

# *The View* *from the* *Front Room* *Window*

*Growing up in the 1940's and 1950's*



*Gail Hanson Mikkalson*

*The View*  
*from the*  
*Front Room*  
*Window*

*Growing up in the 1940's and 1950's*

*To Dorothy,  
Warm regards,  
Gail Mikkalson*

*Gail Hanson Mikkalson*

Scripture quotations are from:  
The Holy Bible, King James Version

Front Cover: Hanson's Hatchery,  
summer of 1949 during the  
Golden Jubilee Parade

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To order additional copies of this book contact:

Gail Mikkalson  
130 Pohl Road  
Mankato, MN 56001  
e-mail: [demikk@juno.com](mailto:demikk@juno.com)

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# *Dedication*

This book is dedicated with love to Dale, who shares many of these same memories, to our children, David, Paul and Sara and to our grandchildren Matt, Andy, Sam, Kathy, John, Karen, Laura, Jake and Ben.

## *Life on Main Street*

The year was 1936. The winter was cold and snowy, so much snow in fact that Mom and Dad were worried that he wouldn't be able to get her to Albert Lea to the hospital when it was time for me to be born. The decision was made that Dad would take Mom at a time when the roads seemed most passable and she would stay in Albert Lea with a friend of hers to await my arrival. Even then the story goes that they followed the snowplow or they wouldn't have been able to make it. It was two weeks yet before I was to be born on February twenty-fourth.

Not only did that winter hold the record for being the coldest and the snowiest for many years, but the summer proved to be a record holder as well for having the highest temperatures. The 1936 high temperature records for the Twin Cities have stood for more than 56 years. The temperatures ran between 106 and 108 degrees during the middle of July. Imagine trying to keep a baby cool with those kind of temps! No air conditioning in those days, in Bricelyn anyway. People tried to cool off by putting blocks of ice in front of fans (if they had electricity). Or they slept outdoors, lying on their lawns trying to stay cool.

Dad barbered with his brothers, Harold and C.M. (Christ) Hanson for several years, but in 1926 with encouragement from his brother Alfred, he bought some incubators, installed them in the basement of our house in Bricelyn and began a part time business of hatching chicks for area farmers. Mom worked with him in this endeavor.

The home we lived in for the first year or two of my life had been Grandpa and Grandma Martin's house. It is in the east part of town across from the former Wilcox home, which housed the Telephone Company.

In 1927 he bought a barber shop on Main Street from Luke and Faith Larmer and continued barbering until it became too much to handle both businesses and at that point, he decided to give up the barbershop and go full time with the hatchery where he could not only hatch chicks but also offer a full service feed store. He and Mom bought a building on Main



**Top:** *The author - Gail Hanson at about age three 1939.*

**Bottom:** *Hanson's Hatchery and our apartment above - decked out for Christmas.*





**Top:** My sister, Pat, age 9 (right) and I, age 3, in the City Park.



**Bottom:** Good buddies, cousin Dixie Martin and I, in about 1940.

Street that had previously been a tavern and then a meat market. It had an apartment upstairs. We moved there when I was one or two years old in 1937 or 1938. The building was directly across the street from the City Park, on the south corner of the block.

The apartment had a large kitchen, dining room, a front room (as we called the living room) and two bedrooms. There was a long entry hall with a storeroom off from it. This is where Mom washed clothes. There was no water source or drain out there, so she had to carry water both before and after the washing. This room was kind of scary to me when I was little. It was like an attic in that the walls were not finished and the floor had wide boards. There was one single bare bulb in the ceiling with a long string hanging from it. One wall was lined with shelves that stored the canned goods that Mom prepared each summer and fall. Another wall had an old chest of drawers that was full of interesting things.

Sometimes Mom would let me open a box that was in one of the drawers. In the box were several long auburn curls of hair that had been my Grandma Martin's. An early custom was to save your long hair when you had it cut and frame it behind glass to hang on the wall. This hair was just lying in the box. It seemed very mysterious to me. I don't know what ever became of it.

We had no central heat, so an oil burner in the dining room had to suffice. There were several adventures with that! One time when Mom was lighting it, it just poofed up with black smoke everywhere. What a job to clean everything! The furniture had to be professionally dry-cleaned and Mom hired a lady to help her scrub down all the wallpaper. They used a pink colored clay-like material that reminds me now of Playdough.

On very cold nights it wasn't always so warm in the other rooms. Although Pat's and my bedroom was right next to the dining room and the oil burner, we were still cold. So we would put our pillows on top of it, turning them to get both sides warm, then grab them and run quickly to bed with a nice warm pillow. The problem was that sometimes we were distracted for a few minutes and would forget our pillows on top of the burner until we would smell something scorching! Oooooopppps! Our pillows! Mom was not too happy about this.

The oil for the burner had to be drawn from a barrel that was outside, first in a covered entryway and later on the roof of an addition to the hatchery. To keep the fire going one had to make sure that the tank on the back of the burner had oil in it. This was not a task that Pat or I liked doing but

if we were around the job fell to us.

One particular incident that I remember regarding filling the oil burner tank was Dad telling me to go fill the tank as he had just had a bath and would get chilled. I thought that was a rather weak excuse but I would never dare say, “No,” or “Why don’t you get it yourself?” so off I went, grumbling to myself.

Growing up in the apartment over the hatchery had at least one disadvantage as far as I was concerned. There was no yard to play in. On the other hand there was no lawn to mow either. There were definite advantages though. As a pre-schooler, I took my red-rimmed set of white enamel toy cookware into the metal feed storage building and there I could play house, climbing on the sacks of feed, pretending they were different rooms of my house. I would scoop up feed that had fallen from ripped sacks, add a little water and stir up “lunch” for my dolls.

In the open area between the feed building and the hatchery, there were stacks of wire chicken cages waiting to be used to put chickens in as they were caught and subsequently butchered. I could pretend those were little houses for my dolls.

In the hatchery were two huge incubators. When they weren’t in use hatching baby chicks they were empty—a perfect place to play elevator—going up—going down—opening and shutting the big doors. I guess no one worried that I would shut myself in there and be unable to get out. Maybe that was impossible to do.

Dad kept two wooden benches painted green which the farmers would sit on when they came in to discuss the weather, the price of corn or whatever. I used to have nightmares about snakes slithering on the floor around those benches. I was safe only because I was standing on the bench.

I liked to play office or school behind the high counter, where there was a large cash box and lots of unused sales slips. I could imagine that I was a salesclerk, filling out a sales slip and then ringing up the sale by pushing down on the little button that would open the cash box. Dad showed a lot of patience, having me hang around as I did. The result is lots of fond memories of playing in and around the hatchery.

One year Dad was out of town as Halloween approached. Mom was worried about kids playing pranks so she stationed herself downstairs in the hatchery with a large kettle and a wooden spoon. She could hear kids approaching and as they started to soap the front windows she grabbed the spoon, started to bang it on the kettle and let loose with the loudest voice

she could, "Get out of here." Later, in telling the story she liked to say that those kids were probably still running.

A worry of Dad's during the hatching season was that the electricity would go off and all the potential chicks would die. This had happened before so he rigged up a battery and buzzer system so that when the electricity did go off a buzzer in our apartment would sound alerting Dad so that he could go downstairs and switch to battery operation.

Before the chicks were moved to the brooder house, it had to be determined what sex they were, roosters or hens, as the hens would be used for breeding stock and the roosters would be destroyed. So the chicken sexers were called in. They came to work in the evening, after the hatchery was closed. Sitting on stools, they overlooked the boxes of chickens. They would pick them up one by one and determine the sex of the chicken. They looked something like pictures I had seen of men sitting at a poker table, a light with a green shade hanging from the ceiling, very low, right over their work. They worked long into the night.

After the chicks were sexed, they were moved out to the brooder house where they stayed in large cages until the farmers came for them. They were so small and cuddly with their soft yellow down. I loved to open the doors on the cages and bring them out to cuddle and pet. It wouldn't be long before the soft yellow down was replaced by white feathers and they wouldn't be nearly so appealing.

The boxes that the farmers would take the chicks home in would come flat. Iver Erdahl was hired to bend, staple and put them together. I got to help with this by punching out pre-cut holes in the sides and covers so the chicks could breathe. Iver was an elderly gentleman with a mustache and a long white beard. I wondered if he wasn't really Santa Claus who just had this job on the side. His wife was a good friend of Mom and a one-time neighbor who Mom just called "Erdahl." I thought it was strange to call someone by only her last name.

Another advantage to living on Main Street was that as a teen-ager I could keep track of the comings and goings of my friends. The view from the front room windows let me see who was driving into town from the south and what was going on across the street to the park and beyond to the school yard. On a warm summer evening I could open a window, pull up a chair and sit down to do a little daydreaming. At the same time, I could keep track of friends that were coming to town and others that were just "cruising" down Main Street and making a U-turn at the intersection in front

of our apartment. When Dale and I started dating I kept my eye out for that little black 1937 Ford coupe (it was old even then) that he sometimes drove or else the blue Chevy pick-up. On rare occasions he got the family car.

During the Christmas season, a huge evergreen tree was put up in the middle of each of the three intersections on Main Street. They were decorated with large colored lights. It was great fun for the teen-age boys to slide their cars (or their dad's cars) as fast as they could around and around those trees on the icy street. To be honest, I'd have to say that there probably were a few bulbs missing after some of those late night adventures!

Another Christmas event that happened on Main Street was that Santa Claus would visit. On at least one or two Saturdays before Christmas, there would be a free show (as we called the movie) at the theater. When the show was over Santa would appear with paper bags full of apples and hard candy for all the boys and girls, an early marketing plan I suppose, as Moms and Dads could do their Christmas shopping while the kids were at the theater.

Santa made a stop at our house at least once. He left a small, metal rocker (I think it was red) for me. I didn't get a chance to see him, as Mom just heard him out in the entry and went out there quickly and brought the rocker into the living room.

The only memory I have of Grandma Hanson is one of sitting in that rocker beside Mom's sewing machine, listening to the hum of the machine while watching Grandma's feet work the peddle that ran it. Occasionally, I would stretch my neck to watch the fabric whiz under the needle and come out on the other side. She was probably sewing the pieces together for her latest quilt. Grandma stayed with us some of the time after Grandpa died. The rest of the time she was with others of her ten children.

My belief in Santa Claus was to be shaken by Aunt Mary, Uncle Harold's wife. In fact, I think I can still hear her voice saying, "Well, there isn't any Santa Claus, anyway, you know!" Mother was quite upset with her for "spilling the beans."

When Bricelyn celebrated its Golden Jubilee in the summer of 1949 all of Main Street was filled with concessions, eat stands and rides. There was cotton candy, hot dogs and soda pop. There was the Tilt-A-Whirl, merry-go-round, a number of smaller children's rides and of course, my favorite, the swings. They were right in front of the hatchery; so if I wasn't down there riding them I had a good opportunity to view the action from the front room windows. Sometimes I would look at a person for a long time to see if I could get them to look up at me. Often it would work. When

they glanced up at the window, I would quickly duck down so they wouldn't see me.

We had a lot of fun during this 50th birthday celebration of our hometown. Jay Gould's Million-Dollar Circus performed several times and besides the rides and concessions there was a gigantic parade that was held twice, once in the morning and once at night. I didn't really get to see how gigantic these parades were because I was marching in the band in our snazzy new uniforms. Again, the front room windows came into play, as Mom watched the parades from one of them. Joan Halvorson, a senior, was crowned Queen and reigned over the festivities.

Cousin Dixie, who is a couple of years older than I, came to visit during this celebration. We were just hanging out downtown and began talking to some boys from Blue Earth. As we walked around Main Street with them we became separated in the crowds, so Dixie and one of the boys decided to wait in his car for the rest of us to show up. In the meantime, I decided to go home. That was a big mistake because when I showed up without Dixie, Uncle Fat, her Dad, was furious and worried because she had gone off with this stranger. Of course, these guys weren't "strangers" to us because we had just met them. Anyway, Dixie got a good "chewing out" when she got home and we decided that either we wouldn't do that again or at least we wouldn't get caught doing that again!

During the years that I grew up in Bricelyn, we never locked our doors. I don't think we even had a key. To my knowledge, no one else locked his or her door either. I recall one time when I wished we had locks. I was walking home from baby-sitting for the Risius family. They lived just two blocks away in an apartment behind their implement business. As I walked, I could hear footsteps behind me. I casually turned to see who it was. There were several young men whom I didn't know. I started walking faster. They started walking faster. I broke into a run. They broke into a run. I rounded the corner of the hatchery and ran up the stairs to our apartment as fast as I could. I hooked the screen door and hurried to the front room window to see what had become of them. They were just around the corner, looking around in bewilderment, wondering what had become of me. It may have been that they were innocently trying to give me a good scare, but I'm glad I didn't hang around to find out.

Even though buildings have been demolished and businesses have come and gone, the years I spent living on Main Street remain etched in my mind as good years and it was a wonderful place to grow up.

## *What Was There to Do ?*

Parents didn't assume responsibility for entertaining us. We had no TV or video games yet there was no lack of things to do. We weren't limited to playing with kids in our neighborhood but could go any place in town. Most of the adults in the community knew whose children we were which gave us a measure of safety but also kept us from getting into much trouble because if any adult saw us we knew there would be a report back to our parents.

As a pre-schooler and until I had my own network of friends I tried to hang out with sister Pat and her friends. Needless to say, I was not very welcome. When she was a teen-ager and I was about ten or eleven her boyfriends tried to bribe me with bubble gum or quarters to let her go with them when she was supposed to be watching over me. No luck! There was no way I was going to stay home alone.

One of my friends, Virginia had a yard with a big tree. Her Dad made a wooden airplane swing to hang from a large branch. How we let our imaginations soar! We were pilots dropping bombs on the enemy or Amelia Earhart crossing the ocean on a solo flight. Once the plane was "shot down" while Virginia was the pilot. The plane had to spin around and around as it fell to the ground. The fall to the ground part was in our imagination, but we could twirl the plane around and around, wrapping that rope as tight as it would go. The problem was that this time Virginia's long blond hair was tangled in it. I don't remember the details of how it happened, but I do remember that we couldn't get her hair untangled from the rope so her Dad had to bring a razor blade and trim her lovely golden locks in order to free her from the rope.

Growing along the side of the building that Virginia's family apartment was in were many tall, stately hollyhocks. To amuse ourselves on a sunny afternoon we made hollyhock dolls. We used one blossom in full bloom for the skirt (turned upside down) and a bud, almost ready to open for the head. If you peeled a ring of leaves from the bud there would be a hole

that you could push the stem from the blossom into and walla! You have a beautiful doll. If we could talk Ginny's Mom into giving us a pan of water, we would float our ballerinas on this quiet, serene "lake."

