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My First Sixteen Years

by

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and Essays

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My First Sixteen Years
by
Katharine Ballard
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To

All Boys and Girls

Who

Attempt to Write a Book

at

Sixteen

This Book

is

Affectionally Dedicated

MY FIRST SIXTEEN YEARS

Chapter I

My Folks and Me

I am, as you have guessed, a native of West Virginia. My parents, since their marriage, have resided in Kanawha, Raleigh, and Fayette counties. Our home now is in Glen Jean, Fayette County.

Before her marriage Mother's name was Blanche Banister or just Dollie Banister as everyone knew her. Then she was living on the Kanawha River in a small town called Shrewsberry. At twenty-two Mother was a tall, slender girl with hazel eyes and very abundant brown hair. She possessed a gentle nature and had a smile for everybody.

Papa's name is William Riley Ballard. But he is called "Doc" by all his intimate friends, for he was named after the doctor who resided in the town during his boyhood. At twenty-five, Papa was a tall man with wavy brown hair and blue eyes. He lived across the river from Mother in a town called Chelyan. After a courtship lasting about five years Mamma and Papa were married in Charleston on December 6, 1905.

I am the fourth child, or second daughter, in our family of four girls and four boys. My older brothers and sister are named George, Oscar, and Blanche. I was born on April 30, 1913 at Oswald in Raleigh County. My name is Mary Katharine. Mother named me after her two sisters, Mary Alice and Virginia Katharine.

Of course, my parents thought me to be a most remarkable child, but perhaps other people noted no such symptoms. As a baby, I looked very much like my father. My fat cheeks had a pronounced rubicund hue contrasting very much with my small, deeply set blue eyes. My hair was short and curly and almost white in color. Grandmother insists that my lacrimal glands and vocal organs were in excellent condition. In stature I was unusually chubby and inclined to be plump in future days.

Our family moved from Oswald to Dry Branch where my second sister, Hope, was born. We moved to Glen Jean, where we yet live, when I was five years old. Since our residence here there have been added to the family -- William Riley, Jr., Elizabeth, and our baby, Lewis Wilson. We are now a happy family of eight.

Chapter II

My Home Life

The recollections of my childhood days are very vague indeed, due to the fact that I was twice severely ill. But I have heard rumors which hint that I was my mother's own darling. Like most other little girls I was an extraordinary housekeeper. My playhouse was usually in a state of wild disorder on account of my very search for dirt itself. My poor dolls suffered only from too great cleanliness; for the very steps which I took for their preservation proved to be their undoing. Doll clothes were scrubbed with such diligence and frequency that their owners suffered from lack of clothing. One of my kewpie dolls endured such treatment for eight years but finally expired.

In large families like ours, one member often picks another for his special companion or chum. My chum is my elder sister, Blanche, who is only one year my senior. Our fun, our bed, and dishwashing are shared together. Together we go to school in winter and together we go on our vacations in summer. It is unusual if one of us is seen alone. We are with each other so often that if she, by chance, is absent Little Sister feels very much lost without Big Sister's guidance.

My mother and I are not only mother and daughter, but are particular friends. I have always made it a rule to do nothing which I would not confide to Mother. When people tell me that I look or act like her, I am always pleased.

My father, also is very good to me. He gives me not only all the worldly goods which I possess but also a number of my traits of

character. When I do my work unusually well he is most pleased and rewards me always with praise or otherwise.

George and Oscar, my two elder brothers have been away at school for the greater part of the last four years. But when they return for holidays or vacations we surely have good times together.

Every summer I go on a ten-day vacation to my mother's old home. There I spend some of the most pleasant hours of my life. I visit many other relations who live nearby also. An excellent place for swimming is afforded in the river which is not far distant. I learned to swim last summer and now I consider it the best sport in the world.

Not long ago I determined to learn to play tennis. I secured a racket and hurried to the court with high hopes. During the latter part of the first game I was hit squarely in my right eye with a very hard ball. My eye wasn't hurt much, but my pride was. I left shortly after the accident and haven't been back since. Thus ends my brief tennis career.

Chapter III

My School Life

My first ten years of school life were spent in Glen Jean. I was five years old when I started and I have made a grade every since. My first four years of school were held in a small wooden structure on Collins Hill. From here our school was moved into a large brick structure located between Glen Jean and Red Star. Here I graduated in May, 1928. I am now a member of the Sophomore Class of Mount Hope Senior High School.

