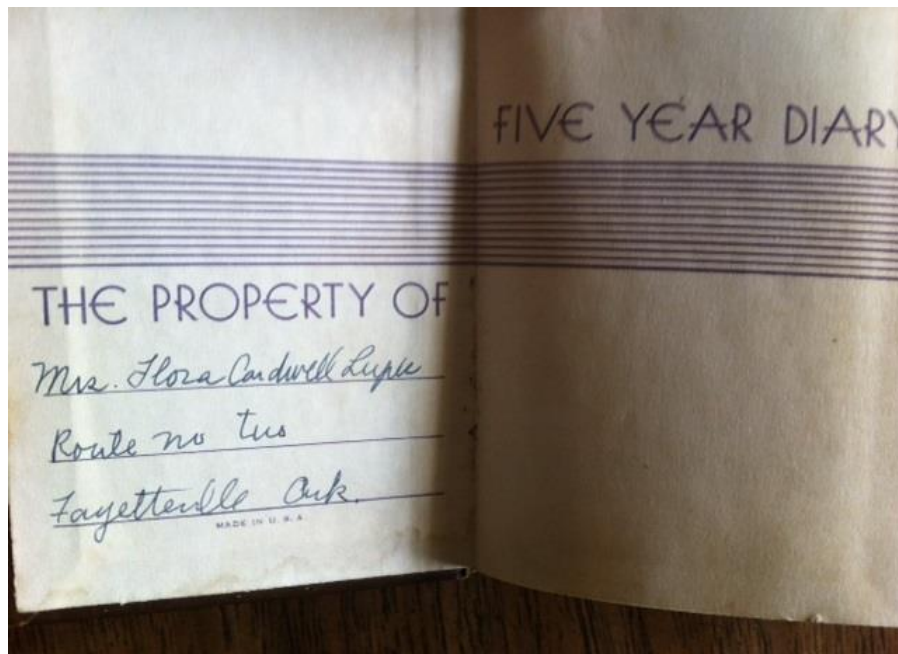


I've Churned, Ironed, and Patched

Fayetteville, Arkansas

December 1948



Al Luper walked in the back door and eased his way over to a kitchen chair. Plopping down on the oak seat, he bent over to remove his work boots, flinching as he moved.

His wife, Flora, turned from the stove, spatula in hand, in time to catch his pained expression. "Your shoulder still giving you problems?"

"Only a mite. At the end of the day. Feeling better, though. That'll teach me to swing wrong next time a nasty opossum has up at 4 a.m."

"At least you got him before he got any of the chickens this time." Flora poked at the pan of potatoes frying and turned the heat down lower.

Al leaned back in the chair and stretched his legs out in front of him. "Guess I should ask if we're going to the laundromat tonight before I get too comfy."

"No. Not tonight. Too much going on here today and I didn't get it all sorted. Besides, I'm all for turning in a little earlier tonight. After our early morning wake-up and running all day, I'm plumb tuckered out."

"Sounds good to me. I think I could doze off right now." Al lifted his nose and sniffed the air. "Fried taters tonight? Lots of onions in them?"

Flora grinned. "You think after all these years I wouldn't know to add lots of onions? Yes. Tators and some of that hamburger meat you brought home two days ago. Need to finish it up before it goes bad."

"Oh!" She laid the spatula down on a small ceramic plate that served as her spoon rest and hurried to the far side of the counter. "Got a letter from Dot today. Finally. The first one from her since she sent your birthday card a few weeks ago."

Al held out his hand to take the offered envelope. "What's that youngest daughter of ours have to say?"

"Read it and see."

Flora turned back to the stove to finish up the supper. As she crumbled the cooked ground beef into the potatoes and started to make a brown gravy in the meat skillet, a noise caught her attention and made her turn back to Al. There he sat, still in the chair holding Dot's letter, which had dropped to his lap, his head lolling back and snores reverberating, each one a little louder than the one before.

After waking her husband so they could eat, the couple enjoyed a quiet supper. Flora babbled a bit about her day and the missionary meeting she'd attended. "Took some cookies." When Al simply nodded and didn't respond much, she knew he was exhausted and didn't pursue anymore conversation. When they were done, she cleared the table and started running a sink full of soapy water to wash the dishes.

Al stepped up beside her. "Mind if I pass on helping you dry tonight, while I go tuck in for the night?"

"No. You go ahead. Those cows will be waiting for you bright and early."

"You coming to bed when you're done here?"

"Just about. Want to sit and write in my diary first."

They often went to bed at the same time. But occasionally Flora stayed up to write in her brown, leather-bound five-year diary if she didn't make her entry earlier in the day. She wrote in it religiously. Had been doing it for so long, the habit was ingrained. She enjoyed the quiet of the evening when she was the only one awake and stirring. The chickens and livestock had settled down for the night. Sometimes only crickets chirping to interrupt the silence. But on this night, the first night of December, it was too cold for crickets. Flora shivered in response to her thoughts and put on a second sweater before she sat down at the table to write.

