

For my early ancestors making their way to western Kentucky, crossing the Appalachian Mountains surely seemed an insurmountable challenge. They mostly walked from North Carolina to cross through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. Along the way there was some passage across the rivers, likely terrifying for those who could not swim.

From bears and bobcats to rattlesnakes, their frontier days were perilous. The pioneers were a resilient bunch, many of whom were rooted in their Christian faith. Their lives followed the rhythm of nature and their beliefs were taught to their children. These "ways" were developed long before my people came to Kentucky.

Sharing their love of Christ and teaching their faith to their children has been my family's heritage for generations. My ancestors didn't just talk about their faith, they showed their commitment to it by the way they lived. Not in a show-off sort of way, but in their day-to-day activities of ordinary life. The habits of prayer and worship were so often practiced it was simply a way of life. At least once and sometimes twice a year they took time to recharge their worship by gathering with others.

When I was a little girl, the small country church where I grew up often held revivals, especially during the summer. These special events were typically led by a preacher from another community. Every time I hear one of the old hymns such as "Just as I Am," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," or "We'll Gather at the River," I think of those revivals. They were filled with soul-searching music, fervent prayers, and a spirit-filled sermon. It was the perfect time for Christians to renew their personal relationship with God.

Another big event from my church memories was Homecoming Sunday. Those special Sundays were similar in many ways to the revivals. There was usually a featured guest pastor or a lay speaker from another church. Individuals and families who were once members of our church made their way "back home" for these annual events. Often there was a retired preacher that had once served our church would return to reminisce old times.

There was always an extra selection of music for Homecoming, with different instruments included in the service, or a guest pianist, organist, or vocalist. Sometimes there was a trio or quartet from a nearby town. The atmosphere seemed almost electric to me as the members of our church were rejuvenated from this collective worship experience. Familiar songs seemed to take on new life as voices melded and emotions flowed, setting the stage for the word of God to be delivered to an eager crowd.

We kept our Bibles in hand to follow along during the service. The sermons were filled with passion, delivered with a

Hometown Ramblings

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Our ways



Photos provided

With his back to the camera, Max Hurt speaks before the congregation at Kirksey United Methodist Church, 1978.



Pictured having a meal at Kirksey United Methodist Church, from left, are Johnnie and Noble Cox, Rupert McCuiston, Jewel McCallon, Herschel Pace and Nadine Pace with her back to the camera.

rich baritone voice rising to the rafters, driving home the finer points of righteousness. Lowering to a whisper to humble us sinners, bringing us to our knees. At the end, a special invitation was made, begging those not yet saved to come forward to be forgiven and walk the rest of their days with the Lord.

When the last song was sung and the benediction was given, it was time for a celebratory meal. The Fellowship Hall was laden with the bounty of summer gardens and every family was proud to contribute their favorite dish. From crispy fried chicken and hickory-smoked barbeque to sliced country ham, there was enough for everyone. Another table was filled with hot coffee and cold lemonade and a never-ending supply of iced tea.

And then there were the desserts. From 2-inch thick meringue-topped coconut and chocolate pies to the two and three-layer cakes of every known variety. Of course, we kids couldn't get enough of the chocolate brownies and peanut butter cookies. Colorful strawberries and fresh-picked peaches made the perfect topping for Angel food cake or homemade ice cream.

The memories of those spe-

cial Sundays came flooding back during a recent visit to the annual Bazzell Cemetery Reunion in Coldwater. It was the perfect opportunity to revisit some familiar ways of my upbringing. While this one didn't involve a preacher or gospel music, it was nonetheless, a good, old-fashioned homecoming. Neighbors and friends came together for fellowship and a good dose of remembering those who have gone before us.

While many of our old family traditions have been abandoned in this 21st century, it's comforting to know that we here in Calloway County still honor our heritage. As the world all around sometimes seems terribly dark, I find solace in my faith and the "ways" I was taught by my ancestors. I'm grateful to those precious, caring souls that demonstrated their faith in the ways they lived their lives, teaching the next generation.

Bobbie Smith Bryant is a native of Calloway County. She is currently working on a commemorative history to celebrate the 2022 Calloway County Bicentennial. For more essays, visit her website at bobbiesmithbryant.com. ■