

## **STORIES BY CALLIE MYERS MELTON**

Callie Myers Melton is a retired Putnam County, TN teacher  
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### **UNCLE BUSH**

"My grandfather, Captain Luther Bigelow Myers, was like most of the people in this area in his day and time. He owned slaves, but he did not believe in slavery. So, sometime after he had moved with his family from Old Fort Blount in Jackson County to the head of Roaring River in Overton County just prior to 1855, rather than split a family apart, he bought a female slave and her small son so she could be with her husband. The Click family owned Siniah. She and Bush (I never did know if the name was Bushnell or Bushrod, for it was always spoken Bush), had a son, App, who always went by the name Click. I knew him in his old age, and he was the spittin' image of Uncle Bush. But let me get back to my story. Siniah and App lived with the Clicks, and Bush lived with the Myers family until Grandfather Myers bought Siniah and App. When the question of Bush and Siniah had come up, the only solution in Grandfather's mind was that he must buy Siniah and the boy and bring them to the head of the river. And that is what he did.



"Uncle Bush was a big man in his prime, not fat, just big-boned and well muscled. He was soft-voiced and slow moving, but with a quick wit and a kind and gentle nature. He was also a good and willing worker, so Grandfather really needed him in this great undertaking. Moving from Fort Blount to the head of Roaring River might not be far as the crow flies, or even by ox-cart or wagon. But in the early 1850's, with plain dirt roads and no bridges, it was something else. There could be no visiting with the family left behind except maybe once a year, if things went well.

"A log house consisting of two huge rooms with a kitchen set off in the back was raised, almost literally, on the banks of the river. All the out-buildings were raised too, between the house and the big sweet-flowing spring a few hundred yards just west of the house site.

"The barn, the crib and the smokehouse, as well as the dwelling house, were built of huge logs. I think they were of yellow poplar, but I'm not sure, for they were worn slick with the years and the use when I was born in 1911. The house was finished inside with wide dressed boards of yellow poplar, and they too had taken on a mellow color from the years and the use. Bush had helped erect all of these buildings, and took great pride in the fact. He had helped get the huge stones that were used to build the great chimneys in all the rooms, and had dressed the big flat rocks that made the wide hearths.

"The horse lot around the barn was fenced with rails, as was the hog pen behind the barn. Bush had helped to split the rails and lay the fence, laying the worm (bottom rail) carefully in the new of the moon so that it would lay on the top of the ground and be less likely to rot.

"Where Bush and Siniah lived, I never knew that either. I am sure that they had a cabin somewhere on the place, where they had their own little vegetable garden, and grew their own beans and pumpkins. I do know that Grandfather always gave them a hog a-piece at hog-killing time. They got corn from the corn crib for their bread, and plenty of milk and butter from the family's cows. Siniah had her own corner of the big spring house where she kept her crocks of milk, butter, souse, kraut, and sulphured apples.

"Bush and Siniah had two more children after she moved to Overton County. App still wore the name Click because his mother had belonged to the Click family when he was born. But the other two children born in Overton County, Jerry and Myra, were called Myers, the name of the family who had owned their parents during slavery.

"Sometime before the outbreak of the War, Grandfather had freed Bush, Siniah and the boy. They moved away from the Myers farm for a few years. Where they went or what they did, I never heard, or even in my ignorance thought to ask. But shortly, they came back to the head of the river and asked to live with Grandfather again. He was glad to have them back, and gave them a little piece of land that lay between the big road that ran from the Myers Mill settlement at the head of the river to Hilham, down towards Butler's Landing on the Cumberland River in Clay County and the river.

"Grandfather gave Bush the lumber, and he and Uncle P helped him build a tiny four-room cabin and barn. With palings, Bush fenced in a yard and a truck patch, and with the rails, he fenced in his small corn patch, his barn lot, and the little orchard just the east of the cabin. It was here that Bush and Siniah lived until she died. Again, I have no idea of the date, except I know that Jerry was about the same age as Dad, and Dad was born in the year 1870.

"After Siniah died, Bush married Aunt Nancy, Aunt Nance, as she was called. The couple lived in the same cabin and on the same piece of ground until Uncle Bush died in 1921. When in 1921, I do not remember. I don't even remember if it was summer or winter, but I do remember when he died, for I was there and saw him leave this world so gently that it was hard to say just what time it was when he departed. I do remember my mother speaking of the clock and just what time he died. That was the custom then, you noted the hour and the minute, as well as the month, day, and year. Soon after his death, Aunt Nance moved to Algood to live with Myra and her family. And slowly and surely the little cabin fell into ruin.

"Uncle Bush had been such a part of the life of my Grandfather's family. Uncle Bush's father had evidently belonged to Great-grandfather Phillip Myers, and I am sure his mother had too, for Bush, age eleven, was listed in the assets of Great-grandmother Mary White Cook Myers at her death in 1845.

"Uncle P, my father's oldest brother, was born in 1852, and there were ten children in all born into Grandfather's family. Uncle Bush supervised their work in the fields, and taught them industry around the house and barn. Grandfather was of German-Jew extraction, very industrious, very particular about doing a job well, and able to do anything from making the family's brogan shoes to fine furniture, to black smithing, rifle making, and what have you. I today own two pieces of fine furniture that he made between the years 1847 and 1849, and a small sprig hammer that he turned out. A gun that he made is much prized possession of distant relatives. So Bush was well trained, and he in turn was very strict with the boys.

"But the children in my Grandfather's family were taught to love and respect the blacks in the household, and woe be unto one who did not. They were also taught that it was their responsibility to look after and take care of the blacks. That philosophy was handed down to us in my father's family. And when Uncle Bush's great-grandchildren sat in my classroom at Algood High School in the years 1960 to 1966, that feeling of love and responsibility was still there, on my side, at least. After Bush was too old to work anymore and provide for his and Aunt Nance's needs, Dad always saw to it that they had plenty of meat from his smokehouse and corn from his corn crib. Aunt Nance was quite a bit younger than Uncle Bush, so she still made a garden, dried plenty of beans, peas, and pumpkin, milked their own cow, and raised a flock of chickens both for food and for barter at Uncle Bill's store, where she got the little sugar, coffee, and salt that they needed.

