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The Family History of Hannah G. Blevins

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The Family History of

Hannah G. Blevins

12 November 2016

Hannah Gabrielle Blevins authored this family history as part of the course requirements for HIST 813 Seminar in American History: Family History offered online in Fall 2016 and was submitted to the Pittsburg State University **Digital Commons**. Please contact the author directly with any questions or comments: hblevins01@gmail.com

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- A1. Hannah Gabrielle Blevins (1990-)
- A2. Allison Marie Lohr Blevins (1980-)

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- A1a1. Verla Dean Mieswinkel Swinney (1943-)
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- A1b1. Norma Lee Leath Blevins (1933-)
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Generation Four

- A1a1a. Amy Elizabeth Moore Mieswinkel (1920-2000)
- A1a1b. Richard Albert Mieswinkel (1913-1999)
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- A1a2b. Arthur Neal Swinney (1904-1972)
- A1b1a. Lorene Myrtle Brashers Leath (1909-1986)
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- A1b2a. Genetta Frances Harmon Blevins (1902-1956)
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- Ala1a1. Nettie Belle Pennington Moore (1883-1959)
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- Ala2a1. Lula Edith Hendricks Hendrickson (1886-1965)
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- Alb1a1. Mary May Hubbard Brashers (1875-1947)
- Alb1a2. Joseph Walter Brashers (1874-1940)

- Alb1b1. Eva Bell Parson Leath (1888-1965)
- Alb1b2. George Elsworth Leath (1884-1974)

- Alb2a1. Cannie String Harmon (1879-1941)
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- Alb2b2. Andrew Jackson Blevins (1861-1947)

GENERATION ONE

I just needed to get out of there. I needed to get away from the collapsing walls of my parents' home, the single road without a stoplight that ran east to west, the smell of the freshly painted walls in the church auditorium. Everything about my life felt like a ship capsizing. I am sure this was overly dramatic because I was a teenager and the *Titanic* was my favorite movie then. Despair and drowning were bound to happen at some point in my mind.

I can remember the point in my life when I crossed the imaginary line between childhood and adulthood in my opinion. I was nine years old and my parents were rushing my baby sister to the hospital for the third time that year. This had become a normal for us. She was born with her heart on the wrong side and required many surgeries and trips to the hospital when I was a kid. I was standing in the kitchen doing the dishes because I had just cooked dinner for my other three younger siblings. I was left there to comfort them and maintain the house until my grandparents arrived. It was there I realized that calm was the only way to be. There was no room for feelings because there were so many others who needed my full attention. I think that it was something I have carried with me into adulthood, it has proven beneficial many times. It is the point that I decided to break back over the line into rebellion and question all my learned responsibility that I am unsure of.

It is hard to call my hometown a town, I consider it more of a modern day colony with a Casey's General Store. Nobody really lived in

town, only in small farms surrounding it. It was the epitome of a dramatic and emotional television show: God, family, and football were top priorities. Nobody seemed to care that the team was on a 90 game losing streak. That one time in 1991 they were State champions was enough motivation to still attend the games every Friday. My environment consisted of Conservative Republican God fearing people who shaped my entire brain, including my parents. I knew right away as a young child that I wanted to be somewhere bigger, with more people. Even more reasons and justification of that decision would come later in my high school years.

Luckily school came easy to me or in retrospect the curriculum in small schools is extremely lacking. I now fear for my sibling's education they are receiving there. I was a star scholar and athlete. In high school I played three sports and excelled at all three. When my softball team went to the state championships my freshman year there was a parade and police escort out of town. I never thought the window paint would come off of my parent's minivan windows. I also dutifully attended church twice a week as demanded by my parents and was a devout Baptist.

I do not think my parents could have asked for a better child personally. I did everything they asked of me and more. I strove for acceptance from my parents and craved the attention success would bring. I maintained excellence in all I did academically and athletically. While at home I woke up every morning before school and got myself ready, I then got my siblings ready, made them breakfast and lunch, and drove them to school. Following after school practice I

would return home to make my younger siblings dinner and put them to bed. I hated to not maintain expectations and I hated to fail.

Change is the word I choose to describe my senior year of high school. Everything changed for me and about me. Success was empowering me as I was accepted into the largest university in the state. Relief washed over me when I accomplished my goals of escape and I thought that it was really the path for me. I had changed though and instead of looking at me with pride my parents began looking at me with disdain. I was never going to be who they thought I was and envisioned for me to be. I was just me and they could not fix that even though they tried. The burden of that was overwhelming. There was no room for feelings.

I left for college that fall and decided that it was a chance to start over and leave behind the war torn remnants of my senior year and family life. I packed my 1997 Ford Escort hatchback with crisp red, white, and blue sheets my grandmother had bought me, a lime green laundry hamper which I still own today almost 10 years later, and enough teenage American Eagle apparel to drown a sea of mannequins in. The fondest memory I can recall about leaving for college was surprisingly one of the first times I set foot in a Target. Growing up Target was where the upper middle class shopped and we were clearly not those people. However, my mom made a special trip because I had to have the lime green laundry basket which was not complete without the lime green hangars and milk carton file box that went with them. This may seem like a small thing but at the time there was so much tension surrounding us that Target felt like I walked into a store of relief.

The town I grew up in was Miller, Lawrence County, Missouri consisted primarily of lower middle class families. My family fit into the very middle of lower class and middle class. Due to the amount of children my parents had it felt like we lived more in the lower portion of that. The families that were above the middle class in the community were very obvious and were blatantly afford more opportunity than those below them on the economic status line. Having more money in our community meant better playing spots on sports teams because parents would contribute more money as athletic boosters. Having the best car in the parking lot that was comprised mainly of old minivans and farm trucks was not a bad either in my teenage mind

The day I left was perfect weather, I do not think I remember this so much as I can see it in a photograph my mom took of my dad unloading my car at the dorms. My dad, mom, and sister made the three and a half hour trek to my school together. Even then in the midst of teenage angst and disagreement I was relieved I was not alone. It was a day that even though my mom was present there was room for feelings. I think she needed them honestly. The most important person there to me though was my sister. We are three years apart and spent high school practically inseparable. It was such a small school that everyone knew she was my little sister and I enjoyed that we were close enough in age to hang out with a lot of the same people. That relationship unfortunately is attached to memories of guilt and regret for me.

Having a child who is gay in a small town is horrendous I am sure. I witnessed the aftermath of it, but from afar in my college dorm room.

Having a prized and popular sibling who was gay in a high school of less than 200 people was even worse. I did not have to be ridiculed at Sunday School, hounded at volleyball practice, or questioned by my parents. I was mainly shunned by everyone I knew. I heard about it though through phone calls and pleading voices to delete my Facebook account and attend religious therapy instead. Praying could cure everything. It could repair the person I was to my sister and rebuild the person my parents thought I would be. Despite desperate attempts in order to be normal it did not change anything. Change like that does not happen to everyone in their last year of high school.

In the book, *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years*, authors Fischer and Hout spend a whole chapter devoted to "How Americans Prayed." The authors discuss how Americans took religion to a much higher extreme than their immigrant forefathers had. Fischer and Hout also discuss how Americans took the religious freedom given to them and drastically expanded it into hundreds of different religions. The chapter suggests that the majority of Americans feel that religion creates better families and in turn better communities.¹ This idea was epitomized by the community I grew up in.

While I was attending Biology 101 my family was being kicked out of the most popular church in the area. While I was attempting to find where I belonged and rid myself of the shame I had been raised to feel my family was bearing the shame I had placed on them. The only thing I

¹Claude S. Fischer and Michael Hout, *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 186-187.

can think of that we had in common then was that while they were trying to rebuild their support group of friends and I was trying to make some. Unfortunately I was very unsuccessful at that attempt. My freshman year of college was not everything I expected it to be.

I felt overwhelmed by the lack of structure my life faced. Routine was something I needed and while it is present in large universities it is not something that one is regularly held accountable for. I went from class sizes of 11 to class sizes of over 100. Nobody knew who I was or if I was ever present for lecture or not. At first I grasped this new found freedom as enlightening because I managed to do most of the coursework without ever attending a lecture. However, in the struggle to recognize and accept my new found identity I realized that it was wearing on me that nobody knew me. I like to think that everyone has feelings about going from popular kid to nobody in a large school but maybe not. There was room for feelings because it felt like there was nobody to care about them except me.

