

## Christian Roethlisberger 1828-1925

Mandy and Stephen, this was your great-great grandfather who was born and died in Canton Bern (Zollbruck) Switzerland. I was eight years old when my father received a letter edged in black from Switzerland telling him of his father's death.

I don't recall my father speaking about him – or his mother – very much except to tell that Christian was a self-educated veterinarian whose services were much in demand by Swiss Cattle farmers.

Christian was short in stature and I believe a jolly happy man. He said if a man could no longer appreciate looking at a pretty girl, it was time from him to die. He died at age 97 years and 20 days.

The following is an excerpt from a Swiss newspaper, *Berner Zeitung*, dated July 14, 1925:

*Last Friday noon, one of the oldest, if not the oldest, farmer in the lower Frittenback at Zollbruck, the widely known, Christian Roethlisberger, died at the age of 97 years and 20 days.*

On June 28, 1828, Christian Roethlisberger, the 3<sup>rd</sup> child of Christian and Elizabeth Aeschlimann Roethlisberger of Langnau, was born. It was prophesied at his birth that one who is born on the longest day of the year shall become very old. He fulfilled the prophecy.

In the 1970's, one of my cousins in Switzerland, Walter Steiner, wrote an article about Christian and it was published in a magazine. The following are translated anecdotes that Walter remembers Christian telling. The translations are literal – from Berner Swiss to English.

- 1) – *When I was seven I cured a cow for my father. We were then farming on the Oberegg. I was supposed to herd the cows on pasture, but one cow got away and ate too much clover and bloated. I was scared because the cow was in pain. Then I happened to think that one would vomit if you stick a finger down the throat. I thought the cow would feel better if it could get rid of the food in its over-loaded stomach. I took a goat stick, wrapped it with cloth, and pushed it into the cow's throat. It worked! The cow had a bowel movement and passed lots of gas. The cow felt better, and so did I.*
- 2) *When I was ten, Father bought the lower Schwang in lower Frittenbach. One day I was suppose to use a scythe to cut the potato plants and also watch a calf. Suddenly, I saw the calf try to get into the garden. I was lazy. I threw the scythe at the calf. It hit the calf's right ear and it hung there. The ear bled and hung down. I ran into the woods and with my knife cut some Puulharz (medicinal*

*herb) and used it to glue the ear on. From then on, Father never had to remind me to care for that calf. I always remembered. The ear healed but always stood up better than the left ear. Father never noticed and I was glad.*

- 3) When I was nineteen years old I went to Eggwill to work as a hired man. The lady's name was Elizabeth Stettler and I learned much from her. In her basement many medicines were on a stone table. She told me if one of the cattle looked sick, I should tell her and she'd mix a potion. On tobacco paper, I wrote each recipe and put them in my trunk. When I left Eggiwill, I had many of her recipes and that's how I became a cow doctor.*
- 4) Later in life I became a butcher and learned how a cow looked inside. Often I had to kill sick cattle and I would have known how to have cured them, but it was too late.*
- 5) In later years I learned to be a cheesemaker and made cheese in Walterswill for many years. Often when farmers came to the factory, they spoke of their ailing cattle. Then I would read my recipes and tell them how to cure their animals. Usually my advice worked and after awhile it was told that the cheesemaker was quite a cow doctor. I learned how to help cows that were calving and had breeched calves. I could turn the calves so they would lie right. That was easy because I had little hands! I liked living in Walterswill. I married Lisebeth there and soon we had four children. (My comment: Eight more followed. I don't know their names, but my father, Simon, was the youngest and the only one to leave home and travel to America. He never returned.)*
- 6) In 1862, Father sent a message that due to his advancing age he wanted me to return to lower Frittenbach. I left with my family to lower Schwang. (My comment: My father Simon was apparently born there in 1867) The farmers were soon aware that I had knowledge of veterinary medicine. Often they called me for help.*
- 7) Once a farmer called because one of his cows had a problem calving. She was attempting to discharge the after-birth, or placenta. When I got to the barn I saw that the farmer had tied a cloth on her rear so she couldn't lose the placenta. I had to laugh. I knew immediately what was wrong. I removed the cloth for the cow had not finished calving. She was producing a second calf. And so it was. Soon there was a second calf lying on the straw and everyone was happy.*
- 8) What things are possible? Once I was believed to possess magical powers. A farmer came to tell me about his sick cow. I soon realized the problem and told him there was nothing that I could do. She was beyond help, and he should go home and butcher her. "When you butcher the cow" I replied, "You'll find the*

*chest cavity infected". With this sad news the farmer returned to me and said, "It happened just as you said. Tell me, good man, how did you from Frittenbach, know what was wrong with my cow in Landes? You must eat more than bread. Maybe you can tell me who stole my chain and biel?" I almost became angry and said "Listen man! I do not work with the Devil. Go ask a gypsy who stole your possession."*

- 9) *I got along very well with Veterinarian Eggimaa in Langnau. Sometimes he would take me with him when a cow had calving problems. When I'd turn the calf to the proper position, he'd say "Chrigeli, how do you do that!?" I said to him "If you can peel a potato with your ass, you can do it to."*
- 10) *One time a horse answered me. That I cannot forget. It happened in this way. Down in Emmenthal was a young farmer who was kicked by a horse and he died. The horse became sick. The young widow sent a message to me to look at her horse. I had to pass the blacksmith's to get there. The smith knew that I was coming and he said to me "Don't go into the horse barn. The horse has already killed its master. It's not necessary that it kill two men." I said nothing and pretended to go to the house, but instead I went directly to the horse barn. The door was open, I entered and saw a beautiful young horse. I thought I should be able to help that animal. I prayed to God that he stand by me and help me. The horse looked at me, lifted his right hind hoof, bit into it, and trembled. Then I knew when the horse kicked at his master he hit the plow with his hoof and injured it. I took the horse to the blacksmith and told him the right hind hoof was infected. The smith jumped up and yelled "You're wrong. It has some thing else wrong." I asked him to hold the hoof so I could operate on it. He refused and said that it was much too dangerous. So I did it myself. The infection drained. I instructed the widow how she should treat it. A year later the blacksmith slit his throat with is pocketknife.*

*(This end the translated anecdotes)*

In grandfather Christian's later years, his veterinary recipes were printed and distributed in book form. He worked closely with an apothecary in Langnau and instructed farmers on the treatment of their ailing animals. He spoke there at the Apothecary Mosimann in Langnau until he was 88 years old.

When he was 71 years old (1899) he built a two family house and lived there with his daughter Marie and her family until his death. He had his own apothecary in this home. Many of his recipes are used in Switzerland today.

Grandfather Christian told many humorous stories, he loved music, singing, and conversation. He never needed to wear glasses.

In the spring before his death, he had a hernia operation. He said if he had been younger he could have performed it himself.

In his 97<sup>th</sup> year there was a family gathering and Grandfather danced with a 19-year-old granddaughter.

He endured many problems and sorrows in his lifetime, but was sustained by his friendly spirit and his oft-stated belief “We are Lead”.

### **Elizabeth Aebi Roethlisberger**

Mandy and Stephen, Elizabeth was Christian’s wife and the mother of their twelve children – seven girls and five boys and was my grandmother. We had no pictures of her and I don’t know when she died. In fact, I know nothing about her. She was my grandmother and your great-great grandmother.

(Later from Walter Steiner) Elizabeth Aebi Alexanders from Walterswyl died November 19, 1886 in Kipfstalden. She was probably not 60 years old. Simon was then 19 years old and came to America 6 years later in 1892. She had 13 children – son Alexander died at age 6 weeks.

### **Simon Roethlisberger**

Simon, who was my father, and your great grandfather, was born on May 30, 1867 in Langnau, Switzerland, near the village of Zollbruck. There were twelve children in his family and he was the youngest of the boys.

I don’t know much about his years in Switzerland except that he served in the Swiss army. Apparently as with so many Swiss of that era, the family farm and economic conditions of the time could not support all twelve children at home and so at age 25 he left all of his family and emigrated to the United States.

Five years later at age 30, he married my mother, Elise Mueller in Monroe at St. John’s Evangelical Church. He became a cheesemaker and for 15 years he and my mother lived in various cheese factories in Gratiot, South Wayne, Wisconsin and Warren, Illinois. During these years they became parents of my brothers, Fred in 1898, William in 1899, Carl in 1902, Emma in 1904, and Ida, who died at age of 4 months, in 1910.

My mother used to tell how difficult life was in the cheese factories of that time. They were poorly constructed and rooms were small. It was cold in winter, and hot in summers in those buildings.

During these years my father's hands became arthritic and mother decided since they had three growing sons, they should buy a farm so that my brothers could become farmers.

My father bought a farm several miles east of Monroe from a man named Rupnow, and so the farm was always known in our family as the Rupnow farm.

Simon and Elise's children attended Richland rural school and graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade there.

I was born on that farm in 1917 (with the assistance of a mid-wife) and lived there until age 1 ½ years.

At that time my parents sold the farm and bought a very large house in Monroe from a Weber family and that house was always referred to as the Weber house. We lived there about a year.

Simon was 53 at this time and too young to be retired and Elise still wanted her sons to be farmers, so in 1921 Simon bought the farm at Monticello from Oswald Zentner. The farm was near the Woolen Mill and always called the Woolen Mill Farn. I lived there until 1932.

Simon never really liked being a farmer, but Elise loved the land, the cows, and the chickens, and so he made an attempt at farming at her insistence.

The move to Monticello seemed to bring only bad luck. In 1922, the barn burned when a spark from the gasoline engine on a threshing machine ignited straw and the entire structure was lost. Father rebuilt, but built a barn much too large for the 160-acre farm. For some reasons unknown to me, he could not collect the money from the men who bought the Rupnow farm in Monroe, he couldn't pay the Rolph Brothers for constructing the big barn, and in 1925 or 26 he developed a breast cancer and needed surgery and in 1927 four Stauffacher brothers bought the farm. (Conrad, Fred, Dick, and Werner Stauffacher)

Simon became a disillusioned man – bitter toward Elise, insecure because of his failure, and in some ways he retreated into a shell, and gained comfort from alcohol. He had been a proud, energetic Swiss, hopeful of becoming conformably wealthy in the promised land of America, but found all his dreams of success and happiness broken. In 1930, he became ill of what was perhaps leukemia, and died at home in October after having spent three weeks at Wisconsin General Hospital in Madison. Simon was 63 years old.

