

A TALE OF A FLIRT - AND WHAT HER FLIRTING LED TO

By J. B. Leftwich

The Tennessean

On Mother's Day

She was 16, pretty, the only child of a well-to-do farmer and his wife. Her brown hair fell below her waist. She often did it in braids coiled it around her head, but as often it cascaded in well brushed strands to its full length.

She was pretty, and she knew she was pretty, and she knew the boys thought she was pretty. Many said she was beautiful. She was an accomplished flirt, prompting many of the boys to think her attentions were directed only to them. This pleased her for she did not care when the boys found out she was only flirting.



She was headstrong. She wanted her own way. And, being the only child, she usually got what she wanted. Often she clashed with her father who also was headstrong, wanted his own way, and usually got what he wanted. This left her mother in the role of peacemaker. A gentle woman with much love in her heart, her mother devoted many of her waking hours to reconciling differences between father and daughter.

The first confrontation came when the daughter finished elementary school and her father took her to Bristol, VA, and enrolled her in the preparatory department of Virginia Intermont College. After one week there, she took the train home. Her father met her at the depot bought a ticket to Bristol and sent her back. She stayed another week then took the train home. Her father, exasperated and weary of

the expense of her rides to and from Bristol gave up. She had outmaneuvered him, and she knew she could do it again.

Back home again in the rural hill country of Middle Tennessee, she sat about doing what she did best - mesmerizing the boys. But there was one boy, older by a number of years, who out maneuvered her. He was not shy as the other boys were, but aggressive and seemingly indifferent to her charms. This made her more determined to win the flirtation battle. Not that she really cared about him; it just got under her skin that her usual techniques were not working.

Her father was aware of what was going on, and he did not like it. Even in the small rural community, there were social strata, and the father viewed his daughter as a tier above this boy. In no uncertain words, the father made his position clear, but this did not sway her. To her the flirtation was serious, and she did not mean to be outdone.

So the flirtation continued. Her Father admonished and cajoled, all to no avail. Finally, an ultimatum: Stop the relationship or he would lock her in her room or send her out of the community. This prompted secret meetings -even thoughts of marriage. By this time the boy was so taken in by her charms that marriage was an appealing idea to him. To her, marriage was a last resort in the clash with her father. Eventually her father found out about the secret meetings and locked in her room she vowed to escape.

A circus came to the community. One of the neighbor boys, not her sweetheart, came to ask her father's permission to take her to the circus. Her father was suspicious. Was the neighbor boy an unknowing

accomplice in his daughter's scheme to escape surveillance? Putting aside his misgiving he relented and allowed her to go.

At the circus, she saw her boyfriend and abandoned the neighbor boy. They drove away in his buggy and married.

The father unwilling to drive a final wedge between him and his daughter, provided a cabin on the farm for them. With the help of her mother, they made it livable. About a year later, at the age of 17, she became a mother, but her baby only lived three days. The marriage was dissolved, and she never mentioned or discussed it with any her children.

At the age of 18, she married again. This marriage lasted until death did them part 43 years later. It produced four children.

I was the oldest.

Lela Bates first married Vestal Newman. They had a baby boy who lived two days. Marriage was annulled.

*See J. B. Leftwich stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

I REMEMBER MAMA

By J. B. Leftwich

There was a play, later a movie entitled, I Remember Mama On this day and two days from now I, as many in my generation, will remember Mama.

My mama. Blithe spirit. Maverick. Incurably romantic who faced life with equanimity. And often with a bit of rebellion. Mama was a pretty woman. At times a beautiful woman. Deeply religious. Though romantic, pragmatic in her beliefs.



She dreamed of more than she had, this hill country, woman, this farmer's wife, this survivor of the Great Depression. Materially, she had little but always she found beauty, in flowers, in porcelain, even of majesty. . As a girl, she was a princess. Later she was a captive

Much in her life was tragedy. A daughter, the only daughter she was to have. Dead before she, was two. And before that a foolish, impulsive teen age marriage that ended in annulment after one year. Shortly after her baby boy, who lived only three days, was born.

