

## Spotlight on Florence Victoria Coulter

I have hesitated to write much about family members in my topics; however, I feel the time has come to tell about one of the finest Christian ladies that I have ever known – my Grandmother Florence Victoria Coulter. If I have ever known a person who lived her faith and depended wholly on the Lord, it was my grandmother.

We always called her Mimi and never Grandmother or Grandma. She had been widowed in February of 1921 when Grandpa Coulter was killed in an accident at the pump house at the Coulterville Depot. Left without the support of a husband, she raised six children on her own and made sure that each one of them finished high school which was quite an achievement in those days when so many children dropped out of school by the eighth grade. Mimi was an accomplished seamstress and put that skill to use making clothes and mending clothes for customers as well as taking in wash and doing ironing.

Mimi's brothers, elders Addison and Ed Downey, moved her from Coulterville to the house that is now owned by Hazel Neddo where she finished raising her six children including W.L. Coulter, Jr. with whom she was three months pregnant at the time of her husband's death. Addison lived just north of Rock Creek on Highway 27 and Ed lived about a quarter mile north of that. Each one of them kept check on her and made sure that there was always a pig for slaughter in the fall and a milk cow and chickens for fresh milk and eggs. Brother Ed always had work for all the children to do which supplied them with money for school clothes and to help Mimi with her home expenses.

The oldest son, Murrell, graduated from high school that spring and took on the role of breadwinner for Mimi. He continued in that role for a number of years until Bill graduated in 1927 and then Luther and Beulah in 1930. Through all of this, Mimi's faith was never shaken and she clung to God's divine grace and provision. God did not fail her and her needs were miraculously met. She and Grandpa Coulter had helped finish raising four of the Coulter siblings of Grandpa and the youngest two sisters of Mimi. In later years when those six siblings grew up, they never forgot Florence and always sent money to her at Christmas so that she and her family could have a good Christmas.

Mimi's house was always the one where family felt right at home. Addison's children loved to sneak off from home and go to Mimi's house to play and to snatch a biscuit from the side compartment of the old wood-burning cook stove. Ruth Evelyn said several times that she loved to snatch biscuits and play with the cousins there. Sister Mary lived behind Mimi, and her children came over and played as well.

Mimi was a strict believer in living by the word. She was a devout Christian who was constantly in touch with the Lord concerning her family and her life circumstances. When one of her children failed to live up to her standards and expectations, she said, "Look, you can get down in the gutter if you want to, but I'm not getting down there with you." There was a distance between them for the rest of her life, but so deeply did she believe in her convictions that she did not compromise her beliefs.

For at least the last thirty-five years of her life, she lived in the upstairs room at my parents' house. Her few possessions remaining were the furnishings in that room. A makeshift closet contained her entire wardrobe of no more than four or five dresses. Her dresser contained her everyday clothes and atop that piece of furniture were two pictures – one of Grandpa Coulter and one of Ed Downey, her brother. The most cherished items in her possession were her old trunk with a few family heirlooms and pictures and a

Singer sewing machine that she had used for many years. I can still see her meticulously oiling that sewing machine and getting it ready to make a flannel shirt or pajamas for one of us grandchildren.

Every Sunday morning Mimi was ready and waiting to ride to church where she usually sat with Gertie List or her sister-in-law Florence Downey or her sister-in-law Helen Coulter or with brother and sister-in-law Addison and Burleigh Downey. She was completely content just being there in the midst of people she loved and in the middle of church service. Her worn, cheap, paperback Bible was carried to service each Sunday, and she wore it out regularly during each week.

During World War II she began staying at my parents' house with my mother while my father was serving in the Army. One night after a big snow, a pounding on the front door awakened Mimi and Mama. It alarmed both of them to hear pounding on the door at 2:00 A.M. My mother was almost too afraid to go check until she heard Mimi's footsteps coming down the stairs and with a pistol in her hand. Mimi noticed someone walking around the house to the back door. She walked bravely through the darkened house with the loaded pistol in her hand. When the person outside knocked on the back door, she called out, "Who's out there?" Back came a familiar reply, "It's me, Mama. It's W.L." It was her son, W.L. Coulter, Jr. who was in the Marines and had returned from a campaign on Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. Everyone was relieved including W.L. because he knew that his mother was a defender of her loved ones and her turf, and that little Marlin pistol was known to be in her possession and that she was adept at using it.

Mimi could have been depressed with her life, but I only saw her shed tears and be visibly upset one time, and that was not concerning her own situation. It was because there was some strife in the family. Family was most important to her, and she felt that it was her responsibility personally to see that everyone was getting along.

When my sister Elaine was a small girl, she often asked to sleep upstairs with Mimi. She remembers quite vividly getting into bed and Mimi turning off the light. The old streetlight shone through the branches of the oak tree just outside the window and made dancing shadows across the small bedroom. Elaine said that in that darkened room she always heard Mimi's voice begin praying out loud in the dark. She prayed for each of her children, for their salvation, for their return to the fold of the Lord, for their deliverance from the sins that they may be indulging. For my father and his sister, Beulah, who were both devout Christians, she prayed for God's provision on them. She prayed for family harmony. She prayed for the grandchildren. She prayed for her brothers, sisters, in-laws, and friends. She didn't leave anything out. Elaine remembers those prayers vividly even today and the impression that they had on her life. She recalls that Mimi prayed very earnestly but very softly and quietly and that it was spontaneous each time.

Mimi lacked for a comfortable income in her final years, but her faith never diminished. I never heard her complain one time about the things that others had that she did not or about the type of life that she had to live without a husband. Rather, she always gave the impression of contentment in her state in life and epitomized Philippians 4:11 "Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." That is the greatest lesson that I learned from Mimi.

My remembrance of my grandmother was that she was probably one of the strongest, most consistent, and truest Christians that I have ever known. I count myself very fortunate to have been around her and to have been her grandson. Her spiritual strength and witness mean more to me each day as I recall her quiet but steadfast nature.

Mimi died in 1970 and was sorely missed by all her family. Several years ago I had a strange occurrence happen. As most people do at one time or another, I had a dream in which I briefly saw Mimi's face. It was so vivid to me at that time that I could even see the facial hair and smell the aroma of her facial powder. We all know the power of the human brain to conjure up things from the past. It may have been just a fluke, but to me it was a gift from God to be able to visualize the face of my grandmother one more time. I look forward to seeing her again in heaven and telling her in person how much her life and Christian testimony meant to me.

I am sure that Jesus' words "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" met Mimi when she arrived in heaven. All her sorrows and deprivations were more than rewarded when she finally met her savior.