

TEXAS GIRLHOOD

I was born on the wrong side of the river as well as the wrong side of the tracks. The year was 1905 and the place 221 Clay Street, East Waco, Texas. East Waco was the wrong side of the river because it was the lower side and therefore first received the overflow which accompanied the fortunately infrequent floods along the Brazos. During the long dry seasons one often could cross the quarter mile of sand islands which formed the river bed without getting his feet wet, if he were sufficiently adept at Eliza-on-the-ice technique. On our side most of the poorer inhabitants lived. Here also were the cotton compresses, the railroad shops, the slaughter pens, and the county Poor Farm.

Not much of obvious imagination distinguished the general of East Waco lives. Among those who did dream dreams of something better and who translated dreams into action were my father and mother -- always Papa and Mama to me. When Papa was but nine years old, his father, an itinerant German baker, had drunk a glass of cold water one sizzling summer afternoon, lain down to rest, and died, as we children were told, because the ice water froze the arrow around his heart. We were never clear as to the exact nature of the anatomical area involved, but it was a long time before I could drink a glass of ice water and then lie down without misgivings as to the certainty of my subsequent arising.

Papa-to-be left school and got a job along with the older boys, Herman and Walter. During his three years of schooling Papa's teachers had spent most of their time with him trying to persuade him as by force to renounce his natural left-handedness in favor of the less individualistic alternative. But Papa said "No", and his "No", even at that tender age, was final. Grandma also had to find salaried employment outside the home. She spent long hours sewing uniforms for college students at Baylor University, leaving her own mother, Grossmutter Franz, to tyrannize over and harangue the seven fatherless Strickers. Despite her German heritage strong minded Grossmutter forget she was a mere woman and was able to intimidate even Herman, who, in his late teens, might have entertained notions of assuming the dictatorship himself. She prepared the food, and told them all that if they didn't like it they could lay their heads out. This, Papa was often disgusted enough to do. Of course there was neither time nor money for books on what to feed the growing child, and, besides, Grossmutter could neither read, write, nor speak English. It was not remarkable, then, that Papa grew up with the notion that something was wrong inside him and that the end was never far off.

Papa sold papers, peddled ice, delivered groceries, graduated to cabinet making, and, at the advanced age of nineteen and on an income of nine dollars per week, married Mama. That was his lucky day. Mama worked even harder than he did, and found her greatest joy in helping as well as in pleasing him. Runie Moore was just plain American with no recorded or recognizable adulteration, but if she had been German born she couldn't have fitted the German pattern of domesticity more perfectly.

Mama, for all her seventeen years, was no stranger to adversity herself. She too had missed carefree childhood. Years before she was born her father had returned home to Alabama from four years of fighting for the South to find his wife dead and his children scattered—he long knew not where. A lasting injury, suffered when his abdomen was pierced by his saddle horn during a cavalry charge, added to his woes. But he gathered up the pieces of his broken heart and health, and with a characteristic masculine capacity for recovery rushed off to Texas and into a second marriage. Soon he had added to his adventures two more children and a divorce.

Undaunted either by age, ill health, or by previous matrimonial catastrophe, and perhaps impelled by the fear of an approaching old age unsoftened by feminine companionship, William Moore went in search of a third wife. It wasn't long before he met and married Grandma, a childless widow of thirty-six who had spent the Civil War years mothering seven partly orphaned brothers and sisters. Grandpa and Grandma both wanted a son to care for them in their declining years (women declined less reluctantly than), but they were rewarded for their designs on destiny by Mama, whose earliest recollections were clouded by consciousness of their disappointment in her identity with the weaker sex.

But what she lacked in masculine brawn she made up in feminine bravery and a willing, unselfish spirit. She did a hired girl's and a hired man's work on each of the more or less primitive backwoods farms the family occupied as she grew up. Most of these were little more than clearings, and in at least one of the log houses they called home, the ground, kept clean by frequent sweepings, served for flooring. At twelve Mama was proud of her ability to lift one hundred pound sacks of feed. Her reward for this

attempt to save her father was a permanently injured back which brought her agony through the years. At one time a hired man was employed, but before long he was taking pot-luck with the family, whose sole income for a considerable time was provided by the sale of milk and butter from one generous cow.

Grandpa was just plain worn out, and work as they all did, at best only enough to make ends meet was ever scraped together. When Mama was about ten the family went to live with Grandpa's younger brother in Palestine, Texas. This didn't prove to be the promised land either. To make the arrangements business like, Grandpa was to do the cooking for the combined families, which numbered some eleven Joneses and Meeres. Things bumped along the inevitably rough road until Mama, with a child's lack of discretion, caused a conflagration which consumed the slight store of amenities left.

One day as Mama was setting the table, her eldest cousin came in and tried to tell her how it should be done. Whereupon:

Runie: You go out of here. I set tables before you were born.

Cousin (reporting to Auntie): Runie told me to get out of the dining room, that she had set tables before I was born. Did she?

Auntie (blazing at this affront to her offspring): Well, of all the nerve! Ethel, if you speak to Runie again, I'll cut your tongue out.

Sometime later Runie was at step-grandmother Jones', and when the subject of the recent altercation arose, Runie forgot temporarily that in the presence of her elders a child should be seen but not heard.

In fact she became so irreverent as to aver that Auntie had lied since she knew she wasn't going to cut Ethel's tongue out.

Some adult tongue repeated the accusation to Auntie. She wrathfully demanded that Rumie be publicly punished. Grandpa, preferring justice to security, refused to accommodate, and soon the Moore's were once again on the move.

Three paid a price for the lesson Mama learned, but she learned it triply well. Today, people on opposite sides of inflammable arguments confide in her with the explanation, "I can tell you, because I know you won't repeat what I say."

Mama learned some things outside of home, for she went to school when it was conveniently near, which wasn't often. Although she was officially in the seventh grade when she permanently withdrew to devote herself to assisting at home, she estimated she had actually attended school the equivalent of three years. Her education was not supplemented extensively at home, for there library facilities consisted of a weekly newspaper which Grandpa felt should be quite as interesting to her as to him.

While the Moores were living in East Waco, adjacent to the slaughter pens, Mama, then sixteen, met Papa, all of eighteen. No trousseau being inevitable unless some cash were forthcoming, Mama obtained a job as telephone operator in Waco. In five months she earned one hundred dollars with which she paid her parent's taxes, bought her father a suit of clothes, and purchased all of her wedding things, including sheets and other household necessities-- all of which would indicate that she was uniquely qualified to begin housekeeping with a husband on nine dollars per week. An that is just what she did.

II

In a year or so along came little Walter. A larger income was needed, and there was a move to a tiny country town not far from Face. Here the sixty dollar a month job that Papa had been promised was found to have shrunk to a thirty dollar one. Even in those days that was hardly existence for three. So, Papa went to work for his uncle in Calvert, but he continued to worry about his health and to predict his untimely end. Little Walter was evidently impressed by Papa's "blues," for when asked "what does Papa say?", he would prop his little head on his hand and sigh, "I do sure feel bad."

Before little Walter was three, his tiny life was snuffed out by diphtheria. There was no antitoxin in Calvert, nor any infallible medical diagnostician. So, after three weeks of "sore throat and tonsillitis," as he lay in Mama's arms one early morning just before dawn, death took him from her.

Back to the "city" came the stricken parents. Papa got a job in Mailander's Cabinet Factory, and at nights he and Mama slept at the Cotton Warehouse where Papa acted as night watchman between naps. Then, in 1903, Henry Junior arrived to keep Mama at home nights as well as days. Twenty-two months later I joined the circle. There was at least one unusual circumstance attending my birth — I was delivered by a woman physician, and in 1905 not many Texas babies had that distinction.

The house into which Dr. Gates ushered me was a little frame structure consisting of bedroom, dining room, and kitchen. To quote Mama, "It was a very nice little house, and was painted on the outside." The inside walls were plain shiplap without benefit of paper. There were

no modern conveniences, the water supply being drawn from a well which Mama helped Papa dig. When I was but three days old this little shell of a house weathered a freak storm which frightened even Mama, perhaps because she was still a bit under par in her capacity to stand up and meet the issue. Papa started out to rescue the baby chicks, but soon decided to turn back to rescue us in case we were blown away. The storm lasted only a few minutes but was so terrific in intensity that it blew the rain through the walls of the house.

