



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

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Dawg Days

"Dog Days" officially began July 28 here in the mountains of western North Carolina. The local people tell me they last 40 days. They began when Sirius, the Dog Star, made it's bright appearance over the eastern horizon.

It was the Romans who gave the star the name of Sirius, or Dog Star. They blamed it for the arrival of the hot, muggy weather. But here in the mountains of western North Carolina, Dog Days has other meanings. Here the mountain people speak a pure language, but enjoy flavoring their fables with just enough folk lore to keep them interesting.

"You'uns got dawg days down thar in Florida? We'uns shore hate to see 'em get h'ar."

Our down-the-road neighbor, Hicks Summey, who was born right here in this holler, started the whole thing last week by reminding us that whatever weather you have the first day of Dog Days will be a good sign of the weather for the next 40 days.

I remember Aunt Lou Summey, who lived on top of the mountain near the big walnut grove, up the dirt road from our cabin, scarin' the britches off us little kids from Florida. "Lot's 'o dawgs go mad during 'Dawg Days,'" she wheezed

one evening, sitting on her rickety old porch near the grape arbor. "Not only dawgs, but 'coons, bats and even foxes. Why, I seen a big old red fox come stalkin' up the road one e'en, just about this time o' day. 'Hit was just twilight and I could see his lips a-snarling and his fangs a-drippin white foam. He'd already bit three young'uns down thar in the holler and was a-comin' after me. He was jest fixin' to leap at my throat when my son, Jessie, blasted him with the scattergun. You'uns shore better watch out fer wild critters when you go home t'nite. They'll get you'uns fer shore."

We'uns set all kind of sprint marks running home that night from Aunt Lou's house.

It was Herschel Lee's wife, lee-Lee, who told us kids that nothing would heal during Dog Days. "Now that's the gospel truth," she told us wide-eyed kids sitting in her dirt yard while she boiled sheets in a big, black iron kettle over an outside fire. "You'uns run a brier twixt your toes and 'hit'll not heal fer 40 days. 'Hit's the dew. You get dew in yer scratches and they'll just fester. Asides that, if'en you stub your toe the nail'll always fall off. Hit's the gospel."

I'm not sure whether we have Dog

Days in Florida or not. But up here, when it's "lay-by" time on the farm and folks have enough time to sit a spell on the front porch, rock and talk, chaw and spit, spin a few yarns and watch the stars come up in the evening — Dawg Days brings back a raft of memories.

It's time for the sweet corn to ripen, for big, green, ripe water-melons, and plump, frying sizechickens. It's time for honey in the comb, to tie strings on June bugs, to chase lightning bugs, and to watch the old mules turn the mill and sip 'lasses like you never tasted. It's time to rope off the main street downtown on Monday night and join the cloggers as they make music on the pavement. It's time for "protracted meetings" in the brush arbor, all day singings and dinner on the grounds, hayrides on country roads and so many churns of home-made ice cream that you have to unbutton your pants and let your belt hang loose.

I hate to leave them behind — these Dog Days. But next week I return to Florida and other things that make life meaningful. That is, I'll be home lessen' that critter I sees comin' up the path is a big, old, red fox with white foam a-drippin' from his fangs. And that's the gospel.