Arbuckle Stories of Belle Vue Farm

 Chapter 31

This is my account and memories of the sad and sudden death of Carrie Botts Arbuckle

 *“A Time to Die”*

By Jim Arbuckle

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January 14, 1975 was a cold Monday winter afternoon. I had just come back from class at West Virginia University when the phone rang. Laying down my books and grabbing the phone, I was happy to hear my mother’s voice.

“Hello honey,” my mother Louise said. “How are you?”

“I’m okay,” I said. “It’s really cold here in Morgantown. How are you?”

“I am okay. It is cold here too” she said. “But I am afraid I have some bad news!”

“I hope it’s not one of my horses!” I said. “Is Poor Lady Gin and Cochise okay?”

“It’s Nana,” she said. “She passed away about an hour ago. She underwent an emergency surgery this morning, and did not make it.”

“What!” I said as I had to sit down on a chair beside the phone.

“Your dad had to rush her down to the hospital this morning with a terrible stomach ache. I’ll let him tell you more when you come home. The funeral is going to be on Thursday. I hope you can come home. Your dad is calling the family now.”

“Of course I can come home,” I said. Nana is more important than anything I’m learning up here. How is Dat?”

“Well, he’s in shock like us all,” she said. “Jane is with him. I know Virginia will be checking on him too. And I’m sure Johnson and Alex as well.”

For those who do not know, Nana was Carrie Botts Arbuckle, the mother to my dad, Thomas Alex, Aunt Virginia and my uncle Lockhart. She was grandmother to my cousin’s Johnson, Jane and Alex Lewis, my brother Davis and I. All five grandchildren had been close to Nana while growing up, so I could imagine the hurt my cousins and brother were feeling, not to mention our granddad Alex and the entire family.

After I hung up, I called and told my girlfriend, Pam. I did not sleep well that night, but left early the next morning as I drove for the first time down new Interstate 79, which was covered with snow, and reached Lewisburg shortly before 10 a.m. My father, Thomas Alex was talking on the phone to some of Nana’s family in Missouri when I walked in the house.

“What happened to Nana?” I said as my dad came into the den. “How could she die from a stomach ache? We were just over there Sunday night and she was fine.”

“Daddy said she was not feeling well when she went to bed and was complaining of a bad stomach ache,” my dad, Thomas Alex said as I sat down. “She did not sleep well the night before, and when morning came, her stomach ache was worse. That is when Daddy called me, and I drove her to the doctor. I then took her on to the hospital where Dr. Prillman operated on her for a stomach aneurism.”

“But how could she die from that?” I asked. “Why didn’t you take her to another hospital? Nana was strong. She was only eighty years old.”

“Mother was sick, and you don’t know half the story,” Daddy said frowning at me. “Mother was in pain, and gangrene set in, and Dr. Prillman did all he could do. He’s a good surgeon. There was just too much infection in her body for her to overcome.”

“Maybe I should go over and see Dat,” I said as I got up.

“You ought to stop and see Aunt Emily first,” Daddy said. “Jane and Virginia are with Daddy, and I’m sure Johnson and little Alex will help with Daddy too. Davis and I went to see Aunt Emily last night, so you go over and tell her that I got hold of all the family, and most will be here tonight and tomorrow morning. CC, Jean, Emily and John are all coming and will stay here with us.”

After I fed my horses, I drove over in Arbuckle Lane to see our Aunt Emily Sydenstricker. It was around 5 p.m. and it was still cold, but the wind had stopped blowing. Aunt Emily was now ninety five years old, but still in good health. Seeing the door unlocked, I walked in. “Aunt Emily,” I called as I stood in the dark living room. “Aunt Emily, are you here?”

“Thomas Alex, is that you?” she called from back of the house.

“No, Aunt Emily, it’s me, Jimmy,” I said. “Are you in the bedroom?”

Walking down the hall, I saw Aunt Emily lying in bed and smiling at me. “Oh Jimmy, she said. “Your voice sounded just like that of Thomas Alex. I’m sorry you caught me in bed, but I’ve been up all day doing around, but when you’re nearly ninety six, you have to rest. I’m ready to get up and eat my supper. Please tell me this is not true about Carrie. I was just overwhelmed when Thomas Alex came and told me yesterday.”

“I was too,” I said as I sat down by her bed. “I was shocked when mother called me.

“And what about Alex?” she said as she began to cry. “Have you been over there? How is he doing?”

“No, I’m going over there now,” I said. “I guess he’s in shock like all of us. Jane is with him. The thing is, how are you doing?”

