Leo and my mother didn't get along very well at all. Mom referred to him as a crusty old sea dog that suffered with bottle fatigue. My dad would come to Uncle Leo's defense stating he was only trying to escape an unhappy past. Then Mom's vocabulary would leapfrog into action. One of her favorites was "for crying out loud, his entire lifestyle has been boozed and snoozed." I think this may have all started with my father having to pay for Uncle Leo's last two divorces. Mom said that he should be totally ashamed and covered in embarrassment for being in a constant state of no income and that he had all the speed of an arthritic snail when it came to paying back my father.

Actually, Uncle Leo lived off the income of a small, old insurance claim that he had been awarded. Mom said that his attorney, Perry Loophole, was only missing an eye patch and a parrot and would steal a dead fly from a blind spider. Mom often referred to Uncle Leo as a park bench lunatic who was a tycoon in the art of leisure. Normally, we kids would be sent from the room whenever his name came up. I guess he had a habit of leading a path that meandered slightly off course, which often stirred up quite a commotion in the family. He embraced the notions of smoking and chewing tobacco and loved to drink what he referred to as Vodka soda. He said it provided him with inspiration. Myself, I really don't think he was a threat to society as mom often indicated.

Uncle Leo was not one to hold a grudge. Even though at times he thought mom had the disposition of an untipped waitress, I know he loved her anyway.

He always looked kind of old. I wasn't sure of his exact age, but I know he had been in W.W.I (you know, the war to end all wars).

He often held us kids spellbound with his stories of trench warfare in France and how he had been one of the first Americans over the top. Mom said someone had pushed him.

Each summer as soon as school was out, Uncle Leo would drive up to get me and take me to his island for a week of fishing and camping. Around March, I would find myself already waiting for our unpredictable adventure of summer to begin. It was still early in the '50s, a time when boats were still made of wood, and Uncle Leo's had been lost in a time warp somewhere. He referred to it as his "dream

missile.” Actually, it was an old canoe. He took it with him just about every place he went. He had this old car he had converted into a pick-up truck. When he would come to pick me up, I could see the smoke from the engine long before I could see him and his “missile hauler.” Mom called it his “Spanky and Buckwheat” contraption.

Getting to his island was half the fun. We would ride in the “missile hauler” for at least two hours; then, we would load all the beer gear into the canoe for the crossing to his island. Just the sheer pleasure of spending time with Uncle Leo on his Fishing Paradise was better than being anywhere else. Uncle Leo’s fishing skills were legendary and his tactics near mystical. Mom said he didn’t know zip about fishing and probably didn’t even have a license. But he showed me the creative process of baiting the hook the proper way and said he had minnows in his bloodstream. All of his fishing equipment was brand new (just 20 years ago). We were fishing detectives. Each evening around the campfire, we would just talk and enjoy a good cigar. Uncle Leo could fish, eat sardines, and drink beer, all while never having to leave his hammock. He would tell me things I would need to know later in life, like “phase one” was to dream. “Phase two” was not to procrastinate about phase one and things like that.

He told me of his plans to turn the island into a monkey farm someday and about all the money he would make by selling them to the circus; then, he would be able to finally pay back my dad. And how when he was a child, Grandma would make him eat everything on his plate because millions of people were starving in China. Now, because of those starving people in China, he said he could no longer appear in public in a swimsuit. With so many fish and so many stories, as in the blink of an eye, our week would fly by. Returning home, Mom would always be waiting for us. I knew that look. She always started with “here comes Blackbeard with his student back from the avoid-work hideout.” Our fishing trips were always a voyage I enjoyed immensely and would not soon forget.

Of course, that was many years ago. I can still picture Uncle Leo swaying in the breeze in his island hammock. Today, I often think about those days of the past, and his voice is still in my mind. As we boarded the canoe, he would say with his colorful speech, “This is where the dreams begin.” Then I can dimly recall my mother saying, “He had waited so long for his ship to come in that his pier collapsed.”

As for me, I never let on that I knew the island sitting on the edge of the lake was Mouse Island. To me it always was and always will be Uncle Leo’s “Shangri-La.”

*-- Phil Edwards*

## Christmas in Ukraine

Following the harvest and after all the work in the fields has been completed comes the holiday season. Now people rest from work and take time to visit with one another. This helps strengthen family ties. They are thankful for all of their family possessions, which are their riches. Life is simple and pleasant in Ukrainian villages. The holiday celebration begins in December with the Feast of St. Nicholas and goes through January with the celebration of the birth of Christ and then the Epiphany.

