The Lives of our Loved Ones

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

This exploration into the lives of Parch, Emma, and Goldie Higginbotham sheds light on the experiences of our ancestors. It describes the lives of typical farmers in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, the effects of the Great Depression on individuals, and the ways individuals coped with emotional loss. This is a family life history which traces the events of the lives of my great-grandparents and grandmother.
Introduction

Perhaps the greatest advantage I have had in life has been the opportunity to live in close quarters with my grandmother, Goldie. She and I shared a bedroom from the time I was five years old until I got married at age eighteen. Mammaw, as I fondly call her, has had an enormous impact on my life. Her presence alone has provided me with a very different perspective of life than others. I have learned many implicit as well as explicit lessons from Mammaw, and I will be indebted to her forever. This close relationship and deep love is what has prompted me to research her life and the lives of her parents so that they will not be forgotten.

The idea actually came from Abe Guillermo, who is a dear friend of the family. Abe currently lives in Florida near some of Goldie's daughters, and he periodically sends cassette tapes of himself talking to her (as do her daughters). Goldie listens to these tapes every night as she drifts off to sleep. One night Goldie was not feeling well, so I went with her to bed to comfort her. We turned on a tape of Abe and listened to him reminisce about Ma and Pa (Goldie's parents). He finally began talking of how someone should write down the events of their lives and even said "Maybe your Emma could do that." It then occurred to me that I could in fact do it and would like nothing more.

A project like this is, of course, dependent on the cooperation of others,
especially family members. I sent out letters to all immediate family relations and a few close family friends. I asked them to send me either a tape recording of themselves or a letter including their memories of Ma, Pa, and Goldie. (Even friends of the family referred to Parch and Emma Higginbotham as “Pa” and “Ma”.) I would like to take this time to thank those people who responded. I received material from Grace Felzien, Abe Guillermo, John Kay Thompson, Jacqueline Norris, Carole Ann Crim, Barbara Jean Stairs, LaDonna McCormick, Mary Smith, and Trena Bowen. Those allowing me to enter their homes and interview them were Grace Felzien, Sim and Marie Higginbotham, and Borden and Mary Lee Higginbotham. I extend a very, very special thanks to Grace Felzien, who truly provided the bulk of this information. She has a wonderful memory of detail, and spent much time transferring it to me.

My hope is that this account of these great individuals does them some justice. It is as accurate as the memories of those who knew them most intimately. My intent is that they will not be forgotten by their descendants. The lives of Ma, Pa, and Goldie mark the end of an era. Life will never again be lived the way they lived -- without running water, electricity, cars, televisions, or any of the necessities of today's world. Goldie saw more change in her lifetime than we can imagine. As a young widow, she saw the days when she had to find and shoot dinner for her children, and today she rides through the McDonald's drive-thru with her grandchildren -- and they get upset because they have to wait a whole minute for their hamburgers. She has lived through the days when milk had to be kept at the stream to stay cool, and she has seen the arrival of refrigerators and microwaves. One thing is for sure, she lived a much harder life than any of us ever will. I never truly appreciated the advantages I had, until I learned what she had done without. I hope her life has the same impact on you.

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A Taste of Life
Before I plunge into describing the personalities of Ma, Pa, and Goldie, I would like to take you back to their time period. This is not a particularly comfortable journey. I am afraid you will have to leave your television, washer and dryer, dishwasher, refrigerator, and even electricity and indoor plumbing. You will also have to leave your town to enter the hills of Arkansas, where neighbors are far apart and the fastest mode of transportation is a horse (of course, many people can only afford a mule).

Why do I insist you travel back with me? Because it is virtually impossible to understand someone's personality until you have a grasp on their frame of reference. So much of what we do and think is a direct result of our experiences. Everyone possesses their own idiosyncrasies; and the less you know about a person's past experiences, the stranger he/she will seem. As I grew up around Goldie, I noticed many things she did around the house which I considered extremely odd. But the more I learn about her past, the more I understand her present actions.

One of the strangest things Goldie did, I always thought, involved hard candy. There has always been a candy dish by the stove at my mother's (Trena's) house fully stocked with cinnamon candy. Goldie would frequently take a piece of candy, suck on it a while, and put it back in the dish. She never wrapped it back up, so it always got stuck to the dish. I wondered why she would not just throw the candy away once she grew tired of it -- surely she knew no one else would finish off the half-eaten piece of candy stuck to the dish. What I failed to understand was that throughout her life she could never afford to waste anything at all.

While Goldie was growing up, if she (or anyone else) received a piece of candy
it was a very rare treat. The candy was savored, some eaten now, some eaten later, and some eaten later still. When she got a stick of gum, she would chew it for a while, set it aside, and chew some more later. If someone saw she had gum and begged for it, she would let them chew on it a while. Every last bit of goodness was wrung out of everything they had.

This principle of not wasting anything extended to every aspect of life. Food was never wasted. After a meal the dishes were washed and anything left on the plates (gravy, grease, etc.) would end up floating in the dishwater. (Remember, there were not faucets or plumbing to assist with the dishwashing. The water was fetched form the river or spring and heated on the stove.) The dishwater would then be placed in the slop can and used to feed the pigs. Everything could be used -- as Ma always said, "Waste not, want not."

Once a piece of clothing had been completely worn out, any good pieces of cloth remaining were cut off and saved. These pieces were used to patch other articles of clothing which had a hole in the elbow or knee. Sometimes patches covered patches. When a new piece of clothing was made, it was usually made out of flour sacks -- which sometimes even had flowers on them. Bloomers, dresses, shirts, pillowcases, dish rags, napkins, sheets, and anything else possible were all made from flour sacks. Every once in a great while store-bought material was used to make a piece of clothing.

This insistence on not wasting anything was not due to any kind of stinginess, but was due to the fact they could not afford to be wasteful. One time their stock of flour (enough to last the entire winter) somehow got too close to the kerosene, which they used for their lamps. The kerosene spilled into the flour, and all that winter they had to eat their biscuits with a slight taste of kerosene in them. They could not afford to throw out the flour.
The bedroom I shared with Goldie had no chairs, but did have a television. Therefore, my brother Shane and I would often sit on the bed and watch television. Goldie hated this, and every time she caught us we could hear her say to our mother (Trena): "Those kids are sitting on the bed!!" We honestly did not know what else to do. She would have been equally upset if we had sat on the floor, and we were not about to stand through an entire television program. I never understood why sitting on the bed bothered her so much until I learned how people used to make their beds.

