

Raymond Killion Brasher

I was born in our home on "C" Street - delivered by Dr. Smythe. My sister, Bonnie Ruth, (deceased) was born in the same house by the same doctor. My brother, Harold (deceased) was born on Massachusetts Street, delivered by Dr. Cottongim.

My father, Jessie William Brasher, was born in Chester County in 1892. He lived in Texas for a while when he was a boy and then lived in Steele, Missouri until he moved to Jackson, Tennessee around 1917. He worked at Southern Engine Boiler Works on North Royal for some time, then got a job driving street cars in Jackson. His "run" was from the courthouse to the end of Neely Station, which is now Hollywood Boulevard. When the streetcar barns burned around 1920, he went to work at Bemis. He was a loom fixer in the weave shop where he worked for about 40 years.

My mother, "Dallie," was born Effie Elizabeth Johnson in Decatur County in 1900. Her father, John Henry Johnson, worked at the Company Store. I remember him as a slight built man with a big mustache. My grandmother on Daddy's side was born Minerva Isabell Dillon. She died when I was three years old, so I don't remember her. Her family came from New York in the early 1800's.

My maternal grandmother was born Sophia Emily Fisher in Decatur County. She married John Henry Johnson and they moved to Bemis around 1920 or so. My mother had 6 sisters and 2 brothers; and I think they all worked in the mill for at least part of this lives, some longer than others. My mother died in 1973 and my father died in 1982.

My daddy liked sports, hunting, music (played the guitar) and loved shooting pool at the "Y." My brother played the banjo a little bit and I played guitar. We used to sit on the porch on Missouri Street and play and sing--lots of fun!

Momma loved to cook, wash and iron and clean house (at least that's what I remember most about Momma). She sure liked to eat so we always had some good meals. She was also the disciplinarian in the family and I sure remember that! My parents lived at several addresses in Bemis--Massachusetts, "C," New Town, and Missouri.

My special memories in Bemis would fill a book so I can't list all of them. I remember playing ball in the street, "Annie Over," hide and seek, tin can, marble, tops, pick-up-sticks, jack rocks, card games like Old Maid (someone would always mark the Old Maid), Rook (they would always mark the "Rook" too), jumping ditches, climbing trees (and all these were before I was old enough to go to the "Y"). I was more or less raised at the "Y." I played pool, basketball, softball and a little bit of everything -- so much I could fill another book.

I loved going to school. I remember all my teachers from first grade through eighth grade. High School was great! I began to see girls in a different way! I started high school in 1941 and graduated in 1945. I especially remember the rivalry in basketball between Bemis and Jackson. I was fortunate enough to be on the starting five in 1944-45 season when we beat Jackson for the district title.

The Bemis Theatre was great! Nickel movies and talent shows (I was one-fourth of a quartet that won a talent contest one year. Others were Kelly Harris and Freck King. Can't recall the fourth member.) We sang barbershop quartet songs, but we won for our jokes!

I remember the class day exercises at graduation time and how Mrs. Woodson smacked her lips and kept us straight or thought she did. We graduated twenty-nine members and said goodbye to the good old days.

I went to Herron Chapel Baptist Church. I have some fond memories of some of my Sunday School teachers. I joined the church in February 1942 and was baptized in cold water. Brother Scates was pastor; and I remember him saying to me, "Raymond, the water heater is out so we're gonna make this short and sweet."

When I was a kid, Christmas was an exciting time--always looked forward to getting fruits and nuts, cap pistol, pair of roller skates (wore them out in a couple of weeks and then make a scooter out of them by pulling skates apart and using two by fours).

I remember when Christmas time at church was mostly for children. We would have little plays and every kid would get a bag of hard candy. We didn't have nurseries at church when I was a kid; mothers sat on the back-row seats and nursed their babies.

When I was growing up, most mothers didn't work at public jobs, so they were there to "keep house." I remember Monday was wash day and Tuesday was ironing day. My job was to keep the fire going around the wash pot and to punch the clothes around and to run the rinse water into two wash tubs. I can remember the blue stuff you put in the rinse water and how good it felt to place your arms in the cool water.

We had a cow in the cow pasture at the end of "C" Street next to the creek. I was about six years old then and don't remember the cow's name; but I do remember that when I went with Daddy to milk, he would call out, "Sook Jersey," and our cow would come running. She knew Daddy's face or his voice (I don't know which) and would come to get some feed and be milked. I remember Momma making butter. I helped her churn; and if I caught her not looking, I would slurp a little creamy milk from the churn.

We had hogs every year when I was a boy. Hog killing time was a pretty hard job, but the fresh back bones and ribs and tenderloin and sausage were so good! Daddy made the sausage and Momma put it in cloth sacks and hung it in the woodshed along with a ham or shoulder and that was mighty fine eating for quite a time. Daddy had a "meat box" made of oak wood and it was about four by five feet which he used to "salt down the middlins" which was used for eating and for seasoning too. During the summer, that box was empty. One day my brother and I decided it would make a good boat if we stopped up the cracks (which we did). We had a little red wagon; so one day while Momma was not looking, we hauled that meat box/boat up to the mill lakes and we got in and paddled out right in the middle of the lade. When water started coming in through the cracks, I told my brother, "we're sinking." We swam out and I guess that old meat box is probably still in the ground where the lake used to be.

When we lived on Missouri Street, we had the "slop route" for that street. Daddy cautioned us about black widow spiders, and I can still see some of those little buggers down around the slop can. I loved to see the hogs eat--kind of hated to kill them in November.

We had a garden, too. My brother and I furnished the fertilizer. We took our little red wagon and went to the cow pasture and collected the cow paddies and piled them up in the back yard. We had plenty to spread over the garden spot when a man would come around in the spring to "break up" gardens. Daddy was a good gardener like most folks raised on a farm. I learned a lot about it too.

We had ice brought to the house by Mr. Gaugh and his helper. We kids were always trying to reach in and get some ice shavings out of the ice wagon. We had groceries delivered too. Mr. Ivan Hampton took our orders and they were delivered right to the house. What service!

We had good toilets on Missouri Street. First, we had a two-holer. Later we had a self-flusher. Couldn't beat that.

The Company Store, West Drug Store, Dr. Smythe, company nurse. Twas' heaven!

Then came the war in 1941. I had just turned fourteen and how exciting it was to follow every day's news of the war. It hurt when we heard of some of Bemis' own being killed or wounded or captured, but it was finally over and life went on in Bemis.

I finished high school in May 1945 and married my high school sweetheart, Raymell York, in July of that year. I went to work in the mill in the spinning room as doffer right out of school in May. I still have my first paycheck stub. I was drafted into the Army and discharged in 1947. I returned to work in the mill until the strike. I went to work with the Illinois Central Railroad as Telegrapher/Agent/Operator. I quit the railroad in 1962 and went to work at the Jackson Post Office as mail carrier until I retired in 1990. We moved to the Old Malesus Road in 1962. Raymell and I will be married fifty-seven years July 14th. We have three daughters, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren. My wife and I are so glad and proud to have grown up in Bemis where industry and friendliness truly described our way of life--our heritage.

Written by Raymond Brasher in 2002



Raymond Killion Brasher

Born 7 November 1927
Bemis, Madison County, Tennessee

Died 2 April 2017
Humboldt, Gibson County, Tennessee