

VI. MOTHER AND HEALTH

Mother was always concerned about the health of her family.



Dorothy and Marion at work in
1920 with their fork and spade

I don't recall the word "vitamins" having been employed, but I do remember Mother remarking at one time that two vegetables should be served at every meal. There was naturally a plenitude of fresh vegetables and fruit during summer and early fall.

What Mother eagerly waited for in early spring were our annual excursions to locate those "greens" which she considered to have the appropriate tonic value. Accordingly, our parents, accompanied by their little children, set forth with little spades and forks to the large vacant lot behind our block of houses to collect the necessary quantity of dandelion greens.

Another more exciting adventure was a trip to the small wood lot two or three miles north of town where we gathered wildflowers for our May baskets. Here we were on the lookout for a marshy place where cowslips, called marsh marigolds in some localities, grew.

For health purposes, our parents screened in the side porch. They also located four sleeping cots and placed them against the wall. In spite of louvered shutters being used to enclose our outdoor sleeping quarters, this unusual sleeping arrangement was the subject of much derision.

Incidentally, it did transpire that the life of two-year old Dorothy, who was suffocating from pneumonia, and the lives of our family following World War I, were saved by means of keeping the windows open.

Although Mother was by no means a patent medicine person, she did go in, now and then, for certain "nostrums." I well remember the arrival of a case of Vichy water. Of course, I have no idea what the purpose of this beverage was, but at least the taste wasn't unpleasant. What was atrocious was the forced imbibing of Pluto Water and Citrate of Magnesia!

Each fall Dad gave an order to some apple grower for the required number of bushels of

apples to be delivered for fall and winter use. I recall hearing mentioned several varieties of apples. Among them were Jonathan, Snow, Delicious, Russet, and Macintosh. “An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” was no idle threat in our household. Apples were foisted upon us children at every turn. Even today apples are not my favorite fruit in the grocery store.

Of course, some of Mother’s health aids must have had a beneficial effect. However, I have a fairly good idea that the best health insurance Dorothy and I had during our school days consisted of the two round-trips we made to school every day. There were, of course, no school buses or hot lunch programs. And because the noon-time break was limited in time and the distance between home and school was at least a mile, our walking had to be on the brisk side.

VII. THE CHURCH

Our town could claim three Protestant churches. The Methodist and Baptist churches were located on Centennial Street near downtown. The Free Methodist Church, which leaned toward evangelistic doctrine, was located on the north side of town. Somewhere in the rural area there were churches of Lutheran and Catholic faiths.

For some reason, Mother chose the Baptist Church. Here it was that Dorothy and I spent long hours each Sunday. We were expected to attend both Sunday School and, with Mother, the regular church service. In my teens I was a reluctant member of the Baptist Young People's Union. Dorothy, a few years later, would have nothing to do with this group.

Strangely enough, I really enjoyed the Sunday School classes provided a good Bible story was the lesson of the day. Occasionally the Sunday School class parties turned out to be pleasant events.

