



Memories of My Life
and My Career in Athletics
at
Abilene Christian College
The University of South Carolina
Louisiana State University
Samford University



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Dedication: to “Mrs. Coach”

The “Mrs. Coach” Athletic Scholarship Award was established at Samford in 1990 to honor the memory of my wife “Bodie,” Ramona Paisley McClure. The award is given annually to those members of the Samford University women’s track and field team who have excelled both in athletics and academics.

“Mrs. Coach” was the nickname given to Bodie by the track and field athletes at Samford, and it was an appropriate one. Each season she accompanied the team on several trips, and was always an enthusiastic, proud, and vocal supporter, even when, as sometimes happens, the performances were nothing to shout about. Her cheers were not just for the record-breakers, but also for those who were struggling to finish, for those who were discouraged and

about to give up. “Mrs. Coach” believed in them. She knew they could be great. They just needed someone on their side, someone to tell them so.

For many girls on the Samford track team, Bodie was the right someone. She was a friend and mentor, a wise, compassionate, humble woman who led by example in her devotion to God and family and all that was excellent in life. The “Mrs. Coach” Award is given in her honor to those student-athletes who have best exemplified her spirit by their own devotion to excellence.

Bodie was always the right someone, the only one, for me. Many times I have said that all I have accomplished in my career and personal life, if it has been anything good, it came because of her love and support. This book is dedicated to her, in loving memory.



1. My Life Growing Up

Where I was Born

My full name is Billy Bert McClure. I was born September 21, 1921, in Wilson, Oklahoma, although we lived in Carter Oil Camp, which was outside of Wilson. Dad was a driller on an oil well.

I remember there was a derrick right outside the house. We lived in a company house. These oil derricks were wooden, and they had a bull wheel

which wound up the drill cable, and looked like a big spool up there on the deck of the rig. We used to go out there and play around, getting chewed out something awful for doing it, because it was dangerous.

I remember being out there on the wheel when it rolled around and threw me down on the deck, which wasn't but 4 or 5 feet. We also climbed up the ladder, and I believe to this day that's probably why I'm leery about heights.



Billy Bert

My Parents

My father, Omer Dee McClure, Sr., came from a big family that lived in farming areas. He was a girl's basketball coach in grade school and high school. I remember a picture of Dad with his high school girls, and they had these white, little, what do you call them? . . . tunics, like shirts almost. And black bloomers. Blousy, all the

way down to the ankles.

They were outside in a group standing by a wooden basketball goal, in a little place just outside of McKinney where he taught . . . Nativity, that's where it was. I'm not sure he ever lived there. He may have lived in McKinney and just ridden out there on a horse or something, because that's the way a lot of teachers did.

I don't know much about his young life, except that he was in World War I as a radio man. They never did talk about it very much around us as kids, and when we got to be adults they didn't talk about it much then either.

He was a good looking young man, a hard working young man.

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Marianne, Russ, O.D. Sr., me in back, O.D., Jay

He worked in the oil fields when the pipes and tools and things were moved around by men and horses. Derricks were built out of wood, and they built their own derricks, drilled their own wells. He followed the oil patch from Oklahoma to Texas, and got out of the oil business when he got to Breckenridge, where my mother's family lived. Her father had a feed store there, and Dad got a feed store also, on the other side of the bridge.

Mother (Bertha Esther Ellen Russell) was born in Hope, Arkansas, on November 21, 1896. I

don't know when they moved to Texas. Probably like everyone else, moving with the oil companies. Moving west. Breckenridge was a big place, including the area around Cisco, Ranger, in there, that whole oil pocket.

They lived on a farm and they did the farm work; the girls made their clothes out of muslin and out of feed sacks, flour sacks, whatever they had. They were farmers. They raised chickens, pigs, milk cows. They didn't have a lot of milk cows then. You didn't sell milk then, except by the pail. Grandaddy Russell,

Elijah, was a very strong man, physically as well as mentally. But I don't know when the children were born. Most of them were born before they got to Breckenridge. I think Ken may have been born in Breckenridge.

Mother was a farm girl, and worked hard. They got up early and went to bed early. Up with the sunrise, down with the sunset. When it was cold and they couldn't work outside, they all gathered around the fireplace to tell stories about their lives and things. That's what you don't do anymore today. At Christmas this year, I was trying to get people in our Brother's Keeper group at church to talk to their kids about their background, talk to them about growing up, because one of these days they'll want to know what went on. You can get too far away from it to where you don't remember anything.

