
Greene County Magazine

The Life of Bess K. Wood



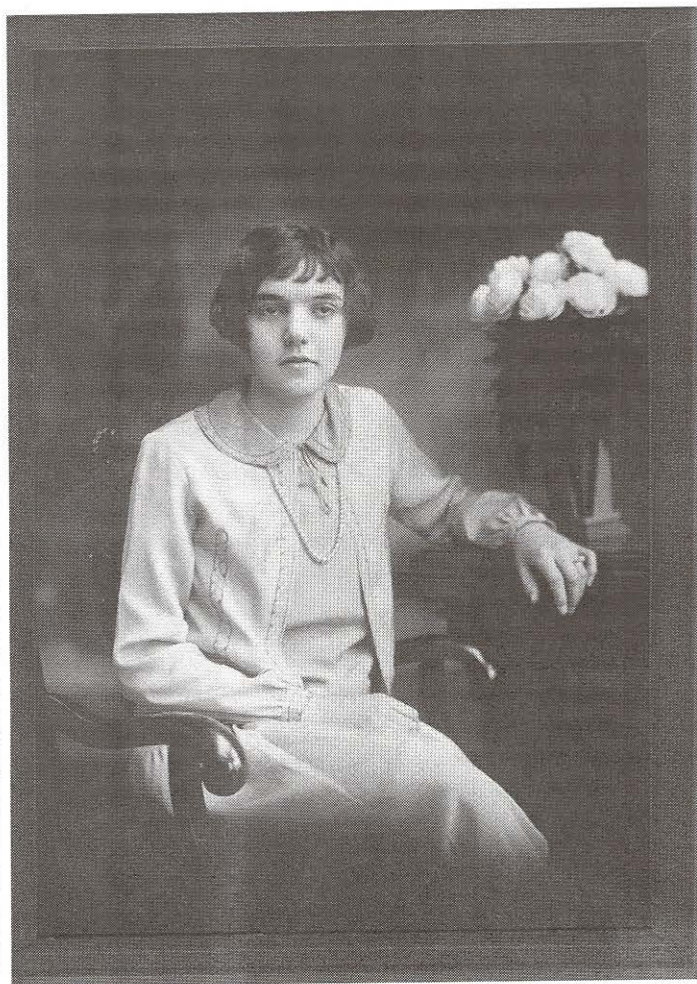
Greene County Historical Society

Volume 18, 2004/2005

(pages 28 - 40)

"BESS"
THE LIFE OF BESS K. WOOD
THE YEARS BETWEEN 1909-1976

By Bess K. Wood



This is my life or as much of it as I can recall.

I was born in the Piedmont Region of Virginia, in Ruckersville, Greene County, the third daughter of William Russell and Carrie Lee Watson Keysear.

I have often heard my parents speak of the long, hot, dry summers, before I was born and how it affected their livelihood. My father was a farmer, with all of the corn crops drying up in the fields, no grass or pasture for the livestock, even the family garden dried up. It was a struggle that summer to get food and to make ends meet.

The nearest [large] town was twenty-five miles away. There were only a few automobiles in those days, but Daddy did have good horses and buggies and we always had a way to go to Church, to the store, or where ever we really wanted to go. Anyway, mama said one long hot dry Sunday afternoon they could see white caps piling up in the sky back of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Pretty soon it started to thunder and lightning and the rains really came down. It rained and rained and rained and the long hot drought was ended. On that very Sunday night August 2nd, 1909, I was born. I guess all ready having two little girls they were disappointed that I was a girl too. Mom said she wanted to name me Nellie, but Daddy wanted to name me Bess so Bess it was, and is. I was a happy little girl. I can remember Daddy made me a swing under the grape arbor and I could sit in my swing and eat grapes and sing all day long, if I wanted to. Because both of my sisters were much older than I, they spoiled me and I guess it took me a long time to grow up.

I do remember one summer when I wasn't very happy; my little brother was taken very ill. The doctor came and said he had typhoid fever and he was so ill for a very long time. Mama nursed him most of the time and after long weeks of little rest and strain, she became ill with typhoid too, then my father. Now this really was a bad situation. Then, to top it all, my second sister had a bad case of poison ivy. She was really in bad shape. Her hands and arms were swollen and raw. Therefore all of the responsibility for keeping things going fell on my oldest sister's shoulders.

