



# ***Table of Contents***

Forward.....	1
Chapter 1—Farm Life.....	2
Chapter 2—Sayre Kids.....	16
Chapter 3—Teenage Years.....	28
Chapter 4—Working, working, working.....	42
Chapter 5—Fun in Acapulco.....	55
Chapter 6—Wedding Bells.....	71
Chapter 7—The Reservation.....	81
Chapter 8—Fish Camp.....	93
Chapter 9—A-Frame and Hurricanes.....	107
Chapter 10—Jackpot.....	121



## **Foreward**

*Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,  
Old Time is still a-flying:  
And this same flower that smiles to-day  
To-morrow will be dying.*

*The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,  
The higher he's a-getting,  
The sooner will his race be run,  
And nearer he's to setting.*

*That age is best which is the first,  
When youth and blood are warmer;  
But being spent, the worse, and worst  
Times still succeed the former.*

*Then be not coy, but use your time,  
And while ye may, go marry:  
For having lost but once your prime,  
You may for ever tarry.*

*- Robert Herrick*

## Chapter 1 — Farm Life

I was born Brenda Sue Sayre in Sissonville, West Virginia in 1947.



*Beulah Mooney (Thaxton)*

I grew up in this small, rural community about ten miles north of Charleston, West Virginia. I was born at home, as were all of my brothers and sisters. Back then doctors would actually make house calls. Setting a

broken bone or birthing a baby, it didn't really matter which it was to them. Often times their pay might be some sort of farm goods instead of hard cash.

I was the youngest of seven children; three boys and four girls. The oldest girl, Beulah, was our half-sister from mother's first marriage. She was several years older than the rest of us and seemed more like our second mother than older half sister. Our father, William Lee Sayre Jr. had also been married once before but no offspring had resulted from that union. I'm sure it was not from a lack of him trying; pop "loved" women. Throughout his entire life everyone called pop, Willie or Dad Sayre. Even I didn't know his real

name until I started doing the research needed to write this book. I guess he didn't like the idea of being called "Junior."



*Rob Aultz, family members and Bessie*

Our home was a big old ten-room farm house that had been built by my mother's father, Rob Aultz, sometime in later part of the nineteenth century. There were several brick fireplaces scattered throughout the many rooms. Yet the old house was very cold in winter due to a lack of proper insulation and its ten-foot high ceilings. The high ceilings kept the place cooler in the summer and firewood was free. All you needed was a sharp ax and a strong back or two and you had heat all winter.

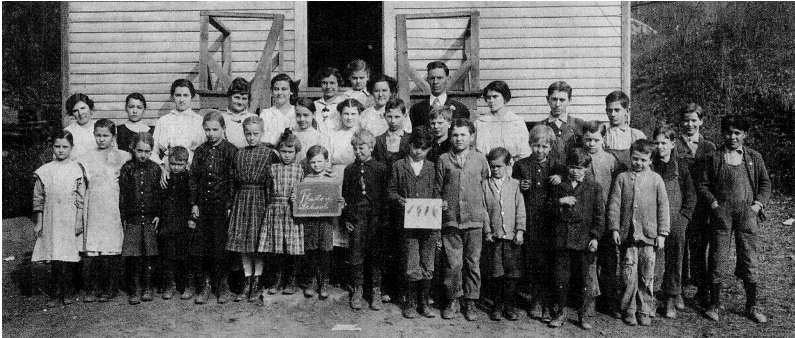
You could always feel a slight cold breeze around all the old windows and doors in winter. The barn, with its loft full of hay felt warmer. During the colder months you were usually only warm if you stood directly in front of one of the fireplaces. Even then it would only be the side facing the fire that was warmed. We had to keep turning ourselves like rotisserie chickens to stay actually warm all the way around. My sister Rachel had the habit of standing too close to the fire. She would often burn her legs by hiking her dress to warm her little butt. The heat felt so

good she just couldn't move away until the pleasure turned to pain.



*Me, Pam Fisher, and Beulah's three children in front of Aultz Dairy Barn*

The whole valley around our house had all been the Aultz Dairy farm at one time. At his death, Grandpa Aultz had divided the farm among his children. Mother, being the only girl, had received the home place and several out-buildings but had to share the big dairy barn with her brothers. Each sibling received a set number of stalls to use until their death, and then it all went to Mom or her heirs. This division caused some hurt feelings in later years.



*Thaxton School (1916)*

My mother was Bessie Agnes Aultz. Her father had let her attend school thru the ninth grade.



Something that most farm girls never got the chance to do in her time. However, her father did not do this out of kindness. Rob was a shrewd businessman and knew her extra

*Bessie on left*

education would come in handy on his farm. Mom could help with much of the time consuming paperwork thus freeing the men folk for the more strenuous farm chores.



*4H Club (Bessie on left)*

For a short while she was Bessie Aultz Mooney but that marriage didn't work out and ended in divorce. The experience was not a total loss though; it gave her a daughter, Beulah. Mother never spoke that much of her first husband as though she was ashamed of her failure in that marriage. Perhaps that was why she stuck it out with pop all those years, even with his occasional drinking.

Having been raised the only girl in the Aultz clan; mother worked the farm just like her brothers. Even though she was a small woman she was not frail and worked just as hard as her brothers at any of the farm chores. Of course she first did her part of the woman chores around the house but after they were completed she joined her brothers in the fields; milking cows, hoeing corn, cutting hay or whatever else that needed done. She was raised in a time when you had to work to eat. There were no free rides back then.

I guess I got my work ethics from my mother. Like her, I would much rather work outside like a man than be chained to a stove. The big difference is that Mother grew food and I grow flowers; nevertheless, I still prefer the freedom of working outdoors.

My father came from a big family; his father had two wives and twenty two children. He lived to be 92 years old, which was no easy chore for his generation. Often times a man of fifty was considered old back then. In his day a large family was not considered a burden, it was a necessity in order to operate any size farm. He grew his own cheap labor force. The children all



worked, therefore the more kids he made the more help he had. For the price of three meals a day; which they raised mostly themselves and some old rags plus the occasional pair of shoes, he had a built in workforce. Pop lived his early years in Jackson County, West Virginia.

My father had to quit school after about the fourth grade to help on the farm fulltime.



*Sayre home place at Kenna*

This was a common practice for the underprivileged children of that era. Pop did his regular chores around the farm but his main job was stoking the firebox of his father's steam powered saw mill. Wil-

lie was so small when he first started this occupation that he had to stand on a wooden crate just to be able to reach the door of the firebox.

His childhood was hard but more or less uneventful. Eat, sleep and work was the sum total of his life experiences for most of his youth. Days off were few and far between on a farm; it's a 365 day a year job. Sickness was about the only excuse that got you out of any of your chores and then you had to be about half dead to qualify.

The one exception was his involvement as a witness to the ambush and murder of Kanawha County Deputy Sheriff, Roy Shamblin. Deputy Shamblin was transporting his prisoner,

Ralph Harper, to the Moundsville State Penitentiary when three men stopped his car and killed him in front of Willie's house in Jackson County. Willie had to testify in court against these murders. All were convicted, largely on Willie's testimony. He was kept in protective custody before and during the trial to keep anyone from harming him until after he had the chance to testify. This was more excitement than most kids his age had in a life time in those days.

The rest of Willie's youth was more or less ordinary after that. As was the case back then with a lot of the local farm boys, my father started drinking moonshine as a young man and unfortunately continued this drinking habit throughout his adult life. One story he used to like telling of his drinking involved a bully and a quart jar of moonshine.

When Willie was about fifteen years old he was walking down one of the dusty back roads on his way to see some girl when he approached a narrow one-lane bridge. There on the bridge rail sat an older boy who disliked Willie for some reason; probably because of a girl, knowing my father.

When the bigger boy approached Willie he announced that he was going to beat Willie's butt. Pop stood up to the bigger boy and told him that he had better put "maybe" in there somewhere. Angered by Willie's arrogant words the boy swung on him and Willie just barely ducked under the oncoming big fist. Unknown to the older boy, Willie had just purchased a quart of moonshine from a local bootlegger down the road a ways and had it hid under his coat. It was al-

most completely full, minus one big sample sip Willie had taken at the time of its purchase. You never buy a car without kicking the tires first.

Before the big boy could take another swing Willie pulled his hidden weapon out from under his coat and smashed the nearly full quart of moonshine down on top his assailant's head, knocking him unconscious. Willie was glad he had won the fight so quickly but sure hated wasting good Moonshine that way. I guess my father was right, the boy should have put "maybe" in there somewhere.

Mom and pop meet after each had become divorced from the first marriages. I don't really know much about their courtship; mom never spoke much about such things; at least not to me. It just seemed to me like they were always a couple. It's hard for me to imagine them with any other husband or wife.

Willie and Bessie lived the typical country life. Almost all their daily needs were created with their own hands. Even something as basic as soap was homemade by rendering hog fat and then pouring rainwater into a barrel filled with hardwood ash to make the lye. These two ingredients were then cooked together outside over an open wood-fire in the same big old copper kettle mom used each fall to cook her apple butter. Once this mixture thickened it was removed from the fire and cooled. It was then poured into molds to harden into bars of soap. We not only bathed with this harsh concoction, we also washed our clothes with it. Our clothes were then hung on a line outside to air dry and they ended up being very stiff and scratchy.

Almost all the food we had was grown right on the farm. To help feed her hungry brood through the long, cold winter months, Bessie canned all she could all summer. She stored this horde of filled Mason jars on rough sawed oak shelves located in the dirt floored cellar under one of the out buildings, along with a bin full of the year's potato crop layered with straw. In the fall mom's big copper kettle was cleaned and placed over a small outside wood-fire to cook apples from our orchard to make apple butter.

Making apple butter required constant stirring with a long handled paddle to prevent the mixture from scorching and ruining its flavor. The sugar and cinnamon used in its making were much too expensive to waste; so close attention to this process had to be maintained. The length of the pole also helped keep knuckles from being burnt and smoke from one's eyes.

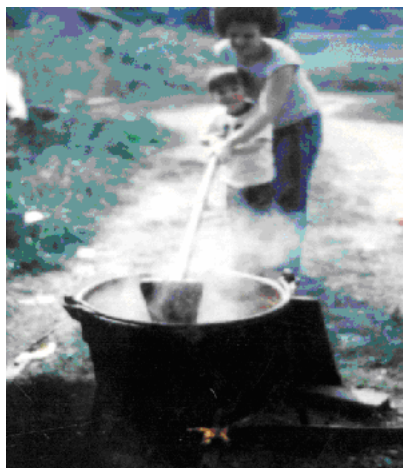


**Aunt Coleda and Bessie  
making apple butter**

Everyone took their turn on the stir pole, even any stray relatives or neighbors who happened by or was drawn in by the smell of the apples and cinnamon cooking. They knew they would receive a quart or two of the brown, sweet sauce for their assistance.

Making apple butter was always an all day event, but well worth the effort.

Mom canned many quarts for our later



*Brenda and Mark stirring  
apple butter*

winter feasts. She usually canned enough to last us until the apples ripened again next autumn. As a farmer's wife she had to always plan well ahead. That habit I picked up on without her realizing that she was teaching me. Flour and salt along with a few spices were about the only store-bought food items we needed, the rest

were furnished by the farm and surrounding woods.

Sorghum molasses was made from the sorghum cane that pop grew down by the creek. Had had a sorghum press that he ran the cane through to get its sweet sap. Once enough of this juice was collected it was boiled down over an open wood fire to make the molasses. He also had hives of bees that he kept to supply the household with honey. If any extra of either of these sweet confections was produced it would be sold or, most often, traded to our neighbors. Cash money seldom passed between farmers.

Our meat came in the form of the chickens and hogs that we raised or the wild game that Willie and my brothers occasionally killed. We had eggs, sausage, pork chops, bacon, ribs, fried and roasted chicken or stewed chicken. The ladder with big fluffy dumplings was often our Sunday treat. The wild food included deer, rabbit,

squirrel, fish and turtle. The turtle was passed off as chicken to the unsuspecting, hungry children who might not have eaten it otherwise.



*Willie holding hog*

Occasionally a side of beef would work itself into one of Willie's trades, but not often. I guess that's why I have eaten so much beef since I've become an adult. The things that we don't get enough of when we are children we tend to over eat in our later years.

In winter when the sap was down, my father would also dig the roots of the Sassafras trees. This was boiled into a tea that was then sweetened with his honey to make a drink that was delicious. We drank it like kids today do soda. Pop didn't care much for sweet drinks. He had a small moonshine still in the woods up on the hill behind our house to make his kind of refreshment. Any of the local men who had the good fortune to sample his wares stated that it was as smooth as his dark, rich molasses.

Our meals were always an important part of our day. It was about the only time that we all gathered together, the rest of the day we were spread out in all directions, either doing our chores or simply playing. Each meal always began with our father saying grace, and then big

cold glasses of fresh milk were poured from the big pitcher that sat in the middle of the table. This milk was so rich that little yellow flecks of butter would be floating in it. Back then milk actually tasted like something. Living on a dairy farm made fresh milk and creamy, hand-churned butter always available. Mother even still had some of the old hand-carved, ornate butter molds that had once belonged to her mother.

With nine in our household, material things like shoes and store bought clothes were always scarce but looking back on what all we had to eat it seems odd to think of this as growing up poor. Many folks back then had very little to eat. A big handmade bench was utilized for seating the smaller kids down the back side of the table. Pop was always seated in the large chair at the head of the table. We called it the Captain's chair. Even though my father was a small man he looked like a giant to me, sitting there in that chair. When you truly love some-



*Bessie and Willie in the home place kitchen*

one, in your eyes they always seem a little larger than life.

A huge homemade biscuit filled with a generous portion of rich, creamy cow-butter and a dollop of blackberry jam from

one of mom's Mason jars would often be our dessert. It tasted better than any fancy French pas-

try to us kids. Not that we ever tasted any of the fancy stuff but you know what I mean.

Our vegetables were grown in two large gardens. One was behind the house and the other was on the other side of a small creek that ran through the farm. We crossed it by walking two rough sawed planks that were about twelve feet long. They spanned the creek from bank to bank. During hard rains the creek would swell up to touch the bottom of these planks. We thought nothing of crossing them in this high water, when one slip could have sent us swirling downstream with the rest of the muddy water and trash. To add a safety rail to it would have been a waste of good lumber. On a farm you wasted nothing. We had to tend the chickens, apple orchard and the other garden so not crossing wasn't an option.

Everyone worked the garden. There was always something that needed attention. We watered, weeded, planted, hoed and performed many other garden duties. We weren't really crazy about working in the fields but we all knew they helped feed us. I'm still amazed today each time I shop for produce at the price of these same vegetables that we took so much for granted in our youth.

Back then my brothers thought nothing of bashing one another with big overripe tomatoes as they chased each other through the garden, just for sport. This would be a very expensive hobby now. If mother caught them they would be severely scolded, she didn't believe in wasting any food. As a farmer's wife she had to try to plan a whole year's worth of meals for her brood.



Wasting may mean doing without when the cold winter winds blew. She knew they couldn't live on snow even though it was one of my favorite things to eat in the winter; nothing tastes better than a big handful of fresh fallen snow.

## Chapter 2 — Sayre Kids

While I was still in diapers my older brothers would build small cars and trucks made from empty match boxes.



*Brenda in diapers*

They and my sister Bea would dig roads into the cool dirt under our house. This made them a shady place to play on hot summer afternoons and a dry playground when it rained. They used old bricks to make houses on which they painted small windows and doors. They made the fences for their small town from used Popsicle sticks. Wild berries were picked from the bushes on the creek bank near our outhouse to be used as pretend produce.

These tiny loads would be hauled in these miniature truck beds and delivered to the various brick houses. Poor kids always had to make their own entertainment. This hidden village fascinated me but I was too small to enjoy it. Each time I tried to join in on their fun I was roughly pushed away and told not to ever enter their private play area. It sucked to be the baby of the family sometimes.

However, simply telling a small child no has very little effect. I discovered the perfect opportunity to secretly visit their tiny town around

midsummer. It was lunchtime and all my brothers and sisters had gone inside to eat. Finding their town unguarded I made my move.

When I first entered this forbidden world I just stood there looking at all the little roads and things they had made. Then a gas pipe that was mounted under the open floor joists of the house caught my eye. It was just the right height for me to catch hold of and swing on. I did not know that this pipe was touching a bare spot on an electrical wire somewhere out of my sight. Our house was so old that it did not have electricity in its original house plans. Therefore when it was later added it was a rather piecemeal shoddy job.

