

*Emma's World:*  
*A World War II Memoir*



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by Ilene W. Devlin

## **Emma's World: A World War II Memoir**

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Cover: A typical rural Missouri schoolhouse. Photo courtesy of the Nodaway County Historical Society, Maryville, Missouri.

## **PREFACE**

Emma' World: A World War II Memoir is a work of narrative nonfiction. Its foundation is published research, oral family history, personal diaries from 1938–1944, and over 500 letters written between two people in love. The story was composed with admiration and respect for the northwest Missouri area and its people, plus a fascination with a period in history, World War II, that altered the entire globe and all of its cultures. The book's focus is life goals, perseverance, and family.

The names of public figures and places have been retained. Other names have been altered to preserve privacy.

## *Chapter 12*

The year 1941 began with rain and clouds turning cold by night. Two friends and Linda stayed with Edith. She was uncomfortable but managed to reassure everyone she was getting along fine. More friends dropped by the next day and planned to stay with Edith on Monday when Emma went back to college. Emma worked hard at school, then cared for Edith when Emma got home.

Emma attended the morning assembly for Religious Emphasis week. At home, she studied and carried in coal for their stove. That evening they heard recordings of President Roosevelt's inauguration on January 20.

"Him getting in this time sure feels different than the other times," commented Edith. "We always expected him to keep us safe. Now it don't feel like anyone can."

Emma stared at the radio. "Surely Hitler will stop being so aggressive soon. He's got so much land under his control. You'd think it'd be enough for him."

In late January, however, the college hosted speaker Roeland Van Cavel from Holland. His lecture contained grim reminders that the Germans showed no signs of slowing their conquest efforts. The audience's mood was solemn as they left the auditorium.

The winter of 1940–1941 brought bad news around Maryville. Two couples each had a baby die, and two adult friends passed away. Bob seemed to be having heart trouble, even at his young age, and the family urged him to see a doctor. Bob resisted the suggestion and felt better by late January. The winter weather always took its toll on people's health.

Emma attended the Morningside Choir concert at the college on January 31. The choir had driven from Sioux City, Iowa—over 200 miles from Maryville. To attempt such a risky trip in late January meant potentially hazardous roads, but they had been lucky with a fairly warm day.

That evening, Edith and Emma listened to the Joe Louis vs. Red Burman fight on the radio. Joe won by a knockout in the fifth of fifteen rounds.

"Can you believe we're hearing what's going on at Madison Square Gar-

den in New York City?" asked Edith. "Why, it's so far away! And the sound is so clear like he's down in St. Jo."

Thursday, February 4, brought cold air and big flakes of snow. Emma attended a pep rally, then went to a free matinee. That evening, she had fun at a college folk dancing party.

The college hosted a Monday duo-pianist concert by Jacques Fray and Mario Braggiotti. They had created a catalog of over 200 original recordings and were the first to play both classical and popular music on the same program. Their fame spread internationally after meeting George Gershwin, who was in Paris to compose *An American in Paris*. Gershwin had launched their careers. In the 1930s, Fray and Braggiotti performed three evenings a week on CBS's nationally broadcast Kraft Music Hall and Radio City Music Hall. Emma had listened to them on the radio, not dreaming she would see them in concert. Being in college had truly opened vistas Emma never imagined possible.

The day before Valentine's, the college announced Horace Mann High School and Northwest Missouri State Teachers College had a measles epidemic. They urged students to monitor their health and stay home if they felt ill.

On February 22, Emma got a call.

"You better get dolled up," said Bob. "We're all going to a barn dance in Shenandoah, Iowa, tonight. We'll pick you up about five."

Emma washed and set her hair, donned her dancing dress, and was ready promptly at five. Edith's foot was still recovering, so she agreed to babysit all three grandchildren.

"Can you imagine driving over fifty miles to a dance?" asked Edith. "Why, a few years ago no one had cars or would dare go that far in winter."

The four brothers and their wives piled into three cars, leaving enough room in one for Emma. They drove through the clear, cool, late afternoon to Shenandoah. At the appointed place, a sign greeted them: "Closed due to frozen water pipes."

"Well, I'll be danged," commented Owen. "We're not gonna waste such dressed up gals on some bad pipes. Let's head back to Maryville. We can make it in time for a movie if we hurry."

The three cars turned south and were lucky the roads were dry. They enjoyed the movie, but still didn't want to head home.

Mike suggested, "Let's go to the Covered Wagon. They've got a live band

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tonight.”

What was left of the evening and into the early hours found them enjoying themselves on the dance floor. Finally, exhausted, they headed back to Edith's. She had put the children to bed, so the three fathers gathered their sleeping children and tucked them into their cars to return home. Emma crashed into bed, falling asleep immediately but happily. What a night out!

On March 5, Edith and Emma spent \$2.02 for wallpaper for the north-east room, which Bob, Mike, and their wives helped hang. Another Saturday, they hung paper in the southeast room. The bathroom was next, completed in just two hours. Sharing such tasks created family bonding and gossip time.

Emma finished her quarter on March 6, taking two tests that day. She celebrated with Jacob, Owen, and their wives at a dance. She found out later she had passed all her courses with two honors.

On Monday, Emma borrowed more money from the bank for college and registered for the fourth quarter. Her courses carried nearly the same titles with more advanced topics. More studying, assemblies, and working at home. Dances on the weekends were her only fun break from the routine.

On March 22, Linda and Emma attended the State Convention of the Church Council at the Methodist Church in Maryville. While Edith had raised her family in the First Christian Church, Linda was a Methodist. Local people didn't really care about a person's denomination, as long as the person was good to others.

Bob bought a new 1941 Chevrolet car on March 29. Emma got to ride with them to a neighbor's yard sale. *Someday I'll have my own car*, decided Emma. *Someday!*

As ordinary as the daily routine seemed, the real world kept intruding.

“Sometimes I feel like I exist in a whirlwind,” she commented to Mae. “One day things seem normal, and the next turned about-face toward the war.”

More local young men received draft notices, and she always feared her brothers' numbers might be called.

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Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria invaded Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, causing an April 17 surrender. Next, Germany and Bulgaria swept into Greece to support the Italians, with Greece submitting by early June. More



countries were at war, putting additional pressure on Great Britain and Free France to battle onward.

