

## Reflections on My Mother by *Marti Hause*

Dorothy Pritchard never knew her grandparents. Both grandmothers had died when her parents were very young, and the grandfathers had died several years before her parents married. They had large extended families in Illinois and would visit and host family members often. A sister, Helen, was born 13 months after Mom was born. She loved traveling to Illinois to visit relatives.

Mom was the tomboy and loved to be outside and, since there were no sons, she helped her father. One story she loved to tell was that she helped the hired man one time bring in a load of hay. They layered slings with the hay. The hired man was not careful handling the horse-drawn wagon and the load tipped over. Grandpa Pritchard then put Mother in charge of handling the horse drawn wagons.

She had known my father slightly as Martin and his sons threshed the Pritchard wheat and oat crops. She never guessed she would marry the shy man who was eight years older than her when she helped her mother feed the crew who came to the farm on Pritchard Road (now in Chrysler Proving Grounds).

She worked at the Methodist Home (now CRC) after graduating from Chelsea High School for a couple years. Her friend Ella was dating Carl Heller. Ella fixed up Mom with my dad and they soon were engaged. They married a year later.

Mom moved into the Wenk family. In fact Mom moved into Martin's home (later to become the longtime home of Ernie and Edna Wenk) as my grandmother had died a couple years earlier. She became the cook and housekeeper of

Dad's brothers and sisters and father. Dad's sister Rubena had married Walter Loeffler but the others still lived at the farm, but were gone working for extended times.

Mom did not speak German; in fact she considered herself of English ancestry as her mother's family had been in the United States for generations and her grandfather on her father's side had emigrated from Wales. Mom learned to make German food, including pretzels, lebkuchen, etc. German church services were held here at Zion at the time, although not every week. German was spoken in the Wenk home quite a lot when Mom joined, but Mom only understood a few words of "Rogers Corners German."

After she became pregnant with me or after I was born, she wanted her own home. Grandpa Wenk had renters in the next home on Fletcher Road, so he told them his son and wife were moving in. Mom loved that home that later became the longtime home of Norm and Lorena Wenk.

A couple years later, the farm on the same side of the road was for sale and they purchased the farm they continued to live on after my sister Irene was born. They worked very hard, gardening, raising sheep, hogs, milk, and pretty much being self-sufficient farmers. The family worked together. She told me the happiest time of her life was when we six kids still lived at home. She loved family.

World War II was going on. I remember the rationing and the sisters-in-law would trade stamps to purchase the sugar and other things that were rationed. They always were a very close family.

We had one of the first televisions in the area. After Chuck was born, my father purchased a dishwasher for Mom. Just before Paul was born, they purchased an automatic washer and dryer at the Chelsea Fair. When Jean was born, the side porch was demolished and the brick and cement porch was constructed with the door and partial flat roof so rugs could be shook out without coming downstairs. We always had good food. We raised it: garden vegetables, preserving them for the winter (in later years with Don and Paul's help of course). Dad butchered our own beef. Times became harder in the 1950's and 1960's, though, and money was scarce for a farmer and his wife with no outside income. Dad started looking for outside income and Mom also worked at Weber's for a short time and Unit Packaging until she was in her 70's.

Wenk family reunions are an annual big event. When the Wenk family historian was no longer able to continue, Mother took on the role. She was interested in her side of the family genealogy also, but because of untimely deaths of her relatives, it was a difficult. Trips to Illinois and West Virginia with Irene helped Mom learn more about her roots.

I was also interested in my roots. After I quit work, I started searching for more information about Mom's family. Through the power of the internet these last ten years, I have found that that on her dad's side, the grandmother who died in childbirth when Mom's father was eight years old was in fact a descendent of the German Brecht family that came to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the middle 1600's and the Miller family that came before 1700. Her grandfather on her mother's side was also from Germany. Mom had more than three quarters German blood!

Mom loved to travel and she really enjoyed trips through the senior center and to California. We found a picture of her riding an elephant on the trip to the Wisconsin Dells. The trip to Alaska was also one she talked about a lot. My husband and I also took her on a ten day cruise to the Mexican Riviera from San Diego. On our trips to Michigan, we took her on extended trips. We went to the Upper Peninsula on the eastern side of Michigan to the Soo Locks. Two years ago, we did the western side of the Upper Peninsula and included a carriage ride around Mackinaw Island. When our son moved to Ithaca, we took her to visit him and his family.

Ninety seemed to be a hallmark. Her mother died just before turning 90. We had a big party for her and all my family came. Ten flew in from California and three came from New York. Mom was slowing down, but she continued the last ten or more years spending a month, then two, and finally three months during the winter in California at my home. Last year, when my children gave my husband and me a surprise 50th wedding anniversary party, Mom and Irene surprised us by coming out. She was tickled she could put one over on me.

She also came in January this year. Don and Paul thought she could not survive the trip; I could see it was harder this time, but she was an amazingly determined woman. We had planned on going to Catalina Island for several years with her, but it had not worked out. This time Chuck, Carl, and I took her for the day. She enjoyed the boat ride over and even saw frolicking dolphins swimming near the boat. She bought a Catalina Island sweat shirt and wore it the rest of the time. She blacked out entering a store with

me a couple weeks before returning home, twisting her ankle as she went down. We took her to the emergency room and she was hospitalized for a day as they performed tests to see why she was blacking out. After a night in the hospital in California and a couple weeks of rest, she and Chuck flew back to Michigan. She had a couple more trips to the hospital, and then moved into Chuck's air-conditioned newer home so she could breathe easier.

COPD had made her lungs not function very well, and she had been diagnosed with heart problem years earlier and now had congestive heart failure. She was continually surprised by the care she received since March when she was no longer able to get out. She kept saying, "My family sure has been here." She loved company and now she will be with all her friends as she had prayed all summer. We will miss her. She was an extraordinary woman!