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Wenona L. Dunn

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courage and faith

Blessed Mama

By Wenona L. Dunn

Edna Pearl Rigney Latimer with her daughters, Wenona and Laurel.

I remember Mama for her kindness and for her toughness; I remember her for her generosity and for her thrifty ways; I remember her for her courage and her stick-to-it-iveness, and for her impatience with the "I can't do it" attitude.

Mama was Edna Pearl Rigney Latimer, born on a farm east of Cordell in Washita County in 1898. She was the second child and eldest daughter of Jim and Mattie Rigney, lately come from north Texas to Oklahoma. In 1900 another girl was born to the family and that winter the older son and the baby died, leaving Mama as an only child. But only for a time, for in 1902 another boy was born and in 1904 another girl.

The family moved into Cordell then, and Grandpa got a job in a dry goods store and Grandma cooked and served meals to people who worked in town. While they lived in Cordell, another son was born. About 1910 the family moved to Dill City and a year or two later to a

farm southwest of the present town of Burns Flat. It was there that Mama met my father, Kirk Latimer, youngest son of J. K. and Sarah Latimer, who came to Oklahoma from Kansas in 1896.

In 1915 the Rigney family moved to Florida, but the next year Daddy went down and married Mama and brought her back to Oklahoma. For several years they lived near Lexington, in Cleveland County, where I was born. In 1921 we moved to a farm four miles south of Foss, which my grandfather had bought the year before. We moved in with Paw and Maw until a small, two-room house could be built for us in the back yard. Daddy farmed the place and Mama helped Grandma in the garden and in canning fruits and vegetables. She also worked in the fields when her help was needed.

In 1923 Mama's second child, Laurel (now Mrs. J. R. McNatt) was born. That year Mama didn't do any field work. In 1926 Mama took Laurel and me to Florida for a visit

with my Rigney grandparents. We went by train and Mama packed a big box of food for us to eat on the way. We stayed about two months and while we were gone Daddy moved our little house to the north eighty, which he had bought from Grandpa, and added two rooms—a bedroom for Mama and Daddy and one for my sister and me. He did this without letting Mama know what he was doing, and was she ever pleased and surprised! She felt she at last had a real home of her own.

Mama always loved flowers, so she promptly began setting out trees, roses, lilacs, spyria and anything else she could get her hands on. She planted dozens of iris bulbs and flowers of all kinds, and every spring our yard was a blaze of color. Mama took many a bouquet to the small church which we attended at Burns Flat.

In 1931 our brother, R. C., was born and Mama's family was complete. During the dust bowl and

depression days Mama worked in the fields with Daddy and us kids — chopping cotton in summer and picking it in the fall. When we finished our own, we worked for neighbors. Night and morning, Mama helped Daddy milk cows and they sold milk. Mama also raised chickens and sold eggs, butter and cream to the produce in Foss. Those were hard times, but we made it through.

Mama found time to sew our clothing — hers and those for us children. She was an expert at crocheting and every new baby in the community had one of Mama's baby sets — a saque, cap and booties. She sold some of her work from time to time, and used that money for something special which she couldn't have afforded otherwise. We kids even yet have some of the lovely quilts which she made from scraps left from her sewing projects.

All three of us kids graduated from Foss High School, and Mama wanted us to have more education so we wouldn't have to work as hard as she had. She used money from her sales of produce to pay tuition for my sister and me at a business college, and when R. C.

was old enough she saw to it that he went to SOSU, where he graduated and received his teaching certificate, and later his master's degree.

During World War II Mama made room in her little house for my sister and me and our babies during the time our husbands were serving in Uncle Sam's armed forces. During that time, Mama had to have a very serious operation and had to stay in bed for a month. Now it was time for us to take care of her. She endured the inactivity with just a little impatience at being a burden to others.

In 1959 Daddy decided to retire from farming, so he and Mama sold the place and bought a nice modern house (the one on the farm wasn't!) with a few acres near Tishomingo, Oklahoma. Daddy was going to enjoy fishing and loafing. But it didn't work out that way! Daddy had been a farmer too long. They sold that place in a very few months and moved back to Foss, where they moved into Grandpa's old house, now empty for several years and in a sad state of disrepair. Mama helped Daddy clean up the house, re-wire it and add a bathroom and a sun porch for her flowers.

When he became discouraged, she was right in there pushing him along. Daddy farmed until he was eighty years old and finally had to retire indeed. His health worsened and Mama was there to take care of him for two years, until she died of an apparent heart attack. She had been out in her flower garden pulling out grass and weeds. She did this in spite of her own poor health, using a small stool to sit on as she worked. That day she came in from her work, prepared lunch for Daddy and sat down to eat. Suddenly she experienced a terrible pain and went to lie down. Before she reached the couch she fell in the floor, and died immediately. In spite of her courage and faith, Death was one enemy she couldn't overcome. She was laid to rest in Page Cemetery, less than a mile from the farm where she had spent fifty-four years of her life.

Yes, I remember Mama! She was quite a lady, "and her children rise up and call her blessed." ■

WENONA L. DUNN of Burns Flat, niece of late Arapaho Laureate Dick Chapman, serves another slice of history to WESTVIEW readers.

Foreclosure

By Fran Merrill

He stands there by the sagging fence
looking over barren fields
where died his dreams.
The heaviness on his heart
restricts breathing momentarily.
He stoops to pick up a handful of soil;
lets it fall to the ground.

Then with head high
he turns and walks toward
an unknown future
where he will again build dreams
from the tiny spark of hope
that will not die.

FRAN MERRILL is a prize-winning writer from Shawnee.