FOURTH OF JULY TALK

GROWING UP IN DYER

BY

Yvonne Nelson Darling

Uppermost in my mind today is that I am pleased to be from Arkansas, that I was born in Dyer, and I'm proud to have been born into the family that is mine—but, I'm thrilled beyond words and thank God every day that I am an American; one who still chills when pledging allegiance to our flag. I am so happy to have attended Dyer school at a time, that in our Fourth-Fifth and Sixth Grades, under the guidance of Mrs. Ruth Johnson we learned a different Bible verse each week ~ and had to memorize such poems as "Hats Off, The Flag Is Passing By":—Before the days of Madelyn O'Hare, when men still removed their hats and put their hands over their hearts when viewing Old Glory.

For those of you who have grown up or moved into Dyer since I graduated from Alma Consolidated High School in 1939, I'd like to tell you who I am. (If I seem chauvinistic, I apologize.) As you will note by the program, I am Yvonne Nelson—but 40 years ago I added the last name of Darling when I married Jim Darling, a young officer who I met while he was stationed at Camp Chaffee, from Elmore, Ohio. However, I want you to know that like Mrs. Lorena, I kept my last name as my middle name. NELSON is still a part of my identification. Most of you are aware that I'm Mrs. Lucy Thomas' niece, Monroe Nelson's daughter. My paternal grandmother was Columbia Lipscomb, the daughter of Monroe and Elizabeth White Garrett Lipscomb, early Dyer settlers. My mother was Sylvia, a sister of Claude and Dyer Meadors. Their mother was Savilla, a sister of Benjamin, Terrell, Chester, and Orel Rhodes, who were children of Caroline Dyer Rhodes, the oldest child of Benjamin Dyer...who was the oldest son of Caleb Dyer...so you see DYER (its people) is my family.

Memories shared by families are some of the best of all. "Remember?" one will say and off they will go gathering peace from the past. I hope some of you, my family, will enjoy going along memory lane with me.

Besides my home, one of the things which stands out in my memory of my first five years here is that of big trees. Seems that I can remember the railroad park, near where the Depot sat, had lots of big oak trees, and another one across the street from that. I am quite certain that I can remember tent shows being held at that location.

I started to school in Dyer carrying my red Big Chief tablet and penny pencil. Miss Dena Cottrell was my first teacher; however, shortly thereafter, my mother and I went to live with her parents, the Lee Meadors' who had moved from Dyer to Fort Smith a short time before. When the depression hit, the summer of 1930, I moved back to Dyer to live in the Barber Shop with my Daddy. He was a good and loving daddy!

After getting me off to school in the morning, he would go cut wood from his land down the railroad track, selling it for $1.00 per rick… home in time to prepare lunch for me, send me back to school, then out to sell and deliver Stark Nursery products in the afternoon…back to the shop to be there when I got home from school. From then until the last customer he barbered...10¢ for a shave, 15¢ for a haircut...most of those being "put on the book" or paid for with barter.

Although most of my summer days were spent in Memphis, Tennessee, with my mother, visiting my Grandma and Grandpa Meadors in their home atop the mountains, near Mountainburg, or in Van Buren when they moved there, and with other family members in Fort Smith, Van Buren, Mulberry, and Booneville, I have many memories of my remaining days in Dyer during the depression days. These are those I wish to share with you today.

Swimming in the Nelson Culvert—in the Heard Branch and at the falls behind the Asa Dyer home...picking strawberries and blackberries…never picked cotton, but knew many of my peers who did...being caught up in the enthusiasm of pie-suppers, box lunches-medicine shows-political rallies and summer brush-arbor revivals...the big gin fire…the canning kitchen...the flood...and bleak rural living...the houses, who lived where...which ones my grandpa and Uncle Claude Meadors built...the town buildings, the Depot and the Churches, .all these are vivid in my memory...but the thing that made Dyer special to me then, is still here now...LOVE...and caring people. Some of the people are gone. I want to share them and others with you.

Mrs. Maude Winfrey designed and made dresses for me. I'm quite certain that she was a dressmaker for many, but at the time I was under the impression that I was the only one...and special. If my memory serves me right, Daddy would give me two 50¢ pieces...one to go to Uncle Tommy Moss's store and get material, including organdies, thread, bias tape, embroidery thread, and anything else Mrs. Maude would suggest and the other 50¢ was for Mrs. Maude's labor. Truly it must have been a labor of love and a genuine feeling of accomplishment for today these dresses would have been designer dresses.

Living where I did gave me a very close association with my Great Uncle Terrell Rhodes (the Post Master). My alarm clock was him, cancelling the mail to be picked up by the early morning flyer. My! I was so proud to be the great-niece of my grandmother's brothers...and they loved me!

We all knew and loved Uncle Tommy and Aunt Dora Moss. Their affection for children...and people...was a well known fact. Remember that long candy case and how difficult it was to know just how to spend that hard earned penny...or egg! Often I would buy candy with the eggs Aunt Lucy Thomas would give me for washing her dishes. Remember the little dolls that Aunt Dora would dress in ribbon and lace and sell for, I believe, 10¢.

