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Sansom Family Reunion

“Ninety Year Trip to Easy Street”

by
Maston Sansom

A Ninety Year Trip To Easy Street

There is a time and place for everything. Now I am enjoying the fruits of life, and memory is like a melody. As time goes by, I feel I am drawing away from the world, and I have these thoughts in mind. From this Valley they say we are going. The lifetime hopes and ambitions have been realized here. This was our homeland and also that of several generations of close relatives.

The Valley of the Scioto is a main part of the Ohio Valley. The Southern end is bordered with hills that came from melting glaciers during the Ice Age. High on the south rim above the Valley was where we lived and enjoyed raising our three boys. The view of the lay of the land was breathtaking. We named our home "Sighthill".

There was always some thought of by-gone days and changes in the course of time. We would recall the dirt road used by horses with wagons and carriages, the third-rail traction line, both going north up the Valley to Columbus. The B & O Railroad, the N & W and C & O gave us a resounding whistle at each crossing, Camp Sherman gave us our vision of War, and there was the flying field used by early aviators near the old Fox Farm.

On the east rim of the Valley was Mt. Logan. In this area, the McRoberts family settled after the Revolutionary War -- Irene's mother's family.

In the middle of the Valley along the Scioto was the Bier family farm where Irene and her five sisters were raised. Her happy thoughts of growing up and the memories of the 1913 flood at age four are still vivid in her mind.

Another piece of farmland in the Hopetown bottoms of the Scioto has been in the family many years. It is near Mound City National Park.

Across the Scioto to the rim on the west side of the Valley was the home of Governor Worthington and Yapples Orchard.

Further northwest of the Valley was Bier's Run, the land where the Boehr (Bier) family settled when they arrived from France, Irene's father's family.

From Sighthill, our beloved home for 35 years, looking up the Valley, you could see the horizon of land and sky melting together. By my experience at sea, I calculated the horizon distance twelve miles. That distance seemed to fit this picture. Kingston, up the Valley, was first settled by the Yapple family when they moved west from Kingston, NY in pioneer days.

After World War I, Camp Sherman land was used to develop the V.A. Hospital and Federal Reformatory and Mound City Park. A new highway, Rt. 35, was engineered around the town.

The relics of the old Ohio Erie Canal down the Valley were covered up and forgotten. This was the world around us.

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When the Sighthill area was just a field, Irene recalls that her grade school class from St. Peter's had a picnic there by following a path up the side of the hill. It was an adventure with wild flowers, birds, small creatures and a beautiful view of the hills and Valley, fresh air, sunshine and heavenly blue skies. This was where we built our home. Construction under our own plan worked fine. Indiana limestone and redwood were prized materials. It sat near the center of our 2 acre plot. We cleared the land and planted shrubbery around the house, and pine trees were planted along the street. A garden was fenced in and on the edge of the hill was a pen for Sandy, our dog.

For our first Christmas tree in our new home a balled fir tree was sent to us from Mt. Shasta, California, by Harry and Marie Watkins. After the Holidays, we planted it about 50 feet directly in front of the house. It is a beauty today.

As we became ingratiated with out surroundings, the environment gave us much pleasure. So many varieties of green plants and flowers, Queen Ann's lace, violets, daisies, iron weed and goldenrod. There were ladybugs, crickets, locusts and katydids. Many birds became familiar and recognized. Our bird-feeder helped bring in a variety of sparrows, wrens, downy, red head and pileated woodpeckers, nuthatchers, chickadees, doves, thrush, goatcatchers, hawks, crows, buzzards, owls and mocking birds. Wild animals roamed the fields; squirrels, rabbits, deer, possum, gophers and snakes wandered in. We experienced many surprising feats of Nature, one so rare that it seemed like a dream. It was fall and on a day after sundown, but before dark, the large maple tree near the edge of the hill changed color and was a golden brown. There were hundreds of monarch butterflies covering every leaf. At darkness they were resting but the next morning they were gone. We did not see them arrive nor did we see them leave.

The world around us was inspiring. We made our home there from 1957 to 1989. We had our three boys to raise. Hugh was 2, Byron 9 and Maston 10.

Our financial situation was limited, but, by giving them the best we could, they studied and worked to attain a recognition of future success. They played with kites, bows and arrows, airplanes and constructed most of them from kits. Each one carried the Gazette. They had many desirable good friends. They took their education seriously. They were of the Baby Boomer Generation. Today each of them could write a book on their endeavors to climb to success.

