

# Unique Prospective

A tale of one of Old Lillydale's favorite residents.

By Darren Shell

Those of us that have spent a day or two in the Lillydale Campground know that the acres of ground that now hold tents and motor homes...were once a thriving part of the old town of Lillydale. A number of folks farmed and loved this long point that stretched out into the valley where the Wolf and Obey Rivers joined. The farmland that is now planted with campers and boaters once raised a bountiful crop of farm families. This story is about one such family that grew into harvest before our waves dampened their homeland.

This is the tale of the family of Mr. John Darty.

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Mr. John Darty. Now there's an old name. Most agree that John's last name probably came from one of the old Daugherty (spelled many ways) family trees. But that remains a vague guess at best, given that none now live that could testify to that for certain. *Darty* was good enough for John...and good enough for the town of Lillydale. And that's where our story begins.

The focus of our story is John...and his prospective. John, without question, had a unique prospective on life. He was a people-person that loved his fellow man. He was well-thought-of in his home town, and the town seemed to relish in his family's presence. They came and went just like everyone else in town...which was strange for the day and time. Keep in mind that this was the pre-lake era. It was the 1930s. In other places of the world, John and his family would NOT have been welcome. Yet, the town of Lillydale considered this family one of their own. You see...Mr. John Darty was the only African-American man in the city of Lillydale...or Willow Grove, for that matter. There were other black folks farther upstream, but these two towns had none but the Dartys. Hence...a unique prospective.

Now...let's examine that prospective. As I've already stated...Mr. John was a people-person. He loved to be around other people and made a practice of being cordial all about town. Quite frankly, people loved John Darty...despite the darkened color of his skin. He was a beloved hometown boy, through and through.

John had taken a wife somewhat late in life. The two made themselves a home in the small hollow on the western-most section of the Lillydale campground (about where the bluff trail begins). They took up housekeeping and started a family. Their first child was a girl, with a young son coming soon thereafter. Mr. John, this people-person, was elated with his newly-found happiness of family.

It was then that tragedy struck. Shortly after the birth of their son, Omer, John's wife passed away...leaving this people-person alone to raise his young family.

But the town of Lillydale rallied around John and his family! John's children were as welcome in any home as they were in their own. Those children broke bread with the many other farming families of Lillydale, and the town thought nothing of it. Those two children attended the same school as every other child in the neighborhood. They sat patiently on the benches of the St. John School at the top of the Lillydale hill, just like every other farm child in town (the old building still rests along the old road to this day).



So time passed. Our people-person, John, continued to live his unique prospective in a city that welcomed it. The city of Lillydale helped raise John's kids and all the local children came and went to and from all houses (John's included, of course). It was a great and wonderful system.

But to John's dismay, at a fairly early age, his daughter married and moved far away up north. As I understand, her move nearly severed her relationship with her family and friends of Lillydale...leaving her people-person father to live with the only other family member he had left...Omer. He and his son became almost inseparable...people-persons held together by family ties. They had an uncommonly close bond.

Then it happened. The lake, that is. The year was 1942. Our government had delivered a check...and an eviction notice...to John and the rest of the town of Lillydale. It was time for that inevitable move created by the building of Dale Hollow Lake. It was time for the farm families to pull up ties and move on...never again to plow the fields their grandfathers tilled. They would never again attend the same church service their families had enjoyed for decades beyond account. It was the last straw for the Lillydale

citizens. And it was more than the last straw for John, our friendly people-person. He and Omer were moving on in many ways. And not for the better.

You see, Omer also had a unique prospective in life. Not only was he moving from his hometown by force. Not only was he the only young black man in a town of white folk. Not only was he saying good bye to his many good friends of Lillydale. Unfortunately, Omer also just happened to be eighteen years of age. And being eighteen years old in 1942 was not a good thing. America was marching off into World War II. And sadly, so too was Omer. So not only was Omer going to fight for his country...his government...but he also watched his government *burn his home to the ground*...leveling it to build our lake. And yet he still proudly marched off to war. Quite a unique prospective.

But before Omer left his home town to engage in that awful war, his father made one last request. He made one last strong statement to his son... "Tell me you will come home, Son. I need my family near. Tell me you will come home."

Omer had one heart-breaking response for his father...only one... "Just where will home be, Dad? Where will home be?"

For the record, Mr. John Darty never saw his son again. Private Omer Darty died in the conflict of WWII...leaving is father, the people-person, alone in the world.

Mr. John Darty eventually moved to the city of Livingston, TN, just twenty miles away from his Lillydale hometown. Each day, he would get out of bed and make his way down to the train station and sit on the park bench...just waiting for people to come and go, so he could chat about their travels and perhaps tell a tale or two about his family in Old Lillydale. His eyes would sparkle with the memories from way back when, and many travelers would unknowingly share in the kinship of Old Lillydale...and the proud nature of this people-person...our friend...Mr. John Darty.~