

Beatrice Elizabeth Abell (1901- )

I was born August 1, 1901, just a few hours late for my mother's 21st birthday. I grew up in Westfield, Massachusetts, in a happy and hard-working family. I was the oldest and I suppose a little privileged. My brother Ellis was two and a half years younger than me, and my sister Mildred was two and a half years younger than him.

My mother's sister Eva, who was fourteen years younger than mother, was thrilled with me and proudly pushed the baby buggy up and down the street with me in it. When I was four or five, I wanted terribly to go to school with her. Of course I couldn't, so she did the next best thing and taught me to read and write at home. She also taught me how to skate, ride a horse, ride a bicycle, and recite poetry. She wasn't happy with me, however, when her friends came to play, and they used all kinds of schemes to get rid of me.

I was very important until my brother and sister came along. They were very attractive children. Ellis had blue eyes and black hair and Mildred was very cute; I always felt I had to make up for my lack of beauty by having a sunny disposition and being helpful. These came naturally so it wasn't a problem, and I guess I felt appreciated as the years went by. Now I realize this was a bit of jealousy which I eventually outgrew.

I always loved school and took great pride in bringing home good grades, which would make Dad very happy and which he liked to brag about. We used to help in our store on Saturday and any other spare

time. There were always potatoes to be put in peck bags and crackers to be taken from a barrel and bagged by the pound. We also had to fill gallon cans with kerosene. The cans had handles and spouts which were used to fill lamps and oil stoves. What would our fire officials say if they knew we had a big container of kerosene in the basement! We operated an attached pump to bring the liquid into the gallon cans. I hated this job. My brother and I were often sent to the wholesale meat market two miles away to get a twenty-five pound clod (shoulder) of beef and a big ham and strips of bacon; we used a cart to get it all home.

The only soda pop those days was ginger ale and Moxie. We kept cases of these in the basement. I discovered that the balsam wood dividers made great kites, and I used to manufacture them for all the kids. Dad wasn't happy when he found the wood gone.

All three of us had a happy childhood. We were never rich or poor as some people were in those days. Our church meant a lot to us, and much of our life was centered around it. Our young people's group had sleigh rides, picnics with a canoe ride with a special boyfriend, and especially plays.

I learned to speak in public because Judge Parker, our Sunday School superintendent, called on us to give an account of anything that popped into his head. You won't know about Camp Meetings so I'll tell you. High school-aged young people were allowed a special week at a church-owned campground. It consisted of an open-air auditorium (having a roof but open at the sides) and several buildings used as bedrooms. The grounds also had a tennis court and a quiet area.

We were there for religion, but did lots more. We attended services and lectures, but had plenty of time for fun. The boys would often tease the girls. The girls retaliated by withholding the fudge and popcorn balls they made. We must have cooked on an oil stove because there was no electricity at camp. There were oil lanterns on lamp posts here and there, but it was mostly dark. It was fun walking back to the bedrooms in the dark or sitting in a circle and singing until we were told to stop. Sometimes we had a campfire. We didn't seem to be as sophisticated as today's young people, but perhaps we weren't as bored. Camp Meeting was all in all a very rewarding experience for me.

At the same age, fifteen, I had a wonderful week at Northfield School for Girls. I was chosen from our church to attend a conference there. Of course we had meetings, but I got to meet some of the top church leaders in the country. We lived in tents and ate in the dining halls. There were all kinds of sports and always singing in the evening in either Round Top (a special small hall) or the auditorium.

This time began my interest in boys; some I liked and some I didn't! Finally there evolved one named John. He sat near me in several classes in high school. I enjoyed his company and we had many good times. He came to see me on his bike (no cars), so we didn't stray far. We did go around with the college crowd (not everyone went to college then). There were about a dozen of us. We had parties at each other's houses. I know this sounds tame, but there were no public places there except public dance halls which were off limits for me.

When college time came, John went to Harvard and I to Boston University. He won a four-year scholarship as a freshman and later one for Harvard Medical School. I went to all the Harvard functions and enjoyed myself very much.

On my first day at B.U., I met the man who was to become my husband and the father of my two children. Bill waited patiently for me. John and I parted company during senior week in college, and then Bill came on the scene. I'll get to the conclusion in a bit.

My college years were made up of study, work, and fun. For work, I trained in the library and became head of the book mending department. This paid a very good sum for 1922. My parents helped me with funds when they could, but Dad was ill at the time and earning no money.

My grades weren't spectacular, but were respectable. I had to keep my everyday work up because exams were fatal to me except for problems that could be proved. In spite of this, I majored in history because I loved it.

I already mentioned the dances and games at Harvard. Of course B.U. had them also, so my social calendar was very full. Mother made me pretty dresses for these occasions. My sorority sisters liked them too, and I often saw my dress coming down the street on someone else! I lived at the sorority house (Delta Delta Delta) my senior year.

In 1924 it was hard to find employment for teachers. I was lucky to find a teaching job only fifteen miles from home in Huntington. The school needed a history and mathematics teacher and I was qualified to

do both. I lived at home and drove Dad's car spring and fall, but took the train in the winter. Huntington was in the Berkshires and up hill all the way.

My fiance Bill was at graduate school at Harvard and he finished up at Wesleyan in Connecticut. He came to Westfield on the train every weekend.

I taught with some very nice people and we had a good time during lunch hours. It was a pretty area around Huntington to take a walk at noon. I can't say that I was a dedicated teacher because I was always glad to hear the closing bell. Perhaps if I had taught more than three years I would have been more enthusiastic. Forty years later I tutored at the Berwick Academy in Berwick, Maine, and enjoyed every minute of it. Huntington as a mill town and with a few exceptions, the young people were anxious to get out of school and get a job.