When I think back at my time there I remember I was fond of the snow. This seems important to me because I hate winter and snow. My dorm was located on one side on an overpass over the street that would be lined with the tiniest icicles in each small square. On campus was different though almost like I lived in some huge east coast town where everyone had to walk everywhere. I could walk in the frigid air and be anyone I wanted to be for a time. I wished then that I owned a scarf, or knew how to dress in a way that I felt comfortable. I question when I think about it why was it only during the winter I felt like that? My time there was short lived. Now I am happy and

relieved that I decided to leave, at the time I felt disappointed in myself. I must have known though deep down somewhere that I was not going to succeed like that. I needed something more.

I came home floundering for a sense of belonging and steadiness. This was not found at my parents' home and the disappointment of that weighed on me. There were feelings even though there was no room for them. They did not help the situation any but I felt relief to have them. This is when I finally crossed back over my imaginary line from rebellion to responsibility. I made a decision that I did not even think about for a whole day, a life altering decision. I wonder now why it was so easy to choose. It is too bad not all adult decisions are so easily made now.

After leaving the University of Missouri following my first semester of school I felt pressured to decide what direction my life was going to go in. I did not want to return to the large school where I was unnoticed and yet I did not want to be the cliché that stayed in the small hometown forever. Looking back I am surprised that I did not get sucked into the lifestyle of no goals and content with being average. I was dating someone at the time that dropped out of college to wait tables, and would have been perfectly happy with me doing the same. I think ultimately I did not want to just be average, I missed the feeling I used to feel when I excelled at something, and I needed a challenge.

I had never known anyone in the military before except my great-great-uncle who was a World War II veteran. I had no idea what being in the military entailed. I saw a commercial for the Army and the

educational benefits that came along with enlistment. I knew I wanted to finish school and I knew I needed a different way to accomplish that goal than before. I walked into the U.S. Army recruiter office in Monett, MO and was scheduled to go to Kansas City for a preliminary physical the next week.

I officially swore in to the U.S. Army on 19 February 2009 in Kansas City, MO along with four other teenagers standing alongside me. They poked me for blood what felt like a 100 times that day, I was placed naked in a room full of people I did not know and was asked to walk across the room like a duck while a row doctors watched from a distance, and a lunch wrapped in cellophane on a plastic tray was given to me halfway through the day. After being thoroughly examined inside and out I was given the blessing by the federal government to officially become a part of the armed forces.

It was October when I left for boot camp. I stayed up the entire night before worried my four am alarm would not go off. This is still a problem I have today when I have somewhere important to be. It was cold in Missouri when I was picked up from a McDonald's parking lot in a large, white, 15 passenger van. I do not know who the driver was or recall what they even looked like. I suppose I could have been getting in the van with a kidnapper who would have sold me into the sex slave trade in Russia. From that McDonald's we made the drive to Kansas City where I would board my first airplane.

The plane was so small I felt like if I had laid extended on the floor my hands would touch the front and my feet the back. There were three other people who made the trip in the van and onto the plane

with me. I cannot remember their names or faces really, I was so nervous I barely remember anything. The plane shook a lot when we took off and out the window I saw the lights from the ground fade and then there was only blackness. We landed the small plane in D.C. at the J.F.K. airport to switch planes to a larger plane. We ran past a Cinnabon trying to get to the next gate. Those cinnamon rolls would be the last fast food smell I would smell for 12 weeks. When I landed in the middle of the night in South Carolina it was no longer cold.

When you Google "movies based off of a true story," they are rarely accurate. However, I have a deep seated faith that some war or military movies accurately portray memories through the eyes of a soldier. Especially because they are so often filmed in clips and flashbacks. I believe this is because nobody can actually remember everything that happened to them. Stress, exhaustion, and strenuous activity stretch the brain beyond what it can handle. All of my memory for months at that time and then months in other situations as well is extremely choppy. I see most it like I was watching a movie, not like I was actually there.

I remember being a large room with rows of healthcare professionals and soldiers. We are all in a line and we travel slowly from one healthcare person to another, silently. There are injections being inserted into both deltoid muscles at once, one stick on either side. I hated needles before I was a combat medic, before I had saw firsthand that needles saved lives. I remember as a middle schooler making my younger brother go before me to get routine vaccines. That seemed petty at this moment in my life. I remember my final phone call

which I chose to call my mom. There had been hours of strenuous activity, yelling, and grown men wetting their pants prior to this. The phone rang and rang but she did not answer. I left I am sure a dramatic, "I have screwed myself" voice message that informed her I had received my H1N1 vaccine and would call her around Thanksgiving. There is absolutely no way to tell the chronological order any of these memories are in after this point. Isolation and fatigue take away a sense of time.

The days began at 4 am and ended around 10 pm, six hours of sleep is all the Army is legally required to give you. This time is best documented in letters which I still keep in a large manila envelope that resides in the top of my closet. They include religious hope from my mom, encouragement from a distant older relative I barely knew who also served in the military and informed me I was the first female soldier on either side of my family, drawings from my nine year old little sister, and family photos from my future photographer brother. These were the best part of the day, issued at night for a reasonable price of 20 pushups each.

The most memorable day, as I am sure it is for most people was the gas chamber day. It was sprung upon us with a surprise road march that ended with the small concrete building of death. We were instructed to form a line and remove our NBC (Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical) masks from our rucksacks. They are the gas masks that are supposed to protect us from airborne attacks. Dread does not even begin to describe the feeling of every person standing outside that small building. We were shuffled inside where we were checked that our masks

were properly sealed to our faces. I don't think anyone really had a proper seal because the masks we were wearing on our faces were clearly from World War II, Vietnam at best. There were small light bulbs that illuminated the single room of the building enough that you could see directly in front of you. I think this was worse because you could see the green gas begin emitting itself from its small container on the table in the middle of the room. As soon as it began billowing the shouting began to remove my mask and recite my social security number in the event that a terrorist would interrogate me in a gas chamber. There was no room for feelings.

The feeling of not being able to breath combined with being blasted with pepper spray at the same time is one you never forget. Once I had recited the nine digit number I was to place my mask back on and reseal it. It did not reseal like it was supposed to. The burning taste of it would not leave mouth or lungs for a couple days. Once everyone choked out their social we were turned to face the outgoing door. We removed our masks and began to sing the song "Happy Birthday" until the first person in line could no longer breathe or utter the words. The release is like the movies when someone is removed from captivity after years in a hole. You cannot see because you're temporarily blinded, you can barely breathe, the sun penetrates the outside of your eyelids and makes your eyes hurt even worse, you are instructed to flap your arms like a bird so that you can concentrate on something and not touch your eyes. After a few minutes your sight comes back and you realize that there is snot dripping from your face,

drool running from your mouth, and tears streaming down your face. While humiliating at least I was not alone.

It was here I found the perfect place to be like everyone else, where there was no room for feelings because you were becoming part of something much greater than yourself. It was here that I belonged because while it was before the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell" I found others like me. It was here I gained my sense of leadership because I was extremely good at something and found my voice. There was a book that they required to be on our person at all times and in the first few pages was quotes. I found one that followed me through life even after this experience. It is by Eleanor Roosevelt and states, "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

GENERATION TWO

A1a. Rebecca Lynn Swinney Blevins (1970-)

A1b. Tony Wayne Blevins (1965-)

Rebecca Lynn Swinney was born on 30 January 1970 in St. Louis, Missouri. Her birthparents are unknown to everyone except the adoption lawyer that handled her case. She was adopted by middle class parents **Verla Dean Mieswinkel (1943-)** and **Wesley Dee Swinney (1941-)** on the day she was born. They named her Becky after her aunt, Becky Edith Swinney (1944-1945), who died as an infant from a heart defect.

Shortly after bringing Becky home from the hospital her parents found out that they were about to be parents once again and 11 months later a sister joined the Swinney family, Jan Elisabeth Swinney (1971-). Becky grew up on the family farm in Mt. Vernon, Missouri, that her father inherited from his parents. The president at the time was Richard Nixon, the Cold War was continuously keeping the population on edge, and in the Vietnam War the United States had just invaded Cambodia. According to the American Community Survey, she was experiencing the end of the Second Great Migration where numerous African Americans left the Southern states and migrated north to populate the East and Midwest.² When this migration occurred, there was a downfall in jobs at industrial and manufacturing sites. However, the American Community Survey produced the 1970 census that concluded

² "The Great Migration, 1910 to 1970." U.S. Census. September 13, 2012. Accessed November 10, 2016. <https://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/020/>.

there was only 29 African Americans in Mt. Vernon, Missouri.³ Since her father ran a farm and worked at the largest local manufacturing plant that made cheese, Kraft, this was fortunate for her upbringing and their family's middle class standing.

