MEMORIES OF HOME 1922-1934

I was a baby when the family moved into our new house, large and modern for its day with a central steam heating system, "running water" with a bathroom "upstairs", and a sink off the kitchen downstairs. Nonetheless, we pumped water from the well for drinking, not a pleasant job in wintertime in snowbanks, or in icy conditions, the water pail with a dipper for drinking sitting on a table next to the stove. The entire family used the same dipper for drinking the water, and nothing was thought of the practice, although it may have facilitated the spread of the colds and communicable diseases among the children when those epidemics surfaced.

The parlor, off the front porch, at the front of the house facing the road, was furnished with an oak sofa and chair, upholstered in brown leather, an oak library table with the family album placed on the lower shelf, a glass kerosene lamp on a crocheted runner atop the table, a large fern at the front bay window, a player piano on one wall, and the Roman chair, in which our parent's wedding picture was taken, on a small side wall between the entrance door and the folding double doors that led to the dining room. As I recall, the parlor was used infrequently, and in winter time was closed off to preserve the heat in the other rooms. Lace curtains hung at the windows.

The Dining Room, with another door to the front porch, was spacious, no doubt to accommodate the large family, and the large crews of neighbors required, at intervals, for the communal threshing of grain, filling the silo, and for entertainment of friends, relatives, and neighbors when house parties and card-playing was common. The Edison phonograph, purchased in [illegible] set on the north wall between the entrance door and a big bay window

chased in _____sat on the north wall between the entrance door and a big bay window. The east side of the room was a bank of windows with a built-in shelf beneath them where our mother's many plants thrived in the east exposure with morning sun. On the south wall with the pantry behind it was a built-in glass china closet with mother's treasured plates, bowls, and china used for special occasions. (Ultimately, around 1925, this treasure was blasted into bits and pieces when Jerome, playing with our father's shot-gun, accidentally shot it off narrowly missing the heads of Juanita and I as I was sitting in a rocking chair with her on my lap as she was ill, and I was tending her while mother was working in the kitchen. Fortunately neither of us was injured.) A brown leather upholstered couch usually sat along the east wass. On the west wall between the parlor and bedroom was an oak buffet with attached mirrored back, and between the bedroom and kitchen entrance was a book case with a convex glass door with removable shilves, and an attached writing desk. Instead of books, an American eagle sat on a wood perch in the book case, having been shot by our Dad on his father's farm when he was eighteen years of age. An oak dining table and chairs sat in the center of the room beneath the chandelier, the table being extendable to seat at least 20 people. The floors were of oak, and were varnished. (I remember the tedious task of removing the old, varnish each spring, cleaning the floor, and then re-varnishing them under the supervision of our mother.)

The bedroom, off the living room and kitchen, was originally used by mother and Dad, and later, became a sort of den. The sewing machine was in this room in summer, but in the kitchen in winter where it was then warm enough for our mother to pursue her endless task of sewing, mending and altering clothing./ I don't remember the more affluent days when more and more difficult as her eyesight became less acute.
a seamstress would come to the house for a week, or two, in spring and fall to sew for our mother, Evelyn and Lila. (Our mother wore bustles and wire framed skirts until?) Later, it became too expensive, and mother tried to "make-over Evelyn and Lila's clothing for Juanita and me. Unfortunately, I was a bigger/person than either Evelyn or Lila, so wearing their clothes was pretty much a disaster, and trying to wear their shoes was plain misery with my feet being at least two sizes larger than either of theirs. I simply never had the right fit in either clothing or shoes, and as a teenager miserably embarrassed. As children, we had to wear long underwear to brave the cold and the snowbanks as we walked to the country school. Needless to say, it wasn't easy to pull the cotton stockings over them, so they were always "bulgy", and of course pants were unheard of for girls in those days. Menstruation was another embarrassing problem as there was no Kotex. We used rags, pinned to another piece of rag used as a string around our waist to hold the rags in place. These sometimes came loose in our bloomers, and I remember once the whole assemblage of rags fell out of my pants on Main Street one day. I tried to cross the street in a hurry ! And, quite frequently, blood was evident on the skits of girl's dresses, and often on my own.

