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**February 26, 1981**

**MR. HILL'S FAMILY**

**By Nell Quesenberg**

**Part One**

Shortly before 1890, the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad Company (K,CG&L) formed its charter and began to lay a railway between Knoxville and Cumberland Gap. A rail line boring one mile through the Cumberland Mountain already connected Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, to Louisville, Kentucky.

The distance of the new route between Knoxville and Cumberland Gap would be sixty-five miles. Some of this passage would be through a pleasant low-lying valley, but the larger part would run through rough mountainous terrain. In order to lay the rails for this course, mountains must be tunneled and ravines, creeks and rivers would require numerous trestles, some stretching their slender length great distances on great timbered legs.

Rails shipped from the great steel rolling mills, large Georgian pine timbers cut for the bridges, plus hued and square-cut cross ties, followed the work crews from their starting points as they slowly proceeded across the beautiful rugged country to their final destination.

J.W. "Bill" Hill was the bridge foreman for the railroad company. The bridge crew set up camp in Lone Mountain. The men, working twelve hours a day except for Sunday, lived in shanty cars that provided them with both a place to eat and sleep. Provisions such as milk, eggs, butter, vegetables and meat were bought from the local families. For many of these families, it was the first time in their lives they were able to earn any meaningful supply of money.

When Bill came to Lone Mountain, he was not old, but he was a widower with children who lived in Morristown, Tennessee. Physically, he was a big, well-proportioned, exceptionally strong man. His fine-looking face was lighted by a pair of bright blue eyes that, upon provocation, could become quite fierce, being at heart a fighter. But Bill really loved people. He liked being with them, he felt great joy doing things for others.

Royal "Rial" Jennings lived on a large farm near the new railroad. Part of the railroad right-of-way had come from this farm. Today, Bill had some business on the Jennings' farm. Upon approaching the door to the sturdy, two-story log structure, he heard a female scream, just to the side of the house. Rushing toward the scream, he saw a young girl, with long black hair, several limbs up in an old gnarled apple tree. Under the Limbertwig tree was a small ancient Negress, holding her big size apron lifted and spread apart in her hands.

She called, "Jump, Cordie, honey! Aunt Nance will catch ye!" The girl cast a last desperate look behind her, where the huge black snake lay twisted around her limb of retreat.

Bill Hill stepped under the tree, his bigness dwarfing the size of the tiny black woman. Looking up into the limbs, he saw a pair of frightened black eyes. Speaking softly to the girl, he said, "Jump, child. See, I can almost reach you. I won't let you fall."

Looking into the man's steady blue eyes, Cordie, with black hair streaming, jumped into the man's arms. As his arms closed around the girl's young body, he was quite nonplused to find himself holding an exquisitely formed little woman.

Cordie was just as confused. It was Cordie's want to never complain, speaking very little about herself, but the snake had badly frightened her and now, for the first time in her life, a man was laughing down at her and, even more confounding, he was still holding her in his arms.

Black eyes blazing, her beautiful high-cheeked face filled with rich color. She haughtily demanded, "Put me down, Sir! I say, put me down!" Still laughing gently, he placed her on small feet that were now quite bare, her dainty leather slippers sitting sedately under the apple tree.

This was the first meeting between my great-grandparents.

Hattie Cordelia Jennings was the oldest child of Rial and Liza Yoakum Jennings. She inherited her sparkling black eyes and dark hair from her great-grandmother, Margaret "Peggy" Moore. Cordie was now past twenty. She had held herself aloof from the local men, preferring to attend Tazewell's new college. However, she had shown some favor to young Robert Leabow, whose family owned a large farm next to the Jennings' farm.

The Jennings were a large family. Besides Cordie, there were Laura, Roxie, Lettucia, Charlie, Louis and Ed. There was another boy who had died when he was a baby and Jim, who had caught diphtheria when about eleven. Rial held the boy in his arms while Jim almost choked from the disease for three days. Suddenly, Jim jumped from his father's arms, ran out the door and around the house three times before Rial could catch him. Jim then died. Rial himself had diphtheria, too, but his case was mild.

Also on the Jennings' farm were three Negroes left from the days of slavery. They were Nancy, and her two sons, Chucky Bob and Jim. At the end of the Civil War, Nancy had said to Zelphia (Rial's mother), "Mamie Jennings, I don't know what me and my boys will do or where we will go." Zelphia had replied, "You won't have to go anywhere. You and the boys will stay here. This is your home."

The admiration between Bill and Cordie grew, and their courtship proceeded on toward marriage. Cordie never called J.W. "Bill" Hill anything except Mr. Hill.

Early the next spring, Cordie's lovely little blue-eyed mother, Liza, died of a body-racking disease called the "Bloody Flux." This gently sweet soul was forty-four years old.

**March 5, 1981**

## **MR. HILL'S FAMILY**

### **Part Two**

Before 1890, mail was walked into the different Claiborne County settlements. After the completion of the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap, and Louisville (K,CG&L), the mail came in by train.

The railroad company built many gray wooden depots along their line. This affected several of the older settlements, causing them to re-center themselves closer to the train stations.

