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The Little Things To Remember

JULY 11TH 2011 BY NEWS

The Little Things To Remember

By Annabeth Miller

It was one of those defining moments that just kind of slap you in the face like a bucket of ice-cold water!

I knew there were times when words would come out of my mouth that sounded just like my mother, and there are things I do around my house or with my plants that are exactly the way she would do them. I guess most women have that sort of thing happen -- you know, like the way you peel an apple or stir a pot of soup. I have also been known I hold my tongue just so when I am concentrating on a specific task -- something my brother says is exactly like our mom. He also says I work in the kitchen just like her - which is scary because she used to drive me crazy when we would work in the kitchen together!

But I think I also inherited a lot from my Grandma Miller.

Grandma was a feisty woman.

Born down the road in the little Dunklin County community of Caruth in the later days of Reconstruction, Elizabeth Bell Jones Trotter Miller was one tough cookie. She was one of the first women to graduate from the Normal College (now Southeast Missouri State University) in Cape Girardeau, she taught in little country schools in the Bootheel, and stuck to some very strongly held principals.

Reading and improving your mind were of the utmost importance -- a passion she passed

to her children and her grandchildren. In fact, all three of her granddaughters -- cousins Pat in St. Louis, Susan in New York City and me -- have centered their careers in one form or another on the written word. You always remembered to go to church, you read your Bible, you did your patriotic duty and voted each election day and you didn't turn your back on those in need.

My dad used to tell the story of how the people in church one time literally turned their back on a young widow and her children. The "powers that be" apparently did not like something this young widow had done. So they kicked her out of church and literally turned their backs as she walked her young children out. Not my grandmother. Dad told the story that standing in church that day his mom kept saying quietly over and over "we will not turn our backs, we will not turn our backs." And she didn't - she helped that young woman, took some chickens over to their farm and included her in the little quilting group.

During my high school years, I had a paper route. Every day after school, I would head to the office, get my stack of papers, and head out. I had the "store route" -- delivered papers to Myer's Rexall and across the street to Archie Parker's drug store, dropped off a copy to Seed Bland at City Hall, and put the papers in at Big Star, Shipman's Market and all the other racks in town.

My last stop of the day was always at Grandma's. Some days she would ask me to bring her a treat on my next trip -- usually a "Snickers without the peanuts". Translation: A Milky Way. The next day when I was in Shipman's I would ask Mrs. Shipman to point out the freshest candy bars, and she would help me pick out the best one for Grandma. Now, it was really a sight to see a 95-year-old woman get excited over a little ol' candy bar. But Grandma sure did!

But wait: She just didn't tear into the wrapper and gobble up the chocolate creation. Oh, no. She would carefully take out a petite paring knife and slice off a thin, little quarter-inch sliver of the chocolate bar -- just enough "to satisfy the sweet tooth." Then she would neatly pull the wrapper back over and secure it closed with a red rubber band. She would snack on that one "Snickers without the peanuts" for several days, each time carefully slicing off just a bit and then rewrapping the bar.

I enjoy an occasional "Snickers without the peanuts" these days. So when I unwrap that little candy bar I think of my skinny little granny with all the spunk.

It is interesting how little things like a candy bar or peeling an apple can keep those we

love in our hearts long after they have gone.

My mom and I always collected old wheat-back pennies. We kept our collection in a little pot I made in 8th grade art class, and I still look at the flip side of a penny to see if it could join the collection.

There have been times in the last few years when I have found a wheat-back at just the right times. It has always seemed to me as though they are my Mom's signal that everything will be okay -- that everything will work out for the best.

Whether it's a chocolate bar or a wheatback penny, those we love are always with us. I guess it is left up to us to be open to those occasions - and then take a deep breath to remember the love.

Annabeth Miller is the editor of the ShowMe Times and a lifelong resident of Dexter.

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The 'Glorious 4th of July'

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The 'Glorious 4th of July'

By Annabeth Miller

Family legend has it that the young lad had saved all his hard-earned summer money -- probably earned while sweating through some lawn-mowing jobs and working in a hot pressroom. Proud as a peacock, he went to the fireworks stand, and purchased the biggest pack of firecrackers to be had -- Black Cat. This was the early 1960s, and pack of Black Cat was a big thing then. It was the Cadillac of firecrackers.

On the morning of Independence Day the flag was placed outside the home, and mom was in the kitchen fixing a blackberry cobbler. But my knotheaded brothers were out on the front steps, anxiously awaiting the moment when they could let those Black Cats go. A punk (not a teenager with an attitude, but a lighting device!) was in hand. But wait! Maybe it wasn't burning. So proud John laid down the "bad" punk and ran back into the house to light a second punk at the kitchen range.

While he was standing there, backup punk in hand, his pack of Black Cats was on the front step. He suddenly blanched and was the shade of a boll of cotton when there was an explosion of sound coming from the front yard. It sounded like Sherman and all his Army was thundering through the neighborhood. But it wasn't Sherman. the neighbors, or even the *precious* little sister.

No indeed, it was the pack of highly-treasured Black Cat firecrackers, lit by the punk that "wasn't burning."

The entire Independence Day Celebration went up in less than a minute in a decibel-breaking racket and a puff of smoke. John didn't even have time to hustle from the kitchen to the front porch to see the puff of smoke.

The 4th of July was always big stuff around our house. Not only did we attempt to celebration our nation's birthday in style, it was also the oldest knotheaded brother's birthday. He never has quite figured out that the fireworks are not in his honor.

