

*My Mother, Carrie Jabes*  
*by Pearl Wicks*

My mother was the strongest, most dedicated, hard-working woman I have ever known. She endured formidable hardships during the depression, never giving up and always believing that somehow she would persevere, with God's help. She remained loving and caring throughout her ordeals.

On September 8, 1889, Kamy Edith Anna, always known as Carrie Anna, was born in Rockford, Illinois to Samuel and Elna Holmquist. She was the eldest of seven children. Her father was a carpenter, and the family moved often, residing in Illinois, Minnesota, Idaho, Washington and finally, Montana. Money was short in the large family, and Carrie left school after fifth grade. At age 12, she started doing housework for other families. When she was a young woman she filed on a homestead south of Joplin, Montana. Emil John Jabes, the tall handsome son of German immigrants, filed on one nearby. Carrie and Emil were married in 1913<sup>0</sup>, and to this union six children were born, one dying in infancy. The family moved to a farm south of Chester, Montana, in 1926. Four years later, my father, my 14-year-old brother William and I became sick with pneumonia. After eight weeks in the hospital the Lord spared me, but my father and brother died. After a tragic double funeral, my mother was left with a small dryland farm and four daughters, Violet, Evelyn, Margaret and Pearl. Violet was nearly sixteen and I was the youngest at four.

We all worked hard during the depression, but my mother showed the most stamina of all. Without the schooling necessary for a good job, she opted to try to keep the family together on the farm. This meant hiring someone to put the crops in, sometimes a different one each year. When one of Mother's brothers could help, a successful crop was possible, but some other hired hands brought disaster. One man didn't set the drill correctly for seeding and the crop was a complete failure. Another time mother found the hired tractor driver lying beside the tractor drunk! Dust storms, dry weather, and low prices for commodities created a struggle for any farmer to make a living, but for a widow with four young daughters, making a living was an even bigger challenge.

Chickens, pigs, milk cows and a few range cattle helped supplement income and fill the table. I remember Mother riding the horse-drawn mower to cut the hay for winter feed. My oldest sister would hitch the horses to the rake to put the hay in bunches. Then all of us would pitch hay onto a rack, take it to our hay barn, and pitch it into the mow. When the fences around the cow pasture needed mending, Mother fixed them. She used an old-fashioned post hole digger and tamped the dirt around the posts with a heavy long bar that would have taxed the strength of most men. The finished fence was quite durable.

Milking cows was a chore morning and night, and we girls helped, but sometimes Mother took over that task, too. The milk was separated into skim milk and cream using the separator. The bowl and other parts of this apparatus had to be thoroughly washed each time. Once a week, some of the cream was churned into butter in a wooden or glass churn. The excess cream was stored in a cream can in the cool cellar until full, when it was taken to town to be shipped to a creamery. There was no electricity available, thus no refrigeration. To preserve dairy products during hot weather, we put them into a deep, covered bucket and hung them in the well.

Indoor plumbing was also lacking at our home place. All water for household use was carried from a well in buckets and carried out again after it was used!

The girls fed the chickens and gathered eggs, but Mother took care of the bigger jobs of cleaning the henhouse and "slopping" the hogs. I recall the pig barrel full of soured milk and food scraps, which, along with ground grain, comprised the pigs' diet.

<sup>0</sup> ( Their wedding was described in the Chester paper, "Signal", as "one of the prettiest in this vicinity for some time." )

At butchering time, a friend or relative usually slaughtered a pig or cow, and Mother processed it. Since there were no freezers, she canned most of the beef and some pork. She cured the hams and bacon and hung them in the cellar.

In addition to meat processing, I remember many hours of canning fruit in the fall. I can still see that towering stack of fruit boxes in the kitchen, all to be canned on a wood- and coal- burning stove. That stove required a supply of wood and coal put up before winter. Many an hour Mother spent chopping wood and piling it in the woodshed. She felt using the ax was too dangerous for us, so she did it all herself. We helped by carrying the wood to the shed and the house.

To cover the mud in the yard, my mother completed another big project: building wooden sidewalks. Cement was too expensive, so she used wood to lay a path to the outdoor privy, the bunkhouse, the woodshed, and the barnyard fence. These walkways lasted the seventeen years she lived on the farm.

Washing clothes was another major routine duty, using a wringer washing machine run by a gas motor. The water was carried from the well, heated in a boiler on the stove and carried to the machine. Mother often added lye to break down the 66 grain hardness of the water. Two tubs were filled for a double rinse. When it rained enough to fill the reservoir in the pasture, we used buckets to fill two barrels, then brought them to the house on a stoneboat pulled by horses. We all appreciated the nice soft water for baths as well as for clothes washing!

