

Old Timers and Main Street: Our Teachers and Their Classroom

By Melissa C. Singleton

I am an educator. I have at least seven years of college under my belt. I have had many teachers and college professors influence me and play key roles in my progression from child to adulthood. However, when I stop to reflect on what I have been taught in my life, maybe professionals were not those who truly educated me. Maybe, just maybe, my true educators were those who lived simple lives. Who probably didn't go to college. Who undoubtedly taught me more about who I am than any college professor could bore into my brain and being. I am talking about, real people. Simple people. Those whom our community is losing every day.

First, let me say that my family has taught me more about life, love and happiness than anyone could have done. My mom, grandparents, aunts, uncles and so on gave me those little life lessons that each of us need for our survival and success. Luckily, both of my parents came from large families by today's standards. With a total of 12 blood aunts and uncles, not including those with the title of "great," I didn't have a choice but to learn some things about life, my shoes, to talk, to walk, to make my bed, to do math. But I reflect further on those who were outside of my immediate family. Those who were living among us in this small community of Mt. Vernon. To some, a community frozen in the early to mid 1900's.

I immediately remember the time my mother owned a restaurant on Main Street. Mr. John Craig never skipped a day of having lunch or dinner with us. I say "us" because I spent many hours at the back table of that restaurant listening and "gossiping" with the locals. Mr. John always had a kind word and big hug for the little girl who charged people for water. I even see his face in my sixth birthday pictures. He taught me that children need to be recognized and appreciated. They deserve to be listened to, as well as loved. He didn't talk in a child's language to me. He talked with me just like I was an adult.

I cannot forget the "little" men who lived in the hotel above the restaurant. Mr. Halcomb, who could not stand upright. The man who taught me to whistle. Now, who in the world would want to teach a little girl, who

were nothing but dresses to white? Well, first I had to buy my knife-a famous '96 Barlow from Hatt's \$8.10. Oh boy, I could whistle. I still see and smell the wood shavings on the sidewalk. With each stroke of knife to wood, I gleamed. Mr. Halcomb had taught me to use my hands; to take nature and shape it; to make it even more beautiful. Finally, he taught me to do something that required me to transfer my energies from running up and down the street to my mind, hands and eyes; to concentrate.

I remember another of the "little" men, Mr. Cummins, brother to Jesse Cummins, who was visually impaired. I remember helping him up the two steps to the restaurant door and to a table. Even with an impairment like his, he spent many hours in town. Once he had finished his dinner, he would slowly make his way home; to rest up for another day to mingling with the street folk. He taught me that any impediment a person had could only humble them while at the same time make them stronger. Finally, I recall Mr. Vernon businessman. The men, women and their families who kept this town in all the

necessities a person or family might need, for at least a week at a time. They were around long before the Wal-Mart Superstores, the Mega Krogers, or Lowe's. Mr. Harold Jones, Mr. Jesse Cummins, Mr. Billy Hatt, Mr. Buster Wilmont, Mr. Estill McBoe, Ms. Mary Ida Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Claude L. Hanzel, Mrs. Mary Ellen Noe and Mr. John Cox. Who needed to travel to one store for everything? Just walk up one sidewalk on Main Street and down the other. You would have all the items on your shopping list and be ready to go home, by noon. Further, for many local businesses, your entrance into their store was announced by the "tinkling" sound of a small bell, not a computerized buzzer. When you were shopping, people were not improving this to "Try our new and improved this or that." You were not given 20 choices of soups and meats. The local businesses "knew" what you wanted. At the check out, a clerk armed with a computerized cash register didn't sling your items across a screen and yell over a microphone, "Price check in lady's lingerie." You were greeted by your name and at the check out you could hear the sounds of an old fashioned adding machine or your items were added up on a piece of paper; a receipt, if you even needed one, was hand written. Further, no maitre d' of day or month, weather, etc., you were greeted with a smile.