We do not wish to bid "Adieu" for always our thoughts of hope, happiness and "heaven on earth" will be at Sighthill. The heartfelt memories that will always bear with us will be the view of the Valley from Sighthill, our Garden of Eden, and the many happy days of our lives spent there. In our Golden Years, it is like searching for the end of the rainbow. We may move on, but one never knows as "Time changes all things."

They say we have a loss of memory as we grow old with the memories of our young life bearing with us and the details in later life slipping away. I will give you a run-down on my past 90 years.

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To know what we are, we must know what we were. To realize some conception of our past we must think of a brief history of our country.

The family history, going back at least five generations, shows that all were born in this country. In a class struggle to improve our lives, we now know how we have reaped our harvest of success. With our meager beginning, it would be hard to find children of another family line of equal size that attained the education and success that has been achieved. This would include doctors, teachers, engineers, scientists, executives and Army and Navy Officers.

Irene has been my life's companion. In good times and hard times, she has been my rainbow. I first saw her when I was 17. By chance of fate, we were dating when I was 20. At 23, on June 30, 1930, we were married. There were four high points in our lifetime -- the birth of our 4 children, Fleury, Maston, Byron and Hugh. The great honor they have shown us is invaluable.

Our philosophy in life has been to "Press On". To look back, life is like a great adventure. It has the four seasons, Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. The road I traveled seemed to be "Fate". I have many thoughts of being in the right place at the right time.

During my early years, I suffered from lack of health care. At ages 5 & 6, I was sent each year to spend Spring and Summer with my Grandma and Grandpa Sansom in Wayne County, W. Va. Their two sons, Frank and Hugh, gave me an insight into the life of the hills and ways of living there. It was like living in the lap of Mother Nature with the bare necessities of life -- food, drink and a roof over my head.

The creek flowed down between the high hills. The road or path followed the creek. The road was a wagon trail with rocks and mud holes. The mailbox was a mile down the road. I say "down" as the road followed the creek which flowed in that direction. Travel in this area was on horseback or on foot. Today that road would not be classified as such. There was no anxiety about mail which came by horseback and saddlebags. A copy of the Toledo Blade came about once a month.

The mailbox was located at a junction of two roads and a one-room church/school, named Crocket. All grades were in one room. Conditions and facilities were primitive. Teachers were without degrees and hard to get. I first started to school there when six years old, as the school year began early and ended early to accommodate help with farming. The old man teacher ruled with the rod, and I was too scared to learn anything. I dropped out when it was time to go back home to Chillicothe.

While with my Grandpa and Grandma Sansom, we attended church, and services were held regularly on Sunday. Usually a quartet led the music and singing. One of the nicest gatherings of people occurred there one summer at a church social with a cake walk where covered baskets of food were auctioned off -- the young lady owning the basket would share its contents with the

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purchaser out on the ground. Church services were highly emotional about hell's fire and brimstone. Every Sunday I listened to the songs and the preaching. There was a song that had a refrain, "God is Everywhere". As I interpreted this, I found myself thinking that I might find God (or his spirit) along any lonesome path. This was like looking for Santa Claus, but it was a good thought.

Grandma walked with me to and from church. She had married Grandpa at the age of 16. Grandpa, in his young adulthood, had taught school. Grandma, being busy raising the 15 children, never learned to read or write. This was no necessity as reading and writing were uncalled for in her way of life. There was no confinement for pregnancies. She was a small woman with a tinge of red in her hair. She was very religious and kept conduct, morals and speech her prime concern. She was a laborer, working like a man in the field, or running a barbwire fence around a pasture. She fed the family well, cooking on the wood burning kitchen range or over the ashes in the fireplace.

It was a small world for my grandparents. With a long barreled ball and powder rifle, a single blade plow, hoe, scythe, axe, hammer, pitchfork, pots and pans and a few dishes, they made miracles happen. Other than the discrepancies of old age, they were happy with living and felt they were blessed to make their own way. They knew of the "bitter and the sweet". When I say "they made miracles happen", I mean that I don't know how they did it. I have a merciful feeling for them.

Summertime was wonderful. Grandma told me that she remembered when doves were so plentiful that flocks of them clouded the earth when they flew overhead. "Lick Holler" was a place where deer came to lick salt from the rocks. Thunderstorms shook the Valley. Heavy black clouds would form and move low between the hills. The boom of thunder and the crack of lightening would bounce and echo between the hills as the black clouds moved down the Valley.