Becky describes her childhood as ideal. She went to school with the same classmates from Kindergarten to high school graduation and has many friends that she has maintained a relationship with throughout her adult life. Becky was not very interested in sports but was a cheerleader for the football and basketball teams, played in the marching band, and sang extremely well in the choir. Singing is one of the traits that she may never know where it came from, but she does wonder about it from time to time. When asked if she would ever want to search for her birth parents, she said no and that she has been given everything she has ever wanted.

As a teenager, Becky was everything she was expected to be. She was mainly always late for her curfew. Her father bought her a 1969 red Nova which she kept and maintained until the birth of her first child roughly 4 years later. A fond memory that she and her father share and laugh about now is how she was always late for her curfew and he would ground her by taking away her car so that he could drive it the next day. There was an obvious special relationship between Becky and her father and he always returned the car the next afternoon.

³ PIO, Jason Gauthier History Staff. "1970 Overview - History - U.S. Census Bureau." US Census Bureau, Census History Staff, PIO. Accessed November 9, 2016.
http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1970.html.

During her senior year of high school, Becky was introduced to an older boy in college one night while driving her Nova around the square downtown. She met Tony Wayne Blevins (1965-) in the spring of 1988. Becky's adult life began very shortly after the encounter with Tony. She left her longtime boyfriend of four years and began dating Tony while he was completing college at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. She fondly recalls spending the summer sitting outside, listening to the same song by Randy Travis over and over again, and waiting for Tony to be done with school over three hours away. Her father recalls that summer as annoying because he could not hear the crickets over her stupid song.

When Tony returned from college that fall, he began his new job with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and proposed to Becky after less than six months of dating. The ring was small with a single diamond, but she still loves it over 25 years later. Tony and Becky were married on 10 March 1989 in Mt. Vernon, Missouri at the family church she had grown up in. The wedding was small but as elaborate as Julia Robert's wedding in *Steel Magnolias*. The bridesmaid dresses were bright green and the groomsmen tuxedos were grey, the school colors of the high school they both attended five years apart. As they began their lives together, they moved into a mobile home that was located on a small patch of land on Tony's family farm in Chesapeake, Missouri.

Tony and Becky were married in March and found out they were expecting their first baby in May. Five days after Tony's 25th birthday and one day prior to Becky's 20th birthday they welcomed

their first child in January, Hannah Gabrielle Blevins (1990-). At Cox hospital in Springfield, Missouri, there was another Blevins baby being born down the hall just 10 minutes prior unbeknownst to anyone else. Hannah's third cousin Lacy Lynn Blevins (1990-) was born and received the last pink newborn cap the hospital had in stock. Since Tony and Becky did not decide to know the sex of their baby prior to birth, the family thought they had welcomed Dylan Wyatt instead of Hannah Gabrielle when they looked at the baby through the nursery window because Hannah was wearing a blue infant stocking cap. Luckily, no babies were switched at birth that day due to having the same last name.

The couple continued to live in the small mobile for four more years, and have one more child, Sarah Elisabeth Blevins (1993-) in the meantime. When Becky found out that they were expecting a third child they decided it was time to move on to a larger home. When she was six months pregnant, they moved to a small home in Freistatt, Missouri where children numbers three and four would be born both on March 23rd two years apart, Luke Anthony Blevins (1995-) and Abby Lynn Blevins (1997-) respectively. After one more move to Carthage, Missouri, the family finally found their forever home in the middle of the country in a small town nobody had ever heard of: LaRussell, Missouri.

The house the couple bought in LaRussell had not been lived in for over 10 years. In order to locate the house on the property they had bought, they had to hire a semi-truck with a large trailer to move it. Hannah recalls it being the most awesome adventure they had ever

experienced. Her mother recalls it more as terrifying and dirty. She told stories to her children later, as adults that there were birds living in the house that they could not get out and a pack of dangerous wild dogs that lived in the field adjacent to the house. Becky had to put her children in a home that had no electricity or running water for months while they slept on the floor in sleeping bags as a family. Tony moved an old wooden outhouse that had been located on his parent's farm to their backyard for regular use while the house was being renovated, by him. Tony was able to work full time and come home at night to lay the foundation for the home, run the plumbing for a bathtub that would not have a shower until 15 years later, install the electrical wiring, and build a new kitchen floor and cabinets. Becky stayed at home with her small children, all under the age of eight at this time, and the couple decided to homeschool them because of their religious beliefs.

After the running water was installed and beds were placed in shared bedrooms, Tony and Becky found they were about to have their fifth child. The only one of their children born in the fall was number five, Aria Rose Blevins (1999-). When she was born Tony and Becky encountered possibly the worst thing their marriage could encounter, a sick newborn. Their fifth child was born with two holes in her heart, one lung not fully developed, and her heart was located on the right side of her body. The right side is the incorrect side. Becky has only told the story a few times, but she recalls that the nurses took the baby from the room which was something they had never let any other hospital do with their other children, so she cannot recall why she

even thought that was a good idea. After an hour or so, they began to get worried. Tony found out that the baby had been rushed into the NICU and was not expected to make it throughout the night.

The next three years would consist of constant doctor visits and surgeries. Tony and Becky carried their infant into three surgeries in two different states before the age of two. At the age of three, she received an open heart surgery in Indianapolis, Indiana, which was supposed to increase their child's life expectancy past the age of five. Luckily, that was the last surgery they would have to, take her to and they are now the proud parents to a very loved, and spoiled by parents and older siblings, 17 year old. It was shortly after she was born that the children experienced public school for the first time.

Tony Wayne Blevins (1965-) was born in a small hospital in Aurora, Lawrence County, Missouri. He was the fourth son of **Jack Doyle Blevins (1932-)** and **Norma Lee Leath Blevins (1933-)**. Prior to having Tony they had Gary Dwight Blevins (1952-) and Billy Doyle Blevins (1953-). Almost 10 years later they had Jack Douglas Blevins (1962-) and Tony. Gregory Lance Blevins (1971-1973) was the last child they had who was born with cerebral palsy and died as a toddler in a hospital in Kansas City in an accident.

When Tony was growing up he worked daily on his family farm and developed a work ethic that he would carry with him into adulthood. Tony lived in the same two bedroom house his entire childhood, that his parents expanded to include a much larger kitchen and an extra bedroom when he was a teenager. Throughout his childhood he collected baseball cards which he kept in a green Puma shoebox. As a kid, Hannah

would get into her parents' bedroom and the shoebox was tucked away under the bed. She would pull it out and carefully sift through the baseball cards that were alphabetically organized with small notecards that were still imprinted with a 10 year olds handwriting. To this day the shoebox is still located under his bed.

As the youngest of four boys, Tony was quiet and well behaved. It would only be later when his children were adults that he told them about the shenanigans he and his friends participated in as teenagers. Growing up on a farm in a very rural area of Missouri, Lawrence County, there were limited things to do. Kids that grow up on farms without very close neighbors have to improvise a lot. Tony and his best friend would walk a mile and a half down dirt roads to meet in the middle of their homes. He recounts spending hours fishing, jumping off a small bridge into the creek, hunting alone at the age of nine, and running through miles of neighboring fields playing. When Tony and his best friend were older they would work at the neighboring farms all summer hauling square hay bales, milking dairy cows at 4 a.m., and combining fescue seed. About 25 years later he bought Mr. Estes', the man he worked for as a kid, combine and ran it himself with his children.

The first person to attend college in the entire direct line of the Blevins family was Tony. He was accepted into the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri in 1983. For the next four years, Tony lived in a small apartment in Columbia with a longtime friend from high school who also attending the university. While at school, he studied agribusiness and mainly kept to himself. He wishes now that he

would have tried to get out more and met more people. He would graduate with his bachelor's degree in 1987 and went on to work for the United States Department of Agriculture as a crop technician and disaster farm financial manager.

GENERATION THREE

Ala1. Verla Dean Mieswinkel Swinney (1943-)

Ala2. Wesley Dee Swinney (1941-)

Alb1. Norma Lee Leath Blevins (1940-)

Alb2. Jack Doyle Blevins (1935-)

Verla Dean Mieswinkel (1943-) was born in Mt. Vernon, Missouri, in 1943, her parents were **Amy Elizabeth Moore Mieswinkel (1920-2000)** and **Richard Albert Mieswinkel (1913-1999)**. Verla was the first child born to Amy and Richard and only one brother would follow her later, Albert Richard Mieswinkel (1945-). This was an unusually small family for that time because the rural farm population was rising and composed almost half the population in her area. The 1940 census in Lawrence County placed the rural farm population at over 12,000 people while the total population of the county was 24,637.⁴ The more children a family had, the more help they would have around the farm, and a larger farm would increase their income.

