

Marie's Journey

Living in a Utopian Communal Society
in the 19th Century

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Introduction and Background

Five McCready children lived at the Koreshan Unity for most of their lives. This narrative was written by Marie, who was about 11 years old when she arrived in Estero, Florida in 1897. Words in brackets [...] are notes that help explain concepts. These are her memories, compiled when she was about 80 years old. She writes,

“Acknowledging the inclination of the older generation to reminisce and recognizing the disinclination of the younger sometimes to hear the stories, we have arrived at this solution of the problem: We will write our memories and, though consideration and good manners might require you to listen, there is no law which says you must read.”

Discussion questions:

- Who would take care of you (family unit)?
- What would be your beliefs and where you would have learned them?
- What would your education be like?
- What kind of jobs would you have or would be learning to do?
- How would you spend your free time?
- How would you have traveled?
- What was your housing like?
- What was the environment and locale like?

Chapter 1: Our Parents

Pappa and Mamma knew each other, at least by sight, from the time he was fifteen and she was ten, when they were both living on farms but came into Homewood [Pennsylvania] occasionally. She said that the first time she saw him she told her father that if she ever married, she thought she would like to marry that boy.

They were married in 1883. Pappa was serious and quite like his father and always read and studied a great deal. When it came time for him to think of making his own living, he did what so many of the boys who lived in the country did in those days- turned to the railroad. He [also] became interested in the printing business.

I believe Mamma was the finest character I ever knew, and not just because she was our mother. Children and young people came to her with their troubles and problems and she, in turn, seemed to love and understand all of the young.

Aunt Margaret and Mamma took up sewing and finally opened a dress-making and millinery [hat] shop. One of her doctor uncles wanted to send her to college but she refused the offer because she did not want to hurt her father by accepting from his brother what he, himself, could not give.

Mamma, herself, loved life and was interested in it until the last. Not long before her death [at age 84] she made the remark that she supposed she had had a hard life, but that she had enjoyed it. She always read the newspapers each day and, as she had more time to herself, a good bit in magazines, also- especially the Reader's Digest, which was her favorite.

[I had several siblings. Catharine, born in 1884, Margaret, who died at age 6 ½, Marie [that's me, born in 1886], Lovelle, born in 1888, Rosalea, born two years later and who had polio as a child, and Will.]

There was a little country school on the edge of town, and when Catherine reached school age it was decided to enroll her instead in a convent school in Beaver Falls to which a Catholic family in town sent their children. Catharine, however, became more and more unhappy with this arrangement so they had Mr. Smiley, our then printing instructor boarder, tutor her at home for a term. The next fall a second cousin of Mamma's Annie Nye, opened a little private school and, as I was then six, Catharine and I attended it for a term. Mamma still did not think

this was what we should have, so prevailed upon Pappa to ask for a transfer to a larger town with a good school, and we moved to Freedom, PA.

Chapter 2: Freedom, PA

We moved to Freedom in the fall of 1895 and immediately Catharine, Lovelle and I entered public school for the first time, term already under way. We rented one of two houses which shared a lot right in the heart of town, across the street from the general store. The houses were both built right to the street line, with a high latticed fence connecting them and opening into a little brick paved courtyard, used only for an entrance way and to draw water from the continuous chain type pump there.

Freedom was built on a hill so we went up several steps to enter the yard, which sloped gradually upward to the back and ended at a high stone wall. At the top of this wall was the street on which our school building stood. Although almost opposite our house, to reach it by the normal route we had to go most of the length of our block, up its side, and then back almost the same distance to the school. To shorten this Pappa built a ladder and fastened it against the wall, so all we had to do was to run up through our lot, climb the ladder and cross the street. We usually came home the longer way, I think, as I can remember that Lovelle and I would do a springy hop most of the way. [We sang a chorus about our old school song.]

"Merrily, cheerily, march and sing,
Merrily, cheerily, voices ring.
Oh, 'tis so delightful when we
march in line
To see the little girls and boys
who keep the time."

Lovelle and I each had our first romance while in Freedom. Hers was with Carl Mohler, a little boy in her class at school, but it suddenly went on the rocks when he hit her during a political argument as to the respective Presidential qualifications of Bryan and McKinley.

Mine was a sort of dual affair, with Johnny Kuhl and Georgie Green who were almost inseparable companions, a little older than Georgie's younger sister Katie [who] was my seatmate in school for some time. I knew they both liked me, but was surprised and felt somewhat important when Johnny's older sister Fannie told me in the store one day that they had had a fight about me. Although I liked them both, Johnny was my favorite. He was better looking, wore nicer clothes, and sometimes gave me little presents, mostly candy but once it was in a little round lacquered Japanese box. Ironically it was gift that brought our friendship to its finish.

One day he brought me some little cardboard soldiers that I had admired when they were in the store window, but either he came without permission or stayed too long for while we were up in the yard talking, his mother came after him. She, ignored me as if I were not there, slapped him several times and then led him home by the ear, berating him loudly in German all the time. It was so embarrassing to us both that from then on we managed to avoid meeting and before too long we left town.

It was during the 1896-7 term, our only full one, that Catharine, Lovelle and I each won the award for highest scholastic rank in our respective classes, and Lovelle and I also [had] perfect attendance; Catharine had been absent two or three days on account of illness. The awards consisted of books, inscribed on the fly leaves by our teachers- Catharine, Miss Watson; Lovelle's Miss Ross; and mine, Miss Manor. Pappa worked at the Conway tower, within easy walking from our house so Lovelle and I usually carried his lunch or supper, whichever it happened to be, to him. On the occasion of the last day of school we both had our hair curled and, when the man in the office with him remarked on it, of course Pappa could not resist saying that those curls meant the highest rank in our classes.