"So many stories are told about Uncle Bush and the family, so many stories that show how much mutual love and respect there was between the blacks and whites in our family. One of the stories that I love the best is the one about Uncle P and the beans.

"Now Uncle P was my father's oldest brother, and we loved him very much for he was gentle and kind, with a sense of humor that charmed us all. He would visit often. He lived over near Terrapin Ridge, so he always stopped on his weekly visits to Uncle Bill's store, as well as just coming over to our house to visit now and then. In his later years, he often reminisced about when he was a boy, and we would all hang breathless on his stories.

"Uncle P said that when he was a boy, he had to work with Uncle Bush in the fields. Now the blacks never ate with the whites under any circumstances. That was just a way of life that was accepted by all. So when Uncle P and Bush came in for dinner at Grandmother's house, Bush took his plate and sat in a chair by the hearth to eat, while Uncle P sat with the family at the big long dinner table that ran almost the length of the old kitchen. Uncle P didn't like the green bean hulls, so when they had green beans, he would eat all the beans on his plate, then pass the plate to Bush. Bush, on the other hand, like the hulls better than the beans, so he ate only the hulls from his plate. Then when P passed his plate the hulls on it, Bush passed his plate back to P with all the beans on it. That was a ritual that went on for years between the two, and it was fondly remembered by Uncle P when he was an old man.

"My personal memories of Uncle Bush and Aunt Nance are not many, but they are very vivid, and they are a very integral part of my life. Us young 'uns were not allowed to run out to Uncle Bush's whenever the notion struck us. We always had to ask Mama. If she let us go, we were always reminded to watch our manners, to call out before we went into the house, not to ask for anything to eat, even if Aunt Nance was baking ginger cakes or frying turtle, and not to go to the orchard unless we were told we could, and not to get in Uncle Bush's way if he was working.

"As the oldest of my father's children, I was special to Grandmother Myers. So when she was invited once a year to take dinner with Uncle Bush and Aunt Nance, I was always included. Small as I was, I looked forward eagerly to the big day. I washed and dressed, combed and plaited as if I were going to meetin'.

"Then about ten o'clock, Grandmother would take up her parasol, and we would walk out the path that went by the barn, across the spring branch, and through the orchard out to Uncle Bush's house. When we got there, we were usually met at the door by Uncle Bush, for Aunt Nance would be busy in the kitchen. We would sit in the big room and talk with Uncle Bush and Bryson while Aunt Nance and Myra finished up dinner. What was served, I only remember that once or twice it was turtle. Uncle Bush loved to fish and there was fish-a-plenty and turtle too at that time in Roaring River. And he was a master hand at dressing out a turtle, for he knew just where each of the seven kinds of meat was located.

"And Aunt Nance, like all black women, was a powerful good cook. I do remember that her table looked like our table at home when the circuit rider came, starched, white tablecloth and all. Her cutlery was the same as ours, steel three-tined forks and wide-bladed knives with bone handles, plates with gold rims and flowers in the center, and tumblers that I am sure now were dish order.

"Grandmother always asked the blessing, and then she and I ate while Aunt Nance and Myra waited on us. The family ate later, for even though we were guests in their home, the old rule was followed. After dinner, Grandmother visited awhile with Uncle Bush and Aunt Nance, while I sat and listened and looked around. On the walls were several enlarged, framed photographs of blacks that I had never seen. I always wondered, but never asked, who they were, and to this very day, I still wonder. I'd give my eye teeth to know. Finally, in the middle of the afternoon, Grandmother would say our thanks for a good meal and we'd take the path home, pausing only at the spring house for a cool drink and a look over in the hog pen at the winter's supply of hams, bacon, and sausage still yet on the hoof.

"The blacks came often to our house, but they always came by the back door, and sat near the wide hearth in the kitchen. They might share something with us, or we shared something with them. But mostly, they came just to see if all was well, or if there was a need. Grandfather had long since been gone, and though my father looked after the family well, Uncle Bush felt that "the Captain" expected him to still look after "Miss Mary" and the children. Uncle Bush's family were the only blacks in our settlement. He were highly respected by everyone, and they in turn treated each person with respect. When Uncle Bush was baptized shortly before his death, most all of his white neighbors were there. A black preacher came down from Livingston now and then to preach at the little cabin, and many whites attended. And it was two white neighbors who helped the old man walk down the hill from the cabin to the river so he could obey the gospel, then made a pack-saddle and carried him back up afterwards. When he was laid to rest in the Wilson graveyard, the hill was covered with white friends who mourned his passing. Uncle Bush was just a simple black man who had lived a long life, born a slave, but lived to enjoy emancipation. He did no

heroic deeds, nor did he amass wealth, but he did something more important ... he lived a good, honest, God-fearing life, showing kindness to all who crossed his path. What better epitaph could any man want?"

Callie invites comments, letters, telephone calls, or visits to her home located at 1275 East White Oak Drive, Cookeville, TN 38501, telephone number 931/520-7016.

Many will remember a grandson of Uncle Bush everyone knew as Charlie Myers. Charlie's obituary reads as follows:

Funeral services for Mr. Charles Whitson "Charlie" Myers, 91, of Livingston were conducted at 1:00 p.m., on Tuesday, February 22, 2005, from the chapel of Speck Funeral Home, Livingston, TN, with burial in Bethlehem Cemetery of Livingston. Mr. Myers died February 18, 2005, at Livingston Regional Hospital. He was born August 31, 1913, in Overton County to the late Jerry Myers and wife Amanda Wilson Myers. He was a press operator at Livingston Shirt Factory. He was a member of the Cookeville Christian Fellowship and a member of the NAACP. At the time of his death, he was survived by sons, Jerry Myers, Dr. Danny Myers; daughters, Charlene Darty; Betty Coleman; Eleane Hogan; Shannon Benson; 11 grandchildren; and 19 great-grandchildren.