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Emma worked up her courage and approached Superintendent Burr on April 5. She wanted to know if she could teach a school of her own, if one was available for the fall.

Mr. Burr said, "Well, now, I'll ask around. But you don't have your college degree yet, so the chances are slim."

On April 14, Emma applied at the one-room Murphy country school. The board turned her down because she had so few college hours. Emma was discouraged but determined.

Emma kept working part-time to earn more money. She hung wallpaper, painted rooms, cooked, cleaned, and canned.

On May 7, she walked four miles in a Walkathon, coming in sixth of nine participants.

"I guess my long legs paid off in fewer steps per mile than the others," she laughed at the finish line.

May 29 was her last day of college for the quarter. Emma had two tests in the morning and mixed feelings when the quarter ended. She would keep working so she could pay for summer classes. At times, however, her determination wavered, but her goal of becoming a teacher would finally win out and keep her sights on the path ahead.

Her hard work had yielded enough money to pay off the bank loan to date. On June 3, Emma registered for the college summer quarter. She bought herself a new dress on sale to celebrate.

On June 6, Emma took an all-day Teachers Exam at the Courthouse. She was one step closer to becoming a real teacher. Again, she visited Mr. Burr, who sent her to Lone Valley to apply for a fall teaching job. Mr. Burr felt her chances of getting the job were good, because she had passed the Teachers Exam. Her interview was scheduled for the next day.

At nineteen, Emma seemed too young to be a teacher. Doubts crowded her mind as she dressed to meet the school board that afternoon. She felt as nervous as when she had asked her father about attending high school. Her palms were clammy, and her knees knocked.

At two o'clock, Emma entered the Lone Valley one-room schoolhouse.

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Four local residents who had been elected to the school board sat at a table in front of the blackboard.

“Come in, come in, young lady,” said a man who introduced himself as Mr. Watson. “We’ve been expecting you. Mr. Burr sent a recommendation along with your transcripts.”

“Thank you” was all Emma could say as she sat in the indicated chair facing the four men.

“We just have a few questions for you,” continued Mr. Anderson. “Your grades are acceptable, and your Teachers Exam score is good. But you seem a little young.”

Mr. Ellison jumped in. “Frankly, we wonder if you have enough courses to be a teacher right now.”

“And do you have any experience in actually teaching a classroom?” inserted Mr. Hall.

Emma felt a lump in her throat, but she took a deep breath. “Well, I’ll have experience after you hire me!”

Surprised, the four men looked at each other, then laughed.

On Monday, June 23, 1941, Emma was summoned to Mr. Burr’s office to sign her first teacher’s contract. The Lone Valley school board members had liked her spunk and decided to give her a chance. Emma was officially a teacher at long last.

“Oh, Dad, I wish you could see this contract. You made it happen by letting me go to high school. Thank you,” Emma whispered as she walked out of Mr. Burr’s office.

The next day, her name appeared in the Maryville newspaper listing her as the new teacher at Lone Valley. Other young women’s names were included at the various district one-room schools.

From June through early August, Emma studied harder than usual. She wanted to have all the knowledge she could before facing her first classroom in September. She enrolled in physical education, humanities, and literature.

Emma attended assembly on July 9 at the Student Center. Dr. Andre Baude had practiced medicine at Chateau Thierry, France, while serving in the French Army until captured by the Germans. He spoke passionately about his experiences and the threats the Nazis posed to the entire world if they succeeded. Once again, global events encroached on remote Maryville, Missouri.

Owen bought a 1939 Plymouth four-door sedan on July 16. Now Emma

felt her dream of also having a car might be closer, since she had a real income beginning that fall. But money to finish school remained her first priority.

August 7 found Emma completing two tests to end the quarter. She had done well enough and considered herself as prepared as she could be for teaching in the fall. *What will it feel like to be in front of the classroom instead of seated as a student?*

War news now filled much of the radio airwaves. Every day the radio and newspaper stories sounded increasingly grim. Emma became more apprehensive, as were all her friends and relatives, about the fate of the United States' neutrality.

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Germany and most of its Axis partners invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. After quickly overrunning the Baltic States, they laid siege to Leningrad in September. Finland also joined the Axis.

U.S. President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter and released it on August 14. The Nazis threatened to overrun Egypt, which would close off the Suez Canal to Allied access to British possessions in India. The two leaders also felt the Soviet Union would be forced to surrender to Germany. Their final concern was that Japan might try to seize British, French, and Dutch territories in Southeast Asia. The Atlantic Charter spelled out the goals for cooperation between the Allies and the United States, both their respective war aims for World War II and an outline of an international system after the war.

Although Roosevelt hoped the Charter would encourage Americans to allow the United States to enter the war, public opinion remained opposed. Churchill also intended to get the U.S. into the war, or at least to increase its military aid to Great Britain and to warn Japan against Pacific aggression. Although neither leader got what he hoped, the Charter raised British public morale and increased the solidarity between the United States and Great Britain.

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Emma attended the teachers' meeting at the courthouse on Sunday, Au-

gust 31. She bought a book sack from a neighbor for \$1.00. Most of the day, she spent packing her clothes and belongings she would need while boarding for the school year with Tom and Ruth Roberts. That evening, Owen drove her to the Roberts' house, which was three-quarters of a mile southwest of Lone Valley school.

"Well, Sis," Owen commented as he dropped her off. "You really did it. You should sure be proud of all your hard work. Now don't let those kids take advantage of you!"

Emma laughed. "After growing up with four brothers, I think I can handle anything. At least, I hope I can. But I've never lived away from home before. I'm not sure how I'll like that."

Owen smiled at her. "I'll be by on Friday afternoon to pick you up. You can stay with me and Melinda next weekend. You'll do fine! If anyone picks on you, just pretend they're one of your ornery brothers and give 'em hell."

Ruth Roberts welcomed Emma with open arms. "We're sure glad to have you stay with us. Our boys've all grown, so the spare bedroom upstairs is just awaitin' for someone to use it."