December 1, 1948. Went to missionary meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Num. At Gladys Diver. Pretty day. I took cookies. Made me pair of flour sacks pants. Letter from Dot at last.

She tucked the journal and her pen in the desk drawer and turned out the light behind her before heading down the hall towards the bedroom where Al snored away. *It's December now. Should start thinking about Christmas. Will be here before we know it. Naw. Will think about that tomorrow.*

The next morning Flora got up with Al as was her usual habit. After thirty-one years of marriage, and getting up early with him to make his coffee, cook his breakfast, and get his lunch packed in his lunch pail, this wasn't going to change.

Sitting his plate down in front of him, Flora asked, "Mind if I ride into Fayetteville with you and the men today? It's raining out and I don't want to catch the bus into town."

"Not at all. What's planned in town for the day?"

"I want to stop by the hospital and see Frank. She's still there. And maybe do a little shopping while I'm there."

A twinkle lit up Al's eyes and he gave his soft little one-sided grin. "A little Santa shopping, perhaps?"

Flora swatted at his arm. "Mind your beeswax. Maybe. Maybe not."

He took a swig of his coffee and grinned like a Cheshire cat.

Flora tucked her dish towel into her apron band and sat down to munch on her now cold toast. "Have to do it today. Tomorrow's club meeting. Will be a full day."

"Where's the meeting at tomorrow?"

"Mrs. Simpson's place. We're supposed to make plans for the Christmas party."

Al spewed eggs all over his plate when he burst out laughing. "See. I knew there was some kind of Christmas plan in the hatching."

"Oh, bother. You men. Act just like kids when December rolls around. Think it's all jolly fun. Don't see any of you getting into the thick of it though. Signing cards and sending greetings. Baking up a storm. Planning gifts."

"Hey, I get involved. I ran out to the back forty and pick us a mighty fine looking tree every year."

Flora smirked. "Yes. Yes, you do. Then leave the decorating of it to the womenfolk and children."

"I don't see nothing wrong with that. You have to admit – I do a good job of wolfing down all the hot chocolate you make us when we do the decorating."

"We?" Flora acted offended, but her smile told Al differently. She knew he wouldn't take her words seriously. After all these years, he knew her as well as she knew her husband.

The next two days were a flurry of activity. Flora barely had time to write in her diary each evening. But write she did. She hadn't missed a day in many years. She didn't plan to start skipping any days now. By the time she turned in Friday evening, she had two more entries penned.

December 2, 1948: Got up early. Flew around. Went to town with Al & the men. Set with Frank at the hospital until noon. She's been real sick. Rained most of the morn. Got papa box of candy. Al pair gloves.

December 3, 1948: Big fog this morn. Not cold. No ice. Mrs. Num & I went to club at Mrs. Upton Simpson's. They gave a baby shower. Made plans for Xmas party Dec 15. We had nice time. Warm weather.

Even with Thursday's rain, Flora only hoped that his mild, warm December would continue. Arkansas winters could be brutal at times and she was enjoying the moderate temperatures. Three more weeks until Christmas. A lot could change in three weeks' time. She sent up a prayer that the pleasant weather would continue to hold.

The weekend passed much as any other weekend. Al fed the livestock and kept busy with his typical duties around the homestead. Flora stayed busy inside with her usual Saturday chores. She washed and mopped. While the weather stayed fairly warm – for December – it was a cloudy, windy day. Flora was thrilled that she wasn't the one who had to go out and milk, or tend to any outside activities other than gather the eggs.

As she stood at the sink washing the dishes, she watched the clouds starting to roll in. When Al wandered in a little later to clean up, Flora said, "Looks like rain coming this way. Think I'll bake us some nice, hot rolls for dinner tonight."

Of course, after mixing up the yeasty dough, she had another batch of dishes to clean. While she waited for the rolls to rise, Flora put the slack time to good use. She pulled out her pen and notepad and jotted a few quick letters. One to Mae McArter and one to each of her daughters, Margie and Dot.

Sunday also was a day like any other Lord's Day. Church and Sunday School in the morning, and church again that evening. Flora did talk Al into driving her into City Hospital to visit their friend Frank.

Early Monday evening, Flora sat at the kitchen table mending one of Al's socks. She heard the door start to open and looked up to see her Papa entering. She laid the darning egg down and jumped up to give him a hug.

“Want a cup of coffee to take the chill off?”

“Naw. I’m fine. Too late in the day for me anyway. Just stopped by to see what you were up to.” He pulled a chair out and straddled it, as comfortable in his daughter’s house as he was his own.

Flora nodded her head towards the two baskets of dirty clothes sitting inside the kitchen door. “Just fixing up a hole in Al’s sock. When he gets home, he’s going to take me into town to the washateria.”

“Still blowing like the dickens out there today.”

“That it is. Third day with wind. ‘Course, I’ll take a windy day in December over an icy one.” She knotted the thread and clipped it before pulling the sock off and tossing it over to the pile of colored clothes. “One good thing, with the weather not as cold as usual yet, the hens are still laying good. Too two dozen eggs to the grocery store today. Got a dollar and twenty cents!”

