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A Legacy of Love

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A Legacy Of Love

by

Jennifer Shurtleff

Introduction:

The paper that I am presenting is a bit unconventional. It is a narrative and historical piece which tests many of the theoretical claims I have been studying over the past two years. I took three courses important to this work: one on the women pioneers who settled the American frontier, another on the relationship of gender to genre, and I am currently studying the creation of self in autobiography. After studying different theories on women writers and the experiences of women pioneers, I decided to test the things I had learned by writing my own story.

I discovered the diary of my great-grandmother and decided that through a narration of her story as an early Mormon pioneer, I could confirm some of the testimonies of other pioneer women. In her book, The Land Before Her, Annette Kolodny discussed the significance of the garden in pioneer life, as well as childbearing and rearing, and the problem of loneliness. As I worked with my great-grandmother's diary I found intricate details and emotive descriptions of these aspects of pioneer life. I decided that the vivid depictions of daily life in her diary were a valuable source in the study of women pioneers and female writing.

My studies of gender and autobiography led me to question the existence of a female story, distinct from traditional male forms. Elizabeth Abel states in her introduction to The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development that, "Female identity is

shaped primarily by the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation from mother. . . girls persist in defining themselves relationally." I found this idea intriguing and decided to test the truth of it through my own process of researching and writing about my great-grandmother's life. I discovered that a symbiotic relationship does persist amongst the women of my family, and I sought to define this interconnectedness by incorporating my own voice with that of my great-grandmother. Also, I recognized the strong tradition of oral story telling that has existed for many generations between the mothers, grandmothers, and daughters of my family, and I tried to accentuate this tradition in my writing.

As far as expressing the 'self' relationally, I observed the women of my family defining themselves as part of a larger, unwritten system of expectations and traditions. I learned life lessons in almost identical situations to those that my predecessors experienced. As I read my great-grandmother's diary, I felt a strong connection to certain stories because of ingrained traditions which have been handed down from generation to generation. I particularly identified with scenes about mother-daughter relationships and childbearing, so I used my personal experiences as a way into narrating my great-grandmother's history while communicating my 'self' at the same time.

I feel that a new voice, encompassing both the past and present, unfolds each time I write. I become a different person

each time I write another section, and as a result of writing, my relationship to my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother fluctuates. Though it is still in progress, I think that this piece may someday shed new light on the writings of other pioneer women and their descendants. It has given me more insight on the problem of defining feminine writing as well as the relationship between autobiography and the self. Perhaps, it could be called a historical memoir or fictional history or relational autobiography, but from a somewhat naive and personal standpoint I would simply call it, Me.

The following is only the beginning of a much larger, life-time project. By combining actual stories from my great-grandmother's journal with my own research into Mormon history, it expresses the essence of her diary in combination with my own meditations on our family experience.

Glenisla

When I was a little girl in Idaho in the early 1900's, my mother would tell us stories to boost up our courage. I remember her voice, the way it sounded, strong but sweet, with a bit of her father's Scottish lull and bounce saddling the slow farming talk of the West. During my childhood, I heard her voice more than any other. It sounded like a weighty iron in the morning. Deep and quiet, it smoothed my wrinkled body from bed with calm and even orders to start the breakfast fire, and in the afternoon her voice became a bellows, blowing out fresh and earthy stalks of things to be done before dinner--finish the gardening, fetch the baby, hang out the clothes, and kindle the fire. My favorite voice, the one that I remember most often, was the voice she used to tell stories. Sitting above our bed after dark she seemed far away and faint in the dim cabin light, her voice pleasant, almost fragile but enduring, like a smooth Indian arrowhead that has withstood a century of sand and desert wind.

I have often wondered how my mother survived living in such a lonely place as Southeastern Idaho. Our farm had only sagebush in front of the house as far as you could see and then the sand dunes spreading out in two gigantic waves to the east. Except for the cottonwoods along the creek bank, the valley was completely treeless for many years. Everywhere you looked the land was flat and dry and brown. So dead, like the wrinkled skin of an apple-head doll.

