

# FAMILY, FAITH, TRAVEL *and a life well lived*



*a memoir by*  
JANET WILLKE NIEKAMP BOLTON

THIS MEMOIR IS NOT A BIOGRAPHY, NOR DOES IT CONTAIN GENEALOGY. IT IS BITS AND PIECES OF MY LIFE. I HAVE ALWAYS ENJOYED WRITING, SO PUTTING MY THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES IN A MEMOIR WAS A NATURAL THING TO DO. IT IS MOSTLY ABOUT MY CHILDHOOD WITH SOME SEGMENTS ABOUT MY JOURNEY THROUGH ADULthood.

JANET WILLKE NIEKAMP BOLTON



OUR HOME WITH ADJOINING OFFICE AND BARN FROM 1932–1951

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MY MOTHER, ALFRIDA E. WILLKE, PUBLISHED TWO FAMILY HISTORY BOOKS WITH GENEALOGY INFORMATION. HER BOOKS CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT:

[WWW.WILLKEFAMILY.COM](http://WWW.WILLKEFAMILY.COM)



THE WILLKE FAMILY. ROSANN, MARILYN, BILL, DAD, MOM AND JANET IN 1982

# INTRODUCTION



This memoir is not a biography, nor does it contain genealogy. It is bits and pieces of my life. I have always enjoyed writing, so putting my thoughts and memories in a memoir was a natural thing to do. It is mostly about my childhood with some segments about my journey through adulthood. It will tell how my childhood set the groundwork for my career, my sense of independence, my self-confidence, my strengths, my love of teaching, my love of travel and my relationship with others.

My mother, Alfrida E. Willke, who wrote two books, was an inspiration to me to write this memoir. Her books, autobiographical and genealogy related, are on the internet and widely read. My memoir is meant for my descendents and is more personal. Also, my son, Andy Niekamp, published a book in 2017 detailing his journey as the first person to solo thru-hike Ohio's 1,444 mile Buckeye Trail. His book also is on the internet. So, writing must be in our blood.

I started to write this memoir in 1999 when I took a Continuing Education class at the University of Dayton. I set it aside for many years because of too many raw memories. I continued when I attended a weekly class held in Orange Beach, Alabama, where we have spent each January and February since 2002. After many months of putting my writing aside, I finished in 2019.

I wrote this memoir so I'd leave a written account of my life of hard work, perseverance, and persistence. I wanted to share my family values, my family history, and also to get an insight into my past. Processing some of the memories caused me many tears and pain. Other memories brought me joy and a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

It is my hope that my readers will note how life has changed drastically since I was a child, born in 1936. It's truly amazing how technology has changed the world. My perceptions of my childhood may not align perfectly with those of my siblings and friends, as we all see events from a different perspective.

I did not write about the busy years when my five children were growing up. Writing about those years would need another entire book; I will leave it to my children to write about their own personal journey in life. When I see my children today, I am brimming with pride. If I have been successful as a mother, my life is complete. They are all successful in their careers, completely independent, giving, appreciative and kind. They all have college degrees and four of them have a master's degree.

# BACKGROUND



I was born December 9, 1936, in Mercer County to the parents of Edgar and Alfrida Willke. I grew up in the small town of Maria Stein, Ohio. The village church spire loomed over the farmers' wheat fields, the milk cows, and the squealing pigs on the farms. St. John Catholic Church was the drawing point of this community, almost all of German descent and of the Roman Catholic religion. I was the third child of Edgar and Alfrida Kleinhenz Willke, having a brother Bill and two sisters, Marilyn and Rosann.

Here was where I was learning, along with everyone else, that hard work is the one-and-only norm. Idleness was not tolerated in this village where work was king. Also, one saw freshly painted houses and barns and well-manicured, spotless lawns.

The people in Maria Stein were 99% German Catholic. I didn't realize it at the time, but many of our customs, traditions, and foods were German. In our community people kept their emotions to themselves and did not outwardly show their affection. Hugs and kisses were not the norm at our house, although one nice ritual Dad and Mom had was kissing each other whenever they left the house. This was the way my friends grew up, too. Later in life I had to learn and practice the art of hugging and saying "I Love You." The good part is that I felt very much loved, cared for, and secure. My parents helped me to develop a positive self-image and a sense of stability and strength which would help me throughout my life. Their greatest gift to me was their never-ending trust in me. My fervent hope is that my children also feel my complete trust, support, and never-ending love.

# MOM AND DAD



My father, Dr. Edgar J. Willke, the town's only medical doctor, was a pillar of the community. He worked endless hours in the doctor's office which was attached to our house. My life as a child was entwined with his patients as they entered and left our property, watching us four children playing in the yard, planting the garden, or riding our horse, Lady. Dad made house calls and delivered lots of babies, often in the middle of the night. I was usually referred to as Dr. Willke's daughter. Although this made me very proud of my father's importance, it also instilled in me a bit of unworthiness. Could I ever match up to his status, education and importance? I didn't get to spend much quality time with my father.

My mother managed the household, took an active interest in our lives and still managed to hunt rabbits, squirrels and pheasants. She also was an avid golfer in later times, bowled, and showed slides of her many trips to foreign lands to local organizations. She was always compiling photo albums, scrapbooks, and studying genealogy. This was the groundwork for when she wrote her autobiography which her grandson, Andy, would later put on the world-wide web. Her second book, compiled by Andy and me, was published after her death.

Mom, always regretting that she never received a high school or college education, instilled in us the value of a college education. She and Dad just expected it of us four children. She took us to camp every summer where we could broaden our horizon, meet friends from the city, and learn many sports. It is during these summers that I learned to master swimming, whereby later I would become a lifeguard and teach swimming lessons at the nearby pool. This, in turn, led me into a career in teaching.

## BOWLING

Mom, at times, played in a bowling league in Coldwater and also one in Celina. I would beg to attend a movie on Monday nights when Mom bowled in Coldwater. Almost all of the movies were musicals which I loved. I think my love of music began when I went to these movies. I remember several incidents about Mom's bowling in Celina. I grew up in a totally Catholic community and Celina was mostly Protestant. When I met Protestants at the bowling alley, I felt so sorry for them as we had been taught by the nuns that only Catholics went to heaven. This is certainly not taught today nor do I agree with it.

One time my school, St. John, was playing in a basketball tournament in Celina on the night of Mom's bowling league. Mom, unknowingly, dropped off us sixth-grade girls at the public school instead of the Catholic school where St. John was playing. This was pre-cell phone times so my friends and I spent the entire evening at another school's basketball game.

## HUNTERS OF WILD GAME

My parents were avid small-game hunters, both owning shotguns. I often sat at the kitchen table watching in awe as they cleaned, oiled and shined their guns, always being careful about removing the shells when not in use. In the fall Mom's greatest love was to hunt squirrels. She would rise before daylight, find a perch in a tree in a nearby woods, and wait for the squirrels to appear. She loved the peace and solitude of the early-morning hours. She would always arrive home with her bag limit of squirrels and her face and neck covered with multiple mosquito bites. We usually questioned her about these horrible-looking bites, but she was quick to tell us how much she enjoyed squirrel season and the solitude of the morning hours. Sometimes my parents would fly to the Dakotas to hunt pheasants. Mom had a taxidermist stuff one of her prized, beautiful multi-colored pheasants; she showcased this trophy on the dining room buffet. We always ate the game they shot, although it was never my favorite meal. In fact, I could hardly tolerate the smell of it cooking in the oven.

Before Thanksgiving Mom and Dad both looked forward to shooting clay pigeons at the annual turkey shoot held at the American Legion Hall. At these competitions round clay discs were ejected out of a trap into the air. The shooter would say "pull" and a clay bird would be released into the air for them to shoot. Both my parents were good shots, so often they would win a turkey as a prize.



JANET WITH HER MOM ON HER CONFIRMATION CIRCA 1946

Dad insisted that I go rabbit hunting with him and sometimes Mom. Rabbit hunting season was in the winter, so Dad liked to hunt when snow covered the ground so he could track the footprints of rabbits. On these cold wintery days I did not enjoy having the task of kicking up rabbits in the fields for them to shoot. Dad always insisted that I never, never walk in front of him. He taught me gun-safety issues, and how to hold his gun while he climbed a fence.

Annie Oakley, a famous and talented sharpshooter and exhibition shooter, was born in 1860, only 20 miles from our house. Much has been written about her skill as a sharpshooter and her marksmanship while touring with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. My parents taught my brother to shoot but didn't teach me or my two sisters. Maybe with a bit of practice and skill, I could have become Annie Oakley, the 2nd.



## CIGARETTES

Mom and Dad both smoked cigarettes. Dad smoked two packs of Lucky Strikes a day; Mom smoked Kool cigarettes, mostly when she played bridge and pinochle. I can still smell the aroma of Dad's cigarettes floating into my play area, which was the porch between the office and house. Dad often kept a cigarette burning in the drug room when he worked in the office.

Dad quit smoking "cold turkey." He developed heart palpitations and other worrisome symptoms, severe enough to land him in the hospital. Doctors never diagnosed anything serious; they did not mention cigarette withdrawal. Well, later Dad resumed smoking again. When he quit the second time (and for good), he developed the same symptoms, so back in the hospital he went.

Believe it or not, Mom encouraged me to smoke when I was in high school. She thought smoking would curb my appetite. This was before the cancer scare. I quit smoking in 1962, the same year my husband Andrew quit.

When I do laundry today, I always have memories of my dad. I helped with the laundry as a child; one of my jobs was to empty the loose cigarette tobacco from the pockets of dad's crisp white shirts. I still have the habit of checking Jim's shirt pockets. Thank goodness. No tobacco. When I was young, we bought candy cigarettes and pretended to smoke them. Oh, how times have changed.



DAD IN FRONT OF HIS OFFICE WITH MARILYN, JANET AND BILL CIRCA 1937



DAD AND MOM 1941

# PEOPLE



## ELDERLY MEN

Several elderly men come to mind when I was young. Ben Groete, an elderly, worn-looking gentleman, painted our house at times. What I remember about him is that he drove an old Model T Ford, probably a 1924 model. I had never seen someone who had to hand crank the shaft at the front of his car to get his car started. With two hands he cranked it around and around in order to get the car to sputter. He worked a long time to be successful in starting his car. I learned later that many men broke their wrist or arm while cranking a car. Charles Kettering invented the self starter in 1919, so Ben Groete was still driving an old car in the 40's as he was rather poor. Dad knew that as soon as he collected his money from painting, he would go on a "bender" at the local bar. Therefore, Dad didn't pay him until the painting project was completed.