As soon as I grabbed hold of this potential death trap the electrical shock caused my little arm muscles to spasm, forming my tiny fingers into a death grip on the pipe. All I could do was scream out in pain and fear. Hearing this, my family came running to my rescue. My brother Raymond was the first to reach me and tried unsuccessfully to pull me free from the pipe. It finally took all three of my brothers' combined strength to pull me free.

My mother carried me into the house and called our doctor. By now both of my hands were burnt black from the electrical charge that had run through them. The doctor told her to wrap my hands in wet rags and put me to bed and watch me for any other signs of damage. Needless to say, to this day I am still afraid of electricity and never ventured under our house again.

With no Television, we kids had to be creative as to how we entertained ourselves. The little creek that ran through the farm provided us

with many hours of adventure in the warmer months. We would wade it searching for tadpoles, crawdads or what ever odd junk that may have washed down from upstream that had its source at the head of Lakewood Drive. There a large pond was formed to hold back the spring-fed stream for farm use. During very hard rains this pond would sometimes overflow its banks and flood our little creek. We had one small section that had a sandbar next to the pond. This was as good as an ocean beach to our childish imaginations.



*Young Brenda*

Wanda Abbott and I would spend hours digging through the dirty sand looking for lost treasures. Bits of broken glass or smooth stones became rubies and diamonds. We spent so much time playing in this filthy creek that it's little wonder we didn't all contract Polio; unfortunately my older Russell did. He still walks with a slight limp.

Another sandbar was located near one of mom's rental houses in which the Newhouse family lived. These rentals weren't much more than shacks and mom didn't get very much rent from them but back then every penny helped. They had three girls near my age with whom I often played. One of my fondest memories of visits to their home was the homemade biscuits and thick white gravy their mother would make. She made these for almost every supper and some-

times for breakfast too. I loved dipping my biscuit into this delicious sticky stuff. It would cling



*Bessie's rental house*

to the bread in a thick white coating. My mother had always made the thin brown gravy that I did not care for that much.

There again she was trying to

stretch her supplies as far as she could. It took less flour and milk to make the brown kind.

One of the drawbacks to having older brothers is that if they became bored you became their plaything. My brothers thought that tying their sisters to the big tree in our front yard was great fun. However, passing motorist would become concerned from all the screams we girls were emitting. Thinking we might be hurt they would call my mother and let her know the boys had tied us to the tree again. Even my Uncle Virgil, who stayed drunk part of the time, had



*Uncle Virgil*

called mom to report the boys' mischief; when he drove by with another load of hay that he had purchased in Ohio. He would tell mom to get us untied before one of us died from heat stroke.

Mother would punish the boys but it would not stop them from tying us up again the next time they got bored or the first chance they got, whichever came first.

Once, my brothers pushed me into an old wooden icebox that was in front of one of the outbuildings in our backyard and latched the door shut. In the darkness the time seemed to stand still. I cried and kicked but to no avail. I



*Family and neighbors*

was beginning to think no one was ever coming back for me. I'm not sure how long I was confined there but I was very frightened. I'm not positive as to

which one let me out but I'm certain mom made them. Otherwise my bones would most likely still be in there.

It seemed my brothers and sisters were almost always fighting amongst themselves. On one occasion my sister Bea was knocked in the head by my brother Raymond during one of their many fights. He hit her with the dinner plate-size metal lid from the top of the wood-burning, cast-iron kitchen stove. The blood poured from a large gash in her head. Not to be out done, she later got even by bashing him in the head with a brick for not sharing the only red wagon we all had to play with. On another occasion Bea pushed Ra-

chel down into a bucket of paint for slipping under the house and destroying their play area that they had taken so long to set up.

Brothers and sisters can be harder on each other than outsiders when they are provoked. As wild as my brothers and sisters were growing up the one bad habit none of us kids picked up from our father was smoking. He even let me try it once in a little corn cob pipe. The smoke made me very sick and after that it just was something that I never wanted to do again. To this day the only one in our family that ever smoked was pop. He always rolled his own from his can of Prince Albert tobacco. In the evenings he would sit for up to an hour rolling his smokes



*Russell*

for the next day. Sometimes he would let me help him. Even though I was just a kid, I got pretty good at it for someone who never smoked.

Brother Russell, being the oldest boy, was sometimes showed a little favoritism by mom. Rob Aultz, her father had never accepted the fact she had lowered herself and married Willie Sayre; a common field hand. The Aultz family always felt that she should have married someone with money and land. Grandpa Aultz even tried to kill Russell once by putting him in the oven but mom saved him. The old man was probably going into early Alzheimer's and was

not diagnosed properly. He blamed Russell for mom having to marry Willie. It wasn't Russell's fault that mom and pop were attracted to each other; he was just the end result as were we all. If mom's health had stayed good I'm sure our father would have made a bunch more of us.

Because of the constant guard that mom had to place on Russell's life after that coupled with the fact that he was the eldest, he soon became her favorite. Russell was given more attention and praise than the rest of us along with the first brand new bike pop was able to buy. Russell would not share it with his brothers or sisters. Bea was always the sneaky one of us girls, so she patiently waited until Russell tired of his



*Bessie with her chickens*

new plaything and foolishly left the bike unattended long enough for her to borrow it for a test ride. The ride ended in a crash into the rear of our father's car parked in the dirt driveway. Russell's new bike

was now new no longer.

Mom had some bad run-ins with her rooster when she would go to collect the eggs from his hens. He didn't want anyone around his ladies and potential children. Often mom would return from her egg gathering with large scratches on her legs from this mean bird. However, if the attacks became too frequent the culprit would find himself headless, hanging upside



down from her clothes line then floating along side some big fluffy dumplings come Sunday. Mom could always get another rooster but she only had two legs.

Across the road from our house stood the big dairy barn that mom still shared with her brothers. They milked about thirty cows each day. The barn was modern for its time, with an automatic milking machine for each cow. Pop often carried me over to the barn to watch the cows being milked. He would sit me on the window ledge to rest his arms.

On one of our visits, as the cows were being released to go back to the pasture, I lost my balance and fell into the oncoming path of the cows. Pop snatched me up into his arms and shielded me with his body as the cows rushed past us. Even though the cows were large he stood his ground and protected me with his very life. Many experienced farmhands have been trampled to death when pinned in close quarters by a rush of dairy cows.

Another bad farm animal experience came a few weeks after this cow thing. My brother's friend, Hop Griffith, would often bring his horses down for my brothers to ride. He lived up on Bean Ridge about three miles from our house. These were very big draft animals, just a little smaller than Clydesdales. To me they looked like mountains with tails. They put me and my sister Rachel upon one and were going to lead us around the yard for a nice little ride; actually a walk.

When all at once it pulled away from Hop's grasp and bolted toward the old shed that was

attached to the barn. Inside the shed was parked an old Packard. We could not control the horse's direction and it ran right between the shed wall and car then out the back. Our legs were raked along the rough wooden wall. We had several nasty scratches and were very happy to be off our ride when Hop caught up to us on the other side of the shed. My brush with death twice in one summer at the hands, or I should say hooves of animals has caused me to fear cows and horses to this day.

Another of God's creatures that I also now fear is dogs. Not without good cause mind you. A dog attack as a child earned me this right to fear them. It came about when my Mother and I went to visit her friend Maggie Carney; whom she loved like a sister. However, when we entered Maggie's back yard through a closed gate her dog charged at us and bit me on my left thigh before mom could kick it away. It left a nasty gash and I still have the scare as a reminder as to how much I fear dogs. Goldfish are just about the only thing that I'm not afraid of in the animal world.

As many close calls as I had growing up it's a wonder I'm still here and able to record all that happened to me. As a matter of fact I almost grew up somewhere far away from my friends and family. The event took place on a warm summer day when I was about five years old. Several truckloads of Gypsies stopped a short ways down the road from our house. They had passed through our area several times over the years as they continually traveled around the country. They had their homes built on the beds

of the trucks. They used to travel by horse drawn wagons but the modern age had caught up to them.

A few of the Gypsy women, in their long embroidered dresses, walked towards me as I played in the front yard by myself. It's hard to say where my brothers and sisters were. They often went off to play with their older friends leaving me alone in the yard to entertain myself. Most often I would just sit and watch the road to wave at what few cars that might pass. Back then there weren't many. Whenever someone took the time to wave back it made feel like I had done something big. Strange how little it takes to amuse a small child.

When these Gypsy women neared our yard they called to me to come to them. Luckily my mother heard their calls and ran out of the house, scooped me up into her arms, then rushed me back inside and locked the door. If she hadn't saved me I probably would have been kidnapped and sold as it was alleged that was what Gypsies did to small children back then.

We Sayres are not big people; I guess we take that after our father. Being small is not a sin but it did hamper me when we were in grade school. I had to repeat third grade because they said I was too small to go on to the fourth even though I had made good grades. If a school would try discriminating like that today the lawsuits would fly. However back then teachers were regarded as something special and their word was never questioned. I'm sure some of them took advantage of this power.

Shoes and clothes were things we couldn't



*Bea, Raymond and Russell  
at bus stop*

raise on the farm and were always in short supply. Some clothes could be and were passed down to younger brothers or sisters but most were worn out before they were out grown. My older brothers and sisters usually started the school year bare-

foot, not getting new shoes until cold weather set in. As the youngest I was always last in line for all the hand-me-downs so there wasn't really much left for me to pick from. I usually could manage to get at least one new dress each new school year. I had to wash it by hand each night and dry it in front of the fireplace to wear to school the next day. It would be clean but it smelled a little of smoke. However my going to a country school made this fact unimportant because all the kids smelled like smoke to some extent. Some of the poorer ones smelled a lot worse than smoke.

To make extra money as I grew older I would shave my cousin Darrell



*Sayre kids*

for a quarter. He always hung around our house. He seemed more like a brother than a cousin. I also baby sat for Betty and Dana Long who had



*Uncle Adam and Aunt Coleda*

bought my Aunt Coleda and Uncle Adam's store that was located just up the road from our house. They lived in the apartment above it. Betty worked long hours in the store and Dana worked another job. I went to school half a day at Wallace Height's Grade School and babysat the other half of the day for Betty, watching her two younger children Jane and Dwight. Their oldest son Keith had married and left home. Later they had another son, Patrick. I also cleaned her apartment while watching the kids. I think I was paid around a dollar a day. It wasn't much but it still was something.



*Brenda's brothers and sisters*

Not having much money made even small things out of my reach. One of my friends, Pam Fisher, had joined the Brownies. I would have loved to have been a Brownie as well but I couldn't afford the cute little uniform. The closest I got to being a Brownie was when Pam would let me come down to her house and try on her uniform. I would look at myself in the mirror and wish that I could have one of these magnificent uniforms. It sure sucked being poor sometimes.

## ***Chapter 3 — Teenage Years***

Winter was a hard time on the farm. The chores didn't stop just because it was cold and snowy. Our chickens and other livestock had to be fed and watered every day of the year; rain or shine. Pop and my older brothers did most of the heavy wintertime chores but we all had something to do around the house to help out. Just going to the outside toilet was a chore in itself in the cold weather. This wooden box had no heat other than our own exhaled breath. I usually tried to hold mine as long as I could. Unfortunately my business would usually take longer than I could hold my breath.

Our outhouse did not smell pleasant at anytime, although the winter aroma was much less intense than the one it emitted in the hotter days of summer. You would think that the recollections of pies baking or the fresh scent of the new mown hay would come to my mind when thinking back on the smells of my youth but no, I still can remember the smell that outhouse.

Keeping all of us kids happy at one time was an impossible job under the best of circumstances. The only wintertime activity that accomplished this was a fresh snowfall and a sleigh ride. We had a fine hillside for sledding just across the road from our house in the pasture.

My brothers would build a huge bonfire to keep us from getting frostbitten and the dark plume of smoke that it gave off alerted all the kids from the surrounding neighborhood to come join the fun. Store bought sleds were in short supply, so we had to improvise the best we

could. An old car hood or a bent piece of tin blown from one of the outbuildings became our downhill racer. You would be surprised just how fast those things can go on hard packed snow.

Being the smallest, I mostly just stood by the fire and warmed myself as I watched the others whiz past. The whole valley rang out with our childish laughter. However, this sport had its own list of dangers. A person could get a nasty cut from the bent metal of these homemade sleds or you could go so fast that you would run under the barbed wire fence at the edge of the pasture and wind up in the middle of the U. S. Highway 21.

One night my sister Rachel and Noble Miller missed the trail completely and ran right through the middle of the big bonfire. Luckily they were not hurt but they scattered ash and flames for some distance down the hillside and gave us all a good scare.

An even more dangerous possible outcome of one of these wild rides was not clearing the fence at all and colliding with its razor sharp barbs as Linda Walker did one night. She received a very nasty gash in her leg. My brothers had to carry her to our house to get help to stop the bleeding. Pop was known to have the ability to stop the flow of blood by quoting a verse from the Bible.

My brother Raymond was small like dad and he also had pop's fiery temper. It was not unusual for car loads of city boys to come cruising out into our country neighborhood on weekends looking for trouble. Raymond was always willing to oblige them; usually sending one or



*Raymond Sayre and  
Ronald Simpson  
holding Brenda*

two of them home with black eyes. Several of Raymond's friends were big, raw-boned country boys and back then they would rather fight than eat. My sister Rachel was Cheerleader at Sissonville High and was runner-up for Miss Indian at the Homecoming

Game; she was escorted by Vernon Taylor. Because both my older sisters were pretty, several of these big would-be-Casanovas would be hanging around our house on weekends. As a result Brother Raymond most often had some help when the city tuffs would come a calling. I tried out for cheerleading my sophomore year and would have made the squad but my grades were one point too low. I really hated that.

One cool spring day around noon, I was walking with Betty Pugh from her house back to mine down Martin's Branch Road. A car pulled up beside us and stopped. We didn't know the man inside, so we thought he



*Rachel*



probably just wanted to ask us for directions. When we walked up to his car he opened his door and then opened his trench coat to expose his private parts to us. We both screamed and started running down the road in the opposite direction from which his car was pointed.

By the time he drove to a turn around spot we were almost to my Aunt Coleda's store. Before he could turn around and catch up to us we had ran onto the lot and hid beside some parked cars. We were not sure if he was going to come looking for us, so we stayed well hidden until we were certain this pervert had left the area. We never told anyone about this stranger because we were just kids and didn't think anyone would believe us. Things like that just never happened in our neighborhood back then.

One of the biggest things to take place in our little community was when someone set up a portable skating ring in our big field next to our house. This gave them plenty of off-road parking. It had a big canvas top and an oval hardwood floor that was polished slick as glass. I can't remember exactly how much they charged but I'm sure it wasn't much. Pop even bought two pairs of skates for us kids to share; one white pair for the girls and a black pair for the boys. Being the smallest I had to rent mine that summer but the white pair was eventually passed down to me in later years.

We had a lot of fun learning to skate but my butt spent as much time on that slick wood floor as my feet did in the beginning. But learn I did and after that I enjoyed skating almost as much as dancing. Back then this type of recrea-

tion was a rare treat. I would love to go skating now but one good fall could reward me with a broken hip. Such fun is for the young; they bend and don't break.

I later started cleaning Helen Frame's hardwood floors for little pay. She lived just a short ways up Martin's Branch, in Pugh Hollow. The work was very hard. I had to strip the old wax with hot soapy water and a stiff scrub brush. I did all this working on my hands and knees. It's amazing what young knees can stand. After the floor dried I applied a fresh coat of paste wax and hand buffed it to a brilliant shine; again on my knees.

She said I did good work and always fed me lunch in the little breakfast nook off her kitchen. I always thought to myself as I sat there munching a peanut butter sandwich that when I grew up I too would have a house with just such a breakfast nook. I haven't gotten one yet but the thought of having one still bounces around in my head from time to time. Maybe before I die I'll have one.

My sister Bea had a near drowning experience in the swimming pool at Camp Virgil Tate on Rocky Fork Road. A close friend, Keith Long, pushed her into the deep end of the pool not knowing that she couldn't swim. Bea sank towards the bottom thinking she could touch then kick back to the surface. Unfortunately she did not make it to the bottom and sort of stopped halfway down.

When the boys on the pool pad realized that she was drowning they dove in to try to pull her out. The first two attempts were unsuccess-

ful; she fought against them in her panic. On the third try they were able to drag her upon the side and revive her. She still can not swim to this day; funny how events like that from our past can control our future.

We girls just never had much luck when it came to swimming. The very next weekend we all were playing in Poca River near Harry William's Country Store and Gas station. The water shallow there except for one deep hole near mid-stream. The local boys had gathered large stones from the river bottom and stacked them across the river to make a crude dam of sorts. Their efforts did bring the water level up some. This allowed them to swing out from a rope attached to an overhanging tree limb and drop into the deep hole without crashing into the rocky bottom.

