

More from My

Hometown Americus Georgia

More Stories, Good Cooks & Country
Music and friends and neighbors

By Tabby Crabb

The original cover concept for the Hometown
Americus Georgia books is by Ralph “Mister
Nelson” Nelson who grew up close by. Nelson
made it big in Hollywood but never forgets his
friends back home.

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Forward Day by Day

My daddy's mother, Carrie Lansford Crabb, loved reading the little magazine from the Methodist Church. It was part of my life just like a praying hands picture or the love of Jesus, Sunday dinner at her house, and trips to the river after church.

We were all in and around Americus. That's in Sumter County. That's where we lived. When you're a kid you don't worry about how you got there, you just hopefully know where you are and who is around you. I've always been interested in where: Plains, Americus, Leslie, DeSoto, Cobb, the Flint River and the lake from the dam to the Vienna Bridge fit into the world at large.

Now, growing older and seeing a lot of the world and meeting a lot of all kinds of people, I learned that I am one of the lucky ones growing up the way most of us down here did. I don't think anybody worried about whether somebody was rich or poor but how you knew him or her and because you got to know someone's character over the span of time you knew where you stood.

Even though I promised after my first book, Hometown Americus Georgia that I wouldn't write another one, I have changed my mind. I got a lot of email threatening me but the call from George Hooks settled it.

I don't know what more I can tell on myself after the first book so I guess I'll have to move away after this one because a lot of it is about you.

It's been almost three years since I first came back home to Americus. I got home just in time to be here for the tornado that almost destroyed the town. We were at my mom's house on Glessner Street when it hit. It was on a Thursday evening.

For decades I had called Mom every night at 8pm and when we got home we continued it and started a TV Thursday night at Mom's for something to do. Gloria would make a homemade pizza and we'd load up Tailer the dog and head from Leslie where we had landed, to Mom's. We were watching Survivor on TV when the power went out. The house started shaking and I was trying to get Mom to go sit in a chair I'd put in the inside hall. The front door was shaking and banging. Mom was fighting me trying to go open the door. She thought someone was in trouble and banging on the door to get in. This struck me.

Then as quickly as the house started shaking and the deafening roar of the locomotives overhead had started it was over and the silence was deafening. Of course the power was off. The phones were out and power lines and trees covered the landscape. I worried about the four pet dogs we had left locked in the little house in Leslie. We got Mom squared away and into bed and tried to find a way to get to S. Lee Street to get out of Americus and go to Leslie to check on our place. It took 45 minutes to go a block and a half, picking our way through the debris in four wheel drive.

By the time we got to Lee Street there were a half dozen cars trying to navigate through the downed power lines. The stop light was out and lying in

the middle of the street. An older woman was sitting in her car frozen by the scene and afraid to make a move. A deputy was parked in front of Lee Street Methodist Church with his lights flashing. I knew we'd soon be trapped and I had to get to Leslie.

From behind me I heard a male voice yell from the car behind me, "I'm a Doctor; I have to get to the hospital."

"Follow me," I yelled and got behind the wheel and drove around the stalled cars and under the power lines. I could hear them dragging along the roof of my Dodge Durango. I remember thinking that we were in no danger because the power was off. It was pitch black dark.

Many years earlier I had been sitting in the office of the director of entertainment in Saigon when I heard the roar of locomotives. Only that time it was a rocket attack and I heard the locomotives just before the ceiling caved in. It's funny the things you think about in the face of danger.

The doctor went straight through the intersection and I headed south toward Tommy Hooks Road past the Manor where I noticed the lights were on. They already had the emergency lights lit.

Leslie was dark but there was no apparent wind damage at our house. I decided to head to Cordele to see if the Wal-Mart was open to get some supplies. It was apparent that Americus would be closed and I needed supplies for Mom. The sky was lit with emergency truck lights headed to

Americus as I headed east out of Leslie headed toward the river. The Wal-Mart was open and word of the tornado had not reached Cordele yet. I bought what I needed and headed back to Leslie to get a little sleep. The lights came back on in Leslie about 2am.



