

A FAMILY OF THE PAST

The Story of Carrie Hughes and the McGee Family, Kelly, New Mexico

by
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Carrie Hughes was born in 1895 in what is now the ghost town of Kelly, New Mexico. Her parents were James McGee and Jo Anne Sullivan McGee. Both of them were Irish.

Mr. McGee came to Kelly in 1875. Like many young men of that time, he came seeking adventure and fortune in the west. He was from Wisconsin. First he worked in the Rosedale mine. At that time the mine was producing silver ore. One day the Apache Indians attacked the Rosedale camp. Before Mr. McGee would get on his horse, an arrow was shot into his back.

He rode into Magdalena, which at the time consisted only of a few ranch houses. At one of the houses the arrow was removed from his back and was treated. While staying there, he saw a bright light on the mountain and asked what it was. The people running the ranch told him that a mining operation was being run. When he recovered, he went up and went to work at the mine.

This was the beginning of Mr. McGee's life at Kelly, another family was heading west. They were the Sullivans. The father came because one of his two daughters had tuberculosis and Kelly was recommended for her health. A year brought about no change in the health of his youngest daughter. The father decided to move back home to New Bedford, Massachusetts. The old daughter, Jo Anna, stayed behind to marry James McGee.

Three children were born to the McGee's. Their names were Ed, Frank, and Carrie. Both Ed and Frank served overseas in World War I.

The main pastime at Kelly was the weekly dance which entertained young and old. The young people spend their Sundays picnicing in Hop Canyon or Northgate. During the winter, the water supply at Kelly froze thick. The men hauled big chunks of ice back to Kelly and stored it in specially prepared ice houses. The next summer, many freezers of ice cream were enjoyed.

Even though Mr. McGee carried the scar of an Apache arrow for the rest of his life, he never failed to give them supplies when they needed them. This kept the Indians from stealing from him. The Apaches did raid the other homes, however, stealing chickens, animals, and food.

Mrs. McGee always had the time to nurse the sick, even though she worked at the family store and cafe. Her specialty was helping to deliver babies.

When Carrie [McGee] was eight years old, she shocked a visiting aunt from Massachusetts by speaking only Spanish since she had grown up with Spanish children as playmates. Her aunt insisted that she go home with her to Massachusetts where she would learn English. She returned to Massachusetts, but the first thing she did was to find the Puerto Rican slums and make friends with the children, who of course spoke Spanish. Carrie would slip away from her grandparent's house in New Bedford and prowl the city streets. At last, her grandfather alerted all the Irish policemen in the neighborhood. She got many ride back home on the policeman's horse. Her aunt decided to send her back to New Mexico. She advised Mr. McGee to give her a proper education.

Soon after her return from Massachusetts, her father enrolled her in the Sister's Convent School in Las Cruces. At the school she kept the sisters shocked with her pranks, such as visiting the convent bakery and sneaking back a hot loaf of bread. One morning, she walked into the Sister's dining room, where the chaplain was eating and said, "Father, I am going to eat breakfast with you. Your food is better than the students." She also told him she wanted some of the wine her father had been sending down from Kelly.

Kelly was well known for its deep snows. Some winters the snow was deep the people had to tunnel under to get to the post office, store and other places.

At one time seven metals were mined at Kelly. The miners worked in shifts day and night. The ore was hauled to Socorro in heavy ore wagons. The trip required two days each way. Camp was made at nightfall and the trip resumed the next day. From Socorro the ore was taken to El Paso to a smelter. Later Kelly had a smelter of its own.

There was great excitement one day when a man exploring a cave in search of signs of ore, came upon a beautiful blue rock formation. He set candles all around and invited the townsfolk in. To get in, one had to crawl on his hands and knees. What greeted the people was a miniature Carlsbad Caverns. Stalagmites and Stalagmites filled the cave. This was the famous Smithsonite discovery. Today the stone is rare and precious.

Carrie married Kenneth Hughes in the year 1912. They slipped away to Socorro secretly, against the wishes of Carrie's father. The judge happened to know Carrie's father. He also knew Carrie was under age. He called Mr. McGee and informed him of what was about to take place. Mr. McGee said, "Go ahead and marry the little brat. She will just slip off again!" Kenneth's father was from Missouri. He worked as a miner and was also in construction.

Carrie and Kenneth had seven children; all of them died young. The oldest child to live was a daughter. She lived to the age of thirteen years and died of the measles. The oldest boy to live was accidentally shot and killed on Easter morning. He was three years old.

Carrie and Kenneth moved to Magdalena in 1938, but Kenneth's heart was still with his Kelly home where he often spend the night after a hard day's work, rather than making the trip to Magdalena. Having enough of this, Carrie hired two men to wait until Kenneth had gone to work and then moved every bit of furniture still left in the old house down to their new Magdalena home. Kenneth owned and operated many mines in the district until its closure. They enjoyed their lives and each other for as long as they both lived. They had many friends. A regular visitor of Kelly was the engineer from Silver City, Mr. Schmidt, father of our Senator Harrison Schmidt. He would always come to the Hughes', throw his hat in the door and wait for Carrie to invite him to stay for lunch or dinner.

I met Mrs. Hughes for the first time three years ago, and because of her poor health I was only to speak to her a few times after that. She died January 9, 1978 and was buried in the Magdalena cemetery along side her husband.