



Durwood Ling – Doucette Blueberry Farm

Tyler County Booster, 2-25-16, 8B.

Durwood Ling built the first store in Doucette, Texas, decades ago, and his wife Estelle ran the Post Office there for 30 years.

He lives on the same property he was born on, delivered in his parent's home by African American midwife Dossie Moye in 1943. She was fond of saying, "I was the first one to spank your behind."

"Lived right here all my life," Durwood said.

The school line between the Doucette and Colmesneil schools was the creek, so he attended Colmesneil school from the 1st through the 12th grades. Working in the field with his father as soon as he was able, he grew up hunting deer and squirrels and fishing.

His leather hands, weathered features and old hat betray an earthy man. Among his several cowboy hats, his favorite was bought at the old J. B. Best in Woodville. Favored by his nephew, Jacob Waldrep, the hat fits like a glove and has seen many miles of sun, rain and sweat. Rough features, grey mustache and wild black eyebrows, Durwood and his signature hat resemble Beverly Hillbillies' Jed Clampett, only, for those who know him, there ends the country resemblance. Unlike Clampett's rather slow and reserved demeanor, Durwood is a bit boisterous, very clear and direct, his hands raise spontaneously to make his point, in no way shy of his opinion.

Above the back door of his house is a six-foot long photo of the Long Bell Lumber Company that sprawled out over Doucette from the 1920-40s. His father, Clarence Ling, worked in the woods all his life, lumber being the industry for Doucette. Before machines, his father would peal pine trees for poles in the woods by hand—very hard work.

"Just over the railroad track," Durwood said, "is the house I was born in, kinda ragged looking. My brother, De Wayne, is fixing it into a hay barn." Lots of history here. "We raised peas, beans, sugar cane, peanuts, cows."



He thought a moment. “Momma would store milk in the spring, to keep it cool. Our ice box took a 50-pound block of ice in the top. But it was expensive. Might last a month. You did not raise the lid, or momma would get upset.”

Durwood is nine years older than his brother and nine years younger than his sister, De Lois, because, “Momma said we were too hard to raise. Just raise one at a time. She was excited when she sold a cow and bought a Hotpoint Refrigerator from Ogden Chevrolet in Colmesneil.”

“While a junior in high school,” Durwood said, “I’d deliver goods for Bendy’s Grocery in Colmesneil in an old truck. Many would send an order to the store by mail or a friend. I’d fill the order, deliver and take payment. Mr. Bendy told me, ‘Listen boy, the ladies will offer you cookies, and you are to take them, whether you want them or not, because it is the kind thing to do.’”

His father gave Durwood an acre of land to work while he was in high school. Durwood grew and sold a crop of butter beans, then went to work at A & M Motor Company, then located where now sits the Woodville Inn, selling International trucks, tractors and Pontiac cars. Durwood became the parts man and worked on tractors, and his father made him deposit half of his \$50 pay every week in a savings account.

Durwood eyed a new red 1961 International pickup with one of the first V8s. Only 18, not old enough to buy it, his father would have to sign for him.

“Mr. F. M. Archer told me,” Durwood said, “‘Take it home and let your father see it.’ It cost \$1,800. My father asked how much I had in my savings. I had \$2,200. The next day we went to see Mr. Archer. My father told him that ‘We are not going to have any note.’ So I withdrew the money, and my father signed for me to get the truck. But he made me continue to put money back in my bank account.”



Durwood and Estelle working together, as they always did

Years ago, Durwood parked the old truck in a shed, where it sits to this day. You just don’t get rid of somethings.

Estelle, his sweetheart, was harder to catch. Patsy Nugent Grimes worked at A & M, and she and Estelle were good friends.

"I asked Estelle if she would like to go to Ferral's Café," Durwood said, "And she said, 'No!'"

Durwood smiled. "Later, I asked if she would like to go to the Drive Inn, and she no again!" He shook his head slightly. "Then I asked her," his voice raised a bit, "where *can* you go? She said, 'Church!' So, we'd go to church, Assemble God in Colmesneil. We'd go to church for every date. When we snuck off to the theater, we were grounded for two weeks."

"We got married when she turned 21, but, since I was only 20, I had to get my daddy's permission." That was 1963, and she is the love of his life.

His aunt had some property close by, and father said, "You need to buy some property and build a house, that way you will always have something to eat."

"Full of pine trees," Durwood said, "you cannot eat pine cones."

His father replied, "But you can eat what comes to them."

Pretty obvious where Durwood got his sharp wit. He was too young to get a bank loan, too. But since he would be 21 in a few months, the bank said he would be old enough when the house was built, so they fronted him the \$9,500 to build.

Among the photos all over their home is one of Estelle behind a horse-drawn plow. She helped plow the land. Another photo showed her on the tractor, so happy, them moving on up to a tractor.

The story of how his exemption from the Vietnam draft was rescinded, sending him immediately into the army, pales in comparison to how he got a hardship release to reserve duty, largely because his superior knew Durwood was not shy about his opinion.

Trained as a nurse, Estelle worked at the Woodville Hospital until she found out her husband payed the store help more than she made. She did not care for the store work and soon took a job at the Doucette Post Office. Within a month, the post master got sick and died. Not long after she was appointed post master, a position she held for 30 years, retiring in 2003, remembered fondly to this day.

Durwood sold the store in 1985 and started Ling's Blueberry Farm, about 1,000 plants that come due around the first of May. Only last year, 2015, they came in June. People come from all around.

"I've a set of scales there. On the honor system," he said, "you pick and weigh them, 50 cents per pound, and put money into the can. Most people put in more, I guess. Every year, a lady in her 80s comes from Houston and picks 100 pounds. This year, she was kind of sad because she wore out, only getting 96 pounds."

If you want blueberries in May, call him at 409-837-2263.



These days, Estelle's health has not been good. Downsizing to give more time to his sweetheart, he sold his two post offices and gave to the True Vine Baptist Church some property across the street from the church.

"I did not want the property to become a beer joint," Durwood said, and he had always had good relationships with the African Americans there.

Annie Jacobs said, "Durwood is nicest man living in this area.... Takes good care of his beautiful wife.... His door is always open." Ruth Durham said, "Wonderful friend. Makes the best cornbread ever." Sue Shaw recalled how her son was in a fix and Durwood just showed up and made things right again.

Estelle collects old whisky bottles and German beer steins, something he joked about, her being such a devoted Christian and never having taken a drink. She painted, too, and her work is all over their home, from landscapes to Hank the Cow Dog.

How much he loves her is an example for all us. He does everything these days. Cleans, gets groceries, chauffeurs to doctors, fixes lunch and dinner.

"At night," Durwood said, in a tone as though there was nothing else he would do, "in case she needs something, I sleep in the living room on the floor next to her."



Iron artwork over Durwood and Estelle's Garage