

Grit In My Gizzard: No. 2

Family Formation

Sol, the bashful bachelor, took notice of the much younger Moore girls on the adjoining farm and began courting Deanie. When they uprooted from Stephenville, Texas and moved to Velma, Oklahoma, Sol soon followed. He was 27 and Deanie was 18 when they married there in 1913. They shared almost 61 years together.

Emily was born to them in 1914 and, after three years, they started back to Stephenville in a wagon. By the time they reached Haskell, Texas, cotton was ready for picking; so Sol stopped to work. There George Foy (Bud) was born in 1916. (We assume that the "Foy" of his name honored Foy E. Wallace, Jr. who lived in the Stephenville area and was two years older than Mom.) Sol was hired at \$20.00 per month to clear 80 acres of virgin soil of its mesquite growth five miles east of Rochester. The only power tools available to claim the land from the prairie dogs and rattlesnakes were his double-bitted axe and grubbing hoe wielded by strong arms with determination. I can remember when there were still tracts of good land covered with the native mesquite. There was no paved road in the county or in the new town of Rochester formed only seven years previously in 1906. The Model T Ford had not yet fully replaced the buggy.

This return to the farm was during WW I years. Dad was not drafted due to age, family, and eyesight. He then rented the land and had good crops until the drought of 1918 which spurred a move to Fort Worth where Dad got a job at the Armour Packing plant making sausages. After that, for the rest of his life, he would never eat bologna or wieners for he knew what they were made of! Thirteen days after the Armistice, I entered this world in Fort Worth on November 24, 1918. In a few months the family moved back to the farm at Rochester and made a great crop that year. My home town was only twelve years old when I was born.

My mother would help with the cotton picking by working close to the wagon where she left the little ones in its shade to watch the youngest (me) who was put in a wash tub for safety. Sometimes a mother, having no one with whom to leave her infant, would put her baby on her long cotton sack to ride along as she picked cotton. In 1920 Dad had malaria. When he was unable to work, we three kids would be left with him while Mom did the farm work plowing with our two mules, Pete and Kate. By the time we were six or eight, a shoulder strap would be put on a tow sack and we were assigned to pick cotton -- both the girls and the boys -- and we also began to be allowed the joy of hoeing!

No doubt, Mom was working in the fields while pregnant with a fourth child, Sol, Junior, born on Dad's birthday in 1921. In his second year he became ill and lingered for about a month. I think it was nothing more than dysentery for which doctors had no method of treating dehydration. There were no hospitals, funeral homes, or hearses. People died at home and were kept at home until the funeral. I have only a few memories of him but I do remember his death, Mom's grief, and the casket being hauled in the back seat of a neighbor's Studebaker, one of the few cars around. Friends brought flowers from their yards for there were no florists then. Neighbors dug the grave in the Rochester cemetery where Dad had bought four burial plots for \$2.50. Men in attendance at funerals in those times filled the grave as the family and others watched, leaving a neat ridge of dirt the

length of the grave. After many decades Mom and Dad have taken their places beside him, and my Elma Lea's ashes lie next to Dad for whom she had a special love. My name is on her marker awaiting a date.

We tend to protect our children from the shock of deaths and funerals, but such things are parts of life that must be faced. I do not recall any trauma or grief that I felt as a five-year-old. Our parents went to numerous funerals and took us kids along also. I judge that it was more helpful than harmful to us in adjusting to reality. On the farm the killing and death of animals was commonplace. Such things are parts of the grit.

I have outlived my brother by 82 years. That leaves me to question any direct choices of an impartial God. Due to his innocence I trust that he is in heaven though the Bible does not define such things clearly. I ask too many questions, I suppose. Will he be still in infancy in the spirit world? Will he even remember his earthly life? Will we recognize each other, and what would we share in common to talk about? My other siblings have led productive lives; what would he have contributed to society? More grinding in the gizzard.