Down the street Mr. Joe Mullens had ice cream in his store! His daughter, Nadine, was one of my first playmates until he sold his store and moved. Our big deal was mud pies! Then, when Mr. Bill Butler took over Mr. Mullens' store, his family moved into the house across the street from where Frankie Rhodes' store is now. Their daughter, Billie Butler and I were great friends. We played hop-scotch from morning until night...fact is, a few years ago when the "Happiness is"… was big, I maintained "Happiness is...the first time you can play hop-scotch, barefooted, in the Springtime."

After the Butlers moved, Mrs. Hunter, her son C.B., and daughters Mary Joe and Bob Ann, had the store in the center of town and lived in the rear of the building. I spent a lot of time with Mary Joe and Bob Ann. Paper dolls cut from Sears, Roebuck catalogues was our main entertainment. The Hunters had a radio in their store and each night at six P.M. the store would be full of people, listening to Amos and Andy and then Lum and Abner. Other of my town playmates were Edith Opal Horne and her sister "Little Ed" who lived in Uncle Dan Chitwood's house that was located where the Church of Christ is today. Some of our early classmates were Kenneth Cottrell, Jenny Lou and Leota Morse, June and Charlie Kennedy, Ruby Jewel Weaver, June Dyer, Gordon Chitwood, Imogene Rhodes, Mary Sula Selby, Wayne Hall, Jack Hunter, and Warren G McGowan. There are others who come to mind but I can't remember if they were classmates or roommates since we had two grades in the same room.

I would need to call the roll of Dyer if I'd name all my friends with whom I shared good times… playing "Work-up" ball. I don't know whether it was hard or soft ball, all I know is that it was a ball and we used any board we could find for a bat…tossing washer at holes and shooting marbles, we called them "doogies"...and "Jacks" was another fun game especially if you could get in one of the games being played on one of the four slabs of concrete at each entrance of the school building. Since Imogene "Tippy" Rhodes was my cousin and friend, that gave me an "in". Living across the street from the school assured us that she would stake her claim early!

The first birthday party I remember attending was given by Mrs. Daisy Renfroe for Billy. I can't remember who all were there but I do recall that we played many games: "pin the tail on the donkey," bobbed for apples, had a three legged sack race and all went home with a prize. Somehow, as we grew older, we realized what a vital role our teachers have played in our lives, and I'm here to say WE were blessed! I have never said anything I meant more sincerely...I must add that I'm so glad that I realized this at such a time that I have been permitted the opportunity to write my appreciation to each of them. I was not the most grateful student at the time that Mrs. Ruth Johnson guided our studies...she spanked the back of my legs once for not tattling on what boy said what bad word on the playground, and she stood June Dyer and myself in the corner one whole day, Mitchie Chitwood and Charlie Kennedy took a paddling the easy way out since they put their aviator style leather caps in their pants. We four had disrupted the class by talking. As you can see I was not a model student in the Fourth Grade but in three years she turned me around to where my grades were "A's" and "B's" and my attitude toward learning was greatly improved.

Valentine Day was big to us in those days. We made our own. I don't know where Miss Beulah Kennedy got a sample wallpaper book, but I do recall making pretty valentines at her house with June and Pauline. Then, there was Leota Morse, who was very talented in drawing, and valentines from her were the most cherished.

Miss Pearl Myers was another caring teacher. I was too old to have been in her room, however, she included Idus England and myself in the Tom Thumb wedding which she directed—Idus was the preacher and I was the soloist! Miss Nell Bevel was super. For her the classroom was until bedtime. I may be wrong but I think this was the first time there was a Girl Scout Troop in Dyer. ***(Yes, Yvonne you are correct and perhaps you have forgotten that I, Lorena Moss, also helped with the Troop and I did it because I had always wanted to belong to a Troop but none was ever organized in Dyer, so I helped Nell with the one she organized).*** We were always working on projects after school and week-ends—making door stops or wall hangings and other craft items from fruit crates we'd get from Uncle Tommy Moss and other merchants. Miss Bevel taught us about the stars...took us on nature hikes and cook-outs! She also directed us in plays ***(And remember, Yvonne, the camping trip we made and sleeping on the big rock near the creek and I was popular that night for all you girls were afraid and wanted to sleep next to me)*** and we even had Court of Awards. She would take any of us who had skates, skating down on the highway. Remember, it was depression years and there weren't many cars on the roads. YES, I had skates, I earned them by selling Cloverine Salve at 25¢ a box and for that price you got a religious picture.

Mrs. Neva Cowart wasn't teaching at that time, but she was involved in our activities. She directed some of the younger Scouts in a type of ballet dancing...our costumes were of brown domestic with pieces of lead foil sewn at random. We sang as we danced, "Two little stars went out to play; two little stars got lost one day. They had forgotten their lamps to light and they got lost in the big black night...etc."

