



HOME & FAMILY

“We Were a Cheerful and a Vital Family”

Mother and Father maintained a genuine partnership in raising their six sons. Father was the breadwinner, Supreme Court, and Lord High Executioner. Mother was tutor and manager of our household. Their partnership was ideal . . . Before their children, they were not demonstrative in their love for each other, but a quiet, mutual devotion permeated our home. This had its lasting effect on all the boys.

--Dwight D. Eisenhower

In the small, Midwestern town of 1900, the extended family was society’s primary unit. Its members were responsible for the welfare of all, and everyone could be counted on to help in difficult times. Whether it was misfortune, illness, or death, it was the family that responded first. For people of this era, to have sought charity outside the family would have been a disgrace. To be of “good” family—one that reflected the accepted values of the community—was a title worthy of respect in the town.

By today’s standards, families were nearly self-sufficient in providing the necessities of life. For many, hard cash was scarce; however, most people had adequate clothing, reasonably comfortable homes, and, in ordinary times, an abundance of homegrown food. Every backyard had a vegetable garden and chicken pen, a source of fresh food with plenty more to “put up” in the cellar. Anything extra could be sold for pocket money.

Boys grew up expecting that they would marry and support a wife and children. Girls were raised to view marriage and motherhood as their life’s goal. For a young woman, to fail to marry was to be doomed forever to be an “old maid,” the object of pity. It was common for extended

family members—generally grandparents or unmarried aunts or uncles—to live with relatives. And, if an unfortunate husband or wife were widowed, a minimum of one year of mourning was considered proper before remarriage.

The well-being of the family unit was of far greater concern than the desires of any individual. For this reason, each family member had a role that he or she was expected to fulfill. For example, the husband was undisputed head of the family and chief wage earner. Men expected to work at least twelve hours a day, six days a week, at hard physical labor for very modest pay. Many wives supplemented the family income with “egg and butter” money.

Women were at the center of the family and home. Large families were the rule, demanding creativity and hard work from women. How well a wife and mother carried out her duties of housekeeping, cooking, and laundry was critical to her reputation in the community. Women kept a garden, cared for poultry, made butter, and preserved produce from the garden. All the family’s clothing and most of the bedding was sewn by women. Out of necessity, women were skilled practitioners

of home medicinal remedies. Every housewife knew that a sore throat required a mixture of turpentine and lard rubbed onto the throat, which was then wrapped with a woolen cloth. To

help with the never-ending household tasks, a “hired girl” often lived with the family at a reasonable cost of \$1.50–\$2.00 a week.

A Day for Everything

*Monday—washing
Tuesday—ironing
Wednesday—sewing
Thursday—gardening
Friday—cleaning
Saturday—baking
Sunday—go to church*



In 1900, the role of children in the family was different from today's. This was an age when, above all else, unquestioned obedience to parents and authority figures was expected. Society supported the view that children were to be "seen and not heard." Mother was the disciplinarian of first resort, but father was the much feared force of reckoning. The philosophy of "spare the rod and spoil the child" was a universally-accepted belief.

The typical home in 1900 had two stories with high ceilings and a wide front porch. Homes reflected a preference for Victorian decoration and furnishings. Dark, rich colors covered the walls and windows with similarly colored rugs on polished, wood floors. Furniture and walls were covered with lace decoration and bric-a-brac. By this time, many homes in town had electricity, but unpredictable currents made lighting dim. Each home had a prized front parlor, furnished with the best the family could afford, but was rarely used. The focal point of the parlor was the family's "what-not" cabinet which displayed special treasures and mementos. Kitchens had a large wood- or coal-burning stove, a sink, an ice-box, and a large kitchen table. Modern bathtubs in a bathroom were a luxury, and most children dreaded the weekly bathing ritual in a large tub on the kitchen floor. Stored in the cellar below the house were bins of apples, onions, and potatoes and shelves filled with canned fruits and vegetables. Even those who lived in town had a barn in the back for the family horse and carriage.

In 1900, the day began with a hearty breakfast of meat, eggs, and potatoes, all fried in lard or butter. Oatmeal with cream and toast or biscuits with homemade butter and jam, were served on the side. Dinner (the noon meal) and supper were also large meals. Roast beef, pork, or fried chicken were typical with potatoes and gravy and an assortment of vegetables. Homemade bread and freshly churned butter rounded out the meal; for dessert, pie or cake was served. Except for occasional hard candy, junk food was virtually unknown at the turn of the century.

