

Imogene's Children

By Lydia Justice Edwards

Introduction

"Have I done the right thing?" Mother mused. They weren't her last words to me, but they were powerful. She described their baths at her cattle pump, the meals she fixed for them, and the pretty clothes she picked out for each one. She expected some of them to come back from where they'd been to see her, but when they didn't, she felt sad because maybe they didn't know where they came from or remember that she still cared about them. She died with this unanswered question on her lips. What ever happened to Imogene's Children?

Mother reared ten of her own children, but it wasn't about any of us she worried. She'd prayed us into heaven, made her peace with God, and settled every other problem except for answering that one question. She was conflicted over it and I wanted to comfort her. "I'll find them, Mother. They will all say you did the right thing." Yes, Imogene's children were still on her mind even though they were all grown by the time my mother died in 1993. It would be six years before conscience led me to find the answer.

And every time I thought about my promise, I wanted to say, "Mother I've changed my mind. I can't do this."

I left my job in public service in 2000, hiked the Appalachian Trail, and bicycled around Cuba, and in one last effort to put off the quest to answer my mother's question, I enrolled in a culinary school for one year on the west coast. Finally, on a visit to Rachel Valley, I saw the developer's sign.

Alongside US Route 60, two miles west of the Boyd County line in eastern Kentucky, a red and white developer's sign leaned on rough sawn 2' x 4' wood legs. "Want to Buy Land?"

The sparkling colors taunted me through the morning frost. Build vacation homes in the old hollow? I braced my elbows on the steering wheel to think. What about the Wheeler family who lived in a shack in these woods? Have I waited too long?

They'll build roads and cut down the old trees. Will they plant grass and flowers over the dark seams of soft coal that streak the yellow clay, where Imogene and her sisters rolled the black chunks into coffee sacks? My mind flew. Who will tell the ghost tale of the moss-covered sandstone rock cliff where the baby froze?

The stench of creosote and shallow sewer, mixed with the must of age, rose to my nostrils- washed over me. I clenched my fists as a chill covered my shoulders, reminding me of the weeping willow behind Imogene's house. Of my promise to my mother to find out what had happened to Imogene's children.

The Genetic Stork plays a trick on Imogene

Imogene Wheeler married Felty Fannin in November 1950. Her first twins, Charles and Hallie Ann were born nine months later. Within a few months, though she aborted two fetuses the same day she had a fistfight with her sister in law, Jessie Sargent on Star Hill.

After that, Imogene conceived fourteen more times over the following fifteen years. And by the fall of 1959 Imogene's babies included four sets of twins and one set of triplets, some were born after six or seven month's gestation.

At first word of yet another baby, everybody wanted to help Imogene. Sunday school classes from the Christian Holiness Church at Rush and the Wilson Creek Baptist Church tromped up the hollow carrying food baskets and clothes. She was their charity and they talked about what they'd done to anybody who would listen for weeks after, before they tired of it.

In our family, whenever the subject came up, we all said it was our Mother and social worker America Holbrook who had braved the muddy ruts up the hollow on a regular basis to haul in commodities, diapers, salves, and warm blankets to Imogene.

Imogene's real story begins long before that. It begins where she was reared - in the coal camps of Carter County, Kentucky. Imogene was five when her brother, Giles, was stillborn on January 26, 1935.

Her mother, Roseanne, did not die right away. They said the midwife climbed on top of Roseanne and pushed the baby out with her knees. Her fever raged while Ellen, her older daughter, fed Roseanne sips of water and spoonsful of broth. Within the week, however, their mother was dead. Eight Wheeler children had lost their mother.

School records for 1935 show that Lily, Ellen, Alberta, Albert, Woodrow, and Imogene attended a one room school at Elk Lick on the head of Smith's Run where it crosses Tygart Creek. There is no school record for Andrew; perhaps he was too weak to attend school before he died of rickets and pneumonia. Little Hazel Lacy was four when she died. A month later, Charlie Wheeler moved his children to a coal camp in West Virginia. Imogene's life pattern was set.

When his work ran out in West Virginia, Charlie moved back to Carter County, Kentucky, to the Rachel Valley. John Holly let him have the Dinkins home place in the hollow. There, Imogene dug coal with her sisters. And because she loved flowers, she planted marigolds around the edge of her vegetable garden. She lost her virginity to her cousin, Herbert, and not long after that, she met Valentine 'Felty' Fannin, the man who would become her husband. Still nothing had happened in Imogene's life to prepare her for the heartbreaking life's journey she would make with him and with their children and the painful journey she would now retrace with me.

My sister Janet Sue asked, "What will we do after we find Imogene?"

1995

On the outskirts of Lucasville, Ohio, Janet Sue and I found 21 Linwood. We knew Imogene loved flowers and when we saw a profusion of yellow irises bursting through a hog wire fence we stopped. In another corner of her small yard, through a gaping hole in a cracked commode, a large red rose bush added to the early spring color. Nestled by the gleaming white porcelain, peony bushes with tiny pink buds pushed through the rusted teeth of a lawnmower and dressed other objects thrown out of the way.

Near the roof on the front of the small house, faded white paint peeled off in mottled strips. Loose boards laid over concrete blocks formed her front porch and held pieces of broken furniture along with trash stuffed into brown paper grocery bags. Down the street from her front gate, three men in greasy overalls leaned under the propped up hood of a pickup sanded down to the gray metal and half painted with red primer. They turned to watch us drive by. I glanced over my shoulder to wave hello as they jostled each other with elbows. Janet and I walked to Imogene's front gate, and the men stopped work altogether and leaned against the side of the pickup to watch.

Uneven tufts of tall grass grew by the short path to the door. Laid over the steps to the porch was a sagging, weathered, gray piece of plywood. We stepped onto the porch boards. Still puzzled, we paused to glance at the curious men before we went in. They stared back at us. There was no screen door.

"Come in," a deep voice called and we stepped into cool, shadowy darkness. A long narrow room spanned the front of the cottage. Dark sofas piled with cushions lined its walls. Directly in front of us, a sunlit corridor blazed and connected itself to the next room and to the backyard where the wispy feather-like fronds of a sparkling emerald willow tree swept the overgrown grass. It swooned in greeting.

A breeze braved its way in, refreshed us against the thick morning heat in the windowless room, then engulfed us with a malodorous burnt creosote scent or perhaps that of a shallow sewer. Pale light outlined Imogene Wheeler-Fannin, squatting on a high wood chair.

She smiled, leaned on a metal walker in front of her and forced herself to stand to shake hands. Right away, she wiggled back onto her perch and leaned forward again to rest her arms across the metal bar. Janet and I gave our names.

"We are cousins to your late husband."

"Yes," she smiled, looking down, folding and stroking her fingers, "I remember you when you were little." I sat next to Imogene's walker. Across the room, near the front door, Janet balanced on the edge of a green sofa draped with a white sheet and crossed her legs at the knee to hunch sideways toward the open door.

At the end of the room among blankets and cushions, the figure of a young man sagged into the soft dark, strumming his guitar. "Hello" I said to him but he didn't look up. I smiled at Hallie Ann, Imogene's

elder daughter, as she entered the room. Still, the young man did seem to notice us. Imogene introduced him by saying simply,

"This is Andrew." We nodded again in his direction and settled into our places.

The bright light from the open front door glinted on Imogene's taut and unlined face. Long skeins of gray-streaked hair fluffed at her temples and on the nape of her neck, held fast with a large band. Her wide dark eyes were set above pronounced cheekbones. Bright and childlike, innocent and gleeful when she smiled through tobacco-stained teeth; Imogene was a handsome woman.

"I'm like my mother, RoseAnn Perkins, a Cherokee woman." She nodded, "I was five years old when she died. I don't remember her at all. It was hemorrhaging they told, at the birth of baby Giles. They say he weighed twenty pounds. Giles was born dead and mother died a few days later," she smiled.

"They were eight of us little children. Dad worked in the mines sometimes. My sister, Alberta, was ten when mother died. She raised us. She's a twin to Albert. Alberta left her classes in third grade to stay home to help mother after Giles was born," she finished. "Then mother died, even though our sister, Lily, was nearly as old as Alberta, but she didn't help at all. Ellen did though. I think she took care of our mother. After that, Alberta was cook, housekeeper, and mother for the whole family." Imogene smiled in her shy way at the story of family triumph. "We moved around a lot to find work after mother died," she explained again. "Alberta taught herself to read and write. We even lived in West Virginia."

Janet dug in her purse. "We thought you'd like to have these," she extended her arm as far as she could before she heaved from her seat to cross the room. "We found pictures in our mother's picture box." She read, 'Taken on their wedding day when they stopped by to say hello,' and she took your picture." Janet said, "Mother always wrote dates and names on the back of her snapshots and that is what she wrote."

Janet withdrew a second small picture. "1967. This was taken nearly seventeen years after the wedding photo." In the black and white photo was Pearl Jean, one of Imogene's younger daughters, then a tiny baby lying on the corner of a bed. Next to her was baby Velva Ann, the baby named in honor of our mother. Imogene studied the faces before she said, "In between these two pictures, I had thirty-two children. I have no pictures of Felty or of any of us. Our house burned. He died in 1987, you know? It burned here in Lucasville, right after he died." Her face was sad.

"Thank you," she studied the pictures before passing them to Hallie Ann.

I scribbled, thirty-two and circled fire with a question mark. "Imogene, we are here to pay a personal call, and also to ask about your children. Can we talk about that? Before she died two years ago, our Mother worried if you knew where your children are. She called welfare authorities to ask about them more than once, but they wouldn't tell her anything. I promised her I would find you. It's been two years since Mother died, but this is my first chance to come."

"Yeah, Aunt Velva was good to us. I named my next to last daughter, Velvie Ann for her. She calls herself Ann."

"They wouldn't tell me either," her voice sullen. "I know where some of my children are, except for the triplets," she drawled; "And Golda and Nola and Brenda Sue, they all was took."

"You had triplets?" I leaned forward. The guitar strumming stopped.

"Yes, born at Kings Daughters Hospital, in the emergency room," she nodded. "Well, Brenda Sue was born in the back of our truck in the parking lot. And the doctors stole her. Stole all of them from me just like they stole Andrew right there in the hospital. I never did get to see any of them." She splayed her fingers on the metal frame of her walker, examined her fingers - flexing them, rubbing her arms - before she said. "Next time I saw Andrew he was growed up," she tilted her head toward the dark couch in the corner. My eyes followed. "I never saw my baby Brenda Sue again. They kept her. She had a cleft palate - you know - hare lip?" She studied my face, "I don't know whether she lived or died." She drew her shoulders back. "King's Daughters' kept her because the doctor said to feed her with an eye dropper ever few minutes. So, they give her up to welfare," Imogene's eyes leveled on mine. "I think they did," she added, but I never got to see her again. I don't know what happened to my last baby. Brenda Sue."

"Next day Felty and me went back to the hospital to get her. They said, "We gave her to her real mother." I asked them, "What does that mean, I'm her real mother. She was born to me yesterday, and we filled out her birth papers and I named her Brenda Sue."

She stared at her hands, rubbing and twitching her fingers.

"We heard tell a man who run the hospital took her, you know the manager? He took her for his own."

"Imogene," I lowered my voice. "May I ask, why you think your triplets was stolen?"

"Cause' I heard them make little sounds like cheeps in the hospital - and I know one was born alive, but the doctor said they was all born dead." Her voice at last broke into an open sob, "And there ain't no death certificates for them. I had a search done."

My lips narrowed. I scribbled on my notebook. "What was their birth date? The date this happened?"

She slumped over the walker, lacing and locking the fingers of both hands, she said, "Right after they took my kids."

"Can you tell me about Andrew? He is here now," I gestured toward the end of the dark room.

"Yeah, he found me after Loretta found me. Loretta was one of the twin girls they took in 1959. It was Loretta and Jeanetta the first ones they got. I named them Loretta and Jeanetta," she smiled. "They said if I didn't sign away Loretta and Jeanetta, I couldn't get my other children back."

I blinked. What was she saying? Did she give up her twins? Before I could speak, she turned toward Andrew and raised her voice. "Loretta found me when she was twenty-two years old. She was nine months old when they took her and Jeanetta."

I settled back. I had misheard her. Her way of speaking was clipped. I shook my head to stay alert. Had she said they took her twins?

"We lived on New Buckley Road. Loretta kept searching and found her half brother Delmar Lee over at Louisa. He's in the phone book." She paused to look at me. "And she called ever Fannin in the book and he brought her here. Felty was still alive then, so she got to meet her dad and her twin Jeanetta did too."

"Loretta - she calls herself Lori now instead of Loretta - remembered she'd seen a little blind boy in one of them foster homes she'd lived in. She went back and tracked him. It was Andrew all right. He was all growed up by then, of course, but she found him." We sat in silence again. Her voice growled. "Andrew was not blind when he was born and they did something to him at that hospital." Her head jerked, "They did." Her eyes blazed. "Andrew was born at home at Avondale, and Felty drove us over to the hospital to have him checked, and they took and put him in one of them incubators cause they said he needed oxygen, they said." She sat for a moment before she said, "And I never saw him again until he was growed up after Loretta found him."

Silence again. The fronds on the willow tree swayed, glistened. I reeled in her story, stared at my pad, tried to sort it out. I didn't expect this tale. But what did I expect, coming here this way? I scolded myself. I drew dark circles around thirty-two, fire, KDH, blind and cleft palate - the only words I'd written. I wondered whether my mother had suspected any of this, the complexity of their young lives and these goings on. Imogene adjusted her long legs behind the aluminum walker and caressed her knee.

"I was in a car wreck. Sitting in the back seat on my way to work to pick green beans in the bottoms by the Ohio River. I'm feeling better though," she smiled. "Their insurance will pay me thirty thousand."

"But, you are not healed yet, are you? Maybe it's a good idea to wait until you get full strength and use of your legs back? Before you settle on the amount - and get therapy at a rehab place?"

"No, I need the money now. Well, Delbert needs the money for his house," her voice emphatic. "Delbert is one of my sons, a twin to Elbert, and he don't want me to go to a nursing home for therapy."

From the corner of my eye, I saw the edge of the couch buckle under Janet as Hallie Ann came and sat next to her. Taller than average and robust with cropped reddish blonde hair and blue eyes, Hallie Ann moved close as Janet leaned away toward the open door. Under the soiled, sleeveless T-shirt, Hallie Ann's large nipples poked at the thin fabric against Janet's shoulder. She crossed large thighs fleshed out under black shorts cropped close, and wiggled her toes, dangling plastic flip flops. Her voice rose and fell as she leaned over Janet's shoulder to peer out the open door at the men working on the red pickup, only to rear back. Tobacco stains began to trickle down the corners of her wide mouth. The open door darkened with a large shadow.

"I'm Delbert," he announced and stood for a moment, his fingers curled around the top of the front door frame as he braced himself, his elbows stuck into the room. Dust floated. Dark hair and deep

brown eyes distinguished him from his elder sister, Hallie Ann. He too was stout. His eyes swept over me, as he roamed around the room, picked up a magazine, laid it down; he paused to touch the top of his mother's walker. Behind me, I heard him plunk the guitar strings like an overseer listing his possessions. Was he checking us out? I froze as he brushed against my foot. Imogene's eyes followed him. Hallie Ann stared at the floor. Satisfied at last, he stepped back out the front door and disappeared. Andrew tuned his guitar. Hallie Ann's voice grew high. Our interview resembled an operetta I thought. I laughed too loud, as my shoulders relaxed.

"They wrote a newspaper story about me and everybody believed it, but we never lived in no cave, and no snake never charmed Susan Lynn."

"I've not heard of this, Imogene. Do you have a copy of this paper?"

"Check with the Ashland News. They wrote it and it made me look bad. I'd like to tell my side of the story," she said.

"Do you remember the date of the article?" I asked.

"Right after they took my kids," she repeated.

"I promised our mother to find what happened to your children, and perhaps we can also find a way for you to have your say." I was bluffing. I knew as I said it. I had no idea how to begin. I added cave and snake to the circles on my yellow note pad.

Edgy, still poised, Janet's elbow tugged at the arm of the couch as Hallie Ann slid off the couch beside her, stood, pranced, and circled. At once, Hallie Ann sat down again. Janet's buttocks slipped with the bounce. To gain a little space, Janet crossed her legs as one thigh at a time clung to the slick velvet fabric. She shifted her entire body and settled back on the other thigh. It was time to leave.

"I need your notarized signature in order to get your records."

"Down at my bank. They've got one there." She turned to Andrew, "Would you like to go with us?" He mumbled and struck a chord on his guitar.

"Andrew's blind," Imogene whispered close to my face when I took her elbow.

In the shadows, I went to touch his shoulder. His long arms encircled his guitar and clasped each hand over the harp. He was handsome with black hair and dark eyebrows framing deep sockets that had once been his eyes.

"Hello Andrew, I'm Lydia. Your father was my first cousin. Do you know Patsy Cline's songs?"

"Crazy, crazy for loving you," he crooned. "I listened as you were talking. I'll talk about my life in foster care."

"I'll be back."

Imogene and I inched down the sagging plywood ramp. Hallie Ann climbed into the back seat beside Janet. At the outside bank teller, a notary brought her stamp to our car so we didn't get out. On our way back to #21 Linwood Street, at fried chicken takeout Hallie Ann shouted her preferences over my shoulder. Back at Imogene's house, when she was settled, we shook hands again.

"I'll be in touch as I find records," I added. "You realize that I have a job that keeps me busy, but I'll work on this as I can?" In the dark corner, Hallie Ann offered chicken to Andrew. Outside in our car, Janet sat slouched and mute in the back seat, with both windows rolled down. The mechanics had disappeared. Their red primer was drying.

In the following months, King's Daughters Hospital released hospital records documenting Imogene's medical emergencies. Through notes on miscarriages, and birth and death records, I scanned for triplets. On January 28, 1962, two months after authorities took her children in a violent confrontation on Star Hill, Imogene had presented herself at KDH. Dr. Edward W. Connelly was on ER duty. His summary:

This 33-year-old white female was admitted to the hospital because of threatened abortion. Shortly after admission, she passed the products of gestation, which consisted of triplets and placenta. She was kept under observation for 48 hours and was discharged on 2/1-1962 in good condition.

Pathologist R A Stewart in his final diagnosis noted:

Triplets (one malformed) four months gestation.

Doctors had not stolen her babies after all. At least not these three babies. But I wanted to know how Andrew lost his sight and how he became lost in Kentucky foster care system. What happened to Brenda Sue with her cleft palate? Did she survive? Why might hospital staff refuse to turn over a newborn to its mother?

Anger and pride flooded my senses. Was this what my mother felt in her love of the Fannin children? They were helpless as she saw it. Was this what it meant to be part of a family? Were they lost children in the Kentucky Foster Care system? Mother thought so. This had happened so recently in our history, in the 1960s.

Imogene's children were listed in the Kentucky Vital statistics housed at the Boyd County Library. I measured the time lapses between delivery and miscarriage dates recorded for each birth. There was a thirteen-month lapse after Susan Lynn Fannin was born at Bellefonte Hospital in Greenup County on December 21, 1960, and the triplet abortion on January 28, 1962. That would have been ample time for a full term pregnancy for Andrew. In between, however, Carol Coleman, who attended the July, 1961, funeral for Susan Lynn, noted Imogene was expecting again. What was the outcome of that pregnancy in the months between Susan Lynn and Andrew? Was there time for two pregnancies, causing Andrew's premature birth at Avondale? Is this the abortion James saw in the outhouse?

In the hospital's emergency room notations for September 16, 1962, Dr. Duff wrote , "full term, thirty-two weeks or eight and one-half months gestation" for baby Andrew who was fully developed with no mention of blindness at birth. But then he noted, "Baby boy born at home, brought to ER."

I verified each child's birth and death that I knew of so far. I discovered two more boys born alive to Imogene Fannin, both of whom died soon after birth. They were named James Felty and Felty James for their father, Felty Fannin. KDH did not have these records, so these two births might have been home births. Later, a third boy named James Felty Fannin born at KDH had survived. According to these records, Imogene conceived thirty-two times within fifteen years.

No wonder she marked dates by the words: After *they took my kids*. I did not know then, and she did not offer to tell me, that Social Services had taken her children three different times. I verified this startling action when I found the negotiated separation agreement, dated August 1959. America Holbrook had bartered nine month old twins Jeanetta and Loretta into permanent foster care, for the return of eight older children already living at the Ramey Home.

Perhaps Imogene was four to five months pregnant when her triplet fetuses aborted at KDH as Pathologist Stewart estimated. What this meant was that she was about two months along with this pregnancy of triplets back in November 1961, when Carter County authorities took her children the second time in a violent raid on Star Hill. Prior to the raid, Imogene and Felty had squatted under a rock cliff on KY Route 207 near Norton Branch on Mary Berry's farm. On that eventful day, to elude welfare, they shepherded the children from Mary's place to Jessie Sergeant's house to bathe them. Imogene fought the officers while her children hurled rocks and screamed obscenities.

The third and final undertaking was on July 8, 1965, at Paradise Hill in Ashland. With Court Order in hand to claim the jaundiced eight month old twins, Golda and Nola, and wearing side arms, Kentucky state detectives and Ashland city policemen were confronted with unexpected and fierce rage by a pregnant Imogene Fannin who had only her kitchen dishes as weapons. She pummeled the officers, scoring a hit to the elbow of the sheriff and his deputy.

Using hospital records to prove up the vital statistics, I documented thirty-two conceptions and pregnancies between 1950 and 1968, including four sets of twins, several single conceptions, and one set of triplets. From an eyewitness account, after a fistfight on Star Hill with her sister in law, Jessie Sergeant, a second set of twins was aborted soon after Hallie Ann and Charles were born. I included that account.

By using the address Imogene gave KDH for her emergency room visits, I tracked her Fannin family migrations within the tri-county area. Each of their addresses was for a different location in southern Ohio, West Virginia, or Kentucky. With these addresses, I checked school attendance records for twins Charles and Hallie Ann, and Martha Lillian in Carter, Boyd, and Lawrence Counties. Felty Fannin was in a dead run fleeing from America Holbrook. The notes gave double verification of their quick transfers from one school district to another, including one to Mansfield, Ohio, where Martha Lillian attended 8th grade.

The schematic accounted for each birth and death of a newborn, miscarriage, and stillborn baby. Before I was able to complete the packet for her with the schedule of births and copies of her KDH medical reports, two months had passed since our visit to 21 Linwood Avenue in Lucasville, Ohio.

Satisfied I had it all, I jammed a large brown envelope with copies of her medical records, complete with doctors comments of her late night emergency room visits and my own question, "Did Imogene name three different babies James Felty, Felty James, and James Felty, with one being a four month fetus?" I called Delbert Fannin, whose telephone was my link to his mother.

"Mom and Hallie Ann are living with me now," he said. "Her house burned. Yep, she was out for a doctor's appointment. She lost everything. It was a hot fire. There was some old crank case oil stored under the house." Delbert continued, "Andrew moved back down to central Kentucky. Lori came and got him."

"Did the only picture of her wedding day burn too?" I wanted to ask. But I didn't. I remembered the delicate, green fronds of the weeping willow tree with its roots set in the sewer drain field, but I knew in my heart neither the photo nor the tree had survived



Figure 1 - Charles 1951-2001



Figure 2 - Hallie Ann 1951-2011

Not all of Imogene's children were lost. Charles, her oldest son with Felty, lived in foster care for a few weeks. He spent his days junking with Felty in Ashland's back alleys and knew how to walk off down the hill from the Ramey Children's Home and get around town on his own. Miss Ramey let him go. His twin, Hallie Ann, and their younger sister, Martha Lillian, stayed almost two years with Gertrude Ramey before they learned where their parents were and how to run away. As Imogene Fannin's children grew up in the Ramey Home and in Kentucky foster care system, each one found a way to come home to her. However, three of Imogene's younger daughters were still missing to her in the secrecy of the adoption process.



Figure 3 - Hallie Ann

In that fall of 1995, when I located Imogene in Lucasville, Ohio, several of her children had run away from foster care to settle near her. They were anxious to know about Imogene's story; they agreed to talk to me. What I learned was that each of these former wards of the state still received public assistance in the form of SSI for a collection of medical issues that included seizures, backaches, and heart pain. And illiteracy. I discovered the illiteracy problem as I mailed drafts of my notes with stamped self-addressed envelopes for their edits. When I received no replies, I phoned for follow up questions only to hear a disconnect signal. Then I learned patience. After the next SSI check arrived, I called back. My tracking instincts developed, and I learned to work faster. I drove to their new address that day or as soon as possible and took packets of family history and made copies of family photographs.

I updated a schematic of births and deaths. As they moved, and they were always on the move, from eastern Kentucky to southern Ohio or West Virginia, I listed addresses and phone numbers to guide and to unite them. I borrowed snapshots of their children for each packet.

They connected, and not just over the tragedy of what had happened to them in foster care, but around who they had become. I undertook each interview determined to hear every word and to assure privacy, if that was needed. It was haphazard and cumbersome. Even though I grew up with the local accent, in the short time they'd spent with Imogene, they had adopted a clipped almost blurred speech pattern and simply did not conjugate verbs, or use prepositions.

Standard procedure for my visits paralleled back hollow hospitality: bring food and news. So I stopped at the KFC or, in some cases, the local grocery for fresh bananas, sliced bologna, Heiner's white sliced bread, Miracle Whip, a head of iceberg lettuce, and a gallon of milk. I covered all the bases for hungry children and their parents. These forays took me into remote hollows, over streambeds, into hamlets or trailer parks braced by snarling dogs, and there were times I became lost, arrived late, or I found nobody home.

With snippets of stories, and sometimes the details overlapped, their dim pasts emerged. They became skeptical of me because in the meantime, Imogene interjected her version of events. They wanted to believe their mother, not the official records I found. And because they were not able to read the transcripts of our talks, they began to doubt me even more. I became a villain.

They had congregated in one general area and always it was near Imogene. However, it may not have been a loose circle of dispute, not sincere affection that attached her to each of them and they to each other, rather a bond of harping distrust.

For economic utility, they lived in pods of two or three, a flexible mini-family. As they went in search of resources from the state and attention from a birth mother they did not understand. There were fallings out, reconciliations, accusations and hurtful words. That was their network.

In looking back, it was usual for them to use a derogatory name for America Holbrook, their former social worker, or for Judge George Hall and Judge Tom Carter, and always there were accusations for Miss Gertrude Ramey. However, they praised Imogene. They believed her stories. She had fought for them - she had broken the Sheriff's jaw in her battle to keep them on Paradise Hill in 1965, and how she had pulled scalp and hair from America Holbrook's head from inside her jail cell at Catlettsburg.

According to newspaper reports and police records, the truth was different.

I relied upon these fragments, until their social services reports arrived from the archives in Frankfort and KDH medical reports gave up the timeline for details of each birth. When I called Imogene to verify new information, she was not willing to reveal much of anything. It was evident she had crafted stories and conjured dramatic episodes to fit the trauma. This caused confusion for her children and consternation for me.

After our initial interview in Lucasville, Ohio, in 1995, I mailed reports of my progress and called her, but I did not meet with her personally again until 2003. In answer to my questions of time and place, she might say: "Shope's Creek" or some other place I hadn't heard of.

For example, nearly every child advanced a version of the powerful evil-eyed black snake that had charmed baby Susan Lynn, or the copperhead snake that had bit Susan Lynn on her leg, or the giant snake that would not leave the big overstuffed chair in their shack. Then there was the tale of the rose bush that grew in their yard at Lavellette, West Virginia. That it changed colors from red to white or from white to red after Susan Lynn died. But when I asked, Imogene said, "I never said a snake bit Susan Lynn."

Social Workers did not write the truth either. Except for one constant in their reports: *Conditions in the Fannin home remain deplorable; the children cannot be sent back until they improve.* Of course, Conditions never improved.

"Dad and mom refused to give us up or to sign the papers for us to be adopted," Henry T. told me. Translated: *Our parents loved us and wanted to get us back home.* Of course, the welfare reports that noted: Conditions in the home remained deplorable told the story for Henry T. - If he had read the report. I made copies of the reports and mailed them or handed them to each child on whom the report was made.

For their parents the message was clear: find a job, send the children to school, clean up her house and nurture your children. The welfare office claimed to present this solution to Imogene and Felty, but in a follow up notation: The Fannin parents refused this service. And this puzzling notation: The children say their father sold all the furniture and they had no place to live.

Next, it was clear that the Kentucky welfare system did not deal with the problematic Fannin children. The welfare services did not administer one solution. Their own reports itemized speech impediments, dentistry and medical issues, and ordered special tutoring. But the children grew up in unqualified foster care where no remedy was ever applied. Because when I met them, they had lost their teeth, they were illiterate, and so, as adults, they qualified for SSI. And so did their children.

While his children languished in foster care, Felty Fannin did find a job once in a while. Armed with employment, he appeared more than once before Judge Carter or Judge Hall to beg for the return of his children. Imogene, on the other hand, did not agree to clean things up. This included her personal hygiene. Perhaps she did not understand how.

The court took custody of Imogene's children three different times: 1959, 1961 and 1965. During these guardianships, America Holbrook siphoned off and arranged adoption for two twin sets: Loretta and Jeanetta, Golda and Nola, and for a single birth, Brenda Sue. She also placed newborn blind Andrew with a foster family and four more families after that. Andrew was not adopted by anyone.

I wanted to answer my mother's question: What happened to Imogene's children? And to reassure her she had done the right thing, but after Imogene told of blind baby Andrew and of the handicapped Brenda Sue, I needed to know her side of the story or at the very least to rebut the 1961 *Ashland Daily Independent* story about them living in a cave in Carter County. Could I help Imogene have her say? My research findings revealed she and Felty had lived in a cave with their children at least once at Norton Branch, once in the Booten Hollow, and where else? Felty died in 1987 and could not answer, but was Imogene at fault for this? Her children still suffered.

As social services reports rolled in from Frankfort, my loyalty shifted. Something was amiss. The disparity was glaring. The social workers reports did not dovetail the child's story.

Word for word I recorded the story that each Fannin child remembered, as he or she had lived it. I used the official social worker reports only for a dateline. The stories as told by the Fannin children were the only real truths; their stories were gospel to me.

After Loretta and Jeanetta left their adoptive Bell family, they made their own search for Imogene; they brought Andrew with them. Their action left three children still missing to Imogene in a maze and secrecy of the adoption process – her twin girls, Golda and Nola, and her last living birth child: Brenda Sue.

My question for Imogene lingers, too delicate to ask when we met: Why had she remained pregnant for fifteen years? What power did her husband have over her that she did not resist his advances, even as she lay on her childbed within hours or days of the last birth? According to the birth schedule of her children, it does seem this was so.

Why so many children? Her answer was a quick proud smile through tobacco-stained teeth. Was it the same gleeful smile she gave my mother? Perhaps the key to the real fracture of this family lay in Imogene Wheeler Fannin's own childhood. Without a mother to love her and to teach her and with a father who brutalized her, what skills had she brought?

This puzzle circled back to my question: pregnant for fifteen years? She produced fifteen living children from thirty-two conceptions between the years, 1951 to 1965. Was it possible she did not have the will to resist constant sexual intercourse nor did she choose not to resist? Was it only the genetic stork that had played a cruel trick on Imogene?

Their first journey

In late fall of 1959, a bitter wind whipped over the ridge from Mile Branch. It vented itself against the bleached gray, cracked boards on the old Ida Dinkins house in the narrow Hollow before it blasted down into Rachel Valley. America kept her coat on and hovered near the oil drum stove with the little children. Imogene smiled her proud smile, poked kindling into the fire, described how she carried water from the deep well, shoveled the coal, and tended to the children while Felty was out junking. When he did come home of an evening, Imogene told America, he brought in a tin of Hills Brothers coffee and a roll of bologna with a loaf of sliced Heiner's white bread from Georgia Conley's store. He had resisted all offers of a regular job.

On her way back to Ashland, America gripped the steering wheel, as an idea came to her. It might work. If Imogene agreed. She would move six of Imogene's children to the Ramey Children's Home, to attend school and receive medical attention, leaving the other four at home with Imogene and Felty. Imogene might be able to feed and care for four children, including the youngest babies, Jeanetta and Loretta while the others were in a safe place for the winter.

When school was out, after warm weather came and Imogene had organized her household, her children would come home. America brought Imogene and Felty and their ten children into her offices to explain. At the conclusion, America drafted her memo.

Central Interoffice Memorandum:

December 15, 1959

**To: Mrs. America Holbrook
District Supervisor**

Subject: Fannin, Felty and Imogene

**Children: Hallie Ann 9, Martha Lillian 8, Delbert and Elbert 6, Henry Thomas 5, James Felty 3.
Carter County, Kentucky**

This is confirming our verbal authorization to accept the above-listed children for commitment to the Department of Economic Security for a period of three months and subsequent placement of the children needing foster care in our approved boarding homes. The parents appeared more comfortable in planning for the children in the neutral office environment. It was your plan to have the worker give intensive help to this family in an attempt to re-establish their home, gain community acceptance, to work with the school authorities for school clothing, and free lunches for the children who might remain with the parents.. RK:js

**cc: Mr. Caleb Ballard
Mr. Hubert Crawford
Central Office File**

Emotional fractures crackled through Imogene's family that day in December 1959, as each child was chosen to either leave home or to stay. The children might not remember being whisked away to an institution on the strength of one episode, but after two more separations scarred with violence, James, one of the littlest ones, remembers the blood in the outhouse from one of his mother's abortions, and, for reasons he did not understand, his baby sisters disappeared two at a time. It was a pivotal time for Imogene too, because she did not see any other way out for herself and her children

America settled six children at the Ramey Children's home in Ashland; she returned to Rachel Branch a few days later. She was greeted by the stench of diarrhea. Sour slabber clustered inside the milk bottles and one baby tugged at Imogene's flaccid breast. In the oil barrel laid on its side and set up on stones Felty had cobbled, fire was burned down to cinders. Felty Fannin was gone again. Imogene was not able to keep even one baby clean or to feed it properly.

America's plan had not helped Imogene at all. Her next demand changed the tone of their relationship from one of trust to one of suspicion. It wrenched Loretta and Jeanetta to foster care. Imogene must agree to it or give up her other eight children.

What was foster care? Imogene wondered. It was threatening, somehow. She and Felty sat around a shiny top table in America's office to read the order written in words she could not pronounce. She trusted America to help her. But, Felty suspected America Holbrook meant to take all their children by easing them away a few at a time.

Maybe America hadn't planned to take Imogene's children for good, but that is what she did. She bundled Jeanetta and Loretta into the back seat of her car. Imogene was relieved, but what else could she do? Her shoulders sagged, but she had no milk for her babies. Her own hopes and part of her spirit disappeared down the hollow with her two babies. She still had eight children to care for.

Imogene hadn't gone anywhere in her life except to Star Hill. By marrying Felty Fannin, she had moved one mile away to live with his mother. Back in the Hollow again, she was carrying water from the deep well and dragging in the coal to keep her children warm in the same old house where she grew up, and she was ten years older.

America understood hard times, too. She was a native of nearby Red Bush in Johnson County, Kentucky, where steep mountains were a kind of barrier, and some said Carter County was more protected than Johnson County. She knew dignified men who clung to the 19th century way - men who lived in the warrens of hollows and forged a natural life off the land. At first, she judged Felty Fannin as one of those hardworking men. At first, America saw his lifestyle as harmless. She believed in him. He, on the other hand, did not trust her kindness or her understanding of his nature.

America was new at her Regional supervisor job for eastern Kentucky, but she was well seasoned in social work. She had enrolled for her Master's degree at the University of Chicago, where the first degree for social work had been created. She'd worked in the tenements where diseases of all kinds existed. In this strangeness, to her at least of inner Chicago, she recorded the stories of proud immigrant men and the misplaced unemployed for Hull House records. She learned to urge them to regain their

dignity through re-education programs designed by Jane Addams, the founder of organized social work. When America left Chicago in 1944, she was ready to solve problems of any nature and to deal with all kinds of debauchery and cunning. She was convinced if only a man had a chance to improve himself, he would prosper. At least that was her premise, until she met Felty Fannin.

America's idea was to separate the Fannin children from their parents to protect the children. This did not work with this grizzled man whose kind brown eyes said one thing, while he kept his children on the brink of starvation. He tried to earn a kind of living off what he stole for junk. Felty was industrious in searching out copper, brass, and pieces of metal and stashing piles in obscure places. It was easy for him to find holdouts in the dark, eastern Kentucky hollows, where he explored old barns and houses for tools and tack. He took what he wanted. He pilfered and invaded wherever he needed to go.

A gun to her head

Felty Fannin descended from tough Kentucky pioneers. To get what he wanted, he used backwoods stealth. But unlike his forbearers who homesteaded and labored, Felty didn't own land; he had learned to live off the land of others. He had also begun to believe he owned what America Holbrook wanted: his children.

Perhaps it was the leverage of that first proposal America made on November 23, 1959, that committed Jeanetta and Loretta to a life of foster homes. The turn of events that followed, set Felty to thinking about her real purpose. For one thing, her surprise visits unnerved him, because no matter where he took refuge, she soon showed up.

On her last visit, to put her off he promised to take the job she offered. But in late afternoon of that same day, he piled Imogene, who was expecting again, and the children into an old station wagon somebody had given him. He drove down the hollow to US 60, east to HY207 across the Carter County line into a part of Greenup not too far from the Ohio River. He stopped in Naples. It was well away, and out of America's jurisdiction, or so he thought; with no welfare office in sight. His car was unfamiliar to residents along the river; he reasoned he was safe. Besides, he had joined with a bootlegger down there to run a few gallons.

He settled into a shack near a rock cliff in the head of Skillet Handle Hollow. That first night, white smoke curled over the lip of the cliff as he boiled coffee and whittled slices of bologna off a long roll from Maynard's store over on Route 5. The meat sizzled in the iron skillet and the children listened to tree frogs and chased lightning bugs under the trees. At dark, they piled in, layered over each other, and slept in the back of the car.

But then Felty Fannin grew careless. His habit was to take Imogene and the children with him wherever he went. He was spotted on one of his bootleg runs. The clincher was when he stopped to get a tire patched at Maynard's service station and Maynard got a nose full of the stench of human waste coming from the tire well. This was what the children used for their toilet. It was something Maynard did not forget and was what he talked about until word reached America Holbrook.

America's visits delighted the Fannin children. She brought food and books and treats. They were always hungry and curious. So, it was in early morning in Skillet Handle hollow when her gray sedan eased through the furrows up the hollow and she stepped out, brushed off her skirt, and complained about the rough road, as if she'd been invited for breakfast.

Felty stood in the shadows to watch. He did not offer to help, as she dragged hemp coffee sacks filled with commodities from her car up the steep garbage-strewn bank. When she finished and all the sacks were inside the shack, she bent over to hand sweets to the children; the unmistakable click of a gun safety paralyzed her. The cold steel touched her temple. With his gun to her head, Felty declared a kind of war with America Holbrook and changed their relationship forever. He was determined to elude the tenacious social worker and her minions; in the end he lost his battle. But for now, all he thought about was he still had some of his children and America Holbrook meant to take them.

"I knew this father wanted to frighten me, but I did not think he wanted to kill me. That he might do so accidentally crossed my mind." In her notes, America Holbrook wrote, "He loved his children, and it was he who fought for them. I knew this. Deep within his caring, he knew I wanted to help too. That may be the reason he did not shoot me that day."

