

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO  
MY LATE HUSBAND, LARRY, FOR  
HIS PATIENCE AS I BLUNDERED  
THRU MY EARLY DAYS IN IOWA

ESPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR MY  
FAMILY - JACQUIE AND BOBLIER  
CHRISTY & KERNY Mc MILLAN  
PAIGE AND MICHAEL

## *Alice in Iowa*

by Alice McGovern

SPECIAL THANKS  
TO JACQUIE FOR URGING ME TO  
ATTEND ROBERT WOLF'S WORKSHOP.  
TO BOB WOLF WHO GAVE ME  
THE CONFIDENCE TO WRITE  
THESE MEMOIRS.

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### *The Arrival - 1953*

**I**t was March 22, 1953 and I shivered as I stepped off the train at 8:00 p.m. in Prairie du Chien. I was shocked by the dimly lighted platform and station. It was drizzling rain, and Larry, my new husband, said, "Wait here with the luggage while I go around the corner to the garage and get the car."

Having always lived in a big city, and now, having traveled from Pittsburgh to Chicago, I had never experienced any place so quiet, small, and dreary. The station master turned out all the lights.

Jacquie, my nine-year-old daughter, and I huddled together, scared of the silence and darkness following the Zephyr's departure. There was a big, old house on the opposite corner from the depot. On the first floor porch a dim sign flashed, saying, "Beer." We could see men near the bar where a big fat woman was serving drinks. There were five men at a table playing cards. A couple of women were watching, and laughing with them.

Larry packed our luggage into the car. I had six bags to be followed by two trunks being shipped. Once in the car we passed through Prairie du Chien's business district. So this was Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin! The French name sounded very exciting and sophisticated. Larry had told us that this was our destination on the train. It wasn't exciting. Not this small place! It was only two blocks long. There was a small bank, a shoe store, and a garage in the first block. The next block had a machine shop, a grocery store, another garage, and a fish market. The store that caught my eye had a sign, "Star Department Store," over a small store front. I couldn't believe it. Macy's and Gimbel's were department stores, not that little old room.

Larry said, "Now we are going to cross the mighty Mississippi River. It is about three miles across it." We heard the bridge groan, and the clackety-clank as the car went up on it. It was a very old bridge. It seemed to be complaining about the heaviness of the car as we traveled through the thick foggy mist that hovered over the river. As the car left the bridge I thought, "At last we are in Iowa. I sure don't think much of Wisconsin. I hope Iowa isn't as desolate."

As we traveled the highway with the dark, forbidding Yellow River

Forest on one side and the Mississippi River on the other, it started to pour rain. A few miles up into the hills we turned onto a dirt road full of chuck holes and I thought, "How well did I know Larry? This must be a mistake." But then I saw a sign saying, "Harpers Ferry."

I thought, "At last, a town. Oh! Yeah! Six lights. Oh, boy! So this is Iowa."

It was so damn dark. Nine miles up the road Larry took a sharp turn down a hill, got out, and opened a crude looking gate.

I thought, "Where's the house? Don't they have lights? Oh, my God, what have I done?"

When Larry got back into the car I said, "Nice place for a murder, no one would ever discover it."

Larry was shocked, but he answered, "It is really a beautiful place in the day time, Alice."

It was one-half mile to the house, and Larry hurried me into the dimly lit kitchen, where his father was washing dishes or maybe the separator pans. Grandpa said, "So here's the cook."

I thought, "Hmmm. That's why he came to Pennsylvania, to find a cook. All those sweet-talking words about how beautiful I was, all those presents and candy just to get a cook. And I fell for him. I'll never forgive him. Never, never, never."

Grandpa was in working man's overalls. I thought, "Daddy never wore such clothes, and look at his mother in those men's pajamas. She has a skin disease. I can't believe this horrible situation—and I'm married."

Grandma (Larry's Mom) said, "There are sheets in the hall closet, and your little girl can sleep on the couch in the living room."

"Oh, no," I said. "No one is leaving Jacquie downstairs alone. We will sleep downstairs, she goes upstairs." I wasn't going to leave her unprotected in this wilderness. No doubt they thought I was crazy.

Larry and I had spent our honeymoon at the Lee Hotel in Washington, D.C., and my aunt Mamie had Jacquie at her home in Petersburg, Virginia. We didn't want Jacquie to be jealous of Larry, so we took her back to the hotel for a couple of days of fun.

Once we got to the farm we bought new beds, and I divided my time

between the two of them, sleeping every other night with Jacquie, until at the end of ten days Jacquie told me that her single bed was too small for me too.

Life on the farm was quite dull. Their radio was only turned on when news was on, or if Grandpa wanted to listen to a ball game. There was no TV, which I had had for four years. La Crosse didn't have a TV station yet. The old folks resented my city ways and intrusion into their life. Larry was forty years old, the oldest of their family, and here was this widow and her nine-year-old daughter expecting all his attention.

Grandma used to say quietly, "So-and-so was away in the service, but he came back and married a nice girl from around here." After repeating it over and over, and praising my sister-in-law from Waukon, I finally was fed up with all these little digs and exploded. "Don't you think I'm a nice girl? Well, let me tell you here and now, I'm twice as nice and ten times more intelligent than most girls around here."

## *Meeting the Relatives*

The next day Larry woke me at 8:00 a.m. and said, "I think you better get up—they (his parents) are getting upset." As I pulled on my lovely robe and went through the kitchen to the bathroom, I could feel disapproval following my every step.

After breakfast of corn flakes (no juice—they didn't drink juice), I looked around the house. It was a disaster—not bad structurally, but in every other way. The walls needed a paint job. In 1945 they had removed a porch and built on a large living room and bathroom and huge closet. They left the large window and door between the addition and main house. That big window and door window was polka dotted with fly specks. In the living room there was a brown sofa and chair—a pink and blue studio couch (where we had slept)—a chrome and red and white table and four chairs—green, pink and blue linoleum on the floor with six throw rugs and droopy faded curtains, their color unrecognizable. No one ever went into the living room except when they had company.

The dining room is where they sat listening to the radio in the evenings.

There was an open staircase—the spokes of it were used as a file cabinet and held everything from newspapers, extra shoe strings, bags of cough drops—you name it. It was there or on top of a shabby old desk. There were six chairs (not matching), a nice oak table, two rocking chairs, and 13 pieces of rug on top of the linoleum floor. Along the opposite wall from the staircase four of the chairs were stacked with newspapers they might get around to reading someday.

Larry interrupted my mental inventory saying, "After dinner I'm going to take Alice and Jacquie up to meet Aunt Kate and Aunt Maggie."

I wondered what dinner would be.

Grandpa said, "The potatoes are peeled" and looked at me. I stared back wondering, was I supposed to cook potatoes for lunch?

Grandma said, "There's a roast in the refrigerator."

"My God! My eyes aren't even open and they expect me to have a big dinner at noon. We always had dinner in the evening at home. What an uncivilized notion this is." Oh, well, roll with the punches I always say.

Then I spotted the stove. I never saw anything like it. It was huge—black and white—no burners—there was a lid on one side.

"What was that for?" I asked Larry.

"Wood," shouted Grandpa. "What do you think its for?"

I meekly replied, "I don't know." Larry took a handle off a hook, picked up the lid, and showed me a big fire. Jacquie and I both jumped back seeing the flames. Larry tossed in a stick of wood and said, "This is a wood stove, Honey."

"Oh," I said, and the old folks looked at me like "Poor Larry has really married a dumb bunny." It wasn't easy, but somehow between Grandpa and Larry and me, dinner was only 45 minutes late.

In my mind I called that stove every name I could think of, but the most descriptive was, "The Great White Monster." It either went out on me or burned everything.

I cleaned up after a grueling morning and away we went up another dirt road back into the woods to a log cabin to see his aunt Kate and Maggie. Kate, his 90-year-old aunt, was sitting in front of a large china closet—black with layers of varnish and coal dust. Her dress a faded print with a grey butcher's apron over it. Maggie was 65 and very different—she had a

pretty housedress and an embroidered apron.

Jacquie and I were properly respectful of these old people and answered all their questions the best we could. Aunt Kate asked Jacquie if she went to church every Sunday, if she knew her catechism lessons and if she had made her First Communion and of course Jacquie replied, "Yes" to all questions, and Kate nodded approvingly. After much conversation, Larry said, "It's getting late - almost chore time." It was almost like a signal. Aunt Maggie said, "You can't go without a bite of lunch." Larry said, "Well, not too much longer." I said, "Can I help," and went to the kitchen to help butter bread for thick ham sandwiches. Maggie put out some canned peaches and a chocolate cake.

Larry stayed with Kate in the other room, who talked so loudly we could hear everything she said, "You never told us until you were getting married, young man?"

"I couldn't, Aunt Kate, until she said yes."

"And why wouldn't she say yes. You are our special boy."

"Aw, Aunt Kate."

"Who ever heard of a white coat in winter and all that purple—hat, dress, even shoes," Kate said. "You better watch her carefully—she has flirty eyes and walks swinging her hips."

"Aunt Kate," Larry says, "Just because she is beautiful and dresses fancy - she isn't bad. She's good and wonderful, Aunt Kate, really."

I couldn't believe my ears. He said that to the old dragon. He wasn't talking about a cook. I guess I will forgive him after all.

## Neighbors

Larry decided to introduce me to his neighbors. First we went around the corner and up the gravel road toward Aunt Kate's. Ellen Hawes and her family lived on a farm adjoining ours on the south. Larry greatly admired Ellen, a widow who raised her six children on the farm after her husband was killed before the youngest was born. Now all grown up - two sons were priests, a daughter a nun, the two younger sons farmers, and the

baby was now a senior in high school.

They were all very nice, but seemed to find everything I said very funny. They inquired how I met Larry. I told them. My parents had visited the McGovern Farm the summer of 1937. His aunt, Mame McGovern had asked them to take her out to Iowa to visit her brother, Albert McGovern. Mame was a dear friend of my mother's and since they didn't have any definite plans for vacation they enjoyed traveling by car to Iowa.

The following Christmas, Larry came to visit his Aunts in Jeanette and Greensburg, Pennsylvania. They called and said Larry wanted to visit the Stalters. My Mother said, "This young man and his parents were very nice to us. I'm sure he would enjoy a pretty girl to show him around town instead of us old folks. Just cancel everything for the next two days." So I took him to the Museum, and the Cathedral of Learning, the skyscraper University of Pittsburgh. I guess I made an impression on him. When he came back to visit in 1952 he remembered I had a maroon dress, hat, shoes and I had a grey Persian Lamb coat.

When Larry's aunt called and said, "Larry from Iowa is here and anxious to visit, I told her I would call Daddy and arrange it." I never remembered who Larry was. At 19 I had lots of boyfriends and most of their names forgotten. A country boy didn't make much impression in my busy life. I told Daddy, "You entertain him. I don't know if he is 9 or 90." Daddy invited them to lunch. His uncle called and said, "We know where you live but don't know where your Dad's new home is. You can show us the way. We will pick you up."

