



Points East

By
Ike Adams

Uncle Stevie Craft was married to my Mom's older sister Nancy (Nan). I'm ashamed to admit it but I'm not exactly sure where Aunt Nan was on the hierarchy because Mom had 9 brothers and sisters and they are all, including Mom, long since passed to "that land beyond the river," where they live in peace forever and they ring those golden bells for you and me," or so goes the hymn.

Anyway, Aunt Nan was considerably older than Mom, as was Uncle Stevie, and their children who were actually my first cousins, were more like aunts and uncles to me. Their daughter, Yada Caudill who still lives on Blair Branch and is the last living of that Craft family, for example, has always been an aunt to me and her kids and my younger brothers all went to school together. Her deceased husband originated the Bufford Caudill Fall Bean that I have made famous in this column and he is also long across the river.

What I'm trying to do for her is put things in perspective. My maternal grandparents were long gone by the time I was able to comprehend much. I was 4 years old when Pap died and he was 86. I can remember a few images distinctly but when he passed, two of my uncles took over as surrogate grandpas as did their wives as grandmas and over the coming months I intend to interject some reminiscence about all four of them individually.

I'm starting with Uncle Stevie because he was sort of a combination Saint and Scrooge at Christmas Time. Wounded in the Spanish-American War, he wound up with a little pension of a few dollars a month and he managed to acquire a few acres of relatively flat land near the mouth of the hollow where he and Aunt Nan could grow incredible vegetable gardens.

They kept chickens and sold eggs. Fattened hogs and cured them out and milked a cow or two. Grew sorghum cane & made molasses and even tapped the maples in the head of Blair Branch to gather sap and boil it down into syrup and maple sugar.

Uncle Stevie could walk the woods and spot a locust or black gum limb perfectly curved for a sled runner and he could build a horse-drawn sled for hauling coal or wood or potatoes from the garden. He shod horses and mules and supervised the butchering of untold thousands of hogs for the neighbors in exchange for a mess of meat.

Aunt Nan was a cook's cook and her idea of Christmas was food. Chicken, one day, ham the next, and apple cobbler, cherry pies, a turkey that Uncle Stevie won at a shooting match and they would only let him win one because it wasn't fair to everybody else to shoot against the gen-

erally-acknowledged best marksman in eastern Kentucky. And he was that.

They'd put a plate of steel up and drill holes in it and poke the turkey's neck through it. You had to shoot, standing up, off-hand, with iron sights, at the turkey's head, from a distance of 60 or 75 yards with a .22 rifle. The turkey would be wobbling his head all about and the more they shot the more he would wobble until Uncle Stevie raised his rifle and ended the misery on his first shot and took home the bird for a holiday dinner.

But best of all, for a preteen mountain boy, he made stuff that had more adolescent appeal. My first sling shot was a Christmas present from Uncle Stevie when I was 7 or 8 years old. Fashioned from the perfect fork of a dogwood branch, the sling straps were cut from an old, red-rubber, automobile tire, inner-tube and perfectly matched. The pouch was made from an old leather shoe tongue that he had softened with mink oil.

I walked out of the hollow at day break to Blair Branch. Grade School more than a mile on a muddy, rutted road. I was terrified of being dog bitten until I got that slingshot. With a back pocket full of carefully selected and rounded sandstone gravel I had biting dogs running under the floors of their owners homes in a matter of days because I could cause them a lot of agony.

I made believers out of two or three older local bullies, too, who told me Dad I'd shot them with a sling shot and he told them that he was going to teach me how to aim better because he didn't see any bruises between their eyes and that's what I ought to be aiming at instead of their tails. They squealed to Willie J. Back, the school principal and he called me aside, gave me a pocket full of marbles for ammunition and advised that I aim for the straddle.

"Them boys are too big for me to whoop," he told me. "Shoot 'em between the legs and they'll leave you alone and they'll be too proud to ever tell on you again." Mr. Back was right and, in hindsight, he was one of the best teachers I had in my educational career. Not because he taught me how to deal with bullies as much as he did in getting me academically ready for high school. The bully lessons came in handy there too. Bark 'em and they'll leave you alone no matter how big they are.

I remember flutes that Uncle Stevie crafted by somehow loosening the bark from a Pawpaw limb and whittling out the inner wood and then sliding the bark back over it and letting it dry real tight for a few days and then whittling holes so that it

could be noted and in tune with a fiddle. And water guns made from elder berry bushes where he used the pith and somehow attached it to a hickory limb to make a pump that would suck the water up when you pulled it back and squirt it 20 yards when you pushed it forward. And to reload all you had to have was a ready supply of water.

