

Precious Memories

by

Vivienne Phillips Roberts Jennings

VIVIENNE HELEN PHILLIPS ROBERTS JENNINGS

I was born at the original Holy Family Catholic Hospital, in Saint Ignatius, Montana, on May 30, 1925, to Pearl Elva Blodgett Phillips and John Gideon Phillips. Doctor Armour was Mother's doctor. It was a bit unusual, as Mom was in the hospital at the time with my brother Gideon, who was eighteen months older than me. Gideon had fallen down the stairs and had broken his leg. Mom was forty years old when I was born.

The older brothers and sisters were Esther, twenty years older than myself, a little boy that died while still a baby, and is buried at Hayden Lake, Idaho, where they lived at the time. Pop worked at a sawmill there. Then there was Wendell, Virgil, Ava and Waldo. These Mom always referred to as the older ones. Mom nearly died when Waldo was born and there was seven years between Waldo and Gideon. Mother and Pop brought Audrey and Richard into the world after me, with two and one-half years between them.

We lived and grew up along the foothills of the beautiful Mission Range, where Pop farmed several hundred acres with horses, raised cattle, pigs, chickens and milked about twenty head of cows by hand. He always had one or two hired men that were treated like part of the family.

We sold cream, and the cream truck came by every day. We got our butter, cheese, etc. off the truck. In the separator house, a small screened building the Mom kept very clean, we turned a separator by hand, which delivered cream out of one spout and skim milk out of another. The pigs, calves and chickens got the skim milk.

We always had lots to eat, as we also cured our own bacons and hams that we stored in the ice house, our own beef, milk, produce from two big gardens, two orchards, and a Mother that canned in gallon jars in the old copper wash boiler, on the wood fired kitchen range.

The old copper boiler was also used on wash days. Mom's clothes were always white as snow. I remember a bluing called 'La France' that she used, too. I can still see her scrubbing on a wash board for all of us, including the hired men's clothes, and singing "Bringing in the Sheaves", and many other old hymns that she told us her Mother had sung.

We had a blackboard that Mom used to draw birds and flowers on. We were always delighted, because Mom really was quite a good artist. She had taken lessons, too, before she married Pop. She had also played the organ in the church she attended up the Bitterroot. I think it was at Victor.

I'm sorry we couldn't have had a piano or organ so she could have taught us to play.

The Home Place where we lived was a mile from where we caught the school bus, so each morning and evening we all walked the mile and no one seemed to mind it. There were so many birds, and I remember learning to whistle on that walk. The first piece I felt I'd mastered was "Over the Rainbow". The snow drifts got so deep in the winter that they completely covered the cross pieces on the old flume.

I took a ride down that flume one summer day when I was seven. What a ride it was, too. Audrey and I were picking berries at the "Lower Place", and I decided I was big enough to sit on one of the cross pieces and reach the big blackberries on the other side. After making sure that Audrey stood well out of danger, I climbed up and started picking. A big wave caught my toe, and in I went. Audrey ran along beside me, but couldn't keep up, or help. A big knife-like piece of metal separated the water about halfway down the mile, causing part of the water to go out on the field, and the rest to go on down the flume. I stayed in the flume, but was able to catch a cross piece and climb out.

My fingers were hurt, and my leg was cut bad. Pop and Virgil were working in the field and saw us and came over. I remember Virgil carrying me home, and I couldn't walk or get out of bed for a couple of weeks. Vic Albeer, a neighbor's hired man, came over every night and played the accordion for me. I should have had a spanking, but instead everyone spoiled me. I was just glad to be alive.

Long before I started school the folks had an older man with a beard working for us, and he spent hours in the evenings telling of far-away countries he'd been to. I loved to listen to him. It all sounded so interesting. I guess that's what instilled within me a strong desire to travel.

Growing up on our farm meant everyone had chores to do, which we didn't seem to mind. They were just part of the day. We were blessed to have a Mother who was a good cook and a Father who was a good provider. Mom could always be counted on to have a kettle of soup, hot donuts, or something good waiting for us when we got home, mixed with the best of advice. I didn't always think so, though. Like "If you can't say something good about someone, don't say anything at all", or "Be content with what you have".

Pop, on the other hand was instructing us to "Think for yourselves", and that the two things he would never tolerate in his kids were laziness

and dishonesty. He was a smart man, who all the neighbors called on for many things. I like to think of him as one of the original conservationists. He believed in putting back into the soil as well as taking out, and his crops were always crops to be proud of. He was a perfectionist at irrigating, building hay stacks, etc., yet no matter how tired he was at the end of the day, he'd always read The Congressional Record, underlining remarks from speeches, and listening to the news on the radio. He had a real head for math and amazed us with his figuring. He always checked carefully every bank statement, etc., and seemed to find many mistakes.

