

## WHEN THE ROAD WAS WIDENED

We lived by a sparsely traveled road called U.S. Highway 169. Whenever we kids saw a curl of dust coming, we raced to see if we knew who was driving by, always exchanging waves.

The highway was quite steep. This was never more apparent than when returning from town in Dad's Model T, slowly chug-chugging up the dirt road. Grandma even had us rock the car forward in unison to give it the extra push to the top.

Dad would park the car by the front gate and we'd troupe out onto the wide front lawn, racing each other up the sidewalk to the big porch.

The view from our home was wonderful. Our neighbors' farms were in all directions; we felt like we were at the center of everywhere.

We liked to play on our front porch or on the lawn under the pine trees. We played catch, somersaulted and ran races. Alice, our youngest sister, kept up with Margaret and me even when she was only two years old. Our dog Spot often joined us. Whenever we turned somersaults, he seemed to think we were hurt and came to rescue us. He got a fond petting whenever he did that. Our porch was a magical place for small girls to spend hours of time.

But that peaceful routine soon changed. One spring morning, the quiet was shattered when big noisy machines came to the crest of the hill and began tearing up the road.

Frightened and awed by the sight, we three girls raced over to Dad. He told us the highway was going to be made wider and deeper, so that motor-ing would be easier for everyone. He told us to stay inside because men were coming to take down the fence and two of the pine trees near the road.

We hurried inside to watch, wide-eyed, from the big front window. We covered our ears because of the noise as we sadly watched the trees fall, but were glad they left two on each side of the walkway.

Sections of the sidewalk were removed and stacked in the side yard near the cherry trees; these became a platform to play on during warm sunny days. We had fun jumping from the platform as we each tried to land farther and farther.



Sitting on sidewalk blocks

Once Dad scooped a pail of clay from the roadbed for us to play with, and the platform became our workshop. The clay was sticky and messy, but we had fun as we rolled it into marbles. Those marbles always surprised us because they wouldn't roll straight, so a new game of "Guess where it will roll?" was made. We laughed a lot while playing this game.

We also shaped clay dishes that we left on the concrete slabs to dry in the sun. Later we used them for tea parties with our dollies as we snacked on graham crackers.

Each day we watched in fascination as the road was dug deeper and wider. The men used their big scoops to fill one dump truck, then waved it on to begin filling the next.

One after another the trucks were filled and driven along the road to a low section. The dirt was dumped there, and we watched the road become miraculously less hilly.

The workers were friendly and waved to us as we played in the yard. They chatted with us on their way for a fresh drink from the well. A driveway was made toward the house so Dad had a safe place to park the car; another was made across the road, leading to the cornfield.

Each evening, we followed Dad out to the road to see what the workers had done that day. After many weeks the deeper, wider road was graded and the dump trucks returned to put gravel over it. Truck after truck lumbered by and spread gravel over the length of highway that had been widened and leveled. Next, heavy rollers came and packed it down smoothly.

Cutting the road deeper had left a steep bank from our lawn to the roadway. Both were off limits. The steepness was rather scary for us so we obeyed.



The new highway

Dad told us that if we drove north on our road we'd reach Canada. And if we went south, we'd arrive at the Texas coast on the Gulf of Mexico. We were about half way between those mystical places.

We thought that was awesome and wondered if any of the cars going by would reach either end. Our knowledge of distance was quite limited, but dreams of traveling to faraway places had begun.

## CARS

In the far end of the garden, an old abandoned car attracted our visiting cousins in the summertime and became a wonderful play area. Because our legs were not long enough to reach pedals, one kid would man the steering wheel; another pressed the gas pedal or the brake, until everyone had a part to control. Someone would take the crank, place it in its socket and pretend to turn, doing his part to get the car started. Sammy usually became the old time 1915 race car driver, Barney Oldfield. Imaginations ruled those stationary expeditions, taking us far away.

By the time cars became available in the early 1900's, Grandpa and his sons were ready to switch from horse and buggy to the modern auto. They were sure that caring for a horse and buggy was more work than hopping into a car and speeding along in high style. Farm work still needed horses for plowing, planting, and reaping, but that was soon to change when noisy tractors and other machinery came on the scene.

Uncle Sam had been delivering the U.S. mail by horse and buggy and be-