

**LOOKING  
BACK  
THROUGH  
THE  
LANNING  
TREE**

**By:**

**Francis William Griffin**

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To preserve the privacy of those living today, I am closing off the descendants beyond my generation. I have many of the family lines and will be glad to share if anyone wants them.

## First Generation

Francis William Griffin

Sarah Curd Griffin

**Francis William GRIFFIN**, son of **George William GRIFFIN, Sr.** and **"Inez" Rebecca Inez LANNING**, was born on 30 Sep 1943 in Ellijay, Gilmer County, GA. Another name for Francis was Bill. Francis married **Sarah Charlotte CURD**, daughter of **James Dalton CURD** and **Margaret Katherine TAYLOR**, on 4 Sep 1964 in York, SC.

Sarah was born in Birmingham, AL on March 7, 1945. At a very young age, Sarah was baptized in Birmingham, AL as a Baptist

Francis graduated from Gilmer High School, Ellijay, GA in May 1961.



He entered the U.S. Army at Fort Jackson, S.C. in June of 1961 and served in the Army Special Forces at Fort Bragg, N.C. until 1964.

Francis was employed on 14 Mar 1966 and began a 33 year career with Southern Bell in Atlanta, Georgia as an Installer Repairman. He worked in complex installation and repair, Facility Assignment, Maintenance Center, Computer Administration, and Construction.



In 1971, Sarah grew tired of Atlanta and this young family of three moved from Atlanta to North Carolina, settling in Gastonia in Feb. 1972 at 4414 Farmbrook Drive. Sarah was pregnant with their second son Joe at the time.

Francis and Sarah joined Sandy Plains Baptist Church in the spring of 1972 and it was here that Francis was baptized in the Baptist faith.

After 33 years of service with BellSouth Telecommunications, Francis retired on March 31 of 1999.

From July 4, 1999 to 2002, Francis worked on a contract basis with U.S. West Telephone Company in their 14 western states. He and Sarah had opportunities to go and do things they would never have gotten to do otherwise.

In June of 2002, Francis went with a group from Sandy Plains Baptist Church on a mission trip to Chugiak, Alaska, to help with construction on a church project.

2006 – Sarah is still working for Clippard's Furniture Inc. in Stanley, NC.

**Children from this marriage are:**



**David James GRIFFIN** was born on 16 Dec 1969 in Atlanta, Fulton County, GA. David married **Julianne SMITH**, daughter of **Ronald SMITH** and **Cathy CRISP**.

**Joseph William GRIFFIN** was born on 9 Oct 1971 in Charlotte, NC. Joseph married **Julie Ann CARRUTHERS** on 4 Jul 2005 in Gastonia, Gaston County, NC.

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### MY FAMILY



My family consisted of my mother Inez and for the longest while, a sister Barbara (Bobbie), and a brother Fred (Ted). Ten years behind me came a brother George Jr. just before my mother and father divorced when I was 10.

George was too little to get into most of the trouble described here but mama used him as her eyes to know who did what to whom with which. It was after George snitched on us that he had to run for his life. If George did not know exactly, mama would tell us to line up, she was going to whip all of us and make sure she got the guilty party. Mama did not worry about the DSS folks showing up on her doorstep. She believed in the Biblical method: "Spare the rod, spoil the child!" I can almost feel the sting of those keen switches yet to this day. What made it so bad though, we had to go get them ourselves. There was always a threat that if it was not a good one, she would wear it out on us and then get her own and start over. There was an expression used by country folks in Ellijay – "I'm gonna cut the blood out of you" – and my mama believed in it literally. I carried my share of stripes on the back of my little legs and more than

once, there were welts and blood.

I dare say I have no scars from those whippings today and I don't believe my psyche suffered too much, even if most folks think my elevator don't quite reach the top. In all honesty, I probably did not get all the whippings I deserved. We did not use our raising for an excuse for the things we did though. We owned up to our mistakes and faced the consequences. Most of the time, there was one pat answer for all things, "just cuz." Sorta like the reason grown ups give when children ask why – "Cuz I said so!" There were no thoughts of breaking the law and having mama bail us out. Mama sided with the law!