He is preceded in death by his parents; his wife, Mildred Elease Copeland Myers; sons, Harold and William Myers; sisters: Marie Andrews, Melissa Cullom, Ella Hill; Sally and Minnie Myers; and brothers Sidney and Ben Myers. His grandsons served as pallbearers.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 29 January 1992

### **SHE WANTS TO STOP, GET OUT, THROW ROCKS AT 'ROARING RIVER' SIGN**

By Callie Melton  
Special to the Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN

Rivers and creeks played a very important role in the lives of the pioneers in the Upper Cumberland as well as other parts of what is now Tennessee.



If the river was large enough, it was a way in and out of the area. Even the smaller creeks could be dammed up and furnish the power for grist mills and carding mills as well as furnish fish and turtles for food when game was scarce.

Having grown up on Roaring River in Overton County and hearing all my life of Wolf River and its importance to the people along its length, I deeply appreciate the stories of the rivers.

As interesting as the history of Roaring River is, the history of its headwaters is even more so, to me at least. To get off on the right foot, let's make sure that we know what the headwaters of a river is. So, in my school teacher-ish way, I'll explain. The headwaters of a river is the streams that join or converge to make the river.

The headwaters of Roaring River is made up of two creeks, which we speak of as the right prong and the left prong.

The left prong was first called Town Creek because it rose in what is now the town of Livingston from a number of springs in the area. It left town by the way of the Bohannon Springs, meandered down by Aunt Beadie Dale's place, or down by Uncle Tom Carr's, then by Billy Crawford's before it joined the right prong.

When Col. Stephen Copeland came into the Wilderness to what is now Overton County around 1799, he settled about two and one-half miles above the head of the river on this left prong. He settled on the wrong side of the Cherokee Line, but he made friends with Chief Nettle Carrier and no harm came of it.

After many years, people started calling this little creek 'Carr Creek' instead of Town Creek because Uncle Tom Carr had lived on its banks for so many years.

Now, the right prong rose from two big springs in the Oak Hill area. From there, it meanders down past Okalona, down through Sulphur where it picks up Sulphur Branch, on down past what we now call the Walter Qualls place, then a little farther down it joins Town Creek. Where the two creeks converge is the head of Roaring River, the exact spot where Roaring River begins.

Now, the right prong has colorful history. Around the year 1769, a group of hunters -- who were later called the 'Long Hunters' because they were gone from home for so long, two or more years -- left their homes in North Carolina and Virginia on a hunting trip to the Wilderness, the Wilderness being what is now Middle Tennessee.

They made their station camps in Kentucky, then split up into small parties for their hunting expeditions. One group wound up at a place now called Waterloo in Putnam County. This group discovered and named the Roaring River.

Another group, which included Robert Crockett, Davey's uncle, wound up at the place we now call Oak Hill. Here they made camp and hunted all up and down the creek that ran through the area.

Davey Crockett's brother

One day the men were out hunting when they encountered some Indians who were just passing through on their way to what is now East Tennessee. They just happened upon Robert Crockett who was hunting by himself. They killed Crockett and left his body where it fell.

When the other hunters got back to the camp at the end of the day, they could not find their friend. The next day they went out hunting for him again. They found his body near the creek where the Indians had left it. The men were frightened -- they did not know what Indians, how many, or if they were still in the area.

So they quickly buried Crockett somewhere near the creek, rushed back to camp, broke camp and took off toward Kentucky and the station camp.

When the Long Hunters finally got back to their home in North Carolina and Virginia, they not only told of the rich soil, plenty of water and abundant game, but they also told of how Robert Crockett was killed by Indians and how they had buried their friend on the banks of the creek on which he was killed. They named the creek that they had discovered 'Crockett's Creek' in memory of their friend.

James Matthews

Then, about 1800, James Matthews moved into the area and settled on Crockett's Creek, somewhere down from where it rose at the big springs. James raised a family, two sons in particular, John and Lawrence.

When Lawrence grew to manhood, he married Agnes Poston, daughter of Richard Poston and the granddaughter of Col. Copeland. Lawrence moved on down the creek a-ways and built a big log house and all the outbuildings. We now call Lawrence's old place the Walter Qualls place.

Lawrence and Agnes raised a big family. When their oldest son, William Jasper, grew to manhood, he married Polly Engles and moved on down the creek. He settled on the east side of the creek near what is now called 'Windle' there at the head of Roaring River.

Bill built a big log house and all the out-buildings, just as his father and his grandfather had done.

Bill and Polly had five daughters -- Aggie who married Billy Crawford, Rhonda who married George Howard, Pluma who married Fowler Johnson, Ellie who married George Talley and Matt who married Ben Crawford, Billy's brother.

Old Bill Matthews, so called because he had a nephew named William Jennings Matthews who was called Little Bill, died in 1909. But by this time the people in the area had forgotten the story of the Long Hunters and Robert Crockett. By 1858, they were calling Crockett's Creek instead of Matthews Creek because the Matthews family had lived along the creek for so long.

There are references to the story of the Long Hunters and the death of Robert Crockett in various old history books -- Haywood and Goodspeed are two of the historians. But you have to know what you are reading when you read these accounts.

I have in my possession today an old deed made to my grandfather, Luther Bigelow Myers, dated 1858. In one line, the deed reads: "... along Crockett's Creek which we now call Matthews Creek."

Some of Old Bill's great-great grandchildren own Old Bill's place, and Old Bill and Polly and many others of the Matthews family sleep in the family graveyard nearby where the old log house stood.

Matthews Creek

Those of us who care resent the fact that the State of Tennessee had the gall to put up a sign on Matthews Creek at the bridge over the creek on Highway 42 near Okalona that reads 'Roaring River.'

Asa Crawford, a grandson of Old Bill's, lived to be around 100, dying not too many years ago. He lamented the fact to his dying day that people didn't know where Roaring River was because of this misplaced sign.

I resent so strongly the fact that the state feels free to come in to the Upper Cumberland area -- Overton County, in particular -- and try to change history. I don't travel Highway 42 too often now, but when I do, I want to stop at the bridge, get out of the car and throw rocks at that Roaring River sign!

*Callie Myers Melton is a retired Putnam County school teacher.*

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### **'LIFE NOT EASY, BUT WE GOT JOY FROM SIMPLE THINGS'**

In the Upper Cumberland 1920:

When I was growing up -- I was born in 1911 -- the world was an entirely different place. We in the little Overton County settlement called Windle, lived as people in this area had lived for nigh on to a hundred years.



