

Memories of Growing Up at Raven Point and Lankford Town
By: Norma Joyce Nix Shrum

I was born March 15, 1934 at my grandmother's homeplace. My grandparents were Lambirth and Minda Byars that had a farm near Raven Point in Tracy City, Tn. My mother Nina Mae Byars was the youngest of their nine children.

My grandfather died in 1931 and my mother and her brother Joe were left at home with their mother. Joe had married their brother's widow after the death of Wayne. Wayne and Maude had two children, Byrtle and Verna. After she married Joe they had Floyd , Deloris and Don before I was born, so the house was very crowded.

Mom married a man not from Grundy County. Luther G. Nix grew up in Florence and Birmingham, Alabama. He hitched a ride in an empty boxcar of a train that came to Tracy City in 1931. He got off the train with no money, no food, and no place to go. He met mom's brother Joe who invited dad home with him. After he met my mom he never left. He and mom fell in love and were married in 1932. They had five children, Joyce married Andrew Shrum, Wayne married Sandra, Juanita and last Frances Curtis, Dessie married Floyd Meeks, Joel married Louise Smartt, and George Ray married a girl in Germany, Irmgard Leitch.

Some of the neighbors that had farms near my grandmother were, Will and Martha Anderson, Jess and Libby Bellew, Albert and Rachel Thompson, William Pyburn and wife.

Albert Thompson's wife Rachel was a sister to the Dalton gang. My mother could remember the gang coming to visit their sister when she was a little girl, but they never got off their horses. She watched from a fencerow. Their son Henry later married mom's sister Dessie Byars. They had no children. When I was small they ran a five and ten cent store in Tracy City, Tn. Aunt Dessie died young with tubercolsis.

Two of the Byars sisters married brothers. Bessie married Wilburn Johnson and had two children, Narva and Herbert. Hazel married Roy Johnson and had seven children, Herman, Zelma, Carl, Neva, Douglas, Wesley and Faye.

Herbert Byars never married and died before his father. They said from lifting a large piece of coal that fell on his father in the mines.

Iona Byars married Ben Lankford and had five children, Herbert, Lucille married James Johnson of Grundy Co., Evelyn married Alvin Anderson of Grundy Co., Bennie Jean married James brother Charles (Chick) Johnson of Grundy Co., and Mary.

Cecil Byars married John Meadows and had five children, Gene married Virginia Keel, Ann married Charles Morgan, Doris married (Poocher) Smartt, Lloyd Ray, do not know who he married. Aunt Cecil was burned by a fire in her home and died and a year or so later Haskel was drowned in a well.

Bessie Byars taught school in a one room schoolhouse The school was located on Lankford Town Rd. where the road forks at the top of the hill. She got married and had to quit teaching and the students had to walk all the way to Myers Hill school. That is where my mom went to school.

At the fork of the road lived Mrs. Smith, (MA), Bessie and Wilburn Johnson, George Kilgore, and further out the road Hugh and Glennie Coppinger. The Gregg cemetery is on the road where most of the families in the neighborhood are buried.

When I was about two daddy decided he wanted to go back to Birmingham because he did not have any work. He went by himself and got a job driving a taxi. He lived with his mother and saved enough money to send for Mom and I. After they got a place of their own my grandmother Minda came to live with us. Wayne was born there. Then daddy got knocked in the head and robbed. He was very bad and they had to put a steel plate in his head over the hole. After he got well enough to travel they came back to Tennessee.

They decided to build us a house and cut logs and started on the side of grandmothers property. He built two large rooms and put a partition in one for two bedrooms and then a small kitchen. They got tin cans out of the dump, cut them open and nailed them over tarpaper for the roof.

It was three miles to school and I walked that by myself until mom started Wayne to school at five so I would have someone to walk with me. After we moved to this house our neighbors were families of Anne Harris, Noah Smith, Walter Cagle, Gene Conry, Will Anderson, Bill Mooney, Bill Burgess, Herb Robertson and his dad, Lillie Harris. Closer to town on Lankford Town Rd. were Bertha Sanders, Roy Price, Mrs. Woodlee.

The dinky track owned by the Werner Coal Company ran by our house to the mines to haul coal. The engineer would sometimes throw candy or gum to us and we were always standing in the yard waiting on the train to pass.

Anne Harris had a daughter that had epilepsy. I believe the girls name was Mae. When she got a spell she would start running down the tracks. If we saw her coming by our house we would catch her and hold her until her mother came. We had to put a spoon in her mouth to keep her from chewing her tongue. One day we did not see her and she got by our house to the dinky trussell over the creek and fell and was killed.

