

Howard Floyd La Favre  
March 15, 1925 – March 9, 2011

Eulogy presented by Jeffrey La Favre at Howard's funeral, March 17, 2011

I have been profoundly blessed in my life to have had two wonderful parents, Howard Floyd La Favre and Barbara Virginia Barber La Favre. My father was a high school teacher for many years and had an avid interest in the history of our country, which was one of the subjects that he taught. And so I thought that you would find it interesting to hear some history of my father's ancestors, who were humble, hard-working people, and who participated in the building of a new nation in North America. My rationale for relating this history is that I believe it reveals some of my father's personal traits that were handed down from generation to generation.

My father's mother, Agnes Elizabeth Christensen, her maiden name, was the seventh child of Mary Petersen and Andrew Christensen. Mary and Andrew had 13 children, 10 of whom lived to adulthood. Mary was born on October 5, 1864 in Denmark and came to America with her parents when she was about 8 years old. Agnes's father, Andrew, was also born in Denmark. We know that his youth there was very difficult because his parents lived in poverty. When Andrew was about 18 years old, he came alone to America and settled in Shelby County, Iowa. Mary and Andrew were married April 2, 1884 and started their life together on a 120-acre farm in Shelby County. Andrew constructed a house with his own hands on this farm and that is where Agnes was born March 10, 1895.

In the relative comfort we enjoy in these modern times, it is difficult to appreciate the hardships that Mary and Andrew experienced on their farm in Iowa. Mary in particular must have been a

strong woman to have survived 13 pregnancies at a time when it was not uncommon for a woman to lose her life during delivery or shortly thereafter. We know that Mary and Andrew had to work extraordinarily hard to maintain their farm and provide a good life for their children.

Andrew had very little formal education during his youth but he was an intelligent man. He had a life-long love of learning and later in life was known to frequent the local public libraries. All of Mary and Andrew's daughters were educated beyond the level that most young women of the time received and I believe they all were school teachers, at least for part of their lives. Agnes, my father's mother, attended Central Holiness University in Iowa, beginning the fall of 1914, and completed her studies at Iowa State Teachers College at Cedar Falls in 1920. Shortly thereafter, on August 24, 1920, she married Floyd Bennet La Favre. During their early married life, Agnes was a homemaker who raised 4 children, Rozelle, Howard, Ruth and Gerald. She was also the wife of a minister, a life that was demanding as any minister's wife well knows. During the latter part of World War II, Agnes began teaching in the Los Angeles City Schools, a career which lasted until her retirement at age 65.

Agnes and Floyd met at Central Holiness University. Floyd started his studies there two years prior to Agnes and graduated in 1916. He served as professor of history at CHU during the 1917 - 1918 school year and Agnes was one of his students. Here I quote what Floyd wrote about himself in the school magazine in way of introduction as a new faculty member:

“To C. H. U. I am not a stranger. Five golden years have endeared her to my heart. She is my Alma Mater. And now the son must introduce himself in these public columns to his mother.

Born on a southern Iowa farm about the close of the nineteenth century, reared in a Christian home, early visited by the Holy Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying power, from the age of five to the present year privileged to pursue an education without interruption, sheltered from the rough winds of adversity, and granted a position in the service of the King of kings - surely I ought not to be a complainer. In view of such providence and mercies I can do no less than return thanks, submit myself altogether to the will of God, and render a hearty service to Him and my neighbor. With this purpose I take up the duties of a professor in Central Holiness University.”

From this introduction we can understand that Floyd was a deeply religious man. After a year of service at CHU, he decided to enter the ministry, which would be his life’s work, except for another brief period of teaching at a bible college in Los Angeles. Early in the 1930s Floyd felt the need to continue his education in order to better serve God. The family moved to Dayton, Ohio, where Floyd entered Bonebrake Seminary. He earned the Bachelors and Masters degrees in Divinity at that institution. Later he was bestowed the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity by another institution. At the time of his retirement, Floyd was a minister of the Methodist faith. He continued to serve in the Church, even in retirement, up to the time of his death, just short of 90 years of age.

Now I would like to turn back the clock of history to the time when Floyd’s ancestors of the La Favre line came to America. There is no doubt that the La Favre name is of French origin and that our heritage comes from that country. The surname is said to indicate the occupation of an

artisan, a gold and silver smith. Our distant ancestors were Huguenots, French Protestants, who were forced out of France, probably sometime in the seventeenth century. My father's seventh great grandfather was Abraham and he spelled his last name L-E -F-E-B-R-E. While I have not established proof yet, I believe that Abraham may have lived in or near the town of Landau, presently located in Germany, not far west of the Rhine River and about 10 miles north of the border with France.

During the year 1709, the accumulated ravages of war, poverty and a very harsh winter, induced some 15,000 people in southwest Germany to leave their homeland in search of a better life in America. Abraham was in the first wave of this mass migration. He traveled down the Rhine River with his family to Rotterdam, where he awaited a passage to England and the New World. The ship records for his passage to England are not complete, but it is estimated that 925 people left Rotterdam about April 30, 1709. There are 852 individuals on the arrivals list in London taken on May 6, indicating an appalling loss of 73 people or 7.9 percent of the passengers. One would not expect such a death rate in a population of healthy individuals for a voyage of only 5 days and this grim statistic underscores the existing poor health of these people at the time they undertook passage to London.