The first step in making a bed (from scratch) was to pluck the feathers from the geese. It took a lot of plucking to get enough feathers for an entire bed. The feather "mattress" was placed on top of a ticket made of straw, which was placed on rope tied like springs. Every morning, to re-make the bed, one had to take the ticket and shake the feathers to one side. Then one flipped the feather mattress over and smoothed and patted it out. This was a great deal of work which could be messed up easily. If the bed was not made up just right, it would not be comfortable. Perhaps this is the origin of the phrase, "You made your bed, now lie in it."

Goldie also got very upset when I washed my hair in the winter. That probably sounds even stranger to most people than it does to me. Our family was never one to get up and wash our hair in the mornings. Instead we washed it in the evening. Goldie would insist that it was too cold for me to wash my hair and I would surely get sick if I did. And if I had a cold already, she would neither let me wash my hair nor bathe. Reasoning with her never helped, and I could not figure out why it upset her so -- until I learned how she used to wash her hair.

The only access there was to water in Goldie's years of growing up was the river or spring. To wash your hair was to run down to the spring and get the cold
water. Perhaps they would have heated the water on the stove to make washing bearable, but the houses were built in such a fashion that she would have frozen if she had sat around with a wet head (no hair dryers existed, of course). Grace told of mornings that upon waking they would find snow on their beds, and think nothing of it. Therefore, the houses could not have been very warm. People in those times would be forced to go the entire winter without washing their hair because it was simply too cold.
Ma and Pa
and
Goldie's
Childhood
Life has changed in remarkable ways since Ma and Pa's young married life. We complain about having to do our laundry with our washing and drying machines. Ma and Goldie did their laundry with a washing board and the spring of water. Each piece of clothing had to be scrubbed individually, rinsed in the spring, and hung on the line to dry. This was before people fenced in their livestock, so Goldie would sometimes have to fight off the cows trying to chew up the clothes on the line. In the winter the clothes would often freeze before they could dry.

All of the water the household used came from a nearby spring ("nearby" meaning about a mile). Anytime water was needed for baths, washing dishes, watering animals, drinking, or anything else, someone had to fetch it from the spring -- usually the woman or one of the children. When Goldie was only two years old, Ma was trying to find a way to make a trip to the spring without taking her along. Pa was out working and it was difficult for Ma to carry Goldie and the water for a mile walk, especially since she was pregnant. Ma finally decided to lift one of the legs of the bed and set it on Goldie's skirttail so she could not crawl into trouble. As Ma went after the water, she began thinking about all the wild animals that roamed the woods and how they would come into people's homes if no one scared them away. The farther she walked, the more frightened she became, and finally she threw down her bucket and ran back to the house. As she entered the house, she found a wild hog had grabbed Goldie by the arm and was about to drag her away. Ma picked up the ax they kept handy (because there were no locks on the doors), and started waling on the hog. It ran off, half-dead. Needless
to say, from then on Ma found a way to carry both Goldie and the water.

This may seem a great coincidence -- Ma's timing -- but knowing her religious nature, it was more likely the Providence of God. Ma was extremely well versed in the Bible. For every action and reaction she was equipped with a well-suited passage to make others think before doing. Ma was never one to keep the Gospel to herself. Her father was a preacher, so she learned the importance of sharing God's message at a young age. Anytime she would meet a stranger or a traveling salesman would come to the house, they would hear about the goodness of the Lord.

"Opposites attract," so Ma was bound to fall in love with a handsome man who lived slightly on the wild side. Pa loved to sing, dance, drink, play cards, or whatever else took his fancy. And, from what I am told, he did it all very well. He was extremely graceful, and had natural musical ability. Pa won prizes in his youth for playing the fiddle at country dances. In fact, he was playing at a picnic when he first saw Ma and was smitten.

Ma was short and pigeon-toed. She had beautiful big brown-grayish eyes and gorgeous lashes. Ma's light brown hair was thick and wavy. She had very strong legs. As a matter of fact, when she broke her hip at age 95, the doctor told her that her bones were bones of a 25-year-old. This strength came from all the walking up and down the hills and the fact that she rarely had a chance to sit down during the day. When she had cataract surgery in her 80's, the nurses fixed her hospital bed so she could not get up without buzzing for them. In the night she needed to go to the bathroom, so she just climbed over the bars to get up and then climbed back in when she was done. Ma thought nothing of it, but the nurses could not believe it. Ma was very bright, clever, and witty. She always had a quick, insightful answer for anyone's questions.
Pa was a tall, straight man who walked with a proud step. He had beautiful blue eyes, pretty mouth and teeth, and wonderful rosy skin. He had a high forehead and big nose and ears. Pa looked a person straight in the eyes when talking to him/her, and could size someone up quickly. He was a very clean and neat person. Everything had to be just perfect -- his clothes pressed, his hair combed, etc. He was extremely graceful with every move he made, which made him fascinating to watch. Pa hated laziness and taught his children to work hard, which made them physically strong and industrious.

Pa’s family was comprised of free spirits. Almost all of them could play the piano or violin and all could dance up a storm. Family and friends felt welcome to come and go as they pleased, and even spent the night sometimes. Pa’s siblings and parents all followed their impulses. If someone got the inclination to play the piano in the middle of the night, he or she would just get up and play it. The thought never seemed to cross their mind that they might disturb someone; they were just having a good time.

Ma continually tried to teach Pa’s family about the Bible. They all had a deep respect for her and her opinions, but believed that as long as they did not harm anyone they were pleasing God. When Ma would talk to Pa’s father about the Bible or spiritual matters, he would always reply: “Emma, when I get to Heaven the good Lord will say, ‘You’re a good man, Jabe. You never stole or beat any man out of a penny.’” Pa’s family was honest and upright, but not as God-centered as Ma’s family.