Another elderly man was a farmer in our neighborhood who enjoyed having us Willke kids visit him at his large brick farm house built in the late 1800's. Heine Bergman owned the field behind us, so we would walk through the field to visit him. He was a confirmed bachelor who had a well-built old red brick house and a small dilapidated farm. He was insistent that I learn how to milk a cow. Sitting on the three-legged stool, I did my best to extract milk, but I always failed. I told Heine what I really wanted to do when I visited was play his organ. He had a large, ancient organ that self-played if you pushed the two pedals. I could create beautiful organ music just by pumping the giant pedals with my small feet. Marilyn remembers helping Heine cut down corn stalks with a sickle. Bill remembers playing in the barn. Heine was not a modern farmer.

Another elderly man I loved to visit when I was a little girl was Joe Goecke, owner of a combined candy store/barber shop/filling station on the other side of town. Joe was the father of my Uncle Al Goeke, who changed the spelling of his last name when he moved to Cincinnati. Joe, who loved children, would give us candy, much to the chagrin of my mom. Joe loved to play cards with his cronies during the day. His shop, which had a single gas pump in front and a well-worn red, white, and blue stripped barber pole, housed a visiting barber on Saturdays. Joe would escort me to his back yard and show me his bee hives which were in open wooded cabinets. I marveled at the bees working hard producing honey. When Mom bought honey, she'd buy the entire honey comb and spread it on bread; we did not eat the liquid honey that we eat today, but the entire comb.

Joe's brother, Ed Goecke, lived next door to Joe's shop. Ed was a skilled wood carver, making furniture and coffins. After Ed's death, there was a huge public sale. I loved going to estate sales which were community events. They were all-day events where delicious homemade food was sold. I remember feeling very important when Dad asked me to bid on an item.

I waited impatiently all day to perform this important task, and I was greatly disappointed when the opening bid was more than dad wanted to pay.

Ed's yard and house were filled with antique furniture, old pots and pans, and rusted tools. I marveled at the auctioneer as Dad and Mom bid on an antique bed made by Ed Goecke. Having bought the bed, they stored the beautiful hand-carved, walnut bed upstairs in the barn where we used to play. There were birds and mice who enjoyed resting on this well-worn bed. Years later when we moved to our new house, Mom asked Mr. Raushau, a wood maker, to cut off the top section of the headboard. He refused! Thank goodness. She had it refinished to its original beauty; the bed is a valued antique today.

## HOBOS AND OTHER TRAVELING VENDORS

Mom was always good to the hobos who knocked on our door in the 1940s. I remember watching the bedraggled, unkempt men eat Mom's food on the steps of the front and back porch. I know the hobo was willing to work, but I only remember their getting a good meal at our house. We were told to distance ourselves from these hobos who Mom always hoped would eat and leave quickly. Unlike a "tramp" who works only when forced to, and a "bum" who does not work at all, a "hobo" is a traveling worker. The number of hobos increased during the Great Depression era. With no work, many decided to travel for free by freight train and try their luck elsewhere. They would walk with their bindle stick—a collection of belongings wrapped in cloth and tied around a stick. We no longer had a train track in Maria Stein so I find it interesting that we had hobos in our town. When one hobo would show up, we knew more hobos would follow. They had a system where they carried chalk and would make symbols for those following them. These symbols could be on the house, road, sidewalk, fence, etc. Some of the symbols were a kind lady lives here, man with gun lives here, okay to sleep in barn, police are hostile, beware of thieves, get bread here, doctor lives here, wet town so alcohol here, good place to sleep, dangerous place, mean dog, etc. Because our hobos came closely after each other, I'm sure they marked the symbol "get a good meal here" on a fence post near our house.

In my early years an ice man routinely delivered a chunk of ice to be placed in the top of our icebox. When we walked to school every day, we would pass the ice house which was two properties east of our house.

About three times a week the milk man would deliver milk. We had a cubby hole on the side of the house where he would place the milk.

Then there was the Huckster Man who would knock at our door at various times; he would invite Mom to come to the street to inspect the wares in his truck. These men were called, at times, Wagon Peddlers. The "store on wheels" sold a variety of foods, vitamins, supplements, dry goods, and an assortment of health remedies.

Also, there was the Watkins man who knocked on our door with a suitcase full of products. The Watkins man brought home remedies to rural areas. He had health remedies, baking products and other household items. By the 1940s Watkins was the largest direct-sales company in the world. I remember that Mom bought vanilla extract from him.

Busse Meat Market from Fort Loramie stopped by to sell meats. Also, we would walk to Grandma Eifert's house, which was next to the church, to buy butter. Her son, Lee Eifert, drove a milk truck and must have supplied Grandma Eifert in her business of selling butter.

We attended free Medicine Shows which were held in the Legion Hall in Station, which we called the area of town west of us. The Medicine Show had touring acts to draw an audience, and peddled "miracle cure" patent medicines and other products. Each show was run by a man posing as a doctor who drew the crowd with a monologue alternating entertainment with sales pitches. The entertainment could be magic acts, ventriloquists, and musicians. Among the many medicines for sale would be herbal laxatives and Snake Oil. Dad was never too happy about our attending these events which he called "pure quackery."

I'm guessing that both the huckster and the medicine show man sold Hadacol, a patent medicine marketed as a vitamin supplement. It was advertised that Hadacol was "good for what ails you." It was a very popular remedy because it contained 12% alcohol.

## TONY AND MRS. VOSKUHL

I have many fond early childhood memories of Mrs. Voskuhl and her husband, Tony. They lived next door to us in a ramshackled, unpainted rickety house. Mrs. Voskuhl helped Mom with her chores two or three days a week and she also served as our nanny, although we didn't use this word then.

Mrs. Voskuhl and Tony had few expenses, as they did not have electricity, running water, central heat, an indoor toilet, a phone or a car. Often on our visits to their house we gathered around their potbelly stove to stay warm. I was in awe when Tony shaved with a straight razor, threatening to "get me" with that razor when his face was covered with shaving cream. He



MRS. VOSKUHL, MARILYN, JANET, BILL, ROSANN (IN FRONT) CIRCA 1944

loved to tease me and he loved the sound of my little-girl giggle. They had a huge garden where they grew most of their food. When I was quite young, I'd see Mrs. V. from our house working in her garden which was adjacent to our house. Mom said I'd stand by the back yard fence and cry for her.

Tony was an alcoholic and a poor provider. I think

digging graves by hand was his one and only job; there were only 3 or 4 deaths a year in Maria Stein. If you needed to find Tony, he was at Gast Pub.

I have fond memories of sitting with them in the evenings on their rickety front porch. We would swing in their glider and watch the sun set. When the sky was full of vibrant colors, Mrs. V. would say that God was baking cookies. I have so many pleasant memories of my time spent at their house, because they treated me like I was a special little girl. When it became dark, they lit their kerosene lamps and sent me on my way home. If I visited them during the day, Mrs. V. would be stitching quilts which she gave us as gifts. Quilts can be quite valuable if hand-made. Mrs. V. used old clothing and cheap cloth she bought at the store as material for her quilts, so sadly her quilts haven't worn very well.

Mrs. V. was a large woman. I can still remember how secure I felt being held close to her large bosom. I remember her washing our clothes and hanging them to dry in our back yard, as we did not have a dryer in the early days. We had a mangle which she used to iron the flat items. She ironed Dad's starched white shirts. She helped Mom can the fruits and vegetables which we grew in our garden.

Mrs. V. and Dad's office nurse Julia ate lunch at our house. I remember Mrs. V. liked to eat the fat left over on our plates.

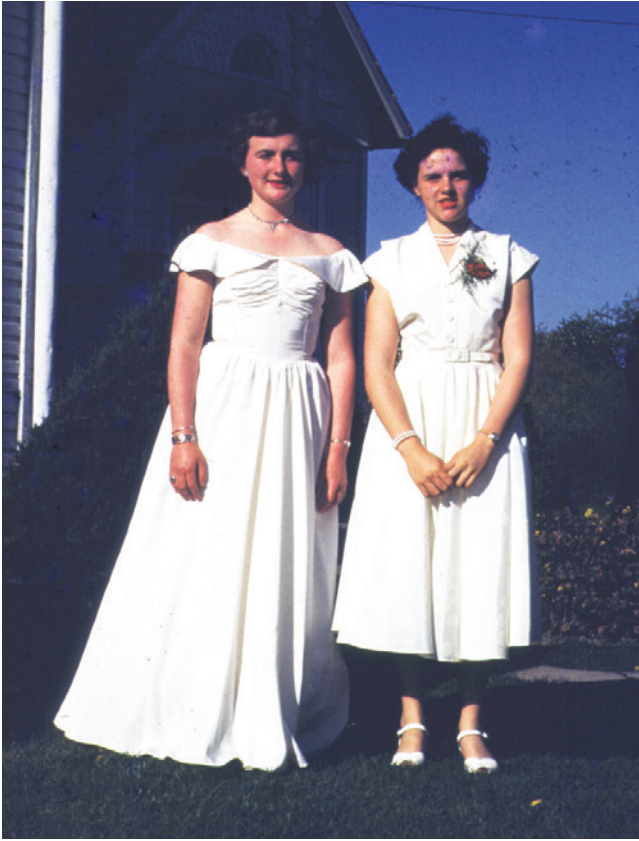
When Tony died, I felt a great loss, and Mrs. V. lost the man she loved. No more swinging on the front porch with her and Tony. No more teasing. Life was going to change. After his death, Mrs. V moved to Cincinnati because her daughter lived across the river in Covington, Ky. Mrs. V. stayed in Ohio in order to get her government assistance check. She moved to a rat-infested upstairs apartment on Elm Street, a seedy area of downtown Cincinnati. I felt afraid when we visited her, having to walk by questionable characters to get to her apartment. Her rickety stairs were the rats' playground. She had an open sore on her leg that never healed. This made me feel very sad for her. Even with her disability, she took in ironing as her income. My parents felt bad seeing her in this condition. They found a better apartment for her and subsidized her rent until she died. She had given so much of herself and her love to our family. It was pay-back time.