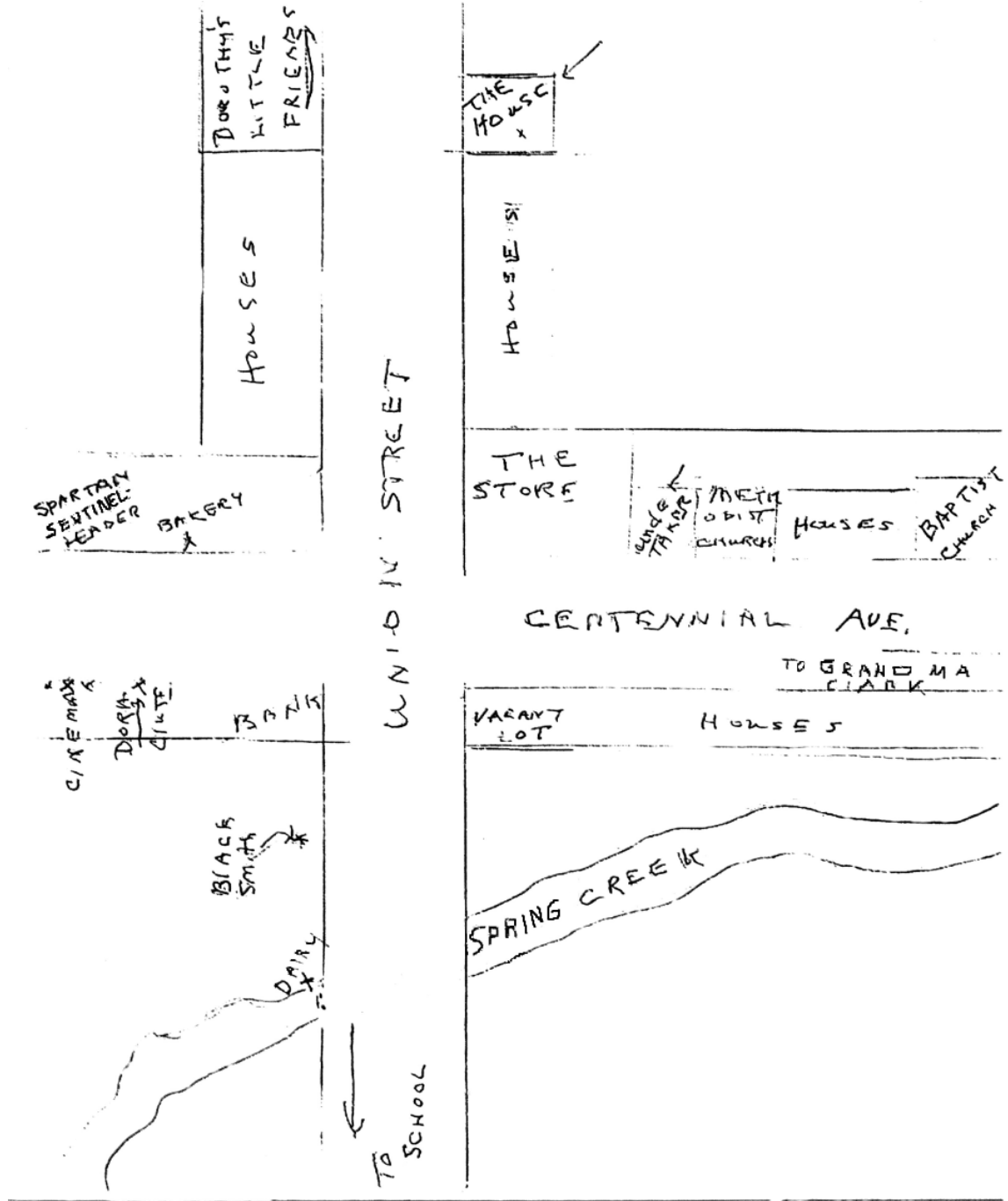
The Baptist Young People's Union was, in theory, an organization set up to correlate the lives of the young people with the moral teachings contained in the Bible. Somehow, however, the right religious climate wasn't present. Mrs. Burke, our former second grade teacher, tried to bring some order to the disjointed religious and social situation, but our hearts weren't in it.

Mother's principal contribution to the church was her presiding over the Primary Department for what must have been a generation of children. She somehow drew a very large attendance, and she was especially effective with her presentation of children's programs. She was painstaking in having each child participate, and went to the trouble of having the adequate number of rehearsals. Mother's programs were a tremendous stimulus for church attendance.

The pastors of our church remained for only comparatively short intervals. There always seemed to be a "review" both locally and at the Baptist headquarters. As I recall all pastors were mild in manner and well-meaning. Their sermons contained no words which could offend.

One year a team of evangelists spent a week in our church. They must have been fairly effective. One Easter morning, at the age of twelve, I found myself being wrapped in a white sheet ready to be dropped into the metal tank which had been cleverly placed under the carpeting of the church platform. In the course of seconds I was submerged in the unappealing water. Unexpectedly my life seemed to proceed in the same direction as before.

My shaky "spiritual" life, however, took a decided upswing when we were introduced



to William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" in twelfth grade. Another jolt came when I was given an educated account of the origin of the Bible.

