Memories of my Childhood

In Seng Run Holler

By

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MEMORIES OF MY CHILDHOOD IN SENG RUN HOLLER

By
~ Louella Barnett ~

I was born in the mountains of Braxton County W.V the 1st child of 4 children born to Anna-Mae Riffle. in a 2 story house or shack you might call it, with rough floors you swept with a broom made from sage grass, pulled and dried and made into a broom. Brooms also were made from hickory pole shavings split back, and then pulled forward and tied for sweeping the yard. A kitchen was made on the side from split boards were split with a fro and a maul.

We lived there until I was five years old. This place was in the head of Seng Run Holler, it ran into Little Birch Creek. Then we moved over near the Fisher Holler on the other side of the mountain. We had one old mule which pulled a sled with a few belongings; the family walked and carried everything they could, including me. I cried, so was said, that’s when my memory starts. I remember someone trying to carry me with a butter churn. Mommie was carring my brother Richard who was born 1 year earlier.

It was about three or four miles up hills and down, only on paths. We passed through the land we later bought. There were huge cliffs; we were so afraid because Indians had lived under them.

When we reached the top of the mountain, the other side was all cleared out for corn fields and way down the hill was a house; our home. Everyone started jumping up and down and running down the hill. I think I was running, too. This house was bigger, two rooms with kitchen and eating place on the side, a big yard, gardens and plenty of fields for corn. A stream of water ran right by, which was the beginning of Fisher Holler that ran into the Little Birch River. We were at the head of it.

We were about two miles from the river, which had a wagon road from Fisher Holler to Erbacon Road. We had plenty of friends now of all ages. Mommie had another aunt that lived farther up the river. She had a house full of children, too.

Every farmer had at least one good mule for work and riding, a couple of milk cows, and young yearlings which were sold for money; also a lot of hogs for meat. Sheep were for wool, which was sent off and cloth and blankets were made. Beautiful red and blue checked blankets were sent back with the clothes.

Mommie knit our socks. We got one pair of shoes a winter for school, we had to make them last. As the children got older, in their teens, they somehow managed to get shoes for summer, sold a calf or my mommie worked for someone else any time she had to spare for a little extra money. We children dug May-apple roots and dried them and my mommie sold them and bought cloth for our summer dresses for school. We would have two each. We would wash them out in the evenings and dry them to wear to school the next day.
A sewing machine and spinning wheel was a must. Quilts were made from the backside of overalls and wool sample books. Wool was spun into yarn for our stockings. I helped my mom by holding the hanks of yarn on my arms so she could ball it and I held the pine pitch light at night for her to knit my socks. Ever’ which one of us she was knitting for had to sit up and hold the light till she finished the pair. One time in particular, I fell asleep and dropped the hot pitch on my bare toes; there was some jumping going on then.

Cane was grown for molasses, cut in fall and ground with a grinder pulled around and around with a mule. Someone in the settlement had one and it was shared. That was our sweetening for ginger cakes and syrup. There was always 5 gal. cans on hand, filled. Cane grinding was a great time. Everyone went, young folks sparking in the ground-up stalks and licking foam from the stir-off with a cane stalk.

In the summer months, hogs were put in floored pens for fattening on corn and slop made up of dishwater and waste from the kitchen. First cold spell in fall one was killed and cured and hung up in the smokehouse. Some middlins (or side meat you might call it) and hams were smoked with hickory wood for days. The rest was salted down for salt pork.

Fall of the year was harvesting time. Fodder was pulled for mules and bundled and dried and corn pulled and hauled out in sleds by mule. The rest of the stalks were cut and shocked for cattle. Womenfolk were gathering everything and canning, drying, pickling, making barrels of kraut and pickled beans and corn; everything that could be saved for the long winter. Beans were dried for shuck beans; a different kind was shelled for soup beans. They knew the right kind. Every child had his own job. We gathered everything left over in the fields; green tomatoes, peppers, onions and corn and put them all in big crocks for salted mix pickles. Irish and sweet potatoes and turnips were put in deep holes lined with straw, which were under big cliffs right by the garden, and kept through the winter. You could open up and get out enough for use as you needed. We had plenty of chickens for meat and eggs, ducks for eggs, and feathers for pillows and feather beds. Fresh straw was pulled in fall as filling for mattresses.

