

Phil George: Getting Electricity

PG: I was born in a little house, right across the road from where I live at the present time. On a blistery, stormy day of February, 1936, delivered by Dr. Thomas Booth, a young doctor whose wife had planned his surprise birthday party for that evening. I surprised them all. I don't remember any more about living in that two room house, because when my grandfather died, my father bought the home place and we moved across the road. One of the first things that I remember about living there was the day that we received electricity. I can still remember walking in my mother's bedroom and flipping the switch to turn on the lights. It was a big event.

Phil George: Bryson School

PG: I went to school at Bryson. We had four grades, and in my fourth year, before I transferred to Elkton, there were four people in my class. And I transferred to Elkton at fifth grade and graduated from Elkton High School. While I was at school at Bryson, of course all four grades were in one room, with a pot bellied stove for heat and big windows for air conditioning. We did have a stage, with a curtain for productions. Later on they decided that we should have a hot lunch, and Mrs. Maggie Storey, of the Bryson community, came over everyday and cooked our lunch in one of the rooms located upstairs. Of course there was no running water or indoor plumbing at the school at that time, either. We did have a school bus that was operated by private owner. The school, the county did not provide transportation at that time. And of course the private bus system was for white students only.

Phil George: Family Farm

PG: My dad was a farmer, and I helped him and worked work on the farm the entire time that I was old enough until I moved to the bright lights of Nashville. We were mainly small grain, corn, wheat, some cotton, and we had a share cropper for that, who lived in a small house on the farm. We did milk a few dairy cows for a cash crop product.

Phil George: Bryson Community

PG: Bryson at that time had two store buildings, one of which was in operation. We also had a blacksmith shop. The large store, which had been closed, had a soda fountain in it, which closed before I got there to use it, but I do remember one year when the Methodist Church, which at that time was in Bryson, hosted a district conference, which lasted three days, and lunch was served every day in this store building. It was quite an event in my young life in the church. . . . We attended the Methodist Church. There was a Presbyterian Church across the road, which is still there, and on the days that we had a minister, the Presbyterians would come down and attend that, worship with us, and on the alternate Sundays, they had a preacher and we would go over and attend services with them. My grandmother lived in the Bryson community. We visited her often. Prior to the house that she was living in then, when my mother was a little girl, they also lived in the school house at Bryson. So Bryson school house has a great history: college, school, apartment building, because when they lived there, there were other people living on the second floor. In addition to the two store buildings, one which was in operation, next door to the operating store was a blacksmith shop, operated by Mr. Dolphus Rowe. That building is still there, and was the original home of the barbecue which is in existence

today. Directly behind the barbecue shop is a house that was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Will Davidson, when I was a child. Mr. Davidson was the local constable, and I had more fear of that man, because he was the guy who could put you in jail, plus the fact that he only had one arm, and that was very unusual in my time, because there weren't that many around. . . . Of course my grandfather and grandmother built the house that still stands today, which is occupied by Joe Bryan, one of her grandchildren. Across the road, behind the old school house and the old Presbyterian Church, was the Presbyterian minister's home, better known as the "manse".

Phil George: Farming

PG: Of course, summer is the busiest time on the farm. As I mentioned, we milked a few dairy cows and of course that was the first thing every morning. And my dad always believed that the cows should be milked at the same time, every day of the week. So that meant you got up at 4:30 every morning, milked the cows, and then as soon as that was finished and you had breakfast, we went to the fields, to either cut hay, plow the corn, cotton or cut the wheat, bale hay, and you did that until dark, and then you came home and milked the cows, ate supper, and went to bed. We didn't have a television but you were too tired to watch it anyway. One thing I remember about on the farm, we not only had to farm where we lived but we leased a farm in Wheelerton, across the railroad. And at that time, the L&N ran the crack passenger train, the PanAmerican. And I knew when the PanAmerican went south, it was 11:30 and time to go home for lunch. And I knew when it went north it was 5:00 and it was getting close to time to go home and milk the cows. Also, when we went, started to school in July, because in October we got two weeks off to pick cotton, which the schools don't do anymore. But farming was interesting, hard work, and I couldn't wait to get off, but now I wouldn't take anything for having done that. I learned to shock wheat on Mr. J.C.Taylor's farm in Wheelerton, who also owned the local store and ran the post office, which Wheelerton had when I was a kid. The mail was thrown off the train, when it went by.

Phil George: Changes in Bryson

NT: How has Bryson changed during the years that you were gone?

PG: Well, for one thing, both stores closed and burned. Of course, the school ceased operations before I left. It was still there, no it burned before I came back, and since I returned, the Presbyterian Church has burned. So, other than the barbecue, there's no business anymore like there was. The blacksmith shop is gone. The road has become a state highway, which before I left it was paved, but I can remember very well when it was just a gravel road. I remember when they did pave it, one of the exciting things as the paving crews progressed, the local ladies would prepare lunch, and that was always a big event because we got to go too. But there's been a lot of change. Most of the people which I've mentioned have either moved or died. And a lot of the people that live here now, came from out of town, mostly Huntsville. You don't know everybody like you did then, and we supposedly lost our Dellrose post office. We're supposed to use Ardmore, however, I still use Dellrose, and a Dellrose zip code and I get all my bills. When they notified my dad of his new address, he said "I haven't moved." [laughter] I guess I followed his tradition.

