

Lyman Choate's memories; written and submitted by Lyman Choate

The Life of Lyman Choate

By Lyman Choate

I do not know exactly where I was born, but I do not believe I was born in a hospital. Back then, most Choctaw children were born at home. My earliest memory is when we were living between Miller and Jumbo, northwest of Antlers. We were living with my great-uncle and great-aunt Robinson and Mulsie Choate. I think I was about four years old at the time, and I think that was about the time my mother, Bycie, died.

I don't remember my dad, Evridge, very well, but I know that he was there at the time. I don't know why my mother died. I remember my sister Juanita Hardy, my sister Rosemond Choate, and my brother Thomas were there. My mother was buried in a church cemetery near Nashoba, Oklahoma.

I remember my great-uncle being sick – he died and was buried in Antlers. While we lived at Miller, we lived on a farm with a barn, cows, mules, hogs, chickens and cornfields. I didn't know I had another brother and sister until later in years. I found out that they were adopted by different families. Their names were Jack Benjamin and Agnes Wilson. Jack was the oldest, then Agnes, then Juanita, then Rosemond, then me, then Thomas.

I barely remember us walking to a church about a mile away. To get there, we had to cross a creek. If the creek was up, we crossed by going across on a swinging bridge, then went through the woods. I can't remember the name of the church, but I believe it was named after the old lady who lived there. Her last name was Carnes. I don't remember her first name. There was a family living with her. I don't know if they were a son or daughter to Mrs. Carnes. They were the Williams Solmon family. There was William, Lena, Eugene and Irita. They also lived on a farm, and as I grew older, I saw that most people who lived in the country had a farm.

I don't remember exactly when we moved to Antlers, but it was before I started school. My sister Juanita was going to a Catholic school in Antlers and Rosemond was going to Wheelock girls' school. I don't remember, but I was told, that when we lived in Antlers we were next door to my future wife, Ruby Jones. We didn't live too long in Antlers because my great-aunt married a preacher named Allen Cooper. He did not speak English very well, but he could really preach in Choctaw.

I started school while we lived in Antlers and there were a couple of bullies in my class who were racist. They used to call me the "N" name and after school they

would chase me home while throwing rocks at me. I was glad when we moved to Finley - about ten miles from Antlers. We lived in one of the old camp houses at Old Cedar Church, a two-room house that was cold in winter. The walls were covered with cardboard to cover the cracks. We didn't have any electricity or running water. We had a kerosene lantern and coal oil lamps, a wood heater and wood cook store. We had an outhouse for a bathroom.

I had the same problem at the Finley school as I did in Antlers, so I was taken to the Goodland Indian Orphanage school, a few miles southwest of Hugo. It was a boarding school for Indians and a public school for all the white people who lived around that area. The school was run and supported by the Presbyterian Church.

I enjoyed my stay at Goodland. There were several tribes represented and I got to make friends with some of them. Most of my friends were Choctaw.

There were some of us boys who squirrel hunted together during squirrel season. Henry, Ned, Neal Williams, his brother Reggie Williams, Donald Westbrook, and me. I think there was another boy named Alexander Postoak.

We hunted a lot and we used slingshots because guns were not allowed. In order to get the rubber for our slingshots or bean flips, we had to go about three miles east of school, across the highway that goes to Paris. We went to a junkyard and would get an inner tube for the rubber.

Reggie and Donald were younger than the rest of us, so we used them to carry rocks for us for our sling shots. We didn't lose too many squirrels, because if they went into a hole, we would climb the tree and chop a hole with a hatchet and pull the squirrel out with our hands and quickly hit it against the tree and throw it to the ground where the boys would take care of it.

We always had fun because every time we went hunting Don and Reggie would get into a wrestling match. Reggie was always picking on Don. Don would get mad and they would start wrestling. They never got mad enough to fight. We enjoyed watching them wrestle.

After the hunt we would clean the squirrels, cut them up, and deliver them to the kitchen. The cooks would cook them for us and keep a piece for themselves. They also cooked fish for us. The school had a large farm pond where a lot of the kids went swimming and fishing.

While I was at Goodland, there was a bad tornado that hit Antlers and killed a lot of people. Goodland is not far from Antlers, so my great-aunt and her son Jimmy Hampton came to school to see if the storm had come through our school. It had not, and I was all right. That was the first time I remember seeing Jimmy, because he was in the Army.

The school that Juanita was going to was ruined but Juanita was all right. After the tornado destroyed Juanita's school, she was taken to Chilocco where Agnes was going to school. They both graduated from Chilocco.

