

SHORT STORIES

Volume 1



By Doris (Dunn) Matlock

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THE PINK BOWL ASSIGNMENT

By Doris Matlock

“Go down to Granny’s and get us some fresh butter,” Momma said, “And take your little pink bowl.” I ran to the kitchen as fast as my little four-year-old legs could carry me.

It was 1942, and we lived in a small share-croppers house on my Grandpa Dunn’s farm in Cherokee County, OK. Usually, my older sister or two older brothers were sent to get the milk and butter from the spring, but on this day, it was my privilege to run this very important errand for Momma.



The Dunn Home Place, 1919

The bright spring day filled me with happiness as I skipped down the long path to Granny’s house. The gate from our yard to the

field was only three strands of barbed wire, and I had just grown strong enough to pull the top wire off the post to open the gate.

My destination was the spring to the south of Granny's big farmhouse, but first I would ask Granny's permission to get some of the butter.

I smelled Granny's fresh, white peonies as I unlatched the yard gate and heard her in the kitchen humming as she prepared the noonday meal. I recognized the song she'd taught me earlier, *In the Good Ole' Summertime*. I closed the screen door gently and looked longingly at the cake dough she was stirring.

"Hi, Granny," I said. "Can I get some butter from the spring?"

"Why yes," she said, "But be sure to put the lid back on my crock!"

I was instantly out the door and across the long south porch. I skipped through the tall green grass, careful to hold tight to my little pink bowl as I watched for copperheads and other harmful critters. When I reached the spring, mud squished between my toes as I made my way to the crocks of butter, cream, and milk in the big homemade wooden box near the spring's mouth.

The spring itself was surrounded by a round ceramic casing. The clear, cold water then ran over the wooden box keeping its contents cold and fresh.

I carefully lifted the heavy crock lid and dishtowel covering the wooden dipping spoon and dipped the sweet, yellow butter into my little pink bowl. I then set the bowl on a big rock so I could replace the crock lid and the wooden box top.

Now, I could get a cold drink. I reached for the tin cup Grandpa had hung on a nearby limb. But on this day, a fat rusty water moccasin decided this was also his favorite waterin' hole!

I had sense enough to stand perfectly still until he swam past. After about 5 minutes of waiting and watching, I cautiously made my way to my little pink bowl of butter.

Once I got back to Granny's, I ran in hollering, "Granny, Granny! I just saw a big sn..."

"Oh, hush, child!" she said, "Cain't you see I'm busy? The threshing crew will be here for dinner, and I ain't got time for any of your stories so run along now!" I knew to mind Granny, so I hurried back up the trail to Momma and our safe little home.

Momma met me at the door and took my little pink bowl. "Thank you Honey! Now I can make the cornbread."

"But Momma, listen to what happened!" I excitedly started to recite all that had happened. Then I realized that if I talked about the snake, she might not let me go on such an important errand again. So I said instead, "I had fun getting the butter!"

"That's good, Sweetie, now run along and play." She said and hugged me as I ran out the door.

The love and trust that Momma showed me by letting me start early with responsibilities, built my confidence and self-esteem at an early age. Completing the pink bowl assignment is among my earliest memories of those "Good Old Days."

GRANNY WAS FROM GEORGIA

By Doris Matlock

I loved my Granny very much, and I know she loved me. But she didn't put up with nonsense, or any of my mischievous ways. Her answer for misbehavior was to put me to work. My first job was learning to wash dishes when I was 5 years old. It was cold weather, so she let the oven door down, set a pan of warm, soapy water on it, and told me to get busy.



Doris Dunn, age 5

I said, "But, Granny! I don't know how!"

"Well just take it easy, and I'll show you how." Granny replied.

She put a cup into the water and patiently showed me how to clean it with a dishcloth. Then she gave me a plate to clean. Soon I was enjoying helping with all the dishes. By the time we finished, I thought it was fun, and I was feeling very good about myself.

Granny was born Sarah Caroline Jones, March 1, 1865, in Murray County Georgia. She married her childhood sweetheart, Levi Patterson Dunn, in 1881 when she was only 16. In the late 1880s, they both came west to Oklahoma (then Indian Territory) with their three oldest children. They were hardy pioneers, and soon had a big farm in eastern Oklahoma where they raised seven more children.

I loved it when Granny would tell me stories about her childhood back in Georgia. She told me about having a pet bear when she

was 8 years old. Her brothers were out hunting and found it alone and hungry. Apparently, the mother bear had been killed or died of natural causes. Granny took care of the bear until it was about a year old. Then it became too hard to handle, so her brothers helped her release it into the woods near their home.

I don't ever remember Granny going to town. She would send by my dad or Grandpa for the things she needed, like thread, fabric, medicines, or the few other goods we didn't grow on the farm like sugar, coffee, and flavorings. She was nearly always in her big kitchen cooking up a tasty meal. The leftovers were covered and kept until supper. Sometimes we kids would sneak in and get a few bites for a snack, but we were always careful not to get caught!



"Granny" Sarah Dunn, feeding her Chickens

Of course, Granny cooked on a big wood-burning stove, so the heat was fierce in the summertime. That reminds me of the song she taught me, *In the Good Ole' Summertime*. She sang and hummed that song a lot.

When powdered sugar came out, that was a real treat! Once my daddy helped me sneak into the kitchen, and we both got big spoonfuls of that white, tasty stuff. Once we had our fill, we left snickering out the side door. That was our sweet little secret for quite a long time.

Granny loved summertime. Her dresses were always long, but in the summer, she would wear short-sleeved dresses and always a full-length apron with pockets. She said she was Irish, and she showed a ruddy complexion most of the time.