I thought It would be a bore but I wouldn't upset Daddy by refusing to go to lunch. So I dressed up in a sophisticated black dress and silver jewelry. When his uncle walked in he asked, "Are you married yet?" I said, "Heck, no, who would have me?" Larry looked at me with such respect. It was so nice.

So, that's the way we met the second time. It sounds like a story from "True Romance" magazine. I ended up saying, "It must have been fate because two fortune tellers predicted it." I noticed the startled glances among the family, especially between the priests. No one was laughing now.

Father Cletus questioned, "You are a Catholic, Alice?"

I replied, "Yes."

He continued, "Did you go to a Catholic school?"

I answered, "Yes, Holy Rosary, a girl's school. Why?"

"Don't you know Catholics aren't supposed to go to fortune tellers?"

I defended myself, saying, "Oh! Everyone went to them—I even had a spiritualist at my house. It was a lark—a fun evening."

Father Donald said, "Oh! I see!"

As I left, I felt they thought a real sinner had come to Wexford.

The next afternoon we went down to the O'Neill's. Our farm house sits high on the hill. Their buildings are below us in the valley. There was Hank, the father, a very thin man in his 70's. Hank was different—a little odd, probably due to senility.

Nora O'Neill, Hank's wife, also in her 70's, was very tall and thin - one might say gaunt. She worked very hard and was a matriarch. I believe she managed her family with a firm hand. She was clearly in control of the farm and its assets. She was very different from Larry's mother, who leaned on her husband and his twisted judgements in all things. Oh, Larry's mother would help out with baking and cooking for church activities, but she was always in the background. Nellie, Larry's mother, was fond of saying, "I came out here a stranger from Pennsylvania, never bothered anyone, and minded my own business. Larry's father, Albert—a dear, sweet man, even decided when and what color to paint walls.

Nora was the complete opposite character. She cooked and baked, but she was very social. She loved cards and bingo and going to other parishes for church suppers. She visited someone every Sunday and enjoyed herself. She wasn't the best housekeeper—the floor was often tracked with mud from the barnyard, but no one really noticed, when the glow of her welcoming smile made you feel good all over.

That afternoon Nora was making rolls and showed me how to shape perfect sandwich buns. Never mind that I had never looked at a bread recipe, I knew how once I was ready to bake rolls.

Nora was sweet and kind. I think she realized the hard time I would have adjusting to farm life. I felt immediately that we would be good friends. She told me about Mary Mona, her daughter who taught in Prairie du Chien. Mary was daddy's girl. She never helped Nora and was always critical of her mother.

Nora had five sons. Steve was married to Eleanor Mullarkey and they had their own farm. Tom and Frank came in from the barnyard for their mid-afternoon lunch and were quiet young men and very friendly. Net (short for Celestine) was a carpenter in Chicago. Hilary worked away, following the harvest through the West.

During the conversation Nora suddenly turned and asked, "Alice, do you know how to milk a cow?"

"No," I replied.

"Do you know how to slop the pigs?"

"No."

"Did you ever raise chickens?"

"No," I answered.

"Do you know how to drive a tractor?"

I timidly answered, "No," feeling absolutely useless.

Nora said, "Well, my dear Alice, don't ever learn and you will never have to."

It was the best advice I ever received.

## *Center of Attention*

Jacquie and I dressed carefully to attend our first Mass at Immaculate Conception Church in Wexford. It was our custom to wear our best clothes to Mass. Jacquie had a Beige Tweed Coat trimmed in Brown Velvet and a Velvet Hat to match. I had a White Cashmere Coat, with Red hat, gloves, purse and shoes. It was in Holy Week so after Mass everyone lined up against the walls to go to confession. As we waited there we felt everyone looking in our direction. Not only were they staring at us but their eyes started at the hat, coat and accessories, and ended up at my four-inch ankle strap shoes.

Jacquie, too, was aware of the children's intense scrutiny. We could almost hear their thought, "So, that is Larry McGovern's bride and her daughter."

After we came out of the church, Jacquie asked, "Why did they all look at us Mom? It made me feel funny."

I answered, "I guess because they never saw us before and our clothes are different." Most of the women wore scarves over their hair and ankle socks. As I glanced at Larry I think he was enjoying himself, standing there proud as a peacock... that we were the Center of Attention.

## *School*

As we went through the gate up to the main road we heard the church bells ringing for Mass. Larry stepped on the gas and when we went past the crossroads he said, "There's your new school, Jacquie."

Jacquie looked out the window and said, "Where, where?" Larry said, "You'll see it on the way home. It's too late to stop now."

We both gawked out the back window looking for a school building. At church we felt everyone staring at us. After Mass everyone came up to be introduced and to congratulate Larry. One thing I noticed was the ankle socks the women wore. No four inch heels like I wore. Coming home Larry stopped beside a little white building at the edge of our property. It was a one room school house with a large bell on top. A woodpile was on one side, then a pump, and another very tiny white shed.

I turned and asked Larry, "What is that building?" He said, "an outhouse." "What?" I asked. Larry said, "it's an outside toilet."

Jacquie and I looked at each other. "This was her new school!" Larry told us he had gone to this school for 6 years. Monday morning we met Miss Leona O'Neill and her seven pupils who stared at Jacquie's store bought clothes and shiny shoes. They repeated after Leona, "Welcome to our school, Jacquie." Neither of us felt they really meant what they were saying. Jacquie was my pride and joy. She was the only reason I had for living since Mother died in February, two months before she was born. The shock caused me to have eclampsia, Uremic Poisoning and a Caesarian. I didn't walk without a cane for one and a half years due to Phlebitis after the operation.

Jacquie's father was killed in the Second World War when she was two and a half months old. It was ironic that her first printing she copied

(at age three) was the hated name "Hitler" from a newspaper headline.

Miss O'Neill had not been teaching Fourth grade and did not know where to start. Jacquie had always been a good student and it was hard for Leona since all the tests were finished quickly and correctly. So, Leona put her in with her fifth graders. Jacquie complained about the cold when the boys didn't bring in enough wood. Miss O'Neill married Cyril Mooney and the Wexford School was closed because of low number of pupils to attend it. Jacquie went to school in Lansing.

Jacquie would often say, "Why do I have to go there? I know all the answers. I'm not learning anything." Needless to say I was upset. Before my marriage Jacquie had taken Ballet, Tap, Spanish, and Hula Lessons. There was no dance studio in Lansing and no one to help with her Baton practice. Life was dull and she was being culturally deprived. So, we would take our paints up into the woods and paint pictures.

## The Creek

Our farm has two hundred acres located on both sides of the Great River Road. It is beautiful in late Spring, Summer, and Fall, but early Spring and Winter is rough. The farm house is a half a mile from the main road. Our first Spring in Iowa was very wet with a lot of late snows that kept us indoors. The mud was deep and the kitchen floor was never clean.

I paced around the house, bored to tears. Finally I said to Larry, "Let's go somewhere."

Larry said, "Okay, we will ride up to Kate and Maggie's."

I quietly whispered, "They are so old. Aren't there any young people around. For heaven sakes, don't do this to me. I'm only thirty-five years old. I need to associate with young people. I will not change into a drab old housewife."

Larry said, "My God, honey, is that what you think I want? I'll talk to Evelyn Delaney. She's about your age. If they are going to be home, we will go up there tonight. Darling, I don't want you to change, I want you to be

happy."

After Mass, Larry introduced me to Evelyn. This woman with the weather-beaten face was my age? Good Lord, is this what happens to Iowa women?

Evelyn said, "I'm glad to have you come up this evening." Evelyn and Jimmy Delaney had seven sons. From what she told me later, they went home and the boys cleaned the house and made a cake and pie for the evening lunch. A tablecloth was ironed to cover the heavily scarred table.

All afternoon I thought about Evelyn. Her hair was limp and stringy, her face already etched with lines from working like a man. The sun had dried her skin and I could bet she never used any moisture cream. But it mattered not to me—I was eager to get out of the house—away from the old folks.

About 5:30, supper was over and I rushed through the dishwashing so we could get dressed. You would have thought I was going to visit the Queen of England as I selected one of my prettiest blouse and skirt. Jacquie, too, was excited to be meeting some kids.

It started to rain, then thunder roared and the lightening flashed. I never worried. We had umbrellas and a little rain never kept me home in Pittsburgh. Poor Larry, he knew what was happening, but was afraid to tell us.

So, we got in the car and drove down almost to the creek. It was pouring rain and the water was rushing down the ditch so fast we couldn't see the road. A flash flood! The road was covered by deep, muddy water and we couldn't get across.

Larry said, "We will just sit here awhile. It will go down soon."

We waited in the steamy car about twenty minutes. I finally said, "Oh, Hell! Even the elements are against me. Take me back to the house." No telephone to call and make our excuses, so we went the next night and had an enjoyable evening. The Delaneys were very nice people and their boys found Jacquie enchanting.

## Loneliness

April in Iowa is dark, rainy, muddy and dreary. It is a dull place to live. Jacquie is trying to read. She doesn't complain but I can feel her unhappiness in my soul. No one to play with, no fun, no TV, no music, no parties. This is an incredibly silent house. The old folks resting and Larry out in the barn. What am I to do? I am so restless. It is like we dropped out of the world into a dark lonely pit. Back in Pittsburgh we would put on our raincoats and splash along to the museum or dash between the raindrops into the stores, losing ourselves into the colorful array of the beautiful Spring clothes.

Here is nothing...nothing! I am trying to make popcorn on the Great White Monster. It is so slow. I'll get the Paint by Number kit Jacquie got for Christmas. We can work on that this afternoon. We will take our popcorn and Pepsi into the living room and see if we can get something besides stock reports, weather or ball games on our radio. Thank Goodness I brought it. They only use theirs for weather or pig prices. I'll ask Larry to take us to a movie tonight. He owes us some entertainment and fun. I'm tired of being bored all the time. Jacquie runs to Larry as he comes in and asks Larry to take us to the movies. He says yes. He never refuses her anything.

Life is more than a place to live and four meals a day. Our family were always party people, friends always dropping in and Mother and Dad at the Baby Grand Piano playing and singing. Mother studied Opera. Dick Powell, the movie star was a personal friend. Frosty Harris, who wrote jokes for Jack Benny, was a regular visitor. Any occasion was a reason for a party. No doubt there were serious times but my recollections of growing up was the joy of living life to the fullest. I've always been a night-owl. Here, Larry and his parents go to bed at 8:00. The furnace goes out and we have to wrap up in coats and blankets, or go to bed at 9:00 to keep warm.

Well, it will be up to me! I'll get this place cleaned up and throw a party. I'll make some fancy hors d'oeuvres... wine before dinner... I'll use my good china, silver and crystal. Planning an elegant party kept me distracted for awhile until I realized it wasn't my house. I couldn't throw anything out. I could clean and dust but put everything back. My pretty

things would look ludicrous in this place. I'll just have to wait until I get my own place. Now I think about it... maybe these farmers would think I was a snob. But why have nice things if I don't use them for friends. I'm not going to be entertaining the Queen of England or the Pope.

