

Childhood Vignettes

By Alys

TOMAHAWK ... Grandma (Minna) Foss was always ready to take us fishing I learned how to get the Northern Pikes and Sun Fish and keep them fresh until we got back to the pier. Then, (Rule #1) whatever each one caught, they had to clean...!

One summer in Tomahawk, as the afternoon was drawing to a close, we heard shouting. A steer had broken loose from the stockyards. It was in Dwires' backyard. We helped the "hunters" form a circle around the long-horn steer. It was really big with the longest horns I'd ever seen. Everyone had a stick or club... except me. I guess, in frantically looking around at the group, the steer decided I was his best bet and he charged toward me. I ran for my life as fast as I could toward a tree and ducked around it. The steer was galloping too fast to turn and kept on going. I had lots of nightmares from that experience for a long time!

ARCHER AVENUE --- 3629—on the South side of Chicago. We lived across the alley from a tavern. The tavern keepers had a very high fence with Doberman Pinschers.

Every once in awhile the dogs would get loose and all the children would be scooped up inside until the dogs were caught. (They were mean dogs, jumping high, barking at everyone.)

I remember one night a drunk came to our front door. Pop was working; Mom was alone with us. She answered the door and he started to push his way in. I remember helping her push the door to keep him out. There was a latch and she finally got it locked and the door shut. We ran to lock all the doors and then we knelt to pray. It was really scary! I had nightmares on this one, too!

My friends at Archer Avenue were Cookie, Carol, Connie and Emil. (He was my boyfriend.) We would go to call on each other, at the top of our little lungs: "OH-OOOOOOOO COOOOOOOOK-EEEEEEEE" with the "OH" and "COOK-EEEEEE" being high pitch and the "-OOOOOO" being sung low pitch. The 'EEEEEE' would last about 10 seconds. It was a neighborhood tradition.

I remember the corner store that had the most beautiful baby doll I ever saw. I would look at it every day. I saved my pennies, penny by penny, and finally bought it.

Archer Avenue also had the "Rag Man." He would drive through the alley with his horse-wagon full of newspapers, rags and neat junk for kids to wonder over. "RAGS...RAGS FOR SALE..." Then the "Scissors Man"—"SCISSORS....SCISSORS...SHARPEN YOUR SCISSORS," as his scissors wagon clanked along with perfect timing. You could hear him coming a block away.

I remember our little Cocker Spaniel that ran out onto Archer Avenue and was killed by a truck. We were never allowed another pet.

It was very very sad. (Mom just told me the dog didn't die immediately, but was very sick and died shortly. We got another puppy that caught the same sickness and died right away. I must have blocked this out of my memory.)

AUNTIE HAZEL took Mark and me to the Shriners' Circus. That was a big annual event...the greatest fun! A huge ugly gorilla climbed up and down the ropes through the seated crowd. We screamed and laughed ourselves to pieces.

Auntie Hazel also taught me how to make Easter bonnets. She would take me downtown to a millinery store and I would pick out a frame and decorations.

Then we would go to her apartment and put it together. It always turned out so original. Auntie Hazel wanted me to go to college. After she died, I did. I think she will be happy when she finds out in the Kingdom.

UNCLE TOM was the turkey carver. We were called in to observe the carving art and taste the tidbits. He would make us "Shirley Temple" drinks (soda) with cherries.

UNCLE OTTO treated us royally. His way of waking us up in the morning at Tomahawk was with beautiful symphonies piped throughout the house. When we got to the kitchen, there was a gorgeous breakfast. Auntie Ethel and Uncle Otto were both good cooks. I remember the round pancakes—like little golf balls. Not too long ago I bought a special pan for making round pancakes.

I think it was AUNTIE ETHEL, perhaps Grandma Foss, Auntie Eleanor or Auntie Hazel, who had kitchen towels for me to embroider and taught me how to knit and crochet.

That kept me busy for hours. I still enjoy doing embroidery, but I don't remember how to do the others. We also played Chinese Checkers and Pick-Up Sticks for hours on end.

When it came to sewing clothes, AUNTIE VI taught me how to sew my first dress. It was white with red strawberries and we followed the pattern to a "T." It opened a whole world and I received a sewing machine for my graduation from Jr. High School from Mom and Pop. It is still in the basement. I have used it for everything from kitchen curtains and bed spreads to model High Priest's garments and Tabernacle Veils.

ELMHURST...we kids would walk everywhere. It seemed each school was at least a mile away...sometimes more. We'd walk home for lunch and watch the Three Stooges.

We rode our bikes to the swimming pool across town almost every day in the summer. One game we played was to throw our safety-pin locker tag over our shoulder into the pool at the deepest end. Then we would race to see who could find it under the water first. (Never lost one.)

