

*A history of the Ritter Family as told to Murry Connie Ritter by his father, William Young Ritter in 1910 when he was 77 years old.*

“Pap, that's what I called my grandfather (Everett Ritter Sr.) told me most all of this and I believe it to be as close to the truth as he could remember. He always said it was important to know where we come from.

Pap's father told him there were three brothers what came to America from Germany because they was being starved to death by the Catholic Church and a lot of them had been murdered. According to Pap, them three men were the beginnings of our family. There's a lot more of the Ritter's we ain't related to that have passed through these parts but maybe they are distant cousins anyways.

Our family took to Pennsylvania because there were already some people there known to the brothers. Pap knew some German and he said our people were called the Dutch by them that wasn't German but he swore we didn't come from Holland.

Pap said his family came there in the late 1600's when his grandfather was just a boy. His name was John Henry Ritter and when he was grown, him and some of his brothers left Pennsylvania and went further south. John Henry himself settled in to Virginia where he married a girl that died giving birth to Pap's father, Jesse Ritter. Later on, he moved to North Carolina and married again to a widow lady named Gussie. They had several children together, I'm not sure of all their names but I know Jesse and his half-brother, John left there and settled in Moore County, North Carolina. There may have been more of them moved there but John was the only one Pap ever talked on about.

Another one of their brothers moved to Indiana and there are still people living there who we are related to as well as all over Tennessee. I'm reasonable certain we're related to all the Ritter's in Mississippi and Alabama too.

Jesse and John Ritter had an uncle living in Moore County and the story goes that he talked Jesse and John into moving there with the promise of rich farmland to be had for the taking. Pap said Uncle Moses was a mean old bastard and he near worked those boys to death clearing his own land.

Once John and Jesse got enough ahead to get their own land, Jesse married a wild woman named either Susannah, Hanna or Anna according to who was telling the story. And there were a lot of stories about her to be sure. Everybody said Jesse was an easygoing, Christian man but his wife made his life miserable and she had been known to take after him with an iron skillet on more than one occasion. She was supposed to be a Wallace, but no one was sure. Lots of Pap's family claimed that woman came straight from the loins of old Scratch.

They had eleven younguns together, Everett who was my grandfather, John, Hannah, August who died as a child. Thomas, Cloey, Elizabeth, James, he didn't never marry, Jesse, Nancy, and Susan. It seems like they was all good names cause our family kept on using them through the years. Pap would often tell different ones they had been named after Uncle this or Auntie that.

Anyways, Jesse's wife run off and left him after all the younguns were borned. He told everyone it was because his aunt was a bad influence on her but like I said, he was supposedly a sweet natured person who would forgive anything. After some time, he married another woman named Charlotte and they had two more children, Hannah and Daniel. We never knew them and Pap thinks they moved to South Carolina cause Susannah came back one day and chased Charlotte out of the house, telling her she

would have her arrested for fornication as she and Grandpa Jesse had never got no divorce. I guess that means we got relations in South Carolina too.

Pap, (Everett Ritter Sr) supposedly inherited his mama's wild disposition instead of his father's more somber one and he was known to be a hell raiser from an early age. He stayed in trouble and had the law called on him more than once according to the tales. His daddy thought getting married was what Pap needed to settle him some but Pap didn't want to be shackled down. He was near on to forty years old before he took to Grannie Nancy and married her. Even then, it didn't slow him down one bit. That old man raised hell up until he died and that's the God's truth of it.

And for that matter, we don't know how many half sisters and brothers my Da actually had back in North Carolina. Pap wasn't no saint, I'll tell you that for sure. But he weren't scairt of nothing and he raised all his children to be that way too. They was all good folks and that's known by everyone that met them.

After Pap had some money to spare, he started trading with the Indians up in the mountains and he spoke their language pretty good. Pap told me one time that he made some fine sour mash that he traded too but Da wouldn't talk about that. He told us Pap made a good living but that he was bad tempered and tended to get het up over property lines and such. One day after he got into a fight with his neighbors, he packed up his family and left Carolina for good, saying he was going somewhere there weren't so many people. A few of his children stayed behind but most of them went with him.

For a time he settled in Tennessee and kept up trading for a living. His boys were all good with trapping so they made out okay. While they were living there, Grannie Nancy took a fever and was sick for some time before she died. Pap grieved her for awhile but he finally married a girl by the name of Charlotte. She were half his age and he got some more children off her...my da's sisters Susan and Maggie and their baby brother, Frank, who got killed in the war. I think being married to Pap was pretty rough on her though cause I remember her looking older than he did.

But Pap had the wanderlust according to Da and he kept on looking to move some place else. He had got to know a lot of the Indian folks around there and he met up with a fella that worked for the government as an Indian agent. This fella told Pap about some good opportunities in the Alabama Territories for a trader like him. He stayed on in Tennessee for awhile but then trouble started brewing with the Indians around that time and the local folks were talking about calling in the army which didn't set too well with Pap..

There was an attack on a farm by a bunch of men Pap claimed weren't really Indians, just white men who wanted to run the family off the land so they could get it. Pap said the men painted themselves all over and tore the place up in the middle of the night while hooping and hollering like they was savages. That done it for Pap. Truth was, he got on better with the Indians than his own kind. He pulled up stakes in Tennessee and headed south on the Indian trail with the agent.