Then a successful marriage. Three sons whom she loved. An expressive love when they were babies and were totally dependent but a detached love as they grew. Rarely a touching love. The expressive, touching love came from her husband who understood her, but who would have changed her if it had been possible.

Although she couldn't touch she demonstrated her love in other ways. The \$20 she saved for a new pair of eye glasses. Given to a son who needed a new suit of clothes. Her meager inheritance shared with another son who needed it. Special meals for her family. Personal sacrifices for her sons.

There were times she shared her interests with the son who wanted to leave the hill country. She shared her dreams, her unfulfilled ambitions. A letter she wrote to Progressive Farmer and her pride when the magazine printed it. Her resolve to write. Maybe his letter would be printed in Progressive Farmer.

She was proud of her grandchildren but detached from them. Except the one who needed her most. This one bright but shy, who wanted to go to college but had little chance of doing so. But she did. When she

received her college degree, her grandmother was proud. Prouder of her than of the other grandchildren who graduated without her help. They did not need her. so she was detached from them. In her way, she took pride in their honors. But she never mentioned them. Their achievements were expected. They happened. That was enough.

She was a reader, an explorer of ideas. But as time went on and she aged, she retreated. Reverted to her childhood books. Fussed about contemporary literature. Thought it had little merit.

I remember Mama as a young woman. Trim and pretty. A head-turner. A lively conversationalist. Sometimes, regarded by her friends as unconventional. But still a favorite among her peers. Probably because she was unpredictable. And interesting.

She spoke frankly. Out with it: Speak your mind. Take your stand. Often she spoke with more candor than diplomacy. At times, her candor would rebuff friends. But they came back. They knew she was intellectually honest. They knew exactly where they stood with her.

She was certain about her religion. Fundamental beliefs. Literal interpretation of the Holy Word. Little patience with a son who rationalized and sometimes questioned her religion. But when her son chose a different religion, she said no more about it. No further discussion. Just an occasional off-the-wall comment that let him know she thought about it.

I remember Mama. The lively discussions. Often debates. Her incisive questions which could dissolve an ill-conceived premise. Late at night, by the light of the flickering fire, as the fire logs burned into coals, Her uncanny way of knowing what this son was thinking, Her accurate predictions of what he was going to do. The bond between them that flamed with the fire. Always there, but always unspoken. No son ever said, "Mama, I love you". She would not have known how to deal with spoken love.

Her letters were to come later. After left home for college had left for. Letters ended simply, "Love, Mama". The closest she ever came to saying, "I love you."

Russell Baker, in his autobiography recalled how his mother had prodded him "to make something of himself." But although he became a famed journalist and best selling author, she was never satisfied.

My mother implicitly demanded that I make something of myself. She never mentioned it. Nevertheless the demand was there. Unspoken. You're different, she would say. I never knew just what she meant. Peculiar? Odd? Strange? She never thought of any of her sons as gifted. But she thought I, as Russell Baker's Mother thought of him, could make something of myself.

Baker, in the opening sentence of his autobiographical volume states: "My mother, though dead these many years roams free in my mind.

So does mine

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Lela Bates Leftwich married Floyd Huddleston, a childhood friend, following the death of Lewis Cass. She died of a heart attack at her home in Baxter, Aug. 7, 1970. She is buried beside Cass in Odd Fellows Cemetery in Baxter.

*See Odd Fellows Cemetery at Virtual Cemeteries: <http://www.ajlambert.com>



Family of Lewis Cass & Lela Belle (Bates) Leftwich

Cass and his family in the late 50s or early 60s.

From Left to right: J.B. Leftwich (son), Lewis Cass Leftwich, Lela Belle Leftwich (wife), Clifford Leftwich, son, and Lillard Calvin Leftwich (son).