

# Lila Lee Wilson Campbell

## 1930-2022



*Lila Campbell at her Tyro home*

I knew Lila Campbell for so long I cannot recall when we first met. Probably after I started writing the *Backroads* newspaper and began going to all the activities held in the mountains. She was always at the Montebello and Fleetwood horse rides, cooking something delicious in their kitchens. She was at family reunions and church functions. I knew her face before knowing her name. But when I got to know Lila and her husband Harold more intimately was when Billy and I began attending Cornerstone Baptist Church in Tyro in the 1990s. Lila was an active member of the church, lending a helping hand for anything needed. I realized she had an interesting life and wanted to talk to her and hear all the details of it so I could include her life story in the fourth *Backroads* book, *Appalachian Heart*.

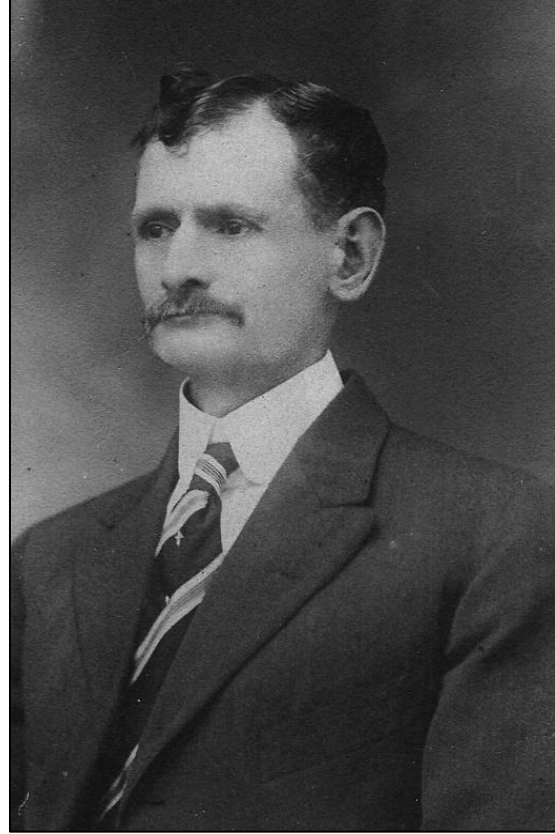
It was a perfect autumn afternoon when I drove to Lila's house to interview her. The temperature was cool, the sky was October blue and

the fall leaves were at their peak of color. Driving down Campbell's Mountain Road, the wind was whipping a never-ending swirl of colorful leaves around the car that left me breathless in its beauty. Knocking on the back door, I was greeted by Lila and her grey cat who rolled over for a belly scratch. Country folk always arrive at the back door; anyone coming to the front door is either "company" or a salesman! For the reader's enjoyment, here is Lila Lee's life story.

Lila was born on January 18, 1930, the only child of parents, Clarence Everett Wilson and Mattie Alice Snead Wilson. Her father was from West Virginia and worked in the coal mines as a young man before moving to Virginia. Her mother was born in Augusta County, Virginia and most of her people were from that area. Clarence and Mattie met at a reunion held at the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind (VSDB) in Staunton where her mother was a former student. Both of Lila's parents were deaf mutes. Her father was handicapped from birth and her mother, who started out speaking and hearing normally, climbed on a chair as a toddler and reached up and drank lye that her mother kept on a shelf. The lye ate through her vocal cords and affected her hearing and it was a miracle she even lived. When she was older, she got a job at the Craddock/Terry Shoe Factory in Lynchburg and worked there for a long time.



*Clarence & Mattie Wilson, Lila's parents*



*Lila's grandfather, William Henry Wilson*

After the reunion at VSDB, the couple began seeing each other and fell in love, marrying when Mattie was in her 30s. Clarence was ten years older than his bride. The Wilsons moved to Richmond where Clarence found employment at the Lane Cedar Factory. Lila was born in Richmond at Sheltering Arms Hospital and said her mother had a hard time delivering her and ended up having a cesarean section which was a much more difficult operation at that time.

These were the years of the Great Depression and the cedar factory eventually closed down. When Lila was three years of age, the family decided to come to Tyro, moving in with her mother's half-sister, Lillie and her husband Bruce Nash and his brother Mixen. The Nash home was large enough to accommodate the six people living there. The house had an upstairs with four bedrooms so everyone had their own room. However, electricity and indoor plumbing were still years away and the families lived in the same way their ancestors did many years before.

