

Edens Family Story

Written By: Flora Edens Schillizzi



— Teaching Truth • Transforming Lives —

Portland Christian School graduates have come from varied walks of life. My father, Simeon Patton Edens was born in 1903, the year the Wright Brothers made their famous first flight. Although his family was extremely poor, they were direct descendants of a Revolutionary War soldier. Known by many as 'Brother Pat', he began his life as one of ten children, born in Tennessee in a 2-room cabin with no electricity or running water. He and his siblings walked two miles to a two-room schoolhouse until they reached eighth grade, which is as far as it went. They ate what they grew or hunted.

After completing eighth grade, Pat began working in the coal mines along with some of his brothers. Because he had poor eyesight, he was not a good squirrel hunter, but he found joy in reading every book he could lay his hands on.

By the time he was in his early twenties, his older brother, Clyde, had learned about Robert Boll's Bible classes at the Portland Avenue Church of Christ and travelled to Louisville to attend them. Their mother, Frances Louthan Edens was a godly woman and had encouraged her family to study God's Word. Clyde wrote to Daddy and invited him to join him in Louisville. Daddy was able to do this because the Portland Church owned a nearby house that they used as a dormitory for boys to stay in while attending the Bible classes and Portland Christian School when it was started in 1924.

Daddy began that first year as a freshman, but he did not graduate in the first graduating class. He had saved enough for that first year but had to return to the mines to earn enough money to complete his high school education. He graduated in 1933. He was 30 years old.

Meanwhile, my mother, Dora Warren, learned about Portland Christian School when R.H. Boll travelled to Toronto, Canada to hold meetings at the Church of Christ that Dora and her parents attended. In many ways, Mother's childhood was just as difficult as Daddy's.

She was born in Lancashire, England in 1905 and was born severely crippled. Her family moved to Toronto in 1910. She went through surgery after surgery on her feet. Because of the surgeries, she was unable to walk or attend school until she was nine. Her mother taught her at home, enabling her to enter fourth grade when she was able to start walking again. She went through more surgeries-so many, she lost count after thirty! She was never without pain her entire life.

After she completed eighth grade, she left school and began working in a sewing factory, sweatshop. Her two older siblings had both married and her two younger sisters had congestive heart failure and were too sick to work. Her parents were also in ill health, so it was necessary for Mother to do what she could to support the family. She was fourteen! She continued working until she was twenty-two. It was 1927.

At that time, she travelled to Louisville to start high school at Portland Christian. She helped a different family each of the 4 years she was at PCS by helping clean their house, babysit, and help in any way she was able in exchange for her room and board. She graduated in 1931. She was twenty-six.

It was in Louisville that Dora and Pat first met. They never dated. After Dora graduated, she returned to Toronto to have another surgery and to return to her work at the sewing factory.

After Pat graduated, he travelled to Oklahoma to stay with relatives and work in the cotton fields until he was drafted into the army in WWII. That was God's provision for him, as he severely needed surgery, but he didn't have the money to get it. The US government provided that in the army, and then gave him a medical discharge. At that time, he began working at the munitions plant in Louisville. During the time he was hospitalized, Mother and he began corresponding. They continued writing for several years and it was in one of those letters that Pat proposed to Dora. But even though she wanted to marry Pat, she turned him down, because she was still working to support her parents and two sisters.

Her father was seriously ill and had been hospitalized several times. On one of those occasions, he told Dora that if anything should happen to him, he wanted her to marry Pat. That night, he passed away and at that point, the two older married siblings agreed to help support their widowed mother and the two other girls. Pat and Dora were married on New Year's Day in Toronto in 1943 and they settled in Louisville.

Pat continued working at the munitions factory until the end of WWII. Then Portland Church of Christ offered him the job where he worked 40 years. At first, the only place they could afford to live in was a cleaned-up chicken coop, but they didn't have to stay there long because they were offered a house to rent by Philip and Lura Bornwasser.



I was born there in 1945 and my sister, Rhoda, was born two years later. That was the house we lived in until 1955. At that time, the Church needed someone to live in the dormitory, because the school no longer needed it and the building had remained empty for several years. The Church wanted to keep it for a place for missionaries who were on furlough to stay, so Daddy was asked if our family would move into the ground floor to maintain the building and it's grounds. Missionaries would then stay in the two upper floors. We lived there rent-free in exchange for keeping up the property.

Daddy worked long and hard hours as janitor for both school and church. Some of his duties included getting up at five every morning in winter to get the coal furnace going to warm the buildings before school. Then he would return home for breakfast, Bible reading, and prayers before leaving again for the day's work.

In summer he had lawns to mow, and that was a huge job, on top of his regular duties. For many years he was expected to set up a huge tent in the school yard for extended tent meetings held there by Brother Boll. This might not seem to be a lot, but he had to spend his nights there to guard it. Then when the meetings were over at the end of the summer, he would have to take it all down.

Another of his duties was hauling up a thirty-foot ladder up the church basement steps in order to clean the lights in the auditorium that was used by both school and church.

Mother died in 1975. The day she died, she had spent the day with Daddy on their hands and knees scraping up a wax build-up on the tile floor in the auditorium. We didn't realize at the time that she had a bad heart. It was a great loss to Daddy and our family, as well as many others. Daddy died 29 years later.

Both Mother and Daddy gave their hearts and lives to the work at Portland. Their work expressed their love for both God and Portland.