

Grace Curry

Home Maker

by Pat Hill

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Patricia Dione Wade Clute Hill

1954 Janet Ave.

San Jose, CA 95124

Erna Holyer's MAEP class

The picture on the following page is Grace Curry at age 12.



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INTRODUCTION

Grace Curry is my grandmother. I use the present tense because she is still here. Her daughter, my mother, Bessie Blanche Curry Wade lives by Grace's example.

Both women chose the career of home making and practice nonjudgement based in trust.

In August of 1997, my parents, Jack and Blanche Wade moved in to my home at 1954 Janet Ave. in San Jose, California. They are 91 and 86 years old respectively.

After this contest presented itself, I began talking to Mom and Dad about past life in San Jose. I realize how great an influence Grace Curry has been in my life.

Grace Curry never criticized. She did the work that needed to be done to provide for her family. Her discipline of herself was her example and direction to her family. Conflict did not exist. She asked nothing of her children and grandchildren that she did not live and love doing herself. She chose to enjoy her family above everything else. This gave us stability.

Gramma, Mom, my daughter, Claudia Dione Clute Schroeder and I love to garden. We loved the fruit ranches. We watched them replaced with subdivisions and industry. We experienced, each in our generation, the accompanying changes in family life.

It is impossible to tell every incident of caring consideration, she did them every day. I will give a few examples of what it was like to live with her and give a few facts about her life.

Patricia Dione Wade Clute Hill

April 24, 1998

Grace Curry, Home Maker

by Pat Hill

TYPICAL GRACE (After remembering, mom told this story clearly)

"Is Dorothy here?" the timid Bessie Blanche Curry asked Dorothy's mother when she opened the door in response to Blanche's knock.

"She is still in bed, she won't be out for a long time, she has to get well."

"Is she getting better after the Scarlet Fever? I know she can't play, I wanted to give her something to play with while she gets well," came the shy reply.

Blanche is ten years old, living close to the south east corner of Alum Rock Avenue at Jackson Avenue next to the Squab Farm. It is 1922.

Mom, as all her six children called Grace Curry, had given Blanch just enough money to buy some modeling clay at Woolworth's next to the First National Bank at Santa Clara St. on First Street in San Jose. Blanch, encouraged my her Mom, Grace, was determined to see that Dorothy, her best and only friend, got it to help her pass the time of her recovery from a disease which took many lives.

Dorothy's mother relented, "She isn't contagious any more, she misses you."

Blanche did not go out to the barn in the evening to get a little milk from the cow squirted in her mouth, straight from the teat, and then drink her fill of the still warm liquid squeezed into a small tin cup by her dad, "Jack" as he milked. She avoided the chicken yard where she talked to the chickens and fed them. The doll house they made in the huge back yard was not the same when she was there alone.

Grace did the cooking, cleaning, and the little things that made a home comfortable.

Grace knew the loss Blanche felt and allowed for it. Grace took the ups and downs of her children in the same stride she took her own, she just kept on doing the work she had to do and made it as easy as she could on those she loved.

"I brought you some clay to model into different things." Blanche began as she entered Dorothy's sick room. She ignored the shades drawn to give Dorothy's eyes protection from light, and switched to the light adventures they were missing together. "The motor cop was in the driveway yesterday. He gave me Black Jack gum, he didn't have any Spearmint."

Dorothy's brown eyes widened, her "dirty blonde" hair was still golden brown though rumpled from reluctant resting, she sat up in the clean bed crisp with ironed sheets. "Was he out front waiting for speeders again?"

Tony Russo*, the Highway Patrol Officer, spent many afternoons in the circular drive in front of the roomy two story farm house the Curry family rented right across the street from Dorothy's one story cottage.

Before Dorothy was healthy again, the ingenious cop would be forced to cease catching drivers who ran the stop sign up the street by hiding in the inset drive way: one citizen who received his ticket complained of entrapment and stopped the practice.

Tony managed to be friends with Dorothy and Blanche and with all the kids in the area.

*page 318. CLYDE ARBUCKLE'S HISTORY OF SAN JOSE states the first traffic officer was appointed in 1910 to control speed and flow of traffic as cars replaced horse and buggies. The first traffic lights were installed in 1928. Chiefs of police were named. Tony Russo is not among them so I must rely on my Dad's memory. He lived near Mom then but they did not meet until she worked at the Fox Theater selling tickets, on First St.

