

**In Praise and
Appreciation of our Mother
Sarah Frances Collier (Kroell)
1871-1949**

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SARAH FRANCES COLLIER (KROELL)

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FRANCES KROELL HAILE: My name is Frances Kroell Haile. The date is March 20th, 1996. This is the story of the life of my mother, Sarah Frances Collier Kroell. In her day, any girl named Frances was almost inevitably called Fanny the remainder of her life, as she was.

I have just completed a history of the Kroell family, into which Mama married, and both my children, Gretchen and Tim, are interested in having a similar record made of the Collier family. I am happy to oblige. As to my competence to attempt this account, I will say that as the last of six daughters of my mother, and as her namesake, she often talked to me about her family members and I visited them more, I believe, than did any of her other children.

In past years I have recounted to Gretchen, especially, many of these facts and happenings, and I am glad that her interest in them remains keen. Just last night I realized how little I had told Tim about the Colliers, and he insisted that I begin at once to correct that discrepancy by use of the written word, plus putting it on tape. I am sure my brothers, Walton and William, will also be interested in this.

I do not know a great deal about my maternal grand parents, Thomas Collier and Rebecca Aaron Collier, though I remember both of them, especially him. Apparently, he was orphaned during the Civil War, and he was befriended by a wealthy couple, John and Elizabeth Leach, who owned a plantation on the Alabama River at Selma, Alabama.

The Leaches played a tremendously important part in the life of my mother, as you shall see. I do know that Grandpa Collier had an older brother who fought in the Civil War. His name was William, and he served in Company H, 7th Alabama Regiment, Confederate States of America. I assume my grandfather was too young to serve, but he worked as a laborer on the Leach's plantation.

Here I wish to begin recounting the stories Mama told me about Mrs. Leach, "Aunt Bet Leach" as Mama called her. I think you will agree with my feeling that she could have been in many ways the model for the character of Scarlett in "Gone with the Wind." Of course, I never knew her but Mama made her come alive for me. Mama said: "Aunt Bet" was first married at 14 to a wealthy man of about 30 or 35. She told Mama that on her wedding night she was so frightened of him that she got between the mattress and the featherbed and refused to come out. She wasn't afraid of him; he was a very kind and considerate man from all accounts. But she was afraid of what the marriage bed meant. Mama said he kept coaxing her: "Please come on out, Betty. I'm not going to hurt you." And he finally prevailed.

Unfortunately, he died of a heart attack a few months later and left her a wealthy teenage widow. I don't know for sure whether the plantation was that husband's (I don't remember his name) or John Leach's, but I believe it was the former husband's.

When the Yankee soldiers arrived at the Leach Plantation, all the men there had gone to war and all the slaves had run away

except one black man and his wife. When the Yankees came, there was a turkey cooking on the stove and Aunt Bet told the servant to bring it to her in its pot. She took a seat on a straight chair, lifted her hoop skirt, and the pot was placed under the skirt. She refused to leave the chair while the soldiers were there.

She told Mama that the house was beautifully furnished, mentioned the handsome pier mirrors that went from floor to ceiling and the beautiful damask drapes at the windows. The Yankees took their sabers and shattered all the mirrors and also used the sabers to cut up the drapes to make saddlebags. They went to the smokehouse, and she said they took the hams, cut out the centers to take with them, threw the rest on the ground. They burned the barn with its grain. They drove off all the cattle, took them with them, but did leave one milk cow for her.

Oh, yes, she noticed one of the soldiers eyeing her wide gold wedding band, and as he walked toward her, she slipped it off her finger, popped it into her mouth and swallowed it, retrieving it later. When the Yankees departed, they left one soldier as sentry to guard against the return of John Leach.

Late that afternoon at the cow-milking time, Aunt Bet told Jim, the black slave, to go and milk the cow. He said, "Laws, Miss Betty. You knows I doesn't know how to milk. I's a house servant." (Remind you of Scarlett? Remember, this happened almost 100 years before "Gone with the Wind" was made.) So Aunt Bet decided to try to milk the cow for the first time. She told

Mama that she would squeeze the cows teats a while, then cry a while over her lack of success, try and cry, try and cry.

