

The Porch

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The day I received a phone call from a tearful voice across the miles made my heart ache in a way I hadn't felt before. To never see that house again, nor set on the porch that had been so much a part of my childhood, and my life, how could this be? For someone to destroy generations of family history in only minutes and wipe that hillside clean as if we had never lived there and never loved there. That was grandma and grandpa's hillside, not the people who were stripping it of years of living, loving, playing, and oh so many, many memories, in the name of coal strip mining! These were the thoughts running through my mind. I was devastated the day I got the news that Grandpa Wiley and grandma Belle's home had been destroyed. I didn't think the tears would ever stop flowing. So many years of love, laughter, tears and family history gone up in smoke. Like the fire that destroyed it, tiny sparks lit the darkest corner of my memory, igniting pictures and memories I'd packed away for years.



I guess my fondest memories of grandma and grandpa's home took place "on the porch", instead of in the house. We would always start our family gatherings inside around the kitchen table and eventually everyone would end up out on the porch! To this little girl it always looked so big, wrapping around the house. I'm not sure which side I loved the most, as the mountains seemed to touch the sky on all sides of us.

I can still see, and hear, grandma Belle out on the porch yelling over to us at our house, or maybe for Uncle Welford, Aunt Kizzie, Aunt Talitha, or always for “Wiley honey” if he was out of her sight a little too long. Her voice was her telephone back then, and that porch her telephone line to anyone within a mile of her, she was the original GRAND “Ma Belle”.

I remember being there many years ago and grandpa, my husband, and brother Steve went hunting. It began to get late and grandma just knew some of them were lost in the mountains somewhere, so she stepped out onto the porch and began to holler for each one of them as only grandma could. I know those mountains are missing her voice today as much as we are.

When I was a young girl I would walk over and there she would sit on the porch churning butter in one of her big ole gallon jugs. She would set me down in a chair, put the jug in my lap and I would get to rock it back and forth watching the butter form on top. That was one of my very favorite things I loved to do at grandma’s. Maybe I’d sit on the porch one day watching her feed her chickens, and the very next I’d be watching her wring ones neck, and plucking it clean for a pot of her chicken and dumplings everyone tried to duplicate, but never could.

Lots of times I would just set quietly with grandpa and grandma in the cool mountain breeze listening to the lullaby of Whippoorwill or Bobwhite, and not to be out done by their daytime songs the hoot owl's, frogs and crickets took over the night. I have a whole treasure chest full of sounds from the porch packed away in my memory attic.

I can hear the sound of train whistles now, if I close my eyes long enough. Many times, we sat and watched them rumble by on the railroad tracks below the house, waving at the engineers, they always knew to look our way, someone would be sitting on the porch. Sometimes as a small girl the railroad track was my playground. One could spend hours walking along the rails, they were our balance beams and we didn’t even know what a gymnast was. I’m sure lots of the kids were one and didn’t know it.

I have walked out onto the porch many times to hear daddy and grandpa in a heated debate over the Bible. Each one sure had his own interpretation of a scripture, although it might be different, was just as God had intended it to be for us. Then another time they might be in a hot contest over who could hit or get closer to the tin can on a tree in the distance, all the while sitting on the porch sighting thru their guns. They both were very good at hitting their target!

The porch was also a favorite place to go and play Chinese Checkers with grandma and grandpa. Everyone liked to play with them and listen to grandpa needle grandma, he liked to win.

I can see grandpa sitting on the corner eating his favorite summertime delicacy, Watermelon and spitting the seeds off the porch. He eventually grew his own in his garden, although they were never as large as the ones from the market he enjoyed them just as much anyway.

I’ve sat on the porch many times to watch him walk “hat in hand”, he was never without his hat, going to his favorite spot in the junction, Corinth Church. One of the last times I spent with grandpa we went to an all-day sing at the church on Decoration Day. I love to hear the old time preaching and singing. I thank God for grandma and grandpa who brought my daddy up to serve

God. We always knew God was first in daddy's life, and he always taught us to love God. What a perfect example he was. He truly lived what he believed in, and so did grandma and grandpa.

One of the last times I was on the porch, mom and I had gone to visit grandma after grandpa passed away. We were getting ready to leave and go back to Indiana. Grandma walked out to one of her rosebushes, picked a beautiful little red rose, brought it back to the porch, pin in hand, and put it on my blouse, "A rose for my girl Helen" she said and kissed me. That tiny rose is in a book today pressed between the pages of time, but still fresh in my memory.

The very last time I stood on the porch was the day we buried grandma. I guess I'm glad I didn't know then that I'd never see it again, or I might never have wanted to leave. Oh, just to look at the world around me once more, as in the days of childhood, from that porch!

These are just a few of the treasured memories that are burned in my heart forever, and not so easily destroyed as the house was. There's a song that must have been written just for my grandparent's home; it goes:

They've packed up all the laughter
Swept out all the tears
If this old house were built on memories
It could stand a thousand years.

and I'm sure it will stand as long as there is a child, grandchild, great-grandchild, or family member left, of Wiley and Belle Anderson.