



Memories of Omaha—A Reminiscence

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MEMORIES OF OMAHA

—A Reminiscence—

BY JOSIE McCAGUE McCULLOCH

WHY I should begin the story of my early childhood by telling of the path shoveled out of the deep snow, high above my little head, I do not know, unless 'tis that it is among my first recollections. Was the snow so very deep, or was I so very tiny? But the memory remained fixed, and it seemed as if I were walking through a tunnel of deep, cold snow.

I was born in Des Moines, Iowa, but my first memories are of that small home in Omaha at Ninth and Pierce

Joanna (Josie) McCague was born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1865 and came to Omaha with her parents in 1867. In 1886 she was married to James H. McCulloch, and in 1905 she and her husband and two sons moved to Chula Vista, California, where she lived until her death in 1950.

Her explanation of how she happened to write these "Memories" follows:

"These pages consist of a copy of 'scrappy notes' put down on bits of paper at different times as I would think of them during the course of several years. I had expected to put them in shape so they would mean something to myself and my brothers and sisters living at that time—to refresh our memories of that happy growing time when we were all little together and when Father and Mother were working hard, not only to establish a Home Mission for the United Presbyterian Church in the new territory of the West but also to rear and train a family of nine lively youngsters in that western prairie town, Omaha.

"Later, when I found my notes fading out so I could hardly decipher them, I read them off, a few at a time, without correction to a young friend who typed them. I have again picked up my notes, not to correct them or revise them as I have not strength for that now, but to give them as they are to my granddaughters, hoping they will enjoy the reading, as I have the remembering of my early days—of living with my wonderful mother, father, and the big family of brothers and sisters."

which Father built for us in 1867 when we moved here from Iowa. Our family then consisted of Father, Mother, John, Maggie, Willie, Tommie, and Josie. John and Maggie had been born in Cairo, Egypt, where our parents were missionaries. Will was born at Grandfather Lowes' farm in Ohio, and Tom and I (Josie), in Iowa. Later Russell (who only lived a few months), Anna, Lydia, George, and Brower were born in Omaha.

We went first to Nebraska City, which people then thought would be the metropolis of Nebraska and which the Home Mission Board of our church thought should be the site of a United Presbyterian mission. We had to ferry across as there was no bridge over the Missouri then. But after a few months sojourn in Nebraska City Father pushed on to Omaha, which he was convinced was going to be an important city. He settled, as I have said, at Ninth and Pierce where he built a little house for his family, and soon after on Tenth and Pierce he built a mission church, doing much of the work himself. Later, part of Father's property here was bought by the School Board for the first brick school building in Omaha, the Pacific School, two stories high.

Our little home consisted of three rooms, kitchen, bedroom, and front room, which was used as a bedroom, library, and living room. Over these rooms was an attic in which were two beds and which was also used as a storeroom.

The kitchen held a large "Charter Oak" wood cook-stove, a wood box, the small table for moulding bread, the kitchen utensils for making pies and cookies, the large dining table, Mother's little rocker, and a bigger one for Father, besides chairs to use around the dining table. I remember in the kitchen the big wooden chopping bowl filled with doughnuts or ginger cookies, the cookie jar full of sugar cookies, the gingerbread, and the eight loaves of bread baked several times a week. And usually after the bread was taken from the oven, the pans were filled with light rolls. Two hundred weight of flour in a month my mother used!

Father held service, preaching every Sabbath in the little mission church. We children had to be very quiet and suppressed while he studied during the week. Father always asked us after we came home from church what the sermon was about. When my turn came, I played safe and wisely answered, "God." The Sunday school consisted mostly of children of foreigners who lived on the hill above the railroad tracks in what was called Bohemia Town. Their fathers worked as laborers on the newly completed Union Pacific Railroad. Very few of these people had clocks or watches, so Mother, as soon as she had given Father and us children our Sunday dinner, would trudge up the hill to gather up the scholars. It was really a house-to-house visitation, and as I see her now in memory, she reminds me of the Pied Piper coming over the hill with twenty-five or thirty little folks dressed in all sorts of costumes behind her. Ten-year-old sister Margaret and fourteen-year-old brother John had classes in the school. For our simple method was to teach Bible verses and to give the children cards with verses printed on them to take home. Often I've heard Mother quote this verse: "My word shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that whereunto I sent it." And sometimes she and Father could actually see a fulfillment of this as, for example, when one of their former Swedish Sunday school scholars who had gone to a farm in western Nebraska, wrote asking for Sunday school papers and Bible texts to use in a new Sunday school he had gathered around him on the prairie.

Many years afterwards brother John came across his old roll book, and as I heard those names again which long before had sounded so strange and outlandish to me, I recognized many a substantial and respected citizen of present-day Omaha, and memory carried me back to those early days when, from the little homes on the hillside and behind the hazel brush, in early dusk we would hear plaintive, homesick strains of music played on harmonicas and accordions brought from their native lands. After their daily toil on the railroad bed these foreigners would sit barefoot on their doorsteps, playing their folksongs before they went to their rest. Whenever I hear the accordion

anywhere, my memory immediately goes back to my joy in hearing that music when I was six years old.

In that neighborhood Swedish, Bohemian, Italian, Irish, and Negro children all contributed to the process of Americanization. Often we children were sent running to the emigrant wagons to hand the children a Sunday school paper or to invite them to church. And many a loaf of bread baked by my mother found its way under the flap of a prairie schooner beginning its long dusty journey across the plains and over the Rockies to the promised land of the Far West.