The hazel light in Blanche's eyes matched Dorothy's in excitement as the two friends came alive with interest. the bow that was fastened to the top of Blanche's bobbed hair jumped as she moved in the enjoyment of being with her friend again.

Dorothy's mother interrupted, "We can't let Dorothy get tired, you will have to go."

As Blanche left she wished the next weeks of healing would go quickly so they could play again in the open land that met her as she left Dorothy's small yard, ran across Alum Rock Road without even looking for cars. She took the path behind her house, past the outhouse, and into the kitchen warmed by the wood stove on which all the meals were cooked, and all washing water heated.

Next day, Grace heard a knock at the front of the house as Blanche was setting the table for dinner.

Mom Curry opened the door to a wave of emotion.

"Why did you allow Blanche to give Dorothy the clay? Did Blanche tell her how to use it? Dorothy was eating it when I came into her room a few minutes ago. She had swallowed a big lump of clay before I found her." Then the distraught mother directed her agitation at Blanche, "What did you tell her? Did you put her up to this?"

"Is Dorothy sick, does she have stomach pain or anything?" the calming concern of Grace was famous for stilling troubled waters.

Blanche took courage from her Mom's attitude of caring, "We talked about making things out of it. Then we forgot about it. We were just having fun."

The picture of two children elated at seeing each other after a separation warmed the situation, and Grace's steel strength in love made Dorothy's mother reconsider, realizing as if for the first time, "She feels fine, in fact better than ever, like before she took sick. Her Dad mentioned this morning that she would be up and about in no time if she kept this up! He didn't know she was eating clay! And I won't tell him." And she smiled.

"Can I come and see her tomorrow, just for a little while?"

"Yes, but don't bring any clay!"

FACTS

Grace Bradley Curry was born in Etna, Illinois on August 25, 1883. Bradley is her family name. She had no middle name. She married Isaac Jasper Curry, born in Mattoon, Illinois on January 8, 1878. They were married in 1900. Una Violet Curry Long was born July 10, 1902, Hazel Florence Curry Riggs Sohm was born September 9, 1904, and Mildred Fern Curry Merland, October 6, 1906 in Illinois. The family of five came west to Greeley Colorado in horse drawn surrey with the fringe on top stayed about three years. Their only son, William Ward Curry was born Dec. 23, 1908. They moved on to Tulare, then to Tranquillity where Bessie Blanch Curry Wade was born August 24, 1911. Grace's last daughter, Betty Bradley Curry Robinson Sohm, was born in San Jose on September 20, 1920.

Along with Jasper's roving spirit, the move from Tranquillity to San Jose was motivated by their 18 year old daughter, Una, who was ready to enter San Jose Normal School and became a teacher. She taught and raised her family in Manteca, in San Joaquin county. Their ranch was on the corner of Louise Avenue and what is now Highway 205.

Grace visited her three grandchildren, and they her yearly. Their visits were always the instigator of a "family reunion".

The Currys had acquired a early model T Ford for the move to San Jose. Their first home was in a tent in the camp ground then under the eucalyptus trees which still stand across from Kelly park on Keys where it turns into Story Road.

Grace cooked over a camp fire, heated water for laundry in the same way, and kept five children clean and healthy. Laundry was done with no mechanical help except two large wash tubs, one for soap, one for rinsing, and a metal scrubbing board which had grooves designed to take out dirty spots when clothes were rubbed over them.

Grace had been free of cleaning diapers, which were soaked in a pail of cool water until washed, for five years. Blanche was seven when they moved to San Jose.

The older three girls were menstruating. Each girl had favorite soft cloths used monthly. They had to be soaked and washed in the same way as diapers. Grace did it all willingly; her children remember no references to the chore, they always had what they needed when they needed it.

The next San Jose home was in the same tent, behind a house on San Carlos street near the canneries where Jasper and his two older daughters worked to support the family.

Two years later, just before Grace gave birth to Betty, the family moved into their first house in San Jose, on Willis Street near Gardner School.

From there they moved on to Louis Road. In the open space, Grace over saw and assisted Bill and Blanch as they constructed an out door kitchen where they cooked and ate their food. (see picture page 12) Bother and sister had a "play house" home. They worked together unassisted picking all the prunes in a young orchard near by.

Bill and Blanche were proud to use the money they made to buy their school cloths the next fall. This was the first place in San Jose where they lived long enough to eat from the garden Grace always planted. In addition to those mentioned, the family rented homes on Forest Avenue, Lewis Road near the current fair grounds, Donner Ave. now Blossom Hill, Spencer and Grant Avenues.

