

WELCOME AS THE FLOWERS IN MAY

By Robert "Bob" Rodgers Chaffin

'Writer's Corner'

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Her given name was unusual, in fact I am sure I have never known another person with that name. Although her name was different, she herself was not. She was as comfortable and inviting as a favorite pair of shoes that fit so perfectly and are so well broken in that when you have them on you aren't even sure you're wearing them.

When I came to know Evergreen Anderson, her husband "Dover" had already gone on from this world, leaving her to cope with day-to-day life alone, and she was more than up to the task. Her address was Silver Point, but perhaps she lived in "Hickey" since I never knew where one community started and other ended.

She was in her "new" house, as she always called it, just across the railroad cut from the road that runs between Silver Point and Baxter, generally known as "Old Baxter Road." The house was on a small island of land bounded by the Tennessee Central tracks on one side and Interstate 40 on the other. Interstate 40 had been the reason for the "new house" since it had cut her farm in two sections and taken the land her "hut," as she called it, had sat on for many years. The hut was four rooms and a kitchen and was still heated only by an open hearth, wood burning fireplace. It had every been painted it did not show, since it displayed the grey weathered hue that was the signature nature color of houses and barns built in Middle Tennessee prior to the 1950s.

The brown eyed girl's grandmother's had both passed away before her birth, and since Evergreen was the oldest sister of my mother-in-law, she had become my future wife's proxy grandmother. When the brown eyed girl and her family "came home" from Detroit on vacations and layoffs, Evergreen's house had been the "home" to which they came.

A sure enough, dyed in the wool, and proud to be, country woman, Evergreen had always felt compelled to warn "Sissy," as she was always called by close family, to "be sure you don't marry one of them Yankee boys; you get you a little country boy from down here."

Knowing all that, it is little wonder that Evergreen's house was one of the first family places to which I was ever invited. Evergreen and I hit it off like peanut butter and jelly. She was great – just my kind of person. Of course, there were some tests I had to pass like showing that I knew how to hunt rabbits and quail with her sons, and proving that I knew one end of the tobacco stick from another before Evergreen decided I was a "keeper." (Hint – the end of the spike on it is the business end.)

Although she lived alone, she continued to make a big kitchen garden, and tended a tobacco patch each year well into her 80s. She could peg it out, sucker and top the stuff, and cut or spike with the best of them. She still wore a sun bonnet, or "pole" bonnet as they were often called, and worked the garden with a goose neck hoe in the hottest weather.

As a cook, no one was better. There was good country food and plenty of it on the table every time I ever went to her house. I particularly remember one time when I had gone with the brown eyed girl to Silver Point to work with the other male family members helping Evergreen “cut tobacco.” There were several of us working the patch and it was likely there would be 8 or 10 people around the table at dinner. The brown eyed girl and Evergreen’s daughter-in-law, Flo, had volunteered to do the cooking since Evergreen herself was in the fields working with us. Along about 11 o’clock she allowed that she had “better go check and see what them girls report, they had cooked so much food that the counter tops and table were so laden with food there was one vacant spot.

When Evergreen arrived she said, “Oh Honey, I’, afraid there ain’t gonna’ be enough here to feed this bunch of hungry men.” The point is not whether there was enough or not, but that she was, even in the fields, the ever aware hostess who never wanted to be guilty of not providing enough food at a “working.” There was plenty.

Although it was before my day, I remember her telling that when Dover passed away, she had been invited to spend a few days with one of the other sisters in her family and one or two had offered to stay a few days with here. Her reply had been, “No, I’ve got to do this and I might as well start now.” With that she had gone home alone and began her life as a widow which would last nearly 30 years. She seldom complained, and seemed to be continually in good spirits, or at least put up a good front. Her hand was generally set to every good deed and every work of the Silver Point Church, as well as being the ever available “Granny” to her grandchildren; seven in all, if my count is correct. Her cheeks were generally tanned and her skin creased with the distinguished wrinkles of a country woman who had spent as much of her life in the fields as in the house. She could be counted on to be seated on her bench at church soon after the doors were opened, and generally counted upon tot take someone home for dinner when services were over.

She was kindness and goodness to the core and I seldom have known another who made one feel so welcome in their home.

“You’re as welcome as the flowers in May, child,” is her phrase often repeated by the brown eyed girl when she remembers Evergreen. I believe it would be fair to say that line sums up Evergreen’s place in her family, her community, and in her church. She was to one and all, “as welcome as the flowers in May”.

Have a blessed day and may you be “Welcome as the flowers in May” as you go about your daily lives.

*Read more of Robert “Bob” Rodgers Chaffin stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

