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## **The Early Thirties**

By Barbara Mooney Myers

Excerpt from James W. Mooney's hand - written in spiral notebooks

This story starts before I was even born over 70 years ago. My dad started out his story a few years after he and Mom married. My oldest sister Dorthy was about 5 years old. My brother Buford was around 3 years old.

Dad

"That year (1932) in Dayton, Ohio, where I had been working for G.M.C. Auto Association, we were laid off from the job. The weather was damp and cold outside.

My wife Josephine and I kept thinking if we should stay on here renting where we live or go back to Tennessee to try again. Finally my wife decided home was the place to be, there near our families. We loaded up everything we had that could get into the car with us, and took it with us. We packed other things and put them with the furniture to be shipped by train to Coalmont, TN.

We said goodbye to our friends and neighbors there in Dayton that day and set out for home. We hit Route 25 and headed South toward Lexington, KY. There we hit Route 27 then on into Chattanooga, TN. We spent the night with an uncle and aunt and their family. They lived in Red Bank on the outskirts of town. While we were there I looked around for a job, but had no luck at it. I told my family, ' Looks as though those coal mines await me on the mountain'. So we said goodbye again, and set out for Coalmont, TN.

We stopped to visit my sister Lillie (Mooney) Bone there in Coalmont. She married Samuel Bone. They had several children then at home. There we spent a couple days and nights. I searched around for us a place to live. We had managed to save about \$500 while I worked at G.M.C. Auto Association through their union there in Dayton, OH, so we had a little to start out on. I found this little house and small farm owned by Ed Sweeton at Gruetli, TN, only a few miles from Coalmont. I paid Ed a small down payment on the house and we waited for the train to arrive a few days later with our furniture.

A job was my next alternative. Jobs were hard to find. I wanted to get settled down, get my family a home, and us get back to normal. Ed Sweeton and I cut timber to make broom handles. They sold at two cent apiece. The logs were pine and cut four and a half feet long at a sawmill. Each was cleaned of its knots. We hardly made anything for pine trees, You found so many culls in them, so making money was difficult. So finding a job that paid more was what I done after a few weeks at helping Ed. I went to the coalmines at Ross Creek. The mines at the time were run by Sewanee Fuel and Iron Company. They, too, like other larger mines, went busted, but were still running two or three days a week. Ed Sweeton came along with me to look for a job. We finally found the right entry where to go in and ask for a job. There we talked to George Tate and Barney Johnson. They had the eleventh right entry contracted on the mines.

Here in the mines I took a place to work. It was a small eighteen inch, chest high opening, and digging coal would widen it a little at a time. It paid 75 cents per ton for the coal. After standing up all day at a factory in Ohio, it would really be different for a man to lay down on his side and dig a ton of coal. To support a family it took some hard digging to make \$.75 to \$1.00 a day. It took over 100 to 112 shovels full of coal to make a ton. And these were the largest shovels ever made. Each day I would try to dig 100 to 112 shovels myself. It was hard work. Making a dollar a day was about all you could do in a day. Those days in the thirties were called 'the Hoover Days'. Some even called them 'the Depression Days' which ever it was the hardest times for a family.

I had to let the farm go for getting enough money for Ed was hard, and supporting my family took all I made to buy food, and live on from week to week. The house we had lived in set there empty for a long time. I had moved my family to a two- room house a few miles distance from where we had lived. They had built the chimney on the wrong side of the house. When it rained, it rained down the chimney. We moved there the last of January in 1932 near the Swiss Colony there in Gruetli, TN. Like most mountain areas was cold and damp outside. It took a lot of wood and coal to keep a family warm through the long winter months. We lived around the woods, so there was plenty of good firewood all around. One big log kept a good fire going all night. From here I could walk to catch the miners' bus to and from work. After arriving to the road, we still rode 5 miles to the mines. From there we'd ride another 3- mile trip <sup>And forth</sup> back into the mines. Here we'd begin our jobs day after day.

I'd leave home about 5:00 in the morning, long before daylight and arrive home way after dark every night. So being home with my family grew less and less for me, except on weekends. During these times few of us had the right foods to eat. Mornings we sat down to a breakfast of only cornbread, white fat back fried, and water meal gravy. Often good coffee, but many times it was made from left over grounds reboiled. We drank a lot of chickory coffee then, for it lasted longer. At lunch or supper, we had dried cooked beans, boiled or fried potatoes or 'taters' as most of us called them, and a pan or skillet of corn bread. No butter for us unless we could afford to buy it, or owned a cow.

