

A Glimpse of My Days on Hazel Creek

By Etta W. Welch

I spent most of my life from early childhood to age 17 in the Hazel Creek, Proctor area. My first memory is when we moved to the Nute Wilson place on Sugar Fork. I was about 2 years old.

W. M. Ritter Lumber Co. was cutting virgin timber near our house. My dad, Bill Woodard, worked with the skidder crew, which brought in the logs to be shipped by rail to the sawmill at Proctor.

I was the youngest in my family. I had three brothers: Andy, Glen, and Carl. Carl lives at Friendsville, Tennessee and is the only one living. I also had three sisters: May, Violet, and Jane. May lives with me and Violet and Jane live in Kingsport, Tennessee. My mind goes back to many precious memories of friends and loved ones.

Richard and Jane Martin were my maternal grandparents. Grandpa's hair was white as snow, in fact, he was a very handsome fellow. He had a good sense of humor, always pulling some sort of trick on someone. When we lived in Franklin Town he and grandma visited us several times. Martin and Ollie Cable lived nearby and Paul was a good-sized boy maybe 9 or 10 years old. He would come over near our porch and try to climb a slim willow tree; that is while grandpa was sitting on the porch. Grandpa would let him get almost to the first limb then he would go, "hum-m-m, hum-m-m". I Paul would get tickled and slide down. I don't think Paul ever climbed the tree with grandpa on the porch.

Also, grandpa liked to tease Leonard. He and Carl were good buddies so Leonard was at our house a lot and would sometimes eat with us. Anything he would call for on the table grandpa would say, "all my grandchildren like that." He also told Leonard that we girls were very saving, that we saved the water we washed our hands in to make up the bread. We didn't have running water in the house. We washed in a wash pan and all drank from the same dipper out of a water bucket.

Grandpa and grandma were both devout Christians.

Grandma was a more serious type person. She wasn't what you would call beautiful feature-wise; her beauty came from within. We loved to hear her tell about Uncle Issac (her youngest boy) having to go off to war. Tears would roll down her cheeks as she talked, and we would cry too.

Uncle Davis was her oldest boy. She would tell us how she broke him from using curse words. She had tried everything she knew to no avail. One day she took him away out in the woods and tied him to a big chestnut tree. It took him a long time to get loose, when he did, he came to her and said, "Maw will you give me a pin?" She asked what he needed it for and he said, "to pick the chestnut burs out of my feet." You see he was barefooted. When he finished with the pin he brought it back to her and said "Maw here is your pin." She said "No son you better keep it for you'll be needing it again and again." Needless to say this was the end of him using curse words.

Grandpa and grandma lived on the head of Hazel Creek, then moved further down, below the Hickory Nut Trestle, not far from where we lived. They lived in the little red railroad cars near the railroad. Jane and I would often spend the night with them. I can still hear the ripple and roar of Old Hazel Creek as its waters flowed over the rocks and rapids. This awesome murmuring sound created a feeling in my heart that is unforgettable and unexplainable.

We then lived at the Jess Cook place. While living here is my first memory of church-going. We attended Bone Valley Church, which was about two and a half miles away. There was preaching only once a month but Sunday School every Sunday. Each year in the fall there would be a two or three week revival, with services every morning at eleven and then night services. I still think of the long walks back home at night when I heard the katydids singing in the fall of the year. The preachers would come to our house often and eat with us. We would borrow extra dishes from grandma so we would have enough. It was during one of these revivals that Glen got saved. I believe he truly experienced salvation. As young as I was I could tell a vast difference in him. When we came home from an eleven o'clock service one morning he was an entirely different person. The Bible tells us in II Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things have passed away behold all things are new."

Glen went to work when he was 14 years old. He worked for the lumber company on jobs that had to do with the train and railroad. He also worked in the commissary where he did all our trading. One time he gave me a beautiful lavender color pencil. This was my reward for picking all the Spanish needles and beggar lice off his hunting coat. I remember him buying me a pretty pair of Sunday shoes, Roman sandals that buttoned all the way to the top; they were black patent leather with white tops. Words can't explain how I cherished these. When I was in the 8th grade Glen 'encouraged me to improve my handwriting. He told me if I would try, I could do a much better hand in writing.

My dad owned a horse we called Old Kitt, which served many purposes. These included plowing, snaking in logs for firewood, taking corn to the mill, and making long trips to Proctor for groceries. The groceries were put in sacks and fastened across the horse's back behind the saddle. This was usually Carl's job, and on the way down he liked to race horses with his friends.

While we lived here I began my first school year. We walked at least 2 miles to school. We crossed the creeks several times on foot logs. When heavy rains came the streams would overflow and get up to, and sometimes over, the foot logs. One time Jane and Ruth Bateman fell into the raging waters. Cowen Bateman (Ruth's brother) was standing on the porch and saw them. He jumped off the porch and rescued them, Jane first and he barely reached Ruth before she was swept into deep Hazel Creek. I specifically remember how thirsty I was one day while walking home from school. I don't know why I didn't get a drink from the waterspout before leaving school. Anyway I was so thirsty I felt I could drink the creek dry every time we walked near the water. This experience comes to mind when I remember how thirsty I got to be saved, before I trusted the Lord Jesus as my own personal savior. Matthew 5:6 says "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.1I I'm thankful to say this was fulfilled in my heart the day I found that peace that passes all understanding.

