

## GRANNY BARB

I started smoking when I started growing tobacco. I felt I had to support an industry that was supporting me and my family. Winston became my one and only brand. At that time, smoking was not considered very lady-like, so I always did it in private or on occasion after sex. Of course both people have to smoke for this to really work out. It's a great way to keep things from not becoming awkward after intercourse. My husband did not smoke. Not good for the image of a preacher. After he died, I finally lit up in public, and not one of the town assholes dared say a word about it to my face since I had been a preacher's wife. Besides, they all knew I was one tough old gal. You see, not many woman around here farmed. Oh, they might have helped their husbands out a little bit, but most of them worked in the home, not in the fields. But not me. I planted the tobacco, cultivated it, harvested it, picked it, dried it, had it graded, and took it to market to sell. Tobacco was very good to this family. Kept us going in hard times, and made good times even better. But of course all good things must come to an end. I think it started when Mary Nell, my daughter, got lung cancer. A two-pack-a-day gal. Woke up with a cigarette and went to bed with one in her mouth. Of course, I had encouraged her to smoke. I've always blamed myself for that. I tried my best to be a good mother to her kids, even though my maternal instincts weren't always the best. Then the downward spiral continued when the price of tobacco kept falling until I finally said, "Shoot, this isn't even worth bothering with anymore." And of course, the government stepped in and started paying us allotments not to grow it anymore. A lot of farmers were happy to sit back and just collect a check, but not me. I enjoyed hard work. Didn't know what to do with myself after I quit, so I just sat out here and smoked and thought about things. Somehow smoking a cigarette always helped me see things a little clearer. Just me, my cigarette, and my thoughts. Of course, you can't smoke in so many places now, but I always could out here on my own porch. A place that became as sacred to me as any church. Now, where would a cigarette be hiding in this house? Where did I used to hide things? Oh my. If I could have just one last cigarette before my body's laid to rest, then all would be well.