

JAMES MELTIDAS KITTLEMAN  
STORY OF MY LIFE

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I am beginning to write today, and expect to continue from time to time the story of my own life-with the thought it may be of some interest to my children, and I shall hope I may say some things in this account that will be an inspiration to them.

I was born at Bloomfield, Iowa, August 28th, 1857. My mother's maiden name was Mary Miller, one of three daughters of Rev. Meltidas Miller, who was an itinerant Methodist Episcopal Church preacher for over fifty years. My father's name was James Finley Kittleman. I know very little about our early family history. My father died when I was six years old, leaving besides my mother, myself, and two brothers, Edward Finley Kittleman, four years old, and Willis Virgil Kittleman, two years old.

There was quite a disparity in ages of my Mother and Father at the time of their marriage, my Mother being sixteen years of age and my Father near thirty. My Mother lost her Mother when quite young, and my Grandfather, Meltidas Miller, married the second time, and tradition has told me that life of the Miller girls, including my Mother, her sisters Helen and Martha, was not happy with the new stepmother. This may account for, and probably did, her early marriage. Our home in Bloomfield, Iowa where my Father had built our first home, a very modest cottage, and on which he himself brought on what I have been told, was the beginning of his last illness by over work, which one day resulted in sun stroke, from which after a long sickness took him away.

I have only the faintest remembrance of my Father's long illness. We lived across the street from his brother, my uncle Wick Kittleman, and I can faintly remember the family relatives, who of course were so much interested in us.

I do remember distinctly my Father's funeral, and no doubt that was because, he being a member of the then Bloomfield band, they marched and played at the head of the funeral procession. This of course made an unforgettable impression on my childish mind.

My father had also been among the ninety day men for the army, enlisting at the call of Abraham Lincoln at the end of the Civil War, and I think there was a touch of the military about the services. This I am not able to give any of the details.

My Mother was left without any resources, having only our little home. In those days there were no opportunities for women in commercial life, and she being left with three sons, two-four-six years of age, faced the world a helpless inexperienced Mother. As well as I can remember, this was in 1865. I shall have to estimate many of my dates, but all will be approximately near the time the events occurred.

My Mother was a very devout Christian, and beginning at this period of her life she threw herself on the promises made in God's word, and by Faith and Prayer entered upon what proved to be a life of struggle. With three boys to rear and care for, I being the oldest of the boys, perhaps caught more of her struggle of those days though only a child myself.

I can remember her life of almost constant prayer, her devotion to the church, and always dividing her meagre income in financial support of the Gospel.

Within a year, and I am sure not over two years after my father's death she sold our little home, and moved to a small town about twelve miles east of Bloomfield, where at that time there was an Academy located, called the Troy Academy. Her purpose in going to Troy, as I have heard her say, was at least two-fold. First, she planned to take in possible roomer students and possibly board them, and then maybe do sewing, having purchased a sewing machine for which she went into debt. It took all the money she received for our home in Bloomfield to pay for the house she bought in Troy, a house of only four rooms which of course was entirely inadequate for what she had planned. As I remember I was between seven and eight years of age at this time.

Her second purpose in going to Troy was to place us boys in the public school, and perhaps sometime put us in the Academy. And I have always believed since growing up, that she had another purpose of far more importance to her, to get we boys away from our environment at Bloomfield, where the evil conditions at that time were not good for orphan boys.

Her life at Troy was a struggle with dire poverty-she having to resort to the most menial of tasks, washing and scrubbing to support her family. What a brave woman she was, and what suffering both mental and physical she endured, driven almost to despair, she took a step, that even made life more of a misery and hardship, but thinking of course she might better her condition, she married the second time to a man named John Miller, taking again in married life her maiden name. This proved after a few years a disastrous failure, but in the meantime another son was born to her, and she had her fourth son. In getting her divorce, she had restored her former name, Kittleman, and was given the custody of Charles Mark Miller, and the courts gave him also legally the Mother's name Charles M. Kittleman.

