

*My aunts would all share a room with two beds to split between the three of them, putting two in one bed. When I spent the night, I slept between my Aunt Maggie and Cebelle. My mother would sleep with Celester in the other bed. My father would sleep in a room with her brothers Spencer and Booker T. A hired hand slept there too. In a child's eyes it was fun to be so packed close together. From the aunts' giggles and the uncles' guffaws, I know they loved it too.*

*We spent nights and weekends with Poppa P. Burns and Grandma Amanda. Grandfather Burns had a big farm, but he did not do any farming himself. It was done by farmhands. Poppa P. ran a General Store, blacksmith shop and a cotton gin.*

*A cluster of childhood memories circles around World War I. I was four years old when it started. My dad and all his brothers received letters from Uncle Sam—I hadn't met him yet—calling upon them to enlist in the armed forces. J.P. Burns and his brother Jerry Lanier went into the army. They both went to England and France and finally to Germany. When they came back they brought with them helmets, gas masks, guns and swords and some great war stories.*

*The end of the war in 1918 was overcast at our house by the final illness and death of Grandfather Burns on March 22, 1919.*

*Poppa P. was a fine man, very attached to me, his first grandson, and I to him. His country store was like Santaland to me. He had everything anyone could want. There was sawdust on the floors. I liked to run my toes through it and form my letters or shape a heart for my mom. I was always fascinated by the store and being there with him. The smells especially caught my attention. Even when I wasn't hungry, the scent of peppermint candy, cheese, peanuts, pickles and balony triggered my appetite.*

*Sometimes Poppa P. would get tired of the store and close it, and we would walk to the house where some of the family and friends were picking cotton. Granddaddy would put me on a cotton sack and pull me on it when he picked cotton. He liked the fresh air and feel of fall that accompanied cotton picking time in north Alabama. I used to feel like that cotton sack was my magic carpet and when we would get to the end of the row, Poppa P. would sit down and put me across his lap*