He got a piece of land and set up an outpost there for them what was heading west over the Mississippi River. His boys would make regular trips into Tennessee to fetch supplies and several of them got their wives up there. Da (Everett Jr.) didn't though. There was an full blood Indian by the name of William Young that did some translating for the agent with the different tribes around there. In those days, there were Choctaw, Cherokee and Chikasaw bringing in furs and meat for trade. William Young's name was something else in the Indian language but the agent called him that because his real name was too hard to say.

The agent's wife was a kindly woman and she took an interest in the Indian children that come down the trail with their folks. That were before they made all of them move away. She taught them to speak English and to read and write if they wanted to. She was particular fond of William Young's daughter who was real bright and stayed with her a lot when her Pa was away.

Well, Da and this Indian girl, they called her Jane, started courting and ended up married which made Pap real happy. Everyone always said Mama was Pap's favorite daughter in law. That's how I came to be called William Young, was after Mama's Pa, they named me. Da and Mama laid claim to some land in Alabama and set up a goodly farm there. Lucky for us, Da took more after Grannie Nancy than he did Pap so he made a pretty good go of things. Him and Mama had 10 children together and only two of them didn't make it.

My brother, Tom, married a good woman named Delila Ray. They had eleven children. He died a few years ago over in Smithville. Eliza Jane was born pretty quick after him. She married a Loggins what died in the war and was left with 5 children to raise on her own. She married a Thomson after that and moved up to Arkansas. I don't know what become of her children, if they're still in Arkansas or not. It's hard to keep track of them that don't have the Ritter name. My brother Robert married Betty Turner. They had 5 children but he died pretty soon after the war ended. I guess you know all of them. There was me and then, Issac who was named after our uncle. He was married to Lucinda Cody who was your Mama's sister. Them and your uncle, Everett all moved away to Oklahoma. Last I heard, Everett was running a store up there. He had a whole passel of children but he always had a good head on him and he's doing real well for himself.

My sister Charlotte married Jake Cody, your Mama's brother. He died up North during the war. They only had one son before he passed. After the war, Charlotte married George Bayless and ended up living in Oklahoma. Nancy was another one that moved to Oklahoma as well as my baby brother, J. H. I don't recall if he ever had any children but I think he was living near to Everett when he passed away.

I guess Oklahoma agreed with all them cause none of them ever moved back here. They all had different reasons for their leaving, a lot of it having to do with our Cherokee blood and how people treated us. From the time we were little, we was told not to talk about Mama being an Indian because the government would take her away. We all claimed we was white from as far back as I can remember. No matter why so many of our family left, I figure deep down, it weren't nothing but Pap's wonderlust coming out in them. I think me and Tom took more after Da than the rest of them did cause we stayed right here.

I don't know how well you remember Da but he was a horse, I tell you. He worked right up until he died. Mama was like that too, didn't nothing keep her down. She'd push out one of my brothers or sisters and be in the kitchen fixing supper an hour later. We were all crazy about her. She had a big ole tomahawk she kept near her and we all believed she knew how to use it and would if anyone looked at her wrong like.

Some of the folks around here objected to her having Indian blood, probably to us too but didn't nobody dare cross Da where Mama was concerned. He would have kilt somebody over that woman, that's the truth of it. When she passed on, they said she couldn't be buried in the churchyard because she was an Indian so Da put her in the ground over towards Chesterville where some of the Riggan family was already laid to rest. He got the stone cut for her and sat out there until he had carved her name into it himself. He didn't budge until it was finished even when it poured rain down on him.

After he got done with her stone, he never said a word to any of us but got on his horse and rode off into the woods. We didn't know if he were dead or alive for years but one day he showed back up. We was all scairt to ask where he'd been, but ever now and then, he'd let it slip out about having seen one of our relations up in Arkansas and Oklahoma. I guess he just went roaming until he got done grieving. He were close to a hundred when he died but he still had a full head of hair and didn't back down from nothing.

I guess you know about Da giving his homestead over to me when he got older. He still liked to work it though. He'd been hurning some brush that morning and sat down in the shade of the porch to rest. When your Mama came outside, she noticed his eyes were shut and thought he was sleeping. It was after that, when she was calling us in to dinner that she noticed his head had fallen forward onto his chest. We buried him beside Mama and had "husband of Jane" carved on his stone. We all thought he would've liked it that way.

Me and your Mama had a good run of it too. Had us a fine family and plenty to eat most of the time. When the war came, all of us were rearing to join up, including most of our cousins. We all thought we were going to be heroes. Da said we were a bunch of damned fools but we was young and figured he didn't know anything. He was right though. The things I seen done to righteous men, shouldn't nobody have seen. By the time it was over we had a different idea about the war. Considering I still got the shakes so bad I can't do much of anything, I wish I had listened to Da. At least I still got my mind. That's better than some of them I served with.

That's pretty much all I got, son. You know ever thing I do after that. I hope you have as many children as me and your Mama did and you can pass all this along to them. Like Pap always said, we need to remember where we come from and them what died to get us here.