

- **Claiborne County (TN) Progress**

## **Nell Quesenbery Report**

**August 27, 1981**

### **WIND FLOWER**

**By Nell Quesenbery**

Upon seeing the beautiful boy, I asked the great Greek god Zeus, “Who is he?” “Adonis” was the reply.

Charlie Wayne Hodges, my husband Jack’s first cousin, comes into my memory plainly at three different ages.

First, I remember Wayne and his two brothers, fine-looking, serious little boys, all under twelve, practicing piano lessons. The piano sat on the highly lacquered hardwood floor of his mother’s large living room. Inside the Lone Mountain house that day, besides his gracious mother, there was a tiny beautiful black-eyed woman, dressed in a brightly pink outing flannel gown. (The old woman was my husband Jack’s and Wayne Hodges’ grandmother, Harriet Berry Hodges.)

In my second memory of Wayne, he is now fully grown, standing in front of his father’s grocery store. I catch my breath at the great beauty of this young man, with his magnificent black eyes. (In Lone Mountain, these type of eyes are called “Hodges eyes,” but in reality the eyes are from our Moore-Jennings heritages.)

My third memory is of a more polished, slightly older, young man, attending his father’s, Granville Hodges, funeral services. I’ve never seen Wayne since this sad occasion, hearing of him only infrequently.

Then one day, a letter arrived for me from California. The letter was from Wayne. Also inside the letter, Wayne had enclosed two poems he had written.

Wayne's letter, May 18, 1981:

*Dear Nell,*

*I've been reading your historical prose about Claiborne County and Lone Mountain in the Progress. Even though I made the move to California in 1974, I still like to take the Progress to see what's happening.*

*Bryan Payne gave me a subscription to it in return for my sending him a subscription to the Mendocino Beacon, one of our local papers. Mendocino is a town of about a thousand people by the ocean in northern California.*

*I've been here for going on six years, having moved up from Fresno after two years down in the valley. It was far too flat for my "hillbilly" taste in terrain. Around here, the redwood, spruce, Douglas fir and Scotch Broom grow on the hills that hug the ocean.*

*I appreciated the one segment of your pieces which talked about the Hodges. I'd like to get more of that information from you. I have a four-month-old son named Silas Granville Hodges, keeping the Granville named passed on.*

*Since I moved here to Mendocino County, I've been a creative writer, publishing mostly poetry and essays. I have a book coming out soon. Sometimes, I teach creative writing in the county school system.*

*My wife, Suzanne, is from Norfolk, Virginia. We met in Atlanta. She teaches law here at the community college.*

*I understand you live in the "John Tom Payne House" by the Baptist Church. I used to spend countless hours there with Bryan, Fate, Johnny and Cissy. It was like a second home. Mary Payne still remains like a surrogate mother to me. She used to cart all of us around to the lakes, picnicking, the movies and whatever.*

*We hope to get a chance to see you in Lone Mountain. I'd like more information on the Hodges if it's no trouble.*

*I'm sending you these two poems which deal with Lone Mountain. One of them has images of Aunt Mag. She was one of my favorite relatives. (Aunt Maggie, whose images that*

Wayne writes about in his poem, "A Song of Paradise," is my husband Jack's mother, Margaret "Mag" Quesenbery.)

*Take care and best wishes. I hope you continue writing narrative history. It's more interesting than the dry prose of text books.*

*Charlie Wayne*

The following are the two poems by Charlie Wayne Hodges:

## A SONG OF PARADISE LOST

*"All is a procession."* Walt Whitman

Hallelujah! to the powers of reverie.

When reality wants to extract  
an extravagant tax from my back,

I won't pay! I won't pay!

I just moonrake awhile, to rise  
above the clickety-clack,  
as it was since we squirmed our way  
out of a churning sea.

A prophet says look back

to see the forward path.

Forget the past and be forever cursed  
to repeat all the infamous deeds.

Hallelujah! to the powers of reverie.

When the clouds come in with the bills

and my wife refuses to speak

and the baby cries like a pup

and I feel like giving up my freedom

for a larger piece of real estate,

I just go back to a solitary mountain

framed in a kitchen window,

above the simple sink.

(It was a simple one, wasn't it?)

Go back to where the first frost

and size of October pumpkins

were pertinent topics of talk,

to where Aunt Maggie would stand and sing

by that same kitchen window, (yes,

it was a simple one, I remember)

stirring up yet another batch

of yellow cornbread with a fork,

hips swinging a beat to a flying utensil.

Tomatoes were sweet and so was the jam.

Hallelujah! to the powers of reverie.

Tomatoes were red and simple-skinned,

round and sweet and plentiful,

like Aunt Maggie's cornbread.

Yes, it is a good and simple interval,

going back to Tennessee in my head,

but I have found, I always find,

it never is enough, never enough,

to satisfy a fidgety soul

or keep the leaves from falling.

*Charles Hodges*

## HE TRIED TO GROW OLD WITH GRACE

It was summer on a storefront bench,  
commerce of flies and poverty  
ignored in favor of daydreams,  
the world contained within a map,  
a great silent bird.

Uncle George whittled on a cedar,  
postulating like a mentor.  
to budding boys beside him:

“If I was but a young man again  
and knowed what I know now . . .”

Then he pursed his thin old lips  
and drew in a quick hissing sound,  
like he’d just burned his thoughts on a stove,  
shook his gray head and grimaced,  
an old dog chewing on tough hide.

Then he went back to knife and cedar,  
whistling to his private thoughts.

He had defeated once again  
the useless hand of useless remorse.

*Charles Hodges*