Finally, the Yankee soldier, who had been leaning on his musket and watching her, came and said roughly, "Here, give me that. You don't know how to do anything." With that he filled the pail and handed it to her. Mama said Aunt Bet always said she knew there was one good Yankee.

After the South lost, the plantation was confiscated; lock, stock, and barrel, but Mr. and Mrs. Leach must have had some premonition about how the war would end because they had put away enough, I guess secretly, so that when they had to leave Selma they moved to the country near Shelby Springs, Alabama, in Shelby County, 12 miles from my hometown, Montevallo. This area is in the exact geographical center of the state of Alabama.

Shelby Springs was not ever a town; it owed its importance to several mineral springs that I remember well, even from earlier years. There was a sulphur spring, the scent of which was unmistakable, but the water really was pleasant to drink - after the first swallow. There was a magnesium spring and an iron spring, perhaps two others. I don't know enough about engineering to know how it was done, but each spring had its own vertical marble top -- for lack of a better word -- with a spout at its lower end from which poured a steady stream of the mineral water, 24-hours a day, and back into a reservoir and out again.

I guess each had its aquafer which kept the water flowing back over and over, so that it never ran dry, and the water was

not wasted. Each week my Grandfather Kroell sent a Negro man on the train to Shelby Springs to bring back jugs of, I believe, the iron water for him to drink. In my childhood it was a favorite resort spot for young people to have house parties there in summer. I remember my sister Dionetta attending one there. They stayed in long, barracks-like buildings. Girls in one and boys in another, not too close, of course, though such outings were closely chaperoned in those days.

Back to Elizabeth and John Leach: They built a large house a couple of miles, I guess, from Shelby Springs and started a big farm there. They had brought my Grandfather Collier with them, and he continued to work for them there, living on the plantation as his family grew. I don't know when or where he married. Grandma Collier was evidently Jewish, and I can't imagine where he met her for Jews were very scarce in that part of the South even in my day. I remember only that she was very small, very soft-voiced and gentle, and that her hair was jet black, even as she grew older. Mama said it never turned gray.

I don't think she lived much past middle age, so maybe that accounted for the black hair. Later Grandpa remarried a lady we were taught to call "Aunt _____," have forgotten her name; maybe it will come to me.

"Aunt Bet" Leach had never had any children, so she and Mr. Leach at some point approached Grandpa and Grandma Collier about taking one of their children to raise and give to that child advantages that its parents could never give it. They pointed

out that that child would grow up near his or her siblings, could see them every day, but the Leaches would be in charge of the child's upbringing.

When the first two Collier children came, Grandpa and Grandma wouldn't accept the arrangement, but when Mama came, they did. I don't know how old she was when she moved into the "big house", but she told me she played with her siblings every day and was in and out of her own parents' tenant house at will. She was informally adopted, I guess you could say, not legally (maybe at her parents' stipulation), but she was the Leach heir and they loved her as their own.

Her brothers and sisters had the barest minimum of education, but she was sent to Montevallo, boarded there to get, I suppose, the equivalent of a high school education, which was all that Papa had, actually. That is where she met Papa and married him later.

Mama was born in 1871; Papa in 1870. They married in 1893, so I don't know how long a courtship they had, but they married at about 22 and 23, respectively, so perhaps it was a long courtship. All her life Mama never forgot that she had had far more advantages than her siblings and tried every way she could to make it up to them. She hardly ever had any money of her own. Papa saw to that as he managed to get control of any she ever had.

In the 1890s, women had very few rights anyway, and Papa, with his German background and personal character, was much more

autocratic than most other men, anyway.

Back to Mama's own family: She had three sisters and two brothers. I will discuss the sisters first in the order of their ages, then the two brothers.

No. 1: Aunt Lula. Married Noah Coker. I don't have any birth or death dates for either of them, unfortunately. They had one son, Elbert, and three daughters, Birdie, Mamie -- named, I think, after my sister Mamie -- and a third daughter whose name I have forgotten. ^{→ (Nora)} Aunt Lula was always fat when I knew her. She spent a lot of time sitting on the front porch fanning herself in the summertime, I remember, but she worked hard, was a pleasant person, always kind to me, as was Uncle Noah. Their simple home was so close to the railroad track that when a train passed by, it shook the whole house and cinders would fly in all directions from the engine.