None of his sons had become farmers. Fred, the oldest, was at that time a mechanic in Monticello, Bill had moved to California where he worked for a dairy, and Carl had for a time been a butcher in Chicago, but did return home to farm in about 1924-25, but again, was not a good farmer and so Carl and his family left the farm in 1932, and we moved to a house in Monticello.

My sister remembers him in his younger and successful days as a happy man who loved to sing, yodel, and dance. I remember accompanying my parents to Turner Hall at Monroe on rare occasions, if there was Swiss music being played for dancing.

Now what are my pleasant memories of my father, Simon? First I cannot recall that he ever scolded me, or spoke harshly to me. When I had a toothache as I often did, he gave me sympathy and care. As a small child I often sat on his lap and he'd allow me to listen to his great gold pocket watch which was in an enclosed case that contained a picture of me when I was three. The picture remained in his watch until his death.

Simon was short and stocky. He had dark hair, blue eyes, and a red mustache, and a great believer in personal cleanliness. Daily baths were a luxury at most homes but every Sunday morning the bathroom was his domain for at least an hour. The preparations he made for his bath were lengthy. When he was at last ready he would enter and always lock the door. This was his time of privacy. Under no conditions did anyone ever attempt to enter the bathroom while he was in it. When he finally emerged, steam and the cool odor of camphor, which he used as after-shave, would come following him. He'd be rosy-cheeked and shining.

Sometimes he'd allow me to watch when he shaved, and that was a privilege. He used a straight razor, which he carefully honed on a strap that he kept near the sink. The first order of business was to hone the razor – a lengthy process. Then he took the shaving mug, which held a bar of his special soap, from the cabinet and with the shaving brush, worked that soap to a thick lather and carefully applied it to his face. Only after considering himself at length in the mirror was the razor put to its use. I watched in fascination and always marveled that he never cut himself with the sharp blade.

Simon and Elise never mastered the English language probably because they never became friends with people other than Swiss with whom they could of course communicate easily. Both had learned the German language in school, and the Swiss dialect in their native homes. They subscribed to and read German newspapers, books, and magazines and I remember these publications in our home. All of us spoke Swiss at all times and Simon showed great displeasure if he heard his children converse in English.

One day when he was going to town, he asked whether he could buy something at the store for me. At the time I loved marshmallows and asked him to buy some. When he returned home he apologized that he could bring no marshmallows because the grocer said they weren't in season. Later we learned he had asked for "mushmellows" and the grocer understood muskmelons.

He disliked changes in any form, and in some ways was extremely rigid. For instance, Mother would have liked to move furniture at various times, especially when she did her spring house cleaning. One year she moved their bed to the opposite wall and my stubborn Swiss father refused to sleep in it, but slept on the floor where he said the bed was supposed to be until she moved it to what he determined was its rightful place.

When she interchanged the desk and the buffet in the dining room, he refused to acknowledge that his desk had been moved and did all his book work on the top of the buffet. Mother stood her ground for several weeks hoping that he'd relent, but it was a futile wait. She finally moved both pieces to the original places.

Much as he disliked change he did learn to drive a car, and before I was born he bought a Chalmers touring car. When I was about five he traded it for a red four door Overland made by Willy Co.. Driving was an extremely serious matter to Simon. He sat behind the steering wheel rigid as a board and looked straight ahead never moving his glance left or right. One summer a band of gypsies had an encampment near our home and were there several weeks before my father saw them although he drove past them every day.

When a stop sign was placed at the intersection in Monticello he refused to obey it. Finally the constable stopped him and said if he didn't obey the sign he'd be arrested. Simon said "I never stopped there before, and I see no reason for stopping now" and continued on his way to take care of his business transactions of the day.

I don't remember that he ever drove farther than to Monroe, and that was usually on a Saturday afternoon when he and mother would go their separate ways upon reaching the square, he to find Swiss friends on the street or in a Swiss saloon, and mother to visit at great length with all the Swiss lady friends she met on the square who were there for the same reason.

I'm sure that he was never in Madison until he was hospitalized there at age 63. He didn't seem to have any great joy in driving and I'm sure would have preferred a horse and carriage, but it was one of his rare concessions to 20<sup>th</sup> Century technology to own a car. When cold weather arrived in November, the water was drained from the car, it was driven to the shed, placed on blocks where it remained until warmer weather returned. Fortunately, either Carl or Bill had cars

and kept them operative during the winter, and we could ride to town or church with one of them during these winter weeks.

We owned a beautiful cutter – shiny black and the seats were covered with red velvet. Most cutters did not have doors but I remember thinking that ours was elegant because it had tiny doors on both sides. The cutter was drawn by one of his older horses named Maude, a small brown docile animal. When I was a little girl in country school we attended school every day regardless of the weather, and often there was a great amount of snow and cold. One of my fondest memories was of could snowy afternoons at about 3:30 when I would hear the sound of Maude's sleigh bells approaching and know that Father, Maude and the cutter would be waiting outside school to take me home.

One day on our way home in the cutter, Maude stepped into a hole in a snowdrift and fell, tipping the cutter, father, and me into the snow. We laughed, righted the cutter, and were again on our way.

I felt like a princess riding in the cutter! No one else in school had the privilege of having such an elegant ride home after a day of school.

Whenever one of my baby teeth had loosened I know that my father would talk me into pulling it. He'd tie a piece of string on the tooth and suddenly pull, and the tooth would be removed. One day in second grade I pulled a loose tooth at school and asked the teacher whether I could go home to show father that I had pulled my own tooth. It was early after lunch and of course my request was denied.

A malignant lump was found in his left breast in 1925 or 1926 and arrangements were made for him to enter a hospital in St. Joseph, Mo. that treated only cancer patients. A few family members, including mother, Emma, and me took him to Freeport, Ill. one night to board a train for Missouri. I remember standing in the darkness beside the train and saying good bye to him. Whenever I hear the lonely sound of a train's whistle at night I'm reminded of that train in Freeport as it left the station and the sadness I felt.

He returned home after two or three weeks, apparently cured and in good spirits but was unable to work a great deal throughout the spring.

We all knew that we were to eat any and all foods which were placed on the table, and there were no exceptions except Simon who ate only what he liked, and breakfast oatmeal was not one of the foods he'd tolerate, but we all had to eat it.

On one of the first mornings after his surgery, a nurse brought his breakfast, which consisted of milk, toast, and oatmeal. He pushed it aside and said to the nurse, "I don't eat oatmeal. I eat ham and eggs." The nurse, who must have been a formidable woman, said, "Mr. Roethlisberger, while you're in my hospital you'll



eat oatmeal!” And he did! I admired him for telling the story, and it amused me because he had always forced me to eat fried eggs, which I hated. Justice had raised its wondrous head.

Emma and Conrad Stauffacher married in 1927. Bill and Fred were away from home and only Carl, my parents, and I remained.

On hot summer evenings mother, father, and I sat on the screened front porch in the dark trying to catch any cool air, but never after 9:00 p. m. for that was bedtime – regardless of the bedroom temperature. Mother and I usually sat on the porch swing, and Simon sat in a big wooden rocking chair and would relate things he had read earlier. One night he talked about the Ku Klux Klan, and what clan members did in their nightly meetings. I was so frightened when I went to bed, and couldn't sleep because I was certain that there'd be a burning cross on our lawn before morning. The KKK did burn a cross on the Stauffacher farm during this time.

On winter nights he would draw his rocking chair near the dining table where the light was better, and read his newspapers while mother sat on the opposite side knitting wool socks for him. One night mother must have been provoked for some reason and said, “I wish I had time to just sit and read the paper!” Father smiled and said, “Elise, I'll give you the paper and you give me the knitting.” They exchanged. Mother pretended to read, but I'm sure she didn't really read a word because she was watching father tangling her yarn in his attempt to pacify her. Finally, she returned his paper, snatched the knitting from him, and spent the rest of the evening untangling yarn.

Simon visited on old neighbor who lived about a mile north of our farm at regular intervals, as did many men from the village. It wasn't until later years that I learned that old John was a moonshiner who operated his still in a barn on his few acres and supplied the village men, and my father, with illegal booze during the years of prohibition. Whenever I had a toothache, Simon would give me a swallow of “schnapps” to hold on the painful tooth to deaden the pain, but told me not to swallow it. White Lightning was a substitute for aspirin in the 1920's! Apparently it was also more economical than taking me to a dentist.

On April 2, 1929, Carl married Margaret Zentner and they lived with us on the farm. The situation was far from ideal for all family members. Simon managed to irritate Margaret by telling her I could make better Chuckel than she. I never thanked him for that compliment because Margaret's rightful response was, “If that's true, then Helen can get breakfast every morning, and I'll help milk the cows.” So at age 12, I had inherited the chore of cooking breakfast.

I don't really remember when the symptoms of his final illness appeared, but it must have been sometime in the summer of 1930. In October he spent three weeks in the Madison hospital and died a week after returning home.

The night before he died he called Carl to tell him that there was a screech owl outside his bedroom window and asked Carl to shoot it. Dusk prevented Carl seeing the owl, but Simon pointed to the branch where he could see it, and Carl shot it. The next night at 8:00pm Simon died.

Simon's body was returned to the farm after embalming and his casket was placed in the living room until the day of the funeral when the minister held a brief service at the house, and then his body was taken to the church for further services before interments at Highland Cemetery. The day was October 31, Halloween 1930.

In this brief story, I've called him Simon or Father. Both are really misnomers for we were not allowed to call him anything except Pa. My friends called their male parent Dad. I tried that, but only once. Today many years after his death I think of him not as Pa but as Simon or Father and I speak of him as "my father".

Simon left no will for there was nothing for his family to inherit in a monetary way, but what I inherited from him has been of greater value than money. I inherited his love for reading, a small bit of his artistic sense, his appreciation for flowers and trees, pride in myself and my talents, a love of Swiss music and foods, and a great pride in my Swiss heritage.

He left me with a memory of a short, stocky gentle Swiss man who held me on his lap so I could listen to the ticking of his large gold watch. A faith in God and in a hereafter surely must have sustained him when he was ill. Even with all the misfortunes he encountered, I always felt that he had a deep religious belief. He attended church with Mother – not every Sunday - but at regular intervals. When I was small, the custom was for the women to sit on the left side of the sanctuary and the men on the right side, and so I never saw them sit with each other. At home we always had table and nighttime prayers and this was without exception. The pastor of the church was considered to be in authority next to God and he was always treated with great respect.

For all these things, I thank him now, as I was never able to do when he was alive. Thank you, Pa!

