

## How We Played

Like the Irish who made many of their “fold” fiddles from orange crates, we too found uses for the partitioned containers. In our playhouses we painted them gray and trimmed them in green paint garnered from Pa’s paint dump. Then we used them for cupboards. These we filled with the most elegant pieces of broken China and clay pots which we fashioned and placed in the sun to dry. Sometimes into the clay pots or bowls we would imbed pretty shells or fossils. We were also the proud owners of a couple of pewter sugars and creamers rescued from Le Tourneau’s dump.

Orange crates were also placed on end and used as doll houses. That way we could have an upstairs and a downstairs. These houses we papered with paper dolls cut from the Sears or “Monkey Ward” catalogs. We’d sneak into the back house and tear out the pages. We liked the colored pages the best...they were too slippery to make good toilet paper anyhow.

Catalog paper dolls were not the only kind of dolls we had. We were especially fond of crooked neck summer squash dolls. These we wrapped in dish towels furnished by the Lighthouse. Therefore, these babies always had blankets embellished with U.S.L.H.S. for United States Lighthouse Service. They were faceless dolls similar to Amish dolls. These we would carry throughout the day until dinnertime when, much to our sorrow, they had to be eaten with the evening meal. It made one feel rather cannibalistic, eating one’s own children all cut into real little slices and sauteed to a golden brown.

There were also dolls made from twigs which we dressed in boughs or leaves – maple leaves for everyday dress and feathery cedar or hemlock for fancy dress.

Ma would sometimes make rag dolls for us with button eyes and bodies filled with sand. The sand would shift and the dolls felt as though they were alive.

Store bought dolls were mostly for “looking at” and not to be handled carelessly. There was a gray-haired, blue-eyed doll that lived in our clothes closet for years. She belonged to our oldest sister, Violet. Although she belonged to Violet, it seemed to me that she belonged to everyone and belonged to no one.

Sometimes when I was banished to the bedroom for rebelling against what I thought was some foolish rule laid down by an older sister, I would smuggle her out of her solitary confinement and talk to her. However, she never did complain about her predicament. She just flashed her white teeth and gazed fixedly at me with her large China-blue eyes. Her eyes didn’t open and close anymore because my brother Don had poked her eyes back into her head and Pa had to glue them into a stationary position.

I figured she must be one to do a lot of worrying because her lovely blonde hair had faded to a dusty gray over the years. Whatever became of the poor little princess of the closet I do not know. The last I heard of her one of my nieces had dropped her and put a hole in her head. This made me feel ever so sad to think she had no one to better care for her.

Whenever we found a partially shaded clearing, we set up housekeeping. First, we would carpet the floor with moss cut in blocks from various places in the woods. These we placed together to form a lovely green growing rug. Next, we would set up our orange crate cupboards and then we had only to become accustomed to our new home before we set about making a rock garden. Many were the rocks we hauled, but somehow, we never seemed to deplete the shoreline.

Although we were very meticulous about the condition of our playhouses, the boys were much more proficient. They built log cabins, cutting their own logs and chinking them with clay from the hillside. The log cabins, however, never seemed to have roofs. I don't know whether it was because they didn't know how to build a roof or they got into an argument and gave up the project.

Sometimes our playhouse was on a rock out in the water. This we pretended was a lighthouse. We collected pieces of glass of various colors which were used in place of binoculars. If we looked through a piece of red glass we would see a stormy sky, yellow glass meant a beautiful sunny day, and green or blue glass depicted variable weather. This is how we told our brother, Leon, if the weather was good for sailing. If the weather was good, he would row the pretend lighthouse tender to our rock to bring us supplies.

Aside from using the rowboat for play, the boys built rafts. In their bare feet, ragged faded pants, berry brown skin and sun-bleached hair, they looked like Huckleberry Finn in triplicate.

Our brother, Don, would often whittle little boats out of wooden corks from fishing nets. They were usually fashioned after the Fox Island boat, the 63. He put little cabins on them and pounded nails in around the neck and connected them with string for a railing. If he were in the mood, he would add a keel made from corrugated metal.

In the winter when Don wasn't busy whittling these little boats. He would make sleds and jumpers for us. The jumpers were made from one ski to which was attached a seat which extended maybe six inches or a foot above the ski. They were very hard to balance and steer. At least I remember going down the hill and hitting a cedar tree at the bottom and ending up with a beautiful bloody nose. Of course, he said it was all my fault and that if I didn't have such a big nose, I wouldn't have bumped it.

The boys had ice skates that clamped to the soles of their shoes, but we girls skated around the ponds on pie tins.