The favorite holiday for children is St. Nicholas Day, which falls on December 19. The children want to be well behaved. They listen to their parents and other adults because they are afraid that St. Nicholas will not bring them gifts. St. Nicholas always brings delicious candy, cookies, and fruits. Children who are especially good also receive a story. St. Nicholas travels from house to house and leaves gifts under the children's pillows. Children always try to wait for St. Nicholas by not falling asleep. Some are lucky enough to get a glimpse of him. Those who do fall asleep are not that disappointed because they are still rewarded with a gift.

Finally Christmas Eve comes. Ukraine has a lot of beautiful old traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation. It seems like every city, every town, every village has something different.

We put up the Christmas tree right before the Holy Supper. Usually the tree comes from the nearest forest. Children decorate the tree while Mother and Grandmother prepare the meal. This evening, all the food must be meatless. Christmas Eve is a strict fast day. There will be twelve different foods just like there were twelve apostles. When the children have finished decorating the tree, Father and Grandfather bring sheaths of wheat. They make a greeting to the family, "I wish you all joy at this Holy Supper with the Birth of Christ from now until Easter, and from Easter to next Christmas and for hundreds of years more." Then they cover the straw on the table with a tablecloth. Women place the meal on the table, light one candle in the middle of the table, and all kneel down to pray. Then all sit down to eat.

The first thing you must eat is the consecrated bread. Grandfather throws a spoonful of kutya (wheat) on the ceiling to see if it sticks. This is a tradition that tries to predict how next year's crops will be. If the kutya sticks to the ceiling, next year's harvest will be plentiful.

Everyone tries to return home to celebrate this Holy Supper with the family. If someone can't come home for the holidays, an empty place setting and a chair are put out as a reminder. Carolers



go from house to house, singing beautiful Ukrainian Christmas songs. No one sleeps that night. Carolers call at everyone's home. No food is wasted. After supper all the dishes are left on the table for the remembrance of deceased family members, and no work is performed. After Christmas Eve we celebrate Christmas for three more days.

It makes me feel so warm inside to share with you all those memories. I wish all of you the best and hope you have a nice holiday season.

*-- Zenia Kovalska*

## Hair Day

My mother was born on a farm in a place called Stamper' Fork. She grew up during the Depression years. They didn't have any electricity or inside plumbing in that area of the country. Times were hard for almost everyone at that time.

Mom had five brothers and four sisters (one died shortly after being born). They all worked very hard as they mostly lived off the land. They had to get up at the crack of dawn to do the chores. The girls made breakfast and the boys fed the livestock and milked the cows. Sometimes the girls helped with those chores too. The boys worked in the fields with Pap, and after the household chores were done, the girls also helped in the fields.

I always loved to hear the stories my mom told of her growing-up years. When she was around fifteen years old, she went to work sewing clothes at the National Youth Administration (NYA) to help out with finances for the family. The NYA was funded by the government to keep young men and women off home relief and either train them in job skills or help them stay in school.

Her parents, Mammy and Pap, were very religious, very strict, and didn't believe in women cutting their hair. After Mom had worked at this place for over a year, she felt like she was old enough to make some of her own decisions, like for one, cutting her hair. Her hair was really long and naturally wavy; it had never been cut. A lot of the other young girls working with her had their hair cut short and permed, so she decided she would do the same. She knew Mammy wouldn't agree for her to get hair cut, so she told Mammy she wanted to spend the night with her older sister who had gotten married and moved close to town. Mom caught the evening train to her sister's house. She enjoyed riding the train; it was one of her favorite things to do.

The next morning Mom and her sister went to the beauty shop, and Mom got her hair cut and permed. It turned out really short and very, very curly since it had some natural wave in it.

All the way home Mom dreaded facing Mammy, and the train ride was not as enjoyable as it had been the evening before.

Mammy was on the porch when Mom got there. She took one look at Mom and started crying. Mammy said, "You threw away all my work." Mammy just kept crying because she felt like Mom's hair was her handiwork, as she loved to comb and fix it.

Mom's grandpa was sitting in a chair on the porch. He only had one leg because the other one was cut off just below the knee and he couldn't walk. Pap was up in the field, and he hollered down to Grandpa and wanted to know what in tarnation was going on down

there. Grandpa hollered back, "Marthie's come home and done something to her hair and Sallie is cutting up."

