

The 16-part "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy" originally appeared in the 2017 Kansas Newspapers in Education. Have fun reading stories, answering questions, and completing activities while learning about Dwight Eisenhower's childhood.



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# "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy"

Chapter 4:

## MOTHER EISENHOWER



*"Because no man is really a man who has lost out of himself all of the boy, I want to speak first of the dreams of a barefoot boy...Because today that dream of mine of 45 years or more ago has been realized beyond the wildest stretches of my own imagination, I come here, first, to thank you, to say the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."*

Dwight D. Eisenhower June 22, 1945

Ida Eisenhower, Dwight's mother, was an enduring influence on her six sons. She was a modest, quiet woman, who set high standards for the boys, but was also loving and cheerful. Born in Virginia in 1862, Ida Stover's earliest memories included the destructive years of the Civil War. Her mother died when she was four and her father scattered the eleven children among relatives, sending Ida to live with her mother's father. She remained with her grandfather until 1883, when she moved to LeCompton, Kansas, to attend Lane University, one of the few colleges open to female students.

She met David Eisenhower at Lane and they were married on September 23, 1885 in the university chapel. Neither completed their formal education, although both pursued what today we call "lifelong learning" through books and correspondence courses.

After an unfortunate business venture early in their marriage, Ida studied law, hoping to one day settle accounts with the individual she believed had acted dishonestly.

One of the most valuable things Ida taught her sons was the importance of hard work and a good education. The six boys were needed

to keep the family clothed, fed, and housed. Cooking, dishwashing (there were no modern appliances in those days), laundry, tending the vegetable garden and fruit orchards, feeding chickens, and milking cows were rotated weekly. Considered "women's work," Mrs. Eisenhower did not hesitate to train her sons to do them—and probably would have done so even if there had been girls in the family.

Each evening the family gathered to read from the family Bible. This trained the boys in their parents' faith and in reading aloud. As they took turns, if a mistake was made the Bible passed to the next child. Competition to read longer than the others required preparation and practice, especially with some of the difficult biblical words. The boys were expected to attend college although they had to pay for it as the family had no funds for six college degrees.

At other times, Mrs. Eisenhower played the piano she brought from Virginia. She taught each of the boys to play, although only the oldest and youngest succeeded in mastering the art. Dwight excelled at cooking, having learned from his mother how to make vegetable soup, stew, steak and potatoes, fruit pies, and hot tamales.

Ida Eisenhower received the Kansas "Mother of the Year" award in 1945. After her death in 1946, the boys donated their childhood home to the Eisenhower Foundation, the organization formed to build a museum honoring 5-star General Eisenhower and all veterans of World War II. The Boyhood Home and Museum are now part of the Eisenhower Presidential Library, administered by the National Archives and Records Administration.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where was Ida Stover born and how long did she live there?
2. What were some of the expectations the Eisenhowers had of their children?
3. What activity did the Eisenhower family do each evening?
4. How old was Mrs. Eisenhower when she died?

### ACTIVITIES

1. Add events from the above story to the timeline of Dwight Eisenhower's history
2. Compare and contrast your daily life with that of Dwight Eisenhower growing up. What things are the same; what are different?