

FRANCES LAVADA (ALTMAN) COX

October 20, 1912 – September 30, 1991

Write Mother's chapter here, and move over into "Our Cox Family" book chapters.

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My mother, Frances Lavada Altman, named for her Grandmother Stockton, was the second of two daughters born to Regina Palestine (Stockton) and Bertie Bertram Altman. She was born October 20, 1912 in Abilene, Taylor County, Texas, and died September 30, 1991 at Tyler, Smith County, Texas.

Her paternal grandparents were Joseph L. Altman (1855-1925) and Eliza Irvin Clark (1861-1938), who moved from Hamilton County, Florida to Waverly, Walker County, Texas in the fall of 1886. Her maternal grandparents were William Benjamin Stockton (1850-1903) and Frances Lavada McElhannon (1855-1937), who came to Abilene, Taylor County, Texas from Jackson County, Georgia about 1881.

Mother's parents had seven children, with the first three born in Abilene. Two died in infancy. The first child of Bertie and Regina Altman was a little daughter, Evelyn, born January 25, 1908 in Abilene, but she was only a few weeks old when she died on March 16. Her death must have been very sad for the young couple.

My mother grew up in her parent's home with four brothers who lived to maturity. As you will see, they moved several times, because the last four children were each born in different places. Besides Evelyn, the next children born to Bertie and Regina Altman in their order of age were:

- 1) Joseph Leon, born February 25, 1909 was called "J. L." by family members, was the oldest son of his parents and was born at Abilene. J. L. was named for his Grandpa Altman.
- 2) My mother, Frances Lavada Altman, born three years later, also in Abilene, followed J.L. in age and was the third child. My mother was given the nickname of "Sis" by her brothers, a name they called her the rest of her life. She was named for her grandmother, Frances Lavada (McElhannon) Stockton.
- 3) Bertie Bertram, Jr., called "Dink," was born June 20, 1914 after they left Abilene and were living in Madisonville in Madison County, Texas.

- 4) Reginald Neal, called “Webby,” was born December 19, 1917, after they moved to Roswell, Chaves County, New Mexico.
- 5) George Fletcher, followed Webby, born July 25, 1922, but he died as an infant. He was named after the man who owned the butcher shop where granddaddy was working at the time.
- 6) Richard Calvin was born May 29, 1925. He was not given a nickname until he went to the Army in 1944 and began calling himself “Dick.” But all the rest of the family continued to call him Richard as they had all of their life.

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Growing Up

My mother lived in Abilene where she was born about two years, but by 1914 when Uncle Dink was born, they had moved to Madisonville, Texas, near other Altman relatives. Three years later, by 1917 when Uncle Webby was born, they were living in Roswell, New Mexico. Bertie and several of his brothers drove a herd of horses from Abilene to Roswell to sell to the army, where an army base had been established during World War I. They were still living there during the 1917 flu epidemic, where every member of the family, except grandmother, had the flu and were very sick.

When they first moved to Roswell, they lived in a two-story house in town. They liked to watch the “soldier trains” going by out of their upstairs windows. The house was very close to the tracks, and they waved at all the soldiers. Many waved back. Some were riding on the tops of the rail cars, and many were shipping out for overseas service.

Later, the family moved to the country and lived 4.1 miles southwest of Roswell, where my grandfather, a butcher, built a slaughter house and raised cattle for slaughter, and also worked in a meat market in town. Two of his brothers, T. D. and Launcie, also moved to Roswell with their families and helped with the slaughter business.

Their new home in the country had a large stucco house, a two-story barn for hay and a large cistern for water. It also had a good peach orchard, and grandmother and Aunt Lemma (Uncle T.D.’s wife) used to can together.

Mother started to first grade in Roswell in St. Peter’s Catholic school, and did so well, that they took her brother, “J.L.” out of public school and put him in Catholic school, too. She told me she attended school there until she was in the fifth grade. Sometimes they rode J. L.’s horse to school. In the winter, J. L. drove the buggy, and grandmother heated a big flat rock in the fire place and wrapped it with an old quilt and put it inside a tow sack in the floor board so they could keep their feet warm on the way to school.

While living at Roswell, Bertie and Regina had another son, George Fletcher, born in 1922. He was named after the owner of the meat market where Granddaddy worked, because they thought so much of Mr. Fletcher. Their little son only lived a month and twenty-two days when he died on September 17.

The Altmans lived in New Mexico until about 1924, when they moved back to Texas because Bertie's father was very ill. In May 1925, they were living in Lynn County on the South Texas High Plains at Tahoka, where mother's youngest brother, Richard Calvin, was born in May 1925.

Mother said she entered sixth grade at Tahoka and at that time Texas only had eleven grades, whereas New Mexico had twelve grades. She graduated from seventh grade elementary school into high school there, according to a little graduation program. According to this little card which grandmother saved for her and which mother saved among her mementos the rest of her life, the graduation ceremonies began at 8:00 p.m. in the high school auditorium on May 21, 1927. Among those on the graduation list, I counted twenty-two girls and fifteen boys, one of which was my mother, Frances Altman.

