



WITH A HEART FOR  
ANY FATE

Hazel's Memoir

By Sharon S. Atkins

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*This book is dedicated to my siblings and their spouses; Patti and Richard, Bob and Nina, and Jim and Joyce, whose unconditional love throughout my life has been a constant source of support and inspiration.*

*And with lots of hugs to my children and their families - Scott, Andrea and Brady; Gretchen, Bryan, A.C. and Dane - these family stories are now in your hands.*

*My dream is for you all to cherish these stories, guard them, and pass them to future generations.*

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# WITH A HEART FOR ANY FATE

## **Preface**

The foundation for *With a Heart for Any Fate: Hazel's Memoir* is a collection of handwritten diaries written by my grandmother, Hazel Hungerford Howland. The diaries are dated 1908, 1913 and 1917-1920. During the time Hazel wrote in these diaries, she was between the ages of 16 and 29.

The diaries were mailed to me in 1981 by Patricia Howland, daughter of Hazel's brother Stuart. After I discovered Patricia's interest in our common family history, I wrote to ask her if she would share what she knew with me. The response I received was almost overwhelming. Within a few weeks of reaching out to Patricia, she sent me a huge box full of ancestor photos, family group charts for thirty generations of Howland and Hungerford ancestors, and these four small booklets, which are Hazel's diaries with entries recorded in 1908, 1917, 1918, 1919 and 1920. I don't know for sure, but I suspect Patricia found these at the Howland farm, which was located near where Patricia grew up.

The diaries I received are each not more than five inches by three inches in size. The fifth diary used for this story is dated 1913 and is in the possession of and was transcribed in 2012 by Joanne Howland Woodward, a grandniece to Hazel. Joanne graciously agreed to allow the incorporation of that transcription into my research. That diary helps bridge the gap in the story between 1908 and 1917.

Within the diaries, Hazel dutifully records her life. Each diary entry appears to be written with a dull pencil. She

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rarely writes in complete sentences; mostly she jots down very short facts about weather, health or her whereabouts. She incorporates her own abbreviations of words to create a form of personal shorthand; some abbreviations are more readily translatable than others. Easy people to identify are siblings "D" (Dorothy) "S" (Stuart) and "M" (Maxon); or neighbors such as "Mrs. A," and teachers such as "Moody." Other people with an unknown relationship to Hazel are referred to with the abbreviations "I" and "A" and are more difficult to identify.

During the time in which this particular story takes place, Hazel's home is the Howland family farm located in LeRay, New York. However, from 1917 to 1920 she lives in Southampton, New York, where she is employed by Union Free School District 6. The diaries dated 1917 to 1920 document multiple trips back and forth between Southampton and the family farm in LeRay, most occurring during school holidays and vacations.

To the diary reader, Hazel's entries noticeably reflect her journey from girlhood to womanhood and independence. They also reflect the challenges she faces in order to pursue becoming a teacher and her quest to pass all aspects of the New York State teacher certification exam. They show her enjoyment of teaching, and in the end, her struggle with the decision whether to change the course of her life and abandon her teaching position with Southampton High School.

Found on the front page of the earliest diary dated 1908, Hazel meticulously records a listing of each of her previous teachers and school superintendents.

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### My Teachers:

1. L. F. Hungerford '98-'99
2. Eva M. Diane '99-'00
3. Everette L. Hurick '00-'01-'02
4. Oren S. Pichard '02
5. Chas E. Bowman '03-'04
6. Mrs. Geo Van Brocklin '04
7. Madola A Bell '05-'06
8. H.B. Arthur '06-'07
9. Mabel L. Rourke '06-'07
10. Johanna Fitzpatrick '06
11. Anna P. Machu supa '07
12. C.A. Moody '07-'08
13. Katharine Bowes '07
14. Janet Johnston supa '08

By reading her own words, I surmise it's these teachers who play an influential role in Hazel's life; whether through example, mentoring, or admiration, they clearly impressed her enough to contribute to her motivation to become a teacher.

