

MRS. KATE WEST'S GENERAL STORE

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'Writer's Corner'

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I was born on the old Abner Chaffin place just across the river from the Gore Farm in the Roaring River Community of Jackson County. The year was 1944 and a good portion of our extended family inhabited the generous old "home place" built by John Robert Chaffin in 1904.



My parents Bob and Maylene Chaffin lived with Donnieta and I in the biggest bedroom; Aunt Thelma, along with Morris and Marva Jean lived in another of the downstairs bedrooms while my Uncle U. L. Mabry was away serving in the Navy. Aunt Ada Berry occupied one of the upstairs bedrooms along with my Aunt Lella Gene, while my Uncle Charlie, barely more than a teenage boy, laid claim to the other upstairs room until his departure for the Marine Corps at the age of 17. It was World War II, the Depression was just lifting, and this was the way families survived. Many of my earliest and most favored memories come from that little dimple in God's Universe. There were several general stores on "the river" but the one I remember best was run by Bill West.

Shortly after passing the spot on the south river road where the road going up Morrison's Creek intersected, one would come to Bill West's General Store. Strictly speaking, it was his mother, Mrs. Kate West's store but Bill ran the store, so to me it was "Bill West's Store."

This country store was complete with covered front porch and a double screen door with "Colonial Bread" embedded in the screen wire. The floors were wide unpainted wooden board, generally yellow poplar, and they had a comforting and musical way of creaking when one walked across them. The store was a center of the community where you could purchase a tin of baking soda, a "co-cola" taken by plunging your hand into the icy water in a red drink box with Coca-Cola printed in white on the side, purchase a pickle or soda cracker from a wooden barrel, or learn the latest community news. Just as the church was the power base of the community, the General Store was the news and gossip was passed on the front porch in the summer and around the pot bellied stove in the winter.

One could rarely find a time when one or more old, infirm, or simply lazy members of the community were not gathered there, possessed of the latest information and laden with opinions. It served as the community center, the senior citizens center, and the teen center. Boys, who behaved themselves at the store, might find that some adult would purchase for them a Coke or perhaps a penny piece of candy. I usually tried to be especially good when we were stopping at Bill West's Store in hopes of getting a Double Cola (we called it a "coke" too or sometime a "big dope") and a box of peanuts.

In those days peanuts came in little round boxes and on occasion a nickel, dime, or quarter would be packed in side the box. I no longer remember the name of this surprise packed peanut brand, but wonder if it might be the forerunner of Cracker jacks. A store of this type primarily carried staples which would keep over long periods of time since some merchandise often moved slowly. In addition to grocery items, the store carried work shoes, overalls, gloves, straw hats, and a liberal supply of over the counter remedies for everything from problems with liver function to irregularity.

Medicine which did not require a doctor's script was commonly called "patent medicine", probably as result of the patent number which was printed on the side of the box or label. Kerosene, Turpentine and Whiskey were also staples of medical treatment in any country home. At the general store, kerosene, which we called "coal oil", could be purchased to fill the lamps used to provide light in our homes, start fires in the stove or fireplace, burn brush, and on occasion, blow ourselves up.

I remember very well the old gasoline pumps in front of most country stores which required that you first pump up, by means of a hand lever, the desired amount of gasoline into the glass container on top of the pump, and then release a valve which allowed the gasoline to flow by gravity into the car's gas tank opening. The country store was Walmart, Dollar General, and Kroger all wrapped up into a single package and a trip was never unwelcome.

I well remember one trip when Daddy was putting gas into the tank of our car and Norman Chaffin pulled up nose to nose with our car. Among the various kids in the front seat of the car were my two sister/cousins, Geraldine Chaffin Collins and Velma Jo Chaffin Norton. I did that little kid wave where you hold up your hand and bend your fingers from the knuckle and then two little hands and arms came out from under the tilted out windshield of the T Model Ford. Funny what our minds retain.

I ponder now the experiences of my own six grandchildren and wonder at the things they have done in their short lives. Multiple trips to Disney World, Titan's games, ice shows, the beach, the ocean, Cruises with Mickey and Minnie, and travel that would rival anything I had done prior to the age 40 and wonder if they find these things any more interesting than a trip to Bill West's Store. I think it was Plato who said, "That which is round can be no rounder." It is perhaps equally true that "That which is exciting, joyful, and fun, can be no more exciting, joyful, and fun." I know that in 1947 a simple trip in Daddy's A Model, a big dope at the store, seeing my cousins, and sitting in a straight back chair on Bill West's General Store was exciting, joyful, and fun.

Have a blessed day and savor the excitement, joy, and fun which present themselves with each day.

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*Read more stories by Robert "Bob" Rogers Chaffin at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>