At the time of my Mother's second marriage I was near eleven years old. I had of course a childish aversion to my Mother's marriage. Just why I have never been able to clearly define, but having seen a few times the man she married, I hated him from sight. It may not have been reason, but it was instinct, and what proved to me afterward that it must have been given to me from God, was, that almost immediately after they were married, I was compelled to leave what home I had and earn my own way.

But before relating my life from this point on I wish to dwell on events at Troy, which were to me the most important and far reaching of any in my life after life.

I have mentioned that my Mother was a deeply religious woman, and that her Father was a Methodist minister. No doubt this early environment had much to do with my conversion at a very early age. When I was only eleven years old I was stricken with typhoid fever and had a very serious case. We were very poor, medical aid very limited, and only the careful nursing of my Mother saved me. It was at this time that I found the Savior. Young as I was, I had a revelation of the love of Christ to me, at a time when I was helpless and in great need. So clearly was He revealed to me, and so conscious was I of His presence, that I have never doubted His nearness that day, when if ever one could or did surrender to Him, I did. I am certain of all that came to me in that little room of our very humble cottage in Troy, Iowa, as I am now that I am writing these words.

As well as I can remember I lived in Troy four or five years. In the meantime we went to public schools. School courses at that time

were not graded, but I had I suppose before I left Troy, having had a few months in the academy, what would be eight or ninth grade in our present school grade.

As I stated before, shortly after my Mother's second marriage I left home and went back to Bloomfield to live with relatives there. I had a very hard life as a boy at Troy. I took care of a two room building where school was held, by being the janitor, building the fires, and sweeping the floors, and doing other odd jobs to pick up a few cents needed by my Mother.

I must have been around twelve or thirteen years old when I went to live with a cousin, Mr. James Reagan, who at that time was agent for the Singer Sewing Machine Company, and who sold most of the machines out in the country, having a special buggy for that purpose. He had a span of rather small horses. He left his home each morning, returning each night. I was paid, or rather earned my board, by keeping the stable clean, curring the horses and feeding them. I again had a little more schooling while I lived there. I did every odd job I could find.

James Reagan and his wife were very good to me. He was son of my Aunt Sarah Murdock, with whom I spent many years later. When I was about fourteen I found a job with T.O. Walker, then editor and owner of the Bloomfield Democrat. As I remember I was there about one year. While working in the printing office, I became quite proficient for a boy in type setting. I was able to set two galleys or two full columns of newspaper space in one day. I set a fairly clean proof, which was the basis of good type setting. The paper was printed on what was known as a Washington hand press. The circulation of the Democrat was at that time 1500 copies. The publishing day was Friday, so on every Thursday night I was rolling or inking the forms until two O'clock in the morning. It was during my time in this office, as the "printers devil", that the great Chicago fire occurred. The Democrat showed its enterprise in that day by putting out the dispatches that came, telling of the great fire that was burning up a city. I from time to time during the nights and days of the great fire, delivered to the stores and shops around the public square the progress of the fire.

To tell further of what was possible the next most important event in my life next to my conversion happened while I was in the printing office. It will be necessary now to give you the location of the printing office. It was on the west side of the square in a two story brick building, at Bloomfield, Iowa. On the ground floor immediately below was a clothing store- James E. Cooper and Company, being the owners of same. Mr. Cooper was a young man near thirty years of age, and in charge of the store. The other partner was Charles Sax, a Jew of Ottumwa, Iowa with whom Jim Cooper had learned the business of selling clothing and furnishing goods.