## MY SISTER, MARILYN

A very significant person in my life, especially the past 45 years, has been my older sister, Marilyn, who is four years older than I am. She is the person I can talk to and share ideas with for hours and hours. She and I accept each other "as is," never bothering to find fault or to criticize. We are alike in so many ways.



JANET, MARILYN, BILL IN 1940



MARILYN AS HOMECOMING QUEEN AND JANET IN 1950.

In 1976, at the age of 44, she had malignant colon cancer. Knowing that I could possibly lose my sister and best friend was very difficult for me. It was then that I realized how much I needed Marilyn. I have vivid memories of visiting her while she was suffering the terrible effects of chemotherapy. Later, I waited anxiously at her side as she received the results of further tests to see if the cancer had reoccurred. I am happy to report these tests have all turned out negative.

In 1970 when my entire world collapsed, Marilyn was at my doorstep. Even though she had five young children of her own, she traveled 65 miles to pick up my five children and take them to her house. Consequently, my children have little recollection of the time their father whom they adored was forcibly taken to the psychiatric ward of the hospital. Going to Aunt Marilyn's house was always a treat for my children; for a period of time it was their second home. I was at her house

when I received a phone call from my neighbor telling me that my husband had attempted suicide. My neighbor's fast thinking had saved his life. Again, Marilyn rescued my children; the children had to be told about this horrible situation much, much later in life.

Today she and I share an interest in the stock market. We both read voraciously and share our knowledge on financial issues. This has enabled both of us to be the single financial adviser in each of our households. Good thing because both of our husbands have little interest in financial affairs. She and I attended financial conferences, mostly in Florida. We made it a point to introduce ourselves to the "big shots" of the financial industry. One year we called home from Florida excited about having talked with John Bogle, the founder of the Vanguard Funds. One would think that we had dined with the Queen of England. Let our husbands and children laugh at us! Guess who reaps the reward of our financial success and ardent hobby?

These days we share ideas on our adult children and their spouses. She and I combined have raised nine sons and one daughter. We talk a lot about our children and grandchildren. Many times she has excellent advice on how to handle a situation. One of her mottoes is "No good deed goes unpunished." It is surprising how often this has been true in my life.

Then there's the discussion on how our grandchildren are being raised. We have to keep our mouths closed around our children, but she and I can clearly express our opinions on this matter to each other. Will our grandchildren, who are given so much, grow up to be as responsible and successful as their parents? Indications are "yes."

And how did I become interested in this University of Dayton's Continuing Education class? It was Marilyn who recommended that I take this memoir course.

## A TRIBUTE TO MY SISTER, ROSANN SPITZER

Today, October 3, 2018, is the second birthday of Meredith Rose Spitzer, granddaughter of my younger sister, Rosann, who left this earth in June of 2007 at the age of 66 after battling cancer. She suffered through five different concoctions of chemotherapy for a cancer labeled “unknown primary.” One of Rosann’s greatest wishes was to live long enough to hold her grandchild. Fate would not allow this to be.

Rosann and I spent a lot of time together during our younger years. We played “store,” using all the empty boxes from the kitchen that Mom could save for us. We sat at our miniature table and chairs and had make-believe tea from our tiny dishes. We skated on the sidewalks and on the cement walkways surrounding the church. We dressed up in old clothes and clip-clopped around in Mom’s old high-heeled shoes. We went to Minster together to take piano lessons from Hilda Wernsing. For many summers we attended two-week or four-week sessions at Fort Scott Camp near Hamilton, Ohio.

We planted seeds in the garden and harvested the results. We cut buckhorns and dandelions from the front yard of our house and attached office. We mowed the lawn. We shared the love of Mrs. Voshuhl, who really loved this new baby girl. I, almost age 4, was thrilled to have a baby sister, but my brother Bill, age 6, was hoping for a brother. I was the winner!

We played on the same girls’ softball team called The Jinz which our dad coached. We often visited Bill at Culver Military Academy in Culver, Indiana, where he spent his last three years of high school. We went to Mexico where dad attended a medical conference and where I learned to love the Spanish language.

We enjoyed shopping once or twice a year at Rike’s Department Store in Dayton. The highlight of the all-day shopping spree was eating



DAD, ROSANN, MOM, OCTOBER 26, 1968



ROSANN AND JANET IN FRONT OF OLD HOUSE CIRCA 1943



ROSANN'S GRANDCHILDREN, MEREDITH AND KATHERINE SPITZER 2018

in Rike's dining room, an upscale restaurant. At times we ate at Culp's Cafeteria, another dining experience for us "country" people.

Yes, in about 1951 I was there when dear Rosann had her first epileptic seizure. Although we shared the same bedroom in our old house, we were in different bedrooms when I woke up to Rosann's seizure shortly after we moved into our new house.

Rosann was there to help me when Andrew became ill in 1970. Andy and Mark, then ages 9 and 8, remember taking the train to Lafayette, Indiana, staying a week with Rosann, her husband Bob, and Mike, an infant.

Rosann was, perhaps, the smartest of us four children. She was the fourth child in our family to graduate from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She graduated in computer science when it was in its infancy. She easily attained a job at Proctor & Gamble in

Cincinnati, programming a large, bulky computer.

I still remember calling Rosann in October, 2004, when Jim and I were at an Elderhostel program vacationing in Quebec. I called to inquire about the results of her recent medical test. The devastating news was that her cancer had spread into her lymph nodes. It was a painful conversation for both of us.

Two years and nine months later she left this world after fighting for her life, as she didn't want to leave her husband, four sons, and especially you, precious Meredith Rose Spitzer.

*October 3, 2018*

*Dear Rosann,*

*We are thinking of you, Rosann, as we celebrate Meredith's birthday today, eleven years after your death. This beautiful, bright-eyed two-year old is the daughter of Megan and Steve Spitzer. As it stands now (2018), Rosann, there is a possibility that this could be your one and only grandchild. Meredith's middle name is Rose in honor of you.*

*Addendum – Katherine Jane Spitzer, a baby sister to Meredith Rose, arrived on December 5, 2018.*

*Love, Janet*

## AUNT MINNIE

My great-aunt Minnie Kleinhenz was a frail, tiny woman with a high shrill voice. She "fit the mold" as a priest housekeeper which she was. Having never married she was technically a spinster or "old maid."



She wore a hairnet on her gray hair which was pulled back into a bun. On her thin frame she always wore a cotton patterned matronly dress which was four or five inches below her knees. Covering the dress was a large wrap-around apron with large, deep pockets. On her legs were brown hose inserted into solid-heeled tied black shoes. When I hugged this dear lady, I thought I'd break her fragile bones. She attended mass every day and often had a rosary entwined in her hand as her lips moved quietly.

Visiting her in a priest house was an eerie and strange experience for

this little girl. The rectory was dark, quiet, nondescript, and lacking a woman's touch. Seeing priests not wearing their Roman collar and in regular men's clothing was a surprise. Although the priests always welcomed us and showered us with treats, I always felt uncomfortable.

Sometimes Aunt Minnie stayed at our house for several days. She always placed her bottle of mineral oil on the dining room buffet. When I asked my mother what this was for, she answered, "to keep her regular." There never would be another person like this loving, petite, gray-haired spinster who enriched my life as a child.

My Great Uncle Tony Kleinhenz was the brother to Aunt Minnie. He lived in a big house set back far from the highway in the Station part of Maria Stein. Sometimes, my mom would drop me off to spend the day with Uncle Tony, who had older sons at home. They always liked to tease me. Well, one day I gave them a good reason to tease me for the rest of their lives. When I was about 7 or 8 years old, I asked Uncle Tony if I could visit my classmate, Betty Schenking, who lived nearby. Well, Betty and I got into a fist fight that day, and I returned to Uncle Tony's house looking a bit banged up. I don't remember why we were fighting or who won the fight. I do know that it has the distinction of being my one-and-only fist fight. And, somehow, Uncle Tony seemed happy about it because he laughed for a long time.

## BILL'S BB GUN

My brother, Bill, was always getting into trouble. One of his punishments for bad behavior was having his BB gun confiscated. During one of his good-behavior months he directed me, his gullible little sister, to follow him upstairs in the barn. He gave me a straw hat, instructing me to hold it outstretched from my body. Dumb me. I did it. Then he practiced shooting the hat with his BB gun. I don't remember how Mom and Dad found out, but I do remember his punishment. No BB gun for an entire year. He must have been a good shot as I don't remember being hit by a BB.



JANET, MOM (ALFRIDA WILLKE), ROSANN AT JOE AND NANCY SCHWIETEMAN'S WEDDING IN SEPTEMBER, 1986

# ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES



## KNUCKLE INJURY / BROTHER BILL

Our family was composed of three girls and one boy. Bill, my brother, excelled in sports and needed a partner to catch his fast, curve balls and someone to hold the football while he practiced his kicking. Bill missed having a brother, so, by default, I became that brother. I resisted “being that brother” but he insisted by bribing me with golden gifts of chewing gum and pennies. One day, in about 1948 when I was 11 or 12 years old, I was holding the football in the usual position for him to kick; instead he ran toward the football at full speed and kicked the knuckle of my index finger on my left hand.

The knuckle was beyond repair. Dad and also Dr. Adkins at the Coldwater Hospital did their best to pull it back in shape, but were unsuccessful. So, after sedating me, various other doctors tried unsuccessfully to pull and push it back to normal. In time I underwent two depressing surgeries, the second one requiring a 2-inch incision over the preceding 1-inch incision.

