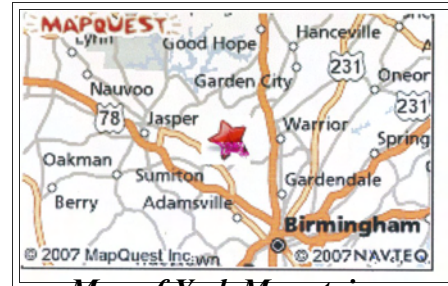


## Chapter One

The ‘Old Timers’ of York Mountain, a farming community of rural Walker County, Alabama often told the strange tales of the worst and strangest ice storm that had ever struck the mountain. Mules and cows died in their barn stalls, pigs died in their stalls and chickens froze in their hen houses from the severely frigid ice storm that swept across the mountain for two days. Birds lay frozen in the pastures and fields. It was told by some that the meadowlarks lay frozen for a day or so and would fly away when they thawed. Automobile and truck tires were frozen to the ground. There was no movement on the mountain except when neighbors were very slowly and cautiously out checking on each other for food and fuel. Those York Mountain folks were stoic. They rebuilt their roofs that had caved in by the added weight of the ice and the mountaintop community became better neighbors as they worked together in care and concern for each other.



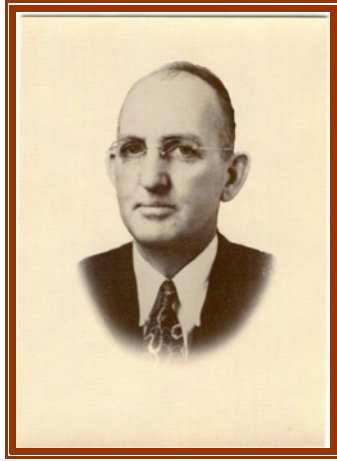
*Map of York Mountain*

There had been a flurry of unrelated activity for the past two days over at Professor and Mrs. Bryant’s Bungalow home amid all of the concerns of the devastation the ice storm had inflicted upon the people of York Mountain. Although the ice storm raged on with fury in its howling winds. I was the center of attention there for the past two days trying to come into this world amid this havoc of a deadly ice storm, raging as only a mountain storm can do, terrifying those caught up into it. It is an awesome experience, whether one is wrapped in swaddling clothes, furs or whatever. The cold, loneliness and terror is truly awesome in a mountain ice storm with freezing rain, when visibility is zero and you are all alone with the hostile elements. I was not alone however because the best midwife in the entire area was attending to my birth. I have been told that others also came and waited on my mamma’s every need such as the care for Sonny, who was now a year and a half old precocious adventuresome toddler demanding ones undivided attention.

The storm had been building for several days and when it broke loose to come over the mountain, it came in a rage; I came into this world with that storm. Mrs. Allums was our dear neighbor and the York Mountain Mid-Wife. She was well experienced. I have always had an “insey” rather than an “outsey” navel, so I am told that she did a good job. My mother was Nettie Jane “Jeanette” Norton Bryant of Auburn, Ala. She was a hard workingwoman. She wanted lots of babies and my father, Morton Hodgson Bryant of Stockton, Ala agreed with her. I must add that he strongly agreed with her, as I eventually had three brothers and three sisters. Death claimed my mother during her eighth pregnancy when I was eight years old, and was number two of the seven children.

She had studied and trained in Nursing at St. Margaret’s Hospital in Montgomery Ala, She switched to Elementary Education and went to Troy State Teachers College in Troy, Alabama. She and her sister, my Aunt Rosa, taught together in Alabama rural schools for three years before she met and married my father in Auburn, Alabama in 1926. The following year, my father graduated from Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, with a

degree in Vocational Agriculture Education and was assigned to be the first Vo-Ag teacher at the remote and primitive area consolidated school at York Mountain which was called Corner because it was in the corners of the counties of Jefferson, Walker and Blount. He wanted a challenging assignment with opportunities to work with farmers.



*Morton Hodgson Bryant*



*Nettie Jane Norton Bryant*

He wanted farm families with sons and daughters who would respond to his teaching new concepts of Progressive Farming. He certainly got just that, working with the wonderful people of York Mt. It was a good place to bring up a healthy family of robust and adventuresome children. They were a courageous couple indeed to pitch their tent in this land that neither of them knew anything about. He told me once that it was similar to a Christian Missionary going into a new land to work with a people, teaching them new concepts, which would be beneficial for them. His love of people and teaching was a gift.

My older brother, Morton Hodgson Bryant, Jr., was known as “Sonny” was born in Stockton, Alabama on July the fourth, 1927. My father told the aging attending family physician Dr. Hodgson, who had attended my father’s birth in 1902, to make the birth certificate read July the fifth because he would never have his own personal birthday if he had to share it with the whole nation. Dr. Hodgson did just that, and his birthday went down as 5 July 1927. My father was Morton Hodgson Bryant, named after Dr. Hodgson the attending physician, as was so often done in those days.



*Mamma & Sonny*

Let’s get back to that ice storm raging atop York Mountain. My father had tried unsuccessfully to free the Chrysler automobile from the ice for two days. The doors were frozen and the tires were stuck fast. The day after I was born, he heated water in the huge cast iron wash pots and began to slowly free the car with the hot water. He carefully drove down the mountain the seven miles to Summiton to summons old Dr. Gwinn to come up on the mountain and attend to me. He did come up and verified that all was well, collected his ten-dollar fee and filled out a birth certificate. I have been told the following story many times. When Dr. Gwinn asked what the date was, my father told him it was the second day of January. He put that down on the certificate, in ink. Then my father told him that I was born the day before, so he marked through the figure two

and put down one. Then my father told him the same old story he had told Dr. Hodgson about Sonny having a birthday on a national holiday, so Dr. Gwinn marked through one and inserted the figure two. Well, I did not particularly believe that story or have any interest in it until I went to join the Air Force and needed a birth certificate. I went to Montgomery, to The Bureau of Vital Statistics and .....sure enough, there it was, the scratched through corrections and the last clearly visible date was January 2, 1929.

Shortly after my father, mother and baby Sonny came to York Mountain, they engaged the services of Aunt Fanny Alexander of the nearby coal-mining town of Empire, to come and assist with household chores as a live-in. She turned her home in Empire over to her son Slick and came to live with us. She was wonderful. I think that she believed that her life mission was to care for us children. She dearly loved my father and mother and each of us children as if we were her very own flesh and blood. It was a most unusual symbiotic relationship. It was built on mutual love, respect and admiration with a spiritual bond. I always believed that she was the person pictured as Aunt Jemima on the cereal boxes. We all grew up with her as the other parent and when Mama died in 1937, Aunt Fanny became our accepted mother and we loved her. She was a master at scolding by using logic and reasoning, leaving only the shame and anguish at myself for my errant behavior. My father, mamma nor Aunt Fanny ever used physical force in discipline. She taught us to sing spirituals, but never as clear and lovely as she. When we would beg her, she would take us into the woods and teach us about trees and plants, living things in the soil and under the leaves, the life of animals, how to drink water from a flowing spring and to perform first aid to wounds and injuries with barks and leaves. Oh, she knew everything about everything. Whenever the family went on vacation, she went with us, complete with market baskets filled with foods she had prepared for the trip.

I knew nothing about racial differences until I was eighteen and in the Air Force. I got my nose bloody several times about racial insults, with no regrets. She stayed with us until I was 12 years old. Her health was failing and she wanted to spend her last days with her son, Slick and friends in Empire where she had maintained her home for him. We visited her regularly, as well as we all delighted in visiting her many times as adults for happy occasions. She was always our other mamma. I am certain that Aunt Fanny has many, many stars in her crown as she cares for some of God's children in heaven.

I do not remember the incident that has been told to me all of my young life by Aunt Fanny and my Aunts. It seems that when I was at the crawling stage, I was placed on the table where we all had our meals and it also served as a kitchen worktable. Mamma or Aunt Fanny had finished churning milk to make butter. The milk churn was a glass container of about two gallons and had a metal top with a turning handle that agitated the milk and cream to make butter and buttermilk. The story I have always been told was that I pushed over the churn trying to get to the butter inside and the churn and I ended up on the kitchen floor. The churn was broken and a piece of the glass deeply stuck into my forehead above my right eye. They pulled it out, stopped the bleeding, bandaged me up and that was the end of that. I was told that I was never taken to the doctor. My early school days pictures clearly indicates a depression in my forehead there and to this day a depression somewhat like a puncture or hole in the skull is easily felt. I have no scar.



*Sonny – Charles - Chippy*

I was probably about four years old when I asked Aunt Fanny why our dog ‘Chippie’ was behaving as she was with our neighbor’s dog. Aunt Fanny was always so kindly as to stop doing whatever it was she was doing and explain to us, our questions to her. I had seen cats and dogs and even cows, give birth to their offspring and was not really curious enough to



*Sonny – Charles - Chippy*

wonder how these miracles happened. She explained about animals mating and that fathers and mothers did something like that so God could bring them a baby. That satisfied my curiosity and I don’t remember ever asking anyone else about that mating thing or where babies came from. Our parents never talked to us about those thing and I suppose our curiosity level was below normal about such matters.

I very clearly remember the events of the birth of my siblings: John (1932). Jane (1933) and Donald (1935). The reason I remember these events so well was that we children would be sent to spend a day or so with one of the neighbors and when we would come home.... Waaa Laaa....a new baby. I thought Jane was just the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I was terrified that she would not wake up when they first let me hold her as I thought something bad had happened to her. Her name was Rowena Jane and I thought that Rowena meant that she was a little Indian Princess that had come to live with us with her dark complexion, dark and alert eyes, a smile and a full head of very black long hair. She wasn’t like the rest of us.



*Baby Jane*

I liked very much to hold all of the babies when Mama would let me. Barbara (1930) would become very possessive when I got to hold one of the babies. She would pull on my arms and pitch a connoption fit to hold that baby. If I got to hold another one, she would ignore hers and have that same fit for the one I was holding. Aunt Fanny got her a rag doll, just for her personal care, and that ended that friction. Sonny never liked holding babies. Being older in a large family was a lot of fun in so many ways. We did not do diapers as safety pins were involved and it was too dangerous for little hands and fingers.

Taking our Saturday Night baths was always a ritual we looked forward to with considerable enthusiasm. At first I remember that we had zinc wash tubs for baths. No plumbing, electricity or telephone was on York Mountain until 1936 when that marvelous, mysterious thing called electricity came to the mountain. About 1935, my father got us a beautiful ornate cast iron bathtub with legs. The water was heated on the kitchen wood-burning cook stove and mixed with the water drawn up from the well by a

windless and rope attached bucket. Oh Yes, it was a real procedure, but baths were so much fun. The tub was situated in a small pantry area with minimal privacy and no heat. We took baths every evening in the summer months. I am describing those cold icy winter times, when bathing has always been a subject of discussion and dread.

The bath ritual began on Friday evenings with my Mama and the youngest of the babies having the first bath. The water was poured out and refilled for my father, who liked to linger and smoke a cigar when he bathed. They had very pretty housecoats, which they wore after their baths and we children would mostly stay out of their way as they enjoyed being together after their bath. Sometimes they would go to Birmingham to see a movie and leave us with Aunt Fanny. We liked that because she would teach us to sing.

The girls were first to get their Saturday bath and rinsed off standing in the tub, towed off and would run to their room. When they were not attended by an adult, Barbara would appoint herself matron of the baths ritual. . . . and Mary and Jane heeled to. Then it was the boy's turn. Sonny and I would bathe together and change the water for John and Donald. We scrubbed ourselves with the wash rag and 'homemade lye soap,' In the summer months, when we bathed every day, we would "draw up" fresh water from the well on the back porch, put it into the tub and set it out in the sun. Now the wintertime was a different story. . . . . The water was difficult to draw up and it was always so cold. Sometimes the fresh-drawn water was warmer than the air temperature. Water had to be heated and then mixed just enough to heat the tub bath water so we wouldn't freeze. After the girls finished their baths, we boys just added some warm water and plunged in for our weekly scrub. Not bad really, except the girls would tease us about what they would do to the water after they had taken their baths. We pretended to believe them by laughing, and they stopped teasing us about bathing in their contaminated water.

When we had finished our Saturday Night Baths, we were always given the same verbatim strict instructions "not to go outside to get dirty again". After our baths, we sat around and played games, made popcorn or listened to our father tell us scary ghost stories of hunting buried treasures. I cannot recall that he ever told the same story twice. He captured our imaginations, breathlessly anticipating the next move of the treasure hunter warding off the ghosts who guarded the treasure. We would be so worked up and excited, it took a long time to settle down for sleep after one of his stories. In the summer we liked to lie on the front porch or cement walkway in front and listen to our mother quote epic poetry. She had a masterful memory. . . . Horatio at the Bridge, The Canterbury Tales, always a different poem or literary work from her vast memory. At some predetermined signal, Aunt Fanny would appear and usher us reluctantly off to bed.

Our Aunt Rosa brought us some rose smelling soap and some bubble soap one time and we loved it. It sure beat the old brown soap we had made from lard and lye that we used mostly to scrub the wooden floors to make them very fuzzy and white. The furniture would be removed, sand was placed on the floor, and all the children would scrub the sandy floors with our bare feet until Aunt Fanny would say "enough". Then we would sweep the sand away and douse the floor with that soapy water made from our brown soap. We scrubbed the floors with corn shuck brooms that Aunt Fanny would make. It got

the floors very clean from grease, food spills and spots. Scrubbing the floors was about an every month ordeal with everyone doing a part. The bottoms of our feet would tingle like little ants crawling on them for hours after the scrubbing or more like shuffling around the sand on the floor. This was a very strange feeling and we would sometimes do this by sitting on the wooden steps to the back porch and scrubbing our feet with sand on the step. In the summertime all of the children went barefooted, even to church in overalls and hand made dresses. Few families could afford “store bought” clothes. We knew we were clean and Aunt Fanny made sure our clothes were clean, starched and ironed. We thought that was fine as “cleanliness is next to Godliness”, mamma told us.

Mamma was so clever in her methods of controlling all of us. I can never remember that she ever used physical force or spankings with any of us. We were always into some form or degree of difference and she ignored such or would call out the name of the agitator of the disturbance. I knew that if she called me by my first and middle name, I had better straighten out my behavior or attitude immediately, with a “Yes Maam”. I thought that children were given a middle name to be used to get their attention immediately. Barbara and I often got into spats in our interactions. If it was not settled immediately and peacefully, Mamma would put me on the outside of a window pane and Barbara on the inside of that pane to clean that window. She was responsible for my side being clean and I was responsible for her side. We were forced to talk to each other pointing out spots to clean. We concentrated on cleaning that window and forgot what our differences were. The two of us cleaned a lot of windows and learned to work and play together in harmony. Another practice she used was to put one child to sweep the front yard and the other child to sweep the back yard. The first to finish was given the side yard to sweep. The front and back yards were swept ever so slowly and thoroughly.

Yard brooms were made from a small bush or shrub plant with a heavy growth of little limbs. The huckleberry bush was ideal for this purpose, but we did not like to tell Aunt Fanny where those bushes could be found. Barbara would tell however. We enjoyed the berries in season too much to cut down the young bushes for broom material. Sonny and I would find other small bushes such as Dogwood, Sweetgum or Sassafras and tie together a bundle of two or three slender branches to make a good brush for sweeping with the bare limbs. Aunt Fanny would make a sagebrush broom with a handful of the long straw stems tied or bound together to make a broom to sweep around the fireplaces

A pastime was to sometimes get under the house where it was very dry and dusty and play with the “Doodlebugs”, considered to be the larva of the Antlion which looked



***Doodlebug cone***

much like the dragonfly in its adult stage. The Doodlebug was a tiny little critter that ate ants. They would catch the ants by digging a funnel shaped crater pit in the loose dry sandy, dusty, soil to the maximum angle of repose. When a hapless ant or small insect fell into the funnel cone pit, it could not climb the crumbling walls of the crater and it was trapped. We would take a straw and lightly touch the wall of the cone and out from the bottom of the cone would come the doodlebug, throwing sand and looking for a meal.

This was for a rainy-day entertainment. Everything we did seemed to have something to

do with competition but I don't remember how we figured any form of competition into this little game with the doodlebugs. When things would get to be a bit fussy between some of us, Aunt Fanny would often say, "Oh, you chillun go play with the doodle bugs". We would laugh and that generally ended the spat. Our spats were always short-lived.

