

A MOTHER'S STORY

Come along kids, boys and Nancy, and walk along with me down Memory Lane. I was born on December 30, 1905. I do not know the day or what the weather was but having lived 87 years in this climate, I'm sure it was cold and there was lots of snow.

I am told I was not one of those beautiful pink and white, roly-poly babies, but a frail, delicate little creature. After many changes of formulas, the one that gave me a start in this big world was oatmeal water. I'm sure it must have been Quaker Brand.

Our house on Calvert St. was built on a hill and the side walk was uphill. In the winter it was a great place for us to slide down it on our sleighs. All the kids in the neighborhood shared it with us, if they were approved by us. We felt we owned that hill because it was in front of our house.

There were five girls and three boys, so with Mom and Dad ten people had to live in that small house. Regardless of the size, we seemed to have made out and I do not remember my childhood being so bad.

The parlor(as it was called then) was a fairly good size, big enough for a piano and furniture. In the next room (dining room) was the coal heater that helped heat the house downstairs. This stove played a big part in our lives besides heating.

It had little squares all around it with isinglass in the squares that made it look like windows. It was so pretty when

the coals got red and it would shine through them. There were a few times when a window would get poked out (who knows how?) and a new one had to be put in. Some nights, we younger ones would pull our chairs around the stove and either sing or put apples on a stick inside the stove to roast them.

It also served as a place, either in back or on the side of the stove to undress and dress. It was pretty chilly upstairs to either dress or undress.

The parlor was shut off most of the winter to help keep the rest of the rooms downstairs warm. Mom and Dad's bedroom was off from the dining room which led into a large kitchen. The kitchen table was large and I can see in my mind where every one of us sat.

As each of us sat down for a meal, if he or she were chewing gum, it was not thrown away. My no, you made a ball out of it and stuck it under the table in front of you. Gum was a luxury and you might not be given another stick for some time again. This would continue until a large amount of gum would accumulate and then Dad would have to scrape and clean up under the table. We were warned not to put anymore gum there but it did occur many times again.

Our kitchen stove was an Andes, a popular name for stoves at that time. Mom did all her cooking and baking on it. It had a reservoir on the back that held water and when the fire was going, it heated the water for our baths.

Saturday was bath time. It was unthinkable and unheard of for anyone taking a bath during the week. We bathed by age, I think. The younger ones in the morning and older ones during afternoon and evening. A large washtub was put in front of the open oven door and each took turns bathing and having their hair washed.

Sunday's were always special. Mom would bake all morning on Saturday getting ready for our Sunday dinner and evening meal. We went to church and when we came home she always had something special for breakfast and also for dinner. Always a roast and pie.

In the afternoon the older girls, Marg and Katharine, sometimes would invite friends for the afternoon. I was generally asked to play the piano and everyone would get around and sing. My Mom included. She loved to sing and could be heard singing during the day as she did her work.

Mom always made a sponge cake and jell-o for Sunday night supper and most of the time who ever were there in the afternoon would be asked to stay and dine with us.

I learned to play the piano at a very early age. I would go into the parlor even in the cold and drum on the piano until finally I was playing tunes I had heard. This went on until I was 8 or 9-years-old and I started taking lessons.

I took lessons for 4 years and was supposed to forget the playing by ear deal but it is something that is almost impossible

to do. The rest of the years I continued to play by ear and I had a good many happy years doing it.

I can just barely remember starting in Kindergarten at Liberty St. School. My teacher was Miss Maybe and she taught for a good many years. I was then sent to St. Aloysius, which was a long distance from Calvert St.

We had to leave home quite early in order to get to school on time. I remember being so tired when I would start home in the afternoon.

We (a friend and I from school) would walk down to what then was called the American corner. This was on Dominick St. and the main street for any transportation.

In those days, the farmers would come with their big sleighs that held feed or whatever and we would hop on the back. Most of the time it would take us nearly home.

I was able to attend St. Aloysius until the 5th grade. I became very sick one winter and the doctor said the distance was too far for me to walk.

I then attended Liberty Street School and continued there until I graduated into high school. It was at Liberty St. School that I met Marion Grogan on my first day there. We have been true friends ever since.

At age 15, my mother passed away and life at home had to be adjusted, but we always felt she was up there guiding us as things went well for us.

Although it meant Rose and I quitting school in our sophomore years to keep house for Dad and our three brothers, we did it and life did not seem too hard on us. Katharine was the first to come home. She and I worked together until she married and then Rose joined me.

Spring

Everyone took to house cleaning in the Spring very faithfully. Dad set a night the boys would be home to help carry the stove into the dining room. This was stored out back and brought in the Fall as it was the main source of heating downstairs.

The carpeting on both rooms (living and dining rooms) were swept thoroughly and put on the clothes line. The boys then took turns beating them. Mom and the girls would be busy mopping the floors and washing the windows and woodwork. The carpets were brought back and everything put in place. A very clean room to enjoy.

Summer

Summer came in and we kids that were in school could hardly wait for school to close for the summer. Wood Creek, which was just a step from the house, played a big part in our lives. There were wild flowers, cat tails and lots of things to amuse us there. We also waded in the creek and had corn roasts in the field near the creek.

There seemed to be a lot to entertain us.

The city ran a special street car for the summer. As a special treat we were given a nickel to ride around the Belt

Line. What a thrill it was to sit on the open part of the street car with the wind blowing on you.

Our next treat for vacation was a day at Franklin Field. Mom would make a lunch for us and give us each a nickel for the street car and away we would go for the day.

It's the simple things in life we never forget.

Our other big trip was a trip to the cemetery with Mom and Dad. Dad had lovely flowers he planted so they were picked and taken with us. This was also a big deal.

