

## ***KIMBO'S MOUNTAIN BIRTH***

*“There is no cure for birth and death, save to enjoy the interval.”*

George Santayana

Last weekend, Ima and I took a long drive down to Norris Lake in eastern Tennessee to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday of our oldest daughter, Kimberly Dawn. For Ima, it was a trip down memory lane. “Forty years ago, at this time we were ...” she would say, with a faraway, wistful look in her eyes, recounting the whole birth experience—step-by-step—as though it was yesterday.

I just nodded and listened.

I’ve learned over the years that is the best thing to do.

At the time, in 1982, Ima and I shared a matchbox-size, wooden, brown-colored frame house on the campus of Alice Lloyd College. We both have fond memories of that small house. We put up and decorated our first scrawny Christmas tree there, in a tin can base (holding the tree upright by rocks from the creek). On one occasion, Belle Philipps and the boys burst through the front door to surprise me (no one locked their doors in those days) only to find me ingloriously sitting on the commode. We still laugh about that. Campus passers-by, students and staff alike, were treated to the music blasting from my quad-stereo system (the four speakers and Akai reel-to-reel made the walls reverberate, especially to driving *Styx* tunes). I brought back the sound system—then state-of-the-art—from Okinawa during my service days.

In front of our tiny abode stretched the “meadow”—the campus center for virtually every College activity. It was the only flat space on campus; a place where the faculty battled student intramural teams in fierce tag football contests (I can still remember Miss June watching from the flat roof of the field-stone campus library), and where the firepit was dug to cook chicken for the visiting crowds on “Our Appalachia Day” (along with the traditional soup beans and cornbread from the “Hunger Din.”)

Today, very little of the original meadow can be seen. The College has built two buildings which has taken much of the meadow's ground.

But back to the tiny house. Before Ima and I were married, mom sewed me curtains from some psychedelic-looking material which decorated the house's front room windows (so thin that I had to crawl under the curtains when passing from the bathroom to the bedroom to get dressed). I was a typical bachelor in those pre-marriage days: while dating, one morning I invited Ima to breakfast—much to her surprise, when she looked through the kitchen cabinets for dishes and bowls, she found all my underwear, t-shirts and socks neatly stacked instead. I had no dresser (there wasn't room in the bedroom for one anyhow) and it seemed to me to be a judicious use of storage space.

Of course, Ima didn't see it quite that way.

Those were the happiest days of our life.

“Sigh.”

I have an unlimited storehouse of memories from that house and those days.

I'll share just one. I returned to our small home—I can't remember if Ima and I were married then—following a Christmas holiday. When I unlocked the front (and only) door, I heard an awful ruckus. Upon investigation, I found a small mouse had climbed down into my plastic kitchen trash bin and the noise was its repeated efforts to climb up the side, only to tumble back again into the bottom. I didn't have the heart to kill the critter. So, I took the garbage pail, mouse and all, stepped over the meadow's stone walls, crossed the road that cut through the heart of campus, climbed down the bank to Caney Creek, and pitched the mouse into the creek. But I didn't throw hard enough. The mouse didn't make it all the way to the creek. I watched helplessly as the tiny creature scrambled between my legs, up the bank, across the road, across the wall, across the meadow and straight through the open front door.

The story of my life.

Giving birth is always a special challenge and that was especially true in the remote Appalachian Mountains of eastern Kentucky in 1982. Ima woke me up at 4:00 a.m. to tell me that it was time, and so we

loaded up—Ima extremely large with child—in our powder-blue 1974 Volkswagen Super Beetle to make the over thirty-mile drive from Pippa Passes to Prestonsburg, Kentucky.

Despite the driving rainstorm, curvy narrow roads and early morning coal trucks, I made it in record time.

We pulled up to the emergency room at Prestonsburg Hospital only to encounter, for her, a huge problem. The gynecologist whom she dearly loved—Dr. Grino—was delivering a baby at nearby Paintsville Hospital. Ima did not care at all for the doctor on call.

It was really a tough decision.

Talk about praying!

By then Ima had dilated significantly: but, according to her wishes, I packed her up in the “bug” (hospital gown and all) and off we flew down old highway 23 through the mountains to get to the smallish, outdated Paintsville Hospital located downtown almost twenty miles away.

Pregnant women have a toughness, ability to endure pain and resiliency that would bring the most hard-core Marine to his knees. Ima was a true warrior. Her labor lasted over thirty hours. Baby Kimberly just wouldn’t turn the right way for delivery. Finally, Dr. Grino had to take the baby.

Because the hospital was so old-fashioned, I was able to watch the entire incredible operation from an observation booth overhead. Kimberly’s birth remains the single most amazing thing I have ever seen.

The birth of new life is an incredible thing.

Kimberly is a true miracle baby.

It saddens me that the sacredness of life—especially human life—has been reduced to a political, rather than deeply moral, issue in our society and culture. If we can’t defend life—the absolute cornerstone of the Christian message and the reason Christ died on the cross for each of us—then nothing else matters.