

Ora Lee Allen

Ora Lee Allen was born in Indian Territory in what is now the state of Oklahoma. She was born on August 14, 1895, the seventh child and fourth daughter of Madorah Ann Reynolds and Samuel Lee Allen.

Ora was wed to Mr. Charles Clay Bursell on March 18, 1913 in Fullerton, Nance County, Nebraska. Charles, who was born on January 12, 1877, was the son of Meredith Daniel and Nancy (Farley) Bursell (Name change came about 1906 when he left Tennessee). This was Charles' third marriage. His first marriage was to Millie Clark, they had one child, Artie Mae Bursell. The second marriage was to Mottie Holiday and they had a son, Homer Chester Bursell.

Ora and Charles had four children during their marriage. Samuel Lee Clay Bursell, born on May 2, 1915 in Texas City, Texas County, Oklahoma, married Ida Jewell Stump on December 23, 1936 in Beaver County, Oklahoma, was their first child and son. Their second child, a daughter, was named Winnie Cordelia Bursell, she was born on November 12, 1919 in Guymon, Texas County, Oklahoma, Winnie married Walter Burton Penhale on February 5, 1945 in Waxahachie, Ellis County, Texas. Rutherford Enz Bursell, their third child was born on April 17, 1922 also in Guymon, Oklahoma, and he grew up to marry Miss. Lois Victoria Carroll in either 1938 or 39 in Dumas, Moore, Texas, and a second time to Beulah Virginia Sizemore in 1968. Their last child and second daughter was called Mary Burcha Bursell. Mary was born on December 19, 1928, also in Guymon, Texas County, Oklahoma. She went on to marry Harold Jack Maupin on August 14, 1946. They were married in Lordsburg, Hidalgo County, New Mexico. Mary is also doing research on this family and has provided me with much of the information I have.

Ora and Charles divorced in either 1936 or 37 and remarried to each other in 1939. The marriage did not take this time either and they were divorced again in 1941. Ora married Benjamin Franklin Wilkerson on January 14, 1944. Ben was born on December 24, 1894 in Big Springs, Howard County, Texas. Ben had also been married before and had the following children: Fred, Helen, Gunith, Clarise Lee, Bernice, Alta Hildred, Alfred and Verna. Benjamin Franklin Wilkerson died on September 25, 1949 and is buried in Sapulpa, Oklahoma.

Charles Clay Bursell died on January 26, 1961 in Clinton, Custer County, Oklahoma and is buried in the Guymon Cemetery in Guymon, Oklahoma. Ora Lee lived for another seventeen years before she died on August 8, 1978 in Phoenix, Maricopa County, Arizona.

Their third child, Rutherford Inz Bursell tells about his mother in these words: *"I always honored both my parents equally but my Mother knew how to accept the challenges of life better than anyone I have ever known. She was a heck of a lot smarter than any of her children and tried to teach us how to enjoy life and make the best of tough situations. When I was small, she taught me how to see the beauty in flowers as the buttercups began to bloom in the spring and how to spot the different kinds of birds and animals and know them by the sounds they made. She use to stand on the back porch in the evening and call the cows from the pasture by blowing through*

her hands--- a low mournful kind of whistle they recognized and would immediately head for the barn. They were all her pets. One time we went to the old abandoned central telephone station in the back to pick greens. While we were there a dust storm came up suddenly. All the way home, she held her apron over me to protect me from the wind and dust while she really laced the whip to old Maud. We made it home in record time, too. Mother could equalize any bad situation or chore and make it easy. She was a woman of much wisdom"

Mary Burcha Bursell Maupin writes about her Mother: "Ora Lee, my Mother, was born in a dug-out in Oklahoma Territory, now Cleveland County. She remembered some of her early life before her mother died. After the 'Little Babe' was born, her mother was too weak to stand and combing out her long brown hair was quite a chore. Mother used to hold it up from the floor while her mother ran the comb through it, then watch while she braided it back. After her death, mother kept her braid, which was dark brown in color, about fourteen inches long, in her trunk along with her silver snuff box, my brother Clay's baby dress and some ribbons from cousin Rheta's baby dress and all of the mementos Uncle Arther sent her from France and Germany. The braid disappeared as well as the baby clothes. Clay has her silver snuff box and the pillow tops Uncle Arther made while he was in the hospital in France along with the cards and valentine, have been given to his children."

