

# Old Jim



By Dan Caldwell

## (Volume Two, Chapter Fifteen)

A lone whippoorwill sent its trill across the river to where the two were working. Up from the river came the aroma of peppermint which grew there in great abundance. Benjimen and Elizabeth, side by side on their knees were just finishing with the cabbage plants that they hoped would provide a late harvest. This, the second week of June was not too late but, depending on the hot summer, planting anything could turn out to be a wasted effort.

"They can't grow if we don't plant them" Elizabeth giggled, slapping the old farmer playfully with a hand that was muddy from the water and soil which she had been applying around the roots of the new plants.

The old farmer laughed at this. With water pitcher in hand, he pretended to pour water on her head.

"They need water too" he said, raising the pitcher. Instead, he poured slowly as she washed the mud from her hands.

"That's the last of them then?" she asked.

"It is and I'm glad of it I think"

"I think we're finished with all the planting aren't we?" she said.

"That's up to you I reckon" he replied, "If you want anything besides this I will plant it for you."

"It's enough Benjimen" she said softly.

"Shall we go then" he asked, "It will be dark soon and the evening will become cool"

"Must we hurry? Is there a reason then?" she returned the question.

The old farmer smiled as he looked into the face of Elizabeth. Taking her hand, he tugged lightly.

"Come" he spoke softly, "We'll sit here by the garden and watch the moon come up over Snake Ridge. It's full tonight."

As they sat down on a moss covered stone by the gardens' edge, Elizabeth leaned softly against his chest. The old farmer placed a gentle arm around her shoulders. There was something more on her mind. He could tell. He had seen her like these many times before. He would wait and would not speak. She would share her thoughts when she was ready and as he well knew, not a moment sooner.

Again, came the sound of the whippoorwill, closer this time as the night began to creep. Down by the creek, giggling, then the sound of splashing as either young Elizabeth or Jay Stidham threw a stone. A slight breeze had begun to stir, bringing with it a stronger scent of peppermint mixed with that of mist from the river. From closer even than that of the whippoorwill came the sound of a bull-frog. Chug-a-rum. Chagrum. As he sat hidden in his place by the water.

Elizabeth leaned closer, turning her face upward to look into the face of Benjimen.

"How do you feel Ben?" she asked suddenly.

"How? I... What are you asking me? I feel fine I reckon. Do you mean?"

"I mean after the accident. You took a hard knock on the head you know."

The old farmer didn't answer right away. Something in her voice or, was it maybe something in her face that spoke what she had not. What had she really meant to ask?

"I feel funny here" he said, placing his hand against his heart. "It happens every time I hold you. My heart skips and flutters around like a butterfly."

"Oh Ben," she cooed, "Why do I worry so much. I know you are strong. Still, I... I'm maybe not so much some days!"

Her voice trailed away. The old farmer held her more tightly now with both arms around her, resting his chin lightly atop her head. Pulling her tightly against his chest he spoke.

"Look" He pointed to the east towards the top of Snake Ridge. The moon, full and round, seemed to set the mountain top afire as it appeared to climb upwards out of this very mountain itself!

"Benjimen!" she said, "It looks like it's sitting on the mountain! Look at it. Look how big it looks!"

"Mmm." he said and began rocking her gently back and forth.

"Look" she whispered then, pointing to the tall grasses in the field across the river. "Lightning bugs"

"Shall I catch one for you then? he chuckled..

"Oh Benjimen, don't be silly. Oh, I know you would too."

"Grandma, isn't it just wonderful here" said Elizabeth.

So engrossed one with the other were Elizabeth and Benjimen, such that neither had been aware of their approach. Jay and young Elizabeth stood there in the dim light of evening. Nor did it escape Elizabeth the elder that Jay held the hand of the young girl.

"Elizabeth was just saying the same" said the old farmer. "We didn't hear you coming"

"We don't mean to interrupt" said Jay, "But I must be going. There's still a chore to be done at home"

"We saw the two of you here" said the young girl, "And we... I wanted to. I wished for grandmother to see this. How beautiful it is. The night. The wind and the sounds. It's... it's..."

The old farmer looked at his wife and smiled. Then chuckled at the puzzled look on the face of the younger.

Elizabeth the elder spoke again. "You cannot speak it child. Not with words. You can try but you'll see. Words will fail you. There are no words to say how you feel. I know it. You have to speak it with your heart. Let your heart speak it."

"But how will anyone know?"

"Your heart speaks through your eyes dear. Not through your lips. The heart speaks through your eyes."

"Then someone must see. Oh, Jay"

The young girl stopped suddenly. What had she almost spoken? Why had she spoken so? This must not be! This cannot be!

The young lad answered, speaking quietly, almost as if to himself.

"Yes. Someone must see. Someone does see. I see. I see you Elizabeth. I see all this" he waved a hand to include all the fields, streams and mountains around. "But mostly nowadays I only see you!"

This was a long speech for the shy and young Jay Stidham. He ended abruptly and breathlessly, daring to look into her eyes, knowing not what she might say. Would she say anything at all? Did she know how he felt inside? Did she not know that he loved her!?

Young Elizabeth said not a word for the longest moment.

With a slight tug she pulled her hand from his. With a quick glance at her grandparents she said, "Jay. You must go now. I must go home too. We must have a talk soon. You and me. Tomorrow then, we'll talk tomorrow. Grandmother?"

Again, bravely taking her hand, Jay said, "I'll walk you then." Nodding then to the old farmer, "Ben. Sir, I'll be going."

"We'll be along in a while." the old farmer said, "Elizabeth and I will be along after a while."