Lone Mountain originally was settled on the flat land just east of the suddenly rising butte of the Lone Mountain range. The first postmaster was William Hodges. He was the son of James Hodges, the schoolmaster. (My husband, Jack Quesenbery, is descended from James Hodges.) The first post office was on the Hodges farm, but when the railroad was finished, the post office was moved near the depot, about two miles east of the farm.

The K,CG&L had planned to go through Tazewell, the county seat, but being unable to obtain right of way, they had to make a bight with their passage. The railroad company built a depot, thus forming the nucleus of the township of New Tazewell.

Bill Hill had a district supervisor. There were also bridge inspectors to whom he must seek final approval. His job as bridge foreman for the K,CG&L line placed him in charge of all the bridge crews and all the bridges between Knoxville and Cumberland Gap. These bridges coming from Knoxville were, firstly, several flat creek bridges, then the trestle at Washburn, Hopson Trestle at Dutch, Clinch River Bridge, Sycamore Trestle, Day's Siding Trestle, just below Lone Mountain, Widow Hollow Trestle at the head of Ball Creek, the trestle bridging the ravine (now filled) at the A.J. Quesenbery farm (Jack's grandfather) just before the rail reached New Tazewell, the highest, 104 feet, Lonesome Valley Trestle, the second highest - 102 feet, Greever Hollow Trestle (now filled), Powell River Bridge and a flat creek bridge that crosses Gap Creek.

All the bridges except the two tallest, Lonesome Valley and Greever Hollow, were built from sawed Georgia pine. The two tallest were, upon the instruction of the company supervisor, built of locally grown round timbers. Somewhat later, the Lonesome Valley Trestle, under the weight of a crossing train gave way, causing the death of the engineer. Charlie Frailey, the fireman, saved his life by catching and clinging to a tree as the train pitched into the deep ravine. The trestle was repaired with sawed Georgia pine.

Engineer Bill Hodges made the first run on the new K,CG&L line from Knoxville to Cumberland Gap. To honor this feat, the company gave him a lifetime job.

The completion of this new railroad meant to the people in Claiborne County that now, by steel and steam power, they were connected to the whole world.

### **Spring, 1890**

After her mother, Louise (Liza) Yoakum Jennings death, Cordie explained to Mr. Hill she felt it her duty to help care for the young motherless Jennings children. Mr. Hill agreed they would begin their marriage on the Jennings farm.

All that Mr. Hill brought of his past to Lone Mountain from Morristown, Tennessee, was his young son, Charlie Hill. His younger brother, George, blond and handsome like their father, came as Mr. Hill's powder man. George was blown up by dynamite while shooting a footing for the Day's Siding Trestle. Mr. Hill also passed down a tale of his mother and father.

This is Mr. Hill's story: His mother lived on a beautiful plantation, being the daughter of an imperious family, the Steels of Virginia. His father, a great, blond, handsome man, was the overseer of the Steels' estates. The Steels' lovely daughter ran away with the handsome overseer to marry him. Upon her return home, her father furiously disinherited her, telling her to never darken his door again. The young couple left, she never seeing her family again.

Civil War broke across the country. Sherman's soldiers were on the march, foraging, burning a wave to the sea. Bill Hill remembered his mother, flanked by her children, a long gun raised to her thin shoulder, warning Sherman's soldiers should they raid her farm for the food she meant to feed to her children, she would shoot to kill. The soldiers stared at the tiny, war-worn little woman with her brown curls pinned to her head a moment and, turning their horses, they left.

The Hills settled into the two-story hued log structure built by Anderson Jennings, Cordie's grandfather. The house had been weather boarded, with beautiful trimwork. There were three large fireplaces, two were downstairs and one upstairs. The stone carver charged twenty-five cents a day. These stones cost Anderson one hundred dollars (400 days). The ceilings made of wide boards of polished poplar were especially elegant. Anderson installed the first glass windows in this part of the country.

"Jim's been killed," shouted young Charlie, as he slammed into the Jennings' kitchen. Jim's mother, Nancy, the aged Negress, threw her apron over her face moaning, "Oh, my baby, my baby!"

Charlie said, "Pap and Chucky Bob are bringing him home in the wagon. He was shot up on the mountain. People say he's been fooling around with some white woman. It was white men that shot him, they say."

The family could hear the wagon wheels rolling up the hill to the Jennings' house. Looking out, Cordie could see Chucky Bob was driving the team. Her father, Rial, sitting stiff and tall, rode silently beside the wagon. Rial's fine high-cheeked face appeared pale against his black hair and eyes.

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*At this time, before continuing to part three, I want to thank Ed Shumate, born 1892, a fine and handsome man; Fred Wells, born after 1900, a gentle, good man; and Helen Jennings, Rial's youngest daughter, Cordie's half-sister and the only living child of Rial Jennings, for their kindly given information for this story.*

**March 12, 1981**

## **MR. HILL'S FAMILY**

### **Part Three**

Jennings slaves were buried in the slave cemetery near the Methodist Church. Both this cemetery and the church lay at the edge of the Jennings "branch" field that bordered the Lone Mountain Creek.

Jim's remains had been carried to the front of the church. Somber words of hope and comfort, along with the dire warning to better manage their own lives, were directed toward Jim's family and friends.

The low clouds had lifted as six men bore Jim's smoothed wooden box to the nearby open grave where several field stones nestled. After today, only two more people would ever be buried here. The bearers used ropes to lower Jim into his damply dark place of rest.