There were two things my mother tried to instill in us, honesty and integrity. In the 1950's, your word meant something – it was who you were. You were either a person of your word or you were nothing. My grandfather Andrew was a shining example of this. If he told someone he was going to do something, wild horses could not keep him from doing it. A simple handshake was all a man needed to seal a bargain, not a team of lawyers lined up with contracts galore to make sure everything was legal.

When I look back today, I know I would not like to live like I did then but I would not take anything for the values that finally stuck in this thick skull of mine.

### THE OLD HOUSE

If you looked back to the 1950's and growing up in Ellijay, Georgia, this generation would not think it very cool. As the old Barbara Mandrel song goes, "I was country, when country wasn't cool." I am not quite sure what was cool about living in those conditions. An old house that was more of a shack was home to us for many years. The house was made of sawmill planks and three rooms were laid out in a row, commonly called a shotgun house – you could fire a shotgun through the front door and the blast would go right out the back door without hitting anything between. The only insulation was cardboard nailed over the cracks in the walls and in the rafters overhead to keep out the wind. Cheap linoleum rugs on the floor kept the wind from coming in there. The only heat was an old wood heater in the living room and a wood cook stove in the kitchen. Forget the air conditioning. The only breeze was determined by how fast you could fan yourself. There was no

indoor plumbing. When I left home in 1961, our house still did not have running water. A telephone was a luxury we did not have. The few times we called my dad, we had to use the community pay phone on the square in Ellijay.

Even a car was a luxury we could not afford then but now everyone thinks at least two cars per family is a must. I was fifteen years old when we talked my dad into giving us an old car. I had to go with my grandfather, Henry, to Spartanburg, SC to pick it up and drive it back. It was a 1949 Ford and we thought we were in high cotton. It's a good thing gas was twenty nine cents per gallon. I remember times we would pull up to Mr. Davis' gas pump on the Chatsworth Highway and get a half gallon. That's all the money we had or could scrape together at the time.

My dad was in the hot car business before he finally left us about 1953. He and some friends had built an extension to the side of our house that looked like additional rooms from the road but was in fact a workshop area. The front wall of this addition was made to be unpinned and lay down on the ground. Cars could then be pulled inside to be stripped or worked on without anyone seeing them. When dad left, mama did put in a floor and made a bedroom in the front part for her own. The back part remained dirt and was storage for canned goods and other paraphernalia for a long while.



As we three kids grew older, mama put a bed in this part of the house and put me there. I never had to go outside to check the weather, just look through the cracks. I had some mornings after windy snow storms that there would be snow in the room with me. I was okay though. One thing we had plenty of was quilts. There must have been eight or ten on my bed in the winter and once you got settled in, you didn't get cold. In fact, you could barely turn over. I remember those cold nights when we had to hustle to the side rooms away from the heater to get in bed. We used to take old irons (the cast iron type used for ironing clothes) and place them on the heater to get them hot. Grabbing a towel, we would wrap the irons, run to our beds, pull up the cover and put the irons toward the foot of the bed. With no hesitation, we threw ourselves into bed and placed our feet on the irons for warmth until our body heat began to warm the little air space we had burrowed into.

The real kicker came in the morning when someone had to get up and build a fire in the heater and the cook stove to get the day started. By virtue of being the oldest, guess who got that task? It got even worse when I was lazy the night before and failed to get in the kindling or the firewood. Oh! The times I cringed when mama called me in the morning to wake me. Sometimes she would have to threaten to beat me half to death to get me to crawl out of my quilts. I often wondered what would happen if she beat me half to death twice? I remember many mornings running out the back door in my drawer tails to gather an arm load of wood and kindling, running back inside and starting the fires. It was too much of a hassle to put on my clothes – I wanted to jump back in the bed just as soon as the fire started. It took a few minutes for the fire to heat the rooms and I found no joy in standing near the heater shivering.

Have you ever gotten up in the morning and wanted a drink of water and the water in the bucket was frozen? – And it was sitting in the kitchen overnight! I can remember having to take an ice-pick and breaking the ice up to get water to cook with.

I also remember those hot summer days also and the things that went along with them. I started to reach under the water bucket cabinet one morning and luckily, I looked first before I shoved my hand inside. When I pulled the little curtain back, there in front of me was a huge copperhead snake. I think this was the only time I saw a copperhead in the house but there were other times when black snakes were plentiful.

