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THE BLANE BRANCH OF THE WHITLOCK FAMILY

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I was born on September 17, 1922, in Blantyre, Scotland, and named after my maternal grandmother, Grace Hannah Mathieson Whitlock. My sister, Janet Keirs Blane Keppel, was also born in Blantyre on July 9, 1925, and named after our paternal grandmother. Blantyre was a small coal mining town, the birthplace of David Livingstone. My father, Robert Blane, was born on November 8, 1884, the eldest of a large family. My mother, Agnes Whitlock was born on February 12, 1887, in Glasgow, Scotland. They were married on July 15, 1921, in Dennistoun Baptist Church. This was the church where my mother and her oldest sister, Susan, attended for many years and were very active in the choir.

My father had worked in the coal mines for most of his life. But, during the general strike, in the mid-1920's, decided that we might do better in the United States, so he left Scotland to find what he felt might be a better life, and, in the autumn of 1926. sent for my mother, sister and me to follow.

My earliest recollections of Scotland are somewhat vague, since I was quite young when we left. One incident I do not recall was the one in Agnes's narrative about pushing her off the sofa. I seem to remember being in my Grandmother Whitlock's house in Glasgow and lying in the bed in the kitchen alcove. I was complaining that my feet were so itchy. It was determined that I had worms! So, some sort of medication was administered. Another vague memory is of being at a seaside place (it might have been Gourock or Greenock, I'm not sure) and my Uncle Walter was holding me. I asked him if the land we could see across the water was America. "No," he replied, "America is much farther away." I was always sad that we couldn't be part of the close Whitlock family except by letter. I know my mother missed her family very much and longed to be able to see them.

My mother, sister and I sailed from Scotland on the Anchor Line's "Cameronia" and arrived in the United States in October, 1926. It took over a week for the crossing. My father met us at the dock in New York City. When Janie saw my father, she walked for the first time.

We lived in an apartment consisting of 4 rooms in West New York, New Jersey, which was just across the Hudson River from New York City. My father had found work in a meat packing plant in New York City and traveled there every day by ferry. I contracted all the childhood illnesses, usually from Janie, and had them very severe. She, fortunately, had them in a milder form.

I started school in West New York at Grammar School No. 6 and graduated in 1936, then went to Memorial High School and graduated in 1940. Janie went to the same schools and graduated two years after I did. We had moved to different addresses during our school years, but still in West New York.

During this time, when the economy was still in the depths of the Great Depression, my mother took various jobs sewing for very little money in order to supplement my father's meager salary. She had great talent for sewing and while still in Scotland, had worked as a sample blouse maker and made tailored men's evening clothes. She was awarded a silver medal for doing beautiful cutwork on the sewing machine while attending classes in West New York. She made beautiful clothes for Janie and me and we always felt well-dressed. We really had no conception of the hardships and worries our parents had during those years because our home was very happy and we were provided all the necessities and some luxuries. They willingly deprived themselves to give us as much as they were able to.

In 1935, my mother, Janie and I finally made a trip back to Scotland where we stayed at Parliamentary Road, Glasgow, with Aunt Susan, Aunt Emma and Uncle Walter. Finally, we were able to see all the relatives we knew only through correspondence. We visited Uncle Alf, Aunt Agnes and Agnes and Grace on West Nile Street, and Aunt Bessie and Uncle Bobby and Betty. I remember Uncle Alf as having a great sense of humor, and it always seemed such fun to visit them. Aunt Bessie and Uncle Bobby seemed much more subdued. Their daughter, Betty, seemed, at that time, to Janie and me, a spoiled brat. We probably didn't make a great impression on anybody, either, for that matter.

My mother, being Baptist, didn't believe in infant baptism, so we were not baptized until much later. Both Janie and I went to a Sunday school in West New York which was a kind of mission. There wasn't a Baptist church in the neighborhood. In our teens, we were formally baptized in Trinity Reformed Church in West New York. We later found a little Baptist church that we attended when in our teens, but it wasn't exactly what my mother had been accustomed to.

I started to work after graduation in the Home Insurance Co. in New York City as a typist. The depression still lingered and it was not easy to get a job, so we were grateful to get anything. My starting salary was \$75.00 per month, 5½ days per week. Janie's first job was with National City Bank (now Citibank) as a teller. During this time, I also attended Drake's Business School, thinking I might add some skills which I could put to use. However, I didn't feel that this was any improvement over the commercial course I had taken in high school. In 1944, I obtained a better job as a secretary with the Manufacturers Trust Co. New York City, where I stayed for two years, leaving for a still better job at Chemical Bank.

In 1942, we bought our first house in Oradell, New Jersey (about 15 miles north of West New York, in Bergen County). We had very little money at the time and my father was very cautious about making the move, but my mother persuaded him. One of my family's old friends said that they were like a ship, my mother being the rudder and my father being the stabilizer. The house cost \$3,500, which seemed like a great deal of money at that time. But we had to put a very small amount down and the monthly payments were such that we felt we could manage them. It seemed as though we had moved into a palace, compared to living in four-room apartments. The house had six rooms, kitchen, living room, dining room, 3 bedrooms, bathroom and a basement. Janie and I could hardly believe that we would not have to share a bed, but could have a bedroom each.

