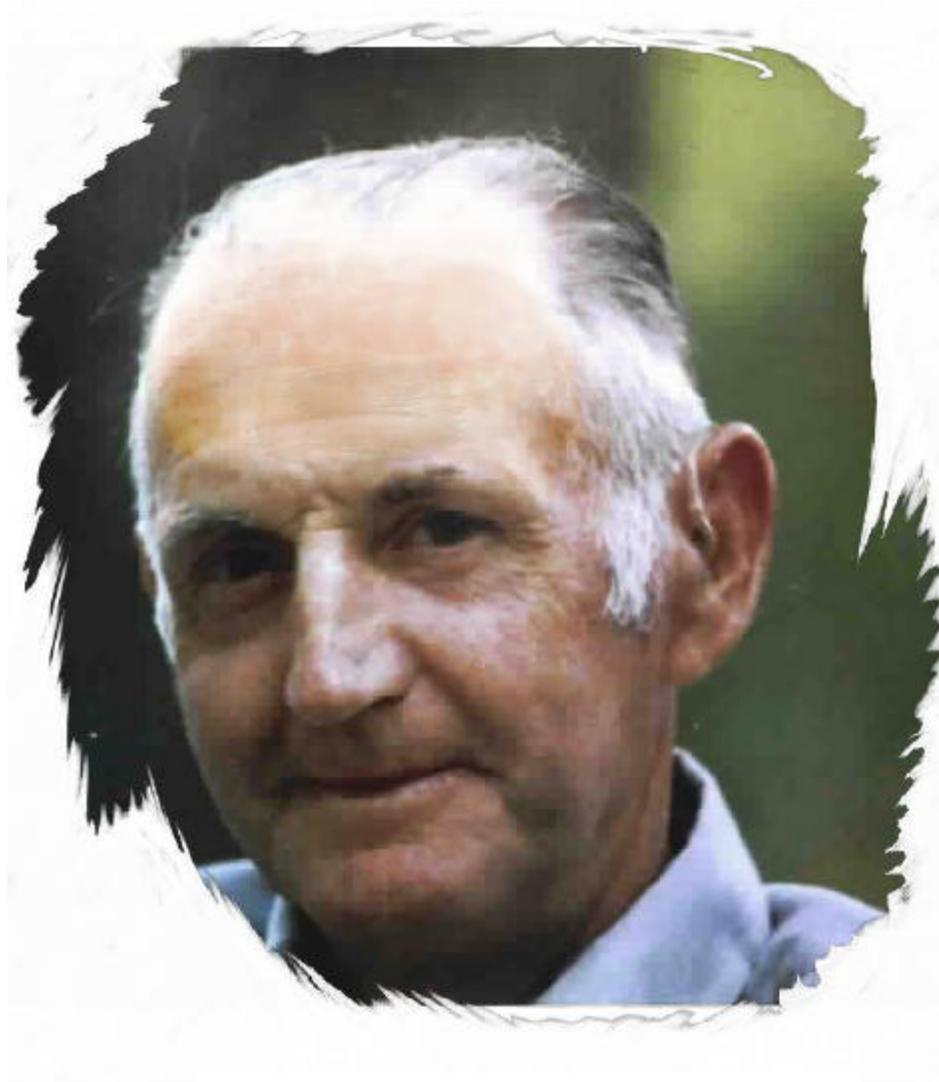


Reamy George Burnett

***"Slim"***

*A Brief History, Including Ancestors and Descendants  
(1802 – 2000)*



Reamy George Burnett

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(1802 – 2000)*

Dedication:

This work is dedicated to my mother, Nellie Elizabeth Burnett. We all recognize what a strong man Daddy was, in his younger years, strong of body, and certainly all his life, strong of spirit and will. However, strong as he was, Mother was certainly an equal partner, and continues to be the real backbone of our family.

Acknowledgements:

I want to thank all those who contributed to this effort. Robyn Burnett for her hard work in researching the extended family history and my brother and sisters for their memories, John, Oren and Vernis Barr for their contributions, Grand children for their special memories, and Mother for the family chronology.

Richard Burnett

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**Edited By: Richard Burnett**  
**January 2000**

## Foreword

Reamy George Burnett, "Slim"; *A Brief History, Including Ancestors and Descendants, from 1802 to 2000*

Reamy George Burnett, fondly called "Slim" by friends and neighbors, was my father. He lived his life on Big Creek, Shannon County, Missouri, the biggest part of it married to my mother, Nellie Elizabeth Barr. He enjoyed a reputation of being a man of his word, honest and hard working. He was short on speeches, leaning more toward getting the job done. While his formal education never reached past elementary school, he had a PhD in good old common horse sense, with a mind like a steel trap. He was fiercely competitive, whether in playing a game of marbles with friends and relatives or a grand child, or cutting more logs in a day's time than any other man in the woods, he had a burning desire to be the best. Daddy was good at nearly everything he tried. He took great pride in getting up just a little earlier than everyone else. It seemed to give him an "edge" on the day. He was a hard worker and judged others by their willingness to work and their honesty.

The last 30 years of his life he suffered greatly with rheumatoid arthritis and the last 6 years he suffered with prostate cancer. Therefore, most of the people that might read this now or in the future won't know the man that a few of us can still remember. I hope that this brief history will do two things. First I would like to describe to the reader, my Father as I remember him when he was in the prime of his life. Secondly, I want to create a record to pass down that will tell our younger generation and future generations, what sort of man they descended from.

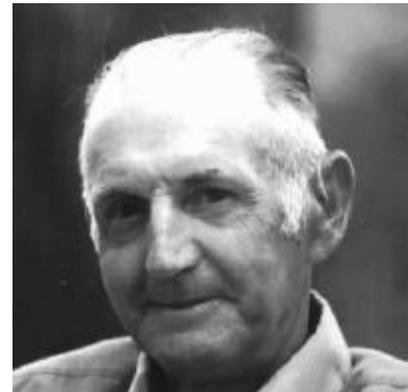
Recognizing that we descend from two families with great heritage, the Barr's and the Burnett's, this work will deal with the Burnett's only as there is already another work dedicated to the Barr's, *The History of Laura Isabelle Biggs and William Ellis Barr and Their Families* edited by Robyn Burnett, copyrighted 1995.

Richard Burnett, Editor

### *Old Hunter*

*A grappling root binds him in bed,  
weeds at the foot, rocks at the head.  
Hoof-beats stifle him underground,  
without his rifle or beagle hound.  
Catamount scream off in the briars,  
Pierces his dreams with old desires.  
Wooded beyonds make his environ,  
Hard as bronze, cruel as iron.*

*By Dennis Murphy*



**"Slim"**

## Beginnings – Ancestral History

By Richard Burnett

**Joseph Burnett**, born in Tennessee in 1802, the oldest ancestor located to date was Reamy's great grandfather. He married Nancy Brown, also born in Tennessee in 1807. Family tradition has it that Nancy was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian. Some believe her father was a chief, who had taken the English name of John Brown. However, it should be noted that no real evidence supports this Indian ancestry story.

It is believed that Joseph and Nancy were married in or about 1829 in Knox County, Tennessee. They must have moved almost immediately to Indiana, as their first four children were born between 1829 and 1835 and are recorded on census records as being born in Indiana. There are some conflicting records regarding the birthplace of Joseph and Nancy, because death certificates of at least two of their older children, Thomas Berry and Joseph Jackson, list the birthplace of their parents as Indiana, while census records show their birthplace as Tennessee. Since some third party completed these death certificates many years after the fact and the questions on the census records, which report Knox County Tennessee as the birthplace, were likely answered firsthand by Joseph or Nancy, it seems likely that Tennessee is correct.

The last four children are recorded as being born between 1837 and 1849, all in Crawford County Missouri, leading to the conclusion

that they moved from Indiana to Missouri between 1835 and 1837.

Joseph and Nancy are both buried in Crawford County Missouri near Bourbon. The exact date of death is unrecorded but believed to be about 1870.



Thomas Berry and Nancy Russell, no date

One interesting sideline here, two of their children, Thomas Berry and Mary Ann married brother and sister, Dalton and Nancy Russell. Three others, Joseph Jackson, Ira M., and Nancy all married Walker siblings; Sarepta, Rachel, and James. (*See the Family History section for complete details.*)

**Ira M. Burnett**, the fifth child of Joseph and Nancy, Reamy's grandfather, was born April 18, 1838, in Crawford County Missouri. He married Rachel Walker in Crawford County sometime about 1863. Rachel

was born in 1841 in Tennessee and her parents also came out of Tennessee in the late 1830's. Possibly the Burnett's and Walker's migrated westward together. Considering how three marriages were made of siblings of these two families and also an indication on the 1870 census records that Ira and Rachel took Rachel's mother and brother in to live with them, the Walker's and Burnett's were pretty close.

Ira and Rachel had seven children; presumably while living around the Crawford County area since they were married there and Charles Henry Burnett, their sixth child is recorded as being born in Crawford County, on March 3, 1874. It is believed that Rachel died around 1883 and is buried near Bourbon, Missouri. At this date, the exact location of her gravesite remains a mystery.

The Burnett boys were southern sympathizers although apparently not feeling so strongly in all cases as to put on a uniform. Ira and James Walker, his brother-in-law, both enrolled as southern sympathizers and paid a fee of \$30.80, exempting them from service. Two others, Thomas Berry and Joseph were in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Reg't Enrolled Militia, Missouri Infantry.

It is unfortunate that we don't know more about Ira for some bits of information Robyn Burnett was able to uncover are quite fascinating. For instance, Crawford County Circuit



**Nanny, Emma, Charley, Betsy,**  
No date

Court records for 1872 show that Ira Burnett and John Bacon were charged with disturbing a "religious worship service".

Ira married Louisa Elliston on October 4, 1883 at the Steelville Hotel in Steelville, Missouri. They moved into Dent County sometime in the 1880's. At least four of Ira's children from his first marriage were young enough to still be living in his household when he remarried. Ira and Louisa had four children of their own, bringing the total number of children for Ira to eleven.

Ira died on November 8, 1911



**Charley Burnett, no date**

and is buried in the Bay Cemetery on Sinking Creek, in Dent County. His death certificate reads, "Died of tuberculosis, no doctor attended him, refused to take his medicine." Louisa is also buried in the Bay Cemetery but no date is recorded for her death.

**Charles (Charley) Henry Burnett**, the sixth child of Ira and Rachel, was Reamy's father. He

married his first wife, Lea Anna Heaton on January 3, 1897, and during the 16 years before Lea Anna died in 1913, they had nine children.

Not much is known about the different places where Charley and Lea Anna may have lived, but Minnie Burnett Blake,



**Charley, Lola, Mamie, & Buster  
no date**

born in 1911 was reportedly born at Cedar Grove. Since the school located near the farm they owned on lower Big Creek in Shannon County was called the Cedar Hill School, it is likely the lower Big Creek community was what was meant by the reference to Cedar Grove as the birthplace of Minnie Burnett Blake and they were on Big Creek most of the time. *(Later in 1920 Charley bought a farm at Cedar Grove in Dent County on the upper Current River, making the reference to "Cedar Grove" a little confusing.)* The Heaton Cemetery is located near that farm or maybe even on the land Charley owned, so we can conclude that the Heaton's had settled in that vicinity too.

When Lea Anne Heaton died in childbirth on July 10, 1913, Charley carried her body in a wagon, from the farm on lower Big Creek, to the farm on upper Big Creek to bury her in what is now known as the Burnett Cemetery. *(This cemetery was probably called by a different name at that time but by 1938 was being called the Burnett Cemetery.)* The interesting part is that he didn't own the place at the

time. Speculation has it that he had his eye on the place at the time, even though it would be seven years before he would finally purchase this farm. However, it may simply have been Lea Anna's request to be buried there, because her Grandfather, J. B. Heaton is also buried in the Burnett Cemetery. Charley would make that long sad trip up Big Creek again, just five days later to bury the infant child, Willie Nora beside Lea Anna.

Charles Henry Burnett and Lola Chasten Black were married on October 13, 1916. Lola's first husband, Joel Black

died sometime prior to 1916. At the time of their marriage, Charley owned a farm on lower Big Creek in Shannon County,



**Charley & Lola Burnett**

currently the last farm on Big Creek that is accessible on a county maintained road. Lola sold the farm and live stock she and Joel Black had owned on Sweetwater and brought her four daughters into the household. Even though there must have already been a houseful with eleven children between them, five children were born to this union, Otto, Reamy, Deward, Floyd, and Lola Mae.

Charley and Lola moved around a bit in those first years as the following birth records indicate. Their first son, Otto was born on August 17, 1917 at Timber, Missouri. Their second son, Reamy George was born on May 21, 1919 at Barren Fork in

Shannon County. Timber was the post office address for Barren Fork so we can conclude Otto and Reamy were born at the same place. *(Daddy always told us that his dad bought the farm at Barren Fork, made one crop and when he sold it he made \$1,000. Then he bought a farm on Cedar Grove on the upper Current River and made one crop and sold it and made another \$1,000. Then they moved to upper Big Creek.)*

It would appear that, Charley bought the farm on upper Big Creek sometime around 1921 as the last children were born while they lived on upper Big Creek. Deward was born on May 31, 1921, Floyd on February 18, 1923, and Lola Mae on January 15, 1930, all recorded as born at Rat, Mo; which was the post office address of the farm on upper Big Creek near Bunker.

We don't know too much about life on Big Creek during these early years, largely because the Burnett boys and Lola Mae just weren't big talkers. Even so, there are several incidents that have been related over the years. They are included here to give some sense of what like life was like in those early years.

Charley Burnett was a farmer and even though the soil on those Ozark Mountains in Shannon County



**Mary Kuntz, Dude, Reamy,  
Otto, about 1923**

is thin and rocky, it will grow corn. According to Otto and Reamy, Charley liked to raise corn. In those days, cultivation of row crops like corn was done with a double shovel, a plow with two blades, which plows only one side of a row on each trip. To plow a row of corn required plowing down one side of the row and back on the other side. Charley planted his corn in perfect squares and practiced what was called "check plowing". He first plowed each row, down and back and then plowed the other way, across the field. It required twice as much plowing as the normal way, but needless to say there were no weeds in his field.

When the boys were quite young, Charley would take all four boys to the field with him, requiring them to follow along and "uncover" any stalks of corn that were covered by the plow. That must have been quite a sight to see a man plowing corn with mule pulling a double shovel, followed by four little boys, ranging in ages from four to ten, all strung out behind him. Otto said that his dad never covered up any corn, but would occasionally cover a stalk just to see if the boys were paying attention.

Dick Williams ran a feed and supply store in Bunker. Charley traded and sold corn and other farm produce to Dick. One year after Charley had used his own corn for seed several years in a row, he asked Dick to order new seed corn for him. Charley favored a variety of corn called "Strawberry with a purple heart". When Charley went into Bunker to pick up the seed corn, Dick brought out a sack of corn and represented it to Charley as the new seed corn.

