

## **CLEO AND PHIL COLBURN**

### **As provided by son, Burrill**

Cleo was born on July 6, 1895 in Kalamazoo, MI. He was one of five boys and one girl. In 1902 the family moved to Fruitport, to a small farm on old Muskegon County 500 (now Sternberg Rd.) just  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile east of Dangl Rd. Cleo graduate from Fruitport High School. Somewhere along the line he met a young lady by the name of Jessie M. Poulson who lived in the now Cloverville area. Jessie, born in 1900, walked from her home to the Heights for the ninth and tenth grades; then on to Muskegon to graduate from the twelfth grade, while living with and working for a family in the Heights. In 1917, while a senior, Jessie accepted Cleo's engagement ring. On June 18, 1918, Cleo along with 228 other men from the Muskegon area were shipped off to war. After basic training at Camp Custer, they were shipped to England and then supposedly off to fight the Kaiser. Politics changed all that and the 339 Infantry Regiment was shipped to Archangel Russia and under English command fought the Bolsheviks. 1000 miles north of Moscow in frozen Siberian swamps where the temperature could drop to minus 50°F was where Cleo and his buddies fought. The Armistice came on November 11, 1918. Again politics were involved and Cleo and the men with him, called "Polar Bears," were retained in Russia by the British and fought until April 1919. *A film documentary about the "Polar Bears," (Voices of a Never Ending Dawn) was produced in 2008.* It was the American public outcry and pressure that finally brought the "Polar Bears" home.

Cleo and "Phil" were married on April 3, 1920 on her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. When Jessie was young she wrote poetry, something she did all her life. In those days the writings of women was largely ignored. She took her initials J.M.P. reversed them and she became Phillip M. Jordan and became a published writer. All her married life she was "Phil" to everyone who knew her and only Jessie on legal papers. The newly married couple moved to East Lansing where Cleo continued his education at Michigan Agricultural College, now Michigan State University. They finally bought their own little house in East Lansing. It has a living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom and bath and a big yard. Cleo had a garden there and sold some vegetables to a nearby grocery. It was a great first year at MAC, but with sadness. On February 3, 1921, Phyllis Jean was born. Their little girl only lived 3 days and is buried in an East Lansing cemetery.

In November 1923 they moved back to Fruitport and phil was pregnant. They had bought an unfinished house across the road from the Colburn "family home" on Muskegon County 500. On August 12, 1924, twins, Murrill and Burrill were born. The twins were a surprise to everyone including the doctor who had exclaimed, "My God, Cleo there is another one." Phil was not surprised as she was sure there were two.

Cleo and Phil were so happy, but both were over-worked with two new babies and still some work to be finished on the house. Phil was carrying for two infants, no electricity, no running water she did the running), cooking, and housekeeping. It took its toll. When the twins were a year and a half old Phil collapsed. She was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was sent to the TB Sanatorium in North Muskegon. Phil was there for a year and a half, bedridden for the first year. Her first five roommates died. By the time she was released she was able to walk from the sanatorium to either North Muskegon or to the highway bridge to Muskegon. The twins had gone to live with Cleo's younger sister and her husband, Guilford Taylor who lived in Coopersville.

In 1927 the whole family was back together again in their own home in Fruitport. Cleo found that farming was not for him and in 1926 he started working for the Muskegon Chronicle in classified advertising. In 1935 he started working in rural subscription sales. Times were still hard in the country and he often took eggs and produce in exchange for subscriptions. He would return to the Chronicle late in the day and sell the goods to other employees, thus providing cash to pay for the subscriptions. Cleo finished his employment at the Chronicle as a carrier supervisor retiring in 1962 after 36 years.

In 1931 Phil found out she was pregnant again and she was pretty scared because she had had TB. The family moved into Muskegon Heights, just two blocks from Hackley Hospital. The twins attended 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at Moon School. Patricia Lucille was born February 24, 1932. Baby Patty Lou had something wrong with her knee. The doctors determined it was not TV, but an abscess. After agonizing treatments the knee healed, but the leg was a little longer.

After about a year in the Heights the family moved back to Fruitport. It was nice to be back in their own home again. When Patty was about 5 she complained for stomach pain. The pain persisted and one night it became severe and they took her to the hospital. It was determined that she had a bad appendicitis and an operation was necessary. The appendix ruptured and infection has spread. Antibiotics were just new then and for Patty ineffective. She died November 8, 1937.

Cleo was a very handy individual. In the 30s when electricity first extended that far out to their home, he installed an electric well pump and the family had running water. With running water he installed inside plumbing with a septic tank. Cleo also installed a basement furnace with hot-water heating. The furnace replaced the old wood and coal fired "Hetrola," a big heater that stood on the floor between the kitchen and the dining area.

As Murrill and Burrill grew they learned many of their dad's skills. The home on County 500 provided land for some farming, but confined to poultry and small fruits and vegetables, raspberries, strawberries and asparagus. The boys joined their dad working on the farm. Cleo taught his boys how to hunt, mostly pheasants and rabbits in those early years.

In 1942 the boys enlisted understanding they would report for duty after they graduated the next June. Murrill was called up into the Army Signal Corps that fall, graduating in absentia. Burrill graduated in June 1943 and entered the Army Air Force. In April 1943 Sandra Louise was born. Burrill took care of his baby sister after school, a skill that he would find useful later in life. Later on Sandie would put in 20 years in the West Virginia Air National Guard.

The rest you know. Cleo and Phil moved from the farm into Fruitport after the children were gone and lived on Elm St. until Cleo passed away on June 10, 1994. Soon afterwards, Phil moved into Dirske's Care Facility and resided there until her death on August 17, 2000. Phil loved to read and write, especially poetry. She has her poem "I Talk to Me: published in CHICKEN SOUP for the UNSINKABLE SOUL when she was 99. Cleo enjoyed hunting and woodworking. They both were very generous with their time and kept busy all their lives.

(Note from Pat Stressman: I was told that I was named Patricia after their child.)