But I must get back to some of the incidents of the little house. The kitchen, as I've said, was pretty small but large enough to hold the "Charter Oak" stove and the dining table. Printed on top of that stove was "Fille's Hot Air Flue." Over and over we spelled that out and asked what it meant. That stove was our first primer. Anna was born in this house, but I was too little to remember that. I do, however, remember when Lydia was born two years later, for that was when Tillie Catherwood, a strong good-natured Irish girl came to work for us. She was kind and helpful, and after she left us to marry a young farmer in Elkhorn she often came to see us and brought us some of her good home-made butter.

Most youngsters of this day do not know what it means to be really cold in winter. But we did, for in our upstairs bedroom the moisture of our breath froze on the bedclothes round our necks so that Mother had to thaw the quilts each day by the downstairs fire. We usually hopped out of bed when called, ran downstairs, and dressed by the sitting room fire or in the kitchen. But the fragrance of toast browning in front of the stove and the other good things cooking made us quickly forget the cold.

We had fun in winter, too, for we lived on a side hill and could pull our sleds to the top and coast down past our house to the next street. Our yard seemed big to me then, but when I went back to see the place twenty-five years after we had left it I was amazed to find it so small, yet enclosing such big memories. One of these memories is of the clothesline on which I used to hang by my knees,

petticoat and dress dropping over my head. But I was in pretty good condition to be seen by passers-by, for in those days our undergarments were long and full and covered our legs completely and had a pretty ruffled flounce at the end of the panties. The test of endurance was to see how long I could swing before the rope broke or Mother appeared in the kitchen doorway and put an end to such gymnastics.

I had few girl mates at this time, but Will and Tom, my older brothers, were my constant companions and play-mates. This meant being out of doors for me so that I could be in on "Hide and Seek," "Sheep in the Yard," tree and fence climbing, and in marble time, "Knuckle Boston" and "Little Ring." But Mother had conscientious ideas about teaching her girls to sew, and she exacted an hour a day from me when I sat by her side with needle and thread and tiny thimble and sewed carpet rags or patched. Tom was so forlorn without me that he asked to come and sew with me each day. Then when the hour was up how we would scamper!

Yes, we had sickness, but I've forgotten much about that. It's the mothers who retain the memory of those anxious days and nights. Our mother had decided ideas about putting strong medicine into delicate little stomachs and early adopted the homeopathic method of treatment with old Dr. Sisson as family physician. He won the hearts and confidence of all Mother's children by bringing along with his powders for the sick child, two or three packages containing plain pulverized sugar for the rest of us. We could then play "sick" with no bad effects. Doctors of today are far too busy to pay so much attention to well children.

The worst enemy to health in those days was what the pioneers called "chills and fever" or what we know now as malaria. This we thought was caused by improper drainage, but modern research has fastened it on mosquitoes that breed in stagnant water. These ague spells came on with sudden chills and violent shaking, and the hands and face became blue and cold. These symptoms were followed by high fever, lassitude, and aching. After

being put to bed with hot drinks, the patient felt well as ever, but the chills and other symptoms soon came back. And this kept up for a week or two. What a trial for Mother when one, two, or sometimes three of her youngsters were going through these sieges. Of course we all had whooping cough and mumps and measles, and the babies were fretful when they were teething. The older I grow the more I appreciate my mother's disposition and admire her ability to carry on so sweetly and so ably. And she not only nursed her own household but also gave help to the sick and afflicted of the church and neighborhood.

Omaha in those days, the late Sixties and early Seventies, began to be known all over the United States as the beginning of the West and the eastern terminal of the Union Pacific Railroad. It was the jumping off place for adventurers, as well as the destination of fine young men who became pioneers in the building of a new country, encouraged by the advice of Horace Greeley who had said, "Go West, young man, go West." My father thought Omaha an excellent place for the establishment of a United Presbyterian church as well as a good place for investing some of the money his father had left him. And he did buy several lots in different parts of Omaha besides his home place at Ninth and Pierce. Later he lost most of what he had invested because some men more worldly minded than he borrowed from him to invest in a coal mine at Brownville, Nebraska. This turned out badly, and Father lost his money, but the loss was harder on Mother than anyone else, for even though she was a master hand at contriving and economizing, she had seven little ones to nourish and clothe. Besides it was right after the Civil War, and there were high prices and inflation as an aftermath. We youngsters always had an abundance of nourishing, well cooked food, yet it took management and skill. We needed no vitamin pills; for the flour kept the important B-1 factor, its wheat germ, the graham mush kept its iron, and the corn meal, its oil. Milk was not run through the separator; molasses and sorghum came with their iron in them. Vegetables were grown in the garden in our yard, while barrels

of apples were sent us each year from the farm of Father's cousin in Illinois.

Our grocery store was run by Mr. Morse whose wife had taught in the little red schoolhouse that was Omaha's first school. And I must not forget to tell about Boyd's Packing House not far from where we lived, where we could get such great sides of spareribs with plenty of meat on them each Saturday, and good leaf lard which Mother melted down and put in large stone jars to use in pies and doughnuts. And every winter there were large jars of mincemeat. What a cook our mother was! Her food was not fancy, but just tasty, well cooked, and nourishing. I remember the tomato butter, and the plum butter, and the green tomato sweet pickles, and homemade catsup. But her bread was marvelous! Eight large loaves came out of the oven before breakfast! When was it made? Well, the potato yeast was made the afternoon before and set to rise. This was gradually added to a large pan of sifted flour. About nine o'clock in the evening luke warm water, salt, and sugar were gradually kneaded into the flour. And I mean *kneaded*, for I often asked her to let me do it. It took about one-half hour of good arm exercise. This large loaf, covered with a clean white cloth and a warm blanket, was then placed near the warm oven and left to rise until early the next morning. Mother got up earlier than anyone else in the family, and about half-past five she kneaded the puffy mass and cut it into loaves, rolling them deftly into shape with her hands. Then she put them in the pans, covered them lightly, and placed them near the stove to rise again for an hour. Then they were ready for the oven where they were baked slowly for an hour, coming out beautifully brown. By this time breakfast—graham mush or oatmeal, fried potatoes, steak, or ham and eggs with coffee for Father and Mother—which had been cooking for some time was ready. Sometimes in winter we had buckwheat cakes and maple syrup. Mother had been raised on an Ohio farm, and her father had a maple sugar grove. Many a gallon of syrup and pounds of sugar were sent us from that farm. There is nothing that makes one's mouth water more than to think of real, honest, yeast-raised, old-fashioned buck-

wheat cakes, swimming with butter and hot maple syrup.

