

Becky

by Amos E. Hawkins

Introduction

“Becky” is a story rooted in the hills of early West Virginia, where life was simple, hard, and deeply tied to faith and family. It follows one family’s struggles and joys as they make a home in the wilderness, weaving together the threads of survival, love, and sacrifice.

This short story was written by Amos Hawkins in cursive. It was transcribed by his son, Dennis Hawkins, and presented here in the first section. There is a second version of the story that was condensed by Chat GPT that some people might find easier to read. Lastly, the third section is composed of scans of the original manuscript.

This story is told in honor of the quiet lives that shaped the mountains—ordinary people whose faith, labor, and endurance left behind a legacy of strength. Becky’s tale is just one among many, but it carries the timeless voice of the hills.

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In Virginia (later West Virginia) in the very heart of the mountains, was a family who lived in a house on the side of a mountain. The house wasn't much. It had the front door on the ground on the hill and the back side held up with wooden posts. Grandpa had built this house himself and was very careful the floor of this house was level. It had two rooms and a kitchen for grandma to cook in. There was no stove to cook on so the cooking was done in a large fireplace that had been built with a double face. One fireplace heated the house in the cold winters and the other fireplace was in the kitchen for grandma to cook in. Grandma thought grandpa was the most thoughtful person for having put her a special fireplace in the kitchen. They could eat in the kitchen now and talk and visit in the front room.

The house also had a loft for Becky to sleep in. That was her room.

Grandpa had come to that area and bought that land when he got married to grandma. The land wasn't much. It would almost grow beans. There was a narrow ridge that could be farmed and a narrow valley below that had a small piece of "bottom land". This land was a bit richer than the ridge land.

About all grandpa could raise on the land was just barely enough to keep the family from starving. He raised a hog each year and grandma kept chickens. They also had a cow that roamed the open range with a bell on her neck so grandma could find her when she wanted to milk. They made butter from the cream and when they had plenty of milk and butter, grandma would make cheese. They always had plenty of buttermilk to drink and cottage cheese to eat.

There was a trail that went almost by their house. It was a good two to three miles distant, but to them that was close and they were fortunate to have a piece of land so close to the road!

They had to go down to the valley and follow the valley until it came to a larger branch (creek). They then followed that creek downstream for a ways and there was the road.

Being so remote, grandpa and grandma didn't have much company and having no horse they seldom went anywhere. They were more or less isolated.

If they wanted to go to the mill, they walked to the ridge until it ended and then went down the mountain to the valley below and nestled against the opposite mountain was a small community with a grist mill. There was also a small general store there. These were leftovers from the lumber company that had come though and cut all of the virgin timber and left.

It was always a days trip to the mill when grandpa and grandma needed corn meal so they could have a corn pone to eat with their meals.

Corn pone was bread that was made of corn meal in the skillet. It was a coarse bread but tasty and filling.

Grandma and grandpa were happy living in their meager existence. The Lord had blessed them hadn't He? They had a place of their own and were happy.

One day grandma let grandpa know that she was with child. Grandpa was happy and wanted to go for a midwife right away. Grandma laughed and told him he better wait. Several months later, grandma let grandpa know that she would soon need the services of the midwife.

Grandpa went to the mill to see if there was one near there. There was one up on the side of the mountain. Grandpa went to fetch her home for grandma. When they arrived home, they found out they were too late. The baby was already born and everything was OK.

The midwife stayed overnight and grandpa and grandma called the baby Elizabeth. She would be known as Becky to everyone. She was named for her Aunt Becky.

This family was never given the privilege of having anymore children for some reason. Becky was an only child and she got plenty of attention from grandpa.

Grandpa and grandma were Christians and loved to go to church, but they had a circuit rider for a pastor and had to share him with other churches. This meant they couldn't go to church much and besides, church was held in different people's homes. This meant a long walk for grandpa and grandma sometimes. Sometimes they had to walk for two days to get to the home where the service was to be held. Going that far in the winter was out of the question.

This was the life Becky grew up in. She was accustomed to hard work.

One day when she was sixteen, she went to church and met a young man there that took an interest in her. He came to her home to court which was proper for those days. After about a year of courting he asked Becky to marry him.

