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Lifestyles

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After nearly 2 years apart, Barry and Regina Catrett are ...

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER – For Barry Catrett of Butler, last Monday was the day he had been anticipating for almost two years – the day when his wife came home.

It had been 19 months since he'd seen her, since he had spoken with her face to face, since he had left her thousands of miles away. It had been nearly 2 years of waiting, of filing documents, of holding onto a relationship that survived despite the distance.

But on February 19, Barry greeted his bride at the airport in Jackson, MS – the first time he'd seen her since they married in July of 2005.

When Barry first met Regina Onganon of Manila, Philippines, their unconventional relationship immediately flourished. It was a relationship that was built across the ocean, across two countries, and across the worldwide web.

Given her email address through a relative, Barry first contacted Regina in January, 2004. That first email began a relationship that would deepen and bloom into a love that transcended the distance between them.

"I first met Barry in an email on January 13 (2004)," Regina told the Sun in an interview last year. "We began as friends, and we developed our friendship through email and letters."

For a month following that first email contact, Barry and Regina began to build a friendship, sharing an obvious connection despite the fact that they had never met face to face.

"People laugh when I say this," said Barry, "but I tell everyone that we fell in love emotionally and spiritually first."

"We talked by email and through letters for a



Choctaw Sun photo by Tommy Campbell
Barry met Regina at the airport in Jackson, MS, last Monday.

month before I saw a picture of her," he added. "Then when I got that first picture, my jaw dropped. She was beautiful!"

Both Barry and Regina say that their relationship grew, first and foremost, through their mutual faith. Although they are from two very different cultures far removed from one another, they found that they shared a common belief that drew them together.

"The first thing I asked him after I knew him is, 'Are you a Christian?'" said Regina. "And then he said 'yes'. That was the time we started

Reunited in America

occasions, and prayer," Regina explained, "Those are the materials that built our relationship."

By early spring, about two months into their friendship, Barry says he knew he wanted a more permanent relationship.

"In March, I knew she would be my wife," he recalled. "I knew I wanted to spend my life with her."

Four months later, on July 28, Barry traveled to the Philippines to meet the girl he had fallen in love with over the internet. He spent the next month getting to know her culture, her friends, her family, and her church.

During that time, Barry waited for an answer to his proposal of marriage. He got his answer on August 28 during a family outing at Boracay, a world-renowned beach resort area near Regina's home province of Aklan.

"That was the time Barry and I announced our relationship that we love each other in front of my family," Regina remembered. "Barry asked to marry me, and with my family around us, I accepted it."

Barry left his fiancée in Manila and returned to Butler. Over the next year, he and Regina planned for his next visit, when they would be joined in marriage.

In July, 2005, he traveled back to Manila, and on July 5, in a civil ceremony, they were married. On July 10, the couple

had a traditional church wedding, surrounded by Regina's family, friends, and church family. Because of the distance, Barry's family was unable to attend the ceremonies.

Barry returned to the United States following their wedding, while Regina remained in Manila fulfilling her obligations on her job and awaiting paperwork that would allow her to move to the United States.

But that paperwork was a long time coming.

Over the past year and a half, Barry has gone through a gamut of problems in putting together the documents required for his wife's move to the United States. From long – and ever-growing – lists of required documents to paperwork that got 'lost' in the shuffle, Barry struggled through a host of difficulties, going through a long list of governmental agencies to request assistance.

"First, it took months just to get the forms," Barry recalls. "Then I filled them out and sent in the money. I don't know what happened to them after that."

Month after month went by, with Barry and Regina still awaiting word from the U.S. government that she had been awarded the Visa that would allow her to move to Alabama. Barry contacted agencies and legislators to garner their assistance, including Senator Richard Shelby.

Through Shelby's help, the process seemed

to be making progress. But there was still no definite time frame for the move to be finalized.

"At one point, they lost some of the paperwork," Barry says. "I was glad I had made copies."

On February 10, when Senator Richard Shelby visited Choctaw County, the Catretts' plight was brought to his attention for the second time. Within days, Barry and Regina got word that their long wait was over.

"She got her Visa on Valentine's Day," Barry says. "I bought her plane ticket the next day."

After a nearly 24-hour airplane trip, Regina landed in Jackson just before 9 a.m. last Monday. After months of waiting, the couple were reunited and ready to begin their new life in Butler.