His attention came to me in this wise. As the "Devil" in the printing office, it was my duty to be at the office very early during the cold months of the year to build the fires and sweep out the office which during an ordinary days work, it was always much dirt and litter scattered about. I had to split kindling and break to pieces large lumps of coal. This may seem trivial to relate, but down stairs was Mr. Cooper trying to sleep. In those days it was the custom for some one to sleep in the stores. Mr. Cooper was quite an attractive, unattached man,- had many invitations to parties, dinners, dances, and other evenings out. No doubt he many times was out late, and my having

to be very early at the office in order to have it warm, made me a nuisance which I could not help. However, he no doubt thought I could make less noise in my operations, though I must say he never warned me about it, but on the other hand he seemed fond of me as a boy.

One day to my great surprise and extreme joy he asked me how I would like to come and work for him in the clothing store at two dollars per week, eight dollars per month. No boy was ever happier than I at that time. No wages since has seemed so large. I had begun to earn something, and besides had found a place in a clothing store, which seemed to me at that time a very honorable calling. I still have that feeling for the clothing business. I fell in love with the clothing business, and this feeling remains to this day, the infatuation enlisted all my energies, ambitions and determination to become a salesman, and if possible learn all that was vital in merchandising this line of business.

After I secured a place in the clothing store my Mother and brothers moved to Bloomfield. I was doing what I could, and indeed was then the main dependence of my Mother and brothers. At first you must know my low salary was very inadequate - but as I was advanced from time to time I was able to contribute considerable to her support. I was now between fifteen and sixteen years old.

I lived again with my Mother and brothers. My brothers were of course soon able to go to work, and both did as soon as they could be employed. At first they did odd jobs working a time at baling hay for shipment by rail. This plant was located along the tracks of the then, what was called the North Missouri Railroad. No doubt this nearness to the freight trains influenced them to seek employment as brakeman at that time. They both finally were employed on this road and for years, in fact, all their lives, worked for railroad companies. My brother Ed was a fireman for years, and when he died was working for the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Willis, my other brother spent forty years on the Burlington system, and was a passenger conductor and had been for years when he passed away.

My Mother only lived a few years after returning to Bloomfield. I was about sixteen years old, my three brothers and half-brother were of course younger. We were all left orphans at that time. For a time we were taken to the home of my Aunt, Mrs. Sarah Murdock, a sister of my Father who was a Mother to all of us, and while I could contribute something for our support, she contributed much more, and I wish to pay tribute to her generosity, and much personal sacrifice on her part to keep us together. She herself had several of her own family dependent on her, and with very slender income, she toiled for us all. Just previous to our going to live with her, and before our Mother died, I was stricken with a long and painful illness brought on largely by over work in the store. In those days hours were long and I was often kept in the store from early in the morning until late at night. Was very irregular in my meals, and injured myself by a thoughtless way of living of early youth - and I must confess for a time, several years indeed, of association that were very bad for a growing boy. As a result I had a time when I should have grown strong in my body, I was stricken with a nervous breakdown that came near wrecking my life. I was confined to bed for six long months, my doctor saying at the time that I was as near a skeleton as he had ever seen to live.

I am recording now my supreme conviction that I was miraculously saved by the power of Divine Grace and was virtually "Snatched as a

brand from the burning." My recovery was slow, and the way back to health was a long, long way to go. When I was able, I again was employed as a clothing salesman at Bloomfield, but by other firms. First, Gutman & Company and John R. Wallace.

At this time began my active Christian life. I joined the church at Bloomfield, and at the age of 15 years was a teacher in the Sunday School under James B. Weaver, who was the superintendent. I want at this time to say that I had found out by this time that my best friends were in the church, and I owe to one man, Arthur Gibbons, more than to any other man at that time, the beginning of my start in business for myself. I had come to be twenty four years of age. I was boarding at this time with my aunt of whom I have already mentioned. She kept a town boarding house, having at times many boarders, among them was a young man, Will McCammon, who was employed as a clerk in a dry goods store a few doors from where I was then employed in a clothing store. We were intimate friends, and often talked over the future of our lives, and finally concluded to go into the clothing business for ourselves. As I think of it now, with our small capital, and at that time having no place selected to start this business, it seems again, that I at least was guided by an unseen influence in what followed without pretending to give the details of all that was involved before the place and time of starting our new enterprise was arrived at.