Granny was a very strong lady in many ways. I learned a lot from her work ethic. She had her own rules that she lived by. “Get your work done before you rest or visit.” For my five-year-old world, it was “Work before play.” One of her favorite sayings was “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop,” I hardly ever saw her idle. She believed that when a woman sat down to rest, her sewing basket should be handy for mending or piecing on a quilt.

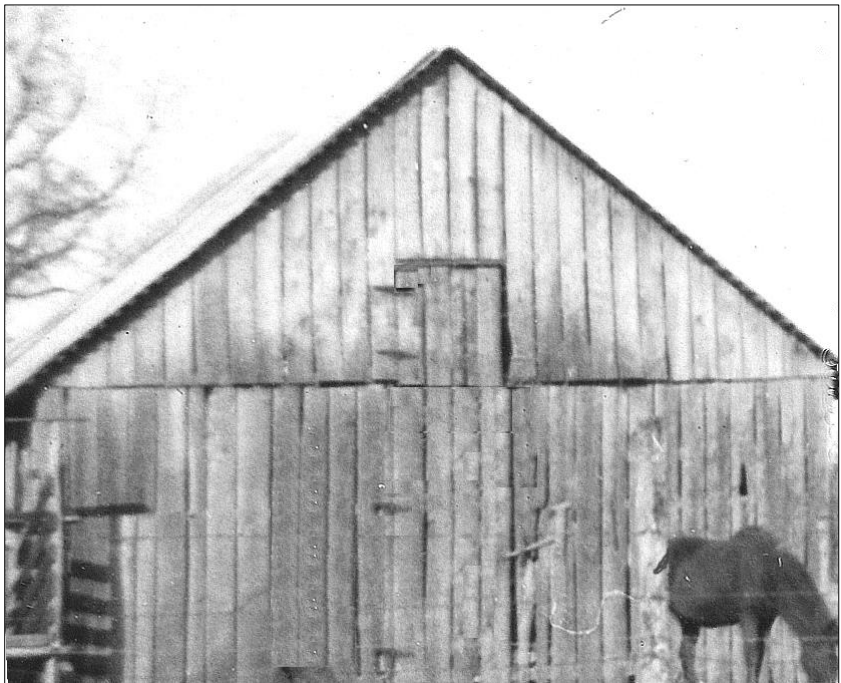
Granny always took time to “nuss” the babies and talk to us little ones. That word “nuss” probably was a southern word for “nurse,” but my family used it to mean taking care of the baby, rocking it, singing to it, and entertaining it.

I learned so much from my Granny during those formative years in the “Good Old Days.”

GRANDPA'S BARN

By Doris Matlock

To me, Grandpa's barn was huge. The gigantic middle hallway had a high ceiling, so it was cool in the summer and smelled of hay, corn, and cows. When Grandpa Levi Dunn came from Georgia to eastern Oklahoma in 1889, he fashioned his barn after his dad's, back in Tenna, Tennessee. He and Granny had 10 children, and their big barn had many uses and provided their livestock with a good home.



Grandpa's Barn

My family lived on my Granny & Grandpa's farm during the 1930s and 1940s, so the barn was one of my main playhouses. I used to climb up on a small wooden box so I could reach the latch on the barn door. I would creep in, reach back through the crack, and latch it behind me.

Even on hot summer days, the long, wide hallway was cool and dimly lit by sunlight streaming in from cracks in the outer walls. There were three stalls on either side of the hallway. Each had a manger where corn, hay and oats were placed, and a door leading outside.

My daddy's team of mules were housed on the west side. The milk cows, new calves and young heifers were housed in the south side.

The stalls all had dirt floors and the ceilings were about ten feet tall. The hallway was built two feet higher than the stalls and the mangers were attached to the front of each stall. This made feeding much easier. The hallway was made of wide oak boards, worn smooth from many years of use. In the summer the boards felt warm and smooth to my six-year-old bare feet.

I can still recall the smell so well as I walked down those old wooden planks. With the hay and corn and warm animal smells drifting up from the stalls, I would prowl around, sticking my head into each stall to rub a cow's face or pat my daddy's mules.

One of my favorite pastimes was to wander down to the corncrib. It had a big wooden door with a latch. Inside were bushels and bushels of corn. Some were shelled in big five-gallon buckets, ready to feed. Towards the west wall, many ears of corn were piled as much as 6 feet high.

A big corn sheller was hooked to a sturdy wooden table in the southeast corner close to the door. I would shuck an ear and stick it into the sheller, but my hands weren't strong enough to turn the crank. At times, one of my older brothers would let me "help them" shell the corn.

Near the front door, was a vertical ladder built onto the wall that led to a square opening into the huge hay loft above. I'd squeeze my small body up past the many bales of hay, to see out the door where the hay was put in during haying season.

The loft door was left open in summertime so breezes could flow through. This door opened onto the beautiful wide countryside of northeastern Oklahoma. I was careful not to get too close, because the door was 15 feet off the ground. I would sit on a bale of hay and gaze off into the distance. I could see the green foothills of the Ozarks over the roof of our big white farmhouse and beyond. Many trees of all sizes covered the hills and valleys and surrounded the ever-flowing creek which ran through Grandpa's eighty acres. As I sat and daydreamed, I traveled to the many fantasy lands of my young imagination.

The climb back down was scary, and I was very careful. I was also careful to close the barn door and latch it before I went on to roam my favorite trails out in the pasture.

I wish all young children could grow up having the pleasure of playing in a big old barn.

