

Floyd Marvel [6148(11)111]

And Fronia (Bixler) Marvel



It was a warm summer evening on the Western Oklahoma Jacob Bixler farm. He was sitting on the cellar door to cool himself, when young Floyd Marvel [6148(11)111] approached to ask for the hand of his youngest daughter in marriage. Did this mean he was being asked to share his petite, dark haired Fronia who had been so close to his heart. Doubtless, she had already confided in Ma, her love for Floyd. After all, wasn't he one of the communities most eligible young men? Floyd had the opportunity for an education, he was popular in social groups as he corded at the piano when the fiddler tuned. Didn't he own the most dashing pair of bay horse and the shiniest buggy of all? Often he was seen with the dapper young men of Forgan, wearing a derby, playing croquet.

The reader can be assured that Jake's words of consent were followed with sage advice on their plans and responsibilities as well as the joys of marriage, advice that Jake was loved and respected for.

It was a wonderfully optimistic Floyd who donned his farmer's attire, his hand set firmly upon the single bottom plow. He would plant wheat, 120 acres, in the stubborn, arid soil on the Ora Andrew's place. This land was near Chauncey Bixler's farm, two miles south and one mile west of Forgan. The farmer's Almanac of 1916 must have predicted a dry year for the crop that Floyd planted in the parched soil before his wedding, Fronia recalled, "never did sprout."

Despite the death of her brother Frank on October 2, 1916, plans were carried forth for Fronia and Floyd to wed on Thanksgiving Day, November 30, 1916. The day would be Fronia's twentieth birthday.

Fronia remembers having a pet goose that followed her about the farm. This goose considered himself the "boss of the farmyard." He became belligerent, often attacking persons. After the wedding, Chauncey told Fronia the center piece of the wedding feast was none other than her grey gander.

The first housekeeping was in Fronia's own home, one-quarter mile west and two miles south of Forgan. Jacob and Rachel left the newly weds and went on an extended visit to the homes of their children in Baca County, Colorado. This included Fronia's sister Nora and Sam Potter, brother Jim and Kit, Floyd's sister Gladys and Sam Lawrence. also several relatives including Jacob's brother Charley Bixler, Pa's nephew Tom Nickell, Rachel's brother Quince Ewing and various members of the Ross, Robins and Potter families. Floyd commented, "There wasn't a hundred dollars in the pockets of the whole bunch."

In December of 1916, Abe Robins took Floyd and Fronia in his new Maxwell car to the Land Office in Lamar to file for 160 acres of land relinquished by Willie Patton, a cousin. The filing fee on the Bear Creek land was fifteen dollars. Facing east was a two-room house on the land furnished with a table, wall cabinet, cook stove and a bed. There was no well. They stayed three months. Fronia recalled it was three-quarters mile west of the Colorado/Arkansas border and eighteen miles south of Holly, Colorado.

During Rachel and Jacob's visit to Nora and Sam's home near Stonington, Colorado, Rachel came down with the flu. Influenza had reached epidemic proportions in 1917. Rachel never completely recovered from this illness.

In April, Jim came home for a visit from Elkart, Kansas. Jim complained of a fever. While at the supper table, Rachel looked at him and asked, "Jim Henry, what's on your forehead? ... Measles?" Rachel, still weakened from the flu, contracted the measles too. This was further complicated by asthma, Her condition continued to deteriorate. She died May 29. Her life spanned sixty years and twenty days.

Rachel did not believe in the embalming of the body after death. Rachel was affectionately called Ma by her husband and nine children who loved her dearly. They were heavy with sadness as her body was laid to rest, in Forgan Cemetery, on the day after Memorial Day, 1917.

In 1917 the miraculous vaccines for communicable disease were not available. Fronia also contracted the dreaded measles virus. Apparently her strong, young body warded any adverse effect on the baby she carried beneath her heart.

Fronia's first pregnancy was marked in part by depression and bitterness toward God for "taking" her beloved Mother during this time when Fronia needed her advice and comfort most. Fronia and Floyd both took courage from the loving counsel of Jacob. Jacob chided Fronia for suggesting Rachel's death was willed by God.

It was the ninth of October that Fronia named her tiny daughter for her Mother. Eva Rachel was a source of comfort and joy and helped fill the emptiness in the home where Rachel had so recently left the family bereft. Fronia kept the spirit of Rachel alive as Eva grew. Fronia's memories of Rachel became the memories of all her children.

Eva was only a few months old when a message was delivered from the United States Department of War. Fronia's brother, Ansel Hall Bixler had been killed by a sniper's bullet, September 15, 1917, while on guard duty. Jacob's wish was that Ansel be buried in Alsace Lorraine near the site of his death.

The saddened family could only take consolation from knowing Rachel was spared the heart breaking news of losing one of her children to the war.

Floyd and Fronia stayed with Jacob for the winter. In the spring of 1918, Floyd with Fronia and Eva returned to eastern Colorado by covered wagon to put in a crop, on virgin land, plowed for the first time by cousin Willie Patton. They lived in the two-room frame house.

