TURN ON THE SUN

A tender portrait of children growing up outside the classroom, and a mother's determination to keep their world intact against all odds.

JOY BAKER

By the same author

CHILDREN IN CHANCERY

under the name Frances Wilding

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

Turn on the Sun

JOY BAKER

This edition published 2025
by Living Book Press

ISBN: 978-1-76153-335-8 (hardcover)
978-1-76153-336-5 (softcover)

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

TO

All My Children
And the days when we were young

I dedicate this, my final book, to my dear son,
Hugh Robert Christopher, whom we sadly
lost on the 29th of November, 1972.

He was taken from us in an accident on the road, on his way home. We never did learn exactly what happened.

We will never forget him. He remains a part of our lives—always loved, longed for, and never forgotten.

Contents

1.	Stone Walls and Iron Bars	1
2.	The Home on the Hill	8
3.	Morning of the Year	13
4.	Pink Shoes and Black Boots	25
5.	Gone Astray	33
6.	Black Angus	38
7.	Danger—Men at Work	53
8.	Turkey in the Straw	71
9.	Honours Even	88
10.	Fowl Pest	97
11.	Ill Wind	108
12.	Brought to Book	124
13.	Show Time	139
14.	Coming to Blows	147
15.	Put Out the Light	157
16.	Valley of the Shadow	168
17.	Under Fire	181
18.	This Old House	192
19.	Mud and Stars	209
20.	Home from the Hill	228

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the 1950s and '60s, I acquired a certain notoriety as Joy Baker—the mother who refused to send her seven children to school. Not only that, but I did not believe in any kind of formal education—no sitting at desks, no set lessons, no timetables, no organized games. I believed that children should receive all their real education at home, in the course of their everyday lives.

As our circumstances were rather unusual, our everyday lives were perhaps more educational than most. This is the story of the everyday lives of the children who never went to school.

Frances Wilding (Joy Baker).

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR'S CHILDREN

These three books—*Children in Chancery*, *House on the Hill*, and *Turn on the Sun*—were written by our mother, Mrs. Joy Baker. Children in Chancery tells of her legal battle with the UK government for the right to educate her children at home. House on the Hill, written under the pen name Frances Wilding, shares the story of our family life during those years. This volume, Turn on the Sun, published here for the first time, continues the account of our unconventional upbringing and education.

Together, they preserve the story of our unusual childhood as "the children who never went to school."

We hope you enjoy reading them as much as our mother enjoyed writing them.

The Children

1

Stone Walls and Iron Bars

It had begun as an almost ordinary summer day, warm and inviting. The sun still shone palely out of a misty blue sky, but the waiting police car stood in the deep shadow cast by the court building. I stepped into the car, shivering and in tears—my arm firmly gripped by an unreasonably officious policewoman.

Twenty minutes before, I had been standing in the dock at the local Quarter Sessions, prepared to face a good deal of criticism by the magistrates, but assured by both my solicitor and counsel that it was unlikely to be anything much worse. Then, I was being hustled out of the court by the policewoman—sentenced to three months in prison.

My most vivid impression was of the policewoman snatching my handbag—and my snatching it back. I knew I couldn't keep it with me, but my fifteen-year-old son Steven was in court, and surely it could be handed to him? I couldn't see that becoming a prisoner could deprive one of all personal rights quite so suddenly as that—particularly as this particular deprivation could only be inflicted on a woman. It became to me an issue out of all proportion—a symbol of all that had been done to me. I was sobbing convulsively, holding onto my handbag and fiercely defending it against the efforts of the policewoman to take it away from me, when my solicitor and counsel arrived and wanted to know what was going on. I was crying too hard to explain, but Mr. Standish, who had known me since he was a junior in a large firm of solicitors (when I opposed him in a minor lawsuit, conducted my own case, and won), grasped the essential point with great speed, took

possession of the handbag, calmed down the snorting policewoman, and assured me the bag would be given to Steven to take home.

There remained the question of what we could do, in a position for which none of us was prepared. I did not seem able to stop crying, and my counsel obviously thought I was hysterical. We could discuss it later, he suggested. But later would be too late. I was quite clear in my mind what I wanted urgently to ask. "The children—can you stop the authorities taking them away?"