"When I saw her get off that plane," says Barry, "I couldn't have pulled the smile off my face. I had butterflies at first. But then I saw her, and I hugged and kissed her."

Today, the newlyweds are making plans for their new life together, plans that include eventually buying a home of their own and maybe even raising children.

And they are also planning another wedding ceremony – their third – this time with Barry's family in attendance. The couple will repeat their vows on March 24 at 1 p.m. at Calvary Baptist Church in Butler.

In the presence of their friends and family, the couple will celebrate their marriage once again, a marriage that, despite their long separation, has held together across the miles – and across the months.

"It's been 19 months and 4 days," says Barry, as he holds his new bride's hand. "But who's counting?"

Black History in Choctaw County

By Ann Harwell Gay
Contributing Columnist

BUTLER -- Slavery has existed for thousands of years. The Greek slave Aesop, a teacher of his owner's children, earned his freedom by telling his wonderful fables and tales.

Spanish explorers brought slaves to our shores around 1539, but even before their arrival some Indians kept captives as slaves rather than kill them. Some "free men of color" (blacks) also kept slaves.

Montgomery and Mobile had Alabama's largest slave markets, but slaves were also brought upriver and sold at St. Stephens.

Some Choctaw County blacks say their ancestors were sold at Tompkinsville. Nova Law's book on African American cemeteries of Choctaw County says some oldsters she talked with said slaves were brought directly from Africa to Oakchia plantation in northern Choctaw County near the Tombigbee River.

Green Berry Chaney, the owner of Oakchia, in 1850 had around 200 slaves. Samuel Ruffin by 1860 owned around 148.

Choctaw County had 460 free persons of color in 1860, an unusually large number according to Rogers and Ward's book August Reckoning. Of these 460, only 16 are named in the 1860 census, which listed mainly whites. Choctaw County ranked 24th out of Alabama's 67 in the number of slaves. Of the 640 slave owners only four owned from 100 to 200 slaves, and only three men owned more

than 1,000 acres of land. Some plantation owners in the Black Belt (Choctaw is actually not in the Black Belt, but in the Coastal Plain) had from 600 to 1,000 slaves. The Black Belt refers to the rich black soil and not to the men who worked it.

It is believed that most blacks were brought to this area by their owners who migrated from the Carolinas, Georgia and other states in search of cheap land and a fortune to be made in cotton.

The 1850 and 1860 Slave Censuses did not list slaves by name, only by age and sex (male, age 22 etc.) under the name of the slave owner. The 1866 State census and the 1870 Federal census were the first to list ex-slaves by name.

How did slaves choose a last name? Many, but not all, took the surname of their former owner. If unhappy with the former owner, the slave could choose any last name he/she pleased. Alabama did not have a system for registering slave names after the Civil War as some states such as Mississippi did.

Author Shelby Foote, an authority on Civil War times, says plantation life was not always as brutal as pictured in the television feature Roots. There were some overseers or owners who beat slaves, but the death censuses also show white owners and overseers killed by slaves. Before 1900 more whites were lynched than blacks.

Whites and blacks belonged to the same churches before the Civil War. Some county church

record books list them by name, first referring to them as "servant of D. Hopkins," and later as "slave of". Christopher Chapel Methodist Church had 52 black members in 1852 and 108 in 1860. Black Creek Baptist Church had 28 white members and 18 black. Ebenezer Baptist Church had 24 black members. Some of these valuable early church records are preserved in the Choctaw County Baptist Association office on Pickens Street in Butler.

It is hard to trace black and Indian genealogy because of the lack of records. Like the Indian tribes, who had no written language, black records are scarce and hard to track down and prove. But more and more African American information is now available on the internet, and if one has the time and patience, it may be rewarding.

Choctaw Co. has slave information on two sites: www.rootsweb.com and www.rootsweb.com. On the AL Choctaw County Genealogical Society site, go to the right hand side of the screen and click on Research links. This site is managed by Steven Randall Mason, who has begun cataloging and entering some African American cemeteries as his spare time permits. Other sites are available, with more coming on-line all the time, and bear checking out, if only for curiosity's sake.