We tried to keep the doors 'latched' at night to keep out critters. There was no worry in those days of someone breaking in – we had nothing to steal, same as everybody else in Gilmer County. The single piece of wood with one nail to allow it to pivot was all the lock we had. Shutting the door did keep the possums and the raccoons out though.

Would you know how to read your power meter if you had to today? When we finally got power in the country, we were part of the REA system. Every month, they sent you a card with the amount of your bill for last month. This card also had a block for the meter reading that was to be taken by the subscriber and mailed back to REA. This reading determined your bill for the next month. There were no little vehicles cruising through the neighborhood stopping to read the meters. Every subscriber was their own reader and there was no reason to lie – sooner or later the readings were going to catch up with you and you had to pay up.

### WASH DAY

Most country folks in the 50's had one day a week set aside for 'wash day.' That's the day we had to carry water from somewhere to fill up the cast iron pot in the back yard. A fire was built around this pot and the water heated for wash water. Before the washing machine, the clothes were plunked into this pot along with homemade soap according to colors and sloshed around with a wooden stick. To get out real dirt, we had a scrub board – a hands-on job. The clothes were rubbed along the rub board until deemed clean and then hand wrung and moved to the 'wrenching' (rinsing) tub.

Did I fail to mention that we also had to carry water to fill these tubs too? We did. We tried to be smart though and set the tubs under the eave of the old tin roof house and catch rain water. We were lucky on those weeks when we had rain and could just carry the tub around the side of the house and it was ready. When it didn't rain, we had to take the number 10 washtub, carry it to the spring at the foot of the hill, fill it with water, and carry it back UP the hill to the house. Not very far if I look at it now but it seemed like a mile when you are ten years old or so. Barbara and Fred had to hold up their end too. Many of our fights broke out over the wash tubs when one accused the other of not carrying his side high enough. Sometimes we even fought through the tub and when we had kicked all the water out, had to turn around and go back to refill and try the hill again.

The old spring we used for many years was about three feet deep and my great grandfather had put concrete blocks around it to form it up. It still had a dirt bottom though and was inhabited by things found in springs and branches. (Salamanders, newts, tadpoles, etc) When leaves and trash gathered up too much, we had to take an old bucket and go clean out the debris. Talk about some cold water, even in the middle of the summer time. George even found a dog in the spring one time and when we got him out and on his way, we had to wait for a few days until all the dog hair got out before we could use the water. Every once in a while some of the local gentry would tumble into the spring while trying to get a drink. We kept an old gourd at the spring for a dipper and anyone walking the road could stop for a cool one. It was mostly after a few snorts of the white stuff in the bottle they made their mistake and leaned over a little too far. The fun part was trying to get right side up in that tight little hole. Even George fell in one time. The ice cold water helped to smarten their faculties so they could think straight. No one ever drowned in the spring.

We had another smaller spring on the other side of the road just below the house where a small branch fed out from under two huge poplar trees. We had dug it out enough to get a bucket into it to get water. This spring acted as our refrigerator before modern technology gave us FRIGIDARE. We had an old ice box but could never afford ice and even if we could, it would have melted before we could get it from town to put in the box. We put our milk and butter in the spring in mason jars or some type of metal container. It worked as well as any refrigerator ever would. Couldn't leave any kind of meat there though – too many critters as hungry as we were.

I remember when we got our first washing machine - An old electric agitator with hand wringers sticking out the top. We still had to carry and heat the water but we laid the scrub board by. It was like saying goodbye to an old friend, we were so familiar with each other. It took care of all the hand wringing also because we could then just stick them in the wringer and turn the handle to get the water out. Way to go modern technology!

There was another wash day too. This one was the body. We had no inside bathroom with bath tub or shower to jump in, turn on the hot water, and just soap and soak for thirty minutes. Those same number ten wash tubs used for washing clothes became a bath tub on Saturday night. Water was heated on the stove or heater and mixed with cold water from the buckets to try to get a suitable temperature before we had to strip and climb in.

Now all this water had to be 'fetched' from the spring so none was wasted. A little more warm water was added as one exited the tub and another entered. The last person to get to bathe may have had more crud on them when they exited the tub than they did when they entered. But at least we were wet and when we toweled off, we felt cleaner. During the week, we used a wash basin and a wash rag to clean the best we could – similar to a sponge bath today.