It was a long, full day for Flora, but she smiled when she tucked her diary away at the end of the day. Three more days had passed. Three more entries. One day at a time she’d fill this little volume up like she had the others before it. Writing in her diary every day was such a habit that she never even thought about it. She simply did it. Like brushing her hair or fixing their meals. It was part of her daily life.

December 4, 1948: Cloudy, windy, warm this morn. I’ve wrote to Mae, Margie & Dot. Had rolls for dinner. I’ve washed, moped.

December 5, 1948: Rained last nite. Wind blowed all day. Cooler this eve. We went to S.S. & church. Went to see Frank this eve at the City Hospital. Went to church tonite.

December 6, 1948: Papa came this eve. I’m going to wash when Al comes. Took 2 doz eggs to grocery store. \$1.20. Wind blowed hard all day, still tonite.

Flora got up the morning of December 7th and didn’t give the date a second thought. It was Al’s turn to drive to work that day, so he’d left a little earlier to give him plenty of time to pick up the others and arrive on time. Harold was home and was over fixing up the meat hog, so Flora was in and out a time or two for that. Other than that, it was business as usual. She stayed in constant motion throughout the day, doing the tasks that kept her busy when she wasn’t going to one of the factories to pick up a little extra work.

As she stood ironing, her mind wandered to the Christmas festivities that were getting closer. She ran through a mental list of the gifts she still needed to make. Wondering how many days she had before the club Christmas party, she stepped over to check the bank calendar hanging on the wall.

Goodness, it’s December 7th. Anniversary of the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. Seven years ago today. Haven’t heard a thing about it. The war’s been over for three years and the whole country is going about their business as usual, not even remembering. ‘Course, I haven’t looked at a paper today, nor had the radio on. They might be honoring the day and I just haven’t heard mention of it yet.

Her thoughts continued in this same vein for a while as she pressed Al's good dress shirt that he wore to Sunday services. She sent up a silent prayer of thanks that both her boys had returned from their time in service alive and with all limbs intact, Wade from the Army and Thord from the Navy. Hundreds of thousands of mothers across the globe lost children in this horrific war. Many in their own small community received Department notices that none of them wanted to see coming their direction.

She giggled as a more light-hearted thought crossed her mind.

And now they're home and giving me grandchildren. Wade gave me little Larry this past February. Little tyke's going to be a year pretty soon. He'll be walking before I blink. But Wade and Gaila better hurry if they're going to catch up with Thord and Melba. With Donna Sue, Dale Alvin, Herman Earl, and Patsy Ann, Wade's got a big head start in the children department.

Then her memories of war time and thankfulness that both boys survived were enveloped by the realities of day-to-day life enveloped the hours ahead of her. By the time the day ended and it was time to write in her diary, the significance of the date has passed

December 7, 1948: Harold home. Fixing the meat hog. Al driving today. I've churned, ironed & patched.

Despite a winter cold she got a few days later, the next few days were filled with signs of the approaching season. Holiday greeting cards began arriving in the mail. Flora opened up the back of the diary where there were several blank pages labeled 'Memoranda' and she started a list titled 'Xmas greeting for 1948'. But the best part of all was that Dot was coming home in a few days. She began thinking of what she'd serve when her daughter came home for the weekend. It was so hard some days seeing her youngest off and out of the house, although she was glad to see that she was pursuing her dream of becoming a nurse.

And before I know it, she'll be married and giving me grandchildren like the other three are. While I sit here spending my days churning, ironing, and patching. And going to church and club, and spending time with my children and grandchildren, and some neighbors here and there.

December 8, 1948: Letter from Nessie (?), Fanny, Margie. Card from Dot. Margie sent my un-known friend a gift Doodle made. It's lovely. For Eutha Curry. Frances wrote Frank. Cold & cloudy today.

December 9, 1948: Carrie spent the eve with me. Was I glad. I have a cold. She brought me the basket (club). It's still cold. We got greetings from Mildred, Carrie & Beulah.

December 10, 1948: Looking for Dot on the 5:30 bus. Made cookies, rolls. I'll have ribs, steak, potatoes, peaches & etc. Dot went to the Field House with Maratha Brook. Wore her eve gown. Cold.

Saturday morning Flora stood at the sink handwashing Dot's lingerie she'd worn the night before in a dish pan of soapy water. She chuckled to herself as she thought about how many years it had been since she'd been washing Dot's dirty diapers out by hand. Now here she was, over twenty years later still washing out her daughters unmentionables.

She didn't have much time to reflect on the memories of the children that had grown up on her. It was a weekend and she and Al were busy from sun up to sun down – despite the fact that they didn't have little ones running around the house any longer. Lots of quick visits to friends was on her agenda for the day. She had to see Joy and Hazel and take them the aprons she'd made for them for Christmas, along with taking the club basket back to Hazel. She wanted to stop in and see Frank and see how she was doing.

Once she got her visits done, she and Al ran in to Fayetteville to pick up a few items for the pantry. As Flora stood pouring the sugar into its bin, Dot walked in holding the daily newspaper.