On December 12, 1942, I married John Meinke, who was in the army at the time. I had been going with him for about 3 years. While my parents thought I was too young to get married, they offered no serious objections. However, shortly after the wedding, John was sent overseas to Iceland and didn't return until 1945.

I decided not to go back to work at Chemical Bank, but obtained a job in a textile firm, Southeastern Cottons, and then for Cannon Mills. In 1946, my daughter, Caryl Ann, was born in Holy Name Hospital, Teaneck, N.J. I continued working, this time for the Protestant Welfare Agency, Child Welfare Dept. In the meantime, Janie married William Keppel on July 10, 1948, and found an apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Janie had met Bill while both were working at Bates Fabrics in New York City.

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Janie and Bill moved to Massachusetts in 1950, where Bill had been transferred to Boston, Mass. They first lived in an apartment and later bought a house in Braintree, Mass., where they lived until 1958. Allison, their first daughter, was born in Cambridge, Mass., on December 24, 1950, and Jackie (Jacqueline) on June 5, 1953. When Bill started working for Stevens, a textile company, he and Janie moved to Baldwin, Long Island, where Barbara was born on May 25, 1958.

My marriage was not working out and I divorced John in 1948. After this, I got a job at Gilbert Associates, New York City, where I worked for Mr. Robert Simpson, a lawyer, in the Labor Relations Dept. After a time, Mr. Simpson decided to buy out the labor relations phase of the business and established his own firm, R. C. Simpson & Staff, Inc. He moved the offices to Newark, N.J. in 1956 and later in 1958 to Ridgewood, N.J., which was much better for me to commute to from Oradell. Mr. Simpson encouraged me to take a correspondence course in law, which the company paid for. I really enjoyed it, and it was helpful to me in my work. I finished with an LL.B. in law.

My father, who had worked for many years with the Chrysler Bldg. in New York City, passed away in 1961. My mother, Caryl and I lived in Oradell until November, 1964, when we sold the Oradell house and moved to Westwood, N.J. My mother was becoming more incapacitated by arthritis so we felt we would be better to live in a one-story house with all the rooms on one floor, rather than having to climb stairs to the bedrooms and bathroom. She suffered great pain with arthrities which became increasingly more severe with the passing years, in addition to having heart problems. In 1972, she passed away after suffering a stroke. She never regained consciousness, for which we were grateful.

The next year, 1973, my long-time friend, Dottie Sweet and I decided to fly overseas to London and then take a bus trip to Scotland. Both Dottie and I felt we needed some cheering up, she having lost her husband a few years earlier and I still grieving over my mother's death. We stayed in the Roxburghe Hotel in Edinburgh. The first night we were there, Agnes, Richard and Michael came to see us. I recognized Agnes immediately. During our stay in Scotland, Agnes and Richard took us to see Grace and Uncle Alf in Glasgow and David and Flo Whitlock. We were wined and dined like royalty. It was wonderful to see all these relatives. Uncle Walter had died shortly before. We also saw Betty and Bert Duff.

Our next trip to Scotland was in 1975. Janie and I took a tour and flew to Prestwick. We went by coach to Edinburgh where we stayed at the George Hotel. We visited Agnes, Richard, Michael, Grace and Uncle Alf.

In 1979, we saw our Scottish relatives again. Bill, Janie and I flew to Prestwick and rented a car, which Bill drove. Janie and I were too timid to attempt to drive on the left side of the road, especially with the hand controls on the left side of the car. We drove all over, visiting Margaret Anderson in Dornoch and Agnes and Richard in Edinburgh, Grace and Uncle Alf in Glasgow. We also saw Robert Blane in Blantyre, who was the son of John Blane, one of my father's brothers.

In 1985, I decided to retire from Simpson's and move to Virginia, where Janie and Bill had bought a condominium. Barbara and Jackie both had married Virginians and Janie and Bill felt they wanted to be closer to them. Allison had married and eventually moved to Maine. Jackie had two children. Beth, born in May, 1978, and Michael, born in 1980. Barbara had two daughters, Lauren, born in March, 1987, and Allison born in January, 1989.

The metropolitan New York area was a very expensive place to live on retirement income. Property, rents and taxes were much higher there than in most other parts of the country. I bought a condominium in the same complex as Janie and Bill and at first worked for Simpson doing research. But, I gave that up after a year or so.

My only regret in leaving New Jersey was the fact that I could not see Caryl very often. She had married Mark Rosenberger in 1972 and lived in Wyckoff, N.J.

Janie, Bill and I are active in River Road Baptist Church, Richmond, which is similar to the Presbyterian church to which I had belonged for many years. Both Janie and Bill are involved in the management of the condo complex, Bill serving as President of the Executive Committee and Janie in charge of the pool.