Daddy had a sister who was a nurse. When she heard about us she came and stayed all of the time. She really was a Godsend to us. Daddy wouldn't listen to 'sister.' He would get up and walk into the room to see Mama and Paul, and Aunt Ellie was the only one who could make him listen. The doctor swore if he didn't stay in bed he would surely die.

Our maternal grandparents lived close by and our beloved grandfather, 'Pop,' would come every day with fresh fruit and vegetables. Grandma helped out too, but she wasn't much of a nurse. The neighbors helped too, but they were afraid of typhoid. There was an awful lot to do with so many sick folks, so I had to help sister with the chores. One thing I had to do every day was to churn. Mama had to have fresh buttermilk to drink every day.

Grandfather would come every day with a large chunk of ice to make the sick ones cold drinks. In those days there were no ice delivery services. This was the year 1915. Luckily, Daddy and grandfather had made an ice house.

They dug a great big hole in the ground and walled it up with logs and packed straw between the logs. Then when winter came they went to the ice pond, which was especially built for the ice for the ice house. They would cut the ice into large chunks and haul it to the house in wagons. They would fill the ice house packing full, then they would cover the ice with wheat straw. It would keep all next summer. The winters were always very long. We had lots of deep, deep snows. This was a big handicap when time came to go to school. Well, the summer dragged on and finally every one got well. By fall and Christmas I had about forgotten the long unhappy summer.

Anyway, the years passed swiftly and my two sisters grew into young ladies. They were very popular and had lots of friends. My oldest sister was considered to be a real beauty, while my other sister made up for any lack of beauty by her charming personality. They both fell in love and married while I was still quite young. I missed them very much and I was very lonely when they left home. So I became closer to my mother. I guess she was lonely too. We did lots of nice things together.

Both of my parents liked to read so there were always good books available for me to read. I spent many happy hours reading. I also spent a lot of time entertaining my little brother. He was always sick a lot because he never ever really recovered from typhoid and infantile paralysis.

Well, time passed quickly and I graduated from the one room elementary school. I was now ready for high school. Here again, was a decision - how was I to get to high school? Some of my girl friends' parents decided to find board and room near the school for their daughters. Daddy said, I could have a nice riding horse if I would stay home. That suited me fine. But there were days when I almost froze to death that first winter having five miles to ride on horse back.

The owner of the livery stable, who took care of my horse, would some times literally carry me to the house, and his mother would have a big bowl of cold water to put my feet in to thaw them out and help prevent frostbite. That same winter mama boarded the school teacher who taught the elementary school from which I had graduated. That came in handy. Daddy let her have a horse and buggy to drive to school and that took care of getting my brother to school. Naturally, a young school teacher would have a boy friend. So that winter was a real fun time. Her friend had a cousin and they would come to see her on Sundays. The cousin liked me and we really had a good time that winter, playing games, sleigh riding and making molasses candy. Mama would always have lots of good cookies and hot chocolate for us to eat and drink.

The winter passed quickly even though it was so dreadfully cold. My poor feet suffered but I never told how cold I got because I didn't want to give up riding. I loved my horse and I loved to ride. I guess I got my love for horses from my mother. She was a very skilled horsewoman. I remember neighbors often telling my father that his little daughter really could ride. But they thought I'd surely get killed on that horse on the icy slippery roads. But Prince never fell with me and he never ever threw me.

I guess the friendship between the school teacher's boy friend's cousin and I might have developed into a serious romance but this was in the mid-twenties and work was really scarce. There was nothing around for a young man with ambition to do. So he west to Washington, D.C. to find work and we drifted apart. I kept on going to school. One Christmas I was invited to my cousin's house to a party. It was there that I met my future husband. I shall never forget that day. He was tall and handsome, so well mannered. He had an aristocratic air of a real southern gentleman. I do not mean to sound presumptuous but I was considered attractive too; I was a small, rather pretty, very happy, and unaffected young girl. I guess our meeting was a case of love at first sight. I remember he took me home from the party in his nice new automobile and I was on cloud nine.

This was at Christmas time 1925, and the following September 22, 1926, we were married. We wanted to keep our marriage a secret and not tell anyone until we were married. That would be a really big surprise, as he was not a local boy and had a traveling position with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, as Long Lines Supervisor of the East Coast.

I was too young to get married without my parents' consent, so Daddy had to go with my husband to-be to obtain a license for us to marry, also to make an appointment with our minister to marry us.