Rial heard the sound of the loose clay dirt being shoveled into the grave, falling on the wooden box. Watching Chucky Bob's strong arm circling Aunt Nance's bent sobbing shoulders caused Rial's black eyes to glitter with tears.

As the swishing scrape of the shovels continued, Rial's mind drifted back to when they were children being raised together. The two black brothers, Jim and Chucky Bob, had always called him Rially.

They were real young, playing under the sycamores that lined the creek in the "branch" field, when they discovered the cave with its many rooms. Remains of utensils and weapons proved that Indians had lived here in another century, but they were too young to understand this. However, in one of the rooms they found a gallon of corn whiskey. ("One full bushel of corn for each gallon of good corn whiskey" was the old saying.) The boys sat down and began to sample the fiery liquid.

In 1850, farm children did not get their hand-made leather shoes, fitted with wooden pegs until Christmas. The boys' feet were bare and all they wore were their knee-length long shirts. Nothing was worn underneath these long shirts that (Zelphia) Mamie Jennings or Aunt Nance had sewn from store-bought coarse gray Hickory Cane material.

After drinking their fill of the whiskey, the boys came home. Going into the living room to show Mamie Jennings how good they felt, they began to jump around doing somersaults and standing on their heads. Their shirts, leaving three bare bottoms, fell over their faces. Ruefully, Rial remembered Mamie Jennings taking her paddle, with the holes, seizing the three boys and giving them a good spanking.

### **September, 1891**

Rh hemolytic disease was not understood in 1891. It was not until 1968 that very much could be done about this disease which caused prenatal morbidity and mortality. A woman whose blood is Rh negative can usually be delivered of a healthy infant whose blood is Rh positive, if it is a first birth for the mother. For each successive pregnancy, the Rh positive infant is in significantly more danger. However, an infant whose blood is Rh negative, as is the mother's, can be delivered safely.

In Cordie's child-bearing years, seven times she bore these little dead infants. Mr. Hill and Cordie had three children to live, Claude, Myrtle and Bessie Lee (my grandmother). Bessie had a twin who was born dead.

Claude was the Hills' first child. He was descended from the earliest of American settlers. Through their veins flowed the blood strains of older European races, English, Welsh, Scottish, German, Dutch and Celtic. Some claimed to be "Black Dutch" (applied to persons in Europe who practiced a locally unpopular Protestant religion). Be that as it may, Claude, with his black curly hair, long sooty lashes and merry blue eyes, would in looks and charm seem to be purely from the Irish.

Cordie, little as it was her wont to show her feelings, doted on Claude, while Mr. Hill became quite "foolish" over Myrtle, who was tiny, quick and dark like Cordie.

### **August, 1892**

David, standing on the rooftop, saw the beautiful Bethsheba bathing and desired her. Rial, still darkly handsome, turned to the beautiful Nancy Howard Holland, desiring her greatly. Nan, with her lovely blue eyes and light brown cap of long curls, was one of the most beautiful women Rial believed he'd ever seen. They were married in the sultry hot month of August 1892.

Rial and Nan didn't move into the big Jennings log house. Instead, they used a smaller house that lay on the Jennings land by the Lone Mountain Creek. In the fall of 1893, Rial and Nan had their first child, Jeff. The other children they would have were Lola, the twins Trula and Beulah, and Helen, the youngest, a very beautiful child, with large dark eyes, greatly beloved by her father.

Nan was very industrious, storing well-prepared food, milking, churning, washing, ironing and seeing to her family's comfort in various ways. However, she was never too busy to keep any eye on the big Jennings' log house, supplying the motherless children with milk and butter. Nan also

helped with their large washings. Things were running smoothly on the Jennings farm, and everyone was quite happy.

Charlie Jennings was especially happy this afternoon. Later, in the evening, he would visit Liz Shumate (Ralph Campbell's mother), a beautiful girl who lived on a nearby farm. But, right now, Charlie was busy hauling rocks.

Fearing he might be late for his visit to the Shumate farm, Charlie whipped up the horses. Suddenly, under the shifting weight of the rocks, the wagon's side board gave way, the horses' feet having become tangled, the wagon overturned.

Rial found his son, Charlie. Rial, his heart pounding, reached to feel the torn wound. His fingers sunk into a large, ragged bone, a depressed area in the back of Charlie's skull. Rial felt even more frightened upon hearing Charlie's senseless groans and his snoring breathing. Charlie's eyes rolled upward, none of his blue iris was visible.

Dr. Day had come in great haste after Chucky Bob told him of Charlie's accident. He ordered Charlie laid on the great table where the family dined. The oak buffet was encased in a long mirror, and Dr. Day asked for coal lamps to be placed in front of the mirror and elsewhere, around the best places, to cast light on Charlie's head.

After careful cleaning of the torn wound and removal of a portion of Charlie's dark hair, Dr. Day decided what he should do. Taking a probe, he slid it under the broken skull, then prying, he lifted up and out a piece of Charlie's skull. A portion of Charlie's brain was mashed. When the broken piece of skull was removed, perhaps a saucer full of his brain also spilled out.

Charlie never regained consciousness. For eleven days, he moaned and screamed his life away. The family was shattered with grief as they listened to the once strong and handsome Charlie die.