FAMILY INFORMATION

Before I go any further, I want to mention some of my family members I didn't know about while I was younger. My mom's maiden name was Watson, and she had a brother named Joe and a sister named Burnett. I am not sure if Burnett was a Watson or not. I found out that Mom had been married three times before she married my father, Evridge. She had a son in her first marriage named Jack Baker before he was adopted to the Benjamins. Her second marriage was to a Frazier. She had a daughter by him named Agnes Frazier until she was adopted by the Wilsons. My mom married again to a man named Hardy and had Juanita. I never knew their father's first name and I never met their fathers that I remember. Then my mom married my father, whom I never knew. I think he must have left us after my mom died. He was our father but never our dad. I never knew him or met him until I was married. He never had anything to do with us, he married again and had four or five more kids. I know two of my half-brothers and sisters and we get along very well, but I do not know the others.

My Uncle Joe had two sons and one daughter, Simon, Margret and Jonas. Simon and Margret have passed away and I don't know their children. Jonas was living in Midwest City the last time I heard from him.

My mom's sister Burnett, my aunt, was married to a man named Houston Turner. As far as I know, they never had any children. I was very young when I knew them, so I don't remember them very well. What I do remember is they were very nice people.

I never knew Mom's parents or my father's parents. I really didn't get to know my mom before she died. I was too young when she died, but I am grateful that our Great-Aunt Mulsie took us as her own and raised us. I couldn't ask for a better mother. My Great-Uncle Robinson Choate had a daughter named Alice. I never knew the two men she had her two sons with, or even if she was married to them. Her son's names were Buck Ishcomer and Nelson Wesley. I did get to know them before they went into the service. Buck joined the Navy and Nelson went into the Army. I think I saw them once or twice more as I was growing up, I don't know where Buck lived before he died, and I don't know about his family, but I heard he had a family. I heard Nelson lived in Oregon, but that was all I knew about him until I read in the Biskinik that he had died. Alice later married my Uncle Joe Watson and they were still married when Uncle Joe was killed in a car

accident at Snow, Oklahoma. He is buried at the old church cemetery near Nashoba where my mother is buried.

Robinson, Alice, Allen Cooper and Grandma Cooper are all buried in the same plot at a cemetery in Antlers. Simon, Joe Watson's son, is buried at a church cemetery near Nashoba, where my mother, my Aunt Burnett and Simon's son are buried.

My sister Rosemond had a son before she got married. While she was in the hospital having Jeffery, her boyfriend (I can't remember his name) was on a motorcycle on his way to the hospital and had a wreck and was killed. A few years later, Rosemond went to Chicago to work in the job placement program and left Jeffery with us. He was later adopted by Allen and Mulsie Cooper.

Jimmy Hampton was married to a white woman. Her name was Mareen, and they had two sons, James and David. Mareen and Jimmy are both buried in a cemetery in north Oklahoma City.

Since I was raised by my great-aunt Mulsie, I thought of her as my grandma.

GOODLAND

Now back to Goodland – we all went to church every Sunday, but when I was in Junior High, we had to milk the cows every morning before breakfast and every evening before supper. This was an everyday job that had to be done, rain or shine, even on Sunday.

I enjoyed my time at Goodland because I made some lasting friends. One lives here in Broken Bow and one in Idabel.

While at Goodland, I was on the boxing team and also on the softball team, but I was not very good at either one. We used to play a game we called Shinny. I don't know where or when or who started the game. It was like hockey, and we used clubs shaped like hockey sticks. We used tin cans as a puck and we played the game on the football field.

After I graduated from the eighth grade, I went to Chilocco Indian Agricultural School north of Ponca City – almost on the Kansas state line.

I didn't know that some of my classmates from Goodland, Johnny Morris, T.J. Frazier and Burney Waldon, would also be at Chilocco. The next year, more of my friends from Goodland came to Chilocco. As Freshmen at Chilocco, we had to take agriculture. One week we worked with chickens, the next week we worked at the dairy, the next week we worked with the beef cattle, then the hogs, then the sheep. We also worked with horses. The last was the orchard and vineyard. Then we started over again. We worked a half-day in Agriculture and went to school

the other half. After freshman year, we went to the vocation of our choice. I chose dry cleaning. The reason I took that was so I could keep my clothes pressed.

The summer of my freshman year, my grandparents had moved back to Miller. My grandpa was a pastor, so they moved every year or two to other churches. When I came home to Miller that summer, I got a job working with the ranchers in that area, helping them bale hay and haul it to their barns. It was hard work because the machines in those days were not like the ones today. It was all manual labor. Miller was a good place to live because there were plenty of squirrels to hunt and a creek to fish and swim in. There were ponds where we gigged frogs. Then I had to go back to school.

