

“I Read Every Book in the School Library”

A Talk with Clara Augusta (Bone) Landon

Written by Jackie Layne Partin

The game was volleyball; the year was 1981. She was sixty-one, and I was thirty-nine. Her home was in Gruetli Laager, Tennessee, and I was living at the time in McMinnville, Tennessee. Although Grundy County was where I was born and reared, she and I had never met, and what an unusual meeting our first one was! We were playing volleyball in a physical education class with a group of young, eager, active and quite agile, college students. Whatever possessed the two of us at our ages to put ourselves in such a challenging position?

On April 13, 2010, I sat down with my former volleyball classmate at her home to have a short chat. Clara Augusta Bone was born August 21, 1920, in Sweeton Hill, Grundy County, Tennessee. “Where did you get the name, Augusta?” I quickly asked. “Well, I was born in August, and my daddy gave me that name,” she laughingly responded. He also loved Roman history where he learned of Caesar Augustus, and he named her the feminine form of Augustus. She was the ninth child of her father, Samuel, (b. April 1880; d. January 1952), and the first child born to her mother, Lillian (Mooney) Bone (b. March 1896; d. January 1960). Clara was born at home, and there was a doctor in attendance although she does not remember who he might have been. Dr. David H. Bryan and his second wife Martha (Lowrie) Bryan were living in the area, so he may have been present.

Clara’s known ancestors were Johannes and Anna Bonn both of whom were born in Switzerland. Around 1846, their first child, Mary Ann Bonn, was born in Ohio where in 1851, their son Adam was also born. The spelling of the family surname went through several changes from one side of the ocean to the other, and even again later in Tennessee. It eventually took on the two accepted spellings of “Bone” and “Borne.” Before the 1860 Census record, Anna’s husband had passed away, and she and her two children were living with sixty-six-year-old Frederick Judy, spelled “Tschudi” in his home country of Switzerland. Frederick was possibly Anna’s father. Frederick Judy, Anna, young Mary, and Adam all lived in Noble, Jay County, Indiana for several years. By 1870, Anna Bonn’s five-year-old granddaughter, Christina Ruckweed, daughter of Christian Frederick Ruckweed and Mary Ann Bonn, was living with her. It was generally accepted that Christina was born out of wedlock, but her mother married Johannes J. Scholer, Jr. on March 8, 1870 in Jay County, Indiana. The move down to Grundy County, Tennessee probably happened after the death

of the elderly Frederick Tschudi. By 1880, Johannes and Mary Ann Scholer, and Anna and Adam Bonn along with young Christina Ruckweed had moved to Tennessee.



John J. Scholer, Jr.

(1832-1921)

and his wife

Mary Ann (Bone) Scholer

(1846-1913)

The Bonns/Bones were in Tennessee in time for Adam to marry a local girl, Sarah Media Nunley on March 30, 1879. Naturally, Anna settled in the Gruetli Laager area with the Swiss colonists where she could speak her Germany language, exchange stories from the old country, and share in the foods and ideas from her homeland. Soon Anna wrapped her arms around a tiny bundle of joy when her grandson Samuel Bone was born in 1879. (*The 1880 June Census notes that Sam was one-year-old, but his WWI registration papers give his birthday as April 14, 1880.*) Her arms were never to be empty again as long as she was able to cuddle, rock and sing songs of the old country to her grandchildren; there was always a new little blanket-filled-bundle to hold – one right after the other.

In June 1900, Samuel Bone was farming in an area of Marion County, but still on the plateau. Some of his siblings were still at home with him, along with his Aunt Easter, who had reared Sarah Media's children after her death. On April 23, 1901, C. H. (Calvin Calhoun) Dykes (*left with wife Ellen Coulston Dykes*) officiated at the marriage of Sam to Miss Maggie Layne. Margaret or "Maggie," as she was better known, was the daughter of Andrew Jackson and Harriett (Bryant) Layne. Sadly, Maggie and her baby died during childbirth.



