

The Swing in the Old Chestnut Tree

by Wilma J. Perry of Watkins Glen, New York
born in 1944

My name is Wilma Perry. I'm very pleased to write and share my childhood memories. I was born in 1944 at Shepard's Hospital in Montour Falls, New York. It's now the Fall's Home for the Elderly.

I lived and grew up on Hause Hill, in the town of Tyrone, Schuyler County, New York. Hause Hill is now legally called Pulver Hill Road. It was a two hundred acre estate once owned by William Hause, a Revolutionary War soldier. He is buried at the Hause Hill Cemetery next to William Harris, another Revolutionary War soldier. He was an Indian trader who married one of William Hause's daughters.

The Hause house dates back to the 1700s. I lived in it, and I remember it as a beautiful home with polished walls and floors. It burned in 1948.

After the Hause house burned, our family moved into the old Pulver place on Losey Hill, near Pulver Hill. There was a large chestnut tree that held a swing. I loved to play on that swing. I went up so high, I thought I was flying. I liked to sit under that chestnut tree and crack off its green shelled nuts. Once the shell was off, there was a brown shiny nut, which I thought was the most beautiful thing I ever saw. The chestnut tree

in it, heavy ropes were pulled through it and tied on the branches. I spent several hours in that yard. It was a wonderful swing.

We left the Pulver House and came back to a rebuilt house on the same foundation as the old one. My father built us another swing.

I played in the granary of the barn. It was made of the same kind of wood that was in the Hause house. It had smooth wide boards, and it looked like a parlor in an old country home. It was a happy, peaceful place. Those kind of memories stay with me. I wish I could have wood like that in my home. The barn fell down in 1965.

I loved to play house. I would find an old blanket and hang it over the clothesline. I brought my dolls into my house. I found two cardboard boxes, which became an icebox and a wood cook stove. I found acorns in the woods, and I made them into dishes. My toy plates were used canning lids from home canned foods. The silverware were knives from Popsicle sticks, small wooden ice cream paddles for spoons and wooden clothespins for forks.

I had a large board I laid on the ground for a table. I put a small quilt on it for a tablecloth. I sat a bouquet of flowers in an old nail polish bottom in the middle of my table, and I was ready to cook.

Cooking pots were tuna fish cans filled with water and stones for potatoes. Stones were set in the oven to bake; they were roasted meat. I sat my chocolate mud pies in the oven. A salad of dried grass, wood shavings, rocks and stones were a salad. A casserole in a sardine can baked in the oven; it was seashell macaroni and cheese. My imagination was good. There wasn't anything I couldn't cook.

I sat my dolls at the table and said the blessing. What a meal that was! After supper, I put the leftovers in the icebox with a rock for a chunk of ice.

On warm sunny days on Hause Hill, I would go out early in the morning, wearing old jeans, some old sneakers and old sweaters. I would walk around looking for wild flowers. I would bring back beautiful bouquets of flowers. I liked tree blossoms. Cherry blossoms, apple blossoms, prune blossoms, and wild plums. I liked pussy willows and cattails. There were roses and lilacs.

I would put them in glass salad dressing jars with water and give them to my mother. The field flowers were dandelions, wild mustard, clover blossoms,



The barn built by William House in 1811 fell down in 1965.

goldenrod, wild asters, myrtle, milk weeds. I learned early how to make beautiful bouquets. I was my own teacher.

Later in the year, I would find some grasses that grew this on the swampy parts of the farm. I tried to make houseplants for my mother. In the cold winter months, with the wild grasses and weeds growing, the house seemed pleasant.

We would start tomato plants in January and watch them grow. I liked to eat wild onions and sheep-sorrow. There were grapes that grew in the hedgerows. They were tame and so delicious. I really enjoyed them. I would walk past rows of wild garlic and enjoy the smell.

Many times I wandered the fields and explored the old Hause farm. There was an old brick oven out back that Mrs. Hause used for cooking. I walked to the cemetery where my grandmother and her infant son was buried. It was an old, old cemetery. My mother had told me not to eat the apples that were from the apple trees on the graveyard. Those apples were white and very sweet. She never knew I ate them. I wasn't about to tell her I had done that.

I loved the wild blackberries. I picked them for my mother for pies. The huckleberries on the hill made very good pies, and I was happy to go pick them. The family would go pick wild strawberries. We made a baking powder biscuit dough and served the berries over the biscuits.

My father loved dandelion greens or mustard greens. My mother baked bread, pies and biscuits in the oven of the wood stove. That cook stove was the source of heat in the kitchen during the winter.

I think about the wood stove, her old treadle sewing machine, the icebox that held a piece of ice, the sad irons we heated on the stove, the outhouse out back, old wooden wall telephone.

Our trips to town were on Saturdays. Once a month, we would get surplus food in Watkins. We would get peanut butter, dried milk, cheese, flour, oatmeal, cornmeal, canned meat, butter, rice, dried beans. We went fishing on Sunday afternoons at Lamoka Lake in Tyrone; we had fish for supper. I will always remember Gold Medal Flour on the grocery shelves, Domino or Jack Frost Sugar, Blue Bonnet Margarine, Kellogg's Cornflakes and Green Giant vegetables. I had fun looking at these shelves.

Ma sewed on a treadle sewing machine. My dresses were made from printed feed bags.

I did get spanked in school. I didn't do anything to have been spanked for, but I do remember it and the awful pain from it.

Memories are what we are made from. They shape

us and give us the strength to move on. Hause Hill is like what it was when I was a child. My parents have passed on to a better world. I hope what I have written can be appreciated for the times I lived there from early '40s to the early '60s. Thank you.