I'm determined to be me. I WON'T CHANGE...Never. Never. I'm always going to have pretty clothes... dress up, and do things my way. Jacquie and I love Larry, but, I HATE THE FARM AND DULL IOWA!

## The Wedding Dance

When we visited the Delaneys they invited us to attend a wedding dance the following Saturday. They said they would pick us up at 7:30. On the way home I asked Larry who was getting married? He replied Leo Manning and Dorothy Keenan. I said, "When did we get the invitation to the wedding?"

Larry answered, "We didn't. We aren't invited to the wedding."

I said, "Well, I never went anywhere I wasn't invited. I never crashed a party in my life."

Larry said, "Everyone who wants to go gives a donation to help pay for the band. This is Iowa, not Pennsylvania."

The night of the dance I dressed carefully in a black and white taffeta skirt. It had streaks of gold on it and the bodice was black velvet. I wore gold sandals, jewelry, and carried a gold evening bag. Larry wore the navy suit I made him buy for our wedding. (Poor guy, I had made him buy another suit for a New Year's Eve party.)

Evelyn was dressed in a print cotton skirt and white blouse. Jimmy wore an old-fashioned suit. Upon our arrival at the dance I noticed that the building's name was City Hall. Larry and Jimmy both put \$1.00 in the donation box. The man in charge dipped a stamp into an ink pad and made a mark on the back of Larry's, Jimmy's and Evelyn's hands. When he reached for my hand, I put it behind my back saying, "No, I don't want that ink on my hand."



Larry said, "It's customary out here. If we want to leave the hall to go for a walk or get a drink, we just show the mark to the doorman and we won't have to pay again."

Finally, I reluctantly put my hand out and I think the man had the idea of how I felt because he said, "It's okay, Larry. I know she's with you."

A lot of people and kids were already in the hall. Larry said, "Oh! I feel terrible we didn't bring Jacquie. We won't leave her at home again." I danced with Larry and Jimmy and other friends of Larry's. One old man, Henry Wagner, was very well mannered and danced the waltz beautifully. Larry's good friend, Tom Marley, was awfully hard to follow. By the time I figured he would go one, two, three, hop, he would put in an extra hop. Every time I saw him coming toward me I would grab Larry and say, "Here comes Tom. Dance with me." Larry wasn't much of a dancer either. But, I could push him around. (Everyone was surprised to see him out on the floor.)

Another man said, "I was really afraid to ask you to dance." I said, "For heaven's sake, why?" He said, "Well, you did dance on the stage." That was how I learned that rumor had it I was a Night Club Entertainer.

During intermission everyone went outside to the cars. A bottle of whiskey was passed around. I pretended to sip, hiding the neck of the bottle with my hands, but I never put that bottle in my mouth. I just couldn't. Germs, you know! When we came back into the hall I was standing with Evelyn. Suddenly she grabbed my arm and whispered as she pointed to where Larry was standing. A nice looking woman had her hand on Larry's arm and was smiling and talking to him.

Evelyn said, "That's Zita. Larry dated her but then she married, and has a lot of kids and her husband is a drunk." Then she continued, "I bet she is sorry she didn't get Larry."

I said, "Oh!"

Evelyn volunteered this advice, "I'd get over there real quick if she was hanging on my husband."

I said, "Oh! Really! If Larry wanted her, he wouldn't have come 1000 miles to find me." Evelyn just stared at me. I had burst her bubble of trying to stir up trouble.

After the dance the Delaney's said, "Where shall we eat?" I said, "Don't

ask me. I haven't been anywhere." Larry said to Evelyn, "You choose." "Clancy's," Evelyn said. "It's the best place." "O.K." said Jimmy.

We drove down to this white storefront near the river with a crudely painted sign, "Clancy's."

I thought, "My goodness, it doesn't look very fancy. Certainly not a Stouffers. Oh, well, I think maybe it's better inside." Remember what Daddy used to say, "Never judge a book by its cover." Once we went through the door, I saw a lunchroom. Six booths and eight stools. A thin grey-haired man in a soiled white apron approached the booth and asked, "What will you have?"

Larry said, "Mr. Clancy, this is my wife, Alice."

Mr. Clancy replied, "Yes, I heard you was married. Guess I read it in the *Journal* that you had gone east and married. It's nice to meet you, Mrs. McGovern."

I was thirsty so I immediately said, "A nice cold Tom Collins." It had been hot and stuffy in the hall and I wasn't drinking as the others.

Mr. Clancy said, "I'm sorry Miss. In Iowa, we aren't allowed to serve mixed drinks." I couldn't believe my ears. Iowa was really backwards. In Pennsylvania we could get cocktails before my Prom in 1935. I just said, "Could you bring me a tall glass of lemonade?"

Evelyn questioned, "No beer?"

I replied, "Beer? Ugh!" I have never tasted beer in my life. It has such a nasty odor, it smells sour and rotten. I have never lifted one closer than six or eight inches from my sensitive nose. Later, Larry told me that Mr. Clancy was a bootlegger and would probably have been happy to have me sample his special blend. But, the law was the law. We all ordered steaks and hash brown potatoes. The steaks were cooked in butter with a pat of butter on the top. It was delicious but always seemed a little too greasy for my city taste.

Sundays are the loneliest days of the week when you are 1000 miles from home and all your family and friends. The day after the dance I needed to gripe about something so I picked on Iowa. I resented not being able to get a good tasting mixed drink. I said, "Iowa was stupid for not having the revenue that whisky sales would generate." I went on and on. Grandma

and Grandpa listened. Their teeth literally clicked and chattered over Larry's depraved wife. As I think back, I delighted in shocking the old folks. They didn't like me anyway. Let them think the worst.

## Trunks

The dinner dishes finished, I looked out the kitchen door. The yard was a mess with Winter rubbish around the fence and tree branches and twigs all over the place. I really should get busy. As I stood there, the warm sultry breeze of Spring beckoned to me to come outdoors. It did not encourage me to work in the yard. Instead, it lured me away from the house to enjoy the beautiful day.

The barnyard had dried up and there was only an occasional puddle. I decided to go for the mail. It was a mile walk and maybe I'd go a little farther. Larry usually went for the mail but he would be pleasantly surprised if I got it because he would be tired after his long day in the field.

It was a beautiful day; unusually warm. Sixty eight degrees after a cold, wet Spring. I threw on a jacket and the first thing I noticed was a clump of purple violets peeking out of the mud in the flower bed. Hard to believe that these violets and Lily of the Valley had survived the big snow last week. The drabness of Winter was disappearing and Spring was here in all her glory. The grass had turned green overnight. The budding of the trees promised leaves in various shades of green.

Two fat robins, who had probably wintered in Florida, and a flock of sparrows flew out of the barn. Just then my attention was caught by a mother cat and three little kittens peeking out of the barn door. They slowly crept toward a sparrow sitting in the sun on a rock. They thought to surprise and catch it. This sparrow knew all about cats, no doubt from previous experience. It sat there preening itself, teasing them until they got to springing distance. Then it flew away and perched on a high tree limb.

The glorious beauty of Spring in the country fascinated me. Never had I experienced the splendid renewal that Mother Nature brought to

plants, trees, and flowers. There were no longer fuzzy, brown caterpillars crawling around the house, but tiny colorful butterflies.

Feeling almost giddy with excitement, I reveled in the joy of Spring. I skipped along down the hill toward the creek. I picked up rocks; no two alike. I stopped quickly as I spotted and heard the gobbling of turkeys. There were thirteen of them who came to the creek for a drink. What a fantastic sight. Thirteen wild turkeys! Just then I heard a feeble gobble, gobble. I looked up the lane to see a pure white Albino turkey struggling and weaving down the lane to the creek. It must have been blind because it ran into the fence several times. The flock of turkeys returned up the lane as the Albino continued to drink. It looked very thin as it struggled to find it's way back to the woods.

I crossed the creek, decided I was too warm, so I hung my jacket on the fence post, and continued up the road between two unplowed corn fields, to the top gate. This gate was much heavier than the one at the creek. I managed to get it open and discovered some tiny pussy willow shoots coming up. I crossed the old gravel road to our mailbox. The mail contained a sports magazine, REC bill, and a letter from my sister. I almost lost the pale creamy post card that slipped out to the ground. It notified me that my trunks had arrived.

"Oh! Oh! My trunks!"

I started running toward Larry in the field. Finally I had to stop because of the ruts. As I picked my steps I wondered what I had packed. I remembered packing them. What was in them? I couldn't bring everything. I had given so many things to my sister and my friends. Oh! I couldn't wait to go to town and get them. When I got out to Larry I shouted, "My trunks are here! Come on! We have to go to town to pick them up." Larry said, "Not now Honey. I have to finish this field before it rains. I promise you we will go the first thing in the morning."

I learned that day that only the crops were important to a farmer. It was still a beautiful day but I felt no joy in my heart. Only a sense of being a prisoner on this damn farm. I truly hated Iowa.

The next morning, 8:00 a.m. found me all dressed to leave for town as soon as Larry finished milking the cows. We had to make two trips since

there were three trunks and Larry didn't have a truck.

It seemed a long time since I had them shipped from Pittsburgh. I was anxious to get some of my good pans to work with. Most of the pans at the farm were very thin, cheap aluminum. Quite a few of them had holes in them that had been mended. I had a lot of good household things, including two pressure cookers. These were in the first trunk I unpacked, along with my chest of silver, silver trays and sugar and creamer. My China and Crystal was cushioned with blankets, sheets, towels and bedspreads. They were so beautiful. Here at the farm everything was so colorless, drab and ordinary. I was determined to make the farm over. I dreamed of entertaining graciously like my family did.

The second trunk was filled with clothes. Pretty colorful dresses and shorts, lovely cocktail dresses, pretty suits and lacy blouses, and seventeen pairs of shoes. Lots of summer play clothes for Jacquie, and her seven dance costumes trimmed in sequins and rhinestones. Her Tap shoes and pink and black ballet shoes wouldn't be much good in soupy March mud.

The last trunk was filled with her dollhouse and her collection of 57 storybook dolls. There was no place for her dollhouse to be set; nothing to display her dolls. Poor kid eventually outgrew the doll house and other toys that were never unpacked. When we moved to town I obtained an antique china closet for the dolls. Her doll house was sold but she now has her doll collection exhibited in two china closets in her own home.

The trunks now reside on a shelf in the garage on the farm.

## Milking a Cow

It was a long day. Boredom and homesickness were giving Jacquie and me the doldrums. To kill time in the morning we had moved everything off the stairway and the chairs. We dusted under all the odds and ends on the table. We longed to toss out the year old newspapers and take the cluttered look away.

However, like the good little girls we were, we stacked the papers back on the chairs and tried to remember which step held the shoestrings,

tobacco cans, cough drops, and other unnecessary clutter. For that's the way it was. We could dust and clean but put everything back. The old linoleum in the kitchen was clean but not shining. There were always a couple of slivers of wood slipping out of the wood pile by the stove. It was an exercise in futility.

Dinner was over and the dishes were done. Now the long afternoon stretched before us. We thought about exploring the path into the woods but Larry had warned us about the bull, snakes, and the chance of getting lost.

