

Autobiography - Helen Wilson

My parent's names were John Wilson, originally from Dakota, and Alma Swanson from Minneiska. They were married December twenty sixth, nineteen hundred. At the time of my birth, they lived in Dakota, Minnesota on a farm where I was born August twenty first, nineteen hundred and seven. I had a sister and brother older than myself who were named Stanley and Phyllis. So far as I know, I was baptized at a ladie's aid at my grandmother's house in Minneiska.

When I was still a baby, we moved from Dakota to Whitman on another farm. Whitman is between Minneiska and Minnesota City. We lived there about one year; then we moved to Minneiska because Stanley was old enough to go to school.

About this time, I must have been a little over a year old. Not very long ago I asked my parents how I looked, making the remark that I would hate to be as fat as my little cousin Harold. "Goodness" exclaimed my mother, "You were worse than Harold. You were so fat that you could hardly learn to walk and we couldn't hardly see your eyes at all." It makes me shiver to think what a sight I must have been. Anyway they say I was a very good baby and hardly ever cried. I cry quite a bit now when I get started. Before I started school, I was very good friends with two girls living up the street whose names were Myrtle and Bernice Hastings. A neighbor boy named Rodney was also a good friend of mine and he is yet. At our house we had a lawn which sloped at the edge toward the sidewalk. My younger sister Lila, Myrtle, Bernice, Rodney, Phyllis and myself used to sit in a dishpan and slide down this slope, jumping off onto the sidewalk when we reached the stone wall. We also had a swing in our one apple tree where we had lots of fun. I can remember one day when Myrtle came down to play with me and their wasn't any board in the swing. We didn't know what to do for the rope didn't feel any too good. Finally I ran into the house and soon appeared with a pie-tin which served very well as a seat. The only damage done was a little bending. We lived in a house right by the schoolhouse so when Stanley got hungry at recess he would run in the house for "bread, butter and sugar". My sister Lila and myself used to like to run away. When we did run away, I always got the blame because I was the "oldest" of the two.

It was while we lived in this house, before I started school, that my grandparents in Minneiska died, fourteen months apart. When they died, there were no renters to live in the house so we moved there renting the place from my mother's brothers and sister. Our new neighbors were an old couple named Mr. and Mrs. "Put" Gray. We called Mr. Gray "Put" for short. His full name was Jeremiah Putnam. They made quite an impression on the children of the town for they went there to hear the man tell stories and to hear Mrs. Gray sing. Mrs. Gray hardly ever wore shoes and many people can remember seeing her go to shows in her old rose bedroom slippers. She was so fat and old that she could hardly move and if she fell down, we would have to call a couple of men to lift her up. These people had pet cats. Mr. Gray's cat was "Clover" and Mrs.

Gray's cat was Trixie. If their cats would die, they called the new ones by the same names. They lived upstairs in their house and Hastings lived down stairs so now we lived right next-door to Myrtle and Bernice. They moved to Buffalo City, Wisconsin, right across the Mississippi and often I was so lonesome for the girls that I cried.

Then I started school. I can't remember the first day nor hardly the first year at all. I think it was in 1913 that I started, and I was six years old. My first teacher's name was Grace Dady and she made me like her very much. One day she sent all to the board; that is, the first grade. Chalk was scarce at the black boards, there being two varieties. There was the hard and the soft chalk. Of course we all went after the soft chalk and kept it. One day I noticed a great, big, long piece of soft chalk and I could see Rosella's eyes glisten as she looked at it. The first thing I thought of was to keep that piece in my desk, using it when necessary so that is what I did. Rosella became jealous and told Miss Dady who made me put the chalk back. She (Rosella) looked as if she wanted it but now she couldn't have it at all.

When I was in the first two grades, I was a pet of the older pupils who were upstairs. They thought I was very cute because I was so little and plump. I wasn't nearly so fat as when I was a baby. I was six years old and had brown bobbed hair which my mother always decorated with ribbons.

I was about six years old when my father took me to the Winona General Hospital where my tonsils were taken out. I had a very nice nurse who made me like her because she gave me some lovely flowers and because she was good to me. I didn't want her to take my patent leather slippers and blue stockings off. The result was that my father kept my slippers, and I wore my stockings. The only unpleasant thing about the operation was having the yellow hood over my face. It smelled so strongly that it seemed as if I would suffocate; so I kicked and cried enough for two girls. When I recovered from the ether they seemed anxious to know how I felt and I told them I felt all right. I don't know if Dr. Nouth or my uncle from Dakota performed the operation. I was sick on the train that night and when I got home that night a whole group of girls and boys were sitting on the steps waiting for me. They regarded me as something wonderful for about a week and then it was all over. My tonsils were taken out during the summer vacation.

At school I made pretty good progress. When I was in the second grade Miss Fitzgerald put me in the third grade for reading and spelling. Miss Fitzgerald taught again the next year. When I was in the fourth grade my teacher's name was Margaruite Havorson. I can describe her as being pretty, soft, plump, charming and kind. All the pupils liked her very much. When I was thru the fourth grade downstairs I went upstairs to the fifth grade, and felt very exalted indeed. My fifth grade teacher was Harry White, a young man. This was his second term and also Miss Havorson's. They both acted as if they were in love with each other and many of us still believe it, although she is married to another man. They couldn't be separated with a pin, but I don't

know if it was tried or not. My sixth grade teacher was Bridget Lee from Kellogg. She taught in Minneiska two or three years although I only had her for two weeks.