Calvin (1842-1929); Ellen (1844-1928)

Two years later, on October 18, 1903, Sam Bone married Allie Francis Hatfield in Grundy County. This couple became the parents of seven children. Fifteen years later in 1917, Allie died with complications of childbirth. It was not unusual for a widower with several children to seek out a new wife to fulfill the role of wife and mother. Soon Sam found the woman he was looking for when on August 18, 1918, he married Lillian Mooney a citizen of Sewanee, Tennessee who was about sixteen years his junior. Her parents were William Benton Mooney and Martha Caldonia (Cook) Mooney. Sam may have met Lillian through his church work. He was a lay preacher for the Methodist Episcopal Church, later the Methodist Church, and traveled around the area spreading the good news of Christ.

Already the father of seven children, Ernest Oscar, Arthur Alonzo, Martin Luther, Ruby Virginia, Edith Louise, Charles Wesley, and little Jennie Lee, he began rearing a whole new family of children. Lillian's young age worked to her advantage because her work was cut out for her. All the children from the second marriage were still at home, except baby Jennie Lee, who had died soon after her mother's death. What a brave, young soul Lillian was! Two years after Sam and Lillian's marriage, their first child joined the already large family. Clara Augusta Bone was now the baby in the house. Slowly, along came Victor Eugene, Etta Mae, Alice Elizabeth, Nellie Josephine, Willie Sue, Clyde, Claud, Samuel Duke and Paul David. Lillian always had a baby on her hip, and friends said she walked along a path or road with all the little ones single filed behind her.

Samuel Bone was a coalminer in the winter and a farmer in the summer. Since there was less need for coal in the warmer months, the miners usual found summer jobs to supplement their income. Sam and Lillian had settled into the Sweeton Hill community where they owned twenty-six acres of land. The Bone family was so large that many crops had to be grown just to sustain them throughout the winter, so Sam made his fields larger and planted more crops to have some to sell, especially sweet potatoes. That was his biggest retail crop. "Pine Breeze Farm" was written on the sign that hung above the entrance to the fields. Clara was proud of that sign. All the children who were large enough to work the fields and crops had to do so, but for young Clara, there was always a joyful adventure ahead for her—the reading of a book. Henry Ward Beecher once said, "Books are the windows through which the soul looks out." From her earliest memories, Clara has always enjoyed reading and still does at her near ninety years of age. She has visited the whole world through the medium of the written word. She recalled that when she was four or five years of age, her older brother took her one Saturday night to see her first movie. It cost a dime to get inside. The theater was across from the Company Store in Coalmont. Even though that little trip was so exciting, it was not nearly as much fun to Clara as reading a new book.

Schooling in her day started with the Primer, then the First Grade and on up. Students were often allowed to move along at their own paces. When Clara told me that she finished

four grades in her first year, I was amazed. She credits that rapid movement through school to her love of books and to her father who was highly intelligent even though he only went through six grades of school. At his time, that was all that was offered, but he read everything that he could get his hands on and taught himself to the point of being able to do college level work. His young daughter looked up to him for encouragement. Her father's eldest son, Ernest, enjoyed reading too. His room was upstairs where he could lock his door to keep all the other children out of his possessions. There was a transom above his door that Clara could climb through to "borrow" books and read them. Ernest agreed that that was okay for her to do.

Addie Mae Flynn was Clara's first teacher at Sweeton Hill School. Her half-brothers and sisters attended the initial, log, school building, but by the time she attended, a different building had been erected. Mrs. Frank Brown was another teacher in the two-teacher school. At first the second building had one large room, but later on a small room was added, which was where Clara ended up in the eighth grade. Those were the Great Depression years, and some children quit school so that they could help at home or get jobs to supplement the family income. Most children were close enough to go home for lunch. Playing ball was the favorite game at school even though they had to look for something to form the bases and use an old plank for a bat. Sweeton Hill students had a lot of fun in walking over to the school at Flat Branch and playing a ballgame with them. Then Flat Branch would come over to Sweeton Hill for a game.