Dot held the paper out so Flora could see it. "Mom? You want to go see a show with me tonight? There's one playing at Cannon Valley."

Flora bent over to see. "Hmmm...haven't seen that one. Sure. What time is it playing?"

"Seven o'clock."

"We could catch the 6:05 bus to town."

So after a quick and early supper, mother and daughter traipsed off down the road to meet the bus that ran between Fayetteville and the outlying areas.

Even with all the activity during the day, Flora still sat down to record the day's events in her diary before she went to bed that night.

December 11, 1948: Washed Dot hose, slip, baz., stockings. We went to see Joy. Took Hazel the basket with apron & cookies. One for Joy, one for Hazel. Went to see Frank. Went to town. Came home. Went back to the bus at 6:05 with Dot. Saw Cannon valley show.

Sunday wasn't any quieter. She and Al drove out to Papa's house. Their friends Burl and Beulah stopped by when they were there. Flora enjoyed sitting and chatting with friends and family.

They chatted about friends. They spoke of the pleasant, warm weather they'd been having for December. They talked about the Club Christmas party that was coming up the next week. How the hens had been laying. How the milk was coming in.

In the midst of their chatter, Beulah shared her good deal of the week. "Got some good sweet potatoes a few days ago from Bill Downard. Only a dollar fifty for a bushel."

Flora was never one to pass up a nice produce at a good price. After Burl and Beulah left, she, told Al, "Let's drive on out to Bill's and get a bushel. If he's still got some."

Al tried to protest. "We've still got some in the cellar that I harvested last month."

"Always nice to have some extra. Bakes up real nice for winter meals and for when unexpected company stops by. What we have probably won't last through winter. A few spare potatoes would be nice to have."

Al didn't argue after that. After all these years together, he didn't even try. In matters of the kitchen and the household, Flora usually got her way.

December 12, 1948: Didn't go anywhere this morn after dinner. We went to Papa. Burl & Beulah came down there. We, Papa, Al & I went to Bill Downard (?) after sweet potatoes. \$1.50 bu. Saw Mr. Stamper. Went to C tonite.

Flora was happy to see Monday arrive. Al went to work and she spent the morning in the kitchen baking more Christmas cookies. On the last batch of cookie dough, she scraped the last bits of butter out, so once the cookies were out of the oven and cooling, she sat down to churn more butter.

In the afternoon, a knock on the door interrupted her housework. Three young school boys from down the road stood on the stoop. She bought thirty cents worth, then decided she'd better get the boxes of Christmas ornaments out of the closet so she and Al could decorate the tree after supper.

They were just about finished with their decorating when Flora laid down the tinsel she held. "I'll be right back. I'm going to go warm up some milk and make us some hot cocoa."

Al looked confused. "Not nearly cold enough for cocoa, is it?"

"No, not for the cold. Just for the memories. Remember when the children were younger and we'd drink hot cocoa or hot mulled cider while we decorated the tree. Then sang carols when we were all done?"

A smile tugged at the corners of Al's mouth. "Those were the days. I'd get the tree set up and fairly straight. You and the youngun's would slather the poor thing with ornaments and tinsel, and paper chains. I'd sit back and watch you, sipping on my hot cocoa. I only needed to referee when it the argument arose over who got to put the angel on top." He sighed as he joined his wife stepping back in time.

They both stood for a moment in front of the tree, a newer and neater model than the earlier years trees had been. But yet, it was the version from the years past, even with its imperfections that seemed to have a glossier finish in their memories.

December 13, 1948: Went to Carrie this morn. Made cookies, churned. Bought 30¢ Red Cross stamps from school boys. Got our Xmas tree all lit up. Warm today.

Flora peered out the kitchen window, then turned back to her husband. "Suppose it serves me right, after all that gloating about our nice warm December days.

Al sat at the kitchen table, shoveling down mouthfuls of eggs and hash browns, apparently oblivious to the rain splattering on the rooftop. "Gonna happen, It's winter."

"I know we need the rain. The winter crops will like it. Speaking of which, I haven't heard about the factories running yet. Sure am glad I'm getting some unemployment checks coming in, small as they may be."

Lifting his heavy ceramic mug, Al swallowed the last dregs of his coffee. "Should be soon. On the way to work yesterday it looked like that huge field on the side of the highway getting awfully green. Couldn't make out if it was spinach or turnip greens.

Flora took his empty coffee mug and sat it in the dishpan full of soapy water. "Hope the rain lets up before tomorrow night. It's the Christmas party for the women's club."

"That's tomorrow?"

"Yes. Don't tell me you forgot." A brief flash of irritation showed on Flora's face before disappearing.

“Knew it was coming up. Just didn’t recall exactly what day it was. Kind of snuck up on me.”

At the end of the day, Flora didn’t have much to report in her diary other than the rain. She felt a little selfish as she sent up her evening prayers that night. Please, Lord, let the rain end before Club meeting tomorrow night. I worry so about us out driving in the rain at night. I know we need it, Lord, and I truly appreciate the raindrops bestowed on us. But if it could end before tomorrow night, why, I’d truly be grateful.