After Ma and Pa got married in 1901, they moved in with his parents. However, once Ma became pregnant she convinced Pa that this “free” environment was not suitable for raising a child. They moved to their own house, and Pa began working and becoming more responsible. Actually, he may have leaned too far in
that direction -- he would sometimes overwork himself in the fields and became quite a worrier.

When talking about Ma, everyone always mentions her love of reading. She received up to an eighth grade education, considerably more than did most girls of that time and place. I imagine she also learned a lot from her father, John Byrd, reading the Bible to her. John's eyesight was very poor, so once Emma could read she became his eyes. She would read Scriptures to him to help him prepare for his sermons. He put a great deal of Scripture to memory and this example is probably what influenced Ma to put so much material to memory -- both Scriptures and poems. John's love of the Bible spilled over to Emma, who adored her father.

Any scrap of paper Ma found, she immediately picked it up to read it. She must have put much of it to memory because she constantly recited little poems, stories, songs, and memory verses. Whatever she did reminded her of a poem, and she recited it to whomever was near.

Ma's love of reading was tempered with a problem -- books were few and far between. Books cost money, and the money they did have was not to be used for such. Therefore, she was always on the lookout for something to read. In those days some people would paper their walls with newspaper, and she would tear off spots for something to read. Sometimes Goldie would get upset with Ma when they were making the beds together. Ma would get distracted reading the walls, and Goldie wanted to get the work done quickly.

Ma's love of reading -- and the Providence of God -- one time saved Pa's life. He was very sick with meningitis and the doctors had not been able to help him at all. As Ma went to the spring for some water, she happened upon a leaflet lying on the ground. Being Ma, she quickly grabbed hold of the paper and read it. The leaflet described a new technique for treating meningitis -- pack the patient in ice.
She presented the paper to the doctor, they packed Pa in ice, and he recovered. Considering the scarcity of any kind of reading material, and the fact that they lived in the middle of nowhere, the only way a leaflet on the treating of meningitis could have happened to be at the spring was that God was watching over them.

Ma was extremely positive and constantly taught and practiced Phillipians 4:8: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things.” Whenever someone was sick she would tell him/her to think pretty happy thoughts. Think about beautiful mountains, streams, valleys, flowers, trees, etc. One of Ma’s many sayings was “Whatever you think, you will be.” So her first objective when visiting the sick was to raise their spirits, usually by stories and songs. Today even doctors acknowledge the strong connection between how people think and how people feel -- but Ma knew first!

Pa tended to look toward the bleaker side of things. He would frequently worry about things which might have happened -- which is a strange contrast to his attitude when he first met Ma. His worrisome attitude carried over to Goldie quite a bit. He was always telling her “Don’t do this,” and “Don’t do that,” for fear she would hurt herself. Goldie believed everything he told her, and so she became very afraid she would hurt herself too. One time when Goldie was chewing on a haw (a haw is a sweet berry, hard like a nut, and about the size of a grape), Pa told her if she got it caught in her throat it would kill her. Although it is probably possible for her to choke to death on a haw, Pa was being slightly melodramatic. Goldie believed him entirely. One day while she was walking by herself, dying for something sweet (as she still often does today), she started chewing on a haw. Sure enough, she got it caught in her throat and started choking. Goldie was able to dislodge it, but still thought she was going to die because Pa told her she would.
She went running home at top speed and informed Ma she was dying. Of course, Ma was juggling several jobs at once -- as always -- and did not pay Goldie any attention. So Goldie just lay down on the floor and waited to die. After lying there a while, she finally realized she was not going to die after all and returned to what she had been doing.

Pa's worries always had a great effect on Goldie. His warnings to be careful produced a fear in her of just about everything. And many of her fears became realized because, as Ma preached, you are what you think. Every day Sim (Goldie's brother) and Goldie had to cross a creek by means of a footlog to get to school. Every time they came to the footlog Goldie would say, "I'm not going to fall in this time." And, sure enough, she would usually fall in the creek. In remembering this, Sim still wondered at how she could fall in as often as she did -- it was because falling in was on her mind.

Although her surface fears were always around her, she had the inner strength to do whatever had to be done. Early in life she took on chores of helping Pa on the farm, helping Ma in the house, and tending to the young children. She had to do a great deal of work which was traditionally considered "man's work" and required physical strength. Pa needed a boy on the farm, not a girl. Goldie also had Pa's love of horses and was the best horse person in that area. She loved racing the horses and challenging anyone who would answer her call. But Pa did not want the horses getting overly hot so she would have to let them cool down before taking them back home.

Goldie also had the inner strength to jump to the protection of those she loved. When she and Sim would go to the country dances, Sim would sometimes get into a fight with another boy. Goldie would immediately rush over, give the boy a good smack, and make sure he left her brother alone.
Pa, Goldie, and Sim loved to dance. Pa was extremely graceful, and also played the fiddle at many country dances. Goldie was an especially good jig dancer, and also had a talent for calling out square dances. I think Sim mostly enjoyed the excitement of it all. Sometimes he and Goldie would sneak out of the house after Ma and Pa were asleep to go to a dance somewhere. Ma never approved of dancing or the rowdy behavior associated with it.

Sim and Goldie were very close when growing up. Since Johnnie was between them in age, one would suspect that she would be included with this pair. But Johnnie refused to participate in the activities Sim and Goldie enjoyed, such as dances. Johnnie would never sneak out of the house with them, nor did she have a taste for chewing tobacco. Sometimes Sim would hide under Ma and Pa's bed until they went to sleep and then sneak out and grab a pinch of Pa's snuff to share with Goldie. About once a month they would take one of Ma's chickens to town and sell it without her knowledge. (The children took care of the chickens, so Ma never really knew how many she had.) They used the money to buy chewing tobacco.

Ma and Pa were sharecroppers. They worked land belonging to someone else and in return received a portion of the crops which were produced. Because they did not actually own the farms they worked on, they moved frequently. Pa would decide that another piece of land would produce better crops, and the family would pick up and move to the new farm. Most of the time they were about midway between Poughkeepsie and Evening Shade. For a while they lived in Evening Shade, and then moved to Walnut Ridge, Arkansas. When they did finally move to Missouri, they actually bought their own farm.