The minister, Mr. Cabiness got so excited over marrying us that he forgot he wasn't to tell, and told at the afternoon Church service that he would be late that evening for service because he had a wedding to perform; of course, every one wanted to know who was getting married. When he told them Mr. Keysear's daughter they nearly flipped. Then the question arose "Who is she going to marry?" The minister couldn't think of the name, so every one started guessing who the young man was until the post mistress of Ruckersville said "You all stop guessing. You are all wrong. She is going to marry the boy who writes to her every day." She was right. Well, by this time our wedding was no secret. So unbeknown to us half of the village was present. If tears shed at a wedding were a token of good luck we should have had plenty luck. There were a lot of tears shed that night. My dearest girl friend Anne C. Jennings and my good pal Dick Cabiness (minister's son) cried. Annie C. sobbed so loud I could hardly hear what the minister was saying.

After the wedding ceremony my husband said we would drive to Charlottesville and spend the night there, then the next day we would go to Washington, D.C. on the train. We had a wonderful honeymoon. I remember one day we went shopping, I had plenty of clothes, but he bought me two beautiful dresses. One was a dark wine red satin, the other one was a flesh colored crepe trimmed in little tiny seed pearls.

His first assignment after we were married was to Lynchburg, Virginia. We had only been there a week when the tornado of 1926 struck Miami, Florida. The communication lines were torn down all along the southern part of the East Coast and he was sent down south to take charge of repairing the telephone lines. This was a wonderful new experience for me. My first experience of traveling on a pullman train and sleeping in a berth on a train. We left Lynchburg, Virginia that night around midnight and arrived in the deep south the next afternoon. I was so impressed with the palmettos and the Spanish mass on the trees. We spent a lot of time in Savannah, Georgia. That was a beautiful old city. I enjoyed staying there very much.

His work was completed in the South and we were back home for Christmas. We traveled around a lot that winter. The next summer August 14, 1927, our little daughter, Mary Barbara, was born. She was such a beautiful baby, the joy of our lives.

I stayed at home with my parents a lot when she was a baby. I was not very well and it was too hard to move so often with a baby. When she was older we traveled some but she preferred to stay with her grandparents. They were thrilled, because they simply adored her. She was a real joy to them in so many ways. She helped to occupy their minds when my brother was so ill.

As I have mentioned before, my brother had after effects from typhoid fever. As he grew older his foot gave him more and more trouble. He began to limp worse. The doctors at the University of Virginia Hospital operated on his foot but the operation was not very successful, so later they sent him to the John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. The doctors there said he had an incurable bone disease - osteomyelitis. They performed major surgery on his foot. This time the operation was more successful but he was in the hospital for months. The treatment that they gave him there did arrest the osteomyelitis. He came home that year for Christmas and we were all so happy that he could walk with only a slight limp.

Then came the Depression Years. I remember we were in Richmond, Virginia, 1929, when the New York Stock Market crashed. My husband lost some money but not enough to hurt us too much. Good people were laid off from work. Lots of people who had lost so heavily in the stock market committed suicide.

The highways were full of people out of work, walking the highways looking for any kind of a little job to get food. Small and big businesses went broke. The banks closed and people couldn't withdraw what savings they had invested. It really was a sad situation to see so many people out of work and hungry.

I can truthfully say the depression didn't hurt us directly as much as some. The company my husband worked for gave their employees a 30 day furlough. We spent the time at home with my parents. We had plenty of food to eat as it was in the summer time and they always had a good garden. But money was so scarce, farm prices were at rock bottom and it was a really difficult time to make ends meet. My husband had a good, kind and generous heart and he shared his money with my parents and others.

I remember when my husband went back to work after the furlough. We went to West Virginia, where we boarded in the home of a retired State Senator, They had lost their business and were in such poor circumstances that my husband gave Mrs. B. two weeks' board money in advance so she could send to the store to get food to cook for our supper.

The year 1932 was presidential election year. The name of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Governor of New York was being talked of loud and strong. The country was in desperate situation. He seemed to be the only hope to get the country out of the horrible mess every one was in. So he was elected our new President with an overwhelming majority.

Things really started to get better right away. He formed 'The New Deal' to put men back to work. The two most vivid in my mind were the W.P.A. to put the men back to work and the C.C.C. Camps for teenage boys and young men. They built State Parks all over the country. I well remember them putting Sky Line Drive through the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. All of these jobs created for everyone was a truly wonderful miracle and all things pulling together put our country back on its feet again.