We went in the opposite direction, wandering down to the creek. We skipped pebbles across the water. We crossed the creek and wandered aimlessly up toward the road where we collected the mail. It was only the *Des Moines Register* and some circulars. No letters today.

Oh! Well! We might as well climb the hill up to the house. We had been successful avoiding the mud, and puddles on the way out but now Jacquie wailed, "I looked at a butterfly and now my shoes are muddy." Looked like mud mixed with manure to me. Larry and Grandpa had gone to Kate's farm after dinner so they had the car. We couldn't even go for a ride. Grandma was up in her room. How were we going to kill time, and how could I amuse Jacquie? We got out the cards but after a few hands of Canasta, gave that up. We sat there staring at each other like bumps on a log.

Jacquie said, "I miss everyone, especially Grandma Westcott."

I answered, "I do, too, Honey. That's it. I'll make you some of her Chocolate Peanut Butter Fudge, and why don't you write her a letter?"

"Okay Mom." As an afterthought she said, "You write to everyone else. Why aren't you writing her?"

"Oh! I will someday but not today!" I never wanted to tell her that Nora had threatened a custody suit when I decided to marry Larry. I could hardly believe it myself. We had been good friends for all my nine years of being her son's widow. I had taken Jacquie out there staying several weeks nursing her through two heart attacks. I was hurt.

Soon the fudge was beaten to a smooth, creamy candy but after all the testing, and licking the pan, we had enough of it's sweetness and put it into

the fridge for later. Larry dearly loved all my homemade candies. It was almost 3:30, time to bathe and get cleaned up for supper.

Soon it was chore time but Larry and Grandpa were nowhere in sight. I suddenly had a brainstorm. "Maybe we should try and learn to help out around here," I said to Jacquie.

Jacquie clapped her hands as we opened the yard gate and started toward the barn. Jacquie said, "Okay Mom. What should we do?"

I replied, "I don't know. Maybe we should try and milk a cow."

"Milk a cow," she exclaimed. "But Mom, you are afraid of cows!"

"Yes, I know but I can try. It can't be too difficult." My motto has always been, "Anything you can do, I can do better," as I thought of all the farm women who milked every day.

There were 18 cows gathered around the barn door. Chewing their cud and patiently waiting to be milked. Gathering up my courage I bravely went between them with a bravado I was forcing myself to feel. These huge beasts actually moved aside to let me go through the barn door, and then followed us inside. Jacquie hugged me and said, "I'm proud of you, Mom. I know how afraid you were."

Jacquie asked, "Which one are we going to milk?" I replied, "I don't know. You are always out here with Grandpa or Larry. Which one would you pick?"

Jacquie pointed to a big old cow with an enormous bag hanging between her legs saying, "That's Sally. Grandpa says she is a nice old girl. She won't hurt us." Grandpa always pats her on the head and speaks to her gently. "Hi! Sally!"

I forced myself to relax and pat Sally. I was scared to death. When we got up near the group of cows, I hesitated. I really had no idea what to do. I had never watched them milk since I was always busy cooking supper when they milked. I asked myself, "Does the milk come out automatically into a bucket?" And answered myself, "No, silly, think of pictures you have seen. Cows are too stupid to do that. This isn't such a good idea, but Jacquie is so excited."

First, you have to sit on this stool. It had only one leg. She handed me a bright clean and shiny bucket. I put the bucket down under Sally, who

politely moved away a couple of feet as I was positioning myself on the stool. It was hard to keep my balance, and now I had to get up and move close to her once more. I sat on the stool and forced my hand to touch this old fat cow. Nothing came out.

Jacquie said, "You have to get much closer and squeeze her tit."

Just as I had her tit in my hand, her tail swished over my head, causing me to lose my balance and fall off the stool. Ugh! There are cobwebs in my hair. I got up, brushing off my shorts and hair. Sally mooed in protest as I sat down on the stool. I'm not a quitter, Old Girl. You are going to be milked by me if it's the last thing I ever do. I grabbed her tit and squeezed, not too gently. She mooed and stood still and the milk started to come in a steady stream. But, not into the bucket... into my eyes, onto the floor, everywhere but into the bucket. I tried to hold the bucket with one hand and squeeze with the other. That didn't work. The bucket slipped and milk filled my shoes.

Disgustedly, I got up. Jacquie said, "Let me try. I saw Grandpa hold the bucket on his lap between his knees." I surrendered the stool and bucket to her. She would probably do a better job than I could. She found out that keeping her balance wasn't as easy as she imagined. Some of the milk went into the bucket and she was jubilant.

A swallow swooped through the barn window. It startled Jacquie and the bucket slipped. The puddle of milk got bigger and the old mother cat led her kittens under old Sally's legs and began to slurp up the fresh warm milk.

We had been taking turns and working for almost an hour when we heard a car pull up outside. We heard Grandma frantically call to Larry, "Thank God you're home. I don't know where Alice and Jacquie are! The fire is out in the stove and there is no supper started." When she got her breath she continued, "Maybe they went up into the woods. Maybe they are hurt," she screamed excitedly.

I called out, "We are here in the barn. We decided to help with the milking and surprise you." Larry came into the barn and asked, "Well, what have we here? A couple of real Milk Maids and milk everywhere. The milk had squirted into our hair and eyes and was dripping from our noses. Our

fresh white shorts were literally making big puddles of milk where we stood.

What really surprised us was when he asked, "Where did you put the other bucket? We looked at our bucket with about three inches and said, "This is all there is." It seems like old Sally didn't give much milk today and she had been milked dry.

Grandpa said quietly, "Old Sally usually gives one and one half buckets every morning and night. You didn't even get a quarter of a bucket."

Larry just laughed and said, "My city gals certainly had their milk baths today."

What a mess we were and we didn't help at all.

## Bread

Every Tuesday was washday. Mondays were beautiful but we went to the doctor on Monday. Tuesday it rained. The wringer type washer in the kitchen was pushed out on the porch by Larry or Grandpa. Then buckets of hot water from the kitchen sink were dumped in the machine. I would wash their underwear, Grandma's pajamas, gloves and finally their overalls. We rinsed in cold water that was set up in an old galvanized tub beside the washer.

Grandma wore pajamas and white undertaker gloves since she had a horrible affliction, a skin disease that covered her body left her no nails on her fingers. Rain or shine, the clothes were hung out on the line strung between the trees.

Although the doctors assured us that this skin disease was not contagious, I was terrified of Jacquie or myself catching this disease. The diagnosis was Psoriasis or Jungle Rot (her son, James had sent back souvenir after World War II.) Another diagnosis was Allergies. You can imagine my anxiety as I put this poor old lady in the tubs of oatmeal water every day to help remove the hard yellow puss scabs. For this reason I would wait for a good day and wash our things by hand.

Because of the allergy problem I cooked special meals for her eliminating flour, which is even found in ice cream.

I cooked good regular meals for the rest of the family. I baked fancy desserts, pies, and cakes, but when men were helping Larry, she would apologize saying, "It isn't the way I cooked but we only have Alice to get meals ready," and would shrug her shoulders as if the meal wasn't fit for a pig. A bachelor, Tom Marley said, "He had never had such a good dinner," but still she apologized.

I slammed a pink and white concoction of strawberry, rhubarb, and angel food cake on the table and said, "Enough! Enough!" Larry and Grandpa looked at her as I rushed out the door crying, "I've had it."

The barn yard was a sea of mud or I would have gone up to the woods. No where to vent my anger so I paced the yard, around and around the house screaming at the top of my voice, letting out my frustration. The cows sleeping in the midday quiet under the trees, got up and, glancing at me for disturbing their nap, they slowly ambled away.

In my heart I knew I better avoid this pitiful jealous old lady, or I would not be able to control myself. It would only hurt Larry and cause trouble, so I sat on the front steps. When I finally settled down I went in to find that Larry, Tom and Grandpa had everything put away and were finishing up the pots and pans.

Larry said, "Take the car and go in and call your sister, and bring some lunch meat for supper and ice cream, so you won't have to cook tonight." What Grandma never seemed to realize was that she hurt Larry when she criticized me.

Grandpa said, "Here's a couple of bucks. Go on over to Waukon and look around the stores, and have a sundae. They were so gentle and kind. I really felt sorry I had exploded. Grandpa must have said something to Grandma, because she never apologized again. Next she started talking about how much they all loved homemade bread. Perhaps this was the way to break this hostility between us.

I made up my mind that I would make bread to win her approval. It wasn't easy, but I have never had a defeatist attitude. Always thinking, "Anything you can do, I can do better."

My recipe said to put the dough in a warm place to rise. I put it on the top shelf of the Great White Monster. It raised a little but the bottom of the dough fried and got hard. The next batch wouldn't stick together and had a tough ribbon in the center. The dogs and cats feasted on it.

The next day was Saturday. Since there was no phone at the farm I was virtually isolated from friends and family. So on Saturdays, I would go to the Corner Cafe with \$10.00 in change and call home. Oh! those conversations were real tear jeerers. My Aunt and Uncle said, "Come back, we will send you a blank check. We will arrange for an annulment."

My Daddy said, "Larry isn't a villain. I know he loves you and Jacquie. He lived on that farm all his life and doesn't see anything wrong. Come home for a month and see how you really feel about him and country life." My sister questioned, "Does he abuse you?" My brother bellowed, "If he lays a hand on you, I'll kill him. Come home Duchess."

In my heart I knew that Larry was good and kind. He would never do anything to hurt me. It was hard for him to see how lonely and unhappy Jacquie and I were. He was caught in the middle. It was hard but I was Catholic, and with God's help, I would get through this awful adjustment.

In the meantime, Grandma and Grandpa adored Jacquie, who was a very loveable child. She followed Larry and Grandpa all over the farm. Jacquie would sit for hours talking with Grandma, showing her schoolwork and drawing her pictures.

One Saturday as I entered the cafe I saw that the telephone booth was occupied. So, I sat down at the counter and mentioned to Rita Garret, owner of the cafe the trouble I was having, and the messes I was making trying to make bread. Rita said, "If you want to learn how to make bread, come in Monday morning and I'll show you how to mix it."

I was there bright and early Monday. This was very important to me. The first thing she did was get out a big roasting pan and rinse it out. She next put in water, salt and sugar. She warmed the shortening and added it to the warm water. Yeast was put into a cup and warm water added to it. She added about 1/2 teaspoon of sugar. She stirred this mixture and set it aside. It raised slowly for a few minutes until it was almost above the cup. Then she put the yeast in the big pan and started to stir in flour. I asked

how much flour she used, since she didn't seem to be measuring.

"Well, I've made bread so much I just add it until it feels right. I usually measure the water, shortening, salt, sugar and yeast, but my best advice is to stir in 1 cup less than your recipe calls for, then add that cup slowly. Sometimes you don't need the full cup, and sometimes you need a little more."

