

Jerry McKelvy's  
**SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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**HAULING BILLETS**

By Jerry McKelvy

The area where I grew up is mostly covered with timber--both pine and hardwood. In earlier times, much of this land was cultivated. Farmers raised cotton, corn, sorghum, watermelons, and many other crops. During the years after the Great Depression, many of the farm fields were planted with pine trees or allowed to seed in naturally. Many of the small farms were purchased by timber companies or by the federal government and the families moved into towns.

My family held on to their land. My grandparents remained on their farm as long as they could until old age and failing health forced them to slow down and finally move in with their children.

There were many small sawmills scattered about in the old days. Many of the young men grew up working in some phase of the timber industry. They may have worked at the mill or in the woods harvesting the timber. I've heard the stories about working in the woods for fifty cents per day, cutting trees with a cross-cut saw, and making railroad ties with a broad-axe. Hard physical labor was the norm in those days.

The farm my father purchased in 1947 was a mixture of open land and timber land. The timber was always something to fall back on during the rough times when extra money was needed. My father always tried to harvest any trees that died from lightning strikes or disease if at all possible. He had the farm where we lived plus his part of my grandfather's place. He also purchased a couple of other tracts of land that joined his property, making a total of 266 acres.

About the time I was a teen-ager, my father decided to go into the pulpwood hauling business and combine that with raising cattle and growing crops. I guess he had learned the lesson about "not putting all your eggs in one basket."

He bought a Homelite chain saw and made arrangements to purchase a pulpwood truck. I remember one time he purchased a used ton and a half gravel truck and converted it into a pulpwood truck. I thought it was pretty neat to have a gravel truck parked at our house, but soon the gravel bed was removed and a pulpwood bed was installed. The last truck we had was one once used by Rufus Formby, the Esso gasoline distributor in Prescott. The sign on the door read "Esso—Humble Oil and Refining Co."

I guess maybe I should explain what pulpwood is in case someone reading this doesn't know. At that time there was a paper mill at Camden and pulpwood was used in the manufacture of paper. They mostly wanted pine pulpwood, but sometimes they used hardwood trees like sweet gum. This pulpwood usually came from smaller trees in the forest--those not suitable for making lumber. The size usually ranged from about a six inch diameter tree to a maximum size of about 24 inches. The tree was cut into sticks about five or six feet long. These sticks (which we called billets) were then loaded onto the truck and hauled to the mill. At the mill, the load

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was measured by the wood yard foreman and the truck was quickly unloaded with a huge lift machine. The driver then returned to the scale shack where he picked up his ticket showing how many cords of wood he had on that load. These tickets were turned in every week to the pulpwood dealer who paid him so much per cord for the wood he had hauled that week. A pulpwood truck was usually called "a billet truck".

My father did all of the timber cutting as I was growing up. I guess he was afraid to turn me loose with a dangerous chain saw. My job was to go along with him and use a measuring stick to mark off each billet so he could cut them the required length. Sometimes we hauled them to Gurdon where they were loaded onto rail cars. The sticks had to be a certain length to fit on the rail cars and they were very particular about the length of the sticks.

I also used an axe to trim any small limbs that the chain saw missed. My father could usually tell when he had a load cut by counting the number of tanks of gas the saw used. He would usually cut a load one day and we would haul it the next day.



Getting the sticks of wood on the truck was the main job. A stick of pulpwood of any size is very heavy. We soon learned to put the heaviest sticks on the bottom and top off the load with smaller sticks. When we first got into this business, we didn't have one of those pulpwood loaders on our truck. We had to load the sticks using manual labor.

We finally managed to get a hand-operated winch mounted on the truck which helped considerably. It was very slow and had to be cranked by hand, but it sure beat picking the sticks up the old way. Finally, we got one of the more modern loaders with levers using power from the truck engine. We thought that was the best thing that had ever been invented. We could pick up a whole bundle of small sticks at one time, and swing them around onto the truck. One man (usually me) would be on the truck to place the load and unhook the cable. The job was dangerous with a lot of potential for smashed fingers or worse. The person operating the levers had to be very careful and know just when to pull a lever to keep everyone safe.

It was hard work, but it was a peaceful way of making a living. We were out in the woods, usually on our own land. We could take a break whenever we needed one. Many times my mother would bring our lunch to the woods about noon and we would have a picnic lunch. I still remember the gallon jugs of iced tea she packed in a 10 pound Godchaux sugar sack wrapped with a towel to keep it cold. That iced tea sure hit the spot on a hot day. She sometimes packed some fried apple pies for dessert.

Usually, we would have the truck loaded by 2:00 p.m. and my part of the job was over--that is, if we could get out of the woods without getting stuck. I can remember several times when we ended up having to unload the truck after it had bogged down in a soft place. There is no fun at all in having to load the same load twice.

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Daddy usually drove the load to the mill in Camden or to the wood yard at Gurdon. The trip to Gurdon was especially challenging because of the steep hill just across the Little Missouri River. At that time there was a one lane bridge over the river. After crossing the bridge at a slow speed, it was hard to get a loaded truck up the steep hill going toward Gurdon.