They would be waiting at home, still expecting me to return—except sixteen-year-old Geoffrey, who was working on a farm in the next county, and Steven, who should have been at work too, but had come with me in case anything went wrong—but no one had anticipated anything as wrong as this. At the House on the Hill, our dilapidated little farmhouse in the middle of a cornfield, fourteen-year-old Victoria and thirteen-year-old Helen were looking after the little ones, known as the weenybedes—Christopher, aged six, Nicholas, five, and Carol, four—and our dog, cats, and rabbits. I didn't doubt that the authorities, who had never approved of us anyway because of my unorthodox views on the children's education, would descend on the house as soon as they heard of my sentence, get the R.S.P.C.A. to take away the animals, and take the children into care. And they would probably refuse to let me have them back when I came out on the grounds that I was not a fit person to have them, having been in prison. The more I thought about this, the more impossible it was to stop crying. With tears pouring down my face, I tried desperately to explain.

"I'm not hysterical, I just can't stop crying. I inherited an emotional temperament from my mother and a practical mind from my father, and I can't help it if they both function at the same time. What I want to say is, will you set in motion an appeal against sentence and apply for bail pending the hearing of the appeal? But, I think I'm right, if the appeal is unsuccessful, it adds an extra six weeks onto the sentence? So, if bail is refused, withdraw the appeal. It would probably indicate that it wouldn't be successful anyway, and I can't risk adding to the time I have to be away from home." My voice shook uncontrollably. "And will you please do something quickly to ensure that the children are left at home

undisturbed until I do get back? Victoria and Helen are perfectly capable of running the house and looking after the younger ones, and Steven will be there at night." My throat got choked, and tears overwhelmed me again. My counsel looked rather dazed, but Mr. Standish got the point.

"Yes, I agree—I'll start on an appeal straight away, and we'll do our best to get bail—if not, we'll drop the appeal. And I'll go out to the house myself, see the children are all right, and try to persuade the Children's Department to leave them there, at least until we know about bail."

Then the bossy policewoman grabbed my arm, and I was hustled out of the building, catching a glimpse of Steven's white face as we passed through the main hall, and followed a large police constable into the waiting car.

"What was all that about?" enquired the constable, getting into the driver's seat.

Before the policewoman could reply, I managed to say, "I got three months—for putting in a lavatory."

Admittedly, it did sound like a bizarre sort of crime, but there it was. Or rather, when the trouble started, there it wasn't. When we first went to the House on the Hill, we had an indoor chemical closet, which had to be emptied into holes dug in the ground. But we had only about a quarter of an acre of our own ground, we had laid out a lawn and flower beds, and after several years, there was very little ground left to dig holes in. Our landlord naturally objected to our using his fields. Then, after a particularly wet year, every hole we dug became useless for disposal purposes as it immediately filled up with water.

The cost of putting in proper sanitation would, I was told, amount to several hundred pounds, which was out of the question. Then I found that I could get a self-emptying closet installed, with its own patent soakaway, which should solve the problem; but I still hadn't got the £70 that would cost—it was often difficult to keep the children clothed and fed. I made enquiries throughout the social services, but I was unable to get a grant for even part of the cost. In the end, driven by the impossibility of dealing with

the situation in any other way, I got the closet and had it installed on credit; but I had been bankrupted many years before, when I was first left on my own to bring up my family, and I was still an undischarged bankrupt—so in putting in the lavatory, I was committing a criminal offence.

Our need had been so obvious that Mr. Standish felt the court would regard the offence leniently; but apparently, they took the view that people in precarious financial circumstances should not aspire to that sort of luxury. And so I was sitting in the back of a police car, on my way to Holloway.

My only clear memory of that drive was being overtaken by a heavy lorry; as it passed, the driver looked down curiously into the car, presumably wondering what dangerous criminal was being taken into custody. Whatever he expected to see, it obviously wasn't a young blonde woman in a pale blue dress, with tears running down her face, looking desperately out of the barred window. The lorry swerved sharply, and for a moment, I thought there was going to be a collision. I've often wondered what he said about it when he got home.

The rest of the journey—the arrival at the prison—was an unrelieved nightmare. My helplessness tore at me. What was happening to my home? Would Victoria be able to keep the doors locked if the authorities called—or would they break in? Would the cats be able to scatter into the hedges and keep under cover, or would they all be rounded up by the police and taken away? Would little Nooni, the collie puppy, be taken care of, or would she be handed over to the R.S.P.C.A. for destruction? When I came out of prison, would there be any part of my home and my family left to go back to? I went through the routine of reception at the prison, hardly aware of my surroundings, comforted only by a kindly cat, who purred around my legs as I waited for my enforced bath—heard the key turn in the door of my cell, woke next day to the dim light coming in through the barred window high above my head—all without any real consciousness of what was happening to me, and aware only of terror that everything I loved might be being destroyed, that I might never see my home as I knew it again.