Helen, Rial's beautiful baby girl, says she remembers finding her father, sitting, staring at the piece of Charlie's skull he'd saved. She said on those occasions, her father would be silent for long periods.

**March 19, 1981**

**MR. HILL'S FAMILY**

**Part Four**

The Spanish-American War lasted one hundred and thirteen days. When it was over, Spain had lost all rights to Cuba. Further, Spain surrendered Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippine Islands to the United States.

For months, American newspapers had inflamed public opinion, creating intense feelings against Spain for her oppression and misrule of Cuba. On Feb. 15, 1896, the American battleship, the Maine, was destroyed. Two hundred and thirty-six men were lost. Under President William McKinley, war was declared. The United States called for two hundred thousand volunteers to beef up its peacetime Army.

Three thousand American soldiers died in this war. Three hundred and six died from wounds, while the rest died from disease.

## **February, 1898**

After Charlie's death, the tall straight man in his neatly tailored black broadcloth suit, with matching black polished boots, could often be seen riding horseback. Rial had a passion for horses. In his youth, Rial had served the Union forces in the 10th Tennessee Cavalry. It was said of Rial, that he'd never seen a horse he was afraid of or couldn't ride.

Young Ed Jennings was in the barn shelling corn. He caught sight of Rial riding down the hill toward the gate. Just a little later, he heard a heavy running horse. It was coming across the Jennings' field from the nearby Granville Hodges' farm (son of James Hodges).

Looking up, Ed saw his handsome first cousin, Jim Hodges, coming at a fast lope toward the barn. (Rial's sister, Margaret Jennings, married Granville Hodges. These are my husband Jack's great-grandparents.) Jim slid off his horse, whose sides were heaving. Jim's denim pants and the horse's chestnut coat were both streaked with dust and sweat.

"Ed, I need a horse. There's a posse on my heels. I thought about going to Pap's, but then I figured they would come there first."

After giving Jim a fresh mount, Ed went back to shelling corn. Pretty soon, the posse came. Seeing the Jennings boy in the barn, they inquired if he'd seen Jim Hodges.

"Yep," said Ed. "Over there is his horse. He borrowed one from us."

"Good boy," said one of the men. "Which way did he go?"

"He went that way," Ed replied, pointing in exactly the opposite direction from which Jim had fled.

Jim Hodges with his lean hard body, raven black wavy hair, laughing, untameable blue eyes, was called the "meanest man in Lone Mountain." (They only meant wild, as Jim had a good, honest heart.) Jim was in love with my great-grandmother, Dora Jennings (a great-granddaughter of Margaret "Peggy" Moore), but she married James Randolph Yoakum (Judge), who was Jim's first cousin. (Judge's mother, Lucinda Jennings, was Rial's sister.)



Outrunning the posse, Jim left home to serve in the Spanish American War. He never returned from the war. Granville never knew if he was shot or died from disease. One day, Granville, who had been a captain for the Northern forces in the late Civil War, was sent a message that his boy's belongings would be shipped to the Lone Mountain Depot. This was the last of the wild, but stout-hearted boy's brief history.

Charlie, Mr. Hill's boy, also served in the Spanish American War. Old photos show Charlie to be splendidly good looking in his uniform. Mr. Hill and Cordie had moved from the Jennings' farm to a white frame house sitting on about an acre of ground just past the depot. Mr. Hill was able to be home with his family more, only occasionally did he now have to travel long distances. Always upon his return from these trips, he would bring Cordie lovely elegant gifts, such as beautiful framed paintings, satin glass lamps or hand-painted vases. Mr. Hill often gave his friends these same kind of gifts.

He deeply adored his tiny wife, allowing her to do no heavy work. Mr. Hill hired stronger women for these tasks. Laura Gray, from Owl Hollow, would often help Cordie.

While in Louisiana, Mr. Hill saw many houses with separate dining and cooking areas. He incorporated this type of an addition to his main house. This necessitated going outside the main house, across the concrete porch that wound all around the front of the house in order to enter the large dining room, lined with windows and a window seat, then on back to the smaller kitchen, which had a door leading into the backyard.

The living room could be entered from outside by two separate doors. Three long bay windows with a window seat beneath formed the front part of the living room.

A large Brussels rug covered the floor, spreading all the way to the fireplace hearth. The room was furnished with a black leather divan, a library table, holding a beautiful double satin glass globed lamp sitting under a large framed painting, a black velvet trio of one sofa and two matched chairs, one a rocker. An elaborate organ and a tall upright Victrola. (My grandmother, Bessie Hill Yoakum, my mother Louise Yoakum Marchio and myself were raised among these same furnishings.)

There was a new baby girl at the Hills, Bessie Lee Hill (my grandmother). Mr. Hill had named her for the good Queen Bess and Robert E. Lee.

Looking at the blonde, blue-eyed child pleased Mr. Hill, but fingers of pain still pressed his heart when he thought of his dark-eyed Myrtle, whom he had loved so dearly. Myrtle had become awfully sick when she was three years old. Near the night, she spoke to her daddy, who was sitting with her: "Oh, Daddy, my little eyes, I just can't hardly see. Everything is turning dark! I'm dying, Daddy. I'm going to be with Jesus." How Mr. Hill held his little dead baby girl and wept. Before her burial in the Jennings Cemetery, Mr. Hill took one of Myrtle's little pointed high-button shoes and a lock of her fine dark hair. (We still keep Mr. Hill's mementos of Myrtle.)