Brother Raymond thought this would be a good time for me to learn how to swim. In those days it was a common practice to toss young children into deep water to force them to learn how to swim. Panic would make most of them kick and grab enough water to make it to shore. Some, like me, simply sank like a stone and nearly drowned. To add to my dilemma my brother thought it would be funny to hold me under water for just a bit. He meant well but his teaching method needed more work. So there within a two week span of time our parents almost lost two kids to water. My bad experience with this primitive swimming lesson scared me to the point that I never have learned how to swim either.

One of my school mates had just moved into a house about a mile away on Martian's

Branch Road. My Aunt Coleda lived just above her. Brenda Smith's brother Fred had the strangest sense of humor. He could not just laugh as normal people do; he had to laugh hysterically whenever anything struck him funny. This in itself is not a bad thing but add to this a car full of teenagers and strange things can happen.

I spent a lot of time at Brenda's on weekends listening to "Rock and Roll" records and dancing with some of the neighborhood boys who would show up for the free chips and to flirt with the girls; these included Lewis Tate, Bo Kelly, Johnie Tucker and Everett Ransbottem. These were not dates, just clean fun. I couldn't have dated if I wanted to; my parents didn't allow me to date. Still, whenever I would slow dance with one of the boys I would pretend that we were out on the town in some fancy nightclub.

One Saturday evening I slipped off with Brenda and her brother in their mom's car to take Bo Kelly to another friend's house several miles away. Bo's mother worked at the H&W Supermarket just down from our house. I had called my parents to ask permission to go with the gang but they refused to let me go. My father had this strange ability to sense when something bad was going to happen.

As we drove along the guys started cutting up and telling jokes. One joke in particular hit Fred's funny bone so hard that he went into one of his laughing fits. The more he laughed the faster he drove. The side road that we now were speeding down was winding and tree-lined; just

your typical country back road. As we entered this one particular hairpin curve Fred's laughter had caused his eyes to tear up so much that it blinded him and he hit a roadside tree head-on.

When I realized that I wasn't hurt I knew my parents would make me wish that I had been. When we got out and inspected the damage we found the front bumper curved around the tree trunk. Other than a slight bump on Fred's head all the rest of us were unharmed. Unfortunately the yard in which the tree was located happened to belong to the Good family that was friends of my parents. On a later visit Mr. Good asked how I was doing after being in the wreck in his front yard. For lying to them, my parents would not let me go back to Brenda's.

My brother Ray, not to be confused with his wilder brother Raymond, was also in a car wreck during his Junior Year of High School. He was riding with Stanly Pugh, Betty's brother. Ray was hurt pretty bad and said that he saw some sort of light at the time of the accident. While in the hospital he promised the Lord that if he spared his life that he would straighten up and try to do what was right. After he was released from the hospital Ray started going to church regularly and still does. He married Becky and has two daughters; the youngest now has two children herself; Ray and Becky are very proud



*Ray and Becky*

grandparents.

Mom was 44 when she delivered me and pop was 47. They looked and acted more like grandparents. This caused me to miss a lot of the things that my older brothers and sisters shared with them. A trip to town for a day of shopping was now too much of a bother for my



*The Sayre Family*

mother due to her poor health. Pop also played less with me than he had the others. I guess it's the curse of my being born so late in their lives. Pop did take me fishing some; he liked doing that almost as much as he liked his

Moonshine. However, mom really didn't like for him to do either and would let him know with a constant barrage of nagging.

All my aunts and uncles were around my parents' age. Our family get-togethers looked like someone had unloaded a bus from the Old Folk's home. For this reason I chose to spend most of my free time with my girl friends' families more so than my own. Their parents were all younger and a lot more fun to be around. All the years of hard farm work and the chore of raising their first six kids had pretty much sucked about all the fun out of my parents by the time I came on the scene.

I had spent so much time at the Walker's house growing up that it was almost like they had adopted me. Julia and Wesley Walker even

took me on my first vacation trip to Virginia Beach, when I was around thirteen. The Walker's children consisted of my friend Judy and her two sisters; Linda and Mary Lou; plus their brother Johnnie. Judy's sisters were older so they became substitutes for my own older sisters who had already married and moved away from home.

When I was about fifteen I started babysitting for Mary Lou's son Scot after she had divorced and moved back to her parent's home. This helped me to make some



**Mary Lou, Becky Ferrell-Schoenbaum and kids**



*Brenda*

spending money. I also babysat for Becky Ferrell, one of Mary Lou's friends. Becky was married to Alex Schoenbaum, the founder of the Shoney's Big Boy restaurant chain.

In her junior year of high school in 1958, my sister Bea wanted to go for a ride with her friends, George Huskins and Doug Monroe, but our father didn't want her to go. He had another of his premonitions about something bad happening. Bea paid him



*Bea*

no mind and went anyway. The car she was riding in was hit head-on by a drunk driver at the sharp curve just before you get to Derrick's Creek Bridge on old route 21. Doug was driving and was seriously hurt by the steering column. Bea suffered sever facial damage and had to have major reconstructive surgery done to her face to repair a broken nose, broken jaw and several other facial fractures. A bone had to be taken from her hip

to help repair her cheek. This caused her to graduate a year late so she and Raymond graduated together.

We were concerned that Bea might be disfigured from her injuries but she pulled through fine and looked even better after the surgery. Bea went to beauty school and became a licensed beautician. I wanted to follow in my big sister's footsteps and become a beautician as well.



*Raymond and Bea graduating from High School*

My brothers started building drag-racing cars while I was in grade school. They started their own car club called "The Spinners



Auto Club” in November of 1957 and it became a Charter Club in 1958; the only one in West Virginia at the time. On weekends our yard would sometimes have as many as fifty cars scattered about. They were all makes and models; each was some farm boy’s pride and joy. Brother Raymond first had a 32 Ford Coup then a 34 Chevy with a chopped top and a big blower. When he fired it up the windows in the house would rattle. Brother Russell had a black 57 Chevy that had special grill work. I was too young to appreciate all the young men that collected at my house each week but I’m sure my older sisters did. Pop had even managed to trade for an old jukebox and had it plugged into an outlet on our front porch. We girls danced with any of the club members who weren’t shy; it was great fun and kept us home and out of trouble.



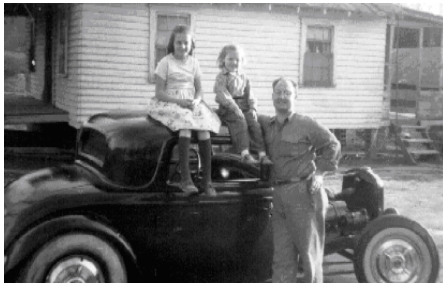
*Bea Sayre-Durham Family*



*Rachel, Bea and Kay Haynes*

They held their club meetings at our house on Friday evenings. The names of the forty-nine Chartered club members included my three brothers, Russell,

Raymond and Ray Sayre. The other forty-six members were; Bug McCallister, Bob Burgess, Noble Miller, Bob Harper, Grant Young, Billy Cruickshank, Skip Cavaness, Gary Vannoy, Gary Cavender, Dale Cavender, Dick Ball, Kenny Boggess, Paul Brooks, Wayne Carney, Dan Cottrell, Dale Farrar, Herbert Garner, Jack Good, Albert Haynes, Bill Harper, Don Parson, Bob Parson, James E. Morris, Lawrence Moles, Larry Rhodes, Jim Mills, M. D. Marshall, Carl Mason, Buddy Mairs, Sam Kelley, Charles Keaton, Richard Jones, Paul Jones, John Lee Hill, Brady Harper, Wesley Haynes, John Lewis, Keith Long, Chester Haynes, Charles Reedy, George Roberts, Kenny Robertson, Dennis Shaffer, Jack Shaffer, Jerry Young, Bob Zabet.



*Brenda, Kathy and Newt Haynes*

ton, Richard Jones, Paul Jones, John Lee Hill, Brady Harper, Wesley Haynes, John Lewis, Keith Long, Chester Haynes, Charles Reedy, George Roberts, Kenny Robertson, Dennis Shaffer,

Jack Shaffer, Jerry Young, Bob Zabet.

Saturday the cars were all prepped for the race on Sunday at the Kanawha Valley Drag Strip at Winfield. There was a quarter of a mile straight stretch of paved road in front of our house. This was where the club members would do their trial runs; luckily there were few cops in our rural area. My brothers have raced past our house on many occasions at over one hundred miles per hour. On one of my Brother Raymond's trial runs with my sister Bea as a passenger he blew his clutch and parts burst through the firewall and injured Bea's leg. He had to work late into the night but he still raced the next day.

My brothers turned our father's barn into a working garage. They had more tools than most professional garages of that day. A greasy chain-fall even hung from the rafters for pulling motors. The barn now smelled more of oil and transmission fluid than it did of pigs and hay. With all the club members hanging there were always extra hands for any mechanical problems. Unlike today with all the computerized parts and gadgets the cars my brothers raced were simpler to fix when they broke. Almost every teenage farm-boy could tear down a motor, tune an engine or fix a transmission. It's what they all lived for, that and the speed. Sometimes girls would creep into their thoughts but then it was mostly fast cars.

We girls loved sitting on the hoods of the non-race cars watching the races. Unlike the cars of today these older cars actually had metal in them and could easily support our weight. It offered us an excellent view but unknown to us the sun bouncing off the windshield would burn our unprotected skin. I was burnt to a blister on several occasions, as were we all. There was no such thing as sun block in late 50s and early 60s. We could have set in the shade somewhere but it would not have gotten us as much attention as sitting high up on the hoods. We liked that as much as watching our brothers' race.

It seemed that someone from the club always brought home a trophy or two. Raymond made it as far as second place in his class at the Summer/Fall Nationals at Indianapolis in 1958. Pitman and Cook took first place honors that year.

## **Chapter 4 — Working, working, working**

When Raymond was drafted into the Army in December 3, 1961 he sold his 34 Chevy Coupe race car and was never able to get back into racing other than as a fanatical Dale Earnhardt Senior and Junior fan. He married Patty Hill from Derrick's Creek and moved to Teays Valley. They now have three sons, five grandchildren and one great grandchild.

My sister Bea married a Charleston City cop, Gene Durham from Rand and later moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She had two children and four grandchildren. My half-sister Beulah was married to another Charleston policeman;

Norwood Thaxton and they lived in North Charleston until their three children were raised, then they moved behind mom and pop. Now she has eight grandchildren and one great grandchild. Brother Rus-



*Russell and Sharon Sayre*

sell married Sharon Ball and moved to South Hills. They later returned to build a big home on the other side of mom and pop before he and Sharon divorced.

All my brothers and sisters were married and moved away when things started to change

radically at home. The government wanted to buy our farm to build the new high school but mom flatly refused to sell. The farm had been in her family for generations and she liked things just fine the way they were.

Unfortunately the government has the right to condemn your land and take it if they want. This is what they did to mom. She was paid \$46,500.00, a fraction of what they had first offered her. Her stubbornness had cost her a lot of money and gravely affected her health. The stress of all the pressure from the state caused her to have a stroke. It almost killed her. She continued to have mini-strokes from that point forward until her death. She was never the same after they took her land. Sometimes your property can become a part of you if you have spent your whole life on it.

She still owned about ten acres across the road around the old dairy barn, so she had her house and all of her outbuildings moved across the road. Today Sissonville High School is located where our home used to be.

My sister Rachel's first husband was Allen Morris. He gave her a daughter, Rosemary, who now is married and lives in Florida with her husband and three children. Rachel's second husband was a Charleston fireman, William Landers who has a daughter from his first marriage.

I went to the new high school my junior and senior years. It was handy living so close to school. During my senior year I never really dated much. Another girl friend, Lolita Harding, owned a Corvair and we often shared the cost of the gas to drive the ten miles into town to cruise

the strip. Unfortunately our “strip” consisted of driving in slow circles around the parking lot of our local Shoney’s Big Boy Drive-In. That was where all the teenagers met on the weekends. There were only a limited number of parking spots to be had so we had to keep circling like Vultures until one would open up for us. The only other hot-spot in town was the bowling alley that was located next door to Shoney’s; that was where the best looking guys seemed to always hang out.

Almost every Saturday night there would be a fight in the parking lot. The town boys didn’t like the country boys. It was a different time back then and most fights ended with only a bloody nose or black eye. These would be proudly worn the following Monday at school like some sort of badge of honor. It didn’t really matter which one won the fight as long as someone had a trophy to show off. I never really understood why they had to test their manhood that way; I guess it was just a guy thing.

Another one of these “guy things” was the stealing of the Shoney’s Big Boy statue from the restaurant in town and sticking it upon the roof of our high school. No one ever got charged for the crime but Jerry Wandling’s name was mentioned several times in the rumors that floated around after the fact. Even though the thing was only made of hard plastic it was huge and stood over eight feet tall. It would have taken several boys to pull off this stunt.

To earn more money I started working in the concession stand on weekends at Laidley Field in town for Hershel Pauley, a Charleston

cop. This was where several of the area high schools played their football games. It seemed I was always trying to hustle a buck; when you come from a poor family you have to if you want any nice things. I would do my friends and their mothers' hair for extra money as well. Everyone said I had a natural talent for doing hair. My Uncle Adam said that I could make hair talk. I guess he meant I could make it look real good.

I took gym class the last period of the school day and my teacher, Mrs. Tyree, would even have me touch up her hair after class. With all the complements I had received for doing hair I decided to go to Beauty School after I graduated from Sissonville High School. It took me a couple of years to get the financing altogether but I finally got started in beauty school.

Beauty School turned out to be much harder than I had expected. I thought it was going to be mainly just doing hair. I had no idea how much bookwork there was going to be. As far as the hair part I had no problems. They had me in the International Room doing haircuts and perms for paying customers in less than two months. They had even asked me if I might be interested in becoming an instructor after I graduated. Most of the other girls that started when I did were still in the training area.

What killed me was all the technical stuff I had to learn from the books. I would go home and try to study but the words just didn't make any sense to me. I would get so frustrated that I would break down and cry. I could do the work with my hands but my brain just wouldn't cooperate. It soon all became a moot point when I

found out that my first sexual encounter had gotten me pregnant.

I was four months pregnant when I went to the doctor and he confirmed it. I was so embarrassed and immediately became the “Black Sheep” of the family. I dropped out of beauty school and started doing hair at home to make money. Some of the people whose hair I did were, Violet Harding, Ann Fisher, Doddie Fisher, Lolita Zarrant, Betty Long, Frances Taylor, Nora Hanson, Mary Carney, Violet Boggess, Quantia Boggess, Judy Boggess, Coleda Aultz, Betty Peters, Margret Haynes, Bea Hill, Nora Hanson, Kathleen Sisson, Janet Aultz, Helen Bailey, Betty Young, Audrey Levers, Margie Mullins, Julia Walker, Mary L. Coon and many others whose names escape my mind at the moment. I worked for just what ever they wanted to give me. As you can see I stayed busy right up until Mark was born; all eight pounds and six and one half ounces of him. If things had gone just a little differently the little fellow would not have made it into this world.

My family didn't want me to have a child out of wedlock. Back then it was considered a very shameful thing even though many marriages were consummated before the official ceremony. More than one wedding dress had fit a little snugly at the waist line in my part of the world. In my case though, a wedding was not going to be part of the plan. This caused my family to try to get me to abort my baby; Mark DeWayne.

They had me sit in very hot tubs of water and ride an exercise bike until I just about past



out but to no avail. Mark clung to my insides and was determined to take the full nine month ride. One family member took me to a quack doctor on the west side of town for shots that were supposed to cause me to abort but they had no effect.

Later this same family member took me to another doctor in a dirty, little coal-mine town in southern West Virginia to have a regular abortion. However as I sat crying and praying that this thing wouldn't take place my relative returned and angrily announced that the doctor said I was too far into my pregnancy to have an abortion. I now chose to face my shame and have Mark on my own. I wasn't sure how I was going to raise him by myself but I felt I owed it to him to try my very best.

The first night after I brought Mark home from the hospital proved to be an exciting one. I almost did what the shots couldn't. It all was caused by the fact that Mark had his days and nights mixed up. In an effort to get him to sleep through the night I placed one of his little receiving blankets over the lampshade in our bedroom to dim the light so that he might go to sleep. I was still very exhausted from the birthing process and sore from where they had stitched me back together down there. I hadn't gotten much sleep in the hospital and was looking forward to a good nights rest.

The dimmer light helped and after a little fussing Mark finally drifted off to sleep and so did I. Then about three a.m. I was awakened by the strong smell of smoke in the room. When I opened my eyes I saw the flames racing up the

curtain behind the dresser where the lamp that I had covered was sitting. Apparently the light bulb had ignited the receiving blanket and it in turn set the curtains on fire. Part of the burnt curtains had fallen onto the dresser and caught it on fire as well.