Anyway, Pap wanted some water brought up, so Mammy made Mom take him a bucket of water. Mom put a straw hat on her head so Pap wouldn't see her hair, but just as she got to him a puff of wind blew off her straw hat. Pap just looked at her and started laughing. "You look like a little foggy-headed ewe peeping through a brush pile." That was all he ever had to say about it.

Mom didn't realize it would hurt her mother so much or she would have never gotten her hair cut andpermed. Of course, Mammy got over it.

*-- Norma J. King*

## Cherry Tobacco

When I was younger, I would beg my parents to take me to my favorite place --- Vinton Co., McArthur, Ohio. I would spend my entire summer vacation there with my loving Aunt Martha, caring Uncle John, and their ten courageous children. They made me feel special, loved, and part of their enormous family.

I spent most of my time outside helping with chores. I would help gather chicken eggs. An old yellow school bus was used for a chicken coop. The first step through its door took my breath away. There was an unexpected strong odor of ammonia from the chicken droppings. I hurriedly gathered the lukewarm eggs and put them into a well-used straw basket. A faraway rooster crowed announcing feeding time. Dirt danced in the single ray of sunlight that shot through the broken pane of the only window that hadn't been painted black. A tree branch scraped the outside of the bus, creating the sound of fingernails running across a chalkboard. The teeth-grinding sound echoed into the bus and gave me goosebumps.

Another chore I learned to enjoy was milking their goat every morning just at dawn. The clean, crisp morning air tingled my skin, and I inhaled big gulps of it. Old Nanny chewed her grass patiently while she waited for her portion of grain. Dewy grass moistened the corners of her mouth when she darted her long, hot-pink tongue out, and a cloud of smoky moisture came from her grey nostrils. My cousin Brenda fed the friendly nanny goat straight from a feeder pouch as I milked her, so that she couldn't bite me. The beast nuzzled into me as I emptied her swollen udder. The goat's skin was hot and smooth. The spray of creamy white milk came flowing into my pail.

I passed up the opportunity to feed the smelly, fat pigs with flies on their noses, pink curly tails, and hogs wash on their backs. Instead I helped Aunt Martha gather wood and coal for the old pot-bellied cook stove to get it hot and ready for cooking our supper. They also used it for heating. I loved the smell of the wood and the coal with a hint of freshly brewed coffee mingled in. Uncle John's cherry pipe tobacco added an even more special aroma to the large, old house.

I went to bed early and listened to the sounds surrounding my adventurous world. A log crackled in the cozy wood stove. From a distance a whippoorwill often sang to me in a poet's voice, and I would drift into a peaceful sleep.

Today the old house is no longer standing. In 1993, Uncle John died quietly in his sleep. The day before he died he shot two deer. He had always wanted to bag two deer in one day. I hope he got the big one that he had been hunting for so many years. Aunt

Martha now lives at a nearby location in a mobile home. She still uses the same wood stove. When I go visit her I can still smell th wood smoke mixed with coffee and (can it be) the sweet aroma of cherry tobacco.

-- *Christine Deal*

## Wildmen

Glistening gold, and whatever hues of the rainbow in proximity for it to reflect, it was truly beautiful. It was a tenor sax, propped up in a lovely, blue, velvet-lined case, and I couldn't take my eyes off it. Yeah sure there were plenty of other musical instruments for flutaphone alumni and their parents to rent or buy at this display. This, however, was the only tenor, and once I saw it, I would look at nothing else.

The salesman, distinguished looking in a suit, slicked-back white hair, moustache, and glasses, brought the sax gingerly out of the case. He adjusted a neckstrap on me (to support the sax), hooked me up, and let me play a few notes. The sax was almost as big as I. I had barely enough wind to play it, and my child's hands just stretched to cover the keys. No matter; this was it! The lower range on a tenor made for a wider range of parts you could play than on an alto sax. Besides that deeper, gutsier sound I had heard on radio just served to make the tenor more desirable.

"Why don't you try one of those altos or a clarinet? You're awfully small for that big thing." Mom spoke and burst my bubble. I was no longer John Coltrane, but a scrawny little kid.

"Aw Mom, everybody is going to have them! I can handle this, honest! I'll be too busy practicing to bug Grandma and Little Brother. Give me a chance, you'll see!" I was begging my ass off, but it was beg or bypass the tenor.

