

Good Ol' Front Porch

Sitting on Grandpa's old front porch, dangling my bare feet over the edge, I enjoyed watching my world of the early 1930s go by in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas.

I was about 8, and the best thing was having Grandpa nearby. He'd be leaning back in his old handmade, cane-bottomed chair and reading *The Country Gentleman* or *The Saturday Evening Post*, and my world was secure and happy.

After Sunday morning church services, we'd gather on that porch and enjoy the family. Dad and his two brothers lived on adjoining farms, so there were "cousins by the dozens."

Every adult and some of the kids played a musical instrument, and everyone sang or "made a joyful noise." Songs from the church hymnal were sung with respect and reverence, but folk songs were our favorites. We sang *Old Dan Tucker* with gusto and glee, and *Cross-Eyed Sue* almost brought on hysteria.

Multipurpose Porch

Dad and his brothers regaled us with stories of their childhood escapades, making us realize that our parents were as normal as we were. They, too, had climbed the haystack and slid off the smokehouse roof, so we weren't so bad after all.

On that old porch, Grandma would set her bread dough in the warm sunshine, and we kids watched in awe as the dish towel covering it rose like a mysterious mountain as the yeast did its job.

Once that bread was baked, the aroma drew us like magnets to the porch, where Grandma passed out thick slices of warm bread with fresh-churned butter and strawberry jam on top.

It was on that porch that I watched with dread as Grandpa pulled an offending tooth from a neighbor's wide-open mouth. It was 25 miles to a dentist, and old-timers learned to be self-sufficient. The poor patient sat in the old hickory chair and hung on to the rungs with a desperate grip as Grandpa tugged, twisted and eventually held up the offender in all its goriness for everyone to see. Who needed horror movies?

One day, a neighbor rode by on his old mare. I watched from the porch as Grandpa held on to the bridle and, in his Southern drawl, reminded the man that he owed Grandpa money for shoeing the mare some time ago. Angry words followed, and the neighbor yanked the bridle away from Grandpa and galloped away.

Grandpa must have seen the terror I felt at seeing him so angry, because he knelt down beside me, patted my head and said, "Cricket, the Good Book says to owe no man anything, so always pay your debts."

I determined then and there that I'd never break that rule.

Years later, I asked Grandpa how much the man owed for the horse-shoeing job. He said it was 25¢!

Hours of Entertainment

During summer showers, we'd lean out from the old porch and let the raindrops from the roof drizzle down our foreheads; for once, we had clean faces.

It was fun to sneak Grandpa's reading glasses, put them on and look over the edge of the porch. Then we'd jump what looked like 10 feet down to the ground; it was only 18 inches.

Great-Grandma Godfrey's spinning wheel sat on the porch, and she'd make yarn from the carded wool piled in her lap. From that came warm socks for all of us, and once she braided straw and

made me a wide-brimmed hat to shade me from the sun. Those pioneer abilities are long gone.

Now that I am a grandmother, a great-grandmother even, I see my family growing older, going away to college or moving on to new careers. I wonder what memories they carry with them, and wish there had been an old porch in there somewhere.

—By Maxine Green-Federico, Mariposa, California