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DAKOTA IMAGES

Drawing on her experiences as a homesteader in South Dakota, author and poet Marian Hurd McNeely wrote a novel set in Tripp County that went on to win accolades as a Newbery honor book.

Born Marian Kent Hurd in Dubuque, Iowa, on 26 July 1877, she was the daughter of Louis G. and Lymna Maxfield Hurd and the second of four children. Louis Hurd was a successful attorney, a member of the local school board, and a trustee of the public library, offering a home environment that may have encouraged his daughter's interest in writing.

McNeely began her homesteading experience when she married Lee McNeely on 4 May 1910. The couple had met in Dubuque, where Lee McNeely worked as a private secretary to Iowa congressman David B. Henderson. In 1908, Lee McNeely moved to Tripp County and took a homestead about seven miles southwest of Winner. He also served as postmaster of the nearby town of McNeely, originally plotted as Minneota. The couple lived on the farm for about two years and then returned to Dubuque, where they raised four children and Marian McNeely pursued her writing career.

McNeely wrote primarily for children, publishing poems and short stories in a variety of publications, including Saint Nicholas, Ladies' Home Journal, and Literary Digest. Two books, Miss Billy: A Neighborhood Story (1905) and When She Came Home from College (1909), were co-written with other authors and published under the name Marian Kent Hurd. Rusty Ruston: A Story for Brothers and Sisters (1928) was the first book published under her married name, followed the next year by The Jumping-Off Place. The novel related the experiences of the four orphaned Linville children, who lived on a homestead in South Dakota with their Uncle Jim. Following his death, they must prove up without adult help. The volume was named a Newbery honor book for 1930. McNeely wrote a humorous poem entitled "A Ballade of Losers" about being "an Also-ran" in the contest, which was published in the Saturday Review of Literature.

Marian Hurd McNeely was fifty-three when she died on 18 December 1930 after being struck by an automobile while crossing a street in Dubuque. Her husband witnessed the accident. Her novel Winning Out (1931) and the collection The Way to Glory and Other Stories (1932) were published posthumously. Each year until his own death in 1960, Lee McNeely sent out a Christmas card containing one of his wife's poems.

—Patti Edman



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