At bean picking time they would pile bushels on a quilt in the floor and invite all their young friends to come to bean stringing. When the pile was finished they would swing “Rabbit Soup”, about the same as square dancing. My daddy wouldn’t allow dancing, so they fooled him and sung “Rabbit Soup” and went through the square dance set.

Winter was tough on us children, all living in a two story house. If it wasn’t too cold, we would go to the barn and play with the young calf. The old cow would run around the barn and bawl and paw the ground. If she could have gotten to us, she would have killed us. One time we played in the fodder for the mule and shattered it to bug dust. They all got a whipping for that. My mommie stood us all in a line, she didn’t whip me but I had to stand with the rest. Seems like my step dad was always gone. He worked for someone every time he could. He would find the damage we had done when he got back home.
We had a good school, a church, walking distance to the store and a post office. To get to school, we had to cross the creek on a foot log that was always scary to me and we had to pass some geese that would fly across the river and bite the daylights out of you.

Times were hard, but we were always happy and loved. We didn’t miss having the good things, we had never had them. We had fun with what we had. We roamed the hills and in the cliffs, we had what we called the “Slick Rock”. When the ice froze over, we would bundle up and go to it and scoot down it.

This one memory stays with me more than any of the others. One cold day snow was on the ground and there was a bunch of bored children with nothing to do. My two younger brothers and one sister suggested we go to the "Devil's Tea Table".

The only problem was, little sister had no shoes since she wasn’t old enough to go to school, and there was no way they could leave her behind. So, my brother, Richard, took some rags torn from old overalls, wrapped her feet up, and carried her. He was small and only five years younger than me. It was a long ways up and around the mountain. They picked mountain tea on the way and brought along a pan and paper bag so they could dry the mountain tea and smoke it. Tales were that Indians lived there and that several men hid there to keep from fighting in the Civil War. We had to crawl along a narrow ledge and into a square hole to get inside. Yellow sand was on the floor and there was a round ceiling that sand was sifting down from. There was a long opening at the lower end with a ledge where eagles build their nests, and ravens too, I guess. We could look down for miles and see the blue Little Birch River. The grownups had a lot more pleasures. They got to spend nights with their friends and go river swimming and skating when it froze over.

After the long, cold winter with smoked, dried, cured and canned stuff to eat, we were glad to see spring come with fresh vegetables and greens. We would go with mommie to pick wild greens until the garden came in. She knew the ones that were right to eat; poke, thistle, speckled dick, lambs tongue, shoney and many more. By the first of June the garden was coming in and also the long summer, with hard work ahead.

My mommie made her own medicines from herbs she gathered. She made liniment from different stuff she brewed down and cough syrup was made from mullein, horehound and honey. Sheep bullet tea was made to treat measles; a salve for burns was made from hog hair and turpentine. She rendered groundhog grease for croup; wild cherry bark for yellow jaundice or kidney trouble, and she also set broken bones. There were no doctors near so you had to rely on yourself. She was the best livestock doctor in the country. She was called on to doctor other people’s stock. I carried with me her remedies and used them with my own family. No inside toilets and no running water.

Water was carried from the spring about 200 ft from the house.
We lived there until I was 11 years old, in the spring of 1946. My mommie had now bought and paid for land on the other side of the mountain. She paid for it by selling a calf to her brother Charles.

We were now in our house and on our land; We were beginning to get ahead. My step dad planted fruit trees, had bee gums for honey, our first mattresses; no more pulling straw for straw beds.

~* To Be Continued*~