Verla always had a hard time growing up because her name was so unusual and everyone commented on its uniqueness. When her mother was alive, she would tell the story of how they decided to name her over and over again, as if it was one of her finest moments as a parent. Amy's siblings were hosting her baby shower for her first child, and they decided to play a game where all the guests wrote down what they thought Richard and Amy should name the baby and then placed them in a bowl. Amy was to draw the names and pick the one she liked best as the

⁴ Stewart, Carolyn. "US Census Bureau Publications - Census of Population and Housing." US Census Bureau Administration and Customer Services Division. Accessed November 5, 2016. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>.

winner of the game. The winner was Verla Dean and that was indeed the name they chose a couple months later when she gave birth to a baby girl.

Verla's parents owned a farm outside of Mt. Vernon, Missouri, that is still standing and occupied today. Due to living so far out of town, Verla can recount how she and her brother had to walk almost two miles to and from school every day. The worst part that she recalls was when the Missouri winter hit and all the students who lived nearby had to go to a neighbor's house who was a retired school teacher. She taught them in the winter time instead of them traveling to and from school in the dangerous conditions. The wintertime schooling would continue until late elementary school when her parents would invest in two cars and her mother could drive her to school.

When Verla was in middle school, her parents bought a beautiful house on the highway that runs out of town. The house was white with black shutters, and it had two stories and a long concrete front porch that ran the length of the house complete with wrought iron railing. The drive that went up to the house was fine white pea gravel and wrapped around a small tree covered in gooseberry bushes in a perfect loop. She chose the room upstairs that faced out the front into the large yard that eventually collided with the highway. Across the highway and one field down is where her new neighbor and schoolmate lived, Wesley.

Wesley Dee Swinney (1941-) was born to **Norvel Henrickson Swinney (1912-1981)** and **Arthur Neal Swinney (1904-1972)**. He was the third child in a family of five children. His family ran a small farm in

Lawrence County right outside of Mt. Vernon, Missouri. The farm consisted mainly of beef cattle, but when he was a small kid, his father bought him horses to raise. Wesley would keep those horses throughout high school, and they would instill a love for horses in him that he would attempt to pass down to his daughters in the future.

As a teenager, Wesley worked many long hours on his family farm after baseball practice in the afternoons but managed to find time every night to ride his horse up the road and across the highway to visit his longtime neighbor, Verla. His visits on horseback eventually paid off, and she agreed to date him when she was a sophomore in high school and he was a senior. Unfortunately, his dream for his life was not sticking around and working the family farm so after graduation he decided to move to Kansas City, Missouri, to live with his older brother.

During his time in Kansas City, Wesley worked overnights for the Hallmark factory and drove trucks for a shipping company during the day. He and his brother lived in a small one bedroom apartment where they barely slept but always kept a refrigerator full of beer. Wesley still managed to somewhat maintain his relationship with Verla while he was away and the summer after she graduated from high school he decided he had better come back to Mt. Vernon if he wanted to have any chance of not letting her slip away with someone else. When he returned, he was able to explain his running away to Kansas City to her. He asked her to marry him the next year.

Wesley and Verla were married 13 January 1962 when he was 21 and she was 19. Verla attended a vocational training course in Springfield,

Missouri, the year following her high school graduation and became a certified accountant. She quickly became hired to work for the Missouri Rehabilitation Center in Mt. Vernon, Missouri, where she would stay until she retired 40 years later. However, when Verla entered the workforce around 1963 there was a very low approval rating of married women working. In Figure 9.2 "Approval of Married Women Working for Pay, by Year, Age, and Type of Place" of the text *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years* the authors split up the percentage approving in rural areas between the years of 1952 and 1968. In that time frame when Verla was entering the workforce the approval rating of a married woman in the workplace in her community fluctuated between 25% and slightly above 50%.⁵ This had to have put Verla and her family in somewhat controversial situations at times.

During the same time frame, Wesley began working for the Kraft factory and driving a semi-truck for a local trucking company. The young couple moved into a small outer building that they converted to a small house with two bedrooms and a living area that had a small kitchen in the northwest corner. The makeshift home would eventually be turned into a small storage facility and garage when they moved about 10 years later.

The couple wanted to start a family about a year after they were married, but time was not proving to provide results. After over two years of trying on their own, Wesley and Verla considered adoption.

⁵Claude S. Fischer and Michael Hout, *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 219.

After saving for almost five years, the couple reached out to an adoption agency and six months later they were informed they were supposed to drive to St. Louis to pick up their newborn from the hospital. It was a couple weeks following their 8th wedding anniversary.

Wesley and Verla brought their baby girl home to Mt. Vernon in a small basket that sat in the backseat of the car and held tightly by Verla the whole four hours home. The first stop when they got back into town was at the local grocery store where Verla's mother and aunts all worked so they could see the baby dressed in her obnoxious white lace gown that swallowed her tiny body. A couple of short months later, the couple would receive surprising news.

The questions rolled and rolled around in Verla's head without ceasing. The questions of what it meant to be a mother, a woman, a human being who had to live with impossible decisions. These decisions and questions would weigh on her consistently as though her soul was being pulled to the core of the earth. She pondered all these questions as Mary once did and all mothers before her. Almost all mothers. Most mothers are not concerned about if their child will live in fear or despair because they look nothing like their family members, or that their child might possibly feel like a refugee in their own home. Not everyone, but she did. Her mind rained juxtaposed thoughts: wanting a child and giving birth to one of your own. It had only been two months since they brought her home from the large St. Louis hospital, and now the natural concern she had as an adoptive mother had dramatically increased. She was pregnant. After years of

trying, it was impossible to not be consumed with happiness at the news. But she was faced with dread and a heavy heart as she grieved for the questions her child would have in the future. 11 months later Wesley and Verla would have their last daughter, Jan Elisabeth (1971-).

Roughly 10 years after the birth of their second daughter both of Wesley's parents would have passed away and the couple moved their small family out of the makeshift home on the farm and into the main house. The main house had two bedrooms with a three season porch that Wesley finished into a third bedroom so their daughters could enjoy their own space in separate bedrooms. Over the years they would make other changes to the house such as adding a deck on the south side of the house and remodeling the kitchen to remove the horrible green counter tops that were obviously installed in the 1970s. They would remain in the same house for the next 50 years.

Although Wesley never planned to be in charge of the family farm, he found himself responsible for it by default in 1972 when his father died and all of his other siblings were living in other states. He began running the farm and working at the Kraft factory until his children graduated from high school when he began to run the farm full time. After his mother's death ten years later, Wesley would develop a deep depression during every month of August. While he is not a man who speaks a lot, he rarely talks in August because both of his parents died that month nine years apart.

Norma Lee Leath (1933-), was born in Lawrence County, Missouri, to **Ueal Cecil Leath (1908-1984)** and **Lorene Myrtle Brashers Leath (1909-**

1986). Norma was the third daughter born to Ueal and Lorene. Following her, there would be another daughter and three sons, making Norma one of seven children. Her siblings were Nova Marie (1927-1992), Catherine Geneva (1928-), Wilda Loretta (1930-), Harold Cecil (1939-), Delbert Wayne (1946-), and Roger Darrell (1951-).

Growing up, Norma lived in a small house on a farm that her father ran in Lawrence County, Missouri. The house was so small that Norma and her three sisters shared a bedroom that only consisted of two beds. Her brothers slept in a small building apart from the house that her father built. The building her brothers slept in did not have a stove, so during the winter time, they came in and slept on the floor in front of the fireplace. Norma envied this because anywhere in the same room as the fireplace was a thousand times warmer than her bedroom that sat on the opposite end of the house.

Her entire educational career took place in a one room schoolhouse. The schoolhouse that she attended was the Sycamore School and is still standing today as a protected building by the community. A normal school day for Norma started at 4:00 am and would not end until well after 10 at night. Growing up on a farm that sustained daily life with things such as milk, vegetables, and fruit added an extra weight of responsibility to them.

She would wake up next to her sister, Catherine, she had to share a bed with her because she was the closest in age to her by a year. The girls would light a small kerosene lamp they got to keep on the floor by their bed and get dressed. The floor would creak and they would pause as they walked down the short hallway fearful of waking their

mother. The back door would be in eyesight and they would tiptoe until they undid the handmade latch and made their way down the beaten lane to the milk barn. At the barn they would meet pet the black and white Holstein milking cows on the nose before sitting down on a small stool next to them with a metal pail. During the winter time she would pull her small hands close to her mouth and breathe deeply into them trying to pull warmth from her breath for her sake just as much as the cow standing in front of her.

