

A Portion of the chapter "ENDA"
from "A Baby's Life in the Rocky Mountains"
by Esther Burnell Mills.

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Spring is a sly trickster up our way, slipping in an April sky, a burst of pussy willows or a Redwing's call, when the calendar registers only February or early March. Long before the lengthening days of sunshine have conquered winter's deepest snowdrifts, aspen buds have swollen to the point of bursting. All our mountain valley seems suddenly filled with a throbbing undercurrent of awakening life.

We are a bit suspicious at first, but if the weather continues finessing we go forth for other and more tangible signs. If that early comer, the bright anemone, greets us, then we exclaim, "Well, spring has put it over on us again!" There is suspense, expectation, spring does not come boldly, as yet. Snow flurries blow off the high Range where winter still sits heavily. A cold March wind does vigorous housecleaning among last autumn's leaves. Then, unannounced, a flock of bluebirds dart by, and we go forth to look upon the face of the earth again. More anemones, more bluebirds, and a stronger pulsing of life in every growing thing gives us confidence.

One year these awakening signs of life had a deeper meaning. The flickers hammered more nosily at their nest building and the earth seemed more redolent than ever before with the fragrance of ardent greenness.

For into these scenes came baby Enda-the very spirit of spring itself! All energy, eagerness she was, springing into life like an early flower. A late April snowstorm greeted her but she came as undaunted as a bright anemone, and as well equipped as any native product for life in the mountains.

Had Enda viewed her world beyond the walls of that little log cabin, she would have seen bold, rugged mountain peaks towering east and west, with a broad valley swung between like the "cradle in the treetops." There were winds to rock this cradle, but

they were kindly to this baby, the first white child to claim a birthplace in Tahosa Valley, at an elevation of nine thousand feet above sea level.

As I lay awake that night, the booming of the Wilson Snipe, just arrived to nest in our marsh, sounded to me the most elemental of all nature's voices. It seemed to be an echo from the far distant past, of primeval nature. I had been wondering about Enda's endowment from the past, what dominant influences were asleep in her little being and what response would be stirred in her by this environment of nature. Would she feel the beauty and the mystery of the mountains? That mystery had been so influential in determining the lives of her parents, both of whom had started life on the plains of Kansas.

It was a matter of comment from her father that the chapter of a forthcoming book, "Children of My Trail School," happened to be the one left waiting in the typewriter for two weeks, while he gave his entire attention to the new recruit. Into this chapter he had put the summing up of his life work in nature guiding, illustrated with the responses of the child's mind to the elemental influences of the outdoors.

Enda's calm, sunny nature seemed to me a reflection of her father's. If the forming of a child's character is influenced during the first few days, certainly her father had all the credit. His big arm chair, piled high with pillows, was her first bed. He was her first nurse, and his study was her temporary nursery. I am sure for the first thirty-six hours he didn't sleep a wink. Perhaps he was wondering if that bed was big enough to hold her. She was a lively five and a quarter pounds.

He accepted this new factor in his life so completely that even when a caller came one day that there was no thought of introduction. Enda decided to make herself known, during a lull in the conversation, and her father answered the caller's astonished expression with "Oh, didn't you know we had a new nature guide?"

With a kodak "always loaded" it was rather strange that it did not occur to us to take Enda's picture for several weeks. Most of our efforts the first few months were rejected as not doing her justice. We made up for it later, Enda learning the meaning of

"kodak," long before she was two years old.

Even if she was not a subject for the kodak, her father's manifestations of interest gave assurance that she surpassed his expectations in all other respects. Of course he put her through the usual instinctive test of lifting her from her crib with his forefingers firmly grasped in her outstretched hands, every day showed new development. One of the most rapid, as well as alarming, signs of development, was in the use of her legs. During some unguarded moments of the bath hour, she took delight in getting her feet against my stomach and giving kicks that might have sent her flying off my lap. It was a matter of some amusement to her father when the scales were brought up from the office each week, and a record kept of her gain. It was a matter of satisfaction to me that she doubled her birth weight at four months.