While they were living at Tahoka, a big fire broke out on one side of the square where the courthouse stood. Six or seven buildings burned, including her father's café and root beer stand. All that was saved from the fire was Bertie's root beer barrel. The fire also burned up her brother's violin which he had left there after school. J. L. was so happy, because he never had to take violin lessons again!

Mother also told me once that she and Dink picked cotton on Saturday's and that is how she made the money to buy her first pair of skates, when she was about thirteen or fourteen years old.

I remember one time when my niece, Becky, was asked to make a three-generation comparison of the women in her family – which included Becky's generation, her mother, Jane, and her grandmother, "Mama Frank," one of the questions asked was: "What kind of transportation mode did you have?" Mother paused for a minute before answering and said with a smile, "We used our feet mostly." How many kids today would give that as their answer in this day and time?

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Health, Medicine and Doctors

In those days they practiced a lot of home remedies and visits to the doctors were rare. I remember asking mother whether or not they had any broken bones. I do know she told me they had the usual childhood diseases – mumps, measles and chicken pox.

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It was during 1925 that my mother's grandfather, Joseph L. Altman, died from stomach cancer at Burleson, on their farm outside of Fort Worth. I'm not certain whether or not the family were able to attend, although I expect I have this information in some of my oral history stories from Uncle Webby and mother. *(I'll have to search for this. I know Uncle Webby told about most of the sons, including my grandfather, going to Burleson one summer and fall to help harvest and bring in the crops because Grandpa Altman was sick and unable to do it. When they finished, they all went down to the Trinity River, camped out, and fished for two or three days. He told about floating down the river on an inner tube.)*

Not long after this, mother moved with her parents to Archer County, where one of the largest shallow oil pools in the area had been developed. Bertie Altman operated another café at Archer City. Mother recalled that she saw her first picture show there and remembered that it had a dirt floor. Her Uncle Arthur came by to see them while they were living there and stayed awhile. Apparently business must have slowed down and the Altman family next moved to Wichita Falls in Wichita County, a manufacturing and beef and dairy area. The town thrived even more when oil was discovered near Electra and later at Burkburnett. Mother went to school there for one year where her father worked for Piggly Wiggly as a butcher.

From there, the family moved to Pampa, where they lived until 1931. Richard once told me that he started first grade in Pampa. Bertie worked in a meat market for Mr. Thomas at Pampa, and later ran it altogether. Still later he bought the meat market from Mr. Thomas. Soon afterwards, he opened a café next door, then another building next to that, which he remodeled into four apartments that he rented. The oil business was booming in Pampa during this period and many new families and transients had moved into town. Regina helped do the cooking for the café and mother and all her brothers helped out after school and on weekends. One of their specialties, according to mother, was their fried apple and peach pies.

Finally, Bertie Altman prospered enough to buy a rabbit farm out in the country on the outskirts of town. Before long, they had pens of so many different animals that people from town brought their children out to see them on Sunday afternoons. Granddaddy sold all the rabbits he could raise during this Depression era to the markets and customers in town. Rabbits were good to eat and were cheaper than beef and pork. Mother said it was her and Webby's job to keep all the rabbit pens cleaned out, and to put out feed and water for them.

One thing I wish I had asked mother about was where and how she got her clothes. I know she told me once that she learned to sew in homemaking at school, and that one time Aunt Velma helped her make a dress and put in a zipper for her home sewing project. Mother thought she would make an "A" because Aunt Velma was an excellent seamstress, but she only made a "B+." I know that two of the most popular fabrics at that period were organdy and dimity in the summer time and wool and crepe in the winter time. But before that, I would have liked to know for sure if grandmother made all her clothes or not. It stands to reason that since grandmother had a 1905 Singer treadle

sewing machine that she made her daughter's clothes. I know Uncle Webby said she made shirts for all the four boys.

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Going to School at Pampa

In a way, my mother led a pretty sheltered life when she was growing up – in a time when the world moved at a much slower pace than it does today. She had no thought of going to college – no one in her family had ever gone to college – and not too many that she knew planned to go on to higher education. Girls were more interested in getting married. As a rule, it was more or less expected of them. Many boys quit school early and went to work to help out at home, particularly where there were big families and many mouths to feed.

During the Depression era – 1929 -1935 – times were hard and nobody had much money. In rural areas, they really didn't need a lot and were pretty self-sufficient. A lot of things were *bartered* for.

In discussing kids at school, she told me about her closest friends – Lucille Kettering and Catherine Roberts – in high school. The three girls went every where together. Mother said, "Where you saw one, you always saw the other two." I think she told me the kids at school called them "the three Musketeers."

