

DAISY'S BIBLE

Good Evening. In the past few weeks we have heard from our member/presenters on a variety of subjects, each beautiful papers containing stimulating thoughts, lessons to be remembered, and excellent scholarship, to boot. I am humbled to be a presenter again, and I continue to be in awe of the company we keep in this club. Occasionally, papers have touched upon ancestors and relatives of our members, who have been scholars, architects, scientists and surgeons. Many of our members have distinguished family trees.

About 10 years ago, I began to become curious about our family ancestry. My folks had laid some groundwork, especially mother, who had basic information on her side going back to her grandparents, but no further. She and dad had organized the information, and dad had put it in a notebook that became my amateur genealogist starting point. The information on his side went no further than his grandparents either. I began to do some research. One thing led to another, and an associate of mine helped in tracing

my father's mother's male ancestors all the way back to England in the 13th century. That stimulated my imagination to the point where I write a fictional account of my earliest recorded ancestor's young life in a paper I delivered previously to this club 2010. Thereafter, my interest in the process came and went, but I did decide to take the materials and organize them and see what I might do to preserve them for my children and theirs.

Dad had related the circumstances of his childhood and young adult years on the north side of Peoria, where he was born and raised. Mother was also born and raised in Peoria, but on the south side of town. They did not meet until they both came to Chicago as young adults. Their folks remained in Peoria until each of them died.

Daisy Myrtle Hudson McWherter was my mother's mother. Grandma Mac, we called her, or just Daisy.

When I was about 8 years old, while my parents were travelling, Daisy was sitting for me and my sister. We were at the kitchen table waiting for grandma to finish heating some lunch on the stove. At one point, Grandma asked my sister to do something (I forget what) I said that my sister was too lazy to do what she was told. Grandma quickly turned to me and said, "Stephen, I don't like to hear you say such things about your sister." Snapping back, I said, "Why not? She is too lazy."

Grandma turned the heat off the stove, came over and sat at the kitchen table next to me. She reached out and took my arm and squeezed tight. I remember the force of the squeeze and her saying "Stephen your grandmother loves you. That is why she doesn't like to hear you criticize your sister. "I began to protest. "But..." I said, and her grip grew tighter. "You see, when someone criticizes another person most of the time they are criticizing them to the same degree they are guilty of the same fault themselves. So, when I hear you say your "sister is lazy" I know you think you are lazy yourself. Because I

love you, I don't want hear that you are lazy or less than Grandma knows you are."

I had no idea what she was talking about. But I do remember how serious she was and I carried my puzzlement for the next ten years. I tried not to criticize someone else in front of Grandma ever again.

In the fall of 1962, I entered college and took an introduction to psychology course. In the Northwestern tech building lecture hall, Professor Francis Hsu covered the required reading from his text on projection and transference. I had my Aha (!) moment that day, as I remembered back to that day in our family kitchen and understood for the first time what Grandma was talking about. Coincidentally, Daisy died in the same month, on October 6, 1962 at the age of 76.

My early memories of Daisy included visiting her in her small apartment in Peoria where she lived with her husband. The apartment was on the second floor in low-rise public housing on the south side of Peoria. My sister and I would go out to the playground

in the middle of the projects and play on the equipment with the children who were grandma's neighbors. We would visit them about once a month. I remember the apartment as spare but spotless. Her husband was a frail man in those years, suffering from the "palsy" as Daisy said. He had Parkinson's disease, and his hands always trembled softly but steadily. He listened to a Cubs game on the radio or eventually on a small television every Sunday that I saw him. An original Cubs fan, for sure. He died in 1952 and after that, Grandma would come and visit us in Chicago, at times to sit for us young kids, and at times to spend holidays with us. However, she remained a resident of that housing project and an active member of the Acadia Presbyterian Church in Peoria until she died.

She always seemed to be in a good mood and she loved to hear music while she was either cleaning, knitting, or carefully draping tinsel on our holiday trees. I remember her dancing in front of our first television when Dick Clark's American Bandstand was on one

afternoon. I thought it was funny at the time. I also remember she had huge floppy ears which she always covered with her hair.

Decades later, I visited my folks on a Sunday afternoon. Mother was off to church and Dad and I were talking on their back porch. When Mother came home from church, Dad asked her how the church bake sale went and she remarked it was a real big success. They had made \$18 that morning. He laughed. He knew how much time and effort and ingredients went into those pies and cakes. He remarked that he only knew one person that was more optimistic than his wife; her mother, Daisy.