"Let the boy have the big one, eh? He's not a midget forever you know. He's got the wind, he's strong enough to lift it and carry it, so what's the problem?" Dad was taking my side. Excellent! We prevailed, and the tenor found a good home . . . ours.

I not only learned to play, but play pretty well. This was possible because of my friend Gary. He was a natural born musician, and everyone that played with him or around him got better. We'd take turns going to each other's houses (a few blocks apart) and play band music, lesson music, Monopoly, radio, and records. It was really cool when Gary's dad broke out his big band music books and "blew the cobwebs out" of his tenor sax. We then had trios with one alto and two tenors. Needless to say, I packed my sax and music folder into my Radio Flyer wagon quite often to make the pilgrimage to Gary's house. Gary and I both stated at this point in time that we wanted to be band directors. He would follow through with his dream, while I would follow a lot of dead ends.

By junior high, Gary and I played sax, clarinet, oboe and bassoon and whatever else we could get our hands on. Gary had also put together an instrumental quartet. We played big band tunes, covers of Beatles, Dave Clark Five, Gary Lewis, Pet Clark, Wipeout, .

. . etc. Our gigs were mostly dinners for local lodges and school dances. Our mothers got together so we always “looked nice” in our maroon blazers, gray slacks, and white turtlenecks. All the arrangements on the pop music were figured out and written out by hand from sheet music that Gary purchased at music stores. With the advent of guitar-driven bands with vocals, and high school, we kind of went our separate ways.

Marching band was fun too. Gary and I had started early (grade school) thanks to 4-H band. We went to every kind of parade, the state fair, and even sat in the grandstand to play between harness races at the county fair.

There was one sadistic irony that seemed to plague every marching band. Nearly all of them wore white shoes. Nearly all of them would be stuck behind the equestrian contingent of any and all parades. Ask any band mother about horseshit and white bucks.

High school marching band brought majorettes, summer practices, and band camp into play. On the bus trips my harmonica played along with whatever anyone felt like singing. It was also during this period the Wildmen came to be. Mostly sax players, a few trumpets, trombones and drums, we were devoted to mischief as much as music.

One example of the Wildmen in action was during my junior year. A couple of guys would lead me over to the opposing team’s bleachers after halftime of the football games we played at. I wore dark glasses as they did also. I’d play a five-minute set on the harmonica, while they held their hats out (we were in band uniforms). We were doing pretty well with this, until the band director followed us on the sly one night. Once we cranked up, he put a detention slip in each of our band hats. Hell, I never said I was blind . . . near-sightedness ought to count for something!

School band sponsored all sorts of neat things through the years. Solo competitions, concert band and marching band competitions, . . . all involved coed music, travel, and fun. This wasn’t enough for the Wildmen going into their senior year. They wanted a jazz band to play some of the big band, jazz, R & B, and rock music they grew up listening to and loving.

What our band director arranged was for us to spend our second semester study hall practicing for what he called a “lab band.” Hell, we weren’t retrievers or rats, why not a jazz band! To add insult to injury, his insipid saccharin selections of “musak” must have been spawned at the bottom of an elevator shaft.

The bright spot was that the director would leave for most of the period to go across the building and have a smoke in the teachers’ lounge. The minute he was down the hall, whoever was on lookout yelled “Wayne Cochran and the C. C. Riders!” We would at

once break into any one of our collective eclectic repertoire. We played, swung and bobbed our horns, cut up, . . . what we had wanted to do to begin with. When the director would return (which wasn't often) we would just say we were taking a break and resume the elevator etudes.

Our group included eleven Wildmen and one Rosa. She was a great trumpet player. She was a great arranger too. Between her and Gary, we always had something new and fun to try out.

When she had transferred mid-term to our school in her senior year, Rosa made sure she was in on every possible music activity (vocal and instrumental). This had been the impetus at first for her landing in the "lab band."

Rosa stood out appearance-wise to the wannabe fashionable and cool Wildmen. A walking anachronism, she wore long skirts, sweaters, and saddle shoes handed down from older sisters (she was one of 14 kids). Her black hair was pulled back in a bun. Her face was accented by a pair of butterfly glasses so thick, that when she stared into the sun, the magnifying effect caused smoke to come out of her ears. But with this in mind, deep down most of us knew we weren't exactly celebrity look-alikes, . . . and she could play!

Teenage boys in a group often joke around to the point of being obnoxious. Any heckling of Rosa got dismissed by her rapid-fire one-liners. I guess any girl growing up with eight brothers wouldn't be cowed by cutups. The first day she was with the group set the tone.

