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LITTLE RABBIT

Virginia Davis



OUR FAMILY MOVED FROM OKLAHOMA when I was seven, so most of this writing was about my young preschool memories of the beautiful and bountiful land around the home place.

The trip up Highway 77 from Ardmore to Grandmother's was fun and the scenery was usually interesting. I say, "usually," because many times as I crawled into the black Chevy, I pulled off my shoes and played in the floorboard until we got to Turner Falls. When I felt the car swaying, I climbed back up on the seat because I knew we were climbing the hill above Turner Falls. Looking down through the thick jungle of cedar trees and vines, I caught glimpses of free running water, children swimming, picnic tables, and family tents. I always asked to stop but I don't think we ever did. It seemed Daddy was always in a hurry to be somewhere he wasn't.

A little past Turner Falls we left Highway 77, rolled down the windows, and shifted to a lower gear. Then, daddy turned the car right, onto a reddish dirt road, and we crossed a rickety wooden bridge that creaked as we navigated it. John and I chanted, "Fall bridge, fall." Thank goodness it never did. I was relieved because secretly I always thought it might. Because of the rough, rain-beaten road, Daddy slowed even more. Trees laced with honey suckle and trumpet vines formed a canopy for the road. Streams of light danced through the thick foliage onto the red dirt ahead of us. I loved that ride! Through the thick vines we caught flashes of the Washaita River. We skirted the river for about five miles. We could hear its angry roar. It seemed to want to remind us to stay out of its bed.

As we climbed the last hill, we pulled up to the white picket fence and I pulled on my shoes. Matching cousins, Wanda and Shirley, met us. Sometimes off-aged cousins were also there. We jumped out, greeted the kinfolks and headed up the dirt path toward the rock house. A sea of multicolored Zinnias and red and pink Poppies banked each side of the path. Near the end of the path, we entered a tunnel of orange Trumpet Vines. Bees and darting humming birds ignored us as we ran through the vine-tunnel and on up the steps onto the screened-in front porch. Granddad Brubaker, Uncle Gilbert, and Uncle Guy Crutchfield built the rock house. Uncle Guy was a brick mason and the three of them laid native stones in concrete to give the house shape and warmth.

**ALL HOLES
LEAD TO CHINA**

Beverly Sellers

As a child
I was fascinated
with the idea
if I dug a hole
straight down
A N Y W H E R E
and kept on digging
it would come out
in China.
I took this
as a literal
statement of fact.

So I borrowed
Daddy's shovel
which stood taller
than me and
started digging in
the sandy loam
out there in the pasture
in back of our house.

I dug and dug
for days on end-----
then plum tuckered out
I concluded
the Chinaman in China
could wait to meet me
and I to meet him
until maybe next year
when with luck
I'd grow taller than
Daddy's shovel.

Five or six homemade rockers were lined up along the cedar wall. At the far end of the porch was a handmade table covered in a checkered oilcloth. Benches for ten or twelve adults framed the table. An embroidered dishtowel covered salt, pepper, sugar and syrup in the middle of the table.

Behind the rockers was a pine doorway that led to a large family room. Every piece of homemade wooden furniture faced the ceiling-to-floor rock fireplace. Two doors led from the back of the large room to four bedrooms; across the back of the last two bedrooms was a screened-in sleeping porch. All the beds had goose down pillows and feather mattresses and were covered with homemade quilts. The only picture I remember was "End of the Trail"- at sunset, an old Indian sat on a horse; both with bent heads. The warrior had a club head or spear in his right hand.

To the right of the front room was a large kitchen with a wood-burning cook stove and a corner icebox. The icebox held a large block of ice that stood in a tin pan in the bottom half of the box. The wooden box was lined with tin to hold in the cold air. The top half of the box stored the milk. I do not ever remember opening either the top or bottom half of the icebox. It was forbidden. A cupboard stocked with jars of canned meats, carrots, peas, beans, pickled peaches, and beets stood on the south side. A door to the right led to the before mentioned front porch. Off to the left side of the kitchen was the back screened porch that housed a daisy church, a separator, large crocks that held milk clabber, a drinking water bucket, a dipper, and a tin pan for the men to wash their hands. A wall with an open door on the back section of this porch led to Granddad and Grandmother's sleeping porch.

They slept out there the year around. In the winter and during rainstorms, canvas was unrolled to keep them out of the direct weather. I never remember them sleeping anywhere else. I don't think I ever went into that room, but I looked through the doorless frame every time I went out on the milk porch.