This frequent moving placed a great strain on the children's education. Every time they moved they were in a new school district. The children had to make new
friends, adjust to the new teacher, and try to catch up to where their classmates were. Sometimes the children would have to attend a town school instead of a country school. The children at the town school always dressed and talked much differently than the farmers. Borden remembers being embarrassed about his clothing and because he could not afford to buy a pencil.

Education was also interrupted by farm life in general. If it was time to plant, hoe, or harvest, the children had to stay home from school to help their parents. When they got to return to school they had to catch up on what they missed. About the time they caught up, they would be kept home from school again. Although their education was constantly interrupted, they are all well-spoken, and have good English and communication skills.

The children were necessary on the farm because of the primitive methods of farming they used. They farmed forty acres of cotton, fifty to sixty acres of corn, and twenty acres of wheat or rye with a team of mules and a turning plow (which plowed one row at a time). After plowing the land, they walked over it again with a single-row planter. The front of the planter dug a row and the back dropped seeds into the row. After the planting was finished, the mules went over the fields again pulling a five foot log, called a drag. This flattened the ground and covered the seed. Therefore, someone had to walk over every single acre a minimum of three times just to plant the seed.

A few weeks later, the crops would begin to appear, along with grass and weeds because they had no chemicals to prevent their growth. The acres had to be hoed by hand. Once harvest had come, the wagon would be pulled down the rows of the corn field. The children and farm hands would break off the corn and throw it in the wagon. When the wagon was full, it was pulled over to the barn. There was an opening in the barn about five feet off the ground through which the
corn had to be shoveled. So one of the boys would get on the wagon and start shoveling the corn through the opening, which was back-breaking work.

Harvesting the cotton was an equally difficult task. Ma, Pa, and the children walked up and down the rows of cotton, picking the cotton out of the boll and throwing it into the bag over their shoulder. Once the bag reached seventy-five to eighty pounds, it was drug back to the wagon and weighed. The bag was dumped into the wagon and then filled again. Of course, not all of the cotton blossomed at the same time, so the rows had to be checked three or four times each harvest.

Pa and each of the children would have their own row to pick at, but Ma would float between their rows. If one of the children was getting behind, she would pick in that child's row for a while. Grace remembers being so thankful and glad when she got to a place where Ma had picked for her and she could skip ahead. Ma did a great deal of work with the crops, especially considering all the other chores she had to accomplish -- cooking, laundry, ironing, taking care of the young children. A week after Borden was born she was back in the fields. She set him down at the end of a row and picked her cotton. What an amazing woman!

Around November or December, when it was getting cold, it was time to slaughter the pigs which had fattened to 250-300 pounds. The hog was shot, and then hung by his hind legs and gutted. A large iron pot with a fire underneath it contained boiling water. Two men would lower the pig into the water and bring it back out many times to loosen the hair on the pig. The hog was then laid out on a table and all the hair was shaved off his body -- a very tedious task. The hog was quartered and covered in salt and sugar to saturate the meat and keep it from spoiling. The meat was then placed in the smokehouse for the winter.

Doctors were almost never seen -- home remedies were used frequently. One time a doctor was sent for, but he was not much help. An epidemic of typhoid fever
had plagued the area and infected Ada and Enid. The doctor told them not to eat or drink anything at all. Of course, Enid ignored him and ate whenever she wanted -- she was never very good at taking orders from anyone. Ada, however, did exactly as she was told. At age twelve, Ada died from the typhoid fever. Whether it was because she followed the doctor's orders or not, we will never know; but Enid recovered to live a long life.

When Goldie was about fifteen years old, Pa traded a fine team of mules, a wagon, and a load of corn for a motel in Evening Shade. Goldie was given the responsibility of running it, so she moved to Evening Shade while the rest of the family remained on the farm. She missed her mother and father terribly. The snow was so deep that winter that they could not come to see her often. She was frightened of staying alone at night, but persevered almost a year. Pa decided he was losing money and sold the motel. Goldie says there was just too much work for one person to run the place.
Love and Marriage
Goldie was a very beautiful girl. She had Pa's blue eyes and pretty skin, and also his big nose and ears. She was medium-built, had a good shape, and was as strong as a man. Goldie had dark hair, and those blue eyes always had a twinkle. She was a "people" person and, according to Sim, had many boyfriends. To this day she still talks about and dreams of one in particular -- Brian Lane. Goldie refers to Brian as "the only man I ever loved," but this was to remain an unrealized love. Brian loved her too, but Pa did not think it was proper for them to marry because they were second cousins and discouraged Brian from calling on Goldie.

Pa was more inclined toward a young man named Tolar Thompson, primarily because Tolar's father was believed to have money. Pa was very pleased when Tolar began calling on Goldie and eventually, according to her, made her marry him. Pa, of course, never threatened her into marriage, he only strongly suggested it. Goldie never dreamed of talking back to her father or disobeying him, as children might today. So while she longed to run away with Brian, she married Tolar instead.

Tolar was very good to Goldie, but she never saw the money for which her father insisted she marry. As a matter of fact, while growing up Goldie had sometimes passed by a particular house which was extremely run down, small, and dirty. She would think to herself how glad she was she did not live there. After marrying Tolar, that was the very house to which they moved.

Goldie soon began having children: Mac Rae, John Kay, Jacqueline, Mart, Billie
Lou, and Barbara. John Kay has provided a wonderful description of the house he grew up in; whether this is the same house as above, I do not know. This house was half-way between Poughkeepsie and Evening Shade. It had four rooms and was built of rough sawmill lumber. The walls were made of vertical boards twelve inches wide with thin boards covering the cracks between the boards. There was no insulation and light shone through the cracks. A wood heating stove and a wood cooking stove kept them warm. Newspaper covered the walls on the inside, which was a fairly common practice. A tin roof covered the house and front porch. The house was on a hillside so the front porch was about ten feet high off the ground. In the front yard sat a large oak tree with a swing hanging from one of the limbs.

The house was about a mile and a half from the main dirt road and was surrounded by large oak timber. At the bottom of the hillside was a wide stream bed and a spring of water. Nearby was a smokehouse where meat was smoked and cured, and also a blacksmith's shop. About two hundred feet away from the house was the barn lot where mules were kept and used. The farm, which was about three hundred acres in all, was given to them by Tolar's father. This farm and a gift of a 1933 Ford were all Goldie ever saw of Tolar's father's money (of course, it was the first car in the county).

