

Erwin

Growing up in Onslow County  
By Nannie Morton

My name is Nannie Morton. I was born August 23, 1913, at Richlands, Onslow County, North Carolina, the first of five children born to Cader and Bessie Barbee.

My father was a farmer who raised cows, hogs, corn, peanuts, tobacco, and soy beans. We children helped with the work as we grew. We brought the wood in for the cook stove and fireplaces. We hoed the crops and harvested tobacco in "putting in the barn time" in summer. If a neighbor needed a hand, we were happy to work for \$1 a day.

We devised fun things to do. The grape vines made good places for play houses. When my girl cousins came we made leaf hats of big oak leaves, pinned together with little sticks and decorated with flowers from our yard. My brothers played baseball. My sisters and I played "Hopscotch" and "Hay Over." All of us played games in the road. An indoor board game we played was "Fox and Geese."

We drove our pony to school and kept her in our uncle's stable. He carried the mail. Sometimes a person on his route would not have the money to pay for a 2 cent stamp. He would put two eggs in the mail box. Uncle Dell would sell the eggs, and then stamp the letter.

One day in summer I drove the pony to town on an errand. When I got ready to go home I went to get the pony. Uncle Dell was making cider. He and my aunt and their daughter were drinking it and they gave me some. On the way home I suddenly realized that I might get drunk. I shook the lines for the pony to go faster. It was a hot day and when I got home, the pony was in a lather. Mama asked me why I ran her so fast. I told her I was afraid I'd be drunk from the cider. She assured me only fermented cider would make one drunk.

On our farm we used what we had. Our extra eggs were sold for groceries. Daddy cooked syrup for neighbors who had sugar cane. Corn was ground into meal or hominy which we had with thickened meat gravy on cold winter nights. Mama milked the cow. In summer she would strain out a gallon in a jug which she lowered into the open well until lunchtime. How cool and refreshing it was!

One year the hogs got cholera and died. Mama prayed to know how she could fix lunches without meat. Finally she decided to make peanut butter. She parched the peanuts, ground them and mixed them with a little sugar, butter and a dash of salt. It was delicious crunchy peanut butter.

People usually bought peanuts to plant because the hogs were put in the field where the peanuts were raised. The hogs would eat up all the peanuts and there were none left for seed. Before planting time, the farmer might have a peanut shelling. Young people were invited to help. After finishing, refreshments would be served, and then square dancing or games would be enjoyed by all. Corn shuckings and tobacco tyings

were also times of fun. These were great times for young people to work and play together.

In summer we would go swimming after a big rain in a canal that had been dug by slaves. The Sunday school picnic came in August. Our church would go to Montford's Point where Camp Lejeune is now. We would rent our bathing suits for a swim before the picnic supper. My daddy got out in water up to his shoulders. One time a hole came in the bathing suit. He sent a man to get him another. As he came back with another one, the man's suit sprang a hole that he did not know about. Everyone on the porch of the dressing rooms got a good laugh!

Mama made laundry soap by saving all of the meat scraps. She would buy Red Devil lye, put some water with the scraps and add the lye and stir it as it boiled away in a big black pot. She would take samples, until she felt it had cooked long enough. She would let it cool until it was hard. Then she would cut it into bars. This was excellent for laundry or hard cleaning jobs.

My mother made most of our clothes. She would go through the Sears Catalog and pick out a dress she liked. She could cut a pattern out of newspaper. She also made shirts for my brothers. When our long black stockings wore out we patched the hole in the heel with a piece from another stocking. She did this for my father's and brother's overalls, too.

We lived about three miles from Richlands. School buses did not run until I was in high school so we drove our pony and put her in Uncle Dell's stable while we were in school. On cold winter mornings her hair would fluff up to keep her warm. She would trot for a mile or more as she thought of the warm stable she had waiting for her. Walking or riding to school were good times unless we happened to get in line behind farmers hauling fertilizer. Then the dust would cover us.

Finally, my father bought a Model T. We seldom took time to put the curtains up so we used the buggy robe to keep warm on the short drive to town.

Our lives centered around home, school and church. Studying by kerosene lamps or an Aladdin lamp with the firelight glowing were quiet times with no TV or radio blaring. Church attendance was regular and enjoyed and another place for young people to make friends.

Growing up on an Onslow County farm was not always easy, but we had plenty to eat, the love of our parents, and lots of ways to have fun and make friends.