

A Trip Down Memory Lane

(Written by Flora Freeman, nee Shepherd in 1970)



I remember I remember.....the farm where I was born.

Well, I wasn't actually born at Borran's as I was 6 weeks old when we arrived. Me cradled in sheets and blankets on the sledge drawn by old Peggy the horse, that being the only means of transporting the furniture up the fields from the road to the new farm. At that time there was mother and Dad, Ruth who was three years old, Bill who was two and little me. We were to be joined later by other brothers and sisters, Chris came next, named after my Dad, then Edith, named after mother as she was so like her and still is, then came Betty, Bobby, Barbara and Brian.

I remember so many things about our childhood up there so perhaps I ought to tell you a little about Borran's farm situated up there in the Pennines between the three peaks, Penyghent, Whernside, and Ingleborough. Borran's was nine miles from the market town of Settle and two and half miles from Horton in Ribblesdale and the nearest station. It was a mixed farm but as the hills and moors were more suitable for sheep that was what Dad concentrated on most, with a certain amount of cattle, pigs, hens and ducks etc. Oh! Those stupid ducks they never would come back on their own so someone had to go and fetch them in before the foxes claimed them, or before the eggs were laid in the nettles and so lost (Chris being very resourceful – or lazy would round them up on his bike). Ducks always lay first thing in the morning so if they were shut up for the night they were safe and so were their eggs then they were set free “to go a dabbling- up tails all”. That little snippet of a poem reminds me of a schoolmate who took years to learn it, he was no scholar but he knew where to find the Curlew nests and that of the lapwings and the best way of catching rabbits or tickling trout. Not that we were slow in that respect, we've spent many happy hours searching for nests and watching for the young ones to appear. I have walked many miles with my brother Bill setting snares for rabbits and getting up early in the morning before school to see if we had caught any.

The school we attended was a good mile away down the hills and along the roads and as there was no such thing as school dinners we had to take our own in a basket. The teachers would

boil the kettle and make us a cup of cocoa. That was a dear little school with one classroom and one teacher; she must have been a genius as she taught all ages from 5 to 14 and managed to get a very good percentage of pupils to pass their scholarships. One lesson we really enjoyed was a nature walk and Mrs Towler taught us the names of all the trees and flowers in that neighbourhood. Of course, eventually the authorities closed the school (after the war) and now instead of chattering schoolchildren it houses a lot of miserable squawking battery hens, sacrilege I call it!

Chris used to wait till he heard the 8.40 AM train come chugging up the line then he'd set off and run hell for leather down the fields and race it to the signal box where the guard would throw out the daily papers, if he got there first Chris would have the honour of delivering them to the three or four farms near the school.

We used to wear clogs then (my own children laugh to hear of this – they with their winkle pickers and paper thin soles) but I credit those clogs with the fact that I have good feet, no corns or squashed up misshapen toes. When winter came the clogs would gather up the snow until we grew a couple of inches at each step and we would see who could get the biggest lumps under their feet before they fell off or we fell over.

We used to look forward to the snow coming then we could go sledging, even in the moonlight if it got dark before we go bored. Of course, the older children had jobs to do before we could go and play. The boys helping with the feeding of the stock and bringing in the coal and sticks, we girls with the washing up and cleaning and filling the oil lamps – mother was very fussy about the glass for the lamps – “don't use a cloth that's had paraffin on it” and “don't leave finger marks”. It took no end of breathing on to make it shine to her satisfaction.

We all had to help at lambing time to bring the sheep into the little meadow by the house and the lambs that had been born during the day down into more sheltered places or even into the barn if they were rather weak – that was quite easy though – all you had to do was pick up the lamb and the mother would follow – unless she suddenly decided you hadn't got her baby she'd hurry off to where she had been and we'd start all over again. Sheep dipping came next on the programme and we helped with that along with the neighbours. Dad would gather the noisy bleating sheep from the hills in the morning and release them in the evening to find their way back again. I'm, sure they didn't like the bit that came in between - poor dripping objects. But I think they must have welcomed clipping time when they got rid of that heavy fleece, it must have been dreadfully hot. That was a busy time and the neighbours helped again, Dad assisted in return when they were busy.

I remember I remember.....hay making.

