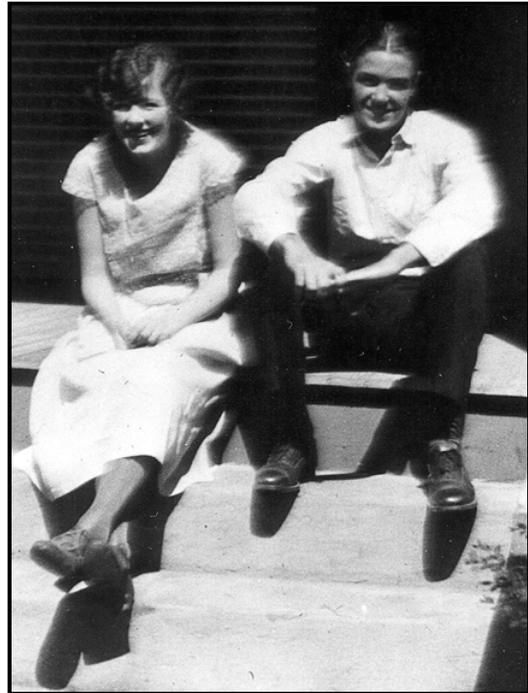


Claire Smith

A Biography by Her Grandson, Richard (Sharp) Martin

When I was about nine or ten years old, I remember visiting my grandmother while she was living in an apartment in Houston, Texas. She greeted us warmly and gave me a big hug. She had a fair complexion and was very slim. She smoked cigarettes and the strong smell of tobacco permeated the air. I sat



Above: Claire Smith (1907-1991), age sixteen, and Marion Sharp (1905-1988), age eighteen, about 1923. Claire was four days shy of her sixteenth birthday when she married Marion, and had four children before her twenty-fourth birthday.

quietly not knowing what to say. I could not remember seeing her before, and, sadly, if my mother had not told me that she was my grandmother, I would not have recognized her.

Claire Smith* was born on September 16, 1907, in Searcy County, Arkansas. Her father died when she was eleven years old. Her family moved from Searcy County, Arkansas, to Little Rock, Arkansas, just before her father's death in 1919. While attending high school, Claire met Marion Sharp. They began dating in 1922, when he was a senior, and she was a sophomore. They became romantically involved and their parents thought it best that they get married. On September 12, 1923, four days before Claire's sixteenth birthday, they were married. The next year my father, Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr., was born.

****Claire Smith was the mother of four children (Marion, Alice, Ronald, and Carol Sharp) and the grandmother of seventeen grandchildren: Cathy, Ronald, Nancy, Richard, Samuel and Jody Sharp; Sheryl, Sandy and Christie Herrick; Lincoln, Vickie and Marcia Davis; Sharyn, Debra, Jerald, Susan and Barbara Bradshaw.***

Marion, Senior got a job with the Rock Island Railroad. Claire stayed at home and was helped by her mother, Cora Bratton Smith. By the time she was twenty and a half years old she had three children: **Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr.** (1924-1980) Alice Joyce Sharp (1925-1996), and Ronald Clair Sharp (1928-1988). Marion believed that Claire would not be able to raise the children well and proposed that they allow his aunt to adopt Ronald. Claire consented and she never saw her son again until she was in her seventies. All of her life she regretted having allowed her son to be adopted, even if the adoption was within her husband's family. She cried many times when she reflected on her decision. Her last child, Carol Lee Sharp (1931-present 2012), was born three years later in 1931. All four of her children were born in Little Rock, Arkansas.



Above: Claire Smith Sharp and her first-born baby son, Marion Sharp, Jr. (Father), about 1924.

and that Claire came home and cried and cried.

Claire and Marion, Sr. had marital difficulties and divorced after ten years of marriage in 1933. The economic depression of the 1930s was in its depth and the family had many hardships, but with the physical, moral and financial help of Cora Smith and Claire's sisters, the family managed to make ends meet. Carol Sharp Bradshaw, Claire's youngest child, said that Claire once saw Marion in downtown Little Rock after their divorce

Claire's second marriage was to Ed Cartwright, which ended in divorce. Claire married again in 1948 to Floyd Wilson. Carol said that Claire's marriage to Floyd was more for economic reasons than for love. Floyd liked to drink and he got Claire into the habit of drinking alcohol more than she normally would. Their marriage lasted nine years and they divorced in 1957. She never remarried.

Claire was close to her sisters and would often visit them in Little Rock. Claire moved back to Memphis, Tennessee, and spent the last years of her life living at 2152 East River Trace Drive, Apartment Number 1, in Memphis. I visited Claire a number of times at this apartment. In the 1980s, we had three Sharp family reunions. In

1983 Carol Sharp Bradshaw, Alice Sharp Herrick (Aunts), Lincoln Davis (Uncle), Ron Martin (Brother) Sharyn Bradshaw Owen (Cousin), Grandmother Claire and I had the first family reunion in Memphis. We all went out to eat together and toured



Left: Claire Smith about 1958. Above: Claire and her sisters. Left to right: Claire, Ann, Henrietta and Mary Smith. Lower left: Floyd Wilson (second husband of Claire Smith). Below: Claire at work in April 1969.

