



## I Had a Lovely Childhood

by

Inez Fulton MacGillivray Peper  
Winter 1994

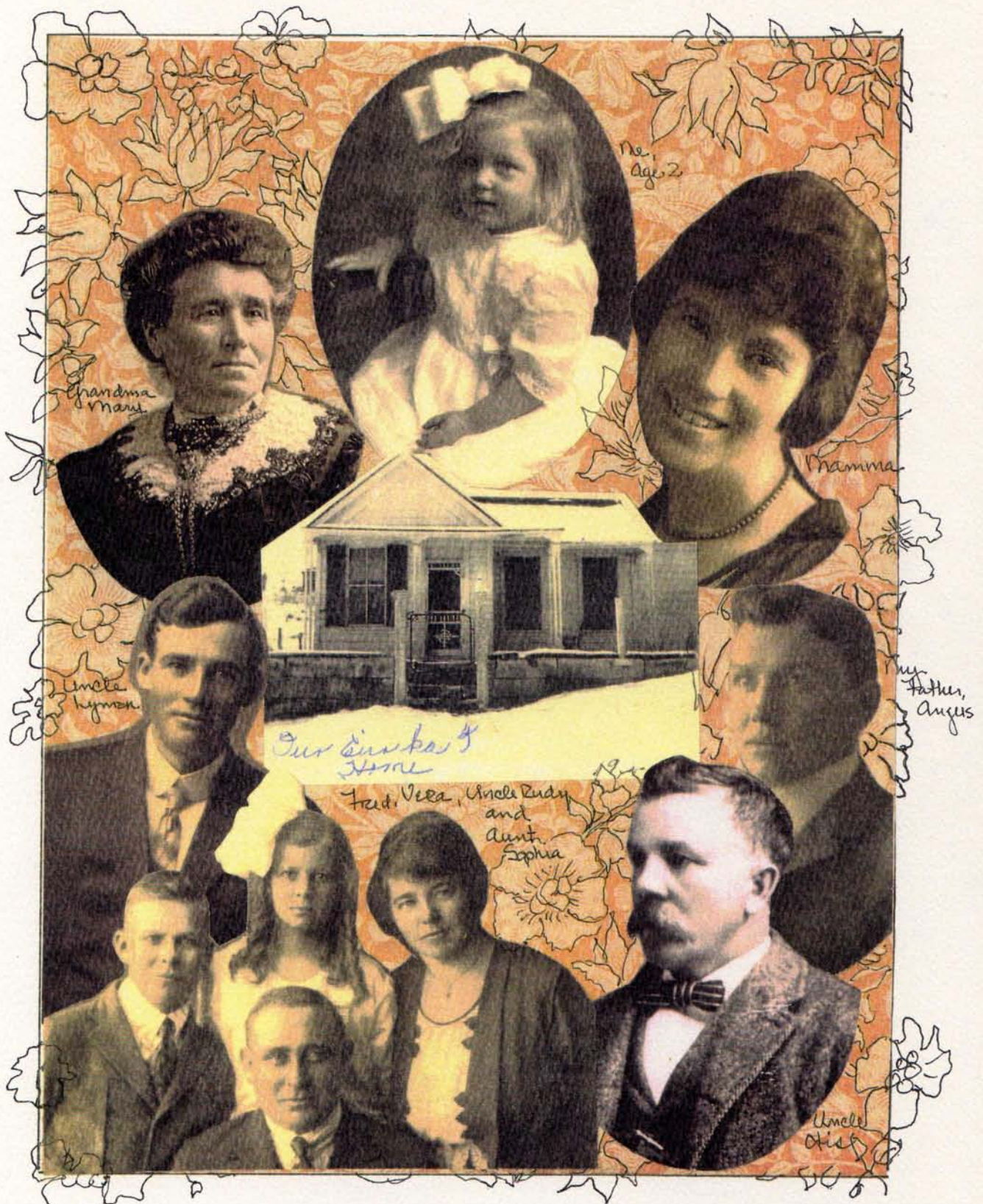
illustrated by

Christye Peper

Book number   1   of fifteen.

I Had a Lovely Childhood  
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I had a lovely childhood...  
 almost solely peopled by adults  
 ... each of whom loved me dearly.



I had a lovely childhood. Unlike that of most children, it was almost solely peopled by adults, all of whom were marvelous companions and playmates, and each of whom loved me dearly. Up to age six, all my life centered in and around Grandma Mary's home on Nob Hill in the little town of Eureka, Nevada.