But the 4th would be a day of shooting a few firecrackers, lighting a few other whirligigs, and waiting anxiously for the evening. Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Dick (Trotter) would

come over, a freezer of ice cream would be ready, and mom would carry out the best-tasting blackberry cobbler this side of the Ozark hills. Finally, when the sun would set quietly in the west, the fireworks would come out. Little sis didn't get to do too many -- maybe the waterfall off the clothesline, a pretty fountain cone, and, of course, sparklers. There had to be sparklers.

All of these sorts of celebrations are appropriate for our nation's birthday. History tells us that John Adams -- one of the men who brought this nation into existence -- actually wanted Americans to celebrate Independence Day in a grand manner.

In a letter to wife Abigail, Adams wrote that the day should be a "great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore."

In a strange quirk of history, Adams and colleague Thomas Jefferson were to think of one another 50 years after the fateful signing of that Declaration of Independence. Both on their deathbeds, thoughts turned to the other and to the nation they helped establish. At Monticello, Jefferson stirred, and asked if it was the Fourth. Hearing a yes, historians say he lay quietly back down. Occasionally, his hand could be seen moving, as if he were writing, this mimicking the motions of penning that important document.

North in Massachusetts, John Adams' awoke in the morning and said "It is the glorious 4th of July. God bless it, and God bless you all." Sometime in the afternoon, he roused again, and said his final words: "Thomas Jefferson survives."

Two men, close friends and so important in the birth of our freedoms, died on the same day -- 50 years to the day after they signed the Declaration of Independence.

America will have celebrations this weekend from Alaska to Missouri to New Hampshire. Politicians will pontificate and attempt to lift up the heritage left to us by such men as Adams and Jefferson.

But to me, the 4th of July is in the backyard celebrations. It's in the light on a kid's face as they twirl around with a sparkler in the early evening. It's the voices of youngsters standing on the Dexter post office steps reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, it's the fireworks overhead, and sharing the oo's and ah's with friends. It's in blackberry cobbler and homemade ice cream and reading the Declaration of Independence just one more

time.

Happy Independence Day! Celebrate America!

Annabeth Miller is the editor of the ShowMe Times and a lifelong resident of Dexter.

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Happy Birthday, Camp Latonka

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Happy Birthday, Camp Latonka

By Annabeth Miller

It was 60 years ago this week a place that has become special to many women in Southeast Missouri and beyond first opened. Sixty years ago this week the gate at Camp Latonka opened for the first time for girls to attend summer camp.

Now the story of how Camp Latonka came to be - and the people who made it happen - could be a great book. But for now, let's just consider the unique legacy of the place that has been a magnet for many a girl for six decades.

There are two parts of the Latonka story that I think are remarkable.

The first is the incredible Latonka tradition - the important things that have stayed constant throughout these 60 years. And for that, we have people like Beaver Brown, Bid Miles and the entire Baker-Brown-Miles families, and Illena Aslin, Edna Sargeant, and Dexter residents Edith Camp and Mary Ulen, and so many, many more who instilled a priceless purpose to Latonka and valued the girls who were there.

And the second thing that I feel is great about Latonka is how it can reach to (strong) women of all generations - and the meaning and importance and memories are equally important across the years.

The hills at Latonka are, to me, priceless. It has always held a very precious spot in my heart. Just like Cotton Boll Girl Scouting, Latonka made such an important impact in my life. There was something so unique in our tradition - every girl had value, every girl could grow, every girl could reach inside and accomplish what she might not thought was possible. It didn't matter if you were from Dexter or Doniphan, Peach Orchard or Puxico, Sikeston or Kennett or Wardell. Latonka was for YOU. You could be independent, share thrills and joys of friendship, learn of God's incredible gifts in Nature, and sing - yes, oh sing - beautiful songs.

My thoughts go back to the 40th Anniversary (now 20 years ago!) and the Chapel service that weekend. I remember Marky Ford standing and talking about the memories in those hills. It's true - those hills, rocks, and trees hold our memories. I can still hear the voices and the songs. I can hear the cabin door slam in Hickory Hollow, the chitter-chatter of girls not-quite asleep in Shady Oak, laughter from the cabins in Gypsy Dell. The stories from the Level Acre unit house are still there ... ready to share that wonderful spot with new generations of CITs. The songs in the Dining Hall and at the Waterfront are still sung in my heart. And those darn rocks ... I still have a pretty good scar on a knee from a Gypsy Dell rock! Memories of friendships, of wonderful days in our lives, of bonds that tie each generation to that spot.

It's a wonderful thing to celebrate 60 years of a grand tradition and the generations of strong women who grew and learned and now share because of that tradition. So, I say Happy Birthday Camp Latonka.

And Happy Birthday to all the girls and women who made it all the best spot in the world!

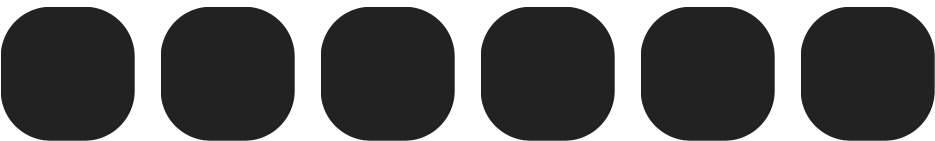
P.S. How many still wash dishes in Dining Hall order?

Annabeth Miller is a resident of Dexter and the editor of the ShowMe Times, and a former camper and camp director at Girl Scout Camp Latonka. She is in the photo above.

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