Daddy continued to haul pulpwood for many years. Over the years he had three or four different pulpwood trucks (all were used trucks when purchased) and went through several chain saws. He hauled the first load into the new Bluff City wood yard on Hwy. 24 that was opened by International Paper Co. in 1978. He hauled his last load when he was close to 70 years old.

The pulpwood trucks like we used are now a thing of the past. Loggers now haul the wood to the mill as tree-length loads pulled by big transport trucks like Macks and Peterbilts. That left the small producers out. Trees are now cut by large cutting machines and very few loggers still use a chain saw except for trimming, etc. The paper mill at Camden was shut down in 2001, so pulpwood in this area now has to be hauled long distances to other mills.

Our last pulpwood truck now sits over in the field slowly rusting away.



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### A POP TEST

Here is a little quiz I put together to test your knowledge about civics and general American history. I think every American should be able to answer most of these questions. Write your answers on a piece of paper and then go to page 8 to check your answers. Don't peek!

1. According to the Declaration of Independence, we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What are the three branches of our government?
3. What are the first three words of the preamble to the U. S. Constitution?
4. Name one of the freedoms we are guaranteed under the first amendment to the constitution.
5. What are the first ten amendments to the U. S. constitution called?
6. Who is commander-in-chief of the U. S. military?
7. Name two of the four presidents whose faces are carved on Mt. Rushmore.

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8. What part of the government has the power to declare war?
  9. How many justices are on the U. S. Supreme Court?
  10. What is the term of a U. S. Supreme Court justice?
  11. What is the minimum age to be president?
  12. What is the term of a U. S. senator?
  13. What are the three colors on the American flag?
  14. How many stars are on the American flag?
  15. July 4 (Independence Day) celebrates our independence from what country?
  16. Who is the current vice president?
  17. Who is third in line to be president after the president and vice president?
  18. Each state has how many U. S. senators?
  19. The president is elected for a term of how many years?
  20. Which president is called “the father of our country”?
  21. Name the U. S. senators from your state.
  22. Who said “Give me liberty or give me death”?
  23. Which state was the last to be added to the Union?
  24. Who wrote the Star Spangled Banner?
  25. What do the stars on the American flag represent?
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### MORE LOOKING BACK



At the end of the day Friday, October 24, 1969, we had been in Zambia for a week. We had seen the missionaries, the campus, the church building, the primary school site, and the homes of all the missionaries. We were welcomed, and treated like royalty! But now it was time for us to tackle some of our responsibilities. Housekeeping matters, transportation, and shopping were high on the list. I knew it would take planning, patience, perseverance, and WORK for all of it to come together.

The following day, Saturday, was an exciting day for Lloyd and me--we went into town with Mary. Our main interest was to find where to exchange our American dollars for the Zambian kwacha, how to post and receive our mail, and where to buy groceries. Mary took us to the post office, the bank, and to an Indian (Asian) shop where most of the staff did their grocery shopping. I guess the most unusual thing I saw that day was the butchery (meat market). The door was open leading to the back room, and there was a big cow hanging from the ceiling. I learned you ordered your meat, and the owner went into that room and cut it from the carcass.

This little town reminded me of home (Bluff City!). We never had a cow to hang, but I remember when I was small that our big brother would hang a pig or two in our o’smokehouse. I also remember that we had a store or two just

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beyond our house. There was a post office, but no butchery! There was a church building next door to our house where we would go to church every time the doors opened for worship or Bible study—Sundays and Wednesdays, for sure. I remember those days well because my sister and I were the janitors for that big building. There was a blacksmith shop, and just behind it was a place where people took “their grinding”—corn to be ground into cornmeal. But Mary told us that most of the women did their pounding at home—at least the ones she knew did. Kalomo has a railway, but Bluff City did not have that luxury when I lived there.

Shopping was difficult, to say the least. There were shortages—black pepper, cooking oil, bread, and even a fly swatter was not available. This is just a few of the items that may not be available at any one time, and this is true even today. Different things came in at different times, and it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time. I had not been in the shop very long when I realized my cooking would be “from scratch,” as my Mama and others used to say. There were no “ready-to-cook” mixes. I also learned that I would need a new vocabulary, because things were called by different names! Some of the things I encountered: gasoline is petrol; kerosene is paraffin; a spool of thread is a reel of cotton; a baby pacifier is a dummy; cookies are biscuits; diapers are napkins; table napkins are serviettes; a flashlight is a torch; a car hood is a bonnet, the horn is a hooter, the trunk is a boot; a flat is a puncture, and the indicator is a blinker; a movie is a flick; a refrigerator is a frig; vegetables are veggies; and a television is a telly. And the list grew.....

October is the hottest month of the year in Zambia, and we learned this quickly. It proved to be very hot for us. We had no fan, no air conditioner, and not even a breeze. We could not escape. Summer is from October to March, and winter from May to August. The rainy season is from November to March, but even then the sun shines an average of five hours each day. Just remember that Zambia is south of the equator, and the seasons are reversed from yours in America. When I write, “It’s a cold day in August,” you will know I have not lost my mind.