DADDY'S MULES

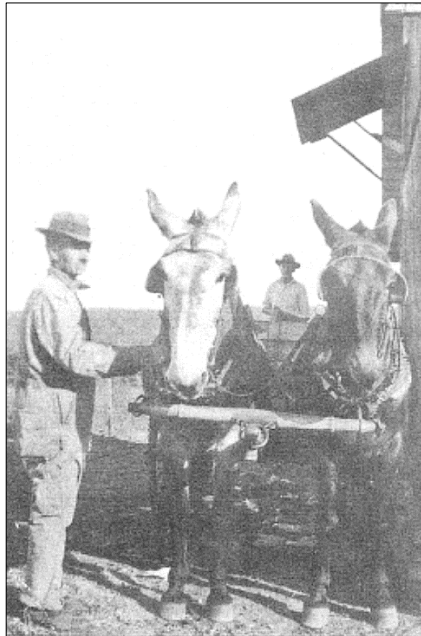
By Doris Matlock

My dad, Lowell L. Dunn worked hard in the fields of our eighty-acre farm in northeastern Oklahoma in the 1930s-1940s. He had a team of mules that were big and strong and served him well.

From the earliest I can remember until I was 7 years old, I played all over the farm and followed Daddy when he plowed, harvested the corn, or did whatever work he had to do.

One day when I was about 6, I saw him hitch up his old mules and start down the path, which led past the spring and over toward the fields. I followed him over to the east field where he was preparing the ground for planting corn.

I stood at the edge of the field and watched as the team circled the field, the old-fashioned turning plow slicing into the rich, dark earth. With each turn, the plow left deep furrows



"Daddy" Lowell Dunn and his mules

of shiny, black soil. It was a perfect place to play! I settled down with the sticks, leaves, and fruit jar lids I had brought in the pockets of my play dress.

Suddenly I heard my daddy yelling, “Whoa mules!” I looked up and the mules were just about twenty feet away, coming straight toward me! I jumped up and ran to the edge of the plowed row. I had been so intent on building my make-believe village that I hadn’t seen or heard the mules whinnying and rearing up.

Daddy hadn’t understood why they were so spooked until he saw me. He soon settled them down, tied the check-lines to the plow handles and came over to me. “Sister,” he said, “I don’t mind you playing over here, but you have to be careful and stay out of the way of these mules. You could have been badly hurt!”

“OK Daddy,” I said. “I promise to be careful and play far away from the mules.” Then he gave me a big hug and sent me back to play in the yard.

I stopped at the spring for a drink of cool, clear water before heading to the house to see if Momma needed my help. I wanted to get in her good graces because I knew that Daddy would tell her of our harrowing experience that day.

Sure enough, after the discussions at the supper table and a scolding from Momma, I learned to be very careful about where I set up a playhouse, and to always show due respect for Daddy’s Mules.

A WILD RIDE ON FOXY

By Doris Matlock

“Hey, Momma, it’s such a beautiful spring day,” I said. “I think I’ll go for a walk up the road.”

Momma replied, “OK, but don’t be long, we have washin’ to do.” My 12-year-old thoughts were far from doing laundry.

I was making an excuse to take another look at Foxy, a young stallion tied to a sapling in our country lane. He belonged to Richard, a friend of my brother Don. They were talking near the barn, and I heard Richard say he didn’t want any of us kids to try and ride Foxy. He said, “He’s very Foxy, and will try to buck you and run.”

I quickly left our yard and walked up the lane. I just stood and watched Foxy. He looked so handsome and stately standing there, his head held high and prancing. He was about two years old with a shiny, reddish-brown coat. His new saddle and rhinestone-studded bridle was glittering in the sun.

I gave in to temptation. No one was looking. I was hidden by the trees. I climbed up quickly, got seated, and he instantly whirled and took off in a dead run! I grabbed the saddle horn as the reins were flying in the wind below his neck,

I had never been so scared in all my life! I was afraid to turn loose as I surveyed the gravel road on which we were traveling. Rocks and gravels were swirling by underneath Foxy’s feet as we neared my cousin’s house about a quarter mile up the road. I was

screaming at the top of my lungs as we passed my dad and cousin Albert in the yard. Foxy raced on at top speed and didn't turn the corner by the school but ran down a steep hill instead. I was breathless now and getting so tired. As he galloped up the next hill, I turned loose and fell right into the rocks, weeds, and brush!

I lay there moaning. My cousin and dad chased after us as soon as they saw us fly by. Dad picked me up and carried me back to Albert's house. I kept screaming, "My back, my back!" It felt like it was broken. I later learned that the jerking motion of the fast ride had hurt my back muscles more than the fall.

As soon as Dad looked me over and saw that I was all right, he took me home. Mom put me to bed and made me as comfortable as possible. Dad kept saying, "What in the world got into that girl? Gittin' on that wild stallion?"

Mom said, "I told all the kids not to be botherin' around that horse."

"Well, I reckon she's learned her lesson." Dad said, "Do you think she broke any bones?"

"No," mom said, "I've checked her over good. Let's let her rest a while and I'll rub some liniment on her back and legs." Mom and Dad both gave me hugs and dried my tears. I didn't even have to say, "I'm sorry." My moans and groans proved that.

Everyone went back to their work and I was left to rethink the Bible verse, "Children, obey your parents." I eventually recovered in a few days with no broken bones, just bruises, aches, pains, and mostly a bruised ego.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

By Doris Matlock

On my first day of school, I was so excited! It was Sept. 4, 1944 when my daddy walked with me to our one-room schoolhouse for the first time, from my grandpa's big white farmhouse where we lived a quarter mile away.

Momma had made me a new dress for my first day of school. It was made of cotton with big flowers in fall colors: brown, yellow and orange, on a green background. I had new shoes, and my long hair was slicked back and braided into pigtails. Daddy took me to school because Momma was at home with my baby brother.

