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A GRANDFATHER TO EMULATE

by Inez Schneider Whitney

I will never forget Robert Chinworth Provines, my Irish grandfather; but I didn't fully appreciate him until after he was gone. What a wonderful person he was—kind, sympathetic, intelligent, and clever.

When Grandpa was 38, he was left a widower with four children, three girls and one boy. Their ages were 14, 12, 10, and 8. My mother, Estella, was the oldest. Grandpa was from a large family, and relatives urged him to let the children be reared by various aunts and uncles.

He said, "Thank you, but I'll keep my family together," and he did. My mother was ready for high school and plans had already been made to have her stay in town during the week and come home on weekends. After his wife's death, Grandpa started completing the arrangements. Mama told him, "Pa, I won't go. I'm going to stay home and help you."

What good times they had in the years that followed. Mama used to talk about it. She said, "Pa would hitch up the carriage and take us to church, spelling bees, pie suppers, and anyplace we wanted to go. He was so much fun to be with, even more fun than someone our own age. My friends used to say that they wished they had a father like ours."

We were his whole life. He never considered marrying again although he lived to be eighty-nine. He was a farmer with only a grade-school education, but he could hold his own with anyone in a discussion about politics, literature, history, geography, and the news. We had a four-volume set of McCauley's HISTORY OF ENGLAND. One day Pa brought home a set by another author. I asked, "Pa, why did you buy this set of books? We already have one set about English history." He replied, "Well, I want to compare the two sets and see if the authors agree on their facts."

Grandpa gave very few gifts. When the children were small, he often gave them a rubber ball to bounce. Everyone received a shiny half-dollar for his birthday and for Christmas. Although all of us—his children and grandchildren—were very dear to him, he wasn't one to show affection. He never gave me a kiss or even a hug, and I can't remember ever being held on his knee.

Grandpa spent a lot of time at our home. One morning when I was about ten, Mama said, "It's summer and you're not in school. You're old enough to help a little. It will be your job every morning to wash the breakfast dishes."

Nearly every day, Grandpa would wander into the kitchen and ask, "Inez, you really like to wash dishes,

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don't you?"

"No," I'd always reply. Then he'd say, "Oh, I think you do or you wouldn't take so long to get them done." I wouldn't say anything, but it really made me mad.

I was always glad, though, if he was visiting when school was going on because he was such a good mathematician. I went to a one-room country farm on the corner of our farm. The problems in the seventh- and eighth-grade books were very hard. Sometimes we'd be on a problem for several days, and even the teacher couldn't get the answer. Parents worked on the problems, too. Mr. Agan, a neighbor, had taught school. He used to call Mama at night and ask, "Do you have the answer yet?"

I remember one problem well. The cost of building a brick house had to be figured. The size of the house and the price of a brick were provided. Mama, the hired hand, and Grandpa had been working on the problem for several nights. Papa never helped; he always said he was tired and went to bed. One night after they had been working a long time, Grandpa jumped up and yelled, "I've got it. Do you know what we were doing wrong? We were paying for brick twice in every corner." I was really happy to take the right answer to school and brag about my grandpa. When I finished Eighth Grade at Prairie View,

the country school, I rode the bus to the little town of Custer City where there was a high school.

One time there was a geometry problem that no one could work. Mrs. Etchison, the teacher, was very smart, but she couldn't even solve the problem. She said that she was going to write to the textbook company because she was sure the problem was wrong. Grandpa got the answer by using plain Arithmetic since he had never had Geometry. I took his solution to school, and Mrs. Etchison was able to transfer it to Geometry. She said, "Your grandpa must be a very smart man." How proud I was.

Mama had wanted to be a teacher but couldn't go on to school after her mother died. From the time I was small, she always talked about what a wonderful career teaching would be for me. When I graduated, it was possible to teach right out of high school if a person was 18 and could pass the County Examination. I was only 16.

One day, Mama said to Papa, "Mrs. Randol just called. She asked if we were going to send Inez to the college at Weatherford. They want to send their daughter Cora. The rent on a light housekeeping room is only ten dollars a month. If we sent Inez, each girl would pay only five dollars.

Then Grandpa spoke up, "The tuition is only five dollars a semester. They could do their own cooking, and Inez would come home every weekend. You could send back milk, butter, eggs, and other groceries. If she were at home, she'd have to eat, so it

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wouldn't cost any more.." Off I went to Southwestern State Teachers College.

Papa didn't like it too well. Although the college was only twenty miles away, he liked for me to be at home. After going one year, I started teaching on my eighteenth birthday at Red Rock, a two-room country school only six miles from our home. The next year, I went to teach at Custer, which was only three miles away. Also, I went to college every summer. During the school term Papa took me to Saturday classes at the college every week. I received my degree before my twenty-third birthday.

After my college graduation, I went to Oklahoma City to teach; there I met my husband-to-be, John Whitney, a young attorney. Not long after we were married, all the relatives appeared one evening to bring gifts and help us celebrate. Grandpa was there too. Although he was 81 and almost blind, here is what he wrote in our guest book: 'Many a mickle makes a muckle' and indicated that it was an Irish saying.

