

# Precious Memories

Written by Teresa Layne and submitted by Lynn Coffey

*Note: This tribute to Jacob Coffey was written in the October 1986 Backroads newspaper by Jacob's granddaughter, Teresa Humphrey Layne. She wrote it as an adult looking back at her childhood memories of a beloved grandfather. How fortunate Teresa wrote a slice of her family history before her own passing in September of 2021. No doubt, 42 years after this writing, many that were named have passed and many more have been born. It is a reminder of how important it is for each person to pen their own family genealogy/history so that future generations will know something of their ancestors and the life they lived. Special thanks to Joe and Marion Humphrey who provided the photographs of their grandparents.*

---

In my mind he is forever straight and tall, with a quiet dignity that commands respect. Some might say he was a man of few words, but I believe he simply weighed their worth and impact before he said them. You could see the wisdom and twinkle in his eyes and the sense of humor there; a result of having spent his life as an observer while going about the everyday business of living. I'm told he once drove back across the mountain to pay back a man he had mistakenly overcharged ten dollars for a load of wood. He wasn't able to sleep until he had made right with the man. He was my grandfather, Jacob Coffey, and he died September 5, 1982, but I thank the god Lord I had the privilege of knowing and loving this wonderful man.

He was born August 9, 1897 in the mountains of Love, the third son of John and Lucy Ann Demastus Coffey.



*Jacob's parents, John James and Lucy Demastus Coffey*



*Gravestones of Jacob's father, John James Coffey & his mother Lucy Ann Demastus Coffey, buried in the Demastus cemetery in Chicken Holler, close to their original homes in Nelson County.*

His brothers, Delly, Andrew, Clinton, Luther, and sister, Clatis Everitt, have all passed on but sisters Effie Demastus of Love, Ida Brydge and Madge Coffey of Lyndhurst are still living.

The homeplace still stands though time has taken its toll. We had a picnic there when I was young and I remember thinking what a wonderful place to have grown up.



*The Coffey homeplace on Campbell's Mountain after it was restored*



*Jake and Annie in earlier years*

As the grown-ups showed us through the inside, pointing out what this or that was, you could almost hear the laughter of happy times; the voices, long gone, calling to each other in the midst of day-to-day routines. We children thought it was a place made just for us. There was a rope swing hanging from one tree and a low branch on another that was a perfect limb horse. All that long afternoon we played, running up and down the hills, around and around the house, and in the middle of it all sat Granddaddy, watching us with a peaceful smile that seemed to say he was remembering his own days of playing in the same way. He sat on a handmade bench of oak. In later years that same bench and its twin were brought to his home in Fishersville. They were a small piece of home.

I've often wondered what it was like for him growing up. My grandmother, Annie Coffey was raised on neighboring land. They went to school together in the old Ivy Hill School. I like to believe it was inevitable that they married. My Uncle Andrew married Grandma's sister, Ethel Coffey. Granddaddy and Andy used to run moonshine but they always said he never touched a drop

Granddaddy and Granma moved to various places over the years. Times were tough but they always seemed to make ends meet. Granddaddy could do most anything, and probably had to at times to make a living. He cut and sold shingles for a time and being a good hand at carpentry I'm

sure he had jobs at that too. Their last home in Fishersville was at one time a one-room schoolhouse that he made over into a house.

His sawmill was a place I remember a little about. It smelled so good and was a beautiful place Granddaddy knew wood and appreciated the beauty in each tree. We were forbidden to climb the trees in his yard. More than once, he gave me a talking to because I did.



*Ivy Hill School and students, early 1900s*

The family is close, thanks to him and Grandma. They had four children and when Christmas came and all the aunts, uncles and cousins piled into their home it was chaos! Wonderful, joyous chaos! Christmas with them is a most special memory. Granddaddy would get us a real tree, and pine branches that Grandma hung around the door. There were always a bag of oranges and some hard candy and his beloved sugar cakes, because that is what he grew up with at Christmas. Somehow, those special Christmas trees smelled so much sweeter than the ones of today, and the turkey dinners have never tasted quite as good. Perhaps it is the memory that makes it seem so. As his oranges and sugar cakes were Christmas to him, so will having the family together will always be Christmas to me. The family consists of firstborn Thomas Coffey, who married Eugenia Monroe. Their children are Barbara and her husband Tommy Mayo, Barbara's son Tommy, his wife Cindy, their son J. T. Chester and Jacob are next with Jake's wife Karen and their baby boy Jacob. That is a few generations in itself but there's more. Marjorie is the second born. She was married to Robert Breeden and they have one daughter, Evangeline, better known to us as "Polly." This branch of the family tree lives in Florida but visits often. Polly married Jerry Ross and they have four daughters; Tammy married Grant Haines and they are the parents of two girls, Brandy

and Amber. Jennifer, newly married to Bert Dunbar and Kim and Beth. Lorene is the third born, married to Paul Monroe. They are the parents of four sons. Donnie married Ginger Clark and they have a daughter, Christy. Alan is married to Faye Fisher with daughter Angie. Doug married Linda Breeden with children Donna, Jeff and Becky. The youngest of Lorene's is Mark. My mother is the baby of Granddaddy's children (Virginia Mae "Ginny.") She married Johnny Lee Humphrey and they are parents to Marion, James, and me (Teresa). I am married to Jim Layne and have three children; Rob, Amanda and Eric. Quite a family and we had quite a patriarch. I mention them all because we all loved Granddaddy very much and are bound together by that love as much as by blood. He enjoyed his grandchildren and the first "batch" of us, he gave nicknames which he always called us by. Some of them really stuck. Evangeline is truly "Polly" and my brother James is "Joe" I had a special name for Granddaddy. I called him Jakey-boy and that is what my children knew him by.