Susan Lynn and the red rose bush

It was December 1960 when Felty loaded up his children and drove Imogene to the Bellefonte Catholic Hospital emergency room. There a robust dark-haired girl she named Susan Lynn began her short life. Afterwards, Felty picked up his mother, Martha, over the mountain in Westwood. Martha's social security check was due any day.

Someone in Greenup County at last sent word to the sheriff about children living in an old car. America worked fast. On February 17, 1961, she pressed Judge George Hall to sign her child neglect complaint. Felty was at work, as well. With his mother's pension check in his hand, he cleared out of Skillet Handle Hollow and dropped Martha back in Westwood. His sister, Sarah, was at work. Her door was locked. He wrapped his mother in a quilt and left her in a rocking chair on Sarah's front porch. .

It was impossible for him to hide the rickety car filled with children. Nearly everyone spotted his drive east on Winchester Avenue within blocks of the Boyd County courthouse. He crossed the Billy Clark Bridge into Kenova, West Virginia, and escaped America's dragnet.

Charitable folk, unfamiliar with the Fannin family, made the usual job offers, donated sacks of food, and suggested work in Kenova, until somebody noticed he was tinkering with his car day after day, and his partially clothed children were still playing in the cold. At his point Susan Lynn was two months old.

America had no jurisdiction across the Big Sandy in West Virginia, but she set up an alert. It took weeks before a letter from the Kenova Welfare Department was red-flagged on its way to their Charleston, West Virginia, main office for investigation.

April 21, 1961

Dorothy Allen,

Chief Division of Child Welfare

Charleston, West Virginia:

Dear Miss Allen:

The Kenova Police Chief states that the Felty Fannin family moved there from Boyd County, Kentucky in early January 1961. He personally took baskets of food and clothing to the family, and that the father, Felty Fannin either refused to work, or spent his time working on his automobile. . Those neighbors also gave food and clothing several times during the two weeks they lived in Kenova.

The Kentucky Department of Child Welfare, seeking custody of the remaining children, has filed a petition. The Kenova Police planned to arrest the Fannins on a neglect charge, three weeks ago, but they fled during the night.

Sincerely yours,

Marjorie A. Davis

Child Welfare Worker

Wayne County West Virginia

Donations stopped. Felty set out again along the Big Sandy River driving farther into the West Virginia Mountains. He tucked the children in among the mattresses in the back of the truck.

Set deep in a narrow hollow near Lavallette, long empty of human inhabitants, the gray frame house was partially furnished with abandoned furniture, including a large overstuffed chair where a black snake had taken up residence. In the fall, the snake edged inside the rusty springs, laid its eggs in the padding, and rolled itself into a ball to wait for mice. Felty drove it out more than once, whacking at its sleek tail disappearing under the loose floorboards, but at night, while they slept, it returned to the chair. Their joust went on until tragedy struck.

July 26th was seasonably hot and humid. The Fannin children dug sand tunnels and patted mud pies under the cool shade trees. Imogene felt heavier than usual and dreaded to go into town. Felty prodded her because they would be given extra commodities if she came along. With scant money left for gas to reach the welfare office in Wayne, Felty and Imogene at last ventured down the hollow. Felty always took their son Charles, twin to Hallie Ann, with him.

Hallie Ann, Martha Lillian, Delbert and Elbert, James, and Mary Lou stayed behind to wait for the food and to look after Susan Lynn. As Imogene left, her seven month old baby crawled on her pallet. Her milk bottle was nearly empty.

On their way home, the old wreck of a truck overheated. People slowed down and stared, but nobody stopped. Hours passed. When at last they drove up the hollow, Hallie Ann ran to meet them, her face streaked with tears. Her baby sister's arms and legs were draped across her tiny shoulder, but the baby wasn't asleep.

Damned and poisoned by the evil eye of a snake, Felty told, when my mother asked. She shuddered at his impossible story. On Wilson Creek in Kentucky, Susan Lynn's body was laid out at Aunt Mary's house. Set high on the dining room table in a tiny white casket, the baby wore a pink dress someone had given. The other Fannin children went home with relatives for baths and clean clothes to get ready for their baby sister's funeral.

They buried Susan Lynn in the Fannin cemetery on Norton Branch next to Granny Martha. In spite of it all, Mother noted, Imogene was expecting and after all that had happened and after all she'd done to help them. Likely, twins again. Mother studied on the death of Susan Lynn: Felty had lied to her. She knew it. She suspected a tragic accident had killed the baby, but what? Who was he protecting? Imogene was mute with grief.

Baby Susan Lynn had four pallbearers. Here are the accounts of three of the teen age girls who remember carrying the tiny casket.

Verna Mae: "Baby Susan Lynn was laid out at Aunt Mary Berry's house, and that's where we took the food. Her funeral was next morning at the Old Norton Branch School. It also served as church. It's gone now. It was built right in the middle of the fork of the road. We four girls carried that baby's little casket up the hill to the Cemetery. The Fannin family was poor and very few people came, so I guess we jumped in to help. We were all about the same age. I was eighteen and Joyce was sixteen."

My mother Lottie Berry attended every funeral in our District, so we expected to go. She also went to sit up with the each bereaved family in our Norton Branch community. It was the right thing to do, she said. She loved to bake pies and cakes and she took me to help carry her food. I was the baby of the family and I went everywhere with my mother. I'd sit up as late as mother did. Back then; we'd sit up all night with the body. She was devoted to helping out, and I learned from her."

Joyce Hutchinson: "The baby was buried in a little white casket. I remember its handles were loose, and I worried as we carried it up the hill to the grave, whether they would hold."

Glenna Gail Dinkins: "Yes, I was a pallbearer. I don't recall who asked us girls. I guess it was because we were young, and the little baby was only seven months old. Maybe no men were present. The funeral was held on a weekday and men were most likely at work."

Linda Berry Black: "Uncle Felty showed up on Wilson Creek with a little white casket. He asked Aunt Mary to have a wake in her living room. My father Jim Berry a half-brother to Felty, took me over. Susan

Lynn was a beautiful little girl dressed in a pink dress someone had given them. Her body was swollen though, and on her forehead, I saw a gash about one inch long - not sutured or bandaged. Dad said he thought someone had tried to suck out the poison from the snake bite."

After Susan Lynn was buried, Felty considered his usual hiding places. He could not go back to Lavellette though, because Social Services in West Virginia were still investigating Susan Lynn's death.

The Ida Dinkins house stood empty again; the clapboards had peeled off and the cracks between the logs were wider. The deep well needed to be dug out, but he had lost America for the time being and no truant officer searched for them, yet.

The Fannins' trips to the brown and white log house at the foot of Star Hill increased. On most mornings, when their Aunt Velva even when she wanted a day to herself, set to worrying about whether the Fannin children had anything to eat that day. And if she left, she cooked up a pot of ham and pinto beans and baked hearty corn bread if they did come. She knew that salves and potions or even the frank conversation she'd had with Imogene, while Imogene had nodded with a gleeful smile, would not alter the cycle of endless pregnancies for this hapless woman. Velva puzzled over the bond between Felty and Imogene that kept Imogene pregnant and the multiple births that often resulted.

By early fall, the balmy summer weather turned chill and rainy and not one Fannin child was enrolled in Star school. Word was out, as it always was when Felty had used up the community, and there were no more church donations. Felty had no winter provisions or prospects, as he looked for another place. Even Bob Sarven, their friend in Westwood, had no room for them.



Figure 4 - Imogene Wheeler and Valentine 'Felty' Fannin

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CARTER JUVENILE COURT

SPECIAL TERM

October 24th, 1961

IN RE: Charles Fannin, Hallie Ann Fannin, Martha Fannin,
Delbert Fannin, Elbert Fannin, Henry Thomas Fannin,
Mary Lou Fannin, and James Fannin, needy and
neglected children under sixteen years of age

It being called to the attention of the Court that
the children hereinafter named are needy and neglected
children within the purview of KRS 200.010 et seq. and the
children being brought before the Court and the parents,
Felty Fannin and Imogene Felty, being present in Court, and
the Court having duly considered the matter now holds that
said children need supervision and attention which can not
be provided by the parents;

NOW, it is therefore ^{ordered} that Charles Fannin, age 10,
Hallie Ann Fannin, age 10, Martha Fannin, age 9, Delbert
Fannin, age 7, Elbert Fannin, age 7, Henry Thomas Fannin,
age 6, Mary Lou Fannin, age 5, and James Fannin, age 4
be and they are hereby placed in the Gertrude Ramey Home
at Ashland, Kentucky subject to the provisions of KRS 200.110,
and it is further understood by the parents and so ordered by
the Court that said parents are not to interfere with the
supervision of said children by The Gertrude Ramey Home and
shall not visit said home unless arranged by order of this
Court.

Terry Carter
Judge, Carter Juvenile Court

Figure 5 - Court Order

Judge Tom Carter and Star Hill 1961

As last, there it was, a dire single line in the weather report of the Ashland Daily Independent for October 10, 1961: *A cold front is sweeping the Appalachia Plateau bound for the lesser hills of Carter County.* Was this the trigger for Mother to take action?

Without a word to any of us, Mother scraped the frost off her Ford, took her good coat down off its nail, and drove off. Later, we found out she went to see County Judge Tom Carter in Grayson. We knew him. He made all kinds of promises and smiled and nodded when he stopped by Mother's kitchen to ask for her vote before his election. Anxious to do the right thing, the smiling judge ordered the Fannin children into protective custody. Mother's courage that October day and Judge Carter's decision caused her worry for the rest of her life.

Martha Lillian fought. She screamed and shouted cuss words she'd heard her mother say, as a big man locked arms around her waist and wig-wagged her toward the police car. Her long skinny legs swung and twisted as she stiffened her body against his grasp. She was only eight years old. Her brothers and sisters ran and screamed and cried. Officers caught them, as well. Imogene clawed at the men, pulling hair and shouting obscenities as they fetched each child, but they did not arrest Imogene that day. They pushed her children into the shiny black cars and drove off Star Hill. Felty did not fight. He swiped at his eyes and promised to get a job, to do better. His sister, Jessie, drew her own children inside her house.

Boyd County Judge George Hall denied the Fannins access to their children, except by special permission. They didn't bother to ask, and they didn't know where their children were.

Until Miss Gertrude Ramey engineered attention to the new family. In November 1961, a picture of their children held at the Ramey Home was published in the *Ashland Daily Independent*, with a caption: *Children found living under a rock cliff.* With the photo was a special interview with Gertrude Ramey. Miss Ramey described how the snake bit Susan Lynn in a cave, and how the children ate black walnuts to live. Her capital soared. This was her most daring rescue. Donations flowed into the Ramey Home.



Figure 6 - Ramey Home November 1961. Henry T, James, Martha Lillian Twins: Delbert and Elbert Twins: Hallie Ann Charles in chairs.

Then Felty and Imogene knew where their children were and nearly everyone felt relieved to know they were safe. A few days before Christmas, Felty and Imogene lined up shiny red bicycles they'd managed to buy from his work on the garbage detail, along the yard outside the Ramey Home, but Gertrude Ramey herded Mary Lou, James, Hallie Ann and Martha into an attic room on the third floor. The children glimpsed their parents and the bicycles through the tiny window. By then, the boys: Delbert, Elbert, Henry T., and Charles were at the Hack Estep Home for Boys, miles away.

In nearby Avondale district, Felty and Imogene moved into one of George Kimbler's shacks on Branch Street. Felty took all the work he could get with the garbage detail. The weeks dragged on. He knew what he had to do, but Imogene refused to go with him. He understood about sanitation and keeping house. His mother Martha had been fastidious in her person and in her household. He had steady work. What he needed was a proper home to get his children back, but Imogene was growing large. She had not felt well since she had fought with the law on Star Hill. For the first time, her house was ominously quiet because all her children were gone.

Felty chided his wife. He cajoled and prodded her to fix up their shack. Despite her lumbering figure and unease, she heated flour and water for wallpaper paste and papered the walls with a cheerful pink rose cover that a neighbor had given her. But there it ended. Three months later, she doubled over with cramps. On February 1, 1962, in the Kings Daughters Hospital emergency room, she aborted triplet fetuses.

Seven months after the triplet abortion, Imogene gave birth to Andrew Jackson Fannin in the same Branch Street shack. Andrew was pale and fretful. At Kings Daughters Hospital emergency, doctors kept him overnight. When she came for him, the doctors told her the baby was blind. The question of whether he was blinded by infection at birth or from excessive oxygen pumped into his incubator remains unanswered, but the hospital refused to give him up to her. Andrew Jackson Fannin began his life's journey through the Kentucky foster care system on September 16, 1962. He was separated from his birth mother for twenty-five years.

Portending more misfortune, six months after that, Imogene returned to the same emergency room at the Kings Daughters Hospital where she aborted twin babies. Ten months after that, on January 19, 1964, her new son, Matthew, struggled to breathe and soon gave up his fight. He was buried next to Granny Martha and baby Susan Lynn. The dusty path to the Fannin cemetery on Norton Branch saw little rest.

Yatesville, Kentucky Lawrence County Twin girls Golda and Nola

Summer 1964. Without even a question as to where the little Fannin children would live and perhaps because he did not want to know, Judge George Hall slammed his gavel, thereby reversing the orders of Carter County Judge Tom Carter and changing the fate of the Fannin children once again.

In September 1964 Felty retrieved his children, except for Jeanetta and Loretta, left Ashland and crossed back into Carter County to settle near Grayson. Delbert and Elbert, Hallie Ann and Martha Lillian

attended Prichard Elementary. That first morning Dick Vincent and other school officials took the boys to the gymnasium for showers, while female teachers bathed Hallie Ann, Martha. The school board members found clean clothes for all of them.

It wasn't long before the children were truant again. At the Fannin home in Dixie Park, America didn't knock: she left a brown coffee sack filled with fresh milk, cheese, and ground beef on their doorstep. They needed it badly, but Felty didn't see it as a good will gesture. But rather as just another of her threats - one of her mysterious visits. Before nightfall, on November 11, 1964, he slid off into the night, headed east through Hitchens, this time to Lawrence County. His former sister in law, Golda Sparks Ball, had already sent word about an empty house in Fallsburg. As for Imogene, she hadn't seen a doctor but she knew she was carrying twins again

Their new place was drafty. The chinking between the old logs was gouged out and crumbling. But Golda had straightened things up and piled in wood for the fireplace. It was near midnight on November 12, 1964, Felty and the children unloaded the household plunder. Imogene felt the onset of labor pains. Within hours and toward morning, Imogene gave birth to twin girls on their old mattress on the floor. Later that day, Golda drove Imogene and the infants, one named Golda for her generous midwifery, and the other Nola, to the Lawrence County Health Department to register for commodities. Their stay in Lawrence County might have worked out for the good, if Felty or Golda Sparks Ball had asked permission and paid rent to the land owner of the old log house. But planning ahead was never in Felty's plan. Within weeks, they picked up and moved again. When his old truck flagged, along the steep ridge road to the Diamond place, Felty strewed clothes and supplies the generous churches had sent. In January 1965, the Fannin children walked down that same ridge to ride the bus to the Fallsburg school. Their attendance was sporadic

"Those children ate wild onions on their way to school. My, when they got on the bus it was evident. Then, in the classroom, Edith Hall, who taught right across the hall from me, had placed a chair for the older boy, Charles near the open door. The other children had complained so. You know wild onions ruin milk. If the cows ate them in the hay, the dairy sent the milk back. They are powerful." Sara Rice, one of the teachers, stopped to smile. "Today, we call them ramps. Over in West Virginia, there are so many, they create festivals to celebrate them," she chuckled.

By the end of the 1965 spring school term, their second landlord discovered his unusual tenants and asked for rent. That was Felty's cue. As his fortunes dwindled, this flight with his children was to be his last; at least with those still remaining in his care.

Felty loaded up and fled to Branch Street in Avondale. He rented a shack from George Kimbler for five dollars. There, among other peripatetic boarders, he struck up a friendship with Lige Fields, whose brother John worked for Kimbler. Lige owned little parcels of land around the unincorporated fringe of Ashland. The two men cut a deal. Lige offered Felty a job of feeding his hogs on New Buckley Road near Westwood. In exchange, Felty asked to build a small house near the hog lot. With the promise of work and a home, Felty broadened his junking area to loot pieces of lumber and roofing. He was not able to find windows. This new home had doors only.

While Imogene was more ambivalent, Felty never gave up. He wanted his children back. He had built a house in the hog feed lots, and he had a job. As soon as he could, Felty arranged to see the judge. In court, he wore a clean pressed suit that Mary, Lige's wife, provided. They faced Judge George Hall. For that day, Imogene wore clean clothes and she had braided her long brown hair. Her unlined cheeks shone around an expectant smile while Felty, hat in hand, said, "We miss our children. We've worked, like you said." Of course, he hadn't, but Felty listed what Carter County Judge Carter ordered him to do: *get a job, set up a home, and clean up.*

Deputy Janet Stevens was impressed and so was Judge Hall.

"He looked like a folk hero standing at the bar with his neatly combed, slicked back dark hair and determined brown eyes to tell his story of building a new house out of found materials," said Janet Stevens, deputy sheriff Boyd County. Somehow, he had managed it without much help. It is not of record what Judge George Hall said to them, but he restored their children for the second time.

The Fannin daughters left the ordered life at the Ramey Home where they regularly attended school, took dance classes, and learned to roller skate. The Hack Estep Home released the little Fannin brothers, where their parents picked them up for the second time.

The Hog Farm on Paradise Hill 1965

But then Felty quit his job with the city of Ashland and faded into the hog lots on Paradise Hill. Of an early morning, he did what he loved most, aimlessly scavenging the back streets and alleys of Ashland before the garbage trucks came. Charles went with his father. He was nearly fourteen when he found an old .22 rifle and carried it home for the metal. Before long, bereft of school attendance and even the use of an outhouse, the younger children roamed farther and farther from the shack, down the New Buckley Road, looking for something to eat.

In early July, Imogene took her twin babies to visit friends, Ann and her brother Douglas Gullet. Alarmed, Ann drove Imogene and her new babies to the emergency room; the diagnosis: jaundiced and malnourished.

Doctors alerted Social Services. After Felty's flight from Dixie Park, America had lost him, but now she knew where he was hiding. America entered a rescue order for the two babies to save them from certain starvation, but she hadn't seen the older Fannin children yet.

Boyd County Sheriff and his deputies assembled at 10 a.m. on Monday, July 12, 1965. They drove up old Buckley Road onto Paradise Hill.

"I stayed in the car while the children ran by, shrieking and yelling. They climbed trees and crawled under the house." Her attention was drawn to the house Felty had described in Court a few months earlier. It was a windowless shack, with waste splashed out the door. It was not a home for children or even for the pigs. Deputy Stevens held Golda and Nola in the back seat of the police car as the siren wailed.

Back on Paradise Hill, America Holbrook entreated the Sheriff to rescue all of the Fannin children again. After two years in the Ramey home, where they were nourished and educated, they were again in peril with emaciated bodies, uncombed hair, and soiled clothing, and they were living in a windowless shack in a feedlot for pigs.

He called the State Police for back up. In her fury, she hurled dishes from her kitchen and shards cut the sheriff on his elbow and brow. For her assault he handcuffed and arrested Imogene. Then Hallie Ann, Delbert and Elbert, Henry T., Martha Lillian, Mary Lou, and James saw it was no use. They climbed into the police cars.

Felty was nowhere in sight. He and Charles had already gone out to forage. Unlike the previous two raids, when the judge did not charge Felty, authorities issued a warrant for his arrest for child endangerment. Lige and Mary Fields bailed Imogene out of jail and took her home with them. Imogene was expecting again. After three weeks, Felty too, was released. Charles joined his brothers at the Hack Estep home, but he did not stay long.



America Wright Holbrook and Linda Ashley, social workers

Sheriff, Deputy Hurt Taking Mother, 9 Children In Custody

CATLETTSBURG. — Amid a band's arrest for contributing to juvenile delinquency, "all heck broke loose," he declared.

A barrage of dishes, cups, rocks and assorted items were hurled at the officers. Sheriff Hall said a claw hammer was taken from one child; a crowbar from another, and a .22 caliber rifle from another.

For assistance, the sheriff called Kentucky State Police which sent two squatters, and the family was taken into custody.

The children, dirty and half-naked, ranged in age from 16 years to eight months. The three girls were sent to the Ramey Children's Home, and the four boys to the Boyd County Boys Farm.

A fifth son is with his father, Felty Fannin, whom the sheriff expected to take into custody sometime over the weekend.

The warrant was obtained by Miss America Holbrook, a supervisor of the State Department of Child Welfare.

Figure 7 - Newspaper Clipping

This third episode on July 12, 1965 marked the end of law enforcement raids to rescue the Fannin children into protective custody. They were older now; there was no hope that Felty and Imogene could change or provide for them. The children were separated from each other and placed in institutions, foster care and detention where they came to know a new kind of terror apart from evident hunger and neglect.

Charles, Delbert and Elbert, and Henry T. were housed again in the Hack Estep Home for Boys in western Boyd County. While there, Charles walked off - something he knew how to do. His brothers Delbert, Elbert and Henry T. were then transferred to a lockdown reception center one hundred miles away at Lexington, where the courts were impervious to the pleadings and promises of Felty Fannin. It was too far away for the bewildered little boys to run off.

After that, for nearly a decade, the three little Fannin boys were traded like commodities. They passed through the hands of six social workers, four institutions, juvenile detention, and three foster homes. They were severed from their sisters and their parents. They disappeared into the Kentucky foster care system where their lives were altered forever.

The Decline

The process had actually begun much earlier and long before America took Jeanetta and Loretta into foster care in 1959, and before Felty fired up a feud with truant officers and before county judges Carter and Hall began their power struggle over the Fannin children.

Star Hill US 60. The changes in their lives began in a civil way, but with the savagery of the engineer's sextant. The highway department surveyed the right of way for I 64 through Star Hill. The engineer was a visionary. Instead of following the old horseshoe turn that meandered up, he measured due west over the sandstone boulders. What stood in his way was blasted and scraped until the pinnacle of Star Hill was flattened. The roots of Martha's big oak tree lost their ancient footing. Bulldozers picked around her cottage leaving twenty feet of bank.

Martha moved out to live with her daughter, Sarah, in Westwood. The shack, where so much of her life had started and ended, peeled away, as board by board slid down the bank until somebody picked it up for firewood. But the truth of the matter was that Martha didn't really own it anymore. Each time Felty came home to her with another new baby or another problem, she'd borrow a few dollars from her elder daughter, Mary, or her brother, Chead, to stretch her social security stipend. She'd lost her home inch by inch. Felty was still hiding out in Lavalette, West Virginia, sparring with the black snake, when Martha, died on June 1, 1961. With her death, he lost one more cog in his delicate economic balance.

Imogene resumed her usual activity: she gave birth to three more daughters. Velva Ann was born in the emergency room at Kings Daughters Hospital three months after the July 12, 1965 raid on Paradise Hill. Imogene listed her home address as 3221 Smith Street in Ashland.

Two years later, Pearl Jean was born on February 9, 1967. Then, eight months to the day, Brenda Sue was born on October 1, 1968. This birth may have marked the end of fifteen years of constant pregnancy for Imogene. At least for babies who survived their births?

Healthy except for a harelip and cleft palate. While Imogene filled out the forms, she named her baby Brenda Sue. Imogene was released, but her newest baby girl was admitted to King's Daughter's hospital for observation by the emergency room physicians. It was a trick. When Imogene returned for her baby the following morning, she was told her baby had been given a new mother.

Imogene did not know whether Brenda Sue Fannin had survived. (Thirty-seven years later, in November 2005, we located her in Florida, living with her adoptive parents, the Blythe family.)

Dr. James F. Williamson, serving the emergency room on October 1, 1968, explained that Brenda Sue must be fed with an eyedropper every few minutes. He kept the baby in Pediatrics. Subsequently, a court order issued by Judge George Hall gave custody of the baby to the Kentucky Social Services. There was no discussion about the matter.

With the birth of Velvie Ann and Pearl Jean, America Holbrook's pursuit of Felty Fannin quickened. It was not easy to keep track of them because these last two Fannin children still in Imogene's care were not yet old enough to be enrolled in school.

America filed her petitions for Velva Ann and Pearl Jean, but Judge Hall had second thoughts. He and Judge Carter had already removed twelve of Imogene's children in three raids. They had hoped to wake up Imogene and Felty and to get them on track. Had they learned? And what was the lesson? During this delay, while Judge Hall considered his options, Felty and Imogene fled Boyd County and Judge Hall's jurisdiction and moved into a house in Lawrence County at Blaine. Felty Fannin understood the judicial system better than anyone else and he understood the rivalry among the three judges. He circled the eastern Kentucky counties the way a hawk circles its prey.

The dynamics changed fast after that. Before she was eighteen, Hallie Ann ran away from Gertrude Ramey's care and soon after married William Henry Stewart of Olive Hill. She gave birth to her first daughter while her husband was imprisoned for murder in Lawrence County, Ohio, in 1973. She gave birth to two more daughters with Frank Crum. After she fell out with him, she qualified for SSI for herself and for her three little girls. She moved back in with Imogene and Felty and with her two younger sisters, Velvie Ann and Pearl Jean. Located in a remote Brushy Creek hollow at Blaine in Lawrence County, Kentucky. During this time, Martha Lillian left home for good with Harm Stewart, brother to William Henry. She was fifteen and he was twenty years her senior.

From Blaine, Velva Ann and Pearl Jean rode the school bus to Louisa. Welfare investigation of their home conditions in Blaine not only revealed abject poverty for Peal Jean and Velvie Ann but also uncovered Hallie Ann's three babies all under four. In two trips, Judge Alvin Ball ordered all five children removed. Felty pressed his elder son, with his first wife Versa, to claim the three little girls. His elder daughter Vada convinced welfare to give her Velvie Ann and Pearl Jean to her care. But after a few months, Felty stole Velva Ann and Pearl Jean from Vada. He fled to Chillicothe, Ohio, where they had all



Figure 8 – Hallie Ann's daughters

been hiding out since the killing at the Starlite Drive In.
(Author's note: Please see the epilogue for a detailed account of this murder.)

Back in Kentucky, Felty was arrested for unlawful taking of the two girls, but in Louisa, Judge Ball restored the two little girls to Felty and Imogene. This placed the little girls on a course that changed their lives because Felty left Lawrence County jurisdiction and moved to Henderson Branch near Olive Hill in Carter County. It was a collision course for all of them. Soon after that, Delbert ran away from the Opportunity Workshop in Lexington; without a word, Elbert walked off from the Coburn foster care family. Henry T. was delivered by his foster parents to Henderson Branch.

It happened fast after that. In rapid succession, over a span of several weeks, Delbert and Elbert and Henry T. congregated with Imogene and Felty and their little sisters Velva Ann and Pearl Jean. But soon after their reunion, Henry's money ran out. The hungry boys pilfered food from neighbors. When boredom set in, they practiced skills of thievery and bullying they'd learned in their journey through the foster care system, including wounding one neighbor girl with a shotgun blast. In their spare time, they abused their two little sisters.

This is background and prelude to answer my mother's question. What ever happened to Imogene's children? What follows is in a small way, an account of their suffering and bewilderment.

War on Poverty

The glaciers never reached the area that became east Kentucky where we all grew up. These ice floes flattened Ohio several times, but each time they receded before they smoothed the foothills of the ancient Appalachians. Their melt created the Ohio River and the division between the two states.

On the Kentucky side of the Ohio River, the sharp ridges remained nearly impassable and nourished a certain kind of life and culture. But Kentuckians were visionaries. When the borders were set, they claimed ownership of the Ohio River as their northern boundary.

In 1792, Kentucky was the 15th state admitted to the Union. A minimalist Judiciary was set up to please a network of small agrarian fiefdoms that populated the hard country. It left decisions to the head of the family unit and gave no instructions for exceptions such as the care and treatment of children or for women faced with domestic violence. That was left to the Kentucky Assembly. The Constitution was still unchanged in 1959, when America Holbrook wrote up her first proposal to help Imogene and when she committed the Fannin children to a lifetime of institutional dependency.

Whether Felty and Imogene ever heard of JFK or his design for Appalachia is not known. What is clear; however is that Felty Fannin fought for his independence? While he rebuffed America Holbrook's job offers, he grasped something else she offered and understood: food stamps. Imogene and Felty tuned in

to the delivery schedule for free commodities of canned fruit, bricks of yellow cheese, plastic gallon jugs of mayonnaise and dried soup. Welfare and institutional dependency ingratiated their lives.

The Fannin children's story began in 1960, about the same time JFK flew in on his political plane, several ridges distant from the Wheeler Hollow, and landed on a tiny flat field in Letcher County, Kentucky. He spoke about change and his hopes for east Kentucky if he became President. In his way, he planned to do what the glaciers could not - to reveal what was left of Appalachia. By building wider roads over the mountain paths and creating jobs, the pockets of protected life were to be exposed and denuded. Clearly, he did not have an understanding of what a tough business that might be and that the sharp peaks of the oldest mountain range in the world resisted change.

In 1963, Lyndon Johnson picked up the JFK blueprint and declared his own War on Poverty. About that same time, blind baby Andrew Fannin followed Jeanetta and Loretta into the labyrinth that was the Kentucky foster care system. Felty and Imogene were unaware of the political world outside. They went on doing all they knew how to do: having more babies and picking around the edges of other people's lives.

The Search Begins

Carter County's death certificates are filed in cardboard boxes at the Health Department near Grayson, Kentucky. From the outside, the building is an efficient, square, red brick structure, but inside, in a cramped closet of a room with no work table and no direct light.

I squinted at the frayed edges and faded ink on birth and death records.



Figure 9 - Imogene, Felty and Hallie Ann

The clerk in charge pulled on the chain to light the single bulb over our heads and reminded me in an impatient voice, "They have all this over at Frankfort, and it's easy to get off the Internet. Do you have a computer?" she asked.

I corrected her in my gentlest tone, "They don't have everything in Frankfort. I am hoping to find something about Roseanne Wheeler's death."

In answer, she turned on her heel and was gone.

The faded, blue cards provided precious few legible words - Undertaker: Neighbors. Burial site: Falls Branch or Kehoe or Iron Hill. The cards in the shoebox-shaped file told the ancient stories: the name of the doctor in attendance, if there was one, used pre-printed forms. Skimpy with his ink, in the glow of a kerosene lamp, the doctor jotted and stabbed with his fountain pen. He might skip the line asking for names of the parents. Often, he did not seem to know the exact birth

date of the dead child, and in a less direct way, he scribbled the age in years and months, as in the case of Imogene's older brother, Andrew Fannin: *12 years and one month old; drowned*. These death notices reported only the perfunctory dates of life's end around these camps of transient workers.

Death was a common tragedy, as frequent as birth. The settlement at Elk Lick on Tygart, where Charlie Wheeler brought their children in 1935 after Roseanne died, was no different from other camps where they had lived: Lindsay, Iron Hill, Stinson and Kehoe, where he moved them into drafty abandoned farmhouses with no provisions. Charlie's existence depended on work in the mines or in a sawmill.

Imogene's interest in my work to discover the truth about her lost children was mixed. Often, she balked at my question about her children, but she became excited when I asked about her own youth. She called and called again. Hammering me. She made demands on me to prove up and piece together the episodes of her early tangled life story. Had she begun to trust me? I wondered at this openness.

"They said the midwife got up on mother's stomach to push the baby out with her knees," Imogene told me. "After that, Sister Ellen fed mother in her bed but she died anyway of child bed fever, they said. I was too little to remember my mother or her dead baby. But one day I asked where my mother was. I missed her, ya know, an' someone told me she was buried at Iron Hill when I was five years old, and that's all I know," her eyes twinkled and softened - not in sadness, but in innocence that belied the tragedy she described. On every level of her early life, tragedy assaulted her: losing her mother and a stillborn brother, while two more of her siblings died of malnutrition. Still she smiled.

That much at least came from deep within Imogene's memory. I found no written record of Roseanne's death, not in this dark room at the Health Department, nor at Frankfort. There were no doctor's scribbles. At Iron Hill there was not even a rotting marker for her burial site or a sandstone rock to mark the hastily dug grave. Perhaps she was buried near her baby Giles, or even with him in his grave. There is no grave to visit and decorate or a mother to remember for Imogene. Nobody can remember just how long Roseanne lived after Giles was stillborn.

It was March of 2006, that Imogene sent word for me to search for a death certificate for Hazel Lacey Wheeler. Another death? But tragedy for the Wheeler family had come to stay. Imogene called again, having remembered another piece of her early life. She said her mother Roseanne had been dead two years when her little sister Hazel Lacey Wheeler turned four years old one morning in February, 1937, and died.

"They say she lost heart," Imogene remembered for me, "She just died, of nothing in particular." Imogene was three years older than Hazel Lacey and she did not remember her sister's death either, only what she was told.

According to the doctor's notes, from the old blue card, Hazel Lacey died of pneumonia and influenza. There was more. From another deep place in her memory, Imogene sent word, "Search for brother Andrew twelve years and one month old," was her brief message left on my telephone. On my next visit to the health department, I withdrew the faded blue card. Later, after I'd found Andrew's death certificate, Imogene said, "He couldn't hardly walk, they called it rickets."

The doctor had scribbled: *Pneumonia March 6, 1937*. Perhaps Andy had died of rickets and pneumonia. On the record, Andrew died one month after Hazel Lacey.

Twists and turns in my interview process with Imogene Wheeler Fannin kept me poised to rush in. Her memory bank erupted from time to time, but not when I sat with her and implored her with my pen in hand - then she was mute. Later she might send word to me with the answer to a question I'd put to her weeks before.

Her surfaces of gleeful innocence deny her complex feelings. Just when I need it, she refuses to sign a release document. It's clear she wants her truth told as she conjured it, not the truth on hospital records and police reports. Imogene will soon be seventy-seven, and except for her sister Lillian, Imogene is the surviving member of the Wheeler family.

The 1930 census for Carter County captured her Wheeler family snapshot still intact. Imogene's parents Charlie and Roseanne shared hard times in the home of Charlie's sister, Ellen Wheeler Vaughn and her coal miner husband, Lem, in Grayson. Life went downhill after that. Lemuel Vaughn died in 1936, and Ellen went to live at the County Infirmary where she died alone of cancer six years later in April 1942.

Jobs created by timber and coal fortunes brought widower Charlie Wheeler and his surviving six children: Woodrow, Albert and Alberta, Lily, Ellen and the youngest, Imogene farther east to the Wheeler Hollow on Rachel Branch sometime in the 1940s.

The dead baby in the cliff

It was late August 2004, when my sister, Janet, came from a yard sale on Rachel Branch.

"I saw Jack Dinkins today. You know? Jack owns Star Antique store? He said to tell you to talk to his dad, Toby. Toby grew up in the hollow where Imogene lived." She added, "Better take a paper and pencil. Jack says Toby is stone deaf."

Toby was eager to go with me to scout out his home place. The very next morning as we made the sharp turn off US Highway 60 into the mouth of Wheeler Hollow, his flat, toneless voice rose, "After we sold out to John Holly, he let the Wheelers move up here. They changed things in a small way," he nodded. "We hadn't mined the coal, but the Wheelers tore out the hillsides with picks and shovels. Charlie made his girls Ellen, Lily, Alberta, and even young Imogene work like men, digging that coal. I think he give coal to John Holly for rent and sold some, maybe. His boys though, well he was even tougher on them. He took them to work every day down at the Princess Coal Mine and they worked for George Ferguson. He'd go along to see they dug the quota of coal and to collect their pay," Toby nodded. "Mostly to see they worked, but he didn't work. He'd just watch 'em, and eat his lunch."

We rumbled up the center of the hollow past a mosaic of tiny jagged bottoms. It set me to wondering what violent deluge had carved it out, when Toby signaled to stop at a steep ravine. He leaned over and flicked his finger to get out of the car. He led us up the wet bank over a large oval lichen-covered rock tucked under the side of the cut bank.

At its core facing east, scraggly green moss grew in patches over a slab shelf nestled under the overhang. Toby sought my eyes again and jabbed his finger toward the deep dark opening. "One of the Wheeler girls had a little baby," he pointed towards the overhang. "She'd walked half way down the hollow they say, when the baby fell asleep. Got heavy in her arms, they say, and she swaddled it in its blanket and placed it inside the cliff, sound asleep, until she got back from the store."

Toby began to whip his head, "This wasn't the case though, because she was somehow delayed an' she come back to find her baby is dead. They say it froze. I don't know if that's true, it's what we heard, what everyone talked about. I don't know which one of the girls it was." Toby's voice turned soft and faded as he turned up the slope with his strong legs and out-stepped me.

I wanted to tug at his sleeve to ask, "Are you sure?"

I scrambled after him, as all around us the sharp slopes harboring tall thin saplings wormed their way toward the sky, competing for the light with the fast growing sycamores and scrub cedars. Rivulets of clear water seeped through the slivers of yellow iron-stained rocks under our feet. At last, Toby stopped, waited and turned to me again, "This place in here was called John Holly hollow after he bought it from us, but he lived somewhere's else, so people started to call it the Wheeler hollow when Charlie moved in because there were so many of them and their youngins', and they did some interesting things."

Toby stepped out again only to pause at the next slick rock. I caught hold of his hand for a boost. "Imogene was Charlie's youngest girl, I think. She married your cousin, Felty?" He added with a wrinkled brow, "She had a baby before that, named Oscar. I think his daddy was a Kincaid, but they named the boy Wheeler." I blinked at this news as he traversed the slope, and waited again to pull me across a rushing narrow stream.

"This land was marginal for growing anything to eat. Oh, we did raise a nice garden on that little flat piece up there," Toby, pointed across the hill. "I think the Wheeler girls did too, but raising hogs was the best because they ate the acorns and lichen, and whatever they found their selves, and pigs don't notice whether the sun shines or not," Toby quipped with a twinkle. "Nearly everything else was hauled in with a sled and a mule. Now, Charlie Wheeler had a few hogs to sell too. Once I took a man up there to buy a shoat he advertised and when they looked around for it, it ran out of the kitchen."

After another steep scramble, I panted while Toby said, "Us kids used to play in those cliffs, just everywhere," his arm swept the ridge. "After we sold out though, John Holly let the Wheelers live up here to dig coal," he repeated and drew my gaze with another sweep of his long arm, "My granddaddy is buried right over there at Kilgore cemetery. One Decoration Day, my boy Jack and I hiked up there with flowers for his grave, but we couldn't find it no more, so we laid the flowers down and left," his burnished skin glistened, and pale blue eyes twinkled again.

"Them iron furnace owners always bought a big tract of treed land around their furnaces to make charcoal for to heat up the iron and limestone. Ya' know, like the Star and Savage? Now, there ain't no limestone here in this hollow, nor ever was, or close by here even, and none all the west of here to the Caves, and east all the way to the Ahia' River, only sandstone soil and clay of course, so, they hauled the

limestone from somewhere over at Olive Hill. But they used to own this hollow, way back before my Daddy bought it. This is all second growth timber," he added.

The pages of my writing pad were used up. I drove Toby home to Norton Branch, where he lived with Jack. We hugged goodbye. It was the last time I saw him. When I returned to Kentucky in the next early spring, I stopped at Star Antiques on US 60 to leave the pictures we snapped that day on the ledges and slopes in his home place Hollow.



Figure 10 - Where the baby froze - Toby Dinkins

the past with this sparkling blue eyed historian.

I turned west on US 60 and slowed down for a salute to the tale of the frozen baby on the ledge and to Toby's Hollow. There, a new green sign surprised me: 911 had restored the historic name of Toby's place to the *Dinkins Hollow*; as it ought to be.

