

LIFE ON OUR FARM

I'd like to share with you some dear memories of my life on a farm, many years ago, in the Bartlettboro neighborhood of East Stoneham, Maine. I lived there with my parents and my grandmother. It was in the decade of the 1930's. Our country was in the midst of the Great Depression, but our farm seemed just wonderful, to a small child.

It was just like "The Walton's TV Show" even to the squeaking screen door!

Our house was built in 1843 by a man named Elijah Russell.

My great grandparents and my grandparents lived there before me, and raised their families.

Great Grampa Isiah and Great Grammie Mary raised three daughters and three sons.

Grampa Frank and Grammie Lucy raised three daughters and one son, who was my father.

Oh yes, my Great Grandparents also brought up one of their little granddaughters when her mother passed away at an early age. My Grandparents raised a grandson whom you will hear more about later in my story.

We had a flower garden which contained creepers that had pods the size of eggs with prickles on them, columbine, a tub full of calendulas and Golden Glow (which I still have in my garden).

We had two "Balm of Gilead" trees, one Silver Maple and plenty of Locust trees.

My favorite tree to play house under was a big Willow tree that you could climb up and sit in the place where the limbs branched out.

My rope swing hung between two trees where I could face down to my cousin Jeans. She'd be in her swing and we'd swing and sing to the top of our voices.

We didn't have any refrigeration back then. Everything had to be kept down cellar that could spoil.

We butchered in the late Fall when it was cold enough to hang the meat outside. I can remember a pig all dressed out, hanging in our barn.

I had a swing in our barn, too. I used to dress up my pet hen and swing with her in my arms. I raised her from a chicken, her name was "Mother Pullet".

I had a black cat named "Fluff" and a yellow cat named "Eddy". My Grammie used to call them saying, "Come Puss, Puss, Puss!".

We had sheep, horses, cows, chickens and pigs.

The horse stood by the window in our "tie up". The cows stood beside him.

We had a pen for young calves in one part of the "tie up". We had both a summer and winter "tie up".

I remember the big horse collars that hung in the barn, and the harnesses with the shiny parts.

Back then you could get two deer in the Fall, if you were lucky enough. Daddy always got his two deer!

In mud season, every Spring, Jean's Dad, Bernal, would hitch up a team of horses, cut down some Alder trees, and drag them behind the team, to smooth out the muddy ruts that cars had made.

There seemed to always be a milk strainer made from cheese cloth, hanging on the clothes line by the kitchen door. We sold milk and butter to summer people at the camps around the lake. We had a cream separator which we had

to run the milk through every time Daddy milked the cows. That would let the milk come out one spout and cream another.

Before we got the separator, we used to set the milk in pans in the cellar way - when the cream rose to the top, you could skim it off with a skimmer, which I still have.

Speaking of the cellar, it always scared me to walk down the stairs, because they had open backs and it was dark behind them. I could imagine someone reaching out to grab me as I went down the stairs!

We had a dirt floor in our cellar. There were shelves of canned things that Mama had canned. The two quart jars in the back row, then the quarts, then the pints. There was a wooden bin for apples and one for potatoes. Big crocks on the floor for pickles and salt pork.

My family used to pick apples in the Fall and ship them by the Narrow Gauge Railroad in Harrison, on their way to England. They hired men to pick them. This was before I was born.

We raised many kinds of apples. To name a few: Black Apple, Blue Pearmain, Wolf River, Ben Davis, Cat Head, Strawberry Apple, Hubberson, Red Astrican, Snow Apple and Baldwin.

We had plum trees down back of the old barn that we eventually tore down when we built the new one.

We "banked" the house with sawdust in the Fall to keep the drafts out and keep the cellar from freezing.

Our drinking water came down from a moontide spring up in the front field and ran into the kitchen sink from a hose and faucet. We had a big black sink and the soap dish on the back was one of my baby dishes.

The kitchen table sat next to the outside wall between the window and the door to the barn. You had to step up to get onto the main barn floor when you entered from the kitchen.

The sink was on the back wall toward the pasture. The stove was on the wall next to the Dining room. Today it would be called a Living Room but back then it was a Dining Room. We never ate in there only on special occasions like holidays.

In the winter we had a woodstove in the corner of the Dining Room. The kitchen stove was on the other side of the wall.

On the front wall toward the lawn was Grammie's rocking chair, by one window, our Majestic Floor Model Radio sat against the wall between Grammie and another rocking chair which was usually occupied by my Uncle Fernan.

We had paneling half way up the walls in the dining room. The upper part of the wall was papered with a floral design on a white background.