Another thing that was special about my mother is that for the rest of her life she continued to correspond with these two friends even after all three married, and they exchanged Christmas cards and sometimes birthday cards, until their deaths. Mother saved several letters that Lucile Moss wrote her in later years and I found them among mother's treasures after she died.

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Mother told me that when they decided to get married they had been talking about it for awhile. She was a Junior in high school, and it was after Christmas, on January 18, 1930. She was seventeen and Daddy was twenty. Mother told me her remembrance of this event but daddy remembered it and told the story much more vividly:

"Well, I had a date to take her to the picture show. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and at the time I was working for the Magnolia Petroleum Company – working derrick on a drilling rig out at Pampa. And I went down to get her and she came out and it was really cold – snow all over the ground. And we got in the car and we already had a date set for up in the spring to get married. I've forgotten the date exactly, but we had it picked out. But at any rate, we left her house and started to the picture show and got about two blocks from her house, and I just mentioned the fact that I wished it was that date. She says, "I do too."

And I just turned my car around in the middle of the street. And she says, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Let's go get married now." And she says, "I can't. I've got this dress on. I couldn't wear these clothes."

So I just drove her back home. And her mother wasn't at home, and she went in and put on a black dress...kind of a long formal dress of some kind. I believe it was black. And she got her long coat, and we took off to Sayre, Oklahoma. It was somewhere around two hundred miles away. On a one-lane strip of highway. Snow banks were drifted up higher than the car on both sides. If we had met a car, there wouldn't have been able to pass each other...somebody would have had to back up, because just one lane was open."

By the time they got to Sayre it was way up in the night, and the roads were drifted with snow. At one point they had to get out and drive in a wheat field. In some places, the snow was higher than the car. And daddy said mother got scared and started crying. And wanted to back out. *(Daddy laughed at this point in telling the story.)*

"And I just had on low quarter shoes. And the road had drifted full of snow and they had taken down the barbed wire fences where the snow had blown off and go a ways, and then get back up on the highway. So we finally got up there, and then I had to find a Justice of the Peace. And get a marriage license. And the justice of the peace was in the picture show...mind you, the midnight show, they called it, but it started at eleven o'clock, see. Somebody told me where he was, and we went and got him out of the picture show. There was just one there. And he came out there and we had to go get the license then. He sold them, I guess. It seems to me like. At any rate, we had to have two witnesses. One of them was named "Kingdom Snell." I never will forget that. He had a mustache, like Clark Gable's. And I have forgotten what the other guy's name was. It's on our marriage certificate.

So we got hitched. And then we went to a hotel and got a room. I don't remember the name of it. And we sent Mr. and Mrs. Altman a telegram Sunday morning, and said, "Here's how...we're married now." *(Laughter.)* And Monday we went back home and walked in about 2:30 or 3:00 in the evening. And her mother came to the door and she looked at us and said, "You two sure think you're smart." Of course, I was embarrassed and I didn't say anything. But Frankie, she was real flippant and she said, "Sure do." *(More laughter.)*

And then her mother started crying a little bit. And we had to start hunting a house...an apartment, rather. We rented a nice little place...a duplex, upstairs. Stucco. I thought it was nice. I don't remember what street it was on, but she probably does. And then mother thought a minute and said:

“No, but I think it tells it in that little newspaper clipping...what street it was. It’s in that picture book.”

Daddy continued with the story a little bit more:

“It was Monday when we went back. I had a 1930 model Chevrolet coupe, with a rumble seat in the back of it. And we had to go buy everything. Linens for the bed, and even pillow cases, and things like that.

Mother remembered that the apartment came furnished with dishes and everything to cook with, and it had a chest-type ice box, but not like the ones we have today. They didn’t have electric refrigerators then. Mother knew how to cook a little, she said... just enough to get by...mainly what she had learned in home economics at school.

When I asked daddy if he had to go back to work on Monday, he said it was Tuesday when he went back. I asked if any of their friends gave them presents, and he said that mother’s friends might have, but he didn’t have many friends in Pampa, except the men he worked with. Mother couldn’t remember anything but the pillows, but daddy said:

“Lucille and Catherine probably gave us something. Lucille gave you a table cloth and napkins. And of course they still came around just like...when she was going to school and they were her good friends. And they came to the house afterwards. But her cooking was terrible, ohhh...groaning. It was terrible. And I made a comment about it. And her mother baked some pies and brought them up there, and boy I was really glad to see them.”

Mother corrected him and said:

“No, she didn’t bring them up there. She came up there and made them. She might have brought some of the stuff to make them with. Some lemon pies.”

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When she married, the *Pampa Daily News* ran a little Society column written by Miss Willette Cole. The phone number for the paper was “666!” On Monday Evening, January 20, 1930, she carried the following little story:

**Miss Frankie Altman
Marries Gilbert Cox
Saturday at Sayre**

Miss Frankie Altman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. B. B. Altman, 418 South Cuyler street, became the bride of Mr. Gilbert Cox on Saturday evening, in a simple ceremony in Sayre, Okla. Upon returning to Pampa the young couple will be at home at 307 East Kingsmill.