The Toby Dinkins story of the dead baby under the ledge was disturbing. I asked Georgia Conley if she had heard of it. She said simply: "If Toby told you that story, it is the truth. Toby Dinkins would never tell anything that wasn't true."

Valentine 'Felty' Fannin 1950

Widower Charlie Wheeler, his sons Woodrow and Albert, his daughters, Ellen, Lily, Alberta, and Imogene had lived in the Hollow for ten years when Felty Fannin came to court Imogene. Despite his own obvious dearth of parental guidance, Charlie Wheeler opposed his younger daughter's plan to marry this divorced, unemployed father of five, who was twenty years her senior.

Jack met me at the door, "He died, Lydia. He died over nothing really. His doctor sent him to Kings Daughters for tests right after you saw him and something went bad. He died over nothing. Nothing."

We stood in disbelief. Jack, a loving son with whom his father lived his last days, and for me, a fortunate woman

who'd been given a glorious glimpse into

As a warning, he sent her son, Oscar Jiles, to live with his elder daughter, Alberta, on Straight Creek with orders not to turn him over to Imogene. Imogene slipped off anyway. One day in late November of 1950, she waited for Felty at the mouth of the hollow. She began her life on her own terms.

Felty was named for his paternal grandfather, Valentine Justice, his name misspoken and shortened to Felty, was kind enough and clever too. He often made little art objects, such as a picture frame or a windmill out of twigs or Popsicle sticks. He carved an animal from a sassafras root.

He gave these treasures to my mother, and she lined them up on the sash of the kitchen window. We children felt afraid of him. He was always around our place as we six sisters grew up. For one excuse or another, he'd stray from the work he was assigned to corner one of us girls in the kitchen and ask us something we didn't understand. We learned to duck under his arm and run out. Often he would rattle the outhouse door, and we cowered inside until he left.

"Felty is my nephew," our father reminded us, so our mother tolerated him in a cautious way, until one day my little sister Ruth, who was ten at the time, right at the supper table, asked, "What's a pussy?" After that, Felty pumped his drinking water where the cattle drank and ate his dinner in the yard.

Felty married his first wife, Versa Sparks, when she was a girl of thirteen and he was twenty-eight. Tragedy and hardship struck early when their baby, Richmond, named for her father, Richard Sparks, died at one month old. As was the habit then, babies slept between their parents in the same bed. Some thought the baby died of bold hives, but whenever the subject came up, our mother drew her lips into a thin line, "I think it smothered," she said quietly. It was 1931, and Felty and Versa had five more children after Richmond.

Delmar Lee was Versa's first son to survive. "He wasn't much of a manager," Delmar Lee said of his father. "We moved around a lot, and we all worked in the farm fields. I missed so much school because of it. I taught myself. Mostly our Mother's people raised us over in Elliott County."

Vada Fannin, their elder daughter is a high-energy, animated woman who inherited her mother's distinct cheekbones and quick smile. She is also fearless like the Versa I remember. She said, "I would live my childhood over if I could. Growing up was delightful. Our mother, Versa, worked all her life to keep us together. After we grew up and left home, she never wanted to live with any of us. When she divorced our father in 1949, she was industrious, as always, and worked at whatever she could find. She cleaned other people's houses and chopped corn in their gardens. Finally, she drew a little Social Security as a result of being married to Felty. It was all she ever got. She lived in Columbus. I moved up there to take care of her before she died."

Vada's feelings toward her father are more ambivalent. "His behavior baffled me and belies explanation even now." She recalls how her mother waited while he disappeared for hours and did not return with food for them as he promised. "Our mother did her part. She starched white shirts for him to wear to work, under bibbed denim overalls." Vada shook her head. "After my father married Imogene, things changed for him. I visited them at Blaine in Lawrence County. They had all those children by then, and they moved around a lot to hide out from America Holbrook.

One winter, they settled into an old two story house with nine rooms that somebody let them have. Instead of chopping wood for the fire, all winter long he burned the house room by room. By spring they were crowded into two inner rooms that still stood, and a shed with only three walls for the milk cow."

Felty worked in our spring crop season and sometimes through the winter stripping and tying tobacco leaves into sable-soft hands for market. He lived with Versa and their children in our extra farmhouse on the edge of the Carter Caves land.

Felty was distracted and restless, though. He promised to stay through the harvest season, and he probably intended to. Then, without provocation, on a sunny morning, he'd walk out the front gate carrying their littlest child, with Versa and the other children split-splatting down the dusty road behind



him like beads on a loose string. At the Y where Carter Cave road meets US 60, he hitched a ride for them east to Star Hill.

His habit was predictable. He went home to his mother, rested awhile, and used up what little money she had saved or borrowed. As she aged, he waited for her old age pension check on the 10th of the month. With those few dollars in hand, he set out again on his own. By then, our father was over being mad at him for leaving in the middle of a busy farm season, or there might have been some kind of understanding between our father and his sister, Martha, because soon Felty was back working on our place.

On a cold day in January 1947, Versa borrowed a few dollars from our mother for bus fare for her and her children, Vada, Delmar Lee, Shirley, and Jimmy. Delmar Lee was ten, just like me, and I remember how he waved at me through the bus window that day until the Greyhound disappeared up Star Hill. They were little children, under twelve and didn't really have to pay the bus fare. Versa had left Felty before, but this time it was for good

because she got off the bus in Grayson to see Attorney Thomas D. Theobold about a divorce. Records show D.V. Kibby represented him. At the brief hearing, Felty told Judge Tom Carter that he had no money and no prospects. This was true. Their divorce was granted on September 28, 1949.

After their divorce, the Court ordered Felty to support Versa's children, and he sent a little money once in awhile, because our mother addressed the envelope for him.

By 1950, he moved back in with his mother on Star Hill and seemed to forget his children over in Elliott County. In the summer of 1950, our father sold off his farms and didn't need as much farm help. Idleness set in for Felty. On a regular basis, he walked past our house toward the Wheeler Hollow on lower Rachel Branch.

Felty's mother, Martha, was a small, slightly stooped, wiry woman and she was devoted to him. Leaning over a washboard, beating coal dust out of other people's clothes curved her slim straight spine up near her shoulders. She was only forty-eight in 1950, when he married Imogene, but by then, she'd reared seven children of her own with two husbands. She still had fiery red hair she tucked up into a bun at the nape of her neck.

When she came to our house, she tied a gleaming white scarf over her hair and wore a man's black dress coat over her faded cotton dress. Gold-rimmed glasses perched on her nose and magnified her bright blue eyes. Until the day she died, we hardly ever saw her without a chaw of Brown's Mule tobacco. She lived as long as she could. She delivered Imogene's babies and stretched her old age pension as far as it went. Within a few weeks, after Martha died in June 1961; things went downhill for her elder son and his second wife. Imogene's youngest baby Susan Lynn was charmed by a black snake and died in her sleep somewhere over near Lavallette, in Wayne County, West Virginia. That was the tale Felty told us anyway.

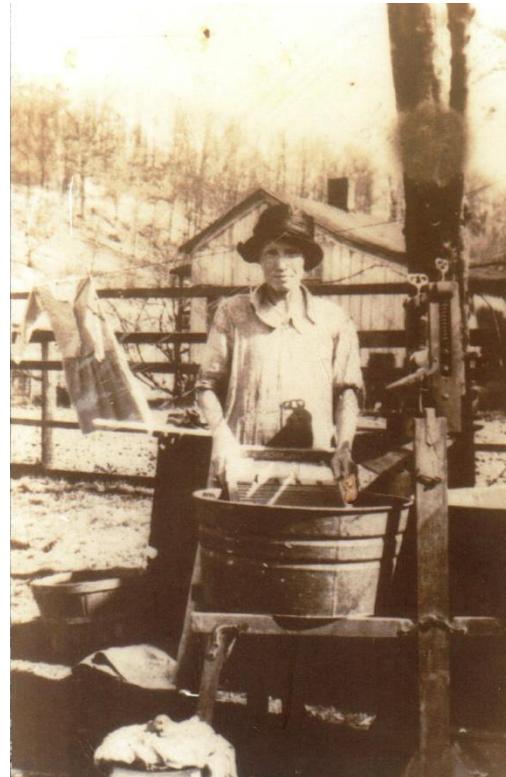


Figure 11 - Martha Justice Fannin Berry

Finding Imogene

The Ramey Years 1959

The distress of the Fannin children as each child reached school age became visible through chronic truancy. Underscored by a lack of hygiene and clothing and with only sporadic food supplies, America Holbrook at first took a gentle hand with Imogene and Felty. She knew they wanted their babies and in their way felt proud of having so many. Their distress was exacerbated because their father, Felty Fannin, was either unable or unwilling to hold a job.

Still, America wanted to keep the Fannin family together. She was often in their home in the Wheeler Hollow or in Avondale or wherever she found them. Their houses were old and drafty with no indoor plumbing. Sometimes the electricity was off. With her influence, she called the power company to beg their understanding. She always took hot food and extra commodities with her. At those times, the Fannins were happy to see America's familiar sedan bumping up the road.

Imogene's father, Charlie Wheeler, died in July of 1957. While he did not own the old small frame house near the sandstone cliff in the Wheeler Hollow, it was vacant, and Imogene moved back there in 1959. Imogene reached her 30th birthday in July 1959, with ten children under the ages of ten. Charlie's death left an acute void for Imogene. His social security check had provided a small cushion for her. Her brothers, Woodrow and Albert, had left home at last. Albert went to live with his twin sister, Alberta, on Straight Creek and Woodrow found a woman to marry. Ellen moved to West Virginia, and Lilly lived near Ashland.

In Ashland, America met with her Field Supervisor, Miss Rosalyn King and their District Supervisor, Luther E. Minyard. Back in the Wheeler Hollow, she explained her proposal as gently as she could: Your twin babies are sick. Turn them over for foster care, and I will return your older children from the Ramey Home - Hallie Ann, Martha Lillian, Delbert and Elbert, Henry T. and James will be brought home. At home already were Charles and Mary Lou. The child exchange was at last agreed to. (Two years later, in October 1961, this order was reversed by Judge Tom Carter, except for the twins Jeanetta and Loretta who were still drifting through the foster care system since 1959).

Carter Juvenile Court Special Term October 24, 1961

It being called to the Attention of the Court that the children herein after named are needy and neglected children within the purview of KBS 200.010 et seq., and the children being brought before the Court and the parents, Felty Fannin and Imogene Fannin being present in Court, and the court having duly considered the matter now holds that said children need supervision and attention which cannot be provided by the parents.

NOW, it is therefore ordered that Charles Fannin, age 10, Hallie Ann Fannin age 10, Martha Lillian Fannin age 9, Delbert and Elbert Fannin age 7, Henry Thomas Fannin age 6, Mary Lou Fannin age 5 and James Fannin age 4, they are hereby placed in the Gertrude Ramey Home at Ashland, Kentucky subject to the provisions of KRS 2000.110 and it is further understood by the parents and so ordered by the Court that said parents are not to interfere with the supervision of said children by the GRH and shall not visit said home unless arranged by order of the court. Judge Carter Juvenile Court Tom Carter.

Uncultured and uninitiated into society, they were spectacles when they arrived at the Ramey Home. Connie Ramey, one of the Ramey Home Children, recalls, "I remember when they were brought in. They scooped pinto beans into open mouths with fingers held together in a practiced way, like spoons. They ate as fast as they could and asked for more. Bowlful after bowlful, they ate beans with their hands. They knew they might not get any more.

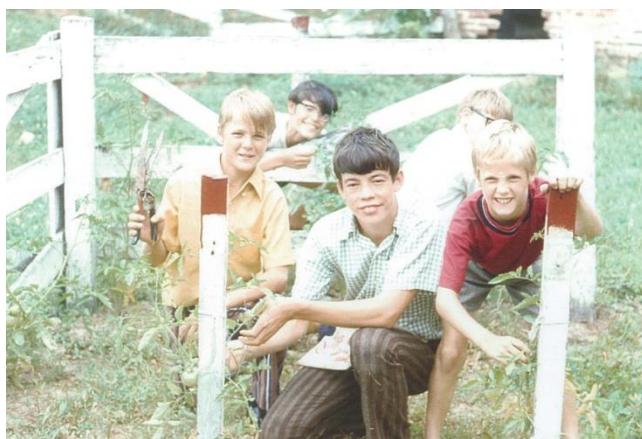
"That night when we all went to bed, they began to cry, wailing and keening. Miss Ramey told them, 'You mustn't cry like that, you are disturbing the other children. Nobody can sleep.' But they cried for days. It was a high pitched primitive animal sound from somewhere deep within their hearts."



Meeting James

"Hello, James? My name is Lydia. You don't know me. I'm cousin to your late father."

"James, may I ask a few questions? Are you married?"



"I married Cathy T." He mumbled. "I don't know how to spell her last name. We divorced after six years."

"Do you know where I can find your older sister, Lori?"

"She's in New York. Maybe she's back. I have not talked to her in years. Ask my sister, Pearl Jean, she keeps track of us."

"James, do you work during the day, or can you meet with me on Wednesday morning?"

"I don't work. I am disabled."

"I am sorry to hear that. May I ask what the problem is?"

"I have seizures and I can't read or write."

"When did your seizures begin?"

"In 1983...Called 'temporal' seizures."

"Do you take medication for seizures?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad you have a remedy. James, will you meet with me? I would like to talk to you about your life in the Ramey Home. Your sister, Pearl Jean, said you grew up at the Ramey Home for Children."



Figure 12 - James Valentine Fannin

James Fannin.

"Hello."

"Hello, James I am your cousin, Lydia."

James nodded, his lips clinched.

"Yes, I was three or four and five and six when I went there. I was on my own at age sixteen. I have always wanted to write my own story. I can tell you stories about the Ramey home. I can tell you stories about the food!"

This story is dedicated to James Valentine Fannin

James splashed toward me across the wet asphalt parking lot. I leaned forward and swiped at the mist on my windshield. Wet streaks of gray glistened in his overgrown black beard. His hair, straggly and uneven around his ears, was also streaked with white. He opened the door and clambered up into the seat, his plaid shirt and worn denim trousers soaked and dripping.

He offered his hand. Through closed lips, he beamed a bright smile. His deep brown eyes sparkled. I knew right away I liked

"If I had the money, I'd buy it." He blurted. "I'd buy the Ramey home. They say the County is selling it off. We grew up there, we children did. We have some ownership in that place. It's been our home for so many years. It's all I remember, them hills," he gestured with a sweep of his right arm. "The hills and that spot by the creek. That big rock, that's where I really grew up, on that rock. I want to show you my favorite spot. I hope it's still there. It ought to be. There's a cemetery on the big hill too. I used to go up there by myself to play in the dirt and to read the names."

Out 13th street on US 60, we drove west past the pillared entrance to the Rose Hill Cemetery and turned north on Poor Farm Road. The narrow road meandered past the Jean Thomas historical marker. "This was a dirt road when I lived here," James said He pointed at the road sign. "Now it's called McCullough drive for one of the men who started up the Ramey Children's Home where I grew up."

At the base of a steep hill, a round sign painted in bright green with a giant white oak tree depicted in its center flanked the drive. However, James pointed with both hands, not to the sign or the red brick mansion high on the hill that slipped into view, but across my steering wheel at the brown creek water rushing alongside the road.

"There, wait!"

I braked. He circled our car and, dragging his right leg, lurched across the road. A white crown of foam floated on the muddy water, curled into a large flat rock across the eddy, and boiled up against a yellow sandstone overhang. His voice echoed into a high pitched childlike wail. "I used to sit here. See that rock?" he pointed, interrupting himself, "That's my favorite place. When I was sad or I wanted to be by myself, I played here a lot all alone," he repeated. "Sometimes I brought my paper and pencil down here to draw," his voice tapered off. I came to stand by him. The wet, shiny leaves dripped their sheen into the muddy crystal bubbles of the stream.

"It looks the same - like when I first come here to the Ramey Home, I was four years old the first time I saw it, that big rock!" James sputtered and pointed as his smile widened. "I liked that big rock ledge best. See where the water slides over and they say that water runs all the way to Mexico!" He opened his palms toward the sky.

"It's a pretty place, James. It's exciting here. I like your spot." I spread my arms too and arched my eyebrows. "Wow, all the way to Mexico!"



Figure 13 - James Fannin far right

The Gertrude Ramey Home is a red brick three-story house that once served as the Boyd County Poor Farm. Its destiny, like James Fannin's life, was redefined several times.

In 1944, Gertrude Ramey's Children's Home was only an apartment over Stafford's Grocery store in Catlettsburg across the street from the Court House. By 1946, with her fledgling Board members in place, including R.A. McCullough who drove the official formation of the Ramey Home, she purchased the house at 3218 Winchester Avenue in Ashland, where, at an alarming pace, the population of that three story house exploded. Casting about for safer grounds in the country, the Board expanded itself to fifteen influential members who coaxed County authorities to turn over the red brick, storied house west of the City for one dollar a year.

After forty years, hastened by the death of its founder, Gertrude Ramey in 1991, that arrangement was about to unravel. Three years later in November 2003, the last children to live at the Ramey Home were transferred to the modern and more remote Ramey-Estep facility twenty miles away at Rush. The old brick house was still elegant but in need of restorative care, such as Gertrude Ramey and her volunteers had lovingly provided for forty years. Presently the Home had been reclaimed by Boyd County. Built in 1910 on five acres at a cost of \$10,000, it was meant to house seventy-five of Boyd County's homeless poor. It more than fulfilled its purpose. Its future role now was uncertain, again.

"I hope they don't tear it down," James lamented, as I eased up the hill to the parking area. James jumped out again. By the back entrance, he pointed to a sycamore near the corner. "I planted that tree. See?" James gestured with both arms for me to follow him. "I got mad at Gertrude Ramey, and I planted that tree." I grabbed my camera. He circled the tree several times with arms outstretched, looking upward. It towered over him and the three-story roof of the old house.

"Step over there by your tree, so I can take your picture -with your tree." I emphasized. His eyes glistened as he drew his lips into a smile at the corners. He wanted to smile. I saw then James had no teeth - the reason for his tight lipped smiles. At age forty-eight, he had lost his teeth.

A tall, marine-type young man with a curt manner and a burr hair cut and wearing a buttoned blue sweater emerged from the small county office. He gave his hand and his name, "Dave Kozee, M'am." He unlocked the back door that opened to the old kitchen.

I felt startled by the emptiness, but James darted ahead of us and disappeared down the hallway. His voice pierced the house as he came to each room, describing how it had once looked and where he had slept. His words echoed and bounced on its high ceilings, as he painted a picture of a lively, happy house with children everywhere. Mr. Kozee and I followed. James did not notice the gray walls and odd pieces of old chairs, bedsteads, and soiled mattresses that had been shifted out of their places. I wondered at how bleak it looked today. The gray paint was dismal, the carpet worn out and soiled. Children had lived here only last month.

"I've stayed in nearly every room. I was switched around." He bounded through a wide door into the kitchen. "There used to be a big green cabinet here." He stopped until I caught up. "It was full of plates and cups." he pointed to the moldy, bare wall of peeling paint.

"And this table is where we all ate." A long, wood table embedded with stains and scratches and carved initials stood in place, equidistant between the door and an enormous gas cook stove. Mismatched wood chairs lined its sides. James let his hand rest on the corner of the table. He became silent.

The kitchen was small for its original purpose but boasted a high ceiling, giving the feel of a much larger room. Recharged, he continued. "This hasn't been changed." He pointed to the old brick fireplace at the end of the eating table. "We've never built a fire here. It was always bricked in, and that back stairway is a shortcut to the second floor. He stepped back and led us back down the long hallway. I snapped photos as we went. His vivid descriptions of large chests, the piano, dressers, and other pieces of furniture that had once held the children's clothing, now no longer there, and rooms full of beds for the little boys made the house come alive again for us. From his child's perspective, it was still home.

"This was Miss Ramey's room." James braced his hands on the door frame to stop himself. "This is where she lived, and I was never in there." He turned away. At the door to a small room he said, "We had a piano too and sang songs with a guitar and everything in here, but it's all gone." His voice dulled. Then, just as quickly he took up his descriptions until at last he waited to make certain he had my attention and pointed to the main stairway leading to the second floor. His eyes bounced. He grasped the side rails and circled the small landing. Again he caught my eye and said, "Up there is where they locked us up one time for three days. My sister Mary Lou and me was locked in this little room for three whole days. We had nothing to eat or drink."

"Have you been back here since you left, at age sixteen?" I asked, pausing beside him on the tiny landing to place my arm around his shoulder. "Oh, yes, I used to come back and see Miss Ramey a lot when she was alive. It was my home. I grew up here." his voice was intense. "I come here for good when I was

nearly six years old. Before that, they say I come when I was about three years old. Once, I come back and asked if I could stay, because I was so depressed. I was getting counseled at Pathways. Miss Ramey said, "No."



Figure 14 - James Fannin at the Ramey Home

Colorful descriptions of his friends and games tumbled out again, just as before. In his excitement, his lips sputtered and saliva sprayed in all directions, until he turned to go up the stairs.

"James, please tell me again why you were locked up here?"

"I don't really know, but I think it was because our parents came to see us. That is what I think it was. They brought us bicycles and came to see us. That's what it was." James nodded and stepped into the center of the tiny gray room. We couldn't go to the bathroom, either." Dave Kozee stared at his feet. "Sometimes, children came for a week or two or just overnight, but my friends stayed a long time. Like Mike Enyart. He stayed here like I did."

On the second floor, the rooms were larger, with two tall windows and space for two beds or three beds. James recited the names of friends who'd shared these rooms He disappeared up a narrow

winding stairway passage to a dark opening on the third floor. Each wood step squeaked under our feet. James stood outside the door to a tiny room. I peered over his shoulder. Two small, square windows allowed light and air into the room, its walls, now painted gray with streaked and faded gray carpeting to match.

"They forgot about us. I think that's what happened. They forgot we was up here," James reasoned.

"Who forgot, James?" I pressed.

"Why the workers here, those people did, I guess. Somebody forgot."

I stepped closer to one of the small dingy windows, as James stretched his neck to peer out at the hills.

"See the old cemetery?" Childlike, his voice returned as he changed the subject of his ordeal so long ago. "It's called the Winslow, I think." At the top of the hill, white granite glistened. I came to see what he saw, to feel a pang of what James may have felt. As a small, bewildered boy he went to the hills to find his joy. Even through these dingy windows, he caught glimpses of the hills he still loved.



Figure 15 - James Valentine Fannin

"See these hills? I used to run everywhere. I wasn't allowed to and I got whipped every day, but I loved to run around on the hills. Minnie would hit me with a belt or anything else she had. Sometimes it was a coat hanger. She whipped me every day. And James Stambaugh whipped me too.

"Why did they whip you, James?" I interrupted. Mr. Kozee stood stiff as a poker, hands jammed into the pockets on the front of his blue sweater.

"Because I ran over the hills. They whipped Mike and me too, every day. I am talking about Mike Enyart my friend. I just lived with it. I thought it was for things I got away with. That was the only way I could live with the hurt. I knew I must have done something really bad sometime but I didn't know what it

was. I tried to remember what it was, but I couldn't. That was the way I handled it." James looked away. "It wasn't so bad when Miss Ramey was well because she would come out to check on us, but when she got sick, Minnie and James Stambaugh took over." He paused to catch his breath.

"At Christmas, we got all these presents and toys, you know? I guess everybody in the country sent toys to us. We opened our presents and played with the toys, but then right after Christmas the toys would just be gone. They disappeared." James breathed deeply and looked at his shoes. "One Christmas, I remember, Minnie got mad and broke every toy we got. We heard she told Miss Ramey we did it."

"James, did you ever go to Miss Ramey? Did you tell her about Minnie hitting you?" I asked.

"Nope, there was nobody to tell," James shook his head. "Who was there to tell when things went bad?"

"Did Miss Ramey pay attention to you while you were growing up? Did you get to know Miss Ramey?"

"No," James lowered his eyes and kept walking as he talked. "Nobody hugged me or anything like that or paid any attention to me, I guess. I played with the other kids and I slept with the other boys in the cabins. But there was no kind of real hugs, if that is what you mean," his voice broke. He lifted his face and looked at me sideways and said, "When I went to counseling at Pathways, I told them at the sessions that anytime anyone touched me when I was little, I thought they were going to hit me or for a sex act. So the counselor had us all learn to shake hands just for me to learn how to be friendly - just be friendly."

In silence, we walked on through the other upstairs rooms but my thoughts lingered on the gray walls and gray carpeting and dingy windows of the little room and the stories James told. His voice was lower, more solid, and stronger as we moved on. His crisis of the little gray room was past. He began again to describe his life growing up here in this impersonal place, how he had made it home because that was what he knew. A home with no parents, a home where touching from an adult meant punishment or a sex act? A home that once held rowdy friends and thrilling games now stood empty of his friends - empty expect for broken pieces of old chairs and old drapes at the tall windows.

"I hope they don't tear it down," James said again. "It was my home and home for all my friends. I wonder if the other kids who lived here know it's changing?"

I felt great sadness for the other small children who'd lived in these rooms and perhaps the loneliness of the old people who had died here even before that. Most of the rooms were average size, barely room enough for two beds, except for one large room at the end. In its original state it had been used for the dining room. For so many children to live here, the house was small. Where were the thirty-two rooms Miss Ramey claimed? Where did fifty-three children sleep? Back on the first floor, James led us past a small narrow room.

"This wall was full of our pictures of all of us. Kind of like an office for Miss Ramey. I wonder what happened to our pictures. Who took our pictures off the wall?" he asked.

We exited through the wide front door. Over our heads on the narrow porch, a contemporary brass chandelier swung back and forth in the breeze. New and shiny and a bit out of character, it was likely donated, as all the furnishings and equipment the house required. We passed between wide-set round columns flanking the grand, stately entrance. Under our feet, the paint was peeling over spiderwebbed, cracked concrete.

We followed along the sidewalk, as James gestured toward giant trees growing near the entrance and shrubs that lined the flight of steps leading from the lower road, "Those trees were little when I lived here." At the edge of the lawn, he shuffled to the top of the steps leading down to the road. "I got off the school bus down there and walked up these steps every day." He pointed to the trees beside the road below. "I helped to plant those poplars." He whirled and led us to the other side of the house. "See that fire escape? I helped paint that fire escape a hundred times. One year, we painted it red, white and blue for the 4th of July," he beamed.

I thanked Mr. Kozee for his time, and suggested we could continue on our own. Mr. Kozee said, "I am to stay with you until you are finished."

We walked to the edge of the sloping lawn, and James pointed down the hill to a stand of skinny tall trees growing in a carpet of golden brown fall leaves.

"See that cemetery? That is the graveyard for the old folks who died here at the Poor Farm. That was before it became the Ramey home," he explained. A thin, rusted wire fence represented its boundaries through the leaves. I pointed my camera at the bowl-shaped shallow place, at the base of the hill. James reminded me. "There is the other cemetery, see up there?" he pointed in the other direction into the trees high on the hill to the Winslow." I used to go up there to play in those woods. It's my favorite place."

Near us, separated from the main house and perched on the half moon rim of the lawn, stood a long complex of still brilliant white walls with green-framed narrow rooms with a porch and railing.

"What was here?"

"Why this is where us bigger boys lived. We stayed out here to sleep and came in to the main house to eat." James explained the system. "We couldn't play with the girls. I stayed out here when I got older."

"What about your sisters, Mary Lou and Martha and Hallie Ann? Did you see them?"

"Yes, I saw them sometimes." He pointed to another white cottage nearby, with green shutters, "That cottage is where Dr. French stayed."

"Was Dr. French the doctor for the Ramey home?"

"Nope," James said, "Dr. French cut the grass and visited. He stayed in that little white house when he came. The only doctor I remember was in Ashland. One time, I had an earache and Minnie took me to the doctor. While we were waiting for the doctor to come in, Minnie took a long Q-tip stick and

pushed it into my ear. My ear bled. When the doctor came in and noticed the blood, Minnie said, "James is always picking at his ear."

"James, are you injured? I noticed you are limping?"

"Yes, he answered, "It's my right leg. I hurt my legs when I tried to commit suicide."

"Suicide on your legs?" I asked, laughing to release my tension.

I felt ashamed. Before I could apologize, he took up his story. "Yep", James said, "I poured paint thinner on my legs and set them afire."

He spoke as if his legs were not part of his body. .

"How did you survive or escape?"

"Neighbors saw me. They called the ambulance." James looked down at his disabled leg. "I was down. I had been counseling at Pathways in Greenup. They gave me some medication. My wife and I had separated and I missed my sons."

"I am sorry, James," I said, as I touched his shoulder.

"I am better now," James reassured me, "but I stayed in Cabell Hospital for one month over at Huntington. I have learned to think different thoughts. I have been down, with no place to go. Way down. I have slept under bridges. Now, I am staying with my son and his family."

"Do you work? Do you have a job?"

"Nope, I am disabled. I can't read or write so I get SSI."

It was the first time I'd heard of SSI. I made a note to find out.

"Well, James, it is not too late to learn to read and write is it? Literacy is not a medical disability."

James was ready for me. He squared his shoulders. "I have seizures, too. I have temporal epileptic seizures," he enunciated.

I smiled a tight smile. I had heard of this before.

"Do you take medication for your seizures?"

"Yes, I do, ever since 1983, I've been taking medicine," James finished our discussion with his practiced remark. "I used to work. I was in ninth grade at Boyd County High. I was age sixteen, still going to school. Then, one day, we were taking a test. The teacher said to me, "James, if you will watch the other students and tell me who cheats, I will give you an A." At first, I thought it was because he couldn't get around and he needed my help in some way, because he was in a wheelchair. When I thought about it, I knew something was wrong. I didn't know what it was. I felt like he was not telling me

something. I felt uneasy and ashamed, so I never went back to school. Then of course, when I quit school, I had to leave Miss Ramey's for good. I went to live with Aunt Lily and Uncle Fred Kincaid.

"Before I left here, Minnie tried to get me to sign a paper of some kind, an' I think she said I would not have a claim on anything here. It had something to do with money in the bank. I wouldn't sign and I wondered what it meant? Did I have some savings? Can you find out for me?" his voice pleaded.

"I knew I couldn't stay at Aunt Lilly's house, so I went down to join the Army. I took their test. The man there, the recruiter man took me in this little room. He told me I hadn't read the forms very well. I found out then that I could not read and about all I could write was my name. I was confused by what the army man said. I told him, "I've gone to school for nine years nearly every day. I got on that school bus and went to school every day, but now you say I can't really read or write?" James bright blue eyes, flooded. "Nobody told me. I thought everybody saw things the way I did."

"Later on, I went to vocational school and learned to upholster down at Thelma, Kentucky. I enjoyed that work. I was good at it. I apprenticed for three years and worked on my own for five years after that," James smiled. I snapped photos of his warm face with its myriad of expressions. I liked James with his uneven energy, his buoyant outlook, and his way of distracting himself away from bad memories.

Mr. Kozee had left us. James and I walked down to take another look at his special rock. The churning water cascaded over the edge on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. James wanted to tell me about his daily routine at the Ramey Home.

"We dressed up for company on Sunday. Actually, we kept our church clothes on. I knew when people came, Miss Ramey received presents, so I always tried to be nice to company," James said. "Sometimes people gave us money, but when the people left, Minnie made us give it up to her."

James became quiet. I asked him whether I might show him where his real family lived. He smiled his toothless grin and this time, he did not clench his lips.

"Have you been to the Wheeler Hollow where your mother grew up? Or to Star Hill where you were born?" I asked as I drove past the ancient site of the Star Furnace, to a sharp cut in the hill. "Might I show you the rock cliff described in the Ashland paper in 1961? You know? The Cave they wrote about in the Ashland paper, where it says you all were living in a cave?"

"I could hardly believe it when they told me we were living in a cave. It made me feel so bad. The other kids made fun of me. I didn't know why. Now, I know why. You say there was a picture?"

"Yes, a picture and a story. I have a copy for you. Would you like to see where your mother lived? This road is smooth now, but when your mother lived here it was a dirt road muddy with ruts and barely passable when it rained." James was silent.

"This was a nice place to live. Your parents moved back here many times through the later years. It was a safe haven for them. The new owners are developing it into a resort." I pointed to the clearings in the watery sky. The high, picturesque cliffs jutted out through the trees. Some displayed dark streaks of coal

veins. "See, those near-bald hills with the black streaks? Those coal veins have been mined out and you can see outcroppings where your mother and her sisters dug out coal to sell. They dug coal by hand with picks and shovels," I repeated. "They'd roll the coal chunks into coffee sacks and your granddad, Charley Wheeler, sold it by the bag. It was hard work. Your mother had a hard life. In a way, for a lot of reasons, she married your father, Felty, to get away." I stopped my car where we could see a cliff overhang and pointed. "I think that is the 'cave' they referred to in the news article. It's not a cave, but a rock overhang. Would you like to walk over there?" He sat motionless. "That is the place we lived?" he growled.

"Yes, but you lived in a house, James, not a cave as the newspaper said. "I checked it out. The reporter who wrote the news article for the Independent told me she never came here at all. She interviewed Miss Ramey. It was Miss Ramey who told her they found you children in a cave. Perhaps you were told to run and hide, so you hid under the rock where you played during the day?"

"Your older brother, Elbert, suffered his awful burn when a draft came down the chimney and caused the coal to flare. He was standing too close to the grate. It caught his clothing. He was four. Granny and Hallie Ann put it out. That happened here. Do you remember that, James?

He said, "They told me about it. I wasn't born yet."

I said, "Technically speaking there are no caves in Boyd County and there are no caves east of the Carter Caves system, even here in Carter County, so somebody got everything wrong."

He waved his hand when he was ready to leave.

"This is where I lived and this is where your father and mother came to see his Uncle Chead. He was a brother to your Granny Martha. Our family still owns this place." I realized he would have been too young to remember coming to the log house, and the rock cliff story may have confounded him.

"See, James, I grew up nearby. Your dad always brought you kids to our house. That brown and white striped log house I showed you. Your dad drove a small truck with an open cattle rack made of pieces of wood and fence posts and anything else he could pick up, and when he drove into our place, arms and legs and kids were hanging out all over," I laughed.

"Our Mother took one look and started cooking. Your dad brought you kids over when he had a new baby to show my mother. He named Velva Ann, one of your sisters, for our mother, Velva. I remember our mother had just returned from a trip to California in 1965, and how pleased she was to have a namesake."

We passed Georgia Conley's store. "Your mother and her brothers used to come here to buy groceries. Their regular place was Mae Haney's store." I pointed to a small building under the edge of the highway. When they built this new version of US 60, Mae's store was nearly buried."

We turned onto the old Midland Trail, renamed US 60 after it was paved. But in 1960, it too was abandoned in favor of the new, wider but shorter US 60 that cut the top off Star Hill.

"That little white frame house on our left? That was your Aunt Sarah's house. She was your father's youngest sister. Your Aunt Sarah helped your father when she could. I repeated, "All of your Granny's grown children were clustered around her on Star Hill."

Remnants of the old Midland Trail were still smooth. It hooked sharply to the right and above the curve, high on a shallow shelf on the bank, was the remains of a gray shack.

"Your Uncle Jim lived here with his family. He was a coal miner too. Your aunt Anna, one of your aunts, still lives in Ashland." James was silent.



Figure 16 - Martha Justice Fannin-Berry on Star Hill where many of the Fannin babies were born.

then in the coal mines.

"After your Granny died in 1961, your folks may have lived here a little while, until the little house shifted too much. Excavation for the new highway undermined its foundation - with only twenty feet of her land left after the new road was built. So, your folks moved to Greenup where Susan Lynn was born, then to Wayne, West Virginia. I understand that it was near Lavallette that your baby sister, Susan Lynn died?"

We circled the horseshoe curve up the steep grade to the end of the old cracked pavement. "This was a pretty place to live. There was a giant oak tree next to your Granny's house. She used to run a grocery store in that front room. She was a hard worker. Your folks came here to live with your Granny, when things weren't going so well for your dad. She always gave him her social security check and then she would go to live with one of her daughters, Mary, Jessie, Sarah, or Anna. Many of you children were born here on this spot. Perhaps you were?".

"Your aunts helped your dad take care of you children. It wasn't easy. Your mother was often contentious. Once, the story that I heard, is just after her first set of twins was born, that would be Charles and Hallie Ann, she got into a fistfight with a neighbor and miscarried. She was already pregnant with a second set of twins, about four months along, they said. Well," I summarized, "That was a long time ago, and I wanted to show you just where you fit into your family and who you are. Our family members were proud pioneers. It was a rough life here in these hollows. They worked in the iron mines, and

James eyes twinkled again as he took up the story. "They say," he emphasized, "It was the evil eye of a copperhead that killed baby Susan Lynn. That snake looked her in the eye and charmed her and it bit her. My mother saw the bite marks. She didn't see the snake bite Susan, but she saw the bite marks," James said, "Our dad killed the snake."

"After your granny Martha died your folks moved back over here. This is where welfare came to get you children in October, 1961."

"I know a great place to eat. May I treat you to dinner in Rosie's?" He beamed. Back on Rachel Branch near a hairpin curve, I slowed, rolled down the window, and pointed to my left, "Our people all lived here. In this small hollow was the original home of your great grandfather, Valentine 'Felty' Justice. Your father was his namesake."

"My father's name was Valentine?"

"Yes, Valentine. The nickname for Valentine is Felty. I guess it should be Velty, and it is mispronounced like nearly all the names were." James smiled, and let the word roll off his tongue. "Valentine." He said, "Then Valentine is my middle name too."

We ate fried chicken at Rosie's and shared a fluffy piece of coconut cream pie. It was late afternoon. James wanted to show where he attended church at Rose Hill when he lived at the Ramey Home.

"It's right on the way. I always went, because Minnie told me, 'If you don't go to church, you don't eat.'

"We fed the hogs on Paradise Hill for Lige Fields for rent, but he wanted his land back, so he reported our folks to the welfare. That is what I was told," James said. "If you drive us over to Mike's house, he will tell you about Minnie Suttles."



Figure 17 - Dormitory for boys- Ramey Home

We found Mike Enyart in a white cottage perched on the side of the road near Tunnel Hill. While I grabbed my camera, James went to find Mike. Inside, a tall, blonde man was slapping James on the back as they laughed. "Tell her Mike that we got whipped every day," James urged.

"Yep, we did," Mike, said nodding.

"It still bothers me along with a lot of other things, but I deal with it."

"May I ask how you came to live at the Ramey home? Are your parents dead?"

"Nope, my mother is alive, and I have never known my father. I guess we had no place else to go. My mother worked for Gertrude Ramey because our dad ran off when we were little. Miss Ramey let her bring us to live there. We lived with the other children just like they lived. It had something to do with

benefits and it was the only way Maxine could keep us together. So, Maxine turned us over to the Ramey Home system and worked for Miss Ramey.



Figure 18 - Mike and James

I didn't know for a long time, until I was nearly grown, that the woman who sat at the other end of the eating table every morning was really my mother." He paused. "I still call my mother, Maxine."

He added, "I don't know what ever has happened to Minnie Suttles. I hope she's dead."

A search at the Ramey-Estep Home and the State archives revealed that no records exist for James V. Fannin or the history of his eight years at the Ramey Home. LJE.



Figure 19 - Martha, her brother Chead Justice and his wife, Velva at the log house, where Imogene brought her children for food and baths.

