

Mary & Jesse Rigsby

By Karen Wabby



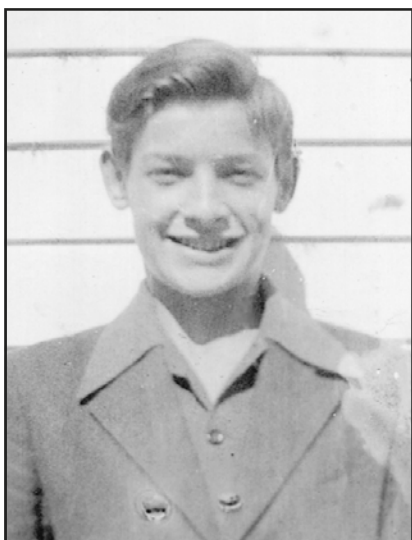
My parents, Mary & Jesse Rigsby, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Aug 17. Sixty years is sure a long time and they've had much happiness and a few tragedies as well. There are many stories to tell, and here are just a few.

Mama grew up in a family of five boys

and two girls in Princeton, Kentucky. Her dad, Ernest Jewell, and subsequently three of her brothers were farmers, raising tobacco and hogs. Their home was a log cabin, replaced by a modest 2 bedroom (no running water) home when I was two or three years old. It remained without running water until just a few years ago, when her three bachelor brothers who still lived there installed their first bathroom. Her mom, Monte Ladd Jewell, died when I was only six, so my only memory of her is of her sitting in her rocking chair in the living room near the coal stove.

Mama tells us her childhood claim to fame was her spelling prowess, winning a \$25 savings bond at a spelling bee when she was about twelve. She was a tomboy, too, often getting into fights with the boys in her school. In one of the only pictures she has from elementary school, she has a cut on her forehead to prove it. She liked to go to the movies in Princeton. An English bulldog belonged to the folks who owned the movie house and he guarded the theatre. To this day, she loves English bulldogs, and we got her one several years ago that she named Beaugard; it broke her heart when he died.

Daddy's mom and Dad, Marcus Rigsby and Jennie Gannon, started raising their family of three boys and a girl in the Chapel Hill area. Daddy tells about the time some older boys were throwing rocks at the brick walls between the windows of a church, telling Daddy they were "trying" to hit the windows, but claiming to be poor marksmen. Daddy, being much younger, believed them and proceeded to knock out several glass windows in that church. He says all he got that year for Christmas was a sack of sticks, coal, and broken glass. When the depression really hit, they lived in Nashville. Daddy tells of swimming in the Cumberland River and giving his mama fits by his shenanigans. My favorite story from his childhood is when he was around eight years old, and the depression had left his family on hard times like most during that era. He went to the market one day near Christmas with his daddy, and as luck would have it, found a DIME on the ground. At that time, a dime was probably worth what \$10 is today. His family,



Young Jesse & Mary

having no money, had been unable to afford any niceties for the kids, like oranges or candy, and he could have easily spent the money on himself. Instead he bought a picture of a mother holding a baby

with the family dog looking on, and gave it to his Mama for Christmas. I still have that picture on my wall.

During that tough time, Daddy had ear infections which subsequently caused him to become almost completely deaf. At first they didn't realize it, thought he just wasn't paying attention, and he fell behind in school. When his deafness was finally discovered, he was sent to Knoxville to the "Tennessee School for the Deaf and Dumb" (not a politically correct title these days) where he learned sign language and to read lips, and was trained to be a barber (a skill he practiced on the boys and sometimes our dolls).

Mama liked school and during her high school years she tells about gas rationing and everyone pooling their ration tickets to get enough gas to go to the movies in Princeton. On one of those trips they had a flat tire, and of course, no spare tires were to be had. They had to abandon the car and hitched a ride home on a coal truck. Since she attended high school during World War II, graduating in 1944, she says there were no boys in her senior class; all of them had already joined the service. One of her favorite stories is about her Geometry teacher who was a fairly young man who for some reason wasn't accepted for the service. She said almost everyday when the class started, he'd say "All right girls, put your figures on the board" and their giggling would make him think about what he'd said, and he'd turn red. But eventually he'd forget and say the same thing another day. The school year was cut short because of the war, so when Mama graduated in April 1944, she headed off to Detroit to work in an airplane factory and do her part for the war effort.

Daddy wasn't accepted in the service because of his deafness. His Uncle Jesse Gannon was working at the same factory in Detroit where Mama got her first job. Uncle Jesse would talk to Mama at the lunchroom, and told her he had a "good looking nephew" she needed to meet. And not long after Mama arrived in Detroit, Daddy got a job there too. Mama's job was to take in tools that had become broken or damaged on the factory line. The way it worked was when someone broke a tool, they came to the tool crib, and she exchanged the broken tool for a working one. Daddy must have been smitten because he started talking the other workers into letting him go to the tool crib in their place so he could talk to Mama. I guess it's not too hard to figure out his work suffered and he got fired. With no money, he returned to Tennessee; he did odd jobs to earn enough money to get a bus ticket back to Detroit. When he arrived, of course, he couldn't get in the factory and not wanting to wait until Mama got off work, he stood outside the factory and threw rocks at her window to get her attention (he's obviously got a thing about throwing rocks). Theirs must have been a mutual attraction because they married in August 1944 only four months after Mama left Kentucky for Detroit.