Sometimes on Sunday mornings we children attended Sunday school and on others Pappa took us on long walks, usually along Dutchman's Run, while Mamma stayed home to have dinner ready when we returned, one of our favorites being roast veal with brown gravy and Yorkshire pudding, which nobody else ever made so good. I have since thought how unfair this was, but in those days people did not go out to Sunday dinners so they had to be prepared at home.

It was during the early winter of 1897 that we made [a] move that was to change the whole course of our lives.

One day we had taken Pappa's lunch to him as usual and found two strange men there talking, Pappa evidently very much interested. One of these, we learned, was a Doctor Jackson, and he was there to try to persuade Pappa to attend evening lectures in Beaver Falls [PA] which were being conducted by Doctor Teed, the founder of Koreshanity. They were being held at the home of a McDonald family with whom he was staying at the time, and not only Pappa, but the whole family attended. The meetings, themselves, were very tiresome to us children, but Lovelle and I enlarged our stock of rhymes by learning the streetcar ads on the trips to and from them. One of our favorites was that of a tailor:

*"Higgeldy, piggeldy, my son John
Went to bed with his britches on.
He was in love with their style, you see,
Because they were made by Kent, that's Me."*

On Pappa's invitation, Doctor Teed spent the last day and night at our home before leaving for Chicago [Illinois] and he and our parents talked away into the night. From that time it was decided that we would join the community in Chicago and plans were immediately made.

The Pennsylvania Railroad, for which he had worked so many years provided a box car in which to take our household furnishings and Pappa's printing equipment.

Chapter 3: The Koreshan Unity

Chicago

The Koreshan Unity was founded by Dr. Cyrus Reed Teed, who was born October 1839, near Trout Creek in Tompkins Township County, New York, in a small community called Teedsville. His parents were Jesse and Sarah Ann (Tuttle) Teed, and he was the second son of their eight children. Jesse Teed, was said to have been a successful country doctor, was probably, like so many in his profession then, not so successful in collecting his fees, for Cyrus, when eleven, left school to help support the rapidly growing family. Friends and relatives tried to persuade him to study for the ministry, his family being of the Baptist faith, but his inclinations were to follow in his father's footsteps, so he turned to medicine instead and, in 1859, when he was twenty, began to study with his uncle, Dr. Samuel F. Teed in Utica, N. Y.

After serving with the Union forces throughout the Civil War he entered the Eclectic Medical College in New York and, after graduation in 1868 began his practice in Utica. However, his experiences during the war combined with his naturally religious nature, it is said, gave him the urge to help mankind not only physically but spiritually as well. In 1869, during a period of fasting and prayer, experienced what he always called "The Illumination," that he believed was a revelation of the mysteries of life and death and the relation of man to God [metaphysical]." He continued his [medical] practice but his theories made him "different in the conservative community in which he lived and eventually it began to fall off.

When he was invited to address the National Association [of] Mental Science in Chicago, his natural ability as an orator [speaker] and his great personal magnetism impressed the convention to such an extent that he was invited to accept the presidency, which he did and, in 1886, he and his then small number of followers left New York and settled in Chicago, where they incorporated the "College of Life" under the laws of the state of Illinois. The organization was also known as "The Church Triumphant" and, two years later in 1888, it became the Koreshan Unity, "Koresh" being the Hebrew translation of his given name Cyrus. Those who joined the community turned in all of their worldly possessions and lived a celibate life as brothers and sisters in a communal society.

Doctor made frequent lecture tours, such as the one to Beaver Falls [PA], and usually brought in new converts, though some remained, where they were known as "Outside Koreshans."

None of us would ever forget our arrival at Washington Heights [IL] in 1897. Through some misunderstanding, we, did not get off at the station where we were to have been met, so started out on our own. It was a bitterly cold day and we struggled through snow and driving winds until we were almost frozen. When Pappa stopped at a house to inquire, we found we were not far from our destination, but the friendly German woman insisted that we come in and warm her fire before going on, and we were glad to do so.

While the main body of the community lived at Washington Heights, those engaged in printing and publishing were at Englewood, a closer in suburb of the city, where they had a home as well as the publishing house building. Publications were "The Guiding Star," "The Flaming Sword," and "The Cellular Cosmogony," the last named being considered the standard textbook of the Koreshan belief that all life was contained inside, not outside, of the globe. Because of his experience with printing, Pappa was assigned to that part of the community's activities, his duties consisting of soliciting for the commercial department, proofreading, etc. He did not live in Englewood [with the printers], however, but at Washington Heights, commuting back and forth by train or streetcars.

Sometimes when the printing office had a rush job requiring the folding and insertion of leaflets or papers, Pappa would take Lavelle and me down to help, which was always fun for he usually drove old Nelly at such times so we enjoyed the trip down and back. Everybody made a good bit over us, the men at the printing office and the women at the house where we would eat our dinner, though sometimes during periods when nobody came around we just sat and worked, it became a little tiresome. In this connection, Lovelle recalled the first trip we made to Englewood on the streetcar alone - or so we had supposed until we got up to change cars at the junction and spied Pappa sitting in one of the back seats, his sheepish look at being found out.

Chapter 4: The Koreshan Unity

Estero

In 1884 an old German farmer, Gustav Damkohler, and his family homesteaded a tract of land along the Estero River and then added to it by purchasing an adjoining one. His wife and two of the children died of a fever, but Elbert, a young son, survived and the two of them continued to live on their property. Then, in the early 1890's, Mr. Damkohler became converted to Koreshanity and turned his property over to Doctor who, by that time, was planning to establish his growing colony in a home of their own. On January 31, 1894, pioneer party of sixteen members left Chicago and began the long trip by slow train to Punta Gorda, then the terminus of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, and from there first by sloop and then by skiffs, to join Damkohlers and begin clearing land and constructing the buildings necessary to house

themselves and the others to follow. The first finished was "the log house," still there, and Pappa's home during his entire life in Estero.