We lived on a small farm six miles outside the town of

Wapello. Like all rural communities in the West at that time, the farms surrounding Wapello were widespread, quickly built, and lonely. Our nearest neighbors lived three miles away and our nearest Mormon neighbors were nearly five miles up the valley, as you followed Chikta Creek toward the mountains. About one-third of Wapello was Mormon until land opened up, and my father, along with several other Saints, bought homesteads. Then the population of Saints grew to equal the number of ranchers, freighters and shop keepers who were not Mormon. Though we never thought of ourselves as pioneers, just country "shucks" as the kids in town would call us, my family, as well as the entire town of Wapello and most other towns in Southeast Idaho were the result of the late Mormon immigration companies of the 1840's. We were made up mostly of Scandinavian and Scottish converts.

Since we were six miles from Wapello, it took a full day's buggy ride to get to town and back. Father often went to town to sell vegetables or milk, but the rest of us only went on Sundays. Somehow he packed us all into our single buggy, then hitched up one of the horses to pull us all to church. Sundays were always my favorite day. I loved going to church because of the other young people that I got to see, but mostly because of the large shade trees that were in town.

Wapello was settled almost fifty years before my father decided to homestead there. The trees in town had had plenty of time to grow and even a few of the log houses had been changed to brick. The first people to settle, came in the early 1870's when

everything was just sandhills and sagebush. Brigham Young had commanded the people to settle Idaho, and so many of the recently emigrated Scottish Saints answered his call.

I think Idaho must have been even more lonely to them than it seemed to me. I really don't know how the first settlers managed without trees to visit on Sundays. Before the irrigation ditches were dug, the shale soil would have been shifty and parched. Only a chapped layer of shadscale, prickly pear and sagebush could have digested the seven inches of rain that falls on the valley between May and September. But the large Blackfoot river provided hopes of irrigating and Brigham Young was anxious to see good, strong settlements of Latter-day Saints develop in as many places as possible.

I only wish that when he had called Saints to Idaho, Brigham Young would have called the coyotes to California. Perhaps, though, even the prophet couldn't have kept the wind and the coyotes from echoing our loneliness in their eerie and forlorn chorus each night.

My own great-grandfather joined the Mormons or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a young boy in Scotland, and I came to learn about his conversion and immigration as a child listening to my mother's comforting evening voice, which danced with Chikta Creek to moon sounds as she put us to sleep. When father went away from home she would reassure my brothers and myself by telling and re-telling stories about our courageous pioneer ancestors.

"When Grandpa joined the church, he was only ten years old. Dat's only two years older than you, Verna," she'd begin.

Her sing-song voice always had a way of making me feel safe and close to Heaven. She told about the Scottish lowlands and the Robertson's trip across the sea. Other times, she talked about the family's harsh journey in crossing the plains. My favorite, though, was her story about the Scottish missionaries who traveled all the way back to their parents homeland to share the gospel with my great-grandfather.

"Your grandfather Robertson was a brave young boy," my mother would say.

And immediately the wind outside our cabin walls would lean over to whisper a solemn hush. Then our contentment would expand within the small room to give us a padded, protected feeling. I remember the story so well.

"Back in the deep green lowlands of Scotland, Grandpa's family planted potatoes for sale in Glenisla, the cobblestone village where Robertsons were being born as far back as anyone could remember, which was probably with Robert," Mother continued.

At this point she would always stop and laugh at her own little jingle, as she called a joke, and then let out a deep, half-contented, half-tired sigh before picking up the next line of the familiar story.

"Besides growing potatoes, the Robertsons raised a small flock of sheep and a few pigs and chickens. And, of course,

Grandpa's mother grew vegetables, fruit, and flowers in a large garden behind the house. Grandpa started working very young, with gathering eggs, slopping pigs and feeding the chickens. Later on he helped his older brothers tend to the sheep and the potato crop," she said.

