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MEMORIAL DAY

By Imogene Barger

It is Memorial Day 1989, and I have been to various cemeteries in Caddo County taking flowers to the graves of loved ones, and at each place I have had a short memory visit.

The first visit is with my husband's maternal grandfather, a jolly man who could find more to laugh about than most but could also get angry at the drop of a hat and fight over unimportant things. As a carpenter and woodworker, he left a legacy of the things he had built through the years.

Then I go on to visit my husband's parents, who had treated me like one of their well-loved children. I could hear the click of his mother's shoe heels as she hurried about her work, see her nimble fingers as she played the mandolin and guitar, and hear her sweet soprano voice singing her favorite gospel songs. I could see his dad's sparkling blue eyes as he told stories or sang some crazy little Kentucky hill song to his grandchildren. I could hear his "dad-blam-it" if he was aggravated or the "dad-blam-it-to-the-devil" if he was really upset.

I go on to visit my husband's paternal grandfathers that I know only by word of mouth from grandchildren that marveled at the great-grandfather's ability to work and the grandfather's story times. I do remember the tiny, dark-eyed grandmother who smoked a pipe and made the best blackberry cobbler and ice cream for miles around.

Then I go to visit my paternal grandfather, a reserved man and a strict Baptist of whom it is hard to believe ever ran with Jesse James—as claimed by one aunt and hotly denied by another.

Next in line are my maternal grandparents. The only memories I have of my grandmother, since I was very small when she died, are her sweet smile and the way she looked as she lay in her casket at my aunt's home. Grandfather was small, dark, and restless as the wind. He was constantly on the go, and the direction didn't seem to matter.

I go on to visit my parents. Mother was kind, sweet, and pretty. The killer of the time, T.B., ravaged most of her beauty but never her sweetness before causing her death when she was only forty-three. I can still see her making pretty clothes for me and trying to turn her little tomboy into a lady.

I can see Dad as he walked behind a team of horses in

the fields and his strong hands on the reins. I can see him jumping through a broomstick when he was seventy years old and hear him laugh when he didn't make it the first time and landed on his backside. I can hear him singing gospel songs and the old cowboy tear-jerkers.

I also visit a beloved sister, brothers-in-law, aunts, uncles, shirttail kin, and many friends and enjoy a memory visit with them all. I am thankful for all the good times shared and the support through the bad times. I give silent thanks that I loved and was loved by so many and that my life will never be empty.

Then I look further afield—the cemeteries are neat and well kept with flowers everywhere brought to honor all the dead. I see flags flying on the graves of members of the United States Armed Forces. Suddenly in my mind, I can hear taps being played and cold chills run up my spine as the heart-rending sounds touch my very soul. Then I remember part of a poem learned as a child in school about the World War I dead:

In Flanders Field where poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row
To mark our place, and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing, fly.
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the dead; short days ago
We lived, felt life, saw sunset glow.
Loved, were loved, but now we lie
IN FLANDERS FIELD.

I can see young men, dead before they were old enough to really live. I can see older men that had seen and done things during battles that they wished they could forget. I can see the tears of the families and feel the heartache when a son, daughter, or husband and father were laid down to the final rest. I can see the flag carefully folded and handed to the grieving family. I wonder: will wars never end.

I leave for home. My happiness is tinged with sadness, but I enjoyed my memory visit. ●

IMOGENE BARGER of Lookeba has contributed many articles to WESTVIEW. Her interest in history is reflected here and in her many other works.

