

Hortense Heggie, 1894-1978

Memories of a life well lived, as related by her grandson, Richard J. McKinney

Hortense Miller Heggie was born in Battle Creek, Michigan on October 10, 1894 along with her identical twin sister, Harriet Miller Holmes. Her father was Jeremiah A. Miller (1864-1914, son of Richard Jeremiah Miller, 1839-1929) and her mother was Elizabeth Margarete (Maggie) McLaughlin Miller (1870-1947, daughter of Eliza M. McLaughlin, 1843-1927), who with her mother and sisters had immigrated from County Tyrone in Northern Ireland (others went to Australia). It was reported that her father, Jerry, had asked his wife if he could name the twins whatever he wanted and apparently, after a long delivery, she easily consented. So according to Hortense she was named after her father's old girlfriend. The twins were the oldest among their siblings who included Clifford, Ellen, David, Richard, and Madelyn.

Tragedy struck the Miller family on October 9, 1898 when her father's 14 year old brother, Richard Jeremiah Miller, Jr. went missing. Hortense remembered her uncle Richard for he sometimes came over to play with the twins. After many search parties were conducted, his body was found on May 8, 1899, in a sand pit, previously searched, not far from his home. On May 31, 1899, although the boy's skull had been crushed, the majority of a coroner's jury ruled the death as accidental. See articles on the case excerpted from the Battle Creek Moon at http://www.migenweb.org/calhoun/miller_richard.htm.

Tragedy struck again in 1914 when Hortense's father, Jerry Miller, passed away after his eye was struck by a wooden splinter and it became badly infected. Many of the Miller children had already been working and helped to support the family with Hortense and Harriet working, it is believed, in a clothing store. The attractive twins were soon asked to become advertising models, but the family vetoed that idea as being too worldly. The identical twins would sometimes deliberately fool folks about who they were speaking with. Family members, it appears, could always tell the difference.

However, it was not long after that time that the twins began receiving gentlemen callers and one particular suitor for Hortense's hand was William Donald Heggie (born March 1, 1888, son of George Heggie and Barbara Donald), who came to the United States from Dundee, Scotland on April 1, 1911. Records show that he arrived on Ellis Island from Glasgow on the S.S. California with \$25 in his pocket and was listed as travelling on to live with his sister, Annie in Toronto; with a ruddy complexion, dark hair and grey eyes. He was a plumber by trade and was a fairly short man in size such that Hortense's brothers would often tease the couple as their sister was a few inches taller than Bill Heggie. Because of the teasing Hortense said she rejected his initial marriage proposal and he went back to Scotland. When, in 1915, Mr. Heggie returned to Battle Creek, he again pursued Hortense and this time she said yes to his proposal of marriage and they got married in 1916. She later told her grandson, Richard (Rick) McKinney, that the one major regret she had in life was not saying yes to Bill Heggie's earlier proposal. Whenever formal pictures were taken Bill Heggie always made certain that he was standing on something so he would appear taller than his wife. William Donald (W.D.) Heggie was known as a fine Scottish tenor and early in their marriage he and his wife, Hortense, who sang contralto, participated in

various choral groups and bands (Vaudville). W.D. Heggie also organized his own band and choir called, "The Pilgrim Entertainers," which performed on the radio and other events and churches (1920-1923).

Bill and Hortense Heggie had three children. The first was a boy (William Jr?) who died in childbirth on January 15, 1921. The second was a girl named Margaret Barbara born on September 29, 1923 (married Harold C. McKinney, Jr. in 1944, died on November 4, 2014), and the third was another girl, Patricia Jean born on December 12, 1927 (married David Bates in 1947, died on November 29, 1987). The Heggies lived at 2015 Prospect Street in Lansing, Michigan where Bill Heggie, also had an office on their enclosed front porch with a roll up desk that he used to run his plumbing business. Bill also had a plumbing shop with the title "Scotty's Sales and Service." The business sign with that title is now housed in the garage of Joann McKinney Cerullo, his great granddaughter, and the roll up desk is now in the home of his granddaughter, Sandra Bates Childers in Lansing, Michigan. A few blocks away from the Heggies lived Hortense's twin sister, Harriet, who had married a banker named Walter Holmes, but they had no children. Next door to the Heggies was another couple without children, Laura and Dave Filkins, whom the Heggie children called their aunt and uncle.