VIII. THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas Festivities at the Church

Sometime during Christmas week, the church presented its annual Christmas program. Since this festive occasion was held in the evening and because every child in the Primary and Junior Departments was involved, there was always a tremendous turnout.

The first part of the program was devoted to the children's presentations. Naturally, all parents and grandparents eagerly awaited the stage appearance of their special child.

The second half of the program was the dramatization of the Nativity Scene. Dorothy and I as grade children really anticipated this part of the evening's schedule. We were about to be regaled by the "singing" and the "acting" of six choir members with whom, unfortunately, we were already fully acquainted (musically) each Sunday morning.

Hopefully, we would now find these individuals, in another guise, waiting at the edge of the stage. Of course, our expectations were met when the three shepherds and the three wise men began to stalk across the stage singing, in turn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and "We Three Kings of Orient Are."

Of course, I have no idea how the rest of the audience reacted during the performance, but we two little girls could never hold back our hysterical laughter – not only at the badly rendered Christmas songs but at the same old props, the awkward fitting costumes, and the unnatural body gestures.

Dear Simon Le Vine and Thede Teeple and your four co-singers, please forgive us two little girls our childish merriment! Perhaps you were even serving the church unwillingly in this Christmas ritual. In any case, we two children would have been really disappointed had your vocal numbers or your stage presence been altered in any way. Thank you for being what you were!

Christmas at Home

For Dorothy and me the Christmas season fell into five distinct categories: (1) Christmas preparations, (2) Christmas at the church, (3) the opening of the presents Christmas morning, (4) Christmas dinner, and (5) the opening of the presents from the relatives.

Several days before Christmas Dad must have ordered the tree and Mother must have given some thought to its decoration. In any case, we children sat down with Mother and proceeded to help with the long strings of popcorn and cranberries, which, when finished, were placed lovingly around the tree. In addition, we had a few left-over store bought ornaments and a small amount of tinsel. Mother always came up with home-made productions constructed out of aluminum foil and colored construction paper. For years we had no store lights. One year our parents experimented with candles held by holders which were clipped to the branches of the tree.

It was about this time that we children belatedly began to worry about the presents that we were supposed to give our parents. I have no idea what Dorothy came up with. At Mother's suggestion, I could only think of grapefruit for Dad. Citrus fruit, in our childhood, was a rare commodity.

This night before Christmas did pass and Christmas morning did arrive. Once away, Dorothy and I rushed downstairs to wonder anew at the glorious pile of presents under the tree.

I really don't remember any specific item which we were given except for one large gift that I had wistfully longed for. A few weeks before I had come across an illustration in one of Dad's store catalogs depicting a children's handcar suitable for two children. I easily pictured Dorothy and me riding merrily together on Sparta's sidewalks. It turned out that when at last the new vehicle was tried out, Dorothy was too fragile to do her share of the pumping. Hopefully, two deserving little children later made use of this really wonderful gift.



Dorothy and Marion
at a very early age

Thanksgiving and Christmas entertaining were alternated by Mother and Aunt Ethelyn. These social occasions loomed large for both hostesses since the guests were not only the immediate families but also the two grandmothers and sometimes Aunt Nina and Aunt

Elizabeth.

Aunt Ethelyn thoroughly enjoyed the planning, the preparation, and the serving of her elaborate dinners. Of course everything was very, very attractive and delicious. In retrospect, there was just too much of everything.

Mother, on the other hand, hated every minute of both Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner festivities. I recall her serious sense of exhaustion at the end of each occasion when it was her turn to entertain.

The Christmas dinner at noon was followed by a general move towards the living room where presents were exchanged and duly admired. Undoubtedly this part of the program was merely an expected ritual, as most of the time the gifts were probably unwanted.

Conversation occupied the rest of the afternoon. Dad and Uncle Fred chatted non-stop about crops and business affairs. What subjects the ladies found to talk about can only be left to the imagination. No doubt Mother only craved for her bed.

Aunt Ethelyn always thoughtfully provided games for Dorothy and me, and Hugh and Eddie. In case Mother entertained, Dorothy and I, more or less a team, were sent to the kitchen to attack the enormous stacks of dishes. Mother must have been desperately tired in order to allow us girls to deal with her Haviland china.