Things seemed to go along good for a while. I traveled with my husband some and stayed at home some. We always had a nice vacation every summer but he would always reserve one week of his vacation for Christmas. That was his favorite time of year and I never hear "Silent Night" that I do not think of him in a very special way.

Once when I was visiting him in Fincastle, Virginia he was taken violently ill in the middle of the night. He hemorrhaged until I thought he would surely bleed to death before we could get a doctor. We were lucky to get such a good doctor as Dr. Noffsinger, who was a specialist in internal medicine at the Lewis Gale Hospital in Roanoke, Virginia. The X-rays showed he had a duodenal ulcer. It gave him a lot of trouble. After his illness I stayed with him a lot as he needed a very special diet.

That fall when Barbara was six years old, we decided to take her with us and enter her in Kindergarten. We were so happy that the three of us were together.

We were boarding in a private home. The folks were so nice to us and so friendly; they would often ask us to play cards with them in the evenings after dinner. I never believed in premonitions but the experience I had one night has stayed with me through the years. We were playing cards and having a nice time. My husband excused himself to go to our room for a few minutes. When he came down, I said to him, "W.D., what was wrong with Barbara? Why was she crying?" He assured me she was not crying but was fast asleep. That pitiful cry kept ringing in my ears. It was as though something was really hurting her, and it kept on until I couldn't concentrate on the card game, so I excused myself from the game by saying I had a headache.

The following week our daughter was stricken with scarlet fever. The Doctor there in Rainelle, West Virginia advised us to take her home where she would be under her own doctor's care. It was good that we did, she was so very, very ill for so many months. Complications set in and she had acute nephritis [kidney disease]. Our doctor called in a specialist in Internal Medicine from the University of Virginia to help him with her, they said her recovery was a miracle and that only by the Grace of God did she pull through that illness. All the while when she was delirious and cried so pitifully, it was the same crying that I heard that night in West Virginia that had haunted me so. She was so thin and frail for so long. We could never let her go in water or get her feet wet after that, until she was much, much older.

My husband's work kept him moving around so much, we wanted to be together as much as possible but we decided we should buy a home somewhere, where Barbara and I would be more settled and where she could attend one school.

So there was a farm for sale a few miles from where my parents lived. My husband thought it would be nice to own a farm so he bought it.

In the meantime my brother had married, and the plan was that he and his wife would live at the home place and my parents would come live with us. Daddy would supervise running the farm, two hundred and fifty acres. My husband would not be there to take care of it. Naturally, I was thrilled to have a home of my own, also happy that Mama and Daddy would be living with us. As I have said before I was always so close to my mother and daddy and to tell the truth I would have been afraid in that big house without them.

The farm was on the Rapidan River. The land was fertile and very productive. The house, built in 1852, was of Georgian architecture, brick with large white columns on the front porch. Inside the wide halls ran all the way across the front of the house on all three floors. There was an open stairway and wide double doors to the living room. All of the rooms were large and spacious with long roomy windows. There was a lovely old English basement. The lawn was filled with big old oak trees. It's unbelievable how large those trees really were. Some of them measured over eight feet in diameter. Naturally, it was a lot of work and there were repairs and painting to be done. I really had a good time choosing the wallpaper and paint for the inside. When it was all finished and ready for us to move in, it really was a truly beautiful old colonial home and we spent many happy years there.

The second summer, we were in our new home we had a second crisis. This time Barbara had typhoid fever and we almost lost her the second time. The Health Department checked everywhere and found that the water at school was where she got the germ. We could never understand why she was the only child at school that got the typhoid germ when all of the other children drank water from the same well. We had a really good doctor and he had a specialist from the University of Virginia to help him with her. She also had a super nurse - my mother. Goodness knows she had had experience enough with typhoid. I forgot to mention I had typhoid when I was three years old also my oldest sister, we sure were plagued with that blasted disease.

Anyway I was just simply frantic over Barbara. Her temperature stayed on 106° for days. The only way we could keep it down was ice water baths every 20 to 30 minutes. Well, thank heaven she finally got well with no after effects at all. All of our friends and relatives were so happy for us when she was well again and able to go back to school. All of the children and teachers at school liked her and were happy to have her back with them again.

In 1939 the World's Fair was being held in New York. My husband said he wanted us to see New York and the World's Fair so we went with him. I shall never forget that vacation. He took us to see all the highlights of New York City. It was a wonderful and fascinating experience for both of us. I was very impressed with some of the exhibits at the World's Fair, especially the 'World of Tomorrow.'

