

Pastor Herbert Brown's story¹ about the conversion of Mark Cathey

Some weeks before Charlie Pelham came to Bryson City to promote evangelistic clubs, Mark's sister, [Mrs. Charlie Beck](#), had approached me after Sunday morning worship. She had said, "Preacher Brown, my brother, Mark, has a bad heart. He is 73 years old and won't live long. And he's never made a change. I wish you would see if you can help him. He lives with [Charlie](#) and me." So I had gone after him. But he was hard to catch because he hunted and fished most of the time.

Mark, a small, scrawny man, killed fifty-seven bears and caught a car load of fish during his exploits in the Great Smokies. His unusual wit and delightful sense of humor made him quite popular. Twice Tom Mix tried to get Mark to act with him in a motion picture filmed in Hollywood. But Mark spurned the invitation. He was just not interested in that kind of life. He said to a friend afterwards, "I mighta died out there and those folks forgot where to send my body. And I want to be buried in the Smokies."

Well, Charlie Pelham wanted to go with me to see Mark. And we happened to find him on the Square – surrounded by a group of admirers, as usual. We waited until he walked out Everett Street, away from the crowd, so we could speak to him privately. He was very courteous to us, but said, "I don't have time to let you fellers talk to me today. I promised Charlie I'd gather some corn for him."

I thought he was just giving us the dodge. "When can we see you," I asked.

"I'll be at Charlie's in the morning," he replied.

"How about ten o'clock?"

"All right."

Sure enough, the next morning he waited for us on the front porch. It was a sun-filled Saturday morning, with gorgeous fall colors.

The best I can recall, we approached Mark from a fisherman's point of view. That is, we told him he was a bad fish in a polluted stream, that he needed Christ, and so on. After a few minutes, Pelham took the initiative and put the question squarely before him. And he readily believed unto salvation. Subsequently, he gave his testimony to friends on the street, Preacher Thad Watson for one. But he never lived to be baptized.

For a few days later Mark heard a squirrel barking up in the cove behind his sister's home. He said to her, "Gimmie my gun. I think I'll go get that squirrel." Searchers found him about ten-thirty that night, sitting at the trunk of a tree with his gun across his lap. His heart had failed.

No more would William Marquis Cathey's bon mots charm his admirers. His many friends would remember to be sure, as Claude Patterson did: "Mark was awful witty. He could always come up with a good yarn." No more would his sister fix his hunting packs of baked beans, jellies, jams and bread. The lean-faced, overalled logger would drive no more oxen. His Redbone bear dogs, Old Jolley and Red, would whine for him. His fox and coon hounds would never again hear his shrill voice directing the chase. Neither would the greatest hunter and fisherman the Smokies ever produced be around to quieten down his dogs when strangers approached the house; "They won't bite you. They know you belong here. I've done told them so." And [Dan Fisher](#) would get Mark's turkey caller, because Mark himself had heard a call – to eternity.

After the funeral, the Cathey family asked me to write an epitaph for Mark's headstone. It reads like this:

"Mark Cathey, 1871-1944, Beloved Hunter and Fisherman, was himself caught by the Gospel hook just before the season closed for good."

¹ W. Herbert Brown, *Spiritual Flambeau: A Story of Religious Conflict in the Great Smokies*. Greensboro, NC: Central Printing Company (p. 18-19).



MARK CATHEY

1871 — 1944

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