

Before She Was Mother

(The story of my life for my
children — Katharine Ballard Anderson)

My Childhood

Chapter I

I was born in a small coal mining town in Oswald, West Virginia in Raleigh County on April 30, 1913. In those days Oswald was as good a name as any town could have.

Walt Disney wasn't heard of and of course Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President Kennedy wasn't born for many years.

All I know about this little town was that it was situated between two very high mountains and seemed remote from every other place. The weather was always very cool, so cool we slept under blankets even on ~~summer~~ ^{summer} nights

and never walked after sun
down without wraps.

My father, William
Riley Ballard was the local
store manager and my mother,
Laura Blanche (Baristes)
Ballard, had three other
children, but welcomed the
new comer with joy. George
was five, Oscar three, and
Blanche was just fourteen
months old when little
sister arrived. The true
story goes that Blanche
patted my fuzzy head
with pleasure and said,
"Kitty - Kitty." She showed
no jealousy whatever and
these two sisters were
always congenial thereafter.

When asked what

she wanted "probably" Mother would have said, if she had been like one of the modern mothers, "a rest". But in West Virginia's mountains large families were expected and appreciated. My next sister was just thirteen months later and she was named Charlotte ^{shaded} when she was small, of croup on one day.

My name was not soon decided upon. Papa wanted me to be Virginia Mae after his two sisters. But I was an April baby and Mother wanted me to be called Mary Katharine after her two sisters, and eventually she carried her point.

Aunt Jennie, mother's

older sister was named Virginia Katharine and she always claimed me in a special way as the niece who was her name sake.

Aunt Jennie was considered to be the brains and talent among "the ^{Banisters} Erdister girls."

She had unusual ability in drawing and learned to play the piano by note by herself. Aunt Mary

was mother's younger sister.

She was famous for her large family of ten boys and two girls. So, you

see, in a way, I had a rich heritage and took after

both maternal aunts because of my "pictures" and ^{my} boys - six in number. (As a child

I considered it a great accomplishment to be able to name all Aunt Mary's boys and girls in their chronological order!)

Papa was thirty-two when I was born and Mamma was thirty. Her birthday was April 13, 1883 and we were the only two in our family who had April as our special birthday month.

We lived in Oswald in a big house on a hill. It had high steps, a banister, and big rooms, and an upstairs. My baby picture shows me being held on one of the banisters for a snapshot while Mamma stands by, in a dress with a skirt that swept the ground it was so long.

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I can't remember anything much before I was five years old. Maybe the reason was that I had two very serious illnesses, influenza ("flu") ^{at five} and _{or six} not long afterwards, pneumonia.

We all suffered from the terrible flu of the World War I days. We had Aunt Jennie to help Mamma take care of us. She contracted it and had to go home. Then we had two nurses come to nurse us all back to health. These stole so much from us they gave the nursing profession a bad name with us Ballard for years to come.

Papa had such a bad spell of "flu" that he didn't get to see his new-born son

and name sake until after Junior was two weeks old. I don't know how Mamma survived the siege, but she never had the "flu" — only a baby! (Forgive me, Mother.)

The other item of my childhood days often discussed was the Cabin Creek flood, a flash flood, when we lived at Dry Branch, West Virginia. The water came up to our very door step but never got into the house. Thirteen people were drowned, and not far from our home a drowned woman was found. I was the baby and they carried me, in a clothesbasket for safety, with the rest of the family to the top of a nearby hill

We stayed there until the water went down and then returned very gratefully, I'm sure, to a dry house. This same year there was another catastrophe. The winter was a cold one and somehow the mines caught a fire inside and burned for days.

We moved to Glen Jean in Fayette Co. when I was five years old and here I started to school. I remember visiting once before I started and telling everyone I was going to begin not in school in the first grade but in the fourth or fifth with my older brothers. I remember how everyone laughed when I said this, but I didn't know why they were laughing!

Early Education Chapter 2.

The old school house in Glen Jean was located near Collins Hill where the coke ovens burned at night. The Community Church was there too and a big store. I can't remember much about the school but the teacher had a rough time with some of the boys and she carried a big paddle called a "blackjack". The benches and desks were wide and accommodated two people for they were about a yard and a half wide. We brought our lunches.

In the school yard was a pump and you pumped it up and down to get a drink and furnished your own cup. Once I remember when I was in the First Grade of sitting by the pump a long

time and when anyone came for a drink I would ask them: Would you like to hear me spell LONGFELLOW. Then I would spell it quite proudly, as though it were the L-O-N-G-E-S- word in the world!

One day two boys brought a bag full of money to school and with an ax chopped it apart. When we saw all that pile of money fly out the rest of us were very awestruck and we thought a bank or train had been robbed. The boys had stolen it from a little boy in our school and the police were called to investigate. The school was in an uproar and the awful deed never forgotten by any of us.

Soon a lovely new school house was built in the opposite

end of Glen Jean. They just scraped off the top of a hill between Glen Jean and Red Star and the new school served both towns. (Aunt Lois Lively, my brother Oscar's wife came from Red Star.)