The bride is a popular member of the Junior class of Central high school. Mr. Cox is the son of Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Cox, 428 North Wayne street. He is an employee of Magnolia Oil Company.

That same year a cute picture of mother picture appeared in *The Harvester*, the year book of Central High School, as “Frankie Altman” and beneath her name the caption read:

“The lure of housekeeping was greater than going to school.”

(Dink and Richard were the only two of mother’s brothers who graduated from high school. Dink graduated from Central High in Pampa and Richard graduated from high school at Clayton, New Mexico.)

Sometime later the newlyweds moved to the apartments that her daddy owned. That’s where they were living a year later when Eula Mae came down from Stinnett and she stayed a couple of weeks with them, and worked at the dime store during Christmas. It was the first job she ever had. At that time Grandmother and Granddaddy Cox were living in Stinnett, but they were getting ready to move to East Texas. It was then that Bob came to Pampa and asked Eula Mae to marry him.

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Letter from Lucile “Cile” – Mother’s best friend – written from Pampa on December 28, 1931 – addressed to Mrs. Frankie Cox, Overton, Texas Route 1, c/o F. A. Florence (Mother would have been 19 at the time):

Dearest Frankie:

I was delighted to hear from you. I know I would just love where you are living. I am glad you had such a nice Christmas. Santa wasn’t so bad to me himself. I got my long wanted cedar chest. You can imagine how happy I am. I also got a new dress, muffler, kid gloves, underwear, and so much candy that I haven’t acted like myself since. Harold sent me a picture of himself. I had known him a year the 27th of December, but he could come to see me if he liked me very much.

Do you remember Nena English's cousin Joe? He died last week with pneumonia. They were living at Skelly Town.

I have been working at Monkey's before Xmas, but things are so dull now that my position ended rather sudden.

Charles Barrett is going to get married soon I think. He is sweet on some girl at Hinton (Ha ha.) She has been here visiting him during Xmas. He worked at J. C. Penney's before Xmas, but I think his job ended like mine. Looks like I might be an old maid. But I'm not worried much.

Kat was over here today. She is the same silly Katherine. Always talking about how popular she is, but you never see her with anyone. Juanita has a steady. Can you feature that?

I am still trying to get in Training. I have forgotten whether you knew I was going to be a nurse or not, but I am.

Pauline Thomas is taking a post-graduate course at High School.

I think I have told you all the news so will close.

Wishing you a happy, happy New Year.

Lots of Love,
Lucile

Mother certainly did think the Xmas card was pretty & so did I, and please forgive me if I don't answer promptly cuz I am so alfully busy. "Cile"

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Mother received a second letter from Lucile written from Pampa on November 11, 1933:

Dear Frankie:

I have been thinking I would write you for sometime, but just haven't gotten around to it. How are you anyway and the baby? I have forgotten its name but I know it is cute. This has been one grand day. Harvesters played the Sandies. We got beat, but not so bad. 9 to 6.

The stores all closed till the game was over and then we opened up. All I do is sit up here in the office and make change. I sure have a grand job, or should I say "position?"

I am going to the dance tonight. What do you think of that? Oh, I am really getting bad.

Say, kid, have I ever told you about my love affair? Well, it ended just about as quick as it started. For a while, I thought I was practically married, but I soon found out different.

See Kit and Oakalee every once in a while. Just the same kids.

Mother has gone to Mo. My grandpa is not expected to live. It sure is tough without her.

I have a lot of new clothes, but whats clothes without your man, ha! Oh well, “there’s better fish in every sea, that have never been caught. (Ha).

Think of you real often Frankie. Of all the good times we used to have. Those were in the good old days, but we didn’t realize it then.

How is Gilbert? Still working? Tell him hello for me.

It is nearly closing time, so guess I will close, before I rave on all night.

Write me often.

Your Pal,
Lucile

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Mother was a good and selfless woman. Sometimes we called her “mother” but more often, I remember we called her “mama.” And that’s what she called her mother, too – “mama.” She never drank, although she did smoke, and I really can’t ever remember her using a swear word. We called our father “daddy” and that’s what our mother called her father, also. Sometimes mother affectionately called her husband “daddy,” too, and he often called her “mama” but of course that was because of us kids. Along the way, as with any family, there were also a few rocky times between our parents, but it was always overcome.

It always seemed to me there was a lot of love and kindness in the Altman family. My mother had wonderful parents and her brothers were equally good boys and very respectable men, because their parents set a good example. The Altman family was “salt of the earth” folks. I like to think their characteristics of love and compassion passed down to our mother and her brothers, were, in turn, passed down to us kids through our mother.

Mother never had to work in the public during her married life, although once, after I was already married, she did go to Jacksonville and get herself a job near Christmastime at a “five and dime” store. My father vigorously opposed this when he found out, and she only worked two weeks, as I recall. Except for that brief period, she was a homemaker

and always put her occupation on their income tax form as “homemaker.” That was not the ordinary reply that thousands give when they fill in the occupation blank with “housewife.”