Mother always emphasized the work part of the story, as a way of stirring our meager ambitions into helping her with the extra farm work while father was away.

She would chirp that for Grandpa work "meant getting up with the sun in the summertime and without it in the wintertime, then going out to the hen coop and gathering fresh eggs for his mother to make into a breakfast for his older brothers and father when they came in from their mornin' chores. Sometimes during the winter it would still be black outside and as cold as any winter in the Rockies, but Grandpa went out anyway."

The thick liquid air of a Scottish mornin' made the hens hard to find, so he would cackle to them, then plunge his cold hands under the warm belly of each hen, as she responded, until his basket held at least seven breakfast eggs.

Next came the part of the story I've always liked best. I remember that the first time I heard it my little brother, Dewey, had already fallen asleep so I cautiously yanked the blankets over from his side of the bed in order to scoot forward. Struck with amazement, I willingly left my feather pillow behind until Mother finished. I remember her story word for word, as if my mother's voice had bedded down in my brain in order to awaken now

and tell the story to you.

By the time the missionaries came, Grandpa was already ten and had graduated from gathering eggs to helping his father with the farm. In the autumn of 1844, two Mormon missionaries came to Glenisla and were preaching in the marketplace. Grandpa didn't hear them as he had gone out with the sheep that day, but his father, who was in town selling potatoes, overheard their story about the Book of Mormon and invited them to the Robertson's home. That night around a warm hearth fire the elders told Grandpa's family how they could find out the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

"The ancient prophet Moroni has given us a promise at the end of the book. It says that if you will read and then pray with real intent, having a faith in Christ, God will manifest the truth unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost. You know what the Holy Ghost does, don't you?" said the tall blonde elder with the soft blue eyes which seemed to sing as he spoke.

The family shook their heads, no. None of them knew.

"Well," answered his companion. "The Holy Ghost can direct and comfort us. We often feel his presence as a warm, tingling feeling in our hearts, or sometimes as a voice. It is like the way you feel when you help someone. So will you read the Book of Mormon and pray about it?" he asked the family.

The Robertsons had heard rumors about this new church from neighbors and they knew that several people had asked to be baptized right after the town meeting. They were friends with

many of these people, and so they said that they would give it a try.

Later, the elders came back and asked what the family thought. Grandpa and his father were sure. They had prayed and felt an immense warmth, an inner comfort that was even better than the warmth of the hens on an icy morning. However, Grandpa's mother was still hesitant and wanted to learn more. So the elders taught them that it was possible for their family to be together forever, even after death. Grandpa's mother had lost two babies before giving birth to Grandpa's eldest brother. She thought about the two little boys that had died just a few months after they were born. Their tiny fingers and delicate little faces would be waiting patiently for her in Heaven. She had always wished for a time when she would hold them again and be able to watch them grow. After hearing that this was possible she gave her whole-hearted consent for the entire family to finish reading the Book of Mormon and join the church.

It was here that I drifted off to sleep, my breath and thoughts sinking into the rhythm of my mother's faith. For a few moments between her story and sleep, I thought about the faithfulness of a grandfather only a few years older than myself. Slowly, his young courage helped me to forget the awful loneliness that had melted and seeped into our house when father went away.

Zion

In winter, after the crops were all taken in, Father would go freighting, then work in Northern Utah on the railroad for a few months before bringing a load of Eastern goods back to Wapello in the Spring. He was away for months at a time and when Clifford and Gerald were old enough to get hired, they often went too. The transcontinental met in Ogden, Utah, home of the golden spike. So it was here that they joined with men from all over the West, Mormons and non-Mormons both, who wanted to get ahead on seed or farm equipment when Spring came. They took wool and wheat to sell in the city, then returned with a new plow, or pine logs from the Rockies. The boys always brought Mother some fresh pine nuts and the rest of us were treated to oranges and apples from the southern farmers in St. George, Utah. Then, Father would save a little of the money for shoes and the older boys would put their savings in an old canning jar, to save for a mission.