**Elise Mueller Roethlisberger 1876 – 1958**

Elise Roethlisberger, who was my mother and your great grandmother, was born on April 23, 1876 in Canton Berne, Switzerland and was the daughter of Fridolin and Magdalena Beesche Mueller. Elise's father's first wife died when very young and left a daughter, Anna. Elise's father remarried and had three daughters. Elise was the middle daughter, Magdalena who was the Berthi Ingold's mother, was the eldest, and the youngest was Katherina. They lived in the mountains near the village of Gaarstadt on the other side of Baltigen. Anna, Elise's half sister, had a daughter, Frieda Bohren. Fridolin's second wife, Magdalena, also died young.

Elise's family lived closer to the Alps than my father's family and I remember that he used to tease her about being a Swiss hillbilly. Magdalena (Tante Maddie) was a sickly young girl, Katherina was the youngest, and so it was Elise that Fridolin chose to be his helper with the farm and cattle. You know the story of "Heidi" by Johanna Spyre. I've always thought of my mother as a Heidi. In the summer she accompanied her father to the lower region of the Alps where they took their cattle for summer pasture. There the two lived in a mountain hut for three months. Elise helped watch the cattle while they grazed on the Alpine grass, helped prepare the food for their meals, which consisted of mostly bread, milk, and cheese and helped her father cut hay with a scythe, rake it into bundles which her father then carried to the village on his back in a canvas slung over his back.

When it was determined to be the spring day to take the cattle to the upper pasture for the summer there was always a big village celebration. All the villagers gathered to watch the procession and the merriment was assisted with yodeling, and accordion playing and laughter. A garland of flowers was placed around the lead cows neck while other cattle wore heavy Swiss cowbells on their annual trek into the Alps.

Mother knew that she wouldn't return to the village for several months although Grandfather returned to the village at intervals bringing the cheese he'd made into the village for storage, and to return later with needed supplies. Grandfather smoked a pipe and had several curved Swiss pipes. One day when he went to the village, Elise thought that she'd do something nice for him and surprise him with her thoughtfulness. She took all of his pipes and scrubbed them thoroughly with soap and water. She said he thanked her for the thought but she was instructed not to do it again...ever!

During the long winters the girls attended school where they learned to read, write, and converse in German. Swiss is a dialect of German and was spoken only within the circle of family and friends. Evergreen trees grew tall and close together. Elise told me that on her way to school she said other children

would climb the trees and swing on the branches from tree to tree until they reached the school. Elise learned to knit and crochet but I don't know whether these were taught to girls in school or not.

Their homes were two storied as most Swiss farm homes were. The lower story served as a barn for the cattle in winter. They were near for the farmers to care for them and the heat from their bodies helped to heat the family quarters on the second story. Elise and Simon both spoke about the flowers grown outside their homes, especially red geraniums. This custom is prevalent today. One of my friends who visits Switzerland annually says, "If there's an inch of unused soil, the Swiss stick a geranium in it."

Edelweiss, a lovely white velvety flower, grows in the mountains in Switzerland where there is sufficient sunlight and cool temperature and is probably considered to be the natural flower of the Swiss. It's written about in story and sung about in songs and always with nostalgic reverence and I've always wondered why the Swiss chose it instead of the red geraniums.

Both my parents loved flowers. Mother always had geraniums and wintered them in our south dining room window. Simon planted artistic gardens, much of it not in rows, but circles like wheels. The spokes were narrow paths between flowers and vegetable plantings. One of his favorites must have been Moss roses for those blossomed in profusion along a wall in the backyard.

When Elise was a young girl she apparently developed an allergy and the doctor's prognosis was that piercing her ears and plucking her eyebrows would remedy the ailment. Primitive medicine! The eyebrows never grew again.

Grandfather Mueller was a poor Swiss who owned only a small farm and a few Brown Swiss cattle and had four daughters to support. When mother was 16 and her sister, Magdalena, was 18, he convinced them that their lives would be better in America. Somehow he obtained money for their passage to "the land of opportunity." Each girl was given a gold watch as a final gift from Grandfather, and they left their mountain homeland never to return.

How sad Grandfather must have been to send his girls to a country so far away. The girls had little knowledge of geography and had no idea of the great distance that would separate them from their father and sister. Neither Elise nor Mattie ever returned. I don't know when Grandfather Mueller died or that we ever had a photograph of him. Mother had a picture of Katherina and her family that I saw years ago. They were a typical Swiss farm family wearing rough, durable clothing typical of the times of the 1920's in Switzerland.

Elise and Mattie boarded the ship that was to carry them to a new land in France. Naturally, they were placed on the lower decks with many other

emigrants from many countries of Europe. Both young women were seasick throughout the three-week journey, and happy to reach land.

Mother told us that their main food aboard ship was soup, which was wheeled past the passengers in a large metal vat. Each person had a bowl and spoon and could fill their bowls as the vat progressed through the waiting line of emigrants. Some passengers upon seeing the soup vomited into the vat and the vat simply progressed through the line.

The year was 1892, when they landed on Ellis Island. Two Swiss girls with no knowledge of the English language, no awareness of American customs and very little money. They must have had courage in order to face their new life.

From Ellis Island they traveled by train to Ohio where they were met by Swiss family friends. When they heard that there were many Swiss people in Monroe, Wisconsin they left Ohio and ventured to Monroe. I don't know how long they were in Ohio or what work they did there.

In Monroe, both found work at the City Hotel which was owned by a Swiss couple, Mr. and Mrs. Affolter. Mother was a chambermaid and Mattie, I believe, assisted with the cooking. The hotel was a gathering place for the Swiss farmers, cheesemakers, and laborers. Cheesemaking of that time did not make cheese in winter, but rented rooms at the City Hotel until spring arrived. Many immigrants went there as they arrived from Europe for they had heard of the place from acquaintances.

At the City Hotel, or as it was later nick-named, the City Box because of its boxy shape, had a bar where the men could enjoy drinks and play cards, probably "Jass" but the women were not allowed in the male haven, but could wait in a parlor opposite the dining room with their children until their husbands were ready to leave. Here they could gossip with other Swiss women. It must have been a great part of their social life.

The City Hotel was built in 1854 (before the Civil War) and now in 1984 still stands on a block south of the west side of Monroe Square. In 1981, the name was changed to the Swiss Haus, but the main structure still looks as it did in the early 1900's.

I slept there one night in 1935 when I enrolled at Green County Normal because the owner, Louisa Steffen, was my mother's friend and allowed me to sleep with one of the hotel maids until I'd find a permanent place to live. The rooms were probably not much different in 1935 from the way there were in the 1890's when mother lived there.

Mother often told us how difficult it was to work for Mrs. Affolter who was presumably a stern and demanding employer. The hours were long and the pay low. When mother left Mrs. Affolter's employ she carried no love for the women with her.

Elise was a tiny young woman, brown haired, brown eyed and slender. During her stay at the City Hotel she met Simon. Maybe he was one of the cheesemaker who lived at the hotel in the winter or maybe he went there to visit other Swiss, at any rate, Simon and Elise were married in a double ceremony with Elise's sister, Mattie and her fiancée, Fred Hofstetter, at St. John's Reformed Church in Monroe on April 28, 1896. Mother had become 21 years of age only five days before.

I believe they immediately moved to a cheese factory in the Warren or Gratiot area where on January 28, 1897 my brother Frederick Herman Simon was born. That's exactly nine months later!

Sometime during that year at age 21, Elise learned that all of her teeth would need to be extracted. Father took her to a dentist, all were extracted the same day and she returned home to prepare the evening meal.

The cheese factories where they lived were cheaply constructed, cold in winter, hot in summer. Cheesemakers of the time were considered to be second-class citizens. Many were Swiss and had difficulty conversing with the farmers who brought the milk to the factory. Their customs were entirely different and so it seems Simon and Elise had little social interaction with the neighbors.

The family rooms in the factories were small. Usually the packing room was larger than the living quarters. The floors were of rough lumber and mother yearned for carpeting. When she had finally saved enough money for some carpeting she ordered it from Montgomery Ward and Co. It was sent by train from Chicago to Warren and was in the depot overnight. During that night the depot and all its contents burned, and Elise's dream of having a rug and the rug both literally went up in smoke.

On May 11, 1899 William Werner was born, Carl Otto on May 13, 1902, Emma Elise on September 16, 1904, Ida in 1910. Between 1904 and 1910 Elise had a miscarriage. All these children were born in cheese factories in the Gratiot or Warren, Illinois areas.

Simon must have done well financially, but Elise who loved the land and cattle wanted to be a farmer's wife. In 1911, Simon bought a farm east of Monroe, Wi. and now Elise finally had a house!

I was born at that house on July 12, 1917 when my mother was 41 years old and my father was 50. Can you imagine how difficult it must have been for Elise to accept that fact that at age 41 she had another baby to care for?

The family lived on that farm for nine years and in 1920 Simon sold the farm to a group of men and bought a large house in Monroe. The people who sold the house to Simon and Elise also left some furniture, but mother wanted all new furniture for her new home and so she and father bought "Grand Rapids" style and the Weber furniture of marble-topped solid walnut pieces were stored in the attic and remained there when father sold the house a year later.

Now Elise was a "city lady". I believe the three sons were all working on farms and Emma was a clerk at a dry goods store where Monroe Clinic is today, so she had only me at home during the day. At sometime both Fred and Bill attended Monroe Business College. I don't know the length of time they attended or if the courses were worthwhile.

Elise still wanted to farm and in 1921, Simon bought the Monticello farm from Dick Zentner (now the Buehl farm). I was 3 ½ years old and have really no recollection of moving there.

Now Elise could have cows, calves, pigs, chickens, cats and a dog. She milked cows morning and night and spent a great deal of time with the chickens. I don't recall that she ever helped in the fields, that seem to have been the domain of Bill, Carl and Simon.

Friends from areas where they had once lived still visited Simon and Elise. I remember a Meier family from Warren, Ill, Judge and Mrs. Becker from Monroe, and of course Uncle Fred, Tante Mattie Kuenzi and Berta and Lena. Other names were Steffens, Augsbergers, Rubins and Schenkel.

Mr. and Mrs. John Zeller were neighbors to the north of Monticello and became best friends of Simon and Elise. They were also Swiss (Appenzell) and the two couples visited regularly to play cards, talk, laugh and just generally have good times. They remained fast friends through all the years, until they died, one by one, Simon first, John Zeller in 1939, Elise Zeller in the 1950's and last of all Elise Roethlisberger.