My mother was always a very good looking woman. A very forceful woman. Very tough in the sense

of the old stock of toughness. When Dad got sick and had his medical problems, Grammer went to work. She sold these door to door things for women. She got enough money to buy her an old Chevrolet roadster, and would drive around to make those appointments and sell and make a little money because we needed it.

I could probably talk for two or three days about what our parents taught us that helped me in life . . . I think one of the most important things was the sureness of punishment if you did anything wrong. It might not be immediate, but you could rest assured if you did something wrong, and you were found out, you'd get punished. We didn't get a lot of spankings. We got some, but mostly it was "Well, you're not going to the creek this week. You're going to help around the house this week. You're going to do this, this week. You're going to kill chickens this week." That's how I got into killing chickens. I was bad, did something, I forgot what it was.

We raised chickens, and pullets, which are young chickens. When



O.D. and me on Chestnut St.

Growing Up

they got up to 2 or 3 pounds, I'd go out and kill them. The way I'd do it was to pull their heads off under a broomstick. Omer Dee or Russ or Jay or Marianne wouldn't do it, so I got the job. Whether I wanted it or not, I guessed that's what I was going to have to do. Grammer showed me how, and so we did that. My granddad used to wring their necks, but I wasn't strong enough to wring their necks. You had to be pretty strong to wring a chicken's neck. You get a two pound thing going in a circle, you know, it's pretty tough to do.

But, mainly, I guess our penalties were individual, you were not sure exactly what kind of punishment you were going to get, so you couldn't plan for it and say, "Well, I'll do this and I'll just get that." It was kind of left up to them what kind of punishment you would get. Grammer used a belt some. I think

particularly on Jay and me, because the others, Omer Dee, Russ, and Marianne, didn't cause that big a problem. I can't really remember any particular time, like "Gee, I really got whaled on that." I think it was probably a very minor number of times.

What I am that's good belongs to my parents; where I'm bad belongs to me. They were strong parents. We knew how far we could go, what the limits were. We knew not to expect things just because other people had them.

My Brothers and Sister

I feel a lot closer to all of my siblings now than I did when we were growing up. Omer Dee was our older brother, Jay was younger than me, and Marianne was younger than Jay, and Russ was the baby. So I was always resentful with Omer Dee, and Jay was resentful with me and Russ was always resentful with all of us, I mean, we picked on him.

And Marianne, bless her heart, she had a tough, tough time because she was raised with four boys and



Russell

she was just like another boy. Pictures of her when she was growing up, she'd wear jean coveralls, like everybody wore then; not overalls, but coveralls. And she could play baseball, she could run, she could play cowboy and Indians, so she was just like one of the boys.

A Christmas Memory

Our Christmases were wonderful, but we didn't know any better than to expect very little. It was always good, always a surprise.

One time we were traveling at Christmas time and we were in Oklahoma City. I don't know why, but we were there and we were in a hotel, and I remember . . . I can see the room right now, there were two beds. Omer Dee and I were the only kids then, and we knew that Santa Claus was not going to be there, because he didn't know we had left home, he didn't know we'd gone to Oklahoma City. I asked Mom a number of times and I guess she told me, but I've forgotten why we were there. I have a feeling we were



Marianne and Grammer

on our way to Texas, fixing to move to Texas. So I would have been 6-7 years old. Maybe even a little bit younger than that, may have been 5. Omer Dee was probably 7 or 8 and I was 5 or 6. Anyway, the next morning when we got up we didn't see a thing, nothing. And we were just about ready to

fill up a washtub with tears.

Grammer said, "Well have you looked every place?"

"Yeah, we looked every place."

"You know sometimes when Santa Claus comes in, he has to be very, very quiet so he won't wake anybody. Have you looked under the bed?"

"No." So we looked under the bed, and there was Christmas.

We had a cowboy suit, each one of us had a cowboy suit! We had a vest, and chaps, and boots, and cap pistol, and hat, and kerchief around our neck. We were real cowboys. I think that was probably the most memorable Christmas I had as a kid

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growing up. Have had a lot since then, with my own kids. But I remember that, just as plain as day.

Traveling

We lived in a number of places while I was growing up, from there at Carter Oil Camp, Oklahoma to Denton, Texas, to Breckenridge, Texas, to Abilene, Texas, where I finished growing up and finished school.