As I began the month of November, I tried not to rush things or to become impatient. As I went along, I was becoming very aware of life’s simplest blessings and learning a bit—or perhaps a lot—about values. I also knew it was going to take time to do what needed to be done before school started in January. I knew the Hensons were trying, and needed, to adjust!

We had many things to fight—language, weather, customs, and culture, just to mention a few. I tried to start by focusing on some of the things that were right under my nose—things too close for comfort. Sanitation was a big one. I knew I had to see that water and milk were boiled. We also had to be careful

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when eating fruit and vegetables grown locally—we needed to know what kind of fertilizer (human waste?) had been used. All fruits and vegetables had to be soaked, peeled, or boiled before eating. Dishes should be washed, rinsed, and disinfected. Since we did not (and still do not) have the modern conveniences you have in the States, we must do it the hard way. My sister and I learned and knew this way as we grew up in Bluff City. But my question at that time was, “Will I have time for all this when school starts in January?”

Early in January as I shopped in Kalomo, I bought an old fashioned rub board. I thought this would be an improvement over the rub-them-by-hand method. On day Georgia came over and saw my rub board and said I should not give it to my house person. Georgia said he would rub the clothes to pieces. (At that time I did not have a house person.) When she said, “You are going to have to employ one, especially before you start teaching.” At this point, I got busy on her suggestion. Soon one of the missionaries told me he could get one whom he knew in the village. He recommended him because of his being a Christian and one of the most honest men he knew. By the end of November, we had a house person—JANUARY! He and I began our work together. He even learned how I wanted the sheets put on the beds! Yes, January worked for me a long time, but I always did my share of the work, and right now there is plenty waiting for me to do.

So for now.....

That’s all, folks,  
Pearl Louise Henson

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## DOODLING FOR DOODLE-BUGS



One of the favorite pastimes I remember growing up was doodling for doodle-bugs. These cone-shaped depressions were found in dry sandy spots such as under an open shed.

We would get a broom straw or a small twig and gently stir these depressions while saying a verse to coax the doodle bug out of his hole. The verse I remember saying was “Doodle bug, doodle bug, come out and get a chew of tobacco.” It was considered quite an achievement if we were able to get the doodle bug out of his hole.

Does this bring back any memories? Maybe we just didn’t have enough toys to play with at our house. Do any of you remember saying a different verse to get the doodle bug out of his hole? Write and tell me about any other

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children's games or activities you remember from your childhood days.



### **THE BERRY MARTIN / McKELVY HOUSE**

Maybe it's just me, but I like pictures of old houses. It's hard to find a photo that shows a whole house since people were more interested in pictures of people than wasting film on pictures of buildings.

This is the house I remember as a child. My father bought a farm from Berry Martin in 1947 which was located one and a half miles out of Bluff City on what is now Hwy. 299. This is the house the Martins lived in, situated on a high hill with several sycamore trees for shade. I don't know if Mr. Martin was the builder or exactly when the house was built. I only have a few pictures showing parts of the house, but you can get a general idea of what it looked like. There was a porch on three sides and the house was built a few feet off the ground as most houses were in those days. The top part of the roof was covered with tin and the lower part was covered with cypress shingles. It's hard to tell from the pictures, but there were two doors on the front of the house and some large windows about the same size as the doors. The rooms had high ceilings with the light bulbs hanging down from a long cord. I can see the porch swing in the picture which was a cool place to sit and get breezes from two directions. When I see these pictures it reminds me of the time I was running barefoot on the front porch and got a large splinter in my foot which had to be removed by a doctor.

At the time this picture was taken, we were probably more interested in getting a picture of our new 1949 GMC pickup than anything else.

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We lived in this house until 1955 when we tore it down and built a new house in the same location. We used lumber from the old house in the construction of our new house. .

Wouldn't it be interesting to be able to go back in time and see what the area around Bluff City looked like 50 or 100 years ago? If you have an old picture showing an old home, store, or church in the Bluff City area, let me know and I'll put it in a future issue.

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### ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
2. legislative, executive, and judicial
3. We the people
4. freedom of religion; freedom of speech; freedom of the press; right to peaceably assemble; right to petition the government for redress of grievances.
5. Bill of Rights
6. president
7. George Washington; Abraham Lincoln; Thomas Jefferson; Theodore Roosevelt
8. Congress
9. 9
10. life
11. 35
12. 6 years
13. red, white, and blue
14. 50
15. Great Britain (England)
16. Joe Biden
17. Speaker of the House (currently Nancy Pelosi)
18. 2
19. 4
20. George Washington
21. Depends of where you live. Arkansas' senators are Mark Pryor and Blanche Lincoln.
22. Patrick Henry
23. Hawaii in 1959
24. Francis Scott Key
25. the states--one for each state

### HOW DID YOU DO?

- 21-25 correct--Very Good--Maybe you should run for office  
15-20 correct--Maybe you should drag out your old school textbooks  
10-14 correct--This would get you an "F" in school  
0-9 correct-- Are you sure you are an American citizen?
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Did you know that in April, 1941, Arkansans were encouraged to turn in their old used aluminum car tags to be collected and sent to Great Britain? The metal was needed in the war effort there. Later that year, the U. S. found itself involved in the war.