With the pail of milk full from the first cow Norma would lift it with her small fragile arms and carry it back down the lane to the house where her mother would use it later that day. Her father would have 10-15 milk cows in the barn at a given time for her and her siblings to milk on a daily basis before school. The dread and disdain of milking cows early in the morning would stay with Norma until she was an adult and prevent her future husband from ever purchasing one.

After milking in the morning Norma and her sisters would make breakfast for themselves and their younger brothers. After washing the dishes from breakfast before leaving the house that morning they would pack the lunches for the day. The lunch consisted of a small cheese sandwich that was placed on homemade bread her mother had made the day prior as well as a piece of fruit they had picked from the orchard that resided behind the dairy barn. Once breakfast dishes had been washed and lunches packed into small metal pails they walked the thirty minutes to school. The way Norma describes it the whole event of going to school was very *Little House on the Prairie*.

It was at that small one room schoolhouse that she met Jack. Norma enjoyed going to school and the break from the hard back breaking work that every day at the farm held. Jack on the other hand was the complete opposite. He did not enjoy school and had trouble learning as quickly as the other children. He knew how to work with his hands and that was satisfying enough to him. The two opposites became friends in elementary school and began dating in middle school. Jack decided to drop out during the 8th grade but was supportive of Norma finishing school.

The pressure of marriage and family loomed in her mind throughout high school. She was in love with Jack and her parents highly approved of him. Jack was running his own farm and making money, saving. His morals and values were the same as hers. However, perhaps she could be the one to break the mold and wait to get married. She wanted him to wait for her. To wait for her to work on her own and become independent without him and to figure herself out before jumping into life like every generation before her. Norma battled internally with this decision but eventually succumbed to the pressure of society, her family, and Jack. On 1 February 1952 she married Jack at the age of 19 in Eureka Springs, Arkansas.

Jack Doyle Blevins (1932-) was born in Lawrence County, Missouri, to **Genetta Francis Harmon Leath (1902-1956)** and **Claud Ellis Blevins (1901-1983)**. Jack was the fourth out of five children including Juanita Leota (1926-2012), Betty Lou (1928-), Donald Dean (1930-1945), and Dale Ellis (1940-). Jack grew up extremely poor on a small run down farm his father managed. His parents had moved to Lawrence

County from Oklahoma shortly after they were married to farm near Claud's family.

Jack's life was very simple as a child. His family lived in a two bedroom farmhouse which in the wintertime he and his two brothers would share the bedroom with their sisters. The boys would sleep on the floor while the girls had their own shared bed. However, in the summertime Jack fondly remembers taking his blanket to the hay loft and making a pallet next to his brothers where they would sleep in the summer months. The smell of hay and the small scratches that the stems marked his skin and remained there for the next 60 years.

When Jack was 13 years old he was riding in the family farm truck with his older brother Donald and a friend of Donald's. The family lived in Marionville, Missouri, and Donald was 15 at the time and responsible for delivering farm materials to another farm in a neighboring town, Ash Grove, Missouri. While on the drive there Donald was driving too fast, and the truck hit a usual bump which caused the vehicle to overturn. Jack and their friend were thrown from the vehicle, but Donald was pinned underneath it. His mind raced to possible options of how to remove his big brother from underneath the vehicle. Donald bled out from an abdominal hemorrhage that took 45 minutes to run the course to death. As a young teenager Jack was in shock.

His arms were used to work and at 13 he considered himself stronger than the other boys at school. As he strained to lift the large farm truck he found himself weak and useless. Jack's screams for help went unheard on the small rural road and he longed for a Good Samaritan to

drive by and help them. Jack and their friend were finally able to unpin his brother from the old truck. With blood covering his hands and staining the knees of his pants Jack and the two boys ran down the road letting his tears drench the dusty dirt road. He found help at a neighboring farm miles back down the road and reported the accident to the authorities. They thought that Donald was going to be okay because he was able to walk down the road to help. However, 45 minutes following the accident Donald died from internal bleeding.

Following the accident Jack did not return back to school. Jack had lost his motivation for attending school without his brother and he did not want to answer all of the questions school children probe with after a tragedy. Instead he chose to work away his grief with long hours on the farm with his father. Claud supported his son's decision and appreciated the extra set of hands he received all day. Work does not make grief and guilt disappear completely. Jack would carry that with him always.

In 1952 Jack married Norma and exactly nine months later the couple had their first child, Gary Dwight (1952-). Thirteen months following they would have their second son, Billy Doyle (1953-). Life in the early years of their marriage was not easy for Jack and Norma. Jack would go to work every day at the Kraft cheese factory and Norma would remain at home with their two young boys to do the chores and take care of the farm.

Norma recalls setting the babies on a small blanket in the garden while she weeded for hours, attempting to produce enough vegetables she could can and feed her family through the winter. This did not

always work well as more than once did one of the boys crawl away to grab and place in their mouth unthinkable items, as toddlers do. She would rush Gary to the emergency room to ensure he had not swallowed the poison ivy that his small fist had shoved into his open mouth. Following that incident Norma decided a different approach had to be taken to gardening situation. Jack would then build her a makeshift outdoor playpen with chicken wire that they would sit in until they were old enough to crawl out.

Nine years following the birth of their second son they had Jack Douglas (Doug) (1962-) and a year later Tony Wayne (1963-). With four boys in a four room house it became very crowded. Norma begged Jack to remodel their home and make it larger. Instead of fulfilling her wishes Jack converted the building on top of the walk in underground cellar into a small room for Gary and Billy. The makeshift room had a stair case of precarious large rocks stacked to the top. These rocks became infamously known for having copperhead snakes hiding between and under them.

Norma feared for her two oldest children sleeping outside of the house on top of snake infested stairs. However, she also felt guilty because of the amount of relief that washed over her when she had extra room in the house. The boys would spend their high school years living in the room above the cellar while Doug and Tony slept in the second bedroom in the main house.

In 1968 Jack developed a cold. This cold seemed routine and he was so busy that he barely even noticed. He did not notice until one day he woke up and his three year old son was trying to speak to him and

he could not hear him. Time seemed to slow down as panic set in from losing his sense of hearing. Jack was told that he would never hear again. Therefore, he began the long process of relearning how to communicate with his family. He refused to learn sign language because he selflessly did not want his family to have to learn it as well. Jack managed to learn to read lips and his wife and sons learned to communicate with slowly. This would eventually become second nature to those around him.

A year after Gary graduated from high school Norma gave birth to Gregory Lance (1971-1973) three days before Christmas. Greg was born with cerebral palsy. Deformations and limited mobile activity was all that Norma heard playing over and over again in her mind. The rural area of Lawrence County could not handle a disease of that magnitude. The couple were advised to send their newborn to the children's hospital in Kansas City, Missouri.

Norma packed her bags and was dropped off in Kansas City by Jack. He stayed for a few days but had to get back to the farm and his job so that he could support the endeavor his son was about to take on. Stress and depression wore at Norma from the sight of watching her son lay in a hospital crib but never be able to move the correct way. She eventually would only spend the weekends in Kansas City because Jack insisted she had to begin to work so that they could afford the massive stack of hospital bills piling up on their small kitchen table. Therefore, Norma began working as an assistant nurse at the local hospital.

For two years Jack and Norma traveled between Chesapeake, Missouri, and Kansas City, Missouri, to see their son. As Greg slowly developed into a toddler he never learned to walk and his severe issues became more and more clear. Greg died six months after his second birthday from suffocation. A pillow had been left in his crib at the hospital and because of his condition he could not roll over to receive the proper air supply. Jack and Norma buried their son at a local cemetery down the road from their home in Chesapeake.

GENERATION FOUR

Ala1a. Amy Elizabeth Moore Mieswinkel (1920-2000)

Ala1b. Richard Albert Mieswinkel (1913-1999)

Ala2a. Norvel Henrickson Swinney (1912-1981)

Ala2b. Arthur Neal Swinney (1904-1972)

Alb1a. Lorene Myrtle Brashers Leath (1909-1986)

Alb1b. Ueal Cecil Leath (1908-1984)

Alb2a. Genetta Frances Harmon Blevins (1902-1956)

Alb2b. Claude Ellis Blevins (1901-1983)

Amy Elizabeth Moore (1920-2000) was born in Lawrence County, Missouri, to **Nettie Belle Pennington Moore (1883-1959)** and **William Robert Moore (1870-1953)**. Amy was number six out of ten children born to William and Nettie. Her siblings included Ada Alma (1908-2001), Herbert Edward (1912-2015), William David (1914-1971), Allen Arthur (1916-2002), Norman Albert (1918-1999), Herman Houston (1918-2000), Walter Russell (1924-1972), Bessie Irene (1927-2017), and Edith Pearl (1929-).

