

“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. . .

One hot summer day, Grandfather and I took a walk through the woods by the farm to look for treasure he said the pirates forgot they had hidden in Indiana and had left behind.

"We should search by the pond first—that's where all pirates hide their treasures. You go look and I'll stand guard," he said.

He was so smart. Well, it seemed as if I searched forever, while Grandfather stood guard, but I couldn't find the treasure. I let out a long sigh of discouragement. A long deep chuckle rolled from his chest and past his loving smile.

"Come on, Cinnie An Wutts—let's have a seat and think this whole thing out. We really shouldn't give up, but we deserve a rest."

Grandfather always called me "Cinnie An Wutts" instead of Cindy Anne Rust like everybody else. He said "Rust" sounded funny. The best kind of names started with an "O" like O'Byrne, he thought. That made me laugh. I asked him if he didn't think that O'Rust sounded even funnier.

"No—just more Irish," he said with a wink.

Lots of times he would sit and not say a word, but other times he would say so many important things that it was hard keeping up with him.

"You know it's too bad about your face—what's it like to have a nose right in the middle of your face, you funny lookin' kid, you."

And so we sat on the plush green moss by the pond and talked about all the important things like bugs, Christmas, and why the sky is blue and stuff.

Would he remember that day? I wondered. Mother came back out to the hall.

"Can I see him now?" I pleaded.

"Maybe you can see him in a while—he isn't doing very well so we will have to wait and see," Mother said.

I repressed my desires to pester her about how long "a while" was.

I was always being told to wait a while. I remember one Easter spent at Grandfather's house. That time I refused to wait a while. On Easter morning, I tiptoed softly into Grandfather's bedroom and then ever so carefully pounced on him demanding to begin the hunt for the eggs IMMEDIATELY! He shot upright and quickly drew his finger to his lips.

“SHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! It’s too early—it is before the dew has dried, so the rabbits are still playing Bite-Ear.”

Needless to say, I wanted to know what this Bite-Ear game the rabbits played was.

“Well, Bite-Ear happens every morning when all the rabbits come out of the woods and meet in the field by the house. They jump up and down wildly trying to bite each other’s ears without having their own ears bitten. I discovered this Bite-Ear business when I had gone out one morning, before the dew had dried, and found myself in the middle of all of those rabbits trying to bite each other’s ears. Cinnie An Wutts, I feared for my life but mostly for my lobes! I was defenseless because the rabbits were too small for me to bite back!”

I decided he was right and that the Easter egg hunt could wait until the morning’s Bite-Ear was completed and the rabbits had returned to the woods. So I went back to bed and waited.

But I didn’t want to wait any more. I wanted to see my Grandfather.

“Please Mother, now?”

“All right,” she said softly, “now.”

I felt anxious but frightened. Would he remember my name, the summer day, or Bite-Ear? Please God—Grandfather couldn’t have forgotten me, could he?

A man in white pushed open the tall swinging door to his room. My knees were quivering and my mouth was dry. I drew to his bed. It was surrounded by large silver machines with flashing lights and lots of knobs and switches. He lay quietly in the big, white bed and didn’t move. They had put tubes in his nose and arms and clear stuff oozed in and out of them. I reached out and took his hand.

“Grandfather? Grandfather, can you hear me?”

Slowly his eyes, encircled with wrinkles, opened and looked dreamily at me. Then a faint but sturdy voice murmured—

“Hey, Cinnie An Wutts, promise me that you’ll keep looking for that treasure and watch out for those rabbits. . . .”

I nuzzled my head on his chest.

“I will Grandfather—I love you!”

Grandfather Byrne is dead now. But memories of him, pirate treasure, nicknames, and Bite-Ear will live in my heart forever.