Playing with paper dolls was a favorite pastime when I was little. I sometimes got into sister Pat's collection. I, of course, knew that I would be very careful with them but apparently she didn't think so as I usually got in trouble when I played with them. If we tired of playing with our store-bought dolls we would ask Mom for an old catalog and cut out our own from the many choices there.

There was always an exciting adventure for a girl from a small town when I went to stay with cousin Dixie in Mason City. She lived maybe a mile or two from downtown (which referred to the main shopping area). We would check to see that we had some coins in our little purses and off we would trek, across peoples yards, over to the school playground where we would stop to swing or slide for a while and on again until finally the tall buildings of Federal Avenue came into view. Ah, which dime store should we go into first? We had big decisions to make as to how to spend our money. Maybe it would be another Little Big Book or maybe a barrette to wear in our hair. Whatever we bought we had to be sure to have enough money left to buy a float or malt at the soda fountain in one of the stores. Then we would start the long jaunt home.

We stayed up until all hours of the night playing Monopoly or reading the Big Little Books with the adventures of Dick Tracey. What great fun it was! But when our eyelids could stay open no longer and we finally turned the lights off to go to sleep I had to muffle my sobs in the quilt and wipe my tears with the sheet, as this was the time of day that I became homesick. The next morning all would be well again and off we would go for more hours of fun.

As elementary age kids, we played Hide and Seek in the City Park, which was across the street from the hatchery and our apartment. Whoever was "it" stood facing a tree with her arm over her eyes. One of the others would draw a circle on "its" back and dot it in the middle and as they dotted, they would run to hide as the others had already done. During one game, we were unable to find one of the girls. It was Roselyn's cousin, Mildred from Iowa. We finally got on our bikes to look all over town for her. We were quite worried until we found out that her parents had spotted her and picked her up to go home. We often chuckled later about never finding Mildred and we still wondered where she was.

Before I could read, Pat and I played Old Maid and Authors card games. I called the Mark Twain cards Uncle Harold because he had a mustache like Twain, the Henry W. Longfellow looked like Santa Claus and the redhead was Robert Louis Stevenson. The only female was Louisa May Alcott so I simply called her the lady. On it went with a special name for each author. Pat knew who I meant and so did Mom if she played with us so it worked fine.

Hopscotch and Hollywood Hopscotch were two games we played especially at noon and recess at school. To play the Hollywood variety you had to know the names of lots of movie stars—which I did! You wrote their initials in the squares and when someone landed on it they had to know which star it was and write it down.

Of course, we spent a lot of time on our bikes. I don't think our Moms worried about us. It was small town-1940's. No helmets or kneepads, plenty of scraped knees, arms and noses but no major injuries. There was an apple orchard in a vacant lot (vacant, so nobody owned it, right?) across from the Wilcox house. We loved the green apples from those trees. We would hurry home and get a big salt shaker, dump a bunch of salt in the palm of our hand and dip the apple into it. We had to take one big bite first so the salt would adhere to the fruit. My mouth puckers up just to think of it. No worry about too much salt in those days.

A favorite place to ride our bikes was the cemetery just a mile out of town. Sometimes we would take a lunch along and sit by one of our grandparent's gravestones. The conversation would always steer toward ghost stories. We could scare ourselves silly even in the broad daylight.

One bright, sunny afternoon Roselyn and I decided to ride over to Kiester to visit her sister. It got to be a longer ride than we had figured on. The road was full of loose gravel, cars would whiz by leaving us with dust in our hair, eyes and mouth and there were SO MANY hills to climb. No speeds on your bike to choose from to make the going easier, just your legs and the pedals! We began playing a little game to encourage ourselves to go on. We would say that we were SURE we'd be able to see Kiester over the next hill but if we couldn't we'd turn back. But when we reached the crest of the hill and we still couldn't see it, we'd just go on and say the same thing again. When we finally did get to Kiester we had a tall, cool glass of lemonade at Roselyn's sister's house and then hopped on our bikes for the trip back home.

At that time, there were several rows of evergreen trees that formed the northern border of the village. They made a perfect place for kids to play.

War games were one of the favorites. We didn't have toy guns so we used sticks or just our arms. The needles on the trees were very sticky and scratchy but the fallen needles made a soft bed to fall into if we were "shot".

Annie-I-Over was a game we played in the neighborhood. A team of kids positioned themselves on either side of a garage, shed or other building. One of our favorite places for playing this was the garage at Alan's house. Someone on one team would yell Annie-I-Over and throw a ball over the roof. Someone on the other team had to catch it, run around to the other side of the garage and throw it at someone, hoping to hit them.

Wintertime brought different activities. Ice-skating was one of them. During my elementary school days, the ice pond was on the school grounds-in the southeast corner of the block. It was just a walk across the City Park for Pat and me. I can still remember how bitterly cold some of those times were but nevertheless we loved being outside. None of us ever had skating lessons but our role model was Sonja Heine, the great Olympic skater and movie actress.

During my junior high days, the ice rink was moved to an empty lot across from the canning factory. That was so much better as there was a warming house. Sometimes we spent more time in there than we did skating! There was a wood burning stove and some benches to sit on. We often went downtown when we were too tired to skate anymore and would stop by Sally's Cafe for a cup of hot chocolate.

Being built on quite flat land, Bricelyn didn't have many hills for sliding, but there is one street in town that is on a hill and how it came about I'll never know but the city fathers closed it off to traffic so we kids could use it for sledding. What fun running with your sled in front of you and then plopping down onto the road at the crest of the hill. We experienced a thrill with the cold air rushing past your face as you and your sled sped down that hill. Pat, Mary and Margaret lived on that street and Carol lived at the top of it so one of their Moms usually had us in to warm up with hot chocolate. Moms generally weren't working outside the home during those days so someone was always around to keep an eye on us.

In the spring, after the snow melt and the heavy rains, there was a street on the west end of town that had ditches that would fill with water. This was just too tempting for kids. Several of the boys in the neighborhood would build wooden boats out of scrap lumber. (At least they thought it was scrap lumber.) These boats were big enough for us to ride in and we had great fun rowing up

and down the ditches by Moen's on the west end of town. We pretended we were sailors, pirates or maybe just rowing at leisure down the "river."

One of our friends, Nancy had a two-room playhouse in her grandparent's back yard. She lived with them and we sometimes thought she was lucky because she seemed to get everything she wanted. What was lost on us was that what she DIDN'T have was her parents. We had a lot of fun in the playhouse though with neighborhood kids when we were little and even later, as adolescents, when there was often kissing games going on in there.

Roller-skating was fun and it wasn't until we were older and skating in indoor rinks that we wore shoe skates. Before that time, they were metal clamp-on-your-shoe types. We got the right fit by tightening the clamps with a key, which we wore on a string hanging around our neck while skating. They had ball bearing wheels though.

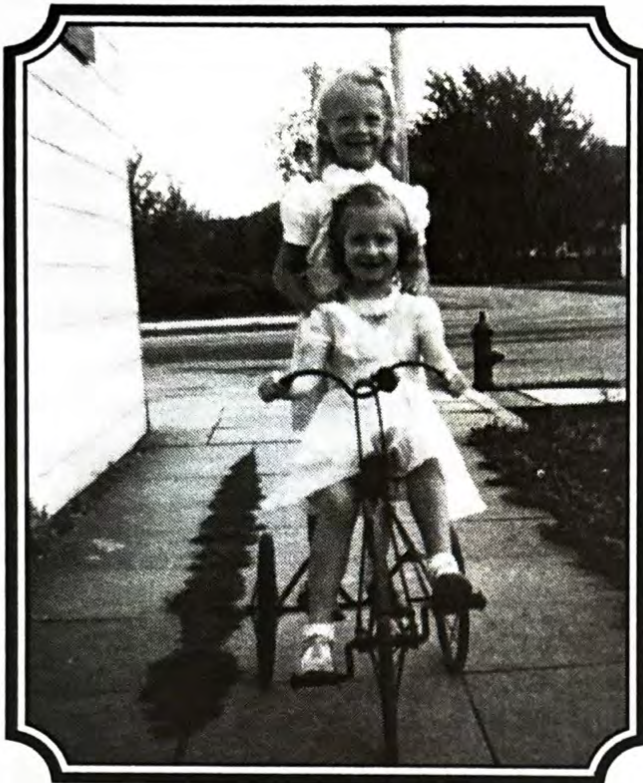
One event that really scared us was when Margaret broke her nose roller-skating. We usually skated on the city sidewalks but this particular Sunday afternoon a bunch of us were skating in the town hall on Main Street. Weren't we smart? We had our own private roller rink! I have no idea whether we had permission to do that or not. Maybe the door was just left unlocked as doors were back then and we decided it would be a great place to skate or maybe the city council said we could. There was no worry about lawsuits then. Anyway, Margaret took a tumble and there we were, with a girl whose nose was bleeding and were we scared! Several of us walked her home (about two blocks) and were glad that her Mom was there to take care of her. I think that was the end of roller-skating in the town hall!

Later, in high school we skated in an indoor rink in Kiester. It was a fun way to meet other kids. If none of us could get the car, we would hang around Peterson's Cafe downtown to see if someone would show up who could give us a ride.

We also skated in Blue Earth. In fact, in high school we had all-school skating parties over there and several bus loads of kids would go.

One particular evening Dale had the car so instead of riding the bus three of us couples piled in his car and away we went to Blue Earth. It was great fun roller skating but when it came time to go home we decided it was too early to call it a night. We discovered that there was a midnight movie showing in Fairmont and away we went, no thought of calling home. We enjoyed the movie but that was the last part of the evening that we enjoyed.

As we rolled in to my place about 2:30 a.m. we discovered that quite a few people were concerned about us. As well as our parents, who wondered, "What were you thinking?" (I guess we weren't) there was a host of other people in town and out in the country who had listened in on the party line (rubbernecking) as our parents called one another, worried sick about what had happened to us. I'm sure their next step was to call the highway patrol. Needless-to-say, we didn't do that again!



**Top:** *My good friend Virginia Savick and I riding my tricycle in 1941.*

**Bottom:** *My beloved Kitten, that Mom said someone stole, and I at age six.*



# *Communication*

## *Numbee, Please*

Bbbrrring, bbbrring- a telephone call from Sara in Woodbury. She has a question about a recipe. Her question is answered, we chat for 45 minutes or an hour before we hang up. Oh, I forgot to tell her what time dinner is on Sun. I go to my computer and send her an e-mail message. Later in the day, a phone call comes from Dave. He's on the road as a consultant and calling from his cell phone. That evening we get a telephone call from Paul. He's calling from somewhere over Texas as he flies home from a business meeting. A regular part of life in the 90's, right? Not so in the 40's and 50's.

It was 1944, I was 8 years old and in the hospital for an appendectomy. It was about a 10-day stay at that time and Mom was with me. Dad had been notified by telegram that Grandma Hanson who was staying with Aunt Julia in Madelia had passed away. The telegram was sent from the railroad depot in Madelia to the Chicago Northwestern Depot in Bricelyn. The depot agent had to send and receive messages in Morse code. When a message came in he would type it up and see that it got delivered to the addressee. Dad, in turn, let us know by sending us a card. No telephone calls even with a death in the family!

There was the penny postcard and the three-cent stamp and letter writing was almost an art form. Today's quick e-mail messages and telephone calls can't compare with pouring over a cherished letter from a loved one, to be read over and over and saved in a bundle wrapped with a yellow ribbon.

Even into the mid-fifties the long-distance call was used sparingly. Carol, my college roommate made the judgement that being selected to sing with the Luther College Nordic Choir was reason enough to call her parents long-distance. When I wanted to get home for the week-end I would have to make arrangements enough in advance that I could write my parents to

let them know where to meet me.

Our telephones were either an oak box with a black mouthpiece, receiver and ringer that hung on the wall or a desk model that was all black. There were no dials. We just picked up the receiver, gave the ringer a whirl and an operator would ask what number we wanted. Tina and Hannah were the operators that I remember being on duty the most and Tina would always say, "Numbee, please." When you told her the number you wanted she would hook your number up with that one and presto! Your friend's phone would ring.

There are certain things that stick in my mind even better than today's grocery list and those are my phone number and that of the hatchery—52-J and 104.

My sister Pat worked as a part-time telephone operator when she was in high school and I got to visit her to see how the system worked. Actually, I think she was doing double duty by working at the telephone office and baby-sitting me. The office was in a little room through a side door in the home of the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox. The operator sat at a desk with a kind of box on top of it. On the front of this box there were holes. When a light went on (or a buzzer sounded if it was late at night and the operator might be sleeping) by a hole that had your telephone number on it she would pull up a cord, plug it into your number and ask what number you wanted. Then she would grab another cord and plug it into the hole with the number you wanted and somehow the connection was made. At the time it seemed pretty high tech to me.

If you lived in the country there would be many other homes connected to the same line. Your house was assigned a certain ring so you would know that call was for someone at your house. It might be two longs and a short or three shorts and a long or something similar. There was also a "general" ring that would ring in all the party lines. Its purpose was to let everyone know of an emergency, such as a fire or accident or maybe there was a snowstorm and school was going to be closed.

Now it was often just too tempting not to listen in on some other farm family's call especially when the calls were between teen-agers, not to say that the adults didn't listen in on each other's calls also. You could be in on a lot of news and gossip that way. This was called rubbernecking. Some of the town folk too, were on party lines as they were called, but ours was a private line.

Until the mid 50's when Mom and Dad got a television set, radio and

newspaper were the means of keeping up with the news. Dad would sit by his radio in a rocking chair faithfully at noon and ten o'clock in the evening and listen to Cedric Adams on WCCO. Cedric was like a member of the family. Being in the agricultural business the farm report and the markets were especially interesting to Dad. We all gathered around the radio to listen to the Amos 'n Andy and Jack Benny programs on Sunday nights and "Fibber Magee and Molly" on Tuesday nights. Pat and I tuned in to "Let's Pretend" on Saturday mornings as we tried to avoid doing our weekly chores. Mom sometimes listened to a couple of radio soap operas called, "Clarenzo Jones and His Wife Belle" and "Stella Dallas."

The Minneapolis Morning Tribune was delivered daily with the mail to our box at the post office where we would go to pick it up. The Bricelyn Sentinel was delivered the same way only just once a week, on Thursday. This was how we kept up on all of the local news.

The theaters also provided us with news. There was a short feature called Movietone News that would run just before the main feature of the evening. What I remember most about it was the scenes of battles that were happening in Europe and the Pacific during World War II.

