

GRANDPA AND THE COPPERHEAD SNAKE

By Mildred "Millie" Thacker Graves

During the time my grandpa, George William Thacker, was a young boy and living with his family in Kentucky, they had a dog. Apparently the dog was considered an integral part of the family, since the dog often slept in the house on a braided rug beside my grandfather's bed. Sometime during the dark part of the night or early morning, my grandfather awoke and got out of bed, stepping on the rug in the exact spot where a Copperhead Snake was curled up, resting for the night. The snake reacted by immediately striking my grandfather on the foot, injecting its poison. It was later speculated that previously the dog had probably been sleeping in that very spot. The snake, feeling a bit cool, had coiled in the same spot in order to absorb some of the residual warmth left by the dog.

In those days, the standard medical practice for snakebite was to have the victim drink a large quantity of liquor, preferably, some good old Kentucky whiskey and the sooner, the better. This method has since been abandoned because it has been found that the alcohol causes the poison to travel even more rapidly to other parts of the body.

Between the poison of the snakebite and the unaccustomed whiskey, my grandfather was deathly ill for a number of days but finally, he slowly recovered. In the years that followed he always associated his illness more because of the whiskey and less to the effects of the snakebite, therefore, from that day forward, he believed in the evils of drink, especially whiskey. He did not touch any liquor nor did he want anyone in his family to do so.

This event influenced his thinking and had a very profound effect on the rest of his life.

Granny, Louisa Frances (Farmer) Thacker, the wife of George, came from a fairly well to do family in comparison to others living in the Somerset, Pulaski County, region of Kentucky. Her family was made up of landowners, storeowners and planters who raised tobacco. In fact, Grandpa had become acquainted with Granny when he had come to work for her father.

It seems that drinking in moderation, such as a glass of sherry or a bit of brandy or wine with their meal was a part of Granny's family's lifestyle. Due to the snakebite trauma, more so than his religious upbringing, Grandpa did not approve of the consumption of spirits in any form.

Therefore during their married life, Granny must always justify her want or need for some spirits, such as her favorite, apricot brandy, which she called Apricot Nectar, in order to keep peace with Grandpa. She usually kept it on hand for medicinal purposes, such as for colds or sore throats but, sometimes, it was needed for other unnamed and undiagnosed maladies. She couldn't be classified as a drinker but she did enjoy an occasional bit of wine or brandy. Apparently to

appease Grandpa, whenever she wanted a sip or two of spirits, she would begin to cough or to clear her throat, followed by the announcement, "I think I feel a cold coming on." There is no doubt though that the Apricot Nectar was a magical tonic because Granny very seldom developed a full-blown cold after a few days and a few doses of her special Apricot Nectar.