Mother taught the boys from the time they were very little to save for a mission. She told them how the missionaries of Scotland had influenced her grandpa to come to America. I listened to these stories too and couldn't wait for the time when I would be able to go back to Scotland and share the gospel. She would sit in her chair by our bed and talk while she darned socks or made a new shirt, or crocheted something for the baby. Sometimes though, on a particularly dark night, she would lay in bed with us, filling the crisp air with stories until she too

drifted away from our cabin and back to Scotland. I remember how comfortable and soft her voice felt, pitted night after night against the constant droning of the wind.

"The two missionaries who taught Grandpa Robertson about the church were Scottish descendants themselves, and so they talked about their Scottish grandparents and the success they had found after immigrating to America," Mother told us.

Then imitating the elders she'd tell us in a grave and dignified voice that "a great community of Saints is blossoming in the Salt Lake valley and there is a wonderful spirit to be felt living close to the Prophets and Apostles of God."

"The elders promised the Robertsons that if they did as much as they could to save money, the Lord would provide a way for them to travel to Zion. At first they did not want to leave their homeland and their friends. But they were soon humbled. After only a few years as members of the church, Grandpa's father became very ill just before the winter wood had been hauled in," Mother continued.

"Mama, Verna didn't bring in enough wood for breakfast in the morning," my little brother, Dewey, interrupted, yanking all of us back into the pale grey light of the present.

"Verna, how many times do you have to be told. Now you'll have to wake up before breakfast and I don't want you freezing to death in the morning. I wish you would stop putting your chores off all day. You need to learn how to obey! But since you're already in bed we might just as well wait 'til mornin.' What do

you think would have happened if my grandpa had behaved that way when he was a child?" Mother asked me.

Dewey always interrupted. Afterwards, I usually wasn't as interested in knowing how Grandpa behaved, but I listened anyway, resisting sleep and thinking of ways to get back at my brother. He was just younger than me and always came up with wonderful ways to keep me from sleeping.

In the wintertime we had to sleep four kids in the bed to keep warm and sometimes I didn't think I would be able to bear it for another night. I was eight, Dewey was six and Gerald and Clifford were ten and eleven. I was trapped between sleeping with three brothers or freezing to death. Gerald and Clifford would whisper incessantly without ever letting me in on their secrets and sometimes they would grab my doll away and weave exotic stories about her capture by wild Indians. Dewey just kicked and turned and put his cold feet all over mine. I tried not to complain, but it was so hard, and Mother would try to distract me from Dewey's cold feet with stories of true pioneer suffering.

"The year that Grandpa's father got sick it was unbearably cold. Grandpa and his brothers cut as much wood as they could, but without a horse or mule to help them haul it they could only go a mile or so away from the house to find more. When the wood ran out they did not know what they should do to keep their father warm. In desperation Grandpa's mother sent him to cut and drag home young willows from all along the river bank while his

brothers tended to the sheep who also had to go further and further away to find shrubs.

"The wind bit and stung the air that year and Grandpa's feet got wet and cold from working by the river. One day, he went further away than usual and had a particularly large load of wood to carry. He decided to work a little longer even though the sun had already slid beneath the covers of earth. The way home had been dipped in a deceitful bowl of honey. When the honey light melted Grandpa was left to walk home in the icy darkness.

"As he walked, he began to grow numb with cold. Passing a haystack, he looked long at it wishing that he could lie down and just fall asleep. But not daring to stop and rest for fear that his mother would worry, he kept on. When he arrived at home his brothers who had been looking for him were outside waiting. They knew he would be close to freezing by this time and quickly stripped his wet clothes and rubbed him to restore circulation. His feet were so badly frostbitten that he suffered great pain for a long time afterward and it was a long time before they completely healed," Mother said.

