

RUSTIC KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN CABIN DOORS

My parents, John and Edna Riley, were Missionaries in Breathitt County, in the Kentucky Mountains, from 1932 to 1936. Initially, the local people were very suspicious of them. They even called them "Furrineers." But slowly the Rileys won over the hearts and minds of the local people. I have written about my parents other experiences, in Kentucky, in other documents.

But my parents were impressed with how the local people built the doorways to their rustic cabins. The doors were made out of very strong hand cut lumber. There were no metal knobs or keyed locks. Such items were called "brought-on". Brought-ons, i.e. products not made locally, were frowned upon! They were viewed as a threat to the peoples' thrift, self sufficiency, and independence! The door was secured by a heavy wooden bar that went across the middle of the inside of the door. The end of the bar near the door hinges was pivoted. (The large door hinges were made by the local blacksmith, Steve Stamper.) The other end of the bar fell into a strong slot in the wall near where the door opened. Through a hole in the wall, over the top of the door jamb a string came down and was attached to a hole in the end of the bar. The door could then be unlatched by pulling up on the bar or on the cord. In the daytime the other end of the cord would hang outside over the door, so the door could be unlatched just by pulling down on the cord from the outside. When no one was home the outside end of the cord was hidden in the structures above the door so it could be brought down and pulled to unlatch the door. At night the cord would be pulled inside the house. Unwanted visitors would see the latch strings suddenly disappear as they approached the door.

At first, when the Rileys went door to door to meet the local people, they would see the latch strings quickly disappear and no one would answer the door when they knocked. But, with time, more and more latch strings were left out and people would not only come to the door, but wanted to share what little food they had. It was traditional for them to ask visitors to stay the night at their house, even if some of the family would have to sleep in the barn, the smoke house or with neighbors. But it was just a friendly gesture that was always politely declined except in an emergency situation.

Before the Rileys left Kentucky, they were pleased that even the moonshiners were leaving their latchstrings out. Some people were saying to them. "Our latch strings will always be out when you come to our house. Don't knock, just come on in, you are now just like family. When we were sick you rode your horse many miles and sat with us, prayed for us, and even waited on us. When family members were dying you came at night and sat with them so the rest of us could get some sleep. You were there when they died. You cried and prayed with us. When our children had no milk, you rode miles to bring us goats' milk. When we needed clothes and shoes, you rode six miles to Oakdale Mission and brought back proper clothes and shoes for us from their storeroom. You split firewood, hauled coal, and even fetched water from the well for us when we were sick. You even helped us dig our wells. You taught us the proper way to train our horses and mules. Best of all, you taught us about a loving God

who has saved us from our sins. Now we are able to forgive our enemies and are living a much better life. You are now a big part of us!"

When John Riley entered the gates of Heaven, I think he was surprised to hear one of the most important (and most humbling) words in all the King James Version of the New Testament:-- "INASMUCH".

WHEN THE LORD APPROACHES THE DOOR TO YOUR HEART, WILL YOUR LATCH STRING BE IN OR OUT?

By PAUL M. RILEY, MD:- born in Breathitt County, Kentucky in 1935 Email:- hlinza@ymail.com