Hazel's diary entries of 1908 speak often of the weather, her father whom she refers to as "Papa," and her mother whom she refers to as "Mamma." As she matures, diary entries during the later years refer to her parents as "Father" and "Mother." She records in very factual and staccato-like manner entries about her siblings, herself, her family, and her friends. She comments about neighbors, farm happenings,

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interactions with various people, travel details, movies, and sporting events, as well as participation in church, and social and local events. Little is written about emotions or feelings. However, the reader can infer some emotions by noting details, such as her use of punctuation or the length of the comment. Her writing is straightforward, factual, practical and to the point. Much like I remember her personality - no nonsense.

The story in this book is told through short peeks into the daily life of Hazel and the Howland family as seen through Hazel's eyes. It is my passionate desire that readers find this approach an enchanting method for learning about a young woman's life in the early 1900's. The purpose is to bring history, and Hazel, to life for the reader.

While *With a Heart for Any Fate* is based on historical facts, it is ultimately a story where I only have the ability to recount how I imagine portions of Hazel's life journey may have happened.

## Chapter One

8 August 1920: Evans Mills, New York

THE MORNING SUN IS BLAZING; I'm already hotter than a pancake on a skillet. My anxious heart is pounding, and I find it a struggle to breathe, nor can I contain my impatience as I see the train pulling into the station in Evans Mills, New York.

My brother Stuart and I arrive just in the nick of time at the train station to meet the 8:00 a.m. train from New York City. Stuart parks the Ford motorcar he has driven here from our farm. I don't think I shall ever want to learn to drive a motorcar. Thank goodness Stu is good-natured enough to bring me here.

I'm wearing my best white and black shirtwaist dress for the occasion. I'm desperate to make a good impression.

In a few minutes, Carlton Corwith will be stepping off this train. He's been traveling since last night, coming more than four hundred miles from Southampton to visit me.

Carlton lives and works on his family farm in Water Mill, a small hamlet next to Southampton, New York.

Can two months have passed already since I left him and Southampton?

I came home to LeRay, New York, for a summer vacation from teaching school in Southampton in June. The closest train station to home is in Evans Mills.

It's with a bit of trepidation I wait to see him. I suspect that this quiet rumbling in my stomach is a reflection of my nerves. I realize that sooner rather than later he will wish to know if I have reached my decision. Indeed he will be most anxious for me to give him the answer he wants to hear in response to his proposal of marriage presented to me last May. And, of course, he's here to meet my parents, siblings, and extended family.

I do want to be able to tell him what he wants to hear. But before I can, I feel an urgent need to be honest with him about my reason for taking so long to reach my conclusion. After months of thinking, I've only just realized the reason for my hesitation myself. The one concept I do grasp is that if we are to have any basis for an honest marriage, I must be able to tell Carlton all my fears as well as all my joys. It's only fair to tell him the true reason for my hesitation.

The train has pulled into the station now. Steam is everywhere. It's a challenge to see through the fog.

Wait, there he is. I can see all six feet of him. His brown hair is combed to perfection. He is one fine looking twenty-five-year-old man with his broad shoulders, straight-

as-a-pin posture, and purposeful stride. To me he's a sight for sore eyes in his light brown suit, white shirt, and dark brown tie. My heart is racing in anticipation of him finding me in his line of sight.

"Over here, Carlton," I shout.

"Ah, there you are, Hazel. How marvelous to see you. You look beautiful as usual." His smile is wide and bright enough to blind all the people on the platform. He stands close enough for our arms to touch. His deep blue eyes are twinkling. "I assume this is your brother, Stuart, with you?"

"Yes, of course, I'm sorry. Carlton, I'd like to introduce you to Stuart. Stu, I'd like you to meet Carlton."

"Hello, Stuart. Or do you prefer Stu, as Hazel refers to you?"

"Stu will be fine. I'm pleased to meet you. Hazel has been talking non-stop about you all summer."

