

MY CHILDHOOD

Pauline Dickman Lawler

When we moved from Iowa to Missouri, Paul and I had never gone to school. I think we entered school the following fall. It was a little one room white school house. The teacher had to build the fire, the boys carried in the wood and we all cleaned the school room. There were two large black boards that covered the front wall where the teacher put arithmetic problems on the board, also diagramming....and if you misspelled too many words you had to stand up there and write them one hundred times. That was where I spent most of my time.

There were only thirteen of us in the school and believe it or not, three sets of twins and all in the beginning class. Paul and I were the youngest. The boy twins were morons and the girl twins were big, jet-red faced Swedes about fifteen, and one other little fellow that was very smart.

The teacher always had little exercises on Friday afternoon with everyone in school taking part. They could sing, dance or recite a poem. I remember one of the morons got up and said, "I had a little dog - his name was Rover, when he died, he died all over."

There were no girls near our farm so I never had a playmate. There was a set of twins that were two and one-half years older than we were that Paul played with. They would go fishing, swimming, set traps and I had to stay home and help mother. When we came to Florida, I was not much better off. There were no girls my age. Our cousins, Willard and Clinton, one was older, the other younger than we were. I tried to do everything they did, but being a girl I sure missed out on a lot of things. Thanksgiving was always about the opening of the hunting season and the boys would go hunting. I always wanted to go, but, no, I had to stay home and help get dinner and afterwards wash dishes.



You should have seen what I learned to swim in. I do not know who made it, but it sure made me a strong swimmer. It was a denim-like brown material. The blouse had puffed sleeves that came to my elbow gathered in to a cuff. The blouse gathered into a belt around my waist and the bloomers were attached to the blouse and came below my knee gathered into an elastic. On top of that was a gathered skirt. All was trimmed in white tape. I thought I looked real smart until I tried to walk out of the water. I lifted gallons of water that my sleeves, waist, and bloomers held.

Much later I got real smart and made myself a mini bathing suit out of some white wool. It was just as pretty as it could be BOY - you should have seen me when I dove in and started coming out of the water. I might as well have had nothing on. It was transparent.

Now comes the part you have been waiting for. When I was about fifteen a family moved in and there was a girl that was about two years older than myself. She was pretty, played the piano, and like Mother, made friends with everyone. Of course, I fell in love with her and wanted to spend all of my time at her house. But, there was one terrible drawback - she had the dirtiest "old man" for a father you can imagine. He was a tall rangy man - their house was small - he could reach out and grab you - and didn't care where - so I just didn't go there when he was home. She also had a brother who was exactly our age - birth date and all. By that time, I thought I was growing up and couldn't be bothered with Paul's friends - they were just kids.

Uncle G.M. had gotten the college started and Willard, Clinton and Paul and I quit grade school and started to college. Of course, it was mostly high school subjects we took.



Students were coming here from everywhere. Among them was a handsome boy, about eighteen, and I thought he was something special. He dated me and I really was on Cloud Nine. Here is where the serpent entered the Garden of Eden. Mary, my beloved friend, took him away from me. Do you know - I mean this - I have never trusted a girl since - not where there was a man concerned.

Mary and I remained friends after that little episode blew over. She played the piano and I sang and at one time we had a good quartette and she played for us. But I never did trust her - even up to the day she died - much too young - of cancer.