

MILDRED / MICKEY

PART I: Early Childhood

Chapter 1 Early Childhood Memories

MILDRED IRENE FOWLER was born on Tuesday, March 30, 1926 at 1:00 a.m., the daughter of Clarence Albert and Maude Carmen Hill Fowler; in Colfax Township, Harrison County, Blythedale, Missouri. Dr. Winningham delivered Mildred. According to the stories told to Mildred by her mother, on the night she was born her Dad rode on horseback to the highway, US 69, 3 miles to the west, in a snow storm; but the doctor was in Andover, 3 miles to the north, delivering another baby, Jean Carpenter, at 11:30 p.m. Clarence, with the doctor, got there just in time to deliver Mildred. Clarence's oldest sister, Leona Currie, helped Maude after the birth of Mildred, according to the "Memories of Maude Fowler". Clarence's mother was there also, and then Clarence's youngest sister's daughter, Ruth Hohn Swigert, came to help.

Mildred's brothers were: Randall Albert born June 24, 1916, Francis Clair born August 6, 1918 and died December 28, 1920, Marvin Lee born March 22, 1920 and Donald Raymond born September 30, 1924. Mildred's sister was Virginia Ruth, born November 3, 1921. Later Nida Kathleen was born July 23, 1929 and Carol Louise was born February 16, 1933.

This story is written by Mildred and the rest will be written in the first person.

I, Mildred, will write about my childhood in Part I. Some of it may not be exactly as it happened but I will do my best to tell what I remember or think I remember!

Clarence Albert Fowler, my father, was born september 29, 1892, in Colfax Township, Harrison County, Missouri. He had black hair and blue eyes. He was tall, thin and good looking. He weighed, around 170# and was about 6' 1" tall.

My mother, Maude Carmen Hill, was born May 20, 1895, in Clay Township, Harrison County, Missouri. She was tall, about 5'11" and weighed around 225#. She had red hair and green eyes. Sometimes when I look in the mirror at my eyes, I see Mom's eyes.

Mom wore her hair combed back and held in place with side combs. Her hair was cut short in the back. I am often told I look like my mother. I am 5' 9" and weigh around 160#.

Dad and Mom ran away and got married on October 20, 1915 in Bethany, Missouri. Mom tells about this in the story of her life.

Dad and Mom, Clarence and Maude Fowler, bought a 116-acre farm from Dad's Uncle, Elwood Fowler, and moved there in April 1925. I was born in March the following year. Mom said when I was a baby she had to watch Don as he would take my bottle away from me, drink the milk and then throw the bottle under the bed. He had not been weaned from the bottle long when I was born.

The farm is located 4 miles north and east of Blythedale, Missouri. Our house was a small house having a large kitchen, pantry, and a large living room. We had a big table in the kitchen with a bench along one side for us smaller kids to sit on while eating. There was one large bedroom and a small bedroom. Randall and Marvin used the small bedroom. Mom, Dad, Virginia, Kathleen and Carol slept in the large bedroom. Don and I slept on the "daveno" in the living room, with a board down the middle to keep us from fighting.

We had no modern conveniences. We had to carry water from a well in the yard. We used the chicken house for our toilet or a bucket in the kitchen. We took our weekly baths in a tub in the kitchen. We used kerosene lamps and wood stoves. We did have a washing machine with a handle that some of us kids would have to push and pull to make it agitate to wash the clothes, and a wringer that we had to turn around and around to wring the water from the clothes.

We had a large garden each year and what Dad called a Truck Patch, as we grew nearly everything we had to eat. Mom, with our help, canned vegetables and fruit all summer. We had a cellar to keep food cool. We did not have an icebox. Dad had chickens, cows, pigs and sheep. In the winter, the farmers took turns butchering a calf or a hog and would share the meat. In the summer, we ate chicken, rabbit, squirrel, or fish. Dad raised corn and alfalfa hay. Dad had corn ground into cornmeal. He raised cane and had molasses made, and he had bees for the honey. Dad used a team of horses to farm. I have the plow that he used. Often farmers called their work horses by ladies names, like Nellie, Millie, etc. That is why I have never liked to be called Millie.

We worked to have food to eat. Mom baked 7 loaves of bread every other day.

Mom made rolls for our Sunday dinner. On special occasions Mom made cinnamon rolls or donuts. It makes my mouth water to think about how good they tasted. One day her "starter" died and we had to walk over to our neighbor, Arlene, for some of her starter.

Carol and I sat next to each other at the dinner table. We shared our bread. Carol ate the inside of the bread and I ate the crusty outside.

Mom tried to make American Cheese but it just didn't turn out right. She made Cottage Cheese often, even when we were older. It was better than what you can buy.

When we were little I don't know where Dad got any money. He did sell calves, pigs and wool from the sheep. He didn't go to town very often and when he did he bought very little, mainly flour, sugar, salt, and sometimes corn candy. Don would say, "When I get big I am going to buy rooms and rooms of Pork and Beans and boughten bread. Speaking of money, we ordered shoes twice a year from Sears, Roebuck and Co. or Montgomery Ward. We ordered white shoes to wear to church during the summer and school shoes each fall. Dad would repair the soles if needed. I have the shoe last be used. Anyway, one year I picked out a pair of white sandals that cost \$2.29 but Mom said, "Now Mildred, you just pick out a pair for \$1.99". We went barefoot all summer and stubbed many a big toe!