Despite all of Grandpa's and the family's efforts to keep the house warm and care for their father, he never gained any strength back and died at the beginning of Spring. Grandpa's mother decided that the family couldn't survive alone so she decided it was the right time to join some other Scottish Saints and travel to Zion. The church needed the help of new members to strengthen it and to contribute to the building of the temple.

Many of their friends in Glenisla had joined the church over the past two years and nearly one-fourth of them planned on immigrating that January. The missionaries had had great success in the English and Scandinavian missions at that time. In fact, Grandpa's family was one of the first families of 15,000 members to leave the British Isles between 1849 and 1857.

In 1850 they arranged with leaders of the Church to cross the ocean in the ship, Juventa. The Saints in Salt Lake City had established an organization to help pay for and assist in chartering the passage of many converts. This group was called the Perpetual Emigrating Company and they had chartered off a section of the Juventa so that two Glenisla ward's could make the passage together. Grandpa's mother thought it would be best to travel with their friends, and also one of the missionaries who had converted the family a few years before would be travelling home and presiding over the Saints on board.

Mother always became distant and quiet when telling this part of the story. She would stop sewing and fold her arms about herself, squeezing her long fingers into her sides and glancing out toward the window with a sigh.

"The weather was stormy and the crossing took almost two months. Grandpa told me only a little about his time on the boat because many people got sick and it was hard for the family. The stories that he did tell were mostly about good times when the sea and sky cleared. Then, they would meet on deck and spend the evening with the other Saints singing hymns and talking about the

day when they would reach Salt Lake City.

"Others times they would sit on deck and watch for flying fish, the sky and sea creating an immense circle around the boat, bounded only by huge billowing clouds. Sometimes they saw porpoises tumbling and playing in the sun, and once a school swam right in front of the boat. One of the brethren caught a porpoise and hauled it on deck. It was five feet long so the meat could be divided among several families.

"This was much needed since the supply of fresh meat taken aboard had only lasted about two weeks into the voyage. Grandpa said that he didn't like the meat but was glad for the extra food. He said that it tasted like coarse beef and was very black in color.

"On days when the weather was poor, members would meet between decks to worship. Grandpa told of one Sunday that a couple was married after the meeting. It was during a particularly rough time when over half the passengers were sea sick and so Grandpa was one of the few people able to celebrate with the couple. Some of the passengers never recovered and others didn't survive the entire journey," Mother said.

Her voice was just above a murmur. I could tell that she was sad and I'd get a worried, sick feeling inside thinking about Great-Grandma. I was so afraid that Mother would tell me she had died on the boat. I thought about living so closely with all those sick people and of taking care of sick children. I'm sure that I would have died, if I'd been her.

She didn't die on the boat, but she was ill the whole way so that when they landed in New York she felt very weak. In New York the family boarded a train and had an easier time traveling to St. Louis, but then they had to ride horses to reach Council Bluffs, Iowa, where the Saints had gathered to prepare for crossing the plains. The trip between St. Louis and Iowa was extremely difficult for Grandpa's mother, and a short time after arriving in Iowa, she passed away.

Grandpa and his brothers worked together digging a grave for their mother. They made it especially deep so that when they moved on the coyotes would leave it alone. After they finished, they hired out as hands on the local farms in order to obtain food, a wagon, two oxen and one cow for their journey. By the time they had enough to set out with, the Scottish wagon companies had already begun the trek to Utah. Without the support of a company the family could not have carried enough supplies for everyone so Grandpa split up from his three brothers to travel by himself.

He was sixteen and was able to find a freight company called Gilbert and Garnish to pay his way if he could drive a team carrying textiles across the plains. Grandpa was disappointed and sad because he knew that he might never see his brothers again, but he was also glad to have the opportunity of making their trip easier. I'm sure that it took great courage and faith for him to leave his family and travel by himself.

