

Stories of Ruth Pearson Beattie by Ruth - Born: March 7, 1917

We moved quite often during my early life. I was born at home and delivered by our family doctor Rahe. For some reason he neglected to register my birth. My Aunt Peg and Uncle Ed used to pack up all the baby necessities and take me for the week end. I am not certain that that was when my sister Fran was expected but I know it happened regularly.

Fran was born in a hospital when I was 2 1/2 years old. I have a slight recollection of being taken to see her. For a while we lived in a three flat in Roseland. My mother was trying to wean Fran from the bottle so my mother threw the bottle out into the prairies that surrounded our flat. The next day Fran and I embarked on a hunt for Fran's "botchel". By the time we found it, several days later, it had lost its charm.

When I was nearly five we moved into a flat in a large court around 62nd and Dorchester with my Grandma Barhyte and her husband, George. I remember the flowers that grew there, golden glow and cannas. Since I was the right age, it was arranged that the girls upstairs, Lorraine and Leola would walk with me to kindergarten since I would have to cross 63rd Street. The big day came. When I saw the kindergarten teacher, the only thing that registered was her large goiter. When we went out for recess, I took off for home. I couldn't explain what bothered me but no one could get me to go back to kindergarten.

That summer I spent at my Uncle John's farm outside of Niles, Michigan along with my Grandma Johnson. We took the interurban to either Niles or South Bend. The thing that impressed me was how the drinking water was dispensed in paper cups. My uncle picked us up in a buggy pulled by his faithful horse, Grant. On the way to the farm, we forded a creek and I got to hold the reins. As soon as we reached the farm and our luggage was stowed away I was taken to the barn and introduced to Buttercup, the cow, who was going to provide the milk I would drink. I liked my milk cold but I was told that Buttercup would be insulted if I would not drink her milk as it came. Buttercup was a Jersey cow as was her daughter Pansy. I loved everything about the farm from digging up a carrot, rinsing it under the pump and eating it to going to the outhouse at night under the stars accompanied by Prince the collie. There were three dogs, Prince the largest, Patsy a mixture and Peggy a small black terrier I learned to feed the chickens with my cousin Helen and to look for eggs under the hens. I went with my cousin Bud to take the cows down the road to the pasture and to bring them home toward evening for milking.

The summer came to an end. The next place I remember was a first floor apartment at 79th and South Shore Drive. It was heated by a stove that burned coal. The flames could be seen through the isinglass doors. One day I was sent to the store across the street (South Shore Drive) to buy some onions. When I went to return home, I was knocked down by the bumper of a Ford model T. The driver was very excited. He came into the house with me, but I was not hurt. I think that the accident was due to my nearsightedness.

I knew how to read before I went to school. I started first grade at the Bradwell School. Besides the brick school building there were many portables connected to each other and the buildings by boardwalks. There were drinking fountains in each portable, but the washrooms were in the brick building. I loved my first grade teacher, Mrs. Walsh but was not too happy when it was decided that I should go directly to second grade. In third grade I began getting math papers with failing grades. It was discovered that I was copying the numbers wrong as I could not see the blackboard. So I got my first pair of glasses. I was amazed at how the world looked. I knew trees had leaves because I had seen the leaves up close, but I never knew you could actually see them on the tree.

We moved several times, once to 79th and Burnham behind a store. It was hard to get to sleep there as there were cats doing their thing at night. It was also interesting as there was a fire station next door.

The next time we moved was to 7932 Escanaba Avenue. That was a two story house with a nice back yard. Our landlords were an old Swedish couple and we were always warned to be very quiet so we would not disturb them. On our birthdays we would sometimes receive a five dollar goldpiece from Grandma Barhyte. We would play on the front sidewalk after school. Boys coming home from St. Bride's school would often tease us and take our jump rope. We complained to our parents but were told, "Fight your own battles," I took that too literally. The next time a boy tried to take our jump rope I hit him over the head with a roller skate. Besides a severe scolding I had to give my five dollar gold piece to pay the doctor bill.