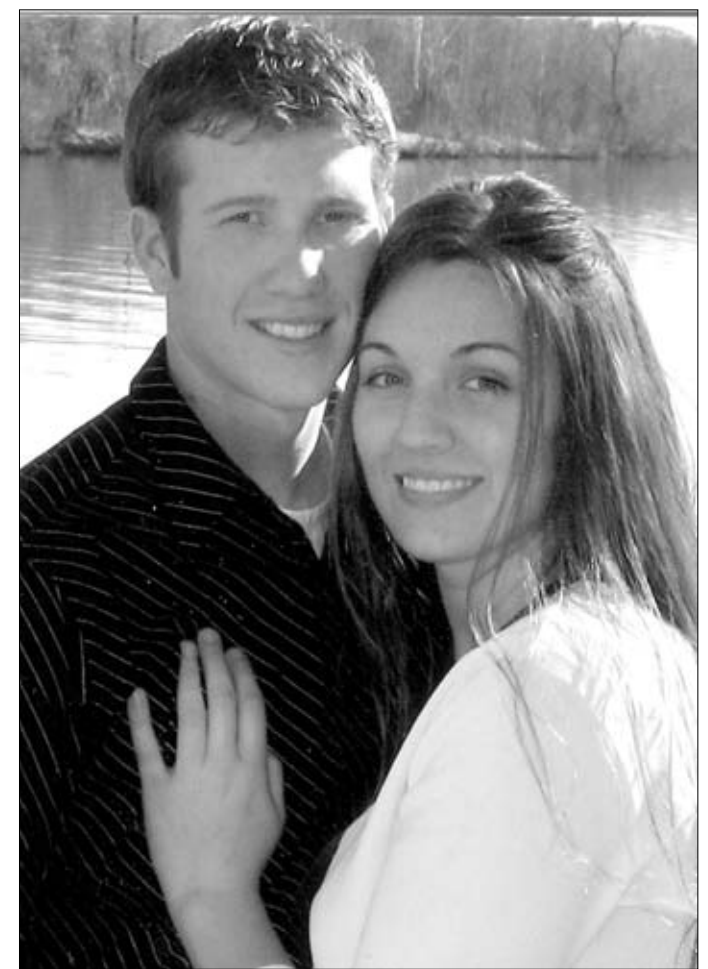
The Choctaw Co. Public Library has some African American family files in the Alabama Room and a book African-American Cemeteries and their history,

Choctaw County, Alabama, Volume 1 by Nova Law. This book includes 18 cemeteries, most in the North part of the county. The county genealogy society would like to find volunteers to catalog the rest of our black cemeteries and get the information in print or on-line or both. The book The Heritage of Choctaw County, Alabama, also in our library, has excellent information and some photos of many of our black families.

There are scant records in our courthouse because of fires in the 1800's. A few records remain in court files and old record books before 1865. The 1870 and 1871 Tax books contain names of African Americans. If they were old enough to pay the poll or property tax in 1870, they were born slaves. All you will find in these early tax records is a name and possibly some idea of where the person lived.

Begin asking your grandmother or grandfather (or other older family members) questions, and write down their answers. Make one list of your mother's people, and another for your father's side of the family. The easiest way to keep it all straight is to use genealogy charts - an ancestry chart and family group sheets. Use a loose leaf notebook for storage. Look for old family papers that might have names on them - letters, deeds. Hunt the Family Bible if there was one. Get some birth and death dates from the cemetery where your folks are buried.

Get started today because time flies!



Mr. Sullivan, Miss Gibson

Gibson, Sullivan to marry in March

GILBERTOWN -- Mr. and Mrs. Randy Gibson of Gilbertown are pleased to announce the engagement and forthcoming marriage of their daughter, Brittany LaShae Gibson to John Derrick Sullivan, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Westley Sullivan of Millry.

The bride - elect is the granddaughter of Mrs. Alice Gibson and the late Mr. Samuel M. Gibson of Gilbertown, and Mr. and Mrs. John R. Dunn of Waynesboro, MS. Brittany is the 2005 graduate of Red Springs Christian Academy. She is currently employed with First United Security Bank in Butler.

The prospective groom is the grandson of Mr. and Mrs. Isaiah Sullivan, and Mr. Floyd Beasley and the late Mrs. Josephine Beasley all of Millry High School. He is currently employed with INCO Construction in Mobile.

The wedding will take place on Saturday, March 10, 2007 at 2 p.m. at Gilbertown Church of God in Gilbertown.