The lived for a few years in Nashville which is where Clayburn or Jr. as he's now known was born. They moved first to Rover, then to Eagleville when Grampa Marc bought the farm that is now owned by John and Nina Merritt. I came along when Jr. was six years old. We all lived in a tiny three room house and didn't have an indoor bathroom. Daddy drove a bull dozer for his daddy and in 1957, Daddy and his two brothers, J. W. and Merkle, bought the grocery store and garage in Allisona that is still owned by Uncle Merkle. Daddy and J.W. drove dozers all summer, as long as the weather cooperated, and then worked in the garage with Merkle the rest of the time. The three wives, Mama, Lorene and Betty, each worked two days a week in the store. Mama and Daddy were saving all they could to build a nice brick house for the family. The house they live in now was built largely by Daddy, his brothers, and Jr. with help from various cousins and friends. It was completed in 1962, and Daddy had saved enough to pay for everything in cash except for the last \$1,000. He always said it took him three years to pay off that \$1,000 and he'd never borrow money ever again. He hasn't as far as I know, although he likes to use his Discover card now because it pays him money back. Of course, he pays it off in full every month.

Mama knew how to save money too; she scrimped and saved her left over grocery money so that she could buy braided rugs for the new house. Why were

we not surprised when she returned from her day of shopping in downtown Nashville with a new pair of multi-colored lizard skin spike heels and a matching purse...and no rugs! Mama always has been a stylish dresser with a real weakness for shoes and purses...I must have inherited that from her.

For Jr. and me, having our own bedroom was really nice, not to mention the bathroom. Not long after we moved in the "new" house and all had separate bedrooms, Mama became pregnant with Steve. At Eagleville graduations, as the parents always stood up when their student crossed the stage to receive their diploma, the mother was presented a rose. Mama was a sight at Jr.'s graduation, six months pregnant with Steve. A day or two after Steve came home from the hospital, Jr. bought a beautiful red and white 1955 Thunderbird convertible. That morning at breakfast, Jr. was complaining about "that new baby keeping me up all night"; Mama said "Yeah that new baby on the carport!"

As we were growing up, Mama and Daddy always liked to travel. Mostly we went out west as Daddy had cousins all over Texas, Montana & Wyoming. Although we often stayed with relatives, we always liked the nights when we weren't close to relatives and could stay in a motel with a pool! We'd drive much of the day, persuading Daddy to stop when we saw some roadside attraction that we just had to see. Today traveling by interstate and flying across the country are nice and you sure get there quicker, but I miss those driving vacations, just stopping when you see something interesting and really enjoying this beautiful country of ours. The year Jr. married Betty Dalton, we all headed out west, traveling to Montana and Wyoming to see Yellowstone Park and that part of the country; Steve was just two years old. Traveling through Utah, we were hit by another car. It was very scary, but we were all OK. Mama, Betty & I were really scared to get in a car again, but the next morning Daddy rented one and made us visit all the local sights in Utah for the three days it took to get our car repaired.

After Jr. and I were gone from home, Cindy, Jr. & Betty's daughter who is only two years younger than Steve, often went on vacations with Mama and Daddy to keep Steve company. And many times, Steve went on vacations with Aunt Betty and Uncle Merkle and their youngest son, Alan, who was a little younger than Steve. Mama has lots of pictures from these vacations out west. They always had lots of fun and felt very fortunate to see so much of the country.

Probably the most adventurous family vacation Mama, Daddy and Steve took was to visit me while I was working in Germany. I drove a little VW beetle, and we would all four pile in and sightsee and enjoy the great food. I even persuaded Mama, who is not a drinker, to try a glass of German wine at dinner. On the way home from our first few dinners, Mama commented that she thought my car might have a carbon monoxide leak, as she kept falling asleep in the back seat. We got a good laugh when we figured out it was because of her "sampling" the wine. While they were there, on the days I worked, I gave them the car and they did their own exploring. Daddy had a lot of fun driving that VW beetle all around Bavaria. One day my German landlord who spoke no English, wanted to host them for a day around the area. They agreed and visited some beautiful castles and local sights, and had a lot of fun trying to communicate! Daddy even got the treat of going into a German "beer keller" where some friends of the landlord made their own beer. We think Daddy may have "over-sampled" that day, but he sure did have fun. One of our most memorable trips in Germany was traveling up the Alps in that little VW...it would strain and struggle to make it to the top of each mountain, then we'd all hold our breath as we screamed down the other side.

About nine years ago, Daddy had a cochlear ear implant, which means he can now hear! Sometimes, when Mama can't get to the phone quickly, he'll answer and it sure is odd to talk with him on the phone. He hands it off to her pretty fast, as he hasn't acquired a love of talking on the phone.

Mama and Daddy have been blessed with four grandchildren, Jr. & Betty's children, Cindy and Mark (who was tragically killed five years ago) and Steve and Cathy's children, Jesse (named for his granddaddy) and Sierra (the

newest edition who will be three at Christmas). They also have four great grandchildren, Cindy and Jimmy's two, Colin and Rachel, and Mark's two boys, Matthew and Landon. They are very blessed that all but Matthew and Landon live fairly close by and can visit often.

Mama has had some health problems in the last few years, but she's working hard at making the best of the situation. She's always told her doctors that it doesn't matter about the "dog in the fight", what's important is the "fight in the dog" and she's still fighting. Daddy spends his days now playing cards at Rigsby's store and gardening in the summer. Together, he and Mama still fix their own meals although kind neighbors and friends help out in that regard more and more. This year for the big anniversary, a nice dinner out is planned with immediate family. They didn't want a big event, just their kids and grandkids around them, as that's what has always been important and meant the most to them.

