

A Christmas Memory By: Ann Adams Simpson County

December 1966, I was six years old and excited because it had snowed and it was almost Christmas. Dad had already went out and cut our Christmas tree and we had a great time decorating it. Mom made us hot chocolate and popcorn and she helped with the decorations.

I was already dreaming about what Santa might leave under that tree. Mom was busy with her holiday baking, the house smelled like cookies and jam cake, Mom made the best jam cake I have ever had. She made it with her homemade blackberry jam she made every year.

It was going to be a wonderful Christmas and I was already counting down the days to it.

Then everything changed, a fire started in the attic of our home and by the time we realized it had spread to the rest of the house. Mom got us all out of the house and thankfully no one got hurt. My brother ran to a neighbor's home and they called the fire department but they could not get there in time to save anything . All we could do is watch the fire take everything we had. We were very lucky we all got out of the house to safety.

What do we do now, where do we go? We went to our Papa's house he lived close to us. Mom and Dad kept telling us everything would be fine but we just felt lost and scared. It was a long night and nobody got much sleep but morning finally came and an amazing thing happened. The news of the fire had gotten around and it seemed like the whole community wanted to help. Our neighbor, Mr. Hinton stopped by before Mom even finished cooking breakfast. He said he had a house that was empty and we could move into it, I could see relief on Mom and Dad's faces. She looked so happy I didn't feel scared anymore.

All morning friends and neighbors came by offering furniture and bringing bedding and things we would need. A neighbor drove Mom to town to get the electricity turned on and pick up some things. We spent that night at Papa's again but the next day we started moving into our new home. We had lots of help from our friends, they came with more things they

thought we might not have and they stayed to help us get settled into our new house. The owner of Gold City store came by and dropped off a box of groceries. That really put a smile on Mom's face. She thanked him and gave him a hug and that put a smile on his face.

We spent our first night there and were grateful to be safe and together . The next day was Christmas Eve. We knew it was not going to be the Christmas we had been hoping for, but Mom sang Christmas carols with us and told us stories to keep us from feeling sad. We were still trying to get settled in and Mom was making lunch when a truck pulled up. It was Mr Hinton's oldest son and he had went out in the woods and cut us a tree for Christmas. He brought it in and helped my brother get it set up. He even stayed and helped make decorations for it. I will never forget that tree. It was a pretty tree trimmed in paper chains, candy canes and tin foil ornaments we made.

My sister and I were sleeping in the living room and that tree was the last thing I saw before I fell asleep that night hoping Santa would be able to find us in our new home. And he did! When I opened my eyes on Christmas morning the first thing I saw was that tree and it had presents under it. I couldn't believe my eyes! He had found us! I was so excited. I can still remember exactly what I got that year. I got a paper bag full of fruit and candy, a new coloring book and crayons. And a doll, she was so pretty. She had long blonde hair and was dressed in a blue and white sailor outfit and tiny black shoes. It was love at first sight. We had a very merry Christmas that year with help from our friends and neighbors.

I have always loved Christmas and spending time with family and friends. And I have enjoyed every Christmas and I treasure all my memories of those wonderful holidays.

But when I remember that Christmas of 1966, I can still recall it so clearly in my mind it amazes me and it always reminds me that there are good people in this world who are kind and willing to help a friend in need. I think my family was truly blessed that Christmas.

What "Going Home" means to Me

"Going Home" to me is much more than just traveling across several KY counties or U.S. state lines. My homeland is located 90 nautical miles from the Florida Keys. It is known as the "island that time forgot". It is the island that I have not been able to visit freely since 1959.

I was born in Havana, Cuba on July 7 1951 in a small borough called El Cerro (The Hill). With all the unrest under the Batista Regime at the time, my parents made a very important decision to immigrate to the USA. My father's cousin living in Tampa Florida sponsored his legal immigration to the U.S. in the spring of 1954. In August of that same year, my mother and I joined him in Tampa. We did not make the journey by boat as many would assume but came to America on commercial airline flights.

I grew up in the U.S. surrounded by the Hispanic and American cultures and customs. Thanks to my parents, I learned to read, speak and write Spanish at home. I began learning English watching American television and then further perfected my English when I was enrolled in the American school system. I was very proud to become a naturalized U.S. Citizen at the age of 18. To this day, I consider myself very fortunate to live in the United States and be bi-lingual.

From 1955 through 1959, my parents and I would visit Cuba annually with the family that lived on the island. On my last trip to my homeland in 1959, I celebrated my eighth birthday with my parents, grandparents, godmother, aunts, uncles and cousins. Sadly, many of these relatives have since died, and I will never see them again.

For 70 years, I have longed to "go home" to visit my homeland and see family that I may still have there. I would like to tour the island and experience its true beauty as I have seen in books and on television. Most importantly, I would like to return to Cuba and scatter the ashes of my beloved parents in the land of their birth.

This is what "going home" truly means to me.

Mayra Diaz-Ballard
January 25, 2025

Clutch

by

Kimberly Barbee, Taylor County Homemakers

In the 1970s, teenagers could get their driving permit at age 15, and then test for their driver's license at 16. There were four girls in my family and my mom taught me and my three sisters to drive. She must have had nerves of steel! One thing she insisted upon was that we all learn to drive a straight shift, also known as a stick shift car, in addition to learning how to drive an automatic car.

We had just one family vehicle, which was an automatic. I was allowed to drive that car only for special occasions in high school such as drill team practice or performance at a football or basketball game. However, when I got to college, I was gifted with the use of a red VW Beetle that my oldest sister had purchased. By this time, the car had been used by my two older sisters as well as by the previous owner(s). The VW was a straight shift. It was also old, but somewhat functional. There were rusty spots in the floorboard and the pavement could be seen through those openings. The gas gauge didn't work. However, to me, it represented freedom.

As a new driver, I loved to get behind the wheel. I volunteered to run errands for others. One weekend, I went out with my boyfriend and I decided to drive the VW. In my small town we used to "cruise" around town on Friday and Saturday nights. Unfortunately for me, part of this drive involved a steep hill named Jamestown Hill in Columbia (Adair County), KY. As we started up the hill, traffic suddenly came to a halt. When it started

moving again, I tried to apply the clutch and gas method using the combination my mom had taught me. In my mind, I knew I needed to let out on the clutch while I pressed down on the gas in order to move the car forward up the hill. However, I was unsuccessful and the car rolled backwards a bit. Gathering up my courage, I gave it another try. Still no luck. Again, the car inched backwards towards the car behind us. Finally, I realized I was getting closer and closer to that car. At that point, I knew I had to stop attempting to move the VW or I would hit the car behind us and potentially cause damage to both vehicles. Luckily, my boyfriend could also drive a stick shift so we traded places. I got out of the driver's seat and moved to the passenger's side of the car and he did just the opposite. He moved the car up the hill on the first try! Of course, I was happy we were no longer impeding the flow of traffic, but I was frustrated that I hadn't mastered the clutch. He just thought it was funny.

Although I was embarrassed, I didn't give up on perfecting my gas and clutch technique. In fact, the first car I bought with my own money was a green Nissan that was a straight shift. I ended up driving it through the mountains of West Virginia to Virginia where I had gotten a job and then I made trips back to Kentucky. Shifting gears became easier for me, although taking off on a hill from a stopped position still caused my nerves to ramp up a bit.