Other properties were soon added to the Unity's holdings, including long strips of beach on Estero and Big and Little Hickory islands, and sill later a tract at the mouth of the Estero River and Mound Key, both now parts of the Koreshan State Park.

How we got there in 1897.

I have no idea how many there were in our party, but I do know that our car was filled with women and girls and the men and boys were in another one behind ours. They were day coaches but, most of us being young, we managed to sleep well enough during the three nights lying on the seats with pillows for our heads, and walking around outside at the main stops gave us some exercise. However, all were glad when we reached Punta Gorda and the sloop waiting to take us to Punta Rassa, and from there to Estero Island where we spent the night before being packed into row boats for the journey up the Estero River to our destination. The monotony of the mangroves everywhere in the bay and lower reaches of the river were disappointing to me so I could not be very enthusiastic when Doctor, who was in the same boat I was, kept saying, "Isn't it beautiful?" However, as we progressed, I could, for Estero River is the most scenic stream I have ever known. When we finally climbed out of the "Bamboo Landing" at Estero and looked around, it seemed that we really entered a new world. The grounds were attractive with their, to us, unusual trees, shrubs and flowers but, with the exception of the picturesque log one, the houses were ugly, black, unfinished shells.

Our Housing

Dominating the others was the big three-story building which was the center of the colony's life. The ground floor of the main part was the dining and general assembly room, with the women's dormitory on the second and the girl's on the third floors. The wing on the back contained a combination hallway and butler's pantry and the kitchen with its two big wood-burning ranges. From the hallway part there was a door to a porch outside and a stairway leading to the second floor. The rest, or butler's pantry part, had a long table in the center where food was deposited by the cooks, dished up by others assigned to that duty, and passed through windows to the shelves inside the dining room where, in turn, the dishes were picked up by boy waiters and carried to the proper tables, known as the First, Second, Third, etc.

Sisters' and First, Second and Third, etc. Brothers. There were two tables for the children, one for the girls and the other for the boys, each headed by one of the women. Just above the center table in the Butler's pantry was a two-tier storage shelf hung from the ceiling. In one corner was a cabinet covered with fine-mesh wire netting and, under the stairway, the bread slicer.

Catharine and I both sat at the Third Sisters' table, which seated twelve of the older girls, and had a room together on the third floor in front. Lovelle was with the children.

Each of the two floors above the kitchen had one bed room, the one on the second being Mamma's for most of her life there, though she had first had a place in the women's dormitory.

There was also a one-story attachment beyond the kitchen where the baking was done and a long storage pantry to one side, both opening into the kitchen. The little bakery room was rather isolated from the rest of the house and had a separate small stove so the young people sometimes used it for clandestine [secret] get-togethers to cook wieners and make coffee, or fix up other little snacks. Later a two-story building was constructed not far from the kitchen with living quarters on the second floor and the first used exclusively as a bakery, the big oven being built into the back.

Here were no partitions in the dormitories except the framework supporting the sheets which enclosed each person's little "room." Each had a long shelf with a row of pegs underneath covered by a curtain and a homemade washstand, also curtained. Equipment consisted of a pitcher and bowl or basin and two pails, one to carry water up and the other to carry it down again after use. Later, when the flowing wells were brought in, a community washroom was built in each dormitory and the water piped up, which did away with at least the first of the shores.

There were no window screens, but each bed had a "mosquito bar" suspended over it – a frame covered with cheesecloth long enough to tuck under the mattress which, at first, was a tick filled with pine needles, so the insides of our wrists were always speckled from reaching through the slit, left for that purpose, to stir the needles around. Sometimes in the mornings we would find the cheesecloth practically covered with mosquitoes and more than once I awoke to see bat claws and, more distinctly, the bat itself hanging to the screen. Usually a barrel rocker completed the furnishings of each room, and these were surprisingly comfortable unless one rocked too hard; then they always toppled over.

When the last of the Chicago [group] moved down, bringing several carloads of furniture, including beautiful antiques, the rooms began to lose some of their pioneer appearance.

The children's cottage, a two-story building, was some little distance to the west of the main house, the first floor occupied by the girls and the second by the boys, with a caretaker or matron who lived with the girls but looked after all.

Between the big house and the children's were two cottages, though believed the one directly between was built a little later, and in line with the children's but to the south was a one-story place in which three or four of the women had rooms. Still in line and further to the south was the laundry, which connected to the machine shop. Mamma and I were the first of the little cottages during my convalescence from typhoid and later our blind member, Emmit McPhetter, lived in it. The other was our school for a time and then was used by Marie Fischer and by Vesta Newcomb.

School Days

To the east of the main house and near the road was another two-story house where we went to school when we first came to Estero, Samuel Armour being the teacher. Later it was renovated and used entirely for [housing].... At that time the school was being held in a little building some distance up the country road and I remember Rosalea and I had a frightening experience one day. I don't know how we happened to be there after all the rest had gone but, as we left and started down the short path to the road, a big razor-back hog, which had been rooting around nearby but we had not seen before, charged us. We ran back around the building, hand-in-hand until we could manage to scramble up on the porch from the side just as he reached us, and there we stayed, [trapped]. After some time, when he seemed to have lost interest and wandered off behind the building, we decided to make a break for it. With the school between him and us, we slipped off the porch and began to run, still hand-in-hand, only to learn that his interest had not waned after all. When his view was no longer blocked and he saw us running, he started after us again and did not give up the chase until we were about ready to turn into the grounds, out of breath and our hearts pounding.

It was while school was held in the little cottage nearest the children's house that I was appointed teacher to fill out the term when, for some reason I do not remember, the teacher did not complete it. Until then I had always thought I would like to be a teacher, but that experience ended any such notion. Several in the school were just my age [11] or a little older so of course had to assert their independence to show that they were not subordinate under my rule that they had otherwise observed as a matter of course, and of the children, Mildred Teed was especially obstreperous, so none of the pupils was more glad that I when the end of the term arrived.

