

Memories of writer's childhood from pleasant life in Holy Cross

by Theresa Demientieff Devlin
for the Tundra Times

Holy Cross was one of my favorite childhood memories. One year we stayed all winter. It was different, walking to school and sharing the same classroom with two other grades.

Eileen and I were both small, so we had to sit together in the same desk. It was fun; we became good friends.

The only significant difference at the time was that she was in the mission and I was living in the village. We, being so close all of the time, spent time whispering and sharing secrets. We even shared our crush on a boy named Donald. We didn't even know enough to be jealous. He was so cute!

After class we went into our different worlds. Mine was so filled with family and all of the events that go with growing up.

One time we had a traditional potlatch. It was so exciting. Everyone in the village had partners. Mine was Frankie. He was a young man, and I was just a little girl. I remember I was supposed to fix a dish of some sort and be all dressed up when Frankie came to accompany me to the hall.

I was very serious about the whole thing. He came for me and off we went. Everyone in the village had a partner. After we ate, they turned down the lights and the men danced traditional dances.

It was the first time I remember seeing the dances. They were so powerful. I was spellbound by them. I didn't dare move. It was as if nobody moved.

One of the dances was a Crow dance, I think. Pius Savage and another man did the dance together. Pius danced with all his strength. His

Anyway, Frankie walked me home, and I will never forget that night.

Spring rolled around, and Mom sent away for Easter Dresses. She ordered three beautiful, frilly dresses — mint green, yellow and pale blue. I remember walking to church. We — Sugar, Tootie and I — took our short cut, under the bank. We were on our way, and to this day I don't know what came over me. I wanted to roll my own cigarette! I had some tissue, a match, and right there on the trees were the leaves, just like leaf tobacco!

I picked old, dried dead leaves, rolled them up in the tissue paper and lit the thing. Needless to say it went up in flames, the burning leaves fell onto my new dress, and it started to burn.

I don't know how we got it out, but I ran back to the house and changed to my everyday dress. I hid the burned dress away, and when Mom asked where my dress was I just said, "I didn't like that new dress."

That is my first memory of doing something I knew was wrong, yet I tried it. Now, looking back, I realize it was youth exploring, trying the forbidden fruits. I knew Mom and Dad didn't smoke, but I wanted to try it myself! I felt shame, yet I covered it all over with an innocent sounding lie.

Spring again, and we were back in to the routine of summer activity. One of those activities was fetching water from the well house. Sugar, Tootie and I loved to go back there and get the water. We didn't actually get to do the work; we watched with awe.

The well house was like a big shed. There were no windows. In the middle of the floor was a big hole. Over the hole were some strong planks. A

Well, Birdie got us over to the well, fetched the water and loaded the buckets into the truck. I, so proud of myself, nose in the air and all, climbed into the truck with no argument at all. I put my elbow on the edge of the window, as if I were someone big and pulled the door shut. Only I didn't close it all the way. We started to back

I could do to grab on with both hands. I was hanging out there over a huge puddle.

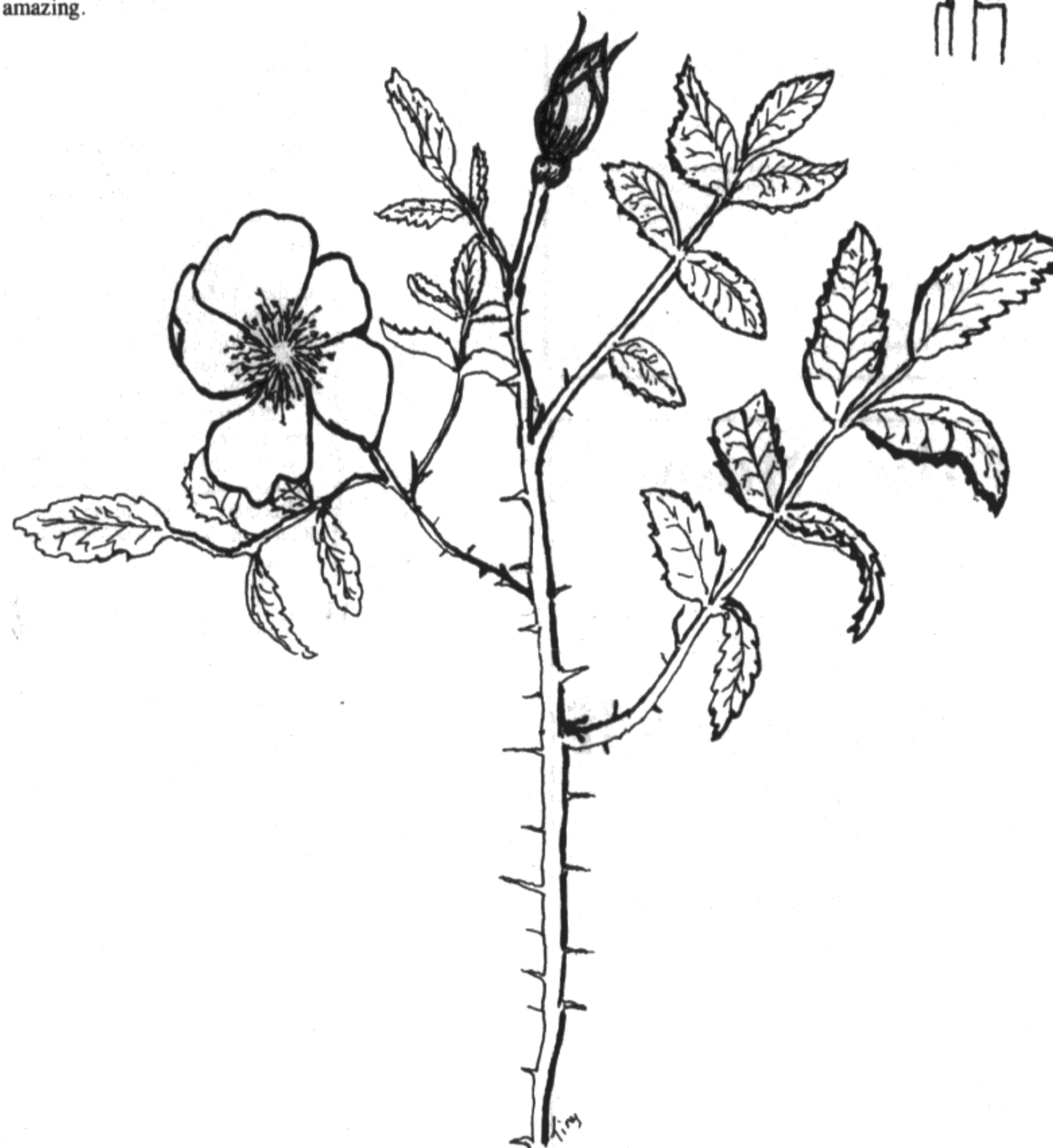
I didn't even have time to make a sound. We jolted forward, and the door just swung back! I never bothered sitting by the door for a long time. I just kinda sat real close to the driver.

That year Mom and Dad celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. It was something. Lumpy had to run to the mission and ask Sister Ida to make the cake. We got the hall for a dance, and everyone was busy. The whole village seemed to buzz.

The cake was so beautiful. It had three layers and on each layer there were candles that looked like kids — 10 — one for each one of us. It was so amazing.

square dances. It was so funny. Bing was standing on a bench and he was hollering out orders on what to do. We all were busy going round and round, dosey doeing and allamanning right and allamanning left, and Tootie went by!

For a moment, I thought, didn't I just see Tootie? I continued around the circle, and there she was again, mixed right in, going with the boys. I quickly glanced around, and there was her partner going with the girls. They were both going so fast that they didn't even notice.



on the left there's a parlor. The parlor was used for dances, for sitting and visiting and drinking tea. In past the parlor, there was a small sewing room. Grandma had her sewing machine in there.

