

Chapter LV

Camille

July 25, 1969 – August 20, 1969

It had been a couple of days since Ramona had checked on things in her garden. When she went out on Saturday morning, she found that the beans were ready to pick. Since Craig and Edith benefited from the garden, she enlisted the help of Edith, and her kids, who were all old enough to be good helpers, to pick beans. While they were busy out in the garden, she had Sheffield help her wash bottles to get them ready.

Then while everyone was busy snapping beans, Ramona got her canner ready. Once everything was ready, the process of bottling began. With the pressure cooker going, and the temperature and humidity both near ninety, the sweltering kitchen became nearly unbearable. The big batch of lemonade sure was refreshing.

By the time the day was over, better than a hundred quarts of beans sat on the shelves in the fruit cellar. On top of that, there would be another smaller batch ready in a few more days.

Come Monday morning, the second cutting of hay was ready. Sheffield started up the tractor and backed it up to the mower to hitch it up. His Farmall 340 was eleven years old and in terrific running order, thanks to Craig. It didn't have all that many hours on it and the paint hadn't faded since he kept it in the barn.

The model 25-V sickle mower on the other hand was quite old. It was already several years old when he bought it twenty two years ago. Despite the fact that it was an old piece of equipment, it had served him well with no more hay that he had to mow.

Once he had it hitched up, he had to attach the power take off shaft and plug in the hydraulic hoses. That's when he noticed that the twelve inch tire that trailed behind was low. He pulled around to the barn and filled up the tire, gave all of the zerks a pump or two of grease and headed out to the field.

Ready to go to work, he engaged the p.t.o and the mower blade came to life. He grabbed the hydraulic control lever and lowered the seven foot cutter bar. He let his foot off the clutch and the tractor moved forward. Sheffield looked over his shoulder to watch the alfalfa fall over the blade and lay on the ground, the sweet aroma of new mown hay began to fill the air.

He only made it half way through the field when he heard a loud snap. He instinctively shoved in on the clutch and disengaged the p.t.o.. A quick glance over his shoulder told him what the problem was. The wooden pitman arm had broke. All he could do was raise the cutter bar and head back to the barn.

Sheffield shutoff the tractor and dismounted to take care of the problem. All it took was to undo five bolts to remove the broken part, a repair that he had to make a few times over the years.. He hopped in his pickup, which was also was also getting old, and drove into Roanoke to the International Harvester dealer to get a new one. While he was there, he picked up some extra teeth for his side rake and some baling twine, since he knew that would need some.

The new part went on as easy as the old one had come off and after only an hour and half of down time, he was back out in the field. After stopping for lunch, he went back out to finish and was done by late afternoon. After unhitching the mower he went in the house and cleaned up for supper.

The next morning, Sheffield went out after breakfast and started up the tractor again. First he pulled up to the gas tank to refuel and then backed up to side rake to hitch it up. The International Harvester Model R 505 side rack was also 1940s vintage. He bought it at the same time he got the mower, when the first got the ranch. It was getting pretty rusty but still worked. He had considered replacing it with a newer one. Once he had it hitched, he pulled over to the barn where he replaced the teeth, oiled the drive chain, and greased the moving parts. When he pulled into the field, he got off the tractor to engage the gearbox on the front axle that turned the reel and the lowered the reel.

As he moved through the field, the teeth on spinning reel swept the hay to one side, leaving it in a row. At the end of the field he turned around and came back up the other side, leaving a windrow behind. The job went fairly quickly and after taking a break for lunch, he was finished by early afternoon. Now all he had to do was to let it cure for a few days before baling it.

While waiting for the hay to dry, Ramona had another batch of beans to put up. The process wasn't nearly as drawn out as there were only half as many beans in that picking. Nevertheless, she added another fifty seven quarts of beans to the shelves in the root cellar.

Sheffield had hoped to bale the hay on Saturday, but it rained Thursday night and a good share of Friday. So on Saturday, he hitched up the rack again and went out and turned to windrows over so they could dry out. With a lot of sunshine and a gentle breeze, by Monday it would be ready to bale.

After turning the hay on Saturday, Sheffield hitched up the baler and had it serviced and filled with twine. The International Harvester Model 55 baler was newer than his other implements, as he had replaced the original baler a number of years earlier.