Chapter Ten: The Ramey Home Reunion

Dr. Robert French, Director Emeritus. His name stood out from other Ramey Estep board members on their website. Was this the Dr. French James had told me about?

His voice was terse, edgy-like and it was he who interviewed me. When that was settled, I asked, "Do you know where the records for the Ramey Children's home are stored?"

"I don't know."

"How about photos of James Fannin. He has nothing of his early life."

"I'll look." It was clear that Dr. Robert French, Director Emeritus, knew where the Records were.

When we talked the next time, ""James is troubled over his life at the Ramey Home. He attempted suicide and crippled his legs and he says he suffered abuse from Minnie Suttles and James Stambaugh. Do you know these two staff persons?"

"I'll call James and ask him to go on a hike with me," he offered.

"Well, that is probably not a good idea. You see he crippled his leg when he attempted to kill himself."

Dr. French lent several nice photos for copies. He also made duplicates of children's Christmas and Easter programs at the Home. The singing voices ringing over the decades were joyful and clear. He was generous with his pictures, but he did not offer records for James F. Fannin.

"My story is about my Fannin cousins. Why don't you write about the Gertrude Ramey Home? You knew her and the operations and some of the children. You can capture the spirit of her work?"

"I have home movies too," he said.

I roasted a chicken, with condiments, and took a bottle of sherry. He brought out paper plates, but I found china plates in the cupboard and heated them up in his oven.

"I've been 'over-trained' in a cordon bleu culinary class."

Dr. French admitted he had begun to write years earlier. His set his first chapter during WWII, when Violet, Peggie, and Anna Sue first arrived at the Ramey Home in 1944. In his manuscript, he had changed their names.

A few weeks later, he called to invite me to drive with him to Berea College where he would be performing in an a cappella 18th century musical at Berea. His beautiful baritone resonated above the other voices.

We stayed in touch on a regular basis, until he invited me to the Ramey Home Reunion at Armco Park in Ashland.

After the picnic, even though I had toured the campus with James, Mary Lou, and with Martha Lillian, a few days earlier, I joined the tour of the old house with the former residents and their families. I heard more than I'd expected.

Cindy Miller is an attractive and tall, robust woman with engaging blue eyes and a broad smile. She walked near the end of the line with me. "My sister Mary and our little brother grew up here."

"I know James," She pointed to a large woman at the head of the line, and whispered, "See that woman, she raped me when I little."

I froze. But I managed to continue to snap photos. I focused on my cousin Mary Lou and her beautiful daughters and grandbabies. James did not show up. By the time we reached the third floor, Cindy was no longer beside me, but Bonnie Ramey was, "You know, Cindy is troubled, I hope you are aware that she is unstable and what she says is unreliable? She is on medication for a mental disorder."

I nodded. Cindy returned to my side. At this point in the tour, we stood in front of the upstairs bathroom. "This is where she did it the first time," Cindy whispered. "She locked the door and raped me."

"One time?"

"No, she arranged to sleep with me at night and she never let me alone. She was a lot bigger than me. See that woman there? That is BJ Sullivan. She hit me every day." I followed her gaze to a woman whose hair was cropped close. She wore glasses with large, thick lenses. She was dressed neatly in white short-style pants. She wore no makeup.

As we inched along, BJ kept close to the Ramey twins in the small crowd. Once I saw her glance at me, and I smiled back. The tour resembled an operatic stage with players whispering in my ear, only to be replaced with another person who asserted the opposite was true. How did they know?

The paradox, at least as far as I knew, was that BJ Sullivan was a foundling who'd grown up in Gertrude's care and who never left the Ramey Home. She stayed to work with the children, and to make her home there. BJ was her name of choice. Her real name was Bettye Jane Sullivan. Why hadn't she left?

"I saw BJ beat your cousin Hallie Ann Fannin. She hit her fifteen times. I counted. She pulled her hair," Cindy whispered. "And she whipped me every day, sometimes with coat hangers."

This was unexpected.

"I think my family name was Terry, and I was about eighteen months old when they brought me here," BJ whispered at my elbow.

Dr. French was watching this Wagnerian operatic scene as Cindy, BJ, and others spoke to me. In the stairwell on the third floor, he drew me away to a corner.

"No need to discuss these kinds of things. Just let the sleeping dogs lie."

"How did BJ come to live here all her life?"

"She came as a toddler, malnourished, and Gertrude said she'd been found on a river boat living with drunken adults. Little is known about her past. You realize? Her mind is not just right." I recoiled.

Overlying this particular scene and this tour, Connie and Bonnie Ramey, twin girls who also grew up in the Ramey Home, had returned to Ashland, Kentucky, from their home in Houston to host this Reunion. They organized their former child housemates, issued the invitations, and acted as ambassadors. Also, they had a larger mission. They wanted to reclaim the 1910 red brick on McCullough Drive. They had 21st century plans to restore it and to help former Ramey Children who still needed help.

Dr. French said, "This is just a building."

Did he view me as a threat to Gertrude's reputation? With all the children Miss Ramey had saved and helped, how could an interview with BJ Sullivan or Cindy Miller harm her or that legend? What he was afraid of?

"I took this Home as my mission," he told me.

"I drove from my practice in Lexington to Ashland every weekend or so. I cut the grass, ran errands, and advised Gertrude if she asked me. I snapped photos, taped the singing, and developed the history of the Home, as I saw it."

But, according to Bettye Jane Sullivan, James, and other children who lived at the Ramey Home, Dr. French saw only the best behavior on the part of staff and Miss Ramey. It was what BJ called the "Bow" times. During his supervised work projects he'd served as her spokesman when the Press came to boost her fund raising. By his testimony, his mission was to serve Gertrude Ramey.

Now, in 2005, Dr. Robert French, Director Emeritus, was displayed on the Ramey-Estep website along with the 21st century board members. I wondered whether he created the prominent web page for himself, as his Director Emeritus title is listed prominently.

Were his memories, photographs and recordings of Gertrude Ramey and the hapless children who lived here the only recorded legacy? And what of the memories of the thousands of children who came to her door? Dr. French's weekend snapshots may be the only reliable documentation. Did he also have her missing records for the children from all three Ramey Homes?

Connie and Bonnie Ramey said, "Yes, he told us he has them."

In a final effort to find the reasons for the constant abuse to my cousin, James, I asked Dr. French about Minnie Suttles. He said, "She calls herself Mina, 'not Minnie.'" He continued, "I've talked to another person who knows and she says Mina is psychotic."

The last day at the Ramey Home on McCullough Drive.



Figure 20 - Martha Lillian Fannin

If you ask in eastern Kentucky, nearly everyone will remember the Ramey home. The doors were locked for good in fall of 2003, as custody of the red brick mansion was officially turned back to Boyd County under the care of Judge Scott.

I was there with Martha Lillian Fannin on November 20, 2003, when Ann Perkins, director for the Safe Harbor women's' shelter loaded up the last of the rickety furniture. Outside on the grounds, even in late November, the grass was still green. Martha Lillian and I sauntered by the weathered merry go round, its arm broken and tilted crazily like a wounded flying saucer. Martha Lillian let her hand slide over its peeled paint. She had lived at the home three different times - first in 1959 for five months, then in 1961 for six months, and again in 1965 for two years.

She paused at the top of the stairs leading to the school bus stop, then, as if inviting me to go back in time with her; she stepped down the cracked concrete steps and stood at the bottom. She turned, held to the old metal railing worn shiny by hundreds of little eager hands, to show how she climbed back up of an early evening after school. Her red sweater outlined her fulsome bust.

Martha Lillian is a pretty woman whose smile, a bit compromised by missing teeth, anchors her features of Fannin ancestors favoring dark brown eyes and flawless skin. She is the third child of Imogene and Felty and one of the many Fannin children who lived here.

"We had dance classes at June Conn. There was always something to do. I liked living here." She pointed to a small white building, now taken over by the Boyd County Sheriff's dispatch, "There is where we learned to roller skate."

The old pickup loaded at last, her driver waited while Ann Perkins came back to find us. She embraced Martha Lillian with a broad arm hug across her back and shoulders. Experienced in offering comfort to women, Ann obviously thought Martha Lillian needed a hug. When I opened my arms, she hugged me too. Her pickup rattled off the hill, taking old furniture, window curtains, and mattresses to recycle at her Center. Martha Lillian and I stood watching the last of the Ramey Home tangibles disappear around the curve onto McCullough Drive.

The hill became quiet. But I thought I heard silent sobs of anguish, the excited voices of visitors on Sunday, the shouts of children at play on the lawn, and at suppertime, the high-pitched voice of Miss

Gertrude Ramey calling, "James, James, where are you?" She pointed to a tall boy near the gate, "Run up on the hill by the old Winslow cemetery and get James Fannin. Supper is almost ready."



Figure 21 - Stairs at the Ramey Children's Home



Figure 22 - Martha Lillian Fannin

"I lived here a short time, I think." Martha Lillian said, her quiet voice pulling me back. "I don't remember the first two times I came here. I was too little, I guess, but they say, I was put here two times when I was a baby, but I remember when I left for good." Martha Lillian nodded her head. "I was nearly fifteen. I missed my parents a lot, and I'd found out where they were living, because Minnie Suttles would take me and Hallie Ann for a ride and a purpose, she'd drive by this little shack of a house on Tunnel Hill. 'That's where your parents live,' she'd say. All I can figure is she wanted to shame us, but she wouldn't stop and let us go in to see our parents." Martha's voice was low. "We cried. Sometimes all the way back to the Ramey Home."

We stood for a moment at the edge of the yard. She stared down at the shallow of the Poor House cemetery nestled in a brown carpet of fallen leaves before she said, "When I left, my older sister Hallie Ann was still here, and James and Mary Lou, too. It wasn't long before Hallie Ann ran off and came home after I did. Pretty soon, after I moved back home with my parents, I met Hager Stewart. He was brother to Hallie's old man, Wm. Henry. Hager moved in with us for about a year, then him and me

moved out together, got our own place. We lived together for fifty-three years until he died last year in 2004. He was older than I was by about twenty years. We had seven children. They all died though, but Punky. So we have one son."

After I drove Martha home, we promised to meet again soon. I sent letters to Martha to clear up questions. She kept the few dollars I enclosed but she did not answer. One time she called and we talked a bit. She answered my questions with clipped answers. Later, I learned that she could not read what I sent. In May 2006, Martha was admitted to Kings Daughters Medical Center in Ashland for a heart problem. From the Center, she called and asked for me to pay her electric bill. I asked whether she lived alone and she said she lived with Punky. "He junks," she explained.

I said, "Maybe Punky ought to get a job, a real job with regular hours." I said, "Martha, I am sixty-eight, and I work every day. Should I be sending money?"

She said, "I didn't know you work."

"How else would I get money unless I work for it?" I asked. "Are you still using tobacco?"

"No, I quit."

I heard a voice in the background and Martha said, "Hallie Ann is here."

Hallie Ann was adept at asking for money. Once, a few months earlier she called from Delbert's to ask for \$400 for an oil stove.

"Hallie Ann, you receive SSI each month and you live with Delbert. Isn't there electricity in his house? Doesn't he keep the house warm for you?"

"Yes, but not in the back."

Within a few days, I received another call from their younger Pearl Jean, living in Kenova, West Virginia. "I've found me a house in Catlettsburg. I can buy it on a land contract."

"You understand how that works, Pearl Jean?"

"Yeah, I think I do." "May I say that when you go to look at the land and the contract, you might want to ask "What is the total asking price and what is the percent of your payment that goes to the principle and what is interest? Also the exact dimensions of the lot?"

"Ok, yeah."

"Then write it all down and send it to me. I'll figure out exactly what you are promising to pay before you sign anything. How is your family?"

"Mom got over being mad and came back to live with me. Yeah, she got to coughing from all that smoke at Delbert's."

"What about your sister, Hallie Ann?"

"Martha got evicted. She is living with Hallie Ann in that barn of a place at Delbert's."

"Do they know there is low income housing for them? They can rent it together and live better." She called twice after that, "Do you have pictures of the old folks in our family?"

When we settled on what she wanted, I mailed everything that day to Kenova, West Virginia. Within a day or two the packet was returned to my post office. Pearl Jean had moved again.



Figure 23 - Martha Lillian and Ann Perkins

Mary Lou

Delmar Lee Fannin and his wife, Polly, live in a cottage perched over the Tug River north of Louisa, Kentucky. Delmar Lee is the elder son of Felty Fannin with his first wife, Versa Sparks. He is one of the five children his father left behind a few months before he made his second marriage to Imogene in 1950. Delmar Lee and I hadn't seen each other since he waved goodbye from the Greyhound Bus on Rachel Branch in 1949.

Delmar's wife, Polly, is a cherubic woman with a soft, smiling face. She is mother to their two daughters and aunt-mother to Ginger, BJ and Regina. Polly is organized. She found phone numbers for Imogene's children, Pearl Jean and Delbert, and one for Mary Lou with her cautionary, "These numbers may have changed. They move around."

The first two phone numbers were disconnected. Mary Lou invited me to her home overlooking Bear Creek Road. Her daughter and children live in the main house. "We gave it to them; they need more room, and Roger and I want to be by ourselves. We plan to buy a second double wide for the next pad for another of our daughters, and her family."

In what became clear, Mary Lou and her husband Roger are supportive and close to their daughters and grandchildren. Their family complex is spread over their own land and there is room for at least one

more generation. Mary Lou brought out an old file folder. She splayed its wings and balanced a yellowed, frayed piece of newsprint in the fold. I didn't offer to touch it.

"I've kept this all these years because it's all I have of my brothers and sisters. Well, some of them," she added. "More were born later, but I've never seen them. This picture was horrible for me, too. It's shamed me all my life because the kids at school teased me about living in a cave. I didn't know what to say then. I was little and I don't remember it even now, if I lived in a cave."

With her fingertips, she laid the delicate, tattered piece of newsprint in front of me. Dated November 11, 1961, published in *the Ashland Daily Independent* the newsprint was crowned by a black and white photo depiction of seven children posed, playing with games on the floor and looking at books in the living room of the Gertrude Ramey Home for Children. The Headline screamed: *Family Found Living under a Rock Cliff*. "I was there too, but not in this photo," she explained.



Figure 24 - Collection of Depression glass

Within a few days, Mary Lou and I strolled over the grass at the former Gertrude Ramey Children's Home where she grew up. "Miss Ramey was like a mother to me, or a grandmother. I always knew she'd help me and I helped her. Once, Roger and I lived in her guest cottage. Before she died, and she was sick a lot, she'd call me. I sat with her, and reassured her as well as I could. She gave me a few of her treasures.

She had a collection of Depression glass, and I have that to remember her by."

Mary Lou laughed, "One time, we ran off. Two of my friends and I dressed in our best clothes and put on our church shoes, and we just ran off. We couldn't take the roaches anymore, so we talked it over and decided we'd go to Ohio and tell somebody about the roaches at the Ramey Home." Mary Lou Fannin burst into a big smile at her memory.

"We ran away, right over into that Park next to us." She pointed across the road into the trees to Armco Park. "All night long, we walked. We nearly froze because we had on our flimsy clothes, not warm clothes at all. We snuck off after supper, didn't tell anyone where we were going. By morning, when it was starting to get light, the first thing we saw was the school bus driving up to take us to school. We hadn't gone anywhere at all, and certainly not to Ohio. We had walked in circles all night!

Miss Ramey was so glad to see us. Hugged us, and cried. She hadn't looked for us, because she'd no idea what had happened. She gave us a hot breakfast and told us how we might have been killed or hurt. Then the police came and took the other two girls to the reform school. I stayed with Miss Ramey, though. The other girls were older than I was, about eleven or twelve. One was a Clevenger girl," Mary Lou remembered, "She didn't do anything to us for running away, but she sent the other two girls away. I don't know what happened to them after that.

While I grew up at the Ramey Home, my close friends, Cathy Van Hoose, Diane Kazee, and I were always together." She glanced down the steps towards the school bus stop. "We had chores, too. My first job was to get the little kids ready for the school bus. I got them up, bathed and dressed and fed them. Then we sat on the steps to wait for the bus. But I did not know how to tell time, and I'd woken them much too early. It was still dark.

I went to Boyd County public schools on the school bus, but when it was time for me to go to high school, Miss Ramey sent me to Hazel Green Academy, a private Lutheran boarding school in Wolfe County. It's closed now. She registered me as Mary Ramey. She gave me her name because she thought I'd be safer. That my parents would not find me?" She paused to touch the broken down swing set.

"But Aunt Lily and her husband, Fred Kincaid, found me and right away they wanted me to come live with them. They promised freedom that I had never known. They promised me a family of my own. I was in my second year of high school. I felt rebellious. I had grown up in a kind of institution. I wanted a family. I had money in my bank account to pay for all my expenses and tuition, that I'd saved and Miss Ramey gave me some for school. As soon as I went home with Aunt Lilly, I had to draw my money out to pay them. When the money ran used up, she kicked me out. Right after that, Aunt Lily and Uncle Fred left

for Florida, and I never saw them again.



Figure 25 -



Figure 26 -

"I had no place to go. I was a kid. A teenage kid; with no work experience and no education. My money was gone. I was walking down the road, crying my heart out, because I truly had no place to go, when a young man drove by. I had met him before. He took me to his mother's house. Later, Roger Fryer and I wanted to get married. I thought I was at least age eighteen, but I didn't know for sure, until I went to get married, and found out that I was too young. I didn't even know how old I was. Can you imagine?" Mary Lou asked. "Miss Ramey had protected me in so many ways, I wasn't really well prepared. Roger and I did get married eventually. We still are together, with three beautiful daughters and grandchildren.

"James and I grew up here. This was our home. We were four and five years old when we came in 1965. At least this is what I remember. I understand we had been brought here to the Ramey Home in 1961, too. From the picture in the newspaper, I know we'd been here before, but I don't remember it. James

used to run all over these hills and Miss Ramey would send me to find him.

Other staff worked here. Maxine Enyart was my favorite. I loved her. She and all her children lived here. Although her children didn't call her mother, we all knew she was their mother. There was Minnie Suttles and James Stambaugh. Minnie punished me. She would hit me with the wire end of a fly swatter. I was never sure of what I had done. I was scared of Betty Jayne Sullivan too, so I stayed in my room a lot. Minnie and James were fired one time, for stealing medicine, I think. By the time I went to Hazel Green, Miss Ramey had hired them back. Miss Ramey wanted to help everyone," Mary Lou said.

"It wasn't easy for any of us. Everyone read that article about us living under a rock cliff, and that was changed to living in a cave. At school, the other children teased us, and teachers whispered. We couldn't read. We were too little, so we did not understand this new kind of torment. And I soon discovered living at the Ramey Home carried its own stigma. We were pretty much ignored by the other school children anyway. We were left alone," she continued. "We dressed differently too. We wore cast off clothes that people gave to the Home and everybody knew that. Wherever we went they stared at our clothes. I guess to see if they recognized them. Sometimes the clothes fit, and sometimes they didn't. They were never stylish."

Mary Lou stepped close to show me a cloudy spot on her left eye. "Before I went to the Ramey Home the last time, we lived at Avondale. I was about five, and I was riding my bicycle by our house in Avondale. Freddie Spradlin, an older boy, a neighbor, threw a piece of coal at me. After we went to the Ramey Home to live, Gertrude took me to doctors for surgery, but they found damage and scar tissue had formed. It was too late. Every summer, when school was out though, the doctors would try to take off part of the cataract so I could see better."

Had Mary Lou, like James overcome this unusual adversity to go on and form healthy families? For a while, until the next interview, I felt encouraged and optimistic about prospects for their siblings.

Delbert

Finding the Fannin children.

To keep my interviews moving, I called each Fannin cousin often. Delbert was my favorite because he recited many stories from his youth. He also kept me up to date on the configuration of his life centered at two double wide mobile homes parked on his own land at 3196 Conley Road in a remote section of Lawrence County, Ohio. He explained he used Imogene's insurance settlement for injury to her legs for the down payment.

But that was way back in early August. After that I'd tracked Pearl Jean and her husband, Gary, to Ashland, where their phone number was disconnected. Family network word was that Pearl Jean had moved her contingency back to Lucasville. Imogene, Hallie Ann, Pearl Jean, and her husband, Gary, had brought their two daughters along to live, "in the corner of the yard," in the second mobile home. As it set, I had four Fannin subjects in one place in Lucasville, but this soon changed. They moved two more times before I was able to catch up with them.

I phoned ahead. Delbert described the new arrangement, but he said, "Six people were burned out in my other mobile home; they're gone. My brother, Henry Thomas, is here to stay, though."

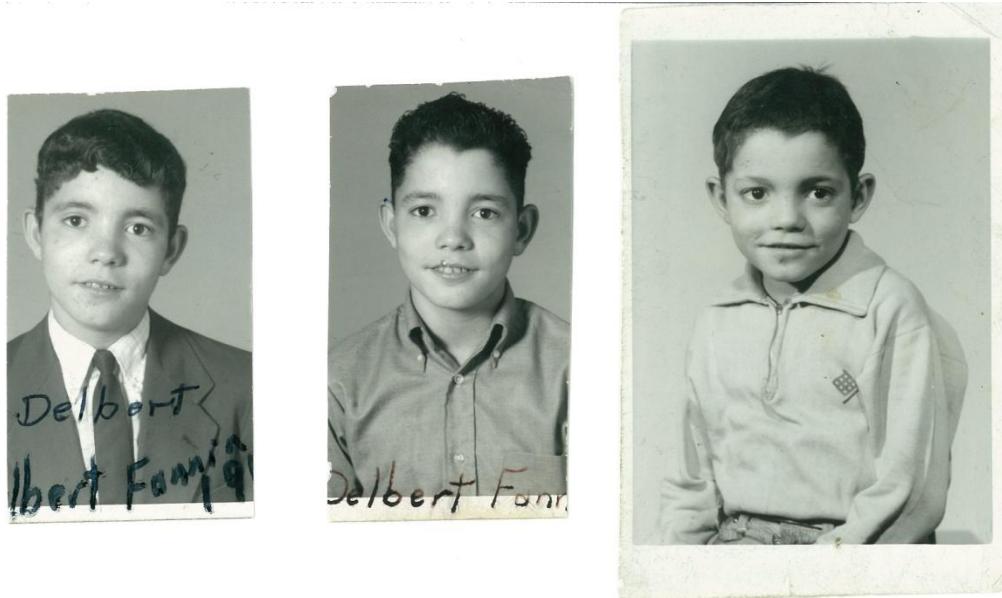


Figure 27 - Delbert Fannin

I wanted to meet Delbert at his home near Lucasville, Ohio, but searching for 3196 Conley Road took on a comedic turn after I chose a back road shortcut into Lucasville, Ohio.



Figure 28 - Delbet Fannin and Dean Webb

At the Muleberg store, a customer pointed and I drove in that direction until I saw a sign for Michigan. An Ohio state police officer guided me back to one end of Conley Road. After he drove off, I discovered that Conley Road ended in a creek bed. I flagged down a small red car. The driver, a smiling lady listened and instructed simply, "Just follow me." She sped down the road for twisting miles and dirt roads and led us into her mother's driveway on Cawley Road. She turned and asked, "What number on Cawley Road?"

"Not Cawley," I said slowly with a big smile to match hers, "Conley."

Undaunted, she said, "Wait, anyway because my mother will know where Con-ley road is," she enunciated.

I waited because where could I go? When she returned, with sweeping gestures, she sent me off. Before long, I hailed a pickup whose driver said, "Drive up Duck Run. It's the next turn. You can't miss it." Shortcuts are popular in Lucasville. Nobody wanted to disappoint me. I was back where I started. The driver thought I had said, 'Cawley Road,' too, even though I had spelled Conley. After a series of turns, I did find the other end of Conley Road where I wanted to be.

The pavement petered out and any sign of town disappeared. Soon the valley sharpened into a narrow dirt road between two steep hillsides. On one side, two older mobile homes perched on narrow bulldozed plateaus came into view. On one, ruffled, singed curtains blew out the busted windows. Yellow clay stripes and dark wide seams of fallen leaves marked the hillside. Rivulets of water seeped from the trees above, cutting across the bare ground into glistening miniature cobweb gullies. Lower down, the muddy water collected into reflective, leaf-clogged pools. I stopped at the edge of the last flat solid earth. Good thing I wore my hiking boots, I muttered to myself, as I switched off my engine. Did I imagine a scent? When I opened the car door, sour fermented fumes swirled around me. I pressed my horn button. On the far right, a figure appeared through the door, and a male voice called, "Up here." I grasped the neck of a plastic water bottle and, bent forward under the weight of notebooks, tacked across the steep hillside stepping over each flume.

Set against the front door, a stack of rough-cut wood steps with gaps too high for my short legs was my only invitation to enter. Good-naturedly, I called up, "Come down and pull up your old cousin." A smiling, blue-eyed man stepped down, held the glass storm door open with one leg, and extended his hand. I stomped inside and stood panting.

"Hello," I said to a woman washing dishes, but she did not turn around. On my left, my smile connected with two boys still in diapers, nestled next to a young woman whose arm looped around them over the back of the couch. The blue-eyed man disappeared.

"Jewelavene is my name," the young mother said. We shook hands. The woman at the sink still did not turn around. I leaned into her kitchen, still looking for Delbert. There, shoved into the far corner behind a round laminated table top, between corner windows, sat a grizzled rotund man.

"Hello, I am Delbert, and this is my wife, Beverly," he boomed in what I soon learned was Delbert fashion.

"I am Beverly; Delbert's wife." Beverly was neatly dressed, tall, and serene. She turned back to her sink. In the living room, Jewelavene made room for me on the couch.

"I'm Delbert's daughter and these are my sons." Her dark hair and pink, white skin glowed. I smiled at my little cousins as I surveyed the room for a place to work. The television blared.

"Can we all sit at this table? I need a place to write."

Henry, who had pulled me up the steps, returned. He pushed a wood swivel chair over to me. The chair rocked and I held to the edge of the table. The two little boys, shy at first, came to stand beside me,

their brown eyes smiling. From one of my bags, I pulled a large box of fried chicken. I held it up to Jewelavene.

"I need a little air," I said, "I'm still puffing from my climb up your hill, and I don't smoke. You go on and smoke." Delbert reached over with his left hand and yanked at the metal window. Cool air flooded in, bringing back the malodorous scent of the hillside.

Beverly stacked her dishes and went to sit in the living room in front of the TV. At our table, I described my driving adventures to find Conley Road. Henry leaned against the door jam. By all I could see, Delbert was sitting in one of two chairs in sight and I had the other one.

Jewelavene said, "I will find a chair for you, Henry."

Henry sat down at my right elbow, still smiling. His blue eyes twinkled over gapped, splayed front teeth.

"I'm your second cousin," I said. "Your father, Felty, was my first cousin. He and your mother used to bring you to our house on Star Branch when you were little."

They stared. I tried again, "Do you remember coming to your Uncle Chead's for dinner? To a white and brown log house?"

They erupted into laughter, "Yes, you used to scrub us in that cold water as the cows watched! Well, if my mother were still alive, she'd claim her dinner, because she cooked for you."

I saw my opening, "Before my Mother, your aunt Velva, died in 1993, she wanted to know about you children. She cared about you, but she could never find out where you were after they put you in foster care. I promised my mother I would find out what happened to you. You know, there are three of you, three younger ones, still missing and unaccounted for - twins Golda and Nola and the last baby, Brenda Sue. So, in 1995, just about eight years ago, your mother Imogene and I met in Lucasville. We talked about telling her story and tracking her lost children. She authorized me to write her story. I haven't done it, because I had a job that kept me very busy, but I left that job last year in 1999. Your mother wants her side of the story told." They stared at me.

"There were news articles written about Imogene and about you children that she says were not true, and she wants to have her say." I waited. "I plan to research every point, date, and episode. It will be the truth. Since you children were separated from your mother and father and from each other, you may have no idea of how the others grew up. We'll back it up with dates and facts. Perhaps this will reunite you, at least on paper by your life stories." There was more silence and staring.

"Before we go on, I have some papers to release the welfare data that will give me these exact dates and places you stayed. I want to be able to obtain this with your authorization."

"Ok, you are going to write a story?" Henry asked.

"Yes, I am setting down the facts as you tell them. I hope you can tell me what your life was like as you grew up. Will you do that?" I laid the documents in front of Henry.

"I can't read or write."

Jewelavne stepped up behind him. "I will read it to you, Henry. I will help you." She took the CFC-305 forms and began to explain how the archives in Frankfort will produce his welfare reports. She filled in his social security numbers and he signed the forms in two places. Delbert did the same. He also signed a power of attorney. Jewelavne witnessed their signatures.

"If it's all right, Henry, can we start with you?"

He blinked.

"Henry," I said, "You have the prettiest blue eyes I have ever seen." His lips parted into a big smile, exposing front teeth with a velvety texture and an odd yellow cast.

It was slow going. With each question, Henry paused, looked at Delbert. Delbert said, "Henry was with me and Elbert at first; that is, until we went to live at the Coburn foster home at Fallsburg. Henry stayed back with the Carters in Sandy Hook. So, we were kindly in it together for a long time."

"I was fourteen when they sent me to reform school. I think it was in Lexington or maybe it was Louisville," Delbert said. "I stabbed the principal of the school. He hit me around the side of my head with an oak paddle, and I grabbed my knife and cut him in the stomach."

I gasped.

"In class, we were shooting spitballs at one other. Several of us were doing it with another foster boy and some girls. The teacher caught us. We were disrupting her class, of course. She whipped us all except for one big girl. Our teacher was a small person, and she was afraid of the big girl. So, she called in the principal. I wanted to distract him so he wouldn't hit the big girl, and he told me to go home. I didn't. He had a big wood paddle in his hand. He hit me. I reached for my knife. I can't recall whether it was my Bowie in a scabbard or my pocketknife. I cut him in the stomach. Just broke the skin, and they took me away from the foster home and sent me to reform school. Of course, no witness would confirm that the principal had hit me. It was just my word, but he did hit me."

"Did you stay in reform school?"

"Two years, from age fourteen to age sixteen. Then I ran away. The place was full of criminals, only we were children. There were runaways, boys in trouble, like I was, and some who had killed already. I learned to line up for everything: to use the shower, to eat, just about everything we did, we lined up in single file, but for the first time, my education was constant. I learned what I know during that time, but I never completed more than the fifth grade level during all that time in foster care and in reform school, from 1960 when I was nine years old, to age sixteen until I got out of reform school."

Delbert sighed. "I was a slow learner, backward, and things were hard for me. There were no counselors, or anyone to explain anything to me. At age eight, I was tested at the first grade level. Then at age fourteen, when I went to reform school, I was at the fifth grade level.

"I was never molested, but when I first arrived, thirty other boys in the school beat me up. They broke seven of my ribs, trying to make me cry. They said it was their initiation test, to make me cry. I told them I would not cry, so they kept beating me," his bravado voice broke. "I wanted to cry, but I knew I had all cried out, long before I got to that reform school."

"The supervisor helped me get even, though. First, he told me he added six months to their sentences for punishment. Then he let me know that he would look the other way, if I wanted to take revenge on them. He wouldn't stop me. It took me six months, and I beat up every one of them. Yeah," he said, "I learned to fight in reform school. That is what I learned in reform school."

"When you were taken from your parents? Do you remember anything about that?" I asked.

"The first time?" he asked.

I was startled, "Well, yes, was there a second time?"

"Oh yes, the first time they took us to the Gertrude Ramey children's home in Ashland. At Gertrude Ramey's, we were told we were taken there because we were stealing things. At the time, I couldn't think it through, but now when I consider we were eleven years old, and we lived in a remote place with no close neighbors. What could we steal? Food? I guess. I was also told I had threatened an officer with a rifle who tried to arrest my mother. I was eleven years old. What child would watch his mother being handled without trying to help in some way? Mostly, we ran and hid. The old gun we had was an antique. The old man brought it home from a junk pile. The officers found it in the house."

I was quiet. I kept to myself and I sat in the corner. I hated Gertrude Ramey. When our parents came to see us, that first Christmas, she locked us up in an attic and wouldn't let them see us. They brought bicycles. I saw the other children at the home, riding our bicycles, but, as I remember, none of us ever got to ride them. I don't know why."

"How did Children's service get involved in the first place?"

"Yes, it was Aunt Jessie. You see, Granny Martha died, and she had left her little house, and land on Star Hill to our dad. But Aunt Jessie lived on that land and had lived there since she married. So, it was told she wanted to get rid of our dad, so she could get it."

"After you all were taken the second time in 1961, do you know the reason authorities gave you children back to your parents after only six months?"

"They couldn't prove neglect, so they let us go home. They kept us six months. By then, our Dad was working steady and he'd built a house on Lige Field's place on Paradise Hill with Lige's promise for free rent for us to live there for five years. We were to feed his pigs. But after three months, Lige called

welfare to come in. I guess Lige decided he didn't want to give up the house for free rent, so he called in Children's Services. It was in July 1965, and after that, we didn't see our parents for seven years until we ran away. I was sixteen. I just walked off and hitchhiked to Olive Hill where my parents had moved Henderson Branch. The old man always found a way to send word to us.

Henry stayed with the Carters, They wanted to adopt him, but they only wanted one more child, and since Elbert and I were twins, they kept us together and sent us to the Coburns' at Webbville and we went to school at Fallsburg.

"Can you tell me about your foster families?"

"Elbert and I lived in three foster homes. Henry lived in two. Henry stayed at the Carters when Elbert and I were sent to the Coburns'.

At the Carter place, Flossie Carter and her husband had a small twenty-five acre farm, near Sandy Hook in Elliott County, and they already had four children of their own. They were kind, nice people. The first thing I learned was to not run through the tobacco patch barefooted. There was a thorn tree growing nearby, and I pierced my foot with a four-inch thorn! They also taught us to work and to be honest. But it was from Fallsburg, where they transferred Elbert and me to live with the Coburns' that I was sent to reform school.

"At the last place, we lived with Charles and Pauline Coburn. They had five hundred acres. We worked hard in their fields. We chopped corn and worked in the tobacco fields. Their sons did not work so hard. They were older than us. I liked Mr. Colburn, but I think Mrs. Colburn did not like me. She favored Elbert. We had fun, too. At night sometimes, Elbert and I stole their mules out of the barn and rode them through the countryside. We put them up before morning, and those mules were tired - could hardly pull their plow the next day." He chuckled. "They had another foster kid, Albert Prince, and he went too. When we could, we played in their woods. We played Tarzan, explored and swung on grapevines."

From the living room, Jewelavene called to her father, "Daddy, let Henry answer."

Henry was unable, or unwilling to recall the details of his early life in foster care. With nods, or a word correction from Henry, Delbert outlined their transfers from one foster home to the next. I was gathering up my notes, when Henry found his voice.

"I went home in 1971. I was sixteen. The Carters wanted me to stay with them in Sandy Hook, but I wanted to go home to see my folks. The Carters wanted to adopt me, but I wanted to see my parents. We were glad to see each other," Henry stammered. "First thing I did was to give \$100 to my old man to buy a new fishing rod and we went fishing." Henry smiled at the thought of his gift over thirty-five years before.

"I'd saved about \$300 the Carters paid me for stripping tobacco. I gave all my money to the old man." Henry explained. "Basically, they had no money and there we all were there - five of us adult children suddenly come home," Henry's face was solemn. There was Hallie Ann and Martha come home from

Miss Ramey's, and Delbert, Elbert and me, and Charles too. Then mom had two more little ones, Ann and Pearl," he added.

"Despite being apart all that time, I still loved my parents, and I lived with them until I married in May, 1985. I was twenty-nine years old." He drew on his cigarette stub before he tossed it through the open window.

"Henry, you said you don't read or write. Did you attend school in foster care?"

"Yes," he said, "To the 9th grade."

"Did the Carters notice that you had not learned?" I asked.

"They helped me with my homework."

"What is your work, Henry? What do you do for a living?"

"I can't work, because I can't read or write. Nobody will hire me. I can't read or write. That is how I qualified for SSI payments," he settled back into his chair.

"Well, you are physically able to work though, aren't you? You are not suffering from any kind of medical problem? You are physically strong and able to do hard labor?" I asked.

"I've got high blood pressure and migraine headaches," he posited.

"High blood pressure can be cured by a good diet, and no smoking." I pointed to his cigarette and smiled. "And you can learn to read and write, can't you?"

His eyes were furtive.

"What I mean is, do you have a learning disability, or is it because you have not had a chance to learn?"

Delbert said, "We moved around so much, we never had the basic learning we needed. None of us did."

"I had a stroke," Henry injected. He held his hand up and wiggled his fingers, "My fingers got numb, and they kept me three days in the hospital, said I had a stroke."

"Do you throw up when you get a headache?"

"No," he said, "I just have a bad headache when I get up sometimes, of a morning."

"Maybe, you have a bad pillow?" I asked.

"No, that's not it." From across the table came Delbert's words. "I have migraine headaches sometimes, and I throw up."

I pulled copies of a faded news article from my file. "May I show this to you? It's a news article from December, 1961, about you children living at the Ramey Home for Christmas."

They picked themselves out in the faded picture, but neither one read the text.

"Your sister Mary Lou kept this picture because it was all she had of you brothers and of her sisters, and because it shamed her so. She was pointed out to other people and they made fun of her at school.

"Yes, the other children always made fun of us. We were backward, and they always made fun of us, but I've never seen this."

"I've never seen it either, n' I hate it," Henry said. "I hate Gertrude Ramey. She's dead now, but she told me my parents were dead, and that's the reason we all had to go there. I cried a lot about it, but I couldn't believe it. I guess, I never really believed they were dead," his soft voice tapered off.

"They tried to break our spirit towards our parents," Delbert said. "When our parents brought bicycles that Christmas we were at the Ramey home, Gertrude Ramey locked us in the attic to keep our parents from seeing us. Through the windows, we saw other kids riding our bicycles. For some reason, we never got to ride them. We never did get to see our parents." He looked away, over his shoulder towards the muddy hillside.

"I don't have hard feelings toward the system. We need some systems. When I drink too much and drive up this Hollow, I ought to be thrown in jail, and for kids that have nobody, we need a system, but for us Fannin kids we had kindly parents who loved us, who tried to take care of us. They couldn't do it just right but they tried. Taking us away, placing us in a boys reformatory and accusing us of thievery as the reason for locking us up there, then putting our parents in jail did not do much of anything for us," Delbert shook his head. "Hell, we can't even read or write."

I gathered up my papers, as Jewelavene came to offer a hug and whispered, "My boy's father is asleep in the bedroom, want me to wake him up?"

Henry T.



*The word: **Delinquent** means guilty of a crime, and **Incorrigible** is defined as beyond any hope or reform or improvement. These descriptions dogged nine year old Henry through seven years in foster care and all the way to prison for the criminally insane.*

Henry Thomas Fannin is one year younger than his twin brothers Delbert and Elbert. He is angular and lithe, shorter in stature. Despite our initial interview, Henry T. did have a story of his own. With smiling blue eyes, Henry is relaxed. Unlike several of his siblings, Henry was a single birth, after a full term pregnancy.

Figure 29 - Henry Thomas Fannin

"I hate foster care, and I hate Gertrude Ramey." He reeled back in his chair until it chunked against the wall. "The first thing I remember after we was took was sleeping under Delbert's bed at the reformatory. They called it the Reception Center. Under his bed was the only place I felt safe. I was scared. The big boys put bars of soap in socks and beat me with them. I hid under his bed, so they couldn't hit me."

Henry crossed his legs at the knees, leaned toward me on the edge of the wire chair, and with his fingers intertwined, stared at Delbert across the brown Formica tabletop. "Them big boys would go to the bathroom and take their shit and smear it on me. I hid under Delbert's bed."