We were very poor but we had all we wanted to eat and clothes to wear. All the families around us lived as we did so we didn't know any other way of life. We went to school and to church and had work to do each day. One of our jobs was to keep the weeds out of the garden area. Dad was proud of his straight rows of vegetables. He planted the garden with Mom's help. Mom would "boss" us kids as we worked in the garden hoeing and pulling weeds. We also picked the vegetables and helped prepare them for dinner or to can. Kathleen did not help us work in the Truck Patch. Her hands and arms would break out when she was around cucumber or melon plants.

Another job was to carry wood into the house and pick up corn cobs which we used for kindling. Virginia helped Mom cook but I had to help with the dishes. One evening I decided to let some of the dishes drain dry and I went to bed. Mom got up during the night and saw the dishes not dried and put away. She made me get up and finish the job. Needless to say I never tried that again.

Mom taught us to peel potatoes very carefully without cutting very much of the potato away with the peeling. She said her mother had made her peel the peelings once! Mom would not allow us to sweep just the middle of the floor where it was dirty.

We had to sweep in the corners of the room and under the furniture. Virginia did most of the cleaning and dusting when we were small.

The flies were terrible everywhere. We had screens at the windows and doors, several houses didn't. Mom and us kids would start in one room and wave tea towels in the air and chase the flies out the door. At night Dad would kill flies, after we all went to bed. He would leave a lamp burning on a table, then flies would land on the ceiling and Dad would swat them.

Dad only milked a few cows when we were little children so we did not need to help him. We either drank all the milk or fed it to the pigs. We churned butter by putting thick cream in a 1/2 gallon jar and shaking it until it turned to butter. We didn't help Dad milk but we did go out and call the cows each evening. If they did not come when we called, we had to walk out to the pasture and herd them back to the barn. One day I went after the cows alone and I saw a blue racer snake. It frightened me and I started running home and the blue racer ran after me. When I got home and told Mom, she explained, the snake was afraid of me too and that I only thought it was chasing me. She said it was really trying to get away from me too.

In the summer we had to walk up in the "north 80" and pump water for the cows to drink. It was a shallow well and we'd pump it empty and then would wait for the well to refill and then we'd pump it empty again. We'd play in the ditch nearby that had water in it and a water falls of about 12". Sometimes to kill time we would watch the stink bugs. They are interesting to watch, about like ants, if you can stand the smell of cow piles! One day when we were up in the North 80 we thought a calf was missing. There was a second well not far from the well we used, only this one had no pump; it had boards across the opening. We decided the calf had fallen in the well and drowned, as the boards had been knocked away. We found a piece of barbed wire and decided to stick it down into the well to see if we could touch the calf. The wire wasn't long enough to reach the bottom so we decided to form a human chain down into the well. I was the bottom of that chain. There I was hanging down in the well, twisting the wire around and around trying to snag some hair off a drowned calf in the bottom of the well. I don't know if this is a true story or not or if it's a figment of my imagination.

We had two ponds on the farm. One was only a pig pond, but we could play in the other pond. It had mud about to our knees and water to our shoulders so we couldn't drown in the water but might get our heads stuck in the mud! It was great fun in the winter to skate on the pond. We had skates that clamped on our shoes and we spent more time clamping them on than we did skating.

On some "not so cold days" the ice would be like elastic and we would run back and forth on it and hope we didn't fall through. Marvin was my hero. He was, also, the instigator of most of our escapades. Marvin would always watch out for me. I was the youngest of the four of us that played together. Randall was older and Kathleen and Carol were too little. Marvin would see that I would get up a tree when the bull chased us, after we had teased it. He would tie a rope around my waist, throw the other end over a tree limb and pull me up into the tree as he climbed up himself. He would see that I didn't fall off the tree that we walked on to cross the creek; and that I didn't fall in the water when we were fishing, etc. Marvin dug a cave out of the side of a hill and we spent one night there; unfortunately a cow walked across it and the roof caved in on us. We would take eggs, potatoes, water and tin cans, build a fire out near the creek, and have our lunch.

Sometimes Marvin would climb the trees in our front yard and swing from limb to limb, thus his nickname "Tarzan". I tried to do that one time and fell to the ground. Luckily I did not break any bones; in fact we never saw a doctor, other than when we were born. Mom doctored us through all our ills. Other than on two occasions: One day we were all sitting around the kitchen table "looking" dry navy beans Dad grew and he wanted to sell. Kathleen stuck a bean up her nose and they could not get it out, as it started to swell. They had to take her to the doctor to have it removed. The other time is told under Chapter 2 about, Cisco School.

I'm away from our jobs again. We had jobs to do early in the morning and, later in the afternoon but we could go off and play during the heat of the day. We often went down to the creek which was about a mile west of our house. There we'd fish and play. One time Marvin caught a big turtle and we carried it home on a stick, the turtle biting on the middle of the stick, while we carried it holding each end. Mom made turtle soup but I don't think we ate much of it. Marvin caught a big bull snake one day at the creek. He popped its head off and mice ran out (really). When Kathleen wanted to tag along with us, we would run around and around the house until we were out of her sight and then we would dash out into the field and onto the road leading to the creek. Marvin made pigeon nests up in the barn. I climbed up the rafters to see if any eggs were in the nests, fell down the rafters and cut my legs on the nails he had nailed up to use as foot holds. I still have scars on my legs from the cuts. Marvin made me a "kitchen" in the hen house one summer. It was neat, even had running water. Of course it was only made from "junk" he could find around the farm but I thought it was the greatest thing.