The Zellers had four sons and they too became family friends. Jack worked in Chicago and was engaged to a girl named Hazel. Shortly before their marriage, Jack was killed in an auto accident. Werner, one of the handsomest men I ever knew, was a friend of Bill's. Walter, who outlived all the Zeller family, and Arnold, who was four years my senior, and who I was sure I'd marry one day, but Arnold was killed in an auto accident when he was 16.

Jack Zeller always came from Chicago for July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday and always brought a box of fireworks. On 4<sup>th</sup> of July night the two families would gather and Jack would light the fireworks for the entertainment of all.

New Year's Eve was a time of celebration at one farm or the other. The two couples would play cards until near midnight. Then I remember Mrs. Zeller serving "Needla Schwing" which was a large bowl of whipped cream topped with cinnamon (or nutmeg) and probably laced with brandy or whiskey. It was an old Swiss custom for each person to eat a dish of "Needla Schwing" at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Mr. Zeller was a tall handsome man who smoked a curved Swiss pipe – always jovial and kind. Mrs. Zeller was a tiny woman. Her face always seemed to crinkle with a smile and when we visited them she had cookies, often home made, but she also had "store cookies" which we seldom had at home. One kind had an imprint of a fireplace, and the word "Fireside" on them, and the other was a brown, round, crisp and covered with peanuts.

The Zellers had a console phonograph that seemed quite elegant. There weren't many recordings, but they played them over and over when we visited. In their living room was the first floor lamp I had seen. It had a brightly colored beaded shade and a long beaded fringe. We thought it was gorgeous.

When Walter married, the two families lived together for a time, but John and Elise moved to Monticello in about 1928.

Simon and Elise were also friendly with other families, as O.E. and Edith Zentner, Rudy Leuenberger and his family, and Jacob Marty, his wife, and sons but the Zellers were the favorites.

Elise was a good hostess and happy to entertain friends or family. She served cookies or cakes and Simon treated with home made wine or a "schnapps" which he purchased from a neighbor who was a bootlegger.

The early years on the farm were relatively happy for Elise, but misfortune came. The big barn burned, farm economy declined in the 1920's, and they were unable to pay the entire cost of the new barn, Simon's health began to fail, and her children were leaving home. Fred, her oldest, had failed at farming near New Glarus and had moved to Milwaukee where he was an auto mechanic. Bill had gone to California with his friend, Werner Zeller in 1927. In 1927, Emma married Conrad Stauffacher and moved to his farm. Carl married in 1929 and brought his bride to the family. This was not always a happy situation for Elise. She was now 53 years old and it was difficult to become accustomed to the presence of a 19-year-old bride whose habits of doing housework were different from hers. Carl was



not very responsible and the farm had been sold to the Stauffacher brothers. All her dreams of being wealthy in the promised land of America were dead.

By 1930 she had several granddaughters who brought her joy. Fred had Delma and Marilyn, Emma had Dorothy, and Carl had Alice Mae. She adored them all and often “baby-sat” with them.

Elise remained healthy. She had had her gallbladder removed at a Madison hospital in the early 1920’s, but I don’t remember that she had any other physical problems. In the summer, she had two large gardens, one of which had a big strawberry patch and so she spent hours preserving fruits, vegetables, jams, and jellies. She purchased very little at the grocery store other than flour, sugar, and spices. She baked her own bread and cakes (usually sunshine cake which was Simon’s favorite) and cookies and pies.

Simon butchered cows and pigs, so the family had smoked hams, canned beef and of course always fresh chicken and eggs from mother’s flock. Simon also made sausages and they were a staple food in winter. There were few cookbooks for mother to use but I always felt that she was a good cook. Our breakfasts were “farm” breakfasts. Hot cereal, oatmeal, and on Sunday mornings she made Cream of Wheat and fried eggs. Other days we had Chuckel, French toast, Eier Datuch, and always eggs. Father’s rule, not to be contested, was that we ate whatever was prepared and placed on the table, but it was a rule only the children had to obey, not he.

We seldom had fresh fruit except bananas on week-ends, when it was a special treat to have jello with sliced bananas. At Christmas the church would place oranges in each candy sack and that was the only orange until the next Christmas, but Elise always served home canned strawberry, raspberry or peach sauce.

We had no refrigeration and so had ice cream only on Sundays and then only a pint. Milk, butter, eggs and other perishables were carried to the basement after each meal because it was cooler there. Butter, which was usually home churned, often turned rancid. Milk was always luke warm and I personally still dislike soft ice cream and warm milk.

Mother’s chickens stopped laying in winter months and so she preserved eggs in boxes of rock salt and stored them in the basement for winter use. They were used in cooking and baking but not satisfactory for frying, so Simon must have had some breakfasts without eggs.

We did have vegetables – especially in summer. Leaf lettuce, spinach, beets, peas, corn, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes were in abundance and mother canned some. I never had broccoli, Brussel sprouts, squash, parsnips or sweet potatoes and

yams until I was at least in my teens. I also knew nothing about seafood's such as shrimp or lobster until I was older. Fish were a rarity and we ate them only if one of my brothers caught them in the river and they were often carp.

Most Swiss ate all meats, including tripe (chutla), brains (hereny), smoked tongue and pig's feet. Other's ate heart, kidney, lung, and sweet breads but we didn't.

Some of these years were the Depression years of late 1920's and early 1930's when thousands of people were hungry, especially in the cities, but we had ample food – simple fare, usually but substantial and we never knew hunger.

There was a large hot air furnace on the farm, and somehow there was always sufficient fuel to keep us warm in the winter, although the house had no storm windows or insulation. We had cotton sheet blankets, heavy comforters, and flannel nightwear for nighttime and on winter days all were required to wear long johns and warm stockings. Hated attire, but necessary for survival!

Elise used home remedies when any of her family became ill for there was little money for doctors or pharmacy medication. Hot lemonade, with added honey, was a cure for colds or Simon's homemade hot wine with honey and a cinnamon stick was also given to ailing family members. A toothache was treated with whiskey or a hot bread and milk poultice applied to the jaw. These two remedies were usually not too successful and any relief was but temporary. She also believed in preventive medicine and purged every family member every spring with a horrible concoction called Rocky Mountain Tea, which was made of herbs and purchased at the pharmacy – the one condescension to pharmaceutical drugs. This tea was brewed each night before bedtime and there were no excuses for not drinking it. No words are at my disposal to describe the utterly horrible taste I endured and it was not until I was eleven or twelve that I learned to dispose of it in the kitchen sink when Elise wasn't looking. The effect of the tea upon the body was to afflict the user with violent diarrhea, and the belief was that we were ridding our systems of accumulated winter poisons. A spring body-house cleaning, as it were. To this day, I cannot drink tea in any form and dislike the taste of whiskey and wine because they're reminders of times when I was ill.

Elise used no cosmetics and never visited a beauty salon. In her later years, Emma and I gave her home permanents and she may secretly have started using a little face powder, but she did love cologne and used it profusely, especially when she attended church. The cologne was, I believe, poured on her handkerchief. When she opened her purse in church, people for several pews near her must have received a sudden whiff of whatever scent she was using at the time.

Elise was a firm disciplinarian – her children were taught the precept of right and wrong and there were no gray areas between the two. The greatest punishment she inflicted on a wrongdoer was to completely reject that person for several days depending on the severity of the misdoing. That person was simply not visible to her – they were not addressed or hugged until she felt a lesson had been learned. It was severe punishment for me. I would rather have been thoroughly scolded than ignored. When I was very small one of her punishments was to place me in a closed closet for a period of time. She didn't realize how barbaric and cruel this form of discipline was, I'm certain, or she wouldn't have done it.

When I was a sophomore in high school, Carl, Margaret, little Alice Mae, mother and I left the farm and moved to an old house in town. I guess we were penniless. It was 1932 and a worldwide depression. Carl drove a Potosi beer truck, I was in high school and Elise, at age about 56, went to work for sick people at \$3.00 a week plus room and board.

Usually she took care of sick, old ladies and did more than care for their needs. She also cooked, cleaned, baked – whatever work needed to be done. Life in America had turned from a dream to a virtual nightmare, but she seldom complained.

By about 1940, she began living with Conrad and Emma on their farm where she lived until her death in 1958. Elise's physical health remained stable for a long time, but her mental health slowly deteriorated as she became a victim of Alzheimer's disease and slowly regressed to a state of "second childhood" where she had to be tended as a baby.

In 1958 she suffered a broken hip and died of pneumonia the night of November 16<sup>th</sup> at age 82.

Elise had a simple religion to which she adhered faithfully. She had a firm belief that the Bible and its teachings were her salvation and if she lived the Ten Commandments and believed in God she would have eternal life. Until she became senile, she read in the Bible or her worn prayer book every night and always prayed in the morning, at bedtime, and before meals and I firmly believe that in her prayers she asked God for very little, but thanked him daily for her blessings.

Simon, Elise and Bill are buried in Highland Cemetery in Monticello. She once told Emma and me, "When I am buried, you needn't bring fresh flowers to my grave all the time, but if you have flowers, pick them and place them in your homes in my memory. Just don't allow weeds to grow on my grave."

The little Swiss girl died leaving no money, but a host of friends and family who missed her pleasant personality, love and laughter.

## **Conrad Stauffacher – 1896 to 1971**

It's impossible to write a family biography and not include my brother-in-law Conrad, or Connie as he was better known in the community. To me he was more important as an influence than most of my immediate family members.

Conrad was a big man, 6 ft tall, dark haired, brown eyed, and a weight of over 200 lbs for many years. Having spent my childhood years in a family of short people his size always impressed me.

Conrad was born on the Stauffacher Farm and lived there all his years until 1964. He was one of a large family of three sisters and five brothers and was the third youngest.

At sometime in the 1920's his parents moved to a house in town and Conrad, his brothers Werner and Fred, and sister Marie remained on the farm. Marie, unmarried, kept house for her brothers and hired help. Fred and Anna lived in the newer house on the farm across the road.

When Conrad and Emma married, Maria moved to town with her parents.

The Stauffacher farms were always a big operation and at one time made it the largest farm in the immediate area. Conrad was a progressive farmer and the brothers initiated many agricultural practices in the county.

