

Memories of Winters and School in the 1940's in Tracy City, TN

By Barbara Mooney Myers

Today I see this weather has people in such an uproar. Our schools are closed, which I know is for security of the children, no buses running with these freezing temperatures. It's a reminder that takes me back to the middle forties when we went to school wading the snow up to our knees at times. We had no school buses or any transportation to take us to and from school, or anywhere else for that matter. We did have a family car at times, but Dad used it to get back and forth to work. At the time he was working in the coal mines like many men used to here on the mountain. There were times when his old jalopy, as he called it, wouldn't start, and he'd set out on foot walking into town to hitch a ride with someone who also worked at the mines. Dad hardly ever missed work. That extra dollar, to him, meant a lot for his family of six at home.

Snowy days were happy times. We had snowball fights, built "Old Frosty" and maybe "Minnie", his lady friend, to pass away the time. After the third snowfall of the season, Mom would make us some of that delicious vanilla "snow cream". She always made it from clean snow she got off the top of the grape arbor where Dad had nailed some boards. Often, if she had some Watkins pineapple or orange flavoring, she'd make those flavors for us kids. It was so good! We called it our happy, joyful treat.

On school days Mom wrapped us up so that we had no space underneath to get cold. I had long pants, two pairs of thick socks, my slip, and a full dress. Mom never let me wear long pants without a skirt over them for she said that it was not nice for a little girl to not wear a dress. Pants were always worn under a dress, never by themselves. For shoes, I wore black and white saddle oxfords or brown penny loafers.

As I have said, snow didn't keep us out of school. I remember the fifth and sixth grades really well. My teacher in the fifth was Mrs. Oma Lee Garthwaite. I loved the lady. She was special. On my way to school one day, I got my feet wet even through my rubber boots which we called galoshers, my shoes, and two pairs of socks. My feet were so cold that they ached. Mrs. Garthwaite had me take off all the wet footwear and hang them on the radiator to dry. I handed her a piece of flannel that Mom had stuck in my booksatchel to use if I needed it. She looked up at me, smiled so big and said, "Some mothers just care like that." We had begun our studies in class when suddenly a voice let out, "Whose stinkin' socks are them on the radiator?"

I looked around. I knew that voice. It was Gene Carrick. "Oh, those are Barb's", he said. "Who else would have stinky feet?" He was grinning so big when he said it, knowing that at break I would chase him, and he liked that. "I'll get even with you", I told him.

Our school days were happy ones. I could hardly wait for each new year to begin to see who would be there again among those I shared my happy times with the year before. I had no conflicts with anyone throughout my school years. When Shook School burned, it was a sad time for a lot of us, for school was like a second home for us. Today I glance at many photos of Shook School, and my memories go back to those good old days I shared with the students and teachers there, many of whom have gone on now. Those who remain are dear to my heart. Let me say to you. When you have a good memory, share it. Everybody loves to think of pleasant times in their younger days. Even the memories that weren't pleasant at the time bring smiles. Some received those dreaded paddlings, but looking back we can remember that even a "whack" was sometimes for one's own good. Dad used to say, "A lick from the board never hurt anyone." It did keep us behaving and following the teachers' directions. We behaved, and we learned.

These are some of the memories I have of my school days in Tracy City, TN.