



My Friend Ardith

by Jean Gaut

My farmer parents took their cream and eggs to sell to the creamery and produce house in Nowata, OK, our home town just three miles from our farm. The owners were a man and wife team named Mr. & Mrs. Shacklett. They were the parents of my friend Ardith.

I was born in April and Ardith was born the next June, so we were very close in age. I can remember going with my parents to the creamery and waiting for the cream to be tested. Ardith and I must have played together when we were babies and as we grew and began to think for ourselves we called each other

Keller Baby and Shacklett Baby. Eventually we progressed to Keller Girl and Shacklett Girl. I remember asking her mother, "Where is that Shacklett Girl?" Finally, it became Delores (my first name) and Ardith.

Saturdays were a special day because my family always went to town on Saturday to sell our produce and buy the few things we needed. Of course, my special excitement was getting to play with Ardith and her great toys.

When the paper doll craze hit, Ardith always had the latest movie star paper dolls. We punched the dolls out of the cardboard book covers, but the clothes had to be cut out. We labored long and carefully cutting out those beautiful clothes and played for hours pretending we were movie stars.

When Ardith had her eighth birthday she received a pair of skates. She taught me how to skate and then each of us put

on a skate, held on to each other and pushed with the other foot. We went zipping along together having a wonderful time. She was never selfish with her toys. On her 12th birthday she received a new bicycle. Once she had taught me to ride, it was my job to do the pumping when we rode double, which we did a lot. I guess that was only fair since it was her bike and I always weighed more than she did. Somewhere during this time we developed an ice cream appetite. We would beg our parents for a quarter and then would run four blocks uphill to the Candy Kitchen and buy a butterscotch sundae. That was wonderful on a hot summer day.

During our 12th summer I stayed all night with Ardith. We were looking for something to do the next day and Ardith suggested that we go to the

Vacation Bible School that the First Baptist Church was having. So we went. That was the day the Pastor was giving a salvation message to the juniors.

The Lord really convicted my heart; I felt like such a black sinner. So I went to the altar and gave my heart to Jesus. I had new eyes and everything looked different and I was a new creature. Ardith didn't go to the altar, but that day began a whole different direction

for my life.

I had started first grade in a country school at age five years, so that put me in high school a year ahead of Ardith. We had both gotten other friends in school, but we still stayed overnight occasionally with each other. Once we had a Sunday outing with our families to take a trip 45 miles away to a park and zoo. Ardith had invited a boy to go with her so we were to ride in his Model A Ford. He brought along a friend, so that meant the friend and I would have to ride 45 miles in the rumble seat. The trip there went well. We had our picnic lunch and went to the zoo. Our parents started on home and I was reminded that I would be expected back in Nowata by 5:00 p.m. to help with the farm chores that night. We kids started home and the Ford started missing. The boys said that the motor was "out of time." We had to stop twice and hand-push the car a few inches forward or a few inches backward while the driver tried to set the timing correctly. We were nearly an hour late getting back to Nowata, much to my parent's displeasure.

Ardith married a man employed by Phillips International and lived in several foreign countries. She had six children because she loved babies. Anytime she was back home in the states we tried to get together.

Ardith died at 71 years of age from emphysema brought on by heavy smoking. She was a wonderful childhood friend and I still think of her often and smile.



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