

MEMORIES FROM THE HEART

By Betty Schaefer McCormick

A few weeks ago our pastor's sermon was on the respect that teenagers and the elderly must have for one another. It definitely brought back memories of my childhood in Gary. There were so many elderly people who were kind and looked out for me. I tried to do the same. Each night after school I would make the rounds to see how the elderly neighbors were managing.

Sometimes, they needed their mail, maybe a few groceries, or to help pick up things around their house. Then other times, we would sit and have coffee and cookies together. Some of the people who come to mind are the John Kennedys, Mrs. Schweinfert and Clara Frank, Mrs. Stefferud, Mrs. McKey, John and Mary Hunt, my Uncle Hank and Aunt Neva. These people always had the best homemade sugar cookies, it was a real treat.

Some of the people I just enjoyed talking to, Mrs. Webber, Mrs. Marsch, Mrs. Tietjen, Mrs. Denekamp, she always had the beautiful white laundry on the line, Mr. and Mrs. Miottel. I would pop my head into the stores and say hello to Fannie Harkins, Mr. and Mrs. Van, sometimes stop and say hello to Ethel Bartels. I thoroughly enjoyed Ethel's home. It was so comfy and seemed so plush and she loved to visit. It was so sad to see that her home had been torn down. I enjoyed going into the creamery and watching the butter being made, and sometimes. Mr. Sanden would let me have a taste of it.

The store owners were all so friendly. I would collect pop bottles and sell them. I think if I remember correctly, I would receive one or two cents per bottle. So if I had five to ten bottles that bought a treat for me and my Mom and Dad.

Later on when I was a teenager, I was offered jobs at Van's Variety, Heaton Drug Store and Dode's Café I was most grateful, because now I could help purchase my own clothes and have spending money. It was a great experience. I still am grateful for those days. This past summer we visited the Cozi Museum in Columbus, Ohio. They had the full set up of an old soda fountain and drug store. It brought back so many memories. I went behind the counters and could just imagine making the sundaes, the malts and mixing the drinks. My favorite was the cherry coke and sometimes the chocolate, cherry coke with a pack of salted peanuts put on top.

Later in high school, Mary Gordon and Mrs. Overgard would hire me to do ironing and cleaning house. It was always fun because we did the work together and had really good visits. Then during the winter I would help with cooking and serving food for their holiday guests. I still remember the Lutefisk dinners Mrs. Gordon would arrange.

When I go to work I enjoy the teenagers so much. They enjoy talking to me and I enjoy hearing about them and their studies, where they plan to go to school, and their adventures. They enjoy hearing what I did as a teenager. I know I probably appear to be a relic to them, but we have some wonderful conversations.

Jim and I enjoy the kids in the neighborhood. I like to read the local newspapers so we can see who is doing what and what awards or events they may be in. It is important to congratulate them and ask them about their school and what they are doing.

This week at church we said goodbye for the second time to a young man going off to Baghdad. We pray for his safe return and thank him for his duty of service to our country and await his safe return next year. I remember my Dad so worried about the young boys going off to Viet Nam and praying for their return. Of course, we know one of our home boys did not return, Richard Kloos, one of the nicest and most enjoyable kids in Gary High School. It was a sad day

when we learned he had been killed. When we visited the Viet Nam Memorial in Washington, DC, it was very important for me to look up his name.

As I am typing this, I have left out too many wonderful people in Gary. I believe everyone who lived in Gary when I was growing up was a wonderful person and has shared something with me, maybe a quick conversation, a cup of coffee, a word of advice or a compliment. When I return to visit, everyone in Gary is so wonderful. The town has been so blessed to have such wonderful people live there.

My children always say, "You and Dad must know everyone". You talk to everybody". "Yes," we respond, we pretty much do or we knew someone in their family. As a person gets older, those are wonderful memories to have. Sometimes, I visualize the streets I walked and the people who lived in the houses and I think how wonderful it would be just to touch base with them for a few minutes and let them know a bit about my life. I think they would enjoy knowing. But then again, as my husband says, they are all watching over us in heaven and that is very reassuring. So in conclusion, I am glad I took the time to say hello and get to know these wonderful elderly people. They had so many experiences, so good and not so good, but they were always willing to share their thoughts. Some were good story tellers and that is important to be able to tell a good story.

When I went away to college, I saw that an elderly lady lived in a big old house next door to me. She barely went outside. One day after school I walked over and knocked on her door. I told her who I was and asked if she needed anything. She invited me in and we talked for a bit. She prepared tea for us to share. She was very much into health foods. I learned she was a retired Army Nurse from World War I. What wonderful stories she had to tell. I would go over every night after school and we would visit. She advised me to use olive oil when I went into the sun as I was so blonde. She said that is what she used during the war to prevent sunburn. I still use olive oil when I go into the sun. I moved away but I have always remembered her in my heart. She was a very special lady, mother, veteran and friend.

So the sermon brought back many memories and I am so happy I have those memories and also grateful for all the wonderful people who made them possible.