As more and more homes bought TV's, the way that news was delivered was changed forever. When it was first available in our area Dad said he wouldn't dream of having one. The picture didn't come in very well, it was too "snowy" and besides there were no good programs. We did notice that he spent a lot of time in Lindeman's Furniture Store though and it wasn't to buy furniture but to watch TV on the model they had on display. It wasn't long before Dad succumbed and bought one. However, it was after I left home to go to college.

## *Elementary School Days*

The school, along with the church was the center of our social life. Our school was a two-story square reddish brick building with a gymnasium attached to the back. It housed grades one through twelve. To the front just beyond the school property was the square block of the City Park all connected like one big playground. At the end of the front sidewalk was a large oak tree whose roots had pushed up the sidewalk. Another sidewalk coming from the front door angled to the corner of the lot. It was on this sidewalk that we played hopscotch and it was behind the bush at the end of this sidewalk that we first grade girls would hide so as not to be kissed by the first grade boys!

When I first started school there were only three elementary teachers—one for first and second, one for third and fourth and one for fifth and sixth. As I progressed through school, more teachers were added probably because country school kids began coming in to town school.

Miss Virginia Graber, who married a local farmer and became Mrs. Smith, was my first grade teacher. She was beautiful, gentle and kind and remained so during all the years that I knew her. My second grade teacher was Miss Dorothy Schert, well trained at Miss Woods Kindergarten and Primary Training School and Columbia University in NY.

Third grade brought me to the most seasoned of the teachers as Miss Aura Kingsley had taught in Bricelyn for more than 20 years and in area rural schools several years before that. She was a leader in school, community and church activities. She was ahead of her time in that we studied a lot about the Indians (Native Americans) of Minnesota and things having to do with nature. I still have a piece of embroidery work with a Native American design on it that I sewed while in her class.

Our third grade class was her last, as I remember coming to school one morning and meeting friends in the cloak hall where we hung our coats and left our boots and learning that she had a heart attack or stroke and would not be back. I must admit to having mixed feelings, as I had been

afraid of her since the day I had walked up the aisle between the rows of desks to go sharpen my pencil. She was sitting on a chair at the head of the aisle and as I tried to squeeze past her she grabbed my ear, pulled it and shouted, "Were you born in a barn?" I guess that incident taught me a couple of lessons. One—be more careful about where you walk and two—don't embarrass anyone like that.

Somewhere along in here, one or more of my teachers had a talk with Mother about what an excellent student I was—but—I did talk too much. I think Mother knew that already since she had to put up with me at home.

My fourth grade teacher was Miss Betty Thatcher. What I remember about her is being surprised to learn that she had a life outside of school. One Halloween Mom took me trick or treating to an apartment in a big house on the north end of Main Street. I knocked on the door and was I surprised when Miss Thatcher opened it! What was she doing out of school?

Mrs. Aldin Udstuen, a graduate of Mankato State Teachers College, was my fifth grade teacher. I remember her as being very patient and understanding. I believe we had Mrs. Beulah Jorgenson also that year, who I already knew and loved dearly as my piano teacher.

For sixth grade we had Mrs. Wells. I wonder how she put up with us. She commuted from Blue Earth which we thought was an awfully long way to come. She had a little girl named Sandra who got to come to school with her the last day in the spring.

We spent many hours practicing the large, oval O's (around and around) and the long, slanted lines (push, pull, push, pull) from our Palmer Penmanship Book. Beautiful handwriting was something to be valued.

Once a week we would have a spelling bee. Oh, the excitement of standing up beside your desk when it was your turn and correctly spelling whatever word the teacher pronounced!

Learning to read from the "Dick, Jane and Spot" reading series was a thrill not to be forgotten. Soon I was devouring all the books in the library.

I usually finished my work quickly, including all the memory work. One day, while in sixth grade, I filled my spare time making drawings of all of the instruments in our newly formed band. Imagine my embarrassment when a shadow fell over my desk and I looked up to see our new superintendent and band director, Mr. Rupp looking over my shoulder. He just smiled and walked on.

We opened every morning with prayer and the pledge to the flag. On

Friday afternoons the whole elementary school would gather in one of the classrooms for choir practice, I guess, or at least a time of singing. We sang songs out of The Golden Book of Favorite Songs, such as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "The Marine's Hymn," "God Bless Our Native Land," "Jesus Loves Me," and other patriotic and Christian songs. This was probably the time when we practiced the music for our operettas also.

Miss Thatcher directed one of them, "Polly Make-Believe." Carol Balzer played the part of Polly. Kathy Zupp, Norma Bergsather, Janice Jacobson and I played the part of Dutch girls. Our Moms made our costumes and we felt very special.

When I was in fifth grade we presented a second operetta "Sunny of Sunnyside" starring Dale's cousin, Joyce Mikkalson as Sunny. There were 98 of us in the cast. It must have been the whole elementary school. These were the kinds of activities that brought out the whole community, whether you had any children participating or not.

It was no easy task presenting a play in our school. The stage had to be built on one end of the gym floor. Heavy burgundy curtains needed to be hung from the ceiling. The backstage area was only a narrow walkway. Steps leading to the stage were placed on each of the side entrances. It was later that the stage area was built to extend right up to the outside walls of the gym, making entrances and exits a lot easier. Plays had to be scheduled after the basketball season and the stage was too small to hold the band so we set up on the floor of the gym for our concerts.

Most of the work of setting up and taking down for concerts and plays fell to the school janitor, Ralph Black. We respected and maybe even feared him, as he was very protective of "his" school, making sure that we took our boots off before coming in and watching to see that no one walked or played on the tennis courts without tennis shoes on. He truly took pride in his work. When he left to become an engineer at the Blue Earth Hospital, he was replaced by equally capable men, Ray Hintz and Roger Johnson, who continued the tradition of keeping the building spotless, as did others that followed them.

The school carnival was an event that we looked forward to. It was a chance to hang out with our friends, play games and eat. It was often held following a Friday night football game. There was bingo, a cakewalk, a fish-pond, nail driving and nickel pitching. The PTA also participated by having a country store where you could buy canned preserves and vegetables. Boys would sign up to box each other and you could use some of your

tickets to get in a room to watch them. Admission to the carnival was ten cents, which would entitle you to a chance in a drawing for an electric iron or maybe a free play to be given in the school library. The climax of the evening would be the crowning of the queen, who was determined by the largest amount of tickets sold by a certain grade. As much as one thousand dollars or more was raised for various school projects.

We had a school lunch program, but when I was in elementary school I always went home for lunch since it was only across the City Park to our apartment over the hatchery. Mom was always there to fix dinner for Dad, Pat and I. Noon was when we had our big meal of the day. It would be roast beef, pork, steak or hamburger with baked or boiled potatoes and gravy, Jell-O and pudding or pie for dessert. The vegetable was corn, peas or beans. The evening meal was supper and it would often be leftover meat with fried potatoes or a hot dish as we called a casserole.

Those that went to country school remember bringing sandwiches and a potato in a bucket. They would put the potato on top of the wood stove in the morning and by noon it would be cooked to perfection.

Our class trip was to St. Paul to the state capitol building. Such a frenzy of planning went into it. Not about anything we were going to see or learn about but whom we would sit with on the bus. Notes were passed back and forth for many days, "Will you sit with me?" or "Who is your first choice, second choice," and so on.

On our way home we stopped at the Weddell Baptist Home in Mpls. to see Miss Kingsley who had been living there since becoming ill back when we were in third grade. She was so happy to see us.

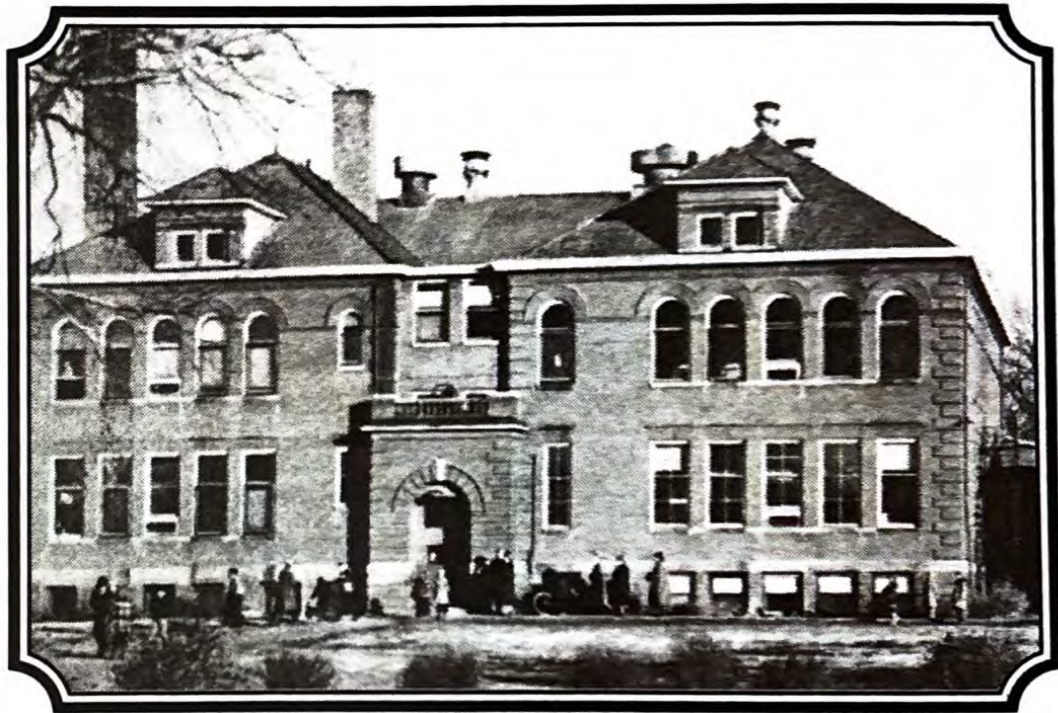
Getting a permanent for my straight-as-a-stick hair was not one of the things I looked forward to. Every few months I had to go to the "beauty shop" where over the course of several hours my hair would be rolled onto curlers that were attached to a huge electric machine that hung over the top of my head. After my hair had its proper curls, Mom would tame it by rolling it in rags on Saturday night. I would sleep on those so that on Sunday morning for church and Sunday School I would have long ringlets of curls. The price of beauty in the 1940's!

Dr. Lewis Hanson, who became our family doctor, began a medical practice in Frost in 1931. He was my cousin, a son of C.M. (Christ) Hanson who was Dad's brother. Stories about his practice in rural Minnesota and Iowa could make another whole book.

Doc Louie, as he was often called, made house calls, as did other doc-

tors during those years. One night Dad was very sick with pneumonia, so Mom called Doc and he came to our house to give Dad a shot. While he was there, Mom asked him to check me over also, as I had been complaining of stomachaches. He did and promptly told Mom that I had appendicitis and would need to have my appendix out. Was I surprised! I thought I had been faking stomachaches so I wouldn't have to go to school!

When the doctors removed my appendix, they discovered it was full of bebe shot that was used to kill the pheasants Dad had hunted during the fall. Some of the shot remained imbedded in the meat; I inadvertently swallowed some when I ate it and it imbedded in my appendix. See if I ever fake a stomachache again!



*Bricelyn School in 1951.*

## *Saturday Nights and the Show*

“I’m leaving to park the car, Gail, I’ll be right back.”

It was late Saturday afternoon and Mom wanted a good place on Main Street for the car. It was tradition for the farmers and their families to come to town on Saturday night when the stores would be open. The farmers would have eggs to bring in to one of the produce stores or Wolf, Habein, Anderson. After they were candled, the farmers would get paid for them. To candle the eggs, they were held up to a light and checked for blood spots, cracks or other imperfections. The money they got for the eggs was to be used to buy groceries and other necessities for the week. We “city folk” also used this time to do some shopping and visiting with one another, so it was important to get a good parking place on main street in order that the women folk could sit together in cars to chat and watch the action. It was a time for exchanging news (gossip) about family and friends.

The kids got to go to the show, which was what we called a movie. On Saturday night, it was usually a western. We’d get a card that would be punched every week and when the card was full of punches we’d get a free pass to the next week’s feature. There was a “short” that was shown before the feature began. One was with Dick Tracy and another was a melodrama with Pearl White. Some of the early westerns featured Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, with Dale Evans, Gabby Hayes, the Sons of the Pioneers and Trigger, Gene Autry with Pat Butrum and Champ, The Lone Ranger with Tonto and Silver. Randolph Scott was often featured in the Sunday night western which was supposedly a little more high class. That would be in the 1940’s. We could come with 25 cents, pay 12 cents for the movie, 5 cents for a bag of popcorn, another 5 cents for an ice cream cone after the movie and still have change left over.

I remember Art Peterson running the concession stand where we got our

popcorn and/or candy. "Doc" Naee, my friend Pat's Dad ran the projector. Young kids were sometimes hired to sweep the floors and clean up the theater the next day. This was one of the few jobs that were available to town kids.

I often went to the show three times a week when I was young—about ages ten to twelve. This would be on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday nights. Were my folks trying to get rid of me or what? There's only one movie that I remember Mom not letting me go to and that was "The Snake Pit." I think it was about someone going crazy and being put in an insane asylum as we called it back then. After we got into Junior high and beyond, we were busy with school and church activities and a social life that included roller-skating and parties and didn't leave as much time for movies.

As young teen-agers, however, when we did have time, the theater became a place to meet your boyfriend—always in the balcony of course. Clint, the owner, would come up often and shine his flashlight into your face if he thought you and your boyfriend were getting a little too chummy.

As preteens, we would chase around downtown with our friends until our parents said it was time to go home. We used the rest room in the dry-goods store (as it was called) Wolf, Habein, Anderson, not only for what it was intended but as a place to hide from a particular group of kids that we wanted to get away from. It was upstairs where the women's clothing and shoes were so we could hide in among the dresses, too.

The store carried not only women's clothing but men's and children's, plus linens including bedding, tablecloths, fabric, and notions. In the back was the grocery department where my Uncle Vic worked. His father-in-law was a part owner. Vic had gotten some drinking glasses in that were made of a new unbreakable material—plastic. Eager to show off these great glasses, Vic approached some customers and told them of the terrific feature these new glasses had, perfect for families, unbreakable. He proceeded to raise the glass high over his head and wham it down on the floor. Cccrrrack! The plastic splintered into hundreds of pieces scattering all over. Needless to say, Uncle Vic was terribly embarrassed. That was one demonstration he didn't try again!