I had gone to school only two weeks. One noon I was coming home to dinner and had just reached our barn when suddenly a fierce pain shot thru my left leg. It came so quickly and hurt so much that instinctively I reached out to grab some support. There was nothing to hang on to and the next thing I knew was that I was laying in our garden right by the berry bushes. I picked myself up and found that I had rolled from the barn, over a stone wall and in the berry bushes. I no sooner got up than I fell again for my leg still hurt. Lila came up to me and helped me down to the house and my mother became greatly alarmed. She kind of guessed that it was a mild form of paralysis or something like it. That evening when my father came home they decided that I should go to my uncle who is a docter and who lives in Dakota. So on Saturday morning Stanley and I set out for the depot, I hanging desperately on his arm. Stanley was glad to go for he was fifteen years old and six feet tall, and loved to show off to little sister Helen that he knew all about trains. As we went thru the street I noticed everyone watching me and how I walked. This made me nervous. When we got to the depot we learned that the train was late. I kept asking Stanley all about trains, how to get on, how many seats were there, what would I do if there weren't any empty seats, and how late was the train. This last question I kept repeating for I was sick, nervous and scared. "Stanley, where is the train now?" "Oh 'bout up to Kellogg." Silence. "Stanley, do you know where the train is?" "It's halfway between Kellogg and Weaver." More silence. "Stanley, is the train to Weaver yet? How far away is Weaver?" "Yes, the train just got to Weaver. That's three miles away." There was a long silence (only five minutes). Finally I exclaimed "Ain't the train ever coming here?" Then Stanley was beginning to get nervous, (catching it from me) when the train pulled in and we eagerly climbed aboard. I believe that was the longest morning I ever spent for it seemed as if we never would get to Uncle Clarence's. When we did get there, it was nearly dinner time. Uncle Clarence came in from his office and Stanley told him all about me. Nothing was done, only I had to eat pills and drink medicine for a few days then Uncle Clarence wanted to see me in his office. It was just before dinner and I wasn't expecting to be examined then. I was a little scared, too, for Stanley had gone home Saturday night. Uncle Clarence felt and pressed my leg all over and nothing happened; he was just about to give up when he suddenly pressed my leg accidentally and I jumped as if I were shot. Sunday my father and mother, and Woodrow, came down to Dakota to bring me home again but I told them quite gaily that I had a sore throat, and besides Uncle Clarence wanted me one week more. My folks went home that night, which was one that I never slept thru. I vomited about four times, was sick, and stayed awake all nite. Next morning Uncle Clarence came in and found out I had the "flu". I was the first one in Dakota to get it and also the first Minneiska person to have it and I considered it quite an honor. In about a week and a half I was well enough to be up and Stanley came down again. He asked me if I wanted to come home but I had to go anyway for they were all packed up and ready to move to Kellogg. On the way home that evening it was Stanley's turn to ask me questions - which I gladly answered for now I wanted to

show off to him. We got off the train that evening and quite a few were down to meet me. When we got up town I saw old friends who acted very glad to see me again. Most of them were surprised I cried that night, I was so glad to be home once more but I couldn't play at all. I had to sit quiet all the time to keep my leg rested.

We moved to Kellogg Oct. 2, 1917 or 1918. School was closed there for five weeks on account of "flu". I had already missed two weeks of school. All of us were sick in Kellogg except Pa who had to take care of us six. We got well and then Pa got sick. This was the second time I had the "flu". I missed two months and a half of school that fall while Stanley and Phyllis entered high school. I started a week later than the others, again on account of my leg.

When I was in the eighth grade, we moved back to Minneiska for most of us were lonesome for our old friends. That was in April 1920. Phyllis was a Junior so her and I went to school every day in the morning on the 6:30 train and came back at night on the 6:30 p.m. train. We had hasty breakfasts every day, cold dinners, and seven o'clock suppers. I studied after school in Kellogg and went to bed when I got home for I was always very tired.

That fall Phyllis and I went to school the same way. Phyllis graduated that year and I was just a freshman. I certainly was proud when Phyllis was made salutatorian. It was while I was a Freshman that my father wanted me to quit school, for the means of getting there was causing me bad health. I hated the idea of being put a year behind so I kept right on.

When I was a sophomore I had to go to school alone every day and I certainly was lonesome. Still, it was fun to travel alone all the time and I was a young girl yet (only 15 years old). After Christmas I started to board with Ledman's and life became much easier for me.

It was the summer before I became a Sophomore that I made my trip to Milwaukee. We had built a new house in Minneiska in 1920 when we moved back from Kellogg. In 1921 my uncle Art and his wife and child came up for a visit, in their car. When they returned, they took me along to spend two weeks. Instead of two weeks, it proved to be two months, and it is the best summer I ever spent in my life. I spent my fifteenth birthday in Milwaukee; just a week before school started I came back all alone on the train. In the one little week before I went back to Kellogg, I entertained the Minneiska kids with my stories about Milwaukee and one young girl whose name was Vera Johnson, told me I looked just like a city girl, but I never fully accepted her statement, seeing she didn't know anything about city girls at the time. The following term was my sophomore year. I went back to school as a Junior in 1923-24 and spent the year fairly well. I stayed with Mrs. C. Young.

Now I am a Senior. One of my happiest moments this fall was getting my class ring. It certainly made me feel proud of myself, even if I am not a genius nor an extraordinary girl.

I think I will graduate in June. Then I will go to Normal school and, if nothing happens, be a school teacher. Probably some day I shall go to college for I am beginning to have a yearning for a broader education. Maybe I'll never get there at all. Who can tell? Finis