

My Mother-in-law -- Alice Kimball Stearns (1870-1953)

Grandmother Hartwell, as I called her, was a near a saint as I ever knew. She was very proper having grown up in the age when girls of good families were proper. She was a medium build and height, had brown hair and hazel eyes with a light complexion. Grandma Hartwell was very conservative, self-contained, unassuming, religious, methodical, and somewhat of a perfectionist.

She lived in Wilton, New Hampshire, until her late teens. Then the family moved to Hopedale, Massachusetts, a small town next door to Milford. Here she went to work to help her sister through college so she could become a missionary. When Alice's turn came, she won a full scholarship to Northfield School for Girls and later the Northfield scholarship to Wellesley College. When she was in college, her fiance (Allen Hartwell) told her he needed her. His father had died and left a house just built, four children, and his mother. He was the head of the house and needed a wife. They were married very soon and she took over this ready-made family. She and Allen had three children, but only one survived childhood, William, my husband.

Grandma Hartwell was a hard church worker, and she was greatly loved and admired by her very large Bible class she taught. The Hartwells had a regular farm with a vegetable garden, fruit trees, and chickens. Alice canned everything possible. The old-fashioned phrase "she set a fine table" certainly applied to her. She was a wonderful cook. She made fish cakes (salt codfish and potatoes made into patties

and fried) for her husband every Sunday of her married life.

She sewed her own clothes, but there was nothing very stylish in the lot. One day she said, "I certainly need a daughter to modernize me." I suggested we buy some new clothes, have lunch out, and have a fine day in town. This was a rare treat for her, especially as we came home with three dresses.

Later, when Grandma Hartwell came to Durham to live in the apartment house, she was very grateful for plenty of hot water and no drafts. She loved to ride in the car and enjoyed a trip across the country at age eighty-three. My mother, who was ten years younger, looked out for her comfort.

Her last act for me was to wipe the dishes the Sunday before she died. She died as she lived -- quietly.