December 14, 1948: Raining this morn. Rained hard all day long. Warm.

The next morning, Flora tuned her ears in before throwing the covers back. She didn’t hear any rain. Course, that didn’t mean anything. Could be drizzling and silent. Could have turned cold and icy, although the air in the bedroom didn’t have the frigid winter chill that it had when the temperatures dropped that low.

Throwing on her worn terrycloth robe, she scooted towards the window and pulled back the drapes. It didn’t appear to be raining, but it was still too dark to be able to tell. By the time breakfast was cooked and they’d both eaten, daylight was beginning to break. Flora jumped up to look out the kitchen window and heaved a huge sigh of relief. “Thank the Lord. No rain today.” She turned and looked directly at Al. “Now, remember, the Club Christmas party is tonight. I’ll eat there, so I’ll leave you something to eat in the icebox.”

“Okey-dokey. I’ll be sure to be on time. Wouldn’t want to upset my Missus.” Al grinned and gave her a wink.

Flora flushed slightly as she swatted at his arm. “You charmer. Now, get on out of here.”

With a peck on the cheek, Al grabbed the lunch pail Flora had packed while the bacon was frying and hurried out the door. After the breakfast dishes were washed, Flora spent the rest of the day preparing for the festivities later that night. She ironed her best Sunday-go-to-meeting dress and hung it on the back of the bedroom door. She fixed the dish to take to the potluck.

In the afternoon, she wrapped Eutha Curry’s gift. As she folded the paper around the stationery set she’d purchased in town earlier that week, she taped the edges carefully. Want to make it as pretty as I can. Wonder who drew my name this year? Wonder what Mildred’s Christmas decorations will look like this year? Probably will be pretty as a picture, knowing that she’ll have a houseful of guests there celebrating.

The evening didn’t disappoint. Over twenty women from church filled Mildred’s home, cleaned to sparkling and decorated with holly and pine garlands. The tree in the corner glistened with handfuls of silver tinsel with a pile of gifts that grew as each woman member arrived.

The ladies chatted and laughed all through the evening. It was if the holiday festivities highlighted their usual get together, making their time together more festive than ever. By the time Flora headed home, she felt like she was almost hoarse from talking so much. As tired as she was, she still sat down for her nightly journal entry. She even opened the diary up to a back blank page and listed all the women who attended that night, while the names were still fresh in her memory.

December 15, 1948: Warm & cloudy. Went to Xmas Club party at Mildred’s. Mrs. Williams had my name. I had Eutha Curry’s. We had good dinner. Letter from Dot.

Despite her later than usual evening at the Women's Club Christmas party the evening before, Flora was still up bright and early, fixing their breakfast before Al headed off to work.

He sat at the table nursing a cup of steaming coffee between his hands. "A mite colder today. Didn't know if I was going to get the cow milked before my hands froze. Still cloudy too. Wonder if it's going to rain? Radio man didn't say anything about it."

Flora topped off her mug from the percolator and took a seat across the table from her husband. "I hope not. I wanted to run into town today and put ten dollars down on that new gas range we looked at last week. Think I'll get my heavier coat out from the back of the closet today."

"Might be a good idea. Bus stop isn't that far, but in cold weather it makes for a long walk. That all you going to do today? You can go tomorrow. Might be a nicer day."

"No. Can't go tomorrow. Papa's coming over and spending the day."

Al sat his cup down on the saucer and leaned back in the chair, stuck his legs out and clasped his hands over his head in a giant stretch. "Ah, I'm not feeling like working today. I tell you, I'm slowing down the older I get."

"Oh, shush. You only turned 57 last month. You've got a long ways before you get to claim 'old.' Now when you get to be Papa's age, then you'll have something to grumble about. Old man, my foot."

Laughter erupted from his lips before he could stop it. "Don't know about that on the days the grandkids come for a visit. That's why the Good Lord gave children to the young ones. Why, when they leave I'm plumb tuckered out. Speaking of which...they coming for a visit soon? Haven't seen the tykes in a coon's age."

"No. Haven't heard anything from the kids about it. They're probably busy with Christmas festivities. Just as well. I want to sew up a few more aprons this weekend to finish up my gift list."

"Let's run into town Saturday. I want to do a little shopping of my own. I want to pick up a little something for Dot."

Flora rose and started carrying dirty dishes over to the sink. "About running out of time. Nine more days before the jolly man's appearance." She squirted some soap into the dish pan. "You know, I was just thinking. Carrie and Hazel's going to pick me up this afternoon. We're going to go sign up at the un-employed office. Maybe they'll stop by the appliance store while we're in town. Then I won't have to take the bus in this morning."

By the time Al left for work, Flora was elbow deep in soapy water, but her head was days away in the midst of Christmas time, running through her list of the errands she needed to complete, the gifts she needed to make or buy, and what menu she'd have for Christmas Day. She kept busy from sun up to sun down, but there was still much to do in the next nine days.

