

Excerpts from Journal #7 Josephine Therese Stonitsch

Growing Up in the Smith Family

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July 19, 1994 Journal Entry

Dear Little Lindy called me a day or so ago and asked me to write a book about my life. This sounded so far out for me, since I felt my life was just an ordinary, mundane style of existence. I gave it no thought to even consider it.

Last night, Lindy called again with, "Well, how is your book of memories coming along?" I laughed and said that nothing could be that interesting. Still, she went on, "You are the only grandparent left for my children, and some day, they will enjoy your stories." Still not giving in to such a project, I dismissed it from my mind. Jay called me later, so I mentioned Lindy's suggestion, knowing full well, Jay's own literary abilities, and my meager ones. But he didn't seem to feel it would be too far out for me to consider writing anecdotes of my experiences. And so, this morning, I gave it some thought, and made a call to Mandy, to refresh my very first incident of my life that I remember well. Thus, maybe I can begin to put down on paper, those times that were special events of my life and the times of the days back then.

So let me begin.

July 19, 1994 Journal Entry

I Remember When...

It was my mother's 36th birthday on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918. World War I ended. I was only 3 years old at the time but would be 4 years old one month to the date. The reason I can remember is that my father had a "talk of the town" car accident that day. But let me go back some.

At that time, my parents rented a home in Glenwood, Illinois. There were 5 of us children then. With Julie, the 6th, on the way. I remember the old black iron stove, mom used to cook, bake, heat water for our baths, and also to keep warm by on cold nights, as we would huddle near the stove, as well as another coal burning stove in another room. Basically, the kitchen, as I recall, was our mainstay.

We had a pump outdoors for all our needs, and an outhouse. Running water in houses was unheard of in that small town, though a few may have had it.

To get back to Armistice Day and mom's birthday: Birthdays were special days in our family, but this day wasn't special to mom as far as happiness for her went. Dad worked 4 or 5 miles away at Victor Chemical Works in Chicago Heights, IL. He drove his friend, Mr. Tattersall in our old crank started Ford which wasn't always reliable to say the least. But it took us to church, St. John's where Fr. Burke, a kindly and jolly priest, as I remember, was pastor. Mom and dad were always fervent church goers.

On that day of days, my dad and Mr. Tattersall were returning from work, and we were all waiting eagerly for mom's birthday celebration to begin. Mealtimes were always happy times in our household. Dad always came home with jokes—not always ones we should hear. Though we little ones didn't understand them, we joined in the laughter. This night was different. Mom had supper all prepared. We never ate a meal without dad being there, so we were all hungry as time went by and no dad.

As it was, dad's ford stopped directly on the railroad tracks. Dad saw no trains coming. There were no signal gates there, so dad got out, started to crank the engine, when he hears, in the distance, a train whistle to clear all rails. Thinking quickly, he told Mr. Tattersall to get out of the car and as they stopped far enough for safety, they watched the car being hit to smithereens, both safe.

There was a tavern close by, called Hottinger's place, where dad and Mr. Tattersall went to call the police about the accident. While they waited, it being the end of the war, Mr. Tattersall, who imbibed and enjoyed his drinks, talked my dad into having a beer, which was far out of line in practice, for my dad, but he was always a good sport and this day, he probably felt a drink was the thing to do. Anyway, by the time the police came and celebration at the tavern, dad came home singing as though not a thing was wrong. All I was told was that mom certainly didn't enjoy that episode of either kind, she quickly fed the family and off to bed we went. Mom was justifiable angry to end her birthday this way. The only remaining part of the Ford were the little leather curtains from the side windows, which blew a distance away. Needless to say, the car was demolished. As small as I was, the events of that day were my first recollection.

Glenwood, as probably still today, was a quaint little town. People were very neighborly. Everyone had a garden, small homes, outhouses, pumps, and

wood/coal burning stoves. Milk wagons, drawn by horses came down the dusty roads.

We were well fed, prayed daily, had our “Saturday baths.” Mom would heat the water, put it in a large tub in the kitchen, and one by one each would take a bath in the same water. I remember that! But it was the thing of the day and we accepted it as a blessing to get cleaned. We washed our feet in tubs of water outdoors as we played in dirt.