We went to Temple Hill Baptist Church, which has been completely rebuilt in recent years. On occasions we went to Brother Hinton's Church of Christ Church because he and my father were good friends and this is where Rex Turner and all of his family attended. Once or twice in the summer months, Temple Hill would hold revival meetings, which meant that folks would come from all over the mountain to be baptized, because the creeks were too cold in the other seasons. Some people liked to be baptized every summer. I was baptized in a pasture pool, which was a favorite baptismal place, when I



*Renovated Temple Hill*

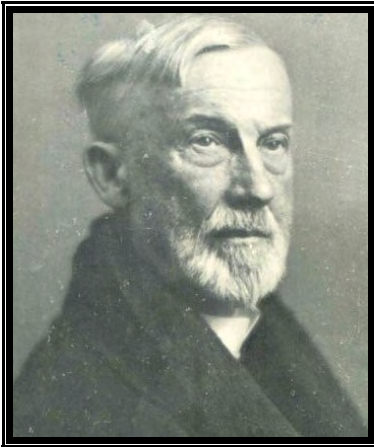
was ten years old. Walking down that aisle was an emotional time I shall never forget. A favorite occasion at Temple Hill was the 'All Day Singing and Dinner on the Grounds.' They would make lemonade and tea in washtubs, with real lemons and blocks of ice. We children loved it all. They had boards nailed between the trees for standup eating. I think the women competed in the making and presentation of their cakes and pies.

We children knew that it was all good. We never wasted any food, eating all that we were served or took. People would come from miles away in wagons and by trucks to enjoy the festive affair of such an event. This event provided us children to meet others we had not known or had not seen since school days, which ended in May. I liked the event because the boys ever wanted to fight. It always frightened me to see boys fighting.

Many poor old roosters were sacrificed for that tremendously abundant all day feast. The farmers brought their finest of melons. When we tired of the shouting sermons by the preachers, Sonny and I would meander to the little creek nearby and go fishing for the tiny fish there. It was really just feed the fish everything we had, as we never caught one.

My father was Presbyterian, but there was not a Presbyterian church within miles of York Mt. He sometimes attended the Third Presbyterian Church in Birmingham where Brother Bryan was pastor. My father was a strong admirer of him and supported his ministry. Brother Bryan was the noted Birmingham Presbyterian Preacher who developed and provided a soup kitchen for the needy during the depression years. He walked to the Farmers Market, late every afternoon, about two miles, and gathered those vegetables, fruit and melons that the farmers did not or could not sell. He also had his favorite butcher shops where he could always get a free soup bone or so. It is said that the firemen would come with their fire wagon and haul him and his garnered goodies back to the church kitchen every day. His soup kitchen was known far and wide for a good free hot meal of vegetables and soups served after a strong sermon on the wages of sin. It was an

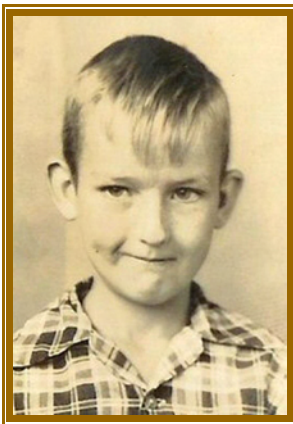
often-repeated story that one wintery day while enroute to the farmers market, he encountered a man shivering from the cold and Brother Bryan gave the man his overcoat.



*Brother Bryan*

My father invited Brother Bryan to come to the Corner School one night and tell the community of his recent experiences of visiting the Holy Lands and Egypt. He ate supper in our home. I was about five years old. I was fascinated to watch him eat peas on the back of his fork, pushing them with his knife. I had been fascinated with his talk and still remember some of the places of which he lectured about. He spoke in a Scottish brogue rolling his “Rs”. He asked me to come up on the stage and I did. He was explaining how the camel would sway to and fro in a rocking and sideways motion when it was being ridden. He then told me to get on his back while he was on the stage floor on all fours so he could demonstrate the camel ride. I remember I began to cry because I thought I was too big to get on this frail old man’s back. I well recall that he put his arms around me, consoled me and escorted me off the stage. I was embarrassed that I had cried before all those people. I remember the gymnasium was filled to capacity, as we set out extra folding chairs and brought the benches out from the basketball player’s locker room. It had to be more than 200 people who came to hear and see him, as he was a living legend.

When John was about four years old, he was severely injured by the windlass handle to the bucket at the well. The water well was located under the back porch. It had boards boxing a wooden housing from below the ground to well above the porch flooring opening level. This wooden housing kept things from hopping into the well. Over the well opening on the porch was a pulley assembly suspended from the porch ceiling. A long rope was attached to the three-gallon metal cylinder within the well that held the water to be drawn up. The rope was threaded through the overhead pulley and attached to a windlass drum with an iron handle to crank it up. When not in use the rope would be looped around this iron handle to keep the cylinder from being at the bottom of the well. John somehow managed to unloop the rope, which sent the cylinder plunging down the well as the windlass and handle violently turned loosening the rope. The spinning iron handle struck John in the middle of his forehead, making a deep gash into his forehead and down into his nose. He was knocked across the length of the porch. I was standing there helplessly watching as his blood was gushing. I was afraid he was going to die. Every time someone was injured and bleeding, which was not too often, I always seemed to have this terrible fear that they were going to die. Mamma got the bleeding to stop, washed the huge open wound with turpentine and iodine and used some adhesive tape to close the wound. We all held him down while she so expertly treated his wound. He fully recovered but he still bears evidence with a forehead scar of that



*John*



frightful accident that could have been very disastrous. After this terrible accident, we made it a practice to leave the bucket cylinder deep in the well, thus having no tension on the rope or handle.

We had oriental rugs to cover the wooden floors. They were especially nice in the winters because the wooden floors were so cold to little bare feet. Each spring the rugs would be hung on a plow line stretched taut and tied between two of the apple trees in the back yard. We would take sticks or bats and beat the dust from the rugs, which worked very well. We would really wham the rug to make the dust fly. This was a very effective way to get most of the dirt and dust out of a rug. This is the method used by Turkish women.

The rug was hung evenly on the very taut rope with the bottom almost touching the ground. Mary decided to hide between the hanging rug. When Sonny and I came back to beat the rug again, she was well concealed between the draped rug. We didn't know she was hiding there. Yep, the obvious happened. I don't know which one of us was the one who delivered the terrible blow directly to her mouth. I remember hearing her moan as she fell between the folds of the rug. We picked her up and rushed the short distance to the house. She was sobbing, almost inaudibly, but she was not crying. She was bleeding



*Mary*

profusely and I was terrified. I was afraid she was going to die. My morbid fear probably added to the problems when there was a serious injury. Her teeth were just hanging there in her mouth. Mamma worked with her teeth for a long time. She softly sobbed but never cried. Sonny and I were so upset and remorseful that we told Mamma that we did not want to beat that rug anymore. She agreed and we took it down and put it back into the girls' bedroom, dust and all. Mary was fed soup and pureed food for many weeks and was told not to bite anything. She was also told not to push her teeth with her tongue. Her teeth eventually became firm back in her gums. She was never taken to a dentist. Her teeth grew back somewhat not in a perfect dental alignment, but she has always had such a warm and lovely smile, no one has ever known the difference in her front teeth alignment. As an adult, she wore dental braces, which corrected her dental alignment with a radiant smile.

One day at church when John was about six years old, Buddy Harris the principals' son, charged up to John and pushed him down in the church aisle saying loudly, "My name is Popeye, I eat spinach." John got up and really gave Buddy a tumble down the aisle, saying, "My name is Yon Riant and I eat oatmeal." We did eat huge amounts of oatmeal. The large oatmeal boxes contained various dinnerware pieces now called 'Carnival Ware'. Her pattern was 'Ruby Red.' Mother gave it all to Mary and me as a wedding present. We still have most of it intact, after 56 years of marriage and three children.



*Yon Riant*

We were an adventuresome group of children, those Bryant chillun', as we were called. We explored every nook and cranny of the ravines, cliffs, and wooded areas of York Mt. One of our favorite places was a huge abandoned sawdust pile left by the timber loggers years before. It was about half a mile from our home in a secluded wooded area. We would often get Aunt Fanny to pack us a picnic lunch and we would play on that sawdust pile for hours on end. The family rule was always to be home well before dark. We had favorite rock cliffs that jutted out and provided a shelter. Sonny was allowed to carry wooden kitchen matches in a small waterproof round tin container for that purpose. We sometimes built a small campfire under these overhangs to keep warm or to cook roasting ears or roast potatoes. After tiring from the sawdust pile play, we would often sit under one of these recesses and make up stories of how robbers used these cave like places to hide out. Everyone would add a little to the fantasy tale and we would all laugh and giggle at everyone's suggestion about the robbers as the tale would build and build. Finally the lawmen would come and take away the robbers and it would be time for us to go home. There was a favorite creek we enjoyed wading in but we would have to check for leeches between our toes and gently pull them off when we finished. Sonny carried matches and would burn a small stick and put it onto the leech. It would turn loose without pain. There were too many leeches in that creek to ever consider swimming in it.

During our explorings, we knew exactly where all of the wild grape vines, huckleberry bushes, crab apple trees, persimmon trees, and possum grapes were in the surrounding woods. I was particularly fond of an apple that was on a tree that was somewhat isolated at the edge of a forested area. Those late summer striped apples were so good. I asked Mrs. Ware, the landowner, if I could pick some of them. I was about six years old. She told me that I could consider that to be my apple tree. I loved her instantly. I would bring her bags of black walnuts and hickory nuts. I would go down to that apple tree and hoe away the weeds and care for it like it was mine. On an occasion while hoeing, she brought me a glass of milk and sugar cookies. She told me that her family and the York family came to The Mountain together and were the first to stake out land claims before the Civil War. She was an old woman and was widowed. She liked to talk and I liked to listen to her. I can smile, even now as I remember so well how good her kitchen smelled.

Canning and drying were two of the most popular forms of preserving food for later use. Making cornstalk and dirt tepees for storing potatoes, rutabagas, and turnip roots was another way to preserve foods for the winter months. Onions were plowed up, dirt shaken away and the tops tied so as to be hung in the dry storage of the barn. These were ways of preserving foods for the winter, learned from the Creek Indians. It worked so well.

An activity we enjoyed was to 'play house'. We had oodles and oodles of fruit jars, which were used in canning and preserving foods. Mamma would let us carefully use the empty fruit jars to make the outline of the make believe house. We ate a lot of 'make believe' meals in the make believe house. Somehow Sonny knocked the canning jar wall down and broke a jar. That almost ended our playhouse activity. Maybe it was an accident, I can't remember. Aunt Fanny would let us have a tablespoon or so of sugar and a little cocoa mixed with it, which was a delicacy for us. We called ourselves dipping snuff with that mixture in our cheeks. Sometimes we would get to eat a real lunch of

biscuits and sliced ham in our make believe house. The best delicacy of all was a biscuit thoroughly slathered with butter, a generous sprinkling of sugar, and a shake or so of cinnamon. We also took biscuits and poked a hole in the edge and filled it with molasses syrup or honey, which we did not often have. Uum Mm good. We would spend hours sitting on the dirt floors of our make believe house with make-up fantasies and giggles.

Another favorite activity, which we enjoyed, was playing in the barn hayloft. We would jump and slide on the straw and spend hours up there. Our father was the only person on York Mt. that let little people play in their hayloft. Our loft was a playground for children on the mountain. The barn hayloft was huge to me as a child but after looking at pictures of it years later, it just didn't seem to be that huge. Helen was a girl who lived part way down the mountain and would come up to play with Barbara and Mary. She had a massive Mulberry tree in their yard and I loved Mulberries. I went down to her house once and got Mulberry stains all over me. They don't wash away; you have to wear the stains away. I was about five years old when I almost learned about sex up there in the hayloft. We were playing in the loft one day when she asked that old familiar question of some curious children "show me yours and I will show you mine." Maybe we were distracted, but we never got to the show down. That ended my sex education as a child.



*Melvin and Billy Allums cen  
It Sonny & Charles rt.*

I suppose every barn on York Mountain was infested with rats but we seemed to have an abundance of the rodents. Wet and soggy corncobs made excellent ammunition to kill the things as well as slingshots with creek rocks. My father did not object to the boys of the community gathering at the barn on Saturday afternoons to kill rats and have corncob fights. All of the boys were somewhat older than me and I was not about to get into one of their corncob fights, but Sonny would, and he always got sorely bruised. I remember a time or so before those corncob fights, the boys would gather behind the barn and see who could urinate the highest up the barn siding. It must have been a boy macho thing. Melvin Allums was the oldest and biggest and would always win that little giggle contest.

I sincerely regret that I do not have a picture of that barn, as it was the center of recreational activity for the boys and girls of the mountain. It was probably not as large as I have now envisioned it to be. It provided us a place to keep corn, peas, dried onions, field implements, saddles and harness and a shelter and feed for the animals. Sonny and I built several pigeon nest boxes and nailed them under the eaves of the barn. We loved to hear them coo and watch them fly. After about two years, suddenly one day they were gone and we never knew why they left or where they had gone. We would declare that the striking coal miners came and stole them to eat. We had about twenty assorted pigeons.

Sonny made a parachute of fertilizer sacks opened and sewn together with the threads serving as shroud lines. Some of the neighbor boys came to see him jump out of the

hayloft with his parachute. It was a momentous occasion that Saturday afternoon as the boys urged him on and I was there saying, “don’t do it.” Well, he finally jumped and it didn’t open as he had planned. Nothing broke but he was sure sore for a while. I was really scared for him. He was always doing something like that. On one occasion he built himself a diving helmet from a five-gallon kerosene can with the bottom cut away and shaped to fit his shoulders. He had fitted hoses going to floaters on the surface. He was about eleven years old and I was nine. We took the contraption and rode our mules down to the Little Warrior River, which was about four miles away. He got it all adjusted and strapped under his shoulders and tried it out underwater. He almost drowned before he could get the thing off his head underwater. We left the thing on the banks of the river and rode back with him still proclaiming all the way home, that it could have worked if...

I went to elementary school at Corner in a four-room building that had one wood or coal-burning stove in the middle of the building in the open hallway connecting all four classrooms. The first and sixth grades had a room alone. The second and third grades were together and the fourth and fifth grades were together. We sat two to a desk with each having an inkwell hole at the top of the desk and a shelf for books and papers under the writing surface. The seat folded up against the back. We were not permitted to whisper or socialize with our desk partner. During my third grade year, I was seated with Geraldine, the principal’s daughter. She was in the second grade. I hated her because she would chase boys and bite their arms and nobody would make her stop. I fought back one time and chased her into the girl’s toilet, which was an outdoors toilet down the hill from the school. She was screaming as I pulled her hair and hit her back. The teacher, Miss Smith, spanked me, the principal, Geraldine’s father, Mr. Harris, spanked me and my father gave me a swat that only hurt my pride that I was scolded. Oh what a lesson. The only sympathy I got was that Aunt Fanny put her arms around me and whispered so softly, “Did you get in a good lick to her for biting you all those times?”



*Charles & Geraldine*

Our father enjoyed taking us with him to his students’ family farms and to the events in Birmingham. He took us to see an air show in 1937. It was the most exciting thing I had ever seen. We played a lot and we worked a lot. Every child had chores to do and we did them rather cheerfully as I remember. Some of the things that needed to be done every day were: gather the eggs twice every day, feed the pigs, milk and feed the cow in the morning and at night as well as feeding the calf and other cows, feed the mules and horse, secure the hen house every night, bring in firewood to start the cook stove for breakfast, stoke the fires and bring in a fresh supply of coal for the night, empty and clean the slop jars every morning, and the list could go on. It is said that many hands make light work and as our family grew we knew that. In reflecting, I think we enjoyed doing chores..

Monday was the washday for families on York Mt. Some children stayed at home from school that day because they did not have a change of clothes. When it was rainy and clothes would not dry, the children stayed at home until they had dry clothes. During my

childhood, there was only one class of people on York Mt., .....the poor, proud, humble, and honest hard working folk.

As I was about twelve years old, Mr. Fikes who was a diligent farmer and a Christian leader for the young boys on the mountain, decided to take a pickup load of the boys to Cook Springs for a days outing. This was a Baptist Retreat Center about 50 miles east of Birmingham. There were about ten of us boys who crammed into and onto his pickup truck early one Saturday morning with baskets of food, watermelons, cantaloupes, apples and peaches. We were all so excited about such a long, all day trip. We had no idea as to what to expect when we got there. He had told us to bring a towel and some kind of clothes to swim in, such as a pair of overalls with the legs cut off or anything of that nature. Sonny and I took cutoff overalls. It was optional to bring along twenty-five cents for colas and maybe a New Moon Pie. Mr. Fikes drove so slow that I thought we would never get there. Finally we arrived and got the shock of our lives...the place was a huge concrete swimming pool filled with boys and girls in fancy swimsuits, splashing, screaming, sliding and having the time of their lives. None of us were about to go in swimming with those rich city children who would make fun of us in our outfits. We were a dejected lot.