We got our water from a spring that flowed from beneath a big walnut tree. It flowed through the springhouse in a trough, which we called the spring box. Here we kept our milk, butter, and

anything else we wanted to keep cold. In the wintertime we kept our hog meat, barrels of pickled beans, kraut, and bleached fruit in the springhouse.

We did our laundry near the spring branch using a rub board and tubs of water. We heated our wash water in a big black tub. We washed our clothes through two waters then boiled the white things and washed them through two more waters before hanging them on the line to dry.

I saw my first automobile while we lived here. It was a Model T Ford owned by Sam and Crate Wike. Sometimes they would take us for a ride to Proctor and back on Sunday afternoons. They and some of their folk also owned the first Victrola (talking machine) I ever saw.

The first radio I ever saw or heard was owned by Leonard's family. Sometimes we would go up there and listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights.

We moved from the Jess Cook place to a big 2-story white house at the mouth of Sugar Fork. Shortly after, Leonard's family moved to the mouth of Bone Valley. The first time I saw Leonard, he, Roy, and Walter Wiggins crossed the creek below our house on their way to scrub and clean the house they were moving into. They had brooms, buckets, etc.

Leonard and Carl became good friends and their friendship grew over the years. Leonard proved to be a true friend by standing up for what was right in school, making it easier for us. Leonard went by the nickname, Skinny, because he was so slim and thin. Guess this is the reason he could run faster than anybody else.

Come election year we got our notice to move, all because of politics. We moved to Proctor in the middle of the school year. I was in the 4th grade and hadn't missed a day and by moving on the weekend I still made a perfect attendance record. Elvaria Welch was my new teacher and I became one of her favorite students. I made straight A'S as long as I was in her room. Elvaria and Leonard were cousins, their dads being brothers.

Uncle George, Uncle Allen, and F. D. Welch (Leonard's dad) all lived at Proctor. Leonard's dad was sick a lot and I don't remember seeing him in church as much as Uncle George and Uncle Allen. I always loved to hear Uncle George pray. He would get down on his knees and make motions with his hands as if the Lord was there before him. Very few people prayed in public.

My dad was a good honest man. He believed in keeping his word and treating everybody right. He was very strict with we children. We received a Bible teaching magazine "The Searchlight," edited by J. Frank Narris, a fundamental preacher. We would all gather around at night and he would have Violet read aloud from the magazine. We knew to be quiet and listen. The only song I remember hearing him sing was, "I Am Bound for the Promised Land." I wasn't as close to him as I was mama, but he worked away a lot. One summer while he was away we bought a bushel of peaches. I picked out the biggest, prettiest peach I could find and saved it for him.

To me, mama was the closest and dearest friend I ever had. She and grandma would talk and say they didn't know which one of them I loved best. Mama was a lot like grandma, serious-minded and quiet-natured. She was always doing something for those in need. She made most all our wearing clothes. We would pick out a dress in the catalogue that we liked and she would make us one like it. She also knitted our winter stockings, sweaters, gloves, and caps. She

knitted herself a pair of gloves with one to fit her crippled hand. She only had her thumb and little finger on her right hand. She got the others crushed in a cane mill and they had to be amputated when she was 12 years old. Although I never, ever heard her pray out loud, she was faithful to read God's Word. I feel confident she knew the Lord, therefore she was sure of a home in heaven. The Lord called her home at age 50. This seemed so unfair to me. I was envious of the rest, because they got to be with her longer than I did, and I loved her so much. She died of cancer and was sick a long time. She called me to her bedside one day and asked me if I would meet her in heaven. I said "Mama I'll try." Grandma was standing there with tear-stained eyes. All the rest had made professions of faith except me. I was then 12 years old. At age 13 I made a profession but it was not a true profession. I didn't understand what to do to be saved. I did what I promised, I tried, but not till I quit trying and one time trusted, did I find that peace and joy I had been searching for. That was 17 years later September 10, 1948. The Lord didn't give up on me; in fact I can now see his watch care over me all the days of my life. In Hebrews 1:14 speaking of angels the Word says, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

Sometimes I feel the Lord has been better to me than anybody in the world. I'm sure that's because the Lord knew just what I needed and He gave just that for me.

To make the story short, Leonard and I were married December 25, 1935 in the home of Martin Cable. We left that area and came to Bryson City to live temporarily with his sister and her husband, Hettie and Walter Wiggins. The Lord gave us three lovely children, all of whom are married and have families. The Lord called Leonard home to be with him, May 31, 1981 after nine and one half years of illness. Through it all, the Lord was faithful, and His presence real.

I'm thankful for the Blessed Hope we have of meeting again where all will be joy and peace!

We now live in a world of turmoil and sin, but when that day comes, broken promises will be a thing of the past, whether personal or our Federal Government. There will be no hindrances when the Lord comes with a shout and the voice of the Archangel. All those lonely graves will give up the bodies of the saints and those who are alive will join them to meet the Lord in the air, and "so shall we ever be with the Lord." Wherefore comfort one another with these words. I Thessalonians 4:17,18