While I no longer have a straight shift car, I'm proud of the fact that I can drive one if needed. I'll always have the memory of trying to master the clutch technique as well as a good story to tell new drivers!

DEVELOPING GOOD WORK ETHICS AS A YOUTH

AS VERY YOUNG CHILDREN WE WERE GIVEN JOBS. I REMEMBER ONE CROP, TOBACCO, THAT MY FATHER RAISED AND LEASED MANY ACRES FROM OTHER FARMERS THAT WAS LABOR INTENSIVE.

WE HAD TO CUT DOWN A LOT OF TREES AND PILE THEM 100FT. X 9 FT. AND 6 FT. HIGH AND SET THEM ON FIRE TO STERILIZE THE SOIL. AFTERWARDS, I TUGGED AND SHOVELED THE AREA CLEAR OF TINY LOGS . MY FINGERS WERE NUMB FROM GRIPPING THE RAKE. I SPLASHED WATER ON MY FACE TO COOL OFF.

I HELPED MY SIBLINGS LOAD EMPTY BARRELS ONTO THE WAGON AND WE TRAVELED TO A LOCAL CREEK AND BACKED THE WAGON IN. I GRIPPED THE HANDLES OF SMALL BUCKETS INTO THE CREEK WATER AND FILLED THEM. MY BROTHER POURED THE WATER INTO THE BARRELS. WE HEADED BACK TO THE TOBACCO BED AND SOAKED THE STERILIZED SOIL. FINALLY, I HELPED SCATTER THE TOBACCO SEED ON THE BED. CLUTCHING THE EDGE OF THE TOBACCO CANVAS I HELPED COVER THE BED.

WE LET NATURE PROVIDE THE SUN AND WATER. WE WAITED FOR THE PLANTS TO GROW TO 6 INCHES TALL. I GAZED UPON THE NEWLY PLOWED FIELD WHERE THE PLANTS WERE READY TO BE TRANSPLANTED. THE ROWS WERE MARKED OFF IN STRAIGHT LINES AND THE PLANTS PULLED FROM THE BED. WE OWNED A TWO PERSON METAL TOBACCO SETTER. ONE SIDE HELD 4 GALLONS OF WATER AND AN EMPTY CHAMBER. I SQUEEZED THE LEVER ON THE HANDLE AND MY SISTER DROPPED A PLANT INTO THE EMPTY CHAMBER AND WATER CAME OUT INTO THE HOLE. I LIFTED THE PLANTER FORWARD 6 INCHES AND REPEATED THE PROCESS. MY BROTHER FOLLOWED BEHIND AND CLOSED UP SOIL AROUND THE PLANT.

AGAIN, WE LET NATURE PROVIDE THE SUN AND WATER. AS THE PLANTS GREW TALL I USED A HOE TO NAVIGATE AROUND THE PLANTS TO REMOVE WEEDS. LIFE SETTLED INTO AN EVEN KEEL WHILE THE PLANTS GREW 4 FEET TALL AND FLOWERED. I USED A SHARP KNIFE TO CUT THE BLOOM OF EACH PLANT OFF AND DROPPED IT TO THE GROUND. THIS PROCESS ALLOWED THE TOBACCO PLANT TO MATURE .

IN EARLY FALL I HELPED DROP THE 4 FOOT LONG TOBACCO STICKS ALONG SIDES OF THE ROWS. I GRIPPED THE METAL SPIKE AND SET IT ATOP THE TOBACCO STICK. MY BROTHER CUT THE PLANT OFF AND HANDED IT TO ME. I SPIKED IT ON THE STICK AND MOVED FORWARD UNTIL I HAD 8 PLANTS SPIKED ON THE STICK. WE GLIDED DOWN THE ROW. A WAGON FOLLOWED BEHIND US AND PICKED UP THE SPIKED PLANTS. A FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT MADE US TRUDGE TOWARD THE END OF THE ROW. WE REPEATED THIS PROCESS TILL THE CROP WAS CUT AND SPIKED.

WE THEN KNEW WE COULD REST A FEW MINUTES BEFORE LIFTING THE STICKS OF TOBACCO ONTO THE RAFTERS IN THE BARN. I PAUSED OFTEN TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH BEFORE TRUDGING BACK IN TO LIFT MORE STICKS TO THE PERSON IN THE RAFTERS. WHEN THE BARN WAS FULL I GLANCED UP AT THE BEAUTIFUL SCENE.

AGAIN, NATURE HAD A HAND FOR 3 MONTHS FOR HELPING CURE THE TOBACCO FROM A YELLOW TO BROWN COLOR. I BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF AND PEERED UP AT THE PAIN STAKING JOB BUT WE COULD NOT REST TILL THE CROP WAS READY TO STRIP OFF THE LEAVES FOR MARKET.

ON A RAINY MORNING IN EARLY FALL, I CLIMBED UP IN THE RAFTERS AND HANDED DOWN THE TOBACCO. I SHUDDERED AT ALL THE WORK THAT AWAITED ME. THE LEAVES WERE PULLED OFF EACH STICK AND GRADED INTO TRASH, RED LEAF, TIPS AND LUGS. I PAIN STAKING PULLED THE LUGS OFF AND TIED A LEAF OF TOBACCO AROUND THE HAND. EVEN THOUGH I WAS BUNDLED UP WITH MANY LAYERS OF CLOTHING I WAS CHILLED IN THE COLD BARN. IT TOOK WEEKS TO STRIP AND TIE UP THE LEAVES. I HELP LOAD IT ONTO A TRUCK AND MY FATHER TOOK IT TO MARKET AT A TOBACCO WAREHOUSE IN GLASGOW.

I REFLECTED ON ALL THE HARD WORK THAT WENT INTO RAISING A LABOR INTENSIVE CROP BUT A FEELING OF HELPING MY FAMILY HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO COVER OUR EXPENSES FOR ANOTHER YEAR. IT INSTILLED GOOD WORK ETHICS IN ME. WE LEARNED NOT TO QUIT UNTIL THE JOB WAS DONE AND A FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT. I LEARNED TO WORK WITH OTHERS TO GET A JOB DONE AND PRIDE KNOWING OUR FAMILY WAS FINANCIALLY HELPED.

A Legacy of Light: My Sister's Journey

When my sister was nine years old, our world turned upside down. It started with headaches and blurred vision-little warnings of the storm to come. The diagnosis was a cruel one: a brain tumor entwined in her optic nerve. The doctors spoke in hushed tones, their faces etched with concern. They told us she wouldn't live to see her eighteenth birthday.

Three major surgeries followed, each more daunting than the last. We watched as she fought through pain no child should have to endure. She lost her sight in her left eye completely, and her right eye was left with tunnel vision. Her world grew darker, but her spirit never dimmed.

Despite everything, she chose to live. She chose to love. And she chose to serve.

For 27 years, she walked the halls of Kyrook Elementary, her shoes tapping softly on the tiled floors. She knew those halls better than anyone, not because she could see them, but because she felt them with her heart. Every child who passed through those doors knew her voice, her laugh, her unwavering patience. She volunteered tirelessly, helping with anything and everything, never asking for recognition or praise. Her reward was the smiles she brought to young faces.

But her generosity didn't stop there. She dedicated over 32 years to the Homemakers, serving in important positions and bringing joy to gatherings with her humor and kindness. She was a cornerstone of the community, a constant presence that made everyone feel welcomed and valued.