We lived in the house that my grandfather, Capt. Luther Bigelow Myers, had built when he moved his family from Jackson County to the head of Roaring River around the year 1853. There at the head of the river, he and his brother-in-law, Morrison Woods Cummins, built a huge rolling mill.

Now a rolling mill is different from the grist mill in that it grinds wheat as well as corn and must be three stories high to handle the flour. A few years later, Morrison moved to what is now Cummins Falls and built a mill.

There at what was at first called Myers' Mill, the Myers family did things just as their parents and grandparents had done before them. We had a cookstove, but we still cooked in the fireplace and on the broad hearth.

We produced everything the family needed except sugar, coffee, salt and soda. We grew cotton for the cotton batts for quilt making and the thread that was woven for the cotton garments. We raised sheep for the wool that, too, was spun into thread, then used to knit socks, stockings and mittens and make the woolen winter garments.

The woolen threads were also used to weave the bright-colored coverlets that are now such prized possessions if a family is lucky enough to own one.

The little village of Hilham, and Livingston, the county seat, had a few stores where things that could not be produced on the farm could be bought. And, too, the "pack peddlers" would come through about twice a year. From them could be bought whole nutmegs, dried ginger roots, needles, pins, buttons and small bits of jewelry.

A few crocks and churns were available, for by that time the settlers had learned many of the crafts. There was, in every settlement, too, some one who wove white oak baskets, who bottomed chairs or turned out wooden articles. Every family raised a good crop of gourds every year. Gourds were still used for drinking dippers and storage containers. The little cymlins were used for nest eggs, darning balls and 'play purties' for the young'uns.

Life was simple but good – large families had each other for company and nearby relatives for an occasional visit. Yes, we all worked hard, but we lived well indeed.

Plenty of hogs made all the meat and lard that was needed. Large crops of cane were raised for the gallons and gallons of molasses. Both sweet and Irish potatoes were grown in abundance. Big orchards were on every farm, and the apples, in particular, were used in so many ways – dried, smoked and made into apple butter, as well as being holed-up along with the turnips, cabbage and Irish potatoes.

Corn was the most important crop, for corn fed both man and beast. Corn was eaten fresh as boiled corn, fried corn and roasted corn. Dried corn made hominy and meal, as well as for feeding the livestock and fattening-off the hogs. Corn blades were pulled and used as fodder for the stock.

But more than the way we lived and worked were the customs, habits and beliefs that we clung to even more than the way we kept house, cooked, made soap, planted and harvested.

The Fourth of July, Halloween and Thanksgiving were just days on the calendar – we mentioned them in passing but that is all. In contrast, we did observe Easter and Christmas, but not as we do today. I guess Easter had a greater impact on our way of life than Christmas, because we were more deeply moved by the reason for Easter.

There was no big feasting or special foods for either day. But on Easter it was the custom to see how many eggs you could eat for breakfast that morning. So long before the day, we began saving eggs.

We also prepared for Easter in another way. Mama made all of our clothes, and long before would plan a dress for each female in the family. She would make her own pattern by looking at a picture, then cutting the actual pattern out of newspapers. After the pattern was made, she went to Little Bill's store and bought the material. The males all got new shirts; she made them, too.

We each had a new garment to put on on Easter morning, because it was believed that to have good luck in the year, you must wear a new garment on Easter – we didn't go by styles or fashion but by old beliefs and customs.

Plenty of eggs were hard-boiled and dyed with home-made dyes so that after dinner there could be an egg hunt. Each family had its own egg hunt, not because we were selfish or unneighborly but it was just the way it was always done.

We ate boiled eggs until they almost came out our ears. And we talked about our new clothes and how many eggs we found for weeks and weeks afterward.

Yes indeed life was not easy, but the joy and satisfaction that we got from such simple things was truly something to remember – and remember I do, each year when Easter comes again.

*Callie Myers Melton, a folklorist and retired Putnam County school teacher.*

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 14 May, 2000

### **MEALTIME NOURISHED BODIES AND STRENGTHENED FAMILY TIES**

Literature and legend tell us that nectar was the food of the gods. Well, I am biased – and why shouldn't I be? – but as far as I am concerned, nectar could never hold alight to the everyday foods we had in the Upper Cumberland when I was growing up.



Sometimes the yearning for the old days and the old ways is so strong that, in my sleep, I dream of the people, the places and the things of my childhood. I not only can see the faces of the dear ones but I walk again the dusty roads from our house to the homes of neighbors and relatives.

And I even sit down to share a meal with our family – and mealtime was so special at our house.

In my deep longing, the dream is so real that when I wake, my nostrils are filled with the remembered aroma of a meal my mother so often cooked each summer.

I roll on my tongue the flavor of the green beans seasoned with a chuck of hickory-smoked hog jaw and cooked in the three-legged pot on the hearth in the kitchen.

I taste again the fresh field corn fried in bacon drippings, and the crisp brown hoecakes made from meal ground from our own Hickory King corn.

The bite from the bowl of fresh tomatoes chopped up with onions and hot pepper, then seasoned with salt, sugar and vinegar is as real as if I had just eaten it.

My hands ache from the numbing coldness of the bowl of butter and the crock of rich milk that have just been brought from the spring house.

I hear again my mother call, "Pick up your chairs and come one." I see our family gather around the long table, and after our Grandma has said the blessing, we break bread together.

Now, I realize that far more important than nourishing our bodies, we, through this shared experience, strengthened our family ties so that in the years ahead we would be able to draw strength from each other.

*Callie Myers Melton is a folklorist and retired Putnam County teacher. She lives in Livingston.*

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 4 June 2000.

### **BACK THEN, RHYTHMS OF LIFE AND THE SEASONS WERE GOOD TO COUNT UPON**

When, finally, July rolled around, things slacked up a bit. For weeks on end, the grown-ups had been going around in circles they were so busy.



The men and boys had to plow-over, then chop out the cornfields and truck patches before they could be laid-by. The women, on top of their regular work, had to clean house, burn off the skillets, pick the ducks and geese, set the old hens and tend the biddies.

We young'uns didn't get off easy, either. We toted water, picked up chips, carried in stove wood and fetched and carried from sun-up to sun-down.