Phil George: Changes in Wheelerton

PG: Well, Wheelerton has changed quite a bit. I mentioned that there was a store, which is no longer there. Wheelerton had its own post office, which is no longer there. Even though the passenger trains didn't stop, the depot was still there when I was a kid. And it, also they had a side track there, which is now gone, where trains would stop because passenger trains had priority and they had to let them by. They also had a pumping station to supply water to the steam engines and a bin to load them with coal. And they kept a spare engine in Wheelerton to help them push the trains over the hill going to Ardmore. Of course they don't do any of that any more. There is no switch, so they don't even slow down when they go through.

Phil George: Sunday Afternoons and Christmas at Mama Bryan's

PG: In our immediate family, my parents and my brother and sisters, Sunday was the big day because my dad did not work on Sunday, other than milking the cows. And mother always had a little extra special dinner that day, and we would go to church, and couldn't wait to get home and eat, and that afternoon, my dad would prefer to lay around and rest and get ready for another week, but we'd usually go visit my grandmother or one of my aunts or uncles, on Sunday afternoon. And then Sunday night was nothing special, of course there was no television at that time. I do remember one event every Sunday night, we always listened to "One Man's Family" which was a "soap" for the family. I may still have some of the scrapbooks that we ordered, showing their family, but that was a big event. I guess one of the highlights was Christmas at my Mama Bryan's, when all of her seven children and their children would come, a big event. Two tables, of course the children always had to eat in the kitchen. And as you see now on TV, "Grandma, can I eat at the big table this year?" It seemed like it would never come. But it was a big event. The only drawback was my Uncle William lived in Nashville, and we couldn't eat until he got there, and it seemed like he would never arrive, because there was no interstate then, and he'd get there by 1:00, but it was a good time had by all. Everybody saw everybody and learned the new kids' names, because everybody was raising families.

Phil George: Moving Up to Elkton School

PG: Of course, when you went to Elkton School, you had more to offer, they had a high school and they had basketball teams and baseball teams, and you'd go to their games and their tournaments and put on Future Farmers of America was one of our clubs there in the school for boys and the girls had the Future Homemakers. And we had projects and events, and it really expanded your social life when you went to the big school. Huge school. Four in my fourth grade class and when I graduated there were eleven.

Phil George: Morrell's Mill and the Elkton Gin

PG: I remember when there was a Morrell's Mill. And we would bring corn down there and swap it for corn meal, to use in cooking. That was a big event because I thought that was one of the most humongous buildings that I had ever seen, and all that water, that big water wheel, that was a major attraction. We also raised cotton and Elkton had it's own gin. And that was another big event, when you'd get a bale picked and you'd take it to the gin and get it baled and sell it. Made many trips to the Morrell's Mill with corn to swap for corn meal and remember very well the day that Mr. Erskine Sharp and his son

were fishing there on a Sunday morning and got caught in the undertow of the dam and both drowned. But I understand that the dam is no longer there.

Phil George: Going to School in Bryson and Riding the Bus

PG: Well, at Bryson, I guess, as I mentioned, we had a stage in the room, for stage productions, and it had a curtain, that rolled up and down. And I thought, oh, that was really wonderful. And I remember the meals that Mrs. Maggie Story would cook for us, and we'd go upstairs to the room, and that was a whole lot better than carrying a peanut butter sandwich in a paper bag. Riding the school bus was an event. I remember that old bus. It did not have seats as we know it today. It had two benches running lengthwise of the bus. And they were not nailed to the floor, and if he went around a curve or made a sudden stop, the benches would move, and then you'd have to hold on.

Phil George: The Train at Wheelerton and Family Trips to Nashville

PG: And of course it was always fascinating when the train would stop in Wheelerton. You'd almost stop work, if Dad wasn't around, and go look at the train. And of course it was a steam engine, they made all kinds of noise and they puffed smoke and they puffed steam. It was a big event. And a big highlight, of course, was even going to Pulaski. We didn't go that often, and once a year we'd make a trip to Nashville, and that was almost like waiting for Christmas. They did tell me that the first time they carried me to a restaurant in Nashville, and they asked me what I wanted, I told them pinto beans, because I thought that was what everybody ate every day, I guess.

Phil George: I-65 and Small Communities

PG: Well, the interstate was built after I moved to Nashville, and I know that they'd talked about that it was coming, and of course my dad always said not in his lifetime, which he was wrong. But it made a big difference for people like me, coming back to Bryson. It cut your travel time in half, and I remember one time, during construction, you could get on it for a while, then you'd have to get off and go and then come back, but it brought Nashville a lot closer to Bryson. I suppose it, in my opinion, it hurt the small communities. US 31 was at that time, the main north-south route. And all those people came right through Bryson, they came right through Pulaski, they went right through Ardmore. Everyone of those places had a Greyhound bus station, and the tourists would stop there and buy gas and food, but now they're on the interstate, and they leave Nashville, and they may not stop anymore until they get to Birmingham. And I'm not even sure if we have bus service in Elkton anymore. Or Ardmore, either one, or Pulaski. But of course, I guess that's one reason that there's a decline in bus riding nationwide. The whole nation has been a victim of the interstate system. But it took life out of the small communities by routing that traffic away from them. Much like the big box stores have hurt the small town square merchants.