In the year before Mother passed away, she told me about her childhood. For the first time I learned that almost half the children she started elementary school with had died before they graduated. I learned her family was so poor during the depression that they gave her to another family as a sitter during her last two years of high school because they couldn't feed her. Mother had never complained about circumstances growing up and her mother had never

complained in my presence of anything except my criticism of my sister.

Mother telling of her childhood caused me to wonder just what type of life her mother had lived before her. Then, when Mother died, among her possessions was Daisy's bible. As I opened it and flipped through its pages, I found notes written in fine fountain pen ink in the margins and fly leaves and any blank portions of the book.

Immaculate cursive writing and note after note describing the writer as a person who only questioned her understanding of the meaning of the passages and not in the truth of any of them, which was clearly unquestioned. To Daisy, her note of the name Jesus with an arrow above it in the margin pointing to God with an arrow within a circle labeled heaven and an arrow pointing down from Jesus to the word "me" about said it all.

Daisy Myrtle Hudson was born March 22nd, 1886 in the town of Elmwood, Arkansas. That's in the Ozarks in north central Arkansas just south of the Missouri border. Her father, John Franklin Hudson

was 28 and her mother, Mary Elizabeth Nance, 24, already had four children, (all girls) at the time of Daisy's birth. They went on to have a son who died under four years old and two more daughters. All eight daughters survived frontier childhoods and lived long lives. Oddly, Daisy's mom had a baby every two years from 1878 to 1892, all in even-numbered years.

Her mother was born in 1862 in Tennessee somewhere in Davidson county not far from Nashville. On June 8th, 1861 the year before she was born there was a referendum. A closely divided population of about 11,000 in Davidson county voted narrowly (a plurality of about 300 votes) in favor of secession. And the Civil War broke out. So, great-grandma was born at the outbreak of the civil war. By the time she was a year old, Union troops came to occupy the county, and Nashville became the first so-called "southern" city, to fall to the north. Mary's mother, Annie Hurt Jones was 32 when she gave birth to Mary. She only lived to be 44 years old. However, her father John Nance was 38 when Mary was born. He made it all the way to

91 years old, before he died in 1915 in the village of Ewing, Boone County Arkansas. Mary Nance's first ancestor to come and settle to North America was a Richard Nance, who was born in 1604 in Cornwall, England and who came here as a servant in 1639. He was married in Virginia. Each later generation moved west across Virginia, North Carolina and to Tennessee. This is information that I am sure Daisy never knew.

Daisy was the fifth child (and fifth daughter) of Mary Nance, whose first daughter, Berthe, was born in 1878 when she was 16. She married John F. Hudson the year after Berthe was born and was the father of all 9 of Mary's children. The family moved from Elmwood, Arkansas to Stillwell, Oklahoma, around 1900. John Hudson was a merchant who operated a general store.

Stillwell, Oklahoma, just west of the border with Arkansas, was not the flashiest place on the prairie. It was established in 1895 as the Kansas City Southern Railroad came to be built. The town was named after the first Superintendent of that railroad. A Cherokee

named Samuel Johnson had owned the land on which Stillwell came to be built. This was still Indian Territory at the time the Hudsons moved there. All the areas' original residents were Cherokee. The town formed after Methodist Missionaries established the New Hope Methodist Church in the area. City histories note another man as the chief lumber merchant and do not mention John Hudson. It is possible that Hudson worked as store manager, rather than owning the store that, along with a small plot they farmed, fed the family. Surely, however, the family was involved with the Methodist Church.

The earliest photographic records of the family that I have are of Daisy's family in Stillwell, Oklahoma. All of the sisters seem to be happy and smiling. There is not one picture of their mother when she is not wearing a frown. As they grew up and mostly married, they spread out throughout the country. One made a life on Manhattan Island in New York City. One (the youngest) in Bellingham, Washington. One to Wichita, Kansas, one to Indianapolis, and Daisy, of course, to Decatur and Peoria with forays into Chicago. Her

photographs and few personal papers included a postcard in 1909 from a sister who had apparently married a missionary because she was reporting in from Nagasaki, Japan. The card relates what nice people the Japanese were.