I remember how other farmers came to watch haying operations when Stauffachers bought their first hay bailer. Other farmers laughed when soil conservation practices were started on the farm. Terracing the hills to retain the soil and moisture was a Chinese practice and unknown to Green County fields and so it was ridiculed when Stauffachers started it along Highway 69. Strip cropping was another innovation on the farm as was planting trees on useless ground. In 1941, Conrad and Fred were named Master Farmers and honored at Wisconsin State Fair.

Conrad held many offices: a director of the Green County Fair board and Swine Superintendent for many years, deacon on the consistory for Zwingli Church, member of Green County draft board during World War II, director of the Bank of Monticello, and many others I have forgotten. It seems he had meetings several times a week serving in one position or another.

Conrad was my "father image" and I tried to never do anything that would displease him. I needed his love and respect. I owed him both for he took me to their home when I had no other place to go.

I don't recall that he ever reprimanded me in any way. I just simply knew my limits, and obeyed them, in what he'd accept in my behavior, and always, always wished for his approval.

It was Conrad who literally pushed me to attend Green County Normal School. He knew how much I wanted more education, and pointed out that this was a cheap school. I remember that he financed my last semester with \$35, which I repaid \$5 a month when I began teaching.

He approved or disapproved of my boyfriends, but in a subtle teasing way. He wasn't one to show a great deal of outward affection, like giving a hug or a kiss, but I knew his signs of affection in his approval.

When Fritz and I married I asked him to "give me away". After all, he was closer to me than my brothers who never seemed to care about my welfare during my growing up years.

I know that after all the years of pleasing him, and always doing what I knew he expected, I finally gave him a great disappointment, which he didn't forget although he never actually voiced his disillusion.

In 1963, when we stopped renting the farm, and I had returned to teaching, he wanted Fritz and me to buy the land and buildings on the west side of highway 69.

For many reasons we refused the offer, and opted to buy the Feller house in town. I know how disappointed he was, and it caused a strain in our relationship for awhile, but Fritz and I both knew that our decision was wise, and were never sorry.

Now it seemed I had "cut the cord" and didn't rely on Conrad as I once had. I became more independent and I think he recognized that at age 46, I didn't need him as I once had.

### **Emma Roethlisberger Stauffacher 1904 – 1993**

Pretty, vivacious, fun and life loving, Emma was my only living sister, thirteen years older than I – not only a sister, but mother figure and friend.

Emma's early years were spent on cheese factories with her parents and brothers. Because she was the only girl she was adored by the family – good, kind, willing Emma.

She attended rural schools, and helped at home. When I was born the family lived on what was known as “the Rupnow farm” east of Monroe. I became her charge almost immediately after birth, and remained in her care for many years.

When Simon sold the farm and the family moved to Monroe, Emma worked as a salesclerk at a mercantile store until we moved to Monticello in 1921. In Monticello, she worked as a clerk in People’s Supply Co. (now, in 1985, Dickson’s Grocery) until her marriage in 1927.

While Emma lived at home our house often had young people as guests. She was popular and well liked by both sexes and had many friends. I often envied her when she had dates and wondered whether I’d ever find boys interested in me as they were in her.

The Stauffacher family was very prominent in the community having been successful farmers for several generations, wealthier than many others, and highly respected by everyone.

Emma knew Conrad by sight and I think fell in love with him before meeting him. She expressed her feelings to a girlfriends who said, ”Connie Stauffacher? He won’t even look at you.”

But meet him she did, and they began dating when I was about eight years old.

On March 3, 1927, they were married in Monticello church parsonage. My brother Carl and Conrad’s sister-in-law, Anna, were attendants. Mother cooked the wedding dinner for the immediate families.

Emma wore a pale gray chiffon dress, pearl gray kid pumps, and a pale pink silk embroidered cloche and carried a pink and white colonial bouquet.

Immediately after dinner, they left for Milwaukee to spend the night at my brother, Fred’s. The following day they left by train for California where they spent a month with my brother Bill and friends at Burbank.

When they returned Emma moved her clothing to the Stauffacher farm where she lived until 1964.

The house on the farm was huge – 10 rooms, large ones, cold in summer and hot in winter, but they had a refrigerator and a radio and I thought it was beautiful.

On March 3, 1928, Dorothy Ann was born at Deaconess Hospital, Monroe. A few weeks after birth, Dorothy developed eczema, which eventually covered her entire little body until she was about two years old.

In 1928-1929 doctors know very little about treating allergies and so the poor baby suffered with intense itching for month after month. She was apparently a strong baby with a great will to live and she succeeded.

I used to spend every week-end with them, and most of my summers too, and became very attached to my little niece.

Work on the farm was not easy for Emma. She was a small person, 5ft 1 inch, 110 lbs but she had physical and mental strength. Beside having a sick baby, she had a large house to maintain, and always hired men to feed and do laundry for. She always had a garden and the lawn care was also her chore. In the summer she preserved fruits, vegetables, and lots of jelly. In winter, Conrad butchered beef and pork which was preserved in huge stone crocks after being browned and then stored in lard. Some was canned. Much was made into farmer's sausage.

Emma was a good cook and always fed the men well. I remember helping to bake cookies, cakes, and pies. The bread baking was Emma's domain.

We peeled hundreds of apples from the farm orchard every summer and Emma's goal was always to have 100 quarts of applesauce on the basement shelves when autumn arrived. Applesauce was a staple food the year around.

It wasn't all work for Conrad and Emma. Emma loved to dance, and they went to dances at Monticello and New Glarus often, although Conrad often went reluctantly.

They and five other Monticello couples formed a Sunday dinner group. All the men had heartily appetites, the six women were all excellent cooks, and when one of their dinners was served the tables were covered with their best china, silver, linens, crystal, and dish after dish of delectable food. Soon the group was given the name "The Hungry Twelve" by a town wag.

The couples were Conrad and Emma, Fred and Anna Stauffacher, Christ and Ellen Stauffer, Fred and Elfa Voegeli, O.D. and Sylvia Curtis, and Adam and Lona Schuler. Now as I write this, the only ones surviving are the widows, except Elfa Voegeli who died in the 1970's. The men were all 6ft tall except Adam who was about 5ft 4" and slim Adam outlived the five big men by a number of years.

These years were Depression years. Farm prices were very low and many farmers failed, but at the Stauffacher farm it seemed there was always plenty of everything.

Conrad and Fred were partners in the farm operation. Fred and Anna lived in the new house on the west side of the highway, and because their house was new and expensive Anna was not required to keep any hired help for many years, and

so the work fell to Emma. What an inequity that was! Emma did it with little complaint, but that was before woman's lib.

The years passed, Dorothy began school at Voegeli rural school in 1934 with Hazel Kundert as her first teacher. She had out-grown the eczema but suffered with food allergies, which were minor in comparison with the eczema.

During the years, still Depression, Emma sewed for all of us- Dorothy, me, Elise, and herself. It seems now that the treadle machine she had in the kitchen was seldom closed. Not only clothing appeared but many things made of cotton feed sacks. She made sheets, pillowcases, luncheon clothes, shorts, and even our sanitary napkins (because commercial ones were too costly) of the sacks.

Many of my clothes during the Depression were hand-me-downs from various sources, but she always remade them so they'd fit.

Emma had some degree of musical talent, and although she wasn't trained to play an instrument she could play some Swiss melodies on the big walnut player piano that was her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday present. She sang and yodeled doing her household chores.

Conrad and Emma both enjoyed travel, sometimes to distant places, but often only to Madison, Milwaukee, or Chicago. In 1939, they, Dorothy, Elise and I went to California to visit Bill and family for about 5 weeks. After the Depression, when money became more available, they spent time in Hot Springs, Arkansas and also part of a winter in Florida. Conrad always drove on these trips.

In the 1940's, Grandma Elise was unable to work for others anymore, and so she made her home with Con and Emma until her death in 1958. Elise had Alzheimer's disease in her last years and caring for her was not pleasant, but there were no homes for senile people at that time and so the lot fell to Emma. I helped when I could but most of the work was on Emma's shoulders.

Conrad and Emma made a home for me from age 16 on, although much of the time it was only my week-end home when I worked for my room and board for others while I was in high school. I knew I was welcome, as were my friends at any time. It continued to be my weekend home while I attended Green County Normal in 1935-1936, and the first three years that I taught at Zentner rural school. Summers I worked for other families.

In 1939, I began teaching at Voegeli rural school and so lived with them for the four years I taught there. I paid Emma room and board every month.

No one was ever turned away from their table. Emma always had food for everyone. During the Depression years, many were unemployed and there were



always hoboes on the highway. They learned that Emma would feed them. None was ever turned away and some days she'd feed as many as six hungry men.

Usually the hoboes were unkempt, tattered, desolate men with no future. I recall that on Emma's wood burning stove was an aluminum pan with hot soapy water which contained the plate, cup, and flatware used to feed the hoboes. It was there for months because there seemed to be no end to the line of men who would stop daily and ask for food. None was ever turned away. She filled their plates with whatever food she had on hand and fed them on the porch. I'm told that hoboes marked the places where food was available for other hoboes to see. If that's true then the Stauffacher farm must surely have been marked.

Emma was social to a point, but never a "joiner". She belonged to Eastern Star for many years and for a few years held an office as a Star Point. She was a member of the Ladies Aid of Zwingli Church but didn't participate too often. Emma was a loyal member of Swiss Reformed Church and for many years attended church weekly. When Conrad was a deacon on the consistory, she assisted often with communion by washing and ironing the communion linens.

Emma's religion was evident in her care and compassion for others. We always had table grace, and all her life she said her nighttime prayers. I really don't think she could have slept without saying them first.

Dorothy graduated from high school in 1946 and then attended Elmhurst College in Illinois, and later a year at Whitewater. Now the farm also became her weekend home until her marriage in 1952. Her only child was now away but Emma continued to sew for her and for me.

During WW-II farm prices rose and so Conrad and Emma were in a better financial situation. In spring of 1942, Conrad's partner, Fred, died and so Conrad and Dietrich (Dick) Stauffacher became partners in the farming operation. Dick, however, lived in Baraboo with his wife and five children and so he was an absentee partner. He did make frequent visits to the farm, and began the soil conservation practices of terracing and strip cropping. Dick worked as a soil conservationist in Sauk County for many years.

Dick's family often came to the farm without any notice prior to their arrival, but Emma always managed to feed all seven. Sometimes she quickly made waffles or chuckel but never gave away any sign of irritation at their surprise visit.

In September of 1946 Fritz, Harold Ott, and Elroy Duerst formed a three-way partnership and rented the farm across road (which belonged to the Stauffachers). Fritz, baby Jim (8 months) and I moved to the second house on the farm. Elroy remained a partner for about a year and Harold for many more years until the mid- 1950's.

