

## The Grapevine

From the sketchy descriptions of her childhood my mother must have had a heavily supervised and strict childhood. Her parents were truly Victorian. They generally wore black clothing and were very dour in attitude. There was little laughter whenever we visited them in their beautiful, white, two-story home in Kirksville, Missouri, if one of us misbehaved, my grandparents were quite threatening. I suspect my mother's childhood must have been similar or worse.

The experience of Doc's Tribe with our mom was considerably different. We were accustomed to our mother organizing and participating in various children's activities. There was a lot of hard work but also a lot of laughter and fun. Mom was very creative and wanted us to enjoy our childhood.

Sometimes her ideas were a bit hair-brained, but she truly wanted to expose us to both physical and mental activities which would stretch us. Mom was a school teacher and was always thinking of ways to challenge us.

One summer when we lived on the farm near Columbia, Illinois she decided to organize a picnic to one of the fields away from the house. She selected a nice grassy spot near a wooded area containing a sinkhole. Sinkholes are depressions in the ground where rain has soaked through the soil and dissolved the underlying limestone forming caverns. The soil above the sink hole erodes into the cavern producing a funnel-shaped depression. Because the sides of many sinkholes on the farm were so steep, the ground around them couldn't be farmed. Oak trees and grapevines grew in and around them.

We loaded picnic baskets on the hay wagon one summer day and drove to the field she had selected. She had prepared sandwiches, cool-aid, and cookies. After lunch we decided to explore the sinkhole nearby and found that thick grapevines had grown up into the trees. The vines were an inch or two in diameter and firmly fastened to the trees, we thought. Many of them were twenty or thirty feet long. I chopped the bottoms of several vines loose from their roots so we could swing out over the sinkhole below. We had visions of swinging from tree to tree like Tarzan.

Each of us took several swings out over the yawning chasm below and safely made it back to the edge of the pit. After watching us enjoy the long pendulum ride across the sinkhole, mom decided she had to try it. She tentatively grabbed a vine and swung out over the chasm and back again. Then she took a second, more strenuous run and made it all the way across, but on the way back the vine broke loose from the trees above and she suddenly dropped from sight. She fell about fifteen feet and crashed onto the side of the pit and slid toward the hole near the bottom.

All of us watched in horror as our mother disappeared into the gloom. We ran down the side of the hole to rescue her not knowing if she had been hurt or not. We helped her to her feet in the dark at the bottom. She climbed shakily back to the light at the top covered in dirt and acorn bits. Fortunately, she was uninjured, mostly just embarrassed. I don't know if she ever told dad about her day in the sinkhole. If she did, I doubt if he would have been surprised. Mom had a reputation for participating in unusual activities with the family. If I have opportunity, I'll relate some of these exciting adventures with Supermom in future stories.