

LEARNING TO BE CONTENT IN MA-MA MABERRY'S KITCHEN

By Robert "Bob" Rogers Chaffin

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'Writer's Corner'

Ma-ma and Pa Maberry lived in the house that stood between the entrance to the Smith County Memorial Gardens and the old concrete upright silo that stands guard to the entrance to the school on the eastern edge of Carthage. Like so many places, it is city now but was out in the country way back then. It seemed like a pretty big farmhouse for the day with four big rooms downstairs and two finished attic rooms upstairs but of course had neither central heat nor indoor plumbing. Having no central heat and a big kitchen meant that most of the day-light hours were spent in the kitchen and that is what I remember most.



(Pictured: Edgar, Lola and Maylean Maberry. Edgar and Lola are the grandparents of Robert Chaffin and Maylean (Mayberry) Chaffin is his mother. Photo from Robert's book titled *Pioneers, Preachers and Patriots, The Chaffins of Roaring River*).

The fireplace had been mortared up and fitted for an iron coal grate and big chunks of coal, dumped on the coal pile in the backyard, were hand carried to the side of the fireplace in a coal scuttle. A few can bottomed straight chairs sat up around the fire and an iron poker leaned to one side of the grate. On the other side stood Ma-ma's white churn filled with milk waiting for it to clabber. When the cream had clabbered, it would be churned until the butter came, and the butter strained out of the mixture leaving butter milk (the real thing, not the cultured stuff you buy in the store).

On the north wall of the kitchen stood a General Electric refrigerator, (always pronounced "refrigerwator" by Ma-ma). Inside she kept several wide mouth gallon jugs with raw milk, provided by the Guernsey cows in the barn. The jugs contained milk in the various stages of processing country home-made butter. If you skimmed off too much of the cream what you had left was "blue john" and few Upper Cumberland men were fond of drinking this "pore do" liquid so it was often fed to the hogs. "Clabber" was milk that had started to curdle and was ready for churning when warm. Blinky milk was suspect as to being "fit to drink" but was retained for baking bread or other uses where high heat would be applied. Eventually excess buttermilk, blue john, and blinky milk would be fed to the hogs and recycled into bacon.

Beside the old refrigerator sat the big console radio where Pa Maberry listened to John McDonald (It's Noontime Neighbors) and the farm report (dinnertime) and to H. T. Kaltenborn give the world news at supper.

"Hesh, you children hesh, let's listen to Kaltenborn now," was uttered by him so many times I can still hear it in my mind. On the back wall set Ma-ma's "meal barrel" which was actually divided into two parts and held meal on one side and flour on the other. Meal had been obtained by taking a "turn of corn" to Smith County hardware where a gasoline powered grist mill in the basement ground the corn into the veritable staff of life for the country people of the Upper Cumberland. Next to the meal barrel was a rickety little table where the water bucket stood, except when it was cold enough it might freeze that far from the fire. The water bucket was white enameled with a red stripe around the rim of the bucket, and an aluminum dipper rested inside the bucket for all who wished to quench their thirst. A pie safe and the old Roper electric "cook stove" graced the final wall. The stove was white and huge with plenty of room to set pressure cookers when the cans of beans were ready to come out and give the lids a final tightening.

The house had been built before electricity came to the rural areas and had been wired, after the fact, by running wires outside the wood slatted ceilings to the single porcelain fixture in the center of each room

and along the papered walls to one or two outlets in each room. This wiring setup necessitated a copious use of extension cords and outlet expanders in a sinister web of electrical spaghetti. Perhaps that is why during an electrical storm a lightening bolt sent a power surge creating a ball of glowing electricity flying out of one of the “caps” on the humungous stove. My sister, who was standing nearby, contends to this day that the ball chased her around the room and flew out the door. All I know is that it took three months and at least a quart of Dr. Miles Nervine to settle her down. In the center of the room set a Formica breakfast room table and chairs which Pa often propped up on because it allowed him to keep his great round ash tray handy instead of having to flick ashes in the cuff of his pants. (To Pa, the whole world was a ashtray.)

The kitchen did not have one ounce of granite countertop of any kind. Ma-ma did not own a blender or a food processor, an electric can opener or an automatic percolator of any kind. She washed dishes in a dish pan, not a dishwasher, had a couple of good butcher knives, one of them made from an old hand saw, and cooked nearly everything by frying it in a black iron skillet. There were no maple wood cabinets, no hardwood floors gleaming in the sunlight, no espresso machines, or woks, or microwaves, no convection ovens. No island graced the kitchen, no bay windows, no pantry. Occasionally a small handful of butter cups or roses were placed in a blue/green mason jar but only when the season was right.

What there was however, was warmth and love, good family conversation, and sage advice from the older to the younger generation. The sense of safety and caring was palpable, and as bright as the rose bordered linoleum rug on the floor. We scooted up around the glowing coal embers breathing in the slight sulfur smell and were not distracted by television, videos, or electronic games. If we did play games like Rook or Monopoly, they required participation, dialogue, and exchange of information between the players.

I believe the ting that strikes me most is the fact that Edgar and Lola Maberry did not feel that they were somehow shortchanged by the lack of things. Some of it I suppose, was the fact that they had never had these things so they felt no sense of loss, however I suspect much of it came from learning contentment. The Apostle Paul said, “have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” (Phil. 4: 11,12).

I think Ma-ma and Pa had lived through the Great depression, two world wars, and had learned to be content and, “Rejoice in the Lord.” They were a wonderful, and continuing gift to all of us grandchildren.

May you find the secret of contentment and be blessed to bless others.

Bob Chaffin was born in the Roaring River Community of Jackson County, Tennessee during World War



II, but soon moved with his family to the nearby town of Carthage; where he spent the balance of his growing up years. He was graduated from David Lipscomb University and Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan where he earned an MBA. Upon graduation from David Lipscomb he took a job with General Motors' Financial Staff and worked his way through varying levels of responsibilities in a number of GM locations.

In January of 2001 he retired while holding the position of Finance Director for the Information Systems Division of GM and returned with his wife Janice Lafever Chaffin to his beloved Tennessee. Today, he lives in Lebanon, raises Black Angus Cattle, and serves as an Elder for the Maple Hill Church of Christ.

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>