The next three years went by pretty fast. I enjoyed every bit of it. I had a few girl friends in the four years I was in high school, but none serious. My girlfriend in my senior year was Shirley Tiger. We were in journalism class together. That class put out the school newspaper every week and I was the sports editor. I got to travel with the teams when they traveled off. The journalism class also published the school's Annual book and the class chooses the King and Queen for the Annual. Shirley and I were chosen King and Queen. That was an honor!

The school had what we called "play day". It took place in the Fall and in the Spring. There were all kinds of games and it was a competition between classes. When I graduated we had the record for the most play day wins. My senior year, while playing touch football, I fell and dislocated my left elbow and I was taken to a hospital in Arkansas City, Kansas to have my elbow reset. I wore a cast for a month and it took a year or so to get my arm back straight again. My arm still bothers me to this day.

I lettered in track. In order to join the Lettermen's Club, we had to go through an initiation. We had to borrow a dress from a girl and wear the dress and makeup for a whole week. Also, if a letterman asked for his shoes to be shined, we shined them for him and if they asked us to do push-ups, we had to do it. The last thing we had to do was to go through a gauntlet, where all the lettermen lined up in two lines and they paddled us as we ran between the lines.

After graduation, I went to Tulsa and stayed with my brother Jack and his family for about two weeks. Jack had six kids at that time because they had lost a twin son to one of their daughters. After a couple of weeks with Jack, I went to Oklahoma City and stayed with my sister Agnes and her family – her husband Luther, son Steve and daughter Lisa. I got a job working for a man who lived out of the city. He would pick me up every morning and bring me back every evening.

I helped the man clear his land. He even fed me lunch every day. I worked for him the whole summer, then I went home.

My grandparents were living in Finley again. By then, a parsonage was built at Old Cedar for the pastor. There was still no running water, so we had to use the little house behind the big house, but they did have propane gas in the house. My sister Juanita was still living with our grandparents and taking care of them. She took care of them for the rest of their lives, and she took care of Jeffery until he got married. Jef had one son by his first wife and two daughters by his second wife.

My brother Thomas and I went to Antlers one weekend and there was a county fair. While we were wandering around the fair, we saw Ruby and her sister getting off of the Ferris Wheel and it was love at first sight. I was in love with Ruby before I met her, and it was the following weekend before I met her. I was too shy to go to her house to ask her for a date. I met Precilla and her friend in town that Saturday evening and I asked her to ask her sister for a date for me. She said yes and that is how we started dating.

Ruby was a junior in high school at the time we started dating and we dated until I joined the Navy in January 1958. While I was in the service, we stayed in touch. She joined the Navy after she graduated in May 1958.

When we lived at Finley I was dating Ruby before I joined the Navy. I did not have a car then, so on Saturdays me and Thomas and a friend, Victor, would hitch hike to Antlers which is about ten miles from Finley. We would catch a ride from one of the boys from Finley and after the late movie was over, we would catch a ride back. One night, I stayed too long with Ruby and we missed all the rides that went to Finley and we had to walk all the way home. We got home about daylight and my grandma would not let us go to bed because we had to go to church.

My grandparents moved to Broken Bow in June 1957, but I stayed in Antlers with a friend and his family. His name was Charles Lewis, his mother was Lucy Tom. Charles had three brothers, Raymond and Robert Lewis and James Tom. Lucy was not married at the time. She was a good woman.

YOUTHFUL MEMORIES

I remember when we lived in Finley, there were families who lived around Old Cedar Church. In the summer when the creeks and rivers got shallow, we would all go on a fishing and camping trip. We would seine the shallows and fish the deeper holes and we would cook fish and whatever else that was brought. We had a good time. I also remember there was an old man named Somme Frazier who lived a few miles southwest of Finley. He lived right next to the Big Cedar

River. He made bows and arrows and he shot fish with them at night in a boat, using a carbide light. His grandson Johnny Frazier was a good friend of mine.

When we lived near Muse, we would go into the mountains near Honobia and pick wild blueberries – they were plentiful back then.

I remember when gas was twenty-five cents a gallon and a big pottle of pop cost five cents. A bag of peanuts to put in the bottle of pop cost five cents. Many other things didn't cost much, but we had trouble affording them.

When I was a freshman at Chilocco it was about the time Hank Williams died. I was a big fan of his and I got to feeling sick. I don't think it was because Hank died. I'm not sure what it was, but one of my friends, Johnny Morris, said, "You better get out of that bed! What are you trying to pull - a Hank?" That is when I got my nickname Hank and my school mates who are still alive still call me Hank.

