

4. TRAIN RIDE

By Sandy Stuart Shaller

My Uncle Abraham McCandless was the most important person in my life. He was as tall as a redwood tree, with frizzy white hair like Albert Einstein and a big white mustache like Mark Twain. I came to him thirty-four years ago when I was, “No bigger than a palm cake...” according to him, and that was how he carried me out of the hospital, *in his palm*, and wrapped up in a red and green plaid blanket that his dead wife Ellie-Beatrice had made.

He put me in a basket on the floor of his old Ford pickup truck and drove with me from New York City to Lower Waterford, Vermont, three hundred and twenty-nine miles north of the city. It took Uncle Abraham five hours and twenty-seven minutes to get there, and he said I was good as gold the whole time.

“I just kept looking down at the wild mop of red curly hair that you popped out with and thinking the Maker has given me a little miracle.”

I never knew my parents. They died two days after I was born. Mother had a sudden hemorrhage, and my father had a car accident racing to the hospital when he found out. So Uncle Abraham was my mom and dad and most everyone else. Unfortunately, we had a very dying family, so I had no grandparents and only one uncle who lived in Alaska.

I never cared, though; Uncle Abraham was all I needed. During the day, I helped him in his antique shop, *The Treasure Chest*, and outside in the big plot of land in front of the store. We were trying to create a Shakespearean garden. We had a willow tree in one corner and a sundial in the center. Around the sundial we planted violets, primroses and daffodils, eglantine, honeysuckle, gillyflowers, and plenty of pansies. Uncle Abraham had read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to me, acting out all the parts, and I was convinced that if we grew a purple pansy I could use it to make Petey Hannotchy fall in love with Betsy Mooney, who was always writing him notes.