I feel my cheeks grow warm with embarrassment as I retort, "Oh, don't be putting grandiose thoughts in this man's head about how much I have missed him."

"Sis, I suspect the man understands that already by the look on your face."

"Never mind that now. I see you have your suitcase. I suppose we should be on our way. Stu will be driving us home."

We all walk to where the motorcar is parked. Using the side running boards we climb inside. Stu and I sit down in

the front seats and Carlton sits himself in the back, placing his suitcase on the seat next to him.

“You haven’t learned to drive this summer, Hazel?” Carlton laughs. “I thought for sure I’d see you driving after spending the summer here.”

“You know me better than that. I don’t see the necessity for learning to drive. Heavens, I have Father or Stu here, and you when I return to Southampton next month.”

Stu rests his hand on the steering wheel and gazes out the window as he turns north from LeRay Street onto Main Street. “Sis, you know I love you, but it would be nice if I didn’t need to drive you everywhere.”

With the best indignant tone I can muster, I respond, “Nonsense. I walk most of the places I need to get to. It isn’t that often that I’ve asked you to drive me.”

“You realize we’re both having fun with you, don’t you?” Stu smiles while navigating the road toward the farmhouse. We all remain silent for the next few moments. I’m contemplating the day ahead.

“How was the train trip? Did you manage to sleep?” I soon inquire.

“Not really. Sitting up all night is not very conducive to sleeping. But I was so looking forward to being here it didn’t matter. I’ve been counting the days until today for so long it almost doesn’t seem reality that I’ve arrived.”

Before I know it, we arrive home. I immediately spring out of the motorcar and show Carlton inside to meet Mother and Father.

Father stands up out of his chair as we enter the parlor. He appears to be about an inch shorter than my dear Carlton. Father has put on his serious face, trying to look like he means business. I wonder if he's testing Carlton's resolve.

Fortunately, Mother starts the conversation by acting kindly and graciously toward our guest.

"Hello, you must be Carlton Corwith." Mother smiles. "Welcome to our home. You must excuse Dorothy and Max for not being home this morning. They've gone to Watertown on some errands. Mr. Howland, Stu, and I will meet up with them, along with some other family members, at the ballgame this evening and come home together. You two are welcomed to join us. "

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you for your generous invitation to visit as well as to join the family this evening. After all Hazel has told me about you both, I feel as though I already know you." Carlton's voice is warm. Turning toward Father, he continues, "From what little I've seen so far, your farm looks most impressive. I would be most appreciative if you would be willing to show me around later."

"Why, I suppose I can find time to show you the place. I'd like to hear about your farm in Water Mill, as well. We'll have to make a point to exchange thoughts after a bit. I understand you work your farm with your father. I shall look forward to our conversation. But for now, I suspect you'd like

to take off your suit jacket and settle in. Stu, show Carlton to your room. We've put a bed in there for you, Carlton."

Carlton and Stu leave the parlor to head to my brothers', Stu and Max's, bedroom upstairs. Father and Mother walk towards the barn and I retreat to the kitchen to fix some lemonade. I take two filled glasses out to the side yard, along with a small box of items I wish to show him.

While waiting for Carlton I am reminded that I'm as excited by being with him today as I was last September at the church supper, the first time he noticed me. We had a splendid conversation.

Within a few minutes I see him coming out the front door, walking across the lawn toward me. He indeed has left his jacket somewhere inside the house.

"Why don't you roll up those long shirtsleeves? Come sit beside me. Try one of these lawn chairs. It's cooler under this large shade tree out of the sun than it is sitting inside the house. I have poured us each a glass of iced cold lemonade. After a while, I'll prepare us a sandwich if you'd like. I am so pleased you have made the trip from Southampton to visit me and to meet my family. I'm ever so pleased you accepted my invitation to see where I have called home all my life. This place, this farm, is part of who I am."

"Thank you for the drink, Hazel. It is peaceful and quiet here. I can immediately see why you love it. I'm looking forward to having your father show me more of the farm property."