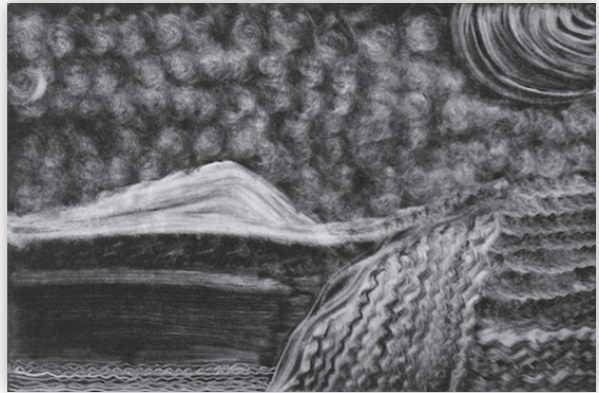
On the right side of the exit screen door from the milk porch was a rain barrel. The rainwater was used on Saturday nights to wash the girls' hair. Up a path, about one hundred yards through bushes and vine, sat the outhouse. Sears Roebuck catalogues served us well. Sometimes corncobs were available.

Straight out the back door was the chicken yard. I always wanted to collect the eggs from the hen house. I was glad I had remembered to put my shoes on as I passed through the chicken wire gate into the inane world of the chickens. They did not seem to like me very much. When I spread corn feed over the pen, they seemed happy enough, but

when I got to the hen house and felt under the hens to get the eggs, they pecked at me and flew in my face. Hawks usually swept the sky above and the roosters kept wary eyes skyward. Maybe they thought I was a hawk. Anyway, I never stayed in the hen house longer than I had to. When I took the eggs to the house, I'd check the drinking bucket. If it were near empty, Shirley and I would take it to the spring. We passed by the smoke house on the left. It was always full of hanging beef and hogs. To the right of the smoke house was the potato cellar. Many times we went down in it just for the smell. It smelled like wet ground after a rain because Grandma, or one of us, turned the potatoes each day. We threw out any soft potatoes and pulled eyes from those trying to grow. After we emerged from the cool dark cellar, we were right at the edge of the ravine. We'd search for a hanging grape vine, then swing down to the bottom of the ravine, put our bucket by the pump, and make as many return swings as we wanted. Strangely enough, I never encountered poison ivy, but I think John did. The well below the pump was deep, and when the ice melted in the ice box, Grandmother brought the butter to the well and lowered it into the cool water on a long string. We pumped the water into the bucket then drank as much as we wanted and splashed as much on each other as we dared and then sloshed our way up the grade and back to the milk porch.

Now, we were free to run across the dirt to the barn. This was a treat. Granddad was always over there, filling the corn bin for the pigs, pitch-forking hay out for the horses and cows, or slopping the pigs. We usually went straight into the hayloft. The sweet smelling hay filled our senses, especially if it were freshly mowed. From the hayloft window, we watched the Washaita River roar by on its way to nowhere. It seemed so angry and in such a hurry. Each spring it flooded the vegetable garden at least twice and always carried brush and tree branches in its red foam. Many years it washed out bridges making it impossible for us to go to church. The garden contained every vegetable I could name, plus a few I couldn't. I remember peach trees, black berry patches, and the pecan grove. The riverbed held rich red silt and the fruits and vegetables tasted fresh and full of acid.

Granddad made his living selling to the Baptist encampment just over the hill behind the spring. He took any leftovers to town on Saturdays to sell at market. All they brought in the grocery store was blocked ice, flour, sugar, coffee and tea, snuff, and kerosene for the



UNTITLED
James G. Robinson

lamps. Sometimes we rode in the back of the pickup, singing and teasing each other. It was grand until Granddad spit snuff out the window and it smacked one of us in the face.

Living off the land was hard and demanding and a constant call to work; however, it was satisfying and the family was very aware of its dependence on nature and on God. The one Christmas I remember was when most of the family was there. Great grandmother Brubaker was a happy little gray-haired lady who loved to cook, sing, and dance. Many times these were combined and she did them all at once. What a wonderful show! She'd twirl around the kitchen - bowl and spoon in hand. I thought that was grand. She sang in German. I didn't have a clue what the tune or words were but had no doubt they were happy ones. Uncle Paul and Aunt Jo lived in Chicago. He was a carpenter and they didn't get to come that year, so he sent every granddaughter a doll. My what a wonderful day that was: the uncles had cut the tree; we popped Granddad's popcorn over the open fire in a metal basket; great Grandmother Brubaker kept singing, dancing, and serving sweets until we had to turn her down. My grandmother was the most patient woman I ever knew. She never raised her voice to us or to Great Grandmother Brubaker. It was a good Christmas.

O'CONNOR 5 James O'Connor



When I was seven, we moved to West Texas. On the trip out, I remember Highway 82 from Guthrie to Dickens - no trees, no vines, no water – just rolling hills and burned grass. Mother cried from the time we drove up on the Caprock until the Crosbyton superintendent called and asked her to teach English. That occurred about two weeks after we moved in. She kept repeating, “J.P. there aren’t any trees.”

