

Coming Home



I have always heard it said, "you can never go back". For the most part, I have always believed that. When you move away, leave friends, family and the community in which you were born, you can never go back and pick up the pieces, and start life over, as you once knew it. But, I have had an experience that has really put some doubt in that old saying. Please allow me to share a bit of me, with all of you.

I am Lloyd Sutton, son of Charles Sutton and Ora Smith Sutton and grandson of I. C. Sutton and Cornelia White Sutton. These Suttons were from Lurton, Arkansas. My mother's family was from the Big Creek area around Vendor, Arkansas. My maternal grandparents, from that area, were James Pleasant Smith and Susanna Jane Pierce Smith. Great-great grandparents were, Martin Tackett Smith and Rhoda Cindy Standridge Smith and James Pierce and Rachel Owens Pierce. This is to just fill you in on my Newton County connections.

I was a child from a home divided by divorce back in 1944. I was nearly four years old at that time and was born at home, as most were at that time, at Lurton, Arkansas, in a small frame house along the old highway #7. Even at that young age, I have some memories of Lurton, Granddad Sutton's Handle factory, Uncle Irving Sutton's store, My Grandmother in the Post Office, and old Shep, a dear dog that kept me company wherever I went. You have to keep in mind that these memories are not clear and bits and pieces of things come and go. "For now I see through a glass darkly..." But some of the more traumatic or extremely good memories come in focus very clearly.

After my dad left to go into the field of electrical work elsewhere, My mother decided to go to California where several of her brothers and sisters had now moved. We caught a ride out of Lurton, Arkansas on the back of Berry Hefley's big cattle truck. He had a tarp stretched over the cattle frames to provide a shelter for the ones in the back. There were others from Lurton that were migrating to California also. Riley Cathers and his daughter Ilene were on there, as I understand.

We lived in California for two years, then my mother met and married a man from Fouke, Arkansas by the name of John Combs. I spent my life growing up at Fouke and then married my childhood sweetheart, Jo Ann Scott, and we still live at Fouke.

Now, with this background, my story starts with a trip back to Lurton. After we moved to Fouke, Arkansas from California in 1946, we went back to Lurton to pick up a few things that were left there, such as an old single shot 22 that my mother's brother, Andrew Smith, had kept for us and a few other things. As we got there and walked around meeting people, memories started easing out, slowly at first, then more freely. I was seeing faces that were vaguely familiar. Besides family, there were Big Joe Hefley, Mr. And Mrs. Tidwell, Fred Rosamond, and others.

I made several of these trips to Lurton throughout the years. My grandparents lived in the "Y" between the old highway 7 and 123, in the two story white frame house. As I was growing up, this house was like a lighthouse. It lit the way for me as I came home to Lurton. I never felt like I was home until I saw that white house at the end of the street. Yes, this was home for me, for as long as I can remember. My roots are planted deep in Newton County and especially at Lurton. The old Hotel, built by Harry and Josie Smith Tatro, is another landmark at Lurton and is near and dear to me. Aunt Josie was my mother's Sister. It later became the property of my mother's brother, Mitchell Smith.

Lurton holds many memories for others and they have related some of them to me. I have heard of the great Lurton picnics, held at the Old Ball Diamond near the Freeman field, and at the Lurton School, near where the Community building now sits. There were dances, games for the kids, entertainment for the adults, airplane rides at the Freeman field, and even some disruptions with drinking and fights. My Grandfather was deeply involved in these Lurton Picnics. He has hired a plane to fly around the other communities and drop leaflets advertising the Lurton Picnics. They had greased pigs for the kids to try to catch, sawdust piles with coins scattered within for the kids to dig through to find the planted coins, and greased poles with money on top for the one that could climb up to get it.

I. C. Sutton's handle factory provided employment for many people in the Lurton area. My grandfather had timber scattered all over the mountain, giving more work for the ones working in the timber. Sawmills were scattered around, also. My grandmother ran the Post Office and even named the town of Lurton when she applied for the opening of the first Post Office. She had to provide a list of names for the Postal Service to pick from. The name Lurton was the name of her sister's husband Marion Lurton.



Lurton Arkansas in the 1940s.

