

Remembrances of My Father  
Dee Thomas Stockton  
11/7/1867 – 2/14/1931

Most of the stories of my father, Dee Thomas Stockton, are gathered from family stories, the earliest of which was when he was five years old. He and his older brother, James Andrew Stockton, took a wagon load of grain to the Salado Grist Mill to be ground into flour and cornmeal. They started out at first daylight and did not return until dark. Grandma (Mary Elizabeth White Stockton) asked Daddy if he was scared or afraid. His reply was, "Oh, yes, Ma, I saw a big bugger and a whole lot of little ones!"

Daddy showed a talent for music at a young age and was sent to Goodville for piano lessons from a blind teacher. After a few sessions, his teacher terminated instruction as he was playing by ear.

As a teenager, Daddy had a misunderstanding with one of his brothers, and he left home and was gone for a couple of years. Grandma had ESP with her children. One morning, she was baking vinegar pies, and one of the girls asked why she was baking pies. Her reply was, "Dee is coming home." Sure enough, he showed up late in the day.

When Daddy was a young man, he had a livery stable business in Granger, Texas. Aunt Matt went to live with him to keep house and cook. Later, he had a dray business in Bartlett, Texas. Mr. Lawrence, a friend of the family, told of his great strength and ability to bump cotton bales up on a wagon three bales high.

After Daddy and Fanny Shell married, he and Uncle Tom Talbot, Wallace Walton, and perhaps another friend, went to Oklahoma to help lay a railroad line. Daddy was a gentle, kind manager with livestock. The railroad needed livestock, equipment, and men for the hard work. After the railroad was completed, he and Fanny remained in Oklahoma and went into the dairy business. Good fortune overtook them with the oil boom. With oil lease money, they were able to build a nice two-story home, barns, and silos.

Several years after Fanny's death, Daddy married my mother, Anna Lee "Leila" Sappington, twenty-three years his junior. Life was hard, but we were making a good living. Grandpa (Douglas Hayden Stockton, Sr.) and Ira Connell came to visit us. We spent a considerable amount of time in the storm cellar as cyclones were frequent. All of our buildings were damaged, and cows were scooped up and let down in our neighbor's pasture. Grandpa said, "Dee, don't you think you have ridden out enough of these storms? Come back to Texas and run the home place."

A railroad boxcar was engaged to move livestock, farming equipment, and household goods, and in 1916 we moved to Bartlett. After cotton prices fell, there were floods and drought. My father and a group of Central Texas farmers were talked into selling as they could double their acreage by buying into a raw land development in South Texas.

We moved to Christine. My father was too old to clear land or build tanks and a camp house. After making one crop, he suffered a sunstroke and heart attack. Again, we were uprooted. We moved to Nueces County on the Gulf Coast so our family could once again go into the dairy business. We lived in Driscoll, Texas.

While in Driscoll, my older brother Waymon, who was 17 years old, went to work in the oil fields so he could buy a small herd of Jersey Springer heifers from Heaps Dairy Farm in Austin.

During inclement weather, Daddy would often ride with me on the milk route. If I was driving over 25 miles per hour, he would reach out, tap me on my knee, and ask, "Are you thinking as fast as you are going?" I got the message.

Also, one day in Driscoll, my little brother Jimmy was out at the milk barn following Daddy around. Daddy said, "Hemmy, go ask Mama if supper is ready." Jimmy marched up to the kitchen window and asked Mother, "Is supp ready?" He was such a darling baby brother and the prettiest baby I ever saw.

One foggy morning, Waymon and I made the milk run to Robstown. On our return home, we were barely moving. Visibility was zero. We were moving much too slowly for Waymon. He reached over and pulled the gas lever all the way down causing us to run into the back end of a truck bed. What a mess! Milk bottles, feed sacks, and block ice came flying down all around us. The radiator was smashed almost into the front seat. We were, however, able to creep home although the car was steaming like a Calliope. When we drove into the yard, Daddy rushed out to check the damage to our car, but first he gathered me into his arms and inquired if we were hurt - an example of his love and concern for his family.

I can remember Daddy pulling us kids into his lap often and saying that he never wore out a pair of khakis or overalls - his kids wore them out sitting on his lap.

Sunday afternoons were spent singing hymns. On one occasion when Daddy was holding Ardis and dancing, he slipped and fell striking his head on the baseboard. We were all very distressed, but no permanent damage was done.

On another occasion, when the great contralto vocalist, Alma Gluck, was appearing in Houston, Aunt Emily (Daddy's sister Emily Priscilla Stockton Carothers) invited my father to join her for a program. Mother was great big pregnant and unable to travel, but Daddy slipped off to join Aunt Emily for a little culture. Needless to say, Mother was quite upset!

The last year Daddy lived, we all drove to Kingsville to shop for school clothes. Daddy enjoyed a movie – Sophie Tucker in “The Last of the Red Hot Mamas” - while we were shopping. He enjoyed the movie so much he convinced Mother that all of us should see it. We rushed back to Driscoll to do the evening milking quickly so we could go back to Kingsville for his second viewing of the movie. Although Mother wasn't as impressed, we all continued to enjoy Sunday afternoon musicals up until Daddy's death.

Daddy's health was rapidly deteriorating. It was necessary to make another move to Kingsville, Texas, so that we children would be able to further our education. I was in the eleventh grade. Driscoll schools only went through grade eleven.

We ran a little dairy out on Mr. Steldzig's land. Although Daddy's health continued to decline, he led the way to the milk barn and herded the cows along the highway. Jimmy was only three or four years old, and Daddy would sing him cute little songs and let him ride horseback with him.

While there were many days when he was too ill to get out of bed, Daddy was never cross or irritable with his family. His great love, gentleness, thoughtfulness, and concerns for his family were always present. His great regret upon his deathbed was that he was leaving his family so ill provided for. One Sunday afternoon, he told cousin Mitt Perry he was such a failure, but Mitt tried to comfort him by telling him that he was one of the richest men he knew because he had such a fine family. Those words were a wonderful blessing and comfort to my father.

When Dad knew the end was near, he pulled me down to him and said, “Honey, you have been such a joy. You have been everything a parent could wish for.” He made sure each of us knew he loved us. At that time, Waymond was already married. I was eighteen; Lida Ruth was fifteen; Ardis was eleven; and Jimmy was five. Dad died of a heart attack there in the little bungalow on the dairy farm where we lived.

After Daddy's death, Mother decided to open a rooming and boarding house near A&I College in Kingsville. This proved to be a wise decision and the best solution for her to make a living for her young family and to be with Jimmy as babysitters were unheard of then.

I have always been proud to walk down the streets of Bartlett knowing that I am Dee Stockton's daughter. My father was highly respected by businessmen, friends, and family. And, he was certainly loved by his family.

Lovingly submitted by daughter,  
Laura Stockton Bentley  
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