Some of the stage plays were magnificent. I remember Kate Smith was there in person. She sang 'God Bless America,' and received a standing ovation. As you know, everyone was very concerned about the trouble in Europe and the Far East at that time.

In 1940, Barbara was graduated from Barboursville Elementary School and entered Orange High School. The school board decided to consolidate all of the high school students from all over the county and send them all to Orange by bus. This made the Barboursville and Gordonsville students unhappy. For one thing they had such a long ride - twenty-one miles twice a day. The bus schedule would not permit the students to stay to participate in any of the activities such as Sports or Drama. There was a lot of confusion but the students managed, and most of them graduated in June 1944.

The summer of 1940 was a good summer but very warm. We could hardly wait to get supper over with so we could go sit on the front porch. It was always a good breeze on the front lawn and porch. One night we were sitting on the porch and suddenly Mama said to me, "Bess doesn't the sky look funny, it shouldn't be this light out here. There is no full moon tonight". I got off the porch and walked out in the middle of the lawn. There in the middle of the sky was this huge, mammoth magnificent ball of light. It was so bright it reflected all over the sky and on the trees on the lawn. It got brighter and brighter. There were four huge streaks of light painting and reaching out from the center of the ball or circle in the sky - clear across the sky, to all four corners of the earth. I said, "Mama, come quickly" and we both stood there completely awe-stricken, and almost speechless as this peculiar phenomenon took place in the sky.

Cold shivers ran all over me and I was frightened and concerned. I said, "Mama, what do you think this means?" She said, "it is a premonition. God is warning us, for something. We are probably headed for another war and this time I have a feeling the whole world will be involved." She said to me, "You were too little to remember, but I remember. There were strange lights in the sky (though not like this) before the beginning of World War One."

I am sure that all of us who are old enough to remember, will never forget December 6, 1940, the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. President Roosevelt's voice came over the radio loud and strong, "We the United States of America have been stabbed in the back, therefore I declare the United States in a state of war."

Oh, boy, what a time that was getting this big and great country of ours ready for a full scale war. I could write pages but I will only say briefly that mass production was what was needed. Every one was working, women in the factories. There was rationing of vital commodities, such as gasoline, sugar, coffee and shoes. We were issued stamps - each person was allowed three pairs of shoes per year. That was the beginning of all types of play shoes, because people couldn't make three pairs of leather shoes last a year. The shoe factories started making play shoes without leather.

In 1941 the war was getting worse so the government started drafting boys 18 years of age. Lewis Miller, who is now my son-in-law, left Orange High School in his senior year. He only trained six weeks and then was sent to the South Pacific. I also had several nephews in the service. It really was a traumatic experience for all of those who had loved ones directly involved.

Barbara continued on to school at Orange and in June of 1944 she was graduated from there. In the fall of 1944 she enrolled as a student in Westhampton College, University of Richmond, Virginia. Her college days were much happier than her high school days in Orange High. She was well liked in college and was voted one of the ten most attractive girls in the college. She graduated from Westhampton, June 1948, with a B.A. Degree in Psychology. Her Dad wanted her to continue on to school and get her Master's Degree, but she was tired of going to school so she accepted a job that fall as English teacher in Stanardsville High School. Her grandparents and I were delighted, as she was close enough to stay at home, and drive to school. My father's health was failing fast and she often said afterwards that she was glad she had that winter there with him.

The following summer, 1949, she was married in the Baptist Church in Orange, Virginia with a reception following at the James Madison Hotel in Orange. They have made their home in Arlington, Virginia. Lewis had a good job in Washington, D.C., where he is now co-owner of the company.

Barbara pursued the course she started on as a psychology major. She is now a state certified learning disability specialist in the Arlington, Virginia school system.

All during the 1940s the farm was paying off well and times were good for us. We all stayed well and we were happy. But by the end of 1949, Daddy was not very well. So my husband hired a man to run the farm so Daddy wouldn't have to worry with it.

1952 was not a good year for us. I was sick the first part of the year and had major surgery. That fall my father had pneumonia. He kept having a relapse and on November 10, 1952 he passed away. His death was really hard for us to accept. One spoke in the wheel was now missing and things would never be the same again. Mama adjusted to his death better than I thought she ever could. We did all we could to help her. One day my husband went out and came back with a tiny little baby chihuahua puppy. She was so pleased and proud of her little puppy. She dearly loved him and he loved her. He was a world of pleasure and company for her especially when I had to be out checking on the farm. He lived to be 17 years old. He died only a month before she was taken to the hospital.