Charley scooped up a double handful of it and as it ran through his fingers and back into the bag, he said, "I believe I raised this corn on my farm last year." He turned around walked out without buying the seed corn.



**Charley Burnett with his car, no date**

Family tradition has it that Charley and Jim "Judge" Swiney got the first automobiles on Big Creek, probably Model-A Fords. Judge Swiney lived about four miles down Big Creek on the farm later owned by Charley Sullivan and then by Willard Turner, which was also first location of the Rat Post Office. *(The Rat Post Office reportedly was named when the old building that was to house it was opened for inspection and a big rat ran across the floor. Judge Swiney upon seeing the rat, exclaimed, "Let's just call this place Rat.")* The roads were one-lane wagon roads, just two ruts with an occasional wide place where two wagons might pass, if one of them pulled off the main road. As the story goes, Charley and Judge Swiney were

traveling in opposite directions and met on this narrow road. They collided; head on, probably not because there was no place to pull over, but rather because neither would.

Once when Charley had just returned from taking a train carload of cattle to the stockyard in St Louis, he entered the Bank of Bunker. Old Doctor Gordon and Charley were engaged in conversation when bank robbers burst into the bank. The robbers shouted for everyone to get on the floor. Doctor Gordon and Charley were so engrossed in their conversation and both hard of hearing, that they had not heard or obeyed the robbers' command. One of the robbers rushed over to them and pushed them into a small broom closet. After the robbery was over, Charley stepped up to the teller and deposited more money than the robbers took from the bank.

A final note about the bank of Bunker; there must be some cosmic connection between the Burnett's and the bank. In 1963 or 64, Otto Burnett, the oldest son of Charley and Lola was hired to construct a new building for the Bank of Bunker. Reamy, Charles and Richard all worked on the bank building with Otto. Presently, Douglas Burnett, Otto's only son, is president of the bank, which still occupies this same building.

Charley Burnett died on May 10, 1939. At the time of his death, he owned land on upper Big Creek at Black Hill and another farm a couple miles down the creek, known as the "Lower Place".

Charley's will divided the farms among the children of his union with Lola Chasten, with transfer of

ownership to be postponed until the death of their mother. The upper farm was divided between Otto, Reamy, and Floyd, with Otto inheriting the portion with the home place. The Lower Place was divided between Deward and Lola Mae.

Tradition has it that when Lola heard the way Charley had drawn up his will, that she complained that he wasn't leaving anything to "her" girls.

Charley responded by saying, "When we married you sold your farm and live stock. You still have that money in the bank. That's their inheritance so you should give it to them whenever you want."



**Black Hill School Class, about 1929**

Front Row: Layard Turner, Howard Burns, Deward Burnett, Floyd Burnett, Sutton girl, unknown  
 Middle Row: Otto Burnett, Willard Akins, Reamy Burnett  
 Back Row: Bill Burns, Willard Turner, either side of teacher-unknown, two on right -unknown

Later when Lola was sick and thinking she might die she went to the bank and drew out the some of her money and divided it between her girls, Lena, Hazel, Irma, and Mamie. Apparently Charley and Lola had a rather odd financial relationship anyway. Once when Lola needed surgery, Charley was a bit short of money so he borrowed money from

Lola to pay for her surgery. He paid every penny of it back. (*Lola Burnett told this story to Nellie Burnett.*)

The boys continued to farm the land until Uncle Sam called all but Reamy into the army to fight in WW II. Reamy was selected to stay on the farm because he was married and Nellie was expecting a baby, Otto and Deward were single, and although Floyd was married, no baby was expected yet. Floyd and Lorene were not too keen on staying on the farm anyway.

**Reamy George Burnett**, whom this book is principally about, married Nellie Elizabeth Barr in Salem, Missouri on April 2, 1941. Four children were born to this union, Linda Ann, Charles Ellis, John Richard, and Rebecca Lynn.

Reamy bought a farm of his own over on Bounds Branch in 1952 and moved the family there. He continued to farm the home place for his mother.

About 1956, he bought the farm on Big Creek at the mouth of Bounds Branch, from Harold Sullivan. Uncle Otto, after having spent several years in St Louis as a barber,



**Reamy & Nellie, 1939**

returned with his family to the home place.

When his mother, Lola Burnett, died in 1961, Reamy traded for Floyd's land, which adjoined his part on upper Big Creek. He continued to farm on

Deward and Lola Mae's land until they sold out to Dean Lanham in the mid to late sixties.

From the early 1940's until 1995, Reamy Burnett would be a major influence on upper Big Creek. After purchasing the farm from Harold Sullivan, Reamy and Nellie put in the first indoor bathroom on Big Creek. He tended the land and was there to help a neighbor in need.

When the State decided to construct a new highway down Big Creek, Reamy was all for it. Even though the road would take prime farmland, he could see the benefits of a good road. Construction of the road required new fences to be built the entire length of the Burnett land. While Otto came down and helped when he could, Reamy shouldered the load of rebuilding the fences.

As the road crew came in to begin construction, Reamy signed on to work on the building of the road. New friends were made when several of the construction crew boarded with Reamy and Nellie. He continued to work with the road construction company as several other roads were constructed in surrounding areas.

Reamy donated land for a new church building, and once again shouldered the load in the construction of the building. At that time he was not a member of the church or a professing Christian. Later, he would remodel the church and add on a fellowship hall and Sunday school rooms. Sometime around 1966, he was saved and baptized in this same church.

Reamy had used tractors and other motorized machinery early on but found it didn't pay on the small

Ozark farm. He farmed with horses and mules for years until he bought another tractor to use 1963. He kept a tractor even after he stopped making crops and hay to bush hog and keep the land cleared.

In 1967, Reamy and Nellie sold the farm at the mouth of Bounds Branch and built a new home on the land he inherited from his father. He built this house with his own hands and lived in it for the rest of his life.



**Reamy, Nellie, & Natalie Morton, about 1986**

In the late 1980's the arthritis began to take it's toll and he traded in his horses for a Honda 3-wheeler. While the 3-wheeler is generally a recreation vehicle, for him it was a working tool, serving as his legs. It allowed him to continue to get around and he continued to run cattle.

Over the years, Reamy had several trading partners; notably among them were Harold Sullivan, Dean Lanham, Joy Terrell, Leo Ritter, and Oren and Vernis Barr. He was very careful with whom he entered into partnerships. If he did partner with someone, you can rest assured that he trusted him. Likewise his partners

trusted him. Harold Sullivan once said, "I never met two more honest men than Otto and Reamy Burnett."

When he was in the cattle business with Oren and Vernis, he sent Oren to the auction to buy a bull. Oren bought a bull but Reamy picked at him about how sorry it was. However, although he would never admit it to Oren, he was heard to comment that the calves from that bull were the best ever raised on Big Creek.

Reamy loved hunting and fishing, although he never took much time for it when he was younger. He really got into hunting and fishing about 1967 when he moved to the new house on upper Big Creek. He had a knack for training dogs and always kept a good squirrel dog, the most notable ones were Rachel, an Airedale and a redbone hound that didn't seem to have a name. Once when Mel Reese, Charles's nephew came down to hunt with him, and after they had shot a fine mess of squirrels, Mel said, "That is a mighty fine squirrel dog. I believe that if she would only bark that she would be the best I have ever seen."

Reamy replied, "That dog is awful smart. She knows I can't hear so there ain't any need of barking."

He loved to fish too. He was always building a pond and stocking it so as to have a place where relatives could catch a "big one".

Reamy was a pretty fair carpenter and once had a crew of all women. It was called the "Sunshine Crew". He and the Sunshine Crew, consisting of Lorene Lanham, Juanita Lanham, Katrina Lanham and Cherrie Malone worked all up and down Big Creek. They did several carpentry jobs, including bricking Reamy's

house, remodeling the church, remodeling Juanita's house, and practically building Bud and Katrina's house.

Reamy got into hunting and digging ginseng in the 70's and 80's. It was a great hobby, and like everything else he did, he was pretty good at it. He even made a little money at it. One year someone broke into Reamy and Nellie's house and stole a rifle, camera and several other items. They were pretty sure it was not a local person, or at least not a person knowledgeable of ginseng for the thief left a bag of drying ginseng that was worth more than the items taken.

Reamy was a farmer, a woodsman, and an excellent judge of livestock and he raised and traded cattle, horses and hogs. He worked for US Forest Service from 1962 until his retirement in 1969 due to ill health. He was a hard worker and judged others by their willingness to work and their honesty.

His own reputation as an honest man was widely known. Once, when a neighbor died, the widow sent word that she wanted to sell her cattle but that she would only sell to him and Harold Sullivan, as she knew they would not take advantage of her.

The last 20 years of his life he suffered greatly with arthritis. Yet he continued to do more work than most healthy men. The people that knew him in the last years knew him as a "tough" old man. Of course he didn't get that toughness by living an easy life in his younger days. He lived in some lean times when a man had to work hard to make a living. Given his circumstance in life, he made a living

better than most, all through using his wits and hard work.

Reamy George Burnett was not a man that showed love and affection easily, especially in those early years.



Clinton McCall, Great-grandson, about 1996

But he loved his wife and family dearly; one can see it in the way he treated them. As he aged he mellowed and began to show more affection. He was always very supportive of his kids, giving a word of advice or lending a helping hand when needed and standing back to let them learn their lessons too. He treasured all his grand children and all of them remember him fondly. His last greatest pleasure was probably playing with his great grand children, Elizabeth, Calvin, and Clinton.

In 1989 Reamy received news that he had prostate cancer. He faced this new obstacle with courage, just as he did every other one in his life. It was a hard fight; still he managed some quality time in those last years.

He died in 1995 at the Salem Hospital with all his family present. He was buried in the Burnett Cemetery on Big Creek, on the land he loved.

*Following is a tribute to Reamy Burnett written by Cherrie Malone, his granddaughter at the time of his death.*

***“We live in a communication generation and most of our words are meaningless. People speak of love and commitment but are not willing to show outward signs of it. People speak of hard work and honor but wouldn’t want anyone seeing their hidden moments.***

***A eulogy makes all men sound a saint, when those words are placed in the right order. But R. G. Burnett never needed men’s words to sound good. For his name was honor. And though his body had been spent with cancer, to behold his form was to see strength. Many a man has left this world leaving loved ones riddled with doubts and though I never heard him say I love you, I knew he did, every time he came to get us and every time he took us to the pond, I knew it. Those of us he loved may have never heard the words aloud, but they are forever engraved on our hearts.”***

### **Nellie Elizabeth Barr and Reamy George Burnett**

*By Nellie Burnett*

Reamy and I met at a party in March 1939. We started dating the very next week. When Reamy’s father



Nellie Barr, about 1937

died in May that same year, he got the preacher, Sterling Chitwood, to take him to Bunker to get me to attend the funeral with him. Other than his brothers Deward and Floyd, I had never met any of his family.

We went together for the next two years and were married, April 2, 1941. Reamy was working for Bay's Stave Mill Company cutting stave bolts. He went to a sale that Marion Thompson was having and bought a housekeeping outfit, consisting of a used table and chairs and cook stove. He bought two new beds from Emory Highley at Bunker. Our first home was at the Bay Mill Camp. We lived at the mill camp about four months and then moved to Bunker to a boarding house.

The war situation was getting pretty bad and men were being drafted all around. Reamy was exempt

because we were married and expecting a baby. Otto was running the farms for his mother up until this time. When he got his draft notice, Reamy quit his job and we moved to the farm on Big Creek on December 14, 1941. Linda

was born a month later, January 19, 1942. We lived on the farm with Reamy's mother for 10 years.

Life on the farm was new to me and I had a lot to learn. I learned how



**Otto & Reamy, just before  
Otto went into Army**

to milk a cow, make garden and many other things pertaining to farm life.

During the war help was scarce as well as money. My brother John helped out during the summer months. Lola Mae and I both worked in the hay fields. When money got tight, Reamy would hew a load of ties or cut a load of stave bolts to make some extra money.

One fall when Linda was still a baby, Reamy wanted me to go with him to help cut some wood. I bundled Linda up good so she would stay warm and went with him to the woods. I had never used a crosscut saw and he got to quarrelling at me, saying I was "riding" the saw. I finally told him that I was doing the best I knew how and that if he didn't hush I was going to take Linda and go home. He hushed for a while but soon begin to fuss again. I finally dropped my end of the saw and picked up Linda and started home. In a little bit, he called and asked me to come back so I agreed if he would not fuss at me. He didn't say another word and we finished cutting the wood. Later that evening, Mr. Akins from across the valley came over and noticed the wood. Knowing there were no men around who could have helped get it, he asked Reamy who helped him get the wood. Reamy said, "I got it in by myself." He never asked me to help get wood again.

Schoolteachers were scarce and the one room school at Black Hill was in need of a teacher. I went to Cape Girardeau and got a teaching certificate and taught school for a term.

Reamy's mother, Lola was good to the kids and me but we were living in her house and truth be told she was

a little hard to live with. The older she got, the more quarrelsome and difficult she got.

In 1952 we bought a farm over on Bounds Branch. It had a little four-room shack on it that we made into a home. Rebecca was born shortly after we moved to Bounds Branch. Times were hard and we didn't have much but we had some of our best times in that little house.



**Reamy & Family, 1958**

The place on Bounds Branch was all grown up in brush and weeds and had an abundance of copperheads. I was deathly afraid of them. Mostly I suppose I was afraid one of the kids would get on one and get bitten. Once the boys kicked one up out in the barn lot. Reamy was some distance away from the house picking blackberries. I got a hoe from the garden and was attempting to hold

it until Reamy got there to kill it. All the time I was holding it, we were yelling for Daddy and the boys were throwing rocks at it. When Reamy arrived, all out of breath from running the snake was covered up in rocks and chopped in pieces. He was just a little put out that we had scared him nearly to death, hollering like we did and when he got there the snake was already dead. I had several run-ins with copperheads over the years but luckily none of us ever got bitten.

In 1956 we bought the Harold Sullivan place. We had to borrow the money for it and because it seemed like a large sum of money, Reamy thought I ought to go to St Louis and work a summer to help make money to pay off the note. I took Rebecca and went to St Louis to work that summer. Linda was only thirteen years old, but she cooked, cleaned house, did laundry, survived a clothesline loaded with freshly washed clothes breaking and dropping all the clothes in the dirt, and made garden that summer. It was quite a job for a thirteen year old but we didn't think too much about it, rather we just went about and did what had to be done.

Reamy said that when we got the note paid off that we would put in a bathroom. It took us only a little over a year to pay off the farm note and we put in the first indoor bathroom on Big Creek. Beatrice Sullivan was the last Post Mistress of the Rat Post Office before it closed. The post office had been run out of the farmhouse and one room was set-aside for that purpose. The bathroom went into the room that had been the last location of the Rat Post Office.