UNITED STATES NAVY

Charles went into the Navy with me. We weren't working so we decided we should join the Army for a couple of years. We went to see the recruiter, but the Army recruiter was off that day. The Navy recruiter was there, so we joined the Navy for four years. It was a good four years. We were sent to San Diego for boot camp. After boot camp I went home for a couple of weeks and saw Ruby, who was living with her aunt and uncle, Lucelle and Louie Underwood, because her family had moved to Oklahoma City. I went back to San Diego for an electrician school and after finishing the school, I went back home for two weeks of vacation before I was sent to Subic Bay, Philippines. Ruby had joined the Navy by then, so I didn't get to see her. I did stop in Oklahoma City and spent the night with her family.

When it was time for me to go, I had to go to Treasure Island, a naval station in California next to Oakland and San Francisco. I boarded a merchant ship that took us to Subic Bay Naval Base in Olongapo, Philippines. My job as an electrician was to work in the battery room and keep the batteries charged and the starters in working condition. The shop I worked at was called the Boat Pool. The Boat Pool crew took care of all the boats that hauled people and material from the ships because they could not get too close to shore – the water was too shallow. They had to anchor out in deep water. We also took care of the Shore Patrol boats.

One of my schoolmates happened to be stationed there. He and I always went on liberty together and a couple of times we went to Manila on leave for a few days. The Philippines was a jungle. There were even Natives there who lived in the jungle. Every once in a while the Navy would let them come on base and put on a show for us. They were very small (maybe four feet), bushy-headed and

wore loin cloth for clothes. They used spears and bows and arrows and they were very good with them. They were called Negritos.

It was very hot there except during the rainy season. It rained and rained almost every day for weeks. When my 18 months were over, we boarded a ship and headed back toward the states. We stopped at Midway Island to pick up sailors going back to the states. We also picked up sailors and Marines at Guam and Hawaii. When we reached Treasure Island I went home with a friend that I had in Subic Bay. He lived in Salinas, California. I stayed with him for about a week. I didn't know Ruby was home on leave until I got to Oklahoma City and went to visit her family. I was surprised to see her and very happy.

She said she had been there about two weeks and she was leaving the next day to go back to Newport, Rhode Island where she worked in the Navy hospital. If I had known that she was going to be home I wouldn't have gone home with my friend.

After my leave was over, I had to go to Bremerton, Washington, an island just a little way from Seattle, to go aboard an aircraft carrier called the Bon Homme Richard, CVA31. It was in dry dock for repairs and painting.

After the ship was finished, we sailed to San Francisco to load up on supplies and ammunition. We went to San Diego, our home port while in the states. The ship went out to sea every Monday morning and came back Friday evening. We had drills all the time we were at sea, just in case there was war. We trained for about two months, then headed for the Far East. We went to Hawaii, Guam, Midway, the Philippines, several ports in Japan, and Hong Kong, China. Our home port was at Yokosuka, Japan. We replaced a squadron of ships that had been cruising the Far East, so they could go back to the states.

While in Japan, we left port every Monday morning and returned on Friday evening. If I didn't have duty that night, I would head into the town of Yokosuka, where the enlisted men's club was. I would order a steak and a cold glass of real milk, because all we had at sea was powdered milk. They would bring out the steak on a platter and it would be sizzling. I did this almost every time we came back to Yokosuka. Some Fridays we went to other ports in Japan.

I forgot to mention that when we were out to sea, they served meals around the clock, except for an hour in-between meals to change the menu. One time while we were at sea, a typhoon came up and we couldn't get away from it. That was the only time we had to eat sandwiches. The sea got pretty rough.

Sometimes I would go up above the flight decks and watch the flight operation at night. The planes were shot off the ship by a catapult and when they came in

for landing, the planes had a metal hook on the back of the plane that could drop down to catch a steel cable that would pop up for them and stop them. It was amazing to see what those pilots could do.

MEMORIES OF NAVY AND FRIENDS

I remember when I joined the Navy and I was in boot camp I met one of my school mates there and one day when on liberty I ran into two of my classmates. When I went to Subic Bay Philippines, another of my school mates was there! While on liberty in Yakashka, Japan, I ran into a friend from Broken Bow that I went to school with at Goodland.

After our time was up in the Far East, we headed for the United States. On the way home, we stopped in Hawaii for a few days of rest and relaxation. Then we headed for San Diego, our home port. About two months after we got to the states it was time for my discharge and I was discharged as a Third-Class Petty Officer, Electricians Mate, EM3. Ruby had already gotten out of the Navy and was working as an aid in a hospital in Oklahoma City.