Bill Hartwell and I were married June 30, 1927, in Westfield, Massachusetts. After the wedding reception at church (over 300 people), many of our friends came back to see our gifts and to enjoy our lovely rose gardens. My Grandpa Ellis cared well for the grounds, but they were never more beautiful than the day I was married. The setting of that house was worthy of being called an estate, with the flower gardens and the brook. I was proud of how well everything went, especially since I planned it myself. My friends took care of the reception which helped a lot. We used mountain laurel, which came from my uncle's farm, for the flower decorations.

Bill and I had a short honeymoon to the Catskills because Bill had taken a job at Boston University for summer school. Our first academic year was spent at the University of Maine. I walked my new husband to class and returned in a roundabout way which gave me several miles to walk. My housework was done in no time because Mother had trained me how to take care of a house. I was a fair cook but never would equal my mother-in-law. I spent much of my time walking and reading. We joined a fine church and met many friends.

The next year Bill spent at Harvard studying and working. We lived with his parents at Milford. Priscilla was born that year on May 13, 1929. She was received as if she were a princess by both families. Neither family had had a baby for over twenty years.

When Priscilla was four months old, we moved to Durham, where Bill had taken a job teaching Physics at the University of New Hampshire. We moved into a house on Bagdad Road and soon learned we could only have it for a year. So we hired an architect, got a loan from Bill's father, and built a house at 30 Bagdad Road. It was a colonial house so I had fun furnishing it with furniture from here and there. Bill's Grandmother Stearns was an especially lucrative source. It took 27 pairs of ruffled curtains to do the windows. We had to do a little penny-pinching to afford them.

It was depression time, but in spite of it we welcomed George into the family on March 29, 1932. Now our family was complete. George was a big baby and was hungry all the time. He didn't mind telling us about it with a yell heard down the street. That wouldn't happen now because

mothers are wiser about feeding babies. We always felt like a close and united family and this feeling continues as we add new members to the fold.

The children grew and Bill and I got involved with church and civic responsibilities. I was president of the Woman's Club twice as well as president of several other organizations. I guess it showed that I liked to organize and boss.

I suppose our home wouldn't have enough fireworks for some people, but neither Bill nor I liked to quarrel. Our disagreements were settled in a peaceful manner. We both could fight when sufficiently aroused, but that didn't happen more than a few times in a lifetime.

Bill had a 1924 Ford which he received for a graduation gift from his parents. It had curtains to put on when it rained and an unusual method of driving it. There was a brake and a pedal that one pushed forward to go ahead and backward to reverse. I never did get the hang of it because I'd always driven a normal shift car. One day Bill's mother wanted to go shopping, and being very brave I said I'd take her. I got along fine until I let my passengers out and started down a slight hill to the garage. As I drove in, I couldn't stop the car and went through the rear of the garage. Fortunately there was no damage to the car and the boards were nailed back onto the garage.

I did a lot of sewing for many years. I dressed Priscilla and myself. We bought almost nothing in the clothing line. I even made ski suits and winter coats. After awhile Priscilla learned to sew and surpassed me in the skill.



I loved to be out of doors and often took the children skating and swimming. I also enjoyed walking and journeyed miles with different friends. My husband never walked before I married him and never after if he could help it.

Bill and I enjoyed bridge and we played a lot with friends and also in a bridge club of sixteen. We had a pot luck supper and a wonderful evening for each club meeting; this continued for twenty years or so.

We also used to entertain quite a bit. Some of it was expected of us as members of the faculty and some of it was on our own. Occasionally we entertained for dinner and overnight celebrities who came to U.N.H. to perform. Bill was chairman of the group that brought them here.

Because of Bill's love for music, we sponsored the Community Concerts in Dover. We enjoyed the concerts and I especially enjoyed going to the receptions in the Dover homes after the concerts.

Since there was no high school in Durham, both of our children went to the Northfield schools in western Massachusetts (George to Mount Hermon and Priscilla to Northfield). The house seemed big for a few weeks, but then Bill's father and mother decided they wanted to come to Durham. We couldn't find a suitable house for them, so we decided to build an apartment house which would take care of both them and us. It was on the adjacent lot on 28 Bagdad Road. It was great fun to watch the house progress. It had three large apartments and three small ones.



My mother, who was living with my sister in Westfield, came to visit for a week and wound up staying eight years in one of the small apartments. Bill's father and Bill and I each had a large one. From then on, life was a whirl. I really enjoyed it most of the time. My folks loved to ride so I never went anywhere with an empty car. At first they were quite independent, but as time went on, I had more and more to do for them. I was rewarded by knowing they were happy.

They died one after the other -- Mother was the last one. Then just one year later, Bill died of a heart attack after thirty-two happy years. I always considered him indestructable so the shock was terrible. Then a miracle happened. Someone called me from Berwick Academy and asked if I'd be interested in tutoring. I enjoyed doing it but it gave my brain a good workout.

After a couple of years a new phase of my life began. One Sunday there appeared at my door one Ralph Hugh Mason, whom I knew because he was married to one of Bill's cousins. He had lost his wife and was very lonely and asked if he might visit. We took rides and got really acquainted. We enjoyed each other's company so when he asked me to marry him, it was a matter I considered seriously. He adored me and needed me and I was happy to be with him.

Ralph was a gentleman of the old school and very thoughtful of me. I was probably spoiled, but I spoiled him too. He came to Durham to live, leaving his Gloucester beach house of many years. He fit in well with my friends and was well-received by them. We went to Europe on our honeymoon, and I had fun showing him places that I knew. Later we went

to Hawaii and through many states and Canada.

Ralph was ill the last two years of the ten we were married. Then I was left alone again, but somehow felt better able to cope with loneliness. I moved into Church Hill Apartments in Durham, and am still here at age 81.