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Stories From East Tennessee

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Editor's Note: *These stories revolve around Mr. Byrd's growing up in East Tennessee mining country (Scott County) in the 1940s and '50s. His daughter-in-law, Lisa Ryan, has edited the stories "in such a way that his unique 'voice' is retained."*

My dad, Sigal Byrd, went to work in the coal mines when he was sixteen years of age. He would have other jobs in his life, and sometimes the coal mines would go on strike. But as soon as a strike would settle, Dad would come back to the mines. The coal mines just kept calling him back. One old miner used to say that the coal dust just gets in your blood and that once it's there, you're never satisfied unless you're working in those surroundings.

When he was twenty-one years of age, Dad went before the state Mine Inspection Board to be certified as a foreman. There's a series of tests that you had to take in those days, including personal interviews, but at that time he was the youngest man ever certified to be a foreman in a coal mine operation. For years he would work for the Blue Diamond Coal Company out of Pennsylvania.

My daddy had a reputation. It was said that he and his crew could produce more coal than any others, and none of the other shifts could

come even close to reaching the tonnage that he and his crew would bring out during their time.



Sigal Byrd

The Lady with No Head

Dad had an older brother, Fred. Grandpa would tell me that Dad and Fred did most everything together. I think from time to time, they even slipped into the rheumatism medicine that the uncle would have. Back home, some folks would keep something called white lightning around the house. If you kept it, you'd tell folks it was for rheumatism. Grandpa told me a story one night that Dad and Fred had been off down the road somewhere and came home, and Tater George came with him. He's a man that lived up at the upper end of the valley and probably had a hand in making this medicine. No one ever said for sure. But Grandpa says they could see the dead. They had been doctoring up their rheumatism.

Down at the mouth of the valley, I took the right fork and came up to Montgomery where we lived, then took the left fork and went up into where the coal mines were. But just shortly after you took the left fork, there was a house on the left and a family lived there, and up across the creek the road took a turn up the hill.

And it was said by several people that at certain times of the night on certain nights, there was a woman that would walk down that hill with no head. Now, I have been up and down that hill different hours of the night a lot of times, and I have never seen a woman walk up and down that hill with no head. I will admit, though, that I didn't look very hard when I was going up that hill or coming down it, and I did come down it pretty fast.

But Dad and Fred and Tater George decided that they would go down there, and if she came down that hill that night, they were going to catch her and put an end to this nonsense. And Grandpa said he just sort of laughed to himself, listening to them out on the front porch making their plans. And Dad hollered to tell Grandpa that they would be back tomorrow. Grandpa said that he was sitting on the porch and not

yet gone to bed, actually waiting for them to come back. He could hear them coming up the road, and they were not wasting any time.

"She's gonna get me!

She's gonna catch me!"

And you could hear Tater George calling them names and cursing at them because they wouldn't wait on him. And Grandpa said he could make out, "She's gonna get me! She's gonna catch me! She's gonna get me! Wait on me!" And Grandpa said they came into the yard, and he asked them what was wrong. And they said they were at the hill and that she attacked them, that she screamed at them. And they were fine--he could tell. Of course, the rheumatism medicine had a lot to do with it.

So Grandpa said, "Well, let's go back down there and see if she's still there," and then he said it again, chuckling to himself. And they were sort of reluctant to go, but if Grandpa was gonna go, and they took a gun--well, they figured they would go back. Now, what a gun would do against a woman with no head, I don't know, but I guess it gave them comfort.

Grandpa said they got the lantern and they went back. It had been misting, raining a good portion of the evening--not a hard rain, just a mist. And Grandpa asked them, "Where did she attack you? Where did this take place?" And Dad said, "Just there at the top of the hill, there by the ditch."

Grandpa took the lantern and walked up, and he could see there where they had dug their heels into the soft mud of the road as they

turned and fled down the hill. But one of them had been walking almost on the very edge of the ditch.

Grandpa said he saw then what had happened. There were signs where they had torn up the bank and on up into the woods, and there had been a wild hog laying there for some reason, maybe lying in a little pool of water that had collected. And evidently the hog had dozed off. And the boys of course were sneaking up the hill very quietly, and whichever one was on the edge of the ditch had stepped onto the pig, and the hog, of course, let out a blood-curdling squeal.

And our three knights that were going to catch the lady with no head were soon to vacate the premises and not slow up until they were safely back in the barnyard at Grandpa's house. He said "Let me show you your lady with no head." He showed them where the hog had torn up the bank and run up into the woods.