To augment an increasingly inadequate income, Papa and Mama decided to add nocturnal farming to their already over-crowded schedule. They rented a couple of acres in what was paradoxically known as "Dry Pond" - an area at the edge of the railroad shops, which were in turn at the edge of Waco. Mama worked all day at the house and barn, caring for us, a cow, a horse, and chickens. She made all our clothes except a few items in Papa's wardrobe. She even made his shirts, of both day and night variety. Grandma, now widowed, was living with us, and although she had rheumatism and got around with difficulty, she helped in the house. In the evening when Papa returned from a hard day at the mill, together he and Mama worked far into the night setting out hundred of cabbage and tomato plants by lantern light. They had it all figured out. Dry Pond was to be their bonanza. Somehow Mama found time to cultivate the young plants by day. On such occasions she would frequently place me, a toddler of less than two, in an apple crate and drag me along the rows as she uprooted roots and grass and carefully loosened the soil around the tender plants.

One day as I sat in my wheelless chariot, Mama noticed that I

wasn't feeling well, and that my head was drawn down to my right shoulder. She tried to lift my head, but the muscles refused to relax. The doctor was called, medicine administered, and then the admission made that medicine couldn't cure me since the disease was infantile paralysis, as polio was then called. The M. D. advised Mama to take me to an osteopath in West Waco. And every other day except Sunday for four months Mama hitched up the horse and buggy and drove us the long distance across the river to the osteopath. These treatments, for which the physician, (also a woman) charged only ten dollars per month, did me so much good that that today, except for a one-sided smile and perhaps an impaired right eye sight, I am none the worse for the affliction. And that is luck, for had the paralysis struck in a limb, the results might have been disastrously different.

The Dry Pond bonanza turned out to be worse than unprofitable, the only crop which brought any return - and that to our kitchen only - being some very fine turnips which the previous tenant had left in the ground. So we moved back to Clay Street. The little house was turned around and another room added, making a grand total of four. Eventually Mama canvassed the kitchen walls and Papa followed suit with the ceiling. Then he papered the room. This decorating was finished just three weeks before the fire.

On a cold, windy January 11 of my third year, sometime before midnight, Mama was awakened by little Henry's cries from the dining room where he and Papa were sleeping. Smelling smoke, she rushed to the

kitchen to find it already roaring with flames generated by an exploded kerosene lamp. She roused the rest of the household. Then, in her bare feet and with only a nightgown to protect her from the chill wind, she ran across the street and awakened the neighbors, with whom she left Henry and me together with our clothes, which she had picked up as she passed the chair on which they had been placed when we undressed for bed. Then back to the flaming house to rescue as many as possible of our possessions. After a falling wall had barely missed Papa, salvage work had to stop. The firefighters were there, but no water. Soon there was nothing anyone could do but watch the wind driven flames consume the dry timbers to the last splinter.

Concerning this thorough execution, my first, and I believe my last, bright saying is recorded. Some time after the disaster, my mother was postmortally going over the details with friends, and in the course of the conversation some one remarked how completely our house had burned up. Whereupon, with a precocious reverence for truth and all the impudence of an as yet unquashed three year old, I piped, "Didn't burn up. Burned down."

In the heat of the conflagration someone hurriedly threw out of a window a suitcase containing a handmade layette. The case flew open and the wind completed the job of scattering the contents, from dresses to diapers, in all directions. Later Mama went collecting and recovered every item of the initial wardrobe provided for eminent Eugene, who made a not surprising early arrival eleven days later up the road at paternal Grandma's.

It was not long before we - now six - were again on our own in our own, for soon another house similar to the one consumed was perched over the latter's scarcely cold ashes.

My first recollected (with help) conflict with existence came at age four when I was permanently separated from the end of my left thumb. This occurred while paternal Uncle Walter, Aunt Laura, and cousin Monte were with us for one of their indefinite stays - indefinite as Uncle Walter's prospects for getting and keeping a job. The three of them were some six weeks that round, six weeks during which our four rooms were filled to bursting with five adults and four children. Sleeping arrangements were correspondingly incongruous, and going to bed was accomplished in relays and under cover of darkness to provide the irreducible minimum of privacy. There was no unpleasantness or ill feeling, however. You couldn't help liking Uncle Walter for all his improvident ways of living. And Mama always concentrated on the likable qualities in people.

One day, after eating our fill of "sa'mon" salad at the noon-day meal, we three older children left our elders to their loitering over the coffee cups (Uncle Walter was known to have imbibed fourteen cups in a single day), and went outside to play. Our house was built in typical Texas-then frame style, perched on cedar legs; and the enclosed space underneath served as combination cellar, attic, implement closet, and rainy-day playhouse. Here reposed that intriguing machine the lawn mower, which, on pain of corporal punishment consequences, the boys had been forbidden to operate. But Cousin Monte, who was the older,

and Henry ignored these admonitions and proceeded to begin the large order of mowing the grass which grew between the vehicular center of the road and our fence. I couldn't resist lending a hand, and I undertook to push the wooden roller as the boys tugged at the handle. Around came the blades and caught my unsuspecting thumb. I screamed, we all screamed, and Mama came running, expecting to find me impaled on the picket fence. Instead she found the end of my left thumb hanging precariously from the rest of me by a bit of mangled flesh.

When the doctor came he sewed back the partially severed part and shook his head at the possibility of my ever being whole again. Some days later he returned and found his fears confirmed. The mangled flesh had fallen away from the softened stump of bone, and he snipped off this part as easily as one might a finger nail.

I yelled with gusto out of all proportion to the pain inflicted, and my laments brought baby brother Eugene, aged two, to the door. He gave the doctor one dirty look and retired. In a few moments he returned, bearing a stick from the woodpile. This he pointed at the doctor. Came the report in baby treble, "Bang! ... How!". Then, turning on his tiny heels, he stalked away, confident he had slain the dreadful ogre who was hurting his "sittar".

Gene and I matched wits at arguing as long as he lived, but we defended each other against all comers with something of the same spirit with which he came to my rescue on that memorable morning of our childhood. I was his intercessor when Papa became too intolerant of his non-conformity, and he my advocate when I was in the paternal doghouse for similar reasons.

When I was five death brought us across to the right side of the river to live. Fragile Aunt Allie had crossed the long visible bar, and Mama's Uncle Stephen and cousin M. C. needed someone to keep house for them. So, we moved to Bell's Hill. Uncle Stephen's house was high —five rooms, hall, and latticed back porch, which served as bedroom by night and dining room by day. There was running cold water but no bathroom. There was a large cistern in which, after having washed the roof, the rain water was caught and hoarded and from which it was sparingly drawn to provide drinking water, rain water and rice pudding being Uncle Stephen's favorite table delicacies.

Uncle Stephen was gentle, dignified, and we all loved him. He worked on the editorial staff of the daily newspaper, and that was a mysterious and fascinating occupation. To me he was the personification of affluence, both mentally and materially. Soon after we descended upon his quiet establishment he became our banker-broker. He set aside a pocket in his coat for each of the three of us children and staked us to a nickel apiece, which was to rustle for us during the day. Each night as he came up the walk, three eager investors ran to meet him and to feel in their respective pockets to see if their nickels had rustled any that day. Sometimes they had and sometimes they hadn't.

Across the street from Uncle Stephen's was the Bell's Hill elementary school. There, at age six, my formal education began, evidently inauspiciously, for I have not the slightest recollection of that historical first day.

Papa was doing carpenter work now, building houses. But he was not

flourishing financially. Soon after my start in school, Uncle Herman succeeded in persuading him that indoor work was more lucrative and cherries more luscious in Arlington, where he himself lived, and he painted a glowing picture of the inevitable rise in our fortunes should Papa go into business for himself. So, Papa went, and we with him.

We could never understand why Arlington was at all, unless, being midway between Dallas and Ft. Worth, it grew out of the indecision of home seekers caught between the rival allures of the two cities. Its lassitude, characteristic of the mental processes which might account for its existence, caused Arlington to be called, rightly, a "dead town". Papa found this out ere long, for the candy, fruit, and cigar business didn't buzz as per our travelling salesman Uncle's predictions. Even with the added income contributed by a heroic cow and two acres of fruits and vegetable (cared for mostly by Mama) and a paper route handled by Papa in the early dawn before the store opened, the tide of Stricker fortunes continued to ebb perceptibly.

