

## **Bicycle Made For None - A True Story From The Tyson Chronicles**

Lying on the ground bleeding, her right nostril cut clear through, Naomi heard Waverly wailing from the porch. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Although the sisters were five years apart, they were silent allies; they never talked about it but a look between them spoke volumes. Life was difficult for the family. Jean, their mother, loved her husband, Walter, and her children fiercely and ruled them with an iron fist fighting hard to keep them in line. It wasn't easy to follow her edicts, so trouble brewed at every corner. Life wasn't easy for Jean Opal either because no one was able to meet her expectations. Jean had many talents and could have done many things with her life, but she chose to direct a well-run household and the lives of her family. After a train trip to an evangelistic meeting, she decided that Walter, a factory worker with an eighth-grade education, should become a minister. Walter was soft spoken with a great capacity for fun and exceptionally gifted mechanically. He appreciated Jean's guidance and caring; he worked hard to meet her expectations. Jean's voice was often strident, her patience stretched thin as she chided and corrected Walter's English and manners. Scarcely a day went by where she didn't find fault with the children's behavior. She forced the culprit to fetch the razor strap; she placed the child over her knee, raised the child's skirt and unsparingly strapped the child's bottom. Every night, after Walter made the girls giggle as he chased them up the stairs, she told stories, sang songs and hugged them close. Naomi adored Waverly and wanted to do everything she did. At three, she followed Waverly to school; Waverly brought her home with a severe warning, "Naomi, if Mother finds out she'll use the razor strap and you'll be sad. When I get home, I'll play a special game with you." When Naomi tried to follow her sister again, Waverly patiently brought her home. Their infractions were undiscovered. Jean assigned the girls tasks. At supper time, the girls set the table and if done correctly Jean allowed them to walk to meet Walter on his way home from work. It was a special time of day and Naomi excitedly raced out the screen door; it would have banged shut behind her if Waverly hadn't caught it. "Naomi,"

she admonished, "we can't let the screen door slam or we'll get a razor strapping and we won't get to meet Daddy." Naomi was quiet and sobered for a moment by the near disaster, but soon the girls were running hand in hand down the street. Walter, thrilled to see his girls, grinned from ear to ear. He grabbed Naomi up, handed Waverly his empty lunch pail and held her hand as they walked toward home where a delicious meal waited.

With her family toeing the line, Jean successfully guided Walter to his first ministerial assignment at a small country church in Northern Wisconsin with three tiny rooms in the back where the family lived and worked hard to survive. The family's income was insubstantial; the congregation was miniscule and poor. But Jean was talented, resourceful. An excellent cook, she stretched the food. In a garden, she grew lettuce, beans, peas, corn, tomatoes and potatoes; with her pressure cooker, she canned jars of food which Walter placed in a cellar he built into the side of a hill. Jean made lovely matching dresses for the girls from flour sacks. Since there was no water, Walter hauled 10 gallon containers of water from a neighbor. After he drilled for water three times, he finally found fresh water, built a well and magically designed running water in both the kitchen and the garden via hand pumps. There were unending jobs, but Walter always found a way to make fun for his girls. In the winter he created a sled run covered with ice and for summertime play, he built two swings. Mother didn't approve of animals, but a stray cat chose the rafters of the garage to make a nest for the birth of her babies. After Waverly and Naomi solemnly promised secrecy, Walter helped them up a ladder and enjoyed their delight as they gently touched the tiny kittens. One day, Jean screeching loudly, almost stepped on a mouse; Walter convinced her that they needed a mouser; so the cat stayed. Naomi was curious and watched the cat after she caught a mouse and asked, "Is it good, kitty?"

Waverly, mature at 10 years of age, earned money taking care of a neighbor's children across the road. An old unused bike caught her attention and the neighbor said she could buy it. Waverly was enthralled; Jean was not and told Waverly in no uncertain terms that she absolutely could not buy the

bike. Devastated, Waverly spent hours thinking about that bike. Children didn't beg, ever and when Jean said no, that was the end. But somehow Waverly, normally so docile and obedient, found the courage to ask and ask again, "I've earned the money and I'll only ride in the yard."

Uncharacteristically, Jean acceded.

Thrilled, Waverly often rode the bike in the yard and around the garage and Naomi ran joyously behind her. A game they called "Meet you at the corner" had disastrous results. As they approached opposite corners, they collided. Waverly ran to Naomi and saw blood. "Oh no! I'll get a cloth; don't tell Mother!" But when she returned, she discovered the enormity of the freak accident and ran yelling "Mother, come quick!" Overcome by guilt and remorse and certain Naomi would be scarred for life she screamed "I'm sorry, I'm sorry; I'll never ride the bike again." During the 30 mile drive to the nearest town, she sobbed quietly in the back seat, softly mumbling the same words over and over.

The doctor complimented Naomi for her bravery as he closed the gap with 7 stitches; luckily there was no lasting disfigurement.

Two sisters became three when Beth was born; the small home was crowded; Jean and Walter soon accepted a ministerial post that included the use of a large house. Just before the move, Waverly wandered into the garage where she saw the dusty bike standing against the wall; she began to clean it. She couldn't help the thought that came unbidden "Maybe, I'll take just one little ride." Her ride was short; without warning, Jean burst through the screen door shouting, "Waverly, you promised never to ride that bike again." Shamed by her action, Waverly sadly wheeled the bike back into the garage.

The bike disappeared during the move. Afterward Jean never allowed the girls to bike ride or have bikes. However unfair it might seem, Tim, born 5 years after Beth, had a bike.

The sisters meet yearly and reminisce about early years; they laugh often and know that their parents, now gone, loved them and did the best they could with the capability they had.