Perhaps her greatest legacy was at 4-H Camp. For 29 summers, she led craft classes, her hands guiding where her eyes could not. She taught more than just crafts-she taught resilience, creativity, and perseverance. The kids adored her, not because she pitied herself but because she inspired them. She showed them that obstacles are just opportunities in disguise.

Year after year, she returned to that camp, pouring her love and energy into every lesson. Generations of campers grew up under her care, learning not only to make something with their hands but also to believe in themselves.

The doctors were wrong. She didn't just live to see her eighteenth birthday; she lived to see fifty-six years, each one more meaningful than the last. Her life wasn't measured in years but in

moments, in lives touched, and in the legacy she left behind.

When she passed away, our community mourned deeply. It was as if a light had gone out, but her glow remained in every heart she touched. At her memorial, stories poured in—stories of kindness, of laughter, of quiet encouragement. People spoke of how she had changed their lives, how her courage had inspired them to be better.

I still hear her voice sometimes, echoing in my memories. I remember her laughter, her fierce determination, and the way she never let anything hold her back. Her vision may have been limited, but her insight was boundless. She saw beauty where others couldn't and she shared that beauty with the world.

My sister taught me that life is not about what you can see but about how you see it. She chose to see hope, love and purpose, even in darkness. She showed me that a legacy isn't about wealth or power, it's about how you make others feel. It's about the lives you touch and the light you leave behind.

She was more than my sister; she was my hero. And though she is gone, her legacy shines on—in every craft project, every child she mentored, and every heart she inspired. She taught me that the greatest vision comes not from the eyes but from the heart and hers was the brightest of all.

Tears

What other people think! I'd have said it doesn't matter to me. But when someone today told someone else what she thought of me, in my presence, well, it mattered immensely.

Down the road, alone, I could hear her. Not the exact words but the gist of her description of me. At least the part of me she thought she knew.

Tears came to my eyes. Emotion swelled around my heart. Who would've thought she had even noticed me these past several years. Now a very new person has this voiced idea of who I am along with their own first impressions. Interesting! To me anyway, because it was about me. Rare is the occasion to hear someone talk about you to your face, although my eyes probably were cast downward as the attention of the moment was on me.

Such a teeny tiny spotlight compared to the Red Carpet crowd. Wonder how they accept acknowledgement. Maybe if your name is in lights, you become kind of immune or nonchalant to the brightness.

I did respond gracefully and I might say humbly to being brought into focus. Guess now I can't help but guide myself toward that unsolicited endorsement. A way forward highlighted and underlined!

Sundays with Daddy

Some of my favorite memory of my dad was from when I was very young and we were very poor. Okay, maybe not VERY poor but we certainly fit the poor category. I was about three years old and we lived in Public Housing in Louisville because nobody would rent to my parents because there were five kids in the family. We did not have a television so there was not an option for us to be entertained in that way so we actually played with our toys.

Sundays were always special for us as it was the only day we really got to see Daddy due to his work schedule of leaving before we arose and returning after we were in bed. On Sunday nights we would all get in our pajamas and sit on the couch as Daddy read us the comics that were in the Sunday Courier Journal. The bright colors of those comics were in contrast to the daily comics that were in black and white. As we sat there with Daddy in the middle, he would read and generally explain the comics to us. It didn't matter that sometimes the meanings in those strips were over our heads, Daddy always took the time to explain them so we could get the humor. Most of the time the humor for us was clearly in the different voices he would use to create the different characters and how we loved those characters.

We loved the antics of Nancy and Sluggo, Dennis the Menace, Dick Tracy and all the people of Dog Patch that included Lil Abner and Daisy Mae. Perhaps my favorite was Pogo and I can't say why he was except for the silly voices Daddy gave those particular characters. I do remember that almost every comic strip had an underlying moral lesson and Daddy made sure we got that lesson.

As we began to learn to read, we all started reading the comics for ourselves and those wonderful evenings of Daddy reading to us diminished, but the lessons never did stop. Throughout his life he often found wisdom in many of the comics that appeared in the papers and were included in his teachings as a Sunday School teacher. Not only did we learn to look for wisdom in the comics but we learned that we were an important part of his life.

So my favorite memory of my dad centers around the Sundays he devoted spending time with us and creating wonderful memories of a loving father who worked hard to provide for us, but also spent time showing us how important we were to him. A memory and a lesson we could carry into our adult lives. Thank you Daddy for the Sundays, the lessons and the memories.

Addiction

Years ago, you became my addiction. From the moment you walked into my life, your smile captivated me. The way you walked with such confidence and the first time you spoke to me I was transported to a place I had never been. And all you said was, "Hello."

Every day we were together I was on a forever high. When you were gone for more than a day, I would come down and come down hard. The moment you returned I was in an instant state of euphoria.

For five years I was highly addicted to you. Then one day, out of nowhere, you were gone just like the day you had walked in so casually.

The withdrawal was instant. I came down hard: sweats, then chills, and throwing up. I just knew that I was going to die. I cried all the time. I barely got out of bed. This went on for three years. Finally, I made it out of the deep depression that had taken over after the withdrawal had ended.

Seventeen years passed, and I saw you on a social media site. Like a recovering addict with an urge for the forbidden drug, I just had to have you, so I took a leap of faith that maybe things had changed and we could be one again.

Shortly after, with my eyes wide open, and so high that I thought I might never come down, I heard your voice on that first phone call, and I was transported twenty-three years into the past.

The high was not the same and I needed more: to see your face and to feel your touch. Then I would have the full dose needed for the complete fix, but months would pass before I would be able to get the full dose of you, the drug I had needed so badly. After seventeen years of sobriety, I was hooked again and the addiction would take over my life again.

With you being so far away, a daily small dose of messages and phone calls were not enough; I need more of your kisses and lying in your arms. I was miserable; I needed a higher dose, but did I need it if I were in danger of overdosing? I did not care. I had to have you in my life. Good or bad, you will always be my biggest addiction.

Playing in the Barn

Children today have no idea what it is like to not actually have entertainment 24 hours a day! So, I'm going to explain to you one of the ways my cousins and I entertained ourselves growing up.

When I was a child and all my cousins would come to our Mamaw's house for Thanksgiving, we would all go down to the tobacco barn or the "backer barn" or "backy barn" to play. There was no TV in this area of the mountains in Eastern Kentucky at that time and the radio was only for Cincinnati Reds ballgames on Sunday afternoons in the summer. We were not allowed to play in the barn until the tobacco had gone to market and that was right before Thanksgiving when it was sold. Now when you play in the "backer barn", you have to climb up to the different levels that are situated in the barn. I usually would climb about halfway up and play Barbies with my girl cousin. Of course, if you are a boy, you had to climb all the way up to the rafters to prove something, don't ask me what because I'm not a boy so I can't answer that one. Anyway, this was actually one time in my life when I was definitely glad that I was a girl. I NEVER wanted to climb all the way up and I REFUSED to climb all the way up to the top of the barn. I just knew and still do, that I would have fallen and broken my leg. All of my boy cousins (and there were a lot of them) would make fun of me for this. I didn't care though because as I said, I knew that I'd break my leg. My girl cousin Sarah Joe (Sary Jo) would

always take up for me and tell them to leave me alone. They'd shut up real quick when she fussed at them because they didn't mess with Sary Jo. She is the only female cousin that I have that is actually close to my age on that side of the family and we had to stick together against all of them boys! All of my other girl cousins that I have are quite a few years older than I am and were married and gone by this time.

