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CORE 1130
February 6, 2021

Mini-Assignment: 'Interview a Family Member' Narrative
An interview with my dad: A family value of social justice

I chose to interview my father, James Fairley, to find out more about Lulu Woolsey, my great grandmother, who was the mother of his mother, Catharine Hurst. I have been fascinated with Lulu ever since I found out a few years ago that she was passionate about social justice, and I wanted to find out more about that, to understand more about how she might have influenced me today, through her daughter Catharine and grandson James.



Lulu Woolsey, my great grandmother

Lulu was born in Illinois in the United States, on August 20, 1876, which is 100 years before I was born in 1976. Lulu graduated from the University of Chicago in 1899 with a degree in political science, at a time when it was still rare for women to go to college. Her thesis was about race relations in Illinois at the time of the American Civil War. Lulu was also a refined concert pianist, and continued to play in recitals all her life. She married an electrician by the name of Hurst, and they had four children together. They moved to an area near the town of Chester in northern Montana to homestead in 1910, when Lulu's daughter Catharine was only 6 weeks old. Lulu was not happy about moving to this isolated place and did not want to homestead. They struggled for four years to try to make it work, but in the 4th summer, there was a severe hail storm that completely destroyed the crop of wheat they had been growing, and the wind blew ice everywhere, covering the house. This was the last straw for Lulu. She told her husband that she had had enough and was moving to the bigger town of Great Falls--with or without him. Pregnant with her fourth child at that time, she

collected her 3 other children and moved to Great Falls without her husband. But he decided to join them by the end of that summer of 1914.

Lulu had always cared about social justice, which is clear from her thesis topic. When she moved to Great Falls, she became passionately involved in the women's suffrage movement--the struggle for women's right to vote, which was finally won in 1920. It seems that as a mother, Lulu was considered as not doing her job properly because she was out so often doing other things. My dad tells me that she and her husband argued a lot. Her husband thought that she should stay home doing the things that women were 'supposed' to do. Perhaps this is why he opposed his daughter Catharine when she wanted to go to college, saying that "women shouldn't be educated because then they are not good wives." However, he let her go, and even paid for her to get her Master's degree, although she ended up unable to complete it due to illness. Lulu died in 1927 from a heart attack as she was walking home from a piano recital. She was only 50 years old.

Although Catharine was only 16 years old when her mother died, Lulu had instilled in her a commitment to social justice--a commitment which my father says drove her life. She always taught him that it matters what you *do*, not just what you believe. She would say "You have to love ALL humanity--with actions." And she would ask him regularly, "What have you done today to help someone?" She went out of her way to befriend people who were different and who were discriminated against by others. This was in a small town with a great deal of prejudice. She started a United Nations club in this town, and struggled against great opposition from respected people in the town. My dad believes that his own care for social justice was passed on to him from his mother. He recalls being the only one in his class to defend Native Americans or the civil rights movement, while his classmates thought he was completely "bizarre" to do so.



Catharine Hurst (Fairley), my grandmother

My dad recounted a time in the summer of 1993, when we were visiting Catharine in the retirement home where she was living at the time. My African American cousin, Richard,

came to join us too. The white nurses were suspicious of him. A nurse came into the apartment asking if my grandmother was okay. Then another nurse came in to check. My dad didn't realize what was going on, but my grandmother did. She got very upset when the second nurse came in, and told her "This is my grand nephew and he has every right to be here!" No more nurses came in after that.



My cousin Richard, me, my sister Elizabeth, and my cousin Lynda

My dad spent a lot of his life working for social justice. He joined the civil rights movement and marched through the south and met Dr Martin Luther King. He participated in protests against the Vietnam war, and joined the feminist movement too. He was a stay-at-home dad for a few years while my mother worked and completed her Master's degree. We lived on a Native American reservation and then moved to Tanzania, in East Africa, because of my parents' commitment to bringing people together and supporting those in the world with fewer privileges than they had.



James Fairley, my dad; with Becky Fairley, my mom

This narrative is a tribute to Lulu and Catharine and James. I am so glad I interviewed my dad about Lulu. Learning more about her life makes me feel so honored to be her great granddaughter, and it helps me understand more about where my value of social justice comes from. I can see that it isn't just because I decided to suddenly care about human rights and connecting with the 'other'. It is because Lulu (and my other forefathers) instilled this care in their children, which was passed on to me. And because of the choices my parents made--bringing so much diversity into my life, I have been able to take more steps towards connecting with people who are different from me, truly making friends with them, and breaking down some of the prejudices that divide us. As my dad mentioned during the interview, "We are more influenced by our parents and grandparents than we realize." I am so grateful to you, Lulu!