October, 2019

Dear Family,

We have a treasure to share with you. Our grandmother, Katherine Elizabeth Hoag Hoyt (Kitty) (1872-1958), left a journal of her daily life as a primary grade teacher with black children with the American Missionary Association in Wilmington, NC in 1897-98. (These were the grandchildren the of slaves.) In addition, there is a talk she gave to a church group around 1913 about her work. The talk provides helpful background about Wilmington, the Gregory Institute or day school where she worked, the teachers’ home, the students and their families. Also, she makes a touching appeal for tolerance and compassion toward African-Americans, known then as “coloreds,” or “Negroes.”

The journal and talk were among the things that Ann’s mother, Ruth Hoyt Edwards, found in grandma Hoyt’s Clinton, Michigan, home following her death in 1958.

Acknowledging that they belong to all of her descendants, I (Ann) transcribed the talk and half of the journal in 2004 and passed it along to at least one family member of Paul Hoyt, Ada Hoyt VerBryck and Hugh Hoyt.

In 2017 our cousin, Joanne VerBryck Kissinger, began working with me to finish transcribing the remaining half of the journal. In 2018 we completed this task mostly over the phone with Joanne reading and dictating the journal while I copied it on the computer. We thoroughly enjoyed doing it and are grateful for the opportunity to get to know our remarkable grandmother through her writing when she was a young woman.

You will find question marks (?) in the text occasionally, which indicates that we were unsure of the word or spelling. The journal was hand written in pencil, and some parts have faded over the years.

Grandma and Granddad Hoyt made regular winter visits to central Florida, where I lived with my mother, Ruth and brother, Bill. My father, James Stewart Edwards, died of heart disease in 1940. While they certainly enjoyed the Florida weather, our grandparents came mainly to help my mother resume her life and take over my father’s business after his death. He owned a fernery to raise ornamental plants to sell in northern markets. My mother was a nurse anesthetist and had no experience in running a business and supervising men working in the fernery. Grandpa Hoyt stepped in to encourage and assist her in doing a very unconventional job for a woman in those days. Their extended stays gave me ample time to get acquainted and come under their beneficent influence. I believe they came almost annually until our granddad’s death in 1953, with grandma continuing to come until her death in 1958.

This letter is intended as a preface to her journal. I’ve lifted up personal qualities reflected in her writing along with my own memories of Grandma Hoyt. These qualities include:

**Courage, adaptability and a sense of justice:** Leaving her home in Michigan and traveling to unknown, far away North Carolina to work with black children and their families was extraordinary for a young woman of her time. As a child, I recall that she befriended the black servants in our household and often sat and ate with them in the kitchen. This was a departure from the expected custom of the the South of my childhood, and such actions spoke louder than any words.

**Connectedness to others:** Numerous correspondence with family members and friends, as well as the letters received from them are documented. It’s clear these messages were a source of comfort, support, and joy. Note the letters to and from “Laddie,” who I believe is Hugh Percival Hoyt, the sweetheart she will marry in 1898. Also, notice she often mentions friendly encounters and walks with fellow teachers, as well as regular visits to parents of the children she taught, in clear defiance of social conventions of the South. I recall her routine of writing letters to family and friends and her open, sweet nature in relating to others who visited in our home. She endeared herself to all.

**Appreciation of nature:** Almost every entry begins with a comment on the weather and delight in a beautiful day. I remember her saying regularly, “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Also, I recall her love of flowers and her practice of making attractive arrangements for our home. She took care to have the pansies show their pretty faces in a vase, and the last time she visited us, she went outside and said “Good-bye” to the flowers, trees, and birds she loved so well.

**Thrift and orderliness:**  The cost of each purchase she made is carefully documented, and there is no evidence of extravagance. Mending clothing was regularly mentioned also. I remember her sewing basket and was intrigued with the thimble she wore on her finger while sewing on buttons and mending. I had a quilt she made from scraps, including dresses for daughters, Ruth and Ada.

We trust you will enjoy these treasures and get a sense of the wonderful person Kitty Hoyt was. We all need good stories of lives well-lived to encourage, inspire, and bless us in being the best we can be. We suggest that here is a family member who can do just that.

With love,

Ann Edwards Fordham Joanne VerBryck Kissinger

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