

CHARLEY, GEORGE AND LOLY

Little Loly was not an only child. Losing her mother at three, when a fourth baby named John Aaron for his two grandfathers was born, the little girl had two older brothers Charley and George. What do you remember from when you were three? Loly had but one recollection of her mother. The father kept a small grocery store on Locust Street in Columbia opposite the Opera House. The family lived above and to the rear of the store. Loly kept all her life a pleasant mental picture of the three children gathered around the mother as she peeled an orange and handed out sections in turn to each one. Isn't that a lovely picture of one's mother to treasure all your life through!

When suddenly the home was broken up the three children came to live with Grandma and Grandpa, their father's parents. Also, in the household were Aunt Emily and Uncle Harry. Uncle Harry was a big friendly man. His work was in Lancaster, so he came and went, but Aunt Emily who was plump and pretty was there all the time. The grandfather was an old man. He said, "What is the child's name? Loly? I can't remember that. But I can remember the battle of Paoli. I'll call her that. I'll call her P'oli." He did not live many years after her arrival.

This new family made the three children warmly welcome. The grandfather was elderly of about eighty years. His picture, an India ink sketch made from a daguerreotype, shows him with firm set jaw and drooping eyelid, an appearance that could have been frightening to a small child. I have no doubt he was kindly.

The grandmother was fifteen years younger than her husband, but the responsibility of caring for three young children, seven, five and three must have weighed heavily upon her. Soon Aunt Emmy and Uncle Harry were assuming much of the duty as parents.

To cheer the little girl, give her something pleasant to think about, to win her heart to the new family arrangements, her Uncle Harry gave her a gold ring set with a tiny garnet. She never lost her ring. She told me its story, and as a little girl I wore the ring. Now I have given it with its story to my youngest granddaughter who is four when the ring is 100 years old.

Mother would tell of Christmas as she remembered it, a far different celebration from our modern wealth of toys. At breakfast there would be an orange on each one's plate. This was a special treat for oranges were not a daily breakfast fruit in the 1870's. As a special gift, Grandma would have made a little ruffled pincushion or some such bit of handcraft.

There must have been a Christmas tree; the lighted tree is a German tradition. When but a small child, Mother told me, of coming downstairs in the early hours of Christmas morning before others were moving about. There the family found her sitting under the tree in her new little chair singing happily to herself.

I have no recollection of the mention of Christmas cookies, but I am convinced that sand tarts cut as fat robins and thin legged horses, a running dog and a sitting cat must have been made at the holiday season for these old tin cookie cutters have been passed on to me as part of the Christmas tradition.

Sometimes there must have been more impressive gifts for Mother described how a neighbor arrived one day before Christmas with some strangely knobby bulging burlap bags. When she inquired about their contents it was implied that they contained potatoes. The truth of the matter came out on Christmas Day: a dry sink,

dropleaf table and cradle. Four generations of children have delighted to play with them. The sink is right height for a small child. If there were chairs, she might sit at the table. I recall having a large family of dolls seated around this table in my playroom at One South Market Street before 1916 when the house was changed.

Charley, George and Loly each had a pretty child's plate of his own. The table would be set with the plates turned upside down between meals. One day George, sitting at the table early, said to Loly, "Look what I can do. You can't do that." He made a fist and appeared to hit down hard on the center of his plate Loly not to be outdone made a fist and pounded hard on the center of her plates. To her surprise she broke her pretty little plate.

Another time the joke was turned on Charley. He was ill and Aunt Emmy was having difficulty persuading him to take his medicines. "Charley, I'll tell you what I'll do," sympathized Auntie. "Here are some cherries. Now you eat this one. See how easy it goes down Now I'll put the pill in this one, just eat it like the other one." You guessed it, Charley gagged and choked -- the second cherry would not go down. It really did not matter because the pill had been in the first cherry.

There is a story told of George's first experience taking a girl to a party. The party was over, and they started home together. When they came to the parting of the ways, her home lying in one direction and his in another, George paused, considered the alternatives then said, "Goodnight, Mary. You have about as far to go as I have."

The father remarried after some years. The boys went to live with him and their new mother in Lancaster, but Loly continued in the grandmother's home until she married

Little Girl Growing Up

In 1875 the last house in town at the west end of Main Street was a two and a half story brick house. You can see it today with very minor changes. This was to be Loly's house for about twenty years. When she first came to live there, a tiny, flaxen haired child, sober and uncertain, the family worried for her health. She remembered how each morning, when the boy came by with his milk cart fresh from the farm, she must take her little mug out to the cart and have it filled with milk still warm from the cow. Then, sitting on the doorstep she would drink this magic potion. Oh, M. Louis Pasteur, what do you think of that?

She did survive and was soon happily playing with the other children in the neighborhood. She especially enjoyed playing with the children from a large family nearby. The mother of such a family was no doubt more lenient and easygoing than her grandma and auntie. There, when the bread was being kneaded, the children were allowed to enter into the business of breadmaking. In later years she said she now realized why the bread there was grayer than her grandmother's.