The Kitchen was also a quite large room with a pantry off from it, and on the opposite

Bell telephone was attached. As I recall, we had four rings on our party line. There was a little crank on the right-hand side of it that we could "ring-up" neighbors, or the operator if we wanted to talk to someone "in town". A screened porch was off the east entrance door, and across from it, on the west side, the back porch that led to the windmill and the milk house where the cream, butter, and milk were stored in the water tank. We threw the dirty dish-water off the back porch, as the washroom sink drainage was poor, and non-existant in the winter time when it was "frozen-up". In later years, when canned food was bought commercially, the tin cans and garbage was thrown off the back porch onto a pile in the corner. With a family of eleven, we naturally had a large kitchen table, covered with oilcloth, where all meals were eaten. The oilcloth became pretty well worn before replacement as in addition to meals, studying was done there, mother's patterns were cut, mending and patching took place there, and kids did their homework there after when the other rooms were too cold for comfort. Usually on the table was a toothpick holder, mustard, ketchup covered with a dish towel. The wood stove stood on one wall with a 10-foot high water tank on one side which was connected to the stove for heating water for kitchen and bath use, and sometimes, if it worked, for the upstairs bathroom. Hot water for the upstairs sink and tub could not be obtained unless the kitchen stove was fired up as the hot water had to come from the water tank attached to the stove.

(Potatoe peels and vegetable trimmings saved in a pail and taken to the hog pen.

(Now, hardly anything is repaired as it is often thought to be cheaper to throw it away and buy a new item.)

Most of the time, there was little hot water. The wooden table next to the stove was used for preparing the meals. Always there was a big dishpan of potatoes to be peeled on it, and vegetables to be cleaned. The water pail and dipper at the far end so we could walk up to it and take a drink. Preparation of the pies and cakes was done in the pantry. Most everything we had to eat was grown on the farm, but 100-pound sacks of sugar and flour were bought and stood on the floor in the pantry for the cakes and pies that were made every day. Sugar and molasses cookies were made almost as frequently so we could take some of them to school for our lunch. (When the sacks were empty, the seams were ripped out, then soaked in lye, and bleached in the sun for use as dish towels.) Mice were always a problem in the pantry so mousetraps were baited with cheese and set routinely, and on occasion one of the many cats in the yard would be brought in to exterminate the mice. A healthy meal, in large proportions, was prepared three times a day as the hired man and dad required a good meal for the day's work, and the children needed it as well for growth and energy. Our mother was always first one up in the morning to fire up the wood stove, and have breakfast ready for everyone. Fried potatoes and eggs, with perhaps sausage, was made for the men along with oatmeal being a staple for everyone with cream direct from the freshly separated milk served with it for a high-caloric, hardy meal with which to begin the day. As there were no electric toasters, we usually ate home-made bread, or home-made rolls that were also baked every few days. Sometimes we would place bread between a wire holder with a handle on it, and hold it over the coals in the stove to make toast. Always there

was homeade jam or jelly to use with the bread or rolls. As a child, I don't remember eating cereal, but later cereals were processed at the Battle Creek Sanitarium Health Foods plant. Some of the first cereals were Elyahs Manna, later called Post Toasties, and Charles William Post developed the variety of "ready to eat" cereals, Grape Nuts and Postum. The biggest meal was prepared at noon, and called dinner, again with the working men in mind with their heavy manual labor in those days. Always there was meat, potatoes, gravy, a vegetable, frequently cole slaw, bread, and pie as a dessert. The evening meal was just about as large, but perhaps with more baloney and sausage than pork chops of beef roast being prepared, and a cake instead of pie for dessert.

For all of my young years, at home, the wood floor was uncovered, and varnished as in the other rooms, but worn and dirty with the traffic from outside being centered in the kitchen. A difficult job I often had was to scrub that floor "on hands and knees" until it was clean and white, but it never stayed that way for long. We did have a few braided rugs placed before the stove, work table, and at the entrances from the porches, with gunny sacks just outside the doors to clean one's shoes before entering the house. On the edge of the porch was a metal blade imbedded in the cement for the men to use to slide their shoes across to remove the mud and manure from their shoes before coming indoors. Even so, cleaning the kitchen floor was everlasting. Much later, after I was gone from home, a linoleum flooring was laid in the kitchen.

