

Experience at being a Serving Girl

Collector: Marie Marshall

Contributor: Agnes Pike

Marie Marshall:

Okay. It's January 29th, I'm here at Agnes Pike's she's going to tell me a story about the time she was out as a servant girl. Go ahead Agnes.

Agnes Pike:

Well Marie, I grew up in a family of twelve children and, you know, it was five boys and six girls, grew up in L'Anse Diable. Dad was a fisherman and ... and mom worked at the fish, and in the stage just as much as dad did. Dad brought it in and we'd put it away and ... and... I'd like to elaborate a little bit of how, you know, how life started off for us.

As soon as, we were old enough to be able to handle the fish or wash a dish or make a batch of bread, we was taught how to do that, or take a set of knitting needles in your hand, you know. That was the way of life, it was a part of our survival, I guess, and as a young girl, very young, I mean you were called out of bed early in the mornings when the men come in with a trap load of fish and ah... get up and go down to the stage in.....and... mom was a ... her main job in the fishery was to salt her fish. She was a salter, but ah.... ah.... grandmother was a splitter, left handed splitter... ah...and ah... she taught me to split at a very young age. My first job was how to head the fish, I stood on a I'm not very tall now, but at that time she stood me on a one of those three quarter tubs about twelve or fifteen inches high and stood up to the table and taught you how to head a fish.

And, you know and ah... ah... you know and it was nothing but work, that was probably eight or ten years old then and then you went from that to helping to dry the fish and bring it in and one thing another. And then, when the fall of the year came, in the month of September, and you went to school..... ah.... you were up early in the mornings, help to spread the fish, 'til twenty minutes before school, you go up and wash your hands and perhaps get a slice of molasses bread and off to school.

In the evenings, right out of school, get a lunch and right down at the fish again, 'til five o'clock or six o'clock whenever, out of ... was all picked up or whether you were working at the

Marie Marshall:

Fish.

Agnes Pike:

Dry fish.

So ah.... one...one.... one of the things that ... that and then, as years went on, I mean we weren't very old, but I was the second oldest girl, I had a sister older than myself in the family and I wasn't a person that done much around the house in terms of housekeeping. Wasn't much of a housekeeper, because there was always grandmother, and my mother, and my older sister. And my older sister, Beatrice, who was like she... she.... she was the real homemaker, like she use to cook and knit and sew and. She did all that stuff, I was more the outdoor person. I like to have me... have a couple of dogs that I could harness in, and go in the woods behind my brothers, and one thing another, like that and.... but.....and I had a pony. I had an....my older brother bought me a pony when I was twelve years, and I use to use her and I use to saddle her up and ah..... but you know, that that was the kind of life I enjoyed and

At age fourteen, when I turned fourteen years old, that year, the parish priest at that time decided to close out the school in L'Anse Diable. And and 'fer us that was a real setback. There was a.... because all my brothers who was older than me was married and Mr. Marshall had a big family, and his.... a lot of his family was married and had children then. There was quite a few kids there then, but it was a one room school, they wanted to close it out, so they could get a bigger school in West St. Modeste, but what he did was he put... it was like the old saying, he put the cart before the horse, and he wanted the schools closed out before he had a big school and had a transportation iss... a transportation problem, solved.

Instead of that, when he closed her out in 19 and 58 in L'Anse Diable, we were out of school that year. And I was a full year out of school. And that fall, I was out one day, and it was in around the last part of October... and I don't know.... I don't know what I was doing. I was.... I certainly wasn't in the house, I was outside doing something, whatever the boys was at, I was out doing it. Grandmother always called me a tom boy. But anyway, and this young fellow walked up from Capstan Island with a note from his mother.

Aunt Stella Fowler was going to the hospital to have a baby and ah... she wanted to know if my older sister, Beatrice, go down serving girl. And mom asked Beatrice, and them... those days it wasn't a matter of going out serving girl, it was ah... ah... helping your neighbor and ah..... Aunt Stella was a good friend of the families, and mom felt bad because she was going off up to the hospital for her baby, and she already had, I think that was her tenth or eleventh child and ... so Beatty said no, she didn't want to go. So somehow or another, I dropped in to the house and I saw her standing up with a note in her hand and I said "what're ya talking about, what's that". She said "that's Aunt Stella maid," she said "wanting to know would Beatty go down and ah.. go serving girl with her for a couple of weeks while she was gone to the hospital, and" she said, "Beat don't want to go". "Well", I said, "Tell her" I said, "I'll go if I'm any good to her". And my grandmother said, she looked up "yes, she'll have something when she gets you". So they didn't ... their expectations of me wasn't very high and I wasn't, you know, much of a

serving girl, wasn't much of a housekeeper and all that kind of stuff. So they figured I was a disaster.

So anyway, and bun by, I went on out through the door, that's all I thought about it, and out comes my mother and sings out and says "You mean that? Would you go down with her if she wants you, if you're any help to her". I said "Oh yeah" and that's all I bothered about it.

So she wrote a note down to her, and little Joe took the note, Joe Fowler, and took the note went back to Capstan... walked back to Capstan Island, no roads, to his mom and he's mom come up and so two evenings later, here he comes. Come in the house he said, "pack your bags" he said. "I come up to get ya." So anyway, it wasn't much of a bag to pack, never had a whole lot clothes, a couple of shiftin's. And I put it in a bag and Joe took it, and me and him walked to Capstan Island, down to his mothers, that was a Friday evening, I'll never forget it.

