

At Home With Mama Mamie

By Camilla Holben Collins
Copyright © 1980

Contact: Hale or Barbara Lee Collins
Route 1 Box 228
Lamoni IA 50140
(641) 784 6007
w6rwh@arrl.net

DEDICATED TO
THE OFFSPRING OF SAMUEL AND MAMIE
EMMERSON HOLBEN
AND
THOSE OF HER MOTHER, CAROLINE VAN EATON
EMMERSON

Chapter 1

The long, whistling train came to a screeching halt. Sister Carrie almost toppled over as she finished buckling the last pair of overshoes, and the lunch baskets Elson and Ethel were tugging from the shelf scurried noisily down the aisle. We had arrived.

Grandpa picked up toddler Helen and the other six children joined hands in pairs. Mama bundled me tightly and grabbed the diaper bag while Grandpa and Grandma hurriedly gathered up pillows, books and carpet bags to tuck into empty hands.

Mama stood to cast a fleeting glance at her young army and began quietly calling out commands and questions. "Ethel, please tie Jimmy's shoestring. He'll stumble on the steps. Pull your earflaps down, Elson. Where's your other mitten, Elva? Pearl, I see another book on the floor. Is everything off the shelf? Carrie, grab Grandpa's arm."

"Logan... Logan..... LOGAN," the conductor called a bit impatiently and our exit began.

Helen hugged Grandpa tightly around the neck as they passed the porter, but this time didn't scream at the sight of his coal black face.

Each little traveler was warmly welcomed by Aunt Carrie Hill as she watched anxiously for her newly widowed younger sister.

Uncle Frank eased the tension of their greeting by calling each of his nieces and nephews the wrong name, amidst amused giggles, as he patted and kissed each one.

When the train pulled away everyone burst out laughing for, in spite of Mama's last minute checkup, two of my drying diapers were still flapping from a slightly opened window.

It took two surreys to get us all tucked in for the seven mile trip to Magnolia, Iowa. When we finally reached Grandpa and Grandma Emmerson's old rambling house, all the neighbors were awaiting our arrival. Between cries of "Home again," and "How the children have stretched," they took turns peeking at Helen and me. We were the two who had arrived since Sam and Mamie left Magnolia five years before to live on a farm near Eatonville, Washington.

The older children adjusted easily to the familiar quarters while 2 1/2 year old Helen and I, only one, did much investigating of our new home to the constant tune of "No, no."

I'm sure during the cold winter months Mama must have often dreamed of the farm and Washington's milder climate. The home she had left was made of logs except the kitchen. Gorgeous red roses vined over the porch and a fragrant honeysuckle vine climbed over the kitchen window. From this room she could see, on clear days, majestic snow-covered Mt. Ranier with its rosy topping at sunset.

In the orchard there was a variety of apple trees as well as peach, pear, plum and white and red cherry. The white cherries were destined to be canned live, for there was always a youngster straddling a limb of the tree.

Beyond the orchard was a field of cattle and a winding road with towering pines all about. Is it any wonder that Mama thought Washington the most beautiful of all states? How she must have missed the scenic West when gazing out into Iowa's winter snowdrifts and summer cornfields.

But most of all I'm sure she missed the kindly little Englishman who had suddenly died of a heart attack, leaving her at 33 years to rear 8 lively children.

During the next few years of adjustment Mama was most grateful for Grandma's and Grandpa's help. Dear Aunt Harriet Emmerson, now 100 years old, recently told me, "Grandma

was extremely deaf and Grandpa nearing blindness when your family came back to Magnolia. His eyesight had been impaired by measles while in the Civil War. But the two joined forces in forming a team of LISTEN AND LOOK while your mother was at work. With Grandpa's ears and Grandma's eyes they could easily spot you children and either put a stop to your commotion or join in the fun."

Our uncles also sensed their responsibility and played the part of second father to our brood.

Uncle Frank teased us, as daddies always do, and often sang his favorite song, "Three Little Girls in Bluelet," to his own daughter and Helen and me. He was great at telling jokes and asking riddles, too.

Uncle Trum was our clown and as unpredictable as any ever seen at Ringling Brothers or Barnum and Bailey's Circus. He came hustling into the garden one day as we weeded to put on a little I'm starved to death act. "I haven't had anything to eat for ages," he whined while pretending he could hardly walk.

"Shall I make you a sandwich?" Helen asked sympathetically.

"No, Helen, that would be too long to wait," he groaned. Then pulling two radishes and an onion he shook off the loose dirt, tore off the stem ends and the radish tops and devoured the vegetables in haste. Then, to demonstrate his new found energy, Uncle Trum jigged and danced through the garden rows, bowing and tossing his hat as he went. How we loved to see Mama's youngest brother coming.

Uncle Will, her older brother, had hobnobbed in a logging camp with many Scandinavians. The yarns he told in Ole Olson's dialect sent us children into fits of laughter. I've forgotten the stories but I can still see my cousins, Dorothy and Fae, and me rolling on the floor as the tale grew funnier. He won our hearts by the stories he created for our entertainment.

Chapter 2

Since I was only one year old when Grandpa and Grandma Emmerson brought our family back from Washington to share their home, I cannot remember how it looked then. But I'll wager it had the very same appearance as I recall a bit later. So I'll skip a few years.

The home around which the first part of my story is to be centered was entirely different from the homes of today. Let's start with the kitchen. Can you imagine one completely lacking in gadgets? Well, ours did have a coffee mill. It hung on the wall near the cooking area. We smaller youngsters were allowed to stand on a chair, dump in the sack of coffee beans, turn the handle and grind and grind. In the absence of instant, drip and perk varieties, this process worked very well for making Mama's morning cup, brewed in a graniteware coffee pot on the big cookstove.

In our kitchen the stove took the center of attention with its warming oven at the top and a reservoir for heating water at one side. On the back of the stove the irons, with handles that had to be held with a woolen holder, were parked ready to smooth out the laundry. Beside them, in winter months, were the bricks and soapstones to warm our beds.

Behind the stove was the high painted woodbox flanked by a pail of cobs or kindling for starting the fire and a scuttle of coal to help hold the heat. A matchbox was housed in a tin container nearby and beside it a goose wing to insure after-mealtime dusting of the stove, both inside and out,

when crunchy breakfast toast was made in the oven.

Although no one could call our stove ornamental, how we loved its crackling sounds and singing teakettle.

A broom and dustpan rested in a close-by corner ready to tidy up the messes made by ashes, wood bark, cob chaff and coal dust; and just think, there were no electric cords for the broom to get tangled in.

Near the outside door was the commode with its blue washpan, a bar of soap resting in an old jar lid, a pail of water with a graniteware dipper and a roller towel above. This was the spot where we grabbed a turn to wash for meals and disposed of in-between playtime grime, dumping the water into an ever almost overflowing tin pail.

The supply cupboard was tall with shelves also for dishes and a lower section where leftover dinner food sometimes molded before suppertime. Usually, with 11 hungry mouths to feed, this posed no serious problem at our house.

The oilcloth-topped wooden worktable, for preparing food and washing dishes, stood near the cupboard with cooking pots and two dishpans hanging above. Dangling among them was the string holder which, in the absence of our modern tapes, often saved the day.

This room may seem drab, but in a way it was tops. Everything cooked or baked in it was made from scratch with homegrown fruits and vegetables, whole milk, real butter and fresh eggs to add to wholesomeness. There were no harmful preservatives to plague us. What a blessing to have fared from such a kitchen.

Pussy and old Jack, our disposals for kitchen scraps, thought so, too. Then the neighbor's greedy chickens scrapped over bits that they passed over.

Our dining room was large and a bit prettier than the kitchen for it had linoleum on the floor and calendars from the bank and stores to liven up the walls. Our grandparents had set up housekeeping in two rooms of their home, but we always kept an extra leaf in our table so they could join us as they chose. Around this extended table were eleven chairs of all shapes, sizes and colors. Some of them were a bit wobbly. I never watch the Waltons', on T.V., sit down to a meal without thinking of us. We numbered exactly the same and produced just as much chatter and racket.

The lamps, with their chimneys sparkling after a daily bath, set on the wall shelf near the table ready to brighten our way.

But the cheeriest spot in our dining room was the big hard coal burner with its iringlass doors through which we watched the dancing flames of yellow, red and blue. Best of all were the delicious aromas from the earthen pot on the back of the stove where cereals, stews and baked beans alternately simmered during winter months.

The parlor I recall best after it took on its new look. The rejuvenation began when Mama's sister, Carrie, gave us a big tan rug. It was our very first. Although it had been used, it was still in good enough shape for our gang to lounge on. We thought her gift was beautiful with its circular design of pink roses in the center and one bright flower in each corner. We had no carpet sweeper, and brooms, it seems, only remove surface dirt. So periodically we lugged the rug out to be paddled on the clothesline. It polluted the air and almost strangled the one wielding the beater, but we were still grateful for its beauty and comfort.

With the rug to inspire, Mama gradually added to our parlor, from yard sales, a green velvety couch and a dual purpose bookcase and writing desk. How we admired its rounded glass

door and shiny mirror. Before long a "Daisies Won't Tell" embroidered cushion and several others adorned the couch and our two squeaky rockers.

But this was not the end. Ethel longed for a piano and was elated when "The Logan Observer", a weekly paper published in our neighboring town, sponsored a subscription contest. First and second prizes of pianos were to be given.

"I'll work hard in soliciting, Mama," she begged. So the race was on. Dear old Grandpa Emmerson helped all he could by carting her over the countryside in his buggy, drawn by his faithful horse Dandy. Grandpa was afraid of dogs, but Ethel was determined not to pass by any of the farm houses.

"I'll go first, Grandpa, to see if anyone is home," she always told him.

At the close of the contest she was well rewarded for her bravery and perseverance. She came out second in subscriptions and won a black walnut Howard piano. None of us will ever forget the day it came from Logan to add that shiny look of elegance to our parlor.

Ethel took lessons for awhile and was soon able to play very well. She loved to slip onto the piano stool at night and, without a lamp, play all she knew from memory.

The most memorable addition to our parlor was yet to come. It was a great day for all the villagers when electricity came to Magnolia.

"We can't afford to have the whole house wired, but we really need better lighting in the parlor," said Mama. So she asked the electrician to drop a cord from the ceiling. With a bulb screwed in its socket we were as proud of our one hanging light as some of our neighbors were of their fancy chandeliers. It was as delightful as Aladdin's Lamp.

There was not much variety in our bedrooms. Each had two beds, a dresser and a washstand with a large white bowl, a tall pitcher and a towel rack. Grandma's colorful rag rugs and quilts added a bit of homeyness.

One bedroom had a folding bed which occasionally lived up to its name amidst our screams for help. All the other beds had slats which we could depend on to spraddle. Countless exciting dreams were disrupted as we thudded to the floor and sleepily readjusted the offender.

Somehow I cannot dream of this old house without hearing some of the sounds, especially in the wintertime. There were no storm windows or plastics, and how the wind rattled the windowpanes. Mama eliminated all the breezes she could by tacking thick, black tar paper over the screen doors and, on blizzardy nights, we helped her stuff carpet rags in the cracks of the doors with silver knives.

Even then sometimes we awakened to find that the howling winds had sifted a thin layer of snow in on the foot of the bed. We would cuddle the warm quilts about us and listen as Mama pounded the ice in the water pail so she could fill the teakettle. After we had counted the shake-down of ashes in three stoves and heard the noisy, little hunks of coal tumbling down into the magazine of the hardcoal burner, we knew it was about time to hop out of bed and dash over the icy floors to the dining room. There we hovered, in pairs, around the big stove, warming our fronts and then our backs while we washed and dressed.

I doubt if Mama could have truthfully sung, "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," but I still recall the feeling of thankfulness for a warm fire and an uncomplaining Mother who tried hard to make things as pleasant as possible for all her offspring.

Chapter 3

The Three Bears had nothing on us for our family came in three sizes, too. There were Carrie and Ethel, our biggest sisters, Pearl and Elva, our middle-sized ones and Helen and I, though not wee-little, much smaller than the others.

We seemed to have every variety of girls but a redhead. There were both blue-eyed and brown-eyed blondes, a typical brunette and a unique combination of blue eyes with dark skin and hair. In temperament and talents we were all quite different, too.

Because we were always seen in pairs, our names were almost as inseparable as Jiggs and Maggie and neck and ears.

Carrie, the eldest, had amusing ways of expressing exasperation when things went wrong. Her most emphatic one was, "Now wouldn't that jar your grandmother's preserves!" She was our organizer and general in charge. Although petite in size, weighing less than 100 pounds, her voice and manner carried an air of authority. When she spoke we flew and things got done. Perhaps it was partly because she wore aprons like Mama's. Or maybe it was her pompadour hair style, like a lady's, that caused us to obey the first time spoken to.

She was the motherly type who had grown up from childhood tying shoestrings, wiping noses and scouring out ears. It seemed her nature to spot the needs of all the brood and figure out a way to meet them. We respected her and often asked for advice. With all of us to supervise, a last minute charge up the schoolhouse hill proved a daily marathon for her. The kindly janitor gave her a sly wink when she came puffing in and kept ringing the bell until she was seated.

Ethel, our brunette and next in line, was spick and span particular. She gathered up our stray socks, locked us out when the floors were drying, wiped up our water pail spills and was a persevering tidy-upper.

She had a sense of humor and a witty way of trying to manage the gang. We were quick to take advantage. At times we led her a merry chase around and around the house until she would get to laughing and could never catch us to apply her little switch. In the end Carrie stepped in to assist Ethel by making us mind.

After listening in at our house one of our little playmates once said to her mother, "I love both the big Holben girls, but Carrie seems much more sterner." Somebody had to be for sure. But we loved Ethel's gentle soft-spoken ways and felt at ease around her.

Elson was the third in the family and the big brother, though slight in build. From my earliest memory, it seems, he was always doing odd jobs for someone to earn a bit of money. So at lyceum time it was Elson who helped buy the tickets. On the Fourth of July he would slip each of us a few more dimes and there was always that extra package of valentines.

He was nicknamed "Ready" by some of his friends and the name was fitting. He was a ready supplier of food, often appearing with mushrooms, fish, gooseberries, rabbits, squirrels or nuts.

Once he came home with a turtle. No one wanted to cook it, so I volunteered. At the table I was reluctant to take any of the meat.

"Come on," everyone urged, "it's good." Some insisted that it tasted like chicken. Others were sure it was similar to beef or pork. Mama explained that she had always heard that each section of a turtle had a different flavor. Then little bites began journeying from plate to plate and I finally joined in the game.