Tabor Lutheran church was at 80th and Escanaba. The minister was Pastor Bostrom. He had three children, Luther, Paul and Sylvia. Sylvia was close to our age and we played together at times. Mother joined the ladies group there and we went to Sunday school. The pastor took the injunction to greet each other with a kiss literally. That was about the time when my father joined the church. He was not too happy about the Lutheran Church's attitude towards the Masons, but I think he was protecting his own territory. I don't remember his going to church too often.

Now I didn't realize how young my parents were at the time. I can remember one Christmas Eve. Our parents sent us out into the kitchen. Soon one of them came in and said, "Santa Claus must have come early this Christmas! Come and see!" I didn't realize at the time that they were the ones who couldn't wait. I am not sure whether that was the time that we got the little cast iron stove with all the pots and pans, the stove lids, the lifter for the lids, the coal bucket and shovel--and other related items. At any rate, we always opened our Christmas gifts on Christmas Eve after that. We always had home made potato sausage, glogg, bondust (a kind of Swedish cheese) and pickled herring.

The living room window in the Escanaba house was larger than usual for that time. Fran and I were home alone. We entertained ourselves by rocking in a rocking

chair as hard as we could. The chair went over backwards and broke the window. We were terrified and hoped our mother would come home first because she would be easier on us. But it was our dad. To our surprise, he didn't say much, just arranged for the glass to be replaced.

Something else happened while we lived on Escanaba. My mother came home with some baby clothes and told us that she was going to have a baby. I was just about nine years old at the time. Faith was born in September. Shortly after, my Grandma Johnson became sicker than usual so Faith was baptized in her bedroom. I seem to remember that Grandma Johnson died soon after and was laid out in our parlor. There is no one alive who can tell me if my memory is correct. I believe she was buried from Tabor church but my sister Fran and I did not attend the funeral.

Our next move was to 8202 Clyde Avenue. That was a second floor apartment in a new brick building that had about 6 apartments. My folks slept on an in-a-door bed and we kids slept in a bedroom. It was about this time that we realized that Faith involved some work on our part. It was fun at first but it soon grew old. We also changed schools and attended the Horace Mann School. It's school song was, "Fill the steins to dear old Mann--Shout till the rafters ring etc." There was a prairie behind the flat building and next to it was a Baptist Church in a converted bungalow. I am not certain how it began but Fran and I used to get up on Sunday mornings, get dressed, eat breakfast and go to the nearest Sunday School. I imagine someone must have taken us the first time but I am not sure. At any rate we attended a smorgasboard of Sunday Schools. I think that the Baptist Sunday School was my favorite for a while, with its swingy hymns. However the baptismal font rather scared me. I knew that I had been baptized and did not want to be immersed.

It must have been about this time that my parents decided to buy a house. It was a brick bungalow at 1736 East 85th Street. It was red brick, two bedroom, one bath and an enclosed back porch. My mother had always wanted a fireplace so a mantel and artificial coals lit by two revolving fans were added. It had hot water heat and a basement that flooded but we didn't find that out right away. Our next door neighbor to the east were the Sachtlebens. Dr. Sachtleben, his wife, who had been a nurse and handled some of his office work, and their two children, John and Mary. There was a vacant lot just west of us where we played baseball.

We had a rather large kitchen, half of which was taken up with a breakfast nook. We were delighted with it at first but when it was time to wash the kitchen floor it involved a bit of crawling about. As I remember I usually sat on the north end closest to the kitchen stove and next to my mother. Fran sat across from me next to my father. Faith sat at the end in her high chair. I had the reputation of being fussy; I didn't like home canned peaches because of the fibers that had held in the pit. Fran was a slow eater. She was usually the last finished. Faith had a good appetite. We didn't have too much conversation at the table. My dad wasn't much of a talker and my mother might report on what we had done wrong.

I believe that we inherited a strong furniture moving gene from our mother. This was in evidence once when my father came home after working the afternoon shift. When he came home, he did not turn on any lights in order not to disturb anyone. He went to lie down on the bed but the bed wasn't there. My mother had cleaned and moved the bed. We all woke up.