"Hey Rosie, are you in the wrong class this period?" Larry was snickering behind his trombone.

A Doc Severinonesque riff on her trumpet got everyone's attention, and her reply kept it. "My name is not Rose, not Rosie, but ROSA, ROW-SAH! Would you like for me to call you Looser or Lumpy instead of Larry?"

We were having a good time with this group, as there was not a grade or real credit. Our bon temps were bom-barded, however, by an announcement from our band director that we were entered in a contest a month away (a week before graduation). No sweat, except that the set list he gave us looked like selections from a doctor's office.

The director's last name was unpronounceable, as it contained more consonants than a scrabble game. Everyone "affectionately" called him Mr. Ed. That is everyone but the Wildmen, who addressed him thus more for his uncanny resemblance to the posterior of the equine TV star of the same name.

This sucked! We went on strike. It was our way or no way. It was our group, our reputations. We were seniors and either we got creative control or forget it! Mr. Ed capitulated resentfully, telling us if



we did poorly in this competition, we would all get "F" for the last grading period in concert band. He clopped and snorted back to his stall where he pretty much stayed for the rest of the year.

Yeah! We did it, . . . but we spent the next few days bickering over which four songs to play for the contest. There was a whole gargantuan gamut of music that was really cool, but no set four tunes that turned everybody on. We were on the verge of descending into the nihilistic depths of deep shit.

"You guys want to hear my idea for a killer set?" Rosa chirped in during a lull in the rumblings. Her suggestion was met with silence and stares, as she continued. "We use Gary's arrangement for Brubeck's 'Take Five,' Gary and I both arrange Sam and Dave's 'Hold On' and James Brown's 'Cold Sweat,' and last we use my arrangement of this hot new Latin number."

Gary thought that would be fine, as the three tunes we knew had great horn parts. I cautioned, though, that the middle two selections might sound funny without vocals. "Who the hell is going to sing songs like that and make it work?" I worried.

"Me!" Rosa asserted. Her face quickly flushed the hue her name suggested from the resulting laughter and guffaws. As we quieted down, she defended "I've got the same range as most male singers, just an octave higher. I sing along with records and radio all the time. I sing in the choir, I sing in church, and I sing for pay at weddings, dances, and the like in Lorain."

Why not? We were gaining nothing by arguing. Besides, if Rosa and Gary put something together, the rest of us couldn't help but look good and sound even better.

The first time we got it together enough to add vocals, Rosa quelled any doubts we may have harbored about her singing Sam and Dave or James Brown. Her mousy appearance was the antithesis of her pure, powerful voice. She had the thrust and force of Aretha Franklin or Janis Joplin, but with her own unique sense of sound, phrasing, and style.

We were rolling now. Maybe the contest wasn't ours for the taking, but like Frank Sinatra said, we were doing it our way. We memorized our parts (like marching band). We practiced swinging (and spinning) our horns, and we even managed to learn a few dance steps. We were going to give it hell and enjoy ourselves to boot.

"My sisters, the twins are coming up from Miami for a visit. They've agreed to sing backup and dance for our last three songs." Rosa beamed one day as the contest drew even closer.

"That's nice," I said, not entirely sold on this newest twist. We figured the sound was the thing, but after all the work Rosa had put in, why not add backups? "Hey, that fourth song doesn't have vocals," I remembered.

"It will have, I wrote the song, and I'll have the lyrics in time," Rosa stated with confidence. She had led us to believe this was a Santana tune until now. The ploy worked. We loved this ballad that changed tempo and volume like a Camaro shifted gears and took turns. An original composition . . . what else did she have up her sleeve?

The time was at hand. All of the guys arrived at the mall where the contest was to take place. We were to go on last, but we were concerned that Rosa (usually early) wasn't there yet. Maybe we made her mad sending her the two dozen sweetheart roses earlier that day. We all signed the card and wrote in it "To Rosa, the greatest Wildman of us all! Knock 'em dead tonite!" Maybe we pissed her off.

"Hoo-Whee! Check out what's coming this way!" Frank (our drummer) said out of nowhere. It was easily the most beautiful girl in Lorain County. She had ebony shoulder-length hair slightly curled and pinned back on one side. The hair framed a lovely high-cheek-boned face that glided lithely along on a killer bod. She wore a western-style white shirt (with embroidered flowers), a black mini skirt (slit up one side), and high-heeled cowboy boots. She moved like a jungle cat . . . Hot damn! She was coming our way. She walked right up to us, stopped and flashed a dazzling smile. We were paralyzed. I noticed she had two sweetheart roses pinned in her hair with a silver and turquoise beret . . .