By the time Blanche had reached the seventh grade the family had rented the Lester family home on the corner of Lincoln Ave. and Lincoln Court, now the site of the Lincoln Glen School, remaned The Willows Community Center. Later, Jasper purchased land across the street and the apricot shed behind the Lester house. moved it across the street and built Grace's final home at 1115 Lincoln Court, a three bedroom home with large front room and small kitchen with wood burning stove. With his son in law, Hazel's first husband, Ralph Beaumont Riggs, he built a few of the small homes still standing on Lincoln Court and Radio Avenues.

Though Jasper wandered to many different places in southern central California to build, Grace stayed with her children and her home and her garden. Two apartments separate from the house provided income and homes for relatives over the years.

Grampa Curry wanted Grace's home to purchase property. The six children advised divorce to assure ownership. Grace complied and continued her ordered life.

AVIATION

"I hear the plane!" shouted Blanche.

"I'm heading toward the car now!," responded Mildred Curry (Merland), known by everyone as Teddy.

"Can I ride with you?" asked Blanche. In her late teens, and working part time at the Fox Theater, where Teddy worked, Blanche hoped she might get a ride in Johnny Johnson's* plane. Teddy met the plane daily and took the mail to the post office for Johnny.

"He said I could have a ride today, remember?" Blanche reminded her sister.

"Then hurry up, he won't wait if we aren't there." Teddy called as Blanche scrambled into her brother, Bill's yellow sedan convertible. He let Teddy use it without question.

Grace Curry came out to wave the girls on. She had ignored for some time the looks of increasing agitation from neighbors as Johnny, each day flew over their home on Lincoln Court to alert Teddy to start for the airstrip, nothing more than a dirt field at the corner of Alum Rock Ave. and Capital Ave. When Johnny started the mail route to Oakland, the neighbors on Lincoln Court enjoyed the novelty of the plane dipping near their homes, but it got old after a while. If she had any concerns for their safety, she kept them to herself.

Grace kept the house clean and always had food on the table.

*page 470, CLYDE ARBUCKLE'S HISTORY OF SAN JOSE, the first Oct. 15, 1928, he made his initial daily round trip between San Jose and Oakland. It was too expensive. Johnny became a pilot on long distance air flights.

"Will we go all the way to Oakland, can I see San Jose on the way?" Blanche pressed.

"I have to drive Johnny's car back to San Jose from Oakland!" said Teddy.

They arrived at the landing strip to find Johnny sitting in the plane ready for take off. As they climbed up on the wing and into the closed cabin, he assured Blanche, "If I'm the pilot on every flight I take, I will never crash, it's only when I'm not the pilot that I worry, so have fun."

The take off into the blackening night was smooth and Blanche could see the lights of the eastern side of San Jose below.

"Sit still, don't move from side to side, it's hard to keep the thing balanced," Johnny warned Blanche when her excitement at the scene made her move from side to side.

Six years later, Blanche and Teddy were devastated when Johnny was killed when he didn't follow his assurance to them and flew with another pilot. Grace cooked and cleaned every day, Teddy knew it would be OK.

Teddy lived for a time with Johnny's mother on Singletary Street, then moved to Hollywood and lived on the edge of the movie industry after marrying a camera man for MGM studios. Childless, they came to San Jose for Christmas with the grand children.

THE LYNCHING

"Was Grampa Curry really at the Hart* lynching?" I asked Gramma Curry when I was in 7th grade at Willow Glen School in Mr. Martin's social studies class in the 40s. I wanted to confirm the rumor.

*page 342, CLYDE ARBUCKLE'S HISTORY OF SAN JOSE "The community in general preferred to forget."...the lynching of the men held responsible for killing Brooke Hart.

“Well, he wasn’t home that night, so he was probably there. He never talked about it. The men were not proud of what they did. The Lindbergh baby episode was still in our minds, things like that hadn’t happened before. These men were angry, and at that time we could still remember the time before policemen, when everyone felt responsible for seeing that people followed the law. And Grampa Curry could get carried away with things.”

Her honest response ended there, and I did not pursue it further. It’s the only time I can remember when I could feel that further questions would not be appreciated.