The Heggies were of the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition and attended Pilgrim Congregational Church in Lansing, Michigan where Bill Heggie directed the church choir. The family's religious affiliation changed in 1928 when Margaret, their daughter, had a spleen which became very large due to an inherited blood disorder, spherocytosis, and the doctors recommended surgery to remove the spleen. However, such surgeries were extremely rare back then and according to Hortense a nurse likened it to removing the heart. Thus Hortense was quite fearful, but her brother, Richard, told her about his Pentecostal pastor in Battle Creek who would pray over people and they were often healed. So Hortense took her daughter, Margaret, to see this pastor accompanied, by her brother, Richard and her mother, Elizabeth. The pastor asked Margaret if she believed that Jesus could heal her and she responded by saying that her grandmother said he could. So the pastor prayed by laying his hands on her and immediately, according to both Hortense and Margaret, the spleen shrunk considerably in size. That healing of her daughter, before her very own eyes, convinced Hortense to change churches to the local Assembly of God, a Pentecostal church in Lansing, Michigan and she also took her two daughters with her. However, her husband, Bill Heggie, as choir director at Pilgrim Congregational Church, did not follow the move until several years later. By the way, Hortense's brother, Richard J. Miller (Oct. 19, 1897-July 29, 1928), passed away that same year from unknown causes, but somehow all his siblings ended up becoming Pentecostal. Because of spherocytosis Hortense and Harriet both had their spleens removed some time, it is believed, in the 1950's as did several grandchildren and later some great grandchildren.

Hortense Heggie was a committed follower of her Lord, Jesus Christ and she was not shy at talking about the need to give ones life to Him. For instance, she would often coax her grandchildren to watch a Billy Graham Crusade on the television set with her and encouraged them to kneel down and give their lives to Jesus as the choir sang, "Just As I Am." Hortense avidly read her Bible and her granddaughter, Barbara McKinney Urra, remembers being instructed by her grandmother to never be "lukewarm" in the faith as God would spew such a person out of his mouth (Rev. 3:16). She also would counsel one to not be critical of ones pastor and would say, "touch not the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 24:10, Ps. 105:15).

Hortense was known for her positive attitude and on rainy days she would thank God for the water that sustained all life on earth. Her positive attitude was somewhat in contrast to her twin sister, Harriet, as was pointed out in a book authored by their niece, Joyce Landorf (Clifford Miller's daughter), who was a Christian author and speaker. She loved and cared for people, especially the members of her family, but was also known to wash the feet and trim the toenails of vagrants who might come down the alley next to her house. Her grandson, Rick, when he was 11, remembers how he spent a week at the Heggie household during a Winter break and how his grandmother seemed to constantly feed him with items like cottage cheese and saltine crackers in milk. Her goal, she later confessed, was to get her slight grandson over the 60 pound mark and she succeeded. He also recalls some comical table manners his grandmother had such as asking things to be passed with words like, "Rick likes butter." One time he did not pass the butter and when she complained he said, well, you never really asked for it. She then admitted, "well, you got me there." The Heggie household did not have a lot of toys for young boys but his grandmother was a constant saver of things and two of the items she saved were the red and blue waxed cardboard caps on milk bottles and various sizes of many empty bottles of her husband's after shave lotions. Rick and his brother Bill found that such items made excellent toy soldiers and marshalled them into battle against one another, red caps versus blue ones and certain bottles versus other bottles.

The McKinney grandchildren fondly remember an incident with their grandmother while traveling with their parents on vacation in a large Buick. Their grandmother was in the middle of the back seat with two children on either side and the children were making considerable noise such that their father asked their grandmother to do something to keep them quiet. And keep them quiet she did by stuffing their mouths with newly purchased "homemade" bread whenever one opened his or her mouth to speak.

The Bates grandchildren also remember having fond memories of their grandmother such as having a "peanut party" with them; giving them a small bowl of M&M's for their "pills," as they watched her take her daily pills and vitamins; giving them olives as a treat if they ate all their dinners; and making jello out of Vernors ginger ale. Her granddaughter, Susie Bates Covello, also recalls how her mother and grandmother tried to get her to stop sucking her thumb by putting certain hot spices on them, but to no avail. However, it was grandfather, Bill Heggie, who did the trick by calmly explaining to her that she would soon be starting Kindergarten and may not like the other children seeing her suck her thumb.