She was proud of the home she maintained and kept a very clean house, sweeping every day and mopping the kitchen several times a week. Our house was never dusty. When we were old enough, we helped her polish furniture at least once every other week. And we washed and cleaned the fingerprints from our French doors and the back door to the porch more often than that!

Every morning and evening for years she milked our cow until my brothers got old enough to take over this job. Once in a while when my dad was home from his job on the railroad, he would milk the cow. He loved piddling around down at the barn out behind the house and the workshop he later built down there. Otherwise, when he was not home, she slopped the pig twice a day, fed the chickens morning and evening, and of course we helped with those two chores too.

She usually started to work in her garden as soon as breakfast was over. When we were old enough, we helped with the garden, and helped with harvesting everything we grew which was a lot. We always had a big garden – sometimes with bumper crops – depending on the weather and how much rain we got. Summertime was canning season and involved a lot of hard, hot work. Mother canned hundreds of jars and cans of fruit and vegetables for eating in the winter months. We snapped Kentucky Wonder beans, all kinds of speckled butter beans, purple hull and cream peas for sometimes what seemed like all day long.

To get a jump on what would be a hot summer day, we got out on the back porch in early morning just as the sun came up and began husking and de-silking corn, cutting it off the cob, filling dishpans full, pre-cooking it just a bit, and putting it up in cans or jars. On those days, we usually had a cooker full of corn on the cob for our lunch. All we could eat – with plenty of fresh churned butter. Boy, we all loved corn on the cob picked fresh from the field. Besides canning No. 2 and No. 3 cans of vegetables and fruits, we also made pickles, chow-chow and chili sauce. As I recall the kitchen became unbelievably hot because this was in the “old days” before air-conditioning. We did have an old General Electric fan that helped some, but it mostly just turned hot air.

Because Daddy was away working on the railroad most of the time when we were growing up, mother always headed up the harvest and the canning process, and we kids all helped do our share of the hard work and spent long hours in the kitchen. Daddy’s job as a fireman on the Missouri Pacific Railway took him as far away as Palestine where he maintained an apartment in the early days, coming home whenever he could. Later, during the middle of World War II, he was working as far away as San Antonio and didn’t get to come home sometimes during those war years for as much as six months at a time.

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I remember my childhood days as being very happy. We worked hard, but mother always saw to it that we had some good times too – simple times, simple things - maybe just taking a picnic and walking down to one of the creeks on either side of our house – each about a mile away – and going swimming in the creek.

We grew up on a little five-acre farm on the corner of the Troup Highway and a crossroads, just 1.9 miles north of Summerfield. We were very fortunate and had wonderful neighbors, who shared with one another. Until they moved away, we often visited with two old maid cousins – Miss Fannie and Miss Effie Gill, who lived south of us a ways on the highway. Our next door neighbors, Newman and Eva Mae Darby always invited us to come pick any vegetables that they had an abundance of in their garden, and Floyd and Mary Richardson down the crossroads always invited us to come pick roasting ears from their corn patch and red ripe field tomatoes for canning. We canned a lot during the summer. Especially tomatoes for wintertime soup and meatloaf.

Our neighbors, the Darbys, Richardsons, Tennisons, and Wallaces were all everyday folk who had persevered through two world wars and a depression.

My mother was an excellent cook and learned how to prepare a lot of specialty dishes at Pampa High School in Gray County, Texas when she took Home Economics:

She made several dishes that were very popular with Bub, Doug, Reggie and me, but the all-time favorite was “Eggs a la Goldenrod” which all of us still prepare today, and now the grandchildren ask for it. Her biscuits were the best in the world and we had them often at breakfast and supper, along with lots of fresh-churned butter and homemade blackberry jam or apple butter.

Three very special desserts she made were French. French Toast, Chocolate Eclairs, and Boston Cream Puffs. In my memory, I can recall exactly how they looked, smelled and tasted – mmm – mmm - delicious!

She made wonderful cinnamon rolls with a sugary coating made from powdered sugar and sometimes these would be waiting for us when we got off the school bus on a rainy day.

On cold days, the thing I remember most was her wonderful hot, steaming vegetable soup which contained a tomato base, with lots of potatoes and spaghetti and roast beef. And she had a delicious, golden brown pan of cornbread to eat with it. My mother’s cornbread was the best I ever ate anywhere – it was as good as cake!

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We had a very nice solid oak “library” table where we studied and wrote out our lessons on a dark red Big Chief tablet. The library table had a shelf about six or eight inches wide beneath that ran the length of the table, and Reggie used to get up on that shelf and

lie down and get “rested.” When it was cold, mother had hot cocoa made for us, sometimes with marshmallows. And we would sit there listening to *Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy, Captain America, the Lone Ranger, The Green Hornet, The Shadow, Little Orphan Annie, and Mystery Theatre or “The Squeaking Door”* on our RCA radio while we got our lessons.