Every morning before breakfast we had family worship with the singing of psalms, the Twenty-third and the One Hundred and Third and many others I'll never forget. Father was musical and played the flute beautifully, and he often lined us up to sing during worship. I can hear him now leading us in:

Give thanks to God for good is He
For mercy hath He ever
Thanks to the God of gods give ye
For His grace faileth never.

That psalm with its many verses reciting in detail reasons for continual thanksgiving, has stayed in my conscious and unconscious mind down through the years, and I hear that refrain, "For His Grace faileth never," singing away in my mind when I am doing things that have no connection with the song.

Maybe we sang too many verses, and the breakfast had cooked long enough; but Father was enjoying the singing, and Mother was very patient. When the older children started to school Father had to shorten his morning prayer and some of the singing or else get us all up earlier. By the time I was in high school we had worship right after breakfast, but this was never left out of the day. If Father was away, Mother took over. Her favorite chapters were from Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Perhaps this was because they have so much practical, everyday wisdom in them.

If ever any one of us children complained that there were too many of us because we could never have a new dress and new shoes at the same time, Mother would say, "All right, would you want to be the one left out?" Then with an optimistic smile she would inspire us with anticipation as she said, "Just wait until the coal mine is sold," or, with a still broader smile and twinkle in her eye she would say, "Just wait until we get our share of the Annecke Jans estate!" For were we not direct descendants, seven generations back, of that wealthy Dutch ancestor who had owned valuable property in New York City? That thousands of others were also her descendants did not disturb



ОМАНА, ABOUT 1870

the dreams of us children, who wove a fairy tale around our fancied inheritance.

Here is another picture that lives in my memory. We lived two or three blocks south of the ramshackle frame structure that was the first Union Pacific Depot. The shrieks and whistling of the locomotives, the clanging of the cars, and the puff-puff as the engines started, thrilled me, so that even now, as I hear them, I am carried back to my childhood days in Omaha when we stood at the gate of the white picket fence watching for Father to come up the road from the depot. Perhaps he had gone to meet a relative from "back East," but more likely it was to meet a stranger who wished to make the minister's house his stopping place while in Omaha. There were few hotels in Omaha then where transients could be comfortable, so the frequent question from travelers was, "Where is the nearest minister's house?" Father's home being that answer, many and many a time we were either happy with a delightful stranger, or, as sometimes happened, imposed upon. Father and Mother firmly believed in that text, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." To us children most strangers were "angels," for we loved to hear them talk, and it was exciting to have company. Poor Mother, however, had to make the meals stretch and often had to reluctantly take the little ones out of their warm beds and make up beds on the floor for them. Inside her heart she rebelled at that.

But here comes Father now with the stranger he has gone to meet, and each of them is carrying a carpetbag. Did you ever see one of these articles? Imagine a very much enlarged shopping bag made of Brussels carpeting material. The handles were in the usual place, but there was also a lock and key and safety catches. One could carry more in one of these than in a modern suitcase. As I have said, we children loved these visits when we could listen to stories and incidents like tales out of a book. We didn't mind sleeping on the floor, but eating, that was the question! Which one or two or three of us would have to wait for second table, and how much of the chicken would

the first table eat? But whimpering and whining were unheard of in our family. That would never have been allowed if it had ever begun.

I remember one day when three people came trudging up the "carpetbag way," a man, a lady, and a four-or five year-old redheaded boy. They were a minister and his family enroute to some home mission field. When the little table had been stretched to its full length it was seen that three of us children would have to wait for second table. It was taken for granted that the little redhead would be glad to play outside with the other "waiters." But no! He protested, and he cried, and his father and mother, mortified by his actions, coaxed and pleaded and then tried to force him to do as they wished. Such screams and yells appalled us children who accepted without question or protest such things as waiting for second table. We could not understand, and we peeked in the door in alarm, expecting the heavens to fall on such a rebellious child. At last Mother suggested that the little boy be allowed to stand beside his father since there was not room for another chair. I never forgot that boy, and when in after years we learned that he had an important position in the church, I could scarcely believe that he had turned out a really good man.

But I was describing the little house and digressed. In the front bedroom we had a little wood stove. Alongside the pipe was a toy man propelled by the currents of hot air. When the hot air rose it started the little man to sawing a stick of wood on a saw buck. Up and down, up and down, he kept sawing, as the currents of air kept him going. This was fascinating to us.

Near the door stood a tall, painted bookcase full of Father's theological reference books. Among these were a few, very few novels. I remember especially later reading "Ministering Children" and its sequel. These were charming English stories of childhood life in pious families of the gentry and poor of rural England. I often wonder if the impressions received from reading and re-reading these books helped to make us children willing to run errands for Mother, such as taking her good homemade bread and ginger cookies to homes in our poor neighbor-

hood, and to share the little we had. The lesson of thankfulness was taught us all our lives. "Let me not hear one word of complaint," Mother would say. "Go out and see how some folks have to live and you will be glad for what you have."

In one corner of this room was a "whatnot," containing what its name implies. Some of our precious Egyptian curios reposed here and a little lustre pitcher and a child's little blue and white tea set brought from Holland by some of Mother's Brower ancestors.