Between the house and the tracks was a tremendous area of their front lot which had, at some time, been planted in perennial flowers which bloomed profusely. All summer it was a veritable feast to the eye with thousands of zinnias (I remember them, especially) of every color; plus coxcombs, red and yellow-green; and several species of daisies. And, over all, swarms of butterflies were sure to be there feeding throughout the long summer days; fun to catch, examine, then let fly away again. I remember the beautiful Monarchs, especially.

I forgot to mention that Aunt Lula had thick, coarse, black hair which she had never cut. It was so long she could sit on

it. She must have inherited that from Grandma Collier, the Jewish side.

One of the daughters, Mamie, a very shy, quiet, teenage girl caused the family the only scandal I ever knew about. A young man came to work nearby a few months, doing what, I don't remember. He courted Mamie, and she fell in love. Thought he was going to marry her, but he vanished into thin air when she discovered she was pregnant. She had a little girl, whom Aunt Lula and Uncle Noah raised as they had their own and loved her in the same way. Mamie continued to live at home, and I don't think she was ever married.

No. 2: Mama. Her life has already been thoroughly covered in the Kroell history, and I will not repeat it here.

No. 3: Aunt 'Tell (Eliza Estelle, born November 3, 1877, died October 1970) for whom I was also named, tiny and pretty, as Mama was. She married Ben Gunn, a tall, raw-boned man, also a farmer -- I always thought of him as a gentle giant. They had three daughters: Bessie, Addie, and Louise; and three sons: Fred, George, and Edward (nicknamed Wackel). Addie died in childhood, and I don't remember her at all, but the others I do.

From the time I was about eight or nine until I was about 15, I guess, I would go every August to visit for a week with Mama's kin, staying at Aunt 'Tell's and visiting the others only in the daytime. The Gunn house was a typical frame building of the time with a "dog-trot," or open area, between two wings, with two bedrooms to the right as you crossed the wide front porch and

a bedroom and combination kitchen and dining room on the left. Of course, there was the usual privy out the back and up the hill, plus the cow lot, horse corral, and pig lot, and chicken yard. Louise and I were the same age.

One reason I went in August was that they liked for me to come when it was the week of revival time. Revivals were for them not only important for reasons of faith (Baptist) but a form of recreation, of gathering a large number of people together to enjoy each other's company. Also, their lives were hard; their work never ending, and they looked forward to the revival every year. It was so different from Mass that at first I was lost, especially with the preacher's loud shouting and exhorting the faithful to come forward to be saved and be counted.

But I learned the old-time hymns; like "When the Roll is Called up Yonder, I'll be There" (was my favorite), and "The Old Rugged Cross," and "Jesus Loves Me." The services were held at night, and the walls of the wooden church were lined with oil lamps, casting light and shadows as the preacher's voice rose and fell in his preaching. I also attended "baptizings" in the nearby creek. We children went swimming in the creek, too. Someone would say, "Do you want to go in a-washing?" (not swimming) and off we'd go with our bathing suits to change behind a bush. Of course, when the boys went alone, they went skinny-dipping.

Another form of recreation was to listen in on people's telephone conversations. Everyone was on the same party line,

and everybody knew whose ring it was when the phone rang, like 1-long and 2-short for the Browns, for instance. There was one lady called "La" for short -- maybe her name was Ella -- who always had all the local news, so when 'La's ring was heard you could hear telephone receivers being lifted all along the line. I guess if you wanted to have a private conversation with anyone, it was safer to do it in person.

The front yard was always kept swept clean; it was mine and Louise's job to make sure that any leaves that fell during the night were swept away with a brushbroom the next day. I don't remember any flowers at Aunt 'Tell's, except some flowering shrubs and dogwood trees. The windows of Aunt 'Tell's house had neither glass nor screens, but were fitted with solid wooden blinds on hinges, sort of like square doors made to fit into the apertures. These were closed at night, even in summer time, to keep out night-flying varmints like bats and birds, maybe mosquitoes, too. They were opened in daytime except in winter.