“Mud Island” as a family. Everyone enjoyed themselves. It was the first time that the entire family, including Lincoln, had ever gotten together. We met together again in Memphis in 1985. The last Sharp family reunion was in 1987 at the Marriott Courtyard Hotel in Dallas, Texas.



Claire wrote me a letter on Saturday night November 6, 1982, from her home on East River Trace in Memphis.



Just a few days previous to writing this letter, her son, Lincoln, whom she had named Ronald, visited her for the first time.

“Dearest Richard, Karen and the little stranger, if he has arrived: I hope you will forgive my negligence in writing you, and have thought every day I would write to



Above: Claire probably in the late 1940s. Right: Claire with her sister, Mary Smith Van Loon, 1980s.

thank you for the wonderful thing you did in locating Ronnie. Only you could have accomplished that. I had no idea where he was. No one would tell you, and I feel so much better knowing he is well and happy. I enjoyed their visit so much, and wished you could have been here.”

looking forward to meeting him. Oh, yes, if he has red hair don't be alarmed. Your great-grandfather Smith had red hair. Also, your great-grandmother Smith and I have hoped every time that one of the children would inherit it.”

“Has Jr. arrived yet? I am presuming he will be a boy. I sure am

“Karen, how are you feeling? Fine I hope. Carol is fine, and often asks about you and Richard. I am looking forward to the time you can come up for a visit. Of course you know I have moved. I have a much nicer apartment, and like it out here.”

“I am glad I expected Ronnie, otherwise when I opened the door, I would have had quite a shock. He resembles Junior so much, and seeing him standing there in the breezeway—I would have flipped. Carol came over that night, and the first thing she said was that he looked so much like Junior. Although when you see Carol and Ronnie together, their resemblance is startling. I liked Judy very much; she is very attractive.”



“I hope you are doing fine—please let me know when or if the baby has arrived and do take care of yourselves.”

“All My Love, Grandmother—Mamma Claire—whichever you prefer.”

“PS: And thanks again for the wonderful thing you did for me. I love you very much.”

The most meaningful discussion I ever had with my grandmother was by telephone in 1986. We talked about the family, and she gave me many thoughtful, pleasant insights into the lives of our relatives that she had known. In our discussion, she was considerate and non-judgmental in her opinions of other family members.



A couple of months before Lincoln Davis died in 1988, he drove from his home in Abilene, Texas, to Memphis, Tennessee, to see Claire. He stayed with his mother for three days by himself for the first time. Lincoln did not realize that he was to pass away soon at the age of sixty. Just four months earlier his father, Marion, Sr., had passed away, and I think he felt a spiritual need to know his family better.

Top: Claire with her son, Lincoln Davis, and daughter, Carol Bradshaw, in 1982. It was the first time Claire had seen Lincoln in 54 years. Above, left to right: Lincoln Davis (son), Claire, Ron Martin (grandson) and Patricia Bowles (daughter in law), 1987.

Claire was always a heavy smoker. The fact that she lived to be almost eighty-four-years-old is a testament to her natural, strong physical nature. Her funeral in Memphis on September 10, 1991,

was the last time that a Sharp reunion was held. Carol and Alice (Aunts), Cathy (Sister), Ron (Brother), Carol’s family, and I all met for the last time. Aunt Alice died in 1996.

Sources

- Personal Knowledge of Claire Smith.
- Personal Knowledge of Carol Sharp Bradshaw, daughter of Claire Smith.



- Records and letters of Claire Smith in possession of Richard T. Martin.

MRS. CLAIRE WILSON, 83, of Memphis, retired night auditor for Rice Hotels in Houston, died Sunday at St. Francis Hospital after a short illness. Graveside services will be at 2 p.m. Wednesday at Memorial Park Memorial Park Funeral Home has charge. Mrs. Wilson leaves two daughters, Mrs. Alice Joyce Herrick of Sioux City, Iowa, and Mrs. Carol Bradshaw of Memphis, and 15 grandchildren.



Top: Claire's grave (left corner) in Memorial Park Funeral Home Cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee. **Left:** Gravestone of Claire Smith Sharp Wilson, mother of Marion Sharp, Jr., Lincoln Davis, Joyce Sharp and Carol Sharp. **Above:** Claire's obituary. **Lower left:** End of letter written by Claire to her grandson, Richard Martin, in 1983.

Side Karen & the lady my love - also
 Bonnie -
 and Lots of love to you,
 Shantana Claire!