We lived in Glenwood for two years, when dad wanted to get closer to his work. So, he rented the house on Main Street, closed to Chicago Road, before finally buying the house on 1657 Euclid Avenue, where I was born, Dec. 11, 1914. Dad had rented this house for 2 years before we rented in Glenwood—also for two years, prior to the move to Main Street and Euclid Avenue in Chicago Heights, Illinois.

July 20, 1994 Journal Entry

I Remember...

Euclid Avenue very well: a big fenced-in back yard, tubs mom used for laundry we also used to fill with water in summer to splash in on hot days. We had indoor plumbing and bathrooms at that time. I was about five at that time. Julie was born then. I was the baby while in Glenwood—very blonde curly hair, always a happy child and loving to sit on mom’s and dad’s laps, I remember. Every night, we girls (6 by then) would take our turns to kiss dad and mom good night.

The Hoels lived on one side of us and the Noxons on the other side. Mr. Noxon had an eye for young girls. We were forbidden to go near their house. I will never forget Mrs. Hoel. She was instrumental in my potty training. I was nearing 5 years old and eager to go to school, so my mom was worried that I wouldn’t stay dry at school. Evidently, mom told of her concern about me to Mrs. Hoel. She called me over and promised me a bag of candy if I could stay dry for one week. I remember well, after one week, going over to Mrs. Hoel’s house to tell her the good news. I got a white bag of my favorite candies at the time—butterscotch patties. I gave my sisters each a candy and then carried that bag of candy all that day. I was so pleased with myself that I was now ready to enter kindergarten at 5 yrs. old at St. Agnes School in Chicago Heights, IL.

I Remember...

My first nun was Sr. Mary Esther. I was the smallest child in class. There were divided classes then. Some come children were in second and even third grade in my class. I loved to read and memorize little songs as I would go round and round our circular table, happily singing and reciting from my reader. One I liked especially, that went like this: Swing, swing, swing, swing. Up in the apple tree. Swing, swing, swing, swing, happy and gay are we-e-e-e-e.

In those days we literally swung in our apple tree. The branches were spread, so that dad tied a big heavy rope up high and added a wooden seat with grooves on each side to insert it over the loose rope bottom. We loved to swing in our backyard.

Back to school. Dad drove us to Mass every day before he went to work at 7:30 a.m. We'd get there early, so would help the nuns do little chores. I was Sr. Esther's pet. She saw how well I read, and I was allowed to go to 1st grade within a month or so. I stayed in the same class. I remember Sr. Esther would put me on her lap and would fix my hair. Mom always let me wear big bows at the top of my curly hair. No uniforms at that time, long white cotton stockings held up with homemade garters my mom made for us with elastic. I wore white high-topped shoes with black patent leather bottoms. They were buttoned shoes. Mom had a special button holder to button the shoes. When I was in second grade, I made my First Holy Communion.

I Remember...

My First Communion Day I have never forgotten. I still had Sr. Esther for my teacher. The pastor at St. Agnes was a huge red-faced man—a very likable person as I recall, as he passed out our report cards each month. Tuition at that time, because there were 5 of us attending was .75 a month for each of us. We brought our lunch, oftentimes wrapped in newspaper and tied with string. Our sandwiches ranged from fried egg (on Fridays when no meat was allowed) to peanut butter or plain buttered bread and jelly, an apple and maybe two cookies. We got milk at school.

To get back to my Communion Day (June 21, 1921). Then, we were not allowed to eat after midnight before Mass at 8:00 a.m. I think I wore my sister's white dress and veil. It was natural for me to wear hand-me-downs, but this was

my own special day and clothes were of no concern. I was so excited and nervous, because I led the procession, so was first to kneel at the altar railing to receive our Lord. Father Martin seemed to tower over me with his paunchy red face, and as I received the Host, I could feel myself faint. I can still hear Fr. Calling Sr. Esther to come get me as I was fainting. She took me to the vestibule and gave me water to drink to swallow the Host. Before Mass ended, she brought me to sit next to her. How pleased I was at that. I was o.k. of course. I don't recall any special activity at home for me. After all, each year one of us went through this. Mom had her hands full. I never had a picture taken either. But I still remember how happy I was that whole day.

July 21, 1994 Journal Entry

O blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways!

By the labor of your hands, you shall eat.

You will be happy and prosper. Your wife like a fruitful vine in the heart of your house.

Your children like shoots of the olive, around your table.