*A later photo of Jacob Christ Coffey and wife Annie*

My father was in the Air Force and when duty called him overseas, Mama and we kids would stay with my grandparents. This is the part of my childhood I remember best. We had a taste of real old-fashioned living, although at the time we didn't know it! I am proud to say I know the ins and outs of a sink pump, an outhouse, and wood burning stoves. I suppose to some this would seem very inconvenient but we never gave it much thought. The water from the pump was sweet and cold and the heat from the stoves was the kind that warmed your very soul. The "house" as we called Granddaddy's home has recently been torn down. The actual building is gone but the memories are there forever. Summer days of splashing in the creek, weeding tomatoes in the hot sun, the musky smell of digging potatoes and squishing your toes in the cool soil. I helped snap beans for canning and ate my weight in fresh corn on the cob. In this, Granddaddy was my co-conspirator. He knew my fondness for corn and when my dad scolded me for being a glutton Granddaddy would simply put my empty cobs on his plate and slip me another ear of corn. How many children have known the joyous freedom of playing outside in the dark, running through the cool evening breeze, adorning themselves with lightening bug tails, or the joy of riding in the back of a tar-stained bed of a dump truck? That dump truck was very special to Granddaddy, more than a means to make a living, and he cried the day it was sold. I loved that old truck and remember being so proud the first time I was allowed to clean it. That truck took us many places; to school, church, and I loved the smell of the oil and asphalt residue. There was something very comforting in riding beside Granddaddy, his hand resting on the gearshift between us. I know we had to have drove him to distraction some days but he never raised his voice to us. For that matter, I never heard him raise his voice to anyone. One particular boring summer day, my brother and sister and I had nagged our mother hourly to take us to the park so we would have something to do. She was busy and we were cross and it came as a surprise when Granddaddy gathered us up to go for a ride with him. Knowing we had been terrible all day, we were three quiet children. He pulled into the parking lot at the park and stopped the car, never more saying a word. We asked if we could go play and he simply nodded yes. We had our fill of swings and slides and mindful of the time, soon returned to the car where he waited. Still not saying a word, he headed for home, so we thought, only to stop by the ice cream drive-in. He gave us money for cones before we headed home. I don't remember him saying a word the whole outing but I wish I could tell him now how very special that day was and what a precious memory it is to my brother, sister, and me.

Granddaddy was a quiet man but I learned so much from him. I used to walk beside him and he would point to the turned-up leaves with his cane and say, "It's gonna rain." He usually gave me a watermelon on my birthday and it was from him that I learned how a ripe one sounds when it is thumped. All perhaps trivial knowledge, but special because he shared it with me.

In his later years, his body grew tired and he spent many hours sitting on the front porch, my little dog Pepper by his side, watching the day go by. There was a family of "pecker woods" he watched for several summers. By this time my father was out of the service and we had moved to our own home a few miles away. We knew his home was a home to us also and were frequent visitors. We greeted him on the porch and asked, "What do you have to eat?" It was a standing joke with us and when he saw us coming, he would say, "Annie, hide the food!" Then he would

do the opposite and get out the sweets and soft drinks he loved so well. I guess we felt guilty after a while and it became standard to stop and get Granddaddy a soft drink on our way to visit. Maybe it wasn't really guilt, but a quiet thanks for all the trips to the store with him which always ended in some treat before we left. Sometimes our visits were only minutes long but we always bent to kiss his cheek before we left, saying, "See you later Granddaddy." Those were the words I said to him the last time I saw him before he died.

His body rests now in a place seemingly made for him. It is under an oak tree on top of a hill. There is always a cool breeze blowing and the morning sun on your face. You can stand and watch the traffic down below or the farmers in the fields. It is a peaceful place for a peaceful man. I enjoy going to sit awhile with him, looking off the hill or feeling God's presence. Before I go, I tell him, "See you later, Granddaddy" and someday I know I will.

My grandmother, Annie Coffey, died in January of 1986 and now rests beside Granddaddy. I had just finished writing these memories and it is to her I dedicate them, because she always loved him best. Jacob Christ Coffey - born August 9, 1897, died September 2, 1982 at 85 years of age. Annie Coffey Coffey - born September 16, 1901, died January 13, 1986 at 84 years of age. Both are buried in the Calvary United Methodist Church cemetery in Stuarts Draft, VA



*Jake and Annie's gravestone at Calvary Church cemetery*