I had a few days of schooling in Arlington before the authorities there discovered that I was not yet seven; and in lieu of the required tuition I took an extended vacation from the three R's. But although Arlington approached the unenviable inn so far as my mental growth was concerned, it was in this same Arlington at age seven that I put off the joyous spirit of carefree and unselfconscious childhood. It was there that I confronted the moral universe, weighed it emotionally, and found it wanting in justice, mercy, and that quintessence of human understanding which begets tenderness and compassion.

It happened that my contribution toward the support of the family was the job of carrying a bucket of milk each day to a neighbor who lives a quarter mile up the sandy road in the direction of Ft. Worth. It was sort of fun loitering along barefoot, feeling the tickly sand gently slipping between my toes, and swinging the bucket dangerously high for the safe repose of its contents. Besides, when I deposited my wares at the Lampe's front door, I was sure of an unbusinesslike welcome, which might reach dimensions involving cookies or some other sweet. With the joyousness of childhood my heart responded without reservation to their neighborly manifestation of confidence and goodwill.

Just outside the Lampe side fence an enormous sunflower grew, and its robust beauty fascinated me. Since it was outside the Lampe yard, and in no one else's, it was to me a wildflower. The fact that it was far larger than any of the other sunflowers that grew in riotous confusion over the fields didn't mean anything to me as far as heredity and environment were concerned. To me it was an exquisite accident in the direction of perfection.

So, one day, while the Lampes were admiring the same thing of beauty from a window and, unsuspected by me, contemplating its value in terms of chicken feed, I broke off the blossom and started home, happy in the more intimate possession of this source of joy. I didn't get far. Soon I was bewildered by cries of reproach, by charges of ingratitude, and indifference to the regard of others. I promptly loosed a cloudburst of tears, dropped the already wilting cause of it all, and ran for home. Mama was there. She would know I was neither an ingrate nor a thief. And she

would understand the deeper hurt - that of being labeled as such by people who had trusted me and of whom I was so very fond.

III

Fall found us back in Waco, "flat broke". For the few days it took to find a house to rent, we stayed at maternal Aunt Lennie's, and at night our cousins and we slept dormitory fashion on pallets. This was 1912, the year Papa began working for Mr. Stratton as cabinet man in the furniture store.

The house we rented was something out of the ordinary, for, although it possessed no conveniences except running water, it boasted an attic in which one could stand erect and to which one could retreat when the world was too much with him. This place was otherwise memorable for its proximity to the backyard beginnings of what later became a flourishing potato chip factory. The small outhouse which sheltered the cooking vat was so close that we received the full benefit of tantalizing chip aroma. We were even allowed a glimpse of the mysterious process, ^{but} I don't remember if any morsel of the finished product ever passed our lips. Perhaps it did since I wondered then if cooking potato chips wasn't a more pleasant occupation for one's Papa than refinishing furniture.

I had begun school again at Bell's Hill, but in January of 1913 we moved across town to North Waco and Tennessee Street. This put us in the Brook Avenue school ward. Somehow I was placed in second grade, and at Brook Avenue my education progressed without remembered event until March of 1914, when the combined ravages of smallpox vaccination and measles left me too debilitated to resist the development of my third and nearly fatal round of pneumonia. I lay for weeks growing slowly worse, while the doctor

insisted all would be well in time. But Mama observed me too constantly to be convinced. She never left me, even for sleep, unless she had to, and then she called Grandma to keep watch. When I began to show signs of approaching coma, the doctor was hurriedly called. He tapped my side (a procedure followed earlier as precaution), and when he drew out the tell-tale pus, things began to happen. He called for hot water, rushed to his car, brought in the necessary instruments, and in amazingly short order had performed a major operation with a cot for an operating table and no anesthetic except a local. Although I cried with genuine fright and perhaps largely imagined pain, I didn't move, probably because I was too weak to struggle. When the doctor and family saw what gushed from my side they found it easier to believe in miracles. Tubes were inserted, and for the first night in weeks I slept naturally and normally.

I had gone far down the road toward eternity and the way back was long. When I was able to be helped out of bed it was to learn to walk again. I couldn't stand erect, so long had I bent to the left to favor the afflicted side. For compensation a large bottle filled with sand was provided, and wherever I walked for weeks, the bottle went too, suspended from my right hand. My straight very dark hair fell out down to about six lonely strands which Mama clipped off. Soon a near black downy fuzz covered my head, and it became evident I was to be compensated for my affliction by natural curls. What joy! My recovery brought joy to the doctor too. Every time he saw me for years after, he threw out his chest and patted himself on the back.

By the time my convalescence was at an end, school was out and I had missed nearly a whole semester. Next fall, however, I was allowed to go on to the fourth grade. The 4-A teacher was my first childish crush, but a worthy one, as time attested. She liked me too, for she let me sit at her desk and read "The Mouse Pie" to the class. (Years later, when we were both in high school, she reminded me with her soft voice and warm smile that she too remembered like me and "The Mouse Pie".

One day that 4-A class gave Miss Lulu a flower shower, provided mostly from nearby fields where bluebonnets grew in crowded splendor. To further italicize this day for me, I was one of four chosen to carry the portable portion of the shower all the way across town to Miss Lulu's home in South Waco, and that during school hours. There was the long ride on the street cars, the arrival at my goddess' home, the rap on the door, ecstatic anticipation. Then, a pleasant faced sister with biscuit dough on her hands opened the door and received us.

At the end of this year one of my classmates, who was also a friendly rival for scholastic honors, went to summer school, and by a stupendous feat of mental osmosis, absorbed the entire fifth grade during a scorching six weeks session. I wanted to go too, but that was out of the question, for summer school meant tuition. This girl's father was business manager of the city school board, and I heard unconfirmed but believable rumors that he received all of fifty dollars per week --riches indeed compared to Papa's eighteen.

My disappointment was bitter. But I was comforted and my injured ego soothed by Mama's sympathetic understanding and brave example.

She wept with me but not in desperation or despair. Mama always managed to keep her gaze fixed on spiritual values not quotable in gold. I don't remember ever hearing her complain about the meagerness of our material existence or the never ending toil this state of affairs brought^h to her. For while Mama had been a dear-without from the cradle, she never allowed the resultant deprivations to harden her into cynicism or soften her into self-pity.

At ten, of course, I didn't waste too much time mourning over my fate, or over the lost classmate who remained the year ahead of me throughout public school and continued her excellent work without obvious handicap from that streamlined passage through grade five.

I was never unduly concerned over fashion, nor did I lose much time languishing over the inability of Papa's salary to provide me with outfits for every occasion. But I do remember one adored pair of shoes. To ~~own~~ own two pair of shoes at the same time --one for every day and one for Sunday -- was up to this time an experience unknown to me my brothers and me. Thanks to a home administered shine, our school shoes at least looked different on their dress-up day. High top laced ~~knish~~ shoes were the cheapest~~est~~; so, we wore them. Button shoes were the almost exclusive possession of the plutocracy. But, perhaps in celebration of my close call on eternity, I was made the proud possessor of a pair of button shoes with patent leather lowers, ~~and~~ kid uppers, and, to make them absolutely perfect, spring (no) heels. I had these beauties for Sunday wear alone at first - until my school shoes were out. Then, much to my delight, I was allowed to wear the newer ones everywhere I want.

My joy at sporting these proud possessions was not unalloyed, for at the same time I was required to wear a little straw hat, not bad in itself, but even then one couldn't wear a five and dime store hat with pride even if did cost a whole dollar. There was something unmentionable about this circumstance and my vanity was offended.

Henry, Gene, and I had the meagerest of wardrobes, little save the bare necessities. And if Mama hadn' been such a wizard at managing, we might have suffered considerable humiliation. She made pants for the boys out of Papa's trousers, that is, what was left of them after he had finished with them. She made shirts for the boys and all of our clothes, even to underwear, the cloth in which bore through many washings the legend of its former service in conveying flour from mill to kitchen.