Families in town usually had ice-boxes with ice-delivery service to their homes. The ice-man was always welcome, and even to the kids who would follow him in hopes that when his tongs grasped a big block of ice/some of it might fall off/and they could have a little chunk of ice to suck on, or trimmed it to weight desired by a customer,
Those of us who lived on farms could obtain ice from the ice-house about three miles away. Here the ice, taken from the Old Lake during the wintertime by the neighborhood of farmers was stored for use in the summer by those families who had contributed to cutting, hauling, and storing it during the winter months. We used it primarily to make home-made ice cream, a big treat, and perhaps the best tasting ice-cream ever, as pure cream was used in and Lila had obtained an excellent recipe for chocolate ice cream which was yummy. We kids would take turns turning the ice cream maker, until it was done, and then it would be taken to the cool basement to preserve the ice it was packed in for as long as possible.
perhaps in the late 1930's ??
By the time we had a refrigerator,/I had already left home, so I never enjoyed that luxury while living at home, or the electric stove, or washing machine.

We did have a radio for a few years before I left as Lila's boyfriend, Howard Fuhrman, gave her one that became the coveted possession in the household.

(4)

Before the advent of electricity in _____the kerosene lamps and lanterns had to be cleaned everyday, the lamps for the house, and the lanterns for light in the barn to do the milking and chores. There was no refrigeration in the home during my young years, any foods that needed to be kept cool as well as jello, to set until about 1940 (?). Therefore,/milk, cream, and butter/were stored either in the cistern in the basement, or in the milk house where the cool well water ran through the tank.
I don't remember pots and pails for excreta, but assume they were used in the "old house" before I was born. Although we had running water in the kitchen washroom and bathroom upstairs, it was not reliable unless there was sufficient wind to turn the windmill. On those many occasions, we were required to use the "backhouse" for our physiological functions during rain, sunshine, heat, or freezing cold weather. I remember it well, and the Sears Roebuck catalogue was there for assistance with the necessary activity. If the upstairs bathroom was used when there was no wind, we carried pails of water, hand-pumped from the well, to carry to the bathroom to flush the toilet.

(In late 1800's, brushing of teeth was a new habit, with toothbrush and toothpaste when more and more people had indoor plumbing.)

I can't recall having a toothbrush when young, but perhaps we had a common family brush used by all of us as we did the dipper in the water pail for drinking water. Neither do I recall toothpaste being available, but do remember our mother making a paste of baking powder and salt.

Depending on the wind, barn smells were a constant, as was the fresh, pungent smell of

the barn to the woods where they were corraled except for morning and evening milking. A brood of cats was ever present and multiplied rapidly, but they were thought to be helpful around the barn in keeping mice and rats away from the cows. Flies seemed to swarm, and were never ending. The screen doors would be covered black with them during the summer, and with the many kids going in and out of the doors, a large number of flies came in with them. Fly swatters either weren't available then, or we didn't buy them, or they may have been considered non-utilitarian in combatting the healthy fly population. Instead, we always had long strips of sticky glued paper hung from the cieling to catch the flies. And, particularly before a meal served to the threshers, or to company, we kids would be armed with dish towels to "chase flies", flailing them in the air in unison, toward the open doors at either side of the kitchen.

Another activity, 60-70 years ago, before the advent of electricity, and before the electric washing machine and the electric stove, was the washing-ironing operation for a large family. Our mother would bring into the kitchen a good supply of wood from the woodpile in the yard, and a bucket of coal from the "cellar", to make a good, hot fire in the cook stove. Then the copper boiler was placed on the stove to boil the sheets, towels, and white clothes in the Fels Naphtha soap and water mixture. Following that, the copper boiler was carried, either to the basement in winter, or outside by the back porch in the summer, and the contents poured into a wash tub./ There,/thecalico/ were men's work shirts, kid's clothes etc. after the white clothes were washed and rinsed, rubbed on the "scrubbing board" for a sufficient time, and then transferred into the washing machine, hand powered, requiring one to push the handle back and forth to provide