Mr. Fikes took us a short distance away to a picnic cabana and we had our thanksgiving prayer and lunch, pretty much in silence as I remember. After lunch, we were ready to go home. He called for us to "Circle Up Boys". He told us that if suddenly all their clothes fell off those people in that pool, they would all look just like us without our clothes and that was the way the Lord looked at people. I remember laughing out loud at the thoughts of the mental picture that had been drawn for us, looking like the natives in the National Geographic magazine. Everyone was laughing. We couldn't wait to head for the dressing rooms, shuck our clothes and put on our cut off overalls and dive in with the best of them. We found them to be friendly. We shared our fruit and melons with them and thoroughly enjoyed our time at Cook Springs. It was a long cool ride home in the back of that pickup but we had had a great time and I had learned a lesson that I could never have learned in any other way, probably. Mr. Fikes was not a learned man but he knew the Lord and he knew my heart was ready for the message he taught me that day. Anytime I have had reservations about 'my place' in society, especially among some who have had certified superiority wall hangings, my thoughts are immediately brought back to Mr. Fikes and his simple message, giving me strength to plunge in there "amongst em" and do the best I was able to do, to succeed and enjoy life to the maximum of my imagination and ability. Thanks to you Mr. Fikes. You will live on in my memories all of my life.

The summer before going into the seventh grade, I was probably twelve years old, Miss Gassett and Miss Murphree hosted a group of High School and Junior High students to go to Atlanta on a school bus. They let me go along, as Sonny was to look after me. It was to be an all day trip to see the Zoo, the Cyclorama of the battle of Atlanta and a trip to Stone Mountain. We were to take a sack lunch, milk and some money for admissions. I was so excited about going I don't think I did anything at home except my chores for two weeks prior to going. I had never seen a zoo and was fascinated with the animals and the seals especially. They were so playful and would gracefully swim and hop up on the flat

rocks. They had no feet, only flippers. The Cyclorama was so awesome, and the gun smoke burned my nose. I wanted to see it again but we had to scoot along to get to Stone



*Stone Mountain, Georgia*

Mountain and eat a late lunch in the park there. Sonny and I ate our lunches on the bus on the way to the mountain. When we got there, Sonny headed straight for the base of the mountain, with me right at his heels. He found the iron rods the workers had drilled holes to set the rods as stepping rungs to climb up to their work. They had been chipping and blasting away the side of the Mountain to carve a picture of Gen. Andrew Stonewall Jackson on his horse. It had been several years since the workers had done any work on the face of the mountain. Only General Lee's face was discernable.

Sonny went right on up those steel bars protruding from the face of the mountain of solid rock, with me slowly climbing after him. He would urge me to hurry on up closer to him. He told me not to look down....I did.....Oh dear me.... I got the shakes and nausea at the same time, probably diarrhea too. I began to hold on for dear life. Sonny saw me having a problem and came back down to help me overcome the fear of heights I was experiencing. I remember he talked very kindly to me as he eased past me so that he was below me and held onto one of my legs and placed my foot on a bar as we carefully descended easing down to the ground, one bar at a time. He talked reassuringly to me at every step on every bar. He was so patient with me. I think it may have been the first time I ever realized that he was truly my brother and my keeper and that he loved and cared for me. I was terrified but he was so reassuringly confident, I did everything he told me to do to get down. I believe he would have gone to the top, if I had not looked down and panicked. I don't like open heights even today. I avoid looking over the edge of buildings or even one story housetops. I don't even like ladders. Miss Murphree fussed at us as she said she was terrified as she saw us high up on the face of the mountain. She just kept hugging us as she met us at that last step. I really enjoyed that trip, except Stone Mountain. I remember that I was embarrassed and was quiet all the way home sitting very close to Sonny. We did not tell our parents about the Stone Mt. episode but Miss Murphree did. Neither of us were scolded but we were admonished for poor judgement.

The big social event of the York Mt. community was the annual Community Fair, hosted by the Vocational Agriculture Department and the Home Economics Department. Corner was strictly an agricultural community with no other industry. People from all over the mountain would bring the best of their produce, canned foods, preserves, jellies, jams, dried fruits and other things to be judged and displayed. It was an all day affair and on into the evening with a cakewalk, apple bobbing, relay games, needlework exhibits live bands and fiddling for entertainment. Some of those local musicians were illiterate but really knew how to make music. I especially liked Mrs. Attaway's black walnut and peanut brittle, which she passed out to us as treats. This was the only annual social event of the mountain folk, and it was very popular. It was held at the school sometime in early September after the cotton was picked and the crops were harvested. There were no rides or carnival activities at this community fair. The cakewalk was ten cents to benefit the

PTA projects. All other games were always free. They always started the evening with a box supper, which was the only fundraiser for the general school improvement activities. This event was mostly for the young to bid and buy their girlfriends boxed meal for two.

One year I took some stalks of sorghum cane and bound them together as an exhibit. It took first place in the sorghum cane exhibit because it was the only entry. I stuck the blue ribbon in the bib pocket of my overalls and we chewed the cane stalks among all the children who wanted a joint or so to chew. We thought it was funny to chew up and spit out the first-prize winning exhibit. The Home Economics teacher would demonstrate how to make egg omelets and everyone would eat them as fast as she could make them. We were told to take only one, thank her and move on. Omelets were new and tasted so good.

Mr. Tingle had a syrup making business on his farmstead. The farmers grew Sorghum Cane and brought the stripped stalks to his farm by appointment dates. Stalks were fed into a crusher or juicer and the juice was extracted and drained into a holding barrel. The syrup maker would dip the juice to be placed at one end of a cooker, with many divisions for the juice to flow from one end to the other, cooking all the way. When it reached the end it was considered cooked. He tested the syrup by dropping drops into a jar of water. I liked to help him cook the syrup and feed the fire for the long syrup pan to cook the juice. I would go over to his syrup mill and work, even when we had already done our cane into syrup. Syrup was stored in one-gallon tin buckets. The juice was good but just a bit too much and one would have diarrhea. Yellow Jackets abounded around the syrup skimmings. We had to be careful not to step on one as everyone was barefooted. He also had a blacksmith shop and we got all the plow points sharpened there. He let me help him in the shop and I was able to sharpen the sweeps and points by myself. I never wanted to shoe a horse though. I liked to take a small iron rod and make square cut nails.

Corner School was a very rural school and was considered a consolidated school because Bagley Elementary School transferred their Elementary students to Corner for continued education. During the depression years, there was no money to pay teachers sometimes. Some teachers were without pay for as much as a year. The area farmers were generous to take a share of their farm produce to the teacher's home. My father was paid by the



*Corner School*

Federal Govt. and the State of Alabama and did not suffer from pay losses as teachers did, because they were paid by the County Board of Education, which was bankrupt. He was considered to be wealthy by the teacher pay standards. My father took on a project for his Ag Boys to lay flagstone sidewalks about the campus to keep students from the mud trails. Those walkways are still there, after seventy five-years use. He took about twenty-five of his Ag Boys to his family home in Stockton on Mr. Mitchell's school bus one summer. For most of the students,

that was their first trip beyond Birmingham. The students were impressed to see lightning rods on the house as well as the enormous barn at the Bryant homestead. Lightning rods were a new notion with the Progressive Farmer. They swam in the Gulf.

There was a steam engine operation across the field from our farm. It consisted of a wood fired boiler to generate the steam. The steam engine itself utterly fascinated me. The machinery, which it operated, was: a sawmill, a cotton gin, a gristmill, and a feed mill. These operations were driven, one at a time, by belts connected to the various wheels on a long shaft that was driven by that massive steam engine. The steam engine was under a shed perhaps fifty feet from the structure that housed the various equipment and that long shaft that connected the various operations. A long belt connected the shaft of wheels and belts to the huge wheel of the steam engine. A man would slip the drive belts onto or off the pulley wheels by hand, while they were turning. He would also take a block of beeswax and rub this onto the belt while it was turning. This was extremely dangerous. Slabs of bark and wood from the sawmill were used to fire the boiler to generate steam.

After about six years of a very successful operation for the owners, the fireman got careless, overheated the fragile boiler and it blew up. The sound could be heard for miles as it reverberated throughout the mountain community. I remember that day very well. I used to go over there when it was operating and sit by the hours watching that steam engine go shush- shush as the drive piston shaft went back and forth turning the giant wheel that drove the main belt that connected to a shaft of pulleys with belts that drove each of the various machines. I was fascinated by the action of the governor that kept the speed constant. I imagined that it must have been a genius engineer that designed and built such machinery, the engine to drive it all, and bring it to us there on York Mt.

My little world was of a sole existence atop York Mt. and it was a comfortable and complete little personal world. I had a limited vision of the realms beyond that which I had personally experienced. I enjoyed magazines such as National Geographic, Life and other graphic pictures depicting the world beyond, but it meant very little to me. I was twelve years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed. My fear was that the Japanese might come to York Mt. and do us harm. I had little concept of the vast distances and cultural differences of the world and how we fit into all of that. The little school newspaper, "Weekly Reader" began to teach me of the geography and peoples of the world. I couldn't read enough about these other people throughout the world and that York Mt. was not even a place on the maps anywhere, except that it was my home and I loved it.

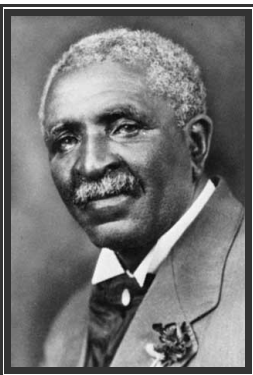
My father was assigned to teach at Corner Consolidated School because he wanted to be challenged in a position of a very rural environment, with people who would be respondent to his teaching of new and different "Progressive Farming" techniques. His first crusade was to teach the farmers to grow vegetables and fruit that could be sold in the markets of Birmingham and to progress beyond eking out a living called "Subsistence Farming" that had prevailed. York Mt. soon became known as the garden of Birmingham as farmers grew "truck crops", meaning that the vegetable harvests were loaded fresh daily on their trucks and taken directly to the markets of Birmingham. The soil was fertile, the climate was cool and humid and the people enjoyed the labors and the fruits of



their labors. The farmers learned from my father the value of providing nutrients back into the soil for increased yield. They plowed humus back into the soil rather than burn it, as had been the long tradition. The Great Depression of the 1930s had little effect on these 'Progressive Farmers'. They supplied an essential product and received cash money for their family needs. I cannot recall any family in dire financial needs on York Mt.

The next crusade my father launched was to get some of his Ag boys and others to raise chickens. One of the most successful was Hoyt Bagwell, who later became very wealthy with his chicken broiler business. Others raised chickens for their eggs. The Cagle family was one of the most successful. The mountainsides were dotted with the huge chicken houses that sprang into being to seize the lucrative chicken business opportunities.

My father had so many interests in his life and he seemed to thrive when he was under intellectual duress to solve major problem considerations. He often told us the story of his second year at API, Auburn. His freshman year, 1924, he was a roommate to his brother Marvin Earle at the Norton family boarding house on North College St., which was about five blocks from the campus. He was kept busy in adjustments and doing as he was told to do which was in a major part, to be very active in the Square and Compass Fraternal Order. His second year, he was close friends to a classmate, Elmer Salter who was a radio enthusiast. My father had a little surplus money from cutting timber the summer of 1924, so he and Elmer decided to buy some radio transmitting equipment. They got permission to use a closet in Broun Hall to set up their radio station. Another student joined them with more money and they bought good equipment that would transmit about five miles. They did their little electronic project with the encouragement of Dean Judd of the School of Education. They broadcast college news and the Auburn vs. Georgia football game. They had to choose a station call letters and they chose WAPI. They became very popular as Mr. Salter took the lead and began to sell advertisement as he bought out his two partners, He operated WAPI very successfully for a few years and sold to a group in Birmingham where the once fledgling station is now a leading Radio and TV conglomerate. Mr. Salter has told me this story so many times. He built station, WAUD in Auburn and made that his life career. He admired my father and they were life long friends. I remembered him from the time he once visited us at York Mt. in 1937.



For the summer of 1925, Dean Funchess of API, Auburn, suggested to my father that he work with Dr. George Washington Carver at Tuskegee Institute as an assistant. He complained that the pay barely provided room and board but he accepted this as a summer project. His assignment was working with sweet potatoes. He often proudly remarked about his days of research with Dr. Carver. I was five years old in 1934 when he took us to meet Dr. Carver. He held me on his knee and showed me a jar of turnip roots he had canned ten years before. I asked him if we could eat them. He had such a nice laugh as he tickled me in the ribs and I remember so well that he spoke very softly, almost in a whisper. I wanted to spend the day with him. His hands were so soft and the veins stood out so interestingly on the back of his hands.

In 1926, Dean Funchess of Auburn asked my father to head-up a project to propagate a vine-plant that might develop into a possible solution to stop the erosion of farmland in North Alabama. A thousand cuttings of this vine were shipped from Japan to Hawaii and then onto Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama for Dr. Funchess to work with. He had two greenhouses to be built behind Funchess Hall for my father to work with. My father was a student but he devoted much of his time for a year to this project of nurture and care for the cuttings, which were planted and replanted several times.

Eventually he had more than ten thousand cuttings of this oriental vine ready for field-testing. When my father graduated the following year and the project went into hold, many of the cuttings died from lack of care and failure to distribute for field-testing. In the summer of 1928 he returned to Auburn and brought back many of the surviving cuttings, to be distributed to the farmers of York Mt. They eagerly received them and planted the cuttings with care in their field gulleys and washes. This reception by the farmers was a refreshing encouragement to my father as an omen that the farmers trusted his notions and suggestions of progressive farming. The hearty plants grew prolific and spread everywhere, thriving especially in poor clay soils. It was considered a cattle food, a source for chlorophyll, used in chewing gum and hundreds of other uses. It was, and is best known for its original envisioned purpose and that was to stop the soil erosion. The plants became very popular and some of the farmers even sold cuttings to other area farmers. Its popularity grew among those who had erosion problems and was cursed by those who considered it a nuisance plant. My father never boasted of his role in bringing this plant to America while many others such as young county agents, claimed much personal credit for the merits of its success in the fields of erosion. The plant is Kudzu.

My father took great care in his classroom lectures to explain nutrients in the soil that affected the growth of the plants and the fruit of those plants. He stressed the value of nitrogen and its positive effects on the plants. He introduced two nitrogen producing cover crops, Crotalaria and vetch. Farmers instantly bought seeds and planted their fields with these as a winter cover crop. He introduced the Velvet Bean as a legume to be planted between the stalks of corn in a row. The cows loved these purple velvety, large beans, pod and all. He encouraged farmers to keep records and experiment with their soil and its minerals. Farming became exciting as York Mt. farmers shed their old eek out a living subsistence farming methods and quickly believed that everything my father said about farming was from the Mecca of modern farming techniques, API, Auburn. He often held meeting in his classroom at night with the farmers, teaching such things as testing for milk fat content, soil Ph and nutrient deficiencies. The farmers loved him. He was given a 16 mm sound movie projector and he showed films at the meetings. He often let me operate the movie when I was about 12 years old. I was in my glory doing that. Sonny would operate the centrifuge for the milk testing. We got to stay up late on those nights.

Our mamma was a very brave and courageous woman. During the 1930s, rabies was a dreaded disease that was very prevalent among dogs and wild animals throughout the south. York Mt. was known to have had several rabid animals so we were always on the alert and never encouraged wild animals or stray dogs to be near us. One day about the year 1934, my mother had taken Sonny, Barbara and me down to a field which she had

planted corn for family use. We were hoeing the weeds and grass away when she saw a dog trotting across the field towards us, in a strange manner. She quickly put Barbara in a nearby young pine tree as Sonny and I scampered up the tree also. I was really concerned that the limb I was standing on might break. Then I remember how frightened we three were that Mama was facing a mad dog by herself with only a hoe. Mama courageously stood armed only with her hoe in hand as the dog approached. I remember that it was really salivating. She held the hoe high and as the dog got within reach, she swung that hoe mightily and cut the dog's head almost off. We were screaming and yelling, terrified, as she got us out of the tree and we raced home, after assurances that the dog was dead.

After that harrowing experience, she often carried my father's S&W pearl handled 32-caliber pistol with her when she was working outside the home, for protection from rabid animals. Every morning early, we would all go into the garden armed with our little bottles of kerosene to pick the potato bugs from the leaves of the potatoes. One day while we were all working in the garden, Donald (b1935) was a toddler and was with us. He had found a snake and was toddling after it about the garden. Mamma saw what was happening and softly told him to be very quiet and not to make a move. The snake had now coiled under a squash leaf. She carefully aimed the pistol and killed the snake. My father was amazed, but I don't think he was surprised. I know the head of that snake was gone as we put it on the garden fence and it would wiggle itself to fall off. We tied a string around it and hung it on the fence to ward away other snakes. Really That was the saying, to keep other snakes away, hang a dead one on the fence. Maybe it worked because I don't remember any other snake incidents. Another tale told to us was that a snake will not die until sundown, so be wary of its head. Also a tale was that if a turtle bit someone, even though its head was cut off, it would not turn loose until sundown. They urged that the children not ever work or play in the garden area alone. She was a good marksman and taught Sonny and me how to handle a 22 cal. rifle with safety. I felt so adult and proud like, when she would take us out beyond the garden and shoot cans off the fence posts with her. Grandmama let me hunt with a similar rifle at 8 years years old.

