

A PLAYHOUSE IN TALLEY'S HOLLER

By Robert "Bob" Rogers Chaffin
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'Writer's Corner'

The Bible makes mention of the fact that it is a pleasant circumstance when folks dwell together in unity. I have also noticed that there are few things more pleasant than being in the company of people who really like one another.



My daddy's best friend was Norman Chaffin. Norman's grandfather and Daddy's grandfather were brothers so that made them cousins and in Jackson County family is family, no matter how distant the cousin might be. I think however, it was not the fact that they were kin that forged the bond between them, it was the fact they were kindred spirits.

Norman lived on the old Robert and Barbara Gallion Young place in what was then called Tally's Holler but has been renamed The Crockett Hollow. He remained a farmer all of his life and part of the kinship between he and Daddy was the ability to make do. For instance, Norman's Tobacco patch was on a fairly level field that lay on the flat top of a pretty high hill. It was before the days of John Deere Gators and even if such vehicles had existed, Norman would never have bought one. He would have made do, and made do he did by stretching a taunt wire between a launching point on the top of the hill and the barn in the valley below. By using hooks he had fashioned in his blacksmith shop, he utilized the power of gravity to slide the sticks of burley down to the barn for hanging. The broad burley leaves acted to slow the stick tobacco stalks down to a reasonable speed. The alternative would have been using a ground sled and mules to pull up and down the rough road, thereby shattering and breaking the tender green leaves. Instead Norman found a way to harness the law God had given us and the result was much reduced effort and less damage to the burley.

He also used the same principle to provide running water for his family in a time and place where few folks had such luxuries. Since there was a spring high up in the head of a holler behind his house, he ran a flexible pipe down from the spring to the house, thereby piping "running water" into the house. What about freezing in the winter you ask, well he simply left the water running in such weather; after all, he wasn't likely to run up the water bill.

As a teenage boy, I can remember no happier days than those spent rabbit or squirrel hunting with Norman and Daddy and simply being able to back in the warmth of their long standing friendship. We three would climb to the top of the ridge which separated Norman's farm, from the Abner Chaffin homeplace where I was born. There we would sit under the canopy of leaves in a forest where the trees had never heard the whine of a chainsaw nor felt the blade of an axe and simply contemplate life.

Another pleasant and important annual event in my young life was when our little church in Carthage, held the summer Vacation Bible School. All of Norman and Hattie's girls, unless they were old enough to hold a full time job, would come and stay at our house and attend Bible School with Donnieta and me. It was a fun filled and magical time, made so by the simple and innocent enjoyment of one another's company and our "like precious faith". We have all remained life-long friends and I still always look forward to any excuse for us to be together.

Hattie's real claim to fame was the fact that she made the best souse meat in 6 state. If you are from up north you call this "head cheese" but down south it is "souse meat." It is what happens to the head snout and other parts of the pig that are more gristle than lean meat. It forms a jelly like substance when cooked down and when mixed with just the right herbs and spices it makes a heavenly treat that is to die for. Cut off in a big thick slice and eaten between two pieces of fresh sourdough bread, it is good eating indeed. Hattie kept it in a crock and it stayed in one of the rooms away from the fire, thereby being cooled and not needing refrigeration.

Donnieta was especially close to Cindy, Jamie and Tildy, while I loved to play with Geraldine and Jo, even though they often talked me in to doing something that I would have done for none other. They insisted we "play house" in their pretend kitchen. It was located in the head high, washed out gully next to their house and was outfitted with the porcelain liners from Zinc Mason jar lids which they used for dishes and various other broken or chipped pieces of pottery or glassware they had managed to collect. My job was usually to "go to work" which I did with relish and then simply threw rocks or looked around for arrow heads for a while, until I returned and announced my homecoming.

The older girls worked at Wooten's Drug store in town and were allowed to take home the comic books which were unsold and outdated once the covers had been removed and returned to the publisher. So, they had an endless supply of this precious and scarce commodity. In those days prior to television and videos, reading comic books served as our escape from reality and stirred out imagination as we flew with "Black Hawk" or chased the bad guys with Superman.

Is it not amazing how our creator knows our needs for relationships and provides others to fill that need? In the end though, it is a relationship with the Creator we long for, and only He can fill that God shaped hole in our lives. Have a blessed day.

Author of the books: Pioneers, Preachers and Patriots: The Chaffins of Roaring River, Jackson Co., TN and Ridin' the Blinds.

*Read more about Robert Rogers Chaffin in the Chaffin files and read more Writer's corner stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>