One time some boys put a dead mouse in my bike saddle basket. When I reached in to put in my gear, I felt this fuzzy thing. I pulled out the dead mouse and screamed appropriately! Guess they knew that would happen!

At the end of the block there were trees and fields. My girlfriends and I would climb the trees...make forts...bury our "hidden treasures" and make treasure maps. In an old farm house was a very old lady the kids called the "Witch." We were petrified to see her...she was a legend. Now the area is built up with modern suburban homes. I think the kids today are missing something.

I was a member of the Bluebirds, later a Campfire Girl. We were always doing interesting projects and I was a busy little girl. I remember taking tap dancing, ballet, violin and piano.

Mom and Pop gave me exciting birthday parties. My little girlfriends and I were taken to the Goodman Theatre, downtown Chicago. We saw “Jack and the Beanstalk” and “Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves” from the Arabian Nights, among other children’s plays.

When Grandma Bell died, I received money to go to business school. When Grandpa (Irving) died, (he called me “Piedie” to the end), I received money for a down-payment for my condo.

When Auntie Hazel died, I received money for a down-payment and bought my house.

So besides many wonderful memories, and the wonderful heritage of the Truth and knowledge of the Lord, I still have my secretarial skills which I depend on daily and have become a part of my nature. I still have my condo for investment toward retirement. And I have the shelter of my comfortable, wonderful home, which I daily delight in, and which I am thankful to have for the Tuesday night meetings.

I enjoy looking back at my childhood. My relatives were so good to me. And they have been such good people. I am so very, very lucky.

Reflections as a Grandchild

Our yearly trips to “Grandma and Grandpa in California” were taken every summer on the “El Capitan.” The exciting train ride, diner, porters, the stop at Albuquerque for Indian wares—was always an adventure in itself.

But “PAS-A-DEEEEEEEEE-NA!!!” was the achievement. Grandpa was always standing at the train as we approached...and when we left, he always ran along beside it waving till we couldn't see him anymore.

I always loved the old English Tudor home on Elmwood Drive. The old high beamed ceilings, fireplace, Spanish terraced gardens, incinerator, cactus garden, kitchen where Grandma was always busy baking—no recipes, but the best apple pies and dough in the world. And always a chocolate Hershey treat for 4 little kids!

The gully was our favorite play yard. In spite of poison ivy, we played cow-boys and Indians. We spent hours on hours on hours drawing our lives away and reading.

Grandma Bell, too—and Grandpa Bell—chock full of stories.

I got my favorite doll, Betty Jane, from Auntie Shirley on Elmwood Drive. The hours upon hours of love with that doll and her huge accumulated wardrobe!

The ice cream man controlled the hills—you could hear him streets away. As kids, we really covered the neighborhood—its shortcuts and alley ways. Kids went everywhere and really walked a lot!

The days finally came when Faircourt Lane was built. This is where we all got the measles. I remember Grandma Bell sitting by our beds in a darkened room, telling story upon story of her childhood to pass our hours. We were fascinated—she was SUCH a GOOD story teller!!

