

# Effie's Wing

*Blaine Halley*

Last summer I returned to the hills on the banks of the Ohio River. When I saw the turnoff to grandpa's I experienced the same sense of excitement I had known as a child. The difference in this last trip and the others was the insight gained on a way of life sheltered and so very different from my own.

Every morning bird-song awakened me and breakfast was ready before my feet hit the floor. The eggs gathered before I got to the table were always served with cornbread or biscuits hot from the oven.

On this trip, I was determined to learn about the country people sometimes referred to as hillbillies.

On the third morning, Arley Patterson, a tenant on my uncle's land, arrived to discuss shoes for a pony. Arley comes from a big family. His father had three wives and twenty-four children. I learned Arley's brother, Harley, once traded one of *his* kids for a pickup truck. No one could remember the year or model truck. After my uncle settled the pony shoe question, Arley called my uncle to one side and confessed he didn't want to talk much in my presence because I might be from the FBI.

Later, my uncle asked if I would like to go out and see Arley's and Harley's sister Effie. Effie lives in a small cabin with her grandchildren, Arley, and her absent husband's brother named Junior.

My aunt told me Effie was a woman of few words. However, one day Effie told my aunt how she'd learned to tell if Junior wanted anything special. Effie said, "When Junior lays his backside up against me I can tell he wants *somehin'*."

Arley, said to be a mama's boy, lived with Goldie his stepmother before he came to live with Effie. Goldie lived so far back in Modoc Holler that when she got sick the only way Arley could get her to a doctor was to cut down a tree, nail her rocking chair to it, hook it up to George the mule, and drag Goldie five miles to the road for an ambulance to pick her up. Goldie did not survive the ordeal. At the funeral hall Arley, grief stricken, passed out and didn't make it to the funeral. He stayed sick until Effie rented the cabin and took him in. The rest of the clan moved in as circumstances guided them to seek protection under Effie's wing.

On the way to Effie's cabin my uncle let me know I'd never be invited in. The cabin is reached only by a foot path, and as we came near, Junior and Arley met us and had us sit down beside the path. I brought along a six pack of beer and as they were emptied they were tossed to the dog. Junior told tales about all the kids and the dog while they jumped and hopped around and over me.

In a sudden quiet, Effie came from the cabin with a baby in her arms. She approached in silent dignity, her presence putting a hush upon us all. She greeted me with nothing more than eye contact and seated herself in front of my view of a red rooster strutting in the garden. Effie accepted the beer I offered her and sipped it slowly until the baby in her arms began to cry. She pulled the baby close to her breast, rose, and returned to the cabin, leaving her silence behind.

Far beyond the strutting red rooster, the garden, and the green and rolling hills—I saw the Ohio River.