

Her Father Believed in Her

It was the average summer day in Texas, USA, the year 1945, as Barbara McBee warily came out of her room into the kitchen. Her family had grown increasingly worried as WWII had fired up and the propaganda posters were everywhere once more. Their male family members had already talked about going to war, therefore, the ladies became progressively anxious. The farm was owned and managed by her father and she had questioned what would happen to it if he left, she was only 16 and knew close to nothing about agriculture. Her brothers, Jason, Bill and Bob were quite ambitious and were proud of the fact that they were leaving. None of them really liked her or ever did anything for her. Her four sisters Jane, Bella, Rose and Tilly were young still, they could help with close to nothing out in the farm.

As she sat down she saw her father come out into the kitchen with a chunky bag and camo track pants, her brothers following closely behind. "You aren't leaving yet are you?" Barbara questioned anxiously, her voice breaking the slightest bit. Her father sighed, he was quiet for a moment. "Not today, but soon," he replied, "...quite soon Barb."

Barbara felt a burning in her eyes as anxiety surged through her body. She ate her breakfast quietly. That day went by too slowly, it was a Friday which meant she went to school. Even when it's lunch and they are let outside, you could sense how fearful people were. Many of the children were quiet, smiles were rare she noticed. The hours ticked by and Barb finally went home. That night at dinner, few words were spoken and few actions were taken. Before she knew it, the day had arrived once more.

She walked out into the kitchen fearfully, dreading what would come next, her father sitting on a chair looking down sadly. Her brothers on the sofa nearby possessing the same emotion.

"You're leaving today aren't you?" she questioned sadly. He looked up not realising she was there.

"Yes, I wanted to say goodbye," he said shakily, it's the answer Barb expected, "I know you'll have a tough time but I also know that you will be fine. You'll figure it all out as you always do. Barbara McBee, you are strong." Her brothers and sisters watched gloomily from the corner of the room. She didn't know how to say "goodbye", all that would come out was:

"I'll miss you," she hugged him and all her brothers dejectedly. She knew what would occur when they were away, the Germans were brutal and harsh.

"Stay safe!" she called out after them as the tears dried on her cheeks.

She investigated the farm for a while that day. As she walked along slowly, she made a list of all the chores needed to be done on the farm. The first step: Learn to ride a horse. Her mother knew that you needed to kick

them to go faster but that was about it. That same day she was to move the cows to a better paddock with rich, fresh, long grass. As she went to the horses and managed to get a halter on her horse, she realised she'd never tacked up a horse. She tied up the beautiful bay, named Ronnie, and walked into the tack shed. She came out with a couple of brushes to groom old Ronnie and then placed the saddle on with the saddle pad. That was just about all she confidently knew how to do. She unknowingly did the girth up the slightest bit too tight. Ronnie started to have shortness of breath. Barb was ignorant of this as she was focused on getting the bridle on. She finally managed to do so and off she was with Ron struggling. She awkwardly trotted over to the paddock, the fences already set. She opened the gate and shooed the cows out, Ronnie struggling. His footing was off and he began to tremble. Barbara finally noticed. The gates were set so she thought it'd be fine to stop a little. Although, she wasn't quite certain of what to do. She checked the bit and then the saddle. Although, she didn't think about the girth. She walked beside Ronnie for a bit as the cows made their commute to the paddock. He appeared to have improved as he was finally walking properly but now she saw his struggle with breathing. She chucked the reins back over his head and finally decided to examine the girth. She saw nothing faulty but decided to loosen it and got back up on the saddle. Ronnie was much better that day yet he still had awkward footing. Barb decided to let him rest for the rest of the day and did the rest on foot. "Sorry big boy," she told him sympathetically.

As the day was over and the daily chores were completed, she walked inside deciding that it didn't go too badly. Her mother had already set the table, she was impatiently waiting for her.

"What took you so long, child?" her mother asked irritably.

"Sorry mother, I didn't figure it would take that long," she apologised, "old Ronnie had something up with his girth I think. Shortness of breath and awkward footing." She sat down at the table with her younger sisters.