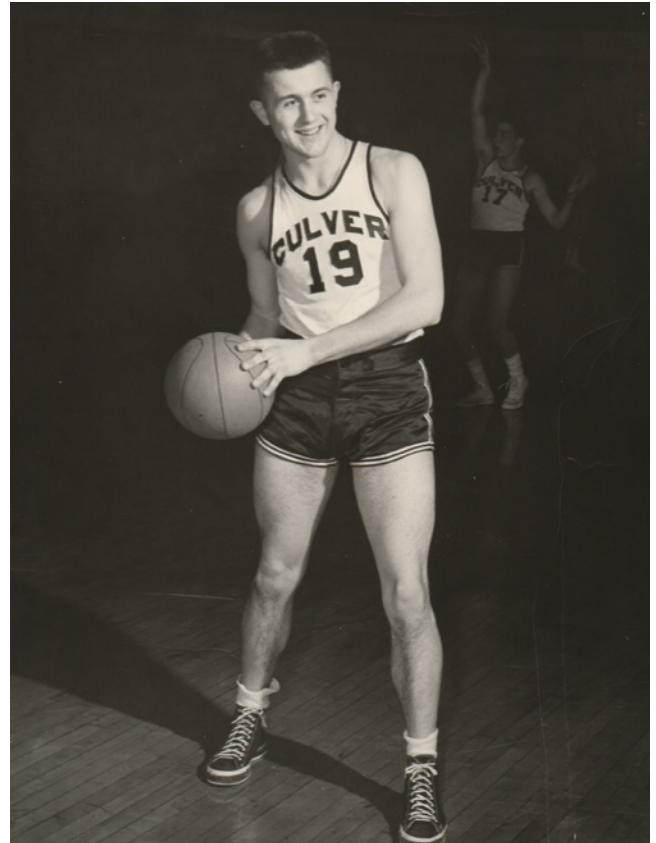


BILL, JANET AND MARILYN IN 1937

Being in the Lima Hospital after the last surgery was a life-changing event. During this time I felt very sorry for myself; I brooded a lot, and had the “Why Me” self-defeating attitude. After surgery I was wheeled into a 2-bed sterile room. In that room was a big silver metal object that was making noises that sounded like breathing. To my surprise a girl my age was fully enclosed in the casket-like machine, called an iron lung. Polio was rampant at this time; many young people became crippled or died of this dreadful disease. While in the hospital my roommate, who had polio, and I became friends, even though we could hardly see each other because of her enclosure or converse because of her difficulty breathing. I could see her face in the mirror which was attached to the iron lung.



BILL AND JANET IN FRONT YARD OF OLD HOUSE CIRCA 1947



BILL AT CULVER MILITARY ACADEMY

After a few days I was released from the hospital, but my room-mate was not so fortunate. Her death several days later made me profoundly sad, guilty, and embarrassed. I was alive and she wasn't. My knuckle debacle seemed insignificant, and I felt like a spoiled child. I wished that I had displayed a more positive attitude when I was with her and maybe been a bit more sympathetic and kind.

My career in football and basketball ended at this time, but it was just beginning for my brother Bill. He later became a star athlete at Culver Military Academy in Indiana. He attended Culver for three years, and received varsity letters in basketball, baseball and football all three years. In his senior year he was captain of the football team which had only one loss that season. At graduation he received the best all around athlete award. It was never mentioned at Culver that Bill's little sister helped lay the groundwork for his successful career in sports.



MY BROTHER BILL, GRADUATION FROM CULVER MILITARY ACADEMY IN 1952

## A LEG ACCIDENT

When I was in the 7th grade, I had a terrible accident. My girlfriends and I were at Marilyn Thobe's house attending a birthday party. Their farm had a long lane going down a steep slope. We girls were on a spring wagon being pulled by two of my friends. Anyway, those who were guiding the spring wagon lost control, and we cruised wildly down the hill, ending up in a ditch. My left leg became lodged in between the wagon and the insert of the wheel. It opened up a large three and one-half inch gash in the calf of my leg.

The wound gapped opened so I had to hold it back in place. My girlfriends were hysterical when they saw the insides of my calf. Mrs. Thobe, the mother of 16 children, did not know how to drive and they didn't have a telephone. Don Thobe, who was in the 8th grade, knew how to drive farm equipment, so he drove the farm truck to alert my dad, who was working in his office. I still remember how shocked Dad was when he first saw my leg. Mom wasn't home at the time so Dad drove me to Coldwater Hospital. Dr. Adkins sewed up my wound, using a lot of what he called "cat gut" for the interior. I was on crutches for a long time. My girlfriends were quick to tell me that they were not the fault of my accident. I don't know who was at fault. That memory is blocked forever. It really doesn't matter.

## AUTO ACCIDENT

I experienced a tragic event on New Year's Eve when I was age 16. Delbert Clune and I had quite a few dates in high school, and I truly enjoyed his company, as he was considerate, kind, always a gentleman, handsome, and had a good heart. He was a star athlete in football, baseball, and basketball. So, when he asked to escort me to the New Year's Eve dance at Edgewater in Celina where a big band was playing that night, I danced with joy. Being with Delbert was special. He, at the time, was playing on a minor league baseball team and was home (St. Rose) for the holidays. Driving home that night around 1 a.m., there were four of us in the car. Alex Bruggeman and Duretta Link were in the back seat.

In Maria Stein Station there is a popular bar. A disorderly drunk stumbled from the bar and walked in front of Delbert's car, hitting the right front fender directly in my sight. He was killed instantly. How shocked we all were, witnessing this tragic event. No words can describe how bad we felt, especially for Delbert and the family of this elderly gentleman. Bystanders first tried to contact my dad, who wasn't home. Then they contacted Julia Feltz, dad's office nurse who came to the scene. The county sheriff was called too. The four of us were stunned, giving solace to Delbert, who was shocked, feeling guilty and at fault. He was not under the influence of alcohol or driving above the speed limit.

Delbert was not charged although I knew he would be devastated by this and harbor feelings of guilt. The day following the accident, he and Alex stopped by our house to see how I was doing. The sad part is that I never talked with him again. He left town to continue his short-lived baseball career. We never had much closure. To this day I feel sad about this. I also felt sad and hurt because when I finally returned home, my father was upset with me for not coming home immediately after the accident. I was still shocked from what I had witnessed and was hoping for compassion from my father.

# EVENTS



## LEARNING TO DRIVE IN THE 8TH GRADE / NEW HOUSE

When I was in the eighth grade, my parents decided to build a new brick home 1/2 mile west of our existing home. It was on the corner of Route 119 and Rolfes Rd. It was a busy time for Mom and Dad as they were dealing with many contractors and the architect. Dad was very, very busy in the office; Marilyn was in college, and Bill was at Culver Military Academy. Dad needed someone to drive to various places, such as the lumber yard and hardware stores in nearby communities. Who did he choose to be his “gofer?” Me! His 13-year old daughter! So, he taught me to drive our Chevy coup which had a stick shift. In our tiny village in Ohio there were no policemen, so I did quite a bit of driving at an early age with no fear of getting a ticket. Many of my friends, who were farmers, had learned to drive tractors and farm machinery at the age of 13 or earlier. The good that came out of this is that I was allowed at age 14 to drive to the nearby drive-in outdoor theater with my friends.

During the big Thanksgiving Blizzard of 1950, we had about 20-30 inches of snow. The winds were strong and produced heavy drifting and all the roads were closed. The heavy winds had blown over the electric utility poles so there was no electric service. The workers had plastered the walls of our new house the day before the blizzard. The electricity was off; the house did not have heat, so the plaster was going to freeze and crack. Dad had a dilemma. How does he get heat in the house immediately? Our horse, Lady, and my older sister came to the rescue. Marilyn, home on Thanksgiving break from college, was selected to ride Lady to the new house. Dad saddled Lady with food and overnight supplies and sent Marilyn on the half-mile journey through the heavy snow drifts. Marilyn was successful in riding Lady to the new house and used the garage as a temporary stable. She kept the house above



JANET WITH RAG CURLS IN HAIR CIRCA 1946



JANET WITH RAG CURLS IN HAIR. UNCLE CARL THOUGHT I LOOKED LIKE JUDY GARLAND AND OFTEN CALLED ME "JUDY." CIRCA 1948

freezing by burning wood in the fireplace. She kept feeding wood into the fireplace throughout the night, sleeping on the floor. The roads were partially cleared the next day. Yes, some plaster cracked but Marilyn and Lady saved the day. This was before cell phones. I can only imagine how my dad and mom worried that night and how happy they were when Marilyn and Lady returned safely.

## PHOTO CONTEST / HAIR STYLE

I am told that I was pretty when I was a young child. In 1937 Mom entered my picture in a Montgomery Ward contest when I was about 4 months old and my picture won a cash prize. Mom often talked about this contest.

Mom often put my hair in rags. She used strips of cloth and rag-rolled sections of my hair. It's still used today as a no-heat natural way to make curls. In the morning after removing the rags, Mom did not comb my hair but left the sections in tight single curls. I had about 6 or 8 tight curls on my head.

## A VISIT TO THE DENTIST

Why did my children hate to go to the dentist? Let me tell you the ways. Because we had free dental care in the country where my parents and sister lived, we traveled there from Dayton regularly. My dad and Dr. Bernard, a dentist, both being doctors, treated each other's families at no cost. My children recall a quid pro quo for their dad's legal services and Dr. Bernard's dental services. My sister and I both had five children each, all being treated by Dr. Bernard.

Dr. Bernard had a one-person office which was located in the front room of his brick house built on a rolling hill in the small town of St. Henry. Dental hygienists were not in abundance at this time. He wore a wrinkled suit and always had a friendly smile. When he finished working on one child, he'd clasp his hands together and say, "Who's next?" My children who remained in the waiting room cringed and said, "Not me. You go ahead." Children with fear in their eyes!

My sister and I didn't learn until years later that Dr. Bernard didn't give Novocain to children. Our children received fillings without the area being anesthetized. Today our adult children teasingly accuse us of child abuse. These children are doctors, a lawyer, and professionals, and they haven't brought us to court yet. I can't complete this topic unless I tell you another story about how I have emotionally maimed three of my sons for life.



JANET FOUR MONTHS OLD. THIS PHOTO WON \$10 IN A MONTGOMERY WARD PHOTO CONTEST IN 1937.

Marilyn always planned field trips for our children. On a “dentist day” Andy, Mark, and David had a tour of a local slaughter house. While several of the children were at the dentist, the boys saw a cow slaughtered from beginning to end. They have vivid memories of the shooting of a cow. It was a traumatic experience for them. Are they still traumatized today? To my knowledge, my sons still eat meat, so they aren’t as emotionally scarred as they pretend to be.

As I picture Dr. Bernard standing in his office clasping his hands together as he eagerly awaits his next victim, I can also picture the cows standing in their stanchions mooing, “Not me, please. You go ahead.” I don’t imagine those cows received Novocain either before they were hit by the bullet.



