

THE ALBUM
By Teresa Smyser

The old blue picture album sat in the middle of the table. My finger slid across the cover on my way to the phonograph. I looked over my shoulder to see Mom's smile. Pulling out her favorite record, I placed it on the turn table. After flipping the switch, I carefully laid the needle against the old vinyl disk.

Mom patted the chair next to her. "Come on. It's time." She drummed her arthritic fingers on the table. "You know, once a year isn't enough time to reminisce about this whole album."

"You're right. It's not." I settled into my seat and pulled the album close. Would we make it through the whole book before the needle found the deep scratch in the record? Doubtful.

"What are you waiting for? Open it."

I grinned. "Alright. Alright."

With a gentle touch, I turned to the first page. A black and white picture of Mom at the age of 27 stared back. My brows raised. "I sure like this photo of you."

"Thank you, my dear. It is one of my better ones. But enough of this page. I wish to look upon our family and friends. They're much more fun."

She winked and giggled.

We thumbed through the first few pages remembering her parents and her grandparents. Thankfully, I had recorded details about each picture since Mom's memory often failed.

As we cruised through the cousin pages, Mom stilled my hand and pointed to one picture.

"Now, that was a exciting trip."

Her gaze stared out the window with a far-away look.

"I was eighteen and dating your dad. We went with my cousins and our two married friends to the camp." She grinned. "They acted as our chaperones."

I knew without asking that she referred to the camp owned by her cousins, Boyd and Sib. The log cabin sat underneath Sky Bridge in Kentucky, and they called it Sleepy Hollow Lodge—a place where you never see a lizard. Humorous. Lizards scampered everywhere.

After telling funny things they did on that trip, a big sigh escaped her. She flopped back and looked at me. "As enjoyable as my outing at the camp, a dark element still haunts me."

I'd heard these stories so many times but of what did she refer? It didn't take a second before she repaired my memory.

"I hated and I mean really hated ..."

She stretched out a long pause. "... using that outhouse!"

My eyes widened. "Oh me. Of course ... the outhouse saga. On that note, I think we need some popcorn and sweet tea before progressing."

Mom chuckled.

The smell of fresh popped corn filled the room. After a refreshing drink of iced tea, I chomped on my popcorn and avoided the outhouse episode when she got poison ivy.

I enjoyed pictures of an era when you always wore your Sunday best to Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner. When being with family was more important than any other activity.

Mom particularly savored the neighborhood friends' pictures where my brother and I ... I'm the baby ... grew and played with our pals. Her finger tapped one photo. "To wear pants and ditch dresses for every occasion was monumental for women."

I shook my head in agreement. "Look here Mom. You, in a bathing suit. You and the neighborhood ladies were such sun goddesses."

Of course, I knew most of the women couldn't swim. They watched their kids swim and prayed if any got into trouble, someone would pull them out.

My head jerked around at the horrible screeching from the phonograph. The needle sat in the deep groove on the record. I pushed my chair back and hustled to spare the ears from further suffering. I didn't bother to restart the music.

When I walked toward the table, my eyes filled with tears. Half the book remained unseen. I closed it without a sound.

As I gazed at her empty chair, my tears fell. "Happy Birthday, Mom. I miss you."