Clara remembers the winter when it was so cold that Mr. Scott's goats got under the school building and grouped themselves under the floor where the school stove sat. That didn't even save their lives, for they froze to death that night. Clara couldn't eat for several days for thinking about those poor "cold, dead goats." She also recalled that there was a bucket of drinking water with one dipper. If one child got the mumps, the whole school eventually came down with the mumps; the same went for measles or any other "bug" that was going around. Before the county built outdoor toilets for the school, the "woods" were used by the children—girls went one direction and boys went another.

When Clara and her siblings arrived home, there were always chores to be done. The little ones carried water to the older children who worked in the fields. Not only were crops raised for the family and to sell to the public, but also crops fitting for the farm animals were raised, harvested and stored for the winters. Of course, the girls always had chores inside the house to do like cooking, baby sitting, and cleaning, but Clara preferred to work outside. When a volunteer was solicited for outdoor duties, she was it. If there were good rains, then the barrels at the corners of the house filled with water for washing the clothes. Otherwise, in dry spells, Lillian and the girls carried the dirty laundry down under the hill to Lonnie Bones' well where it often took most of the day to get everything washed. Because the family

was willing to work and saw a need to work, they did not have to rely on government commodities. This was not always true for those families who had only one parent in the house or did not own enough land to sustain a large family.

Lillian Bone wasn't afforded the opportunity to attend church with the family every Sunday because she "always had a baby in her arms" and/or one on the way, but Sam took all his children, who were able to walk, right along with him to the Methodist Church. "Did your father ever load all the children and make a trip to Tracy City?" I asked. Clara stated that he made trips to other towns, but the children did not go with him. She recalls that her own son, George Landon, Jr., loved his trips that his grandfather let him make in the old farm wagon. Their snack for the trip was crackers and cheese. What little boy wouldn't love an all day trip in a wagon with his grandpa?

Pone cornbread was Lillian's specialty. Neighbors purposely dropped by hoping that Lillian would offer them a slice of her cornbread. It took three large ponies in a large bread pan to feed her family. The cornmeal mixture, a little thicker than normal, was hand-shaped like a loaf of bread and placed alongside other ponies for baking. I can attest to the fact that cornbread baked in an old wood-burning stove oven was the best in the world for the following reasons: pure lard or salt pork grease was used instead of Crisco or vegetable oils, and fresh homemade buttermilk was used instead of sweet milk. Some women sprinkled sugar in the mixture, and some often stirred "cracklins" in to give it a different taste and texture. After the hog was killed, the meat was salted down for preservation. Later the salted, fat trimmings were cut into small cubes and rendered. The crispy, crunchy, brown bits of salt fat were called "cracklins."

How does one have Christmas with so many children on the gift list? According to Clara, everyone had a stocking hung, and Santa came in the night and placed fruit inside each. They also had a tree at church where each child received a gift. If one needed something from a store, the Company Store and Creighton's in Coalmont were the choices.

I asked, "Did your father worry about going into the mines? How did he act toward his job?" Clara stated that most male citizens of Coalmont were coalminers, so it was just what they did—just like every other job. It was a place to go and a means of supporting one's family. Sam Bone nearly lost his life in the Ross Creek mines. During one of the miners' exits from the mine for the evening, the car started slipping backward; Sam became frightened and without thinking, he jumped over the side of the car and his body was scrapped alongside the ragged wall. The men who stayed inside the car were not hurt. Most miners thought that Sam was dead, but he was taken to Sewanee Hospital where his many cuts and injuries were tended. It was a good while before he was physically able to go back into the mines. I wonder if any of our Grundy miners ever took a canary into the mines with them. Our

miners were actually living, or dying, “like a canary in a coalmine!” Local story upon story could be written about mine tragedies.

