

Remembering Pappy

Why were we moving in the house with my grandparents? A four years old doesn't understand how her Pappy Mayes was having to stay in bed and his only son was needed to take care of the farm. Even though my Dad was a carpenter by trade that was how my family of four ended up living with my grandparents, Frank and Maud Mayes, in the Blackjack community.

Pappy had some good days like the time he took me with him to Springfield, Tennessee to the tobacco auction. Bought me a bracelet and my older brother, Bobby, a BB gun. He was a wonderful fiddle player. Before getting sick he played for all the square dances where everyone knew him as "Cat Head" probably because of his eyes. One of my favorite memories was him holding me playing the fiddle with my head fit in the crook of his arm with the bow going back and forth in front of my eyes. Loved when he played Orange Blossom Special sounded just like the train was coming down the tracks. Then there was the day while lying in bed he had Bobby bring him his BB gun told him to hang his hat on a nail in the wall. He had the best time taking target practice much to my Grandmother Maud's disapproval.

That winter we heated with coal and the only place warm was within three feet of the fireplace which is if Pappy felt like sitting up he was the only one getting the heat with his legs spread out in a V shape where no one else could get close. No electricity, no running water, and no bathroom we would wake up in the morning with frost half way up the wall, water bucket frozen, thank goodness for five quilts and a feather bed. Some mornings I would run to crawl in the bed with Pappy where he would wrap his arms around me to keep me warm.

He began to suffer probably from stomach cancer. Dr. Carter Moore made weekly house calls, taught my Mother how to give morphine injections. Remember how hurt I was when I went running though the room and Pappy called me a Spoiled Brat to my grandmother and for her to keep me quiet. I disappeared into the front room sitting in a chair crying until my Mother came to hold and love me trying to explain that Pappy didn't mean what he was saying that he was sick and hurting.

Two nights before he died all the men in the neighborhood were sitting up with him. I was told he started calling on them one by one to lead in pray. I just remember peeking in to see all the men gathered around the room. My mother recalled it was the only time she heard her Dad pray aloud. Some said it was a spirit filled prayer meeting some thought he was talking out of his head. He died

on December 23, 1947 in the bed that I would cuddle with him. I remember seeing my Uncle place the coins on his eyes pulling the sheet up until the undertaker came for the body. At that time the corpse was brought back to the house for viewing. All the furniture had been removed from the front room but a few chairs. The coffin was placed against the West wall with some type of pink colored lights set up at each end. If I close my eyes I can still see that warm, pink glow cast all over the room.

Granddaddy Welty, mother's dad, held me up letting me touch him to say goodbye.

My Aunt's two teenage daughters were determined I have a Christmas tree so a little cedar tree was decorated and moved from room to room during the visitation. I know Santa found it but can't remember a gift Bobby or I received but you can be certain there was lots of fruit.

The next day, Christmas Eve, the body was moved from the house to Blackjack Church for the funeral service with burial at Greenlawn Cemetary in Franklin.

This was definitely not the way a child should remember Christmas Eve. Instead of a Christmas Wreath to welcome your friends and family a Funeral Wreath hung on the front door instead. But it was a wonderful way to celebrate Pappy's life and the birth of Jesus.

Although I have never liked my first name, Frances, I do feel honored to have been named after this sweet, loveable, talented, Christian man that I remember as Pappy.

In Memory of Elisha Franklin Mayes September 1, 1892 – December 23, 1947

Written by: Marie Mayes Pitts