He went out early Monday morning, before sunrise, to take advantage of the dew. He pulled into the field and got off to lower the pickup before he got started. From in the house, Ramona could hear him going as she laid in bed deciding whether or not to get up. The hum of the tractor and rhythmic sound of plunger as it shoved hay into the bale chamber nearly lulled her back to sleep. By the time the sun came up at six thirty, so was she.

Sheffield worked throughout the morning, while the dew lasted. At one point he looked back to see that the last two bales scattered behind him. He had to stop and adjust one of the knotters that had worked loose. Rather than leave them, he gathered up the broken bales with a pitch fork and fed them back through the baler. By around eleven the dew was gone so he quit for the day, but he had about two thirds of it baled.

After lunch, he took Ramona, Gean, Geoff, and Todd with him haul in what he had baled. Ramona

drove the pickup, with the trailer between the rows of bales. Geoff and Gean's job was to pick up the bales and set them on the trailer, while Sheffield and Todd stacked it on the wagon. After it was four bales high, they took it into the barnyard and added them to the haystack. It was hot, so before they went out for the second load, they took a break and sat in the shade drinking lemonade.

"Well, it's not going to haul itself." Sheffield said when their break was over, so they went back out for another load, followed by another break and one last load. By the time they were done, they were all dirty and soaked with sweat.

When they were finished, the kids were released to go home so they could clean up. As for Sheffield and Ramona, they went straight to her bathhouse and took off their dirty clothes and stepped into the shower for a good scrubbing before settling in for a good, long relaxing soak. The hot water felt particularly good on Sheffield's aching muscles. At seventy years old, he felt he was getting too old to manhandle those sixty five pound bales.

When it was time to get out, they dried off and wrapped up in their bath robes and carried their dirty clothes into the house and put on some clean clothes. By then Craig was home from work and they walked up the highway to their house for dinner and to celebrate Craig's thirty eight birthday.

Tuesday was repeat of the day before, only it didn't take as long. Sheffield was done baling by mid morning. With the same crew as the day before, less Ramona who had to go to Relief Society, they went out while the morning was still cool to haul in the last two loads. In her place, Sheffield had eleven year old Todd drive the pickup. He put it in first gear for him and had Todd steer the pickup between the rows. And he did a good job of it too. They were finished by one o'clock, about the time Ramona got home. Sheffield cleaned up while Ramona fixed lunch. Then in the afternoon they took the grandkids, including Tina, to the Lakeside Amusement Park in Salem, just two and half miles away. After taking them out to eat, they had Gean and Geoff home in time to go to Mutual and for Sheffield to attend his district council meeting.

With the second crop hay put up, Sheffield took it easy for couple of days, but on Friday Ramona pressed everyone into service to help put up corn; and there was a lot of it. Then on Saturday, they got together with Craig and Edith and their kids, and Stirling and Mary Ann to celebrate Edith's thirty eighth birthday.

In addition to work, they did a lot with Craig's kids during the summer, taking them places and doing things. Gean had a summer job so between work and dating, she wasn't always available. As the kids got older, their interests had evolved accordingly, especially fourteen year old Geoff. Todd and Tina still had a little childhood left in them.

Despite the distance, they kept in close touch with Norma and Janet and the grandkids out west. Typically they wrote letters and sent pictures back and forth in the mail. The grandkids always included

notes in with the letters. Occasionally there was a long distances telephone call. But because of the cost, they were brief and few and far between. It was through these letters and telephone calls that the upcoming holidays were planned out.

For the next several days, things were fairly routine. For Sheffield, that routine included watching the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite. The lead story that night was that the British Army was sent into the streets of Northern Ireland, which set off a round of violent protests. As a side note later in the broadcast, he reported on tropical storm Camille that had formed in the Caribbean, about fifty miles west-northwest of Grand Cayman.

Over the next few days, the crisis in Northern Ireland continued to dominate the news. There was also a story about a gathering of hippies at a place called Woodstock in upstate New York. Oh and by the way, Camille had intensified to hurricane strength as it crossed the western end of Cuba. Forecasters were predicting that it would turn to the northwest, toward the Florida panhandle.