As I watched closely, not wanting to miss any of the procedure, she beat the dough quite thoroughly until it pulled away from the sides of the pan. Then she turned it out onto a floured bread board and sprinkled a little flour on top of the dough, and some on her hands. It was a real surprise to me as she pulled it into a ball, jabbed it, punched it, and beat it with her hands, sprinkling a little more flour on damp spots. Then she repeatedly jabbed, punched, and turning on the board until she was satisfied that it was ready to put in a greased pan to raise.

She now said to me, "Wash your hands. I want you to know how the dough should feel. Dry your hands thoroughly, sprinkle them with flour and now touch the dough and see how firm it feels." We waited about an hour for it to raise and punched it down again and waited until it rose again. Then she rolled it, tucked the ends in and shaped it into a greased loaf pan.

So this was what kneading the dough meant.

The next day I made my first loaf of bread. It was a beautiful golden brown.

Grandma said, "It smells good."

Grandpa came in from outside, sniffing, "It smells so good I can hardly wait to taste it."

I could tell Larry was pleased by his smile. He was proud of my accomplishment.

When it was cool, it was all eaten at one meal, even Jacquie said, "Um, Um, Good."

Through the years I've shown many of my friends what Rita taught me. You don't handle bread dough with kid gloves, you beat and punch the he\_\_ out of it.

## The Garden

Larry said, "It is time to plant the Garden." Now this is something I know all about. Oh! Yes, I know all about gardens. Back when I was much younger, a small child really, I remembered. You put seeds in the ground, you watered them and they grew up big. Oh! Yes, I know all about gardens.

We lived in a pretty home in Jeannette, PA. It set in the middle of three lots. My father was a very busy man. So, we had Mike, an old Italian man who was short, wiry, with dark swarthy skin, who took care of our lawn and garden. I adored Mike, who always worried about me being so pale. Mike built a tree house in the peach tree and showed me how to skin a cat on a bar on the low branches of the apple tree.

Flowers bordered our property. Mike would catch a little rabbit for me and put it in a cage he built under the back porch. I spent hours playing and petting this soft furry bunny. It was a wild rabbit but became tame because I loved it so much. Daddy didn't believe it should be caged so every night he would let the bunny out. The next day I would cry to Mike, "My Bunny is gone."

Mike would say, "I'll find him. Don't worry Princess." He always used Daddy's pet name for me. Sure enough, Mike would catch Bunny for me after lunch. I would bury my face in his soft brown fur, and I think Bunny loved me as much as I loved him because he would appear at the edge of the newly mowed lawn and wait for Mike to pick him up.

Daddy planted a small garden and Mike kept it weeded. A neighbor, Mrs. Peach, gave Daddy gooseberry bushes. Umm, they were so good. We kids picked them all before Mother could get enough for a pie.

Yes, I wasn't dumb when it came to gardens. I had never planted anything but I know you put seeds in the ground, watered them, and they grew. I'll show them I'm no dumbbell.

Larry brought the tractor out of the shed. I wondered what that was for, but I kept quiet. Then he went to the corn crib and hitched on the plow. Then he went into the garden. It was green with sprouting green weeds. As he drove row by row, the earth emerged dark and damp looking. I grabbed the seeds and made my way down to the garden starting to open

a package.

Larry said, "Wait, I have to disk it first." He drove the tractor out the gate and removed the plow and put on big round shiny disks and went back into the garden. The plow had turned the earth over into big wet clumps. Now the disks were breaking up the lumps making it soft and fine, ready to be planted.

Again, I rushed over with the seeds. Larry called, "Not so fast, I have to mark it." Once more he went out the gate.

"Now what!" I called.

He answered, "I have to get the corn planter."

"Corn Planter. Why?"

Larry answered, "You'll see."

Again, he shut off the tractor, removed the disks and put the corn planter on. Then he went all over the garden. Surprise! Surprise! He didn't plant corn, but he made long even rows in the fine soft earth.

Larry said, "Now." I wanted to plant cucumbers, but Larry said, "They will go near the bottom of the garden because they spread all over. We will plant beans in the first row." Larry dug holes about 12 inches apart and told me to put 3 seeds in each hole. Onion sets came next, root side down, about every 3 inches. Lord Above! It was taking forever. Beets, carrots and corn. Oh! Gee, the only think I ever wanted to plant was cucumbers and strawberries. This planting was tiresome.

At last, Larry said, "We will save a couple rows for cabbage and pepper plants, and put the cucumbers down here. He mounded five hills of earth and made little holes in the top of the hill and put four seeds in each. Finally the tomato plants were in and I was exhausted. It had taken all afternoon.

For the next month I watched the garden grow between packing for our trip home to Pittsburgh. Little did I know that Larry would be hoeing and pulling weeds all the next few weeks. As we left for the train on July 8, Larry said, "Everything will be ready in the garden by the time you come home."

Little did I know the beans would have to be weeded while I was gone. Larry hoed potatoes, watered tomatoes, and cucumbers. Grandpa helped between the grass and milking, and he cooked the meals. Larry

was busy haying, so there were extra men to feed. They worked from dawn until dark. It was the worst possible time for my trip home, but they never told me.

I had no time schedule, so after 2 1/2 weeks in Pittsburgh, I took a commuter train from Chicago to my Aunts, in Glenview, Illinois. We had a fun week with my aunt, uncle, and cousins.

We arrived back in Prairie du Chien about 11:30 on August 3rd. As we drove up into the hills, Larry said, "The sweet corn is ready. The garden is great this year."

Oh! Yes! The garden had flourished while we were gone. Larry had picked and Grandpa had already canned 21 qts. of beans. There were tomatoes ripening everywhere and the refrigerator was overflowing with cucumbers.

Arriving at the farm and seeing all that produce made me think I was drowning in vegetables. I just couldn't believe it. What was I supposed to do?

I soon learned the next day. Jacquie and I picked two bushels of beans. Grandpa and Larry showed Jacquie how to take the ends off the beans. I learned how to wash and sterilize jars. I never worked so hard in my life but I wasn't bored. There was a certain satisfaction in seeing those jars of beans lined up on the counter. It was 7 o'clock and I breathed a sigh of relief as I gave them a cold supper.

All of a sudden I remembered the tomatoes and cucumbers. I panicked and started to cry. Larry and Grandpa were milking. Grandma took pity on me and putting her arms over my shoulder said, "I'll tell you what to do," and helped me find her recipes. As I leafed through them she said, "Tomorrow is another day. You did enough today. You'll learn."

I had to.

And so began a city gals experience with gardening and love affair with canning and freezing.

## The Trip

On July 8, 1953, Larry took us to the train in Prairie du Chien, WI. I was very glad to be on my way back to the world, the city, my real home. I knew I would miss Larry, but was anticipating seeing Daddy, my brother, sister and all my friends.

From Prairie to Chicago we sat in the Club Car sipping Cokes and eating sandwiches. We spurned the lunch Larry and his parents insisted we pack into a brown paper sack to save us money. From the Zephr's windows we saw a lot of small towns and creeks. At last we were on our way.

Soon we were going through suburbs with pretty houses. As we got closer to Chicago, we saw the ugly back alleys and dilapidated buildings of the city. There were beautiful skyscrapers in the distance. As the train crept into the station we observed many tracks with passenger trains headed for other destinations. Freight trains were seen on other tracks. Here beside the tracks everything had a fine overlay of coal dust. The Commuter trains were on all sides waiting for the evening rush of Passengers.

In Chicago we arrived into chaos. Mail bags piled everywhere. We had read in the Des Moines Register about the mail strike but until you were actually in the middle of all those sacks, it meant nothing to us. Noisy, angry voices shouting obscenities surrounded us.

We struggled with our suitcases down the long platform toward Union Station. It was a slow process with some slow passengers and others pushing and shoving past in their hurry to make other trains, and some just being rude and uncaring if they bumped an older person walking with a cane. An unconscious thought crossed my mind, "That wouldn't happen in Lansing."

Once we emerged into Union Station we were surrounded by commuters. Tired-looking shoppers in low-heeled oxfords and ruffled dresses. They were hurrying home to make supper for husbands and kids. It wasn't quite the end of the business day but there were a lot of young men in their grey flannel suits and briefcases hurrying in all directions and secretaries in smart suits and dresses stepping along in high spike heels. It



was difficult getting through the crowd but finally we found a stack of lockers and put our heavy overnight bags in one, dropped in a quarter, and extracted a key. Now we were free for 2 1/2 hours to go up to town and our bags would be safe until we came back. We had 2 1/2 hours in Chicago between trains.

Oh! Thank Goodness! We had eaten on the train. Look how crowded the restaurant was. After checking our bags, we hurried outside and caught a cab to Marshall Fields. We could have walked, but wanted all the time for shopping. The store windows were beautiful; filled with models displaying darling sun-dresses and summer playclothes, flowers and lawn furniture. As we rushed from counter to counter I wished we had time for trying on clothes. I told Jacquie, "Kaufman's and Gimbels in Pittsburgh will have lots of pretty things, too. We will buy lots of nice things when we have more time." Checking my watch I realized we had only 1/2 hour until the Broadway Limited would pull out.

I said, "Come on Jacquie, we will have to skip Carson, Pirie and Scott this time. We will go there on the way back." Luck had it we shared a cab with another Passenger going to Union Station.

At last we were on the Broadway Limited on our way to Pittsburgh. It would be a long ride. 12 1/4 hours, so we settled down with books and puzzles.

As we crossed Indiana we decided it was time to eat. Again we ignored the Brown Bag and off we went to the Dining Car. This was the way I liked to live. Colored waiters, polite and helpful, serving a nice (not necessarily delicious) dinner. There was a single red rose in a bud vase on all the tables. The china was lovely. All hot dishes served with silver covers. At the end of the meal the waiter brought finger bowls and small white linen towels. Other passengers were surprised to see Jacquie correctly using the finger bowls. Little did they know we had traveled since she was three months old and she was well trained in table manners.

At Fort Wayne, Indiana we put our watches ahead an hour going onto Eastern Daylight Time. About midnight, we hungrily devoured the sandwiches, cookies and bananas from the Brown Paper Bag. They sure tasted good. We slept until the Porter woke us in time to freshen up before

we arrived in Pittsburgh.

As we approached Sewickly, the glow of the Steel Mills filled the sky. It thrilled me and I kept repeating over and over, "I'm home. I'm home." None of my family ever worked in the mills but everyone in Pittsburgh lived in the red glowing reflection in the sky.

We stepped off the train into the waiting arms of my father. He was an Official of the Railroad and so allowed out on the platform. We chattered with joy while we waited to collect our bags at the checkroom. My sister, Peg, was waiting with Bill in the car since they couldn't find a parking place. Horns honked and drivers yelled as we hugged and kissed in the middle of the street. It was dangerous, wonderful, and exciting, seeing the multitude of bright colorful lights was just great. We drove to my sisters home expecting to raid the refrigerator but her five kids had set the table and we all had a joyous reunion until we toddled off to bed about 5:00 a.m. and Daddy left to go to 5:30 Mass.

The next day we watched Jacquie running in and out with her cousins. The phone rang constantly. There was no phone at the farm and I loved the noisy ringing and hearing the welcome voices of my friends.

