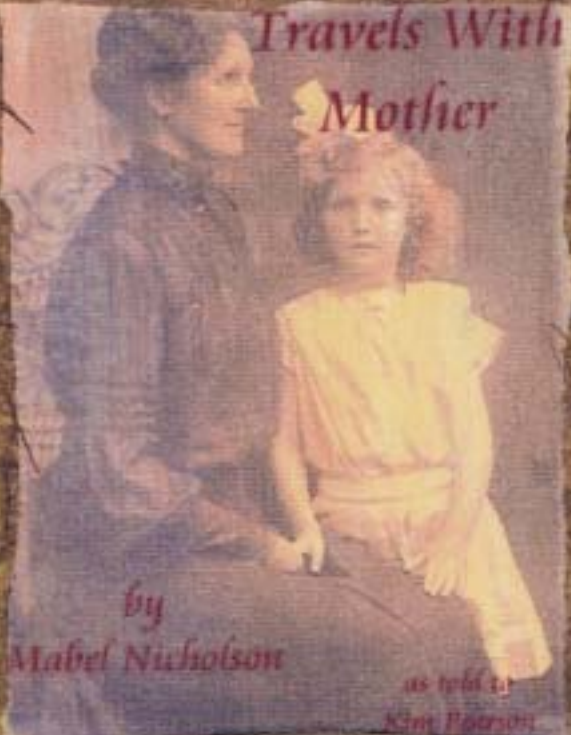


*Travels With
Mother*



*by
Mabel Nicholson*

*as told to
Kim Pearson*

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Mother was a courageous, dominant, commanding woman with a will of iron. I never remember her shedding a tear. She never really knew how to play or have fun: she was always working.

All her life she was attractive to the opposite sex. She had a slim, beautiful figure and carried herself like a queen. Her hair was thick and curly; when she let it down it fell around her waist. She often wore it up in a crown of braids around her head. Not only did men like Mother; Mother liked men. She never had much use for women. In fact, I do not think she ever had a confidante, or a woman friend, not even her sisters or daughters. But I do remember a steady stream of gentlemen friends.

When Mother was 18, in 1883, she married an Irishman by the name of Duke Morrison. I don't know how she met him. At the time, she was working as a nurse in a mental hospital. Duke Morrison was a "gentleman" as they said in those days, which meant he was not a laborer. There was an estate in Ireland that he was supposed to have inherited, but the family story is that he was done out of it. There's another family story that says he was the black sheep and was disinherited. Of course this is all a long time before I was born, so it's all hearsay to me.

She and Morrison had four children: Gertrude born in 1885, John Thomas, called Tom, in 1887, Florence May, called May, in 1889, and Edith in 1891. It was evidently not a happy marriage; Morrison was not a good provider and a rather cruel man. Mother said that once he tried to suffocate her with a feather bed. When she told her family this, her youngest brother Frederick thrashed Morrison with a horsewhip. Shortly after this Morrison disappeared and Mother divorced him for desertion.

To support her children, Mother owned and ran a fish and chip shop in Leeds, Yorkshire. She bought

the shop with the money left her when her father died. Her father had been quite a miser, so he left a bit of money. He divided it equally, in six portions to his six children, which infuriated Mother's brother Arthur. Arthur was the eldest son and it's traditional in England for the oldest son to inherit everything. Hard things were said on both sides, and Mother never spoke to Arthur again.

The only thing I know from this time in her life is that in 1899 Edith broke a bone or something and had to go to the hospital. While there she was put in a room with another child who had diphtheria. Edith caught diphtheria too, and died in the hospital. This left Mother with a permanent hatred and distrust of doctors and hospitals.

Four years after Edith died, in early 1903, Mother met and married my father, Herbert George Nicholson. He was a bricklayer-builder, called a brickmason. There is still a row of houses in Leeds named after him. He was a 40 year old widower whose wife had died in childbirth along with their fourth child. His other three children were Elsie, Ida, and Horace.

When Mother and Father were married, his children were 7, 5, and 3, and Mother's three children were 17, 15, and 13. So when I was born on November 3, 1903, I was the tag-along in a large family all much older than me. Mother was almost 40 and my father was 41 when I was born. Incidentally, November 3rd was also Tom's birthday, and May's birthday too. Tom was born at 11PM, May at 1PM, and me at 8AM. Mother used to say, "I had a child morning, noon and night on November 3rd." So much for astrology, as all three of us were entirely different and led very different lives.