MY MOTHER WRITES: "AFTER GIVING IT MUCH THOUGHT WE WENT AHEAD, IN 1950, WITH PLANS TO BUILD A NEW HOUSE. HAVING THE OFFICE NEXT TO THE HOUSE HAD BEEN CONVENIENT FOR ED ALL THESE YEARS BUT IT WAS ALSO DEPRIVING US OF A LOT OF PRIVACY. SO WE DECIDED TO HAVE THE HOUSE AND THE OFFICE IN SEPARATE LOCATIONS. AFTER SELLING THE PROPERTY TO ST. JOHN PARISH, THE OFFICE BUILDING WAS MOVED A QUARTER MILE WEST ON LAND WE HAD PURCHASED FROM TONY VOSKUHL.



# PLACES



## OLD HOUSE

From birth until high school I lived in a two-storied wooden-structured house which had Dad's doctor's office attached to it. It was located at 8459 State Route 119 west of St John church in Maria Stein. We had a big two-storied barn, an out-house, and a dog house which housed our beagles. When I was a very young girl, a small indoor bathroom was added to the rear of the kitchen. It had a small sink, toilet, and bath tub. All six of us shared this tiny bathroom.

As a second bathroom we used the outhouse which was located in the rear of our property. Instead of toilet paper we used pages from the Sears-Roebuck catalogue which was rather rough. We had an apple tree near the outhouse which mainly produced rotten apples. With a good throw, one could pick up an apple and throw it through the ventilation design opening which was in the top front of the outhouse. I remember being bombarded by those rotten apples. In fact, sometimes I escaped Bill and friends by locking myself in the outhouse. That's not an ideal place to hide! So called "Honey-Dippers" came regularly to empty the contents of the outhouse. On Halloween it was somewhat common to tip over outhouses as a trick.

During the time we lived in our old house, the US mail was not delivered. We lived in the tiny village of Maria Stein. The town did not have a stop light, a police department, a mayor or town council. It housed Menker's Grocery Store whose front section housed the post office and many personal mail boxes. Mail came twice a day so we children were sent there to retrieve our mail twice a day. The grocery store was not self-service. Often when we got



JANET AT AGE 18 MONTHS WITH HER WAGON AND TOY DOLL. NOTE COAL CHUTE IN BACKGROUND WHERE COAL WAS DELIVERED INTO THE CELLAR

the mail, Mom would give us a grocery list which we handed to the grocer. Pete Menker often had to use a long pole, which had a crab clasp on the end of it, to retrieve cans on the high shelves. We bought vinegar by bringing our jug to be refilled from a large barrel. The price for the groceries was written in a ledger, and we would get billed once a month. No cash register. No calculator. Much trust by/in the grocer.

Our next-door neighbor owned Gagel's Hardware Store which was in the center of town. There was the Knight's Hall, Gast's Pub, Goecke's small shoe and shoe-repair store, and Joe Goecke's place which sold gas. The western portion of Maria Stein had a grain elevator and a bar.

All stores and businesses closed on Sundays because of the blue laws. Blue laws were designed to enforce religious standards. Some blue laws are still enforced today; in Ohio one can't buy alcohol on Sunday mornings.

Our house had an old coal furnace in the dank cellar that provided our heat. We had a "stoker" furnace. Once every day and twice during extreme weather, the furnace had to be cleaned. This involved opening the fire chamber and grate and with the assistance of a long metal poker, pushing all the ashes through the grate into a collection pan underneath. Dad transferred these ashes into metal pails which he then used to cover the driveway. These ashes, called clinkers, were very sharp. As a child I walked bare feet almost all summer. Many times I stubbed my toes, but I still continued to walk without shoes.

I had many injuries on my knees when I fell on our driveway, where I liked to play. The scars from these knee injuries piled on top of each other. I remember how happy we were to get an automatic stoker.

Besides the furnace in the cellar, Mom had her canned goods on shelves. I particularly loved her home-canned peaches. She made strawberry and grape jam. Every year she went through a long process of making sweet pickles. Big crocks of cucumbers were soaked in vinegar, water, sugar, salt, and mustard seed and then transferred to another crock with a different liquid. Everything Mom canned came out of our garden, and Dad's patients often gave him some vegetables or fruit grown in their gardens. Sometimes, it was their only payment for Dad's services. I still miss the acidic taste of our homegrown tomatoes which we grew in abundance.

Dad enjoyed working in the garden after office hours, and he needed his kids to assist him. We'd grow many rows of potatoes which we stored in the cellar. Corn, radishes, endive, leaf lettuce, rhubarb, tomatoes—we grew it all. Working in the garden was not my favorite chore. One time Bill went wild with his hoe and hoed me in the head. You would think that those stitches in my scalp would have kept me out of the garden. No way.

Dad was adamant about keeping our yard looking green and free of weeds. Often my job was to cut the dandelions and buckhorns that were plentiful. We did not use insecticides at that time. Also, our lawnmower was a push mower.

We did not have heat in the upstairs three bedrooms. Bill's bedroom and the bedroom that Rosann and I shared were so cold in the winter that sometimes the water in the holy water fonts, which hung on the wall, froze. The rooms were blistering hot in the summer. Therefore, we didn't spend much time in our bedrooms during the day. Marilyn's room had a grate in it, so some heat from downstairs flowed into her bedroom. Dad stored his extra large bottles of medicine in her closet; in that way the medicine did not freeze. Dad did not write prescriptions; he had the medicines in his office. On the third floor we had a large attic where many items were stored.

Our house, built in the early 1900's had transoms over the doorway. Transoms were used to allow passage of air and light between rooms even when doors were shut. They were over-door windows that opened and closed. I remember my brother Bill throwing balls through these transoms.

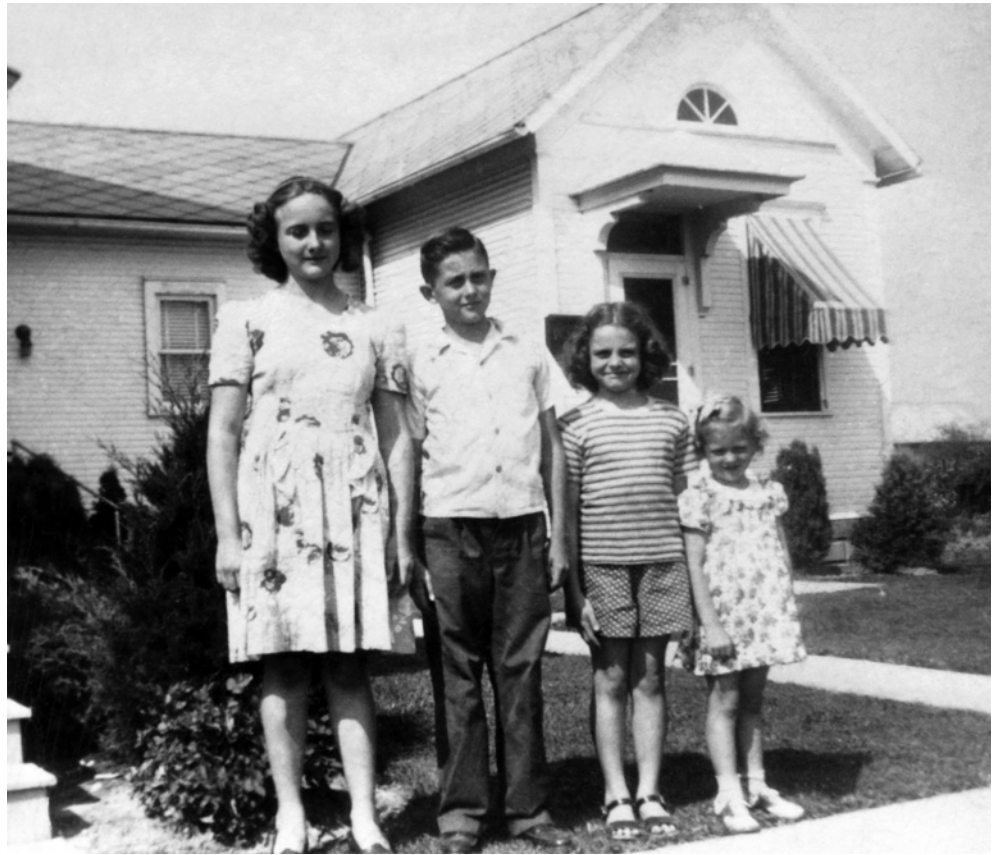
## DAD'S OFFICE

Dad's office was attached to our house by a breeze-way or porch. His

patients exited the office by passing through this porch, which was often my play area. Sitting on our front porch was like being on display while the patients walked through our front yard and entered the waiting room to the office. Many women did not drive, so their husbands drove them to the office. They parked parallel to the road in front of our house. These men bided their time by watching us play ball, work in the garden, and ride our horse, Lady. Dad didn't take appointments, so people, in general, had a long wait. The lack of privacy didn't bother me, as I was accustomed to it. My mom became perturbed when patients would knock on our dining room window as they were exiting the building. They wanted to say hello to Alfrida.

Many times when we were noisy in the back yard, dad knocked on the window or hollered out the office window telling us to quiet down. When dad spoke, we obeyed. You bettcha.

When I got older I felt like a "big shot" when Dad asked me to help him in the office. He was strict and exact in how he wanted things done. The office had a waiting room, two consultation rooms, a drug room, and a multi-purpose room. The drug room, where I worked, had the smell of cigarette smoke as Dad was a chain smoker. Dad, like most country doctors, gave the desired medicine to his patients; he rarely wrote prescriptions. I had to count pills and put them in a small envelope. I poured liquid medicine from a big jug into a small bottle, all exactly the way Dad had taught me. To my wonderment, one time I had to stuff flour into capsules. I kept quiet about this, but Dad always mentioned that a portion of his patients didn't need the medication they demanded. Patients returned their empty bottles to the office, so it was our job in the house to wash, steam, and dry these bottles for future use.



MARILYN, BILL, JANET, ROSANN CIRCA 1943

Sometimes his office nurse, Julia, was not able to work, so I stepped up in importance as her replacement. I can still smell the ether Dad administered when he removed tonsils on Saturday mornings. I can smell the musty aroma of a cast Dad was removing. I couldn't look while he was suturing a wound. Yes, I felt a close bond with my dad when I helped him in the office. Dad was not one to show affection or give compliments, so I spent my entire life trying to win his favor. He was a typical German!