Mr. Hill grew older. Exposure to the weather and long, hard hours of work had impaired his health. He decided to retire from the railroad. Purchasing a ninety-nine year franchise for certain telephone lines, Mr. Hill formed his own switchboard and telephone service. Cordie and Bessie, now age seventeen, ran the switchboard service.

The following is a list of Mr. Hill's April 1, 1914, telephone service customers: Dr. Sam Adkins, Adkin's Yoakum and Co., W.F. Breeding, Mrs. Lucy Breeding, W.A. Bartlett, Ben Brooks, James Brown, Wint Bolton, A.M. Bolton, James Campbell, Joe Campbell, E.T. Campbell, S.M. Cardwell, Add Cardwell, James Carr, Dr. J. Carr, M.L. Carr, J.W. Cumbley, E.R. Cook, C.H. Davis, M. Dalton, Dr. W.N. Day, W.L. Edmondson, J.N. Farmer, T.P. Gray, Gray Bros., W.T. Golden, John Gose, Charlie Grubb, Sam Harris, T.B. Hobson, Wm. Hurst, Stone, Kyle Hurst, V.T. Janeway, John Jennings, A.S. Johnson, B.R. Jones, J.B. Irwin, J.N. Lewis, Milt Lewis, W.M. Lewis, James Loop, Bose Loop, Frank Mason, J.E. Mason, Lone Mountain Mill Co., R.L. Myers, John Myers, J.L. McKenzie, J.L. Morision, L.T. Wnn, Calvin Osburn, James K. Ousley, W.S. Ousley, Payne Bros., R.W. Payne, L.G. Payne, Charlie Parkey, G.L. Phelps, Lonis Phelps, George Rosenbalm, John Rosenbalm, Hamp Rosenbalm, Marian Rosenbalm, Andy Rose, B.F. Rose, C.B. Rose, V. Richey, John Shumate, Neal Shumate, N.N. Sneed, Dr. Sneed, William Stone, Charlie Stanifer, Trunk Line to Knoxville, W.H. Vannoy Farm, W.H. Vannoy, J.H. Vannoy, Venable Bros., J.H. Walker, Robert Ward, Arch Wolfe, Joe S. Yoakum, James R. (Judge) Yoakum.

**March 26, 1981**

## **MR. HILL'S FAMILY**

### **Part Five**

Men, who, to the exclusion of all other methods of gaining a livelihood, play the cards for money are of that society of men known as gamblers. Since these men must by their wits and skill live off other men's labor while having many of the social graces, they are as one apart.

Oscar Thomas was from Virginia. He was a tall handsome man with carefully groomed, black wavy hair and darkly oblique eyes. He kept a room at the Mason Hotel, just doors away from Mr. Hill's house. The hotel was owned by John and Dorcas Mason. In the large dining room, meals were provided for the hotel guests. (Dorcas Yoakum Mason was Rial Jennings' niece; his sister Lucinda Jennings having married Robert Yoakum of Powell Valley, my great-great-grandparents. John Mason's mother was Helen Van Bebber of Powell Valley, a sister to Cordie's grandmother, Martha Van Bebber Yoakum.)

Often, Oscar Thomas would travel either by horseback or by train, being away from the hotel for several hours or even a few days. Upon his return from these trips, Oscar's appearance would still be immaculate. However, the white luminous flesh of his face may be paler, with fingers of darkness in the hollows beneath his reticent eyes. By profession, Oscar Thomas followed cards. The

nature of his calling demanded that he be an astute judge of human nature, possessing great self-discipline. He was a good gambler.

In the afternoons, Oscar liked to walk to the Hills' house, where Bessie, age sixteen, along with Cordie, took care of the telephone switchboard. Many people besides Oscar visited with the Hills while they ran the switchboard. The switchboard also gave the Hills a great chance to visit with their different friends by phone (Bertha Campbell Payne and her sister, Eliza Campbell Carmack, have just recalled to me an interesting telephone visit their father, Ewin Campbell, once had with Mr. Hill; however, I'm darenist to publish the details.)

Bessie's light blonde hair, by her sixteenth birthday, had turned to a deep brown, her eyes were a lovely blue. Oscar Thomas became greatly enamored of Bessie. Once he'd been away a few days, upon his return he came to visit Bessie. In his arms he carried a package. It was a box of candy elaborately wrapped and decorated with yellow silken roses. It became known that this box of candy cost Oscar twenty-five dollars. This was unheard-of lavishness. Although World War I would begin shortly, the country was in a numbing depression, with grown men laboring for less than fifty cents a day.

Mr. Hill, whose health was declining steadily, still worked in his abundantly producing vegetable garden, cultivated his beautiful flower gardens and husbanded his grand arbor and fruit trees. Nowadays, he suffered great fatigue and must frequently sit on the long rounding concrete porch, cheerfully visiting with the many passers-by and the beloved children who came daily for their treats from "Daddy Hill." When Mr. Hill saw the expensive gift that Oscar gave Bessie and by Oscar's actions, Mr. Hill could no longer doubt that Oscar was in love with Bessie, and would ask her to marry him.