Emma smiled and looked around the small room under the sloping roof eaves. Homemade quilts covered the full-sized bed. A mirror hung above a washstand and pitcher of water. Near the gabled window sat a small desk, chair, and kerosene lamp. Everything was spotlessly clean.

"I'll be very happy here," assured Emma. "I'll just unpack before dinner, if that's alright."

"You just go ahead. I'll holler when the food's ready."

So began the biggest adventure of Emma's life. She was to be a teacher starting Monday morning, September 1, 1941, at Lone Valley. Whether or not she felt ready, she would meet her students at nine o'clock.

## Chapter 13

Emma rose at six o'clock. She wanted to eat breakfast and get to the schoolhouse before her students arrived. She had not had a chance to examine the room to see if everything was in order for the new school year. Ruth packed a lunch of a ham sandwich, an apple, and some cookies.

Lone Valley school was located about five miles west of Pickering, the nearest small town. Local folks referred to the area from Pickering to Hopkins as Toad Hollow. Of course, Emma was back to walking to school. This time, she had to go one-quarter mile north, then turn east for a half mile. The building sat on a strip of land between the east-west road on the south side and a small, tree-lined creek. Across the road, a knoll rose to level off before heading southwest to the Roberts' farmhouse. Monday was clear and hot, and the dirt roads were dry, a good day to begin a school year.

She would be making about \$2.40 per day, a fortune to her after all the hours she had worked for \$3.00 per week. Of the \$48.00 per month she earned, she had to pay \$20.00 to the Roberts for boarding her.

Arriving at eight o'clock, Emma found the room in good condition. Local residents had cleaned the shelves and desks and swept the floor. She quickly laid out her books, lesson plans, and blackboard chalk. The children would bring their own slates. As she surveyed the room, Emma tried to calm her nerves and act like a grown-up, long-term teacher who could handle anything.

Five boys and one girl had enrolled. Emma felt lucky to have a small class to begin her teaching experience. Mentally, she rehearsed her lesson plans, then kept glancing out the windows to watch for any children.

At a quarter of nine, three boys came strolling down the road. Emma straightened her new dress, checked her hair in the hall mirror, and took a deep breath before stepping onto the front porch.

"Good morning, boys," she called as they entered the schoolyard. "We have a fine day to begin our school year, don't we?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered one. The other two just stopped to study their new teacher.

“You have about fifteen minutes to play before I’ll start class. The tree in the corner has a good swing on it and there’s a teeter-totter also. Does anyone have a baseball?”

The boys just shook their heads to indicate no ball was available. They sauntered toward the tree, more to distance themselves from the teacher than to take advantage of the swing.

Emma kept smiling. She could see a boy and the girl walking down the road. The last boy was nowhere in sight.

“Good morning,” Emma called. “Welcome, and we’ll all get acquainted in a little while. I’m Miss Trotter, your new teacher for this year.”

The girl looked about six years old and the boy about eight. They were obviously brother and sister, with matching heads of red curly hair. They entered the schoolyard and walked over to the pump that provided the school’s water.

At nine o’clock, Emma called them into the schoolroom. “Let’s get started. As I said, I’m Miss Trotter. Please sit with you older students on my right, and anyone in first through fourth grades on my left side.”

After the five students found a desk, Emma continued. “Please introduce yourselves. Why don’t you start?” she said as she smiled at the girl.

Obviously a little shy, the girl took her time in answering. “I’m Mary Sue,” she finally replied.

“Nice to meet you, Mary Sue. I see from the records you’re in first grade?”

Mary Sue nodded.

“Okay,” Emma said as she turned to her brother, “what’s your name?”

“Billy,” Mary quickly and firmly answered for her brother. “He’s in third grade.”

“Very good!” encouraged Emma. “You both are my youngest pupils this year.”

The next boy looked about eleven years old. “I’m Pete. I’m in seventh grade!”

Emma tried to hide a smile. “Well, your records say you should be in sixth grade. But if you can pass some of the seventh-grade tests I can give you, I’ll let you skip a grade. Do you think you could pass them?”

Pete smiled sheepishly. “Nope. I guess I better do sixth grade first.”

The next two boys looked about thirteen and fourteen years old. They just stared at their desks, pretending not to notice her.

Just then, the sixth student, a boy about fourteen strode into the room.

He was a farm boy from his tall height and muscular build, outweighing Emma by over fifty pounds. His face showed defiance as he ambled to the back of the room and took a seat two rows behind the other boys.

“Good morning,” smiled Emma. “We are introducing ourselves. I’m Miss Trotter. Could you tell me your name?” She had his name on her class roster but wanted to see his reaction.

The teenager stared sullenly at Emma. She waited patiently, trying to hide her rising irritation at his impudence.

Finally, he responded. “Bud. And we drove the last teacher away, and we’re gonna get rid of you too.”

It was stated as a fact, not a threat. The other two older boys giggled and smiled at Bud.

Emma did a quick inhale, kept smiling, and took a moment to decide how to respond. “Well, I’m sorry you did not get along with your previous teacher. Maybe we can start fresh, get to know each other, and things will work out better.”

Bud grunted in reply.

Emma continued, turning back to the other two boys. “And your names are?”

“I’m Sam,” said the fourteen-year-old.

The boy of thirteen, wanting to look as brave as Bud, spat out, “Call me Kurt.”

“Okay. So we have Mary Sue, Billy, Pete, Kurt, Sam, and Bud as we go by class levels. We’re going to cover a number of topics this year, and as a new item, we’ll be discussing the impact of the war on our community as we study history. I’m sure you’ve been hearing your folks talk about it and maybe have older relatives who’ve already been drafted or enlisted. We can work in history, math, and social science as we learn about Europe and our country.

“As most of you know, since we’re all in one room, I will be working with the different grade levels one at a time. So while I’m with one set of students, the rest of you will be working on assignments or reading your textbooks. Please do so quietly, so the students I’m working with can concentrate on their new material. Are there any questions?”

Thus, the day began. Emma handed out the precious textbooks, paid for by school district funds, which were barely enough to cover the school’s costs. Emma had already been told to limit any expenses, and she had to

submit her supply lists to the school board for approval before they administered any funds.