"Well, aren't you glad you ate some?" Elson asked.

"I'm not sure," I answered with a distressed look. "I wish turtles wouldn't try to get away. He wiggled and wiggled almost out of the skillet. Why don't they stay dead like a chicken?"

Then everyone realized why I had lost my appetite. Mama told us that turtle meat always wiggled as it cooked. But this was the last time I ever volunteered to put one on a platter for Elson.

Pearl, our fairest blonde and first of the middle-sized sisters, was the quiet one and the family's most avid bookworm. She was a homebody who didn't care at all for public gatherings. But her abilities shone. She could play many hymns in the Saints' Hymnal without ever having had a piano lesson. We thought her paper dolls and snowflakes were fantastic and her May baskets truly creations. She came up with new shapes every year. But those we most proudly hung were her high heeled, pointed toed cardboard slippers, completely covered with tissue paper fringe and with fancy fringed buckles.

There seemed to be no end to Pearl's talents. Her valentines were the daintiest, and I always marvelled at how she could just peer, now and then, at a large crocheted doily and produce one exactly like it. While the rest of the girls tatted the simple pattern of old hen and chickens, Pearl made fancy wide lace and lovely doilies.

She mingled Latin with our skippity hops as we went for the milk. All I remember now is, "Mira, mira, parva stella," (Twinkle, twinkle, little star), but the love of languages has always stayed with me.

Elva, just a notch below Pearl, was entirely different. She was happy-go-lucky and talkative. She made friends easily and kept them, too. Perhaps it was because she was so generous and loved to do for others. Elva often brought her pals home with her and shared with their families many times in return. If there was anything going on she was there for she loved people of all ages. She was especially fond of children and had a way with them. We tagged Elva about and liked to do as she did.

She enjoyed the out-of-doors but didn't care too much for pots and pans. Quite often she left a number of them soaking in out of the way places.

From her school text she taught me bits of German. It was easier to learn than Latin for many of our neighbors were of German descent and it was Magnolia's second language.

Helen was nearest my age. She was only 19 months older, so I'll lump us in together. We got along well but I admit I was secretly envious of her red and pink dresses and ribbons. "It must be so nice to have brown eyes," I often thought.

She was a fix-it gal with tinkering ability that I completely lacked. At an early age she could take the alarm clock apart and put it back together without a tiny piece left over. I couldn't even spot where to park the biggest parts.

Her love for arithmetic amazed me. Spelling and history and reading were so much more interesting. I loved to memorize poems but she couldn't seem to catch the rhythm.

Helen dutifully wore her sunbomet to stave off freckles, but mine dangled from an out of sight fence post. I went through a pair of shoes about every two months while hers remained shiny new. She was quite inclined to argue but I preferred to keep silent and avoid fusses. All in all we two didn't seem to be fashioned from even a similar pattern.

At one stage we won the nicknames, for a short time, of Slats and Stuffy. Although younger, I was a few pounds heavier and caught up at an early age in height. Strangers often asked if we were twins, but I'm sure Mama was most grateful that none of us arrived in doubles.

I mustn't leave out our other brother. Jim came along right after Elva. For several years he

was called Jimmy for Grandpa was Jim at our house. Even though he was older than we, Helen and I, while youngsters, thought of him as our little brother for Elson was our big one. I'm sure, with four sisters, Elson must have heralded his arrival with great joy. But all of us girls, too, thought it was really nice to have brothers.

Jim was a typical boy. He joined in our outdoor games, made fun of our mud pies, watched over us on the way to school, hid our dolls, and with warm smiles and winning ways endeared himself to the whole family. He kept us girls supplied with sling shots and even loaned us his jackknife. I still carry a long scar on my forefinger due to my eagerness to learn to whittle, as he did, all by myself in the woodshed. He was our rescuer when we fell from our stilts and gave us much appreciated instruction for walking in mid-air more safely.

My childhood memories of him are very pleasant. Well, all except one that centered around a chilly evening in very early April.

Supper was almost ready but where was Jim? "Has he been home since school?" Mama asked as she came in from the store.

"Yes," everyone agreed.

"But I haven't seen him since he stopped by with Hannaman's cow," Ethel added.

Elson chimed in, "I'll bet he's out trapping. Girls, go check the woodshed. See if his trap is off the hook."

Helen and I went running, but as we reached the door we backed away grabbing our aprons to our noses. There stood a bedraggled Jim. As an unmistakable scent penetrated the kitchen, no one doubted where he had been.

"Don't come in," yelled the older girls.

"Get out to the woodshed," Mama commanded.

Sympathetic Elva moaned pitifully as she slammed the door, "Will he ever smell good again?"

Everyone was chattering at once. Somehow we all lost our appetites as supper simmered on.

Mama took command, showering orders like an army sergeant who had taught and expected immediate action. "Get the tin tub, Carrie. Elson, bring hot water from the reservoir. You little girls pump some cold from the cistern. Pearl, bring out soap and towels and Elva, find Jim some clean clothes," she yelled back from the woodshed as she joined our doomed youngest brother. He was due for one of Mama's energetic scrubblings. She took no stock in the old saying that cleanliness is NEXT to godliness. Cleanliness IS godliness was her conclusion.

Quite sometime later they emerged from the shed, Jim looking spotless. But when we drew straws to see who had to sit by him during supper he was crestfallen.

"Do I still smell?" He was on the verge of tears. "Mama almost scalded me and rinsed 'till I shook and that bar of soap looks like a sliver."

Everyone held noses and agreed that he fairly reeked. The odor had lingered in his thick brown hair.

After supper Elson burned Jim's underwear and dug a trench in the garden to bury all his colored clothes. That procedure Mama had learned from Grandma who had survived five trapper sons. It was guaranteed to eliminate the odor and salvage the perfumed clothes from an ashy grave.

"Now listen, Jim," Mama warned as she started back to the store, "you be careful! If you have another disaster with Jimmy Skunk we're apt to bury YOU."

Chapter 4

"It isn't easy to make a living in Magnolia for eight children, Mamie," some of our neighbors were always advising. "There is no reason why you can't get some help from the county."

But energetic Mama cut these well-meaners off rather curtly by her prompt answer, "As long as I have a back I'll make my own living."

Our house was surely not a mansion and very poorly furnished, but Mama tackled poverty, just as she did everything else, with chin up and an indomitable will. Many times she quoted to us, "Where there's a will, there's a way and it's up to us to find it."

I'm sure we lived far down the hill from the poverty level of today, but Mama never let any of us even surmise. I do not recall ever hearing the words, "We haven't enough." But I do remember hearing her say many times, "The Lord makes the back to fit the burden." She had faith that he would provide, but she impressed upon us that faith without works is dead. Consequently in the spring we were awakened early many times to the click of her hoe in the big garden, perhaps as a reminder that each of us was expected to share in the daily weeding.

Often at planting time we begged, Mama can't we have just ONE row of flowers, please? Sweet peas or nasturtiums would be pretty. All the neighbors have flowers in their gardens."

But Mama would shake her head and answer, "First things must come first and in our garden it's food. Would you like nasturtium soup or stewed petunias instead of juicy peas?" Then noting our disappointment she would cheerfully add, "You can find all kinds of pretty flowers in the woods and get good exercise to boot. After all the snowballs are already budding, we'll soon be sniffing lilacs and in June the roses will burst out all over."

We watched wistfully as she plunked dozens of cabbage plants into our dream row reminding us of our winter supply of sauerkraut and slaw.

Mama was proud of her garden. She beamed when neighbors complimented her on the straight clean rows, the large variety of plants and the general layout.

But one spring she really had a problem. We lived next door to the German Evangelical Church and parsonage in Magnolia, Iowa. The pastor was a kind, friendly sort of man, well loved by his flock. But somehow, with only two children, he didn't seem to quite comprehend the greater responsibility of a widow with eight. Consequently, several times per week, he opened his chicken yard gate and let all his hens out to graze.

Now Mama didn't mind so much if a few wandered over into our yard, but when they piloted over into our fenced-in garden it was a different matter. Twice during one week she pled her cause as politely as possible, but on the third offence she meant business. "Reverend X, I've explained our need of food, and I've reminded you twice of the city ordinance concerning keeping chickens penned. Now if this happens again I'm going to have to do something about it."

Reverend X pretended to understand, but at the end of the week there those chickens were again, scratching out the plants in our vegetable rows.

"Jim...Helen...Camilla," Mama called sharply.

We arrived from all angles, and when we saw her standing tall and erect, with pursed lips, we knew something was about to happen.

"Get those hens," she snapped. "You girls chase them into a corner so Jim can catch them. Hold'em tight, Jim, and bring'em to me."

It took awhile. Even though we were good sprinters, those birds evaded all our closing-in

schemes. But finally, red-faced and breathless, we delivered the culprits to Mama.

Slinging them one at a time over her head, she wrung their necks. Then gathering up their remains, she tossed the intruders over the fence into Reverend X's chicken yard. "Some people have to learn the hard way," Mama explained as she scanned our horrified faces. "I'm not a preacher and I can't speak German. But this act is my sermon in plain English for him. I warned Reverend X. He knows our need and he knows the law. Now let's hope he keeps it."

Reverend X did. Neither he nor Mama ever mentioned the incident, but never again did we see his biddies out for a morning stroll. From then on Reverend X treated Mama with the greatest respect.

Chapter 5

The little store where Mama found employment was a typical country one with neighing and pawing horses tied outside and numerous spittoons inside. I aimed at one once and ever after marvelled at how accurately these big jolly farmers made their goal.

I loved to watch them bring in baskets of freshly churned butter. Sometimes Mama would lift the clean linen tablecloth and let me peek. I was amazed to see the butter patted into rounded pounds with pretty designs on top.

At other times she let me stand by as she squinted at eggs with a kerosene lantern and laid aside the not too fresh ones. Some folks didn't wash their eggs and I liked the butter smell better.

Speaking of smells, what a variety at Mr. Frazier's General. There was that horrid salt herring and codfish. I edged away from those barrels and sniffed the cracker barrel instead. Sometimes Mr. Frazier rewarded my lingering presence with a sample cracker topped with a generous hunk of cheese. The aroma of coffee beans wasn't too bad, but everywhere in the store there was that horrid dank odor of burlap sacks and smelly leather saddles.

The best of all sniffs was near the candy bins. There was a tower of glass cases stacked on top of each other and reaching almost to the ceiling. Secure from eager hands the open sides faced the little aisle where the clerks walked. But one could stand and drool, and for a nickel carry away a piece or two of each kind. There were chocolates, "sawdust" covered marshmallows, taffy, jelly beans, chocolate coated peanuts, gum drops, candy corn, lemon drops, horehound and several kinds with crunchy fillings.

At the other end of the big room it was fun to hear the ticking of the clocks and the thump, thump as Mama unrolled the big bolts of cloth to measure off pretty aprons and dresses, promising to loan my sisters' patterns.

As I wandered around, I often spied new items on the many shelves reaching clear to the ceiling. Occasionally I was allowed to scurry, monkey style, up the tall hinged-at-the-top ladder to bring non-breakables down to Mama.

Frazier's Store was truly a YOU NAME IT...WE HAVE IT one, bulging with everything from tin cans to tin tubs, tacks to stepladders, needles and thread to overcoats and chewing tobacco to perfume.

We were all thankful for the store, for Mama brought home seven shiny dollars every week.

Since Mama's wages were very small, everyone at our house had a part in keeping the wolf away from the door, although she never mentioned the creature. As soon as Carrie and Elson

graduated from high school they went to work. Carrie's first job was in a telephone office and later she worked with Mama in the general store. Elson was first employed as a mechanic in the Magnolia garage where there were a few of the early models of Brush, Carter and Buicks to tinker on.

Mama also scurried up a job for us three youngest ones. I suppose it was really Jim's job, but Helen and I helped. It seemed that many people kept a cow or two, but only those who lived around the outskirts of the town had grazing plots. So every morning, on our way to school, we stopped here and there to let another waiting cow out a creaky gate to journey with us to the big wooded pasture adjoining the school grounds.

With Jim, Helen and me to keep them in line, it was a fairly easy job, but occasionally an enterprising bossy would take a notion to charge up a bank. Invariably her friends followed suit and the chase was on. In the spring they never seemed to learn to dodge puddles and we sometimes arrived at school well splotted and speckled.

At four o'clock we left our dinner pails by the pump and all hurried out to count the cows standing patiently by the high gate. We always wondered how they knew the time. Did they start ambling in when the last recess bell rang, or did their full tummies give them a clue?

But Jim said, "They probably want to get rid of their load of milk," and that seemed logical. All too often as we counted we found one cow, and sometimes several, missing. We'd scan quickly to see which ones weren't there so we could call their names and listen for bells as we searched. It was usually Brindle, Speckles and Molly that lagged behind. We made a game of it to see who could locate and identify the tinkling bells first as we called "Co Boss, Co Boss." Sometimes we were out of luck for bossy was found resting under a tree as she calmly chewed her cud. The lagger was always in the farthest corner of the pasture.

Pay day was the happy time. As we delivered each cow we were paid a silver dollar for the month. At home we had our own little Bank of America. We'd pile all the spools of thread into another drawer of the old Domestic Sewing Machine, dump in our 20 to 25 silver dollars, and then take turns jerking the drawer in and out to hear our fortune jingle. That sound assured us that we had really done well in earning so much money.

When we saw Mama coming from the store to supper, we'd quickly plunk the dollars into an old sock and proudly present it to her for buying our shoes. The ones I remember best were the high topped red ones with black tassels. That one pair made all those twice daily trips with unpredictable cows in wind, rain, mud and scorching sun seem worthwhile. But Mama's gratefulness for our willingness to help was our biggest reward.

At eight o'clock each morning Mama was due at the store, but often as she bustled around we were unknowingly invited to share in the process of bringing home the bacon and, in the meantime, enjoy a happy day. Such expressions as these gave us incentive during the early spring days: "I wonder if the biggest mushrooms this year will be around that old stump in the timber?"..."Wouldn't it be fun to discover a new spot?"..."How do you think wild strawberry jam would taste with pancakes for supper."

Later in the summer we trekked to the woods for wild gooseberries with promises of jelly, jam and pies. None of us particularly enjoyed stemming them, but Mama knew the art of getting it done.

"There must be three tall glasses in the cupboard exactly the same size," she'd begin. "I believe last year I paid a penny a glass to the one who filled his first."