The next day Camille had become a Category 5 hurricane, when it slammed into the Gulf Coast on Sunday the 17th killing 259 people; mainly in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, becoming Walter Cronkite's lead story. It was estimated that the storm would continue north and quickly die out.

By Tuesday afternoon the remnants of the storm was moving east, toward Virginia. The weather forecast called for thunderstorms and possible heavy rain as it came across the Blue Mountains into the Roanoke and Shenandoah Valleys.

Sheffield decided to play it safe and had Geoff and Todd help him bring the cattle across the river and locked them in the corral. With the cows secure, they filled the mangers with hay. In addition, they put the horses in their stalls in the barn. Sheffield made sure everything was battened down as if he was taking his ship into a storm. Anything that could blow open or blow away was secured.

Later in the evening it began to rain as the leading edge of the front began moving in. Around midnight, the low-pressure center intensified as a band of rain and thunderstorms some forty to fifty miles wide moved eastward into Virginia along a track south of Roanoke and Lynchburg, dumping heavy rain along the western slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

As the storm hit, Sheffield and Ramona were awakened by the lightning, thunder and the wind. At one point the lightning was quite close. Sheffield was glad that he had taken the precautions that he had. It wasn't long after the storm hit, that the power went out. All they could do was wait out the storm.

By morning, the thunderstorm had moved on, but by the time it got light it was still raining quite heavy. A quick glance outside showed that everything seemed to be intact. The yard was full of puddles with water running down toward the river. The power was still off, so Sheffield turned on a battery powered radio to see if he could get some news while he got ready for the day.

They had gotten off lucky where they were. The folks up in Nelson County, between Lynchburg and Charlottesville had been hit hard as the storm stalled over the area and dumped an estimated twenty inches of rain over night. Preliminary reports told of flash flooding and landslides. Many roads and bridges were washed out and there were reports of fatalities.

After breakfast the power was still out. Sheffield donned his raincoat and rubber boots and ventured out to survey the ranch. The rain had let up considerably as he looked around. Limbs and branches were strewn everywhere. The livestock were safe and had weathered the storm no worse for the wear.

As he scouted around, he found some shingles scattered around that had blown off the roof of the house. The heavy rain had washed little gullies through the driveway and across the yard as the rainwater made its way to the river. Sheffield made his way down toward the pasture and stopped to see if there was anything amiss. One of the larger trees had come down. Without getting any closer, it looked like it had been hit by lightning. The river was swollen, with a swift current, but there didn't seem to be any flooding.

There wasn't anything he could do right then, so he made his way back to the house.

"How bad is it?" Ramona asked.

He gave a report of what he had seen and added, "There's not much I can do about it until it stops raining and dries out."

The power wasn't restored until around eleven o'clock. As the afternoon wore on more reports came in from Nelson County. With each report, the news became even more grim. Many rivers were at flood stage and the death toll began to mount up. During the afternoon, Sheffield had Geoff and Todd help him clean up the debris and heaped it up in a pile to burn later. It would take a couple of days to get it all. He decided to leave the cows in the corral again that night, since the river was still running high.

That evening, Sheffield got a call from his nephew, Danny Brason, asking him to go up the next day with him and his son-in-law Preston Casper (who also happened to be Edith's nephew) and his seventeen year old son, Emmett and help with the clean up. Since Craig had to work, he got Geoff and Todd to go with him.

Early the next morning Sheffield and the boys loaded the old pickup with things they might need; Sheffield's chainsaw and some shovels. Since they didn't know how long they would be, they took some changes of clothes and a cooler full of food. And since they didn't know where they would be staying, they threw in three sleeping bags. Ramona, Craig, and Edith saw them off as they pulled out of the driveway.

They drove over to Danny's place and found them ready to go. Since he owned his own excavation business, he had two dump trucks and a pickup loaded with equipment and supplies fueled and ready to go. Behind the pickup was a low flatbed trailer with his backhoe. After a brief chat, Danny told him that they were going to Wood's Mill, which was normally just over a hundred miles away. But since sections of

Highway 29 had been washed away, they would have to go the long way, up Interstate 81 through the Shenandoah Valley and over to Charlottesville and back down to Wood's Mill, which was only about thirty miles farther. Sheffield was to follow behind, but if they got separated, they would meet up there.