Mr. Harold Jones was always waiting for children to enter through his door. He held in one hand a piece of bubble gum and had the other free to pat you on the back. I visualize the staircase in the back of his store and the distinct smell of his cigar. I learned from Mr. Jones, to always be friendly and greet people with a warm hello and a pat on the back. Sometimes, that pat on the back can change a person's whole day.

In the good old days, if a person ran out of flour, milk, eggs, or any other staples found in a normal kitchen, there was no need to do without. All a person had to do was call Foster Cummins. I can still see his maroon station wagon putting around town as he delivered groceries to those unable to come to the store. Not only did he deliver, but also, he was open early in the mornings when I would be making my way to school. I could always stop in to have my lunch homemade, just like mom would do. Mr. Cummins taught me that all people have a purpose and a need. We must be willing to go the extra mile, to make money, but simply to be a good Samaritan.

Thankfully, Mr. Billy Hatt is still in business and his store remains a fine example of small town life and business. Barbies were \$3.99 and yes he had Malibu Barbie, Ken and all the gang. A child could do his or her Christmas shopping for parents or teachers. There were always items for less than a dollar that could be purchased by a "big girl." Laysaway as long as you like. I could even pay \$0.6 a week. Mr. Hatt taught me that sometimes your biggest customers are the little guys and gals who want to spend their life savings, even if life savings means all they have is a dime for a dime's worth of candy.

Forget owning your own four wheel drive. When it snowed, a person could always count on Mr. Buster Wilmont to take you where you needed to go. The telephone pole no longer stands, but that telephone ringing still exists deep in the crevices of my mind. No matter time nor distance Mr. Wilmont would show up in his four door car or oversized Suburban.

He taught me no person's problem is too big or small to put on hold due to weather or lack of personal transportation. Take the time to lend a hand or in his case a car seat and ride to town.

Need socks? Today, this small requirement is fixed by visiting a national franchise. In my childhood, it was remedied by a short walk up

Main Street to McBee's Department Store. For less than a \$1.00, I could have the latest sock fashion-bobby socks. Mrs. Frances Cox, Ms. Hanzel or even Mr. McBee himself greeted me with a warm "Hello" and an eagerness to take care of my needs. Time and other customers were not a factor. I was allowed to walk up the winding staircase to the second floor by myself and look out the front windows below to the busy street. I learned from them that children are to explore and adults should lead the exploration. But sometimes, the children explore best when left alone.

Mary Ida Jones has probably dressed ninety percent of Mt. Vernon's inhabitants. I know that she has dressed many of my baby dolls; most of them for less than a nickel a dress or slipper. If you are lucky, she might even have a little something special that would just suit you in the back. She sits behind her counter, to this day, and shares stories and conversations with the locals that call her place their hang out. She has taught me that everyone wants to be appreciated, no matter their status in life and we should never judge others.

One of my favorite little boys, "I'm not a little boy." And so would start the conversation between Mr. Claude L. Hanzel and me. He always greeted me this way. Never knew why, but I still miss that greeting today. He loved to hand out hugs and smiles. And like Billy Hatt, he always had something that even the youngest of customers could afford. I think I bought my first set of jacks from his store and someone I still have them. He taught me to make everyone feel important and special. Give them a bigger bag for their small purchase so that when they leave your place they look back and feel more important than their small item in the bag would reveal otherwise.

Mary Ellen Noe remains in my heart and memories. If I was bored at the restaurant, a brief skip up Main Street took me to see "Granny Noe." What she taught me humors my husband, Steve, and he makes sure everyone knows my corny habit. I learned to call grown onions the best way-wrapped in white bread and sprinkled with salt. Actually, she simply taught me that you don't need the same four fathers to make you related. Love makes everyone a relative, so love all humans and let them know with a few moments of your time and share even your strangest of habits.