Grandpa sat down with him to find out who's boy he was. It turned out that he was Aunt Becky's husband's younger brother. No 'kin' to Becky.

Moe Jesse was a lazy fellow. He had been listening to the preacher and heard him quote from the Bible about "if the Lord will take care of the animals and plants then if you believe he will take care of you." He missed the part about the "sweat of the brow". Jesse took this to heart and felt God meant that for him. He wouldn't work and lived off his relatives. Marrying Becky was an ideal way to be taken care of by her parents in his way of thinking.

Before Becky and Jesse were married, grandpa built a room onto the house and gave it to Becky & Jesse to live in after they were married.

Becky and grandma sold eggs and chickens and other stables until they could buy the thread to weave cloth to make Becky a wedding dress. It wasn't much, but it was new and Becky had lovingly pressed it with a hot iron until it looked nice.

Becky put the dress on, fixed her hair up pretty and then let her for the look at her.

"Yore plum pretty, Becky! I sure hope Jesse appreciates all the work you and grandma have gone to, to be pretty for him on your wedding day."

Becky and Jesse were to be married at grandpa's house when the preacher came. Jesse arrived after the preacher came. He had on a pair of long pants with leggins wound from his ankles to his knees. The pants were dirty, but he had put on a clean shirt and shaved and combed his hair. The shirt was wrinkled from not being ironed but it was clean.

The preacher came and Becky and Jesse were married. They went into their room and only came out when it was time to eat. Grandpa tried to get Jesse to help around the place, but Jesse would not work.

Grandpa told grandma that he was about to pull a John Smith on Jesse and tell him that he wither worked or didn't eat. Grandma was appalled! If he denied Jesse food, he would in turn deny Becky food! How could he do that to his own daughter? Grandpa backed off and grandma got Becky to work some, but she couldn't do much for she was with child by now.

In due time, Becky gave birth to a pretty red headed baby girl. Becky was happy, but grandpa was so happy that he didn't care if Jesse was living off of him. He was happier than he had been when Becky was born. He took Suzie with him and taught her a lot of things. Grandma cautioned Suzie not to go near the water until she learned to swim. Grandpa took her to the branch and made a dam to where there was enough water in it for Suzie to swim. Grandpa made Suzie learn to swim.

Grandpa fussed and talked to Suzie when he had her to himself. He loved that little girl!

One day grandpa & Suzie had walked to the mill to get some corn ground and there was a sign asking for workers in most trades in Ohio. There was a new iron furnace being built and they would pay the most common of laborers ten dollars a month to work. Workers would get a cabin to live in and a small piece of ground. There would be a church nearby and a school for the boys and girls.

Grandpa thought this was just meant of God for Jesse to move there with his family. Where would he ever get a better offer?

Grandpa and Suzie came home and told Jesse and Becky. They looked at one another. Finally Jesse spoke up and remarked that Suzie did need to be in school. Someone in the family should learn to read and write!

Jesse borrowed a horse from one of his relatives and took off one morning early for Ohio. He found the place after some trouble and saw the head man. He was offered a position and shown a cabin that would be his if he took the position.

Jesse looked at the church and the school, came back and told the boss that he believed God wanted him to take the position. He would return home and have his family there by the first of the next month.

Jesse returned home and broke the news to the family. Becky was excited about having a place of her own and a garden that didn't roll down the mountain each time it rained.

Grandpa was happy. He was getting rid of Jesse and Jesse was getting a good job apparently. The only thing that saddened him was that he was losing his beloved granddaughter. She was now twelve years old and would soon be getting married and leaving her grandpa, but this was a bit sooner than grandpa had planned. He cried when they all left and made them promise to return to visit sometime.

Becky

by Amos E. Hawkins and ChatGPT

In Virginia — later West Virginia — in the very heart of the mountains, a family lived in a small house perched on the mountainside.

The house wasn't much to look at. The front door opened at ground level, but the back stood on wooden posts driven deep into the slope. Grandpa had built the place himself, careful to make the floor true and level. It had two rooms and a kitchen, where Grandma did her cooking.

There was no stove, only a wide fireplace built with a double face: one side for warmth in the front room, the other for cooking in the kitchen. Grandma often said Grandpa was the most thoughtful man alive for giving her a fireplace of her own. Now they could eat in the kitchen and visit in the front room, just like fine folks.