Indeed, thus shall be blessed the man who fears the Lord. Psalm 128

Our family's happiness was rooted in God. I can still see us at table, eagerly awaiting dad to get washed after work, to sit at the head of the table. We took turns to say grace, usually a snicker or two as we'd look at one or the other. Dad always got served first. I liked sitting next to my dad, though I would be the last to get my share. There never seemed to be any greediness to take more than we should. We knew that we could fill up on bread, our mainstay. Mom baked bread almost daily. I remember the huge enamel bowl—blue and white speckled—that I would help her knead the dough in. We always had margarine, except when company came. Pure butter was special to us, although we had it often enough. I remember mom buying the boxes of white margarine, and nestled in, was a tiny gelatin capsule of yellow coloring. Mom put the margarine, maybe 2 lbs. at a time, to soften in a bowl and I used to love to watch mom insert a pin in the capsule and squirt out just so much coloring. Then I would get to swirl it around until it was just the right color yellow. I liked that job. Mom's bread was the best. We could smell it for a block as we'd walk home from school.

Mom wasn't too healthy at times, I recall. Wash days for her were more than a full day's work. We had a hand-wrung washer in those days. On Sunday nights, mom gathered all our white clothes to boil on a 2-burner stove, in a huge copper oblong shaped pot. She would add borax and climalene. My father worked at the chemical factory Victor Chemical Works, as a foreman, doing the electrical work on the huge motors of the machines, that made such products as soaps, toothpaste, cleaning materials, Epsom salts, and other ingredients for pharmaceutical companies. Thus, dad bought supplies from the company in large quantities. Climalene we used to soften our water, scrub floors, sinks, etc. We also used Bon Ami, a dry soap cleaning powder for shining windows.

Mondays were full wash days for mom. She had lines and lines of clothes in our backyard. She was always so particular how each piece was hung, stretching each one to cut down on ironing. I helped mom as clothes dried, then more hung till all were dried. I like to iron and did a lot of that, I remember.

Every Sunday, we would pile in our car—always a Buick, second-hand, but big enough for us to go riding. We loved riding to farms in the country where we would get our eggs, bushels of apples (only \$1.00 a bushel). How we loved those sweet-smelling apples from the tree. We could go through a bushel of apples in a week. Mom baked the best apple pies in the world. I learned a lot from watching her.

Many Sundays we'd go back to Glenwood to visit the Dolan's. They always had the comics for us to spread on the floor to read. Mr. Dolan wore a mustache and we'd laugh when he would pour his coffee in the saucer and scoop it up through his mustache. We loved going to their house.

I Remember...

In 1920, we still lived on Euclid Avenue. I remember across the street was an empty lot. A Jewish girl lived next to the lot; an invalid woman lived on the other side of the empty lot. Both were opposites as to friendliness: the Jewish girl was not allowed to cross the street to play with us, so she would sit on the curb and watch us. We had friends on our side of the street. Dolores Shepherd was my friend. We used to sew doll clothes from scrap materials. My mom sewed most of our clothes. She dressed Lucy and Amanda alike and I would have the same pattern dress, but of different colors. Mom sewed well and did beautiful lace work—crochet and tatting. She loved to do this in the afternoons. Dolores and I would plan a wedding procession with our dolls, dressing one like a boy doll and

the bride and flower girl. I remember making a little wagon with a box, to carry the bride and groom down the street, using a string to pull them. Sylvia, the Jewish girl, loved to watch us. We were not allowed to cross streets, unless we went to the invalid lady's house to help her. We were good friends with her. Dad used to take her for a ride with us some Sundays. She lived alone. She would try to please us and make us fudge, which she would put in an old medicine box. My father would never let us eat it, naturally, but we like this lady.

One Saturday afternoon, after our baths, dad would sit on our front porch, smoking his pipe and watching Julie and me play. We had no big ball, so I suggested we use a good-sized round rock to throw back and forth to each other. That was great, until the time I missed, and the rock fell on my big toe. Blood came through and I began to cry. Poor Julie was afraid, but dad was like a country Dr. and took care of my foot. My toe was never quite the same after that. The nail had been imbedded for years to come.

I Remember...

When my little brother Anthony was born on my mom's birthday, Nov. 11. He seemed to be sick ever since he was born. He would have convulsions, so mom had quite a time, since she herself wasn't that well. We had a maid come to help whenever mom was sick or had a baby. Women had midwives during birthing, so she would stay on as maid until mom felt better.