For a variety of reasons the operation was not very successful. No one made any money – as simple as that!

Bob was born in 1949, and through the years of the boy's childhood Emma was always there when I needed her. She helped me when the boys were sick, or if I needed help with household chores. I could always rely on her support.

Emma loved children, and they her. Grandchildren began arriving, Heidi the first in 1953, and again Emma was always willing and available to help Dorothy at Sturgeon Bay, Monroe or Sun Prairie, wherever they happened to be living. Connie arrived in Sturgeon Bay in 1954 and Eric in Sun Prairie in 1962. Emma loved her status as grandmother and had the respect and love of all three grandchildren.

In 1959 Conrad became diabetic and as a result one leg was amputated. This was traumatic for all of us who knew and loved him, but especially so for both Conrad and Emma. Conrad was determined that he would not become an invalid. He was fitted with prosthesis in the spring of 1960 and found that he could again walk, drive a car, and be fairly independent.

Now Fritz was trying to conduct the farm operation with one hired man and Jim. But again we met with no financial success. The acreage was too great, farm prices were not high enough to balance cost of farm products as feed and machine energy and as we learned years later, Fritz was not really well either, and had lost all interest in farming.

Conrad and Emma wanted us to buy our house on the farm plus a couple of hundred acres, but we saw no financial future in this. Much of the acreage would have been woodland and Fritz and I both knew the investment at our ages would have been too great. (I was 46 and Fritz 53).

In July 1963 our family left the farm and moved to our home in Monticello. Now Conrad and Emma were alone on the farm. (Mr and Mrs. David Olson had moved into our house as renters).

In 1964 Conrad and Emma bought a house on Lake Avenue in Monticello and moved there in November of 1964. The farm was sold to Rufus Freitag of California at a low price per acre.

Leaving her beloved farm home, lawn, and garden must have been very traumatic for Emma. But once more, she painted rooms, made repairs on the house in town and made it livable and inviting.

In 1960's? Conrad had his second amputation and was, until he died, confined to a wheelchair. For a number of months he was a patient at Monroe Manor nursing home and Emma visited him every day. (She had learned to drive at age 65)

When he left the Manor and returned home she cared for him alone. During this time she also began working at John Streiff's grocery store from 8am. to 6pm. five days a week.

Dick, Conrad's brother, came from Baraboo to live with them and to stay with Conrad while Emma worked.

Conrad died in March 1971 at age 75. Emma continued working for John Streiff until 1979 and retired when she was 75 years old.

In October 1979, she sold the house on Lake Avenue and moved to a small apartment at Wittwer Apartments for Senior Citizens. During the years Emma lived on Lake Avenue she continued to raise flowers, for about a year Heidi lived with her and worked at New Glarus's Swiss Miss, so Emma still had someone to cook for.

At Wittwer Apartments she no longer had lawn work, but each summer she had a plot for flowers, petunias, mums, and impatiens. On her eightieth birthday, September 16, 1984, Dorothy and I hosted a dinner in her honor at the New Glarus Hotel for Ken, Dorothy, Connie, Eric and Angie, Jim Haldiman's family, Bertie Ingold, Bob and Alma Talent, Bob Haldiman and me with gifts, birthday cake and coffee later at my house. She was *Queen for a Day* and thoroughly enjoyed all the attention.

Emma was not only a sister, but my friend and teacher and often in my childhood, a mother when my own was away working for others. Did she have faults? I guess her worst fault was pouting. Rather than to give vent to anger with harsh words she often became silent toward those who had offended her.

Kind to her friends, neighbors, and family, compassionate to all who had less than she. Fun-loving, dedicated to husband, home and family, a love for all children and devoted to God. This was my sister, Emma.

I relied on her so completely for many years. Very seldom did I make a decision by myself but always seemed to need her advice and I listened well. In retrospect, I believe it wasn't until I returned to college in 1966 at age 43 that I began making decisions concerning my life. Some of the decisions were major - returning to teaching, buying a house in town, choosing other friends, and minor decisions were made as well. Maybe I had finally cut the "apron strings" I was so firmly attached to.

Did we have fun through the years? Of course! Emma and I were both gigglers. Maybe as strange sense of humor occasionally, but many things made us laugh. We had fun working together, shopping, and especially when I grew up, going out to eat, movies, beer, visiting friends, going to Madison, overnight

stays in Milwaukee, Lake Geneva, stopping at the Chateau. From 1946 until Conrad's death we played hundreds of games of Canasta, the women against the men, and always in a spirit of fun and friendship. We painted rooms using innumerable gallons of paint through the years, removed varnish on woodwork, wall-papered, hauled hundreds of loads of wood together, gardened, picked strawberries and raspberries and apples in the farm orchard and always together. The joys and sorrows of one were always shared by the other.

After age 75, Emma began to become forgetful and often confused. Arthritis gave her pain-filled hours, but she didn't complain too often. She began to isolate herself in her small apartment, not entertaining others, cooking only for herself, and having little desire to "go shopping". She still enjoyed eating in restaurants, but didn't care to travel very far – not even to Dorothy and Ken's Waupaca home. Emma walked to town every day regardless of the weather – sometimes several times a day – for the exercise and to see other people for a few moments. This was a part of each day – snow, ice, rain, or bitter cold.

After my retirement from teaching, I found that I had to establish new friendships because I still liked going to functions that had been denied me during my teaching days and so because I always went away when I had the opportunity, we saw each other less and less. We talked on the telephone every night at 10 p. m., but she seldom had much to add to the conversation and cared less about what I'd been doing.

Lydia Voegeli (who died in 1988) also lived at Wittwer Apartments and the two ladies spent most evenings at each other's apartments watching television, talking, and sharing a glass of wine.

I know that in these later years she was fearful of what lay in her future. She hoped she'd never be a burden to either Dorothy or me, and I know she dreaded that thought of someday being helpless and being a resident of a convalescent home.

As days passed after 1980 all of us were aware that Emma was very gradually becoming more forgetful and often quite confused.

In the summer of 1989, she discovered a lump in a breast and on August 30<sup>th</sup> she had a mastectomy at St. Clare Hospital where she was a patient until September 6<sup>th</sup> when she was transferred to the New Glarus Home. Dorothy and I both realized that she was no longer capable of caring for herself and taking care of her apartment. We also had the assurance of Dr. Aquino that the Home would be the best place for her to live.

The decision was made with heavy hearts by all her family, but good sense told us she'd be where she had good care and safety. Dorothy spent two weeks

with me and during those days we cleaned Emma's apartment. In doing so we were firmly convinced that Emma was unable to live alone. On October 22, 1989, we moved all her belongings to Waupaca and her beloved apartment was vacated.

Emma recovered well physically after her surgery and even though Dorothy had told her she'd be remaining at the Home, she forgot about it and always spoke of returning to the apartment.

The adjustment to the Home was not as chaotic as we had feared. Emma was the best-dressed lady there who always looked nice, clean, and presentable. She participated in all the activities the Home provided, really enjoyed often being the center of attention, and in getting the excellent care provided by the nurses and aides.

Note by Amanda: Emma's Alzheimer's got progressively worse and she often spoke of Fritz visiting her which was impossible since he had been dead for several years. Her battle with Alzheimer's finally ended on November 28, 1993.

### **Fred Roethlisberger 1898 – 1984**

To you it may seem strange when I say I had a brother that I scarcely knew. Fred was the oldest of the family and in my memory we never lived in the same house. For many years, he was a young man who came for Sunday dinner. He never teased me, played with me or conversed with me.

He was baptized Fred Herman Simon. I never knew why they chose two middle names. His early years were spent on cheese factories and his teen years on the Rupnow farm where he attended Richland rural school.

During WW-I he was drafted into the army. My parents invited friends for a farewell party the night before his departure. The next day was November 11, 1918 and the last day of the war – the signing of the Armistice. The war was ended and Fred did not have to go.

Father loaned him money to rent (or buy) a farm near New Glarus. He was unmarried, young, and apparently not interested in farming and after a succession of unreliable hired married hands, he failed. He was a proud person and I'm sure ashamed of his failure and the loss of his parent's money.

In 1924 he left the farm country for Milwaukee where he became an auto mechanic where he remained until about 1929.

On December 29, 1924 he and Barbara Duerst were married in Milwaukee. In April 17, 1925 Delma, their first daughter was born. Mother Elise never quite forgave them for the sudden marriage and the birth of Delma only a few months later, but both Simon and Elise were forgiving and accepted Barbara into the family circle and loved lovely little Delma whole heartedly.

Depression came to the cities sooner than to the rural areas and in 1929 Fred left Milwaukee, moved to Monticello where he and Barbara bought a small house on Coates Ave. where they lived until about 1980. Marilyn was born in 1929 after they left Milwaukee.

Fred worked as an auto mechanic for Schoonover – Voegeli Chevrolet garage for a number of years before having repair shops with Ivan Wichser and later Louis Ubert. In late years he became a refrigeration repairman.

Fred was the most intelligent of the Roethlisberger children. He read a great deal and was informed on many topics. He was an excellent auto mechanic and refrigeration repairman. Years after his retirement people still spoke of his skills.

For all his intelligence and skills he never succeeded financially, and once more a proud person began to drink more alcohol than he could handle and was admitted to Pleasant View Nursing Home when he was in his late 70's.

Their marriage was never particularly happy. They rarely communicated with each other – often many days passed when no word passed between them. Barbara would have liked many material things – a big house, lovely furniture, and expensive clothes, but Fred was never financially able to provide there. In order to buy things for herself and the girls, Barbara became a dressmaker for ladies of the area and in later years was a dishwasher at the Casino in Monticello until arthritis caused her to retire.

The little house was sold and Barbara moved to a low-income apartment for about a year until she was physically unable to care for herself. She then moved to the New Glarus Home.

Fred and Barbara celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in New Glarus at Marilyn and Dwight's (Elmer) home in December 1974. It was attended by a few relatives and friends – their daughters, Delma and Marilyn, and their husbands and their three grandchildren, Jayne and Jim Elmer, and Barbara Hershleb.

I've often wondered how different Fred's life might have been if he had been able to continue his education. What if he had been born years later and become an engineer or computer specialist or an electronics expert? What if he and Barbara had married others?

Fred was liked by everyone – he was honest, and fun-loving. Laughter came very easily to him, but basically his life was probably filled with sadness and regret for dreams that never came true.