“Each of you will have some textbooks. You’re responsible for their care and safe return at the end of the year. If you damage or lose them, you’ll have to pay the district for their replacement cost. So please be careful. On rainy days, you’ll need to keep them dry.”

Surprisingly, Bud made no overt misbehaviors throughout the morning. Emma had good peripheral vision and did notice Bud’s many smirks when he thought she wasn’t looking. By noon, she had met with each grade level and written assignments on the blackboard.

When she called for lunch time, the students raced from their desks, grabbed their lunch pails from hallway storage bins, and fled outside to eat and play. Emma heaved a huge sigh of relief.

“I made it through half a day!” she muttered. “Now for another half, then several months of days more.”

Unfortunately, by day’s end, Mary Sue grew frustrated at her first day of school. She didn’t like being confined to a seat and paying attention for so long. Even though Emma took pains to be patient with her, Mary Sue began to cry before the last period.

“Just great!” muttered Emma after school. “I made a child cry on the first day of school! Wonder what I’ll cause tomorrow.”

Tuesday began very wet, with rain most of the morning. Emma walked through mud to school wearing galoshes over her good shoes. *I wonder if the students have overshoes and how muddy the classroom floors will be by the end of the day.* She was responsible for cleaning the entire school and outhouses each day before she left for the Roberts’ home. She also had to carry in coal for the stove when the weather got cold.

The second day went well, for the most part. Egged on by Bud, Emma was sure, Pete talked back to Emma once too often. She couldn’t let him get control of the classroom, so she moved him to two rows behind Billy for one hour. She kept her calm demeanor, but firmly let it be known such rudeness was not allowed in her classroom. Bud didn’t say anything, just kept watching her.

By Wednesday, Emma got a brief break. Under morning threatening skies, Miss Kimberly came to teach music. Emma enjoyed a one-hour break, sitting at the back of the room, preparing for the remainder of the day.

That evening, the Roberts took her to a free movie at Clearmont. Emma



appreciated the break and a chance to relax during her first week of school.

September 3 was also Jacob's thirty-fourth birthday. The family was going to celebrate that weekend.

By her fourth day teaching, time seemed to pass faster. Emma managed not to yell when a toad jumped out of the desk drawer when she opened it. She grabbed the poor frightened creature and asked, "Is this anyone's pet?" Then she walked outside to deposit it on the grass, washed her hands in the hall basin, and returned to class. Bud seemed impressed she hadn't panicked.

Emma gratefully watched for Owen's Plymouth to drive into the Roberts' yard Friday afternoon. She had completed her first week as a professional teacher. All students had shown up daily for class, she hadn't been threatened further by Bud, and overall the week had gone pretty well.

As her second week began, Emma greeted three visitors to the school. Parents and school board members would occasionally drop in to observe the teacher. Emma had been warned this might happen by other student teachers at college, but she had hoped such visits would wait until she felt more comfortable teaching the class.

On Wednesday, Emma and her students rode to the fall fair parade. The students enjoyed the outing, and Emma had them write a short essay on what they saw.

Emma started decorating the blackboard for fall the next day. Also, three new pupils began classes: Carrie, age ten; Wilma, eleven; and Nick, twelve. After she got them introduced and settled, classwork resumed as usual.

Bud had not carried out any further aggressions toward Emma. She tried to be her usual friendly self, knowing she had always gotten along well with boys, since she had grown up with four brothers and their friends. Her biggest success with Bud seemed to be at lunch and the brief recesses they took in nice weather.

Emma talked Mike into finding a baseball bat and ball from a family whose boys had grown. The second Monday, she brought the equipment to school, inviting everyone to play baseball at lunch. Bud, Sam, and Pete were one team with Nick, Billy, and Emma on the other side. Bud looked smug as they laid out bases for a small diamond in the school yard. But when Sam pitched a fast ball, Emma drove it over the fence into the hay field, rounding bases for a homerun. Bud even smiled in surprise. Afterward, he seemed to give Emma a little more credit, at least for not being a sissy-type girl.

That evening, Emma and the Roberts listened to President Roosevelt's

Fireside Chat. A destroyer, the U.S.S. *Greer*, traveling in daylight near Greenland and clearly flying the U.S. flag, was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine. Previously, the U.S. merchant ship SS *Robin Moor* was sunk by a German submarine in the mid-south Atlantic in direct violation of international agreements signed by many nations, including Germany. The passengers and crew jumped into lifeboats hundreds of miles from land. In July 1941, an American battleship in North American waters chased away a submarine trying to attack a ship. Other American-owned ships had been attacked and/or sunk in the past few months from the Atlantic to the Red Sea.

Roosevelt stated clearly such a great nation as the United States would not exaggerate one incident or become inflamed by one act of violence. He firmly stated, however, "It would be inexcusable folly to minimize such incidents in the face of evidence which makes it clear that the incident...is a part of a general plan." He declared the Hitler government was defying the laws of the seas, the recognized rights of other nations, and trying to close the entire Western Hemisphere to all ships except those of the Axis. Roosevelt concluded, "From now on, if German or Italian vessels of war enter the waters, the protection of which is necessary for American defense, they do so at their own peril."

Emma expelled her breath after the speech and understood the gravity of what Roosevelt had proclaimed. She thought about her young students, wondering if they had older brothers who might be in danger if Germany continued to attack American ships and pull the United States into the war.

"What madness to think one country would try to dominate the entire Western Hemisphere, in addition to the European territory it already claimed!" she fumed.

Wednesday, September 17, was Emma's hardest day at school. She had tried to let the students pick their own seat assignments, as long as they were grouped roughly by grade level. Sam and Kurt, however, encouraged no doubt by Bud, had been totally obnoxious all day. Finally, Emma moved them apart permanently, seating them so they had no one within three feet. They were not happy, but they minded her.

On her fourth Monday of teaching, Emma welcomed Mr. Burr. The school district had paid for a piano tuner to repair the old upright piano. Sitting in a school room conditions ranging from melting to freezing, damp to dry, had wrecked the piano's tuning. Now it sounded much better when

Miss Kimberly used it for music classes. Mr. Burr approved of the piano and Emma's teaching ability. Emma had prayed Bud and his two cronies would behave while Mr. Burr was present.