At Christmas time the little front bedroom became a mystery and a forbidden room, for under the bed was an immense clothes basket containing dolls and other toys which the church ladies had assembled as gifts to be put on the Sunday school Christmas tree. The ladies met at our house to dress these dolls. The dresses were pink or blue or red tarlatan with skirts and sleeves puffed out. They were really beautiful and the desire of all. When these were hung on the tree with tarlatan bags of candy and tiny horns, drums, mouth organs, striped balls, colored wax candles, and strings of white popcorn, it was prettier than any modern tree. We children peeked in and thrilled at the sight of all these things and the thought of what they would look like on the lighted tree.

Right here I'll speak of good friends and neighbors of these early days whose names are indelibly printed in my memory. One of these was Mr. L. B. Williams. He stayed in our home for two weeks while he was thinking about Omaha as a home and as a location for his drygoods business. He did decide to stay and soon brought his family. His first store, a wooden one-story building with rooms at the top for his family, was located on the northeast corner of Fifteenth and Dodge. Later, after he had built a beautiful house for his family in the country, the first Omaha public library occupied these top rooms. In 1892 he built a large brick building at Fifteenth and Dodge for his store, the Bell Department Store. He was prominent in business and civic life, being one of the incorporators of the Cable Tramway Company in 1884, a director of the Commercial National Bank, and a trustee of the Presbyterian Hospital.

This friendship was a lasting one, and even after most of the Williams family had left Omaha they kept in touch with us.

Another friend I can never forget is Mrs. Jenkinson whose husband was head of one of the construction gangs building the Union Pacific. His work took him away from home a great part of the time, but she seemed to me to be never lonely, for she kept her home immaculate, was a good cook and baker, and she had a garden of beautiful flowers which she generously gave to everyone. Her cookie jar was never empty except right after she had filled the hands of the McCague youngsters who came on various errands. She was Mother's understanding neighbor and had helped her over many a tight place. We always went home with great bouquets of flowers—sweet William, portulaca, candytuft, mignonette, larkspur, four-o'clocks, forget-me-nots. My knowledge of all of these comes from her. Such joy as I've had in the fragrance and beauty of that garden.

But dear Mrs. Jenkinson, how I worried about you once! Somewhere I had heard the rhyme,

Whistling girls and crowing hens
Always come to some bad ends.

My heart hurt, for didn't you whistle about your work? I finally asked Mother about the truth of this saying. She laughed and said, "No, that's just a rhyme, don't worry your head about it." So after that I learned to whistle and still do. Now the song in my throat has lost its sweetness, but the whistle is still there. Then there was Mrs. Kent, another great lover of flowers, and Mrs. Mericle, a sweet, black-eyed neighbor who came from way back East and who lavished her affection on us children, as she had no child of her own. And of course our neighbors, the Harmons, with Arthur a grown boy and Alice who was my age and my best friend and chum always. I could stand at the gate of our picket fence and call over to her, "Ask your mother if you can come over and play." Into the house Alice went, and soon she would call, "Yes, I can come for half an hour." One-half hour meant just

that, or there wouldn't be any "next time." Parents in those days gave orders that were firm and were obeyed. The child respected authority and learned in the home "obedience to law." Lovely hours we spent in that home, but we were very quiet in our play for Alice's father was getting old and often took a nap in his chair by the fire with a shawl over his knees. Mrs. Harmon was a very fine New England woman, very ladylike and particular so we were on our good behavior most of the time. Many a time I stayed for dinner, and wasn't it good! Often chicken and always pie or cookies for dessert. When the cellar door in the floor of the pantry was raised, Mrs. Harmon went down the steps and brought up a mince or apple pie from the five or six on the shelf. My! that seemed wonderful to me, for it took two pies to go around our family, and we had no cellar to store anything in, in that little house.

Then there was Mrs. Morris Elgutter, the Jewish lady whose husband had a clothing store. Fine people they were, but the great sorrow of her life was that Charlie, her only son, had broken his leg when a little chap, and the knee was left stiff. She lavished such attention on him that we little folks were somewhat envious, but yet sympathetic; for day after day Charlie sat with his leg stretched out on a chair while we could romp and tear around to our heart's content. His mother would often send word to our mother asking her to lend her Will or Tom to keep Charlie company. This friendship begun in boyhood years lasted all their lives.

Next door to us lived the Dickinsons. Mr. Dickinson was an official of the Union Pacific, and they had a real piano upon which Miss Dickinson practiced every day. I was allowed to sit on a tiny stool by the side of the piano and listen. I was only five years old, but even then I loved music. And I must not forget the McKoon sisters, Miss Hattie and Miss Jennie, teachers in the public schools from the early days. Miss Hattie afterwards married Sam Rees, the printer.

Omaha at this time of course was a little pioneer town, with streets deep in mud or dust. Tiny cottages of frame were the rule, with occasional two-story houses and

a very few brick ones. The Kountze home a block south of us seemed palatial. It was surrounded by a few acres of ground and had a fence and gate around it. But this was exceptional, and young men brought their brides out here from comfortable homes "back East" furnished with every convenience. In Omaha the young wives found two- or three-room houses scattered here and there on the prairie, without water, light or heat, except from cisterns or wells, kerosene lamps, and wood stoves. After a few months the wife became homesick. Missing her old friends, she tearfully longed to go back "home." The young husband was in despair. He would come to Mother (the preacher's wife) and ask: "What shall I do? She wants to go home, and I'm afraid if she goes she'll never come back." Mother asked, "Have you enough money to send her back?" If the young man said he thought he could manage, Mother would say, "Then send her back and tell her to stay as long as she wants." The young husband went away dejected, fearful lest he was sending his wife away forever, but after a few weeks he would receive a letter which said, "Just as soon as I can, I am coming home to stay." Without realizing it, the young wife had been inoculated with the pioneer spirit of the new West. The desire to help found a new town had entered into her blood, and she found that the old settled ways of the comfortable East did not appeal to her now as much as did the adventure of building a new home in the Empire of the West. Mother received warm thanks from the happy husband who told her his wife was coming home to stay. "I knew she would," Mother would reply.