The meaningless day dragged by. I had almost forgotten that one

could be reached by the outside world when I heard the woman in the cell next to mine calling my name. She had dyed hair, a raddled face—and a newspaper in her hand.

"Look, luv, isn't this your children? Aren't you lucky? Aren't them little 'uns sweet? Is that your eldest daughter? Cor, she's a luvly girl."

In a dream, I took the paper and saw the flamboyant headline: VICTORIA KEEPS FAMILY SAFE! And under it, a double-column picture of my children standing in the doorway at the House on the Hill: Helen, holding Carol by the hand; Victoria, with Christopher and Nicholas behind her, standing protectively in front of them all, her face lifted proudly, her copper hair piled on top of her head. Nooni was sitting at Helen's feet, and I could even see a few cats in the background. The story explained how Victoria, the eldest girl of seven children, had taken charge of the family and kept them behind locked doors, cooked the meals, sent her brother off to work, and, with Helen's help, looked after the three younger ones—and defied the authorities from an upstairs window, refusing to let anyone in—while her mother was in prison for three months for fraudulently acquiring a lavatory.

Suddenly, the pain in my heart burst, and hope flooded in. It was like giving birth to a baby after a long and painful labour—like giving birth to seven babies all at once, as well as a dog and the cats and the rabbits.

The next day, I was taken down to the visiting room to see a solicitor—not Mr. Standish, but a member of the London firm he had instructed on my behalf. For the first time, I was conscious of what I must look like in my shapeless grey prison dress, with my hair falling over my face—I had no means of putting it up properly, since when I came in, it had been held up with five combs, two tortoiseshell and three colorless, and they took the colorless ones away because they were regarded as "decoration" and not permitted. It was comforting to see an ordinary human being again. Everything that could be done was being done, he assured me; and he brought me the documents I had to sign for my appeal.

On the third day, I was taken down to the prison workshop. Later, I would be asked to choose work and start training. But that afternoon, I was given a large box of assorted screws and a number

of small boxes and told to sort the screws into separate kinds. I was glad to have anything to concentrate on, but the time passed dreadfully slowly. By the middle of the afternoon, I had finished, and then one of the officers came and picked up my little boxes of screws and emptied them all back into the big box again. I was just absorbing the futility of this when another officer came up. I was wanted in the office.

Dully, I followed her through the prison, wondering what was going to happen next. "What am I wanted for?" I asked. Quite casually, she said, "Your bail has come through—you're going out tonight."

Then the prison walls fell flat around me, and I knew it is not walls and bars that make a prison, but the fact that other human beings can order and enforce imprisonment. I was still standing inside a locked and barred fortress—but I was free.

It was like waking from a nightmare. I went through all the procedure I had gone through when I came in—in reverse. As I collected my things from my cell and followed the officer along the landing, a prisoner on the landing above looked down and called out, "Where are they taking you, dearie?" My spirits were soaring. "Oh, I didn't like it here," I called back. "I'm going home!" As we turned the corner, she was still gazing after me in astonishment.

They gave me back my clothes and my combs and let me turn back into a human being again; they gave me a few shillings and a railway warrant, and I walked out through the prison gates as if I was floating on air. It was just as well that the London solicitors, who had arranged my bail, had also sent a member of their firm to meet me, since I had no idea how to get to Liverpool Street station. It was raining, and I didn't care. I walked down unknown streets in my light cotton dress, rejoicing in the feeling of the rain on my face, clutching my money and rail warrant in my hand—for of course, I had no handbag to put it in. The court, the bossy policewoman, the agony, and the tears seemed a million years away. As long as I live, I thought, I can never be happier than this, for a miracle has happened, and there is a happy ending. I am going home.

I didn't even need my rail warrant, as reporters met me at the station and took me back by car. I felt light-headed, almost disem-

bodied—the reaction from hours of pain. There was a thunderstorm as we drove back, and hammer blows seemed to strike the clouds over my head as the white fire of lightning split the sky. But I was conscious of nothing but exaltation—I had just been granted a miracle; nothing could hurt me now. And then, out of the darkness of the surrounding fields, looking down the quiet country road, I saw at last the shining windows of my home, where my children were waiting—the lights of the House on the Hill.