The race was on. There were spilt berries, sore thumbs and occasionally a loser in tears, but

as we sang, joked and made rhymes about each other, it was fun.

How proudly we scanned the Herald House special edition called "The Blue Zion's Hope" in December to spot our names in the Christmas Offering list.

As the summer progressed the older girls pickled and relished on the old wood stove. Some folks stopped with cucumbers, but Mama's jars boasted watermelon, cauliflower, beans and crabapple pickles, plus piccalilli, green tomato relish and nippy catsup. I often wondered when she'd start pickling turnips and greens

Along with the pickling they jammed and jellied and canned hundreds of quarts of tomatoes. We small fry had a part even in these operations. It seemed that someone was forever interrupting our play by yelling, "Jim, the woodbox is empty.".. "Whose turn is it to go to the store? We've just run out of sealing rings." What a nuisance big sisters were.

In those pressure cookerless days it was necessary to cut corn from the cobs and dry the kernels in the sun. It was a sticky, messy job, but what a delicious flavor it had when cooked for our winter meals.

Even though our kitchen cupboard may have at times been barer than Old Mother Hubbard's, there was no poverty row in our cellar. Before the first snowfall everything was gathered in from the garden and periodically we followed Mama down the rickety steps for thankful sessions. First we always viewed the rows and rows of colorful jars. Then on to the stone jars we skipped.

"See, there are enough carrots packed in sand to last 'till spring," Mama would assure us. "I don't know when we've had such a good crop of potatoes, and won't these sweet potatoes be a welcome change?"

Then while she peeked into the sauerkraut jar to see how it was ripening, we raced along the ledge thumping the paper-wrapped cabbages and sniffing the bins of apples. Sometimes, if supper had been a bit scanty, we were allowed to carry up one apiece, in our apron baskets, to nibble with evening popcorn.

As Mama carefully closed the cellar door she would often remark, "We surely don't have any knickknacks, children, but let's be thankful for what we have. Could anything be better for us than fruits and vegetables?"

Well, some of us thought that nuts were. So, in the fall, Mama sent her troop off with burlap sacks for black walnuts and hazelnuts. We slithered under fences, straddled gates and tossed acorns as we raced over the crunchy leaves of the lovely oak trees. Quite often we were waylaid by a thorn apple tree. A good whiff and a quick rub removed the dust from the tiny orange-red fruit. Cautiously we nibbled around the worms for a tasty snack. But in the end we wended home with a generous supply of protein to supplement our garden menus.

Because of her determination to provide for her family, Mama had lots of help from those who admired her pluck. Everyone knew that in our home there were 8 stairstep children. So, during fall but chering season, some of the less desirable cuts of meat jostled over the muddy country roads in buggies and wagons to our door. Mama accepted these gifts gratefully and helped the girls concoct a variety of tasty dishes. We little Holbens ate with relish never dreaming that on cows and hogs, alongside liver, hearts, tongues and spareribs, there were also steaks, roasts and chops.

Some of the farmers had daughters who were pals of Pearl and Elva, our middle-sized sisters. Every year they were invited at fruit harvest time, to pick out a tree for themselves.

Pearl's yearly choice was a cherry tree because cherries made delicious sauce and she enjoyed baking pies, too. She let me fill my little pail from the lower branches and on Saturday

didn't mind if I joined in the pie baking.

But the big problem was where to hide the pies so there would be enough left for Sunday dinner. Guy and Alfred, our older sisters' beaux, always came on Saturday evening and never could resist that delicious aroma.

One day Pearl's eyes were sparkling. "Come with me," she whispered. Together we sneaked out to the rain barrel. "We'll suspend this board down into the barrel," she giggled. "It will be our secret pie and cake parking shelf, and don't you dare tell."

"I can keep a secret," I promised. To our great delight this ingenious spot with its tin tub hat was never discovered.

Elva's tree was always an apple, usually Jonathan, but sometimes she chose Grimes Golden. It was fun to pick apples with her for she laughed and joked and was pleasant to be with. And it was a treat, too, to ride home at the end of the day with those several bushels of apples in our benefactor's wagon.

Sometimes Mama would have to can a few of the spotty ones on Sunday. But she justified the act by quoting from the Doc. & Cov., "Nevertheless, let nothing go to waste."

Mama's boss at the general store was also an aid in helping her make ends meet. She often jokingly said, "We can do it, children, if we all pull together and never allow the ends to stretch too far apart." Mr. Frazier helped shorten the distance by sending, every month, a wagon load of light weight wooden crates for us to kindle our stoves.

Once while piling them in the woodshed Jim let out a squeal. "Look, kids. Here's an unopened box of Nabisco Wafers."

"Whoop-ee!" we all yelled and immediately held a conference session to decide what to do with them. "Would it be right to keep the cookies?"... "Did the boss accidently miss this box, or did he want us to have them?"

"Yes," Helen and I voted.

But Jim who was a bit older and wiser wasn't so sure. "If we ate the cookies, though," he reasoned, "Mama would have one more box for kindling."

"Sure," we all assented.

What a grand tea party we had. Hastily we set up a makeshift table in the woodshed, called in our friends and dined, till we thought we'd burst, in order to add that box to the kindling pile.

Forty years later I told this story to Mama. "Why you little rascals," she exclaimed. Then she laughed heartily, adding, "Well, knowing Newt, I'd say he put that box of cookies on the wagon, but no doubt he expected a thank you for his generosity."

Chapter 6

The head of our household was a saver. "Let's tuck that away for a rainy day," she often said. So she had us rolling bits of string into balls. She kept every scrap of paper to help build fires or to park under winter boots, and snipped all the buttons into jars from threadbare clothing. Then she tore our worn-thins into strips which we girls wound into balls so Grandma could make colorful rag rugs for our bare slivery floors.

During gardening season she carefully scanned her garden plot for plants that had gone

to seed, and made her own little packets of radish, lettuce, spinach, beets and turnip seeds. She also periodically dried peas and beans from the sturdiest plants and seeds of the choicest cucumbers, tomatoes and melons. "Take care of the pennies," Mama always said, "and the dollars will take care of themselves."

With that slogan in mind she never allowed food to be wasted. "Take all you want," she advised, "but don't take more than you can eat."

Under her watchful eye every plate on our table, at the close of each meal, was as slick as Jack Sprat's platter. Often though some of us departed later than others. One time, when staring down at creamed codfish, I tried falling asleep. But my snores were soon stifled.

Helen hated carrots and I detested beets, but when Mama noticed that we had passed them by she always retrieved the bowls and portioned our share before us. "Everyone can learn to like vegetables," she'd pleasantly remind us, "and if you don't like them just eat them anyway. They're good for you." Then seeing our pouty faces she would add "If you're really hungry it's easy to eat what is set before you, and remember there'll be no piecing between meals."

Bread crusts she promised would make our hair curly and after fruitless sessions before the mirror I almost lost faith in Mama. But with such perseverance, the crust is still my favorite slice.

Bits of dry bread found its way into bread puddings, tastily doctored up with leftover fruit, plump raisins and a variety of flavorings.

Even the potato peelings were salvaged at garden time. Although we had been taught to pare the potatoes paper thin, Mama would say, "Peel them thicker, girls, and save the peelings for planting." I'm sure they were buried with fervent prayers and the increase God gave was marvelous.

Every bit of fat from meat frying and cracklings from lard rendering went into cans stored in the cellar for soap making. In the fall Mama turned it out by the tubs-full, large snowy but scentless bars.

Even though laundry soap was but a few pennies a bar, she found joy in figuring up how much money she had saved to apply to our food budget.

The old maxim, "WASTE NOT . . . WANT NOT" didn't need to hang in a frame in our home. It was woven into Mama's daily accomplishments. She was truly a faithful steward over her meager possessions and, therefore, didn't like to have our family in want because of another's thoughtlessness, particularly Neighbor Z's.

Mama was blessed with a nice disposition and was most always cheerful, but one day she was really cross. Mrs. Z had just borrowed a half pound of butter. "In the past two weeks," Mama sputtered, "I have loaned her a sieve of flour, a cup of sugar, several eggs, a bar of soap, some vanilla and land only knows what else. Now, of all things, she has borrowed the butter you girls worked so hard to churn. Remember, children, if you borrow only a teaspoon of soda or salt see that you pay it back promptly and don't forget. I can't tolerate sponging off the neighbors and I don't want any of you to sponge while I'm at work. She always says she'll be going to the store soon, but none of the food ever makes its way across the alley to our cupboard. The poor dear! She just hasn't realized that she's actually taking food from our table."

"Why don't you tell her?" suggested one of the older girls.

"I suppose I should," Mama said, "but we'll have to think of a more tactful way to do it. We want to be generous and always willing to share, but it doesn't seem quite right to allow an otherwise good neighbor to fall into such a rut." Mama looked thoughtful for a moment. "Hmmm! I believe I borrowed that idea from good King Benjamin."

Taking the Book of Mormon from the shelf she turned quickly to his reunion sermon and read, "And I would that ye should remember that whosoever among you that borroweth of his neighbor should return the thing that he borroweth or else thou shalt commit sin and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also."

"She doesn't dream that she's a sinner, does she, Mama? Shall we tell her she can't have any more of our food?" Helen asked.

"Oh, no, but let's try to find a way to teach her to pay back."

Just then Ethel called from the kitchen, "The potatoes are peeled, but what happened to all the salt?"

"Aha! I'll get you some," called Mama and grabbing her shawl and a cup she was off to visit Mrs. Z.

In a few minutes we all ran to see how much she had borrowed and found just one little teaspoon of salt in her cup.

Mama shook a dime from the piggy bank and sent Jim racing to the store for a sack of salt. "See how fast you can make it," she called after him.

Jim broke all his sprinting records and again Mama set out for neighbor Z's. We fired a volley of questions but she only smiled and promised, "I'll tell you when I come back."

Soon we were flocking to the door. "What did you do, Mama? What did you say?"

"Well when she saw that teaspoon of salt that I had borrowed just a few minutes ago she laughed and laughed. 'Why, Mamie, you didn't have to pay that back. You shouldn't have bothered to send to the store so quickly. It was only a dab,' she said as she poured it into the salt shaker. But quite enough to make a kettle of potatoes more tasty for my hungry children," I answered. "It was good of you to help out because now we can eat on time. For that reason I'm happy to return the salt and, after all, that is what Mother Emmerson always taught me to do."

And so Mama's food borrowing problem ended. Wise King Benjamin had helped her solve it.

Chapter 7

Our mother had ways of sparing doctor bills, too. In the early spring, long before the first edible radishes and lettuce, she was out crawling around the big lawn digging tender dandelions to supply her brood with greens. As the season progressed we downed, with varying degrees of facial protest, more than our share of lambsquarter, pigweed, sourdock and mustard, and sometimes a grand mixture of them all. We were truly vitamin packed long before this nutritional need was discovered.

Along with her wild greens she toned us up with sassafras tea. Whether it was of any real value to our health remains a mystery but, when made of milk and sweetened with honey, it made a welcome change. Another less palatable tonic was sulphur and molasses which was supposed to have magic effects on winter-weary bodies.

Hacky coughs were treated with a mixture of lemon and honey, and runny noses called for her famous hot lemonade at bedtime. We felt like royalty propped up with fluffy pillows waiting for this delicious brew. And it worked. We were always better by morning, never realizing how much vitamin C we had imbibed.

But chest colds were another story. Mild ones were treated with turpentine and lard, but

oh those rattly ones. "Mama, do we have to wear a mustard plaster?" we'd whine. But she paid no attention. Plastered we were amidst howls of "Isn't that enough?...Please take it off, Mama It's burning right through to my backbone." As we wiggled and squirmed she'd threaten to spank, but the plaster always remained its allotted time.

Mama seemed to sense our every pain, although sometimes difficult to locate. Once when Ethel was asked where she hurt she answered, "Mama, I'm not sure whether it's the back of my front or the front of my back."

But with a bit of probing our home remedy doctor usually located the spot and applied her grandma-inspired concoctions. Sometimes when we complained she would remind us, "Well, you've never had to wear a dirty sock around your neck to cure sore throat or smelly asafetida balls to ward off diseases." Such superstitions Mama couldn't tolerate. She wasn't even leary of black cats nor the supposedly harmful night air. "There is nothing wrong with night air unless it is last night's air," she always told us. "No one can be healthy breathing stale air," and with that the windows went up until everything was smelling fresh.

Disease germs she thought could be banished by sunshine. Consequently, when other folks were cool, we sweltered with blinds sky high, for as Mama said, "Sunshine is cheaper than doctor bills."

One winter an almost unbelievable thing happened at the Holben quarters. All eight of us came down with the measles almost simultaneously. Of course Mama had to stay home from work and, to complicate matters, there was a law that measles must be quarantined. So with a big red sign on our door she was left not only to be nurse but cook, dishwasher, fire builder, cleaning maid and chore boy, carrying in water and fuel and carting out the ashes from several stoves. A bathroom would have been such a blessing but, since we had only a path, the poor soul was constantly on the run with so many demanding patients.

With eight of us coughing, itching and running temperatures, Mama abandoned her money-saving home remedies and called in our family doctor who was Frank Hanson, the brother of Apostle Paul Hanson. He was a general practitioner who not only made house calls, even at all hours of the night and in all kinds of weather, but delivered babies, pulled teeth and fitted eyeglasses. Doc, as we called him, was a cheerful, kindly, soft-spoken young man who was greatly admired and loved by people for miles around. He was not only an excellent doctor but often went the second mile in giving unusual service.

On this occasion Dr. Hanson followed Mama, carrying the kerosene lamp, from room to room. He checked our temperatures, peered down our throats, listened to our breathing and made remarks about the extent of our speckles. He stopped to stroke my hair saying, "Poor little thing. There isn't a spot on her without a measles."

When check point eight was finished and he had prescribed our medicine, instead of putting on his overcoat he slipped off his dress coat and began rolling up his sleeves. Mama watched in amazement.

Dr. Hanson spoke in his deliberate manner. "Get the hammer, Mamie. I can't stand by unconcerned and let you run your legs off. I'm thinking if you nurse all these youngsters back to health you're going to have your hands mighty full. Let's move all the beds into the biggest bedroom and set up a hospital to conserve your energy. "Besides," he grinned, when the kids start getting well they can entertain each other."

So together they hammered the iron beds apart and soon the measles ward was in operation. Before leaving the doctor Summarized briefly. "These blondes, Mamie, will do fine. But

it's the brunettes I'm worried about. They may not break out so well and that's when they'll be really sick."

