

Spring came in beautiful and we were glad to be out in the sunshine. Mother and Middle were busy with their work. They could not plant a garden for we had no seed. We were hoping that we would not be bothered with night riders this spring, but were in for more trouble. The children were getting sick. They had a fever and it seemed that trouble never comes alone and this time it was coming in droves. The children breaking out with the measles--Middle had five--Mother had five and there we were, all with the measles with nothing to eat,--no doctor, and nothing to give them. Mother said we, have to meet this as we did everything else,--with a will. They went to work with a will and went to the woods and gathered the wild things. They did not have the right kind of food for sick children to eat. Mother still had one cow and she parched corn, and

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ground it in the coffee mill. She put the meal into sweet milk,--that was good food. She made sassafras and spice wood tea. Mother and Middle were almost ready to give up when we children began to get better. They were so glad and thankful to God for his kindness to us in our trouble. Then Johnny said to thank the cow,--she saved us. I told him to, ^{hush,--that} ~~thank~~ God, ~~she~~ gave us the cow. Then Mother said that is another thing to be thankful for. We all got well and with good appetites had nother to eat. We had gone through so much that we could not bear anything that was cast upon us. There were many families made homeless by the Tories and the other desperate men bent on taking everything that they could lay their hands on. We had four houses on our place. Mother turned them over to the homeless women and

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and

children that had nowhere to go, & few old men whose sons were in the rebel army, and one old man who was a Unionist. He had a place that joined ours. Neither the Yankees nor the Torries bothered him. Some of them would give him things to eat. He was a free will Baptist preacher and he would divide them between his needy neighbors, friend or foe,--they were all the same to him. If they had know he was giving things away I believe they would have killed him.

This person is Peter Wood, b. 1806 in Laurens. SC. He moved to Jackson, GA, and then to Hardin County in 1837. His father, James, was the original owner of the Duncans' property on Eastern Rock Hill. Peter Wood owned property adjacent to the Duncans' land. His church was near the site of the current Shady Grove Cemetery. See the map under "Maps & Photographs" or go directly to the map at [this link](#). Peter Wood's great-great-grandson, C.D. Rickman, identified the location of the Duncan property based on Elsie's descriptions of the spring, cave, bluff, creek and swamp. He researched land records to determine that Joseph Duncan's brother, Evan E. Duncan, bought this tract of land from the Wood family in 1850 and sold it to Joseph Duncan in 1859.

Brother Peter was doing what was right in the sight of God and man. He was on the Lords side. He was tall and straight with his snow white hair and friendly smile. We picked up an old horse, he must have gotten loose from some one. We thought we could plow with him and make a crop. We tied him out in the bushes. All of our hopes were doomed to failure. A thief came in the night and took our horse away. We got along alright,--we did not have any seed anyway to plant a crop with. Everything was growing wild. Greens were plentiful,--Mother would gather them and cook them in clear water. We had plenty of good water. The wild onions grew in great profusion, in the creek bottom. We would gather them in armsful. Mother cooked them without salt or any kind of seasoning and we children would eat them like Scotch Irish rebels that we were. Our cow had gone dry and we didn't even have any milk to cook with. We were getting a long fairly well hoping that we would not have any more trouble but we never can tell. We were still under Tory rule. We were booked for more trouble. There were spies on the lookout for any rebel boys that might slip in. One of my brothers slipped in and stayed in a room with the door closed. Some one had seen him come in and it was not long until it became known that he was at home. We were uneasy with danger lurking. We could not always see it but we could feel as something was going to happen. That same unseen foe was prowling about the place at night,--^{those} ~~that~~ unseen eyes were watching the house. It was dark in there; we spoke in whispers; we did not see anyone. I slipped around back of Mothers chair and asked her if we could slip Jim through the trap door. That was a terrible risk but it had to be done and we did it. If There was not anyone watching as our fears told us there was. Anyway next day they came after him but they never found him. He was in the cave. Mother helped him get away, then we knew that none of our men could come home

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without being seen by prying eyes and we would have to be more careful in the future. Mother never let us go far from the house. We had to bring water from

the spring at the edge of the swamp. The spring was under a bluff. The water was clear and cold. We would run down there in a hurry. We did not stop or play by the way. Mother never went to the spring. She was afraid to leave the house. She most always stood in the door when we went after water. Oh, she was a wonderful mother. She was brave and strong. I think our unbounded faith in her made her strong and brave. We looked up to God to protect us all and he did. I believe her great faith in our heavenly Father brought us safely through those trying times

John Russell Bean
Duncan, b. ca 1851, d.
1931

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There was a man that slipped in with some corn meal in the upper neighborhood and Mother went up there to get some of the meal. She had to go at night. She took my twelve year old brother with her. That left me and two other little girls there by ourselves. Soon the little girls were asleep. We were in mothers room and all at once I thought I had left the back kitchen unfastened. We had to cross an open porch to get to the kitchen--then we found the door barred. The night was so dark that we could not see each other. Then we were afraid to go back into mothers room and we had left the door open,--so there we stood close together and waited for Mother to come home. Everything was so still and then we heard footsteps crunching in the gravel in the backyard. There was only one coming.

