

Ranch Schoolteacher

Eulilia Bourne

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I was glad to be invited to take *Little Cowpuncher* to Sópori, a neighboring school over the divide on the Santa Cruz Valley side, on the Sásabe Star Route, only forty-five miles from Tucson.

Sópori

Maurice Chevalier said it right: *Thank heaven for little girls!* In my teaching years many lovely little girls have brought joy to daily school routines and liveliness to extra-curricular activities. Some times I wonder why pregnant women seem to hope always for boy babies. I asked Lavita about this when she was sad at the birth of her fifth child, a little daughter. "Oh," she sighed, "She will have to suffer what I have had to."

Happily at school I have had my precious little girls before they arrived at the state of suffering. In primary grades I have been blessed with little ones with the childish charm of playful kittens. Their responsive enthusiasm, their determination to have everything go right, their doll-like beauty, their flower-like appeal, have made school days wonderful to remember.

But old-style rural education being a three-to-eight-ring circus of activity — so much to do in so little time — my honest preference in girls has opted for those in the upper grades. They want to help carry the load. They like plays and parties and masquerades and public acclaim; under teacher's direction, they are willing to put out efforts to accomplish these aims.

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At Sópori I found five such cheerful laudable helpers, all good students, all willing to pitch in and work with the younger kids. Three of them, early teenagers, made up the eighth grade — a lovely graduating class. They were interested in civics and social matters (studying state and federal constitutions) and English literature and composition. Naturally we got along just fine, working closely together, and I'll never forget their cooperation and warm interest and helpfulness.

They were these: Alice Hackett whose grandmother had been my friend in Oracle, the post office and village near my homestead; Barbara Black, daughter of a top cowhand working for wealthy Easterners who had bought a big ranch not many miles from our school; and Dolores Badilla, who six years previously had been my second-grader at Baboquivari. At that time she was called Loli by every body, but I called her "my angel."

Two other girls helped make our school a valuable experience: Yolanda Amado in the seventh grade, and her sister Natalia in the fifth grade.

These five girls lightened the teacher load and gave the school a chance to be "little cowpunchers" and more than just a study routine. For their sakes, I tried beyond my strength (Sópori was a difficult school) to give them a year to remember with pride.

Alice, perhaps because of overweight, was self-conscious and shy, in spite of her blonde good looks and special talents. She played the piano (and we had one) and was good at singing, drawing, and writing. Often she did the lead stories for *Little Cowpuncher*.

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Sópори, like Redington, was a happily integrated school. Most of our pupils were of Latin-American descent, but all had a good working knowledge of English. Barbara Black was the only one of the older pupils who knew no Spanish. She was a late-comer to the community. She was not a blonde like Alice, nor a brunette like Dolores, but in between. She had light brown hair, a suntanned complexion, and a gentle disposition which made her our most popular pupil. School was her pleasure.

Loli (I couldn't always remember to call her Dolores) had the grace and beauty of an aristocrat from Old Spain. She enjoyed all our activities and was a big help taking over the little kids on *Little Cowpuncher* print days. With affectionate satisfaction I saw her take pride in her person, her family, and her ancestral ranch home. My own folks had always been on the move, seeking new frontiers: from Mississippi to Texas; from Texas to New Mexico; from New Mexico to Arizona; from Arizona to California-- as far west as they could go. Even in youth I always envied girls living in homes built by their ancestors. Such a one was Loli, and it gave her dignity and a deep pride.

December 7, 1941, fell on Sunday. I was in my cabin at the little ranch on Pepper Sauce Canyon putting a fried chicken dinner on the table for the three *viejitos* (dear old men) who held down my homestead week days that I might be away earning the cash salary (\$135 per month) that kept us afloat. I had a good radio that stood — with its A battery and B battery — two feet high on a big antique chest of drawers.

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Plates in hand, I hesitated, for the music suddenly stopped. A long pause. And a dramatic voice spoke of a bulletin that had just come in. Pearl Harbor. None of us or our plans and hopes would ever be the same.

It was pre-TV tune, but almost every home had a radio. Monday morning the kids crowded around me, tense, questioning. Why? What does war mean? What will happen now? What about war?

What could I tell them? That General Sherman did not exaggerate? That wars are caused by ignorance and greed? That homo sapiens has come up with no better way to settle disputes and end injustices than to kill off the world's young men? That, nevertheless, attack must be met with fight?

The best I could do was to wriggle out of my dilemma by turning the tables. I asked my children to write for *Little Cowpuncher* and me and our readers their true thoughts about war.

CHILDREN THINK ABOUT WAR

I don't know what to think since I have never been in War before. I heard so many people talking about it. It is terrible what I hear on the radio — all those poor people getting killed and wounded and all parts of their bodies thrown everywhere. I stop to realize how terrible it would be for us in America here in Arizona to have our fathers and relatives killed or crippled.

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All I hope is that we won't have to suffer death and woundings and that we beat all those who want to take the whole world for themselves and sink ships and kill innocent people.

I hear that pretty soon we won't be able to buy what we want or need. Anyway I am helping. I am going to buy defense stamps and I'm going to raise some baby chickens in June. My father said he was going to buy some and June is the best raising month for baby chickens.

— Yolanda Amado, 7th Grade

NOW WE ARE IN A WORLD WAR

We did not publish a paper for December. And in this issue we will print only four pages because we want to save half of the paper we are supposed to use. American Defense needs paper for war use.

We are lucky because next month the issue of February *Little Cowpuncher* will come out in the Rodeo Edition of the Arizona Daily Star and the *Tucson Daily Citizen*. We hope all our friends will buy those papers and read our stories there. War has changed everything.