2

The Home on the Hill

It was spring when I first came to the House on the Hill, a mother alone with my six children—beginning with Geoffrey, then aged twelve, and ending, for the time being, with Christopher and Nicholas, then eighteen months and six months old—and my seventh baby on the way.

Spring and summer were, in fact, the only times of the year when anyone could come easily to a house standing in the middle of a field, with no way to the nearest road but a rough track over ploughed land leading off a rutted driftway; and no other human habitation in sight but a pair of derelict cottages halfway up an overgrown loke running between the fields at the front of the house, which led to another road beyond.

"Too isolated to live in" was the description that brought me there, and isolated it was; but there were horses, cows, and sheep grazing in the fields; apple trees around the back of the house and a pear tree by the front door, surrounding our windows with pink and white blossom, and birds chirruping in their branches; and later, the ploughed field outside our gate was green, and then golden, with swaying corn. Here, at the end of the winter, when the field was a sea of mud—and the doctor and nurse had to run up it, in boots, with only minutes to spare—my baby was born; and I called her Carol because she was a song of joy.

We had had to have some repairs done to the house before we could move in: missing tiles on the roof and broken windows replaced, fallen ceilings put up, a bath and kitchen sink installed—although they only drained into the nearest ditch—and a pump

on the sink, piped from the well. We had a gas cooker put in and gas lights in the kitchen and sitting room, although we had to roll the cylinders up and down the field to the road—and the delivery man frequently complained that they were muddy—because the van couldn't get up the field to the house. We had the old copper in the kitchen taken out and a pantry made in the gap where it had been; and we made the original pantry, a fair-sized room opening off the sitting room, into a playroom for the weenybedes—thereby being, as Victoria said, probably the only family in existence to keep the children in the pantry.

On the day we moved in, the weather, kindly, was dry; the sun shone, and there were golden pendant catkins on the willow trees; we got our furniture up the field in a van, with a horse and cart borrowed from a nearby farm standing by at the bottom of the field in case the van got stuck. I was awakened the next morning by birds chirruping outside my window, and a pair of turtle doves who came and sat on the roof and cooed down my bedroom chimney. It wasn't really isolated, I thought; we could see the roofs of other human habitations from our upstairs windows.

During that first day, we received calls from several of our nearest neighbors: cows and horses came up and tried to put their heads in the sitting room window, and when I went to answer a knock at our back door, I found our visitors were three large black sows. But it was several days before we actually saw a human being, and then the children came in to tell me there were two men working at the far end of the next field—"They're hedgers and ditchers!" Helen said.

During that first year, we made a garden out of the quarter-acre of rough grass, nettles, and thistles that surrounded the house when we first came to it. Now we had comparatively smooth grass, mowed into a lawn; paths around the house and winding between the apple trees to the bottom of the garden; and a little group of shrubs: rosy flowering currant, scarlet japonica, mauve lilac, pale pink cherry, and golden forsythia. Beside the paths were flower beds and borders, filled with roses, lupins, delphiniums, brilliantly scarlet oriental poppies, and pink and purple columbines, golden nasturtiums and marigolds, and velvety wallflowers and sweet wil-

liams, daffodils, tulips, violets, and forget-me-nots, that greeted our second spring. We planted a row of sweet peas each year, and against the walls of the house, we grew golden winter jasmine, sweet-scented honeysuckle, and Virginia creeper.

We also weathered a good many storms during our first three years—rain and snowstorms, floods and drought, a fallen ceiling, and a fire—all of which, as Geoffrey said, made life more interesting. And then, when Carol was two years old, our well started to go dry, and we were told the water was contaminated and unfit to drink. We were advised to move; water supplies could be brought up to us, but only in summer—in wet weather, no vehicles could get up the field. So we started thinking about the old cottages up the loke, where there was a well which no one had complained of; we even began making enquiries about the possibility of buying them and getting them rebuilt. That should have been the end of the story and the beginning of the next; but things didn't work out as we had planned.

The realization that the cost of rebuilding would be considerably more than we had thought at first; the sudden illness and death of my father, who had intended to help with the cost; and the changing needs of my growing family brought our plans to a halt. The problem of the water remained.

"But perhaps the well isn't so bad now," I said hopefully. "There has been a lot of rain since it was last tested—it must have filled up with new water since it went dry."

