

## Fred and Opal (Knotts) Weekley

By William Weekley St John



My Granny Opal.

I was reading some of the web sites I look at to keep up on the news from the mountains... West Virginia that is, where half my family is from. I read in the Obits that the last of my grandparents, my grandfather's second wife, passed away on July 2, 2007. She was the last of that generation in my family. She and my grandfather married in 1956 and were very happy together. She brought 3 children of her own and my grandfather had 4 kids left at home out of 8 total.



Top pic left: Lowell (my uncle), Grandpa Fred, Opal, and Opal's daughter Geneva at their wedding.

Bottom left: Fred facing Opal at their wedding, the vows.

Next pic: the Kiss.

Last pic: wedding cake.

I loved this woman so much. We all called her, Granny Opal. I grew up thinking that everyone had three grandmothers until I was around 10 years old and started asking questions, "Why do I have three grandmothers?" That is when I found out what the word "divorce" means, remarriage and how the local Methodist church pastor was less than unkind to my remarried grandparents. He told them they were living in sin and they were going to Hell, yada yada yada. My grandfather never went to church after that. I don't think he went much before that anyway. He did find his faith later in life but it was too late for his children who were hell raisers and wild hillbillies, as the rumors go.



Opal and Fred in Calif.



1973 on Sears Run



1965 Sears Run

My fondest memories were of Granny Opal playing the piano at their home on Sears Run, Minnora, West Virginia and singing hymns. She continued to play the piano until she had three of her fingers sliced off by the lawn mower my grandfather, Fred, was working on. Grandpa needed my Granny Opal to hold the mower on its side while he did something. He forgot to disengage the spark plug and when he spun the blade around the mower's engine engaged: Granny Opal's fingers got in the way and off they came. She wrapped them in her kitchen apron that she was wearing, blood flying everywhere, and my grandfather drove like a bat- out- of- hell to the local hospital. Reattaching fingers back then was far beyond the surgeon's skills in the mountains, so she learned to live without them. Grandpa felt badly about it. Perhaps even a little guilty.



My Grandparent's home and cellar-top as see in the summer 2006

Other memory of Granny Opal was of her baking biscuits in the mornings. We spent every family vacation week on Sears Run. We never went to Myrtle Beach or "foreign" places. The mountains were our home away from home. It is true that you can take the boy out of the mountains but never the mountains out of the boy. So off we went. We often slept in the cellar top, which was a bunk house above the cellar where all the canned food went in winter. There was a gas floor stove to heat it in winter and the feather down blankets and hand made quilts to kept the morning mountain chill off your slumbering body in summer.

Grandpa would give a holler in the morning when it was time to get up, usually around 6:30 AM. Vacation sleep ins were not a mountaineer concept. It was early to bed (9 PM) and early to rise.

The kitchen would be a bee hive of activity with all the grandchildren sitting around the kitchen work table where Granny Opal kneaded out country biscuits, cut them with the open end of a tumbler and powdered them with flour on a greased cookie sheet. A teaspoon of melted butter went on each biscuit before they were placed in the oven. Now, one of the best things you will ever eat is a warm morning mountain biscuit with butter and karo syrup that was made from sugar cane that was grown and cooked down at the West Fork Park. Thicker than honey, the syrup was spooned out on your plate and cool fresh butter was cut into in with a fork. You used your biscuit to dip into it and, well, the combination of the textures and tastes are making my mouth water even now. The breakfast table was filled with foods that we just don't eat everyday. Eggs over easy, tomato cream soup, ham, bacon, gravy, cold cereal if you wanted it, and karo syrup. It was not uncommon for the entire family to gather at Sears Run. Cousins, aunts, uncles, from all over the country would "come home" throughout the summer months. We kids would play in the creek that flowed through my grandfather's farm or climb the two mountains in my grandfather's backyard. The farm was 102 acres of playground. In the summer and fall the men and boys

would go hunting for grouse and rabbit with my one uncle's coon dogs. We would crawdad fish in the creek and go fishing.



The four kids left at home in 1955-56: tallest in back, my father, Loy. in front of him, my Uncle Bill, beside him my aunt Sharon, and in front of her, my uncle Carroll.

On Sundays we would walk to church up the dirt road. We would insist on going because it was a treat to ring the bell to call everyone to worship. The mountain church experience was very different from back in Ohio. The singing was different. A kind of mournful wailing. When prayer time came, the old men would bend down on one knee facing their wooden pews, place their faces in one hand and pray out loud, all at once, yelling as loud as they could, as if God could not hear them. The women would sit quietly "in their places." As would the children. I remember looking at my sister, Sarah, trying not to laugh at all the crazy noise. Praying was men's work. And, as I found out later in life, women were to keep quiet in church. But that was back in the later 1960's. I am sure they can pray now. The preacher would scream a sermon with gasping breathes between every sentence. It was, as I said, a different way to worship.



