



Hulda Bell Foss

By Holly Foss

My father was born to a farmer who did well. My Dad's pal was his brother Robert. They always talked of coming to the "new country." Their Dad had died quite early as did younger children. He left an "inheritance" for the two oldest boys. Their secret plan was to leave Ireland on that money and go to America.

When Dad was 21 (and Robert 20), he claimed his money and found when their mother married again, the step-father persuaded Grandma Bell (now Graham) to "borrow" the money—and it was soon gone. Robert died within the next two years, while Will got a better paying job to save for his trip.

In those days, boys were hired as apprentices, given board and room and schooling, which amounted to high school education. So "Willie" with his letter of recommendation, his thorn stick, and his carpet bag, sailed with instructions that with every new moon, he should turn it in his pocket. When we saw it, it was worn so thin, the engraving was gone. What a wonder, to realize the moon in America was the same moon they had in Ireland!

He was 23 years of age at that time, and at 30, before the red head he'd chosen would marry him, she insisted he write his mother—the first time in seven years. By that time, his mother (Grandma Bell Graham) was living with her youngest son, Willie's only living "sibling." His picture looked like Mark Kandel. He had married an English girl and moved to London.

Even then, there was much strife between hardworking, strict and serious Episcopalians in the North, and practical jokers, jobless, large families Southern

Catholics. A “line” was marked out, with pubs lining the road, and too bad if the scholar met the boy in the South. He’d get his brothers in the fight.

Dad was always kind to the children. He still loved to give the red head soft gloves, while I’ve seen holes in his shoes and wearing frayed cuffs. No stopping him.

He was always at his desk “figurin”—first the mortgage payments—then the doctor bills—hard coal—etc. He’d bring home “swatches” of material, quarter yard samples of silk and velvet he could get “at a price.” But I remember how important I felt, when I gave him five dollars for Christmas, which I had saved for a long, long time, to pay up the mortgage. He must always have a starched (detached) collar and white tie. Colored shirts were for the working (?) class.

The one time he spanked me, he apologized. My greatest reward was when he would say each night at bedtime—“My own little darling daughter, you’ve been a good girl today.”

My mother’s family was known for its “good” and “bad” guys. Mother’s Grandfather apparently liked his wine, women and song, and was a trial to his wife, and no doubt, vice versa. Great Grandma was working at an open fire when a spark hit her eye. The “cure” was a poultice, which left her blind, and infection hit the other eye, and blinded it.

Great-Grandma King never saw any of her six children. One of her girls died early, also one of her boys. One of her daughters turned spiritualist, one attended the first Bible Students’ convention, and her picture was in the group with Brother Russell. She [Mary?] was the one that took my Mother to a “chart talk,” which used the chart as a background.

Her youngest, Evelyn, was Known to us as “Big Auntie,” but when Great Grandpa King left his blind wife and six children, Evelyn gave up her fiancé and her schooling to care for her mother, which she did (care for the family) all her life.





Apparently the younger Kings were much in love. They lived quite near the O'Learys and left their home to go to relatives on the North Side when the Chicago Fire, 1871, got too close.

George King and his wife Elizabeth had a red-headed boy of 2-1/2 years of age; a black-haired girl of 1-1/2, and a pregnancy of two months to go.

His sister, with a little humor, piled one hat on top of another, and Grandpa King locked the door and took the key—(all he salvaged). He made his wife comfortable on a feather bed in a wheel barrow, and headed for Lake Michigan.

They followed the road which was afterwards called Lake Shore Drive. The sandy beach was later filled with cans and trash, made into a parkway, and some of Chicago's tallest buildings are built there.

William (Will, Willie, Bill), Georgiana (Georgie), Frances (Carrie), Margaret (Maggie), Anne (Annie), and Evelyn came along. Grandma King was remembered as a wonderful Mother, who loved to rock in front of the fire with a book and the latest baby.

The older children did the diapers and dishes and felt amply rewarded by a hug and a fun session with Mamma. The family business (horse shoeing) kept them comfortable.