I panicked and ran through the house to get help screaming "FIRE"! Pop jumped from his bed and ran into the kitchen and quickly filled a bucket from the sink. He then ran into the room and threw the water on the flames; dousing most of them. However, the upper part of the curtains were still on fire so dad jerked them down and stomped out the remaining flames with his bare feet.

By now the room was filling with thick smoke and it was hard to see. My sister Rachel ran in and snatched Mark from his crib and rushed him from the room to safety. We opened all the doors and windows to let the smoke out but we couldn't leave them open long because it was February and very cold.

After everything calmed down I realized that my mad dash for help had torn several of my stitches loose and I was bleeding a little. I thought little of it at the time but it has caused me some problems in my later years. I would not recommend anyone to run with stitches.

The father of my baby was R. L. of Sissonville, West Virginia. His family had a little money and he drove a Corvette to high school. While I was going to high school I had heard the other girls talk about sex so I guess I was naturally curious to see what this great stuff was all about. I had only gone out on a few dates during and af-

ter high school and never did any more than a little light petting. My mother or sisters never took the time to discuss birth control with me so getting pregnant wasn't even on my mind. R. L. was older and should have realized that I knew nothing about sex. He should have taken some precaution to not get me pregnant but he didn't care. I was just another easy lay for him. A rich kid in an impoverished, rural setting considered the local poor girls just entertainment. We were just playthings and easily manipulated.

When I approached him about my situation he denied being the father and his family even hired several guys to say that they had sex with me. His mother made her brags around the neighborhood that she would see to it that R. L. stayed out of trouble no matter how much it cost. They left me no other course of action but to take R. L. to court to swear my child to him.

I knew he wasn't in love with me but I thought he might at least do the right thing and marry me to give our child his name. However he and his family would not hear of such a thing. I was not from their social class. To them I was just some dumb, poor farm girl and not fit to be their precious boy's wife.

After her divorce, my sister Rachel and I, along with her daughter Rosemary and my son Mark, all moved to an apartment on the west side of Charleston. Rachel



*Brenda, Mark,  
Rachel and Rosemary*

was able to get a job as a Meter Maid for the city and I got one as a School Crossing Guard at Wilson Junior High. In the winter I almost froze to death standing out in the cold. My hands and feet got so cold that I almost had frostbite. Sometimes the local patrol cops would give me a ride up the hill to the apartment but not often. That was a very painful walk home on many a cold winter's day.

R. L. did stop by once after I had Mark to see his son. He apologized for getting me pregnant. However he had also gotten another girl pregnant in our neighborhood around the same time. She had a daughter by him but she refused his offer and wouldn't marry him. My son Mark and his half sister went to school together for years before they knew they were even related. It was rumored that R.L. had fathered at least one more child out of wedlock. He would not be able to get by with being that selfish today. He would either be paying a lot of child support or he would be in jail.

I later moved to a downstairs apartment with Mark after I was able to get a better paying job at the Big Star Supermarket on West Washington Street, as a cashier. The head cashier there, Jenny Smith, convinced the store manager to hire me because I was a single parent and really needed the job.



*Brenda and football player who was signing photographs at Big Star*

The pay was around \$1.25 an hour as I seem to recall.

I started dating a guy named Jim who lived in the same building, in another apartment. We dated for eight years and each year he held out the promise of matrimony to keep me on the string. I broke up with him after I found out that he had been seeing other women all along and had promised them all the same thing. He now goes to church and I hope he has settled down but I wouldn't want to be his wife and take that chance with his track record. It's a shame that I wasted eight years of my life with someone who turned out to be nothing but a lying, cheating two-timer.

It took me three years of legal action but I proved R.L. to be the father of my son. When we finally did make it to trial only one of the four worthless guys he had paid to swear they had sex with me showed up for court and he was drunk. While giving his testimony he even looked over at R. L. and winked; the whole jury saw this stupid action. When my lawyer cross examined this drunk he could not remember if we had sex in the front or back seat of his car. When the jury was shown baby pictures of R.L. and I held my then three-year-old son up for them to see they could tell by their similar features and with blood work results that he was the father of my son.

I was paid somewhere in the neighborhood of \$3,500.00 to cover the medical bills and what not and that was all I ever received from my child's father. The lawyer even took part of my settlement as his fee, stating that he needed a

new pair of shoes. I took the rest and used it as a down payment on a mobile home that I had set up on the corner of my folk's lot.

R. L. has never paid me one cent of child support or offered to help his son in any way. He may have made my child a "bastard" but I think we know who the real one is.

I transferred to the Big Star Supermarket at Sissonville right after I got my trailer set up.

Unfortunately, while my trailer was parked beside the road next to my lot waiting to be moved into place some thieves broke into it that night and stole all my furniture. It just seemed like I couldn't catch a break at this point in my life.



*Brenda's first trailer*

When word of my pending transfer got back to R.L.'s mom she approached the manager of the Sissonville store, Dave Buxton, and tried to get him to not let me come to work there. Dave told her that he couldn't do that because I was a good employee and had three years experience as cashier. She threatened to take her business elsewhere and did so after I started work there.

However, R.L.'s father used to stop by the store from time to time and ask how the "boy" was doing. He seemed like he was genuinely concerned but a neighbor who worked at the store informed his wife that her husband was check-

ing on their grandson, which she didn't want to claim and his inquiries stopped coming. As a matter of fact he wouldn't even come through my check-out line after that. His wife must have really scolded him for his actions. It must be terrible to have that much hate in your heart.

After a while and much hard work, I made Head Cashier and was put in charge of all the front end operation of the store. This angered some of my male co-workers and they did things to try and make me quit. They picked up my car and placed it tight up against the building that made it almost impossible to move away from the wall. It took me several minutes of small back and forth movements and small turns of the wheel to free my vehicle. They shoved a banana into my exhaust pipe and egged my car. They lit newspapers under my car to try to burn it up and they even removed the oil plug from my motor to try to blow it up. My coffee was spiked with laxatives and they even locked me in the bathroom with a rat. They acted like a bunch of childish delinquents.

When these terror tactics did not deter me they turned on my friend Phyllis Raynes and snuck up behind her and placed a pet Boa constrictor around her neck. She screamed and ran to the back of the store. She was so upset she couldn't run her register so I had to cover her position. Her heart was pounding so hard that she thought she was having a heart attack.

They even put Mark up to walking up the road to R.L.'s motorcycle shop and asking him for a motorcycle. Mark was only about eight years old at the time, so when he approached

R.L. in the shop and asked for a motorcycle R.L. asked him who he was. Mark said proudly that his name was Mark Sayre. R.L. then angrily ordered him out of his shop and told him not to ever set foot inside it again. This rejection really hurt Mark's feelings. Needless to say Mark never again asked his father for anything. He always said that some day he would settle the score with him. My co-workers may have gotten a good laugh from their prank but all Mark got was a broken heart. Little things like this can shape how we live the rest of our lives. This may account for some of Mark's actions towards his own children. Pain can stay with you all your life and you may not even realize that it's there.

I was determined not to be run off by these co-workers and they finally realized this and left me alone. I continued working there for fourteen and a half years. I lived within sight of the store so that I could make it to work even in bad weather. If it snowed I would even walk



*Phyllis Raynes*

to work. I worked hard at my job and did make some dear friends. Phyllis Raynes was one of them and we became very close; she felt more like a sister to me than just a co-worker.

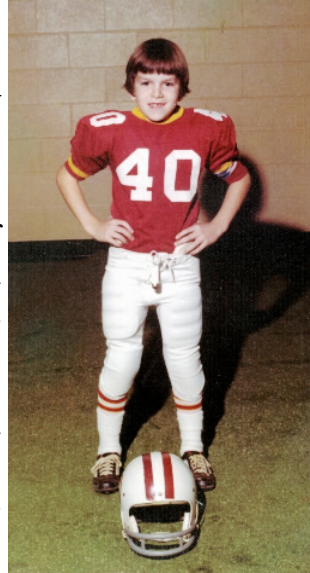


## Chapter 5 — Fun in Acapulco

As Mark grew older he started spending more time by himself after school and to fill these empty times he thought up new things to cause me grief and to entertain himself. He played football but he still had extra time to kill so he cut the bottoms out of empty soup cans and buried them to build himself a miniature golf course in our yard. He even let the grass grow longer than where he mowed around the cans so that they looked like the putting greens he had seen on T.V.

He also constructed a ramp out of a stack of bricks and an old board from the barn in the driveway. He then drove his bike at top speed to try a jump just like Evel Kneivel. However, all he managed to do was knock the wind from him when this stunt sent him crashing to the ground flat on his back. It's a wonder he hadn't broken his neck.

His exploits grew bolder as he grew older. The cops were at my door several times because of his mischief. Once he and some friends stood on the side of the hill and threw snowballs at the passing cars. As Mark's luck would have it one had to be a cop car. On another occasion he and another neighborhood boy decided that it would be "cool" to cut folks tires just for kicks. Neither



*Mark Sayre*



*Raymond, Patty and three sons*

the recipients of these flats nor the police found this to be amusing in the least.

His luck with guns in his early years also got him into trouble. I returned from work one afternoon to find a

22 caliber bullet hole in the wall of my trailer by the back door that faced pop's house. On another occasion he shot his cousin Michael, Raymond's son, in the back of the head. Luckily this time it was only a BB gun but the boy still had to go to the hospital to have it removed from under the skin. This was the same BB gun that he had used to shoot up the plastic lid to his new stereo system that I bought him for Christmas that year. I had told him the big box housing the stereo was clothes so that he wouldn't snoop while I was at work. Later that day he took his gun and filled the box full of BB holes. It was just not safe leaving him unattended for very long.

Pop would set with Mark for me sometimes but I had to be sure he wasn't drinking before I could trust him with Mark. If my father was under the influence of alcohol Mark could talk him into doing anything. Then I had two delinquents on my hands instead of just one.

I took mom and dad on vacation with me

to St. Petersburg to visit Rachel. This was the first time either of them had seen the ocean.

They looked hot in their street clothes walking along the beach and picking up shells. What onlookers didn't know was that dad still had on his long handle underwear under his pants. I even took them to Sunken Gardens that they also enjoyed.



*Mom and Pop*

On the way home I got my first speeding ticket in Virginia. The cop said I could either pay him twenty dollars cash or I would

have to come back later for a court hearing. I paid the twenty but I doubt the courts ever saw any of it. I only had fifty dollars at the time so we just barely made it home after gassing up again and getting everyone something to eat. This left nothing for a motel room so we had to continue driving



*Dad, Brenda, Mom and Mark  
at Sunken Gardens*



*Brenda and Mark*

straight through the night. We hit heavy fog coming through the mountains that night and following the tail lights of a passing car was all I had to navigate by. I was never so afraid in my life.

Pop had gotten arrested for drunk driving once so he thought it best he not drive when he drank after that.

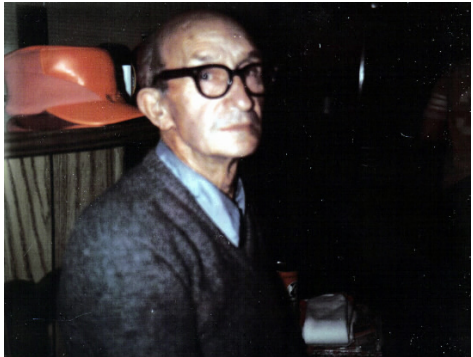
This sounded like a good plan. He lived within easy walking distance of the store so access to his beer should not be an issue. However, even this did not work out for Willie. By now all the local cops knew him and of his drinking, so when he went staggering up the highway on foot they still picked him up for being drunk in public. After that episode he said the heck with it and went back to driving under the influence. Often times he would be so drunk when he did make it back up the driveway that the only thing that stopped him was when he ran into the garage doors and stalled his engine. He would not be going fast so the garage doors stayed intact but they bore many scars from their run-ins with dad's old truck.

One winter afternoon mom called me in a panic. Apparently dad had been down the road drinking at one of the local bars and had, as

usual, come home drunk. Only this time he had missed the driveway about halfway to the garage and was stuck in the high, dry grass beside it. He had passed out behind the wheel with his foot on the gas pedal, pushed all the way to the floor. His old truck's engine roared as its back wheel spun freely off the ground. By the time I got my coat on and ran across the yard to him his muffler had heated to the point that it had started a small fire in the dry grass under the truck.

Fearing that the whole truck was about to burst into flames I jerked pop's door open and pulled at him with all my might. Even a small man like my father is hard to maneuver when he

was unconscious and limp. Yet I had no choice in the matter, I had to get him out of the burning truck and I had no time to get help. Therefore, I mustered all my strength and pulled on pop with all my might. He



*Willie (Dad) Sayre*

finally pulled free of the truck and I dragged him away to what I thought was a safe distance. I then rushed back and turned off the engine and proceeded to throw hands full of snow on the burning grass until it went out.

It was not like he stayed drunk all the time. Pop would stop his drinking from time to time and go back to church. As a mater of fact

he was made Deacon and the choir would come to our house to practice their songs for the coming Sunday service.

Sherman Walker's quartet from Tupper's creek spent many evenings praising the Lord with song in our living room.



*Choir practice in the living room*

After having one child I was sure that I didn't want to bring anymore into this world; planned or otherwise. I had tried the pill for several years but they started causing me problems so I decided to have my tubes tied. By now this was a fairly simple procedure; done as an outpatient.

My friend, Lolita wanted hers done as well so we decided to go together and have them both done the same day. Lolita's surgery went like clockwork. When she awoke she made water and was free to go home. I, on the other hand could not only not make water I couldn't regain consciousness. We both should have been out of the hospital by noon but here it was after eight p.m. and I was just starting to wake up.

When my eyes did finally open I was shivering and couldn't stop. I ached all over like I had the flu. It took me another hour to make water and to get stabilized enough to be discharged. I think they gave me too much gas. I don't know why it is that the simple things always turn out hard for me.

After my breakup with Jim I started going



*Betty Peters*

to nightclubs on weekends with my cousin Betty Peters. She was older and a widow but a lot of fun to run around with. She lived in a big brick home just two doors up from my trailer so often she would ride with me when we went out clubbing. Neither of us was looking for a man at the time, we just wanted to have a few laughs and dance a little.

I started going to a nicer club in South Charleston called the Club Colonade. The owner was Boyd Frazier from Frazier's Bottom, a small town to the west of Charleston. He was up in years a bit but he was still a very strong man; he bounced his club himself.

Frazier struck up a conversation one evening as I sat at the bar alone. He could tell I was feeling down. We talked for a long time about this and that then he asked me my name. When I told it to him he said that he had known a Sayre girl from Ripley that had died in an airplane crash with a friend of his some years back.

As the evening started to draw to a close he said that he and several of his friends were going to Acapulco, Mexico on vacation and asked me if I would like to go with them; all expenses paid. I thought about it for a week then said yes. I had the vacation time due me at work and besides how often does anyone offer you a free vacation. Or at least I thought it was free.

I was so naive that I thought he just wanted me along as a guest, sort of like a buddy;

one of the gang. But being buddies definitely wasn't what he had in mind. This I found out when we had to stay overnight in a motel in Cincinnati, Ohio the night before our flight to Mexico. Bad weather in the form of heavy snow had forced us all to drive there to make the connecting flight.

I suppose I could have said no and made him bring me home but after eight years with that lying, two-timing Jim I felt like I was owed a little fun. Mr. Frazier seemed like a nice older guy. The last vacation I was on with Jim I had to pay for everything to get him to give up the plans he had secretly made with one of his other women.

So if a rich guy wanted to pay my way for a change, so be it. My reputation was already shot because I had a kid and wasn't married so I figured I might as well have some fun. Frasier had made it plain from the start that marriage was never going to be an option with him and if I wanted to continue our relationship on those terms then we would see how long it lasted. At that point in my life I wasn't looking for a husband, just a good time.

Mom had always said that it was better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave. I think she was thinking of her own life and how much easier it would have been if she had listened to her father and married one of the local, rich farm owners that had wanted her instead of some well equipped farm hand who didn't have anything.

Acapulco was great. Frasier rented a villa for us halfway up the mountain overlooking the



town and ocean. We had a private pool and our own bartender who stood behind the bar all day watching and as soon as your glass emptied he refilled it with whatever you were drinking. He also was our cook and bought fresh food for us every day from the open air market at the foot of the mountain.

After watching the world famous cliff divers we went down to the market one day just to check it out. However, after what I saw there it made me wish I hadn't gone at all. I was accustomed to our supermarkets back home, with their clean floors and plastic wrapped meats. This Mexican open-air market looked like something out of the Dark Ages.

