

W. L. & IVA MAY (MCMURTRY) CUNNINGHAM

Mrs. Cunningham was born January 28, 1907, the second daughter of Jacob Taylor and Rosa Evergreen Dorris McMurtry of Shackle Island, Tennessee, near Hendersonville. She entered school in the 3rd grade with her sister, Eva Sue, because she already knew how to read! Most people thought the girls were twins!



The McMurtry girls (eventually there were four altogether) did the farm chores because there were no sons in the family! They learned to keep house, too, and found it fun one summer to live in the hay barn with their parents while their house was being rebuilt and remodeled.

(Pictured left: W. L. Cunningham & Iva May (McMurtry) Cunningham, Highlander Yearbook 1942, Baxter Seminary Faculty, Baxter, Putnam Co., TN).

Jake and Rose McMurtry were very musical and made certain that the children took piano lessons. Their favorite pastime was spent in entertaining and making music with their neighbors. At New Hope Baptist Church, their Papa led the singing for 50 years, and the girls sang (or played) for weddings and funerals.

Iva May graduated from Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville and from MTSU in Murfreesboro. She accepted a first grade teaching position in Palmer, Tennessee, where she met W. L. Cunningham who was Principal. They were married in 1933.

W. L.'s parents did not believe they were actually married because the romance blossomed rather fast. When the couple announced to his parents this fact, his mother Jackie continued to call her "Miss McMurtry" and said to her as they left the house on Viola Road, "You come back again, Miss MuMurty!"

In the following years, the Cunninghams served other schools: Anita was born in Palmer, Bill in Pinehurst, NC, and Mac in Cookeville, near Baxter, where W. L. as Dean of Boys at Baxter Seminary and Iva May was the Freshman English teacher and Registrar for many years.

They also taught in the Hamilton County schools, Chattanooga, and lived there until their retirement in 1977.

At this point, because of W. L.'s love for gardening and working outdoors, they bought a log home in Rock Island (near his birthplace) and produced food for themselves and their neighbors. They also resided in Antioch and White House during the summers and grew and processed "tons of food" as Iva May said.

But it was in Baxter that the Cunninghams showed the most influence and accomplished their goals as teachers and advocates of young students who boarded on the beautiful campus. They became part-time parents to many boys and girls who needed their guidance and attention. Iva May recalled more Baxter memories than any others and actually stayed in contact with some of these students even after 50 years. Her students remember her as being “personal, loving, kind and sweet, and a genuine mother who cared about their well-being.”

It was our mother who taught us how to be more Christ-like. She reminded us to study and believe the words of the apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians (Chapter 5:22): “When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control.”

Source: All Roads Lead to Baxter by Anita Cunningham Mitchell, pgs. 70 & 71.

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