Well, everyone broke out but Ethel and we almost lost her. Poor Mama followed the doctor's orders explicitly but spent many anxious moments.

Kind neighbors and relatives did what they could to help by leaving kettles of soup, custards and other easily digested foods at the door. When one good friend pounded on our quarantine sign and saw how haggard and worn Mama looked, after two weeks of constant vigil, she insisted that she was coming in to help.

"But, Mae, the law says no one is allowed in the house. I can't let you in," Mama protested.

"Then I'll just come in on my own, Mamie. You're going to bed and get a good rest while I take over. The idea of one person doing what you've done. Yes, I know you have an iron constitution, but what would happen to this family if you collapsed?" And in she came.

Mama laughed many times later about her neighbor's spunk but admitted she was an angel sent from heaven and just in the nick of time. Together they got us all on our feet, and Ethel was slowly nursed back to health by an excellent doctor, two patient nurses and the blessing of administration.

Mama's philosophy was, "The Lord helps those who try to help themselves." It wasn't just a trite phrase with her for she truly sensed her partnership with God. So, after home remedies, she didn't hesitate to call the elders if she felt we really needed God's help. She had learned from experience and from testimonies of others that rich blessings are available. Perhaps the most vivid in her memory was the testimony of her own mother.

Grandma had taken a short vacation to visit her parents, leaving her two sons, Sim and Tom, to experiment in housekeeping. When the boys received word of her return date they decided to decorate the house for Christmas. So they fastened sprigs of evergreens and clusters of red berries on all the curtains and made winter bouquets in several dishes and jars.

But Tom was troubled. "The house still looks sort of bare, Sim. Let's hunt up some pictures and decorate the walls."

So they brightened the scene with colorful pages from an old seed catalog, using pins to save making holes in the wallpaper. But they had to finish off with needles.

"It's a good thing there are three needles left for Mother's patching." Tom laughed as he laid them in a windowsill. Then he began picking up bits of paper, spilt berries and evergreen twigs.

During the night Grandma returned and was up bright and early to have a good breakfast waiting when the family awoke. She hustled about dusting the furniture and the windowsills and suddenly cried out in pain.

Sim and Tom came running. "Mother, you're home. But why are you crying?"

"I was hurrying to dust out the windows and something terribly sharp went into my hand."

"Oh," Tom moaned, "the three needles! I meant to put them back in the pincushion."

Sim hastily examined the floor. "There are none here, Mother. All three must be in your hand. I'll call Father and let's get to the doctor."

In a short while they were home again but with grave faces, for the country doctor had said the needles were too deeply imbedded and a surgeon would have to take them out. This would mean driving many miles in the wagon to the city and probably would take a lot of money, too.

"I just dread to be gone on Christmas Day." Grandma was in tears.

"Caroline, do you think God could help you?" Grandpa asked.

"Why yes, Jim. Of course he could through prayer.

"I've been thinking we might ask the Latter Day Saint elders to come and administer to you. I've heard that many people around here have received help."

"Jim! How can you think of such a thing? I have nothing against our good Mormon neighbors, but I don't want any of them laying hands on ME!"

Tom placed his arm about his mother's shoulder. "Susie told me that when she had pneumonia and was about to die two elders from the Reorganized Church prayed and she got better right away."

Grandma nodded. "Prayer no doubt saved her life but not because two elders laid on hands. The good old religion of your grandfather is still good enough for me."

"Yes, Caroline," Grandpa spoke up quickly, "it has surely been of great help. But perhaps if we'd study a bit and listen we might find something even greater. The Latter Day Saints speak of the fullness of the gospel and they-"

"That's nonsense, Jim," she interrupted. "All these newfangled ideas sound crazy to me."

"Well now, Caroline, I'm not so sure that this R.L.D.S. religion is so newfangled. Take baptism by immersion for instance. Jesus himself was baptized that way and after all it was Jesus who first laid hands on sick people to heal. All the gospel writers have written stories of his miracles. You know, Caroline, Jesus promised that same power to his followers who believed. I'm almost convinced that our Latter Day Saint friends share a bit more of the old time religion than we do."

"Jim!"

"Now don't be angry. I said almost, Caroline, almost convinced."

Several days passed. The pain of the needles was more than Grandma could stand. Each time Grandpa asked to have the elders she would stubbornly answer, "No, Jim, the good Lord has heard our prayers many times when we needed his care. We can surely trust him now."

But after several sleepless nights Grandma said, "Jim, if you'll go bring the Chambers brothers I'll let them administer to me."

How happy Grandpa was to make that long trip in the wagon to their country place.

Hours later a feeling of peace came into the little home as the elders humbly asked God's blessings. While they prayed the throbbing pain in Grandma's hand left and that night she slept peacefully.

The next morning Grandpa and the boys watched eagerly as she unwrapped the bandage.

"Does it hurt, Mother? Did you get a blessing?" Tom asked excitedly.

"I surely did, son. There isn't a sign of pain." Then Grandma gasped. "Look, Jim. Look, boys."

There in her hand lay the three needles. Reverently the grateful family knelt about the kitchen table to thank the Heavenly Father for this much needed blessing, the best Christmas gift of love that they had ever had.

Chapter 8

Clothing eight children could have been quite a problem at our house, but many outgrown coats and dresses found their way to our door. We were all taught to rip and often, when we stepped

out in one of Mama's creations, no one even surmised that the garment had been turned inside out, upside down, washed, pressed, re-cut and trimmed with ripped off fur. All of us went to high school in homemade coats.

With six girls in the family our theme song might have been, "Pass It On." At each transfer there was always a bit of altering for some of us were pudgy and others lanky.

Oftentimes watchful critics would advise, "Now, Mamie, you know you shouldn't work all day at the store and then sit up half the night fixing hems. Just leave those dresses like they are and the girls will grow into them. What if they are a bit too long? Next year they'll be just right."

Then Mama would calmly answer, "Did you ever try adding an extra inch to the end of your nose?" How thankful we six girls were that we didn't have to wear misfits.

Sometimes if there were a tiny flaw in a garment to be made over for Helen or me Mama might overlook it for as she said, "It will never be noticed on a galloping horse."

No one even thought of asking for new clothes for at our house we had learned, as they used to say, to hand it down, wear it out, make do or do without.

Mama even made the boys' overalls and knitted all the winter socks for her first five. when she became too busy to make them she taught us never to buy sleazy hose. Always be sure they are of good quality material so they will last." Later this advice carried over into many other areas.

Aunt Carrie Hill, Mama's older sister, borrowed us younger girls, one at a time, during the summer for a week or two and made over winter dresses for us. This was a wonderful gift, for Mama did all of her sewing at night from ten P.M. until two, after her long day at the store. Often she folded a rug along the bottom of the door so Grandpa wouldn't see her light and scold about her need for rest.

Mama always dressed her blue eyed blondes in blue for as she said, "It makes you look prettier." But one memorable summer Aunt Carrie sent me home with six made-overs: a maroon, a white, a green, a black trimmed in red and only two of those wearisome blues. As I looked at her blue eyes and light brown hair I guessed that she had lived through the same problem. I loved her for her understanding heart. Ever after she was included in my thankful prayer as I tied my starched apron and secured a white hanky to the pocket with a tiny safety pin.

Once as we ripped and sewed she told me a story about our Grandma, a tailoress, who made men's suits by hand - vests, coats and trousers. when sewing machines were invented she was determined to have one. After much skimping and saving it was ordered and when the machine finally came the news spread quickly. On Sunday afternoons people came from all over the county in buggies, wagons and on hayracks to see the wonderful invention perform.

One day, as Grandma was demonstrating, a curious lady asked, "Mrs. Emmerson, will it make buttonholes?" Grandma laughed about it all her life and thought that was the silliest question anyone could possibly ask.

What would Grandma say now if she could see our modern sewing machines stitching forward, backward, zig-zagging, doing all sorts of fancy stitches and not only making the buttonholes but sewing on the buttons! But when they make a machine that's geared for ripping, won't that be the day?

Poor as we were Mama drew the line on letting any of her chicks wear cast off shoes for she realized the importance of healthy, well shaped feet. How she ever did it I'll never know, but all eight of us always had two pairs of shoes, one for everyday and one for Sunday. Our father had

come from a family of twelve in England and insisted on following this custom of his parents. After his death Mama respected his wishes although I'm sure she must have had her own shoes resoled many times for our sake.

Keeping the mending done for such a brood was an enormous job, too. It seemed in the morning, as we were getting ready for school, someone was forever chasing us younger kids with a needle and thread to fasten dangling buttons or repair gashes. Jim was quite often turned over the kitchen stool while the patch on his seat was saved from flapping.

"A stitch in time will surely save nine," our sisters always told us, and often racing to beat the tardy bell we would have much preferred the extra stitches later.

I doubt if anyone ever heard our mother complain about the hardships of managing on a meager salary. But quite often she jokingly remarked, "I'll do that when my ship comes in."

Immediately my imagination would set sail. Would her dream ship be large or small? Would it come gliding gracefully or chugging along? Would there be richly dressed passengers or only happy sailors? Would the cargo be of gold, crisp green bills or shiny silver dollars? And how would it ever get to Magnolia when there wasn't even a river close by?

Referring to her ship wasn't just idle chatter. Mama had a right to daydream about its arrival. Three times in her life she had received a long questionnaire to fill in. Each time it revealed that once again a member of the Emmerson family was desperately trying to locate all the heirs of a small fortune. This money had lain in chancery in a bank in England for many years. At the end of one hundred years, if all the heirs could not be accounted for, the money would be turned over to the English government.

The story goes that in the early eighteenth century John Emmerson became the coachman for a Lord and Lady Tozer in England. Their beautiful young daughter, Maria, always insisted on riding with John on the coachman's seat and eventually they fell in love. Knowing that Maria's parents would not approve of their marriage they eloped and sailed for America. Mama's father, James Tozer Emmerson, was their eighth child and with his offspring was in line for a share in the fortune.

Well, Mama's real ship never came in, but some of the smaller lifeboats made their way to shore.

I recall the day she set off for Omaha, Nebraska, to buy herself a much needed warm coat. She was carefully guarding the contents of the piggy bank amounting to 25 sacrificed dollars. Arriving at Brandeis' big department store she found one of good quality that was becoming and extra warm. But before making her decision to buy she discovered a whole rack of children's coats on sale for \$5 each.

"It seems a shame to buy just one coat when I could get five," she thought. "Why, that \$25 would buy coats for the five older children. They'd be so surprised and happy. What a lot of sewing and making over of old coats that would save me, and I'd get more rest, too. The children really need better coats. With a sweater under my old coat I'm sure I could get by." Mama had reasoned herself out of a warmer coat. Happily she watched as the clerk boxed up the smaller coats and securely tied them.

When she reached the street there were puddles everywhere. As she picked her way along she glanced into the little river racing in the gutter. A tiny, floating roll of green paper caught her eye. Curious she rescued it. "Why, it's five \$5 bills," she exclaimed. "Now how can I find the owner? Maybe I could advertise."

"Then many dishonest people will try to claim the money," an inner voice whispered

quickly.

"Perhaps it would be better to turn the money in at the store," she mused.

"But there would still be the same problem," the voice answered.

After several moments of silent arguing, with a clear conscience and a warm feeling of gratitude she returned to Brandeis and bought the very much needed winter coat.

The little green sailboat had dropped its cargo at her feet for she had truly unselfishly given her all for others.

Chapter 9

Mama didn't discuss religion very often. Perhaps it was because she was only home at mealtime and on Sundays and holidays. She worked twelve hours a day in the general store and we smaller children were sound asleep when she returned at 10:00 P.M.. She seldom quoted scripture yet could turn readily to passages if someone were searching. But she wove bits of religious philosophy into her teaching which have stayed with me through the years.

"Everyone must share. There is no joy in being stingy or hoarding. After all we can't take anything with us when we go," she always said.

I was delighted many years later to find that Alma of Book of Mormon days had summed her advice up, "Seek not for riches for behold ye cannot take them with you." (Alma 19:20)

She often thankfully told us, "Whenever I cast bread out it always comes back someday well buttered and jellied. I figured later that this was her own version of Christ's instruction on the mount, "Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over." I have seen these words literally fulfilled many times as our mother proved her generosity in sharing her mite.

Another gem of her Philosophy I have treasured is "Learn how to receive from others. Giving brings happiness 50 don't spoil another's joy. Take the neighbors' plates back empty and tell them how delicious their food was. Then later do your sharing."

She also impressed upon us that every good turn didn't need to be repaid. "But see that you always watch for chances to help someone else who really needs it," she advised.

Our mother set a high standard for us in living her teachings by sharing with sick neighbors and watching for ways to bring joy to our elderly ones. Once she suggested that we hang a May basket to the old couple whose yard joined our garden. So Helen and I slipped over with one of Pearl's colorful, fringed Cinderella slippers.

The next morning Mrs. Menching came over early to chat in our kitchen. "Last night," she began dramatically, "someone hung us a May basket. It was so beautiful, a dainty slipper with a golden buckle. That SOMEONE had filled it with popcorn and violets and candy corn. It made Pa and me so happy. I just can't imagine who brought it, but if I could find out I'd go up to Frazier's store and buy those children a big sack of goodies. I'd get oranges and apples and bananas and peanuts and cookies and candy and -"

I could stand it no longer. Running to her I joyfully jerked her sleeve. "Mrs. Menching, it was US," I exclaimed.

Mama firmly believed that we shouldn't let our right hand know what our left hand was doing, but she didn't scold me for telling.

Surely Mama must have treasured the promises of the Lord's prayer for she demonstrated great faith in them. She truly feared no evil. She never locked a door or a window even when leaving home for a few days. "If anyone wants to get in he'll find a way by cutting screens or breaking windows," she reasoned. She only smiled when we'd suggest that a turn of the key might make entering a bit harder.

One spring a terrible storm threatened our little town. The wind was howling terrifically causing the house to creak and jerk. It seemed that the roof might come tumbling in any minute. By 5:00 P.M. it grew so dark that we couldn't see without lamps. Huge hailstones clattered on the roof and the north windowpanes came crashing in.

Our neighbors were all in storm caves. We had none, but Mama thought they were a hazard anyway, for falling trees and flying objects could easily block the entrance and cause panic within.

We children were becoming very frightened, but Mama calmly gathered us all into the living room to sing hymns. I shall never forget the quiet, peaceful feeling that came over us as we sang, "God Will Take Care Of You." The storm passed us by. Mama's faith had carried us through.