CIVILIAN LIFE AFTER THE NAVY – HOME AND MARRIAGE

When I got to the city I stopped there to visit Ruby and her family for a couple of days, then I went home to Broken Bow. My grandparents were living in the parsonage at Yasho Church. They had not retired and had not moved because they planned to retire in Broken Bow. The parsonage did not have running water, so they did not have a shower or a commode in the house. We used the little outhouse behind the big house, and to take a bath we had to warm the water that we got out of a well with a bucket on a rope. I got a job working with a surveyor on the road which is now the dam road where the Choctaw Casino is being built. I was making one dollar per hour at that time.

There was a particle board plant about six miles east of Broken Bow and I would go out there every week while I was working on the dam road. When my job ran out on the dam road, Dierks hired me. Ruby and I had been writing to each other and had set a date to get married. We didn't have a phone then. When the time came for us to get married, I had my grandparents get ahold of Joe Wilkens, a man we both knew in Antlers. He was a minister and a pastor for the Choctaw churches around Talihina. I had to drive to Antlers and pick Ruby up because she was coming on a bus. We got married on a Saturday and my grandparents let me use their car and we went on a one-night honeymoon to Paris (Texas, that is!)

My grandparents bought us a 1952 Chevrolet car and when we rented a house in town, they bought us a whole bedroom suite.

I went to work at Craig Plant for \$1.25 an hour. I got the dirtiest job they had at the plant. I had to unload train cars loaded with asphalt. It was hard as coal sometimes and hard to break apart. I had to use a pick and a sledge hammer to break it up, but it was a job - and I didn't plan on staying on that job very long. I planned on getting into the electrical department, but it was about a year before I got into the electrical department.

I think I was making about two dollars per hour when I started as an electrician, then I worked my way to becoming a shift electrician. Shift electricians work with the same crew of people and rotate shifts every week. I was the trouble shooter for all electrical problems that happened on my shift.

Our first baby was born in February of 1963 and in the next eight years we had three more babies. We had lived in three houses because they were sold and we had to move. It was time to get our own house. A friend of mine told me of some land for sale in Hochatown, so I checked on it and there were just four lots left. I didn't like them, but the man who was selling the land had one lot he had promised to someone for doing work for him, but he had not done the work so he sold me that lot. We had a house built, but before we could build the house, we had to get the Choctaw Electric to set poles and run the electricity. We also had to clear the lot and have a well dug. The road to my lot was an old logging road because the road had not been built yet.

In order to get funds to build the house, we had to borrow from Farmers Home because we could not get the Choctaw Nation to help us at that time. After we got our house built and moved in, the Battiest School district said we were in their school district and had to go to Battiest School. I talked to the superintendent at Battiest and the school board and the county superintendent and even wrote a letter to the Congressman of our area. I got no results. Battiest is about twenty-five miles from my house and Broken Bow is about eleven miles, and they would not give us a transfer. I don't know if they got more money for Indian kids, but there were several white children living in our area and they were going to school at Broken Bow. We moved into town and lived with our grandparents and came home on weekends until they quit bothering us, about two months. My wife drove our kids to school every day until they all graduated from school. After about two years in our new home, we had our last child, Russell. We have five children and we had to drive them all to school. That is a long time, from the first child to the last. There was Lymona, Lydia, Lynda, Randall and Russell. After all our children started school, Ruby enrolled in Nursing School near Idabel, so we had our kids catch the bus at school and be taken to our grandparents house until I

got off work or Ruby got out of class. Then we would eat supper with our grandparents and go home so the kids could get their homework done. We did this for a full year until Ruby graduated from Nursing School. She graduated top of her class. I don't know what we would have done without our grandparents and my sister Juanita. She was a very good cook, and we miss them all.

After Ruby graduated from Nursing School, she got a job with the county health. She traveled all over the county checking on seniors and taking their blood pressure. After working for about a year for the county, she was hired by the Indian Health Service in Broken Bow. She worked for them until Choctaw Nation took over the Indian Health Service and she worked for the Nation about 23 years.

I want to mention some of the activities that our kids took part in during their school days. Lymona and Lydia took part in band and track and summer soft ball. Lymona and Lynda took part in basketball. Lynda also took part in chorus and Brownie Scouts. Randy and Russell took part in baseball and track. Russell also took part in football. Lymona was the Owa Chito Princess and she was the Outstanding Girl Athlete of the Year for McCurtain County. They all participated in the American Indian Leaders Youth Council (AILYC).

The first few years we lived in Hochatown there was just one store and a café and what is called the Whippoorwill that sold chocolate candy. Now there are thousands of homes and cabins all over the place. There are all kinds of stores, restaurants, wine and beer makers, saloons, and now the Choctaw Nation is building a casino in Hochatown. We had the most beautiful part of the state, but now our part of the state is changing very fast and I don't know where or when it will end, but I can say we had it all to ourselves for many years and enjoyed every minute of it.