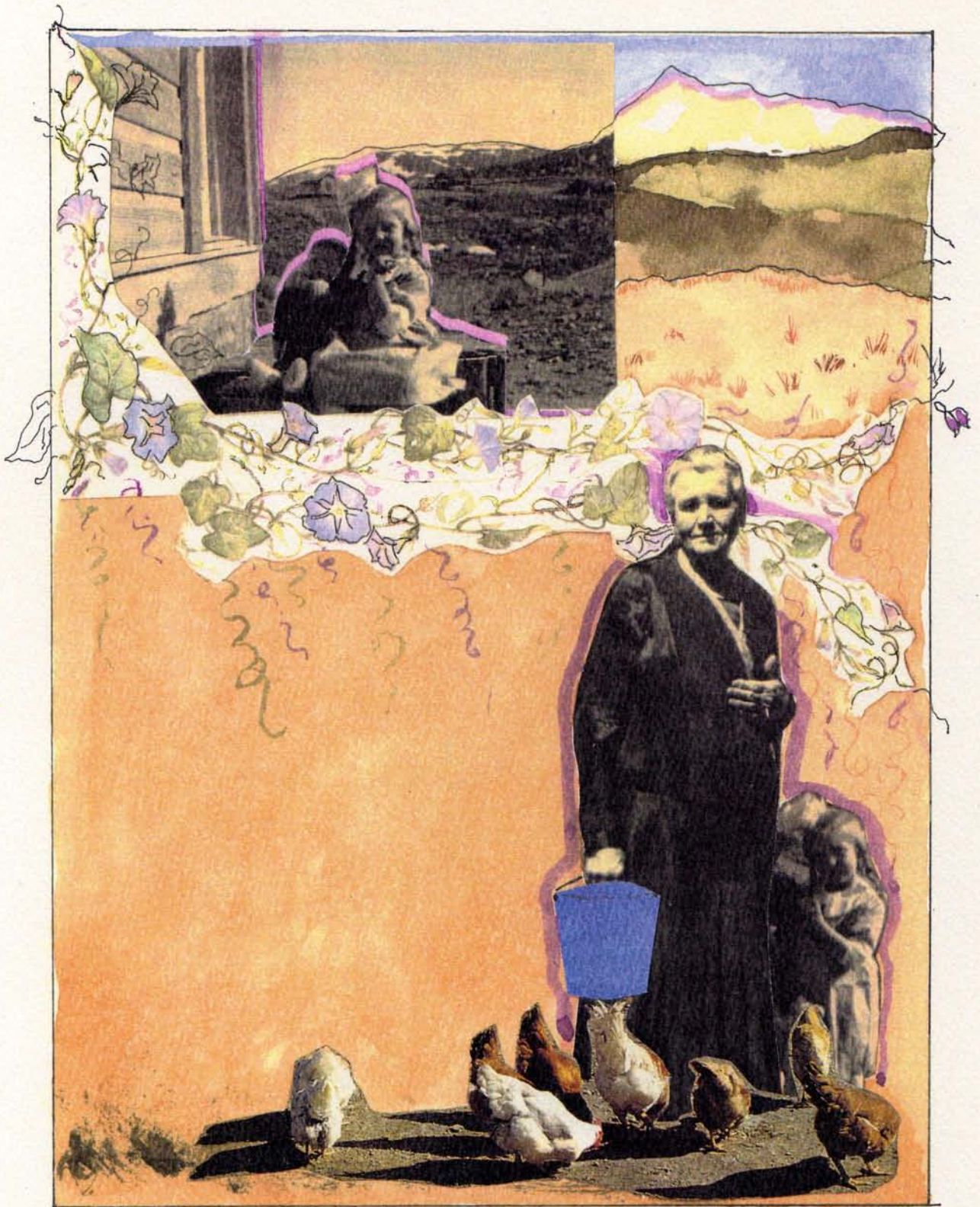
The house was occupied by grandma, mamma, sometimes Uncle Lyman, but always Great Uncle Otis Fulton, and me. Aunt Sophia, my mother's older sister by two years, lived close by, and was a regular visitor as was her husband Rudolph Zadow, the town butcher.

Missing in the household was my father. His absence literally escaped me until I was much older. Except for occasional trips up the hill to the Odd Fellows' Cemetery with my mother, and the pretty diamond and wedding rings on her finger, I was totally unaware of him. He had died when I was four months old, so never knowing him I did not actually sense his absence, and with three uncles in my life had a comforting male-female balance.

In summer, after eating the breakfast of hot oatmeal my Scottish grandma had cooked, I headed straight outdoors to greet the wild morning glories that grew under the diningroom window in the side yard. Still wet with dew, their wide open faces welcomed me, and once again I was curious, knowing their nap time was not far off. What if they overslept some morning and did not open up?

Suddenly these thoughts were interrupted, "Chick, chick, chick, chick...chick, chick, chick, chick." It was grandma feeding her chickens. I ran to the chicken yard and grandma let me reach in her bucket and help scatter the grain. The old rooster strutting among his flock made sure he got his share, his red and blue-green iridescent feathers glowing in the sun. There were White Leghorns, Plymouth Rocks, and Rhode Island Reds.

The old white Leghorn still carried the markings of the dreadful experience she'd had several days before even though grandma had hosed her off good. She'd flown over the fence and found her way into the backyard outhouse. Then, I suppose, as she stood on the edge of the big "two holer", she became a bit heady and toppled in.



... outdoors to greet the wild morning glories...  
... it was Grandma feeding her chickens.



Con conversationally, I had told grandma she must have missed the old white hen when she clipped the chicken's wings to keep them from flying over the fence. Then as she put the rake down the hole to rescue the silly bird, I mused, "If it had been one of the Rhode Island Reds it wouldn't have been so bad."

Once the rescue was complete and the bird had been hosed, I was told the whole episode was likely my fault...if I'd just please remember to close that door when I was through.... A little low small hole had been built in the outhouse just to accommodate me, so I wouldn't go the way of the chicken.

Ah! ...Those precious old architectural wonders! You've not lived if you have never experienced them.

When grandma was busy, Uncle Ote was often my prime playmate. He had been Superintendent of Mines at Cortez, pronounced *Cortus*, Nevada, for many years. As a young man in the mines, he'd got a piece of steel in his eye and, as a consequence, wore a glass eye. He also had a game leg, a result of having had a tendon cut, and at this point in life used a cane. Uncle Ote and Grandma Mary's husband, Fred, had been brothers. Grandfather Fred had died when my mother was eight years old.

Every once in a while Uncle Ote would drop his glass eye and it would break. Forthwith, my mother ordered a selection of glass eyes in varying shades of grayish blue from San Francisco. Ultimately, one evening when we walked to the post office to pick up the mail we'd find a little wooden box from San Francisco.

The next day, when the light was right, uncle would seat himself facing the dining room window. I would pull my little red chair in front of him and sit facing him. As my mother selected one glass eye after another and inserted it into the empty socket, I would scrutinize each eye carefully. I'd shake my head, "No...no...yes...no...," and so on, until finally we'd have as near a match as possible.





*I would scrutinize each eye carefully.*



I suspect mamma really made the choice, but I had been made to feel truly needed in the process, which was most likely connived to keep me out of the way.

When Uncle Rudy, Aunt Sophia's husband, came to shave Uncle Ote a couple of times a week, I was again needed. Uncle Rudy would first stir up a tremendous lather in the big shaving mug, then he'd hook the razor strop on the back of the chair and whip that straight razor back and forth like a professional. Once more, I'd place my little chair in front of Uncle Ote and watch his face being lathered till he almost looked like Santa Claus. Then Rudy would say, "Iny, watch carefully, because sometimes I miss a few. I'm counting on your sharp eyes to let me know," and believe me, I did. I'm certain he always missed a couple of spots to keep me entertained.

