

EDNA

(Rare and Unusual Stories That Happened in Her Life)

Murder Next Door (Age 8)

Early on the morning of 3 August 1929, on Wilmont Park Ave., SE, Atlanta, GA the murder of the next door neighbor Mrs. Thomas R. Bagwell by her husband, and then immediate suicide by Mr. Bagwell was observed by Edna. She was eight years old. The story, as remembered by Hollis, Edna and Mildred.

Mrs. Bagwell had returned home to milk their cow and process the milk. It was not uncommon in those days for families in the suburbs of Atlanta to keep a cow in the backyard. Our family also kept a cow. Mama had met Mrs. Bagwell on the street and suggested that she not go into the house, since her husband was despondent and was believed to be still drinking. Mrs. Bagwell stated that she was not afraid and that she needed to see after the cow, the milk, and related chores. Mrs. Bagwell's daughter-in-law came into our house with Mom to see some dresses that mom had made and was there when the event took place.

The Bagwell's son Forrest, who had come with his mother and wife, was outside near the garage repairing the cow halter. Hollis had been outside near him, but had returned inside the house and had just sat down when the shots were heard.

Mildred does not remember exactly where she was. Edna was at the dining room window, with her nose pressed against the window, as a child is sometimes likely to do. From the dining room window, Edna was looking directly at the back porch of the Bagwell's house.

Mrs. Bagwell came out on to the back porch and opened the icebox, presumably to put the milk in the icebox to cool. It was not uncommon in those days to have the icebox on the back porch. Mr. Bagwell opened the back screen door, stuck the pistol out and shot his wife while she was bent over removing or placing items in the icebox. He then stepped back inside the door aimed the pistol at his head and shot himself. Edna saw all this as she was rubbing her nose against the dining room window glass.

As the shots rang out everyone got excited. Mom called out "come on kids, let's go before he shoots some of us"; not knowing that he had already shot himself. Hollis scooted under a bed that had been placed across a doorway in order to get out, and that clarifies a prior misconception that he ran and hid under the bed. "No", he says, "I was responding to Mom's call, I was trying to get out of there".

Forrest, the Bagwell's son, ran into the house and grabbed the gun, which made him an initial suspect by the police. As things began to settle down, before and as the police arrived, Hollis and Edna went over to the Bagwell's house for a close-up look at the two dead neighbors. Shortly, however, the police moved everyone away from the scene.

The authorities naturally began to question family members and neighbors. Mama told the investigators that “we did not see it happen”. Edna says, “I saw it Mama”. “Hush Edna”, mama said, and continued the discussion with the investigator. Again, “Mama I saw it, I saw Mr. Bagwell shoot Ms. Bagwell and then shoot himself”. “Hush Edna, they are not interested in what children saw”. “Oh yes we are”, said the investigator. “Now why don’t you tell me exactly what you saw”, as he pulled Edna closer to him. Thus Edna became a key witness in the case.

Daddy, who was working on his Laundry route (he worked for Mays Laundry) heard about the incident somehow, and came home to see exactly what had happened and to check on the family.

Later that same day Edna was asked to repeat what she saw to several men gathered in the living room of the Bagwell home. It was probably the investigating authorities and the coroner.

The Atlanta Newspaper reported the murder/suicide on the front page on the Sunday 4 August 1929. The Bagwell's were buried together, as requested by him in the notes he left to the families, in Marietta, GA. Quote from the newspaper, “Thomas R. Bagwell, 40, in a fit of despondency Saturday morning shot and killed the mother of his seven children and himself. The murder and suicide took place shortly after 8:30 o’clock at the Bagwell home, 1353 Wilmont drive.”

Fast forward to the 1950/60’s. Forest Bagwell was working as a milkman for the J. P. Johnson Dairy, east of Snellville, Gwinnett Co., GA, and he delivered milk to Edna when they lived on GA Hwy 124 in Snellville. She and Forrest discussed the incident, and he told Edna that he felt her testimony removed him from suspicion and possibly prevented him from going to jail and maybe even prison.

So she learned to speak up at an early age, and ever since - - - - - well, you know.

Tom Thumb Wedding (Age 9)

Dad moved the family back to Grandpa Ewing’s farm in early 1930, and the children, Hollis, Edna and Mildred were enrolled in the Five Forks two room school.

Well Edna got married. Three times the story goes. It was the traditional School Play, a Tom Thumb Wedding at the school in 1930. Edna was the blushing bride. Ralph Hutchins was the groom. Mildred was the Trainbearer. That sure started something. Ever since Mildred has been walking behind Edna carrying something for her. I’ve heard that every time Ralph Hutchins meets Edna in a crowd he tells everyone in earshot that he married that girl three times and never did get to live with her. Oh well, such are the burdens of life.



(School Picture about that time)

Deputy Mom (About Age 10-12)

Some time along about this time Edna was deputized. Not formally, but gradually and informally. I can just hear Mom now, especially with a fine young baby boy in the family, “Edna you’ll have to take care of this, I’ve got to finish - - “, whatever it was that she might have been doing. I am sure as time went

on more and more responsibility and authority was passed (some assumed) along to Edna. She being the oldest daughter, that was not uncommon in families, especially farm families, of that era. She began to set a standard for the rest of us to meet, or rather to fume, fuss, rebel and argue about. You see we siblings did not always readily accept the “Deputy Mom” concept, formally or informally. But there was a need in the family that someone had to fill. It was a challenging task. Edna filled it well, - and still does. And we are all (well most of us anyway) proud of her for it.