We must have been a handful. I can remember one incident when she had a broom to scare us to being good. In my mind, she was not taking my mom's place. But little Anthony and mom pretty much stayed upstairs.

I remember the night well. Anthony was in his crib, really suffering, so mom called the priest to come baptize him. This was the following February. Mom cooked our supper. I can still see the table set. We were all hungry waiting for dad to come home. When he came home around 5 or 5:30 p.m. he picked Anthony from his crib, and I can still remember standing very close at dad's side, holding Anthony as he breathed heavily. He died in dad's arms as we watched. Needless to say, we were too sad to eat after that.

I remember the day of the funeral. Julie and I and maybe Lucy, who took care of us as we watched them pass our house once more. In those days, on funeral days, the hearse would drive past the house of the deceased as a last tribute. Doors would have a purple wreath on them, to indicate a death had

occurred. I remember the big brown leather rocker we sat in together, by the window. We pulled back the curtains to say goodbye to our brother Anthony.

I Remember...

We went to confession every Saturday afternoon. I would go earlier, to help the nuns clean their house. They had a big house next to church. The nuns had their own nun housekeeper, but they all had their blue/white aprons on Saturdays, when they all had jobs to do. Some cleaned the church, others did yard work, cleaned the house, baked and other menial chores. I never minded working with them. At the end of it all, Sr. would bring out fresh roasted peanuts or some homemade goodies—that was the prize each week.

My mom loved the nuns and baked for them a lot. She crocheted beautiful lace for altar cloths. The nuns had their own chapel, so mom made cloths for that too. Mom prayed a lot. She had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother. Her rosary beads were always in her apron pocket.

I Remember...

When dad announced that we were to move on the other side of town. By then, we needed a bigger house. I hated to leave all my friends, but it was exciting to move to the big 2-story house at 1144 Emerald Ave. It was on a huge corner lot, black iron fence all around, our own fruit trees—2 apple, 2 cherry trees, one date, one peach and a huge grape arbor which dad added later. What I liked was the old player piano and all the wartime (WWI) sheet music we found in the attic. I never took piano lessons, but we had music at school, so learned how to read simple notes. I loved to go to that piano, even without lessons.

We had a big attic and mama had a huge trunk filled with many of her treasures. I would go up to the attic from the stairs in my bedroom closet and spent hours there, looking through old pictures, some of my mom's pretty clothes she could no longer get into, I guess. One was a lovely brown taffeta with lace. My dad used to buy her pretty clothes when he had to go away now and then. He always brought us expensive chocolates, I remember. He liked the best of everything, but he worked very hard.

I remember how he walked to work across the railroad tracks two blocks down, with his tin lunch bucket. Mom always put an apple for his lunch and most of the time, the apple would still be in that box when he'd come home. We used to wait for that apple. Dad would divide it in 4 to 5 pieces, for we who were small and waiting. I think he liked that part of his return home each day, to share his apple.

I Remember...

Apples were always my favorite fruit. We had 2 apple trees, which I loved to climb, or we'd take one of mom's clothes sticks to get the highest apples on the tree down. Now and then, there would be 1 or 2 lonely apples way up high after the rest were picked. Those seemed to taste the best. They were the hardest to pick.

I was a tomboy—a fighter, too. No one was going to hurt my little sisters. I could tackle the Hinckley boy as well as any girl if they fought with my sisters. We would spend hours jumping rope—double ropes, high waters and all the fun songs as we jumped. Every night, after supper, gangs of kids on our block came over. We lived on the corner and always had friends to play with. I liked to play ball and jacks, too, and O'Leary with a golf ball. All the neat games to try to beat each other.

We also liked to play paper dolls in the house on rainy days. Sears catalogs were where we'd get our paper dolls. We would choose girls and ladies with just underwear and cut them out. Then, we'd find pages of clothes to fit the dolls, and cut them out. But mostly, we would draw, color, and cut out our own doll dresses. That was fun designing our own. I also liked to sew for little dolls, so I would make clothes for my little sister's dolls sometimes.

I like to read—mostly, mystery books. I would go to the library often and sit an hour or two, then bring 5 and 6 books home to read. We spent our summers reading and playing.

Nostalgic Moments...