My folks were friendly with and saw quite a bit of two other couples and their kids. The first were the Reeds, Tom and Ruth and Tommy, Bobby and Ruthie. We kids got along well. Tom, the father always used to embarrass me by telling them how he used to change my diapers. Later they moved to Detroit. Ruth Reed had a relative living on a farm in Indiana and both families often went there for the weekend. I remember our parents shooting at tin cans.

The other couple were the Howells, Bea and Dave nicknamed "Peanuts", and their boys, David, Bob and Jack. We used to play under the dining room table while our folks played pinochle. When the boys had to go to bed we took over the couch in the living room. I read all of the boys' series, Tom Swift, The Hardy Boys etc. Dave, of course, later married my sister Fran. Peanuts and my dad, Perky, both worked in the mill. (Illinois Steel, Southworks.)

Fran and I continued to go to Horace Mann for a while, transferred to Avalon Park and then back again to Horace Mann from which we graduated. Graduating from Horace Mann involved much more than than ordinary schoolwork. The girls had to make their graduation dresses. Our homemaking teacher was a very strict red head named Mrs. Langan. If anyone answered one of her questions with "Maybe" she would always answer "May bees don't fly in March." The first problem was to design a monogram. Our dresses were to be made of white silk pique and consisted of a dress and a long sleeved jacket with lapels. The monogram was to be embroidered on the front of the dress. If it had not been for a lot of outside help, mostly from my mother, I would never have graduated.

Faith started school at some portables a few blocks away. About this time, our paternal grandfather entered our life. We knew that Grandma Barhyte was divorced from her first husband's because of his drinking. A man called my mother on the telephone and told her he was Frank's father. She told him Frank's father was dead and hung up on him. My father admitted that his father could be alive. The next time the man called a meeting was arranged and they got together. My grandfather had dried out with the help of the Salvation Army. He got his act together, remarried and started a restaurant in Sumner, Mississippi. We found out that he had tried to contact our dad several times. I think they had agreed that the personals in the Chicago Tribune could be a place to contact each other. We always got the Sunday Tribune except once when the weather was very bad. That was one time that our grandfather tried to contact us. When he was not successful he got drunk and went home. The next summer we went to Sumner to visit. We stayed at the hotel and had our meals at the American Cafe on one side of the town square. We found out about segregation. When we walked on the sidewalk, the black people stepped off. Also there was a table in the kitchen of the

restaurant, where some black people could eat.

In the fall I entered Bowen High School. Bowen was an old school. Some gym classes were held in Bessemer Park across the street. My locker was on the fourth floor. It was almost impossible to go from class to my locker and then downstairs, cross the street and get to the fieldhouse. When I did make it the gym teacher was cross-eyed and I couldn't tell whether she was looking at me or someone else. Soon it was easier to spend the period at the store across the street. Later I had to double up on PE classes. I spent three years at Bowen and when Hirsch High School opened I transferred there. I worked on the school paper and became part of a group that wrote poetry. The journalism teacher liked me and thought I might be interested in college. Her father was connected to De Pauw college in Indiana and she was almost sure that he could get me a scholarship. I couldn't imagine not living at home and I never mentioned anything about it to my parents.

One day when I came home from school I found my mother talking to Reverend Carlson, the minister from Tabor. He asked if she wanted to send me to confirmation class. Mom pointed out that we lived quite a distance from Tabor now. I would have to take two streetcars. At the end it was left up to me. I said I would go. There were 14 members in my confirmation class-- seven girls and seven boys. Three of the girls from church, Daisy, Meg and Marion and Fran and I and a couple of others had a bridge club that lasted many years.

When I graduated from Hirsch high school I signed up to take the tests to enter Chicago Teacher's College for lack of anything better to do. At that time I had no idea that you could get copies of previous tests to study. I took the Teachers' college entrance tests and they were hard. They included math science history, geography, music and art. We would not know the results until August. I spent part of the summer with my cousin Leonard and his wife Viola. They had a little girl, Connie and a baby boy, David. I was sort of a mother's helper. Later in the summer, we got a telephone call from home saying that I was to go in for an oral exam. So I went home and took the oral exam. Later I was notified that I had been accepted.

