

## Wisconsin to Louisiana

When my grandmother was nine, she went on the long ride to Louisiana from Madison. Though it was a trip, it was still a life changing experience.

My grandmother didn't have to leave anything or anyone behind but had just lost something. Her grandmother and my great-great grandmother, Susan Strong, had just died in an automobile accident. Her grandfather was extremely sad and had recently had a heart attack.

With her twin Susanne, seven year old brother Michael, five year old sister Mary Beth, four year old sister Jennifer, two year old sister Kathleen, her baby brother John, and her mother my grandmother boarded the train in Madison. Their final destination was Louisiana where their aunt lived.

They had a small room where their seats folded out into bed. Ruth, my great-grandmother divided the kids into the "bigs" and the "littles". The "bigs" were my grandmother, Susanne, and Michael. Mary Beth, Jennifer, Kathleen, and John were the "littles". My grandmother, Susanne, and Michael didn't always behave. Once they stood on the end of the last car until a man told them to go back to their mother who was taking a nap. To them this train was a jungle to explore in. With stops at every station and long layovers in Chicago and St. Louis, this journey was tedious at times.

Traveling was a great luxury. With trains and planes being used for soldiers during World War II, travel was rare.

They were on that train for a long time. When they got off for the final time in Louisiana, they saw their aunt. For the first time they ate fried chicken and chocolate chip cookies. Here in Wisconsin, they never fried food. All the chocolate went to the soldiers. The house was very quiet, as if there weren't seven children.

It was very hot that summer. For lunch they could cook, but for dinner, they ate something cold as it was too hot to cook. Frying an egg on the sidewalk actually worked.

The journey home was much like the way there. Summer was near its end.

That summer was like no other. To my grandmother it was a summer of discoveries.