The Growing Commune[ity]

Others from the north, or new members, kept coming occasionally, but it was not until the fall of 1903 that the remainder of the Chicago colony came to Florida...With their arrival, our population soared up toward 200 and things really began to hum.

The first need was a new building to house the printing and publishing department, so work was begun immediately on a two-story building near the river and on the other side of the county road. This offered an excuse for little groups of the young people to have get-togethers. We would go over in the early evenings to see what progress had been made during the day and usually a group of six or eight would meet, make see-saws by putting planks across sawhorses, and some of the more adventurous of us would climb ground on the floor beams; then all would take a walk up the road. Sometimes, but not always, we would take something to eat.

After completion of the printing office, the sawmill was moved to the river bank beyond it, and boatbuilding docks and other facilities built close by.

I am not sure whether it was before the visit of Arthur Teed [Doctor's son] or just after that the Art Hall was built, but certainly the name was given to it because of the large collection of his paintings which adorned its walls after the Unity purchased them at the end of his stay. He had received his training in various art centers in Europe and was considered an artist of note. For some time, anyway, it had been felt that a separate place should be provided for church meetings, entertainments, and concerts. Situated right off the road...it was easily accessible to the general public and more suitable for such purposes. It still houses much of the history of the community in the various objects kept there, even the old orchestra and band instruments.

I believe the "Planetary House" was the last to be added, and that this time was after I left, though of course I am familiar with it from my many trips back while Mamma and Pappa were still living.

Environs

Although there were already many plantings of tropical trees, shrubs and flowering plants on the grounds before the arrival of the last [group] from Chicago, a crash program was soon under way to make the place outstandingly beautiful. A large crew of Negro workers were employed to complete the work as soon as possible. Walks and driveways were widened and new ones made and covered with shell brought up from the bay. Mounds were constructed

and sunken gardens dug. Many more pams of various kinds, and other trees, shrubs and flowers set out. Soon a plant nursery was built up which for many years to come helped add to the community's income.

Pastimes

My first companion was Bertha Graham, whom I had not known in the north...and was some four years older than I, though never seemed so to me, and we spent practically all of our free time together, and if it had not been for Bertha I would not be here now.

She had lived at Estero before for a time and was the only one of the girls who could swim, but all wanted to learn. The river was the only place available and it was shallow only along the shore, the bottom suddenly dropping to a depth of eighteen feet in the middle at the Royal Landing where we were practicing – so named because of a royal Poinciana tree nearby.

After playing around in the water for some time, the others had one by one climbed out and were on the landing, but I was still practicing my strokes and kicks, not noticing that I was alone until I suddenly realized I had slipped into very deep water. Looking up, I could see the sun's rays in what looked like along diagonal stripes, and I seemed unable to rise. My only thought was the hope that Bertha would miss me and come in, which she did. The next thing I remember is being on the landing and the others rolling me around. Later, Bertha told that when she reached me, I immediately climbed on her back in such a way that swimming was impossible, so all that could do was walk and hope it was in the right direction. Some of the girls said I had come up and gone down three times, but I was not conscious of it.

After Berta, I went around some with Marguerite Borden, but that companionship was not always harmonious. She had a mania for collecting all sorts of insects, butterflies, spiders and anything else that she could catch and impale on boards with pins to die, which to me, always tenderhearted to the point of fanaticism, seemed horrible, so I always fought to save them from her when I was around. I remember once even dropping to the ground and spreading my skirt over a big spider she was attempting to add to her collection.

Meanwhile, Catherine was frequently calling on me to act as her foil when she and James Newcomb, who were then interested in each other, wanted to meet somewhere. These sessions were more than boring to me. I was entirely out of the conversation, but just had to be there.

On the whole, however, those early days were happy ones as everything was so new and different and there was always so much going on. Even the freeze which occurred the first winter had its thrills. The men stayed up all night during it to fire the citrus groves and several of the women stayed in the kitchen to have hot coffee and snacks ready when they could come in off and on. The first night I hardly slept for, sitting at my third-floor window, I could see the many fires with the men moving around among them under the pink-tinted smoke clouds, and it all seemed too beautiful to leave for sleep.

Although the young people were not supposed to date alone, we were always together in groups and I believe really had much more fun than most of the young folks outside who were supposed to be more privileged.

One of the favorite spots for little get-togethers was Victoria Island, a small plot of ground in the river some distance further up towards its source. In addition to its own growth, the trees from both banks of the mainland leaning over made it a regular little bower. Groups of about six, usually, and a chaperone would build a fire at one end, eat their little picnic supper and then lounge around, talking or singing.

Lovelle tells of a time when the group consisted of Ada and Carlton, Eva and Robbie, Harry and herself, with Catharine as chaperone. Redbugs were always something to be reckoned with, but must have been especially had this time as Catharine memorialized the occasion with the following poem:

“The Redbug

A Picnic Tragedy”

By Catharine McCready

“What’s this romantic sight?
An island where moonlight
And dusky shades of night
War for supremacy.
Above, the tree-moss grows;
Below, the river flows;
O’er all a south wind blows
With luxuriancy.

“Upon the rugged ground,
In restful postures round,
On picnic pleasures bound,
Three men, three maidens lay.

MARIE'S JOURNEY

In dreamy thought they smiled
Or murmured low the while
In indolence they wiled
The summer hours away.

“But ah! The treach’rous earth
Ere this has given birth
To things of spurious worth
And man’s discomforture.
Within this snowy sand
A red fiend has his stand
Nor thought, not act, not hand
Can stay his silent tour.

“He bores into the flesh
And leaves behind a mesh
Of crimson sores that rush
With stinging biting fire.
The victims tear and scratch
But this they find no match
For these small mounds that hatch
To raise and test their ire.