Part of playing in the barn for my boy cousins was throwing the backy sticks at each other. The backy sticks were used to dry tobacco while in the barn during the drying season. When they weren't being used, they would be stored in the barn. One of the things that my boy cousins enjoyed doing was climbing up to the top of the barn while holding onto a backy stick and then throwing the sticks at whomever was on the ground and seeing if they could hit you with the stick. Of course, they never actually hit anyone that I know of with a stick because, if you're on the ground and you see a backy stick coming at you from above, you pretty much had enough sense to move out of the way. Ahhh, those were the days!

Surviving The Crazy Christmas Cat

During my grade school days returning to school after a break, meant there was the paragraph that had to be written on “What I did over the school break.”

This is a story about what happened over Christmas break one year at my son’s house, as dramatically told to me by my five-year-old grandson. A story I felt like I actually lived through by watching the animated way he told me the story. One I actually laughed till I cried through.

It was a typical Christmas morning starting out like any other Christmas morning with kids awaking at the crack of dawn, getting Mom and Dad out of bed, racing to the living room, and investigating all the bounty left under the tree.

Then it turned into a helter-skelter kind of day. There was cleaning up, gathering food, family gifts, in and out of the house loading the car, and heading to the grandparents’ homes. The day ended back at home with everyone in and out of the house unloading the car. Somewhere along the way an unexpected guest made its way into the house and stowed away in the pantry.

As my daughter-in-law went about her business of putting things away, she spied a green-eyed creature hunkered down in the corner. She knew it could not be the family cat, “Nose,” because she had just encountered her doing what she does best, “nosing” in other people’s business. Brodie, a Great Dane, was much too large to be hunkered so low.

With a squeal, as the surprised cat leapt out of the corner, my daughter-in-law took off. On her heels was the stowaway cat, Nose butting in, big scaredy-cat Brodie bounding after the trio, and then followed by my son, and two grandsons trying to figure out what all the commotion was about. It was a three-ring circus.

After hearing about the story, I asked my grandson about their unexpected visitor. His eyes widened and he began: “Oh my gosh! It was a Crazy Christmas Cat!”

He relived the story for me. It seems after the parade of pandemonium they all ended up in a bedroom with the door shut and Crazy Christmas Cat going berserk. Here were four family

members, a three-foot tall dog, and a nosey cat all trapped in a room, which was getting smaller by the minute, by a stray cat gone mad.

The Crazy Christmas Cat could climb shelves, bunk beds, curtains, and leap from one piece of furniture to the other as if it were a flying squirrel. It could even get into the farthest corner under the beds. Kids were screaming, dog barking, Mom hollering at Dad to get the cat, and Dad running around trying to stay out of harm's way, while Miss Nose was watching from her own perch, doing what she does best.

Reed, wearing his Leonardo Ninja Turtle costume, complete with face mask, and brandishing two swords, was jabbing aimlessly through the air and giving Ninja yells of "EEEYT" (which he so dramatically demonstrated). He then courageously tossed one of his swords to his dad and yelled, "Chop him dead, Dad!"

Mom was trying to be civil and save the cat's life until she became the brunt of its claws and retaliated with, "Get the dart gun!"

"She wanted to shoot it dead!" Reed explained. "It was scary when Crazy Christmas Cat jumped off the dresser and kept hissing, and saying, 'Meow, Meow,' really loud."

Finally, the cat was captured in a box, unharmed, (probably because it was exhausted), and was carried outside and released. Crazy Christmas Cat turned out to be only a kitten whose adrenaline had gone wild from the frenzied Christmas Day adventure. It wasn't the fully-grown bobcat they had imagined.

Reed reported the next morning the Crazy Christmas Cat was sitting on the porch meowing some more. "She wasn't even scared of my mom and dad either," he said.

Now that was a crazy cat.

Foster's Lake- A Memoir

By Sandy Hamilton

Foster's Lake, named by my siblings and I, was a hole of water near our home, where we spent many summer days cooling off. The water was about three feet deep, after we created a dam of limestone rocks found along the banks. The dog days of summer beckoned us to build this structure to hold back water and create a swimming hole.

Our dad soon learned that we had created a possible safety hazard and came to the creek and dismantled the dam. We weren't very happy and vowed to rebuild it when he was working on the back of the farm. Our mother was a home manager and couldn't be in several places at one time, so we got by with our swimming pool. When dad went to work the next day, on the back of the farm, we rebuilt the dam and swam all day. But when he came home that evening for supper, he was none too happy about our lack of obedience and disrespect for his opinion. We were threatened with a visit from the county sheriff if we didn't stop.

So, a week or so went by. Being hot and bored, so we decided we would rebuild our pool and tear it down before dad came in from the field. We were quite shocked when an official vehicle crossed the cattle gap to our farm and drove over to where we were. We all climbed out of the water, just knowing we were on our way to jail. The sheriff described what happens when kids are left to their own devices and how much trouble they can get in to. He also made mention that the neighbors couldn't get water for their cattle if we

were holding it back. He stood there and made sure we dismantled our wonderful pool. We promised never to do it again, and we didn't.

After the sheriff left our farm, we discussed how mean our neighbor must be to call the sheriff on a bunch of kids just trying to stay cool.

We learned many years later, that it was our dad who called the sheriff to put some fear into us and make sure we stopped building the death trap.

THREADS

My grandmother Mary Tilson believed she could foretell the future by studying the clipped threads and bits of fabric that caught on the hem of her skirt whenever she made a new dress.

She taught me to sew and as I pedaled away on her treadle machine, she also taught me to respect her strange Irish superstitions. To her, those stray threads she found on my clothing had landed there to help her analysis of my future. Different colored threads meant different things. Black did not mean death. Black was the color of my true love's hair. Threads in red, yellow, green or pink were fine unless they were from my wedding dress.

Granny would sing, "Married in red, you'll wish you were dead. Married in green, you'll be ashamed to be seen. Married in pink your spirit will sink. But when you marry in white, you'll find the love of your life."

For a time, after she taught me how to sew, I believed that the stray threads really could show me a glimpse of my future. Do I still believe that those bits of colored thread have a mystical magic and power? No I don't, but I still remember and treasure Granny's long-ago lessons.

Before I walk down the aisle in my white wedding gown, I'll think about the pattern my life will take. I'll take a mare's nest of tangled threads from the bottom drawer of Granny's sewing machine to weave into my bridal bouquet.

I do believe in traditions so I'll make sure that on my wedding day, I'll have something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue. Granny's tangled threads are old, my gown is new. My Irish lace veil is borrowed, and my garters are blue.

Murder in the Woods

The alarm sounded at 5:30 am. I quickly moved to silence it so as not to wake my hubs. Who knew I could move so quickly at that time of morning! Last night's hope of getting into position well ahead of the murder has quickly waned as I remember the 28 degrees I will be facing while I wait for that moment. I linger under the warmth of the covers. It would be so easy to drift... back... to sleep. Then I remember the purpose of the early wake up call. The excitement and anticipation grow again, providing me with enough energy to leave the warm bed. I must be in position by 6:30 am.

