

ENTERTAINMENT

Music, with small ensembles, violinists, and bands were common in the neighborhoods of our German, Austrian, and Bohemian ancestors who came to this country in the mid nineteenth century. Our grandfather played the violin, and Aunt Elvina "chorded" for him on the piano. Our mother related that she often went dancing with her father who was an expert doing the "jig", and the polka, two-step, quadrille, and square dancing were all common dance forms. Mother told us that her mother frowned on their father's love for dancing as she considered it sinful, and almost irreligious, she being a very strict Catholic.

Opera houses where vaudeville and circus acts were performed were found in many small towns in the late nineteenth century. Quilting "bees" for the women were customary as they gathered in each other's homes to make quilts by stitching layers of fabric together with a padding of cotton batting between them, and then stitching them throughout the quilt in spaces about six inches apart. In this way, the quilts were insulated for warmth. As they became worn they were patched, or re-sewn, and patch-quilt designs were made from pieces and remnants of colored and flowered, or figured calico material.

Card games, and house parties were common, reciprocatory between neighbors. The living room rug would be rolled up, furniture set aside, and the polka and quadrille danced to the music of a couple of fiddlers. Always a lunch was served, and home made wine was available for the men. A lot of popcorn was eaten, and in our home, it was an almost nightly ritual to pop corn in a "spider" on the wood stove for our dad and the hired man after they finished the evening chores.

(We always had a hired man living in our house, and he was like part of the family, and was given one of the largest bedrooms in the house. Usually we kids didn't make our beds, but I always had the task of making the hired man's bed, and tidying his room when I wasn't going to school.)

Visiting relatives on Sunday afternoon was entertainment, too. I don't remember going visiting in horse-drawn wagons, but when we got a car, we would visit Uncle Charlie and Aunt Eda Helbl, or Uncle Charlie and Aunt Martha Yelk. But, I always remember the ordeal of "getting all of the kids dressed and ready" to go as there were several younger than I to wash and dress, and always a baby for mother to carry in her arms. I remember our

being crammed into the back seat of the touring car, open if weather was good, and with the isinglass windows buckled on in rainy weather. Dad liked best to go to Uncle Charlie Heble's, as they could talk politics together. Mother and Aunt Eda were favorite sisters, and I liked to go there best, too, because we might be able to wade in the creek on their farm, and then, we always had a good dinner that I didn't have to help make. But, these visits were reciprocated, and then it was our turn to prepare the meal and serve it. With no long-distance telephones to use to make plans for get-togethers, letters had to be sent, or sometimes, company would arrive unexpectedly. Then the men would visit, and the women busy themselves preparing a meal as quickly as possible. The Lawrences, distant relatives, she somewhat psychoneurotic, and with a large, poor family, came frequently

and unexpectedly on Sunday afternoon, always in time for the evening meal. Our Dad was annoyed, but our mother always treated her with kindness and charity, and prepared a meal for them which they consumed with obvious hunger.

In 1882, Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus originated in Wisconsin, to become the "greatest show on earth". It was moved by railroad, and able to travel throughout the area, and eventually the country. The circus, with steam locomotive, carved wagons, wild animal exhibitions, man-geries, equestrian acts, jugglers, clowns, mummers, and pygmies was a big event to watch, particularly the parade, until such time as it disappeared when auto traffic made it difficult to clear the streets. I longed to see the circus, and the big Wisconsin State Fair in Milwaukee, but I never got to either.

As a kid, it seemed we had little choice of games or entertainment. We played/hide and seek in the yard in summer time, or in the house in winter time. On the short sidewalk we had leading from the kitchen porch to the driveway, we played hop-scotch, marbles, and jacks with a rubber ball. We had no roller skates, ice skates, bicycles, but usually had a sled.

Barn dances were held in the late spring and summer when all of the hay in the loft had been used, and in the 1920's and 30's the big name bands came to the Sun Prairie Park Pavilion routinely during that era of jitterbugging, fox trot, sarba, etc.

The country school, Oak Lawn, was a center for Christmas programs, spelling bees, and May basket socials. As there were no flower shops then, in our area, in which to buy

flowers, we went into the woods to pick wildflowers--violets, mayflowers, lilies of the valley and jack-in-the-pulits, fastened them to the baskets, and filled them with a lunch. The baskets were auctioned off with the highest bidder among the men having the privilege to eat the lunch with the girl who made the basket.

The little village of Sun Prairie was a gathering place for the men at the barber shop, blacksmith shop, grocery store, post office, or saloon with its spittoons for refuse from chewing tobacco, plug tobacco, snuff, homemade cigars or cigarettes. Our Dad usually rolled crushed tobacco into cigarettes, occasionally smoked cigars, but never chewed tobacco, so there were no spittoons in our house. (Evelyn and I copycatted the smoking of cigarettes. I started by stealing our dad's "King" cigarettes from the packs he placed on the ledge of the oak door frame in the kitchen. Cy and Jerome smoked, too, in early years, but both gave it up later on.)

On Wednesday and Saturday nights, in the summertime, the village band played in the band-stand, and it was a special treat if we could go to town with our dad to listen to the band and walk up and down the street with a girl friend while our Dad was visiting with his friends. Our mother stayed home with the kids and did her sewing and mending. Dances were also held in the Parish Hall in the 20's and 30's, square dances always being a part of the program.

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I may have played with Evelyn or Lila's old dolls, but I don't recall any tows or play-things that were originally mine. One memory, probably compensation for the real thing, is that, in summer, when the corn crib was empty, I would go there where I had set off a little corner of it as my play house. With a brother three years older than I, and a sister three years younger, I had no playmate, and so I made believe. There, I mixed dirt and water together to make mud, and made my own miniature play house with old boxes or sticks, and the mud figures of playmates, or dolls in that little structure. I seemed to find pleasure in going to the cornerib to fantasize, or I would sit on the wooden gate or wander around in the woods looking for flowers, to the woods, or walk down to Grandma Blaska's where she always seemed to be baking such good smelling bread and kuckens. She would always give me fresh, warm bread with brown sugar and butter on it, such a treat, never forgotten. Mother told me years later that she always thought I was the "different" one among her children, and sort of a lone child. There is a picture of me sitting on the wooden gate to the woods, the lonely urchin ! I participated in very little after-school sport or extra-curricular activity as I was expected to get home as soon as possible to help. But, as I had no independent transportation in high school, unless I walked, I never got home from school promptly. Often, our mother would still be in the fields, so supper needed to be started, and maybe the noon dishes still to be washed, as meal making and dish washing were never ending chores, along with a basket of ironing waiting to be done.