I also remember Mama as a woman of high ideals, very strict moral standards and most charitable. If any one of her six daughters chanced to make a remark about something overheard, she would frown and say, "Tut, tut now, girls. It doesn't pay to gossip. Gossipers just talk to hear their tongues wag. We must always give a person the benefit of the doubt." The gossiping ceased. At the close of her almost 82 years, all of us could truthfully say that we had never heard her speak disparagingly of anyone. Mama may have been lax in talking religion, but I doubt if anyone ever thought she failed to live it.

Sometimes we would say, "I wonder who is preaching tonight?" If Mama heard she always spoke up quickly but kindly. "What difference does it make? If you are attentive and don't let your thoughts flit out the window in a daydream, you can get something out of the sermon no matter who preaches." This was her way of encouraging regular church attendance.

Grandpa was a big help in getting this message across. He seldom missed a church service and on dark Sunday nights we children vied to be his lantern bearer, waiting patiently while he said, "Eeney, meeney." There were no street lights in Magnolia and he was almost blind. So with the chosen one forging ahead and Grandpa flanked by the rest of us, we steered him safely up Main Street many times to the little white church.

One night as the sermon progressed the wind howled increasingly louder, spitting snow against the windows and rattling the panes until we could scarcely hear the elder's voice.

Sister Carrie looked more and more worried and at the close of the service took immediate command. Six of us had accompanied Grandpa that evening and her first order was, "Remember, children, we are all leaving together. Let's get bundled up quickly. She bustled about helping tie mufflers over noses and chins, pulling mittens up over the bottoms of coat sleeves, buttoning leggings and buckling our cloth overshoes. When Grandpa's hat was well anchored with a scarf we got our blizzard directives.

"Jim, you carry the lantern and Pearl and Elva can guide Grandpa. Camilla, you're the littlest so walk right behind Grandpa. He'll be a good windbreak. Helen take hold of Camilla's hand and I'll hold yours and walk behind to see that no one falls. Ready? Let's go."

The first gust of the whirling snow tried to tip us on end. It pricked our faces and almost blinded us while the fierce wind made balloons of our coattails and stiffened our legs. But off we trudged toward home. The wind had piled snow mountains everywhere and threatened to blow out the lantern. But we kept slowly shuffling a path through, zig-zagging around the biggest drifts with

Carrie encouraging every inch of the road.

"Won't it feel good to get home, children? Mama will have a cozy fire blazing...Aren't we thankful for warm mittens and mufflers?...Try not to cry, girls. We don't want icicles hanging from our chins...Everyone hold on tight. The wind can't upset a seven car train...I'll bet Mama will have milk toast ready and aren't we thankful for hot bricks to warm up our beds?...It's only just a little ways farther now. We'll make it...Oh, look! There's our kitchen lamp. Our guardian angel has guided us home. There's Mama peeking out the window!"

We finally made it to the door. All my life whenever I need to feel grateful I have only to recall this walk in an Iowa blizzard with a sister who had learned to be thankful for some of life's most precious gifts, and a Grandpa who silently prayed.

Chapter 10

In the long ago days there was no bread sold in small town stores, so Mama always had to bake on Sunday while she was home for the whole day. How often I remember seeing the crock of sponge parked on a chair behind the hard coal burner. In severe weather it was wrapped with an old blanket to coax it to rise.

With nine mouths to feed Mama considered Sunday bread baking a necessity, but did her best otherwise to impress upon us the importance of keeping the sabbath day holy. So, when we arrived home from church, we donned aprons over our Sunday clothes. After the noon meal we were expected to not only entertain ourselves quietly but keep our clothes clean. We could play dolls and quiet games such as Checkers, Dominoes, Old Maid, and Authors. Quite often Mama's ingenious parking spots livened up Hide the Button. But the noisy wagon was isolated in the shed for the day and disturbing outdoor games completely banned.

"It's the day of rest," Mama would explain, "and we must have respect for our neighbors and not disturb the worshippers at the German Church next door."

As I look back Sunday was really a unique day. Mama was home. The house was all slicked up in preparation for proper Sabbath observance and everyone was looking his best. The aroma of a good meal cooking after a week of dinner pail lunches was heavenly. Mama felt she owed her flock one extra good mother-prepared meal per week. Now extra good at our house didn't mean roast beef or turkey. It might be Widow's Soup, one of Mama's specialties, or her add-a-bit-here~and~there variety. Her potato recipe with onions and carrots was our favorite because her delicious ribbles were always floating in it. They were mixed like noodles but crumbled in little balls that took on fantastic shapes as they simmered.

Sometimes our Sunday meal might be built around the lowly bean. It seemed there was always a pan full soaking in the kitchen. Nothing tasted better on a wintry day than beans with ham hocks, topped off with homemade bread and sliced onions.

We secretly hoped Mama wouldn't fix tomato soup for she never mastered the art of keeping it from curdling. But we downed it anyway.

Mama always said, "The good cook is not someone who can produce a fine meal with everything at hand to choose from. It's the one who can prepare a tasty meal with odds and ends of this and that." Many times she came from the garden on Sunday with a basket of fresh vegetables and, with the aid of a few nuts, proved her point.

But best of all was the Sunday afternoon togetherness in the parlor. We never seemed to tire of looking at Grandma's lovely scenes through the stereoptican viewer and the big, red velvet family album was always a favorite attraction. There were many old-fashioned tintypes to thump and various photographs of queerly dressed gentlemen in stiff-bosomed shirts. They were always seated comfortably while the wife stood with one hand on her spouse's shoulder. I was sure that this pose was to show off the ladies' lace, ruffles, bustles, hoops and many petticoats.

At sometime during the afternoon we were all expected to study our Sunday School lessons for the following week. Often, too, we listened as someone read the "Stepping Stones" aloud. Mama encouraged us to read good books by reading chapters to us from our favorite author, Louisa May Alcott. We especially loved her "Little Men," "Little Women" and "Jo's Boys".

Mama never seemed to worry about anything, at least not audibly. But many times, on Sunday afternoons, she related stories of God's goodness to her mother after the death of Grandma's first husband. Perhaps it was when she needed reassurance that there was a God in heaven who cared and was daily watching over our little brood. These stories made a great impression on us children.

So, after a few chapters from Alcott, someone always piped up, "Now tell us a true story about Grandma." We drew our chairs closer in anticipation.

"Well," Mama would begin, "once Grandma's cupboard was completely empty except for milk supplied by gentle Spotty, their most treasured possession. One morning as Uncle Hi went to milk the cow he saw a young deer standing in the barn lot. As he cautiously approached the beautiful animal made no effort to escape. Not wishing to take a chance on losing it, if he returned for his gun, Uncle Hi picked up a stick of wood and hurled it at her head. The deer crumpled at his feet. He had killed this God-sent creature because of great need and every morsel of the meat was manna from heaven to Grandma's hungry family."

"It's like the Moses story," I'd always interrupt, but Helen would clap her hand over my mouth so Mama could go on.

"Another time they found a deer with his horns locked in the wagon wheel. It was a large one and he supplied them with fresh meat and venison for many days."

"And one day Grandma was out sweeping the porch," I'd remind.

"Yes," Mama would nod as she continued, "and Jared Errinerson, a close neighbor, rumbled over the hill in his wagon. Seeing Grandma he yelled, 'Caroline, is there anything I can bring you from town?'"

"Grandma hesitated for a second and then answered, 'No, Jared, but thanks anyway for thinking of us.'

"Later that day the family heard a voice yell, 'Whoa!' They peeked out and saw neighbor Jared loading his arms with groceries. When the boys had finished helping carry in the food, the little table sagged beneath a big sack of flour, sugar, rice, beans, salt, cornmeal, dried fruit, potatoes, lard and other necessities.

"As the girls opened the cupboard doors to stow away the food, Jared glanced at the empty shelves murmuring, Just as I thought, Caroline.

"Just as I thought," we'd all echo and nod for we knew the story by heart.

"And after awhile he was Uncle Jared," someone always reminded.

"Yes, because Jared's brother James married widow Caroline, and they became my parents," Mama would agree.

"And that ends the Jared story," I'd interrupt. "Now can we hear about the skimpy supper?"

We waited patiently for her to continue.

"Well, one day when the family was down to a diet of commeal mush and milk a group of soldiers stopped by. 'May we come in and warm ourselves?' they asked.

"Grandma invited the shivering trio in. Then placing extra bowls she apologized for their skimpy menu, adding, 'We're happy to share but we're sorry that we had no salt to season our supper.'

"The soldiers gladly furnished the salt and ate the mush as if enjoying a banquet. Then emptying their knapsacks out on the table they left Grandma a generous supply of salt, sugar and dried meat. Again the good Lord had looked down from heaven and had not only seen but supplied the need of a trusting little family."

"And Grandma trusted God when everyone else got scared, didn't she, Mama?" Helen asked.

"Yes, Helen, I think she should have been named Caroline the Fearless. Her first husband, Reverend John Van Eaton, was beheaded by the Indians in a Minnesota uprising, the Little Crow Massacre of 1862. Grandma was left to provide for five young children. One day her daughter, Sadie, came rushing in yelling,

"'Mother, Mother! The Indians are coming. We heard the galloping feet of their horses.'

"'Are you sure, Sadie?' Grandma asked.

"'Oh, yes, Mother, I saw them as they came over the hill.'

"By that time three pairs of brown eyes were peering out from beneath the red tablecloth and Sadie scrambled into the big woodbox, landing right on top of little Ella.

"Grandma peeked through a small hole in the worn windowshade as many Indian ponies raced into the yard. Protesting chickens scattered in all directions.

"'For goodness sakes,' Grandma gasped. 'Those Indians are swooping down and trying to steal our chickens.' Bowing her head she prayed aloud, 'Dear God, I know you will protect the children and me, but please, God, help me to save our scanty supply of food.' Then leaving the boys to watch the younger children she grabbed the broom and rushed out the door.

"A big Indian rode almost to the porch. Swooping down he tried to catch a cackling red hen.

"Grandma raised the broom as high as her five feet could reach. Then she banged it against the porch as she shook her head and yelled, 'No, No.'

"Another Indian came near. Again she crashed the broom and yelled even louder, 'NO! NO!' This action went on and on, but not a single Indian had been able to catch a chicken.

"Suddenly the Indian chief gave a signal and all the braves crowded their horses around him. For several minutes they talked in low tones while Grandma stood erect and frowning with her broom poised for another strike.

"Then, wheeling his horse, the Indian chief rode up to the porch. There was a trace of a smile on his rusty red face. As he looked down upon our tiny grandma, the big Indian spoke but two words. 'Brave squaw!'

"With shouts that echoed far away to the rolling hills, the chief and all the braves galloped quickly across the prairie.

"As Grandma entered the kitchen five happy youngsters danced around and around the table yelling, 'NO, no.'

"'No, no,' Grandma repeated softly. 'Just two little words, but I'm sure God put them into my mind. He answered my prayer, children, and I'm so thankful to him for now we still have chickens to supply eggs and meat for the long winter months ahead.'"

Some Sundays Mama told us a story of a Magnolia family that also increased our faith in the Lord's promise to provide.

"Brother Fryando was on a foreign mission, children, and Sister Fryando became very short of food for her family because in those days missionary allowances were quite meager.

One day she heard a knock at her door and there stood a stranger. He came in, placed a cup on her table and left.

"Immediately the thought came to her mind that they would be provided for. As she heard the gate click she realized that she hadn't asked the stranger his name. Rushing to the door she looked in all directions, but the man could not be seen. There were no houses nearby and no trees or buildings to obstruct her view. Sr. Fryando was sure that the vanishing stranger was either an angel from heaven or one of the three Nephites who chose to remain on earth to minister to others.

"In a very short time there was another knock on the front door. when she answered, Uncle Dickey Chatburn, a beloved member of our Magnolia congregation, greeted her. Another man was with him and their arms were loaded with groceries. After that they never once lacked for food while Bro. Fryando was in the mission field."

"Uncle Alma told us that story at Sunday School," one of Mama's captive audience never failed to recall.

"Yes, Alma probably helped his mother put the groceries in the cupboard. And remember, children, The Bible says, 'Be not afraid to entertain strangers for perchance you may entertain angels unawares.' Always share something from the cupboard."

Just before dusk on the Sabbath Day, story time ended and we sat in a circle to sing hymns. Everyone had a turn to choose his favorite, and week after week my choice was always, "The Saints Shall Wear Robes as the Lilies." After wearing hand me down dresses from five sisters, the promises of those verses sounded fantastic:

To be dressed as lilies of snow
Walking beside murmuring waters
Picking roses
Gazing off toward jeweled temples

what ladies of splendor we would be. But best of all, as the Palm Sunday children, we'd be strewing flowers for Jesus. He'd really be there.

It was on these Sunday afternoon get togethers that we had time to reflect on our many blessings. The blue and red flames of our hard coal burner were so beautiful and the warmth so cozy. The water from our old oaken buckets was the world's best. Weren't we lucky to have such a big garden plot and so many good vegetables in the cellar? Very few children in Magnolia had a huge hackberry tree as large as ours to shade their home, and house a swing to take them so high into the air.

Mama's thankfulness and cheerfulness were contagious and, when she ended the session by popping huge pans of our home grown corn, we felt rich indeed and well prepared for the evening services at the little, white church on the corner.

Chapter 11

As a child I do not recall hearing the word Zion except when read in scriptures at church. Nor do I ever remember hearing Mama mention building a zionic home. But now, in retrospect, I'm sure that was her goal and she had her own ways of reaching it. At our house there was always much work to be done, but she didn't quote us scriptures about working together. She seldom even assigned specific tasks but pointed out the disaster areas and then said encouragingly, "Let's all pitch in and catch up around the corners."

Well, I don't know just how clean the corners turned out, but I do recall seeing my second oldest sister, pretty brunette Ethel, many times on her hands and knees vigorously scrubbing the floors. She was a perfectionist and I'm willing to vouch that the corners received their share of attention as well as the cobwebs, the ashes beneath the stove, and smudges and fingerprints on the painted doors. Nothing escaped her searching brown eyes.

Since there were six girls we enjoyed working in pairs. We could spread up beds in record time with one on each side, and what a clatter there was in the kitchen at dishwashing time. Our automatic was all the gang. We had no sink, but a broad oilcloth topped table supplied ample room for two huge dishpans. One was steaming with sudsy hot water and the other with almost boiling rinsing water. We had no sponges or pretty dishrags, but a scrap of a worn flannel gown or a hunk of a fleecy underwear arm served us very well. I can still hear the grating sound of the old zinc lid used as a scratcher and recall the smell of the ashes for removing stains.

