

Jewel Bailey Interview

Arriving in Tennessee

As far as I can remember, from the age of 5 to 11...I would come every summer. My brother and I and our two cousins, Dorothy and ... would be just so excited to ride the bus to come to Tennessee to get time on the farm. And when we would arrive there, the bus would let us out on old Highway 31 and the farm sat right across from it. And we would look at the road and see that it was clear and we would run across and we were just excited. And they would always be on the back porch, my great grandmother Henrietta and my grandmother Susan Eddings and my aunt Ella Mary. And the first time when I did run around to the back porch where we always had to go, she would always be staying there in all white, and she was very pale and had all this real long white hair. And the first time I saw it, she was combing it and I got very frightened—I thought I was seeing a ghost.

Country Breakfast

And so at that time they would hug and kiss us, you know, and say, “We’ve got breakfast waiting.” We would always get there in the morning, and they would always have a big breakfast, you know. Up north we didn’t have the type of breakfast they had: ham, fried chicken, fish, red eye gravy, eggs, potatoes, biscuits, all types of jellies and desserts, milk and coffee. And everybody would just be so, in such a happy mood and everything. And we just loved to see the animals out on the grounds, you know. And they had this old dog, I can’t remember his name now, but the dog would even be excited to see us.

Livestock

And of course, with us being city kids, as they would always call us--our country cousins from Tennessee would always call us from up north “city kids”—and then we didn’t know anything much. And of course when we first started going, we didn’t. Because we had never really experienced being around, I guess you’d call it, livestock, such as horses, cows, pigs, chickens, and you know, those types of things. And it was fun trying to learn how to feed them and cope with them, you know. And we would get upset, like I remember the first time I tried to milk a cow, the old cow rapped her foot on the cement, and swished her tail, and turned her head, them big eyes. I got up off the stool and said the cow was rubbing, was rolling her eyes at me. And my aunt, she laughed. Another event, when we went to the horse stable. Oh, petting up on the horse, I was rubbing him, and the old horse, I guess you’d call it burred his lips, or whatever makes that sound, “Brrrrr” like that. And I said, “Oh, the horse is spitting on me.” Dumb city kids, didn’t know. And when we’d go out to the, where the pigs were, to slop the pigs, I’d just, “Oh, I can’t, no, no, not this, this troubles me, I can’t do this.” And then of course I would holler when I tried to feed the chickens, “Oh, the chickens are pecking at my feet.” And my aunt would say, “Girl, they’re not pecking at your feet, they’re pecking at the food on the ground.” So we were quite dumb, didn’t know much of anything about country life, and the only thing that I thought was really safe, was that when we would go to the

chicken coop with Aunt Ella Mary to gather the eggs, of course she would shoo all the chickens, the hens, out of the hen house, or whatever you called it, and we would go ahead and pick the eggs out of the nest, which we really thought was doing something great.

Grandpa Matt's Horse

And after they had their dinner, they would return to the fields the men would, and Grandpa would get up on his cart. And he had this most beautiful horse I thought I'd ever seen. He was a reddish brown color and it had this long tail and the tail hung all the way to the ground, and it was just, oh I just thought it was the beautifulest thing I had ever seen. And Grandpa would get on his horse and he would ride the land to tell all our family and friends we were there for our summer visit. And neighbors and things. And I remember that all the family and friends would arrive, just about all that first week they would come, you know.

Watermelon Patch

And then the other thing that we would do, when we were down there, is, he would always say, "Now, don't you kids mess in my watermelon patch," you know. And we said "OK," you know, and of course right off we would always in the afternoon go find us a watermelon. And there was a clear pond right off from the watermelon patch, and the water was really cold in that pond. And we would put the watermelon in there to chill it and we would go around and watch the tadpoles stir around in this water. And after we had been there maybe about 15 minutes or something we would bust that watermelon and eat it and looked like it was so good. And then we would continue to talk and watch the tadpoles. We just thought that it was very interesting, cause we had never really seen tadpoles before. You know, city life is so much different from the country, farm life.