Because most of the farm was in the woods and hilly, it was not well suited to crop farming. They grew hay and corn on the flat land along the river, and a few acres of cotton on the upper hill land. They raised cattle and hogs, and had mules and sometimes a horse. In wintertime they trapped for possum, skunk, coon, and occasionally a fox or mink.

Tolar made moonshine whiskey and sold it to whoever would buy -- one of his customers being the county sheriff, of course. When Goldie would hear a car
coming through the woods, she would move the half gallon fruit jars of white lightning off the front porch and hide them. One day when Goldie was cleaning out the kegs -- because she was forever cleaning something -- she wanted to get rid of the mash which had settled to the bottom. Knowing the animals needed to be fed, she decided to put the mash in the trough to give the pigs and chickens a cheap meal. After a while, she noticed a rooster crowing and crowing -- which was odd in the afternoon. Goldie looked around and realized she had gotten the roosters, chickens, and pigs drunk on that mash. The chickens were trying to roost in the trees, but every time they flew up they would hit a branch and fall back down because their coordination was gone. One of the pigs tried to climb the steep slope up to the house, and once it almost got to the top it rolled back down, squealing all the way. This pig had seven piglets who were also trying to climb the slope. They would roll down the hill and squeal just as loud as they could. Goldie says she nearly laughed herself to death.

Tolar liked to party, dance, and play baseball, and Goldie was always watching her small children. When Goldie and Tolar would go to square dances and country dances, Tolar would be able to go and dance and have fun. Goldie was always stuck with the children and did not get to enjoy herself. This led to a few arguments on the way home.

Sometimes the family would go off to a candy breaking. At a candy breaking, people took sticks of candy, broke them into different lengths, and put them into a large dishpan covered with a cloth. Couples then tried to draw out pieces that matched. Any successful couple got to take a stroll outside.

Goldie tried to get the children to church every Sunday. Everyone would put on their best clothing and take the five mile wagon ride to church. Jacqueline says going to church was a great deal of fun because they got to worship and see all
the neighbors. She describes service as being simple, without a preacher. A song, prayer, and class were led by one of the men, followed by a scripture reading and the Lord’s Supper. The people would then form a line and lay their contribution on the table. Service was closed with another song and prayer.

In 1929 Billie Lou got sick with chicken pox and whooping cough. Whooping cough and pneumonia stole the lives of many children that year, and Billie Lou was one of them. She was not quite two years old with beautiful blue eyes and blonde hair. To this day Goldie treasures the only picture she has of Billie Lou.

About a year after Goldie and Tolar got married, Ma and Pa moved to Missouri near Sikeston. They bought a large cotton farm. They also farmed other crops and raised enough animals to make themselves very self-sufficient. There were very few items they actually had to purchase, such as sugar, coffee, and flour. Everything else was either grown or made from what was on hand. When the Great Depression hit, Ma and Pa did not feel the severe effects other people did simply because of their self-sufficiency.

For Tolar and Goldie, however, the Depression made life almost unbearable. The hill country they lived on was not conducive to growing as many crops as Ma and Pa could grow. Tolar and Goldie relied on the money they could get from selling the animals they raised. But during the Depression, no one was buying. They decided to move to Missouri, work on Ma and Pa’s cotton farm, and live in a small tenant house.

About a year after the move, Tolar’s appendix burst and gangrene set in. Goldie took care of him as best she could, but absolutely nothing could be done to help him. He died an agonizing death. Pa refused to allow Goldie and her five children to stay with him after Tolar’s death. He was still convinced that Tolar’s father had money, and thought Goldie would be better taken care of in Arkansas.

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The depression kept life extremely hard. Goldie still had five children, but no husband. Her oldest son Mac Rae (who was about twelve years old) helped her out a great deal. She loved and appreciated him so much for trying to step forward and fill in his father's shoes. Mac Rae and Goldie worked long hard hours side by side to keep the farm going and food on the table. John Kay says that even in these rough times Goldie "made sure we all had food on the table even if she had to go out and get it." At times she would have to go outside, find and shoot something (squirrel, rabbit, anything), skin it, and cook it for dinner. This state of worry, never knowing where the next meal is coming from, had to have an enormous effect on Goldie. Even today she will sometimes ask my father or brother as they enter the house, "Did you get a rabbit?"

To keep the milk and butter cold, Goldie kept them in a box at the spring. At these times, people did not keep their animals fenced up. Her neighbor had a sow which would frequently knock over the box trying to drink the milk herself. This was extremely upsetting considering this milk and butter was practically all they had to eat. One day after this sow knocked over the box, Goldie got so mad she ran and got her gun. She only had intentions of scaring the sow, but actually shot it. It walked right up to her front porch and died. Goldie did not have the money to pay for the sow, so she had Mac Rae and John Kay drag it off and hide it. Her neighbor never found out what happened to his sow. To this day Goldie feels very guilty because that sow had nine little pigs who would never again see their mother.

In addition to her daily trials of life, Tolar's father developed cancer of the ear. None of his children or other relatives would take care of him, so Goldie did. She cleaned and dressed his ear, fixed his meals and fed him, and kept his whole body clean. As the cancer ate his ear and the area around his ear, the smell became so

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bad that those in the kitchen could barely stand to eat. No matter how bad the smell or how deformed his face became, she never wavered in caring for him. He told her how much he appreciated her care and told her where he had buried his money. He said she could have it all because she was the only one watching over him. Goldie replied, "I'm not doing this for your money, I'm doing this because I love you." Once Tolar's father passed away, his children dug up his money and never offered Goldie a cent. Goldie's selflessness is something not seen very often anymore.

