

GRAVEYARD GRAVEL

1. Graveyard gravel
2. Watermelon, stolen
3. One bobby pin, stolen
4.?

Shelly had made the lists for a scavenger hunt, and this was our team's pick of the draw. We knew we were in trouble when we saw the graveyard gravel. We would have to go all the way across town to Mount Carmel Cemetery for the gravel and then back to town to steal a watermelon and to steal a bobby pin.

I made a quick trip to Shorty Sanders to ask him if I could borrow his jeep to pick up some graveyard gravel. Shorty was really good to me. I was careful to not take advantage of his generosity too often, but some of the times that I used his jeep were "excursions to remember".

OK. A quick trip to the graveyard. Next we headed to Cottons' grocery, hoping that James Larry was working. He was!

"Do you possibly (please, please, I hope he does) have a watermelon that we can have?" We followed him to the cooler at the back of the store, and YES, YES! a cold, cold busted watermelon. We walked past the cash register and out the door, just like thieves. Next was a trip to Tatum's. I'm afraid that someone in Cordova bought a card of bobby pins with one missing bobby pin.

We went on to complete our list and headed back to see if we had beaten the other team back to the finishing point. Unfortunately we had not, but I think it was the best watermelon I have ever eaten.

BACK-IN THEATER

We saw other people enter the drive-in theatre, but someone had the dyslexic idea that a back-in movie would be more fun. We were in Shorty's jeep, headed toward Jasper, and figured, "Who would ever notice a jeep full of girls backing into the movie?" It was worth a try. We made it.

To a spot on the back row, parked the jeep, settled down to watch a movie, when we were approached and asked to leave by way of the exit which we had just entered.

MISSIN' SHELLY

Shelly was my buddy. Shelly was my brother. Shelly was my friend. Shelly was my confidant. Shelly is my inspiration.

By the toll of people at Shelly's funeral, he was some, all, and more to a lot of people.

Other than a short stint in a kindergarten in Cordova, most of my preschool life was spent in the steel mill cities of Gary, Indiana; Bessemer, Alabama; and Chattanooga, Tennessee, but beginning in first grade, Cordova and the Drummond family became home to me.

The Drummond family was my family. Looking back, I realize how much they were family. Too bad they didn't adopt me. They could have at least have claimed me on their income tax.

It wasn't until my teen years that Shelly and I became buddies. Shelly listened to my stupid teen problems and offered a shoulder to cry on in my times of pain. He felt my pain, and he encouraged me. I've heard many people say that he would give you the shirt off his back, but I say that he gave even more than that. He gave his heart with it.

I left Cordova in 1960, and, just because of the call of a personal life and family, the visits to Cordova diminished over the years, and I lost touch with Shelly until the early 2000's. My dad was back in Jasper and I began to visit Cordova and Shelly. The first time I went, I found him at home. We talked a long time. With several other visits and lunches together, we did some catching up, but it was going to take some time to catch up on it all. Every time I would go, he would tell me that I had made his day. If he had only known how much he had made my day. At one visit to city hall, they told me he was at home, and he hadn't been feeling well.

Then it was cancer. Before long, he had to move in with Carolyn. I went to visit him there. I knew his preacher had been checking with Shelly about his assurance of his salvation, but I wanted to tell him that I wanted assurance that he was going to be in heaven to meet me when I get there. He said he was sure he would be.

Then he was gone, and I'm still missin' Shelly.

AW RIP!
(Class Bloopers)

One thing I learned in sewing class was how to make patches, because I cut a hole in almost every item I made in sewing class. In spite of that, I did like that class. I remember choosing to make a horrible sixteen gore skirt (lots of chances for patches). I remember that silly brown "red riding hood" dress and cape. I loved that thing. I still enjoy sewing when I can get a chance and not long ago I drug out my stitches workbook to find a good stitch for some patches I need to do.

Cooking is another matter. I remember very little about that class. Carolyn recently mentioned the prune whip in our cooking workbook. I **must** drag that out and cook that soon.

Ah, yes--typing. Now that was a class. I wasn't sure why I was taking that class. I discovered that it is the only class that it is possible to make a grade below zero. I loved the typing tests, because I always loved a good laugh, and I had plenty of those. For instance there was the time I took a typing test only to look up at the end of the test to find that I had failed to put a piece of paper in the typewriter. Then there was the test where I had not used the space bar between any of the words (and flip, I was doing so great on my speed in that test). I was just glad to get out of that class alive (and with a C).