## Friends

So many called that Peg finally got a tablet and I made a day by day schedul—Brunches, Cocktails, and Dinner invitations. Oh! This was living...busy, busy! Jack's brother, Bill, called. He and Rosie wanted me to come for the weekend. Bob and Helen called and they had a party planned, hoping that Jack's mother and step-father would come and we could make peace. She had been so bitter that I had married again. Jack's father and his wife took us out for dinner and to the theatre. One friend invited us for lunch.

Connie was a very flighty redhead, beautiful and spoiled by being raised by her mother and two old maid aunts. She never had to do anything except buy lovely clothes and go to parties. She wasn't much of a cook.

However, I had been eating so much that I refused breakfast and went to Connies. Lunch wasn't ready but Connie served wine and after the third glass I realized that I was getting tipsy. Connie then said Tony was coming home early and we would wait for him. When he came in about 3 o'clock, his voice sounded away over there. I felt like I was watching from outside myself, seeing someone else talking. Four months of drinking nothing stronger than a Coca-Cola made the wine on an empty stomach make me drunk.

No wonder we waited, It was Tony who served lunch. Connie was a guest same as me. Tony told me that the night before he asked Connie to come down into the basement and talk to him while he washed his work clothes. She answered, "It's the strangest thing, Tony, I don't hear a word you say on Friday nights," and cuddled up on the couch with a good book and a box of chocolates. Tony was rather short with her and she laughed and said he is mad. He had spent all day Saturday cleaning the stove, and Sunday she had let the soup he had prepared boil over while he was out cleaning up the yard. He was a sweet guy and adored Connie.

Last I heard, she met a handsome Baptist minister and really got religion and left Tony. In spite of all that I knew about her, I really enjoyed being with her. She was selfish, different, flaky, and beautiful...lots of fun to be with.

## *Reunion - Classmates, 1953*

It was only 18 years since I had graduated from Holy Rosary, but I longed to see everyone. Mary Enright had a Sunday afternoon luncheon for six of my classmates present. I expressed an interest in hearing news of others and Mary, being in one of her happy moods, said, "I'll call the Fairfax Hotel and see if they have a private room on Tuesday night before you leave on Wednesday. Marcella said, "I have to go home but I'll make a list of girls to call from there." Mary Jane said, "I'll look up phone numbers." My sister-in-law said, "Bill is here. I have to go but I'll call the first five names on the

list." Dorothy O'Neill said, "I'll see Janet and Catherine at the hospital tomorrow and tell them."

Everyone entered into the fun of planning the party. It was hard to believe that Tuesday night 37 classmates came in from as far as 100 miles for a gala evening. Mary Enright (Executive Secretary to First Vice-President of Carnegie Steel Co.) had her assistants round up favors for everyone. It was surprising that so many friends responded to the call, "Alice Stalter Simmons McGovern is in town from Iowa and wanted a reunion. There will be a dinner at 6:30 at the Fairfax Tuesday. Hope you can come join us. Price is \$3.50."

Frances Conroy, a pretty brunette was now a snow white-haired mother of ten children. They called about 10:00 and told her their house was on fire. We hurriedly called for a taxi when the second call came from her husband saying the kids were playing a trick on her.

One other incident I recall, I was talking to Dorothy Dodson when I noticed a cord on her shoulder. Without looking closer, I grabbed it and realized it wasn't an ordinary cord, but attached to her hearing aid. I apologized but she laughed and said, "It is great hearing and understanding us, but she turned it off when her kids started fighting."

The next morning we were on our way back to Iowa. This time we arrived in the daytime and as we wound our way up the hill from Marquette Jacquie whispered, "Oh, I'm glad we don't live in Chicago (where my brother-in-law lived and we had just left.) It is so dirty, look at all the beautiful trees." She tried to tell Larry everything at once and finally said, "Oh! Larry, I missed you." Larry smiled and said, "I missed both of you, too."

## *Apartment in Town*

Returning from Pennsylvania, we heard that Wexford School was closing and Jacquie would be attending school in town. Grandma said, "Millie boarded in town to go to high school, and I'm sure Jacquie can too."

I said, "Oh, no, I could have sent her to boarding school in Switzerland if I had married Rod. Oh! No! I am raising my daughter. We will move into town."

Larry agreed, and we moved into a 1 1/2 room apartment at Fern Wendell's. It was shabbily furnished with a bed, chest of drawers, and a broken down old couch that Jacquie slept on. Larry would bring us in on Sunday night, stay overnight, and go back to the farm until Wednesdays, and again on Friday. We would go to the farm on weekends. I would wash their clothes and clean house for the old folks. I did the best to please everyone.

Larry drove the car, but he never owned a car. Shortly after Christmas Grandpa said, "The car is going to town too often. It was nonsense to think Larry needed to come in on Wednesdays to be with us." Larry became very angry. He came in, told me to get ready, we would go to Chicago to buy a new car. We left Jacquie with Mary Manton and her girls. We took the Zephr to Chicago to his sister's home. His friend, Net O'Neill drove us around and we bought a new 1953 Chevy. Since it was last year's model, he made a good deal since he paid cash.

A late snow in April made the hills great for sledding. We took Rosemary Spinner, Jacquie's friend, out to the farm for the weekend. Jacquie needed a playmate. They went sledding and the sled stopped on a patch of grass and Jacquie didn't. She broke off a front tooth. She was hysterical and screamed, "I don't want to get false teeth." Grandma got very nervous, blaming Rosemary. After we returned to town, Grandma complained to Larry that we had no right to bring anyone into her home. Larry had it with all their criticism. He went to Vernon Peters to find us an apartment. Jacquie had all her classmates praying that we would find a nice apartment in town.

Mrs. Englehorn showed us their second floor apartment but said another person was interested in renting it, so she would have to let us know in a couple days. I think she had to check on us financially. The call came for us to come and sign a lease.

We moved our bedroom furniture in and bought our living room furniture in La Crosse. It was Chartreuse and I loved it. We also bought our

refrigerator and stove. Our table was a black formica tweed top with black wrought iron legs. The chairs were upholstered with red plastic tweed cushions and backs. It was gorgeous. The most expensive and modern in the store. Larry had bought me a sewing machine earlier and I made beautiful drapes for the living room...a white background with an Oriental Design in red, green and chartreuse. We went to Prairie du Chien and bought our two step tables and gold and cream colored lamps.

I was so happy to be among the living again and Jacquie was only a block from school. We could walk across the street to the Beauty Shop and Lansing Movie Theatre. Larry came home from the farm every night. It was hard on Larry, seeing all that cash flowing from his bank account in just a couple of months. Harold and Viette were good landlords and we enjoyed our seven years as their tenants. We had a nice life. Jacquie had lots of playmates and I made friends.

Msgr. Scharphoff picked me to be president of the Women's League and then recommended me to be Deanery President. Later my name was approved by Archbishop Byrne to be First Vice-President of the Dubuque Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women. This kept me busy and happy. I went to the National Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada and spoke at the Organization & Development Workshop.

One day I received a letter from Jack's brother, Bill Simmons. His family would visit us. I knew they wanted to check and see how Larry and Jacquie got along. We had a lot of fun. Millie and Leo Stirn took us out to the Sand Bar on their houseboat where the kids enjoyed swimming. At the end of the visit, Bill hugged me and said, "Little Sister, Larry is a great guy. I think you did right thing, when you married him. He will take good care of you and Jacquie. Even though Jack is with the Good Lord, in heaven, you will always be part of our family, My Little Sister."

## Bowling

Because I was the first-born child of very loving parents, I enjoyed a close relationship with my Daddy—while Mother was busy with my sister and brother. My father and his bowling team were of championship calibre, winning beautiful trophies in many tournaments. I finally coaxed Daddy to take me bowling when I was eight years old.

As we entered the brightly lighted alley I smelled smoke and wax. I heard laughter of men and women who were having a good time. I heard the Bump, Bump, Bang and Boom of pins being knocked down. I heard clapping—someone yelled "Good boy!" Someone sighed, "Oh! A split." Someone else shouted "Watch out, careful, you have a sleeper." Team mates grabbed each other, pounding on their backs—giggling and laughing. "Just in time, a turkey...you saved, us great shot. We won, we won!"

Oh! The excitement of it all made me dance in anticipation. One man said, "Hi Doc." Doc was Daddy's nickname. Another woman questions, "Is this the Princess—your little girl you're always talking about?" Another girl said, "Are you going to be a champion bowler too, Honey?" I shouted, "Yes." As we approached the counter, the man behind it said, "No shoes small enough, Doc—she will have to bowl in her socks." I took off my shoes and everyone looked for a light ball for me to use. I was bouncing from lane to lane until Daddy said, "Get over here and stay put. You can't go on anyone else's lane." Then he said, "Here's your ball. Hold up your hands."

"Oh!" I said, "It's so heavy!"

"Careful, don't drop it," Dad said. "Now here's what to do."

"I know, I know," I laughed, "it's easy," and didn't pay any attention to his instructions. I threw the ball. It slowly bumped—bumped down the lane about three feet and limped into the right gutter and none of the pins went over. I quickly grabbed another bigger ball right away. This one veered off the the left gutter right away.

"Oh!" I cried. I was so disappointed. The pin boy laughed. Daddy tried to console me saying, "There, there, Princess. Listen and watch me."

His ball went swiftly down the right side, turned toward the center

and scattered the pins with a loud bang, making a strike.

Once again I picked up the ball and threw it to hit the pins.

Again the pin boys laughed, sitting on their perch—they didn't have any pins to pick up.

A tall dark-haired man sauntered over to us. He said, "Hi, Doc! Having a little trouble? Maybe I can help."

"Well, maybe you can, Pete. I'm not getting through to her."

Dad said, "Honey, this is Pete. He's a Pro and the best bowling coach I know. Do whatever he tells you."

Pete said, "Doc why don't you go back and get a beer. Alice and I will get along just fine."

"O.K. Daddy!" I answered.

Pete said, "Come up here." He pointed to a line. "See this line. It is called a Foul Line. You must never go over the foul line. Now walk back three long steps and stop."

I did as he told me and then Pete made a chalk line where I was standing, right beside my right foot. Pete said, "Turn around, put your foot on that line. Now we practice—watch me. See how I walk up to the line. I'm pretending I have the ball in my hand. I hold the ball with both hands...on the second step I let go of the ball with my left hand and on the third step we throw the ball toward a spot, the second spot on the right side."

We practiced this without the ball for ten times. Now Pete tells me, "Go to the rack and pick up your ball, come back to the chalk line." I looked up and saw Daddy and waved. "Forget Daddy," Pete said. "Listen and think what I tell you." He took my right hand and spread my fingers over the ball. He made my three center fingers go under the ball. "Now do what I told you," telling me the correct way as I got ready to throw the ball.

I started. "Pick up the ball from the rack, with both hands, go to the chalk line, put your fingers of the right hand under the ball, look at the second spot, get ready to throw your ball at the second spot."

Pete says, "Remember to throw the ball on the third step."

Alright, time to do it. I threw the ball and this time I was thrilled to see two pins fall over. Pete said, "Good girl!"