We attended church at Sugar Tree Grove United Baptist church. The church met for a while in the Black Hill schoolhouse. When the school district sold off the old one-room schoolhouses all around this part of the country, the church was unable to buy the Black Hill building. We met in the old Rat schoolhouse for a while but



**Reamy & Nellie, Dec 1978**

this proved unsatisfactory, as the roads were so bad that people just couldn't get there. Reamy and I decided to deed over a piece of land to the church where a new building would be built. There was an old store building on our place that we cleaned up and Hazel Turner and I papered the walls to make it look a little better. The church met in this old building while the men were building a new church. The church still occupies the building and grounds that we donated back in the 50's. We stayed active in that little church and Reamy was saved and baptized in that little church in 1970.

In 1967 we sold the farm we bought from Harold Sullivan to Ted and Sue Farris. We built a new house on upper Big Creek, on the land

Reamy inherited from his father. We built the house ourselves even though Reamy was working a full time job in the Iron Works. Otto helped get the basement in and the framework up and other than that, the house was built before and after work.

Reamy and I had a good life together. The first half of our married life we were mostly concerned about making a living and getting our kids reared. There were some lean times but we always had everything we really needed. We raised our family here on Big Creek and are very proud of each and every one of our children. After the kids all left home and went out on their own, we continued to enjoy our



**Reamy & Nellie, 46th Anniversary, 1987**

lives together. I learned to drive after we moved to upper Big Creek, and it was a good thing I did too. Reamy was in poor health the last thirty years of his life but he just would not let it keep him down. He wanted to live life to the fullest and was not the sort of man to let his illness keep him from it. We were blessed to have many friends

around this area to visit and fellowship with, and were always out doing things we liked to do.

Reamy was not a real talkative man but there were few days that we didn't sit down face to face and talk about things that were going on, or that might be on our minds. He was hard of hearing and I had to be sitting, looking right at him for him to understand what I was saying. Of



**Reamy and Grand Kids, about 1980**

course we did know each other quite well and often knew what the other was thinking, even without talking. There was much love in our family, granted it was not demonstrated with lots of hugging and kissing but it was there. As the kids got older and returned home to visit us, you could readily see how fond they were of their Daddy. I would be in the kitchen preparing a meal and I could hear them reliving their fondest memories with him. I feel very privileged to have had Reamy for a life partner and I know our kids felt the same way about him being their father.

### **The Children of Reamy and Nellie**

#### *Linda Ann*

Linda Ann Burnett was born January 19, 1942. She graduated high school at Bunker and went to Beauty School at Rolla Missouri. After finishing her training and certification, she went to St. Louis to work in a beauty shop. She was working in St. Louis when Grandma Burnet died. The shop owner refused her time off to attend the funeral and told her that if she went, she would be unemployed when she got back. Linda, always a family oriented person, never thought twice about heading home to be with the family. A trip to Salem was all it took to find another job.

She met Bill Malone and they kept steady company for several months. After a short time back in St. Louis working at the International Shoe Company, she and Bill were married in Salem on March 17, 1962. Linda kept her job in St Louis until June and then moved to Salem with Bill.



**Sherrie Malone. 1969**

One daughter, Cherrie Linda Malone was born on August 2, 1964. Cherrie would later on add two more to the family when she

gave Linda two grandchildren, Elizabeth and Calvin Perrin.

Bill Malone was an electrician by trade and owned a business in Salem.



**Elizabeth Perrin**

Linda and Bill lived in Salem until 1967 when Bill started working for the mining company as an electrician. They moved to Illinois for a while and in 1972 to Claremore OK, where they remained until Bill's death in 1979.

Linda and Bill lived in Salem until 1967 when Bill started working for the mining company



**Calvin Perrin**



**Linda and Bill Moody**

Linda stayed in Claremore after Bill Malone's death and later met William E. (Bill) Moody. She and Bill were married and she they continue to reside in Claremore.

Reamy and Nellie made several trips to Claremore to visit over the years. Reamy wasn't big on traveling, but he truly enjoyed going to Linda and Bill's. Bill and Reamy had a mutual respect for each other and enjoyed time together, playing pool, working jigsaw puzzles, and other competitive games.

*Charles Ellis*

Charles Ellis Burnett, who carries the names of two of his grandfathers, was born August 10, 1945. He graduated high school at Bunker in 1963.



**Charles and Brenda**

Charles married his high school sweetheart, Brenda Burns at Little Vine Church on June 20, 1964. Charles and Brenda still attend Little Vine United Baptist church.

Charles first went into the construction business with Uncle Otto. When the lead mines came into the area, he signed on as an Iron Worker and worked on the construction of the mining facilities. Later he joined the mining operation where he still works today.

After the death of Brenda's



**Charles and Hank**

parents, Charles and Brenda bought her dad's farm. Charles loves horses and is an excellent horseman. He always seemed to have a knack for breaking and training horses.

Charles, like his father and uncles, enjoys a reputation of being an honest man and a hard worker. This reputation was not just "inherited" either, but rather was earned. He was and presently still is able to do nearly everything he puts his had to and do it better than most. Brenda his wife, comes from a family much like the Burnett's, in that they were honest and hardworking. In fact, the two families have been neighbors and

friends for many years. Charles and Brenda are liked and well respected in the community.

### *John Richard*

As a very young boy, Richard had an active imagination. When he was about three, he told the preacher that he rode Ole' Cooney, a blue tick hound, to Rat. (A trip of about two miles.) It's also reported that he bragged about shooting a bear with a cork gun. He has also been known to repeat an embarrassing story at a most inopportune time, as his mother will testify.

John Richard Burnett was born on June 22, 1947 at the Burnett farm on upper Big Creek. His birth certificate reads, Rat, Mo., as that was the name of the local post office in 1947. He graduated Bunker High school in 1965 and went on to attend college at Truman State University in Kirksville Missouri, formally Northeast Missouri State Teachers College, where he earned a degree in mathematics.

In June of 1967, he married Margaret Floyd and they had one daughter, Rona Burnett, in 1969. They were divorced in 1975.

Richard married Lola Frazure on March 14, 1985.

After graduating college, Richard taught high school math for one year at Bucklin, Mo. During this same time, he was working in the computer center at Northeast Missouri State. In 1971, he joined the Missouri State Highway Patrol where he was the systems development manager for 14 years.

In May of 1985, Richard and Lola relocated to Alabama, where

Richard joined Auburn University and currently serves as Director in the Division of University Computing.



**Richard and Lola**

Richard and Lola live in Opelika Alabama where they enjoy traveling, singing gospel music, and their many pets.

They say you can take a boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy. The desire to return home to Big Creek grows stronger with each passing year.

### *Rebecca Lynn*

Rebecca (Becky) Lynn Burnett was the youngest child of Reamy and Nellie and was born on September 9, 1952. She attended and graduated from Bunker High School, where she met Steve Parker.

Becky and Steve were married March 29, 1969 and have made their home at Bunker Missouri.

Steve worked for Amax until they closed the mine and all the men were laid off. Becky was a homemaker while the children were small but after they got out of high school, she began working too. She worked for Paramount Headwear for nearly twelve

years. Steve continues to work for a Security company.

In the early 70's, during the Christmas season, Becky and Steve were awakened to a fire in their house. In moments, all their material possessions were gone. Fortunately the family escaped unharmed. Although it was a devastating loss, they recovered and went on with their lives.



**Becky and Steve**

Becky, no less honest and hard working than any other Burnett before her has been a great help to her parents. She and Steve attend church at Sugar Tree Grove with her parents and Steve's father; Lowell Parker was the pastor there for many years.

Attending church on Big Creek put her there often and therefore she was there to lend a



**Megan and Clinton**

helping hand, as Reamy and Nellie got older. Also having two grandchildren for them, close at hand, put her in

constant contact; thus putting Becky right there when help was needed.

Reamy was always going out to Becky's to get Megan and Mark to come down and stay with him. He would pick them up about the middle of the week and she would have to go get them for he probably never would have returned them home. Once when he came to get the kids, Becky says to him, "You only come to my house to get my kids, not to see me."

He gave her that little grin of his and said to the kids, "You'ns ready to go?"

Becky and Steve continue to live in Bunker where she and Nellie share joint enjoyment of Becky's grandson, Clinton.

### **Brothers and Sisters of Reamy George Burnett**

There were no less than nineteen children from the combined marriages of Charley Burnett and Lola Chasten. Charley's first wife, Lea Anne Heaton had nine children and died in



**Deward, Floyd, Reamy, Otto, No date**

childbirth in 1913. Lola Chasten and Joel Black had four daughters when

Joel died. Charley and Lola had six children, including one that died at birth.

Although most of the family stayed in Missouri, it did spread out quite a bit. Some of Charley and Lea



**Lola Mae, Lena, Hazel, Irma, Mamie, No date**

Anna's children stayed around Shannon County, some ended up in St Louis, one in the Springfield area, and one even as far away as Arizona.

Lola's daughters stayed around the Bunker and Salem area and raised their families.

The children of Charley and Lola; Otto, Reamy, Deward, Floyd, and Lola Mae, with the exception of Deward, stayed around the Shannon County and Bunker area. There was, because of this close proximity, a good deal more interaction among Charley and Lola's children and Lola's daughters.

### *Otto Otis*

Otto Otis Burnett, the oldest child of Charley and Lola, was born August 17, 1917 on Barren Fork. He worked on the farm with the rest of the family until after Charley died in 1938.

He entered the armed service and served in World War II. Upon returning to Big Creek after the war, he met and married Geneva Barr. Otto and Geneva had four children, Brenda, Rhonda, Robyn, and Douglas.

Otto barbered in St Louis a few years until the call to Big Creek drew him back. He settled his family on the "home place" on Big Creek where he lived until his death in 1977. Otto practiced several trades, carpentry, farming, and saw milling, among others. His reputation around the area grew and he was known as a fair and honest man. He was a very community minded man, serving several terms on the Bunker School Board. He was well liked by nearly everyone and well respected by all. He was truly a man who made a way for his own. Every one of his children, nephews, and nieces probably benefited from the legacy and reputation he left.

Otto had a great sense of humor and loved practical jokes and loved life.

He is buried in the Burnett Cemetery on Big Creek, on the land he was raised on and loved.

#### *Deward Paul*

Deward was the third child of Charley and Lola. He was born May 13, 1921 on Big Creek. He worked on the farm with his brothers until he entered the service to fight in World War II.

Deward married Pearl Goforth and they had one son, Kenneth. Unlike the other boys, Big Creek and Shannon County couldn't hold Deward. He soon moved to Michigan, where he worked for General Motors

until he retired. Deward's only son, Kenneth still lives in the Flint area.

Uncle Deward was a favorite with the nephews living around Bunker. When he came back to visit, he was usually driving a new Cadillac or a new Buick, and he would load up



**Deward and Kenneth, No date**

all the older nephews and head for a swimming hole. He always let the boys take turns driving his car as we explored every road from Sutton Bluff to the Blue Hole to the Birdie Hole on lower Big Creek.

Deward died in 1996 and was cremated, per his request.

#### *Floyd Gale*

Floyd was the forth child of Charley and Lola, He was born February 18, 1923 on Big Creek. Like his brothers, he worked on the farm until going into the armed services during World War II. Floyd was wounded in the war.

Floyd married Lorene Black of Bunker and they had five children; Sharion, Robert (Bob), Elaine, David (Doc), and Larry. Floyd and Loraine lived around Bunker and raised their family there.

Floyd worked in the timber, operated a farm, and owned and operated a service station in Bunker, and carried the US Mail on a rural mail route. He enjoyed the same reputation for honesty and hard worker as his brothers.

Floyd and Lorene's children have all continued to live in the Bunker - Salem-Ellington area.

Family tradition has it that, stern as the old man Burnett (Charlie) was reported to be, Floyd was the only one of the kids he ever spanked. As the story goes, Floyd was about four or five years old and the old man put his pants on him. Floyd was fussing because he wanted his mother to put them on for him so he pulled them off. The old man lost patience with him and spanked him.

Floyd died in 1972 and is buried at the Bunker Cemetery in Reynolds County.

#### *Lola Mae*

Lola Mae was the youngest child, and only daughter of Charley and Lola. She was born January 15, 1930 on Big Creek.

Lola Mae married John Conway and they had three daughters; Ellen, Jo Ann, and Johnita. She and John were divorced while the girls were quite small and she was left with the task of rearing three children on her own. Lola Mae didn't shirk this task and worked at several jobs to support

her family. She operated a small country store and was Post Mistress of the Midridge Post Office, among other things.

Lola Mae's two older girls, Ellen and Jo Ann have married and raised their families around Bunker. Johnita lives in Rolla and has a successful Real Estate career there.

Lola Mae later married Willis Goforth and lives in Salem.

#### **Daddy**

*By the children of Reamy Burnett,  
Linda, Charles, Richard, Becky*

*(What follows is a collection of  
memories from all of us)*

Earliest memories go back to the 1940, when Mom and Daddy were living on the home place with Grandma. He was a serious minded man, but loved his fun too. Once when he and Deward bought tricycles for Linda and Kenny, the men just couldn't wait for Christmas. They devised a scheme where they would shoot off a shotgun and summon up Santa Claus. Ole' Santa would bring the tricycles up to the front porch so the kids could ride them a while. After a bit, they would shoot off the



**Reamy and Charles, 1946**

shotgun again. Ole' Santa would come back and get the tricycles.

Daddy was anxious to get a helper for the farm work. When Charles was only about eight or so, he left him mowing on the farm on Bounds Branch while he went after another team. By the time he returned, the team had gotten into a yellow jackets nest and run away, tearing up the mower. Fortunately, Charles was unhurt.



**Richard & Charles, about 1950**

Daddy was a strong man, one that never seemed to tire. During the weekdays, he was cutting and splitting stave bolts. In the mornings before leaving for the woods, in the evenings after returning home, and on weekends, he farmed. He took care of a herd of cattle, several teams of horses and mules, kept hogs, chickens and ran goats on the steep hillsides to keep down the sprouts. Of course he didn't do it all by himself, even in the early years when us kids were too small to help much, Mother worked just as hard as he did. She did most of the gardening and fed livestock when Daddy was leaving home too early or returning too late to do it.

Daddy seemed a stern man but he was not nearly so mean as one might think. He could count on one

hand the number of times he spanked us kids. He did want us to obey and saw to it that we did, but seldom had to raise his hand to get us to do what we were supposed to do. He could aggravate Mom though, and often did. If dinner was not set on the table when he came in and sat down, he would pick up a fork and bang it on the plate, saying, "Done or raw, bring it on." Of course a couple of boys like Charles and Richard would NEVER have copied this sort of unruly behavior. It is likely that he came close to getting a pot roast over his head a few times.