REINCARNATED FROM SHELLY'S OIL DRUM HOUSEBOAT?

I don't think so. I never had a chance to ride in the houseboat. I never even got to see inside the houseboat. Maybe if I hadn't laughed.....

I'm sorry, Shelly. I love your houseboat. Is it in heaven with you?



LITTLE RICH GIRL

She approached me as I was leaving Shelly's funeral, asked how I had been all these years, and, casually mentioned about how she, living at the bottom of Nation's hill, had always thought that rich people lived on top of the hill. I smothered a laugh, but could not help replying, "You're kidding!"but you know what? She was so right!

The Baptist Hymnal has a song, "Count Your Blessings", that says, "Name them one by one....." Number one blessing was Essie, commonly known as Mrs. Tompkins to everyone. Everybody, and I mean everybody, loved Mrs. Tompkins. If it is possible to live your life and never have an enemy, or, never have anyone who disliked you, you would have to call that person Mrs. Tompkins. Essie was grandmother, "Mama", to me. She was born in 1888, and,if you can..., imagine the world she came into, and the world she left in 1980. She and Alex, grandfather, "Papa", blessing number two, travelled by wagon, in the early 1900's, from Tuscaloosa County to Fayetteville, then Boldo, and finally, Cordova in the 1920's. They lived on Tennessee Avenue, and Essie worked at the Cotton Mill for a few years, but then they moved up to "Nation's Hill" where the rich people lived. They bought two lots of land, containing a white clapboard house, an outhouse, and a smokehouse, which became "the washhouse" by the time I came along. The back lot was "the garden" lot. Papa was a house painter and, for some extra money, he taught shape note (that is fa, sol, la for some of y'all) singing lessons at the house.

My earliest memories there included an icebox refrigerator, baths in a washtub, and treks to the outhouse. Oh, yeah! Two fireplaces heated the whole house. Like, no way! The only warm part of your body was the up-close part facing the fire. The two rooms with fireplaces were combination living room/bedrooms, and two families, mine and my grandparents, lived in the house for many of my earliest years. One saving feature in those days was the feather bed. Mama warmed the sheets before I got into the bed, and the feather mattress did the rest by swallowing me in its warm arms for a cozy night of sleep.

The road in front of the house was dirt and the house had to be dusted, swept and mopped daily (go to *Bottom of the Pothole* page for a poem about [dirt roads](#)). Mama had never known an easy life, but she did have servants. Rich people have to have servants, don't they? A big three legged black iron pot worked for her, alternately making hominy and soap. A tall ceramic churn made butter and pickles for her. A rub board and washtub washed her clothes, and a clothesline dried them for her. Batting cards made the sheets of cotton for her quilts and a ceiling hung frame served her guests at occasional quilting parties. She and Papa always had a garden. Papa plowed the plot that would feed us until next year's crop came in. Mama canned almost everything, other than meat, that we would eat. Corn was taken to the grist mill for our corn meal. Lard was rendered from the animal fat. Chickens happily and unwarily ate our scraps until the "day of their calling".

Sunday was usually one of those days. Going out to eat was unheard of. On Sunday, Mama would be up early preparing for Sunday's dinner. The preacher would be coming to eat with us, and them chickens would be our special guests. Kids had to wait until the grown-ups ate, but we could count on the drumsticks being saved for us. Mama would set the table with our best china and silver-plated silverware, that is, until the day Mama's life changed. I don't know if she bought it, or someone gave it to her, but one day I heard Mama say that she was dragging out the good stuff for us to eat with. Looking to see what she was talking about, I found that she was talking about the stainless steel utensils, also referred to as "the silverware".

Early in the 1950's, Papa added an indoor bathroom, complete with a claw foot bathtub. Gas space heaters had been added to the house, and even the bathroom had one. The only room without a space heater was the guest bedroom. I reckon that said something to anyone wanting to stay too long.

Papa cut down the white mulberry tree and built a garage. That was when I told him that he had gone too far with his building projects. I loved those white mulberries, and I have not seen another white mulberry tree since.

Things were looking up. Mama got an electric refrigerator and a wringer washing machine. In time, a party line telephone was installed, but there was no television even when I left for college in 1960. Papa had died in 1959 and their son Chester had come to live with Mama. They worked the garden, and Mama continued to can the fruit and vegetables. On one of my visits back home, I found that Chester had bought her a freezer. Mama thought she had died and gone to heaven.

