

Hazelle Boxberg

Hazelle Boxberg was born on November 16, 1907, to Marie and Fred Boxberg in the Bellvue Hospital Charity Ward. Fred was an English immigrant working as a porter at a hotel. Marie was a German immigrant who spoke five languages and had come to the United States with the family she worked for as a governess. After Fred and Marie married, Marie began working as a seamstress. Unfortunately, Fred died from pneumonia just two months before little Hazelle was born. This put Marie in a difficult situation, but she made it work. Hazelle remembered playing bridge with her mother in the evenings and on weekends, and visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural History, and the Bronx Zoo. Hazelle remembered being very happy with her mother.



In January, 1918, Marie visited Hazelle at school with a suitcase. She told Hazelle that she had just visited her doctor and needed to check into a hospital for a series of tests to find out the cause of her chronic headaches. Hazelle would be staying with Marie's employer, Miss Helm, until her mother was able to leave the hospital. Hazelle did stay with Miss Helm for a few weeks, but apparently Miss Helm did not or could not continue to care for her. At this point, Hugh Bryce, Marie's fiancé, placed Hazelle in a convent. A little while later, Hazelle was moved to another institution, and by May, 1918, she was living in Grace Home, which was operated by the Children's Aid Society. Looking back, Hazelle was not sure that her mother actually knew that she was no longer living with Miss Helm. Marie wrote to Hazelle often, but always addressed her letters to Miss Helm.

In December, 1918, Hazelle was put on an orphan train. She was 11 years old, and was aware that she was being sent further away from her mother. She tried to explain that she was not an orphan, but no one listened. On the train, she was paired up with a 3-year-old girl named Emma. Years later, Hazelle wrote of their journey, "So – we were, 14 of us, ages from 18 months to 14 yrs – put on the train for the 3 days and nights to Greenville – with only the sandwiches packed in NYC to feed us the whole trip. No fresh milk, though Mrs. Comstock and Mrs. Hill had hot coffee, etc. from the peddlers who boarded the train at stops."



On December 6, they arrived in Greenville, Texas. The first day, the group was presented at the Bickham Hotel, where Emma was picked out. The second day they were presented at the Masonic Hall, where Hazelle was taken in by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Tredway. The Tredways already had one son, Hugh, who was four years older than Hazelle. Her foster uncle also took in two children from the train, Morris and Nina Hazleton.

Hazelle later recalled, "one of the first things I told [my foster parents] was, my mother is not dead." Her new father resolved to find Hazelle's mother, and, working with a local lawyer, they discovered that Marie was living in a



hospital and was suffering from a brain tumor that could not be removed. Hazelle was able to write to her mother until Marie's death in September, 1920. Unlike many children, Hazelle was able to bring a few of her mother's things with her on the orphan train. These objects are now part of the National Orphan Train Complex's collection, and include a set of drinking cups from Ellis Island, a monogrammed watch, and a few sewing supplies. We also have a few letters from Marie, her doctors, Hazelle, and the Children's Aid Society.

Hazelle was able to secure some of the money her mother left her after she died, and used that money to attend high school, business college, and purchase a farm next to her foster family's land. In 1929, she married Bill Bellinger, and the couple moved to Indiana, but due to the Great Depression, they could not find steady work there, so, in 1931, they moved to Connecticut. The same year, Hazelle became pregnant, but the baby was stillborn.

During World War II, Bill enlisted in the Navy, leaving Hazelle by herself. She found jobs in various east coast cities until she moved back to Texas. After the war, Bill came back and the pair moved to Oklahoma, where they lived until Bill's death in 1963. Following his passing, Hazelle moved to Hawaii and then to Arizona. While working at a hospital in Phoenix, she met John Latimer, and the two were married in 1972. Hazelle and John lived for a short while in California, and then moved back to Greenville, Texas, where Hazelle had lived with her foster family.



In 1991, Hazelle wrote, "all the years – in different places I had wondered about my little partner, Emma. One day, a lady called and said I didn't know her as she was, Helen Vaughn. I shook, as I asked her if her name was Emma, and she said, "Yes." So we have had some very nice visits. I was so glad that she got a family who loved her."

Towards the end of her life, Hazelle stated, "So the years have gone by. Things have happened, but here we sit in our own home – not alone anymore." She passed away in 1997 at the age of 89.