

THE ANGRY RAINS OF 1949

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'Writer's Corner'

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In the spring of 1949 the rains started on the upper Cumberland and did not stop until the Cumberland River became an angry muddy color and began to ease over its banks. We watched as the rising river covered all of the bottom lands and extend the full mile from the river to the road. Still the rains continued and soon Upper Ferry Road itself became covered with the brown backwaters.

A field road wound past our house and back across the hill to my grandparents home, far away from the river. We were not stranded as we often had been on Roaring River. It was a sight to see-the usually lazy flowing Cumberland was now a mile or more wide with tree tops and small islands poking up where little hills had been.

When the waters eventually receded, the fences and low swales trapped great numbers of catfish, suckers- red horse and buffalo-what we called "rough fish" and Daddy and the other men captured them and hauled them away by the wagon loads. We are fish until I thought I might never like them again. Being rough fish meant they were bottom feeders and full of bones. Daddy's theory was that you never had to worry about the bones if you ate plenty of cornbread with the fish – perhaps this is why "hush puppies" became a staple with fish in the South.

Another decree was that one must never drink "sweet milk" with fish or it would surely make you sick; so Mamma always served tea and coffee with fried fish. Time un-telling of this flooding of the bottom lands had created rich fields with topsoil shovel handle deep in some places. Erosion was literally moving the topsoil and humus from the hill tops to the bottom lands. It made the low lands productive and easy to cultivate or "tend."

In those days we "tended" most of the land which today lies in pasture and the fields were full of the patch-work colors of corn, wheat, soybeans and oats, each having their own distinct hue of green. I could stand on the front porch and watch Daddy as he plowed and worked the land. One special day stands out in my mind.

Mamma brought out a quart jug of ice water, wrapped in newspaper, and tied with grass string to keep the already sweltering heat from melting the ice before the water could be delivered. She handed me the jug and sent me down the road and across the fields to take water to Daddy while she watched from the porch. No trip I have ever taken was a greater adventure or gave me more sense of independence than this one. Imagine, at five years old being entrusted with such an important job and allowed to go alone. Never mind that Mamma could see my every step from the front porch.

When I got there Daddy said, “Well her comes one of the hands with water.” He drank deeply of the cold liquid with little trickles of water running down his chin and mixing with the sweat which already had soaked his shirt. When he finished drinking, he sat the jug in the shade of a tree at the end of the field and placed me on the cross member of the turning plow and allowed me to ride a few rounds. I was so close to the mules that it seemed I might reach out and touch the stiff hair of their tails as they swayed to the rhythm of the plowing.

The musky smell of the mules mixed with the early smell of the sod being turned over planted itself firmly in my member and even today either of those smells invariably takes me back to that day. It was my proudest moment to that time.

It’s funny about smells, how they invoke memories. How honeysuckle makes you think of one thin and roses another. How sausage on a griddle with onions and peppers takes on back to the County Fair. How the smell of a barn is pleasant to one and obnoxious to another.

God has given us a great gift in the senses we possess but seldom think of on a given day. Sights, sounds, touch, taste, and smell are all capable of transporting us from one day to another and from part of the world to another. He is truly all good, all the time.

Have a blessed day.

*Read more Bob Chaffin stories and ‘Writer’s Corner’ at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>