Sheffield stayed with them all the way to Charlottesville, where they stopped off to arrange for a couple of motel rooms and to get something to eat. As they headed down to Wood's Mill, the devastation began to be apparent but they didn't realize the full scope of the disaster until they got there.

As the Rockfish River meandered through the hills, all or the rainwater from the storm drained into the river, which became raging torrent that swept away boulders, trees, and everything else, including people. At Wood's Mill the bridge across the river had been washed away. Crews were already there working on clearing away the debris at the bridge. A Sheriff's deputy directed Danny and his crew back up the road to the cut off to State Highway 6, which was barely passable, and start clearing away the highway along the river.

They followed the road along the slope of the hill, a little ways from the river. As they came around the bend, the road was clogged with debris where the river ran next to the road. Off to the left was a broad open area where they could dump the debris until it could be disposed of later. The immediate concern was to open that section of the road. To the right was a damaged home in the mouth of a gully. They found it abandoned. Who knew where its inhabitants were. Hopeful they were safe.

Danny and Preston began to size up the task and what needed to be done. Danny put Preston and Emmett to work cutting the trees into more manageable chunks while Geoff and Todd got the job of gathering up the smaller pieces. Danny ran the backhoe, while Sheffield was the truck driver. Wood and things that would burn went into one, and rocks and things that wouldn't burn went into the other one. Soon there was a load ready for Sheffield to dump.

They worked until about two o'clock before they stopped for something to eat and to rest. They had barely made a dent in the mountain of debris. Danny estimated that it would take at least three days. After lunch they went back to work.

Towards late afternoon, Danny had just scooped up a bucket load of logs when Geoff cried out, "There's someone in here."

Everyone else gathered around while Danny dumped the bucket. Work came to a standstill while they assessed the situation. There was an arm reaching out of the pile. It was obvious that they couldn't dig it out with the backhoe without mangling the body further. Carefully the men and boys began removing the top of the pile. Some of the bigger pieces still needed cut down to size.

It took a good hour to uncover the body. Laying on top of the pile was the body of a young woman, most likely a teenager.

"She must have washed downstream." Sheffield observed.

"From the looks of her, she came a long ways." Danny added. "As she had tumbled downstream in the torrent, she must have been battered by the debris in the river. So much so that whatever she was wearing had been torn from her body."

Her mud caked, naked body was bruised and broken beyond recognition. It was a ghastly sight that sickened the men and boys who had discovered her.

"What do we do now?" someone asked.

"Nothing." Sheffield said. "Get something to cover her with. I'm going to drive back over to the bridge and get help." He went over to his pickup and got in and drove off. Danny retrieved a tarp from the back of his pickup which they used to cover the poor girl's body.

While waiting for Sheffield to return, the rest of them rested in the shade in the yard of the abandoned house. They talked of the poor girl and of her fate, wondering who she was and where she had come from. Todd, at eleven years old, found the idea of a dead body fascinating. Geoff on the other hand found it upsetting. From the looks of her, she probably wasn't much older than him.

Quite a while later Sheffield returned with the Sheriff's deputy right behind him. Sheffield and Danny took him to where they found the body and showed it to the deputy. He didn't say a word and returned to his patrol car and reached in to get his radio. He clicked it on and said, "Dispatch, we've found another one."

He talked to the dispatcher for a moment and returned. "Good job, men. You handled this just right." he said. "Altogether more than eighty bodies have been recovered so far. Since the road to Lovington is washed out, someone is on the way down from Charlottesville to pick up the body."

He took a statement form each of them describing how they had found the body. When he was finished, he said, "In the meantime can you come around and work from the side."

The crew went back to work clearing away the road. They were more careful, in case they came across anyone else. In the meantime, the deputy stayed until an ambulance arrived from Charlottesville.

As they prepared to move the body, Geoff was distracted. His attention was fixated on the dead girl as they carefully picked up her body and placed it on a stretcher and covered her with a clean white sheet. Once the ambulance left, he returned to his work, but he couldn't get his mind off her.