Over our side fence were the woods—not real woods with trees, but shrubs and underbrush. There were hazelnut bushes, and the ground was carpeted with field flowers that we children loved to pick—sweet William, Johnny-jump-ups, Dutchman's breeches, lamb's tongues, and in these bushes Indians were sometimes lurking. They were not dangerous Indians but friendly ones of the Omaha tribe. Their camping ground was north of town at what was known as Sulphur Springs. We children were not allowed to go into the brush alone, nor were we allowed to

call the Indians names to anger them as some children did. Often they would come into town and loiter about the streets looking very formidable in their blankets and moc-casins and painted cheeks. One day I remember one of these Indians appeared out of space at our back door. At intervals he would raise and lower a staff he had, making a tapping sound. I hid behind Mother's skirts and peeped out at him as he stood there stolid and silent while Mother went about her work. At last Mother said, "What do you want, Tom?" He made no reply but took a small box filled with shelled hazelnuts from under his blanket and held it out to her. She took it and went back into the kitchen and brought out one of her nice loaves of bread which he took, grunted a bit, and walked away, apparently satisfied.

I have told about Mother's visits to the homes of the children who attended the little mission Sabbath school. There was one family that claimed her special attention and sympathy; that is, the two little black-eyed children did, for the father was a drinking man and, sad to say, the mother also drank. One day Mother went to hunt up the children and found them in a room with their parents and several other men and women, all more or less under the influence of liquor. Mother's indignation was great, thinking of those beautiful children in such an atmosphere. She was very small physically, but she was great in authority. She ordered the men out of the room and told the ring-leader of the women, a notorious old woman, to get out and go home or she would get the police. She cleared that room in a hurry and told the father and mother how ashamed they should be to have their children see such sights. Off started the old woman, cursing Mother and shaking her fist at her, but our little Mother was not afraid of her and followed her up the street until she landed in her own home. Mother notified the police of what she had found, and for a time they kept watch of the premises and protected the children.

Saturday evenings after supper, Father went down to Morse's grocery store to pay a week's bill and get groceries for the next week. We watched anxiously for him to come home, for he always brought either pink and white taffy

or peppermint sticks for a treat. He liked candy, too. If I wanted to make molasses candy, I'd slip in quietly and ask Papa if he would like me to make some. He always said, "Yes." Then I'd go to Mother and tell her Papa wanted some. She would give her consent but was wise to my scheming.

On Saturday nights after the dishes were done Tom and Will had to black the shoes for all the family ready for the Sabbath Day, for we couldn't usually have a weekday and a Sunday pair of shoes. Papa's leather boots, so long in the leg and so big and wide, were really a chore to do. And of course this was bath night, too, when we all had a scrubbing in the washtub in the kitchen.

This reminds me of the time Tom got an extra bath. When he was about seven years old he had been left at home for some reason or another when the rest were at church and had been told what he was *not* to do. Evidences showed that he had disobeyed, and when asked about it, he told Mother a falsehood. All right! After dinner was over, Tom was told to bring the washtub into the kitchen. Water was heated, and Tom was told to undress and get into the tub. Mother gave Tom an allover bath with yellow laundry soap and also used a good quantity of the bitter, reeking soap in his mouth and on his tongue. Whether or not Tom cried, I did not wait to find out, for I ran crying into the back yard as far from the place of punishment as I could get. I could not understand what was going on, for had not Tom had his bath the day before, and why all this and soap in his mouth, too? "Now, Tom," Mother said, "I have washed your body and your tongue clean, and you must ask God to forgive the wrong done Him." I doubt if Tom ever tried to falsify, for Mother nipped the inclination in the bud. I know the lesson made an indelible impression on me.

I have already mentioned a coal mine that was supposed to make us rich some day. Some of Father's acquaintances got him interested in this mine near Brownville, Nebraska, and he bought stock and also loaned money to others so they could go in. The mine proved to be a shallow vein, and not only did Father's stock become worthless,

but the loans he made to other stockholders were never paid. This disastrous failure proved to Father that he should not trust his money to others while he was busy elsewhere, but it was hardest on Mother who had already borne so much both in Egypt and Omaha. It was hard to know that not only was Father's inheritance gone but that he was in debt and had to borrow money at high interest rates.

Long afterwards, Mother told me that one day she was ironing with the tears dropping on her work as she thought about their situation and felt pretty sorry for herself, when suddenly, I, who was playing on the floor, piped up with the verse of a hymn I had learned:

The Lord will provide
 In some way or other
 The Lord will provide
 It may not be thy way
 It may not be my way
 But in His own way
 The Lord will provide.

She said the song came like a reproof for her lack of faith. Her tears were dried, and her heart sang with its usual trust.

In our church we sang only psalms in those days, but I learned many beautiful hymns from the Methodists, who held their cottage prayer meetings at our house while their congregation was being organized in our neighborhood, and I love to sing them to this day—"When He Cometh to Make Up His Jewels," "Out on an Ocean All Boundless We Ride," "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and especially, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," which was Mother's rock-a-bye song for her babies. How often have I felt how fervently she sang!

Come Thou fount of every blessing
 Tune my heart to sing Thy praise
 Streams of mercy, never ceasing
 Call for songs of loudest praise.