Grandpa and Grandma were ageing after raising a family of 12 children of their own, and 3 more, making a total of 15. Grandpa's health had failed and Grandma ran the farm and worked from daylight until dark. Their home was a two-story log house which they built Circa 1850. Sometime later a frame structure was added on for a kitchen and dining room. Behind the house was a dug well with rope and bucket to draw water. Nearby a cave sunk into the hillside to provide a cool storage for milk, smoked meat, fruit and vegetables.

An outhouse, set over a creek branch about 200 feet from the house, provided two holes and some convenience of a toilet facility. When the rain came an automatic flush served the sanitary need.

There was a large barn some distance beyond the outhouse that cared for the horses, mules and cattle, as well as the storage for hay and grain for feed. One year they had sheep, for I remember the shearing.

The house was meagerly equipped. A large fireplace in the living room, a couple of chairs, and only beds were in bedrooms with chamber pots underneath. There was no such thing as a modern

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convenience. No carpets or rugs, no curtains or shades. A clock and coal oil lamp were on the mantle over the fireplace. There was no electricity anywhere, no telephone, no flashlights -- electricity was an unknown convenience.

Grandma and Grandpa were not aristocrats. They were dirt farmers and lived the same life enjoyed by their neighbors and people that had occupied this area since it was a pioneer existence. Money was scarce and unthought of. Trade and barter were the means of keeping the daily necessities. The main food and health requirements were provided by work and planning the four seasons. A large garden, milk and butter, honey, and food fresh from a natural source gave the right sustenance.

The Civil War took its toll from the family in many ways. Some never recovered. At that time, being Virginians, they were loyal to the South. Living in the border area between North and South, they were harassed by raiding parties that stole, burned, killed and destroyed their possessions. It was guerrilla warfare, and subsequent years of hardship made recovery and hope for the future futile. The Confederacy lost the War. The western part of Virginia became West Virginia, a northern ally, and the people of Wayne County had another cross to bear.

Any purchase was paid for with chickens, or eggs, or sometimes grain or sweet potatoes. A sack of corn would be laid over a horse's back and I was hoisted on top to go to the mill about a mile away. The mill man would take half the sack of corn as pay for grinding meal. I would be remounted on the horse and return with meal for cornbread.

One of my life's earliest recollections was a funeral service for a member of the family. Neighbors took turns sitting up with the corpse all night. The casket was homemade from pine wood and lined with a sheet. The family cemetery was high on a hill. Most of my relatives attended family funerals, and the graveside service and singing were unforgettable occasions.

My favorite pastime was playing in the creek. I caught crayfish and learned the habits of frogs, minnows and water snakes. Grandpa and Grandma's dog, Shep, was a close friend. I rolled rocks down the hill, and he chased and barked at them. He would chase a rabbit to its hole and I would help him dig it out. One day I was passing a neighbor's house down the road. I was always scared of other people when I was alone. By my timidity, the neighbor's young son, about my age, wanted to chase me home, but my timidity changed to defiance, and soon we were rolling each other in the middle of the road. My good friend, Shep, grabbed the boy's hair in his teeth, and we rolled him down over the road bank -- and left him there.

A couple of times I walked barefoot from Wayne to Miller's Fork. Passing the Wilson Creek Church, I would stop at the house of my Aunt Eliza Sansom and her two sons, Shirley and Herman. Once, when I was visiting my Aunt Bessie Workman, I was given a dress to wear while my clothes were washed.

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At 6 years of age I entered school at the Eastern School in Chillicothe. A Mr. Yapple from Kingston was the Principal. My mother was involved in caring for my infant brother, Andrew, and no thought was given to my education.

Nine months of school for eight years with the same group of children was a wonderful experience with good teachers. In one grade, the teacher took me to the cloak room and paddled me because I was too slow getting ready for the next class. By the time I reached the 8th grade, I felt charmed to have the pleasure to walk the class Queen home from school, Claudine Talbott.

In early years all schools turned out to join the Farmers' Fall Festival Parade. I recall one being led by Wild Buffalo Bill Cody and a squad of Indians.

With the beginning of World War I, the world changed. Camp Sherman was built and soldiers poured into the camp by the trainload. The railroads shifted troop trains in and out. The streets were crowded with people and I began carrying papers and selling them on the streets. I can hear the constant rifle fire from the range on Mt. Logan and the boom of cannon from a range south of town.