Coyotes

As a child I never felt that I'd inherited any of the pioneer courage that my mother talked so frequently about and also displayed. I was always extremely frightened of any wild animals or Indians that might come around our house. The sandhills that shaded our farm gave me some sense of warmth, a painted view protecting me from the dark spaciousness of flat, harvested fields beyond. But the safety that I felt was false because actually these hills padded any warning of lurking wolves, coyotes or Indians. They rippled eastward out from Chikta Creek, like reddish brown cardboard defending our home. During the day they sucked in all the heat and color of the sun, but in the dusky evening-light they looked like cold black glaciers.

One time, I remember it was one of the last days of Autumn in mid-September, Father was away selling wheat. Behind the house, the fields were completely bare so that you could just make out the young poplars surrounding the Malm's place. And to the east the sandhills cast huge gray shadows, dark patterns that seemed deep with life, like the surface of a mountain lake after a summer thunder storm.

Summer had long since past and I could tell by the tingling smell of the air that this would be our last time to go fishing or play by the creek after dinner. In another week it would be getting dark as soon as we got home from school. My brothers and I were practically wallowing in the last few hours of sunlight

before Mother came out and forced us into the stuffy, dim lit cabin for the rest of the night.

I was lying on the bank nearest the house watching Clifford tie a new fly, a tiny skeeter bug with a juicy red middle and spindly limbs neatly knotted together from a shaft of Dewey's auburn hair. It had been mercilessly plucked out then touched up with currant berry juice. Clifford cast out, flicking his wrist to bounce the skeeter above a dense blue water cove protected by hovering cottonwood shadows. The leftover sunlight seeped through the branches like sticky syrup reflecting patches as stringy as the legs on Clifford's skeeter. The air shifted, as if sucking in on itself selfishly for a moment, and Clifford bobbed his wooden pole coaxing a rainbow to join us for dinner.

"Verna, Clifford, Gerald, Dewey. Come inside right now!" Mama shouted.

Besides enjoying the last bit of sunlight, Gerald and Dewey had just discovered a checkered snake skin in the tallest grass where Chikta lapped the bank. They knew that mother wouldn't let them bring it in the house, so all of us chose to ignore her call.

"Clifford, Verna, Boys. Now!" she called again.

She sounded upset. There was a finality in her voice and I wondered what kind of trouble we could have gotten ourselves into this time. Perhaps if we just pretended not to hear her, she would give up and forget the food we had eaten or the mess we had made. Finally, though, she broke away from the doorway which

seemed connected to her frame and came down to the creek to get us. She grabbed Dewey by the waist and swung him into her arms while latching onto my arm with the same hand, then she practically beat the two older boys into the house with a stick. We didn't understand why she was so furious.

"Verna, Clifford, Gerald, Dewey. I told you to come inside!" she said in a low, stern voice.

"But Mama . . ." we complained.

Usually this worked to give us a few more minutes, but not this time. I didn't understand why she was so upset with us. I wanted to scream at her, but I kept my tongue, and I have always been glad that I did because I will never forget what happened just as soon as we all got in the house.

Mother shut the door and barred it with the trunk that we used for a table. She pulled us to her and led us to the kitchen. Then we heard it. The life-infested shadows of the sandhills became a pack of wild, howling coyotes. They rushed forward, whooping a forlorn war cry and then danced around and around the house. We couldn't see them, but for almost two hours, we stayed huddled together in the kitchen clutching mother and sobbing at each of their terrifying shrieks. Finally, Mother made us go to bed.

"I know that yare scarred but there's nothin' more ta do except wait for them ta go away. Now ya all get in bed, then ya kin sleep an' forgit about the coyotes for a while 'til mornin' comes," she said, the Scottish lull covering her fear.

I didn't want to leave mother and the boys at all. I was practically stuck to the kitchen floor and couldn't have stood on my grounded shins and knees, even if Mother had promised to get in bed with us.

"Mama, I'm so scared. Please don't make us go to bed until Papa gets home," I begged.

"But Papa isn't coming home until at least Friday," Clifford reminded us.