“Salt baths, indeed, or Oh!
Coal oil! Sapolio!!
In quantities that grow
Can bring them no relief.
Tired out, their efforts cease;
Sleep brings them a release;
Into unconscious peace
They sink at last from grief.”

I can remember similar times, though I believe our chaperone would be Rose Gilbert, who always entered quietly into the spirit of things, and was an especial favorite of mine.

The river was the scene of many of our good times. Although occasionally a boat belonging to someone further up the river passed our place, coming or going, it was not very often so the river seemed almost to belong to us. Quite clear most of the time, we could sit on the Bamboo Landing with our feet hanging over and watch the fish swimming around, especially the long sharp-nosed gar, which were so numerous there and came in close. On dark nights the water was sometimes so phosphorescent it was like looking down into the milky way and, from a distance, it actually had a milky appearance, but when a school of fish was disturbed by something and swam off in all directions, it was as if rockets were being shot off.

Often we would go out in the rowboats for little singing parties, with Harry playing his coronet – its notes always honey sweet – or Jay would accompany us on the guitar.

Sometimes on dark nights there were fire-fishing excursions. Allen, in his book, tells that the first group had them to provide food, but ours were more for fun, though the same methods were used – a pitch-pine fire on the stern deck of the launch Victoria and the string of skiffs tied behind (a larger one was called a “shark boat”). When enough fish had jumped in for our purposes, we would land somewhere, the boys would dig shallow pits and build fires in them; then the cleaned fish were baked in the coals and we had a fish supper by the light of the fire. There was one supper that Bessie Grier did not enjoy so much as the rest of us for a big fish had struck her in the stomach and more her quite sick for awhile.

Marguerite and I, both early birds, often slipped out at the first sign of light to an unreal, fog enclosed river. Going upstream where it was more narrow, sometimes an alligator, aroused by the sound of the oars, would slide into the water just ahead of us or almost alongside, or a nightbird fishing from a low branch suddenly fly off with great flapping of wings, while the continual drip, drip from overhanging branches soon had us about as wet as if we had been in, not on, the river.

During the early part of our life in Estero several of the girls were given alligator eggs by one of the boys who had found them somewhere along the river. Most were already cracked so it was thought they would soon hatch but it turned out that none did, the reason given by one of the older men being that the little alligators had probably drowned during a period of high water. We were told to keep them in damp sawdust and I, at least, did though do not know about the others. Ruth became impatient and decided to help her little one out, she said later, but found it was not ready so threw it into the river. This left only mine and it was at least a couple of weeks later before the shell began to crack and move. As it was during a squally weather period when we were housebound, several of us spent a good bit of time sitting around Catharine's bed where I had it so we could be more comfortable while we watched and it would be safe from falling or getting under foot if it hatched while I was not there, for I always tucked in the mosquito bar. However, he obligingly popped out of the shell while most of us who were interested were watching. Catharine happened to be at the island at this time, but when she arrived home and found I had used her bed as an alligator hatchery, she called me sown as only Catharine could. I named him Imp and, as it turned out, a fall from the bed to the floor would have meant nothing to him for he managed to get away from me one day and headed straight for the stairway. Before I could get to him he had fallen through the stair well to the second floor and through that to the first. A colored woman who was helping out in the kitchen announced his arrival there by a loud shriek and continued with one after another until I could get down and corner him, none the worse for his experience. He died during the following winter and one of the men told me it was because I kept disturbing him for feeding when he was supposed to be hibernating.

The water supply had always been supplied by the big cisterns, one at the corner of the dining room with the butler's pantry, I believe, and the other at the southwest corner of the kitchen porch. A big toad lived for a long time under the latter and was considered more or less as a pet, so one day while several of us were working in the kitchen and heard a muffled but still

loud croaking and ran out, we found an unusually big blacksnake swallowing out toad. John Watson grabbed a broom and beat the snake until he disgorged the toad, which was then washed off under the cistern faucet and allowed to go back into his retreat, the snake meanwhile oozing off to a less hostile environment minus his dinner.

Health and Safety

After the arrival of our crowd, the increased use of water, along with an unusually long spell of dry weather, soon exhausted the cisterns so a well was dug not far from the kitchen to take care of the needs. However, as it turned out, the well was not deep enough and the water evidently contaminated so several contracted typhoid fever, I among them though Catharine and Lovelle escaped.

The first effect was a weakness which grew until I could hardly perform my duties. Several of us were assigned alternatively to dining room and dishwashing chores. In the dining room each was responsible for five tables. We not only cleared and reset them each meal and swept under and round them each day, but also ironed their tablecloths and polished their silverware. Then three of us at a time would take over the dishes in the kitchen; one would wash, one wipe, and the third roustabout, which meant scraping, stacking and bringing the dishes to the dishwasher, and putting them away after they were dried.

While still on the dining room shift, I reached the point where I could hardly drag the broom around, and several of the sisters noted with disapproval that I was doing just that, dragging and not sweeping. Then I had to rest twice on each of the two long flights of steps to get to my room, but nobody paid much attention. One of the sisters remarked that there could not be much the matter with anybody who had such red cheeks; that I was the picture of health. Mamma would have noticed at once that all was not well.

Finally I finished my dining room shift and progressed into the kitchen as a roustabout but, by then had reached the last of my endurance and, as I started to take some dishes from the shelf, fell headlong into a faint. Sister Emma was sent for as Doctor Ruth was on a trip to Marco Island at the time and I woke up in bed. Sister Emma was not only the matron but also a sort of homeopathic doctor whose main prescription was a series of emetics. Already so weak, these left me unable to stand.

Catharine and I shared our little enclosure but she was at the island then so Lovelle came up to bring my dinner – I believe the second day of my illness. There was a severe thunder storm in progress at the time, and just as she was preparing to give me a spoonful of something, there was a deafening crash and crackling sound. Lovelle dropped the spoon and was off like a deer.