Then to the right of the door there was a laundry room, complete with a wringer washer and deep sink. On the far side of the room there was a door, joining the laundry room with the kitchen.

The kitchen was huge. The outside wall was covered with cabinets built from the ceiling on down to counter-top level. It was all pale yellow.

Then there was the upstairs. I never went up there. That was just too

would both sit down and enjoy. She just talked and talked and talked.

I remember some of what she would talk about, things such as her being a lady in waiting, about Russia, about fine things! I wondered about her. She certainly was different. She could play the organ; she was certainly a lady, and so refined!

Maybe. Maybe she just ate too many fish hearts. I don't know, maybe it was all true.

Uncle Petruska was the closest thing to Santa that my imagination could muster up. He was sort of round. His eyes smiled, and he loved kids. My best memory of him was when he came and helped Dad work on his

My favorite person to visit was Great Aunt Tatiana. She never married. She lived by herself in a little house up the hill on the edge of the mission gardens.

private for me to venture into. It was as if I could not even think of going up there. I wondered about it, going up, but, no, I shouldn't even think of it!

My favorite person to visit was Great Aunt Tatiana. She never married. She lived by herself in a little house up the hill on the edge of the mission gardens.

Her little house was always warm, and she was always there. I used to bring fish hearts up to her house. Mom always saved them for me. I would bring them up and knock on the door. She would let me in, and I would always give the fish hearts to cook.

I would say, I brought you some fish hearts. She would cook them and we

fishnet. Uncle would work slowly, and he always had time for questions, no matter how many and no matter what kind.

Thinking back to my growing up years, I would later realize that Mom set her boundaries of things acceptable and things of which she did not approve.

It was as though I would remain protected within the boundaries, yet as I grew I would explore outside of her limits. I would always tumble back within the safe confines of her protection, with my feelings a little bruised, humbled and sometimes wondering how does she know all this.

It was her love that provided the protection and security.

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neck moved like a bird's. He looked from side to side, with short, precise movements. He strutted about and teased the other bird.

The tension level in the hall was very high. Their dance carried a very strong sense of teasing, uneasiness and fear. They danced with all of their energy.

Then the women came and danced a gentle dance and everyone kind of relaxed. I don't recall who the dancers were but I was sure glad they danced. When it was all over I felt different, as if something inside of me had changed.

rope was strung up to the ceiling over a pulley, and the other end was tied to the wall onto a piece of wood.

So in order to get to the spring at the bottom of the hole whoever was getting water dropped the bucket and pulled it with the rope.

One time we went with Birdie. He took the truck, and we fussed enough to get to go along. We all climbed in, and as usual we were fighting over who got to sit next to the window.

I was older, so I was starting to think ahead just a little. I claimed the window for the return trip and let Sugar and Toot fight.

up, and I was sitting there so important!

The spring rains had just cleared up so there were big puddles every now and then. We backed up real carefully. The door slowly swung open with me on it. I was so surprised it was all

The whole village stopped by for cake, and everyone brought gifts for Mom and Dad.

In order for the adults to visit without kids all over, somebody planned a dance for the kids. We went up to the hall and Bing called some

Bing was hanging on to a beam he was laughing so hard. Then, we were all squared back in to our places, and we danced all afternoon.

Then the adults joined the dance and the evening started with polkas and the shadashes. I was completely confident by this time. I was right in there with the best of them. I slipped once and sat on the floor, but this was serious business by now and I didn't bat an eyelash. Up I jumped before anyone could do anything and just kept on dancing.

I didn't have any trouble sleeping that night. It sure was a glorious day.

Grandma lived in a house that Grandpa and his brothers built. It was behind our house. I sure liked it. I would go over to visit. I didn't really know them. I just liked to go over and look at that house. It still stands today!

I would walk into the front door and

