

easy to pick out.

Kathleen Brown was born in 1921 on the very top of Peter's Mountain where the AT&T super secret communications facility is today. She remembers running barefoot and fetching water from a mountainside spring, warming herself by a woodstove while the wind howled outside. And she vividly remembers the day they moved down to Barboursville. No electricity, no car. "Nooooo indeed, we had a buggy and a wagon." She was five years old. "We moved on a wagon with horses. We had cows. My brother and George Haney got behind the cows and drove them. I remember that." She also remembers, "we had a little, one-room schoolhouse up on the mountain, and I went up there, but when I come down to Barboursville, I wasn't but five, and you had to be six before you could start school in Barboursville."

The Brown family moved into a house "right by the railroad track. We lived as close to the railroad track as this street out here." She points out the window to Peliso Avenue. "These trains would go right by our house, and as the trains went by, and the cars that hauled the coal, they were open, and sometimes the coal would fall off on the railroad down on the bank, and somebody said, 'if



Kathleen Clore takes a World War II rationing book from the yellow box that her husband George Bickers brought back from Germany after the war. The box holds cherished mementos spanning decades.

Photo by Phil Audibert

y'all go up and down the track and pick up coal, when you get ready to iron your clothes put that in the stove, it'll make your iron a whole lot hotter.' And we used to do it and sho' 'nuff it was so."

In the heat of summer, the kids watched the refrigerator cars go by, essentially ice boxes on wheels. "And those big yellow box cars, it would be people riding on them you know, and they would throw us off great big chunks of ice." She smiles demurely. "I had a good childhood."

Kathleen attended James Barbour High School, back in the days when oil lamps were the

only nighttime illumination. The school's auditorium was where Four County Players is now. "We had to go to the pump and get our water to drink," she remembers. "They finally put in water and bathrooms." She pauses and her piercing blue eyes take on a distant look. "Those were the good ole days," she says, adding "That's one thing I have... a good memory, thank God."

Outside Kathleen's house fly at least two American flags every day. "I LOVE flags," she says passionately, "a flag; that means a lot to me."

Coming up this next month, Kathleen will have lived in this same house on Peliso for 53 years! And, just last month Kathleen, surrounded by three generations of family and friends, celebrated her 85th birthday, ironically at her old workplace, now the Silk Mill Grille. "I'm the last one," she says with a note of finality. "There were 11 of us, and I'm the only one living." She steadfastly refuses to go to a nursing facility, and although she has a little trouble getting around, she seems to be doing just fine... home alone.

Besides...she's not really "home alone," is she? June Sturm of the

Rappahannock-Rapidan Community Services Board comes by once a week to help clean and take care of Kathleen's needs, referring to her as "one of my most delightful clients...a beautiful lady." And then, "the man up the street comes and checks on me...this woman over here," Kathleen points up and down the street. "Even a town cop comes in and checks on me," she says with mock surprise.

Most importantly, there's her family. Son, George stops in regularly Wednesday eves to read to her "that scandal sheet," the *Orange County Review* (you saw it here first, folks), and cook her dinner. Son, Kenneth regularly does the shopping. Daughter, Betty Sue, although she lives in Haymarket, keeps in touch by phone and post, sending dozens of family photos. Grand and great grandchildren dote on her. "My children are very good to me," says Kathleen gratefully. "When God Almighty made them, he lost the pattern."

She's lucky to have everyone so close; in these times, many families scatter to the four winds. "People change, you know it. It looks like they're pushing away from each other," she observes. "That's what's wrong with the world; there's no love like there used to be. And it looks like families are pulling away from each other."

Kathleen's knuckles are gnarled by arthritis. She's had two heart attacks, a hip replacement, takes a cornucopia of medications daily. Last month she fell and hit her head. But she doesn't complain. "The good Lord's got a reason and purpose for everything and everybody; I believe in that. He's keeping me here for some reason." She rummages again through the yellow box.



Home alone with the yellow box

Kathleen Clore spends most of her time home alone with a small, yellow metal box. But she doesn't seem bored or depressed. Surrounded by family photographs and memorabilia, she has set herself up in her favorite easy chair in a sort of mini-den in her kitchen. Her link with the outside world, her beloved telephone, is within arm's reach. So is the TV remote, the radio, and her link to the hereafter, the Bible. From her perch, she can look out a narrow window and see what's happening across Peliso Avenue at the old town maintenance shop.