Once Goldie had returned to Arkansas after Tolar's death, a man named Luke Massey began helping her in every way possible. He had dated Goldie even before she fell in love with Brian Lane. Even though she married someone else, Luke never married simply because he loved Goldie. He would come to her home and help with the children and around the house. He basically made himself a necessity for Goldie. After a couple of years Luke and Goldie were married, and eventually had two little girls -- Mary Wanda and Trena Kay.
The Move to Anderson
The first one of the family to move to Anderson, Indiana was Johnnie. She reported to the rest of the family that the job opportunities were better in Anderson, so soon Sim and his wife Marie, Borden, Grace, Ma and Pa, Enid and her husband R. B., and Anna followed. Grace and her husband Floyd and Ma and Pa all lived together, so Terry, LaDonna, and Lorna (Grace's children) were to Ma and Pa as their own children. Carole (Goldie's granddaughter) states: "I never knew if Ma and Pa were taking care of Grace and Floyd's kids while they worked or if Grace was taking care of her parents." LaDonna remembers the way Ma and Pa enjoyed fussing at each other. It was never an argument, just bantering for fun. Their deep love for one another never wavered. If Ma would fall asleep on the couch, Pa would cover her up and say, "That's the best woman that ever lived."

During some of the rougher times of the Depression, John Kay came to Anderson to stay with Borden and his wife Mary Lee. Borden and Mary Lee had seen how difficult it was for Goldie without Tolar, and agreed to alleviate some of the burden.

After Goldie married Luke and life became easier, Mac Rae came to Anderson for a while. He fried hamburgers at Hills Snappy Service. He had personality, charm, and good looks. But he also had a bad valve in his heart. After Mac Rae had been in Anderson a couple of years, the doctor informed him of his condition and told him that if he had a home he should go to it. Mac Rae went back to Arkansas and Goldie cared for him the last nine months of his life. During the winter months it was so cold that she had to break the ice in his glass before she
could give him a drink of water at night. By the time Mac Rae finally died of congenital heart failure, his feet had turned black and smelled, Goldie had to turn him with a sheet, and she slept with him every night. Mac Rae's girlfriend, Mary Ellen, followed him to Arkansas and helped Goldie in any way she could -- Goldie still had three other children at home between the ages of four and thirteen.

Mac Rae's death was an enormous emotional blow to Goldie. He meant so much to her, and was so young when he died. This loss made her long to be with her family even more than she already did. So in 1943 or 1944 she and Luke moved to Anderson, where the rest of the family had congregated.

They rented one side of a duplex on Walnut Street with had a living room, one bedroom, a kitchen, and no doors. The bathroom was shared with the people renting the other half of the duplex. The bathroom had neither shower nor bath, so all bathing was done in a large washtub in the kitchen. Eventually a shower did get installed in the bathroom -- which was cause for much rejoicing. Luke got a job at Anaconda, a wire company which did a great deal of work for Delco-Remy. While Goldie was expecting Trena, she worked in the kitchen at a restaurant called the Alibi (Mary was in school at the time). The Alibi was partly owned by Anna's husband.

In 1944 Jacqueline's (Goldie's daughter) husband Floyd Norris was sent to Germany to fight in World War II. Jacqueline and her two daughters, Carole Ann and Barbara Jean, moved in with Goldie and Luke. Although there were three extra bodies living in the small space they had, Barbara Jean says she never heard any complaints from Goldie or Luke. And even in these tough times, Goldie never hesitated to invite a homeless person in for a meal. At this time Mart was in the Navy and on a ship in the Pacific. John Kay was in the Coast Guard.

Goldie finally had her last child, Trena, in 1946. This was the first child Goldie
ever had in a hospital. After this experience, she told her doctor that if she had ten more children, she would have them at home. She hated having someone telling her what to do -- she had already given birth to seven babies, she knew how it was done.

Mary fell in love with her baby sister immediately. The occupants of Luke and Goldie’s duplex were now themselves, Mart, Barbara, Mary, John Kay and his wife Lou, and Trena. Floyd, Jacqueline, Carole Ann, and Barbara Jean lived down the street. Ma, Pa, and Grace’s family lived three blocks away. And Tom (Goldie’s brother) and his wife Gladys moved around a lot, but were always nearby. Family came and went freely -- they mostly came for Goldie’s cooking. Goldie still cooked all her southern meals. She made biscuits and gravy, homemade rolls, cornbread, all kinds of greens, pork chops, sausage, macaroni and cheese, lots of fried chicken, chicken and dumplings, chicken dressing, and the list continues. Sometimes Grace would come by just to run in the house, grab a biscuit off the stove, and run back to work. Everyone was at Goldie’s small house so often that Trena remembers wondering “Why don’t all these people go home?”

Floyd Norris (Jacqueline’s husband) installed Goldie and Luke’s first television -- this was a major event. All of the family members crowded into the little three room home to watch the television shows.

After supper and before television, Goldie would play games with the children. They played “William, William Trembletoe” and “What’s down the Little Round Hole?” Usually it was Goldie, Barbara Jean, Carole Ann, Mary, and Trena who played. When playing “William, William Trembletoe,” she would add to the last line “The first one to show their teeth gets on my back and I’ll shake you till you spit.” Everyone would try not to laugh, but someone would always break down (usually Carole or Trena).
Luke and Goldie moved to a house on George Street. Mary thought she was in paradise because she had her own room with a door. They always kept a garden in the back yard for fresh vegetables. Goldie cooked and cleaned nonstop, and never asked Mary or Trena to help. She said they should enjoy their youth because they would have the rest of their lives to cook and clean.

Goldie loved Anderson, her life was so much easier. Not only did she have electricity and fewer children, but she was also in walking distance of everything. Goldie also loved to ride the bus, but she would never wait on it. If it was not in sight when she wanted it, she just walked. Sometimes while she walked a car would slow down and offer her a ride to town and she would accept. Before leaving town Goldie would always buy a little sack of candy for $.10 at McCrorys (she would claim she bought it for Trena).

One day Trena saw Goldie walking home from town with a couple of housecoats over her arm with the hangers still in them. Trena thought that was odd and made a remark to Goldie on her way in the door. Goldie's eyes bugged out when she saw them and she said she was looking at them when the bus pulled up. She ran out to catch the bus and forgot all about the dresses. So Goldie went right back to town to return the dresses -- she was very embarrassed.

