



TONYA'S TALES

By Tonya Sprague

A Promise Kept

Ten years ago, on April 8, 1998, my grandfather on my father's side, William Lloyd Brantley, (Pee Paw) passed away at age 84. It wasn't until months after his funeral that I realized I missed the opportunity to talk in depth with him about his family history. I didn't know much at all about his parents and grandparents. I had so many things that I wanted to ask him and lots of unanswered questions. It was around that time that I began working on my family tree. I was compelled to find out what I could and as much as I could about my father's side of our family. My dad didn't know too much about his ancestry either and recommended that I talk to his uncle Tommy, Pee Paw's

younger brother. To my surprise, it turned out that my great uncle Tommy had started working on the Brantley family tree many years ago. I could hear the excitement in his heavy Georgia southern accent over the phone as he began telling me what he was able to research and remember. He lived in Powder Springs, Georgia not too far away from Atlanta. He told me that when he came up for a visit in a few weeks he would bring me everything he had about our family tree.

A couple of anxious weeks later, uncle Tommy gave me a big folder full of information that he had gathered over the years and asked me to continue where he left off. He only got as far back as his

grandparents. When I asked him what he knew about my great great grandfather he told me that neither he nor his siblings and relatives ever asked about him. He said, "We never bothered to ask, and never thought to ask until it was too late." It was then that I made the promise to him to find out as much as I could, keep him informed on my progress, and bring him our updated family tree. It took many years, lots of research, and several progress reports, but I finally got the answers to the questions my great uncle Tommy longed to know and the stories behind a family history we never even knew.

Saturday, March 15, 2008 will forever be remembered as one of the proudest days of my life. I refer to it as one of the most significant "life markers" I've had so far. It was the day I made good on the promise to my great uncle Tommy Brantley. He is now 83, and in a nursing home in Powder Springs, Georgia. Parkinson's disease has taken over his ability to get around on his own and reduced his heavy Georgia accent to a whisper, but his mind is still as sharp as a tack. I could still hear the excitement in his voice as we began another progress report. I cannot express how honored I was to read our family tree book to uncle Tommy and see his smile and pride filled eyes when he finally got to see the results of the hard work that he started and passed on to me to update. I told him the

details of our ancestors and showed him family documents and photos of those he'd never seen, including the last will and testament of Edward Brantley, the first of our lineage to come to America from Great Britain in 1638. I showed him the tombstone of his third great grandfather, Amos Brantley, a Revolutionary War Soldier from Hancock County, Georgia who was a private in the company commanded by Captain Bacott of the regiment command by Colonel Archibald Lytles in the North Carolina line from 1782 to 1783. I showed him a picture of his grandfather James Amos Brantley, who he never thought to ask about until it was too late. He was a Confederate guard of the Georgia Volunteer Infantry who enlisted on July 15, 1861 and was later appointed 4th Corporal on November 30, 1862 before he surrendered with General Robert E. Lee at the Appomattox Court House in Virginia on April 9, 1865. For my great uncle Tommy, a W.W.II Navy Veteran, to get the opportunity to know where we came from and who we came from is a proud moment I will cherish forever. I only wish I could have started this sooner in time for Pee Paw to know too. But I'm sure he's met the whole family by now.

I'm still researching and learning more about my ancestors. I encourage you to research your genealogy and start or update your family tree. After all, the word 'genealogy' means family

knowledge. You can learn more from your local genealogy society. The experience and the feeling you get when you discover new things about your family history is unlike any other. You contribute to the stories that get passed down from generation to generation. I came across a wonderful story myself while researching my family history that I will share with you. If nothing else, I hope it inspires you like it does me every time I read it.

The Storytellers... We are the chosen. In each family there is one who seems called to find the ancestors. To put flesh on their bones and make them live again, to tell the family story and to feel that somehow they know and approve. Doing genealogy is not a cold gathering of facts but, instead, breathing life into all who have gone before. We are the storytellers of the tribe. All tribes have one. We have been called, as it were, by our genes. Those who have gone before cry out to us: Tell our story. So we do. In finding them, we somehow find ourselves. How many graves have I stood before now and cried? I have lost count. How many times have I told the ancestors you have a wonderful family you would be proud of us? How many times have I walked up to a grave and felt somehow there was love there for me? I cannot say. It goes beyond just documenting facts. It goes to who am I and why do I do the things I do. It goes to seeing a ceme-

tery about to be lost forever to weeds and indifference and saying I can't let this happen. The bones here are bones of my bone and flesh of my flesh. It goes to doing something about it. It goes to pride in what our ancestors were able to accomplish. How they contributed to what we are today. It goes to respecting their hardships and losses, their never giving in or giving up, their resoluteness to go on and build a life for their family. It goes to deep pride that the fathers fought and some died to make and keep us a Nation. It goes to a deep and immense understanding that they were doing it for us. It is of equal pride and love that our mothers struggled to give us birth, without them we could not exist, and so we love each one, as far back as we can reach. That we might be born who we are. That we might remember them. So we do. With love and caring and scribing each fact of their existence, because we are they and they are the sum of who we are. So, as a scribe called, I tell the story of my family. It is up to that one called in the next generation to answer the call and take my place in the long line of family storytellers That is why I do my family genealogy, and that is what calls those young and old to step up and restore the memory or greet those whom we had never known before. -Author unknown.

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