I listened to her running down the stairs and, realizing that I was alone in that big room, looked up to see the entire unfinished inside area of the roof filled with an opaque violet light which soon gave way to flames at the far end of the room from me. Within minutes it seemed that the entire dining room erupted into the third floor dormitory, the men carrying pails of water, though as it turned out they were not necessary in the rain, coming down in such torrents, soon extinguished the fire without aid. The bolt had come in through the window of Marguerite's room, cutting the wire holding up her mirror as it passed and dropping it unhurt to the floor. A sister who was standing near the dining room window just below at the time said it looked like a ball of fire as it came past the window and struck the ground. Sometime later Lovelle graduated from the children's cottage and moved into the dormitory with us. Catharine's bed was at the east side of the room, Lovell's at the west, and mine across the south side. I suppose there was some excuse for the accusation that we had too much "family tie," for we did manage to keep together to a greater degree than most of the others there who were relatives.

Annie Armour, who had the corner room was cared for by her sister Bella. Maude Acuff was very sick in the room at the head of the stairs. Doctor Ruth, who had come home meantime, said Maude's symptoms were more those of yellow fever than typhoid. Both Annie and Maude became delirious. I was determined not to become delirious so, when I closed my eyes and my mind to drift, I immediately opened them again and concentrated on something definite. Doctor Ruth told Mamma later that he had never understood how, with the long, high fever I had, I never became delirious unless it was just will power.

Then Annie died and it was decided to wire Mamma that I was very sick and might not live, so she, with Rosalea and Will, left immediately for Florida. Later she told that, while waiting in Fort Myers for Brother George to arrive with the Victoria, two men standing near her were talking about the Unity illnesses and one mentioned that another girl had died. Mamma said she involuntarily cried out, "Marie! Marie is dead!" and the man assured her that the one who gave him the information also said that the girl whose mother was coming from Chicago was still alive.

I will never forget my joy at being locked in her arms and knowing she would be with me from then on. I had her put her bed right against mine so I could reach over in the night to touch her and be sure she was still there; after all those months, it seemed too good to be true. There was always something so comforting and reassuring about Mamma's presence. Even years afterward during my visits to Estero, again quartered in the third floor dormitory, when there would be an especially bad lightning storm during the night, I would run downstairs and slip into bed with Mamma. Nothing would be said by either of us, but, with her arms across my chest, I was soon sound asleep, utterly oblivious to the thunder and lightning.

Rosalea, being a little older, seemed to adjust to being away from Mamma better than Will. He would come over from the children's cottage and sit on the steps, the nearest he was allowed to come. It must have been heartbreaking to Mamma to know he was there but, for the time being, she felt that my need of her was greater.

Play and Recreation

While the first rainy season we experienced in Florida left memories of vicious lightning storms, the second one tried to compensate with its rainbows. Each rain seemed to terminate with at least one big perfect rainbow arching across the key in the distance, and sometimes two at the same time. Watching them, I often thought of the one in Freedom [PA]. I had gone to the kitchen window to see if the rain was over and there, to my astonishment, was a rainbow, clear to the ground in our back yard. Everybody had always said it was impossible to get to a rainbow even when it seemed near, for it would recede as one approached, so I raced out of the house and up the steps into the back yard, expecting to see that it was already at least to the wall, but it was just where it had been and I ran into its misty veil of iridescence. Holding out my arms, I saw them through the soft multi-colored hues, which gradually became lighter and then were gone. There was no pot of gold, but O did reach the end of the rainbow and stand briefly with it all around me.

Estero Island was where we all went for vacations of anywhere from a few days to a week or two weeks at a time, and there never seemed to be any trouble about "getting off" to go.

Lovelle and I and another girl, I believe Ada though am not sure, had waded during an unusually low tide to an exposed sandbar much further out than we had ever been before to look for shells. We found so many nice ones and became so engrossed in our pursuit that we did not at first notice that the area of search was becoming smaller with each wave - the tide was coming in fast. Immediately we started toward shore but found there was almost no place where we could wade, which meant swimming back to the whole long distance to our beach. At first it was funny and we giggled, but learned pretty soon that we had better save our breath for swimming, and it was with great relief that we finally came near enough to the beach to touch ground and wade out, for we were all exhausted.

The other time was just after my recovery from the fever, when Catharine and I were spending awhile at the island for any possible benefit that might accrue from the change and the salt air. As it happened, there were several others there at the same time - Doctor, Victoria and Carlton Case, among others. To many of the Unity boys sailing was almost second nature, but, though this did not happen to be so with Carlton, he invited Catharine and me for a sail and we accepted. Everything was fine at first for he could manage as long as the weather cooperated

but, while we were still quite some distance from port, a storm began to roll in, preceded by strong winds. Carlton, inexperienced in such a situation, was already becoming rattled by the time we reached the pass at the end of the island and then everybody being out gesticulating and yelling instructions did the opposite from helping and he lost his head entirely. Baited lines were often kept in it and then the sharks brought up and buried in the farming areas as fertilizer. Now the waves were high and we jumped from one side to the other as the boat dipped and water poured over the sides. Catharine and I both bailed when we could but had to watch for the boom, which swung back and forth. Almost miraculously, it seemed, he finally did bring the boat close enough to shore so that John Watson and Thomas Gay waded out and pulled it in. They then made a seat of their hands and carried me to the house as, still so weak and burdened with my soaking clothing - then long skirts and petticoats - I could not walk. Poor Carlton, though his intentions had been the best in the world, was in deep disgrace for taking us out when he did not know how to sail.

The two big events each year were Doctor's birthday, October 18, and Victoria's, April 10. On these days the dining room was always profusely decorated with pine boughs, palm leaves, etc., potted plants were brought in from the nursery and flowers put on the tables. There was always an unusually good dinner and some sort of entertainment afterward. Also, we girls usually had new dresses for the occasions.

