

## A Mess'a Cousins and a Cow

First of all, when we went to Grandpa and Grandma Atkinson's house in Pawnee City, Nebraska for Thanksgiving or Christmas – and everyone was 'over to Grandma's' – there were a mess of kids! First there were the Los Angeles cousins which were Uncle Dan and Aunt Elsie's kids (Uncle Dan is Gaylord's brother) and there were five of them: Kristine, Owen, Joyce, Ellen and David. Then there were the Kansas City cousins – you know them – Gaylord and Erma's kids: Kathy and Janet. The next batch of cousins were the Binders (Gaylord's Sister Wilma's family): Uncle Hook, Aunt Wilma, plus Marjorie, Barbara, Phil, Tim, Joy, Mary, Sharon Rose, and eventually little Mark Paul. *(I have no idea how Uncle Hook got his name. His real name was Leland but if you are thinking "Peter Pan" here, so did I. I was always scared of Uncle Hook.)* Lastly there was Gaylord's sister Vivien and her husband Ken Lackey with their Pomeranian dog, Kibby. Kibby was almost as good as a cousin but not nearly as friendly. All the kids wanted to hold and pet Kibby who looked like a fluffy white stuffed animal of a dog but was actually a evil tempered old man dog and didn't let anyone touch him except Barbara. *(Vivien had childhood or Type 1 diabetes and the first pregnancy she and Ken had almost killed Vivien and the little girl died. So they didn't try for any more children. They just had a series of Kibbys.)*

### We kids parceled off in batches of three:

**The Older Girls:** Marjorie, Kristine and Kathy

**The Boys:** Owen, Phil and Tim

**The Three Sillies:** Joyce, Janet and Ellen (and Barbara)

**The Little Girls:** Joy, Mary and Sharon

Barbara, who I found out later was actually older than Owen and myself (Barbara born in October, Owen in November and Kathy in December, 1952) was so tiny that none of us knew that she wasn't the same age as the sillies – so she mostly hung out with them.



Here we are, an early version of the 'mess of kids,' before Mary, Sharon and Mark Paul.

**Back Row:** Grandma holding Joy Binder. Grandpa holding Tim Binder.

**Middle row:** L-R Owen, Kristine, Kathy doing her darndest to stand as tall as she could between Kristine and Marjorie, and Marjorie

**Front row:** L-R Little Janet, Ellen, Phil Binder, Joyce, and Barbara Binder.

Now Grandpa and Grandma's house and the grounds around it were SOOO wonderful for kids. You could chase all the way around the house and play super games of tag, keep-away, hide-and-seek (there were so many places to hide.) You could go down to the garden, into Grandpa's blacksmith shop, over to the goldfish pond, and around the flower gardens. Straight west there were two pastures, the north one and the south one. Grandpa had a cow when we were little and he rotated her from pasture to pasture so that the grass had a chance to grow back. The grass was so tall in the resting pasture that the grass would be almost waist tall on a grown-up. I have a memory of watching Grandpa Atkinson walking through the pasture into the sunset and just running his hand lightly over the tops of the tall seeded grasses – disturbed insects flying up, in a golden swirl around him, and the crickets singing in the grass.

Now one day all of us kids decided to go play keep-away with the cow in the cow pasture. Grandpa had a nice cow who wouldn't have hurt anyone – cows are mostly intelligent, curious, gentle creatures. Well the cow got curious about all of us kids in her pasture and she ambled over to see what was happening. We kids ran laughing out of her way but she was curious, so she kept patiently following us around, and eventually she managed to get one little kid backed up into the corner of the pasture up against the fence. The little kid she pinned was Janet. Now that cow was huge to us kids, especially up close. We had never seen anything larger outside of a zoo and when she came up to Janet, Janet was no taller than her shoulder. The cow, who had been trying to get close to a child this whole time, saw her chance to give a child a good sniff.

### **And then there was a huge misunderstanding.**

As Janet put it when she ran crying hysterically into the house to report what happened (with a whole stream of hyper-excited cousins behind her) she cried out, "The cow TASTED me!" From the cow's side I have often wondered if she saw this scared little calf-of-a-human crying and tried to comfort her. Either way, the cow slurped her big tongue up Janet's face from chin to forehead, slathering her bangs with cow-spit straight up into the air – a genuine "cow lick" if there ever was one.

The grownups eventually got everyone calmed down and Grandpa told us if we didn't want the cow kissing us we should stay out of her pasture and just feed her windfall apples over the fence like we usually did.

Wish you could have seen it! ☺ These days a video of the "cow lick" would have gone viral on YouTube.