The concept of self-serve had not yet reached our community. There was a counter that the clerks stood behind and if you wanted something, you would tell them what it was. They would get it for you. When you paid for it the clerk would put the money and a copy of the sales slip in a small metal container and hook it onto a moving cable that would take it up to the cashier who was on the mezzanine. The cashier would take the money

out and put the correct change back in the container, sending on down to where you were waiting.

Mom sent me to the store often as it was just on the other end of the block from our apartment. I always put the groceries in a cloth shopping bag that I brought from home.

When a couple was to be married, there would be a church shower to which all the women of the congregation would be invited. If a woman didn't know the bride or groom particularly well but wanted to go to the shower and be in on a gift, she would give \$0.50 or \$1.00 or however much she wanted to give toward a gift. The day of the shower the hostesses would go to Lindeman Furniture, Wolf, Habein, Anderson or the Gamble Store to see how much money had come in. They would then proceed to pick out a gift for the couple. It was something like the bridal registries of today. The bride could go in ahead of time to see what she wanted and then tell the hostesses.

There was lots of activity on a Saturday night in Bricelyn in the 1940's and 1950's.

## *My Aunt Joey*

My story about growing up would not be complete without including memories of my favorite aunt, Josephine or Joey as she was known by all of her friends and relatives. She was Mother's younger and only sister and she lived with us off and on, sometimes baking pies for one of the local cafes and other times working in the canning factory. Thinking about it now I realize that it must have been difficult having a family member living with us but in those days it was very common to have several generations under one roof.

As a young child, I felt there was quite a bit of mystic about Joey. For one thing, she was divorced, which was quite unheard of in our town during those years. As kids we had heard only sketchy reports of her first husband but we knew that whatever had happened to end the marriage it surely was no fault of hers.

Secondly, Joey was a smoker. Most of the men we knew smoked, but not the women. During the Second World War when it was difficult to get cigarettes, Joey would roll her own. She had a hand-operated machine that had a little groove in which you put the tobacco. You would then lick the sticky end of the paper, insert it into the machine and pull a lever to roll the tobacco into the paper and a cigarette would drop out on the other side. We nieces sometimes got to make these cigarettes for Joey. We thought it was cool, but we never tried to smoke one.

No one could whip the batter for a cake, cookies or bars like Joey could. I can still picture her, seated on a kitchen chair with a large mixing bowl in her lap, her cotton apron covering her whole dress, and a wooden spoon in her hand whipping away. No wonder her baking turned out so good! Using oleomargarine instead of butter became common because we had to use a treasured coupon to get butter during the war. We began to call it just oleo. Unfortunately, the margarine came in white form instead of the nice, rich yellow of butter. We could buy it in a bag that came with a little cap-



*Here are Aunt Joey and  
Uncle George when they  
were courting in the 1930's*



***Top:** Aunt Jo and Mom standing by our new 1949 Buick.*

***Bottom:** Aunt Joey and I at a family picnic in her later years.*



sule of yellow food coloring in it. The capsule could be broken and the color spread throughout the margarine by kneading it while still in the bag. This was my job when Aunt Joey was baking. I looked forward to these times together.

On Saturdays, she and I would listen to the Minnesota Gopher football games on the radio. How we would cheer when the Gophers made a touchdown! Before I was ten years old I knew the words to all of the fight songs that the marching band played-The Minnesota Rouser, Minnesota Hail to Thee and others. It was déjà vu for Dale and I when about forty years later two of our children, Paul and Sara were members of the University of Minnesota Marching Band. We got to not only see and hear them play those fight songs that I knew so well, but we also got to watch the Gophers play football which was much more exciting than just listening on the radio.

Joey had met a wonderful man while working in Mason City. His name was George. He was of Italian descent, dark and handsome. He loved Joey very much but it was only after a courtship of many years that she would marry him. Even then, it was after he left for San Diego to work in a defense plant during World War II, that Joey must have decided that absence made the heart grow fonder. She followed him and they were married in California.

Aunt Joey worked the corn pack in the 1930's and 1940's before she went to California to marry Uncle George. She stayed with us during this time. I could look out the window of our apartment and see her coming home for lunch or at the end of her shift, so I would scoot down the stairs and run to meet her. Her rubber apron and gloves were caked with corn so Mom would soak and clean them for her, ready for the next shift. The gloves had to have cornstarch sprinkled in them to help keep her sticky, sweaty hands from sticking to the rubber making it almost impossible to get the gloves off. During these years, the factory ran long hours, many times well after midnight.

After the war, they returned and settled in Mason City. I often spent a weekend or a few days in the summer with them. At least once my best friend, Loleen got to come, too.

"Come on, Gail, we're going to go for a treat," George would say.

"Oh, wow! Where are we headed?"

"It'll be a surprise. Just hop in the car."

As we drove toward North Federal Avenue, I thought we might be on

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As we drove toward North Federal Avenue, I thought we might be on

our way to Birdsill's Ice Cream Shop. But no. Uncle George kept going. "Where is he taking me?" I thought. Soon he pulled up to the curb and hopped out as he told me to stay put. I could see that he went in to a bar. In a few minutes out he came with two huge double dip ice cream cones, one for each of us. We had passed up Birdsill's because this bar served double dip cones for just one nickel. I think that was our favorite place to go for ice cream, at least until the price went up.

Joey kept her home spotlessly clean, but sewing was of no interest to her. If she needed a dress altered or other major sewing done, that's when Mom came into the picture, as this was her area of expertise. George handled the smaller sewing projects such as sewing on buttons and mending socks.

Easter Sunday always meant a special treat brought to us by George, but made by his sweet Italian mother. It was a basket made of bread with colored eggs baked into it. We still got together often and instead of just a favorite aunt, we now had a favorite aunt AND uncle. They never had children of their own so all of their nieces and nephews became their "family." They loved us as though we were their own and we loved them as well.

## *All Aboard*

It seemed that Bricelyn was destined to become a large city, with two railroad lines intersecting just outside of town. The two lines were the Rock Island and the Chicago Northwestern. But for some reason, it just wasn't meant to be.

The Rock Island I wasn't too familiar with except that (1) the Dad of my good friend, Pat, was the depot agent and (2) there was a rhubarb plant growing down by the depot. Dad told me his Mother (Grandma Hanson) used to pick rhubarb from it to make pies when he was a kid. He called it a pie plant. Many years later after the depot was abandon he thought of that and went out there to see if the plant was still growing. It was and I wonder if it still is today.

The Rock Island line was in south Bricelyn and carried only freight, no passengers, although people did sometimes hitch a ride on the caboose to Albert Lea in order to do a little shopping.

The other line was the Chicago Northwestern and the depot was located along Main Street near the canning factory. The father of another friend, Connie, was the depot agent here for a time. Besides carrying freight, this was the passenger train. At one point in time, I understand there were several trains each day, but I remember one train going west in the morning and southeast in the evening.

Coal was shipped by train and when it arrived, it would be shoveled onto the drayman's truck. He, in turn, would deliver the coal to the homes and businesses that had coal burning furnaces. There was a small metal door leading into the basement coal bin, which would be opened up, and the coal again shoveled, this time off the truck. In the days before trucks, it was hauled with a wagon and horses.

My Grandpa Martin, Mom's Dad, worked as a section foreman for the Chicago Northwestern. The story was that he invented the thing-a-ma-jig that sprayed fire out to burn the weeds along side the tracks. I don't know if it's true or not but it makes for a good family story.

The railroad tracks provided some entertainment for us. Walking the tracks, trying to balance on the rails was one pastime and also leaning down and putting our ear to the rail to see if we could hear the train coming was another. If we could hear it, the next thing was to guess how far away it was. Listening to the whistle of the train from my bed at night made me dream about far away places and what it would be like if I could go there.

I often got to ride the passenger train (sometimes called the puddle jumper) with Mom and Pat to visit relatives in Mason City and sometimes I got to go by myself. I felt so very grown-up. The excitement welled up in me as I listened to the train approaching from the west. The black and white smoke poured out from the stack on the engine. As it chugged to a stop, the conductor would hop off. It would take only a few minutes for the mailbags to be thrown off one of the last cars and to load others so I had to be ready to board. I would walk down the aisle a short way to pick a seat, hopefully by a window so I could watch the countryside whiz by. Soon I could hear the conductor yell, "All aboard!" We were on our way. I just knew I had to stay on through the stops—Kiestler, Scarville, Joice, Hanlontown and so on until we got to Mason City. After we were well on our way the conductor would come down the aisle and ask for my ticket, which he would punch and hand back.

Shortly before we arrived at the depot in Mason City, I could spot Dixie's house and back yard. Then I knew it wouldn't be long. She and her Mom and Dad or Joe and George would always be there to pick me up. It was quite an adventure for a nine or ten year old.

The train always went southeast in the evening, but in the morning, it would head west and to Blue Earth. My sister Pat and her friends would ride the train there to shop for the day and come back on the late afternoon-early evening train.

The mailbags would be packed at the post office and hauled to the depot in a two wheeled wooden cart pushed by Mr. Febblestad. He had one stiff leg so it must have been a difficult walk for him. This ritual would take place twice a day as the mail came in and as it went out. As a little girl looking for something to do, I would often join him as he passed by the hatchery and walk with him on his way to the depot. I don't know that we ever carried on a conversation but none was needed. I was keeping him company on his daily walk and during the canning season, I just might be able to meet up with Aunt Joey on her way home from her shift at the factory.

The railroad played an important role in our country during the years that I grew up until after World War II when the interstate highway system was built. It was then that the large trucks took over the task of transporting goods across the continent and cars became the preferred mode of transportation for the general public.

# *World War II*

## *The Home Front*

Although we saw lots of Movietone film clips in the Movie Theater about the war as it was happening it was still a very remote idea for me. I was only five to ten years old during the years of World War II, so it is quite surprising to me that I remember anything at all about it. But I do.

We got behind the war effort in school by bringing in our dimes to buy stamps on Monday mornings. These stamps would go into a book which when full could be converted to a savings bond. Even as young as we were, we were able to knit little squares to make afghans that would be sent to our troops to help keep them warm.

At home we saved aluminum foil, string and other various things that could be used for the war effort. People planted Victory gardens and willingly gave up traveling and other things in order to help. Each person was issued a ration book (I still have one of mine) that had stamps in it. In addition to paying for the gasoline, sugar, tires and other items that were in short supply, you had to use a certain number of stamps from your ration book. When you ran out of stamps, you couldn't get any more of that item. The more people in your family the more books of stamps you received. I'm sure there was black market going on at this time. People would try to talk retailers into slipping them extra products on the side.

Another one of our efforts was to pick the fuzzy material out of the milkweed pods and collect it in bags. It was supposedly used for filling for life jackets. All of these activities helped people to feel as though they were doing their part in bringing the fighting to an end.

During the war years, we took our family vacation in Clear Lake, IA where we rented a little cottage across the street from the lake. There wasn't enough gas available for us to go "up north." There was a girl about my age that lived next door in an enormous house. She had a marvelous doll-

house that even had ceiling lights in each room. I spent hours playing with this house. I don't think she was nearly as impressed with it as I was.

Something that this cottage had that we didn't have at home was an ice-box. It was made of oak on the outside, metal on the inside, and had two doors. About twice a week the iceman would come with these huge tongs to put a fresh block of ice in the bottom compartment. I would sometimes take a pick to chip off a chunk of ice to suck on. I thought the whole ice-box thing was a "cool" concept but I'm sure Mom preferred the electric refrigerator that she had at home.

The whole community practiced "black-outs" during the war. All the lights in town had to be shut off or at least all the window shades drawn. I think it was actually called a "brown-out". We wanted to be ready in case of an air attack and if there were no lights the Nazis wouldn't know there was a town below them as they flew over. Thinking back on that now I'm sure that we would have been in REAL bad shape if the Nazis or the Japanese (we called them Japs) got as far as Briceyn before being shot down! I remember thinking that they really might fly over and drop bombs on us, but still the idea was unbelievable enough that I never felt unsafe.

There were prisoner of war camps just north of Wells. As I recall, they brought Italian prisoners there. It was a scary feeling driving by those long barracks, thinking, "What if they would escape?"

Each morning in the Minneapolis Morning Tribune, there was a list of war casualties from the state of Minnesota. Mom and Dad were visibly upset as they read the list and even more so when someone from our town was among those listed.

The mothers of those that were killed in the war were called Gold Star Mothers by the American Legion Auxiliary and each Memorial Day they rode in the parade to the cemetery where they were honored for the great sacrifice their family had made in order to keep our country free.

About the age of nine I had memorized the Gettysburg Address and was asked to recite it for a meeting of the Auxiliary. I had to leave school during the day and walk to a house where the meeting was being held. It was scary, but I did it. I guess I thought that was one of my contributions to the war effort, since I was reciting to the American Legion Auxiliary.

Lots of different treats were hard to come by during the war. One of them was bubble gum. Occasionally, O. C. Mineer's Tobacco Store would get in a shipment. We did wonder if he bought it on the black market, because it seemed as though the other stores in town were unable to get a supply.

But we didn't really care how he got it, just that he did get it. I was never brave enough to go in the store to get some because it was also the pool hall and I knew my parents wouldn't approve. I don't think they ever actually said not to go in there, but I just knew! The kids that did go in and buy some often sold it at an inflated price to the rest of us.

I was proud to have many cousins serve in the military. Because of Dad being the youngest in his family, my cousins are all older than I am and thus they were old enough to serve although I was under the age of ten during the war. "Swede" and Kenneth Hanson were both graduates of the Naval Academy. They supposedly ran into one another on a battleship in the Pacific not knowing that the other was there. Bergene and Araelus (Rale) Hanson also served our country as well as Don Martin and probably others that I don't know of.

Several times while I was growing up, my parents would talk about my cousin, Adelaide's first husband, Bill Genaust, as being the one who took pictures of the flag raising on Iwo Jima. Later, probably when I was in college, I learned that the name of the man who took the famous photo of the flag raising was Joe Rosenthal. I supposed then that my parents must have been mistaken. It's only in the last couple of years or so since Adelaide's death that I learned that Genaust did indeed take pictures of the flag raising but they were on a 16-millimeter movie camera. He never lived to see his film developed or to receive any credit for filming that historic event. He was killed by Japanese soldiers nine days later, while investigating a cave, possibly for souvenirs. Ten years were to pass before he received full military honors with recognition of his contribution to the national archives.

I do remember V-J Day, victory over Japan. It was August 14, 1945 and I was staying in Blue Earth with my second cousin, Janice. They lived in an apartment just off from Main Street. Her dad, Rale was in the military at the time. When the announcement came that Japan had surrendered, church bells began to ring, sirens went off, the canning factory whistles blew and people ran out into the streets, dancing with one another, throwing confetti and shouting with happiness. It was a very exciting time. The war was over. People could go on with their lives.