When we left Oklahoma and moved to Texas, we lived in north Texas at Denton, and then we moved to Breckenridge, and then to Abilene. In every case it was a move that had to be made for jobs. Following the oil patch. The oil patch went from Oklahoma down into Texas to Denton and around in there, and we moved from there to Breckenridge, and from Breckenridge to Abilene and Albany and around in that area. So you just kind of followed the oil company.

That's what Dad's brother Bill did, he followed the group to California when they had the great drought up in the plains area in Oklahoma and Texas, and in New

Mexico. There were places that you just couldn't make a living anymore. So, they went to California. A lot of people just picked up and left.

Weather played a tremendous



Family Christmas, c. 1950

part in the movement of the common people westward. They wanted to get away from the drought, the floods. Particularly in Arkansas and Tennessee, there were more floods that destroyed things than drought. They'd hear about the California gold rush, finding nuggets on the ground, that kind of bull. They heard stories about free land that you could go out and homestead. That's the way my grandfather's family moved, following the homestead deals.

In fact, as late as, I guess it was the early 50's, because it was after the war, Bodie and I thought very seriously about going to Guam because we could own land, I could get a job in the school system there, and my way there would be paid, and we'd get to come home once a year for holidays; they'd pay our way to come home.

That was kind of the way it



Going to the lake with Grammer!

was back earlier, only on a different scale. Wagon trains were common. I'm sure my grandfather was acquainted with that type of transportation. Grandfather Russell, I know, drove a team of horses to

Breckenridge from wherever his family came from.

I'm trying to think, where did they come from? Arkansas? Or Oklahoma? Because Mother was born in Hope, Arkansas. When they came to Breckenridge, they didn't come in cars, they came in wagons. Mother was the oldest child, so probably the only one at that time. It seems like Ethel and Wilma and Ruth were all spaced kind of in between the guys. Nine kids, living on a farm, you need extra hands.

Family and Social Life

That's what they believed in. They didn't believe in small families at all. You know, if you had just one or two kids everybody thought something was wrong with you, something was hurting someplace.

I used to sit at the Piggly Wiggly store in Abilene, and also at the feed store over in Breckenridge, just sit down and listen to old men talk. Now, they may not have been as old as I think they were, because they may have been in their mid-forties! They would talk about the war, about World War I, they'd talk about the farms, the money being wasted, and the schooling, how bad it was. Just like you do today, you get a group of

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guys together and they solve the world's problems. They did the same thing then, but on a much smaller scale. They didn't know what went on in Washington, they didn't even know what went on in the state office. They knew who the local sheriff was, or the constable, or somebody like that. Or the principal at school, because he had been in touch with them, or a teacher or someone like that, but they didn't have the slightest idea about what went on nationally or internationally.

Then when World War I came along, of course just like any war, all the young people were up and gone, and it left a real tough situation for lots of people that had husbands and sons in the war -- no daughters in the war back then. They had a nursing corps, but it was here, not over there. Florence Nightingale, I guess, got the first

one started. That wasn't until the war was almost over.

But the perspective was minuscule compared to what it is today. My kids at school are so much more advanced in computer technology, and other things, but they still don't know fundamentals, basic things.

They think money will buy anything, and that you have to know somebody to get anything done, you can't

do it on your own.

You have to, what do they call it? Used to call it the Good Old Boy Network, but now I don't know what they call it. That was true in coaching, where one coach would either get fired or leave a job, and immediately, all the other people knew about it. And there would usually be a meeting of the minds, "Well, who's going to get that job?" And everybody else would back off



Marianne & Frank. K's wedding party

and he would go ahead and get it, and that'd be it. That went on for years and years.

But now, they interview five or six guys and they get through all the interviews, and all of a sudden here's another guy who's interested, so they keep it open. Used to be, like when Carl Maddox, Deitzel, and

people like that were ADs, they got the guy hired before anybody knew about it. You have to advertise now, which is downright ridiculous sometimes.

But the thing that's changed, I think, a lot, and I guess I'm being prejudiced by my age, is that kids miss out on so much, yet they get so much. They get so much, but they miss out on little things that used to be big things for us. Having friends, being neighbors. I could go into any house in the neighborhood. Everybody knew everybody. Mothers, fathers knew everybody, kids knew everybody.