The first time Henry T. Fannin went to live at the Ramey Children's Home in 1959, he was four. He was still four when, after three months, Judge Hall changed his mind and sent him back home to his parents in the Wheeler Hollow in exchange for the twins, Loretta and Jeanetta.

Henry T. was six years old in October 1961, when Welfare authorities returned for him. Judge Carter had changed his mind again. This time, Henry T. was at Star Hill in Carter County, when he and all his siblings were taken by state troopers. But after six months Boyd County Judge Hall changed the orders of Judge Carter and sent Henry back to his parents.

Nearly three years after that, on July 6, 1965, Judge Hall changed his mind again. He sent authorities, including the Boyd County Sheriff to Paradise Hill to rescue nine-year-old Henry T. for the third time. When Imogene screamed for help, Henry wanted to protect his mother. This is a chronicle of how he survived in a world of strangers for seven years after that.

Four months later, on November 8, 1965, Henry T. was held with his brothers, Delbert and Elbert, in the Welfare Reception Center. According to Welfare records, signed by Ronald G. Moatz, there was no available boarding home for these three little boys. Their lives became a series of official memos:

*Their parental home cannot be approved for their return.
No boarding home for three boys is available.*

Faye Cochrane, CWW produced her summary dated November 22, 1965:

In her memo, Faye Cochran wrote to Ronald G. Moatz: *The little boys understand they are at the Reception Center because, "Daddy sold the furniture and we have no place else to go."*

Moatz writes: *On a trial basis, the Fannin boys will be transferred to the Miller Boarding home in London, Kentucky and will be managed by Carol Ann Isham, CCW for Laurel County, on November 22, 1965.*

With cc: to America Holbrook and Donald R. McClure, CCW.



Figure 30 – Henry T. Fannin with his children
Amanda and Henry Lee Fannin

The three little Fannin boys are excited about this placement, and happy with their first impressions of Mrs. Miller and their new home.

They were enrolled at Colony Elementary School on November 23rd.

December 4, 1965 Mrs. Miller reported all three boys had messed their beds. She was very upset. She promised them a spanking if it ever happened again. The Millers have built on an extra room upstairs where all the boys will sleep.

December 15, 1965 Mrs. Miller reported: Henry .T, Delbert and Elbert have settled down, but not learning very well. They are very slow, although they get along very well and do not fuss or fight. They are obedient. They like school but do not progress in their studies. This is agitating to us because we work with them on their studies.

March 16, 1966 Henry is sick. He is pale and nervous and refuses to eat.

On June 6, 1966, Mrs. Miller asked that we make other arrangements for them before school starts again. That she and Mr. Miller are unable to help them; they need special help and speech therapy. All three have speech impediments.

They have few faults, but they tell stories and pick up things. For some reason, Mrs. Miller says they cannot stay awake in church. They seem to be very proud of their new clothes. They seem satisfied in the Miller home and very happy in school.

June 23, 1966 Faye Cochrane, CWW for Laurel County, sent her Memorandum to Ronald G. Moatz, Juvenile Placement Officer:

Henry T., has an inability to comprehend. He has been socially promoted to another grade, as have his twin brothers, Elbert and Delbert. They need Special Education Classes and speech therapy. Since all three have speech problems. Their needs are not being met since there are no facilities in our county or city school system for this type of child. We recommend another boarding home to found to best suit their needs. Ms. Cochrane concludes her memo: the Miller's have asked these children be removed from their home, and they are pressuring us to find a place for them.

On July 1, 1966, Ronald G. Moatz, reported in his Facts for Characteristic Data and Reference form for the Department of Child Welfare:

Henry T. Fannin; Delinquent Attacked Police

However, under item number 11, Moatz wrote:

Grade five; of normal intelligence.

Moatz makes no mention of their learning disabilities to aid his next foster parents in another county and for his next CWW, as Henry T. Fannin is transferred again.

On July 16, 1966, Faye Cochrane CWW in her memo to Ronald G. Moatz refers to her previous memo dated June 22 asking that another boarding home be found for Henry T., Elbert and Delbert. That academic achievement is limited due to their inability to comprehend. All three have been socially promoted. The Millers believe the boys need Special Education and speech therapy.

In the interim, Dr. L.F. Boland, Medical Consultant, asks for an interview with the boys:*Our reason for this request is for a study of environmental and hereditary factors related to mental retardation occurring in fraternal and identical twins.*

One year later, in mid-1967, after Henry T., has been evaluated and transferred, Ronald G. Moatz, still has not recommended learning programs or other remedies to educate this small boy. But he summarized Henry's needs in his second annual report to America Holbrook: *Delinquent In corrigible Attacked Police*

Welfare records indicate that Ronald G. Moatz was not there on Paradise Hill, when Henry was pulled from his parents in July 1965. And except for that one meeting at Winchester one year later, when Moatz transferred Henry T. and his brothers to another boarding home, Moatz never saw the Fannin children. Instead, he copied and relied upon notes of other social workers and passed them to America Holbrook.

At the Reception Center in Louisville, Kentucky, on November 16, 1965, three months after Henry T. arrived with his brothers, caseworker Carol Isham interpreted Henry Thomas Fannin's future in these words: *Basis of Commitment: Incorrigibility. The Charge is parental neglect and resisting officers on July 6, 1965. Received at Reception Center: July 20, 1965.*

Reason for Placement: Henry has begun to initiate contact with adults; he is not a discipline problem.

Where Placed: Mrs. Elbert Miller Route #2 London, Kentucky November 22, 1965.

The Millers are a small farm family; also at home is one daughter and one older son.

Henry T. was only nine years old, but the stigma or the context of having 'attacked police,' is never explained. After six months with the Miller foster family on July 14, 1966, Faye Cochrane, Child Welfare Worker for Laurel County mailed her summary memo to Regional Supervisor, America Holbrook: 'I wrote to Mr. Moatz again asking to move Henry T, Delbert and Elbert Fannin to another boarding home. The Millers feel the boys needs are not being met, and request they be placed in another boarding home.'

On July 29, 1966 the Fannin boys were removed from the Miller boarding home and taken to Winchester, Kentucky to meet Mr. Moatz who will transfer them to another boarding home in Sandy Hook.

In June 4, 1971, the social worker visited the Fannin home to evaluate the situation and prepare the parents for Henry's return. She wrote: *they apparently have had contact with Henry since they were*

already aware of some of the difficulties Henry has had in foster care, even though there have been no official visits from his parents.

Their home situation is deplorable. The house is filthy and had a strong odor of urine and garbage. Several people were still in bed-some not clothed.

The summary concludes: *DCW believed the Fannin home to be unsuitable in 1965 for the children in the home at that time, and there is no change since that time. Although we can not prevent Henry T. from returning to his home, at least he has had the best care available and has the advantage of six years of formal education that he most likely would not have received at home." Mr. Ronald G. Moatz*

June 4, 1971 *Regional Supervisor.*

On August 17, 1971 Beatrice Gehringer, SSW writes to Child Welfare Supervisor,

Ronal G. Moatz.

A summary: *Since the last reassessment conference in November 1970, another Fannin child has left foster care. Henry T. Fannin has returned to his parents. Henry T. felt that he was not a member of this foster household where he has lived for several years. He became rebellious and hostile. He wanted to go home to his real parents. The decision was to allow him to return to his parents even though the home situation was deplorable. The only alternative was an institution to prevent his return, but this was not a logical solution."*

Six months later, Willis R. Rogers, Juvenile Counselor wrote the Closing Summary for Henry Thomas Fannin: *On June 7, 1972, Henry T. Fannin was placed from the Carter foster home in Elliott County to his parents in Olive Hill, Kentucky. Due to this family refusing to accept any services that the Department of Child Welfare has to offer, I am closing the case as of this date. Dated: January 24, 1972.*

Henry rejoined his birth family on June 7, 1971, at Henderson Branch. He was sixteen. He had experienced the trauma of a lockup and sexual molestation at the Reception Center and by an older boy in the Elbert Miller home. He had lived in two foster homes and, except for his older brothers, Elbert and Delbert; he had not seen any of his family since July 6th, 1965. And even though he attended school every day, he was illiterate.

"Basically, our parents lived in a shack, and they had no money. Eventually, I gave him all my money, about \$300. We were all glad to see each other, my mother too."

Records from Carter and Boyd counties, Kentucky, and from Lawrence County, Ohio, document the slope of Henry's life from his early life at home with his parents, into foster care, and his return to his birth parents, followed by the course of petty theft and burglary, in Olive Hill and Ashland and at last to murder, and to the asylum for the criminally insane in Lima, Ohio in 1973.

His sister, Pearl Jean, remembers, "After he was home for a while, Henry became belligerent to our parents. Once he knocked our father down. Then all three of them, Henry, Delbert, and Elbert began to hurt Velvie Ann and me. There didn't seem to be anything our parents could do to stop them. Our brothers took turns with us. I was nine years old when they started on me."

My search to discover the truth intensified as I located several social workers from the 1960s who had retired in the Ashland area. Each one wanted to help. A few suggested I call Ronald G. Moatz "He might remember the Fannin family," they suggested. He had been their district manager.

But Mr. Moatz would not come to the phone. He sent word through his wife, "I do not recall a Fannin Family."

I reviewed his welfare reports. Sure enough, for seven years, Ronald G. Moatz signed reports for the Fannin children.

The next time I called he came to the phone but disavowed any involvement with a Fannin family. He said he barely knew America Holbrook, his district supervisor, and never worked with her directly. I also asked about Gail Cunningham, his assistant.

Before he hung up again, I asked his opinion on the reasons Judge Carter and Judge Hall returned the Fannin children to their parents after all, when conditions in the Fannin home were unchanged.

"The laws back then, or the lack of laws, had no teeth in them. We had no tools to protect children. It wasn't until the mid 1970s when the court changed the quality of judges. It was too late for the Fannin children and all the other children we wanted to help. After Kentucky amended its constitution, now Judges are educated to the law. They are required to have a law degree and rely more on science." The phone clicked and Ronald G. Moatz was gone for good. I did not call back.

Lori (Loretta) Loretta and Genetta went to foster care in 1959

"I remember leaving my doll someplace on the shelf because I thought I was coming back, but I didn't."

"They home-permed our hair and the waving lotion burned our necks. Jena and I wore green dresses, with little dog's print, and shiny shoes. They took us to a motel in Ashland to meet the new adoptive parents, Ray and Kay Bell. They wanted to adopt us, and we lived with them for ten years until we married at age sixteen. We married just to get away from 'home'. Ray molested me from age nine."

In 1995, after I interviewed Imogene in Lucasville, Loretta sent a letter, but we did not meet until November 30, 2003. To help her out, I made copies of my research documents, welfare reports, and school records. While she promised to bring information she gathered, she did not have anything for me, except, of course, memories of growing up in the Kentucky foster care system and of her adoptive family. It was plenty.

Contrary to my policy to verify the story of each child before I write anything, Lori refused to sign a release form to recover her early records. But I wrote what she told me:

"Rita and Ryan Bendell at Catlettsburg were our first foster parents. They wanted to adopt us, but for some reason, they were not allowed to. He is dead, and she lives in Missouri. There was another almost adoption at age four when a Reverend and his wife wanted us, but they returned us to welfare because they complained we were too active.

"We lived in a second foster home, and a third. In one foster home, we lived with our brother, Andrew. When I asked, they insisted he was not our brother. But we knew that he was. I rocked Andrew in my arms in the playroom.

"We realized we were foster children, when we lived with an old man and woman who also had older children. We were seated at a separate table where we ate bread and milk and half a plate of potatoes and beans. Their family ate chicken, pork chops and other foods."

"After Jenna and I were adopted, our new parents were advised to get us settled in one spot. Because we were moved around so much in our young six years, that not even a vacation trip be advised. It was a year before they took us on a drive to the St. Louis zoo.

"Kitty Washburn was my social worker in Muhlenburg County. After I married, I begged her to reveal our birth name. She refused, but she did say Jena and I were born in eastern Kentucky. Imagine sitting on the other side of her desk while the secrets and the keys to our lives were spread out in the file folder, but she wouldn't tell? However, she conceded one clue, it was a riddle: "A man with the same last name as your birth parents was elected Governor of a western state."

With a map, and several biographies, Lori picked out the name of Paul J. Fannin, the new Governor of Arizona. He was born in Boyd County, Kentucky, and moved with his family at an early age to Arizona. He was elected in 1958 and served until 1965. He served in the US Senate from 1965 until 1977. Later we discovered he was our cousin.

"There were ninety-six Fannins in the phone book. Way down on my list, Polly Fannin answered the phone. "You are speaking to the wife of your half-brother, Delmar Lee," she said.

"When Imogene called me from an outside payphone, she was standing in the rain. The connection was poor. She called me 'Loretta,' and I felt sick to my stomach. After a brief talk, I hung up. I did not call back for nine years."

During this time, Lori went in search of Andrew. She and Jena knew in their hearts the little blind boy they played with in the foster home was their brother. There is only one school for the blind in the state of Kentucky.

"I found him right away. He arrived by bus that week. Andrew grew up isolated and alone, not only by his blindness but by circumstances. While some of us, like Delbert and Elbert were kept together with Henry T. and Jena and I grew up together, Andrew was alone.

He is a calm spirit. I can talk with him about anything. He lives alone, with his music. He sings and plays his guitar and lives in his own apartment over in Hopkins County, "Lori said.

By 1990, Lori was still troubled. She called Delmar Lee and Polly a second time.

"I wanted to face my past and to meet them all," she said. "I was ready, or so I thought. For moral support, sister in law Joanne accompanied me, because I knew she would not flinch, no matter what I found. I was still haunted by the stories our social workers and our foster parents had told us about our backward parents," Lori frowned.

"Midway of our seven hour drive to Louisa, Kentucky, we stopped near Beaver Dam to eat. I felt scared. Joanne and I sat at the cafe counter, talking. Even to strangers, I told my story. Three hours passed before I felt ready.

We arrived at Polly's house around 5 a.m. She was welcoming, just as she was when I called nine years before. In their neat bungalow on the banks of the Tug River, she prepared a southern breakfast for us. My half brother, Delmar Lee, told us about our family. I hung on to his every word. While I relished Polly's fried potatoes. "Fried potatoes was our father's favorite food, Delmar Lee said."

"I didn't eat fried potatoes for months. I didn't know how to manage information about our parents. Even casual remarks set me off. I did not know how to store it or process it. Our father had died in 1987. "On the way to see Imogene, we stopped in Lucasville, Ohio, to meet Velva Ann, our young sister, but she ran away from us. She was monitored by the Welfare over custody of her children and she thought we were there to check upon her. The pieces of our lives would not come together so easily.

"At Imogene's house, Henry T. was the first of my siblings to extend his hand in greeting. We hugged and cried. Right away, Imogene took me to her garden to show off her beautiful flowers. The bright blossoms of her flowers and the neat rows of her vegetables, belied the unkempt condition of her home, but she had spread a clean sheet over the couch where I could sit. She wanted to make me comfortable. She had tried."

James, our younger brother, teased and tormented me to make me laugh, just like a bratty brother might. While it was easy to bond with James with his sense of humor, my other siblings had reservations. I felt unbalanced, like an outsider.

"When I met Charles and his wife, Goldie, he asked to borrow fifty dollars. Before I left, I stopped to say goodbye and to pick up my money. Charles pulled out his pistol, while Goldie threatened me. I left. Later, Charles apologized for their behavior, but he did not pay back the money.

"One by one my other siblings came, but they had errands to attend to. They were curious about me, but they were not interested in getting acquainted, at least not then," Lori recalls.

"The trauma and separation had taken its toll on them as well. Each of us had grown up in a different culture, with a separate set of parents, in a strange home, in another community." Lori mused, "But in truth, it meant sharing Imogene with yet another sibling. I got to know Delbert a little better when he invited Joanne and me to a bar. We relaxed," Lori smiled at that memory of bonding. "He told small

stories about our parents and their early lives. Sometimes, his story wasn't just right, but he wanted to draw us together. He tried to find a reason, and he still wants to know, like we all do: who is responsible for our family tragedy," Lori said.

"In 1991, I was divorced. Andrew moved in and we talked our way through our probable pasts. We wanted to heal. So did Andrew. I suggested the only way he might do this was to go and stay with Imogene in Lucasville, Ohio. In 1995, he moved in with Imogene and Hallie Ann for over a year. When he was ready to leave, he discovered some of his things were missing."

"We still have some emotional garbage. Social workers and our foster parents told us stories about our parents that were untrue. Some of us grew up believing our parents were dead. We had no way to compare information. We were never told the truth by anybody. Not the social workers, not our foster parents, nobody. Not even to this day."

Andrew blinded at birth

After my initial brief meeting in 1995, at Lucasville, when I interviewed Imogene, I spoke to Andrew Jackson Fannin over the phone. He refused to sign the release papers because he said Lori told him not to because she was writing her own story. I hope that she does. This is what Andrew told me:

"I remember the names of my social workers: Martha Collins, Louise Pergrem, Marilyn Jefferies, Lynn Gore, and Victor McKinney. My foster parents were the Dickersons at Morehead from 1964-67. Also I lived with the Smiths and Pages, and I lived nineteen years in foster care with Nancy Powers." Andrew said with perfect diction.

"I learned to read at the School for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky, where I graduated. I like to read science fiction and mythology in Braille. I play the guitar and listen to my music. I have lived alone since 1983, after Lori found me and told me about our parents. She helped me to get established on my own."

"In 1995, I went to stay with Imogene for nearly two years, and we talked. That was when you came to talk with Imogene," he paused. "It was not always pleasant because she does not like to bathe. While I was there my brothers and sisters stole my things." In 2011, after no word from Andrew for a decade, he sent an email to ask about whether my story of Imogene's Children was completed. I was glad to hear from Andrew. I asked whether he wished to sign the release forms and to participate in the story. He never answered. LJE

Second interview with Imogene Akers Street Ashland, Kentucky

Her voice followed me east on Interstate 64. "Twenty-two degrees here in Lexington but the crocus will soon be up," the broadcaster chirped. "Expect signs of spring," her voice faded beyond the mountain.

"Crocus," I thought back, "Will grow anywhere, at any time. Now, when I see the red bud and white blossoms of dogwood on the ridges that is spring." I turned up the heat in my Ford and jammed an audio book into the tape deck.

In her story, *Leap of Faith*, Queen Noor described her life with King Hussein of Jordan - how they met, and fell in love in the hot deserts of Iran. I scoffed. Her story could not be farther from my own situation, and the lives I want to describe.

With trepidation, punctuated with Queen Noor's voice, I drove toward Ashland, Kentucky, for a second interview with Imogene Wheeler Fannin.

At the exit to Olive Hill, a little town made famous by the lilting hill country songs of Tom T. Hall, I pulled over to phone and confirm my appointment. From our talks, I knew Imogene's younger daughter, Pearl Jean, was buying back from her husband's brother a double wide she had once owned and that it was in one of the trailer courts on Akers street in Ashland. Imogene lived with Pearl Jean, at least for now.

Imogene answered; her voice strong and familiar with clipped half-words. We had not spoken since our first meeting in 1995 at Lucasville "Pearl Jean and Gary went to West Virginia."

"What? She promised to wait for me."

"She'll be back. She had to go check on Brenda and Mary."

"I will be late. Expect me at eleven instead of ten." Over our fuzzy connection I shouted, "Imogene, I will be late."

Imogene was skittish. Seven years had passed since our initial meeting in 1995 at Lucasville, Ohio. But I was perplexed. The information she gave that day did not mesh with the stories her children told. Armed with copies of their foster care reports, a picture emerged and it was different from Imogene's story. I had tough questions for Imogene.

On Akers Street, we sat in Pearl Jean's home facing each other again, but Imogene was hostile. I felt it. I was ready to leave, to give up, when her face rounded, and a smile curled its way across her lower lip. One corner lifted as her voice changed to a soft whisper.

"I remember one time when I was little, we lived in Olive Hill. We didn't have anything to eat, so brother Woodrow broke the window in this store and pushed me through the window, because I was little, you know? I was the only one who could fit, so I got us something to eat." Her face hung tilted, like a half moon. "I remembered that." Her eyes leveled on me.

She reached under her thigh, slipped out a red and white striped paper tobacco pouch and dipped two fingers into the poke. She punched a bundle of shredded brown strings into the corner of her wide mouth. Pieces stuck out like frog legs caught in the uplifted corners. She pressed her fingers into the dark oblique opening behind her teeth, half way to the knuckle with practiced jabs, again and again until

the squiggly strings disappeared inside her slack jaw. A pooch firmed out on her right cheek next to me. Her eyes danced at me, innocent, gleeful, and proud.

I bent to the littered floor, put my hand down, and slowly, one by one, I picked up my papers. I felt hot. She was playing me, manipulating me. She wanted to rewrite her history, to play out the stories she had conjured, told her children - that there was no cave, that she had fought for them, had broken Sheriff Hall's jaw, that she had gone to jail for them. I provided her stage. I was her vehicle for prevarication. I was her importance, for now.

"Imogene," I said, "that was a wonderful story about your childhood. That is what I want you to tell me." I smiled, "The question, though, is about the cave. Where was the cave and what happened that day on October 24, 1961, when they came to take your children? You say you never lived in a cave. Ok, where did you live? When we met in Lucasville, you told me you wanted your story told, to explain your side and all the bad things that have happened to you and to your children. Yet, you are answering my questions with 'yeps' and 'nopes.' Then you stuff your mouth full of tobacco in the middle of our talk." Her eyes danced as she swallowed saliva into her chew.

I stacked my soft-sided Keeneland bag across my knees, folded my arms across the top, and hunched my shoulders forward to rise. I squinted at her across the gloomy room where she sat in the squat chair before her TV. I wanted to jump up and run to my car. Could I do that? No, I wasn't through with her. I began almost begging,

"Do you trust me?"

Her shoulders wiggled. I wondered whether she could hear. Pearl Jean sat on a sagging sofa across the room from us. Imogene blinked in Pearl Jean's direction, back at me, "Yah, I want to find the other three children."

"Will this story produce your other three children? I don't know. I don't guarantee that. What we are doing is telling your story. You want your story told, don't you? You asked me to tell your story in 1995 when we met in Lucasville. I need help. I want to help you. Oh, just simple things like, if you'd tell me about when you first married Felty, where did you live? Since your own mother died when you were just age five, who taught you? Things like that to get us started?" Her tongue wrapped and licked around the brown leaves in her mouth. Her eyes never left my face.

She said nothing.

"We can tell your story, a sympathetic story about your life." I waited. "You said you want your story told. Well, the mother is always blamed when something bad happens to a child. If we describe your life and how you grew up, then we can explain and offset the reasons your children were taken away." Silence.

"Or I can tell your story from gossip, if you prefer." My voice was tight. "I can write what I heard from the men in our neighborhood. It's no good. Wes Keffer bought coal from your father, Charlie. He leases my tobacco base, so I see him sometimes. Wes told me he saw your sister, Alberta, sitting on your dad's

lap, while he fondled her. He was drunk. Wes said Charlie was always drunk. He said that you, Alberta, and Lily dug coal for Charlie to sell - that you worked like men. That your father, Charlie, was mean and drunk. Alberta was just a young teenager." I paused. "Did this happen to you or to your other sisters? Did your father molest you girls?" I spread my hands with my palms open and looked them over. "Those are the stories I heard, Imogene, that John Holly, Harve Berry, and Suk Alexander came to see you all. That John Holly let you all live there on his land, let you dig coal, just to have you there."

I talked fast to say it all. Her large eyes widened. She shifted in her soft chair. She placed her arms over the bars of her metal walker and leaned away towards the dark TV screen. She wasn't going to tell me anything. She really did not want the truth told. I knew it then. She had her own truth. She told distorted stories to herself and to her children.

Then she said, "I had another baby when I was young. I named him Oscar Jiles."

"Who is his father, Imogene?"

"Why, Herbert Kincaid was," she smiled and released brown streams down each furrow of her chin. Her voice was melodious, lilting with a 'don't you know?' hiss.

"Who is that? Who is Herbert Kincaid?" Pearl Jean did not move. Were we hearing her mother's secret?

"He is Freddy's son. Fred Kincaid was sister Lilly's husband. He's dead now. When I married Felty, Daddy wouldn't let me take my son. I had to slip off to get married, so Jiles went to live with my sister, Alberta." She turned away. Her jaw shook, as tremor after tremor moved over her shoulders. What would it take to break her out? She hadn't answered my questions - not the important things about the cave, but she had baited me with this tidbit. I already knew about her son, Oscar Jiles, although, I hadn't thought about his father. Some said it was her brother Woodrow's child, or even Charlie's. We sat in silence.

"Mom, you have a chance to tell your story, so why don't you tell it? You said you wanted to explain. Here's your chance," Pearl Jean said.

Imogene's brown eyes flickered back and forth between Pearl Jean and me. She shifted her shoulders and sat up straight. She met my eyes, but she pointed at her daughter. "Write your questions down and leave them. Pearl Jean will help me to answer them." She stared out the window. She growled, "I never heard of Wes Keffer."

"I am afraid she is not hearing me," I said.

"She can hear," Pearl Jean said quietly.

"I will, Imogene," I said, to the back of her head. "But, of course that won't work for our interview. I need to sit with you alone for about two hours. That's the reason I drove to Ashland today. Can you arrange that? How about that round table in the corner?" I pointed to one of the cluttered tables at the end of the room. "Maybe clear that one off and lock the door to keep visitors out for a while? This is not working, Pearl Jean. We need to talk by ourselves."

"There's hardly ever anyone here but Gary and me and Mom," Pearl Jean said.

The front door opened. A tall, thin, blonde woman wearing a faded blue parka slipped in, followed by Gary, Pearl Jean's husband. He stopped in the doorway, hung on to the doorknob with his fingers, and called in, "Lydia, this is my sister, Adeline." I nodded to her, as she sat down on the couch next to Pearl Jean. I perched on the edge of my chair, ready to say goodbye. Before Adeline spoke, Gary yelled over my head, "Adeline, this lady can help you get your kids back. Ask her, she can help you." I looked around the room. Was he talking about me? Gary has a hearing problem. His voice is flat without intonation and always too loud.

"They took my kids - both of them. They were adopted out, I think. I'm signed up with the registry and if they contact the registry, I am signed up." Adeline turned her shoulders to me, but her eyes watched her own hands work a piece of tissue. Her face was drawn, lean. She shifted towards me, keeping her eyes downcast. Pity and a great sadness flooded through me as I looked at her strained face. Through half-closed soft blue eyes, she glanced up at me, waited for me.

I sputtered, "You've done the right thing, Adeline. That was the correct procedure," bringing up a thin smile. What the hell was I saying? I knew nothing of the Registry. Adeline started to repeat herself. I had to get out of this warped cycle with this stranger. Did I need to respond, "How long ago did this happen?"

"Five years ago," she blurted, before I finished my question, nodding her head at me.

"Five years ago," I repeated in a low voice to buy some time to think. "Well, in that case, your children are settled. If you can, perhaps you might want to try to accept it," I paused. "You are registered, and your children can find you. You have done the right thing. It's the only thing you can do," I smiled, nodding at her.

Adeline said, "I'm ok." She stood up, looked at me with a small smile, and slipped out as quickly as she had come in.

The door opened again. Gary herded three women towards me.

"These are our neighbors," Pearl Jean said from the couch, "Mary, Bonnie, and Sherry."

"Hello, hello, hello," I smiled my greetings, jumped to my feet, clutched my bag, and backed toward the door. Was Gary conducting a tour? Word had gotten out. They were coming to take a peek at me. Pearl followed me to the door. "Honestly, Lydia usually it's quiet around here. Send your questions, Lydia, and I will get the answers for you."

Over email, in the next few days, I received, "Yes" to the first question, "Yes" to the second, "Bob Sarvins, 102 Ferguson Drive in Westwood to the third, and to the fourth question, the answer made up in length for the others: "Taking a bath at Aunt Jessie's when child services come, not under a cliff or in a cave. All the children were in school at Star in the fall of 1961. Daddy worked for the highway

department in West Virginia for 4-5 months, so we lived over there. This is all a lie. We did not live in a cave."

I sent a message back:

"Thanks, Pearl Jean. I will match these answers up with my questions.

Love, Cousin Lydia

In a final email, she said her computer was crashing, and her cell phone bill was past due.

Chapter Eighteen: Peal Jean

Imogene is a prized economic consort. She makes her home with Pearl Jean and Gary, but sometimes, when he can convince her, she moves across the Ohio River to live with Delbert near Ironton, Ohio. Her widow's benefit from a Black Lung pension and a social security check travel with her. Always a steady income, they are in no danger of being taken away.

Her son in law, Gary, who suffered a hearing loss at twenty-three, has been careful about supplemental earnings. He took day jobs paid with cash. SSI benefits did not allow a disabled person to earn money from a separate source. Until policy was changed, it made cheaters out of every recipient, even if a spark of ambition surfaced. Gary is fit and able, despite his disability. He works at any job he can find to feed their family, and Imogene's pensions help out when Gary can't find a job. So, Pearl Jean and Gary keep Imogene close.

Pearl Jean's survival instincts are developed too. She has figured out well enough how to apply for heating supplements, food stamps, and any other public subsidy. Her sense of family and organization keep her three children anchored. They also receive SSI benefits for disabilities. Pearl Jean keeps a mental track of the adaptable, peripatetic lives of her siblings as well.

Hallie Ann lives with Imogene and Pearl Jean but it is not easy for her. She is often volatile and weepy. The same heart failure ailment that killed her twin Charles in 2003 now plagues her. By combining incomes, Imogene, Pearl Jean, and Gary and Hallie Ann live comfortably on their resources. Separately though, even with the best management circumstances, stretching the meager stipends meant only to be supplemental, not mainstay, is nearly impossible.

"If they want to eat at Captain D's or buy cooked foods, there is no provision for the rest of the month," Pearl Jean explained. "They can live it up the first week and cover their bad habits for a few days right after the checks come," she said again. Pearl Jean's voice was confident as she described her strategy. "I stock dried beans, flour, meal, and staples to last four weeks. Food stamps help. They extend the food supply to the bitter end of each month." She added, "Of course, mom chews tobacco, and sometimes I do too."

Pearl Jean is a pretty woman with creamy skin and black hair. She completed formal school in ninth grade and left home to marry her sweetheart, Gary Christian. She is a 21st century anchor for her roaming family and the godmother in the extended Fannin family. Her soft brown eyes speak to me inquisitively. She is rotund. Her front bodice extends into a soft egg-shaped body; her breasts mold into her abdomen. When I look at her, she smiles a shy smile. I want Pearl Jean to succeed.

After Delbert's fire, Pearl Jean left Lucasville, Ohio, and shepherded her flock to West Virginia. This meant major moves for six Fannin family members within four months. Pearl Jean had made her way up an unpaved country road to a rustic clapboard cottage in a hollow at the end of a long row of shanty houses stuck on the edge of a washed out stream bank near Branchland. I know, because I went there to find them. Within months, though, as Queen Noor and I drove east, Pearl Jean had moved back to Akers street in Ashland, Kentucky.

She and Gary had deposited their two daughters in Branchland. "Brenda and Mary wanted their own place," Pearl Jean explained. "So, they stayed over there in West Virginia with their aunt Hallie Ann."

This new configuration took a chunk of monthly income with it. It also indicated that Pearl Jean's daughters, Brenda who was single and expecting a child, and Mary who was married, were awarded SSI, and that West Virginia contributed stipends such as food stamps separately for their household. Theirs was another level of institutional dependency set up in the corner of another state. Somehow, Pearl Jean had held on to Imogene. She too was back on Akers street waiting for my arrival. But for now, I focused on Delbert and Henry T. - Still in Lucasville, Ohio.

In our telephone conversations, Delbert was articulate, even if a bit broad as he recalled family episodes. His stories were colorful. He was energetic though, and as I found out later, his stories always contained truth. They conferred a small hero status for him, while reflecting a victim-like status on his parents. His theme was to highlight their fight to survive and how something or someone more devious and powerful thwarted their efforts. After our talks, I mailed follow up lists of probing questions for him to consider. He sent nothing back. I discovered that he could not read what I sent, or so he claimed. I adjusted my interview questions, and checked my schematic of births to get Henry T. into view.

I feel a small stirring of outrage at their manipulations of the system that propels them into the third generation of institutional dependency. More distressing though, is how this federal welfare stipend has thwarted the ambition of their young. It also keeps them clinging to the fringe of dishonesty. This and other cultural, social, and family nurturing omissions cripple them. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has not figured out a system to educate Kentuckians past the 8th grade. Appalachian hollows are not at all like the ghettos and neighborhoods of New York City or Boston. The major economic development since 1961 may be the proliferation of billboards posted along US23 to lure illiterates, alcoholics, and the hopeless to apply for SSI benefits. It works.

"How did the Fannin family slip through Kennedy's optimistic programs?" I ask Queen Noor, as she describes King Hussein's opulent home and his courtship of her. On an invisible hinge, my thoughts swung back to Pearl Jean's delicate balance and how she keeps all her benefits arranged. She is literate and she has designed a clever plan to make a life for her mother, her sister, and her daughters. It is mere

subsistence, right under the umbrella of public accounts. Pearl Jean keeps her family clean and fed. Perhaps she has redesigned the welfare system for three states to make it work better. I was sympathetic to her, whatever her plan was, if she had one.



Figure 31 - Figure 30 - Pearl Jean and her daughter Brenda at Branchland, WV

Pearl Jean is one of the youngest Fannin children, born a few months after welfare authorities swooped in to take away her sisters and brothers for good on July 15, 1965. Not long after that, in 1969, Imogene and Felty Fannin qualified for his Black Lung pension. If he'd had that money before, Imogene might have kept her children.

"They signed because they figured it would give Felty something to live on," Danese Sargent, Felty's niece, told me. "Felt wasn't a regular coal miner like my dad was.

But he knew hacking coughs and black spittle from being around my dad. Felt lived on Welfare most of the time after he married Imogene, and she had all those children, but he was sixty-seven when the Black Lung Pensions came in. He was not really able to work at a regular job, not that he ever did. He was able to qualify because George Ferguson and my dad, Dexter, signed for him, so he'd have something to live on."

Black Lung

The Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 was enacted one year after Imogene lost all her children for good. She had three more children, Pearl Jean, Velva Ann and Brenda Sue, and the Black Lung check changed her life forever.

By 1970, Imogene and Felty did not need to dodge and run, at least for a short time, because their Black Lung payments and social security were steady and the bulk of their children lived in foster care, except for Pearl Jean and Velva Ann.

They'd settled on Henderson Branch near Olive Hill. With the first federal back payment amounting to a few thousand dollars; Felty took a small piece of land with an option and spent the rest of his windfall to buy ponies. He fenced in his yard and advertised ponies for sale. The ponies were old and past their prime, but he liked to trade. From a distance, driving by on US60 looking over Henderson Branch, the ponies created a pastoral scene around his shack.

For the first time in two decades and on a steady basis, Imogene had food to eat and a place to live. This place was on the westernmost side of Carter County and out of direct jurisdiction of America Holbrook. The new Social Services agents were W. Roscoe Rogers and Janice Miller, a new worker right out of college. America Holbrook knew where the Fannin's lived, but her welfare office was twenty miles away.

"One day, Mr. Rogers and I were walking to a house on Henderson Branch when Felty Fannin called over to us to see his new baby. As it turned out, it was the child of his daughter, Martha. We walked over, and there the newborn baby lay on a cot with sheets the color of coal dust. Everything on the baby was the same dark color. And what I remember most was there was no front door, just an opening, but I still remember how proud he was of that baby. I was stunned though and appalled," she recalled. "Some of us believed he was the father."

This peaceful scene of grazing ponies and entrepreneurial stewardship was not to last. Martha Lillian and Hallie Ann, now fully developed young women, had run away from the Ramey Children's Home to link up with the Stewart brothers, Hager and Wm. Henry.

Their brothers Delbert, Elbert, and Henry T. came home too. Now grown into strong, burly, and angry men, they found not the testy, combative father they remembered in 1965, but an aging man of sixty-eight who qualified for black lung medical disability. The young males brought with them new societal experiences and complex problems to this home surrounded by old half-fed ponies. They tried them out their little sisters, Ann and Pearl Jean. Gradually, the four rooms of their frame house with no front door on Henderson Branch were overrun with five young adults, two little girls, and two aging parents.

Golda, Nola, and Brenda Sue

It was in the fall of 2005, ten years after I first met with Imogene in 1995, that I became acquainted with a professional adoption researcher. She located Imogene's three missing children, the twins Golda and Nola and Brenda Sue Fannin.

My first call was to Edward Kidd in Morehead, Kentucky. Edward is adoptive brother to Golda and Nola. His parents renamed them Tamela and Pamela. I explained my mission. Edward Kidd told me, "Our parents are dead, but you can speak to Pamela," he offered. "She is standing right here. But go slow."

"How slow?"

"About six years old," he said softly. "Both my sisters have learning disabilities."

Next, I called the adoptive family of Brenda Sue. I was not able to connect with her or her adoptive mother Edith Blythe. A member of the Blythe family described Brenda Sue as having learning disabilities similar to the ones described by Edward Kidd. In addition, she had had corrective surgery for her cleft palate.

It was good to know they had survived and had been adopted by loving parents, but for me, a sad time to know that they, like some of their older Fannin siblings, also suffered from mental challenges. It gave me a great deal of pleasure to tell Imogene her three lost daughters were safe. The entire family was overjoyed to know about their sisters. Before Pamela and Tamela met Imogene, each wrote a letter to say, "I love you, mother. And I am not mad at you for giving me up."

I called retired Kentucky State Police officers Van Hoose and Boyle, who had rescued Golda and Nola Fannin on Paradise Hill in 1965. Both officers were glad to know the girls survived even though the early malnutrition had taken its toll.

The loving Blythe family saved Brenda Sue's life and also adopted her. She grew up in Florida where they moved after adopting Terry, another child from Boyd County. They moved to Florida because Terry had severe allergies. Brenda Sue is developmentally challenged and received special education. She did not suffer malnutrition after birth because she was kept at KDH but may have been affected by the deficiency in Imogene's diet and her tobacco use. Her adoptive mother, Edith Blythe, has not consented to a meeting with Imogene or with any of us, nor will she send a photo. We understand.

Quite often, Pamela and Tamela Kidd call me to say, "I love you." Or they send a note on flowered paper or on email. They want to know my favorite colors, my favorite food, and my favorite flower. Of course, I write back.

Tamela Kidd has married more than once. She has four children and six grandchildren. She lives in Morehead near her children but she is estranged from Edward Kidd, her adoptive brother and his family.

After their adoptive parents died, Pamela Kidd remained at home with Edward Kidd and his wife Coleen until 2009. She washed dishes in the restaurant where Colleen is a cook. At some point, she wanted a family of her own, and without a word to them or to any of us, Pamela ran away and went to live with Imogene in Ashland. Both Tamela and Pamela receive substantial stipends from their adoptive father's business pension.

Soon after Pamela arrived in Ashland, Pearl Jean introduced her to Eddie Mullins who has a similar background. Once in a while I receive a phone call or an email from Tamela to tell me how happy Pamela is, living with Eddie Mullins who I am told, "works every day." In September 2009, Pamela and Eddie moved to South Shore where they share a household with Gary and Pearl Jean. But, my 2010 word is that Pamela and Eddie are living at the Avon Apartments. In the meantime, Gary is divorced from Pearl Jean and has remarried.