## *Waste Not, Want Not*

We were brought up to not waste anything. Turn off the lights when you leave the room, clean your plate, don't stand with the refrigerator door open while you decide what you want, don't replace anything unless it's totally worn out and useless, cover the furniture with throws so it doesn't get dirty, use the old throw rugs, save the good ones for when company is coming. Water down the shampoo so it will go further and on and on. So actually, saving and recycling is nothing new. We were doing it years ago.

One of the very worst ways to save money as far as I was concerned was when Mom made catsup. She would bottle it up in empty store-bought catsup bottles I thought just to try to fool me. Now that I think about it, I'm sure that wasn't her plan. She just needed something to put it in. She would send me back to the storeroom to bring a bottle to the kitchen for dinner. As soon as I looked at it, I could tell it wasn't "store bought" and if I was pushed to taste it, I knew for sure. I considered myself a connoisseur of fine catsup and knew every time that it wasn't Heinz.

We saved rubber bands, string, plastic bags, paper bags, aluminum foil, and grease, among other things. You name it, we saved it.

People back then had to save and make do, as everything was cash and carry—no credit cards. We lived in our apartment over the hatchery while Mom and Dad set aside money to build a house. It wasn't until I was a senior in high school that they had enough money to pay cash for a house.

When Pat and I were young Mom made lots of our clothes and she also did repair and remodeling work on fur coats. Many people wore fur in those days and as styles changed, they often brought their furs to Mother for remodeling so they could continue to wear them. This was one way they could save, by not having to buy a new coat.

Being conservative in our use of material goods was very heavily entrenched in the minds of kids growing up during the years that I did.

## *White Bucks and Overshoes*

It was almost a mortal sin to step on the top of my white bucks and get them dirty! That seemed to be a favorite pastime among certain senior boys. They must have liked to see how mad I would get. Wearing white suede shoes with “anklets” (as our socks were called) to match our wool skirts or sweaters was the “in” style. At various times throughout high school penny-loafers were popular footwear as were saddle shoes.

We girls did have jeans, but we never wore them to school. It seemed to be an unwritten dress code. The boys wore them with button-down shirts either plaid or plain colored. They sometimes wore sweaters also.

When we were juniors, we could order our letter sweaters, which were orange cardigans. We earned an orange “B” outlined in black (our school colors) for a certain amount of participation in sports. Additional participation was awarded with chevrons that were sewed on the sleeve of the sweater along with the last two numbers of the year that you would graduate. Getting a “letter sweater” was a very special event.

Plaid, pleated skirts worn to mid-calf length, cardigan or pull-over sweaters, sometimes with a white dickey or collar, other times with a strand of imitation pearls or a small color-coordinated scarf tied at our neck was the “uniform” worn by many of us girls. We also wore dresses and jumpers to school.

The teachers always dressed very nicely. Male teachers wore white shirts and ties with their suits or sport coats. Female teachers wore dresses or skirts with sweaters or blouses but never pants or slacks, as we called them.

For our graduation pictures we dressed up in our best sweater with a pearl necklace or white dickey around our neck, fixed our hair ourselves as nicely as we could and went over to Ness Studios in Wells or Russell Studios in Mason City. We may have had one or two poses to choose from.

No one had a casual or outdoor shot, although some of the girls posed for a glamour shot with a black drape falling to a v-neck. The boys wore a shirt and tie with a suit or sportcoat.

Although Mom sewed a lot of my clothing when I was younger, I also remember a seamstress, Mrs. Hegg, coming to our house for days at a time to sew for us. In addition to altering clothes for mom, she made clothes for Pat and I and also curtains and drapes for our home. She rented a room in someone's house and would hire out to sew for people. Mrs. Hegg was given to talking a lot while she sewed. She told us stories about her son whom she said was the king of some country. I was quite intrigued by these stories, as I had never met anyone who told such outlandish tales yet seemed to so thoroughly believe them herself.

We always wore our very best clothing to church. Through the 1950's, hats and gloves were in fashion for women and young girls; white shirts with starched collars and fashionable ties under dark colored double-breasted suits for the men, solid colored or floral dresses for the women. The men wouldn't be seen coming or going from a special event in the fall, winter or spring without their wide brim felt hats, often in a brown or dark gray color. It was definitely considered poor manners to wear the hat once you had entered a building.

During the winter, while in elementary school we girls had to wear either long wool stockings or slacks under our dresses or skirts. A garter belt that hung from our shoulders held up the stockings. Needless-to-say it was very uncomfortable. The girls that lived a few blocks from school could unhook the stockings and roll them down to around their ankles as soon as they were out of sight of their Moms. I lived too close to school to do that. It was only across the City Park and if I tried that, one look out of the front room window and Mom would be able to see me!

To keep our heads and ears warm we girls wore wool scarves, tied under our chins. But those too, we tried to shed as soon as we were out of sight of our parents. The young boys wore wool caps, often with earflaps. Our parents were certainly trying to make sure that we stayed warm. Of course, those of us who lived in town most often walked everywhere that we needed to go so we did need to stay warm. Country kids got rides to town either on the bus or in their parent's cars. Car heaters weren't what they are today and often it was hard to get the car warmed up enough to keep the frost off the windows much less to keep it's occupants warm.

We wore buckle overshoes that were just that-worn over our shoes. The

overshoes that we tramped through three-foot snowdrifts in were the same ones that we sloshed and stamped in through the water, in the spring. It was great fun, when the streets and sidewalks were full of puddles to see how wet we could get one another as we walked to or from school. Mr. Black, the janitor was always right there at the top of the stairs to see that we took our overshoes off before we came into the school.

To save money, my overshoes were often bought a size or two too big for my shoes, so that they could be worn for more than one season. When this was the case, there was a kind of "double" sound that was made when I walked-one sound as the boot hit the ground and the second sound as my shoe hit the ground. During that second season of wear I could count on a hole or tear developing on my boots and one day I would take the boots off to discover that my shoes and socks were completely soaked.

Mom always wore a full apron when working in the kitchen, around the house or in the kitchen at church. She made these herself, from a lightweight cotton print bordered with bias tape. Other women wore aprons like this also, to protect their dresses, which often had to be dry-cleaned. Another popular apron was a gingham check with counted cross-stitch, which was worn for church dinners by the women who had to serve in the dining room where everyone would see them. Wearing sloppy tee shirts, sweatshirts, slacks or jeans would have been unthinkable.

A wedding reception in the family always meant making organdy half aprons for each girl who was asked to be a waitress. These aprons would most often be in the colors that the bride had chosen for the wedding. By the time all of my friends had married, I had quite a collection of organdy aprons.

It was a big task for the woman of the house to ready the clothes for everyone in the family. By the early 1950's, some households had automatic washers and dryers. Those that didn't, washed and rinsed clothes in a tub with an agitator and then had to pick up each item of clothing and run it through a wringer. They then carried the wet laundry outside where they hung it up on clothes lines erected for that purpose. During the cold winter months, they hung the clothes to dry on wooden racks in the house.

There were no wash and wear fabrics and there were no steam irons, so all of those cotton dresses and shirts had to be sprinkled with water after they were dry. They were then rolled up and piled in the laundry basket for a few hours until they were slightly damp all over. Mom labored over ironing the frilly sleeves on Pat and my dresses when we were little and the

stiffly starched collars on Dad's white shirts. If there was any mending to be done, that was her job, too. It seemed we always were wearing holes in our socks. There was quite a skill involved in mending them so we wouldn't feel a big lump on the back of our heel or on our toes.

In addition to getting the clothing ready for Sunday School and church, Saturday night was bath night. We always had a bath tub (not everyone did) but I remember before we had a hot water heater we had to heat the water in a big tub on the cook stove. It was then carefully carried into the bathroom and gently poured into the bathtub. Families with several children would begin bathing with the cleanest one first, going on to the dirtiest one last, all using the same water. Similarly, the water had to be heated for washing dishes. What a great day it was when we got a water heater and had only to turn the faucet for the magic of hot water!

Saturday night was also when I would get my hair rolled into those rags that made big lumps all around my head so that when I laid down to go to sleep there was no place to put my head that didn't have a bump. I think I learned to sleep face down.

On the kitchen counter or table, the "Sunday" shoes would be lined up after being polished-little white tie shoes for the babies and toddlers, Mary Janes for the little girls, dark colored tie shoes for the boys and Dad.

On Sunday morning Mom would have to get the chicken fried and into the oven, the potatoes washed and peeled; ready to cook so dinner would be ready when we got home from church and Sunday School. This was in addition to making the pies on Saturday. Weekends were just as busy as the weekdays if not more so for the women in the 1940's and 1950's.

## *Holy, Holy, Holy*

That hymn and Beautiful Savior are the two hymns that stick in my mind as the ones that our choir marched in to virtually every Sunday at Bricelyn Lutheran Church. Church and all the activities surrounding it were the foundation on which our lives were built in the 1940's and 1950's. As I look back and remember the activities I participated in and the people I associated with at that time I realize how important they all were in building a foundation of faith which was to continue to grow and flourish as I grew.

I remember helping Mom pack up casseroles, Jell-O salads, buns, pickles and cakes in laundry baskets to be hauled to church in our car on those days that it was her turn to serve the lunch at Ladies Aid. The women worked very hard preparing the lunch both at home before they got there and in the church kitchen as well. The egg coffee that they made in large seventy-five cup pots had a pungent aroma that was not pleasing to the kids and just knowing that it had eggs, dumped raw into the water made it seem even worse. We were sure we would never learn to drink something like that, let alone like it.

We kids would have to sit quietly during the program but while lunch was being served, we played tag both in the church basement and outside. There were two stairways leading into the basement. One led from the side of the church directly into the kitchen. The other came from the front of the church and led into the social hall. What fun we had, chasing each other around and around until someone almost certainly would fall and there would be tears. The Dads and other family members would come for supper after work. We looked forward to those fun times.

As three-year-olds, we could go to Sunday School. Before that, we were members of the Cradle Roll, which we were enrolled in at birth. Sunday School was held in the basement of the church. The preschoolers sat on tiny red wooden chairs. When it was your birthday you brought pennies and put one for every year of your age into a bank that held the money that would later be sent to missionaries. Then the whole group would sing

Happy Birthday to you. After the birthday children were honored and some songs were sung we were dismissed to various parts of the basement to meet in small groups for our lesson. Some met in the kitchen by the furnace, others were in a storeroom amidst piles of boxes and books, room dividers were everywhere and the noise level was very high. It would be a few years later, after I graduated from high school that the congregation had the old church torn down and a new one built.

In the meantime, when I was in high school several classes had to meet in the classrooms at the public school. We liked that as it killed a little time getting there. It was amazing how long we could take to walk the one block from church to school.

A couple of senior high S.S. teachers stand out in my memory. One was Mrs. Bertha Flo and the other was Mrs. Billie Johnson. Their strong beliefs made a big impact on me.

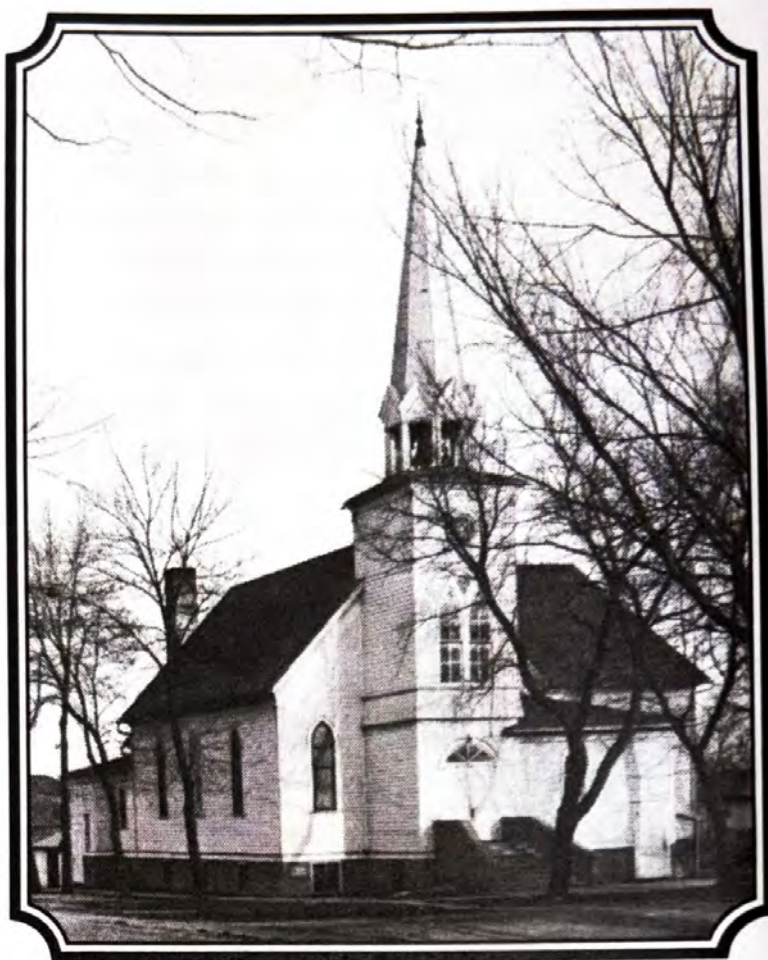
Part of preparing for church each Sunday was to fill out the giving envelope and write a check to help pay for the work of the church. During the time that I grew up until about the 1950's, common practice was to publish, at the end of the church year, the name of every family and how much money they had given to the church that year. I can just imagine the feelings of pride and the feelings of shame that rippled through the congregation. It might have prompted people to give but certainly for the wrong reason.

After coming home from church and Sunday School, Sunday was a day of rest and for visiting with relatives if they lived near-by. Of course, certain tasks HAD to be taken care of such as milking the cows and feeding the animals if you lived on a farm. The family had to be fed, which meant that the women had to cook, serve and clean up after the meals. Also, beds would never go unmade. So there were chores to be tended. The stores were not open so there wasn't much activity around on Sundays.

Once a week during the school year we had "release time" this was an hour taken out of the public school day given to the churches for instruction in religion.

Memories of Wednesday night Lenten services include walking the three blocks to church sometimes with snow flurrying all around me and other times in mild temperatures with a light rain and just a hint of spring in the air. Many times a classmate of mine, Lee Ann would sing "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" She sang it with a soulful mood and sense of suffering. The words made such an impact on me that it has become part of my worship experience during Lent every year. I regret never taking the

**Top:** Lutheran Church, Bricelyn, MN.



**Bottom:** Here's my family - Dad, me, Mom and Pat on my confirmation Day, May 13, 1951.





**Top:** Bible Camp at Green Lake in Spicer, MN. Standing Robert Jacobson, Gene Halvorson, Donovan Jacobson, seated Candy Munson, Harley Jorgenson, Sharon Gudal, Alona Blom, and Roselyn Gullord - 1950.