During the Flu Epidemic, I saw hundreds of boxed caskets stacked at the railroad station for shipment. Two funeral homes on East Second St. had the alleyway at Paint Street closed because blood from the corpse of soldiers was draining down the alley and emptying into a street sewer. Bands played and there were funeral parades for some officers. There was always a horse, riderless with boots and spurs turned backward in the stirrups.

Since I lived on Clay Street, so close to the railroad station, I was involved in the movement of troops, such as an occasion when troops were brought from a long distance crowded into cars without water to drink. They would call to me, "Get some water." I would go home and get a bucket filled with water and a cup and rush back to the train. They drank all the water I had time to carry and in appreciation tossed to me their rations of hard tack and corned beef in cans. I would take them home and stack them on a shelf in the basement for our future use.

One memorable occasion of a troop train shipping out was the one that carried the Ohio Rainbow Division Company H, which was composed of Chillicothe soldiers from our local area. Numerous people were at the station to bid what may have been their final farewell to friends and relatives headed for France. This was very emotional with tears, kisses and hugs and handshakes to boys hanging out the train windows.

Near the end of the War, German prisoners were brought here to serve out their time. At Greenlawn Cemetery is a marker for a German prisoner who died here. When our soldiers returned, Camp Sherman was buzzing again.

During the War, the Government set up a program for all school children to sell U.S. Treasury War Savings Stamps. To create a sales competition, the names of the students were put on the blackboard with the amount of stamps sold. My Uncle Richard Sansom purchased \$10,000 in stamps from me. I was credited with selling the most stamps in Ohio Sixth Congressional

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District. The U.S. Treasury Dept. in Washington D.C. sent me an award of a German Officer's patent leather dress helmet with a spike on top. He was captured at Paris when the Germans were getting ready to take the city.

In the 8th grade, boys were sent for a class each week called Manual Training. The girls' class was called Domestic Science. I took interest in working with tools and equipment to make wood objects. The instructor gave me the privilege of picking a design for a small desk to build all by myself. When I completed the project, I asked him to inspect my desk. He was elated at seeing the finished desk and made it a gift for me to take home. I am still using it in my bedroom today. When my report card came, I was given my greatest achievement, a grade of A+.

I graduated from high school in 1925. The school yearbook had a picture of Maston Sansom with the caption "Small but Mighty".

I went to Huntington, W. Va. with some thought of going to Marshal College. However, I went to work for Banks-Miller Supply Company as the office boy.

Returning home for a visit in 1927, I met a friend and he asked if I could use a new job. Trying to get ahead, I said, "Yes." He took me to the Warner Hotel and told the manager, Mr. James Herman, I would appreciate his job as desk clerk. Within a couple of years, the manager died, so I was made manager.

This was the time of the Great Depression, and many people were without jobs. I was able to give assistance to some friends and relatives. At this time, the City, during the term of Mayor Bob Gunning, was wild and reckless. Prohibition was the law against alcohol, but taverns, clubs and some private families dealt in its sale. Gambling was prevalent! Two places in the center of town took horse racing bets. They had equipment to allow you to hear the results of a race as it was run.

The greatest place of amusement was a dance hall known as Winter Garden and operated by a Mr. Kathe. It was beautifully decorated with a large crystal ball in the center that shed light reflections like a rainbow. The greatest bands of the land, Paul Whiteman, Tommy Dorsey, Ted Lewis and Benny Goodman, came to the Winter Garden, and played beautiful dance music which we all enjoyed.

In my senior year at high school in one of my classes was a small girl, always dressed like a doll, wearing patent leather boots, with short bobbed hair. She was quiet, withdrawn and would not look at me. I must have irritated her when I flipped chalk across the room in her direction. This beauty was Irene Bier.

After beginning work at the Warner House, I stopped one evening at the general meeting place, Wayland and Ballards Soda Fountain. A friend asked me to go with him on a double date. He said there were two sisters and named them the Bier girls. I was greatly enthused, but in doubt as to how I would be accepted. Arriving at the Bier home, we were greeted by Edna. She invited me to sit in the parlor and wait for Irene. Shortly, I heard the clicking of heels down the stairs.

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To my great surprise, Irene came to my chair and sat on my lap. She put her arm around my neck and, with a cigarette in that hand, touched my cheek. She branded me.

