

Thought I might as well send you
a copy of this. Maybe Ernest would like
to read it.

(1)

A Promise

If I live many decades, no
birthday will surpass the
expectations - the excitement or
pure joy of my 10th birthday.
It was a simple promise from
my mother that explained it
all! "On your birthday you
may hold your month old
baby brother all day long!" I
had watched him daily and
touched him but to hold him
was forbidden.

This event had been
developing over a period of at
least ten months, but I was kept
in the dark until that morning -
March 1st. A statement by an
older sister revealed all - "Get
ready we have to go to grandma's.
Mama is going to have a baby."
Getting ready was no small
chore. On the last day of February
one of the rare blizzards had
covered our wheat farm in
Western Oklahoma, with four to
six feet of snow - only the
buildings and trees seem to
peep through. The temperature
during the night had fallen far
below zero. We bundled in our
sweaters, coats, mittens, caps,
overshoes and took comforters
to warm us in the horse

horse-drawn wagon. With Mary
 driving, she, Martha, Fay and
 I set out for the mile trip
 to grandma's house. It was
 thrilling to ride over fence
 posts we knew were there
 but couldn't see. No matter what
 the weather my excitement kept
 me warm — a new baby — a
 playmate — would it be a
 he or she? I barely heard the
 grumblings of my teenage
 sisters which ran like this —
 "Another mouth to feed" — "I want
 to go to college" — "More work to
 do at home" — "Less time to study".
 I just couldn't understand such
 nonsense!

We arrived to a most kind
 welcome from our grandparents.
 What a long day! My sisters had
 to me and we played many
 games of hide the thumb. Late
 afternoon the telephone call
 came. Mary answered and
 announced that we had a
 new brother — Ernest Robinson Chowning.
 I scrambled to get my heavy
 clothes on and waited anxiously
 while Mary + Fay hitched the
 horses to the wagon for the ride
 home. Luckily much of the
 snow had melted and it took
 a little time to get there.

I rushed in and to my mother's bedside. There he was — blond, curly hair, and the rest of him a little red.

What a long March that one was! Finally it was March 31st, a Saturday. How lucky — no school and with three older sisters my chores were few. Breakfast seemed such a long meal! Two of my sisters cleared the table and washed the dishes on a kitchen cabinet. Hot water was supplied by an iron kettle on the Home Comfort stove which was at the opposite side of the room from the table. Behind the stove were closets $\frac{2}{3}$ the width of the room — same for pots & pans and a medicine cabinet. Next on that east wall was a coat rack and a door leading to the living room. The wood box and coal scuttle were on the ^{floor} left of the stove. Before reaching the outside door on the south wall of the kitchen was a wash stand over which hung a mirror with a black frame. On top of the wash stand stood tooth brush holders and tooth paste — a soap dish — a wash pan and a galvanized water bucket with an enamel dipper. Towels hung from a rack.

Beyond the door was the kitchen cabinet with lots of storage space. The west wall had a window in front of which sat the dining table. On one side of this table was a backless bench. On the other three sides were cane bottom chairs. On the north wall was a window between the stairway to the second floor and a safe - glass doors at the top - two drawers and solid doors at the bottom. There the good dishes and silver were stored.

My Saturday chore was to wash the bare steps with a cloth dipped into a pail of water. This day I did it in double time. Mary mopped the bare floor. The room was so light with the windows and doors - the walls finished with horizontal natural wood siding rubbed with linseed oil.

Everything shone when Mamma brought Ernest Robinson Channing downstairs. ~~Martha~~ ~~held him~~ Martha laid towels on the table and a baby's enamel wash tub. She held the baby while Mamma fixed the bath water - testing

At the warmth with her elbow, quickly she undressed Ernest, held him in the tub and washed him with ivory soap — starting with his face & head then down to his feet. This was a quick bath & a quicker rub down with a soft towel. She dressed him and wrapped him in a blanket. "Now come to the other room and sit in a rocker," she told me. Quickly I followed orders settling into a rocking chair with my feet scarcely touching the floor!

Then it happened — that warm, soft bundle in my arms! "Be careful to support his head and back," I was warned. Only momentarily he opened his blue eyes and looked at me. Then he slept for two hours — he scarcely moved — just slept. I began to notice my paper dolls in their shoe box house — my books — they looked lonely and I was getting tired of holding this lump. Could I do it all day?? My mother who had not left the room saw me wiggle & swing my legs. She calmly said, "I think I'll put him in his crib." Nothing else was spoken as I

event to my Toys — well,
I had held my baby brother
and it was a wonderful
birthday!