Sometimes Uncle Otis had terrible nosebleeds, hemorrhages, mama and grandma called them. After one they would have him sitting up in bed. They didn't want him to touch his nose in case the gesture would start the bleeding again. I was told to watch him and let them know if he made such a move. I sat there like a little hawk, eyes glued on the man.

After a while, he would make a move toward his nose. "Mama, mamma," I'd scream, "Uncle's touching his nose!" Mamma would come bursting in, and uncle would chuckle and say, "Aw, Chris, I didn't do anything." He just got such a kick out of me doing my assigned duty, and there were so many false alarms, that mamma and grandma learned not to give me that assignment.

Is it any wonder I grew up with such a sense of responsibility? All these chores I was involved in!

Uncle Otis died on October 12, 1921. I had just turned six years old, and mamma and I had moved to Round Mountain, Nevada. It was good that I was not in Eureka when it happened.

Six or seven years ago, Paula, my youngest daughter, and I made a trip to Eureka to replace the family headstones in the Odd Fellows' Cemetery. An old friend had let us know they were deteriorating. I had new bronze plaques placed on the graves of Mary, Fred, and Otis Fulton. My father, Angus MacGillivray's, granite stone was in good condition.



At that time, an elderly gentleman named Albert Biale told us that Uncle Otis had once served as a Eureka County Commissioner. There were three commissioners and they jokingly became known as the "Three-Eyed Commission," because one man had normal sight, one man was blind, and Great Uncle Otis had but one eye. This was a story I had never heard.

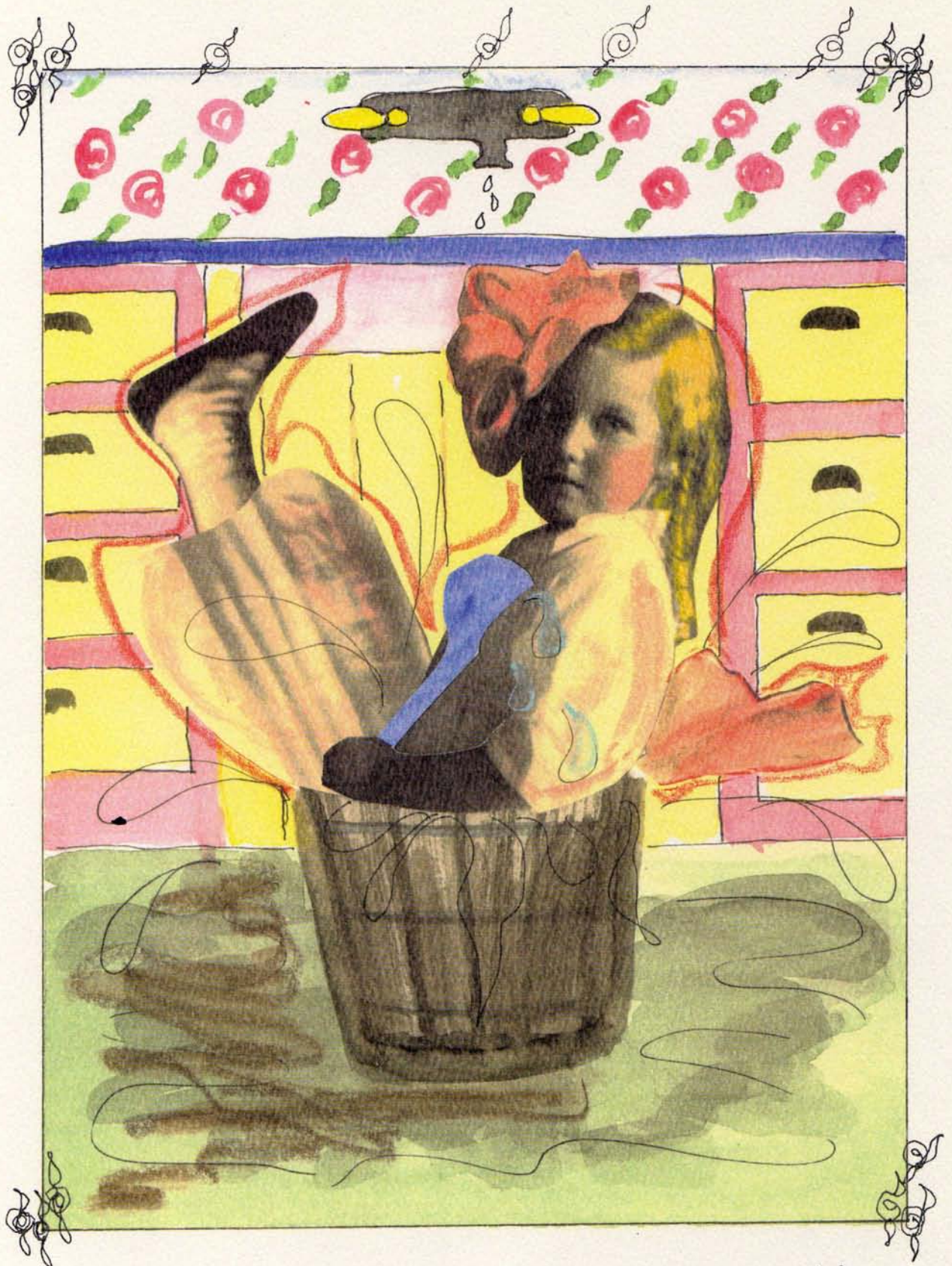
During my early childhood, Eureka had no electricity. Most homes had very little plumbing. In grandma's house water piped into a faucet above the kitchen sink drained into a small ditch below the house where it absorbed into the ground. Greasy dirty water was never poured into this drain. Instead, it was emptied into a large bucket, called the slop bucket, which was placed under the sink, eventually to be dumped into a cut in the hillside where cans, bottles, bits of broken dishes and glassware were also thrown.