Figure 32 – Mary Christian Spencer and her daughter Tatiana at Branchland, WV

Mary Spencer, elder daughter of Pearl Jean and Gary is mother to four children. Her first daughter as an infant was adopted away by the Reveal family in Ohio. Mary lives with her remaining three children and her mother Pearl Jean in Branchland, West Virginia.

Elbert

"I'm on paper. I can't leave the state of Ohio. Can you meet me halfway? Say, in Waverly?" I studied the welfare reports for Elbert Fannin:

Elbert is in the Coburn foster home and is well satisfied there. This child was burnt from the chin to the waist while he was in his parent's home at four years old. The scar tissue was so thick that his chin had drawn down to his chest. He could not raise his head. One can imagine the mental state the child was in most of his life. He has had two previous operations and then just this past month, he had his third surgery.

For the first time in ten years, he is able to raise his head. The foster mother shows great concern; in fact, she went with him to Kosair Clinic for the operation. Elbert is not considered bright but he is a fairly sensible boy. It is felt that he will be able to do enough work to support him, as he gets older. Faye Cochran, Social Worker.



Figure 33 - Elbert Fannin

"Mom and the 'old man' was out cutting Christmas trees to sell when I got burned," Elbert said. "I was cold and standing too close to the coal grate. A wind draft sent sparks back down the chimney. Set my clothes afire. Granny Martha was there with us. My big sister, Hallie Ann, run up and down the bank to get water from the well to pour on me while Granny rolled me in a blanket. They saved my life, Granny and Hallie Ann did," Elbert, his voice solid, matter of fact. Distant. He described an event he had heard about. "I was four and they sent me over to Lexington for nine months." My eyes flooded. His jaw pulled at his lower lip as the marks on his neck stretched taunt; no other part of his face moved.

His words were precise, like his scars, and without emotion. My eyelashes drooped over my tears. His story came not from his own memory but from what he'd been told, what he'd heard repeated about himself. It was memorized, practiced so he could talk about it.

"This last time, when the rest of my family moved back to Kentucky, you know after the killing at the Starlite? And some of us, well, the old man brought us up here at first to Chillicothe, because we didn't know for sure who all done it. Henry hid out in Florida with Aunt Lily for a while. When Charles and Henry T. and William Henry were sent to Lima, I stayed in Chillicothe with the Watkins family. I do jobs for them and they give me rent," his tone rose. "I talk to Mom on the phone," he added. "Now, I am on paper, so I can't leave the state," he delivered the last sentence as an afterthought. For the first time, his eyes slid away from mine.

When he pulled into the parking lot of the Ponderosa Steak House, in Waverly, Ohio, he was easy to spot. He leaned out the window flashing his wide-toothed grin. His round form was framed by a lacy

border of rusted orange spread along the bottom of his old white pickup on which the salted Ohio highways had taken a toll. It was reminiscent of what his "old man" might have driven. I hailed back.

I encircled him with my hug as far as I could reach. He touched my back with awkward, stiff arms, like sticks, as we walked inside. The steak house was busy for the early bird special. "It's my favorite place." "We've eaten," Janet Sue smiled, "I'll have coffee."

We settled into his booth in the back corner. A trim, dark-haired waitress came over to stand beside him, leaning her back to the wall. She let her hand rest on his shoulder. "I am going off duty, so I can't serve you today," she smiled down at him. He quipped, "Well, I won't leave your tip with anyone else."

Elbert balanced his elbows on the edge and fumbled with the tiny white square of cash register paper, nearly hidden between his bulky fingers. He laid it on the table, stared at it, and grasped his hands in his lap. Picked it up again; expectant. I felt the same. Janet sat down at an adjoining table to sip her coffee, out of our way and close enough to listen if she wanted to. A plastic green shade on a brass chain dangled low over our heads and flashed a soft brilliance on our hands. I brought out pictures.

"There are quite a few, so I wrote names and dates on the back too."

Elbert began to shake his head in stiff, sharp twists.

"I can't read nor write." He studied each one as I turned it over. "Can you find pictures of me before I was burned?" He bunched the photos on the seat beside him.

"Before age four? I will try, but where to look?"

"Ask Aunt Mary's girl, she might have one. I know they are scarce."

"Yes, Virginia Ann might know."

"You may keep these pictures. I made copies for you. You have three generations of Justices and Fannins for your files and the names and ages are written on the back." He fingered the pictures on the seat beside him.

"She was, to be blunt, a poor housekeeper," Elbert said in a low whisper. "The old man had to move us because our mother was not clean." Delbert frowned and spread his hands on the table. "We lived in awful places where no one else would stay. We never had running water and most usually we had a fireplace or just an old drum for a heating stove that the old man fixed up," he waved his hand in dismissal. "Real primitive like our Granny did long time ago. We never had no electricity and we always had a long walk to a creek for fresh water," his voice dropped. "As I told you about when I was burned, when I was four? It was always like that. We children always had to haul water in a bucket."

"That's the way I remember it when Susan Lynn died too. You know about our little Susan Lynn? I was little, just about seven is all, but I remember it." Elbert laced his fingers and stared at them. "A copperhead crawled into her bed and 'quiled under the covers with baby Susan Lynn where it was warm, you know?" He looked at me for agreement. A furrow formed in my brow as I shuddered. "When

Mom got up that morning, dad had already gone to work, an' baby Susan Lynn didn't stir. Mom didn't see the snake, but she saw the fang marks on her leg. She sent me out to get to a phone for the squad. I ran down the hollow 'til a car came. They took Susan Lynn to Cabell but she was already dead, pizened by the snake."

The story was odd - like his stone face, like he was repeating what he'd been told, not what he knew. The snake story wasn't new. I expected to hear it that it might shock me, to see what I would say. With each telling the mystery deepened. The snake changed color or species, as its discovery was revealed and conjecture of how it had killed Susan Lynn by squeezing her, or using its evil eye, or by injecting poison. With Elbert's version, I had my own suspicions about how the baby had actually died and it wasn't from snakebite.

"That's when we moved back to Carter County," he finished, relieved of his story. "To bury Susan Lynn. We took her to Aunt Mary's one night on Wilson Creek. She is buried right next to 'the old man,' and Granny, and Matthew, our baby brother in the family place. Matthew died the day he was born at Kings Daughters." Elbert fumbled with the receipt.

He stammered until he found the right word and brought his eyes up to mine. They brightened when he said, "They's a rose bush growing in our yard at that old house in Lavalette, with the prettiest red roses on it, but when Susan died the roses turned white. Just like that and after that, only white roses grew on that bush." I nodded and touched his hand.

"That is a problem for me, Elbert," I laid my hands on the table to get his attention, stretched my fingers. "Where did you all live after Susan was buried? Can you say where you all were staying when they came to take you children, right after Susan died?" I selected the word: stay, because they often stayed with a relative.

He blinked.

"I know you were in school at the Ramey Home by October because I have those records, but where did you live from the end of July, right after Susan died, until October in 1961?" I cringed. My approach was intense, wrong. Elbert wanted to help if he could remember.

"At Aunt Jessie's on Star Hill? No, maybe it was with Aunt Alberta on Straight Creek?" He stopped.

"Elbert, your mother told me you went to get baths when the Sheriff came for you. It was a bad time. Do you remember how you got to your Aunt Jessie's that day? That would be the second time you went to the Ramey Home."

"We walked through the woods. We lived down on Route 5, so we walked through the woods."

"Elbert, that's miles away, too far for little children to walk, don't you agree?" I looked at my list of their births. "Mary Lou was five, James was three, and you and Delbert were only eight." I bit my tongue. He said, "Mom carried us a lot. Yeah, it is too far," he conceded. I scratched on my note pad, writing nothing.

If this trek through the woods took place, it was October 1961, three months after Susan Lynn died, and Imogene was three months pregnant. By January 1962, she delivered triplets in the emergency room at KDH. They died.

"You know, I had my first skin graft when I lived at the Ramey Home?"

"No, tell me about this?"

"Well, I had to go back to Louisville at the hospital to have it done. We took the train down. Jim Stambaugh worked for Miss Ramey. He was a handyman person. He went with me on the train and came back to get me later after my surgery. The second time when he came to get me, we had to hitchhike home to Ashland."

"You hitchhiked home?"

"Because Jim Stambaugh used up our train fare to drink, so he didn't have a dime to get us home to Ashland." Elbert's eyes twinkled at his story. "He threatened me, made me swear not to tell, and I never have." Elbert laughed aloud, his expression did not change under the scars. "I think he was a drunk. Somebody said he was."

Separation was not new to Elbert. At four, after he was burned, he healed for nine months in the Kosair hospital, at Louisville, without seeing his parents. After those nine months, he returned home only to be sent to the Ramey Home two more times, along with his twin, Martha, and James. Elbert knew about separation from his family. He didn't object.

"Why do you suppose the newspaper reported you were living under a rock cliff?" I brought the focus on the one question that haunted me. Elbert fondled the tiny square of wrinkled cash register paper, crumpled it, smoothed it out, smiled at me with his toothy grin, and shrugged.

"Can we talk about foster homes you lived in?"

"Sure," he nodded. "I lived in three places besides the reformatory where they first sent us." He shuffled his feet under the table. I felt a twinge of discomfort. I wondered whether the scars on his upper body, like the deep swirls and wrinkles on his broad neck, that tugged at his lower jaw and kept his mouth open, also pulled at his posture. I blinked my question away.

"First time they put us all in the Ramey Home, but we didn't stay there very long, just a few months before we went home again," he nodded at me, as I made a note in my notebook.

The first time Elbert lived at the Ramey Home was in October 1959. He was five. The second time he lived at the Ramey Home was in November 1961; the third time was in July 1965. Elbert was age nine.

"And, the next time you went to the Ramey home was in July 1965, do you remember where you went after that?"

"They put us in the reformatory in Louisville. They called it a reception center I think, but it was just like a prison. They told us we stole something," Elbert's tone was solemn. "Henry, and Delbert and me, we were together at this place. We were locked up with other boys bigger than us. It was like a jail. We were locked up," he said again.

"Surely not locked up?" my voice shrill. "You and Delbert and Elbert, were locked up, you were just little boys? I think you and Delbert were eleven and Henry T. was ten."

"We cried a lot, we cried all the time. That was the first time. One of the big boys bothered us. You know, he bothered us, sexually."

"Was he a staff person or another boy in the reformatory?"

"He was another boy," Elbert said, "And the next time was at the foster home in London and the big son, there, bothered us."

My heart felt heavy.

"Well you know they had an older son," Elbert was watching me. "They had a daughter too," he added.

"What happened?"

"Touching mostly, he touched us all the time and he made us to touch him." His tone was flat. "We were at the Millers', I remember so well because the dad's name was Elbert too like mine. Elbert Miller."

By November 1965, in less than four months at the reformatory, the three Fannin children had been sexually molested in state custody. They were then committed to their first foster family on November 22, 1965: Mr. and Mrs. Elbert Miller in London, Kentucky, where their foster brother took up sexual molestation.

My mind zoomed back to Faye Cochran's report and Mrs. Miller's hard line of complaint just before Christmas in 1965: that all three Fannin boys were generally unsettled. She wanted to keep the boys. They had good behavior but, 'They ate too much,' was her main message. She had moved them to the bedroom near the bathroom and promised them a spanking if they continued to mess their beds. She emphasized her extra work of laundry and ironing and the amount of food the Fannin boys ate.

Elbert fumbled with the frayed scrap of receipt. His left eyebrow arched, "After that, nobody ever bothered us. We moved to the Carter's home in Sandy Hook and then to the Coburns' over in Fallsburg. They were all good to us."

"Course, we lost Henry at the Carters because Mrs. Carter couldn't keep us all three. She told she had too many boys. So, Delbert and me went to the Coburns'. We never saw Henry again 'til we all got out

and went home. That was on Henderson Branch where mom and dad lived then," Elbert's neck muscles strained his lower jaw into a half smile.

On August 1971, Beatrice Gehringer wrote her report:

Elbert remains in the Coburn home where he is well adjusted. Child Welfare stated that they talked to his teacher. He cannot read or write, but he loves school and does not present any behavior problems. He will be socially promoted to the 8th grade this year. He attended summer school. It was his decision, since the teacher and Mrs. Coburn realized it had no value except social. Mrs. Coburn took Elbert back to the Kosair Clinic in Louisville for a check up. He was told to return in one year for more surgery. He still has large burned areas around his chin and mouth, but he looks so much better. Beatrice Gehringer, SSW. Elliott County.

"Delbert got out first. He just walked off from that job training place in Louisville and hitchhiked to Olive Hill. He was sixteen." Elbert paused. "He called me at the Coburns' and wrote me a letter to come home but I stayed at the Coburns' until I was eighteen. I didn't mind not being with my family. Then Delbert went and found Henry. The Carters were real nice to Henry. They wanted to adopt him but after Delbert talked to Henry, he wanted to go home too. The Carters drove him to Olive Hill, when he wanted to leave. Then when I heard Henry went home, well I was curious about my real parents too.

"I think it was December 1971, when I left the Coburns', because I was eighteen then, that's what Delbert told me - that at eighteen I could just walk off. I'd had my last surgery at Korsair in January to take off my burn scars, and I'd been in foster care since 1965. That was the last time they took us away, in 1965," he nodded.

Elbert began his final journey through the Kentucky Foster Care System in July 1965:

July 12, 1965

To: America Holbrook District Supervisor
From: Ronald G. Moatz, Juvenile Placement Officer

Twins, Delbert and Elbert, eleven and Henry Thomas, age nine, are to be committed to Reception Center at Louisville for further socialization. A plan is underway to place their sisters, Martha age twelve, and Hallie Ann age thirteen at a boarding school at Lost Creek in Breathitt County. James age three, and Mary Lou age five will be placed at the Ramey Home in Ashland.

November 4, 1965

The Fannin boys are now ready to leave the Reception Center, but their own family home cannot be approved for their return; therefore, it will be necessary to place them elsewhere.

November 15, 1965

Carol Isham social worker at the Reception Center has found a placement for the little Fannin boys at the Elbert Miller home in London, Kentucky. She will transport them on November 22, 1965 to their new home.

November 23, 1965 all three boys were enrolled at Colony Elementary School.

December 2, 1965

Mrs. Miller is very happy with the boys, except for the second night there, Elbert messed his bed. Possibly the reason, she said, is the move from the Reception Center to their home had upset him. She said they seemed to be eating and drinking milk like pigs. Elbert is a pathetic looking little boy. Has been burned over his entire body. She said the children appreciated everything she did for them.

Mrs. Miller has assigned little chores around the house. For example, they set the table for breakfast in the morning, and are always eager to eat.

December 4, 1965

Mrs. Miller called to advise that two of the boys had messed their bed the night before. She was upset. She had promised the boys a spanking if it happened again. She moved them to the bedroom next to the bathroom.

December 15, 1965

From Faye Cochran Child Welfare Worker
to
Ronald G. Moatz Juvenile Placement officer.

Since I have not heard from Mrs. Miller for one month about the Fannin brothers, I stopped by. She said they were doing much better and had stopped messing their beds. She had decided that the boys were just eating too much, and were somewhat emotionally upset. She takes them to church and has bought new clothes for them. They drew names at church and will spend \$5 for Christmas presents. Mr. Miller has built another room upstairs where her son and the Fannin brothers sleep.

January 18, 1966

Ms Cochran wrote her follow up to Mr. Moatz:

Mrs. Miller said the Fannin boys enjoy going places, watching television and eating. They are proud of their new clothes and try hard not to get them dirty. They seem to be well satisfied in the Miller home and very happy in school.

June 22, 1966

From Faye Cochran Child Welfare Worker

to
Ronald G. Moatz Juvenile Placement officer

The Fannin boys have been in a boarding home in Laurel County since November 1965. They have made an amazing adjustment and seem happy there. However, their school Achievement is limited due to their inability to comprehend. However, they have been Socially promoted to another grade for the following school term.

I feel the boys need Special Education Classes and probably speech therapy since they also have speech problems. We do not have these facilities in this area so I feel they should be transferred to another boarding home.

July 14, 1966
From Faye Cochran Child Welfare Worker
to
Ronald G. Moatz Juvenile Placement Officer

Please refer to my memo of June 22, 1966 asking that another boarding house be found for the little Fannin boys. The Millers are now pressuring to have these boys removed from their home for good.

October 6, 1966
To: Wanda White Area Supervisor
Subject: Moving Delbert and Elbert Fannin(twins b. 9/9/54) Boyd County to third boarding house.

Moved from the home of Flossie Carter of Elliott County to the home of Mrs. Charles Coburn in Lawrence County. Mrs. Carter says four school age children who were as aggressive as they are, was too much. She was able to keep their younger brother, Henry. America Holbrook, District Supervisor.

November 29, 1971
The Honorable George Hall
Judge, Boyd County
Catlettsburg, Kentucky
Subject: Elbert Fannin b. 9-9- 1954 White/Male

Pursuant to the authority given the Department of Child Welfare by the Kentucky Revised Statutes 208.433, the Department is releasing Elbert Fannin from custody of and commitment to the Department.

Elbert Fannin was committed to the Department of Child Welfare on July 16, 1965 by Boyd County Juvenile Court. He was placed in foster care November 22, 1965 and has been in his present foster home since September 1, 1966.

Although Elbert has been exposed to acceptable social values, he wishes to return home. The Department is releasing this youth since commitment to an institution would be the only alternative to his desire to return home. . Sincerely, Ronald G. Moatz Regional Supervisor

December 13, 1971 (the last social worker is concerned about Elbert's clothes):

*Mr. Felty Fannin
Henderson Branch
Olive Hill, Kentucky 41164*

Dear Mr. Fannin:

It has been reported to this office that your son, Elbert, has left the foster home in which he was staying and has returned to your home in Olive Hill. On December 8, 1971, I picked up Elbert's clothes and other personal possessions from the Lawrence County Worker. These belongings are presently in my office in Grayson and you may pick them up any weekday before December 17, 1971. If you do not call for these belongings before the above mentioned date, I will assume that you do not want them and will give them to some needy family who does not have clothes that are as good as these.

Sincerely yours, Willis R. Rogers Child Welfare Worker cc: Ronald G. Moatz

"Elbert, please correct me, but you told me you cannot read or write, yet when I spoke to your former teacher, Sara Rice over at Fallsburg, who sends her regards, she told me: 'of course he could at that time.' "She thinks you have forgotten, is that possible?"

"I was faking it. I never learned. They all say I can't learn," he said.

"I see but you've heard of adult literacy?" He sat still. "You remember our former first lady, Barbara Bush's adult literacy program that gave us adults a second chance to learn to read?"

"The Watkins help me, and you know the family I live with in Chillicothe? They help me." I let the matter go, but Elbert wanted to reassure me. He raised his voice, "I had so many skin grafts. I was gone so much I just wasn't in school enough."

"How many skin grafts have you had?"

"Two or three I think. I was gone for months to the Hospital in Lexington, or maybe it was in Louisville. Yeah, that is where it was, Louisville."

Report:

His first graft was in 1961, at eight; when Elbert lived at the Ramey Home for a few months.

His second skin graft operation, late spring of 1971, Ernestine Kennedy, child welfare worker wrote: Elbert is now able to hold his head straight. Before surgery, he looked as though he were hanging his head in shame, constantly. This improves Elbert's appearance. He is now able to look directly at the person he is talking with, and he seems to have more confidence in himself.

His third plastic surgery operation at Kosair Clinic was scheduled for January, 1972.

"I've been married three times. My first two wives died. They were angels. Good to me and loved me even with these scars." He tried to smile at me as he touched his lower jaw. "But they had cancer, both of them. My third wife was wicked, just evil. She set me up, accused me of bothering her granddaughter."

In December, 1995, Elbert Fannin was sentenced to Ohio Reformatory for five years for molestation of a child. After serving his probation he makes his home with the Watkins Family in Chillicothe, Ohio.

2007 Velva (Velvie) Ann

"A black snake'll charm ye. It'll look you in the eye," she leaned close, searched my face. "That snake charmed baby Susan Lynn and mommy found her dead in her bed with the snake coiled up under the covers right next to her."

I pulled my lips tight over clenched teeth to let the moment pass.

Velva Ann Fannin was born four years after her sister Susan Lynn died in 1961, but she believed that a charming snake with its evil eyes and poisonous fangs had killed her baby sister. Her version was graphic.

US Highway 23 loops through Lucasville, Ohio, before it enters the Hocking Valley to north Ohio. Lucasville is a small village on the Appalachian Plateau with big connections to the ancient Shawnee mounds and it sidles up to the expansive Shawnee State Park. Its main industry is a maximum-security prison.

Near the Speedway service station, the highway widens into a strip mall fitted with liquor stores, laundry mats, and fast food cafes. I turned down an embankment onto a small bottom where a sea of house trailers and mobile homes lined up in narrow parallel spaces. Between pickup trucks and barking dogs and patches of straggly green grass uncut from the last season, narrow worn paths and cracked driveways lead to front doors.

Velvie Ann did not look like her siblings. Her stature and form and her smile set her apart somehow, but I knew it was Velvie Ann because she stood by the street to wait for us. She wore a denim shirt and jeans with a brown plaid coat. Her red-blonde, straight hair was fashionably cut into a bob that reached her ear lobes and cupped her round face. She was still a beautiful woman with radiant skin and a full figure. Her appearance matched her deep voice I had admired on the telephone.

After hugs, we posed for Janet's camera. Before we climbed into my car, Ann, as she asked us to call her, pointed across the lawn to where John, her friend, with the help of two other men, hoisted a large greasy black motor from inside a piece of machinery. Dinks and pings and cursing identified their progress. Their clothes were all the same color of grubby and were black with motor oil and grease.

"This is my cousin, Lydia and her sister, Janet."

"Want us to bring back sandwiches and some hot coffee?"

"Nawww, it's too early, we just ate." It was a 'leave us alone' bellow.

Ann's travel trailer house was set back from the street, and unlike her neighbor's houses, was pulled up broadside. Bark encrusted slab palings, pieces of car parts, broken boards, and warped metal rods leaned against the foundation in a continuous skirt. It was no longer in a condition to travel.

"Can we find a quiet back room where we could talk?" I asked.

Ann pointed to a white-framed house where red and white hand-painted signs boasted a discount breakfast. Beneath was a small, sun-bleached boastful sign: Home of the original Krispy Kreme donut recipe.

The discount signs did not impress my sister.

"Is this a clean place?"

With a mock smile, I drove across US 23 into the Burger King parking lot.

Lusty Patsy Cline music blasted. Janet went in ahead of us while I gathered my notebook and purse. In those few minutes before I stepped down, Ann withdrew the papers I had asked her to sign and tossed them on the dashboard.

"John don't want me to get 'hurt.' He won't let me sign your papers. I called my mother, and she said, "It's up to you.""

"I can't read, so I had John explain them to me."

Her mood changed, "I was tired of gettin' beat," she said simply. "My husband beat me, so I left." Tears welled into her soft brown eyes. "Mitchell was always good to our children, so I walked out. But he was caught, drunk, with some of our children in the car. He had left the others at home with another young girl. So, we were charged with abandonment. All our children were put in foster care." She twisted her fingers around a tissue. Her short nails, bitten to the quick, were rimmed in black grease. "I was abused sexually too." Tears spilled over her long lashes.

"In foster care?"

"No, it was my three brothers, Delbert, Elbert, and Henry T. From the time I was nine years old until I left home. I left home to marry to get away from them. You know, they run away from foster care to live with us."

"How were you abused? Fondling or what?

"Yes," she answered, "and almost everything."

"Did you tell Imogene?"

"Yes, just a week before I left to get married, but she didn't believe me."

"I've forgiven them for what they did." She lifted her dark hair into a toss. "I've tried to commit suicide eight times."

I touched her elbow.

"Once, I swallowed 1200 pills," she said. There was a lilt to her voice.

Was she saying she did empower herself at last? She wanted to abandon her children for good, even her Mother's lack of faith in her, or all of it? This was her way to disagree?

She recited the names of her children, their ages and birth dates, and where each one was living.
"They're nearly grown now. Two are ready to graduate from high school. My youngest is seven, lives with my older daughter."

"Do you see them?"

"No, they won't let me see them," she stared at her fingernails.

Ann did not sign my papers that day and I did not hear from her until 2004, when she sent word to call her. "I've left John. I'm living in Ironton now."

I congratulated her.

Her second call was, "We made up." Her third message had a different tone. "My old man is in jail. He didn't pay his tickets. I need three hundred dollars." Ann's familiar voice sparkled. "Guess I ought to have just signed your papers." Click.

I did not hear from any of the Fannin siblings until Pearl Jean called, "Martha Lillian wants you to call her. She can't make long distance calls."

"I need one hundred dollars to buy medicine. Hager and me went out shopping. Someone came into our house and stole our medicine." Martha was inventive. I mailed twenty dollars with a note, "This is a gift, Martha, because I don't lend money."

Then it was Velvie Ann's turn again.

"John's still in Jail. Can you help me?"

I called back, "Hey, John can stay in jail for my interest in him."

She hinted about signing my papers. I tucked a few dollars into an envelope and asked her to mail the papers even if she didn't sign them. "I will sign the papers." But she didn't.

Over the next two years, I felt anxious about Ann and I always asked, "Has she left John? Or found a job?"

Late one evening in April 2005, I returned home to find ten calls from the Paintsville, Kentucky jail. An electronic voice instructed: Press 0 to accept or 5 to decline. Who did I know in jail I wondered, as I went to bed?

The next morning I dialed 0. With that signal, Ann explained she and John went to Louisa, Kentucky, to reclaim an old car parked at her Brother Henry's place. He called the police. As it turned out, Ann had no papers for the two hundred dollar car. She was charged with theft.

Deep in the Johnson County files was another old warrant for Ann and so she was charged for not having insurance nor a driver's license five years previous. In fact, both Ann and John had Kentucky warrants outstanding from prior arrests. John for public drunkenness, but for Ann it was more difficult. They were taken to Paintsville. John paid his fine, but Ann did not have nine hundred dollars for hers.

John returned to Lucasville to borrow money for Ann's fine. He rustled up two hundred dollars from their landlord, and returned to the Paintsville jail, but officials refused his offer. He gave Ann one hundred dollars and got she said, he got drunk on the rest of it. When John returned to Lucasville, Ohio, without Ann and without any money, the landlord (who was also his employer) fired him.

"Will you bail me out?" Ann asked me.

"Just get some good books and read for the next thirty days."

"I can't read."

"Well, you will learn in thirty days."

"I was chasing an old car I bought for John," she blurted before I hung up.

Several more electronic beeps flashed on my phone before I dialed 0 again.

"Get a job and stay in Paintsville near your family," I said. Why did you buy a car for John? He is a drunk. Why not pay two hundred dollars toward your fine? You knew you owed this money. Or why didn't you give it your daughter?"

"I know, I know," she sobbed, "I want to talk to somebody."

I stayed on the phone with her; after each call, I sent a message to her mother, Imogene, and her sister, Pearl Jean, to update news of her.

"Could you help me get out?" she asked each time.

"Nope," I said. "I figure if you are in jail there is a good reason for that. You keep John in beer with your SSI check. Ask John. Hey, get a job and stop pretending to be injured or hurt. I work every day and I am sixty-seven."

"That is what you told me." Her tone was a flat.

I mailed a fifty dollar money order. "She can use it in the commissary for tobacco and snacks," the jailer said. "It will cheer her up."

"I only got to keep seven dollars because I owe forty-three dollars in booking fees. They were subtracted from the fifty."

"How did you spend your morning?"

"Slept it away. I had a nasty breakfast: a slice of bologna and toast and oats with too much sugar. I don't eat at home. I work out in the garage with John. This is nasty food."

"My fondest memory is of my grandfather making oats for me and he always added too much sugar, with a fried egg. I loved it," I injected.

Ann knew she could not expect financial help from me. She began to tell her story.

"I met Mitchell Mayhan when I was twelve. He was nineteen. Mitchell came 'wallowing up the hollow,' drunk. Just to see who lived up the Brushy Creek Hollow," he said. "I liked him right away. I told Mommy: I wanted to marry him. She said, 'Why he hasn't even talked to you.' It took him two weeks to convince me to kiss him. Mom didn't care. She was worried I guess that I might get pregnant too soon. Mitchell was from Johnson County. He was good looking, a real doll baby. Somebody told me my daddy sold me to Mitchell. I don't know if that is true."

"I was nine when my brothers started on me. It went on until I was twelve and went to foster care. I would put knives in the door to keep them out, but they came right in my room. They hurt Pearl Jean too. Delbert liked to spend the whole day with her. Delbert would whip us all the time. Only once did my daddy and mommy whip me. Henry T. was mean to daddy and knocked him down once."

"I went to a foster home. My older half-sister Vada came and took Pearl Jean and me to her house. It was a good thing, but I wouldn't tell her she did a good thing. She taught us things about housekeeping. I think she called welfare though, because she thought I was PG. I started my period then stopped for two years. Then started again."

I blinked at this irrelevant story, determined to hear her out.

"At first, Pearl Jean and I were taken to the Freeman foster family in Louisa I told them, "If you take us, there is nobody to take care of the three little girls. Hallie Ann lies around in bed with that Crum guy, and never takes care of her babies. Then welfare went back and took Hallie Ann's three babies."

"Our half-brother, Delmar Lee, and his wife, Polly, went to court to claim the three girls because the court was going to separate them. Daddy asked him to. Delmar Lee and Polly raised them."

"We went to school when we stayed with Vada. Ever day she sent us to school. Vada wouldn't let us bathe in her house. We had to go to the creek. We lived with her for two years. The long walk up the Brushy hollow where our dad lived was too far for us. Then one day, when Pearl Jean and I were walking along the road, Daddy came and took us. He stole us. When the law caught Daddy, Vada wouldn't take

us back. She said he had interfered. So they put us in Foster care in Louisa with the Freeman family again, until I ran off with Mitchell Mayhan. It was 1979, I think. I married Mitchell Mayhan in Clintwood, Virginia. My mom went along to swear I was seventeen. But I was fourteen. We lived with Mitchell's mother and I got pregnant within three months. We paid her sixty-five dollars a month to live there," Ann said.

Another collect call from Ann beeped on Saturday at 5:00 p.m. She was crying.

"Let's talk some more," I said. I helped her count the days she'd served until she felt better.

Her voice brightened and she told me about Mitchell, born in 1980, and who lives in Martin County. He has a girlfriend and baby girl, Emma Lee.

Kim, born May 23, 1981, married to Clifford Fairchild, has two babies. She has kept her younger sister, Tinaka, age eight, for the past two years. They live at Little Mud Lick near Paintsville, Kentucky.

Scott lives with Kim or wherever he can. He was born April 4, 1983, and is twenty-two.

He does not smoke or drink and works in a garage on Highway 201.

Jonathan, born May 28, 1984, lives in Ohio.

Heather, born March 1, 1987, is graduating from Martin County School and lives in foster care.

Josh is in foster care in Martin County.

Ann's daughter Tiffany was fifteen living in foster care; she has cerebral palsy.

"Do you want to hear how I lost my children to foster care?" Ann asked on the next call. "I wanted to go to a funeral for Punk's wife, Maria, but my husband didn't want me to go. 'If you go, you can't come home.' I went anyway, and stayed for fourteen days. When I come back, I left him again and our children behind, for good. He was fine with the children until he drank. Then one day, he left the little ones with Heather to babysit, when she was only fourteen. Mitchell was arrested for driving drunk, and he had some of our children in the car with him. Welfare took all the children and charged us with abandonment. They were placed in foster homes. Nobody contacted me about it. Mitchell is homeless now. He lives in a car alongside the road wherever he can park."

On Saturday, April 23, 2005, Ann called twice in the morning, worried about whether John will come with the money to pay her fine. "Would you call him and leave word for him to come? To be there!"

I left word on an answering machine. A startled woman named Angie called to say I had misdialed. Ann memorizes everything, including phone numbers.

Each time Ann called I sent word to Pearl Jean, Imogene, and Hallie Ann.

"Tell them I love them," she said and I reassured Ann of their love for her.

She called again on Monday morning, April 26, unclear about the charges against her.

I called Johnson County officials to get the case number. Later that day, Ann was worried about her SSI check. "John will cash it and get drunk again." Was Ann worried about his getting drunk or the loss of her funds? She decided to send her daughter to Lucasville with a note for the postmistress. So that was settled. Ann is afraid their landlord has set her things outside too, when he evicted John for lying to him.

Ann recited another memorized phone number. When I called, Dorothy Blanton assured me, "Her belongings are at Avanelle's, and they are safe."



Figure 34 - Janet Sue on our first trip to Lucasville, Ohio 1995 to meet with Velvie Ann Fannin

Ann has left dozens of call back signals on my phone by now, and I have accepted six calls. Each call lasts about five minutes. Sometimes she cries, and sometimes she complains about the food, and she is always bored.

The Court Clerk called with a list of charges against Ann: *No car Registration, not wearing a seat belt and no operator's license or insurance -outstanding since: October 1999.* For seven years, she might have dealt with this obligation, and she has - by staying out of Kentucky. Initially the fine was ninety-nine dollars. Since Ann failed to appear in court, a

Bench Warrant was issued. No wonder Ann was hiding out in Lucasville, Ohio, where she was safe from this Kentucky warrant.

"Everyone knows to wear a seat belt, and how much trouble is it to go down and get a driver's license?" I asked.

"I can't read."

"They give oral exams. If you identify stop signs and you can memorize rules, certain shapes, and colors. There is nothing wrong with your eyes? Ann, ask the jailer for the driver's pamphlet and, while you are in jail, you have time to memorize the driver's regulations, and at this same time, you might teach yourself to read?"

"Yeah, I could do that, but the jailer here won't help me. They won't answer my questions."

"I understand charitable groups come to sing and to talk with inmates."

"Yeah, they do come. I guess I could ask one of them to help."

"If you stay in jail and serve your time, you can serve off a nine hundred dollar fine. You are essentially making thirty dollars a day, being fed and given shelter, and you are saving your SSI check. When you get out in forty-five days, you will have nearly eight hundred dollars! Or, why not make a proposal to your

judge? Johnson County doesn't really want to feed you for forty-five days. Offer your SSI check when it comes in this week and ask for time served."

"We don't see the Judge. I don't have a hearing. I am already sentenced because I didn't show up seven years ago. That sentence is already imposed, and I have no hearing scheduled. I won't be having one. Besides, now we just see the judge over TV. It's the new system. I saw the judge; it was a woman, when I first came in."

The next day, I called Judge Holbrook to point out Ann had served two-thirds of her forty-five days sentence, that John had not returned with money for her fine as he promised and likely would not. I asked the judge to release her for time served. She did. John came for her.

My telephone bill for Ann's collect calls was two hundred and fifty dollars. After she left jail, I heard she went back to live with John in Lucasville, Ohio. Ann can now travel legally anywhere in Kentucky.

I received one more collect call from Ann from her daughter's home in Paintsville, Kentucky. "I'm living in Paintsville again because John was arrested for stripping stolen cars in the garage where he worked. He's in Jail in Lucasville. He was blamed, but it was his boss who was doing it." I ignored her hint for his bail money.

In 2009, Velvie Ann is living with her daughter in Paintsville, Kentucky. Her minor children live in foster care. She reported, "John is serving hard time in prison at London, Ohio."

Sara Rice Lawrence County, Kentucky

Louisa, Kentucky, is a sparkling town named for the Levisa River, where it joins the Tug River to form the unpredictable Big Sandy. The muddy Tug begins its erosive journey in West Virginia, bearing a steady transfer of Appalachian silt bound for the Mississippi delta. It encircles Louisa like a giant hug.

US Highway 23, the main thoroughfare to Louisa, is peppered with modern eateries, gas stations, and signs reminding us it is called the Country Music Highway for good reason. Near this curve, Loretta Lynn and Crystal Gayle, Ricky Skaggs, and a myriad of other gifted eastern Kentucky country singers grew up.

Near the A&W Root Beer stand, a small road dips down the ridge past Paul's food market and saunters back into the 1900s. There the neon sparkle tapers off into the gingerbread cutouts of Victoriana. On nearly every block, at least one white frame house is converted to a small business or a gift shop, as the 21st century takes a toe hold. Howard See's old insurance office is now an espresso house open part time. Across the corner, there's a gleaming modern pharmacy and just past the white painted bricks of Louisa's first jail, where U.S. Supreme Court Justice Fred N. Vinson was born and grew up, the city of Louisa backs up to the edge of the Mountain State.

A modest sign beside the bridge invites visitors to cross over into West Virginia to explore Fort Gay, or to follow Route 3 along the muddy Tug River. I've accepted those invitations before, however, and today my mission is research at the Lawrence County Library.

Legend in the Fannin family network has them living at Fallsburg, not far from Louisa, where Golda and Nola were born in 1959. Again, in the late 1960s, Delbert and Elbert lived in foster care with the Coburn family in this obscure part of Lawrence County. Later on in the 1970s, after four sets of twins and three singles had been siphoned off, only two little girls, Velva Ann and Pearl Jean remained with Imogene and Felty at Blaine in another part of this sprawling county. There was no other place except the Library to begin my search for the records of the Fannin family. This much I already knew.

Set between an aged, red brick two story relic of the 19th century and the ancient railroad track, the Lawrence County Public Library is no small piece of archival pride. Their smiling assistant librarian listened to my story, before he fished out book after book, returned each one, discovered yet another, until he exhausted the history stash from his reference room.

I stared at the neat shelves of books, wondering where to turn next, because I still had found nothing, when he asked, "Don't you want to speak with Mary?"

"Mary?" I asked.

"Yes, our Librarian, Mary McGuire."

And just like that I met her.



"Hello, I'm Mary McGuire." Curly hair framed her face and bobbed like miniature gray springs as she extended her hand. Three adolescent girls worked at computers set up along the walls of her small office.

"I am searching for school records or yearbooks for Fallsburg - anything that will give info for the 1960s, specifically on a nomadic family named Fannin." My voice deepened and I sagged into an empty chair. After the early morning drive, no lunch, and my perusal of the reference library, with a half smile I asked, "May I sit down?" She nodded toward the computers, and she pressed her finger to her lips.

"One of the students, a Fannin boy, stabbed the school principal." The computers keys stopped but wheels whirred in Mary's eyes. She pressed buttons on her telephone. "Wanda this is Mary McGuire. Do you recall the Fannin boys who lived in Fallsburg in the 1960s? You do, because they had the same name as your Fannin family? Of course."

Figure 35 - Sara Rice

I sat on the edge of my chair to read her upside down notes, or squares as they were. "Wanda Fannin remembers the family but she doesn't recall a knife or a stabbing incident. I'll call Sara Rice. She was a teacher at Fallsburg." She shook her head at me with a wry smile. Her hand froze over the phone. "This won't be easy. Sara likes to visit."

Sure enough, Mary's quick half smiles rippled up her face as Sara's responses dipped, branched, and took off in irrelevant directions attested to by the high round extension of Mary's eyebrows and nods. I settled into my chair to listen. Mary began the winding down process from Sara Rice who hung to her favorite topic: the students at Fallsburg School.

"Sara had the Fannin boys in her class. She remembers Delbert and Elbert very well. At one time, in 1965, that family lived in an abandoned house next to her land." Mary frowned, "but she describes the knife incident differently." Her curls bobbed, "Sara says she took the knife herself, because she asked Delbert to hand it over and he did. He just handed it over to her. Nobody was stabbed." One of the young girls came to stand by Mary's chair. Mary whispered and the girl returned to the computer.

