

## **REMEMBRANCES OF MOM**

by Robert "Bob" Rogers Chaffin  
Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN:  
Sunday, 4 May 2014, pg. C4  
'Writer's Corner'

It was the Borden's Milk Company and the Steven's Pants factories that saved the family farm and allowed Middle Tennessee to continue the agricultural way of life that they valued so highly in the 1950-1960s.



This may be a little hard to follow, but the fact is the income generated on family farms had, in many cases, dropped below the subsistence level by the 1950s and farmers would have been forced to give up working the land of their fathers, except in the words of my father, "they became go-get-hers." Their wives and daughters got a job at the local pants or shirt factory and at four o'clock he would go get her.

Actually, the shirt or pants factory job often became the reason the Middle Tennessee family got a second "passenger car" as opposed to the farm pickup truck. Once we left the farm in 1950, Mama always worked: first at the Community Grocery, a little local store that our family owned and ran, and then at the Locker Plant. Finally, like most other women of the Upper Cumberland, she was able to work for the local shirt factory. She folded the shirts, pinned them to the cardboard shaper and placed them in the boxes for shipment. She called herself a boxer and I delighted in telling my friends, even in college, that my mother was a boxer.

Here greatest passion was that my sister and I "turn out right." That meant that we become useful citizens of the community and The Lord's Kingdom and live in a way that would show forth Jesus' principles in our life. There was no greater expectation or accomplishment in her view. I can scarcely remember a night that she did not lay down across the big bed and read with me, read to me, or later ask that I read to her from the Bible. On the other hand, there was little discussion of religion or religious doctrine in our home – particularly not with her. She simply required that you live your life in such a way that it was clear to all around you that you were a person of Christian values. Take every opportunity to do good to others, never talk about anyone, support the local church and its efforts, be kind to strangers and offer hospitality whenever you could, make sure the visiting preacher always had somewhere to eat and to sleep, provided transportation to anyone who needed to get to church (seldom did we not have at least one person riding to church with us), make sure that your word is your bond, especially with your children.

She was hospitable to a degree seldom seen today, and never worried about the state of her house when someone came to visit. She had grown up a very poor farm girl, even by the standards of those lean times, and while our house was reasonably clean, it was obviously not her priority to have it spotless. If someone visited, they were invited to share in whatever we had. It might be a cup of coffee, milk for the kids, or a slice or two

of cheese and some crackers. She never seemed to have the slightest thought concerning if the fare was good enough or not. After all, it was what we had and we were grateful for having it, meager as it might be, and if it was good enough for us it was good enough for anybody, was her motto.

Adie (my father's great-aunt who lived with us) did most of the cooking on weekdays and she and Mama cleaned up the "pot vessels" and dishes together each night. Donnieta and I took turns washing, drying and putting away. On Saturdays we did big house cleaning with everyone involved except Daddy. He was always exempt from such menial chores, but in turn kept the outside maintenance of lawn and house under control.

When I got big enough to almost handle the old Pontiac push lawnmower, Daddy bought a power mower from Smith County hardware and running it became my responsibility. I found that it opened up a whole new world and as Daddy liked to say: "He cut trees down with my lawnmower." Which was not entirely false, but they were only a inch or two in diameter. I set about clearing the back lot to the creek bank and created a neighborhood football field, badminton court, and croquet ground that became a center for local children (and sometimes adults) gatherings.

Daddy salvaged some big lights from a service station being demolished downtown, and it was often brightly lit and full of young people until one by one their mothers called them home. Mama seldom interjected herself into our school affairs and, in fact, seldom set specific requirements of my sister or I in that regard. There was simply the big rule, "don't forget who you are and don't disappoint us." That big rule had sufficient moral suasion to prevent the necessity for lots of little rules designed to achieve the big rule objective. Most of our decisions about what we could or should do or not do were made by us on the principle of: "If Mama and Daddy find out will they be disappointed? Will they say, 'You know better than that, we expect better, and you are a better person than the'?"

The once or twice I do remember her interjecting herself, are not the stuff of which happy memories are made. One memorable such time was when I was walking home from school at lunch and a couple of other boys decided to practice their pitching skills by throwing rocks at me. When I turned to say, "You really shouldn't hit me with that rock," (or something like that) one of them let fly with one about the size of a golf ball which opened a sizable cut just above my right eyebrow. When I arrived home, expecting only Adie to be there, I had a handful of blood oozing between the fingers of my right hand which was covering the cut. I don't know if I have ever seen my mother so made before or since.

She cleaned up my eye – but not too clean – stuffed me into the car and drove directly to Smith County Elementary School where she marched me in to the principal's office. I think the principal at the time was Mr. Massey, whom I feared with about the same fear I did the old red dragon, Satan himself.

Mr. Massey marched me, with my mother following, down to my classroom and called out the town perps and took the whole gang back down to the office. I was “sweatin’ like a blind gunfighter.” He then took Mama into his office and left the other tow combatants and myself alone in the anteroom to contemplate out fate.

Being boys, we of course agreed that it had all really been in fun and now the establishment was about to exact unfair retribution on us. They convinced me that the only way out was to stick together and say it had been intended as fun and just gotten out of hand.

He then interviewed each of us individually, carefully comparing the story of each boy to that of the other. It was a fine piece of police work and interrogation, missing only the bright light and rubber hose. When the principal, now in the role of high sheriff, came out he announced out fate. The two guilty of casting stones were given detention after school for a week, given a note to take home to their father for a signature (which would of course bring a sound whacking at home), and had to write “I will not throw rocks” 500 times to be presented to the high sheriff himself. I was swelling with righteous indignation and self-satisfaction when I heard my name called. What? Why am I being addressed? “And you Mr. Chaffin, since you have suffered the cut, I will reduce your punishment.” What? Punishment? I am the innocent victim here. What about victim’s rights?

I will only require you to write “I will not fight” 100 times to be turned in to me.”

Boy, talk about your blind injustice. Couldn’t he see that I was covered with blood? Didn’t he know that I was barely clinging to life? Sentences to write, those boys had not only applied a rod Head-on! Directly to my forehead, they had lied on me and convinced Mr. Massey that I had been a combatant. Well, it tuned out to be an important lesson in life. The best policy in life is always just to tell the unembellished truth. You know, you can’t remember a lie and when start telling other than the truth you lose track quickly of to whom you have told what story. If you tell the truth you don’t have to keep up with the story.

I know Jesus said to turn the other cheek, but I’m not at all sure it applies to the other side of your head. Also, they apparently had not taken to heart that scripture that says “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,” because I knew those tow and righteousness was not their strong suite.

Well, have a blessed day and remember don’t get in a rock fight when a soft answer could turn away wrath.

\*Read more stories by Robert “Bob” Rogers Chaffin at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>