

PUDGIN' TROT AND PAPA, PLUS THREE

by

Sybil Corwin

2/19/76

This book is given to my nephew,
Clyde, with the hope he may
be able to catch a glimpse
of his father, grandparents,
uncle and aunt - as they were
in the days of long ago.

With much love,
Aunt Sybil

These pages are
dedicated to my brother Clyde
whose light burns so bright
for so many, including me.



SPELLING BEES,

BEES,

AND CLYDE

Simmons, Texas, 1914

We moved to Simmons in November of 1913 from a tiny place called Alfred. My only memory of Alfred was playing Ante Over with Clyde. The small house had a steep roof and I would roll a ball gently up the roof, but hard enough to roll down the other side. I would shout "Ante Over" and my brother would catch it on the other side.

One day papa was sitting on his side of the house reading a newspaper. The yard was cool and shady and he was engrossed with his reading when my ball rolled over, gathered speed and hit him right on the top of his head on his bald spot. I hoped he wasn't hurt and to show my sympathy I wet a washrag and polished his bald spot. He always enjoyed having me do that.

After arriving in Simmons papa started buying bees and soon we had five or six apiaries. He placed fifty to seventy five hives in each location. That first year it rained a lot and it was just like the Garden of Eden. Flowers blossomed everywhere and the bees made a lot of honey.

We depended on the sale of the honey for our living. We only got six cents a pound for it in San Antonio, so it was important to take good care of the bees so we would have money to last us through leaner years. Our wagon was usually loaded with empty crates of gallon cans or the cans would be full ready for shipment. But a lot of work went into robbing the bees and taking the honey.

Many back breaking hours were spent in tending the apiaries. Papa and Clyde would leave in the early morning in the wagon and be gone ten or twelve hours. Most of the hives were two to four stories high and contained twelve or fourteen frames.

It was all important to keep the queen bees from hatching and they had to cut out all the queen cells from each frame. If a queen hatched she would swarm and take all the bees with her. They made frequent trips because cattle damaged some of the hives. There were many hazards such as brush fires caused by a careless hunter. They often had to rebuild the hives. The maintenance work took a lot of time, but taking the honey was a real event.

Some of Clyde's classmates would work for them, and oftentimes five or six of them would load the wagon with the honey extracting equipment and arrive at the apiary just before sundown. They would set up the equipment and as soon as it got dark they would start opening the hives and brushing off the bees.

They would take the frames of honey and place them in dummy hives so they could be handled easier and take them to the extracting location.

The frames would be replaced with empty ones with flat sheets of bees wax placed in the center of the frames. These sheets had slight indentations in them in the shape of the opening where the honey is contained. The bees would then start rebuilding the comb from this centerpiece.

At about 2 A.M. they would have all the honey removed, extracted, crated and ready for shipment. The next day papa and Clyde would haul it to the nearest railroad for shipment. The little town of Kitty is now non-existent and I doubt if even the rails are there. The round trip would take a couple of days.

Later on, our mail man would meet the train in Three Rivers every day, get our mail and set his watch because railroad time was official. Every one watched for his horse and buggy as we were anxious to hear from the outside world and get the correct time. There were no telephones.

When we first moved there the nearest railroad was in Beeville where two of papa's brothers lived. The trip to Beeville was quite a project as all the roads were bad. We usually stayed overnight at the half way point, asking some farmer if it would be all right to water our horses. We would sleep in our covered wagon. Many times mama would make a camp fire, fry potatoes and cook wild game for dinner. One time she made a mouth watering grape cobbler for dessert. She had picked wild grapes along the way. How she managed to do this with a dutch oven is beyond me. On one occasion a farmer gave us some corn to pop and we all sat around the campfire eating buttered popcorn.

My brother Clyde was eleven years old and there was very little time for play. For recreation he and his classmates often camped out all night on the Nueces river.

We could count on a string of catfish on his return.

Then the rains stopped. The drought lasted for a couple of years. The bees made honey from the sap of the mesquite trees. No flowers bloomed, and grass was long gone. The poor cattle stood around with cactus thorns through their lips. Papa and Clyde had to burn the thorns from the cactus for miles around so the cattle could eat it. Honey grew scarcer and times were hard. My older brother had fallen in love with my school teacher and had followed her to Denton to enter college with her. Papa and Clyde could not postpone the inevitable. We had to move away. But before we did, there was a memorable event.

The big event of the year was the scholastic and athletic rally at the county seat. Clyde was very good at basketball and tennis and was chosen to represent our school at the rally. I had outspelled all the kids in our school and I was to be the contestant from Simmons in the spelling bee. All the schools in the county were represented.

Excitement mounted and the night before we were to leave mama worked feverishly by a kerosene lamp to finish my brother's athletic shirt. Somewhere she had found blue felt and had painstakingly cut out the letters SHS for Simmons High School. Bent over the lamp late that night she finally finished it with a sigh of relief. Everything was ready.

We left early next morning for the county rally and barbecue. The barbecue was delicious and was served on paper plates by girls from the various schools. I remember mama saying,

"U-m-m, that was good", and going over to the serving table she said to one of the waitresses,

"Young lady, I'll have another dish".

The girl looked puzzled, then handed mama an empty paper plate. Amid general titters mama explained she wanted a second helping.

Now it was time for the spelling bee. We went into the large auditorium. Mama sat in the audience with the other parents and I was ushered onto the stage with about thirty other girls and boys. I was very nervous, never having faced such a crowd. My knees were shaking.

We formed a line and the spelling began. One by one the students sat down as they missed a word. It seemed a very long time before all the students were eliminated with the exception of another girl and me. The words were getting harder and harder. Now and then an easy one came along... I was terrified I would lose. Eventually I did. The teacher looked at me and said

"Niece", and I bravely said,

"N-e-i-c-e", and it was all over but the shouting.

And shout I did. Letting out a howl I ran to the edge of the stage sobbing.

I was lifted down and my mother took me outside. Holding on to her hand tightly I cried and cried. She walked me down the street crooning words of comfort. We heard footsteps behind us and a nice looking man caught up with us saying,

"Come to the corner drug store with me, little one, I want to treat you to the biggest box of candy in town. I think you did fine and so does everyone else. Dry your tears and come with me."

I brightened, and taking my other hand we walked into the store and he bought me a huge box of chocolates. It was lavender and was tied with a huge bow of lavender ribbon. Long after the candy was eaten I sniffed the empty box. Heavenly. The rich chocolate aroma lasted for months. I finally used the box as a trunk for my dolls' clothes. As a matter of fact I came to feel the present was better than first prize.

During my humiliation in the auditorium my brother Clyde dressed for the tennis matches and the basket ball game. On donning the athletic shirt he noticed at once that mama had sewed the letters on backwards. Instead of SHS, there it was, in blue felt letters four inches high across his chest: **2H2**.

He proudly wore it all day and no student, nor anyone in the rooting section heckled him. One look into those steady brown eyes forbade any comment.

They all knew a winner when they saw one.



THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Simmons, Texas, 1913

I learned to read when I was three, although I can't remember where I found any reading material. First, papa made a game out of words. He would say, "Bebo, this is a Bois D'arc tree, It is spelled b-o-i-s d-a-r-c. Now, you say it." Bois D'arc trees grew profusely in Texas and became part of the history of the state. They form dense thickets and have long sharp thorns. Long before barbed wire was used to keep the cattle in, these thickets were planted and generally used by ranchers instead of fences. No animal could penetrate those prickly barriers. As to spelling, a little later papa pointed to a large tin box on the kitchen shelf and said, Bebo, there are three words on that box, so let's spell them. N-a-t-i-o-n-a-l B-i-s-c-u-i-t C-o-m-p-a-n-y, he would say over and over and before the day was over I was chanting the words and never forgot them. I suppose my brothers school books were mastered next and no doubt the family Bible. The Sears Roebuck catalog was fascinating to look at and I never tired of reading the descriptions of the wonderful things in the catalog and the colorful pictures afforded me endless hours of pleasure.

Especially the pages illustrating Christmas tree ornaments. The glowing colors sparkled like gems and I longingly read every word about them trying to imagine what they would really look like, for you see, I had never seen a Christmas tree. There were no evergreens in our part of the state. I read and re-read every word on the page to mama and asked many questions.

"What are they made of, mama? She told me they were light as bubbles and almost as fragile. I said, "Do you suppose I will ever have any to play with?"

Mama told me dolls were to play with but these ornaments were carefully packed away and only used once a year. Nothing could stop my yearning to touch these lovely sparkling globes.

Time passed and the holidays drew near. Mr. Madden at the general store came back from a buying trip and he brought a huge fir tree which he donated to the church to be used by the entire community at Christmas time. Every farmer and ranch hand for miles around drove their families in to the church for the big occasion. Mr. Madden donned a Santa Claus suit. I gazed in awe at the tree which almost touched the church ceiling. On the top of the tree was a glistening pink angel. The boughs had been richly decorated by all the ladies of the church. Families laid their presents under the tree and during church services we couldn't wait

for the big event. At last, Santa Claus began reading names off the boxes and with squeals of joy children of all ages claimed their gifts. I watched wide-eyed, waiting my turn with quiet confidence. Time seemed to stand still but after a long while I could see the heap of presents had been distributed and my name had not been called. Finally, Santa said "Boys and girls, line up, and as you pass before me, each of you will receive another present from Santa".

I quickly thought, "So that's it. It will still be all right. He will surely hand me mama and papa's present."

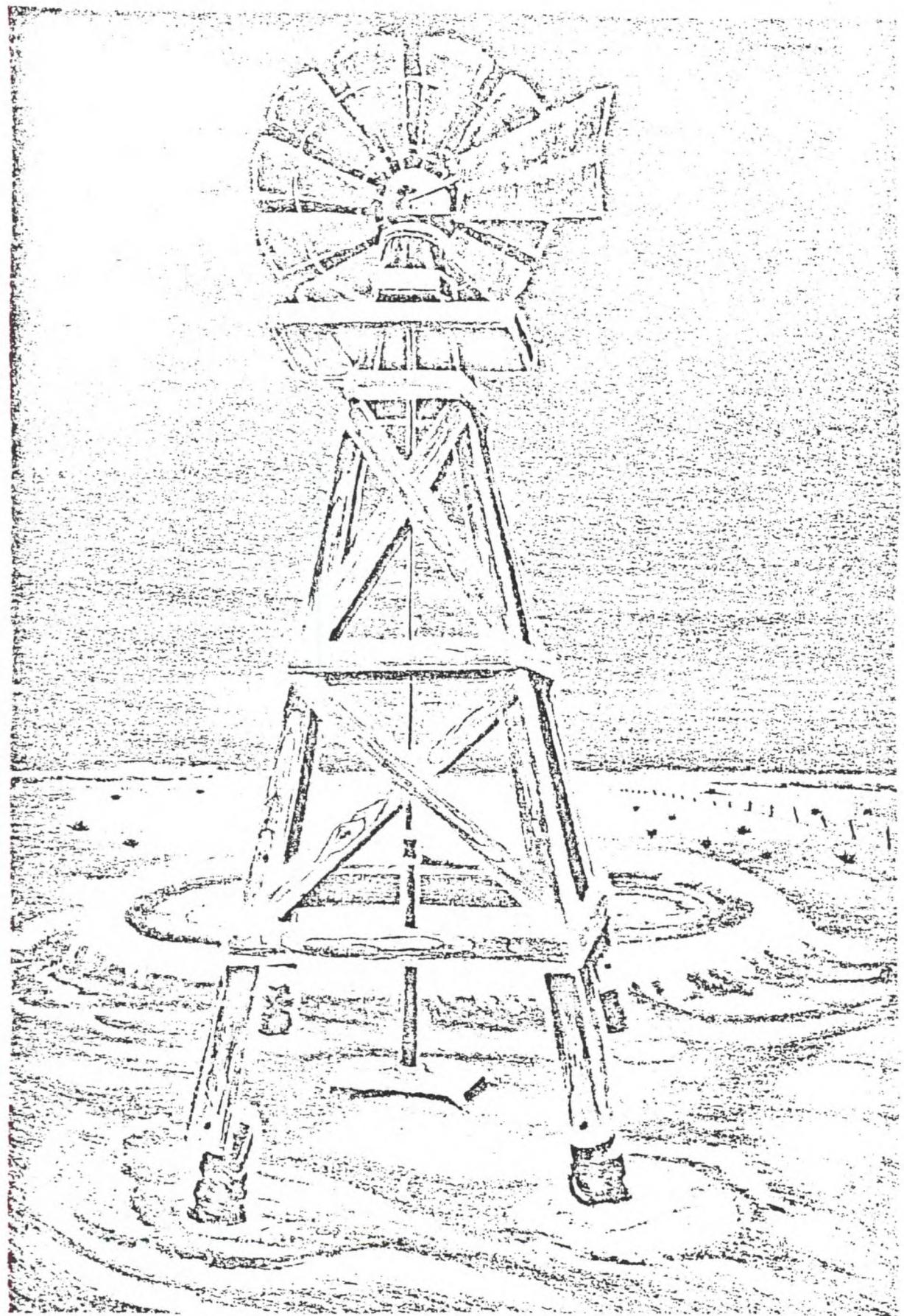
Actually, what he did was to give each of us a red net bag containing an orange, some nuts, and a few pieces of hard candy. Masking my disappointment, I heard shrill voices. The church ladies and mama were engaged in quite a fuss. I heard my mother say,

"I put her box under the tree with the others", A neighbor lady stepped forward and said,

"Miz Adams, I guess we are guilty. A mistake has been made. I found a box of ornaments and not finding a card on it to your little girl I assumed it was another box of church ornaments and decorated the tree with them. But here, we will re-fill the box".

Ornaments were placed untidily back into the box. Some were broken into bits.

It is a sad picture of mama I carry in my heart, hesitantly handing me an open box of Christmas ornaments that had been intended for me to gently use in games and play with at will. She knew the illusion had been shattered and we went home trying to the end to exude gaiety and Christmas spirit, but I had no words to let her know how sad I felt over her disappointment.