Wakeup Call

We would wake up early in the mornings, to the sound of the old rooster crowing... They would come down the road, early in the morning, riding on a wagon, being drawn by a big horse, and they would sing to the top of their voice. And Aunt Mary always said, "They're just trying to wake you all up, so you can get up." And we was anxious to get up so we could ride the wagon with them. And we would jump up and run, out of bed and run down the steps you know, to the back porch where they kept these, I guess you'd call them, metal or tin pans, you know, filled with water at all times so we could wash our faces. And the cups would be there and we would take and brush our teeth and everything. And we were not thinking about eating at that time. We would run straight out to the road, where they were with this horse and wagon. And we'd say, "Can we get a ride this morning?" And they would say, "Yeah, get on." And they would not even try to help us get on the wagon. We was just jumping and everything. Our brothers had already jumped on the wagon and we just had to get on what ever way we could.

Grandpa Matt Looks at the Farm

We would see Grandpa Matt sitting on the hill in the early mornings, with his horse, and the sun would be at his back, and I would always think, in later years, that when he would be sitting on this horse up on this hill, just looking around, and I said to myself, I don't know if that's the word that came to my mind, "Sure, he's just sitting up there looking over his vast domain." And what made me think of that is because I can remember one morning him and I was standing out on the back porch and he told me that, "Look to the left and to the right. Look in every direction." And of course I followed his hand and I looked in every direction. So he said, "As far as your eyes can see, all of this land belongs to your Grandpa Matt."

Helping on the Farm

We were out trying to churn the butter. Oh we thought we were really doing something. And drawing water from the well, they had two wells there, and we would gather vegetables from the garden and go out into the orchard and pick apples and peaches and cherries from the trees. We thought we were really doing something—most of the time we were just eating them as we tried to pick them. We did learn that there was always something to be done on Grandpa Matt's farm. And he if he could get some help out of us kids, he would, you know. He believed in hard work.

Those Are Not Nuts

And one morning, my cousin Dorothy and I we had this brilliant idea that we would go out into the field and pick these nuts. So we went out to pick nuts and we came running to the house, showing our parents our skirts full of nuts. And our parents said, "What have you done? Those are not nuts, those are cotton bolls."

Cousins

One of the times that I remember very well, we went to the night service at Grandpa Matt's church, which was called St. Elizabeth's. Well, us girls needed to go to the restroom. And remember it was night time. And our cousins took us all through the cemetery, and we said, "Oh, my goodness, we're walking through the cemetery, we're walking on dead people." And they said, "Oh, they won't hurt you." Maybe we wouldn't have been so afraid if it hadn't been dark. So we went into the outhouse, and while we were in the outhouse we heard them say, "We'll see you when you get back." And they ran off and left us! Oh, such a screaming and a hollering. And then we found out that they had hid in the bushes and were making all these frightening sounds that we heard. And Dorothy and I were just screaming and running like crazy, trying to find the church.

Grandpa Matt's House

And we always thought it was so curious how the house was built, you know. We'd come in the front door off the porch, the front door, and then there was rooms with fireplaces in them, two great big rooms, and out of my grandmother's room you'd go up the steps and then there was two bedrooms up there, and the one huge room up there had two great big

iron metal beds, or whatever the material was, and we slept in those. The boys slept in one and the girls slept in the other. And my uncle A.G., he had the other room. And we were up there fighting by those steps, because it looked like they would just come straight down, we would always be holding on to the walls on the steps. And then you'd come down the steps, you'd make a turn to your right, and that's when you'd step out onto this back porch. And you'd go from the back porch into the kitchen. And then you'd make a turn to your right from the kitchen and there was this big dining room, big old table with chairs around it. And of course I have to mention that most of the time we ate in shifts, 'cause usually there were so many people at the house that everybody couldn't sit down at once. Of course Grandpa Matt was always in the first shift at the head of the table, and of course the kids waited until later, we were always the last ones, but we never worried because there was always plenty of food and goodies to eat, you know. So we would say, "This is the funniest looking house we have ever seen, and why do they separate the kitchen and the dining room from the rest of the house?" And upon asking my aunt, "Why did Grandpa Matt build this house like this?" And she said, "For the coolness." So the front part of the house would stay cool, and you'd send the heat back here, it would stay away so you could be comfortable out there. And they had lots of windows in the dining room and in the kitchen, so they would open that up, so the breeze would blow through in the summer. And in the winter, the heat from the great big huge cooking stove would keep the dining room warm.