Considering these primitive living conditions and other hardships, including limited water and abundant rattlesnakes, Floyd decided to sell the Colorado prairie land to the neighbor east, for one-hundred fifteen dollars for his one-hundred sixty acre homestead. They sold the land after harvest, although the sale was contested because they had not lived on it for the required six months.

Again Floyd and Fronia and "Little Eva" returned to the Bixler farm. Floyd helped with farming and rode a bicycle to Forgan where he found employment at the grain elevator. They lived there for two years. Although the crops were fair, the price of wheat was only thirty cents a bushel.

At the approach of winter in 1919, Jacob, Fronia, Floyd and Eva moved into Forgan. They rented the "Meadors" house, located a block from where they would purchase a house in 1928. There on January 26, 1920, their second child, a ten and one-half pound chunk of boy with a shock of black hair was born. Dr. Duncan, the family doctor had delivered Darrel Ray Marvel [6148(11)1112].

About six months later Jacob married Lizzie Weaver from Iola, Kansas. Floyd's parents Arvel and Mary (Barrett) Marvel [6148(11)11] moved from their farm, four miles west of Forgan, into town while Floyd and family moved to the farm.

In the spring Fronia gave birth to their third child, John Arvel Marvel [6148(11)113]. He was born on March 13, 1922 during a spring blizzard so severe that Dr. Duncan could not travel to the farm. The birth was assisted by Floyd and neighbors, Alta and Ray Henson. J. A. weighed in at nine and one-half pounds.

In 1923, Floyd and family moved to Garden City, Kansas where he was employed by the local sugar mill. Unfortunately, Fronia contracted "Yellow Jonders" and this plus her being depressed and homesick caused them to return to Forgan.

The years 1924 through 1933 was a period of financial stability for Floyd and family. For a time they lived in a dugout with a hard packed floor and occasional

snakes including a blue racer that crawled from under the bath tub while J. A. was being bathed. A Model T Ford, a portable Victrola with Edison records contributed to making these happy years.

Western Oklahoma in the early thirties suffered from a prolonged drought as well as a national "Depression", cattle died, banks closed, crops sprouted and died, and land eroded by the winds brought the term "dust bowl" to the area. Fronia sealed the windows shut and made dust masks to protect the children as they walked to school. Floyd's employer, Mercer Parks Ford, lost his franchise and Floyd lost his job. He signed on with the Works Progress Administration, earning minimum wages as he helped build a gymnasium, a Boy Scout facility in the county seat of Beaver, Beaver Dam, and another dam near Meade, Kansas. Fronia contributed by taking employment with the county government distributing food to needy families.

Fronia canned the meat when cattle had to be slaughtered due to the lack of water, she gathered and canned sand hill plums that grew in the pastures, and cooked rabbits that Darrel and J. A. shot with their twenty-two rifle, despite its crooked barrel.

As the drought subsided and the economy improve, Floyd assumed the management of a service station that could have been successful except for, well meaning but improvised customers being unable to meet their accounts. After the service station closed he drove a school bus and clerked at a local furniture store, They had bought a two bedroom house in 1928 for five hundred dollars. The payments were five dollars a month and several months this was hard to come by.

To make matters worse Dr. McGrew recommended that Fronia have her tonsils removed. the operation was to cost twenty-five dollars. J. A had five dollars saved from his paper route, a neighbor loaned them ten dollars and the county Welfare agreed to pay the remaining ten dollars. Years later when both Floyd and Fronia were employed they returned the ten dollars to the Welfare Office.

In the spring of 1935, while Eva was working in Amarillo, Texas, Floyd converted his school bus into a mobile home and, with the children, traveled to Arkansas. They parked the bus on the Welch property, near Springdale, for a three months stay. The job, paying one dollar per day and lunch, required a ten-mile, round trip, walk. Darrel and A. J. together earned another seventy-five cents per day. Fronia canned fruits and berries, making jams and jellies. Water was drawn from a nearby spring which may have been the source for the typhoid fever that A. J. contracted, and had long lasting effects.

There was no Primitive Baptist Church, in Forgan, for Fronia to attend but visiting pastors often held all-day preaching services. Eva, Darrel and J. A. recall the three hour sessions, the bountiful dinners, and the joy of being excused to play outside. Floyd's parents were devout Methodists and Fronia saw to it that the children were involved in church activities. Eva, with friends, attended the Baptist Church. Darrel and J. A. were also involved in the Boy Scouts.

Darrel enrolled in Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas and then in the spring of 1939 at Northwestern State College in Alva, Oklahoma where J. A. enrolled in the fall of 1940. Both boys paid for their college by working in the National Youth Administration program. Darrel completed a Civil Aeronautics Association training program to acquire his pilots license. During his junior year he started dating freshman Frances Smith from Manchester, Oklahoma.

Eva Rachel had graduated from high school in 1935. She attended Amarillo Junior College, partly because at that time John Arvel and Mary had a fruit market in Amarillo and she could stay with them. Later she was furnished a room by the owner of a potato chip factory where she worked part-time. After one year she returned to Forgan and begin dating Olin Still, a soft spoken, tall, shy son of a successful German farmer, west of Forgan. Olin and Eva were married in a garden setting outside the Forgan Methodist Church the morning of August 21, 1938. Three sons were born to them: Paul Olin, Jr. in 1939; Burl Dean in 1941; and Keith Allen in 1943.