MY FIRST DAY IN SCHOOL

I awakened early and was anxious to have mama comb my hair and put on my new red hair ribbons. The new dress she made was hanging near by and was blue with red rick rack braid on the collar and sleeves.

However, mama insisted I slip into an old outfit and eat breakfast as it was too early to get ready. I was so excited I didn't eat much and when I finished she asked me to visit the old hen's nest and see if she was setting on her eggs.

Skipping down to the row of nests I peeked in each one for a newly laid egg. Sometimes I was able to transact a little business with Mr. Bell. Oftentimes he would give me four black gum drops for an egg. No eggs were in the nests and coming to the last one where the hen was supposed to be I found a big chicken snake coiled on top of the eggs. With a shriek I ran back to the house.

I was told that kind of snake was harmless. Nevertheless, I shuddered. I had seen many rattlesnakes around the premises and sometimes I came across a tarantula or scorpion. A scorpion made its way into my brother's bed one night and stung him. Mama treated it with one of her sure fire remedies but he suffered a lot of pain the rest of that night.

At last it was time to go to school. I looked in my new lunch pail. My mouth watered as I looked at the fried chicken and the biscuits that mama had packed for

me. We walked out of the yard and mama picked up a long stick in case a sidewinder crossed our path. These little snakes didn't get very big, but they were plentiful and very deadly. She held my hand as we walked the half mile to school. I wasn't allowed to run ahead or wander among the bushes. I thought we would never reach the schoolhouse. I was eager to get there and get started.

I knew the teacher well. Lillian Neal was a beautiful girl and she and my oldest brother, Tex, were in love. For some reason her father, who taught the high school students upstairs in the same schoolhouse, did not approve of the match, and moved heaven and earth to keep them apart. As lovers will, they found a way, and one evening I saw them walking through the trees with their arms around each other. They shooed me home.

A week or so later we were awakened one night by my dog barking something fierce. We opened the front door and there in the moonlight was Lillian running around in circles with the dog. He would snatch at her nightgown and she was trying to outrun him. Papa called a halt to this and brought her in the house. She stared off into space a minute, shook her head, then looked around the room as if she had never been there before and said in an unnatural voice,

"Where am I? Oh, Mr. Adams, how did I get here? I must have been sleepwalking again."

Sleepwalking, my eye. She just wanted an excuse to see my brother. Mama tucked a blanket around her, and Tex walked her the two or three miles home and didn't get back until almost daylight. I never did find out how her father took it.

When we reached the school room Miss Neal treated me like any other new student. After mama told me goodby, she assigned a desk to me in the front row with the other first graders. Second grade was just back of me, and each row accomodated a higher grade. The eighth graders in the rear looked awfully big to me.

The morning passed swiftly as it was so new to me. I practiced penmanship with the others, doing many push and pulls on my slate. This finally got boring and I longed for recess. When the bell rang I crawled under the schoolhouse with a little boy named James and we were just getting acquainted when Miss Neal came around the corner and peeked under and found us there. He had just given me a bite of his chocolate bar. It was covered with blue tinfoil and I resolved I would get one at Bell's drug store next time instead of gumdrops. I got about fifteen gumdrops wrapped in an old newspaper for a nickel, but the chocolate bar, though small, seemed so elegant for a nickel that I was willing to take quality instead of quantity.

Miss Neal said, "Come inside, children, you must not have heard the bell. Classes are beginning again."

Seated at my desk again, I became restless.

Suddenly I wanted to see my mother. Resting my elbow on the edge of the desk I picked up the chalk to draw some pictures on my slate. After a moment or two a phenomenon occurred. My arm gave a little jerk. A nerve somewhere had rebelled at my awkward writing position. Fascinated by this I waited for it to do it again. I wished real hard for it to jerk again and with a little help it did.

Passing down the aisle reviewing our work Miss Neal paused at my desk and said,

"Aren't you feeling well, dear?"

She looked a little puzzled, and placing her hand on my forehead she continued,

"Come on up front with me, and we will see how you feel a little later."

She pulled a chair next to hers and had me sit in it and place my head in her lap.

I was quite pleased with the arrangement and with a little more help my arm continued to jerk. Looking down at me now and then she became concerned and at lunch time she took me home. My mother was surprised to see me back so soon. She put me to bed and I could hear the murmur of their voices as I drifted off to sleep. I wasn't too sure whether I had pulled it off or not.

My last thought was I had better not press my luck and try it again.

THOUGHTS AND AFTERTHOUGHTS

Simmons, Texas, 1914

Thoughts

I must have been six years old. We lived on the Nueces river in south Texas. Nothing much but cactus and mesquite trees. The facts of life were presented to me in a strange way. Mary was seven. Her father's farm was a mile away and we spent a lot of time together. That is, until one afternoon when she asked me if I knew how babies were made.

When I told her the doctor brought them she whooped and hollered and then dropped her bombshell.

She said, "First, the woman and man go behind a door somewhere." When I asked her what for, she said,

"Silly, so nobody will see them start a baby."

Puzzled, I asked what they did behind the door. She said

"I'll show you, and grabbed a little stick. She said,

"This is what the man has, and he puts it inside the woman like this," and she made a lunge for my crotch whereupon I ran like a turkey and heard nothing more on the subject until we moved to Waco.

Afterthoughts, 1918

Reva and Reba were twins. I'm pretty sure that was their names. It's been so long ago. They were tall wiggly girls, full of mischief and mama really didn't want me to play with them. But they were always interesting, and besides they lived in a huge old house which seemed like a castle to me. Now I know it was quite shabby. These girls didn't stick as close together as twins usually do, so it was that for a time Reba and I walked home from school together, she talking all the while, and I almost believed most of her wild stories. It's only now, in retrospect, that I wonder how I could have been so gullible. Anyway, we usually cut across a field coming home from school. She would put her foot on the bottom strands of barbed wire and hold the upper strands away from me while I scuttled through the hole endeavoring not to rip the back of my dress. Then I would hold the wire back so she could scoot through.

One afternoon we were dawdling on the way home from school, picking a daisy and going through the "he loves me, he loves me not" ritual - taking a blade of grass, pressing it flat between our two thumbs to see who could make the best whistle, when suddenly she began to talk about grownups. This subject always fascinated me. I knew so little about them. My mother was the only grownup I really knew, and my two brothers were older than I.

My oldest brother was ten years older and I always thought of him as a man, as indeed he was in most things. My younger brother was serious and studious and had little to say. When he talked, everyone listened. He was also a champ at mumble-ty-peg. That is the way it sounded. I don't know how it is spelled. Riding his bicycle was dearest to his heart. He was an artist in his way, and brought my mother home a beautiful carved box he'd made at the cabinet shop where he worked. But they were both too old to play with me, so I was quite a loner.