Mr. Hill decided to speak with Oscar. Gently, but firmly, he told Oscar that Bessie was too young to think about marriage. Mr. Hill's mission was so accomplished that Oscar still remained friends with the family, paying frequent visits. However, he pressed his suit with Bessie no further. Shortly, he married Cordie's first cousin, Elizabeth Yoakum.

Mr. Hill was forty-seven when Bessie and her dead twin were born. His beloved Myrtle had already died. Bessie's nature, like Mr. Hill's, was most generous and jolly. However, she, too, could become quite fiery, having Mr. Hill's battling heart. Believing injustice done to themselves, or others, usually created this wrath. Mr. Hill spent so many hours with Bessie, discussing his beliefs, both religious and philosophical, which he instilled into her fertile, loving mind. He most valued friends, believing they were more precious than gold. He valued an honest and good name. Bessie accepted and held to these beliefs all of her life.

Sometimes, Mr. Hill would take his family on an all-day train trip to Knoxville, making delightful excursions of the city. They were allowed into places on the train that other passengers did not visit. Bessie was proud when all the railroad men seem to know and greatly respect Mr. Hill. When frozen luscious ice cream first became available, Mr. Hill would have strawberry ice cream shipped to Lone Mountain for Cordie, Claude, Bessie and their friends. This frozen cream was packed in ice.

Claude Hill and Rial's son, Jeff Jennings, were both now working on the railroad. Mr. Hill had taught both them and their cousin, Horace Yoakum (my grandfather; son of James Randolph "Judge" Yoakum) the carpenter trade. Before going to work on the railroad, Claude had helped build the "rock house" (still standing) in Lone Mountain that was used for a jail.

The "boys," when they were home from the railroad work, could usually be found at the Hills' or at the Jennings' farm. This time, Claude had brought Bessie a finely made light colored suit. The skirt was a long hobble skirt, with the coat being tailored in the latest "scissor tailed" fashion. Bessie, who fairly worshipped her big brother, was highly pleased with Claude's gift.

Daily, Rial came to visit the Hills, sometimes bringing the milk and freshly churned butter Nan gave them. In the summer, Rial, still slender and erect, wore a snowy white Irish linen suit. Helen, now eleven, a lovely brown-eyed child, whose curls were touched with chestnut, came with her father whom she adored. Like Rial, Helen could ride anything with four legs.

Today, Rial had meant to speak with Mr. Saul Paul, the stone carver, about Chucky Bob's tombstone. Yesterday, Chucky, who was feebler than Rial, had been on the ridge most of the day. Late in the evening, Rial had sent Helen looking for him. Helen found Chucky coming off the ridge, carrying a long slender rock, almost too heavy for the feeble Negro to manage. Helen, happy she'd found the old Negro, asked, "Chucky, what's the big rock for?"

"It's for my tombstone, Helen." Helen told her daddy that she'd found Chucky and what he'd brought down from crooked ridge. Rial came out to where Chucky was, demanding, "Throw that rock away! Tomorrow, I'll see Mr. Saul Paul and order you a proper rock."

Rial, seeing Mr. Hill sitting in his rocker on the front porch, seated himself beside Bill. Mr. Hill, occasionally coughing and spitting into his closed container, holding carbolic acid, sat quietly beside Rial. Rial was thinking of his darkly handsome son, Louis, who had died a few years back. Louis had married Dr. Sam Stone's daughter, Ona. Now he and Nan had lost their first daughter, Lola, from heart dropsy. The two men, comfortable together, sat talking on the concrete porch. Bill, whose failing health was daily making him weaker, and Rial, on whose left cheek a cancer would soon start growing.

**April 2, 1981**

**MR. HILL'S FAMILY**

**Part Six**

War in Europe was imminent. This war would involve ninety-three percent of the world's population. It would be known as World War I. By 1915, the oncoming years of double-digit

inflation would begin, not really ending, except for brief quieting periods, until the great Depression of the 1930s. However, just before this time of great expansion (1915-1929), Americans were suffering under a time of terrible economic depression. Charlie Hill had returned home from the Spanish American War and married Bessie Day. Bessie was the only child of Ransom and Liddy Barnard Day. Bessie had inherited the tract of land next to the Hills' from her deceased parents' estate. They lived beside the Hills for awhile, then decided to sell their land and move to Kentucky, where Charlie could work in the mines.

(In 1916, this land was finally bought by Frank and Ollie Stone Evans. Presently, their daughter, Imogene Evans Rose, and her husband, Thomas J. Rose, live on the land. There has been five generations of friendship to date [1981] between the families of Frank Evans and J.W. "Bill" Hill.)

### **July, 1917**

Margaret Payne, World War II Army nurse (daughter of Byrd and A. Payne), one among many women, called Horace Yoakum the most beautiful man they'd ever seen. Horace, a slender gentle man with dark eyes and hair, was also magnanimous to an extreme degree.

Bessie Lee Hill, also thought her young cousin, Horace, the most beautiful man she'd ever seen. When Mr. Hill saw Horace and Bessie would marry, he asked to speak with Horace.