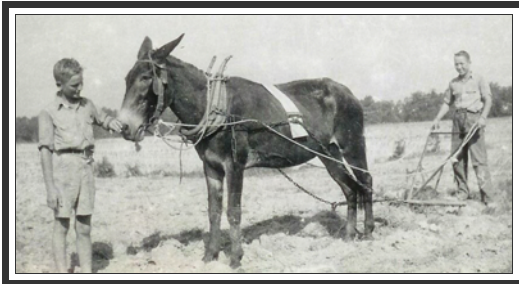
A man smelling of whiskey came to our house one day and said that we had his rifle. He said he wanted to pay part of the money he had borrowed and he wanted his rifle, now. He said he had given the rifle as collateral and insisted that Mamma get it for him. She went into the house, came out and pointing the rifle at the stranger asked, "Is this the rifle"? He fled from the porch shouting, "Don't shoot, don't shoot", and was never seen again. I think Donald is the proud possessor of that varmint eradicator now.

Our family enjoyed the subscriptions to publications of The Grit, The Christian Observer, The Progressive Farmer, and The Saturday Evening post. We would read these to the younger ones until they would tire or go to sleep listening. There was no Boy or Girl Scouting groups on York Mt. but we had the scouting manual which we really enjoyed. Sonny subscribed to a novelty catalogue because it had balsa make-it-yourself model airplanes for ten cents. They were made of balsa wood glued with rice paper coverings that shrunk if sprinkled with water. They were rubber band driven. We always had one pinned to the drawing board in the process of construction. The catalogue also had cheap

novelties and tricks which we would order and enjoy their products. We could sell a dozen eggs at the store and get ten cents to buy a model airplane or novelty trick

I enjoyed plowing and cultivating the soil on our little forty-acre farm. The soil on York Mt. was a fertile sandy loam and was very easy to cultivate. The soil smelled so good when it was first turned or cultivated. I was probably about six years old when my father bought a turning plow for me. It fit me just right and was too small for any of the men who worked on the farm to use, so it was all mine. I was very possessive of my plows and tools and the old mule that my father said was mine to work and attend to. I felt like I was an adult when I worked in the fields and produced things from the soil.

We had a cornfield directly in front of our home and across the dirt road. I felt so possessive that the field of corn was mine in that I had planted, plowed and cultivated that field of corn by myself with no help from anyone. Mother was a real shutterbug as she had a little box Kodak 120 camera and loved to take pictures of the family and friends. She cared nothing for landscapes, only people. One day while I was plowing that field of corn, she came out into the field with Sonny to take a picture of me plowing. She



took a picture of Sonny behind the plow as though he was plowing. He never plowed; he did other things but never plowed. I was incensed that he had his picture taken plowing in ‘my field’, with ‘my mule’. Sonny and I sometimes had spats. We quickly resolved differences and were brothers, always. I really admired Sonny for all that he was and what he meant to me. He was always tutoring me.

At a recent family reunion, that picture was shown and I burst out laughing, that I had been so childish and selfishly enraged over such a trivia incident so many years ago. One of my most prized crops was a two-acre field of peanuts that I had grown. The field had been fallow for several years and needed to be cleared of little pines, brambles and other scrub bushes. I had done this completely alone and had plowed the field twice to remove the roots and debris. I told my father that I wanted to plant the huge Virginia Jumbo peanuts on that two-acre field. He agreed and bought the peanut seed; with poison on them for nematodes etc and that little boys would not eat them before planting. We all enjoyed raw, boiled and roasted peanuts that winter. We even made peanut butter with some of them. It was good. Even the pigs enjoyed rooting in the field for the peanuts left behind and the one-acre of peanut plants that I failed to cultivate and the weeds took over. After the peanuts were plowed-up to harvest, I would bring the vines with peanuts, near to the barn to form a peanut haystack for curing and drying. A grass and weeds fire started near one of the haystacks. Everyone rushed out with whatever was available to beat the fire out and rescued the peanut haystacks. Years later John told us that he was playing with matches and accidentally started that fire. We all enjoyed those peanuts.



We had a three-acre cotton allotment, which we planted as a cash crop. We made about five bales of cotton, which was very good for the area average. A 500-pound bale was valued at about \$250 and we brought the seeds (about a ton) home to feed the cows. Picking cotton was a fun sort of thing to do. We all worked at picking cotton, the girls too. Our father would pay us a penny a pound for picking cotton and this was our money to go to the State Fair each fall in Birmingham. He always anted up more for each of us because our cotton-picking money was not very much. The fair was a real fun thing to do with all of the rides, foods, exhibits and things to do, and see, except one year I got so sick from eating cotton candy. One year an automobile daredevil stunt driver named 'Lucky Teeter' put on a very impressive daredevil show with Ford automobiles. I thought he was just about the bravest man alive to do the things he and his crew did with his cars.



*Vulcan's Ear*

My father and the Home Economics teacher always hosted the Corner School exhibits at the State Fair. He had to stay close to the exhibits but we children were free to roam. We liked to play hide and seek among the cast iron pieces of the Vulcan that were grouped in piles at the fair grounds. This was before the "Iron Man of Birmingham, "Vulcan" had found a site to tower over Birmingham and it lay for years in scattered pieces at a remote part of the State Fair Grounds. One year Mary hid in the Vulcan's ear and went to sleep there. We searched frantically for her, thinking that something bad had happened to her. Of course it was Barbara who ran and tattled on us to our father that we had lost Mary. Everyone was searching for Mary. We were scared that the Gypsies had stolen her. We were so happy to find her. We kept up with each other more closely after that scare. Barbara was the family tattle-tale.

I never wanted to ride the rides with Sonny because he liked to violently rock the Ferris wheel seats and every other ride that he could. Even the slightest rocking by him of any ride would set my terror feelings soaring into screams which was simple encouragement. He was like Lucy and the football with Charlie Brown, he would promise me that he would not rock the ride and when the thing got started, he would rock as hard as he could. Heights and twirling always scared me anyway. I rode one of those whirling rides with Barbara one time and she threw-up. Later on, we rode together on things like bump-cars or things that did not rock.



We all worked at picking the three acres of dried black-eyed peas also. Our father paid us a penny a pound for picking peas. We used the cotton-picking sacks to harvest the peas, which were much easier and less painful to pick than was the cotton. We had to be careful not to handle the dried pods roughly or else the peas would all fall out on the ground. This was a quick and easy lesson to learn and everyone picked peas. Our father would put

a soda drink bottle filled with High-Life down into the top of the peas and close the cover. This kept the weevils from the peas and we ate peas all fall, winter and spring, sometimes two times a day. We would always have two fifty-five gallon drums of shelled dried peas. It just seemed to always work out that way every year, two drums.

Every year late in the fall, a man would come up on the mountain in his Model A truck with a pea sheller mounted onto it. He would jack-up the right rear wheels, attach a belt from the wheel tire to the sheller and feed the dried pea hulls into the machine. We would load the expelled dried hulls that had been pulverized onto the sled and put them back into the soil in the garden. This was to add humus and fertility to the soil. He took money or would collect a portion of the peas he had shelled. It was a very interesting operation.

When the local miller ground our grits and corn meal every month, he always collected a share of the product he had ground. I liked the taste of the hot corn meal as it came out of the vibrating mill chute from the grinding stones. The miller was a happy man and was always teasing us boys when we went over for the monthly gristing. He could make the very best coarse hominy grits ever. Aunt Fanny would soak them over-night in water to tenderize them. She boiled those coarse hominy grits for about an hour or more each morning for breakfast. I hated to wash that cast iron grits pot and lid because grits would get splattered everywhere and would stick like glue. Even the bowls which we ate the grits from were very difficult to clean, even after an hours soaking. The Miller got a huge stationary gasoline engine to drive his mills, after the steam engine boiler blew up. Everyone marveled at his new engine, saying it was unique in that it was said to have sixteen cylinders. I know it made a lot of noise, as it had no muffler. It could be heard from a far distance as he ran it at a high speed to operate his gristmill and feed mill.

My father was very instrumental in getting Alabama Power Company to bring electrical power to York Mt. in 1936. It was fascinating to pull the cord and have the light bulb glow. Everyone got onto the power line and had to wire their houses with wires and insulators. We also wired the barn for electric power outlets and lighting. Two wires were set parallel into separate ceramic insulators with a nail to secure them into rafters in the ceiling. The wires were about a foot apart so as to prevent them from contact if the rats ate the insulation from the wires. We would inspect the wires about every month to ensure that the rats had not eaten away the insulation and that the wires were free and clear of anything that may cause a short and start a fire. The attic was also storage space.

My father bought an electric Maytag washing machine with a pivoting wringer. It was set on the back porch with benches arranged just so, for the three #2 zinc rinse tubs to be easily available to the wringer. The agitator went flip-flop back and forth to clean the clothes. Mama thought she needed to use her old stick from the outdoor wash pot to keep the clothes submerged. Jugging the clothes, it was called. The stick struck the agitator and the kickback severely bruised her neck. This casual accident became very serious.

With the advent of electricity, many things changed on York Mt. and at Corner School. I was in the first grade when the school was wired for electricity. A man came out to the school on Friday afternoons to show us 'moving pictures' which many of us had never

seen but had heard of. The charge was five cents or six fresh eggs. The two classrooms would be darkened by curtains and was scary to first walk into the area of the two classrooms divided by folding wall panels. The first 'movie' I ever saw was called "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine". I cried and sobbed when the little boy was blown up on the train trestle and his little faithful dog was so sad as he whined and crawled at the funeral. Miss Murphree, a much-loved teacher, took me outside and explained that it was only a make-believe story. It was so real to me however. Those Friday movies were always so eagerly awaited. He generally showed a short snippet movie of a comedian with a big wide smiling mouth named Joe E. Brown, which always got everyone laughing.

Knowing they were just movies with make believe stories was of little consolation to me because they were so very real and emotional to me. I think my first case of love was made one Friday afternoon watching Shirley Temple in a story about her being in the Swiss Alps. I don't remember the title to that movie, but I know I dreamed of going to the Swiss Alps to be with her and help her with her chores and learn to yodel. I well remember asking my father if I could run away and go to Switzerland to see Heidi. He was a very wise father because he did not try to reason with this first grader that it was only a make believe story. One day after school, he led me over to his classroom and we sat and talked. He recounted that it was a beautiful country, with sheep and goats that I could care for but it was so far away. We sat in his classroom and talked for a long time that afternoon, about an imaginary trip to see Heidi. He very subtly began to talk about the hardships I would have as a little boy, sometimes being cold and hungry and that I may not be able to find Heidi. I think the clinch that cured me was that he said I would have to wear knickers and fancy shirts and ties and shoes like the boys in the movie.

He told me of the time he had "run away" to see his cousin, Buck Richerson in Mesa, Arizona. He was out there because he had contracted TB. The climate was supposed to help him. I had heard the story many times from cousins and uncles but he had never told me personally about the experiences he had there. Buck was lonely and my father went out there on a train to comfort him and ended up spending the summer working on a cattle ranch. He had been robbed and had no money to come home. He bought a pearl handled six-shooter Smith and Wesson pistol, but too late to defend himself. He gave it to me and I still have it. He wired his father for money to come home and the response he received was, according to the many times told legend, "Son, you got yourself there, now you can get yourself back." That story made an impression on me then as much as it has during all of my life, that I and I alone, am responsible for the things I choose to do.

Although I was very young when he told me of these things, I have remembered so well the feelings of that story and my impression at that time. I have at times curiously pondered upon that lesson and considered the "what ifs" in my life. What if I had chosen to do this or that, contrary to what I had actually chosen to do? That is an exercise in futility and folly, as I chose to take the actions I have done in life because I chose to do so for my pleasure and a vision of well-being in the future. The problem was, I didn't know the future and my estimate of fitting into that future was flawed. This brought me to have faith that the Lord directs all. In His grace, HE grants me freedom to live my life. HE has often built bridges over the quick-sand pits along the paths of life I have chosen

Rural schools such as Corner School built a nice home for their female teachers for obvious reasons that there were no boarding places available. The Principal always had a home also. The lady teachers all lived together in this nice and roomy house on the school grounds called "The Teacherage." They also had a cook. I remember once as I passed by their teacherage home on the way to my fathers' "Laboratory Acre" which he used to demonstrate progressive farming techniques and skills to his students, I noticed that even the garbage can of the teacherage smelled good, like pineapple, which we had never eaten. My father and Coach Percy Vines were the only male teachers at the school. Coach was an outstanding basketball coach and had a most impressive record of



*Milk Bottle*

defeating the large Birmingham Schools. He boarded with a kindly lady who lived adjacent to the school, Mrs. Attaway the aunt of Brammer Attaway who ran the only store for miles in any direction. His little country store was the metropolitan area and social center of Corner. Many of us would take our quart bottles of milk with a cardboard top, to Brammer each school morning and he would refrigerate them for us. Never fill the jar too full because it may freeze and push the cardboard top out, making a mess of milk to clean up. It was so good to put a little sugar and vanilla flavoring in our milk jars. Some of the boys put in raw beaten eggs. The top of the milk always had a thick layer of cream because the milk was directly from the cow, not homogenized or pasteurized. The way we drank milk was to first, thoroughly shake it to mix the cream, remove the cardboard seal-cap and drink directly from the bottle and make a milk moustache.

Miss Murphree would take me into her room in The Teacherage Home to teach me oil painting about two afternoons each week. I was nine years old. She said I had artistic talent but I didn't think so. Perhaps she was just being kind to me after our mamma died and wanted to be a consoling mother figure to me. I didn't understand any of that, I only knew I loved her very much as she was like a mother to me. In the wintertime, it would get dark early, even about the time school would be out. That didn't bother the two of us as we would still paint and giggle about my mistakes for maybe a two hour session. I would sometimes walk home in the dark. It was only a mile. If I got scared, I just whistled a lot louder. She took me home in her car only once that I remember. It had been a cold and humid day. About an hour into our painting class, it began to really snow very hard. I mean so really blinding that we could not even see where the car garage was.

We painted on for an extended class time. She went to the kitchen and got each of us a plate of supper, which I inhaled mine. We did not have telephones at that time. I remember that I wasn't concerned, because I could sleep on her bedroom floor on a pallet and would not have to do the morning chores at our house. I was always barefooted, even in the winter, until I was in the seventh grade. I was concerned that I must wash my feet before sleeping in her quilt pallet. The snowstorm slackened and she took me home. I well remember that I cried after she left, going back home alone. I was afraid that she might get lost or stuck in the ditch without anyone to help her. So many cars and trucks would slide into the ditches during rainy weather. The roads were clay with red and gray igneous rocks from the coalmines that had been scattered atop the clay surface and the ditches were deep. The roads were graded only, just before Election Day and that was



every two years. I always enjoyed searching for fossils in the rocks when they would bring out new loads of the material to put on the road surface. It was fascinating to split open the larger slate and igneous rocks to discover the imbedded animals, fossils and ferns. I had a very good collection of fossils of many kinds of animals and many, many different kinds of plants. I had several boxes of these fossil impregnated rocks and gave them all to Mrs. Bankhead and Mr. Owens at the Department of Archives and History in Montgomery on one of our treks to Stockton as we went through Montgomery. Many of those rocks are still on display there, or were there in 2003 when I visited that section.

We all loved Miss Murphree so very much. I have the fondest recollections of being in her presence and hearing her gentle encouragement to make the brush strokes thus and thus and to blend the colors for a just right realistic view. She was never demanding but was thorough in her instructions. She seemed to know when I was restless and would give me a slice of apple or maybe tell me to smear some oil onto a cardboard and see what it looks like. She often gave me those times to play and dabble with the oils in whatever manner I wanted to do on those cardboard backings. If I did not follow the directions she had given me in the lessons, it really showed and I would paint over it and start again. My errors were always so obvious. I learned to plan ahead and be patient.