I laid my clothes out in the living room the night before. The illumination from the front hall will cast enough light into the living room to get dressed without disturbing my sleeping hubs. Now the often futile, but necessary, steps to be warm while being still in the woods. I sit to pull on my 1st pair of socks, stand for the thermal underwear, sit for the 2nd pair of socks, stand for the flannel lined jeans. A quick struggle with zipper and belt, all is secure. Now to the top half: thermal top, t-shirt, flannel shirt. I must hurry now. If I start sweating in the house, I will be cold outside. Timing is important. The hall holds my camouflaged outerwear. I pull on my insulated coveralls, slip each foot into insulated boots, almost in one smooth motion. A down coat, baklava, ball cap with a red head lamp for seeing at night, complete this layer. I check my phone. I am on track to be in position on time. I turn off the hall light, turn on my head lamp and quietly open the door, now stepping into the cold predawn night. My gloves are in my coat pocket. I pull them on as I quickly but silently move into the woods at the edge of the yard.

I constantly scan as I walk, in hopes of seeing any animals before they see me. I hear a deer blow... I was spotted. I look in that direction, my head lamp lights up a bounding White-tailed deer as it hurries away.

About 50 yards away I can see the outline of my goal... my perch. The enclosed perch sits about 5 feet above the ground. From this spot I can watch the woods as it awakens. I make my way to the perch and climb its ladder. At the top, I carefully open the door to make sure no other critter has arrived before me. The perch is empty except for the chair from where I will watch the events unfold. I enter. The time is 6:20 am. The murder is expected about 15 minutes past sunrise at 7:27 am. As planned, I am here an hour early. No matter how quiet I am, I know I have disrupted the woods. This hour will give the woods

time to forgive my trespassing into its domain, allowing the woods to assume it's routine. I turn off my head lamp, sending me into complete darkness.

I sit. I listen. I doze.

In the darkness, I open my eyes to the sounds of a small animal scurrying through the leaves. It is most likely a Possum or Raccoon foraging. I will never know for sure as the head lamp should remain off.

I doze.

My heart races as I once again open my eyes, staring into the night. Cocking my head to hear something. I do not hear anything, except my heart beat. Something has to be there. Some noise woke me. Didn't it? I sit in silence. I hear it. A gentle movement. Most likely a deer.

I sit in the silence. The outside world starts waking. An occasional neighbor dog barks, a mule hee-haws. Traffic noises indicating other folks heading to work. I refocus on the woods wondering if the deer is still nearby. I think I hear it from time-to-time, but I'm not sure. I see a faint glow from the East. Sunrise is probably 30 minutes away, but the glow has begun. I am surrounded by the various bird's participation in the morning rhythms with their short peeps of welcome to the morning. The squirrels have their rhythm too as they move through the leaves ... hop, hop, sit, hop, hop, dig. As the sun continues its journey up to the horizon, the woods take on a slight glow. Enough now that I can barely make out the deer lingering nearby and the squirrels in search of food. I love watching and listening to the woods wake.

In an instant, the woods are bright. It's official... the sun has risen... the murder should be soon. You can almost set your watch by it. Yet it does not happen every day. I will be disappointed if it isn't today.

I can hear the raucous of crows cawing. The symphonic sound of their cacophony is proof that the murder of crows is in the woods now.

HIDDEN TREASURES

At 21, I discovered I had 2 half-sisters. Before the use of personal computers, there was no way to track down someone. Even with technology, it was almost impossible if the person had been adopted and had a different last name.

Through 23 and Me, I connected with Carol, the daughter of one of my half-sisters. She had been looking for me. Unfortunately, my half-sister had died but Carol was so excited to get to know me and learn more about my dad - her grandfather. She lives in Colorado and we text often.

Another relative popped up with a high percentage of DNA match. I found a picture of him and knew immediately he was from my mom's family. He looked so much like my uncle and granddad. He was born in Hawaii where my uncle had been stationed with the Navy. Long story short, he was born to my teenage nephew who knew about him but never had contact with him. I gave my nephew his phone number after getting approval from both of them. It was a great reunion.

This one is the most bizarre. Kate, a 35 year-old woman in Pennsylvania (I live in Kentucky) contacted me through 23 and Me and said I was probably her grandmother. I responded with "I don't think so but there is a high DNA match so

I'll see what I can find out". I thought about this overnight and called my son the next morning. He never knew about her but wasn't surprised, the pieces all fit. She was indeed my granddaughter.

What a gift! I am so happy to have her in my life. We got to meet a few months later and she looks like I did at her age. We even have an identical mole. We fell in love with each other and text and call often. Not only did I gain a granddaughter, I gained 2 beautiful great-grandsons and a wonderful grandson-in-law. It has been so much fun buying birthday and Christmas presents for the boys. I feel so blessed that she found me.

I'm anxious to see what other hidden treasures await me.

Karen Mink

My Wedding Day

By

Marie Mayes Pitts

Every little girl dreams of the day she walks down the aisle wearing a beautiful white bridal gown with a flowing train behind her to meet her prince charming. Then in ninth grade during homeroom I met this boy sitting across from me, which at that time I could barely stand from some of the comments he made to me. Then feelings changed in the 10th grade after a Halloween Party at my friend's house that lived just down the street from me. We were an item through the rest of high school, going steady, wearing his class ring with lots of tape and he wore mine on a chain around his neck.

After graduation in May of 1961, we both joined the work force, he at Motor Parts and I at Potter and Brumfield working in the office. We each was making a whopping \$1.00 an hour and we were so in love the next step was naturally "let's get married". I didn't believe him the first time he ask waited until he ask again before saying yes.

The date was set for November 18, 1961 at 2:30 in the afternoon since I had heard the minute hand needs to be moving upwards signifying good luck for the couple's future together. Rented a small one bedroom house for \$40 a month. We later said all our furniture was early attic and old garage since most came from our parent's houses.

My grandmother insisted that she purchase my dress from Gillispie Dry Goods Co. which was the most expensive department store in Franklin. My beautiful white dress became a blue satin dress that you would have worn on Easter Sunday but I loved the color and the way it was made. I chose blue because had also heard "marry in blue, always be true". My grandmother, being her typical self, noticed a small lipstick smear where someone had tried on the dress previously. To my embarrassment she managed to talk the clerk into a much lower price which was around \$10.00 or less. I then had something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. So I was ready to meet my prince at the altar. After our parents went to the court house to sign permission for us to get our marriage license, blood work to make sure we didn't have a horrible disease, jewelry store for two gold wedding bands, we were ready for a Saturday afternoon wedding.

My best friend since I was five years old, Bonita and Ronnie's friend and neighbor, Wayne met us at my Mother's house along with my new Pastor, Brother Porter. Others wanted to attend but I only want the five of us at my wedding. May have been because since my Dad passed away when I was thirteen and would not have been there to walk me down the aisle and another I knew my widowed Mother could not afford the expense of a wedding. After prayer in the living room, we five left to go a few miles to Drakes Creek Baptist Church where we would be wed. Our small church only had preaching on one Sunday a month and unbeknown to us, they had started remodeling the front area of the church. We opened the door to the site of the pulpit, pews, ladders, carpenter tools and sawdust everywhere. Someone grabbed a big industrial dust mop, made a circle about middle way down the aisle big enough for the five of us to stand. So our "I love Lucy version of a wedding" was about to begin. Brother Porter was already nervous enough since this was his first marriage to perform. Think we all were a little nervous or silly.

