

Call of the Katydid

It was about 10 o'clock in the evening this past Friday, June 22, when Lola and I stepped out of the home of Forrest and Kathleen Preston. We had been invited there for some of Kathleen's delicious homemade dessert, in the company of Don and Kay Provonsha and Mike and Joan Carter.

It was a warm summer night; the season had just made its debut the day before. Across the lake, off in the woods on the far shore, the melancholy cry of a whippoorwill echoed among the trees. Then we heard it, rich and clear: the call of the katydid, the first in 2007. Now, that marker in time may not mean much to you who live in other parts of the country. To a Southerner, however, those distinctive notes are a concert for the soul.

The katydid is a large, green insect with long antennae (feelers). It is a type of long-horned grasshopper. Its name comes from the love call of a certain male species in the eastern United States, more specifically, the southern half. Katydids rub the bases of their front wings together to make their sounds. Many katydids begin their "songs" at twilight and continue all night.

But this column is not intended to be a scientific treatise on katydids. You will notice, as you read on, that it has very little to do with science. Katydids are ensconced in folklore. Oldtime farmers will tell you that when the first katydid's song is heard, the first frost will cover the earth 90 days later. That would mean we can expect the first frost – in these parts – on September 20. Admittedly, that's early, but don't count them out. I've tracked their record over the years, and katydids are right more often than not.

While the katydid's "music" – and that's stretching the definition of the term – is a song of love to the species, it is a melody of memories for me. I can remember hearing the katydid as ...

- A lullaby as I lay in my bed while the wind coming through an open window gently swished the curtain.
- I peered from a farmhouse porch across the meadow to admire rows of corn bathed in the golden glow of a full moon.
- I walked barefoot along the path to the house, carrying a string of freshly caught fish.
- I stretched out in the swing, the legs of my jeans rolled up, and dreamed of years to come and what they might hold.
- I read about, and lived, the adventures of Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn.
- The family strolled along, chatting with neighbors, after a revival service at church.

(more)

- Darkness forced the end of a softball game on the vacant lot down the street.
- Relatives visited, and we produced homemade ice cream on the back porch.
- I walked up nervously to the front door to pick up a date, and then, as I returned her home afterward.
- As we sat, after marriage, at the top of the outside stairs to our tiny apartment and held hands.

Katydid's have a way of stirring the inner self; they have been such an abiding presence in the summers of my youth and adulthood.

I told you this wasn't about science.

--Beecher Hunter