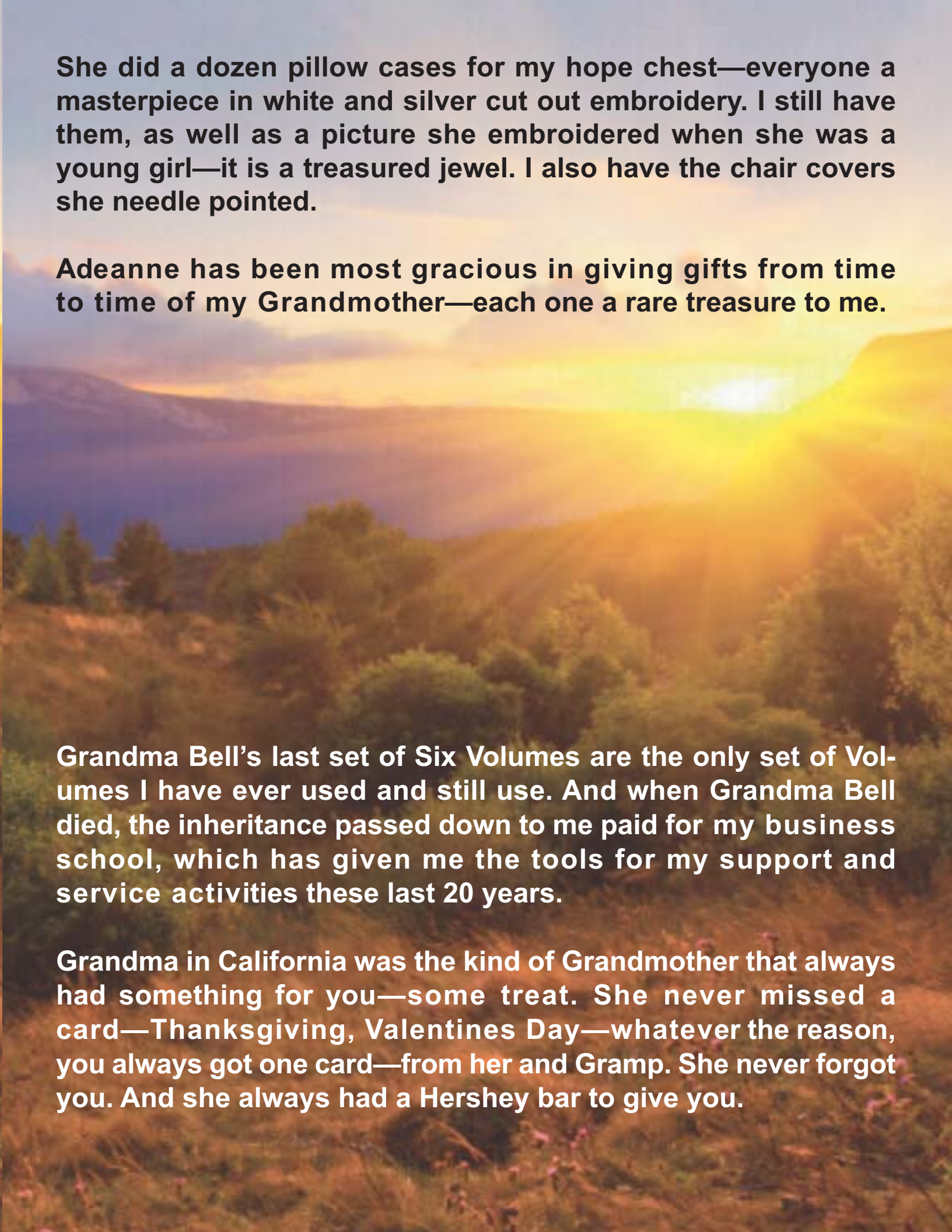
These were the days of “Chutes and Ladders,” “Candy Cane Lane,” and daily trips to the park. We loved it at the park. Just never got weary of playing. There was much happiness in the visits to Faircourt Lane in childhood.

My Grandmother was a merciful saint. I will never forget, once when we went through her photo album (as I did on every visit and got the best old-time stories)—a picture of a beautiful girl with a baby. The baby’s head was almost double the normal size. Grandma explained the child had water on the brain.

She said the child had been born out of wedlock and many Brethren said this condition was God’s punishment. She felt this was a horrible judgment to make and that God was more merciful and that just because one was born maimed was not a punishment. I will never forget her breadth of mercy in this.

She was also very involved in our problems—but not in an interfering manner. It was her desire toward the end of her years to visit me in Albuquerque. Knowing intuitively of my problems, she was determined, in spite of very failing health, to make the trip. They stayed only briefly. But she visited me when I needed it most and I will never forget her concern and sacrifice.

She never showed favoritism. Everything was divided in 4 equal parts, whether we were 2,000 miles away or in her kitchen. She loved us each for exactly what we were and didn’t try to make us fit any preconceived mold. She was a PERFECT Grandmother!



She did a dozen pillow cases for my hope chest—everyone a masterpiece in white and silver cut out embroidery. I still have them, as well as a picture she embroidered when she was a young girl—it is a treasured jewel. I also have the chair covers she needle pointed.

Adeanne has been most gracious in giving gifts from time to time of my Grandmother—each one a rare treasure to me.

Grandma Bell's last set of Six Volumes are the only set of Volumes I have ever used and still use. And when Grandma Bell died, the inheritance passed down to me paid for my business school, which has given me the tools for my support and service activities these last 20 years.

Grandma in California was the kind of Grandmother that always had something for you—some treat. She never missed a card—Thanksgiving, Valentines Day—whatever the reason, you always got one card—from her and Gramp. She never forgot you. And she always had a Hershey bar to give you.

March 22, 1991

Memoirs of Sasha The Sweetest Little Dog

This morning, as I was driving to work, they were taking you out of the little cage. They lifted you to the table and you were very obedient, they said. I told you to be good and do exactly what the doctor said...and you did.

As I was walking to the door, they were opening you up. And as I sat at my desk, Dr. Redicker called. You were very, very sick. The tumor was large and on your liver. There was no hope left for recovery.

And so, my sweet little Sasha, I gave them the word for you to be put to sleep while under anesthesia.

My sweet, sweet little Sasha....

Blue clouds and Raindrops

The clouds are layered in ranges of deep blues

And the raindrops are falling, falling...