There was a patience factor involved in painting because it took considerable time for the oils to dry in order to continue the work. I would sometimes get impatient and the colors would run together if I painted over something not yet cured. She taught me real life lessons in patience. I often recall her profound wisdom in patience. Silence, Silence and Silence. Anyway, we painted a lot of pictures, some were from copying a picture that was before us, such as a Christmas card and some were from an inspirational imagination. I mostly used the backs of five-cent 'Big Boy' ruled tablets that had a stiff cardboard backing. She got me several laundered shirt cardboard stiffeners from Coach Percy Vines who had his shirts laundered and folded with the cardboard, at a laundry in Warrior. Miss Murphree brought me a surprise one day. It was a stretched and treated real canvass with a very ornate gold frame. This was her reward to me for doing a reasonably good job, most of the time, in following her instructions which resulted in a somewhat fair amateur oil painting art work done by a fourth grader as she and others evaluated my oil work.

I treasured that canvass and the frame to fit over it, as priceless. The measurements were about a 36 X 24 inch frame with a fancy, ornate gold tint. It was so pretty, and I was so afraid that I could not paint a picture worthy of fitting into such a lovely frame. I well remember it took a long, long time, working immediately after school and well after dark to finish that picture of my imagination onto that store bought canvass. I was very careful to apply all of her yearlong instructions to me. She would be busy with her picture and turn to look at my picture asking, "What is that going to be?" We would laugh together as I played the little game of keeping the obvious mountain lake scene a secret. As I recall, it seemed a forever for me to complete that painting with each little delicate detail of the mountain lake scene and its leafy Aspen trees. I was very proud of it when it was finished because, for one thing, Miss. Murphree never criticized or suggested any part of the painting. I made mistakes but I would paint over them and continue on. I gave her that painting when I had finished. I think she was more proud of it than I was, which was

a lot. Mary and I visited her in her home in Boaz, Alabama many years later. They're, hanging in her living room above the mantel and fireplace, as a centerpiece, was that painting. It brought tears of humility as I thought of all those years she had remembered me and kept that picture that we had both liked, so alive and visible for all to see.

I gave my Grandmamma Bryant two of my better pictures as a gift for Christmas. She entered them in the Mobile Fine Arts Assn. contest and they won prizes. She and Miss Murphree were very pleased. I had little interest in what others thought of my paintings. Grandmama hung the pictures and the ribbons in her Parlor for years. When she died, the pictures and ribbons disappeared. Perhaps the greatest gift from Miss Murphree has been an appreciation of the lessons she taught me in her gentle and loving manner, for me to be patient and tolerant, to achieve as best that I could do and to enjoy life along the way.

When Sonny and I were small children, our father was gone much of the time and was unable to attend to the essential farm chores and labors. The Chafin family lived adjacent to the farm, which made it convenient for his family to operate the forty-acre farm and they did a good job of doing just that. They helped with the farming and milking the cows when we children were too small to help. He worked for another family also. The Chafin family was a poor but proud family dedicated to honest relationships and manual labor. All that the family had ever done was to be a sharecropper. He farmed the land for a share of the harvest. His investment was his labor. Our father provided the land, animals, equipment and money for seeds and fertilizer. This was a good symbiotic relationship that served a great need for each family. I know my father gave Mr. Chafin money at Christmas to buy his children Christmas items of food and clothing. Mrs. Chafin was a very good seamstress and made oodles of tatted doilies which she would sell. Her fingers would fly as she made those beautifully ornate things, oblivious to what she was doing such as talking or scrubbing a shirt with her bare feet in a pan of soapy water. She would unravel fertilizer, sugar and flour sacks to get threads for her doilies. She kept her threads wound into large balls. Some farmers saved their strings for her and gave her their printed floral sacks to make clothes. She made and sold children dresses and doilies.

The Chafins had a son named Cohen who was about four years older than Sonny. I can't ever remember anything nice to say about Cohen, as he was mean to us in sneaky ways. He did not know that I was watching him at the barn one day as he took half a corncob, soaked it in water and rubbed it in fresh cow dung. He was slowly sneaking around the corner of the barn toward the corncrib where Sonny was concentrating on shelling corn to take to the mill. Then, I knew what he was up to. He was intending to put one on Sonny that he would long remember, because the wet corncobs can be almost a serious weapon, or at least cause a deep bruise for days. I loaded my slingshot with a shiny creek rock about the size of a glass marble agate. I always carried the slingshot and stones. I slowly crept about fifteen feet behind him. I couldn't miss. When Cohen drew back to let that filthy corncob fly, I already had the rubber bands taunt. All I had to do was turn loose the loaded leather pocket, with his behind in perfect target position. He was a real crybaby and squalled at the top of his lungs, rolling in the manure and straw of the hallway of that barn. Mother and Aunt Fanny came running out of the house to the barn and tried to quiten Cohen. He went limping and running off through the woods toward his house, still

yelling. I told her what had happened and showed her the fresh dung soaked cob that Cohen had intended for Sonny. They walked back to the house and I never heard anymore about it. We didn't like him and tried to stay out of his way as best we could.

Sonny was always the daredevil prankster and would dream up risky things to do such as tying a rope high in a tree over the dug out and dammed up creek swimming hole, using the rope as a high swinging diving platform to swing out and drop into the swimming hole. He took plow line rope and taught us to rappel off those sheer rock cliffs that we had discovered down in the ravines, sometimes maybe a fifty feet drop. That was in the days before anybody knew anything about the sport of rappelling. It was tremendous fun until our father stopped it because some of the bigger boys were tearing up the plow lines into chaffed bits. Sonny was also known to be the daredevil designer as he dreamed up little sporting fun things for farm boys on a Saturday afternoon. These antics were a macho kind of thing before there was such a word as macho. Lee taught us many callisthenic movements and flips. Barbara could really do those cartwheels until one summer day some of our cousins at Stockton laughed at her because she was wearing flowery homemade underpants, made from flour sacks. Maybe "Mothers Best" was printed on them. I was never interested in peoples' underpants, but I could easily imagine that almost every female on York Mt. wore underpants made from those flowery feed and flour sacks and even fertilizer sacks. I suppose men did too, in the summer time. Men wore Hanes long-handle underwear during the winter months, the kind with the buttoned trap door in the rear and buttons all the way down in the front. Some wore this yearround.

Sonny and I did mischievous things sometimes. I was about six years old when he came up with the idea to put cow dung in a paper sack and tie it up neatly as though it was from the store. We put the sack into the middle of the dirt road and hid in the bushes some distance away from the road. Mr. Wade came along, stopped and picked up the sack to put it into his wagon. He cursed very loud when he realized what had happened. We controlled our laughter and fear. We told Aunt Fanny about it and she scolded us.

Our father was the community veterinarian, counselor, referee in father/son disputes, a model community citizen and sometimes the banker and trust holder. He made wooden coffins in the Vo-Ag wood shop, free of charge. His primary role was teaching Progressive Farming and changing the economics of the community from subsistence farming to an economic farming production with a cash flow for the farmers. Subsistence farming is an operation whereby the farmer makes enough food for the family and the animals and with a small cash crop, eek-by from year to year barely subsisting on the land, with his family laborers. He was a missionary with a purpose, always visiting and teaching the mountain families. They always seemed to invite him to have the noon meal with them which Sonny and I really enjoyed if we were with him. He often took different ones of us children with him when he would go to visit his student's farm and families on the mountain.



We liked to go with him on his field trips and visits because we would get to hunt the fields for arrowheads or

points and other Indian artifacts. The farmers and their sons would often give us some of their collection of arrow points they had unearthed. I would mount them with a cotton background in a frame with glass on the front. After a good rain was the best time for hunting the flint stone arrowheads because they would stand out clean and glisten when wet. They were beautiful works of art. I mounted them on cotton behind a glassed frame.

These field trips to his student's farms and their Ag projects were generally an all day trip. They would almost always insist that we stay and have the prepared noon meal with the family. I can remember of only one time that he declined to stay and eat with a family. They were very hospitable and had insisted that we stay and eat lunch with them. The kindly mother of his student had been out picking blackberries the morning we came for his visit. She had made a deep blackberry cobbler pie. Oh my, it smelled so good.

She had also made the kind of cornbread I liked, fried, and I was getting hungry. As we had washed and were about to sit down to eat, Sonny remarked that the Blackberry piecrust was moving. The lady brushed her hand across the pie dish and literally dozens of houseflies flew up from it. Our father made some quick excuse that we had to go and we left immediately. She offered to prepare some blackberry cobbler for us to go, but he declined and we left immediately. About a mile away he stopped, got out and lost his breakfast. That was the only time I ever saw him to be sick. He said that he despised a filthy housefly, and had rather have a buzzard walk across his plate than a housefly.

A uniformed nurse came to Corner School on Saturday mornings to teach Red Cross First Aid. Sonny, Barbara and I, all attended regularly. She gave us a rather thick First Aid handbook to study and keep. Sonny and Barbara were very enthusiastic about the course. I think it was probably as a result of that course, that Sonny decided he wanted to become a physician and Barbara decided to become a nurse. They splinted everything they could. They practiced putting splints on Mary and John. We even held down a poor little calf and those two wrapped a splint on its' leg. Our parents encouraged them.

I told you that Monday was washday on York Mt. but I did not explain how we did the washing. We used two large cast iron wash pots each filled with about 20 gallons of water from the well or spring. Fires of wood would be built under them, heating the water until it was almost to a boil. This would sometimes take an hour or more if the wind was blowing. The firm homemade brown lye soap would be thinly shaved into the pots of water. If we did not have the soap, we used a bar of Octagon Lye Soap. When the soap was presumed to be dissolved, the clothes, which had been color and fabric sorted, were dumped in the water. A stick was used to push the clothes into submergence and to stir and turn the clothes. After about half an hour of this 'stir and boil' process, the clothes were taken out one by one and twisted to wring out the wash water as much as possible. The clothes were then rinsed through three tubs of water, wringing out the water of each garment as much as possible between the rinses. The clothes were then hung to dry on a clothesline, shrub or fence line until dry. Only oak wood was used to fire the wash pots. When the ashes were cooled, they would be scooped into a sack, tied and immersed in a



*Wash pot*

wooden barrel of water. This water was later to be used as lye water and boiled with lard to become lye soap. The oak ashes were the reason the lye soap was so dark brown.

Making our soap was a fun thing to do. The clothes washing and floor scrubbing soap was made from a strong solution of the oak wood ashes and was a dark brown, strong-odored soap. Our hand soap was made from this same solution but was strained and somewhat diluted lye water. Rose water and glycerin would sometimes be added to the making of hand soap. After it was thoroughly homogenized, the hot liquid soap would be poured onto huge drying pans or onto a large flat surface. It was then sliced into bars when cooled and wrapped into wax papered cakes. It seems that every family on York Mt. had pride in making their soap. Homemade soap was a big display at the local fair.

Speaking of wax paper. One of my favorite activities in the fall was to collect as many different leaves in changing to fall colors as I could, and press them between sheets of wax paper with a warm clothes-pressing iron. Irons were heated on the top of the stove. The wax paper would be gently peeled away leaving the leaf coated with a nice layer of wax. The leaves would be identified and placed in a loose-leaf journal. I was very proud of my leaf collection. The leaves held their colors for years. I gave it away to Miss Murphree when we were in the clean out process of moving to Foley, several years later.

I hated the times when it was necessary to slaughter animals for food. Neighbors would come and help with the all day process of slaughtering, cutting up, and processing the meat. Our father and his brother our uncle Mack, operated a butcher shop and meat delivery route during their high school days. They delivered in a covered 'Market Wagon' that had a big sign "Bryant and Bryant Meats." It was painted green and lettered in yellow. It was a very fancy wagon stored in the then catch-all sheep shed at Stockton

Pigs would be slaughtered and dipped into "scalding hot" water to make the hair easy to remove. The butchering was a precise thing for my father. Those helping with the daylong process took certain pieces of the animal as their reward for helping. I sometimes operated the meat grinder and sausage stuffer. The entrails of the pig were thoroughly washed, picked of all fat, called pickings and used as sausage casings. Every part of the pig was considered edible, except the squeal. Hams and shoulders would be rubbed with a mixture of salt, pepper, finely crushed saltpeter, and sugar and hung in the smokehouse to be cured alongside the hanging sausage and other meats to be cured. Every smokehouse had about the same unique odors. Houseflies and other critters, even rats, would not venture close to a smokehouse for some reason. Perhaps it was the spice odors.

The adults of York Mt. had the utmost respect for Sonny and held him in high esteem for his intellect. Some of the folks would ask him as to how much lumber they could expect from a certain tree. He knew how to figure it and many of those folks relied on him for all sorts of information. He really impressed Mr. Mitchell by calculating and telling him the exact height or length of a tree he was about to cut down and how much board footage he could expect from the tree. He was always telling folks that Sonny was a genius, which embarrassed him greatly. Sonny finally got Tatar, his son, to tell his father

to stop telling folks that he was a genius. He still greatly admired him and preferred to talk to Sonny at community affairs more so than he did in conversations with the adults.

When he went out on a veterinarian calls or student visits, the farmers would often feel that they needed to pay him. He never accepted pay, but he sometimes brought home bags of corn, potatoes, cabbage, collards a ham or a beef shoulder or something that the farmer insisted on giving him. He vaccinated dogs for rabies for 25 cents per dog, cost of the medicine. He said he vaccinated the dogs on their backs above their front legs because the nerves cross there and they have no feeling. He still wanted the owner, Sonny or me to hold the dog. I never remember that a dog ever tried to bite him. He would rub their ear and talk to them before a vaccination. Sometimes he would be gone all night helping a cow or horse give birth. We never waited on him to share the mealtimes.

Nitrate of Soda was a fertilizer new to the mountain farmers. It was used as a final fertilizer to extend the life of the plants and to make it produce a larger size to the fruit or vegetable. The farmers called it 'sugar' as it was a white granular substance, applied to the soil of the plant as the last fertilizer of the season. One afternoon a family's milk cow had eaten much of a sack of the fertilizer and had swelled to an enormous size. She had fallen onto her side and couldn't get up. She was in agonizing pain. They sent word for my father to come quickly. I went with him. I thought she was going to die. He took his pocketknife and stuck it deep into her bloated side. It made an awful sound and a terrible odor but she almost immediately began to shrink and kick. She soon got up and ran off to the spring for water. He would put his fingers in the cows nose, holding her head high as he used a long neck wine bottle to force 'drench' cows with a solution that only he knew the formula, to relieve their distended stomachs when they ate too much fresh green grass. He was usually called 'Professor' but was sometimes known as "Doc", as he often treated wounds, cuts and ailments of the people on the Mt. Dr. Gwinn encouraged him.

Another passion our father had was to redo the field terraces that every farmer had. The field terraces were linear mounds of dirt sloped to control rainwater. These terraces were very prone to breaking in heavy rainfalls, just as an earthen dam, and the gushing waters caused deep ravines, destroying that use of the field. The gentle ditches did not have that ability to collect water and wash ravines in fields. All of the fields were mountain terrain and need terraces to control the rainfalls. He wanted the farmers to have gentle ditches that would direct the flow of rainwater to the edges of the fields without collecting waters for an overflow. In 1943, he was demonstrating how this was done, by using a tractor and turning plow to plow away the terraces and form the gentle sloping ditches. The tractor lurched over a terrace and he was struck in the right chest by the steering wheel, which had a long protruding chromium nut in the center. This was a very bad engineering design. His ribs were always very sore and never healed from the injury. He eventually suffered from cancer in that injured area. Later surgery seemed to only spread the cancer and six years later he died of Sarcoma cancer as a result of that afternoon accident trying to make that community a better place to live than when he first arrived as an enthusiastic advocate of Progressive Farming. Indeed, he and our mamma and mother were a courageous people to have spent their lives in a service to the people of York Mt. That Bryant family became a legend among the mountain folk, even to this day.

The sacks we used in picking cotton were long canvass bags with a strap to fit around the neck and across the shoulder. It was about three feet in diameter and about eight feet long, which was dragged behind, as we would bend over to pick the cotton from the bolls. The dried bolls, which opened wide to expel the cotton, had sharp prongs that could prick the nimble fingers under the fingernails of the picker. To pick cotton with gloves was like picking blackberries with gloves. Cotton pickers learned to grasp only cotton.

A bag could hold about twenty-five pounds of cotton. A very good picker could pick about 200 pounds in a long day in the field. The most that I ever picked was about 100 pounds one very, very long day. A bale of ginned cotton weighed 500 pounds. The Federal Government controlled Cotton production. Farmers were allotted only a certain amount of acres they could plant. Our allotment was only three acres, which we enjoyed as the only cash crop of our tiny little forty-acre mountain farm. Sometimes when it was hot, I would be plowing that cotton field and wishing I were doing other things. I sometimes hated that we had that three-acre cotton allotment because it was a lot of work, not a fun thing to grow like edible crops. Velvet beans grown among the cornrows, was a most unpleasant thing to harvest, because I always broke out in a red rash from their velvety covering. The cows loved eating velvet beans and would salivate profusely.