Top photo, Kathleen Clore does not look or act her 85 years. At right, Brown (left) at age 7, with her brother James and sister Pearl at their Barboursville home.

Top photo by Phil Audibert

They're tearing the old shop down as they move to new quarters off Byrd Street. This is something of a problem for Kathleen

because the town shop...well...it's been a source of entertainment for her (and she, a source of some bemusement, for town employees) for 53 years. "I really miss seeing those people over there," she says wistfully. "Old Man (Mayor Ray) Lonick told me before he retired that they were going to put something pretty over there for us to look at," she says with a twinkle. "I started to ask if it was going to be him." She chuckles impishly at the thought.

Seriously, though, how is Kathleen Clore to know that it is snowing outside, without going to the window to look? In the past, she wouldn't even have to get out of bed on a cold winter's night. "If I'd hear them trucks, I'd know it was snowing."

Memories...Kathleen's got a pile of them, and despite her 85 years, she remembers many things like it was yesterday. Her piercing blue eyes catch hold of a yellow metal box that her first husband, George Bickers brought home from Germany after the war. Out spill all manner of trinkets, photographs, letters. "I'm a packrat," she readily admits. "You see, I save everything and in the long run it might amount to something." It certainly does.

She fiddles inside the box...holds up her ID badge from American Silk Mills where she worked for 28 years. "I ran a



Kathleen Clore still has her I.D. badge from American Silk Mills where she worked from 1942 to 1970 when, "I came home and set down." Note the slogan that says "Keep 'em Flying," referring to the parachute material that was manufactured at the Orange mill.

Photo by Phil Audibert

quilling machine and boy you got a little speck on them quills you'd go to the office," she recalls, conjuring up an

image of a child being sent to the principal. Badge number 322. "I had a number but I wasn't no prisoner," she laughs. The badge had a motto on it, "keep 'em flying," referring to the parachute material that was made there during WWII.

"They made beautiful material down there," she recalls fondly. "I worked on third shift for four years down on re-drawing and quilling and then they put me up on warping and I worked in the ole size room, all that ole heat coming out of them big ole barrels and all, but I loved every minute of it."

She started work at the local textile mill in 1942 at the age of 21...met her husband George Bickers there, was married, watched him go overseas and come back with that yellow metal box.

They started a family...Betty Sue was born first, followed by George. And then, one dark night in 1953, when the kids were still little, George and his brother were killed in a car wreck near Goochland coming back from Richmond.

"Both of them got killed," she says softly, her voice quivering imperceptibly. "I didn't know nothing about it till the next morning...state police come, (former Orange Police Chief John Baldwin." And so, there was Kathleen Bickers, widowed with two young children... home alone with the yellow box.

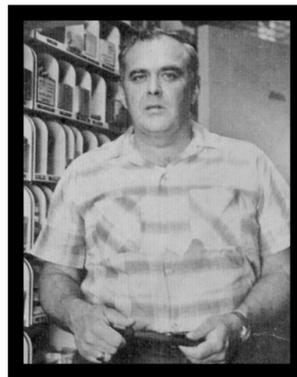
She reaches into the metal box again. Out comes a ring crafted from a silver dollar, with her name on it. Her second husband, Herman Clore made it when he worked at Virginia Metal Products. The ring kindles more memories.

Her daughter had graduated and son

George was playing quarterback for the Orange County High School football team when one evening, she and her sister went out to dinner at that now lost but not forgotten Orange institution, DeVivi's Restaurant. "You could get a heck of a supper over there back then, fried oysters and everything for a dollar and a half." A dance was going on at the VFW Hall. "Somebody said, 'We'll ride down there,' and there was a bunch of us so we went down

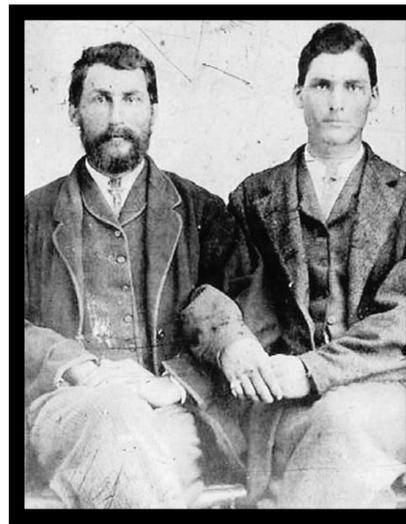
there and they had good string music, Shorty Lloyd played, he's dead now," she asides, "Herbert Whitlock, he's dead. So anyway, we heard the music and we said we'll go in there a little while and listen."

