

A Little Girl Named Mae

Written by Mae (Tobin) Caron

Once upon a time, there lived a little girl named Mae. She lived on a beautiful island named South Manitou. It was surrounded by Lake Michigan. It was a beautiful place to live while growing up; it had beautiful woods and meadows and a high cliff of sand dunes.

Our school was near an in-land lake, named Lake Florence. The school had one room, a cloakroom, with outdoor toilets - two-seaters. There was a pump outside for pumping our water; teacher would select a student to keep the water bucket full - we all shared a common dipper. Sometime a drowned mouse would be found floating in the bucket. There were about thirty students, from kindergarten, through the eighth grade. We had nice teachers, who came from the mainland and boarded with local islanders. There was one teacher that I didn't like at all. She would pull my hair and pick on me, maybe because we were poor and didn't dress as well as the family she boarded with. I was afraid to walk home after school. The cattle had free range of the island, and seemed to always be in the pasture outside of school. I was only five and my sister and brothers got out later than I. Lived in the country and had to cross a lot of fences to get home. I have never gotten over the fear of cattle to this day!

We lived on a farm, with cows, horses, pigs, and chickens. It was my brother Ed and my job to pull weeds and feed the livestock. We also gathered the eggs. We lived in a large house with a big porch. The kitchen door opened on the porch. There was a big lilac bush outside the parlor window; I can still remember the pleasant aroma of lilacs in springtime. An old Astrachan apple tree stood by the back window. My sister Edna and, I used the tree to climb to get in the window of our playhouse. It was so much fun playing make-believe in there. We had old broken dishes, odds and ends of things and our dolls. We had duties to do, helped mother with the dishes, made our beds.

We picked berries about a mile from home. The summertime was so hot we had to take cold water along with us and a lunch. My older brother would hide in the woods and, snort like a bull - it would frighten us to death. Edna gave him h--! She had to care for us. I was six, George was three, Ed must have been nine, and brother Harold was twelve. We sure had some exciting times.

Our home was big. It had a large kitchen and pantry. It was furnished with a big table and chairs, and a range with an attached reservoir that would heat the water for

household duties. There was a large dining room, with table and chairs, a china cabinet, heating stove, and other odds and ends. A small bedroom was downstairs where mother and dad slept. The parlor was a special room - if we had company, it was then used. It had a broadloom rug - very pretty; it covered the center of the floor. It was dark green with the center being a circle of roses. The black leather davenport and chair filled the room. Mother's rocking chair sat near a phonograph, with a big red horn sticking from it. We kids liked the song, "The Three Black Crows." It was funny. Upstairs there were three bedrooms and it as very cold in the winter. The only heat was from the open stairway.

We didn't lose much time dressing in the mornings, and we hurried downstairs to stand around the pot belly stove. The smell of pancakes was out of this world. After breakfast, when our lunches were packed, we setout for the long walk to school. In the winter after Lake Florence froze, we walked across it to get to the school. My father always cut cedar bushes to mark the location where ice was cut for iceboxes, so we couldn't fall into the icy lake. The ice was also cut to pack fish for shipping to the mainland.

In winter, we had fun sleigh riding down the sand dunes. The older kids would ice skate. On Saturday nights, our dad would hitch up the team of horses, so we could go to the neighbors' houses for parties. Sundays we would visit grandmother, or Aunt Violet.

Thank God, my memories are still with me.