I had mixed feelings about hay making – we bigger ones had to help with the tossing and turning of the grass and that really made our arms ache. Being hilly countryside most of the work was done by hand with wooden rakes. The only machinery used was a mowing machine and I have walked for miles following behind it pulling the swathe of grass clear so that it didn't clog up the blade of the mower. I think I really enjoyed that despite my protests especially when the morning was bright and sunny with the larks singing overhead. I fail to understand how people can go into raptures over the song of the nightingale - the lark is surely "Top of the Pops (in my estimation). The yellow hammer would fuss about in great agitation less we should discover her nest, which we seldom did. But best of all were the meals we had out in the hay fields grass hoppers in our tea and all. One of us used to help mother bring it from the house – a big basket full of sandwiches and cakes and a great hot steaming tea can. I don't really remember this episode but I am told that I fell asleep in a nest of hay and there was a great to do when I couldn't be found to have my dinner. Those who were too small to help used to follow the load of hay to the barn and then have a ride back on the empty cart or sledge. It must have been a busy time for mother as she coped with all the household chores and when they were done to help in the fields where she would work until the dew began to fall and darkness and then go back to more chores. I know it was a relief when the last load was stowed away in the barns and we could forget the blisters on our hands and the midges that attacked us each evening, especially in the low meadow. OH! That's where I found and collected a pinafore full of baby frogs when I was tiny, much to mother's horror (aren't grown ups queer fancy not liking baby frogs – I still do). I can clearly remember that, it's strange how some incidents remain while some are forgotten at that age.

I remember I remember..... the Roses red and white.

Although they were only the wild dog roses but I remember the violets and the lily cups – or king cups as we used to call them. Mother was never short of flowers in the house from the time the first colt's foot of celandine appeared to the last of the Canterbury bells. My favourites were the primroses and mountain primulas, tiny little purple flowers – I think they must have been mother's too as I recall her coming with us across the fields to where she knew they grew and that was a rare occurrence for her to down tools and pick flowers. I wonder if Edith, Betty or Barbara remembers being queen of the May, on the first day of May we'd make daisy chains and the youngest girl was crowned when she was all nice and clean and ready for bed in her nightie – her throne being the baby's chair.

I remember I remember..... where I used to play.

I wonder if Thomas Wood had a swing like ours. Dad used to put one up on a bough of the ash tree that grew near the house and near a stone wall. We would stand on the wall, put a foot in the swing and sail up into the air like swallows on the wing, if we kept it going and really worked hard we could almost reach the branches. Mother would never watch us, she would disappear into the house thinking I suppose that if she didn't watch nothing would happen and it didn't. I suppose we were a lot of dare devils, Chris especially, why Mother's hair never turned white I will never know. He would climb on to the barn and walk along the ridge. And along the house top too, I can't ever recall Mother forbidding him to do this, psychology I suppose, I mean if you are forbidden to do something you'll straight away go and do it so he didn't do it too often.

There was a croft at the back of the house full of rocks many of them positioned ideally for a game of "houses", we'd gather sticks and coal into a crevice for a fireplace and find an old pan – steal some fat and potatoes - and make chips. They always turned out black smoky and horrid – I wonder why or how we ate them but eat them we did.

Another thing we liked to do was walk around the little meadow near the house on the wall top, here I ought to explain that all the fields are divided by stone walls, anyway the object was to walk all the way round without getting down even for the gates. Then there was hide and seek though we usually recruited some of the neighbouring children for this game and if it got dark we'd borrow a couple of Dad's lanterns and place them at strategic positions – actually it was more fun in the dark – no need to hide, just stand still, unless you had on light coloured clothing. Or we went paddling in the beck that came from underground in the low pasture, the water being so cold and sparkling that our feet soon began to tingle and we were pleased to take them out for the sun to warm them. This spring never dried up so if the supply to the kitchen tap had failed the water was carried from there.

Rainy days were a bore but if the barn wasn't full of hay we were allowed to play in there. We liked to jump from the loft about 10 foot high above the shippons where the caws and calf were, onto a pile of hay below then back up the ladder to repeat the performance. The boards in places were rotten and I know Edith remembers falling through onto the calves below but I don't know who was the most frightened her or the calves, Dad tried to clean her up a bit but couldn't do much for laughing. This barn is where Edith and Chris found the kittens and hid them so Dad wouldn't find them and drown them. Only he did find them and he did drown them.

Winter nights were spent indoors, reading or listening to the wireless, often Dad would play cards with us, starting with snap when we were little and graduating to rummy and whist as we got older. There were whist drives and dances organised in the little school which used to go on to two or three in the morning. Mother played the piano and one of the neighbouring farmers a violin. We children had a Christmas party each year followed by a dance, any excuse was good enough. The vicar used to come from Horton once a month to give a service in the school room though we had Sunday school every week, so our Christian education was not neglected.

I remember I remember..... our neighbours.

We were very lucky to have good neighbours, the nearest ones being separated from us by three meadows and there was a well worn path from our house to theirs though the path to the other neighbours was even more worn as our Auntie and Uncle lived there. Their three youngest children were a boy Bills age and two girls – one older and one younger than myself so we saw quite a lot of each other. When Auntie Annie died a few years ago we lost an angel. She had raised a family of 13 to be good citizens and yet we never heard her speak a sharp word or raise her voice, there was always a welcome and a biscuit – home made ginger ones from a huge tin – to speed us on our way home again, or if we didn't want to go home we'd stay the night sharing our cousins bed's.