Of course, flies were a problem, always. There was an ingenious contraption made to keep flies away from the food while the family ate. It consisted of a pole hung by a cord at each end from the ceiling to just above the family's heads so that it hung free. Over this pole were hung open pages of newspaper lengthwise, and the bottoms of the pages were cut with scissors so that they looked fringed. While we were eating, someone would hold a cord to make the paper-covered pole swing back and forth to shoo the flies away. It had to be long because the table was

long to accommodate the large family -- they had to squeeze me in.

When I would go to spend the day with Aunt Lula and Uncle Noah, Louise and I would usually ride the mule there. But when I went to see Aunt Bet, Mama's youngest sister, we would go in the buggy or wagon, as she lived farther away. More about her and her family later.

When Aunt 'Tell's children grew up, most of them left to find work else where. Fred and Bessie, neither of whom ever married, went to Birmingham and Bessemer, respectively. George married a girl, Earline Jones, who had an extremely dark complexion, not Negro but more like the descendant of some Eastern European strain. They had a little blond boy named Charles Benjamin, after his grandfather. He was born September 7th, 1921, and died August 28th, 1925, of, I believe, whooping cough, this before the shots required now to prevent it in young children. The family grieved for him forever.

I have just discovered these dates in some long forgotten notes about the Gunn family, and they will come in handy in writing this history. Once, I made a special trip to Shelby Springs to locate the graves of the Leach's in a very old cemetery. Bessie took me there, and I did find the graves of Aunt Bet Leach and Uncle John Leach, though vandals had toppled and broken their headstones. Bessie said motorcycle gangs did it -- incredible.

I also found a grave for a George Washington Gunn (I guess

George and Earline Gunn's son) who lived only about two months: August 26th, 1930 to October the 1st 1930; as well as a Georgia Reba Gunn, who lived less than a month: August the 4th, ¹⁹³⁵ ~~1835~~ to August the 17th, 1935. Earline Jones Gunn was born April the 5th, 1900, died September the 24th, 1974. I have always wondered where my sister Patty got her middle name; she must have been named for George Gunn's wife. He married again, but I don't believe he had other children. I have a birth date for him of June the 22nd, 1899. I seem to recall that he developed throat cancer and committed suicide. I believe my brother Walton could confirm or refute that.

Uncle Ben was born September the 20th, 1867; died February the 20th, 1943. Uncle Ben's mother was Louise Fielder, from County Cork, Ireland, and his father was George Washington Gunn, from England. Uncle Ben had three sisters: Lou, Ella, and Lizzie; two brothers: John and Rushian. There was a grave in that cemetery for a Rushian B. Gunn, born May the 23rd, 1906, so that must have been a child of Aunt 'Tell's that I never knew about, for their daughter Addie was born June the 14th, 1908, died March the 31st, 1917, almost nine years old.

Louise Gunn, my contemporary, married but they had no children; he died rather early, if I remember correctly, and she returned home to live. Her brother Fred was born July the 10th, 1897, died December the 3rd, 1976. Bessie died just a couple of years ago. Walton has kept up with Wackel through the years; I believe Wackel is still living. He never married, was devoted to

Aunt 'Tell, as were all her children. He inherited all the family property, which was covered in virgin timber, some of which he has sold from time to time, and I understand that Wackel is worth at least \$200,000 or more; spends most of his time worrying about people trying to steal it from him. I believe he keeps it in cash in various safety deposit boxes to keep from paying income taxes on it. I should have such a worry!

When our cousin Bessie died, Walton went to the funeral, and there he met Milton Bird, whom I knew in my teens, and he told Walton that he used to dance with me at all the dances my crowd had in those days. For years Milton (called "Skillet" -- I don't know why) wrote a weekly column called "Good Morning" in the county newspaper, a chatty, down-home type of prose, quite enjoyable.

Back to Mama's sisters and brothers. Every year, months before Christmas, Mama would begin gathering together the gifts, usually of clothing, for each member of each family so that in the Christmas boxes she sent them there would be sure to be a gift for everyone. As I have said, she never had any money of her own but she could get things out of the store from time to time, I guess letting Papa think they were for us. She would then deliver or ship the big boxes in time for Christmas.