No matter what was happening in Goldie's life, she was always helping out someone else. She did everything from feeding the homeless to visiting the sick and elderly to clean and cook for them to lending a sympathetic ear. Trena remembers a period of weeks when a lady from across the street would come over every single day to talk about her problems. The lady would stay from the time Trena went to school in the morning till the time she got home. She was apparently going through a divorce at the time. When Trena asked Goldie if this was tiring, Goldie simply replied, “She needs somebody.”
Although Goldie's life in Anderson was much easier than it had been in Arkansas, she still canned, jellied, jammed, and preserved anything in season. The fruit and vegetables came from their garden, friends and relatives' gardens, and friendly owners of fruit trees -- who always received a batch of the jelly.

Mary and Donna went to Florida College, and the summer of 1956 they were followed home by two adoring men, Vic McCormick and Abe Guillermo. Donna and Vic were married that fall, and Abe became the preacher for the congregation just beginning at Hillcrest. He lived with Ma and Pa for a while; and with Goldie for a while. Goldie loves him as a son to this day.
Old Age
Almost everyone in the Higginbotham clan has grown to an age past what statistics tell us they should. Is longevity in their genes? Probably. But even more importantly, these people are strong. They are strong both physically and emotionally. After living through all the difficult times they have had, they have the kind of endurance most people today do not have. At age 91, Goldie’s arms are stronger than mine at age 20. Not because she is active now, but because she spent many years hoeing crops, picking cotton, carrying children, and so on. This is true of all the Higginbothams. They look younger than people who are 20 years younger than themselves. The last time Ma walked from Grace’s house to Goldie’s, which was about two and a half miles, she was eighty-five years old. She said she would have been there sooner, but she was with Lorna and Lorna needed to stop and rest.

Ma and Pa remained with Grace through their old age. Grace took excellent care of them, always keeping them cleaned and groomed. Grace distinctly remembers the day Pa died -- down to what she made him for breakfast. As she left for work on June 16, 1964, she could tell he wanted her to stay with him, but that was always true. Donna, Lorna (Grace’s daughters), and Goldie were all going to stay with Pa that day. He had a heart attack that morning and Grace rushed back home. She followed the ambulance to the hospital, but he died before she got to see him again. Grace then went back home to tell Ma. Ma only lost control for a few minutes by sobbing on the couch. Then she picked herself up, wiped her face and held back the tears. Grace would sometimes catch her
pacing in their bedroom wringing her hands “with a far away look”. Trena remembers Ma once saying, “He always said we’d die together, but he didn’t wait on me.”

Grace loved her mother dearly and was deeply hurt when Ma’s memory started fading. Grace says she still always remembered one scripture: “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest, take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Although Ma was probably tired of living, she was still thinking of others first. Grace relates this about Ma:

“I would ask her often ‘Mama, are you weary, wouldn’t you like to go home to heaven?’ ‘No,’ she would say. Then I’d ask, ‘Why?’ She would reply, ‘My children need me.’ I would look at the dear stooped shriveled body, just like a baby almost, and wonder, ‘How can she think that?’ But do you know, she was right. We did and do need her in a lot of ways. There was strength in her presence. She was a hitching post, a security, a bonding glue that kept the family intact.”

Ma finally reached the point where she did not know who or where she was. She had spells with heart failure, and finally became too much for Grace to handle at home. Grace resorted to putting Ma in a nursing home, but stopped by to see her on her way to work every morning and after work until Ma went to sleep. During the day Enid and Sim stayed with Ma a good deal. A month later, on April 17, 1978, at age 100, Ma died.

Once Luke died, on April 17, 1977, Goldie moved in with Trena because she did not want to be alone. After all the over-crowded, small places Goldie lived in, can you imagine her not wanting to finally be alone? Strange as it may seem, it is true. As a matter of fact, she never wanted to be left alone for an hour. So
between my parents (Trena and Carl), my brother (Shane), myself, and wonderful Grace, we have juggled our schedules in such a way that she is almost never alone. And I cannot think of a better reason to juggle a schedule.
What's the point?
I mentioned in passing earlier that I have learned many lessons directly from Goldie, and many from just being in her presence. After researching their lives, I have also learned many lessons from Ma and Pa. My sincere hope is that you have too. Before closing, I would like to share a few of mine.

The most important lesson I learned was both from Goldie and Trena. Love is an action, not just a feeling. The good works Goldie did for people are countless. She did not look for the glorious or easy tasks, but rather she met people's needs when the tasks were disgusting and difficult. Goldie cared for Tolar's father when his face was deformed and he smelled awful. She cared for Tolar, Mac Rae, Billie Lou, and anyone else who needed her. Goldie always put everyone else before herself. She was forever cooking, cleaning, caring for children, or for others. Her love runs strong and deep.

Trena obviously learned this same lesson from Goldie. Trena has cared for Goldie for fifteen years thus far. Because Goldie never wants to be left alone and never wants to leave home, Trena is practically chained to the house. She only leaves for very short periods of time. Trena always makes me think of the verse: "Greater love has no man than this: that he lays down his life for his friends." Trena has laid down her life for her mother. Trena never puts her own desires ahead of anyone's. Thank you, Mom, for being such a great example.

Another lesson I have learned from being in Goldie's presence is to look at the long-term effects of what I say and do instead of the immediate effects. Our society today places a great emphasis on immediate gratification. The major problem with
this is that most things which are immediately gratifying are destructive in the long run. Perhaps most people think they will not live long enough to see the destructive effects of what they have done take place. However, with Goldie around I was always aware that I may very well live to see the consequences of my actions.

Being in Goldie's presence and learning of her life has also made me very appreciative of what I have. I am appreciative of my youth and of the many advantages of life I have enjoyed, such as electricity, home appliances, indoor plumbing, etc. I am also very appreciative of being allowed to marry the man I love. Goldie was not afforded that opportunity, and she is still regretting it.

From Goldie I have also learned to have a deep respect for the elderly. It is truly incredible what these people have lived through and the wisdom they possess. The elderly deserve our love, compassion, respect, and attention, but too often they are pushed aside as "slow" or "useless".

Many other lessons I have learned and still continue to learn. Please remember these great individuals, and pass their memory along to others. Learn from their experiences, enjoy their happy times, and mourn at their losses. God bless you.
Ma's Favorite
Poems
and
Sayings
Ma's Sayings

Be a peach out of reach.

What is worth doing is worth doing well.

Don't let work work you. You work work.