Pete kept changing where I should stand and then he adjusted the spot my ball should hit according to the way my ball came in. I finally knocked down eight pins when Daddy asked Pete if he would help me again.

I became very serious and listened intently to all of Pete's instructions and after four lessons was making an occasional strike or spare. Pete had coached me well the right way to bowl duck pins.

I loved the game. I bowled in Pennsylvania—we bowled with a small ball with no finger holes and small pins. For twenty-seven years I bowled on various leagues.

I was invited to join the Lansing Interstate team when I moved into town from the farm. We took turns driving to Waukon. The first night, I could hardly believe my eyes or lift that big ball. Only men bowled ten pins in Pennsylvania. I had no idea how to handle that big ball...no idea which fingers went into the holes. Horrors! My first game was only sixty two. What would these new friends think. I felt like crying. It took me about a month before I hit a hundred. My team-mates were very patient. They encouraged me through many bad weeks when my ball hit the gutter so often that I blushed with shame.

## *Bowling Comes to Lansing*

The summer of 1974 we heard that the old City Hall was sold to Maggie and Kenny Strub. Rumor had it that the Strubs were going to use it for a Bowling Alley. Oh! This would be great, no longer would we have to travel to Waukon for our fun. All summer we watched the contractors changing the dance floor and basketball court into an eight-lane bowling alley.

There would be women's team leagues on Tuesdays, Wednesday afternoons, and Thursdays. Since I was busy with the Tops Club on Thursdays, Mary Hawes and I decided to form a new team. We recruited five other Wexford ladies to form our team. Maggie called a meeting to

organize the Lansing Women's Bowling Association and to elect officers. In Waukon I had pretended that I couldn't keep score because every organization I joined elected me into office and I had enough offices. I didn't want my bowling spoiled. I just wanted to enjoy myself with no responsibility.

But here in Lansing I was quickly elected President. I didn't refuse because I liked Maggie and wanted the lanes to be successful. Besides, the president's duties were to conduct two meetings a year and co-sign checks. Jeanne Neilson was elected Secretary-Treasurer and her salary would be \$50.00 a year because she would have to do all the work. Jeanne had no idea what to do so I was kept busy coaching her. After three weeks of coaching Jeanne decided to divorce her husband and leave town. This caused me some problems. I had two options: elect and train a new Secretary-Treasurer or elect a new President, and take over the Secretary's job. The second option seemed the lesser of two evils.

One hundred eighty six women were signed with sanctions for membership in the Lansing Women's Bowling Association, Iowa Women's Bowling Association, and Women's International Bowling Association. These memberships guaranteed that our women were eligible to enter tournaments and bowling on local, state, and international levels. There were bowlers from Waukon, New Albin, LaCrosse and Prarie du Chien, Wisconsin, and LaCrescent, Minnesota, and about 120 women who had never bowled.

These newcomers needed to be advised about all the rules and regulations and have them interpreted for them. They had to have the small courtesies of bowling explained, such as the bowler on the lane first has the right to bowl first. If both bowlers arrive on the lane simultaneously, the bowler on the left must step back and let the bowler on the right go first, and not to bowl out of turn.

We had three all-women's leagues on Tuesday night, Wednesday afternoon, and Thursday evening. Women bowlers were also involved with men bowlers in Couples Leagues on the late shift on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. It took all week working with Kenny, Maggie, and Tom Feltes, the Men's President to organize the leagues. Each league had

to elect a President and Secretary-Treasurer. There were all types of forms to be filled out with sanction fees to be returned to me. The Sec.-Treas. had to collect fees from the team captains, and open an account with both President and Sec. Treas.'s signatures. They paid the bowling fee by check and the remaining amount was kept in the bank to pay the President's \$10.00 salary and the Sec.-Treas. salary of \$50.00 at the end of the season. The rest of the money was used for trophies and prizes.

The teams all received money according to the games won. Everyone knew I was fair and went strictly by the rule book. But get a bunch of women together and there were several arguments I would have to settle. In October we had to pick out a date if we wanted to participate in the Iowa State Tournament. We picked a date in April and I was amazed at the number of women who signed up to go. The fee was \$18.00. At a quick meeting we decided to travel by bus, so made arrangements for a charter Scenic Stages and made motel reservations. All money passed by my hands.

It was quite an experience and I was pleased that everything was going smoothly, when I was informed that I should set up a Lansing Women's Tournament for January. This really threw me into a tizzy, since I had no idea how to do it. However, I loved bowling and wanted to be a good secretary and do everything possible for the bowlers. I sent to Lou Bouchard, State Secretary for instructions and we had our Tournament. Tuesday Night teams bowling and the Wednesday afternoon team event went smoothly, and then the Thursday night teams came in.

The rules were posted on the bulletin board and the Minnesota Bowlers challenged some little technicality. I calmly explained to all these much bigger and taller gals that the State Secretary had approved the copy of the rules that I had sent to her. They shouted at me while I tried to reason with them. Then the Wisconsin Bowlers (who never attended a meeting) started to scream that I favored bowlers from Waukon. I still kept my cool, saying, "after all River Lanes is in Iowa." This really seemed to inflame their anger. The men who were to keep score were listening and watching. I was quite embarrassed by this show of bad sportsmanship. They went on and on and finally, I clapped my hands and stamped my foot and said, "I am running this Tournament and if you don't like it—feel free to leave."

As I turned away everyone—men and women—cheered me, except the troublemakers, who stuck their tongues out behind my back. I blew my whistle and called "Scorekeepers to your places. Teams on the lanes. Start bowling!" I went over to Kenny and said, "I may have lost some bowlers, but I will not take their abuse." When the team event was over the troublemakers left the alley saying, "I won't be back." I really felt bad, but Kenny said, "Don't worry about it—we have lots of women on a list to replace them. I heard they were glad to get rid of them in LaCrescent. They'll be back, it isn't easy to get on a league in the second half of the season."

The singles and doubles event was the following weekend. Sure enough! They all came in quietly and bowled as if nothing had happened. I never had another problem for the next ten years. When I decided it was time to resign and train a younger person to do it, that team was among others with a nice appreciation gift when I left Office. The Association gave me a \$100.00 gift when I resigned.

River Lanes has changed owners twice in the last few years: Duane Peters and now Rick Heldt. Through the years the economy has hurt the Lanes. Women have had to supplement their husband's income by working in local factories. Time and money has taken its toll. Rick is planning some streamlining and hopes to bring in more bowlers in the future.

## *Sheila—Lydia—The Foresters*

**W**e were only in town a few weeks when Jacquie come running home from school with her new friend, Sheila Powers.

Jacquie said, "Can I join the Foresters Mom? Please. Mom, please... Sheila is a forester and goes to lots of parties and they really have fun. Please, Mommm!"

I said, "Honey, I never heard of the Foresters."

Sheila piped up, "Do you know Lydia Fritz at the Bank?" She will tell you all about the Foresters."

Jacquie pleaded, "Please, Mommm. Please."

I answered, "I'll see." In my mind I thought, Little Girls---Parties---Foresters means something to do with trees. It doesn't make sense.

Sheila continued, "Lydia is my best friend. I live with her."

This made even less sense. This little blonde girl's name was Sheila Powers. Could she be a Foster child?

The next time I went into Kerndt Brothers Bank, this little grey haired teller asked, "Mrs. McGovern can Jacquie join the Foresters?"

I questioned, "What is the Foresters?"

Lydia answered, "It is an insurance organization and I am Juvenile Director of our local court. We have little parties for our young members and entertain them at Holidays and for Birthdays.

I said, "Oh! I have lots of insurance on Jacquie."

Lydia said, "It is so cheap only \$1.25 a month for \$1,000.00 death benefit.

"Oh! That is cheap. I spend more than that on candy bars. Yes she can join. Anything to keep her happy."

Lydia said, "I'll bring you an application tonight after work."

"Fine, I'll be home."

Lydia and I hit it off immediately and I offered to help her with the children's parties. Shortly after we became acquainted I asked, "Are you related to Sheila? I noticed you don't have the same last name."

Lydia said, "No. I'll tell you how it happened that Sheila lives with me."

None of our family are married. My brother Hugo, sisters, Emma, Tina, and me. The young couple, Jim and Leone Powers who lived next door had four children, Jack, Maureen, Tom and Sheila. Sheila was about two years old when Leone discovered she was pregnant. Sheila was a beautiful baby yet when her sister, Ellen was born. Leone had so much to do that Sheila was left to play by herself. One day Hugo saw her playing outside and thought it was too cold. He picked her up and carried her into the house saying, "She's cold, make her something warm." Tina took her and wrapped a blanket around her and Emma made some hot cocoa and gave her some cookies. Hugo called Leone and said that Sheila was with us, so she wouldn't worry. Sheila soon learned to come to the back door

and beg for cookies.

The new baby and three other kids took all of Leone's time and energy. The Fritz's were good people and kind. We loved to have Sheila so it relieved Leone's mind when she was over there. Her visits were the bright spot in our days. The house next door was small for such a big family and one night Sheila fell asleep on my bed. We asked Leone if we could let her sleep over and bring her home in the morning. We all loved her dearly and she was like a ray of sunshine in our barren lives.

Soon she was bringing her clothes and toys over to the house. She claimed all our attention which she got very little of at home. We spoiled her with surprises and goodies and at the end of a few months she had her own room and was living in our home. Sheila had inherited Asthma from her father and we nursed her through many attacks when she struggled to get her breath. As the years went by, Leone went back to work as a teacher and Sheila stayed with us. We bought her clothes and gave her things her folks couldn't afford. We couldn't be closer if we were related. She seems like our child. Now she is older I am sure Leone and Jim would like her to come back home but she feels like we are her family and it would certainly break our hearts to lose her, and that is why Sheila lives with us. It wasn't planned...It just happened.

Jacquie joined the Foresters. Through the years Lydia and I spent many happy hours making fancy favors, planning games and lunches for the Forester children. I met many friends through my association with Lydia. I was no longer such a stranger. I met Greta Scholtes who started me helping Brides and their mothers have perfect receptions, and Milli Stirn who befriended me and took me shopping and we loved each other like sisters.

Although I helped Lydia I never joined the Adult Foresters. Lydia suggested to the Regional Director who was looking for a Field Representative for Lansing that I would be a good one. After buying a small policy Angela Lanners trained me to sell the various policies. Soon I became Recording Secretary, Financial Secretary and Juvenile Director plus being their Field Representative.

In 1970 I was selected as the court's Delegate to go to the State Convention in Cedar Rapids. When I arrived at the bus station in Cedar

Rapids I went to the cab stand and as I gave my destination as Hotel Roosevelt to the driver two women asked me if I was going to The Forester Convention? When I answered "Yes" they asked if they could share my cab. I acquiesced and they climbed in.

As we rode along, these two women from Ft. Atkinson introduced themselves Nettie Schmidt and Eleanor Huber. Nettie asked me, "Are you going to run for National?!" Eleanor said, "Oh! Yes you should. It is a wonderful trip and all paid for."