Finally, Mama's youngest sister, Elizabeth, called Aunt Bet. I am sure she must have been named for "Aunt Bet" Leach. She was born August the 12th, 1884, so she was 13 years younger than Mama. She died April the 26th, 1966. She lived but four years

longer than Mama did.

She was a tiny, little thing (I know that's redundant), the most self-effacing, gentle one of Mama's sisters, I think, and she had a very hard life. She married Uncle Pierce Bierley, pronounced "Barley," born June 15th, 1877, died April the 18th, 1958, so they both lived to reach their eighth decade in spite of everything.

They had four daughters: Daisy, Willie, Bernice, and Dollie; and, I believe, two sons: John Reid, the older, called "Reedy." I have only Reedy's dates: June the 18th, 1910 to October the 28th, 1945. (More of his tragic death later.)

Uncle Pierce was not one to work from dawn to dusk, and how they managed to live I don't know. He spent a lot of time, I remember, just sitting on the front porch, just sitting. A conversation with him was usually very one-sided, with you making statements to which his invariable reply was "I do declare." Mama said that Aunt Bet "drove her ducks to a poor market" when she married Uncle Pierce. He was a good man, but certainly no ball of fire in the work department.

Aunt Bet, like Mama, had tragedies connected with her children. She had another baby, I believe a boy, a toddler who drowned in her churn. How that happened: Aunt Bet had finished churning, removed the butter from the milk, poured off the butter milk, then poured hot water into the churn to scald it, left it to cool before washing it out -- something I helped Mama do many times. The baby came along while she was away, for some reason

peered into the churn and fell into it, drowning in a few inches of cool water.

Daisy, the oldest daughter, had scarlet fever as a child and the extremely high fever caused brain damage to such an extent that she remained a child all her life though she became a full grown woman. After the parents died, the daughters took turns having Daisy live with them. I remember her as being and acting very childlike, giggling and running and jumping about as a child would do, hard to control sometimes after she was full grown and strong. Willie was my age, as I remember, and I remember hearing that she was not very cooperative about helping to care for Daisy.

Bernice, the next youngest, married a man named Brasher, and they lived in Shelby, the little town near Aunt 'Tell. Aunt Bet lived closer to the county seat, Columbiana. The son whose name I can't recall was never, even growing up, any help to her. I remember being told that he was drafted, served in WWII, and came back, apparently shell shocked, was in and out of hospitals, and caused a lot of trouble when he was out of them.

Reedy was the one she depended on; he was steady and hard-working, devoted to his mother, never married. He had a job in Columbiana, rode his bicycle to and from work. One day, October the 28th, 1945, he got off work and started home on his bicycle, was struck by a drunk Negro and killed -- a little over 35 years old.

The girls were all rather nice looking growing up, with dark

hair and eyes, as I remember, with Dollie, the youngest, also the prettiest. I was never as close to them as to Aunt 'Tell's children, but I loved Aunt Bet dearly. In the past years, Walton would have some news of them to pass on to me from time to time, but I don't know whether he knows anything of recent news now. Dollie "married well," I was told -- believe that was her second husband. The information I have for her, was as Mrs. J.O. McCombs with a Columbiana address, but I believe they were divorced. Again, Walton could tell me, if I thought to ask. He has lived most of his life in the Montgomery area and has a lawyer in Columbiana, so he has been good to stay somewhat in touch with at least some of Mama's sister's children.

Mama's ~~older~~ brother, my Uncle Jim (for James), I never knew very well. As I remember, he was a "wayfaring man," as they called a man who traveled around working at different things then moving on. He always carried his fiddle with him and, I remember, was always ready to play a tune when asked. I believe he was the only one of Mama's family with any musical ability. He was amiable and easy to talk to.

Good heavens! I just looked out, and tiny snowflakes are spitting down. Not on March 20th, the first day of Spring. It was predicted by the weather man, but I just thought: "Yeah, right." Better get out to the mailbox. Don't go away, I'll be right back.

I almost forgot to mention that Uncle Jim did get married, and he and his wife had one daughter. I'm not sure I ever saw

either of them, but Papa knew them and would see them from time to time. He liked all the young nieces.