The two grades about which my pleasantest thoughts are centered are the fifth and sixth grades. During both these grades my teacher was Miss Althea Morton - a very gentle and artistic lady. Outside the regular routine of class work Miss Morton taught us two other things of which I am very thankful and proud today. First, she taught us penmanship and neatness. Miss Morton herself is an unusually fine writer and neatness characterized every-

thing she did. If the autographs of every person of our graduating class of '28 were carefully scrutinized the effects of her teachings would be highly visible, for we all write practically in the same style. The other thing that Miss Morton taught us was to paint and draw. Before that time I had never tried, but I immediately became interested and now I have a large collection of my own pictures and sketches. Drawing and painting have become so much a part of myself that I cannot imagine us separated. Now, perhaps, you know why, to me, my fifth and sixth grades stand out and above the rest.

My school chum in Junior High was Margaret Lewis. She was not only my chum, but also my friendly rival in classwork. Margaret is a small studious girl with brown hair and eyes and is somewhat older than myself. Her younger sister, Kathleen, was also in our class. Kathleen and I are also good friends. Last summer the Lewis' moved to Oak Hill, where Margaret and Kathleen are attending high school this year.

As a rule I like to go to school. My favorite subjects are English, Ancient History and Latin. I dislike any form of mathematics. At our school last year I was president of our 4-H club, vice-president of the Athenian Literary Society and secretary of the graduating class. I like to act. In our annual literary contest, I won the musical reading two times in succession, for my society. But I consider getting the saluatorian address last year my greatest achievement.

Perhaps my friends would be interested to know that I am not only a member of Mount Hope School but also a member of the Mount Hope Baptist Temple, where I was baptized last February.

Chapter IV

Ego Ipsa

I might write a whole volume about my life and you then wouldn't know anything about my own real self. So I'm putting in this little chapter that we might become acquainted.

I'm sixteen now, weigh a hundred and twelve pounds, am five feet four inches tall, can't dance, curl my hair sometimes, and wear size five shoe -- there! Now that our acquaint-

ance is begun properly we can talk plainly. I have gray eyes and brown hair. My hair is long and greatly resembles the headdress of the Chinaman. None of my movements are at all graceful, and indeed, I am quite a common mortal.

I like to draw and dream. At times I am very studious. I sew a little and play the piano a lot. I care little for sports in general, although I do like to swim. I like housework when I'm not told what to do. My favorite movie stars are Greta Garbo and John Barrymore, and my favorite characters in books are Jane Eyre and Lady Macbeth. I like to quote poetry, especially Shakespeare. I adore books and dill pickles.

I'm very absent-minded. I have lost my pencil in my hair at least a dozen times this year--not that my hair is so long, but that my memory's so short! Sometimes I dine with my aunt (who lives here) when I forget my lunch. On such an occasion while returning to school I find that I have forgotten my drawing ink which I had removed from my pocket during lunch, and so, I must return tomorrow to obtain that ink, and day after tomorrow to secure the gloves which I had, the day before, left. Aunt Jen looks suspicious when I voice my excuses for intruding, (Thereby getting an invitation for dinner) but she says nothing when I show her the ink and gloves except to comment dryly upon my excellent memory.

I am noted for making funny mistakes. Once, for Hygiene Class, I made a tooth chart and decorated it with numerous magazine illustrations. It remained on the bulletin board for perhaps a month. On removing it, a girl discovered that instead of illustrating the chart with a large tube of tooth paste, as were my intentions, the tube read "Shaving Cream":

All the pictures which Mother has of me are very comical so I have not used any of them as a frontispiece. Mother comforts me by saying that all artistic people look queer in photographs and now I really don't feel so bad about it after all!

I have told you a lot about myself sub rosa and we are now, I trust, good friends.

Chapter V

My Ambition

My ambition is to become an artist. But, as the saying is, "Talent isn't genius," so I will probably have to find my life's work elsewhere. I have plenty of perseverance, but this isn't all that's necessary when one is pursuing an artistic career. Even talent counts a lot. I will try my best and if I fail, I fail. Other vocations in life are as honest and honorable as is the former, but are not as desirable.

I'm on the high road with the hope that My First Sixteen Years are the hardest.

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