"After Aunt Trude married, Granddad was at a loss on how he was going to care for the family and especially this nine year old girl. He talked with the Woodrow family and it was agreed Mother would stay with them to be a playmate to their little girl. Only Mother didn't understand it that way. She spent the night with them and the next day after school she headed for home only to find there was no one there. All the furnishings were gone, the house was empty and she was left there all alone. Tears welled up in her big brown eyes. She began to look around and found fresh wagon tracks leading to the road then south. She followed the tracks almost four miles. Then she saw her Papa's wagon and team and her three brothers playing with the children she stayed at Grandma and Grandpa Allen's. She said she just stopped and played too, until Granddad called her into the house."

"Apparently five of the children, Maude, Arley, Arther, Ed and Mother stayed with Granddad and the wagon as he started off to look for work elsewhere. Mother tells that 'Sister Maude' got a job doing housework for a family, leaving Mother, three boys and Granddad to travel alone. Aunt Maude left a pair of her old shoes in the wagon and Mother wore them, even though they were far too small for her. She walked barefoot alongside of the wagon in order to save Maude's shoes for special occasions."

"One evening late, Granddad had camped along the road not far from where Aunt Maude was working. Whether by choice or accident is not known. Uncle Ed saw his sister Maude through one of the lighted windows and ran towards the back door. He put his little dirty boyish face up to the screen door and called her. She brought him in and fed him the scraps from her employer's table and handed some to the other three who remained outside. She was afraid of letting these ragamuffins in for fear of losing her position."

"After Aunt Maude married, Mother took over the task of keeping the wagon and watching after her two younger brothers. The four of them, Uncle Arley, Uncle Arther, Uncle Ed and Mother all

slept in the wagon and Granddad always slept beneath the wagon. Sometimes they had only salt port, sorghum molasses and grease to sop their sourdough biscuits in. But if Granddad camped along the road where lambs quarter or dandelion grew, they had greens to eat. Granddad was a stickler for cleanliness and neatness and he often scolded Mother for not cleaning the utensils well enough. Being responsible for the cooking, cleaning and two little brothers was not the usual life for a 10 year old."

"Sometime between 1908 - 1910, they were living in the panhandle. One afternoon Granddad drove up to their wagon in a buggy and introduced Millie as their new 'mama'. After the marriage, they lived in a two story house. One morning Millie was upstairs with the boys when Mother heard Arther cry out. She picked up a stick of stove wood and raced up the stairs, two at a time, raising the wood over her head as she reached the top of the stairs. The frightened look on Millie's face convinced her she didn't have to use it. This was one incident which Millie did not tell Granddad. Mother felt she had to protect those little boys from Millie's wrath, usually unprovoked, as they were too young to protect themselves."

"Millie never liked Granddad's children and was often the cause of them being punished. Millie would tell Granddad that she would make something for the family if he would get the ingredients. After he was gone, she would bake cookies or gingerbread, then hide it from his children and give it to her daughter, Nora, when no one else was around. One day Mother saw Nora eating something which she and the boys didn't have, and asked her about it. Learning that Mother had discovered her secret, Millie poured turpentine in Mother's milk. Mother smelled the odor before she drank it and accidentally spilled it. She took a severe scolding from Granddad because of her awkwardness, but she didn't tell."

"About 1910 they were in Guymon and Mother became acquainted with the Weatherfords. Julius and Laura were expecting their third child and ask Mother to come help with the cooking and cleaning during harvest. Julius and Laura lived in a half-dug-out and the stove was out under a remade. One day was particularity impressive to Mother. Laura made fried apple pies for the haying crew and they all ate outside. With Laura teaching her how to make fried pies and Aunt Faye teaching her to make shirts for my Dad, she became skilled in both crafts."