I held Daddy's hand tightly as we walked with some other children into the schoolyard. It was all so beautiful and new to me. Our school had been built in 1936 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a government program during the Depression era. The building was made of sandstone that had been brought there in horse-drawn wagons by workers from the surrounding hills. It still stands today, sturdy and strong.

I loved that school. Going through those doors was like entering a magic kingdom. I soaked up knowledge like a big sponge. I developed a love of reading and writing that has helped me through many a tough situation.

Our first teacher kept good order in all eight grades. We younger children were seated in the front of the room so she could help us more. Sometimes she selected some of the older students to help us with reading and arithmetic. We had one teacher for all eight

grades until about 1948, when two teachers were hired, one for the first through fourth grades, and the other for the fifth through eighth grades.

At home we had only a few farm magazines and newspapers to read, so the charts, books and number cards at school fascinated me. I had never had my own books before. Momma and Granny had helped me with my ABCs before I started school, but no children's books were available. To this day, the smells of chalk, new books, and freshly painted classrooms still bring enchanting memories.

Some of us who lived close to the school walked home for lunch. Momma usually had a pot of pinto beans and corn bread for my brothers, sister, and me.

We enjoyed our recesses so much because we had to be very quiet and still during study time inside. The younger boys and girls played hopscotch, marbles, pop goes the weasel, go in and out the window, and jump rope. The girls also played jacks on the cement steps. The older children played rougher games like red rover, crack the whip, flying dutchmen, softball, and annie-over.

In the afternoon, each class was called up to recite their lessons and listen to explanations and illustrations from the teacher. My best teacher was Mr. Dan Herrington, a fine gentleman and scholar. He taught grades five through eight. He loved to tell us stories about real events that made our lessons so clear and relevant.

Mr. Harrington always made our history lessons so alive and interesting. He and his wife Mary, and daughter Beth, traveled

throughout the south over many summers to visit historical locations and museums. Then in the fall he showed us the brochures and other pictures as we studied from our history books.

Daddy was a member of the school board. In my mind, that was as good as being President of the United States. I reminded the other kids quite frequently that my dad was on the board. On one occasion, I told this in a threatening way to some boys who were bothering me. It must have worked because they never bothered me again.

Our classrooms and the methods of teaching in the 1940s might be considered primitive today, but the discipline and community spirit we learned and experienced within those walls can't be beat.



White Oak School, Qualls, OK

PIE SUPPERS & CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS

By Doris Matlock

The small country school of White Oak is situated in the community of Qualls, about 17 miles southeast of Tahlequah, in Cherokee County OK. In the 1930s and 1940s, the annual pie suppers and Christmas programs held there were the highlights of our farm community's social calendar.

In late October and early November, two pie suppers were held to raise money for Christmas gifts for the school children. All the ladies brought pies, beautifully wrapped in bright paper, to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. The name of each baker was discreetly pinned to the paper. Teenage girls hoped that their boyfriend would buy their pie so that they could eat together. The husbands all bought their wives' pies.

We enjoyed other entertaining events after the pies were sold. For the cakewalk, a large circle of chalked squares was drawn on the wooden floor. Each square was numbered. Individuals and couples who had bought tickets started walking around the circle as music was played on a wind-up record player. A number was called out, and when the music stopped, whoever was standing on that number won a cake.

After that, a jar of dill pickles was ready for the "lovesick couple" (teenagers who were sweet on each other). These couples were nominated by someone putting down money to have their names written on the chalkboard. A time limit was set, and the couple who made the most money would have to come to the front of the room and together, take a bite from a pickle held by the

auctioneer. The embarrassed couple endured much clapping and laughter from the audience, but it was all in good fun and humor.

Next was the Pretty Girl Cake. Girls' names were written on the chalkboard and the girl who got the most votes, backed by money, got the cake.

Finally, a bar of soap, usually homemade lye soap, was ready for the man with the dirtiest feet. Names were put on the chalkboard, and again, the man who got the most votes and the most money had to come to the front of the room, take off a boot, and hold up his foot for all to see----and smell!

One of the most joyous times of my childhood was the Christmas program made possible by these pie suppers. It was held a few days before Christmas and the whole community participated.

We began planning in November. The teacher decided which students would be in the play and who would give individual speeches. The young bashful ones were given small parts and coached gently by the older students. The welcome speech was a rousing one given by a brave student who could deliver with a clear, confident voice, since we had no microphones in those days.

Our one-room schoolhouse was decorated with red paper bells strung high from one wall to the other. Green and silver crepe paper ropes crisscrossed just below the ceiling and colorful paper chains made by the students decorated the windows. Two large Christmas wreaths were hung on either side of the curtains. The curtains were large white sheets hung on wires stretched across the front of the stage.

A few days before the program, a couple of the dads and some of the bigger boys would bring in a cedar tree nailed to a stand and put it in one corner of the room by the stage. The teacher and older girls would decorate it while the rest of us were out playing at recess.

I remember so well the fragrance of the tree and how festive and bright the whole room was. The tree had lots of ornaments and sparkling icicles. Then, on the night of the program, more good smells came from the big boxes of fruit, candy and presents under the tree.

The program was held on a Friday night. Our lighting was provided by gasoline lanterns. All the parents and grandparents came to see their children “say their pieces” and perform their parts in the play, which was usually a humorous one.

At the end of the program, the spotlight was on the nativity scene with the appropriate actors, and the Christmas story was read from Luke’s Gospel.

