

BACK IN TIME

A special grade-school friend

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE



When I started grade school at Beaver Creek School, my cousin Douglas McKee and a distant cousin of ours, Marcene McKee were the only first graders. Marcene and her family moved to Jacksonville before I was in second grade and when a Walter Offenbacher started school he and Douglas got along right well. I missed having a girl friend in my class. When the boys started bringing toy trucks to school and making roadways on the school's hillside I felt very left out, it looked to be so much fun.

My mother surprised me one day with a little toy pick-up she had bought when she was shopping in Medford. It was bright red with white wheels. (It is the only toy I remember her buying) I was so happy to take it to school and show everyone, but chose to make my own roads on the hillside because I figured the boys didn't want me in their territory. I don't remember any other girls joining me.

Elsie Dietrick was her name and the toy car bit was over by the time Elsie joined us in the fourth grade. Her family came here in 1934 during the Depression and moved nearby, into a small log cabin, on the first mining claim up Palmer Creek. She had two brothers, Loren, older than her and Harry Jr., the youngest. This was the first family with children during that time to live on Palmer Creek. There were

quite a few other miners up there but I only remember two who had wives; the rest were bachelors.

It is interesting how well Elsie and I got along. We never had any disagreement as most children do some times. We liked doing the same things and our teacher would let us study together away from the other students if we had finished our homework. We could go into the library room or the girls coat room, our favorite place, where we would go into a small closet and sit on the top shelf to look out the small high window.

It didn't take long for Elsie's family to get acquainted with mine. Her parents, Harry and Hilda, liked to play a card game, called Pedro, with my folks. The family would walk down some evenings before dark to have some enjoyable card games. The adults played in the living room with the door closed and we kids played cards and other games at the kitchen table. We were cautioned to not "rough house" because kerosene lamps were to be protected as well as the rest of the kitchen. We had so much fun and the time seemed to go too fast before they had to leave for home.

Often times, Elsie was asked to stay all night with me, like a Friday after school. One Friday is quite memorable! I decided we needed a special treat after the mile walk home from school. A hunger for some candy resulted in us making our own.

Some powdered sugar and butter blended together with some red food coloring to get a luscious pink candy. Even though it was before the evening meal, we ate all we could hold. Sometime in the middle of the night, I became very ill and was unable to keep from throwing up over the side of the bed. Of course, this woke Elsie up and I was so embarrassed to find Elsie's shoes the target of my distress. My mother had to clean everything up so no one got much sleep that night. To this day I cannot stand the sight of any kind of pink candy or frosting.

I don't know how Elsie was able to forgive me or if her shoes were ever the same, however, she did invite me to stay all night with her which pleased me. I so enjoyed being in the one-room log cabin as it was the first time I had ever been inside one. It seemed so cozy with that nice family. I prayed that I would not eat something to cause another nighttime episode. Of course it was difficult for Elsie and I to go to sleep and not disturb her family with our giggles. I don't recall how all the beds were arranged in such a small area. In those times one had to make do.

My uncle, Ernest McKee, got word to us that his family was moving from Klamath Falls to Cottage Grove, Oregon. They had a player piano they did not want to take with them and he said my folks could have it for \$50.00. During the Depression, that was a lot of money but my dad thought it would be especially nice for my sister and I to learn to play. I don't know how he was able to get that much money but since he was known as "honest John" I am sure he didn't steal it. Anyway, dad contacted Mr. Dietrick, who had a fairly new pick-up and they went to Klamath Falls for that wonderful piano. It had some piano rolls with it so our house was constantly being filled with the roller music or our own terrible playing. (*Mom still has this piano and the rolls which I remember playing as I was growing up. J.S.*)

It didn't take long for our closest neighbor, miner Bill Oats, to hear about our musical addition. He was English and we thought his name was Mr. Bloats when

he first introduced himself. It took some time before we found out it wasn't Bloats. He had built a cabin at the far end of our field which belonged to my grandfather, Amos McKee, who let the miners build on his properties in return for a percentage of gold they may find and also to help him during haying season. One day he came to see our piano and sat down and started to play. To our amazement he played classical and other songs we knew. How I wish we had asked him about his background as it was obvious that he had some formal training. In those days it wasn't proper to pry.

Elsie was here for three more years, finishing the seventh grade at Beaver Creek School. The family moved to Ruch, probably for her older brother to ride the bus into Jacksonville for high school. They lived in the old dance hall that Cap Ruch had built in 1900. Elsie finished the eighth grade there at Ruch and graduated from Jacksonville High, while I graduated from Medford High. Her folks eventually moved to Dunsmuir, California and communication with Elsie got less and less. We both married and were kept busy with household duties and raising our children. However, we never forgot each other.

When Elsie was living in Eugene, Oregon, and her mother, Hilda, was living in Shady Cove, Oregon they came to see me. It was a wonderful surprise which brought back such wonderful memories. At Christmas time, we share our love for each other along with our happenings during the past year. Sometimes there is much happiness and sometimes much sorrow to write in our letters, but I have always felt so fortunate in having this classmate friend for so many years.

Evelyn Byrne Williams
with Janeen Sathre
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1933-34 School Picture Left to right:

Front Row: Orden Phillips, Harry Dietrick, Dean Phillips

Middle Row: Douglas McKee, Walter Offenbacher, Elsie Dietrick**, Evelyn Byrne**

Back Row: Clara Faye McKee, Lorne Dietrick, Rosella Offenbacher