In August of 1969, Essie had a stroke and with Chester's help, was able to stay home for a while, but, they eventually realized that the time had come for her to go to the Cordova Nursing Home. People visited her to cheer her up and left, having been cheered by her. We visited her there many times and her thoughts were always of us. She never complained about her situation, but every visit was accompanied by a wish by her that she could be home just so that she could cook something for us. Farewells were always tearful, as I am sure she felt it could be the last time she would see us.

That time approached in 1979. I don't know how to relay to you the clarity and the feelings I had on that November day in 1979, when, during my prayer time, I heard a voice in my spirit telling me that Mama was going to die. It was so real that I wept as if my heart would break. But Mama was fine, or, so I thought. Before long I found that was not true. She was not fine. I was told that she had been in the hospital and they were talking about heart problems.

We went to visit her several times as she was moved around to a couple of hospitals, ending up in the hospital in Jasper. It was found that she had pernicious leukemia. Her condition deteriorated to the point that it was believed that she would die Christmas Eve, but she rallied for a short time.

January 5th It's time to go see her again. Her son, Aster and his wife, Dessie had been with her during the whole time of her hospitalizations. They told me that she had been a coma

and had not recognized anyone for days, but I just KNEW that it was time for me and my family to go to her. She was awakening just as our children, Charlie and Wendy entered the door to her room. We walked over to the bed and.....

(READ the copy of the original page from my prayer journal-forgive sloppy writing- can do better, just impatient writer) An explanation in the prayer journal and the accompanying card is about Chester. Chester vacillated between being faithful in a Christian walk and getting involved with the weekend his weekend drinking buddies.

Nov. 5, '79 When praying other day, felt a voice (not sure God) saying Mama would die. Today Sue came by, had been talking ^{to} someone from hospital or nursing home & asked about mama. She told her she wasn't doing as well as before going to hospital, has had heart trouble. Hope voice wrong. Hope just imagined. Tried to dismiss it. Prayed she would live 5 more years ^{but only if} in good health