## CLOTHING

Clothes were a necessity, not a luxury when I was growing up. We were lucky if we had one set of clothing on our backs and another in the closet and one on the line drying. I guess it wasn't quite that bad but it seemed like it. We had school clothes and other old clothes for work clothes. In the summer, it seems we wore one set of old work clothes from wash day to wash day. Most of the time I was barefoot, bareback and in shorts only so there was not too much to get dirty.

## SHOES

We didn't have a lot in the way of style or designer clothing when I was growing up. I got one pair of shoes each year, usually in the fall for school. They were not NIKE or AIR JORDAN either! Bro-Gans we called them – ankle length lace up boots with nothing extra. If the soles began to wear thin before coming completely loose, we stuffed them with paper to hold until summer came and we could kick them off and go barefooted. I can remember the sole coming loose from the top sometimes and flopping while I walked. It took a little more than tape and paper to fix this problem.

Sometimes we actually got a pair of 'tennis shoes' for the summer. These were our 'Sunday go to meeting' shoes and were not for wearing while playing – they had to last. These were usually hi-top Converse brand and we were glad to get them.

## SHIRTS, DRESSES AND UNDERWEAR

In the 50's, flour and hog feed came in twenty five and one hundred pound cotton sacks with printed designs – mostly flowers. Women would take these sacks, wash them and then using the latest patterns, cut them into clothing – shirts, blouses, dresses, skirts and underwear (unisex – panties for the girls and boxers for the boys). It was amazing what an old manual sewing machine and a needle and thimble on the hand of a skilled lady craftswoman could produce – especially if you consider much of it was accomplished by oil lamp or light from a fireplace. When electricity came by, then mama pulled her chair up under the bulb and worked from there (Too many shadows in the corners of the room). You could tell the city kids in school because their shirts and blouses were not floral prints.

The dresses and skirts for the women and girls came just below the knees or longer. There was no thought of 'mini' anything. It amazes me today to see girls and women buy short skirts and then spend all their time trying to pull them down when they try to sit.

## PANTS

There was no such thing as pants for the girls and ladies. This was a time when Virginia Slims had not liberated the women of the day. Dresses or skirts were the accepted attire for girls in school but when they reached the house after school, these came off and into the shorts they went. Most of these had been home made from purchased cloth and made to fit the occupant.

For the boys, blue jeans were about it. I thing there were two brand names back then and neither were designer. Dickie also made overalls of denim and a khaki work pants. Most of the boys tried to stay away from these if at all possible – they weren't cool like they are today.

The cool thing was the blue jeans rolled up about two turns, and the tee shirt sleeves rolled up about the same. We didn't spend our money on britches that were too big and too long and then spend all of our time and effort trying to stay in them. I guess I am just old fashioned because I can't understand this generation today. I had a few hand-me-down britches that I had to hold up with one hand to keep them on a body that

had no hips at that time (ain't things changed). People pay good money now for britches they have to either pin to their shirts or walk along holding up with one hand. You ain't cool either if you ain't walking on about a foot of britchy leg as you shuffle along with your underwear showing.

### APRONS

One of the most versatile pieces of clothing ever made has to be the apron but they were a main staple of the woman's wardrobe in days past. Very few women even wear them today – many have no idea what they are. A few men use them as a status symbol when they get out in the yard to cook on a grill. Let me tell you some of the uses for these old aprons besides just protecting the clothing of those who wore them – both mamas and grandmas:

- A holder for removing hot pans from the oven
- For drying children's tears
- On occasion it was even used for cleaning out dirty ears
- Used for carrying eggs from the chicken coop
- Sometimes used to carry half-hatched eggs to be finished in the warmth of the kitchen by the stove
- When company came those aprons were ideal hiding places for shy kids
- When the weather was cold, women wrapped it around their arms
- Those big old aprons wiped many a perspiring brow, bent over the hot wood stove
- Chips and kindling wood were brought into the kitchen in that apron
- From the garden, it carried all sorts of vegetables. After the peas and beans had been shelled it carried out the hulls
- In the fall the apron was used to bring in apples that had fallen from the trees
- When unexpected company drove up the road, it was surprising how much furniture that old apron could dust in a matter of seconds
- When dinner was ready, Grandma walked out onto the porch, waved her apron, and the men knew it was time to come in from the fields to dinner

It will be a long time before someone invents something that will replace that old-time apron that served so many purposes.