Now that Father had lost so much of his money he could no longer support the little mission church as he had been doing for four or five years. Father decided to take

up home mission and evangelistic work, and our church board sent out Mr. James Duncan to take Father's place. Rev. Duncan decided to move the congregation nearer to the center of Omaha, and the church Father had built was sold to the Methodists. We sold our little house and moved over on to Cuming Street into a comfortable home owned by Dr. Tilden. Dr. and Mrs. Tilden were our neighbors, and Mrs. Tilden proved to be a staunch friend of Mother's always. They served together on the Board of the Old People's Home and other Omaha charities for many years. Our next door neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Cole and their daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Squires.

As we grew up we all became great readers and devoured the back numbers of *Harper's Weekly* and *Youth's Companion* that someone sent us, and gradually Father's ban on novels was relaxed, and we actually read to pieces Mark Twain's *Roughing It* and *Innocents Abroad*, and by the time we were in high school we had discovered Dickens, Hawthorne, Cooper, and other classics. Good English was used in these old books, for the writers wrote for the future life of the book instead of for the dollar value in a quick sale. Speaking of authors makes me think of the game of "Authors." I still remember the names of Dickens' novels by thinking of the titles on the author cards. How many hours we spent over this and other games around the big round table after it had been cleared of the supper dishes. The big lamp stood in the center. Mother was seated just outside the circle, knitting or mending, and Father was nearby in his big chair nodding or reading his Greek Testament which he enjoyed so much. And often friends would come in. It was while we were living in this house and attending the United Presbyterian church at Eighteenth and California that we got to know the Charlton family who became such a help in the church and such dear friends to us.

Our school was on Izard Street not far from the Himebaugh and Merriam Linseed Oil Company, and Mr. J. B. Bruner was principal.

Both Mr. Merriam and Mr. Himebaugh were devoted active Christians and helped to organize a mission Sunday school at Twenty-fourth and Izard to which Mother gave much of her time, teaching primary classes on Sunday afternoons. This little mission afterwards became the North Presbyterian Church, but I am ahead of my story.

We moved again, this time to Twenty-third and Nicholas and were quite cramped for room, but Mother always managed and was even able to have company. In this house Mother's twelfth and last child, Brower, was born. He was the special pet of all of us, with his happy, smiling disposition.

Father had been doing evangelistic work at the call of the board of our church for some years now, so that the care and management of the household fell on Mother's shoulders. Fortunately we had been brought up to regard our parents' rulings as the final word without protest. Also brother John, whom we all looked up to as the wise older brother, and conscientious sister Margaret, were a great help. One summer Mother even took a trip back to Ohio to visit her family. She took the four youngest with her but left the rest of us in charge of John, who was twenty and working at Union Pacific Headquarters, and Margaret, who was sixteen and had just graduated from high school. Will and Tom were raising vegetables that summer and had great success, for they made over one hundred dollars. The biggest part of their success came from the victory Will had over himself when he swallowed his pride and took his basket of beautiful, washed radishes, onions, lettuce and beets around to the back doors of some of his schoolmates' homes.

It was during this time that Mother was away that the great fire that demolished the Grand Hotel at Fourteenth and Farnam occurred. It was Omaha's first large hotel (four stories), and the fire was a spectacular one and a tragic one, as four firemen lost their lives. We knew one of these, the son of our neighbor, Mrs. Wilson. Margaret was in charge at home and she allowed Will to go to the fire as he was fourteen, but she thought Tom was too young. I wonder if he ever quite forgave Margaret for this deci-

sion because a fire had a fascination for Tom that amounted almost to an obsession. But there were many accidents, and she acted wisely.

This fire was in September, 1878, but earlier than this, in 1874, there had been an even worse disaster. This was the terrible plague of grasshoppers. It was fun for most of us children but terrifying to grownups. Grey grasshoppers were piled inches deep on trunks and limbs of trees. The sound of their crunching and chewing of leaves and vegetables and every growing thing was horrible. The boys tied string around their pants' legs and the ends of their sleeves and wore scarves around their necks and waists. Little girls tied string tight around their pantie legs and sleeves, but even so the hoppers would get in, and such a yelling and disturbance as we made when we ran to the house to get Mother to pull the nasty things out. We mostly stayed in the house. The sky was dark as the sun looked like a pale moon when the plague was moving. By the second day they had eaten their fill and left. But every green spot was denuded. Cabbages and lettuce were left with only the tough veins standing up from the root. The vacant lot below us had holes the size of lead pencils all over it. When we dug into these we found, about four or five inches below the surface, a dozen big fat eggs. We destroyed many of these so they wouldn't hatch next year.

What a desolation those hordes of grasshoppers made wherever they descended! I remember a cartoon in the paper which seemed both funny and pathetic to us. An immense grasshopper was sitting on a rail fence that surrounded a field of beautiful waving wheat and seemed to be whetting his crunchers. The caption under the picture was: "In this wheat bye and bye."

I think it was while we were living at Twenty-third and Nicholas that Tom, Anna, and I spent part of our vacation out at the Taylor fruit farm. It was just south of what is Forty-eighth and Leavenworth now, near Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, but it was way out in the country then. We used to walk all the way, about four miles from our house. When we reached the top of the hill on Leavenworth where Rev. McCandlish lived we were less than one

half the distance. Then there was a long lonely walk with here and there a house or a farm, but when we reached the low, rambling house of the Taylors at the top of the hill above the railroad tracks we had a warm smiling welcome from the family—Mr. and Mrs. Taylor and Martin and Joe. Mr. Taylor's farm furnished Buffett's grocery store with all their best fruit and vegetables. These had to be picked and ready for Martin to take at daylight to the early morning market. Tom was a fine picker and worker, but we girls just loafed and ate Mrs. Taylor's good food and occasionally washed and wiped the dishes. Sometimes we would help her make jelly, but more often we just ate the stewed chicken and mashed potatoes and cherry pie and cake and drank the wonderful milk and cream. How patient and kind she must have been to do all this for us visiting, lively girls. But perhaps having Anna and me and the two Pratt sisters there helped her forget her sorrow over the recent loss of her own two girls from scarlet fever.

