

EVA CAROLINE SMITH (1889-1988)
Born Ohio Co., KY- Died Smith Co., TX
the daughter of
James Thomas Smith (1856-1926) and Sarah Sanders (1861-1931)
of Ohio County, KY

-- GRANDMOTHER COX'S TALES --
Excerpts about her home, homeplace and neighbors
As she was growing up

This story is excerpted and put together from a number of other audio tapes of interviews that I conducted with my grandmother in the 1970s and 1980s. I picked out all the descriptions I could find when her home or home place was mentioned – and this particular writing is from the excerpts of many tapes. Her children were Gilbert, Eula Mae, Retha and Darrell. My mother joined us, as we all sat around her dining room table to conduct these interviews, usually on weekends. It was so much fun. I interviewed her over a 17-year period.

May 1, 1976

Retha: Edith Ellis was born on “that old Chancellor place that mama got when they divided up, you know.”

GRANDMOTHER: I was just saying how close we were when we’s children, you know...at home. When the day’s work was done and supper was over, they had a table and it usually, sat, you know, right in front of the fireplace. And one sat on one side and one sat on the other. And us children all around in chairs. And we would pop corn and we’d make candy, and tell stories, and eat apples and have a good time.

We didn’t do too much reading, I guess, because we were always talking. And if we were making candy and all. Of course, we talked.

Darrell: But that was your entertainment? GM: Mmmm-hmmm.

Retha: But as Mama said, it was a family...a family group. Everyone wasn’t going different directions. And their mealtime was together. It wasn’t ...one eat here and one eat there.

GRANDMOTHER: And each one knew where their plate was. My daddy and mother always sat at the ends, like me and Retha are sitting now. And Charlie would sit down at that end, I’ll say. And then Ellis sat down next to Ma. The boys sat on one side and the girls on the other. I always got in there, right close to Mother. I don’t care if they had company, and I was little, they say I would always scrooch in there somehow. Right by my mother. I’d always do that. I wanted to eat and I always got my plate and got right by her.

We never did have a cellar. We never did have bad storms like we do here.

We had two big rooms, and the porch, where we had the dining table and the kitchen and the upstairs. And we had a parlor, what you would call today a living room. But in that day and time it was called a parlor. And we didn't use that room too much, Jerri, only when company come, and then it was used all the time.

Eula Mae: When you built this new home. Did you say you remember that?

GRANDMOTHER: Yes, uh-hum, I don't think I was over three years old. Mother told me I wasn't over four, if I remember. But I remember carrying things from the old house to the new house. Little things, you know. Everybody had to help. It was about as far as from here to Gilbert's, not very much further. (My parents lived across the highway from my grandparents - Which would be about a block from one door to the other, maybe a little bit further, JB)

GRANDMOTHER: The old house had logs in it, and our new house did too. Oh, yes. It was built out of logs, but the logs were wide, and you would think they was round, wouldn't you? On each side, they was shaved down and they fit them logs. Square. You just can't imagine. They planed them. They had the lumber off our place. And then they weather-boarded it. They sealed it. It was weather-boarded on the outside. And they sealed it inside and papered it.

And the chimney was right in the center between these two rooms. It wasn't at the end of the house. And it heated both rooms. And you couldn't hear people talk too much when you were in the other part of the house. Because the logs were so thick, you see. And my daddy painted the house every year.

Well, the stairs come down in the room where we mostly stayed. But I can remember having to come downstairs, when I was cutting up and making a lot of noise, and they would tell me to come down. They never did get after us, except at night, you know, if we were scuffling. They would make us take our seat right down on those steps, and Mother would say, "Now stay there until I tell you to go to bed." And that was the end of it. And sometimes they went off to sleep and left us sitting. And I would hear that old clock strike, but I wouldn't get up and slip back in there to sleep. And I would sit there a little longer. (*Chuckling.*) It was me and Ella or one of the boys. Ella and me, mostly. I think when they woke up...I know they went to sleep. They would call you and say, "Now you can go back to bed if you think you can behave." And I was ready to behave. I can remember that.

No, I didn't get cold. It was always warm in there. There was always a big log burning in the fireplace. I think there was a closet under the stairway where they put wood in. Oh, it's been so many years ago, I have almost forgot. We always had lots of wood stacked up for wintertime. The boys cut the wood, but the girls brought it in, the same as the boys.

Retha: And Mama, when you misbehaved, didn't you have to go to the garden and work and pick?

