

### A wet drive to Renfrew



By Mary Cook

Mother stood by the kitchen window. We five children were right behind her. The rain was pelting down like pellets from a gun. It had started raining early in the day and according to Father, who seemed to know about such things, it was likely to continue long into the night.

But Mother had promised she would take us into Renfrew to the picture show, and she said a little bit of rain never hurt anybody, and as far as she was concerned, the trip was on. Father lowered the Ottawa Farm Journal, peering over his dime store glasses and said, "Anyone who goes out in this weather is asking for trouble."

Everett was told to back the Model T out of the drive shed after he had rolled down the canvas window covers, and he was to secure them as best he could. With every second grommet missing, there were more holes than curtains!

He came back into the house and announced the inside of the car was already soaking wet. Father said, "You'd have to be daft to take that rattle-trap on the road tonight. You'll be soaked to the skin before you hit the end of the lane."

Mother said to get into our warm clothes, even though it was only late October. And she told Audrey, my sister, to fetch the mitts and hats from under the bed. When we were bundled up as if it was the middle of winter, Mother went to the bake table and then to the kitchen table. Shoving the salt and pepper shakers, the spoon holder and Eaton's catalogue to one side, she lifted the two big pieces of red and white checked oilcloth from both.

She reached for the box of big safety pins . . . ones we called horse blanket pins, and told us all to make a run for the car. Four of us slammed into the back seat, and Audrey tore into the front with Mother.

Even though it was only late afternoon, it was almost pitch black in the Model T with the curtains rolled down. Mother had brought out a flashlight and she told Audrey to beam it onto the curtains. The rain was pouring into the car through the dozens of cracks around the canvas, and Emerson said that at that rate, we would soon be soaked to the skin.

Mother was on her knees on the front seat, holding up the oilcloth against the windows. Using the big safety pins she fastened the table cloth along the driver's side, and then pinned up the other pieces on the other side of the car. She left a small opening near the steering wheel so that she could see out the little clear pane. We soon felt like were inside an airtight tent.

I commented on how clever was our Mother. Audrey said she hoped we didn't see anybody we knew. Everett cranked the car, and mercifully it caught on the first try. Mother pushed the gas lever down and put her foot on the forward pedal. I could imagine Father in the kitchen window, and Audrey said she could see him through the windshield glowering and shaking his head. She said he looked like thunder!

The car started to steam up inside before we hit the end of our long lane, and we all commented on how nice and cozy it was. Audrey was ordered to keep the inside of the windshield wiped off with her mitts so that Mother could see where she was going. The rain was still pounding on the roof and on the curtains, and it ran off the oilcloth forming puddles at our feet. But none of us cared a whit . . . we were on our way to the movies and that was all that mattered.

Audrey asked Mother if she would park the car well away from the O'Brien theatre, just in case there was someone there from the Northcote School. Audrey needn't have worried, the main street of Renfrew was packed with cars and we had no choice but to go to the end of Raglan and find parking near the horse stables.

We raced down the street in the pelting rain to the picture show. We had no umbrellas, only our heavy clothes, mitts and hats for protection. When we got seated, Audrey hissed that the theatre smelled just like the Northcote School on a rainy day. Everyone had dressed for the bad weather, and crammed into the theatre Audrey said she was sure she could see steam rising from the bodies of everyone there. Which of course was nonsense.

Back then the movies on a Saturday night were almost always cowboy shows, which I hated with a passion. I usually fell asleep half way through, and had to be wakened for the trip home. But that night, I stayed wide awake, as gun-fire, racing horses, and a wicked thunder storm flashed across the screen. It was still raining when we came out, and pools of water were ankle deep on the car floor. I thought of Father at home, in his dry clothes, sitting by the Findlay Oval, and for a brief second I wished I had stayed with him in our warm house. But just for a second. Because a trip in any weather to the picture show in Renfrew was an adventure not to be missed.

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