With a nice evening together, I was still amazed at this unusual girl. A couple days later a friend that had been my senior class president said to me, "Chubby, I have some news for you. I have been dating Irene, and she told me she wants to see you and not me anymore." This was the beginning of our romance -- she was the girl of my dreams.

She graduated from high school in 1927, and I attended her graduation ceremony.

On June 30, 1930, we were married. Harry and Marie Watkins gave us a memorable wedding trip. They drove us to Toledo where we spent the night at the Commodore Perry Hotel. At midnight, we took a walk and, passing a fruit stand, we bought a treat of bing cherries. The trip extended into Canada, to Detroit and back home.

My father sold me his house on Clay Street. We enjoyed fixing up the house and living there. Fleury was born and we moved to the Warner House. After about eight years at the Warner House, it was sold and I moved to the Stonewall Jackson Hotel, Clarksburg, W. Va. as desk clerk. Later, I worked at the Mayflower at Akron, the Virginia in Columbus, The Governor Cable in Huntington and ended 15 years of hotel employment at the Lancaster Hotel in Lancaster, Ohio.

I enrolled in a vocational school for training in machine shop basics. When the course ended, the instructor advised me that he thought I could get employment in Scottsdale, PA, at the Hazel Atlas plant. I went to work there.

World War II was raging and my wish was to find a Government job and be able to retire with pay. I made application to Civil Service for a job as Correction Officer with the Bureau of Prisons. Passing the examination, I was accepted and assigned to U.S. Penitentiary, Terre Haute, IN.

The War with Japan was putting more demand on the military. Irene and Fleury were in Chillicothe with her mother. I was 35 years of age and, with a spirit of patriotism, I went to the Navy Recruiting Office and joined the Navy. I was sent to a camp where Construction Battalions were formed. I was given a Chief Petty Officer's rating as a platoon leader in a cargo handling battalion. We were shipped to Pearl Harbor and loaded and unloaded ships.

With the bombing of Hiroshima, the war ended. I felt that President Truman saved my life. I received my Honorable Discharge and returned to duty at the penitentiary in Terre Haute. The training of personnel and strict enforcement of discipline made it one of the best prisons in the country. After a couple of years, I was given a transfer to Chillicothe Federal Reformatory.

Irene, Fleury and I settled down, living in the house built by Irene's father. Three sons were born -- Maston in 1947, Byron in 1948 and Hugh in 1955. I had continued my military benefits by joining the Naval Air Reserve. I trained as a member of a flight crew. During the Korean War, I

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went on active duty and was in charge of the catapults for launching planes on the U.S.S. Mindoro - 1951, 1952.

By joining the Air Force Reserve at Wilmington, Ohio, I could avoid the monthly trip to Glenview Naval Air Station in Chicago. I was accepted and made Fire Chief for the squadron. We trained hard, thinking we might be activated for the Vietnam War.

By the time I was to retire, I received promotion to Senior Master Sergeant and a Commendation and Medal Award from the Air Force.

The job went on at the reformatory. I purchased vacant land on Carlisle Hill. I needed some cash and went to the Central Bank. Talking with the loan officer, the bank president approached us and said to the loan officer, "Give him whatever he wants." We sold Irene's home place and moved to Western View Apartments while we were building our home across the street.

Raising the 3 boys, Irene (Mom) was like an old mother hen with chicks, clucking to them daily about health, school, play and work. This was their start on the road to success.

Fleury was 16 when Maston was born. She married and raised two daughters. The three boys moved on, receiving the highest education required for their professions, and then married.

Mom and I were contented with our home, named Sighthill. The view of the Scioto Valley, the wild birds and animals and fresh air were our pleasure. There were days to remember. At last, we reached "Easy Street". We took vacations and traveled north, east, south and west. In 1960, in our camper with 3 boys, we went west and covered the coast from San Diego to Portland, Oregon. We saw the Grand Canyon and other national parks. Our accurate account of this vacation from June 12 to July 10 was 7,203 miles for a total cost of \$558.22.

In later years, we spent two winters in Florida. A visit with Hugh and Nancy in Munich, Germany, was a great experience, never to be forgotten. Now, with loss of vision, I feel fortunate to have seen much of this good earth.

In 1966 I retired from the Bureau of Prisons.

Our family has grown since 1931 to include 14 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.

I am now in the Twilight Zone of life and hope that 90 years from now someone will remember.

Today is history
Tomorrow is mystery

I hate to see the evening sun go down. I want to say I am thankful for the benefits I have received from relatives and friends.