I am a little under five foot, Bonita is a good head taller than I and we are standing real close together in this circle. Brother Porter started out by telling Ronnie to repeat after me then started reading like a book. Ronnie's face goes a little pale as to say I can't remember all that, then Brother Porter tells him that is not what he has to repeat. Bonita gets tickled, her elbow is in my ribs starts going up and down and gets me tickled too. Finally we both get our vows repeated and when Brother Porters tells Ronnie he can kiss his bride, I say "not in front of the preacher"! So our first kiss as a married couple was in the car before we left the church to go to our new home.

At the time I was eighteen and Ronnie was nineteen, November 18 along with our three children, their spouses, and five grandchildren we will be celebrating sixty four years of marriage. Even though the setting was not perfect we meant those vows "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part". God had truly blessed us! Hoping Ronnie will take me out to eat this time since I thought I was supposed to cook our supper that night but we first had to go back to my Mother's to borrow some potatoes.

Marie Mayes Pitts

The Queen of Substitutions

Tamela Plamp, Butler County

My mom grew up in Oregon, just six miles from a grocery store. When she married my dad, she did not know that the closest grocery store would be forty-eight miles away. They only went to town once a month for groceries. It didn't take long for my mom to learn to make a grocery list and to keep ingredients on hand. She told me she learned many things that first year of marriage: to persevere during the tough times, to not give up, and to make the best of life. I don't remember her ever planning meals.

Living on a farm, we grew our own meat and vegetables. Each morning, I remember Mom going out to the freezer and selecting whatever meat she found. Then she would plan the dinner meal around that. Sometimes she would not have all the ingredients needed so she would either leave them out or substitute something close. Mom was always trying a new recipe she read in a magazine or one a friend gave her. Due to her lack of planning, she would decide to make the recipe even though she might not have all the ingredients. Living so far from the grocery store, she couldn't just run to the store. It wasn't always possible to borrow from a neighbor. Therefore, when she didn't have an ingredient for a recipe, she would look for a substitute in her cupboards. Many times it was a spice like garlic salt or onion powder to replace garlic powder or something easily substituted that didn't really change the flavor. To me, it seemed like substitutions were a way of life for her and we ate whatever she cooked.

In later years, my best friend Shirley, my mom and I would go on trips together. Shirley and I would plan easy to fix meals and desserts. When Mom got home, she would call one of us and

ask for one of the recipes we had made her. She wanted to make it for potluck. After Mom made the recipe, she would call to tell whichever one of us she got the recipe from that it didn't taste like what we'd made but that it was still good. As we talked about the recipe she would say something like, "Well, it called for Jello, but I didn't have any so I used the pudding I had. Oh, and I didn't have sour cream either, so I just substituted mayonnaise. It didn't hold together very but still tasted good."

By the time she finished telling what she had substituted, of the nine ingredients in the recipe only three were not substitutes. This happened many times over the years. Shirley and I nicknamed my mom "The Queen of Substitution". Even though Mom died a few years ago, Shirley and I still laugh and laugh over Mom's substitutions and mishaps caused by the substitutions.

Now when I make something, I find myself substituting an item rather than driving the six miles to town or borrowing from my neighbor. Then I laugh to myself and think, "Oh no, I've become my mom!" Then I tell myself, "No, I'm not that bad because there will be only one Queen of Substitution . . . my mom!"

Old Woman

Old woman walked slowly down the lane, looking at the flowers left behind in fall's siege. The tall grass swayed in the music of the wind.

The sky was startling in its clarity. A tiny cloud drifted timidly. Old Woman leaned on her cane and chuckled. "A waste," she said, referring to the timidity of the cloud.

Birds trilled close by. Farther away was the sound of a dove. She inhaled the scent of pine until she thought her lungs would burst. She picked up a pinecone and examined it. Presently, she threw it away.

She walked on into the "Place of Death," where her father had died in a hunting accident when she was seventeen, and imagined she saw his blood on the leaves. But those leaves had long since decomposed.

She saw the places she played as a child and a young girl. She set the swing in motion with her hand and caressed the black kettle her mother had made soup in. The barn that had once held tools and tractors and the two old mules, Pete and Joe, was falling. The walnut tree she had practiced on with her flipper had been torn down years before by a bulldozer. Her mother and brother were dead.

She remembered the people she had known in her youth and the friends she felt she still had, although, some were dead or far away.

Old Woman took pleasure in the turning leaves and caressing winds, the bright sun and sky. Her frail body waved in the wind. She welcomed the sunlight on her countenance and in her lonely heart.

She remembered the love she'd thrown away as easily as she had the pinecone; the sharp words of malice and the changing of innocence into hardness because of her disillusionment.

Where had time gone? Time had once laughed and loved and played with her. She had lost it. Time was her faded eyes and wrinkled hands and the cane she leaned upon. The voice called her name, and she sighed and turned.

Time to return. She was grateful for this last look at the world she knew. Perhaps tomorrow or a few years from now, she would awaken in the Lord and be a better person than she had been before.

She walked on the gravel under the oaks and glanced at the church. This church was empty of spirit. She lingers in the grass, hesitantly. The voice was louder. Presently, she came to the rock and looked at it—touched it.

As her body began to fade into dust, she chuckled. “A waste,” she said, referring to the absurdity of the rock that bore her name. And the wind carried the dust, scattering it. The voice remained with the rock that spoke.

Headed Home

I had left home at 8:00 that morning and had been shopping in Bowling Green all day. It was 2:00 in the afternoon and I was headed home on Interstate 65. The day was sunny and beautiful. The traffic was heavy but basically it was going pretty smoothly. Vehicles were zipping past me. All of a sudden, I was behind a little blue truck. The bed of the truck was loaded from top to bottom with all kinds of junk metal and other items. The junk and other stuff did not appear to be tied down and it looked like things could start flying off at any moment. I wondered if I should pass the truck before something came off and hit me, damaged my car and/or caused an accident. I looked down at my speedometer and saw that I was going 65. The speed limit was 70. I thought I would be able to safely pass the little truck. I pulled out to go around the truck and it speeded up to 70. I was halfway around the truck and decided to continue on even though it would put me over 70. I had just passed the truck and out of the corner of my eye I saw a patrol car setting on the left side of the road in some trees. I thought, maybe he would not see me. To my horror, I saw lights flashing and heard the siren. He was pulling out on the interstate. I was going to get a ticket, all because of the little blue truck. All of a sudden, there were semi trucks everywhere. They were in front of me, beside me, and behind me. I was completely surrounded by trucks. It was scary. This continued for about 5 miles. Then, the trucks left me as suddenly as they had appeared. The patrol car was nowhere in sight. I was never really sure what happened and/or why

it happened but I often wonder about it. After the trucks left me, I headed on down Interstate 65. I headed home.

One in Ten Thousand: God's Confirmation on Marriage

by Carol Chandler Russ

During three years of dating on the college campus, Bill and I had become best friends, then sweethearts, and become engaged. Now we were working on wedding plans. It seemed right to us, but for such a huge, permanent life decision, I ABSOLUTELY wanted God's approval! Who knows???? Out of ten thousand men I could meet in this lifetime, perhaps there was someone else out there who would put my life on a different trajectory that God had planned. So, I began to pray earnestly during that spring of 1977 that God would confirm to me that out of 10,000 men I could meet in this lifetime (perhaps a far too high estimate!), Bill Russ was indeed the one God wanted me to marry.

The weeks passed and one Friday afternoon, I had a major test. Bill and I planned to drive ninety minutes to the North Carolina mountains the next day. I needed some money for tomorrow's day trip, so handing Bill my ATM card, I asked him to please withdraw some cash for me from the campus bank.