**Bottom:** Another year at camp - 1952. Back: Carol Balzer, Sharon Blom, Janice Klingbeil, Dana Kapplinger, Janet Jacobson. Front: Donna Satre, Loleen Leland, the author Gail and Joyce Mikkalson.



opportunity to thank her for sharing her talent in that way.

We had Vacation Bible School every summer as soon as school was out. Mrs. Jorgenson was the teacher a lot of the time, but one year we had two young women missionaries who were on leave from their mission work. We fell totally in love with them and decided that we, too, would become missionaries when we grew up. We even got report cards at the end of the two weeks. We sang lots of great songs of praise but we had some neighbor kids, the Farrells, who went to the Baptist Church Vacation Bible School. They taught me some of their songs and I liked them even better!

Willing Workers—that's what a group of young girls from ages 8 to 16 was called. I don't know how willing we were, but we met every other Tuesday night to do embroidery work and the Dorcas Society ladies met to finish off the pieces into towels, etc. which were then sold at an annual auction. Miss Aamodt, bless her heart, was the patient lady who helped us learn how to sew.

We had meetings too, before which we had to answer to roll call. Now you couldn't just say "here." We had to recite a Bible verse when our name was called. There was help for us though. Lindeman Furniture and Funeral Home gave away calendars every year that had a Bible verse for each day, so Miss Aamodt cut them out and put them in a box for us to pick from. We all would hang around and talk until it was time for the meeting to start at which time we would hastily grab a slip and run to sit down and read it when our name was called. One of the girls, Roselyn, often pulled up from memory "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say rejoice" taken from Philippians 4:4. The verse must have made an impact on me since I still remember and try to practice it.

Miss Aamodt's millinery shop was just three doors down from our place on Main Street. She lived in the back. One day Mom and I happened to be standing out by the hatchery when she walked by and she was not her usual self. Mom asked if anything was wrong and she said yes she had just fallen and her wrists were both hurting. Mom took one look and promptly took her to Dr. Hanson in Frost. Both wrists were broken and since she lived alone she had to go back to her hometown, Lake Mills, IA, to stay with members of her family for several weeks.

As teen-agers Wed. nights were reserved for Luther League. I know we had business meetings but it was mostly a social organization. Unlike Willing Workers, which was only for girls, Luther League was co-ed. We girls thought that was great! Reverend Jorgenson was in charge of it but oth-

ers helped him. One of the games we played was wink-em. We sat in a circle of chairs with a guy behind us. One chair was empty and the guy behind it would wink at a girl to try to get her to come sit in his chair. The guy behind her would have to grab her by the shoulders to keep her from leaving. If she got away, her guy would wink to get a girl back in his chair. Then we would switch so the girls could do the winking. We loved it! South Blue Earth Church had their Luther League meetings on Sun. nights so Dale usually came to ours since all his friends from town would be there.

Each spring the Blue Earth Circuit Luther League had a convention. It included the Luther Leagues from all the churches in the Blue Earth Circuit, which would be Wells, Kiester, North and South Blue Earth Lutheran, Bricelyn, Blue Earth, Delavan, Dell, Frost, Elmore and maybe others. We were encouraged to attend this. It would be a Sunday afternoon and evening with guest speakers. There would be music, devotions, and a business meeting. The officers were selected from the leagues in the member churches. I was often a delegate. It was certainly a chance for young people to use their talents in music, leadership, and public speaking and to grow in their faith.

My friends and I were all very active in the church. Beyond Willing Workers and Luther League we sang in the adult choir, played our instruments or piano, helped with Sunday School and Bible School. I even played the organ once for our Christmas program. (Never did that again!) Mrs. Jorgenson directed the choir and one year we gave a joint presentation of the Christmas portion of Handel's Messiah with Trinity Church Choir (where Rev. Jorgenson was also pastor). That was my first introduction to that incredible piece of music. Later I was to perform in it as part of a mass choir at Luther College and I continue to enjoy listening to it.

Confirmation classes on Saturday mornings were taught by Rev. Jorgenson. As I recall we met from about 9:00 A.M. until 12:00 A.M. We always had a lesson to memorize so Mom would "hear" my memory work on Friday night before the ball games. If I didn't know my lesson, I couldn't go to the game. This same scene was acted out in virtually every home that had a confirmand. I always knew my lesson as memory work was easy for me so I never put Mom to the test to see if she would actually keep me home or not, although I feel quite certain that she would have because confirmation lessons had a high priority in our home.

On the Thursday or Friday night before we were to confirm our faith at the Sunday service there was a public catechism at which time we were

questioned individually in front of the congregation as to our knowledge of the catechism and other tenants of our faith. It was a scary time for us fearing that we may have a "memory lapse" and embarrass our family and ourselves. Reflecting on this practice, I think how much more intimidating it was for those kids who had trouble learning and/or memorizing than it was for me.

I couldn't help but look forward to the gifts I would receive from Mom, Dad, aunts and uncles at the dinner given in my honor at our home. It was tradition to receive your first wristwatch as a Confirmation gift. It was a treasured gift at a time when watches were very expensive.

"Have you registered and paid for Bible Camp yet?"

"No, how much does it cost this year?"

"It went up from \$12.00 to \$13.00."

It was a given that we go to Bible Camp for a week on Green Lake near Spicer, MN sometime during our years of confirmation study. I went three summers, as did most of my friends. We left on a Sunday after church services and came home the following Saturday afternoon. The ride was in a school bus but if it was uncomfortable or hot we didn't notice, we were just excited to be able to go!

It was another time of growth in my faith. Our worship services were geared toward youth and the singing was mostly campfire-type songs. I remember the impact that some of the faculty had on me. Mrs. Branstad gave presentations in the chapel but then would sit with us girls and discuss "life" issues important to teen-agers. There was Dr. Huggenvik, who would begin our song sessions with, "And now we'll do a little seeenging". There was Pastor Hanson who had us write a letter to ourselves that we gave to him and he mailed back to us a year later so that we might remember the thoughts and feelings we had that year at camp.

Of course, a BIG part of camp was the opportunity to be with your friends and make new ones for a whole week. There were bonfires on the grassy area in front of the chapel, talent shows inside the lodge, swimming, boating and laying by the lake to get a tan, hiking into Spicer, playing volleyball and other great activities. We each had to take a turn working in either the kitchen or dining room. In the kitchen it was peeling potatoes and doing dishes. In the dining room, it was setting the table, waiting on tables or clearing the tables and washing them when everyone was finished. Even these chores took on a new meaning when we could work together with old and new friends.

One of the games we played was with a pocketknife. We would stand across from one another and the person with the knife would flip it so it would go end over end and land by your foot, sticking into the ground. You had to move your foot to the place it landed and then proceed to flip the knife back to the other person. The idea was to see how far we could make one another stretch before they would finally fall.

It was exciting for Dale and I when years later, our daughter, Sara had the opportunity to go to Green Lake Bible Camp. We saw that many things had changed on the campus, new buildings, old ones torn down, but one thing that hadn't changed and that was that the same type of kids were there eager to make new friends and searching for the meaning of life.

The impact of the church and all of its activities were just the beginning of my walk in faith. The Holy Spirit has led me through many more experiences that have influenced my beliefs in the years since growing up in Bricelyn.

## *And the Music Goes Round*

Coming home from school one day when I was in third grade, I discovered that the stairway was blocked with a big piano and several men were pushing and pulling it up the steps. It was to be mine and I could start taking lessons with Mrs. Jorgenson as soon as I wanted. I was thrilled!

It was a big task to get it upstairs and Dad said he thought that two very big, strong men, Donavan Jacobson and Harold Christianson moved it almost by themselves. Dad didn't think he wanted any part of trying to move it down again, but he did and they did—when we moved to our new home the year I was a senior.

I started taking lessons right away and continued until I was about a freshman, mostly from Mrs. Jorgenson but some from Mrs. Jagerson. I loved going to the parsonage (Rev. and Mrs. Jorgenson's home) for my lessons, as there were usually kids from around the neighborhood to play with both before and after my lesson.

I don't remember participating in any recitals but Brian Sabo and I did play in a contest in Rake, IA involving students from 10 other schools. I played "Minuet" by Paderuiski and what a shock when my fingers ran down the base clef and right out of keys! It was a piano without a full keyboard! Since I was playing from memory, it made it even harder to gain my composure and continue. I was still given a B+ rating.

Because a high school band was considered a civic necessity and because Bricelyn had not had a high school band for a number of years, when Supt. Edward Johnson resigned it was decided to replace him with a superintendent that could also start a band. They hired Victor Rupp and we were on our way.

There were nearly one hundred eager students from grades six through

twelve that joined the band. I was in sixth grade and started on a cornet. After about six months, Mr. Rupp asked if I would be willing to switch to baritone horn, which I did. I love the sound of a baritone horn and enjoyed playing it. The one thing I didn't like was lugging it home in that huge case across the City Park so I could practice!

It was soon apparent that setting up and taking down chairs and music stands and storing instruments in an already busy gym was not an efficient way to run the program. The school board then backed the construction of a band room addition, which soon turned out to be too small for any music activities except small group practice. Eventually this room was used for classes, the band rehearsal went back into the gym and small group rehearsals and lessons were anywhere from the lower hall that led into the gym, the furnace room, to the girl's locker room or the boy's locker room. (When they weren't in use, of course.) We girls thought that the boy's locker room was a smelly place to have to have a music lesson.

The band parents and other interested community members led the drive to buy uniforms for the band. The money was raised primarily by solicitation. The uniforms had gray trousers and black jackets and were made of wool. We looked very sharp marching in area parades including the North Iowa Band Festival in Mason City. One of the first years that we had our uniforms we marched in the Aquatennial Parade in Minneapolis in a pouring down rain. The uniforms were never the same after that. Even our snazzy bright orange plumes were ruined.

Summer brought weekly band concerts given in the newly remodeled band shell in the City Park. People would sit in the park to listen but many also parked their cars around the block and demonstrated their approval by honking their horns. We took pride in giving a musical performance but it also meant a chance to get together with friends every Wednesday night. The community club showed its appreciation by giving each band member a ticket worth 15 or 20 cents to be spent in one of the stores in town.

There were sometimes ice cream socials during these summer concerts and one year we even participated in a band festival/ice cream social with other area bands in Frost to raise money for the Blue Earth Community Hospital Fund. Many Band Jamborees were held to raise money for other worthy causes.

When the position of band director grew to be more than Mr. Rupp could handle along with his duties of superintendent, Cec Turner from Albert Lea was hired to come to Bricelyn two days a week to give lessons. After Mr.

**Top Right:** Our band director, Cec Turner, giving a lesson to Sharon Gudal and Loleen Leland in the boy's locker room - 1951.



**Top Left:** Me in my snazzy, new band uniform - 1949.

**Bottom:** Brass sextet: Sharon Gudal, me (Gail), Pat Naae, Gene Halvorson, Ronnie White and David Jorgenson.



**Top:** Pat and I showing off our new coats in 1952.

**Bottom:** Friends at a potluck dinner at Loleen's, left to right: Carol Balzer, Janet Jacobson, Janice Loge, Norma Bergsather, Pat Naae, Janice Jacobson, Joyce Mikkalson. Seated in front: Loleen Leland, Gail and Loleen's kid sister, Beulah - 1952.



Rupp left the community for another job, Cec was hired as our only band director. We grew to love him and when it seemed as though he would have to leave, as he was not properly certified to teach, many of us band members threatened to quit. He remained through my senior year so I never had to act on that threat.

Being in the band was a big part of my social life. We got to go to many area towns for concerts and parades. In the spring, we participated in large group and small group music contest. I played a baritone horn solo every year for district contest. I received an A rating and then could go on to participate in state contest which was held in Mankato. I was very frustrated that I could never capture that coveted A rating. Nevertheless, I always had a great time spending the day in Mankato with my friends and meeting kids from other towns.

I was introduced to two Lutheran Church Colleges through my participation in music. Gene Halvorson, Dana Kapplinger and I were invited to take part in an instrumental music festival at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. We got a taste of dorm life and an opportunity to play with their band in their spring concert. Dorian Music Festival was at Luther College in Decorah, IA. Percy Grainger, a well-known composer, worked with us and conducted the massed band in one of the numbers. This is where I decided to go for my post-high school education. Another exciting event was being chosen to play with the United States Navy Band for a concert in Albert Lea.

Our drum majorette was Sharon. We were so proud of her performance as we marched down the street. If we were marching in a summer parade on a hot day it was almost a given that she would put so much into her performance doing cartwheels, forward rolls, twirling her baton, throwing it into the air and catching it, that she would drop from heat exhaustion before the parade was over.

Vocal music had its share of my time also. High school and church choir and small groups were fun to be in. Mrs. Wettstein, one of our memorable choir directors, had such a wonderful way about her and soon had many small groups such as trios, triple trios, duets, octets, quartets and solos practicing our hearts out preparing for concerts and spring contest. It was unbelievable how many boys she enlisted to sing solos, some of whom never thought they had any talent for singing. It goes to show what effect it can have when someone believes in you and has confidence in you.

Our senior year we had a principal who had to fill in as choir director for a time. It didn't take us long to figure out that he didn't know a tenor

from a soprano, but was assigned to direct the choir because of a lack of anyone else to do it. He didn't last long.

One day when we were getting ready for choir rehearsal, two or three of the boys were moving the piano from the hallway into the gym. One of the wheels must have caught on a rise on the floor and over the piano went, crushing Roger's fingers between it and the floor. Those of us who were standing around hardly knew what had happened before a couple of the boys grabbed Roger and pushed him through the hallway, up the stairs and out to one of their cars. They whisked him off to Frost to Dr. Hanson's office, not bothering to stop in the superintendent's or principal's office to let them know. I think they were just so freaked out that they acted without thinking. The administrators were not happy at all over the way the boys handled the situation. But all turned out well and there was no permanent damage to Roger's fingers.

The music we listened to was either on the radio or our phonographs, which played 78 rpm's or the small 45's. In the 1940's, we wouldn't miss listening to "Your Hit Parade" or "The Frank Sinatra Show" on the radio both starring Frank Sinatra. Later, on TV we watched "The Hit Parade" starring Gisele McKenzie and Dorothy Collins, among others. The big band sound was popular in the '40's as were ballads, music from Broadway shows and movie themes and later on in the '50's, rock and roll.