Emma went to Maryville on Saturday, September 27. She made her first bank deposit from her teaching salary, retaining a little cash for expenses. Feeling almost giddy and wealthy with so much money in the bank, Emma allowed herself to buy two pairs of shoes, a hat, and a winter coat.

Each district school was required to hold seasonal programs. Emma had to write a Halloween program, which she composed in the evenings at the Roberts'. She wrote parts for all students, trying to match their abilities to memorize with the number of lines the simple play would have. Emma had never written a play, but she had attended programs as a student and had visited other schools. She managed to get an inspiration and worked on writing the parts for the next two weeks.

On October 9 and 10, school was dismissed. Emma had to attend more teachers' meetings. The sessions covered new teaching methods and curricula and also began to answer questions about emergency preparedness in case of war. Even in rural Missouri, people were becoming concerned about growing world tensions.

The next week, students Pete and Kurt moved away. Emma's class now had only seven students, which made teaching easier. Also, two of Bud's buddies were gone, so fewer mischief makers.

The Halloween play plans progressed well. The students practiced a little each day and made decorations. Emma wrote invitations to parents, school board members, and area neighbors.

On October 28, her first Halloween program drew a good crowd who applauded the students' efforts. Afterward they enjoyed coffee, sandwiches, and pie, all donated by the parents.

Her students had taken their finals the day before the program. Most of them made average or above average scores, which pleased Emma. The district provided the tests, so her teaching efforts had been effective. The students seemed more comfortable with her and tried fewer antics.

The next quarter began November 3, but Emma had not received the new materials yet.

"For today and tomorrow," she announced, "we'll have to alter our plans until our new courses arrive. Let's take a field trip and see what we can find." Her students applauded the chance to get outside in the nice weather.

They mounted fall leaves on paper, painted pinecones, wrote stories, and held spelling bees. The unit arrived late the second day, and Emma studied the materials that evening to prepare to teach them the next day.

Prairie View, the closest one-room school two miles north of Lone Valley, held a community meeting Friday night. Emma and the Roberts attended, and Ruth bought three tickets on a chance to win a free turkey. Edith also bought three tickets from a neighbor. Unfortunately, neither of them won the turkey, but they were happy to support the school's fundraising efforts.

Emma's next project was a Thanksgiving meeting. She was on the Program Committee, which also held a raffle for a free turkey. Sam's mother won the bird, and Lone Valley raised \$7.70 from ticket sales.

"Now I can buy a tall Aladdin oil lamp for the school. It's so dark inside on cloudy days," announced Emma.

On Monday, November 24, Miss Kimberly came. After music class, as she tried to drive out of the schoolyard, her car tires became mired in the mud. Emma and her students pushed the car while Miss Kimberly slowly applied the gas, trying not to splatter everyone with mud kicked up by the tires.

"Okay, everybody," ordered Emma, "Wash mud off your shoes and legs before going back inside. Anyone who tracks mud inside gets to clean it up!" No one disobeyed, since they all wanted to finish school as quickly as possible.

For 1941, Thanksgiving on November 20 was also Emma's birthday. Since Roosevelt changed the date in 1939, his decision had become increasingly unpopular. Finally, on November 26, he admitted his mistake and signed a declaration making the fourth Thursday in November the permanent national holiday. The public applauded his change back to the traditional schedule.

With the two fall holidays over, Emma turned her attention to the Christmas program. She wrote her Christmas cards at night and encouraged her students to sell Christmas Seals when they were home or in town. The seals were issued by the National Tuberculosis Association to raise funds to fight the disease, and patrons added the cheery stamps to their letters and packages. The students were taught how to sell the stamps and when to return the money to Emma, who would turn in the funds to Mr. Burr in Maryville.

Emma also bought candy for her students, which she divided in little paper bags. Carrie, Wilma, and Nick were moving before Christmas, so she gave them their cards and candy the first week in December.

Emma had enrolled Lone Valley in the Junior Red Cross program, which was already sending relief supplies to civilians in war zones. Schools were encouraged to produce comfort items, clothing, and gift boxes for children overseas, and to contribute to the National Children's Fund to meet emergency needs. Although families in Emma's area had little spare cash, they were happy to make quilts, coats, or blankets from scrap cloth.

Emma worked on a Red Cross quilt in the evenings, with area quilts auctioned to raise money. Her children also gathered scrap metal to sell. The United States might not be at war, but other countries were and needed help desperately.

## *Chapter 14*

Keeping the country out of war ended Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, when the Japanese devastatingly attacked Pearl Harbor. Many Americans didn't know where Pearl Harbor was, but the fact that U.S. ships were sunk and military personnel and civilians killed was enough to enrage the populace. By late Sunday, President Roosevelt had proclaimed his Day of Infamy speech.

Edith and Emma sat stunned beside the radio. "Well, we're in it now," Edith stated flatly. "My boys may be called to go who knows where soon. Oh, how did this ever happen?" Most Americans asked themselves that same question.

On Monday, Congress declared war on Japan. By Tuesday, over fifteen additional countries did likewise.

President Roosevelt's Fireside Chat 19 declared the Japanese attacks in the Pacific provided "the climax of a decade of international immorality." He called the Axis partners gangsters who banded together to make war on the entire human race. He called on every American man, woman, and child to become partners in the most tremendous undertaking the country had ever faced. Victories and defeats were ahead, but the country would fight, and U.S. forces would win eventually, with the help of the Allies.

Roosevelt warned against listening to rumors, the vast majority of which would be false propaganda by Axis members to spread fear and confusion. He required radios and newspapers to reach the ears and eyes of American citizens and not to publish unverified reports of war efforts.

Vast assembly lines would be expanded in the near future and work seven days a week. The country needed money and materials, and production doubled and quadrupled. Such efforts should not be considered sacrifices, but privileges to defend the United States and defeat an evil Axis. Roosevelt warned of shortages to come with raw materials needed for military production.

Roosevelt said the country had a sacred obligation to the dead, their children, and all the country's children never to forget what happened at Pearl

Harbor. The country was now at war, not for vengeance or conquest, but to make the world safe for its children. The United States would face the dark days ahead knowing the vast majority of humans on earth were on its side, hoping for liberty.