But even with all she had to do, she still never neglected writing in her diary each and every day.

December 16, 1948: Cold & cloudy today. Turned warm & sunny. \$10 on a new gas range today. Went signed up at the un-employed with Carrie & Hazel. I get 2 more checks. Will be \$48 in all.

December 17, 1948: Cold & clear today. Washed my hair. Gave 25¢ for spool thread. 400 yds. Papa spent the day here. Gift from Lanny (?) Greetings from Dot & Lanny.

December 18, 1948: Cloudy, misty. Greetings 14 today. Made 3 aprons. Al got Dot some stationery to send her for Xmas.

Flora got up early Sunday morning – her usual routine – to start frying the bacon and potatoes. She enjoyed cooking a larger breakfast on Sundays before she and Al headed to church. As she cooked she ran through a mental list in her head, trying to keep all the Christmas tasks organized and on track. At least she'd finished all the aprons she needed for her friends and the women in the family. Dot wasn't coming home for Christmas, so this week Flora needed to package up Dot's gifts to mail her, including the stationery Al had bought Dot in town the day before.

She turned the bacon and stirred the fried potatoes and suddenly realized that Al hadn't appeared in the kitchen yet. She wondered if he'd slipped out to milk the cow without her noticing. Carrying her spatula with her, she peeked in the living room. No Al. She stepped down the hallway and saw him still tucked under the quilted comforter.

Worry took over her mind first, before she saw that his chest still rose and fell, and a light snore escaped from his lips. The fast rush of concern quickly turned into irritation. "Al! Wake up. We're going to be late if you don't get up."

He moaned and rolled over facing where she stood in the doorway. "I'm not feeling well. Don't think I can make it."

Flora moved to his side of the bed and felt his forehead. "No fever. What feels bad?"

"Just feel congested and stuffy."

"Guess you'll be spending the day in bed. I'll bring you a bowl of hot soup. You know – starve a fever, feed a cold."

"Hate to miss morning services."

"You've got to. Don't want to be spreading anything around. Besides, you'll do better with some bed rest and soup. Rest up today and maybe you'll be okay to go to work tomorrow."

Flora dashed back to the kitchen, fortunately catching the bacon and potatoes before they were fried to a crisp. She turned off the burners and laid the bacon out on a plate to drain. Opening up the cupboard she pulled out a quart jar of chicken stock that she'd canned earlier in the year. She twisted the ring off and used the edge of her spatula to pop off the seal. Once dumped into a sauce pan to warm up, she rummaged around in the pantry, looking for a bag of egg noodles to add once the broth was simmering.

By the time she got Al's bowl of chicken noodle soup cooked and served to the patient in bed, she barely had time to change into her Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes before she headed out. On her walk there, she sent up a silent prayer of thanks that the cloudy, misty weather from the day before had cleared up. She didn't mind walking to church. Almost everyone did, but on days with inclement weather, it was nice having Al drive them.

Her prognosis for the patient was correct. A day of bed rest and several bowls of homemade chicken noodle soup later and he was feeling much better. He made it to work the next morning. When he walked in after work the next day, she glanced up to assess how he was feeling.

"You still up to take me to the washateria tonight?" she asked.

"Feeling a little peaked. But I think I'll be alright. Besides, it's probably the best night to go, with Christmas being this Saturday."

"You sit and rest a few. I'll take the laundry baskets out to the car."

Later that evening, as they sat together waiting for the washers to finish their job, Flora filled Al in on Grandad's visit earlier that day. Then she reported that the factory was starting to run the next day.

"Carrie said spinach and turnip greens are coming in. We should get a few days work in this week. Will be nice to have a little extra, this time of year."

It's a good thing Flora was conditioned for her early rising. She had to be up, dressed and ready to get to the factory by eight the next morning. After getting in a half day's work, she walked home and was pleased to see an unemployment check waiting in their mailbox for her.

"Christmas greetings and little money too – life is good," she remarked out loud to herself.

December 19, 1948: I walked to S.S. & church. Al has a cold. Had beef steak for dinner.

December 20, 1948: Walked down to Mildred to see Frank. Al & I went to wash tonite. Grandad came by going to town.

December 21, 1948: Factory run from 8 to 12:30. Spinach & turnip greens. Got my un-employed check \$12. Get me one more. Ironed this eve.

The next two days had Flora wondering about the statement she'd said aloud to herself earlier – about a little extra money and Christmas greetings and about life being good. Usually she was happy to be able to pick up extra work at the canning factories around Fayetteville. But the factories have to work when the crops are ready. And the crops don't always time their harvest for when it's the best for the people.

At least Flora was able to work next to her friends, Bertha and Carrie. That made the day more tolerable. But still, it was horrendously long. They worked Wednesday from eight in the morning until 11:30 that night. At one point Flora hollered across to Carrie, "You'd think the spinach would know that its Christmas in three days and it's putting a giant damper on my holiday excitement."