Amy grew up on a farm that is located outside of Mt. Vernon, Missouri. The ten children assisted their parents every day working in the corn fields and dairy barns. The house her father had built with his own hands was small but fit all of them inside during the winter even when they had to sleep five people to a bed. In Margo J. Anderson's book, "The American Census: A Social History", she discusses the 1920 census and the impacts of the postwar crisis on the rural population. In 1920 Amy was born into a rural population that had declined by five million people since the previous census. Furthermore, Anderson points out that because of Missouri being such a

rural populated state it affected the number of seats they held in Congress. Missouri lost two of their seats that year.⁶

Amy attended Mt. Vernon high school where she graduated with her degree. The industrial jobs in the area had become more abundant over the few years leading up to her high school graduation and against the status quo she went to work right after school instead of getting married right away. Amy would not get married until two months before her 21st birthday.

After marrying Richard Albert Mieswinkel (1913-1999) 23 August 1941 Amy quit working for a time because nine months later they had their first child. Amy would take considerable time off until her children were both in high school when she finally decided to go back to work as a cook at a local diner and then at the local grocery stocking shelves with her sisters. Amy worked at the grocery store until she was in her mid-forties. It was then she discovered she had cancer.

Amy was diagnosed with cancer in her right breast and arm when she was in her mid-forties. Shortly after the diagnosis both her breast and right arm were removed. She had to overcome obstacles that not only came with having one arm but only having her no dominant arm. Amy learned to write, beautifully, in cursive with her left hand. Furthermore, she learned to sew and crochet with only one hand. She would go on to survive cancer and live for thirty more years. However, she would be killed in 2000 in a tragic accident after returning from

⁶Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History*. 2nd ed. Yale University Press, 1988, 136.

a trip to the east coast with her siblings to meet extended relatives in a massive family reunion.

Amy was a very independent woman who had self-confidence instilled in her from a young age. In Fischer's book, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*, he brings focus to that idea of self-confidence in a chapter titled, "Mentality." In that chapter he discusses how Americans believe they are more responsible for their success in life in contrast to other countries, because of that mentality citizens who feel that way tend to be more successful. An example he pointed out was in sickness. Furthermore, he discusses how parenting changed and attitudes became geared toward independent children, particularly in literature.⁷ The change in society that encouraged children to become more independent was obviously established in Amy's household and she exemplified that change in her adult life and in her battle with cancer.

Richard Albert Mieswinkel (1913-1999) was born in Lawrence County, Missouri, on September 19th to **Mary Louise Wiese Mieswinkel (1883-1950)** and **Frederick Mieswinkel (1875-1963)**. Richard joined six older siblings at his birth and witnessed the birth of four younger siblings after him. He was number six out of eleven children. His siblings were Leonard Willard (1904-1980), Wilburn Roy (1905-1952), Emery Elsworth (1908-1925), Vernice L. (1910-1987), Loren Alfred (1911-2003), Leona Katherine (1912-1999), Lavera Dena (1915-1950), Leo Charles (1917-1993), Helen Marie (1917-2012), and Della (1922-).

⁷Fischer, Claude S. *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, 211 & 213.

As a child Richard and his siblings sometimes attended Union School and Edgewood School in Lawrence County. However, they did not get to attend as often as they hoped because survival was more important and they were needed on the farm. Richard never attended school past the fourth grade but could read and write well enough to get by. He stayed and worked on his father's farm until he was old enough to manage his own farm. As a child while working on the farm Richard and his brother Leo were carrying dynamite to their father for a demolition project. The dynamite in Richard's hand exploded and partially amputated his left thumb and index finger.

The farm that Fred ran was so large and successful that the local newspaper published an article about him and his children working the farm. The article ran on October 6, 1932 in the *Aurora Advertiser* and spoke highly of the 270 acre farm that Fred and his sons were running outside of Aurora. Richard and his sibling's names were listed in the last small paragraph of the article. The article lays out how many acres of how many crops Fred and his sons were sowing that year, the amount of cows giving milk in his Jersey barn, and even down to the Rhode Island Red chickens that they had running free around the barnyard.⁸

Richard never quit working or took time off to socialize very often. The Mieswinkel and Moore family had been pillars in the community for some time but Richard's particular generation tied them together forever. Richard was introduced to Amy by his little sister Helen.

⁸ "Fred Mieswinkel." *Aurora Advertiser*, October 6, 1932.

Helen was dating Amy's brother Allen. Richard took time off to spend with Amy and eventually by extreme coincidence both sets of couples were married.

Richard was 28 when he married Amy and had been working on his father's farm. Richard never graduated from high school but in the 1940s this was actually not hindering to him supporting his family. Figure 5.15 "Unemployment, by Year and Education" in the text, *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years*, the unemployment rate for citizens without a high school diploma dropped to below 5% from 7.5%.⁹ However, Richard wanted to increase his skill set and he began working in construction.

Richard would build dozens of houses by hand and become an extremely talented wood worker. His shop was located in the garage at their final house. There was never enough light inside because the small glass panes at the top of the walls were flecked with sawdust. The rows of hand wood planers lined the South wall of the shop, situated neatly above a wood topped work counter that he had installed himself. It was in here that his children would find him after dinner covered in sweat and sawdust, chasing them like a bear with his dirty hands.

Norvel Hendrickson Swinney (1912-1981) was born in Christian County, Billings, Missouri, to **Lula Edith Hendricks Hendrickson (1886-1965)** and **Norman Hendrickson (1885-1924)**. Norvel was the youngest of three children Fayma (1910-1972) and Wilford (1911-1922). Norman and Lula

⁹Claude S. Fischer and Michael Hout, *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 129.

did not give any of their children middle names. Norvel grew up rather poor and did not finish high school.

Much of her early life is unknown including how she met her husband, Arthur Neal Swinney (1904-1972). Arthur and Norvel were married 7 June 1930 in Ash Grove, Missouri. The couple would have five children in their marriage Norman Denny (1936-), Linda D. (1938-), Wesley Dee (1941-), Stephen Douglas (1943-), and Becky Edith (1944-1945). All of their children were born in Turnback Township, Lawrence County, Missouri. However, after the death of their youngest child, Becky, they would move to a farm just North of Mt. Vernon, Missouri.

After moving to Mt. Vernon Norvel went to work after being a homemaker for the entire beginning of their marriage. She worked for a local doctor, Dr. Haywood, as his personal assistant in his office. After a few years she found a job at the Missouri Rehabilitation Center in Mt. Vernon, where her future daughter in law would also work and retire from, in the dietary section.

Arthur Neal Swinney (1904-1972) was born to **Hannah Abigail Johnson Hendrickson (1869-1950)** and **Benjamin Franklin Swinney (1870-1949)**.

Arthur was number five of seven children: Leta F. (1894-unk), Orpha Ellen (1895-1980), Delta (1898-unk), Ona May (1901-1990), Albert R. (1907-1994), and Lloyd E. (1909-1992). Arthur grew up in the Billings and Turnback Township area. A township is smaller than a county and usually overseen by a small board of community members.¹⁰The Turnback Township would eventually become inactive but at the time was

¹⁰ "Civil Township." Wikipedia. Accessed October 16, 2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_township.

extremely small and only included one town, Chesapeake, Missouri. The township was named after the creek that runs through it, Turnback Creek.¹¹ He did not graduate from high school but strongly encouraged his children to in the future, which all four of them did. As an adult Arthur consistently ran his own farm and managed the local feed store in Mt. Vernon, Missouri. Upon retirement from the feed store Arthur continued to run his farm and worked off and on at the local bowling alley as a janitor to make ends meet.

Lorene Myrtle Brashers (1909-1986) was born in Lawrence County Missouri, to **Mary May Hubbard Brashers (1875-1947)** and **Joseph Walter Brashers (1874-1940)**. Lorene's siblings included Ota Ermine (1894-1969), Harriet Erma (1901-1901), Cora May (1905-1967), and Joseph Orman (1918-1920). Lorene's maiden name was French and pronounced Brashears not Brash-ers. Her father traveled to Missouri from Tennessee with his parents in a covered wagon. It is said that they stopped in Missouri and camped at what is now known as Turnback Creek. Half of the family decided to stay in Missouri and the other half returned back to Tennessee. It is said that after that the Creek they camped at was known as Turnback Creek because of the Brashers family.

Lorene did not complete high school but rather got married at the age of 17. On 21 August 1926 she married Ueal Cecil Leath (1908-1984) who was 18 at the time. The young couple had their first child exactly nine months following their wedding and began their life in Southwest Missouri. Lorene stayed at home with the children while Ueal worked on

¹¹ "Turnback Township, Lawrence County, Missouri." Wikipedia. Accessed November 2, 2016.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turnback_Township,_Lawrence_County,_Missouri.

the farm his father started and did odd jobs for the community to earn extra money.