At approximately age three, steadily growing more self-sufficient, and quite unknown to the family, I had become adept at getting myself a drink of water. By pulling myself up, I managed to hook my right arm over the sink rim, and in this suspended position, use my left hand to turn on the faucet, set the dipper directly under the water flow, and thus, quench my thirst. It was all pretty slick...till one day I slipped and fell smack into the slop bucket!

Unfortunately, mamma was home, heard the commotion, and found me stuck in the bucket, drenched, and covered in mess as was the floor around me. Amidst heavy scoldings, she cleaned both me and the floor, and exacted a solemn promise from me to ask for help when I wanted water.

However, some days later, Aunt Sophia came to visit, walked into the kitchen, and discovered me hanging precariously chinned on the sink rim, legs drawn up under me as high as possible to prevent the bucket from swallowing me, too scared to even try to yell for help. Sophia scooped me up laughing, "Aren't you glad I'm not your mother!" All I could do was nod yes. Later I heard her and grandma laughing. Mamma never said a word to me, but I think she knew.

As for garbage, the chickens and the dog consumed most of the table scraps. Whatever waste paper there was, was used to build fires in the kitchen range, and the dining and front room



I slipped and fell smack into the slop bucket!



stoves. Tissues, paper towels, and toilet paper did not seem to exist. The outhouse was supplied with the previous year's catalogs and old newspapers. Clearly, garbage service was not a necessity. Had it been, where would today's collectors ever have found all those lovely desert sun-colored amethyst bottles?

A large reservoir built into the big black kitchen range, kept filled at all times, provided hot water. A full size galvanized bath tub with legs and wooden rim was carried into the kitchen on Saturday nights and early Sunday mornings so each of us had a nice warm bath weekly.

We did have telephones, large box-like affairs fastened to the wall, a crank for ringing the bell located on the right side, a receiver on the left, and a mouthpiece in the center. Our ring was two shorts and Aunt Sophia and Uncle Rudy's was a long , a short, and a long...all of which were rung manually.

Uncle Rudy loved kids. He had two of his own, Vera and Fred, four and six years respectively older than I. Often he would call grandma in the evening. I'd climb up on a chair by her side and wait impatiently for a chance to talk with him on this wonderfully magic contraption.

When my turn finally came, "Hello," I'd say. "Guess what I had for dinner!"

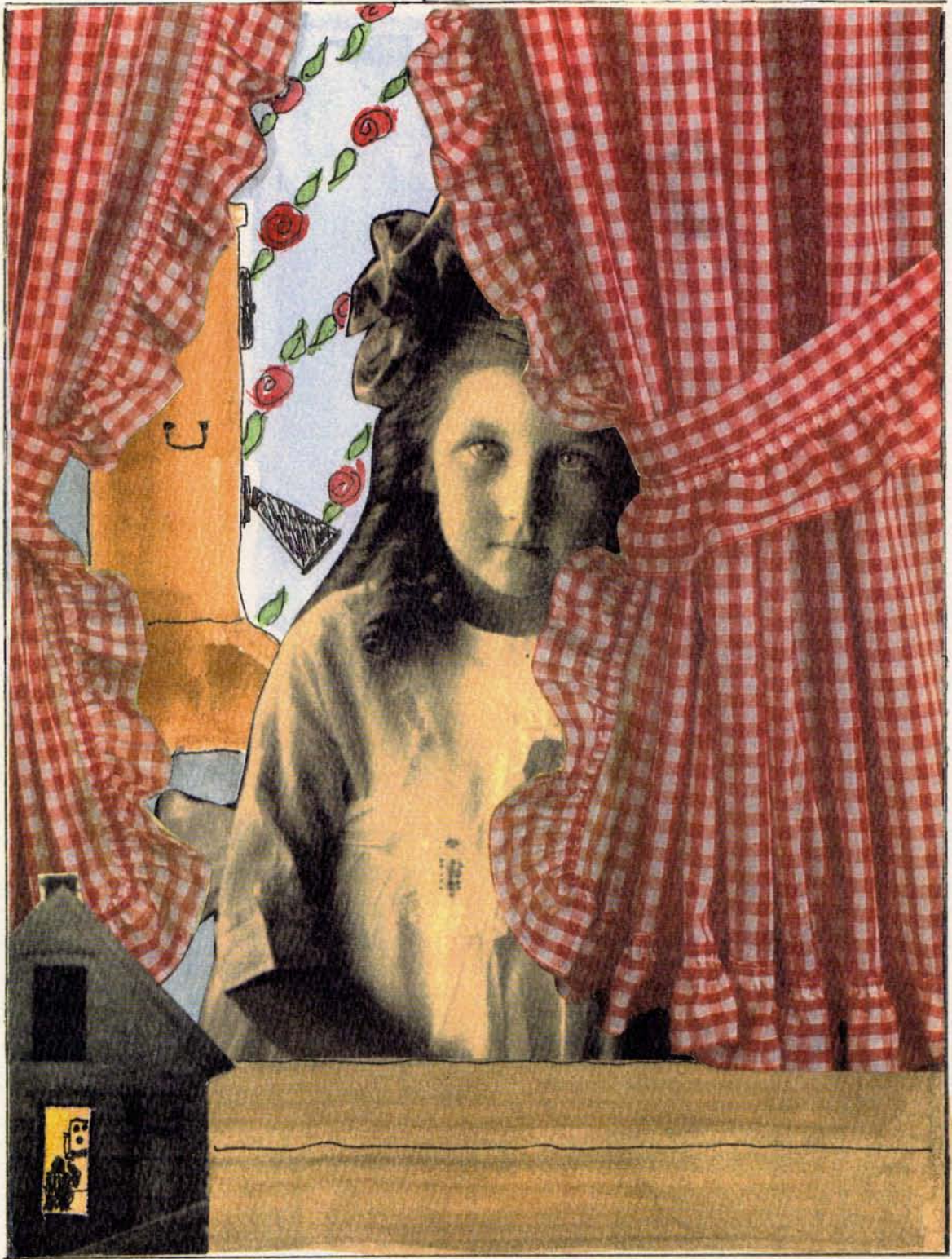
Silence. Then, "Let me smell your breath!" I'd give a big exhale into the mouthpiece.