But we never went to school dirty or untidy because Mama had a passion for cleanliness. It must have been congenitally acquired, for as a child she was considered queer for insisting on a much larger number of all-over ablutions than were deemed necessary or convenient for the frontier accoutrements of her childhood. There was no bathtub except the tank where one's privacy might be interrupted by a horse or cow come to drink and wash off the heat of the day, or, more comfortable in winter, a wash tub laboriously filled by hauling water from this same polluted hole in the mud. No one could understand why the regular Saturday night exercises did not suffice for Mama, and it was charged to her that she was either the dirtiest person alive or the cleanest.

Nevertheless, ridicule was endured and conviction strengthened. For many years Mama spent countless hours at the washtubs, scrubbing us

Bathing the washtub way isn't so bad at that, particularly for the one fortunate enough to be first in the suds. Through these years Mama spent the most of two days each week out doors at the washtubs with our clothes, sheets, towels, etc.. A corresponding amount of time went for ironing. Sometimes I was down to two dresses, but she didn't lower her standards for that.

Next door to us during some of these years lived a quiet elderly woman and her kittenish middle aged daughter, whose standards of tidyness were none too exemplary in more ways than one. Both dipped snuff, and, being too lazy to expectorate the foul secretions in a receptacle which might ultimately have to be emptied and maybe cleaned, they utilized a rat hole in their back porch floor; and, with acumen born of persistent practice, X hit the small spot most of the time with amazing accuracy.

The fact they had both been divorced sued me into silent wonderment over their possible past. The daughter had two children, then grown, as the result of her first marriage, but they lived with their father who, it was more than hinted, had been a cruel husband. The current, very mild husband, ^{was} considerably her junior, but she called him "Daddy" and deceived him for years as she carried on an affair with a married neighbor, who was welcomed at the front door as soon as "Daddy" was kissed goodbye at the back.

We were sure this lady had seen better days, for she had a piano and could even play it. Often a visit by her daytime paramour was immediately preceded by her singing in tearful and terrible voice something to the effect that "Up through the beautiful gates of gold/ My Mama's waiting there..." She said sorrowfully that this song made her think of her own baby girl who had been so cruelly kept from her. I almost wept with her and found heaven and her not too incongruous for association.

At that time we children didn't know what all younger children today find out^{or} are told about the facts of life. An since this to others lurid lady was kind and generous to us, we accepted her -- unladylike rouge, snuff and nonsense, and all. We enjoyed her geniality and her conversation which, although not exactly ordinary, was decidedly not subversive. Mama allowed us to go next door, and implanted no prejudices in our minds, for she cherished the hope of reforming our fallen friend, in whom she was sure there was much good. Nor was her missionary ardor dampened either by the admonitions of her respectable friends nor by Papa's scepticism.

Mama even went so far as to plead with Mrs. B. to give up her double life, and, after more soul searching arguments had failed, pointed out to her that some day someone would tell Mr. B. Mrs. B laughed good-humoredly at Mama's earnest plea but reported its substance to her partner in iniquity. He sent back his reply, which she conveyed without its original malice. It was that Mama stick to her washtub, which was all she knew anyway, and keep her nose out of other people's business.

Mama was not hopelessly discouraged by this rebuff, but before long the affair culminated as she had predicted. The husband was told. There was a violent quarrel, a threat of murder, and he left, as did the stranded ladies shortly after. Sometime later Mama received a letter from the former Mrs. B. postmarked another state, and bearing the news that she had at last found true love with a perfect husband. Once more Mama took heart. But even Mama sadly gave up that soul for lost when, not so long after we heard that the adored perfect husband had murdered a man over his faithless wife's affections.

As early as I can remember there was Sunday School. I always loved it, and to have to miss Sunday School was a calamity precipitated only by serious illness. I studied my lessons, and, under the responsible instruction of teachers who also studied theirs, I reviewed my vast store of home-learned moral precepts and acquired a knowledge of the Bible in exchange for which I would take nothing learned since from other books. Then no doubts arose as to the literal truth of the Biblical account of cosmic beginnings or subsequently related events. If God himself was not the one and only penman, he guided the hands of those who did write. Hence the Word was infallible. Logically, then, our denomination (called Christian from the scriptures) which had "no book but the Bible, no creed but Christ" and boasted "where the Bible speaks, we speak; and where the Bible is silent, we are silent" was the one sure guide to correct interpretation and therefore salvation. I don't recall wondering about the ultimate destination of some of my friends of other persuasion. I suppose that reason even then told me they had just as firm hold on Heaven as I even if they were sprinkled rather than immersed.

We didn't practice infant baptism. It had no Biblical authority, and, besides, belief, which preceded baptism in the general commission as delivered by Jesus to his disciples, was incompatible with infancy. Children were acquainted with Christ's precepts and examples, and, where there was a cooperation between Sunday School and home, almost invariably "accepted Christ" when they reached the "age of accountability".

And so, on the glorious Easter morning preceding my tenth birthday I joined His church. Although taking this final step followed logically, it was to me no mere formality, but rather, for my age at least, a supremely serious moment, both emotionally and spiritually. It was the custom in our church to extend the invitation with true apostolic zeal at the conclusion of each Sunday service. An invitation hymn was sung to further move the hearts of those who, although "almost persuaded", still hesitated to "make the good confession." "Just as I Am" was the hymn on that memorable Easter morning, and to this day its strains kindle within me tiny but unmistakable flashes of that early emotional fervor which accompanied spiritual surrender to an ideal.

And just as Christ according to scripture "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water", so did we in our baptism. All the awful solemnity of this symbolic washing away of sin, this final step in the renunciation of the way of evil and dedication to the ideal of good, moved me deeply, and I arose from this "burial with Christ" with remembered emotions of exaltation. To my mind this experience justifies the inconvenience of immersion as compared with other forms of baptism more commonly practiced.

It was while I was in 5-B that I almost committed murder. For assembly our room was presenting a dramatization of the trial scene from William Tell, and I was cast as the hero himself. I made my own bow from a broomweed, a species which grows abundantly in Texas wherever ground is not cultivated. A well nourished broomweed is a tree in miniature; and in the late autumn, when partially desiccated, its trunk is very resilient and as excellent for bows as its spreading branches are for sweeping the dirt floor in one's outdoor playhouse.

During the practice sessions in our room I proved to be a dead shot on at least one occasion, for I nicked the apple my "son" supported on her trusting head. But, before the dubious eyes of the entire school, I missed the apple's core as my arrow sailed away in the direction of Heaven -- a humiliation to me but a godsend to my "son", who, in the bittering confusion, still remembered to bob her head enough to unseat the apple. I don't know why I was allowed to attempt a bull's eye, for even a horse made arrow might hurt if it hit the spot with the proper inclination.

Under the inspiration of the thoroughly uninspiring and ineffectual 5-A teacher, my suppressed desires in the direction of misbehavior found expression, and I received my first and only 0 (B) in deportment. So pathetic a figure did this teacher cut when she undertook to establish order that frequently I as well as other fellow offenders felt sorry for her and made angelic resolutions which the devil in us repeatedly repudiated. Oddly enough, it was during one of these moments of contrition that I received my first and last taste of school administered corporal punishment. It happened at the beginning of the drawing period when, as usual, the chaos was worse

than average, I was handing out drawing paper, when it wasn't being snatched from me in all directions. The situation became so disgraceful that the teacher decided she had to do something to justify her presence. Unfortunately for me, I was within arms length of her at the moment she made this belated decision, and she made an example of me with as vigorous a shaking as one might expect from so timid a soul.

But what this laying-on-of-hands lacked in physical vigor it made up in mental cruelty. I was doubly wounded --by the public humiliation and by her failure to see that I was, momentarily, trying to be good. My customary flood of tears descended. Seared by sight of them, and stunned by this teacher's surprising assertion of supremacy, the room quieted down. But not so the turmoil within me. It was a warm spring day, and tears and perspiration mingled indiscriminately on my bowed head so closely clustered with these post-pneumonia curls. Frances, who occupied the seat in front of me, was so moved by my misery that she played truant from the art lesson with me, and while I sobbed in deep despair and magnified the injustice of existence, she compassionately pushed back the curls and stroked my moist forehead. There were at least two of us against the world, and we would have no more of it that school day.

As I gathered my belongings preparatory to going home that afternoon, the sad faced teacher asked me to stay for a moment. When all the others had gone, she took me on her lap, big, almost eleven year old that I was, and we had a good cry together. After that I became self-appointed leader of the give-her-a break society, and the year came to a fairly peaceful conclusion, if not in a wave of mutual admiration at least in a student wave of rededication to the Biblical injunction, "Finally, brethren,....."