I was about eleven years old when Sonny and I did a terrible thing. We had been harassing a massive swarm of little but fiercely stinging Yellow Jacket wasps. Some people called them little Jenny wasps. A massive colony or swarm had built a huge nest under the floor of the hayloft very near the entrance to the tunnel or open hallway with stables, stalls and a corn crib on either side. The nest was maybe more than a foot across. Honey bees can sting only once and then they die, but these little things have a hyperemic needle stinger and really like to shoot it to you as fast as they could sting, pull out and sting again and they are well armed with venom. They would not come down in a swarm to attack, unless they were disturbed. Simply walking under the massive nest would not set them off; it had to be an intentional jarring disturbance of their massive nest, then run like the wind.



We had an empty vinegar barrel, which was used in the winter months for pickling meats. One of us would accept the double-dog dare and get inside the barrel with the lid removed and roll ourselves down the open hallway directly under the nest with the hole in the middle of the barrel pointing up to the nest for visibility. A beanpole would have been laid in position for the occupant of the barrel to reach out, get the pole and point it near the nest of the little wasps using that hole in the middle of the barrel to see to direct the pole. The occupant of the barrel would then give the flooring a good poke, release the stick and stay curled up and very quiet and safe, maybe. We did not want to damage the nest, just tease the Yellow Jackets. The little stinging Yellow Jackets would come swarming down by the hundreds, but couldn't find the one hidden inside the barrel. This was a truly daredevil trick to experience this just once and not get stung. It definitely gave bragging rights and soon many of the boys



*Yellow Jacket Nest*

of the mountain wanted to join our Yellow Jacket daredevil club. The Corner High School mascot was a Yellow Jacket. When we would go into the loft to pitch hay for the stock in their stalls, we were very careful to walk gingerly above the nest on the underside of the loft flooring and to not even think of walking in the loft if someone was innocently entering or leaving the tunnel or hall. I don't think our father was aware that we were harassing those Yellow Jackets because he never said anything to us. If he had known of our dangerous mischief, he would put a stop to it. It could have been serious if the wasps had swarmed upon one of the small children, an adult or animal.

We had three very old apple trees in our back yard. We really enjoyed and used those apples as we made and canned apple butter and apple sauce, sliced the apples and dried them on tin roofing sheets by the ten gallon loads to last as snacks all winter. We made apple pie filling material and canned it. Aunt Fanny and I liked the apple cores best of all so we made some jars of canned apple cores for the two of us, seeds and all. It was very restful to climb high atop one of those trees and eat an apple or two. Two of the varieties were striped apples that were very mellow when they were fully ripe and very tart before maturity. The other was called a 'horse apple' and was firm and very tart tasting even when fully ripe. We used that variety for sliced sun drying. After drying, the slices were stored in a folded cloth in five-gallon lard cans. They were so good in the winter after they had mellowed. We had other apple trees but these yielded the biggest and best apples. Castor oil was used for the "Green Apple Bellyache." Careful. Once was enough.

Cohen Chafin had a cousin who lived in Birmingham. The cousin came out to York Mt. for a country vacation one summer. Now he was about the same age as Cohen and just as mean to us. One day Sonny and I were in one of the apple trees eating an apple. We saw Cohen and his cousin coming our way. We climbed higher in the tree. They began to throw some of the green apples that had fallen off the tree. They continued to throw apples at us as we climbed as high as we could without fear of breaking a limb. Then they started throwing rocks at us. Now those rocks really hurt, so did the green apples but we got scared that they could really hurt us with the rocks. Maybe Cohen was getting back at us for shooting him with a slingshot loaded with a stone, a few weeks earlier.

Finally Sonny came up with a plan. We whispered about it and knew exactly what we were going to do to try and get out of this predicament we were in. We were not about to yell and scream for Aunt Fanny to come get us out of this mess, but I really wanted to. Sonny agreed to a fight between the four of us up in the hayloft. Those overgrown bullies readily accepted the offer because they could have torn us to pieces. Sonny made them agree to give us a head start running to the barn loft. They agreed to back off a considerable distance and let us get down and start for the barn before they would chase us. They knew they had us like a cat has a wounded mouse, so they complied, almost.

About the time we got almost down from the tree they began to make a run for us...up the tree again we went. Sonny made them back off even farther away and wait until we were part way to the barn before they came after us. There was a barbwire fence around the barnyard lot. We had learned and practiced and knew how to be running and dive for



the dirt just before the fence and roll under the bottom strand of wire without injury. That was another one of Sonny's little dare devil tricks he would do and I would copy cat him.

We were running for our lives and did the little dive and roll maneuver to get past or under the fence and into the barn lot. We were still running for our lives as they were closing in on us. Sonny was the first to reach the barn and climb into the hayloft. I was right behind him now. Cohen and cousin were in the perfect position entering the tunnel. Sonny and I made a mighty leap and landed on the planking directly above the nest. We heard the boys screaming bloodcurdling yells and curses. They were running wildly in crazy circles swatting the thousands of Yellow Jackets that were following them in dark swarms about their heads. We were rolling with laughter in their well-deserved agony.

Mother and Aunt Fanny came out of the house because of all the yelling and cursing. Sonny yelled to them that it was Jenny wasps. Aunt Fanny went back into the house and brought out several blankets and threw them at the boys who had by now gone crazy in pain. We were not laughing anymore. They wrapped their heads. The wasps stopped swarming about them and returned to their nest. We knew we were in trouble now from all the attention being paid to the boys. Sonny and I stayed in the barn loft until mother called us down. The sting punctures were everywhere about their swollen faces. Those boys were a pathetic sight, eyes already swollen shut, their tongues were so thick and swollen they could not talk. They were crying but no tears from those tightly swollen eyes. She had gotten a plug of our fathers chewing tobacco, which he used doing animal surgeries and delivering calves. She instructed us to chew it and put the juice on their wasp stings. At first it was funny. We did a sort of spit the juice on their faces and rubbed it on them. It was fun to spit tobacco on them for what they had done to us. We soon tired of this, mostly because we were both sick on the tobacco. Oh we were sick, so sick. No one ever got after us about the incident. Mr. Chafin sent the cousin home and whipped Cohen for fighting us. He came over and apologized to us for his son's behavior. Cohen later became an outstanding FFA student and a star salesman for the Ford Tractor Co.

I was about thirteen years old when I had a serious accident in the cotton field. Sonny and I were 'play fighting' with our partially filled cotton sacks. We would sling our sacks around and around at the other. The object was to wait until the very last moment and then duck to miss the twirling sack of cotton passing just over the head. It was my turn to be the target as he twirled his sack around and around. I would duck each time, just in the nick of time to keep from being struck. I ducked and accidentally stuck the bud top of a hard, dried cotton stalk into my eyeball. It didn't particularly hurt as I remember, but we dropped our cotton sacks and raced home. I was taken to the hospital in Birmingham and the surgeon sewed up the hole in my eyeball. All of the fluid had leaked out. I wore a patch over that eye for more than a month. I did not have to pick any more cotton that year because I was not to bend over or put any stress on the eye. The scar is still visible but has never affected my vision to any degree. Some neighbors were paid to pick the rest of the cotton that year. Sonny liked that too. They were paid two cents per pound to pick.

My father had a good friend who had a small coal mine on his farm, which was on the mountainside a short distance from our home. It had once been an active mine but the

vein of coal was not then sufficient to keep it active. He would let us get coal from it if we did our own digging and took care to remove the shale rocks we had to remove to get to the small coal vein. It was exciting to put on the miners cap with the carbide lamp attached. We would take a pick, push the little rail tramcar into the mine and dig out chunks of the coal. We always filled several burlap bags with coal, loaded them onto the little tram car and push it back out to the mine opening. The farther we went into the mine the lower the ceiling got until it almost became a crawl space. Water always dripped from the ceiling and we would come out cool and wet. This was summertime work.

We used a two man crosscut saw to cut pine trees for firewood to be split, stacked and used for the wood burning "Home Range" cook stove. It had a 'warmer' that had doors, above the stove eyes, that kept food warm. That warmer was where Aunt Fanny kept biscuits, sweet potatoes, cornbread, and other goodies for us to eat when we got home from school. I still consider a hot buttered sweet potato as my favorite in-between meals afternoon snack. We had a pie-pantry cabinet that held pies, cakes and other pastry and foods. It had two small, hinged screen doors. A tall metal porcelain covered cabinet held groceries, spices, sugar and flour bins. This type cabinet seemed to be in every kitchen.

Our father got two weeks of vacation in the summer and two weeks at the Christmas season. We went to Stockton at those vacation times. We also spent several days each summer in La Grange, Georgia with our Grandmamma Norton. Reflections tell me that perhaps there were too many of us children for comfort in her modest home. We loved her dearly and all of our aunts there with her. She was an avid gardener. She grafted tomato plants onto ragweed plants that produced big pretty tomatoes, even for Thanksgiving. She was so proud of those plants and the tomatoes that were produced.

We had some of the usual childhood diseases of a mild form. The only one I can fully remember is when Jane had Scarlet Fever. She was bed ridden for something like two weeks. Every day we would rush home from school to come into that darkened room to hug her and know that she was doing well. We would sit with her for a long period of time, each talking to her about our school day. She was so lonesome. She said she counted and recounted the cracks in the ceiling every day, just to have something to do.



Our aunts Wessie and Lee had roller skates and would let us use them to skate down the hill on the sidewalk in front of her home. That was a great fun. Skates had a key that was used to fasten the skate to ones shoes. We were always barefooted and had to borrow our Aunt Ira Lee's shoes to skate. She would take us to the city pool each afternoon for a swim. We had to buy swim trunks to swim. We really enjoyed those summer visits to La Grange. She maintained a beautiful grass lawn that smelled so good when it was freshly mowed and watered. Our yard at York Mt. was bare of any semblance of grass or plants. We used a yard broom, which was made of limbs from a huckleberry bush, or other plant that had many small limbs attached, to sweep the yard very bare of any growth. A sagebrush broom was then used for the final sweeping to give the yard that swept look.

I had an anthropology professor, Dr. Icenogle, at Auburn who told our class that this was a long ago daily evening tradition among the Scots who believed that spirits came in the night to visit the sleeping. He said the bare yards would be inspected first thing each morning for evidence of tracks from the spirits. That certainly wasn't our case, but the yard sweeping was a weekly affair with us and with all the other families at York Mt. Grass was abhorred in the yards, in the gardens and in the fields. All grass was despised.

Our visits to Stockton were always memorable because we had cousins our ages to play together. Grandmamma Bryant's house was big and roomy with a porch that ran around the house. She scolded us many times for running and chasing each other on that huge porch with its banister hand railings. One Christmas holidays night in 1938, John got a very bad splinter deeply imbedded in his foot on an occasion when we were playing tag on the porch. He was taken to the little office of Dr. Hodgson in the new Terraplane automobile of our Uncle Marvin Earle. He was an older brother of our father who taught Vocational Agriculture in the community of Tanner Williams, in Mobile County, Alabama. Dr. Hodgson made a deep incision into John's foot to remove that sizeable splinter that was partly exposed in the sole of his foot. He did this by the light of a kerosene lamp, as there was no electricity. He did not get the entire wood splinter out. The rest of the splinter festered and came to the surface weeks later. Mother later told us that Uncle Marvin Earle fainted, our father got sick and that left only mother with John, during the surgery. As we cleaned up the blood on the porch, I was terrified that he would die. I always seemed to get that feeling when someone was hurt and blood was visible. I don't know why because I never knew of death until our mamma was called away from us, and even then I did not fully comprehend death or her absence from us was final.

In the summertime, we boys would walk to the clear pebble bottom Watson creek and swim in the nude. We took a bar of soap and would get a good bath in the process. The creek had small fish, which we fed with a hook and worm but were never able to catch.

There was a large implement shed between the cattle dip and the huge barn. The shed was also used to shear sheep twice a year. The sale of wool had once been a very important farm product. There was an old Fordson tractor with steel wheels under the shed, which I loved to climb aboard and pretended to be driving. I was missed at lunchtime one day and a search party went out to find me. They found me unconscious atop the gasoline tank of the tractor, with my nose at the open tank filler, smelling the gasoline fumes. I was eight years old but even to this day, the slightest smell of gasoline odors makes me instantly dizzy with a buzzing sound and tingling feeling in my head.

Barbara enjoyed going to the barn and watching the cows being milked and fed. She invariably left the barnyard lot gate open. The animals would get out and it was a chore to round them up and back into the barn lot. One evening after having rounded the cows up from the cornfield, our father threatened that he would chop off her toes if she ever left the gate open again. She was terrified and fully believed him, even to this day. She says she has tiny little toes today because they stopped growing that threatening day.

Our father liked to tease us children. Sometimes it seemed to be rather harsh, and yet maybe that was his way of controlling our errant behavior. John passionately wanted a horse. Our father teased him that he was going to get some pony seeds for him. They would talk seriously about how to plant the pony seeds and care for them. John really believed him and often reminded him to get those seeds soon. Our father called Donald ‘Slim’. I never knew why. Donald was always such a happy child. He never cried, never. Everyone loved his disposition; after all, he was the baby of the family and got attention. Mother has often told the story that the first evening meal of that day when she came to be our mother; she was horrified that Aunt Fanny chewed some of his food to tenderize it before giving it to Donald. After regaining her composure, she stopped that practice.

It has been an often repeated and very likely story that Kathleen Allums, a teen aged neighbor, came to visit one day about the noon lunchtime. She saw that the table was set with a huge bowl of boiled okra, a skillet of corn bread and glasses of buttermilk. When she asked if that was all that we children were to eat for lunch, Aunt Fanny told her that our stomachs were like little garbage cans and that we ate any and everything that was set before us. There was a lot of truth in what she was alleged to have told Kathleen because we had no food allergies and even today, none of my siblings nor I have any traditional edible foods that we absolutely will not eat. And John still eats oatmeal.

Mamma’s youngest sister, Ira Lee, we called her Lee, was about ten years older than me. She enjoyed spending her summers with us riding the horse and enjoying the friendship of our two neighbor girls who were her age, Kathleen Allums and Gladys Mitchell. My father had a 1929 Whippet roadster coupe with a rumble seat. Lee learned to drive that thing and would take all of us for rides on both of the roads on York Mt. Gasoline was fifteen cents a gallon and she bought five gallons at a time, seventy-five cents to ride all day. The gas was first pumped up into a glass container on top that was measured in gallons. The pump had a big long lever handle on the side that was pushed and pulled back and forth to pump up the gas. She must have been a good driver because she never had an accident. We certainly had some very thrilling rides however, on those narrow winding mountain dirt roads. We would scream, giggle and sing, hanging on for dear life in the rumble seat as she drove along, swerving from side to side as we swayed and screamed. Mamma let all of us go with her.



The roadster had what we called a “cut-out” on the exhaust system. A length of hay bailing wire was attached through the floor to a valve that directed the engine exhaust to the muffler or to bypass the muffler and go straight out of the exhaust manifold. It made a terribly loud sound when Sonny would pull on the wire and activate the cutout bypassing the muffler. Lee would race the engine while coasting and yell for Sonny to pull the wire. We would all bounce and giggle with glee sitting back there in the open-air rumble seat. The horses, mules and cows would run in terror at the sound of that cut out, Blam-Blam. Mr. Christensen came by one day and strongly suggested that Lee not drive that noisy thing by his farm anymore as his milk cow was so terrified and ran so hard, she “held-up” her milk and was unable to be milked on the days when we drove by his farm.

The Whippet had a very ornate radiator and radiator hood ornament. I was five years old and have a very clear remembrance of doing the destructive deed but I have never understood why I did it. I took an old railroad spike, which we had a plentiful supply with which to make farm tools and implements in the blacksmith shop, and with a hammer, I drove a spike into the front of the radiator. When my father got home from school that day, I told him what I had done, as water was everywhere under the engine. He walked out, looked at it, shook his head and never said anything to me. I knew I had done wrong and didn't know why I had done it. Sonny told me several years ago that he sold the car very shortly thereafter with the spike still stuck in the radiator. I was recently looking at a classic antique automobile catalogue and saw a 1929 Whippet Roadster that had been restored and the price was more than \$20,000.



The weather conditions of York Mt. were very conducive to growing many kinds of vegetables and fruits. We had a very nice fruit orchard with several varieties of apples, peaches, apricots, a large cherry tree and a vineyard of concord grapes and scuppernongs or as some called them muscadines or bullises. I especially liked the row of cultivated berries we called Boysenberries. We were told that seeds in berries would give us fatal appendicitis. They were delicious as simply eating or when made into pies. We ate,



*Drying Fruit*

canned or sun dried all of the fruit from the orchard. We sun dried fruit by peeling it, taking out the core or removing the seed and then slicing the fruit into slices about one fourth of an inch thick. These slices were then placed on a sheet of corrugated tin roofing and placed in the sun on sawhorses. The fruit would be gathered up at the end of the day and placed back the next day with the other side up. We made raisins from the big clusters of blue grapes, but it took another day. It took two sunny days to fully dry fruit.