Not only did they direct our plays but they also designed and often made or outfitted us in our costumes, and gathered up the props. Fadau Rhodes' orchid bedroom suite surely made an impression on me, when the seniors, I was Sixth Grade, used it on stage presenting "Little Miss Adventure."

Then there was Miss Thelma James and Mr. Fry, such gentle souls, coping with us as Eighth Graders was a real chore. I remember the boys heating the poker in the old pot-bellied stove until it was red hot then, placing it on the oiled floor, causing quite a smoke and stench. Ugh!

Mr. Cowart—We all loved him—and he us. Later, while in Alma High School, I knew I was Mrs. Cowart's pet but I didn't know I was Mr. Cowart's until I read his notes published in "Looking back at Dyer" in 1976...he didn't even mention that I was with June Dyer and June Kennedy in the hooky playing. What he didn't know was that our whole class was supposed to have been in on that venture, but we were left "holding the bag" when the rest of the class got cold feet. We missed out on our class outing the last of school, but Mr. Cowart's scorn was the hardest punishment for us to accept. He was our Principal, Teacher, Coach and best of all: OUR FRIEND.

You will note that I now wear glasses. I have only worn them since I was out of school; really, only for the past 25 years. The examination revealed a very severe astigmatism, which drastically impairs reading. The doctor asked if I had finished High School and, when I told him that I had finished in the top l/3 of my class, was Editor-in-chief of our Alma Airedales, and took part in all extra-curricular activities, he said, "Well, young lady, you must have had terrific teachers."

I acknowledged that I did and thought of the many times that Mr. Cowart and Mr. Fry said to me that I'd be a straight "A" student if I'd put a little book sense with my common sense. Memories of our out-of-school activities most always reveal a teacher at the helm. They were dedicated and loved children, and we knew it.

While I've paid tribute to teachers of those depression years, I would be remiss not to mention the affection and concern of parents. Even though life was difficult, I cannot remember an unkind remark by any of my friends' parents. Love was evident. I would like to name them, but I fear that I would miss the dearest one.

Churches also played a large part in our lives. Everyone went to all of the Church meetings…that was the place to go. Remember we had no TV, few had radios or electric lights, besides that, just maybe a boy would walk you home. The Church of Christ where I attended met in an old store building that had John Burroughs written all over the walls. I always wondered if he owned the building. Brother England was our pastor and we, who became member of his church at this time, were baptized in the Heard Branch. My baptism was very memorable to me...there was group singing, "Trust and Obey" and to this day that song brings that scene again to my mind. My Daddy didn't attend Church with me, even though he was the one who made sure that I went. He spent his Sunday morning ministering in his own way...visiting the sick and the old folks, giving them shaves and haircuts.

As we grew older and could stay out later, we walked in groups to 61 Community to little plays that were given over there, went to parties at homes and churches, played different games… "Pleased and Displeased," "Spin the plate," and danced circle dances. It was such fun to go to Martha Belle and Claude Hatley's, listening to Claude play the harmonica and guitar and we'd sing all the old songs then, when Pleas Gregory joined Claude by playing the violin, we would dance.

I trust you have discovered, as I have, that Cicero told the truth when he wrote that "Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things." No matter how mysterious memory is, we all know it isn't just a visual recording machine. It involves smell, the smell of those bowls of good food that my Aunt Lucy fixed for Daddy and me every day of those years—hearing: the hearing of those trains going through our town—Even TASTE, the taste of Plum Butter that Aunt Lucy gave me to take on our Girl Scout cook-outs that we put in the biscuit cones we made on a stick and cooked over the camp fire—and especially TOUCH, the hug of a family member or handshake of a dear friend.

Memory can be a passport to a pleasant past, for most experts agree that we remember more good situations than bad. For this fact I am grateful. However, there are a couple of bad memories that keep creeping back, and both have to do with the school buildings...yet they were necessities. The first one, I'm sure you have guessed—the school "outdoor john's." Enough said. The other one was the Typhoid Shots. As you remember they were given alphabetically. My last name starting with a "N" seemed to put me away down the line. It was hot, babies were crying, and some ladies were fainting. Oh, how I wanted to turn and run. Knowing that the next day we would be so sick and ache so bad. I remember laying on a pallet with Ruby Jewel and Golda Weaver on the seemingly cool front porch of Mr. Alvis and Mrs. Nora Weaver's house when they lived across the street from the Methodist Church—our arms aching so that we felt any moment they would drop off.

Those years in Dyer gave me a basic necessity for a positive attitude in living a life with many ups and downs—triumphs and tragedies—heart aches and ecstatic joy—and that was LOVE—Love of God, Love of Family—Love of Country and Love of friends. While most of my friends and family have gone from Dyer, my memory brings them back so clearly.

Hal Broyles wrote: "Memory is the best of all gardens. Therein, winter and summer, the seeds of their past lie dormant, ready to spring into instant bloom at any moment the mind wishes to bring them to life". The British writer, James Barrie, said it in even fewer words: "God gives us memory so that we may have roses in December."

In my December, my years in Dyer truly makes up a bouquet of roses.

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