

Herb Norry's story of

Mildred



My mother died on a bright sunny Easter Sunday morning when I was six years old... It was April 5th, 1931. My brother Bob was four and my sister Kathleen was eight. That was the worst day of my life until my daughter Maryann died when she was 42 years old. She was taken to the hospital on April 5th and died six days later leaving a 12 year old daughter, Kylie, and a nine year old son Matthew. That was worse. Mother and Maryann were two of a kind.

Mildred Hornick was born in the farm home in 1896, the second of four daughters and four sons of Herbert Hornick and Susan Atkinson. The Hornicks were Irish Palatines and the Atkinsons were from England. Mother was christened in 1898 when the newly ordained Thomas Dobson arrived in Tilbury, Ontario. Archdeacon Dobson spent the next 50 years in the same parish, rebuilding a congregation and then a church, and ministering to the congregation.

On the day after mother's death Aunt Kathleen returned from the funeral home in tears as she told us, "I took my prayer book and asked them to put it in Mildred's hand... She always wanted a prayer book of her own and she was the one who used one more than any of us... She is the one who went to church whenever she could and sang in the choir and taught Sunday School. The rest of us had our own prayer books and she would never have bought one for herself. Why didn't I ever give her a prayer book? It is too late now. I hope that she knows."

From Winifred, her youngest sister: "The first three girls all received a large ally before I was born. I was so envious and made a big fuss about this. Later, when nobody was watching, Mildred brought her ally to me and told me that she wanted me to have it, because she had enjoyed it for years and it was my turn now. Hazel was different. She might have given me one with a flourish, while planning how she would soon get it back". (Seventy five years later Aunt Winifred gave the ally to me.)

Guera Brown was a daughter of Aunt Annie and the Reverend Thomas Brown, who loved mother and told many stories about her. "Mildred was the quiet daughter that stayed at home to help her mother in that busy household. Hazel had trained as a nurse and was making money; Kathleen was also working. Mildred was the only one at home when I arrived and we had a lovely time. She was an excellent seamstress and showed me many things that she had made. She had just finished a lovely dress for herself. She modeled it and it was beautiful and we both knew it. At that time Kathleen arrived home from work and was thrilled when she saw the dress. She said "I knew you would remember my birthday", and Mildred gave it to her with a smiling "Happy Birthday". I am not usually at a loss for words and I hate myself that I did not speak my mind. Others were working and had more clothes, and she gave away a dress she had made for herself."

Mother and Dad were married on April 21st, 1920 in a simple ceremony... After morning chores Dad went in his horse and buggy to travel to the rectory in Tilbury where Aunt Belle Challis and the rector's wife were witnesses. There was plenty of time to get home for the chores.

Prior to his marriage my father had farmed with his Uncle Bob. Their household consisted of the two of them plus my father's mother and grandmother. Uncle Bob wanted to retire. He sold his farm and gave the livestock and machinery to my father and loaned him money to make a down payment on his new farm with its big house where mother and father started farming on their own. In 1920, when they bought their new farm, the prices were at very high levels because of the veterans returning from the Great War. Mother and father did not have money for new equipment. They rented an additional 100 acre farm and they worked hard and hired help when they required it.

Mother's father was on the Township Council as a Deputy Reeve and later as the Reeve. He had two farms and his best worker, my mother, was leaving to farm with her new husband. Her two surviving brothers, seven and eleven, were at home. For twenty years Grandpa and Grandma had a series of Home Boys from England. One of these, Stephen Carter, was there in the 1920s.

Father and mother started their family with Kathleen in 1922, Herb in 1924 and Bob in 1926. They had a mixed farm with horses, cattle, pigs, sheep and chickens. In one year Dad exhibited his Chester White pigs in Toronto at the Canadian National Exhibition and at the Western Fair in London.

When I was three or four Kathleen and I were playing in the kitchen and the floor was messy with the papers we had been cutting. Kathleen was cleaning up and took the lid off the stove to burn the papers. The tea towels were hanging above the stove and they caught on fire. I was frightened enough to get to the open window and called for help as loud as I could, and mother heard the yell out in the barn, and she ran to the house in a flash. As was her custom, she praised me. I had yelled so loud.

