

Emma's Story

By Emma

"I can be still and rest in God, for there is never a moment when I am out of His care."

--B.J. Hoff

I had one sister, Adelle. She and I were different in almost every way. She was taller, fair and more confident than I. We both had brown hair, hers was darker, her facial features more finely honed. And, too, she had the high cheekbones of our father. She had slender hands, fingers and nails, and shapely legs. She had a good voice for singing and sometimes sang at local events. "Among My Souvenirs" was one of her songs I remember. These features were from the paternal side of the family.



Adelle, left, and Emma.

She could sew a fine stitch and keep a neat house like our mother. Though our differences were many, we managed to get along and to help and enjoy each other.



Emma, left, and Adelle

It was most important to our mother (as it has been with me) that her daughters never let anything or anybody come between them. Then there was the matter of school.

Whereas I was eager to go and to learn from the older students as they recited (this was a one-room school,

you know) she couldn't have cared

less. She dropped out of school in her junior year and married Thomas, who had bought a small place adjoining the south edge of town. This place had two acres of ground, a four-room house and outbuildings. Sometime later, they bought a newer four-room house in town on the north side. This place, too, had a porch across the front, a little garden space and lawn. They lived here until their marriage ended and she remarried.

Adelle had loved and enjoyed my daughter so much and was overjoyed when she gave birth to a baby girl, whom she adored and who was the joy of her life. In 1943, our husbands went to Chicago to find work. These were war times, and many of the plants had been converted into producing wartime equipment.

They both found jobs. Adelle and I and our daughters followed soon. We had expected to follow the moving van, but when we realized he had given us wrong information, we dropped that idea and figured out where we were (we were traveling at night) and how to get to Chicago. This was an arduous trip for Adelle, who was not well. We finally arrived in Chicago, and it was upon arrival there that we saw and experienced our first highway cloverleaf. There were no superhighways then. We moved into a duplex located on a cul-de-sac. I soon went to work and Adelle looked after my daughter while I worked.

This was a good arrangement for all of us for a time. Adelle had a longtime health problem, which limited her diet to very few foods. She had been under the care of Dr. Roberts in Springfield, as was our mother. Both thought he was a good doctor, but he was never able to make Adelle well.

Adelle became very ill right at Christmastime. No one could be admitted to a hospital without having a physician's referral. Physicians were scarce. We found one who came to the house and had her admitted immediately. She survived only a few hours and died in the early morning hours of Christmas Day 1943. This was a sad, sad time for all of us. We grieved for ourselves and for her daughter.

My Early Years

My early years were spent on a small 40-acre farm in south southern Missouri. In addition to the house and barn area, there was a wooded section, pastureland and a few acres for farming. Farming was done with a single blade plow and a single row cultivator, each hitched to a single team of horses.



Fond memories of those years were hearing my dad (Pappie) whistle as he brushed and curried and harnessed the horses in preparation to go out to work in the fields. The horses were Mabel, a feisty filly, and Streak, who was lame. Pappie improvised a seat on the cultivator so I could drive the horses while he gave his full attention to guiding the blades of the cultivator so as not to plow up any of the precious corn plants. Seed corn was costly.

One day, I drove the horses too far at the end of a row and upset the machinery and me into a branch as I was turning the horses around. This frightened Pappie, being the protective

father he was, but as I recall, no damage was done to me, to the horses, or to the equipment.

Other livestock were a few milk cows, pigs, grown for butchering or possibly sale, and chickens. Butchering, always in the fall, was a big event—lots of people, lots of work, lots of meat. Daily chores included gathering the eggs and bringing in the wood for both heating the house and cooking. Ashes had to be removed each day. Wood ashes were used for cleaning bottoms of pots and pans and for polishing silverware. There were other uses, but I don't remember specifically what. Wood ashes were white and powdery. These ashes had no resemblance to the chunks from burnt coal.

