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Ida Vowell Robertson

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Jog Down Memory Lane

Serious

—By *Ida Vowell Robertson*

D

OVES COOING AND FLUTTERING in the autumn sunshine outside the windows, and a fountain gurgling musically amid a forest of greenery

flanking a wall of the solarium at the Methodist Retirement and Health Care Center in Clinton provide an atmosphere of peace and well being for a group of ladies visiting in wheelchairs or in colorfully upholstered patio chairs. The setting could well be a social gathering in someone's own home, but it's really the regular Friday morning meeting of the Memory Trail Joggers.

The Memory Trail Joggers group is the brain child of an auxiliary volunteer who believes in "Reminiscence Therapy." She adheres to the theory that reminiscing stimulates the mind when a person verbalizes memories. She feels that jogging down Memory Trail in a rocker or wheelchair is the mental equivalent of a walk through the park or a hike through the woods.

Early each week the volunteer sends each jogger a reminder of the coming Friday's trip and designates a certain holiday or a certain event such as "The First Day of School" or "My Most Important Birthday" as the subject to be reminisced.

The jogging expedition back to the romance of courtship and weddings was an exceptionally fulfilling one as each returned to

"The Day I Met Him," "First Date," "My Wedding," etc. Each was eager to tell her story and to hear the others' stories. Some had vivid memories, and some remembered only certain highlights. The glow returned to faces and warmth to hearts as memories of long-ago love affairs were related.

"L", a spry, cute, gaily dressed little lady, younger than most of her "eightyish" friends, laughingly recalled, "I was working in my daddy's dry-goods store in my little home town. A new guy who had just come to town was walking by and saw me through the window. I guess he liked what he saw as he came in to get acquainted. We went together about a year. Times were hard during those Depression days, and we mostly just went to a movie. We couldn't afford a big wedding, but we got married and had three girls and two boys. We lost one of our boys. My husband was overseas a long time during World War I, but he came back and we had some good years together before he died before our youngest was grown. I went back to work until my health failed." A faraway look came into play as she ended—"But I have friends, and my girls live near enough to come see me and take me out."

Tiny, frail, little "M" chimed in—"All I can remember is that we rode horseback to get married!" Then, fairly beaming, she added,

"But I always remember that he was the best husband in the world." Her daughter, who was visiting, echoed, "Yes, Daddy was a wonderful husband."

There was an almost reverent silence as the joggers seemed to feel that "M" indeed had had a wonderful romance and that although time had dimmed the details that he was the best husband in the world and that was a real love story in itself.

Then "E", truly beautiful in a fragile way, with only sprinkles of gray in her dark hair, wearing the same make-up as in her youth, and with brown eyes sparkling mischievously as she smoothed her collar in a gesture of neatness, began her trek down "Memory Trail": "I was a senior in high school in 1928. Our girls basketball team was in Cordell scheduled to play in the Finals of the County Tournament that night. I was the only girl with long hair, and we went to a barber shop to have my hair bobbed. The young barber was tall, dark, and handsome; and I could see that he was interested in me. I think he came to see us play that night. No, we didn't win the tournament because just as the forward went to shoot in the final moments of the game, a button came off her uniform bloomers. She turned loose of the ball to rescue her bloomers from falling, and the whistle blew. We lost! That was in February. In March the barber called me several times for dates. Then I finally accepted and soon we were going steady. He didn't have a car, but his friend and his girl often took us to movies in Clinton. I had always planned to go to college and become a teacher. But we married in June, and I became a wife and mother. We soon moved to Clinton where he opened a barber shop and we have lived here all these years. We had a son and a daughter."



Robert and Marguerite Edgar, December 22, 1928. Photography by Blunck's Studio.

'Oh, I remember your kids," a friend interrupted. "Your Treva was Homecoming queen, and your son was a ball player."

'My son lives far away, but my daughter is near enough to visit me often," "E" continued. "Our health failed last year, so I moved out here and he went into the Veterans' Center. We were also separated a long time when he was

overseas during World War II. He is very ill now, and I am taken to visit him often. I joined his church after we married, and we had a wonderful life."

The circle had become very quiet. Then someone said, "What about your courtship and your marriage, 'A'? Do you remember?"

"Oh yes," said "A". "I certainly do remember lots of things. I was one of nineteen—yes, nineteen—children. I was raised on a farm in Eastern Oklahoma. Went to a country school." She stops to laugh. "I remember I had to wear a lump of stinky asafetida around my neck to ward off diseases. Well, at least it warded off the other kids! And when we had the Thanksgiving holidays, we always had to pick cotton. Oh, I always hoped it would rain. But Mother would always cook a big dinner and bring it out to us."

"But, 'A', we want to know how you met your husband and did your courting," interposed "L".