Ueal Cecil Leath (1908-1984) was born in Arkansas to **Eva Bell Parsons Leath (1889-1965)** and **George Elsworth Leath (1884-1974)**. Ueal was the only child of Eva and George. It is unknown how Ueal and his parents came to move from Arkansas to Lawrence County, Missouri. Moving into the Turnback Township area is how Ueal met Lorene. Ueal farmed for the remainder of his life.

Genetta Frances Harmon (1902-1956) was born in Woods County (now Major County) Oklahoma, to **Cannie String Harmon (1879-1941)** and **Henderson Harmon (1876-1915)**. Henderson and Cannie had seven children including Genetta. They were Lillian (1897-1926), Dewey William (1899-1957), Flossie May (1904-1953), Rossie Ray (1904-1967), Floyd (1906-1958), and Edgar Edward (1910-1964). Genetta grew up in Oklahoma on an original homestead that her grandmother, Ruth Anne Crump String (1845-1915), homesteaded on her own following the death of her husband in 1879. The homestead was kept in the family until Genetta's family including her grandmother traveled from Oklahoma to Lawrence County, Missouri, sometime between 1910 and 1915. It was in Lawrence County she met and married Claude Elis Blevins (1901-1983) on 25 November 1920.

Claude Elis Blevins (1901-1983) was born at the beginning of August to **Nancy Angeline Hicklin Blevins (1865-1939)** and **Andrew Jackson Blevins (1861-1947)**. Claude was one of eleven children born to Nancy and Andrew. His siblings were Elmer Lee (1886-1959), Minnie E. (1887-1888), George Frank (1888-1966), Emory E. (1889-1912), Tennie (1892-

1922), Effie (1893-1930), Lucy Jane (1894-1990), Freda Marie (1896-1994), Dollie (1898-1994), and Lou G. (1905-1992). Claude did not finish school and worked on his father's farm his entire life.

In the text *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character* the chapter titled "Public Spaces" author Fischer discusses the changes in the typical American home. The section on homes suggests that in the 1950s most Americans installed air conditioning into their homes and had a television set, which in turn brought more families together.¹² However, the chapter does not seem to separate rural versus urban areas. Claude and Genetta did not have air conditioning in their home at any time. A television set did not make an appearance into the home until after Genetta's death and Claude decided to buy one in the late 1970s. The idea of bringing family together for Claude and Genetta focused more on the appreciation of hard work and being thankful for what they had.

¹²Fischer, Claude S. *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, 174-175.

GENERATION FIVE

Ala1a1. Nettie Belle Pennington Moore (1883-1959)
Ala1a2. William Robert Moore (1870-1953)

Ala1b1. Mary Louise Wiese Mieswinkel (1883-1950)
Ala1b2. Frederick Mieswinkel (1875-1963)

Ala2a1. Lula Edith Hendricks Hendrickson (1886-1965)
Ala2a2. Norman Hendrickson (1885-1924)

Ala2b1. Hannah Abigail Johnson Hendrickson (1869-1950)
Ala2b2. Benjamin Franklin Swinney (1870-1949)

Alb1a1. Mary May Hubbard Brashers (1875-1947)
Alb1a2. Joseph Walter Brashers (1874-1940)

Alb1b1. Eva Bell Parson Leath (1888-1965)
Alb1b2. George Elsworth Leath (1884-1974)

Alb2a1. Cannie String Harmon (1879-1941)
Alb2a2. Henderson Harmon (1876-1915)

Alb2b1. Nancy Angeline Hicklin Blevins (1865-1939)
Alb2b2. Andrew Jackson Blevins (1861-1947)

Nettie Belle Pennington (1883-1959) was born 15 August 1883 in Lawrence County, Missouri. Nettie's parents were **Peter David Pennington (1852-1928)** and **Amanda Isabel Vancil Pennington (1867-1929)**. The Pennington's were a very well off family in the community and were spread out along the Northwest portion of Lawrence County all the way to Phelps, Missouri, which borders Jasper County. Nettie was the oldest of 11 children including Bessie May (1885-1971), Nollia Matilda (1887-1889), Edith Pearl (1891-ukn), Genie Vitula (1892-1973), Cecil Dalton (1895-1976), Ethel Clarice (1896-1981), Helen Marie

(1899-1899), Nina Althea (1902-ukn), Leta Evaline (1904-1976), and Howard McDermott (1908-1991).

Nettie married William Robert Moore (1870-1953) on 20 April 1907 in Mt. Vernon, Missouri. Nettie and William met because their family farms were neighboring each other. After they were married Nettie became a school teacher in the area, teaching at Fairplay and Stinson schools. William would farm with his father and grandfather.

William Robert Moore (1870-1953) was born to **John Williams Moore Jr. (1848-1919)** and **Sarah Elizabeth Ragain Moore (1849-1931)**. William was the son of the first John Williams Moore to come to Lawrence County, Missouri, from Tennessee. His grandfather, **John Williams Moore Sr. (1815-1895)**, would come to Lawrence County later. He and the rest of the Moore family are buried in Williams Cemetery, named after John Williams Moore Jr., in Mt. Vernon, Missouri. William was the oldest of eight children born to John Jr. and Sarah. Their children were Granville Grant (1871-1946), Clint Edward (1872-1873), Vintie Milburn (1875-ukn), Ida Loretta (1877-1956), Oakley Homer (1881-1923), Minnie May (1882-1966), and Walter (1886-ukn).

William had a rich piece of bottomland that he farmed with his father and grandfather. The Moore men were known in Lawrence County for the corn they grew. John had brought the corn seed with him from Tennessee and the stalks grew unusually tall. It is said that their corn stalks grew up to 10-12 feet tall and the individual white corn grains were 3/4" long. Williams's son-in-law Richard would save some of the corn seed when his father-in-law stopped farming. However, the next year when Richard went to plant the corn it never grew. He

assumed that the seeds were barren or was spoiled so it would not germinate.

Mary Louise Wiese (1883-1950) was born to German immigrant parents **Charlotte C. Frederking Wiese (1856-1928)** and **Christian H. Wiese Jr. (1847-1933)**. Mary was born in Illinois and traveled to Lawrence County, Missouri with her parents as a toddler. Mary was one of eight children: Emma Magdalena (1875-ukn), Louisa Louise (1877-1953), Lydia S. (1885-1950), Minnie Agnes (1888-1940), William Heinrich (1890-1970), Anna E. (1892-ukn), and Dena (1895-1943). Mary's sister Emma married George Robert Meyer Jr. who was the uncle to Frederick Mieswinkel (1875-1963). Emma introduced Mary to Fred and they were married 10 April 1902 in Stotts City, Missouri.

Frederick Mieswinkel (1875-1963) was born in Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania, on April 23rd. His parents were **Charles Joseph Maiswinkel (1856-1875)** and **Emily (Emma) Meyer (1857-unk)**. Frederick's parents were never married and his father died 10 months after he was born at the age of 19, cause unknown. Two years later his mother had another child, Minnie (Mina) (1879-unk). When Frederick was four years old his mother's parents, George Robert Meyer (1853-1903) and Catherine Elisabeth Molan Meyer (1856-1925) immigrants from France, took Frederick and his little sister to Missouri with them. Frederick's mother remained behind in Pennsylvania and never came to Missouri. George and Catherine's other children, George Robert Jr., Charles, and Frank, made the journey with them.

When Frederick moved to Missouri his friends often called him Fritz, but as an adult he went by the name of Fred. When Fred was 16 he went

to work on George Robert Jr.'s farm near Stotts City, Missouri. George Jr. and his wife Emma would continue to raise Fred and Minna. Fred would eventually have his own farm west of Aurora, Missouri, and run three different farms the rest of his life. Fred's last name when he was born was spelled Maiswinkel but on his marriage license to Mary he changed the spelling to Meiswinkel. Following the birth of their first few children they changed the spelling again to Mieswinkel. The reason for the change is unknown.

Fred grew up knowing very little about his family heritage but through research from two of his grandsons he was able to find out his father's name and most of lineage before passing away in 1963. His grandfather was Johann Eberhard Mieswinkel born in 1824 in Prussia, Germany. Johann went by the name of Eberhard. In 1849 Eberhard came to the states on the bark Alder from Bremen, Germany. He traveled from the port in Maryland to Pottsville, Pennsylvania. In Germany Eberhard apparently worked for the royal family with the title of "Royal Baker".