“Once you get him talking, it’ll be hard to stop him.” I laugh as I hand him his glass.

Carlton takes a long sip. “The lemonade hits the spot. It’s delicious and very refreshing. Thank you.”

“You’re quite welcome.”

“You’re fortunate to have grown up in such a lovely place.” He smiles at me.

“I am most fortunate. And I’m also fortunate to have met you through our association at the First Presbyterian Church in Southampton. I find it hard to believe you’re actually sitting here beside me.”

“Your parents seem like kind people. Since the instant I arrived, you all have made me feel most welcome.”

“What shall we talk about?” I look at Carlton with a slight hesitation.

“Hazel, I’m not going to lie. I have been anxiously awaiting this trip. Not only to see you again after all these weeks since school ended, but to, you know, see if you have come to a decision. I am reluctant to broach the subject so soon, but I find it most difficult to contain myself.”

I’m feeling anxious about how to proceed. Dare I ask him to wait a few more hours to learn the answer he wants? I don’t want to make him nervous about what he thinks I will say. I conclude that I must sit up straight and keep my resolve to be forthright and honest. I respond, “I realize you’ve been waiting several months for me to respond to your proposal of marriage. I suspect because you have studied agriculture and

been a farmer all your life, as has your father; you may think I don't wish to become a farmer's wife after having been a teacher for years. Both our families have a rich history in working the land. Maybe now, after having the opportunity to see how much I love being at my home, on a farm, you will realize that this is not the cause for my hesitation. I admire you, Carlton Corwith. You and your family have roots back to the founding of Southampton, just like my family has deep roots here in Jefferson County. I do like living in Southampton ever so much. And being on a farm again would be like coming home for me.

"But before I tell you my decision and give you my answer, I would like to share a few stories from my past. It's my hope that hearing these stories will help you understand why providing you with my heartfelt answer has been so difficult and such a struggle for me.

"I have found a small box of memories and some old diaries I wish to share with you. They will help me to tell the story of my life until now, before your proposal."

"Hazel Howland, I'm honored you feel comfortable sharing your past with me. Of course I'd like to see what's in your box of memories, hear your stories, and in particular, learn more about your life before we met." Carlton's reply is warm.

"Thank you. Do you mind if I start now?"

"By all means. Plow ahead."

With a gentle hand I reach for the box. It's filled with mementos, newspaper clippings, and old diaries I have kept over the years. I pick up a folded yellowing program.

"Oh, look. Here is my high school graduation program. It's dated June 20, 1911. How well I remember that day."

"Tell me about that day." Carlton smiles as he glances at the old program.

Thus, with Carlton's encouragement, I begin telling him my tale...

I'm nineteen years old and I am beyond frazzled. My hands are shaking, my heart is racing, and my mouth is dry. Right at that instant, I feel as though I'm behaving like a nervous Nellie.

I'm beginning to wonder how I'll ever speak in front of students in a classroom if I can't speak what's in my heart to family and neighbors this night. This is just one of the frantic thoughts racing through my mind as I approach the podium with caution in the Methodist Episcopal church in Evans Mills.

Evans Mills is a village within the town of LeRay. It's a Tuesday evening, two days before the Summer Solstice, and almost 8:30 in the evening. Everyone is gathered in the church to celebrate the Second Annual Commencement of Evans Mills High School. This year's graduation theme, "Nothing without Work," resonates with me.

This sixty-nine year old church has been a part of the community for all of my childhood, and well before.

Constructed in 1842, the church is decorated with our high school colors of white and gold. Vases full of white carnations placed at the altar and around the church add a slight but pleasant fragrance to the air.

Even though I am beyond nervous, I remind myself that on the bright side, I'm rather proud of the results of my sewing and creating the new white dress I'm wearing. It highlights my narrow waist and frame with a blue satin sash. And I think the matching blue satin bow I added to tie back my light brown hair shows an unusual sense of whimsy. By any stretch of the imagination, this is not normal behavior for me. But this is a special occasion, and besides, without the sash the dress is practical. I know it will be perfect for future occasions that might require a special dress.

