

Stories and memories of Jessie and John DeBolt

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Everyone seemed to love Jessie, who radiated peace and tranquility. She was one of the favorite aunts. Ray Beckham, in particular, loved her. Jessie “adopted” Ray who spent a lot of time with the DeBolts. . He lived with the DeBolts during many summer vacations and while attending a term of junior high in Warren, AZ. and high school in Safford, AZ. He might have taken the place of the baby son Jessie lost to pneumonia. Her eyes always went soft and sad whenever John Robert was mentioned. Her eyes went soft and happy at the mention of Ray.

She hated Texas and worked very hard to get rid of any trace of a Texas accent. It may have been because of unhappy memories. The Spurlocks held “school” in their home in Texas, but Jessie couldn’t go to class until she had cleaned up all the breakfast dishes for the large clan. As a result, she slept through a lot of her lessons and didn’t learn much. In the eighth grade, however, she went to live a teacher of a one-room schoolhouse in Tucumcari, NM, I believe. In that one year, she caught up and ranked first on the state achievement test. We can’t help wondering if perhaps the teacher taught to the test. Never mind. Jessie also was valedictorian of her high school class in Chandler, AZ., but was too shy to give the valedictory address.

John had a hearty laugh and was a great storyteller -- joke teller, really. One evening he entertained Jim and me with his jokes for about two hours without stopping. In college, I had an English prof who started each class with jokes, all of which I had heard from my father, John. I didn’t laugh. The prof didn’t much like that and one day noted, “Everyone is laughing except that damn Presbyterian sitting on the back row.” That would be me.

John told about having dinner with a family who served a dish he couldn’t stand. To be polite and cope with that, he gobbled up the dish as fast as he could. The hostess said, “Oh, I see John liked that so much, he’ll have to have a second helping.” Is there a moral to this story somewhere?

A story about Aunt Ercell and Aunt Mamie

They both vied for the attention of Ray Beckham. One day Aunt Ercell cut him a piece of banana cream pie – his favorite – but cut her finger and a drop of blood dripped onto the meringue. Ray couldn’t eat it. This was at the Old Marsh Ranch in the stone house. Aunt Mamie had the “modern” wooden house with wood floors down the hill.