After being a resident of Pleasant View Nursing Home at Monroe for eight years, he died at 8:05am on September 18, 1984.

Barbara spent her last years at the New Glarus Home. She was in constant pain from arthritis and died there on May 30, 1985, three days before her 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

### **William Werner Roethlisberger 1899 – 1955**

William, Willy to our parents, and Bill to everyone else, was born to Simon and Elise on May 11, 1899 in Illinois and was my second oldest brother, 18 years older than I.

Bill attended rural schools and for a short time attended Monroe Business College. In his youth he did farm work for our father and at times for other farmers.

When Bill was in his twenties he became engaged to Marie Zimmerman of Monticello. For reasons unknown to me, she broke their engagement. I remember that Bill was devastated and spent several days in his room seeing no one.

Shortly after this, he and friends Werner Zeller, Herman Kropf, and a Holcomb from Monroe bought an old open Ford sedan (1920's vintage) and drove to California, the land of opportunity in the 1920's. I believe this was in November of 1926. They came to the Zentner school I attended to say good-bye to me.

For most of the years in California, he was a milkman for the Golden State Dairy and lived there until his divorce in 1946. Bill was handsome, dark haired and brown eyed. He was fastidious about his clothing and appearance in general. Proud, vain, and complex are adjectives to describe him.

In good moods he was happy, out-going, and liked being with people where he'd be everybody's friends. But dark moods were always a part of him from his early childhood until his death of suicide by hanging in January 1955.

When I was a little girl he was always so good to me and I worshipped him and felt so sad when he went to California. He played with me, teased me, gave me gifts, and made me feel important.

When Grandpa Simon became ill in 1930, Bill came home for a year. I remember that he gave my parents \$1000 he had saved. In 1930 that was a good sum. After Simon's

death he helped Carl on the farm, but there wasn't enough income for everyone, and he returned to Glendale, California.

In 1933 he married Esther Hegge, a farm girl from Iowa, who was working as a hired girl for one of Bill's friends. Esther was a great many years younger than Bill and this may have been one of their problems, that led to their separation and divorce later.

Bill and Esther had a daughter, Joyce, and in 1939 a son, Bill Jr. Bill, Esther and little Joyce visited Wisconsin in August of 1937. We had all hoped that we'd like our sister-in-law, but unfortunately this did not happen – then or ever.

In 1939, Conrad, Emma, Dorothy, Elise and I drove to California to visit them. Billy Jr. was about a month old and we were there for his baptism. When Billy was 6 years old he and Bill Sr. again visited the family at Conrad and Emma's. I believe in June or July.

In the winter of 1947, Bill and Esther separated and Bill, a broken man, came to Wisconsin alone, and lived with Conrad and Emma for awhile. Fritz and I were living at the farm at this time and Bill was hired to be a hired man and came to live with Fritz, Jim and me in 1947.

Now the brother I had adored became a difficult person to live with. His mood was usually black, his temper short, and it seemed that he did everything possible to antagonize and irritate Fritz and me, and I spent many unhappy days and hours while he lived with us. Days I would not care to repeat.

I know that if I had been older I would not have tolerated his behavior and attitude for eight years. One of us would have had to leave.

Finally in 1954, the situation became so intolerable that he had to leave the farm. He didn't get along with Fritz or Harold Ott, who were partners and his bosses. He got a job working for Lora Pease who had a shop in Monticello and there he took his life in January of 1955.

With advanced years I have gained in wisdom and compassion and so I need to write words in Bill's defense. Losing his home and his children at age 48 was surely devastating. He loved Joyce and Billy and was very good to them. He worked hard in California to support them and to teach them correct values. He had pride in the little home he had purchased at sacrifice to himself. I'm sure he loved Esther at one time, and was proud to have a wife much younger than he. He came to Wisconsin at age 48 with nothing but his clothing and a few dollars. Esther got the house, the car, furniture, and the children's custody.

Bill brooded, sometimes ranted and raved, about the inequities of life. His personality changed – gradually – until he seemed to care about very few things. Possibly it was difficult to live with us, a happy family with two children. Part of his problem was



probably jealousy. He took solace in playing his accordion and in drinking the home made wine he made. The wine made him more morose and quarrelsome.

Billy Jr. used to spend part of each summer with us and during those weeks Bill was more at ease – calmer, happier – but the moods returned when Billy would return to school in August.

Esther, Joyce and Billy came for Bill's funeral and remained for two or three days. We didn't see Esther after that for many years. She remarried, traveled everywhere, Alaska, Hawaii, Europe. In 1980 she and her husband stopped at Emma's one afternoon on their way to Ohio to visit Billy and his wife Mary. She went to the cemetery and place three roses on Bill's grave, and they left after visiting Emma and me.

Joyce married very young, had three children and later divorced her first husband. Her second marriage was to LeRoy Markman. She and Leroy visited at Dorothy's when all of us were there for Eric's wedding in 1984. We had not seen her since 1955.

Billy Jr. we saw often during his high school, college, military and married years. To us he was almost a third son. He married and had three sons and became successful, first as a teacher and later as an insurance agent for American Aid to Lutherans.

### **Karl Otto Roethlisberger 1902 – 1970**

Karl was my youngest brother, 15 years older than I and was born May 13, 1902 to Simon and Elise.

He was short, had light brown hair and blue eyes. School was difficult for him and I don't believe that he ever learned to read without using his finger to move along the line of words.

Karl worked at various trades. For a time he was a butcher in Chicago when I was quite small. Later he farmed with Simon and Elise.

During his farming years he married Margaret Zentner on April 2, 1929 against the wishes of her parents. Margaret was 20 and Karl 27. In March 1930, Alice Mae was born and I believe in 1932 Carol.

They remained on the farm with Elise after Simon passed away in 1930. Depression came worldwide and it seems especially farmers were badly affected. In apparent realization that he could not succeed as a farmer, Karl and family left the farm and moved to Margaret's grandmother's house in Monticello. Elise went to work for other people at \$3 a week, and I remained with Karl and Margaret during my sophomore year of high school.

Karl was now a distributor for Potosi beer, drank more heavily, used some of Elise's money to buy a truck, which was never repaid, and life was not too great for any of us.

In the summer of 1933, they told me that I could no longer live with them because I was an extra person to feed. (as told to Amanda by Helen: The put her out in the lawn with all her belongings and she cried because she didn't know what to do. Along came Conrad and Emma, she explained that Karl had kicked her out and Conrad told her to get in the car because she would be living with them). The entire episode created a rift between us, and we were never very close after that.

In about 1934, Karl and family moved to the Gratiot area where he became a cheesemaker. He continued in this trade until his health failed and he died of throat cancer in 1970 at age 68.

Karl and Margaret had six children, Alice Mae, Carol, Ronald, Nancy, Linda, and Rhonda. Alice (Mrs. Erling Olsen), Carol (Mrs. Ed Stietz), Ron (Evelyn), Nancy (Mrs. Steven Fry (divorced)), Linda (Mrs. Dennis Henessey), and Rhonda (Mrs. Ted Chitwood) all live in the Grant Co. area except Ron in Freeport and Linda in Milwaukee. The older three all had large families and remained quite close. Linda and Nancy and Rhonda were much younger. Nancy is about 15 years younger than Alice. Their families are also smaller.

Margaret was a good mother and managed to sustain her brood with hard work at many jobs like cleaning and washing and house cleaning for other people, sewing for her family and other people, and being without material things so her children could have more. Most of her life was spent in cheese factories – the last home for her was a mobile home in Gratiot for about two years before she died of lung cancer in 1983.

### **And then there was Me – Helen Roethlisberger Haldiman**

**7/12/1917-2/2001**

How do I begin to write about a life-time of 68 years in a few pages? Will I tell you more than you really want to know – or will I leave out things you'd like answered, or have always wondered about?

I write this to you, my family, because I had so little knowledge about my own family ancestors, and at a point in my life I wished that I had asked questions and gained information that suddenly is no longer available. When we know the past, we begin to understand the present, and we learn who we are.

I was the surprise baby in the family, for Mother believed that she was past childbearing age when she learned of my presence and I've always known that it was an unwanted pregnancy, but I've also been grateful that she didn't have an abortion.

I was delivered at the family farm east of Monroe on July 12, 1917 by Dr. Bear Sr. with the help of a mid-wife. My first few months of life must have been difficult for Mother because I developed eczema in the first few weeks, the beginning of the allergies which plagued me throughout my life. Mother often told me that a Dr. Seyler would come to the farm in the morning to remove the crusts from my eyelids and nose so I could see and breathe.

I have only a few memories of my first years. When I was 2 ½ my father sold the farm and my parents, Emma, and I moved to a large, large house in Monroe, where we lived for about a year.

At the foot of the open stairway was a double door with panes of ruby glass. I've always remembered how beautiful the glass was when the early morning sun shone through it. One day when I awoke from a nap in what I remember as a huge upstairs, I became lost and couldn't find the stairway. Emma worked as a saleslady at a store in Monroe where the Monroe Clinic is now ( now the Monroe Library 2004). At noon, I would stand by a large window and wait for her to come for lunch.

I also had whooping cough that year and had to be indoors for many weeks. When I was finally allowed to go outdoors, I fell on the wooden porch steps and cut my knee on a nail, and so I was again housebound. I had the scar on my knee for many years.

Directly across the street lived John Green with his grandparents, Judge and Mrs. Becker, and his mother Edna. John was a year older than I, but my only playmate in those early days. One day John decided we should go for a walk. The walk became a long one, and I believe we were lost. Someone reported us to my father, and he retrieved us quite a number of blocks from home. I was three, and John was four.

In 1921, we moved to a farm east of Monticello where I lived until I was 15. I remember nothing of moving, or my reaction to the new home. There is a very very faint recollection of riding through Monticello's main street, and in that memory I have a mental picture of an unpaved muddy, wet road, but I have no proof that this was true.

We remember spectacular or traumatic events, and not always the daily routine events. I think I was four when the barn caught fire from a spark of a tractor that landed on shredded fodder. Firemen came, Mother cried, and she and I sat by the bathroom window watching the flames as the barn burned to the ground, but I have no memory relating to the construction of the new barn.

The new barn was too large for the number of our dairy herd or the size of the farm. A simple case of overbuilding, and then not being able to pay for it. I don't know

whether Rolph Lumber Co. ever received all the money due them. My parents assumed that Bill and Karl would remain on the farm and operate a large dairy business. Not so!