There would be stories later that people had claimed to see the lady with no head. But as I say, I never seen her, but I never looked hard either.

A New Recruit and a Tragedy

Dad worked, and I guess Fred worked in the coal mines with him. And then when World War II broke out, they went together to volunteer for the Army, as they had done most everything together most all of their lives. But Dad had broken his arm in an accident there in the mine, and it was in a cast. The recruiter took Fred on the spot, but he asked Dad how long he was going to have to wear the cast. Dad told them six weeks, and the recruiter told him, "In six weeks, you come back." And he returned home and Fred was shipped out for training. Fred came home on leave. And of course everyone was excited to see him and hear all the things that went on in training and boot camp. After the evening meal, everyone went into the living room. Grandpa and Grandma had a large living room in that home, and Grandpa's rifle was hanging above the fireplace, as it normally was. And because of snakes and things, the gun was always loaded.

*Fred went to the fireplace
and took down the rifle.*

Fred went to the fireplace and took down the rifle and said he wanted to show them how he had to drill, and he started going through the motions of drilling with the rifle. And as he turned the rifle around, it somehow went off, and the bullet hit him in the side of the head. And they would later tell me that he died with his head lying in Grandma's lap.

It took a long time, they told me, for Grandma to ever get over that. Dad said he was really lost for a long time. And when the cast was off, Dad went to the recruiter again, and they knew what had happened, and they told him to go on back home.

Life on the Farm

Some of my earliest memories are of living in the mining camps. Mommy told me later on that if there was trouble in a mine or if one of the mines was not producing as it should, the people in charge would ask Daddy to move to that one, and Daddy became superintendent of all three shifts. And so we moved wherever there was a problem.

We did that until I was ten years of age, and Dad decided that he no longer wanted to live that way. So he bought a farm that was just adjacent to Grandpa's farm, and we moved over there. Dad continued to work in the mines, but he told his supervisors that he did not want to move from place to place anymore. He wanted to stay in the mines at a place called Roach's Creek. So there would begin my life of living on a farm.

Dad never treated me like a twelve-year-old boy, but like an adult. He would talk to me about crops and what we'd plant here and what we'd plant in this river bottom and so on. And when Dad became just a foreman then, he was assigned the second shift, working from three in the afternoon till eleven at night. So he would always leave right after dinner--remember in the South, now, dinner is the twelve o'clock meal, and supper is the evening meal--to get ready for his shift at work. He would be around before noon with Grandpa and me, though, and we would talk about what I needed to get done the rest of the day after he left.

We always kept the livestock in the barn so that we were ready to go to work, but they also had to be watered. I'd take them one at a time across the bottom to a big spring that never ran dry. Even when water was low in the hot months of July and August, this spring was always full and overflowing,

and we always watered the livestock there.

And I had told Daddy that I could do that, but Mommy said, "No, you're too young." And I said, "No, I can do that now. I can take them to water."

So one day Dad decided I could take the animals to water. And, boy, was I proud of myself as I headed back to the barn with both of them and turned them in the stall. I ran home to let Dad know I successfully completed this chore, and he said, "That's good, Son. I knew you could do it all along."

When it came time for the evening water, Dad had told Mom, "Let him go do it. You don't need to go up there with him. He can handle it." And so I did. And it became my job every day the rest of the time I was at home. I did that several times to prove I could do certain things. Sometime later on, though, I realized that once I had proved I could do things, I somehow got appointed to do them all!

So one time after Mommy had died, my stepmother was going to teach me how to milk the cow. And for some reason I just could not learn how to milk that cow. I could make a little, pale blue stream come, but I couldn't make a gusher come like I was expected to. You see, I knew that once I had proven I could milk the cow, that would become another chore--so that was chore I made up my mind I could never, ever master!

How Did He Know?

I remember Dad back at the time when we moved; our mom was sick, but I didn't know how sick she was. I knew that she had had a kidney removed, but I didn't understand. If that had happened today, she'd be fine. But in those days, you didn't survive very long with one kidney.

Dad always had a coon dog. He loved to coon hunt, and I tried to stay with him, because I loved the hunting also. I would hunt many days by myself where I grew up. But he had bought this black and tan hound, and we called him Watch. We had a blue tick hound also, but this Watch was a very particular dog. I guess he had been trained or maybe had been beaten when he was a pup, but that dog would not come into your home, into the house – he just would not come. Dad would call to him, and he'd come up on the porch and stop two or three feet from the door, but he would not come any closer.

