

This document contains all the narrative which appears on the window created by Gerri Young

FEEDING CHICKENS

My cousins, Donna and Edna Epperley lived up the hill and were built- in playmates for us when we were on the farm. None of us seemed to need shoes during our roaming from place to place. This would lead to calamity for my baby sister, Pat, who left this world unexpectedly in Nov. 2011. Left to right see my cousins Donna, and Edna; my sisters Cheryl, Pat and myself, feeding the chickens by shucking corn from the crib to the right rear of us. The big rock in the barnyard was a favorite play place for us and it is still there today. There were also pigs, cows and lots of cats. Strangely, I could not find a cow photo, but I remember learning how to milk and feeding a calf from a bucket fitted with a nipple. I loved sticking my hand into the calf's mouth and feeling how rough the tongue was.

MY FAMILY

This window tells just a few of the stories of my childhood summers on Happy Hollow Road in Blacksburg. My grandparents, Tom and Essie Epperley lived and worked on this farm for many years. Their daughter, Elizabeth, married Gerald Hedge from Dublin and went on to have three daughters—Cheryl, Geraldine and Patricia. They were sweethearts from school days and enjoyed a long, loving and happy marriage. My dad joined the Navy the minute he could and spent 30 years in uniform, being stationed from coast to coast. Nearly every summer we spent his four weeks of leave dividing our time between the Hedge farm in Dublin and the Epperley farm on Happy Hollow road, our favorite place in the world. Once, when we were teenagers, my parents decided to take us to Canada for the summer instead. After a highly dramatic protest from us, that trip was abandoned in favor of, once again, a month on the farm.

THE HOUSE

The clapboard house on Happy Hollow road was simple and weathered. It was heated pot bellied coal stoves in the two up and two down rooms. The big kitchen enjoyed the warmth of a wood-burning cook stove. My grandma Essie was not happy when that stove was replaced with an electric version and she had to learn how to cook all over again! I think she must have greeted the switch from wringer wash machine to electric washer and dryer with much more joy. The house had an attic, which I never saw because the door in the ceiling gave us kids the creeps. It also had a dirt cellar with its own share of creepy things for us to fear. We would brave the trip down the outside steps to fetch jars of jelly, one-of-a-kind homemade sausage, apple butter from copper pots and millions upon millions of green beans—the food I credited with me ever being able to grow somewhat past miniature size. The front porch was one of my favorite places, even in the rain when I would snuggle beneath a blanket and read *Gone With the Wind*. That summer my dad called me Scarlett. The porch looked out toward Harding Avenue though I never knew that was its name. I considered it the road to the cheese plant and just loved making the milk delivery trip there in the mornings on the back of the blue 1950 pickup truck my granddad owned. Happy Hollow was dirt back then and a stream rolled across it somewhere past the waterfall. When he hit the pavement of Harding he would turn off the ignition and coast all the way to the plant. Even though our parents had given each of us a dime for penny candy from the store next door, granddad would often secretly give us another dime to buy a Dr. Pepper from the water-filled soda cooler. All this was before breakfast!

THE YARD

In front of the porch were two big trees that attracted hundreds of gold finches. We loved to play under the trees. A rickety picket fence ran parallel to the road. Sometimes a slat or two fell to the

ground and lay there unnoticed. One of the fallen slats spelled disaster for my bare-footed baby sister. The town doc made a house call to clean the wound caused by a rusty nail. Years later, an unknown speck of rust left in the ball of her foot led to the amputation below the knee and became the thing that challenged her every step for the rest of her life. She was my dearest friend and the bravest person I ever knew. I will always miss her.

In the lower corner of the yard, to this day, is the spring, which provides water to the house. In our childhood, it was where the “giant” snake was spotted and the place we filled Coke-a-Cola bottles with the ice-cold water for our mud pies. Sometimes we captured salamanders from the shadows of the banks.

MY PARENTS

My parents were devoted to each other. Only once in my life did I hear my father raise his voice to my mother and it happened here on the farm. Long before electronic pay, my dad arranged for his Navy check to be mailed to the farm instead of our home in Rhode Island at that time. Normally, he would immediately take the check from the envelope and put it in his wallet for cashing later. This day, he left the check in the envelope and laid it on the big dining table, just a few steps from gram’s wood burning stove. Some time later, Dad asked where his check went. I watched as my mom’s face turned pale and tears instantly formed as she said, “don’t you have your check? You always take it out of the envelope.” Dad, “Libby, what did you do with it?” “I threw it into the stove,” she tearfully replied. “Libby, how could you?” he yelled. I was smart enough to know this was my cue to leave the room. I when out to the kitchen porch and watched the most expensive smoke in the history of the stove waft slowly into the sky and wondered what we would do for money after that.

GARDENING AND FARMING

My grandmother, Essie Epperley, could grow anything. On a mostly flat spot above the house was the vegetable garden where I could not pick beans because they made me itch like crazy. I joined Grandma in the breaking of the beans on the kitchen porch. All around the yard it seemed she poked a stick into the ground and grew blueberries, grapes, and flowers of all kinds. Sunflowers were one of her favorites. My hardy grandparents farmed the old-fashioned way with horses and very hard work. Nancy and Junior were the only horses I knew there as a child. They were big and gentle and dragged many a plow through the red dirt. Sometimes all three of us would ride on Nancy’s broad back and she would never go above a walk with us. Here my granddad and my Uncle Edgar pause with the valuable horses on a day of plowing.

THE OLD TRUCK BED

Across the road from the house there was an abandoned truck bed we loved to play on. Left to right you see my baby sister Pat pouting because she wasn’t “driving.” Next is my older sister Cheryl who appears happy enough. Then you see me with my hands on the wheel, making like a crazy driver. Not far from this spot was a huge mulberry tree we foraged under to eat the fruit. Across the road from the truck bed was a large cornfield. It was a great place to play in the summer because it was a cool and secret sort of place to hide. One year we couldn’t wait to have fresh corn so we picked the ears with the tiniest kernels and took them home to cook. All the grownups thought it too young to eat but let us cook it. The young corn was so wonderful that our parents sent us back to pick more.

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In memory of those featured here but now gone from our lives:

Thomas McKinley Epperley ~ 1896-1990

Essie Mae Trail Epperley ~ 1901-1990

Elizabeth Mae Epperley Hedge ~ 1921-2008

Gerald Elmer Hedge ~ 1920-1971

Edgar Lewis Epperley ~ 1923-2012

Edna Epperley ~ 1945 - 1995

Patricia Jean Hedge Kennedy ~ 1947-2011 (a brick in her name can be found on the Black House lawn)

Too many of the people in these photos are gone now. They were part of many idyllic summers of my childhood and were still there when I came back as an adult in need of safety and peace in my hectic grown up world. I never expected to end up living here after I retired, but it was like coming full circle for me and it feels right.