

Through the Years

Ramblings of Lee Fairchild July 1993

My father, Chester Hobart Fairchild was born in Magoffin County, Kentucky on July 5, 1897. His parents were Henry Frank and Nannie Lee (Johnston) Fairchild. His early years were spent on a farm near Elk Creek, not far from Sayersville, Kentucky. The family moved to Pecan Gap, Texas ca. 1905, crossing the Oklahoma Indian Territory. Granddad Fairchild, not being satisfied with Texas, returned the family to Kentucky. In 1911 the family moved to Michigan and settled in the northwest corner of Newago County. My father was between 13 and 14 years of age at the time. The family moved again to Wolverine, Michigan and at the age of 17 my father got his first job as a clerk with the Michigan Central Railroad. He was later transferred to Wyandotte, Michigan where he worked as a clerk in the Michigan Central freight yards.

It was in Wyandotte where he met my mother, Gladys Pratt, born on May 13, 1903 to Clarence and Jessie (Tubbs) Pratt. They were married on October 30, 1920. My sister, Anita Harriet was born the following year on December 1, 1921 in Wyandotte, Michigan. I was born exactly six years later on December 1, 1927 in what was then the new Wyandotte General Hospital. During the years between our births, my parents lived in Ecorse, Commerce, Whitmore Lake, Detroit and Wyandotte, all in Michigan.

The first home I can recall was in Redford Township, Michigan. In November 1932 I remember going to the voting polls with my mother in an old Hudson automobile. That was the year Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to his first term as president. The country was in a deep depression that would last until World War II began in 1941.

My father often told the story about the time we lived in Redford and he was offered a job with Bankers Mutual Life Insurance Company in Chicago. At the time he had eight dollars. He gave my mother three and kept five and along with two extra cans of gasoline, he drove the Hudson all night to Chicago. He was waiting on the steps of the office building when the manager arrived. Father got the job and was asked to open an office in South Bend, Indiana. That caused us to move from Redford to Niles, Michigan with a short stay in a rented house in East Lansing, Michigan. I began school in Niles in the fall of 1933. Later we moved into a larger house in Niles, situated on a bluff above the railroad yard. Times were hard but my mother was a soft touch for the hobos and itinerants that would come to the door asking for handouts. (The hobos would leave marks on the houses that provided handouts. It was a sign of the times.)

My bedroom (in the summer) was a second floor screened porch. A rose trellis came up the side of the porch and late one night I was awakened by a noise at the screen. A man had climbed the trellis and was attempting to break in when I let out a yell. My father was away on business and mother called the police. He was probably a hobo from the railroad tracks, but that ended mother's handouts.

One of the treats I enjoyed at the time was riding the inter-urban from Niles to St. Joseph, Michigan with my mother. It was like a two car streetcar that went through the country side. Often, Anita and I would spend part of our summers staying with Granddad and Grandma Fairchild on their farm near Eastmanville, Michigan or with our uncle Emmons and aunt Celia Fairchild whose farm was near our grandparent's. Neither of the farms has electricity. Light was from oil lamps, cooking was done on a wood stove and water was carried from the pump outside. The outhouse or privy was out back and the toilet paper was a Sears-Roebuck catalog. Saturday night baths were taken in a washtub set in front of the wood cookstove. Pine trees grew in abundance in this part of Michigan and when the fields were cleared for farming the pine stumps were placed upside down in the hedge rows to form fences. We would play baseball in the Kloosterhouse pasture located cross the road and use a rock or cow chips for bases.

At my grandma's house there was a dirt floored room off the kitchen where the fire wood was stored and a DeLaval cream separator stood. To me, it was a monstrous cast iron machine with a big hand crank and shiny stainless steel bowls. After hand milking the cows, the pails of milk were carried to the house where it was poured into this machine. Sometimes it was my job to turn the crank while the cream came out one spout and milk the other. Most of the milk was sold, but milk for family user was kept in the spring house as there was no refrigeration. For me that room always had a pleasant smell, the odor of the pine wood and sweetness of the raw milk.