Over a long period a monthly birthday party was given for all who had birthdays that month. Each of the men and boys was presented with a big gingercake woman and each woman or girl a gingercake man. Then, following an old Spanish custom, everybody in turn, beginning with the guests of honor - those whose birthdays were being celebrated - was blindfolded, given a heavy stick and turned around a couple of times before he or she tried to break a heavy paper bag suspended from a supporting beam in the ceiling. When the blow was successful, everybody undignified enough scrambled for the various trinkets, candy, etc. with which the bag had been stuffed. The Spanish and Mexicans call this bag, "la pinata," and Lovelle and I have wondered if Rollin Gray, who we suspect may have been part Mexican, was the one who introduced the idea. He looked Spanish and gave Spanish lessons for awhile.

Ester Stotler, A Pittsburgher and first cousin of Andrew Mellon, gave the girls dancing lessons; not only the waltz and two-step, but the Virginia reel and such specialties as the "Portland Fancy," so there were often dances in the evenings. When it was just waltzing and two-stepping only the girls took part as the men did not like to dance with other men, but all joined in the Virginia reels and square dances. Ross Wallace, with his strong voice, was generally the caller.

When Johnny Horne, a Scotch boy, came and danced the Highland fling, some of the younger girls immediately wanted to learn it so he trained a foursome of Julia Wright, Rosalea, Ruth Wallace and Eunice Hussey. Julia and he later married and brought up a family near the Unity.

Among children's entertainment given at Estero, there was one I remember especially, perhaps because Will, then little, was the hit of the show. It was called "The Toys' Rebellion," and the children, made up to represent different kinds of toys, marched around the stage singing and voicing their protests. Will, a toy soldier, walking stiff-leggedly, brought up the rear. Just as he reached the middle of the stage on the last round, he came to a dead stop as the rest marched into the wings. He stood there a few seconds all alone and then called out: "Wind me up: I'm all run down," and brought most of the evening's applause.

Many of the young people liked to play cards and sometimes there were several tables going at the same time, often playing different games. I believe cribbage was the more general favorite, though we also liked whist and euchre, and even poker, but think that was more the boys than the girls.

Sometime after construction on the printing office was finished, an unusual swing was put up near the short-cut path leading from the dining room to the store and post office. Long, slender cypress poles were used instead of ropes, and two people standing face to face could "work up" shed to where it would swing almost straight out. Bertie Boomer and I never chummed, but I do not remember working up with any of the other girls. We would go down and stand by the swing until one of the men came by to give us a start, and then would swing until tired. We never did go as far up as was possible but sometimes the boys did. We had been doing this for quite awhile before somebody told Doctor and he sent word that it was dangerous so not to do it any more, and we didn't.

In line with Doctor's often repeated desire that his people "be informed," one member always sat at one of the reading tables during meals and read the papers out loud, most often while I was there this was Henry Silverfriend. Impromptu meetings were called sometimes at which incorrectly worded sentences were read from the stage and then it was asked that someone in the audience rise and give the correction. However, I think the spelling bees were more generally enjoyed for there was always a big, eager semi-circle on such occasions. This all had the desired results for everybody naturally made an effort to speak as correctly as possible, and even those who did not have the advantage of much schooling before coming in soon have the impression of having an education.

Music and Concerts

Music was always a vital part of Unity life. As soon as we arrived Jay [Morgan] began giving music lessons to those of us who could not already play an orchestra instrument, preparatory to building up an orchestra, and soon a fifteen-piece one was organized.

The little "music house" to the west of the other buildings, was much in demand for practicing by those of us who were taking lessons. In fact there were just not enough hours in the day to get in all we wanted to so, in hunting around for a place where I could put in some extra time, I came upon a little hut across the river and not far from the county road where I decided I could set up my music rack and practice to me heart's content without bothering anybody or being bothered by someone else coming in with his or her instrument before I was ready to leave. This little hut was just a frame with both roof and sides thatched with palmetto leaves and had originally been used as a bee house, where honey was extracted, but now abandoned, was almost hidden behind weeds and bushes. For a few days I was perfectly happy in my little hideaway and then one day while I was concentrating on my notes a sudden shower of bird shot came through the window and side of the shack. Terrified, I put my viola in its case, grabbed the music and rack and ran for the road. I never did learn who fired the shot but it certainly aimed right at me, so the little building was again abandoned. On certain evenings those of the young people who were interested, mostly the orchestra crowd, would meet at the music house, where someone would read articles from our two musical magazines, *The Etude* and *The Metronome*, and there would be general discussions.

We all enjoyed the orchestra practice sessions. Selections were classical and semi-classical and, after we played the last notes of some piece on which we felt we had done especially well, we would turn to each other to smile or laugh, the pianist swinging around on her stool to join in.

One of our lighter numbers which we all liked was called "Aleida," so when the orchestra group, in some way I do not now remember, acquired their own little sailboat, we named it for this piece, and we often had little excursions to the island, where it was usually kept, for sailing parties.

The most thrilling trip the orchestra made as a group, however, was to take part in the first Fair which was held in Tampa. The Unity had taken a booth (those first ones being temporary, rustic, thatched affairs) where the Koreshan doctrines could be brought to the attention of those who would attend, and the orchestra entertained and helped bring people to look at our exhibits and listen to the little lectures which were given frequently. Eleanor Castle, a brilliant ex-teacher from Chicago, did most of the talking; her quick Irish wit not only enabled her to hold her own in any argument, but always put a note of humor into it.

The orchestra members wore white uniforms with decorations of red and gold braid across the fronts of the coats and down the legs of the men's trousers and the side seams of the girls'

skirts. As we were mostly young (Lovelie and I barely past our fourteenth and sixteenth birthdays – mine may have come during the Fair if it was held at the same time then as it is now), everybody connected with it made a great deal over us, which, of course, we enjoyed. At the time the Tampa Bay Hotel, now the University of Tampa, was still being operated as a hotel, and the orchestra gave at least two concerts in it, which were exciting as of course we were the center of attraction and were taken around to see the many historic and beautiful art objects which had been brought from all over the world by Mrs. H.B. Plant as furnishings for the hotel when it was opened by her husband the millionaire railroad magnate, about 1890.