I.C. Suttons home is the white building in the background on the left. The Hotel is the two-story building behind the car on the right.

The Hotel provided rooms for many workers with the Forest Service and Highway crews and others. The CCC camps were scattered around the mountains giving work for many men. The camps were run much like a military installation. There was lots of work performed by the men from the CCC camps. Many of the men met and eventually married women from the Lurton area as well as the other areas around the mountains. One of my first cousins, Juanita Smith met and married Austin Davis, a man from Fouke, who also happened to be a first cousin of my stepdad, John Combs. He was in the CCC camp near Lurton.

Lurton had a baseball team, coached in part by my uncle Andrew Smith. Austin Davis pitched for the team some at one time. There were many different men that played on the baseball team at different times. They raised money to buy uniforms and were really good, from what I hear.

When I would come back home to Lurton, I always felt a sense of pride. I had many family members around that were well known to the area like my grandfather, I.C. Sutton and my grandmother. Uncle Andrew Smith was a big coon hunter and a dog man. He loved his dogs and always had plenty around. He had won many field trials in his day, even in California. Uncle Mitchell Smith was always busy with his things, such as

running the Smith Garage and dance hall. His wife, Aunt Lucy Hallum Smith kept the hotel going. Uncle Irving and Aunt Ruby had the General store just South of the Hotel and always had many people coming and going. Their children, Halleen, Sonny, and Bobby Sutton were very much a part of Lurton. Bobby and Sonny were always a bit mischievous, but were good kids. They were always pulling something to liven up the town of Lurton. I had family there and felt good when I came back home.

I was so distant from my grandparents that I felt a little less than a grandchild. When you live so far away and didn't get to see them often, it was hard to get to know them. In a way, I shied away from them and was just a bit afraid of the unknown. It was later years when I finally started becoming close to my grandparents. I have spent the night there in that two story white frame house at the end of the road and thought about my life and relation to the Suttons.

As I became older, the trips to Lurton were more friendly. I had a chance to spend some time at Granddad's house with Jeanette Thompson, another first cousin of mine that was about my age, Bobby and others. We spent time upstairs playing with the old wind up Victrola. There were some old records that we liked to play. One record stands out in my mind, may be the only one that I really remember. It was titled "Hallelujah I'm A Bum". I can remember playing that record many times. The tune was the same as the church hymn, "Revive us Again". At a young age I did not attend church much, as my mother and step father were not going to church very much at that time. Well, when I was at church one time I realized that they were singing the Bum song, or at least the tune. I thought at the time that it was kind of unusual for them to write a church song with the same tune as the Bum song. It was some time later when I decided that it was the other way around. The bum song was written after the church song, "Revive Us Again." I have thought of that old song many times.

Time was limited when we made visits to Lurton and I did not know very many people there. I have made several trips to Lurton through the years, but it was never the same after Uncle Mitchell and all the others left. When Granddad moved to Harrison with the handle factory (about 1952), it seemed odd going back through there. Then later, Uncle Andrew moved away. Now it was like a ghost town to me. But, I always liked to go back through Lurton just to see the Hotel and Granddad's house. I always liked to reminisce about the old days when times were different...when as a kid I shied away from Granddad and Grandma Sutton, because I was shy and insecure---and afraid. I have had many regrets as I look back. I wish I knew then what I know now, but that is time that cannot be called back. I lost more than just my Grandparents, I lost the history that only they could have told me. I was always taught to not ask personal questions. Now I wish I had asked many personal questions. I now have many things unanswered because I did not ask enough questions.

Many years passed by with the occasional trip through Lurton just to get a look at the old house and hotel. Other than memories, I had lost all my Lurton family and connections, with no one there that I knew. I always left with a feeling of sadness. Why did it have to change? Why could it not have stayed the way it was?