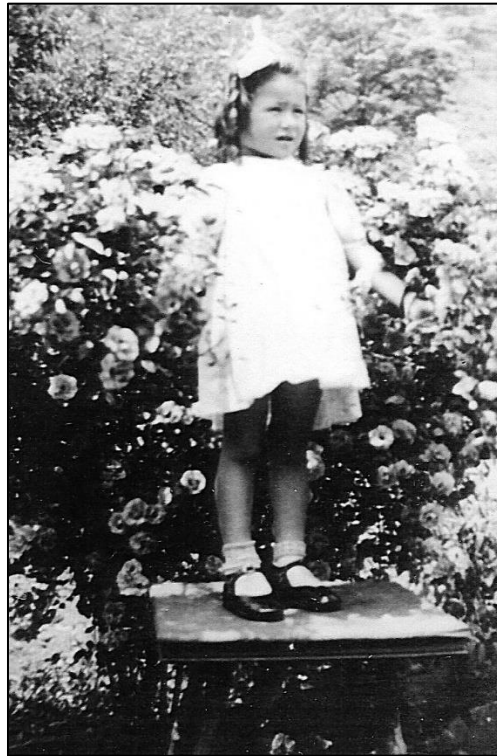
As a child, Lila's parents taught her sign language and this was the principal way they communicated. When they first came to Tyro, the Nashes thought Lila was also a deaf mute because she never spoke. Once she was around speaking people, however, Lila quickly adapted and began talking with her aunt and uncles. Early photos of Lila a young age show her hair worn in long sausage curls that she continued to wear for many years.

At four years, Lila was too young to attend regular classes but a teacher by the name of Miss Sanford would stop by her home and take her to the two-room schoolhouse located next to

Harmony Presbyterian Church so she could sit in with the bigger girls. When she was actually old enough to go to school, she attended Fleetwood in Massies Mill that had grades from one to eleven.



*Baby Lila on her mother's lap*



*Lila as a young child*



*With her uncle, Leonard Snead*



*Lila as a younger teen*



The Nash family owned and operated a large apple orchard and packing shed. Lila said she remembers during the fall harvest how they would hook horse teams up to ground sleds loaded with wooden barrels and drive them to the orchard where the pickers would pack fruit in them. One day when no one was looking, Lila climbed into one of the empty barrels and it began rolling down the hill. People started yelling and chasing after it, fearful that if it made it to the Tye River, Lila would be washed downriver. Luckily, they caught it before she got to the water and that was the last time she climbed into an apple barrel! She said each weekend during apple picking time, the family drove to Lynchburg to sell fruit, butter, and eggs at the farmer's market.

*Lila as a young girl* lives. Bruce Nash died first, followed by his brother, Mixen. Lila's father, her aunt Lillie and finally her mother. But her mother and aunt lived there together for many years after the men passed away.

Lila met her husband, Harold Campbell, when he came to the orchard seeking employment. The Campell family lived about halfway down Campbell's Mountain, in a home that Harold's father built. The house still stands and is occupied today.



*The old Campbell home on Campbell's Mountain Road*

Harold's parents were Clarence Campbell and Bucy Hatter Campbell. Later on, Harold found a job at Craddock/Terry Shoe Factory in Lynchburg, the same company Lila's mother worked. In 1945, he joined the Navy and when he came home from boot camp he and Lila married. They tied the knot on March 8, 1945 and were married by Rev. Longwood at the Methodist parsonage in Lovington. Lila remembers she wore a blue dress with white trim and white shoes. Harold was dashing in his Navy uniform. They came back to the Nash house before Harold left for Bainbridge Naval Station in Miami, Florida where he was stationed. Lila, as a young bride, boarded the train



*Harold's Naval photograph*



*Newlyweds, Harold and Lila Campbell*

accompanied by her aunt Lillie and made the long trip down to Florida to be with her new husband. What a big adventure for a young lady of fifteen! She remembers eating in the train dining car and looking out the windows, marveling at the brand-new chapter of life she was about to enter. In Georgia, she said that little children would line the railroad track and wait for people to toss pennies out to them. Once in Miami, Lila said it was such a busy, different world than the quiet one she left back in Tyro. The couple lived off base and didn't have a lot of money so Harold brought his bride something to eat from the commissary when he came home in the evenings. When Harold was reassigned to another base, Lila came back home to Tyro. A year later the war ended and Harold came home for good and worked on the Nash farm.

A few years later, Harold found work as a taxi driver in Lynchburg, where they moved. Their firstborn child, a daughter they named Linda, was born on August 5, 1947. Shortly thereafter, the Campbells bought the old John Hatter homeplace on Route 56, just up the road from the Nash house. Their son, Tom, was born on June 16, 1950 in that home Lila still occupies. She remembers Leasy Snead Adams, her mother's sister, was the midwife living on Harper's Creek who delivered Tom as well as most of the children in the Tyro community.