I remember wooden toy pistols lovingly and precisely carved to look so remarkably like the real thing that it took a trained adult eye to tell the difference until they held them.

I remember a wooden sleigh that he made for me when I had been whining for a mail order toy with metal runners that was advertised in the Montgomery-Ward's Christmas Catalogue.

I must have been in third grade but several of the older boys wanted to swap me for the brough on ones they had gotten from Ward's when we went back to school after Christmas. Mine, made of bent hickory, had a

set of short runners in the front that pivoted like the front wheel on a bicycle. Their's just kind of bent up front and basically went straight down hill. I could salmon off the hill-sides like an Alpine skier. Uncle Stevie must have spent several hundred hours building it.

It occurs to me that Uncle Stevie was not much older than I am now when he was such a grandfather to me but it is impossible for me to remember Christmas Past without smiling and remembering my Uncle Stevie Craft. I'd give anything to be such a person to some kids today. I'd give anything if there were some kids out there who would appreciate it as much as I did growing up. I can't make a computer but I'm pretty sure I can still make a slingshot.

I know you're up there somewhere Uncle Stevie. And I know you're grinning. So am I. So am I.

I appreciate you more now than ever. Merry Christmas!

Another year gone by



Richard
Anderkin

Editor
Mount Vernon
Signal

are, so I will leave it at that.

I would also like to thank the many advertisers who have once again chosen to advertise here.

Also a special thanks to Steve Owens who has been so helpful since Dad got sick.

Changing gears a little, the Rockcastle County Kiwanis Club is no doubt the most active civic organization in the county. Last week they held an appreciation banquet at the Rockcastle County Middle School.

They honored local Veterans, firefighters and police officers. It was very appropriate and put on with a lot of class.

It was nice to see so many Veterans turn out for the event, because we all know they are worthy of any and all recognition they receive.

Kiwanis President Corey Craig did a very good job recognizing those who have given the ultimate sacrifice, losing their lives while serving this country.

And for those of us who know, the county would be in sad shape without the dedication of our local volunteer firefighters.

None of them are compensated and unless you have been called out in the middle of the night two or three nights in a row, sometimes in extreme weather conditions, you have no idea what a service they provide.

Police personnel are also very worthy of the recognition they received on that Sunday afternoon.

They are compensated, but many

of them, especially in the three small towns are not paid extremely well.

Can you imagine this country without police officers, although I do think there should be some kind of age requirements even if the pay is low.

A couple of local office holders, the Chief Justice and our State Representative spoke. I thought the County Judge/Executive probably should have gotten a few minutes, since he is considered the highest ranking local official, but that just goes to show you there is politics in everything, even a civic organization.

Two weeks ago I broke one of my own rules and wrote about a complaint we had received concerning not enough coverage for the JROTC at RCHS.

I know better, because I know they have not been slighted in anyway - so you just over look complaints such as we received.

And, I upset Mrs. Jenny Taylor and her husband Major Sgt. Keith Taylor, who are the main reasons the program is so successful at RCHS.

They certainly made no complaints and I owe them an apology.

They do an excellent job of providing us with information about the accomplishments of their students.

Congratulations are also in order this week for the program's Rifle Team, which won the state title again on Saturday. It is something they should be very proud of.

It has been a strange time in this country since September 11th and I think those events have actually helped some of us realize what is important and what isn't.

We should also remember that thousands of families will be celebrating this special time without loved ones who were killed for no reason.

Although we are the greatest nation in the world, the U.S. has its faults and I am a little concerned that we are about to lose some of our civil liberties. I think Americans will be tolerant, given the circumstances, but I am also satisfied that we will get them back.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all of us and there are a lot of us (which is a good thing) to all of you.

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Front row from left: Jess Bullock, Corey Craig and Terina Helton. Back row from left: Karen Bullock, Sandy Durham, Donna McClure, Julie Pigg, Dawn Mullins and Cindy Griffith. Not shown is Ina Jean Taylor.



Main Street Branch

Front row from left: Melinda Osborne, Jenny Bray and Matt Cromer. Back row from left: Shauna Lawson, Jeannine Lawrence, Cathy Howard and Alice Faulkner. Not shown were Sue Owens, Donna Statton and Becky Mays.

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