

This true story of Eva takes you into the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia, before and during the Great Depression of the 1930s. You will experience her painful struggles to survive while giving of herself often to help others.

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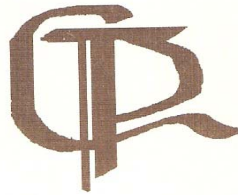
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# Go Get Eva

**Jack O. Moore**

## **ONE – Initial Years**

Pocahontas County, West Virginia, in the late 1800s' remained a wild, undeveloped and unforgiving mountainous region. The Greenbrier River, approximately 160 miles in length, begins in the northern part of the county and flows south westerly through the county emptying into the New River. Indians, for hundreds of years, hunted this wilderness area that provided an abundance of wild game. During the Civil War those who passed through the region saw the enormous amount of valuable virgin timber. And in the decades to follow, the harvesting of trees developed as the major industry for the region. Some of the more common trees were white pine, beech, red oak, sugar maple, black walnut, black cherry and chestnut. The Greenbrier River first facilitated movement into this untamed wilderness to harvest the huge stands of timber and the establishment of lumber mills.

Initially, logs were floated down the river to lumber mills during the later half of the 1800s'. Then the railroad emerged. A branch off the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad in Ronceverte, was built along the Greenbrier River and the first train reached Marlinton on October 26, 1900. On December 22, 1900, the railroad reached the town of Cass. Between Marlinton and Cass the railroad passed through the rural community of Stony Bottom, located at the base of Cheat Mountain along the Greenbrier River. During these up-and-coming years of development and change, Eva May Meeks was born on April 1, 1888, not to far away, on Williams River. During her early years on Williams River she learned to deal with raw fear.

I listened to her tell how she, as a young girl, and her younger sister, on one occasion, walked over the hills and through the woods to visit their friends. They lingered longer than planned and had to return for over one mile in the dark. They had

intended to return during daylight and had not taken a lantern. Panthers, large cats the same as Mountain Lions in the west, roamed the West Virginia mountains during those years. Soon after leaving her friends house, and threading her way through the darkness around trees and undergrowth, she heard a Panther scream. Shivers went through her body. She pulled her younger sister in front and walked faster. Eva told me their scream often sounded like a small child.

Soon they had to climb over a rail fence. One or two minutes after they climbed over, she heard the Panther jump upon the rail fence and scream. She walked as fast as she could, limited by her ability to see while pushing her young sister along. They climbed over a second rail fence and the panther soon screamed again. She kept telling her little sister to walk fast and they would be alright, as she frequently glanced back over her shoulder. When they finally reached an open field within sight of the lighted windows in their home, they ran the remainder of the distance. Eva stated she was really frightened, but could not let her fear show. She didn't want to scare her little sister more than she already was. Had she panicked and run, this could have enticed the panther to attack. But she remained calm in a dangerous situation in the dark of night. An incredible story of bravery for a young girl.

I don't know her age when the family moved through the mountains approximately forty miles to Clover Creek, only a few miles from Stony Bottom. There is where she met Ellis Matrona Moore, who was born in Stony Bottom on August 18, 1882. Ellis, an outdoor man, like most men in that region, worked as a lumberman and on sawmills. According to Kathryn, Eva's surviving daughter, the courtship was only a few months and they were married on December 26, 1906.

Their first small house, a log home, was located in Stony Bottom on what is still known as the McCalpin Place, down near Woods Run Creek, no more than one quarter mile from the railroad. Today, there are no remnants of their first home. Many years ago the railroad track was pulled and the railroad grade

was converted to what is now known as the Greenbrier Trail that follows the Greenbrier River. This is a popular trail for hikers, riding bicycles and even horses pulling old covered wagons.

Their first child, Mamie Marie was born July 25, 1907. The second daughter, Anna Vera, was born August 6, 1908. They were faced with tragedy early in their young marriage. Mamie died December 8, 1908, with measles and high fever. The death of a young child was common during those years.

In 1909 they bought and moved to a larger house near Elk Lick Creek, less than one mile away. The house had been formerly a boarding house for lumbermen. They had the one young daughter at the time, Anna Vera, age one. The house is still occupied today by Bill and Maude Moore. Bill is also Eva's grandson and was raised by her. Today, the house closely resembles the original structure though extensive upgrades have been made over the years. The surrounding grounds, however, are not the same.