Mama's younger brother, William, "Uncle Bill," never married, was very timid. There is a yarn about him in my story of the Kroells, so won't repeat it here. I know that he was a great help to Grandpa Collier, stayed home and helped to work the farm all his life.

Almost all of Mama's people were very short, including Mama herself. This reminds me of something: Grandpa Collier developed stomach cancer when he was old, and Mama brought him to Montevallo to care for him in his last illness. I was working in Montgomery, I believe, when he died, and Mama called me, distraught because Papa had bought a huge coffin for Grandpa's burial, buying one suitable for a fat man, well over 6 feet tall; Grandpa was only about 5'4" tall and thin.

I'm sure Papa chose that particular coffin because it was marked down or maybe was defective -- was cheap in any case. Mama was heartbroken. Wanted me to talk to Papa, but I told her Papa would never listen to me about anything, and he might be mean enough to refuse to have anything to do with burying Grandpa; in which case, she would really have a problem. I hated to refuse her request, but I was too far away to do much good in the matter. I grieved for Grandpa Collier, who had always been gentle and kind to me.

Going back a good many years: When I was about 12, I guess, one day Mama had had news again of Papa's philandering, and she

told me, "I can't take this any more, right now. I've got to go and be with my people." I was the only one at home, as I remember, don't know where the twins were, maybe we left them at Grandpa Kroell's, but she got a horse and buggy from Grandpa's livery stable, and we took off. I'd never seen Mama drive a horse before, that I could remember, but she drove expertly, whipping the horse just enough to make him go at breakneck speed but with her still in control. I remember, I had put on my pretty, white, organdy dress patterned in tiny pink rosebuds, and Mama put the laprobe over us as we left.

As luck would have it, a sudden rain squall came up; we got drenched, and the red laprobe faded all over my dress, but we kept on going. I think we went to Grandpa and Grandma Collier's and after a visit with them and she poured out her grief and disappointment; just being able to unburden herself helped her go back to face her life with Papa again.

Aunt Bet and Uncle John Leach had left to Mama a nice little house across from the Shelby Springs property. Through the years she had tried to keep it rented to have a little income from it, but it was difficult because some of the renters took advantage of her not being right there all the time and didn't take care of the place. One time we went up there and found that the sorry, lazy renters had pulled up the floorboards in one room to use for firewood instead of cutting down a tree -- which they had permission to do -- and cutting it up for firewood.

I think then it rented for about \$25 a month - a whole

house. One renter who did take care of things was my friend Tess's Grandmother Simmers, who, with her daughter Addie, lived in the house for a time. That was when and where I read the Oz books to Tess the summer I mentioned in the Kroell Saga. Papa would never do anything to help her with the renters because he didn't want her to have anything.

Finally, a big promoter named Dick Yount from Birmingham bought all the Springs property, had big plans of making a fabulous resort there. He also bought Mama's property: as I remember, giving her a new car as down payment and a promissory note for the rest. But Dick Yount had overreached (right word?) himself and went bankrupt. Somehow, in the end, Mama got the property back and kept the car. It was the only one we ever had -- a Nash sedan, and, man, didn't Papa hate that!

One day Mama, bless her heart, decided she wanted to learn to drive the Nash and asked me to teach her. I was about 16, had learned to drive with Tess's Ford Coupe -- thought I'd never learn to back up -- and I certainly shouldn't have tried to teach Mama with that big car, or if I did, I should have just let her drive around the block a few times on the first try. Instead, I let her drive through town and out on the main road going to Calera from Montevallo.

She was doing fine, and I should have quit while we were ahead, but no, I let her keep on, and we reached what was called Holloway's Hill, not a steep hill, but steeper than anything she'd been on up to that point. She lost her nerve, and the car

went into a ditch, just sort of eased over against a bank, but there were no men to help us right it, and I had to flag someone down to get a wrecker to come from town to tow it back and make sure no damage was done. When the men with the wrecker came, Mama said, "I wrecked the darn thing." It was the first time I ever heard Mama say anything even approaching a swear word.