Jacob was 14 when his brother Jim served in the Civil War, and he could remember seeing Abraham Lincoln in his home town of Springfield, Illinois. Fronia remembered the tragedy of her brother Ancel being killed in the World War. Now, in 1942, Darrel was drafted and assigned to the Quartermaster Corps. After receiving basic training at March Field in California he was trained in the care and repair of business machines. This training formed the basis for a lifelong career. His Army unit was sent to the Pacific Theater and after a three week voyage on a troop ship he disembarked, down a rope ladder, onto the Island of Okinawa. After the end of the war he continued clean-up, clearing land mines and building an airstrip. While operating a bulldozer he suffered a back injury that was to nag him the remainder of his life. Darrel was discharged in January 1946. J. A. tried to enlist in the Marine Air Corps but was rejected because of color blindness. He joined the Army Reserve Corps and was called to active duty in May 1943. These reserves were sent to the Army Specialized training Program which enabled J. A. to pursue college courses in engineering at Texas A & I in Kingsville, Texas. This group was phased out and all were transferred to the infantry. He was redeployed to Fourth Army Headquarters only hours before the company was sent to Europe where they suffered heavy casualties. J. A. served for three years on various bases in Texas. Eva husband, Olin, had three sons and was past draft age, but he enlisted in the Navy Seabees and served in the South Pacific. He contracted hepatitis during this period of time. On August 14, 1945, Japan surrendered, and Fronia, Floyd, Eva, and J. A. were spending the night in at the Bell Hotel in Alva, Oklahoma. Their destination was the Smith home in Manchester, Kansas where the next day J. A. and Frances were married.

Floyd and Fronia had served the State Hospital for twelve years when they had the opportunity to purchase the Star Mail Route that provided service between Liberal, Kansas and Beaver Oklahoma. They purchased a house at 38 South Calhoun Street, Liberal, Kansas. Floyd retired from the mail route in 1970 after eighteen years. In retirement, Parkinson's disease limited his daily activities. In the spring of 1985 a mole on his back developed into melanoma. On September 8, 1985, with Fronia and Eva at his side he died. He was buried in the Forgan Cemetery where his brother DeWayne had been buried in 1907. Fronia had been employed at Levine's Department Store for twelve years but the stress of keeping a home neat and clean and the working saw the beginning of a stomach ulcer. A diseased colon was successfully removed but in 1988 severe internal bleed nearly ended her life. At the writing of this document, in 1992, her ninety-sixth year, Fronia continues to be confidently independent and treasure the nearness of Eva and the loving support of a devoted family

Olin returned to Forgan and opened a successful automotive/mechanic business. He used his G.I. Benefits to subsidize the purchase of land near Lamar, Missouri. The worn-out soil led to failure and after a few years they returned to Liberal where he became supervisor of the Maintenance Department of Beach Aircraft. He retired in 1970 and died of cancer of the liver in 1972, probably a result of the hepatitis he had contracted while in the Seabees. After his death Eva continued as a bookkeeper and sales person for several businesses in Liberal.

After his discharge, Darrel took employment with Underwood Typewriter and Business Machines in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Here he became smitten with a pretty, petite, brunette. On October 3, 1947, in Vernon, Texas he married Billie Granot. They started married life together in Oklahoma City where two sons were born, Terry Lee in 1952 and Mark Allen in 1954. They moved to Lawton, Oklahoma where they operated a successful "Marvel Business Machines." They sold the business and building and moved to a lake-side house located near Rush Springs, Oklahoma. Subsequently they opened "Marlow Business Machines" in the nearby town of Marlow. They expanded this business to include a Radio Shack franchise.

John and Frances received their bachelor's degrees from Northwestern State College in Alva, Oklahoma, on the same day. John signed a contract to teach business courses and to coach in the Hazelton, Kansas Public Schools where he was later named as Principal. Frances taught private piano lessons during this period and gave birth to two children, Merrill Ann in 1945 and John Alan in 1946. In 1952, accepted the position of Principal of Eugene Field School in Manhattan, Kansas. It was here that their third child, Marvin Kim, was born. The G.I. bill was in its final year when John used it to subsidize his higher education. He enrolled at the University of Oklahoma where he received his doctor's degree. In 1955, he accepted the position as professor and director of the Laboratory School at the University of Wyoming at Larimie. He was appointed Director of Adult Education and then became the Dean of the College of Education. In 1965, the United States Department of State invited John to evaluate the American schools in Pakistan and Afaganistan. In 1966 he was named President of Adams State College in Colorado. During his tenure here he was awarded a Danforth Presidential Leave to study selected institutions of higher education in Central and South America. After eleven years at ASC he became President of the Consortium of State Colleges and Universities of Colorado. He received the Distinguished Fellow Award by the Kellogg Foundation to conduct seminars in higher education for universities and colleges in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand. In 1986, he was called to serve as Provost at Hawaii La College on Oahu, in 1989 he became its fourth President. After this, they re-retired to Santa Fe, New Mexico.