(5) agitation of the clothes in the water until they were ready for rinsing. Then they were transferred to the adjacent tub, either by wringing them out by hand, or, for the smaller items, by placing them in the wringer attached to the tub, propelled by hand into the rinse-water tub. There the same procedure for wringing them out of the rinse water was repeated. I was considered to be strong enough to accomplish this task, and remember our mother showing me how to gather the sheets, towels, etc. in both hands, and rub them up and down on the wash board until considered relatively clean. Shirt collars and cuffs had to be given particular attention. In fair weather, the clothes were then hung on outside lines to dry with clothespins. In fall and winter, the clothes would freeze stiff on the clotheslines, stretched between the trees, almost as soon as they were pinned there to dry. The drying process was finished in the house, first hung on lines in the basement, and then, if urgently needed, brought upstairs to the living rooms where a newspaper was placed over the steam radiators and the clothes hung over them to dry. It seemed we always had clothes drying on radiators somewhere in the house in the wintertime. Later, with electricity, an electric washing machine and wringer simplified the process considerably, but I wasn't at home long enough after that to appreciate the convenience, having gone into nursing school when I was 17 years of age. As might be expected, the washing and ironing for a large family was a never ending chore. The wooden ironing board was ever present with a basket of "sprinkled" clothes under it needing to be ironed. Again, before electricity, we needed a good fire in the wood stove to heat the hand-irons on, and to re-heat them frequently during the ironing it

process. The handle would detach from the iron by means of a lever to deposit on the stove for re-heating which was needed frequently during the ironing process, and it took days to complete. Try as I did, I never accomplished it despite my mother's goading to get it done. The clothes and shirts were always dirty, ready for washing before all ironing was finished. But, as she would be working in the fields, except in the winter time, I would have to wash the breakfast dishes, re-set the table for the noon meal, peal the potatoes, make a pie, get the veetables from the garden, and try to have the noon meal pretty well prepared by the time she would come from the field just a little earlier than the men. So, I never succeeded, in any of the housework, including the cleaning, cooking, etc. and eventually grew to dislike all of the tasks encountered in life on a farm,-- just one of the compelling reasons I was determined to leave it as soon as I could, in whatever way I could find to become independent of it.

(Another job I grew to hate was cleaning the cream/milk separator in the barn which had to be thoroughly washed every day. Hot Water and soap had to be carried to the barn, the entire separator taken apart and thoroughly washed and rinsed, and then reassembled. I didn't like to go into the barn by myself as I was afraid of the bull that was housed in a pen at one end of the cow stanchions. And, the smells and flies and the frisky horse, Barney, in a nearby stall all made it a disagreeable task for me. My mother tried to teach me to clean the barn, too, scraping the manure out of the troughs, and I did learn to milk cows, but and distribute silage for them, but it was always done with a certain amount of fear, and with distaste. However, when the barn burned in _____, and the cows were tethered in the "woods" for milking, I did help with milking the cows routinely even though I was but ___ years old at the time.

The basement, (or cellar), as we called it, had three rooms separated by cement walls. The furnace room, under the parlor and bedroom, contained the wood-coal furnace with the remaining space the large coal storage area. When coal was delivered, the truck backed up on the lawn to the cellar window, a chute was placed in the window, and the coal shoveled into the chute to the cellar floor. On that day we could smell the coal upstairs. The furnace room was always warm. Our mother usually started the fire in the furnace, carefully with wood kindling, and then gradually added the coal to it for a longer fire. The few times our dad would do it, he would throw kerosene on the coal, and it would blaze in a minute, and so loud it could be heard upstairs. Thus our mother tended the furnace as she was always afraid Pa would burn the house down. In very cold weather, she would bank the fire before going to bed, and then get up again during the night to keep the fire going so it would last all night to keep the house somewhat warm, and prevent the water pipes from freezing. Even so, we sometimes had a thin covering of ice in the water pail in the morning. On very cold nights, we would heat flat irons on the stove, wrap them in rags, and take them to bed with us to keep our feet warm as usually the upstairs bedrooms were cold as radiators were turned off so that the heat could be retained in the downstairs area--at least be warm enough in the kitchen and living room with the parlor and downstairs bedroom closed off.

Air conditioning was unheard of, and, at times, the summer heat was almost intolerable. During a very still, hot day, one could hear the cicadas zinging in the atmosphere,

like a continuous zzzzzz. Occasionally, we would take a blanket and sleep on it on the lawn or downstairs before an open door, (no insulation in homes, then) as the upstairs bedrooms were always warmer than any other place in the house in the summertime, as well as colder in the wintertime.