Living conditions were considered harsh by any standard. Electricity for power and light was not available in the region. Kerosene lamps were used for lighting. Wood-burning stoves were used for heating and cooking. There was no bathroom. The toilet was the old "Out House," located some distance away. She did not have "running water." In other words, water was not piped into the house. Water was drawn from the well. And with no electricity, there was no refrigerator for preserving food. To current generations, such a way of living is unthinkable. However, it is probably still possible to find similar living standards in the most remote hollows in the Appalachian Mountains. It is remarkable during those early 1900s' how families flourished and enjoyed living under such hardships.

Ellis, in addition to working on lumber mills, was always attempting to improve his surroundings and willing to try new things. During these years of family growth he improved on the

original house. Upstairs were two large bedrooms with two beds in each room, plus a large hallway and storage area in between. Downstairs was one bedroom, the living room, dining room and kitchen with a large walk-in pantry. All rooms were large. A large cast iron flu about twelve inches in diameter, went up from the living room wood-burning stove, through one bedroom where it was totally exposed, and out the roof. This stove provided their primary heat during winter. A wide covered porch wrapped around the front and side of the house.

He built a large chicken house for raising their own flock of Plymouth Rock chickens that would provide an abundant supply of eggs and meat for those mouth-watering Sunday dinners. Attached was a corncrib where shucked ears of corn were stored for feeding chickens and hogs. The icehouse that had walls filled with six inches of sawdust for insulation. During the winter, with the help of the older children, he cut and hauled ice from the river.

This ice, inside the cellar with the sawdust insulated walls, provided a cool place to store food well into July. Here they stored their canned jars of food primarily from the garden and apple orchard. He built a wood shed with a haymow overhead. They could store the chopped wood below for the wood stoves and the dried hay above for the milk cow. It is believed he planted the apple trees on the property. There were several large trees of different varieties, two stories high, that produced a plentiful crop every year. He built a fence around the house. Eva planted and tenderly cared for a variety of flowers and shrubs. Tending her flowers became one of her most enjoyable pastimes. They cleared rock from two to three acres of land to the sides and back of the house for a large vegetable garden, which would become the mainstay of their food supply. During those years you relied on your own hard work and resources. One did not count on help from others. They worked diligently toward becoming a self sufficient family.





Ellis and Eva  
(Probable Wedding Picture)



Ellis and Eva



(Right) Ellis sitting, Eva Standing

(Left) Brother Hoxie Meeks sitting, Maude Standing



Mamie Marie Moore  
Born July 25, 1907 -- Died December 8, 1908



Anna Vera Moore  
Born August 6, 1908



Eva With Daughters  
Allie Kathryn (on lap) and Anna Vera



Vera, Jesse and Kathryn 1914

## **SIX – Eva the Caregiver**

Some of my earliest recollections are of Eva leaving for the day, overnight or longer. She would hear of somebody's illness. Or the family would send for her. Most often it was a young child or an elderly person. It was not uncommon for young children to die from various illnesses. Eva knew firsthand the personal tragedy and heartache of losing children.

On one occasion, I was ill with fever and severe cramps. This continued off and on for two or three days. She was giving me some kind of tonic or medication daily and during the day I lay on the sofa in the living room. When I began to feel better, even though I was still lying around, early one morning she packed a small bag of "her things." She threw it over her shoulder and stated, since I was feeling better, she had to go take care of somebody on Clover Creek. This was a full four or five hour hike across the hills. Her parents, who had lived on Clover Creek, were no longer living. Lloyd, my uncle, was still at home with me. She returned after three or four days.

Then one day Craig Tallman, who lived across the Greenbrier River, came for Eva. Anna Mae, his wife had been seriously ill for several days and was not getting any better. They also had three young boys, the oldest probably no more than age seven. Eva immediately threw some belongings in a small sack and went. The "swinging bridge" across the river would sway and could be very unsteady. It consisted of two or three small planks laid over cable, with cable on both sides, waist high, to hold as you stepped carefully.