We had a linoleum on the dining room floor that had a big circle in the middle. In the circle was a tea service pictured. I used to put my little toy cars inside the circle to play.

On the far wall next to Birch Avenue, was a long sideboard, with doors underneath and cupboards up top. It had a mirror on one side toward the bedroom door. This sideboard had an open end where I kept some toys. This is where "Old Bruce", my cousins dog used to hide, in a thunder shower. He stayed with us alot. I loved him very much!

Our bedroom was a large room with two big beds, a blue bureau, a fancy stand and a commode which was a cabinet to keep a washbowl and pitcher on, with a rack on back to hang towels. You could keep a chamber pot underneath. Today a "commode" refers to a pot chair.

Grammie's room was at the north end of our bedroom, however, Daddy tore the wall out to make one big room. He then made a room for Grammie off the Dining Room, near the stove. She used to have a featherbed, with warm fuzzy blankets. I liked to crawl into her bed and sleep with her, once in a while.

When one opened the door leading to the second floor, it was like taking a trip back to the past. At the head of the stairs was an attic room or an unfinished room where we kept things from another time. If you glanced up overhead to the real attic you could get a glimpse of a trundle bed that my Aunt Marion slept in, when she was a little girl.

At one end of the room was a box which held the cast of my cousin Errol's foot that he had operated on many years before. Why Grammie kept it, is more than I know. I was really scared to even look in that direction. To me it seemed as if someone's foot was in that box!

Next you came into a long hall. At one end was a door that went into "Grammie's Room", so called. No one ever slept there, but it was all furnished just as Grammie wanted it. There was a closet off the room, which contained a feather boa, which Grammie called a "Kiss Me Quick". It was kept in a big round hat box. I liked to try it on, once in awhile, when I played "dress up". There were braided rugs on the floor. I tripped and fell on one when I was small and split my front tooth.

There was a picture on the wall in Grammie's room of a pretty young girl which I always admired but I never knew who she was until later years. I learned she was my great Aunt Melissa. When we left the farm I took the picture, which I still have today.

At the other end of the hall was my play room. It used to be Mama and Daddy's room before I came along. I had it filled with toys. I even had a trunk full of Butternuts which were drying, from our Butternut Tree out back of the barn. We would go up stairs on rainy days and crack them, to eat.

Daddy's Violin was kept upstairs. I would open the case and look at the pretty red felt lining which held the violin, and wonder what it sounded like when Daddy played it, many years before. I never heard him play.

We had a blacksmith shop where my grandfather and his father tended to all the black smithing jobs that needed to be done, on the farm.

My Great Grampa, Isiah, was a "cooper" by trade. There was always a demand for his skills as our apples were shipped in barrels.

Grampa Frank was a self taught veterinary. He traveled on foot to where ever he was needed.

Grammie Lucy was a midwife. She attended many births throughout our neighborhood.

My father and mother were married in 1911. Daddy was 23 and Mama was only 15. I didn't come along until 1932 right in the middle of the Great Depression!

My Grampa Frank was a very religious man. It's been said that he used to walk from the farm down to church at the village many times. He was Deacon of the Church at the time of his accidental death in 1919.

I'll speak of two events that stand out in my mind.

One day, some summer residents that were vacationing down on Lake Keewaydin came to visit us and with them came a real live Indian; complete with feathered headdress and all. He had been giving lessons on Fly Tying at a Resort in Lovell. He came right into our living room and sat in my Uncle Fernan's chair! Can you imagine the wonderment of a little girl at such an experience!

Another time was when my Uncle Fernan had a bad heart attack and his son, Merton, was summoned. Merton drove a big bus such as Maine Central. He was out on one of his routes, so he came with the bus. Our little back road had never had a big bus with all the colored lights on it. It was a sight that I shall long remember!

My cousin, Jean, who lived next door, often came to play with me. As I recall we could only play at each others house for half an hour at a time. We thought we could spend more time together if we met half way between our two homes. We chose a big rock that had an upper and a lower level to it. One half was mine and the other half was Jean's. We decided that this was to be our "Private Rock" and immediately put up a sign to declare the same.

One day my cousin Milt came over. He'd been fishing down in the brook. He had a baby sister at his house but she hadn't been named. I remember going over to see her. Her mother was in bed, putting on cream where the sheets had made her elbows sore. She said, "What shall we name the baby? We can't just call her "Baby" all the time". The next thing we knew she had been named, Elaine.

Elaine's older sister, Dot, was also one of my playmates. There was another girl named Pat in the next opening, but we never got together that much.

I remember one Christmas when Daddy was sick in bed, my Aunt Edie dressed up in a Santa Claus suit that belonged to the lodges and played Santa for me. She had fixed up and painted some dolls furniture that was my cousin Arlene's, when she was younger. I probably wouldn't have had any Christmas that year if it hadn't been for my dear Aunt Edie!