GRANDMOTHER: Why yes. We all worked. I can remember them sending me to the garden to pick beans. I don't know...I wasn't any larger than her (*nodding to Amy, who was about six or seven.*) And I would cry. I would pretend I was crying. Trying to get their sympathy. And they could hear me. And then I would look up to see if anybody was coming. And they hid. Auntie did. And she said, "Young lady, you aren't crying. You are just playing like it." But I

always had to pick that bucket full of beans, before they would let me come in. That bucket would be full!

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Retha: And mama, you were telling us this morning about cleaning the house, and how you used the white sand to clean the floors.

GRANDMOTHER: Well, we would get sand and scrub the floors with it. And they was pretty and white when we got through with them. Spring cleaning. And the curtains had to be washed, and starched and ironed. And the windows washed. The painting had to go on. Everything had to be clean. Everything! We beat the rugs. I can remember them having that carpet and it went from wall to wall and they tacked that. But they put straw and leveled it under this blanket and then stomped it down for a pad. I can remember them doing it, maybe one time.

Jerri: Oh, and Retha, you should have heard her tell about the mattresses.

GRANDMOTHER: Yes, that's when they threshed the wheat and had new straw put in the mattresses. And we wasn't the only ones that had it. Everybody did. Because it was cooler than feather beds. And they didn't have zippers to zip everything up. Mother left this place in the center and put button holes and buttons close together to button with, and we had to take the old straw out. And put in new. It was cooler. In the winter, we used feather bed mattresses. Everybody had them. Straw ticks. Until later on, and then I don't know what they got. I remember that. We used to beat them with a broom and smooth them out. And we picked feathers off of the geese, when they were still alive. And they were good and warm in the winter.

Jerri: And your mother made her own quilts, Grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER: some, she never did quilt much. We always got blankets and comforts. And when we went to Beaver Dam, and it was cold, and we could get in the buggy, we would get...Mother had a big old sand rock and she would put it in the fireplace and get it hot and she had an old quilt that she would wrap around that rock and sprinkle a little water on it and steamed it, and that old rock would stay warm in the buggy floor.

Jerri: You all had a buggy with two seats, grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER: No, we just had a buggy with one. And there would usually be two or three of us go together to town...to Beaver Dam.

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November 7, 1976

In one discussion among the ladies present, we discussed women and present wages, and grandmother remarked that she thinks they should get paid the same as for men. She said, "They work just as hard as the man does." She agreed that they need a woman on the Supreme Court and said, "They could do just as good a job as a man." Discussing the role of women, who work, and even those who don't, it was agreed that a woman is the first one up and the last one to bed in the course of a day. Grandmother said, "A woman's work is never done, and it's

been that way for a long, long time.” “Although, she said, “I don’t think the women see the hard times like they used to do. They have it so much better now.” (Meaning that we have all the modern appliances, etc.) “Washing machines...and we used to have to scrub on an old washboard. I’ve seen the time when I washed on that old washboard, I’d just be tired and worn out.”

When asked if she ever washed in an old black wash pot, she said, “Oh my lands, yes.” And we had a good wood stove, and ironed with flat irons.

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Darrell: Oh, Mother, tell Jerri about what you did when you planted your trees.

GRANDMOTHER: Oh, those maple trees, there at home? We went and dug them up and brought them to the house and set them out across the front of the yard. Four, I believe it was...or five. Each one of us claimed these trees. And oh, they grew and was so pretty. And each one took care of their own tree, watering it, and then they grew to be big trees. I think they are all gone now...the house and everything is gone.

Darrell: And what did Auntie do one time? Climbed out of a top window.

GRANDMOTHER: Oh! (*laughing*). When they went to Beaver Dam, Mother and Daddy left Della in control of the children. They were supposed to mind her. And mother and daddy got in the buggy and went to Beaver Dam. So Della was the one to boss us kids, because she was the oldest. And Auntie got to cutting up, so she put her upstairs and fastened the stair door, and told her she had to stay up there until they got home. And all at once, she comes in. And Della says, “Well, how did you get in here? How did you get out?”

GRANDMOTHER: And she had gone to the window, raised it, and jumped out. Swung down and dropped...to the ground. It’s a wonder she didn’t break her neck. I forgot how many feet that was, but she let herself down as far as she could and then dropped on that hard ground.”

Question: Did all of you children sleep upstairs?

GM: Most of us, yes. Us girls did. All the girls had a room upstairs

Darrell: Did you tell me you all used to listen to them in the parlor downstairs? Or you all could look down and see through a little crack or something?

GM: No, I can’t remember that, honey. No, you could not see. There was no cracks. See, it was a log house. And then weather-boarded and painted. And ceiled inside and papered. And you couldn’t hear anything or see anything.

Darrell: May that was Daddy who told me that. Maybe it was his house.

GM: Yes, maybe it was something that Daddy told. No, you couldn’t hear no noise.

