

Missions

Rejoice in the Seasons for God is love;

As the seasons change it brings back old memories as a child when I was growing up back in East Tennessee. Fall is much different here in Texas than it was back home. In Texas we can have several different seasons in a week. Luckily this year we're having a real fall season, the weather has been beautiful for the exception of the lack of rain fall.

In Tennessee we had four distinct seasons, fall starts in September, the leaves began to turn as the temperature drops, the dance of a brisk fall breeze signals colder days ahead, and maple trees punctuate the landscape with bright tartan colors. Flower beds display vividly colored pansies and mums. It's the most beautiful time of the year.

Autumn is the perfect season for making pumpkin pie. Mom's kitchen was small but she could make some fine vittles in there. There is nothing like the aroma of cinnamon and ginger to make a kitchen extra cozy. Sharing a piece of warm pumpkin pie with family is one of life's vastly underrated pleasures.

To make a little extra money we would travel about 20 miles to the nearest paved road and set up a little roadside stand to sell fruit, arrowheads we found in the freshly plowed fields, pelts from muskrats and a few mink that we had trapped.

We would spend the rest of the afternoon at the old country grocery store drinking RC cola and eating moon pies. I always put peanuts in my second RC, what a treat. The old men sat outside whittling and chewing tobacco and debating on when the first freeze would be.

By October the tobacco crop was ready for harvest and it would take 3 to 4 weeks to cut it down and get it in the barn. That was hard work and the only good part was we didn't have to go to school and we earned some money for Christmas.

In 1958 we had a hard winter, the snow started shortly after the tobacco harvest. We lived in a valley between Short Mountain and Clinch Mountain, in a community called Cloud Creek. We had families of mountain people living on our land high in the mountains.

They all were poor and you didn't see much of them except for harvest time and at church. They were more or less sharecroppers. They would help us with the crops and we would share with them. One family my mom was partial to was the Gilliam's, they had nine children aging from 6 months to 14 years. Mom was always concerned if those kids had enough food.

The snow was about 3 feet deep and we were for all practical purposes "snowed in." The only way we could get around was by tractor or foot. We didn't have to worry about food, we had plenty of can goods from the women canning everything from the garden to the fruit and berries. We had plenty of meat from hunting deer, rabbits and squirrels to pork and beef in the smokehouse.

The snow continued to come down and mom's worries came to action. She sat down with me and my older brother and shared her concerns. She ask us to go back in the mountains and check on the Gilliam's. She knew it was risky but she told us the Lord would look out for us because He had been tugging at her heart to do something.

After we thought about it for a few minutes we said yes we would go. The next step was to get approval from Dad, he was the master of the house.

Mom brought Dad in and we all discussed how important it was that we check on them. Dad warned us of the hazards of getting lost or being attacked by a large animal. He was just testing us to see if we were

brave enough to take on this adventure. He knew we could do it because over the years he had taught us the way of the land.

I was 12 years old and my brother was 15, we knew the mountains very well and we had been trained with bow and arrow and guns to hunt game for the winter. We also knew how easy it was to get lost in the snowy mountains and Dad was right we had bears, mountain lions and wolves to worry about but we had made the commitment and we were going, no turning back.

That evening mom began to pack can goods and meat for us to take on the journey. We were up early the next morning before daylight because we knew it would take all day to get up that mountain and back home. We didn't want the sun to set before we got back.

My brother was carrying my grandpa's 10 gage double barrel shot gun and a small hand gun and an old Bowie knife that he traded a couple of skins for. I was carrying a 30-30 lever action Winchester rifle, hoping we might see a buck on the way back.

After we had fed the pigs and milked the cows and ate a hardy breakfast we all held hands and said a special prayer to God asking for His protection and guidance, then we lit out on our journey. After we crossed a 100 acre field on the south side of the farm and made it across a pretty wide creek in the middle of the valley we started up the mountain.

It was hard walking in the deep snow carrying all those can goods. We were already breathing hard when we reached the foot of the mountain. We stopped to take a breather and sat down on a large tree that was a victim of the creek floods in the springtime.

We talked about what we were setting out to do, and like always we made a plan about how we would climb the mountain and what we would do if we saw an animal that might be a threat. We talked about getting lost and what we would do as well. We felt with our plan and the help of God we could do this.

First we had to find an old log road that would lead us close to the Gilliam's because the mountain road that led to the house was several miles to the east and the house was almost directly south of the farm. Two miles to the mountain road was a waste of time if we could find the log road.

We headed east and shortly found the old log road and started up the mountain. It was much easier on the log road because the trees and brush had been cleared some years ago by loggers.

It was cold and hard climbing up that mountain, we didn't encounter any wild animals but we did see some strange tracks that we didn't recognize which was unusual because we were pretty good trackers.

About three hours later we arrived at the old house in the mountains. It was hard to find because we were looking for smoke from the chimney and we just kind of stumbled upon the house but there was no smoke, no fire to keep warm. We looked at each other and quickly knocked on the door.

A man's voice said come in, we entered the old house to see that some of the kids were in one bed covered in blankets and some were in the bed with mom and dad. They all seemed to be ok, but they didn't want to get out of bed because it was so cold.

We told them we were sent from home to check on them and we had food if they were hungry. Just then the door opened behind us and there stood the oldest boy he was about my brothers age, he was carrying a 22 single shot rifle he had been out hunting and he had been watching us as we came closer to the house.

I looked down at his feet and suddenly realized where those strange tracks we saw in the snow came from. He had a pair of women's shoes on with a rag wrapped around the toes. We talked about the snow and how cold it was and my brother asked him if they had an ax, he pointed at the fireplace, we picked up the ax and went outside.

My brother ask him if they had any dry logs around that we could cut up, sure enough there were some under the back porch. We pulled them out and cut up enough wood to get a fire going. The boy told us before he left he made a fire earlier and while he was gone they ran out of wood. His dad wouldn't cut wood cause that was his job. So we left him cutting more wood and took an arm full in to start a fire.

After the house began to get warm we pulled out the can goods and meat and put them on the table. Mrs. Gilliam got out of bed with several layers of clothes on and started to prepare a meal, we quickly noticed she was pregnant again.

By this time it was getting pretty late and we knew we had to go, we said our goodbyes and they were all thankful for what we had done. We gathered and said a prayer, asking for Gods help in these hard times and praising Him for the good ones.

As we were walking out the door the older boy said wait a minute, Pa wants you to take two of the girls with you. We were shocked but understood why he told us this, he did not ask he just told us what Pa said. Times were bad and he had too many to feed.

After they finished eating they got them all bundled up and away we went down the mountain. The girls were 6 or 7 years old and we had to carry them on our back most of the way home. I didn't mind but I was hoping to do some hunting on the way back.

When we arrived home mom was so happy to see us and was delighted about the girls. She got them cleaned up and made a bed for them in my sister's room. After the snow had melted down she took them to town and got them some shoes and material to make them dresses.

She got them enrolled in school and they went to church with us as a family. We all praise God for giving us what we had and that we could share it with others. As kids we learned a valuable lesson that cold winter and I never forgot it.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you...God will bless you for it. That was 57 years ago and although I got distracted from His path many times in my life God was always with me, as my mother prayed that day for God to be with me and my brother I knew that was her unselfish prayer for all us kids. She was a great example of a Christian and she love the Lord and all His people. Her prayers were answered.

Love you mom.

In brotherly love;

Rob

