

Coming to Arizona

From the autobiography of Helen Shelby Farrell Jeffcott, condensed by her granddaughter, Randi LeGendre Turk

In 1923, four young girls and their mother drove from Caddo, Oklahoma, to Phoenix, Arizona, in a Model T Ford. Ida Shelby suffered from tuberculosis, and her youngest daughter, Lois, 11, had poor health due to bouts of pneumonia. The three older girls, Velma, 20, Pauline, 18, and Helen, 15, did the driving.



Velma, Pauline, Helen, and Lois at Eureka Ranch, near Bonita, 1941.

When we had to come to Arizona, Mamma bought a 1921 Model T Ford with a self-starter. She thought that since we were all young girls, it would be better for us not to use the crank. Early one Saturday morning in August of 1923 we started. We had said goodbye to all our old friends the night before, and it was like saying goodbye to soldiers going off to war. All I'd ever read about Arizona was in Zane Grey's novels, and he had painted that country as pretty rugged.

We came across the northern part of Texas finding fair roads, with the exception of a strip one mile long. As we approached, I read a large sign sitting in the middle of the road, TACKS ONE MILE, and that's

exactly what it meant. We fixed 19 flats in that one mile. Fixing a flat in those days meant taking the tire off, patching the tube, remounting it on the wheel, and pumping it up with a hand pump.

We drove on to Santa Fe, where I first heard Spanish spoken. It gave me the feeling that I was completely out of the United States. The day we went to the cliff dwellings, President Harding died, and returning to Santa Fe, we marveled at the speed news travels to the four corners of the earth.

Between Santa Fe and Albuquerque we saw our first Indian dance, the Santo Domingo Corn Dance. From Albuquerque we followed the Santa Fe Trail, that is, when we could see it to follow, but mostly we made our own trail.

At one point, the trail went straight up the mountainside. Our gasoline supply was too low to feed into the carburetor, and Model Ts had no speedometer, so we had no idea where we were. We had about decided to try to back up the mountain, when we saw a car approaching. It was a Mexican family, but one person spoke English fluently. Their plan was to pool our gasoline and drive one car up, then carry the gasoline back down the mountain and drive the other one up.

It was late when we arrived at a little village called Socorro in a downpour of rain. The only available shelter was a dance hall, which we shared with the other family. The rain continued all the next day. At Lordsburg, we discovered we had lost our clothes, which had been tied on the side of the car. What a feeling it was to own only what we had on our backs.

Upon arrival in Tucson, we found that Zane Grey had written of days gone by, not a cowboy riding down the street on a horse with boots, spurs, chaps or six guns. We visited the university and San Xavier mission, and then drove on to Phoenix, which was our destination. Mamma bought material and in one day by hand sewed us each a dress to wear. Lois and I went to school that year in Phoenix, but the next year, Velma took a teaching job in Glendale, where I transferred to Glendale High.

Velma married Oren Teague and became Glendale's librarian. Pauline married James Burch, a doctor. Helen became a rancher's wife, widowed and remarried, in Southern Arizona, and teacher of the year for Nogales Public Schools. Lois married W.B. "Bill" Barkley, mayor of Glendale, later a legislator and Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives.