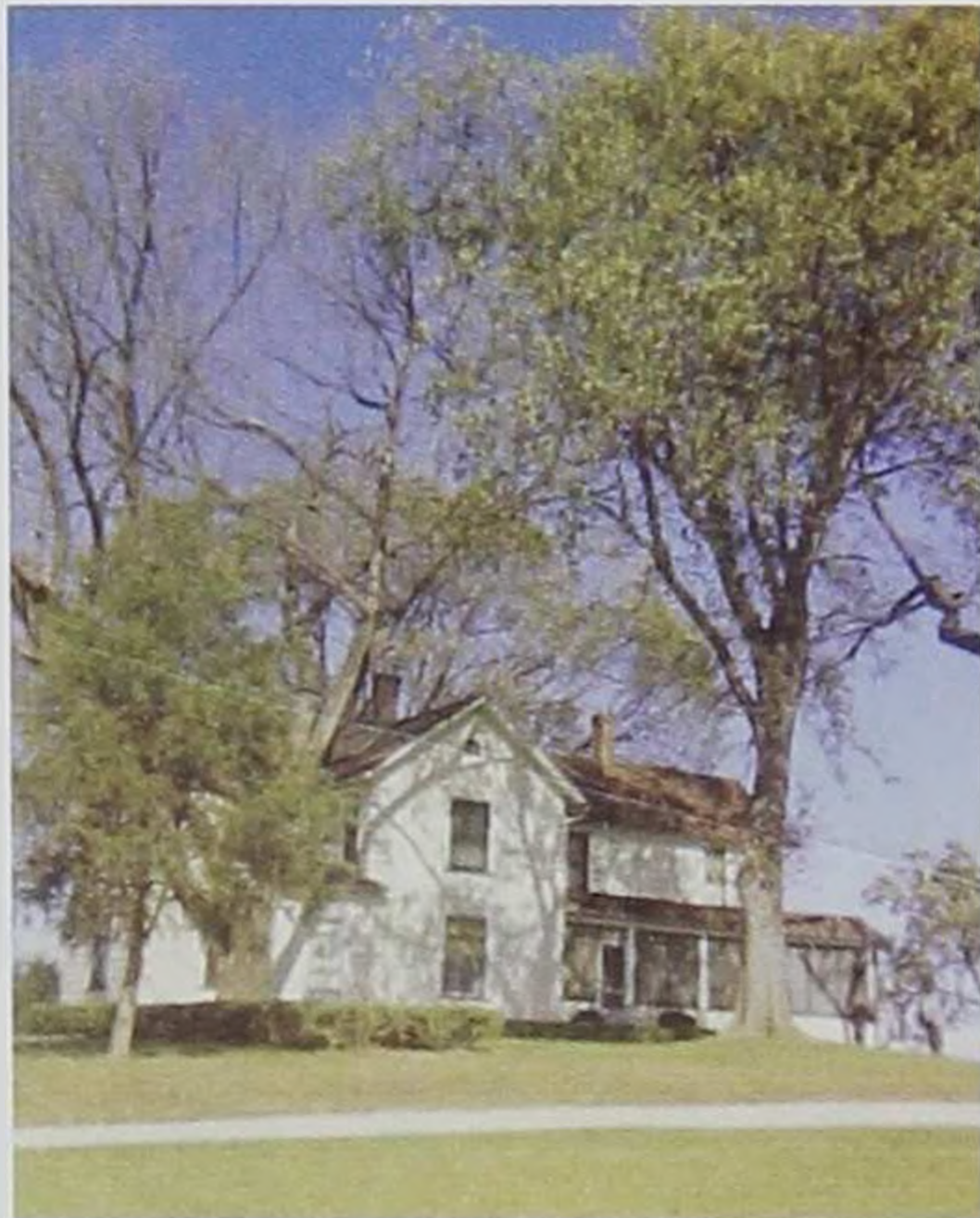




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The author, as a child, poses by a favorite tree on her grandparents' Iowa farm. Another favorite spot was the screened-in porch on the farmhouse.

Summer

by Sherrill Lynn Hofer Kerbaugh

I could hear distant rumblings as I played on the tall swing set behind my grandparents' farmhouse near Low Moor, Iowa. The air freshened, and a playful, little breeze became more determined as it gained a bit of strength. Storm clouds were forming against an enormous blue-gray canvas. My Grandma Johnson called to me from the kitchen door, which opened onto the big, screened-in porch. "Sherrill, a storm's coming! Come help me get the laundry off the clothesline!"

I ran to help her, and we laughed as we tried to grab the clothes flapping wildly in the wind. As we reached up to undo the wooden clothespins, the bed sheets billowed around us and covered our heads. While hurrying to get everything folded and into the clothes basket, I buried my face in each piece and smelled the sunshine.

Mid-afternoon was the time of day when Grandma and I took

lunch out to the field. Neighboring farmers and hired hands who were helping Grandpa would be waiting for us under the only tree in the field. This afternoon, however, Grandma said they would be coming back to the house for lunch. Sitting under a big tree wasn't a good idea during a thunderstorm.

I would have to hurry if I wanted to watch Nature's matinee. I helped Grandma put out sandwiches and cookies on the kitchen table and cups near the big enamelware coffee pot that was perking away on the stove. (I had once asked how the men could drink hot coffee on hot summer days; I was told that Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians just did that.)

The men had washed up outside and now found places at the table, chatting about the day's work and whose farm they would be working at next. I filled my plate, got my own cup of Swede-

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Dane-Norwegian “summer” coffee (mostly milk and sugar with a teaspoon of coffee), and hurried to my favorite spot on the porch.

Grandma’s old couch had a freshly laundered cover with lots of pillows. The air had cooled off several degrees, so I grabbed one of the throws from the back and tucked it all around me, carefully balancing my plate and cup. The show was about to begin.

A line of cattle was heading for the barn to hunker down. The birds had stopped chirping. Even the usually noisy hens were quiet. The towering clouds were ominous but truly beautiful as they formed and reformed, moving across the farms and fields in the distance. Everything was still.

A bright flash of lightning and its equally impressive clap of thunder made me jump! The first raindrops were subtle, pinging ever so softly on the tin roof. As the storm came closer, the drops got bigger and bigger and in-

creased in intensity. I loved the thunder and lightning even though I closed my eyes and held my ears. As the wind changed direction, the rain blew in through the porch screen, and I squealed with delight and pulled the throw up around my face. It would have been more sensible to just get up and go inside the warm, dry kitchen, but it wouldn’t have been as much fun.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the storm passed our farm and moved on. The thunder rumbled in the distance and the lightning wasn’t as bright. Patches of blue were appearing in the sky. As the rain tapered off, its song on the tin roof changed beat, back to just pings here and there.

The trees were still dripping, so I stayed on the porch. Besides, the old couch was still the best seat for what was coming—a gorgeous rainbow, a gift from the sun for those who had patiently waited and watched the whole

show. The air was warming up and smelled so good, so fresh, so clean. Grandpa’s cattle stepped out from the red barn and headed back to graze, oblivious to the mud puddles. Even the hens were clucking again, and it sounded as though every bird on the surrounding fifty farms was chirping at the same time.

Fifty-some years have gone by, and I often close my eyes and play this scenario again and again in my mind — a childhood memory that I have finally put down on paper so that others might sit with me on the old couch and listen to the raindrops . . . ping . . . ping . . . ping.

The author lives in Aurora, Colorado. As a child in the late 1940s and early '50s, she often visited the farm of her grandparents, Carl E. and Esther H. Johnson, in Clinton County.