

Mother had to take care of everybody including Ida Wilson. She was twenty-two and Ernest was twenty-three. They were both impressed with each other.

Mother was impressed with the efficient way he handled the wagons and the way he took care of his horses. He picked out good camping places and stopped early enough to make camp and let the horses graze and feed before dark. And he got them up early enough in the morning to get a good start. He was tall, and good looking, and she could not have helped but notice his striking blue eyes. This was in direct contrast to her father, who never seemed to know how to take care of his animals. And when the family traveled, her father would start late in the morning, and travel late in the evening, so that it was difficult to make a good camp. On the other hand, Dad was impressed with Mother. He liked the efficient way she handled the children (and her Aunt Ida) and that she did all the cooking. And she was a good cook! Besides, she was very pretty.

As they approached San Jose they came to a steep downgrade called the Squeeze. It was a narrow, rock ledge, just barely the width of a wagon. The grade was so steep that the rear wheels of the wagons had to be locked so that they dragged instead of rolling. This caused the rear wheels to act as a brake. Wagon wheels had worn ruts in the rock road—just the width of a wagon and the ruts were three or four inches deep. Once into the Squeeze, you could only go down or up. There was no way to turn around or for anyone to pass you. There had been more than one fatality on that road.

The first day out, Mother had ridden a horse, but after that she rode up beside Dad. She said:

That's the first time I had ever ridden down a canyon in any wagon, and I guess that was the worst place a wagon could have gone. Down the Squeeze! And I rode down the Squeeze with Ern Langford. I guess I just had enough confidence in Ern's ability with the wagon. Before that I had never ridden down a canyon anywhere or with anyone. I'd get out and walk, walk, walk. But I rode down that Squeeze with Ern Langford!

From then on he dated me and—and do you know? Dad wasn't going to pay Ern for moving us!

After we got to San Jose Dad came to me and said, "What do you think I should do? Shall I pay Langford for this trip? We need the money here."

And I said: "Indeed! You will pay him!" Now why would you suppose Dad would ask such a thing of me? But I told him he had it to pay and he paid!

Actually, Mother was engaged at the time to marry a young man by the name of Joe Foutz. But she never told Dad about it—and I guess she wasn't wearing an engagement ring. After they had been dating for a while, Mother's sister, Vivian, let the cat out of the bag. Vivian told Dad that he didn't need to think it would do any good to date Charlotte, because she was engaged to Joe Foutz. Dad didn't say anything to Mother. He just kept dating her. Later when Dad was in Douglas, he ran into Joe Foutz, and Foutz was complaining that Harvey Langford (Dad's half brother) had taken Charlotte away from him. Dad didn't say anything—he just let him go on thinking the culprit was Harvey.

THE 4-BAR RANCH

Three months later, in the fall of 1911, Mother wanted to go out to the States and get a job so she could earn enough money to go to school. There was an Academy in Thatcher, and

since she had relatives in Thatcher and Central she wanted to get at least one more year of schooling. Her father took her by train out to Douglas. Mother says:

I must be cocky. I just went into a hotel, found the manager, and said I was looking for a job cooking.

The manager said, "There was a man in here looking to hire a cook. Will you go out on a ranch?"

I said, "I'll go anywhere."

So he got hold of the man that was looking for a cook and told him about me. The man's name was Mr. Neil. I never knew him by any other name. He walked up to me and looked at me and said, "You're just a kid. Do you think you could hold down a job cooking for cowboys and all?"

And I said, "I can hold down a job of any kind!" So he hired me at twenty dollars a month and keep. And I thought I was on top of the world. Mr. Neil was a wonderful man. Everyone thought a lot of him. His ranch was called the 4-Bar Ranch. And the nearest Post Office was called MacNeil.

OPPOSITION IN ALL THINGS

But Mrs. Neil was a horse of a different color. She was a devil on wheels. The cook before me chased her around with a butcher knife. But I told myself "I'm going to work here until school next year, and I don't care what!" I just went in and built up a wall within myself against her.

My duties: I had to churn butter from the cream of two Jersey cows. The fellow who milked them would pour the milk in pans. I had to skim it, churn it, and take care of it. I had to cook for the two Neils, myself, their boy, her brother and four cowboys regularly. I had to make bread, pies, and cakes and do all the baking. From scratch. Even the coffee beans had to be ground. And during round-up I would have to cook for up to thirty people at a time. I was also supposed to take care of the cleaning of everything in the house except Mrs. Neil's bedroom and the living room.

I had to learn how to handle and cook the whole beef. The hired man would cut it up for me, but I had to cook all the cuts—from the head to the hoof. Bacon was not cut. It came in slabs and I had to slice it. [Mother's experience cooking for the boarders in Madera must have come in handy. At least she was used to cooking for about as many people as were in the core crew at the ranch.]

TEMPER! TEMPER!

Speaking about "cutting"—that's how I got this scar on my thumb. When Thanksgiving came, the chore man, Jarvis, got drunk and so he was in no condition to cut the steaks which I had ordered for breakfast and that meant that I had to cut them. And I was mad of course! If I hadn't been I wouldn't have sawed myself. But when I started to cut those steaks, I put that saw clear through to the bone on my knuckle. And I came out holding that thing and it was just streaming blood.