But the coming of July, there was a breather of a few weeks before the fall work set in. So the protracted meetin' at Shiloh Church always began on the second Sunday in July. Now school always started on the second Monday in July, so the meetin' and the beginning of school over-lapped.

The families of the church always took turns having the preacher for dinner and over-night, for Shiloh was a rural church and our preacher was a circuit-rider. Having the preacher made a lot of extra work for the women, but they really didn't mind – meetin' was about their only chance to socialize with their neighbors and get caught up with all the local gossip.

So no matter what, when the preacher came, you always put the big pot in the little one.

Now it was only in the summer and fall that we ever had fried chicken. So it was fried chicken along with lots of thicken' gravy, fresh green beans with tiny patty-pan squash cooked on top, fried field corn, stewed new potatoes, vinegar slaw, thunder-and-lightning and hot crusty cornbread along with plenty of cold mild and butter.

For dessert, it was always a big fruit cobbler – blackberry, cherry or goose berry, whatever fruit you had. The cobbler was always served with a pitcher of heavy cream. This was standard fare in every home in the settlement at this time of year. When the preacher came, you killed two or three chickens according to the size of your family, and just doubled the amount of everything else.

The meetin' times were at 10 o'clock in the morning, and at early candle light at night. In this way, the women, after breakfast, would have time to get the house and the young'uns cleaned up and dinner and supper cooked before meetin' time.

Supper was the same as dinner, except you always made hot bread. It was the saying that only a triflin' woman would set her old man down to cold cornbread.

Breakfast – preacher or no preacher – was always the same in summer and fall: fried bacon, fried corn, biscuits, butter and molasses, with plenty of strong, hot coffee for the grown-ups. We young'uns had milk, for we were told that if young'uns drank coffee it would make them black.

We didn't go to the store and buy a dressed chicken. Nobody had ever heard of such a thing! Mama would go out to the barnyard where the chickens were always fed, and when the flock had gathered, she would point out the young rooster that she wanted to kill.

You never killed a pullet – pullets grew into hens, and hens laid the eggs that we used for barter at Little Bills' store where we got out salt, soda, sugar and coffee.

After Mama had picked out the young rooster that she wanted, we young'uns had to run him down. When he was caught, we either had to chop off his head or wring his neck. But whoever had to kill him was always reminded, "don't hold that chicken while it's dying – that will make you have the palsy."

Now “the palsy” was the disease that made you shake all the time. Aunt Fannie, Dad’s sister, had the palsy, and it was hard for her to hold anything that had liquid in it. So we knew well what Mama meant.

People were not as smart then as they are now, so we really thought that holding a chicken by its feet while it jerked and quivered after we had beheaded it would actually make us palsied when we got old.

Now that school was going on at the same time as the protracted meetin’, the teacher was expected to take her entire school up to the meetin’ at least one day. After that day, we played meetin’ at school for days even during recess.

There was always one boy who was good at preaching – we never dreamed of having a girl preach. And there were one or two who could lead the singing almost as good as Uncle Fisher lee.

Plenty of the girls were good at shouting – we Methodist shouted back then – and some of them could out-pray the preacher. So we sang the old songs like *Father’s Have a Home, Old-Time Religion* and *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks* as lustily as any real congregation.

Finally, we’d have a baptism in the spring branch that ran across one edge of the school ground. This was the time that everybody was supposed to shout. One time we got so carried away with our shouting that we alarmed the neighborhood. Several of the parents came rushing over to school to see what in the world was wrong.

July finally rolled into August, and things started to pick up again. The cane had to be stripped and topped and hauled to the molasses mill. The fodder had to be pulled, and the Irish potatoes dug.

We all watched for the signs of an early frost so the sweet potato vines could be cut off. If it frosted on the vines, that would ruin the potatoes – and who could live through a winter without baked sweet potatoes soaked in butter at both dinner and supper/

And so it went, the same routine year after year after year. But hard as life was, it was so satisfying to know what was coming next. Here in the Upper Cumberland, in the days before World War II, nothing changed except the seasons.

That was, in great part, because we all hated change like we hated sin and the devil, and we fought both at every turn. But World War II changed everything, and we who knew the peace and tranquility of the old days and the old ways feel a deep sadness when we realize what our children and grandchildren have missed.

*Callie Myers Melton grew up in the Windle community of Overton County, TN and is a folklorist and retired Putnam County school teacher. She lives now in Livingston.*

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 9 July 2000.

### **‘DOG DAYS’ MEANT A LOT OF HARD WORK; WE COULDN’T WAIT FOR THE FIRST FROST**

“Dog Days”! To us young’uns, these two words struck terror to our hearts.

When we’d ask the grown-up what Dog Days was, they all told us the same thing – it’s just a time during late July and early August when dogs go mad and all snakes go blind.



So we always kept a sharp eye out for mad dogs and blind snakes, but never in our lives did we ever see either. Years and years after I was grown, I realized that the grownups had just told us what they had been told when they were young’uns.

Even though the grown-ups really didn't know the hows and whys of Dog Days they did now by experience that you did or didn't do certain things during that time. The women knew that the sage must be picked before the Dog Days set in, for if it was picked during that time it would be bitter and not fit to use.

Now, sage and red pepper were our main seasonings, and any family that didn't grow enough for their own use was called "shiftless." Pork was our meat and it took a lot of sage and red pepper to season the sausage and souse.

The men grubbed sawbriers, sourwood and sassafras sprouts and cleaned out the fence rows in Dog Days. They, too, knew that anything you cut down during that time would be killed, even the roots. We hated sawbriers with a passion, and sourwood sprouts only a little less, and killing both was something we looked forward to.

Now sassafras was a different story. We depended on sassafras tea in February to keep us from having the chills and fever during the summer, so we half-heartedly whacked down the sassafras sprouts in the corn fields.

We young'uns knew that stubbed toes and stone bruises were harder to heal and they hurt worse in Dog Days. We hated to hobble around with a stall on a sore toe or a stone bruise on a heel. So we didn't make the usual fuss when Mama dressed the hurt toe with sugar and coal oil or bound a wilted Jimson Weed leaf on a bruised heel.