The class that entered in September was divided into four sections. There were about eighty of us out of about the thousand who took the entrance exams. I was in the section that had the boys or men, all eight of them. It was nice though because we knew all of the players on the basketball team. I managed to enjoy P.E. for the first time at Chicago Teachers College. I learned to play tennis, captain ball (similar to basketball) and some archery. I made some friends with whom I stayed in touch for many years. (Alice Heale Frase, Esther Soderstrom Larm, Shirley Hassel, Milicent Deick McFarland, Minnie Langdell Pester.) I also found out that there were other parts of the city besides the south side and the loop. I learned some of the mysteries of the "L".

There were two very difficult things for me in teachers College. One was learning to swim the elementary backstroke the length of the pool. (It wasn't only the swimming; it was what preceded it. One had to shower, soap up and call the teacher to

be okayed. I wasn't comfortable being seen without clothing.) I made it after quite a few tries. The second thing was to play a simple melody on the piano. I finally conquered "Twinkle, twinkle, little star."

I rode the Stony Island streetcar from 85th street to 67th street, then rode the 67th street car to Normal (Chicago Normal College or teachers college). We passed Oakwoods cemetery on the way. When I was still in my poetry writing stage I remember writing one that started "They laid red roses in the snow ". I found out later that my grandfather Johnson was buried there.

When our class graduated we were required to do cadet teaching. That was a semester of free service. I went to Horace Mann. I was amazed to see how young some of my former teachers were! When that was over we learned that there was a five year wait for an assignment. For a quicker job, one could prepare to teach, blind, deaf or mentally retarded children. I took the course to teach mentally retarded children. My practice teaching was at the J.N. Thorpe School in south Chicago not far from the steel mills. I was surprised to see how poor many children were. I felt guilty for having so much. There were special rooms for children at risk for tuberculosis. Most of the children were Polish, Mexican or black. There seemed to be little tolerance between them.

After graduation I substituted until I was assigned. My first assignment was at the Tilton School on the northwest side. I had to leave home before 7a.m. and take one streetcar and 2 elevated trains to get there. The room to which I was assigned was one half story above the third floor. In other words, we were isolated. There were about 25 students in the class aged from eight through 16. I was informed that the previous teacher suffered a nervous breakdown. I jumped right in; organized reading classes; set some students to painting the chairs bright colors and tried to sell them a bill of goods. They complained that they were called the "dummy" room. There was an assembly each week attended by the whole school. We worked on having absolutely perfect behavior during the assembly. It was noticed. Then I trained some of the older boys to run the movie projector, something that was not easy for me. When another teacher wanted to have a movie our boys would set it up, run it, and then return it. This provided them and our class some respect. Miss Flanagan was a great principal. She came into the room and asked, "How can I help you?" She was not like another who would come in and say, "Your shades are not aligned evenly."

When school was out I decided to go to summer school at the University of Illinois to work toward my bachelor's degree. The university classes began over a week before the Chicago schools closed for the summer. I arranged to room with a classmate from teachers' college, Millicent Dieck. She taught in the county so she was down earlier. We roomed in the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority house. It was an impressive looking, Greek revival house with large side porch supported by large white columns. I was one of the last students to arrive so in the dorm the only beds available were on the triple top bunk. Millicent and I shared a study room with two desks and chairs and room for personal items.

After I arrived Millicent told me that there was a boy in our botany class whom she found attractive. When I was in the library doing some botany class work both he and I were looking for the same text. He bought me a coke and walked home with me. As soon as we reached the house I went upstairs and told Millicent that I brought the boy she liked home for her. She refused to come down. At any rate I played some tennis with him and he got a date for Marian when she came down to visit. We went to a band concert, and found that we both lived in Chicago. Summer school was the very first time I lived on my own and I found it to be quite wonderful. Millicent and I would get up early and play tennis before our first class. We didn't do anything special but it was great to eat what one wanted, to wear what one wanted.