Above the rooms, a small loft served as Becky's space. That was her room, her little world.

Grandpa had bought the land when he first married. It wasn't much—so poor it would almost grow beans. A narrow ridge offered a few rows of planting, and down below was a scrap of bottomland, a little richer but still stingy.

He raised just enough to keep the family alive: a hog each year, a few chickens, a cow that roamed the open range with a bell around her neck so Grandma could find her for milking. From the cream they churned butter; when there was extra, Grandma made cheese. Buttermilk was always on the table, along with cottage cheese and corn pone fried crisp in a skillet.

The nearest road lay two or three miles away. To them, that was close. To reach it, they followed the valley to a larger branch, then trailed the creek downstream until they came to the road.

So far from neighbors and with no horse, they rarely traveled. A trip to the grist mill meant a full day's walk. They walked the ridge, valley, and down to a small settlement where a mill and general store stood as relics of the lumbermen who had stripped the virgin timber and moved on.

Life was hard, but it was theirs. And they were content. The Lord had given them a home, a living, and each other.

One spring, Grandma told Grandpa she was expecting. He wanted to fetch a midwife right away, but she laughed and told him to wait. Months later, she said it was nearly time. Grandpa brought a midwife down from the mountain, but they arrived too late. The baby was already born, healthy and strong.

They named her Elizabeth, after her aunt, but everyone called her Becky.

For reasons no one could say, Grandpa and Grandma were never blessed with more children. Becky became their joy, their one bright treasure. Grandpa doted on her, teaching her the ways of the farm and the woods.

They were churchgoing people, but services came seldom. A circuit rider rode through when he could, preaching in homes scattered across the ridges. Sometimes it meant a two-day walk, which was near impossible come winter. Becky grew up in this quiet, isolated life, used to hard work and little company.

At sixteen, she met a young man at church. He came properly to court her at the house. After a year of visits, he asked for her hand.

Grandpa sat him down to learn who he was. The boy turned out to be Aunt Becky's husband's younger brother — not kin, which was a relief. His name was Jesse.

Jesse was strong but lazy, a dreamer who had taken the preacher's words to mean the Lord would provide without a man having to sweat for his bread. To him, marrying Becky meant being looked after by her parents.

Still, Grandpa built a room onto the house for the young couple. Grandma and Becky sold eggs and chickens until they had enough to buy thread for weaving a simple wedding dress. Becky pressed it smooth with a hot iron until it shone.

"You're plum pretty, Becky," Grandma told her, tears in her eyes. "I hope Jesse knows the treasure he's getting."

They were married in the little house when the preacher came through. Jesse showed up in dirty pants bound with leggings, though he had shaved and put on a clean shirt. Wrinkled or not, it would have to do.

After the vows, Jesse moved into the new room with Becky. Grandpa tried to get him to work, but Jesse never lifted a hand. Grandpa swore he'd "pull a John Smith" on him — work or don't eat — but Grandma wouldn't hear of it. If Jesse went hungry, Becky would too.

Soon Becky was expecting, and in time she gave birth to a red-haired baby girl they named Suzie. Grandpa's heart swelled. He adored the child even more than he had adored Becky. He taught her to fish, to climb, even built a dam across the creek so she could learn to swim. Suzie became the very light of his old age.

One day, he and Suzie went to the mill and saw a sign calling for laborers in Ohio. A new iron furnace was being built, offering ten dollars a month, a cabin with a garden plot, a school for the children, and a church nearby. To Grandpa, it seemed the Lord had opened a door. Surely Jesse could not refuse such a chance.

When they came home, Jesse listened. For once he agreed. Suzie needed schooling. He borrowed a horse and rode to Ohio, where he found the place, spoke to the head man, and accepted the offer. He returned, saying God meant for him to take the job.

Becky was excited at the thought of her own home and a garden that wouldn't wash down the

mountain with every rain.

Grandpa was relieved—Jesse finally had honest work. But his heart broke at the thought of losing Suzie. She was only twelve, but soon enough she'd be grown, and now she was moving away too soon.

He cried when they left, and made them promise they'd come back to visit.

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Being so remote, grandpa and grandma didn't have much company and having no horse they seldom went anywhere. They were more or less isolated.

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