"Hmmm...", he'd say. "Let me smell that again." Then after a pause, "Pot roast!!!"

"What else?" I'd ask, and this went on and on right down to the apple pie dessert.

Of course, Rudy ran the butcher shop, and since grandma always bought her meat there, he generally knew what we were likely to have for dinner each evening. Besides, he had consumed a good many of her dinners. But to me, he was endowed with marvelous divining qualities.

The youngest of my uncles, Lyman Fulton, my mother's brother, was, until the late 1980's, the youngest man to have been elected to the Nevada State Legislature. He represented Eureka County during three different legislative sessions and later became a United States Marshall. His first legislative service was in 1915, the year I was born. He and I were great pals. He used to save the "cows" off his Bull Durham sacks for me.



"Guess what I had for dinner!"



He made a little change off me sometimes by making bets with his friends that his little niece could read...a highly unlikely proposition because I was not quite three years old. He'd bring his friends home, put me in his lap with my "ABC" book open, and as they put up their money, he'd turn to page one. Then slowly running his finger under the words, line by line, I would read:

" A B C  
Tumble down D,  
The cat's in the cupboard  
and can't see me,"

and so on and on to page two and three. Then he'd skip around in the book. I could still read. He'd pocket the money and his friends were totally unaware that the pictures on the pages were my clue, and Uncle Lyman knew precisely the proper speed to pace his finger, line by line, to my reciting by memory. I really did start learning to read from my school teacher mother when I was four.

Uncle Lyman owned a big Scotch Collie named Rover. Never allowed in the house, Rover permitted me to curl up with him wherever he lay, patiently letting me explore his ears, his eyes, even his tongue, which was a major curiosity. Sometimes it was long and dangling, sometimes he seemed to swallow it. Ultimately, he let me thrust my little arm down his throat as far as I could reach, hoping to find its source. Never once did he snap at me.

There were few cars in Eureka in that pre-twenties era, but Rover managed to chase one and was so injured that he could not walk. Uncle Lyman had to shoot him. Mamma cried. I cried. It was my first sorrow over a death.

Not too many days later, Uncle Lyman came riding home on his horse from the Sheep Ranch where he sometimes worked. Cradled in his arm was a little bummer lamb which he placed in my arms.

I named the lamb Denny. At first we fed him with a bottle. Later he kept grandma's lawn cut. He followed me all around the yard just like Rover had. Eventually, he got so big he'd butt

me and send me flying. After grandma discovered that, he disappeared. All she said was, "Uncle Rudy will take care of him."

One night at dinner someone said something about the meat we were eating. A great light exploded in my brain...it was Denny we were eating. I have never been truly fond of lamb since. In fact, in only recent times have I been able to stomach a lamb chop.

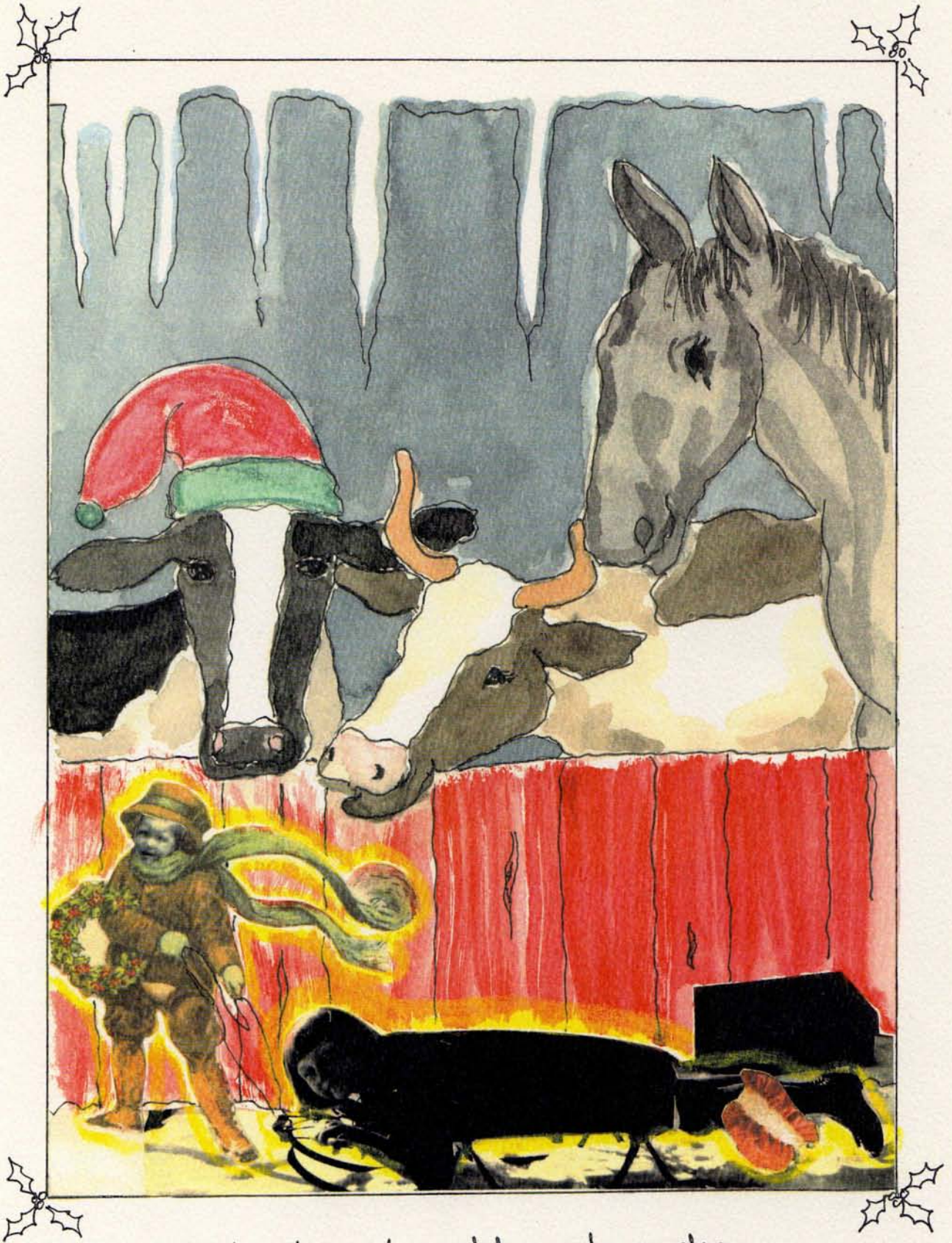
Uncle Lyman gave me my favorite children's book, *Sunny Bunny*, by Nina Wilcox Putnam. Bunny-eared today, by wear and tear and love by both me and my children, it is tucked away still treasured.