RADIO and GRACE’S SON IN LAW

Blanche and Jack, my parents lived in the apartment built above the garage at 1115 Lincoln Court in 1932 when the depression had taken both their jobs. After I was born, Mom used her trusty Maytag washer for my diapers, even after the three of us moved to downtown San Jose to be close to my Dad’s new job. He saw a sign for a board marker in the window of Buchannon and Co. at their new office on the corner of First and Santa Clara, diagonally across from the First National Bank Building. Dad took the daily stock quotes off the Ticker tape and wrote them on the new quote board they had just installed.

Everything stopped at Grace’s house when One Man’s Family came on the radio. Amos and Andy* received the same silence . When my dad was promoted to the stock reporter on the 12:00 news on KQW every day, she listened, and encouraged me to “hear daddy” on the radio.

*page 387, CLYDE ARBUCKLE’S HISTORY OF SAN JOSE “Amos and Andy captured San Jose overnight.”

Grace agreed that he was probably the first ever stock reporter on radio, if she was asked about it years later.

WORLD WAR II

Bill Curry enlisted in the Navy as soon as he was old enough, in 1925, and Grace willingly signed the papers. Fourth of July was made memorable each year when he was on leave. He arranged for and directed the fireworks display in the front yard on Lincoln Court for the whole family. Gramma cooked and clean for family reunions.

Gramma kept a record on a map of the routes of the USS Marblehead, the ship Bill served on in World War II. After it was so heavily damaged and reported sunk, there was no word Gramma Curry never talked about her concerns and did not visibly worry. When he came home safe, she was the same calm person. (see picture, page 13)

Uncle Bill was known for his ability to enjoy alcohol. Grace did not tell him that she preferred it not be used at home, but he never brought it to a family gathering.

POLIO

In 1952, before the Salk Vaccine, Grace's youngest daughter became ill with the disease which left her dependent on an iron lung to breathe. Grace took the bus from Lincoln Court to Shasta Avenue, where Betty lived, every week to take care of Betty and raise her grand daughter, Sally Robinson Sohm and grand son Richard Sohm. Betty outlived Grace by eleven years probably due in large part to the care she gave Betty in the early stages of her adjustment to being completely paralyzed. Grace still kept her garden, cooked, cleaned and made two homes comfortable until the end of her life.

Grace Curry had an unusual back ache that wouldn't go away in early 1966, it was diagnosed as cancer. She died in her home with her daughters attending her on June 22, just 22 days after Grampa Curry passed on in Tulare, California.

CONCLUSION

Grace Curry was not famous. She had no power over people, other than her ability to live life to the fullest and do as much as she could to make life better for those around her. Her family was her life. She was her own person. She demanded respect for her values by living them.

Her life is valuable to remember because she lived a happy life. She was part of the change that went on around her with out letting it change her. My family, two generations later, experienced the decline in quality family life that is still happening.

I feel if families had one person taking the role of stability provider as Gramma Curry did, this "Valley of Heart's Delight", Santa Clara County, now "Silicon Valley" would fit that earlier name chosen to attract attention and draw people here.

I know if I could ask Gramma Curry today, how she feels about the changed life style and the families who live so differently from hers, I can hear her saying, "Now, Pat, its all right, things will work themselves out, you did your best. Let's be sure to get the tomato plants in after the last frost, but as early as possible."

X X X



Chickadee Picnic



Structure of a Mill - situated within a sandbar area, in the river



6, JULY 4, 1942

Visits Here



William Curry, chief cook on the ship, is home visiting his mother, Mrs. Isaac J. Curry, 215 Lincoln court, while his ship, the Harbinger, is in New York for repairs.



Local Sailor Rests From Action

For once the ship is not in the harbor. It is in the water, and the crew is resting from action. The ship is the Harbinger, and the crew is the local sailor.

The local sailor is William Curry, chief cook on the ship. He is home visiting his mother, Mrs. Isaac J. Curry, 215 Lincoln court, while his ship, the Harbinger, is in New York for repairs.

In addition to his mother, Mrs. Isaac J. Curry, 215 Lincoln court, Curry has many other local relatives. The crew of the ship is also resting from action.

The ship is the Harbinger, and the crew is the local sailor. He has been in the navy for years. Most of his service was spent on the U.S. Marine.



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Conversations and questions with both my parents, Jack and Blanche Wade. Both are very clear about their live in San Jose and enjoyed checking out their memories as far as they could with the facts. The agree the dialogue is as close as possible to what happened.

San Jose Mercury News, April 8, 1998, "Roots of the Valley" page G1