There was a small pretty ditch that flowed across our property above the house, and at times Mom would say "Why don't you go and gather some pretty rocks from Hawkins' Ditch?" Mom liked rocks, and she did wind up with a granddaughter, my youngest daughter Sheila, who carried on her love for and interest in rocks, and is a Geologist.

We also had "The Big Ditch", a big canal that we swam in, in the summer time. It was great! The neighboring Johns girls usually joined us. I thought I knew how to swim, but the first time I tried it in a pool I nearly drowned. I was used to the water carrying me along.

There are so many stories that could be told about growing up together on the mountains that I'll just have to leave most of it out. Basically we were happy, well fed and busy. Mom was very special. Not only full of love and wisdom, but having a deep desire to not only care for us physically, but wanting to see our character develop as well. She really worked at the job God gave her to do.

Ava was already working away from home, and only came home on the week-ends. Virgil and Waldo were quite a bit older, too, and Esther and Wendell were both married. One of my regular jobs was to baby sit Dick (Richard), who was six years younger than me. Each day after lunch I'd rock him to sleep, and sing to him. I sang them in the same order each day, and usually knew which song he'd go to sleep at. He always knew if I left one out.

Invariably, if Audrey and I had a disagreement, Virgil would "go to bat" for Audrey, and Waldo for me. I guess it didn't seem to matter who was right. Gideon was my champion, too, and I knew I could always count on him. What a family! Anyway, we were all close and it made life interesting, but poor Mom!

I must not have been over twelve when I went to work for Waldo and Mildred in the summer, helping to cook for six or seven hired men, clean house and take care of their children. It was hard work, but didn't seem

like it. We always had fun. Mildred was an excellent cook and always insisted on a very clean house, etc. Waldo played the accodian in the evening, and we all really enjoyed it. I felt like part of their family, too.

New Years Eve of 1941 was the beginning of a whole new life for me. Waldo and Mildred had invited me to go to a dance with them at Post Creek Pavillion. People came from near and far as it was a big hall, and they hired big name bands. Mildred always had pretty clothes, and she insisted that I wear one of her dresses. Well, that's when I met Jesse. He was like no one I'd ever known before, with exciting man-of-the-world stories, and besides that, I thought he was 'cute'. He was eight years older than me, had a good job as brakeman on the Northern Pacific Railroad and had a new Mercury convertible. I danced most of the night with him, but knew my Dad wouldn't let me go out with him, so instead of telling him this I gave him the wrong directions to our place.

I figured that would be the end of that, but it wasn't, he found me. It was really muddy up our lane, but he had a friend that knew where we lived, and he helped push the car up the lane. I felt a bit foolish, but not Jesse. He got to be friends with Mom and Pop, and spent time playing cribbage with Pop. They really liked him, so gradually I got to go out with him. He'd come by the school with the top down on the car and the radio playing, and the other girls looked on with envy.

I got an engagement ring on my sixteenth birthday, but Jesse assured the folks we wouldn't get married for a long time. On November 21, 1941, we got married at the Court House in Missoula, with Ed Russ and his wife standing up with us. Ed was a close friend of Jesse's and his folks had Russ's Cycle Shop across the Orange Street bridge. Jesse and Ed rode motorcycles together. Jesse was an excellent rider.

We went to Seattle for a week and visited Jesse's cousin, Red Thayer, and his wife Ellen at Port Angeles. Red manned the lighthouse there. Everyone but our folks were upset with us when we got back, as they had wanted us to have a church wedding. We never regretted it. We moved into an apartment in Missoula on North Second Street.

December seventh Pearl Harbor was attacked. Until then, Jesse was in 4-F because of his railroad job, but then everything changed and he was put in 1-A, which meant he could be called up at any time. The first part of January he joined the U.S. Marines, in preference to going into the Army. I stayed with his folks in Ravalli for a while, helping in the Post Office and store. Talk about long lonesome days and nights! Many evenings I'd take long winter walks, talking with the Lord, and trying to think things

out.

Jesse was stationed in San Diego for a while, and then he was sent to San Louis Obispo to the rifle and pistol range. Being an excellent shot, he wound up 'Expert' in everything he fired. We visited him once before they shipped him out. I didn't hear from him for many months, and by then he was on Guadalcanal.

I entered The Modern Beauty School in Missoula after a while, and enjoyed my work. One day my landlady called and said the mailman had just delivered a Government envelope addressed to me. It scared me so bad that I left a lady with her hair half done and ran all the way home. In the envelope was a card made from the back empty page of a book he'd found on one of the islands. He'd taken his knife and cut it to postcard size, addressed it to me on one side and on the other side had writtenn "I Love You" and "I'm all right". He sent it out on a passing ship and they put it in the envelope at the first Post Office. That was the first I'd heard from him in many months. After Guadalcanal he was sent to a hospital in the New Heberdies Islands, and then to New Zealand. From there it was home.