The sisters kept in touch from all over the nation by sharing photographs and cards and letters. They tried to travel to get together with one another on a remarkably regular basis. Each of the photographs and captions in photographic books written by Daisy identify the people in the photographs and also have upbeat captions. The pictures, a few each year, are a little hard to sort out, but do show all the sisters stayed in touch and got together regularly and always described their lives as fun.

Daisy married Robert McWherter, who lived in the nearby settlement of Adair, Oklahoma, in 1906. Robert was a salesman of sorts, and also seemed to know most about two things, chickens and the Presbyterian Church. His father was a minister up in Illinois at the time. Their wedding license and certificate, which mother saved,

was issued by the United States of America, Indian Territories, Central District, and certified by a minister named Phelps. A very nice document, issued in what was frontier America, even in 1906. The first local telephone company in Stillwell was organized in 1906, but there was no central water company organized their until 1911. And Daisy and Robert had high-tailed it out of Stilwell and moved up to Decatur, Illinois before that time, where they started their own family. As near as I can tell, Daisy did not have running water in any place she lived until close to 1930 in Peoria.

While in Decatur, Daisy had her first two children, both boys, my uncles Art and Wally (that's Archibald and Wallace) and the family decided to move to Peoria. Daisy's husband had some good results with chickens, earning a few cups at the State Fair in Springfield, specializing in Rhode Island Reds for show purposes. He and Daisy bought a home on the far south side of Peoria and, in 1914, Daisy gave birth to her last child, Elizabeth, who was called "Bette" or "Bett", when her brothers stopped calling her Liz. From all accounts the

older brothers doted on their baby sister, and they remained close all their lives.

Like her grandmother before her, Bette was born at what became the beginning of another Great War. Daisy's husband was too old, and her sons were too young, to serve in World War I, so Peoria was their world during that war.

Daisy's husband started an egg business. He purchased a lot of laying chickens and contracted with others to coop and feed them and deliver their eggs to him for delivery to households throughout the area. The economy tanked, the eggs didn't get paid for, the chickens were eaten, and the mortgage that Robert had put on the family home to buy the chickens in the first place, was foreclosed. Troubles in a river city, for sure. Robert was depressed thereafter until the day he died.

Daisy took in other's laundry. She was an excellent seamstress, so she made the clothes for her family and for others. They kept some chickens in a coop in the back yard, so for Sunday dinners, you

know what you got. When we visited Daisy in Peoria, even in public housing, that was it. And... it was delicious.

And Daisy stayed a member of the Arcadia Presbyterian Church until the day she died. And, at least as far as I can discern, there is no record of her ever complaining....about anything, except my criticism of my sister for faults she does not possess, but which have been my own.

Of course, Daisy's bible has the answers to much of her own personality and experiences. Whether we believe, or not, she did. Concisely, she wrote "God is the spirit of love. If I have and give love, I have the spirit of the Lord" "Those who have the spirit of love, will inherit the Earth". There are many references to life everlasting and the kingdom of heaven and the oneness of heaven with life on earth. She seems to have believed not only in life everlasting but that one could make life on earth most like heaven if one just had a positive attitude in the face of tough times. Her bible is probably like tens of

thousands of others throughout the world. Nothing rare and yet so special

Daisy was part of an amazing generation who entered this world with few creature comforts and lived the majority of the 20th century in an increasingly technologically advanced environment. Daisy's father likely never rode in a car and perhaps did not have a radio. Daisy was able to watch men go into space, although she died just shy of landing a man on the moon. Her mother and father, however, could read and write and she and all of her family could do so too.

Technology advanced during Daisy's life to make her final years much more comfortable than in her early years. Stillwell, Oklahoma, has not thrived. And Peoria has been variously up, down and on the rise again. And technology has changed all of our lives, realistically, beyond our own understandings and beliefs. And it will be ever more influential on our children and generations to come.

I wish to be grateful always for the lesson she tried to teach me about “projection”. And grateful for the peace she brought her children, each of whom followed her belief of “love of life, of all ‘God’s children.” Beliefs aside, the one lesson that clearly has stuck with me is that when I hear someone that wants me to do something for them criticize someone of a fault, I’d better question whether or not that person is talking fact, or is really revealing the truth about themselves.

Thanks ever so much for the opportunity to share these little anecdotes with you tonight. Let’s keep this club going for another 150 years.

By: Stephen J. Schlegel, presented to the Chicago Literary Club regular meeting at Cliff Dwellers, October 23, 2017.