There was always work to be done and we were put to work . . . feeding the animals, picking strawberries, hoeing the garden, bringing the cows in from the pasture, etc. Uncle Emmons had a small building near the house which was his tool shed. It was a favorite place of mine with the work bench, tools and a hand operated grinding wheel. Another tool I remember was the corn sheller. An ear of corn was placed in the top and a crank on the side was turned to remove the kernels from the cob. I would use it to shell corn to feed the chickens and pigs. They say there is nothing like certain odors to take you back in time or stir past memories. I can still recall some of those odors to this day.

From Niles we moved to St. Joseph, Michigan where we lived in a brick apartment building situated on a bluff above Lake Michigan. There was a park between the apartment and the bluff where my school friends and I would play. When my mother would let me, I would go down to the beach and walk out to the end of the pier where the light house was.

Another move took us to Coopersville, Michigan where my father worked for the Durham Hardware selling appliances. The depression was causing hardships for many and sales were few and far between. Anita and I went to school in Coopersville. I can't recall the year but I believe I was in the fourth grade around 1936.

From there we moved to a farm house between Coopersville and Ravenna, Michigan. Anita continued to attend school in Coopersville as she was in high school by then. I went to a one room country school about one and one half miles from the house. I was about ten and in the fifth grade. Laverne (Ike) Leifers lived on a farm just down the road and we would walk to school together. In good weather we would cut across the fields to shorten the distance, but when the snow came we had to stay on the roads. The school had a pot belly stove in the center of the room for heat and out door privies in the back. There were eight grades taught in the one room and I believe the young students learned quicker by hearing the lessons for the older students.

The country was still mired in the depression, but we always had plenty of food. We had a large garden, chicken, turkeys and fresh meat from pigs and calves. My mother canned much of our food on a wood cook stove in the cellar. She made jams, jellies, preserves, canned vegetables, fruit and even meat. During that period, my father somehow was able to buy about 100 used radios from the J.L.Hudson Company in Detroit. These were radios Hudson's had taken in on trade for new ones. Where he got the money to do so I'll never know. He hauled all those radios from Detroit to the farm on a four wheel farm trailer. They were stored in the barn, cellar and other out buildings. Tony Bushman was a high school student in Coopersville and was a whiz at repairing radios. Tony practically lived at our house taking parts from one radio to repair another. He got most of them working. My father would go out and 'sell' them to farmers in the area. No one had cash to pay for them, but instead the pay came in the form of chickens, calves, pigs, turkeys, feed, etc. It was a time when people bartered. I recall several wooden barrels filled with popcorn still on the cob as payment for a radio. That winter we sat evenings shelling the popcorn and putting it in cellophane bags. My father then sold the bags of popcorn.

The farm house did have running water supplied by a windmill that stood next to the house. We had running water, that is, as long as there was wind. On calm days I would have to disconnect the fan blades from the pump, and pump the water by hand to fill the storage tank. A ladder went to the top of the windmill tower so the fan blades and vane could be greased periodically. I liked climbing the tower to look out over the country side. It was like I was on top of the world. The time we lived in that house provided some of the best memories of my childhood. I had a part collie dog named 'Pal'. . . I got my first two wheel bicycle (old as it was). . . I learned to swim in the creek down the road. . . I learned to ice skate on the pond in the back pasture. . . I would help on the Leifer farm when the steam tractor came to thrash wheat, oats, or make silage from corn. Ike and I would sometimes spend a night in their 'sugar bush' tending the fire to boil the

sap down making maple syrup. These are all good memories of a time and place I loved.