The largest room in the basement was beneath the living room, and the same size. Clothes lines were hung under the wood rafters for use in inclement weather. On one end were the vegetable bins. One or two of them would be completely filled with potatoes in the fall, with a light cover of soil atop them, if I remember correctly. In other bins were pumpkins, squash, carrots, cabbages, and turnips. Usually the bins were empty before the winter was over, but toward spring some of the produce had rotted, creating quite a smell until the soil and refuse was carried out, and the bins cleaned.

On one wall were shelves that held all of the canned fruits and vegetables in glass Mason jars, and the jams and jellies, topped with wax to preserve freshness, and covered with lids. A big garden produced most of the fruits and vegetables for canning during the summer. Early on, we had an orchard with apple, cherry, and plum trees. Gooseberries, blackberries, and raspberries grew in the woods, and were picked and eaten fresh as sauce, or canned as jams and jellies. Dried apples were made by peeling and slicing them, then placing the slices on a large flat tin, and setting the tins on the "tin porch" to dry in the sun--no matter if the flies and bugs were attracted as the porch was not enclosed. I think we were immune to flies as they were everywhere!

Buying one or two bushels of peaches each summer was a special treat for making pickled peaches and preserves, and I remember them as the best I've ever tasted. Before my time wine was made from elderberries or plums. A large strawberry patch was always maintained for fresh strawberries and jam and jelly. A large cucumber patch was planted each year from which pickles of all sizes were canned, sweet and dill, the latter often stored in large crocks in the dill brine. A large grove of hickory nut trees, among the other trees in the woods, provided the nutmeats for adding a special flavor to the cake icings and cookies constantly being made. But, the cookies most remembered were the molasses and sugar cookies as they were the cheapest to make, with just sugar sprinkled on the top. In the fall, our mother would take us kids to the woods (we were sometimes afraid of the cows), give each of us a pail to pick up the nuts, and we would have gunny sacks full of them by the time the season was over. Then, they had to be laid out to dry before they were ready to crack, sometimes on the tin porch, but usually in the attic where it was dry and hot. Then, on cold winter nights, we would crack the nuts with a hammer on the flat irons, and pick out the nutmeats with special picks for that purpose. Walnuts could be picked up from our grandparent's trees, but we seemed to like the hickory nuts better. In good years of a surplus production of hickory nuts, there were sufficient nuts for our mother to sell at 7 cents a pound, if already picked up, or 5 cents a pound, if the purchaser picked them up in the woods.

~~Hogs~~ and cows were butchered each fall with the help of neighbors reciprocating as it

kindling for the furnace. Later, about 1939 (?), a new stove, half wood, and half electric,was purchased. The "back house" was just across the driveway to the house, near the chicken coop.

Our front yard was fairly large with lawn in the front to the road, and to the entrance side of the house and driveway. A large oak tree grew in the center of the front lawn with a bridal wreath bush on one side, and a maple and pine tree on the other side. Flower beds were planted around the front of the house, and two large elm trees provided shade in the back yard, and anchors for the clothes lines stretched between them. A pet white shepherd dog, Sport, lived in the yeard for almost fifteen years along with many cats, chickens, ducks, and geese.

The pasture for the cows was in the woods across the road from our house. In the summer, they were brought to the barn only for milking,twice a day, along a lane not far from the house. They got to know this path, and would head for the barn as soon as the gate in the woods was opened, probably because their bags, bulging with milk, were hurting, and they were anxious to have them emptied. As they needed a water supply in the woods, there was a large 10x10' wooden water tank that stood just inside the fence, near the road, which was attached to the well by piping laid under the lawn and raod. Unless rain filled the tank, it had to be filled by pumping water from the windmill. If there wasn't sufficient wind to turn the windmill, our mother and us kids would

have to pump the water by hand to fill the tank for the cows. Later, by the year, ____, we had our own aeroelectric windmill for several years before rural electrification came to our farm area. That windmill provided the energy to pump the water most of the time, except when there was no wind at all. Then, too, we had to resort to the hand-powered pumping. Also, in the pasture, were saltblocks for the cows to lick. And, in the pig pens were wooden troughs in which to "swill the pigs", which our mother did most of the time in the summer when the men left for the fields early in the morning during the planting and harvesting seasons. The land was still being cleared of trees, stumps, and large stones when we were growing up. Horses pulled a flat, wooden bed, like a sled, to haul the heavey stumps and stones to the quarry, or the property line after the trees and stumps that could be used for fire wood were salvaged. Hand scythes were used to cut down the underbrush and weeds.