

Dirty and Stuck!

Lou had just finished her morning housework and had changed into a fresh “house-dress” when she decided to take a few minutes to complete one more task; sweeping the front porch.

That turned out to be an alarming, unlucky decision.

As she stepped outside her front door, it slammed shut behind her with a loud thud, and she found herself accidentally locked out of the house. It was a snowy February day in 1924, in Hammond, Indiana. She was now very cold, all alone, and pregnant. Her husband was away on a business trip and her four children were all in school—not due home for several hours. The family home sat on a large corner lot, with no close neighbors to call for help. She knew there would be only one unlocked window through which she might possibly crawl to get back inside: the coalbin window! The local deliveryman had just delivered the month’s load of coal. Backing his truck alongside the access window, he had shoveled the heavy lumps into the long metal chute, where they tumbled directly into the coalbin in the basement near the furnace.

Lou was my grandmother. My mom (who was the new baby born later that summer) recently told me, “My mother, never one to be afraid, knew she had to rescue herself! She decided to slip through the small opening, slide down the chute, and get safely into the house.”

However, when she landed with a thump on the hard basement floor and straight into a fluffy pile of coal dust, she discovered the door into the house was not only locked, it was barricaded with a heavy wooden board. After a minute’s thought, she found a long piece of thick plank in the kindling pile and began banging away at the door. Exhausted but determined, she finally managed to bend and break the metal latch. She freed herself from the sooty, dirty coalbin, where she could have been stuck for hours. After a warm bath, another set of clean clothes, and making sure that supper was cooking on the stove, Lou saved her funny tale to tell the family at dinner that evening.

This was only one of the many fun stories about my grandmother, Lou Taylor Ault, who was born on the Iowa prairie in 1886. She was raised by a single mother in eastern Nebraska, and her father deserted them for the lure of gold and riches in Colorado. She graduated highschool, taught in a country school, married her sweetheart, became a mother of five, and in later years was a published writer and poet. Always ready with a tale to tell about our pioneer family, my Grandma Lou was truly an encyclopedia of family history. She encouraged me (as a young teenager) to pursue the fun of genealogy research long before it became a popular hobby.

And, the skills of quick, clear thinking and “rescuing oneself” are certainly part of her legacy passed along to my mother and to all the women in our family.

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