Moving time, however, came again, This time it was to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Anita stayed in Coopersville working for the Lilly family as a domestic so she could finish high school there. We rented a house on the corner of Lafayette and Franklin streets where I attended Madison Elementary School. The following fall I went into the seventh grade at South High School. (President Gerald Ford graduated from South). I don't recall how long we lived there or what my father did for a living, but it seemed to be a rather sad time. The country was still in a depression and Germany was beginning to expand her dominance in Europe. The WPA (Works Progress Administration) formed by President Roosevelt was putting people to work on public works projects. At the time a major WPA project was progressing along Franklin Street. A new water system was being constructed for the city of Grand Rapids to bring water from Lake Michigan. A major aqueduct was being installed down the center of Franklin Street and the large sections of concrete pipe and huge piles of sand made a great playground. It was here that finances became very bad for my parents. We had to make another move. My father and I moved in with his sister Gladys in Lincoln Park, Michigan and my mother went to work for a family in Detroit as a live-in domestic.

My father eventually found work selling motor oil for a distributor in Detroit. Now having two income, my parents were able to buy a used 14 foot house trailer that they parked in Arnie's Trailer Court in Garden City, Michigan near Detroit. Things began to improve and they traded the old trailer in for a new 23 foot Vagabond and bought a new 1941 Ford station wagon (a woody). As the economy began to get better my parents began to get back on their feet. During the summer of 1941 we moved the trailer to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where my father continued to sell motor oil for another distributor. The trailer was parked behind a tavern on the south side of town and I attended Pulaski High School. (Anita had married Glen Averill in September of 1940 and was living in Grand Rapids).

On Sunday, December 7, 1941 war was declared against Japan and my father thought it best to return to Garden City. It was back to Arnie's. I got a paper route delivering 'The Detroit News'. The daily cost 3 cents and the Sunday edition was 10 cents. I earned 9 cents a week for each customer and I averaged about 110 customers of about 10 dollars a week. I supplemented that income by working at a nearby roller rink and washing cars in the trailer court. My father went to work at the Ford Motor Company (Rough Plant) in the tool and die building. He was later transferred to Ford's Nankin Mill Engraving Plant. Mother went to work at Ford administration in the old Rotunda Building on Schaeffer Road. I began having problems in school and my father was able to have me enrolled in the Henry Ford Trade School located in the Rouge Plant. I soon realized I wasn't cut out to work in a factory. At the time many of my older friends were either enlisting or being drafted into the armed forces. I decided I wanted to enlist also. In September, 1942, I ran away from home (age 14) and ended up in Portland, Oregon where I enlisted in the Navy by lying about my age. (The minimum age

was 17). I was sworn in on October 21, 1942 and sent to US Naval Training Station, Farragut, Idaho for recruit training. After finishing boot camp I was sent to Aviation Radio School at the Naval Air Station, Alameda, California. Other service included the Oakland Municipal Airport, USS Ormsby-APA 49, USN Destroyer Base, San Diego, California. I attended schools in Monterey, Vallejo and Half Moon Bay. I was sent to the Pacific in March 1944 and served on the USS William P. Biddle-APA 8 as a radioman third class. The ship participated in assault landings on Guam, New Britain, Leyte and Luzon in the Philippines. The ship returned to San Francisco in March 1945 for a refit and repairs. While in port, Patricia and I were married on April 21, 1945. I was on a 30 day leave and after our honeymoon at the Old Hearst Ranch near Pleasanton, California, we took the train back to Michigan to visit my parents. On our return to California we left Detroit a couple days early to avoid running into several shipmates who would also be returning. Our plans, however, went astray as the train arrived late in Chicago causing us to miss our connection. We stayed over and boarded our California train the next day. Sure enough there were several shipmates heading back to San Francisco.

My ship left port in early June, heading for the Philippines. At Leyte we loaded troops and were steaming for Hawaii in August when word of the Japanese surrender reached us. Orders came for us to proceed to the US where we entered the port of San Pedro, California. I was transferred to United States Naval Hospital in Long Beach in preparation for discharge. Further Orders took me to the United States Naval Reserve Station at Treasure Island where I was discharged on November 7, 1945.