We moved to Hochatown to get out of town, but now I think we are back in town because Hochatown has grown so much with all the cabins and homes and the Choctaw casino that is being built here and all the businesses being built. I believe in the summer time Hochatown is more populated than Broken Bow. Hochatown is now a town because we voted to make it a town with a mayor and a town council. The town is still growing and I don't know when it will stop.

I worked for Dierks Industries for a few years until Weyerhaeuser Timber Company bought them and I worked for Weyerhaeuser until they shut down the plant. All-together, I worked for them for 28 years.

I started working for them at the bottom of the pay scale, but when the plant shut down, I was the highest paid hourly employee, thanks be to God. I went to

work for Tyson as an electrician at the Feed Mill for less money than I could have made elsewhere, but I would have had to travel quite a ways, and I didn't want that. I wanted to stay close to home.

RETIREMENT, SCULPTURES AND TRAVEL

I worked for Tyson for about four years, and we got a new boss on the last year I worked for them and we did not get along very well. He was a horses a--. But I really liked all the men and women that worked there, and before I decided to quit, my friend Steve Blanton gave me a rasp. I think it was for trimming horse hooves, but I used it on wood and that is how I started making sculptures. I didn't know what I was going to do when I retired, but God gave me the talent to do this, so to honor God I give away a lot of my sculptures, and I am still making sculptures. I have one here now, February 8, 2023, that I will be donating to the Ruby Choate Clinic when they remodel it.

About the time I quit Tyson, a friend from working at Craig Plant called and asked if I would work for them, because they were going to tear the plant down and rebuild it in Broken Bow. I accepted the job. I worked for them four years, and retired when I turned 62.

The last year I worked for Pan Pacific, there was an art contest at Beavers Bend that was for the non-professionals in artwork. I entered and I won. I won again the second year and the third year. They stopped the contest after that, but there was a four-states art contest for non-professionals, so I began entering that contest every year until they stopped. I placed a few times and even won Best of Show one year. After that, in order for me to continue to enter the art show, I had to enter as a professional, so I did, but I am not a professional, I am a hobbyist.

Choctaw Nation started having an art show and contest. I did not enter the first year, but did the second year. I have been entering every year since. I have won a few times, but haven't won Best of Show. My time is running out, but I have enjoyed my God-given talent, and all the friends I have made with the Choctaw artists and with the Chief and Assistant Chief, and my good friend Judy Allen, and the museum director Regina Green.

After my wife retired we used to travel a lot, most of the time we would go to Loveland, Colorado to a big sculpture show and visit our niece and her family – Sheilah, Bruce and Jayden. We went to Montana to the Charles Russell Museum in Great Falls. We have been to the Custer battlefield a couple of times, and Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon a few times. We have been to Hot Springs in South Dakota where there is a mammoth museum and on to Custer where the Crazy Horse monument is, and Mount Rushmore and the badlands of South

Dakota. I never got tired of visiting these places and seeing all of God's creation. Nothing can compare to what God has created.

When our children were still very young, we went on a trip to California. We went through Dallas and the first night we stopped in Andrew, Texas and spent the night with Josephine and Obie Taylor, our friends we knew in Antlers. The next day we went into New Mexico, and to White Sand. From there we went into Arizona and to the desert museum near Tucson. From Tucson, we went to Yuma, Arizona and spent the night, then on to San Diego, California to visit a friend I had when we were in the Navy, but he did not live there anymore, his dad told me. So, we traveled on to Anaheim to stay with a friend from Antlers and to go to Disneyland. After that, we headed for Las Vegas to visit Ruby's friend from the Navy, Mary Jane Doecker. We spent a night there, and she took Ruby and I to a live show, an Elvis imposter. After the show we went to Caesar's Palace where I gambled the rest of the night. Ruby and Mary Jane talked all night. From there, we headed for the northern rim of the Grand Canyon and it really is GRAND. We then headed for Oklahoma, stopping to see the Petrified Forest and the Painted Desert, then home. I think everyone enjoyed the trip, but we were all give out.

RUBY'S HEALTH

We had to quit traveling so much because my wife was getting weak from the effects of diabetes and her kidneys were starting to fail. One day, we were going to go on the bus to McAlester for the health fair. I was locking the back door and turning off the lights and when I came out she was on the ground and she didn't feel well. We decided she needed to go to the hospital so I called the kids and told them what we were doing to do. Randy came and drove us to the hospital and when they checked her out, they sent us over to the Fort Smith hospital. She had a tube put in her chest for dialysis because her kidneys had stopped functioning.

