



A Talk With Miss Nell

by Dee Van Asdale

After three boys, Mrs. Shaw finally had her baby girl. On June 8th, 1920, she gave birth to Margaret Nell. The Shaw's lived on Ball Play Road....right around the corner from where Nell and Ed Frye live today. Nell says she was called "Margaret" for her whole childhood. It wasn't until she was in High School that a friend's daughter started calling her "Nell." She says it stuck. She has been "Nell" ever since.

Nell Shaw spent a lot of time in church. When she was a youngster, her family went to the Methodist Church in Tellico Plains on Sunday mornings and to Center Presbyterian Church on Sunday afternoons. She played piano for church services for a while but she says she wasn't very good. (I'm sure she was better than she thinks she was.)

When Nell decided to marry Ed Frye in 1938 they went looking for the Preacher Man. They went to his house and were told that he was down at the barn, milking. So they

went down to the barn to find him. He married them right there in the pasture. He was Rev. McCoy Franklin, Roberta Childress's father. Nell remembers wearing a blue dress. I asked her if she had it saved away somewhere and that's when she told me about the fire.

The Fries were living in their first house. Ed was working on a logging crew and Nell was cooking for the men. She was alone in the house. The wind was blowing hard and a storm was coming. Nell had put some beans on the stove to heat and had fallen asleep. When she woke up from her nap she smelled smoke and found the whole house burning. They think the wind blew down the chimney of the wood stove and stirred up the fire. Nell thinks her wedding dress went up in flames.

After the fire, Ed and his father and brothers built the house they live in today. Nell is still there on Ball Play Road, right around the corner from where she was born. I had noticed a greenhouse attachment on their place so I asked her about it. She said that "foolin' with flowers" was one of her favorite things. Her mother always grew beautiful flowers and Nell thinks she inherited the green thumb gene. Roses are her favorite. The little greenhouse only lasted about a year when one of our rare snowstorms piled so much weight on it that the roof caved in.

One memory was of Ed and Nell driving an Aunt back to her home in Phoenix, Arizona. After they delivered her, they drove all around the area, visiting Yellowstone Park and Old Faithful. They were gone for seventeen days. I asked her about motels in the 1940's but she told me they slept in the back of the pick up truck. That was when they were in their twenties.

Some of Nell's favorite memories are of the Wagon Trains that used to run from Tellico Plains to Robinsville, North Carolina, "back in the days." We remember it from when we first came down here, in '76. The Wagon Train would go through town on Fourth of July Weekend. The town would fill up with people who had come in to see the wagons and horses. They stopped doing it after the Cherahala Skyway was put in. Nell said that she went once with husband, Ed, who was Wagon Master in 1958. It rained non-stop that year. They started back from N.C., got to the State Line and couldn't go any further. The mud was so deep the wagons kept getting stuck and they all had to camp out for DAYS until it dried up and they could continue the trip. Nell just kept saying "days and days." It's only twenty miles from here to N.C. on the Skyway but I should think it would be a major trek with a horse and wagon. She said they had regular clothes with them so they didn't have to spend those days and days wearing long dresses and sunbonnets the way they had started out. Many of the wagon riders wore old-timey costumes.

The Lord didn't send any children Nell's way but she has nieces and nephews who care about her. A nephew sent her a big bouquet of flowers for Mother's Day.

"Without a big family to raise, how did you spend your time?" I asked.

"Why, I worked for the Post Office for Thirty Five Years!"

Before the Post Office, she had worked for Stokely's. There were few jobs other than Stokely's or the Forest Service for young people at that time. She said the Post Office was a great place to work. She was able to see and talk to people all day. After retiring from the Postal Service, Nell has enjoyed her time, working with her flowers, taking care of Ed.

I asked her if she had any advice to give and her answer was "No."

"I don't give advice," she said. "Everybody has to live their own life and work it out for themselves." That is a piece of wisdom we could all keep in mind. (The most fun about this conversation with Nell was that she kept laughing while we talked and kept me laughing, too.)

Margaret Nell Shaw Frye will be 86 soon. She is the second oldest member of Center Presbyterian Church and is always in our prayers.