The house had clapboard siding and galvanized roofing. Rain, especially hail, made a loud noise when it hit the roof, but it was very durable and washed off quickly when it rained. The water then could be run off into a cistern, which was our only water for drinking. Several oak trees, a cedar tree, a lilac bush, a Century plant, and a couple of rose bushes made up the front yard landscaping.

Cherry trees were part of the scene in the back yard, a vegetable garden adjacent to the South and a potato patch farther away in the direction of the barn.

Barns were built with stalls on either side and there was a wide space in the middle for bringing in hay or other feed. This area became a garage for the Model T Ford that was to become a part of our lives in the early 1920s.

Our First Car



Prior to the Ford, we had a surrey, just like in “Oklahoma,” but with no fringe on top. The Ford, like the surrey in that movie, had two seats and side curtains for use in inclement weather. Both had running boards and both were black. The similarity ends there. The

car had three pedals on the floor—a clutch, a reverse and a brake. On the steering column were the spark and gas levers. To start the motor, we had to use a crank at the front of the car. Starting the car was tricky, because of getting the gas and spark adjusted just right and the crank turned hard. Sometimes it would backfire and would give a real jolt to the arm and the shoulder of the person turning the crank.

Often there was difficulty getting up the hills, particularly after a rain. We would have to let the car roll all the way down and take a run for it, trying to make it all the way to the top of hill. The roads were not paved or graveled. Just dirt—dusty in the dry season and muddy and slick when it rained or snowed. Also in the bottom grounds, we would sometimes get stuck in the mud and everybody except the driver would get out and push. We would be mud-splattered from top to bottom when we got out of there. Not much fun.

At that time, there were few women drivers—they were all men. That changed rather quickly as people realized the advantages of being able to drive. Of course, many women of that era never learned.

Life in My Hometown

My parents took over management of the local telephone company in January, 1925. Adelle and I graduated from eighth grade in May of that year. Though the distance of the move was a mere five or six miles, it was a whole new world for us. Here were sidewalks, no more muddy overshoes. We had electricity, no more lamps to fill, chimneys to clean or wicks to



trim. School was three blocks away. We could come home for lunch. Then, too, there were new names, Alla, Altris, Durley and Wesley. This was

exciting. Our schoolteacher, Mr. Cooke, had drilled us in spelling. I was well equipped to compete in the county spelling contest, and I won. That, too, was exciting. My high school years were long anticipated and fulfilling. Here was a whole new curriculum, new and fewer subjects and longer class periods. I no longer remember how many were in our freshman class, but twenty of us graduated.

The nearest four-year high school was in Aurora, and that's where most of us went. I stayed with a nice couple and worked for my room and board. He managed the A&P grocery store (a competitor of Kroger), and she worked with him. As I recall, I prepared breakfast and learned from him that catsup on fried eggs is pretty good. I had dinner cooking and Mrs. D would help finish it. Then I'd do some weekend cleaning. Mrs. D gave me 15 cents a day for lunch. That bought a sandwich and a drink or candy bar. I saved the dime to buy my shoes for

graduation—very pretty white pumps for which I paid \$2.50 (Remember this was 1930).



I saved dimes to buy the white shoes for graduation at the dear price of \$2.50.

Some of the local students seemed to believe they were superior to those of us from the smaller communities.

Whatever opinion they had of me, if any, changed when the first honor roll was posted and they found my name there. Some of them were curious about who this Emma was and began to seek me out. As I recall, I was on the honor roll all year. After all, school was my main reason for being. Although I had some successes, this was not an easy year for me.

My parents moved back to the farm that year not realizing how serious the Depression would become and how much they would be affected. Adelle's husband was working for the

General Merchandise Store. He helped them a great deal by bringing food staples.

On my mother's 40th birthday, she and I went to work at the Brown Shoe Co. We used the family car, a 1922 Model T Ford Touring car for transportation, which I drove. A license to drive was not required then. We worked in the same department and both did stitching. I'm not sure how long we worked, but my guess is that I had a chance to go to work at the A&P Store and she was ready to quit. My friend was already at the store when I came. My friend and I had rooms together. We were making money and we were able to buy some pretty clothes and had a good time.