We had a pit that we called a storm cellar, which was a rather large, and deep hole that was dug and covered with logs and dirt piled atop. It had a horizontal hinged door and stairs leading down into it from the back porch of our home. This was our refuge when very dark clouds suddenly appeared indicating that a tornado may be forming. We had many tornados that swept across York Mt. and everyone had a storm cellar. It was always cool down there but never freezing. We stored all of the canned goods on shelves and hung the dried fruits in bags from the ceiling or in sealed five-gallon lard cans. Sometimes the flooring boards would have water collected and we would bail it out, but it was generally just cool and damp. Several candles and matches were in a box at the top of the stairs. Barbara and Mary were terrified to go down there for fear of the spiders that lived in the log ceiling. Some of the spiders were Black Widows with a red dot on their undersides. I didn't exactly relish the task of going down there myself, to get a jar of this or that. I did enjoy the cool dampness down there on hot summer days.

During the summer of 1939, when we returned from the two weeks vacation at Stockton, we discovered that all of our canned goods and bags of dried fruits stored in the storm cellar had been stolen. We were devastated that the food and all those hundreds of quart and half gallons of canned goods were gone. It was too late in the summer to do anymore canning or storage of food. Replacing all of those jars with zinc lids and rubber seals was to be an expensive project. The Walker County Sheriffs officers came out to investigate.

They reported back that the coal miners of the DeBardelaben coal company of Empire, a small mining town about six miles away, had gone on strike and some of the miners had come in the night with trucks and had stolen our canned and dried goods. I don't think there were ever any arrests. The company paid three hundred dollars in restitution. The company paid their miners in scrip, which was good only at their company store. That theft had a profound effect in my life as I grew to despise John L. Lewis, coal miners and labor unions. John L. Lewis was head of the coal miners union and led the nations miners in numerous strikes during the course of WW II. I felt that labor unions were a despicable lot and cared nothing for the security of this country. Everything I ever read or heard about them was more money and less work. I have a very strong dislike for all unions.

We never went hungry that winter because we sometimes ate dried black-eyed peas or grits twice a day. We had banked hills of sweet potatoes, turnip roots, rutabagas and Irish potatoes, as well as dried onions hanging in the barn. We ate lots of cornbread because we had most of our fields planted in corn, for the family and the animals. We always had lots of corn in the barn crib. We also had a corn sheller that shelled the corn from the cob and it was very easy to use. It was a bimonthly ritual to shuck and shell the corn and take two bushels to the gristmill in pillowcase like bags. One bushel was for course grits and the other was to be ground into cornmeal. The gristmill that ground our corn into meal and grits was very convenient. It was across two fields and a creek, less than half a mile.

I disliked helping in the canning of tomatoes. Peeling tomatoes caused a rash on my hands and they would be sore for days. I liked tomatoes, corn, chopped okra and onions mixed when it was cooked as a stew and canned. It was delicious. I disliked the very acrid tasting canned tomatoes that we sometimes ate. The canned jars would be placed in the storm pit on shelves. Invariably, after a few days, some of the canned tomatoes would begin to form little bubbles that floated up. This meant that this jar of tomatoes was about to spoil. We would take that jar out and give the tomatoes to the pigs or eat the tomatoes as they were, if not spoiled. We also made canned tomato gravy to be put over biscuits or grits. Anyway, eating those about to spoil canned tomatoes was not my favorite food.

My father tried to make some wine one-year from the peelings of the peaches that were to be pickled or canned. His wine project turned into vinegar. He made some homebrew once, which all of it seemed to loudly pop the cork and bubbled out to make a foul smell like yeast. The odor never left the storm pit. I never saw my father take a drink of liquor, beer or wine. He may have, but I never saw him do it. Having a cup of Christmas Eggnog at Stockton, yes, and we children would be given cups that did not have the spirited nog.

My father was a staunch Democrat, supporting all of President Roosevelt's plans for the economic depression recovery. He did not favor the appointment of Judge Hugo Black to the Supreme Court however. I was eleven years old when Alabama's beloved Congressman and long time Speaker of the House, William B. Bankhead died and was brought back to Jasper, Alabama to be buried. My father and mother took Sonny, Barbara and me to attend his funeral. President Roosevelt came to Jasper for the funeral. He sat in a big wicker chair as people lined up to shake his hand, as well as the hand of others. The daughter Tallulah and Senator John Bankhead were in a line to greet friends. On the way home that afternoon, Barbara and I giggled and said that we would not wash our hands for a week after shaking the President's hand. Barbara tried to imitate the gravel hoarse voice of Miss Tallulah. She giggled too much. Aunt Fanny always packed a market basket of food and we always seemed to consume all of it before reaching home

We had a Majestic, battery operated cabinet model radio. It required an antenna of precise lengths to be strung between the massive shade oaks that were in our front yard. Many of the families would come to our house to listen to selected programs on particular nights. Batteries were expensive and the radio was used sparingly to listen to only a few selected weekly programs. Amos and Andy, Fibber McGhee and Molly, and Red Skelton were favorites as well as the 6:00 PM news. It seemed that the whole community came over when there was a championship-boxing match. We ate popcorn and played games such as hide and seek while our parents listened to the radio. Aunt Fanny made popcorn.



*Majestic Radio*



I was eleven years old in 1940 when our father took Sonny and me to hear an address by the fiery and eloquent arch segregationist Congressman Bilbo of Mississippi. It was held in the crowded courtroom of the courthouse at Union Springs, Ala. The afternoon was very hot and everyone was fanning their faces with undertaker fans. He was extremely animated and dramatic in his speech, waving his hands, stamping his feet and shouting as he pounded the podium, all to the great amusement and encouragement of the crowds that had packed the courtroom and were overflowing about the courthouse grounds. I intensely disliked him as he severely berated the black people. I felt that he was talking about Aunt Fanny. Afterwards my father took us up to get into the line to shake his hand. I reluctantly did so but I told Sonny later, I wanted to go wash my hand.

My father enjoyed taking us to events and places of note and always gave us a good lecture of explanation of the event or personality involved. We were enroute to Stockton one summer when he deviated his route down highway 31 through Montgomery to take us to the capitol building. We stood on a brass star that had been imbedded at the capitol steps, at the exact spot where Jefferson Davis was said to ★ have stood to accept the Presidency of the Confederate States of America. The side trip this day was very memorable in my young mind. I returned to that brass star years later on the

occasion of the inauguration of Gov. Jim Folsom and reflected on the inspirational lesson he taught us that day. I had marched up the Dexter Avenue, Montgomery inaugural parade with the Alabama National Guard in 1947 and had a little free time to visit.



*Steam Locomotive*

We always stopped in Montgomery at an ice cream plant and ate all the ice cream we wanted. Our next rest stop would be the old W.T. Smith Lumber Co. steam locomotive near



*The Family Car*

Chapman, then on to Stockton

arriving after dark. Our father took rope and tied the rear doors securely so the doors could not be accidentally opened. A fixture for our travels was a potty chamber on the floor of the back seat. It was well used by the little ones between the rest stops. Luggage was tied to the running boards and a rack on the rear. Spare tires were mounted in the front fenders of the big Chrysler Touring Car. The rear side windows and rear window had pull down curtains with a fringe. There was no such thing as a car radio. The car had running boards with a collapsible or storable luggage railing. It had a big luggage rack on the back. This car had a heater, which most cars did not have. I think I felt a bit smug about our fine car.

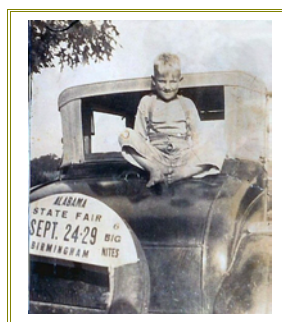
In November of 1937, Dr. Gwinn was called in to diagnose the pain and suffering Mamma was experiencing as well as the bruised colors she exhibited in the left side of her neck. He passed it off as a neck bruise she had suffered from an accident with the new electric Maytag washing machine the week before. She had used a stick to push the clothes down so as to be submerged, as the washing machine stirred the water and clothes in an agitating manner backward and forward. The stick contacted the agitator and with a whiplash, struck her on the neck. Her neck turned blue, then yellow and other colors.

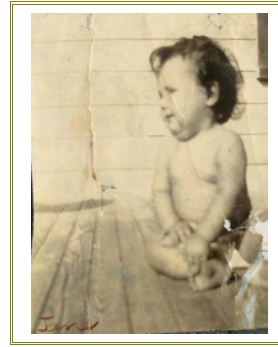
At some point, my father contacted his brother-in-law, our Uncle Jake Ealey, who was married to mamma's younger sister, our Aunt B.B. He drove an ambulance/hearse for Luquire Funeral Home in Birmingham. He told me years later that he had raced at the fastest speed he had ever driven, to our house to get mamma and take her to the hospital. Mamma had developed blood poisoning. I can so well remember her, lying in bed after she had turned blue, yellow and red about her face and arms. She hugged and kissed each of us as she was being transported to the hospital in Birmingham. It was too late, as she died two days later. The following year an anecdote was discovered for blood poisoning (Tetanus). She gave birth to her eighth baby as she was dying. He was a stillborn. Her body and the baby were taken to Stockton for burial together. We children were not taken to the funeral services or the burial. Her death certificate didn't enlighten me as to what her name actually was. She was born before birth certificates were in use and there was confusion about her actual name. She was Mamma to us, Jenny to my father, Nettie Jane to her sisters and her Troy State College diploma, Jeanette to her mother and Nellie Jane Norton Bryant on her death certificate. Maybe the Lord called her "My Sweet Angel".



It was decided that we should be given to our Grandmamas for at least the balance of the school year. Our grandfathers had died earlier. Sonny, Barbara and I were sent alone on the modern L & N Hummingbird train to Bay Minette and then on to Stockton. Mary, John, Jane and Donald were taken to La Grange to be with Grandmama Norton and our Aunt Dora who cared for Mary and John while Grandmama Norton, Wessie and Lee cared for Jane and Donald. They were not yet of school age. I knew little of their life in La Grange except the story that was often told of John mimicking Uncle Sam Stevenson, Aunt Dora's husband, as he shaved. The story was many times told with humor, that John watched him shave and after he had finished and left the bathroom, John proceeded to lather his face and shave himself. He cut up his face terribly and thoroughly frightened them with his white lathered face covered in blood. One of Aunt Dora's yard chickens was finally eaten as a Sunday dinner because it was always chasing and pecking Mary.

### A Collage of Childhood Pictures





For the Christmas of 1937, our father came to Stockton and got the three of us. We went to La Grange to get the four younger ones there and all go home to York Mt. for a few days, united as a family together. It was always a happy time to spend with Grandmama

Norton and our aunts. Leaving their home, enroute to York Mt., a terrible accident occurred near the town of Weedowee, Ala. A little seven-year old boy named Billy Smith, darted onto the gravel roadway from behind a rolling store parked alongside the gravel road. A rolling store is a large enclosed truck, loaded with merchandise, groceries, meats and fruits with the merchant making weekly rural routes for his merchandise sales.

Billy had an armload of loose apples his grandmother had just bought. The contact was unavoidable, as the right front fender of our 1935 Ford Sedan automobile struck him and broke his neck. He died instantly. The father had been cutting wood and came up to the house with his axe in hand, asking in a loud voice, "Where is that man that killed my Billy?" We all went berserk yelling and screaming. We were terrified. My father and little Billy's family calmed us with reassurances that my father was not at fault and everyone would be safe. At some time, our father went with Billy's father and grandfather in their vehicle to Weedowee to pay for a casket and funeral expenses. It was a terrible mistake that for some reason, he left all of us there in the car. He seemed to be gone an inordinate length of time. A truck loaded with rabbit hunters with their guns, came to the house asking in a loud voice, "Who killed Little Billy"? There was no amount of consolation or comfort that would suffice to calm us in our deathly fears. It was a bad scene for everyone. Billy's Grandmother took us into her home and tried to comfort us in our all-consuming fear. Only after our father returned and we quickly left there were we calmed enough for him to convince us that neither he nor we were in any danger. This whole incidence had been the most terrifying and traumatic event of my life. The accident and resulting death disturbed my father greatly for the rest of his life. I well remember him openly weeping some years later about the death of that child. We were later returned to our grandparents, but we never again went the way of Weedowee, Ala.

I was in the third grade that year at Stockton. Mrs. Eleanor Gause was a wonderful teacher for me. Sonny and I were assigned to live with our Uncle William, Aunt Cora and family of two daughters and four sons. Walter was my age. Hamp was Sonny's age and Roy was a little older. The five of us did not get along very well. They liked to "pick on me" and I was the brunt of some rather cruel pranks. It was decided it would be best that I would go live with my Uncle Bill, Aunt Robbie and family. Barbara was already living with them in the adjacent cottage that Uncle Bill, a WW I veteran, had built for his mother-in-law, called Bama. Oh How I despised that Old Woman Bama, for ever so long. She took my heavy wool blue overcoat, sewed up the split in the back and gave it to Barbara. Grandmama told me that Barbara needed that coat much more than I did and that I should be glad that I had a coat to give my little sister. I agreed with her and smiled about it, but I still hated Bama. I sulked at the mention of her name for a long time.

That first night I was with them, I was to sleep in the bed with my cousin Christine who was three years older than I was. Of all the humiliating things for a third grader, that first night with them, I had "an accident" and slightly wet the bed. That did it. I was humiliated and Christine was furious. I was immediately sent to live with Grandmama Bryant, her youngest child, my Uncle Woodrow and her brother Uncle Johnny Richerson. She never let me eat sweets like syrup that I liked so well with buttered biscuits, and she

never let me drink water before bedtime. I never wet the bed again. I went to bed sometimes thirsty but I was proud to never have had another bed-wetting accident.

She gave me one of Grandpapa's nightshirts for sleepwear. I felt so proud. Her home was so big and spacious. She still had the fixtures in the twelve foot ceilings where carbide lamps hung that had once glowed to provide night lighting. Her food was always so good and I was never hungry. She prepared many kinds of wild game meats such as turkey, deer, bear, boar, and turtles. She had house servants and a cook. Mealtimes were always a happy time and she often had people drop-in just to have a meal at her table. Her kitchen smelled so good. Her house always smelled of cedar and oak smoke. I had assigned chores, which I thought were a lot of fun. I liked to bring in an armload of her rich smelling pine fat wood for starting fires in the mornings. I really enjoyed living with Grandmama in her big house with feather bedding. I adored her. She made me laugh.

### ***Old Bryant Homeplace - Grandmama's House***



***Sam Smith, Woodrow Bryant, Grandmama, Maggie Willie driving,***

***Charles on running board***  
I slept on a big goose feather bed with big pillows, in the room with Uncle Johnny. I have so many happy recollections of us working together in the Richerson Cemetery. It was just a short walk behind the barn, across the creek and through the woods to the cemetery. He had built a small storage house at the cemetery to store his implements for

keeping the grounds in good condition and for storage of bags of cement. We would build wooden forms to pour a concrete slab over many of the unmarked gravesites that he knew where people were buried. They are still there, just as we poured and smoothed them back in 1937-38. We used a sledgehammer to drive a pipe into the ground a short depth. He put a pitcher pump onto it and we could then pump up water to mix the concrete. I thought he was so clever and all-wise in knowing exactly where to put the pipe into the ground to get water. Uncle Johnny taught me many things about the clouds and how he could predict the next day's weather by looking at the clouds. He talked a lot about the lore and legends of our Bryant and Richerson families. He had once been a very bad alcoholic, which cost him his job in Mobile, his marriage to Grandpapa Bryant's older sister and his good health. He kept his wine bottles concealed in the unused blacksmith shop, which was filled with fleas. One day I was out there and he offered the bottle to me. I gulped it heartily and became so, so sick, instantly. I vomited. Grandmamma sent him away for a while, but he came back and I was glad to see him. He had such a gentle manner. I never saw him drunk but it was said that he was a mean drunk. I liked him.

I seldom visited Sonny and my cousins because they were so mean and sometimes cruel to me, but one day I was over there when Sonny took a dare to ride a fair sized steer. The steer was caught and held with ropes about its neck alongside a wooden fence. Sonny climbed upon the fence and lowered himself onto the back of the steer. They turned the ropes loose and nothing happened. The steer just stood there with him on his back. Roy twisted the steer's tail. It sat down on its hind legs as Sonny slid off. All of the boys whooped, yelled and laughed, slapping their knees. The poor steer trotted off. That ended the double-dog dare bull riding affair. I was always scared when he accepted those dares.

