

The Sainted Woman



This article appeared in the November 1989 Backroads and was written about Emma Frances Fox Miller, a devoted wife and mother, by her two daughters, Kay Campbell of Beech Grove and Joan Hodges of Afton. At that time the girls interviewed their father, Quinton Miller, about their mother's early life. He felt God had given him the inspiration to reveal these facts about his late wife of almost fifty years and he wanted her to be remembered for all the good and kind things she did in her 73 years on earth. The following relates what life was like in Afton, Virginia, in the early 1900s, and how one woman's shining example influenced those she came in contact with. May we all take a lesson.

Sisters: Joan Hodges & Kay Campbell

Part I --The Early Years

By Kay Campbell

Very early on the morning of June 10, 1915, a baby girl was born to Elmer Samuel Fox, Sr. and Nita Brown Fox. She was born at home with the help of a mid-wife. She weighed only two- and one-half pounds and rumor has it that they put her in a shoe box. At that time, a doctor was usually not present at a birth unless there were complications. They named the baby Emma Frances; after her Grandmother Brown and a great aunt. She was the second child of three. The first being a



The Fox family circa, 1917

son, Elmer Samuel Fox, Jr. and three years later another son was born, George Wilber Fox. At the time of her birth the family lived in a small house in Greenfield over in Nelson County which was the property of her father's family.



The house in Greenfield where Frances was born

Frances would help her mother clean and sweep the floors. It was hard for her to sweep the kitchen because it had a dirt floor and impossible to get clean. She was like other children in that she loved to make her mother angry by hiding behind the giant chimney while her mother called and called. Her mother had to stay in the house to take care of the youngest child, Wilbur, and Frances and Junior would take advantage of that.

Her father was a very resourceful person; always thinking and into something. He was a man of many talents. He could auctioneer and because he was a man of small stature, he carried a stool to stand on so he could be seen when he cried a sale. He was a successful orchardist, farmer, and peddler. He was always trying to pull tricks on Frances. One time he gave her the choice of a shiny new penny or an old nickel, thinking she would take the penny. But she knew better... she took the nickel!

France's mother, Nita Bell Brown, was from the town of Waynesboro. She was a tall and very attractive woman. She stood a good four inches taller than her husband. As a young girl she lived and worked in Waynesboro, at White Brothers' Department Store. Junior looked like her and Frances and Wilbur took after their father.

When Frances was three years old the family moved from Greenfield to a new home in Afton which was about four miles away. The new homeplace was a large farm where they raised cattle and had an orchard.



Growing up on a farm is hard but exciting work. Everyone had to pitch in and do their part. There were many things to do. The garden had to be kept free of weeds, the hay cut and put up for the winter, the fruit needed to be harvested and the trees taken care of. The hogs had to be fed and watered. One day when Frances was feeding the hogs she fell over into

the lot. She was only six years of age and very scared. The mother sow had several small piglets and she apparently thought Frances was trying to harm them and went after her. Luckily, Frances got up quickly and climbed over the fence with the old hog right on her heels. It was a close call!

The children had fantastic pets when they were growing up. Frances always loved cats. When they had to go way up on the mountain everyday to get the cows to milk, she would carry her kitten in her apron pocket for company. Some days the cows would travel far up into the mountains looking for food and her little kitten would stay in her pocket for the entire journey. The cows had to be milked both morning and night and Frances did her part. The cows were put in stalls in the barn and they were given grain to eat while they were being milked. Sometimes the cows had calves in the barn that had to be fed, too. The milk was used for drinking, cooking, and medicine. For instance, if you got a scratch or dirt in your eye, they would put some sweet cream in it to help the pain and clear the eye. The milk was put into jars and carried down to the springhouse for storage since there were no refrigerators back then.