# Granny's Porch

## Darlene Slurping Coffee

Hello Everyone! This is Granny on this beautiful September day. How has the time flown by? I can hardly believe it's the middle of September already. Soon, we will be seeing cold weather and snow again. Right now, with all the concerns about Covid-19, most of us are staying home as much as possible.

I was thinking this morning as I sit here having my morning coffee about when we were raising our children. I've already written in earlier issues that we had no electricity during those early years so all we had for entertainment was a battery radio or, someone would pick up a guitar and play and sing some. After Danny got older he got a banjo but



up until that time we just mostly listened to the radio.

The radio used a big, long battery which we would usually order from Sears & Roebuck. When the battery would start to get weak, someone would go outside and pour some water on the ground wire (which was hooked to the antenna) and that would somehow improve the reception and make the radio get louder for a few minutes.

Each morning there was a radio program that came on that we would listen to. It came from the Cincinnati area on W.C.K.Y. AM radio and was hosted by Bob Jennings. \*(I think that is the correct call letters). If you wanted to request a song, you would have to call him or, since we didn't have any phones, we would write him a letter. We had requested songs many times before, then our seventh child was born. It was November 17th, 1958, and our fourth little girl was born. Her name is Darlene. We were so proud of her. We wrote Bob Jennings and told him about our little girl.

Bob was always talking about drinking coffee at about that time of the morning, so he said, "I guess little Darlene is up slurping coffee this morning"

We always drank a lot of coffee, so I suppose she did get a little sip that morning.

Our little girl grew quickly and there is much, much more of which to write about our family on down the road.

This was wintertime and things got a little rough for us a few times along the way. It was getting closer to Christmas time and Foister was out of work so, let me tell you about some good people across the mountain.

Across the mountain was Middlefork (named for the middle fork of the Kentucky river. There is also the North and South forks) and it was there, on Middlefork that we got our mail at that time. The post office was Saylor, Kentucky and Sam Caldwell was the postmaster. They heard about Foister being out of work and the people got together and loaded our mailman's truck with all kinds of groceries and some clothes. I'll never forget how much that helped us. Some of those people was on welfare themselves and still they helped.

The mailman drove up and called out that there was some stuff for us, and he unloaded it down by the mailbox. We asked who was responsible for this and he said, "Just good people". Later we found out who some of those people were but many of them didn't want their name mentioned so we never knew for sure.

This is just one of the many times that the Lord has supplied our needs. Even though we were not Christians at that time, the Lord was still looking out for our family. We knew that it was God that was leading!

At that time, we had some neighbors that lived close to us, just up the road a ways. Their names were Ryle and Bessie Brock. My sister had married their boy, Donald, and they lived there for a while.

Ryle and Foister got jobs cutting trees. This brought in some money, up until the summer came. Ryle was bad to drink. One day he got weary on the job, and he said to Foister, "Let's go and get drunk".

Now, he didn't have to say more that lets go get drunk and Foister was ready to go because ever since he came home from the war he was bad to drink. So, they grabbed their dinner buckets and got into our old Chevy and left their jobs.

As usual I had supper ready for him when he came home but, it got later and later and still no Foister. Finally, I decided to go up and see if Ryle had come home. He had not! Sometime in the night though Ryle did come home but some of the Brock boys had got in with them and had let him out on Middlefork, quite a ways away from home. So, I just waited.

There was nothing I could do but wait. I did pray. I always believed my prayer was heard.

The next morning, I got up early and went back up to the neighbors and Ryle said the boys had let him out and had taken the car and Foister over into Harlan County.

I got my brother-in-law, Donald, to go with me to look for Foister. The car had quit on them, and the Brock boys had left Foister in the car and had run off. After he sobered up, he caught a ride for part of the way back and when Donald and I met up with him, he was walking, carrying his dinner bucket. That was all he got out of the deal.....a bad hangover and his dinner bucket.... he lost his car!!

Now, they had nothing to drive. So, they walked to work and cut trees for a while longer. Donald decided he would just start making whiskey. He knew he would have at least two customers. This went on for a while and Foister saw that Donald was doing pretty good selling what he made. Ryle soon moved away and Donald and Cassie, my sister, lived on there in the house. Now, Foister had no buddy to help him cut timber. This was the perfect excuse for him to help Donald make whiskey. So....

They got started in a big way. We had raised a big field of corn, so they used our corn and didn't have a lot of stuff to have to buy. Just sugar and rye.

Foister smoked Red Ox tobacco. Red Ox is actually a chewing tobacco twist which we would tear apart and dry in the oven or in the sun and crumble into a fine tobacco, which could be rolled in a paper and smoked. It was very strong. Foister had smoked it for a long time, and it didn't seem too strong to him. One night, he and Donald was up in the holler running off a run and they began to sip. They sipped a way to much. Donald had run out of cigarettes and Foister gave him some of his Red Ox to smoke. Just after daylight, I saw them coming. They were both about drunk. Donald came up into the yard and said, "That Red Ox has made me so drunk that I can't walk".

Foister said, "I know what made me drunk. I caught too many lids full of the first alcohol that came through the worm. That's what made me drunk!"

This is just one of the many things that happened to us on our journey from there to here and many more that I will tell, but, for now let me put my pen away and say meet me here again next week for more from Granny's Porch. Love, Granny.

## Donnas Cut And Curl

5456 hwy 3630  
Annville, Ky.  
606 364-2426

Donna Gill  
Master Hair Stylist

Erica Ward  
Master Hair Stylist



*Make your appointment and spring in today  
for a new style and color!*