They worked until dusk and quite for the day. They drove the twenty four miles back to their motel and cleaned up and went to the coffee shop next to the motel for something to eat. Sheffield and his grandsons shared one room, while Danny and his boys shared the other. That night as they went to bed, Geoff was still having a difficult time with what had happened that afternoon. It was obvious that he was quite troubled by it.

That gave Sheffield an opportunity to talk about some of the things that he had encountered aboard

the Reprisal in the aftermath of battle. Some of the things he had seen were far more gruesome. As badly mangled as this young woman was, at least she was in one piece.

Geoff wanted to know, who was she and where she had come from? Who was he family? What became of them? Had they survived? Were they out there somewhere wondering where she was? Eventually he went to sleep.

The next morning they all got up early and had breakfast at the same diner and returned to the job site. As they worked, it became tedious and mundane as they cleared the road. Slowly the two piles of debris grew in size, marking the progress that they made. At least they didn't find anymore bodies. They worked all day Saturday and when they quit, they had about a half a day of work remaining when they returned to their motel for the night.

Even though it was Sunday, they got up early and returned to the site and worked through the morning. By noon, they had cleared away the stretch of road along the river which allowed the search crews to get past and go further up into the hills. The same deputy thanked them for their work and released them.

Before leaving, Sheffield asked him, "Is there any word on the girl we found the day before yesterday?"

"I haven't heard." he replied. "Besides by now the body count is well over one hundred. It's hard to keep track of all of them, but if you really want to know, you could call the coroner's office in Charlottesville."

Sheffield thanked the officer. They loaded up everything they had brought with them. After stopping in Charlottesville for lunch, they drove home. It was early afternoon when they got home with enough time to clean up and go to Sacrament Meeting.

The next day Sheffield called the coroner's office in Charlottesville and identified himself as part of the crew who had found the body of a teenage girl at Wood's Mill on Friday and asked if she had been identified.

The Coroner told him that her name was, ironically, Camille Davis. Her family identified her body on Saturday and had been handed over to a local funeral home. He also told him that where she was found was about four miles from where she was swept away. Sheffield inquired further and learned that her funeral was scheduled for eleven o'clock Thursday the 28th at the Baptist Church on Adial Road just north of Wood's Mill.

When he told Geoff what he had learned, he expressed a great deal of desire to attend her funeral. He couldn't get her off his mind and he wanted to know more about her. So Sheffield agreed to go with him.

It wasn't until when the Monday edition of the Roanoke times arrived that Sheffield learned full extent of the disaster caused by the remnants of Hurricane Camille. According to the article, Nelson County had been declared a disaster area. The storm had stalled on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge Mountains,

dumping a record quantity of rain, mainly in a three-hour period. Over five hours, it added up to more than thirty seven inches, in addition to the deluge of five inches in half an hour the previous day which already had the ground saturated.

The worst of the damage was reported in Massies Mill, Woods Mill, Roseland, Bryant, Tyro, Montebello, Lovington, Norwood, Rockfish, and along Davis and Muddy Creeks. Most of the bridges were washed out in Nelson County. In the community of Davis Creek, only three of thirty five homes were left standing after the floodwaters receded. An unknown number of people were still unaccounted for, while others were found as much as twenty miles downstream. Major flooding occurred downstream on the James River at Richmond as a result of the runoff.

Over the next several days and weeks more details were certain to come out as the cleanup efforts continued. Sheffield was grateful to have helped out in his small way. It had been a good lesson for his two grandsons.

Sheffield turned his attention back to cleaning up the Two Star Ranch. It was nothing compared to the destruction that he had seen at Woods Mill. Geoff and Todd were a big help to him and after a couple of days that had it all picked up. He had Danny bring in a couple of loads of gravel, one for the drive way and one for the landing strip. Using his tractor with a scraper blade attached, he spread it around and smoothed it out.

On Thursday morning Sheffield and Geoff left early to drive back up to Woods Mill. With the roads and bridges still out, they had to take the back way in through the hills. They found the church and parked the car and went in. They were there in time for the viewing prior to the funeral. Geoff was a little nervous, but he didn't let it deter him from his purpose in being there.

As they greeted the grieving family, they looked the strangers over as if trying to place them. Sheffield extended his hand and explained. "Mister and Missus Davis, my name is Sheffield Brason from Salem and this is my grandson, Geoff."