On Saturday nights, we took turns taking our baths in the big old No. 3 galvanized tub in the kitchen. Mama heated a tea kettle full of hot water, and poured it in the tub, and had the water just the right temperature.

We always had a good radio in the house because Daddy used to sell radios when he and mother were first married in Pampa, and Daddy and Mother gave us an RCA Victor when Conrad and I got married. I still have it packed away in the garage, and plan to have it restored. Daddy loved to listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday night and we liked to listen to Minnie Pearl, Grandpa Jones, and all the other great performers of country, and the blue grass songs of Bill Monroe. We especially liked the fiddler and banjo music.

We didn’t have a fire place, but we did have a very warm Florence coal-oil heater in the corner of the dining room. It was a beautiful brown color, enameled, stood about 3 feet tall and had a tank on the back that had to be filled from the coal-oil can kept out in the barn. You had to be very careful when you loaded the filled tank into the slot at the back of the heater. It was a good stove that put out plenty of heat to warm our dining and kitchen area.

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(Tell somewhere about Mother’s brothers and about Uncle Webby and Dee Walker leaving home during the Depression years. They became part of the hoboes who rode the rails all over the country looking for work – *any* kind of work! They went to places at least as far away as Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Wyoming, eventually returning home to Seneca and Clayton. Uncle Webby married; Dee Walker (Harvey’s brother) joined the army during World War II and became part of the Bataan Death March, was captured and was a prisoner working in a salt mine in Japan until he was freed when the war was over. Uncle Dink remained in Pampa when the family moved to Clayton and Uncle Joe married in Fort Worth and eventually he and Aunt Mary migrated to the Whittier, California area where they remained the rest of their lives.)

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**SEE ALSO: THERE IS ANOTHER SAVED STORY ABOUT MF UNDER COX,
FRANKIE - HER LIFE**

Happy Birthday, Mama Frank!

To Frances Lavada Altman Cox

In Celebration of your Seventy-Sixth Birthday
October 20, 1988

~ By Jennifer Elaine Brown Elbert

It just occurred to me, Mama Frank, that this birthday makes you twice my age. It's fun to think, that while I've known you all my life...you've only known me for half of yours! How could you have made it through your first thirty-eight years without me? I certainly can't imagine going through my first thirty-eight years without you! Haven't we had great times together?

Here are some of the things I think about when I think of you...

"I see Mama Frank's house!" How many hundreds of times Mom, Teresa, and I must have played that game while driving from Tyler to see you. Teresa and I both wanted to say it first, and I know I must have cheated a lot – saying I had before I ever really saw your house. Teresa rarely let me get away with cheating, and sometimes I admitted it. But we couldn't fuss about it long, because within minutes we'd be out of the car, giving you hugs and kisses.

Long after I was grown and driving my own car, I'd still play the game by myself, and say it out loud whenever I could see your house in the distance. The anticipation of lively greetings and the excitement of being together in familiar surroundings made every trip more fun, especially the long, five-hour solo drives from Houston to New Summerfield.

Now that I think of it, I have a lot of terrific memories of being in your driveway – going and coming. How we'd giggle from the car when you'd say, "See you later, alligator," or "After while, crocodile." You'd always call us – "Coxie-Loxie," and tell us "See you in the funny papers." I thought you were so clever.

I still think you have a wonderful sense of humor. Roland has told me that's what he notices most in reading your letters – he describes your sense of humor as "girlish,"

because you have a playful way of looking at things sometimes. You're a lot of fun to be around, Mama Frank.

Generosity is another quality that comes to mind whenever I think of you. You've always been so willing to shower your time and your energy and your love on your family. What wonderful help and support you must have been to Mother as she brought up her family. And look how big your family has gotten to be – four children, nine grandchildren, and eight (soon to be nine) great grandchildren. Not to mention your own brother, nieces, nephews, cousins, and in-laws.

Memories of your parents make me smile. Your little mother, Regina Palestine Stockton Altman, with her apron on, always busy, singing the “Chinaman” song to the delight of all her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Your father, Bertie Bertram Altman, teasing the little kids, quietly stirring his coffee, then touching the spoon to the nearest unsuspecting child, asking with a grin, “Is that hot?”

There are lots of other fond childhood memories with you...