Emma's world became a mental whirlwind of international and national news, then returned to day-to-day life in rural Missouri. Many people she knew had never been as far as than Kansas City, some one hundred miles away. Now they tried to understand where places like the Philippines or Guam might be, let alone countries they had never known before like Croatia or the Balkans. Such distances were outside their understanding, for farm life was a constant local cycle of seasons, crops, and events. Suddenly, local folks were unwillingly involved with the entire world's affairs, something they resented. Yet they felt a small part of the larger war effort.

Cold and snowy Thursday, December 11, arrived. By evening, everyone heard on the radio that Italy and Germany had declared war on the United States. Now America would be stretching its military forces across two vast oceans.

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On the home front, plans for the Christmas program proceeded. Emma wrote the play, the children practiced their parts, and winter set into the area. She bought a new black dress and four-buckle overshoes. She set hair for neighbor ladies and listened to local gossip and attended dances on weekends. She shopped and wrapped Christmas presents and sent cards.

During the week, Emma graded papers and perfected the Christmas program. On Friday, December 19, which luckily arrived as a warm clear evening, program attendance rose to capacity for the one-room schoolhouse.

Christmas Eve that year reflected the public's mood, warm but misty. Ice coated the roads, but Emma's brothers and their families arrived in Maryville to spend the night at Edith's home. Having so many people in a small space required goodwill by all, but the experience bonded the family especially tightly with the draft looming.

By the next day, a dear family friend left for service after being drafted. Other young neighbors enlisted immediately, rather than wait to be drafted. Most men felt torn between wanting to enlist as a patriotic duty and knowing their families and farms required their attention. With the country at war,

farm production had to increase dramatically, so farmers were desperately needed on the home front.

School studies went on as if no war existed. Charlie, eight years old, joined Emma's class on December 29. The snow melted enough so everyone made three big snowballs at recess.

Daily life continued its routine of winter weather, school, studies, community events, and family gatherings. Overlaying all the normalcy, the evening radio war news and daily newspaper updates intruded into their lives. At times, everything seemed unreal to Emma, who felt she switched constantly from being pleasant and encouraging to her students to worrying about what changes loomed ahead that she could not control.



## Chapter 15

Emma glanced out the schoolhouse window on January 1, 1942. Huge snowflakes swirled in angry fits, driven by furious winds. The roads had drifted full in places, and Emma dismissed school at one o'clock. She sent the students home with assignments to do in case school was canceled the next day.

"Be careful on the way home. Everyone stay together until you reach your turnoff roads. Bud, you and Sam make sure the younger kids get home safely, will you?"

For once, Bud was agreeable. "I'll get them there. Might have to carry Mary Sue 'cause she's so short," he said with a laugh.

Mary Sue's eyes grew large when she saw how much snow had piled against the schoolhouse steps.

"What about you, Miss Trotter?" asked Sam. "You'd better get goin' too. It's real deep out there."

"I'll leave as soon as I straighten up and restock the coal box. You have a safe walk home. Now get going and watch your steps."

Emma shivered as the freezing air blasted the room when her students left. She stacked her papers, placing them in her book sack. Then she cleaned the blackboard, swept the floor, and wrapped up to go outside to the coal bin. She had brought a pair of slacks to wear under her dress to and from school.

*I'm sure glad I have my overshoes, but I'm not sure they're tall enough for this deep snow.*

She opened the front door, felt the assault by frigid air, and dreaded going to the coal bin, which lay to her left beside the building. Struggling through the deeply drifted snow, she managed to pry open the icy lid, scoop coal lumps into her bucket, and head inside. She filled the coal box for the next school day, whenever that occurred, and put out the stove fire.

"I'm not going home by the road tonight. I'm taking the shortcut across the field. The snow's deeper on the drifted roads than it is in the pasture, I think," she announced to the empty room.

The distance to the Roberts' house going across the pasture was about a half mile. Normally, Emma would not go home that way, because a nasty tempered bull claimed the winter pasture as his own. But today, the bull would be huddling in the lean-to by the barn, not tempted to venture outside.

By the time Emma left, the clock said two thirty. Her chores had taken longer than she had intended, and the snow had fallen several inches deeper. Emma tossed her book sack over the south fence, stepped her overshoe into a wire slot, and tried to balance herself against the force of the north wind. Gripping the post, she managed to swing her free leg over the fence, pivot, and bring the other leg over the top. Then she stepped down—to find herself buried in over a foot of snow.

Fierce swirling wind drove snowflakes into her eyes and threatened to rip her tied-down knit hat from her head. The cold sucked air from her lungs, making it hard to breathe. For the first time, Emma felt panic growing.

She couldn't see the farmhouse through the blizzard, but she knew the north wind slammed her back. As long as she walked away from the wind and angled to her right, she would eventually run into the fence leading to the house. Staying in place would prove deadly, so she forced herself to lift her entombed boots and begin walking forward.

Emma had traveled about one third of the way when she realized her strength was failing. Each step brought painful cramps in her legs, which were sucked into the deep snow with each step. Breathing the cold air, even with her neck scarf tied over her mouth and nose, froze her lungs. The physical strain sapped her energy until she feared she could not continue. No one would be out in the blizzard, and she had taken the shortcut instead of the road, so no one knew her location if they did search for her.

She struggled onward, each step becoming shorter and more difficult. She understood stopping to rest would be fatal but wondered how long she could force her body to wade through the knee-high snowflakes.

Then she thought she saw a shape through the blinding snow, a gray form also moving slowly. She shook her head and strained to see better. Yes, something moved ahead of her.

A horse and rider trudged through deep drifts and swirling flakes. They approached her like a slow-motion movie scene.

“Emma! Emma, is that you?” yelled the man's voice.

Emma waved her arms in disbelief. “Here! Here I am!”

Turned sideways, the horse blocked the wind. The man's arm reached

down to pull Emma up behind him on the saddle.

"I was hoping you were holed up at school," shouted Tom Roberts. "I never dreamed you'd be out in this storm."

Emma clung to his waistline as he turned the horse away from the blistering north wind. "The storm just got ahead of me and I waited too long to get started home," she screamed back.