Pretty is as pretty does.

"I can't" never did anything, "I can" does wonders.

Where there's sweet, there's always bitter -- accept the good with the bad.

If you can't say something good, don't say anything at all.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.

Beauty is only skin deep.

Don't tie so tight with your tongue what you can't loosen with your teeth.

You are what you think.
I Used to Shoot Birds in My Boyhood

I used to shoot birds in my boyhood,
Blackbirds, robins, and wrens.
I hunted them upon the hillsides,
And hunted them down the glens.
I never thought it was sinful,
And I did it only for fun.
And I had rare sport in the forest
With the poor little birds and my gun.
One day in early springtime
I spied a brown thresh on a tree,
It was merrily singing and swaying
As happy as a bird could be.
I raised my gun in a twinkle
And fired -- my aim was too true.
For a moment the little thing fluttered
And then off the the bushes it flew.
I followed it quickly and softly,
And there to my sorrow I found
Close by a nest full of young ones
And the poor mother dead on the ground.
Little birds for food they were calling,
But now they could never be fed.
For the mother who had cared for them and loved them
Was lying there bleeding and dead.
Well I picked up the bird in my anguish,
And I stroked the poor motherly thing.
Never again in its lifetime
Would it fly through the air on swift wing.
And I made a firm vow that moment
While my heart with such anguish was stirred
That never again in my lifetime
Would I kill a poor innocent bird.

Us

There's so much bad in the best of us,
And so much good in the worst of us,
It doesn't behove any of us
To talk about the rest of us.
The Haughty Chicken

Once there was a pretty chicken but his friends were very few --
For he thought there was nothing in the world but what he knew.
He was always in the barnyard and had a very forward way --
Telling the hens, geese, and turkeys what they ought to do and say.
"I wish my Old Aunt Darkey," he began to her one day --
"Wouldn't set all summer on her nest upon the hay.
Why don't you come out to the meadow where grass with seed is filled?"
"If I should," said Old Aunt Darkey, "then my eggs would all get chilled."
"No they won't," replied the chicken, "no matter if they do,
Eggs are really good for nothing. What's an egg to me or you?"
"What's an egg!" said Old Miss Darkey, "could it be that you don't know --
That you yourself was in an eggshell just a few short months ago.
And if kind wings hadn't warmed you, you wouldn't be out today telling hens,
geese, and turkeys what they ought to do and say."
To be very wise and show it is a pleasant thing no doubt --
But when young folks speak to old folks, they should know what they're about.

Show Love by Doing

"I love you, Mother," said little John,
Then forgetting his chores. His cap went on,
Then off he went to the garden swing
Leaving his mother the wood to bring.

"I love you, Mother," said little Nell,
"I love you better than tongue can tell."
Then she teased and pouted the live long day,
Till mother was glad when she went to play.

"I love you, Mother," said little Fan,
"I'll help you all I can."
How glad I am that school doesn't keep
So she rocked the baby till it fell asleep.

Then stopping softly she took the broom
And swept the floor and dusted the room.
Busy and happy all day was she,
Helpful and cheerful as a child should be.

"I love you, Mother," again they said.
Three little children going to bed.
How do you think that mother guessed
Which one of them really loved her best?
Two Little Children (song)

Two little children, a boy and a girl
Sat down by the old church door.
The little boy's coat was all tattered and torn
And a tear stood in each little eye.
"Why don't you go home to your mother," I said,
And this was the maiden's reply:
"Our Mother got sick, angels took her away.
She said to our home fair and bright.
She said she'd come back to her darlings some day.
Perhaps she's coming tonight.
Perhaps there's no room up in Heaven, she said,
For two little darlings to keep."
Then laying her hand on little Jimmy's pale face
She kissed him and both fell asleep.
Now the Saxon came early
To ring the church bell
And found them beneath the snow white.
The angels made room up in Heaven, they said,
For two darlings with mama that night.

Little Shadow (Ma's nickname for Grace)

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head,
And I can see him jump before me when I jump into my bed.
The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow,
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow.
For he sometimes shoots up taller than an Indian rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little there's none of him at all.
He hasn't got a notion how children ought to play,
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.
He stays so close beside me -- a coward you can see.
I'd think shame to stick to Nursie as that shadow sticks to me.
One morning bright and early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup.
But my lazy little shadow like an arrant sleepy head
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.
Fall

Come little leaves said the wind one day,
Come over the meadow with me and play.
Put on your dresses of red and gold,
For summer is gone and the days grow cold.
Soon as the leaves heard the wind's loud call,
Down they came tumbling one and all.
Over the brown fields they danced and flew
Singing the sweet little songs they knew.
Cricket, good bye, we've been friends so long.
Little brook, sing us your farewell song.
Ah, yes! You'll miss us we right well know
But winter has called us and we must go.
So dancing and whirling the little leaves went;
Winter had called them and they were content.
Soon fast asleep in their earthy bed
And the snow layed a coverlet over their heads.

Winter

Winter has its rich rewards. See the white flakes fall
As the snow piles blanket soft near the garden wall.
Here is silence deep as thought. Here is God's own gift:
Strength and beauty in the depth of a graceful drift.
Soon the winter twilight falls, shadows violet-gray
Reach like bands across the snow, and another day
Slips into the night. The moon rocks itself to sleep
High in a star-hung sky. Again, silence pure and deep
Covers all. My heart is still as the snow wrapped land,
Winter holds me in its spell and my God is near at hand.

Spring

I must hie to the hills, a soft breeze is blowing,
The call comes tender, yet urgent and strong.
There soft clouds are floating
Midst young tender green leaves
And the daffodils are calling, "Oh! Come along, come!"
Wind

Wind! I saw you toss the kites on high
And blow the birds about the sky,
And all around I heard you pass,
Like ladies’ skirts upon the grass.
Oh, wind a blowing all day long.
Oh, wind that sings so loud a song.

North Wind

Whooo, whooo, hear the North wind blow.
Whooo, whooo, hear it sound so low.
If the North wind did not blow this way,
We would have no flowers in the month of May.

Sunset

Flickering fireflies over hill and plain,
Cows lowing in the lane.
Bright red, yellow, golden skies.
That is how the daylight dies.