Reba was holding the barbed wire down for me when she made her startling disclosure. It affected my life for years afterwards. We had been talking about my unusually long hair which was braided in two pigtails. She asked me if I washed my own hair. I told her that my mother washed and combed my hair. Then she said something like, "You're too young to have hair you know where". I didn't know where, so she told me. I raised up so suddenly I tore my sleeve on the barbed wire. More explicitly, she said, "People have long hair there and they have to comb it". "How long?" was my first question. "Real long". "Really?" "Long enough that they have these tiny brush and combs to take special care of it." I got very excited. "Where do they keep the brush and comb?" "In a little box". "What color is it?" "The hair?" "No, the box". "Where do they keep the box?" Vaguely, "Oh, different places; but so that no one ever finds it, that would be too horrible". "Is that kind of hair blonde, red or like ours?" "Oh, sort of. It depends." Suddenly tiring of the discussion she raced ahead of me waving goodby as she reached her porch.

I was in a quandary. Full of curiosity, wonder, and a nagging sense of guilt that I knew such a thing about my mother and father. This did not deter me, however from searching in every nook and cranny for the little box for several years to come. Mama would say,

"What are you looking for, baby"? "Oh, nothing, mama". But, when I misplaced my jacks and looked for them or other lost treasures, consciously or subconsciously I would hope to find that little box of undetermined size and color, holding a cute little pink (or blue) comb and brush with fancy designs on the handles. I'm almost sorry I didn't find it.

BEBO'S PLACEBOS

Bebo's Placebos

Simmons, Texas, 1914

It seemed that wild flowers colored my days as a child. A few hundred feet in front of our house was a field of sun flowers and blue bonnets. On warm summer days the butterflies floated through the flowers, and their flashes of color vied with the flowers for attention. The smaller flowers, primroses, daisies and buttercups - I used to decorate my mud pies. They looked good enough to eat, and I suspect I tried a nibble or two.

Sometimes I would tire of the mud pies and mama would let me take a little flour outside and I would mix it with water and knead the dough until it was ready to roll out into make believe cookies which I dried in the sun. I was laying out my cookies to dry when I saw Mr. Howry coming down the path. Mr. and Mrs. Howry were quite old, but Mrs. Howry was still able to take in washing.

Mr. Howry was always ailing, and everyone in our small town thought he feigned illness to keep from working. This morning he came to our door and said to mama, "Mornin', Miz Adams. I'm fresh out of aspirin. My back aches me. I've sure got the miseries. Could you hep me out with a couple of aspirin, please ma'am?". Always a good neighbor, mama commiserated with him and gave him the medicine. After a few minutes of exchanging news he left. Mama became a soft touch. She could never turn anyone down, even though she discovered Mr. Howry was bumming aspirin daily from all the townspeople. His addiction for aspirin became common knowledge and here is how I solved a community problem,

My mother was a crack shot. When she wanted a cotton tail for dinner she stepped on our front porch, bided her time, and when a rabbit crossed her vision she killed it with the first shot. This wasn't considered unusual, as we lived off wild life. Quail, deer, fish and rabbits were plentiful and our cupboards were never bare.

Naturally, empty cartridge shells were easy to come by, so I drew my mother into a conspiracy. The next time she gave me a small amount of flour I asked for a half teaspoon of baking soda. I mixed flour, soda and water to a thick paste, rolled it out to one quarter inch thickness, used the cartridge shell as a biscuit cutter and cut out several dozen of the nicest pseudo aspirin you ever saw. I laid them on a bread board to dry in the sun. I tasted

one, and you could not tell the difference. When properly bottled they looked like they were fresh out of Mr. Bell's drug store.

When Mr. Howry came by for his next allotment, mama surprised him by saying, "Here, Mr. Howry, please take several. You are surely welcome."

Clutching his windfall he scuttled down the path. The word got out to the other neighbors and for as long as we lived in Simmons Mr. Howry always had a plentiful supply of home made aspirin for every ache and pain. When we moved away we gave him a quart jar full which probably lasted as long as he did.

MAMA, WILL THE WIND BLOW?



Simmons, Texas, 1915

Mama, Will the Wind Blow?

My brothers were in Beeville visiting relatives. Papa came in with six quail for dinner. Mama dunked them in boiling water. I helped pluck the loosened feathers and soon we had a platter of crisp fried quail. With corn bread and greens cooked with salt pork it was a supper fit for a king.

At meal time we would bow our heads while papa said grace. He would start, "Dear Lord, blub, blub, blub for a minute or so and then I heard the closing word "amen". I never did find out what he said in between.

Papa often bragged about having read the Bible through nine times, one of the results of which left him insisting that bread, all bread any kind of bread, be broken with the hands, and never cut with a knife.

I'll never forget when his favorite niece brought a pan of hot cornbread to the table cut into neat two inch squares. Papa took one look at it and muttered something unintelligible.

Remembering papa's rule of never cutting bread, my aunt hastily reached for the bread and broke it into a pile of crumbs. Papa laughed and all was well.

Getting back to the quail dinner, it was ominously quiet for a while and then I began to hear the wind whistling through the cracks of our old house. It was a subdued moan at first then shrill, almost like a woman's scream. I heard loose boards flapping on the porch. I ran to mama and put my head in her lap. It didn't take long before I knew both papa and mama were alarmed. Without much warning we felt the house shake.

Wordless, my folks looked at each other, grabbed some heavy blankets off the bed, and as we hurried for the front door, there was a great trembling and groaning of the house as it moved off the wooden blocks on which it sat. It lurched downward at a crazy angle just as we made for the porch and stepped out into the night. All kinds of flying objects came through the air so my folks threw the blankets over our heads and we made haste to reach the village. I was between my parents and with the blankets over us, I couldn't see anything but feet. I was paralyzed with fear, and my mother's hysterics only frightened me more. We finally sought shelter in a low brick building in town where most of the villagers had found haven.

Pallets were made on the floor for the children, but I refused to lie on the quilts and go to sleep. Instead, trembling and shaking, I clung to my mother through the long night until the wind subsided.

At dawn it was quiet and still. We opened the door to survey the damage. Most of the houses had blown away. The old hotel remained standing and that was about all. Old man Howry and his wife stayed with neighbors while the townspeople rebuilt their shack.

The trauma of the hurricane made such a deep impression on me that for years if the branches of a tree moved or a leaf quivered, I would run to my mother, shaking, and cry out,

"Mama, will the wind blow?"

After the storm we walked home and when we first saw our house at a crazy pitch, the kitchen eighteen inches higher than the common eating and sleeping room, mama said,

"Oh, my, is it safe to go in?"

Throwing his arm across her shoulders with an affectionate gesture, he used her nickname which he reserved for special occasions,

"Don't you worry, Ol' Puddin' Trot, I can fix that."

We lived there another year before we moved to Waco, and mama and I got mighty tired of running down hill to set the table and running uphill with a stack of dirty dishes.

Papa never got around to fixing it.