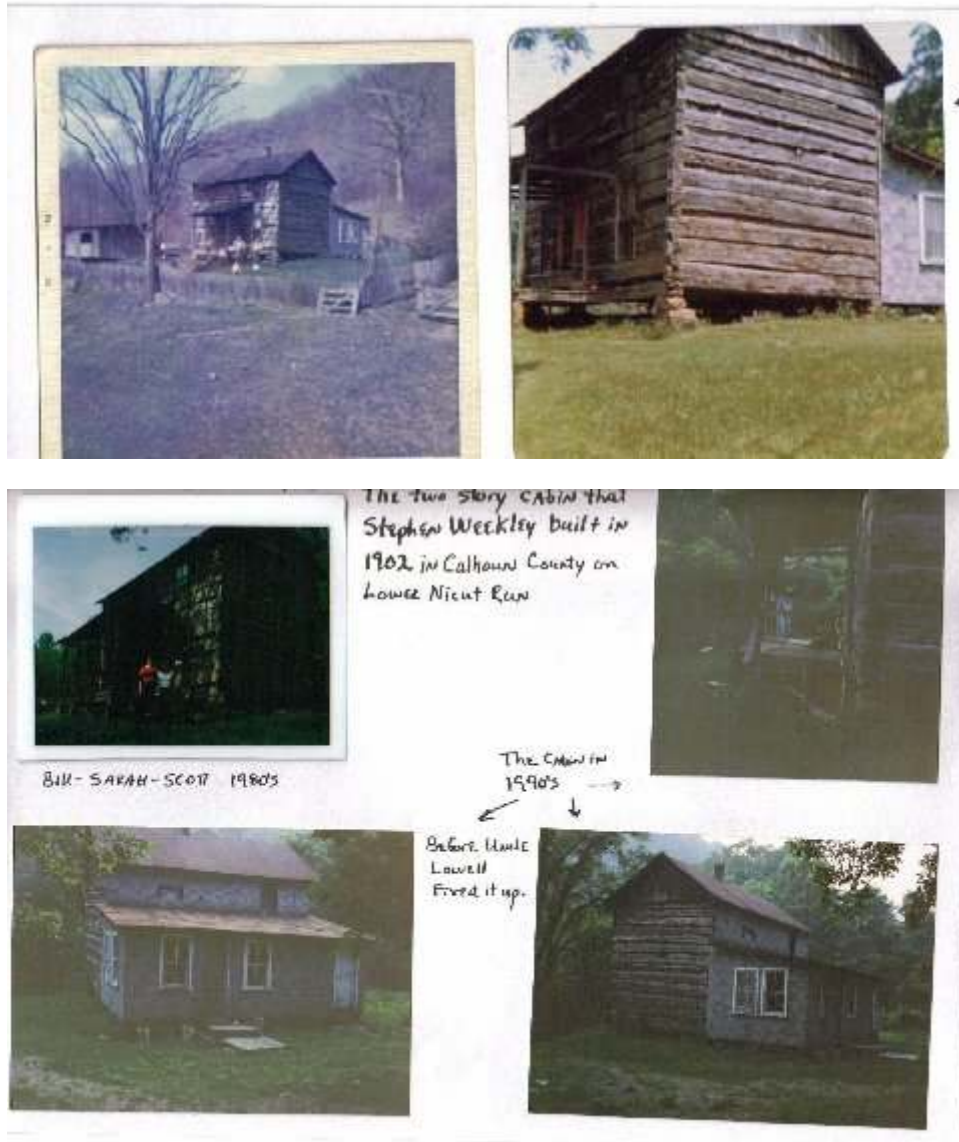
The summer of 1983 - family reunion.

Just part of the grandchildren and great grandchildren. I am in the center back row in the red shirt. My sister-in-law, Jackie just to the right is holding my newly born nephew, Jimmy; my brother Scott is directly in front of her in the red tank top, and my sister Sarah is next to him in the white dress. My up and coming famous artist cousin, Adam Weekley, is in the front row, last kid to the right.