Then came the moment all the kids had been waiting for—getting their presents from under the tree! Suddenly Santa would appear through the north door, from behind the Christmas tree, with shouts of “Ho, Ho, Ho,” and “MERRY CHRISTMAS! He would hand out gifts and talk to the little ones. There was lots of happy laughter and rustling of paper. Each family received a sack of fruit, nuts, and candy.

This community project provided a very happy time for our small farm community and made for a very joyous and memorable Christmas in the “Good Old Days.”

THE OLD COUNTRY STORE

By Doris Matlock

I can still hear the swish of the screen door and the creak of the old wooden floor as I hurried in with my basket of eggs. Oh, the mingled fragrances of candies, vanilla, spices, dry goods, medicinal concoctions, and cold soda pop that linger in my memory.



Qualls Mercantile, Cherokee County, OK

Mrs. Clem Meigs, the kind proprietor, patiently counted the eggs I had brought to trade for a package of pinto beans for Momma, a pound of nails for Dad and for me, a cold bottle of RC Cola and a Hershey bar. We lived just about half a mile from the store, so I often walked there on an errand for Momma or just to visit and

buy some bubble gum. The old “Qualls Mercantile” was the hub of our Oklahoma community. It was about 15 miles from the nearest town of Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation.

Before Easter one year, Momma let me pick out some dress material from Clem’s store. Momma sewed the pretty purple fabric into a beautiful Easter dress, and I was proud to wear it to our small community church on Easter Sunday.

Folks from the local Native American communities would also gather in the late afternoon to visit at the store, have a cold drink of soda pop, and buy their staples. The men usually stayed outside, talking, and smoking while their wives went inside to visit and purchase goods. Sometimes in the summer, they would sit on the low counters near the ice-filled case of soda pop. I would sit as close as I dared and listen intently, trying to figure out what they were saying. I loved their laughter. They were always gracious and kind to everyone, especially a curious little child like me.

That’s where I first heard the Cherokee Language. The deep, throaty sounds of the adult conversations were intriguing. I would follow outside when they finished shopping to hear them speak Cherokee to their children who were playing in the shade of the tall oaks beside the store. The ladies spoke in soft, husky tones. Occasionally they spoke sternly to the children if they wandered near the gravel road.

Many families didn’t have a car in those days of the 1930s and 1940s, so our local store was much appreciated. I sometimes watched the store owner pump the red gasoline up into the store’s single gas pump for the customer who was waiting to fill up. Gas cost was about 24 cents a gallon in the early 1940s before the war.

After school, our school bus driver sometimes stopped at the store and let those of us who had a little change go in and buy a pop and a candy bar. We didn't dally long though, as the driver was waiting with the motor running.



Original showcase and counter at Qualls Mercantile

The store stood at the intersection of two main roads. Many communities were off to the west, and many more to the east and north. To the south was the “Cantonement”, as some folks called it – about 30,000 acres of wooded hills, large streams, and many miles of wilderness for soldiers to engage in mock battles and practice all kinds of military maneuvers. It was Camp Gruber, the Army camp where US soldiers trained before going overseas to fight in World War II.

I think the soldiers out on bivouac were surprised to find the store so handy. They were always courteous. Some of them from northern states were curious about our southern accents. We

thought they were a little “uppity” with their Yankee accents, but everybody was just teasing and having fun.

The old Qualls store still stands today although it has been converted into a restaurant called Jincy’s Kitchen. It is family-owned and has very good old-fashioned home cookin’. Jack Rucker and his wife Rena Mae, and their daughter Debbie are the owners now. The original owner, Jincy Lane, was Jack’s grandmother. She opened the store at Qualls around 1900.

Many of the original furnishings are still in the store, including many antiques from the 1930s, 1040s, and 1050s. The counters, shelves and showcases are still in place, just like in the “Good Old Days.”



“Grandpa” Levi Patterson Dunn
“Justice of the Peace”, Qualls, OK



Doris Irene Dunn

CHORES AND CHOCOLATE DROPS

By Doris Matlock

During my early childhood, my family and I lived with my grandparents Levi and Sarah Dunn on a big farm in northeastern Oklahoma.

I had chores to do, but also lots of fun things to do in the summertime. One fun thing in particular was walking down the gravel road with Grandpa to the old country store. While Grandpa was shopping, I would have the chance to ask him for some chocolate drops. These were big, fat chunks of vanilla creme with a thick chocolate covering.

On this particular day, I was on the hunt for Grandpa. I had just finished sweeping off one of the big, long porches for Granny and thought I deserved a treat. I had just turned 5, and Granny was adding a few more chores. Mom and Dad were working in the fields, so I was to mind Grandpa and Granny.

I saw Grandpa coming out of the kitchen, fresh from his afternoon coffee with Granny. I remember so well walking barefoot across Grandpa's long west porch. It was August, and the wooden boards were very hot on my little bare feet.

"Hey Grandpa, could we go to the store for beans and stuff, and maybe some Chocolate Drops"? I asked.

"Well, Sis, since you have finished sweeping this porch, put your shoes on and off we'll go!"

As we walked the quarter mile to the store, Grandpa talked about how hot it was, “But,” he said, “this is not as hot and muggy as my days in Chatsworth, GA, when I was a little boy working in the cotton fields, facing the long rows that seemed a mile long to me.”

“Did you get paid, Grandpa?” I said. “Yes, with good food on the table and a little time off to go fishing in the creek,” said Grandpa. “Those were good days but a lot of hard work.” “I help Momma in the garden, Grandpa.” I said. “Pulling weeds and things.” “I know you do Sis, and that’s good.” said Grandpa. “You’re paying for your keep.” “Paying for what, Grandpa?” “Never mind Sis, we’re almost to the store.”