We all have great memories of growing up on the farm. Once when Becky was about eight years old, there was a cow in labor. She wanted to watch the calf being born but Daddy told her to go to the house. She slipped into the barn to watch but got caught. He came out of the barn after her, telling her that if he caught her before they got to the house, she would get a whipping. It is likely he didn't try too hard to catch her because she never got a whipping from him, ever.

We can all remember the day the boys set the woods on fire. Daddy had been clearing brush on the hill behind the house and it was very dry. Somehow we had gotten our hands on some firecrackers. Momma probably thought, "What harm can it be to give them one little match?" Being bright little boys like we were, we headed straight for the dry brush and within a few minutes had the woods on fire. To make it even worse, Daddy was working for the Forest Service at the time.

The greatest and most useful thing our father gave us, besides feeding and seeing to our basic needs,

was to teach us to work. He started us all early on, teaching us responsibility and teaching us to carry our share. Now days, if a father worked his children as hard as Daddy worked us, the Child Welfare people would probably come and take them away. However, we never thought we were mistreated in any way. Truth be told, he seemed to expect a little more of the older children than the younger ones. Maybe he didn't realized it, but looking back now, it seems that once the older child learned how to do something, from then on, he just expected it of them but he never quite expected as much of the younger ones. We can all remember him being supportive of us in one way or another, whether it be of advice and council or materially. He

We can all remember working in the hay fields, the old-time way. Not tractors and hay bailers, but horses and mules and bull rakes and stacking hay out in the fields. In building a hay stake, you have to have someone on the stack to tramp it down as it is pitched up onto the stack. That was always the job of the youngest child in the field, walking around on top of a stack of hay as three or four men pitched it up to you.

There were lots of good times too, swimming in the creek and Daddy taking time to play with us. Like playing a game where the boys would run past him in the house and he would lasso them, or him getting on his hands and knees and letting us ride him as he bucked like a wild



*Linda, Richard, Becky, Charles, 1999*

taught us financial responsibility too, his favorite saying being, "If you have the money, you can buy it."

horse. Looking back now, one has to wonder where he got the energy to work all morning in the fields and then

take time to play with kids when he came in for lunch.

Daddy was an avid reader and in his later years loved to read westerns. In those early years, after chores were finished, Mother would read to us. We all, including Daddy, sat around and listened, as our imaginations took us back into the Old South with "Chad and Melissa" in those great old classics like, *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*. This was before television or telephones and provided some great family time.

Daddy loved coon hunting with Harold Sullivan. He got a Black and Tan puppy, which he named "Silver Lad". That dog was his pride and joy and not only was he a fine coonhound; he would trail a hog or a cow if Daddy sent him after a trail. Many were the times when he would take us boys with him and Harold. When the dogs picked up the trail of a coon, Daddy and Harold would head out in a run after them. It would be pitch black and we would catch hold of the hammer pocket loop that is attached to a pair of bib overalls to keep from being left behind.

Daddy had a thing about picking up things, mainly rocks and black walnuts. We all helped but never finished. Even after he was nearly an invalid with rheumatoid arthritis, he would hook a small two-wheeled cart behind his Honda 3-wheeler and pick up rocks from his fields. He also loved black walnuts. Once when he couldn't even bend over to pick up a walnut, he rigged up a spike on a stick so he could stab them and pick them up. He had Uncle Oren carry a concrete block into the kitchen so he could crack

walnuts when he was too sick to get out.

We all learned to drive in one of his pickups; some of us were too small to see over the steering wheel. The boys probably have more memories of outside things, as they tended to work outside with him while the girls stayed with Mom. It is difficult to remember the first time we went out to work with him, or the first time we rode a horse or drove a team. It seems like we have just always done those things. Things like driving farm implements, mowing machines, hay rakes, wagons and the like and hearing a neighbor say, "Slim is going to get them boys killed." One would conclude that this neighbor must have thought we were too young to do the things we were given to do.

Daddy was a man of few words. He wasn't big on telling you the same thing over and over. He thought you should be listening to him the first time. When he was working on something, he wanted your full attention. If he needed a tool, we were supposed to anticipate that need and have it ready to hand to him, sort of like a surgeon's assistant. If his hand came out, opened, he expected the right tool to be placed there. He was a good teacher but we didn't always realize it at the time. As we went about our business, he would point out a good deal on a calf or a hog that boys might buy. Later on it could be sold for a profit.

Daddy prided himself on doing more work than any other man on the job. He was fiercely competitive in work and play. He wanted to be first to arrive on the job, or at any function we might be attending. He used to say that he never went looking for work,

but that work always came looking for him.

Once we were putting up hay when Bill Evans came to see Daddy about cutting logs for him. Daddy told him that he was just too busy with the farm to take the job. Bill talked on a while and finally said that he had a man skidding logs for him that no one log cutter could stay ahead of. That was all it took. Daddy told him that he would finish the hay and be there the next week. When we got on the job and Daddy cut the first tree, the log guy hooked onto the first log even before Daddy got it cut off. It went that way all morning. Daddy would finish cutting the logs in a tree and hand the saw over to us to be carried to the next tree. He would actually run through the woods to the next tree and when we got there with the saw, he would grab it and go to work. Along about mid morning, he began to get a little suspicious. He walked back up through the woods where we had been cutting logs all morning, and found that the log skidder guy had only taken one log from each tree, while we were cutting two or three from each one. When the guy tried to hook up to the next tree we cut, Daddy shut off his saw and told him, "Don't ever hook on a log I'm cutting until you have skidded everything else I have cut."

We never saw him up close again. When Daddy left that job later in the winter, he had cut enough logs that they hauled his logs for the whole next year.

For a few years in the late 50's we made maple syrup. There was an abundance of sugar maples on our place and we were getting just the right kind of weather, freezing at night

and thawing during the days. We tapped thirty or forty maple trees, using sections of elderberry stalks, (pvc wasn't invented yet), to drain the maple sap into buckets. Every evening, after getting home from school, the boys would drive a horse drawn sled around to the trees and pour up the collected sap into cream cans. On the weekends, the whole family would turn out to cook down the sap. We would build a fire around a big black cast iron kittle and cook the sap down into syrup. Everyone helped to carry wood for the fire and the cooking sap had to be watched constantly to keep it from boiling over. It took 30 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. Like everything else Daddy did, just enough for our family wasn't his way. He always wanted to do things in a big way, making enough to give all the neighbors and visiting relatives a quart. So we cooked lots of maple syrup, until we were so sick of looking at it that we didn't want any, well at least not until breakfast the next day, when we poured hot maple syrup over Mom's biscuits.

One way that Daddy had of teaching us kids responsibility was to "give" us a calf to take care of. This calf would be sold at the feeder sale and the money used to buy our school clothes. One year while everyone else was gone to Salem, the boys got the calves up in the barn and started riding them. For some reason Linda's calf was ridden too much and got too hot and later died. She was a senior in high school that year and had several expenses, i.e., senior picture, cap and gown, etc. Every time Linda needed money Daddy would make the boys shell out to pay for the "calf they rode

to death". Probably that calf made more "profit" than any other in the history of the Burnett family. It is also safe to say that the responsibility lesson was learned in more ways than one.

Becky had a little trouble with this concept of having an animal to care for and then sell. She was always naming them and then wanting to keep them for pets. Once Daddy allowed her to pick out a pig to be hers for breeding. She picked the runt, probably because it was the littlest and cutest. It got big enough and ate plenty but seemed not to be fertile. Leo Ritter came along one day on a hog-buying trip. Becky's sow sure was pretty, all fat and slick and Leo wanted to buy her. In a little while he and Daddy made a deal. About the time they got the sow loaded into Leo's truck, Becky came along and saw her "baby" in the truck. She setup a howl and Daddy was about to spank her to get her to leave so Leo wouldn't unload the sow. After Leo left, Daddy had to give Becky \$35.00 to get her to hush about selling her pet.

Daddy and Uncle Otto ran their cattle together. In order to be able to identify which cows belonged to whom, they used an aluminum label in the cows' ears. The printing on the labels was so small that you had to catch a cow to read it, so they devised a scheme where Otto would label his cows in the left ear and Daddy would label his in the right ear. That way ownership could be identified at a distance. One year while labeling some new heifers, one of them ran out of labels but still had one heifer to label. They decided to use the others label but put it in the proper ear. That



**Reamy, Nellie and family, 1963**

would have worked fine, except they got mixed up later on whose cow it was in the first place. Now anyone that knew Daddy and Otto, knows they liked to argue between themselves. They could never agree on whom the cow belonged to, so to stop the argument, they gave it to Charles and Richard.

In 1966 when the lead was discovered in the area, the mining companies bought up all the land on Blair Creek. After all the farmers moved out, they left lots of good grass, just going to waste. Daddy bought a big herd of cattle to graze on the grass. He hauled a horse in his pickup over to Blair Creek to ride as he looked about his cattle. We boys rode along, though we were both living away from home by then. While sitting in the truck waiting on him to return, a big

rattlesnake crawled across the road. We jumped out and chopped off the snakes' head with one swing of the axe. We put the dead snake in the back of the truck as a joke. The horse Daddy was riding that day was a good loader. He would jump in the back of the truck on level ground with no urging whatever. When Daddy got back, he led the horse up to the truck, but he wouldn't get in. Instead, he began pulling back and snorting. Daddy got up in the truck, to pull the horse in. Now normally he was very observant and seldom missed anything that was around him. But this time, because the horse was acting up, he was keeping his eye on the horse and didn't see the snake that he was now standing on. He called to us to get out and help him. About that time he saw the snake. He jumped out of that truck, momentarily forgetting that he was crippled up with arthritis.

"Get that snake out of there," he yelled. We got rid of the snake and kept a pretty good distance from him all the while. We got in the truck and headed for home. About half way there, he got a little grin on his face.

Daddy was quite competitive and always strived to be the best at whatever he did. This was true of both work and play. After he became so crippled with arthritis that he couldn't work, he passed the time with various games and hobbies. Eugene Farmer, a nephew on Mothers side made a marble board for a game called "aggravation". Daddy loved that game and would usually stick to it until he really did aggravate Mom. Although we suspect he didn't cheat at it, he would pretend that he was, just to aggravate you a little more.

He also loved to shoot pool. He didn't have a fancy stylish stroke like pool shooters usually do; rather he simply took a steady aim and poked once. He had a good eye and was a dead shot. He was extremely patient in playing pool, never forcing the play but waiting until the right time to make the shot. Once he and Mom went out to Oklahoma to visit Linda and Bill for



**Charles & Mark at Mark's graduation**

a few days and took Mark with them. He, Mark and Bill shot 120 games of pool and he pretty well wore Bill out. Bill was glad to see the weekend go so he could go back to work and rest. Another time, after Rex Conway won a pool tournament in Bunker, Daddy was in the pool hall and Rex ask him to play a few games. Daddy beat him, at least on that day.

Some of the stories we didn't live through, but have just heard them from others. A favorite involves him and Uncle Joel Goforth. They were cutting hay on Sunday and the team broke the tongue out of the mowing machine. One of the mules got in the mower and it cut off a foot. They had to destroy the animal, but crazy as the

two of them were when they got together, they hatched up a plan to bring home some mule meat to cook. When they got home, Mom refused to even let them in the house so they took their mule meat up to Aunt Lena's and asked her to cook it. She did. It gets a little hazy as to whether or not they ate any of it, but Ernie and Bernice wouldn't eat any gravy for a long time for fear it might be tainted with mule.

*Additional Memories from  
Grandchildren*

*By Cherrie Malone Plamer*

Memories are a funny thing, when people move on from this life to the next one. Every one handles their memories of loved ones differently, many things can effect the emotions memories have. But when you adore someone like I did my Grandpa every memory of him is gold.

As a kid my Grandpa named every dog we had Jack. We longed for some hand picked names like Cowboy or Spot, but in his perfect wisdom he always chose Jack. Our Grandpa was just a little hard of hearing. I wouldn't say he was deaf but we did a lot of yelling. He never spoke much and when he did it was very brief. Well one summer when I was about 12 years of age we had a beagle pup named Jack. It was the cutest pup you ever did see, and he had the sweetest nature, however as far as a good country dog went he came up a little short. My Grandpa disliked this dog he was always yelling at him, "Dog Get down, Get off me, Get out of here." So me and my 3 cousins thought it would be

funny just to call the dog "Get" seeing how that's all our Grandpa called him anyhow. So we did. We fed him treats and would say, "Good dog Get." Which seemed very funny at the time. But the dislike Grandpa had for his dog grew,



**Linda, Calvin, Becky, Mark, and Nellie 1998**

for each time he would bark commands at this dumb dog he would just pant with delight and wag his little tail. Grandpa would be yelling at him to, "Get down! Get out of here! Get off of me!" and this silly little dog would just be all over him anxiously awaiting his treat that he never did get. We would go swimming to some far way country water hole and Grandpa would bring and leave the dog hoping this poor excuse of a hound would get lost. But our brave dog, Get always made it home. Panting in delight and wagging his tail, as Grandpa would yell out his name, "Get!"

My grandpa was also a very creative man he knew how to keep us 4 wild Indians out of mischief and how to get us ready for his nap. At about

1:00 each day we would take feed sacks (made of paper I might add) 2 shovels and 4 pair of hands in assorted ages of 14, 9, 8, & 5. For two summers running, we would fill the bags with sand and place them across the creek in hopes of making a dam. For if we ever dammed up the creek the next day Grandpa would get the backhoe and dig us out a swimming hole. We did this every day for two summers, at the end of several days we were close but paper being what paper is we never reached our goal but every day we did lay down at naptime with our Grandpa.

Memories do not just become cherished because someone has died; every memory of my Grandpa and Grandma has added texture to my life. Whenever I think of church, I think of my Grandma and Sugar Tree Grove Baptist Church, average attendance about thirty-five in those days. When I was a small girl this was a two-roomed church with a little brown building on the backside of it, no indoor plumbing here, thank you. I always sat on the fourth row with my Grandma. Church was always opened by Ted Farris, who gave the Sunday School report, and then he would open the floor to song and testimony. One by one People would stand "I just want to say I love the Lord" or maybe sing a song accapella their voices were, some loud, some soft, some shaky, some in and some out of tune, but all inviting you to lesson. When singing was over Ted would return to his seat, which was on the opposite side from where Grandma and me sat. The elders of the church sit on the right hand side of the church many of them in Big Smith overalls. My cousin Megan's grandpa

Mr. Parker would stand to preach, he was an old fashion hell fire and brimstone preacher, in a short sleeve white shirt who had that rhythmic sense of speech. He kept a cold glass of water on the pulpit and a starched



*Clinton, Greg, Megan, 1999*

white hanky in his left hand. It was on a hot summer day in June when I was nine years old sitting there by my Grandma that I walked the aisle of that old county church and gave my heart to Jesus. As Mr. Parker introduced me to the church as a newly created creature, to people that had known me since birth; I smiled at my Grandma and Grandpa who I loved with all my heart and still do to this day.