This picture shows my grandfather with his six surviving children. They are from left to right: Lowell, Sharon, Bill, Paul, Fred, Grandpa Fred, Carroll, and Loy. August 1983

Grandpa could no longer keep up with the farm on Sears Run in Minnora so they sold it and moved to a house in Mineral City, WV. It wasn't long until he could no longer stand being away from the place of his birth and the birth of his children. So they bought a double wide and placed it a stone's throw from Sears Run, at the foot of the mountain he once owned. There, in view of the Little Kanawha River, my "third" grandmother, Opal, cared for Fred till his death. I would stop and visit on my trips back and forth from Tennessee where I was in college. Those visits were precious to me. I knew it would not be long till my grandfather's health failed him. He is buried on the backside of the mountain he used to own. It was from this cemetery that we would set out on grouse hunts and circle our way around the mountain and end up at my grandparent's farm.



These are photos of the log cabin my great grandfather, Stephen Alexander Weekley, built in 1904 to house his growing family. My grandfather, Fred, was born here in 1908. The top left picture is from 1973 when my great uncle Tusca Weekley still lived there. He was a cook in WWII on a naval ship. He came back from the war and never left this log cabin until he was too sick to stay there. My uncle Lowell now lives there. He added a porch and extra rooms.



This is an early picture of the cabin taken from the mountain side behind the farm. Not sure of the date. I had the flash on and it messed up the picture.



This is the family cabin now, in 2006. My uncle Lowell did a good job fixing it up.



Even if in life my grandmother Lear and my grandfather Fred could not reside together, they now lay in the same hillside in death. My great grandparents, the Parsons, and their daughter, Lear, my grandmother are buried next to each other. My grandfather Fred and my Granny Opal rest a few yards away.



This is my old Honda parked in front of my grandfather Fred's grave. Taken back in the early 1990's.



This is the grave of Fred and Opal Weekley.



The headstone (upper left) are my great grandparents, Bailey and Nannie Parsons. Their daughter, Lear Parsons Weekley, is to the right. My Uncle Lowell will be buried with his wife, Janet, in the foreground.



This is my cousin Chris and her dad, my Uncle Lowell and me.  
Summer 2006.

Calhoun County holds the resting remains of more relatives than I can count. That place will always hold sweet memories for me as well. From those cool summer mornings when the clouds came down to kiss the mountain trees, picking berries for a blackberry cobbler Granny Opal baked, to June bugs on strings, mournful hymns of praise to the Creator, treks to the outhouse, drinking from clear mountain streams, swinging on vines hanging from trees, visiting older family members, hearing stories from the old days, the picket fenced flower garden of my great grandma Nanny Parsons in Chloe, the mules my great uncle Tuck used to have, karo syrup, grandpa's tobacco spit can, Grandpa whistling his wake up call and stirring under the feather mattress and pulling the warm quilt closer, the smell of gas from the floor heater, Grandma Parson's sun porch and swing, sneaking into old barns and looking at stuff from years past, skipping stones on the creek under a canopy of massive trees, bats flying in the twilight of the evening and chasing lightening bugs that seemed more numerous than the stars, swimming in Uncle Larry's pond on Wolfe Run and getting leeches, hunting with my uncles and dad, family around the breakfast table, climbing mountains with my cousins, iris gardens with butterflies and bees and winding my way home around two lane roads; these are the precious memories I will cherish and love till my days are done. I don't think I missed out on going to the beach after all.

May all my grandparents and relatives rest in peace. There is no more beautiful place to sleep than in the mountains of Calhoun County.

William Weekley St John  
Akron, Ohio

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"Calhoun Chronicle" - 12 July 2007

OPAL KNOTTS WEEKLEY

Opal Knotts Cottrell Weekley, 90, of Orma, died Monday, July 2, 2007, at Roane General Hospital.

She was born at Chloe, the daughter of the late Charles and Ettie Duffield Knotts. She was a homemaker and a schoolteacher in Calhoun and Braxton counties.

Surviving are one step-daughter, Sharon Weekley Hill of Lineboro, Md.; four step-sons, Paul Weekley of Knoxville, Tenn., Lowell Weekley of Orma, Bill Weekley of Wooster, Ohio, and Carroll Weekley of Parkersburg; two daughters, Geneva Lucas of Kingman, Ariz., and Barbara Travis of Parkersburg; one son, Larry Cottrell of Orma; three sisters, Marie Knotts Arnold of Coolville, Ohio, Jean Knotts Carte of Charleston and Juanita Knotts Siers of Fayetteville; 40 grandchildren; 51 great-grandchildren; and 12 great-great-grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Fred Weekley; two step-sons, Robert and Loy Weekley; one step-daughter, Glenna Weekley Pilgrim; two sisters, Sadie Knotts Arnold and Reva Knotts Gibson; and six brothers, Lee, Scott, Cecil, Bernard, Tommy and Charles Knotts.

Services were held at Stump Funeral Home, Arnoldsburg, with Rev. Darrell Mollohan officiating. Burial was in Minnora Cemetery.