This hot dry time was a good time to dry apples, pumpkin and leather britches. They cured better and tasted better, the old folks said. So Daddy would put up the scaffolds, where the sun would hit them all day long, and Mama would spread the apples and beans on them in a single layer and cover them with mosquito net to keep off the flies.

The pumpkin rings were hung on long poles and the poles were swung between strong supports. All this stuff had to be brought in at night for the dew would ruin it. But after three or four days, it was all bone dry. Mama put the apples and leather britches in half-bushel gourds and stored them under the cook table. She strung the pumpkin rings on stout strings and hung them from nails on the kitchen wall along with strings of red pepper and dried onions.

Dog Days was also the right time to clean the house before winter set in. Our floors were made of wide oak planks, so we scrubbed them with white sand and soap suds left over from the family wash. Our white sand bank, there on the river, was ruined about 1918 when Roaring River got so high during the spring flood and its muddy water covered the sandbank.

After that, Mama would send us young'uns up to Uncle John Davidson's sand bank for buckets of white sand. We had only home-made brooms, so Mama scrubbed with a shuck mop.

All the straw ticks were emptied, washed and then filled with fresh wheat straw. The feather beds, bolsters and pillows were hung across the clothes line and then beaten and pummeled until they were fluffy and dust free. All the quilts were hung out, too, and after a day or two in the hot dry sun, they smelled fresh again and were now ready for the first cold snap.

After all this extra work, Mama was worn thread-bare at the end of each and everyday. But she was up with the chickens and at it again the next morning.

Daddy was out early and worked late, taking only an hour out for dinner at noon. He ate, then napped briefly on the baby's pallet. We didn't have a dog-trot, so sometimes to get a breeze, he'd drag the pallet out in the yard and nap under the shade of a tree.

Young'uns didn't get off easy either. Before school, we drove the cows to the pasture, filled the stove wood box and the chip basket, brought in apples for Grandma and Grandpa to peel for drying, toted water from the spring and filled all the buckets. Then, after school, it was fill the wood box and chip basket

again, get up the night water, feed the chickens, gather the eggs and carry all the apple peelings out and dump them in the hog pen. Then it was go to the pasture and bring in the cows so Daddy could milk before supper.

After supper and the dishes were done, we hardly had time to draw a long breath before Daddy would say it was time to get ready for bed. So we'd wash our feet, tumble into bed and be asleep before we even got straightened out.

Even before the first rooster crowed the next morning, Daddy was up. He'd start a fire in the cookstove so it would be hot when Mama got up to get breakfast. While the stove was heating, he ground the coffee and put the pot on to boil. The sound of the coffee grinder and the smell of the boiling coffee would wake us young'uns up.

We'd hit the floor running, still half-asleep. We sure didn't want to be late for school, and we knew we had work to do before the bell rang.

Glory be! Finally Dog Days were over. Now we could all get back to our normal way of life. We'd heard the first katydid around the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, so we started dreaming of the first frost that we expected around September the 1<sup>st</sup> – 90 days after that first katydid.

After the first frost we could go 'possum hunting', eat the first persimmons and fox grapes. Just maybe we could find some black haws along the river bank. Yes, life did get a lot better after Dog Days.

*Callie Myers Melton, a folklorist and retired Putnam County school teacher, lives now in Livingston.*

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 27 August 2000.

### **NO DOCTORS, SO SETTLERS DOCTORED THEMSELVES**

Things were vastly different: no roads, no waterways, no settlements, few preachers.

Today even the people who have deep roots here in the Upper Cumberland can't seem to understand how different things were when the first settlers came into this area.



Those who came into Overton, Pickett and Fentress Counties were searching for freedom as well as for homes. They were mainly German, English and Scotch-Irish whose ancestors, for one reason or another, had fled their homelands. So here in this isolated area of what we now call Middle Tennessee, they found what they had been seeking – freedom, rich soil, plenty of wild game and homesites second to none.

There were no roads, only trails and traces, and no waterways for an outlet. And there were, here and there, little pockets of Indians but they were Cherokees who accepted the settlers as friends and taught them many things that made life a little easier for these strangers in a strange land.

There were no settlements, just isolated farm houses; no schools, no churches and, worst of all, no doctors. But these hardy ancestors of ours had seen worse and had less. So they dug in and made a way of life that, hard as it was, was the best that they had ever known.

Each and every homesite was located on or very near a creek or river. The creek or river gave them an anchor, so to speak, and many of these streams came to bear the names of the early settlers who had lived on their banks or of events that had occurred near-by – Mitchell's Creek, Nettle Carrier Creek, Crockett's Creek (which we now call Matthew's Creek), Wolfe River and Roaring River, to name a few.

As families grew up, lived, died and were buried along the same river, it became near and dear for it was a part of the warp and woof of their lives. How fondly my Grandpa and Grandma Smith always spoke of Wolfe River. How near and dear Roaring River still is to the Myers family, both black and white.

Occasionally a preacher would come through the area. Then there would be weddings, funerals and baptizings. Funerals were delayed for years as a result of this lack of preachers, and “Jumping the Broom” served as a marriage ceremony until a preacher showed up. The old saying “Necessity is the mother of invention,” surely held true here.

Children were taught to read, write and cipher at home if they were taught at all. A strong back and a quick mind were the two things that counted most in this early society.

The lack of doctors was the worst thing that these early settlers had to face. These good people had to learn to do their own doctoring. Cures and remedies were used that had been handled down for generations as well as some they got from the friendly Cherokees.

Others they learned by trial-and-error. Since it was up to each family to take care of their own sicknesses, in this way a whole catalog of folk medicine peculiar to their area was created. Not every family used exactly the same remedies, but a common thread ran through them all – common sense and what we had to do with.

Mama had not only Daddy’s mother but her own mother for help, but many families did not have that luxury. This led to the granny-woman who was able and willing to give of her time and her knowledge and experience.

There were nine of us young’uns in our family, and we had our share of cuts, bruises, stings, boils and such minor incidents. Mama and both grandmothers always came up with a cure or remedy for each situation. How well I remember so many of them.