Several times Dad would have me go to the kitchen and get a piece of meat that may have been left over or a piece of bread from the meal and lay it down just inside the door. And he called to the dog to tell him he could have it, but he would not come in the door. So eventually I would get up and then give him the food, and he would take it and go off the front porch.

Mom fed him on occasions when I was not there, or just when she wanted to; Mom loved animals. And speaking of that, the strangest thing happened--something I wondered about for years.

The day that Mom passed away at home, the family sent word to the funeral home, and of course everyone was around waiting for them to come to pick up Mom's body to take it and

prepare it for burial. We were standing there and the screen door was open, because people were coming and going. The neighbors would come by to express their sympathies, and some of them were carrying food in.

All of a sudden, we looked up and Watch came up on the porch and walked right inside the front door. He walked by all of us, proceeded back through the house and went back into the room where Mom's bed was--the room where she had passed away.

[That dog] went to the bed and stood there and looked at her.

Dad and I got up to watch him, and he went to the bed and stood there and looked at her. Of course, they had placed a sheet over her body.

The dog sat there for a few moments, then turned around, walked back out through the house and out the door and out into the front yard--as if there was no one around. He paid no attention to anyone and did not even look our way.

That dog had never been in our home before and was never inside the house again as long as we had him. I wondered: How did he know? He had never been in the room with Mom; how did he know where to go? Later on, I thought maybe he was able to detect the smell of death, or maybe he even knew her and knew her smell. But it was amazing that he must have followed that smell and knew something had happened to her.

It rained most all the day of her funeral. The old mountain people have a saying, and I used to watch it come true time and time again: when someone dies, if that person is right with the Lord, it'll rain within three days. I saw it happen so, so many times,

that it rained. And in some cases, when it didn't rain, I knew the lives of those folks and that was the way it should have been. Was there truth to it? I don't know. But when Mommy was buried, it rained all day.

A New Member of the Family

Grandma and Grandpa had come to live with us. Grandma was not well, and she was getting up in years. One morning we got up and Dad said, "I want you to take a ride with me." We drove around by the graveyard where my great-grandfather and several members of my family are buried. It lies back at the foot of the mountain, and I believe I could take you there today and you would feel the same way. It is one of the most peaceful places I have ever been, that cemetery. Dad parked the car and said, "I want to ask you something. Mom is not well, and to take care of us has put quite a load on her. My sisters have agreed that they will take you kids because I've got to work, and sometimes, as you know, I work long hours. But none of them will take all three of you, and I don't want to split you. "Mom can't take care of us, so I'm gonna ask Lois Miller to marry me. You know Lois, and your sisters know her, and she'll be good to you children. And then we can live together as a family."



Don Byrd, A Sister, and a Friend

He continued: "People will talk about me now because your mother has only been dead a few months. So they'll say that I did not wait long enough for a mourning period. But we have to go on, although I won't marry her if you

tell me you don't want me to do that. I want to know what you think about it."

I told Dad I thought that would be just fine, because I did like Lois, and my two sisters liked her. They lived across the creek in a farm where they were sharecroppers, a big farm that a doctor in the community owned. I think there were eleven of the kids.

Dad and Lois went together a few times to church, because back then, that was about the only place you went. After a bit, he asked Lois to marry him, and she said yes.

And she came about as close as anyone could ever have come to taking my mother's place. I will respect her as long as she lives because she took in three children and a husband, and that was quite a responsibility for a young woman to take. There was never a moment of trouble between us three kids and her.

There were several years between her and Dad, but they would go on to have five children of their own. So from a family of three, it was not long until we were a family of eight.

The day that Dad passed away--we'll talk more about that later--he looked up at me and said, "Son, take care of her--she's been a good one."

I remember Argil Byrd, who was a distant cousin to us, talking to some people at the graveyard when Dad was buried. And he said, "You know, he was one of the lucky men. A

man's real lucky if he gets a good woman, but he had two good women." And I smiled because Lois was good to us and is still good to us today.

Roy Rogers

We had a set of red mules at that time, a pair of red mules. One of them you could ride with a saddle, and the other one you could not ride with a saddle or a bareback. That mule was just impossible to ride.

There was a period of time there that my Dad lost his way. I guess that's the best way to say it. Three months after Mom died, the house burned. We lost everything we had. In the country in those days, there was no such thing as insurance on your home.