So I asked the Council to make another test, and their advice on the result, though still dubious, was less devastating. The water, I gathered, was now no worse than it had been when we first moved in—which wasn't saying very much; but provided it was always filtered or boiled, it would be more or less fit to drink. It was no worse, they added gloomily, than many other wells in the locality. Not really reluctantly, we gave up our hopes of the cottages; and by the time that the apple blossom was blushing again on the trees outside our windows, and the hedgerows were creamy white with hawthorn and cow parsley, we were prepared to settle down for the foreseeable future at our home on the hill.

But these were not the only difficulties we had to contend with;

our lives were further enlivened by a series of arguments, periodically escalating into legal battles with the local education authorities, over the children's non-attendance at school. The views of the authorities seemed to be limited to the inevitable confining of all children in a crowded classroom, regardless of whether or not they were learning anything, for a statutory number of hours every day, five days a week; indeed, their Welfare Officer told the Justices that he regarded "being in a classroom" as the most important part of education for a child. Whereas to me, education was something much nearer to our daily lives under the certainly old-fashioned, if not entirely primitive, conditions at the House on the Hill—learning to face up to and deal with the problems of everyday living, to take responsibility and develop initiative and independence; and starting to understand some aspects of adult life, as well as acquiring a knowledge of reading, writing, and practical arithmetic, and taking an interest in a wide range of subjects, instead of meaninglessly studying those that arbitrarily appear in the curriculum at school. I shocked the Justices by saying that I regarded what I termed the "three C's"—cleanliness, courtesy, and consideration for others—as being at least as important as the "three R's"; in fact, I was trying to put time back, out of a century that seemed to me to be becoming increasingly uninhabitable, into the days when the house was first built on the hill, and people were both closer to the earth and nearer to the sun and the stars. The authorities, predictably, regarded this as an impractical approach to education, and continually served Notices, School Attendance Orders, and ultimately summonses on us; none of which ever resulted in any of the children attending school.

They had frequently threatened to have the children taken away from me; so it was obvious that they would now be very ready to take advantage of my enforced absence, and if given the opportunity would certainly descend on our home and take them into care—where they could ensure their being given a conventional education, regardless of the suffering that would be caused by this disruption of their lives. And it was also obvious to me that if this happened, it was extremely unlikely that they would ever let me have them back.

So I came back to my home that stormy night knowing that we had avoided a heartbreaking catastrophe. But the danger was not over; I was only out on bail; my appeal had yet to be heard. I lay awake for a long time that night, wondering about the future, and looking back over the last eighteen months of our lives—the sun and shadow, the tears and laughter—that made up our days at the House on the Hill.

3

Morning of the Year

At the House on the Hill, we were mud-bound, if not snow-bound or actually under flood, until well into April; so although we were aware of the year's awakening as early as February, spring did not really come until the green corn in the field stood several inches high, and the pink and white of the apple blossom lay like sugar icing over the trees. Then daylight came before I could get my eyes open to watch its coming, and the willows hung their green fronds dripping with golden catkins over the silvery water of the pond; the dew lay glistening on the snowy white of the hawthorn bushes up the loke, and the swallows skimmed over the corn and sped joyously through the hazy blue of the morning sky. On mornings like these, anything could happen; and on quite a number of them, something did.

I got up early as a matter of course; partly a habit derived from years of giving my babies their early feed, and partly because I had found from long experience that the only way to keep order in a house full of children was to get up before any of them were about, and start the day before all the family came tumbling, so to speak, on top of it and me.

But on one particular morning, I had promised to call Victoria. There were five horses then on the top field up the loke—a brown mare, two piebald mares, the grey mare, and the pony Snowy. The brown mare was in foal, and on the previous evening, Victoria and Helen had come in just before dark after spending the evening with the horses; and Victoria was sure that the foal would be born that night or early the next day. Knowing my daughter's affinity

with horses, I thought she was probably right; and the daisies and dandelions were still sleeping in the grass when I roused her, and she in turn awakened Helen. A few minutes later, the two of them slipped out of the back door and up the loke, through the grass shining wet with dew, their copper hair gleaming between the green branches of the hawthorns until they were out of sight.

They came back half an hour later with awe and excitement on their faces.

"It was born just as we got there," Victoria said. "It's standing up now, and starting to feed. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Why don't you go and see it?" said Helen; and Victoria added, as sounds of movement could be heard upstairs, "I'll look after the weenybedes."

I put on my boots and went out.

"The mare isn't a bit frightened," Victoria called after me. "She'll let you come quite near. We went up and stroked the foal, and she didn't mind at all."