A traumatic event was when Mother had gallstone surgery at Madison General Hospital, and I was left at home with Emma for several weeks. I think I was afraid that she would never come home again.

During Mother's absence our cousin Lena spent some time with us. It must have been in April for I remember Emma and Lena made an Easter hat for me. She bought a black straw cloche and decorated it with blue and pink forget-me-nots, and I thought it beautiful.

After leaving Monroe, and John Green, I didn't have any playmates until I started school. When the Zellers visited my parents, their son Arnold who was four years older than I, accompanied them. I adored Arnold from the first time I saw him and that was an adoration that lasted until his tragic death in a car accident when he was 16. I was devastated.

Friends of my parents from Monroe visited us on Sunday afternoons and some of them had children. Mother always said, "Now you children play with each other," but I was shy, and so were they, and most of the afternoon passed before we'd even know what to talk about.

One family had a daughter born with Down's Syndrome. We didn't know the term Down's Syndrome, and I in my childish mind hated seeing her come for I considered her ugly and dumb, but Mother insisted that I play with her. Her visits were not joyful occasions.

One hot summer Sunday when they visited us, Louise found a heavy stocking cap in a closet and decided to wear it all afternoon. I remember feeling so embarrassed to have such a person as a playmate.

Maybe I was a lonely child. I had to play by myself with few playthings, and so very early in life I learned to amuse myself. That's probably why I can still spend days alone and find things to do to pass the hours.

I fantasized – we called it "playing pretend", and having no one to talk to I talked to myself. I had a doll and a doll buggy, but dolls never interested me very much. The doll was stiff, and cold, and had only the clothes that came with her. She gave me very little happiness.

Judge and Mrs. Becker gave me a doll imported from Germany. She had a leather body, a wooden head, and straight unmanageable blond hair. Mother thought I should be very grateful to the Becker's for giving me an imported doll, but I hated her.

One day I took the doll and Mother's sewing scissors, crawled under the dining room table, and cut the doll's hair. Sadly, it didn't improve the doll's looks, or my

mother's disposition. I don't know what ever happened to Miss Ugly and cared less. If I had her now, she might be quite valuable – even with the haircut.

Emma played with me when she had time, my brothers, Bill and Karl teased me a lot, but adult brothers know very little about entertaining a little sister. My adult cousins, Berthi and Lena, and Emma's good friend, Bertha Berger, tolerated me when they visited us, but again, they were not playmates.

We had very few books, and a couple newspapers but somehow with this scant reading material, Emma read to me, and taught me to read. The first day that I attended school I surprised the teacher by being able to read the first page of the *Beacon Primer* which I still have. I could read:

*See Mamma*

*See Kitty*

*Mamma, see Kitty*

*See Kitty, Mamma*

My love affair with reading, you see, began at a very early age. Books became my companions, my friends, my solace, and that love affair had never died.

I don't remember what style, if any, clothing I had in those very early years, but I suppose Emma or Mother made my dresses. I know that I wasn't concerned about my appearance until probably age eight. My hair was always stick straight and thin, plus very blond. My brother Karl always teased me about my crooked legs which were a result of having had rickets as a baby. No orange juice, cod liver oil, or vitamins in those days were given to babies. Besides those "attributes", I also had poor teeth which gave me lots of torturous toothaches. Home remedies were used to stop the pain rather than to send or take me to a dentist for that was less expensive.

The remedies consisted of either a swallow of moonshine to be held on the aching cavity, or a hot bread and milk poultice on my cheek. Neither remedy cleaned and filled the cavity, and I abhorred both; the remedies and the pain. Maybe that's why I've never liked the taste of whiskey.

When I was four years old I went to Warren, Wisconsin on a Sunday with my family to visit the grave of my sister, Ida. I suffered with tooth ache all day long and remember crying on the way home. Dad stopped in Monroe and called a dentist, Dr. Bennett, who came to his office and extracted four decayed baby teeth. His bill as \$4.00 and I believe the first money ever spent for my teeth.

At some time before I started school I fell on my head! That should explain a few things! I was in the car with my parents. We were parked on Monroe's square and my parents were visiting with friends who had their young son (died in 1994) with them. The

young boy suddenly opened the car door I was apparently leaning against, I fell to the brick pavement and got a bump on my forehead. It had never disappeared. Dr. Aquino told me that I had a skull fracture. In order to hide it, I cover it with bangs. It seems to have become more prominent as I've grown older.

My parents loved me, I know. I was seldom scolded, never slapped or spanked. We were an affectionate family who hugged and kissed each other so I was never in need of affection. I got plenty of it from my parents and sister, Emma. Bill was the most affectionate of my brothers.

These are some recollections of my life to age 5. I suppose I was pampered. In later years, I was told that I'd been spoiled because I was the baby of the family, and this may have been true to some extent, but personally I never really believed it.

### **This Ole' House**

When Mandy was about seven years old, I took her to the farm where we had lived until I was fifteen. She had asked questions about my early years, and visiting the farm was a way to provide some answers.

It was my first visit to the farm since leaving it in 1932 at age 15 and now I was in my 60's. There's a quirk in my character, more than one, most likely, but one is that I do not like to return to a place where I have lived after having moved from it.

Bob and Ruth Buehl now owned the farm, and Ruth graciously gave us a tour of the house. It was not the same as I remembered for the Buehl's had added rooms and redecorated everywhere and so only a few parts of the house looked familiar to me.

The house had been cheaply built and there was nothing really pretty about its design. It was cold in winter, no insulation or any storm windows or doors to keep out the cold, and the summer heat found no problem in penetrating the thin structure.

The rooms were of odd sizes. There were two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. My brother's room was large enough for two double beds and several bureaus, as was the second bedroom which was shared by my parents, Emma and me. Can you imagine how little privacy my parents had sharing their sleeping quarters with their two daughters? Each room had a small closet but we had few clothes and so closet size never seemed to present a problem. Mother insisted that we have "Sunday" clothes, mostly designated for church attendance plus a few other rare occasions, and the rest were work or school clothes.

After I began school, I learned that most families did not have bathrooms as we did and I considered us to be quite wealthy to have running water and indoor toilet, and a

bathtub. However, the bathroom was so cold that no one ever stayed there longer than absolutely necessary, and I don't remember dawdling when I had my weekly bath. Daily bathing was an unheard of luxury for farm families and probably for village people too. Although we had a bathroom we had no water heater, and so bath water had to be heated on the kitchen stove and carried upstairs. Families who had no bathrooms bathed in wash tubs in the kitchen, and I was told several family members shared the same water. Usually the girls of the family could use the water first, and then the boys. Apparently, it was considered that girls were not as dirty as boys.

There was an attic but not easily accessible for the only entry was through a crawl space in the upstairs hall ceiling that had to be reached by ladder. The kitchen was small, and definitely not designed for the comfort of the cook. A sink was in the corner, there were no built-in cupboards so Mother always had a mobile kitchen cabinet, and the wood and gas combination stove completed the kitchen furniture. It was an ugly kitchen – painted dark green by the first owner and if there was a floor covering I don't remember it. Kitchens then as I said had no built ins, but all homes had pantry's with wood shelves for dishes and cooking ware. Our house was no exception.

The large dining room where we ate all our meals contained the table, six chairs, a buffet, my father's writing desk and book case combined, a large leather rocker for my father, a smaller rocker for my mother, and a fainting couch. This room was the center for family activities – for eating, entertaining guests, reading, my mother did her knitting there, card playing – and the fainting couch was used for those who took naps, or happened to be ill. Lace curtains, heavily starched twice annually, were at the windows, and a linoleum covered the floor.

The parlor, as that room was called when I was little, was seldom used. It contained a small sofa, a couple chairs, and Emma's piano. We used it on Christmas Eve or when the minister and his wife visited.

The Christmas tree, one my father cut in a neighbor's woods, was always place in a pail of sand in the same southwest corner of the parlor, and anchored to the wall with twine. If it wasn't anchored it would surely topple as it did one previous year.

When friends visited, they were often entertained by some family member playing the player piano. Playing the numerous rolls of music was one of the pastimes too. I'd pretend that it was not mechanical and that I was really the pianist, and thought that if I could just pedal slowly enough I could learn the sequence of the keys as they played the melody and then imitate them, and I'd be a pianist. Childhood dreams!

A small bedroom, the "guest" bedroom, although I don't remember many guests sleeping there, was next to the parlor. It always seemed to be an unfriendly room and to me it appeared to have no practical use.

The exterior of the house was white frame. Paint must have been superior then because it never needed paint during the years we lived there.

An L-shaped porch was on the south and east sides, and we spent many summer evenings there. There was a porch swing suspended by chains from the ceiling and I spent many summer hours on it day dreaming about my future. There were two old wooden rockers – one for Father and one for Mother, and the three of us would rock and swing on hot humid evenings trying to catch a cooling breeze before 9 p. m. bedtime sent us to the heat of the upstairs bedrooms.

After Karl and Margaret were married and living with us, there was a fire in the basement caused by a wood burning stove used to heat water for laundry. The fire department was summoned and the blaze was extinguished and there was little damage except smoke damage to the first story. Fortunately, Father had enough household insurance to pay for new flowery wallpaper. Finally the colorless, old, textured paper, called oatmeal paper, could be removed and replaced. To me, the new paper was beautiful and I felt so fortunate to live in a house that had central heating, running water, electricity, and a honest-to-goodness bathroom, plus new wall paper!

If I've made the house seem drab I'm sorry. But today's standards, it would be considered drab and uncomfortable, but this is how I remember all farm homes, and ours had conveniences that many did not. No one had wall-to-wall carpeting, draw drapes, matching tables, or anything that could be called artistically coordinated through out the rooms as we have in most farm homes now.

It was clean and it was home. My parents loved me, and I was secure in the knowledge that I'd be fed, clothed, and loved as long as I remained there.

Maybe someday, I dreamed, I'd have the house of my fantasies, where there'd be a fireplace, a curving open stairway where I could float down to greet my guests and I'd be wearing long silver or yellow or green chiffons with matching high-heeled satin slippers. My house would have royal blue or deep burgundy velvet draperies at all the windows, and all the beds would have satin spreads. The furniture would be ornately carved, heavy and dark and the sofa and chairs would be deeply upholstered and covered with heavy brocades.

In the fantasy there would be a husband, tall, dark, and extremely handsome and wealthy who would grant me every wish, and consider me the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Years of few playthings, very little money, and not many playmates passed and with them the hours of playing pretend in "this ole house".