Having been so studious during her early years, Clara was able to start to Grundy County High School during the 1932/33 school year when she was still eleven. One of her half-brothers, Charles Wesley, was four years older than she was and attended high school at the same time she did. He excelled in his Agriculture class and once won a ten or twenty dollar gold piece. Wesley was still in school at the age of eighteen when he contacted typhoid fever and died. This burden was tremendous on Clara’s young heart. Dr. Upton Beall Bowden gave the whole family shots to prevent the same thing from happening to them. The spring near the house where the family got their drinking water had become contaminated.

Ms. McAlister, Ms. Stella Cox, Mr. Rudolph Schild, Ms. Rich, and Mr. Allen McCormick (principal) were names that she remembered being on the teaching staff. Clara’s favorite place to be was in the library where she read “every book” on the shelves. Because of her love for reading, she didn’t form many close relationships with her classmates, but her best friend was Elizabeth Fults. “I always had my nose in a book!” she explained. Due to the fire in 1935 that burned the first four-year high school building, which was only about six years old, Clara had to finish high school over at the Shook School. The gymnasium did not burn, so some of the classes were held there. A student drove the bus loaded with students between the gym and Shook School until the new High School was built. Hallis Northcutt did the driving while Clara’s group was being transported. When she was fifteen, she graduated from high school. Even though it was a dream of hers to go to college, there was no money especially during the 1930’s.



Fifteen-year-old Clara Bone



Clara (Bone) Landon as a young bride

At the age of seventeen, Clara went to work for the Lightfoot family in Tracy City as a housekeeper. Mr. Lightfoot was the superintendent at the CCC camp that was built near the city ballpark. It was while she had this job that she met the young man who would become her husband. George Landon was born in Mississippi and found himself in the CCC camps of Grundy County, Tennessee. On October 29, 1938, Clara Augusta Bone married George Landon with W. H. Warren officiating. To their union was born a son, George Landon, Jr. and a daughter, Donna Rose Landon. George, Sr. went back to school and became a surveyor. I just imagine that Clara gave him a little encouragement toward that goal.

One might think that this is the life that Clara settled into, that of being a wife and mother, and that her life was just the same routine of most homemakers, but not so. Let's go back to that volleyball game in 1981. When Clara was near her sixties, she did what she had always wanted to do—went to college and studied for a degree in education. For some years she had been a substitute teacher, but she wanted more. She joined other people around the county who were trying to work at other jobs and go to school at night or on weekends, or even on some weekdays. Her mother, who had moved over to Tracy City after the death of her husband, Samuel, helped with baby Donna. Clara was allowed to teach while she worked on her degree, but her pay scale was quite low. A degree would raise her salary. One place she taught while working toward her degree was at Mt. Vernon School.

That physical education class was the last class she had to finish on her long journey toward becoming a certified teacher. That's why she was there; I still don't know why I was there, but I had a ball just pretending that I knew how to play volleyball. The teacher allowed Clara to sit out most of the actual playing, but he made her take the test. One young man helped her along as she proceeded with her last hurdle before she would be allowed to hold that diploma in her hands. We both passed the PE course—she passed from sheer determination, and I passed from “just plain fun and foolishness.”

Clara continued to teach after her husband's death in 1992; she taught school in Grundy County for twenty-eight years and retired at the age of seventy-two. She taught upper and lower grades preferring the older students. Folks, it is my understanding that Clara never learned to drive a vehicle. Now, I am giving you a warning that with the determination this lady has, she is just as apt to find a driver's education teacher and “take to the roads.”

Some of my husband's favorite Biblical words are the following, and I will paraphrase them—Paul's instructions in I Thessalonians 4:11...**Be quiet, do your own work and mind your own business!** Clara Augusta (Bone) Landon is a lady who follows these teachings of the great Apostle Paul; she is a Christian and attends church whenever she is able. She's still an avid reader, who loves people and family. If awards were being handed out, Clara

would get the “Best All Around” certificate. What a great example she has been and still is to all!

Clara August (Bone) Landon

At Home in (2010)



Note: Please send corrections, additions or comments to jackiepartin@blomand.net .