In Dad's early years as a doctor, he waited in his office for patients to appear. Later, he was extremely busy and on call all the time. Seems all of Dad's energy was exerted in his job. He didn't have many leisure hours for us children. For a time, he did not accept new patients. Later, when I gave birth to Cindy and Andy, my doctor did not arrive at the hospital in time to deliver them. I thought of all the times my dad had been called in the middle of the night to make sure he would be in attendance for a birth. Dad spent many long hours at the hospital waiting for a mother to deliver. My doctors did not.

## NEW HOUSE

In the late 40's dad wanted to build a new house, but the local farmers refused to sell their precious farmland. Dad had at least three lots where he would like to build, all on Route 119. He was extremely upset as he thought that being their doctor, who had given so much to the community, at least one farmer would sell a lot to him. At about that time he experienced a personal tragedy as his brother, George, died unexpectedly of a heart attack. This was very hard on Dad at a time when he felt unappreciated by his community.

Dad gave serious thought about moving to Cincinnati and taking over my Uncle George's medical practice. All of dad's siblings lived in the Cincinnati area. He looked at George's finances and saw that his patients were not paying their bills as dad's patients were. When word



ROSANN MOWING LAWN AT NEW HOUSE ON ROLFES ROAD IN MARIA STEIN. HOUSE COMPLETED IN SPRING OF 1951

got around town that dad was contemplating a move to Cincinnati, some farmers took immediate and direct action. Years later Marilyn found out a secret, which was supposed to be buried forever. A group of Maria Stein men met in the woods secretly and put pressure on Henry Streaker to sell Dad a lot. So he did. I never heard what

the consequences would have been if Henry Streaker had not done so. We moved into our new house in April of 1951. Our lot had farmland on the south and east sides, so we often had cows grazing near our property.

My parents both died in 1990 when I was 53 years old.

That same year Jim's mother died, Jim and I married, three of my children married, and it was the first year I taught at Ferguson Junior High in Beavercreek. That was a momentous year.

After the death of my parents Dr. Jim Schwieterman, my nephew, and his family bought this solid brick house. Some years later, the house imploded and was knocked off its foundation by an explosion, caused by a gas leak of a propane tank. Luckily no one was injured. Dr. Jim tore down the badly-damaged house and built another house which looks a lot like the original.



WINTER AT THE NEW HOUSE

## CHURCH

I grew up in a small community where everyone was Catholic. All of our lives were entwined around the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 40s and 50s Roman Catholic nuns taught in our local public school, so in a way, religion was taught in our school. This basis of a strong religious background has stayed with me throughout my life. In my childhood, important days were First Holy Communion, Confirmation, Solemn Communion, May Day, and other religious holidays.

St. John Catholic Church, a block from our house, is where I was baptized, confirmed, and married. The priest said the Mass in Latin in this magnificent Gothic church. On my First Communion day I wore a white satin dress and lace head veil and carried a new white prayer book and white pearl rosary. At that time we were not permitted to eat or drink anything after midnight if one was to receive Holy Communion on the following morning. I remember my parents covering all the water faucets in our house with towels in order to keep me from accidentally drinking water before my First Communion. Many of our relatives came to partake in this wonderful, holy, and important celebration. It was a special day for all of us second-graders when we received the sacrament of Holy Communion.

I remember often climbing up the steep open steps to the bell tower of the church. Dickie, the teenage bell ringer, was probably not allowed to have an 8-year old accompany him in the climb of these treacherous steps to the top, where he pulled the ropes connected to the bells.



JANET, FIRST HOLY COMMUNION, 2ND GRADE IN 1944.

When someone in the community died, Dickie pulled the ropes of the bells equal to the age of the deceased. When the bells tolled other than at noon and at 6 pm, we knew someone had died, so we stopped what we were doing and counted. Our beagles howled incessantly when the bells were ringing.

The cement sidewalk around the church grounds was my favorite place to roller skate. It had smooth and even concrete and was much smoother for skating than the rough sidewalks leading from our house to town. My roller skates were attached to the soles of my hard shoes. A key tightened the skate to the shoes. Misplacing this important key was a common occurrence at our house; while skating I tied it to a shoelace which I placed around my neck. Still this key got misplaced often.

When our class went to church each school day, we sat as a class with our nun teachers watching over us. I think the girls sat on the right side of the aisle and the boys sat

on the left. During Mass I remember making stick people figures with my handkerchief, which we called hankies. I became adept at folding this hankie to make figures. I wish I could remember how to do this "trick" today. Many of us went to Communion every day. Some of the buses arrived too late for my farmer friends to attend mass. Many of them had risen early to milk the cows by



JANET'S CONFIRMATION, BACK ROW — BETTY THIEMAN VALLO, MOM, AUNT OLIVE THIEMAN, FRONT ROW — JANET AND ROSANN. 1946



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH WITH GRADE SCHOOL IN FOREGROUND. SCHOOL HELD GRADES 1 THROUGH 12. MARIA STEIN, OHIO

hand, to collect eggs, and tend their chores. We “townies” walked to school and usually received Communion. I have vivid memories of being permitted to eat my cold breakfast sandwich during first period religion class. I still relish a good egg sandwich today, especially if it’s cold.

During my early years the church had a law that said women’s heads had to be covered. We wore a small doily or lace head veil coverings which we pinned to our hair with bobby pins. On Easter Sunday we always were decked out in a new hat, dress, and purse.

Adults in the parish were required to pay pew rent. We children sat in the front pews, so Dad only had to pay pew rent for him and Mom. At the designated hour, the parishioners would bid on what pew they wanted. The pews in the rear of the church were the most popular and rented for a higher rate. “People watchers” wanted the back pews.

For most of our meals, we had meat, potatoes, and a garden vegetable and we always had bread on the table. We rarely had fresh fish of any kind. Church law stated that we were not permitted to eat meat on Friday. Our Friday meals usually consisted of tomato soup, toasted cheese sandwiches, tuna casseroles, and delicious crispy macaroni and cheese casseroles. Sometimes we had pieces of bread soaked with warm milk for lunch.

## THE PRECIOUS BLOOD CONVENT AND RELIC CHAPEL

The Precious Blood Convent and relic chapel were one-half mile from St. John Church and school. Whenever our Cincinnati relatives visited us, they wanted to go to the relic chapel to have the relics explained. This was a sacred place which held the second-most number of relics in the country. If we were lucky, we could hear the nuns chanting in the chapel which was



MARIA STEIN CONVENT AND RELIC CHAPEL, BUILT 1846

adjacent to the holy relics. For many, many years the nuns had 24-hour adoration in this chapel. Dad was their doctor. When Dad made house calls to the convent, he always had one of us children accompany him, but we stayed in the car. Did he bring us children along to maintain his respectability? He never said. I remember that he gave several cases of beer to the nuns at Christmas every year. This was

a surprise to me as a young girl. I never imagined that under that heavy robe and their habit, there was a normal woman. My friend saw a nun in the grocery store and was surprised that she even ate food!

When we were in the eighth grade, the good Sisters of the Precious Blood took us girls to Salem Heights in Dayton which, at that time, is where girls began to study to be a nun at the age of 13 or 14. It was a recruiting effort which didn't produce any future nuns from my class. What I do remember is that they measured all of us for a uniform, in case we decided to attend the convent in the 9th grade. I did my best not to laugh when they measured me because I knew their recruiting effort, in my case, was futile.

## SCHOOL

I went to St. John Public School, which was across the street from St. John Church, for 12 years. We had Precious Blood nuns as our teachers during grades 1 through 6. With these nuns as teachers, we received an excellent grade school education. All the students in our school were Catholic, so we gave little thought to the "religion in the public school" issue. Of course, this all changed later.

The grade school and high school were in the same 2-story old brick building. We did not have a kindergarten class. Grades 1, 2, and 3 were in one room with one teacher; grades 4, 5, and 6 in another room; and grades 7 and 8 in another room. During my first three years at St. John School Sister Mary Ambrosine taught my class of 10 students and also two other grade





ST. JOHN'S SCHOOL IN MARIA STEIN, OHIO. GRADES 1, 2 AND 3. 1942-1943. JANET - 2ND ROW, END ON RIGHT. BILL - TOP ROW, 5TH FROM LEFT.

levels in the same room. We received a good basic education in grade school but that was not the case in high school. I started high school with 40 in my class and graduated with 29. Many farmers, especially boys, quit school at the age of 16 to help on the farm. All freshmen were in the same English, Math, Science, and History classes. We didn't have an art or physical education teacher. When I was a freshman, Dad and some other parents put pressure on the school board to offer a foreign language to those of us who were planning to attend college. It was a fact that none of the school board members had ever attended college, much less received their high school degree. So it happened that eight students in my class received two years of Spanish; after those two years they discontinued offering Spanish for awhile. These two years of Spanish had a profound effect on my life, as I later became a Spanish teacher and loved every minute of it.

Those of us who went to college were poorly prepared for the rigors of college courses. Those who went on to secretarial jobs did extremely well. Our entire class was required to take two years of Typing and one year of Bookkeeping. Some took two years of Bookkeeping and Shorthand, which was in demand at that time. Future secretaries took Shorthand, an abbreviated symbolic writing method that increases speed and brevity of writing. The process of writing in shorthand is called stenography. Secretaries took dictation by using shorthand. The men who went into the Armed Services, including my husband Andrew, benefited greatly by having had typing and some other business courses.

My sister Marilyn was the first female from St. John School to attend and graduate from college; I was the second female. Rosann, four years younger than me, and her classmate, were the third and fourth females to attend college.

We always wore dresses, skirts and tops to school. Never slacks. In grade school many of the girls wore ugly tan thick stockings under their dresses. I was always grateful that my mom allowed me to go “bare legged” to school in the winter. In about 1961, when I was teaching at Starling Jr. High in Columbus, we were finally permitted to wear slacks in the classroom.

In school our desks were bolted to the floor, each having holes for ink wells. I remember filling my fountain pen from ink bottles, but not from the desk bottles. Later came the ball point pen. Ink from fountain pens smeared, so we were happy when they invented ball point pens.

We were not permitted to chew gum in school. More than a few times the teacher would say, “Miss Willke, are you chewing gum?” I guess I was not a discreet gum chewer.

We did not have a lunch room, so I would walk home from school to a lunch prepared by Mom. Most of the students were farmers, so they packed their lunches and ate on the gym bleachers. I envied them as they had sandwiches made with homemade bread. After lunch we rode on the merry-go-round or teeter totter when we were younger and would play softball or basketball when we were older.

