

## James E. Fagan By Connie Fagan Witte



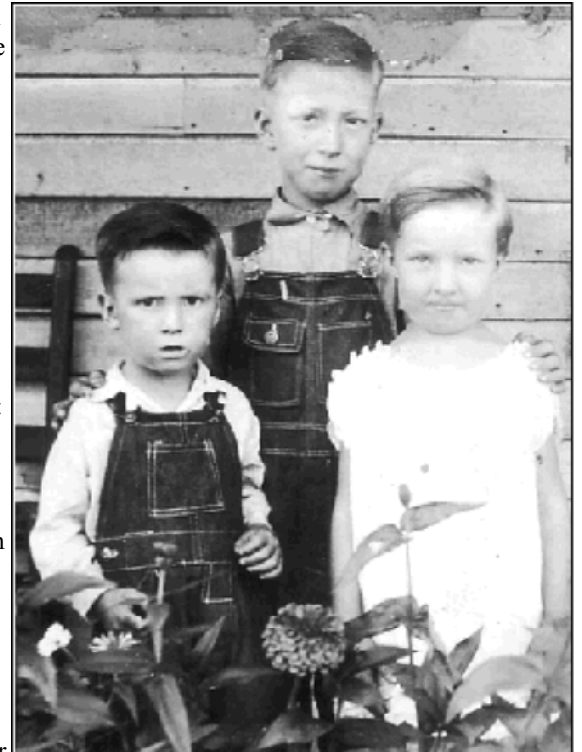
James E. Fagan is the youngest of three children of Owen Elliott and Mamie Lou Dean Fagan. He was born 80 years ago on Leap Year, February 29, 1924, in Caney Springs in Marshall Co. His brother Edwin and sister Dorothy Dean are now passed away. His family moved to Eagleville when he was three years old and he started in first grade at Eagleville School when he was five.

He has fond memories of his childhood in Eagleville during the Depression of the 1930s. He said he and his friends Bill “Hot” Dyer, Urban Little, Robert “Pint” Gillespie, Junior Bellenfant, and Russell Little were reminiscent of the kids in the “Our Gang” movies. A favorite activity during the hot summer was to go to the swimming hole down Cheatham Springs Road where they’d lay their clothes on the bank and go skinny-dipping. One day a couple of girls came along, trapping the boys in the cold spring water for quite a while. By the time the girls finally left, the boys were so cold their lips were turning blue.

Looking back on his boyhood experiences, he thinks Eagleville was one of the best small towns in Tennessee. Kids had fun, entertained themselves, played pranks, but there was nothing going on for which they had to be ashamed. He and Hot Dyer decided they were going to make a lot of money by catching mink and muskrat along the Harpeth River. They would have to get up very early to check their traps before school. Hot needed help to wake up, so he would tie a rope around his leg and run it out of his upstairs bedroom window. James would come and pull on the rope to wake Hot without disturbing anyone else. This venture lasted a few weeks before the boys gave it up without ever catching anything.

Eagleville in the 1930s was a bustling place. There was a big, beautiful two-story hotel with a balcony located on what is now the vacant lot behind the Dairy Bar. Some of the schoolteachers stayed there. The McCord brothers had a furniture store. The first elevator James ever rode was in that store, a manually powered pulley freight elevator. At Tomlin’s Restaurant, referred to as the pie wagon because it was a long, narrow building, one could get a good egg or baloney sandwich for a nickel. There were six grocery stores, four garages, two banks, two dentists, a physician, a barbershop, and a hardware store. One of the grocery stores had a soda fountain. There was also an ice house/pool hall/bowling alley (with just one bowling lane). The ice would arrive from Murfreesboro in 100 lb. blocks and be stored in a big walk-in cooler. In those days most people had iceboxes, not electric refrigerators, and would buy ice for a penny a pound. There was a creamery and feed mill run by A. P. Elmore. Mr. Elmore was also the magistrate for the area. The road to Murfreesboro and the one to Allisona were blacktop roads, but the ones to Shelbyville and to Nashville were only paved for about two blocks before turning into gravel roads.

Just about every evening all the kids around would gather in Dr. J. E. Stephenson’s yard to play. There would be ten or twelve kids including Pauline and Jane Stephenson and the Redmond twins, Margaret and Marjorie, playing kick-the-can or hide-n-seek. He doesn’t know how Dr. and Mrs. Stephenson put up with all the kids always playing in the yard and running through the house, but they didn’t seem to mind. When he was about twelve, he and some of the other boys would go into Murfreesboro almost every Saturday. They would sometimes ride on the milk truck but usually Dr. Stephenson would take them. For 25 cents they could spend all day in Murfreesboro. They would go to the Roxie Theater and pay a dime for the movie, a nickel for popcorn, a nickel for a soft drink, and usually get a candy bar with the last nickel.



Entertainment came mostly from school or church activities and whatever kids could find to do. There was no TV and not many radios. He and several other boys made their own crystal set radios. By stringing a long wire between two trees for an antenna and wearing headphones because the sound was so weak, he was able to get one radio station and that was WSM in Nashville. He could listen to the Grand Ole Opry. He was active in school sports playing basketball and baseball, was in a number of school plays, was president of one of the two high school literary societies, and president of his senior class. Bill Wheeler was the principal when James graduated from Eagleville School in 1942.

## Citizen

WWII was in progress when he graduated. He went to school in Dickson to learn to be a machinist. He was sent to Maryland to work at Engineering and Research Corp. on airplane propellers for the war effort. That is where he met his wife, Jean. He wanted to serve his country further and enlisted in the Army. He did his basic training in Florida to prepare to fight the Japanese in the tropics, but instead was sent to the cold climates of Germany and France where he fought on the front line in the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He was in Germany in 1945 when he received the telegram saying his daughter, Connie, was born. As a WWII veteran he was awarded several medals including the Bronze Star.

When he got out of the service, he returned to Eagleville for a while. Then he and his family moved to Maryland where Jean worked at The National Geographic Society and he worked for Litton Industries as a manufacturing engineer. After about 15 years, they decided to make a lifestyle change and moved back to Tennessee, just down the road in Chapel Hill, where they built a home and started a beef cattle farm. They retired from farming about 12 years ago, and now reside once again in Eagleville. James and Jean are active in the Eagleville Church of Christ, and Jean is also active in the homemakers club. Until a few years ago, both helped with the Chittlin Supper and he was involved with the Lions Club and their activities.

This is a very special year for James and Jean, as they will be celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on March 19. Always a close family, their only child, Connie, married and stayed nearby in Murfreesboro with her husband Larry Witte and two daughters, Laura and Lisa. Laura and Lisa have many wonderful recollections of the fun and adventures experienced with their grandparents on their farm. Now Laura and Lisa are grown; both are college graduates; both are married; and Laura has a son, Justin, making Jim and Jean great-grandparents.