*My Grandpa*

*By Megan Jane Parsons*

Reamy George Burnett was my grandpa. He molded and shaped my values so much that even today I think of him during my daily trials.

I can't remember a time when his hands weren't bent by arthritis, or his walk slow and tedious, but I

remember a man so strong that he overcame all that pain to spend time with his grandkids. My mother said he would come out to our house to “see if we were ready to go with him.” My brother and I spent a lot of time with him and grandma.

He never played favorites like some do. To him we were both important. He would take us fishing and he would be just as proud of my catch as he was of Mark’s. I had to help clean them too. Just because I was a girl didn’t mean anything.



**Reamy & Grandson, Mark, about 1976**

Grandpa also taught me about work. It is a way of life. If you want something, you work to get it. One Fall he helped us pick up walnuts so we could buy Christmas presents. Sometimes we worked for him. We would pick up rocks out of the field or stack wood for winter. I hated those jobs but he always made me feel proud of doing them.

During the summer before my senior year, we built fence and made a corral in the lower field. We stretched

barbwire and dug postholes. Then we built the corral and it had to be just perfect. I would hammer boards and he would take them down until finally he would just do it himself. My boards looked just the same as his to me and I wondered why pull them down. Then I finally understood. It had to be done his way.

Grandpa was also a very religious man. He attended the Sugar Tree Grove Baptist Church until he was just too sick to go. He even donated the land for the church to be built on. I believe it takes an unselfish and caring man to just give away something to benefit others.

I hope to make as much impression on my own children and someday my grandchildren as grandpa did on me.

*My Grandpa the Good Dragon*  
*By Rona*

I know the title of this piece sounds a little odd, but there was always something magical about my Grandpa. He was 50 years old when I was born. For as long as I can remember, he had severe arthritis that left his hands curled and made getting up and about difficult, and yet he led a more active lifestyle than many people who didn’t have such challenges. I remember my dad telling me how I’d missed seeing what a strong and active man Grandpa had been in his prime, and yet I know now that I have seen that same man: strong, kind, stubborn, and somehow magical, just like the dragons in legends. He could still lift large bales of hay, cart loads of firewood or rocks, move at a pretty fast pace when he had a mind to, and

though his hands were permanently curled he could always open the most stubborn jars and bottles, even those no one else could budge.

I loved my other grandparents too, but Grandpa and Grandma Burnett were my favorite. Growing up, I thought it normal to go there for every major holiday, as well as a chunk out of the summer. My mother never accompanied me on these trips, so for a kid these trips were a true vacation indeed, away from the rules and routine of everyday life. I was a city girl, but I harbored a fantasy of living on a farm, so Grandpa's house with its huge barns, creeks, hills, and woodlands was a magical place for me.

It was also scary at times with threats of ticks, chiggers, spiders, a seemingly endless variety of bees, and of course, the dreaded snakes. Despite that, I found wildlife fascinating to listen to and watch. Even as a young girl there was plenty around that I had the skills to catch, and every summer my cousins and I would start an aquarium in a large bucket, which would last roughly as long as it took the resident frog to hop away.

Playing with my cousins was definitely a big part of my visits to Grandpa's house, and when I arrived the first thing I would do (after hugging Grandma and Grandpa) would be to ask when Megan and Mark could come over. Going to Bible School at the big fancy church in town was a routine of the summer visit, and I always wondered as we drove by the school my mom and dad had attended what it would be like to live there all the time. One year when my summer visit occurred late in the summer after

school in Bunker had already started, I visited Megan's first grade class, where my freshly honed skills from the previous year dazzled the teacher.

This visit must have whetted my appetite, because when I was in junior high I finally convinced my mother to let me live with my grandparents for a couple of years. It was wonderful being in school with my cousins, having some of the same teachers who had taught my daddy, and having Grandpa sit with me out in the truck on cold mornings waiting for the bus. Granny worked, and if I missed the bus I could ride into town with her, and on rare occasions I would walk there after school and hang around until she got off. Most days though, I'd arrive home before her and I'd see Grandpa starting dinner. He could cook the best, fried chicken.

My daddy always told me how he'd learned a lot from Grandpa growing up by helping out on the farm and living in the country. I feel I learned a lot also from my stint in the country. I learned that eating in the country was something you appreciated a little more and enjoyed a lot more, because the food you were eating was probably the vegetables you had grown, harvested, and canned; the fruit you had picked and baked into pies or eaten fresh; the walnuts you had gathered and cracked; the fish you had caught, cleaned, and fried up; the squirrels, rabbits, and deer you had caught and skinned; the beef and pork you had raised and slaughtered; the eggs you had brought in from the barn; the milk you had just got from an obliging cow or goat; the butter and ice cream you had whipped up; the breads, cakes and pies you had made

fresh from scratch, and the water from your well which tasted better than any water on earth.

Sundays and Wednesday evenings would find us down at the little church Grandma and Grandpa favored, Sugar Tree Grove Baptist Church, which Granny had told me Grandpa donated the land for. I remember back to the days when it didn't yet have indoor plumbing, and trips to the bathroom entailed being escorted by Granny to the outhouse where a precarious perch protected you from falling into what looked like a bottomless pit to a five year old. Granny sat up on one of the front pews, and when we were little my cousins and I sat with her, although as we grew we would sit in a clump of our friends. Grandpa would always sit in the back, and once I asked Granny why he sat back there, and she told me he felt more comfortable in the back.

Granny taught our Sunday School class when we were little, and for many years after that was active as Treasurer and Sunday School Director. I remember sitting around the table after Sunday dinner had been cleared away, with Grandpa and everyone opening the offering envelopes, and sorting and counting money. The Lord's Supper was a special treat at that church, where us kids would help collect the cups afterwards while polishing off the rest of the grape juice and biscuits. At Christmas time we would be in the play as shepherds and wise men.

I always felt close to Grandpa because I was like him in a lot of ways. His diet included a certain set list of foods, and he was disinclined to try

new things, a habit I copy faithfully to this day. I still remember with fondness the day I convinced him to try my spaghetti. He liked reading, which I loved also, and would tear through several books in a week. He was also famous for getting up early, and going to bed early, and although I too now have a reputation sometimes for going to bed early, I only get up early when I have to go to work. He would listen to you speak your piece, and he didn't think himself too good to talk to anybody, but once he'd made up his mind you weren't going to change it, and I've been told I have a stubborn streak, too. He had a fondness for new gadgets, and I love newfangled gadgets myself. I remember him having two three-wheelers, a satellite dish back before all the good movie channels were scrambled, and a riding lawn mower.

He also had a few things that were not new: an old truck named after one of his daughters that had a four wheel drive you had to get out of the truck to use, an old dog usually named Jack, an old comfortable rocker by the fireplace patterned in green for the longest time until Granny finally re-upholstered it in brown, an old model hearing aid that spent most of it's time turned off though it worked just fine when he needed it, an old snake bite kit which rested on his dresser, and old values which he passed on to all of us.

He wasn't a man to talk much, but I remember having discussions with him about the economics of keeping a farm, and how to raise cows, pigs, goats, chickens, and such, grow a garden, find food growing in the wild, and even how to make extra money by digging and drying ginseng to sell. One of my best memories was going through some old photos of his, which for some strange reason were kept in a box, not an album, and writing down the names on the backs while he told me about the people in them. He



Charles & Rona Paschal, 1999

wasn't much on kissing, but since I could outrun him, I used to get in a couple of smooches. He taught me many things I won't ever forget, including taking me out driving in his pickup.

Grandpa was a big part of my life for as far back as I can remember.

I was out of state when he passed on, so I didn't get to see him at the end, but he and I had a connection between us that wasn't broken by time or distance. Even though he's now in heaven, he is still very much with me. He and I still have those lazy afternoon conversations, and even if I have to carry on his end of it in my mind, I feel I still learn a lot from him about life and how to live. In legends, dragons would watch over their special humans and briefly appear during their early lives to offer wisdom. I like to think of my Grandpa as my special dragon, who was there to teach me during my childhood and early adult life, and who now watches over me, and my family from heaven.

### **Otto's Family**

*By Richard Burnett*

We were closer to Otto and his family than we were with our other uncles, aunts and cousins, because Otto and Daddy were closer. They were the oldest and shared a common interest in farming the land while Deward, Floyd and Lola Mae went in other directions.

Charles and I worked for Uncle Otto quite a bit when he came home from St Louis on weekends to take care of his farm. We especially like working for him, because he paid in real money. (Working for Daddy, you were paid in sitting at his table and with the "experience" you were gaining.) Also Uncle Otto was a good teacher and a little more likely to tell you why you were doing something instead of just telling you to do it. And

of course, it has to be mentioned that Aunt Geneva could make the best chocolate cake with fudge icing you ever tasted.

About the time all of us kids were getting married and leaving Big Creek, Brenda and her husband, Ron Morton was settling back on Big Creek. They built a home right between Otto and Daddy's farm. This was quite a relief to us, too, as it put family close to Mom and Daddy. They were there, close by where they could look in on them and help out with some small task or another. Also Ron was a great companion for Daddy and they spent many pleasant hours hunting and fishing together, having cookouts, fish fries and so forth.

Rhonda and her husband, Mike Hill, settled not far away too, and were there to help when asked. Once when the doctor advised Daddy that a change in climate might help him with his arthritis, Mike drove Mom and Daddy to Arizona. At the time they left, they didn't know how long they would be gone, but that bit of uncertainty didn't cause Mike and Rhonda to hesitate one minute. They just jumped in and helped.

Robyn and her husband, Ken Luebbering, lived a little farther away, but her presence was felt as well. When Robyn got into researching the Burnett family, she was always bringing Mom and Daddy into her findings. Once after having discovered some new cousins, Earl Burnett and Darlene Pendleton, she brought them down to spend the day with Mom and Daddy. Daddy was pretty feeble at the time, suffering with both arthritis and cancer, but the visit was quite uplifting for him.

Last but not least is Doug. Doug and Joy moved back to the family farm six or seven years before Daddy died. Doug worked, first in Salem and later in Bunker and this meant he was going to "town" every day. He was always willing to pick up something for them. It pleased Daddy a great deal to see a Burnett boy, especially, Otto's son, living back on the home place and raising his family there.

### **In-Laws and Out-laws**

*A Loyal and True Friend By John Allen Barr*

I have known Reamy Burnett since the early 40's when he began dating my sister Nellie. After they were married and moved to the farm, I spent the summer of 41 and 44 with them. I remember these two summers were a lot of work and a lot of fun.

Reamy was a small man physically, but felt he could do as much work as anyone. He never let another man get ahead of him.

During the summer of 44, parts for farm machinery were hard to get. We broke a wheel on the road wagon and Reamy replaced it with a steel farm wagon wheel. The only way to get to Bunker for supplies was by wagon. Reamy was too proud to drive the wagon with three rubber tires and one steel one of a different size, pulled by a mismatched team of one horse and one mule. He conned me into driving Nellie and his mother into town.

It the spring of 46 my folks moved to Big Creek. I remember when Reamy, his nephew Lester Foster and I set up a sawmill, using only a level, a square, a crosscut saw and a chopping

ax. We cut ties and lumber all summer. I left Big Creek and went into the Navy that September.

Over the last fifty years I was only around Reamy when I was on Big Creek to visit. We had a lot of good times fishing and squirrel hunting.

One Sunday while Nellie and my wife Evelyn were at church, Reamy asked me what I wanted to do; go fishing or hunting. Reamy was so crippled with arthritis that he could not walk across the room. Figuring we could ride, I told him we could go hunting. We rode his three-wheeler up the ridge to the Fire Road. We had three or four squirrels when it started to rain, so we started back to the house still getting squirrels. When we got to the Log Road leading from the Fire Road to his farm, there was a long deep rut made by log trucks. He was on the upper side of the three-wheeler and it turned over, throwing him over it and flat on his back. There was no way he could get up by himself. I picked him up and got the three-wheeler back on its wheels. I didn't say a word to anyone about the spill, but next day at my brother Oren's, he laughing and telling the fellows about it.

Reamy was one of a kind, his word was his bond and he was a loyal and true friend.

*A Special Brother-in-law by Vernis Barr*

Even though I had been the family thirty-four years, I didn't really get to know Reamy until we moved back to Big Creek in April 1986.

We moved back to the Barr home place and the second day Reamy convinced Oren and I that if we

planted a garden without a fence around it, it would be ok. Frank and Mike Hill were running cattle where we were planning to make our garden. Slim told me that, "cows won't walk on plowed ground."

When asked why not he replied, "Why would they want to?"

Needless to say the cows ruined the first planting and we fenced the garden.

The many hours spent playing marbles and dominos are some of my treasured memories of him. He was one of a kind.

*The Wild Mule and Other Ramblings by Oren Barr*

We moved to Big Creek in March of 1946 when I was eleven years old. I worked for Slim and Otto both when I was a kid living here on Big Creek. Slim was always working half wild horses and mules. He had a wild mule that was awful bad to kick but Slim had him choked down so he could handle him. Ondo Medley came along and thought he was a pretty good lookin' mule. Him and Slim got to tradin' and he traded for the mule. Now you should understand Slim and Ondo had been trading for years and were always trying to out do one another on a deal. Slim loaded the mule on a truck and hauled him to Bunker to Ondo's barn. When Slim turned him loose in the barn, he slipped the halter off and let him go. Someone standing by said, "I don't believe you fellows will ever be able to catch that mule again."

Omer Highley piped in and said, "The Medleys will work that mule."

My dad, William Barr was watching the whole thing and remarked that, "There ain't a Medley by the name that will ever be able to catch that mule again. When they next get it out of the barn, they will have to open the door and drive it out."

They finally turned the mule out and let him go because no one would get close enough to catch him for fear of being kicked to death.

Otto returned from the army the year we moved to Big Creek. Slim and Otto setup a sawmill up the creek from our house. My brothers John and Bill worked for them. Slim ran the saw, Bill caught slabs, John and Lester Foster cut logs, and Otto hauled them with a team. I was too young and small to do any real work but when the saw was shut down, Slim paid me .50 a week to clean out the sawdust with a shovel and wheelbarrow.

Slim was always into some big deal, looking for a way to make some money. One summer they bought a threshing machine and a binder in partnership with Charlie and Harold Sullivan. Bill and I were at the right place and time to get right in on several of these schemes, so that summer we had a job shocking wheat. One summer Slim took me to Illinois to split stave bolts for \$5.00 a day. We slept outside on the ground. We got up at daylight and had cornflakes for breakfast. Then we went to work until about noon. Slim would take us into town for a plate lunch. The job lasted three days.