I said, "I don't even know what you are talking about. This is my first time."

I went to all the first days meetings and the Dinner with the ladies from Ft. Atkinson, the only ones I knew among the 63 delegates. Then I went upstairs, took off my clothes and settled down with my book on the bed. The phone rang and I wondered who would be calling me.

It was Angela Lanners from South Dakota who had trained me. She had just arrived and said, "What are you doing? Why aren't you down here in the Piccadilly Room? This is where all the action is."

I said, "I'm all undressed."

Angela said, "Well get into your clothes and come down here."

Always ready for some fun I threw on my clothes and took the elevator down to the Piccadilly Room where there were about 30 delegates sitting around a big table with papers in front of them. Angela was in the center and cried as I walked in, "Here she is...This is Alice McGovern from Lansing..We want her on our list for National. Lucy Horvach from Grundy Center will nominate her."

I couldn't hardly believe my ears. I had never been consulted. Oh, well. I'll never be elected.

Next, Angela said, "Now every one on the list be sure you pass your cards to each delegate and introduce yourself and ask for their vote."

I said, "Angela, I don't have any business cards."

Angela replied, "Well, just write your name on a piece of notepaper with your Court number."

"Make sure everyone has their list with you so when we vote you will have it to refer to."

When I returned to my room I started to write. After I had written three notes, I thought, this is silly, no one is going to vote for me. So I quit and went to sleep.

There were 63 delegates and Iowa would be represented by 15 at the National so everyone couldn't go. My head was swimming with all the intrigue and politics of this meeting. Next day six delegates handed me cards at Breakfast so I thought I should do something so I went to the tables and smiled my sweetest and said, "I am Alice McGovern from Court 637 in Lansing and I'm running for National. Now I know you all have your favorites but if you have an extra vote I'd appreciate it."

Imagine my surprise when I received the most votes, 59 out of 63. My two friends from Ft. Atkinson were also elected and three other delegates asked if they could be my roommate. It was held in August at the Hilton Hotel in Chicago, and it was nice. I took our Court's Scrapbook with me and we won 1st place and a \$25.00 Savings Bond. There was one night we all went to Drury Lane to the Dinner Theatre and another trip on a Boat on Lake Michigan, nice dress up Banquets. Five days of Business and fun evenings. I was an Iowa Delegate to five other National Conventions, in Minneapolis, Denver, Rapid City, South Dakota and Kansas City. Finally I retired because the next National was in Chicago.

Our Court disbanded this last spring and we gave over \$1900.00 to various Charities. I still write insurance, mostly on babies and young children at the request of Grandmothers who like the one payment plan for children for \$2500.00 until they are 21 years old. Wrote one for my Great Granddaughter, Paige Jacqueline McMillan this spring.

## V. A. Check-up

As we were finishing lunch one day we heard a loud knock at the downstairs door. A man's voice inquired as Mrs. Englehorn answered the door, "Are you Mrs. McGovern?" "No," she answered,

"The McGoverns live in the upstairs apartment. It's the first door at



the head of the stairs."

Jacque looked at me and I shrugged. I didn't recognize the voice. We went to the door together, and the man said, "Hello, Mrs. McGovern and this must be Jacque Simmons. I'm Bill Peters from the Veteran's Administration." "Oh!" I said. "Well, come on in and sit down." I wondered why he was here. Bill slowly looked around him as he unfolded some papers. He seemed impressed with our new furniture, chartreuse sofa and chair, and the obviously new drapes of an oriental design on white background, that I had just finished making.

Next he started to talk to Jacque and ask her about school. Did she like school? Did she have many friends? How were her grades? Did she like her teachers? Finally he turned to me and said, "You are remarried to a farmer. His name is Lawrence McGovern, is that correct?"

"Yes," I answered.

"How do you like living in Iowa?" "It's o.k. but I do miss Pittsburgh and all my friends."

"According to our records you aren't using any of Jacque's money for her maintenance. You know you can buy her clothes and other expenses from the checks."

"No, we don't want to do that. Larry will take care of her and the money will be saved for her education. I went to Duff's Iron City Business College but I always wanted to go to regular college. Jack and I planned to send our children to college and that's the way it is going to be for Jacque."

"Well that's fine. Are you sure this isn't a hardship?"

"No," I answered. "We get along just fine."

Bill Peters wrote something on a form and then asked Jacque, "How do you get along with your Step-Father?"

Jacque looked blankly at him and said, "Huh!"

I said, "He means Larry." We had never mentioned the word Step-Father to her.

Jacque said, "Oh. You mean Larry, Well Larry loves both Mom and me. We go to the movies and he is good to me, just like my Dad."

"Well fine," says Bill. Again he turns to me and says, "Mrs. McGovern, are you sure this isn't a hardship?"

I answered for the second time, "No we don't need her money."

Jacque says very proudly, "Larry is going to get me a pony when we live out at the farm and I can take care of it."

Both Larry and I feel Jacque needs chores to make her a responsible person. She helps clean and irons some of her play clothes.

Bill says, "Well, it sounds as if all is going well here but are you sure it isn't causing a hardship—this money is to support the child."

By this time I was getting annoyed by this hardship question and snapped, "No."

He put his papers back in the brief case and asked Jacque to walk out to his car with him. I never did find out what he talked about. But as Jacque followed him down the stairs, I solved the Hardship Question. That morning she had gone up to the attic and rummaged around and found a pair of thread bare jeans that I had saved for patches and...she had them on and you could see her pink panties through them, and her blouse was made of pieces of vary colored leftover material that she had outgrown, and hardly covered her waist. No wonder he kept asking if this was a hardship.

Next, Bill stopped in at our Lawyer's Office. "Frank," he said, "Mrs. McGovern seems very nice and the little girl says Larry is good to her but they should use some of the money for clothes. She was walking around in rags."

Frank Riser questioned, "Who, Jacque? Why her Mother makes all her clothes and dresses her like a little princess. I do their income tax. No, they definitely do not need her money."

The V.A. never investigated us again.

## Golden Wedding

The May 7, 1959 issue of the Allamakee Journal contained a General Invitation to an Open House at Wexford Hall, Sunday, May 10, 1959 honoring Mr. & Mrs. Albert McGovern on their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

It all started in February, when Larry and I were going out to dinner for our anniversary. Grandma said, "We never celebrated our anniversary."

"You didn't!" I said, "My parents always did something special on theirs. When is yours, and how many years?"

Grandma answered, "We will be married 50 years on May 10."

"Well," I said, "You will celebrate this year. We will have a party."

"Oh! No," said Grandma. "You don't have to do that, Alice."

"Yes, I love parties. It will be fun planning it for you and Grandpa. I know all about weddings since I help so many brides in town. We will have it at the Hall and Father Perry will have a special Mass, and you can renew your marriage vows."

"Oh! No!" Grandma exclaimed.

"What? You don't want to stay married to Grandpa." I teased.

"Oh! Yes, but we don't need all that fussing."

"The whole family needs this party. You never have reunions. We all are proud of your fifty years together."

In my mind, I decided to do it up right, and make it the nicest party I could, one they could always remember. Just thinking about no parties or celebrations made me mad. Well, life would be different from now on.

The next day I wrote to Mame, Albert's sister and Gert and Ada, Grandma's sisters, and invited them to come out from Pennsylvania for the Golden Wedding, and they accepted by return Mail. I wrote to Millie, Larry's sister, John and Jim, Larry's brothers, and everyone seemed to be happy about the coming event.

I spoke to Father Perry, asking him to make it a very special Mass for them, and I reserved the Hall for that date.

I sewed four aprons of gold and white printed material for the cooks and made white organdy ones, trimmed with gold Rick Rack, for the six waitresses. I used fancy molds for gold and white rose mints to serve with nuts on the punch table. I searched all my punch recipes for just the right one, which was gingerale with orange sherbet.

Jacque picked out a pretty white straw hat with a veil for Grandma to wear with her new black and white dress, and I had Grandpa's suit cleaned and pressed. A white carnation corsage and boutonniere were ordered with gold ribbons. Jacque went to LaCrosse and brought the Golden Wedding Anniversary Guest Book.

I ordered two large hams and buns, and asked the four cooks to make potato salad and baked beans. The day before the party Jacque and I decorated the Hall with gold and white streamers and bells.

The cake was a beautiful three tiered one with white frosting and golden roses. Every family in the parish was represented at the party, and the couple was happy to see so many old friends there. They received all kinds of gifts and cards, which Grandma treasured through the years.

It was a lot of work but I enjoyed every minute, and they were so happy; this shy old lady and kind old gentleman who never had parties.

Thank God, they had a big celebration this year. It was only a month later that Grandpa got sick and painfully ill with Cancer. There would be no more wedding anniversaries to be celebrated.

## *Final Chapter*

**I**t is the Sunday after Thanksgiving, 1959, usually a happy day when I write my Christmas cards, but not today. I'm trying to write cheerful messages to my friends, but my first three were hard, since they were to Larry's brothers and sister.

My heart is filled with sadness, and their messages aren't happy ones. It is almost six months since Albert, Larry's father was diagnosed with cancer of the Liver. My uncle, Jack, who is hospital administrator at Cook County hospital told me Albert would only live about six months. Every day I see him struggling to hide his reaction to the severe pain. I must tell them all to come to the farm for their Dad's last Christmas.

That great old guy is so brave, never complaining, always taking care of Grandma, who is always complaining. She scolds when Grandpa stays in bed a little later in the morning. She wants him up for breakfast, same as when he was younger and well.

Christmas will be hard since I'll have to cook all night, go to 5 o'clock Mass and carry the whole meal from the apartment in town to the farm in Wexford, take a few Christmas decorations and try and make the place

look cheerful.

They all came on Christmas Eve, and everything went well. Grandpa was happy to have his family there. We came home to the apartment, and next day Larry told me that Grandpa was so miserable that Jim, the youngest son took him up to see Dr. Murphy and he admitted him at once to the Lutheran Hospital where he could have nurses to administer the Morphine he needed. I went up the next day and stayed with him until he died. I slept on chair cushions on the floor beside his bed. As the weeks went on he received his medication oftener as the pain got more severe. He lost so much weight that as I helped him into the bathroom, the skin hung loosely on his bones. He was such a gallant old gentleman, that I know he was ashamed to have to accept my help.

His daughter, Millie, had come from Chicago for a couple of days. Dr. Murphy told us, "He won't live the day." So she knew that she would have to pack up her family and come back for the funeral, so she caught the Zephr back to Chicago. Larry and Jacquie went to the Depot to pick up John who was coming out from Aurora, Illinois.

I sat quietly with Grandma saying the Rosary. It is noon, January 14, 1960. The nurse brought in the lunch. I said, "He is dying and can't eat." Nurse said, "You might as well eat it. You will be paying for it." She put the tray down on a table by the big chair and Grandma went over, sat down and began to eat.

I sat by the bed holding Grandpa's hand and he tightened his grip and I leaned down and heard him say, "Oh! Girl. How we misjudged you." I treasure those few words and how often I think, it is ironic that I was there when he died. Everyone else was gone.

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