In the earlier days concerts were under the direction of Harry Boomer and were usually held on Saturday evenings. One of these included an instrumental duet by Lovelle and him, she playing the violin and he the trumpet, with piano accompaniment, of the old song :Love me and the World is Mine.” The audience was somewhat amused at this for, though Lovelle was never very responsive, Harry made no secret of his interest in her, which began, I believe, when we first went to Estero and she and Mamie Weimar, then eleven or twelve, would sit on this woodpile while he chopped wood for the kitchen ranges, and lasted until his death in an army hospital in Texas after she had left Estero. Lovelle and Will were the musical members of our family, while Rosalea’s talent was for writing. Rhymes and verse came naturally to her from the time, when not much more than a baby, she announced her disapproval of the doctor who had just left with: “Bad Doc Nye, he made me cry.” As a child her little verses were published in a national young folks’ magazine where one of them attracted the attention of a Harry McCready in California. He wrote her and the ensuing correspondence continued for many years. Her stories have been published in various magazines.

One of the most ambitious and spectacular of the dramatic productions while I was there was the life of Joseph at Pharaoh’s court. For weeks beforehand, Moses Weaver, our chief artist, and his helpers worked on the scenery, which they sometimes put up in the dining and then general assembly room. Finally came the rehearsals. Catharine and I had been cast as Pharaohs daughter and her friend. One scene was supposed to open with us sitting in a room talking and then she was to sing while I accompanied her on my autoharp. However, we were equally opposed to taking part in a dialogue so, much to the disapproval of the writers, that part was changed. As the curtains were opened, Pharaoh came into the room where we were sitting and said, “Daughter, sing to me, “ or something to that effect, and I think she did say (whatever my name was), will you play?” I inclined my head and we began. Catharine often sang at entertainments, but she never enjoyed it, despite the fact that she always received a great deal of praise, and even sometimes presents from “outside” young men who attended and admired her.

The general public were always invited to our concerts and other entertainments and many came from Fort Myers as well as the near neighbors, for we furnished entertainment not available elsewhere in the area.

The Wildlife

Lovell's [other] favorite man was John Sargent, who was in charge of the stock in our early days, and she says she would sit for hours on the high fence watching the young pigs, the first she had ever seen. After awhile he gave Julia Wright and her each one for their own. Julia's was black and she called it "Love," but soon tired of and abandoned it. Lovelle's was black and white spotted and she named it "Beauty" (hardly suitable, perhaps as pig names, but they seemed so to twelve and thirteen year olds). Beauty followed her around like a dog and was the only pig that could climb over the stile. She bathed and perfumed it, tied ribbons around its neck and loved it, so was broken hearted when the man who was doing the butchering one time included Beauty. I don't think Mamma ever did quite forgive him, for everyone knew about Lovelle and Beauty and she felt that he had done it deliberately and not by mistake.

In addition to Pappa's duties at the printing office, where he read proof as long as he could be up and around, he took on the bees. Bees had always been kept, but it was rather a hit or miss operation until Pappa began to put his "as near perfection as possible: methods to work. Once when a cold winter and spring had made honey producing flowers scarce, I remember he took his own portions of honey, sugar, syrup, etc. to supplement what he was able to obtain from the kitchen to keep them going until the blooms were more plentiful again. He built new and improved hives of his own design, and the colonies multiplied rapidly. When just about ready to take off a tremendous amount of honey as measured by previous output, the worst flood in the history of the area occurred, resulting from unusually heavy hurricane rains in that watershed. The Estero River overflowed its banks, as did others, and so much flooding resulted that the launches could be taken from Estero to Fort Myers right over the countryside. When Pappa could get back to his bees, there were few left. Many of the hives had been barged further down the river to where the mangroves were blossoming and these had generally been washed out into the bay and lost. He retrieved what he could find and brought them back but, though bees still clung to some of the them, the honey was mostly ruined.

Getting Restless

For a good while I was dissatisfied and wanting to leave to stay with our grandparents McCready in Homewood, PA. Never strong after my long spell of typhoid, I became less and

less able to enter into activities with my old zest, and finally went into a spell of anemia which kept me in bed for eight weeks, just too weak to even sit up for any length of time. When I was finally able to be around again, Mamma arranged for me to go to Grandma's, with Pappa's consent, but not his approval.

Doctor died December 22, 1908, while I was still in Homewood for I remember Grandpa broke the news to me when I came in from some outing, though I do not know how he learned of it so soon. Shortly thereafter I joined Lovelle in Washington, D.C. where I, also took a course in stenography.

After Doctor's death, a general exodus of the younger people began, many of them to marry each other, and others to go to their relatives outside and then to take positions in work for which they had been trained in the Unity. Many were ready to go into printing and publishing concerns as printers, intertype operators, etc., or into machine shops, and others to find positions as stenographers and bookkeepers.

Without Doctor's lecture tours to bring in new converts and his magnetic personality to hold those already there, along with the gradual dying off of the older ones, the membership dwindled until there were not many left when Hedwig Michel, a young German woman who had become interested through a group of Koreshan scientific followers in Munich and Bavaria, came from Germany to join the Unity. Being of an energetic and naturally administrative nature, she eventually took over the actual management of the community, though Laurie was its president until his death.

She was undoubtedly the moving spirit in the decision of the Board of Directors, most of them living outside, to turn over to the State of Florida the properties then left. These properties, though in three different places, are now known as "The Koreshan State Park," and this was undoubtedly the best possible use to which it could be put.

Now its beauty and history will be preserved by the State of Florida for generations yet to come.