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Agnes Aaron at age 83.

Time of Change and Challenge

By Agnes Aaron

My husband and I moved from our farm in the Texas Panhandle near Wellington to the northwestern area of Greer County, Oklahoma on January 11, 1957.

Our 320 acres were situated in a small valley known in the area as "Booger Hollow." Its boundary on the north and east was the shallow Salt Fork of Red River. We were nine miles from a paved road. Mangum, our county seat, was 30 miles east. The little community of Reed was between us and Mangum. Hollis, the county seat of Harmon, was 25 miles south. Vinson, another small community, was between us and Hollis.

Even though our farm was isolated, the neighbors said that in the early days Booger Hollow had been a great place for "rip roaring dances."

At the time of our move, only two of our eight children were still at home. Lyda, the youngest of 7 girls, was 13, and our only son, John, Jr. was 15. Another son, Jerry Paul, had died when he was three.

In 1964, my husband's health began to fail. Our son had just graduated from Southwestern State University, and Lyda was a junior there, so my husband and I were all alone. John's doctor was in Hollis; thus, we decided to move into Vinson to be closer to him. Since I was pastor of the Methodist church in Vinson, we moved into the parsonage.

I had been serving as a licensed minister for the Methodist church

since back during the Depression years. My father-in-law, John Selby Aaron, was a Methodist minister when John and I married. In 1932, my father-in-law asked me to help with the preaching in a revival he was conducting in a little community near Wellington. He thought I might be able to reach the young people. It worked out so well I was asked to finish the revival.

Not everyone liked having a woman preacher. Sometimes some of the men would gather in the back, and as soon as I started to preach, they would all walk out. But most of them would eventually come back. In a way all my pastorates were pushed on me; I never actually sought any of them. It was just that we always lived in small communities, and there was often no one else to fill the office. My husband was proud of me, saying I was the best preacher he'd ever heard. He often led the singing when there was no one else to do it.

Not long after we left the farm and moved into Vinson, our daughter, Ann, moved home with her two little boys, Danny and Paul. It was decided that Ann would begin college at Southwestern State, and the boys would stay with me during the week with their mother driving home on weekends.

My husband died from complications following surgery on June 14, 1966. We had been married for 44 years.

Having my grandsons to take care of helped fill the emptiness of this period of time. They gave me a reason for

going on.

My life was quickly forced to change following John's death. For one thing, I had never learned to drive. John and I had always gone everywhere together, and I guess I never saw the need. And other than church, I had been too busy at home to go anywhere very much.

So in the late summer of 1966, I started learning to drive. To put it mildly, it was difficult. My attention span was too short; I couldn't seem to keep my mind on what I was doing. To always have to keep my eyes on the road and miss seeing the sunlight dancing on the sunflowers in a nearby field didn't seem like much fun to me.

I especially had trouble driving in town. I soon got a permit to drive as long as there was a licensed driver in the front seat. The trouble was, I scared everyone so badly, no one would ride with me when we reached town.

After many tear-filled weeks, I still had not passed the driving test. One day I told the patrolman, "I want you to know how much I appreciate your kindness and patience. And I don't want you to be discouraged because each time you take me for my driving test, I feel I am learning just a little more." He didn't answer, just gave me a weak little smile.

One day I could tell I was doing really well. This time I just knew I was going to pass. Just then the patrolman yelled, "Watch out for that truck." I said, "What truck?" He said, "The truck you almost hit." To this day I have not figured out where he saw that truck.

Needless to say, I didn't pass my driving test. When he told me I had

failed again, I laid my head on the steering wheel and cried like a baby. I just couldn't help it.

Several weeks later, I did finally pass my driving test and received my first driver's license. I don't know who was happier — the patrolman or me. That happy day was 21 years ago and now I am 83 and still driving. I have a good driving record.

In the summer of 1967, my mother came to live with me. She had become disabled from a recent stroke and needed me to take care of her. A year and a half later, she died.

Once again there was a great emptiness in my life. Having my grandsons helped me through the difficult time following her death. Taking care of them helped to give my life stability.

In the spring of 1969, Ann graduated from college and she and the boys moved away. It had always been understood that when Ann started teaching, the boys would again live with her. But it was still very painful to give them up.

Now I was alone. The house was so quiet — so empty. My heart seemed empty too. I kept thinking about what direction my life should go.

In a few weeks, I knew what it was I wanted to do. I wanted to go to college. My husband and I had put five of our eight children through college. Now, it was my turn.

Altus Junior College was only 60 miles from Vinson, close enough to drive back and forth. I called Dean Chesser and asked if I could come to school. He said I could, but enrollment was still two weeks away. If I waited that long, I might change my mind so I asked if I could come right then. He said okay.

I drove to Altus that afternoon and

enrolled as a college freshman for the fall term. I was 65 years old. I had graduated from high school in 1922.

I entered college with anticipation and hope. But that was before I knew about Freshman Composition. What a jolt! I had taken many correspondence courses from Methodist colleges during my time as a Methodist minister, always making **A's** and **B's**. Only occasionally did I see a red pencil mark.

That was before I met Mrs. Emma Madden, my English teacher. Mrs. Madden expected perfection and would not settle for less. She had two grades for a composition: one for content and the other for mechanics. It was mechanics that sold me down the river. At first I prayed to make **A's**, then **B's**, then **C's**, then finally I just prayed that I would pass. God heard my prayers. I not only passed, but I learned a lot in the process. Before the semester was over, I had come to love Mrs. Madden. She is a great teacher.

I completed three semesters at Altus and then transferred to Southwestern State University at Weatherford. I graduated May 18, 1973 with a major in English. My grade point was 3.33. It would have been higher except for Math and German. They were both foreign languages to me.

After graduation, I left Oklahoma and moved to my present home in Matador, Texas, a small town 70 miles east of Lubbock. I am still quite active. I no longer pastor a church, but still teach Sunday School and Bible classes. I raise a large garden each year, freezing and canning huge quantities of food to give to my children and friends. I still enjoy reading, sewing, and watching sports on television.

My college years stand out as a rewarding experience in my life. My



Agnes Aaron, SOSU student, on graduation day.

teachers were dedicated professionals. They were also kind and compassionate individuals. I hold them in my memory as friends who guided me through the wonderland of poetry and literature; friends who taught me a better way to speak and write; those who led me through the great struggles of history. I graduated from college with more than a degree — I graduated with a deeper understanding and a greater appreciation of the human endeavor to respond to all the complexities of life.

The greatest wealth of Western Oklahoma is not found in her oil wells, wheat fields, or cattle. Her greatest wealth is her people. I shall always remember with pleasure the people that make up Western Oklahoma: friends that I laughed and cried with; friends that I prayed and worshipped with. ■

AGNES AARON, a former Western Oklahoma Methodist preacher and a SOSU alumna, now lives in retirement in Matador, Texas.

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