Each stall had all their wares piled on dirty tables or hung from rusty hooks. Plucked and gutted chickens with their heads still attached swayed gently in the sea breeze as a multitude of flies swooped from one carcass to the next. The unwashed locals paid them no mind as they happily pawed each piece of fruit or vegetable looking for the least rotten ones. Needles to say I didn't have much of an appetite the rest of our stay in the villa.



*Brenda Sayre and Boyd Frazier  
in Acapulco*

People had told me not to drink the water but they had forgotten to tell me not to eat the food.

Once we were back in our clean villa the filth from down bellow seemed like another world. The beauty of our mountainside surroundings quickly made me forget the horror from down below or maybe it was those big, frosty rum drinks that our bartender kept shoving into my hands After a few of those I even started snacking on the huge plate of diced fruit that was always in the middle of our table. I tried not to think how many dirty hands had picked over this fruit before it had gotten to our table.

Our little band of Mexican desperadoes that had accompanied us on this journey back in time included Wade and Pauline Brooks, Bob Frasier, Lloyd and Helen Frasier, Terry and Pete something and Martin Bowles. All were club regulars or family. By the end of our trip Frasier and I had become sort of boyfriend and girlfriend. He wasn't really the kind of man that let anyone too close. But for now I needed someone in my life and I think maybe he did too.

I can think of a lot worse things than having an older, "rich" boyfriend. He



*Brenda at the Villa in Acapulco*

was able to show me a very good time and really wasn't that possessive as were the younger men I had dated. I guess the rather large difference in

our ages made him aware that our time together was going to be short one way or another.



*Brenda at Club Colonade*

Every week at his club he reserved the first table by the dance floor for me and my friends. Some of my table regulars were Misty Pitchford, Susie Bird, Phyllis Summers, Betty Peters and Sue Moore; with whom I shared a

vacation trip to Myrtle Beach.

Frasier was usually busy most of the night on weekends making sure that everything went alright in the Club so to pass the evening I danced with any of the guys who



*Sue Moore, Susie Bird, Phyllis Summers, Mitzy Pitchford and Brenda*



*Brenda at Myrtle Beach*



*Sue Moore at Myrtle Beach*

would ask me. That usually meant almost every dance. At the beginning of the evening Frasier would have his chef cook us each a big steak and baked potato before the band started playing and the crowd began pouring in.



Frasier got *Brenda and Frasier Deep Sea Fishing* along with my family just fine, I think mainly because he was more their age. I also believe the prospect of having a rich brother-in-law made them overlook the obvious difference in our ages. He tried to buddy up to Mark but they never really hit it off that well. He was just too old to have much patience with an active kid like Mark. Sometimes I think Mark did things just to upset



*The Sayre Family*

him. He wanted to be the only man in my life and did not like to share my attention with anyone. That's one of the drawbacks to being a single parent.

A year or so into our relationship Frasier bought Mark a mini-bike; that's like a baby motor cycle. Nothing would satisfy them both but for me to get on it and give it spin around the yard. I told them I was afraid of the thing but they kept insisting I try it. I had been watching Mark and it looked as simple as riding a bike only without all the pedaling.

In my front yard I had half-buried some giant truck tires that I had painted white and used as oversized flower planters. The reason I mention these will become obvious to you in just a moment. As I said earlier, the guys kept after me to ride this thing until I gave in and got on. In their haste to get me to take a test ride they forgot to mention how to operate the gas on this thing; nor had we discussed the brakes.

As soon as the engine started this thing between my legs jumped forward and started straight for the highway. I panicked and twisted the throttle in the wrong direction. Soon I was stretched out flat on the seat with my legs flapping in the wind as I raced for my destruction on the Highway and its steady stream of oncoming cars.

The harder I gripped the throttle to keep from falling off the faster the thing went. As I approached one of my big planters I had to make a split second decision as to which fate I wanted to endure. At that moment bouncing off my rubber planter seemed better than the cold steel of one

of the passing cars. So with a loud thud I swerved the bike into the planter and tumbled head first into my flowers. This did kill the bike's engine but it nearly killed me as well. I was sore for a week after this little joy ride. Even my sandals had been ripped backward off my feet



*Brenda's sailfish with the Captain and his wife*

and were hanging onto my ankles only by the top straps. This ride ended my career as a biker.

Frasier and I dated for four years and he took me somewhere different for vacation each year. We went to Stuart, Florida the next year and I reeled in a big Sailfish that he had mounted and hung proudly on the wall opposite the bar in his club. The picture shows the captain of the boat we were on and just how big the fish was. We took Willie and Mark with us the year after that to Canada fishing. Pop had a great time and caught some really nice big fish.



*Dad fishing in Canada*

We also stopped at Niagara Falls on the way there. If you have never seen the falls I would strongly encourage you to go. It's so beautiful it



*Winnebago at the  
Grand Canyon*

will take your breath away. It also has a real calming effect for some reason. You can stand for hours and watch the water cascade over the rocks never repeating the same movement

twice. It's like a new picture each second. I loved it; can't you tell.

Our last vacation together was a drive across country in his Winnebago. I even helped



*Brenda at the  
Hoover Dam*

with the driving. We took Mark with us and I was even able to stop by and visit my friend, Susie Bird, who had moved to New Mexico some years back.

We saw the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam and even gambled a little in Vegas. When we got to California Frasier's brother, who is a lawyer,

took us up in his small private plane and flew us all over San Francisco.

By the time we made it back to West Virginia, however, Frasier was tired and had become very grouchy with both Mark and me. The difference in our ages was starting to show. He had always told me that if I wanted to get married he would find me some-

one. I told him that I was perfectly capable of finding my own.



*Susie Bird in New Mexico*



*Brenda climbing into Frasier's brother's plane*



## Chapter 6 — Wedding Bells

Shortly after this trip he went back out to California for a month to help his brother build



*Sue Moore, Brenda, Danny, Rachel, Bea and Shannon Arnott as the flower girl*

an A-Frame on some land they owned at Lake Tahoe. While he was gone I met and fell in love with Danny Breeden. Dan had just recently divorced and was making the rounds of the clubs. He

looked out of place amongst the other happy party goers. I could see the hurt in his eyes.

I remembered him from when I used to cash his checks at the store when he lived in Sissonville some years earlier. He had been a Deputy Sheriff then and looked very striking in his cop uniform and big gun. He asked me to dance and one thing led to another.

When Frasier came back I told him that Danny and I were getting married. He took it pretty well but



*Mark and Ray as ushers*



*Brenda and her  
Dad*

he did make me give back the new car he had been letting me use. I guess that was to be expected. All in all, I think he knew we were over as a couple before he left for his brother's because he had never bothered to call me the whole month he was gone.

Danny and I planned our wedding for weeks. We spent over two-thousand dollars and it was just a simple yard wedding. Still the cost of the flowers and rented reception equipment added up quickly. My girlfriend, Rosemary Ray, helped with all the wedding plans and made sure everything went as it should. Because he had gotten married his first time in his parent's mobile home wearing a borrowed Sports Jacket from his cousin, Jerry Wandling; this time around Dan insisted on wearing a white Tux and tails. He said it was going to be his last wedding and he wanted to do it right.

Even though I had a fourteen year old son I still got married in a white gown, after all it was my first time; getting married that is. My father walked me down the aisle to give me away. We had built a temporary ramp at my brother Russell's front door and covered it with green indoor-outdoor carpet. We set up over one hundred folding chairs, which we had borrowed from the local Nazarene church, in the



*Rosemary Ray, Tim  
Arnott and Sean  
Breden*

front yard. We had a flowered arc under which



*Brenda's Parents (Bessie and Willie)  
Brenda, Danny and his parents  
(Imogene and William)*

we stood to say our vows. On either side of the arch were huge pots of yellow flowers placed on thick, white Roman pedestals. It was a beautiful wedding and around one hundred people showed up for

it. My youngest brother's two girls took care of the guest registry.

It was the 26th of June and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Unfortunately for our guest metal folding chairs and a hot, summer sun can be a painful combination. Most were glad that our service was brief and all dashed to the rear of brother Russell's house where we had wisely set up the cake and punch fountain in the shade.



*Danny's son as ring bearer  
and Rachel*

It was a little strange in that our flower girl was Dan's ex-wife's niece and her father, his ex's brother-in-law, was Danny's best man. However they had been a part of his life for over sixteen years. His eight year old son Sean was the ring

bearer and my son and one of my brothers were ushers. My sister Rachel was my Maid of Honor and Sue Moore and my other sister Bea Durham were Bridesmaids; their escorts were my brother Raymond and my brother-in-law William Landers. The preacher was Buddy Mairs.



*We cut the cake*

When we got ready to leave on our honeymoon the wedding guests had decorated our car and placed the rear wheels up on blocks so that it wouldn't move when Dan put it in gear. The crowd had a good laugh but we were both glad to just have all that behind us now. Weddings can be a lot of work; we had been planning this thing for several weeks. It was hard now to believe it was all over with so fast.

Our drive south was strangely quiet. I don't think it had fully sunk into our brains yet as



*The wedding departure*

to what we had done. We spend several days at Myrtle Beach but it wasn't quite what I had expected and hoped for. Before the wedding our relationship had been great and still is today but on our honeymoon Dan just moped around most of the time missing his sons. I think he felt he

had betrayed them in some way.

I admired him for being a good father but this was to be our time. The years that followed showed me that it was no use trying to compete in Dan's heart with his sons; they always came first. This didn't mean he didn't love me as well; it's just that I had to except that he loved them in a totally different way.

Dan didn't expect me to be a mother to his boys; they had a mother. However I was hoping he might become the father figure that my son Mark never had. The closest thing he had to a father was his grandfather Willie. Even though pop tried, he could not keep up with an energetic young boy who was always into mischief. Pop was also blinded by his love for his grandson and was sometimes talked into buying things that he couldn't really afford on his limited income.

Mark's latest interest was Coon hunting. To accomplish this you need a good Coon dog. He talked Willie into buying several of these would be master hunters. One in particular stands out in my memory because it was the only time I let him talk me into going Coon hunting with him. Pop had bought Mark a new Red-bone hound that its seller had promised to be one of the best dogs in the state. Dad had spent \$300.00 on this wonder-dog; nearly a whole month of his income.

The night of our big hunt, Dan had agreed to come along as well. He was trying to show an interest in Mark's hobby even though he would have much rather stayed home and watched T.V. as would I. The hunt was to take place after dark

on the mountain behind our home. This made it at least convenient if nothing else.

We each had a flashlight to navigate the winding-trail and the big red dog strained eagerly at its leash as we climbed higher up the hillside. It would stop every few steps and hike its leg to pee on the surrounding brush. This must be the sign of a good dog. He must be lightening his load for the upcoming chase. Having never been Coon hunting before in my life I asked Mark exactly what we were to do. He said that when we reached the top of the hill he would release the hound and it would sniff out the trail of the elusive coon. Then we would follow its barking to the tree that our wonder dog will have chased the coon up into.

Once we get to the treed coon Mark would shoot it out with the rifle pop had giving him and the big red dog would finish killing it on the ground. This all sounded a bit gory but I was determined to stick out at least one hunt with Mark.

It had been many years since I had last climbed this mountain. I didn't remember it being this hard to do when I was a young girl. When we topped the hill Mark released the dog and we stood still catching our breath and awaiting its famous base bark that would signal a fresh coon trail. We shined our lights on the dog as he crossed the trail back and forth with his nose just barely off the ground.

Mark told us to turn off all our lights and we were to just stand still and let the dog work the trail. We did as we were told and not two seconds after shutting off our lights the big red dog

came rushing back towards us. He ran up to us and sat at our feet quivering with fear. Leave it to Mark and my father to buy the only Coon dog in the world that was afraid of the dark.

All the way back down the hill I kidded Mark, calling his dog a "Pisser dog" not a Coon dog because that's all I saw him do. Needless to say they unloaded this mutt as soon as they could find another sucker but they took a beating on the price. Before he tired of this latest hobby he and his grandfather invested in twenty-one Coon dogs which pop wound up having to feed and water most of the time. Mark also tried his hand at raising rabbit beagles but on his very first trip out with one he shot its lower jaw half off instead of the rabbit. The poor thing tried to eat but we finial had to finish it off with another bullet.

After his hare-lipped beagle and his pisser coon hound, Mark lost interest in hunting dogs for the time being and started begging for a pony. He assured me that, unlike the dogs, this pet he would take extra good care of and would not need anyone's help. This turned out to be a false statement before he ever got the horse on the grounds. He talked Dan into helping him fence in about half an acre of pop's back lot. They strung three strands of barbed-wire all one Saturday afternoon.

When the pony he had picked out was delivered it turned out to be a big one; almost the size of a full grown horse. It was so big in fact that Mark was afraid to ride it. This turned out to be another one of those Mark ideas that wasn't thought all the way through. As with the

dogs, I lost money getting rid of this huge wild pony.



*Brenda and Danny*

Even though Dan still had another year of electronics school to complete we started making our plans to move to Florida when he was through with his course. While we waited we went dancing every Saturday night and had a lot of fun times in West Virginia but I was ready for the change as well.

Many bad memories still lingered about the Sissonville area. Everyone here knew of my disgrace of having a child out of wedlock. I was



*Danny and his son, Sean*

ready for a fresh start and to meet new people who would judge me for the person I am not for the one big mistake I made in my youth. Thanks again R. L.

After Danny finished electronics school we sold my trailer to his brother Bill and his wife



Sherry and I moved to St. Petersburg, Florida. They agreed to continue cutting mom and pop's grass just as I had been doing all these years, so that made me feel a little better about leaving them. Dan hoped that he might find work in the electronics field there. He had spent two years studying hard to get his associates degree and now it was time to put all



*Bill and Sherry Breeden*

that he had learned to use. I too was looking forward to the change in employment; besides that's where my sister Rachel and her husband Bill lived. We didn't stay long in St. Petersburg; no one would hire Danny in electronics because of his age and disabilities. A two year degree wasn't worth much when you are middle aged and had to compete with young men and women fresh out of four years of collage. He did find work after a while as a Mental Health Tech at a halfway house for psychiatric juveniles in Clearwater.

I went to work right away managing a small bar for a family friend, Guy Hardman. His parent's were Lena and Harold Hardman from Derrick's Creek who owned the Skipper Motel on St. Pete Beach. His wife was Sue Coon from Pocatolico. The bar was called Club 28 because it was located on 28th street.

It had been a Biker Bar at one time but Guy tamed it down to just your run-of-the-mill neighborhood bar. Dan got off work at ten p.m. and would come to the bar to help me close at 2 a.m. One evening one of the customers said something negative about me to his buddy sitting to his right. Unknown to him at the moment Dan was sitting on the stool to his left and became angered by his comment and challenged the man for his abusive language. The man disarmed Dan's rage by asking him why he would let his wife work in a place such as this if he didn't want her to hear the occasional off-color remarks; after all it was a bar not Sunday School.

## ***Chapter 7 — The Reservation***

This drunk had made a good point so we moved back to West Virginia shortly after this confrontation. It had taken all our savings to get moved back to West Virginia so we had to move in with mom and pop for a while. That was hard living. We fixed the front room into something like a small apartment. Dan added a half bath and closet in one corner. This kept us out of the way some but we still had to bath in the other bathroom. Mark slept on a half bed in the other front room. Mom and pop always closed this part of the house off in the winter and never used it. The back half had all the room just the two of them needed. It contained the kitchen, dining room, bedroom, bath and a little sitting room where they spent most of their time watching T.V.

It was a strain living with my parents but we had no choice until spring, then Dan could get some work with his family. We cleaned and painted the whole house on the inside; something that hadn't been done for years. It took 16 gallons of paint to do it all. With all the improvements we were making around the house we felt we were paying for our stay with our sweat and materials. When the weather broke and warmed enough to permit him to do so, Dan built a new set of stone steps at the front porch to replace the old wooden ones that were falling apart. These old ones were in such bad shape that Willie had to crawl up them on his hands and knees. Of course pop still sometimes came up the new steps that same way because of his

drinking.

Willie had a special blind spot just off the front porch and to the left where mom could not see him from any of the windows of the house. This was where he would sometimes slip off to and do a little afternoon drinking or he would just sit in his old worn out lawn chair



*Willie (Dad) Sayre*

to hide from mom for a while. His secret place was in the shade of one of the big trees in the front yard which sat on a little knoll beside their driveway. On at least one occasion he was witnessed falling asleep and tumbling head first out of his lawn chair down the little embankment. Luckily he was never hurt in these almost slow motion falls.

Still I'm sure that even with all the improvements we were making to the place mom would much rather that we were gone. She became very agitated one day when she found out that in our cleaning efforts we had burned up an old tattered couch that was just in the way on the side porch. Mom always hid money around the house and, although she never admitted it, from her reaction I bet we burned up her stash of cash.