When I was in high school, our history teacher asked me to drive Mary Jane, one of my female classmates, home, which was in St. Sebastian. I didn’t ask him why he asked me to do this rather unusual task. So, I took Mary Jane home as directed, dropped her off, and returned

to class. The teacher asked, “Where is Mary Jane?” I responded, “At home.” I didn’t know that the see-through blouse she was wearing was too explicit, and she was supposed to change blouses and return to school with me. I can’t imagine a teacher today asking a student to do this because of all the litigation and liability. In my last years of teaching we were instructed to not even touch our students.



ROSANN AND JANET. POHLMANN FARM ACROSS THE STREET FROM OUR HOUSE. 1942

## POHLMANN FARM

The Pohlmann farm was across the street from our house. Sitting in our front yard we could watch their pigs wallow in the mud and we could hear the flapping of their feeders. We enjoyed the taste of the farm-fresh eggs and milk although we experienced a problem. When Celie Pohlmann filled our milk bottle jars, she first skimmed off the dead flies floating on top of the milk in her large container. Also, the eggs had straw and



RICHARD POHLMANN FARM HOUSE CIRCA 1927.

chicken manure pasted on them. When my parents found out about the flies in the milk, they were quite concerned. Dad asked the two local grocers if they would please stock pasteurized milk. Eventually, Gast Pub stocked pasteurized milk for our family.

When word got around that Dr. Willke was not drinking the local raw milk, the farmers were not happy. Sometime later, the health department required that farmers transport their milk to dairies, who bottled and pasteurized the milk. Some farmers today still drink raw milk, but they can't sell it to the consumer.

Bill often helped on the days that Pohlmanns butchered hogs and beef cattle, also on threshing days. A threshing machine removes the seeds from the stalks and husks of grain. Farmers worked very hard. Often I'd see the farm helpers sitting in the Pohlmann kitchen having a mid-morning or mid-afternoon lunch consisting of home-cured meat on delicious homemade bread. I envied them having homemade bread.

Another blow to the farmers was the beginning of artificial butter called oleo or margarine. When one purchased a block of margarine it was white. It contained a capsule of yellow food coloring that could be kneaded into the margarine by hand. The farmers did not want margarine to have the same color as butter. Consumers liked margarine because it was less expensive and easier to spread than butter. The farmers, protecting their milk and butter supply, lobbied hard to keep the capsule in margarine. Wisconsin, a dairy state, held on to this concept for many years, but Ohio and other states later permitted oleo that looked more like butter.

# EARLIER YEARS



## PHONE SYSTEM

We had one phone, a black rotary dial phone in our house. Most of my friends had party-line phones in their homes. Two or four families shared the same phone line, each having its own ring tone. One could pick up the phone and listen to what his/her party-line neighbors were saying. My friends and I rarely talked on the phone. If we did, we had very short conversations getting “down to business” quickly. No unnecessary chatting. There was a rumor that some women had the habit of listening to other people’s conversations. This caused a lot of conflict among neighbors as they knew when someone was listening to their so-called private conversation.

We had a one-party phone because Dad was a doctor. He needed to be on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. At that time he didn’t share a practice with other doctors. The same phone number, 912, was used in the office and the house. We were constantly told, “Get off the phone.” We had to keep the phone line open because some mother might be starting labor pains or there was an accident or other emergency. No pagers. No cell phones. No caller ID, no iPhones. If we all left the house, we needed a “phone sitter.” Consequently, one of us had to stay at home or Dad would pay Mrs. Voskuhl to “phone sit.” Dad always left a number where he could be reached, even at a movie theater or restaurant. Also, he left the phone number where

he could be reached at the Coldwater Hospital.

As I got older, I realized that I hated to talk on the phone. My sister said the same thing. I would cut conversations short, eager to “get off the phone.” I had not learned the art of carrying on a polite conversation on the phone.

Now 70 years later, things have changed.



JANET DRINKING FROM HAND PUMP IN BACK YARD HOUSE IN 1937



FRONT ROW: ROSANN, MARILYN, BACK ROW — JANET, BILL. CIRCA 1945

My dear sister calls and talks and talks and talks. She usually starts out our conversation saying, "I have nothing to talk about." And then we proceed to talk about that nothing for an hour. Yes, things have changed.

## MY EARLIEST MEMORIES

My earliest memory is sitting in a large bucket seat up in the air near a telephone line which was in front of our house. Apparently, the telephone technicians asked my mom if they could take me up in their utility bucket. My memory says I was hanging from a telephone line. Couldn't be so. Well, I'm guessing the bucket was attached to a truck. The bucket was swinging, which terrified me.

Another early experience is dressing up in a Halloween costume when I was four years old. Bill's first grade teacher had asked my mom to bring me to school dressed in a Halloween costume. Mom and I walked to school and waited in the hallway until Bill's teacher called me into the classroom where the first, second and third graders were. I was the mystery guest of the day. The students had to guess who it was in the costume. Well, Bill was shocked to find out that it was his little sister.

Another pre-school memory is when I fell out of our car when we were driving through Chickasaw. In the 1940's Mom drove a Chevy coup that had space for two small children's chairs behind the front seat. These chairs were not attached to the floor, so we had a rocky ride when Mom turned the corner or went around a steep curve. On this particular day I was seated in the front seat when somehow the door opened and I toppled onto the frigid snow-packed street. Luckily it was winter and I was wearing ski pants (snow pants) when I fell out of the moving car. I first bounced on the running board which broke my fall and then landed on the street. My guardian angel was with me that day as Mom quickly stopped the car. A very frightened Mom picked up this equally frightened child. She hugged me for a long time when she found out I was not injured. Car seats and seat belts didn't come on the scene until much later.

Also, I remember visiting the brothers of my Aunt Alma Kleinhenz when she came into town from Columbus. These rustic-looking bachelors, who we called the Bruns brothers, lived in a farmhouse that did not have electricity or any modern conveniences. We usually didn't venture beyond the wallpapered kitchen which I remember vividly: icebox refrigerator (which held a large block of ice), a wood stove for cooking, canning supplies on shelves, oversized white kitchen sink, pie safe (a cupboard with rectangular metal pierced panels), hanging cast iron skillets, oilcloth tablecloth, and kerosene lamps. The Great Depression of the 1930s left many people penniless. Electricity was wired into many city homes during this era, but rural farmhouses were some of the last to see this modern improvement.

We often bought our meat, especially fresh and smoked sausage, at the Busse's Meat Market in Fort Loramie. The kind butcher would give us kids a raw hot dog to eat while Mom was shopping for meat.

In our back yard we had a pump with a handle which we pumped to get spring water. I have a picture of me about three years old having my face under the spigot drinking water while someone was pumping the water. I guess the usual tin cup was not there that day so

I had to get my face under the water. I can still feel the metal taste of that cup. I guess people didn't fear the germs on that "community" cup.

## FEARS

To the rear of our house was a large field used by farmers. The field was loaded with mice, which wandered on to our property. They found the perfect spot under our kitchen sink near the trash can. When I threw something in the trash can, I closed my eyes and swiftly threw the trash in the can. To this day I have fear of mice! Mom would give us 5 cents for every dead mouse we trapped. I wasn't in that dire of a need for a nickel, but I do remember emptying mice from traps. Not my favorite activity. Besides the fear of mice, I also had several other fears. At our school we had a narrow balcony overlooking the stage and gymnasium. I was always worried that its supports would break loose and fall. Another fear is when my mom would drive her Chevy coup parallel to the canal on the road to Minster. For the longest time, I was concerned that we would end up in the canal.

## MORE CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

We first had a washing machine where Mrs. Voskuhl, our helper, rinsed the clothes by putting them through a ringer. An automatic washing machine was a great invention. To iron most of our clothes we had a mangler, where she put clothes through hot rollers. We did not have a dryer during my younger years. We hung our wet clothes on the clothes line in our back yard. When the weather was inclement, we hung clothes in our utility room, which was a room off the kitchen.

In our barn we raised chickens, which today we call free range chickens. I must tell you the gruesome details of how Mom killed our chickens. She would catch the chicken and twist its head off! The remaining bloody body would flop about our back yard afterwards. A frightening experience for a young girl! The chicken would be plunged into boiling water and then defeathered. Most families in our area had a traditional Sunday chicken dinner.

Mom always did a lot of cooking as Dad and we children were home for all meals because we walked home from school. Dad's office nurse ate with us. Mrs. Voskuhl ate with us. Even the painter, carpenter, and other workmen ate with us. We had little privacy. Julia Feltz, Dad's office nurse, walked through our house to use our bathroom.

In my early childhood, we only had family-owned restaurants, and it was a very rare occasion when our family or other families in our area went out to eat. It was before the days of pizza and McDonalds.

Some of my favorite memories of Mom's cooking are her donuts. She prepared the dough, rolled it flat, and cut it out with a donut cutter. She fried the donuts in oil (probably lard) and then rolled them in powdered sugar. Yummy! She and other women always made delicious pies using lard. Crisco came later. The favorite snack of popcorn was popped in a regular sauce pan, and on special occasions, coated with caramel sauce. We called this carmel corn.

When Marilyn was a young teenager, my parents asked her to make strawberry jam when the strawberries ripened in the garden. They went on a long trip somewhere, and Mrs. Voskuhl

watched over us. Well, when you make jam, one has to stir the hot mixture at all times. Marilyn didn't think this was necessary, so she did not stir the jam. Needless to say, the entire batch had to be thrown out. I think of Marilyn every time I stir the pot of my homemade strawberry jam. Yes, I follow the directions.

There was a custom called "belling," a noisy mock serenade. When a person married for a second time, neighbors and relatives would go to a newly married couple's home at dark. They would bang pots and pans and make loud noises, all to keep the newlyweds awake. The couple was then supposed to invite the adults to come inside for a party. Perhaps this was a German custom.

Every year we had a festival (called picnic at that time) on the grounds of St. John School. Dad loved to play Chuck-A-Luck. Dad would place money on a paddle that showed numbers on three dice. A festival worker would spin a large wheel showing various combinations of dice. If the wheel dice and Dad's dice were identical, he won the pot. The day after a picnic, we would get up early and hunt for money that had dropped on the ground.

