

fore we left we appeared on a country music TV special.

Other fun memories were made on an all country TV show which was broadcast live every Saturday night from Bowling Green, Kentucky. Betty had done her songs live, but a friend from the old barn had decided to do a lip sync from his little 45 record that had just been recently released. He'd asked Betty to lip sync the woman's harmony part on his segment. However, the station DJ had started the little 45 speed on a 33 speed on accident, so the dragged bass sound filled the studio. Our friend, not realizing what was going on, was trying to align his voice with this dragged out sound. We all had a good laugh, but they finally got the speed straightened up and his little record finally got some good live air time. During this same time period, Betty Jean also appeared on Earnest Tubb's Record Shop in Nashville, where she had the honor of performing on the Porter Wagoner Show, backed by the Wagon Masters.

Another event that made lasting memories was when the Betty Jean Show was booked with our friend, country music star Jimmy Skinner, at the Burnside Drive-in Theater in Burnside, Kentucky. On that occasion, I was even more excited, because I got to play back-up mandolin for Jimmy, which to me was the grandest thing in the world. He was born in Berea, Kentucky, in 1909, and he died in Hendersonville, Kentucky, in 1979. He was indeed a great personality whose demeanor was plain and down to earth. He recorded for Mercury Records in Nashville and had several big country hits throughout the years.

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Stringbean

David "Stringbean" Akeman was born in Annville, Jackson County, Kentucky, on June 17, 1915, and died on November 10, 1973, at age 58. He got his first real banjo at the age of 17, in exchange for a pair of Bantam chickens. Akeman began playing at local dances and gained a reputation as a musician, but the income wasn't enough to live on. He joined the "Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps" building roads and



Charles Harrison of Berea, Kentucky, shares this photo of David "Stringbean" Akeman, 6/17/1916-11/10/1973, born and reared in Annville, Jackson County, Kentucky, and his wife, Estelle Stanfill. They were married in 1945. Date and place of photo was not given. This photo was inadvertently placed in the December/January 2018. See "I Remember" at

planting trees.

Eventually, he entered a talent contest judged by singer/guitarist Asa Martin. He won and was invited to join Martin's band. During an early appearance, Martin couldn't think of Akeman's name and introduced him as Stringbean because of his tall, thin build. Akeman used the nickname the rest of his life.

Akeman also played semi-professional baseball, he met Bluegrass pioneer Bill Monroe, who fielded with another semi-professional team. From 1943 to 1945, Akeman played banjo for Bill Monroe's band. In 1945 Akeman married Estelle Stanfill. That same year he formed a comedy duo with Egbert West Brook, and they were invited to perform on the Grand Ole Opry. Stringbean's stage costume he acquired from a shirt with an exceptionally long waist and tail, tucked into a pair of short pants given to him from his friend "Little" Jimmie Dickens, which was belted around his knees. Stringbean began working with Grandpa Jones, another Kentucky old-time banjo player and

comedian. They both played on the TV show "Hee Haw," Stringbean still performed at the Grand Ole Opry.

It was a Saturday night on November 10, 1973, when Stringbean and his wife were returning home from the Grand Ole Opry. On their way home, burglars jumped them, and they were both murdered. Grandpa Jones had a fishing date with Stringbean, and when he failed to show up, Grandpa Jones discovered Stringbean and Estelle. David "Stringbean" and Estelle Akeman were laid to rest in the Forest Lawn Memorial Gardens in Goodlettsville, Tennessee.

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The Grandmother Tree

I was born in Greenville, Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, in 1937 to Robert and Frances Dempsey. We moved to Louisville during the war. When the war was over we moved to Bardstown, Nelson County, where my father opened Dempsey Furniture and Dempsey Pontiac.

In 1972 my mother started making Christmas tree ornaments for me and my five children. She had always been skilled in the use of her hands, so they were beautiful ornaments of her own design. They were constructed mostly from felt and sequins. Every year she made three or more for each of my five children, my sister, and for me. Some years she made ornaments for friends and other relatives. The ornaments required many hours of work and a great deal of patience. For her it was a labor of love.

Every year when we gathered to celebrate Thanksgiving, Mom would proudly hand them out to all of us. "This is my favorite," my youngest daughter would say, while selecting a gingerbread girl. "I love the Santa," said another. As far as I was concerned, they were all special.

The years passed, our children married, and soon had children of their own. They took the ornaments they came to treasure to place on their own Christmas trees. Soon Mom was making ornaments for each of her great-grandchildren, too. Now it took her many more hours and many more weeks to make them. It was something that she worked on all year. As each of the five children married, my grandmother's tree got

smaller. It went from a 12-foot to a six-and-a-half foot tree as the children took their precious ornaments away.

As much as we loved our old ornaments, we could hardly wait to see the new ones each year. We could count on at least three new ones all initialed and dated. By 1999 there were five grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren. Poor Mom!

She is now 86 years young, still an active member of her church, community, and our family. For the past three years Mom has been unable to make our ornaments. Arthritis has set into those wonderful hands that were once so agile. We are sad that she can no longer work on the Christmas project. She enjoyed making those ornaments. We all miss our Thanksgiving gift from Mom. Her love and talents will always be remembered. There are now six beautiful trees adorned each year with our cherished ornaments she made. There is one in every family home. My sister passed away three years ago and we divided the ornaments from her tree among all of us.

As I look forward to taking out my many decorations wrapped so carefully, I think of the poem I wrote that hangs framed by my tree:

"The Grandmother Tree

"Oh Christmas tree, Oh Christmas tree,

"You mean so very much to me

"The beautiful ornaments your branches hold

"Were made by a woman with a heart of gold

"She made them each with love in mind

"More special ornaments you'll never find

"Each year different ones she will make

"How many hours each one takes



Velma Atwood, 96 Ebenezer Road, Campbellsville, KY 42718, shares this photo of her maternal grandparents, Elzie Garfield Pierre, 11/7/1880-9/17/1958; and Louella McIntyre Pierre, 6/30/1883-1/25/1963. Place and date of photo not given.

"The married children take theirs away

"To fill their trees on Christmas day

"They love them just as I do

"Because they were made by only you...

"My mother."

Mom and her Christmas spirit will be with me and my family forever.

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Mother's Ducks

My mother, Sally Fields, received some duck eggs from a friend of hers. She decided that with no better option available, she would put them under a sitting hen, and the eggs would hatch this way. Once the eggs had hatched, the ducklings left the nest with the mother hen when she left. The mother hen would start scratching in the barnyard dirt for worms or insects to eat for them all. The ducklings, however, wanted no part of this scratching, as their feet were not made for this task.

The real surprise came when the mother hen took the ducklings down to the creek where things took a drastic turn for the mother hen. The ducklings waded into the water and began to swim around and have a big time! You should have seen how distraught this made the mother hen, causing her to run up and down the bank flapping her wings and squawking loudly, as baby chicks do not swim, and cannot swim as they don't have webbing between their feet. To me it seemed as if the mother hen was so exhausted that it was surprising that she didn't have a heart attack then and there. Mom had to

keep the ducklings until they were taken, along with grain, to the friend who gave the eggs to her. They had other ducks with ducklings, and they fit right in.

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Happy Valentine's Day!