Eighteen days after Sol, Jr died, Elda Jean, a fifth child was born and Lois Dean, the last of six, was born in 1925. Children were born at home, usually with a doctor attending, but at times only with a neighborhood woman acting as a midwife. After giving birth in those times, the mother usually remained in bed for a week to ten days. While Mom was in bed after Lois was born, I recall mopping the linoleum floor covering with a wet tow sack. I was seven and had much difficulty wringing the water from the burlap. And because I missed an area in my mopping that Mom could see from her angle and she had to repeatedly point it out to me, she became impatient with me. I recall no joy at the arrival of either of my sisters. Did I eagerly ask to hold them in my lap? No way! I was more embarrassed by them. Mom and Dad had made no mention of their expectancy in preparing us with joyful anticipation. Surprise, the doctor just brought them! That fitted well into, or helped develop, my left-brain inclination.

Children were taught responsibility and to work. This was generally true in all farm families. Such demands on children today would bring the welfare people and police to rescue the kids. Among other assignments, I was put in charge of my two younger sisters regularly beginning at the age of seven. I also soon had tasks working in the field and others like gathering the eggs, and putting the chickens in coops for the night. I am writing this on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2005, which also happens to be my 87th birthday. The first Thanksgiving that I can remember was when I was eight years old. Being out of school that day, we three siblings had to pick some of the last remaining cotton. It was a cold, blustery day, but we had to "chase" the sparse remaining cotton. Such last gatherings were of poor grade, so they were used especially for our mattresses and quilt-making.

Traveling ten miles round trip in a farm wagon to attend church meetings was a real test of faith and conviction. Though Dad was reluctant, Mom insisted. I faintly remember such a trip. In those times one service on Sunday with no classes was accepted as sufficient. Most of the time a man of the congregation brought the lesson. During the last song, the contribution was made by people (more often their child) taking the money and laying it on the "communion table." I recall a "paid" preacher going home with us one Sunday. He was given the collection, which he counted after we reached home. It was a hand full of coins.

When people visited in homes, they often “talked religion.” None were well-educated and all had a King James Version of the Scriptures. One Bible served our whole family then. I doubt if any had a dictionary or commentary. So, many simplistic interpretations were developed and branded in our consciences by the sincerest of people whose devout aim was to please God. One woman thought “filthy lucre” might be snuff! Since we were to be “peculiar people,” various peculiarities were stressed. Most arguments were about what was permitted in assemblies – details of the Lord’s Supper, the introduction of classes, use of printed literature, use of women class teachers, and singing without accompaniment.

After Mom’s health broke in later years, even though she might have been sick in bed all week, when Sunday came, she would get up and go to church if at all possible. It was a guilt-induced sense of duty. I do not recommend such a driven motivation but her dedication did have lasting effect for good on the family. That grit in our gizzards helped to make us what we became.

The quietness of farm life then and the inefficient mufflers allowed one often to hear a vehicle long before it came into sight. We were amazed to hear a motor in the sky! Surely enough, we saw an airplane headed our way! Adults and children alike gazed at the small bi-plane intently until it vanished from sight. It was so high! Soon afterward, we had special interest when Charles A. Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic alone and non-stop in 1927. I was nine.

In such a bleak and austere circumstance for the forming family, was there hope? How could they ever fit into a world of privilege and sophistication? Happiness and achievement are not dependent upon affluence or abundance of opportunity. Gizzard stones can grind and utilize the hardest of grains.

Yes, we and my generation were from a different world. We who have survived it have made drastic adjustments in order to conform to present-day society, though we are still notably old-fashioned. For an ancient one to try to be a modern one is to make a foolish spectacle of one’s self, and “there is no fool like an old fool!” We are rightly concerned, however, when we see values we learned through life experience and education forsaken and replaced by a “do what makes you feel good” philosophy and the chase for instant gratification. Pulverized food requires no gizzard stones. []

(Cecil Hook: December 2005)

I hope the good and bad in your life have processed to give you faith and assurance so that you may truly enjoy a MERRY CHRISTMAS.