Papa was tickled pink that it happened, and Mama would never try to drive again. Not a day when my smarts were all in working order, I must say.

More about her Shelby Springs house: After I was made Mama's guardian and I was working in Montgomery, I received word that someone had just gone on to the front of her property and built a road there, building the level of the road up so high that her house was actually lower than the road, causing a bad drainage problem to make matters worse. I knew that a rich man from Birmingham had bought the Springs property after Dick Yount had failed and that he, the new owner, had fenced in all his property, including the springs, of course. Michael and I were courting then, and he agreed to take me up there one day right a way. I was told that the overseer for Mr. So-and-so (I didn't ever think I would forget his name) was the one who had supervised the road building.

I knew him, the overseer, and couldn't believe he would be a party to such an injustice to a poor, sick woman -- he knew Mama -- guess I still hadn't lost all my faith in human nature. I went to see him first, and he curtly told me to see his boss.

Went back to Mama's property, and Mr. So-and-so was there leaning on the fence beside the road waiting for me. He was extremely rude; told me, in effect, that if I didn't like it, I could lump it. Michael didn't enter into any of the discussion, just stood by and listened.

I said I was going to see Mr. Handy Ellis, Papa's lawyer in Columbiana, about five miles further up the road, if I remember correctly. He just laughed and said, "Go ahead and see how far you'd get trying to sue me." But we went on to Columbiana, anyhow, to Mr. Ellis's office. Fortunately, he was in. It became immediately apparent to me that Mr. Ellis knew all about it and sanctioned the whole shoddy deal. He told me right away that he handled all Mr. So-and-so's law business and that he would not, under any circumstances, be interested in helping me.

If I'd had the money to hire a good lawyer in Montgomery, how I'd have liked to take them all to court. Oh, that word "if"!

Mr. Ellis was a big shot politician, crooked as a dog's hind leg and probably the most powerful man in the whole county, maybe even the state. So I knew I was licked. I didn't offer to pay him for his non-advice, and as I left, he said pointedly, "I've always done your father's law work for free, too." How I hated him. It just happens that his son, Butch Ellis, is my brother Walton's lawyer. I know he is a big shot, too, very powerful, a trustee of the college and all that, the Governor's right-hand-man, etc., but I hope he is more human than his father was.

Oh, yes, before I left the man who stole my mother's property, I said, "Mr. So-and-so, I know you are rich and ruthless; I also see that what I've heard is true, that you are badly crippled with arthritis which can only get worse. I hope that the next time I see you, if I ever do, you will be in a wheelchair and as helpless as my poor mother is now. God will surely not let you continue to ride rough-shod over people." And I turned and walked away.

Mama's property was later sold for a song because, of course, having a high banked road right in front of it made a tremendous difference in its evaluation. They could have at least provided some sort of access to her house from the road, but, no. My blood pressure still goes up after all these years when I think the high-handedness of it. God forgive me; I did wish him ill, and I was never sorry for it. Actually, my wish did come true; the man became totally helpless before he died, so I was told. I hope he and Handy Ellis enjoy being together in a bad place for all eternity -- not Hell, but Purgatory, at least.

I don't cry often, but all these memories still hurt, and I must hurry and think of something happy to counteract this painful memory which I've kept buried so long, another memory of mistreatment of my angel mother.

I'll think about the extra lot next to the big house on Highland Avenue, which lot, Papa owned also, and where he continued to tend a big vegetable garden. He let Mama have a strip of it in which she grew rows of rainbow-hued sweet peas,

which she loved to pick and share with her neighbors, other friends, and Kroell family members. She also had a beautiful rose arbor near the terrace I described.

And in the back yard, she finally had the longed-for cement-lined goldfish pond, where large imported and domestic goldfish swam around, their colors glinting in the sun. She didn't mind the extra work it took to keep the pond sparkling clean.

I remember, once the mother of a beau I had as a teen was very ill in Selma, and Mama said, "Let's pick a big bunch of sweet peas and send them to Dub's mother on the train today." She packed them lightly in damp cotton; I rushed the box to the train, and they arrived in a couple of hours as fresh as when they were picked. I soon got a phone call from Dub, saying how the flowers had cheered his dying mother. Nobody, but Mama, would have ever thought of doing that.