In the procedure we had a scraper, two wipers and, standing in the highchair, I stacked them in the cupboard while Helen motored them up to me. Sometimes Elson and Jim added a bit of zest by joining the crew and they took great delight in flipping dish towels to hear us scream.

Getting the laundry done at our house was another one of those pitch-in-together affairs. It was quite an operation, so Mama's boss let her off early, about 8:00 P.M., one night a week, to engineer the job. There were a few things we could do in advance. The woodbox and coal scuttle must always be filled and the copper bottomed boiler of water was to be steaming on the big cookstove.

Our running water came in by leg power from the well at the rear of the house. It was fun to pull the rope and watch the empty wooden bucket, with its brass rim, lower into the water as the full bucket journeyed slowly up. While pulling we liked to yell down the well to hear our voices echo and often sang joyfully, "The Old Oaken Bucket That Hung In The Well." The water was so cold and refreshing that we most always stopped to have a drink from the tin cup fastened by a chain to the well shelter. Then emptying the wooden bucket into the tin pail, we sloshed to the house.

Sometimes, when there had been plenty of rain, we could carry the water from the squeaky, gasping soft water pump nearer the kitchen door. This rainwater didn't require so much soap and Mama always declared the clothes looked whiter.

Whether hard or soft water was used we added nose-stinging lye to the boiler. It not only softened the water but brought all foreign matter to the top in the form of scum which must be skimmed off.

"Don't forget to sort the clothes, girls," Mama would call back as she left after supper for the store. When she returned our dining room floor resembled a series of Nebraska sand dunes

extending on into Colorado.

In the meantime, we smaller ones took turns shaving soap for the boiler. At 8:00, when our home-from-the-store engineer was comfortable in wash day togs, the first boiler of water was divided in two tubs. The scrubbing began. While two at a time rubbed, others refilled the boiler for in olden days, in the absence of bleaches, all expert washers thought the white clothes must be boiled in sudsy water to insure whiteness. Then they were hoisted from the hot water by coiling them around an old broomstick. From the first tub of rinse water they were wrung through the hand wringer into a second tub to which bluing had been added for whitening and brightening.

To avoid skinned and blistered fingers, turns were taken at the washboard. The constant sound of soap grating against the board always sent shivers down our spines. When all the piles on the floor had dwindled, it was time to tote out the wash water to irrigate the garden. Then the floor had to be mopped, the stove slicked up and all the paraphernalia stowed away.

In the warm seasons it was a joy to hang the clothes outdoors and watch them flap in the breeze. After we had filled several long lines, the garden fence accommodated the leftovers. Mop rags, patched overalls, rag rugs, and denim jackets made a cheery scarecrow display. Sometimes we appointed cloud watchers and often the whole family joined in the race to rescue clothes from sudden showers.

But wintertime hanging, most always at night, was another story. Often the pieces froze before we could get them securely pinned and our fingers sometimes stiffened, making it difficult to push the pins over the line. Then, too, the frozen garments caused many pins to split. There seemed to be no end to our hanging problems. The lighter materials soon whipped dry, but I still smile when I recall the fun we had watching frozen overalls and winter underwear standing guard around our stoves and then gradually growing limp and swooning over waiting chairs.

Mama never complained about the hardship of doing laundry at night, nor the drudgery of the washboard. She always looked happy that she was home a bit earlier and seemed glad to be able to work with the family.

I'm sure none of our gang will ever forget the feeling of elation that came with the forerunner of the electric washer. We called it our come-TO-me-go-FROM-me machine. It operated by a wooden handle which produced sore muscles and tired feet, but eliminated skinned knuckles, tenderized fingertips and tub-weary backs. It truly revolutionized wash day and we joyfully took turns supplying the push and pull for the handle motor.

Another "Let's all join in" job was preparing our comforts for winter. Many of them were made of heavy worsted or serge blocks and filled with woolen bats which could not be washed without matting up. In late summer we snipped the tying threads so the tops and backs of the comforts could be laundered. Then we spent happy evenings fastening them in quilting frames and re-tying them with colorful crochet thread or wooly yarn. We often raced to see which side was ready to undo the frames and roll first, singing lustily as our needles sped, "It Was From Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party I Was Seeing Nellie Home."

Although I feel that our home atmosphere was zionic, its appearance would scarcely have measured up. With everyone racing for school things were often left untidy. Even on days when Mama was home it would hardly have rated a star for good housekeeping. She was far from meticulous for she was always busy doing the more important jobs. Clutter didn't bother her half as much as it did some of her daughters. "Oh that's just clean dirt," she'd cheerfully tell us. Yet she did each individual task well, though often on the run in early morning or late at night. The washing was snowy white. The ironing, she occasionally did from the ever bulging basket, was

entirely wrinkle free. Her meals were tasty, her stitches tiny and the garden weedless. No wee bug escaped her eye when cleaning the garden greens for the table. She gave her best to each job at hand, impressing upon us that things done by halves are never done right, a truly zionic principle.

Sometimes, when our attempts didn't turn out too great, she would say, "Never mind. It will all come out in the wash. Better luck next time." Watching out of the corner of her eye, and seeing that our patience was wearing thin, she would remind us of the persevering hen she once discovered in the orchard setting on fifteen green apples. If we still persisted in whining, "I just can't do this," Mama would say, "Now remember that I'LL TRY got across the river and I CAN'T might have drowned in mid-stream." We knew she was referring to her courageous mother.

On this occasion she and Uncle Hi had gone in the wagon to Waterloo, Iowa, for groceries. While they shopped the clouds blackened and soon rain fell in torrents.

"Caroline, you'll never be able to make it across the Cedar River," warned the friendly grocer. "This has been a regular flash flood. Why don't you stay overnight with us?"

"I appreciate your offer but the children are home alone and we must get back tonight," Grandma told him.

As the wagon rumbled on he called, "I surely hate to see you try it, Caroline. The river will be high and the current swift."

On the way to the river other friends begged them not to ford the Cedar, but Grandma was determined to be with her children by sundown.

"Listen to the water roar. Mother, it's several feet higher," Hi said. "But I guess we can trust old Buck and Jerry."

"I'm sure we can, son, but let's place our faith in a higher power," his mother added.

As Grandma drove the horses into the rushing water, several men tried to stop her with cries of, "Are you crazy?"...."Do you want to drown the boy?"...."Don't you know you'll be washed downstream?"

Grandma stopped the team. "This may seem foolish to some of you, but I have small children at home and I must be with them tonight." In her voice and manner there was a calmness that the frightened men didn't understand.

Tapping Buck and Jerry with the whip, for she had no reins, Grandma urged the faithful team out into the river. A hush fell over the crowd. Buck and Jerry did their best until they reached the middle of the river. Then the raging torrent began dragging them down stream. She could hear the moans of the watching crowd. She knew they feared she would miss the opposite road and be drowned in the deepening river. But Grandma was alert to this danger. Standing up in the wagon she tapped Buck and Jerry with her whip until they turned around with their heads up stream. Tapping harder she drove them against the current for several yards. Then she allowed the current to take them gently toward the opposite bank and the road.

A roaring cheer came from the crowd. They fairly went wild with joy as faithful Buck and Jerry pulled the wagon out of the river. Children hugged each other and danced with glee. Old men tossed their hats and anxious mothers wiped their eyes with the corners of their calico aprons.

As Grandma's wagon rumbled out onto the muddy road, she and Uncle Hi waved to the happy crowd. Then stopping the horses they clasped hands and she began repeating bits of the Psalms she had often read aloud with her Methodist preacher husband:

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills
From whence cometh my help

My help cometh from the Lord
Which made heaven and earth...
The Lord is my helper...
The Lord is my keeper...
The Lord shall preserve thy going out
And thy coming in from this time forth
And even for evermore."

As they gratefully journeyed on toward home, Uncle Hi spoke softly, "Mother, I think the Psalmist David must have forded a river."

With this story ringing in our ears we children would tackle most anything. Often we chanted, as we persevered, "If at first you don't Succeed, try, try again."

Now and then we tried quarreling as we worked. But Mama much preferred peace. Whenever she heard a quarrel brewing she would invariably intercede with, "Children, Stop jangling." Occasionally, in sharper tones, she had to add, "I mean right now!" We knew that meant not even one more word, even in undertones. If we persisted in prolonging the argument we sometimes got spanked. Then if we howled too long she commanded, "Now dry up." At that we knew we had better grab a hanky or dab with our apron tails.

Even though she never mentioned to us good King Benjamin's zionic Sermon on the duty of parents, she got his message across "Ye will not suffer your children to fight and quarrel one with another." We eight grew up truly loving each other.

Chapter 12

Perhaps the greatest of all lessons that we learned from our mother's attempts toward building a zionic home was to be contented without things. In our happy hours of play, toys were never a necessity. None of our eight ever owned a bicycle or a pair of roller skates. We felt fortunate to have a rickety second hand wagon that made a delightful rattle as we rolled along. We cuddled rag dolls made of black stockings and admired their embroidered faces and gaudy calico outfits. We traipsed around and around the house on stilts our brothers made and pumped two at a time, toward New York and Philadelphia, on the swing in the huge hackberry tree. We had much fun twirling ropes to see who could jump the longest without missing.

On rainy early spring days, while cooped up indoors, we enjoyed mimicking. If Mama were home she couldn't refrain from smiling at our antics, but she never missed a chance to plug in a charitable word.

We liked to pretend that we were chubby Mrs. Y. Once when Mama caught us filling a make believe corn cob pipe she said, "You know, children, our good neighbor came from the South where tobacco grows and probably was never taught that smoking was harmful. So let's not make fun of her."

One day, when she heard us stuttering like neighbor Joe, she called us to the window. There he was picking up the little pieces of coal that had tumbled from his horse-drawn dray as he bumped over the rutty roads. His long coat tail was flapping and his purple muffler soaring in the

March wind.

"He's such a good, honest man and always does his work so well. Why he wouldn't cheat anyone who depends on him to carry fuel," Mama mused. "Everyone loves him even if he does stutter."

At times we tried limping like jolly peg leg Johnson, and Mama made us feel guilty as she reminded us of all the work that wooden leg had helped him accomplish.

Then there was Jamey who had been in first grade far too long and could still scarcely write his name. When we played school and screwed our faces into goofy poses, Mama knew whom we were imitating and would say, "Poor Jamey! He's the only child they have and they love him so much. Be sure to be good to him at school." That admonition often rang in our ears when we saw the less fortunate being mistreated.

Sometimes, when Mama thought our mimicking was getting a bit out of hand, she'd suggest that we make doll clothes, presenting each of us with a bundle of material scraps.

Helen was always delighted and at the end of the day had her doll attractively attired, sometimes in a stylish dress but often in a split or pegged top skirt, a ruffled blouse and a flower-decked hat.

I watched each addition to the queen's wardrobe longingly. Then with a sigh I'd choose a piece of cloth, cut a round hole, stick my doll's head through and fasten her Indian robe securely under each arm with a safety pin.

The first time Mama noticed me creating a gown she laughed heartily. When my tears couldn't hold back any longer she soothed, "Don't cry, honey. Helen has Grandma Emmerson's talent, but someday you'll discover one, too. Just wait and see."

At least this promise gave me something to wonder about. I still can sew only rips, patches and buttons and darn a little. But at the Lamoni Stake Service Center even this tiny bit of ability proves to be rewarding as we see our wares hanging ready for sale, to keep some little boy warm or a tiny girl happy.

On windy spring days Mama encouraged kite making, so we searched the rag bag for suitable tails. After a hammering session in the woodshed we'd trek to the pasture to see who could coax his contraption to soar the highest.

In April, too, we raced through the woods for violets, sweet Williams, lady slippers and honeysuckles. Sometimes we found a clump of Dutchman's breeches or a Jack-in-the-pulpit. We loved to help him preach his squeaky sermon and had a hilarious time interpreting his messages to us.

But the very best of all spring days was May Day. All through April we longed for it, crossing those eternally slow-moving days off the kitchen calendar with sighs and groans. Every sunny day I'd tease, "Today is almost hot, Mama."

Then, as if reading my mind, she'd answer, "Yes, but the mornings and evenings are still a bit cool. Let's wait a little longer."

"But Tootsie and Leta don't have to wait, Mama."

"And those two may soon be doctoring sniffling noses," she'd warn me.

As a last resort I'd try my spring song. "I can smell the lilacs coming, Mama. The trees are all leafed out, and guess what? I saw a whole flock of robins on my way to school." But wary Mama would only frown and squint one eye at me. So we fanned and squirmed and itched most miserably, waiting for that eventful date. But Mama firmly stood her ground amidst all our pouting and teasing.

Finally, on May Day morning, with a whoop and a yell we'd shed our winter underwear for those heavenly thin cotton unionsuits. Then barefooted we'd tiptoe over the velvety grass in triumph, ready for a new season of play.

One balmy Saturday during spring, when we were a bit low on play ideas, we discovered a pawless gopher in the woodshed. Jim had turned in the paws as bounty but had neglected to bury the donor.

"Let's have a funeral," someone suggested.

So arrangements were in order. We all agreed that Cousin Hortense would make the best preacher. I was to provide the coffin, the neighbor kids would be the mourners and the rest of us would make up the choir. But that was where the trouble began. Hortense wanted "Nearer My God To Thee" and Helen insisted on singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." They quarreled lustily, but neither would give in. The argument ended when our peace loving choir leader, Cousin Dorothy, solved the dilemma by saying, "Well, we could sing both."

The funeral was underway. Everyone was happy with my choice of a casket and delighted with the sweet spice aroma of Bible times. We were soon weeping and singing at the designated points and then came Hortense's stirring sermon.

"This dear little gopher has gone to the Happy Hunting Ground. God bless his soul. He is now with all our pet rabbits, kitties, puppies, ponies and canaries that have gone on before him."

We wailed in chorus.

"Don't cry, children," she soothed. "I have faith that this little fellow can walk again. He is no longer without paws. God has given him a brand new pair of feet and he's busy right now digging a gopher hole and tossing up a mound where he can sit and watch for his enemies. But, children, in the beautiful paradise of God, in the Happy Hunting Ground prepared for him up above, he will find that there are no enemies. Every creature large or small, wild or tame is now his friend. This little gopher is loved. Even the dogs that once chased him are sharing their food and making him feel welcome." She preached on and on until our wood stump seats began to wobble.

