

A Case of Levitation: The Story of Frances Naylor

Frances Naylor was born September 30, 1907 to William and Eugenia (“Jennie”) Naylor of Evanston, Illinois. Her older brother George was born in 1905. In the spring of 1909, shortly after she learned to walk, Frances developed a circulatory problem in her legs. When various therapies proved unsuccessful, her legs were amputated.

For months after, little Frances tried fruitlessly to walk. She eventually gave up, finally understanding that she had lost that ability. Though confined to a wheelchair, Frances excelled in school getting top marks in all her classes, especially grammar. Socially, Frances was less adept mostly keeping to herself. She had no close friends, and spent many hours in her room. She also enjoyed playing the piano and caring for pets, including a bird - Percy.

Sometime in the spring of 1921, at the age of 13, Frances (called “Franny” by her family) began to have dreams that she was able to walk again. So strong were these dreams that one morning after waking Franny leapt out of bed without thinking and found herself able to levitate, just as if she were standing. With a little effort she found she had the ability to move about the room. She called to her parents who came running, afraid Franny had hurt herself. When they came into the room they were amazed at what they saw. Her mother fainted.



Franny was able to negotiate the hallways and, with a little practice, descend the stairs. Her father, an accountant with American Express in Chicago, was fascinated with this ability, as was her brother George. But Franny’s mother was frightened of it. A devout member of the Methodist church, Jennie Naylor was convinced that the phenomenon was a sinister manifestation. She forbade Franny from using her ability outside the house, afraid of what



attention and shame she might draw to the family. Whenever Franny left the house she had to remain in her wheelchair.

Franny's father, William, was also an amateur photographer and photographed his daughter during this period. He used a camera popular at the time which took side by side images which could be viewed in stereo, or 3D. These images stand as the only evidence of the amazing levitation of Frances Naylor.



For reasons just as mysterious, Frances Naylor lost the ability to float just a month or so later. Devastated by this, her school work suffered and she became quite reserved even with her family. In 1930, with the country entering the Depression, William Naylor found himself without a job and unable to support his daughter. Unmarried and unable to attend college, she took a job as a seamstress. However, the job's monotony coupled with Franny's ongoing depression led to advancing mental illness, and two years later she was institutionalized where she became catatonic. Frances passed away from pneumonia on October 15th, 1935.



About the house - Built in 1885, the house is named the William McLean House for its first owner. A similar house was built for William Marsh at the north end of the block, though the architect is unknown. The Naylor's bought the house in 1898 and lived here until 1931, adding the porch in 1910. To-

day the house has been restored much to its condition in the 1920s and contains many of the original pieces of furniture. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance.

Sadly, all that remains of Frances Naylor and her strange fleeting ability are the photographs her father made.