They ceased any conversation attempts as the horse struggled to carry two humans through the deep snow. *He'll enjoy extra oats tonight*, thought Emma, *if we make it back safely*.

After what seemed an agonizingly long time, the fuzzy shape of the barn appeared ahead. The horse sensed shelter and added a little more effort to reach home, safety, and a warm stall. Emma had survived her first blizzard.

Ruth thawed out Emma with hot tea, a hot meal, and a warm footstone to heat her bed. She also ordered Emma to stay in bed as long as she wanted. "No idiot's goin' to school tomorrow with that much snow closing the roads."

Morning arrived as the coldest of the winter. Many telephone lines had blown down, but the Roberts' phone still worked. The party line had passed the word about a fire west of Burlington Junction, which had burned down a house, leaving the family homeless. Emma and Ruth worked on the Red Cross quilt, making blocks to be hand-sewn together in patterns.

School didn't resume until Monday, January 5, when they shoveled paths to reach the outhouses and coal bin. The next day they received their first mail in a week. It took until Friday before the county grader plowed the east-west road past the school.

Emma marked test papers, worked on entertainment ideas for the next community meeting, and read newspapers full of depressing war news. A couple of friends had carried through with their wedding on Saturday during the bitter cold left by the storm. It was the only happy news.

The war intruded into the classroom. Besides the Junior Red Cross initiatives, the United States sold World War II Defense Savings Bonds books. Emma bought ten-cent Postal Savings Plan Stamps using her own money as incentives for her students.

"Okay, Charlie, this week you did very well on your homework. You scored two 100 grades in spelling, so I'm giving you a ten-cent Defense Stamp. And here's a book to paste it in. When you get forty stamps, you can buy a Series E war bond," announced Emma.

Charlie's face lit up with happiness. He was the new kid in school, but he had done better than the long-term students.

Emma also had the children make a "Remember Pearl Harbor" poster. They drew small pictures they pasted onto the poster.

To be paid each month, Emma had to walk to Mr. Watson's house to get her teacher's warrant. Then, when she got a ride into Maryville, she would deposit the check, keeping whatever cash she needed. She paid the Roberts for her board each month. By late January, she had completed five months of teaching.

In some ways, she felt she had been doing teaching longer and, in other ways, a shorter time. Her attitude switched depending on how each day went, but she assumed all teachers felt that way. They loved their students, but some days teachers just wanted to send the children home to avoid their antics.

A new family moved in northeast of the school, and their daughter Kathy, age ten, began classes. Emma's room now had five students.

The day had been warm and the roads perfect. Throughout the winter, the roads would thaw into muddy quagmires or freeze into excellent walking paths, depending on weather temperatures.

When she arrived at the Roberts', she was surprised to find Tom seated in the kitchen. Normally, he would still be outside completing his chores before dark.

"Dang it," Tom fussed. "I twisted my ankle! I slipped on some ice, caught myself on a fence, but dang near busted my ankle. Ruth's out finishing the milking. My ankle's so swolled up I can't walk on it."

He had his foot propped on another chair. Ruth had wrapped a bag of ice around the ankle and found a cane for him to use.

"This is gonna keep me sittin' for too long, I just know it," he fumed. No farmer ever wanted to be injured so he couldn't care for his own farm.

"Well, I'll just start supper until Ruth gets in," offered Emma. She put away her books and papers, grabbed an apron off the wall hook, and stuffed some wood into the cook stove. "I better chuck some wood in the heating stove, too. It's going to be cold tonight."

Later in the evening, Ruth did dishes, watching the winter scene outside the kitchen window. Suddenly, she saw something waving in the house shadow cast by the moon. "Emma, something's wrong outside!"

Emma grabbed her coat and hat, running out the back door. Ruth fol-

lowed her, with both women looking up at the house. They spotted flames shooting from the top of the chimney. The creosote had caught fire inside the kitchen stove's chimney, shooting fire, deep smoke, and soot into the air.

"Oh, good golly!" cried Ruth. "If we don't get that fire out, it can spread to the roof and burn down the house! And Tom can't climb a ladder! What're we gonna do?"

Emma was already racing for the nearby tool shed. She grabbed the ten-foot ladder and dragged it back to the house. The back porch offered the lowest roof access point, and she thought she could climb to the chimney if she was careful.

"Grab a couple of buckets and hand me one when I get on the porch roof. I'll try to drag the bucket up behind me as I shimmy up to the chimney. Get Tom to filling buckets from the kitchen pump. You'll have to climb the ladder to the porch edge so I can meet you there and get the buckets to the top."

"But you can't climb that slick roof! You'll just slide right down!"

Emma was already starting to climb the ladder. "We don't seem to have a choice! Now get me that first bucket!"

Ruth dashed into the kitchen, pumped water, yelled at Tom to fill the second bucket, and carried the first one outdoors. Luckily, there was little evening breeze to spread the flames.

Ruth carefully climbed the ladder, handing the bucket to Emma. Then Emma, carrying the bucket in her left hand, leaned her body into the gently sloping porch roof. She supported her body by pressing her right hand onto the roof. She made it to the V-shaped edge where the kitchen roof met the upstairs bedroom roof, only spilling a little of the precious water. Pressing both knees against the rough shingles, she lifted the bucket in front of her, bracing the bucket against her chest as she inched upward. Then she used her arms and legs to lift herself further up the slope.

Finally, she reached the flaming chimney top and poured the first bucket into the opening. The fire sizzled from the water and lessened its strength a little. Emma slowly slid down the V, reached the porch roof, and carefully crawled toward the ladder. Ruth was waiting with another bucket. Emma tossed the first bucket to the ground and returned to the chimney. The second bucket of water seemed to douse the fire completely, but Emma made a third trip just to be sure.

By now, Emma's legs were exhausted, and her lungs had inhaled a fair

amount of smoke. She managed to safely climb down the ladder, then collapsed onto a kitchen chair.

“Oh, my dear, your knees are scratched up somethin’ awful,” sympathized Ruth. She hurried to get bandages and antiseptic ointment. “We’ll get you washed up in no time. Now you just sit there and let me take a look at those legs.”