It is said that Eberhard fell in love with a commoner, Josephine Pelstring, and the royal family asked him to leave. A woman by the name of Wilhelmine Josephine Pelstring left Germany on the same boat as Eberhard and it is speculated she was running away with him. The couple met in Pottlesville, Pennsylvania, and began their life together. Eberhard started a brewery and multiple porter beer bottles have been recovered with "E. Mieswinkel Pottlesville" molded into the glass. Josephine went on to own and run a hotel in Pottlesville and

died in 1899 from burn injuries obtained when her dress caught on fire raking coals in the hotel.

Lula Edith Hendricks Hendrickson (1886-1965) was born to **Naomi J. Laney Hendricks (1864-1915)** and **Franklin L. Hendricks (1863-1947)** in Billings, Christian County, Missouri. Lula had an older brother Alfred (1883-1962) and two younger siblings Lloyd W. (1888-1962) and Winifred (1893-1947). Lula grew up in Billings and there she met Norman Hendrickson (1885-1924). They were married 11 December 1908.

Norman Hendrickson (1885-1924) was born on 14 July to **Mary Foster Hendrickson (unk-unk)** and **Joseph Hendrickson (unk-unk)**. Six years following Norman's marriage to Lula World War I began. At the age of 33 Norman was instructed by the federal government to fill out a draft card. Norman filled out his draft card in Lawrence County, Missouri, on 12 September 1918. According to author Anderson in her text, *The American Census*, the American entrance into World War I caused more work for the census bureau because they began to prepare estimates for draft age men. Anderson discusses how by the time Norman filled out his draft card 143 employees were working on the war statistics in the bureau office.¹³

Hannah Abigail Johnson (1869-1950) was born in Lawrence County, Missouri, to **Joseph Johnson (1814-1874)** and **Hannah Cotter Johnson (1835-1912)**. Hannah was the third of five children born to Joseph and Hannah. Her siblings were Delila Florence (1865-1935), Dennis Franklin

¹³Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History*. 2nd ed. Yale University Press, 1988, 128.

(1867-1940), Henry Richard (1872-1951), and Joseph Amon (1874-1962).
At age 21 Hannah married Benjamin Franklin Swinney (1870-1949).

Benjamin Franklin Swinney (1870-1949) was born in Kentucky. According to his death certificate his father's name was **James Martin Swinney (unk-unk)**. His mother's name is unknown. It is also unknown how Benjamin got to Missouri from Kentucky but his occupation was labeled as farmer.

Mary May Hubbard (1875-1947) was born to **Martha Ellen Acock Hubbard (1852-1899)** and **John Henderson Hubbard (1850-1908)**. John and Martha had eight children including Mary. Her siblings were John (1872-1932), Anna Lucinda (1873-1905), Laura (1877-1898), Martha Alice (1879-), and Bertha (1881-). Mary grew up in Lawrence County, Missouri where she met Joseph Walter Brashers (1874-1940). They were married 5 February 1893 in Marionville, Missouri.

Joseph Walter Brashers (1874-1940) was born to **Harriet Melissa Helm Brashers (1851-1925)** and **Jesse Rankin Brashers (1841-1916)**. Joseph had nine siblings: Mary Elizabeth (1869-1950), Melissa Caroline (1871-1872), Manda Catherine (1873-1951), Addie Alice (1877-), Melinda Nora (1879-1959), James Albert (1882-), Reuben Jesse (1883-1942), Coral Edith (1885-1975), Noel Gordon (1891-1976).

Eva Bell Parsons (1888-1965) was born on New Year's Eve in Lawrence County, Missouri. Her parents were **Sarah E. Parker Parsons (1856-1900)** and **Alexander Woodson Parsons (1840-1935)**. Eva had two full siblings, James Arthur (1882-1959) and Edward Lesley (1895-1978). Her father had been previously married until his wife died in 1878, and from that marriage Eva had eight half siblings. Her half siblings were

Narcissuss Jane (1866-1948), Louise J. (1871-1940), Orum (1870-unk), Oney (1872-unk), Willie (1875-1878), Albert Moore (1878-1960), Cora (1878-1878), and Infant (1878-1878). Through the coincidence of family farms being nearby Eva met George Elsworth Leath (1884-1974). They were married in Casa, Perry County, Arkansas, on 3 April 1907.

George Elsworth Leath (1884-1974) was born in Lawrence County, Missouri, a day before his father's 25th birthday. His parents were **Mary A. Robinson Leath (1862-1950)** and **David Paul Leath (1859-1952)**. When George was eight years old his parents had one other child, Otis Ezerth (1892-1955). Sometime in the eighteen years following the birth of his younger brother George's parents would get divorced. George's mother would go on to get married twice after the divorce but George became estranged to her. David married Minnie Anne Wilson Leath (1881-1958) on 27 November 1910 in Montgomery, Arkansas. Minnie became the main matrilineal role model in George's wife and his children would know her as Grandmother. George farmed in Lawrence and Christian Counties until his death at the age of 90.

The fact that George lived as long as he did seemed to be an anomaly for the timeframe he was born into. According to author Claude S. Fischer in his text, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*, life following infancy was low. Furthermore, Fischer discusses how much death and disease impacted life in the 1800s, and that in the timeframe George was born men who lived past the age of 20 rarely lived to their 45th birthday.¹⁴ This fact in

¹⁴ Fischer, Claude S. *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, 18.

enlightening to the world George grew up in and the dangers that just living normal everyday life held.

Cannie String (1879-1941) was born in Saline County, Missouri to **Ruth Ann Crump String (1845-1915)** and **Benjamin J. String (1831-1879)**. Cannie's father died when she was three month olds and her mother never remarried. Therefore, Cannie grew up an only child. Her life as an only child with a single mother ended up being rather extraordinary.

In 1908 Cannie's mother, Ruth, at the age of 63 decided to take her daughter and her family to Oklahoma. It was nine years after the great Oklahoma Land Rush but there were still plenty of homesteads left available. Ruth and Cannie's family went to claim a piece of Oklahoma and Ruth became one of a small number of women to claim land without a husband. Her land was 160 acres in Indian Meridian, Oklahoma. Between 1910 and 1915 Cannie and her mother moved back to Lawrence County, Missouri.

Henderson Harmon (1876-1915) was born in the same county as his wife, Saline County, Missouri, three years earlier. Henderson's mother was **Martha J. Thomas Harmon (1847-1910)** who was born in Kentucky and moved to Missouri with her parents as a child. His father was **John Edward Harmon (1849-1916)** from Missouri. John and Martha had six children that they raised in Saline County, Missouri. Henderson's siblings were, Permily (1866-unk), Thomas Melton (1867-1936), William Thomas (1870-unk), Margaret (1882-unk), and Martha F. (1886-unk).

Henderson would meet Cannie in Saline County and they were married 27 November 1895 in Marshall, Saline County, Missouri. With one child

and one on the way Henderson and Cannie agreed to go to Oklahoma with Cannies, mother, Ruth, to help start her homestead. Henderson was the one who built the small cabin that the family lived on and ran the small farm operation they would maintain for a few short years before moving back to Missouri. Instead of moving back to Saline County they went further south to Lawrence County.

Nancy Angeline Hicklin (1865-1939) was born on November 14th and had an identical twin, Martha Emeline (1865-1955). Nancy's parents were **Tabitha Box Hicklin (1830-unk)** and **William Hicklin (1813-1894)**. The proud parents of twins in 1865 already had one son prior, James H. (1836-1910). Following the birth of their twin girls Tabitha and William had six other children: Lydia Jane (1874-1960), William Robert (1874-1951), Johnathan Elbert (1877-1967), Dollie Malissa (1879-1963), Mary Elizabeth (1881-1937), and Joseph P. (1885-unk). Nancy grew up in Lawrence County, Missouri. She married Andrew Jackson Blevins (1861-1947) on 11 December 1884 when she was 19 years old.

Andrew Jackson Blevins (1861-1947) was born in Johnson County, Missouri. Andrew's parents and siblings are unknown. According to Andrew's death certificate he died of influenza in 1947 and his parents' names were listed as unknown. His death was reported by someone of the name Lee Blevins which is suspected to be his son Elmer Lee (1886-1959).

Andrew was born at the very beginning of the Civil War. According to Margo J. Anderson in her book, "The American Census: A Social History", Abraham Lincoln had just become president in 1861 and he would spend the years of the Civil War using the Census data to

determine the effects of abolition on the slave population in the states.¹⁵ With Missouri being a controversial state roughly 40 years prior there had to have been many split family situations during the Civil War. Speculation is that Andrew's family was split during that time frame and that is why his family tree is lost prior to him.

¹⁵Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History*. 2nd ed. Yale University Press, 1988, 63.