

# MAMA'S ORGAN

June 2009

Mama was Rhoda Delma Fuqua Gleaves,  
Born Oct 7, 1903 Died May 12, 1965  
Married Claude R. Gleaves, 15 Aug 1925  
Daughter of T. L. and Susie Carver Fuqua

Mama took lessons on a piano and practiced on an Organ. Her mother, Susie Carver was an Organ teacher and there was a piano in the home. When Delma was four years old her father was taking a skillet out of the oven that was on fire. He had reached in with a fire shovel and as he turned around to head for the door Delma's right hand was burned severely. Her middle finger, ring finger and small finger were all bandaged together. Consequently they all grew together and remained that way until she was 21 years old and had them cut apart. She learned to play with all three fingers hitting the same key and was taught to make up for it with her left hand. However, no one listening to her was aware of the handicap. Even after having the fingers clipped apart she still could not spread them for music that had "frills and ruffles" as she used to call it.

In the early 1940's married and with five children she was asked to play the piano at Baker's Grove Baptist Church, Hermitage, Tennessee. At that time we were living on Earhart Road. She played without pay, off and on until 1952.

Mama was one of the few good pianists in the neighborhood, so during revival season, the neighboring churches of all denominations would ask her to play the piano or organ for them also. Even those denominations not using instrumental music were not to be slighted and a special effort was always made to invite Mama to come and help sing. She sang a loud deep alto.

Sometimes these revivals were in church buildings, but often in huge tents, with folding chairs and sawdust. A small military folding organ was taken along for these tent revivals. Occasionally services were held out in the open-air and mama played the organ from the bed of a pickup truck.

The old organ at that time was no longer used by the church as it was in very bad shape with the belts to the pedals broken and almost ruined by long years of neglect and mistreatment by children. It was sitting in a Sunday School room and taking up needed space. Mama saw the possibilities of this old organ, though other church members saw it as junk. Because Mama had been very faithful as the Church pianist it was decided to let her have it for \$5.00.

However, we did not have the funds to pay for the organ and the Chairman of the Deacons, a Mr. Harvey Douglas paid the amount to the church.

Daddy was a musician, in his own right with a very keen ear for music. As soon as the organ was in our home, he had his screwdriver taking off the front panel. He took the two worn and broken belts off. The belts work with the pedals to force air into the bellows. This is what enables the keys to have sound. Mama trimmed and mended one of the belts on her much used treadle sewing machine. However, the other belt could not be repaired. Daddy went to the barn and got the belly band used to hold the mule harness in place. Taking this belly band he and Mama were able to make a new belt for the organ. Daddy got the belts back on, tried them out for strength and then let Mama set at the organ to see how it sounded. The first horrible sound told the sad story it was not ready to be played.

Daddy then took the back panel off and there the collection of dirt, grime and dead mice told the story. Mama and Daddy were not to be defeated or discouraged. They went to work with rags, a broom and sandpaper and five children huddled around them to give encouragement. Before they finished every key but one, a real low one on that old organ rang clear and sweet as only an old organ can.

Mother must have been praying that Daddy could fix it because the first song she played was "Sweet Hour of Prayer". Daddy picked up his old violin, tuned it and much to our amazement joined her. We then sang until mama stopped playing to cook supper. However, before she stopped she had given us a simple music lesson and marked the notes on "I Gave My Life For Thee".

From that day on this organ has been a prized possession of the entire family. The organ became the center spot for many good times with both family and neighbors. The handles were added to each end to make it easier to transport and it was used rather than the small military organ at tent revivals. Mama would be helped into the truck bed with the organ and the song leader

According to the "Minutes of Baker's Grove Baptist Church as transcribed from the First Minute Book" covering February 10, 1884 thru May 11, 1919, this Organ was first used in a Protracted (Revival) meeting September 19, 1896. Sadly no one in Mama's family can play. The Organ now refinished and silent is in the home of her youngest son Owen C. Gleaves.

Mama's father, Theophilus LaRoy Fuqua was the first to be ordained to the ministry at Baker's Grove Baptist Church in Nov 1896.

Recollections of:

Frances Gleaves Nichols &  
Owen C. Gleaves