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So we thought that if we had to die we would die fighting. So I got the shovel and the other girl got the tongs,--then we waited. Then we heard him come up the steps,--then all was still. Then I heard a voice soft and low saying, "pàace be still". Then we waited. Then we heard the voice again soft and low, "peace be still." Then I snatched the bar from the door and there stood my father. That was our pass word. If repeated three times and no one answered he would have gone to the cave. Soon mother came with some corn meal and our happiness was complete. We went to bed with a singing

These girls could have been daughters of Elsie's half-sister, Milberry Duncan Blevins ("Middie" in this manuscript), but records appear to show her with only one daughter at this time: Jane Blevins, b. March 1856. I'd appreciate any information you may have on this subject.

heart and slept like two tired little girls. When we got up next morning Father had gone. Mother said that they had heard a noise in the night, They were certain that it was those same ones spying around again. So he left for that blessed cave again. My father being a chaplain he could get permission to come home. He would always bring something with him to eat when he could get it but it was not safe for him to come. Just a few days after that some men came all dressed in gray. They looked all around, upstairs and in the kitchen. They said that they were looking for some Yankee scouts,--they did not bother anything. They asked mother a lot of questions about her men folks. I slipped around behind mother and told her that I saw U.S. on their belts. She said that she knew they were nice and friendly. When they left Mother said that they were wolves in sheeps clothing. One day the baby was sick and mother sent me into the edge of the woods to get some ground ivy to make him some tea.

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I stayed so long she came after me and found me in a circle of supposedly Yankee soldiers. The officer in charge began to curse her and she told him that it was wrong to use bad language that he would not go to heaven. He said that he did not want to go to heaven where all of the old cecesh were going. Mother said that she was afraid not many of them would get there either. Oh, I was so seared and afraid they were going to take her. She ran back to me and we ran back to the house. I never got the ivy so the baby got well itself. We were afraid they would come to the house after dark but they did not. We never knew why they were there. After that we had to stay closer to the house than ever. Bringing water from the spring was the worse thing we had to do. We never went to the spring by ourselves any more. Some time after that incident Mother was out in the yard

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She looked so distressed like she was worried and uneasy and restless. I stayed out there with her. I thought she was looking for some one. I began

fall out into the road. Then Mother ran up there. I didn't see him. Mother picked up the hat and went into the bushes. She came back after dark, and I asked where pappy was. She said that he was gone, that it was not safe for him to come to the house. Mother did not know that he was coming. She was worried and uneasy. She had no way to hear from him except when pappy could get a chance to slip in. She must have worried about lots of things that she didn't tell us about. I began to be on the lookout. We had depended on Mother to take care of us. I began to realize that she had no one to take care of her and when we would

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see her sitting there at night we would go and stand behind her chair. She would tell me to run along to bed. Then I would try to keep awake. I left her sitting there keeping watch over us while we were sleeping. I was uneasy about mother. She looked so distressed sometimes. I had great fear--a feeling almost of despair. That she was going to die. She had gone through so many trials and troubles, and we did not know what was ahead of us. We had picked up a stray cow. She did not give much milk. We were so happy that something good had happened to us. Mother was smiling and glad we pulled grass to feed her with. We could not turn her out for fear she would stray away. We were doing fine now. We went to work with a will to prepare for the coming winter. Mother had dried a lot of fruit and put up a lot of other

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wild things that we gathered out in the woods. With that and the nuts and wild onions and the milk we will do very well. If we can keep them. We will have to keep them hidden away. Summer was passing away. Our shoes and clothes are wearing and we have no way to get more,--no more camps to raid and pick clothes left by the soldiers. We would be glad to wear the blue now. They would keep us warm anyway. Our clothes are passed patching now, and if something doesn't happen soon we will have to wear them ragged. This is the fall of the year but the weather is still nice and pleasant. We hope for the best and Johnny said, "hope for the best and get the worst."

and he was about right. Two men came in the lot and took our cow right in day light. We saw them drive her out and we ran in and told mother about it. She came out but

