

Lagatha Paysinger: Born in the Same Bedroom

LP: I was born in the River Bend, that's the original Elkton, commonly known as Lower Elkton. I was born LaGatha Croney, C-R-O-N-E-Y, to. I was on May 6, 1932, to Mary Alice Rogers and Joe D. Croney. I have two sisters, Betty and Joanne. I have made many, many footprints in the River Bend area, so I know that from heart. I know that from actually being there. I was born in the same house that my dad was born in, the same bedroom, the same corner of the bedroom.

Lagatha Paysinger: Life in Lower Elkton

LP: But in the Austin-Harlow-Croney cemetery, at the east end of River Bend, I have a grandfather, a grandmother, a great grandfather, a great grandmother, and a great great grandfather, and a great great grandmother, that I know of, and many many stones that we don't know who is buried there. My Croney relatives were poor, so it was hard for them to eke out a living, just as it was for many, many people back in those days. They were self contained. They had a few farm animals, hogs, cattle, and pigs, that they used for their survival. They had a little garden. They grew, their crops were cotton, corn, and tobacco. And being self contained, there was a grist mill for grinding of the corn mill, there was a saw mill, for making their lumber for their buildings, and there was a molasses mill, that not only did they make their own molasses, but they did it for surrounding communities and people who brought their own stuff there.

Lagatha Paysinger: Cleaning the Austin Croney Harlow Cemetery

LP: In this Austin-Croney-Harlow cemetery are many field stones, and I've been told that slaves are buried there, you've heard that. My husband, Bob Paysinger, and I started cleaning off that cemetery back in '50, '73, '73, 1973. We went down there and we could not get in there to find my grandparents' grave. It was so thick with bushes and briars and all kinds of trees and things, and we just turned away, and decided we were going to do something about it. So we went back, later that year, and started with a two bit axe, just cutting away, and we made ourselves a path in there. There was a locust tree growing up in my grandmother's grave, that my husband cut with that axe, to get it out of sight. And, as the years went one, every January and February, the first warm days, we would go down there and cut away, cut away, and cut away until we finally got it sort of cleaned off. Then in later years we continued that, until the last time we were down there was in 2005. . . Then, I decided I was not satisfied with just that, because I was afraid that the farm tractors, whatever, would damage the stones, and maybe run over some field stones and move them. So we decided we would put a fence up. So, through donations from Croney's and Harlow's, we established a bank account, and we got the fence put up. And now, since my husband is gone, and I no longer care to go down there to do that, I don't know who is going to contain that cemetery. I just hope somebody, somebody will care enough to do it annually, because that's the only way that you can keep up with it is, is to do it annually.

Lagatha Paysinger: Wash Day on the River Bend

NT: Tell me a little bit about growing up down on the River Bend. What were your days like?

LP: Well, actually, I didn't live there and grow up there. We moved around like a lot of people did, renting houses and my dad working here, there, and yonder for whomever. But his oldest sister, Velma Croney Dollar, eventually she and her husband bought the house and the acreage around it, and they lived there. They were like the grandparents that I never knew, on the Croney side. So I spent many, many days, many nights down there. I dearly loved them. And they had a garden and she always had flowers, and she and I would get out there and we would talk about family and pick flowers and she would let me arrange them. I would help her, when she was going to have company, I would help her clean the house, and I would be there and enjoyed the black lady who worked for them, who would come down there and do the washing. And I was always amazed that Aunt Velma would have Minnie Lee Grigsby, who was married to Russell Grigsby, and they farmed with my uncle and aunt. But she would have Minnie Lee to go out and build a fire under the black wash pot in the back yard, and fill it full of water, and let it come to a boil, and put all the sheets and white things in there, from time to time, and boil those things. Then she would bring them in the house and with the wringer type washer, wash them again. And I couldn't get over doing two washings like that, but I would help Minnie Lee. And I got to know her real well, we shared a lot together.