After that, our lives were very settled, and happy times set in. Daddy left home each morning at 6:30 and walked to the SCS office carrying a lunch box. John, Mother, Beverly, and I crawled into the black Chevy. First we dropped Beverly at Mr. Finch’s or Mrs. Knapp’s. At noon we came home, and then after school, I ran to the car so Mother and I could pick up Beverly and have supper on the table for John and Daddy who arrived at 5:30 from football practice and work. I don’t ever remember asking one parent if I could go somewhere, getting the wrong answer and then going to the other parent. Somehow, we all knew they were on the same page and the answer would be the same. I felt our family worked well as a team. We knew what our chores were; we did them and enjoyed them. I worked with Daddy in the yard, cooked breakfast for John, Beverly, and I and did the weekly ironing. Ironing provided lots of time for me to listen to Nemo Knapp and Daddy’s discussions on politics or to daydream. I was better at the latter.

Every Sunday, Daddy took us to Sunday school and church; then, mother took us on Sunday night. We were active in the Methodist Youth Foundation, the MYF. As a matter of fact the church provided most of our social life. I loved choir practice under Ann Hamilton, the preacher’s wife.

John was a leader at school and at church. He was kind and wanted everyone to feel a part of what was going on. We assumed he was right on most issues and I guess he was; I never thought he might not be. As president of the student council, he rewrote the constitution. Mostly I cheered him on and spent a great deal of time planning recreation for the youth at the church. As long as I could have fun or be outside, I was happy.

Beverly was a gift to all of us. She was beautiful and good-natured. She loved animals and brought home every stray within a mile of our house. I remember a pet rooster and an assortment of dogs and cats. She was a naturally happy child and brought joy to our home. I thought she was mine; no one ever told me differently. As a matter of fact, I grew up thinking and acting about the way I wanted to. It was a good childhood!

(When the grandchildren were younger, I told them "Little Rabbit" stories that incorporated the home place and my imagination. I thought the other Davis and Hager grandchildren might enjoy this one)

Spring days grew long, so Little Rabbit and Turtle decided they'd sit on the back porch and watch the hawks circle above the hen house. A light breeze lifted the hawks' wings as they glided on the air-stream smoothly, silently. The rise and fall of their wings almost put Little Rabbit and Turtle to sleep.

As they watched the circling birds, the newest chick in the hen house made his first trip out into the chicken yard. He fluttered across a splintered board that held the shed together. It felt good to be free from that old wet egg.

"Free at last!" he whistled to himself.

Then, he waddled off into the flock of chickens. They were pecking at corn kernels that had been spread across the ground by Mama Rabbit. He happily went after a loose kernel only to feel a sharp pain on top of his head. He recognized the feet beside him. They were those of a chick hatched only a few hours before him. That rascal was after the same kernel. Chick flapped his wings and managed to get a little distance between himself and the other chick.

Not wanting any part of the pecking order, Chick spied a kernel off to the edge of the chicken yard. Then, he fluttered and spluttered toward it and away from the flock. As the chick rushed toward the corn, the sharp-eyed hawk caught sight of him. Instinct took hold, and that old Hawk swooped down and passed right over the chickens toward Chick. The familiar swooping sound set the roosters to crowing and the hens to cackling. Soon the air was filled with clouds of dust, cackling hens, and flying feathers.

Chick had reached the chicken wire fence with no place to go. So he hit the ground, buried his face in the loose sand, and shook all the way down to his new tail feathers. Hawk zoomed in closer, and right when Chick thought he was a goner, he heard a loud thud and a weak groan right above him. As the dust cleared, Chick looked up and there was Hawk stuck beak first into the chicken wire. He was knocked cold with his eyes wide open. Hawk's old body went limp and he slowly slipped to the ground in a heap.

Now, you need to know, his troubles were just beginning because Mama Rabbit had heard the ruckus and here she came through the screen door, across the wooden porch, and down the dirt path to the chicken yard. As she passed through the gate she picked up a shovel that leaned against the gatepost. Shovel held high, she pushed open the gate to the chicken yard and headed straight for that poor old hawk. When Mama Rabbit gets mad, she screams unkind things. So as Hawk rose into the air, one of her shovel swings caught Hawk right under his beak and her unkind words scorched Hawk's tender old ears. I think it must have been pure fright that lifted him out of any further injuries from the crazed shovel.

But Mama wasn't through! When Hawk escaped out of swinging range, she pulled back her throwing arm and sent that shovel - javelin-style - straight for Hawk's head. Luckily for him, she was so angry she "missed him by that much" but struck an old pine tree just the other side of the chicken wire. That shovel hit and buried itself deep in the soft wood and quivered for a full minute.

All this sent Mama Rabbit into new verbiage about how those hawks had better leave her chickens alone. Hawk's limped-flighted back into the woods. He was a pitiful sight as he zigzagged to the safety of darkness to lick his wounds.

When Mama Rabbit turned back toward the house there were Little Rabbit and Turtle watching wide-eyed and Little Rabbit said, "'Atta, girl, Mama!"