**The Night the Rooster Died**

By: Diana Goodpaster

Granny Garrard was a very important part of my life until her death on April 12, 1982. After that, the memories of her have come to sustain me and provide many moments of laughter. She was born, Arra Ellis and had a twin sister named, Narra. Obviously, not a great deal of thought went into those names. For some reason, unknown to me everyone called her “Tuss”. I’m pretty sure more thought went into her nickname than her birthname.

At the young age of 15 she married her soul mate and friend, George. My papaw always reminded me of Abraham Lincoln for he was tall and a man of few words but when he spoke, everyone listened. Except for my Granny, when she was in a “buck chawin” mood. “Buck chawin” was my Granny’s way of saying stubborn. Together they created 8 children, 6 boys and 2 girls, all born at home with the help of a neighbor lady. One of the girls is my momma, who happens to be the baby of the family and the only remaining sibling. They raised their children to be hard-working, independent, and God-fearing people.

Granny Garrard was a shoot from the hip kind of gal. No nonsense. She ALWAYS told it like it was and” if you didn’t like it, you could lump it” as she would affectionately say after speaking her mind. I can remember a time when she hurt my momma’s feelings so bad. Granny told someone, right in front of my momma, that “all her bunch would go broke buying clothes because they all were big as barns”. But Granny didn’t care, because her boys and girls were, as she would put it, “big raw bone people”. She would say, “they can’t help it because the good Lord made them that way and they wooden no use in pushin back from the table cause no diet is gonna change how God made ‘em and if you tried to change it you’d be dancing with the devil.”

Granny and Papaw worked hard on the farm to provide for their family. Granny, barely 5 foot, would work out in the field all day just like the men and never complain. Although, by the time I came along she, “had some years on her”, as she would say and mostly helped out by cooking the workhands meals, working in her garden, and tending to her beloved chickens.

Granny’s chicken coop was a large lot with several buildings behind her house, it was accessible from every angle. She took great pride collecting her bounty of eggs every evening. I can still see my granny, gathering the bottom of her apron and transforming it into a basket to “pack” the eggs to the house to be wash up. Those beloved chickens, I never really understood my granny’s love for her feathered friends but she had a passion for them and protected fiercely.

I can remember one morning waking to Granny having a “tee-total fit” because someone had stolen some of her chickens the night before. Granny had no tolerance for a thief of any kind, and especially someone who would ruffle the feathers of her dear pets. Granny was wobbling back and forth in the kitchen, since ole Arthur had started housekeeping in her bones, she wobbled. She was contemplating what she was going to do to the low life cowards and brainstorming their identity. Granny had a pretty good idea that the thieves were the Bowles boys and she was going be ready for their return. Granny knew she didn’t have to put much thought into catching them because the Bowles boys weren’t known to be overly intelligent.

A few days went by as I recall and one evening Granny thought she heard someone on her place late one night. This didn’t bother my granny for she always went to bed ready for any type of wrong-doing. All lathered up with Ben-Gaye to keep ole Arthur from having a dance party in her bones while she was sleeping, she slept every night with a loaded sawed off shot gun under her gigantic feather bed. As Granny slowly wobbled toward the door, she saw what she thought was a glimpse of a person chasing one of her hens. She opened her back door and let the hammer down, a loud boom ranged throughout our little community. I remember being woke by my mom and dad shuffling around trying to get to Granny as soon as possible. You see we lived right down the road from Granny on the other side of the Church so we heard the shot loud and clear. I asked my mom, “What’s going on?” mom pacing nervously said, “Your Granny may has shot somebody.” I could just see my granny in her pink apron behind the bars of Andy Taylor’s jail.

When we got close to Granny’s, mom and dad began to yell for they knew she had reloaded and was pretty limber from being Ben-Gayed up. They knew she’d be trigger happy from all the adrenaline rushing through her harden arteries and we didn’t want to be the next victim. We finally arrived at Granny’s and she was on the back porch barefooted with her pretty pink ruffled nightgown with matching hair-net, and holding the smoking shot gun. She was dusting herself off because the blast of the shotgun and thrown her to the floor. She looked at my dad with a wild look in her eyes and said, “Well Earl, ole Bowles won’t be stealin no more of my chickens cause he’s either meetin his maker right now, or somewhere shakin and cleaning his drawers.” As mom and dad began to scour the yard in the direction Granny shot, dad discovered that the only thing meeting its maker was the concrete rooster that had once so proudly adorn Granny’s yard. She had blown the old rooster to smithereens with one shot leaving the concrete hen a widow. From that night on, no one, and I mean no one, came near my Granny’s place without yelling from across the road. She never found out who stole her chickens that night but we are sure the night the rooster died was heard throughout the community because no one ever stole from my Granny again.

Many years later after Granny had passed I feel if the Bowles boys were the chicken thieves, they got their dues. You see, we sold all of Granny’s beloved chickens and guess who wanted to buy all of them, the Bowles boys. I was with my dad when they came one evening at dusk to round up their feathered purchase. Johnny Bowles who was one of the smarter boys, had set his sights on the last hen to be caught. He sized it up and ran like an African lion on the Safari pouncing on its prey. I can remember seeing him go airborne and it was like slow motion, he landed perfectly on his target. The only problem was, the target was the widowed concrete hen. Needless to say, ole Johnny was knocked deader than 4 o’clock, right there in the middle of Granny’s yard for all to see.

We all stood in silence staring at the lifeless figure laying on the ground beside the triumphant widowed hen. Suddenly, Old Man Bowles’ words cut through the silence like a knife, “Aye, he’ll be alrite!” With his words, the remaining upright Bowles clan headed to their truck. As my dad and I remained dumbfounded in the silence, staring at the lifeless body of Johnny Bowles as he laid spread eagle by the victorious widowed hen.