Then, in November of 1993, after visiting with Uncle Harry Sutton in Harrison, Arkansas, copying many of his old photographs, I made a trip back towards Lurton that changed my life. I drove first through Jasper and subscribed to the "Newton County Times." Then, I began a sentimental journey that has not yet stopped. I drove to "The Smith Cemetery", near Vendor, Arkansas and then on to Lurton. As I stood in the Smith cemetery, I had a realization of a truth that shocked me. That day I stood there all alone, with no one else around, looking at inscriptions on the stones, trying to pull up bits and pieces of things told. That is when I realized that I really did not know much about my family. My Mother, Father, Brother, all grandparents, most of my aunts and uncles and many friends and acquaintances were gone. Here, I was all alone in the world, it seemed, with no one to talk to. I could not stop by anyone's house to visit, because I did not know anyone. I walked around that cemetery with a lump in my throat so big I could hardly swallow. I took pictures, looked at names, inscriptions, did a lot of wondering, and after much soul searching, I drove through Mt. Judea and on to Lurton.

When I got to the Tarlton Cemetery, at Lurton, I did much the same thing as I did at the Smith Cemetery. Here, at least, I knew a few more of the people in the cemetery. But, I did not know one person to visit there at Lurton...not anyone. All of my family had died or moved away. I was all alone and again---the

lump. I was feeling so down and alone...I wanted to just find a place to sit and cry. And, I probably did a bit of that. After all, there was no one to see me...I was alone in the world, at that time. I walked around, took pictures and looked for tombstones of people that I remembered from my childhood. There was Cliff Tidwell and his wife, Robertha. I remembered them...he had a round smiling face that reminded me of Santa Claus, if he had the beard. I found Fred Rosamond's stone. I could see his face with the big grin. He always made us feel welcome when we came to Lurton.

There was Mrs. Crawford's grave. She was at Ernest Daniel's place when I visited at Uncle Andrew's house one year. I was pretty small...about 12 or 13, maybe. She told me that she remembered the day I was born. I thought that was odd. How could she remember me out of all the babies that were born there at Lurton. Then, she told me that was the day electricity was turned on at Lurton...September 23, 1940. Then, she said that was also her birthday. I looked at her stone there in the cemetery to convince myself that I was not imagining things. There it was, September 23, 1888. Sure enough, her birthday was the same as mine.



Andrew Smith and one of his prize coon dogs.

Photo provided by Ronnie Smith.

I looked at Uncle Andrew's stone and stood reminiscing about the times I had spent at their house, with Aunt Creasie and James Harmon. I thought of Uncle Andrew's dogs...he loved his dogs as much as anything he had. I could almost hear him in that distinctive voice of his, "here, Blue". I found many others that were vaguely familiar. During this time, I was thinking of my Sutton family and how I knew so little about them. There was my great-grandmother White, Grandma's mother. There was great-grandmother Minerva Sutton, Granddad's mother. There was Granddad and Grandma Sutton, Uncle Irving, Aunt Ruby and all the rest of the Suttons buried in a row across the cemetery. I thought of Sonny Sutton and how he always loved to have fun and was always playing jokes on everyone. I could form a mental image in my mind's eye of the ones I remembered. Some were as clear as if viewing them on a screen from a slide. As I looked at these and all the others...they were just a memory now. I really had some bad feelings of loneliness, there that day all alone in the Tarlton cemetery. It was as though there was no one within miles of me. I felt totally alone in the world.

I left there and drove by my grandparents house and took some pictures of the house and hotel. After much reminiscing and soul searching I drove home to Fouke without talking to anyone at Lurton that day. I really wanted to talk to someone, but I really did not know anyone to talk to. That particular incident really bothered me for a long time afterwards. As I said, with me being alone, I felt loneliness and isolation as bad that day as anytime in my memory. It seemed like this was no longer home. And even the house where I was born had been torn down and no longer existed...just gone.

About this time, I was just starting to correspond with Colleen Haynes Rongey. Uncle Harry Sutton had put me in contact with her. We wrote, called and got to know a little about one another. Then, before the time of the Decoration in 1994, Colleen invited me to come to Lurton to her family reunion and the decoration. I had never been to a decoration before...this was my first. I got there on Saturday and after driving around for awhile, I drove over to the Daniel's Park. I got out of the car, feeling a bit nervous, and started walking towards a small group of people there. I think it was around 12:30 when I got to the park. I had already started looking for Colleen, but I did not know what she looked like. The only pictures I had seen of her were from the old days when she was young and black headed. I had not spotted anyone that might be her. But, a lady walked toward me with that question mark look in her eyes. It was Betty Ann Daniels Thomas. She asked, "do I know you?" I said, "no, but I heard there was going to be some good food to eat and I decided to stop." Well, as they say, the rest is history. We hit it off very well and I feel close to all the Daniels family.