Mr. Eddy Myles was a kindly and gentle man, born 1889, who drove a school bus from the rural Little River area of North Baldwin County, where he lived and operated a country store, to the Stockton Elementary School. In those days the drivers owned their school bus and were paid by the miles driven on their route. Ruth Coghlan, a student, kept order on his bus. She once told me of having to 'bop' the very popular Henry Bryars for fighting on the bus. One day I asked him about that incident and he just smiled. Mr. Myles was a WW I veteran. He always went to Mobile to get a load of fireworks for the fourth of July and New years celebrations. People came from far and near to see his July fireworks show. and to buy some fireworks also. The firecrackers had a terribly frightening effect on the horses. He operated a country store on the Blackshear highway.

Mr. Myles would can, pickle, or preserve huge amounts of vegetable soup ingredients, each summer, for the school lunch soup he would prepare. He brought fresh daily vegetables or some of his canned vegetables along on his bus. After delivering the students, he would go to the Stockton Bryant and Cox General Merchandise Store and get a large can of crackers, a soup bone and perhaps a little meat for his soup. He brought this back to the school where he had a little kitchen, and made, absolutely, the world's most delicious soup. These were the depression years of the 1930s. He charged five cents for a big bowl of his delicious hot vegetable soup with broth. Whatever was left over he gave as seconds, for free. Grandmama would fix me a big cat-face biscuit sandwich and give me a nickel for the soup. I really enjoyed my year living with Grandmama and all the fun

things we would do. She would crack open the geodes found north of Stockton and take out the colored clays inside the irregularly shaped sandy iron geode. She would mix this with egg whites and this was what she used to paint beautiful pictures. We had a lot of fun together, each painting a picture. I liked bright pictures with flowers, a blue sky and white clouds and bright green leaves. She liked dark pictures like moon lit landscapes and dark skies. She painted portraits also. I could never do that as I lacked that talent.

As school was out for the summer in Stockton, My father came and got the three of us to return us to York Mt. Aunts Rosa and Wessie brought the four younger ones from LaGrange. We were reunited once again and happy to be together. Aunt Fanny took very good care of us. When our father left us to her care that summer of 1938, we became somewhat independent and strongly resented the mountain community adults that called us “those poor orphaned Bryant children”. It was not pleasant to go to Temple Hill any longer, but we went because of Miss Murphee and Aunt Fanny. Our father was criticized for leaving us alone with Aunt Fanny that summer while he went to Auburn for his required studies and refresher courses. Aunt Fanny cared very well for all of us. We took care of each other also. We stayed in the woods a lot and they considered Sonny, John and me to be somewhat wild. We camped out a lot, sleeping under the stars. We roasted ears of corn in the shucks, ate strips of meat that had been roasted in the campfire and we ate pork and beans from a can. We also enjoyed roasting sweet potatoes and Irish potatoes in the campfire. The Chafin family had continued to plant and care for the farm through the years. He stored our share of the farm products for our winter use.

Corner School had a very limited athletic program of opportunities for students to engage in sports, except basketball. The teen-aged boys had to work the fields in the afternoons after school, to harvest and wash the cabbage, collards or other produce in the creek to be taken to the Birmingham Farmers Market early the next morning. It was a rigorous life. The students were not available for athletic practices except for those exceptionally gifted and talented boys like Shag Hawkins who was to be a star for the API, Auburn team. Our father and Coach Vines got him a scholarship. Our father also got Rex Turner a scholarship shortly after he arrived at Corner School. Rex Turner was later to become the founder and president of Alabama Christian College and University for many years. Our father had helped him to establish that Church of Christ College. The Turner family was noted to be a good progressive farming family and were our closest neighbors.

Our father really enjoyed taking Sonny and me to the wrestling matches in Birmingham. This was in the early years of the noted wrestler Gorgeous George with his long curly hair. We practiced the holds, the flips and tumbles, which the wrestlers thrilled their audiences with. We were once asked to perform our stunts for a weekly school assembly program. We knew about the “good guy, bad guy” act and I was to be the bad guy. Sonny was slightly injured, as the ‘wind was knocked out of him’, when I threw him off the stage and jumped down on him. That ended the demonstration. I was indeed the bad guy and Sonny was the hero and good guy. I have often remembered that day and have truly regretted that I did not jump down onto the floor, rather than onto his stomach.

Our father would return to Auburn each summer for refresher courses and courses leading to his Master of Science degree, which he earned several years later. During the summer of 1938 while he was at Auburn, he met and married the wonderful lady who was to become our Mother. The Lord had blessed our lives by being born as children of the angel we called Mama. Now, we were being blessed by another angel coming to be our loving mother for the rest of the years of her life. She lived to be 100 years old. Her birthday was on Thanksgiving Day, 1904. We said that the Lord let us celebrate Thanksgiving with her and then called her home to eternity two weeks later. She was indeed a truly remarkable mother and faithful Christian leader to all of us.

## Reporting On Teachers Vacation

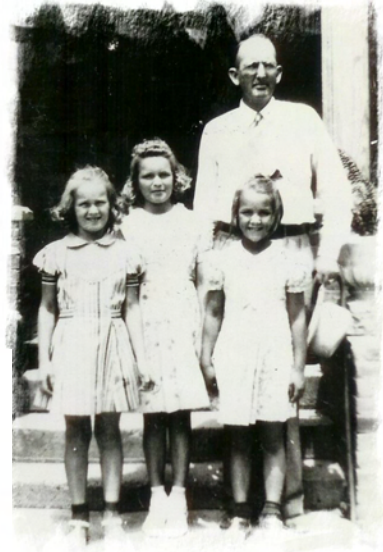
The highlight of Mr. Bryant's summer work was spent at Auburn from July 15 to August 3, at the annual school of instruction for the teachers of vocational agriculture of the State.

It was a very informal but genuine agreement that all of we children agreed to call her Mother, even before we ever saw her. She enlightened our lives in so many, many ways. She inspired us to achieve only that which we felt that we could do and to do the best that we were capable of doing. She inspired us to live honorable Christian lives and to be good citizens. I learned from her that the measure of success in one's life is not found in achievement but in the comfort of knowing a personal satisfaction of ones life.

We had no telephones on York Mountain; so all correspondence was done via by a three-cent postage stamp. Our father had written Aunt Fanny to have us ready to receive them on a particular day. They were married at Inverness, Alabama, which was her home. They were to spend that night in Birmingham and come home to York Mt. the next day. She had never seen us. She told us many times that the Lord had directed her to be our mother. I sincerely believe that is exactly what prompted her to marry our father and come to devote the rest of her life to children she did not know, had never seen and who lived at such a remote place that wasn't even on any map. That was sheer foolishness, an act of utmost courage or the leading of the Lord in her Christian life. I choose to believe she was a spiritually filled person following the leadings of the Lord and was sent to us.

Aunt Fanny had our clothes starched and ironed so neatly for the day of their arrival. We had baths the night before and were dressed and prepared all day, looking down the mountain road for them to come home. Finally we saw that Ford Sedan Deluxe coming up the road. We all quickly took our positions according to age and lined up on that little concrete walk in the front yard. We were like seven little stepping-stones. When they drove into the yard, they sat in the car for a long time, it seemed, just sitting there. Finally our father got out of the car, went around and opened the door for her. That model Ford car had doors that were hinged in the rear and opened from the front. They were later called suicide doors. Then she gracefully stepped out of the car for us to see her. She was so tall and beautiful. We just stood there in a line like little toy soldiers. Finally she came to us and hugged each one of us. She was crying and we didn't understand. Aunt Fanny brought out pitchers of lemonade served with jelly jar glasses. We sat on the porch and in the swing and just stared at her, she was so pretty. It was instant bonding for all of us.

## The Day She Became Mother to Seven



The Corner School basketball team generally had only seven players but they were so outstandingly good that they led that school with undefeated championship trophies, season after season. The big Birmingham schools dreaded to come to Corner to play basketball because they always went home defeated. The logo for Corner High School was the dreaded "Fighting





Yellow Jackets.” The Corner gymnasium was grossly undersized and the playing court, in order to be regulation size, had the painted sideline markers less than a foot from the gym sidewalls. When the ball was needed to be put back into play from the sidelines, the players stood on the sideline marker and put one foot against the wall to throw the ball back into the court. Spectators had to sit on the stage and the visitor fans had to sit on the floor on the opposite end under the hoop backboard, just away from the end zone court line. I have rambled somewhat to tell you that our Corner School was a round ball playing school only, because there simply were no student athletes available to make up a team to compete in other sports. Almost every home on York Mt. had a basketball hoop of some sort attached to a tree, pole or to the barn. They all loved the game and were very talented in basketball skills. The community supported the team.

Mother and some of the women teachers and other ladies of the area organized a basketball team and played a night game. It seemed everyone for miles around came to see the women in their bloomer style shorts and oversized blouses with arms to the wrist and buttoned to the neck. They played by the rules of a ladies three court division so the ladies did not have to run as much. They had one of the biggest gate receipts ever.....but, some of the men on the mountain felt the uniforms revealed the calf of their legs and told Mr. Harris not to have any more ladies games. They claimed it was evil for women to have such exposures and movements before men and children. That ended ladies basketball at Corner for many years even though the uniforms were uniforms from Troy.

I knew of a boy about my age, 13 years old, that did not go to school because his family worked as tenant farmers for Preacher Bagwell, and he had to stay at home and help with the farm. He had lots of ducks. We bartered for me to trade him a Barlow pocketknife for a mother duck that was sitting on nine eggs to hatch in about a week. I walked to his house, about two miles away, and we swapped. I brought the duck and eggs home and nursed that duck as she faithfully nested those eggs. All nine hatched and they were so pretty and fuzzy. I made corn meal cakes for them to eat. One morning I went to feed them and found that a predatory, dog, fox, or perhaps a raccoon had killed six. I took special care to lock the ducks in a pen every night with two wire fences about it. They were such good pets, following one of us everywhere we would go in the yard. They were good to pick bugs from the garden plants. I would sometimes take the ducks to the Irish Potato field and they would follow me in a line, quacking as they waddled along. I watched over them and would bring them home when they had picked over the field.



Sonny and I each had a calf for our FFA project. I was in the ninth grade. We had a real competition about those calves. We named them, but I forget their names at the moment. There was an epidemic of screwworm that summer and we constantly kept an oily medication on their backbone areas to ward off the flies that carried the worm larva, which was a parasite and destroyed the value of the hide. The FFA boys did the judging of the farm animals the students had grown as their projects.

Neither of us won a prize for our calves but it was a wonderful experience caring for

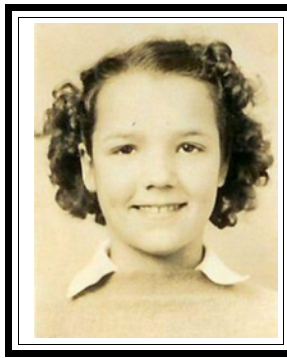
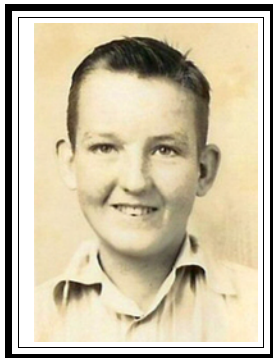
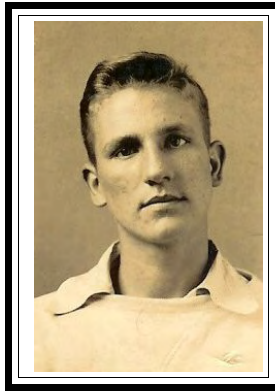
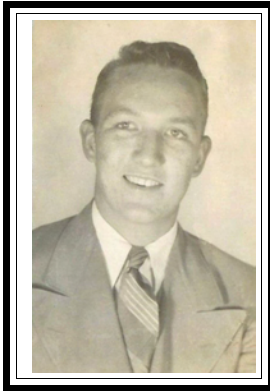
those calves. The day they were to be slaughtered, I went to the woods and spent the day. Sonny liked being a butcher and was right in the middle of the affair. Most of the meat of the calves was placed in the two super saturated salt brine pickling wooden drums and made into corned beef. Some meat was divided among those neighbors who helped and the remaining parts hung in the smokehouse to be smoke cured.

In the fall of 1943, Coach Percy Vines decided to organize a six-man football team to compete with some of the other schools of the general area. Sonny was in the eleventh grade because he had been double promoted when he was a second grader and I was in the ninth grade. We had six students to volunteer to play the game, which included one of my classmate friends, the athletically talented S.J. Creel. Six-man football was a running, running and running game. It was also a very physical activity when a ball carrier, running at top speed, was tackled on the clay field without safety pads. We had no spectators at the two home games and very few spectators for the two away games we played that season. We lost all four games. There was no money for any equipment or safety pads. The Warrior School gave us two footballs, one for practice and a game ball.

When I was starting into the ninth grade, Mr. Harris, the principal, asked me to open and operate a concession stand for students to get refreshments at the morning recess and at lunch time. He designated a dressing room on the stage of the auditorium for the operation. For two weeks before school started, Brammer Attaway helped me order cooler boxes, drinks, cookies, candy and refreshment goodies. He even loaned the school a glass candy display case. The students had been getting their snacks at his store previously so I never figured out why he helped me to be his competitor. He was just a really nice man. The first day of school, he closed his store for a short time and came over for the recess time and helped me. I was overwhelmed. Mr. Harris helped me sometimes and then a senior student, L.J. Files was assigned to help me. My pay was to get one Grapico drink and a cheese cracker pack, ten cents. I was so busy I seldom got to enjoy my pay before the bell would ring and I would have to rush to lock up and not be late for class. The snack bar made lots of money for the school to be used by the student government for school improvements. Before the year was over, Mr. Harris expanded the operation to sell school supplies and pencils. I enjoyed managing the refreshment center. I made a financial report and inventory to him every Friday afternoon after school.

I learned a lot about human nature, making money changes and in dealing with my peers. Mr. Harris taught me how to make the weekly financial report to him. Brammer would tease me about being his competitive merchant. I have always appreciated Mr. Harris selecting me to operate his little school store in that little dressing room on the stage.

**The Way We Were**  
Our last year at Corner High School  
School pictures of 1943-44



Our father was stricken with crippling arthritis in both of his hips. He was in a hip cast for a long time and walked in pain with the aid of a cane the rest of his life. He never told me this but I feel certain that after the debilitating episode with arthritis and the injury he sustained to his rib cage while demonstrating how to make a new form of terracing for the mountainside farms, he may have taken stock of his many monumental achievements and successes at York Mt. He may have decided then, that he wanted to finish his successful and personally rewarding career as a vocational agriculture teacher somewhere near his people in his beloved Baldwin County. His work at York Mt. had been a job well done.

Surely it was God's Grace and reward to him, as the teaching positions at Foley became open in the summer of 1944. His cousin, Professor W.C. McGowan, was principal and invited him to come fill the position of Vocational Agriculture teacher. He accepted. Mother was given a position to teach third grade children, which was an answer to her diligent prayers. It was truly a new life for all of us as we diligently began planning to start our lives anew in a small town rather than the rural environment of York Mt. It seems that we had about twenty days before he was to report in position for duty by the first of July. It was a scramble to pack the things we wanted and discard those things we would not need in our new lives in the town of Foley. I think the washing machine was Mother's highest priority to be sure and take, along with that new electric roller-ironing machine.

Mr. Harris, the principal, became so despondent at losing his good friend to Foley that he requested to be transferred to an open principalship at Mortimer Jordan High School, nearer Birmingham. He was awarded that position and readily vacated his position at Corner. The four older ones of us were sent to Stockton on the Hummingbird Train the week before the moving date. We all made our adjustments and were so happy with the new life that we anticipated experiencing in Foley. Life was taking a new perspective for all of us. It was truly a new life for all of us as we were starting our lives anew in the small town of Foley, rather than the very rural environment of York. Mt. Barbara even changed her name to be called Elaine, which was her middle name. She has said it was because two friends within their circle were named Barbara and she wanted to be accepted without confusion. We moved into a former residence on the school campus, which had also been used as a sixth grade classroom, but was renovated and expanded to accommodate the nine of us. It was sad to bid farewell to the many friends at York Mt., especially for Sonny as he was now a senior, going to a new school and having to learn new friends for only a year before he was to go to Auburn to study pre-medicine to become a physician. We helped our Father collect his personal tools and equipment such as a transit, books and other personal items he had in his classroom, lab, woodshop and blacksmith shop. Donald was to be in the third grade and mother was to be his teacher. We all made our adjustments to leave York Mountain and the comfortable life we had known. Our excitement was now focused on unknown factors. We were a very happy, large, loving family with a new outlook in anticipation of being with new friends in Foley. Would they like us? Would they accept us as friends? What kind of house would we live in?