I think it was as this same household that watching the process of scalding and perhaps helping with the plucking of a fowl, she saw them singeing the bird with flaming paper at the end of the process. She volunteered to the neighbor that "We never singe our chickens." Repeating this to Aunt Emmy, she was informed with dismay, "Of course we singe our chickens, but not when children are around. We don't want them to get the idea of playing with fire."

Soon it was time to go to school. Though she lived at the far end of town, there was no school bus to transport her, nor was there a school cafeteria for hot lunches. Either you carried your lunch, or at noon back you went, half a mile or so, for a good dinner and then back to school again for the afternoon session. 8 AM until noon and then 1 PM until 4 PM was a school day. Today, children are deprived of that best of exercises, walking. Then to compensate we build expensive gyms and equipment to provide the needed exercise.

Mother told me of how she would be bundled up in flannel petticoat, woolen dress, heavy stockings, long underwear, high buttoned shoes, leggings, and storm rubbers then over all on the worst snow days a heavy pair of stockings to be peeled off first with the snow clinging to them. The teacher would dry out the wettest ones over the big hot air register. When I mention long underwear, it reminds me of this rule: when mother with the onset of cold weather began wearing her long sleeved and long legged undies she could not change to lighter weight until the locust trees were in blossom in the spring.

Loly's grandmother and her auntie were deaf. She must indeed speak loudly and clearly to be understood. She recalled an incident from primary grades. A large room was divided into smaller classrooms: by sliding or folding partitions. Suddenly, one day this obstruction was pushed aside by an exasperated teacher from the other classroom. A book was thrust into her hand and the teacher said, "Here, Lola, read this." She took the book reading in her usual voice, probably shouting out louder than most children. "Now," said the teacher to a timid soft voiced child in her class, "read like that."

There are three relics which may indicate the type of educational toys available for a child at this time. I have on the desk near me, carefully covered in plastic to protect it from dust, an alphabet picture scroll on double rollers set in a wooden frame. This was Loly's and surprisingly has been preserved through three generations. "A was an Arab, and had dark skin. B was a beggar both ragged and thin." The pictures in color date the toy by costume. "C was a candy man," standing by him are two gentlemen with high hats and beards looking like Abe Lincoln. "U was a Union boy and had a large flag" (with 35 stars). "Z was a Zouave who had been to the war." Who today has heard of a Zouave?

There is also a little picture book. The covers are gone but it must have been treasured because it is carefully repaired with hand stitching in heavy thread. The pictures are quaint and colorful. The poetry is simple and moral.

My own pet lamb I long to be
From every pride and malice free
Patient and mild and meek like thee
My own pet lamb.

Or this ...

Joseph West had been told
That if, when he grew old,
He had not learnt rightly to spell,

Though his writings were good
'Twould not be understood
And Joe said, I will learn my task well.

One other game, a card game, has the date 1843 on it. The Game of Dr. Busby, similar to Authors, is played by calling for the cards you do not currently hold, to fill out a family. In addition to Dr Busby's family there are the families of Mr. Ninny-Come Twitch, Doll the Milkmaid, and The Gardner. The costumes are of an earlier period, amusing to us today.

At the rear of the garden to Loly's home at grade level was the main line of the Lancaster to Harrisburg railroad. Her cousin Dave was an engineer on one of the trains. In those times, a train did not go whooshing along; life was lived at a more leisurely pace. As she grew older, knowing the time of his train, she would wait at the side of the tracks with a basket of some goodies from Auntie's baking, to exchange a bit of friendly gossip or just to wave as he went through.

There was a vacant lot and some empty sheds near Loly's home. Here, tramps would sometimes congregate. Evidently she had been warned about them and had developed a certain sinister feeling about them, for after she no longer lived in that home she had a recurring dream of hurrying up the steps to the side door, feeling pursued, entering and closing the door. When she turned the key in the door it went round and round but did not hold.

In Lola's school days there were no integration problems. The colored families in town were few and the children black and white attended the public school. A slate and slate pencil were standard equipment for each child. Chalk on blackboard writes smoothly and quietly. If you have not written on a slate with a pencil of slate, you cannot know that screeching noise that sends shivers up your spine. To alleviate the annoyance, one would suck the slate pencil, but it was not too effective. In Lola's class, Black Cassie had the best luck with her slate pencil. So, the rumor spread that her black sucking of the pencil had a special charm, and soon all the little girls were getting Cassie to suck their slate pencils.

When Loly was eight, her brother Harry committed an almost unpardonable act. He married a young lady, thus placing Loly in second place in his life. At least this was how she felt about it and for some time she felt her nose was cut short, as the saying goes. In due time, she found Aunt Addie one more person to include in her circle of love. Together, Uncle Harry and Aunt Addie had a great positive influence on her as she developed into young womanhood.

