

THE AUTHOR

I was born in Des Moines on a snowy Sunday morning in April in the early part of the "Roaring Twenties." I was always told that "Sunday's child is full of grace."

I often heard the poem about, "The little girl with a curl." The "curl" is visible in many of my pictures, and the poem reads as follows:

"There was a little girl, who had a little curl,
Right in the middle of her forehead.
When she was good, she was very, very good,
But when she was bad, she was horrid!"

In my early years, I had an untarnished outlook on life as the world was dewy fresh and new to me. In my heart, I am still in the springtime of my life. My name, Mary Catherine, was that of my maternal great, great-grandmother. My mother sometimes called me "Polly." In high school, I was known as Mary Kay.

My mother had dark hair, blue eyes and a sprinkling of freckles. She was small-boned and looked very French. Most people who had known my mother for a long time, endearingly called her, "Little Bess." My mother died at 62 in 1963. I thought I could never live without her. She was loving, kind and a very important link in my family that has had five-generations twice.

My ambitions were to be a dancing teacher when I was young and a school teacher when I got old. Being nurtured with love and family values were my strengths. Love then, as now, is the joy, the song and the dance of life.

My grandpa, George or "Little Papa," was an educator, genealogist and story-teller. He told me many stories of the Revolutionary War and his boyhood on the farm. He called one story, "The Legend of Chicken Hill" and my favorite was about a pig that he raised called "More if I Had It." It was because of how much it ate and how fast it grew.

My grandma, "Garnie," made sure I knew the story about the first will ever probated in Green County. It belonged to her maternal great-grandfather, Jacob Young. I am the sixth generation removed and named after his daughter. Mr. Young was killed in a sawmill accident on September 12, 1855. This unique document was hurriedly written on a shingle with his own blood as his life quickly ebbed away.

My grandmother's paternal grandfather came to Iowa in 1856. My great-grandfather, Sylvester E. Hanyan, was six years old when his family rolled across the prairie in a covered wagon from New York state and settled in Panora. His father was a millwright along the Middle Raccoon River. The Hanyan Mill was located where Lake Panorama is now. "Ves" told me many pioneer stories. He was 93 when he died in 1943.

My youth was a treasury of childhood experiences. When I was very young, life in the city was a mecca for the unusual. There were flag pole sitters, marathon dancers, city market places, "bat man" at the airport, polo games at Fort Des Moines Army Post, tiny Baby Ruth candy bars dropped by little parachutes from low flying planes and miniature golf courses everywhere. There was more!

Early in life, I unknowingly developed a deep-rooted fascination for history through engaging stories shared by my family and their friends. At eight, I received a five-year diary and began faithfully keeping a journal. However, my lime green and gold diary held many locked up secrets for just four years, as there wasn't room for more. Writing plays, casting and costuming neighborhood playmates in new roles was another passing phase.

Dancing and dramatic art lessons, plus recitals, allowed my imagination to flourish. Even an extra set of my grandmother's lace curtains once met with my scissors and the sewing machine. They became a lovely costume in a short time.

When I married and moved to the farm, I learned that the wrath of nature deserves tremendous respect. Farmers must constantly deal with dust, hail, wind, rain and snow. Working in and with the elements presents a thousand pictures. Very few walks of life offer as much visual sensitivity to the environment and allow deeper appreciation of nature.

The Shady Oaks Trailer Court years have meant dealing with more and more people. Many people move because work beckons them elsewhere. The stately oaks are sentinels over our residents who range in age from eight months to 80 years plus. The rich history of our property and the surrounding area prompted my desire to tell its story.



Author, Mary Gift, and Her Grandson, Mick Jurgensen