When it came to start school, Frances went at an early age so she would be able to go with her older brother, Junior. There were no school buses so the children walked two miles to the nearest schoolhouse. It was a long walk for little legs. The Fox children did not start school at the same time as other children. They always went a little later because they had to stay home in the fall months to help pack apples from their orchard. During the cold winter months, their father would drag a log along the road with a horse to clear the track so they could walk to school. The school was a one-room schoolhouse with one teacher in charge of all grades. The school is now a house where Thelma Kitty lives today. Frances's first teacher was Miss Nita Dawson. Some of the other teachers were Mrs. Mary Bimble, Katie Margaret Witt, and a Miss Grinston.

Frances would always stay after school in the afternoons to walk home with the teachers who boarded with her family. Frances would do the teacher's washing for two dollars per week. She

earned her pay since there were no automatic washers in those days. She also served the teachers their meals up in their rooms and went back to pick up the tray of dishes when they were finished.

Another chore that needed doing before school was to go out and check the traps. She and Wilbur would go out to see what had been caught the night before. You never knew what to



expect; a fox, beaver, mink, or maybe even a skunk! By the time they left for school they had already done a day's work.

Frances and her mother made all the clothes for the family. Ladies wore shirtwaists and skirts. Many hours were spent on beautiful tatting and decorative stitches on the clothing. Back then, feed sacks which came in

pretty prints were used to make clothing. The fabric was much nicer and more durable than any you could buy today. Quilts were also made for the family's use out of scraps of material and pieces of old clothing. One winter, Frances and her mother made nine quilts. They were piled three and four to a bed on extremely cold nights.

Church played a big part of Frances' life. Her father took her to Hebron Baptist Church in his 1916 Dodge. When she was twelve years old, she was baptized in the duck pond at Afton Chapel. She also enjoyed teaching children in the three and four-year-old classes in Sunday School.

When Frances was sixteen years old, electricity came to the Afton area. The installation of poles started on the top of Afton Mountain, slowly working its way down to the Fox home. It took a long time since the telephone poles had to be dug and set by hand.

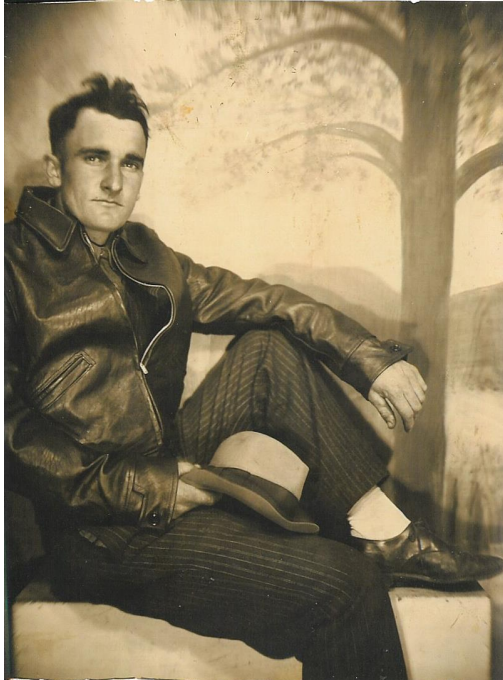
When Frances was twenty-one years old, she left her family and went to live with her ailing grandmother in order to take care of her. Her widowed aunt lived with them and Frances took full charge of raising her aunt's three young sons, which were also her first cousins. She always referred to them as "her boys."

Frances grew up with a young man by the name of Quinton Lacy Miller who lived one ridge over from the Fox farm. Quinton's parents were Lacy and Sarah Fortune Miller. When she was twenty-four years old, in the year of 1939, she and Quinton eloped but never told anyone about it since she wanted to take care of her grandmother for as long as she lived. She remained there for the year that her grandmother did live and later, when the couple had a place of their own, the three boys whom she help raise, came to spend the summers with them. Over the years they remained in touch.





The Miller family; Quinton on far left as a young boy



Quinton Miller, circa 1931

Part II – A Daughter’s Memories

By Joan Hodges

I had the privilege of being raised by a mother who could have taught the whole world to share if only they would have listened. The world doesn’t know, but God and I know how much she will be missed and all the work that will be left undone because she has gone to heaven. Mother never met a stranger, no matter where she was. She always had a friendly smile and pleasant conversation for anyone she came in contact with. She was always ready to help people in whatever way she could.