“Honey, I’m okay,” she said with a sad smile. But my poor dear brother! How bereaved he must be with the loss of his dear Carrie. Jimmy, I never believed God would take Carrie before me. She was so alive and well when I saw her at church the other day. She was such a good sister-in-law. She called me most every morning and evening to see how I was. She made me more dresses than I can ever count. What a gracious God to have given me a wonderful sister-in-law like Carrie. What will my dear brother do? What will we all do without Carrie? I want you to go over home and tell Alex he is in my prayers, and that I will see him soon. My brother will need Jane, and I am so glad that she is with him.

“What about you?” I asked. “You may need someone with you.”

“I have called Ruth Wade,” Aunt Emily said. Dear girl is always offering to stay with me. I feel tonight I may need her here with me. You go to your granddad and tell him I send my love. And Jimmy, please let me know all the funeral plans. How will we all go on without that dear Carrie?”

After leaving Aunt Emily, I drove over to Belle Vue, where Lockhart was coming from the barn with a bucket of milk. After walking in the kitchen and speaking and hugging Jane, I walked in the dining room and saw our granddad Alex sitting in his old recliner with his head in his hands. “Dat,” I said.

“Where did you come from?” he said as he looked up.

“I guess from Aunt Emily’s,” I said. “Aunt Emily said to tell you she was praying for you. I’m sorry about Nana. How are you?”

“I’ve been better!” he said. “I can’t see how Carrie could die from a stomach ache. They’d been better off taking her to a vetinarian! Who and when is everyone coming?”

“Well, just family,” I said. The ones from Missouri, Alabama and maybe, Florida. Some are coming tonight and early tomorrow.”

“Where’s Lockhart?” he asked with a frown on his face.

“I guess he is using the separator,” I said. “He’s finished milking.”

“I wish I could be helping do something,” he said. “You run along and help Lockhart, and tell Thomas Alex that I want all of Carrie’s family over here.”

Telling him I would have daddy to call him, I wished him well and would see him soon. I stopped in the kitchen and talked to Jane. As I was leaving, I talked to my Aunt Virginia as she was coming in the kitchen door. Outside I talked to cousin Alex and Johnson before I headed home.

When I drove up our driveway, cars were everywhere. Parking in the grass, I walked in the door I saw a house full of people. The Botts from Missouri, the Arbuckle’s and Becker’s from Alabama. Price, Lynn and Uncle Lock from Florida, Andrew, Dottie and Philip McLaughlin, plus our preacher, Dr. Hamrick, not to mention many friends from the church and community.

“Jim, do you want to help Dr. Hamrick prepare mother’s service?” Daddy asked as Mother and Davis were busy talking to everyone.

“Aunt Emily would be better for that,” I said. “But I would be glad to help.”

“Well, I’ll get Dr. Hamrick,” Daddy said. “And you all go over and talk to Aunt Emily before she goes to bed. How was she doing when you were over there?

“She was okay,” I said. “Dat was also doing okay too.”

A few minutes later, our pastor at Clifton Presbyterian Church, Dr. Spencer Hamrick and I drove over to Aunt Emily’s where she gave him the scripture and I helped select the hymns.

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January 16th was a cold, but a big day for the Arbuckle, Lewis, Botts, McLaughlin and Becker families. I arrived at Belle Vue where many of the family were there greeting CC Arbuckle, Tom and Jim Botts, as well of other family members who had come for the funeral. As we were all talking, a knock came at the door, it was Tom Botts Jr. He had driven all the way from Virginia Beach, and my dad, Thomas Alex was so happy to see him that he was overcome with emotion.

The church brought food, as did many other family and friends. Jane, my Aunt Virginia, my mother Louise as well as my Aunt Jean all served the guests.

Then at 1 p.m. we followed the funeral possession, as they took Nana’s body to Clifton Presbyterian Church for the 2 p.m. funeral. As the family walked in, those in attendance stood as organist Sandy Mackey played “A Mighty Fortress is our God.”

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The following is the service, conducted by Dr. Spencer W. Hamrick.

*+“We are here to celebrate the life and resurrection of Carrie Botts Arbuckle,” Dr. Hamrick said as all listened. “Let us stand and sing hymn number 138, Holy, Holy, Holy.”*All stood and sang: *“Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee. Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty. God in three Persons! Blessed Trinity!”*

As the all in attendance were seated, Dr. Hamrick began to read scripture from Psalm 23, Romans the 8th chapter, and Revelation 21: 1-9.

