

BACK IN TIME

First year of school

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

The excitement in 1932 of my first day in a one-room schoolhouse is more memorable than on any other school day. I hardly slept the night before, just anticipating my being there in a new dress that my mother had made, my brand new shoes, and a colorful lidded lunch pail.

To help my shyness at that time, I was so glad to have my sister, Gladys, going along with me, even though she was much older and in the eighth grade. Also, my first cousin, Doug McKee, and my second cousin, Marcene McKee, would be joining me in the first grade.

I already knew the wonderful teacher, Miss Jeannette Gore, because she boarded at my grandparents' home. She was so very well liked and became a close friend of our family. Thus I headed off on the mile-long walk to school with great anticipation of

all the fun I would have on my first day at McKee School.

Miss Gore greeted everyone and assigned seats. There was a primary table about three feet by six feet and maybe 20 inches high with six small chairs. (In later years I was given one of these chairs that my children and others enjoyed using.)

We had a first-grade reader and workbooks with about 50 pages, in which we copied the alphabet, made words, and wrote numbers. To me, the best part of the book was coloring the pictures; sometimes we were told what colors to use, and other times we could create some of our own colorings. Miss Gore made a weekly inspection of our assignments, and we usually got As.

Recess was the best, but the playground did lack for equipment, except



McKee School.

for a large slide, which I did not play on due to my fear of heights. Also, the older boys would wipe it with wax paper, always in good supply from our sandwich wrappers, which made for an extremely fast ride. "Anti-Over" was a favorite game with the older boys. This game consisted of two teams, one on each side of the school, throwing the ball back and forth over the roof. If you caught the ball, you got to throw it back over. The only other rule was to not break a window in the school building. To the best of my knowledge all windows remained unbroken.

And, of course, where would we be without the game of baseball? Our school lacked enough older students for a full team, so, reluctantly, some of us younger children were asked to fill in. One year we were taken to the Uniontown School to play a game, and I was scared to death that a ball would come my way! I don't recall who won, but I do remember the teacher at Uniontown was Miss Inlow and ours was Mrs. Bertha Haskins. Priorities!

At Thanksgiving time, Miss Gore must have contacted our mothers about making some costumes in which

to celebrate the season. We were dressed as Indians and pilgrims. I remember the scratchy gunnysack clothing we wore as the Indians, but I was very proud of the hand-painted designs and the turkey feather on our headbands. It is amazing to still have a couple of pictures of us in our costumes.

It seemed as though that first year of school went faster than any other, and then I was looking forward to summer vacation. On that last day of school, I was bragging to Marcene that my birthday was June 22 and after lunch on that day I was going to have a big birthday party with a delicious birthday cake for all to enjoy. Well, much to my regret, she remembered that date and her mother brought her to our house for the celebration. I was shocked and so embarrassed, and my mother was totally flabbergasted. The truth was that no party had been planned, not even a cake baked because the wood cookstove made the house too hot in June. Lois, Marcene's mother, and my mother actually had a nice visit, but I never really got over that embarrassment!

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Costumed students. Front row: Albert Anderson, unknown, Carmelita Lewis, unknown, Rosella Offenbacher, Clara Faye McKee, Evelyn Byrne. Back row: Gladys Byrne, Frances Port (?), Vonetta Rupretch, Lester Anderson, George Taylor (?), Victor Anderson (?). Anyone know the "unknown" students or can confirm the (?) students? Let us know!

Sweet madrone

BY LILY MYERS KAPLAN

It was the click-clunk sound of the nippers as I cleared the tick-bush brush from the trail that did it. Or was it the under-scent of pine in the spring-fresh wood that brought the memory alive? Maybe the fact that, as I had done forever, I was making a home out in the wild.

It started when I was five—digging holes with teaspoons in the damp earth, thinking I would tunnel my way to China. It progressed at six to building bridges across the cold creek with found rocks lugged across the grassy field. At eight my two older sisters, Sally and Lois, and I found the sugar-pine grove where we each staked a claim on our own house—a small circle of young trees in which we built tables and chairs of granite gathered from up the hill.

Just last Sunday, as I carefully pulled poison oak and re-laid gnarled branches to outline a path to the sweet madrone grove, the memory claimed me. The image of Lois and me hanging doorbells on boughs for utmost respect and privacy blended with memories of our back and forth visits for tea parties. A tender smile gave way to a few mournful but peaceful tears—a wish she could be alive to visit me here in the Applegate—rolling down my cheeks as I recalled our secret dugout and brick-lined hiding holes filled with treasures.

Because we covered them with endless piles of aromatic needles, our young minds were sure that they would be safe, always.

The memories came unbidden but were not unwelcome. I called out to Seth, "I've been doing this forever!" "What?" he hollered back from up the trail, saw in hand.

"Making a home in the woods," was my reply. I reminded him of my early life and the sisterhood forged through forays into the woods behind the back-beyond where we fell in love with earth. Was that the birth of my calling here to Applegate Valley? More deeply fulfilling than homestead-dreaming is my love—or more accurately, my complete passion, *abandon*, even—when it comes to carving out a spot in which to nestle in nature. *This* is where I remember my soul.

My mind wanders beyond the tasks of garden and mulch, tilling and pruning, cleaning and clearing. *A practice of Sabbath*, I think. *Time each day for more being—and less doing.*

"Sweet Madrone Circle!" I shout back up the hill to Seth. "That's what we should call it. This is where we will gather strength for all that lies before us. Here is where



our spiritual coffers will be filled. *This* is why we moved here."

We have lived in the Applegate Valley for less than three months. We barely know the boundaries of our land. We have myriad dreams of garden and sanctuary held in check by jobs and travel and building a livelihood. Time, it seems, is not our friend. "Patience and persistence," I remind a client who is frightened

about how much lies ahead. I think to myself, *Good advice, Lily. Pay attention!*

While Seth and I tend to our psychic rooting here in the Applegate, we find ourselves falling hard in love with carpets of fluorescent pink shooting stars and feather-like heads of blood-red Indian warriors. They punctuate what we have discovered today—our sacred circle of madrone.

Madrone, it turns out, is revered and considered sacred in some Native American traditions where it is called The Tree of Depth and Integrity. The madrone's uncanny ability to twist and turn as it reaches for light shows me that I,

too, can do the same. I run my palm over the smooth maroon bark and consider the many layers that have slowly peeled over umpteen years to reveal this inner beauty, her satin skin. Words rise up in me as I embrace the magnificent tree... *The Madrone, she wears her heart on her sleeve. Her true nature, layer by layer, is revealed—unabashed and unafraid!*

Seth and I, too, have shed many layers to come to this moment, this place, and this new life. We, in our 18 years together, have dreamed of leaving behind a much too busy life in order to live a new story. Still, we struggle to find it. Yet we are surprised each morning as we wake to the beauty before us, finding ourselves *here*, living in a fresh, new way.

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