My husband's work kept him busy and away from home, but he always managed to come home every week-end.

Then came the fall of 1956. We had freshly papered and painted the hall and living room and had put up new drapes and decorated for Christmas. The whole entire house felt so warm and friendly and a true feeling of Christmas spirit was everywhere. We had a wonderful Christmas holiday. Then time came for everyone to leave, to go back to work. My husband left on New Year's to be back in Alexandria, Virginia the next day for work.

The next day, January 2, 1957, word came over the telephone that my husband had had a fatal heart attack and he was gone. I just simply could not believe it. Yesterday he was here with me and today he is gone. I went into a state of shock. As I look back, the whole ordeal was like a horrible nightmare. The days that followed were very difficult and trying for all of us. Especially for Barbara, Mama, and me. When we lose a loved one it is so very hard to realize that they are really, really gone and that there is a chapter in our life that has ended. We just have to go on living and do the best that we can.

The following spring Barbara talked me into joining a garden club. This really was wonderful therapy for me. I took more interest in my flowers. I had some pretty roses and I won a lot of Blue Ribbons in the annual flower shows. I became especially interested in dried flower arrangements and I used to spend many hours walking around over the farm looking for and gathering materials to dry. In doing so I found that nature has a great way of helping to heal wounded hearts.

Mama and I lived on, on the farm. The family was good to us and came when they could. My sisters always tried to come and help out in busy times. In the summer of 1961, one of my sisters was home and it was hot and dry as it could be. Mama was taken sick one day. We sent for the doctor for her, and when he came he said she had a kidney infection. She was so ill we almost lost her. That sure was one miserable summer. She was so sick. It was so hot and dry, and all of the fowls and animals tried to see how much water they could drink. The boys that helped me with the farm chores could hardly keep them in water to drink, and I had a time seeing to it that they did keep them in water.

My brother would come to see Mama as often as he could. One fall evening when he came, he stayed to eat supper with my sister and me, we fixed all of the things he liked to eat. I even baked him some custard, but he ate such a little we could hardly miss what he ate. I remember he said to my sister, Mimi, "this world is no place for a sick person and a cripple and I am very tired." When he finished supper he said he would have to go home, so he went upstairs and told mother good-bye. A few days later he entered the hospital. He had staphylococcus pneumonia and on October 25, 1961 he died. Of course all three of us, his sisters, were grieved to see him die and I was especially worried. I thought this would certainly give my mother a real setback, but she managed much, much better than I ever thought she could. I knew how much we would miss him and how much his visits meant to her. He had an out-going personality and everyone who knew him loved him. I had never heard of anyone receiving such generous expressions of sympathy as my sister in-law received in his memory. Time is endless so the weeks went by and Mama finally got well enough to come downstairs again and I was happy.

We got along that winter fine. She stayed well and so did I. The next summer though, I broke my ankle. It was a bad break and I had to keep a cast on for three months. After I got the cast off my foot I felt a lot better and time seemed to fly the next few years. Mama and I both stayed fairly well. My sister in-law came to see us often. Lots of Sundays she would come to our house after church for lunch. She was good company and we always enjoyed her visits very much. Then she met this gentlemen friend. So she didn't visit us as often after meeting him. Then late that summer we got a letter from her saying she planned to get married in the fall. I felt very sad. I wanted her to be happy and have a good life, but I knew she would be leaving Charlottesville for good and that we would miss her visits on Sundays. When I finished reading Mama the letter she took my hand and said, "Don't cry, things have a way of working out, you may not miss her as much as you think." Sure enough she was right. Two people came into my life that summer that came to mean a lot to me.

Ronnie was a little boy whose father moved into the neighborhood. He was out of a job, so I gave him some work to do. Ronnie would come with his father every day. He fell in love with the farm, especially the chickens, little lambs, and little calves. That fall he would come after school and help with the chores. Even several years after they moved to Culpeper, Virginia, he would come on the bus to Orange, so he could be there to help me on weekends. I really needed him then as Mama's health was failing fast and I needed to spend more time with her.

Remember in the early years of my life I mentioned this young man of whom I was very fond? Well our paths crossed again in the summer of '69.

