Jean Eborn: A Spirited Lady

Introduction by Paula Kershner

Reliving the days of yesterday is what Ms. Jean Eborn did by telling her stories one spring morning. Mr. Boyles, Cindy Woolard, and I had the opportunity to spend several hours at the home of Ms. Eborn while she told us her stories about growing up not only in Beaufort County but in South Carolina and Georgia as well. Ms. Eborn is a remarkable lady with all her travels and knowledge of the past. She shared with us one adventure that she
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had when she was a little girl traveling across the United States by car, going and coming from Nevada with her mother and little brother. A trip like that would be an adventure today. I could not begin to think about how adventurous it must have been in 1930.

Ms. Eborn educated us on what the younger generation did for recreation in her day here in Washington. The “Picture Show” was a big deal to the young, and they would go see some of their favorite actors such as Jean Harlow and many more. Ms. Eborn said, “Going to the picture show or anywhere in those days was a big deal, and you would dress to the occasion of going out.” She also told us that the Pamlico River was a huge part of their recreation. On behalf of Mr. Boyles and Cindy Woolard, I would like to thank Ms. Eborn for inviting us into her home and sharing her memories with us.

Jean Eborn: We came to Washington in 1932 or 33. My father started up a sawmill up here. He bought some property that’s all I know, and put a mill in. He bought land and he had the timber taken off it, and he shipped it to the government and the railroads. Moss Framing Mill bought a lot of that property. I guess they have it now.

Life: What did he ship the timber on? Was it by boats?

Jean Eborn: Railroads, shipped it by railroads.

Life: How old are you, Ms. Eborn?

Jean Eborn: Eighty-one.

Life: You were telling me about someone who was off at the Civil War and writing letters back and forth.
Jean Eborn: My great-grandmother kept a diary during the Civil War.

Life: Have you read it?

Jean Eborn: I never got a chance to read it. My brother got that, and I don’t even think he knows what happened to it, but in that diary she talked about how terrible it was. She said they had a northern boy, a young boy, and she had put him to bed, and took care of him until he got better. She said she hoped that the North would treat a southern boy in the same manner. I thought that was very interesting. They were good people, Christian people.

Life: Was that down in South Carolina?

Jean Eborn: That was Georgia. That was where Sherman marched to the coast. Do you know where a place called Sunberry is? Not many people think of it. The people that settled there had yellow fever, and moved to higher ground which was Savannah, but old Sunberry, I think, was an original port.

Life: You were still a young girl when you moved up this way, I guess?

Jean Eborn: I was eighteen.

Life: Were you excited about the move, or did you want to stay down in South Carolina?

Jean Eborn: No, I wasn’t excited, or unexcited, or anything. We moved so much, by that time it didn’t bother me at all.
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in your street clothes. They don’t dress like they used to dress. People don’t look as good either.

Life: Who were the big movie stars that everybody liked to see?

Jean Eborn: Kay Francis, Jean Harlow, William Powell: there were a lot of them. But those were the ones that people really looked forward to. Carole Lombard.

Life: I guess you listened to the radio a lot, too?

Jean Eborn: Yes, when I was eight they had earphones, and then they had a song called “Lucky Lindy.” That was when he made his crossing. We also had a Victrola. The Victrola had a hook up on it, and it had a doll on it. Looked kind of like a statue, and she would wiggle like this; (laughing, showing how the doll would wiggle, side to side) and it fascinated me. The name of it was “Siam Sue, she does the low down hoochie coochie.” The doll would wiggle( laughing). Now in New England, Massachusetts, that is where my ancestors came from.

Life: They came over on the Mayflower?

Jean Eborn: No, they came over on the Mary and John. They were Puritans. They had a place called Dorchester, and those people had a way when they moved, or migrated south, they named each place Dorchester. Puritans built Dorchester, South Carolina.

Life: Did a bunch of people have those “Siam Sues”? Was that a pretty popular doll?

Jean Eborn: I never heard of it anywhere else. If I did I would try to buy it. Mother and Daddy had that thing when we lived in Wilson. I was 6 years old.