Will graduated from high school when he was sixteen and went to work as a bookkeeper in the office of George Patterson's coal company. He received an excellent salary, but he brought almost all of it home to Mother. He did the same later when he worked for the Omaha and Grant Smelting and Refining Company (the forerunner of the American Smelter) at seventy-five dollars a month, which was considered a magnificent salary then.

And not long after this we moved into a home of our own. Brother John had put by some of his savings and so had Margaret, who had been teaching since she was sixteen. They put their money together and bought a lot at Twenty-fourth and Izard about a block away from where we were living. This enabled Mother to build a house there, as she had been left a small legacy by an aunt in Ohio. So now Mother had title to a new home of ten rooms. We moved there when I was twelve years old. It was in this house that we children grew up, went to high school, had our gay times with our schoolmates, and from it we girls were married. There were six bedrooms in it—plenty for us all and for company, too, for we could double up if necessary. Father's and Mother's bedroom was downstairs,

and upstairs there were five bedrooms and a bathroom and a *back stairs*. This was a wonderful arrangement for a bunch of lively youngsters, for how could we have escaped when chased if there had not been a back stairway as well as a front one. We had a large yard where we played croquet (Father could beat us all), and later when we bought another lot the boys made a wonderful tennis court. This was the scene of many lively good times as our schoolmates congregated here to play tennis or to drink lemonade in the shade of the trees. I remember the sweet syringa bush and the snowball and the lilac, and I had a long garden bed of verbena and mignonette.

As the older boys grew up and began to earn good salaries, a piano took the place of the organ that Margaret had bought with savings from her teaching. Will bought a guitar, and a cousin from Indian Territory who lived with us for several years had a banjo. Anna took piano lessons and practiced faithfully—especially at dish washing time her sisters thought—and as we all loved to sing and Father encouraged us, we had a happy musical time of it. Some of my sweetest memories surround that piano. Anna would be playing and taking the alto part, Will playing his guitar and singing tenor, Cousin Arch playing the banjo and taking the bass, while Lydia and I took the soprano. Often Alex Charlton and other young people were with us while we all sang “Oh the Days of the Kerry Dancers” or “Love’s Old Sweet Song” or “Oh Dem Golden Slippers” and many, many more—fifty or more songs that were popular then. I’m afraid the heartfelt comradeship enjoyed by the tuning of heart and soul around a piano can never be replaced by the “canned” music we have now.

Here in this house was courtship and marriage, visits from school and college mates, and many a guest of Father and Mother from distant lands. Often returning missionaries from Egypt, China, and India and travelers to and from the awakening West would find welcome and rest with us for a few days. How these visits broadened our expanding minds and made our thoughts international instead of narrow! These faraway places became real to us, and geography was not just a map, but living, growing locali-

ties in which men, women and children like ourselves lived and moved and had their being. As I grew older I realized how privileged we children were. Turkey, Syria, China, and Egypt were real places because we knew people who had lived in them. Egypt of course was our special interest, and we watched the Nile valley develop and the desert blossom as the rose, and we assumed a protectorate over the schools established there by our church. No wonder that many years later our hearts almost failed us during the invasion of Ethiopia and during World War II when Rommel advanced rapidly toward the Suez Canal, and bombs were falling over the mission that our parents had helped establish. But Egypt was saved from the Nazis, and again I could hear my father reading that prophecy in which he placed so much confidence, "Blessed be Egypt, my chosen."

I entered high school when I was twelve years old (nearly thirteen, though), and five days a week Tom and I climbed the steep hill to the school on Capitol Avenue on the site of the old Territorial Capitol. The high school was an imposing brick and stone structure with a basement and four stories topped by a very high steeple into which we could climb and look over the city for miles around. Three stories were used for school rooms, and the fourth had a number of unfinished rooms which were furnished with heavy rope swings and a few rings and ladders and were used for gymnasiums and winter playrooms. We youngsters would climb up the ladders, take hold of a rope with a loop in the end, swing down and over the room. This took some skill and courage, but we enjoyed it all the more because it was dangerous.

We lived twelve blocks from school, and as no cable car could take us near, we had to walk every step up the steep hill. So when the morning chores of washing the breakfast dishes and putting up four or five lunches (my job) were done, there was no time for loitering if we were to get in our seats at school at nine o'clock.

We had a fifteen minute recess at ten-thirty, and on cold icy mornings we used to take old pans, shovels, boards or anything else available and slide down the ice-covered

hill in the school yard. Oh such fun it was! We had fun in our hour and a half noon recess, too. After hurriedly eating our lunches we would either go into the wide hall to dance or into the chemistry room where we would take our little hoards of brown sugar and butter and make taffy over the Bunsen burners. That candy seemed to taste better than any other. Or, perhaps we'd go up to the large auditorium on the third floor, and some aspiring young actress or orator would mount the high rostrum and orate the "Burial of Sir John Moore" or Marc Antony's speech from "Julius Caesar" or something from Josh Billings like the "Essay on the Horse" which was one of Tina McCheane's specialties. And we would cry copiously when Naomi Knight would recite "Oh Rome, Rome Thou Hast Been a Tender Nurse to Me."

The school study was presided over by Professor Hine or Miss Hill and was apparently a beehive of studious pupils in their single seats. But very often some one would ask to sit with another pupil in order to study some big reference book, and behind this, hazelnuts and peanuts were cracked and candy and popcorn eaten. If the professor knew what we were doing he didn't let on. Children are alike in every age.