"Well," said the aged, but sharp and witty little lady who still walks all over the facility without a cane, "Oh that was really something. You see, there were two little country schools close together with a little store in between. One day when I was about twelve, my sister and I went to the store for something. There were some more kids there, and we got into a mumbley-peg game. Now the game is to get the peg into a hole and then take it out with

your teeth. If you drop the peg, you have to pay a penalty. Of course I fumbled and dropped my peg, and this big boy, about fourteen, from the other school, leaned over and kissed me. That made me mad, so I turned and slapped at him. He started running and I chased him. I grabbed him by the back of the shirt, and it tore all to pieces. I ran home. My sister told Mother, and Mother told me that I had to apologize to him. I apologized rather grudgingly. He said not to mind—that the shirt was old and rotten. We got to liking each other; and since we went to the same church, we began going to church affairs together. When I was nineteen, we got married.”

“And I guess you’ve been mending his shirts ever since,” said “M”.

“Yes, we had fifty-one happy years together. We stayed in the Church of God, and he became an ordained deacon. We worked hard and did well. We had a beautiful home on Lake Eufaula, but after he died and later when I couldn’t live alone, I sold it and moved out here to Clinton to be near my brother who lives near Clinton. We raised two boys at Eufaula. I loved Eufaula. You have heard of those Selman Boys who were **great** O.U. football players? I watched them grow up and thought lots of them. I’ve been here three years,” she said finishing her story with a smile. It is easy to see that “A” has learned to be content whatever and wherever her lot may be. The joggers have found “A” very easy to love.

“I” has sat quietly through all the reminiscing. A tall, slender, pretty woman, she sits straight and gracefully poised in her wheelchair. In her youth, she must have been a soft-voiced, willowy blonde who would never, never have paddled around the house with her hair in curlers. With a little urging from the others, she briefly told her story. “Well, I didn’t get stood up at the altar by my bridegroom, but we both got stood up by the preacher. We didn’t know what happened to him, but someone got another preacher, and he married us.”

“L” asked, “Did you ride horseback to the wedding?”

“Oh no” came the quick reply. “My husband had a very nice car—one with a rumble seat.” Thus ended “A’s” story.

“N”, a beautiful charming, bright-eyed resident, has come back to her home town after many years. She happily told her story of a simple courtship and long happy marriage. “I started working at Scotts’ Ladies Shop when I finished high school. I was paid twenty cents an hour; and if sales were slow during the week, I received a dress instead of cash. But I didn’t mind that as I lived at home. I walked a few blocks from home to work, and one morning I met a strange young man walking in the opposite direction to work. Soon we became acquainted and started dating. As he was paid only twenty-two cents an hour, he couldn’t spend much for entertainment. So most of our dates were spent in my home, playing Pitch with my parents. We didn’t marry until I was twenty-eight years old. We moved to Oklahoma City, prospered, and lived happily until he died several years ago. Later I broke my leg and could no longer live alone. So I came back to Clinton and moved into this home where my sister has lived for the past four years. We have two sisters who live here in their

own homes. Very nice! We had one son who was a doctor in the City

until he retired. Now he lives out south of town and raises rabbits. And that’s my story.”

All eyes now focus on Marguerite, a sweet lady whose lovely white hair crowns a face whose fair skin is still smooth and soft with few wrinkles. Her hands, which once sewed fine seams, performed years of hard farm work, penned beautiful poems and a fascinating autobiography, are now useless because of

“And I guess you’ve been mending his shirts ever since”

arthritis. Her manner reflects a philosophy of "Life is what you make it" and "Happiness is found in the state of mind."

Marguerite's story is sparked with both humor and pathos. She was the "only girl" with three mischievous, prank-playing brothers. Her parents were fairly well educated for their day and fairly prosperous; they gave her the advantages of piano lessons and schooling. The music lessons and schooling came to an abrupt halt when she met "Robert"

and married him before finishing high school. Marguerite's memories seem very dear to her and very

vivid in her mind. She proceeded with confidence—"I was seventeen and had had a few high-school crushes when I met Robert, who wasn't going to school but was working on the Hatcher Ranch. I'd seen him occasionally at church and parties. He had the bluest eyes, and I thought he was just about all right. In time we started dating, quite often doubling with my brother, Arthur, and his girl friend. Arthur had a new Ford, the last model that came out before the Model A's. Robert and I grew quite fond of each other as I got to know him better. I could see he was quite ambitious to get ahead. He'd bought a second-hand Ford roadster, which gave nothing but trouble, so he sold it for \$50 and with the money bought a heifer that was to calve in the early spring.

"He would ride his horse Sunday afternoons to see me. I had a saddle horse, so sometimes we went riding.