Other things that required attention on the farm during those depression years included hand pumping water into a trough for the cattle when the reservoir was dry, breaking the ice in the winter when it was frozen over, raking the yard and burning the tremendous amount of tumble weeds piled along the fence lines from strong winds, cleaning manure from the cow and horse barn, shoveling grain from a truck into a bin and shoveling it back into a truck when it was sold, repairing corrals, painting the house inside and out, and handling any unpredictable problems that arose frequently. All of us helped when we could, but the burden of keeping the farm going was on my mother's shoulders. She never complained, but had a great deal of worry and concern which she handled with dignity and perseverance. One thing she didn't have to deal with was figuring and paying income tax!

Never once did mother accept welfare, even when our income was severely limited. We seldom had fancy extras on our dinner table, but I never remember going hungry either. A garden was an essential part of our life. Since rain was the only "watering" we had, it was often too dry to produce many vegetables, but I recall the potato bin in the cellar usually had a winter's supply of potatoes.

This exceptional mother of mine had few idle moments. She might take time for a short nap during an extremely tiring day, but she also found time to do many special things around the house. She baked delicious bread and rolls, planned and cooked big Sunday dinners, not only for family, but often for 20 to 30 relatives and friends. Our house was small, but she always managed very well. Home made ice cream was a great treat. First Mother got ice from someone who had put up ice in the winter in an underground ice house. Then she mixed the ingredients together and put them in the ice cream freezer, and we took turns cranking the handle until the ice cream was frozen. We all came with spoons to help clean the dasher when it was pulled from the container. Then it was closed and packed with ice until we were ready to have it for dessert.

During the winter mother made quilts. I'm certain during her lifetime she completed over 100 afghans, patterned quilts, and others. She cut the pieces and sewed them together.

and after the quilt was made, ~~would~~<sup>she</sup> put it on quilting frames and hand stitch<sup>ed</sup> the entire area. This task required many hours of careful work, but the finished quilted product was beautiful, with long, even lines of stitches. Usually she tied the afghans with yarn.

When my father was alive, we had a Willis-Knight car, and later a Model-T Ford. I'm not sure what happened to the first car, but the Model-T burned when my oldest sister was a high school senior, leaving us with a horse and buggy in good weather and horse and sleigh in winter as our sole transportation (until we could later afford to buy a Model-A Ford). My second oldest sister was in charge of driving to school, taking care of the horses when we got there, and hitching them to the buggy or sleigh after school. For her, this chore was not only tedious, but embarrassing, since everyone else drove cars by this time. For those cold drives to town, Mother would heat flat irons and wrap them, to help keep our feet and hands warm.

Once in a blizzard, we didn't come home when Mom expected us. She seldom rode horseback, but this time she was so worried that she saddled up a horse and set out to find us. It turned out that the school principal had held all rural children until the storm abated, but with no telephones in those days, Mother had no way of knowing we were safe until she rode the 3.5 miles to town through the blizzard. That's the way my mom was: willing to risk her own well-being for that of her daughters.

In the same way, she never considered remarrying. She feared a stepfather might not be compatible with her family. After we were grown, though, Mother had a friend whom she may have become close to, but he died suddenly. This was another painful loss for a woman who had suffered so much loss already in her life. Nevertheless, Mother always continued to find happiness in her family, and their accomplishments. All four daughters completed high school and three went on to college. They all married and raised families within 60 miles of the home place. Mother was with us every step of the way.

In 1947 Mother moved from the farm into Chester, seventeen years after losing my father and William. One might think she would have been ready for an easier life after all the hard work on the farm. Not so: she worked steadily in her yard, raised beautiful flowers, clipped the hedge when necessary, mowed the grass, and had a productive strawberry patch. She also continued to make quilts into her eighties.

Mother passed away in 1978 at the age of 88. When I remember my mother, I think of a woman with an iron constitution, who worked harder than any person should have to work; a woman who kept family together, and also kept the farm from "going under;" a woman who showed endless stamina in spite of adverse conditions; but most of all, a woman who cared. We four daughters loved our mother dearly, still miss her, and feel heartbroken because of the sacrifices she made. She is truly the most remarkable woman I've known. It seemed to me that she triumphed over the many crosses she had to bear. She guided us down life's pathway with a feeling of security, and the knowledge that "where there is a will, there is a way." Never give up!

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