In 1710 Abraham purchased 500 acres in Philadelphia County in the Colony of Pennsylvania. An inventory of Abraham's estate included "all sorts of books." Thus, we can presume that Abraham was literate. Abraham's great grandson, who was also an Abraham, died in Wayne County, Kentucky in the first decade of nineteenth century. The inventory of his estate included "some old books." From this evidence I would suggest that perhaps the early Lefevers of our

line in America were educated to a greater degree than one might expect for people living on the frontiers of a young country.

The primary occupation of most of the early Lefevers in America was farming. They made their way from Pennsylvania to southwest Virginia, then Wayne County, Kentucky, where later the children in the family moved to different regions. Our line made their way to Indiana and then Iowa. During these migrations, the Lefevers were constantly moving to areas where land had not been settled previously by white Americans. They were confronted with challenges that we can hardly imagine in the context of a modern lifestyle. Trees needed to be cleared from land by hand axe, perhaps only a few acres per year, to yield land that could be cultivated with various crops necessary for simple survival. There were myriad hardships to be overcome in order to survive and prosper in these new lands. My ancestors were self-reliant, which is a characteristic that my father inherited.

In reflecting on my father's life I would like to emphasize two things that he instilled in me: self-reliance and a love of the outdoors. I believe these are characteristics that were handed down to my father from his parents and in turn from their ancestors. They are gifts that my father gave to me which have served me very well in my life.

As a young couple in the 1950s, my parents struggled financially. At the time a teacher was not paid very well. In order to stretch every dollar, my father did most of his own repairs around the house. I have one memory of my father doing a brake job on the family car. This was something that held some interest to me. To complete the repair it is necessary to bleed air out

of the brake lines. The task is best completed by two people, one operating the brake pedal and the other opening and closing the bleed valve at each wheel cylinder. Mom worked the brake pedal while Dad worked the bleed valves.

Our first television was a black and white model with vacuum tubes. This was the time before solid state electronics. Vacuum tubes have a relatively short lifetime, like a light bulb. So it was necessary from time to time to replace a worn out vacuum tube. Dad had a TV repair booklet that he used to determine which vacuum tube might be defective. After possible candidates were identified, we would go down to the Thrifty Market on Hacienda and Gale where there was a tube tester. That was the fun part, putting each tube in the tester to discover the defective tube.

Dad was not an expert at all repairs and many things he learned from trial and error. Sometimes things did not go well. Once he was working on the clothes dryer and his screw driver touched a hot electrical line. There was a loud noise and Dad received a powerful electrical shock. He forgot to unplug the electrical line before opening the dryer cabinet. I don't think he made that mistake again.

When I was in high school, Dad let me do some of the repair work. This was the start of my training and the way Dad taught me to be self-reliant. We had a 1965 Ford pickup truck that Dad used to pull our travel trailer. It had a 350 cubic inch V-8 engine which served the purpose well, but it required frequent valve jobs. I remember doing this job twice myself. At the time I don't think I gave much thought to it, but now I wonder if Dad had any doubts about my ability to do this job. In any case, he was willing to let me give it a try.

During the early years in the house at 2151 Turnbull, Val and Vic shared a bedroom and Alex and I shared the other bedroom. But there came a time when my parents felt that Val needed her own bedroom. The only problem was that the house had three bedrooms. My parents solved the problem by moving out of the master bedroom and giving it to the three boys. But by the end of high school I was tired of sharing a bedroom with Alex and Vic (it was quite crowded). The solution would be to add a room to the house. I was able to convince Dad that I could build the room myself. I am not sure how many fathers would be willing to trust their 18-year old son to build a room on to the family home. But I think my father felt this was another experience that would help me in becoming self-reliant. I can't say that the process went smoothly. In fact, after pouring the concrete, I discovered that the foundation was not level. After some thought I came up with the solution: two 18-foot long wedges placed on the foundation to effect a proper level. The rest of the project proceeded without any problems and the room remains in good condition to this day, some 43 years later.

There were times when Dad did question my wisdom. A good example was the time when I decided to add a sun roof to my Volkswagen Bug. I can clearly remember that day. I was using a saber saw with metal cutting blade to cut a hole in the car roof. About half way through the process, Dad appeared at the living room window and asked me if it was a good idea to cut a hole in my car roof. He was correct in questioning me, it was not a good idea.

One of the advantages of a teaching career is the long summer vacation. There were a number of years when Dad took a summer job to make ends meet, but we did go on long vacations. In the

early years we would camp using a tent. I have many fond memories of these experiences, including swimming in the river at Richardson's Grove State Park in northern California and camping in Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks. In 1965 Dad borrowed his parent's travel trailer and we explored much of the western states and Canada. Mom in particular was sold on this mode of vacationing. I believe she was getting a bit weary of all the work involved in tent camping. Soon afterwards, my parents purchased a travel trailer, which was the starting point of many years of travel throughout the US, Mexico and Canada. One of my regrets is missing some of the later trips, after I had graduated from high school and was working at a Boy Scout camp in the summers.

These gifts that my father gave to me have served me well for my entire life, down to this very day. I shall miss him greatly.