

About Wilburn Cox having infantile paralysis

By Missy Jones

Our parents were William Cornelius Cox and Minnie Steward Cox. They were married in 1912, and on August 2, 1915 my brother, Cornelius Wilburn Cox was born. My sister, Geneva Cox was born in 1919. When Wilburn was 18 or 20 months old, they were living near the Pettit community, between Gustine and Comanche, Texas. And, he had infantile paralysis (polio). I have found in old Comanche Chief newspapers that a little girl from Blanket was afflicted with infantile paralysis in 1913, and this is the only mention that I can find in the newspapers about that time in Comanche county. Later, there was a bad outbreak of polio in Comanche County.



The picture of them as children shows Wilburn to be about 5 years old, and Geneva was a baby of less than 1 year old. You can see Wilburn's left hand is closed. Our mother said his fingers on the left hand were clenched, and she could not get a wash cloth under his fingers to wash his hand. Also, notice his left leg. The left leg is shorter, and even at that time, he was wearing 2 different pairs of shoes, one for the regular size on the right, and on the left, the shoe is a smaller size, and you will notice that the sole has been built up to the correct height. All of his life, he had to have his left shoe built up with a thicker sole.

Daddy and Mama moved to West Texas in the mid 1920's. They were living 24 miles from Big Spring, and did most of their buying in Big Spring or Midland, Texas. Wilburn was a young teenager at that time, and when they would go to buy him shoes, he had to have two pairs, of different sizes. Mama said the merchant at Big Spring that they traded with, told Mama and Daddy about the Scottish Rite Hospital in Dallas, Texas that was for crippled children. This merchant was a Mason, and contributed to this hospital, and he wanted mama and Daddy to take Wilburn to Dallas to be examined at this hospital. At that time, this was free care for children, Mama and Daddy did not have thousands of dollars for medical bills.

They made arrangements to go to Dallas, and they went in their Ford Touring Car, this was probably in 1928 or 1929. Mama said that Daddy drove all over Dallas and didn't get lost one time, that they had no trouble in driving there at all. We will understand that driving conditions were different in Dallas then than they are now. They saw doctors, and Wilburn was examined and plans were made for him to go to the hospital for three different surgeries, one surgery on his left hand, one surgery on his left ankle and one more on his left foot.

Geneva talks in our book about the cold weather in the first of January, 1930. Daddy and Wilburn went on the train from Big Spring to Dallas to enter him in the hospital. Geneva talked about how cold it was, probably below zero out on the plains. A friend and neighbor, Ollie Faye Nichols came and stayed with Mama and Geneva, and she helped Geneva take care of the livestock during all of this terrible cold spell. Mama said she

would have probably lost her mind if it hadn't been for Geneva and Ollie Faye. They told funny stories, sang songs, and did anything they could think of to try to get Mama's mind off of the fact that Wilburn was gone and having surgery and she could not be with him. Wilburn would be at the Hospital for 4 months, and would be coming home the last of April.

Wilburn talked a lot about what good care he and all of the children had at the Hospital. One time, and these boys were all in a big ward, there was a boy across the room from Wilburn, and he was really bad sick. The next morning his bed was empty, and Wilburn asked the nurse if he had died. Yes, but she didn't want him to tell the other younger children and scare them. Wilburn was such a fine young man, the nurse could trust him to keep this a secret

One day, Wilburn said they were all wheeled out on a big porch to get some sun, and he said he was cold. He told the nurses, and they brought him several big blankets to cover him up.

Also, after he had surgery on his hand, they had lots of therapy for the kids. Wilburn made a ring, and two bracelets, these were small beads strung on fine wire. His family has these items now. They did everything they could do to help the kids to exercise, etc, to strengthen their muscles.

On April 30, when I was born, Daddy had gone on the train to Dallas to get Wilburn and bring him home. He had been down there since the first of January. Mama and Geneva were so glad that he was finally going to get to come home.

He told about when he came home, his left leg was in a cast, and he was so anxious to get to ride his horse, Daddy helped him to saddle it up, and he was out in the cow lot chasing chickens. He said his horse stopped before a little bush and wouldn't jump over it like he wanted it to. He went over the horse's head and fell off. He jumped up, looked around as fast as he could to see if anyone saw him and got back on the horse. Mama said she saw this from the kitchen window, she said her heart was in her mouth, but he got right back on the horse as though nothing had happened and went back to chasing chickens.

One other thing, after the cast was off of his leg, the doctors wanted him to lie out in the sun to tan and strengthen up the leg. He would lie out on the porch with his leg in the sun. Wilburn was the finest man I have ever known. All of his life, he was burdened by being cripple, and sometimes new kids would make fun of him and call him "crip". But, he always had lots of friends that helped him fight his battles. He worked hard, and could break horses, work in the fields, drive trucks, and do anything that anyone else could do.