I loved school but it was far to walk to from our yellow house by the creek and bridge in "the bottom" of Glen Jean. Leap creek was too dirty and cold to swim or wade in though it was usually swift and clear. Our house was a good one and we had a large grassy yard with a hill side right behind us to climb. It was covered with pretty trees and there were long grape vines to swing on, and black berries, and interesting sights and sounds.

One day I found a baby bird and just as I started to pick it up the mother flew down from a tree nearby and flew around and 'round my head trying to pick my eyes out, and making horrible sounds to keep me from touching "her baby". I "made for home" from the hill and learned not to interrupt Mother birds who are giving their offspring "flying lessons".

Another time I was swinging on a grapevine and it came loose at the top! And I came down with a thud and rolled to the bottom of the hill and landed hard up against the fence that separated us from the hillside. For a while I was knocked unconscious. The doctor was called and he took several stitches on my left

eyebrow where the scar remains" to this day." But grape-vine swings are wonderful!

Behind our house on the creek bank to the left of the garage I often played along the creek bank. I collected bits of rock with the prints of ferns on them. These rocks had been dug up out of a near-by coal mine and they were very pretty and artistic. We set the table with them down by the creek and even pretended they were dainty morsels of food to eat.

There was a cliff overhanging the creek and a cave underneath it. On the top of the cliff was a birch tree which hung over the water far below. A little friend of mine and I climbed this cliff though it was high and dangerous. He wanted some of the birch bark to chew on for it tasted good to us. So

we climbed up the tree and out on the limbs. Then somebody saw us and alerted even my father down the road at his office. We were told to get back and down from such a dangerous spot, and so we did without harm! On the cliff there were snails and I remember how slimy they felt under my hand as I climbed up the cliff and put my hand down on one without seeing it. Ugh! But would ^{it} you love to climb up a cliff you saw every day of your life - just once?

I had two teachers whom I dearly loved: Miss Christian and Miss Morton. Miss Christian was small and dark and so good to us in the fourth and fifth. I thought she was the smartest

and best teacher in the world! She died and it was my first memory or encounter with sorrow.

God was good to our class though and He sent us someone else whom we all fell for at once: Miss Althea Morton was tall and slender and a very happy and charming person. She taught us everything in the fifth and sixth. She could write very well and gave us some fine writing lessons. Everyone responded and we all improved and became forever grateful for our "pennmanship." Then she taught us art. We painted with water colors and what sunsets and pine trees and snow scenes we created! Several of us showed a talent for drawing and painting and here is where I became interested. I kept up with the

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pencil drawing for years and then turned to pastel chalk and oil paints after I became a college student and then a school teacher. For many years I followed this hobby and it brought me much pleasure, and too much admiration, perhaps, from my friends.

My memories of Glen Jean are very good and here I lived until I was about twenty-seven years old. While I was at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago my family moved to Fayetteville, West Virginia. But I did not live long in Fayetteville before I was married - only about a year or two. My childhood and adolescence were spent in Glen Jean, a town I shall always love.

There is a great deal I would like to write about my life in Glen Jean. I saw the beautiful ^{new} school house burn down, and not long afterward another built and a Junior High added. Ours was the first class to cook in the new kitchen! I helped to unpack all the new dishes and the pots and pans.

We cooked but the cafeteria did not operate until later. My job was to make cocoa. This I did everyday until I was very tired of it. One day I said, "I am tired of this job and just watch me. I can make cocoa with my eyes shut."

So while the teacher and students watched I proceeded to make cocoa with my eyes shut. I reached for the cocoa can but the can

had the lid on not tight. I fumbled the lid fell off, the jar turned over and down came the chocolate on my head covering me all over with a heavy mist of brown. You can imagine how I felt with all the class looking at me!

"I think you had better make the cocoa a while longer," Miss Deahl said, and that was my fate!

I graduated out of the ninth grade from Glen Jean and then went to Mount Hope High School as a sophomore. My best friends in Glen Jean were Margaret and Kathleen Lewis, Margaret Ross and Beulah Richards. I also liked Irene Warden and Isobel Bess but they seemed so much older than

I and both married after the ninth grade graduation. I was salutatorian at this and Margaret Lewis was valedictorian. Mother helped me think up the speech which revolved around the way different nationalities greeted each other. (The Indians said "How!", and the Eskimos rubbed noses, etc.)

Margaret Lewis was a great help to me and was about two years older than I. She was very small, brown-eyed, wore glasses, and was slightly crippled in ~~the~~ hip so that she had a limp. She loved me so much that I felt it! She was always doing things for me and protected me on every occasion. and helped me learn

When the family moved out of the
bottom of Glen Jean we felt greatly
"promoted"! Didn't ^{on the hill} Mr. William McKell
live up there, the owner of all the
nearby ~~collieries~~ mines? And Miss Clara
Craig, ^{live there} our Sunday School teacher
and closest neighbor and friend?