It always snowed in winter in Eureka. Paths were shoveled from the house to the woodshed, to the outhouse, to the front and back gates, and to the chicken yard. Sometimes the piled up snow was higher than my head. Snow meant pulling the old sled out of the woodshed, getting buttoned up in leggings, buckled up in overshoes, and bundled up in warm sweater, coat, cap, and mittens. Then off through the back gate to the top of the hill.

The sled was old and crudely made. The only way to steer it was to jerk it right or left with the weight of my body, and my little body was not heavy enough. Fortunately, the barn for the two cows and the horse was below me at the bottom of the hill, so I just climbed on the sled, sat upright, feet in front of me, aimed at the barn, swooped down the hill, and the barn brought me to a stop, however abruptly.

Once in a while I wouldn't aim quite right and would veer off into the can pile where the bottles and broken glass were thrown. One particular day when this happened, I flew off the sled and wound up running to grandma with a skinned nose. As I got to the house a strange man was just leaving. Grandma held the door for me, and seeing the damage said comfortingly, "We'll fix you right up." Picking up a flat silver can from the kitchen table, she removed the cover, ran her finger over its light green contents, and rubbing it on my nose, said, "This is Russian salve. It will make you all better." The man I had seen leaving had sold it to her.





...and the barn brought me to a stop...

Selling patent medicines door to door was very popular in those days. This was shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution and today I sometimes wonder if the stranger might not have been a refugee from Russia. That bright silver can of ointment remained in our medicine cabinet for years.

At my current age of seventy-eight I can still feel, hear and smell the first warm days of the spring thaw. Grandma and I would sit in the sun, just outside the back door. Little trickles of water began growing into mud puddles. A warm breeze caressed us. Grandma called it a Chinook. I felt as if I might burst with joy.

One day, not long after I ran amuck in the can pile, grandma and I were in the kitchen. She was ironing. A loud knocking began at the front door. "Run answer that, dear, and I'll be right there." So I streaked through the front room, flung open the door...and there stood Santa Claus!

"One of my boys told me you really need a new sled, so I made a special trip. Here you go!", and he handed me a brand new Flexible Flyer just like the one in the Sears and Roebuck Catalog. I stood there flabbergasted! I couldn't even say, "Thank you," so grandma, who'd arrived by then, said it for me. By the time I recuperated from my surprise and tore my gaze from the miracle in my arms, Santa was gone.

Out to the kitchen we hurried with grandma saying, "Wasn't Santa thoughtful?" Quickly she winterized me, and out the door I rushed for my first belly-buster down the hill. No more running into barns and can piles for me! I could steer this beauty.

I stayed out the rest of the afternoon. Finally, when grandma called me to come in, I decided first to hide my new sled in the storeroom under the bed that was kept made out there. I crouched down and started to push the sled under. "Whoops!"...Somebody'd been there before me! Right in front of my eyes was a Santa Claus suit hurriedly hidden. I had a serious revelation. No wonder Santa had disappeared so fast! No wonder Santa knew I had skinned my nose! "Hmmm," something to think about. "I mustn't tell mamma when she comes home from school, and I mustn't tell grandma...Santa is Uncle Rudy!"



Although my vision of Santa Claus was shattered, the other miracle worker in my life remained very secure. Ours had always been a church going family. My thoughts had been directed toward God and Jesus from the time I had begun to toddle. Among my first memories is one of standing on the seat of the pew in church between mamma and grandma when the congregation rose to sing. It gave me an excellent vantage point to check out the ladies' hats, one of the methods I cultivated to amuse myself.

On this particular day, Mrs. Skillman's hat literally made my mouth water, for it was decorated with a wreath of ripe red cherries. Typically, grandma's friend Mrs. Sweick's hat wore bright blue forget-me-nots. When we visited her she always had a bouquet of flowers on her kitchen table and often gave me some to take home. I peeked around behind me at Mrs. Johnson who gave me a reproving look with her snapping black eyes. Her hat had a masive black wing across the front, as if it could lift right off her head and fly away. Worse yet, draped around her neck was a strange beady-eyed little animal that perpetually bit its tail. The whole picture was forbidding.

Suddenly, I became aware of the words of the hymn and all those singing voices came crowding into my consciousness. They were singing to me! "Inez, tell Jesus...Inez, tell Jesus." That was my name, but what could I tell Jesus?

Stunned, mulling it over as we left church, I clung tightly to mama's hand, and finally blurted, "Mamma! What am I supposed to tell Jesus?"