*L/R: Bruce & Mixen Nash and Harold Campbell*



*Harold and Lila with children Linda and Tom, 1963  
(photo courtesy Laurie Coffey)*



*The Snead family reunion, 1951*



*Harold and Lila photographed near their house in Tyro  
(photo courtesy Laurie Coffey)*

Linda attended Fleetwood School and finished school at S.V.A. in New Market, going on to college in Maryland. Tom also attended Fleetwood and right out of high school, he went to work for Jennings, a company in northern Virginia that did construction and landscaping. Later he worked for his brother-in-law, Carl Coffey, who had a successful business in that same area. When Tom retired, he moved back to Tyro in a home just down the road from his mother. Lila said his home used to be an old schoolhouse from an earlier time. Her last child, Mark, attended the school at Massies Mill for part of the elementary grades and then attended fourth through the seventh grades at C. F. Richards in Staunton, and graduated from Nelson County High School. He later went to college and graduated from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

Mark was born in the Waynesboro Hospital on May 12, 1966. Three years later, on the night of August 19, 1969, Hurricane Camille ripped through Nelson County, taking many lives and causing untold devastation to the area. Lila said it was raining so hard that night that sometime after midnight she asked Harold to get up and look outside. He went to the door and the rising water was already up to his knees. He told Lila to bundle up Mark and put him in the family Volkswagen and they drove up the back side of the mountain and parked. Lila recalled, "The lightning was continuous and the thunder so loud you had to holler just to be heard inside the car. When daylight came, we could see where the river had come across the road and into the basement of our house. A huge landslide came right beside us in the car and we never knew it until the following morning. Our house was located in a bad place; between Coxes Creek and the Tye River. The abutment from the old Hatter grist mill, which was located on our property and powered by Coxes Creek, was washed away. We could see washing machines and all kinds of the debris floating down the river. What saved our house was the debris that had wedged in the rocks along the creek, diverting the water away from where we lived. It washed out two big culvert pipes on Route 56 and much of the road on Coxes Creek, trapping those who lived up the holler. After talking with my Aunt Lillie, the phone went dead so Harold decided to walk down to see if she and my mother were okay. Trees were down everywhere and he walked across one that had fallen over the creek and hopped to the other side, making his way down to the Nash place where they lived. There was four foot of mud inside the downstairs of the house and all the windows were washed out. My aunt woke up in the middle of the night and knew they could never make it out so they went to the upstairs to wait out the storm. That's where Harold found them, shaken up but still alive. A home across the road belonging to the Zirkle family had washed completely across route 56 and came to rest in Aunt Lillie's field. The Mennonites came after the storm and shoveled out all the mud and pulled out the furniture that survived and put in new windows. They did so much for so many after the storm I can't say enough about how grateful we all were."

By this time, Harold was cutting timber and milling it at his sawmill but the mill was also taken by Camille so he bought a dump truck and began helping with reconstruction work of damaged highway 56. This turned into a hauling business that he eventually retired from. He also drove the handicapped bus for Nelson County school system.

When Tom was in the third grade, Lila, too, began working for Nelson County as a bus driver, a cafeteria worker and the school's janitor. She started in September of 1959 and retired in June of

1995, after 36 years of service. She also worked summers at the Seventh Day Adventist Camp in Montebello when school was not in session.

While the children were growing up, the family attended Evergreen Christian Church in Nash, not far from their home. Later they went to the Adventist Church in Staunton, and finally settled at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Tyro where Rev. Jerry Hopkins was pastor.



*Lila and Harold in later years with their adult children. L/R: Mark, Linda and Tom  
(Photo courtesy Laurie Coffey)*

Lila said her dad could draw most anything and when she was small, he let her doodle on paper, encouraging her artwork. In the late 1980s, Lila began attending art classes taught by Eleanor Fauber in an old schoolhouse near Brownsburg. Later, those same people began to meet in the basement of Mount Paran Baptist Church in Montebello. Eleanor moved to Pennsylvania after her husband Ray passed away but the class members continued to meet each Wednesday morning at Mount Paran. Walking through Lila's home, there is ample evidence of her artwork; beautiful oil paintings depicting landmarks in Tyro; The one-room Tyro School, the Nash home, Harold's old truck overgrown in honeysuckle, and many still life's.

Harold passed away in March of 1997, after 53 years of marriage and Lila said she misses him still. Framed photographs of her lovely family hand on the walls and stand on tables of her home and it is clear she loves each one dearly.

I asked Lila what she thought the biggest change has been in her eighty-two years of living and without hesitation she replied, “Discipline! Everything is moving too fast with technology and both parents working. They are so busy they don’t take the time to discipline their children. Also, people don’t visit and associate with each other like they used to. I remember Aunt Lillie had a quilting room upstairs and people would come and spend all day talking and quilting together. Neighbors would come and sit on the porch to talk. It’s nothing like it used to be. It wasn’t all this fast living and rushing around. Tom and the other children would go out and play up and down the creek bank and we never thought nothing of it. Now I’d be afraid to let them out of my sight.”

As the interview wound down, I asked Lila if I could take her picture and she asked where I wanted her to stand. In the kitchen...by her Home Comfort wood cookstove with fresh biscuits sitting on top. Her sweet smile, a snapped photo; a moment in time capturing not only the essence of a special woman but of an era where fresh biscuits atop a wood cookstove was the norm.

***Afterthought: Lila Lee Wilson Campbell, a woman of great faith, passed into heaven on August 1, 2022 and with her passing, the community of Tyro lost one who will never be replaced.***



***Lila Campbell, center. With husband Harold, top left. Daughter, Linda on right. Bottom left, son Mark. Son Tom, on right. Photo courtesy of Mark Campbell***