Early the next morning we headed back into Americus to check on Mom. The devastation was shocking; numbing really, I tried to go around Rees Park to check on my aunt and uncle and traffic was backed up with sightseers and others I'm sure trying to check on family and friends. My aunt and uncle had gotten up at the crack of dawn and headed to Hawkinsville to stay with their son so we headed to Mom's. The damage on Glessner Street was shocking.

This is how it started. Back home to be here for Mom and much of the town landscape that I had grown up with 45 years earlier was gone. The tornado had jumped over Mom's house and she

was fine. She was up trying to figure out how to boil some water to make some tea. Mulkey McMichael drove in from Buena Vista with a weed eater and some lawn tools and helped me clear the debris from her yard. Mom always said that if she were 30 years younger she would make a play for Mulkey. He's a great person.

Slowly Americus resumed some normalcy. Businesses reopened. Houses got new roofs and trees were planted. Hopes rose. Three weeks after the tornado I was hauling my boat to the river. Going across the bridge the trailer came off the ball part of the hitch. I could feel the back of the car being pulled around and when I checked my side mirror, I could see the bow of the boat. It looked like it was trying to pass me.

It was still chained to the hitch but the boat, a large Sea Ray day cruiser, weighed 5000 pounds and my little Dodge Durango less than 3000. It was touch and go there for a few minutes until I got slowed down and pulled the crippled trailer off the side of the road, Two highway workers helped me get it back on the hitch and I towed it to Tom Harris's boat shop in Cordele where it stayed for six months.

Just today, we were down at the river and took the Sea Ray from the Lake Blackshear Marina down to the dam and back. I'll always love that river. I can feel my daddy and the Commander on the lake. I can still hear the Commander shout, "Hotamighty" when he'd hook a big fish that were abundant in those days. I can still remember his wife, my grandmother Carrie, chastising him for

using the "Lord's name in vain." I had trouble getting my head around that but if she said "Hotamighty" was a cuss word then it was. She would know living with the Commander all those years..

A year or so later I ran across a little classified ad in the local paper, the paper I'd grown up with. They were looking for a "Local Correspondent" to cover a few columns a week. Knowledge of photography was a plus. I decided to see if I could get myself hired on at the paper, to test myself as a writer. I emailed the editor and she agreed to see me and talk about it.

About ten minutes into my meeting with the editor, she asked me if this was something that I would want to do for a long time and I said I would. I was responsible for three weekly columns; Question of the Week, Cook of the Week and one about the folks who live around here called Friends and Neighbors. I was especially interested in this part of it but I was concerned about finding the cooks since I really didn't know whom to talk to. The editor said she was leaving on vacation the next day and that I was on my own. My first column was due in 48 hours.

During this period I discovered that writing for myself and writing for a newspaper editor are two different things. One of the first things I noticed was that none of the editors were actually from Americus. They hadn't gone to school here. The other thing I noticed was that they did not like my style of mixing first person with third person

reportage but I liked going out in the county and meeting people, seeking out someone to profile.

The cooks were the hardest and I fabricated several cooks in order to fill a column. Once I even used a picture of Nick Blaxton who had played drums in my Nashville band. I called him B.G. Woody, a play on his current band, Big Woody and the Splinters. We did a Fourth of July BBQ special for the paper. I'll include it with some of the other stories about people I discovered like Lillie Mae Johnson in Andersonville, Ed Cobb in Leslie and, quite by accident, Captain Bud Mills who lives in Americus. That's what made it fun.

I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize Gloria for all her help in staying up late to proof the proof and to give helpful advice and criticism during the writing and publishing process.

And lastly, thank you to all those kind people who supported the first book, Hometown Americus Georgia especially The Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Mary Edna Popwell, Brenda Gautier, Becky Holland, the ladies of The Friday Lunch Bunch, Bill Murray, Griff Eldridge, the Hooks Family, The Times-Recorder newspaper and many others who helped by giving the book publicity, support, and buying many copies.

Thank you to all of you named or not who purchased copies of the book lending support to the endeavor.

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