There were people named Harrison, who lived right across the street from us. They had two daughters, and the one I knew was Nettie. What a name, Nettie Harrison. I thought she was the girl of



Jay in uniform

my life. She was my first girlfriend (I had only three: her, Jackie Belew, and Bodie). We'd be over there in their house, they'd come over in our house, we'd be in the neighbor's on the right or the neighbor's on the left, or across and down three or four blocks away.

And then you didn't really want a phone, because you had the old party line phone you'd pick up and find everybody else was on the line, you know, so you didn't do that.

Zolus Motley lived just down from us when we were on Fifteenth in Abilene, just go down one street and turn left and they lived on the next corner. They had a farmhouse, and that was intriguing, because they had a barnyard out there where they kept the horses and the cows. This with all these houses built

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around there. We used to go over there and meet with them, and they'd get us to stay for supper. Mother would really get ticked off about that, because food was a big item. You didn't have enough to feed your kids and all the other kids in the neighborhood too. And usually, you'd notice that you didn't get a big helping. You got a smaller one than you'd get at home, probably, because it had to be split up more ways.

When you didn't have gas, which a lot of people didn't have, you had a fireplace. When it got real cold, everybody went in the room where the fireplace was, and put your pallets down and slept by the fireplace. The bedrooms would be too cold. I remember going over to Grandmother Russell's house and sleeping upstairs in that big old house. They had feather beds, and they had thick covers. You go up there in wintertime and that's what you needed. It was cold up there. Didn't have central heating or anything like it. I remember the first time they got gas stoves. It was open

flame, but gas stoves. That's what we had in the house on Chestnut, no central heating, just open gas stoves, which was great.



Zulus Motley

The Depression

We were raised in the Depression. You don't hear much about it now, but from 1929 to about 1936, this country was in deep trouble. And we kids never did have to work, which was really unusual, because Grammer didn't want us working, she wanted us at home. She

and Dad would work. Dad had a feed store in Abilene, like he did in Breckenridge, and he sold insurance, and worked for a feed company. He did jobs like that, and then he got the feed store in Abilene, and things went well for quite a while, but when the Depression hit, it all went.

Before the Depression he was working for a feed outfit out of Kansas City, Purina. They had a branch in Ft. Worth, but it was really out of Kansas City, the main office was there. He'd go around to all the grocery stores in town. Back then the

grocery stores would sell feed; they sold sacks of grain and food for horses, hay, if you didn't have a feed store in town, and Abilene didn't have an abundance of feed stores.

Then he and another guy named Baldridge bought a building over on the south side of town, just south of the railroad track and all the way down . . . if you come up Oak Street, you turn right and go down there. They had a feed store down there until everybody went broke.

Then, when he got sick, back I guess in the mid-forties while I was gone to the war, he had to quit working. I don't remember if they had Social Security then. I think they started in '36, but I don't think he got anything from it then. Anyways, he had a tough time, and we had a tough time. But Grammer went to work, and it was alright. Of course, prices weren't like they are now. You could rent a house for \$20 a month because they were just going begging.

We had bought a house out on Chestnut Street, 1525. We lived first in a red brick house right across the lot, then we built this one, and moved in. That's where we raised chickens, and had a cow, and had a garden, and our greatest activity as children was . . . well, there was

Westway Drive a block or two away, a concrete street, the only one around, and it had about an 18 inch curb, all the length of Westway Drive. So we played shinny on skates there on Westway with mesquite clubs and tin cans as pucks. We didn't spend any money.

Pets

We always had dogs. Jiggs is the one I primarily remember. One time we thought he was a mad dog, had gotten rabies, and we put him in a pen. Someone told us we needed to go up in the hills and see an Indian. He had a heart stone out of a deer -- deer have a stone in their stomach that helps them grind food a little bit. I don't know whether they swallow it on purpose to get on' or what.

But this Indian would scrape your hand or arm, bring blood, and stick that stone on it. If it stuck, you had rabies. If it didn't stick, you didn't have rabies. Well ours didn't stick, so it was alright. He was an old Indian, I remember he was dressed in ritual clothes, but they were filthy. He lived in a cave, made a little money doing that , and that's about it.

