

JENNIE BELLE HUGHES - THE EARLY YEARS

Jennie was one of five daughters of Joseph and Adeline (McCain) Hughes. Joseph's father was Richard T. Hughes who married the widow of James Ramsey, deceased father of Sarah Jane Ramsey. Thus, Jennie's father and her future mother-in-law, although not in any way related, grew up in the same household and remained close friends throughout their lifetime.

Jennie was born in Effingham IL on 22 Jul 1892¹, to Joseph and Adeline (McCain) Hughes. In 1900 when she was 8 years old her parents were divorced² and Joseph and his four younger daughters moved to Cabery, Ford Co. IL. The 1900 census shows Joseph Hughes and daughters Myrtle, Jennie, Laura and Gladys, living in the household of Thomas Stagner. The Stagner's operated a boarding house in Cabery. The Hughes family later moved to Cooksville in McLean Co. IL then back to Cabery again all in a very short time period³. Joseph Hughes was a bridge carpenter for the railroad and very likely, these were the towns nearer where he worked at different times. Later he quit the railroad and moved onto a truck farm near Bloomington IL where he was in business with Thomas Stagner⁴.

In the meantime Jennie's two older sisters had married and were living in Decatur, Macon Co. IL. When the Hughes-Stagner partnership dissolved Jennie was sent to live with her oldest sister, Mamie (Hughes) Sams. Not long thereafter Joseph also came to Decatur and began working for the Norman Laundry as a fireman in the boiler room. While there he met Mary Ellen Dixon a divorcee who also worked a Normans, and in 1905 they were married⁵.

Mary Ellen had two boys at home; Herschel and Homer. Eventually the family which then included Jennie, Laura and Gladys her two younger sisters and also Mary Ellen's two boys, moved to a tenant farm in the Sunnyside area of Macon Co. IL, owned by the Dipper family, where Joseph gradually began to build up a herd of milk cows. Eventually he went into the dairy business and became a successful Dairyman⁶. The 1910 census lists him as a Dairyman and farmer living on the Rock Springs Road in Macon Co. IL.

Jennie, after she left school in the 8th grade, began to do domestic work in neighbor's homes to earn her living. She had several domestic jobs, including one with the Gulick family, with whom she is listed as living in the 1910 census. Eventually Jennie began working at Aston Hall, a girls dormitory for Millikin University. While there she made friends with a student whose father was a Doctor in Charleston IL and through this friendship, Jennie began to take Nurse training in a Charleston Hospital. She soon found that her sympathetic nature would not let her give shots and do some of the other things nurse trainees were required to do, so she dropped out. She then went to southern IL to care for a patient she had become acquainted with while at the hospital, who was there after having given birth.⁷

When the baby became a few months old, this job ended, and Jennie came back to Decatur and soon began to work for a prominent family named Shaw. The Shaw's had a daughter who was in the advanced stages of tuberculosis. Originally Jennie was to do the housework so that Mr. and Mrs. Shaw could spend all of their time caring for their invalid daughter. However, once when Ivra, the daughter, had a bad coughing spell, Jennie had to take care of her, because Mr. Shaw was away from home at the time, and thereafter, Ivra would have no one but Jennie care for her. Thus Jennie's job changed from housekeeper to nurse⁸.

Eventually the Shaw's sent Ivra to a sanitarium in Saranac Lake NY and they sent Jennie with her as nurse companion. Jennie and Ivra remained there for about two years. It was during this time that Willy and Jennie

began a series of letter writing which eventually led to a proposal of marriage. Jennie came home and they were married on 12 Aug 1917 in Decatur IL⁹. They were married in the parsonage of what later became the Cleveland Avenue Methodist Church, by Reverend Jockish.

1Birth Certificate; Jennie Belle Hughes, dated 20 Jul 1892: Original record on file in the Effingham Co. IL County Clerk's Office.

2.Effingham Co. IL Divorce case; Joseph Hughes VS Ada Hughes: original papers on file in the Effingham Co. IL Circuit Court Clerk's Office Archives.

3. INFORMATION OBTAINED IN CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE WRITER AND HIS MOTHER.

4. *ibid*

5. *op cit*. Conversations with the writer's mother

6. *op cit*. Conversations with the writer's mother.

7. *op cit*. Convesations with the writer's mother.

8. *op cit*. Conversations with the writer's mother.

9. *op cit*. Marriage license.