

# Allie's Stories



## Old Timers

I think I'd like to start recalling when I was a very, very young fella, maybe 3, 4, 5, or 6 years old. Some of the oldest people that I remember in my family. It's always interesting to know who your aunts and uncles and relatives are. Let me start with the oldest person I ever met in my family. The oldest person that I ever knew that was a relative of mine turned out to be my great-grandmother. Her name was Sarah Ellen Barnett Sweet, and she was my grandmother Eichelberger's mother. She was called Aunt Sadie by a lot of the neighbors and a lot of people in the family, and she lived in a large brick house on Church Street in Saxton, PA. It was a gorgeous home, still up there, and **it's** two doors from the Methodist church. Her husband was William Howard Sweet. They had been born in the middle 1840's. She was born November 22, 1848. He was born October 10, 1847. They were married on July 4, 1870. William died in 1910, but great-grandmother Sweet lived on to be nearly to her 91st birthday. She was one of 11 children. Her dad's name was Jonathan Barnett and her mother's name was Elizabeth Berkstresser. Sarah and William, when they got married back in 1870, were very, very poor. He, who is dead and I never met him, had been a child of a large family, one of **two** boys and eight or nine daughters, whose daddy was killed or died. He was a coal miner. When the father died, William had to go to work in the coal mines at about age eight. He was a water boy. That meant he carried water to the miners so that they could have water to drink.

He worked in the coal mines from the time he was 8 years old until a time whenever he had made enough money to buy a mine and become a coal operator and a coal mine owner. However, when they first married they were so poor that they went to housekeeping with nothing but orange crates for furniture. Now orange crates are wooden boxes that fruit comes in to the store, and those orange crates they would get from the store and take them home and try to fashion them into tables and chairs and pieces of furniture that Sarah and William could use in their first home. They were very, very poor. poor. William didn't know how to read or write. Fortunately, Sarah did, and they went to housekeeping that way. They were very, very diligent people, hard working, and over time Sarah taught William how to read and write as an adult. He was basically a smart man. He was very religious man and hard working. He made a very, very good living for his wife and subsequently their 9 children, one of whom was my grandmother Eichelberger.

Over time he prospered and built on Church Street the beautiful red brick house that was called the Sweet House, and it is next to the Methodist parsonage in Saxton. As a young boy, William was gone, but Sarah still lived up there, my great-grandmother. I can recall on occasion being taken up to visit my great-grandmother. Unfortunately, by the time I was born and got to meet or come into her presence, she was way beyond her 85th birthday. She was sickly and frail, and it was a bit scary for me to go up and see this wrinkly old woman lying in a bed, not smiling, not a very benevolent or loving woman by all appearances, but a dear lady nonetheless. I can recall probably the last time I went up there she was dying and she was pointing her finger at different people and asking who's this, who's that, and I thought it was terribly strange that she didn't know who I was. I mean, after all, I had been told by many people that I was her great-grandson and certainly she should recognize me. But I would say by the time I was five and one-half she was dying and, sure enough, in October of 1939 she did, in fact, die. She was always a mystery to me. Of course, I was very young and everything was a mystery to me at that time. I didn't understand very much about all of these folks in the family. I sort of forgot about her after that.

I had other people who were old in the family, not nearly in their 90's, but there were people like my grandmother Eichelberger, and she had a sister, Aunt Elsie, who lived about a block away from her house. Aunt Elsie lived in a big, white house up on Church Street across from the Methodist church. Aunt Elsie had some type of a nervous condition because her head shook all of the time. Of course, as a child, I thought that was awfully funny, and behind her back sometimes we would refer to her as Shaky Shannon. She was a woman of apparent wealth. The man she married had made money also in coal mining, as had my great-grandfather. They lived in a huge home with 22 rooms, oriental carpets on the floor, and everything that seemed to be apparent success. Aunt Elsie was an unusual woman. There were lots of stories about her that were flattering and unflattering, but nonetheless she lived a block away from my grandmother Eichelberger. Grandmother Eichelberger also had another brother. As I told you earlier, there were nine children in that family—Elsie, my grandmother, Uncle Jimmy, Aunt Martha, Bert, and on down through the many people in that family.

Uncle Jimmy was a widower. He was my grandmother Eichelberger's brother. He would drive in to Saxton from Lock Haven, usually in a Chevrolet, and stop and visit with grandmother Eichelberger. He always called me "Bucky". I don't know why he called me Bucky, but Bucky

seemed to be the nickname that he thought fit Allie. He was a bald-headed man who didn't have any hair on his head, and he always looked like he had just come back from a fishing trip or was getting ready to go to a hunting camp. He was sort of a nice guy. He would take my grandmother out for a drive, the two of them being brother and sister. They would go out somewhere for a ride in the car.

Another favorite old timer in my family was my mother's mother. She was grandmother Benton. My mother's maiden name was Hortense Benton. G-ma was what we called her, or Big Mamma because she was heavy. She was a pretty big woman. G-ma Benton I always thought was the funniest old folk I ever knew. When I was a child she would come to visit, and it seemed like when she was around the house I always had a little more freedom to do things and get into mischief. It also seemed like she always seemed to have time to spend with me when maybe my mother and father were too busy to do that. So I enjoyed G-ma Benton. For example, one time I had a monkey when I was about four or five years old, and my monkey was all brown except for the button eyes he had. That was the only thing he had...he didn't have a belly button or anything like that. He just had two buttons for eyes. G-ma Benton was looking at the monkey one day and she said she thought the monkey didn't look complete or didn't look right. I asked well what can be done to make him look right? She said, "Well, my eyes are going bad, but if you'll thread me a needle with black thread, I'll put a crack in his hiney." And so she took the needle and thread that I put together and she sewed a little black line right up where his hiney butt would be, and we thought the monkey looked much more realistic after G-ma Benton had sewn his little hiney butt right the way it should be. She was that kind of person. She would help make fun with the children in the family.