My Aunt Eva said Mother was such a sweet and kind little girl, willing to help and do for others even when she was very small. Kim Willis, who was a friend of

Mother’s, recalls his first day of school and how scared he was. He said Mother stopped on her way to school, took him by the hand and walked with him all the way there. He said he remembered how good it made him feel to have an older friend along.



My mother's great-grandparents (Jerome Howard Brown and Margaret R. Sellers Brown) had a large farm in Churchville called "The Cliffs." It was a beautiful place. The Browns had a daughter named Nita Bell who married our grandfather, E. S. Fox.

I remember an incident when I was around four years old. It was a cold winter day and my sister was in school and my Dad had gone to the stock market. Mama and I were in the kitchen baking cookies when we heard a knock on the door. When we opened it there stood a young man without a coat or hat. I remember hiding behind Mama's dress and asking who he was. Mama said she didn't know the man but he must be cold so she opened the door wide and asked to come in for some warm cookies. He never said a word but followed us into the kitchen and sat down at the table. Mother fed him and gave him one of



Daddy's old sweaters and a hat. Silently he got up and left. I asked Mama why he didn't say thank you and she said maybe he couldn't talk.

The "Cliffs," Churchville home of Jerome & Margaret Brown



Nita Brown on right at the Cliffs homeplace

something you would like to keep, otherwise it's not good enough to give to someone else."

In the year 1969, Hurricane Camille ripped through our area and left many people homeless. Mother cleaned out her closet and I help her pack her best things into boxes which she gave to the people in need. Opening the door to her wardrobe, I saw that she had given away most everything she owned. When I asked her about it, she replied, "I've got plenty." She said, "When you give something away, make sure it's

Another friend, Eva Mayo, remembers Mother as being like her own mother. She said that several times when she got sick, Mama and Daddy always came to help her. And her cousin, Evelyn Davis, recalls how hard Mama worked in her home and how much she enjoyed it.

My mother, even though she loved visiting with family and friends, never liked to take long



Lacy and Sarah Fortune Miller

trips or stay too long away from home. And for someone who never drove or got a license, she sure got around. With my Dad being a farmer and working near home, we had ample time to pile in the truck and take off. Wherever Dad's business took him, there was always a nearby friend or relative to visit. Or we'd go over to Grandmaw and Granddaddy Miller's house on Sundays after church. Sometimes there would be a many as thirty relatives there visiting.

My homeplace is a beautiful place to be. Mama loved to plant things and that was her joy throughout her life. Just one week before she passed away, we dug up brown-eyed daisies and planted them. Mother NEVER gave up. That was her message to us... never give up! No matter what comes in life, try to be the best person you can through it. She lived like it says in the Bible, trying to be happy all the time.

Part III – “Going Home”

By Joan Hodges

As I walked into her hospital room that last morning, all the lights were on and yet Mama was peacefully sleeping. I knew her spirit was seeking the light of God and that He would soon come and carry her home. I began to cry and she woke up and said, “Oh, don't cry... well, yes, crying helps.” She said for us girls to cry for a little while and then to just let it go. I asked her if she thought she would see baby Sarah, the little girl we had lost to a heart defect and she said she had been missing her for so long and was anxious to be with her again. I asked if she was afraid to die. She said, “Oh, no, I've lived all my life trying to do what I was supposed to and now I know right where I'm going.” I laid my head down on Mama as if I were a little girl again and she softly rubbed my head before falling asleep.

A life so near perfect and good can never be forgotten. It can only serve as an example for others to follow. Anyone who served the good Lord the way mama did can best be remembered by her love and good deeds. So, let us all strive to live and serve the way she did. Let us pass by the temptations of this world and keep our eyes on the Lord until we, too, return unto His care forever.

Photos from the Miller family album



Quinton Miller holding Kay, 1951



Sellers family reunion in the 1940's



Miller family reunion with 13 of the 14 children



E.S. Fox, Nita, Frances, Jr., Quinton