Since Bill and Cordie had lost so many of their babies, perhaps Mr. Hill overly compensated, but he always, both summer and winter, required Bessie to wear heavy, long-legged woolen drawers. He asked Horace to promise to make Bessie wear her woolen drawers. Horace (H.C.) gave Mr. Hill his promise.

However, Horace had reckoned without Bessie's will. They married July 27, 1917, and in the midst of that summer's heat, Bessie shed her drawers. Never in her entire life did she wear any type of drawers again.

Horace and Bessie moved in with his mother, Dora (Granny) and her second husband, Cal Holland. Cal and Dora lived in the newly formed Watt Jennings Subdivision, located across the Lone Mountain Road, and then a few yards east of the Hills' house. Ten months later, Louise (my mother), their first and only child, was born.

Daily, Bessie dressed Louise in little white dresses and walked out to Daddy Hill and Mamie Cord's house. Today, Cordie had baked Mr. Hill and Bessie strawberry pie from freshly picked berries out of their tame strawberry patch. Mr. Hill had been playing with Louise on his bed when Cordie called them to dinner.

Cordie's dinner table was well managed, with several vegetables, warm breads, and a good dessert always appearing. Bessie, holding Louise, sat on the window seat, the warm sun spilling past her shoulder onto the long oak table with its white linen cloth. They were talking about Claude.

## **Summer, 1918**

Since Claude had brought home his new bride to live with the Hills, and the brief unhappy marriage that followed, Claude had become both restless and dissatisfied with his job with the Southern Railway Co. He wanted to move to Kentucky and work as a mine carpenter with Charlie, but Mr. Hill and Cordie would become so upset about him working in the mines, that Claude would agree to stay with the railroad.

This early June morning, when the train pulled into the Lone Mountain Depot, Claude got off long enough to talk with his parents. Looking into the warmer over the cookstove, he found a piece of fried streaked meat, enough biscuits and gravy to make a good quick breakfast. The Hills watched their son eat as he told them he was going to ride the train on up into Lynch, Kentucky, to visit his brother Charlie's family. Charlie and Bessie just had one child, Roy Lee, who was now six.

Toward dusk that evening, upon the train's return, the Hills were surprised to see three men walking out their walk toward the porch. It was Charlie, Claude and Charlie's mine carpenter foreman, Bob Taylor. The men planned to stay overnight and, within that time, Claude was bent to persuade Mr. Hill to give him permission to work in the mines.

Finally, Mr. Hill agreed for Claude to work as mine carpenter with Charlie, on the condition that Claude's work would all be on the outside of the mine. Bob Taylor, shaking hands with Mr. Hill, promised that "Claude would never step foot inside the mine."

Claude enjoyed working for Bob Taylor, easily winning Bob's friendship with his merry blue eyes and friendly, laughing ways. In September, he would be twenty-seven, much of the pain from his brief marriage was diminishing.

It was now July. He'd been working in Lynch, Kentucky, for almost a month. This weekend on his way home he'd stopped over in Middlesboro, Kentucky, and had breakfast with his childhood friends, Edgar and Ida Pearson Jennings. Cordie had always hoped for a marriage between the lovely young Ida and Claude.

## **July 27, 1918**

Claude's boss, Bob Taylor, was away from his job today. Working near the mouth of the mine, Claude was thinking of his sister, Bessie. Today, July 27, 1918, was Horace and Bessie's first wedding anniversary. He thought with pleasure of the set of ruby-colored goblets he'd bought for Horace and Bessie. He was also pleased with the little white crocheted hat and matching coat he'd had made for the baby, Louise.

Just inside the mouth of the mine, he noticed one of the carpenters setting timber. The man called, "Claude, come in here a minute and hold this timber." Cheerfully, Claude complied.

The piece of slate waiting to fall on Claude was six feet long and three feet thick. The slate covered all of Claude except for one heel of his foot. The carpenter whom Claude had entered the mine to help was untouched.

When Charlie and Bob Taylor learned what had happened, they were both sick with grief, thinking of Claude's lost young life, his terribly ill, fine old father and his doting mother, who even now would try to hide her grief when she learned the horrible news of Claude's death.

The funeral parlor in Lynch had placed Claude's body in the train's baggage car. Both Charlie and Bob climbed in with the body. They could feel the shifting pull of the cars as they began their steam puffing journey homeward for Claude through the beautiful Cumberland Mountains. Dynamite had to be used to remove the rock from Claude's body. The undertaker had asked Charlie to view the remains. Under the heavy white facial powder, Claude's face and head appeared flattened. Part of his suit, especially around the arms seemed stuffed. Charlie figured the dynamite had blown part of them away.

Charlie's heart ached for his little family in Lone Mountain, his ill father's drawn face, Cordie smiling, quick and small, Bessie, jolly like her father, and Claude. How he wished he could spare them this pain.

The next afternoon, Claude's funeral was preached under the pear tree in the Hills' yard. Then his body was hauled by wagon to the Jennings' farm. He was buried in the Jennings Cemetery, back of the two-story log house.

**April 9, 1981**

## **MR. HILL'S FAMILY**

### **Part Seven**

The Apostle John was the most intimate earthly friend of Jesus. He was the apostle of love, yet Jesus called him "son of thunder." John's character was a blend of a passionate, forceful nature, combined with gentleness and love.