....if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things."

Six I brought Miss Grace Stone, who in a quiet manner ruled as rigidly as her name implied, as straight as she carried her bustle-crowned back, as squarely as she held her competent shoulders. That was the day when shirt waist and skirt were the voluntary pedagogical uniform -- wide swishing blue serge skirts of near floor length and crisp white cotton shirt waists with high neck and long sleeves. Thus was Miss Grace consistently attired. Her weak and, except for one brief moment, flabby spirited predecessor characteristically abided corsets, and her waistline was as indefinite and elusive as was her professional dignity. Miss Grace had masses of fine pre-bob, pre-permanent red hair, which she wore piled high. Her eyes (I've forgotten the color--blue, I think) flashed with a keenness reflecting the satisfaction she found in her work. And even that modest bustle as it followed her about the room was eloquent with purpose. Her fingers were not long or tapering, but I remember how immaculately groomed they always were, so much so that the chalk dust from the black board seemed a desecration. Behind her typical stern door of stern and dutiful determination another portal of softer substance flashed open with merry twinkles to those who knew the combination.

Thus, it was natural that Miss Grace had smiled indulgently at my brother Henry Junior's lusty singing of "The Watch on the Rhine" which, along with other proclamations of sympathy for Germany at war, caused him to be dubbed "the little Kaiser." When Germany went to war in 1914 it was quite natural that Americans of German parents, particu-

larly those who were not profound students of history, should be pro-German in their sympathies. Papa was no exception. I was only nine at the time, but with what feeble convictions I could muster on world affairs, I supported Papa. But Henry was eleven, and then as always Papa, his ideas and loyalties, formed a gospel which his namesake embraced with unquestioned devotion. I didn't rebel at being called "little Kaiserin", although I don't remember that any delusions of regal grandeur disturbed my youthful fancy. Thus, for three years Henry went crusading for the Kaiser's cause, and almost everyone thought the whole business very funny --until 1917.

In January of that year I graduated to grammar school where Henry had preceded me by a year. Then the United States openly embraced the cause of the Allies and we were in the patriotic doghouse. That we should have been concentrated there by the children was understandable. But that some adults so lost their dignity and sense of proportion as to stoop to persecution was a commentary on the depths to which passion, masquerading as patriotism, can descend. Papa was a better American than these child-whipping-post enthusiasts. Although he did not understand all the forces that led America to go to the aid of the Allies, he was an American first, even when America was fighting against "the old country." I took my cue from him and did my bit with as much enthusiasm and understanding of what it was all about as my classmates could muster.

But Henry didn't get the point so quickly. He was called a traitor when he didn't even know the meaning of the word. I believe that any kind of racial persecution is despicable, and I have long since

forgiven the little leering-faced Jewish classmate who lost no opportunity to hiss "dirty Hun" when I was within earshot of him.

Papa was logically blamed for Henry's inability to change his allegiance overnight, and, along with other German Americans, was kept under surveillance. The high school principal was put through the third degree of suspicion, as were two members of the high school faculty. One of these, the physics teacher, was accused of sending wireless messages to Germany by way of Mexico over the high school wireless, a tribute to his scientific skill, to say the least. He was kept in a concentration camp for the remainder of the war and was never allowed to return to the high school.

In this atmosphere of war and suspicion I entered high school in September, 1918. Small wonder it was that Armistice day had even greater significance for us than it likely had for many non-combatants.

One very vivid incident of my grammar school days precipitated me into another debacle of wounded feelings. I blamed the war for this too. In our school's elimination for state declamation contest honors, I was judged best for my rendition of Lowell's peaceful poem "The Dandelion." Citywide elimination progressed until only two of us were left from pre-high school contestants to declaim for the honor of representing Waco against Austin. For the seventh time I put everything I had into extolling the virtues of the lowly dandelion. But the subject was untimely, and my honorable opponent was given the decision for her rendering of a war-inspired jingle entitled "Mother Does Her Bit" --for the Red Cross, I think -- this in spite of the rule which wisely forbade the use of any

subject related to the war.. I was crushed and wept my usual copious tears.

This was not the end of the matter, however, as far as the others were concerned. Some unhysterical person pointed out the violation of rules by the judges, and it dawned on them that Austin might claim the victory by default if our winner did her bit about "Mother's Bit". But, out of consideration for this poor child's feelings (mine didn't matter) a consideration influenced somewhat (or so I thought) by their solicitude for the feelings of this child's prominent clubwoman mother (my work-at-home mother didn't matter), the judges decided not to disqualify my yí victorious opponent. Instead, they asked ther to learn an eligible selection in time for the finale with Austin that very night. This was expecting too much of any ten year old. Thus, when her big moment came, memory forsook her, and, having been untrained in poetic improvisation, she and the honor of dear old Wace went down to inglorious defeat. I blush now as I recall my lack of mourning over the outcome.

VII

Meanwhile, Papa was working his way up in the Furniture business. He had graduated from shopman to shipping clerk. As shipping clerk he got things done because, as a large sign over his desk proclaimed, "SISTEM" was his watchword. The boss noticed the sign, commended Papa, then suggested that he learn to spell his motto correctly. Papa was a bit crestfallen over this reminder of his lack of learning, but he carried on without burning any midnight oil, and was soon helping out "on the floor" when lunch hour left it undermanned. So successful was he at selling that before long he was promoted to fulltime salesman on the stupendous salary of \$22.50 per week.

Shortly thereafter the boss sold the business to a rival concern with the understanding that Papa was to be retained. And he was. From 1915 to 1918 Papa sold quantities of furniture, as much as \$60,000 worth in a single year. But his salary never got beyond \$30 per week and there were no commissions. Consequently the Strickers went on no sprees.

Around 1915 we moved next door into a larger house - five rooms, a latticed porch, and a partitioned-off-the-kitchen bathroom which boasted a solitary tin tub. This tub had once been painted white, but when we made its intimate acquaintance it was a mottled shade of something or another, and the paint had aged into such corrugated wrinkles as to be a positive menace to the human epidermis. At least there was no danger of slipping upon entrance or exit.

Sometime later was added a new bathroom possessing a handy fixture especially convenient in cold, wet weather. Now our bath water no longer ran out into the backyard, creating a hazard to flying feet. This new room was hung over the one outside window of my tiny cubicle, which served as

sleeping space for me. Hence I had about as much privacy as the people who happened to be on the other side of the window. This public bath was entered by a door opening off the latticed porch, on which, in summer, Papa, Mama, and the boys slept. Thus, only in summer did we have a living room without nocturnal occupants. Grandma held forth in the one respectable bedroom, and I shared her centripetally minded feather bed when there were overnight guests.

But we found compensation for the inadequacies of the house in the extensiveness of the yard, which accommodated a garden and orchard, a cow, chickens, and, for a time, even pigs. All of these Mama cared for in her spare time without much help from us children, I'm ashamed to admit. She even allowed me to add a series of dogs to the barnyard menage. The fact that she too loved dogs made the welcome awaiting their sometimes unannounced arrivals more spontaneous than they might have been.

Dogs were my especial delight. But I seemed to be bad luck to them. Some observers facetiously suggested that I bathed them to death. But I wanted to cuddle them and encouraged them to share my bed with me. In our house, therefore, bathed they had to be. I suppose I shed more tears over parting with my dogs than over any other griefs or disappointments that came to me during those early years.

The first one, given to me for my very own, was a young bird dog that I named Bessie—I've forgotten why. I still remember the day she didn't answer my call to breakfast. And I can still see the pleading look in her bewildered eyes as she lay in the front yard unable to move or cry out for the agony she was suffering as the aftermath of having eaten

ground glass some fiend had made available, though not intentionally for her as far as we knew. Quickly Papa secured a merciful file, and I ran away so that I could not see or hear. Later, amidst sobs and tears, I dug a little grave for Bessie in the backyard and covered her lovingly.

