

MANUSCRIPTS
OAK STREET

Sue Ferreira

As the days grew warmer and May slipped into June, I knew that soon it would be time to go to Oak Street. When I was six or seven, I looked forward to Oak Street as much as I anticipated my birthday or Christmas. To me, Oak Street was more than just Grandma and her house; Oak Street meant endless summer days of playing with cousins, climbing trees, learning to sew, or just listening to tales told by Gram or Aunt Della. As soon as school ended in June, Mother shipped me off to Oak Street where I spent many summer weekends escaping from Mattel and Mickey Mouse.

My memories of Oak Street are a collection of sultry July afternoons spent with my cousins. Usually there were four or five of us together for a weekend at Gram's, and every member of the group had a tan, knobby knees; at least three Band-aids, and a pink moustache from drinking Kool-aid. The only characteristics that distinguished the girls from the boys were our bobbing pigtails and the boys' stubby crewcuts. We were affectionately known to everyone on Oak Street as "Kate's Kids."

There was no doubt that Gram's house and yard made an excellent playground. Sometimes we'd spend hours as courageous explorers who thrashed through the lilac bushes and evergreens with pretend machetes. We would brave all sorts of dangers such as camouflaged thistles, "prickers," mosquitoes, and the old witch next door. If one of us became wounded on an expedition, Gram would act as our "medic" and calmly patch up the scratched knee or cut finger, kiss the wounded firmly on the cheek, and send him back out into the wilds.

Another favorite pastime was collecting mulberries that fell from Gram's old gnarled tree. We called them "mayberries" after Mrs. Mayberry, a good friend and neighbor of Gram's, who was as rosy and plump as they were. Each one of us would steal a Tupperware bowl from the kitchen and once we had a substantial pile of berries, would sit on the front porch swinging our legs and mashing the berries with a stick to make "Mayberry jam."

The old house itself also gave us hours of pleasure. There were drafty walk-in closets just right for hiding in, and secret doors which led you to the basement to discover only Gram's washer and dryer. On the

second floor a long, graceful staircase cascaded to the first level with a slick bannister which was constantly polished by our bottoms. But I must admit that my favorite part of the house was the tiny attic off the second floor bathroom, where I would often go to be alone. It was a magical place that smelled of lavender and old books, but with a mere wish it could become the throne room of a Queen or a huge, grassy meadow with a horsehair rocker as my stallion. Sometimes Gram would come in at night and find me asleep on my steed after a long day. She would waken me gently and I would curl up in her wide lap as she rocked in time to the crickets' chirping. We'd sit and talk about anything and everything until the moon slipped behind the clouds, and then it was time for bed.

But the best part, the very best part about Oak Street was Story Time. On a hot Sunday evening after all the dishes were washed and put away, my cousins and I would gather on the big front porch glider with our popsicles. In the hazy twilight we'd hear Aunt Della's slipped footsteps as she'd shuffle over to the glider and ease herself down next to us. We'd snuggle up to her soft bosom and she'd say, "All right now, what story would you like to hear first?"

"The goblins'll get you!" We'd reply in unison. Aunt Della would adjust her glasses and tip her head back so that her nose was a shiny hook in the twilight. The glider would begin to swing back . . . and forth, back . . . and forth, until it began to lull us to sleep with the rhythmic chirping of the crickets. Aunt Della would start the story in a soft, low voice, and as the tale grew and grew her voice built with it:

"Once there was a little boy who wouldn't say his prayers.
And when he went to bed that night a-w-a-a-a-y upstairs—
His mammy heard him holler
And his pappy heard him bawl.
But when they turned the kivers back,
He wasn't there at all!
They seeked him in the chimney flue,
The cubby hole and press.
They sought him in the rafter room,
And everywhere I guess.
But all they ever found of him
Was his pants and little roundabout—
And the goblins'll get you!
If you don't watch out!"

"Oh!" we'd all scream, and invariably someone would drop his popsicle in the excitement. "Tell us another," we'd beg Aunt Della. "Tell us 'The Big Toe' or 'The Crooked Mouth Family.'"

It was usually at this exact moment that Mother would drive up in the station wagon to claim us.

"Hi kids!" she'd call. "Ready to go now?" And suddenly the magical spell was broken. We'd untangle ourselves from Aunt Della with a last good-bye hug and kiss for her and Gram. And that was the end of a weekend at Oak Street.

I'm sure that we all counted the days until we could go back to Oak Street. I still go there today, but not half as often as I did during those summers when I was six or seven. My cousins and I don't grab a popsicle from the freezer anymore, or fight over who will sit by Aunt Della.

Now Gram and Aunt Della are old, like the house, and talk of leaving Oak Street soon. I hope they don't, because I'd like my little girl to grow up spending summers making "Mayberry jam" and hearing stories on the front porch as she drips popsicle juice and snuggles up to her favorite aunt on a warm summer's evening.

GRANDFATHER BYRNE

Cindy A. Rust

The smell of medicine and anaesthetics hung heavily in the air. Men and women in white uniforms rushed expressionless up and down the corridors. The stiff lace of my Sunday dress itched horribly. I didn't like this place. It was scary. I just wanted to see Grandfather. My desperate pleading to my parents had resulted in my being placed on an old gray sofa in the hall, away from the grown-ups. Why couldn't I see him?

Mother had told me Grandfather Byrne was dying. I understood that. I just wanted to see him. The grown-ups said that he was different and that he might not even know who I was now. That couldn't be! He wouldn't be different. He was still Grandfather. He would know me. . .