Jiggs was our dog, we grew up with him. I don't think we ever had another dog until we got over in Texas. He was my pal, he'd take care

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of me. He was a pretty good sized dog, an Airedale. A lot bigger than I was. I couldn't do anything with him when he didn't want me to. We played together a lot. If you were fixing to hurt him or something, he'd just duck his head and butt you down. He wouldn't try to growl at you or anything. I remember learning to walk with him.

Mother would put the dog out with us, and she'd feel very comfortable about leaving us with him. He'd get us out of trouble, or push us away from the rig, stuff like that. They didn't have roads as such, they had trails, but there weren't any cars running up and down. We lived in a compound where you didn't drive back and forth, you parked down there and walked to your house.

Play

In the summertime we'd play out until it got dark. Then if the street-light was on, we'd play until they'd tell us to come in, which was usually around ten o'clock. We'd play tag, hide-and-go-seek, and wolf over the

river, which is a tough game. You lined up in two lines and you'd hold hands, then you'd holler at the other line, "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Come over, come over, come over." And someone would run over and try to break the chain.

We had a cave we dug out and put a roof on just to play in, about four feet deep. You had to crawl in through a tunnel, but you could sit up once you got inside. Grammer even used it to store onions and other kinds of food stuff. It's still there in that vacant lot at 1525 Chestnut. That vacant lot's still vacant, nobody's ever built a house

there. I've thought a time or two if I ever hit a jackpot, I'd go back there and build me a house, right on that spot. We didn't have toys like kids do today. We made

our own toys, made our own stick horses, made our own sling shots, made our own rubber guns. We would play war with rubber band guns. We had rifles that would shoot five or six times because you would get a long stick of wood and cut notches in it and then



Marianne's dog "Toodles"

you bring the rubber band back and put it in a notch. You would put string under each one so that when you got ready in the war to fire, you could pull one or you could pull them all. You could fire a bunch of times or every once in a while.

We made our own balls out of socks stuffed with rags and things, and that was our baseball or football, because nobody could afford to buy a real ball. A mesquite club was our bat. We tried making bows and arrows and got a negative from our parents on that, because we could hurt somebody with it. We sharpened the arrows. Didn't put metal or stone points on them, but we sharpened the arrows. So we got that nullified, they knocked that out. We didn't know much about basketball; we were outdoors all the time and nobody played or thought very much about it. They had outdoor courts, but usually they just had one goal. You'd have one goal and you'd play, and when the ball went over you'd have to take it back to the half

court and come back again. Nobody had a gym.

We played all kinds of games. An athletic game we played was "one and over." Kind of like a broad jump and a triple jump. You have to leave from the mark, and there's a guy down with his hands on his knees, bent over, and you plant your hands on his back to go over him, straddle him, get over him, and he keeps moving out a little each time. When somebody can't go over him, then he's down, and you go out. Then you go one and over, you can take one giant step and then over, and that was the triple jump, although we didn't call it triple jump. I've told

my track kids, "I'm going to teach you guys a game one of these days, teach you a little bit about jumping, hopping, and things." And that's the game. We played everything. Played baseball more than anything, but it wasn't baseball, it was softball. We never had a ball. I don't remember ever having a ball growing up. I'm sure we did sometime, I'm sure somebody could afford to buy a ball once



Marianne's snowman

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in a while. But mostly we'd get these socks, and Grammer would get some cloth that would draw up tight, and wind it around and really make a hard ball out of it. There was a hill across Oak Street, a community baseball field. We played out there every day. I mean as soon as we got home from school, in the spring, that's where we went. In the summer, that's where you went.

We had track meets too. We didn't have a track; we had gravel roads, and once around a block was our track. When you'd run a relay, you'd run one side of the block and hand off, and he'd run another side, and the next guy would run another side. They weren't always even, one side might be a little longer than another. We did the high jump, and the long jump, and we did the sprints, and we did the miles by running four times around that block, which is a lot more than a mile, I know now. In fact, I've threatened to go back there and measure it to see how far it is.

We built our own high jump bars, made them out of bamboo or willow canes, cut the canes on the creek. We built standards for the high jump, but didn't know what

the pole vault was. We did the long jump too, we made a pit for it.

And we would just go places. I've been back to Abilene many times to see where we went as young kids. There's a pond just down on the other side of Oak Street, and we'd go down there almost every day in the summer time and catch crawfish on a string with bacon rind, and bring them home by the tub, just hundreds of them, and Grammer would cook them all. Take the tails off, and take the scales off the tail and cook them, and they were good. Then we'd go down to Elm Creek, which was probably two or three miles away. We were 7, 8, 9, 10 years old and we'd be gone all day, and nobody thought anything about it.