Another act of our good intentions that

went wrong was when Dan cut down mom's black berry vines. This patch had been planted many years earlier just outside their little setting room. Over the years the vines had grown unattended to the height of the gutters. They formed a thick, prickly barrier that made seeing anything out of the windows on this side of the house all but impossible. This fretted mom because these windows faced my older brother Russell's house and she would set up late on the weekends until she saw the lights of his car pull safely back into his driveway. Once she was sure her eldest was home safe she could then go to bed.

Mom casually mentioned that she wished she could see out these windows a little better so Dan took it on himself to clear her a better line of sight. He worked for hours chopping down and dragging off all the black berry vines to the burn pit on the other side of the garage. He had blood dripping down both arms from the many scratches he had received for his efforts. When he was done we then cleaned the windows inside and out so that mom had a clear view of Russell's driveway and house. It was probably the first time those windows had been cleaned in thirty years.

When mom hobbled outside to inspect his progress she became angry and rewarded Dan's hard work with a swat on his rear from her cane. She had just wanted a hole cut through the vines to peek out of, not all of them removed. Somewhere in the back of her old mind she still thought she would be able to harvest her berries and can them as she had been doing years ear-

lier. The fact of the matter was that her age and poor health had prevented her from canning anything for some years now.

It gave me a strange, sad feeling deep in my guts looking out mom's side window at the lights of what used to be my trailer. It seemed odd having someone else living in my home. It hadn't bothered me while I was living in Florida but now it made me wish that I hadn't moved away. I think Sherry felt uncomfortable being there knowing how badly I wanted it back. After a month or two she and Bill moved back to Bill's trailer on Victoria Road so that we could buy my trailer back.

Dan and I discussed the possibility of opening some sort of business for ourselves so we wouldn't have to work for someone else the rest of our lives. His health was declining and stonework was taking a real toll on his body. My grocery store chain had sold out to new owners; as a result I had no good job to go back to either. I had gone to work at J.C. Penney's Department store in the Town Center Mall but it was only part-time work and the pay sucked. Even though I didn't care for the job I still applied myself at it and had top sales one month. However, after being a supervisor it was hard taking orders from younger folks who had not paid any real dues in the work world.

After doing a lot of research into the needs of our local area Dan and I felt that either a Nightclub or an Ice-cream type restaurant should go over big. We ruled out the nightclub idea right away because we knew mom would never go for it. It has been said that location is

everything in business and we definitely had that going for us. The high school was just across the road and we were on the main highway. The only thing we lacked now was money.

Mom and pop had deeded me the acre that my trailer and the big house were on. However, they had reserved for themselves a "Life Estate" in the property; this meant nothing could be done without their consent. In order for us to borrow the money we needed to build the restaurant they had to sign away their interest in the land. This would be tricky because if something happened and we failed in this venture then my parents would be kicked off the land along with us.

Dan drew up the plans and we showed mom and pop what we had in mind and explained that we couldn't do it without their permission. Mom was hesitant at first but I assured her that if we couldn't make it work then we could rent it to cover the mortgage. Having been a landlady herself for many years she understood the value of rental property. Plus we told her she could have all the free ice cream she could eat; mom loved her sweets. I'm sure Willie would have preferred that we build a bar and give him all the beer he could drink.

Only \$47,000.00 was borrowed from the Bank of Sissonville to build the restaurant. Normally you can borrow 80% of the quick sale value and quick sale value is 80% of the appraised value. The appraised value of the house, trailer and restaurant combined was \$125,000.00 so we could have gotten a loan for \$80,000.00 but we wanted to try and keep our

payments as low as possible. Besides, we figured if we needed more money later we could always take out a second mortgage for the balance of the loan value. That was mistake number one.

Danny had estimated the building costs that it was going to take to build our restaurant down to the last nail and board. He brought the building in within \$100.00 of what he had proposed. However, when we started putting the needed equipment inside, our projected cost for this phase was exceeded by over \$10,000.00. That was the bulk of the operating money that we had budgeted for our first year. We had no idea that restaurant equipment was so expensive. We even bought used equipment whenever we could but most of it was new. The equipment cost overruns had drained our safety margin to the point that we had to borrow \$50.00 from one of our cooks to enable us to make change the day we opened. We had every penny that we had borrowed tied up in the building, equipment and stock. We didn't even have enough to pave the parking lot and only had one of the entranceways completed.

We went back to the bank when we realized we were going over our budget on equipment to take out a second mortgage but they refused to lend us any more money. It was rumored that the bank wanted our land to trade to the pizza place next door to the bank so that the bank could expand in that direction. Like I said, it was just a rumor but it might explain why we were not given the loan; \$47,000.00 is a long way from \$80,000.00. With that extra \$33,000.00 we could have made it, I'm sure.



So with no operating cash and a half completed parking lot we were doomed from the start. It sure seemed like someone wanted us to fail. Yet we struggled on trying our best to make it work. We had started with seven employees and after three months we were down to just one fulltime worker and one part-time lunch helper, Danny's ex-



*Kathy and Tim Arnott*

sister-in-law Kathy Arnott. Danny and I worked our tails off. We were each putting in over a hundred hours of work a week into the restaurant. Money got so tight at the last that we had to take the cash we made from the day before and hurry into town the next morning to buy supplies for that day. We operated in this desperate manner for almost a month.

Seeing no other way out I turned to an old friend of the family, Okey Boggess to ask for help. He had made his fortune in the grocery store business and now, along with his sons, owned several stores. He loaned us a few thousand dollars to add another entryway onto the parking lot and freshen up the gravel. We also closed in our covered picnic area and converted this space into a game room for the high school kids. With what cash that was left over from his loan we were able to stay open a little while

longer but we knew we were doomed. When we couldn't scrape up the next month's nine-hundred dollar mortgage payment the bank started making foreclosure threats. Okey then offered to buy the place to keep the bank from taking it. Without a finished parking lot we could not even rent it to someone else to cover the mortgage. His offer was somewhat less than the appraised value but he said that he would reinstate mom and dad's "Life Estate" on the land. That made his lower offer acceptable.

It hurt to give up all we had worked so hard and so long for but I could not chance costing my parents their home. After Okey paid us I sat down and wrote out almost \$95,000.00 in checks to pay off every last dime of debt we owed. This left us with just enough to move back to St. Petersburg and make a small down-payment on a double-wide trailer in the park where my sister Rachel, her daughter Rosemary



*Bill, Rachel and their daughter Rosemary*

and her husband Bill lived.

Almost everyone else who lived there was retired so Dan and I felt kind of out of place. Mark would have been bored to death if it had not been for his

almost nightly trips to the St. Pete Pier to fish or throw the eleven-foot fish net that his aunt Ra-

chel bought him.

One weekend afternoon while Mark was throwing his net he caught a forty pound Black Drum fish. It was all he could do to pull it up and over the pier railing. It just so happened that a Television crew was on the pier filming a commercial that day. When Mark finally got his catch over the rail he heard clapping. When he turned to see who was offering their applause he was surprised to see that the whole T.V. crew had stopped what they were doing to watch him. Mark takes his love of fishing and hunting back after Willie.

Another thing that helped Mark adjust to living in Florida was his new little girl friend, Shawn. She was full blooded Mexican-American and very cute. However her two younger brothers were little devils. They got Mark banned from the Park's Clubhouse because his little Mexican friends broke one of the club's pool sticks and were very rowdy when Mark took them in the swimming pool area. The Park was for old people



*Mary Beth and Rachel*

and had little tolerance for a wild bunch of kids.

Danny went to work for Goodwill in their big sorting plant in St. Petersburg as a plant-maintenance worker. Mary Beth, a friend of my sister Rachel, was able to get me a job at Ross Chevrolet in their service department as a cashier. A little later, my brother-

in-law, Bill Landers, got me a similar job where he worked at Swanson's Chrysler Plymouth dealership in their service department but for better pay. Things were going along pretty smooth until Dan hurt his shoulder at work. While he sat around the house recuperating his first wife Donna, who was now living in Daytona Beach with her third husband, started calling Dan and complaining about how this latest husband was mistreating her and the boys.

She discussed the possibility of them getting back together for his boy's sake. Maybe she meant it at the time she was saying it, who knows. The next thing I know Dan is gone. After six months he came back over to work on our taxes from where we had sold the restaurant. I had already filed for divorce and had a boyfriend that I was seeing regularly. I had met him at the VFW club where I worked on weekends as a waitress to help out with the bills.

Danny explained that after he had helped his first wife get rid of her third husband that they had a heart-to-heart talk and they both felt it just wouldn't work out between them. They both felt that it was useless to try to force feelings that just weren't there anymore. They both felt that it would be unfair to the boys to get their hopes up and then put them through another break-up.

When her third husband left he had cleaned out their checking account, took all the household goods his van could carry and moved back to South Carolina. I guess she wasn't lying about him being a bad person. Danny was working two jobs and giving almost all his money to

his ex-wife to keep her and his sons from being evicted or going without food. Dan on the other hand had been doing without just so they could have something to eat. He had lost thirty pounds since I had last seen him. He was now a rack of bones and looked totally worn out.

After we worked on the taxes we talked about what had happened and he assured me it had been just for the boy's sake that he had left me. Needless to say I was still mad at him for deserting me like he had, but I know how Dan is about his sons. After a long talk we decided to give it another try; but slowly. He would come over on weekends then go back to Daytona to work the weekdays. It was almost like dating all over again. I explained to the guy that I had been seeing that I was going to try it again with Dan and he understood. He had helped ease the pain of Dan's leaving me so I guess we both had gotten something out of our arrangement.

When Race Week came Dan lost his second job as the part-time maintenance man at the small motel where he had been living; this work had paid for his room. The owners had all the rooms now reserved for the race fans, even his small one that he shared with the extra yard tools and half-full paint buckets. They would be getting double their normal rate for the next few months; all the way through Spring Break. Anything with four walls and a roof could be rented during this peak time of the season. Dan moved in with one of the single carpenters that he was working with. His bed was a cot on the guy's unheated closed-in porch. Winters can still get cold even in Florida. Some nights Dan would sleep in

his clothes to help fight off the chill. It sucked but still beat sleeping in his car.

After about a month of this long distance courtship and with the motel he was helping build almost finished, I decided to let him move back in with me and Mark. I guess I felt that I had punished him enough. We agreed to take it one day at a time and just see how things went. There was a lot of trust that had to be rebuilt before I could let my guard down again. And that's what we have been doing now for the last twenty years or so; taking it one day at a time.

We decided to sell the double-wide and move over to Daytona Beach. There were a lot of bad memories connected to St. Pete now. Some are too painful to even talk about without hurting others. The people who owned the small motel where Dan worked his second job offered us the position as live in managers. It had been a



*Danny's work at the Town 'n' Surf Motel  
in Daytona Beach, Florida*

little Mom-and-Pop business and now that the father had died this left the mother and her middle-aged son to run the place. She was up in years and her son really

had no interest in running a motel.

Unfortunately it took us longer to sale the double-wide than we had anticipated. By the time we made it back over to Daytona the owners had decided to sell out and move back north

themselves. So with no real job offers in the area, we too decided to head back to West Virginia and start over.

## Chapter 8 — Fish Camp

We didn't have enough money to rent a truck to move our stuff back so we had to leave it stored in Daytona until Dan could make enough money to come back for it. We stayed with his parents for a while until he got a few paydays. Then he and his father took an open two and a half ton flat bed back down and picked up our things. It had side-rails of wood so they covered the load with plastic and a tarp for the trip back.

When they arrived back in Charleston with our things Dan decided to build a shed on the back of his father's garage to hold our stuff instead of renting a storage building. We unloaded our things from the truck onto the ground in front of the garage and covered it with plastic. Naturally that night it rained. The next morning when we started uncovering our stuff a big black snake about five feet long came slithering out from underneath the plastic. It came out right at my feet and scared me to death. I don't know if he crawled in there during the night or if Dan and his father had hauled him all the way back with them from Florida. Either way I was very



*Danny and Brenda's camper*

careful when I finally unpacked my boxes not really knowing what to expect what might jump



out at me next.

As if the snake hadn't shaken me up enough, Dan started that morning to build the shed. He handed me an old power saw to hold off the wet ground while he plugged the extension cord that it was plugged into in an electrical outlet inside the garage. This saw had seen better days and unknown to us at the time now possessed an electrical short in its handle. The saw's flaw became evident the second Dan plugged it in and I started to vibrate. My scream alerted Dan and he quickly unplugged the drop cord that led to the saw. Memories of my childhood shock came rushing back to my brain. From that day forward I have refused to hold anything that Dan plugs in.

Shortly after we got back to West Virginia we found out that the accountants that had been taking care of our taxes when we had sold the restaurant had failed to have us pay the last \$125.00 in Federal tax that we owed. Because the business was in my name a Federal warrant had been issued for my arrest for tax evasion. If I had gotten stopped for any traffic violation while I was living in Florida they would have arrested me and put me in jail. With the fines and late charges combined it cost us over \$3,000.00 to clear up that mess. We even had to pay another \$75.00 to have the warrant removed from the active list after we paid all the money we owed the government. This was back before the IRS became the nice guys they are today.

After Dan made some money we bought a used camper and set it up beside his father's garage. We lived in this camper until an old house

on Melody Lane just down the road a short ways came up for sale. It was defiantly what one would call a fixer-upper. I went to work at a little convenient store just down the road called the Jiffy Mart for Carol and Bert Thomas.

I worked there through three different owners. The second set of owners was Gene and Judy Ball. They also owned Sun Control, a window tinting and lighting company. She was more than just a boss, we became good friends. I was at the hospital with her when she gave



*Gene, Judy and their kids*

birth to both her sons. The last owners I worked for were from Bombay, India; the brothers Shaw, K.C. and C.K. They were nice people too.

But getting back to that rat hole we bought on Melody Lane. We worked on that thing and its yard, or rather its hillside, for two years before we had it in shape to try to sell. We weren't having much luck unloading this old house until a guy from up the road showed some interest. His name was Roy Wickline and he had a little reputation as having some problems. He received a Government check for something from his time in the war and was qualified for a V.A. loan.

He decided he wanted the place and the V.A. inspectors checked out the place. They gave

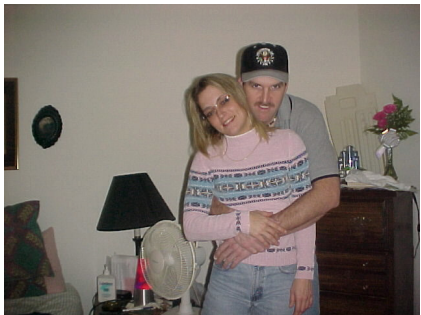
Dan a list of things that we needed to do to have the house qualify for the loan. The major thing was a completely new roof. All these improvements cut into our profit margin to the point that we could have cleared more money working at a fast food place the same two years.

Before the papers for the sale were signed Roy showed up with a dozer and an operator. They started re-landscaping the yard and hillside. Roy needed more room for all the junk he had collected. In the process his operator cut the natural gas line to the house and a couple hours later Roy cut one of our trees into the electric wires leading into the house and shut off all our power. All we had left was running water and at the rate he and his dozer were going I didn't think it would last out the day.

He didn't even give me time to take up any of my flowers that I worked so hard on for the last two years. He just had it all pushed over the hillside. I could have choked him. Luckily the sale did go through; I hate to think what Dan would have done to Roy if it hadn't.

With what profit we made from the sale we loaded up another U-Haul and headed back to Florida. Before we left this time Mark meet a sixteen year old girl and fell head-over-heels in love. Her name was Angie Bowling from Cross Lanes.

He would not be going back with us this time. Mark and



*Mark and Angie*

Angie got married on the West Virginia Belle, a three deck riverboat that worked between Charleston and Huntington. Angie's mother, Linda, rented the whole second floor for the wedding and paid for fifty guests. Angie's parents divorced when she was very young and she and her two brothers were raised by their father Doug. Paying for the wedding may have been her mother's way of trying to make up for not being their all those years.



*Mark, Angie, Brenda and Danny at Mark and Angie's Wedding on the West Virginia Belle*

The wedding took place on December 22, 1989. It was so cold that the river had frozen all the way across and we looked like we were riding an ice-breaker as we split the ice and forced our way up river for the two hour tour.

Nothing would do Mark but to get married in a white tux with tails just like the one Dan had wore at our wedding. I even gave Angie my wedding dress and hat to wear.