We had pigs and chickens, a cow, and other things to help survive in those days. We raised a big garden and my grandmother made hominy. We had a dug well that depended on the rain and a cellar for our canned goods and milk.

My dad got on the NC & St. L Railroad in 1941 Their train was known as the Mountain Goat and they hauled coal from Palmer to Cowan to be loaded on a larger train. Some of the men that worked on the railroad with my dad were J. W. Arbuckle, Alan Shook, "Juke" Shook, G.B. Marler, George Sitz, John Gould, Ed Hunziker, "Porky" Flynn, Charles Schearer, Jack Parmley, Will Payne, Mitchell Sanders, Raymond Short, Murry Arbuckle, Jess Hoosier and J. D. Crownover and others. That was the happiest work he ever had during the war years. Later he worked some in Chattanooga and Guntersville, Al. on the extra board but never had steady work after that. He did sawmill, mining and anything to make a living after that. He died young at 56 in 1963.

Dad had saved enough money to buy a house closer to town when I was in the fifth grade. This was right outside the city limits by the Payne bridge in Lankford Town. After we moved our neighbors were Hazel and Roy Johnson, Clarence and Maggie Coppinger, the McCormick family, Tommy Sanders family, Austin and Susie Thorpe, Roy and Lizzie Guyear, Silas and Mabel Guyear, the Lankford family, Doyle Ellis, Alfred and Agnes Meeks, the Taylor Meeks family, Dee and Mary Johnson, Minnie and Bass Payne, the Tommy Meadows family, Verna and Hershel Anderson, Edwin Shook & wife, Hattie and Henry Dove. This was the families on our side of the Payne bridge.

Sometimes the teacher would keep the whole class after school if there was any disturbance in the class. She would let me go home because I had so far to walk. Well, after we moved I failed to tell her so the first time the class had to stay after school she told me to go home. Next morning the class was mad at me so I had to apologize to the teacher and the class.

We always had a Christmas tree with hand made ornaments and some present. Usually something mom made or a doll for me if I was lucky. The boys usually got a small roll toy. We had an apple, orange and large stick of mint candy that was crushed and divided.

We had to walk to high school because the bus did not run for the students in Tracy City. The girls in the neighborhood usually walked to school together and would pick me up at the bottom of the hill, being the last one. They were Margaret and Betty Guyear, Martha Thorpe, Ruth Guyear, Frances and Verma McCormick. I ate breakfast standing at the back door looking for them.

Madge Anderson married Robert Baggenstoss and they bought her parents farm near Raven Point. My brother Wayne and I worked for them all through high school. Wayne worked some at the bakery but I only helped Madge at the farm.

Wayne and I started going to Sunday School at the Methodist Church after we moved closer to town. My cousins, Neva and Douglas Johnson came to go with us and we would sometimes get in a fight on the way home. Neva could get me down and Wayne could get Doug down so I guess the fights were about even. We always made up the next day and were friends again. We spent a lot of time at each others houses.

I was saved in a revival when I was fifteen at a revival at the Baptist Church. I joined the Methodist church because that was my desire. My mother and I were baptized at the Shook School because the Methodist church was being remodeled and they were holding services at the school. We were sprinkled with water from the River Jordan that Brother Waddell Roberts brought back from one of his mission trips. That was probably in 1949 or 1950.

I graduated Grundy County High School in 1952. It was a struggle to get the money for my class ring. I think it cost \$27.00. I still have the ring today and it is one of my prize possessions. I came to Chattanooga that year and got a job in the office of City Water Co. Later in 1956 I married Andrew Shrum that grew up at Palmer, Tn. We have always lived in Chattanooga except for two years we lived in Huntsville, Al.

We have two children, Debbie and Mark. Four grandchildren, Joshua, Will, Jordan (girl) and Luke. They all live not far from us .

My brother Joel died a few years back and Mom died in 2004 at age 90. All the family are buried at Gregg cemetery. Dessie is the only close family still living in Tracy City, Lankford Town. Wayne lives in Florida and George Ray also lives in Chattanooga.

We always kept a close check on Mom until her death and visited her often. I took her on several trips with Knoxville Tours and my daughter took both of us on some trips.

I will never forget all the people of Grundy County that helped us along the way. When I was growing up people cared and helped each other. I believe there is still that feeling there today. I have very fond memories of all my family and friends that were there in Raven Point and Lankford Town.

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