The semester ended and work began again. When grades arrived we found that both Frank Beattie and I had received A's in Economic Botany. He invited me to go to a movie. He picked me up in a friend's car. He drove the car back to its owner and I met his friend and also Frank's older brother, Bob. Neither of us remembers much about that meeting. Frank's friend dropped us off at the movie. After the movie we walked back to Frank's house. He said his brother would be home and we would go to my house in Bob's car. His brother did not appear. Frank played a lot of Strauss waltzes. He finally decided that his brother was not going to show up. We walked to the corner of 79th and Cottage Grove and Frank hailed a cab and took me home. It was some time in January when Bob called to ask me out. I suggested ice skating on the Midway, because I didn't know him and it seemed safe. When we got home, Mom invited Bob to stay for supper. Since he didn't seem dangerous, I suggested that we might go to a movie that evening. Things progressed from there. By the time I was to go back to summer school, we were quite serious. I was not feeling well when I went to summer school. My throat was sore and I had trouble swallowing. I went to the infirmary where they told me to gargle with salt water. One doctor thought I had a goiter and wanted to operate. Bob and I had been writing daily. He called my folks and they came down to get me. Dr. Stanton said that I had a cyst on my larynx. He operated successfully.

Bob and I got engaged in August and married on November 23, 1940. We lived with Bob's mother, and a roomer Al Witzl, until we bought our first house. Cathy was born on March 9th, 1942. My sister, Fran, lived at 82nd and Drexel (I think) We would meet, she with Lynn in a buggy and I had Cathy in her buggy. We would window shop on 79th Street and often go to Fran's where we would feast on fried egg, onion and mustard sandwiches with onions. Some times we would walk past 86th and Michigan where our new house was going up.

We were thrilled with our new home. We contracted to do the decorating. Some of Cathy's first words were "Paint, paint" and "big bike". The war was on then so we sold our car and Bob rode his bike to work.

At that time doctors did not take blood tests to check the rh factors. I had two miscarriages. The next time I was pregnant, I spent a lot of time in bed. The doctor gave me shots of diethylstilbestrol which was supposed to prevent miscarriage. Frank was

born on February 24th 1948. From the first Frank was different. He cried a lot. To me it sounded like something was hurting him. I sat up many nights rocking and holding him as Bob and Cathy needed their sleep in order to go to work and school. Also when he was undressed he seemed very uncomfortable. However he was a beautiful baby and gained weight regularly. Physically he developed at a normal pace but when I would stop to play with him he did not react. I hoped that things would change when he started to talk. We took him to our family doctor who suggested that he might be deaf. I took the correspondence course on working with deaf babies and children but got no place. So then I began looking for someone or some place who could help. I read about Dr. Levinson's Clinic for Children in downtown Chicago. Dr. Levinson said, "He will never change. Put him someplace and forget him. Have another baby. Come and work for me." The next place I took him suggested that he might be autistic or emotionally disturbed. At the University of Illinois Clinic, the doctor complimented me on how well I had done with toilet training and suggested that I go home and continue. The final place that I tried was the Institute for Juvenile research. After Frank had been tested I was called in. "Wouldn't you feel better if you knew this was no fault of yours?" the man said. I answered, "No I just want to know how to help him." So I went home. I taught Frank how to ride a tricycle. He stayed on the sidewalk but had no interest in it. Bob and I joined Retarded Children's Aid. That group began and supported a school for retarded children. I stood on street corners and sold chances to win a car in order to support the school. When Frank was old enough I took him to start school. The teacher said, "Where is your retarded child?" At first glance Frank did not look retarded but after observing him they refused to take him. We lost all of our friends but two. We couldn't blame them but I wasn't ready to give up. All of this was very hard on Cathy, Bob, and our families.

We saw an ad in the Southeast Economist that said "Five acres, an orchard, wooded with creeks running through etc." We went to find the place and fell in love with it. The house was on a narrow gravel road. There was an orchard east of the house and a strawberry patch south of that. Two creeks ran through the property and there were many oak, shagbark hickories and hard maple trees. There was an outside garage as well as one on the lower level. There was a chicken house and three sheds and an outhouse. About seven cats were around. One cat hunted pheasants and one caught fish. We put our house up for sale. As soon as it was sold we moved out New Lenox. The Johnsons, who has sold us the property, had bought a trailer and were in the process of moving out of the house. We put our mattresses down on the floor and slept there the first night. Bob made some bookcases and was outside staining them when the school superintendent stopped by. He asked what grade Cathy was in, and we told him. She went to Haven school. He also mentioned that the rural school down the road was to be closed and used as a school for retarded children. In about a week Bob began his long commute into Chicago, Cathy got on the school bus in front of our house and I decided to look into the old Gougar school. I found one lady, Mrs. Vonderheide, trying to organize twenty some retarded children. Of course I began to help her and was soon hired to work there. Mrs. V. said, "you teach the children and I'll do the rest." And so we began. Although being toilet trained was one requirement for entrance to the school there were quite a few accidents. I ordered some simple