Eva did not want to walk over the swinging bridge. Soon they found a rowboat. The river was running high, almost at flood stage, but Eva ventured to cross in the boat. This was a risky undertaking. The current was swift. Two strong men had to paddle, one in front and one in back, with Eva sitting in the

middle. They had to launch upstream in order to reach the desired spot on the other side. And to push the risk factor up a notch, I do not know if Eva could even swim. I had seen her sit in water at the river at the end of a hot summer day when families would gather, but I never saw her swim. I don't believe she could. With the river currents rushing and rolling, the boat could have easily overturned. Many people would have viewed the scene as a disaster waiting to happen. Though Eva was a positive person. When she set out to do something, she believed she would succeed. I did not witness the crossing, but I heard much talk about it over the years. She stayed with the family for almost one week. Craig was worried that his wife may not survive, but she regained her good health soon after Eva's stay.

There is also a humorous side to this story. When Eva returned home she talked about how she would, "Teach those boys some things, if they were hers." In later years when the conversation turned to her stay with the Tallmans, her remarks about the boys always came up. This was amusing to Bill and me. We were certain Eva would "teach" any child some things, if they stayed under her roof. No doubt, whatsoever, in our minds.

Many of Eva's visits were directly attributable to Doc Hannah. After visiting his "patient" he would tell the family, "Go get Eva, if you are not feeling better before I return."

Over the years Doc relied heavily on Eva during those times when he was not readily available. When the illness took a turn for the worse, "Go get Eva," became a common phrase and the desperate call for help, even in the middle of the night. This was uppermost in a worried family's mind when serious illness struck. She always came when called upon. Neighbors never doubted that she would come. Most neighbors were always willing to help another person. But nobody offered themselves to help others to the extent of Eva.

Eva had been called upon often, during many years prior to my memory, by families who needed her healing ways and special care. I have heard her children talk, in later years, about



her willingness to leave “everything” and go immediately where she was wanted. The name, Eva, became a household name throughout the area for families struck with grave illness.

Eva’s visits though were not always due to somebody’s illness. On occasion she would be off with a sack tossed over her shoulder containing a few personal items merely to spend a night with a friend. A couple of her close friends were Quinty Buzzard, a twenty-five minute walk up a steep dirt road and Liza Sharp, who lived at least two miles back upon the mountain. Eva valued her close and good friends.

Then there were times when Eva, Bill and I would be taken to spend a couple nights with Stella Gibson, her younger sister. Willie Gibson, Stella’s husband, would come for us, or Yancy, Eva’s brother would take us. The drive was about one hour and fifteen minutes. The Gibson’s were a large family who lived on Elk Mountain. This was always a fun trip and the feeling was mutual. We were all “family.” Stella also visited Eva on occasion. Both sisters remained close throughout their lives.

The same pattern for visiting also applied to Eva’s brother, Kemp Meeks. During my younger years he lived a thirty-minute drive from Stony Bottom. Visits were made often. Either we visited him or he with his family visited us. Uncle Kemp was a “Paul Bunyan” like man. About six feet three or four inches in height, sturdy, muscular build with huge hands. He always carried a friendly smile with a slow “halting” voice, at times. One of the friendliest, kindest, most helpful men you would ever meet. In later years he lived in Stony Bottom. His death, many years later, was sudden and occurred in an odd way. He, along with other men, was digging a grave for a friend. Each man would take his turn to dig and climb out of the hole for some rest. At one point, Uncle Kemp climbed out, sat down on the edge and suddenly tumbled over. He died instantly from an apparent heart attack. Eva’s other brothers lived in or near Stony Bottom all their lives. And they remained close.

Visiting relatives and friends was probably the most enjoyable

thing families did, except for going to the County Fair each summer. Floyd, Eva's son, has told me several times in the past years there was no money to travel. And you didn't need money to visit. During weekends, especially Sunday, if you remained at home most often somebody would drop in for the day. Families would join together and have an all-day picnic, along the river, at a park in the state forest or in a clearing with mostly grass upon the mountain. Family picnics were common. This was always a fun day for the young kids. The food prepared was unbelievable, including a variety of delicious pies and cakes. And Eva was always one of the first to initiate the outing. She would spend most of one day cooking and baking to prepare. She labored long and hard most days, but when time came to relax, have fun and laugh, she was always ready.