One summer in the late 1940's Slim, Dude, and George Swiney got the bright idea to go down to the boot heel and buy a load of watermelons. They found a farmer with a field full of

watermelons. He took them out and cut three or four melons, every one ripe and sweet. So they bought a truckload and headed for St Louis to sell them. When they started selling the melons, it turned out they were all green. They were soon run out of town.

When Vernis and I returned to Big Creek in 1986 we stayed with Slim and Nellie until we got our trailer setup. He liked to play a marble game and we played every day, winter and summer. In 1988 after Slim lost his cattle partner, he talked us into going into the cattle business with him. He was in ill health so he provided the land and advice and we the labor, splitting the investment. It was a good time and we made a little money and learned a lot about cattle.

About 1990 Slim got the idea to put out a corn crop and wanted us to help. He had a little patch of land up above Ronnie and Brenda's. It was the steepest, rockiest piece of land on his whole farm. Nellie fussed at him, saying, "With all the good farm land we have why in the world are we putting corn here?"

Well we did plant it there and got plenty of rain and raised a fine crop. Slim said we ought to get some hogs to feed the corn to. I ask him how many and he said 15 or 20. Nellie said 2 or 3. I bought 10. We did all right, butchered four and sold the rest, getting our money back. Nellie loved the way we cut them up because when she or Vernis would ask what cut of meat is this, I would reply, "Pork." We made some of the best pork sausage I ever ate.

## **Shannon County**

Shannon County was organized on January 29, 1841 and was named after Judge George Shannon. It lies in Southeast Missouri, in the Ozark Mountain, marked by steep hills and deep hollers. The beautiful Current River cuts across in a Southeasterly direction. Originally, the county was much larger but when Texas, Reynolds and Carter counties organized, they took in parts of Shannon. Today the county seat is the town of Eminence.

The first courthouse was constructed near the center of the county, across the Current River near Round Spring in 1845. It was a 16-by-20-foot, hewn-log structure costing a grand total of \$75. This early Shannon County courthouse along with all county records was destroyed by fire during the Civil War.

In 1868, Thomas J. Chilton deeded 50 acres, one of the few sites with clear title, for the town of Eminence and a site for a new courthouse. Four different times the courthouse and records were destroyed by fire; Once during the war, and again in 1871, 1895, and again in 1938. The present courthouse was completed in the summer of 1941 and dedicated August 2, 1941. It has 27 rooms and cost \$77,500.

## **Big Creek**

The Burnett's have lived on Big Creek in Shannon County since about 1900. Big Creek heads up at Bunker and runs in a southeasterly direction for maybe 25 miles and empties into

the Current River. The farm that Charley owned on lower Big Creek is today the last farm on the creek that is accessible on a county maintained road. In times past there were other farms below this one, probably all the way to Current River. A schoolhouse once sat on this farm and during the 1950 and 1960's James and May Sullivan owned this property. They converted the rock structure that was once a school into a house.

There was once a post office and school called Rat. The Rat school was located at the mouth of Deenie Holler, below Loggers Lake. This rock structure was also converted to a residence sometime in the early 60's. *(This is the site of the famous Pie Supper and fight that occurred in 1941. The women and girls had baked pies to be auctioned off, with the successful bidder getting to share the pie with the girl that baked it. They all got into a big fight that involved nearly everyone on Big Creek. The only problem with this story is that depending on who tells it, the perpetrator and outcome changes.)*

The Rat post office was originally located on Judge Swiney's farm. This farm, which was later owned by Charley Sullivan, more recently has been known as the Willard Turner place. The post office was moved to the farm at the mouth of Bounds Branch where Harold and Beatrice Sullivan lived. They ran the post office and a small store. The post office was closed in the early 50's. This is the same farm that Reamy and Nellie bought in 1953, and today is owned by Ted Farris. The Sugar Tree Grove Baptist church sits on land donated by Reamy and Nellie.

The next farm up the creek is what Charley called the Lower Place

and is the land he left to Deward and Lola May. Two miles farther up the creek lies the old home place where Charley and Lola lived and raised their family. Douglas Burnett, Otto's only son owns this farm today. Joining this farm, just upstream, lies the farm Reamy and Nellie owned. Nellie lives on this farm today.

### **Short Stories**

*By Richard Burnett*

*What follows is a collection of short stories that describe some events that happened to us back in the 1950's. While some of the details presented here are fiction, the stories are based on actual events. I have taken some literary privilege in telling these stories through the eyes and in the language of a five year old.*

#### 1. The Runaway

Me and my brother Charles had just finished breakfast and Momma was loading us down with a lunch of biscuits and bacon left over from breakfast. She put a water jug filled with spring water into a flour sack and hurried us out the front door. It was four in the morning and barely starting to get light. A lone Whip-o-will sounded in the predawn light as we started down the lane toward the barn. Daddy was down at the barn working to harness and hitch the team of one big reddish brown mule named Jim and one bay mare named Maud, to the old rusty mowing machine. He had traded a team of half wild mules for the old Oliver five-foot cut-mowing machine some five years ago. It had

been a good trade, for, despite its appearance, it was a good mower and we had to have it.

The year was 1953 and for the past ten years Daddy had been farming the home place, the farm Grandpa Burnett had purchased in 1921. The farm lay in the rugged Ozark Mountains at the north end of Shannon County, Missouri on the upper part of a small valley called Big Creek.

The creek, which ran the length of the valley, cut sharply back and forth across every half mile or so, had the same name as the valley. Big Creek, which really wasn't big, was maybe twenty or thirty feet wide at most places, and eight to ten inches deep. Occasionally it dipped into deep pools, five or six feet deep where the creek ran against a bluff at the edge of the valley floor. These pools made great swimming holes, though they were a bit on the cold side, but the cold water sure didn't hurt the fishing as the little creek was clock full of small mouth bass and goggle-eye.

Big Creek, like most creeks and rivers in the Ozarks, was fed every few hundred yards by clear cold underground springs. The water in the creek itself was crystal clear and pure enough to drink, though most preferred drinking from the springs rather than the creek.

This portion of the Ozark Mountains consisted of narrow valleys, never more than half a mile wide, marked on each side by steep hills rising nearly half a mile to the ridge tops, all dropping slowly in a Southeasterly direction to the Current River valley and on toward the mighty Mississippi River.

Topsoil in the valleys was thin but fertile and would grow crops in years with enough rain. Grandpa had raised corn, only letting the land rest from corn every three or four years when he would put it in clover. The clover would be plowed under to get the land ready for more corn.

My Daddy favored hay crops because each time a plow was put into the rugged Ozark ground, it plowed up hundreds of rocks, rocks ranging from the size of a man's fist to large boulders you could hardly lift, thus requiring a never ending job of picking up rocks and hauling them out of the fields. Daddy said he had been picking up and hauling rocks from these fields for as long as he could remember. He also said we would never get them all picked in our lifetime either. The rocks were hauled to the edge of the creek, where today a levy of rocks lined the creek bank the entire length of the farm.

Just this spring, Daddy had purchased one hundred and twenty acres with a good barn and a small four room house over on Bounds Branch. This new farm was only about three quarters of a mile away as the crow flies, but four miles by road. Bounds Branch was only slightly smaller than Big Creek and two miles below the home place where the two streams ran together, Big Creek doubled in size.

Daddy was anxious to get the whole family, my Momma and my two sister's, Linda Ann and Becky, and my brother Charles and me, moved onto our own place. It was not that he wasn't grateful for the opportunity to live on the home place while he got better situated, for he was. It had

allowed him to get far enough ahead to make a sizable down payment on his own farm. However, living with Grandma had never been easy and had become more difficult as the family grew. The old saying that "no kitchen is ever big enough for two women" was certainly true, as he had come to learn. Of course we would continue to farm the home place, and since me and Charles would soon be old enough to help, it would be no great trouble to handle the extra land.

Though it was still too dark to see clearly, as we trudged down the lane, we could hear the sounds of Daddy's efforts to get the team ready. I was only six and Charles was eight years old, and while some criticized him for taking us to the fields at such a young age, Daddy believed the best way to teach you to work was to start early.

I can just imagine that seeing us coming down that lane caused his mind to drift back to his own childhood when Grandpa carried him and his three brothers to the corn fields while he plowed corn. Ranging in ages from three to ten, they followed behind Grandpa as he cultivated the corn with a double shovel plow. The boys were supposed to uncover any stalks of corn covered by the plow or pull any weeds missed by the plow, though the weeds he missed or stalks of corn he covered were few and far between. Thinking back, he could not remember a time when his daddy left the house that he and his brothers didn't leave with him. He would raise his boys the same way.

"Here's the water Daddy," Charles said, startling him back to the present, and handed him our lunch

and the flour sack covered water jug. Daddy took the sack and tied it to the one of the hames on the big mule.

The team, which had been hitched to the mower, at first glance did not seem very well matched, as the big mule stood fully two hands taller than the bay mare. However, they were well suited for what he had in mind as they had good sense and Charles would be able to handle them by himself for part of the day. Besides he had yet to see any animal, bigger or smaller, that could out work Ole' Maud. Daddy walked around to the mare, picked me up and set me astride the mare. I grabbed the brass knobs on top of the wooded hames and hung on for dear life. He walked back around to put Charles on the big mule, but Charles didn't wait to be helped. Instead, reaching up as high as he could, he grabbed onto the harness, and vaulted Indian style up on the mule. He struggled a moment, then managed his heel up over the mules' backbone and pulled himself astride.

"Gettin' pretty big, ain't you," Daddy said as he admired the way his eldest son was beginning to show his independence.

Daddy climbed on the mower seat, gathered up the lines and started the team down the lane toward the main road that ran along beside the creek and down the valley. The road would cross the creek several times in the two miles we would travel down Big Creek to the point where Bounds Branch joined Big Creek.

We were in high spirits and having a ball riding atop the big mule and the bay mare. The day was off to a good start and held much promise.

The plan was to take the mower over to the new farm and mow a couple rounds around the hay field. Then Charles would be left to drive the team while Daddy walked back over the ridge to the home place to get another team and mower. This way we could have two mowers going and get the hay cut twice as fast. Next year Charles would be able to handle a team well enough to drive on the road and moving equipment from one farm to another would be easier. We could take two teams at the same time, and in just a couple more years I would be able to drive too.

The team was kept at a walk, not because we were riding, for we could ride well enough, but because the mower had iron wheels. The wheels had been covered with old rubber tires to absorb the shock of the rolling wheels, yet we could not risk having the iron wheels broken by one of the many rocks, which made up the road. So the going was slow. The road hugged the fencerow and ran between the lower pasture fence and the creek for about a quarter of a mile, then cut directly into the creek.

When we reached the point where the road cut across the creek, Daddy pulled up the team and had us slip the bridle reins off the hames so the horse and mule could get their heads down to drink.

"Look at the deer," he called softly to us, and pointed down stream where a doe and her fawn were drinking from the stream.

"Wish I had my BB gun," I yelled. The deer, startled by the shrill cry, threw their heads up and bounded into the thick under brush and disappeared in an instant.

"You'd have to learn to be quite first," Daddy replied. When the animals had drunk their fill, the bridle reins were put back over the hames and we moved on. Dawn was coming fast now and the sun would soon be up.

Daddy planned to move the family in a couple of weeks but wanted to get the hay cut before the move. Especially he wanted to cut the tall weeds around the house and barn, as the place was likely infested with poisonous snakes, both rattlesnakes and copperheads. The grounds around the house and barn would need to be cleared of weeds so we would be able to see the ground where we walked. As soon as we got settled in Daddy planned to get some hogs on the place. There is just nothing like a bunch of hogs to get rid of the snakes. The natural fat on a hog absorbs the snake's poison so it does not harm the animal. A big fat copperhead is just desert to an ole' sow.

The house itself didn't amount to much. It had a rusty tin roof and tan colored tarpaper siding and was constructed of single wall construction. The board floor had cracks that showed through to the dirt below. It had four rooms with a single brick flue coming out at the peak of the steep four-way roof. The wallpaper that had once decorated the walls hung in strips and would have to be pulled down. No running water or indoor plumbing of course but there was a small spring fifty yards beyond the house. There was a much better spring a couple hundred yards up the holler that we would dig out and concrete up as soon as we got time.

Daddy said we might even lay pipe and pipe spring water right into the yard.

The outdoor privy hung precariously out over the spring branch, down stream from the house. It was a little too close to the house to suit Momma, so Daddy planned to hitch a team to it and drag it farther away before we moved in. The barn was in good shape and thankfully wouldn't require us to spend any time working on it.

The house and barn soon came into sight. We pulled up to the gate which led into the hay field and Charles, not waiting to be told, jumped down and unhooked the barbed wire bail that held the gate shut and dragged it open.

Daddy got off the mower, walked to the bay mare and set me off onto the ground. "You boys stay down by the creek out of the weeds til' I get back. There likely are plenty of snakes in these weeds," he said.

We tore off toward the creek, not having to be told twice about some playtime.

Daddy let down the cutter bar and made the mower ready to mow, climbed back on and started the team. He drove the mower across by the barn and up the slope to where the hay field met the trees. The hill was quite steep at this point and the hay was not that good on the hill. However, unwilling to pass up an opportunity to cut the sassafras and hickory sprouts that grew in abundance, he included the steep hillside in the land he would cut.

"If I don't cut them now I'll be out here with a brush hook later," he reasoned. He mowed on up the field, around a slight bend and then out of sight of the house and barn. The field

flattened out and the hay was better all the way to the upper end of the field. The field was about half a mile in length and about a quarter of a mile wide. He soon made the end of the field and cut across to the other side and back down along beside the small creek. The hay was nearly as high as the bay mares back here and quite thick. He got much satisfaction seeing it fall behind the sickle. Soon the team and mower made its way back to the starting point. He took one quick glance down our way where we were skipping rocks in the creek and he turned the team to make yet another round. When he completed the second round he pulled up and called us from the creek. Charles got up on the mower seat and Daddy set me up behind him.

"Stop and give them a breather ever three rounds," he told Charles, "If you clog up the mower, be careful getting the hay out of it. That sickle will cut your fingers off. I'll be back in a couple hours." With that he turned and without a backward glance, walked out the gate and down toward the creek.

Charles snapped the lines sharply onto the backs of the horse and mule and the mower lurched forward as the team stepped out.

Daddy made his way to the creek and picked his way, jumping from one rock to another until he made his way across the creek where he scrambled up the steep bank on the other side.

He began the long climb that would take him to the top of the ridge that separated Bounds Branch from Big Creek. By taking the route over the ridge instead of the road, he would

be back to the home place much quicker. As he climbed, he noted the timber, black oak and white oak growing in abundance. He had walked this land before he bought it, and had quickly realized the timber would pay for the farm. This fall he would start cutting the white oak for stave bolts and the black oak for railroad ties. By selecting carefully which trees to cut and which trees to leave for future growth, he would be able to cut over this same land every three or four years thus providing an additional source of cash. In fact he planned to pay the balance on the place this very winter with trees he would cut.

