



A Talk With Miss Alberta

by Dee Van Asdale

When Alberta Lee Frye was born in 1917 she was the only child, but as time passed she had three brothers and a sister. I asked her if they called her "Bertie" when she was little. She said, "Some people still call me 'Bertie.'"

I wanted to know when she first remembered going to church. She said, " I think I came here goin' to church." I thought she meant she had come from somewhere else but she meant she was born here, "goin' to church".

Her first real memory of Church was when the Preacher Man came to the door to talk to her Papa. There was a Revival to be held in a Brush Arbor and he was visiting every house to spread the news. The Brush Arbor was a frame structure, no walls, with planks set across for benches. The floor was plain dirt and pine branches were spread over the roof beams to keep the weather out. People would come from all around for the service. The preachers were two brothers, Sam and Davis Wolfe. She remembers that she had black

patent leather shoes with straps. Little girls wore cotton dresses with slips back then. Not much different from today.

"Didn't it seem strange to be going to a church like that? With tree branches for a roof?"

"Why, no.... it was just what it was. Our teachers would let us out of school and take us to the Revivals. We haven't had a Revival at Center in a long time....not since Preacher Bill had some."

When Alberta was about six years old, a white frame church building was erected. Alberta remembers that there was a pump organ in the frame church. The Brush Arbor wasn't without music. There was always someone with a strong voice who would lead the singing and everyone else would sing along. I wanted to know if the children ran around during church service. "NO!" she said. "They dasn't run around. We knew to sit still back then." Quite a bit different from today.

While the Depression meant hard-times for many folks, Alberta's Papa worked for the Forest Service. He built the Ranger Station and worked on many other National Forest projects that we still see today.

Social Life, besides Church, was visiting in different families' homes. The children would play games outdoors and the grown-ups would often join them. She mentioned "Skip to M'Lou", a game I played growing up in the '40's. Musicians would sometimes come and spend the evenings making music. There might be a fiddler or a banjo picker or someone with a guitar. There was no dating allowed until Alberta was eighteen or nineteen years old and it wasn't dinner at a restaurant and a movie! She didn't go to the square dances that were held. A "date" was going to Tellico Plains and

watching the people. The streets were crowded with people on a Saturday night in those days. The train ran through Tellico. She remembers that. The young couple would drive to town and she would wait in the car while he went to the Barber Shop for a shave. Then they would sit and watch the world go by. There was always a sister or a cousin in the back seat.

It wasn't easy being the oldest girl in a family. The responsibilities were many. Alberta's Mama and Mamaw were not in good health so most of the cooking, cleaning, laundry and care of the younger ones fell to the oldest daughter. She divided her time between helping her grandmother and her mother and school, when she could get there.. However, she was determined to finish High School. She was twenty years old when she graduated and the only one in her family to do so.

Alberta married Mace McCoy Shaw in 1938. It was the Fourth of July. She remembers that her dress was light blue. It wasn't a fancy wedding.

"We got married on the side of the road."

"What!?"

"Yep. I had been up in the mountains with my family for a picnic and Mace had been playing baseball. We got together in the evening and went looking for a Preacher. Our folks knew what we were going to do. We didn't elope. We were just driving along in the car, somewhere between Brown Hill and Shady Grove and this man was walking down the road. Mace said, 'Right there's a Preacher!' So he married us on the side of the road under a big old oak tree." (It was Buddy Ledford's Grandfather.)

Alberta had me laughing so hard when she was telling the story. She said her sister and cousins couldn't see how they had managed to get away and get married without any of them knowing about it since they had always been so well chaperoned. Bernice came along the next year in July, Glenn followed two years later in June and Kenny, three years after that. Alberta Frye Shaw had her hands full but always had time for church. She has sung in the Choir since the Youth Choir was started back in the '30's when Preacher Franklin was Pastor at Center.

There is a collection of good sized stones around a huge tree in her front yard. They are souvenirs of all the places she and Mace traveled together over the years. Yellowstone National Park was the farthest from home they traveled. She can point to each one and tell you it's story. I asked her what she would like to add to this story and she said, " Tell them, 'If you treat people like you would like to be treated, it seems like you would get along pretty good.' "

Golden Words from a Golden Lady, the oldest member of Center Church and one who is loved by all.