"When she was about 16, Granddad sent her to live with Aunt Gertrude and Uncle George in Nebraska to get her away from my Dad. Aunt Gertrude and Uncle George tried to interest her in other boys but when Dad came to Nebraska in 1913, they went to Fullerton and got married. (The marriage certificate is bordered in red and pink roses and hangs on my living room wall)."

She helped my Dad 'prove up' on the homestead out on the North West Flats. On the morning when Clay was born, she was pulling nails from some used lumber so they might use it to build shelter for their cattle. She milked cows, made butter and sold cream, worked in the broom corn, rode the harrow and drove the team. She nursed the sick and helped deliver babies and even set my Dad's broken leg after he was run over by his own wagon. She raised four children of her own, a stepson, Homer, and a ten year old boy, Billy, who got off the orphan train from New York about 1917.

The years of the "Dust Bowl" and the Depression years that followed were hard on Mother. We moved from a house in Guymon to the Coldwater Ranch, then to Ringwood and on to Granddad's in Oklahoma City and finally to his homestead in Cleveland County, nine miles east of Norman and a mile and a half south on the place where she was born. Granddad, Claude Barefoot and my Dad built a two room frame house roughly in the same spot and almost identical to the one she had lived in. Claud Barefoot helped us plant and dig sweet potatoes that year and we had a few cows, but no money. Clay, now about 20 years old, joined the CCC's to help support us.

In 1936 we moved into Norman where Mother went to work at the Oklahoma State Hospital and made pies for the creamery. Rutherford, now 14 years old, joined the CCC's and was sent to Purcell, not too far from Norman.

Mother and Dad divorced and the three of us, Mother, Cordelia and myself, moved to Granddad's in Oklahoma City about 1937 after Cordelia graduated from high school. Granddad was in California so we lived in his house while Cordelia attended Hills Business College. Uncle Ollie came back from Stillwater soon after, and Cordelia and I moved into Granddad's little two room house near the oil well. Mother lived at the State Hospital (free room and board) and rode the interurban back and forth to see us when she had the money. In the summer of 1939 she was scalded down both legs when she was helping my Dad pour hot water into the gasoline powered washing machine that Clay had rebuilt into an electric. We had no money for doctors or medicine so she laid up most of the summer, blisters as big as dinner plates, with only Ungentine and cool cloths to ease the pain.

Mother and Dad remarried in 1939 and bought a house in Clinton where she took in boarders. When that wasn't enough to pay the bills, she got a job at the WPA sewing room.

In the spring of 1941, she decided to go to her Papa's. She had \$100.00 in savings at the Post Office, a 12 year old child to feed, clothe and educate, and no skills to earn a living except the time spent at the State Hospital and the sewing room.

She worked in the nursing home for Aunt Ola a few months for our board and room. Then she went to work for Robinson Steel in the bakery of the cafeteria. She had already demonstrated that she knew how to make pies in large quantities. A friend of hers was a nurse at Mercy hospital and suggested she try for a job there. When she was there only a few months her supervisor suggested she get a GED and go into their nursing program.

But Mother had only gone to the third reader. Her grace in manners and genteel behavior was molded from childhood and watching other people. She learned math from looking over Cordelia's shoulder and fractions from a measuring cup. The thought of being in a classroom of wealthier, refined, better educated students cared her. She never realized how her elegance of character and charm influenced those around her.

When school was out in 1943, she made arrangements for us to go to Nevada where Uncle Arthur was making mattresses for the government housing at Henderson. She and Aunt Otha always had a lot of fun together, laughing and cutting up like two school girls.

She married Ben Wilkerson in 1944. He worked for the BMI plant in Henderson, but both of them thought Phoenix would be a place to start a new life together. In October of 1945 we came to Phoenix and they bought a small service station. Mother told Ben she could make hamburgers and pies, so they rented the little shed next to the station. A few months later they sold the station and the hamburger stand to Darrell Walters and with the profits bought a farm in Arkansas.