I skipped ahead and climbed the stone steps to the porch. I opened the screen-door for Grandpa, and we stepped inside. Delicious smells wafted through the air. The aromas of different kinds of candy, soda pop and baked goods assailed my nostrils. Dried beans, potatoes, and many other staple goods added to the smells, but my interest was in the sweets. It was warm inside but that didn’t bother me. I was busy looking at all the candy, gum, and other goodies in the big glass candy case next to the grocery shelf.

The “store lady”, as I called her, came toward us from her rocking chair over by the dry goods shelf. “Good afternoon, Miss Clem,” said Grandpa. “Good afternoon to you, Mr. Dunn” said Clem. “What can I get for you today?” “Well, a pound of pinto beans for the wife and a jar of that good molasses will do.” Said Grandpa.

I tugged at Grandpa’s sleeve, “What about the candy, Grandpa?” I whispered. He chuckled and said, “Oh, yes, and 10 cents worth of chocolate drops and 10 cents worth of peppermint chunks.”

I watched with wonderment as the store lady rang up the sales on her big silver cash register. It made clanging and ringing noises, all foreign sounds to my young ears.

“That’ll be one dollar and 53 cents, Mr. Dunn.” she said. Grandpa handed her a dollar from his shirt-pocket, then fished in his trouser pocket for the 53 cents. I was gripping his other hand, eager to head out the door with our stash of candy.

As we climbed down the porch steps, Grandpa said, “Hold on, Sis, I’m not as young as you are, you know!” I slowed down and held onto his arm. “Did you forget your cane, Grandpa?” I said. “Nah,” he said, “I don’t need it ‘less’n I walk a mile or two.”

After we had walked a little way, we stopped and, as I was hoping, Grandpa opened the candy sack and let me pick out two big, fat chocolate drops. I never tasted anything so good! Grandpa popped one in his mouth too. We walked in silence for quite a while as we enjoyed our long-awaited treat. We no longer noticed the heat of the day, nor the beads of sweat on our faces.

Soon we were back home, and two happy people plopped down on the steps of the front porch. Grandpa was fanning himself with his hat and I was reaching for another chocolate drop when the screen door opened and out walked Granny.

Looking at me, she said, “I believe I mentioned sweeping the porches. You have swept the west porch, but what about the other two? Remember our rule for children? You can play after your chores are done.” “Yes ma’am Granny, I’ll go get a drink and finish my sweeping. And here, you can sit by Grandpa and have some of our delicious chocolate drops!”

THE OLD HOME PLACE

By Doris Matlock

I think a lot of people from the “Good Old Days” can remember an old home place built by their parents or grandparents. The farmhouse my grandpa built around 1906 still stands today, and holds lots of good memories for his grandchildren and great grandchildren.



Dunn Farmhouse, Qualls, OK

My Grandpa, Levi Patterson Dunn, came to Oklahoma, then called Indian Territory, in 1889. He traveled from Spring Place, Georgia, by covered wagon with his wife Sarah Jones Dunn and their three children. In later years, seven more children were born to their family.

The big white house he built in Cherokee County Oklahoma was much like some of the old southern homes where he was born near Chatsworth, Georgia. It was white, trimmed in blue and the front

porch had ornate woodcarvings on the porch supports. There was a feeling of royalty about the place, but Grandpa “ruled” his household with warmth and love. He made some of the furniture himself and forged a lot of the tools in his blacksmith shop.

The farm sat on eighty acres of fertile bottomland. White Oak Creek runs through it, and there is a spring that never goes dry. To this day the spring water still tastes good and supplies White Oak Creek with fresh, clear water.

When Grandpa bought the place, he added two large rooms to the existing two-room house, to form a “T”. The house had wide, long porches on three sides with doors opening onto the porches. You couldn’t get to another room without going out on the porch, because the two doors from each room opened only to the outside. Each large room was like a separate apartment. The two “front rooms” had big fireplaces, back-to-back, with lots of windows and a closet in each room.

The kitchen had an 8-foot dining table with chairs for the adults and a long bench for us kids. Granny always kept the salt and pepper shakers, sugar, butter, jellies, and a teaspoon holder in the center of the table, covered by a tea towel. I loved to sneak in there, lift that cloth and see what I could find for a snack. Granny warned us kids about not “messin and gaumin” in her kitchen. But sometimes she would allow us to get a cold biscuit filled with peanut butter or butter and jelly.

The old-fashioned wood-burning cook stove had a warming closet which held left-over fried chicken, biscuits, or cornbread, and usually molasses cookies.

My brothers, sister, and lots of cousins played under the massive trees, and in the evenings we all sat on the long front porch and listened to the adults tell stories about their childhood in Tennessee and Georgia. Then there were lots of interesting tales about the settlers in our own area. Many of our best friends and neighbors were, and are, Cherokee. Some of my dad's best hunting and fishing buddies were Cherokees who lived along the nearby Illinois river.

Grandpa loved company and he welcomed visitors at any time. I still remember his hearty laugh as he talked with visitors around the dinner table in Granny's big, country kitchen.

Grandpa was the local Justice of the Peace. He married people and settled disputes, usually right there in the living-room of his own home. His farm had a blacksmith shop and a large barn. There were cows, pigs, horses, and mules for plowing. A big chicken house held lots of chickens, and usually a few ducks and geese.

We always had a big vegetable garden, potato patch and sweet corn patch. A small log cabin sat in the backyard for storing hog meat and a place for storing potatoes and onions. In the winter it was also the washhouse.

A washtub and a rub board were used for years until about 1940 when Uncle Bob bought the ladies their first gasoline powered washing machine. What a blessed day that was! He got a lot of praise--and clean overalls.