I got up a Saturday morning, didn't know what to expect... but in the note I had some kind of a commitment, this was the trigger, I think, that got me to go there, give me the nerve or a little boost, that Uncle Dave Fowler's mother was gonna come up and help me. So I said now, well, she'll be there and I'm helping along, anyway way to go. Gets up a Saturday morning, and out of the bed and downstairs and big house, I think it was ah.... five bedrooms upstairs, and two bedrooms downstairs.... seven beds in that house. And the first thing you had to do Saturday morning, she gets out the pan, now she said we're gonna make pies, you got to make twelve pies.

God, I didn't know, I started to shiver a little bit, but anyway she got me hands in the dough and I made the pies, and rolled out twelve pies, and we made two layer cakes, what we called some people call them now, pie pans ... put one on top of each other, a white one and a chocolate one. Made two cakes 'fer Sunday and twelve pies, good enough. Sunday come, had Sunday dinner cooked, and but she was around then and

Gets up a Monday morning, striped all the seven beds, everything downstairs, she had a gasoline washer at the time and ah... all the bed clothes, every Monday morning, every bed stripped. Okay, started in washing, about quarter to ten, her husband, Uncle Dave, come in and he said "Stella maid, they're in to the branch".... there was no branch road....there was a road but was no branch road out to Capstan Island, "they're in there for you to go to Long Point". The car was in there. So she got ready, she said "now maid, do what you can". No sign of Aunt Liz by this time, Dave's mother, I was on me own.

So anyway, I washed all day, washed the clothes and put it out and come supper time cooked supper, in the evening I had ah...Monday evenings..... she had it all allotted out for me, that was one good thing with her, I knew every day what I had to get, from Sunday to Saturday, she kind of set up a schedule for me and Sunday was pot day, a big hot dinner, Monday's was leftovers for lunch.... was leftover from Sunday and then Monday nights was fish and potatoes and fat. So that was good. I cooked all the fish and potatoes and fat. Sat around the tables was ah.... four men there then. Joe was two years

older than me, he was sixteen, there was Tom, Uncle Dave and Stella's father Uncle Tom. 'Twas four men and it was ah....there was ah.....five kids.

Marie Marshall:

Five girls?

Agnes Pike:

Nope. There was Elsie, Sophie, Elizabeth; three girls and two boys. There was five. Five kids.... what we called kids and four men. So there was nine of them and myself, was ten of us with Aunt Stella gone. So anyway, we ah..... ah... that was alright, supper went fine. So the next day, Tuesday, was pot day again. And one thing with Aunt Stella's house, it was always lots of, what we called "fresh" in those day, which was wild game... partridges or ducksTom was the big hunter, he was the gunmen. He was always hunting. So anyway, all the men was in the woods and so good enough.

On Tuesday afternoon, I dressed the two ducks and put 'em in the oven, and put on the salt beef, and got ready to cook the supper. So cooked a big supper, time come didn't know how to make a pudding. I wouldn't go ask no one, I had to much pride, I was fourteen years old and I knowed everything else but I didn't know how to cook a pudding. No phones, I couldn't phone up home to my mother, but I and I was too stubborn then at that time, I was there five days and Aunt Liz still never showed up, I wouldn't go down and ask her.

So what I did was, I cooked supper, all hands in the evening when they come.... by this time now, dark, lamp was lighted and you was gettin' supper and laid out and took up the big supper and got around the table, ten of us. And when we got around the table, Uncle Dave always, at the head of the table, when all the children got in and everybody.... Uncle Dave always said grace. And up pipes Mr. Duck.... Walt, looked around the table, "huh" he said "some supper no pudding."

Well I felt like going down through the floor, in thethe old man, his father, he had it ... he never had it out before he clicked him right in the bud of the ear. "You young 'ard tickle", he said.... that was his word, "you young 'ard tickle" he said. "You you thank God", he said, "for what you got" and he looked right at me "Don't mind him, Agnes maid", he said.

Now he taught it offended me, and it did to some degree, but I didn't give in, but that was fine. Anyway, had the meal, Wednesdays was stew and come Thursday was pot day again. "Well" I said on Wednesday night, "now I'm walking to L'Anse Diable". "I'm walking to L'Anse au Diable, going up home the night".

So anyhow, we left a couple of us, and I walked up home, and I got a recipe, mom wrote it down for me, how to make a pudding and Thursday, I made the pudding and I tell you, I went down for two weeks, I was there six. There was nights when I went up over the stairs, I was too tired to get... fall in to bed. The two legs was gone, but when she come back, I had everything under control and I was started house cleaning. She was up to

Long Point a long time, she never got back until sometime in December and ah.... she said when she come back and seen how good everything was done, and I had started Christmas house cleaning. Started stripping everything then and do house cleaning, one room at a time for Christmas. She said "I'm gonna tell your Grandmother," she said, "when I see when I gets well enough to get up there, and sees her," she said. "that she better not say nothing else about you".

So that's me story about going out in service. (laughs)

Marie Marshall:

(laughs) Okay, Agnes, thank you very much. That's a lovely story.