Dan persuaded his oldest son Steve to move back to Florida with us. We rented a house on 11th street in Holly Hill that had a swimming pool to try to entice him into staying. However after about a month he became homesick for his



*Danny's son  
Steve Breeden*

brother and mother and moved back to West Virginia. Dan worked driving a van for a physical therapy place and I worked part-time as a cashier for a Food Lion grocery store just up the street from where we were renting. It was close enough that I walked to work most days. After a short while they moved me into the office because of my many years of experience. However on one occasion I did not

look like the experienced store worker that I prided myself on being. As I was closing the safe in the office I lost my concentration for just a second and slammed the safe door on my thumb. Luckily for me it was a small safe and my thumb was near the top of the door otherwise it would have clipped the end of my thumb completely off. It still smashed the end of my thumb enough to break it but what made matters worse was the fact that the thing shut enough to lock itself, even with my thumb trapped in the door.



*Danny loading a patient  
into the van*

I think I set a new store record for unlocking a safe; man that hurt.

I worked the rest of my shift in pain then went to the Emergency Room to have my thumb X-rayed. The doctor said the bone in the tip of my thumb was crushed and that their really wasn't anything they could do for it but let it heal on its own. They tested me for drug use just in case that was the cause of me doing such a dumb thing. I can't say that I blamed them for thinking that. Of course the test came back negative. Unfortunately I don't need drugs to do dumb things.

Neither of our jobs paid very well and this big house with the pool was too expensive for just the two of us. We held out till spring then we moved back once again to West Virginia. Dan knew he could make good money laying stone for his family and we missed all the kids; his and mine.

After a few more years of doing stone work Dan's knees and elbows played out on him. He had to find easier work that paid halfway decent. This he found guarding Federal prisoners at a work release center in Jefferson, West Virginia. It was called Bannum Place and Dan liked the work. He always was good with people. However sometimes he would have to send an inmate back to prison for not following the rules. He really didn't like doing it but it was his job.

Dan had been working for Bannum Place of Charleston for about three years when the opportunity for him to transfer to Orlando to one of Bannum's new halfway houses for Federal prisoners came up. We both were ready to move

south after spending several cold winters north. Enjoying one winter in Florida makes it very hard to stay north if the opportunity comes your way to move back to this warmer location.

The new center was located in the part of Orlando called Pine Hills. Even the name sounded refreshing and inviting. It conjured up visions of soft green rolling hills and fields of wild flowers. The hard fact as to Pine Hills' real makeup did not hit us until we were inching our way along in bumper to bumper traffic during a blinding thunder storm as we crept into "Crime Hills"; which is what the locals call Pine Hills.

When we stopped for directions we realized we were the only light skinned folks in this part of town. Don't get me wrong, Dan and I aren't racists it's just that we came from a rural white background and now all at once we were the minority. But the color of the people around us did not cause us to decide not to stay in Orlando; it was the traffic. I have never seen such a mess. Dan said that we might as well give Daytona another shot since we were already in Florida with everything we owned in our U-Haul. He felt we stood a better chance there of finding work.

We were living in a trailer on lot 19 in the Reed Canal Mobile Park when 9-11 took place. Dan was at work at the Tomoka Correctional Facility as a kitchen supervisor. Dan's sons and



daughter-in-law had moved to Daytona about a month after we did. They now shared a two bedroom townhouse in

*Danny, Steve, Sean and his wife Mary*

Port Orange. What made this experience even more nerve-racking for us was the fact that Dan's oldest son and his youngest son's wife were both coming home that morning from Columbus, Ohio by plane.

The three of them had flown to Columbus a couple weeks earlier to help with a big computer build for the company Sean now worked for. Sean still had some things he needed to finish but Steve and Mary were done with their part and couldn't wait to get back to Florida. When all the planes were grounded that morning the one which they were on was just about ready to take off. For some very worried time we didn't know if they were safe or not. Finally Sean called to let us know they were OK and off the plane.

Dan left work early, as did a lot of folks that day. When we talked about what happened we decided that we wanted to go back to West Virginia where we knew all the faces and felt like less off a target. The boys and Mary opted to stay in Florida. This felt more like home to them so they weren't about to let the terrorist run them off. It has become a strange world we live in after that nightmare in September. I don't feel safe anymore as I once did. I never realized how good I had it growing up in rural America as a child.

When we got back to West Virginia we stayed with Dan's parents again for a while. This time his nephew had moved out of the little one room out-building which Dan's father built for him when Michael started high school to give the boy a little more privacy. It had been his bedroom only it was not attached to the house. This kept his music from disturbing Dan's parents



and it kept Dan's parents from disturbing Mike's music. Mike had many of his lady friends visit him in his now private quarters. It's a wonder the boy ever left home; he had it made there.



*Mike's bedroom that we turned into an efficiency apartment*

We added a half bath and a closet to this structure and stayed there until we saved enough money to get our own place. The rest of our things we put into rental storage.

To make extra money I cleaned apartments on my days off from the store. I cleaned an apartment up on the Kanawha Boulevard for a doctor and I did a townhouse in Cross Lanes for a professor. They each only paid me \$35.00 but the extra \$70.00 bucks came in handy in the winter months when Dan's work was slow.

Dan's father bought a piece of river front property down on Poca River for almost nothing and agreed to sell it to us for what he had in it. He told us we could pay him in small monthly payments.

We moved from Dan's parents and were now renting a big house from Dan's aunt. It had a full basement. This made an excellent place to prefab the needed woodwork for the fish camp. Dan needed to get some sort of structure built

before he could get the water and electric lines run to the camp. He made the first section twelve



*Danny and Brenda's fish camp*

by twelve so that his material would work out even with the least amount of waste. He constructed three, four by twelve floor panels that would be bolted together on the

site to form the floor. He also prefabricated twelve, four by eight wall sections. These too would be assembled by bolts on site. Lastly he pre-made the trusses.

As soon as the weather warmed enough Dan laid the block work for the foundation. He built it so that the wood part would be eight feet above the river level. He then hauled all the pieces to the camp and assembled them like a giant Erector set. With a structure on site the

water company now gave us a tap. Once the water was in the power company set us a pole. Now we could do the rest of our building on site.



*View from the fish camp*

We added two more sections and when we were done we had one bedroom with two closets, an eat-in kitchen and full bath with room for a washer and dryer. In the bedroom we had a large window that faced downriver. The view from it was beautiful. We lived in the camp fulltime for a year and a half, and then we sold it.

We might have kept it longer if it had not been for the floods. It seemed every time it rained for more than a day the river flooded and we would have a muddy mess to clean up. The last flood was so high it almost got into the camp itself. We had less than sixteen inches between our floor and the flood waters. A T.V. crew even stopped by and interviewed us standing on our front porch with the flood waters rushing just inches underneath our feet.

We had a lot of great times at the camp. In warm weather we always had plenty of company. We had huge cookouts and everyone would come to our place to fish. We had two fishing docks and a concrete boat ramp. If it hadn't been for those floods I'm sure we would be living there still.

All three of my granddaughters loved to fish and they baited their own hooks as well. On one occasion the youngest was getting fretted because the sneaky little Sunfish kept stealing her worm and blurted out, "The D—n fish took my worm."

I looked over at Dan and asked, "Did I just hear what I think I did?" All he could do was nod his head. He was trying too hard not to laugh to be able to answer me. As a matter of fact he had to head for the house as fast as he could be-

cause he didn't want to encourage her with his laughter. I had to play the role of the bad guy and get on to her for saying such a bad word.

She puckered her little lip and looked at the ground and was almost in tears so I had to hold her and tell her I loved her but that it wasn't nice for little girls to use bad words like that. Her come back was to say that mommy and daddy said it all the time and that she had even heard me say it before. This just goes to show grown-ups that little ones are all ears and will repeat what they hear. I tried to explain to her that words like that could only be said by grown-ups and they really shouldn't even be saying them either.

Now that the dirty work was done Dan regained his composure enough to rejoin the group and help take her mind off her scolding with talk of what her next fish might be and how big. Dan was never much help when it came to being tough on the girls; they had his number and could get by with just about anything with him. His weak excuse was that all he knew how to discipline were boys because all he had were sons. I think that was just his justification for always making me out to be the bad guy. All I ever tried to do was teach the girls right from wrong whenever I could. I didn't want them to grow up and make the same mistake I did because no one had taken the time to talk to them.

My sister Beulah and her husband Norwood Thaxton often stopped by the camp. Norwood's health was failing him but he still wanted to go for a drive every day that the weather permitted. He liked sitting on our dock and fishing.

He was so weak near the end that Dan would have to bait his hook and cast it out for him. Still he managed to reel in a few nice fish. This always seemed to perk him up.



*Norwood and Beulah inside the fish camp*

Another couple who visited us often was Don Beaver and his wife, Lorna. Don had gone to Slip Hill Grade School with Dan and Sissonville High with me. They lived up Hisser Creek not far from the camp and often stopped by in their pontoon boat. Sadly, Don died of a heart attack. He will be missed.



*Don and Lorna Beaver*

## Chapter 9 — *A-Frame and Hurricanes*

With the profit from the sale of the camp we put down a big down payment on a new mobile home and set it up on the corner of Dan's parent's property on Victoria Road. Dan's father



*Our trailer on Victoria Road*

let us tear down his old garage so that we would have enough room for the mobile home.

We had to have a sewer and water tap installed. Then we covered the whole lot with

gravel. It would have been pointless to try to have any type of grass yard; there just wasn't enough room left once the trailer was in place.

Dan hated mowing grass anyway. The hillside became my flower garden. I kept creeping farther and farther up its steep slope with one flower bed after another. It made tending my plants rather tricky and I fell off the bank on more than one occasion.



*Backyard of the trailer*

I had Dan go back on the mountain and gather me a bunch of old moss-covered stones to



*Back yard of the trailer*

fashion a rock garden in one corner. Above it I painted stones and placed them in the shape of the state of West Virginia. Beside the walkway to the back porch I had Dan build

me a small pond and waterfall.

I planted lots of flowers and Dan added two porches. Barbra Vickers helped us screen in the back porch just like she had with the screen room under our camp on the river. Her husband Danny helped us add the bedroom onto the camp. It comes in very handy to have friends who aren't afraid of getting their hands dirty.

Mark and Angie's marriage ended in divorce in 2002. Afterwards he lived several places with different girlfriends but he always tried to spend time with his kids when he could and Angie



*Danny and Barbara Vickers*

would let him. Dan and I continued to have the girls as much as possible. We tried to help keep their lives as normal as we could through the divorce but Mark and Angie often found it hard to cooperate with each other. This put the kids in the middle and caused them a lot of grief; I really hated that. There is only so much I can do to

help the situation; everyone's life must go on.

A rich guy that Mark was working for at the time offered him the use of an old, run-



*A-Frame on the Coal River*

down A-frame shack down on Coal River. All he had to do was clean it up and paint it. Naturally he called me and Dan to do the work. The owner had a huge dumpster delivered to the site and by the time we

cleaned all the old furniture and filth out of the place the dumpster was completely full. Even though he told us to keep track of our hours that we worked, we held out little hope of ever receiving any payment for our labor. The neighborhood teenagers had been using the shack as a hangout and had trashed the place bad. They knocked holes in all the walls and used different corners of the rooms as their



*Danny inside the A-Frame*

bathroom and I don't mean they bathed there. We had to rip up all the carpet and padding just to help get rid of the smell. We worked for almost three weeks fixing up the place; mainly so that Mark would have some place to keep his kids



overnight. He had been staying with his latest girl friend at her parent's home and she already had her two small boys sharing her bedroom. This made it all but impossible for Mark to have his daughters for an overnight visit.



*A-Frame after remodeling*

Dan and I had over a hundred hours each in this project and spent several hundred dollars out of our own pocket for paint and what not. This amount the owner did reimburse us. However our labor was never paid for because someone burnt the place down. We don't know who for certain but we have an idea. We were just glad that Mark and the kids were not in it at the time. All three of his daughters

had just spent the night with him as they had been doing almost every weekend since Dan and I had finished the place. I had given him a lot of stuff to set up house keeping. All this was lost in the fire along with much of his personal things.



*Departure to Florida*

Therefore, when Dan and I decided to move back down to Daytona I told Mark he could have my mobile home if he moved it off Dan's fa-

ther's lot and finished paying it off. Because I had made a large down payment the monthly payments were only \$176.00. Even if he had to pay lot rent somewhere he would not find a cheaper place to live. This way I would know my



*Danny and Brenda at Lot 12*

granddaughters would have a nice place to stay when they visited their father. Dan and I had decided that this would be our last trip south. The cold was just too

hard on our old bodies. We were determined to live out our last days in the sunny south. Or at least that was our game plan until everything broke loose.

Dan had been laid up for a month with a broken ankle. He had tripped on a piece of the ramp that had broken off and was hidden in the sand where he now worked. He spent much of his time sitting in our screen room with his bad leg propped up working on his book. He had run a T.V. cable outside so that he could watch the news as he worked.

He called me to the screen room one afternoon to show me this big swirl of clouds on the national weather map. He said this bunch of clouds had been given the name Charley. I could have cared less what they called it. I was sure it would race across the Gulf and hit Texas or somewhere over on that side of the world. A hur-

ricane hadn't hit the Daytona area hard since the sixties. That one was called Donna.

I was not really that afraid when we went



*Hurricane Frances*

through the hurricane named Charley but the next one called Francis was something altogether different. For starters, we were in a nice safe apartment when Charley blew

through. It was where Dan's oldest son Steve lived in Port Orange. The walls were made of brick and we really felt safe there; well as safe as you can feel anywhere during a hurricane.

We had been ordered by the local authorities to evacuate the mobile home we were renting; storms seem to love busting up trailers. Dan screwed some left over plastic lattés underpinning over our windows before we left to go to Steve's apartment. We had hoped this might protect our belongings some. By now there wasn't one sheet of plywood for sale in Daytona. Steve's place was inland several more miles from the beach than ours so it seemed as safe as the shelters they wanted us to go to.

Charley came and went in a little over an hour. The winds blew stuff all around but we were still able to stand in Steve's doorway and watch as the storm blew past. All kinds of things went sailing by the doorway at more than one hundred miles an hour. It would have not been wise to step a foot outside his door. Even a small

broken tree limb can impale you if it's going that fast. At one point a complete Jungle Jim set went sliding up the parking lot and crashed into one of a neighbor's cars with a loud thud. You could hear tops of trees snapping off in the darkness over the roar of the wind and rain. We watched as one tree got knocked down just across the parking lot onto another neighbor's truck.

As I mentioned earlier, Charley was over in about an hour and a half. The winds and rain ended and the stars came out as though nothing had happened. However, scattered all over the ground in its wake was a mess of broken down trees, power lines and miscellaneous junk. We really knew better but we just had to see if we still had a home to go back to. It was pitch black because all the power lines were down. The only lights we saw on the trip back to the trailer were from a few vehicles we passed on the road. The entire town was dark and strangely quiet.

We had to take back streets to get home because the main ones were completely blocked by downed trees and power lines. We picked our way around the limbs in the road and even drove over some downed power lines at one point. They weren't giving off any sparks so we hoped they were dead. We all held our breath as we went over them.

When we got back to our trailer we were glad to see it still standing. A quick check around it showed only minor damage to the screen room. Part of the top of our neighbor's tree had been ripped off and flung through the screen onto our porch. We had been lucky, not

everyone was spared destruction. The trailer just two doors down from us had its whole roof ripped off. It looked like someone had used a giant can-opener.

For the next few days we cleaned and stacked all of the limbs and debris by the driveway to be picked up by the city workers. Even though Dan had broken his ankle a month earlier, he still hobbled along with his brace on and did what he could to help. Soon our little trailer park was starting to look a little like itself again. Except for the huge mound of limbs and trash stacked in the middle of our circle-driveway that ran through the park. Sanitation workers had already made several pick-ups but there was just so much of the stuff that they barely made a dent in our piles. Although we had no electricity our trailer did have bottled gas so our front porch soon became a gathering spot for all the neighbors. We had hot coffee and that can make you very popular after a storm.

We were lucky; our power came back on in about three days. Still in the heat of a Florida summer three days without air conditioning can seem like a lifetime. The ones who were still without power in the park actually got mad at us as though we had some say as to who got their power back, or when. The heat can wear your nerves down fast.

Charley was the first hurricane to hit the Daytona Beach area in a very long time so we were thinking that it would be a long time before it would be hit again. Otherwise we wouldn't have been so quick with our clean-up efforts.

We had no idea that we were about to be

hit again. Francis was not a fast moving storm like Charley. Francis decided to park over central Florida and to grind us for almost twenty four hours. She blew and blew, then blew some more. At first we weren't concerned, after all we had just ridden out Charley and he hadn't really been all that bad; at least not for us.