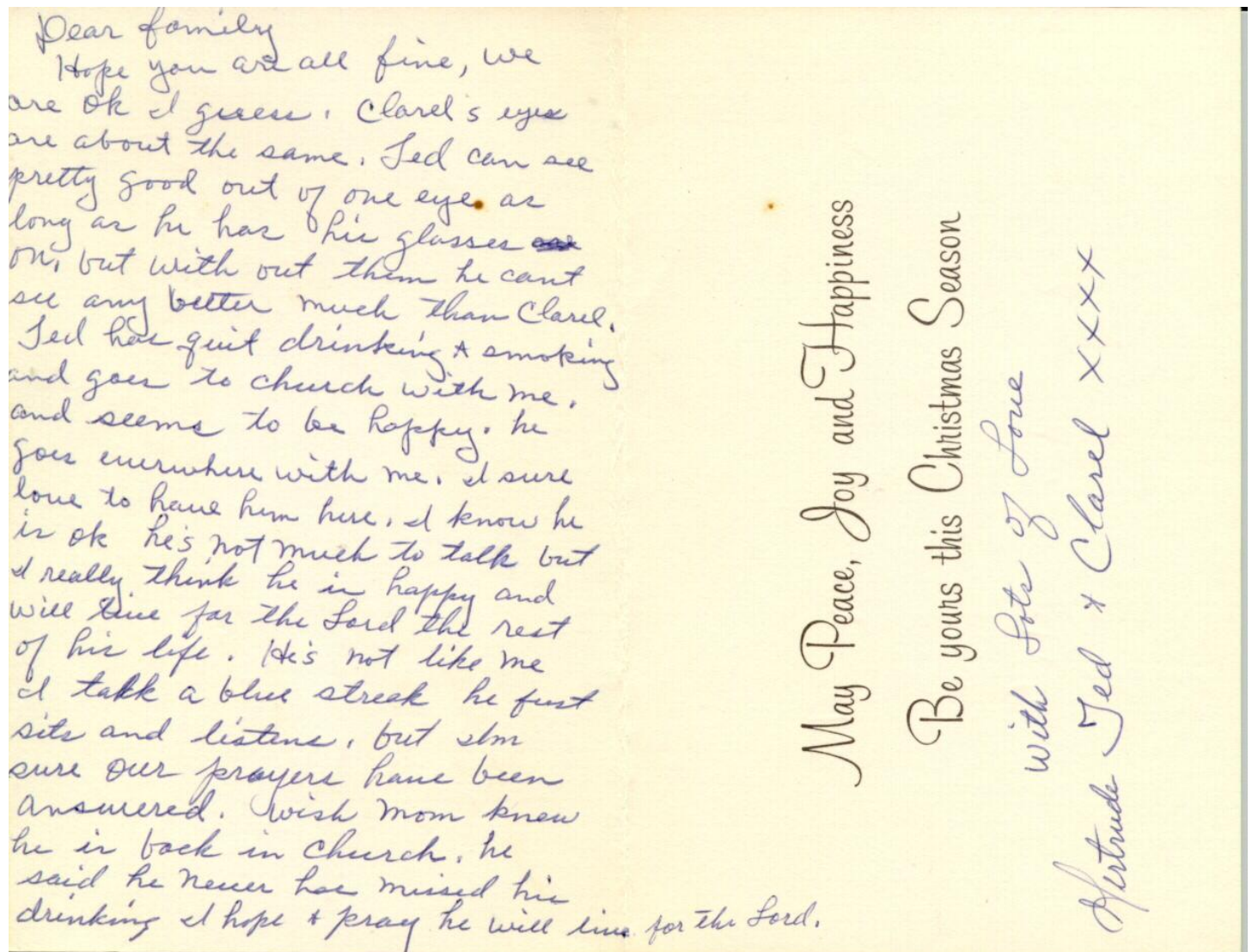
Jan 3 '80 Has been in bad shape

me confidence & joy that she is with
Jesus. Funeral Wed. Jan 9. Believe God let
her "see" her children trusting Him.

about 3 weeks. Thought she would die
Christmas Eve. ~~It~~ was so bad. Help
us know how to pray & what to do.
Jan 5, '80 - Felt all week, we should
go today and take bids to see great-
grandmother. Before we left Chuck prayed
she would have the mind to recognize
us. When we got there, Actor told us
that for the past few days she had
not been recognizing people. Had had
restless days. Wondered if I had been
right in hearing God. But first
time she awoke, kids walked in
door as she was waking, I brought
them in front of her told her Charis
& Wendy were here to see her and that
we had prayed that she would recognize
us. Could tell she did. Told her about
them a little & soon she went back to
sleep. Several times she woke. One time
she was staring at me, Dessie told me
I said, "I knew". Went over and said
'Hi Mama' She said "Hi" & had a sparkle
in her eye, knew she knew me. Another time,
Actor was talking about Chester & that he was going
to end up in some mess as Mama. Her mouth
twitched & tear came in eye. I went over &
told her I had been praying for Chester,
hurray. Jesus sang.

Read Psalm 46 to her. Nurse told us her
kidneys had stopped & just before left Dr. gave her
24 hrs. to live. Died Sat 1:30 Monday. Had gone into
coma sometime after midnight before. Holy Spirit has given

It wasn't long before God did what He led me to tell Mama about Chester. Chester's eyes had become so bad that he was told that he would have to go into a nursing home or go to live with a relative. His sister Gertrude just happened to be a dedicated Christian, and she offered a place for Chester (Ted) to live, on the stipulation that he quit drinking and go to church with her. This is the card she sent me Christmas 1981 after Chester, Ted, had been living with her.



Aster said Mama went back into the coma after we left, and never came out of it again. Mama died on Monday after we had been there on Saturday. In Gertrude's card, she said she wished Mama knew Chester was back in church. I believe God showed that to her on that last Saturday we visited her.

God has blessed me in the years since. If Mama could see where I live now, she would say I am rich. I'm not, but she would think so. Growing up in Cordova, people would have said we were poor. We were not. We were truly rich. I am still rich in my life, my heart, and my soul, all because I grew up in Cordova, on Nation's Hill, where the rich people live.



MOM. (TOMPKINS)
GERTRUDE-TOMPKINS-HASTY

Picture shown above is Aunt Maude Key and Mrs. Essie Thompkins busy at work in their garden. These two ladies planted and cultivated their garden. (2.C.W. photo by Robert Harrison).

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210 Stewart Street



Essie and Beverly abt. 1949

Cotton Pickin' Alex & Essie-back row, 4th & 5th from the left





Alexander Agnew Tompkins
age 16 or 17 yr. 1899



Alexander, Essie, Chester, Gertrude, & Aster Tompkins
Yr. approx 1919



Essie Rice age approx.
18, yr. 1906



Merle, Gertrude, Essie, Alexander, Chester, & Aster
Tompkins in Dayton, Ohio. Yr. approx 1949



50th. wedding anniversary- 1956



Essie Rice Tompkins
age 90, yr. 1978