I loved buying the sheet music for these popular songs and spent many hours playing them on my piano. A couple were taken from movies dealing with the war effort, "Don't Fence Me In" from the movie Hollywood Canteen and "Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive" from Here Come the Waves. Others were "Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue", "The Old Lamp-Lighter", "Near You", "Buttons and Bows", "When You Were Sweet Sixteen", "Love Somebody", "Nature Boy", and many others.

We were lucky if our Dad's car or pick-up had a radio. If it did, there were only AM stations. There were no tape or CD players.

I sometimes wondered where I got my interest and talent in music as neither Mom nor Dad seemed to have a particular talent in music although they certainly supported my interest. I later found out that Aunt Jo used to sing for civic and church events (Mom's side) and Great-grandpa Hanson played the violin back in Norway (Dad's side). So if genetics is involved, I guess I got some from each side of the family.

# *Knee High by the Fourth of July*

“Yippee! Mom—Dad—guess what? I get to work upstairs on the cans this year!”

It was around August 10th or 12th and time for the annual corn pack. This area was corn country and the whole community counted on the factory run to boost the economy. Area farmers raised sweet corn for canning and almost every able-bodied person 16 or older who didn't already have a steady job came to work at the Bricelyn Canning Company.

The hum of the machines and the click of cans could be heard all around town and especially where we lived above the hatchery, which was only 2 blocks away. The whistle would blow in the morning to signal the start of the workday, again at noon and at 6 o'clock. Near the end of the day you could tell about how late the factory would be running by how many loads of corn were lined up in the street waiting to be weighed and then unloaded. In fact, during the earliest years of operation the plant ran long hours, many times past midnight. By the time I was old enough to work there, it would shut down for the day anywhere between 10:00 and 12:00 P.M. and start again in the morning about 8 o'clock. I used to hope it would be late so I could get in more hours and earn more money.

Mexican laborers were hired to pick the corn in the fields in those days. Many brought their families with them. The factory provided housing which consisted of several small buildings lined up on the empty lot by the factory. I would imagine there was rent deducted from their paychecks. Conditions certainly could not have been very good but they came to work and work they did. At least one year brought Jamaicans. On Saturday nights they would gather in the front part of Tillie Aamodt's former millinery shop with steel drums and play music on them. Kids would gather inside and around the front door to listen. This was a great cultural experience for us

who up to this time had probably not heard music from their culture and certainly we had not heard it played "live" right on our own Main Street!

The year that I turned sixteen all of my friends and I got jobs at the factory. It was a given that we would start on the "huskers". This was the place where the corn came into the factory. It would come on conveyor belts above us; a fellow would stand on a walkway and pull ropes to fill the bin that each of us would have to empty. We stood up to another moving belt on a step about 14-16 inches off the floor. On our right, the corn was spilling out the bin. Our job was to lay each ear with the husk still on, onto the belt the narrow end away from us. The worst corn was wet and dirty, so if a clean, dry load came in we thought we had it made. There were maybe 6 of these individual stations down each side of a long room.

We could see our friends as we worked but we couldn't talk to one another because the noise of all the machinery was just too loud. Someone was always coming by hosing down the floors to keep them clean and so there was kind of a mist around our feet.

We got a five-minute break every hour, which we really looked forward to, as it was usually very hot, messy and wet. We could see Evelyn, the relief girl coming down the side of the room to each station for break time so we knew when our turn would come. We would go outside and flop down in the shade on a long bench that was there just for us, I suppose. We might even have a little sandwich or snack.

To help make the time go faster we would work like beavers trying to empty our bins before the fellow up above would pull those ropes and "boom" our bin would be full of corn again. Did we think we would ever be without corn when the guys JOB was to keep the bins full!

I would come home from my shift with my rubber apron and gloves caked with corn. These had to be soaked and washed, ready for the next shift. I usually did this myself but Mom would fill in sometimes. I'll bet she thought history was repeating itself as she had done this for Aunt Joey years before.

I had only one year on the huskers before I was moved to the more "cushy" job on the cans. We worked upstairs where it was cleaner and somewhat more quiet but VERY hot. As you went up the steps, you could feel the heat envelop your skin like you were walking into an oven. Ann, Joyce and I had the task of forking cans out of paper boxes and releasing them onto a conveyor belt, which in turn moved downstairs to the fillers. It was a big responsibility to keep a steady stream of cans on the belt. If you did not, the creamed corn, which was coming out of a machine down-

stairs would run out all over the machine, the floor and the woman who was attending the filler. This was not good. It never happened to us. In fact, we became so adept at it that one of us could handle the job while the others took a break—a far cry from downstairs on the huskers!

As we came to the top of the stairs, to the right was the brine room where Mr. Bjerke mixed the ingredients that would go into the creamed corn. I thought that Mr. Bjerke was The Bricelyn Canning Company. As far as I knew he had been there forever and would continue to be there forever. Who else would know how to do his job?

Infrequently, the cans would come in a boxcar and this offered a new challenge. We had to handle a long wooden fork with about 12-14 tines which we would thrust into a row of cans, pick them up, step off the stack of cans and turn to release them onto a conveyor belt. To do this without having the cans tumble off onto the boxcar floor and then roll to the ground took some practice.

Occasionally I got called in, off-season, to work in the boxer department. Agnes Halvorson was my mentor. We sat in front of a moving belt and as the corn-filled cans came along we grabbed them, flipping them into a box that was on the other side of the belt, continuing to do this until each box was filled. As I recall, we took four cans at a time, but my memory is a little hazy on that point. I was very impressed by how quickly and efficiently Agnes worked! Of course, she had a few years up on me.

The pay was a lot better than baby-sitting and remember, there were no fast food places to work in so opportunities for high school kids to get jobs were limited. Farm kids and some of the boys from town helped in the fields but most of us looked to the canning factory for our first jobs. That first year I got paid \$0.95 an hour and was I thrilled! But by the time Labor Day rolled around most of us were glad that school would take us away from that hot, dirty work.

## *High School Days*

“Have you seen the list of what we have to wear to school tomorrow?” Loleen asked me.

“No, read it to me,” I replied.

Loleen answered with skepticism, “The girls have to have their hair in braids with pipe cleaners, wear high heels with stockings, men’s bib overalls backwards, men’s work shirts backwards, no make-up, and carry our books in a pail. The boys have to wear women’s clothes and make-up and also carry their books in a pail.”

It was the customary freshman initiation day. We wouldn’t be considered full-fledged senior high students until we had gone through this ritual. After living through the day with chortles and chuckles from the upper classmen and the teachers, we had yet to go through the worst part. That evening, at school, they blindfolded us and had us take off our shoes and stockings. As they led us into the gym, we had to step into pails of what felt like squishy worms. Once we all were ushered in, we were served a “lunch” of toast, lemonade, onions and cake. What a combination! Goodness knows what it really was but no one got sick so it couldn’t have been too bad. The freshmen were then stars in a radio broadcast. At the end of the evening the sophomores served hot dogs, coke and ice cream bars to the entire faculty, upperclassmen and us. Everyone was a good sport and we all had a lot of fun.

The autumn of my freshman year was filled with highs and lows for our whole school. Our football team fell to Frost High School in their first loss ever recorded in Border League Conference play. The following week we rebounded by beating Elkton in our Homecoming game. The day before the game a senior football player, Dale Walker died of acute leukemia. For a lot of us it was the first time we had experienced the death of someone so close to us. The scripture that Reverend Jorgenson used was John 14:1-2 “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told

you. I go to prepare a place for you." We took comfort in knowing that God had prepared a place for Dale.

Another tragic event happened about the same time. There was a fatal car accident on Highway 16 near Bricelyn. I don't remember who died but I rode up there with my parents to see the site of the crash and can recall being quite struck with the fragileness of life. Later I had a nightmare that a plane crashed on the football field during the game, which in my mind added to the other tragedies. It seemed like a lot for a young mind to absorb.

Homecoming activities seem not to have changed much over the years. We had a pep rally in the gym the night before the game at which the Homecoming Queen was crowned. The cheerleaders led the cheers, the band played and everyone was all pumped up. The queen, Ann Fosness, along with her royal party were chauffeured in a convertible to the baseball diamond where a huge bonfire was burning. After another pep fest around the fire we joined hands for a snake dance, winding our way down Main Street. The snake dance gradually disassembled near the north end of Main Street where as many of us as could fit in would squeeze into Peterson's Café. Often we kids didn't even order anything. We just took up space. Many of the parents would gather there also. At least they ordered pie and coffee. Later couples would wander off, a current boyfriend walking a girlfriend home or if he had the car, giving her a ride. At other times, the boys hung out in the café, sometimes playing cards way back in the corner booth.

The day of the game there would be a parade of floats led by the band. The floats were designed and created by the individual classes, which gave us great opportunities to get out of the house and hang out with our friends on those evenings before the parade!

My freshman year we won the prize for the most original float. Our team name was the Bricelyn Braves, so our float theme had to do with Indians skinning animals, just as we were going to "skin" Elkton.

During the halftime of the game, the royalty were presented by riding on a float around the football field. Following the game, we had a dance in the school gymnasium.

These same activities with little variation took place each of my four years of high school.

"Mr. Enger, why do I have to learn how to drive a car with a shift when my Dad's car has automatic shift and more than likely by the time I have a

car it also will be automatic?"

"Don't be too certain of that, Gail," was his reply.

Behind the wheel driver's training was a quite new program when I was old enough to get a license. Before that time, when sister Pat got her license she just went to the county seat, Blue Earth, filled out a form and got a license. Now Mr. Enger, the principal and Social Studies teacher had taken training to become a behind-the-wheel instructor. He even used his own car until an area dealer made one available.

My very first time behind the wheel, Dad let me drive out north of town on the black top, but when it came time to turn a corner, I was unable to do it. I just froze, afraid that the car wouldn't respond when I turned the steering wheel. So I had to stop, switch places with Dad and let him turn the corner.

It wasn't long though before I felt like an old pro, getting the car to take my friends to ball games and roller-skating. When I was a senior, Dad entrusted me with the car to drive to Luther College in Decorah, IA for Dorian Festival. I must have been driving quite fast as I remember Janet telling me to slow down on the way there.

That year I took Miss Adron to Blue Earth so she could take her driver's exam. She was our English teacher and a single woman. I don't know how it happened that she didn't already have a license or how I was "appointed" to be the one to take her. I didn't want my friends to think it was my idea or they would think I was "brown nosing."

As it later turned out, the first car Dale and I had did have a stick shift, so it was good that I learned to drive a car with a manual transmission. It was a new blue and white 1956 Ford.

If you lived in the country, riding the school bus was a privilege, not a right. When the kids got rowdy, the bus driver would warn them but if they didn't stop fighting or whatever, he would simply stop the bus and order them off. No one questioned this practice, so kids that were kicked off knew they better walk the rest of the way home and hope their parents didn't find out.

One day when Dale and Ronnie were misbehaving, the driver stopped and told them to get out. Of course, Roger and a friend of his weren't going to put up with their friends being kicked off so to protest, they, too, got off the bus. So they, too, had to walk home. I would call that dumb and dumber.

Along those same lines of dumb and dumber, Gloria and Esther, who lived near Highway 16, which was a major highway that later was replaced



**Top:** Here I am in the crazy get-up for Freshman initiation in the fall of 1950.

**Bottom:** In our "jammies" having a slumber party at Janice Loge's. Back: Joyce Mikkalson, Janet Jacobson, me, Norma Bergsather, Loleen Leland, Janice Jacobson. Front: Carol Balzer and Janice Loge - 1953.





**Top:** Here's the beautiful turquoise blue and white 1952 Buick that I drove when I was learning how to drive.

**Bottom:** A one-act play, "Joint Owners in Spain" performed in competition on my birthday, February 24, 1954. Norma Bergsather, Loleen Leland, Janice Loge and I.



by Interstate 90, were playing around outside and decided to walk up to the highway. Once there, they thought, "Why don't we take turns laying down on the highway, so that someday we can tell our kids that we did that?" So one of them laid down while the other one watched for cars and then they switched places. Consider their kids told.

"Wouldn't it be fun to get some wine, go out in the country and drink it?" I asked some girl friends one evening.

"Yeah," one of them agreed, "but where would we get it?"

"I know," said another. "My folks have a big bottle of Mogan David right on the ledge by the basement steps. I'll go in the back door very quietly and sneak it out."

So away we went, first to Pat's house, where she got the wine without anyone hearing her and then to a country road about a mile or two from town.

"Look both ways to make sure no other cars are on this mile stretch," I warned.

As soon as it was confirmed that there were no cars coming, we unscrewed the top of the bottle and each took a swig. We thought we were so smart and daring! The problem was that we thought the wine tasted awful. Why would anyone want to drink such awful tasting stuff? That was enough for us. It didn't take us long to pile back into Dad's car and head back to Pat's to sneak the wine back on to that shelf next to the basement steps. That was the extent of my experimenting with alcohol in high school.

It was a big day for our community when the former Rosedahl Country School was moved in to town to sit next to the larger town school. More room was needed to house the new Home Economics (Family Living) program and since the Rosedahl School had been sitting vacant for several years it seemed logical to move it in to town and put it to good use. It was one large room and two smaller ones, with plenty of space for cooking and baking stations and enough room left for several sewing machines.

Most of us girls learned to sew, do basic cooking and baking and in addition, learned the rudiments of setting a table. Of course, our Moms didn't just leave these tasks to our teacher, Miss Ratzlaff, but rather, Miss Ratzlaff reinforced what our Moms were teaching us at home. We learned to entertain properly by having our Moms in for tea parties and when we finished our sewing projects, we had style shows.

When Dale was a senior, the boys took Home Ec. for a semester. For several class periods, they were preparing candy for one of our teas. While on

the way to class one day a couple of the boys grabbed some chunks of plaster from a hand rail that was pulled off, bringing them along in their pockets. Wondering if they could get by with it, they proceeded to dip the pebbles in chocolate, planning to put them on the serving plate. Miss Ratzlaff, however, discovered their little prank immediately. She treated it as just a boyish prank and they didn't get in trouble at all. We thought that the boys were her favorites and this just reinforced our belief.

There were no lockers for our coats or boots. We hung the coats on hooks lining the large hallway that led into the school gymnasium. The boots sat on the floor beneath the coats. We weren't assigned any special place, just whatever spot was available when you got there. At least on one occasion I didn't make it out of my coat before it got hung up. Dale and Gary grabbed me and lifted me up to a hook, hanging my coat up with me in it. I truly could not get down nor could I wiggle my way out of the coat to drop to the floor! I just hollered and fussed a lot, thrashing my legs around until they finally let me down. They were lucky my coat didn't rip or maybe I should say I was lucky my coat didn't rip.