Ever since I have been in school I have read in books of war in other countries but I didn't think that this country was ever going to be in war in my life. Since I was born this is the first time I have been in war and I can't understand it. I still eat the same and wear good clothes. I think the United States had the right to fight and I am doing all I can to help for defense. I am buying defense stamps, saving food and everything I can, and I am collecting tinfoil.

— Dolores Badilla, 8th Grade

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The Big Thing with every bunch of little cowpunchers was the participation in Tucson's annual Fiesta de los Vaqueros. The Sópori pupils had seen the kids from Baboquivari, Sasco, and San Fernando ride on floats in the greatest horse-drawn procession in the West. They had heard them broadcast their Western songs on a city radio station. Now it was their turn, and they brimmed over with excitement and anticipated pleasure.

They were not disappointed. Every one of them joined in the festivities. Our entry was a satisfactory success, and it was a good experience for the kids to sing on the radio and to give a short program at the county fair that evening. But they were the last little cowpunchers to ride in the rodeo parade.

It was the ninth time since the first rancheritos from Redington, all under nine years old, had marched three miles in the Big Parade. After that first time, we entered horse-drawn floats — wagons and teams furnished by the parade committee.

It was great fun. The kids received recognition from our friends on the Tucson newspapers and won three silver trophies and a big copper tray for best entry in the country school division.

The Sópori kids looked especially nice, almost rivaling the dudes in their new boots and hats and bright western shirts. They were not as hard up for money as most of my little cowpunchers had

been. They beamed and waved at the crowding onlookers who generously applauded and kept crying out:

“Oh, here are the Little Cowpunchers!”

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But our smallest girl, little Lee Bell, not yet six, was run over by a huge ore wagon and two monstrous draft horses!

Lee was only five when she entered school. She had to ride the school bus morning and night because her mother was the driver. She was anxious to come to school, so we enrolled her.

I was afraid she was too young to keep up with the six- and seven-year-olds, and of course she was. But she loved school and did surprisingly well. She learned to read and write, and happily sang and danced and took part in our entertainments and activities, drawing pictures and dictating stories for *Little Cowpuncher*.

She was so excited about riding in the parade that she got ready early and rode to town with me. Her mother and father drove the school bus, bringing all the children who hadn't got rides already. They had car trouble and barely made it in time for their riders to climb on our wagon as it moved forward already in the line of parade.

That morning when we arrived at the starting grounds to look for our wagon we watched the teamsters get their horses ready and hitch them to the vehicles. The biggest wagon of all was made of heavy lumber; it had been used in the early days for hauling ore. The giant half-broken team for this wagon gave lots of trouble. There was a sorrel Clydesdale with a white streak in his face, and a bigger dapple-gray Percheron who was so rambunctious several men were needed to get him harnessed and ready.

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Finally, when the team was hitched, the driver drove them rapidly around the big open space several times to calm them down. That was about eight o'clock.

Our wagon was soon ready. We got on it and rode to a narrow side street where we parked beside an empty lot near the end of West Congress Street where the parade was to begin. For more than an hour about a dozen kids and I waited there for the rest of our bunch and the starting time.

It was a cold morning, cloudy, now and then drizzling a little. A Mexican participant, barefooted, in a peon white cotton costume with a bundle of sticks ready to pack on his back during the parade, had made a little fire in the center of the empty block which was up on a little rise higher than the side walk. Some of the girls and I went up to share the warmth of the small fire. The other children stayed down on the sidewalk watching all the exciting entries go by to take their places in the line. Lee sat down on the edge of the sidewalk with her back to me.

By 9:45 all the wagons were being lined up ready for the go signal. We were shivering with cold and tired of waiting, but the children were thrilled at all the wonderful sights. I kept an eye on them while hugging the fire.

Suddenly there was a noise of rapid heavy wheels and I looked up to see the big ore wagon with the wild team turn into our narrow street apparently intent on going up to get in line several wagons behind ours. Just then out of an alley came a clown in a billowing red, white, and blue

costume pushing a baby carriage fluttering long red, white, and blue streamers. The gray horse bolted. His companion went with him. The driver couldn't hold them. The horses whirled to the left to jump the sidewalk and cross the empty lot, my children directly in their path. I ran screaming.

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Everybody got out of the way but Lee. She sat there, turning her head toward me, her big eyes full of wonder at my strange antics.

"Lee! Lee!" I screamed, leaping down to her in that half second.

At the sidewalk I met the horses head on, dived under and between the and grabbed for the child. I got her head in the crook of my right arm. Faster than the wind the horses and wagon rushed over us and were gone.

I felt Lee's arms and legs. Nothing was broken. I pulled her to a sitting position. She was whimpering in little choked sobs. We were both covered with fine gray dust from head to foot. There was a spot of blood on her hair from a shallow cut on her scalp about an inch long. Something seemed attached to my head behind my right ear. I felt up and found a big lump sticking out like an egg. The sorrel's enormous hoof had grazed both our heads as he leaped over us.

Two nicely-dressed women appeared and wanted to take Lee to the hospital.

"I'm waiting for her mother," I told them. "I don't think she's hurt."

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"But she must go to the hospital," they insisted.

"No!" cried Lee stoutly. "I'm going to ride in the parade."

I took her to where I had left my little car and brushed us off. With my pocketknife I cut away her matted hair and applied a Band-Aid. Then I tried to arrange our hair and clothes. Some sharp bolt hanging under the wagon had torn a hole in my new green cashmere shirt and scraped the skin from two ribs. I had a terrific headache, and probably Lee did, but she never complained.

Her mother and the others arrived. We climbed on our wagon and away we went in the parade.

Never again would I take little children into a parade of horse-drawn vehicles.

San Fernando Again

It had been a trying summer (the book moves on, away from the Sópори School.)

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