"On July 4, 1928, Robert and I and Arthur and his girl went to a sort of resort, Dripping Springs, near Arapaho. It was a lovely park, and I'd been there only twice before. Water from the spring cascaded into a picturesque little lake. We saw the rodeo that afternoon,

and that night there was a lovely full moon. Robert rented a boat and we went for a ride. The music of a band playing in the pavilion drifted out over the moonlit water; it was all so very beautiful and romantic. They were playing 'Shine on, Harvest Moon.' Always when I hear that song, it takes me back to that night on the water in the moonlight.

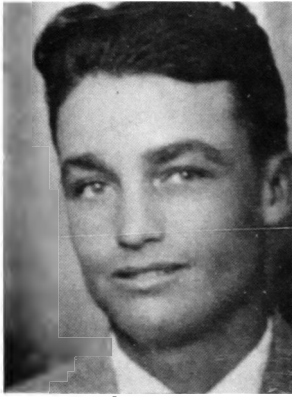
"That summer we spent many hours in the porch swing listening to the songs of the Marvin boys, and Jimmie Rodgers played on a portable phonograph. We'd play the same records over and over. Our favorite song was 'Away out on the Mountain' by Jimmie Rodgers. I still remember the pleasure we got from those songs played on that old phonograph.

"Not long afterwards, Robert told me that he'd rented the farm over by the old Elm Graveyard. He said he loved me and 'Let's get married and live over there and farm that place.' He was twenty and I was seventeen.

"There have been untold numbers like me, down through the past, I'm sure—young, romantic, in love with love, having read too many romantic books, turning their backs on school. My parents would have liked for me to go on to school, but they didn't forbid my getting married!

"We went to Taloga for our license and took pictures on the old steel bridge spanning the Canadian River, then drove to Aledo where we were married on December 22, 1928. Arthur and his girl friend, who was also my best friend, Sallie Holladay, stood up with us. After the ceremony, we came back to my folks' house for dinner and then went to Clinton to have our wedding pictures made. Robert was proudly wearing a belt that he'd had the harness maker trim with shiney brads. He wanted his belt to show in the picture. He pulled his coat open twice and Mr. Blunck, the photographer, came and readjusted his coat, pulling it together. I had a huge fever blister on my upper lip, so I didn't look too radiant, but my wedding dress was lovely—a cocoa-brown satin faced crepe, a beautiful all-silk

"Always when I hear that song, it takes me back to that night on the water in the moonlight."



Robert

material. We stayed with my parents until after January 1 when our house was vacated and we moved in.

"We had spent quite a bit of our little savings to buy cigars and candy for our charivari [shivaree] crowd that we expected, but there was a flu

epidemic, and only two families were able to charivari us. They didn't pound on dishpans or disks or make a lot of noise coming in as was the custom; they simply came in to visit and share candy and cigars."

Robert and Marguerite celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary in 1988 in their modern brick home on one of their farms near Arapaho.

The Edgars reared and educated two sons and two daughters. Robert lives alone on their farm now, still managing farm land and cattle; but every day he visits Marguerite and eats a meal with her. Theirs is an example of young love followed by lifelong devotion.

Marguerite has written many poems. She was a member of the Poetry Society of Oklahoma, and one of her poems won Third Place at one of the meetings.

Her poem "Old Wagon Trails" is a reflection of her romance with pioneer history.

OLD WAGON TRAILS

*The moon shines down her silver light.
Far off, the lonely coyote wails
Whispers of bygone days I hear
Along the ruts of wagon trails.*

*The blaze of campfires now long dead
Seems to flicker and cast its glow
Where wagons were halted for the night
Beset by many a foe.*

*Forgotten graves along the way
The trail of tears and pain
Many who started never returned
To pass this way again.*

*Westward they went through obstacles great
Those courageous pioneers
Wagons have fallen to rust and decay
Leaving ghosts of former years.*

Exciting, appetizing aromas begin to drift into the solarium from the dining room causing the volunteer to glance at her watch and the joggers to lose interest in romance in favor of lunch. So off they go to the dining room to sit at attractive quartet tables and enjoy food which they have not had to plan or prepare. They relax in the realization that when they have eaten, they can just walk away with no responsibility for clearing and cleaning. They are free to go for naps or to the recreation hall to watch TV, listen to the stereo, do ceramics; or hopefully this may be the day that Homa Storm plays the organ for them. His music is always good for a delightful jog down Memory Trail.

Senior years can be Golden Years. There's plenty of time to linger along Memory Trail and plenty of time for venturing onto new trails—nostalgia for the past and anticipation for the future! That's **real living!**

(IDA VOWELL ROBERTSON of Clinton is a SOSU graduate, a retired teacher and social worker, and a volunteer in the Methodist Health and Care-Care Center project in Reminiscence Therapy—"MEMORY TRAIL JOGGERS.") *



Marguerite

Design by Steven Cost