The big difference between the two storms, besides their duration, was the location in which we wound up riding out Francis. Dan's youngest son Sean and his wife decided to stay in their apartment building located at the park entrance. It was a single story building that was made of block and should be just as safe as Steve's place. Dan and I decided to stay with them as well, so that we would be able to check on our place as soon as the storm passed without having to drive over downed power lines as we had done after Charley.

The first few hours of the storm seemed to be pretty much the same as Charley but then the canal across the street from Sean's apartment began overflowing its banks and the water started seeping in around the back door. Now we knew why the landlord had placed sandbags at both doors earlier.



*Sandbags at Sean and Mary's  
Apartment*

We now had two options. The first was to stay in the apartment and hope the water didn't

get any higher or we could make a run for our trailer and take our chances their. Our trailer floor was at least three feet higher than Sean's floor level. Even though everyone had been ordered to evacuate all trailers we really didn't have a choice. If one live power line was blown down anywhere near us now, our standing in two inches of water would surely get us all electrocuted. There were so many trees down already that we were sure the streets to Steve's would be impassable by now.

Earlier in the day Dan and Sean heard the screen room to number 19 being ripped apart. Sean grabbed his camera and they went outside to the west side of Sean's building that offered

them some protection from the howling winds and snapped a photo just as the roof to the screen room was ripped up into the air. It was a dangerous thing to be



*Lot 19's roof getting ripped off*

doing in the middle of a hurricane but you know how men are.

It was now the middle of the night and the storm had been raging for hours. Our run to safety seemed less intelligent as we stood in the trailer and felt the wind gusts rock it back and forth. We watched as the front corner of the screen room raised up and down seven or eight inches. We were sure the next big gust would rip

it from the trailer thus causing the whole roof to be peeled away as our neighbor's had been in Charley.

The ocean level crested three inches deep in our screen room at lot 12. The overflowing salt water from the canal killed many of the orange and grapefruit trees throughout the Park. It gave us a whole new definition of what sea level meant. At the height of the storm we were less than two feet above it. If the storm had come at us from the ocean instead of across the land then any size storm surge would have



*Back yard flooded*

covered us completely.

The next day the winds began to slow down and the storm finally moved away from our area. A small break developed in the clouds; I was never so glad to see blue skies in my life. A Red Cross truck came by a few days later with a



*Screen room flooded*

hot meal for us. Accompanying them was a female newspaper reporter and her cameraman. They chose me to interview out of all the neighbors standing in line at the truck waiting to be given our food. I looked a mess and was glad that when the story came out in the local paper



that they had chosen not to use any pictures of me.



*After Hurricane Frances*

After being without power for seven days and with yet another hurricane heading towards us we decided to move back to West Virginia. Our nerves had had

it. We pooled our funds with Dan's sons and rented a truck big enough to take their stuff back as we went. They had to stay one more day because Mary had an appointment to have her braces removed. She had put up with wearing them for two years and was determined to get them off; hurricane or not.

I figured at least I still had my trailer up north to run to, then the night before we pulled out of South Daytona the power and phones came back on. It was a blessing to have power again, even if it was just for our last night. Once again we had the luxury of air conditioning and hot showers. Unfortunately, the next morning I got a call from West Virginia saying that my trailer had burnt during the night. The story was in the newspaper in West Virginia the same day that my interview with the news reporter came out in the Daytona newspaper. My name was in the newspaper in both states at the same time; what are the odds of that happening?

What could we do, we were committed to

the move now even if we didn't have anything to go back to. To make matters worse the truck we rented had one of those types of beds that lowered for easier loading, only this one never raised back up after we got it loaded. It was too late to change it for another one. We already had this one loaded and we didn't have it in us to unpack and reload another one. In hindsight I suppose we should have changed trucks. All the way back up the highway we were riding on the frame. It was like riding in a car with no shocks. Each bump in the road jarred us and our load severely.

To add to our load's peril, a small truck backed out onto the street in front of us and stalled its engine. Dan cut the wheel sharply and run completely off the road onto the rough grassy shoulder to avoid hitting it. As we bounced around I could hear my things breaking in the back of our truck. We hadn't even made it to the Interstate and already the destruction had begun.

Many items were damaged from this rough ride. The problem was compounded by the fact that when we started packing there was not one length of rope or roll of packing tape left in any of the stores. It had all been bought in preparation for the storm by those who had chosen to stay behind. Therefore our things were just stacked loosely together for the ride north. Without the rope needed to secure it, our stuff bounced around in the truck wildly as we hurried up the road.

I had placed my house plants at the rear of the truck for their safety but they never made it

back alive. Their pots were tossed about so strongly that half my stuff was covered with a layer of potting soil by the time we stopped. At this point all we wanted to do was put some distance between us and the approaching new storm. When we started to unload I was sickened by what I saw when we opened the truck's rear door. We knew the load had shifted some because we heard several loud crashes coming from inside the truck bed when we hit rough sections of the Interstate.

When Dan unlocked the rear latch and raised the door open just a bit to inspect the damage, potting soil and small pieces of broken glass from what once was our tabletop cascaded out off the truck onto its rear bumper like some sort of dirty waterfall filled with thousands of small chunks of sparkling diamonds.

## Chapter 10 — Jackpot

Once safely back in West Virginia we rented two storage buildings; one for our things and a smaller one for the boys' stuff. We had to stay with Dan's parents for a few days until we were able to find a place to rent.

Our old landlady Mrs. Figgatt happened to have a small house available. The floors were so



*Mark demolishing the trailer*

rough and stained that we bought some used carpet and had one of the Skeen boys install it. The kitchen was tiny with one of those old one-piece, single-bowl sinks and draining board combinations. We had no room

for a regular table and chairs so Dan took our table apart and mounted one half with two legs to the wall opposite the sink. We only had enough room for two chairs; which was fine as long as we had no dinner guests.

After the Insurance check cleared we began the cleanup. I should have said the haul-off because that's what we had to do. The fire had only gutted the master bedroom but the smoke and water had ruined the rest. Almost everything was lost. We did save the washer and dryer but I had to replace their melted knobs. After a good



*Mike Payne—demolition labor*

cleaning and a touch-up paint job they were still useable. The rest of the structure had to be torn down and hauled off. This task took us several weeks to accomplish.

We had only been living in the little Figgatt house a few months when my sister Rachel informed me that there was an apartment available in Sissonville just down the road from where I grew up. The rent was cheaper yet it was a much bigger place. The landlady was Gail



*Gail Walker*

Walker, Johnnie's widow. I had known her for years. She made us a good deal on the rent provided that we would help remodel the apartment across the hall. Her son Steve he had left a candle burning unattended and the apartment caught fire, gutting the place. She was lucky he hadn't burnt the whole building to the ground.

Steve and his buddies had started fixing it up but soon lost interest. We finished remodeling the apartment so that Gail could get it rented. She paid us well for that project and several others that we helped her with. She said that we had been sent from Heaven to help her out of a tight spot. I didn't feel much like an angle, it was just my way of repaying the Walkers for the kindness they all had shown me as a child.

A month after we moved into the upstairs apartment the bigger apartment that Gail's father-in-law had added for himself and his wife Julia became available. Although I had just gotten all my stuff set up in the upstairs apartment

I couldn't turn down the chance to rent the big apartment. Wes Walker had built this as his primary living space after they sold their house and every room was made larger than normal.

We had to carry all our stuff back down a half a flight of stairs but the extra room we now had made the effort worth while. To celebrate our new living quarters Dan and I decided to go to the Cross Lanes Dog Track to try our luck at the slot machines. I had won a little money there from time to time but mostly we left broke. We never took more than we could afford to lose. However, each time we went I was always hoping to hit a big Jackpot.

This night was progressing like most of our other nights; which meant we were losing. Then a group of people walked up behind me and stopped for a second. I glanced over my shoulder and this big guy in a Ten Gallon black hat was right behind me talking to the group. It was Jack Whitaker, the man who had just won the largest single Power Ball Jackpot a few days earlier; 310 Million dollars.

I recognized him from all the T.V. coverage he had gotten. His wife was standing right behind my stool so I turned around and asked her if she would have him touch me for luck. To my surprise, he came right over and rubbed my arm and wished me luck.

On my very next spin, I lost. The one after that was the same. As a matter of fact I didn't win another thing all night. I guess he sucked what little luck I had out of me; at least for that night.

Everything was going along just fine until

one evening Dan sat down at the kitchen table and clutched his chest in pain and said for me to call 911. His attack caused him to have four stints put into his heart. All had 80% blockages and any one of them could have killed him. He was very lucky.

A few days after Dan got out of the hospital we went across the road to Buddy B's store to play the slot machines located in their back room. These were legal now in West Virginia and saved us a drive to the Cross Lanes Dog Track. Dan hit the Clown machine before he went into the hospital for \$1,400.00. His father came out the very next day and hit the same machine for another \$1,400.00. I started playing it and Dan said I was wasting my time because it had already paid off big twice in less than a month. I jokingly told him that I was going to hit it too just to prove him wrong.

We were both shocked when three clowns rolled up onto the screen. I had hit the Jackpot but I had not max bet the thing so I only won \$1,400.00 like Dan and his dad. Still I was very happy to have that much. After getting my money from the store employee we walked back across the road to our apartment to have a Coke and celebrate.

After downing our drinks we decided to go back and play some more. I figured that I was playing with "House" money now and could afford to give some of it back to them. When we got to the back room the only machine available was the Clowns that I had just won on a few minutes earlier. No one else wanted to play it because they knew it had just paid off.

I sat down and started playing it just to kill some time until one of the other machines became available. This time I was playing the max bet button. I figured, what the heck, it was "House" money anyway. I don't know why people always use that as an excuse to gamble more instead of taking the money and running away. When you lose, it's your money you lose not the "House's".

Anyway, after several spins without any payouts I was just about ready to stop throwing my money away on this dead machine and sit it out until one of the others became available. Then on my very next spin after this thought three clowns again appeared lined up shoulder to shoulder on the pay line; Jackpot. Only this time the payoff was \$2,400.00 because I had been betting the maximum. So in a little under an hour I had won \$3,800.00. That money sure came in handy.

It took a little over a year but Dan finally settled his workers comp claim for his broken ankle and slipped disc. He received a settlement, which wasn't much for all the pain he had gone through and still does, but it was enough to get us moved back to Daytona.

We were lucky enough to move back into the Reed Canal Mobile Home Park where we had lived the year before. This time we were in lot 6. The owners of the park, Dennis and Gary Garmon, had bought this trailer for next to nothing because it was in such bad shape from years of neglect. The brothers had almost finished painting and remodeling it when we made it back. We told them we would finish whatever else that was



needed if they would let us go ahead and move in right away.

We had to have a place to stay and we didn't want to rent a room and put our stuff in storage until they finished. The owners of the Park both live out of town. Because of this they sometimes had trouble finding the time to finish a project in the Park once they started it. They could have put us off for another month or more and that would have cost us a lot of money in motel and storage fees. That is why we offered to finish the work ourselves.

The flower beds were in very bad shape and most of the metal underpinning was down and dirty. We cleared the flower beds and replanted them with fresh flowers. We reattached the underpinning and gave it a fresh coat of brown enamel paint. We used straight bleach and cleaned the outside of the trailer and its awnings. The mold had almost everything looking black. We removed the old worn-out carpet from the front stoop and re-glued new in its place. Shortly after we finished fixing number six an apartment became available in the big apartment complex in the front of the park. This was the same building that had flooded during the last hurricane. We really weren't crazy about moving again so soon but this apartment was on one level with no stairs and we would be sharing a washer and drier with a nice older couple in the next apartment.

While living in number 6 we borrowed a small 110 volt drier from one of our neighbors, Gerry Penn. But it was old and didn't work very well; much like Gerry. I still had to hang most of

our clothes on the clothes line out in the back. Often times I was bitten by fire ants while hanging up our laundry. It seemed like those things were everywhere. We would put poison on one mound and another would pop up a few feet away. To have access to a washer and a 220-volt dryer in a nice safe ant-free garage seemed like a good deal even if we had to share it with someone else. How bad could that possibly be?

To say our new neighbors were a little different would be putting it very mildly. The wife washed clothes constantly; sometimes one item at a time. Her husband screamed at her constantly and the wall that separated our apartments must have not been insulated because it sounded like he was standing in our living room when he started one of his rants. It became such a problem that we complained to the landlord and he threatened to evict them if they didn't hold down the noise. Apparently several other tenants had also complained about his shouting.

What made the situation worse was the fact that Dan was now working as a night security guard and needed to sleep during the day. This was near impossible because if the lady next door wasn't running the washer her husband would be screaming at her. Then just for good measure, they would run in and out several times a day in their car which meant opening and closing their garage door. This thing sounded like it was on its last legs and ground its gears loudly.

They also had a habit of slamming their car doors as hard as humanly possible each time they entered or left their vehicle. I'm sure they

weren't doing it for spite but the noise was extremely irritating; spite or not. Dan was just about at his wits end when my friend Bobby made us a really good deal to buy her trailer. We really weren't up to another move so soon but we had to get away from these nice folks before they killed us or Dan had another heart attack from the stress and a lack of sleep.

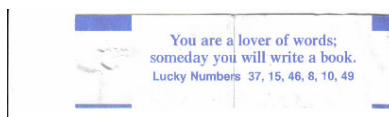
Bobby had some medical stuff done a month earlier and I had helped nurse her back to health. I guess this was her way of thanking me. She had just bought another trailer in the next park up the street and we helped her move in and get set up. Dan even did some minor repairs that her new place needed. We were both so glad to be out of that apartment. I guess we are just not cut out for apartment living.

Bobby's old trailer just needed some work on the flower beds that had gotten a little out of hand and a couple screens replaced. Other than those small items the place looked almost brand new. Best of all was the fact you could not hear your neighbors and Dan could now sleep during the day.

Dan worked on a book for the last year and a half about drug use and sales in Appalachia. He planned to self publish it and to sell the books at flea markets around Florida and on the Internet. He said I should write my book so that we could both have one to sell when we set up at a flea market. I was going to be sitting there with him anyway so I might as well give this writing thing a shot.

It wasn't a week after this conversation that we were in a Chinese restaurant in Port Or-

ange having lunch with Dan's sons and daughter-in-law. When the check was brought to the table and Steve paid it we each received a small fortune cookie. We all started casually reading the slips of paper inside the cookies. Dan was eating his; he will eat anything that has sugar in it. They had your standard, run-of-the-mill fortune cookie stuff written on them about everyone having good fortune of some sort. However, when I opened my cookie I couldn't believe what it said. I was so stunned I handed it to Dan to read out loud. When he took it from my hand he almost choked on his cookie. There printed in bold letters was the phrase "YOU ARE A LOVER OF WORDS; SOMEDAY YOU WILL WRITE A BOOK".



Dan has never really promised me anything except that if I stayed with him my life would never be boring and so far it hasn't been. So if you are reading this now it must mean that I accomplished what I set out to do or you are one of my relatives who has received a copy of this book for Christmas or your Birthday. Either way I hope you have enjoyed it.

You may be wondering why I named my book "West Virginia Mountain Maw Maw." Well, let me take a moment to explain. You see when my granddaughters were small we would sit on my front porch swing and sing together for hours. Unfortunately none of us were very good singers but we enjoyed it just the same. One of their favorite songs was John Denver's "Take me

home country roads.”

They followed the lyrics pretty close until they came to the part that says, “West Virginia, Mountain Ma Ma, take me home country roads” This part they always sang as “West Virginia, Mountain Maw Maw.” The memory of their small tribute has always stayed in my heart and is something very precious to me. So naturally when I started trying to think of a name for my book their sweet little voices echoed once again in my brain, “West Virginia, Mountain Maw Maw.”

I guess I wouldn’t be much of a Maw Maw if I didn’t take some time to talk about my granddaughters. They each have their own special way about them which makes them seem completely different most of the time.

I have always tried to talk to them about the many dangers of the world that little girls have to watch out for. Almost every time I start harping on a subject they interrupt me and say that they already know whatever it is that I’m starting to warn them about because I had already told them. This doesn’t slow me down any; I simply tell them that they are going to hear it again.

Dan and I have watched the girls quite a bit until just recently. Even with us now living away from them we try to stay in touch as much as we can. The Post Office gets a lot of business from me. I try to send a box back north every couple weeks with some little gifts for the girls just so they don’t forget how much we love them. Dan still helps them with homework over the phone. He sometimes has to look up stuff and

mail reports to them for some class project.

I could go on talking about my granddaughters for hours like any proud grandparent but I'll spare you that. However, now is the time when any good grandmother whips out that big stack of photos from her oversized purse.

Ladies and gentlemen I'd like to have you meet my granddaughters; Ashley, Tiara and Sheyenne.



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-Brenda Breeden