

# Our Family

They loved God  
and helped people

by  
Grayce Finley Fleet

## Foreword

This is the story of our mothers and fathers and their mothers and fathers.

Most of it we heard from others, so there may be many mistakes; perhaps we have forgotten or mixed up some of the events and people. But that does not really matter, for this is not alone the story of our parents and grandparents, it is the story of the parents and grandparents of most of us who call ourselves Christians.

# Mom's Family

# Harriet Crane Finley

My father's mother lived in St. Louis near the park near Washington University. Her father would raise the flag in the park every day. During the year, she went to a private girls school and studied very hard. They would spend the summer at their cottage on Lake Michigan.

Her father worked in insurance until the 1929 stock market crash. Then they had to sell their cottage and their car, and my father's mother had to go to public school.

She enjoyed going to church and teaching children. After finishing college, she taught kindergarten.

One Thanksgiving, her church had a party. She was chosen as a partner for my father's father, who drove her home after the party.



## Francis Fouts Finley

My father's father was a Scot who grew up in Ohio. He decided to become a lawyer, so he went to school at Washington University in St. Louis, MO. He liked to read books very much. He was a very smart man and wanted to help people.

After he met my father's mother at a Thanksgiving Day party, he often had dinner with her family. One evening while they were taking a walk together, the church bells played the hymn, "Abide with Me." My father's father said to my father's mother, "Will you abide with me?" And that is how he proposed. A few years later they were married at the pastor's house.



When World War II started, my father's father went to the Army office to sign up. They rejected his offer because he had two small children. So he marched across the hall and joined the FBI. He worked as an agent for the Bureau for over 25 years.

They moved often, which is why my father was born in New Mexico. But they settled in Memphis.

My father's father and mother worked hard. They loved God and helped many people in their work and through their life. They had four sons. The youngest one was my father.



# Robert Finley

My father was the only white baby born in the hospital in Sante Fe, NM. Being the youngest of four boys, he was often teased. One time his brothers held him down and shoved a live grasshopper in his mouth! But sometimes my father was spoiled...like being allowed to have a pet alligator.



When my father was 16, a friend challenged him to read the Bible all the way through. So my father set aside the summer to read it. By the time he got to the book of John, he decided to become a Christian.

A short time later, he felt God calling him to be a preacher. He started speaking whenever he could, being trained by some evangelists. One day he was the speaker at a Baptist church youth meeting. In the crowd he saw my mother. It did not take him long to know that she would be his wife.

# John Edward Staggers

My mother's father was a sergeant in the US Army. He worked in India during World War II. He was part of the Army Postal Unit. They handled about 4,000 packages per month.

One Christmas they delivered over 30,000 packages to the soldiers! Delivering the letters from home to the army men made him very happy. He liked to help people.

When he visited home, he stayed in Indiana.



## Margorie Dobbins Staggers



My mother's mother was a little girl who lived on the Ohio River in Southern Indiana. Her father worked in a cement mill and times were very hard. One day in 1937 the river overflowed. Her house was still dry, but her sister's house flooded. So her sister, who was pregnant, and her family and six other people came to stay! Her sister's baby was born in the living room. Many people did not have clothes because of the flood, so, to help, her mother gave them most of my mother's mother's clothes.

The next year, her sister's husband became very ill. So my mother's mother quit school and went to live with them to help with the baby. Since her sister's husband was so sick, friends from church came to the house in shifts to sit with him. One of these friends was my mother's father. When he met my mother's mother, he told everyone else at church that since he only lived 4 doors down, he would take all the shifts. But his real reason was because he liked my mother's mother.

Five years later they married at the pastor's house. Later they moved to Memphis where my mother's mother helped at the church by cooking meals and my mother's father helped people as a deacon. They loved God and helped people. They had three children. The oldest one was my mother.



# Judith Kaye Staggers Finley



Because my mother's mother and father were always at church helping people, my mother learned about God when she was very young. She liked to learn and was a very good student.

When her family moved to Memphis, serving God at church was very important to her. She helped in the nursery and taught children. She was also involved in the youth group.

One time at church, a young preacher came to speak to the youth group. He saw her in the crowd and decided to ask her out. My mother did not want to go, but her father made her go. Within a short time, she knew she would marry my father.

Many of their outings revolved around the church, my father's speaking, or helping others. After they married, my mother continued to help my father in his work for the Lord. They loved God and helped people. They had two children. The youngest one was me.



# Michele Grayce Finley Fleet



I was born in Texas while my father was in seminary. I wasn't sure exactly what God wanted me to do with my life, but I did know that I was supposed to get married and have children.

A veterinarian gets to help animals and for a while that was what I wanted to do. I volunteered

at a veterinary clinic and helped take care of the animals.



An artist gets to express herself in many ways and I thought about doing that. I spent a lot of time drawing with colored pencils. It was harder than it looked.

One day, I saw a movie in which there were several people who used sign language. God told me on that day that I should become an interpreter for Deaf people. I took classes and met many Deaf people. One day I met your father. God had planned for me to become his interpreter.