"What's your ATM access code?" he asked.

"1 7 4 5," I replied. (not actual code)

"No, that's MY number. What's YOURS?"

"1 7 4 5 IS my code number," I repeated.

We stood there looking at each other for a moment as we slowly realized we had the SAME code number. Quite unsettled, Bill promised to call Wachovia Bank on Monday morning.

“The bank officer couldn’t believe it either!” Bill announced the following week. “For a code number with four digits, the bank officer said that there was a less than one in 10,000 chance that two customers would have the same access code. And ... even if two bank customers DID happen to have the same access code number, what was the likelihood that they would ever find out about one another? We have been dating for three years, seeing one another almost daily, and never knew this before!”

“Yes ...” I said quietly as I meditated on this amazing fact. “And what’s the likelihood that those two people with the same code would be ENGAGED and planning to be MARRIED?”

We ^{stared} at each other, still stunned. I had my ONE IN TEN THOUSAND ANSWER!

Our Dog Bandit

Bandit came into our lives after we had lost our Corgi, Quincy, to cancer. Quincy was really our son Wes' dog. It had been a few months and my husband Dan and I decided to get another dog. We decided to surprise Wes. I had been searching on Petfinder and saw this cute little boy whose ears were too big for his head so my husband and I made the trip to Shelbyville, KY and picked him up. We brought along our other dog, Lacey for the trip to pick up the new puppy. We paid the adoption fee and took our little guy home.

How did we come up with the name Bandit? He was a mixed breed dog; a mix of Cattle dog, Catahoula Leopard and Australian Shepherd. His coat was black, white, brown and grey. He had to grow into his ears. He appeared to have a mask over his eyes so we decided on the name Bandit. We had no idea how appropriate that name would be. He definitely had Houdini skills. We learned quickly not to leave food unattended because it would ever so quietly disappear.

My husband and I were getting ready to go out and run an errand after work. I put a couple of raw hot dogs on a paper plate and laid it on the counter in front of the microwave. I got distracted and stepped away from the kitchen. When I came back a few minutes later the paper plate was still in the exact spot where I laid it, but the hot dogs were gone. I thought I had not gotten them out of the fridge but maybe I didn't. So I opened the fridge to get a couple more out, but there weren't any more. It only took a minute to figure out that he had made those dogs disappear. I think he could have been an apprentice for David Copperfield. That would not be the only time food suddenly vanished in our house.

My most special memory of Bandit is after we'd had him for a few of years. I noticed that when I would play with him he'd started pressing his nose to my chest on the right side and getting my shirt all wet. I didn't think anything of it at first but he continued to do it. I went for my yearly mammogram and the doctor saw something on the right side. I underwent an exam and a biopsy. It did come back as breast cancer on the right side only. I believe Bandit knew that I had breast cancer before I did. After my surgery he would come into the bedroom and lay beside me every day. I think he was protecting me. He did not even want my husband to give me a kiss.

We got to have him with us for nine wonderful years. He began acting strange about a week before Christmas; he was very lethargic. Dan and I both thought he had eaten something in the yard that maybe didn't agree with him and that he

had a stomachache. It was Tuesday and Lacey had a vet appointment on Wednesday so I told my husband that if Bandit didn't seem better in the morning, I would call the vet and see about bringing him in as well.

Wes had left Tuesday to go and visit a friend and came home around 10pm on Tuesday night. About 3am Wes let Bandit outside to go potty. Bandit walked around a bit and then he collapsed in the back yard. Wes woke Dan and me up and we went outside and managed to coax Bandit back into the house. I called the emergency vet in Cincinnati and told them what happened. She advised us to bring him in and that was what we did. All three of us piled into the car to make the trip up to Red Bank Road. Bandit was struggling to breathe in the back seat. That was a horrible sound and the longest drive. We arrived about 4:30am. The vet, Dr. Ingram, took him into the back and we waited. Dr. Ingram took us into an exam room and she said Bandit's chest cavity was full of fluid and needed to be drained. She cautioned us that during this procedure he could pass away. We agreed for her to proceed and again we waited. Dr. Ingram came into the exam room again and let us know that he did survive the procedure. She said he most likely had a tumor in his heart that had burst. The cardiology team would be in that morning at 9am and she would turn his case over to them. She would call us and let us know what their prognosis/next steps would be. I asked if we could please see him before we left and she said yes. We went into what looked like a surgery room where Bandit was laying in a big oxygen tank with an IV. He actually looked better and was breathing much better. Dr. Ingram opened the door for us. We each took a turn telling him to get better and be a good boy, that we would see him again soon. He managed to wag his tail a little.

We drove home and each of us felt better about the situation because he looked better and seemed to perk up when we told him we'd be back and how much we loved him. At 7am Dr. Ingram called and said his chest was full of fluid again. She had never seen that happen before. She said it would continue to fill with fluid and need to be drained. We discussed what that meant and made the difficult decision to let him go. It was hard but it was best for him. We made the decision to have him cremated. He is now in a beautiful box with his name on it in our family room. We tell him we love him everyday and wait until the day we will see him again. Our house is much quieter now and we miss him everyday. He was a very special dog and our family will never forget him.

Glenda Schmidt

I remember when I was in the first grade and one of the boys in my class stuffed my first love letter into my coat pocket as we were being dismissed from school. Anxiously as I approached home I decided to see exactly what that balled up waude of paper said. I was instantly shocked as I read over and over what appeared to be like a thousand times " I love you, I love you!!"

Over and over. I immediately got a sick feeling in my stomach and my heart raced with embarrassment. " Oh Lord," I thought to myself, my parents will kill me if they find out this boy is in love with me! The one that's always pulling my braids! Suddenly I got the wise idea to tear this love letter of passion into a thousand and one pieces. My parents must not ever know!

Afterwards I gradually got a sense of calmness. I then decided tomorrow at school I will stick out my tongue towards him then he will know exactly how I feel about him! "I'm not in love with you, in fact I ah' hate you and all the boys in the first grade". I laugh out loud sometimes when I think of that incident during this season of Valentines. What's one of your favorite memories of Valentines Day ? Remember "love is like a virus. It can happen to anybody at any time. "Maya Angelou.

Jennifer Spriggs

Enjoy The Ride

Growing up on a farm in Barren County I never really had the opportunity to travel or know what the outside world was really like. On this particular occasion my friend ask me to be her traveling companion. I traveled by plane then motor coach to start my journey where we were greeted by the police on horseback. Now I'm on my way to Prospect Point in Canada. As I stroll around Stanley Park I take in the many Indian totem poles. Next we are on our way to see a world famous steam powered clock in Gastown. Heading on, I took the Skyride to the top of Goose Mt., a 4100 peak elevation. Never thought I would do this ,but I walked across the Capilano Suspension Bridge, 230 ft. ht. & a 450 ft.span across the raging waters.

Next "The Only Way To See The Canadian Rockies" I climbed aboard The Rocky Mountaineer. Created over a century ago, a road of steel opening up the Canadian west; hewn by hānd, through some of the most rugged terrain in the world. For two days I took in the sights of the land of legend, still wild & unspoiled, still home of abundant wildlife. This is a land of majestic snowy peaks, glittering glacial lakes, roaring waterfalls, & towering trees. I saw Hell's Gate in the scenic Fraser Canyon. There I saw an Ospray sitting on a branch as we passed by. As we travel on, I can see the breath-taking Pyramid Falls cascading down Mt.Cheadle. In the background you could see snow capped Mt. Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, towering over the lesser surrounding peaks.

