It was a day not soon forgotten. Spring flaunted itself across the Canadian meadows with exuberant splashes of bluebells, buttercups, and yellow sweet pea. A fresh breeze fluttered the clumped tendrils of prairie bunch grass. The rolling Alberta prairie was a giant rumpled patchwork quilt.

Across this prairie, on the beautiful morning in the year 1899, a pretty young girl galloped a fine horse. The girl was Zina Alberta Woolf and she was 12 years old. Buffalo grass waved to them as they passed, and both horse and girl were enjoying the exhilaration of spring. Her horse, one of the excellent animals raised by her father and brothers for the Canadian Government, suddenly shied or stumbled, throwing Zina heavily to the ground. Her left leg was savagely bruised. The accident was witnessed by one of her brothers, who immediately took her home and raced off to get the nearest doctor, but the damage had been done. Osteomyelitis, an infectious inflammatory disease of the bone had set in. She had been crippled for life.

Medical science in those days was unable to deal successfully with osteomyelitis. During Zina’s teens and young womanhood it was necessary for her to undergo numerous operations on her leg, requiring cutting to the bone to scrape away infected tissue. As a result, the musculature of her calf became drastically reduced, both through surgery and subsequent atrophy. Her mobility was understandably limited. Her determination was not. She never complained. Never did she permit her handicap to interfere with enthusiastic pursuit of her many interests. She ignored it, expected others to ignore it, and proceeded through a full and productive life in disregard of a very serious handicap.

Zina Alberta Woolf was the 1st child born in the community of Cardston, first of the Mormon colonies in Western Canada. This colony of pioneer founders, led by Charles Ora Card, son-in-law of Brigham Young, arrived at their Southern Alberta destination (then known as Lee’s Creek) 3 June 1887. Zina was born to John Anthony Woolf II and Mary Lucretia Hyde Woolf the following December 17th. She was the 10th of 12 children.

After completion of public and high schools in Cardston and Lethbridge, Zina went on to Calgary Normal School (Teacher’s Education), Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, received her BA degree from the University of Utah, did some post-graduate work at Chataugua, New York, then received her Masters degree from the University of California at Berkeley. Even during the academic year 1925-1926, by then married and with 3 children, she took leave of absence from her newspaper job, took the children, and moved to Stanford for an additional year of post-graduate study. For Zina, learning never ended.

For several years prior to World War I Zina taught English and Dramatic Arts at various locations in Salt Lake City and Provo. While teaching at BYU she met George Francis Hickman, also a teacher at that time principal at a boys’ academy in Spanish Fork. They were married in Provo 24 Jan. 1915.

George F., Sr. Was 18 years Zina’s senior. Born in Benjamin, Utah, in 1869 of Mormon Pioneer stock, he received his elementary and high school education in Utah, attended the University of Utah, receiving degrees from there and from the University of California at Berkeley. Following an LDS mission in Germany, he continued post-graduate studies at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, planning on becoming a physician as his father had been.
Unfortunately, he was called home at the death of his father and was unable thereafter to continue his medical education. He became a teacher in Southern Utah, while maintaining a small farm, and married Harriet Douglas, who bore him 8 children. After the dissolution of this marriage, “GF” remained in constant and supportive contact with these children throughout his life.

Zina had been advised by her doctors not to expect a normal married life and she was cautioned against childbirth. She was not a robust woman, being less than 5 feet 2 inches tall and seldom weighing over 100 pounds. Nevertheless, she would not abandon her hopes for motherhood. On Valentine’s Day in 1917, while living in Berkeley, Cal., where both Zina and GF were pursuing studies, she bore a son, George Francis, Jr. 1 Dec. 1919, they were blessed with a daughter, Marvel (Mary Laura). On 12 Aug. 1921, having in the meantime returned to Provo, another son, John DeVaux Woolf, was born.

In 1922 Zina, GF and their 3 children moved from Provo to Salt Lake where they purchased a home at 383 G Street, then considered to be high up on the “avenues.” GF became General Agent for Pacific National Life Assurance Co., whose home offices were in Salt Lake. Zina began a 15 year career as a newspaper woman, writing a daily column, feature articles, and eventually editing the entire woman’s page for the old Salt Lake Telegram (later absorbed into the The Salt Lake Tribune). Her column was entitled, “Betty Blair’s Hearts Haven” (an “advice” column version of “Dear Abby”. Her professional identity as Betty Blair filtered into her private life, and many of her friends called her Betty.