Uncle Bob never had children of his own, so he was especially fond of his nieces and nephews. He brought me a cute little

teddy bear from town one day and gave it to me after I had answered “yes” to the question he asked while holding the bear behind his back: “Have you done all your chores for today?”

During the depression years, my family lived with Grandpa and Granny. Daddy helped with the farming and Momma helped with housework, gardening, canning, and fieldwork too. My older siblings also did a lot of farm work.

By the time I came along, my family had already lived there for about six years. My first seven years were filled with a lot of play, roaming the big yard and pastures, and resting with my Grandpa in his big rocking chair and listening to his stories.

I still return to the old home place, just to walk around, look at the beautiful old trees and reminisce about the “Good Old Days.”



Sarah and Levi Dunn, 1944

THIS OLD HOUSE

By Doris Matlock



My days are numbered I suppose, but many happy memories still reside within my walls. I'm dark inside most days unless the sun is very bright. I've never had electric lights, but my old kerosene lamps give just the right amount of light anyway.

My family would often sit at night around the kitchen table and discuss the happenings of the day. The lamp light would shine ever brighter as the sunlight faded and gave way to the twilight hours.

My owner was a farmer who loved tilling the land, and his wife, loved gardening. preserving fruits and vegetables and sewing for the whole family. Their children always did their homework right after supper by the light of my lamps.

Ah, for the Good Old Days! But then, nothing lasts forever. “For the things which are seen are transient, but the things which are unseen are eternal.” I remember hearing that scripture from 2nd Corinthians around the kitchen table as the kids prepared for their Sunday school lesson. That memory helps me as my walls and frame gradually decay. But I’m still standing, and the trees are growing very close to my sides to help hold me together.

I’ve had a very good life, not as a big fancy house, but as a small, love-filled home, way out in the peaceful countryside. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Psalm 121:1 is a favorite scripture of mine. It doesn’t get any better than that!

Early on, I had just two main rooms, then later two smaller back rooms were added on. My front porch was very important, so it was framed right along with the very first boards being put up.

My front porch became the resting place for tired bodies after supper, with cool breezes blowing softly, and the sound of night birds and insects calling in the distance. Many tales of childhood experiences, questions answered for the kids, and sometimes ghost stories, were heard nightly from that porch. It was also a great place just for visitin’ with the neighbors.

Family relatives helped with my construction, along with three other families who homesteaded nearby parcels of land. The year

was 1905. My, how time flies! In my peaceful setting there was such contentment. Each day was savored like a delicious piece of chocolate cream pie.

Oh, the fragrances that filled my little house from morning 'til night. First, perking coffee on the big Home Comfort wood-burning cook-stove, then biscuits baking and thick slices of bacon sizzling in a cast iron skillet. Noon usually meant pinto beans bubbling for hours as the mother busied herself with cleaning, sewing, and reading. By supper time, she had seasoned the beans with bacon drippings, baked cornbread, and fried potatoes. A juicy blackberry cobbler made from fresh-picked berries from along the garden fence was a favorite dessert. Fresh milk from Old Jersey was everyone's suppertime drink.

Springtime would bring storms and cyclones (as they were called back in those days), that tested my sturdy little structure. But as you can see, I'm still standing, and if someone had a mind to shore me up, I can still provide good shelter.

Those Oklahoma storms really rattled my windows and shook my rafters many times. I remember one night in late May of 1938, a very strong cyclone roared past us to the south, and I thought for sure I might go down. My family was huddled in the kitchen praying. And don't you know? That prayer was stronger than that old cyclone. Such relief was felt by all after that storm passed through, leaving us unharmed.

Flashes of lightning could still be seen to the east as my family prepared to go back to bed. I heard little Joanna say, "Momma, I'm thankful for our strong house, and I believe it can hold off any old storm!" Boy, that made me feel good, and I was determined

not to let that little girl down! Her momma replied, “Yes, Joanna, our house is strong, and we serve a Mighty God who protects us, too.” Soon I heard peaceful snoring as the whole family rested within my sturdy frame.

One day a young lady came driving up in an old Model T Ford and said she wanted to interview my family. They sat on the porch for quite a spell, just visitin’ and tellin’ this girl about our farm life. Later I heard her recall this visit after she had married and settled down on a neighboring farm. She said that was the most pleasant time she could ever recall. She had the job of taking the farm census, and just loved talking with the local farm owners.

As they sat on the porch, she could smell sweet potatoes baking while hearing about my family and the fun things the kids did, like swimming in the nearby creek, and going on picnics. Now, every time she smells sweet potatoes baking, she remembers that time on my porch. There was just something about my family’s manner that conveyed their love of the land, farm animals, and family, that the girl always remembered.

I had a scare back in 1953. A city-slicker came by in his new Chevy and tried his best to talk my family into selling me for a very good price. I was shaking on my foundation as I heard all the good things he promised. It seemed that a big four-lane highway was planned to go in a few miles to the south, and this feller wanted to buy up my land in case stores might be built. Well, we listened politely, but thankfully, my family said no. The man left in a huff and was I ever relieved! Later, we heard the highway project was delayed and probably wouldn’t go close by anyway. What a relief! Now I could rest easy on my cornerstones.

My happiest memory was when little Joanna was married right here in my own living room! Her young feller was a handsome young man from across the river. They met in high school and both planned to go to college. What a happy wedding day that was! Joanna's brother was home on leave from the marines and the whole family had the time of their lives! All the neighbors came, and everyone had such a good time. It was a beautiful clear, crisp autumn day in September. Dinner was served on picnic tables out under the trees. The kids tied tin cans to the wedding couples' back bumper and away they went on their honeymoon.