Zolus Motley's dad was a farmer and he had a corn field and a cantaloupe field down by the creek, and we'd go down there and steal his corn and cook it in a bucket of water, and eat watermelon while it was cooking, take a blanket down there and spend the night. Never worried about snakes, though they were down there. We were swimming down there one time, and I thought I saw an asp. A snake came up out of the water and his head was so big, I thought it was an asp. I kept

looking at it, but it had a fish in its mouth and couldn't get it out.

The creek was right there by the "Colony." That was where they put disturbed people and that sort of thing. We were just like any kids, we'd go over and make fun of them, poor things. They'd get teed off at us and the guards would run us off, that kind of stuff.

We'd go with neighbor kids, and we had a gang. We had the Belmont Sissies and the Belmont Alley Rats. Our group were the Alley Rats and the Sissies were the ones that lived on the Belmont side, the upper crust side of town. J.T. Bell, Lavonne Young, Zolus Motley, people that I went to high school with later. We had a lot of fun.

We did those things, and we'd go fishing, we'd hunt rabbits. I've killed lots of rabbits with a sling shot. We'd go down to the creek and find smooth stones. We made our own shooters: we'd get a mesquite limb with a fork, and fit rubber bands over it, pull it back with a little leather sleeve, and put the stone in there. Then go out and practice, try to hit some things. We always would hunt rabbits, and it's a wonder we didn't get trichinosis, because we'd cook them ourselves.

We weren't hurting like a lot of people think today. They think,

"Well, gosh, y'all didn't have anything to do back then. What did you do?" You go to the mall now during the holidays, and you can go when they first open in the morning until when they close at night, and kids are all over the place. All they're doing is walking around, they're not, I don't think, spending a lot of money. They just run around.

Pastimes

I don't think we knew what hobbies were. I don't remember having a hobby. Hunting was a hobby, because we would have almost killed to own a BB gun at one time. We finally got one, got a Daisy pump gun. Never will forget that. You'd put the BB's in it, but you had to pump it up for the pressure to fire the pellets. We made our own weapons, as I mentioned before: slingshots and rubber guns. And we made giant sling shots. We'd get a limb of a mesquite tree that may be forked 3 feet wide. We'd cut an inner-tube and cut it in two to make strips of rubber from it, and launch brick-bats, or big rocks. You know who at? Blacks! We used to fight them every Saturday. I don't think we ever hit anybody.

They lived not far from us - actually, about five blocks. And the funny thing about it, we'd fight every

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Saturday, but the rest of the time, I might be over in their house drinking milk, or they might be in mine drinking milk, or someplace else getting a drink of water. Some of the best friends we had were black kids, but they went to the black school, they didn't go to the white school. So the only time we'd really see them would be on the weekend.

We spent the weekend at the creek. Either that, or in the evenings, if we didn't go down Saturday night and spend the night, we would be playing under the streetlights. Most of the time we'd go to the creek. I got to where I knew every nook and cranny in that creek.

We didn't have musical instruments. I don't think we were disinclined, but we couldn't afford one. We played a comb. You ever play a comb? My parents listened to the radio quite a bit. We had records that were thicker than the ones now, and they listened to classical music. Mother and Grandmother and the girls all listened to classical music, and the guys, men in the family, listened to country music, or "hoedown" as they called it then. Mainly fiddling. Really weren't any



National Theater in Breckenridge, c. 1925

other instruments, or even vocals. Mostly fiddle, and banjo. Guitar sometimes, but not very often. Guitars were more expensive than fiddles.

We read *Boy's Life*, and *Liberty* magazine. *Boy's Life* was the magazine. We couldn't wait to get it. Came once a month, I think. About like *Life* magazine, in size. All the articles were about boys. Fishing and hunting stories, adventure stories, how to raise a dog, how to find a pet. And they'd have stories in there about children. These were not stories for first and second grade, but for grammar school and high school people. I read them up until I went to college. They had

some good stuff in them. I remember I got a knife one time by subscribing. I sold subscriptions so I could get a subscription. You sell so many, you can get a free one.