"What does it mean?" I asked. "Many a little makes a much," he replied.

I remember many things that Grandpa used to say: When I have a task to do, I think of his advice: "Don't wait until the last day in the afternoon." He wasn't very musical. He used to say, "I know two tunes; one is 'Yankee Doodle Dandy', and one isn't.

Although he was a teetotaler, I've heard him say many times when urged to have a second helping, "No, thank you. It's just as much a sin to be a glutton and overeat

as it is to drink too much."

Jewelry used to be advertised as rolled gold. Grandpa said, "That just means it rolled away from the gold."

When he grew older and wasn't too well, one day he said, "I believe I could have improved on the Lord's creation of man. I would have made him like the wonderful one-horse shay that ran a hundred years to the day and then just fell apart."

One day, Grandpa asked me, "Do you know what Eternity is?" "No," I replied. "I'll tell you then. If a little bird flew by and brushed his wing against the earth every million years, when the earth was finally worn away, Eternity would just have begun."

I remember the last time I saw my grandfather. It was in 1943 in the midst of World War II. I was leaving to join my husband in Washington, D.C. He was in the army and stationed at the Pentagon in Military Intelligence. I went in to bid Grandpa goodbye; he was sitting in his easy chair. We had a good visit, and I'll never forget what he said as I was about to leave: "I'm thankful that I have lived during the most wonderful age in history. There could never be another one like it. What a great heritage we have. The United States had only thirty-one states when I was born. Now it has forty-eight. I have seen the birth of the electric light, the telephone, the automobile, the airplane, the

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radio. Nothing could ever surpass that. Tell John to do his part to help our country survive.”

He died four months later at the age of 89. His two daughters took him back to Indiana where he was laid to rest by the beloved wife who had died fifty-one years before.

Grandpa was an Oklahoma pioneer: This is from his obituary: “Robert C. Provines was born in Dekalb County, Indiana, January 31, 1854, and departed this life at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Estella Schneider, Custer City, Oklahoma, September 15, 1943. His wife preceded him fifty-two years before. He and his three children came to Oklahoma and settled near Weatherford in 1901. In 1902 he filed on a homestead six miles northwest of Rankin, Oklahoma, in Roger Mills County, where he farmed until 1919. After that, he lived among his children. He was a kind man and a friend to all who knew him. How patient he was in all his suffering his last few years, never complaining about his pain and trouble.”

How his family missed this wonderful man. We will never forget him. ■

INEZ SCHNEIDER WHITNEY of Arlington, Virginia, is a retired teacher who has published many works in WESTVIEW. Her Bachelor's degree is from Southwestern and her Master's from George Washington University.

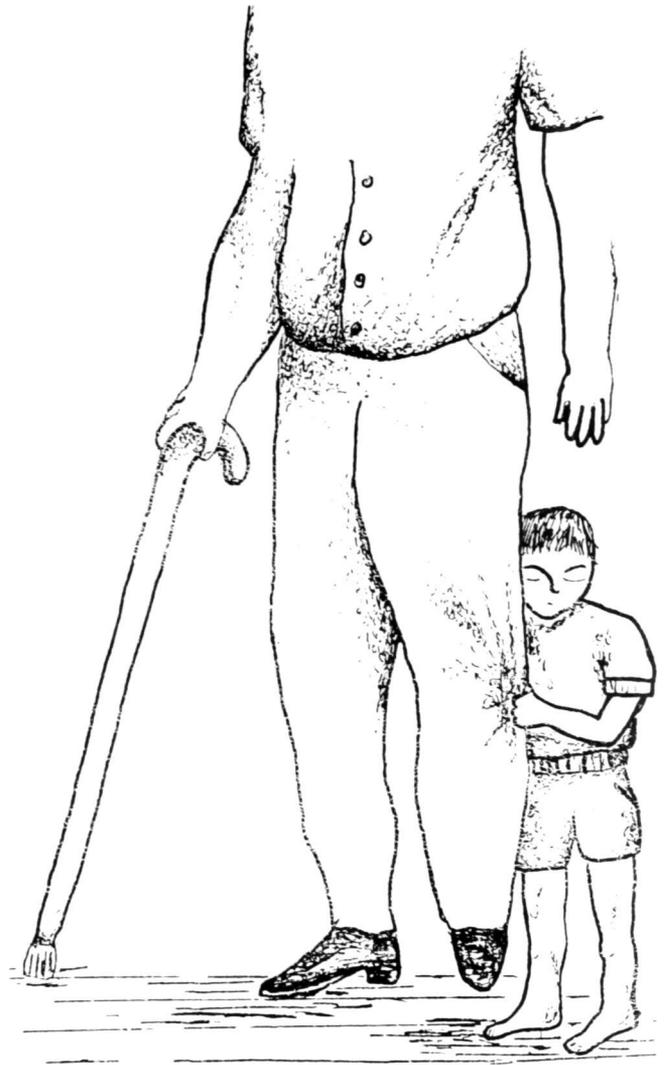


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