Sitting midst the rows and rows of dad's most delicious tomatoes, saltshaker in hand, and really feasting on the juicy "fruit" on a hot summer's day.

Going to open air band concerts on a Sunday evening, feeling the sound of each drum beat as the Star-Spangled Banner was played.

Nestling quietly on a comfortable chair in the living room with a mystery book, an apple and soda crackers to munch on. My idea of pleasure on a summer day.

Running outdoors, barefooted, to splash in the water, as the city opened hydrants to flush out the debris in the water pipes. We waited till the orange rust was cleared.

Smelling mom's delicious homemade jellies, tomato preserves and home-baked breads and pies as we came home from school.

Sneaking bagsful of the juiciest pears in a vacant lot full of pear trees on our way home from school.

Waiting for the "iceman" to stop to bring ice when mom had her "25 lb." sign in the window for our non-electric refrigerator. As he chopped away to weigh 25 lbs, our eyes widened, knowing we'd get to take the large pieces which we put in layers of newspaper, to gold and suck on a hot day.

Hearing and watching the Jewish vendor, with his rickety wagon drawn by a horse, calling out, "Rags, Rags. I take rags." He later sold his collection to earn his living.

Remembering the bakery truck driving by to sell fresh bread and goodies, and we'd get a sample from the baker whom we knew.

The "milk man" on his funny cart, driven by an old horse, who used to "drop" his "road apples" right in front of our house. The birds were there before we knew it, to have a feast.

The cream on the bottles of milk that rose above the neck of the bottle as it froze, lifting the little paper cap, so that I, for one, cut off the top cream and put the little cap on. I'm not sure that my mom ever discovered less cream. Those days, there was almost half cream and half pure milk. No vitamins added in those days.

Milk was plentiful. People had pastures outside of town and sold milk direct from the cow. I remember the huge 5-gallon cans of milk, and I also remember the cow hairs at the bottom of the cans as Mom would rinse them. I wouldn't drink milk after that until it was sold in bottles. Butter, cheese, eggs could also be ordered from the "milk man" at the door.

Sledding down the big hill on Euclid Avenue, in winter with our sleds, going tobogganing in Cicero, IL where the hills were really high. What fun we had in winter.

I remember “making angels” in the first snow of the season, spreading our arms as we’d lie on the snow, to form wings.

Making snow men larger than ourselves using pieces of coal for eyes, mouth, and nose.

Watching the “coal man” shooting tons of black coal through a small window in the coal bin in our basement to last the winter to keep our house warm. Oil or electricity were not heard of for heating homes when I was a child.

I Remember...

The night, Dec. 7, 1941, when dad always listened to the news after supper, and he called us into the living room to hear President Roosevelt tell of the declaration of World War II. We were all scared, thinking it was the end of the world.

I was almost 28 years old, working in a beauty shop in Chicago. The following year my brother decided to go into the Navy, rather than be drafted in the Army. When I heard that they were to form a Women’s Auxiliary Unit in the Army, I was extremely anxious to go to war also. In July of 1942, I had my first experience of what lay ahead. I had to go to Chicago for aptitude tests, medical and physical. I did well on all, but was told that I was 8 lbs. underweight, so had a couple of months to gain that much. That did not daunt me. While all my papers were being scrutinized, records from school verified, police check out on my character, etc., I lost no time in the weight gain. I ate a banana milkshake every day for lunch, so by October of that year, I went again for medical checkups, and I did indeed gain the needed pounds—108 to be exact. I was sworn in the U. S. Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps October 11, 1942 at Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

I will never forget my first leave from home. I was the 1st woman from my hometown, Chicago Heights, IL to go in service. So, naturally, the town newspaper was interested. Mom and Lucy gave me a special going-away party. My boss and co-workers came and brought me wonderful and appropriate gifts to use in the Army.

The Sunday I had to report for duty, mom and dad drove me to the railroad station in Matteson, Illinois where I would be headed for Fort Sheridan. I will never forget my mom as I watched her from the train as long as I could. She was beside herself to lose both Smitty and me that same year. I cried as I went into the unknown. The ride was long and bumpy. The train was full of women also going where I was. My first assignment for basic training was to Des Moines, Iowa—called Boom Town at the time, because of all the Army personnel there.