As adrenaline slowed its pulsing through her body, Emma felt her strength fade. Gently, and privately, she reached under her skirt to unsnap her stockings from the garter belt. Carefully, she rolled the ruined hose down and pulled them off. Teachers were expected to wear a dress while teaching school, even in the coldest weather. Emma added a pair of slacks under her dress to go out at recess and to walk to and from school. She had taken off her slacks earlier but had not had time to remove her hose before the fire appeared. Now her nicest pair of hose were ruined, costing her money to replace them.

Ruth cleaned her wounds, trying not to hurt Emma any more than she had to do. Emma’s knees and shins showed deep scratches, and they would hurt and stiffen more tomorrow morning. But Emma was safe, and their house had not burned down. The scorched roof shingles could be replaced.

Emma managed to teach school the next day. Her legs did hurt walking the roundtrip mile and a half to school, and for once, she taught most of the day sitting at her desk. She had the students come to her if they had questions when normally she would have gone to their desks.

## Chapter 16

President Roosevelt's sixtieth birthday was Friday, January 30, 1942. Emma discussed his accomplishments with her pupils and the fact he was the first president ever to serve three terms. Everyone was present, although the temperature was one degree above zero.

Various students would be absent throughout the winter. Walking to and from school invariably caused health issues. Colds, pneumonia, and flu were common illnesses. Emma had her usual colds, which she figured she mostly caught from her students.

On Sunday, February 8, Emma managed to get to Maryville for the weekend. Edith and Emma got a ride to Melinda's parents' home where Owen's twenty-fifth birthday party was in full swing. Twenty-three friends had gathered to celebrate the birthday boy and to rib him about getting old. Owen drove Emma back to her schoolhouse early the next morning.

Lone Valley had planned a Valentine's party, so her children decorated the room and made cards to share. Between classes, students decorated a Valentine box and pasted hearts on paper cups for the party. They washed the shelves and blackboard, making the room spotless. Parents, school board members, and neighbors were invited to attend.

On Friday, February 13, Emma made a fruit salad and carried it to school. The room filled with happy people, listening to the children read a story and cipher. Then they hunted hearts and had refreshments. Everyone enjoyed a great time, feeling in the Valentine's mood of love.

That ease was shattered on February 14 when the city of Singapore fell to the Japanese. Edith and Emma listened to the radio details, feeling sorrow at the loss of life.

"You'd think they could at least take this day off," muttered Edith. "I just guess they haven't got any love in them right now, just war thoughts."

The next afternoon, they heard a gentle knock at their door. Emma opened it to find a tall young man with soft brown eyes standing with his hat in his hands.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said. "Are you Emma Trotter, the lady who put

out the chimney fire at the Roberts?"

"Why, yes, I am," Emma managed to say.

"I'm Peter Paxton. My mom sent me here with a package."

"Why not come inside out of the cold?"

The man stepped onto the kitchen door rug, carefully wiping his wet boots. Edith entered the kitchen and greeted him.

"Peter Paxton," exclaimed Edith. "I haven't seen you for such a long while. I run into your momma here and there but haven't seen you lately. You've sure grown taller! Come on in and sit yourself down."

Peter again wiped his boots on the rug and followed Edith into the living room. Edith held out her arms for his coat, which he unbuttoned and handed to her.

"What brings you out on this cold day?" Edith asked.

Peter looked uncomfortable, even shy. "Mom heard about Emma and the chimney fire." Peter almost blushed as he spoke. "She thought you was real brave. And she knows how women value such things and felt real sorry your stockings got ruind. She wanted you to have a new pair for being so brave."

Looking at Emma, he extended a package toward her. Emma opened the paper to find two pairs of new hose inside. She was truly touched.

"Well, she didn't have to do that," Emma said. "I was just at the right place when I could help some nice people. But thank her for me, will you?"

Peter nodded his head and stared at Emma until she felt like blushing. He had a warm smile and a good-looking, solid face. As tall as Owen, Peter had to be close to six feet, with a farmer's broad shoulders.

Edith and Peter talked about his parents, his younger brother Davie, and their farm until Edith had gotten all the latest news. Edith didn't believe in listening in on party lines to keep up with gossip, but she enjoyed catching up whenever she could. Edith and Janie Paxton had been friends for years, but only got to see each other occasionally. When they got telephones, they were able to talk more often. But Edith welcomed fresh news from Peter, since she would be more up to date than her other women friends.

Finally stretching his long lanky frame up from the chair, Peter cleared his throat. "Well, I better be gittin' home before dark. Got some milking to do."

Edith retrieved his coat, noted how he looked at Emma again, and said, "Now you just come by anytime, Peter. And you and your folks live outside



Pickering, so you're not so far from where Emma is staying at the Roberts'. So don't be a stranger whenever you're in the area."

Peter said his goodbyes and headed out the door. Emma watched him drive off in a black Chevrolet.

"He's a good boy," noted Edith. "His momma raised him right, and he's a hard worker. He's been helping his daddy farm since he was a boy. I guess he's about twenty-six by now. And he's smart, too."

Emma smiled at her mother, knowing how Edith would love to see her married. A lot of Emma's friends had married after high school. Many had children by now, some starting a second baby. While Emma considered herself average looking, she had never found someone who could share her dream of teaching and openness to learning. Oh, well, she would just keep looking and hoping.

For each birthday and Christmas for several years, Edith had been giving a present to add to Emma's hope chest. Edith had made a quilt, table runner, doilies, aprons, and other handmade items for Emma. She had even saved enough money for a baking dish or two. While Edith never pressed Emma, Emma knew she wanted her to be happy, whenever that might occur, and not rush into something.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ilene W. Devlin was born in Winterset, Iowa, the actor John Wayne's hometown. She lived in Macksburg and Winterset and often visited relatives in northwest Missouri. Attending the University of Iowa, Devlin obtained a BA in anthropology and an MA in archaeology and a minor in museum training. Afterward, she worked in museums in Nebraska, Tennessee, and Alabama.

Since 1986, Ilene Devlin has lived in San Antonio, Texas. Her freelance articles and essays have been published in newspapers in San Antonio and Iowa. *Emma's World: A World War II Memoir* is her second book. Her first book, *Cherry Tree Dares: Essays on Childhood*, was published in October 2020.