By the end of the evening, everyone at the plant was so exhausted they could barely drag themselves out of there. Flora lived close enough that she usually walked when the factory was running. But with it being so late, Mr. Harris gave her a ride home. She was thankful for that. She doubted she could have walked the short distance the way her legs ached.

Thursday morning everyone was back at work by eight again. Thankfully, another long day with everyone plugging away got the spinach and the turnip greens all processed. The next day, Friday, was Christmas Even and no one wanted to come to the factory and work all day.

But yet, not a soul was in the position to turn down good work when it was available. Knowing they didn't have to return for a third long day generated a sense of giddiness among all the workers as they streamed out of the building at five o'clock.

Flora was glad they got out at a semi-decent time. Joe and Pearl were coming over that evening for a visit. She was glad they were all such good friends. Just a simple meal and an evening of fellowship and friendship was enough. The bigger festivities with their friends would be Friday evening, while the kids and their children were coming over on Christmas Day.

Being so tired from working at the factory three days in a row, Flora slept a little later Friday morning to try to catch up on a little sleep. But not too much longer than usual. There was still a lot to do before company arrived that evening for a Christmas Eve meal, even though it was a simple, understated event.

The house was filled with chatter of eight excited adults. Pearl and Joe were back again, along with Burl, Alice, Beulah and Grandad. While everyone was exuberant about the Christmas season, the spectacular news of the night was easily Alice showing off her diamond engagement ring she'd received from her beau, Bill.

Flora tidied a bit here and there throughout the evening. The ladies pitched in helping to set the kitchen to rights. By the time everyone left, the house was back in order, with a few new unwrapped gifts sitting under the twinkling tree. By the time Al locked up and unplugged the tree lights, Flora was already in her nightgown with her face washed, climbing into bed.

The guests probably weren't even home yet before Flora's head hit the pillow and she didn't have another conscious thought until morning.

December 22, 1948: Worked at factory from 8 to 11:30 P.M. Mr. Harris brought me home. Cold. I work by Bertha Hall & Carrie. Greetings every day.

December 23, 1948: Worked at factory from 8 to 5. Cold & rainy. Joe & Pearl are coming tonite.

December 24, 1948: Burl, Alice, Beulah brought Pearl & Joe & grandad up to nite. We had good time together. Alice has a diamond from Bill.

It was still pitch black when Flora awoke, her mind racing with the multitude of tasks before her. Flora lay there quietly in the dark, willing her body back to slumber for a brief time before the alarm sounded its riotous clanging. Seeing her efforts were useless, she threw back the covers and threw her legs over the side of the bed, tapping her feet on the floor in search of her house shoes.

Al stirred and mumbled. "You okay? What 'cha doing up so early?"

"Too much to do before Wade and Gaila get here today. Want to get a head start in the kitchen. Go back to sleep."

Before the last words were out of her mouth, Al was snoring lightly, oblivious to the last of her remarks.

By the time Al entered the kitchen several hours later, yawning and stretching, Flora had already made a huge dent in her kitchen chores. "You're just in time. Can you open the range while I put this in?"

Holding the oven door open while Flora slid the large blue splatterware pan in, he admired the gleaming turkey. "Big bird. Should last us a few meals."

"I don't know. The way Wade puts the food away. Not that you'd know it from looking at him." Flora wiped her hands on her apron and gave a little pout. "Wish all the kids could be here today for Christmas. It's just not the same now that they're grown and moved away. Margie and little Stugie are so far away. And with Dot not coming home for the weekend. The holidays are different now. Not that it won't be grand having Wade, Gaila and little Larry here. Just wish they all could be here."

"Thord's not coming over?"

“He said he’ll stop by, but later in the day.”

While the turkey cooked, Flora fixed their breakfast. They sat at the table eating in that almost silent communication of most couples that have been married for so long. Al took his toast and mopped up the remnants of his fried eggs before he pushed the plate away. “I’m so full now, don’t know if I can eat a Christmas meal.”

Flora smirked. “Oh, by the time everything is baked, you’ll be ready. I know you, Al Luper. Never saw a Christmas meal that you’ve turned away.”

True to her prediction, as the aroma of the baking fowl filled the small home, she caught Al peeking inside at the golden bird more than once to check on its progress.

Despite her minor grumblings about not having all her family there for the holiday, a bit later when Gaila walked in carrying Larry all bundled in a thick, cozy quilt, the rest was all forgotten. Flora’s frown flipped into a grin from ear to ear as she reached for the child.

Wade carried a large box wrapped in pretty foiled paper and topped with giant red bow. He started to hand it to his mother until he saw that she was occupied with her grandson and didn’t have eyes for the rest of the family anymore.

Al came to his rescue and nodded towards the front room. “Put it under the tree with the other gifts.” He followed his son into the other room and plugged the tree in. The two sat down on the divan, father and son comparing notes about work, raising families, and life in general while Flora and Gaila sat in the kitchen and chattered away.