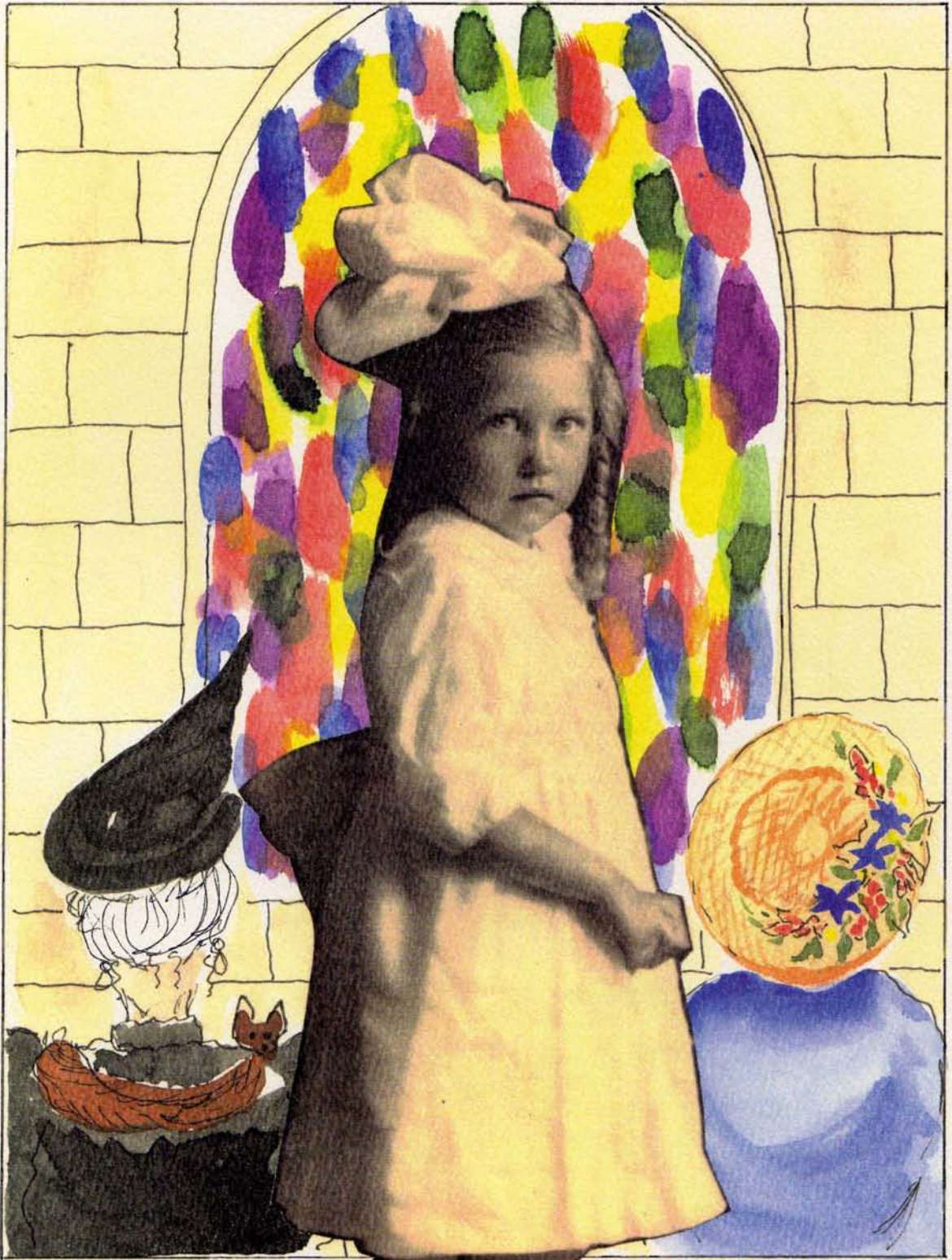
She looked at me in amazement. "Where did you ever get such an idea?"

"Everybody sang it in church! What do I do? They sang, 'Inez, tell Jesus'."

Mamma began to laugh, "Not you, you goose! They sang, 'I must tell Jesus,' and you thought they meant you."

What a relief! I guess I was just born with an over active conscience.

There came a day after the spring thaw, the same year of my delusion over Santa Claus, when the sun had dried the earth just enough for children to go out and play. Mamma finished



They were singing... "Inez, tell Jesus..."



buttoning my new brown shoes just as my friend Wilburta arrived with her jump rope. Out we went, Wilburta to jump rope and I to punch pretty little octagonal holes in the moist ground with Uncle Lyman's small crowbar. Overcome with success, I suddenly grew careless and punch...! Right through my new shoe.

Hopping on one foot, great tears coursing down my cheeks because I had spoiled my new shoe, I found mamma in the kitchen. Alarmed, she snatched me up, pulled off the shoe, and horrors! What a bloody mess!

Sometime later, tears dried and foot bandaged, I was studying the hole in my shoe when Wilburta, who had simply dissolved from the premises, reappeared. She thrust two freshly cooked raised doughnuts into my hands, a gift to ease the pain and sorrow.

Days rolled by. I was not allowed to play outside. I had to wear my Indian moccasins. My big toe was covered by a huge scab. Life indoors had palled. Finally, one night after I said my "Now I lay me" to mamma, I asked, "Do you think God would take the scab off my foot if I asked him?"

"Well, I don't know, but it wouldn't hurt to find out," mamma smiled.

Folding my hands, and kneeling by the bed, I prayed, "Please, God, take the scab off my toe so I can wear shoes again and play outside."

Sleep came quickly, followed by morning. I threw down the covers and looked at my toe. The scab was gone! And there it was, not far from my foot. "Mamma! God heard me," I yelled.

A miracle had taken place. I became a total believer.

Summers were beautiful in that high desert country where Eureka is located. Puffy clouds floated in blue blue sky. Occasionally they became dark and threatening, sometimes bursting into rain or hail, then clearing into gorgeous sunsets.

