

- **Claiborne County (TN) Progress**

## **Nell Quesenberg Report**

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### **THE LAST HOG KILLING**

**By Nell Quesenberg**

Today is the third western snowstorm in less than a week to settle on our valley, lying between the Cumberland and Clinch Mountains. There is an oppressive heaviness to this snow that comes to us after a remarkable winter. Now we must find a reaction to this "February Storm" that preludes spring.

The youngly romantic, with their shiny, lustrous eyes, sense the wonder and beauty of the heavy clinging snow. The cedars, whose ermine dripping boughs take on a queenly grace, are admired.

Homage is paid to the gay trappings of the evenly trimmed hedges, the house across the way with the icicles and snow-clad roof. The heart, however, gives a sad little tug upon looking at the leaning locust post, with the snow on top and the tall parted fescue, lining the chestnut boards of the old slanting barn.

Strangely, for me, having just turned forty-four, it became a time to visit my mind, and I traveled back to the year 1941. It was fall, and I was not quite five.

At age five, and even before, I always felt a rightness about my family. Still, this may have been a strange attitude for me, since from a distance of time, looking at their old yellowed Kodak pictures, notwithstanding their natural beauty, I can catch glimpses of worn, hard endurance of

labor and bodies that were too lean. The people in these old photos had the gentle traits of gaiety, love and generousness.

Eleven years had passed since the start of the Depression. If we suffered great deprivation, we were not by ourselves. Almost everyone lived as we did. Only, I've never, even today, sensed we were poor.

My family consisted of eight members. My father, Dennis Marchio, late of the Civilian Conservation Corps, now traveling throughout the states as supervisor for Mr. Howell of Howell's Nursery; my mother, Louise, who at times traveled with my father. Louise's parents, Horace (H.C.) and Bessie Yoakum; Horace's mother, Dora Jennings Holland (Granny); Bessie's mother, Cordelia Jennings Hill (Mamie Cord); also, Uncle Frank Mason, a cousin who came to live with us after parting from his wife, Leona Pearson Mason.

The reason we all lived together was Granny's wish to fulfill the dying request of Mr. Hill. Horace, Bessie and Louise, who was just a baby, lived in Dora's house. Mr. Hill, on his deathbed, asked Granny to leave her house and move in with his wife, Cordie, who would be alone.

Bessie often spoke of her father, calling him Mr. Hill. I always knew the different flowers and shrubs that he had planted. One part of our yard was completely set aside as "Mr. Hill's flower garden."

Our lot was less than an acre, but to me it seemed an enchanted spot. The back of our lot formed our garden, where Granny raised our vegetables, corn and a tiny tobacco allotment.

At the very back of our lot was where our fat hogs lived in their covered house. Also, this was where our outhouse was located. Upon our visits to this area, the hogs would snort and squeal with delight, moving quickly about gleefully. Whether for our company or food, I didn't know. I always responded to their needs by picking up some corn from the shed, or by gathering horse weed to give them.

We also had a large soundly built smokehouse with a shed attached. Inside were large benches where we kept our salted meats, until we hung them from the ceiling, along with our sausage, stuffed in bright print cotton bags. Shelves held our coffee grinder and canning jars. Boxes of feathers were shoved under the benches. On wire lines hung our old clothes from the last century that had not been packed in the old trunks lining the walls.

Sometimes for Halloween, Mama would dress up in the long dresses and astound me. We also had uniforms stored from both the Civil War and Spanish American War. My mother, when she was a child, enjoyed playing in our smokehouse going through the old trunks, seeing things that we had used in our past. I enjoyed the smokehouse, too.

We washed our clothes alongside the smokehouse drawing our water from one of our two cisterns. Our three large galvanized washtubs hung on sixteen-penny nails at the side of our smokehouse. On "Wash Day," the tubs were taken down and placed on stands. Water was heated for these tubs. One tub was used to soap and scrub our clothes on copper corrugated board. The other two tubs acted as first and second rinse waters.

A fire was built under our large water-filled black kettle. The kettle was encircled by a strong iron band with tall, spreading, pointed legs called a "spider." When the water boiled, Granny added homemade lye soap, and our white clothes. After the clothes boiled, Bessie and Granny handled the hot, soft clothes with long bleached poles, carrying the hot, white linen and cotton to the awaiting tubs.

A gnarled, aged apple tree grew near where we washed. This is where our big fat white hens roosted. A little further away was our coal house. The coal house was sizable, but awfully old and not too sturdy. Lined with straw, our eight covered chicken nests were nailed to its side.

Next to these nests was one of Mr. Hill's pear trees. This tree had suffered a terrible mishap while a sapling. The tree, now grown, was bent so that even a small child could easily master its whole trunk. A wide scar ran through the length of the bent tree's trunk, almost to its core. A child could spend hours on the beloved tree, pretending to ride a horse, studying the population of insects going in and out of its deep scar, or by climbing to the close-by chicken nests, then sitting cross-legged on the straw, and "cackling loudly" when one laid an egg.

There were many other places of interest on our lot. The wood pile and chopping block, sown with a mat of sawdust, with the odor of freshly sawn wood. It was fun to climb the thick, plaited grapevine which Mr. Hill has trained to grow high on an arbor. The branch of our tall, straight pear tree in our front yard held a wing. On a warm day, in our yards and on our porches, one could usually find company.

Our family was extremely democratic, entertaining with equal aplomb the visiting friend, who had imbibed too deeply, talking now, perhaps too earnestly, with our most respectful matron, both seemingly, enjoying the encounter.

This year when Thanksgiving came, the frost stubbed our lot to a hard, white, thin ice. This morning, a neighbor was coming to shoot our hogs for Granny. Somehow, I knew this to be the order of things, but a great sadness of inevitableness took control of me. First seeking comfort, I went to the bed that Granny and I slept in, then went to the back rooms to my parents' bedroom. There, I found my father in front of their fireplace. He, too, had taken extra "treats" to the hogs.

"Daddy, I don't want the hogs to die," I said.

"I don't want them to die either," he replied.

After that exchange, we said no more, standing together by the fire. First, we heard the echoing sound of a shot through the chilly morn. Holding our breaths, there came the flat splat of the second shot. Then complete silence.

The year 1941 was a time of change for all of us. I began school. Before Christmas, the bombing of Pearl Harbor was announced over our cream colored radio. Granny, Mamie Cordie and I would stay in Lone Mountain, but the rest of my family would go to Detroit, Michigan, to work in the war plants.

In Detroit, Denny would become supervisor of the fourth floor of Hudson Motor Car Co., converted to build bombers for the war. Louise, Bessie, Horace and other men from our village that had worked for Denny before would learn to build these bombers.

A time of change and great excitement had come upon us as we braced for World War II.