REMEMBER THIS! – Grandma used to set her hot baked apple pies on the window sill to cool. Her granddaughters set theirs on the window sill to thaw!

### COUNTRY ENTERTAINMENT

There were no parks, no arcades, and no places for teens to hang out in Ellijay in the 50's. Forget about staying inside – we did not have Nintendo, Playstation, video games or cell phones; no cable with 999 channels of junk. Why, we didn't even have internet access – dial up or otherwise. What we did have was friends, family and kin, and we went outside to find them. Our imagination and a stick could carry us for hours on end; from cowboys and Indians to war games, the stick was whatever we needed it to be.

We would get out in the morning and play all day as long as we kept an ear out for mama to call. We fell out of trees, we got scrapes and bruises, and sometimes even a broken bone showed up. We did not spend all day looking for some one to blame. They were accidents. Sometimes we even got into fist fights and punched each other and got black eyes or bloody noses. We learned to get over it and ten minutes later, we were best friends again. I never had to worry about someone going to get their gang and waiting on me. We never worried that someone would get a gun or knife to do us harm. I bet every boy in Gilmer County in the 1950's carried pocket knives but never gave a thought to using one on another human being. Mostly they were for whittling and general purposes, just like the little pocket knife I carry today.

There were no paved streets and sidewalks in the country where I grew up. That did not keep us from building a moving vehicle out of anything we could find that would roll. We found an old pair of skates once and managed to nail them to a board, one behind the other. We would sit on this board and ride it down a bank beside our house. Very seldom did we make it to the bottom still on the plank, most of the time we were thrown off and rolled and tumbled the rest of the way.



We thought we were really something if we could find four wheels and something for axles. We built what we called a "truck wagon", basically three boards, one across each axle and one down the middle from one axle to the other. The front board on the axle was made to pivot so that it could be steered by the feet or maybe an old piece of rope tied to each side. Down the hills we would fly because there was no such thing as brakes. If it got away from you, you had two options – bail out and off and take your chances with knocking the bark off your body, or use your feet. The feet were the last option since most of the time there were no shoes on them. If you had a good ride or a bad one, you got up and drug the wagon back to the top to do it all over again or for the next person's turn.

If we could not find something to roll, we made do with other items. My dad had parked some old junk cars in the little "holler" behind our house before he left and we used the hoods for sleds. Going up the side of the holler was a hill covered with pines. These pines had provided an excellent layer of needles up a little trail we used. Metal or cardboard on pine needles means slick. We would pull the old hood up this trail to the top and then jump in and hold on. There was no such thing as steering. By body movement we tried to make it go where we wanted but most of the time, we were just along for the ride if we could hold on.

I grew up in the period before all the electronic gadgets began to explode on the scene. I remember getting an old second hand TV when I was ten years old (1953) from my dad who was living in Kentucky at the time. We were as proud as peacocks and on Friday and Saturday nights, the neighbors gathered at our house to watch "The Lone Ranger", "Amos and Andy", "Cisco Kid", and "The Damon Runyun Theater." There were others but I have long forgotten their names. I do remember that the shows taught morals and values though, something that is unheard of in the world of TV programming of today. "Father Knows Best" would not last a week in the ratings now.

Sometimes we would dig up a bag or can of popcorn and a big pot and pop up a huge pot of popcorn to share around the room while watching TV. (There was no such thing as a microwave) It worked well unless you burned it and then everyone was mad at you and the little living room smelled awful.

Without cable, we had to have an outside antenna to receive the stations from Atlanta or Chattanooga. We had our antenna stuck up on an old metal pipe beside the living room window. There was a clamp on the pipe but not tight enough to completely keep the antenna from turning. We had to reach out the window (rain or shine) to turn the antenna to change from Atlanta to Chattanooga. A gust of wind also meant a rush to the window to turn the antenna back to where it was originally so we could keep watching.