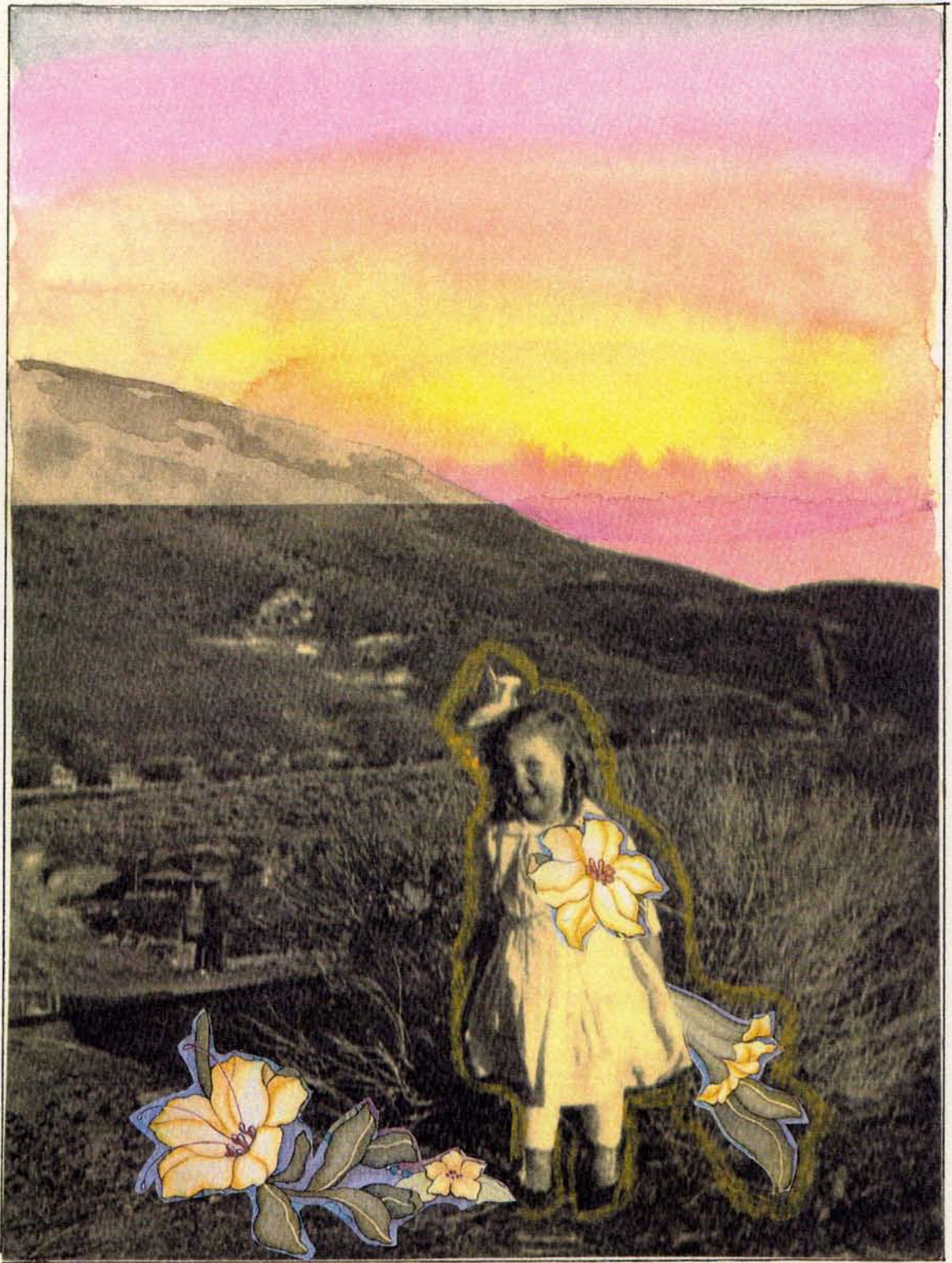
I remember one time it hailed stones the size of marbles. Grandma hurriedly threw an old Macintosh over her head and shoulders and rushed out to lock up the chickens. When she returned she carried a large bucket of hailstones and deftly set about making homemade ice cream,

substituting the hail for ice. She used the rich cream she'd skimmed from the cow's milk, and eggs from her chickens, and to eat the finished product was ambrosia.

Often on summer evenings the grownups sat chatting on the front porch while I roamed that portion of the hill across the road. One of my delights was to find a wild bush, growing among the sage, called a sticky lilly. It produced a beautiful yellow flower that bloomed only at dusk, and when plucked and pressed against my dress stayed fixed of its own accord, hence the name sticky lilly. Days that began with morning glories often ended appropriately with me wearing a lovely evening star on my shoulder.

In September of 1921, just before I turned six, mamma and I moved to the little mining town of Round Mountain, Nevada. I entered first grade in the one room school mamma had been hired to teach. From that point on we only spent summers in Eureka. When I turned eleven, grandma sold her home there, and together, she and mamma bought a home for the three of us in Reno.





One of my delights was to find a... sticky lilly...



Paula and I visited Albert Biale in September on the first leg of our trip to the Southwest. At that time he gave me two tapes he had recorded of his memories of early days in Eureka. This spring I sent him a copy of "I Had a Lovely Childhood." Following is a copy of the letter he wrote to me after reading it:

April 2, 1994

Dear Inez,

What a pleasant surprise to receive the book about your childhood in Eureka. Many thanks for favoring me with a copy that I will prize.

The book is wonderfully done. Your well-written and interesting description of the events in your childhood days, Christye's artistic illustrations and Paula's putting it altogether has resulted in a book that you can well be proud of. You described so well the Eureka of the pre 1920 era and the conditions that existed at that time.

Yes I knew everyone mentioned and pictured except of course your father. Needless to say it has brought to mind many pleasant memories. Your mother was one of my favorite teachers and taught me in the eighth grade in the school year of 1916-17.

Your grandmother had a few cows and sold milk for a time. I can remember your Uncle Lyman driving the cows home at milking time. He had a sorrel horse that he rode and it seems to me that the horse's name was Billy, but I'm not sure.

I remember Rudolph and his family living in the brick house almost directly in back of the school building where we went to school.

In addition to running the butcher shop, Rudolph had the first gasoline station. No modern pumps in those days. The gasoline came in 55 gallon barrels which were rolled up on a stand. Then the fuel was drawn into a 5 gallon can and poured in the auto's tank through a felt hat that filtered out any water or foreign material.

Eureka was on the Lincoln Highway which at that time was the only designated road running from coast to coast. In 1915 San Francisco held the Panama Pacific International Exposition and that year quite a number of autos came through Eureka and of course Rudolph filled their tanks. I was 12 years old at that time and autos fascinated me and I practically lived at Rudolph's which was just across the street from my family home. There were many makes of autos even in those days and I learned their names.

My anxiety is still with me. I am always fatigued and can do very little. At my age (91 in a few days) I feel fortunate in doing as well as I am. It is quite possible that I may have to enter a nursing home. I don't like the idea but it may be the answer.

Again many thanks for favoring me with that very interesting book. My love to you, Paula and Christye, and I hope you all had a pleasant Easter.

Sincerely,  
Albert