I was still very small for my age. All of my school-mates weighed almost twice as much as I did, and I guess this smallness made me keep on acting like a child. I still liked to play more than to study, and Miss Hill used to tell me she had a hard time marking my recitations correctly. She knew I had not studied, but as I listened to the others recite I could absorb enough to answer the questions, and she had to give me a good mark. This neglect of my lessons caught up with me, though, for one year I failed to make a passing grade in the examinations. So I (with several others) had to spend the hot summer climbing the hill to attend Professor Hine's make-up classes. My mortification was extreme. Mother said, "Josie, you are the first one of the McCague family not to pass a grade, and this happened because you played your way through this year." Yes, I did have a jolly time skating and playing and thinking my wits would carry me through. They didn't, and I paid for

my fun by making up my lessons so I could go on and graduate with my class. I was only sixteen when I graduated—too young, I think now, for one needed a more fully developed brain to digest and remember all these studies—algebra, geometry, physics, chemistry, physiology, astronomy, history, three years of Latin, English, mental and moral philosophy, and trigonometry! Pretty heavy exercise for an immature brain and body.

The year before I graduated, when I was fifteen, the Women's Missionary Convention of our church met at Monmouth, Illinois, where Margaret was at college. Father was to be there for the General Assembly, and we all thought Mother should go, too. When she said, "How can I leave my large family?" I said, "I'll cook and look after them." All the rest of the family said they'd do their share, and so Mother went for two weeks. I would get up earlier than usual and get breakfast ready for the four younger children and Tom, who was still in high school, and for Will and Cousin Arch who were working in offices (John had married Mary Van Kuran shortly before this). I had to put up several lunches and once a week make the bread before I left for school. On Saturdays a neighbor woman washed and ironed for us, and I did another big baking of bread and made cake and dessert for Sabbath Day dinner. Then George was sick with an attack of chills and fever for a week, and one day a cousin who was a traveling salesman came in unexpectedly and stayed overnight, so that I had nine people to cook breakfast for. We had a large round steak, besides hot cereal, fried potatoes, and coffee. I had cooked the steak and put it on a large platter on the back of the stove, made a big skilletful of brown gravy and was impatiently waiting for the boys to "come and get it." Time was going rapidly, and I had to get ready to go to school besides getting all my family off to school and work. The boys were slow in coming, and I was getting nervous. As they finally came in, filing apologetically to their seats, I hurried to mine, and as I passed in front of the stove, the pocket of my apron caught the handle of the skillet which was full of hot gravy, and it overturned right on top of our cat who

was under the stove. A yowl and a shriek of pain from the cat, with a wild dash to get away followed as he streaked through the house from dining room to living room and out into the front hall, trailing gravy every step of the way. The boys shrieked with laughter. It *was* funny but not to me (or the cat), and I exploded with anger and burst into tears. "If you boys had only come down to breakfast on time this wouldn't have happened," I sobbed. As soon as they could control their laughter they subsided and were abject in their sorrow and repentance. I think that after I had given first aid to the cat and cleaned up the muss, I decided to stay home from school and quiet my nerves.

I was brave enough to have young Dr. Coulter and Mr. McCulloch, two friends of sister Margaret, to dinner on Sabbath, even if I was a little girl. With the help of the family I managed to get through those two weeks, keeping up the baking and other cooking as well as going to high school. Mother commended me and that was sufficient, for Mother was not given to praise unless it was deserved. In the summer of that year I entered three tall glasses of jelly at the county fair and received first prize for my quince and second on crabapple and plum, as well as second prize on gingerbread and honorable mention on bread. This gave me an incentive to continue in my cooking efforts, and I tried more than ever to excel. Best of all, Mother turned over the family jelly making to me, and I helped her with the fruit canning. We put up lots of grape juice in bottles and also catsup, and Mother made pickles and picca lilli in addition to all the canned fruit.

As I look back on these years I wonder how our mother accomplished all she did so efficiently and with so little apparent effort. She had a wonderful head for management. No motions were lost. Of course she got up early and started the machinery long before any of us got up. She moulded the bread which had been rising in the large pan all night, into loaves and set them to rise, put the graham mush or oatmeal on the stove to cook slowly, then sat down to write one of her long letters to an absent one.

If Father were home he would probably be up and ready for his breakfast. Then one by one the others would come down for the hearty breakfast I have already described. When we had all been fed we gathered in the living room for family prayers which were never neglected. Then we would scatter, some to wash dishes, others to tidy the bedrooms, get lunches ready, etc. Each had his or her job. Soon all were off to school or work, and Father and Mother were left to wrestle with the problems and work of the day.

Mother's work didn't stop with the care of her own family. Much of the time there were visitors in our home who were always welcomed though no fuss was made over them. Another plate was put on the table, and the guest shared whatever we had. But besides this Mother was quietly giving help to those who needed it wherever she found them. For years she made a morning visit to the Old People's Home on Burt Street where she pitched in and did cooking, nursing, housework, whatever needed to be done. And this was just one of her many benevolences. As her minister once said, there was scarcely a square foot of ground in Omaha that her feet had not trod on errands of mercy.

I have mentioned that when Father was absent and Mother led family worship she often used to read from the book of Proverbs. Why, I never knew, unless it was that she thought the practical, honest advice in it for everyday living with one's self and with one's neighbors, good for growing children. Whether we children profited much or little from this I cannot say, but I do know that our mother was like the virtuous woman described in the last chapter, for in her heart and on her tongue was the law of kindness.

And I remember that in her prayers she was always so thankful for everything and enumerated our mercies, especially that we had "a goodly heritage." I know now what she meant, and I, too, am thankful most of all for that.