I don't like to talk about sad times, but eventually they come to us all. My family is gone now. The kids drive by occasionally, just to have a look and reminisce. I want to yell, "Hey! come back, sit on the porch, draw up a bucket of water from the well and have a cool drink!"

Soon I have just silence, and the breeze whispering in the trees. I've had a good life. No regrets. How I wish all people could say that.

An old house doesn't have a personality, you say? Just come sit on my porch and see and feel and think. You'll find out. And you'll go away refreshed, renewed, and strengthened. Ready for each new day.

The restorative powers of places where love has been always lives on.

COUNTRY MAILBOX

By Doris Matlock

Oh, what a joy to hurry and open that mailbox lid and peek inside to see what the mailman brought today!

As a kid, back in the 1940s and 1950s, that was the highlight of the day, to see what's in the mailbox. Along about noon we would hear the mailman's pickup truck coming down the dirt road. Sometimes it was a package from Sears, Roebuck & Co., or a long letter from a friend or relative. Farm magazines like Cappers Weekly or Grit were always welcome for the whole family. These magazines are still around today, with farm news, recipes, and inspirational stories.

When I was about 12 years old, I had a pen pal in Japan. Now that was a treat to get a letter from so far away! Once I started high school and got so busy with new friends and studying, those letters eventually tapered off.

Mom was always ordering something, so she was as excited as us kids to go to the mailbox. Some of our clothes, shoes, and household items were ordered since we didn't travel the 30 miles round-trip to town and back very often.

Nowadays, we hear of the financial troubles facing the postal service. I sure hope things work out, so that we always have mail delivery. I would sorely miss not going out to my little country mailbox every day.

SUPPER AT EDNA'S

By Doris Matlock

Suddenly Ada said, "I smell smoke!"

I looked around and sure enough, in the booth to our left was a man with a cigarette in his mouth. So I said, "We'll move."

"Oh, that's OK." Ada said.

"No, when the waitress comes back, I'll ask about the non-smoking area for this restaurant." I replied.

When asked, the friendly waitress said, "Sure, the non-smoking area is right over to your left."

If we had only read the sign when we came in! 'Read the directions,' or 'follow the signs,' had become an inside joke for my sister and I on this wild vacation trip through Georgia, as we stumbled and laughed our way through one hilarious episode after another.

Earlier in the day, a petite little aristocratic lady at the tourist office had told us "I just cain't think of a better place to tell ya'll to eat, than the mah-velous restaurant out on Route 33 called Edna's. They have good, home-cooked food with luscious pies and all the fixin's."

As the waitress brought us our tea, Ada said, "I'm glad we finally found this place. I'm starved!" She promptly put in Sweet and Low, as she always does, while I took a sip.

“Whoa Nellie! This is already sweetened!” I said. Ada took a sip and hers was doubly sweet. She offered to take mine. “No, we’ll just ask for two new teas and start over because I don’t want any sugar in mine” I said.

Soon our waitress returned, and we ordered. Ada ordered fried chicken and I ordered meatloaf. The waitress did, without comment take the first two glasses of tea and bring us two more, this time unsweetened.

We waited quite a while as Ada tried to get comfortable on the booth seat. She is short, and the plastic seat had a small crater where many butts had landed. A friendly fly buzzed us intermittently throughout our stay, but we shooed him away with our colorful embroidered napkins.

Our waitress finally came sauntering back with two plates of meatloaf and left quickly as my poor sister sat staring at her ‘meatloaf chicken.’ “Hey,” I said, “I’ll tell her.”

When the waitress came back to bring the bread I said, “I’m sorry to bother you again, but my sister ordered fried chicken.” She looked where I was pointing to the word ‘chic’ on the order lying on the table.

“Oh,” she said, “I never read my orders” as she took Ada’s plate and shuffled back towards the kitchen. By this time we were extra hungry, tired, annoyed, and silly, so we just laughed and said grace for what food we did have. We were finding out that the hired help at Edna’s had us wondering about the so-called ‘southern charm’ of the place.

Soon our waitress was back, plopped down the fried chicken, swirled around and mumbled, “There ye are.” Now we were ready to start eating.

The food was actually very good. With our meat we had turnip greens, corn, potatoes, grits, green beans, and brown beans. Also good southern cornbread baked in a cast iron skillet, and fluffy rolls, cold though they were.

Our waitress never came back to re-fill our glasses or ask if we wanted anything else. When we finished the main course, we waved her down as she sauntered her way back from another poor sucker’s booth.

“What kind of dessert do you have?” I asked.

Ada had already looked at the menu and saw carrot cake. “I want a big ‘ole piece of carrot cake!” she said.

“Ma’am, we’re all out of carrot cake.” She waited, eyes on the ceiling.

“Um-mm,” said Ada, “I like pecan pie, I’ll have that” she said with a smile.

She studied for a moment, seemingly checking the far-reaching recesses of her mind. “Nope, Ma’am, would you believe, we’re all out of pecan pie too?”

At this, Ada said, “I’m gonna bop you one!” This produced a crooked toothless grin but not much concern.

Ada was nearly speechless by then, so I said, “OK, I’ll have some of your peanut butter pie.”

“OK,” she said, “We got that!”

The waitress trailed off to get my pie, and I told Ada that we could share. We were too tired to go through any more negotiations. “I’m not givin’ her a tip though,” I said.

“Oh, come on,” said my kind-hearted sister.

“OK.” I said, “One dollar.” We managed to rake up \$3.78, which I left in the pools of water from the iced tea glasses.

Our waitress had disappeared into the kitchen, never to return. She was probably perched on a stool, happily eating the last piece of carrot cake, cackling like a witch, as Ada and I hurried out the door.



Doris and her sister Ada

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