The town selected was Indianola, Iowa, a town the seat of Simpson College, and located in one of the rich farming and stock-raising counties of Iowa. This was the year of 1881 after our final decision to go to Indianola. Mr McCammon and I went to this town in June 1881, planning to get our store open the following September. We went to secure a location for the store and rent a room in which to do business. We found a new store room was being erected by Mr. William Buxton, and could be made ready for occupancy the following September. Mr Buxton lived at Carlisle, a small town in the north part of Warren county, about twelve miles from Indianola. We secured a conveyance and drove to Carlisle, arriving there about noon. We agreed to take this room. We were invited to take dinner with Mr. Buxton and his family. Little did I think at that time. that later on I was to come into this family by marriage to one of his daughters, the incidents of which I will relate later.

I had spent all my life, excluding the few years of childhood spent at Troy, in Bloomfield where I was born. There were four families of Kittlemans that had their homes in this county seat town. Wesley, Harvey, Wick, and James F., my Father. One by one the families had moved away. Wesley and Wick going to Kansas in an early day, Harvey going to Des Moines, engaging in the hotel business in Des Moines.

I felt when I left Bloomfield I was severing all the ties of what relatives that were still there, and all the friends of my youth, even to a girl friend that I was very fond of, and who I had thought some day might ripen into a closer fellowship, but the venture into business for myself, and new responsibilities I was assuming occupied my mind.

We opened our store in September 1881. Indianola at that time had a population estimated at two thousand inhabitants, and as I have already stated, was the seat of Simpson College, a Methodist Conference School, named in honor of Bishop Simpson, who a few years later came to Indianola, and preached the annual sermon. This was his last, and so far as I know his only visit to this institution.

The fact that this was a college town, and largely a Methodist town, was a very great factor in our location there. I at once became very active in church work, and then as now, found many opportunities open to be of service. Our business from the start was a success, although the field was not large, and the volume limited. Because of our ambition to build up a business, together with hard work on the part of Mr. McCammon and myself, we always had our share and more of the trade. We courted of course the college trade, and for years the "Star Clothing House", that being our chosen name, was a center for young students, as well as the trading place of many of the faculty at Simpson.

We were both young men, and while our business was the supreme object, we soon saw that a live town, looking forward to improvements such as electric lights, water works, paving, all of these being lacking - would greatly improve the chances for all business men, who were there at that time. After two or three years our acquaintance with the people grew, and our desire to push Indianola all we could brought us into all town affairs.

I found many friends in the church and have already remarked on the value to any young man the advantages that may come, in addition to the blessing of trying to be a Christian, such friends.

I always had an interest in political matters - not because I sought any position or honor, but just a sort of fascination for organization of parties and political affairs. I was later on elected, to my first political office, a member of the city council. This gave me the larger opportunity to do something to promote the growth of Indianola. There it was, we had our first contest over improvements, proposing to bond the city for \$20,000 to install an electric light plant. After a spirited campaign hotly contested we won. The city council then undertook to build the power house, and put in the plant.

I was made chairman of the new electric committee created for this special work. The contract was let to the Edison Company of Chicago, their manager of construction was a man by the name of Barr, who proved to be a very capable man, and with whom the committee worked without friction throughout the erection and completion of the work. With this completed improvement, Indianola had it's first civic inspiration, and had throughout the southern part of the state much helpful publicity. It is to be said that it proved to be one of the most successful municipal light plants in the state. It's income always paid the running expenses. Interest on the bonds, and long since paid off the original bond issue, and has been from that day to the day I now write an income producing investment.

I have always counted the effort and time I devoted to the City Council, despite some of the bitter contests that arose; and personal sacrifice endured, a blessing. The Newspaper files of that period will disclose that often, those whose only motive was one of sacrifice for their City, was greatly misunderstood by my well meaning people. I was also elected several times to the School Board, which was a position of both honor, and a chance to render service.