He soon gained the ridge top and turned to the North and walked along the ridge top toward the point where he would head down the steep hill into Big Creek. His course would take him into the little draw leading down to the back of the main house. In a short time he was walking into the back yard of the house.

Momma met him at the back door with a hot cup of coffee. He drank the coffee standing at the back door, not wanting to take the time to sit. When he finished his coffee, he walked quickly on to the barn, anxious, not about having left us on our own, but rather about getting a second team harnessed and under way. He wanted to get the hay cut by tomorrow night.

Two black mules, unnamed as yet, were quickly caught, harnessed and hitched to a second mower. This mower was similar to the first except it possessed rubber tires with tubes. He would be able to make much better time, not having to worry about the iron wheels. He put the mules into a

fast trot, knowing he would soon have two mowers in the field.

Charles had no trouble getting the team to follow the swath Daddy had already cut as they were trained to follow next to the uncut hay.

We were excited about moving to this farm, for Daddy had built an excitement in the whole family as he had talked long into the evenings about the things we would do once we moved onto the farm. Every evening, after supper we had talked and planned this big event. Also we knew that just about a quarter of a mile up Bounds Branch from the house was one of the best swimming holes around. It was eight or ten feet wide, six feet deep, and maybe thirty feet long, with clean gravel bottom on one end. There was a high cliff on the far side that would be great for diving and jumping into the water. We could hardly wait to get in.

As the mower rolled and clattered on around the hay field, we talked of the times we would have. Daddy already had a herd of goats ranging the hills behind the house and we planned how we would catch and ride the big herd Billy. We might even rig up a harness and break him to pull our toy Red Flyer wagon. There was a cave a mile up the valley and we talked about how we would sneak up there at first chance.

"Do you think there are bears in the cave?" I asked.

"Ain't no bears around here anymore," replied Charles. "Besides Ole' Coonie would sniff them out if there was," he said. Coonie was an old hound Charles claimed as his own. But today it was work. We made the first three rounds without event,

rested the team and continued mowing.

On the forth round, at the top of the steepest part of the field, all heck broke loose. Suddenly Maud squealed and began bucking and rearing madly. Then Jim began to kick and jump around. The mower had a wooden tongue, which ran between the horses that provided steering and braking control. One of the rearing, kicking animals fell into the mower tongue and snapped it in two. They turned and headed down the hill away from the course they were supposed to travel. The mower, now with no tongue to control its direction and speed, rolled up against the horses heels, further scaring the already frightened animals. Charles sawed back on the lines but to no avail. The horse and mule bolted and were in a full gallop in a flash.

Suddenly a white-hot searing pain tore into the back of my neck, and then another on my forearm. I began to yell and scream as loud as I could. Charles yelled sharply and slapped his cheek where something was stinging him. We were both slapping wildly at the air around us, still not knowing what was happening.

The sudden lurching forward of the mower when the team bolted caused us to be thrown backwards from the mower seat, and lucky for us that it did.

Yellow jackets are small wasps that nest in the ground. They are about the size of a honeybee but unlike the honeybee, they don't lose their stinger when they sting. Where a honeybee can only sting once, a yellow jacket will just keep on stinging. They are very aggressive in protecting their

nest. They are just about the meanest little critter there is. They will go up your britches legs, down your shirt and everywhere else. Once you meet up with them you never forget them.

The fall from the mower seat into the tall grass hid us from the angry yellow jackets and provided cover, thus saving us from more stings. We crawled a few feet from the swarming insects, using the grass for cover. When we were safely away we jumped to our feet and ran down the hill after the runaway team. The air behind us was thick with swarming yellow jackets.

As the team sped away the broken end of the tongue was digging into the ground causing the two wheeled mower to come up off the ground, then breaking free, dropping the mower back, only to dig back in with every jump of the horses. They had run scarcely fifty feet when the broken mower tongue dug into the ground one last time, causing the mower to be flung forward onto the backs of the running team, spooking them even more. It was a lucky thing for us that we were thrown off when the runaway started. We would have been catapulted onto the backs of the running team where we could have fallen under the running hooves and eventually run over by the now upside-down mower.

A mule will sometimes run just for meanness but usually is not scared and will not put himself in danger. A horse is a different story. Maud was crazy scared and running for all she was worth. She would have run straight across the field and through the fence on the other side. As it happened, when they came down on

the flat part of the field, Jim began to slow just a little, causing them to turn in a gradual arc which headed them up the long part of the hay field. By the time they reached the fence at the end of the field, they had run themselves out and came to a stop, their sides covered in foam and heaving heavily.

Charles had no trouble following the path of mashed down hay as we tracked the runaway team. We was both scared but didn't know whether to be more scared of what we would find when we caught up with the runaway team or of what Daddy would say when he got back. The team could easily cripple themselves in such a run. Charles said maybe we would be able to fix the mower before Daddy got back, as we made our way across and up the field.

When we came up to the team, a quick look told Charles that Jim and Maud looked okay and except for their heavy breathing, they were unharmed. The mower was another matter altogether for it was in bad shape. The cutter bar that normally juts out at a ninety-degree angle on the right side of the mower had been torn loose and now trailed behind the mower like a tail. The Pitman rod that transfers power from the turning wheels to the sickle was splintered and would have to be replaced. There would be no fixing that twisted up pile of metal that used to be a mowing machine. He untangled the trace chains and separated the team, leading Maud off to one side. Rigging a way for the whole mangled mower to be pulled by Jim, he boosted me up onto Maud. Vaulting onto Jim, he followed me on Maud, dragging the broken mower,

dreading that moment when Daddy would return.

We could see Daddy coming up the creek with the other team and knew he could hardly wait to get his mower through the gate. Then he saw us with me on Maud, followed by Charles riding on Jim and dragging what looked like a bundle of scrap metal. Daddy's high spirits faded away as he realized something was terribly wrong.

We all reached the big cottonwood tree at the same time. A quick look at the mare and mule and mower told the story.

"You got to learn to hold a team back when they try to run," he said to Charles.

"Them Yellow Jackets was all over us. And they stinging the fire out of the team and us too," he said. "I tried to hold em' back but it was no use and then we was throwed off. And the mower just went right up over on top of Jim and Ole' Maud," he continued in a rapid almost breaking voice.

Even as he scolded us, Daddy knew even he could not have held the team in a storm of angry yellow jackets. "Lets eat dinner," he said. "Then you take my mower and I'll take Richard on home with me. I'll be back with the wagon and tools to fix this mess as soon as I can. Steer clear of that yellow jacket nest when you get up there."

We sat under the big cottonwood and ate the biscuits and bacon. When we finished eating, Charles got on the mower with the two black mules and started around the field.

Daddy sat me astride Maud, and then swung up behind me and, leading

Jim, headed back down the road in a fast trot. A look at the sun told us it was only about ten o'clock. With any luck we would be back, have the mower repaired and be mowing by two or three this afternoon.

"Get an early start tomorrow," Daddy said "And we'll still get this hay cut, though it'll be dark before we're done."

## 2. Copperhead

The rich aroma of fresh baked bread filled the kitchen as Momma lifted the lid from the big black cast iron pot and gave a quick stir to the simmering pinto beans.

"Please, just one little pinch, please." I begged as I looked longingly at the six loafs of fresh baked bread cooling on the counter top. Daddy didn't like "light bread" as he called it, so even if there was money or time to go into town, we wouldn't be eating store bought bread.

"No." Momma replied, "You'll ruin your supper." She opened the oven door of the cast iron, wood-burning cook stove, and slid a muffin pan filled with bread dough into the oven. The fresh baked rolls would be served at supper. Nothing smelled or tasted better than fresh baked yeast rolls. A number-twelve iron skillet, filled with slowly frying potatoes, sat on the stovetop beside the simmering beans. Pinto beans, fried potatoes and fresh baked rolls are not fancy but we were not hard to please and would eat it with relish. Good thing it was my favorite meal since that's what we got more times than not.

Supper would be ready by the time Daddy returned from checking

the timber on the steep hill behind the house. Linda Ann, my eleven-year-old sister, was setting the table for the evening meal. Little Becky, just two-years old was in an old wooden high chair eating crackers.

"You boys get on out from under my feet and go look for holes under that lot fence." Momma said. Still half whining, we headed out the back door. Momma was sending me and Charles out to the barn lot to look for holes under the lot fence because Daddy had traded for a bunch of pigs and the fence needed to be in good repair. It takes a good fence to hold hogs. Given half a chance they will root under the fence and be out and gone. We went out the back door and headed out toward the barn, hoping we wouldn't find any holes to repair, our thoughts still on the smell of that fresh baked bread. I walked along the bare path beside the lot fence, over the little bluff where one of our cold water springs ran, day dreaming as usual. Behind me, paying more attention to the fence and where he was walking was Charles. "Richard!" he yelled, "You just stepped over a copperhead." I looked behind me and sure enough, right where I had just walked lay a big fat copper colored snake.

"How do you know it's a copperhead?" I asked in a low voice. He lay there, not moving, just sort of soaking in the late afternoon sun.

"See them funny looking marks on his back?" he replied. "That's how you tell." The distinct, hourglass shaped markings in lighter and then darker patterns, clearly visible. "Run and get Momma," he says to me. "I'll watch him." I tore out for the house screaming as loud as I could,

"Momma, Momma, copperhead, copperhead! We found a copperhead." Momma must have heard me yelling just as I came through the back yard gate, 'cause we ran smack into each other as she came rushing out the back door. Her face got white and I know the fear knotted up in Momma's stomach. She had been raised in town and hadn't been exposed to everyday life with poisonous snakes. Even living on the home place the past few years had not exposed her to them, as copperheads were not so plentiful there.

Now most women don't like snakes, even the Bible tells about that. At the end of the story of Adam and Eve, to the serpent it says, "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" Now I know this has a much higher spiritual meaning and I mean no disrespect here. But loosely translated in this context it means Momma didn't like snakes, and she most certainly didn't like those that could hurt her children. Her liking for them didn't improve over the years either, as this would come to be only the first of many run in's she would have with the unwelcome critters.

The battle with the copperhead's had started even before we moved. When we came over to cut the hay, Daddy made a point to cut the tall weeds around the house and barn. Removal of the weeds had made for less cover in which the reptiles could hide. He had been right in thinking there would be plenty of snakes around. Ten or twelve had been killed while we worked to cut and put up the

hay. The place was infested with them. They seemed to come out of nowhere and at the same time, everywhere. Up until now, Daddy had always been around to find and kill them, but not today for he had not returned from looking at the timber.

She grabbed a garden hoe from beside the yard gate and went running after me. We ran up the path toward the spring and sure enough, lying right across the path was a copperhead.

Copperhead's range in color from almost pink to a dull copper-brown. But they all have the unmistakable hourglass markings wrapping around their body. They are especially dangerous because the color patterns blend into the natural surroundings, making them difficult to see. Though not aggressive unless cornered or suddenly disturbed, they will strike quite suddenly if crowded. Truth be known, it is unlikely that anyone has ever died of a copperhead bite, but they will sure make you sick. Even though our government officials say they are endangered and have passed laws to protect them, most people who live around them don't like them, and kill every one they see. There was no mistaking this one. It was a copperhead.

"Go get your Daddy," Momma told Charles.

Charles climbed the lot fence and started up the hill behind the house yelling at the top of his lungs.

Daddy had gotten in early from helping Harold Sullivan put up hay. Since he had a couple hours before supertime, he had decided to scout the timber growing on top of the ridge behind the house. Also thinking he might come across some blackberries,

he had carried along a four-pound lard bucket. Making a quick pass through the timber, he had noted several trees ready for harvest this coming winter.

A large flat area lay on top of the ridge. About half of it had been cleared and turned into hay and pasture land. Since early spring, we had been working on the uncleared part of the flat, enlarging the pasture. We had been sawing and chopping down trees and leaving them where they fell. Later, when the fall rains came, we would pile the treetops into piles for burning. It was much too dry to burn now, too easy for a fire to get out of control.

His path across the ridge had taken him across several downed logs and stumps. Stepping over logs and stumps and around treetops, he found the going quite rough.

At the far end of our property line, he found a patch of ripe blackberries. The berries were quite large and the four-pound lard bucket was nearly full in just a few minutes. He was thinking about how good the blackberry cobbler would taste when he heard Charles yelling.

Thinking the worst, he headed back toward the house as fast as he could run. The way back took him directly across the downed trees. Although he could not yet see Charles, Daddy could still hear him yelling. The continued yelling for help spurred him ahead at full speed, causing the blackberries to be spilled as he jumped logs and treetops.

The snake, startled by the noise of us coming and going and tromping around, came awake and began to crawl toward a weedy area. Momma, not wanting to let the snake get away,

and at the same time unsure if she could kill it, didn't know quite what to do. Seeing it was going to get away, she stepped up and planted the hoe on its back, thinking to just hold it until Charles could fetch Daddy. I began to pickup big rocks and fling down upon the pinned down snake. The snake writhed and squirmed but Momma held fast with the hoe. When it almost broke free she raised the hoe and chopped down, getting a new grip, still thinking to hold it for Daddy to kill. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Linda Ann coming up the path carrying little Becky on her hip.

"Keep that baby away from here," she screamed and took yet another chop at the snake.

Daddy raced across the ridge top and reached the edge of the ridge at the top of the big hill behind the house, just as Charles reached the hilltop.

"Copperhead! Copperhead!" Charles shouted.

Daddy looked down at the scene below and could just make out Momma and me by the spring, and Linda Ann holding the baby just down the path toward the house. He could hear the yelling and screaming drifting up from the valley floor.

Charles was too excited to do more than yell "Copperhead!"

Daddy feared that one of us must have been bitten. He tore down the hill in a hard run. The nearly full bucket of blackberries was now nearly empty, as most of them had bounced out.

Momma felt a flood of relief come over her when she saw Daddy running down the hill. She began to yell too,

adding her voice to the yells and screams of us kids.

"Hurry up, hurry up, before it gets away," she yelled. She raised the hoe and chopped down again, getting yet another purchase on the deadly snake. She did not want it to get away, for if it did, it would still be a menace to her children.

Daddy made the bottom of the hill and sailed over the lot fence like a high hurdler.

Momma, her voice shaking with fear said, "Come over here and kill this snake."

Daddy, panting for breath, slowed to a walk and looked down at the snake. He stopped abruptly, threw down his empty bucket in disgust and said, "You couldn't kill it any deader that it already is. You've cut it all to pieces now." He turned and headed for the house. Although he would never admit it he too was shaking inside for fear of what could have happened.

Momma looked down at the once feared snake. It was covered with rocks and chopped into several pieces. Daddy was right. It was dead as it was going to get.