I was lonely, to say the least. We had ridged days of training. It was bitter cold that winter, and they were unprepared for small women, as to uniforms made to design for English women. So, I had a seersucker striped fatigue dress, and a man's woolen overcoat that went down to my ankles. We must have been a funny sight to see, parading through the streets to our daily classes and work. Yes, the hours were long and tedious, but the hardest thing was to know that I couldn't go home. No phones to call from either, but mom saw to it that I had a package with lots of goodies and surprises. The Army also sensed our loneliness and fed us a really great Christmas dinner.

In January after my 6 weeks of basic training, because uniforms were not issued yet, I and some others I was with, were moved from Boom Town to a hotel in Des Moines that the government took over. It was dark and dingy there, but it was more private, and we had more time to ourselves till we waited for uniforms and our first working assignments.

On Sept. 1, 1943, I was assigned to the 1550th SCU at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Of course, we were the first contingent of women at Fort Knox, where there were about 2000 men. We numbered 150 women in 3 barracks away from the men's quarters, up on a little hill. We marched to our respective jobs each day.

Because I had experience in a beauty shop, they wanted me to manage one for the WAACS, which I declined to do, since I felt I had no managerial experience for that. I was assigned then, to work at the supply depot for a while to await further job orders. I eventually was assigned to do office work at the men's supply depot, issuing mechanical parts. This was new to the men. Photos were taken often as the very few WAACS worked at these jobs with civilian employees and Army personnel. By then, I became a corporal, which increased my pay some. As a private we only received \$21.00 a month—a far cry from what people were making back home by then.

I was in the WAACs 11 months and 4 days, when it became a full part of the Army. We had a chance to leave service as a WAAC but I decided to be inducted

once more as a WAC. I had the chance to be retrained then, so was sent to the Dental School in Hot Springs, Arkansas, learning to make dentures. That is another story.

September 19, 1994 Journal Entry

I Remember...

In the cold snowy winters on Emerald Avenue, we would huddle near the kitchen vent to keep warm. We would have tons and tons of coal in our coal bin for it to last all winter, so dad would shovel it in the big furnace before he went off to work, and again at night, but it was never that warm in our house, so the kitchen was where we stayed after supper. We had a large house, 4 bedrooms upstairs, a stairway both back and front halls, a huge octagon shaped dining room with an archway into the parlor as we called it, a side room off the dining room as a playroom for all our toys. It was here that I tried to experiment putting a light bulb into a screw-type electric outlet in the dark closet off our playroom. What a shock I got. I was thrown against the wall. Perhaps this incident made me extra cautious about electric appliances.

Every night, Clara and Smitty would beg me to read stories to them—always the same two stories for sure, because I acted them out with various voices, which they thrilled at over and over: Billy Goat Gruff and Little Black Sambo. I read Aesop's Fables to them a lot, too. Little Claus and Big Claus. Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and others I can't recall now.

We all liked to make up our own stories too, using our own names to make the stories come alive. We would put on our own stage shows. With so many girls and only one brother, we had our own entertainment. I remember liking to recite poetry: long ones, like

Father called me William. Mother called me Will. Sister called me Willie.

But the fellers called me Bill. Mighty glad I'm not a girl, I'd rather be a boy.

To wear those sashes, curls and things worn like Fauntleroy.

And so it goes, line after line, but no one ever tired of hearing it.

Some of my sisters would sing a song; some did a dance. I would do a tap dance I learned at school. We really had some fun evenings together, and there was always the popping of corn over the wood stove. It was in a basket type

popper with a long handle you shook back and forth over the burner to pop it full. Even during depression years, we were never without food. Though many were, who received bags of free food regularly.

I remember the time dad bought a half pig with another man at his work. But we had no freezers then, so dad par-cooked pork patties, and put them in a large crock with the grease to seal the meat. We had a pantry to store foods in our basement, so hams were hung there. I remember, needless to say, we were sick of pork as we couldn't keep it too long.

One time, dad thought he got a bargain with a barrel of flour. They sold groceries in large quantities for the employees to buy cheaper than. With eleven mouths to feed, dad was able to buy good food for us. But the flour was something I'll never forget. It got damp and tasted like the wooden barrel. Mom used it every which way: bread, pie, pasta, gravy, etc. That's a lot of flour even for our large family. It didn't make us sick at all, but the taste was something I will never forget, and we more or less got used to the taste as mom added things to disguise it.

