Carnegie Mellon University

From the SelectedWorks of Gloriana St. Clair

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Qu’Appelle Valley, Saskatchewan, Canada, Summer 1950

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More of memoirs  Trapped in the Outhouse

Family photos provide poignant details of a legendary summer vacation in which the Strange family pulled the Glendoris, our aluminum Lone Star all purpose fishing boat with its 35 hp outboard motor north from its home on 7th street in Tonkawa, Oklahoma to a rented house on a lake in the Qu’Appelle valley. Traveling with us was another family consisting of Jay and Loumeta Liles and their daughters Linda Sue and Deborah. Many details remain unrecorded … did we travel in two cars or one station wagon, how did we find the lake house, and what kind of lodgings did we enjoy along the 1239 mile trip. Three incidents remain clear … I caught a sizable pike, our wood burning stove did not bake two apple pies, and my sister Darla locked me and Deborah in the outhouse.

At age 11, I am already chubby, round faced, and sweet tempered. Glen and Jay took me out to troll one day, leaving all the others behind. Trolling involved dragging a long line with a spinner behind a slow motor boat. We had been catching perch, a small bony fish, and a few pike, the larger sport fish that had drawn us northward. One picture shows, Glen, Jay, and Loumeta with two pike and four smaller fish on our stringer. My excitement when I felt the strike on my line was palpable. I reeled and reeled until the fish came within range to be scooped up with the net and brought into the boat. Nightly, we dredged the cleaned fish in flour and cornmeal and fried them over the wooden stove. My father was particularly delighted with my success as a fisher.

Like many vacation homes worldwide, this house was less comfortably equipped than our homes. It had a refrigerator, but the stove was wood-burning. Jay, Loumeta, Glen, and Doris had all grown up on farms and were somewhat accustomed to less sophisticated kitchens. Doris and Loumeta made a couple of apple pies to go with the fried fish, but despite their combined efforts, they could not get the wood fire hot enough to bake the bottom crust. We devoured them anyway.

One rainy afternoon, the adults were playing bridge on a wooden kitchen table. Deborah wanted to go to the bathroom, and I was asked to take her down to the outhouse, a half a block from the house. Inside the three holer, I heard footsteps on the gravel path and the ominous click of the outside wooden lock being turned. Deborah and I were trapped in the outhouse. Our screams for help could not be heard in the house. Playing hand after hand, women against the men, our parents wondered why we were gone so long. Darla colored quietly on the floor in a Raggedy Ann book not designed for additional color. Finally, Doris and Loumeta came down to investigate. Although Darla expected “to get her ass beaten,” she did not get punished for this tort.

For many years, I have understood that having such a strong family is a tremendous privilege for any child. Children of friends and family often take exotic international trips, but few of those trips could be more educational and character building than this summer trek across an unguarded border to our neighboring country. I am proud to be a daughter of the Strange family.