Even after Enda's kiddie-koop arrived and Enos' supervision of her daily routine was relinquished, he continued to watch over her solicitously. For summer, with its tourist population was upon us. No stranger was allowed to pick her up, and many would-be friends were turned away without even a look if she was sleeping. Her father knew that all young animals have to be allowed to wiggle, stretch and sleep, oblivious of the outside world. He knew that demands from the inside world make themselves known, promptly and specifically, if there were no other undue disturbances. He had raised, and of course fed, a family of orphaned bluebirds when still a boy himself, and later had adopted a pair of grizzly cubs and given them a good home.

The play of young animals has always been one of his most interesting pursuits, and he enjoyed Enda's babyhood from the psychological viewpoint that through play we reach our highest development. When I expressed surprise at his general adeptness with infants, he confided to me that during his first winter in Colorado, one of his special duties had been to take care of the baby Sunday evenings while the ranch family went to church. He intimated that the experience had been quite insightful into the world of the young.

Of all the young animals her father had acquainted himself with, Enda reminded

him most of a grizzly cub. Her knowing grunts and quick responses to little attentions seemed to bespeak an intelligence which justified his complete study. He never came into the cabin (which was several dozen times a day that summer) that he did not go directly to an observation point, even if it was only a crack in the door. He liked to stalk upon her, to take her unaware. "I see you," he would have the unfair advantage of saying, when he discovered himself being watched.

Enda was his match. Even his rubber-heeled shoes on the porch were very early a signal for attention. Enda and her father understood each other perfectly. It seemed to be a theory shared in common that babies sometimes need to see objects from an upright position. He conversed with her about these objects as they walked around the room; the books in the shelves, the burning logs, the stones in the fireplace, the bark on the rustic table. He was constantly drawing her attention to the things around her, rather than to her own fingers, nose and toes. Enda responded in her own way-with rapt attention. Even this early there was a bond of companionship between them.

There was a strong personal resemblance between Enda and her father, which was often remarked upon. He was shyly amused at the comment of a sensible old lady, "She is a beautiful baby, and how she does resemble you!" Her profile certainly suggested his, so too did her blue eyes, which were alert and deep thinking, and even her hair was soon discovered as being a sandy brown.

With all the wonderful opportunities for Enda's mental and physical development so obvious, to us at least, it was often amusing to hear the general solicitations regarding her future. "What will you do when it is time to send her to school?" was almost the first, and certainly the most frequent question. It seemed to be a matter of deep concern that a child should have to face the possibility of being brought up without any real "advantages." To be sure the nearest school was nine miles away. For six, eight or even ten years, what does a formal school matter, with an abundance of other influences to stimulate wholesome activity? The school's advantages are balanced with the disadvantages after all, of teaching en masse and of the learning method used by each

child's mind. The importance of keeping up with a child's individual enthusiasms with personal attention, especially during the first six years when the mind makes its greatest development is enormous. Even if parents are not so situated as to supply the fullest possible background, personal involvement is beneficial. Their own education, no matter how "deficient" or how long suspended, is stimulated anew by the child's exuberance.

Enda was a continual stimulus. She knew our daily routine like a book, and was always a minute ahead of schedule. Even before she learned to talk there was an inquiring "Why?" in her eye that showed she was keeping tabs on the activities around her, and registered any variance in the usual scheme of things. She often welcomed the unusual with a relish, we soon realized it might call for a repeat performance.

This alertness and response to attention made her a ready target for admiring friends. Many were the callers who gained a brief admittance on the grounds of having come "hundreds of miles" to see her! For there is a superstition among mountain folks that babies born in high altitudes do not thrive. She had a smile for everyone and never missed an opportunity for making friends. Her bath hour was often a public reception, her airings an occasion for neighborhood gatherings. She performed for the delights of Otis Skinner, Edward A. Steiner, William Allen White, Edna Ferber and many others. But it was always her father's step for which she listened, and she systematically woke up for his "goodnight" to her, at whatever hour he got his Long's Peak Inn guests to bed.

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