Mr. Davis still had a puzzled look on his face as he tried to place them.

Sheffield went on say. "Geoff was the one who discovered Camille's body and he wanted to come and pay his respects."

"Aw. I see." Mr. Davis replied.

Sheffield continued, "We were part of a clean up crew on Highway Six, down by Wood's Mill clearing away debris and that's when Geoff spotted her arm reaching through the pile."

"Well Geoff," Mr. Davis said as he reached for Geoff's hand. "I can't tell you how grateful we are to you for finding our daughter." He went on to introduce himself and his family. "I'm Charles Davis. This is my wife Mildred and our son Ben and our daughter Bethany."

"We're so sorry for your loss." Sheffield consoled. "It must have been a traumatic experience for you."

"Thank you." Charles said. "It was. It was in the middle of the night and we were all in bed and had been raining hard all night. Then we got a call from a neighbor up the road warning us that a flash flood was coming our way. Right in the middle of the call the phone went dead and the lights went out. There wasn't time to get in the car and outrun it. Our best hope was to scramble for higher ground. With only the cloths on our backs, we ran out the back door and up the hill. There was a sheer drop off that we had to get over. It was raining hard and it was slippery so I went up first to help the others up. I reached for Millie and pulled her up. Camille gave Ben a boost so we could reach him and then the same with Beth. As I reached down to take Cammie's hand, a wall of water came roaring around the bend in the river. I frantically grabbed her hand, but the force of the water ripped her from my grip. I'll never forget the horrified look on her face as she disappeared into the blackness."

"The poor girl." Sheffield said as he wiped a tear from his eye.

"All we could do was huddle together under an outcropping of rocks there on the hill above our house as we wept for Cammie. We stayed there until the water receded the next day. Our house and everything we had was gone, but none of that mattered as much as Camille. Barefooted and in our night clothes, we made our way to a neighbor who lived higher up the hill and they took us in. Their telephone was restored on Saturday, but the phones in Lovington were still out so we couldn't report her missing. Then Millie suggested that I call the Sheriff over in Albemarle County. At least they could pass the information on.

"When I called, the dispatcher said that they had the body of a teenage girl that had been recovered near Wood's Mill and asked for a description. They said that it sounded like the body they had and asked us to come identify it. We had to take the back roads to get there, and when we did, they took us to see her. It was our Camille alright. She looked like she had been beaten up pretty bad. The coroner said that it was his opinion that she had drowned fairly soon after being pulled in. At least she didn't have to endure the beating that she took as she went down stream."

After listening to the sad story, Sheffield said, "If its any consolation I know what you're going through."

"Oh do you now?" Charles snarled. Angered at the comment.

"Yes, I do. You see I lost my first wife and our two children in horrific tragedy."

"I see." Charles said as his expression softened. "I'm sorry for your loss."

"Thank you. That was more than twenty seven years ago. I can assure you that eventually, you can get on with your lives, but I know it won't be easy."

Not wanting to hold up the line of well wishers, Sheffield moved on to Mildred who had listened to the entire conversation. As Geoff stood in front of Mr. and Mrs. Davis, he said. "I'm sorry about Camille." as he handed her the bouquet of daises that he had picked from his mother's flower beds that morning.

“Thank you Geoff.” Mildred said as she took the daises and shook his hand. “That was kind of you to come all this way.”

“I had to come. Ever since we found her, I haven't been able to stop thinking about her.”

Then she looked at Sheffield and said, “That's one fine young man you have there. It was good of you to bring him.”

Sheffield and Geoff then shook hands with Camille's younger brother Ben, who appeared to be a little younger than Geoff, and her sister Bethany, who looked to be ten or eleven. Then they came to the casket, which was closed because of the condition of the body. Situated on top of the casket amid a spread of gladiolus was an eight by ten framed portrait of Camille. Since everything in the Davis home was gone, Camille's grandmother provided her school picture from the year before.

One of the things that Geoff had been wondering about, was what did she look like? He stopped and studied the picture for a good long moment. Putting a clear image of the face with the body brought a great deal of satisfaction for him as he worked through the experience that had such a profound influence on him.