Mother looked at the door for a moment, then scanned the rest of the room, her eyes formulating the pathway from rifle to window. I could see her thoughts moving quickly to figure out what to do, and I decided that just her courage alone would certainly be enough to destroy the coyotes.

"Just five quick steps from kitchen to far corner, then back to the kitchen to hide the children. Put them behind the hot stove and fire. Load. Block the window. Possibly start another fire," she thought to herself, her eyes darting about the room. Then she told us, "Try ta bee brav an' stronge like yar Grandpa was."

"Maybe we should just say a prayer to make the coyotes go away," said little Dewey.

He had stopped crying and peeped out from Mother's skirt just long enough to make the suggestion. His dusty red hair was all tussled and matted by tears to his forehead, but at that moment I thought he looked more like an angel than my little brother.

"That's a good idea, Dewey. Will ya saye it?" Mother asked. And then quickly before he could begin, "And won't ya aske fore yar father too."

We knelt in a close circle, pressing ourselves close to Mother and holding hands while Gerald prayed.

"Heavenly Father, please help the coyotes to go away so that we can sleep, and help our papa to get home soon. Amen." he said.

Then he immediately got up exclaiming, "I'm not afraid of any coyotes. I'm going to sleep all by myself."

I didn't feel as sure as Dewey that the coyotes were going away, but I did feel much better. I knew that I couldn't be shown up by one of my brothers so I pretended to be brave and went to bed too. I remember that after we all got in bed, Dewey and the other boys fell right to sleep. Even Mother slept after she had stacked the wood and organized things for breakfast, but I stayed awake until it was light again, listening to the coyotes and any sound indicating that father might have come home early. The coyotes screeched and danced around and around our house until dawn.

I wished I could be like Gerald who fell right to sleep, or Mother who told us to go to bed without seeming a bit worried about the wild animals outside. I wondered if I would ever become as strong and brave as she was. Mother always protected us. She never cried and always got her work done.

Every night I tried to be brave like the boys were. I would

have been happy just to have their cool self-control, but I usually didn't do so well. One night Mother finally got upset with me.

"Verna, if you don't stop cryin' I'm gun ta run away an' bury my heed in the sand dunes so I kin sleep," she said.

I was so afraid of losing her to the coyotes that I stopped. But then the next day I went out and hid behind the berry bushes and cried and cried. I tried to put my heart away. I tried to shut it up in a box at the back of my throat and then swallow it, but it always seemed to just squeeze through the cracks in my throat and tears would leak out and feed the berry bushes like rain.

Courage

When I was thirteen my mother became very sick. It was then that I became like her. I didn't cry anymore. The cartilage in my throat grew tight like old tree branches clutching around my heart, and so I became strong and took care of her. It was the only time I can remember that mother ever cried out loud. I was thirteen, and Mother had given birth to my sister Mabel. I remember so much about that time because mother was extremely sick. It was the only time I can remember that she ever cried out loud. For many months I thought that she might die and leave me to take care of the family.

I wasn't afraid of the hard work that it would take to keep the house and the garden and take care of the babies, but I couldn't bear the thought of losing my mother. She was always so special to me and I don't know how I would have lived without her.

Mother had Milk Leg infection and pleurisy. She had blood clots in her legs after Mabel was born and we had to hoist them up with ropes to the ceiling so that the clots would loosen. She stayed in bed for more than three months, sick with the fever and coughing. There was no doctor in Wapello and Father had to work in the fields all day, so I kept the house and took care of Mother and the baby. I have never been so exhausted as I was then.

Mother had a hard time nursing the baby and Mabel cried and cried during the day and much of the night too. I got so

frustrated sometimes that I learned to bounce her in my sleep. Walking up and down on the cold wood floor in the kitchen so that Mother and Father could sleep. After a while I became numb like a rag doll, waking up by instinct to take her to my mother, then walking and bouncing and walking until I could lay her down in bed again.

Then in the morning Mother would need new mustard plasters, so I'd send Dewey to bring in water from the stream and heat it on the coal range while I started with biscuits or flapjacks for Father and the boys to eat after they came in from feeding and milking the cows. I never realized before how hard Mother worked to keep our family running.