Life: Well, you do remember where you were when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor? What were you doing that day?

Jean Eborn: I had an apartment right back here, across from the Christian church. I think I have this right. Maybe I haven’t. I am not so sure. Was it on a Sunday?

Life: Yes, in December.

Jean Eborn: That is where I was, right there.

Life: Did you hear it on the radio?

Jean Eborn: I think.

Life: Where did you go out to eat in those days?

Jean Eborn: They didn’t go out to eat. They ate at home. They had servants at home. I have a piece of cloth upstairs that the Aztec Indians made.

Life: What Indians?

Jean Eborn: Aztecs, down in Mexico.

Life: So did you ever make it to Mexico yourself?
Jean Eborn: I made it to the border (laughing). I don’t know how far I was from the border.

Life: What year was that?

Jean Eborn: 1930, 1931 when they were building the Hoover Dam. We stopped, and it was near completed. They would let tourists walk on it and everything. They had a restaurant up there, and we got out of the car and looked at it.

Life: I guess that was quite a trip in those days to go that far out West.

Jean Eborn: Yes, and my mother drove it in an old Hudson.

Life: Do you remember the trip pretty well?

Jean Eborn: Oh yes.

Life: Crossing the desert and all?

Jean Eborn: Yes. I was elected to do the dirty work all the time. I had a little brother. He was 4, and I was 11. Mother said and I think to this day we had a guardian angel. We were crossing the Mohave Desert on just a narrow paved road, and we had a flat tire. I was barefooted. I had never been any place like that. I was elected to walk back to the filling station to get help for the tire. I hadn’t gone far, and my feet were burning up on the concrete. These old dried up cow bones on the side of the road, these old oil wells, and this car came by and turned around. Came back, and picked me up. Took me to Mother’s car, fixed the tire, and we went on.
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Jean Eborn: We went swimming.

Life: The river was still good and clean then, I guess.

Jean Eborn: No, it wasn’t. They would get ear infections, and they still went swimming. There were a lot of ear infections. They skated, rode bicycles, they played tennis, football, basketball, and baseball.

Life: What was your favorite holiday?

Jean Eborn: Christmas. Do you believe in ghosts?

Life: I’m not sure. I’m keeping the jury out on that one. Do you?

Jean Eborn: Yes!

Life: Do you want tell me a little about one?

Jean Eborn: (Laughing) That might be some history in North Carolina that I don’t know about. But my mother moved in here and she had antiques from all over the world. She lived five years, about fifteen miles from Paris. I went out to get the mail one morning, and I was not looking either way and such a thing was not on my mind, nothing, just in a hurry to get back and get through with what I had to do in here. There was an old spinning wheel, an old yarn wheel and I don’t know what was wrong with it but it would not move. Mother examined it. I examined it. We looked at it good, but it was absolutely warped. Coming back down this hall, I happened to turn my head, and that wheel was going round and round all by itself. I put my hand on it. I didn’t know what to do, but I knew that couldn’t go on and on. So I put my hand on it, and it stopped. But I sold it.

Life: You sold it?

Jean Eborn: That was one of the first things I sold.

Life: Scared you?

Jean Eborn: No, it puzzled me. No, they are welcome to play around here if they want to, but I don’t want them playing too much with me (laughing).

Life: Are you saying that you are psychic?

Jean Eborn: I don’t know. I would say that I was a little.

Life: Do you still do that today, or do you not mess with it any more?

Jean Eborn: I haven’t messed with it since I have been in this house.

Life: Would people come to see you about things like that?

Jean Eborn: No, my ancestors did it for amusement. My aunt and my mother—when they were little girls they would wrap the table. Just like you would play cards today. They really didn’t believe in it but did it for amusement. Mother said they would wrap the table, and it would go up and down the steps. They were forbidden to do it, so they went up in the attic and wrapped the table. They caught on that it might be sinful. Mother said “That table
wrapped tapped fire hell I know no peace.” She said children would not think of a thing like that. Mother said they scooted down, and my aunt left her standing there.

Life: Scared them?