Hortense and Bill Heggie were members of the Republican Party. Her grandson, Rick, remembers her telling him that one day, possibly after women got the right to vote in 1920, that she was accompanying her aged grandfather, Richard Jeremiah Miller, on a walk, and he pointed out a Catholic gentleman across the street and then told her "never vote Democrat and never marry a Catholic." She concluded by saying, "And I never did." Her grandson also remembers trying to persuade her to consider voting for the Democrat, Jimmy Carter, in the 1976 Presidential election, as he was a born-again, Baptist Sunday School teacher, but he thinks she kept her promise to her grandfather and "never did." One time, in the 1960's, her grandson noticed a big sign in his grandmother's basement with a picture of Thomas E. Dewey, whom he knew, because he enjoyed reading history, had lost two Presidential elections on the Republican ticket, in 1944 and in 1948. So he asked his grandmother, "who is that guy, grandma?" She said, "I think he was President of the United States, wasn't he?" He regretfully had to inform her that although nominated twice, he never got elected as President.

In June of 1961 the family had a large 45th wedding anniversary celebration for Hortense and Bill Heggie who had been ailing and he remarked at the time to his wife that they had made a big deal out of their 45th anniversary as they thought he might not make it to their 50th anniversary. Indeed, William D. Heggie, died on February 18, 1962, from complications of an bad infection in his leg after being treated for blood clots. It was on a Sunday afternoon after his wife served him a nice Sunday dinner. Not feeling well, Bill had laid down on their couch and told Hortense, "if it weren't for you, Hortense, I would have gone a long time ago." Hearing that her father was deathly ill, his daughter, Margaret McKinney, rushed to the Heggie home at 2015 Prospect Street, but when she arrived she was told that he had already passed and she then fainted but was caught by their next door neighbor, "Uncle" Dave Filkins.

Hortense was 67 when she became a widow and although a man in her church, Onassis (Nasty) Dines, courted her and asked for hand in marriage, she declined and never remarried as Bill was the love of her life (after Jesus perhaps). In her later years she sold her house and moved in with her two daughters, spending some six months out of the year with her daughter Patricia Bates in Lansing, Michigan and six months out of the year with her daughter, Margaret McKinney, in Potomac, Maryland where Margaret and her husband had moved to in 1969. In those years she called herself, "an old biddy" and her grandchildren called her "Granny." She said things like, "Great life honey" and "Never get old honey" and at least one of her grandchildren responded, "but Granny, what's the alternative?" She always attended the Assembly of God Church wherever she dwelled. She trusted in her God, but in those days she also made certain that the front door was securely locked before going to bed.

In June of 1978, Hortense fell and broke her hip in her daughter's house in Maryland and was taken to Suburban Hospital in Bethesda where she stayed a number of days. As an 83 year old Hortense had developed curvature of the spine and on June 30, 1978, a technician, trying to get a better x-ray, put pressure on her shoulders so that her back would become more flat, but instead it broke her back and she died instantly. At the hospital she had been telling her daughter, Margaret, "I want to go home," and her daughter did not believe she meant just her current earthly home. The family was not inclined to sue the hospital and Hortense was buried next to her husband at Deepdale Memorial Gardens in Lansing, Michigan where her beloved husband, Bill, had purchased ten family plots next to each other and had stated at the time, "first come, first serve." Patricia and David Bates are also buried there.

Note: William Heggie's father, George Heggie (1848-1899) of Dundee Scotland was a jute cloth mechanic and Dundee was a major center for jute cloth (burlap) manufacturing at the time. He was the son of David Heggie (1801-1883), the son of Robert Heggie (1772-), the son of David Heggie (1734-), the son of James Heggie (1705-). His first wife was Catherine Davidson (1842-1873?) who had a son named George Davidson Heggie and his second wife was Euphemia Todd Marr (1851-1885) who had four children named Margaret, David, Ann and Euphemia. George's third wife was Barbara Donald (married on June 15, 1891, died in seems in December 1891). Williams's full sister was named Annie and she moved to Toronto, Canada where she was hospitalized and may have died fairly early in life. Hortense said that her husband's half siblings always treated him kindly and as a full part of the family.

See <https://kerrfamilytree.webs.com/heggiedescent.htm>
and <https://kerrfamilytree.webs.com/heggiefamilyreport.htm>.