Even by the standard of the day, the Eisenhower home on southeast Fourth Street in Abilene, Kansas, was small, modest, and—with six growing boys underfoot—crowded. Ida furnished it sparsely and decorated it with her own "fancy work." Out back was the chicken coop and a large family garden with small plots for each of the boys. North of the house was a large barn for the horses and cows where Uncle Abraham Lincoln Eisenhower had set up his veterinary practice when he owned the home.

From their mother, Ida, Dwight and his brothers learned to cook, clean, iron, and sew. On Sunday, the boys were responsible for family meals entirely. David, their father, worked long hours as a refrigeration engineer at nearby Belle Springs Creamery. Still, there was never money enough. Ida recycled David's old clothes for the boys. To his embarrassment, Dwight sometimes had to wear his mother's old high-top, buttoned shoes to school or go barefoot. To earn money for extras, the Eisenhower boys grew and sold vegetables, door to door. For variety, they peddled hot tamales from their mother's Texas recipe.

Ida was the enduring influence in their lives. She was a patient teacher and an openly loving parent who set strict standards and high expectations for her boys. To their constant delight, Ida was a cheerful parent who found fun and humor in life.

David was different. He was the distant and stern disciplinarian. A very formal man, even his work overalls and shirt remained clean and pressed throughout the day. In the evenings, David preferred to sit in the parlor alone, reading.

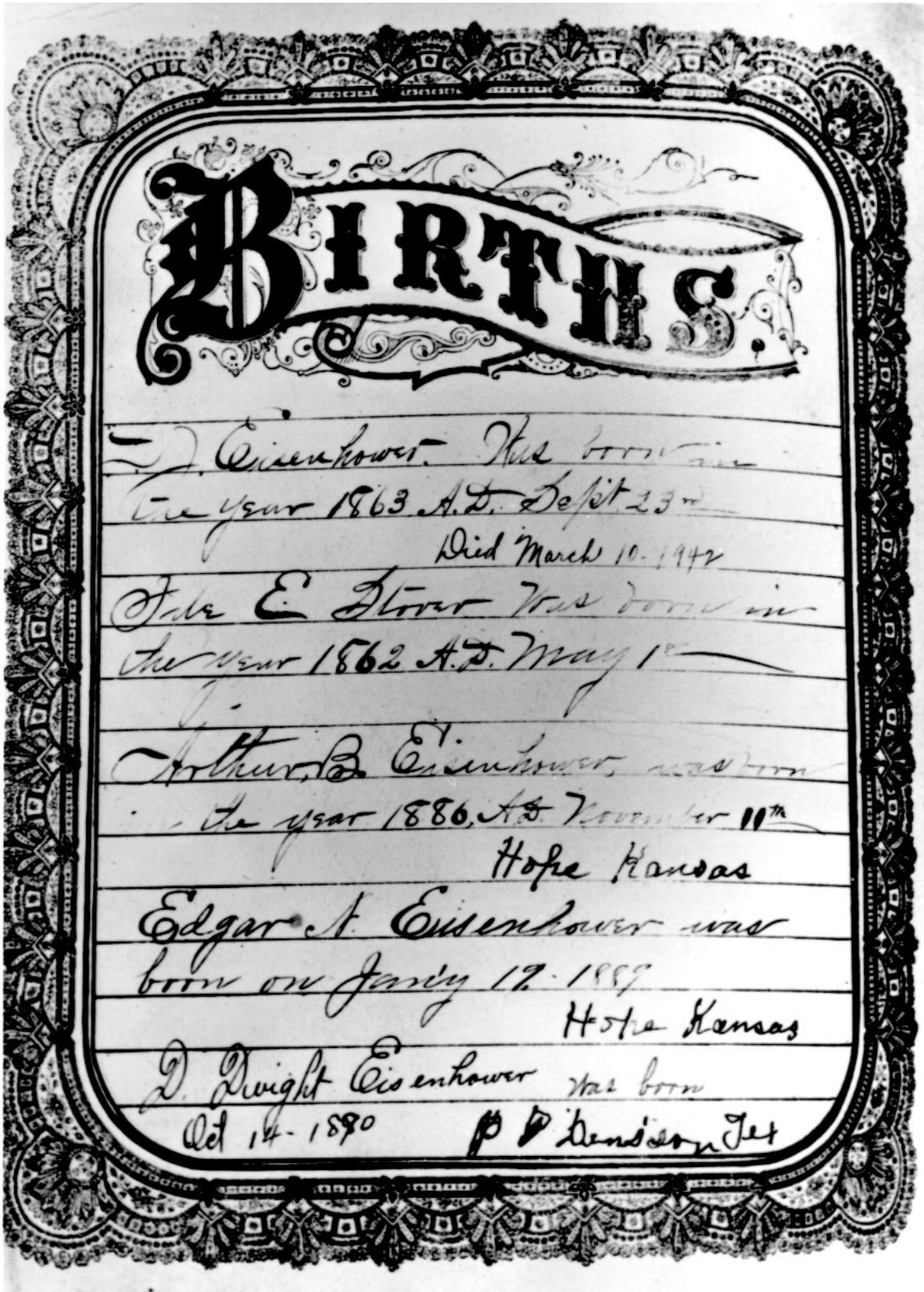
Despite differences in personality, Ida and David each instilled in their sons a belief that the world was theirs for the taking. All it took was lofty goals, a good education, and hard work.