At last, after a fervent prayer, we marched single file singing, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," and interred the gopher's remains in a dandelion-decked grave at the edge of the garden.

But our funeral didn't end there. After supper a distressed Grandma called, "Children, have any of you seen my bedroom slipper? I'm sure I put them both in the closet this morning."

No one had. Now Grandma was very deaf and I knew she hadn't heard any of our woodshed commotion. But I felt my face turning red and got all fidgety. When Grandma noticed my distressed look and actions she popped the question right to me and I had to confess.

Yes, Grandma, I took your bedroom slipper. I couldn't ask you because you were napping. We needed it, Grandma. We really did."

"What for?" she demanded.

"For the little gopher. He died, Grandma, and we had to have a casket. He looked so cozy at the funeral."

"And now I know why my perfume bottle is half empty," accused sister Carrie quite angrily. "Sweet spice for a rodent!"

At that point Mama took over and I learned once and for all never to take anything that belonged to someone else without first asking permission.

But she didn't spank me for she concluded, "The rest of them are older and they should have told you to take the slipper and perfume back to the house."

So we three got sent to bed right after supper with plenty of time to meditate upon this lesson in zionic living.

Soon after this episode a neighbor came one morning to spring plow our garden and we small fry followed behind him with tin cans, searching the mellow, black soil for worms. We had heard Mama say that she always planted an extra seed for the worms who usually ate their share. So we thought we'd help her save on seeds, never dreaming that God had put earthworms in the soil for a beneficial purpose.

We had our fourth can almost full when Buster Brown across the street called over. "What are you doing, girls?"

"We're digging earthworms."

"Oh, good! I just love earthworms." He smacked his lips in anticipation. "If you'll bring some over I'll have Mom fix them for my dinner." With that he was off to work.

We looked at each other in amazement. "Does Mama cook earthworms?" I whispered to Helen.

"Ugh! No! But I've heard that some people eat snails," she answered, "and don't you remember? Once you cooked a crawly turtle?"

"Then let's take Buster a whole canful, Helen."

"Why not give him two cans full? You know Mama says to always be generous and willing to share," she reminded.

So off we went to neighbor Brown's. Aunt Effie, as we fondly called her, didn't answer when we knocked, but the screen was unlocked so we set the two cans on her kitchen table.

After awhile she returned from the store and, seeing us following the plow, called us over. As we entered the kitchen we both gasped. There were worms sizzling on the stove, ambling up the curtains, crawling over all the chairs and hanging over the rim of the water pail. They were circled around the salt shaker, boring into the sugar bowl and drooping like tattered lace from the cushion in Uncle John's rocking chair. There was scarcely a wormless spot in the kitchen. Then Aunt Effie lifted the old red and white tablecloth from her freshly baked bread to show us where the rest of our catch had journeyed. We groaned.

"Why did you bring the worms over here, girls? she asked.

"Well, Buster said he'd like some for his dinner and we had plenty to share." I told her.

The stern expression on Aunt Effie's face melted away as she chuckled. Then she hugged us both. "It's Buster who deserves a spanking. That mischievous boy! I declare he'll never grow up. He's just like Uncle John."

"Then you don't really cook worms?" Helen asked.

"Of course not. But it might serve Buster right if I fixed him a whole plate full for dinner. I think, though, I'll let you girls get them back into the cans, and next time how about sharing your worms with Reverend X's chickens?"

Mama agreed with Aunt Effie that Buster was at fault, but she pointed out another mistake. "This disaster to the bread and Aunt Effie's spotless kitchen could never have happened if you had waited for her to come home. We don't walk into other people's houses until we're invited.

So once again, through trial and error, we had learned another one of those most worthwhile lessons in trying to grow up to be well-behaved.

Chapter 13

In summertime, because of the heat, we amused ourselves quite differently. We camped out in tents made of old blankets and bedspreads draped over the clothesline, or lounged on a quilt under a shady tree. 'Twas there we fashioned hollyhock dolls, costumed whole families of clothespins, made dandelion chains and searched by the hour for four leaf clovers. Sometimes we rigged up scarecrows for Mama's garden or played Fly Away Home with ladybugs.

But the most memorable of our home-invented summer play activities is the concocting of mud pies. "He who hath not made a mud pie hath not really lived," should have been included in Benjamin Franklin's almanac.

We usually set up our pie factory near the soft water pump and close by the garden, for water and dirt supplied the basic ingredients for our pastries. Mama cooperated in supplying our baking pans which included bent up jar lids, baking powder can tops, match boxes and anything that would give shape to our mixtures.

Now anyone could dabble in mud and set the tins in the sun to bake, but the frosting demanded ingenuity. Sometimes we used dandelion flowers, a mixture of snipped grass and red apple peelings, fruit tree blossoms, clover blooms, or anything at hand to add color and create designs.

One day Mama's fun loving brother, Trum, appeared unexpectedly on the scene. "Are these gorgeous pies for sale?" he asked.

"Sure!" we all yelled in chorus.

He bounced back and forth along our display counter and after much deliberation, sniffing, and many words of praise finally selected a clover blossom creation. Then right before our eyes he took a bite of that mud pie. "It's delicious, girls," he said. "I'll take two more so Aunt Harriet won't need to fix dessert for dinner."

To our amazement, he left three shiny nickels. What playtime could have been more rewarding.

With four older sisters we younger girls had summertime dress up paradise, especially while Mama and the two oldest girls were at work. We clumped in their high heels and flowered hats up and down the street. Once we donned their Sunday corsets over our dresses, and after our parade put them carefully back in the dresser drawers.

But on Sunday morning we got our carpet call. "Who borrowed these corsets?" our elders demanded.

"Well, we did, but we only wore them a few minutes and rolled them up again real neat," we confessed. "How did you know? We didn't get your corsets a bit dirty."

"No, but you surely tightened up the strings," our sister snapped.

That little episode almost ended our dress up days. But eventually Mama persuaded the girls to give us a few old things to hang in our own closet with a promise to always respect their belongings.

On the long summer evenings we gathered the neighbor kids in to play Run Sheep Run, Anty Over and Hide and Seek.

Sometimes one close neighbor would try to persuade her little daughter that there were already too many at our house.

But Leta would tease, "Oh, Mama, please let me go. Why Mrs. Holben has so many kids at

her home all the time that one more won't make a bit of difference." But it did for we had all the more fun.

At dusk we loved to watch the big, black ants on their clothesline highway. There was always a steady stream coming out of the hollow of the tall maple tree. They traveled north on top of the wire to the opposite tree without traffic jams and disappeared into a hole. At the same time another group was returning south underneath the wire.

We wondered what they were doing. Were they invited out for supper, changing apartments for the evening or just calling on their neighbors? But on Wednesday nights we all agreed that they were bound for Prayer Meeting, and they would be safely guided home by the lightning bugs.

In late summer and fall our chief play delight was making leaf houses. Of course they were only raked up floor plans, but we made openings from room to room and set up housekeeping with old rugs, and orange crates from the kindling pile. We pretended we were visiting each other and had loads of fun dining on apples, and walnuts cracked on the stump in the woodshed.

Sometimes, after school, Mama let us go to play for an hour in the attic of her boss' only child, Alice. Tootsie, as we called her, had everything. There were dolls with hair a little table with chairs, and real china tea sets. So, with dolls for guests and goodies from their well-stocked kitchen, we'd set up a tea party.

Once her Grandpa hobbled up the steps to watch us play and Tootsie insisted that he say our tea party blessing. But when he protested he didn't know how she pouted, "Well, Grandpa, I'd think you could at least say a few words in a praying tone of voice."

When we tired of tea parties there was a doll house, wind up trains that really whistled and games and games. But best of all was the merry-go-round that played a tune while we bobbed up and down on painted horses.

At the end of the hour Tootsie always begged, "Mama, may I go down to Holben's for awhile? PLEASE, Mama, it's so much more fun at their house, 'cause their kids always play make believe."

Chapter 14

In winter Mama didn't keep us cooped up in the house. Our yard always boasted a variety of stylish snow figures, both ladies and gentlemen.

We loved to play war games, too. Grandpa had been a drummer boy in the Civil War and when we weren't firing snowballs at our snowbank fort, we were parading with our oatmeal box drums to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia."

One day, when the snowfall was unusually heavy, we raced to see how many huge balls of snow we could roll. "Let's make an igloo," someone shouted. With the snow already rolled, we began hoisting the balls in place beside the cellar door until we had an Eskimo home that we could crawl into. We didn't get it quite high enough to stand up in, but for sitting it was very comfortable.

When Grandma saw our masterpiece, she hurried out with two of her colorful rag rugs for us to sit on and another to hang over its open doorway. No doubt this gesture was prompted more by concern for preventing frostbite than for beautification of our icy quarters. A few minutes later she paid us a most welcome visit with a plate of her crunchy sugar cookies and a pitcher of

warm milk to insure survival. As we munched we agreed that she was the world's very, very best Grandma.

At sunset no one seemed to mind all the soaked mittens, scarfs, leggings and coattails draped about the stoves, or hanging on doors, for our radiant faces and ruddy noses shone with the joy of a trip to Eskimo land.

On other snowy days we took our homemade sled to a nearby hill. Since it would not accommodate so many passengers, we smaller ones circled merrily down in old dishpans or squeaky pasteboard boxes, often landing in the ditch. Those numerous snow baths failed to dampen our zeal for sliding.

In a way we really loved the wintertime for we got tucked in at bedtime with warm bricks. Then after the older girls had turned the light low, closed the door and left us to dream, Helen and I would bounce up to reminisce about the quilts.

We loved the crazy quilt and had fun picking out everyone's clothing. There were pieces of many sunbonnets. We could easily spot Mama's garden one and the ruffled style she wore to the store. We'd quietly point out the pretty swatches of our Grandma's last dainty bonnet. Here and there I'd see reminders of my despised blue one and giggle about how often it had dangled from a tree's lower branch while the breeze danced through my hair.

There were splotches of aprons everywhere and we girls would make a game of guessing what had been toted around in its pocket to identify the owner. Love letters, lady bugs, book lists, curlers, snails, doll clothes and apple cores were easy clues.

We took imaginary journeys as we spied colorful bits of long skirts and Sunday dresses, along with many extra nice fabrics from Aunt Carrie Hill's sewing basket.

But the best loved of all our quilts was the one made of featherstitched velvet pieces, each with an embroidered name. It felt so soft and was great for playing I Spy. One of us would describe the person while the other searched for the name.

Once, when I was almost bent double trying to put my finger on Great Uncle Dudley's laprobe, I felt an unexpected spat with the stern command, "Now get under the covers and stay there. You're clammy cold."

Such incidents usually ended our winter quilt games, at least for that evening. But as we dozed off under Grandma's ingenious cover we both felt so fortunate that we had no money to buy those drab, uninteresting blankets on Mr. Frazier's shelves.

As I think back over four seasons of long ago play, I don't recall ever seeing a toy box in our home. We had no use for one. Our rag dolls could rest on our beds and the boys' pockets were usually bulging with whittled toys, willow whistles and marbles. But without many toys we learned to use our arms, legs and brains. We imagined, created, exercised and shared in our play all seasons of the year in God's great outdoors, building healthy bodies, joyful hearts and a wholesome attitude toward each other. The precious memories of such a happy childhood will be a joy forever.

Chapter 15

Christmas was always a happy time. I can still hear Mama warning Grandpa, "Now, Pa, we don't need a huge tree. You know the children love to hang up their stockings, so just a little one will do." But invariably Grandpa came from the woods red nosed and with icily whiskers,

looking like Santa himself, dragging a tree that was destined to tickle the ceiling.

Our era was the cranberry-popcorn one, so we younger children were assigned the stringing while the taller girls did the draping from a stepladder. We spent happy hours making rings of colored paper and covering black walnuts with silver and gold tinfoil. These bits of shiny foil we carefully rescued all year long from cookie cartons sent for our kindling pile. We dangled our ornaments from the branches with odds and ends of colored yarn from the knitting basket.

Occasionally, during the pre-Christmas season, Mama lit a few red candles. But, since that was considered dangerous, we enjoyed their glow only momentarily as we sang a Christmas carol.

The lamps burned very late all during December while Mama and the older girls sewed, knit and embroidered, Planning and scheming to see that all eight of us would share equally.

Sometimes the big surprise of Christmas week was a huge box brought by the drayman to our door. "It's Uncle Tom's package," we'd all yell as we dragged it into the kitchen and began cutting the ropes.

Uncle Tom Van Eaton was one of Mama's half brothers who lived in Eatonville, Washington. Although he had a big family of his own, every winter he chose warm clothing from his general store to send to us

Everyone crowded around the box and, as the older ones laid the garments out on the table, we younger ones began the modeling. No Fifth Avenue promenade on Easter Day could have been more joyous. We paraded in buckled overshoes from room to room in much too large winter longies slipped on over our clothes, and topped with feathered hats or cozy hoods, until finally someone would call, "Now come on! That size was meant for me."

With varied articles of apparel for each, and long, black winter stockings, mittens and mufflers for all, Uncle Tom won a warm place in our hearts.

On Christmas Eve we joyfully arranged chairs across our living room, Grandpa's at the head and mine at the foot, with everyone else lined up, according to age, in between. Then each of us secured a stocking to his chair.

Christmas morning our living room resembled a game of musical chairs but with not a spot to sit. Santa had called and emptied his pack of unwrapped gifts right on the seats. Each one, of course, rushed with happy squeals to examine his own gifts. Then we all journeyed along the row admiring what St. Nick had brought and so attractively arranged for others. Some of the chairs were costumed in gay, ruffled aprons, while homemade dolls hid beneath others. Crisp hair ribbons adorned the chair rounds and bright hankies cradled clothes pin babies.

After staying up most of the night to prepare for our happiness, I'm sure Mama appreciated the lack of pre-breakfast mess. There were no ribbons or wrappings to rescue and no mixing up of presents. Each had his own little domain and, best of all, we younger ones could leave our gifts on display for the day, providing we were willing to sit on our thumbs as Mama always said. While the oatmeal simmered, we were allowed to nibble from our stockings. There was always a sack of candy and nuts, a rosy apple and our ONE orange of the year tucked in the toe.

Another vivid memory of Christmas is the noonday meal. Can you imagine the little folks of today waiting for the second table at a family dinner? Well, we did. Often we were sent out to play, which only made our appetites more ravenous. It seemed that our elders would never finish eating, and we cousins took turns peeking in to sniff the delicious aromas while our aunts and uncles leisurely enjoyed their food.