We had one movie theater in Ellijay. When I first started going to the Saturday matinees, the cost was ten cents. For another ten cents, you could get a coke and a small bag of popcorn. I almost cried when the cost of the movie went up to fourteen cents. I just knew I would never get to go again because it was all I could do to scrape together the dime. I just knew I would loose my place on the continuing cowboy story that ended with a hero or heroine about to loose their life every week.

I guess the biggest event of my young movie going life then though was the introduction of ELVIS. My cousin Rose and I just had to go. She did not go to many movies but there was no way she was going to miss this one. I do not ever remember another movie packing the theater the way "Love Me Tender" did; never heard so much squealing either. We survived though and were there for the next Tarzan or whatever movie.

Cold drink machines were a big thing in the 50's. Since there were no 7-11 stores with the big open coolers, each little store had its own drink machine. Coca Cola in the little bottles, RC, Nehi grape and orange were some of the brands available. I remember when the machine companies tried to increase prices from a nickel to six cents. That penny cost more than they could ever imagine. They almost never worked right and everyone griped because now they had to have additional change to get a 'sodie dope'. Remember getting those cold drinks and a pack of peanuts and pouring the peanuts inside the drink? What a treat.

### **SOCIALIZING**

There is something to be said for growing up in the mountains of Georgia during this period though. We were

isolated from the big cities and life was at a much slower pace it seems. I know there was plenty of hard work going on in Gilmer County because there were no big industrial companies with high paying jobs; Mostly just farmers and merchants, trying to make a living and raising a family. Farming and apple orchards were the main jobs and both required lots of hard work. Sawmills and cutting pulp wood were pretty common also. There was one mill in town, simply called "The Thread Mill", which employed a few of the people. Many would work at the mill for a while and then drift on to something else, maybe returning to the mill when they were desperate for money again.

I remember times in the evening when we were through with the plowing or harvesting for the day that we would walk over to my Uncle Clay and Aunt Allene's house about a half mile away. Clay and Allene Griffin had eight children. Juanita, Buddy, Mildred, and James were older than us were soon gone to make their own way. Bill, Rose, Pete, and Helen were in our group and even now I consider them family. The grown ups would sit on the front porch and talk away the hours while the children would find some activities to be playing. Sometimes we found or pieced together an old ball and a piece of board cut down to fit the hands and played ball (rolla-bat) until we could no longer see the ball. We would then switch to hide-and-seek. We had no playground area; we used the corn field and the dirt road which ran in front of it.

### **RESPECT FOR ELDERS**

Sometimes, our other aunts and uncles would visit from the Atlanta area and the hills would really ring with all the laughter of the additional children frolicking on the hillsides. Aunt Nanny, Aunt Lois, and Uncle Buck – we were taught to call them just that as a show of respect. Anyone older than us was "Sir" and "Mam" or we would get boxed upside the ears. If they were still here today, I would still be calling them Uncle and Aunt. I refer to my mother's sister as Aunt Mary even now and I am in my own grandfather years.

If I acted up or got into trouble around my uncles and aunts, I didn't have to worry about getting a whipping when I got home, I got it right there on the spot. If I squealed that I was 'gonna tell on them', I heard them say calmly, "Go ahead". I never did though because I knew mama would 'tear me up' again.

Back-talking or sassing a teacher was a definite no – no! Besides getting tore up by the teacher or principle right then and there with a paddle, the word always got back to the parent and again I would get another whipping.

I received a paddling in every grade through the ninth, mostly for fighting or other mischief on the school grounds – never for disrespect. I guess it all must have worked back then. I don't remember anyone getting warped in the head by getting whacked across the butt.

### **MY FIRST JOB**

When I was twelve, I started working with my grandfather, Henry, in the tree business. I would work with him on Saturdays and during the summer months when the farm would allow me to be absent. He had a new lady friend at that time and her son and I were his two grunts. Jim Queen was about my age, maybe a month or two less, but we were his crew.

We would get up about five o'clock in the morning and leave Ellijay on our way to Atlanta where he would either have a job waiting or we would cruise the neighborhoods looking for obvious tree work (dead trees, rotted limbs, trees needing trimmed or topped, etc). It is in this old truck that Jim and I learned to drive. Henry would slide over against the driver's door and one of us would scoot over next to him – almost under the wheel. Before a mile was gone, Henry would be sound asleep against the window and Jim and I would do our thing.