"How about the principal of Fallsburg School?" I began.



Figure 36 - Sara Rice by the ancient Rice home

"Homer Thompson? Is *dead*." Mary rattled off succeeding principals and punctuated each name with: is *dead*. When she reached the fourth, we sighed.

"Sheriffs?"

"Nope, they are all dead." She glanced at her watch. It was closing time. She wrote the phone numbers for Sara Rice and Wanda Fannin and extended her hand to me. She had done all she could and it was plenty.

"Let me know how it works out," she said.

I smiled and nodded my thanks to her assistant as he locked the door behind me.

Outside, in the sunlight, my energy surged as a motel sign blinked at me. It was sixty miles back to Grayson and since I wanted to return to Louisa next morning, I considered staying in this charming historic town, but my second thought of roast chicken and a glass of sherry beckoned. I headed east on the

Country Music Highway - US 23 - to pick up I64 to Grayson. Over my cell phone, Sara Rice's clear tones, broken at times through the mountain, blurted an enthusiastic, "Yes" to my query. She would see me.

Sara Rice at Fallsburg

The next morning, large, lacy snowflakes floating onto my windshield displaced the bright warm sun of the previous afternoon. Finding Sara's white cottage meant retracing my tracks across the icy hills of Route 1185 and its s-turns, looking for the "sharp corner at the bottom of the first big hill," more than once. At last the short lane dropped, just as Sara had described. At the bottom of one of the big hills, my shoulders relaxed. I drew up to a small white cottage. Brilliant green faux grass carpeting stretched taut over an ample front porch and cushioned a large willow twig rocker. Covered in floral pink cushions the hand crafted chair rocked of its own accord pushed by wind drafts. Sara Rice opened her front door as I crossed her yard.

"I found you; what a pretty place you have." A primitive foliage grotto encompassed her cottage.

Snow floated through a hole in the sky, edged above us with a canopy wreath of tree branches. Beyond their leafy edges and her patch of green, a wide path with two shallow but indelible wheel marks dug into the weeded ground, which overran from the highway across her yard into the woods. A second, graying, two story frame house stood sentinel there, just at the edge as it must have for years, while this newer white frame cottage had become main house, from which door Sara now beckoned.

This procession of houses had moved closer to the paved road and there was room for at least one more in the line. "Your descendants might build another newer house, and move on in this generational assembly line of Rice homes?"

"This white cottage is already the third Rice home. The original homestead burned down. See over the hump next to the sandstone rocks of the root cellar?" Sara pointed into the trees. "It's all fallen down now. That is the place you've come to see, but I'll show you later. Come in." Sara's blue eyes flashed the welcome she completed with her firm handshake. On her hearth, a yellowed ceramic gas heater on high fancy legs blazed its warmth before a bricked in fireplace. "Salvaged," Sara explained, "from the old house next door." At her touch, blue flames flickered and bounced.

I peeled my fleece shirt. "I keep my house warm. I don't have to pay for the gas anyway," she waved her hand in dismissal. "I have a natural gas well on my farm, and we pipe it right in. I dug out my scrapbooks and albums for you. I found pictures of Delbert and Elbert Fannin," she beamed. On her couch, before her fire, she spread the books across my knees and flipped the yellowed pages. From forty years ago, under the cracked plastic, Delbert and Elbert's young faces shone. They sported white shirts and ties with dark pants, dressed like three dozen other Fallsburg Glee club singers who'd lined up for this picture.

"Delbert was a handsome young man," she handed over a second snapshot. Next to a 4-H sign she'd inscribed, Delbert Fannin and Dean Webb. "They're painting a sign for our Fallsburg 4-H," Sara went on, "Delbert was crazy over that Caudill girl. They say he wrote to her from the reform school. I used to be a 4-H leader," she interrupted herself. "I worked at it through the years I taught. Even after I retired, but they kept changing things so much," her voice tapered off. Her fingers smoothed the pictures.

"I understand the Fannins moved in nearby. Can you show me where that was?" I asked.

In reply, Sara lifted a peach-colored wool coat from a hook on the wall, flopped the hood over the back of her head, grasped a polished walking stick, and jab-stepped across the front porch down the steps, over the trail, past her ancient family home, and guided me to the edge of the woods. I caught up as she stopped to look back at the gray frame house. She leaned on her stick, "This was my grandparents' home. I ought to keep it up, but I can't seem to hire anyone any more to work."

With her sprightly step, she followed the trail into the dark shadows under black oaks threaded with grape vines. Just beyond a short rise she pointed down the slope, "There is where the house was. It burned though. It was a small house, built of logs. It burned years after the Fannins lived here. Others lived in it too, since the Fannins lived here. See? Someone left their old car," She pointed. A rusted yellow shell with fins peeped through the dead leaves.

Ahead of us, the trail cornered at a flat spot and went on up over the ridge. A pile of graying crosscut ties obstructed that path. Sara turned back towards the creek. "The house where the Fannins lived was there, on the other side of the old cellar. Next to the creek. Sometimes it floods," she added. Through the rotted leaves, a pyramid of chiseled, oblong sandstone squares marked the caved in fireplace.

Over our heads, the canopy of limbs, locked in a braid with warty grape vines, gnarled and black, clinging for their lives, embraced into a strangled parasitic path, growing towards the light and out of sight. It was primitive here. Natural too. But it was not easy to understand why the Rice family had built their first homestead on this bank.

Perhaps Sara's ancestors had cut the trees back then, but today it was a cold, wet, and dismal spot - like a leafy cave. Could I imagine a cold mattress on the floor of a dank cabin and two baby girls being born with eight siblings watching on a cold night in November? Was there snow like today? Could I actually smell the mold? I shuddered. Still, they had survived, but I wondered how Imogene had managed - even with the help of a midwife. All they had for warmth was a fireplace and some wet wood and maybe an oil drum.

"It's been forty years near Thanksgiving of 1964, since the Fannins moved here," Sara reminded me. "I figured it out after you called. In the middle of the night when they came. Cold and snowy like today," she added.

I wondered how it looked to them that first cold morning after they arrived. Perhaps this was a grassy slope then, but now the towering oaks, locusts, and quick-growing sycamores had matured into permanent sky covers, blotting out the sun and small growth. My eyes traced a black walnut limb dangling electrical wires carried by upward growth, wrapped in a knot, left after the fire.

"So, did the old house have electricity in 1964?"

"Maybe," she said. "Although they moved into the house in the middle of the night," she repeated. "As I recall," Sara mused, "Mrs. Fannin gave birth to twins that first night on an old mattress. At our feet, she drew her walking stick across our path. "This is the edge of my land and the house they moved into over there was on my cousin Maud's land. She didn't even know they were living here. We all thought she

had rented it out. It took a while before word got to her. She asked for rent, of course, so Mr. Fannin moved over the hill to the Diamond place. It was just another old house," Sara explained.

Sara footed her walking stick on an uneven patch of grass littered with broken limbs and leaves pushed up by the winds, tamped it until she was satisfied, tucked the stick under her chin, and wrapped her hands as its cushion. She gazed up the side of the hill that faced us. I followed her gaze.

"That is mine too." She waved toward a distant stream and the brown leaf-covered hillside. I have seventy acres up here. It used to belong to my grandparents. It was their gift to me, along with the natural gas well." Sara's voice elevated. "I never did do anything with it. It looks just like it always has, wild and natural."

We strolled back through the snowflakes. She stopped before a collapsed shed beside the old path. Sandstone hewn rocks held up thick oak boards. Her eyes focused on its sagging tar paper roof. As if she'd just noticed for the first time. Sara said, "I wanted to keep that root cellar, but it's falling down. It's at least 150 years old. My grandfather built it."

The rough cut wood door to the old shed was torn from its rusted hand-forged hinges and lay on the ground nearly covered with snow. With both hands, I reached for it, wrestled it out of its bed in the brown leaves, and tugged it in under the old roof. "My dad's old saddle was in that shed but I don't see it now," she worried. "Leather won't keep out in the weather too well."

I asked to take her picture and she pushed her hood back to ease the shadows for me as she stood before her grandparents' ancient home. She smoothed the creamy yellow hood as it cupped the jaw line of her gentle face. In her other hand she held the top of her makeshift walking stick. Back on her front porch, she talked as I tugged the willow twig chair into the light.

"My nephew wants me to leave this chair to him in my Will. It's old."

I nodded. "Now we have you and your chair preserved in celluloid. I will send the pictures to you."

Sara rocked, while I sidled back down the path to take one more look at the lonely birth spot of twins Golda and Nola Fannin.

Sara said, "I understand a social worker came and took Mrs. Fannin and her twins over to the Health Department the next day. Ernestine Kennedy, the social worker came, I think it was. She used to be a school teacher."

"Am I to understand they arrived in the middle of the night and Mrs. Fannin gave birth that same night to twins? What about furnishings for the house?"

"She had an old mattress. Now, I don't know whether it was already in the house or they brought it with them. I don't know how they arrived exactly, except they drove in his old truck and they came in the middle of the night. I was sound asleep," Sara shook her head. She gazed across the yard to the distant creek. "I didn't see much of them because the children weren't in school. Then close to Thanksgiving,

three of the girls were out here in my bottom there next to the creek. The older girls, I guess. They were out here wading in the water puddles. They were wearing summer dresses. Frilly, ruffled dresses even though it was cold and wading in the icy water. I guess they took a liking to those pretty new dresses someone gave them. I imagine their legs were chafed from the wind and water, but there they were, wading." Sara stared at the creek, "It was a few days before Thanksgiving and very cold by then. A midwife came, they said."

Sara said, "It was their relative, and they named one of the twins for her." In the Lawrence County Health Department, the birth notations of November 11, 1964, marked the Fannins' move to Lawrence County.

It was Golda Sparks Ball, sister to Felty's first wife, Versa, who had come in the night. Perhaps she had located the old house for them ahead of time. One of the twin girls, Golda was named for this helpful woman. Felty named the other tiny girl, Nola, for his brother Joe's wife, who, as a young mother of three, died of burns after she fell in the fireplace during a seizure.

Six months later, July 6, 1965, in Boyd County, that Sheriff George Hall came to the Fannin home on New Buckley Road with an order to take Nola and Golda. Tucked into the arms of Janet Stevens, the court appointed deputy, Sheriff Hall drove directly to hospital for treatment of their malnutrition and jaundice.

At Sheriff Hall's direction, State Police officers, J.D. Boyle and Van Hoose took the other Fannin children: Hallie Ann, Delbert, and Elbert, Martha, James, Mary Lou, and their mother Imogene to the Catlettsburg Court House. Charles, twin to Hallie Ann, was out with his father at the time. Imogene would not see Golda and Nola again for forty-one years. Her other children were sent back to the Ramey Home and to foster homes in Morehead, Sandy Hook, and Morehead, and she did not see some of them for nearly a decade.

"Of course, word got out about this family living over here. Church people brought food and clothing for the holiday. Somebody was always going past my house to take something to them," Sara frowned. "I guess that was how they lived. They depended on the kindness of others. Somebody said, and I can't remember who, that Mr. Fannin looked at the food boxes and asked, "No coffee?"

"How long did they live here?" I asked.

"Not long. They did not seem to stay long anyplace." Sara paused to consider. "After my cousin, Maud Hayes, asked for rent, they moved over the ridge to the Howard Diamond place. I heard another time that Mr. Fannin tried to haul off the clothes they were given and when his old truck would not make it up that ridge," she pointed to the crest of the hill, "he dumped all those gifts beside the road and there they lay. That is what I was told." Sara shook her head in disbelief at her own story. "That was a story circulated at school.

"Now, the children did not go to school when they lived here in Maud's house," Sara assured me. "It was after they left here and moved over the ridge to the Diamond place. Well, it was actually the Lillian

Taylor place. She married a Diamond after her first husband died. From there they walked down through the woods to catch the bus to Fallsburg School."

"They did not start school until after Christmas. I know that because I rode the school bus too and they got on the bus after Christmas vacation. I don't drive. I did not have any of them in my classroom at that time because I taught 5th and 6th grades, and they were all too young for my grades." Sara continued, "That is until Elbert and Delbert came back to Fallsburg later in fall of 1968 to live in foster care with the Coburn family. They were older than most fifth graders by about three years, but they were enrolled in fifth grade. They were far behind in their work, of course.

"Ernestine Kennedy used to teach with me over at Fallsburg before she started social work. One day, she was overheard to say: "Sara Rice has TB." TB was a real problem then. It's like saying AIDS, today. Ernestine didn't know she was speaking to my Uncle. He came right over to tell my parents. There were no X-ray machines in Louisa then, so I had to go way off for that. I was thin, so I guess that is the reason they all thought I really had TB. I was cleared, but it surely made me feel uncomfortable.

Back at school, I handed my X-ray to Ernestine but she didn't apologize. Later, I heard she told everyone, 'Sara Rice is just an 'emergency teacher.' That was supposed to mean I had been drafted because they could not find anybody else to teach. I had my teaching certificate from Marshall University, though. I don't know why she paid so much attention to me," Sara chuckled. "Ernestine was an honor student. I hope she was happier as social worker."

Snowflakes settled on our shoulders. Sara stopped rocking and held her front door open for me. Beside her couch, she had stacked dozens of albums and scrapbooks filled with rows of neat little square school pictures. Sara had written names of her students and the year on the edge of each photo.

"I kept photos of all the students, not just the ones I taught," she explained her cache. "You can take these pictures of Delbert and Elbert. They might like to have them." She removed the small squares from under the yellowed plastic pages. "I took pictures of students the other teachers didn't want to keep," Sara said again. "I maintained a birthday box for my students too so we could acknowledge their birthdays, but I don't see Delbert or Elbert in my birthday box." She flipped the plastic covered pages as she recited personal accounts of her students and how well some had done. On the lower corner of the page, she pointed to a smiling brown haired boy, and shook her head. "That is Craig Workman. He got to running from the law. Then at the last minute, he dove into the Levisa. They found his body way down the River."

She turned the page and looked up to catch my eye. "Did you know," she asked with a big smile, "I taught our Governor Paul Patton?" Sara gestured to a prominent display on a far wall of her living room.

"How could I have missed this?" I laughed. There, surrounded by pictures of Governor Patton was the familiar seal of her Kentucky Colonel honorarium, signed personally in his bold scroll by Governor Patton, "To Sara."

"Delbert and Elbert will like these pictures, Sara, because they have no early pictures of themselves. Their folks moved around so much and the houses they lived in burned. Elbert wants a picture of himself before he was burned and disfigured. I am not hopeful about that, though, he was so young, only four years old," I explained.

Sara took up her story, "I taught forty-two years in all and I became principal at Fallsburg, but my promotion to teach 5 and 6th grades at Fallsburg was an adventure for me. I remember it still," Sara's eyes twinkled. "Early in my teaching career, I taught at a one room school called Deep Hole, for two years." Then I moved over to Yatesville. Her voice deepened, "That was the original Yatesville where the post office used to be. It was my second school and I could walk to both schools. Then one morning Bill Cheek, the superintendent, came to my school house and said, "Sis, come go with me." He always called me 'Sis.' We drove to Fallsburg School where he escorted me into the 5th and 6th grade classroom. It was just one room for both grades then. He introduced me to the students: 'This is your new teacher, Miss Sara Rice.' I was shocked. He hadn't said a word on the drive over. There I was with forty-five new students and I had been teaching twenty-six students at Yatesville.

"Of course, back at Yatesville my young students waited for me to return. Bill Cheek had brought in a new teacher to take over my classes but I didn't know that, so I didn't take my lunch sack. The new teacher just had a high school education. Later she told me that my students would not allow her to touch my lunch. They guarded it for me because they thought I would be back that day. I never married," she said. That settled the idea of another generational Rice house.

"Elbert? Can you tell me about Delbert's twin, Elbert? During all of this, how was he doing?"

"More quiet, backward, he got along with the other students. They were twins, but they were nothing alike. You know, Elbert had been burned. I don't know whether he was burning brush or what caused his burns. He was scarred so terribly right up under his chin and on his arms."

"Elbert was not burning brush. He was only four years old when his clothes caught fire in front of a coal grate. He was trying to keep warm at his Granny's house. She was watching all the Fannin children, all eight of them while his parents Felty and Imogene were out cutting Christmas trees to sell.

"What I'd really like to talk to you about is the knife incident. It happened in your classroom as I understand you told Mary McGuire yesterday?"

"Oh my, no, there was no stabbing incident," she encircled her cheek with the palm of her hand and shook her head as she spoke. "On a Monday morning, it must have been, one of my students came to me and whispered, ""Delbert has a knife."""

"So, before first recess I explained how a classroom was not a good place for a knife - that somebody might be hurt. He handed it right over. There was no problem."

"Delbert did not stab anyone and certainly not our principal Homer Thompson," she assured me. Her brow furrowed and she went on. "But that was not the end of it; somehow, that was the beginning of trouble for Delbert. Something else had happened on the schoolyard a few days before. It was

something so terrible it hurt Delbert's feelings. I don't know exactly what it was, but it shamed him in such a way that he became conflicted with Principal Thompson, all right. I was not clear about that when Mary called me so I called Dean Webb," her voice was low.

"Dean Webb was in class with Delbert and Elbert at that time. Dean still lives here at Fallsburg and he recalls that Mr. Thompson called Delbert in and brought Johnny Caudill in too. Johnny was Delbert's good friend and the principal paddled them for something they did outside. It was a hard punishment, and it made Delbert mad. I guess he wasn't used to discipline," Sara frowned.

"As I piece things together over that incident, it must have happened on a Friday, because the Coburn boy told the Judge. The Coburn boy came to the Judge's chamber for the hearing, because Mr. Coburn was sick. The Coburn boy told the Judge and I was there too, that Delbert has spent the better part of Sunday sitting on the front porch sharpening his knife on a whetstone." Sara twisted her hands, "I don't know why the Coburns didn't just take the knife away instead of letting him bring it to school. It might have changed everything for Delbert."

"Word was sent in all directions I guess, because I told Mr. Elkins myself - Bill Elkins was our attendance officer - about the knife locked up in my cabinet. The next thing I knew, Lawrence County jailer Coleman Perry came over from Louisa and took Delbert home with him. Jailer Coleman lived on the first floor under the Jail. Then every morning the Jailer brought Delbert to the bus stop and that went on until the hearing in the Judge's chambers took place.

"I asked to go to the hearing too. I took Delbert's drawings and showed his school work." Sara paused, "He sang in Glee Club and completed his 4-H projects. You saw the picture of Delbert painting the 4-H sign?" She reminded me. "He was a talented artist. I thought so, anyway. Delbert was a very likeable young man and I wanted the judge to know that he was not a ruffian, that he had a good side and great potential. But his foster mother had her own opinion in the matter. Mrs. Coburn was emphatic she would not have Delbert back in her home after the knife incident. That was that. She kept Elbert though, but she refused to take Delbert back," Sara said. "Delbert didn't come back to Fallsburg School after the hearing. They separated those boys and they were twins," Sara shook her head.

"Then after a while we heard Delbert wrote to jailer Coleman to ask him to send a pair of shoes he'd left behind and to send them to a Boys reformatory. We knew then what had happened. He had been sent away to reform school over the knife." Sara wrapped her hand around her chin again. "This was bad news to me. It was so sad and I thought it was so odd, too, that he would write about his shoes, but I guess he really liked those shoes."

"According to Delbert, he was sent to boy's reformatory for two years. As you say, he was barely fifteen. They kept him for a year at the Barkley Boys Camp, then they sent him to Louisville to an opportunity school to learn a trade for his second year, but before he finished, he just walked off and hitchhiked home to his real parents." I added, "It did not end well for Delbert."

Sara nodded, "I never knew exactly what happened but I did hear tell he wrote to that Lisa Caudill girl for a long time after he was taken away. She was Johnny's sister. He really liked her and she liked him

too. I don't know what her parents thought of those letters, if they knew at all." Sara anticipated me, she said, "Lisa married somebody else though and she died a few years back."

Tying Up Loose Ends

In 2004, former jailer Coleman Perry, retired and living in Lexington, described his work:

"My service as jailer at Louisa was very difficult. My wife and I lived on the first floor and the jail was right over our heads. It was noisy. We never slept well. I was pleased to finish my service as jailer when it ended."

"I don't remember Delbert Fannin or driving him to the school bus. There were so many young children to take care of. My procedure though, was that if I had responsibility for an older boy, I locked him in one of the cells at night, for his own protection. He would have had dinner with us and then he slept in a cell. Sometimes, my wife and I took the young children right into our apartment and kept them with us. There was no place else to keep children back then in Lawrence County, or we took them over the hill to the Ramey Home in Ashland."

While I called on Sara Rice, I had sent the signed CF305 forms to the archives in Frankfort. A woman called to say she needed a check for the copies. "Yes, I found their reports and I've redacted them."

For the next week, I read the brief letters and memos written back and forth by social workers from four Kentucky counties for several years, as Delbert and Elbert and Henry Fannin passed through their hands.

Ernestine Kennedy: on Delbert Fannin.

On November 12, 1969 Delbert Fannin age 15, was committed to the Barkley Boys Camp in Marshall County, Kentucky.

November 16, 1965

Carol Isham Social Worker at the Reception Center in Louisville, Kentucky wrote:

Under basis of commitment: Incorrigibility. The charge is parental neglect and resisting officers.

Under reason for placement: Delbert is a well-behaved little boy. He responds to adult authority. He responds to social re-training.

Don Pilson, Social Worker for the Barkley Boys Camp, summarized to Group Leader, Jim Henson:

Delbert Fannin was committed to DCW on July 16, 1965 along with three of his brothers, Elbert, Henry and James . They are charged with incorrigibility for resisting officers.

December 15, 1969

Delbert served one year in the Barkley Boys Camp:

Ernestine Kennedy sent an Interoffice Memorandum from Louisa, Kentucky to: the Reception Center

Delbert is an extremely aggressive child. In 1965, he drew a rifle on the sheriff who tried to arrest his mother. His intelligence is within normal limits, however he is not up to grade level. He is presently at Kentucky Reception Center for the second time and he is the subject of this report.

Ernestine Kennedy continues to describe Delbert Fannin:

Item V. Delinquency History:

In 1965, Delbert Fannin was arrested on a charge of resisting officers.

VI. Developmental History:

No known problems centered on the birth or early behavior.

Ernestine Kennedy

Delbert hasn't seen his parents or any of his brothers and sisters since his commitment in 1965 when he was 11 years old. Delbert indicates his reason for blowing up at the Coburn home was his dissatisfaction with the way work responsibility was distributed. He said he and his brother Elbert were doing most of the work, and the Coburn brothers were being paid.

Delbert has missed a great many schoolboy activities a child his age would normally take part in. He had never seen a football game until this past month when he came into the jail to stay with Coleman Perry. Delbert said when he and Elbert tried to play football at school, they did not know how, because they did not understand the game.

Delbert needs to be placed with a younger couple. He is intelligent enough to know he is deprived. He is a strong, active boy but has no opportunities for recreation. He keeps himself well groomed and nicely dressed. I think he has a deep desire to be like normal boys. It might be helpful if his artistic ability could be developed.

He also said he wants to go home to his real parents because he had recently found out his parents are living in Catlettsburg, that his father has steady work. Delbert says he is old enough to work and help them. He also read in the newspaper where his niece has contracted a rare disease called tick fever, and she is only age two, and he wants to see her, and his real parents. They have new found social status and a home where he can live with them.

On October 24, 1969, according to Welfare records, Delbert lost his temper at school when he was discovered writing sex notes. He took his knife to school under his clothes and threatened his teacher. He was brought to the Lawrence County jail. At a meeting to determine the facts, Sara Rice, Principal at Fallsburg, Charles J. LeMaster, Sheriff Edgar VanHoose, County Judge David Whites, Attorney for Delbert, Frank Coburn, foster brother and Mrs. Charles Coburn, foster mother along with Coleman Perry, County Jailer all came to discuss what was best for Delbert.

Faye Cochran, Child Welfare Worker

"Since 1966, Delbert has been making his home with Mr. and Mrs. Coburn at Webbville, a remote section of Lawrence County. This is a below average home, culturally, educationally, and financially. Mrs. Coburn has three other foster children under her care. She is intelligent, down to earth, and a very sensible person who has managed well. She told me she has had no trouble with Delbert until about a year ago. He began to be aggressive, hard to handle and was stealing little things."

Delbert was separated from his twin brother, Elbert, and sent to the Barkley State Boys farm in Marshall County for one year.

February 23, 1970. After one year at Barkley Boys Camp, from a letter written by James B. Hildreth, Superintendent of the Barkley School to Ernestine Kennedy dated,

Delbert received word that his last foster father, Charles Coburn had died. This caused him alarm because he considers the Coburn family to be his home and where his twin, Elbert still lives. Delbert has deep feelings and frustrations about his familial situation. His feelings are coming to the surface in group therapy. He still has not accepted the fact that his real family is unable to provide a home for him. He wants to go home and help them. Our group is offering him some consistency and forcing him to realistically look at his home situation. Now with the death of his foster father, Charles Coburn, Delbert is puzzled as to what lies in his future.

March 5, 1970

Ernestine Kennedy wrote:

It is true that Delbert's foster father, Charles Coburn died one month ago. I have asked Mrs. Coburn to write to Delbert to explain and possibly alleviate some of his concern.

I discussed Delbert's case with my supervisor, Ann Louise Wikoff. She cited our budget crisis;

That no plans are to be made to remove Delbert from Barkley because Central Office directs that foster children in institutions, cannot be removed until further notice. In any event, the Coburn home will not be open to Delbert in the future either. Ernestine Kennedy.

On August 25, 1970,
Delbert Fannin
Barkley Boys Camp,
Kentucky Dam Village State Park,
Gilbertsville, Kentucky.

Dear Delbert:

You have been approved for Vocational Evaluation at the Opportunity Workshop of Lexington. In addition, I will contact your family in Olive Hill as a possible home for you after your vocational training is completed.'

Delbert, the final word on your going home does not come from me, since you, nor your parents are in my Region. It will depend on the Counselors who are working with you at Barkley, at the Opportunity workshop, and the social workers in the county where your parents now live.

Keep me informed about your activities and any change in your address.

Ernestine Kennedy, Child Welfare Worker

On November 5, 1970

Beatrice Gehringer, public assistance clerk

to Child Welfare supervisor, Ron Moatz:

Only three Fannin children remain in foster care. Delbert, who was in the Opportunity Workshop in Lexington after being in Barkley Boys Camp for one year, for delinquency, has run away. He returned to his parent's home after all these years. He is age sixteen and Child Welfare will not force him back into the Workshop. They have reached the decision to let him stay in the Fannin home.

Ernestine Kennedy wrote:

Soon after Delbert ran away, Mrs. Coburn intercepted a letter to Elbert urging him to leave the Coburns' and to come home. Ernestine quoted: Delbert wrote: 'No one can stop you. Not child welfare, foster parents or the police if you really want to come home.'

The letter to which Ernestine Kennedy refers was actually written by Delbert's mother, Imogene with a p.s. From Delbert:

Imogene Fannin wrote: "We've got 4 ekers to live on and to shouse 5 room shuse and we live near the main rode. honey we love you We got Charles and Hallie and Martha and Henry home Now and we wope and pray for you and Elbert and Mary and James come home before Christmas. We all love you. Your little sister said hello you got a sister Ann and Jean Honey we love you. From your dad and Mom and your two brothers and four sisters.

p.s. Come home now! sine, Delbert Fannin

'Do not listen to the police.' Delbert.

February 16, 1972

Hon J. J. Jordan,

Lawrence County Judge

Courthouse

Louisa, Kentucky 41230

Subject: Delbert Fannin b. 9-9-54

White Male DCW #40149

County of Commitment: Lawrence

Pursuant to the authority given the Department of Child Welfare by the Kentucky Revised Statutes 208.430, the Department is releasing Delbert Fannin from custody of and commitment to the Department

Delbert was committed to the Department of Child Welfare on July 16, 1965. He has experienced foster care, institutionalization, and the Opportunity workshop in Lexington, Kentucky.

The Department is releasing this child because Delbert has returned to the home of his Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Felty Fannin of Olive Hill, and is to appear during the March term of the Carter County Grand Jury on charges of breaking and entering and destroying private property.

Sincerely, Kay Satterly

Regional Supervisor.

July 6, 1965

The Hog Farm on Paradise Hill

I wanted to quit. Did I promise my mother to do this? Sister Janet refused to go with me to another interview and it became clear I was emotionally unprepared. Me forays into remote hollows, up muddy roads alone, took on new meaning. I experienced sadness and a hollow kind of anguish.

My cousins were eager to meet with me. There was that curiosity. While their responses to my questions were mixed, a pattern did evolve. Twins Delbert and Elbert and Henry were close in age. They agreed on most of their experiences. But, when I mentioned my next interview was with their younger sisters, Pearl Jean and Velvie Ann. Delbert's voice was full of anger, "You can't believe a thing they say."

I was Ann who told me of the sexual abuse at home. "I was nine years old when they began with me. I married at age fifteen to get away from home."

This was not what I expected. While her brothers have candidly described their sexual abuse in foster care, they never mentioned their conduct towards their sisters as grown young men. I scheduled more time and space in between to regulate the interviews. I felt afraid too. My heart broke for all of us.

I retreated to my log cabin at night to translate my notes, develop photos and write thank you notes. On some days, I seized my hiking poles and pounded the trails at the Carter Caves State Park. While the wild birds chirped, my mind reeled with the complexity of their lives. Did my mother suspect any of this, when she wondered what had happened to those children?

Was it possible to find the responsible party? I tracked Ron Moatz the Regional Supervisor, who's written and signed reports to America Holbrook transferred the Fannin children through the maze of foster homes and institutions.

America Holbrook had died in 1980. I found Mr. Ron Moatz in the Ashland directory. When I called, he refused to come to the phone at first. His wife held the phone, cajoled him; while she apologized to me. When he did at last speak, the few words were denial: he did not recall signing court orders for eight Fannin children and disavowed any involvement in their lives. He also did not know where the last three Fannin daughters were placed for adoption.

Was his role only a snapshot in their young lives that blinked open in July 1965? Had he meant to scribble dark notes about incorrigible behavior and guns that shadowed their lives forever? Had his system conditioned my cousins to avoid work, to expect institutionalized handouts? Because forty years later not one of these former foster care children was employed and each of them lived on a federal disability subsidy called, Social Security Income based on illiteracy? Moreover, and the next generation of their children were on the same track.

Did Ron Moatz care? Our conversation did not go far. He said: "I don't remember the Fannin family at all."

As my cousins and I became better acquainted, we also became a little suspicious of one another. Delbert's teenage story of a stabbing triumph over his high school principal made me cautious. While I regard each child's story with respect, I backed it up, augmented it with the social worker's notes, court records, a witness or another sibling. They told me secrets about themselves, but more often about each other. Just a word here and there until I met with Martha Lillian; she is Imogene's third child, born one year after twins, Hallie Ann and Charles. Martha Lillian was mute during our initial meetings when we toured the Ramey Home, except to mumble answers to my questions. Until she whispered about the murder of the retarded boy behind the Starlite Drive In. "Hallie's old man is still in prison for killing that boy, you know?" But, there it was, so horrible I felt a new kind of fear. She said, "Henry ratted on him you know? Murder," she said." There must be a mistake?" I smiled weakly at Martha.

Was this the outcome Ron Moatz had prescribed for three backward, frightened little boys with bright expectant eyes? Did Ron Moatz really believe any one of them was strong enough to lift a rifle, even to save his mother, Imogene? On Delbert's record, Moatz also wrote: Resisting arrest, armed.

Did these three boys, twins Delbert and Elbert and Henry, ten and nine have the strength to wield a hunting rifle in defense of their mother from arresting officers as Ron Moatz says? Should we blame them? Officers were there on July 6, 1965 and they remember it differently.

B. J. Van Hoose, Detective LT. Ret.

"When I came to work that morning on July 12, 1965, an assist request from Boyd County Sheriff George Hall was waiting. Our Post commander, 1st Sgt, J. O. 'Othar' Cox, Deputy Janet Stevens, and Ray Sloan wanted our help to complete a delivery order to remove two nine month old babies from a bad home situation. Judge E.K Rose had issued a court order to pick up the girls. The information we heard was that Kings Daughters Hospital had treated the babies in their emergency ward for jaundice and found them to be malnourished and in great peril, so they notified social services for help. That's the way I remember," he said.

"We needed extra help, so we called State Trooper J. D. Boyle, Unit 491, who was out on the road, and arranged to meet him at a predetermined spot.

I was a detective sergeant, working out of the Bureau of Investigation, assigned to the Ashland Post, so I wore a business suit with a hat instead of a state police uniform. After we arrived at the Fannin home, at one point while we were trying to get the children settled down, one of the boys threw a plate at me. It whizzed over my head and knocked off my hat. That was the only real resistance we met from the children, mostly it was verbal. They were very frightened.

"Of course, we located the twin girls right away and handed them to Deputy Janet Stevens and Sheriff George Hall who drove them directly to Kings Daughters Hospital for emergency treatment. They were lethargic, and very nearly gone. They smiled weakly, but couldn't hold up their heads. We could see they were ill. I understand they were then transferred to Lexington, for special treatment, in order to save their lives.

"J.D. Boyle was driving the black and white striped state police car assigned to him, when he arrived, so when we loaded Mrs. Fannin and the older children into his cruiser. J.D. was beside himself. He kept his cruiser spotless, waxed and polished, just like he did his personal car. It was moment of levity at a very tense moment.

"At a later date," Van Hoose continued, "I learned the other Fannin children were taken to Gertrude Ramey, where they were thriving."

He digressed to say, "I call Gertrude 'the Mother Theresa of eastern Kentucky.' If she were still alive, we could just give her all the money we spend on juvenile problems, and leave her alone. She would know what to do. We wouldn't have all these problems. She called us her 'boys.' She didn't have to, but when we called her in the middle of the night with a child she would say, "Bring it on over." Mostly, it was after we arrested drunk drivers and found children in the car, we would take them to Miss Ramey."

J.D. Boyle: State Trooper, Ret.

"I've participated in delivery orders for children before, but this was the first time I ever had to take custody of a whole family," he said. "It was in summer, 1965. I remember the date clearly because Sheriff Hall drove ahead of me in his 1964 black Pontiac to where the Fannin family lived near New Buckley Road. It was just before noon on a hot day. As we drove up, Mrs. Fannin came out to meet us. She was alone with her children. She said her husband had gone with their elder son. We explained about the order to pick up her twin girls for emergency medical care and to serve her husband with an arrest warrant for child endangerment. She was argumentative. From inside the kitchen she seized a plate and before he could duck, she hurled it. It cut the Sheriff above his eye. She was a sight. Her feet and legs were covered with soot and filth. She looked like she was wearing dark socks. She wore a loose cotton print dress that was also very soiled. Her face needed washing too. Only the whites of her eyes shone. "

Inside the house, the children had an old rifle, but they didn't try to use it. Besides, when we checked, it was not loaded. The only food I saw for the children to eat was a pan of fried cornbread on a kitchen table. Flies buzzed everywhere. Crusted and dried cooking pots with spoiled food were stacked on the tables. It was the worst I'd ever seen," Boyle said.

"While the initial delivery order was to pick up the twin girls, we now had Mrs. Fannin resisting. In order to take the sick girls, it seemed we had to take their mother too. Once we arrested her, it became necessary to take all of her children. It was good thing we had several cars on hand.

The children at first did not want to go with us, because they saw their mother's behavior, and as little as they were, they tried to help her. Then they ran. Some climbed on the roof and one ran under the house. After we got her settled down, we explained to the children we were taking them for a ride in the car. They did not say very much after that, and became agreeable.

We got them loaded up, and started to pull out, when one of the kids said:

"Wait, James is missing." and another said, "He's hiding under the house." We retrieved James with no trouble because he did not want to be left. They were sweet little kids. As we drove toward the Court House in Catlettsburg, one of the little boys was standing up in the back behind my seat; he placed his grubby, skinny arms around my neck, and said: 'I like you,'" Boyle's voice tapered off as he recalled the difficult day.

It was a County house. That is to say, Boyd County was paying the rent for them to live there. It was small with three rooms. Nobody lived close, because at that time new Buckley Road was in a remote area of Ashland with dirt streets.

At Catlettsburg, we delivered the family into the Judge's chambers. Judge Rose took one look at the collection, and ordered the woman's matron, 'Get some soap and towels and take these children and their mother to the woman's section of the jail, to be bathed; after which,' he instructed, 'Bring them back into court.'

"As I stood by, I remember thinking how all the other children, not just the sick twins, needed help too, and I hoped this was the first step in right direction for all of them. After forty years, I can't forget those children.

"Some of us state police officers had heard about this Felty Fannin Family before. We remembered when these little children were discovered living in a cave in Carter County, some years back, and taken into protective custody at that time, so we were asking each other, 'what happened to these children, how did they get over to Boyd County, why weren't these parents in jail?'

It was no secret to any of us in law enforcement, our neighboring Carter County still operated in a system that might allow the Fannins to slip through the cracks. We almost never could get a conviction for a drunk driver or for any other arrest we made over there. These children were undernourished and unkempt, in the worst way. One little boy had burn scars all over his upper body. It was very unsettling for us. Clearly, in my opinion, they would have been better off as orphans," Boyle summed up his vivid story of the difficult day.

In September 2005, I called Officers Boyle and Van Hoose to tell them the twin girls they had rescued, Golda and Nola survived. That they lived near Morehead with loving adoptive parents.

Jenny Stout, a reporter for Ashland Daily, wrote the news item published December 10, 1961, about the Carter County cave episode. Jenny recalled that six months later, Gertrude called Jenny to report she was forced to give up the Fannin children because Judge Rose had ordered they be returned to their parents, except for the twin girls who went to permanent foster care.

Gertrude Ramey had already rescued the Fannin children once before in 1959. Now, two years later, she saw they were no better off. She knew they needed to be out of that environment, but the seesaw decisions of Judges Tom Carter and E.K. Rose had stymied their lives. Jenny recalls Gertrude Ramey was crying, devastated at having to give up the children again. Miss Ramey could not have anticipated that the Fannin children would find their way into her care for a third and final time in 1965.

History of the Children

Imogene boasted she had borne thirty-two children. Bolstered by her medical reports at KDH, where one doctor scribbled: the patient says she has had forty children, I developed a schematic of documented birth dates and deaths of her children, overlaid with her KDH medical records, where she

received afterbirth treatment or emergency room visits. I also used records from Carter, Greenup, and Lawrence County schools.

- Hallie Ann and Charles
- Martha Lillian
- Twins
- Triplets
- Delbert and Elbert
- Henry Thomas
- Jeanetta and Loretta
- Golda and Nola
- Matthew
- James Felty
- Andrew Jackson
- Susan Lynn
- Pearl Jean
- Velvie Ann
- Brenda Sue

From thirty-two conceptions, she produced eighteen children including four sets of fraternal twins. Of these eighteen children, Matthew was stillborn and Susan Lynn died of snakebite at seven months. Andrew was born in their shack at Avondale and may have been blinded by oxygen in an incubator at Kings Daughters Hospital. Andrew grew up in a series of foster homes.

Brenda Sue was Imogene's last baby of record, born in 1968, in the back of their truck in the parking lot at King's Daughters Hospital. She exhibited a cleft palate and harelip. Neither blind baby Andrew nor Brenda Sue was returned to Imogene, but were kept at KDH for observation while America Holbrook secured court orders to take them into protective custody. Brenda Sue was adopted by the Ike and Edith Blythe family in Ashland and taken to Florida. However, Imogene did not know whether Brenda Sue had

survived until November 2005. Edith Blythe, her adoptive mother has refused communication, or even a photograph of Brenda Sue for Imogene.