- Teresa and I learning to wash dishes while standing on chairs or flour cans at your sink. Mother didn't “let” us wash dishes as much as you did. Oh, we thought washing dishes was such fun!
- Taking turns churning – making butter – in your kitchen. I'm so proud to have your churn in my house. Just think...Emily and I will have to make some butter with that churn sometime. Maybe we can get Brennan, Dillon, and Julieanna in on it, too. I wonder if Amy ever churned butter? Well, she may have to come do it at my house.
- Wearing G. O.'s t-shirts as our nightgowns when we'd spend the night. I have a fuzzy memory of your putting Vicks or some similar salve on our chests when we went to bed in those big t-shirts, to help speed our recovery from a cold or cough.
- Summer visits when you'd teach me to embroider. I remember vividly going to the dime store in Troup where you'd let me choose any design I wanted to make. I know I still enjoy doing handwork because of the good times we had sewing on those lazy summer days.
- Family fish fries for special occasions – like any time we came to visit. G. O.'s crappie, your good tartar sauce, and fresh, hot French fries stolen one at a time and eaten before they could ever make it to the table. Wouldn't that be good right now!
- Watching Lawrence Welk on television on Saturday evenings in the 1950s. I remember hearing you tell that you never learned to dance because your daddy wouldn't let you. “Didn't believe in it.” So, Teresa and I danced

with G. O. and had a fine time.

- Going through the old hat boxes under what used to be Doug's bed, where you stored old pictures and keep sakes. I was particularly fascinated by the World War II ration books and accompanying stories of what life was like then.
- Weekly trips to Troup to buy groceries and a *Saturday Evening Post*. You know that for most of my childhood, I thought you were "rich," because you bought me a popsicle every time we went to town. Obviously, it didn't take much to be rich in my book in those days!
- Holidays at your house, with your Christmas cards placed all around the wide doorway from the living room to the dining room. We put our cards up like that last year, and I'm not sure I realized till now that's where we must have gotten the idea.
- You and G.O. dressed in your camouflage hunting or fishing clothes, going to have some fun outside together. I especially remember your wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat with a chiffon scarf tied under your chin. You were pretty cute in those days, my dear. You're pretty cute these days, too, when you get spiffed up.

Devotion is another trait that I associate with you, Mama Frank. You've always been devoted to your family, and to your country, and to God. I still remember how disappointed you were when we didn't sing any patriotic songs at my high school graduation. Just last week when Roland and I went to the State Fair, we watched a laser light show in the Cotton Bowl, and heard a stirring rendition of "*America the Beautiful*" sung by Ray Charles. I don't think I ever hear "*America the Beautiful*" or "*God Bless America*" that I don't think of you.

Strong is another word I always think of when describing you. You've always found the strength to do whatever needs to be done, and you're not shy about expressing your opinions. I think all of your daughters and granddaughters inherited that from you. "I've never seen so many strong-willed women," Reggie's husband Thornton told us. We laugh about it, but I think all of us are proud of that!

"Proud" is what I am when I think of you, and all the good things you've taught me. "Thankful" describes how I feel about having you around to share my life with. "Rich" is what we are, in so many ways.

Mama Frank, I hope this birthday is a joyous one for you, and that your favorite wishes will come true this year. I love you!

Your oldest granddaughter, XXXXOOOO,

Jennifer

Concerning Politics

Pampa, where mother went to high school, was the county seat of Gray County, in what is still called today “The Panhandle” area of Texas. Since it was a county seat town, they had political orations at Fourth of July gatherings around the courthouse square. But young people her age were not particularly interested in listening to the politician’s promises – they had their own activities. In those days, it was not too different than it is now – the boys liked to “girl watch” and the girls were just as busy “boy watching.”

During her teen years, she had little interest in politics. “Politicking” was left to the men folk in the family and wasn’t usually discussed with the women of the house. No wonder she wasn’t exposed to the election system. After all, what did women know?

It must be remembered that the 19th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, granting full suffrage to women on an equal basis with men, was not passed by both houses of Congress until June 1919. It wasn’t ratified by the required number of states (36) until August 26, 1920! I doubt that even the school books of that day carried much about the Suffrage Act, much less teachers who emphasized the subject in class. The very idea – waiting until 1918 to give women the right to vote! In this day and time, politicians court the women’s vote, and women run – and win – political offices!

Another thing to be pointed out is that when mother voted for the first time, she cast her vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1944 when he ran for a third term in office. Her first vote in a presidential election – or a political election of any kind - came when she was thirty-two, only twenty-six years after women in Texas received suffrage. It was during World War II when patriotism was at an all-time high.

After 1944, mother and daddy voted in every presidential election. She told me “I always voted the way G. O. voted, because he knew more about it than I did.” I’m sure daddy encouraged her to cast that first vote and to go with him to the polls at New Summerfield School where elections were held and are still being held today. There’s not much doubt either, that he strongly influenced the way she cast her ballot for each candidate.

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(To refresh the memories of family members and enlighten the younger generations with Roosevelt’s presidency and the outcome of World War II, the follow-up information is included.)

Nineteen hundred and forty-four probably produced a bumper crop of votes in an election year – not only because everyone was ready to get the war over with – but also because there was a big controversy about Franklin Roosevelt running for a third term of office. No president had ever held office for more than eight years, and twelve years was unprecedented. Congress subsequently passed a law that no president henceforth could

hold office for more than two four-year terms. In 1944 Roosevelt chose Harry S. Truman as his running mate, when he sought a fourth term, and was triumphant over Republican Thomas E. Dewey, Governor of New York. On April 12, 1945, just under a month before Germany surrendered to the Allies, Franklin Delano Roosevelt died suddenly from a cerebral hemorrhage, shortly after his return from the Yalta Conference.