Jim and I would do all the climbing and cutting up in the tree, tying off limbs to be let down on a rope, or topping the tree a section at a time and letting it fall. The one that was not in the tree had to cover the ground work – cutting and loading the limbs or tree on to the old truck for removal. We would be bone tired at the end of the day and wanting to sleep ourselves but once again Henry would move over next to the door and one of us would have to drive home, most of the time way past dark.

## SCHOOL



Early school picture of  
Francis William Griffin

I can vaguely remember my first couple of teachers in grammar school but I have no idea how I got to school. I know for sure that mama didn't take me. There were no waiting lines to drop children off or to pick them up as there are today. My only recollection of transportation to and from school was the 'SCHOOL BUS'. I see the bus pass my house now and if there is a half dozen children, I would be surprised. I remember our old bus being standing room only. We were about two stops from the point where pickups stopped and children had to walk to school. Many times, I had to stand the couple of miles into Ellijay.

When I left grammar school and on to high school, the bus made a stop at the elementary school in Ellijay and then continued on to the high school about three miles below town. Since I was already on the bus, I usually got a seat for this leg of the journey. Now it was the city kids turn to have to stand.

All our bus drivers were male adults. If we misbehaved or acted up, he would stop the bus in the middle of the road and bust our britches right then and there. If I told on him to mama, I got another whipping because I should not have been doing something to make him whip me. And don't even think of getting thrown off the bus. "Hell has no fury like a mother scorned" – uhh – it don't quite go like that but you get my drift.

We lived about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile off the paved road and had to walk there to catch the bus in the morning and walk from there in the afternoons. Rain or shine, sunshine or snow, we gathered up on the side of the highway to wait. There was about a half dozen of us kids that had to walk and meet here. I can remember gathering corn stalks from the lady's garden near the road and building a fire sometimes to try to keep us warm. If it was raining or real nasty, Mr. Heffner would let us stand in his garage which was located just back from the main road. The driver knew if there were no kids on the roadside, stop anyway; we would all skedaddle out of the garage and make a bee-line for the bus.

Before the start of my fourth grade year, one wing of the elementary school burned. All the fourth and fifth grade students had to be bussed to other locations. My cousin Bill, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and my cousin Rose, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and I had to transfer buses in Ellijay and were bussed to East Ellijay – amongst the heathens! Or so we thought. Bill was ushered into an old one room schoolhouse that was re-commissioned just for this occasion. Rose and I were herded off to the East Ellijay Elementary School where a classroom had been made available for us. We were outsiders, no matter if we were from town or country, from Ellijay and had to fight and scrap for everything we were worth that year. It was bad enough to have a name like Francis, now I had two whippings to give or to take. When Johnny Cash came out with the song, "A Boy Named Sue" a few years ago, I knew exactly what the guy was going through.

We managed to survive that year though and moved on through the elementary school system (we had no middle school) and into high school. Our building seemed to be monstrous when I was going there and there never seemed to be enough time to get from one end to the other when classes changed. I returned to the school for my thirtieth reunion and was amazed at just how small it was now; must have shrunk somehow. There was only one high school for the entire county so now we were all thrown together in one common pot.

We still found ways to keep things stirred up though, as I am sure kids do today. Ours was a more down to earth type mischief I think because we weren't into hurting people or property – just mischief. I remember one occasion when someone brought a snake to school and during one of the class changes, shook it loose in the hall. Pandemonium galore! It was basically harmless since its mouth had been sewn shut and it could not bite even if it tried. Good for a panic movement though.

We had a small room in the main hall that sold nick knacks – mostly ice cream and crackers. We used to gather around this area and everyone threw their wrappers into the trash can next to the room. One day after

we had just settled back into our classes, the bell starting ringing and a loud voice was heard in the hall shouting "get out of the way". When we looked to see what was happening, the principal was pushing the can down the hall with his foot and the contents of the can were on fire. Someone had torched a wrapper before heading off to their class.

One of our teachers, a nice enough lady, bought herself one of the new Volkswagen beetles. She was as proud as a peacock. We decided to have some fun with it. During break and lunch one day, we picked the rear end of the car up and slid watermelon rinds under the back tires. We then hid out to watch when she got in and tried to move. The tires would just spin in those rinds and was going nowhere.