We didn't have backpacks. I remember carrying individual books and notebooks home across the park, along with my heavy baritone horn case. It was quite a juggling act.

Our school gymnasium was very small with room for one row of chairs around the perimeter. During basketball games, this was where the two teams and their coaches sat and others could sit in whatever chairs were left. The rest of the spectators sat in a small space, which seemed like a balcony because it had a low ceiling but it was actually on the same level as the playing floor.

For half-time entertainment, Lennie, sometimes joined by his sister, Pat would climb up the rope to the top of the ceiling and move hand over hand across the gym ceiling, hanging on to the various-sized pipes that were up there and swinging like a monkey. As a grand finale, he would drop to the floor and immediately go into a forward roll. The audience would be gasping, mouths hanging wide open. He and Pat would then proceed to do cartwheels, splits and other gymnastics. Realizing how dangerous that was and that no one stopped them makes my mouth hang wide open now as it did then.

Instead of all-school plays, we had a Junior Class Play, a Senior Class play and one-act plays, which would go on to district and regional competition. Sometimes the cast took the responsibility of learning their lines quite light-

ly. Mrs. Leland was the director of one of the plays I was in. It was dress rehearsal, the night before the performance and some didn't know their parts very well. Of course, she became angry with us, rightfully so. Also, as sometimes happens, we came through in the pinch and did very well! As I recall, it was before that very same play that Severt Legred, who had a major role, became ill and Gene Halvorson had to fill in for him, learning his lines in only a few hours. Those are the kinds of problems that give director's nightmares.

During my junior year I was selected to be a school correspondent for the Albert Lea Tribune. My job was to write an article about all the events taking place in school, which was published weekly along with my picture. Writing was something I liked to do so it was an enjoyable and challenging task.

My very best friend throughout these high school years was Loleen Leland. There were lots of girls that we both hung out with but when it came to sharing the deepest of our hopes, dreams and fears, we turned to one another. We stayed overnight at each other's house, we ate supper together, especially at my house because we lived in town and she lived in the country. That way her folks wouldn't have to come to town to pick her up and then bring her in again for whatever was going on that night. We swam together in the gravel pit near her farm home, we went to parties together and we double-dated. We thought we were friends forever, but it turned out to be only until we both went to Luther College. We were put in separate dorms and soon developed other friendships and our lives drifted apart.



**Top:** Dale Mikkalson's 17th birthday party, February 2, 1953. Paul Anderson, Loleen Leland, Robert Jacobson, Joyce Mikkalson, Carol Balzer, Gene Halvorson, and seated on the floor Dale and I.

**Bottom:** This is how we often spent our noon hours - in the library. Paul Anderson, Loleen Leland, Dale and I - 1953.





**Top:** Dale and I at his graduation party - May 1953.



**Bottom:** Dale and I, ready for my Senior Prom - spring of 1954.

## *The Blinking Porch Light*

“That’s the third time Mom has blinked the porch light, Dale. I think I better go in or I’ll really be in trouble.”

Oh, well, what’s she going to do anyway? You know she won’t come down here after you.”

“Yea, but I don’t want to push my luck. If I want to go to the movie tomorrow night I better get in right now.”

Blinking the porch light was Mom’s way of telling me it was late and if I was smart, I would get in the house pronto! I never really had a curfew but Mom, Dad, and I had an unstated understanding of how late I could stay out. It was when I went beyond that unspoken hour that I got the blinking light treatment.

Dating during the era I grew up in consisted of rides or walks home from Peterson’s Café, movies in either Bricelyn or Kiester and occasionally Blue Earth or Albert Lea, roller skating in Kiester, and home parties given by friends.

Dale and I started dating toward the end of my sophomore and his junior year of high school. We each had dated others and when we started going out with one another, I’m sure we had no clue that we would spend the rest of our lives together.

A different type of blinking light got our attention one night as we drove away from his farm home. We had been there alone (or so we thought) and as we drove out of the driveway onto the road we noticed the lamp in the picture window (a large window in the living room) turned off. How interesting! We had left it on and now it went off although no one was home. We began to wonder if we really had been there alone. I was glad that Dale was taking me home, and he was the one that had to go back and see what was up. By the time he got back, his parents were there and his Mom explained that the lamp cord had a short in it and it had been known to

blink on and off before. Mystery solved.

Leaving the theater in Kiester one night, Dale and I both seemed to have a lapse of memory about where we parked the car.

"I'm sure we parked right here around the corner," Dale said. I agreed but no car even close to the description of his Dad's car was near. So off we went, on a "find the car" mission. We weren't too worried as it was a quite common event to happen while we were at the movies or other activity. Dale's friends would see the car parked somewhere and would push it around the block or down the street, as a prank. He would be involved in the same prank when one of his friends was out on a date.

We often stood at the top of the stairs to my parent's apartment to say our goodnight. One evening we heard some commotion in the alley around the corner. Sure enough, several of Dale's friends were pushing his car down the alley.

"So long," he whispered, so as not to let them hear him and off he went, down the steps, around the corner and into the alley. He quietly joined them as they pushed his car down the road. It took several minutes before one of them noticed that Dale was actually helping them take his car! When they realized it, they took off down the alley faster than you can say scoot!

One of our favorite parking places was the road along the city dump. It was only two blocks from the hatchery. (Mom couldn't see us to blink the light from that distance!) This wasn't like the landfills of today. It was just a dump. Individuals or the drayman (the man who hauled coal from the trains to the homes and businesses) could bring garbage or old stuff of any kind and dump it in a pile along side of the road. It wasn't a place where you'd want to get out of the car and walk around.

When we were preparing for a concert or contest, we sometimes had band rehearsal after supper. After one such evening, as Dale was giving me a ride home we decided to stop at the dump road to do a little "necking," (a slang term for anything that took place from the neck up.) We had no more stopped than we heard some noises in the back of the pick-up truck. Turning around to see what it was, were we surprised to see Jeb peering through the back window at us! Jeb was about four years younger than we were and he sat next to me in the baritone horn section of band. He was always such a little imp, but we didn't think he would ever do anything like that. How did he even know where we were going? He thought it was a good joke on us. We thought it was a good joke on him when we quickly made him get out of the back of the pick-up and walk home.

Living that close to the dump had its definite disadvantages, too. One evening a couple of years before that incident, Robert walked me home from a ball game. We were standing at the bottom of the stairs, when all of a sudden, he grabbed his leg just below the knee and I saw his hand toss something out in to the street. IT WAS A RAT! Poor Robert. I would have had a heart attack if that had happened to me, but he maintained his composure like a gentleman. It was quite embarrassing to have that happen so close to my home, but in reality I suppose you could see a rat in almost any town or city if you hung around enough in the dark. I quickly tried to forget that awful happening.

One of the rites of spring was the prom or as it was in our town, a banquet only, put on by the junior class for the senior class. If you were a junior or senior or dating someone that was, you got to go. If not, you were out of luck.

While the Moms were busy planning the food for the banquet, which was served in the school gym, the girls were concerned about what they would wear. This would entail at least several trips to Albert Lea, Mankato or Mason City to shop; trying out new hairstyles and ordering flowers.

As a sophomore, I would get to help serve the food. That's as close as I would get to Dale. We had just started dating and I was disappointed that I was not included in a way that was better than being a waitress. Then I was thrilled to learn that I was chosen to run the phonograph during the dinner, which meant that I could dress up and not have the menial task of serving the food to the juniors and seniors.

My junior year the Moms apparently decided they didn't want to do the cooking thing, so we had the banquet in Albert Lea at the Spanish Dining Room of the Albert Hotel. Although we did have a few dances in high school, it was not the usual thing to do. Of course, we didn't want to go home right after the banquet so many of us piled into several cars and went to a drive-in movie. After that, it was back to Bricelyn to change clothes, (that prom dress with the layers of net was getting scratchy) pick up a picnic lunch made by our Moms and off again to the Faribault Country Fair Grounds in Blue Earth. There we felt more comfortable after getting into jeans and shirts and could enjoy ourselves in a more relaxed atmosphere. I think the boys must have enjoyed the meal of chicken, potato salad and apple pie more than we girls did, as we were still full from the banquet. Our purpose for this picnic was just to make sure that we stayed out all night. We succeed, by getting home about 6:30 A.M.

My senior year we did go to a dance at the Terp Ballroom in Austin, following a banquet at the Hotel Fox Dining Room. Did this mean that our parents were relaxing their attitudes about dancing? It could have been, as dances at school seemed to be more prevalent after that.

Recalling all of these special people and events of my life has been a wonderful experience and I realize how blessed I was to have grown up in the middle of the century, in a town like Bricelyn.



**Top:** The new home we had built and moved into in December, 1953.



**Bottom Right:** Graduation Day - 1954.

## *Mom and Dad*

Many people made a positive impact on my life as I was growing up, but surely none more important than the impact of Mother and Dad.

Despite the fact that neither of them went to high school, together they went on to have two successful businesses—a barbershop and the hatchery/feed store. Although they didn't complete a formal education, they were able to educate themselves by reading newspapers, books and magazines. Dad also attended classes for certification as a barber and workshops and clinics on topics related to the chicken hatchery business. It was very common to not complete school in the early part of the 20th century and before. Young people were needed to work on the family farm or elsewhere, as their own families often couldn't support them. Neither did many communities have a high school. (It seems that we're making a full circle.)

In Dad's case, he moved to Bricelyn from Ringstad, Iowa with his parents and sister, Mabel in 1911. His parents had come from Norway in 1885 with the first five of their thirteen children. Three of the children died in infancy. Because they were very poor, it was important for Dad to go to work.

Mother's ancestry was also Norwegian. She always liked to say how her red hair told of her Irish ancestry, but we have been unable to trace any family back to Ireland. She was very ill as an adolescent and missed a year of school in Lake Mills, Iowa where she lived with her family. When she recovered her health, she, too, went to work. Like many people of that generation, theirs was a strong work ethic, born out of necessity.

Dad served in the United States Marine Corps during World War I. He received his basic training at Paris Island, NC. He was discharged shortly after the armistice was signed ending the war.

Mom became a skilled seamstress for a furrier in Mason City before they were married. They met in Bricelyn, where her family had moved after leaving Lake Mills and were married in Blue Earth, Minnesota in 1921.

When I was learning about the Depression in school, I remember asking Mom about what life was like for her and Dad during those years. She said that they were poor before the Depression so they didn't notice much dif-

ference in their life during the Depression. I wondered if that was what prompted them to go into the chicken hatchery business along with having the barbershop. (So as not to have all their eggs in one basket, so to speak!)

Several people throughout the years have told me how Dad helped someone they knew get through a difficult time. Maybe it was to offer them a job following World War II or when they couldn't get or keep a job. I remember setting out in the car with Mother to deliver bags of groceries to families that were going through difficult times. I was sent up to the door, knocked and handed them the bag when they answered the door.

Mother had beautiful, shiny, dark auburn hair which she wore short with finger waves all around. She was as fastidious in her personal grooming as she was in her housekeeping. Being short and stocky, she usually found it necessary to alter or have her clothes altered so the fit would be just perfect.

I don't remember Mother ever saying a bad thing about anyone. She was always kind and generous to people. As a Mom, she always encouraged me to do my best, to be honest and caring. When I was nervous about a performance, she told me to just do my best, as there probably was no one in the audience that could do any better. (I realize now that there was.)

Dad was a very handsome man, straight and tall (to me), who always looked sharp, even in his work clothes. As a kid, watching him wiggle his ears fascinated me. As he did so, his scalp would move back and forth. I thought he should probably be part of a circus because he could do that. While he would take a short nap at noon before going back to work, I would take his arm and pretend it was my baby, his hand being the head. I don't know how he got much of a nap, but it was a time I looked forward to.

Mother was an excellent cook and often prepared dinners for seventy-five or more of Dad's customers. The main course would often be moose or elk, as Dad was an avid hunter. Because he also liked to fish and was successful at it, they entertained smaller groups with fish fries. Along with this, Mom would have prepared potato salad, baked beans and dinner rolls. The meals were served in the church basement.

Mom did her best to teach homemaking skills to a very reluctant teenager. (Sorry, Mom!) In addition to the cooking and housekeeping chores she repaired and remodeled fur coats for women in the area. She would sit at the kitchen table long into the night working on a fur piece. It was the only time she had left to do it, as during the day she helped Dad in the hatchery.

I was only twenty-nine when Mother was diagnosed with cancer of the liver.

She died at age sixty-nine after a short illness of six weeks. I felt cheated that she didn't live to see our sons grow up or get to know our daughter at all.

Smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes was a habit we wished Dad would give up and it wasn't until years later, after he retired that he did. About twenty years after that he was diagnosed with lung cancer that took his life, at age eighty-three.



*Mom and Dad - 1965.*

## *Epilogue*

Were it not for my longing to know something more about Grandma Hanson's life this story may not have been written. If only Grandma had kept a journal, telling about life in Norway before she immigrated, about what it was like crossing the ocean (the big pond as immigrants called it), coming to a strange country with five small children, fending her way into the heart of America to meet her husband, Grandpa, who had been here for two years. The sadness for the stories that hadn't been written made me realize that some day my descendants too, might long for my stories.

Life in the 1940's and 1950's was nothing like life in the 19th and early part of the 20th century, just as it is different from life now and in the centuries to come. They are all times that cannot be relived. It is only through the writings of those who lived through it that those who follow might have some understanding of what it was like.

I give thanks to Dale for his patience in listening to the stories and sharing his memories, to Esther Erickson Ziemer and Janet Jacobson Peterson for encouraging me to write and to my sister, Pat Hanson Rollene for the hours we spent reminiscing. Special thanks to our son, Dave and grandson, Sam for their part in scanning the photographs. Thanks also to the many other friends and relatives who spent time with me, helping to jog my memory and having a little chuckle here and there along the way. It was time well spent.

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Mankato, MN

# About the Author:

Gail Hanson Mikkalson grew up in Bricelyn, Minnesota where she graduated from Bricelyn High School. She went on to Luther College, Decorah, Iowa and Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota, earning a Bachelor of Science Degree and later, a Master of Science Degree.

She married her high school sweetheart, Dale Mikkalson and they raised their family of three children, living for the past twenty-five years in Mankato, Minnesota. Gail recently retired from being an elementary school educator. She now spends time writing, reading and enjoying her grandchildren.

For readers yearning to relive the memories of their own youth or for those wishing to know about life in a small town in the 1940's and the 1950's, this book will fill those needs.

***The View from the Front Room Window*** offers nostalgia, humor and inspiration.



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