



A New Arrival in 1939

And now that we have finished two years of an excellent education in a one-room school, let me back up to the Fall of 1939.

If you recall, our mother was expecting her 5th child. Needless to say, we were totally unaware of this. Not a word was spoken in our presence of our mother's condition or a prospective number 5 child. We had no sex education either at home or in school, and certainly not in church.

In any case, along about October 26, 1939, my brother Bobbie and I were awakened early in the morning. It was still quite dark and well before our time to walk to the eastern end of Old Turnpike Road to catch our bus for school.

There were other people, perhaps an aunt or two in the house. It was as though they had appeared by magic. We were used to this sort of thing because relatives came and went on a regular basis, and we almost always had someone living with us for a week or two. Where they slept, I don't know. I suppose in our living room as the boys had one room and the girls had the other upstairs.

Our father asked us to walk to the depot and to bring home some sugar from the General Store located just off the railroad tracks. We dressed warmly, and off we went. It was a walk of about two miles, much of it on Route 44. Maybe, one or two cars passed by. We arrived in a dim morning light, no sun as yet. The storeowner had had a phone call from Dad, and Dad had decided that we didn't need sugar after all. The owner kept us there for some while and we thought we would miss the school bus.

Eventually, he gave us some candy and suggested that we return home. And so we did. When we arrived, Dr. Higgins was there and we had a new baby. Wow!

Babies were born at home, we all were, and doctors made house calls. They always had a car. We had some breakfast, changed our clothes for school, and walked back down the hill to get the bus.

Baby Frances stayed in our parent's bedroom until the following summer. And then a crib was placed on the east side in our room. We had the biggest bedroom upstairs. It had windows on three sides. It has only dawned on me in later years that there wasn't a suitable space in the boy's room for a crib.

The only bathroom was upstairs and we all took turns. As it was summer again, we had a new rule. Dad was now very familiar with water shortages, and so we girls had a bath first, and then the boys used our water for theirs.

Dad planted a huge garden that was our job to tend. And then with a bunch of uncles, he built a very nice barn. The aunts and mother would cook and we would all eat outside. This was the beginning of our farm.

Once the barn was finished, Dad and the uncles dug our well a lot deeper. We still went to the Lake every night for our swim, all lathered up. Actually, none of us children knew how to swim, so Dad decided to remedy that.

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Birthplace of Nathan Hale

Further down Route 44, in Mansfield Depot, there was a dam on a small river with a slow current in the summer. Bobbie and I learned to swim that summer and the next summer Hazel and Teddie learned. We all knew how to hold our heads under water, dog paddle, and float.

And so, our third summer in Coventry was 1941.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Thibault Castagno

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