The Cow Came Home Alone (Early teenage)

Daddy was always trading cows. Once when we lived on Grandpa Brownlee’s farm Dad sold a cow to a man in Clarkston, GA., a suburb of Decatur. I suppose the man hauled the cow home by truck. Edna and Mildred slept in the same room at that time. In the middle of the night Edna heard a cow Mooing outside her window. “Moo, moo”, she said it went, and kept on at it. She tried to wake Mildred, but the sleepy head didn’t want to be disturbed by her big sister going on about some dumb old cow. The cow continued to call, “Moo, moo”. Edna got up and went to the window. There stood the cow – mooing. She then went to Dad and Mom’s bedroom and called Dad. “Dad there is a cow outside our window mooing.” Now you can imagine Dad’s reaction in the middle of the night to such nonsense. But he finally got up to go see, and sure enough there was a cow standing in the yard just outside their window – mooing. So he got dressed and went outside, and guess what, that old cow he had sold to the man in Clarkston had walked back over 15 miles home alone. Never heard of that before, or since. Dogs will come back home alone, and rarely a cat will come home, but never heard of a cow coming back home. Why Edna’s bedroom window – we don’t know. But Dad was so moved by that

old cow coming home that he said that if she thought that much of us I'll just go and give the man his money back and keep the cow – and he did.

The Real Wedding **(Age 17)**

The year we moved from Grandpa Brownlee's farm (on McGee Rd) back to Grandpa Ewing's farm (on Webb Ginhouse Rd) Edna agreed to marry the love of her young life, James D. Cofer. It was a strange wedding, even for those austere times in rural Snellville and Fiveforks community. The idea was, as were most weddings of that time and place, to keep it simple. James and Edna, with two of their best friends, George Brooks and Ethel Cates, drove to great Uncle Oscar Moore's house on what is now Fireforks-Trickum Road to "get married". George and Ethel were there, as was the custom, to "stand up with them" while they were being married. Mildred, and her boyfriend Hoyt Cates, was there to witness the event as well. Uncle Oscar, as we called him, was an Elder (preacher) in the Primitive Baptist denomination, and served several churches, but primarily Friendship Primitive Baptist church on what is now Dogwood Rd, in the Fiveforks community.

Well I don't know that they were anxious, but it seems they did arrive a bit early. And as the story has been told, Uncle Oscar had been out selling Christmas Trees all day and he was a little late coming home. After apologizing for being late, he says, "well I can go get cleaned up before I marry you, or I can just take off my coat and marry you like I am". Well it seems that decision didn't take long, since they had been waiting there in the living room for some time and were getting more nervous by the minute. They immediately concluded that the sooner the better.

At that point Uncle Oscar left the living room presumably to remove his coat and probably get his marrying book and bible. When he returned, having freshened up a bit, he was ready to begin the ceremony. Edna and James were standing with Uncle Oscar in front of them, and George and Ethel behind Uncle Oscar.

George immediately noticed something Uncle Oscar forgot. He forgot to remove the flat pint bottle of whisky from his rear pocket. Now it was not a bit unusual for many people, including preachers of that day, that were working out in the cold all day, as he had been, to have a little something to help keep warm, semi-medicinal you see.

The ceremony proceeded post haste. George Brooks biting his lip all the time to keep from laughing. Now you can just imagine the comments as soon as they got in the car about that situation. Well they obviously did get married by a preacher that had most likely been drinking, with a bottle with whisky in it in his hip pocket. George Brooks never let them live that down. But you can also imagine how much fun lifelong friends had reliving that event, after Edna and James got over the embarrassment of it.

Well it just goes to show you, a big wedding is not essential for a good marriage – in fact not even a somber, or is it a sober, one.

Her 80th Birthday

Edna's 80th birthday was a real celebration for her – and for us, her siblings and spouses. We were all invited to Fort Lauderdale, FL by her son and daughter-in-law, Jack and Teresa, for an all expense paid trip, including a trip down to Miami on their boat. A great time was had by all. There were unusual sights to be seen with those sisters climbing up and down the ladders on that boat during a sightseeing trip on the canals of Ft Lauderdale and the inter-coastal waterway from Miami back to Ft Lauderdale. Some of it was recorded for posterity on video camera, and shall be used when a good laugh is deemed appropriate.

The trip to Miami by boat was “iffy” due to weather (high winds). The route to take was in question and of concern to Jack and his friend Ty, who captained the boat. Jack asked Jim Wilkinson and me whether he should ask his mother and the sisters if they thought it would be all right to travel down to Miami out in open water rather than going down the inter-coastal route. To go down out in open water would be much faster, but could be rather rough. I said “Jack it has been my experience that it is much easier to get forgiveness that it is to get approval”. Jim chimed in and agreed. Jack grinned and left shaking his head, and went back to talk to Ty. We took the open water route, about a mile out from the beaches. Ty explained that when we left the harbor channel, we would encounter some immediate movement of the boat, but not to worry when we got further out into the open water there would still be some movement of the boat, but it should be a fairly smooth ride, and it was. There was some movement of the boat, but I noticed Edna and the sisters, while smiling a lot, remained very still in their seats. I didn't notice any “white knuckles”, but I did notice they would frequently hold on to whatever was handy. Confucius, or somebody, said, “a picture is worth ten thousand words”. So I'll stop writing now - -



(On Jack's boat somewhere in Ft Lauderdale or Miami)

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