

A Field of Dreams to the Little House on the Hill
By Barbara Mooney Myers

The Great Depression had passed, and yet it wasn't too far gone for many to remember. I wasn't around then, but my personal depression came in the 1960's.

My husband Carl "Burnice", a farmer, loved tilling the soil so much. In the fields from early spring until late fall is where you'd find him, sharecropping with farmers around Pelham Valley. There were lots of days, weeks and months he was without work, though, for sharecropping didn't last year round. Burnice owned no land or large herds of cattle, nor did he have an abundance of money in a nearby bank or in some secret hideaway. We were dirt poor! He had to find permanent work.

The year was 1962 when he decided to go to Cleveland, Ohio, where his brother and many uncles had gone to find work. We had three children who were still young; all three under the age of 10. Our son was just a little more than a year old. Burnice left me here in Tennessee to go up North where there was work. At the time I felt frightened and afraid, for inside I could feel that something would happen. It was as if a little voice inside me kept saying, "He won't return anymore". Here I was with three children to mother and the job of trying to provide a roof over our heads and food for our table.

Not long, maybe a few months after he left, my dad, sister & brothers all came to visit the children and me. Dad threw a fit. "Burnice needs a horse whipping!" My older sister went through the house as if she was an inspector checking on my family household. Well, I'm sure she was inspecting, but meant well in doing it. I kept saying to myself, "I'll be OK. The children and I will make it." They kept saying, "Yes, but it is winter, and where is your money coming from to buy food and to pay expenses?"

Dad wanted to do the "horse whipping" himself. I felt so humble and frightened as I sat there listening, not talking back to my father. Suddenly I spoke up, "Dad, if things get too rough for us, we'll move back to the mountain and live. Besides, Burnice is only sharecropping, and we have no hold on the house where we are living." The house belonged to a cousin who was a deputy sheriff at the time; we seldom even saw him. But this home was the best we had lived in since we'd been married. We had electricity, a well

on the back porch, lots of room, chickens and eggs for eating. We could get all the milk we needed for the children to drink from Burnice's folks who lived nearby.

The outdoors was our "field of dreams". Many times I'd sit starrng out from the window facing those fields after fields and pretend that someday we'd, Burnice, the kids and I , own those fields ourselves. As the old saying goes, "It was too good to be true".

We stayed on through that winter. My husband's mother Elloise and Ernie, her husband, would come over with the car loaded down with fresh home-killed pork – a slab of bacon or ham, jellies, and canned veggies. I had no refrigerator to keep our fresh foods, so canned goods kept for us to eat through the remaining winter. We never starved, for we were provided for by wonderful people who loved us. We loved them just as much, if not more.

By early spring, we decided to move to Tracy City to live. We stayed at my sister's until we found a little two room house belonging to Joe Flury. I rented it for \$15 a month. We moved in, but there was "hardly room to curse a cat" as granny used to say. So we made it as comfortable as we could. My neighbors were the Douglas family, Wiley family and Seagroves family. Down just a short distance was the Gross family. Here, the children and I could walk to town, for it was a hop, skip and jump as we called it to Flury's Store. Tracy City was once a dear old stomping ground for me and others when we were growing up. Flury's Store was where we'd head for if we got a nickel from someone, and boy, those large glass candy counters took the eyes of every beholder who stood in front of them. My children experienced the same joy as I did going to Flury's. My children have grown and gone now, but Flury's Store is still there, run by descendants of the same family. We began going to First Baptist Church. Price Thorpe, my school friend's family, Austin & Susie Thorpe attended there also. In fact they did until Mr. Austin's death a few years back. When gardening time came, Price turned my garden space. The garden got planted that year on March 22nd.

My sister Dot and her husband Charles came up to see us. Charles picked Mike, my son, up, swung him around and was talking to him. Right then, as I stood in the doorway, that same feeling that singed the entire insides of me came back telling me, "He's not coming back anymore." My sister asked if we could talk inside so that the kids wouldn't hear us. I sat on the foot of the

bed. She pulled a chair over in front of me and said, “Barbara, Burnice was killed yesterday on his way home from work. Two other guys with him were injured real bad and are in the hospital.” Edgar Myers came up and told us about it. He didn’t know where you lived. I fell over beating my head against the foot of the steel bed frame. “You can still have a life,” she said. “I have no life without him. The kids will be without a father,” I replied. “We’ll help you,” she said, “and others will too.” I wanted to go hide off to myself where I could weep loudly, and get away from everyone – be alone.

They left us there, for I refused to go to their house. The children didn’t realize what had happened. Later that evening Ann Wiley, who is still a dear friend today, came and shared many hours with my children and me. Our neighbors brought in food for us and showed their respects as any neighbor would do. Ann took the girls home with her. She had two boys, Thomas and Larry & Bill, her husband, was at home then. Without the help of those dear families and God’s strong hand, I could never have made it. The days went by so hard for me even with close friends and family nearby.

I had to keep struggling, for my kids needed me even more now. The garden turned out a tremendous crop, bushels after bushels of green beans, okra, corn and other things that Price and I had planted. It kept me busy canning vegetables on a cast iron cook stove, so it took lots of wood which we got in the woods near the house. My kids were so wonderful about carrying the wood and helping me all they could. Peggy started her first year at Shook School where I’d attended myself. Mitch and Clydine Douglas were such good neighbors to me. Their older daughters and son Mark, who was Peggy’s age, saw her back and forth to school every day. By late fall in 1963, I’d saved up some money for the kids from their dad’s Social Security. We bought our first TV. My, we were a happy family, and we watched TV ever chance we got. The children loved cartoons best.

By late September 1963, Dad talked me and the children into moving to Chattanooga, where he lived with my two younger brothers. I finally made up my mind I’d go look for a house. It took a few days to find one I could afford on the little money I was able to save, but I bought the six-room house for my children and me. It looked naked and bare and in desperate need of furniture, for I had very little to move into it.

I found a job in a few weeks, serging in a shirt factory. God had answered my prayers - a home, our first one at that, and a job as well. We lived in walking distance of First Baptist Church of Duncan Park. We'd lucked up on lots of those "dreams" we'd always wished for. There weren't any fields. There was little acreage or cattle grazing nearby, but it was home for us. Here we began our growing and filling all the emptiness inside. The years soon added up. "The Field of Dreams" we'd hoped soon to own was a "Little House on the Hill".

We no longer live there, but it still remains, all covered with bushes and neglected through the many years of setting empty, and still with no one inside. In my memory, though, it was a house of dreams, of happy memories, and the place where I found refuge, reconciled my life and raised my children - "The Little House on the Hill".