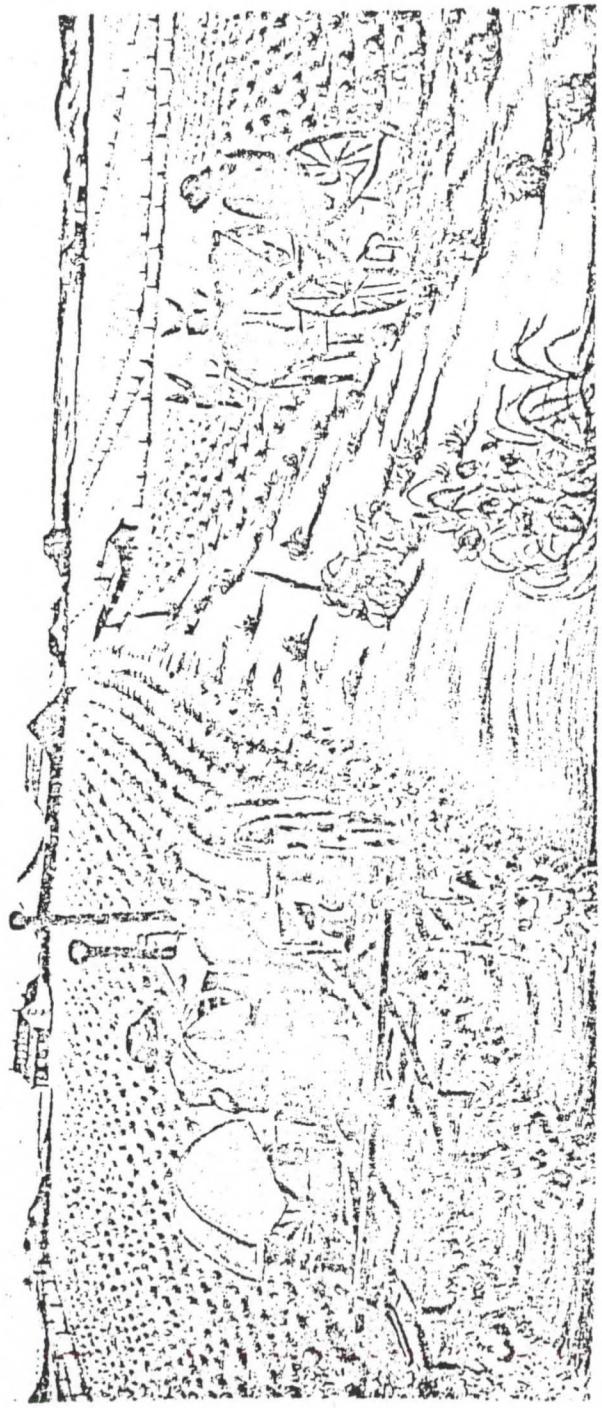
THE DEW GLASS

Simmons, Texas, 1916

One day Mary and I went to make our inspection of the "dew-glass". I wonder if it was our own invention? Never before or since have I heard a child speak of a dew-glass. We would dig a small square hole in the ground, approximately 12" x 12" and about a foot deep. Then we would line the bottom and the sides with grass, ferns, or green leaves. Then the real fun began. We would pick wildflowers of assorted colors and work out varied designs by placing the flowers in the hole. When it was sufficiently interesting and colorful we would place a pane of glass over it. Any broken window glass would do. Early the next morning we would make a pilgrimage to the woods to see our handiwork. If we got there before the sun got too warm, we could see the flowers through a haze of moisture. Incredibly beautiful! And after days of pure enjoyment we would make a fresh one.

Almost as much fun as a dew glass was whipping soapsuds. This could be done with an egg beater or a fork and for hours I would whip and whip, raising the suds to greater and greater heights of dazzling beauty and to top it off I added a spoonful of bluing to the last whipping, the result being palest blue to azure depending on how much of mama's bluing I poured into the eggwhite type mixture.

Then, too, there was nothing more fun than blowing bubbles through an empty spool. My mother sewed a lot and there were many empty thread spools, some of which I used for little wheels on make shift cars. Others, when whittled to a point on one end, made fine spinning tops. But blowing the bubbles was for me the most fun, especially when my older brother made smoke bombs out of the bubbles by exhaling smoke into them. He would blow the bubble to sufficient size, shake it gently off the spool and I would watch breathlessly while it floated to earth and exploded, leaving a satisfying puff of smoke.



I NEED TO GO "OUT"

Simmons, Texas, 1916

Papa never built an outhouse. We had no plumbing of any kind and depended on barrels of rain water placed under the eaves of the house and a well dug by papa and my brothers. Mama never had a sink or a toilet in her home until we moved to Waco - and maybe not then. My memory doesn't serve me as to these devices. It's possible she never enjoyed these facilities until we moved to Los Angeles several years later.

In those early days in Texas the word we used when we had to go was "out".

"Mama, I have to go out."

"All right, honey, I will go with you."

We would mosey out of earshot of the house, walk up a slight rise in the terrain, go down hill a short distance to a clump of bushes and go "out".

When visitors came the ladies would wander off to a convenient site, and on the way back would gather fresh toothbrushes from the trees. Ladylike, they would chew the ends of the twigs until they formed small brushes. Then they would take out their Garret snuff boxes and dip these brushes in the snuff and deposit the results in their cheeks.

Mama could hold snuff in her mouth all day and no one would ever know. It is necessary to spit quite a lot, but somehow she managed never to do this in public, although some of the old folks didn't care where or when they spat.

After we moved to Waco and I entered school, one day the teacher lined seven or eight of us up in front of the class for a spelling bee. I dearly loved spelling bees but nature

called and I raised my hand timidly and asked the teacher if I could go "out".

Puzzled, she looked through the window where rain had been falling steadily all day and said,

"Not now, dear. Maybe the rain will stop by recess."

Knowing I was misunderstood and that the girl's room was just down the hall, I lost control and a puddle of water formed on the floor and the fascinated eyes of the students still seated were riveted to the puddle as it trickled between the feet of the other boys and girls lined up with me.

Mercifully, I can remember no more. Surely no little girl had ever been so disgraced. Modesty was rigidly practiced in our household. Most fathers in south Texas treated their little girls like they were made of spun sugar. I'm sure my embarrassment was keener because I was so protected.

Oftentimes I would be sitting on the ground playing jacks, legs crossed, my bloomers blooming and papa would come around the corner of the house and say,

"For shame, your mother will tell you why. Go in the house."

No one had ever seen me undressed. Not even in a nightgown. To this day, though they are all gone but one, no one in the family but mama ever saw me except when I was fully dressed. Papa was not to blame. He, too, had been conditioned by generations before him who had said "shame on you, little boy" for skinny dipping in the river.

THE GATE

Simmons, Texas, 1917.

Papa never got around to fixing things. For instance, we never had a proper fence or gate around the house. To keep the horses and cows out of our yard and mama's garden, the head of an old iron bedstead became our front gate. It had been an ornate bed at one time and it was distinguished by big blobs of heavy curlicues and medallions. It may have graced some southern mansion at one time, but it had served it's time. How we acquired it is a mystery to me now. Anyway, papa attached it to a fence post with heavy rope top and bottom instead of hinges. One afternoon I was swinging back and forth on this gate in time to a little tune I was humming. In protest of this latest misuse of it's role in life, the gate burst it's bonds and I fell to the ground, still clutching the iron grilles. I wonder now that I was not killed outright, as one of the massive decorations pierced my forehead. Half unconscious and bleeding profusely, I was lifted from the ground and mama tried to staunch the flow of blood with a sheet hanging on the line. Papa flew down the path through the mesquite trees to the general store operated by Mr. Madden. He had the only car in town. A small pickup. After what seemed an eternity, I was deposited on a quilt in the flat bed of the truck and we drove to Three Rivers to the nearest doctor.