His wife had died suddenly that spring. Late that summer I received a telephone call and it was he. He asked me if he could come some time to see Mama and me. I wondered if I would recognize him after not seeing him for forty years. He came to see us and we had a really nice visit. His visits soon became a habit. He was good company and his visits were a pleasure. Mama enjoyed talking to him and I was always glad when he came. He would sit and talk to her for hours. That would give me a chance to get out and check on what was going on on the farm. I can still see them sitting there sipping on a milk shake.

He found out she liked milk shakes and he would bring her one every time he came. Mama was sick all that fall and stayed in bed most of the time. I was sick with grief and worry over her condition. My sisters came and stayed with me. We wanted to keep her at home as long as we could.

Then a few days after Christmas she was taken so much worse that the doctor suggested that we put her in the hospital. He told us then her case was terminal. She only lived one month in the hospital. I stayed with her every night. My sisters stayed during the day. I have never experienced such a heartache as I had that Sunday in the hospital when my darling mother just closed her eyes and went to sleep.

My daughter wanted me to sell the farm. She did not want me to stay on there alone. Ronnie came to stay with me that winter and went to school in Orange. That helped me a lot, but all that winter I was in a deep state of depression and apathy. I knew I could not go on staying there alone, and I dreaded the thought of leaving. Next to losing my loved ones, selling my home was the hardest thing I ever had to do. It was a hard decision to make but by spring I had definitely decided that I would sell the farm. In just a few months a realtor had found a client who liked the farm and wanted to buy it.

I was very busy from that time on getting ready for an auction sale. I had a lot of personal property to dispose of. So we had to have two sales. We sold the equipment and livestock first, then the house furnishings. This was hard to do, to decide and sort out the things I wanted to keep and the things I would have to sell.

Then I had to find somewhere to live. I liked Arlington, Virginia, but real estate was so high there. All of the property I looked at there I thought was priced far above its worth. My sister suggested I try to buy something here in Dundalk, which I did.

After I moved here in June of 1973, I had some improvements made on the house I bought here. This house is small but very attractive and comfortable. When I first left the farm I was very homesick, I missed the country and the life I had been accustomed to living for so long. It was a drastic change for me. I guess once a person has owned an estate as large as the one I owned there is a certain degree of prestige attached to it that is very hard to forget. I am very happy here now and I think that I made the right decision.

All the time that I was so busy selling the farm and taking care of the responsibilities and problems connected with selling one home and buying another, Floyd, my friend was standing by ready to help me in any way that he could. After I moved here to Dundalk he came to see me often. He knew I was unhappy and he did all he could to cheer me up. He liked to go out, and he took me to so many nice places here in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. He had lived most of his life in Washington, D.C. and he knew where all the nice places were to go to. Just a short time before his death, he came one Sunday with box seat tickets to the Kennedy Center in Washington. We saw a fabulous stage play that afternoon.

Shortly after that Sunday, I received a telephone call from his sister-in-law saying that he had died suddenly the night before. My family went with me to Virginia to the funeral, when I left the cemetery that day I felt very sick and lonely for I had lost a very dear friend, and he would be greatly missed by me.

A few weeks after his death, I received a letter from his lawyer saying his will had been read and that he had left all of his property to me. This was a terrific shock and surprise to me, At first I had mixed emotions about accepting the inheritance. I talked to his lawyer, who said Floyd told him that he wanted his property to go to me, and he hoped that I would spend and enjoy all of it. Needless to say I was very deeply touched and very, very, grateful to him for remembering me in such a wonderful way.

Now, I try to live my life in a way that I can get as much pleasure and enjoyment out of life as is possible. I like to travel, I have a sister and brother-in-law who travel a lot. We have been on two really nice tours out west in the last two years. I would like to visit every state in this great United States of ours. Then I would like to go to Europe. I also, would like to visit the Holy Land.

Some times, now as I look back over my life I guess I have had a good full life. I am thankful for all of the good things in my life. I am thankful for the love and understanding of a wonderful family and friend and for my lovely daughter. I am also thankful for the strength the Lord gave me in times of trouble and the will to pick up the pieces of my life and to go on living. I have always kept my faith in God. I still go on looking for the clouds with silver linings, and pray that some day that silver lining will be there for me.

Bessie May Keysear
1976

Bessie May Keysear Wood died in Culpeper County, Virginia on March 25th, 2004