Jesse had sent money home that he won playing poker, and I had put it in the bank. When he got home, we bought a new motorcycle and went on a long trip. While Jesse was gone, Pop Roberts had sold Jesse's precious Model T Ford, and he really felt bad about that.

Next, we went to Photography School in Kalispell, under Vic Guest. At the time, you had to have a license to call yourself a photographer. Jesse got the best grade in Montana when he graduated. He had a real eye for photography, and learned a lot working with Herbert Titter of Great Falls. We opened a photography studio in Ravalli, and did quite well. We took all of the school pictures from Plains up to Polson, covered the big rodeos, weddings, etc. It was fun.

Marilyn was born September 12, 1945, and was I thrilled! She was an answer to prayer, and so cute. Jesse and I knew that he would never be too well physically. Any time he worked up a sweat he'd start running a high fever and end up in the hospital, but he liked photography. He had an opportunity to take a Government test in photography, where he could go different places in the world, and pay him good wages. After taking the test they sent him to Seattle to a job at Fort Lawton until the results of the test came in.

Marilyn was only two and a half years old when we moved, and we lived in a trailer on Aurora Avenue. Jesse was restless, and it wasn't

easy, but we did have fun with Red and Ellen, fishing on the Sound and picnicing. We had a seven-man rubber boat that served our needs.

Sheila was born on March 8, 1948. She was two weeks overdue in spite of everything they did, and she was born feet first which can be dangerous, as she could have breathed too soon. Marilyn was so pleased to have a baby sister, and we were pretty happy, too. Sheila was born at the Swedish Hospital in Seattle, and delivered by the nurses. The doctor didn't get there in time and the nurses put me out like a light. I always felt lucky that Sheila made it O.K. I didn't even remember her being born. With Marilyn I was in labor for two days at the old St. Patrick's Hospital in Missoula.

Jesse sent telegrams to our folks when Sheila was born. He told them her name, when she was born, weight, etc. The funny part was that the telegraph office spelled her name Shelaghli, and we didn't know it. Everyone about had a fit. They wouldn't tell anyone what we'd named her. Then about a week later they discovered the real spelling and everyone had a big laugh. Her dad always called her Shelaghli, when he kidded with her.

Each week while we lived in Seattle, a letter would come from Mom, telling the news and encouraging us. Reminding me she was praying for us, and she always sent Marilyn some little chicken feathers.

Jesse's folks had been trying to get us back to Montana, so one day Pop Roberts wrote that he'd bought an eighty acre farm with a house on it, and that he'd trade it to us for a house we owned at Ravalli. We went back to St. Ignatius, and got settled. Shortly afterwards we got notice that Jesse had scored very high on his Government test and could about have his pick of where to go. We decided it was too late.

AUDREY MYRTLE PHILLIPS

Audrey was two and a half years younger than me. She had big brown eyes and blonde hair. She could run like a deer and was always ready for anything. Paul Bouleau used to ride over on his white horse and take Audrey for a ride. She loved it.

When we got a little older Audrey and I and our little white dog would walk to the lakes in back of our house. I'm sure there's no more beautiful place in the world. The mountains were covered with flowers of all colors, and you could see the huge fish swimming in the lake. The water was crystal clear.

We worked together, played together, and spent time together with the Johns girls, Virginia, Wanda, and Wilma. Many happy memories remain, of life together on the farm.

AVA LEAH PHILLIPS

Ava was a "Live Wire", and full of stories. She was enough older than me that she was already living away from home as I was growing up. She worked for Mother's half sister, Leah Fellows, in St. Ignatius. I used to stay all night there when I had to practice for the school operetas. We practiced in the old Masonic Hall, and put them on at the Gaiety Theatre. Aunt Leah was married to Walter Fellows, who worked for the Federal Land Bank, and they had two children, Walter, Jr. (Sonny) and Elsie.

Ava could come home on week-ends and I used to hear all of her exciting stories about her boy friends, etc. Ava married Logan Engstrom after she went to Spokane to work. They had Angela Elizabeth (Sally), and twin boys, Dick and John.

Ava's stories were always entertaining and if they weren't she made them that way by adding a little bit. Ava was always generous and hospitable and was good to us when our Sheila was in the Shriner's Hospital. She lived within walking distance of the Hospital, and was a real blessing to us. She was a good cook, too, and we were always welcome. Ava had Polio when she was little, and had some minor physical problems from it, but it never slowed her down a bit.