I read *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, Rudyard Kipling, Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*. All the adventure books for youngsters. Dad had them all. He had every one of them in barrister's glass book-cases that were two high, and they'd go all the way across the room. I think Russ may have them now. I think he stacked them, and he may still have some of the books. We read all the time. I couldn't get away from one of those things. I'd sit down and read it through before I'd get up and do anything else. Mother used to get mad at me: "Well, aren't you coming to supper?" "Oh, I'll be there in a minute." That sort of thing.

The first movies we ever went to were in Breckenridge, when we lived over there, and that must have been in 1927-28, because we moved to Abilene in '29. We saw silent movies, and they were Tom Mix serials, Fu Manchu movies, western movies with other characters. A movie would come to town, and it would be there all week. It'd start on Saturday. Didn't play on Sunday, start Saturday afternoon and that's

when all the kids would go. Go at 12:00 but the movie didn't start until 1:00. When they first started, they didn't have anything for you to eat or drink.

We'd go to a show maybe once every two or three months and see a serial. They had serials on Saturday. They were all western, western or oriental, like Charlie Chan. It cost you a dime or 15 cents, and you could stay all afternoon and watch it over and over and over. Mother used to take us to the show and let us out, and we'd go in the show and she'd go get her shopping done at the grocery store, and visit friends or go sell some things or whatever, and come back and pick us up about 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon. They were silent movies to start with, with a guy up on the stage playing the piano. They would flash up on the screen what they were saying, but most of us couldn't read that well then. When we'd go to Breckenridge that's one thing we'd always do, is go to a talking movie, because they had a theater with talking movies there before they had one in Abilene.

Relatives

I don't really know where my father's parents were born; I think you'd have to go to McKinney and

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go to the courthouse and find something. One of these days when I'm over there, I might just run by there and see. They may have come from Arkansas, I don't know. I think Granddad Russell was born in Alabama, and I think Grandmother was born in Arkansas. I think in Hope, Arkansas, because that's where Grammer was born.

I don't remember ever seeing my great-grandparents. We knew Dad's parents well because we were young and we would visit them. But you know, back then you just didn't drive over in a day from Abilene to McKinney. It was at least a two day drive to get there. And when you got to those hills over there around Ft. Worth, you had to back up them in a Model T Ford, because the forward gear wouldn't take you up, it wasn't powerful enough to take you up the hill. They were gravel roads.

We had a little fender on our Model T, and a little telescoping thing that clamped on it, and that's where we put our camping gear, which was not like your camping gear

today; it was blankets and sheets and a tarp for ground cover. There weren't any motels so you'd just sleep out to the side of the road. We'd leave Abilene and drive until you couldn't see, because lights weren't good enough to drive with. I don't remember whether they had lights on them. Guess they did. But they were gravel roads. You didn't have a hotel to stop at, or a motel, wasn't any such thing. No gasoline stations, so you'd have to carry gas with you unless you could make it from Abilene to Breckenridge, which was 56 miles. Actually, it was probably about 70 miles because they didn't have many roads then. It was bad.



Grandmother Russell with me, Jay, and Marianne

I remember my grandfather, Elijah Russell, mainly from the feed store business. He was an outdoor man. I don't know if you remember ever seeing him or not. He had one hand shot off in a gun accident. His wife, his second wife, wasn't at home when it happened. He got in the car and drove to the hospital with his hand gone. He was a tough guy. He was a pretty good size man. He was huge to me, but now I'd say he was probably about 6 feet, I guess, knowing his boys and how big they were.

He was a guy that could have been a millionaire. He was that close. He owned a bunch of property, and drillers would come in and say, "Hey, Mr. Russell, I need some hay, I need some grain, I need some of this. Here's this lease I've got down in Corpus Christi or Baytown, or someplace. They're gonna get oil down there one of these days, and you'll have this," and it was legitimate, a legitimate deal. He . . . I don't know what happened. I asked

Custer and Webb one time, and they thought somebody really took him to the cleaners, because he had the lease, and he always had it in a bank vault. That huge field they hit down there, biggest ever in the state of Texas, that was his. That's where he had his lease or claim. He fought for years through the courts to try to get some money from that. I think they finally got some, I don't know how much, but they got some. Then he bought a lit-

tle farm outside of Breckenridge, where they drilled and hit some oil there. I think Custer and Webb were instrumental in that because they were in the oil business in Odessa. I know Grammer used to get some money from them, not much, 50\$ or 100\$, something like that as a royalty.