After the four adults caught up and the talk slowed, Flora suggested opening presents. It didn’t take long. It never did. The country was still recovering from the war time efforts and the gifts were meager. It didn’t seem to matter. Flora was excited when they opened their present and saw it was a huge box of candy. Wade seemed pleased with his practical gift of socks and t-shirts. Gaila gushed when she saw one of Flora’s apron creations, coupled with a new hot pad and dish towel. Al admired the new warm gloves that Flora had tucked under the tree. But the most fun they had was watching Larry run a toy truck around all over the floor.

After they’d eaten and Wade and his family left, Al and Flora went down to Mildred’s to visit some of their friends from church. They arrived home in time for Thord to stop by.

By the time the sun was setting, Flora was yawning and struggling to keep her eyes open. She leaned up against Al and snuggled under his arm. “You know, earlier this morning I complained about not having all the children here today. And that still makes me sad. But you know, I realized how really fortunate we are. Seeing Wade home safe from the Army and Thord home safe from the Navy, while so many other mothers lost their sons in the War, made me realize how very lucky I am. Margie’s happily married and enjoying being a mother. Dot’s off to school and getting a good education in nursing that will give her a good occupation for the rest of her life. And us...we’re coming up on 32-years of marriage next April. You’re a good man, Al Luper, and I’m lucky to have you in my life. God has been good to us.”

With a broad smile on her face, Flora’s eyes closed and she drifted into slumber, leaning up against her husband and her rock.

December 25, 1948: Wade & Gaila, Larry spent the day with us. Brought us big box candy. Real pretty. We went to Mildred about 3 to see Joe, Pearl, Ruth, Lelsie. Thord came then. Cold.

Without much of a whimper, Christmas was over. It seemed the past few weeks the holiday resided constantly in the back of Flora's mind – what gifts to make, when to pull out the decorations, what to make for Christmas supper, what family was coming in and when. And then, poof! It was gone. Done and over, not to return for another year.

The last few days of 1948 were full and busy. After not being able to come home for Christmas, Dot finally made it home. She took the bus in from school and her brother, Wade, and his family picked her up at the bus stop.

Flora and Al were busy entertaining guests most of the week, or they were stopping by to see friends. Life settled back into its regular routine – friends, family, church, and shopping. Flora ended up sick in the middle of the night and, of course, as family's do, she passed it on to Dot.

Dot being the youngest in the bunch was the only one with plans for New Year's Eve. Her tummy bug ruined those plans and she wasn't able to run into Fort Smith. But other than that, the days slid by and Flora was staring the new year of 1949 in the face.

She didn't have any grand ideas up her sleeve for the new year. No momentous decisions or changes. Take care of her husband and her home. Love and nurture her children and grandchildren. Be there for her friends and neighbors. Continue on attending church and her women's group. Put in a garden. Harvest and can the produce. Work when she had the chance. Except for a few blips here and there from 'real-life', and possibly a few new grandchildren being added to the mix, her 1949 would look much like her 1948...which was very similar to her 1947.

Well...maybe a new range in her future. When she and Al ran into Fayetteville, the store had the model she wanted in stock. There were some changes in her future that she looked forward to. After all, a girl's got to have some dreams. She didn't lust after pretty jewels or piles of gold coins. But a new range, yes, that would be delightful.

And the days passed. The night drew to a close on December 31st. Flora made her diary entry as usual. She closed the book and tucked it in her nightstand drawer. When she pulled it out the next day, she'd turn the page back to the beginning and start recording for a new year. And without any fanfare, Christmas and 1948 was gone. It was but a memory in Flora's mind – recorded in bits and pieces in her diary throughout the year.

Someday she may sit down and pull her old diaries out and read through them to re-visit the passage of all the years. But not now. She was too busy living life and going to bed each night satisfied that she'd taken care of her family and friends, and served her Lord to the best of her ability. In the end, that's all that mattered, whether she recorded the daily minutiae in detail or not. But it was a habit now. One that she'd ingrained over the many years. Let 1949 bring what it could. She'd record all that too.

December 26, 1948: Cloudy & cold this morn. I washed out few clothes & moped. Wrote Dot card.

December 27, 1948: Joe, Pearl came spent the nite. Al got load hay \$80. Joy, Ross, Carrie & Sim came. Stayed until bed time. Ate apples & candy. I got sick about 2. My stomach.

December 28, 1948: Raining, cold, dark. Pearl, Joe & I went back to bed. Ross & Joy came by about 11. They went to grandad. Wade & Gala baby brought Dot from the bus. Ate supper here. Had ribs.

December 29, 1948: Al & I went to Fay (etteville). They have my new range in stock. Dot got me house robe, hose, bra, pants, girdle, & etc. Cold & cloudy. She, Ilene & Maratha had dates tonite.

December 30, 1948: Clear & cold this morn. Pearl & Joe left for Texas with Al & Harold. Dot went out with Alice & Joan this noon. They ate with me. Roast for dinner. I went to town with Hazel to sign.

31st: Dot woke us up about 2. Sick. Vomiting. She stayed in bed most of the day. Herman & Dale are here, ready to go to Ft. Smith with her, but she can't go tonite. Will tomorrow.