After Fort Smith, we started going to Paris, Texas for Ruby's dialysis treatment two or three times a week. We did that for a while, and then we went to Tyler, Texas to have another tube put in, this time in her stomach. With this tube, we could do the dialysis treatment at home. We learned to use the machine and how to hook up the tubes and how to do it all very sanitary. It wasn't that hard.

I forgot to mention that the first time we went to Tyler, Texas to have the tube put in her stomach, we had to be at the hospital very early in the morning so we got there the day before and stayed in a motel room. The next morning, we checked in at the hospital and the nurses got Ruby all ready for the operation. They took her into the operating room, checked her blood pressure and said it was too low to operate. We had to come home and make another appointment.

It is a long trip to Tyler, so we were out the time and money, but we enjoyed seeing some country we had never seen before.

The second time we went to Tyler everything went well and Ruby got the tube put in, but we had to spend a night at the hospital just to make sure everything was alright. Ruby's nurses were very good at what they did and they taught us and we started doing her dialysis at home. Everything she needed was delivered to our house every month. We had to go back to Paris every two weeks for a checkup. Since the tube in her stomach was working so well, we went to Tyler to have the tube in her chest removed.

After about five years of doing dialysis at night, she was told to do dialysis during the day, also. After a few days of that, we got up one morning and were planning to go to lunch at the center. When Ruby tried to get out of bed she couldn't walk, so we called her nurse at Paris and were told to take her to the clinic for a blood test. We found out her electrolytes were too low and her doctor told us to take her to the hospital in Paris. That was a Wednesday and they started giving her what she needed and she was doing good. They had her walking with some help. By Saturday, all her family had come to visit her. That night she went into a coma and never woke up again. The doctors ran all the tests they knew to do, but they could not tell us what her problem was. She was in the hospital for about a month and her body was deteriorating, so I had them take her off life support and she went to be with the Lord. That was the worst loss of my life, because she was my best friend. Ruby is buried in the Hochatown cemetery on the southwest corner.

Nowadays all I do is go fishing, go pick wild onions and go eat fish on Fridays with my son Russell. He's my best friend now. I also go to church at Tohwali United Methodist Church, attend Bible studies, go to Fifth Sunday meetings, go to lunch on Wednesdays, go to all my appointments, go to the grocery store every once in a while, and work on my carvings. I've been retired for twenty-five years this year, and I have enjoyed every minute of it. I have finished a carving that I will be donating to the Ruby Choate Clinic when it is remodeled and enlarged. I am very grateful to Tony Ward and the Council Members for changing the name of the clinic to Ruby Choate Clinic. It is an honor to Ruby, to me and my family. When any of the family members are honored, we are all honored.

MORE MEMORIES

This is not the end of my story but the end of our story. I left out a lot of small stuff but I tried to put all the best parts that I could remember. I will give you a few tidbits that I remember. My memory is not the best in the world these days.

YOUTH

When I was at Chilocco, I played Freshman football and ran track. My Senior year, I was the sports editor for the school paper. Also during my Senior year, my friend Joe Roberts and I hitch-hiked to Oklahoma City for something, but I can't remember what. We didn't get back to school in time for bed check, so we had to move out of our two-bedroom and move into a large room with several beds.

I remember one time when we lived near Muse, Oklahoma (I was about eleven or twelve years old) we had to haul water in a barrel on a wooden sled pulled by a mule. The creek was about a mile from the house. On the way back, the mule spooked and started to run. The barrel fell off the sled and we lost all the water. The mule broke the sled and ran home. We had to repair the sled before we could get water.

When we lived near Muse, I also learned to plow the ground and plant corn. We lived in three different homes while we lived there and we attended two churches.

When we lived at Big Lick Church near Snow, Oklahoma, we had a big garden and a small garden. We also had a big cornfield. One day, I had been plowing the garden and had unhooked the plow from the mule and was taking the mule to the barn to unharness him. As we passed the chicken house, a chicken came flying out of the chicken house and spooked the mule. I had the reins under my arm and over my shoulder and when the mule jumped and ran, he dragged me with wrapped around the tree. I was fine, just a little bruised. They caught the mule about a mile him. The last thing I saw was a tree coming toward me. When I came to, I was down the road.

Another time, my brother Thomas and I were in a wagon pulling a hay rake. We were going to the hayfield that had been cut and we were going to rake the hay. The field was about two miles from the house and when we got to the hayfield something spooked the mules and they began to run. We made about two rounds in the field before we got the mules stopped.

WIFE AND CHILDREN

Ruby told me about a time when I was sleeping (because I worked at night at the time) she and Russell, 'We're going to get the mail.' Russell was three or four years old, and the other kids were in school. We had a pickup at the time and it was a standard shift and Ruby was not very good at shifting the gears. She was going to try anyway, so they got into the pickup, and she started it and stepped on the clutch. The pickup started moving forward toward the house. Russell started rolling the window down. He thought they were going to run into the porch, but they didn't and Ruby asked him what he was doing. He said he was

going to get out, and all during the day every time Ruby thought about it she would laugh and Russell would say, "It wasn't funny."