**&** *“Carrie Botts Arbuckle was born March 7, 1894 in the Botts farmhouse near Mexico, Missouri,” Dr. Hamrick began as all quietly listened. She was the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Botts. Carrie is survived by two sisters, Elizabeth and Frances, both who taught school until their retirement. Also sisters, Mary and Virginia. She is also survived by two brothers, Thomas, a retired track coach at the University of Missouri, and James, who operates the family farm, along with several nieces and nephews. But most of all, Carrie is survived by her husband Alex of 55 years, along with her children Thomas Alexander Arbuckle, Virginia Arbuckle Lewis and Lockhart Francis Arbuckle. Carrie also leaves behind five grandchildren, little Alex, Davis, Jane, Jimmy and Johnson, the pride and joy of her life. Carrie was much older than her sister and brothers, and as sister, Frances said, “Carrie was our educator while we were young.”
But while many of Carrie’s brothers and sisters went on to receive college degrees, Carrie chose to move east and become the wife of Alex Arbuckle in 1920. And for 55 years, this gracious lady was wife, mother, grandmother, housewife, hostess, and friend to all who knew her. She was also a fine Christian woman, and was a member of this church for over fifty years. Carrie was taken suddenly a few days ago and I know she will be missed by all who knew and loved her. Carrie was active in this church, so the next hymn is very fitting. Let us stand and sing hymn number 442, “The Church’s One Foundation.”*All stood and sang:  *“The Church’s one foundation. Is Jesus Christ her Lord. She is His new creation. By water and the word. From heaven He came and sought her. To be His holy bride. With His own blood he bought her. And for her life He died.”*

The next ten minutes, Dr. Hamrick had a short sermon *“The Christian Woman.”* Concluding with a pastoral prayer.

“Let us all stand,” Dr. Hamrick said. And sing hymn number 527, “Nearer My God to Thee.” Everyone stood and sang:
*“Nearer my God to Thee. Nearer to Thee. Even though it be a cross. That raideth me. Still all my song shall be. Nearer my God to Thee. Nearer my God to Thee. Nearer to Thee.”*

“I ask you to remain standing for the Benediction,” Dr. Hamrick said.
*“Dear Lord, comfort us in our sorrow in the death of Carrie; let our faith be our consolation, and eternal life our hope. For we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.*
We will now conclude our service in the cemetery.”

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As all stood, the organ began playing ***“God of our Fathers.”*** Carrie’s body was rolled down the aisle, as Alex and the family members filed out of the sanctuary and to the cemetery behind the church, as the congregation followed. A few minutes later, all gathered around Carrie’s grave on a cold afternoon. I stood between Jane and Lockhart, as all listened.

*“Let us hear a few words from Ecclesiastes. Dr. Hamrick began.
For everything there is a season and a time. A time to plant a time to pluck; a time to weep a time to laugh; a time to love a time to hate; a time for war a time for peace; a time to laugh a time to cry; And in our case today, a time to live and a time to die. Let us all conclude with the Lord’s Prayer.*

*Our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed it be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver is from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*

After the Lord’s Prayer, Dr. Hamrick ended with:

“*We commit our sister Carrie to the ground; in hopes for eternal live in heaven. Amen and Amen. And this will conclude our service.”*

As Alex and his family continued to speak to well wishers, they finally made it to their cars, where they arrived at Thomas Alex and Louise’s home a few minutes later. Louise, Virginia, Jane and Jean served refreshments to guests. Alex looked tired, and although his face looked sad, he was happy to shake hands and receive hugs. “Alex, you got any hard cider?” Mr. Grady Ford said to cheer him up.

“I’ll find some somewhere!” Alex said, as everyone laughed.

After everyone left, Alex returned to his home at Belle Vue, where he enjoyed the company of Carrie’s sister and brothers, plus the daughters of his sister Julia, his own daughter, Virginia and his granddaughter, Jane. He felt so comforted and secure with them by his side. He wanted them to all stay for a few more days, and although many wanted to remain, most had to return to their home states the following day.

I went over to see Aunt Emily that night. Lynn Unger had just returned from taking Ruth Wade home. It was good being able to talk to them. I think we all gave each other comfort. Lynn was commenting on what a good job Dr. Hamrick had done at Nana’s service, and Aunt Emily was sitting on the sofa, with a blanket over her legs. I told Lynn that the other night was the first time I had ever seen Aunt Emily cry.