Always, when anyone was in trouble, Mama was the first to respond if she could help. When we lived in the old house, our next-door neighbors on one side, Dr. and Mrs. Wills, (he was a professor at the college) had two daughters, the younger of whom was subject to asthma attacks. Have never forgotten that child's name: Diadama Dido -- she was called "Dama", thank goodness.

Anyway, when she would have a bad attack, Mrs. Wills would panic, gather her up, and run to Mama, who would soon have a kettle boiling, a "tent" made of a quilt to put Dama under with the steam, and in a short time, Dama could breathe normally again.

When someone was ill or in trouble of any kind, or a funeral was taking place, Mama would bake or prepare something delicious to eat and send it. She would often send by me something good to Dr. Acker's old mother, who would be propped up in bed, and when I would leave, she would give me a picture postcard she had received from someone and on which she had marked out the writing, and she gave it to me as a present for bringing Mama's goodies. She also insisted on giving me a toothless kiss.

Speaking of Dr. Ackers, he was a tragic case. He had been married young, and his wife died in childbirth, as did the baby. Years later, he became engaged to an attractive young teacher at the college, a Miss Patterson, but she accidentally caught fire, somehow, in the backyard of the home where she was staying and died of smoke inhalation. Dr. Acker, a brilliant doctor, took to drink but still practiced.

There were two other doctors in town, Dr. Reid, our family doctor, who gave you a pink powder dissolved in water in a spoon no matter what you had. He was the father of my good friend June, and his bedside manner was perfect. Then there was Dr. Givhan who was as unsympathetic and rough as anyone could be and still practice medicine. When Mamie had Bobby, the Gunlocks insisted that she not go the hospital but have the baby there, out in the sticks. Dr. Givhan was their doctor, so he called himself to be tending her.

She had what was called a dry birth, went into labor, and he let her suffer for something like 48 hours before finally taking

the baby. They said you could hear Mamie screaming from far off. One day, while in his cups, Dr. Acker was reported as saying: "Montevallo is in one hell of a fix for doctors. There's Dr. Reid, he's dumb as hell; there's Dr. Givhan, he's mean as hell; and here's me, drunk as hell." Quite accurate, as a matter of fact.

One more reminiscence and I'll get back to end my regular story: Mama wanted so much for one of us to have some musical talent and pinned her last hopes, forlorn as they were, on me. Our neighbors to our left at the old house were Miss Fanny McMath, a maiden lady, and Miss Bessie McCarey, also a maiden lady who was an illegitimate child whom Miss Fanny had taken in and who grew up to be an accomplished seamstress.

Miss Fanny had a piano and kindly agreed to let me practice on it. So Mama had me take lessons, though how she got the money to pay for them, I'll never know. I'm sure they didn't cost much, but anything was too much for her to spend. I had about as much talent as our dog Keisha, here, but I stumbled on, "practicing" the allotted hour, faithfully each day, but with one eye on the clock. I got good enough to play in a recital, but just barely. And come to think of it, that was in Birmingham, an eisteddfod contest.

Mama's real dream was for me to play a big harp -- lot's of luck there. The teachers at the college were always looking for ways to augment their meager salaries, and Mama decided I should take voice lessons, from a man teacher, yet. I think the lessons

were 50 or 75 cents apiece, and he must have felt he earned every penny of it with me. I was a teenager, all awkward and angles, anyway, and my voice would have made a crow blanch. He finally made some excuse and dropped me as a pupil, so I was off the hook there. I thought of it later when I learned that Michael's older brother, Clement, was a concert pianist, had had a recital at Eolian Hall in Philadelphia. I have a record of his recital.

Michael wanted desperately to play, too, learned a little group of chords that he composed, and sounded okay, which he would play at parties and then pretend he didn't want to play anymore. He had the hands for it, long, graceful fingers, but the talent wasn't there, like with me. Mama finally decided she loved me even if I couldn't give her a musically gifted child.

So, Sarah Frances Collier, your namesake again for the umpteenth time will say before going to sleep tonight: Thank you, my wonderful Mama, from "Little Fanny" and your other children for God's most precious gift to us: You.