Ruby was a real good mother and real good cook. She was a real good housekeeper, a real good wife, and a real good nurse. I miss her very much. I feel sorry for the great-grandkids who did not get to know her.

We have a great family and it keeps growing. The great-grands keep coming. As of today, February 2023, there are seventeen great-grandchildren and another due in May.

HUNTING AND FISHING STORIES

When Randy was about twelve, I took him deer hunting. When we got to where we were going, I set him down where he had a good view of the area in front of him. I know there were no deer there. I left him there and made my rounds through the woods and when I came back to just below where I thought Randy was sitting, I whistled to him. When he came down to where I was, he told me he was watching a buck that was laying down in front of him and when I whistled, the buck jumped up and ran into the woods and he didn't get a shot. How did that buck get there and lay down in front of him without him seeing it? Could he have been asleep? I think he was.

I remember when Randy was a senior and worked at Piggly Wiggly grocery store after school as a sacker. He saved his money, and on Father's Day gave me a hunting rifle. I was speechless. It touched me so that I couldn't say anything. I have killed many deer with it and now I am about ready to give it back to him. I think my hunting days are about over. Thanks, Randy.

I remember when Russell killed his first deer. Russell was in the clearcut as I went into a wooded gully where we had jumped deer before. Sure enough, a deer ran out of the patch of woods in front of Russell and I heard a shot. When I got to where he was he had shot the deer right through the head while the deer was running. Was it a great shot or was it an accident?

I remember when my grandson Christopher was old enough to go on his first youth deer hunt. I took him because his family was gone to Oklahoma City. He spent the night with us and early the next morning we ate breakfast and headed to the mountains to a place where I had killed deer before. He was using my rifle. When we got to the place we were going to hunt, we parked and walked to where we would sit and wait for daylight. As it got light enough to see, a deer walked right in front of us. Christopher shot it and it dropped right there. I think that the hunting bug got him. That was his first deer and now he has killed many more.

I remember one squirrel hunting trip we went on when my sons were still very young. We had two dogs at the time whose names were Luke and Duke and they were from the same litter. They were fast and pretty good squirrel dogs. I remember one time when the squirrel didn't run up a tree and the dogs ran down and killed it.

This reminds me of another dog I had raised from a pup which I got from a friend I worked with. The pup was a cross-breed and I called him Ringer. We called him Heinz 57 when he was still a pup. I would take him hunting with me. I wanted to wound the squirrel and knock it out of the tree so the pup would catch it and I finally did knock one out of the tree wounded and the pup jumped on it and the fight was on! The squirrel bit the pup on the nose and would not turn loose. The pup finally shook it loose and killed it, and after that he hated the squirrels and he was the best squirrel dog I ever had. Somebody shot him in the leg one time and I nursed him back to health. I used him one more season and I think he was stolen because I came home from work one day and he was gone.

I have killed so many deer during my hunting days that I can't remember how many. I have enjoyed all of it. I still do some fishing, but not much hunting. Now, my son Russell and my grandson Christopher are the deer hunters. They furnish me with deer meat.

We kept our two sons on the river or on the lake or in the woods hunting and fishing. This kept them off the streets and out of trouble. They turned out to be pretty good men.

There are a lot of stories I could tell about our fishing trips, squirrel hunting trips, our quail hunting, rabbit hunting, deer hunting and our camping trips. I don't remember all the details, but there were many trips and I enjoyed all of them.

A TESTIMONY

I had a car accident when I was a teenager. Something happened to my back, but it did not bother me until I joined the Navy and was at boot camp doing calisthenics. When I bent over and straightened back up I had some pain in my back, but I made it through boot camp. It bothered me until a couple of years ago. I was watching Rev. John Hagee preaching on TV. He asked anybody needed healing to pray with him and say what needed healing. When I mentioned I wanted the pain in my lower back to be removed, and when he said, "You are healed", the pain was gone. It has not bothered me anymore! Good is good!

FAMILY

My family is a Navy family. I was in the Navy, my wife, Ruby, was in the Navy, my daughter Lydia Gaye was in the Navy and she married a Navy man when she was

stationed in Italy. My son Randall was in the Navy and his wife later joined the Navy. My daughter Lymona is married to a Marine, which is part of the Navy department.

I have a big family that I love very much, and I have my church family at Tohwali United Methodist church that I love, and many friends that I love. God has blessed me and continues to bless me and my family.