She was cute girl with naturally curly, shoulder length red hair, with bangs down over her forehead. and a few freckles on her high cheeks. Geoff remembered the mud caked hair on the body to have been longer. She must have grown it out since then.

In the picture, she wore a pair light colored cat eye eyeglasses, with emerald green eyes peering through the lenses. The thing that was the most captivating about her appearance was her broad toothy smile. As Geoff processed the image, he placed it in his memory to contrast the haunting sight of her bruised and battered face as she lay on her side on that heap of rubble.

Once he was satisfied, he and his grandfather moved on. They made their way to the chapel and took a seat in the back. As they sat down, Geoff looked at the program that he picked up on their way into the chapel. The same picture was printed on the front. First he read her name, Camille Irene Davis. That was one piece of information that he learned about her, her middle name was Irene.

Next he looked at her birth date, October 28, 1953. That meant that she was six months younger than his sister, Gean. She was only fifteen years old – way too young to die. Geoff did the math in his head, she was a year and eight months older than him. As they sat there waiting for the service to begin, Geoff was lost in thought, wondering what kind of person she was? What did she like to do? Things that had swam around in his mind for the last week.

We didn't have to wait long to get the answers he sought. Once the service began, those who spoke talked of the charming, sweet young woman that she had been. Much was said of her love for her family and her willingness to help others. She was well liked by her peers, both girls and boys. In fact she had just started dating during the summer. Her lovely smile was the result of years of wearing braces.

She was looking forward to her sophomore year at Nelson County High School in Lovington when school started in a couple of weeks. She was a good student, with a good mix of As and Bs, rarely ever a C. Her favorite subject was science, as she had a natural curiosity about the things about her. She enjoyed drama and had been in several school plays and was on the girls volleyball team.

In addition to school, her extracurricular activities included being involved in 4H. She raised award winning rabbits that she was preparing the show at the Nelson County Fair the following week along with a formal that she had made for herself. Her rabbits and the dress were swept away with their house in the flood that claimed her life. Camille was into miniskirts and country music. She was particularly a fan of Bobbie Gentry. She had all of her albums and knew every song by heart, as well as many others, and had even taught herself to play the guitar.

The funeral was sparsely attended for a number of reasons, as the pastor pointed out. So many people had been displaced by the flood, many of them still cut off from other areas of the county. There was hardly a family that hadn't suffered the loss of loved ones in one connection or another. In fact there was another funeral scheduled at the church in the afternoon for an entire family of six who's car was caught in the flood as they attempted to flee.

After the service, Sheffield and Geoff accompanied the other mourners to the cemetery just across the parking lot from the church, but held back during the graveside service. When it was over, Geoff wanted to linger for a moment. He sought out Camille's mother and said to her, "Missus Davis, I just wanted to tell you again how sorry I am for your loss. I wish I could have known Camille. I would liked to have been her friend."

She had a hug for him and replied. "I'm sure she would have liked to have been your friend too. Thank you for finding her so we could have closure. Thank you so much for coming. It means a lot to us."

Meanwhile Sheffield approached the pastor and discreetly handed him fifty dollars to give to the family.

Satisfied with the experience, Geoff was ready to go home. On the drive back he opened up and had more to say than he had said all week. The whole experience had been traumatic for him. Attending the funeral had satisfied his need to put an identity with the body. He had something more to remember the experience by rather than just a cold, muddy, bruised and broken, naked body. He kept the program as a reminder of the friend that he would liked to of had.

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On the night of August 19–20, 1969, Nelson County Virginia was struck by disastrous flooding caused by Hurricane Camille. The hurricane hit the Gulf Coast two days earlier, weakened over land, and stalled on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, dumping 27 inches of rain,

mainly in a three-hour period. Over five hours, it yielded more than 37 inches, while the previous day had seen a deluge of 5 inches in half an hour, with the ground already saturated.

Flash floods and mudslides killed 153 people. The bodies of some people have never been found; others washed as far as 25 miles downstream. Over 133 public bridges were washed out in Nelson County. Some communities were under water. The county was virtually cut off, with many roads and virtually all bridges, telephone, radio/TV, and electric service interrupted. The James River crested in Richmond at 28.6 feet, flooding downtown. Camille cost over \$140 million in damages across Virginia.