Although a cool summer-like breeze is blowing outside, I feel as though I am walking down a dirt road at noontime in the middle of August. Glancing with nervous eyes around the audience, I see my fellow graduates, Hazel Whitney, Alice Martin, Carolyn Matty, and Gertrude Helmer. They are quiet while waiting in anticipation of my valedictorian speech to the graduating class.

My father Walter is sitting in the second pew next to my mother Elva, my sister Dorothy, and two brothers, Stuart and Maxon. I remind myself Dorothy will graduate next year. Stu, whose sixteenth birthday will be celebrated within the next week, and Max, age thirteen, are not that far behind us sisters in their schooling. Other Howland and Hungerford aunts, uncles, and cousins who live nearby are scattered about the audience, sitting in various pews throughout the church.

Papa is a well-respected farmer in LeRay. And like so many in the audience, his weathered face and watchful eyes reflect both the good times and the not-so-good times he has witnessed. Today, however, there is a bit of welling pride in Papa's and Mamma's eyes that I suspect comes from watching me, their oldest child, walk to my spot in front of the church.

Reverend Wells has already provided a poignant opening prayer which touches my heart. In fact, his prayer is quite unusual from any previous prayer I've heard him utter. My friend and fellow graduate, Hazel Whitney, has presented a splendid salutatory speech and then sung a solo, "Night of Joy." For goodness sake, even Dorothy acted as cool as a cucumber when she appeared before the crowd to accept the senior class key for the next year.

I should at least have the ability to give the appearance of calm and confidence. I'm beginning to wonder why I can't be serene like Dorothy and Rev. Wells. I try to convince myself if they can manage it, I can too.

With each brave step, I continue to counsel myself, gathering my courage, taking one step at a time. I must have faith in myself and get going. I continue walking. At the same time, I remind myself this occasion is but the next step in my life's journey, and the next step to fulfilling my dreams.

As far back as I can remember, I have wanted to become a schoolteacher. I've envisioned being in front of a classroom, sharing my knowledge with students, and helping to shape the futures of others. I've dreamed of little else. I know in my heart that this is what I am meant to do with my life.

I have been blessed with so many fine teachers. I have been faithful in keeping a record of every teacher-beginning with Aunt Lyla, my mother's sister, who was my very first teacher in 1898. Indeed, most of my former teachers are in the audience tonight to witness this important event.

As I review the list of past teachers in my mind, I fancy myself having the ability to be just like them-maybe even a bit better.

After graduation I plan to submit an application to become a teacher at a local school. Knowing they can pay a lower salary, smaller local school boards are more apt to hire non-certified teachers, like me. Even with the prospect of earning a lower salary, I know my family will welcome the income I will earn.

While I'm teaching, with any luck not too far from the farm, I will also study in preparation for the New York State Teacher Certification Exam. Maybe I will sit for it next year. I trust my earning prospects will improve once I become a certified teacher.

In this precise moment my high school years of studying seem but a blur. Where have those years gone?

With a renewed confidence, I begin to recite my speech from memory...

I pause the telling of my story and glance over at Carlton as he speaks. "You may remember me telling you my Southampton High School class had less than a dozen students. My brother Howard graduated from high school before me. But he worked on the farm until I completed high

school in June 1912. Together, we entered Cornell University the fall of 1912.”

“I do remember. You said you both wanted to attend college at the same time. Did you always know you would study agriculture?”

“I guess there was never any question in my mind. Howard, however, seemed keen on engineering. I like working the land and the feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment I get from planting and growing crops.”

“I know what you mean about enjoying a sense of accomplishment from my efforts. I remember that even though there were only five students, all girls, in the Evans Mills High School graduating class that year, it was still unnerving for me to prepare and give that speech,” I say with an embarrassed laugh. “But once I overcame that fear and finished the speech, I remember feeling a sense of deep satisfaction and accomplishment too.”