



Mountain Pearl: Appalachian Heritage

Peggy Poe Stern

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322 pages (print edition), 101,580 words, Appalachian biographical novel, Mountain family life, Historical & Contemporary literary fiction, Appalachian cultural heritage,

Aunt Pearl and her stepmother recall the story of Peggy's father's family.

From Chapter 1:

"Pearl," Momma tried to make her voice strong. "I aim to whip you for what you done."

Those words struck me hard. Why was she saying a thing like that to me?

"I saved you from those dogs," I said triumphantly as I looked down at Momma's bleeding legs. Surely she knew what would have happened to her if it hadn't been for me.

"You disobeyed me. You know better than to disobey me."

Her words troubled me something awful, and I shivered with dread as I tried to think of a way to make her appreciate what I'd done. I didn't deserve a whipping for saving her life.

From Chapter 23:

I had what few things I owned in a fed sack when Frank came in the door. "Them's my hogs," I told him.

"I'll cross the hill twice a day to feed 'em. Don't you dare do anything with 'em."

"What are you talkin' about?"

"Your precious ma said she'd get Ralph's shotgun and kill me if I didn't get out of her house."

"No way," Frank said.

"Ask her yourself," I told him.

I heard the sound of Effie moving her wheelchair over the floor. "Frank, honey. I said no sech a thing. You know what a liar she is."

I lifted my chin and glared at Frank. I needed to see whose side he was going to take."

"Calm down," he told me. "I'll put Ma in bed so we can talk."

Those weren't the words I needed to hear.

"Oh, Frankie," Effie moaned. "What are we gonna do with her?"

Frank didn't answer as he took hold of the chair. I slung the sack over my shoulder and left the house. The least I could do was see if Lizzie would welcome me for a few days or not.

From the Epilogue:

I saw the tiredness come to Aunt Pearl's face and didn't ask her any more questions. I'd been told hundreds of stories by dozens of family members as well as non-family members.

Aunt Pearl was right. My favorite words when I was growing up were, "Tell me a story." Most everyone willingly obliged. Some people would be slow getting started, but once they got their story telling ability warmed up, they would hold me captive for hours.

Pearl's story has taken me many years to write. Pearl died less than a year after I'd gone to see her with my trusty tape recorder in hand. Much to my regret, she told me what was true. I'd waited a little too long to tape her stories, but I could still replay those stories in my head.

Most of the stories I remember came from Lizzie. Once she started talking she continued talking even when there was no one left in the room to listen.

I've done my best to connect some of the stories I've been told together in order to make this book possible. These stories hold a lot of truth, but I want the readers to realize that I've taken an author's liberty in order to

fit each story together into what I hope to be both entertaining and insightful. Therefore, I've written this book as fiction. There's no way I could possibly know what people were thinking long before I was born. No way I can second-guess exactly what happened and why it happened, no way I can claim this book to be non-fiction although it is based on real happenings.

I hope Pearl's story touches your heart the way all those stories touched mine. One thing was for certain. Being a mountain woman amounted to having a hard life back then. Pearl was indeed one of the most wonderful, and courageous women I had the honor of knowing. I'm proud to have her fiery bloodline flowing in my veins.

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