"Jesus Rosa!" I gasped.

"Hey, Jesus didn't give me the contact lenses or the outfit. I told you guys I want to be a musician. Why not try to look good? You guys told me to knock 'em dead. By the way thanks for the roses . . . you guys are really sweet. This group is the only thing I'll miss about high school." Rosa then hugged and kissed each one of us on the cheek in turn. She then said, "Just like we rehearsed. . . let's kick ass! Wildmen forever!"

Silently we watched the other bands. They were all good, but we were pumped up now. As our turn finally came, we scurried about the stage to set up. We removed the music stands and chairs. The other bands looked at us like we were nuts. We did a sound check with the mike . . . we took our places. It was showtime

Using my best announcer voice, I spoke into the mike. "Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to thank you all for coming. A special thanks to all our wonderful band parents and our distinguished director, Mr. Ed. And now, for your pleasure, the Wildmen Sho Band!"

I stepped back playing my beloved tenor sax to Dave Brubeck's "Take Five." Gary sounded better than Paul Desmond on the alto solos. The crowd was loving it. We weren't worried about

Mr. Ed going ballistic either. . . You see Rosa's brother and cousin were the policemen on duty (by coincidence?), so nobody, not even the elevator man, would be rushing the stage.

After our first number, I had to wait for the applause before I announced, "Please welcome our lead singer, Rosa!" She had handed her trumpet off to someone behind her (so no one would trip), and proceeded to the mike, making the sign of the Cross en route.

We had almost forgotten her sisters (the backup singers) when she took the mike. "I'd like to also introduce our backup singers, my sisters, the Hollywood Blondes as Papa calls them, Carmen and Consuelo!" She pointed to two figures shrouded almost nun-like in hooded ankle-length London fog coats, facing her at the foot of the stage. She turned to us and yelled, "HIT IT!"

We cut loose with the intro to "Hold On." Da-Da-Da-Da-Da-Dah! As we did, the sisters stepped out of the "fog" and strutted up on stage in sync with the music. Lord! Waist-length black hair, sleeveless white buckskin mini dresses (with fringe in all the right spots) and boots like Rosa's. They had deep tans from living in Florida and looked every bit the super vixens.

"Don't you ever be sad!" sang Rosa. The band answered instantly with "Dah! Dah!" while the twins bumped in unison. I was certain the mall custodian would be sweeping up male eyeballs later that evening. "Hold on, I'm coming . . . Hold on . . .," the three of them put their heads together wailing into the mike. We continued to play our hearts out, as we marveled at the Aztec Princess and her high priestesses at work.

"Thank you!" Rosa yelled above the applause as we finished. Before it was quiet, she yelled into the mike, "Are you ready, Boys?" "YEA !!" we roared back. "Two-three!" she barked. Dah, Dah, Da . . . Da-Da-Da! We played the intro into "Cold Sweat."

"I didn't care . . . about your past . . . I just want our love to last. . ." Rosa was in her zone. She and her sisters were so hot, it's wonder the sprinkler system wasn't triggered. They shimmered and shook, and bobbed and bumped . . . all the while singing like n tomorrow. "I break out" Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah, "in a cold sweat!" Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah! They all three did the splits on that last chord!

We were in Wildmen heaven now. As the girls danced, we stepped, swung our trombones and saxes, spun our trumpets, and played for all our collective half lifetimes of musical training were worth. We were really drawing a crowd now, and as they began to get quiet after "Cold Sweat," Rosa announced the last number.

"This one is called 'Papa.' It's for our Papa who worked in the shipyards and kept the family together when Mama died. No matter how tired, he always managed to play guitar and sing my sisters and me to sleep when we were little. Papa, we love you . . . one, two!"

The song began like we rehearsed, with the girls gently swaying, heads down. They began singing in Spanish, flowing along with the instrumentals. We didn't know what they were singing, but that didn't matter. Truly good music needs no set language. The minutes sped by like seconds, and it was over.

The crowd was berserk. They would not quiet down. From their midst, an old Hispanic Colonel Sanders-looking man made his way up on stage. Nobody stopped him. He began hugging and kissing three lovely and talented girls. He was crying. He was Papa .

. .

-- *Ken Tallon*