Very unexpectedly, Mamma died of a ruptured appendix when Frances was 12 and Evelyn was 4. Frances loved school. She had made friends with Ella Flagg Young, her principal (and later the Superintendent of Chicago schools).

The family was left to Great-Grandma and our "Big Auntie" to take over. The older family had gone their ways, but the youngest was still at home. I remember "Big Auntie" as a "Grandma." She was always ready to help. Not so pleasant was her frequent request—"Be Auntie's Little Feet" and "Go up [or down] stairs for me."

Everyone was good to the King Family. Great-Grandma King was JUST if not warm. Will and Georgie had to go to work, and Carrie preferred school until a huge box of lovely clothes (used) arrived. They were boned and bustled, long and rustling. To wear those things to school was too much for a 12 year old, as well as the “Hurry Home!”—“We need your help!”—and kept the scholar worn out. She quit school and went to a factory to make button holes in men’s shirts.

Papa George King was frustrated, too, and began to drink. He’d arrive home, his money gone, drunk and surly. One day he left and never returned. I remember so many times Grandma Bell would say, “I thought I saw Papa on the street.” She forgot that he’d be older and changed.

Will married a Catholic Girl, but Georgie, Carrie and Annie joined the Centenary Methodist Church. (Maggie had died.) The Kings all loved music. Carrie joined the choir and met many young people: Leslie Jones, and a young dentist (whose wife later died in the Iroquois Theatre fire) and a William Bell. William was a little older and more serious, but determined. Always steady and pleasant, always on time.

He had told his fellow workers when Carrie was 12 or 13, “I’m going to marry that girl,” and five or six years later, he did! Of course, Grandma King and Evelyn moved in with them, but soon Grandpa Bell built four rooms (and indoor plumbing), a garden, all new furniture, and in ten months a beautiful boy arrived.

She’d waited all her life. He’d chosen her six years before, and here it was! Alone out on a prairie, pregnant, and not too well, with Will working long hours, sometimes at two jobs.

They built at 44th and Madison, and the train stopped at 40th Street, so when Carrie would hear the train, she would start the potatoes. Will bought Carrie (among other things, for that first anniversary—or Christmas?)—a complete set of Dickens, which she read through with a dictionary at her elbow.

“I remember Mama,” when on Thursday’s off day, we read our usual 12 pages in the Volumes, looking up each Scripture, and the dictionary for each hard word.





Mamma read everything that had to do with the Bible. She read beautifully and understood what she read. She said the men talked of things which interested her—Chronology, Signs of the Times, service, etc., and was enthused at each new effort of service. But Thursday was “Children’s Day.”

By that time, I was home to stay—(Dad loved that his daughters were not to go out in the wicked world, but stayed home and readied ourselves for marriage). Though Nodie married and left, and lived out of a suitcase, she was the best housekeeper of his three girls—(five years’ generation gap).

I was never to get married, and I was the one working on my hope chest. Frances, the baby, hating school, and loving all the “little” things, babies, cats, dogs, rabbits, birds. So on Thursdays, Carrie, Hulda and Frances (now Frankie) would eagerly welcome the “Youth’s companion” and we read. Such an education!!

I was made to walk each day, between swilling down iron and liver by the gallon. If I walked, Frankie went with me, but embarrassed me by insisting on taking a cat in a doll carriage, dressed like a baby. People thought we were friends!? She was nearly as tall, twice as wide, and glowing with health. I felt people were comparing her with puny me.

We went to Olsens’ meetings (Tuesday nights), our House Wednesday, and Joneses’ Saturdays. Before this, we had Tuesday meeting, and our menu—beef-loaf, creamed potatoes, homemade bread and shredded wheat boiled pudding with butter sauce, helped about 40 people to attend. Dad said, “Keep the meeting, but cut out the food!” Attendance dropped to 20.

Joneses lived on the bounty of the friends, for which I felt they gave an equal return (everyone did not agree with me). Their menu of baked beans, slaw, homemade bread, and ginger bread and coffee, brought around 60 out weekly. In spite of working (often until 6 o’clock) with no automobiles, on a Saturday night, and with all day Sunday meetings!! As I remember, Brother John T. Read taught us Volume 5 for years with people sitting on the stairs when chairs ran out. “Those were the days!!!”