For ordinary insect strings and bites, we gathered seven different kinds of greens – that meant seven different kinds of leaves – then twisted them together until the sap ran and then rubbed them on the affected area.

Grandmother Myers kept dried calamus root, dried orange peel and dared yellow root on the fireboard, along with a lump of mutton tallow and some splinters from a tree that had been struck by lighting. We chewed the calamus root and orange peel for a sick stomach, and the yellow root for a sore mouth.

The splinters were used to pick an aching tooth to stop the pain, and the tallow was to rub on sore noses and lips, chapped hands and the bottom of the baby’s feet at night to keep it from taking a bad cold. The fireboard was a sacred place, and we young’uns knew that we were never to climb up and meddle with anything there.

(To Be Continued)

*Callie Myers Melton is a folklorist and retired teacher in the Putnam County school system. She writes from 410 Ironweed Ave., Livingston, TN 38570.*

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 17 September 2000, pg. B-5.

### **HOME REMEDIES BASED ON COMMON SENSE, EXPERIENCE AND A LITTLE MAGIC**

*Editors Note: This is part II of Callie Melton’s column, begun last Sunday, about home remedies used by early settlers in the Upper Cumberland.*

If a cut was not too deep, Mama bound it up with a teaspoon of sugar and a drop or two of coal oil or turpentine. If, however, the gash was deep and bleeding a lot, she would fill the cut with chimney soot,

then bind it up with a clean white rag. We had no gauze or bandages; all white rags were carefully washed then put in the rag-bag that hung on the kitchen wall. When a bandage was needed, we heated a flat iron and ironed the rag to kill the germs.



For a puncture wound, like when one of us stuck a nail in our foot, Mama would throw a piece of old wool rag on some live embers and make a thick smoke, then she would hold our foot in the smoke and smoke the wound good. It, too, was bound up with sugar and coal oil or turpentine.

Nose bleeds were common, and there were countless remedies for that – cold packs on the top of the head or the back of the neck or putting a dime under the upper lip and pressing hard on the lip. These were some of the ones we used, for mama suffered severe nosebleeds all her life.

When we were little, it would scare us young'uns to death to see our Mama bleeding so. Then, when he was around 10-years-old, our brother, Luther, started having bad nosebleeds. If the bleeding could not be stopped by ordinary means, we called on Uncle Tim Pangle or Aunt Bessie's mother, Sis Hall. These two could stop bleeding by faith.

Mama treated burns by covering them with heavy cream fresh from the springhouse or by scraping out the insides of a fresh pumpkin and binding that on the burn. If that didn't work, she took us to "Old" Grandpa Lowrey Smith who could blow the fire out of burns and cure the thrush.

He had been born after his father died, so he had the power to cure burns or thrush by just blowing on them. Scraped Irish potato was also used, and it seemed to ease the pain faster and better than any of the other.

When one of us young'uns had an ear ache, Daddy would blow warm tobacco smoke in the aching ear. If the ear ache was in the summer time, he'd pinch the head off a Bessie bug and drop the one drop of blood in the ear.

If any of us had a headache, Mama would rub a drop of camphor on each temple and on our forehead. Sometimes she would wet a rag in cold water and lay on our foreheads.

We made our own camphor by shaving up a small block of gum of camphor in a pint of whiskey, and the whiskey dissolved the camphor. Mama used it sparingly for gum of camphor was hard to get. And, too, mama always said, "it takes money to buy good whiskey and ride the train."

In our family, we used teas for a multitude of ailments. We always drank sassafras tea in February to ward off the chills and fevers later in the year. Catnip tea was taken for the colic; boneset was for the ague, and sage grass was drunk to break out the measles.

Boils and risin's were common, and were so very painful. Sometimes we young'uns felt like the cure was worse than the disease, for some of the poultices that Mama used to draw the boil or risin' to a head felt like it would kill us.

Warm cornbread crumbs and unsalted butter was not too bad, but a thin piece of fat meat would raise the hairs on the back of our neck. The thin membrane on the inside of an egg shell was used sometimes, and so was a poultice made from flour and milk cooked down thick and then applied while it was warm.

The "summer complaint" or flux was often deadly for a small child, especially one in its second summer. A tea was made from blackberry root, and a teaspoonful at a time was used. But cabbage soup made with rusty bacon was an old, old remedy and one that often proved most effective.

The grown-ups smoked 'life everlasting' for head colds and catarrh for sinus infections, and they made a salve fro hemorrhoids, from peeled buckeyes cooked down in pure hog lard. A tea made from butterfly weed roots was used for kidney problems.

Grandma Smith made our cough syrup by steeping some dried horehound herb in hot water, then adding sugar to the strained water and boiling it down to a thick syrup. A teaspoon or two a couple of times a day soon cured our cough.

For sore throats, Mama greased our throats good with mutton tallow, then tied a wool sock around our necks and sent us off to bed.

All young'uns went barefooted in the summer. Not only did we get stubbed toes and stonebruises but we also got stomach worms. Grandmother Myers always had Mama gather worm seeds from the vermifuge plants growing wild around the edge of a near-by truck patch.

The seeds were carefully saved until spring. Then mama made molasses candy and laced it heavily with the dried worm see. This really did the job.

I am convinced that many of these old cures and remedies were far better than many of the drugs we rush to the drugstore to buy today. At least, they didn't have 'side effects' that half-killed you.

*Callie Myers Melton is a folklorist and retired teacher in the Putnam County school system. She writes from 410 Ironweed Ave., Livingston, TN 38570.*

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 24 September 2000.

#### **COOKEVILLE CITY CEMETERY, COOKEVILLE, PUTNAM CO., TN**

##### **Claude Odell Melton**

b. 28 February 1911, TN – d. 11 November 1981 md **Callie Dimple (Myers) Melton**, b. 30 September 1911, Overton Co., TN – d. 11 October 2009, Putnam Co., TN. Claude O. Melton, s/o **W. M. Gilbert Melton & Belva Tudor**.

\*See W. M. Gilbert Melton buried in Cookeville City Cemetery.