I also was made a member of the Republican State Central Committee from the Seventh Congressional District. During my service on the state committee, my friend, Leslie M. Shaw was elected Governor of Iowa.

In the year 1889 the firm of Kittleman & McCammon was dissolved. Mr. McCammon going to Perry, Iowa, opened a store with his brother

under the name McCammon & Brother. He had a prosperous business for many years up to his own passing away. The store he opened over forty years ago is still in operation by his sons. I continued at Indianola the clothing and dry goods which had been added, until 1897, when I disposed of the business and left Indianola to live in Chicago. I moved there in April 1898 with my family.

Before closing the events that came into my life at Indianola, I continue the account of starting a small suspender company with Charles B. Little a brother-in-law. This article of a suspender was a new article of wear for men. It was made entirely from leather, and for a time had a large sale, this was continued in Chicago for twenty five years.

I return to my life at Indianola to describe some of the events that changed my whole career. The first public meeting I attended in Indianola, was at the County Court House, a memorial service for President Garfield who had been assassinated. There I met and was introduced to a Simpson College student, Miss Elizabeth Ann Buxton. I had of course met her Father, and we were for many years his tenants. It so happened in finding a place to room and board, I found myself at the same boarding house where Miss Buxton had a room, and where she took her meals. This meeting at the Court House had not been forgotten, and soon I was in love with one of the best and truest girls I have ever met. It was romance, and what a glorious two years and a few months we had together. I was often a guest in Carlisle, and on January 1st., 1884 we were married. Whatever good that came to me after our marriage she is given the credit. No greater life as a wife, and mother, and home maker has ever graced human life than she. There was born to us five children, four sons and one daughter. Children who gave so much joy to our lives, and who all have been an honor to their parents. Sons, Earle Buxton, Charles Wesley, James Russell, Halford Harrison, and Mary Hortense. These at this date are all living, all married, and all have families, and whose children are also a blessing and joy to their parents and myself.

In September 1895, the Des Moines Methodist Conference was held at Indianola. At this session I was elected to my first General Conference. My colleague being Leslie M. Shaw, who was later elected Governor of the State of Iowa. At that time the lay representation, in a general conference was two from each annual conference. The General Conference of 1896 was held at Cleveland. It was the year of the Presidential Election. Wm. McKinley was the leading candidate for the Republicans, and was on the program of the conference as a guest speaker, delivering an address on George Washington. He was nominated the month following, June, and was elected President at the November election. Two other great speeches were made during the month of May. Chaplin McCabe, who gave his celebrated lecture on Libby Prison, and Dr. A.S. Palmer of New York, a patriotic speech on the "Die-no-Moves." Dr. McCabe was elected a Bishop at this conference.

One day I think about May 20th., I received a telegram from Indianola telling me that there had been an explosion and fire in my store, and two of the clerks badly burned. I hastened home and found the plate glass fronts shattered, and the store was banded up with lumber, and stock left in confusion. I at once began to clean up and in due time replaced the glass fronts, after two weeks the store was open for business. However, it was an unexpected and expensive glow, and a strange experience in life which comes to us all.

I had for some time felt I should make a change of residence having convinced myself that the limitations of a small town, after now spending sixteen years there, and having no material advance from year to year in the volume of business. Knowing I had put all my time, effort, and energy in the business, it could not be increased, because it was not there.

Business had declined for us from year to year. It was a discouraging period, and not a very rosy prospect to face in a great city, but it seemed the best for me to leave Indianola, breaking with the best years of my life - leaving friends, church and political affiliations, and besides most of my close friends advised me not to leave Iowa. I had done all the good I could for the place in which I had lived with so much happiness and joy, so I thought and I took the step, and with my family, found ourselves in a great city, unknown and without friends. Only my wife's sister Mrs. Charles B. Little, with her husband has preceeded us by a few months.

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