### 3. What She Missed Gettin'

Momma learned an important lesson the summer we moved to Bounds Branch. There's an old saying, "If you don't want something repeated, don't say it in front of the kids." That summer, much to her embarrassment, Momma learned it the hard way.

We were going to a wedding. Now you would think that a dumb ole' wedding wouldn't hold much

excitement for a couple of boys like me and Charles. For kids now days I know it wouldn't for I'm sure they would rather stay home and watch television, but back then, anything that got us out of a normal work day was worth doing. So we were excited about it.

Momma had the big iron cook stove heated up, but she wasn't cooking. On the stovetop sat two irons. The kind used for pressing clothes before electricity was common. The iron was made of one solid piece, body and handle molded together, and got hot all over. A potholder was used to grasp the hot handle when picking up the iron. The ironing board was set up and Momma would pick up one of the irons and swipe it back and forth across a white cotton shirt. When the iron lost its heat, she set it back on the stove to be reheated and took up the other. She was pressing Daddy's white shirt, his only white shirt as a matter of fact.

Earlier, she had sent us boys and Daddy to the creek for a bath.

When we came in from the creek I went over to where Momma was working at the ironing board. "What are you doing Momma?" I asked.

"I'm ironing Daddy's shirt," she replied.

"Why do we have to get all dressed up to go to this ole' wedding anyway?" I says.

The bride was the daughter of long time friends and fellow church members, Willard and Zelma Turner. The Turner's lived about ten miles on down Big Creek. There would be lots of folks at the wedding; it would be the social event of the summer. Everyone for miles around would be there. Also

there would be some folks coming all the way from St. Louis. One in particular, Maudline, Zelma's sister would be there. Maudline and Daddy had been sweet on each other when they were teenagers.

"Well," says Momma, "You know Daddy's old girlfriend, Maudline, will be there. I want to clean him up and hang a tie on him and show her what she missed gettin'." Momma finished ironing the shirt and set about getting everyone looking his or her best for the big event. "How 'bout putting on this tie, Reamy" she says to Daddy when he came in from the creek. Everyone else always called my daddy "Slim", except Momma. She always called him by his first name. It was a silver tie with red poke-a-dots and a full five inches wide at the bottom. Daddy grimaced but took the tie and went on to the bedroom to dress. He was wearing the tie when he came out. The wide part of the tie tucked under the bib of his newest Lee brand bib-overalls. Daddy wore bib-overalls for all occasions, new ones that hadn't been washed but once or twice for Sunday-go-to-meetn', better ones that had been washed a few times but were still stiff, to town, and washed out comfortable ones for working. The wedding called for his best ones.

We all piled into the old Dodge truck, no team and wagon for this trip, and we was off. It seemed like a long way, the truck grinding back and forth across Big Creek, as it followed the narrow road down the valley. The road crossed the creek several times in the ten miles or so from Bounds Branch to the Turner farm. Each time the road crossed the creek; there was a danger of the old truck getting marred up in

the loose gravel. Daddy was experienced in driving across the gravel-bottomed creek and the trip was made without mishap. We were soon climbing out of the old truck and greeting friends.

Momma took her wedding gift and food she had prepared and headed straight for the house. Her comments back at the house long forgotten.

Charles and I played outside for a while, and then headed to the Turner house in search of refreshments. The house was filled with women folks, all abuzz and talking like they hadn't seen each other for ages. And some hadn't.

Once inside the house, I looked around a moment, and then spotted Zelma. I walked up to her and asked, "Which one's Maudline?"

Zelma looked around, spied her sister and pointed to her.

Now I didn't know Maudline but I had a purpose and headed straight up to her. I tugged on Maudline's dress tail until I got her attention.

"What is it child?" she asked, not really wanting to be interrupted by a child.

"You know what my Mamma said?" I asked. "She said she was going to hang a tie on Daddy and bring him down here and show you what you missed gettin'."

Maudline, who had been only half listening up to this time, suddenly got real interested and focused all her attention directly on me. "Who's your Daddy?" she asked.

"Slim Burnett," I answered quite proud of who I was.

Maudline let out a loud squeal then she says in a loud voice, "HEY EVERYBODY. YOU GOT TO HEAR THIS!"

Everyone turned to Maudline and it got real quiet.

Momma looked up to see what was going on. Her heart sank when she saw Maudline and me in the center of attention. She still didn't recall her earlier words, but the look on Maudline's face told her that what was about to happen could not be good.

Maudline, now having gotten everyone's attention, smiled broadly, looked down at me and says, "Tell me again what your Mamma said."

I just couldn't wait to get it out. "My Mamma said you was one of Daddy's old girlfriends and she was going to hang a tie on Daddy and bring him down here and show you what you missed gettin'," I proceeded to announce with an air of great importance.

Maudline clapped her hands and whooped and laughed.

I looked over at Momma expecting to see her smiling at my sharp wit. Momma face was turning bright red and she had this dark expression on her face that I readily recognized from times past. "Hum," I thought to my self. "Someone sure has made her mad about something."

What I didn't know was that she was wondering silently if she could strangle me without anyone noticing. Oh, in case you are wondering, Maudline never let her forget it either. We would see them once or twice each year for the next twenty years. Maud always seemed to be able to work that little tale into the conversation when Momma was around.

"Nell," she would say, "Remember that day at Wanda Lee's wedding when Richard told on you?"

Momma would blush and laugh softly and answer, "Yes I remember."

#### 4. Wildfire

Summer was in full swing and it had turned off hot and dry. Too dry; for we were in the middle of a drought. Daddy went with Harold Sullivan to the Auction Barn in Salem and would be away from home for the day.

Over the past few weeks the little house on Bounds Branch had been transformed from a run down shack to a cozy home. Momma had managed to buy some wallpaper, which brightened it up considerably. She made paste from flour and water. It took some patience to get it to stay on the wall long enough to dry, but once dried it stayed on pretty well.

Me and Charles came inside for the third or fourth time that morning. We were aggravating the devil out of Momma about some matches. Her younger brother, Uncle Oren, had given us a pack of firecrackers when he had paid us a visit the previous weekend. We wanted the matches to light the firecrackers. Momma was a little worried about giving us matches but finally gave in and gave each of us one match.

"Momma, that ain't enough matches for nothin'," complained Charles.

"That's all you're gonna' get," She answered. "Now you boys get out of here and out from under my feet."

We took off to the back of the house. I was poised, ready to strike my match on the big flat sandstone rock that served as a step to the back door.

"Wait," Charles says, "We need to figure this out. If we strike our matches they'll be gone and we'll still have lots of 'crackers left." We huddled up and began to plan. "We can build a fire," says Charles. "But we gotta' get away from the house else Momma will be all over us."

"Lets go out behind the barn, she can't see us there," I said.

"No. We can't light no matches around the barn. Daddy would have a fit," says Charles. "Lets go over the hill behind the house." With that we headed out of the yard and up the big hill.

It was a long climb, nearly a quarter of a mile to the top. On top of the hill was a large flat area of pastureland. The pasture had been grazed clear by the goats and there was nothing with which to start a fire. We continued across the flat pasture toward the edge of the field. Up ahead could be seen the downed trees and brush where Daddy had been clearing more pasture.

"We'll go over to the edge of the field where Daddy has been cuttin'. We'll find some dry leaves to start a fire there," says Charles. When we got to the edge of the pasture, we gathered up a small pile of dry leaves. "Get me a rock to strike on," he says to me.

Rocks were plentiful so I just reached down and picked up a fist-sized rock and handed it to Charles. "Will this do?" I asked.

"Yeah," say Charles. He took the rock, knelt down and swiftly drew the Blue Diamond kitchen match across the rock. The match flared and he quickly dropped the stone and cupped his hands to shelter the flame. He eased the flaming match into the pile

of dry leaves. The flame caught quickly.

"Alright. Now we won't have to worry about running out of matches," I yelled.

Charles backed away and began separating firecrackers from the pack. He handed me some and the fun began.

I grasped a firecracker with the fuse pointing toward the fire and moved it in until it lit. Then I flung the sizzling firecracker into the air. Bang! Bang! Pow! The explosion from the firecrackers echoed back from the hills on the far side of Bounds Branch. This was great fun.

The wind was blowing ten to fifteen miles per hour, directly across the cleared pasture and into the downed trees. We was having a high old time, and had not paid any attention to the fire, though we needn't have worried about it going out. Moments ago it was only a small handful of leaves, but now it was ten or twelve feet wide and spreading fast.

Charles saw the danger before I did and yelled, "Help me stomp this back." We began to stomp on the edge of the fire, trying to put it out. The fire caught up in a downed treetop, still covered with dried leaves. It simply exploded, fifteen feet into the air, sending burning leaves and embers everywhere. The fire quickly doubled, then tripled in size.

"Go get help," Charles yelled, realizing we were in big trouble. He picked up a good-sized limb with no leaves and began beating on the fire. I just stood there looking kind of dumbfounded. "Go on Richard, hurry up. Go get Momma," he yelled again.

That woke me up and I lit out across the field as hard as I could run.

Daddy had wanted to pile up and burn the brush and tree tops ever since he started clearing. But he knew it was too dry for burning. It was too easy for a fire to get away when everything was so dry. He would wait for wet weather, and then we would pile it up and burn it. Or maybe not. While he was miles away the brush and treetops were about to be cleaned up.

I made it across the flat and started down the hill before I started yelling for Momma. Momma was just sliding a pan of cornbread into the oven when she heard me.

"Linda Ann, watch the baby and this bread," she said. "Let me go see what them boys are up to now." She went out to the back yard and could just see me about half way down the hill, yelling for her.

"Momma! Momma! Fire! Fire!" I yelled.

Some garden tools were leaning up against the fence by the back gate. Momma grabbed a garden rake and headed up the hill after me. The wind was blowing away from the house and the big hill blocked all signs of the fire from view. She could see that I was pretty excited but had not become overly alarmed since she couldn't see anything. When we cleared the hilltop she stopped and stared in amazement. On the other side of the pasture where Daddy had been clearing, was a huge wall of flame. Thick black smoke bellowed up into the air. Momma started on across the pasture already knowing it was too late but knowing she must try anyway. She could see Charles and he appeared unhurt,

though he was covered in black soot. Telling me to stay back out of the way, she charged in and began raking a path around the fire. The fire quickly jumped the path and she and Charles had to run back to the pasture to avoid being trapped by the oncoming flames.

"What in the world were you doing?" she demanded of Charles.

"We just wanted to set off our firecrackers," he answered.

Anger flared up in her and she grabbed up a small switch and began to switch our backsides. Realizing whipping us wouldn't help now; she grabbed up the rake and tried again to get the raging fire under control. The heat and roaring flames soon drove her back to the safety of the pasture.

"Lets get back to the house," she said. Then: "I don't know what your Daddy will do when he gets home."

We was both whimpering now. A little switching from Momma was one thing but Daddy on the warpath was quite another. We trudged back down to the house, firecrackers long forgotten. Reaching the house at the valley floor, we turned and looked back toward the fire. The fire had grown big enough now, that while the hill still blocked from view the actual flames, and the thick smoke was now visible beyond the crest of the hill. It would be a long afternoon for me and Charles. Every time we looked toward the fire, the thick smoke reminded us of the trouble we was in. What would Daddy say when he got home?

Eight miles away on the highest point of the main ridge that separated Bounds Branch from the next valley to the west stood a Forest Service fire tower. It was just after noon when

Rayburn Scaggs parked his truck and began the long climb to the top of the tower. During the dry season like this he normally started his shift early in the morning. Today, however, a trip to the Ranger Station in Salem had delayed him. When he got to the top of the tower, he pushed up the trap door and climbed inside the watch station. Once inside he lowered the trap door back into place and prepared to begin his shift.

In the center of the watch station was a round table, the top of which was covered with a large map of the area. The tower was located precisely in the center of the area map. A sighting device with a straight edge sweeping atop the map pivoted from the exact center. This device allowed one to sight at a distant object and then draw a straight line from the tower to the object.

He picked up his radio transmitter and logged in with headquarters, signifying the start of his shift. Then he picked up his binoculars and began a three\_hundred\_and\_sixty degree sweep of the surrounding countryside. He was looking in a south-southeasterly direction when he saw the smoke. It was too much smoke to be anything else, he knew immediately it was a forest fire. He sighted along his surrounding map and noted the exact heading, then picked up the radio and asked the Midridge tower to confirm. The Midridge tower operator answered back immediately, transmitting his own headings. The intersection of the two headings would pinpoint the fire. Within minutes a firefighting team was dispatched to a location on Big Creek, half a mile or so up Bounds Branch.

Carter Williams and his crew saw the cloud of smoke as soon as they turned off the main Big Creek road and started up Bounds Branch. Just below our property line, they turned up the narrow wagon trail leading up the steep point to the big flat behind our house. When they reached the top of the ridge, they could see the fire was still growing rapidly but was still contained on our property and had not yet crossed onto the adjoining Federal land. Knowing Daddy would be billed for their time if they fought the fire on private property, Carter and his crew began clearing a fire path along the edge of the Mark Twain National Forest where it joined our place.

As the fire path was cleared, the fire fighters set small backfires on our side of the path. The small backfires burned back into the main fire and consumed the combustible fuel, causing the main fire to go out. The fire fighters then had only to ensure that the backfires didn't jump the fire path.

The fire, which seemed quite large to Momma and us boys, was not really that big to the Forest Service fire fighters. It was quickly brought under control. Carter left his men patrolling the fire path and told them to be alert for burning embers. He then got a couple of canteens and headed across the pasture and down the hill to the house. He stopped at the spring and filled the canteens before going on to the house. Knocking at the back door, he looked around. He had his suspicions about how the fire had started but wanted to ask at the house to see what he could learn.

Momma went out on the back porch where they talked.

"Slim around?" Carter asked.

"No. He and Harold Sullivan went to the auction," she answered.

"Looks like the fire started up at the edge of your field," he said. "See any strangers around today?"

"No. No one at all," Momma replied nervously.

Carter left the most obvious question unasked, now almost certain about how the fire started. However he wouldn't have to report what he didn't know. He could tell by the look on Momma's face that she didn't want to answer the next question. "Well no tellin' how it started," he said. "Tell Slim I said howdy." With that Carter turned and headed back up the hill.

Momma breathed a sigh of relief; glad she didn't have to tell Carter how the fire started. Slim would put the fear into the boys over the fire and this way they wouldn't have any trouble with the Forest Service.

Daddy got home late. It was dark and there were no visible signs of the fire but the smell of smoke remained in the air. "Smells like something been burning," he said as he pulled a chair to the supper table.

"We had some excitement around here today," Momma replied. "You might want to ask Charles and Richard about it." Me and Charles had already managed to get out of sight.

Years later when we reminisced about the fire, Daddy would laugh and say, "Well it did save us a lot of work piling that brush for burning." However I can tell you, that was not his attitude that particular evening.

## **Burnett Family History – Extended Family**

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