We traveled with our church to far away places to help other Deaf people. We ate many strange things without knowing it, like pig intestines and the suction cups off of an octopus. In Japan, we encouraged Christian Deaf people and witnessed to many who had never heard about Jesus. We rode the bullet train across the country side and wore funny shoes, or, when inside, no shoes at all.



# Dad's Family

# John R Pepper

My mother's father's father was from North Carolina. He moved to the Memphis area and married my mother's father's mother. He was a magistrate and a farmer. They had 5 boys and 4 girls. My mother's father was the 4th boy.

He went to school through the 8th grade, but his talent as a carpenter showed him his future path. He became a builder. After his father died, he took care of the family farm for a while. He took a job with the Board of Education. He spent the rest of his life building buildings - he even built the church building for this church, Mt. Moriah Baptist Church. He was a deacon there for over 50 years! He liked helping people by building good buildings for them.

One Sunday a young woman visited his church with her friend. This young woman became my mother's mother.



# Nina Pirtle Pepper

My mother's mother was the youngest of 6 children. She must have stolen the hearts of her brothers and sister because she was only called "Doll" until she was six! But she doesn't sound much like a china doll. Described as a tomboy, she had chickens and a big black dog and rode a horse to school.



One day she went with a friend to visit a church in a neighboring town. There, she met the man who would become her husband.

She helped her husband and others with her talent as a seamstress. They loved God and helped people. They had two children. The oldest was my mother.



## Betty Jane Pepper Fleet



My mother lived in a small house across the field from her father's mother's house. One day as she was helping her father's mother on the farm, her father's mother fell backwards and died. No one else saw what happened. To let the neighbors know, they had to ring a large bell.



Just before my mother was old enough to start school, her family moved into town. They were very active in their church. My mother's best friend knew my father's best friend. They decided that my mother and my father should meet. My mother and my father spent a lot of time together at church.

At Christmas in 1957, my father proposed to my mother. They were engaged while my mother finished school. Nearly a year later, my mother and her mother rode the bus to the wedding in Maryland where my father was stationed in the Navy.

# George Rufus Fleet

My father's father grew up in Bolivar, TN where he had to support his mother and 2 sisters. His father died when he was 8 years old. He found work as a lumber man and provided for them. His mother ran a boarding house at Fleet's Corner.

When my father's father met my father's mother, they decided to sneak away to Corinth, MS to get married. It was 1935. When the War started, he served in the Navy in the Construction Battalion in the Pacific.

Although my father's father did not see the need to impress God, he helped his family and provided for them.



## Mary Jewell Black Fleet

My father's mother lived in Clover Port, TN with her parents in a log house. Her father had a 117 acre cotton farm. He wanted to help people love God. He memorized all four Gospels and would often quote them to the children. He even thought about being a preacher.

Their log house did not have electricity because they were afraid that it might cause the house to catch on fire.

My father's mother's family liked to help people. One family they helped was my mother's mother's family when my mother's mother was born.

My father's mother and my father's father were married in Corinth, MS. They had four children. The first one was my father.



# George Barry Fleet



My father grew up on Main Street in Bolivar, TN. When he was young, he played the melaphone in the school band. While in 3rd grade, his band marched in the Blue Ribbon Day Parade in Whiteville, TN. Among the crowd, he saw a 2nd grade girl—my mother. He would not see her again until he was 15 years old.

My father worked for a movie theater selling popcorn. On September 19th, 1954, an older couple took my father and my mother to a Baptist church for the evening and to dinner in Somerville afterwards.



Right after high school, my father joined the Navy. He moved to Maryland. On a visit back to Tennessee, he took my mother on a drive and parked the car in a field. With the headlights on, he got out and waved his Navy flags (semifoles).. My mother had no idea what he was spelling out. He explained that he spelled, "Will you marry me?"

They got married and had three children. Two of their children were born Deaf. My mother and my father learned sign language and raised their children. They also helped many Deaf youth at their church. They loved God and helped people. Their youngest child was me.



## Eric Cameron Fleet



My parents lived in Florida when I was born. The doctors told my mother that I was not Deaf, but my mother knew better. I was able to go to wonderful schools for Deaf children. Florida is always warm and comfortable. I spent many years there growing up with sand and water.

When I was 10 years old, my father retired from the Navy and we moved to Memphis. I loved trains and would spend many hours learning about them. I liked to drive to the train yards and watch all the trains coming and going. I even got to ride in the locomotive with an engineer.

As a grown-up, I decided to become a civil engineer. I design roads and plan the land for new houses. It is a very good job for me, but I still was not content. I needed a wife.

One Sunday morning, I decided to visit one of the Deaf churches in Memphis. When we were singing, I noticed a beautiful girl sitting a few rows in front of me. After the service, I stepped in front of my friend so that I could talk with her first. Later, I married that beautiful girl. I enjoy making roads for people and keeping their houses safe from water. My wife and I love God and serve Him. We have had several children, one of whom is you.





