

Memories of Growing up on the Banks of the Ohio River 1920s-1930s

Transcribed by Pauli Driver Smith (her daughter) July 2011.

My very first memory was when I was perhaps three or maybe four years old. Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa Ailshire and I lived on the Lang Farm on the banks of the Ohio River in Kentucky, near Concord, Kentucky. I remember Grandpa Ailshire sitting on the front porch and someone asking me to go get Grandpa something from inside the house. I don't remember who it was or what I was supposed to get. (editor's note: I remember Mom telling this story when I was still a child and well into my teens and twenties. Those times she said that what she was sent to get was Grandpa Ailshire's chewing tobacco).

I remember the train tracks that ran behind the big barn and one day our dog was on the other side of the tracks when a train came through and I cried and screamed at him to not come over because he would get killed.

I remember the chickens and ducks mother (Ida May Ailshire Polly) had and how I would run and chase them. I remember well Mother telling me never to go down the bank to the Ohio River because I would fall in and drown and to this day I am afraid of H2O.

I remember the horse and buggy trips to the little town of Concord, Kentucky. Mother would hitch up the horse and we would take eggs and cream to barter for flour and other staples.

I remember crossing the Ohio River in a skiff. The little boat leaked water sometimes and my job was to take a tin cup and dip it out.

Aunt Effie (Effie Ailshire Wilson, Grandma Polly's sister), who I called Aunt Tessie and Uncle Ira (Mom pronounced his name Iree with a long e) lived in Manchester, Ohio, so we would row across the river to the Johnson place where Dad kept his Model A car parked, and then we could drive down to Manchester. Uncle Ira was a barber in town and Mother would take me there for him to cut my hair and he always paid me a nickel for cutting it.

Up the hill from the Kentucky farm lived the Stone family. They had twin girls, Alberta and Roberta. They were a little younger than me, and were born up the hill from our home. Their parents were close friends of my parents. One of the girls was badly burned as an infant and Mother spent a lot of time helping take care of her until she healed. They were born on Dad's birthday so the birthdays were always celebrated together. Everyone got presents. When we moved to Ohio, their family also moved to be near us.

I visited the old Kentucky home in 1993 – all that was left was the old barn and that was falling down. Where the house stood was all overgrown with brush. I was told the house fell down and was bulldozed over the bank into the river.

I remember rowing across the river to go to Sabbath School and the Lucas and Coleman families were close friends. I don't remember much very much about Dad in Kentucky. They rented the farm from the Lang family and he was a hard worker. Spent long hours in the fields. Crops were tobacco, corn, hay. I remember the big watermelon patch that the boats would stop and the melons were shipped to market in Maysville.

I remember going on a boat with Mother and her looking at all the beautiful dishes. I remember the little country store in Concord, where the horse and buggy took us. It had a big potbelly stove and barrels full of crackers, flour, and pickles. It was a great place to go to socialize especially for the farmers.

My trip in 1993 found the store gone but the horse and buggy lane (that Grandma and Grandpas too to town from the farm) was still there. People living close by said it could be traveled for about a mile but then became farmland.

When I was probably eight years old and living on the farm in Adams County, It was Christmas time and a cut cedar tree was brought into the living room. I was excited about decorating it and of course there was no electricity on the farm so I put little candles on the limbs and of course I had to light them, which in turn set the tree on fire. Mother got it out but not before damage had been done. A article was put in the local paper about the incident. I had the clipping at one time but don't know where or what happened to it.

I had my first permanent when I was probably 8-10 years in early 1930s. I was about to transform my straight hair into luscious Shirley Temple curls. It was at the time scary because there was this "thing" in the middle of the floor with long wires hanging down. There were metal sticks and rods and my hair was rolled tightly to my scalp and secured with the sticks. Then each curl was soaked in a solution that made my eyes burn and made me gasp for breath. The operator clamped those long wires to each rod and turned some knobs and I felt heat like I was going to be cooked but she told me the heat would only curl my hair. I had to wait for a few days before I could wash my hair and I had curls that were a little fuzzy. I think it cost one or two dollars. Progress marched on and eventually the "thing" was replaced by cold perms. Now I realize that getting my first curls was an unusual experience. I'm sure that others who experienced it are now few in number.

When I was five years old (about 1931), we moved from Kentucky side of the Ohio River to Ohio side. I don't remember anything about packing up to move or how they got the furniture across, but Dad had bought a 100 acre farm in Adams County, Ohio on Robinson's Hollow Road. I remember seeing the barrels full of packed dishes in our new, old, house on the farm. I don't remember much if anything else.

Mother loved dishes so they were well packed. It was a two story house. Two bedrooms upstairs. Grandma Ailshire lived with us and we shared one bedroom. I remember the feather bed that we slept in and the slop jar that set on the floor and the old iron bedsteads – head and foot. Mother and Dad had the other bedroom. It was so hot upstairs in the summer and so cold in the winter.

Across the lane and up on a little knoll was the one room, Sunshine School. That was the last year school was held there so when it was time for me to start school I was bused to the new Liberty Township School. Dad later bought the property where Sunshine School was and he then owned a second farm. I don't remember when this was purchased but I remember the Purden family who lived in the old school house. We would go there and visit them. Later years when I was married and living in California, Dad's health was bad and we made the decision to move back to the farm in Adams County and the old school house which Dad had purchased was where we moved to live for one year. Of course, it had been remodeled by then and was livable.

Back to the time when I was five years old. After the move to Adams County farm, I was curious and went exploring. I would walk a short distance up a little knoll and sit and look across to the one room school, which was probably half a mile away, and watch the schoolchildren outside playing.

I, of course, thought it would be great to start school. Then one day I ventured a little farther to the neighbor's farms. The Shipley's lived there. I remember Mr. Shipley talking to me and heard Mother calling. Mr. Shipley got me back home and of course, a good spanking was in order. Mother was frantic.

I remember the old Counterfeit House in Sprigg Township. I was small, maybe four or five or six years old. Mother and Dad were good friends of the Johnson's who lived there and we were invited to big dinners there that they held in the big entry hall. I remember the big house with all its secret doors and fireplaces with places to hide money. It was a mysterious and a fun place to explore. I remember the old player organ that they had, and they would let me play it. The old folks died and John R, the son, took over and lived there. I grew up and moved to California but made a trip back when my dad was very ill and hospitalized at West Union. J. R.'s wife worked there and I did too for about three months before Dad died of cardio vascular disease. He stroked and also threw a clot in his right leg which turned into gangrene and would have had to be amputated if he had lived.

When I was 14, I got my driver's license. One day Dad and I went to town for the day and being bored and wanting to practice my driving, I asked Dad if I could drive the car while he took care of some business. He said yes, so off I went, picking up several school friends along the way. At some point, one of my girlfriends asked if she could drive the car. I said sure, and off we went. We didn't get very far before she ran the car into a ditch, and in the process, doing some major damage to the car. Mother was furious, but Dad took it all in stride. He just was an easygoing kind of guy, few things upset him.

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