Upon Roosevelt's death, Truman succeeded to the presidency. He was immediately confronted with the problems of concluding the war and the ensuing difficulties. The war in Europe ended with Germany's unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945. To end the conflict, he authorized the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That action did bring the war to an immediate end.

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A Trip to New London, Texas

In February 1990 I took my parents to the Old London area in Rusk County where they were living when I was born. I wanted to see the F. A. Florence place and the house where they were living when I was born. I was born at the hospital in Henderson, but Bubba was born at home, in a little two room house, very near the big house where Mr. and Mrs. Florence lived with their children, Finis, Jr., and twins, Jane and Joan.

Old London was not very far from Arp where Conrad and I lived and we drove out the Overton highway. It was a beautiful, sunny, but cool day. I was driving and had the tape recorder running in the car seat beside me. Daddy was giving directions and watching where to turn off on the right side of the highway.

Finally, he said, "Take it easy, I've got to watch. The road will turn off to the right. I'll swear, I can't recognize anything. Did we pass this that day Mama – that day we drove over here several years ago?" Mother answered, "I just don't remember, Papa. There was some kind of brick factory, wasn't there?" (*From this point forward, I'll just repeat what they were saying to me after we turned off on Blackwell road.*)

Daddy: "Now here's that creek – I'm pretty sure. Take it easy. Yes, this is it. Yes, this is it. You'll turn to the right, right up here. There used to be a house that set right here – belonged to Dake Turner. He was one of the old timers. And that hill right back there where we come off, Elmo Wheelis lived there. And now, there's a road you turn to on the right... go real slow...there's Dake Turner's old house right there. It sure is. We always thought he was the one who took a shot at us one night when we were running hot oil – with a 30-30 rifle. We were running it wide open, I'm talking about."

Mother: This was a little road...wasn't even this wide. This is called Blackwell Road now...and it's paved.

Daddy: This is the hill we used to have to come up. Did you see how steep it was then? You couldn't get up it in a car. Red clay! Now, take it easy, Jerri, and I will show you where we drilled that first well. The well is gone now. Right out there...just about as far as from here to that house yonder. See that old house right out there? There used to be an old house...there's the well! There's the legs off the derrick. See where the derrick went? That's the Grissom #1 that we drilled. That's where I got the \$50 suit of clothes. We're going to turn in that road right there, Jerri. Whoa! This is where F. A. Florence, that crippled boy lives. Old man Florence's boy. This is where Finis Florence lived.

Mother: I've been up and down this road many a time. And you have too, but you don't remember it!

Daddy: See that bunch of pine trees and cedar trees? There used to be a row of houses setting right there.

Mother: Now, there's our house, that little two rooms. And Wooley's lived in the other one.

At this point, I asked them if they would like to go in, since we were already there, and say hello to F. A., Jr. and daddy said he would like to do that. While he went to knock on the door, I asked mother if we could go take a picture of the little house where they lived which was only a few yards away, and daddy said, "Oh, Jerri, do you want to do that?" I assured him that I did. I'm not sure what happened to the pictures of it, since I'm not sure if we were using mother's camera or mine.

Mother said she thought the living room was larger, but that maybe her memory had faded. She said that one of the partitions had been knocked out so it looked a bit different. And she thought the house looked a lot smaller. And she looked around more and said:

"There used to be a little row of houses here...right in a row. The last one was right down there. Phillips. Yes, Phillips, the last one down. Might not have been quite that far down. Not even any evidence of it now. You would never know there was a row of houses there. They were all built just like that little one of ours up there.

After we looked around at it, we went in and I was introduced to F. A., Jr.

Mother told me that the first picture ever made of Bub and I together was when Bubba was about a year and a half old and it was made while we were standing on top of a boat turned upside down in the yard of the little house.

When I Was Born in 1933

During the trip to visit F. A. Florence, I asked daddy if that was where it was that they got the lady to come stay with mother when I was born? Daddy answered and said:

“Oh, no. I got a white lady the first time to come. Jim Ben Deaton, down at Tatum, way the other side of Henderson. She was a woman who would stay with people who had babies – new babies. The last time we had a colored woman, but the first time with you, I just hired that woman for a week. Her name was Jim Ben Deaton. We had a colored woman with Bubba. She was just a big girl, you know...a young girl.”

He continued:

“That Jim Ben Deaton was a great big tall girl. The first time I ever went down there, she wasn't at home, and I got stuck in a sand bed. And they were all asleep on the front porch. When I told her daddy that I was looking for Jim Ben Deaton, he told me she wasn't there, because she had gone to Louisiana on a job.”