

NEAR THE OVAL

Daphne Pawan-Taylor

From 1924, when she was five, to 1933 Jean Marie lived with her parents and her brother and sister near the Oval in St. Clair.

There were many trees and shrubs and cats and dogs on the street where they lived and the Oval was always a busy place. Bicycle racing and relay racing went on all the time, but cricket was the most important of all the games.

During the dry season, between January and May, cricket matches were played in the Oval. Jean Marie's brother, Stephen, and her father who was a doctor and worked in a laboratory, liked cricket.

Stephen said that it was a wonderful game because it was interesting and good exercise. Father said that it was a great game because it was disciplined. When cricket was on in the Oval, Father allowed Stephen and his friends to watch the game from the windows of his study. It was only during the cricket season that so many people were allowed to enter that study, and then Mother served tea and lemonade.

Jean Marie did not bother much about cricket. Now and again she would go to the study and look at the players and the crowds who cheered and clapped.



Once there was such loud cheering and clapping and when she went to see what all the excitement was about Stephen told her that Learie Constantine had just "hit a six," and the ball had gone over the Oval's fence into Havelock Street.

Jean Marie thought it was silly having that fence around the Oval, because it prevented some people from seeing the match. Once there had nearly been a terrible accident. A number of boys climbed on to the branch of a large spreading Samaan tree nearby in St. George's Park. The tree was taller than the Oval's fence, and the boys could see the match very well. But the branch broke off and it fell to the ground bringing the boys down with it.

Luckily, no one was seriously hurt. Except for some scratches and bruises, the boys were able to walk back or limp back to where they lived. It was lucky, too, that no one was under the tree when they fell.

Jean Marie loved cats and dogs. Her family's dog was Paul who was a good-natured brown dog with a bobbed tail. But Father kept white mice in his laboratory and Jean Marie thought it would be nice to have white mice for pets.

So Father gave her two white mice and a cage to lock them in. The mice had pink eyes and soft fur, and Jean Marie fed them and gave them water. She called them her "Twins."

Mother did not allow the cage with the "Twins" into the house.

"Mice are mice," she said. So the mice lived in

their cage near to the garage.

Early one morning Jean Marie went to feed the "Twins" but they were not there. She called Stephen and Susan and asked them if they had seen her mice.

"No, we haven't seen the mice," they said.

The only thing to be seen was Timmy, the neighbour's cat, and he seemed to be smiling.

"I am sure that cat knows something about my mice," said Jean Marie to her sister.

"Perhaps the 'Twins' went for a walk and got lost in the Oval," said Stephen.

"There are other animals," said Mother, secretly glad to be rid of the mice. Jean Marie never found out what happened to the mice.

During the rainy season, Stephen liked to play "jockeys" with the other boys on the street. The "jockeys" were paper boats which the boys made themselves. The racing track was the canal on the Elizabeth Street side, from the St. Clair Avenue corner to the Tragarete Road corner.

At the beginning of the wet season when the Queen of Flowers bloomed, Jean Marie and her little sister Susan liked to play "snow." It was an easy game.

At the end of a rainfall, they would put on their swim suits and imagine that they were butterflies or beetles and would dance and sing under the white Queen of Flowers trees in the garden. While they danced they shook the branches of the Queen of

Flowers and tiny, wet, cool flowers fell on them.

“Snow” was always a short game, because Mother was afraid they would catch cold if they stayed out in the damp too long.

The girls called “snow” their ballet. Stephen said that it was a silly game.

Fine day or wet day, Stephen dashed off to and from school on his bicycle. His first school was on Maraval Road and when he grew older he went to the college on Pembroke Street.

Jean Marie and Susan walked if the weather was fine, and when it rained Father came to fetch them in his car. Father's car had a horn which was sounded by squeezing a rubber pom pom. It sounded “honk honk.” To start the car one had to crank it at the front. It was a job for strong people.

When Father was working late the girls took a Horse Buggy, and it was always the same Buggy driven by a cabman named John.

John was kind and he was kind to Tam Tam his horse. Tam Tam pulled the buggy for John.

“Splish, Splash” fell the rain.

“Click, click” said John and he flicked his whip.

“Clop clop, clop clop” trotted Tam Tam and away they went up Pembroke Street, around the corner to Keate Street, on to Chancery Lane and then on to the road that went around the Savannah towards Queen's Park where they turned into St. Clair Avenue on to the Oval.

Tam Tam loved to trot near the Savannah and as soon as he reached near to it, he always broke into a faster trot. John had a foot bell which he used whenever he saw anyone in the way. The bell sounded "Tang ta tang, tang, tang." Sometimes other cabs replied with the same sounds, some louder, some softer.

Tam Tam, Jean Marie and Susan were good friends. Whenever Tam Tam went to meet them at school, he put up his ears and allowed the girls to pat his neck.

When they reached home and John and the two girls dismounted the buggy, Jean Marie and Susan would go inside to get some lettuce leaves or a sprig of water cress or a piece of cabbage for Tam Tam. After Tam Tam had eaten John would say good-bye and go back to the drivers' seat, say "click click," flick his whip and away the buggy went.

One day after supper, when the family was talking, Father said that motor cars were taking over the traffic.

"Very soon there will be no buggies," he said.

"What a shame," said Susan.

"What about Tam Tam?" asked Jean Marie.

Father explained that John had got another job and Tam Tam was going to live in a pasture in the country.

Tam Tam, he said, was getting old and it was too much for him to be pulling a buggy through busy Port-of-Spain. Some kind people were going to look after Tam Tam in the country. Father promised that he would take them to see Tam Tam on some Sundays

and Mother promised that she would let them have some lettuce or carrots to give to Tam Tam when they visited him.

Jean Marie and Susan were sad to see Tam Tam go but glad that he would be in the country where he could rest and not be bothered with traffic and motor horns and bells. Stephen too thought that it was best for Tam Tam.

They understood that, like people, places change. They were growing up.