His passing on to greener pastures and bigger bird tracks is what started

all of this reflecting in my mind. He was one of the last community businessmen who influenced and taught so many of us, including me. His lessons were simple. How to do the time to make a key that really works. What nut and bolt, or even a screw, will work best for that nasty job you might have to complete quickly before the door falls in the floor. Mr. John Cox was and still is a legend in this person's eyes. For as long as I can remember, Mr. John had a truck with big red lights on top. Mr. John had the hardware store where men and women could shop. He did not discriminate. Maybe what I remember most about Mr. John was not his business or his volunteer work but his family business and his family's involvement in volunteer work. I have been lucky enough to know his son and grandchildren and will let anyone know that they are Mr. John. He taught me that our community is worth saving at a moment's notice. You know, he believed this each time you heard his siren and saw him stopping traffic so the fire trucks could rush to the scene.

Oh there are definitely others who have been my teachers. Teachers have been my educators for life. Mrs. Rena Jordan, who taught me to sit like a lady when I wear dresses. Mrs. Christine Krueger, who taught me to appreciate short stories and share them with others. Mrs. Florence Winstead, who taught me to go beyond basic writing skills and WRITE from inside. And yes, those who were the younger teachers, were my educators. Mrs. Katharine Hunt, who taught me that the first book for all subjects is and always will be the Bible. Mrs. Betty Henderson, who let me 'steal' coffee, with her permission. Mrs. Virginia Hunt Darr, who taught me that teachers are also your friends and they are human. By no means are these the only teachers who taught me in school. And finally, Mr. Keith Singleton, who let me know that math is a necessity just like talking.

Maybe, after all these words that express my childhood reflections have passed your lips and absorbed into your brain, you too will begin to realize that we are now the teachers of life. We have the responsibility to educate our community's children.

Our habits, our words, our actions teach children how to be adults and how to survive. Finally, I hope you thank those who have been your educators. Reflect on life's lessons. Start today. And thank you to my teachers. I hope I can fill your shoes.

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The Rockcastle County High School Band and Flag Corp were selected to compete in the 2001 Orlando All-Star Music Festival in Florida recently. Both groups gave outstanding performances and as a result, the Flag Corp took first place in their division as well as earning a rating of Superior. The RCHS Band placed second in overall concert band category with a rating of excellence. Members of the Flag Corp, shown above, are front row from left: Brittany Mason and Tasha Parsons. Second row from left: Jamie Lawrence and Summer Owens. Back row from left: Amanda Ramsey, captain Jessica Ramsey, Jamie Frederick, captain Stephanie Haerman, and Cassi Ramsey. In addition to the competition, students were able to visit several Walt Disney World parks including MGM Studios, Magic Kingdom and Epcot Center.

FARMER'S MARKET COUPONS are now available at the health department

\$20.00 coupons are available for every woman and child participating on WIC. Coupons are also available for WIC infants who turn one year old by September 1st.

Stop by the health department to get your coupons.

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Meeting Location - Brodhead Elementary School and Rockcastle County Board of Education Administrative Building

June 5, 2001

6:00 p.m.

Draft Agenda

1. CALL TO ORDER

- Silent Prayer
- Roll Call
- Reading of Board Team Commitments

2. ADOPT AGENDA/ACTION

3. COMMUNICATIONS

4. OPERATIONS/ACTIONS

- Approve minutes of the April 5, 2001 special monthly meeting
- Approve bills for payment
- *Approve Emergency Substitute Teacher Application: Amanda Dudley
- Approve school trips

Date	School	Grade	#	Location
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5. DISCUSSION/ACTION

- Review/approve Memorandum of Agreement with Upper Cumberland Special Education Cooperative for housing Consultant Tammy Gabhard for School Year 2001-2002
- Review/approve Treasurer's Bond for School Year 2001-2002
- Review/approve Resolution for Participation in the 2001-2002 KISTA/KSBA TRAN Program

6. DISCUSSION/REVIEW

- Review Month 9 Attendance Report
- Review Monthly Financial Report
- Review Superintendent's Personnel Actions Report
- Review Perpetual Calendar
- Other

7. ADJOURNMENT



On the first day of June, this Coca Cola Cutie will be Sweet Sixteen and never be kissed! (Whoops) She has been kissed! She used to have fun in her little pool, splashing in the sun. Now she lies on her float in a bigger one and still has fun splashing in the sun. Happy Birthday Honi Love - Gram