While I was in the Navy, my father took a job selling maps for Hearn Brothers. My parents moved to Hackensack, New Jersey for a short period. Glen Averill was in the US Coast Guard at Sheepshead Bay, New York and Anita went to live with our parents in New Jersey to be near Glen. In August 1945 my parents returned to Michigan and bought a house on two acres of land near Rives Junction. The war had just ended and my father began his own business as a distributor of automotive motor oils and greases. Patricia and I returned to Michigan and bought a small house in Grand Rapids where I attended art school on the GI Bill of Rights. Our first child, Paul, was born in Mercy Hospital in Jackson, Michigan on July 13, 1946 and we moved into our new house as soon as Patricia and Paul left the hospital. The house cost \$3000 with \$1000 down and a \$25 per month mortgage. We were able to buy barely enough furniture to get by, a used gas stove and an icebox (not a refrigerator). We couldn't afford to own a car so we used the city buses for our transportation. The grocery store was about five blocks away and we would bring the groceries home in Paul's baby buggy. I received \$90 monthly under the GI Bill and supplemented that by working nights. I loaded semi trailers for Interstate Freight Company, ran the service elevator in the Pantlind Hotel, made small rubber parts at Corduroy Rubber Company, and sorted mail at the US Post Office. The following year we sold the house (for a 33% profit) and began construction of a house on Berry Road near Rives Junction, Michigan. During that period my father and I began a nursery

business, 'Paradise Gardens Nursery'. I worked on the house, worked in the nursery, worked for the Michigan Department of Conservation as a park ranger in the Waterloo Recreation Area during the summer months. During the school year I attended the Ringling School of Art in Sarasota, Florida.

Patricia went back to California for part of that period. The house was finally finished and Patricia returned. The original house was small, but grew as the family grew. We lived there for 24 years. Tim was born on July 11, 1952; Faune came along on July 25, 1954; and Eric was a surprise on February 20, 1964. Hisako, a Japanese exchange student joined our family in 1963.

I went to work for Consumers Power Company in 1951. It began as a night job allowing me to work in the nursery during the day. The following year I transferred to the Display Department as a display artist. Over the ensuing years, with steady advancement, I was named head of the department in 1970 and in 1974 named head of Advertising, Display, Photographic and Audio-visual departments.

In 1971 we sold our home on Berry Road and bought a house on Round Lake in the southern part of Jackson County. In 1972 my father sold his business and their home and moved to Roswell, New Mexico. They returned to Grand Rapids in 1974/75. Paul and Tim had graduated from Northwest High School, Faune from Hanover-Horton High School and Eric would graduate from Lumen Christi High School in 1982. I was beginning to look ahead to retirement from Consumers Power Company so we invested in a building site in Polk County, North Carolina where we had our retirement home built. Retirement came on January 1, 1984. We sold the lake house and made the move to North Carolina.

I had moved my parents to Polk County where I was able to look after them. My father's health deteriorated to the point where he had to be admitted to a nursing home in Tryon, North Carolina. He died on September 22, 1987 at the age of 90. My mother moved into a small condominium in Columbus, North Carolina and still resides there at age 90.

Patricia's health was deteriorating due to multiple sclerosis. We made the decision to build a new home, designed for easy access and wheelchair accommodation. The house was completed in January 1992 and we made the move in February. At this writing we are still living here and hope to do so for a long time to come.

July 2, 1993
Polk County, North Carolina

ADDENDUM

Patricia died on December 30, 1993 of complications caused by the multiple sclerosis. The following summer on June 25, 1994 I married Pauline Marie Miller, widow of Richard E. Miller. Pauline was formerly from Cleveland, Ohio but had resided in Hendersonville, North Carolina since 1983. We sold her Hendersonville home and kept my Columbus home where we presently reside.

My mother's health had deteriorated and in December 1995 I moved her into a personal care facility in Tryon Estates here in Columbus. At the time of this writing she is being moved into the medical care facility at Tryon Estates where she will receive skilled medical care. She is now approaching 94 years of age and has serious memory loss.

January 1997
Polk County, North Carolina