She can remember it just like yesterday. "And we was all sitting at this big table and Herman come over to the table and asked me to dance, and I said 'No indeed, I ain't gonna dance.' And then he come back again, and poor Mary said, 'Why don't you go on and dance with him.' So I danced and from then on we started going together." She smiles at the memory of it. "We went together going on about two years, I reckon."



Herman Clore- photographed at Virginia Metal Products by Duff Green for the Orange County Review, date unknown.

Herman Clore and Kathleen Bickers were married, had a son, Kenneth. Herman worked at VMP for 40 years, another 15 with VDOT, before he was diagnosed with colon cancer. "He got along real good after he was operated on, went back to work and everything and then he just went right down." She points to the floor and shakes her head. She remembers the doctor saying, "'Put him in the nursing home.' I told him 'No.' I kept him right here and



Kathleen Clore's grandfather, James William Brown (left), is pictured in this undated photograph with his brother. According to Kathleen Clore's uncle, Marshall Busby, Brown, of Barboursville, was a Lieutenant in the 7th Virginia Infantry, Company G and was wounded in the Battle of Five Forks.

waited on him, until he died... I sho' did." She thinks about that a moment and adds, "That's the reason the good Lord has been so good to me. I believe in all that."

Once again, Kathleen Clore... home alone.

She reaches again into the yellow box. Out come thank you notes from Barbara Bush and Ronald Reagan; she wrote both get-well cards... for Barbara Bush when she broke her ankle, for Ronald Reagan when he was shot. "Oh I loved him. We used to go see every movie he made."

She looks in the box again and smiles as she pulls out a World War II rationing book and a WJMA contest card. A regular participant in any and all call-in contests, Kathleen can remember winning on-the-air bingo games, cash prizes, records from Country Countdown on Saturday mornings. "I remember one time I won some money and got material up at Leggett's with it," she says with obvious satisfaction. She and her sister would walk down the street to the radio station in person on Saturday nights and request songs. She dearly misses Swap Shop, that venerable daily yard sale of the airwaves. She called in almost daily. "What you talkin' 'bout," she exclaims in mock surprise. Kathleen peppers her speech with all kinds of homey, old-time expressions, like "Great day in the morning," and "Lorda mercy." She is tickled pink that she is the topic of

this article. "I might be a celebrity and don't even know it," she says wide-eyed.

She reaches under a seat cushion and pulls out a manila folder. Out spills a family genealogy researched in Richmond by her uncle Marshall Busby in 1979. You can see the smile on his face when Busby writes at the end of the document, "Now you hillbillies know where you come from."

A copy of a Civil War photograph flutters out. It shows two seated young men, arm in arm, staring at the camera. "That's my grand daddy, James William Brown," says Kathleen with fierce pride, pointing to the figure at the left. Marshall Busby writes on the back, "Lt. James William Brown, CSA, and his youngest brother." No one knows when the picture was taken, or exactly when Brown died ("about 1912"). Brown is "buried at (Barboursville, Va.

back of the house up the road from Miss Shipp's. He was in the 7th Virginia Infantry, Company G, Orange County, Virginia, wounded five times at the battle of Five Forks, Virginia in 1864."

For the record, Five Forks was fought in 1865, not 1864, just days before Appomattox. But, with all the talk of the Battle of the Wilderness recently, it would be interesting to know if Lt. Brown participated in defending not just his home state, but his home county.

"I love stuff with history and all," says Kathleen animatedly. "Lord I could write a book." She fishes in the yellow box again. Out pops an over-exposed photograph of three kids outdoors in a yard, one of them seated on a tricycle, the garden gate ajar behind them. It is of Kathleen and her brother and sister at their home in Barboursville. Kathleen, with those piercing eyes is



Kathleen Clore's immediate family gathered to celebrate her 85th birthday last month at the Silk Mill Grill. Seated with Kathleen is granddaughter, Morgan Anne Clore. Standing from left to right are Kathleen's daughter-in-law Mary Alice Clore holding Scott Edward Clore ("the sweetest little boy, I could eat him up.") Next is Kathleen's son, Kenneth Clore, followed by her granddaughter's husband Jose Garcia. Behind him is son-in-law, Lenn Koneczny, with great granddaughter Lauren Garcia in front, followed by daughter Betty Sue Koneczny, then great grandson, Andy Garcia, granddaughter Deena Garcia, and finally son, George Bickers on the far right.

Photo by Phil Audibert