As I take the voyage between Vancouver & Jasper, I enjoy a mountain paradise of great beauty. Next dress warmly because we are traveling on the hugh snowmobiles to the Athabasca Glacier, Icefields. It's hard to imagine, but we're looking down at creavasses in the icefields where there is a mass of glacial ice over 1000 ft. thick. Traveling on I take in the Blue Waters of Peyto Lake on our way to our chalet which the Canadian Pacific Railway built on the shores of the lake in 1890 & used the lake as part of its promotion for the new railway. Chateau Lake Louise was created by a glacier. It is framed all around the Continental Divide. The glacial melt water feeding the lake which contains a fine silt stays suspended in water reflecting the green rays of the spectrum. It is to this that

the lake owes its extraordinary colour which varies between emerald green & opaque, turquoise, depending on the light.

Now I climbed on board of our horse-drawn carriage to view the Cascade Mts. & the beautiful flower gardens of Banff. Trying to see as much of the beauty surrounding us; my group had to climb a few boulders to get to the view of the beautiful blue waters of Moraine Lake in the Valley of the Ten Peaks. There was so much to see & do, I could not begin to put everything in this one special travel story. Take the scenic route, enjoy the beauty nature has given you.

Bonnie Vernon
AMAR Homemakers Club

Seasons of Life

As I sit here in my cozy chair cuddled by the fireplace in the sunroom, I watch the leaves on the trees in the side yard sway gently as they dart to and fro, the ground their ultimate destination. I ponder their artistic performance meant for this audience of one and in my mind's eye, I attach similarities of the seasons of life.

As Spring emerges from Winter's sleep, young and tender bright green baby leaves unfold as the sun warms their stem and prompts them to awaken from a long sleep. They grow bigger and stronger each day. Carefree and ready to embrace the freshness of the Spring air.

Sun and rain bring the warmth of Summer and bright, strong green leaves burst open in fullness to wave with the breeze to passersby. Doing the work before them, providing shade, shelter, food and refuge, they have no concern about the shortness of their season.

Far too soon, tuning shades of yellow, red and orange, the leaves move gracefully into their Autumn glory, displaying colors that delight all that gaze their way. They have held witness to new life, both in the air and on the ground, they have displayed glorious colors that evoke joyful squeals to all who take time to look up. They are majestic and awe inspiring.

Vibrant hues turn too quickly to shades of brown, the sameness reflected by their neighbors. They feel the urge to let go, hanging on proving to be more difficult with each sleep that passes, longing for an easier resting place.

The crispness of the Winter air gives the final cue that it is the season to dance. Dressed in their finest brown attire, though frayed by the wind and raveled at the edges, they revel one last time, freeing themselves from the now weakened stem of support. They begin to saunter and dance to the rhythm of the gentle breeze. The slow dance descent to the waiting ground below promises hope of easier days ahead.

Once on the ground, they are joined by friends and neighbors who have arrived before them. They are greeted with familiar delight and take their place to wait and welcome others as they arrive. Once reunited, they all return together to where they began, and their final resting place has arrived.

Once again, Spring arrives, and newborn leaves reappear. And just like seasons before, the circle of life continues in all its miraculous glory.

Written by Sharon Ware

Pulaski County Homemakers, Cards R Us Club

Murphy's World

I did not want a dog. I did not want the responsibilities that would tie me down. Afterall, I was for the first time in my life experiencing an empty nest. I was free. I had taken care of siblings, children, and aging grandparents my whole life. Now was time for me to get the house all alone. I was at peace with this transition in my life. I was sad when my daughter moved out but had come to learn that the quietness of my home was welcoming. Free at last, free at last, Good Lord I am free at last.

Oh, who am I kidding. I did not know what to do with myself. I had never been alone. I was the mother hen to my three siblings. When my nephews and nieces come along, I helped care for them. I attended every game, school activity and church play that any of my nieces or nephews were participating. Then I had my daughter's activities and did she have activities. She was involved in sports, and we traveled everywhere. When I was not with my daughter, nieces, or nephews I was helping with my grandparents who were aging and needed daily living assistance. I did not know or understand what being alone was all about and when I first begin to experience the quietness of our home I was stricken with sadness.

When my daughter moved her things out to be on her own the silence was devastating to my heart. I needed something to fill the void. My husband worked long hours and was not home as much as I needed him to be for my heart to not grieve. Then I decided I needed a dog to help heal the loneliness. I researched different breeds. I talked to friends who had dogs in their home. I called the local Vet and groomer to get prices and thoughts. I often plan too much. I plan to the smallest degree. I thought I knew just the breed for me. I was going with the Golden Doodle. They were loyal, long life span and easy to train, or so the research stated.

We went to pick out a Golden Doodle puppy. I wasn't sure which one I wanted and then this little, yellow ball of fur came to me like he was meant to be mine. In that moment, my heart melted, or maybe I had a Grinch moment, and my heart grew three sizes. However you want to look at it, the person who had never wanted to be a dog lover became a dog lover instantly. And so it was, he became mine. We took him home and he loved me immediately. The name was undecided until we called the vet to schedule a visit. The question was, "what shall we put as a name"? I instinctively stated, "Murphy" and from that moment one Murphy became my world.

When I look into those big, brown eyes its hard to remember he is a dog. When I have an off day and my word doesn't align it is as if Murphy senses my weakness. He becomes extra cuddly and provides warm dog hugs. He will often take his paw and move my hand, so he gets a good belly scratch or rub. I never knew a dog could be spoiled but I have come to learn I am doing and exceedingly good job in that category.

Murphy greets me every day when I come home from work. Murphy has laid by my side as I recovered from back surgery. Murphy let me lay on him and cry when my dad passed away. I was so numb with grief and I felt I could not move, but I did not have to, I had Murphy. His big,

cold nose would nudge me from time to time as if he was saying “get up and move, you will feel better”.

Murphy takes every step I do when I am home. Murphy also takes up the biggest part of my bed at night. My husband and I may be the only family that have purchased a larger bed so that the dog has more room at night. Murphy gets daily truck rides around the neighborhood where he hangs his head out the window and expresses his free spirit.

I have come to realize that a 60 lb. Golden Doodle now rules my life and that I am merely existing in Murphy’s world. He gets spa treatments and daily treats. He has daily walks and belly rubs and is the best listener a girl could ask for. I am glad I get to be part of Murphy’s World for the little time we get to borrow these canine miracles.

At the time we purchased Murphy I thought I was getting a dog to have in my home. I did not realize that I was getting a companion and a creature that I would love with my whole heart. I remember thinking people were silly making over dogs but now I am one of those silly people. I even buy him Christmas presents so he too has gifts under the tree. I am living in Murphy’s world and he in mine.

I am thankful for this big, goofy dog that is clumsy, awkward, and full of life. I am thankful that Murphy has taught me to see the little things, slow down in life and to love something that loves me back for no reason. Murphy’s world has been a fun place to be and with some of the simplest things included. Murphy has learned to slow dance with me, give hugs and to shake my hand. He refuses to learn to roll over or to sit very long. Despite his stubbornness I do get the rewards in the form of sloppy kisses and the dog hugs. I will continue to live in Murphy’s world and he in mine for as long as God allows us to have each other.