

Memories from the John Beck House

By Kathryn Cubalo

As I have said before, my brother Sonny and I often got into trouble. We were only eighteen months apart so played together most of our childhood.

One day, we were making mud pies and had made quite a mess on the porch and steps that went into the house. Our mother came out and told us that we had to clean up the steps and couldn't leave our mud pies there. We didn't mind and just kept on with our game. Mother came out again and this time she was quite angry. She shook Sonny by the shoulders and got him started with the clean-up. He was crying and I knew that I would be next. I thought about how I could escape. There was a cellar door next to the porch and I thought about jumping down on it and then running. I didn't do it, though, and I got my shake and ended up crying, too. I sometimes wonder what Mother would have done if I had run. Probably a good spanking, though I don't remember ever being punished that way.

The fall that my sister was born, we made some pumpkins into Jack-o-Lanterns for Halloween. Our Jacks were lit up inside with candles. My brother and I were in the kitchen admiring our Jacks at the kitchen table and Mother was on the couch in the living room nursing the baby when all of a sudden I saw a frightened look on her face. In a few seconds she had put down the baby and rushed to the kitchen to rub my head with a towel. I had bent over the Jack-o-Lantern and caught my hair on fire. I don't think I was badly burned but was missing some hair.

Sometime the next year, my parents decided it would be a good idea to get a cow so there would be milk for this growing family. They made arrangements to purchase a brown cow named Bossy from a farm to the north of us. They just nicely got her home and in the pasture when she got loose and went back to her home. The name should have given us some clue as to her personality. I still remember bringing her back again. My dad pulled and tugged that reluctant cow back to her new home while my mother drove slowly along behind with us riding in the car.

Then my father had to return to the boat and left my mother with the care of the cow. Even though she had been raised on a farm, she had not done much milking, as that was a job for her brothers. The first time she had to milk Bossy, it took her almost two hours and she got only half a pail of milk. It did get easier, but not a lot. Bossy was called a hard milker--just stubborn, I think. My job was to watch the baby while Mom did the chores. Honey was creeping by then, so I sat her in the boiler (a big kettle used for heating water) and gave her some toys and in that way kept her amused.

One memory that was probably before Honey's birth was about the rain barrel. It seems I was always drawn to play in water and often got my clothes wet. My mother threatened to hang me up to dry if I got wet again. Of course, I did get wet again, so she put a wire hanger in the back of my dress and hung me on the clothesline. She and Daddy and Sonny were laughing at me hanging there. I wasn't left there long but remember being quite humiliated.