I guess my mother's parents were our favorite grandparents, only because we saw them more often. We were closer to them than we were to our others, although we would go see Dad's parents in McKinney



with Marianne at her house

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maybe once a year during the holiday period, or during the summer. Most of the time during the summer, because we could sleep outside then. They didn't have enough room for us to sleep in the house. But with Mother's folks at Breckenridge, as the years rolled by we could get over there a little bit easier.

Grandmother Russell had five girls and four boys. Her name was Mary Bowman. She was killed in an automobile accident in Weatherford, Texas, seems like about 1929-30. It was very unusual to have an automobile accident at that time. One of her boys was driving the vehicle, and I don't really know what happened. I do remember that when they had the funeral they didn't allow the children to go. I was eight years old I guess, which is young enough to wonder about it, to wonder what death really was, and that sort of thing. We were kept at home by the maid, who was a unique black woman called Butcher Knife Annie. She was suspected of wielding a butcher knife against somebody. But she was a very good cook and she was my grandmother's cleaning woman, house woman, as they called them then. She took

care of the kids while the funeral was going on.

My grandmother had, as I mentioned, five girls: Bertha, Ethel, Wilma, Ruth, and Velma, and four sons: Custer, Webb, Tom, and Ken. Tom was nicknamed Vaurice. Custer was the oldest, Webb was next, then Tom, and Ken was the young one. Tom and Ken were killed in an auto-truck accident later between Abilene and Odessa, when they lived in Odessa. I worked with Webb one summer, in 1936, for El Paso Natural Gas Co.

My uncles were my instructors in athletics. There was a field beside their house, which was a huge two story house in Breckenridge. We played football out there every day just about, in the summer time. They taught me how to do everything about football. I spent many a night cleaning up skin, bones, legs and things, because the field was dirt, kind of a gravel field, with mesquite limbs. You'd use them to screen people away from you, dodging around things.

Verna and Eva were my dad's sisters. Bill, Choice, Von Ray, and Dick were his brothers. I don't know when they were born. My dad, Omer Dee, was the oldest, then Bill, Choice, Von Ray, and Verna was the

oldest girl. But there was another brother, a crippled brother, I can't remember his name [Otto Lee McClure, 1894-1930]. Now, knowing what I know about diabetes, I think that is what he must've had, because there were a lot of similar things. He would have attacks like when your blood sugar gets low, and spasms, and he was in a wheelchair for a long time before he died, I believe.

Grammer's sisters are all gone now, except Wilma, and Velma maybe. Wilma moved to Colorado with Betty, her daughter, when Betty got married. Wilma moved with her because Cap, her husband, had died, so they moved up there. Then I think . . . I've forgotten when Mary [Ruth Russel DiVall?] died, maybe 30 years ago [1936]. She died in childbirth with a daughter [Mary Ruth DiVall?] that survived and married the Kansas State basketball coach.

I haven't heard very much about the children of Dad's family. Von Ray and his wife had a boy that was a pretty good tennis player and coached somewhere. Billy Dee and Thomas C. [E.?] were Bill's [Willie?] sons, and they had a daughter too, and they moved to California, and we never heard any more from them. Well, I did too.

When I was in the service, I saw Thomas C. and his wife in San Diego. They lived in an apartment and I'd go in and have a meal with them every once in a while when I was out there. But we heard later that Thomas C. was working at a bank or something, and we never did get details, but it was robbed and I think he was a victim. We just didn't communicate very much after that.

Ken and Tom [Grammer's brothers] — Tom married a girl that was divorced, I think, and that didn't set very well with the family. They kind of isolated him, gave him the cold shoulder for a while, but not very long. Ken never did get married. Webb was married and had a family, Custer married and had a family, Wilma had Betty, she's the only child they had. Velma had a family and they lived in Oklahoma City for a long time, although early in their marriage they traveled quite a bit around the country, and the world. Ethel and her husband went to South America and lived down there until he retired with Texaco, then they moved to Shidler, Oklahoma, up where Ruth lived, and they lived there until they both died.

I don't know whether Ethel's husband is dead or not. We kept up with them for a long time; Bodie

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and I went up there a couple of times, one time when I was going to a track clinic. I was on the staff of a clinic at the University of Oklahoma for state high school coaches, so we decided we'd go by and see our relatives. But overall, we got kind of got split up over the years.



with three of Grammer's siblings