Loretta and Jeanetta were the first of her twin girls to enter the Kentucky Foster Care system on November 23, 1959, when Imogene bartered with America Holbrook for the return of her other children. For five years, Loretta and Jeanetta floated through foster care system. They were chosen once and returned by the prospective parents as too boisterous. In 1961, the Bell family in Muhlenberg County adopted them.

Imogene would not see Andrew again for twenty years until Lori spotted him in one of the foster homes where she and Jena lived. She has told she also located her twin sisters, Golda and Nola, but after one call to the adoptive Kidd home, Loretta who now calls herself, Lori lost courage and never called back. Golda and Nola at nine months of age were rescued on July 9, 1965, at their Paradise Hill home in Ashland and whisked to emergency care because of malnutrition and jaundice. These girls also drifted through the system for nine months until Edith Kidd chose them. They were reunited with Imogene forty years later in 2005. Their adoptive parents, Ike and Edith Kidd, had died and the girls lived in the care of their adoptive brother, Edward Kidd.

Other of Imogene's conceptions terminated with natural abortions. Such was the case for two single births. Boys she named James Felty and Felty James were five month fetuses, but she gave them names. A subsequent birth of a third boy she also named James Felty, born in 1958, survived to grow up at the Ramey Home with his sister Mary Lou. A set of triplets born prematurely to Imogene in January 1966, did not survive.

Police took two sets of twins, Hallie Ann and Charles, Delbert and Elbert and also Henry T., Martha Lillian, James, and Mary Lou on three separate occasions. Carter County Judge Carter restored them to Felty and Imogene in 1959, and Boyd County Judge Rose returned them again in 1961. The third episode was on July 6, 1965, but none was returned to their parents until they were old enough to run away from foster care on their own. None reached the legal age of eighteen in foster care. During the next six years in foster care, three of the Fannin children ran away to return home and three children remained in the system until the early 1970s.

Andrew, a tiny infant blind from birth, was held at KDH before he too was sent to foster care. He returned to eastern Kentucky to meet Imogene in 1995 when he was told about her.

In their official reports titled: History of the Children, on July 9, 1965, Social Workers gave these snapshots of the Fannin Children as they entered foster care for the third time:

Delbert is an extremely aggressive child. He has recently drawn a 22 rifle on the sheriff who tried to arrest his mother. He fights often and has an extremely defiant manner. It is believed his intelligence is within normal limits; however, he, like his siblings, is not up to his grade level. He is at the Boyd County Boys' Farm.

Elbert Fannin-twin to Delbert b. September 9, 1954, is a ten year old who was badly burned at the age of four. His face, chest and stomach show deep, ugly scars. He seems more timid than his twin. He is apparently sensitive and sad. He, too, is at the Boys' Farm.

Henry Thomas Fannin, b. November 11, 1955, is a nine-year-old child who has a better disposition than his older siblings. He, like the others, apparently has been subjected to extreme cruelty and no discipline of the kind he needs. He seems to be better adjusted at school than his siblings. He is at the Boys' Farm.

James F. Fannin is eight. b. January 10, 1958, has never been to school He is named for his father. He, no doubt is better adjusted and he, like Henry T. seems to have a more even temper than the older children. He is at the Ramey Home.

Hallie Ann and Charles: Thirteen-year-old twins are the eldest of Imogene's children. Charles cannot read or write and he may never have been to school.

His twin sister, Hallie Ann is aggressive and loud. She has had to do far too much toward the care of her younger siblings. Hallie Ann is fair with blue eyes and reddish blonde hair. She has normal intelligence but has had such a poor quality of stimulation that she needs redirecting. She is in fifth grade, but like her siblings has been moved dozens of times between Boyd, Carter, Lawrence and Greenup counties. She has, along with her other siblings, recently fought the sheriff who tried to arrest her mother. She is presently at the Ramey Home.

Martha Lillian is a small twelve-year-old girl. Her older sister dominates her. She, too, is in fifth grade. She is less defiant than her sister, Hallie Ann, but has been exposed to a poor home environment. She is at the Ramey Home.

Four months after Welfare authorities removed all her children on July 9, 1965, Imogene started over; she gave birth to Pearl Jean and one year after that, Velva Ann, followed by the birth of Brenda Sue in 1968.

Brenda Sue was born at KDH where doctors explained the difficulty of feeding a baby with a severe cleft palate and harelip. A subsequent court order placed Brenda Sue with the Blythe family as a foster child. The Blythe family supervised several surgeries to correct Brenda Sue's cleft palate. Already in their care,

Terry was another adoptive child whose allergies plagued him. The Blythe family moved to Florida taking Brenda Sue. Later, when she was five years old, they adopted her.

Of all her children, Charles, Velvie Ann and Pearl Jean were her only children to grow up for most of their lives with her. Charles married Golda Blevins but produced no children. He died in 2003 of heart failure. Delbert described his older brother Charles as more female than male with no facial or body hair, except for hair on his head.

Martha Lillian and her older sister Hallie Ann, fraternal twin to Charles lived for two years at the Ramey Home. Charles, whose mental maturity was impaired, ran away from the Boys Farm to find his mother.

Both Pearl Jean and Velvie Ann were removed from Imogene's care when they were eleven and ten for chronic truancy and poor home conditions. While taking custody of the two girls, Social Services discovered three more very small children belonging to Hallie Ann. They too were placed in foster care in Lawrence County, Kentucky. Delmar Lee half brother to Hallie Ann, and his wife, Polly, subsequently took care of the three infant daughters to their adulthood.

It is true Imogene Wheeler Fannin conceived at least thirty-two times after she married Felty Fannin in 1950. We arrive at that figure if we count each single, twin and each triplet conception of record. There may have been unrecorded births. From the depths of his memory, one Fannin child can visualize a fetus in an outhouse.

To explain how or why the biology of multiple conceptions manifest itself in her womb at twenty-one after she married Felty, is left to more discovery. Imogene was not a twin, but she was sister to fraternal twins, Albert and Alberta Wheeler. The only other evidence of the multiple birth genes in Imogene's family was through her elder sister, Alberta, who produced one set of twins. Imogene gave birth to a single birth son, Oscar Jiles Wheeler (1948-2007), before she married Felty Fannin. It is also true there was no history of twins born in her husband Felty's recent family.

Answering the Question

My search for the 1959 Court Order awarding twins Loretta and Jeanetta to foster care took nearly one year. It involved several trips to the Carter County Clerk's office in the courthouse to look for the court order book. That negotiated agreement between America Holbrook and Felty and Imogene explained the onset of the civil dispute between Felty Fannin and America Holbrook. And the flights he took through three states to avoid America.

Had I answered Mother's question? I had come full circle with my Fannin cousins. Those who wanted their stories told spoke freely. I had recorded each memory. What would Mother say if she knew their

stories? I wondered too. Had she done the right thing? Now that we knew what happened to Imogene's children and to Imogene, would Mother be satisfied?

Had I answered my mother's question? Yes, I would tell her, she did the right thing, but other people hadn't. The social workers assigned criminality of the Fannin children's deeds: shooting and wounding, breaking and entering, and other hurtful crimes were felonies. They were frightened children. I felt alarmed for them, but I already knew from the hints and innuendoes of their siblings, the worst of their crimes was yet to be played out.

Their sudden departure from Henderson Branch, Kentucky, to South Point, Ohio, may have absolved them from being placed in a Kentucky prison, and it was their father's plan to save them from that certainty by fleeing as he always had. But his action built the bridge and formed the catalyst to murder. He could not understand how angry and frustrated his sons were.

Epilogue: Murder at the Starlite Drive-In Theater

Referenced earlier in this narrative, what follows is the account of the murder at the Starlite Drive-In Theater. Documented by witnesses and newspaper reports and court records.

It was May 27, 1973, and Jeffrey Alan Scott had run away, but he knew he could go home anytime he wanted to. Above his head, the marquee lights blinked on at the Starlite, causing a shadow to ripple through the cracked front window of the Volkswagen bus. *The Wild Bunch* and *The Five Fingers of Death* paraded across the reader board.

Jeffrey had been asleep in the van all day. He felt hungry. He was fifteen and still growing. They sold hot dogs and popcorn at the concession. He might walk over there. He felt lonesome too; but, if he went home today, his parents might take him back to school tomorrow. Besides, they knew where he was. At least he thought they did. Why else would the state policeman have made him get into the police car? They drove around, talked. So he promised, "Let me out. It's close to my house and I'll walk the rest of the way." But he'd thought better of going home after that. He found the kitchen door unlocked at the widow's house, grabbed some cornbread off her table, and slipped back to nestle in the seat of the old van behind Malone's Garage. The sun was warm. He was still hungry.

The boy's body was discovered Friday at 10:30 a.m. on the 24th of May. That afternoon, Huntington pathologist, Dr. Joseph P. Shiels completed his autopsy for Prosecuting Attorney Lloyd E. Moore:

Cause of death was strangulation by hanging. His report detailed: several broken bones in his neck, his larynx bruised and contusions on his head had taken place before death. His hands had been bound, but not together. Sexual assault had occurred before and after death. And there were more bones broken after death.

It had rained all day and Felty had a plan. He kept his boys close to home waiting for the right moment. Sheriff Russell Blevins was watching for them, Felty knew, but he might not venture out in the rain. Right after noon, his sons and son in law, Delbert and Elbert, Henry T., and William Henry tied the last grimy

mattress over the top and secured the knot in the hemp rope. Spring rain slowed to a drizzle and mist enveloped them, as the rickety truck moved slowly through Sandy Hook toward the Ohio River.

Tomorrow morning the Sheriff might see they were gone but Felty was ready for them. He got excused from posting bond for his unpredictable son in law. All his boys had several charges against them, but there was that reckless nature in William Henry that worried him most, and the way he had of convincing Charles to help. He had taken twenty tires from Ed Porter's garage in Globe with no place to hide them and he'd broken into Robinson's storehouse in Ashland. This time Henry T. had gone with him and he was only seventeen. The charges against Wm. Henry Stewart on April 30, 1973 in Carter County, Kentucky were as follows:

I. . November 8, 1972 for Grand Larceny for taking twenty tires for the value of \$200. Indicted by the Carter Circuit Court Grand Jury.

II. . February 3, 1973 for breaking and entering with intent to steal from Proctor G. Robinson Indicted by Boyd County Circuit Court Grand Jury.

III January 14, 1973 for breaking and entering the storehouse of Proctor G. Robinson on with intent to steal. April 12, 1973

Delbert was charged with malicious shooting and wounding with a shotgun. He'd lost his temper; wanted to scare the girl for throwing rocks at the house, but she was hit and hurt bad. He was already charged with grand larceny for stealing from Mrs. Maddix. Felty knew Delbert was just horsing around. All his boys were restless with time on their hands.

It was the breaking and entering charge against Henry T. in Boyd County that weighed on Felty's mind now. Judge E. K. Rose had replaced Judge Hall, but he too knew about the Fannin family and might not let Henry T. slip through his court. Henry T. was home from foster care on a kind of probation for only a few months. Rose might send him off again with the intention of helping him.

The Maddix burglary in Olive Hill that William Henry engineered caused people to know them, to notice where they lived, and it raised a new kind of fear for Felty - vigilantes. They'd burned Felty out before and they might shoot one of his boys.

Felty knew well enough that Carter County's Sheriff Blevins hoped to rout them. The county did not want to feed and clothe and tend to the needs of the Fannins, no matter what crimes they committed. He and his family couldn't stay in Carter County and he also suspected they'd seize Henry T., if he moved them back to Avondale in Boyd County.

Their new place in Sheridan, Ohio. was little more than another shack. Lodged on the high bank above Possum Hollow and Little Ice Creek Road, it overlooked the distant Ohio River. Surrounded by overgrown brush and trees, the weathered frame house was almost out of sight. With the exception of the main house, where Forrest and Maymie Smeltzer lived, there was nobody about. The other shacks were empty for now.

Felty and Delbert set up the beds and laid out pallets and sorted out their stuff by a single dangling light bulb. Imogene and Martha worked in the kitchen stirring white gravy and brewing strong coffee. Ann, seven, and Pearl Jean, eight, slept next to Hallie Ann while she tossed, retching at the kitchen smells. She was pregnant with William Henry's child. She'd been pregnant before and miscarried twice since they'd married in February 1971.

William Henry felt restless and curious about their new place. He slouched against the tree trunk, shaving a forked stick with his knife and looking things over; then, without a word, he set off for the store at the bottom of the hill in search of tobacco. His red hair bobbed through the trees, his arms swinging as he padded down the muddy path. Henry T. jumped up to follow. Long-legged Charles caught up and the three crossed the Lick Creek footbridge into Sheridan. They headed straight for Alexander's Grocery Store.

As they stomped in, Juanita Alexander, near the back in the meat department, took up a sharp slicing knife and hefted a roll of bologna from the cold case.

Archie, her husband, stood by the cash register as the three young strangers picked up tobacco makings, Baby Ruth candy bars, and waited for their bologna snack. He counted out the few pennies of their change before they let the screen door slam behind them.

They turned toward the river with their bounty. It was spectacular to the three men after the laconic life style of Olive Hill, Kentucky, to see dump trucks hauling gravel and oil tankers barreling past on Ohio US 52 bound for Chesapeake and Huntington. They wanted to see the river close up and hiked farther west toward the marquee of the Starlite Drive In Theatre.

They skirted the last row of drive in parking slots, clambered over the railroad tracks, and scrambled toward the Ohio River bank. It was not far. They wanted to see Ashland from the Ohio side, but they soon found it hard going through the brush and trees that clogged the riverbank. Beyond the thicket, they clawed into a small clearing where a hunter emerged from the woods carrying a rifle in the crook of his right arm. Two red fox squirrels dangled from his belt. William Henry hailed the hunter, "Say we could use some meat."

Playful, at first, William Henry tugged at the wild game, while Henry T. smiled around wide, yellow snagged teeth and like a fast game, slipped the .22 away from the hunter's grasp and threw it into the brush.

The hunter yelled at them. From behind, he felt his shirt rip as Charles grabbed his arms, twisted them behind his back. Wm. Henry unzipped his fly, and made lewd gestures. They stripped the young hunter then, jeering at him, as he struggled.

It was quick. Michael Ackerson felt the tall dark man step close and hook his ankle. He fell and lay sprawled on the ground with the red-haired William Henry astride his back, when they heard the clank metal, and saw the yellow glint of color gliding down the tracks into view. A screech of the brakes scarred the track and a brown uniformed railroad detective jumped down and ran toward them. The

three scraggly young men broke into a run back across the railroad tracks and disappeared into the brush.

Michael arched his back and dry heaved into the dust. The detective stood over him before he picked up his scattered clothes and found his rifle.

"My name is Smith," the detective told him. "I'm an investigator for the railroad. I'm out here this morning to discover such vandals as these. They roll rocks and ties onto the tracks to wreck the trains. You're lucky I came along here. I'd stay away from this place."

Michael Ackerson grasped his rifle, sat mute with his knees humped up tight for a long time before Detective Smith pulled him to his feet. He fumbled with the back pocket of his pants. His last few dollars were gone, and his squirrels lay trampled.

"I was the leader of the gang and told them what to do. He yelled at us not to hang him, but we hung him anyway." Wm. Henry Stewart in his signed confession on October 11, 1973.

Possum Hollow is another name for Little Ice Road. It is one of several narrow branch-off trails along Lick Creek. After a rain, the gullies carry murky run-off down the steep hollow under Ohio US Highway 52 and deposit the silt load into the downriver narrows at Sheridan. At other times, Little Ice Creek slows to a trickle. It was here in Possum Hollow, half way up the mountain on a wooded plateau that Felty Fannin brought his family to hide out from Kentucky authorities in the spring of 1973.

Juanita Alexander. November 2, 2007 at Sheridan, Ohio

"The next day, after they found the dead boy on the riverbank, behind the Starlite - a Saturday, I think - the red haired man and one of the women, I think one of the Fannin girls was his wife, came in to buy a bottle of black hair dye. I sold it to them," Juanita Alexander continued. "They questioned me about that, I remember. Archie and I were on the witness list. We didn't go to court; the investigator came to the store."

"I didn't know the dead boy, but I knew the Fannins. They moved into one of Forest Smeltzer's old shacks up in Possum Hollow they told me. They bought everything from us, and they all came to carry the sacks home. They'd string out along the road, goose fashion. Except for old man Fannin. He'd say, 'I paid for it; you carry it.' Of course, he paid with food stamps. Didn't have a car.

"They never bought anything to cook. Howard Purvis, our meat cutter would slice a whole roll of bologna for them. Mrs. Fannin was a big woman. Those girls, her daughters, I don't remember their names, told stories on themselves. They claimed they all slept together like married people do. Except for the younger, dark-haired woman, I think her name was Martha. She said if one of her brothers bothered her, she'd damage him." Juanita laughed at the memory. . "No, I don't think they ever stole from us."

Juanita continued, "The story they told I remember most was about their baby sister - died of snake bite and they left her in a cave somewhere in Kentucky. I could hardly believe half of what they said; I guess they wanted to shock me. Mr. Fannin talked all the time, mostly nonsense," Juanita said.

"Sheriff Howell really looked for suspects; he even questioned Larry Coldiron about that killing. That was peculiar because Larry was just a boy and not too bright. Old man Coldiron was so mean to his kids; I wonder how they remembered their own names. Larry lives in Florida I think. I don't remember where the Fannins moved after the trials. They sent three of them to prison and the rest of them disappeared from here as quick as they came."

Sheriff Howell felt beleaguered by his hometown news; the Ironton Tribune was on his heels. While he had suspicions, he had no material suspect yet. This killing was his first murder case since he'd been elected. People in Sheridan felt edgy. They cared about their small community. This was no argument between friends.

Michael Ackerson cleared himself with a lie detection test. Larry Coldiron, another local boy, was questioned and released too. The investigation moved in a concentric circle as officers investigated each lead, and it drew closer and tighter to the Fannins.

Sheriff Howell and Deputy Norris drove into the yard as Felty Fannin ambled toward the car. Charles hung back, slouched in the doorway. It did not take long for Felty to recite their alibis: William Henry Stewart was in Kentucky on Thursday night; Henry T. was with his girlfriend all night at her house at South Point; she said she'd swear to it. Charles was at home.

Twin sons Delbert and Elbert stood back on the edge of the group; daughter Hallie Ann, heavy from pregnancy, paced back and forth and close enough to listen. The two younger daughters, Pearl Jean eight, and Ann, seven, played in the yard. Mrs. Fannin did not come out, nor was there a sign of William Henry Stewart.

Armed with the list of alibis, Sheriff Howell crossed the river into Kentucky. His counterpart in Carter County, Sheriff Blevins, was relieved to know the Fannins had left his jurisdiction for good, and now he knew where to find them. His felony charges against the Fannin boys and William Henry Stewart included grand larceny, breaking and entering a home, and shooting with intent to kill. He requested a continuance for the charges against the Fannins, while across the Ohio River the murder investigation unfolded.

Delbert E. Fannin had left Olive Hill with grand larceny charges against him, one that included shooting and wounding Brenda Stone. Henry T. was charged with grand larceny in Boyd County. The list of charges against William Henry Stewart included grand larceny in Boyd and Carter Counties.

Sheriff Howell wasn't able to verify the alibis, with only their mothers as witnesses, but he learned more about the lifestyle of the Fannins. He returned to Lawrence County, Ohio, to round up Henry T. and Charles Fannin. When he arrived at Possum Hollow, the two brothers were gone and so was their brother in law, William Henry Stewart.

By Monday, June 4th, Sheriff Howell had made up his mind. He sent an order on the teletype to arrest William Henry Stewart for first degree murder. The APB described the wanted man as having dyed his red hair black.

On Tuesday, June 8th, fifteen days after the murder, Sheriff Howell sent his deputies to Carter County to pick up Jackie Smith. Sheriff Blevins had already arrested the blonde teenage boy and was holding him in the Grayson Jail for extradition to Lawrence County, Ohio. It was Charles Fannin who had implicated Smith. Another juvenile? It was not difficult to find Jackie Smith. He was a student at Olive Hill High School.

Back in Ironton, Jackie Smith was arraigned before Probate Judge Ray Henry in Juvenile Court with no bond allowed. Attorney Richard Walton was appointed to represent him. It was the first step in the Ohio legal process to determine whether a seventeen year old was to be tried as an adult. Assistant Prosecutor Dennis Boll filed a motion that Smith be tried as an adult and bond be set at \$25,000 because Smith was charged in a murder and was a resident of another state. Judge Roy Henry set the bond at \$20,000 and ordered psychological and mental testing for Smith. The Juvenile Commission took temporary custody.

Charles Fannin had been hiding out too but suddenly returned to his parents' home at Possum Hollow. Within minutes, deputies arrested the twenty-one year old at the shack. \$20,000 bond was set.

The suspects toppled in as Mansfield, Ohio, police records produced a teenage mug photo of William Henry Stewart for the Ironton Tribune and put it over the APB. His record of petty thievery on an outstanding warrant in Mansfield drew his dragnet tighter.

It was a good planning for Sheriff James Howell. The APB had shaken Stewart loose. All of these arrests were due to "intensive investigation" according to Prosecuting Attorney Lloyd E. Moore, by his investigator Randy Dietrich, and Detective Robert Norris representing the Sheriff's office.

The status for Jackie Smith remained: could a youth of seventeen be tried as an adult? Richard Walton, attorney for Smith filed a plea of innocent for his client.

After a brief interview, psychological and mental testing was ordered for Charles Fannin. For the time being, he was charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Interpreted: he had kept Scott away from home after dark. It was enough to keep Charles in jail.

Felty Fannin had not been idle. Within hours of his visit to the Jackson County jail to see Charles, his fine hand of manipulation became evident. Charles pounded the door to his cell to call the guard. He wanted to confess to the murder. He recited the details of his assault on Jeffrey Alan Scott and he also swore he'd acted alone.

Sheriff Howell doubted his veracity. But there it was: a sworn statement and, Howell noted, signed in the scrawl of a small child. The charges against Charles were a composite drafted from all the interviews with Charles and what he described as the murder scene. Charles was not literate; more than once, the

investigators read his rights to him, and explained he was confessing to first degree murder charge. Charles was resolute. "I am your killer," he said. In his confession, he absolved his brother Henry T. and his brother in law, William Henry. He said he lied about Jackie Smith too and recanted his statement that Smith was not involved in any way.

This obfuscation was not lost on prosecutor Lloyd E. Moore. He and Sheriff Howell suspected the mental status of Charles was key and that his condition, well known to his family, was the impetus for his confession. His deficiency was sufficient to cause a grand jury to pass him on to the mental asylum, where he might be treated and released. If indeed he ever came to trial. They loaded Charles into the police car and drove to the murder site. He led them across the railroad tracks directly to the tree where the boy was hanged.

Undaunted, he relished the attention. Charles Fannin showed how he had tied up the boy and beat him. It was brash behavior; he showed no emotion. That he was present at the beating and death was clear, but the investigators doubted this childlike man had designed and completed this heinous killing. While his stature was strong and tall, his simple answers belied the guile and complexity that was required to plan and execute this murder.

The fifteen year-old victim was Jeffrey Alan Scott; slight, even skinny and underdeveloped for his age. Even so, it did not make sense that this one man had the energy or the strength to restrain, subdue and rape the boy, and to do so repeatedly - nor to hang him. It was certainly not child-like Charles Fannin. The larger question though was why Charles wanted to kill Jeffrey Allan Scott. The officers put this question to Michael Ackerson. After his assault three weeks earlier, by these same ruffians, Michael said it was not Charles who directed the sexual assault against him, but William Henry Stewart who gave the orders.

Deprived of evidence against Jackie Smith and William Henry Stewart, the Sheriff had no choice but to release them. With his hair still dyed black, William Henry slipped out of Sheridan leaving his expectant wife, Hallie Ann behind. In the meantime, Henry T. boarded the Greyhound bus for Homestead, Florida, where his aunt Lily Kincaid lived. Jackie Smith, no longer a suspect, returned to Olive Hill, withdrew from his high school classes and disappeared. His release obviated the question of prosecuting a seventeen year old as an adult.

Outraged and uneasy, and casting about to blame somebody, people of Lawrence County wanted to know how Sheriff Howell had allowed the string of pilfering crimes to remain unsolved. The pattern spread out in tiny waves from Possum Hollow like a lacy edge. How had the Fannins become established in their community so quickly? How had they come to murder a boy? What they knew about the Fannins so far, they'd learned it through the eyes of the dogged Ironton Tribune reporter, Jim Redeen.

Redeen reported that in less than three months, the Fannin family had established a residence in Possum Hollow. They were all-too familiar with the system because they hooked up for food stamps and commodities from Ohio resources within a few days. Most likely they were responsible for the increase in burglary and thievery and they had posed a threat to local folk through their unkempt appearance alone.

This behavior mirrored their crimes and their presence in Kentucky, except for homicide and the rape of an innocent boy who was little more than a child. In Kentucky, there was also some evidence of violent crime when Delbert, a younger brother, was charged with shooting and wounding a twelve-year-old girl. His charge was still pending in Carter County Circuit court.

At another level, Sheriff Howell was puzzled. Since Felty Fannin had moved his family to Ohio to escape charges for crimes in Kentucky, why then had they brought this attention to themselves? Had Fannin lost control of his sons and what of William Henry Stewart? This was a rampage with no discernible motive. It defied reason. Who are the perverted leaders and perpetrators he asked himself, and who are the disciples?

Lucy Kitchen, Marie Smith, and Imogene Fannin, the mothers to the suspects, were part of the conspiratorial alibis. Hallie Ann, twin to Charles, was seven months pregnant. She told investigators the night of the murder she felt sick and William Henry stayed close with her. Mrs. Fannin swore it was true. However, at the same time, in a separate statement, William Henry insisted he was not even in Sheridan on the night of May 23rd, but in Kentucky doing odd jobs for his mother, Lucy Kitchen, and that he had stayed the night with Jackie Smith. Jackie Smith's mother Marie corroborated his alibi.

Henry T.'s alibi involved a tryst with a woman on the night of May 23rd. His South Point lover backed up his story. It was haphazard as they worked to close ranks.

That Charles Fannin was present at the killing of Jeffrey Allan Scott was evident. The details of his confession paralleled Dr. Shiel's scientific findings. Sheriff Howell changed the definition from homicide to murder. Charles Fannin's charges remained the same for now: contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Sheriff Howell believed the main charge must be reserved for the gang leader, but he needed more proof. Without malice of forethought or motive, this was a senseless, random killing, and he could not believe the childlike Charles Fannin had executed it.

The Ironton Tribune was the daily messenger for the citizens of Sheridan and all over Lawrence County. "People are afraid," the reporter told Sheriff Howell. "They want the Fannins sent back to Kentucky."

Four days after the boy's death, on Tuesday May 29th, family, friends and teachers gathered at Huntington, West Virginia, to honor his short life. A teacher of the boy stood by her chair during his service to say, "Jeff was well behaved in class, and quiet, a nice boy." The boy's classmates and teachers whispered in low tones about the bizarre event as they left school for summer vacation. But little was said after that.

For a few days after his funeral service, there was no mention at all of the murder in the *Ironton Tribune* newspaper. Rose Marie Malone, owner of Malone Auto Repair and long time resident in Sheridan:

"It was a shock; we couldn't hardly talk about it. There have been violent tragedies here in our community; usually we understood they were episodes of dispute. But the rape and torture murder of the boy was senseless and confounding."

Pat Leighty, owner of a restaurant in Sheridan said, "There ought to have been more said about it, but it was crippling. We were mute, shocked. Usually our community is quiet and we feel proud to live here."

After six days of dodging and hiding out, William Henry Stewart surrendered at Chesapeake on June 21st. His curly hair matted against his head still glistened with the black hair dye. His mother had scraped together money to hire Portsmouth Attorney Elliot Bucher, who brought him in to Judge Stewart Kaiser; bond was set at \$50,000. Deputies Robert Norris, Thomas Fields, and James Heald transferred Stewart from Chesapeake for examination in Ironton.

Sheriff Howell took a deep breath. Stewart's capture signaled a near end to Howell's intensive manhunt. The two main suspects were in custody and the third man was Henry T. Fannin. Police forces had already closed in on him at his Aunt Lily's home in Homestead, Florida.

Howell was still dubious. Smith was a clean cut boy whose only involvement was that he and his mother, Marie Smith, lived near Stewart's family on the Ridge. He had no record of wrong doing on the Carter County books. His thread to Stewart was tenuous. While the student claimed Stewart slept at his house on the night of May 24th, Howell suspected this alibi was coerced by Stewart, and through fear for Smith's safety, corroborated by Smith's mother, Marie.

The Ohio Juvenile Commission took charge of Jackie Smith as the first step in asking Ohio courts whether he was to be tried as an adult or a juvenile, or indeed to be tried at all.

Two days later on June 22, this question became moot when Charles Fannin confessed to the murder of Jeffrey Alan Scott. He swore he'd done it alone. He signed a confession and walked to the murder site to explain how he'd killed the boy. Judge Kaiser released William Henry Stewart, followed by Jackie Smith.

The Grand Jury of the June Session was already in session. The nine women, six men Grand Jury indicted Charles Fannin for Murder. He remained at Jackson County jail. After their initial meeting and examination, court appointed Attorney J B Collier entered an insanity plea for Charles.

But there was more. The dominos toppled for the second time for Stewart and the Fannin brothers. The Grand Jury returned secret, unpublished indictments naming William Henry Stewart, Henry T. Fannin, and Charles Fannin for first-degree murder of Jeffrey Alan Scott.

It was then, Stewart's mother, Lucy Stewart Kitchen, borrowed money to hire Attorney Lloyd Butcher. Back in Portsmouth, Stewart surrendered to his new defense attorney in his office.

The roundup was completed in Homestead, Florida, when Henry T. Fannin signed an extradition waiver. All three suspects, Stewart and the Fannin brothers were delivered to the Lima Hospital for the Criminally Insane for evaluation. As it turned out, William Henry was at Lima when Hallie Ann gave birth to their daughter on July 24, 1973.

Stewart's trial was scheduled first. On Tuesday, October 9, 1973, prospective jurors for Stewart's trial were questioned in Common Pleas Court with Judge Kenneth B. Ater presiding.

Representing the State, Assistant County Prosecutor Dennis Bill and Prosecutor Lloyd E. Moore faced Attorneys Richard Walton and Lloyd Burwell representing Stewart.

Impaneled in the morning, the Jurors were Robert Clement, Ralph E. Compston, Kenneth Joseph, Deborah Spears, Verla Bowles, Lawrence Goad, Terry Smith, Nancy Owens, Jack Webb, Tommy Hayes, Charles Clay, and Agnes Lightner. Alternates were Marshall Taylor and Carolyn Primm.

At 2:30 p.m. that same day, the jury was taken by van to the murder site. It pulled up at the Starlite Drive In, near the Volkswagen van where the boy had been living. From there, Sheriff Howell described the boy's walk to death by strangulation on the scraggly bare tree. Together with Stewart's confession, and the coroner's findings, the Sheriff described a clear picture of the events for the jury.

On October 10, the jury viewed pictures of Scott's body. Using the early statement made by Charles Fannin, that it was Stewart who wanted to hang the youth, after having sexual relations with him before death and after. Prosecutor Moore pressed, "Stewart had sexual relations with the Scott youth, then killed him to cover up his crime."

At his trial, Stewart reversed his confession. In his own defense, Stewart took the stand to deny involvement in the murder. He protested he'd signed the confession in fear of Sheriff Howell, claiming another prisoner at the Jackson County jail had mistreated him. After more questioning by Prosecutor Lloyd Moore, Stewart admitted he had not needed medical attention. In his early confession, Stewart had already waived his rights; Moore read his confession to the jury.

Stewart's mother, Lucy Kitchen, and his sister, Kathleen Stewart, testified that he, Stewart, was in Olive Hill on the night of the murder. Under cross-examination by Moore, the women admitted they did not know for certain he stayed the night. Marie Smith, who had claimed Stewart slept at her home on the night of the murder, said she was groggy from radiation treatments for cancer and did not remember seeing Stewart.

A fellow prisoner at Jackson County Jail, William Bocook testified Stewart grinded and said: "I knocked the hell out of him." Frank Scott sat at the Prosecutors Table for Stewart's trial identified his son's clothing for the jury.

On Thursday, October 11, 1973, after four days of hearings and two and one half hours of deliberation, the Jury convicted William Henry Stewart for his part in murdering Jeffrey Alan Scott. Judge Ater ordered Stewart be sent to Lima State Mental Hospital for holding. Five months later, on Friday, March 9, 1974, Judge Ater sentenced William Henry Stewart to life imprisonment. He remains in prison to this day.

Charles Fannin was retained at Lima after he was declared by state mental hospital authorities to be criminally insane and unfit to stand trial. State mental hospital authorities sent Henry T. to the Ohio Youth Commission for an undetermined period of reevaluation. Both were later released.

On Sunday, March 10, 1974, Ironton Tribune staff reporter Jim Redden filed his final coverage on the death of Jeffrey Alan Scott, including the fate of his three murderers: *Common Pleas Court Judge*

Kenneth B. Ater sentenced a 24 year-old Olive Hill, Kentucky man to Life Imprisonment for his part in the May, 1973 slaying of the South Point teenager.

William Henry Stewart was convicted of murder following a four-day trial in October after which he was taken to Lima State Mental Hospital for the criminally insane for observation before sentencing. Today, Judge Ater ordered Stewart is held at Lima until a proper institution could be determined.

Stewart was one of three persons arrested for the May 24th, 1973 strangulation of Jeffrey Alan Scott, 15, son of Frank and Juanita Scott of Lick Creek Road. His nude body was found lying behind the Starlite Drive In at Sheridan on the Ohio riverbank.

Stewart's brothers in law, also from Olive Hill, Kentucky were charged along with Stewart in the slaying. Charles E. Fannin 21 was declared criminally insane by state mental hospital authorities and unfit to stand trial.

Juvenile authorities ordered Henry T. Fannin, four months past his 18th birthday, to the Ohio Youth Commission for an undetermined period of rehabilitation.

William Henry Stewart wrote this letter from Prison in 1981:

Sir

I sent a letter to the Judge asking this information but he said I should contact your office the murder of Jeffery on May 26, 1973 Could you tell me or not what the reason for death was there is a rumour that also his penis was Biten off I wasn't involved in the murder. But I am doing the time for it But I don't care what time I am doing I just would like an autopsy report Let me know if his penis was Biten off or not after 8 years I sould be let know what really happened it would take a sick person to Bite a penis off and i definite ain't sick so please let me know what the results are I would appreciate it Very much

**Sincerely
William Stewart
Box 69
London, Ohio 43140**

November 23, 1981
William H. Stewart
142-443
P. O. Box 69
London, Ohio 43140

Dear Mr. Stewart:

We are in receipt of your recent letter requesting the autopsy on Jeffery Scott.

Please be advised that our Department does not have access to the County Coroner's Office for the report.

We hope this information has been of some help to you.

Sincerely yours

William Sites, Jr.

Adult Probation Officer

Court of Common Pleas

Lawrence County

Ironton Ohio 45638

Honorable Kenneth B. Ater

Presiding Judge

Honorable Roy L. Henry

Judge

December 5, 1981

William H. Stewart

1421443

P. O. Box 69

London, Ohio 43140

Dear Sir:

As per your request I am enclosing a copy of the autopsy on Jeffery Scott performed on May 25, 1973.

You will note that there is no mention of the condition, which you inquired about, thus it was not present. I trust this will allay any misconceptions you may have concerning the condition of the body.

Sincerely,

Harry Nenni, M.D. Coroner

Lawrence County, Ohio

115 South Sixth Street

Ironton, Ohio 45638

May 29, 1973

Harry Nenni, M.D.

Coroner
Lawrence County
Ironton, Ohio

Dear Dr. Nenni:

This is to confirm our telephone conversation of May 29, 1973 regarding laboratory studies on one Jeff Scott. At the time of autopsy, the rectum was isolated by ligature and irrigated with distilled water. Acid phosphatase analysis of the irrigant reveals concentration of 1500 I.U./ml. Cytologic smears taken from the rectum reveal the presence of sperm in large numbers.

These findings are conclusive for the presence of seminal fluid in the rectum. A complete copy of the autopsy findings is present in our files and available to you upon request.

Sincerely, your,
Joseph P. Sheils, M.D.
Pathologist
JPS/jt

What Ever Happened to Imogene's Children?

She did not know much about the Constitution. That the far reaching effect might counter her wishes, but she had resolved to make life better for Imogene's children. She believed Judge Carter would do the right thing for the little Fannin babies and perhaps he did, but he and his peer judges did not agree on what that was.

Without my mother's knowing, Kentucky barristers worked in tandem with her efforts. From the early 1960s until 1974, they strove to change the judicial system though Constitutional Amendment. Naturally, change was eyed suspiciously, as it had been since 1792, but nearly two hundred years later, in November 1975, they succeeded in placing their designs on the ballot.

Still resisting change and not willing to surrender, 1976 General Election voters in Carter and Boyd Counties where the Fannin children languished in and out of foster care, overwhelmingly voted: No - to change of any kind, but the amendment still passed in other less rural areas.

Former Circuit Court Judge Samuel C. Long of West Liberty served Carter, Elliott and Morgan Counties from the date of implementation of the Judicial Article. "The old law was written to keep families together, no matter what," he said. "The tale about the local judge is that he might not be able to render a fair ruling but he could fix a ticket, give you a pint, or grade your road - because many of these so-called judges didn't know the law. They might do about anything to get elected. They were subject to

political influence, and they paid no attention to what we lawyers told them, and they certainly didn't follow the advice of social workers.

This crucial judicial change required a law degree for judges. With that change, problems and bad habits might still persist, and we hadn't done away with the pint, but it became more difficult to influence a judge. And at last, we knew the judge was literate," Judge Long's laconic wit and political voice were effective.

In United at Last: The Judicial Article and the Struggle to Reform Kentucky's Courts, edited by Kurt X Metzmeier, Chief Justice Joseph E. Lambert described, "*Two areas cried out for change. First, Kentucky had a multiplicity of misdemeanor courts that were presided over, for the most part, by non-lawyer judges. There were county courts, magistrate courts, municipal courts and police courts. It was not uncommon for the judges of these courts to be totally untrained in the law, politically partisan and, in some cases, of dubious literacy.*

Thus, circuit court appeals were frequent, with the effect of duplicating earlier lower court proceedings. Our lower courts were models of inefficiency."

The Judicial Article also provided that justices and judges were to be elected from legislative determined districts on a non partisan basis: This created an accountable process for the filling of judicial vacancies; determined terms of office; required adequate compensation; and authorized the retirement or removal of judges in the event of judicial misconduct.

From 1959, four gullible, misdirected Kentucky county judges, who were not expert on juvenile problems but who were colored by pressure, applied laws written to uphold the social norms; to keep the Fannin family together no matter what. They believed no heavy-handed remedies were needed.

Coupled with parental ignorance, a dozen or so social workers desperate to find safe haven for the Fannin siblings placed them in unqualified foster care. The Fannin children became confused, and they were left untreated even for dental problems. They were buffeted back and forth for fifteen years across six east Kentucky counties, until at last, held in a lock up, they escaped on their own. Unprepared and still uneducated. As young adults, they emerged seasoned for what they were about to endure.

The End