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she could not do anything about it. She said that it was the last ^{straw.} ~~stew~~ She hope it would not "break the camels back." Old Chery did not give much milk but it helped a lot. That left us with nothing,--not even the cat,-- the Yankees ate her up. The men that took cows, horses, and other animals were thieves. They had no mercy on the helpless people that could not help themselves. Things were getting bad by this time. We had very little to eat. Father managed to get a chance to slip in. He brought some field peas and a jog of molasses. Mother cooked the peas and we gathered some wild grapes and we made some preserves. We parched some corn and, ^{ate} the birds caught in the traps. We got along fairly well. Christmas was very quiet and peaceful. Father stayed over. Mother read the Bible and Father

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prayed for peace and happiness, and good health for the dear ones in the army. Then he blessed us all and left us in the hands of God. He slipped away in the darkness. That made us feel closer to the Christ Child. Mother said that we could have a party all by ourselves. Middle had gone across the river to live in the old stone house that belonged to our Father. So we had a party. Mother made some molasses candy and we were happy.

1864

The New Year came in quiet and 1864 was peaceful. We did not have much but we had a lot to be thankful for. We had good health and all our men in the army had been spared so far. ~~That~~ We will start the New Year with a firm determination to fight all the hardships that were in store for us to the bitter end. My Mother stood the storm though the black war clouds hang low

and dark over our beautiful southland. Yet above the clouds the sun is still shining. We never lost faith or courage to meet the hardships and the danger to come. Mother was as brave as any soldier that ever faced the enemy on the firing line. There ought to be a monument raised in honor of this brave woman, of the Civil War, like the women of long ago she too stood beside her men while they fought for the birth of this great nation,--love, peace, and happiness. There shall be wars and rumors of wars until the end of time. We are struggling in darkness and uncertainties. We know not what is in store for us. It seems that we are going through a deep forest in the dark and we can never find our way out. My mother is so tired and we

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are so hungry and cold. We never see our boys any more. It has been so long since anyone has come home. We hear from them only when Father slips in, and that is not often. We have to go on through another winter. We are right in a nest of people that we cannot trust. All of them. Brother Peter was the friend of everyone. He would come to see and try to help, all that he could but there was nothing he could do except pray and do the Lords work which was on honor to his holy calling. About this time my youngest half-sisters husband came home and died. They lived down the river. She came home with her two children. She and mother were heart broken and they cried in each others arms. This cruel war will it ever end? Will the heart aches, grief and sorrow ever end? Will we ever be at peace and rest and cease to

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shed bitter tears for our loved ones? so cruelly taken away from us? Sis had a baby and named her Mary. She was a lovely baby. I was glad to have her for my little sister although I still grieve for little Sallie. I was so proud of this little sister but alas, it was not to be. After a few months dear little Mary was taken away to that beautiful garden in heaven,--there to play with little Sallie. My poor little heart was broken. I felt that God did not want me to have a little sister. Middies little Joe died and sis

Sarah H. Duncan Stratton, b. ca 1840. The 1860 census shows Sarah Duncan married to a boot-maker/shoemaker named W.S. Stratton. Other sources list his name as W.T. Stratton and say they married in 1859. Joseph Duncan's 1862 will mentions her as Sarah Stratton. I have not found any records of a W.T. or W.S. Stratton as a soldier in either army. However, as a boot-maker/shoemaker, he might have served the army as a sutler instead of enlisting. He could have died of disease instead of battle injuries. Many Civil War regiments lost more men to disease than to battle injuries. Do you have any information about either Sarah or her husbands?

19 went over there and stayed with her a while. She left her little boy with mother. We were getting along fine for the time being. We never can tell how soon something is going to happen. It had been raining and the boys had been in playing, the water throwing each other in. My little brother fell into the water ~~the~~ trough and got wet. I took him into the house. Then Mother went out there and made them put on dry clothes. Some of them took colds. Little Joe seemed to be more delicate than the rest of them. Next morning little Joe was very sick. Mother was nearly crazy,--we did everything we could. We could not save him. He died in Mothers arms, and so dear little Joe had also gone on to play with the other little girls, Sallie and Mary. There was more grief and heartaches when Sis came home. It seemed that we could not stand any more. Sis was all alone now,--her huscand and two children gone. She bowed her head to the will of God and went bravely on and helped Mother fight the battle and bear the burden she had been bearing alone. That night we were so sad and lonely. Not a word was spoken.

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Mother bowed her head in silence. I knew that we were in the hands of God. Father came home,--he too was all broken up over the death of the dear little children. He brough some meal and garden seed. He could not stay long. The Torries had left our neighborhood and gone further down the river and yet we were not entirely safe yet. By this time we were in rags. Our clothes were past doing anything with. Spring will soon be here and we are glad, for the sunshine will keep us warm. Mother found an old rusty hoe. She planted the seed. She soon had something growing in the garden. The old hollyhock bush had stood the wear and tare of the battle and the pink rose bush was still there. A few fruit trees were still there. Things were looking brighter for us now, although we would hear of raiders over the river.