Our lives were simple and not too much going on but when these little surprises came up, we really went for them and as you see, never forgot them.

The summer fled and it was soon time to go back to school. This meant Rose and I always had a new dress to wear that Mom made for us. She most always made them alike only one in pink (mine) and one blue for Rose.

Fall

Now it's getting near Fall and time once more for preparations to get ready for the winter. It would be around Thanksgiving that the stove once more was brought in and also the storm house erected that led into the front door.

Thanksgiving, of course, was a great day.

Dad, who raised chickens, would pick out a couple of nice fat ones. We all gathered around to see the poor things get their heads chopped off. Dad would hang them up to bleed

overnight and the next day he would pluck the feathers off and clean them.

Thanksgiving dinner was always special and everyone had all they could eat.

Winter

By now, the winter had a pretty good start and it wasn't long before Christmas was approaching. My greatest memory of growing up was our Christmas's. Like any child, we made up our wishes for what we wanted for Christmas. In the days that Santa played a big part, Mom would sneak our dolls away and make clothes for them. I remember only having that one doll.

Christmas Eve was always a busy one all day. We all had our chores to do. Rose and I were elected to wash and shine the lamp chimneys. The house was scoured and Mom was busy in the kitchen all day. Katharine and Marg were given grown up chores and Mom spent the day in the kitchen baking and getting other things ready for Christmas dinner.

After lunch, Rose and I spent time getting dressed to go to Confession. On the way down, we picked up Marion and Jeannette Grogan. That took most of the afternoon as everyone and his brother was there. Those were the days that everyone who could, would go to Confession.

On our way home, we stopped at the Grogan's home and exchanged presents. To us, nothing could have looked better than those little presents from Woolworth's. (More excitement than the little ones today over the beautiful gifts they receive.)

We went to bed early those years too and the tree was not trimmed before as that was Santa's job. What a thrill Christmas morning was when we walked in the living room and saw the tree for the first time. I always felt it was the most beautiful sight anyone could behold.

We were then hurried up to get dressed as we (all of us) Mom, Dad and 8 kids got ready for Mass. Christmas morning, we all went to 5:30 a.m. Mass. I can see all of us yet filing down Calvert Street Indian file, through the snow. It was always cold and dark as we had no electric lights on the street. I think they had gas lights dimly lit.

Len and Jim always led the way with everyone else walking briskly behind. They were altar boys and they carried their freshly starched surplices Mom had done up for them. I'm sure our minds (the younger ones) were concentrating more on what was waiting for us when we got home than on going to Mass.

After we no longer believed in Santa Clause, Mom would have us wait until she cooked breakfast before the presents were given out. We always had bacon or sausage and eggs on Christmas.

Each one was given their presents individually. It wasn't always easy for Mom to get what we wanted for Christmas as money was not that plentiful, but she always had a great Christmas for us. Just seeing our dolls was such a surprise and joy.

As I was experiencing some of the Christmas's I spent through the years, I often thought of Mom and knew what she went through. The only stores I could shop at were Kresge's and

Woolworth's and by the end of the shopping days, I knew everything each store had on the shelf.

During the winter, we went sliding down the hill in front and in back of the house. Thron's Pond was always frozen and that is where we could go and skate. I enjoyed skating and went as much as I could. Our skates were not like they are today. We had to buy shoes and the skates were clamped on.

Whenever we girls went over there, we prayed all the way over that some nice boy would take pity on us and put our skates on. Otherwise, we could not clamp them on tightly and they would come off. You always tried to look your best when you went over there but sometimes it didn't pay. It seemed we sat on the snow bank most of the time.

The winter passed and when Spring came again you able to look back to find it hadn't been too boring. There was a birthday party now and then that you were invited to or someone unexpectedly would call at the house to spend an evening.

Mom's cousin, Katie Finley and her husband Jim would come for an evening. Jim would bring his violin and I would play the chords on the piano. What a great time we would have. He knew all the "oldies" and I was able to follow him.

Now, as you read this, you really will have to agree my childhood wasn't so bad.

The years passed and as each year came around there were changes. Like any other family, back then, we did not have city

water, gas or electricity for a long time. Yes, we had the small necessary house in the back yard that served as our bathroom.

What a thrill and joy when the city water was put in the house and then the electric and gas. A zinc bath tub was put in the one room we now used as the bathroom. It was some time before we had hot water installed. In order to bathe, it was necessary to carry hot water upstairs. Even that was a luxury to us.

Life went along. I graduated out of grammar school and attended high school until the end of my sophomore year. During that time I was in school, Mom was suddenly taken from us and I came home to help Katharine keep house. Katharine took over as soon as Mom left us and we each (Rose and I) came home to help.

I met your Dad when I was home. He delivered meat to Aunt Bess next door. We started dating and finally we married, each at age 22. After 2 years, Joe was born and then my family started.

So much happened but God was good and took good care of me and you young ones. When your Dad had to be admitted to the hospital, I had no idea this would be our lives for a good many years.

You all grew up and have done great by your selves and your families. I am so proud of you. It wasn't easy through the years being Mother and Dad, but I must say you all grew up being good people, doing as I hoped you would. I used to think when I

was lecturing you and saying "there's going to be new rules and regulations," it was just going over your heads.

After I went to work at Rome Hospital, my life took a beautiful turn and I was happy there for 25 years. Through these years, there were marriages and grandchildren. All this added to my thanks to God for giving me my health and mind to be here to see it all.

As I look back, I know if I had my choice, I wouldn't have chosen this kind of life, but now I'm glad I was able to experience it and would not trade it for anything else.

I am ending this with a census of 22 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren and 10 great-great grandchildren.

Not bad for an 87 year old woman!

The End