Jean Eborn: Scared them to death. I can put my hand on top of a pine table and if it’s a wooden floor that thing will go just like that (She shakes her hand to demonstrate.). One night I thought it was going to beat the woodwork off the door. With nobody’s hands on it but mine and everything in my body away from it. I was just lightly touching it. I don’t know what causes it, but it is something. I am not sure if it is ghost. I don’t know.

Life: Some sort of energy working there.

Jean Eborn: It’s something. Within the last year or two I had a dream about a young man, and something had happened to him dreadful. He had his back to me; he would not let me see his face, just his back walking away from me. He said to me “I fought it with everything I had, but it wasn’t good enough.”

I wouldn’t make up a dream like that. I woke up. I knew I was asleep because I had dreamed it. I have a son in Pennsylvania. My son travels, and the first thing I thought was something may have happened to Billy. So I called him. I told him about this dream. I said, “I just wanted to know that you were all right.”

He said, “Yes, I am fine.” Twenty-four hours later the telephone rang, and Billy said, “You were right.” Billy’s stepdaughter was going to marry this boy, and he had gone to another state. I find out this boy has been killed in a wreck. What would you call that? The same time nearly and everything. It has worried me because whatever it was tried to contact Billy’s stepdaughter I’m sure.

Why go through me? I was not even near Pennsylvania. I think if it was a ghost it figured I would get in touch with Billy, and she would find out. I don’t know what else it could have been. What would you call that? Isn’t that psychic?

Life: Well, it’s a gift I would think.

Jean Eborn: One of my husbands said “Don’t ever dream about me,” because I dream things and tell it. I don’t know what you call it. I really think it is something. I don’t know what it is, but it is something. I will tell you this. The more you dwell on it, and the more you wrap tables and all, the more you are going to see it. It is like developing a talent or something.

Life: You get better at it?

Jean Eborn: You get better at it.

Life: It sounds like you are as good as you want to get at it right now.

Jean Eborn: Well, I wouldn’t mind doing it for entertainment only. I guess at one time if you said anything, told them anything like that, they would have burned you up for a witch. You would have to keep your mouth shut.

Life: Do you remember Prohibition?

Jean Eborn: When I was out in Reno with Mother, there was a bootlegger. This lady had an apartment on the second story. We were on the first floor, and she was a Mexican woman who was real, real attractive. She had a boyfriend who had a great big truck.
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He hauled cabbages all up and down the coast, and what he would do is bring her his capping machine. He would cap that stuff up in her apartment. I can still remember sitting there watching when I was a little girl with my mouth wide open looking at him. He would pull that thing down and cap it.

I must have said, “How do you keep from getting caught?”

He said he put cabbages over it. He would speed up a little ahead. If he saw a police car or anything, he would throw the stuff out and go on with the cabbage. I guess he would go back later and get it. I thought that was something. That was back when they had real gangsters.

Life: How long did you live out in Reno?

Jean Eborn: Three months.

Life: What was Reno like then?

Jean Eborn: It was the biggest little city in the world, and it still is. I didn’t stay long enough to make very many friends. It wasn’t like the other places I have been.

Life: I guess everybody there was pretty much just passing through?

Jean Eborn: They called it the cure. A little girl turned around and asked me, “Is your mother here for the cure?”

I said “My mother is not sick.” (laughing) But that is the way they spoke of it.

Life: Was it cold?

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Jean Eborn: I used to walk to school at seven below zero. Those mountains up there, turkey, it gets cold and the snow gets deep. We had just beaten a snow storm over those mountains and couldn’t get home. The snow was twenty feet deep, drifts up there on that mountain. Scary.

Life: I guess it was.

Jean Eborn: It was to me. I have never gotten over it.

Conclusion by Cindy Woolard

Ms. Eborn is intriguing with all the stories she can tell you about her life and times gone by. I have known Ms. Eborn since 1985. She is a remarkable woman and does not go anywhere without dressing, as she would put it, in the “proper manner.” She helped us visit the days of yesterday in both time and place. She said that sometimes it feels good to relive her time as a little girl, filled with memories of her nanny and parents. Again, we would like to thank her for the invitation to meet her and to hear the stories she has to tell.