RICHARD LAWRENCE PHILLIPS

Mom was forty-five years old when Richard (Dick) was born, and I've always been thankful he made it into our family. I've always felt close to Dick and I did a lot of baby-sitting for Mon, with Dick. He was so special. I always rocked him and sang to him after dinner (now lunch), till he went to sleep.

He has a real good voice and used to sing to the cows as he milked them. Pop always said Dick got more milk from them because they liked his singing. He really worked hard, and I don't know what Pop would have done without him.

Dick and I used to sing and harmonize together. I loved singing with him. He's still singing and playing the guitar, and lives his life for the

Lord. What a blessing he's been to our family.

ESTHER BERNICE PHILLIPS

Twenty years older than me, Esther was married and gone from home when I was born, and had a daughter a little younger than me. I guess that's why she seemed more like a second mother to me than an older sister.

No one could have exceeded Esther's hospitality. She was always so glad to have you come, and she was an excellent cook. Esther and Alfred always went to church, taking the school bus. They took any of the neighbor kids and whoever came from our place, to Sunday School. We walked to their place and home afterwards. It was close to two miles each way, but with the short cuts it wasn't quite that far, and in the summer there were always flowers along the way.

I always felt like Esther never treated me like a sister, but more like one of her own children, and I felt like my opinion on a subject wasn't worth that much. Esther was very strong willed, but I never once doubted her love for me. She had nine children, and raised them all, and believe me, she had her heart in it.

Esther loved gardening, both vegetables and flowers, and really did a good job. Her berries were the best, as well as the vegetables and flowers. Some people criticized her for her housekeeping, but I'm sure there just wasn't time for everything and she put her time to what she thought was most important.

Esther's heart was as big as a mountain. The Methodist Church in St. Ignatius will never have anyone who will out-do Esther and Alfred in their support, be it work or food furnished or more money given in proportion to what they had to give. What a lady!

GIDEON ALLEN PHILLIPS

Gideon loved working on motors of all kinds, and especially his Model T's. Many days of school were missed because he didn't feel good, until the school bus left, and then he always felt good enough to work on, and run, the Model T's. It always amazed me how much school he could miss, and still get the best grades in the class. Smart kid!

He was a good worker on the ranch and Pop maybe spoiled him a

little. His namesake, too. Pop was a good father to all of us, and Mom was a super mother. Maybe I wasn't always worthy of Gideon's support, but I could always count on it.

VIRGIL MARTIN PHILLIPS

Virgil - super honest, quick tempered, very strong physically, and ready to help anyone that needed him, including actually fighting physically for them. He certainly could do a good job of fighting, too. One night at a dance at Equity Hall in St. Ignatius, a fight got started. My Uncle Jud was on the bottom of a pile of men and I remember Virgil reaching down and pulling them off, one by one, with one hand. Jesse commented that Virgil was the strongest man he had ever seen.

He was extremely loyal to anyone he ever worked for, and was a perfectionist in his work, especially his irrigating. He expected everyone else to be that way, and was very upset when they weren't. I always felt that Virgil should have been a Vet. He was gifted at treating animals and was counted on to do it on the ranch.

Virgil was almost naive in his expectation of others, which caused him much unhappiness and frustration. Quite a brother, to say the least.

WALDO KENNETH PHILLIPS

Waldo was the youngest of what Mom referred to as "The Older Ones". She almost died when he was born. Waldo just seemed to take care of everyone else and what you might say "Pick up the pieces". You could always count on him to be there when he was needed.

He was a top athlete in school and attended the University of Montana in Missoula for a while, studying law. I don't think he ever forgot anything. He has a photographic memory.

He married young and had to quit his education to make a living for a family. He was smart and was always a good provider. Waldo always loved family and was my champion all through life, and still is.

WENDELL RUFUS PHILLIPS

Wendell was also gone from home when I came on the scene, or at

least before I was old enough to remember. That doesn't mean he wasn't around. Wendell always seemed special. He was one of those people who had a built in time clock. He was 'quick', always on time, and loved making the most of each day. You couldn't help liking Wendell.

Edna, his wife, and he both liked to cook and my favorite chocolate cake recipe is one they made up. Wendell and Edna had two girls and one boy, the boy being the oldest.

Edna had hay fever very bad, and suffered a lot from it. She died in 1948. Wendell was killed in the woods in 1952, when the top of a dead snag broke off, flew through the air, and hit him in the head. Seems strange to me, as he was always cautioning everyone to be careful working in the woods.

Wendell liked to add the special things to life, like roses when Marilyn was so sick, and the time he spent coming to see us when Sheila was little and had her hip problems. He thought they both were so cute and special.

Wendell had a quick step to his walk. I can't imagine him getting old, and he didn't.