And then Grandpa passed away, and I think it was more than Dad could handle. He had often talked to me about how close he and Grandpa were. They went to work together and shoveled coal all day, and during the Depression, they'd work all day for a bushel of corn and take it to the mill and have it ground into cornmeal. Dad told me that you become more than just a father and son when you go through that type of experience.

So I think Dad lost his way for a short while, and he started to drink. Of course, he thought he was hiding it well. I never saw Dad intoxicated in my life, but I did know that he was drinking some.

I was leading one of the red mules across the bottom to the big spring. Dad's sister and her husband lived on a small farm below the road adjacent to ours, and Dad was sitting on the front porch talking with them. And he hollered: "I'll tell you one thing. When I was fifteen years of age, if I couldn't ride a mule to water, he just wouldn't get no water."

Well, that sort of irritated me because I didn't want him to think that I couldn't ride the mule—especially because I knew I couldn't. I'd been thrown.

I just mouthed right back and said, "Well, if you think you can ride him, I'll bring him out there and let you show me how to ride him." He said, "Bring him out here."

"I'll show you how Roy Rogers gets on his horse."

And I took him through the gate and out into the road and led him down to Dad, who said, "Turn him around there. I'll show you how Roy Rogers gets on his horse." And he took a run and placed both hands on his hips and vaulted over and landed on his back. The seat of his pants didn't much more than touch the back of that mule.

Then he turned around and just chewed me out. "Well, you know, anybody knows that you keep a mule's head up when somebody's gonna get up on him; you hold him where he can't buck. Take him up and put him in the barn."

We got a few paces on down the road, and I said, "Whatever you say, Roy." And Dad gave me that look like, "OK, boy, you've said enough. Don't say anything else." So I went and put the mule back in the barn. It was that way between the two of us.

Giving It Away

I'd seen Dad buy property on a handshake. The people he worked for loved him. And Dad had this philosophy and really believed it. We had a big apple orchard of red and yellow delicious apples, and we had, oh, probably twenty, twenty-five trees, I guess. And then of course we had the farm.

After we had prepared the apples that we would dry and can, Dad would ask his men at work if any of them wanted any apples. And then when we'd get up of a morning to have breakfast, my sisters and I, our stepmother--there'd be a note on the kitchen table saying, "Pick me a bushel of apples," or green beans, or corn, or whatever. Because if we had anything left over, Dad always believed in giving it away.

He would not charge or allow me to charge because he believed if you had abundance of things this year--apples or corn or whatever your goods--and you charge your neighbor for it, the next year you wouldn't grow anything. It'd be a bad year. So we gave it away. That's the way he believed, and I never minded him giving it away. The thing is, I always had to pick it anyway! But we always had it ready, and Dad then would take it to work to the coal miners.

When I drive along now and see people selling fruits and vegetables out of trucks by the side of the road, I think about how I could have probably made some money, which was hard to come by. Ten people in a house on a coal

miner's salary--there was not a lot of money. But we never charged. If someone came down sick, Dad would have me take the mules and the mowing machine, and I'd go cut their hay, I'd rake their hay, I'd plow their garden. While they were sick, if they needed anything done, Dad would not allow me to accept pay--because you did what your neighbors needed.

There was a young man in the community whose dad had been killed in the coal mines, and his mom and sister and two brothers and he lived across the creek, down a little ways from us. He got in trouble and they sent him to a reform school. But he didn't stay there very long. I don't know how Dad ever arranged it because you didn't question Dad about things. He just would not talk about them.

But I remember one Saturday he left very early, and he had dressed up in a suit and tie, and I wondered where he was going. He had not said anything, and he was gone all day. But when he came back that evening, he had the young boy with him. Turns out he had gone to Nashville to the reform school and had gotten them to release the boy into his custody, as long as Dad would be responsible for him. They turned him loose, and to this day, that boy--now a man, of course--would say how much he appreciated my Dad. Why Dad did that, I don't know. He never would talk about it, but it shows the type of person that he was.

The Life-Saving Shotgun Trade

I had a little twenty-gauge shotgun that Dad had bought for me somewhere. I loved that shotgun. It was the sweetest-shooting gun that I had ever had. A new preacher moved into our community, and he came to our house for Sunday dinner. In talking about hunting and dogs, Dad found out that he had a young dog out of Cas Walker's champion coon dog.