Recommended Readings from *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends*: 36-37, 39-43, 51-53, 68, 76-82.



DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER'S BIRTH RECORD

The Family Bible



LETTER FROM DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, 1905
To cousin Nettie Stover

Abilene, Kans

Feb. 27, 1905

Dear Cousin! -

You will see from the date on my letter that I am slow. I received your letter two or three days ago and ^{things you said in it} was unlucky. Now know you said I must not get sick, well I've got the worst sore throat that I ever had or ever hope to see again. Milton asked for the picture you sent me and I let him have it and he said, "This looks like Nettie, is it her?" Milton is much better, but very weak and cannot walk. This old paper hasn't any lines and I feel miserable. Three boys came down there to the Reform School from here for chicken stealing. I have not started to school yet. Arthur intends to go to Kansas City in a few days. He is going to work at short hand. If Uncle Clarence and Aunt Alice don't go before March 9th tell them to stop and visit here awhile because we will not be quarantined after March 9. I'll bet this writing would take a prize any where and



spelling to for all of that, Roy and
I have baked pies three times and
a lady baked ^{some} for us and my
cousin baked 1 for us today well
write soon, even if I don't do it myself
it is 3 weeks today since Milton
took sick from your cousin

L. Dwight Eisenhower
201 E. S. 4th St.
Abilene, Kansas.

P. S. That picture was a
pretty one.

NETTIE STOVER JACKSON ORAL HISTORY

Pages 36 –39:

BURG: Yes, the one [Eisenhower home] in Abilene, being preserved as it was.

JACKSON: Oh, yes. Yes, that west window in the, well, she had her piano in that room, but over in that west window she had a few flowers, but they had their reading material in that. And she had a, it seemed to me, a little rocker; I called it a sewing rocker, there by that west window. And then out this way from the house, northwest from the house, she had a bed of lilies. She didn't have a lot of other –

BURG: Are they calla lilies?

JACKSON: No, no, they're Madonna lilies. They get up so high, and they're very fragrant.

BURG: Wonder if those are still there, Don?

JACKSON: No, no, they're gone.

WILSON: Do you remember when you were there in 1904, the big barn? Was it still standing?

JACKSON: Yes, there was a barn there then. I'm sure there was because they had the horse there that had been --

WILSON: The veterinarian's.

JACKSON: Yes, Uncle Dave's brother.

WILSON: We've tried to track down when that was taken down, but you say that it was still there as late as 1904.

JACKSON: Oh, I know it was. I'm sure it was. I'm sure it was. Because they didn't build anything else. The barn was out there and the chicken house there, too.

WILSON: And then the garden was out directly east.

JACKSON: Yes, east.

BURG: Now when we talked with Milton in the home and he saw the piano, he laughed about it and said that he'd enjoyed playing it after dinner and couldn't understand for quite some time why his father would rise from his reading and come over and close the door. Then it occurred to him that, playing as loud as he was playing, he was disturbing his father's reading and study. Who was playing it when you were there? In that earlier period, was –

JACKSON: I don't remember of anyone playing it.

BURG: Ida presumably knew how to play it.

JACKSON: Oh, I think she knew but, oh, you get so busy with all the things that are involved, the

things that have to be done. And possibly with us being there it made more of course.

BURG: Yes, that could be too. Mrs. Jackson says that for the life of her she cannot remember where she slept in that house, and it had to be crowded.

JACKSON: No, I can't remember when we were little; I haven't the least idea. Seems to me she said something about making pallets. Well, of course, on our old house when I was a youngster, my mother made pallets on the floor. When we had company, why you didn't think about being crowded. It was kind of fun to sleep on the floor. And our house was always Grand Central Station for both sides of the house because my dad loved company, and my mother loved to cook. So our house was where everybody came, both sides. Uncle Worth and Aunt Laura came from Virginia in 1912, and, oh, Dad wanted them to stay longer, but they weren't going to travel on Sunday, weren't going to ride the train on Sunday.

BURG: Mrs. Jackson, in that Eisenhower home with that many boys, life couldn't have been smooth all the time. Do you ever remember Ida discussing with you problems that she had or was she one more to keep it to herself?