I grieved so for Bessie that it was a long time before I could consider allowing another dog to take her place. But when someone offered the boys a little white bristle-haired mongrel puppy, I said yes. Thus began the cherished career of Boob McNutt, named for a comic-strip character whose celebrated cerebral cavity was almost as empty as Boob's. But Boob was adored no less for being dumb. He needed me only the more. Knowing nothing of Boob's heredity, we could not foresee what environment would do for him. It did rather well, for he grew into a huge dear of a dog for all his moronic I.Q. But gluttony was his undoing. He was accused of eating our chickens. I defended him, demanding proof. Proof he brought to the backdoor one day and was convicted. Nextday, when I returned from school, I called out as usual "Boobi! Boobi! (pronounced BBoo-oo). But no Boob came. Mama was gentle as she explained that Papa and Henry had taken Boob away before I got home to save me the sadness of farewells. I didn't fully appreciate this consideration, in fact, wept the louder for having been deceived as well as deprived of my playmate.

Next there was tiny, emaciated Marmaduke Ethelbert, who needed something generous in the way of a name to offset his very obvious deficiencies. He never was well, and before we had time to become well acquainted he died of stomach trouble.

Then came Scraps, a black and white, mangy, fifty-seven varieties mongrel whom the boys rescued from drowning by his former owner and brought

to me for hospitalization. After Scraps had a clean bath he didn't look so bad, and I took him to my heart in spite of his background. Eventually, he went the way of Boob McWatt, but this time I was treated as an adult on the occasion of his departure.

As partial compensation for this series of losses, Cricket, a part collie, named by Mama for one of Fortune dogs, was provided for me. Cricket was lovely and seemed destined to outlive and outlast his predecessors by a long lot. Then, one day, in his joyous romping, he came too near an automobile wheel. I think Mama mourned his loss as much as I.

Sometime during the war we added a cat (Henry's preference) for variety; and in recognition of the campaign to "Hooverize" we named him Substitute. I've forgotten what became of him. Of course he too had his baths.

Chen, another near-collie, was Cricket's successor in my affections. I guarded him against attack from accusing outsiders only to have him contract distemper, and, despite the unprecedented services of a veterinarian, go the way of Bessie.

Penultimately there was Jackie Coogan, whose career with us was as exciting as the movies whose baby star suggested his name. Jackie Coogan, for all his bearish proportions, was as gentle as a dove with us, but he resented the rather indispensable calls of the postman, the ice-man, and the groceryman. When we were unable to train Mackie Coogan not to bite, or, what was as bad, frighten these visitors out of their wits,

we reluctantly gave him to some people in the country. He served them nobly as a watch dog even to the extreme of pursuing over a fence one of the family who, in strange attire, sought entrance after dark.

Last of the line was Dynamite, whose name speaks for itself. He was a diminutive fox terrier of irresistible appeal; and because his misdemeanors were somewhat commensurate with his size we forgave him indefinitely. Papa even tolerated his educated taste for newspapers. So, Dynamite stayed to tell me goodbye.

VIII

Having no sisters to make a lady of me, I was always a tomboy. It took dogs, not dolls, to arouse my maternal instincts, and dogs acted as animated models on the few occasions I was moved to interest in doll dresses. I made the most air-minded kites in the neighborhood, and was consequently worked overtime during the windy March days. Of all the games I liked baseball best and preferred hard ball to its soft substitutes, which could be caught bare-handed. Until I was sixteen, and had begun to grow self conscious when sliding in home was indicated, I played with the boys, and they (at least some of them) admitted I was the better man. My temper sometimes got the better of me. On these occasions my brothers usually got the worst of it, for if I couldn't wrestle them into submission, or throw them flat, I resorted to shin kicking, rightly resented by them as an attack considerably below the belt.

For adventure we went crawfishing, to the County Poor ^harm, and to our Aunt Annie's at Llano. The fishing was done in the creek which

flowed through nearby Happy Hollow during the rainy seasons but which was dried up into mudholes most of the time. One of these latter, the bottom of which we never saw but quickly felt, also served as a swimming hole, although its dimensions made it impossible for us to get more than five feet from shore. We couldn't swim, anyway. An overhanging tree spread cooling branches in the torrid Texas summer, and under these we splashed as happily as if the turgid pool had been crystal clear and its inhospitable bottom soft as soothing sand.

One day the three of us and some neighbor children caught seventy-five crawfish using salt pork for bait. We brought the catch home, I prepared the inestimable edible portions for cooking, and we fried them over a fire in the neighbor's yard. In the interest of conservation I started to the house with the scalding fat that remained. Before I had gone far I stumbled, fell, and spilled the liquid fire over my bare shin, with decidedly dampening effect on my appetite. But crawfish on cold biscuit is good. So are potatoes underfried indigestibly outside.

We always felt rather cheated that we had no relatives to invite us for a vacation on a real farm. But we derived what consolation we could from occasional days at the Poor Farm where Mama's half brother-in-law was overseer. A few table crops were grown by the competent inmates, although for the most part "farm" was a misnomer. Even as a child I couldn't help being depressed by the helplessness and despair written on the faces of these derelicts of society; and I was haunted for days after a visit by the mental image of a big lunatic Negro who, though reputedly harmless, filled me with clammy fear.

There were a few thrilling expeditions to the "mountains" around ~~Ltano~~ where Aunt Annie lived with Uncle Adolf and four cousins—all boys. We climbed the overgrown hill called Town Peak with as much enthusiasm for the fascinating unknown as has moved more mature mountain climbers from time ~~immemorial~~ immemorial.

The only time I ever went camping I had to sleep in a truck with a narrow board understudying my spines. And even though I caught a sizable catfish in my bathing suit (a feat I defy any modern to perform), I voted against further camping excursions unless we could carry along at least some of the comforts of home.

I am not sure that Grandma accompanied us on this trip. But if she did I know that she enjoyed it. Grandma was a wonder despite several disabling physical afflictions with which she lived for many years. One of these ailments directly influenced the expansive rotundity of her unrestrained middle—all stomach to our anatomically untutored minds. She found irrepressible joy in living, and laughed long and often with such gusto that her "stomach" shook without solemnity, much to our delight. Though seventy-five and mostly sedentary, Grandma had the appetite of an adolescent boy. How she enjoyed food! And why not? She still had all her own teeth, and a handsome set they were although no dentist had ever had a closeup of them.

Grandma's chief source of joy was her family of brothers and a sister. When we were very young we used to wonder why she and Great Aunt Susie always cried when they met after being separated for even a short

while. Grandma and these brothers and this sister she had mothered formed in their later years the nucleus of the Jones family reunion. How they adored each other and reveled in being together—Mary (Grandma), Stephen, Cyrus, Andrew, Henry, and Susie. The several half-brothers and sisters were also welcomed, as were, of course all the children, grandchildren, and in-laws. They loved to sing and enjoyed most the songs of the Sacred Harp. First, the notes of the traditional Do-Re-Mi and Fa-sol-la tunes were named and sung. Then the words.

Our five room house was headquarters for one year's reunion. Of course we couldn't sleep them all, but though parcelled out to other relatives at night, the whole crowd ate, sang, and enjoyed each other at our house during the days of the customary week. When Grandma died, at seventy-seven, the joyous circle was broken, and it seemed to be understood there would be no more Jones family reunions.

One midnight in 1921 I was startled awake by cries of distress. I called Mama and Papa and we rushed to Grandma's room. But she was already only partially conscious. After seventy-seven years, her merry heart had just stopped beating. She couldn't have known for long that the time for her departure had come. And that was well. She loved life but not for the material blessings it had bestowed on her. The only tangible legacy she left us was, rather appropriately, a piano. She had made what seemed at the time an even trade when she deeded Uncle Henry a lot in South Houston for the charred remains of a piano, the interior of which he had rehabilitated. Papa remade and refinished the exterior. It was something of a disappointment to the eye, but its tone made one forget that.

It was on this instrument that I learned to play. Mama had never had a lesson in her life, but she dug out for herself the notes of "Sweet Bye and Bye" with variations and "Angel's Twilight Serenade". When I was twelve, I had my first lesson. My teacher was a kind soul, but she allowed me to direct the procedure too much for my good. I didn't want to be bothered with counting; so I didn't count, either to myself or aloud. I disliked exercises, a fact my faulty fingering attests to this day. But I learned considerable for all the practicing I didn't do. And while I never could get hip motion into "The Graveyard Blues", I put emotion into "Il Trevatore". That suited my taste for funereal music better, anyway.