I Remember...

I loved to sew doll clothes. When I was about ten years old, the nuns held a contest for dressing dolls to give to the poor children at Christmas. I made many outfits for a small china doll, all sewed by hand. Mom always had lots of sewing materials on hand. The many dolls were on display at school. I was the only one who made a complete wardrobe for a doll, thus I won the prize. I don't recall what the prize was, but I was a competitive child.

One year, while I was in high school, I enjoyed working crossword puzzles in the newspaper. There was a Cimarron contest of puzzles for a month. Each day, I would hurry to work the puzzles. Some days, I'd run to town to the library to check in the huge dictionary, for foreign words or others I'd miss on some puzzles. I framed each worked puzzle in bright colors to make them attractive. Then, I strung them all with a ribbon to form a booklet and added a special attractive from cover. Needless to say, I won the contest. My prize was a box of 24 candy bars.

I remember graduation from 8th grade. Our class colors were pale green and gold. We wore ribbons with a pin attached about 12 inches long. Our dresses were all alike: Nile green, long waist design over a short full skirt. I had my first pair of high heeled shoes—1 ½ inch. And I remember my first pair of green silk

one piece chemise that was in style as an undergarment then, and my first pair of silk stockings. I really felt grown up and special. I received the 3rd highest gold medal for Effort. Of course, I got a medal for perfect attendance at school and for daily Mass.

I Remember...

When I was 9 years old, I made my Confirmation—1925. That year St. Therese of the Child of Jesus was canonized. That was a big event in my life. I chose Therese for my Patron Saint at Confirmation, as did most of the girls confirmed with me. I can still hear the bishop go down the altar rail, saying “Teresie, Teresie” in Latin.

My sponsor was my best friend’s mother. She was a convert from Judaism, and I went to Mary’s house a lot. Her mom was the nicest person I knew. She gave me some pretty, embroidered hankies that I treasured for years. Mary Rohe and I were good friends for years. She was an only child, not overly intelligent, so I would help her with homework. She would give me a dime. That was a real treat to buy a candy bar at school that the nuns sold to make a few extra dollars.

When we were growing up, dad made lots of our toys. He made a cradle for Ellie and Julie’s dolls one Christmas. He’d make us a scooter with wood and old skate wheels. We loved to skate. I’d skate to school sometime, but mostly we walked with Helen Conway, Helen Stua, and my friend, Mildred Sheehy, when we moved to Emerald Avenue. We had a lot of friends to play with then. No one looked at boyfriends in grade school. We had our own fun and so did the boys.

I Remember...

My first experience at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.

Beth was dating Gerry at the time. We lived 20 to 25 miles from Gary, Indiana where the Mass was held in a huge red barn. Gerry had a roadster then. He and Beth in the front seat, one of my sisters and me in the rumble seat, an open seat that pulled out from the back of the car, wide open to wind, snow, the

elements. We didn't mind. We bundled up, made first tracks in the snow most of the way, and we arrived just on time, standing room only. It was packed. People came from all over as it was something new at the time. We didn't mind standing, we were cold. I doubt that there was any heat but the warmth of our bodies through it all.

Going home was the real fun. We sang carols and shouted Merry Christmas to all we saw. It was fun. We felt so grown up to stay up that late. Beth fixed breakfast for Gerry and us. We went to bed to a wonderful Christmas morning.

Our Christmases were fun. We never got our gifts till morning. Mom would be busy cooking as we played with our toys. Dad always carved the meat, said grace as we each had our own spot at the table. It was festive. We usually ate at noon—that was the way at those times—regular hours for meals.

But soon after, we would call our friends and off we went to a movie—only 10 cents a ticket and we could sit for 2 or 3 movies if we wanted. No popcorn was sold in the show. A Karmel Korn shop was right next door, so we bought things there. We brought goodies from home to eat while we watched. No one cared what we brought. We'd stay all afternoon, walk home and on time for supper. Those were fun times. After supper some of our friends came to see our tree, gifts, and to have fun. We always had plenty of candy in bowls to munch on.

I Remember...

When I was in Catholic School, St. Agnes, Chicago Heights, Illinois, I looked forward to Lent and Easter. We would give up eating candy, though we saved what we'd get from time to time, for Easter in case our Easter goodies were meager, and we could feast on our "Lenten sacrifices."