Uncle Bob did some traveling after his retirement and saw some great crops in Western Canada. Farmers were making money in Western Canada, and he decided to buy a farm in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. He needed the money that he had loaned to Dad so Dad got a mortgage from a Trust Company. The crops were excellent in 1929 and the barns and granaries were filled to capacity. Dad bought yearling heifers to eat the grain he had on hand and he had to borrow more money to do this.

The stock market collapse on October 29th of 1929 ruined everything. Prices stumbled.

1930 was a chaotic year for most people because they had little or no money to buy anything. Savings were vanishing and suicides were increasing. It was difficult for mother because she wanted to help, but was confined to bed with tuberculosis. She must have known that her health was fading fast. That fall was pleasant for me because I was in my first year at school where there was lots of excitement. Every day I hurried home to see my mother in her bedroom. We had so many things to talk about and mother was always smiling.

On one day we were looking at the Eaton's catalogue and the many nice things that could be ordered. She hugged me and told me we could not buy anything because we didn't have any money. I suddenly remembered that I had shown a calf and a lamb and some chickens at the Township School Fair in September and had received \$4.65 in prize money. I raced to get it and brought it to Mother.

That was one of the few times I ever saw Mother cry as she hugged me tightly. She was not crying because she had received the money. She was crying because her little boy was giving all that he had, in the same way that she had given things away all her life. The tears disappeared as we looked for things we could buy for others. My mother said that my Grandma Norry had a daughter and she had no money to buy her a gift. Did I think we should get a gift for my Grandma to give to her daughter? "What a tremendous idea" Both of us laughed with glee at the idea. The gift was a 75c pair of panties. That hour was the best in my life.

In 1931 I lived with Grandma and Grandpa to give my mother more time to rest. I overheard an adult conversation and rightly concluded that someone was taking my mother to the hospital. I just had to see her. Logic left me and I started running and walking to my home. Along the way I had to pass my Aunt Nellie's home. She spotted me and invited me in for a cookie. I obeyed and obeyed again when she said I should go back to Grandpa's house. If I had asked anyone to take me home I might have had a chance of seeing my mother for a last time.

At Grandma and Grandpa Hornick's house I had a small bedroom on the second floor. Mother's brothers were in the next bedroom. They always required several wake up calls each morning. On April 5th 1931 Aunt Kathleen came up early and Arthur and Robert went downstairs without being called. I was dressed and followed them a few minutes later. I remember when I was at the top of the stairs that there was a lot of talking downstairs, and as I went down the stairs all talking ceased. When I went into the kitchen everyone was staring at me and Grandpa, in tears, said "My poor boy, your mother has died"... It was numbing and I rushed into Grandpa's open arms and we both cried. I was not stupid about this, but I had not realized that my mother was going to die. After that long cry I did not cry again. The visitation was in our living room and parlour at our house.... My sister Kathleen could not bring herself to look into the casket. I found my father to lift me up. The prayer book was in mother's hand, just as promised by Aunt Kathleen. At the church we sat in the front seat on the left side. The church was filled to capacity, including the balcony and any other place where a person could sit or stand. Depression days were tough times, but not too tough to keep people from honouring a gem. Uncle Thomas Brown and the Rev. Dobson conducted the ceremony.

Shortly after mother's death my Uncle Arch Garner asked if I would like to go to town with him. I often went into Tilbury with Grandpa. I knew the way and told my uncle about the places I knew. "That is the place where Grandpa stops for ice cream cones". Uncle Arch stopped and bought two cones and we were both happy. When I was at Grandpa's house again I overheard Uncle Arch telling them about this event. "That was the closest that Herb has come to asking for something for himself." I hung my head in shame, as I would have done if I had wet my pants. This was about me but it was also about my mother. She never asked for anything for herself and she passed this trait on to me. It is easy to ask for something for others or a cause, but it is difficult to ask for something for oneself.

For many years I have heard words of praise for my wonderful mother who died in 1931 and who left three small children. Few who knew her are alive today....