Aunt Annie had a pony and trap and we thought it a great honour to be allowed to ride with her down to the village show and sports, I know I felt like queen Bodicea in her chariot. I think one of these little outfits would be a great acquisition in these days of breathalysers and rising costs in petrol and repair, apart from the fact that one could talk to a pony – who wants to talk to a cold gleaming monster of a car?

The first neighbours I mentioned were the Towlers. Matt and Joe and Joes wife Sarah who kept house for them, we called them Uncle matt and Uncle Joe and Mrs Towler, I can't think why we didn't call her Auntie, perhaps because mother's sister was named Sarah too and it might have been confusing. They were kind and gentle folk and loved it when one of us would visit on an errand or other – they have watched us grow up as they were there when we arrived and were still there when mother and Dad left 30 years later. Matt kept a few pigeons in the barn loft adjoining the house and Chris had a hankering for some pigeons of his own but although he managed to catch an occasional one it never would stay until he thought if he plucked the wing feathers it couldn't fly back. It got home though! - it walked and Mrs Towler had to confess they couldn't be cross with Chris, they laughed so much to see this half naked pigeon come walking home.



I Remember I Remember.....Our Father

Well, he is a small unassuming sort of chap – not given to a lot of idle chatter (as is his second daughter so he says) but when he speaks it is usually to say something worth saying. His was the hand that administered any good hidings necessary, as it was one day when Bill wouldn't change from his school clothes before feeding the calves. Mother must have thought Dad was being too severe with him as she almost attacked him with a hand brush saying "you'll kill him, you'll kill him". The rest of us were sorely tempted to laugh but daren't. Dad teases mother about that to this day 30 years after. Chris didn't get many hidings as he was too nimble and Dad couldn't catch him. After chasing him around the house over the walls etc two or three times he'd give up and come into the house laughing – his anger gone in the chase – anyway Chris was nearly lapping him and would have caught up with Dad eventually. But on the other hand it was Dad who found time to soothe me when I had toothache – and that was often as the dentist was nine miles away – he'd sit in mother's rocking chair with me on his knee and rock and sing "I'll take you home again Kathleen" and "Poor old Joe" and all those lovely songs. If he wasn't going very far the youngest of us would go along out of mother's way and I'm told I was sitting on his shoulders one day having a lift home when he gave the wrong answer to my ceaseless chatter and I kicked a tooth out for him. Poor old Dad that taught him to listen in the future I guess.

Dad was a shepherd both by name and by occupation – the moors nearby were shared by all the local farmers each one having so many "gaits". So, Dad's job was to check periodically that all was in order up there. Of course, he had a dog to help. The first one of these I remember was "beauty" I don't know if she came with us to Borrans but I was about 10 or 12 when she grew old and evidently in pain so Dad set off with her up into the pastures with a spade and gun and put her out of her misery. She was a dear old thing and it nearly broke all our hearts. Dad didn't say a word but I know he was upset too. A sheep farmer depends so much on his dog and you can believe that story about him knowing his sheep – even I knew several of them – old cheeky face for instance who didn't believe in staying on her own farm and brought her lambs up to think the same. Mind you, each farmer marked his sheep with his initials on their horns and a mark of paint on their wool.

As well as rather special dog in Beauty he had a rather special horse called Peggy – as I have mentioned she served him well putting up very patiently with us little ones clambering over under or around her and I was rescued from between her legs at round about the toddling stage but she hadn't moved an inch. Eventually she had to go – some mysterious person came for her and we were told she had a bad leg – Mother cried! I didn't like any of the subsequent horses that came – there never was one to replace Peggy in my estimation. I was jealous of Edith once as Dad had ridden over on Peggy to bring her back from an Auntie's across the moors – whenever I went to stay there I had to travel in the Grocer's van and that made me feel sick!

I Remember I Remember.....Our Mother

If Dad is quiet and unassuming then mother is his opposite, a friendly gentle busy type of person. She is attending dressmaking classes now she has time and learning to make her own dresses etc. Though when she finds the time I don't know as she has a little business doing farmhouse teas and bed and breakfast for the visitors who come to see the Yorkshire dales in summer. Dad helps her – he calls himself the chef and is getting a dab hand at ham and eggs. Anyway, that's the present and I was reminiscing about my childhood. Farmer's wives are always busy people but with nine children to care for in addition Mother was even more busy. Mind you, we weren't all there at once Ruth being 20 when Brian was born but there must have been six children there most of the time, so of course she had to have some sort of routine: -

Monday was washday.