(SS Death Index: Name: **CLAUDE MELTON** Birth: 28 Feb 1911– Death: Nov 1981 –Last Residence: (Cookeville, Putnam, TN) -Last Benefit: (Cookeville, Putnam, TN) – SSN: 410-023-1364, TN)

(1920 census 2<sup>nd</sup> Civil Dist., Overton Co., TN: Dwl: 202 Family: 209 – **Luther J. Myers** is head of household, 49 yrs. old, TN md to **Sallie E.**, 28 yrs. old, TN. Children: **Callie D.**, 8 yrs. old; Holley E., 6 yrs. old; Luther K., 3 10/12 yrs. old & Tracy Myers, son, 1 3/12 yrs. old. All born in TN. Also living in the household: Mary A. Myers, mother, 88 yrs. old, TN, widow)

(1920 census 9<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Overton Co., TN: Dwl: 410 Family: 426 – **Gilbert Melton** is head of household, 32 yrs. old, TN md to **Belva**, 32 yrs. old, TN. Children: **Claude**, 8 yrs. old, TN & Alexander Melton, 7 yrs. old, TN).

(1930 census 2<sup>nd</sup> Civil Dist., Gore Ford Road, Overton Co., TN: Dwl: 67 Family: 67 – **Luther J. Myers** is head of household, 59 yrs. old, TN (40 yrs. old 1<sup>st</sup> marriage) md to **Sallie E.**, 38 yrs. old, TN (19 yrs. old 1<sup>st</sup> marriage). Children: **Callie D.**, 18 yrs. old; Edna, 16 yrs. old; Luther K., 13 yrs. old; Tracy A., 11 yrs. old; Earl P., 9 yrs. old; Mary B., 6 yrs. old; Marjorie M., 4 3/12 yrs. old & Arthur B. Myers, 0/12 yrs. old. all born in TN. Also living in the household: Alex Smith, father-in-law, 79 yrs. old, TN (21 yrs. old 1<sup>st</sup> marriage).

##### **Callie Dimple (Myers) Melton Obt.**

b. 30 September 1911, Overton Co., TN – d. 11 October 2009, Putnam Co., TN md **Claude O. Melton**, b. 28 February 1911 – d. November 1981, s/o **W. M. Gilbert Melton & Belva Tudor**. Callie Dimple (Myers) Melton, d/o **Luther Jackson “Jack” Myers & Sallie Edith Smith**. **Luther Jackson “Jack” Myers**, b. 27 December 1870, TN - d. July 1962, (s/o **Luther B. Myers**) & his wife **Sallie Edith (Smith)**

**Myers**, b. 1891 – d. 14 July 1980, (d/o **Alex Smith & Laura Parsons**), both buried in the Shiloh Cemetery at Windle, Overton Co., TN.

**COOKEVILLE** -- Funeral services for **Callie Dimple Myers Melton**, 98, of Cookeville, will be held Thursday, Oct. 15, at noon from the Cookeville chapel of Hooper-Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home. Burial will follow in Shiloh Cemetery in the Windle Community of Overton County. (*Callie is buried in Cookeville City Cemetery next to her husband Claude O. Melton*).

Family will receive friends Thursday, Oct. 15, from 10 a.m. until time of services at the funeral home. Mrs. Melton **went to be with her Lord Jesus Christ on Sunday, Oct. 11, 2009**. She was **born Sept. 30, 1911, in Overton County to the late Luther Jackson and Sallie Edith Smith Myers**. Mrs. Melton resided with her niece, Sally McDonald Askew, in Cookeville. She was a founding member of Parkview United Methodist Church (now Friendship United Methodist Church).

She earned her B.S. degree in education from Tennessee Polytechnic Institute (TTU) and a master's degree in library science from George Peabody College. **Mrs. Melton taught in the Upper Cumberland area for more than 53 years. As an accomplished teacher, librarian, Girl Scout, poet, published author, genealogist, historian and storyteller, she touched the lives of young and old with her love for a good story, books, history, folktales, wildflowers, great food (particularly biscuits) and all things family.** Her family includes three beloved sisters, Mary Barker of Sparta, Marjorie Deck of Maryville and Betty Ashburn of Cookeville; a sister-in-law, Thelma Myers of Santa Ana, Calif.; nieces and nephews Shelby Reid, Patsy and Bob Richardson, Jack and Debbie Myers, Sally Askew, John and Cheryl Myers, Susanne and Roy Ferguson, Steve and Pam Deck, Wayne and Melinda Netherton, Joe and Stephanie Kolb, Phil and Heather Combest, Brett Myers, and Darren and Beth Shell; 11 great-nieces and -nephews; nine great-great-nieces and -nephews; and a great-great-great-niece and -nephew. In addition to her parents, Mrs. Melton was **preceded in death by her husband, Claude O. Melton**; five brothers and four sisters-in-law, Ernest and Edna Myers Smith, Luther K. and Lorelle Myers, Tracy A. and Wilma Myers, Earl P. and Mary Jo Myers and Arthur B. (Art) Myers; and a nephew, Joe Pat Myers.

Pallbearers will be Jack and John Myers, Steve Deck, Wayne Netherton, Kenneth Allen, Roy Ferguson, Jack Horton, Carl Sullivan and Ernest Copeland. Pastor Monica Mowdy will officiate the services. You may share your thoughts and memories at [www.hhhfunerals.com](http://www.hhhfunerals.com).

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Wednesday, Oct 14, 2009

#### **W. M. Gilbert Melton**

b. 3 May 1887 – d. 3 December 1981 md **Belva (Tudor) Melton**, b. 4 May 1887 – d. 23 May 1969.

\*See Claude O. Melton burid in Cookeville City Cemetery.

\*See Callie Dimple (Myers) Melton Obt.

(1920 census 9<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Overton Co., TN: Dwl: 410 Family: 426 – **Gilbert Melton** is head of household, 32 yrs. old, TN md to **Belva**, 32 yrs. old, TN. Children: **Claude**, 8 yrs. old, TN & Alexander Melton, 7 yrs. old, TN).



Callie Melton, photographed at her typewriter a few years ago, has written a number of books, most of which are available at the Overton County Heritage Museum.



Captain Luther Bigelow Myers, b. 4 June 1827 – d. 16 November 1893, (Captain Company D 25th Tennessee Infantry), buried in the Shiloh Cemetery at Windle, Overton Co., TN.