With high school, studies, and basketball practice left me little time for the piano. It was very hard for Mama to extract money for music lessons at best. Thus, I had to make a choice. Basketball won the decision and the year of lessons came to an end, leaving me a fair performer but still a stranger to the more classic composers.

For ~~xxx~~ three years I found increasing joy in countless hours of playing basketball, and my enthusiasm for the sport was not diminished by the fact that I spent about half my time on the floor under the heels of taller and stronger girls than I, and was scarcely ever free of bruised knees and bulging digits. Rivalries for a place on the team were keen, but personal feuds ladylike, for the most part. However, one tall young Amazon was on everyone's blacklist (except mine) because she apparently enrolled everyone (except me) on her own blacklist. I got along with all the girls for the simple reason that I wanted to badly enough. One day in fast play this unpopular athlete descended on me with all her weight,

which was considerable. There were whisperings (she was known to be a knocker-down and dragger-out for all her weaker sex) that she had deliberately hurt me. This accusation almost started a riot, which was averted only by expressed belief in her innocence.

The trips we took, the games we played and usually won, were thrilling adventures. During my senior year, just as I had finally attained the position of first substitute for the "varsity" and was looking forward to accompanying the team to Munday, where we were to play for the state championship, I came down with my fourth round of pneumonia. Disappointment was deep. But I got to go after all, for when the coach too contracted the disease, the trip was postponed.

We all adored the coach. We didn't think of him as a man, or as a bachelor, but as our true friend and counsellor. It was no wonder, then, that sooner or later almost if not all the basketball girls took chemistry, which he taught. I was no exception. And this friend more than any other person was responsible for the crystallization of my early ambition to go to college.

The first chase for bobbed hair struck when I was fifteen. My curls had long since retreated in favor of more manageable braids, but short hair seemed an even further simplification, or so I argued at home. Papa was disgusted at the unladylike idea, but one day after obtaining Mama's consent, I secured the barbering services of a fellow basketball player and, in the girl's basement at high school, just before practice I had my thick, dark tresses bobbed without style or formality. When I

nonchalantly, self-consciously strolled onto the playground, the coach expressed his immediate opinion ~~of~~ of the transformation with a quiet "I am surprised at you." I survived his disapproval and that of Papa, however, and in time they were both reconciled.

But not by the remotest stretch of imagination could I have been called a "flapper." I am afraid that even through high school I took myself rather seriously and ~~manipulated~~ disdained more scornfully than I do now such aids to allure as rough, lipstick, and unnaturally arched eyebrows. This was perhaps one reason why boys never bothered me. I don't remember ever having heaved even one sigh over that fact. My masculine classmates seemed such infants, and although I got along with them perfectly, I had no need for their company after school, inasmuch as I didn't dance and basketball occupied all my spare moments. Besides, if I had definitely decided as a very young child that twenty-eight was the ideal age for a woman to marry and that her husband should be at least ten years older than she. So, believing there was plenty of time for all that later, I left nature uncorrected, carried my own books, and spent my evenings at home.

IX

I don't remember who or what inspired me to elect the classical course in high school. And even less understandable in the light of my antecedents was my early acquired determination to go to college, specifically to Harvard or Yale, which institutions were merely romantic names to me then. It was later that I learned to my great disappointment that ladies, particularly undergraduate ones, were not welcomed within these

hallowed portals.

English was always my favorite subject, and I had my first and last fling at ghost writing in 8 -B. Misgivings about the moral rectitude of such an occupation bothered me even though it were undertaken on a strictly amateur basis and at the urgent and tearful request of a friend. When my theme bearing my name rated only a B whereas my theme credited to my classmate received an A, I decided that ghost writing was wrong in more ways than one.

My 9-B English teacher made David Copperfield live again, and his careful criticism of our themes, written in red ink with all the decisiveness suggested by his lantern jaws and flashing black eyes, were models of instruction not approached by many of his successors. There was a teacher who knew his subject and who imparted inspiration as well as information. I met this instructor again in 10 A, good fortune that may account for the fact that I was stirred by Emerson's Essays while most of my classmates considered them very dull indeed. Although I was one of the few who liked this teacher personally, it was a sad day for the English department when he gave up the job of inspiring youth for that of lining his pockets.

The 9 -A English teacher, a dancing little antiquarian who had taught Mama Latin, had the audacity to accuse me of plagiarizing the short story I was required to write. I was hurt, a bit angry, and I respectfully told Miss Leslie so. Evidently my denial was convincing, for she never seemed to look upon me as a thief and gave me an A for the semester. The accusation, being false, was a reflection on her judgment. But it would have been a reflection on mine had I been guilty, for that

short story was so bad no one but a moron would have chosen it for filching.

Four years of Latin, four of history, four of English, four of mathematics, a year of sewing (ugh!), and a year of chemistry made up my course. During my senior year the school magazine published my first and only published verse. It appeared on the Latin page, of which I was editor, and was a rhyme of many stanzas depicting the vicissitudes of a "pony" ride. I agreed with the latin teachers that riding a pony, inside of class or out, was an activity inimical to the maintenance of one's moral equilibrium.

During the summers between high school terms I haunted the Carnegie library, using almost every conveyance from boy's bicycle to roller skates ~~faucidsxappoxkxskdkyxfhouxkdkkxksmskhdgr~~. By often using all the cards in the family I could avoid making the hot two-mile trip every day. I'm afraid I read neither wisely nor well for the most part. Although I had accidentally discovered David Copperfield at twelve, very little of my summer reading approached it in classic flavor. We had no library at home for there had never been money for books other than Anderson's and Grimm's Fairy Tales. Although I read all the dialogue in almost every library novel with a happy ending (I looked at the last page first), that I remember scarcely anything about any of them is eloquent commentary on their literary value. But I followed the rough course of true love through thousands of pages as I sipped lemonade and alternately sat, stood, or reclined on the back porch, depending on the issue being momentarily decided.

Graduation time came with its days of excitement and moments of

sober contemplation. Our church gave a banquet for its own graduates, and I responded to the toast to the girl graduates with these sincerely felt if not poetically promising lines:

If all of our friends are just like you,
Always so helpful, always so true,
I know we'll succeed what ever we do-
If all of our friends are just like you.

X

During the summer before my entrance into high school, Papa's former employer bought a little second hand furniture store on the main street and engaged Papa to run it in the capacity of partner-manager. Henry was Papa's only assistant except the delivery man. Since Papa couldn't leave the store even for lunch, Mama prepared his lunch at home and Gene or I rode the street car down town to deliver it. Shortly after school began in September, enlarged quarters were obtained on the main street and the business began to take on the appearance of success, which it achieved surely and not too slowly. The paternal drawing account rocketed proportionately to seventy-five dollars per week, twenty-five of which, however, went back as payment on Papa's initial stock.

And so it came about that after many years of living in somebody else's house we were able to borrow enough money to build a home of our own. The site selected was conveniently across the street from the small house we had rented for six years, and we were thus able to watch the progress of construction from foundation to roof. Naturally we concentrated on

bedrooms and baths, an insufficiency of which had inconvenienced us for so long. And we planned a ~~xxxxxxxx~~ large living room, into which to this day, as far as I know, no bed has intruded.

But there were many times when every bed in the bedrooms and on the porches of our large house were full to overflowing. Our house was dubbed the Stricker hotel inasmuch as Papa's and Mama's numerous relations used its accommodations so often. We didn't mind that, for half the fun of having lots of room lies in the joy one finds in having a place to entertain guests, be they relatives or friends. Even Uncle Herman, the same ~~xxxxxxxx~~ travelling salesman of the Arlington gold brick, was welcomed often. Except for his kisses upon arrival and departure, Uncle Herman was an ideal guest. Mama and I didn't go in for kisses anyway, and those Uncle Herman bestowed on us were especially trying on our hospitality since they were delivered through the prickly bristles of a neat but annoying moustache.

After her death in 1921 and until his own in 1923, Uncle Stephen took Grandma's chair at our table. Rice pudding was still served extra often, but the intervening years had destroyed his indifference to the hazards inherent in unpurified rainwater. His vacant chair and bed were taken by paternal Grandma. Thus we were six as far back as I can remember until I broke the circle for good.