Since Mother's pain was so severe she would sometimes cry out and I thought for certain that she would die. I wanted her to live so much, so I never let her see me cry again, knowing that it might worry her.

Growing up in such a dry place gave me a real appreciation of water. It became more and more precious as time went on and I learned to value all water with the same determination that I guarded my tears. I learned not to be as frightened of the emptiness around me and often found solace by laying on the banks of the creek with my feet dangling in the ice cold stream. I would escape from my chores for a few moments while Mother was in the house and spend time staring at the clouds and dreaming.

During the winter time my courage and dreams spread from the creek banks to the path home from school. As I walked I would

think about going to another country someday. I'd watch hawks and eagles and dream about flying to see the other side of the mountains.

One day as I was walking home from school I was completely absorbed in my thoughts. I was ten or eleven years old and had lagged behind Clifford and Gerald because they started teasing me about Lawrence Malm. Lawrence was Clifford's age, and he told Clifford that he had sort of a feeling for me. Clifford and Gerald taunted me for nearly ten minutes.

"Lawrence can walk you home from now on and then we'll leave school early to go fishing. That way you two can be alone and smooch," they said.

"You can both go fishing now for all I care. I don't need anyone to walk me home. And I hope you fall in and get whipped by Mother when you get home," I answered.

I didn't really think that Lawrence would ever actually walk me home because after walking with me he would have to walk another four or five miles to go through the fields to his own house. But just in case, I decided to lag behind the boys so that they would forget the whole idea before they saw Lawrence at school the next day.

Actually I wouldn't have cared that Lawrence liked me if the boys hadn't teased me so much. One time, earlier in the Fall when the apples were ripe, Lawrence told me to watch the water in the ditch that ran through our farm and emptied into Chikta Creek. He said he would throw some apples in this same ditch

that ran through their orchard. The Malm's had beautiful large transparent apples which were a special treat to us because our fruit trees were still too young to provide much. So a few weeks before Clifford found out about Lawrence liking me, I sat by the stream with a rake. After a while the apples came by the dozen. I raked them as fast as I could, but I didn't get too many.

If I wasn't afraid that Clifford and Gerald would tease me about liking a "Swede," I would have told them and we could have gotten all the apples. But I was afraid that they would taunt me, just like today, so I never told any one and ate the apples all by myself. Secretly I liked Lawrence. He was a very nice boy and handsome.

"If only Clifford would mind his own business, or Mother would just let me walk home alone. I can take care of myself," I thought.

I glared at the dirt road and kicked a rock thinking about how mad I was at Clifford. But Mother would probably punish me for lagging behind and getting home late so I decided to start running and catch up. Then, suddenly I looked up to see a large coyote standing crosswise on the road not more than ten or twelve feet from me. I guess he was wondering when I was going to stop! He just stared at me with a wild, piercing look, which froze me in my tracks! All my life I had been so afraid of coyotes and now here I was face to face with one and all alone. My brothers were probably a half mile up the road, and I was still a mile from home.

I couldn't think at all. I was linked to the coyote by a chain of fear until suddenly, as if something or someone else were moving my hands and lips for me, I clapped my hands and yelled, "Sicker Ned, Sicker Ned!!"

And just as soon as I had spoken, away went the coyote, over the fence and through the field. He didn't stop until he was about 300 yards away, then he turned and looked. Again I yelled, "Sicker Ned." This time he kept going, and I ran almost as fast in order to catch up to the boys.

Ned was our dog, but he had died a year before. After I told Mother about what happened she said that some unseen power must have made me do what I did because I was too frightened to think by myself. I have always remembered that experience and the challenge that Mother gave me when she heard my story.

"Always remember, when yar sad or feelin' down that someone is watchin' over ya. Yar a special daughter of God and don't ya ever forgit ta thank heem for yar blessings," she said.