If the weather was too bad we gathered upstairs or in the parlor to play Old Maid or

Authors. Sometimes our games caused a riot, no doubt due to empty tummies. But usually all ended well for the quarreling hurried up the second table. It was with grateful sighs that we discovered plenty of food had been kept warm for our gang.

I never held second table rating for youngsters against Mama for it was the custom of the day. But years later her grandchildren got royal dining treatment and were always fed first. After all Mama had a tender heart. Perhaps the memories of our little noses pressed against the windowpane and the speed with which we were later ready for pie did the trick.

I wish I could say that the real meaning of Christmas has first place in my childhood memories of this happy season. I do recall the Christmas Eve service at the church where we sang carols about the Baby Jesus. But even there Santa stole the limelight as we mingled in favorite tunes of "Old Kris Kringle" and "Jolly Old St. Nicholas." This prepared us for his sleigh bell appearance with that pack of candy and nut treats.

It was not until much later in life that the true significance of the Holy Season dawned in my heart.

Chapter 16

Vacations would have been impossible at our house if it had not been for our aunts and uncles who loved to share. Several of these good times stand out in my memory.

Uncle Frank and Aunt Carrie Hill had a summer cottage out on their farm. It had a large, airy screened room where we could lounge, romp and play games as we listened to birds and watched the grazing animals.

Right next door was the farm home of Uncle Trum and Aunt Harriet Emmerson. We could often hear their prized new Graphophone and loved to sing along with two of their records, "Schooldays" and "The Merry Oldsmobile."

Aunt Harriet and Aunt Carrie were both very amiable and added joy to our summer fun by supplying us with picnic lunches to munch by the creek and in the meadows.

I often chuckle over a little episode with Aunt Harriet's daughter Mary. At three she was proudly dressing herself, but on this particular day she discovered that her button-down-the-front underwear was on backwards.

Aunt Carrie Hill suggested, "Mary, just slip your undies off and turn them around."

But our little cousin tugged and twisted and squirmed, trying to solve her problem without removing her legs.

We watched greatly amused while Aunt Carrie kept kindly telling her, "Mary, it just can't be done that way."

Each time she would straighten up and looking daggers at all of us call out, "It can, too."

After an hour or so she sighed and informed her almost convulsed audience, "Well, I'll take them off THIS time, but I can DO it. You just wait and see."

Once we were invited to spend a week with Uncle Will and Aunt Beth Emmerson and their four youngsters in the country. They had a kitchen-dining tent and a large one for sleeping while spending the summer out in the open near a big orchard.

Aunt Beth was one of those kindly people who was never too busy to mother a few more youngsters and was capable of keeping everything homelike and tidy even in tents. She

worked on the run but was organized and systematic. She seemed to have an automatic timer and everything happened right on schedule. It was good for us to be in a mother-at-home atmosphere and receive a bit of extra attention. I'm sure she sensed this for she went out of her way to make us happy with everything from pancakes to strawberry shortcake and popcorn balls.

Every summer Helen, Jim and I made a memorable trip, usually for several days, to the Dan Ford farm. They had four girls and a boy and what couldn't eight youngsters, all under twelve find to do! We gathered eggs in pails, apron tails and straw hats, broke up the setting hens, slid down haystacks in the mow, climbed the windmill, tossed apples to the hogs and set up housekeeping in adjoining tree houses.

But our favorite pastime was riding their beautiful Shetland ponies. The Fords had a dozen or more of various colors. We weren't allowed out on the road but could ride in the pasture as we pleased. The big treat of each day was when Uncle Dan hitched from four to six of them to the shiny little surrey with the fringe around the top. We'd all scramble in and, with a chosen coachman, set out on a royal journey to an imaginary destination through the fields.

To three little town children this wonderful out-on-the-farm vacation seemed almost like a trip to paradise.

Old Settlers' Day was a single day vacation for the whole family in Magnolia's shady park. With saved up nickels we children rode the Merry-Go-Round, nibbled ice cream cones and sipped pink lemonade until noon. Then Mama appeared with a lunch basket topped with our red and white tablecloth. One of us would guide her to the tree we had chosen for shelter and the picnic was soon underway. Usually two or three families of relatives pooled baskets for a delicious feast, generously shared with the flies.

The afternoon and evening were spent milling through the crowd hunting up old friends who had gathered in from far and near to renew acquaintances.

On the way home we always stopped by the huge, new and cleaned horse tank stationed for the day beneath the town pump. There were many tin cups chained around the top, and hundreds of people had already enjoyed a cool drink letting the cups splash back into the tank. We must have all been immune to germs for we drank and drank and survived without an epidemic.

These vacation experiences with thoughtful relatives and friends have done much to influence me to want to help other little folks have good times. What a joy and a privilege to see them happily respond.

How well I remember my first real, all-day summer trip. It was in a lumber wagon driven by my elderly Grandpa. I loved to see the wind blowing his snow white curls as he gently urged the horses on.

Tucked in between my grandparents on the bouncy seat I wiggled and yawned. "Will it be much farther, Grandpa?"

"Another hour or two, Chicken, and we'll be setting up our tent," Grandpa assured me. "Is the cow still with us?"

"Yes, Grandpa, she's walking right behind and her rope is fastened. But where is her tinkly bell?"

"Grandpa and I thought cow bell music might get a little tiring, Honey, on such a long ride. But we could sing Zion's Praises' songs for music," suggested Grandma. So she started "The Old, Old Path". She knew I could sing that one and Grandpa would whistle along without his teeth.

The time went faster now and soon we reached the tent city in a wooded plot, the Galland's Grove Reunion of 1907.

"Whoa!" Grandpa boomed out.

Children and grown-ups peeked from tent flaps and then hurried out to greet us. Friendly boys watered Brindle and the horses and then let them loose in the adjoining pasture while the older folks lifted out the heavy stone jars with their snow white dish towel covers securely tied with twine.

Since early arrivals had already put up our tent home, Grandma hastily covered a table with oilcloth and arranged her fragrant jars neatly across the back. How that aroma made me wish for supper. There were dill pickles, sweet pickles, apple butter, strawberry jam, molasses and sugar cookies, doughnuts and of course butter and lard. Soon her table pantry was made secure from ants and bugs by placing each leg of the table in a jar lid pool of kerosene.

Then Grandma bustled about making beds, hanging mosquito netting at the door and stringing up a rope for clothes hangers and drying purposes.

Grandpa lugged in the sacks of vegetables, boxes of canned fruit and the bread box. Then he set up saw horses to make a table.

"It's an awfully big table, Grandma," I complained. "There are just you and Grandpa and me."

"You wait and see." Grandma winked her wrinkled eyelid. "We left most of our family at home, but we'll have a reunion family soon."

I watched in amazement as she straightened the red and white tablecloth and set the table for six with her blue and white pictured dishes.

"Now, Chubby, I have a job for you," she said. Grandma broke off a tiny branch from the tree that shaded our new home. She dusted it carefully and placed it in my hand. "You're to walk 'round and 'round the table and keep any stray fly that sneaks past the mosquito netting off the pretty dishes. Just sway the branch back and forth like this without touching anything."

Delighted to be her helper, I obeyed exactly.

At suppertime, just after Grandpa climbed over the fence with a brimming pail of milk, our strange family arrived. It was three men with long whiskers whom they addressed as Brother.

"Our new friends are the visiting missionaries," Grandma explained.

Each day Grandma and I left the mid-morning sermon early to prepare the noon meal. It was good to stretch my legs and wiggle. I happily shooed while she bustled about and when we heard the last song from the big tent we knew our guests were due.

The same three ministers came for meals every day and so sometimes others were with them. They all seemed old to me, some bald and others with funny chin whiskers that Grandpa called goatees. After eating and discussing church they held me on their laps and talked of little girls back home.

But Sunday at reunion I remember best of all. Grandma was petite and in her rustly black dress, a dainty, white shawl and a lacy bonnet tied under her chin she resembled my imaginary princess or perhaps an angel from heaven. Since there were no classes for children I sat proudly beside her in a starched calico dress.

Because I wasn't quite four the spiritual side of the reunion made little impression, but memories of the singing and the happiness and helpfulness of the people have always stayed with me. The joy of helping Grandma by wielding that little branch remains foremost in my memory. I didn't surmise until years later that wise Grandma was slyly keeping me out from under foot; and little did she realize that in letting me share at reunion she had helped to instill in my heart a desire to be of service to the Lord.

Strangely I do not recall one moment of the long, bumpy ride over the dirt roads back to Magnolia. Could it be, that after a diet of three, far above my head, daily sermons, I slept all the way home?

Chapter 17

This was the last trip our grandparents ever took for soon after Grandma Emmerson became very ill with breast cancer. She was lovingly cared for by Mama and assisted whenever possible by Aunt Carrie Hill who lived at Logan, Iowa, nearby.

Mama quit her job and with Grandpa's small Civil War Pension, sister Carrie's earnings at the store and help from members of her family we survived.

Grandma suffered from nerve and heart trouble and passed quietly away at her Magnolia home in May, 1910, at the age of 80 years.

Grandpa grieved greatly for her and we children tried to cheer him as he rocked on the front porch. We kept him supplied with cool drinks and quartered his apples because, with failing eyesight, he couldn't detect the little wigglers lodging inside. He allowed us to comb his beautiful white hair into tight curls and deck them with bright ribbons.

The older girls often made Grandpa feel important. He had very little formal education but he loved to hear them say, "We need your help." After listening to the problem from Milne's difficult arithmetic book he would continue rocking. Without the aid of paper or pencil he would soon announce, "Well, girls, the answer will be about so and so." Grandpa never missed it within a hair's breadth. How he could follow from step to step in his mind without losing the figures none of the family could understand.

Just a year after Grandma's death Grandpa became ill and was confined to his bed. We younger children have vivid memories of hearing him tapping many times on the windowpane in broad daylight and calling crossly, "Haven't I told you children to get to bed?"

Mama would caution us to play on the opposite side of the house but so many of our games demanded full range of the yard and it was easy to forget.

Again Mama became the cheerful nursemaid and washed bedclothes for him in the tin tub every day of his illness. He passed away just twenty months after Grandma on Jan. 10, 1912, at the age of 73 years.

Grandpa's stepchildren, the Van Eaton's, paid him a beautiful tribute when they agreed that he had never seemed like a stepfather. They were appreciative that all the siblings had been treated as equals in a truly happy home. They fondly called him Pa.

Life from here on consisted of a series of moves and varied occupations for Mama. She sold the Magnolia home, left to her by her parents, and our family spent the next five years at Pisgah, Iowa. It was a happy move, for her brothers, Will Emmerson and Sim Van Eaton, lived there with their families.

As usual she was employed in a general store, this time by the three Lane brothers. She was a bit confused in calling them all Mister. But the jovial younger brother solved the problem by saying, "Just call us Art and John and Charlie." Thus a lifelong friendship with the Lane family

began.

Pisgah was a pretty little town nestled between the Soldier River and a high range of bluffs. The people of this farming community were like one big family, sharing and helping each other. Life there proved quite exciting with occasional floods. I recall the evening Mama rode within a few feet of our front door in a boat after helping carry many loads of goods to the upper floor of the store. We were delighted to share our higher ground home with our Emerson cousins for several days.

There were also numerous fires with only bucket brigades from neighboring wells. But in spite of disasters our five years there proved joyous ones. Brother Elson found his lifelong mate, musically talented Tessie Jones, and Elva met her jolly future husband, Milton Silsby. Both couples were married after the boys returned from World War I. Pearl married Sellie Chapman, brother-in-law of Charlie Lane, and Carrie and Ethel married their Magnolia sweethearts, Guy Chatburn and Alfred Brandt.

So our family grew but only Jim, Helen and I were left at home. Jim spent much time at the Hugh Hunt, Rob Peasley and Cliff Silsby farms and became interested in becoming a farmer. In 1918 Uncle Frank Hill offered to finance him on the smaller of his two farms, eighty acres of rich land in Harrison County near Logan, Iowa.

This was a most welcome move for Mama. She had enjoyed farm life with our father and was happy to have more time to garden, raise chickens and help with the milking. It was never drudgery to her.

The next few years of Mama's life were quite diversified. She opened her home to welcome her daughter Pearl and three children and enjoyed watching them grow up. Such escapades as toddlers climbing windmills, throwing eggs into almost full baskets and letting the chickens into her thriving garden gave Grandma humorous tales to relate for years to come. She adored all her offspring.

A move to Lamoni, Iowa, in 1925 gave her a chance to try new employment. For two years she operated the Lamoni Hotel on Main Street. This proved to be discouraging business for the five coal stoves used to heat in winter ate up all the profit of the other three seasons.

For awhile Mama was the cook at the Lamoni Coffee Shoppe and then had the opportunity to become better acquainted with other members of her family. She spent six years with her widowed daughter, Carrie, and her four children so Carrie could clerk in Lamoni stores.

The children sometimes felt quite exasperated for Grandma could never hear them when she called, "Where are you?" Climbing down from playhouse trees several times in one morning could be rather tiring. But Grandma's cooking, sewing, gardening and canning abilities proved a great blessing to Carrie's household.

Mama later enjoyed six years with her daughter, Elva, and son-in-law, Milton Silsby, in Albia, Iowa. Since their two daughters were fairly well grown these years proved more relaxing.

She also spent several happy seasons in sunny Florida with her son, Jim, and vivacious wife, Gladys Weldon.

Even in her golden years she adapted to each new environment and made herself useful about the home. As a hobby she pieced and quilted beautiful quilts for gifts to her grandchildren. Her eyes gave out long before she reached the youngest, number twenty nine.

Due to a fall Mama spent the last six years of her life, without complaint, in a wheelchair. It was during this time that my husband paid her the crowning compliment. "Mother Holben, you have five sons-in-law. I swear I've never heard one word of criticism of any of us from

you. I've checked with the gang and they agree that you rate the score of top-notch mother-in-law."

Mama thanked him and chuckled as she remarked, "I'll try not to topple off my pedestal, Bill, but you've made me sort of uncomfortable." As was characteristic of her she never repeated the compliment.

In March, 1952, Mama was laid to rest in Lamoni, just two months before her eighty second birthday. It was on an icy, snowdrifted day, but the memories lingering with her family were heartwarming. She had no earthly riches to bequeath, but the heritage she left in integrity, pluck, determination, sense of stewardship and respect for the teachings of Christ's gospel was a priceless treasure. This heritage would be woven into the life style of her many descendants.