This really began on Sunday when Dad filled the boiler with soft water from the tank outside the door. That tank was a huge one six or seven feet square with concrete sides about four feet high and a wooden lid. I remember Dad cleaning it out one day and in my childish innocence I thought it was bottomless, I was really scared when Dad got in - him being small there wasn't much of him showing - I thought he would never immerge. I wonder if the carol singer remembers it as he decided to take a short cut over it to the door, the lid gave way and he went in we wondered what all the laughing was about.

The boiler fire was lit the first thing on Monday morning so that the water was heating while mother got breakfast and set us off for school, fed the baby and washed up. Then out would come the dolly tub and dolly legs and there was such a rubbing and scrubbing and boiling and starching and the final rinse with the "dolly blue" in it. It was very rare for her to have finished before we got home again so we were told to "turn the mangle" for a few minutes, it took all my energy to move it, the great wheel and the rollers fairly needed some energy (and I grumbled the other day because it took me two hours to do my washing! Do we ever count our blessings?) Or we had to help fold the sheets or make the tea or "come and help me make the beds".

I hated washday and that set boiler in the corner bubbling and boiling and spilling over on the to the floor to join the cinders and ashes in a great puddle, and the doors always open to let out the steam – and let in the cold!

Tuesday is market day at Settle

On occasions Mother went to Settle market and she left Dad in charge of the infants or kept one of us older girls at home if he was extra busy. She wouldn't be back for when we got home so we would walk down to meet her and carry the shopping for her, then argue who was to be the first to the comic she bought.

After tea there was the ironing to do, She used flat irons with a tin "slipper", heated on the fire then dusted quickly and slipped into the slipper, one being used while the other heated and changed over as they cooled, we would usually do the hankies and pinafores when she left off to get the baby fed and to bed and the little ones attended to. There was usually some ironing left for Wednesday as well as the butter to make, if we were lucky Dad or Mother would have done the churning but if not then I've done my share at turning the great wooden churn.

After the cows had been milked both morning and evening there was the separating to do, I was always a little afraid of the separator that took the cream from the milk. Dad would say "keep it going Flora" and I'd stand there turning the handle until all the milk had gone through and the whirling creature had ceased its whining. Then the cream was saved from day to day till it was made into butter. I don't think I minded churning, I used to turn the handle and sing – till the "swish – swish" of the cream turned into the "slop – slop" of the butter and that was it. My bit was done and it was mothers turn to toss it this way and that till she finally weighed it and formed it into blocks.

On Thursday

Mother would make the dust fly around the bedrooms and change the bed linen.

On Wednesday

I think she would go to the Mother Union meeting she didn't like to miss that.

Now Fridays

I did like Fridays as this was baking day. Dad always lit the fire and made a pot of tea before Mother came down and we'd hear her shout "don't forget to take the shicket out". What an odd name for a piece of metal that prevented the heat from the fire going under the oven to be removed on that special day. We would come home from school to find the floor covered with bread cooling and tea cakes all brown and shiny because of the lard she had rubbed them with, and scones and current pasties, apple pies and cakes. Enough it would seem to feed an army. We would have a lovely tea with new buns (or rolls) and "sad cakes" which we spread with syrup. All still warm and surely very indigestible but who cared for one day.

The grocer delivered the order leaving it in the barn by the roadside and Dad would carry it home up the meadows, as he did when the butcher's meat arrived on Saturday, with the greengrocer doing the same on Tuesday.

Saturday

Saturday morning was scrubbing morning which meant scrubbing everything that was scrubbable including the lavatory seat, the little stools and even the handle of the coal shovel. The floor in the living room was made of great stone slabs and that got scrubbed too, other days a little mopping sufficed. Mother would clean the huge range in the living room – other days she would let us do it but not on Saturdays as the ash pit needed emptying. All the shiny

parts needed emery papering and the black parts black leaded. She would scrub and polish till it really shone – and with a big fire going it looked really something. Somehow it seemed as though it knew itself it looked really spectacular and came to life and shone even more.

Sunday

When we were tiny this day of the week was reasonably quiet with Sunday school to attend and church once a month. Mother used to keep an eye on us from her seat by the piano and if we fidgeted or misbehaved she would frown and shake her head. We were excused from listening to the sermon until we grew bigger and Mother would signal to us to leave the room till the service finished.

As we got older Sundays became less quiet, the ones who had left home visited bringing girl friends, boy friends and parents of friends. Luckily Mother had a huge table but even so I have known there to be two sittings for tea – especially when the grandchildren began to appear. It is still the same today. This last Christmas mother didn't have enough of the family to satisfy her longing for a big gathering so what did she do but invite the neighbours in. The family came in full force on Boxing Day so that would please her.



A view of Penyghent from Horton