

Viola Estelle Bowyer
Written by her daughter, Marilyn Jenkins

Mom's life was not an easy one. She had polio as a very young girl of four or five, and remained handicapped for life. Then at age 10, her mother passed away, leaving her and her younger sister to be raised first by older sisters, then by an aunt and uncle in Spearville, Kansas, where she graduated from high school. She wanted to go to college but there was no money, and her aunt insisted that she come home and help with the family-run café. Mom heard that there was a church college in Hutchinson that would give a student a job if they came. So, against her family's wishes, she found a ride and, with seven dollars in her purse, she showed up at Bressee College, the Nazarene College in Hutchinson. She only completed one full year of courses, but became secretary to the President, a job she held for seven years. During the depression years of the 30's, the school had little money, and she often worked for only room and board when they could not afford to pay her.

It was during Mom's years at Hutchinson that she and some of her friends wanted to go "joy riding" on a Sunday afternoon. After all, all of their friends were driving across the newly completed bridge over the Arkansas River. However, they had no car. Just then, they discovered the car belonging to my dad. He was visiting his girlfriend, and had left the keys in the car, so they were sure, without even knowing him, that he would not mind if they "borrowed" his car for the afternoon. Sure enough, that got Dad's attention, and soon he left the other girlfriend, and he and Mother began dating. About three years later they were married.

After World War II, Dad returned to the farm ahead of Mother. She had never been to the farm, so he gave her instructions to take the Santa Fe train from Dodge City and to tell the conductor that she wanted off at the "McCullough Siding." Well, McCullough was no longer on the railroad maps, as it was only an elevator stop and the elevator was no longer there. Mom was very concerned and she had no idea how Dad was going to find her, and where the train would let her off. The conductor decided she was confused, and instead of McCullough she wanted to get off at McCoys, which was a farm nearby. Fortunately, Dad was watching for the smoke from the old coal fired engine, and, when the train did not stop, he followed it until it did. Mom was sure glad to see him.

Mom always believed in the church and its doctrine of living a Godly life. It was so ingrained into her that, when she went to the care center, she was there a couple years before she admitted to us that she had been playing Bingo. When we found out, she was embarrassed, and she explained to us that it was OK because they played for cookies, not for money.

She did not approve of "little white lies," so I know that it was her frustration that made her tell one once. As a child, I always wanted to have the radio as loud as possible, and I kept turning it up, and she kept turning it down. One day, after the volume going up and down several times, she told me that "When you turn the radio up so loud, it hurts the voices of the singers because they have to sing so loud." From that time on, I kept turning the volume down so that I wouldn't hurt their voices.

In her later years, she fell one day at home, and bumped her head, making a crack in the wall. She was afraid if we knew about that we would not let her live at

home any more, so she moved a piece of furniture in front of the crack so we wouldn't know about her fall.

The same stubbornness and determination caused her to overcome the handicap of crippling polio. Her parents were told that she would never walk, but one day when they were out of the house, she pushed herself out of her chair and onto the floor and crawled to the table to get some popcorn which was on the table. When her mother saw how much determinations she had, she began giving her exercises and working with her to walk.

She loved the piano and the secretarial work she did through college and after her marriage. Then she came to the farm and began teaching piano lessons during a time when most women did not work. But she loved the lessons and the children, and they were a source of satisfaction to her. Even in the Care Center, when one of her ex-students came to see her, she would ask them if they were still practicing.