

FRIENDS

"Ree Ree bit me," I wailed, letting the screen door slam as I ran into the kitchen. Ma turned from the stove where she was stirring something in a large cast iron skillet. Seeing faint teeth marks but no blood, she commented, "Don't play with him if he bites."

"There's nobody else to play with," I said. "Ree Ree only wants to make roads in the sandbox or see who can swing the highest. I need a friend who likes to play house with my dolls and dress up in old high heels and dress-up clothes. I need a friend like me, a girl."

The next morning I was eating my Cocoa Wheats; we were saving box tops to send for a Lone Ranger secret decoder ring. Ma said, "After you finish your breakfast, get dressed and we'll go visit someone who has a little girl just your age." I gobbled the last two spoonfuls of Cocoa Wheats and ran back upstairs to put on my favorite pink play dress. I raced back downstairs so Ma could button the back of my dress and tie my shoes.

We walked to the corner where I waited each afternoon for my brothers to come home from school. We walked past the Lutheran Church where I went to Sunday School, my nickel for the collection knotted in the corner of a handkerchief. We walked a third block, crossed the street and approached a large house with a wrap-around porch. Ma waited at the bottom of the steps to the side door while I walked up those huge steps and knocked on the door. My heart was pounding hard in my chest and my mouth felt dry. How would I ever ask if a little girl lived here?

The door opened. A pretty, blonde lady smiled at me. Behind her stood a little girl just my size. She had red hair in stubby braids sticking out behind ears that supported thick eyeglasses. She clutched a doll to her chest. She smiled at me, and freckles danced on her cheeks. She was beautiful. She would be my friend for life.

by Denise Lane