XI

If I hadn't been bound and determined to go to college, I would have stayed at home and learned to cook and sew. Papa thought those more fitting occupations for a woman. But he tolerated my intellectual ambitions, and although from one quarter to the other he had great difficulty scraping up the tuition fees, somehow he managed. Finding Harvard and Yale out of the question, my next choice fell on the University of Texas at Austin because it was the best known of Texas institutions and had a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. I had a romantic longing for dormitory life, but since we had an accredited university in Waco and funds were insufficient for Texas, I stayed at home and went to Baylor. And I am glad, for had I gone away to college I would have missed Papa the last eight years of his life rather than the last five.

I didn't learn much about so-called college life at Baylor, and, as a day student, I missed most of the extra-curricular activities that contribute so much toward making Alma Mater a term of nostalgic connotation. I have not mourned this loss either, for I gained by it extra time and energy for concentration on what seems so often to be the last consideration of the college man and woman—the acquisition of knowledge.

It was natural that I should major in English and that teachers who made the most lasting impression on me should be those who introduced me to the hitherto practically unknown riches of English literature. Unfortunately for me I was not advised to fulfill more than the minimum requirements in composition. Composition behind me (a B should have warned me), there was soft spoken young Br. Caskey for me to argue with over the possibility and rectitude of forgetting as I read the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" that Shelley had deserted his wife Harriet and driven her to suicide. This

This professor had his own marital troubles I learned later, and although he disposed of them legally before he acquired his Mary Bodwin, he quite naturally couldn't damn Shelley with as much enthusiasm as the latter's inconstancy inspired in me. Other circumstances added to the romantic aura surrounding Shelley's champion. There were his Yale Ph. D. and his Oxford residence as Rhodes scholar. There were his sensitive, clear-cut features and those long, slender cigarette-stained fingers which caressed the pages of poetry. He read Chaucer's middle English carefully but with relish, for he too had a merry heart and a keen sense of humor. He approached Keats as well as Shelley with quiet reverence, and his reading of the "Ode to a Nightingale" so perfectly reflected its mood of ecstatic depression that I am moved yet by the memory.

Browning is the patron saint of most Baylor students, particularly those who major in English. You can hardly be in an atmosphere so permeated with the exposition of his philosophy and so concerned with the perpetuation of his memory and remain unimpressed. All English majors and many others take the Browning course. Here one encounters Dr. Armstrong, and in whatever state of disarray one may leave the scene, he knows that if strong-arm methods had been necessary to enlighten him in the cause, they would have been forthcoming. Dr. Armstrong is the business scholar, the enthusiastic hewer of wood and drawer of water to the end that those contemplative scholars who come in future years may find the appointments for the study of Browning complete and perfect in every detail. Thus, by dint of prodigious energy and consuming purpose, Dr. Armstrong has assembled at Baylor the most extensive collection of Browningiana in the world. That

he has done this at the expense of his own personal accomplishments in the realms of pure scholarship it goes without saying. Much of the money for acquisitions has come from profits on his big business of conducting - in person and by proxy - summer tours, chiefly in Europe. His parting gift to each of his students was a list of Browning items still missing from the collection.

Yet despite the fact that I don't remember that this ^{professor} ~~teacher~~ ever appeared in class with a prepared lecture, or even delivered himself of anything identifiable as such, he was a highly successful teacher. On the day ~~that~~ Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra" dominated the calendar, Dr. Armstrong did appear with a handful of bits of paper on which he seemed to have notes. But most of these, we gathered, were incoherent even to him, for, in a few minutes he threw them into the waste basket and began to talk about --I've forgotten what, but I'm rather sure it was not "Rabbi Ben Ezra." It was not that he was unfamiliar with the text. Far from it. But his professional excellence lay in his ability to inspire us with the ideal to learn what Browning had to say for ourselves. For this one quarter course we were held accountable for ~~an~~ a prodigious amount of Browning's unfortunately self-unabridged output. But Browning and Armstrong were a team, and time spent with them a rich experience.

Shakespeare in a quarter under the whip of this same professorial Simon Legree was equally stimulating. Even to my uninitiated ears Shakespeare was a name synonymous with the most exalted poetic expression of man's most vitally significant urges. Therefore, when in due time the first quiz arrived consistently ^{ing} entirely of a long list of insignificant characters about whom we were to give pen pictures, I was disillusioned.

Putting down my poised pen with undisguised disgust, I demanded of Dr. Armstrong, "Is that what we are supposed to learn from Shakespeare?" Whereupon I was dubbed Miss Impudence. But he didn't hold that against me and that wasn't all I learned about Shakespeare.

After a year and a half of college I decided to work toward completion of the four year course in three years and a summer. That meant taking extra credit hours and budgeting my time. To satisfy the requirements for a natural science, in my last year I took a condensed biology called Preventive Medicine. The instructor had very concise notes and his delivery was exceedingly deliberate and well punctuated. Those elongated pauses provided me with the necessary time for preparing my French lesson. After this poaching had gone on for some time, the members of the class were given a test to determine the condition of their respective nervous systems. The instructor notified that one of my eyelids fluttered, and this gave him excuse for a mild reproof. He had observed my surreptitious activity during his lectures, had looked up my record in the registrar's office, and, although he admitted I was getting along pretty well in Browning, Shakespeare, French, and his own course, he advised that I take things easier for my health's sake. I appreciated his solicitude but ignored his advice, grew thinner, and graduated as I had planned.

XIII

I must have been about sixteen when I heard my first Grand Opera, Lucia di Lammermoor, as presented by the San Carlo company at the local Cotton Palace exposition. The spell of that glorious awakening to the

beauty and loveliness of this supreme art of the emotions and heart holds me captive yet. Fashions have changed in opera as well as in other forms of art; and my taste in ~~the~~ things musical have generally widened and deepened in proportion to my experience and understanding. Currently, in sophisticated music circles, it is heresy to mention Italian opera above a very inaudible whisper. Of course the German opera is grander and Wagner opera's supreme exponent. To the majestic music immortalizing the god-man monstrosities of his incomparable imagination I listen chiefly with my mind and marvel, detached. But it is my heart which listens to the inexpressibly sorrowful strains of the theme identifying La Traviata, that theme so excruciatingly sung by the strings; and I am moved to an irresistible merging of identity with those benighted lovers whose sorrows are no less sublime for being mortal.

I have always loved to sing out of all proportion to my proficiency in the art. And music has become for me the most perfect form of self expression. Music invites refreshing confession and liberating release of those emotional surges that make our heaven or hell, but which, when revealed through words, suffer the inevitable stifling refinements that those who speak and those who listen intrude. In music I dare to declare the whole truth, proclaim the fullest love, consign human devils to hell, and laugh even the gods to scorn.

The voice being the only musical instrument provided by nature, it followed that I should sing somehow, somewhere. Without having had any vocal training-- a circumstance which did not distinguish me from almost all the other choir singers, I answered the call for choir singers in our

church when I was seventeen. If there is any one place in a church where you come to know people as they really are, it is in the choir loft, particularly where the members are volunteer. For this reason the choir has been called "the powder house of the church!" From observation I can vouch for its powder-like proclivities. No Metropolitan prima donna is more temperamental than some gospel singers I have known. One often sweet soprano in that first choir later snooked us all. But for many years before, the exhausting ritual of Mother's Day always reached its tearful climax with this singer's moist rendition of "Tell Mother I'll be There." Knowing nothing against her mother, I have doubts of the ultimate meeting.

Waco, Texas, was far from the centers of creative activity, but thanks to Baylor and to Dr. Armstrong in particular, we sometimes had the opportunity to see and hear celebrities in the arts. I recall Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and some lesser figures. I can still see Sandburg looking very awkward and anachronistic as he simultaneously plucked the strings of a guitar and chanted his poetry. The result wasn't very happy, I thought. I heard Edgar Lee Masters with prejudiced ears, for I had delved into his Spoon River Anthology and The New Spoon River and found them foul. I even wrote an intemperate essay entitled "The Mud in Spoon River."

Gratitude for his part in leading me to poetry, I suppose, led me as late as college to bristle with adolescent indignation at remarks belittling Longfellow because of his didacticism. I even penned some

frightfully bad verses in his defense, verses long since consigned to flames. But even now, having acquired a richer perception of poetic value and long since having graduated from Longfellow, I treasure these lines, from Evangelina:

Talk not of wasted affection, affection never was wasted;
If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters, returning
Back to their springs, like the rain, shall fill them full
of refreshment;