This ideal marriage of Carry and Will (June 17th, 1891) lasted 59 years. A daughter Leonora was born two years after Harry, and I came five years after “Leo.” We used to say we couldn’t compete with their firstborn son, Harry (William Henry).

Harry was five, both he and Leo had colds, according to the old doctor. Harry suddenly worsened and died. A young doctor whom Bells met at Adams Street Methodist Church was called in and diagnosed Leo’s illness as Diphtheria, and saved her life.

Doctor and Mrs. Moe and Bells became close friends. I arrived March 21st, 1899. Perhaps I raised their hopes that I would take Harry’s place, but at eight months I had such a severe pneumonia, that we moved into the Doctor Moe’s home to be near help. In the meantime, an extra room was built on our home for a kitchen, the basement was closed in, and an attic added.

Leo was much help as she grew. Mamma would leave Leo in charge, and she would spend an afternoon with Hulda Moe.

By the way, they named me Hulda for the doctor’s German wife. Her name was Hulda Barbara Sophia. I was glad when my husband called me “Holly.”

I did get 12 sterling silver spoons from my “Godmother.” On the debit side, Dr. Moe operated on Carrie 13 times, ending her good voice. The bills were partly paid by her role as an anesthesiologist and practical nurse.

When I was five years old, Leslie Jones and his wife moved back to Chicago with a new religion. Leslie remembered his young friends, the Bells and Moes and presented it to them. They “Came out of her” and rejoiced. Young Leslie Jones heard the Truth from Dr. Robie, later a Pilgrim.

A new baby was due—Frances. Mamma (Carrie) in her young enthusiasm went to all the conventions, including a cross country trip. Big “Auntie” and Leo took over. Me, the sickly one, seemed to get the lion’s share of attention. I hated it!





Grandma Bell was immersed in 1905, Leo in 1908, and I at 10 years joined several friends of the same age—Adelaide Jones, Flora Hoskins, Norma Turkington Gans, Mildred Flanner, Marie Horth, Gladys Rechel, Gladys Mills, the Woodley girls, and others from Kewanee. Where are they all?

An eligible “older man,” (25!) in full-time service, began to pay attention to Leo, whom he re-named Nodie, and at 16 they married and went into the colporteur work with Roamie and Naomi Harrison. In 1914-1915 the PhotoDrama of Creation was shown for six weeks at the Big Auditorium Theatre in Chicago. We all took part. I began to “live.”

There were so many interested, Dr. Jones, with his usual business sense, got an old building at 7th and Wabash Avenue where we served one year. We all pitched in and cleaned off gum, painted and scrubbed.

Nodie and Dan, Irving Foss (with others) lived at the “Round House,” and Nodie was very fond of her helper, Irving. She’s proud of saying she introduced Irving and Hulda “because she wasn’t silly and giggly.” (Little did she/he know!)

We went together two years, were engaged two, and were finally married on Irving’s 20th birthday. That sickly girl held on with the strong help of a wonderful guy. I call him “My Rock.”

In spite of being warned against marriage and children, we decided on both and have been so very blest with two healthy daughters and four healthy grandchildren. They are the delight of our lives, and we thank God each day for them all.

I will probably hang on like a dried up leaf after my contemporaries are gone. Of course, to back up, I am so grateful for ancestors who loved God, and in this I hope to leave a wonderful inheritance. This, too, I am so happy for.



We all look for the Kingdom, for which we pray. We all appreciate the gift God sent to be a Ransom for all those who love and serve Him. It is our strength and comfort in this mixed up world. We would include in our love and pleasure the young mates who have joined our family.

I don't like the word "lucky," but to thank a gracious Father, I want to rededicate again my grateful heart for allowing a puny girl to live 74 years to see so many of God's promises coming true—not only the pulling down of the old, but glimpses of the coming blessings. I wouldn't change a thing, and am glad to be able to say, "Since God be for us, who can be against us?"