When Daddy worked in Norway he always stopped at the Ben Franklin store and got me a toy to bring home. He also used to leave a dessert in his lunch box so I'd find it when he got home.

There used to be an advertisement on radio for Ivory Soap. It would say "ninety-nine and forty-four one hundred percent pure. IT FLOATS". I always thought Daddy should be there to hear that with me.

Daddy was a carpenter. He helped build many of the cottages around Lake Keewaydin. He also worked for W.H. Brown Co. in North Waterford, building small camps.

Winters were very harsh as I look back. Snow came earlier, lots of it, and stayed later.

Our town used to have a Snow Roller that rolled the snow down so that the sleighs could travel. There was a shed that housed the old roller in our town, but it was never used in my day.

There used to be an old Town Tractor that came up into Bartlettboro. You could hear it coming, long in the night. The smaller plow stayed down in the village.

I had a "SNOWBIRD" sled that Daddy bought for me at the Sled factory in South Paris, for \$1.98. I used to get all dressed up in my snowsuit, go out and jump on my sled and say, "come on SNOWBIRD head for the north" and away I'd go down the hill in our drive way.

While I'm on the subject of snowsuits, every year the summer people that used to vacation at my Uncle Kip's camp on Lake Keewaydin would ask me what color snowsuit I wanted for the coming winter. Whatever I told them, they would send me a snowsuit, of that color, for Christmas.

I remember Grammie and Uncle Fernan sitting by the hour, discussing whether or not "The Townsend plan" would ever be a reality.

One year Daddy hired two French boys to cut wood for us. He told them the signal for dinner time would be when he gave a loud "toot" on his big horn, they would know then, that dinner was ready. One day when they came into the house, one of them tried to pick up my yellow cat and got scratched very badly.

We had a robins nest up under the top eaves of our porch. Daddy would lift me up there to see the baby birds.

I can remember a friend came to call one day. He was driving a motorcycle. When he got to our yard he couldn't stop the bike. He said it was either crash the barn door or roll it over and jump off, so he chose the latter. I was playing house with "Old Bruce" at the time. I had my mother's lace dress on him. When he saw that motor cycle coming, he took off and we never saw mama's dress again; however, after awhile, Old Bruce came back.

One day I "married " Old Bruce by putting a cigar ring on him and I wore Mama's kimono for a wedding dress.

I used to dress up my cats. It was more fun to play with them because they moved. I made clothes for them and made colored designs with crayons, then put a cloth over the design and pressed it with a warm iron to make it permanent.

We used to hire extra help in haying season. Willis Warren hayed for us one year. He brought his daughter, Wilma, who gave me a pretty doll whom I immediately named Wilma. I still have the doll, after these many years.

I had a Little Orphan Annie milk shake mug, a decoder pin also a Shirley Temple blue glass mug and pitcher. I had a little glass "dog" that you could drink out of.

I remember Grammie sitting in her chair by the front window looking down the road and saying "Do you suppose Edie or any of the folks will come to call on me today?" How she enjoyed visits from her family!

My Aunt Mabe had four sons fairly close together, so the oldest one, Errol, came to live on the farm. He and Daddy were brought up as "brothers" rather than Uncle and Nephew. There was only eight years between them.

My Aunt Marion used to sleep in a Trundle Bed which pulled out from under my father's bed. Daddy liked to tease his little sister. He would tie her nightgown to the sheet, then she'd come down stairs dragging the whole thing to show Grammie what he had done.

He used to cut his toe nails and put them in Aunt Marion's pin tray, on her bureau.

When I was seven years old my family decided to leave the farm and move down to the village where it would be nearer for me to go to school.

Aunt Mabe sold us a piece of land next to her where Daddy built us a small house.

We moved into our new home in September 1939. We got lots of help building the house as Daddy wasn't well and everyone gave him a hand.

When school was out in June, we moved back to the farm for the summer.

I remember how happy we were to get back. The Cushman man came to deliver bread and pastries. Aunt Mabe came up to help wash floors and clean through the house.

We repeated this again in the summer of 1941, however in the spring of 1942 I came down with old Fashion Measles and Daddy caught them from me.

The measles together with his bad asthma condition was more than he could stand. Daddy went to Heaven on May 16, 1942.

Mama sold the farm and we made the little house in the village our year round home.

Many times I return, in memory, to my childhood home, and once again, I'm a carefree happy little girl out in my swing waiting for Daddy to come home before the man on the radio says "IT FLOATS!"

Marilyn McAlister Jones