

SINGLE PARENT *By Fred Hobbs*

A commonly held perception holds that kids in homes with a single parent have more problems and suffer more emotional stress than those in two-parent families.

As usual, it's easy to find statistics on any issue including this one. A Parent Magazine survey cites these figures: 13.7 million single parents in the U.S. are raising 21 million children. A study in Sweden claims that in one-parent only homes, twice as many children are likely to develop serious psychiatric problems and addictions in later life.

Of course, these are just numbers in a computer or on a piece of paper. While it seems logical that two parents could provide more support and love to a child, we know there are bad parents and good parents. On radio and TV and in the newspapers we can find ample evidence of bad parents, even child abusers, many of them single.

But this piece is about one heroic single parent. She didn't choose to be single.

At age 32 she was left a widow with five children. Her husband had been sent to Denver's Fitzsimons Army Hospital for treatment of a rare form of tuberculosis apparently contracted in wartime military service. The family had moved from Arkansas to Colorado with hope that the high, dry climate would help cure the TB. Sadly the disease was too advanced. He died without fulfilling his dream of raising white-faced Hereford cattle and bringing up the kids on a little spread just the family's own.

Now the young widow had serious decisions to make. Could she support five children? Should she stay in Colorado or return to the small town in rural Arkansas where she was born and reared?

Relatives were there, with some help, but mostly lots of unsolicited advice. "You can't stay out there in the Wild West," one uncle declared. Of course, he knew little about Denver, imagining that cowboys and Indians still shot it out on the streets of

Denver in 1932. Reluctantly, she decided to pack up the '29 Buick, load in the kids and return to Arkansas.

Almost immediately, she regretted the decision. She missed Colorado. The weather was hot and muggy with constant high humidity. The chiggers were biting and the relatives were still trying to tell her what to do. So, after about a year and half, she reversed course and returned to Denver, where she had met many friends.

The Big Depression was in full swing. The Arkansas relatives had warned that she might have to split up the kids if she tried to go it alone. But, with resolve, determination and pure grit, she successfully held her brood together. Helped by a small pension from her husband's military service, part time work as a domestic, a little help from the Federal relief system of the time and kids willing to do their part with chores and little odd jobs, she persevered in those difficult times. Not until the children were all grown and out on their own did she think of herself.

She married again and shared a new life for the few years she had remaining. The kids (four boys and a girl) did pretty well in life. The girl married a successful businessman and became a distinguished member of her local literary society. As for the boys, one became a career Air Force officer (a colonel,) another a corporate finance officer, the next oldest, a nationally-renowned civil engineer. And the youngest? Well, that's me.

My siblings and I pursued widely diverse professions and have various perspectives on life, but we all agree on one point: We all cherish the memory of our wonderful "single" mother, Irma Hobbs Lentz!