"Alright, don't you kill Ronnie now," her mother impatiently replied back, "Come on, sit down and eat now". She poured soup into everyone's bowls. The house was quieter than usual and the mood in the room was somewhat unsettling. The family ate in silence.

For the next few weeks, Barbara had predicted everything would go smoother than it did. In reality, it was pretty much chaos. The chores were a lot to manage and to finish in one day and Barb was almost always not prepared for anything. Her father decided to leave at one of the most troublesome times, calving season. The cows had to be taken care of with more gentleness and were to have an eye on them at all times. Barb found farm life difficult. The second day on the farm she didn't know what to do. The cows were being milked and she was about halfway through when she

realised the bucket she was using, had a miniature hole in the bottom. The milk slowly pouring out the bottom, she rode back to the stables with Ronnie. There luckily was another bucket right outside, although, she'd already lost plenty of the milk. This would get her a lower pay. A couple of days later, Ron's front left shoe decided to come loose. The farrier was called and she had to use a different horse while Ronnie's shoe was put back on. This horse was, unfortunately, a rearing horse, broken in yet still the odd rear. Her name was Betty. She was quite the fussy mare and decided to rear at the worst moments. She wasn't a farm horse, more of a show horse. To keep it short, Betty thought it'd be lovely to rear up while shifting cows. Technically, she landed on a cow. That cow was very healthy before that and now, she had to be put down due to being badly hurt.

Barbara had thought about her family every night. *What if her father was dead, what about her brothers?* She wasn't very close to any of her siblings but with her dad, she definitely was close to. She knew she could talk to him about almost anything and they always did many activities together. She was sitting on her bed staring off into space, thinking about her father and the war, while all of a sudden, a quiet sob filled the previously silent house. She wasn't quite sure if she even heard it. Barbara stood up and carefully walked to the kitchen. Her mother was sitting on a chair hunched over crying. A letter in hand, her tears soaked into it. Her mum held the letter out for Barb to read.

"It's... your f-father," her mother stuttered, still crying. Barb couldn't believe what her eyes had just read. Her heart felt heavy as her eyes zoomed across the letter, quickly starting to water. As the tears streamed rapidly down her cheeks, she started to overthink:

"But... what about the farm? Or, or Jason, Bill or Bobby?" she questioned. The thought of her brothers made her hands cold, "Do the girls know?" Her hands started to shake.

"Not yet, darl," her mum replied with a gloomy tone as she looked up to Barb, "I-I don't think that they're ready to... know quite yet."

Barbara nodded slowly. She didn't know what to say. She slowly turned to make her breakfast. She ate slowly, her hands still shaking and her cheeks still wet with tears. The farm chores became harder to do. However, Ronnie had definitely gotten better which gave her less to worry about.

She was mucking out the horse's stables just before she was to go inside for dinner and the day would be over as a young man came over with her mother.

"Hey Barb, how'd the farm treat you today?" her mother cheerily called out. Barbara was surprised to finally see someone with a smile on their face.

"Same as usual, mother," she replied, "What makes you so bright and cheery today?" She stopped mucking and leaned the fork on a fence.

"See this young man here?" she inquired, pointing to the kid, "This kind young fella heard how we'd been struggling. Says he wants to help."

"Well hello kid, what's your name?" she asked him.

"Johnny," he replied cheerfully, "Johnny Martin".

"When can you work?" she asked, eager to get him working as soon as possible.

"Whenever you like, tomorrow I'm free," he joyfully replied.

"Great, I'll see you then, I've just about done for the day but I'm looking forward to working with you Johnny Martin," she smiled at him and shook his hand.

"Great, I hope to be of good help, good day," he waved.

"Bye," she called out.

From that day, everything seemed to go uphill. 'That's different' Barbara thought. She enjoyed a happy mood. War was soon over after that and all her brothers came back safely. A few devastating wounds put them in hospital for a while although her family was really glad they were home. "We missed you guys," she told them with tears flowing down her face as she held all of them in a tight hug.

Written by Iulia Bessai, 8AG



Land girls working