I remember looking up at the stars and the moon as we chugged along and wondered if this was dying and if in a few minutes I would know those stars more intimately, for surely they were in heaven where I would soon be and I was sad that I would not be able to tell my brothers goodby. I lost a lot of blood, but the doctor was able to stitch me up and poured some yellow powder over the wound. I can still smell it. A disinfectant used long before the days of antibiotics.

Mama was to drive me many times to Three Rivers to have the wound dressed, as indeed it was a big cut. She had a little mare and a buggy of her very own. On our return home she invariably bought peppermint stick candy. Also a wedge of yellow cheese cut from a big wheel, and a box of crackers. We would take a little bite of each, melding the results in our mouths with appreciation. It was a special treat and I looked forward to our buggy trips to the doctor.

Many weeks later it was almost healed. A huge, thick, dry scab had formed over it and I still wore the bandage around my head. Coming around the corner of the house one day from play, fate decreed that at that precise moment mama opened the kitchen door and threw a pan of warm greasy dishwater on my head. A severe infection resulted and it was only partially healed again when we pulled up stakes and moved to Waco, Texas, in a covered wagon.

THE HAT



Waco, Texas, 1918

I'll never forget when we arrived in Waco. The trip there had been long and arduous, broken up with papa doing a little horse trading in some of the small towns we passed through. Also, I remember the whole family hoeing cotton for a few days. We pitched a tent under a pecan tree. I helped a little, but soon tired of the hot sun. Somehow word was gotten to brother Tex, and he came out to see us. His headquarters with the railroad was in Waco, so we must have been fairly near. I had a sack of hard candy I had saved to give to him. If I got gum drops, I always saved the black ones for my brothers because I liked them the most. I drooled over the black ones but seldom ate those. I remember when my brother swept me up in his arms I showed off by saying, "We didn't anticipate finding you so easily." He roared with laughter and teased me about using such a big word as anticipate.

We all rode in to Waco together. Papa rented a small, shabby house on the outskirts of town until he could find work. It was during World War One and work was plentiful. With our small savings, he bought a small grocery store at 1900 Speight St. for mama to operate. My brother Clyde went to work in a cabinet shop, tooling his bicycle many miles back and forth. Brother Tex had a regular run on the railroad selling candies, popcorn and other goodies to the passengers. Papa worked with the horses in the army camp.

As soon as mama opened the grocery store we moved in a small back room. MP's were stationed on the broad front porch of the grocery store and gave us much needed protection after mama shot a hole through the door one night when someone tried to break in. She was fearless and her rifle was always at the ready.

Thanksgiving Day rolled around, and I remember the store was open, but the boys were away and papa was working. No special dinner had been prepared, and in the afternoon mama said, "Let's have ourselves a special treat for Thanksgiving. I got a recipe from Mrs. Meyers across the street for something called ambrosia. So, get two oranges out of the crate by the front door - while I open a can of coconut." When she had finished stirring the concoction, she put it in two small bowls of her best china and to me it was truly ambrosia. Many holiday dinners have passed, but none that I enjoyed more.

Papa became a street car motorman and I took him his lunch. I could ride the street cars free because of his work and I would catch one near our home and get off at the tallest building in town, the Amicable building. I would stand there waiting for papa's trolley to come ding ding ding-ing along and would stand beside him for the rest of the run. Then while eating his lunch, he would show me how to run the streetcar. I never actually did, of course, but to me it was the same as, because I just knew I could, if allowed.

When he got this job, we sold the store and moved to 1121 Wood St. I'll never forget when Tex came home one weekend. He looked around at our new abode and said, "Well, this is some house. It's even got wallpaper". There was no tongue in cheek about it either. It definitely was a step up in class.

Mama bought new furniture. An "art square", which was a 9 x 12 rug. Red roses against a green background. Heavenly to our feet, as we had never felt the luxury of such a rug under our toes. She was so proud of her living room "suite". She began to feel secure about her home. She disliked moving around so much, and yearned to put down roots somewhere. We had been nomads for years, and she had never complained.

Not too much later Tex moved to Burkburnett, Texas, to get rich during the oil boom there. A flock of our relatives were making out fine. Making and spending money freely. Burkburnett was a huge army tent city. Tex hadn't been there long before he contracted smallpox. The epidemic was widespread. Mama panicked and decided to go there immediately. She took me with her. That part doesn't make much sense now, but there must have been a reason. I was exposed to it and so was mama but neither of us caught it.

Preparing for the train trip, mama took a wide brimmed straw hat, dyed it black and got out her scissors and began to trim it down to a narrow brim. Sighting it with her eyes and trimming away, one side would be narrower than the other and she would trim some more. It was still lopsided, so she trimmed and trimmed until finally it was the weirdest thing you ever saw. She stuck some red cloth roses on the side and to Burkburnett we went. I feel so badly now that I look back on it. My gaze was fastened on that awful hat and I scooted low in my seat so the other passengers wouldn't see me. I don't know why. I suffered then and I suffer now when I remember how miserable I was on that trip.

BOOM TOWN, 1919

Boom Town , 1919

It seems to me that every time we moved, it was predicated upon where my brother Tex was. When we left Simmons it was to be with him in Waco. When we left Waco it was because he was in Burkburnett. With great sadness my mother sold her art square and other new furniture and we left for Burkburnett where most everyone still had half healed small pox sores, or worse, pock marks. Evidently the disease had not been very virulent and I don't remember any deaths. That is, from small pox. Other causes, yes. Men were killed in the streets. I saw a man fall from an oil derrick. His body looked like a squashed melon. Then later a shoot-out in a grocery store.

Mama had sent me to the store. As I entered I heard a shot, and the body fell across a crate of apples. Behind the counter a frightened man and woman stood. Tatum shot Stringfellow for making love to his wife.

Without ceremony the store keeper had a couple of men put the body in a truck and haul it away. He mopped the floor, replaced the crate of apples and business went on as usual.

As I went home I remember running with head bent down to keep the sand out of my eyes. The wind was howling and the sand storm grew in intensity by the minute. Great sand dunes were swept away only to make other dunes nearby. My face stung and I was filled with terror. I hardly knew whether the wind frightened me more than the murder. The combination left me shaking and that night I shivered as I heard the wind howling through the cracks of our tar paper shack. Later we lived in an army tent and my strongest memory is of mama with a flour sack dish towel waving the flies off our food.

I had no playmates , but we had an extra tent nearby in which we stored burlap bags of grain for our horses. I would climb about on those sacks by the hour making up stories in my head. If an idea hit me that I could embellish and dream on for hours, sometimes I would save it for another time. It seemed too good to dream it out and maybe hit a dry spell and have nothing else to day dream about. This may sound confusing, but it worked for me and I don't remember being lonely.