“I cried because I was heartbroken over loosing Carrie,” Aunt Emily said with a little smile. “You know I was so broken hearted the other night that I almost went as far as to ask God why he would take Carrie. And I imagine you and others may have done the same. But let me tell you something, dear children, and listen to me very carefully. God has never made a mistake! He never has, and He never will. That all knowing God of ours took Carrie because He has a plan for her. You know Carrie was always the peace maker of this family. We never fought, but I always saw Carrie as a peacemaker. In Matthew, Jesus says, *Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.* **#** I say blessed is Carrie because she was the peacemaker in this family.”

Our granddad Alex was sad the next morning. He had tears in his eyes as he bid all of the family goodbye. All were gone by noon, and although he had been strong with Carrie’s passing and funeral, this was the first real day on his own. For well over fifty years she had been a fixture to this old home, and now it was going to be difficult for our granddad Alex to remember what the kitchen, the hall or his bedroom was like without his wife, Carrie. It was too cold to do any work at the barn, so he sat by the dining room fireplace as he waited for the evening milking to begin.

I stopped by that night, and found Aunt Virginia working in the kitchen. After chatting with her for a few minutes, I walked in the dining room.

“Dat,” are you okay?” I said as I saw him again sitting with his head in his hands.

“I’m alright,” he said looking up at me. “I didn’t even hear you come in.”

“Dat, I just came to tell you that I am heading back to the Morgantown,” I said looking down at him. “I hate to leave you, and I may not be able to come in next weekend, but I will be in the following week.”

“That will be fine,” he said looking up at me. “Listen squirt, you go on and do what you have to do. I’ll be alright. I’m not the first man to ever lose a wife, and I won’t be the last.”

“I know,” I said. “Dat, you take care, and I’ll see you soon.”

After walking out in the kitchen and giving my Aunt Virginia and cousin Jane a hug, I walked out in the cold dark night air.

 The thermometer on the back porch read 20 degrees. This was the same back porch that Nana had swept every morning for most of her life, but now it looked so cold and empty.

As I stepped off the back porch, the moon shown on the clothes line, where Nana hung laundry for nearly sixty years. As I stood in the back yard, I could see the garden, where I thought of all the hot days I spent with Nana talking and weeding. But on this cold January night, it looked as cold as the night air.

 As I got in my car and pulled out on Arbuckle Lane, I stopped along the side of the road. The house looked so dark, telling us all that Carrie Arbuckle was indeed not there. This was the time that I thought that things would never be the same again, and I was correct, things were never the same again. Although the house was dark, my family and I had a life time of good memories that would light the house forever. For a minute, it was like I could see Johnson carrying the hammock, with Jane and Davis laughing, and little Alex running toward us. As I continued to stare up at the house, it was like I could hear Nana say, “For pity sake Alex, will you take off those dirty shoes? Mercy me, you are surly to be pitied.”

As I drove on out the lane, I remembered Dr. Hamrick’s words. *“There is a time for everything. A time to laugh, a time to cry. A time to live and a time to die.”*

**Carrie Botts Arbuckle March 7, 1894 – January 14, 1975**

*Life at Belle Vue did change after Carrie’s death. Her husband later went to live with his sister Emily, where they were company for each other. Alex was sad for a period of time, but was soon back to work. He turned the farm over to his son Lockhart in 1978, but still went to the farm every day that he could. Alex lived 15 years after Carrie’s death, but spent a few good years living with his sister Emily. They were company for each other, and looked forward to Saturday nights, where they watched The Lawrence Welk Show with nieces Price McLaughlin, Lynn Unger and Sally Keene by their side.*

Written by Jim Arbuckle in 1996

 **+** denotes words from the Clifton Church funeral bulletin

**&** Ideas from Jim, Thomas Alex Arbuckle and Frances Botts Bybee

 **#** Denotes words from Emily Sydenstricker’s diary.

Family Members in this Story

 Alex (Dat) Arbuckle – 1887-1980
 Carrie (Nana) Arbuckle – 1894-1975
Jim, Davis Arbuckle, Johnson, Jane and Alex Lewis (grandchildren of Alex and Carrie)

Virginia Lewis, Thomas Alex and Lockhart F. Arbuckle (children of Alex and Carrie)

Emily Arbuckle Sydenstricker – (sister of Alex, and sister-in-law of Carrie)

Lynn Unger & Price McLaughlin – (nieces of Alex, Carrie and Emily A. Sydenstricker)

**To see a picture of Alex, Emily and Carrie, go to Photos, “A Time to Die.”**