Realizing that college was beyond my reach, I was devastated, since school had always been my major interest, and I had hoped to go. It was such a desperate and desolate time when I got out of high school, there was nowhere to go. I was stuck. Not only was there a Depression, but I was depressed when I came face to face with reality and realized there was no way I could get to college. My whole life was affected by this.

Becoming Emma

My husband, William, had a great deal of pride in his appearance, as did the rest of his family. In my family, being clean and neat were the main requirements. At some point, and mentally I associate this to Richard's Vogue Shop, I came to the conclusion that if I were going to live out there in the forefront of the family, I needed an attitude change about clothes and my appearance in general. I think the girls were pleased that my appearance improved.



Sometimes I'm a slow learner, but I did come to realize that if I were to be my best for my family, then I must be the best I could be for me. This was a revelation I hadn't expected.

Harking back to my youth, I must tell you always I was embarrassed when my dates came to the farm to pick me up. Our poorness was so evident. The area was neat and the house clean, but nothing to indicate prosperity.

It was when I was working as a weekend house mother at a fraternity that I realized how much influence women could

have on men and their life decisions. Until then, I had always believed it was a man's world. It was a belief I had brought into middle age, and it wasn't until this job that I realized the fallacy of that.

Always I had a need to grow to expand both intellectually and



culturally. These needs extended from an early age through my adulthood well into my senior years. Enrolling in university at about 45, I had hopes of getting a degree in business, but that was cut short when William got into an accident that laid him up for months. Sometime after that, I became a member of Toastmistress Clubs International, a

self-improvement organization. This was a great group for the likes of me. I gained confidence and a certain amount of poise. Then, too, spending most of my working years with well educated people (bachelor's to PhDs to MDs) helped me to realize that though I didn't have a degree, I too had a contribution to make.

How could I, but I almost did, forget to tell you about one of my most enjoyable achievements. That was learning to swim. Soon after my 69th birthday, I registered for a learn-to-swim class at the YMCA. A new Olympic pool had been built but classes were given in the old pool. This meant showering before and after class in a room equipped with showerheads but no stalls. I knew beforehand I'd be in a class with lathesome young women, but for this bare body exposure, I needed extra courage. Each lesson was an exhilarating experience. We learned to tread water, to float, to dive. We had life-saving training and even a bit of synchronized swimming. Realizing I could lie in the water and not sink was a moment to remember. Soon I started water exercising and continued enjoying the water until I moved to my present location. Although scheduled transportation to a pool is available, I've been hesitant to go since my steps are now a little less steady.

As mentioned earlier, I was born into a small and restrictive world. A few steadfast rules for living were: Don't steal. If it is not yours, don't take it. Tell the truth even if it hurts. Be honest. Be responsible. Live up to your word. Make a good name for yourself and keep it.

And “Be Nice.”

I’m not sure being nice was the best course of action in every case, but nice I was.

These values have been the standard I’ve strived to live by, though not always with success. My thirst for more knowledge and more sophistication transferred from my own to the need of my daughters. I so much wanted them to have opportunities for the growth and expansion they desired. If they have regrets over choices they’ve made, I don’t remember hearing them.

A compliant child doth not an assertive adult make. At least this was true of me. Then, too, this was well before women’s lib. On becoming an adult, I brought with me the core values I’d been taught plus a deep-seated need to grow. My need never was to be better than, but to be equal to others in knowledge and sophistication. Though I had this long-lasting inferiority complex, I didn’t question my intellect. My schoolwork had led me to believe I was reasonably intelligent. Interestingly, it was the professionals—psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers—with whom I worked who taught me I was OK just as I was.

As a teenager, I became a Christian. Unfortunately, there were times when intermittently my faith was put on the shelf while I went about the business of living. That I regret. A few years back, I heard these words from the lips of Dr. Charles Stanley:

Be the best you can

Do the best you can

Look the best you can

Keep learning

Keep laughing

Keep LEANING ON GOD.

These words have become my motto for living.