



The Life of Amazing Grace

A mother's longtime service to family, faith and community has her children joyfully singing her praises.

By Tom Kinney, DeWitt and Clarice Sundeen, Moline, Illinois

IT WAS ON a farm 3 miles south of Grand Mound that a family of 15 children began to take root in the 1940s to Clarence and Grace Kinney.



Clarence passed away in 2005. Grace, the matriarch of the family at age 95, joyfully lives on in her own home in town. We call her “Amazing Grace”, because when looking back on her long and remarkable life, we think she’s pretty special. After all, she’s our mom.

The second child of seven born to Bernard and Susanna Green, Grace had to grow up quickly in the 1930s as she helped tend to her siblings and worked on the farm. Large families were common in those days, especially if extra hands were needed for farm work.

Little did Mom know back then just how important it would be to learn how to cook, sew, bake, gather eggs and even drive a tractor—all skills she would use to help manage her own large family and household someday.

The Start of a Farm and Family

For in 1943, she met the man of her dreams, Clarence, at a dance. Dad was too shy to ask Mom to dance on his own, so he asked his older brother to ask for him. Mom declared that if Dad wanted to

dance, he needed to ask for himself. He did...and the rest is history.

After a year of courtship, they married in May of 1944. They lived as sharecroppers on a farm near Calamus until 1952, then rented 150 acres south of Grand Mound from Mom’s father.

There, they grew corn, soybeans and grass pasture. They also milked cows, fed hogs, and kept a horse, a flock of chickens and a dog.

But mostly, Clarence and Grace raised children—15 youngsters in 21 years! The final tally was four boys and 11 girls—with no twins or triplets.

People would often ask Dad, “Aren’t

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you disappointed that you had another girl?” Dad would good-naturedly respond, “Not really. The boys will come soon enough later...to see my girls. I think I’ll install pay phones and parking meters in the driveway!”

While we could write a book about Dad and his Irish wit, loving patience, work ethic, deep faith and gentle spirit, this story is about growing up with our siblings and our mother, amazing Grace.

From almost the first day of mar-

IT TOOK 16 CRAYOLAS for parents Clarence and Grace Kinney (inset and in purple left and right of the pole) to color-code their family at their 50th wedding anniversary in 1994.

riage, Mom had endless loads of clothes and diapers to wash and hang from the clothesline; bib overalls to patch; gardens to plant, weed and harvest; and crying babies to comfort.

Life of a Busy Housewife

There were huge meals to prepare three times each day, “new” clothes to sew from recycled older clothes, stacks of dishes to wash and floors to mop. Maternity clothes were in fashion for Mom year after year.

Mom readily admits that she had lots of help. As her girls became older, they became caretakers to their younger siblings and learned to do almost any chore Mom could do.

We had one indoor bathroom, and we kids bathed together until the hot water turned cold. We often slept three or four to a bed—sideways, so there would be more room to “stretch out”.

Some of our most fond and fun memories of growing up on our farm are finding Mom’s saltshakers out on the garden fence posts to have handy when the tomatoes were ripening...and wrapping apples in catalog pages and storing them in the well pit over winter to keep them crisp until spring.

There were year-round 4-H meetings and summer county fairs to attend. Mom

Side Note: Faith is holding on tight when the going gets windy.

always made sure we were prepared and had clean clothes to wear.

We kids took turns riding the only bicycles and tricycles and coaster wagons we had; we built forts out of straw and hay bales in the barn. While Mom watched us play with a discerning eye from a distance, she allowed us the independence to learn and make mistakes on our own.

Plenty of Homegrown Produce

We helped plant potatoes using a steel-wheel planter that was already a half-century old at the time. In early autumn, we dug and cleaned new potatoes and stored them in the dirt cellar after we sold what we felt we could let go.

Over summer, Mom had pickles curing in brine in large old crocks; she'd put up at least 100 quarts of sweet corn and tomatoes. There was fruit from apple and

"She often made caramel rolls to share with family, neighbors and friends..."

peach trees, sprawling grapevines and a rhubarb patch for her to can.

We butchered cows, hogs and chickens for meat, and smoked hams, bacon and bologna sausage in our own smokehouse. Meat and eggs were a staple at almost every one of Mom's hearty breakfasts.

She made a big batch of bread at least once a week, but the real treat was her sweet rolls. She often made cinnamon or caramel rolls for church bake



SUGAR AND SPICE, and a heaping dash of "neighborly nice", go into the cinnamon and caramel rolls Grace bakes for many occasions.

sales, funeral luncheons, for the sick and infirmed, or just to share with family, neighbors and friends.

There are not many people living in this part of Clinton County who have not tasted Grace Kinney's homemade sweet rolls at least once.

The first time I (Tom) saw Mom cry was the day I left to serve in Vietnam; her apron was filled with tears. I promised to write a letter home each week. I tried to keep my promise, since Mom would read my letters to the younger kids.

One by one, all 15 of us left the farm after graduating from high school; most completed college. It was sad to see one, then two, extension leaves had been taken out of the large family dining table when we went home to visit.

Mom Wasn't About to Sit Idle

By this time, Dad had sold all the livestock, rented out the farmland and was working at the Caterpillar plant in the Quad Cities. Mom was getting restless at home and wanted more to do, so she took a job working in the deli at a grocery store in DeWitt.

After watching five of her daughters become nurses, she decided to take classes to become a county home-health aide. She visited shut-ins, helped them bathe, tidied up their homes and made sure they had nourishing food to eat...then drove on to the next assignment.

Even today, Mom remains an active member of St. Philip and James Church in Grand Mound. She keeps busy attending weddings, anniversaries and birthday parties for her 120 descendants.

She recently became a great-great-grandmother for the first time, but that number is sure to grow quickly!

This is the story of our mother, Grace. She's pretty amazing, wouldn't you say?

WHO'S YOUR "CHARACTER"?

Almost every town has an amazing person who keeps people's spirits up, finds humor in nearly every situation and is the "glue" that holds the community together.

If that sounds like someone you know, drop us a note telling a little about him or her. Send us a snapshot if possible.

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Side Note: "Always do right—this will gratify some people and astonish the rest." —Mark Twain