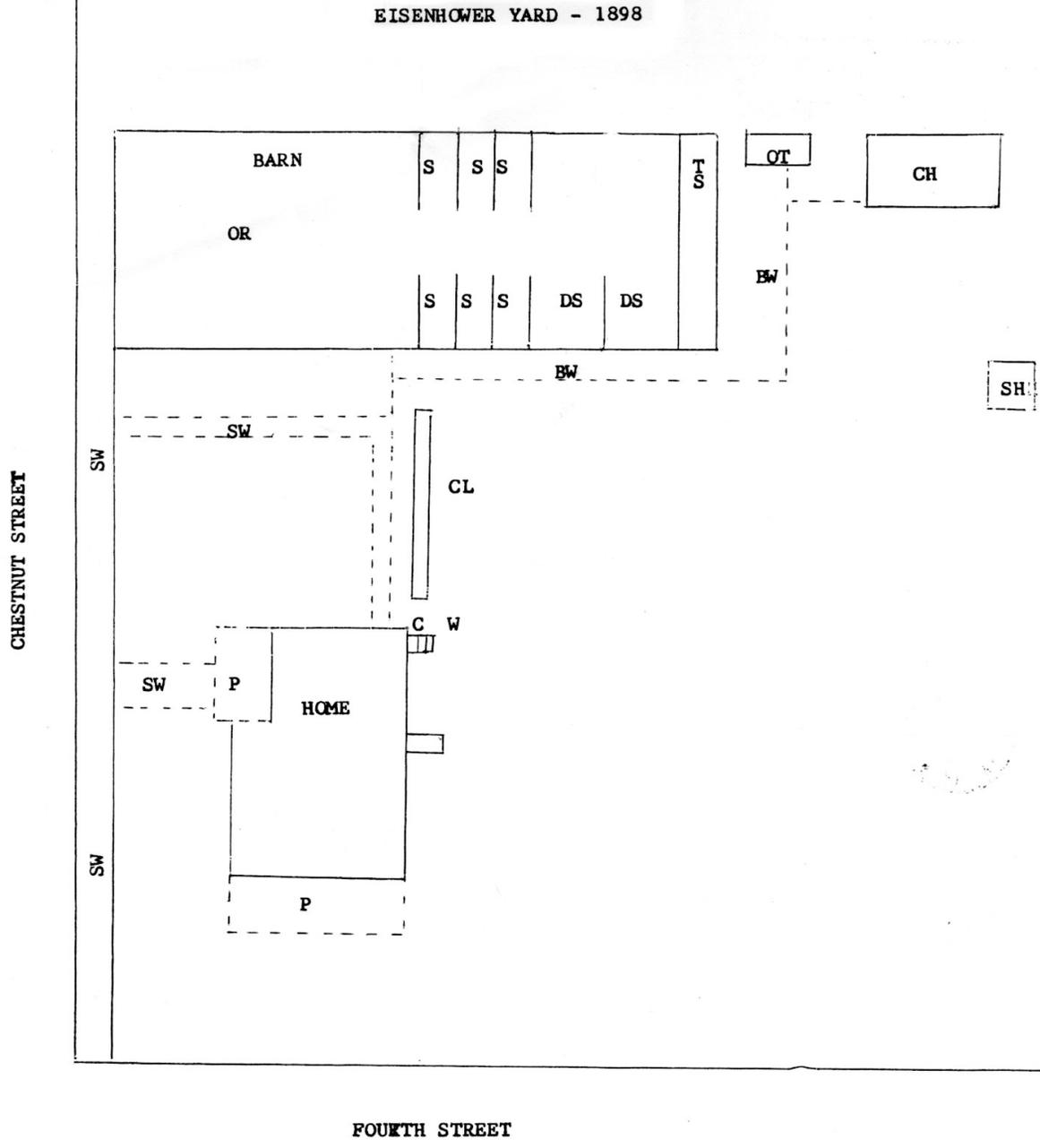
JACKSON: I think she ironed out the problems right as she went along. Whatever came up, right then she took care of it.

BURG: It didn't hang on?

JACKSON: No, I don't think it did. She was an unusual woman. Of course part of that could be prejudice because I loved her so much.

DIAGRAM OF THE EISENHOWER YARD. 1898

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|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| B- Barn | OT- Outside Toilet | <u>BARN</u> |
| BW- Board walk | <u>P</u> - Porch | DS- Double Stall |
| C- Cistern | SM- Smoke House | OR- Operating Room |
| CH- Chicken House | SW- Sidewalk | S- Single Stall |
| H- Home | W- Well | TS- Tool Shed |
| CL- Clothes Line | | |