As Betty Blair, Zina’s compassion and understanding of the problems of others was amply expressed. As always, she felt deep concern for the well-being of those about her. At the newspaper, her morning mail, her phone, and the corridor to her office would bring her serious domestic difficulties, depression and loneliness, young love’s tribulations, and painfully personal and complex entanglements. In order to provide solutions or solace, Zina used the finest specialists available. She called not only upon her own extensive capabilities, but upon the best specialists known to her. She cared. And her desk was often laden with flowers and gifts from grateful subscribers.

Some of the questions she received, and she answered them all in print or in person, were trivial. It was necessary to answer some with tongue in cheek and a twinkle in her eye—which Zina certainly had. In answer to the question, “How does one eat a banana in public?” submitted by a nuisance correspondent whose questions were always inconsequential, she answered, “First, I would peel it.” This became a catch-phrase about the Hickman house. Whenever one of the children would call out, “Mom, how do I—,” no matter what the question, one of the other kids would invariably yell, “First, you peel it.”

For 15 years Zina responded to these problems ranging from agonizing human crisis to trivial inanity. Her ability to suggest solutions, alternatives, and the means to cope with a social gaffe or a disturbed life made her column a notable feature in the Salt Lake Telegram. (When she left the paper, the name “Betty Blair” was retired and offered to Zina to use in any way she wished. However, since it had lost the personal touch, the human contact, she abandoned it.)

Among Zina’s clippings, pasted into her well-worn volume of Sohrab’s The Bible of Mankind is this excerpt from a sermonette by Dr. Jos. F. Newton entitled, “Four Kinds of Men.” “The Savage: a man who lives on others. The Barbarian: a man who lives whether anyone else lives or not. The Civilized: a man who has learned to live and let live.” And the fourth, “Our Next Man, most wise and tender of heart, who lives and helps to live.” Zina did indeed live and
help others to live. She was most wise and tender of heart.

In addition to being a repository of many clippings, notes, and marginal addenda, her extensive library provided Zina with countless hours, over a period of many years, of personal research into religious and philosophical systems. Zina poured considerable energy and intellectual curiosity into the study of the world’s religious beliefs. This serious concern lasted until her final days. She derived great comfort from her broadened awareness of and deepening belief in the Oneness of God by any name, and the integrity of his many prophets and other religious philosophers. Her children were encouraged to adopt the religious principles best suited to their convictions based on serious study of all religion. Bigotry in religion, as in anything, was anathema to her. She found The Golden Rule fundamental to every basic belief.

Zina was a poet and essayist as well as a newspaper columnist and editor. Her poetry and prose essays were published in national magazines, such as Harper’s Quarterly, and frequently appeared in local newspapers or periodicals. Many of her efforts won literary awards and she was represented several times in Utah Sings, anthologies of local poets. Appended to this biography are some of her most noted poems. She was also a sponsor of the creative arts, organizing, promoting, and actively serving the Art Barn, Beaux’s Arts functions, Drama League of America, Chi Delta Phi, Soroptimists, etc. She was generous of her time in support of the creative ventures of others. Among her close personal friends were many of the artistic spirits of her day, such as Maude May Babcock, the great drama teacher at the University of Utah, and Vardis Fisher, whose historical and socially responsive novels won him international acclaim.

As Betty Blair, and in order to lend “the woman’s viewpoint,” to the news, Zina was occasionally given reportorial assignments in areas where she was surely no specialist. She covered boxing matches, baseball games, and once reviewed “The Wrassles,” starring Strangler Lewis as the bad guy. Zina was certain that many readers of these features were completely bewildered by her interpretation of what she thought was going on.