And my heart is broken in sorrows...

I was thinking of how your eyes always followed me, waiting for my approval. How your ears waited for my footsteps...and you would bound up the stairs to greet me. If I moved to another room, you moved just to be nearby.

Yes, I was first in your life. You lived to please me. Your greatest honor was my praise. Your fullest satisfaction was my presence. When you were afraid, my voice made everything OK.

I was remembering all these things when I could not stop crying. To no one else was I “first”—the most important in life.

I cried my way to the clinic to see you the last night. George and Florence were with me when you were admitted the evening before and we all came to tuck you in. But I was driven to see you just once more.

You were SO excited. Your tail banged against the cage so loudly. They let you out into the little room and you wanted to go home. Somehow, I think, you realized it was not to be. You looked so good; no more fever, full of energy. We sat and talked. The little kittens kept crying. We talked and talked and soothed them quietly.

Then it was time. You obediently entered your little cage, licking my hand. My sweet, sweet Sasha. I left you in peace and I had peace.

You were born and taken to the shelter early. Somehow, people kept passing you by for other smaller cuter dogs. Your little legs were too short, your ears too floppy, you were too big and then, too old.

But when I put in a request for the “perfect dog” for Bowser, you were just the best dog that could ever be. You were so used to adjusting to other dogs in the cage, they called you “Sweetness.” I named you Sasha—but, in reality, sweetness was your style.

I’ll never forget “the meeting.” You came into your first house ever—and within 10 minutes, after checking each room, you accepted it as your home—no problem—you acted like you had never been anywhere else!

We tested you with Bowser—you on one side of the fence and he on the other. I turned around and somehow, you guys got the gate opened and were racing and playing back and forth having a grand old time.

You and Bowser were a “marriage made in heaven.” Always licking each other, always together from that moment on.

Remember obedience school? The two of you were “model dogs.” So patient and obedient. Everyone marveled. While all the other dogs nervously barked at each other, the two of you sat calmly watching.

We three would take our evening walks—Bowser always protected between us. If he saw someone in the distance he was scared to death, but you charged ahead. You would attack a dinosaur to protect us.

When Bowser got sick, you nursed him as best you could, licking his sick little legs and sitting by them to warm them. You knew he was very sick.

When we finally let him go, you suffered great loss and were looking for him for days. It was so painful to lose him, but we carried on. We took more walks together and spent more time together and we pulled through our sorrow.

Your great enemy was Mr. L. Every time his back door opened, you charged out Barking. One day, in an effort to make peace, he came into the yard to see you while I held you. He talked to you and decided to pet you. As long as I held you, all was fine. As he took his hand away, I released you and suddenly you charged and bit his hand.

Mr. L. raged and cursed and I clung to you fearfully. (To admit, it was a tiny little pinprick of a scratch.) But Mr. L. cursed us and threatened your life calling you the “most vicious creature alive.” I ran inside with you, crying uncontrollably, expecting to lose you from this incident. The only cost was the doctor bills. (Mr. L. acted like you ripped his hand off—what a whiner!!)

I didn't understand until sometime later a backyard neighbor told me the truth. How Mr. L. would beat the fence with a stick to irritate you into barking and then would come into our yard and hit you with the stick and yell at you. Then I knew why you bit him (and I was glad you did!) I kept you inside from then on, to protect you from your #1 enemy—unless I was home.

Your other fear was thunder storms. (Normal Dog!) You went berserk. Remember when you bit the flexible connector to the gas dryer? Our basement filled with gas. The Fire Department and Gas Company came out to save us. After that, I gave you a doggie tranquilizer when thunder started.

The one thing we both loved was food. I couldn't go into the kitchen without your bounding up the stairs and scratching at the door to join me! No matter what the time of day or night, Miss Piggy, both of us!

And when the backyard green sod was laid...how you managed to get the Mexican neighbors' garbage bag under the fence and opened it all over the yard! What fun you had with that!

The last 8 weeks were hard for you. Again, my GMAT studies exhausting me, neglecting you. I kept you around me as much as I could when I was home. It was very, very difficult.

Then, I noticed you were using the 2nd step to the basement as a toilet. I thought it was because I wasn't home enough. At first I thought it was me. Then I was home and you still did it and I thought it was your getting back at me for leaving me. But after a few days, I realized your little fanny and blanket were staying wet. And the stairs became difficult for you. And eating was hard—you even passed up cookies. Although it was only 10 days ago, it seemed to happen so quickly. I made a doctor appointment as soon as I could, realizing it was very serious.

When we learned about Heidie, we had the premonition you would soon follow her. And you did. My dearest sweetest little Sasha. You gave me your life and lived for me.

Sweet, sweet Sasha...You are in my heart...forever.