Cas Walker was a man that owned several grocery stores in and around Knoxville and East Tennessee. But he was an avid coon hunter and hunted quite a bit and had dogs they'd take to these trials where they would trail a coon, and then the first dog to the tree would win the prize money. And so we find out that this preacher had a young dog out of Cas's champion, and Daddy wanted that dog. But the preacher wouldn't sell him.

But as we were talking during that afternoon, I was showing him my little twenty-gauge, and he wanted to buy it. And I told him no, I couldn't sell it. He said that if I were to decide to sell it, he would hope I'd give him the first chance to buy it. And I said, "Well, I'll do that, but don't expect that to ever happen."

*"Take your gun and offer
to trade it for that dog."*

And the next day or two, Dad told me, "He really wants that shotgun of yours. Go over and take your gun and offer to trade it for that dog, and if we need to give some boot, then we'll give some boot."

And I said, "Dad, I don't want to sell it." He said, "I know, but we need that dog. That dog

is a champion dog, and he'll make a great coon dog for us. We need to trade, and I'll get you another gun."

Well, I was not gonna turn him down, so I went to see the preacher and started dealing with him, and finally I traded my gun and wound up giving five dollars cash for the dog. Dad was so pleased when I brought the dog home. We were going to go coon hunting, and our neighbor, a retired coal miner by the name of Johnny Harness, always went coon hunting with us. So it was me and the dogs in the back seat and Johnny and Dad in the front seat, and away we'd go coon hunting.

The different hollers that branch off had different names, and we decided we'd go up Green Branch, go on top of the mountain, drop over, and come back down Spring Valley Holler, and then we'd have a few miles back to the car. We'd surely catch one or two that way, as we had done before.

But that dog would not go any farther than my light would shine from me; that's all he would do. And Dad, as the night went on, looked so disappointed because he had thought the dog would be a champion tree dog right away.

And I became aggravated that I'd given my little twenty-gauge for him, and one time I even kicked him in the butt--not very hard--and told him to get out and go hunting. But he would not. He stayed right in the light. We were coming down Spring Valley, the old logging road, and all of a sudden the dog gave out a real loud yip. Dad said, "Throw your light on the ground," which meant to put your light down where you could see.

And about that time the shotgun went off. Lying at my feet was a big copperhead. That

dog had been walking between me and the bank of the road. The snake had some-how alerted Dad. He said he felt it as it ran across the road, across his feet, and it got to the bank, and it couldn't get up the bank, and it turned and bit the dog in the side of the jaw and was coiled up ready to strike again when Dad shot it with a shotgun.

I would wonder later why the shotgun didn't hit me, but that close a range, the shot pattern did not have time to scatter, which is most likely the reason I was not hit with any of the

pellets from the shotgun. The dog would be really sick for a few days but would live. And I knew that night that that dog had saved my life, because had he not been between the bank and me, then the snake would have bitten me. And we were a long ways from the car and a long way from the doctor's office. So that dog and I became inseparable. The dog would go on to tree and kill a lot of coons. But I think back, and that little twenty-gauge shotgun was a way to save my life.

Proving Them Wrong

The first time Dad had a heart attack I was up in Indiana working. My sister called me and told me what had happened. I clocked out from work, went home and got my clothes and headed to Tennessee. That night, I'd gone to work on the ten o'clock shift, and our contract was to expire at midnight. If they didn't do something by midnight, then we were going to strike. And so I asked them if I could leave. I told them what had happened.

It was after daylight by the time I got to Tennessee. I went to the hospital, and my sister was there and my stepmother. And they showed me where he was at, and he was bad. Doc Sarge had been the family doctor for years. And I asked him how bad Dad was, and he said, "Well, he had a blood clot that went in his heart and then tore itself out. I don't know why he's still alive, but he'll have to lie here thirty days. And then he'll have to go home and lie sixty days and not get up. But I'll tell you now: you won't take him home."

That was the second time in Dad's life that they'd given him up to die. They didn't know how tough he was.

The first time it happened was a cave-in in the coal mine. He was probably twenty-five or twenty-six years old. And they had brought

him out as they were bringing the others out, and Grandpa would tell me that they had lain him over to the side and said, "That one's gone. We need to work with the others."

"This one is alive!"

But one of the medical people who were working with him saw Dad's hand move, and that person hollered and said, "This one is alive!" They said they had to wait three days for the swelling to go down, that his shoelaces had swollen into his feet, and there were a lot of broken bones. His jaw had been almost shattered; they were able to repair it. It took weeks and weeks, but he lived.