One afternoon in 1937 Zina was addressing her office typewriter from the somewhat awkward support of a folding chair. Her regular desk chair had been removed for repairs and she had been supplied with a collapsible contrivance. It collapsed. Her thin leg, the survivor of over a quarter-century of atrophy and surgeons’ scalpels, was caught between a steel hinge and one of the hardwood braces as Zina crashed to the floor. This time it was too much. At the hospital her doctor advised her of her choices. She could permit them to operate, and be almost certain of a continuing series of operations such as she had faced in her youth, or they could amputate. Her reply was, “Well, I’ve done with it—now I’ll do without it. Take it off.” The following morning her leg was amputated below the knee.

The human spirit is a remarkable thing. Courage and control in the face of adversity is surely a reflection of greater inner strength. Zina responded with a resolution of will, a defiant acceptance of that which could not be changed. She actually made an almost cheerful game out of learning to walk again on her artificial limb. At the start, she announced that “prosthetic appliance” was too cumbersome a reference, “wooden leg” too crude and inaccurate, and anyone calling her “Pegleg Pete” would get swatted with her new cane. She named her limb “Suza-Belle,” and that was that.

The Salt Lake Telegram, believing that “Betty Blair” would be unable to continue as featured columnist and Woman’s Page Editor, dismissed her. For the rest of her life she devoted herself to her writing, to the many organizations in which she was active, to intensified religious and philosophical study and to her family.
Mr. Hickman’s insurance agency covered much of the state, and during the depression years he often received payment “in kind” from rural clients. This resulted in Zina and the kids sometimes finding 20 dressed turkeys hanging like fat white stalacites from the back porch ceiling, or a dozen 5 gallon tins of fresh clover honey stacked under a quarter of beef. “Dad’s grape jelly” was an annual event from which there was no place to hide.

During the traumatic World War II years GF’s health failed. By 1954 the strain of caring for him had become such a drain on Zina’s limited stamina that George Jr. and John returned to Salt Lake, made arrangements to sell the family home, and moved Zina and GF to California, where all of the children were then living. GF was placed in the care of a nursing home, and Zina moved in with George Jr. And his family in San Anselmo.

„Zina’s heart had never been strong. She knew she had a heart murmur, and had cared for herself accordingly. As a dependent parent of Captain Hickman, she received care at Letterman General Hospital at the Presidio, and in 1955 was hospitalized there following a heart attack. Recovering, but weakened and restricted to minimum activity and strict medical care, she was taken home to San Anselmo. In early Sep. 1956 she was stricken with another attack and was again hospitalized at Letterman. For 6 weeks she received the best care available and progressed well. 15 Oct. 1956, her doctor told her she was well enough to return home for recuperative rest and care. Zina, pleased to be free again from the sterile and often lonely hospital atmosphere, went to the corridor phone booth to pass on the good news, and have someone come to take her home. Before the call could be completed, Zina suffered a massive heart attack. She died in the phone booth. In Zina’s handwriting on the flyleaf of her Bible of Mankind appears this quotation:”This way is one, and the winds blow together.”

With love and poignant memories of our mother, we pray that her way be eternal.

John DeVaux Hickman, Son

HER HANDS

She lay there in her soft white robes,
Her face was like a queen;
“I will not weep for her,” I thought,”’In death she is serene.”

But when my eyes had traveled down
To where her dear hands lay
The hands that told of sacrifice,
That I could ne’er repay.

Emotion sped her quiver full,
My strong will to revoke;
I looked down at her toil-worn hands
So still–and my heart broke.

(Written at the death of her mother, Mary Lucretia Hyde Woolf)

NOT IN FINAL TRIBUTE

If there remains a word to say to me,
When I no more with you shall sing my song,
Oh not in FINAL TRIBUTE let it be:
For life is short, Eternity is long,
And this the husk of me that sheltered all
That really lived—and lives—my hopes and fears,
My love and loyalties, was but the still
Where tethered spirit champed at bridled years.

But if when first convulsive grief has passed,
You then should speak of little things I did,
And laugh, and so remembering raise the liod
Of memory on my ultra-mundane past,
You may be sure that I, from off my star
Shall lean to hear, laugh too, and love you for.

Zina Alberta Woolf Hickman

Typed into the computer 26 Oct. 2002 by Kathleen Jardine Woolf Idaho Falls, Idaho
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