Since Claude's death, the ache around Mr. Hill's heart was steady. Sitting on his concrete porch or lying in his bed, often his mind drifted back to the days of his youth. His mother taught him to read from the Bible. Frequently, they read the book of St. John, chapter fourteen. In this chapter, Jesus comforts his disciples, promising them, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

Sometimes, Mr. Hill thought about the railroad. Many years after his retirement, when he was already quite ill, reduced to mostly sitting in a chair, the company asked him to go to Maryland. The bridge in Maryland was difficult. It was always cold, the men wore fur next to their skin. The railroad company provided Bill with a chair to use while he directed the elevations and building of the bridge.

Mr. Hill's bed had been moved into the living room. It sat in front of the long bay windows, near where Cordie watched the switchboard. Cordie, now fifty-three, still had dark hair and a remarkably unlined face. Mr. Hill lay on his bed watching Cordie move quickly around the room.

"Cordie, if I were to die before you, would you marry again?" he asked her suddenly.

"No, sir, I'd never marry again," replied Cordie. "Would you marry again, Mr. Hill?"

"Yes, madam, I'd marry again!"

Twice Mr. Hill's sputum was sent off to be analyzed for tuberculosis bacilli. The last report from Ann Arbor, Michigan, also proved to be negative of the rod-shaped germ. However, daily, Mr. Hill grew worse. He was now no longer able to leave his bed.

He was quite concerned about Cordie, should he leave her alone. Mr. Hill had bought both Charlie and Louis's part of the Jennings farm (600 acres). They died before their father, Rial. According to the Anderson Jennings will, the land would only go to Rial's living male heirs. After Charlie and Louis died, Mr. Hill knew he no longer owned the 600 acres of land.

One day, he asked to see Dora (Granny), whose second husband, Cal Holland, had died in the 1918 flu epidemic. He asked Dora to give up her house, bringing Horace, Bessie and Louise to live with Cordie. Dora, whose tiny body houses a loving, courageous heart, much like Mr. Hill's, gave him her promise to live with Cordie upon his death.

Horace had come to tell his Uncle Rial that Mr. Hill was much worse. Rial paused long enough to get his razor. He could handle his own razor better. However, for several days, Mr. Hill had not wanted to be shaved.

Upon Rial's arrival, Bill, smiling weakly, asked how Rial was and shook hands with him. Rial asked, "Bill, do you want me to shave you?"

"No," was the feeble reply. "I don't feel like being shaved. They can shave me after I'm gone." Rial sat by the bed for nearly another hour, neither man hardly speaking. Finally, Rial turned to Cordie, telling her to leave the room.

"I can't. I have to watch the switchboard."

"Well, then turn your back." Rial could hear Bessie sobbing quietly in the bedroom, not wanting to disturb her father.

Bill turned his head, slightly smiled, life easing out of him very gently.

## **A SUMMARY**



Mr. Hill was buried in the Jennings Cemetery. True to her promise, Dora closed her house and moved in with Cordie, bringing Horace, Bessie and Louise.

In 1924, Mr. Hill's son, Charlie Hill, was shot in Wallen's Creek, Kentucky. He was buried in the Jennings Cemetery. In 1946, Charlie Hill's son, Roy Lee Hill, was shot by his stepfather. He was the second to the last person buried in the Jennings Cemetery.

Rial Jennings lived ten years after the cancer appeared on his left cheek. He died in 1929. His funeral was preached under the fully bloomed pear tree in front of the old Jennings log house. He was buried in the Jennings Cemetery. Before dying, he asked his daughter, Helen, for the bright piece of canned peach that had fallen in the peach juice Mrs. Colby had prepared for him. After eating the piece of luscious peach, he looked at Helen and said, "Try not to cry too much." Rial died about two hours later.

Shortly after Mr. Hill died, Ed Jennings, whom, due to his mother Louise's early death, Cordie and Mr. Hill had helped raise, came to visit Cordie.

"Cordie, give me Claude's death insurance money, and I will pay you interest."

Cordie, who adored Ed, said, "All right, Ed." Shortly, she gave Ed the eight hundred dollars which was all she had. Ed then gave her two hundred dollars, saying, "Cordie, this is your interest for the year."

Of course, real bank interest would have earned Cordie only fifteen or twenty dollars each year. However, for the next thirty years, Ed Jennings gave his sister, Cordie, two hundred dollars interest on her money each year. This was Cordie's income and how she lived modestly, but with pride.

When Ed grew very old, but before his stroke, he called Cordie to him, saying, "I've got to give you your money back. I can't pay you interest any more." Cordie replied to her beloved brother, "All right, Ed."

In 1949, the bottom fell out of the cattle market. Ed also had lost a new tractor and his barn to an uninsured fire loss. He became bankrupt and lost the Jennings farm that his family had owned for over one hundred and fifty years.

(1955) Cordie was the last person to be buried in the Jennings Cemetery. At first, Horace was buried there (1958), but when Bessie died (1964), we bought lots at the Fairview Cemetery. We then moved Horace's remains to the Fairview Cemetery, next to Bessie. Dora (Granny) was buried at the Fairview (1966). Ed and his wife, Dallas, lay next to Horace and Bessie in the Fairview Cemetery.