Darrell: And you all had a fireplace?

GM: We had two. In each big room. It wasn't at the end of the house like a lot of them have. They were in the middle of the house. And it kept the house warm better.

Jerri: And the boys brought in the wood, I guess?

GM: Well, us girls brought it in too. (*Laughing*). We had to help, Jerri. We had to work.

Darrell: Did you tell us that Grandmother did all the sewing for you all?

GM: Oh yes. On a sewing machine. She did all of the sewing. She loved to sew. She bought the material. She had a spinning wheel, too. And she would weave and card. But she made our gloves and caps to wear...she knitted those. That was the only way you had. You had to be self-sufficient in those days.

(Mention of having a good store at Select. "They had shoes there, and grocery stores, post office, and a drug store." And they had the Christian church, that Daddy's father belonged to. And some of his sisters belonged to that church. Select just had one church.")

(There is much more on all of these transcribed tapes, I am just trying to single out her various mention and descriptions of her house and the surrounding acreage. JB)

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September 1, 1986

Jerri: Which one of you girls did the ironing?

GM: Della always done the ironing, and Ma did the sewing.

Jerri: Who did the churning?

GM: Just one, everyone, and the next time the other one. Taken time about.

Jerri: And did you make your own starch, like you did your soap?

GM: Oh yes, I think bought starch in the boxes and made it. Not from scratch. Everything was always starched and ironed as slick as a ribbon, and Della was the one that done it. And on them old flat irons, where they get black on them.

Della always got up and got breakfast, and always got up and built a fire in the fire place. That little bitty thing. And then she would come wake up everybody and tell them breakfast was ready. She would have a great big bread pan full of buttermilk biscuits baked, and ham and eggs and all, and put them on the table. She was an angel all her life.

Retha: And didn't you say she got her buckets and went to milk?

GM: Yes.

Jerri: How come she wound up with all the work?

GM: I guess we...all the rest of us was kind of lazy. (*Laughter*). We had our chores, too, but not as many as she did. But she never complained.

Jerri: And did she do the washing?

GM: Yes, but we helped. But she did all the ironing. I never ironed a thing in my life until I married. And then I didn't know anything. But we would carry the wood in and build a fire around the kettle, and keep the fire going, and carried her water. We had a big spring of water right there by the shade tree.

Retha: Mama, I was telling Jerri that you had a room with a rod down the middle where you kept your clothes. On each side, and all the girls kept their petticoats.

GM: Upstairs. And we had a pole or rod, I don't know. And our clothes were hung. And we could walk down through there and there's where she put all of our clothes. Dresses and slips and everything.

Jerri: Did you wear bonnets, grandmother?

GM: Well, sure we wore bonnets. Yes, we had pretty bonnets. Mother made them. We had pretty bonnets. We even wore bonnets to school. Most all of them did. We would get that red percale and make red bonnets, and blue bonnets ..."

Retha: Tell about the fascinators.

(More follows about the fascinators, hats and school – Bunker Hill – a lot more follows on each of these tapes that is not included here on computer. But the tapes have been completely transcribed on typewriter.

One mention of another item in the house: "A little bottle of whiskey used for medicinal purposes that Ma kept . She always had a little bottle, and she put it in her trunk and locked it." This came up when they used a little of the whiskey from the trunk to revive Ellis after he fell out of the barn loft and was knocked unconscious.)

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November 7, 1976

When Grandmother's new clock that Eula Mae had given her started chiming, our talk turned to the clock on the old fire place mantle when she was young:

Eula Mae: What kind of clock did you have, mama? Was it a grandfather's clock?

GRANDMOTHER: No, it wasn't a grandfather's clock, but it was just as good. And it chimed. Sat on the mantle. It was really good. And that clock...from the time I can remember, until I married, they never had no trouble with it. It was a clock that chimed, with weights. Yes. Had a heavy weight on each side. They called it an eight-day clock. They had to wind it every eight

days. But the chimes were louder than this (*the one she has now*). You could hear it all over the house.

This is a great tape, and ends with this:

And we had a happy home when we were kids...at home. I don't know...it was just a happy time. In that time, we sat around the fireplace and popped corn, and made candy, and eat apples. Just had a good time. We were all close, too. Because we stayed at home, and all the family was together.

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There were several medical doctors, and grandmother names several. She said:

“Neighbors “sat up” with the sick, doctors made house calls, babies were born at home, and family and friends helped.”

There are many subjects discussed about her lifetime:

Garden and orchards
Food and canning
Water, ice and wells
Barns and wagons, and barnyard animals
Hog-killing
Schools and learning
Sewing and clothing
Chores
Haircutting
Hunting and dogs

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