That spring my neighbor Bill Jones came up, brought his mules and plowed us up a space for a garden. My wife and I took advantage of this by getting seed potatoes from her uncle there. We managed to buy the other seed on credit from the local grocer to plant. We sure filled our empty jars and tummies that season with fresh, home grown vegetables. My wife canned up corn, beans, tomatoes, beet pickles and home made relishes. When ripe blackberries and blue berries, or as we called them huckleberries, and apples were in, we took advantage of them too. We had blackberry or huckleberry cobbler for dessert or fried or even baked apple pies as well. We fixed lots of dried apples to last most of the winter, canned jams, jellies and fruits. This maybe lasted a few months before we'd see our shelves and jars get empty again. That summer I got my 1928 Whippet car out to drive. I had it set up on blocks in a woodshed. The tires I had stored to prevent them from dry rotting. I got the battery recharged, and put the tires on. We had only one place in Coalmont that recharged batteries. After getting this accomplished, I needed new license plates for the car. They were now \$7.50. I couldn't

get the car started, so I let it roll downhill, and it finally started. I let it run for a while to recharge the battery. I took my wife and children for a ride through the town of Gruetli. Last we stopped at her aunt and uncle Abe and Barbara Hargis's there in the Colony. My wife always enjoyed her visits there so much. They had a lovely home. Last time I had my family a distance from home was on March 13, 1932, when my brother Critt died in Sewanee, TN. It was such a cold bleary day to bury someone. My uncle John Mooney from Sewanee came and got me and my family and took us to Mama and Papa's house. They lived on the other side of Sweanee at this time. We almost froze to death on the back of the truck of Uncle John's. Later we caught the train back home and rode it as far as Coalmont then walked a few miles home from the depot. I remember carrying our son Buford that day. My son, Buford, looked up at me saying, 'Uncle Critt ought to have waited until some other time to die, Daddy'. I told him, 'Son, death is like being born, we can't stop either of them. That's God's decision.' By May that year we were shocked, for my wife was expecting again by June.

During this time my wife felt sickly, and her cousin Myrtle Braden came and spent some time with her. Around June 2, 1932, my wife kept having labor pains that morning. I still went on to work for we needed the money. By 10 o'clock that day, she was in labor without a doctor around, so Myrtle knew to go get Granny Burrows. She was a midwife and had lots of experience delivering babies. That evening on my way home, Mrs. Burrows hollered, 'Bill, you've got a fine looking son born at 11:30 today.' I was delighted he and my wife were OK. When I arrived home, I was dirty with coal dust and needed a bath. First I glanced at my wife and new son. 'What we going to name him', she said. It being June 2<sup>nd</sup>, that was my brother Joe's birthday, 'Lets name him, Joe', I said, 'and we'll use Thomas from my brother and grand father', she said. 'That's great,' I told her. I'll get my bath and hold him and have supper. Myrtle had a good supper on the table waiting for me. By then our garden was nearing an end. We still had a few green onions and tomatoes, cucumbers and squash left. They had about all gone for we'd taken advantage of them this year. Two weeks after our son Joe was born, our four-year-old son Buford took sick, having a bowel problem. The diarrhea was hard to control. He took a high fever with it. I walked to Coalmont to get Dr. Roberts. He came as soon as he could and wrote prescriptions for our son's medicine. We gave him one dose. It hadn't helped him any. By June 18, 1932, he died at the age 4 years, 3 months old. One son had been born to us, and now God had taken another son. It was as if he'd had it planned for my family. Exchange a son for another. I had no money to buy a casket with, so my father helped me buy a casket to bury our son in. My wife's shoes were about off her feet. She had no shoes to wear to the funeral. Her aunt had given her a pair of shoes to wear. We still had our new son and Dorthy, our oldest to raise, so we decided to get back in church among others that we needed. Friendship was a blessing to my wife in those days. My wife was not well, and we needed milk for the baby for she couldn't breastfeed him. We found us a cow by doing some trading - her Singer sewing machine for a cow. We got the cow home and in no time had fresh sweet milk, buttermilk and butter for my family. That year fled by so quickly for us.

We moved again by 1933 to close neighbors' houses. They were Pascal Johnson, the Godsby Family and Hershel Brown and his family. My daughter had changed schools

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was no extra cost. They just traded homes even. Mom hated it for it meant cleaning new ground for our new barn, a place for a large chicken lot for them to wander around and keep us in lots of eggs to eat and new chickens for eating to increase the number of hens for more eggs. Mom sold eggs to the grocery store to help with buying things she needed. In 1943 their last child, a son Charles Mansel, was born. This kept Mom laid up for a few weeks, but like any other mother in those days, a job still awaited her raising and taking care of all the family.

Like one of the old sayings, "A man works from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done". This was true, for it seemed like Mom went around the clock doing something. If we're mothers, we know the duty of being one. It works for working dads as well. When school days arrived for me, my oldest brother Joe was way ahead of me, so I took school seriously, and grew to love it. It took me away from a lot, so I got away from some work at home, but we still had to do our chores. When gardening time came this meant working a lot out of doors, plus I'd help Mom put up the vegetables in jars, for we had no freezer or even electricity at this time. There was always something to do. We'd help Dad stack the stove wood for the kitchen stove. Later in winter it called for both kinds of wood, and we used a lot of coal for the front room heater.

As time passed on and age caught up with us, we realized our home was well worth the time we spent in it. We never starved or had one outfit to wear. For our parents did as much as they could to make it suitable for us. Mom made our clothes, kept us looking nice for school, church, and even home. I wore out so many hand-made jumpers and blouses through the early years that when I got older a jumper stayed far from my sight. Seems Mom only had one pattern that she made them all from.

But my thoughts still remind me often of those days, even today. But I thank God for my parents even when times were hard, they tried making it better for us. They've both passed on now. Only my brother and myself are left out of 8 children. So the memories kept close helps erase the hurt of knowing they're no longer here to spend time with me. As the tombstone reads, "Gone, but not forgotten."

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