We liked going to Lenten devotions—all our friends would be there then, on Holy Thursday, after morning Mass and Celebration of the Last Supper. We wore our white dresses to walk through the aisles of the church after the priest, who carried the Monstrance with consecrated Host to the Repository at a side altar. We stayed an hour to pray. Then, some of us would walk to other churches in town, many miles apart, to once again pray before the Blessed Sacrament. We liked to see how the nuns adorned each altar as we went from church to church.

All the Easter services took place in the morning. On Good Friday, we would be silent from noon to 3 p.m. and spent that time in church. Stations of the Cross was at 3 p.m., and evening Easter Saturday services began at 7 a.m. and lasted

long. There was no R.C.I.A. at that time. Actually, the Lenten fast was over at noon on Saturday. Somehow, I would feel guilty eating a piece of my candy collection on Saturday, though I'm sure I did.

Easter baskets were more like a shoe box fixed with a couple of decorated eggs and candies—always hidden to make it fun. One year, Aunt Ellie surprised all of us and set up huge chocolate bunnies and special chocolates, etc. Like one big basket in the center of the dining room table. What a feast. Ellie watched with delight as we oohed and ahhed at all she had done—her special gift of love and sacrifice to make this to be our never-forgotten Easter. Ellie's heart was always bigger than life. Our holidays were always so special. We were always dressed in new finery—a parade of girls as we sat as family at Mass, so special to each of us.

I Remember...

A trip we took to Cincinnati, Ohio—Dad, Luce, and 2 others. My mom stayed home with the smaller ones. We packed a lunch, drove all day. There were no motels then. We slept on the side of the road all night, huddled together. We had a flat tire, so spent much time getting that repaired. One had to do those things alone. No such services as today. We went the “cheap” way, but oh what joy when we reached our destination. A feast was waiting for us. We met people we didn't know, though Dad did. It didn't matter having to double up each night. We laughed and enjoyed whatever we did. Mostly, just playing, eating, and talking was the norm those days. People shared and it was enough. We loved visiting. Dad was fun to be with: he loved to tell us jokes every night at table.

I Remember...

My dad!! He and mom and we kids sat in our big kitchen most nights, sometimes having coffee after supper. The coffee pot was always filled with left-over coffee, reheated all day. I used to like coffee with cornflakes, rather than with milk. Before we kids went upstairs to bed, we'd line up, one by one, to get our good-night kisses. Dad would put his hands on both sides of our head and draw us to his face for a kiss. I used to think about his unshaven face, as I could feel the whiskers on my face, but it was the kiss that made us know we were loved.

We would stay awake long after we went to bed. I slept with my sisters: 3 in a bed, me in the middle. Julie and Ellie liked the sides. We giggled and told

stories until one of us said, “good night.” Lots of togetherness in our family, which was to key to loving even to our old age.

I Remember...

Reaching 85 years of age and living alone on the day before Christmas, 1999, I have the great joy of remembering past Christmases when I was a child. One that comes to mind, which is a far cry from this one. With the over-abundance of gifts that I am receiving this year, and along with the gifts, so much love from each who gives, I am reminded that the Christmas of long ago was so simple and beautiful that nostalgia for my own parents and siblings touches my senses.

I remember my father secretly working on a cradle for Ellie and Julie for their dolls. What I got was even more special—the only toy I got. We didn’t expect more than one, though we received smaller items in a limited way. My special toy was a small China cabinet which came with tiny pots and pans—even a small frying pan, not for use as such, but to play “house” with. “Playing house” was the fun of the day and “playing with paper dolls” we could pretend we were moms and line the dolls as for a party. So, I pretended to cook for them and whomever I played with, using tiny bits of food and “sugar water” for tea. Imagination and pretense were the beginning of creativeness of me. I loved to cook and set a “perfect table,” which I never outgrew. A beautiful set table enhanced the food thereon, at least, I thought so. At any rate, our toy lasted forever—until the next Christmas. We wore them out.

Dad was always Santa. We never opened gifts until after we went to Mass as a family. Our Christmases were fun as we sat at table for the feast. Usually, we would go to a matinee with friends. Only 10 cents then. Evenings, friends came to share our toys and to enjoy treats. In a large family, there is much love and joy to share. We always began with prayer—reverencing the manger beneath the tree. Simple yet beautiful!!