I read everything I could find. I walked miles to the drug store and looked over the magazines. I would only have money enough for one, so I would buy Captain Billy's Whiz Bang or Love Stories, take it home and read it in an hour. Back to the store I would go and tell the owner my mother already had it and could I please put it back in stock

and get the one she sent me for. This ruse would only work every now and then, but often I would get two or three magazines for the price of one. The content of these books never seemed to dent my little mind. I preferred the Saturday Evening Post, but after I read it, what was I going to do until the next issue came out? So I wasn't choosy. I even wrote an article for the Saturday Evening Post describing the oil boom in Burkburnett. It was done in pencil with no thought of form, although I imagine my spelling was correct. I waited for weeks and then of course got a rejection slip with a nice letter saying "at this time we have no need for this particular subject". This didn't bother me much, so I started cutting coupons out of all the magazines advertising cosmetics and other products. I mailed them off, and soon after I had a veritable flood of small parcels delivered to me. I could have set up a miniature store of my own had I thought of it.

Because of the burlesque shows in town, girls my age wore heavy make-up. I was just past eleven years old. This white stuff was called Tan-No-More and it came in a tin box like shoe polish with a little sponge. I would wet the sponge, daub my face with the shoe polish, put two spots of red rouge on my cheeks, redder lipstick, make teased puffs over each ear, do the rest of my hair on the back of my head, and it was hard to tell the kids my age from the chorus girls, except we were smaller. Maybe they thought we were midgets in the show.

This custom was to get me off to a bad start when we moved to Los Angeles a couple of years later to once again find my brother Tex.

DAYDREAMING

Daydreaming

We moved our tent around a lot in Burkburnett. We lived near my Uncle Hilleys house first. He had a large barn, and I spent a lot of time there. I spun a lot of dreams in the hay loft there. It had a musty odor characteristic of grass, chickens, horses and left over fragrances of new mown hay.

One day I found a nest of baby mice. I was fascinated by their little pink bodies void of any hair. They couldn't have been over an inch long, though they had little tails almost as long as their bodies. There were two of them snoozing peacefully in a little cottony nest. I thought how nice it would be to raise them as pets. I was a gentle child and wouldn't have hurt them for the world.

The more I thought of it the more I wanted to take care of them and watch them grow. I had an eye dropper in the tent and I figured I could warm milk and give them regular feedings.

Carefully, I lifted them, nest and all, and carried them into our army tent.

The journey was only a few yards, but I was afraid they had gotten cold. Mama had a roaring fire going in the old wood cook stove. She was over at a small table, kneading bread. Usually I was pestering her for small bits of dough to roll out and make the tiniest little rolls no bigger than my thumb. This time I was too engrossed in my new pets.

I thought I should warm them up first, then cover the little nest with a handkerchief. Lifting one out by the tail was quite easy, so growing bolder I lifted the other and tiptoed over to the stove. The two baby mice dangled from my hands and I placed them over the stove to hasten the warm up. The heat almost scorched my fingers, but worst of all, I heard two tiny squeaks of pain as

I barbecued the babies,

I cried for days.

Later on we moved near the banks of the Red River.

A mile from our tent was a long bridge joining Texas and Oklahoma.

I spent a lot of time playing near the river, digging in the red sand, looking for treasures.

Walking along the river one day I picked up a small, smooth brightly colored stone. This triggered my imagination, and immediately I fabricated the best day dream of all.

Suppose I would rub this stone and a genie would appear. He would bow and say, "I am here, little Princess, to fulfill your every wish".

Whereupon I would spend the next several hours wishing for various gifts for my loved ones. Then, becoming dissatisfied with the vast sums of money I had bequeathed certain people, I would erase the dream and start over.

Many times I would start small and wish for beautifully wrapped boxes of candies. I would enlarge on this and decide I would surprise my mother with a diamond necklace and the candy.

In one fell swoop I would wind up giving the whole family lavish gifts, beautiful automobiles, perfumes, furs and whatever else my fancy conjured at the moment.

After turning it off because new ideas were bursting to be dreamed, I would start all over and decide we should all take a trip to Europe instead. I wasn't quite ready for the trip, so my mind would veer off to something closer to hand and I would imagine I handed small handsomely gift wrapped boxes to all my loved ones. To their stunned surprise each discovered a wallet inside.

Opening it, they would find checks of graduated size. A million dollars for my mother and father and \$25,000 each for my two

brothers and smaller amounts to various relatives. Thinking it over, the amounts never seemed equitable and I spent quite a lot of time trying to make it come out just right. Cleaning the slate once again, I started over. Cash would be the thing. Huge stacks of currency and gold coins. But it seemed too bulky to get to the bank. Besides, they might all get killed by robbers before they could spend it.

I worked hard on this dream for years. Sometimes it was just lovely. Everyone was overjoyed at their sudden prosperity and I liked the role of being Lady Bountiful.

The trips were particularly rewarding. I could transport a whole batch of the Adams' clan to distant lands and even arrange for baby sitters to take care of any small children involved. I wanted everything to be serene and orderly while we were in London, Switzerland, Hawaii or some other place I had read about in my school books.

I never, in reality, dared rub a likely pebble or other shiny object. I spent so much time performing my wondrous acts, that I couldn't stand the defeat of rubbing a stone and not have my genie appear. I never took the chance. Such a defeat would have spoiled any future dreaming I much preferred to hope that it could be...it might happen...someday...somewhere, just around the corner.

Maybe tomorrow.

At times I would tire of the genie routine and would imagine an old person would require my help. I would place an old woman in a wheelchair. Her home would be small and shabby. I would read to her for hours. I would prepare her meals and feed her soup and custard. This dear invalid would be all alone in the world and depended on me to care for every need.

You understand I would be genuinely fond of the old lady and only nursed her because she needed me and had no one else in the world to turn to, so I was glad to brighten her last days.

It was always hard for me to kill her off, so I would skip over that entirely and just get to the good part where a letter was found addressed to me, saying:

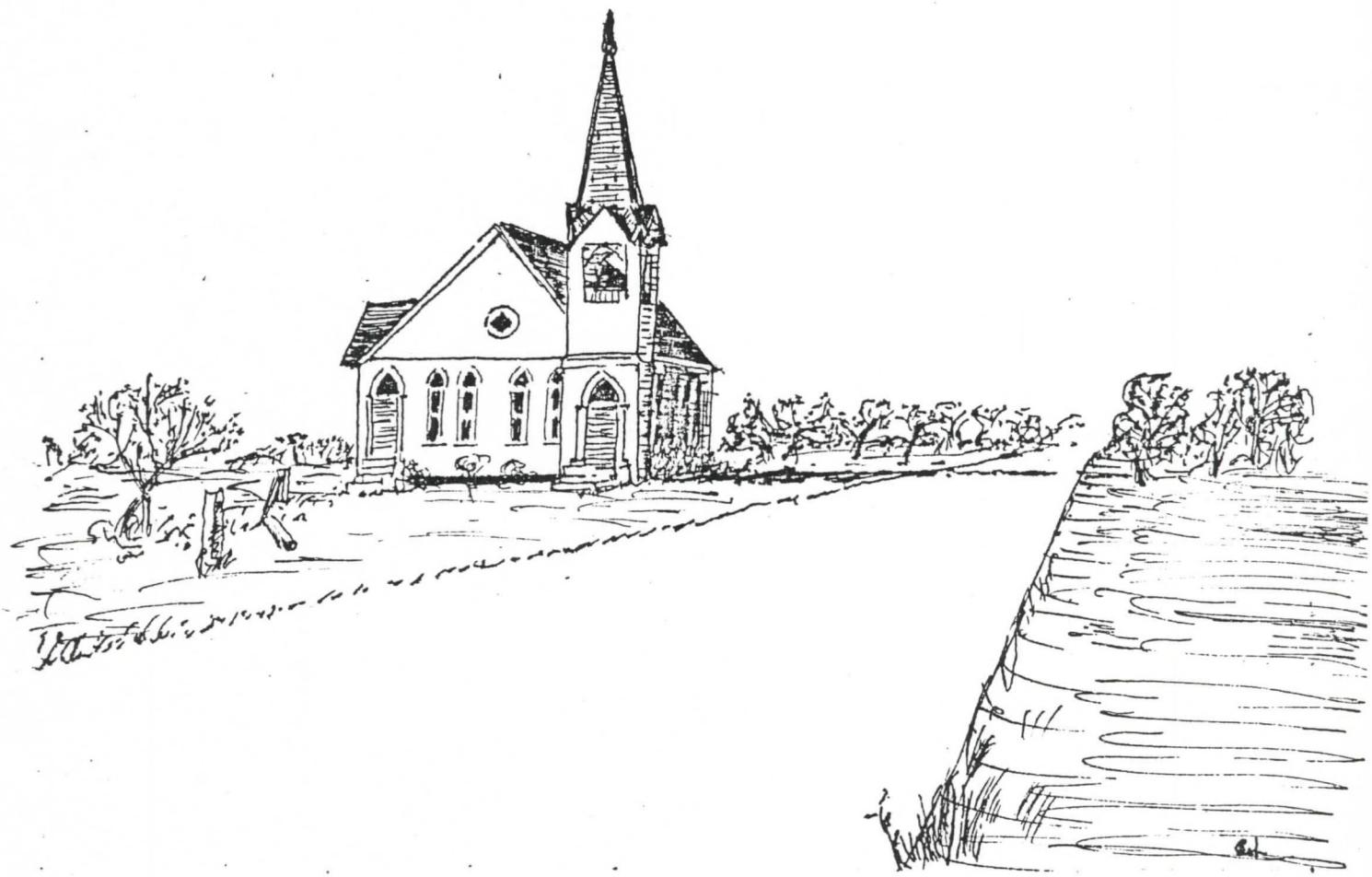
"My dear little girl, you have been so constant and loyal to me that I want you to have everything I possess. It is true that I have lived simply, but in truth I have vast holdings in the east and stacks of money in the bank. My attorney has my will. He will contact you in a day or two and so that you will not have to wait until the will is probated I have directed him to turn over my mansion in New York to you immediately. Also, he has a large sum of money which he will give you at once so you can start spending it right away.

I would appreciate your keeping my trusted servants as they have been with me forty years and I wouldn't want to turn them out in the streets. They have been informed of my legacy to you and will welcome you as they would me. You are a good little girl and I love you very much. Do not grieve. I have had a good life. Stay happy."

Having disposed of her painlessly I could then switch to that portion of my dream where I dispensed my largess and pass out my gifts as before.

SIMMONS, REVISITED

60 YEARS LATER



Sixty years later
November, 1972

SIMMONS, REVISITED

Thanksgiving weekend of 1972 my husband, Bob and I decided to fly to Dallas to visit my brother Clyde and his wife, Muriel. It turned out to be an unforgettable weekend.

After the family reunion with all the kids and grandkids, Clyde came up with the idea of visiting Simmons where we spent part of our childhood. Bob and I were delighted with the idea and we left the following morning.

Driving west of Temple we visited the old Tobey homestead. Here is where my grandmother lived when she was a girl. The old house was in good repair and occupied by a "new" family. On the road before turning in to the house was an imposing archway marked "The Tobey Cemetery". Generations of Tobey's are buried in this quiet spot. We spent an hour or so reading the names on the tombstones. We snapped many pictures and continued our journey.

That afternoon we reached Waco and tried to find the old grocery store on Speight Street but only a fork in the road marked the spot. I picked up a small pebble for a souvenir.

That night we stayed in San Antonio. After visiting the Alamo the next morning, we drove around the curving river which flows through the town. This picturesque city is so beautiful we agreed we would return some day for a vacation.

Late that afternoon we approached Simmons. The landscape looked just the same. Mesquite trees and cactus. No thriving cities. A few farms scattered miles apart. Though not cold, the air was crisp and clear. We saw a few cattle now and then. Bois D'Arc trees here and there. Live oak trees dotted the fields. Now and then a group of them. Then a loner stood silhouetted against the sky.

We began to look for the town. It couldn't be far now. There was a rise in the road that blotted out our view, then suddenly there it was, the exquisite little church I remembered so well. On the left side of the road as we approached.

I looked to the right for the old Goddard hotel. Nothing. Next door had been Bell's drug store. Nothing. Madden's general store. Again, just scrub brush. Then, hopefully, I looked beyond the church on the left side for the school. All that remained was a water tank and a windmill.

After parking the car we slowly approached the church. Then a small miracle occurred. The door was unlocked. Timidly we went in. Standing in the back Clyde pointed out the pew where our folks sat. Not too far behind the pulpit. A stained glass window behind the pulpit cast faceted colors on it. It was a solemn moment.

Turning around Clyde pointed out where the old pot bellied stove used to sit. He and other young boys sat there during the services. Every now and then someone

had to admonish them to be quiet.

The stove now rested in the dusty choir loft above. We found it there at the head of the long unused stairs. Poking around upstairs we found shelves of old hymnals used by our folks. Also a treasure trove of old novels covered with dust. Some of the books were first editions. Grudgingly we put them back. Last, but not least, we came across a box of tiny glass communion cups. My eyes misted as I recalled my mother holding one by the tiny handle.

Reading my thoughts Muriel picked one up. My brother Clyde who has never committed a dishonest act, however small, made her put it back. She giggled, the tension was broken, and we left shortly afterwards. Knowing this was probably the last time I would ever see the church I picked up a small stone as we entered the car to leave.

On the way back to Dallas we talked of those days long ago. Of the time when the wagons and buggies were lined up in front after the services. It was the day my brother Tex was baptized. The minister led the way in his buggy and we drove several miles to the Nueces river. He led my brother out into its waters and baptized him as well as several other young people.

At the services preceding the baptisms I remembered they had sung my favorite hymn. Closing my eyes I could see my mother and father sharing the same hymn book. I could hear my father's resonant baritone voice, and my mother's clear soprano as they sang,

"Oh, come to the church in the wildwood,
Oh, come to the church in the vale,
No spot is so dear to my ch-i-l-d-h-o-o-d,
As the little brown church in the vale."

As a final note, I wish you would look closely
at the little illustration of the church that Bob drew.

Down in the lower right hand corner there appears
to be a little weed. It is not a weed. It is my hus-
band's signature.

I don't know why he made it so small.

Perhaps he was trying to be anonymous because
he swiped one of those little communion cups for me.