instruments and started a rhythm band. As a beginning we tried to concentrate on speech and manners. The school was supported by the parent group and overseen by a board in Joliet that also raised the money to run the school. Two groups asked and were allowed to work with the children. One was a Christian family who did a Sunday School type of thing and the other was two Catholic nuns who taught religion. They came once a week. The most important thing to me was that no one accomplished anything with Frank. Mrs.V. could make him sit still on a chair but that was all.

The first time I took Frank for a haircut in Chicago, the barber had a hard time. I felt he was thinking, "This lady has no idea how a child should behave." I didn't see any point in trying to explain the problem." In New Lenox, we lucked out. Amos Bruns, the barber, put Frank in the chair, sang to him and had his hair cut before I realized it.

I bought 100 baby chicks to raise. We also raised ducks. When the chickens were almost grown we were awakened by some loud noises. A pack of dogs had gotten into the chicken house and were killing them right and left. I went next door to borrow a gun from our neighbor, as hitting the dogs with a rake did not deter them. Bob shot and killed one dog and the others left.

We had good neighbors, the Vervilles (Ev and Ed) and the Landreys (Phyllis and Leonard). Bob also renewed his acquaintance with Roy Dowle with whom he went to high school. When we came out to New Lenox there were a goodly number of animals. Our neighbor Ev Verville, was also an animal lover. But one time the cat population got out of hand. Bob explained that the most humane method of disposing of them was to kill them with the car exhaust. Ev and I decided to do it. We positioned the kittens in a container with the car's exhaust, ran the car's motor for a while, crying all the time. When we thought it was time to bury them, they began to move. They lived long and happy lives.

Part of the parents group from Trinity School for the Retarded, visited the state institutions. The state institutions seemed to be understaffed so much that by the time patients were dressed to go out, it was time to go in. Patients were being cared for by patients. We investigated some religious homes. The time came when we thought the only thing to do for everyone's sake was to have Frank committed to a state institution. That would reserve a place for him, but he would not have to go unless we thought it best. So we did it. I became pregnant. I resigned from Trinity School. Irene was born on May 23rd, my father's birthday, a Thursday. On Sunday we attended Cathy's graduation from Haven grade school. When Irene was about six months we found Frank trying to climb in Irene's crib. It had been his, so it was understandable, but it was also potentially dangerous. Our minister had offered to get Frank accepted into Bethesda Lutheran Home. We asked him to go ahead. We took Frank to Bethesda. He was nine years old. He never came home again.

Life went on. Cathy went to three proms, each with a different boy. In her third year of high school she met LeRoy Bitner. He graduated from high school in 1959 and she graduated in 1960. They were married on December 17th, 1960 and Irene was the

flower girl. Irene graduated from Oakview grade school, Lincoln-Way high school and Valparaiso College with two degrees: one in electrical engineering and one in chemistry.

Bob retired from the Chicago School system in 1976 and I retired from the New Lenox schools the next year. We purchased a used 17 foot travel trailer and took off. We enjoyed it so much, that later we purchased a new 22 foot travel trailer. Bob brought his amateur radio and a portable antenna with us. We continued traveling in the winter for several years, visiting our friends in Florida, Irene in Texas and friends in New Mexico. One of the things we enjoyed was touring most of the Texas State parks. We also had a wonderful trip to Winnipeg with Cathy and LeRoy and Bruce and Sue. Cathy and LeRoy slept in the van, and Bruce and Sue bunked in the trailer with us, alternating who had the top bunk. Bob enjoyed lots of bike riding with the kids and we played numerous games of pinochle.