Neither were as happy as they thought they would be. They had a big pair of Perchion horses and Mother sometimes walked behind the plow tilling the soil just as she had done in her earlier years in the panhandle. Their tomato crop was a disaster so they sold the farm and bought a cafe in Sapulpa, Oklahoma. In December 1948, while Mother was in Phoenix visiting me, Ben had a stroke. Mother cared for him almost two years before he died.

She stayed with one or the other of us children - - never in one place for very long at a time. Uncle Ollie fixed up his garage for her in the fifties, but she was never really satisfied. Rutherford found a mobile home in California and she bought it and moved it to Blythe, California. She said she liked it there because it was hers and she was near enough for her children to visit.

After a severe heart attack, she came to live with me. When I left the Blythe hospital with her in March 1969, the doctor said...'if you get her to Phoenix, she might live 3 months.' As she recovered she began to cut out quilt pieces and quilt them in a very fine stitch. She crocheted and learned to make different crafts. In 1971 Uncle Arthur and Uncle Ed and their wives visited us. In 1973 she entertained three of her brothers, (the four of them had not been together in over 63 years) and their wives and enjoyed every minute of it.

We even took a couple of trips to see Aunt Otha at Leota's and Robert's ranch in New Mexico. When we arrived, after a fourteen hour trip, she sat down on a bench outside before going in. (Rutherford and I jointly agreed she was the best co-pilot to have on a long trip). Leota's pet coyote came from out of nowhere, jumped upon her lap and laid there for several minutes for her to pet him. The coyote usually shied away from anyone except Leota and Robert, but Mother had a special way with animals, tame or wild.

However, as the years went by, she became more dependent upon others. She had a cataract on one eye and a detached retina on the other. Seeing became quite a problem. She misread her prescriptions and thought I was trying to get rid of her when she overdosed on water pills thinking they were digitalis. As soon as she got better she packed her things and went to Clay's in Texas. That lasted almost a year. Then Rutherford brought her back to Blythe and she bought another mobile home. But at age 83, with advancing leukemia and an enlarged heart, long over stressed, she came back to my home in Phoenix to spend her last six months. She received many cards and letters, but she especially liked the one from Gene who told of his cherished memories of her.

Two weeks before her death, Aunt Otha, Leota and Eva came to spend time with her and she was overjoyed, not wanting any of them to leave. Her attitude and sense of humor never changed. She laughed at her own mistakes in her speech saying, 'Now, that didn't sound right, did it?' If I gave

her a quizzical look, she would laugh and say, "Did I come out crazy again?" Her ingenious wit is still puzzling to me after all these years.

We spent many hours talking of the early days of her life. Some sad, and some humorous. But even the sad times had good memories for her. She often wondered why she had been blessed with so many things in life she thought she was unworthy of having. She never regretted living the way she had to live. It taught her to be able to overcome future obstacles and be stronger for it. She felt ashamed of the fact that she hadn't any talents to pass on to another generation.

One afternoon shortly before she died, she had awakened from a nap and wanted to tell me about the dream she had. She was standing on a giant spiral staircase dressed in a flowing pink gown. There was a party going on below in her honor. I asked her how she knew the party was for her and she replied, "Why, they're all there! Mama, Papa, Ollie, Fred, Gertrude, Maude, Arley and Arther", and Ed is calling me his pet names, "plousum, lousum, gotcha lousum". She even mentioned the "Little Babe" and I thought she was going to say his name, but the memory slipped away. On Monday morning, after a full day of Sunday visitors of friends, children and grandchildren, she went into a coma.

Wednesday, August 8th (30 years to the day of her Papa's death), Clay placed his hands over her eyes to close them for the last time. She was lying on her right side so I lifter her from the shoulders to straighten out her body and put in her dentures. As I pulled her towards me, one eye came open as if to say, "I'm still watching you, Mary Burcha."