And now Doc Sarge was telling me he would not live, again. So I called my wife, Shirley, and told her that I would be there for a while. She informed me that the factory where I worked had gone on strike, so that would give me time. And he laid the thirty days and we brought him home, and he laid the sixty days, and he got better. He was forty-four when it happened, but he would never work another day. And finally at the age of sixty-three he would pass away. To be like him would be a great honor. He was my best friend.

The Sweetest Apples

I was in Texas working. My sister called me, and when I'd gotten into the room, there was a message there to call her immediately. I called, and she told me that Dad had had another heart attack, and she said, "This is the real thing. You'd better get here." You see, he had had two other light heart attacks after the first heart attack.

I called Shirley and asked her to meet me at the airport with a change of clothes and then take my car home and I would fly to Knoxville. I'd been stopped once by the state police in Texas, and they always ask you after looking at your license if there is an emergency. And I thought, boy, this time I can tell them there is an emergency. So I had a new Lincoln, and I headed it towards Austin, Texas. I went more than fifty-five miles an hour, which was the speed limit at that time, but never saw an officer all the way to the airport.

I landed in Knoxville, got a cab, and told them I needed to go to St. Mary's Hospital. I said, "There's an extra twenty if you can get me there as fast as you can." And he took me across Knoxville to St. Mary's, and I got into where Dad was, and he had had a stroke and could not speak. He tried, but he couldn't. He could say a word or two, but he couldn't put a sentence together. And my sister said he would become very frustrated because he couldn't say what he wanted to say. So I went around the bed and talked to him.

Later on the doctors came in, and I had a chance to talk with them in the hallway and hear how bad it really was--that he had hardening of the arteries and gangrene had set in in his leg. And the doctors said, "We cannot operate because he's not strong enough to take it. He has a few days." I told them I understood.

Two doctors came in later that day and said, "Mr. Byrd, we need to talk to you. It's our policy that we tell the patient everything. We know that some hospitals do not do that; they tell the family. But it's our policy here. And there's nothing else that we can do for you, Mr. Byrd."

"That's OK," Dad said.

"I don't think you understand, Mr. Byrd," they said. "You're going to die. There's nothing we can do."

And again Dad said, "OK."

So they said, "Mr. Byrd, do you understand that you probably have three days? No more than three days? You're going to die. Do you understand that?"

And for a third time, Dad said, "OK."

I finally cut in and said, "Sir, he understands what you're saying. He accepts what you're saying." And, finally, the doctors left.

Of course, I'd called my wife, and she and the children were on their way from Texas, and the whole family was coming in. Uncle Fred had one son, and he came in, and I asked him if he would sit with Dad while I went out in the parking lot and got some fresh air and walked around.

And I'd just gotten out in the parking lot, and I looked over and cousin came running, and he said, "They want you in there. They want you in there right now." And I thought, well, Lord, this is it, so I hurried back in and down the hallway. I got to his room and he saw me, and he motioned for me to come, and I went around the backside of the bed where he was at.

And he was talking as plainly as I'm talking to you now after not being able to speak for the three days I'd been there. He said, "Now, son, you've all been here now for three days. Everybody, I know, is tired and worn out. I want you to take them home now, because I've got to go."

*"I'd like to sit down here
till you go."*

And of course I was fighting emotions, and I said, "Well, Dad, we are tired, but if you don't care, I'd like to sit down here till you go, and then we'll go."

And he said, "OK." And he had each one of the children and the grandchildren come around, and he kissed them on the cheek, all of them, and he kissed my stepmother, then lay back down on his pillow.

On the way to the hospital, I had talked to the Lord and asked Him, "Can You please just give me some kind of sign that everything

between You and him is all right, just so I'll know." And I'd been waiting, and I had not seen anything. Dad was lying on the pillow, and all of a sudden, he started smiling. He just smiled so big and sort of raised up a little bit, and then he said, "Umm, umm, these are the sweetest apples I've ever eaten."

And I said, "Dad, what are you doing?"

He said, "Well, I'm here. I'm under this apple tree." He said that Pap (his father) was there and Mommy and his first cousin, whom he called by name. And he said, "We're peeling apples. Ooh, these are sweet apples." Then he lay back and looked at me and he said, "Well, Bud, I've got to go now."

And I said, "Dad, I'll tell you what you do. You stay by that apple tree, and you keep looking down the road, and one of these days you'll see me coming up the road."

He said, "I'll see you, Buddy," and laid his hand like he always did, and he never spoke again.