After meeting all of the Daniels, Lillie Hefley Vanderpool, Herbert and Alta Lea Hefley Hampton, Pete and Opal Bristow, Louis and Thelma Awbrey Gregoire, Vernon and Velma Awbrey Rosamond, Devoe Hefley, the Haynes family, and many others, I now feel at home, again. The Haynes family, along with all these others have been like family to me. Paul and Colleen Haynes Rongey, E. L. and Carol Haynes Hefley, Bud and Wilma Haynes, Phyllis Haynes and last but not least Fred and Patsy Haynes Coonts are all my adopted family. I have attended their reunion each year since 1994. I have to give special attention to Patsy Haynes Coonts for the friendship she has shown me since meeting her. She has told me many stories about the Lurton area and is just a very special lady. Patsy has been an inspiration to me as she has been battling cancer. She has made me a better person by just knowing her.

Words cannot describe how I feel. I am like a child that needs his security blanket, in a way. All the great people of the Lurton area have given me my security blanket. I can feel such a surge of emotion sometimes that it is hard to understand. I feel a closeness to everyone and a real connection to Lurton again. I have no family at Lurton anymore, but I feel the same closeness and security with all of these good people that I might feel with family. Lillie has taken me in as one of her family, and she is a great lady. I feel blessed to have met all of you people of Lurton again. You have all been so good to me. I now have a home here again.

In 1996, I had an opportunity to buy a small piece of my grandparents property from the Sutton Estate. It is five acres just down the road from the old house, on the right. It has a good view of the mountains and is a good place for me to build a small home someday, maybe. When I finally got the deal closed, I felt like I was back in Lurton, even though I still live at Fouke. A small piece of Granddad's place...what a thrill. I can walk out and look at the pretty view of the mountains and be filled with deep emotion. I cannot help but think of my grandfather and wonder if this is how he felt when he bought his first piece of land near Lurton back in 1915. Is this what drew him into this rough, but beautiful country?

On May 24, 1997, the old Sutton house burned to the ground. Nothing left now but memories. I happened to be in the area for the Decoration and Woodard reunion that weekend. I was sick when I drove down the street toward the house only to find it gone. The smoke was still heavy from the fire. As I stood by looking at the remains of the old house, I became choked up with that, all too familiar, big lump in my throat. But, all I could do was feel remorse and reminisce about the early days. The old song that Granddad used to play a lot...as well as us kids, came drifting from the ashes..."Hallelujah I'm A Bum." Glena Adams was there at the site of the fire that day to keep sightseers away until there was an investigation. I hated to break down in front of her, but I think I did anyway.

On September 22, 1997, I closed the deal to buy that property where my grandparent's house was. It is only nine tenths of an acre, but it holds the remains of the house and some remaining memories there. I can, in no way, bring back the house nor the good old days, but maybe in some small way I can preserve some of the dignity and memories of the Suttons there at Lurton. I am proud of the rocks that I now own from the Sutton house. I plan to put them to good use in time.

In June, 1998, work was completed on a monument for I. C. and Cornelia White Sutton, paying a tribute to them, their work and dedication there at Lurton for so many years. The monument stands there in the "Y" on the site of the old home place. I am proud of the work done on the monument, using the rock from the old house, by a Newton County Rock Mason, Ron Chasteen who did a great job.

My heartfelt thanks go out to all the people of Newton County. I have relatives around Vendor, Mt. Judea, Jasper, Bass and places in between. There are several that I have never been around, but the blood relation is there no matter how distant. I feel a kinship with them all.

I especially want to note the feelings of love I feel from the people of "The Lurton Assembly of God Church", established by Uncle Dan Hefley. His daughters, Alta Lea and Lillie, along with their families, it has been great to be around. They have made me feel right at home.

It seems as though life goes full circle, from a small boy nearly four years old, through many years of trial and tribulations, heartaches, and then, back home once again to Lurton, Arkansas. Yes folks, I am back home where it counts most...in my heart.

With love to you all,
Lloyd W. Sutton