Needless to say, no one ever 'fessed' up to any of the above actions. Given time, I could probably come up with more shenanigans but I think I will leave it here.

My cousin Rose and I did eventually graduate from Gilmer High School in 1961. We were the first in either of our families that we were aware of to finish high school. Rose married Melvin just before graduation I think; or just after, I can not remember exactly. I had another cousin, Frances Hardin, a teacher in Canton, who was trying her best to get me into college around the north Georgia area. She had even secured a couple of partial scholarships for me but it was not to be. I knew I could never come up with the rest of the money needed and by then, I was just ready to split. Split I did too. On the night I graduated, I walked up one side of the stage, got my diploma, walked down the other side, picked up my bag of belongings, and left Ellijay with the intention of never returning. It is funny now, thinking of how much I would love to be back in the mountains somewhere with a good rocking chair and a good book, just whiling away the time. The old expression, "You can take the boy out of the mountains, but you can't take the mountain out of the boy", has more meaning than ever for me now. I tell everyone I was once a hillbilly, but then I got educated and now I am a hillwilliam.

### **MOVING AWAY**

I left Ellijay in May, 1961 after graduating from High School. I literally ran from the dirt farm life there to South Carolina where I planned to be an auto mechanic with my dad. My presence there created problems in the family so I moved on in July 1961 to the U.S. Army. After the Army came a thirty three year career with Southern Bell, later to become BellSouth which ended in retirement on March 31, 1999 in Charlotte, N.C.

A lot of miles have been traveled down some hard roads and many gallons of water have run under the bridges since I was a barefoot boy with cheeks of tan in Gilmer County. As hard as it was, I would not take anything for the memories. I have wanted to do a booklet or something about my early childhood and growing up poor in Ellijay to leave for my sons and my grandchildren. I also want to pass on some knowledge of those who came before me and whose blood runs through my veins. Most of us just think of our parents as being our makers but there are many, many generations before them. It is almost impossible to chase our ancestors far back in time if they were not people who found their way into the society pages or property records. I am sure my grandfathers and grandmothers of the 1600's, 1700's and 1800's had more on their mind than keeping records. Genealogists today consider a Family Bible to be a gold mine and a treasure to guard at all costs. I am writing this now and using all the resources and information available to preserve a record for any of my descendants that might find the same challenge and desire I had to know those that keep me

**"LOOKING BEHIND ME".**

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The following paragraph is taken from the book; 'The Lannings Of Turniptown Road' and I find it appropriate here also.

**If there is a purpose for this book, it is so that a younger generation will know a little more about their mountain ancestors and a lifestyle that passed away along with the older folks. The past contributes to the future and there is an importance in preserving the old ways. An old saying asks the question: "How do you know where you're going, if you don't know where you've been?"**

**The present generations of young people no longer sit with the family around the fireside at night listening to the old songs and folktales common with their ancestors. Neither, do they know, or hear, about the old ways and customs of a few years ago. Chances are, that you who happen to be reading these pages, will bother to find someone to sing the lyrics of the old songs written herein. Failing to do so the old songs will be lost and die and with them, a part of our inheritance handed down over the years by way of Turniptown Road.**

I feel that when my generation finally passes away, a way of life will also be forgotten. I guess that is the way it is though from generation to generation. I am sure the pioneers of our early days thought the same. I feel the technological age that we are in now will continue to expand and truly there will be no memories of single family farms, plowing mules, outhouses, wood stoves, one room schoolhouses, failing a grade in school and getting held back, "cat-head" biscuits or fishing with a cane pole cut fresh on the river bank and worms you dug behind the barn by yourself.

Despite all of this, I feel my generation and the one before me, has experienced changes that will not be duplicated in scope for generations to come. We have come from zero technology to an electronic world. When man can walk on the moon and explore distant planets at will, what is to hold him back? We are on the brink of cloning a human being; what is next? The past seventy five years has seen inventions and innovators unparalleled before in human history.

I leave this thought with you:

**Dan 12:4 --"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."**

For almost 5900 years, man walked everywhere he wanted to go or rode on an animal. He cooked by fire, lit the night with oil or fire, and wrote on whatever he could find to carry our history forward. Look at where we are now in light of the above verse and we can only ask, "**HOW LONG?**"

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