As I came to the gate of the horses' field, I saw the mare standing in the shelter of the hedge, and the little long-legged foal, like a delicate china model, by her side. Cautiously, I walked towards her; but although she had welcomed my daughters, she was doubtful about me. Slowly, she backed away.

Not wanting to frighten her, I stood quite still and watched. When I stood still, so did the mare, and with pricked ears and liquid dark eyes, she watched me too. The foal took two unsteady steps towards me, its golden coat shining in the early light.

Slowly, the sun rose over the field—the first sunlight the foal had ever known. "Lucky girl!" I told the mare, and I went back to the house.

There I found Geoffrey downstairs too, talking to Helen and Victoria in the kitchen.

"Can you pack me up something for lunch today?" he asked. "I promised I'd go and help hoeing the sugar beet."

"It'll have to be cheese sandwiches," I said, getting out the bread. "And shortcakes, and a bit of jam tart. Have the girls told you about the mare?"

"Yes—I thought she wouldn't be long." Geoffrey pulled on

boots and picked up his coat. "I'll have a look at the foal as I go up the loke."

As the door closed behind him, there was a pattering of feet on the landing. Christopher's fair head and Nicholas's dark one appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Dress me, Biffa!" Christopher called impatiently to Victoria. She went up to him, and I followed her up the stairs and went into my own bedroom, where I picked up Carol, still sleepy, warm, and wet.

"Done dee!" said Carol, smiling angelically.

She always had.

I dressed her and carried her downstairs to join Christopher and Nicholas, who were starting the day as usual by pulling everything off the playroom shelves onto the floor, while I went into the kitchen to get breakfast.

We had finished breakfast, and I was putting away the washing-up, when Tabitha, the oldest of our cats, gave birth to what was to be her last kitten, in a box on top of the old kitchen range. Her two eldest sons, Big Large and Big Huge, were sitting on the mantelpiece; her nieces, Ann and Jane, and her nephew, Pinkle Purr, were lying on the sitting-room windowsill in the sun, and her youngest son, two-year-old Renny, was perched precariously on the top of the pump by the kitchen sink; her younger half-sister, Kettle, was stretched out on the warm top of the cooking stove, while her year-old daughter, Powder Puff, was sitting among the saucepans on the shelf above. They all lifted their heads and pricked up their ears when they heard the cry with which she greeted the kitten's birth—a cry not of pain, but of sheer triumph and delight.

I went to see how she was getting on, and found one small black kitten, which Tabitha, despite her nine years—which would have made her over seventy by human reckoning—was rapidly washing into energetic survival.

Steven had gone out shopping, but I called Helen and Victoria in from the garden, where they were playing with the weenybedes.

"Tabitha's having kittens—listen."

Tabitha's yell of victory was now followed by a deep, intermittent purring.

"She does love having kittens," said Helen. "Shall I give her some milk?"

She held the saucer over the edge of the box, so Tabitha could drink it in comfort.

"She's chosen a nice place to have them," Victoria said.

We never normally used the range. We had done so on one or two occasions when we ran out of gas and succeeded in cooking quite a presentable dinner on it, using wood instead of coal; but by now the chimney was cracked, which caused it to smoke all over the kitchen, and various other pieces had broken off. We all felt that the effort of clearing up everywhere after it had been alight outweighed the benefits, and I had got a paraffin stove for emergencies instead.

The range had become used as a general depository of oddments—the washing bowls, the brush and dustpan, a pile of old newspapers—and a large cardboard box in which Steven had brought a load of groceries on his bicycle up the field. In this box, Tabitha had her latest family; and her eyes shone green in the shadows as she watched us, purring in the intervals of washing her young.

When the kitten was licked dry and had started to feed, we called the weenybedes in to look at it. I lifted Carol so she could see into the box, and Christopher and Nicholas stood on tiptoe and looked over the edge.

"Isn't it teeny?" said Christopher wonderingly, and Nicholas touched it with gentle fingers.

Tabitha purred.

I put Carol down, and Helen took the weenybedes out in the garden again.

"We'd better start the washing," I said to Victoria.

I lit a jet on the cooking stove to heat a saucepan of water. At the same moment, Kettle turned round and flicked her tail across the lighted jet. The fur flared up, and Kettle's tail was on fire.

As quickly as I could, I put down the saucepan of water that I was lifting onto the stove and pulled the cat clear. She appeared unaware that anything untoward was happening, but the end of

The author with Carol.

The House on the Hill