

Linder McNeely is a 69-year-old retired insurance agent. He has three grown sons, four grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

Born in, and spending his early childhood in the Keel community of Lafayette County, Mississippi, he now lives in Oxford with Rachel, his wife of fifty years. He works for the Lafayette County Sheriff's Department; only a few miles from his childhood home.

His hobbies include reading, outdoor cooking, and studying maps.

Brothers is his first literary offering.



PHOTO BY MARION LADNER

BROTHERS



BRROTHERS, is an honest account of a young boy's fears, patriotism, and devotion to his brothers. It is based on true everyday experiences of a seven-year-old boy in 1943, during the darkest and most threatening days of World War II.

Having suffered the death of his father and having his two brothers drafted into military service all within a period of five months, he, his mother, and his sister are forced to move into town because there was no help to run the family farm.

There are many heart-warming experiences of how he overcame and learned to live with his fears and was able to embrace the patriotism that made our nation great.

Allow yourself to share the excitement as Linder and his friend discover the camp of a German spy right in the Keel community, and the emotional trauma left by the death of his father and giving up his brothers to the military draft.

Experience the hardships of the war time rationing programs and the "home front" as told by Linder. These programs were so vital to the survival of our great nation and made a lasting impact on the writer.

As we hope for good to triumph over evil and good times over bad, Linder allows you to imagine the final outcome of his story.

LINDER MCNEELY



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by Linder McNeely

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by

Linder McNeely

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Dedication

It is with a great, great love and much admiration that I dedicate this work to Rachel, the love of my life for over fifty years. Without you, this work would still be just a figment in my mind. For all of your typing, proofing, reorganizing, and for all your patience, I can only say, thank you with all my love and affection.

And then to Bobby, Ricky, and Jimbo, thanks for continually asking me to tell and re-tell this story. Without your interest and your enthusiasm, I might well have forgotten this tale long ago. Thanks for the memories.

*Your loving husband and father,
Linder*

Preface

In the beginning this book was not intended to be a book, far from it. This was a group of stories and tales from my childhood told to my little boys, Bobby, Ricky, and Jimbo as bedtime stories. As my boy's memories developed and their imaginations grew larger and larger, they wanted to know more and more about the old days. As we all delved into the past, then my love of the country, the South and my way of life as a child became more and more apparent and I was continually challenged to "write it down, daddy" before you forget it; I did finally get around to writing it down, thanks to the insistence of my children.

Since these stories were never told in exactly perfect grammar, I hope that you will enjoy them offered in a Southern colloquial manner now.

I sincerely appreciate your reading my story and I hope you can get a sense of the love, devotion, patriotic pride and faith in God that I was able to live during this time of my life.

Linder McNeely

Chapter 9

Cotton Picking Time

In my little corner of the world it is recognized and accepted that cotton picking time is the most important part of the farmer's year. School is also recognized with equal importance as the director of our future lives.

Cotton picking and school required a great deal of planning and scheduling so that each would be allowed to assume its own important part of our rural life. Summer school started in August and would continue for six weeks. The start time was decided by the parents and was influenced by the timeliness of the opening of most of the cotton bolls. School would start back after the six-week-lay-off for cotton picking and go until Christmas.

Even though school had been going on for a very short six weeks, I was glad to get a vacation. Anything would be better than going to school.

Cotton picking time brought much excitement and many different emotions to the South. Cotton being the only cash crop that we had to depend on, we were all excited as we thought about what we would buy with the money that we made from the cotton crop. For the grown-ups, getting the "white gold" to the cotton gin and converting the year of hard work into hard cash was their priority.

Balances had to be paid on the land notes, money set aside for next year's seed and fertilizer; then new shoes and clothes for the family and other things that was necessary in order to survive on a farm.

There was always extra work to be done this time of the year, before the first signs of winter. After cotton picking, then the molasses would have to be made, then hog killing time, and then Christmas.

Linder McNeely

The cotton sacks had been re-bottomed and tarred long before the opening of the first cotton boll.

All able-bodied people, including neighbors with no cotton of their own to pick, many outside pickers, along with all available family members, were enlisted to help gather the cotton. The talk was always about how much would be paid for picking the fluffy, snowy cotton.

A dollar a hundred or a dollar and a half a hundred? There was no way we would ever get paid much more for picking cotton here in the hills, because the custom here was that the pickers were picked up every morning, furnished dinner, weighed up, and paid off every day, then delivered back home. In the delta the pickers were paid each day but they had to furnish their own rides and food. But they were paid two, even three dollars a hundred for the cotton in their sacks.

Cotton was everywhere, plump and fluffy bolls of the white stuff. It looks like a snow bank.

The smell of a cotton field is almost indescribable; there is a clean, pure aroma and yet a slight musty smell that hangs over the cotton fields.

In the early morning, the dew covered bolls give off a strong, pungent smell as the pickers begin their day of back breaking labor.

There is a danger lurking across the white fields, one I detested; the dreaded "stinging worms." They seemed to be waiting for pickers to look away or not pay attention.

The mornings were cool, but the afternoon sun bore down in relentless, blistering rays that were so hot the old-timers would say you can see the rays extending all the way to the ground.

The new cotton sacks had a heavy mercantile smell that would take days to get broken in, but they lasted for years. The old ones, long since repaired, were ready to go to the field. The pickers were given sacks according to the size of the picker, with the children getting the shorter sacks. The adults got long sacks, some eight or even ten feet long.

The wagon, with its special tall side planks and a board nailed on to the back of the wagon to hang the cotton scales from, was taken to the cotton patch and left at the end of the rows under a shade tree

BROTHERS

so that the pickers could weigh up and empty their heavy sacks of cotton.

As surely as I didn't pay close attention, I got my hands stuck by the burrs on the sharp open bolls or I grabbed a boll that had a stinging worm wrapped around the back side, and before I knew it, I was stung. The sting turned red and swelled to a large tender whelp. I don't think anyone ever died from the dreaded sting of a stinging worm, but it sure did hurt.

I don't know which I was more afraid of, the giant cotton spiders that wove their webs between the cotton rows or the stinging worms. The spider webs in the early morning dew looks like jewels, glistening in the early light of day.

Maybe a hundred pounds! Maybe a dollar earned!

The main thing about making a dollar for a hundred pounds of cotton is what I could buy with it; Dick Tracy comic books and orange-pineapple ice cream from Fengers Creamery in Oxford.

The sun became unbearably hot as it climbed higher and higher into the hazy blue summer sky. The heat rays grew longer and longer.

How long till dinner?

And so each day went until all the cotton was picked or most likely school started back and the rest of the cotton was picked in the evening after school and on Saturdays; but, for now I will hold out until the end of the week and I wonder of the strangely dressed-man who had entered my world on a bicycle.