I vividly recall having picnics on the mountain. We traveled several miles on a dirt road to a large grassy clearing about fifty yards in diameter. Located on the brink of the mountain with a panoramic view that overlooked her friend, Liza Sharp's farm far below. The ideal spot for families to spend the entire day together and for the kids to play. When I think of the disharmony in many families today, I think about those days with all the "family togetherness." I did not realize, at the time, how valuable and enriching the time. Life was simple compared to modern day America, but the quality of life was unparalleled. Many of today's families would benefit greatly if they could only spend such quality time together. Even though Eva's childhood and life was embedded in the outdoors, she remained enthused about spending time in pure nature.

During the mid and late thirties, families were overcoming and pulling out of the financial and dreadful hurt thrust upon them by the Depression. Eva was virtually self-sufficient, due to her own foresight, hard work and good planning. Food was always abundant for her family. Yet, she was considered poor by any standard. Many individuals were still "down on their luck" and had little or no food. Transient men were seen often. They were

called, Beggars or Tramps. Some wore tattered, worn clothing and looked like Tramps, while others were dressed decent. Many times while having supper, we heard a knock on the side door leading into the dining room from the outside. Eva would go to the door and a man would ask if she had a little food to spare. Her response was always, "Yes, we do." She would invite the person to come inside and sit at the table, regardless of their appearance. But never once, that I recall, did the Beggar come inside. Eva would prepare a plate stacked high. It was always accepted with manners and effusive thanks. The person would sit on the steps or grass and the plate was always left clean. Eva knew of some people who offered only a couple biscuits. That was not her way of helping a person who needed food.

Strangely, there was never any fear felt when the Tramp knocked. They were not dangerous individuals, just hungry and broke. Often, years later, I wondered why they never came inside. Was it due to some kind of pride? I have concluded it was due to their consideration for the family. They needed food desperately, but wanted to intrude in the least way possible. They never knocked on the front door. It was always a side or back door. Eva never refused to feed one who asked and never wanted to humiliate the person. That person was just as good as she, in her mind. It is ironic nowadays, how we fear many of our fellow human beings. And in many instances justifiability so, unfortunately.

The Pocahontas County Fair held every year, mostly in August, was attended by virtually everybody. The fair was held near Marlinton, a short distance up and along the Greenbrier River. Eva camped for years on the fairground for three or four days. My earliest memory of the fair was with her and being allowed to walk down the hill from the tent, overlooking the fairground, and gaze at the magical attractions down midway. And deciding how to spend my twenty-five or fifty cents. The fair seemed to

have it all: the grandstand with horse racing, stunt car driving, musicians, clowns, sideshows, hotdog and hamburger stands, livestock shows, biplane stunt pilots, several rides including the Ferris wheel, circus animals and more. Eva enjoyed being there a few days to take in all the sights and sounds. She exposed Bill and me to those wondrous thrills at an early age. The county fair was the magical time of summer.

I stated earlier that when time came to relax, have fun and laugh, Eva was always ready. People loved to dance in those days and, of course, still do. A rousing square dance was one of Eva's joys in life. She didn't go to a dance hall or ballroom, there was no such place. She would move every piece of furniture from the large dining room; china cabinet with fine dinner ware, long table that would seat at least twelve people, chairs, huge cupboard with everyday dishes and plants, including a huge Christmas Cactus. The word was passed along and when Saturday night arrived, the house was packed. There were normally three musicians, banjo, fiddle, guitar, and at times mandolin players. Most musicians were versatile and would switch musical instruments every hour or so. All of this musical talent came naturally. None ever had a music lesson. We kids stayed out of the way, but were fascinated by the musicians and sounds. Their heart and feelings came through in their music. People danced as long as the music played which was usually until two or three in the morning. Eva's laugh and desire to see folks have clean fun was contagious. People in those days created their own entertainment, in spite of having few resources. For most, life was a constant struggle, physically and mentally. But they always found a way to lighten the strain and pressure of their hardships from their minds to enjoy living.

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