

My Mother - Elizabeth Anna Ellis (1880-1959)

My mother, Elizabeth Anna Ellis ("Bess") was of medium height, rather plump, with brown hair and blue eyes. Mother was very different from Dad. She never lost her temper and was always cool and patient no matter what happened. She was the backbone of the family to her parents, brothers, and sisters, as well as us. Anything went wrong, "Send for Bess!"

Let me start at the beginning. Mother was born July 31, 1880, in Huntington, Massachusetts. She lived until she was fourteen on her father's maple sugar farm. She often told me about the big house where they lived -- her father Edward Austin Ellis, mother Margaret Black, grandparents Ebenezer Stiles Ellis and Betsy Lemira Hancock, a maiden aunt Clara, and an unmarried uncle. There were hired men who lived on the farm too, but were not part of the family. Four family portraits hung in Mother's bedroom and she always felt a little uneasy because their eyes followed here around the room. They were really fine portraits. We always figured there was some great-grandfather Ellis who had plenty of money and who had his picture, his wife's, his son's, and his daughter-in-law's painted as was the custom of the time.

Mother's grandfather Ebenezer was very lame and so couldn't help out of doors. He always washed the dishes and his blind wife Betsy wiped them. They must have been a sweet pair because Mother said that in the evening they used to sit in the corner and hold hands.

Mother loved to work with the race horses of which here father was so fond. He made up for his dislike of farming by raising horses. Mother often rode them at the fairs and won many prizes.

When she was fourteen, Grandfather's farm responsibilities were over and the family moved to Westfield, Massachusetts. He built a house there and finished the inside in cherry. The cherry was cut on the farm, allowed to slide down the mountain, and was picked up at the bottom. It was fifteen miles for the horses to haul it to the new house at 7 Linden Avenue.

Mother attended Westfield High School where my Dad saw her and decided he would wait for her to grow up. She was a country girl suddenly thrown in a city school; she always talked of how scared she was. Dad waited for her not only for four years, but a fifth while she taught at a one room school at Southampton. They must have been a romantic young couple - Mother at age twenty and Dad at twenty-four. They had four children: myself, Ellis, Mildred, and Frederick, who died at two weeks of an ear infection which would have probably been cured today.

Rarely did I see Mother lose her temper, but she could be stubborn, especially when we tried to push her too far. I have followed her practical wisdom many times in raising my own children. Mother was a great help to my father in the store and with the accounts. She was truly the center of our home.

Mother took us to church early in our life so that the church became the center of our activity. The influence carried through our whole lives, largely due to Mother.

She worked very hard, but always had time to play with us kids. We all became interested in running, and Mother could beat us for years. She would only run when and where no one would see her. As we grew older, she got us interested in the church. How she became so involved with church work and still kept things running smoothly at home, I don't know. Things were not so complicated then. She had friends from every social class, and I believe she met them through our church. She was very friendly with one of the social elite, and also with the Polish butcher who saved us special cuts of meat (we were much more class conscious then than we are now).

Mother had more skill in dealing with children than I ever had. Perhaps it was because she was a very practical person with her feet always on the ground. She spent the last eight years of her life with my husband and me at 28 Bagdad Road in Durham, New Hampshire. She loved the back seat of the car and planned to be there whenever the car left the garage. My in-laws lived in one apartment of our house and Mother in another. They enjoyed each others company and found much to do together.

My husband Bill and I took trips covering most of the United States. This was indeed a treat for Mother since she had never been more than 150 miles from home. She never troubled me with her worries and was happy until the end of her life. Even her son-in-law (Bill)

thought she was a treasure and didn't mind sharing me with her.

Mother died in her 80th year, in 1959. On a birthday card I received a few days before she died she wrote, "I've been so happy with you — thank you."