It was always my job to polish Dad's shoes every Saturday night. That also was the night that we all took a bath in our tiny bathroom. I am told that we children used the same bath water before we had a hot water heater.

## BARN / HORSE

Our barn had a small room we called the smoke-house. Dad converted this and another area into two stalls for our riding horses. He also cemented the main area, asking us four children to insert our footprints in a section of the cement floor. To this day our footprints



MY DAD, EDGAR J. WILLKE, WITH OUR HORSE, PRINCE CIRCA 1951

can still be seen. I was probably 4 or 5 years at this time, maybe 1940. Go check it out as it is still there in 2017.

The first horse Dad bought was named Lady, who was very gentle and easy-going. Later he bought Prince, who was frisky, unpredictable, and easily frightened. Dad loved to ride horses and needed an area in which to ride, so he bought a nearby vacant lot. Dad taught Lady to do various tricks such as to jump over bars set at various levels, and to sit on her haunches



at a child's table and eat grain. Dad and Bill went to rodeos, entering into the various competitions.

I could ride Lady any time I wanted, but that involved currying, bridling, and saddling her. Sometimes I would ride on the side of the road, and people would honk their horns, not knowing that horses can get spooked easily. This intrusion kept me from riding near cars.

Dad bought a surrey which we kept in our barn. Lady pulled this surrey at many events, such as weddings and anniversaries. Bill, in his brightly orange-colored shirt and his elegant black top hat, was the driver. Sadly, the surrey was demolished after the school borrowed it for Homecoming at a football game. When I look back, this surrey, which attracted lots of attention, was dangerous on busy highway Route 119.



HOMECOMING 1951. OUR SURREY WAS USUALLY PULLED BY OUR HORSE, LADY, WITH BILL AT THE REINS. QUEEN ESTHER HAUSFELD LATER BECAME MY SISTER-IN-LAW.

## DEPRESSION BABY AND THE VALUE OF OUR GARDEN

I was born in 1936, smack in the middle of The Great Depression. My dad had not established a large medical practice at this time so money was tight. Dad's patients often resorted to paying him with meat, fruits, and vegetables grown on their farms. Some of the frugal practices of my family during the depression and the war that followed carry on with me today.

Food was scarce at this time and we were indeed fortunate. We had a huge garden that provided us with much of our food. When Dad was finished in his office, which was attached to our house, he'd change his clothes, grab a hoe or rake and head for the garden. I spent many hours weeding our garden, helping Dad dig up potatoes, picking strawberries and grapes, and carrying refuse to our compost heap.

Our cellar was stacked with canned tomatoes, peaches, pears, corn, beans and pickles. Bushels of potatoes and apples lasted many months in the cellar. The purple plum grapes from the arbor made delicious grape jelly. Mom would boil the grapes, place them in a thin cloth bag, and squeeze out the juice. The strawberry patch made yummy strawberry for jam. The rhubarb made scrumptious rhubarb pie. We enjoyed radishes, endive, and lettuce. Also, I remember Mom and Mrs. Voskuhl, our household help, making soap using fat.



JANET RIDING LADY. I LEARNED TO DRIVE IN THE STICK SHIFT CAR SHOWN IN PHOTO.  
OUR GARDEN IS TO THE RIGHT. 1950

A smokehouse, a small room in our barn, contained mostly pork and some beef. These meats, which were cured with smoke, could be stored in the smokehouse for a year. I remember Mom's regular trips to the smoke house to salt the meat. In later years, this area became a stable for Prince, our second riding horse.

During the war years that followed the Great Depression, people were forced to be frugal, ingenious, and resourceful. We saved rubber bands, string, used old clothing for rags, reused aluminum foil, and hardly ever used paper towels and plastic bags. We found use for every bit of leftover food. Some of these frugalities still linger with me today. Check out how much toothpaste remains in my discarded tube. I bet you won't find one smidgen of toothpaste remaining. Yes, I save string.

## MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

As a young girl, I felt the worries and tensions of my parents. Every evening between six and seven o'clock they would sit by the radio in the dining room waiting to hear news that kept them updated on the war. Mom worried about her brothers (Arnold and Eddie) and her brothers-in-law (Hains, Irv and Dick). We heard later that Uncle Arnold fought in the Battle of the Bulge on December 27, 1944. I often saw Mom praying in front of a small homemade altar in our house. Lord, please return our soldiers home safely.

Although the war began with Nazi Germany's attack on Poland in September, 1939, the US did not enter the war until after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941. This date was two days before my fifth birthday. As a little girl, I felt the sadness that prevailed as my parents quietly chatted among themselves. These were solemn times.

Then began the ration book and war-bond stamps. The US entered the war against aggressive Germany, Japan and other countries. When I had some cash, I'd walk to Menker's store and buy stamps to be placed in my war-bond book. Stamps were sold in denomination as low as 10 cents. A book full of \$18.00 worth of stamps was valued at \$25.00 ten years later. Today we call these debt securities.

Ration books for some goods were handed out to each family. We needed stamps to accompany the money we spent on sugar, butter, meat, coffee, canned goods, shoes, nylons, gas, and tires. We salvaged scrap metal which was transformed into war machinery. We had scrap metal drives. We even saved the small amount of metal at the end of a tube of toothpaste. Women donated their nylons to be used for parachutes. Rubber products were needed.

During this time many men were drafted in the Armed Services. Every man on his 18th birthday was obligated to register for the draft. I remember my parents worrying when they found out that one doctor from Mercer County would be drafted. In the end Dad was deferred because he had four children. Dr. Schussler of St. Henry was drafted into the military. When Dr. Schussler returned from his tour of duty, he felt animosity toward Dad, who was not drafted.

Mom would sing us the song, "White Cliffs of Dover" which I still remember today. Words are "There'll be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover tomorrow, just you wait and see. There'll be love and laughter tomorrow when the world is free." I sang this song to my children; my son Jack says he sang it to his children.

On V-E Day, May 8, 1945, the war was finally over. On that day I remember cars going up and down Route 119 with their horns blaring. Celebrations were everywhere. Our boys would be coming home. Finally, there was peace.

Years later when I had four grown sons, I always was concerned about their having to fight in a war. Memories of World War II lingered with me, as there had been 416,800 military deaths. Unlike many mothers living during World War II, I was spared such heartbreaks.



# ACTIVITIES



## CAMP

During the summers we Willke children always went to camp. My parents wanted us to get out of our little community and experience a different culture. Also, my friends had to work on the farm during the summers. I spent many fun-filled summers at Fort Scott Camp near Hamilton, Ohio. Some summers I camped two weeks and some summers four weeks.

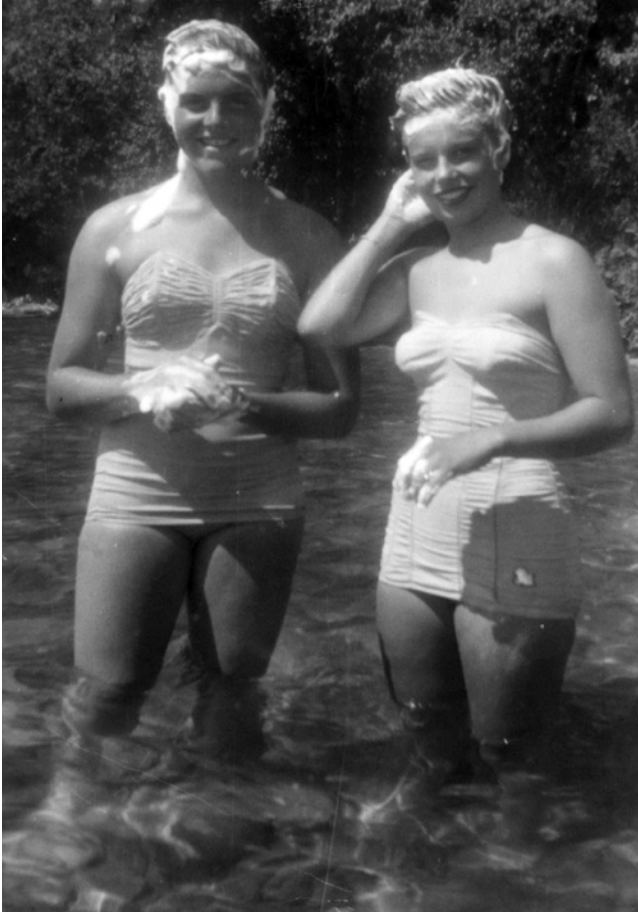
My favorite sport was swimming, so I looked forward to twice-daily swim lessons and once-a-day free swims. I became so advanced at an early age that I repeated the advanced swim lessons while waiting to turn age 14 when I was eligible to take Junior Life Saving. This is where I laid the groundwork for my love of swimming. As I write this at the age of 81, I swim laps three days a week.

Because of my back and leg pains, I am unable to walk much, so I am very appreciative that I can get my exercise by swimming laps and exercising in the pool.

At camp we rode horses, played tennis, volleyball, softball, deck tennis, and had arts and crafts. I loved camp, but being a country girl I didn't always fit in with the city girls, who had come to camp with their girl friends and I had come as a single. Sometimes, I felt



JANET AND ROSANN AT INDIAN BEACH CAMP, NORTHPORT, MICHIGAN. THIS WAS A 4-WEEK CAMP. 1953



JANET AND MARILYN KENNEDY WASHING HAIR AT FOUR-WAY LODGE, CENTRAL LAKE, MICHIGAN, AN 8-WEEK CAMP. 1952

I was outside the circle. But because I excelled in sports, I was always accepted on the playing field. Because of my success in sports, I had visions of majoring in sports education in college. I thank my dad for insisting that I not major in sports. In fact, he was very adamant in telling me that I couldn't major in nursing or physical education. Period. Dad always had the last word.

One vivid memory I have of Fort Scott is when I had a serious bout of poison ivy over my entire body. I saw the camp doctor who instructed a counselor to drive me to see Dr. Al Willke, the camp's go-to doctor in Cincinnati. It so happened that this doctor was my dad's younger brother. My Uncle Al was quick in notifying my parents that they needed to pick me up and take me home immediately. When Mom arrived at Fort Scott, she said that she did not recognize me because of all the poison ivy on my face. Needless to say, I was very allergic to poison ivy.

In early high school I went to an 8-week camp called Four-Way Lodge for Girls on Torch Lake in Michigan. I can still feel the frigid lake water; I prefer pool water any day.

The cabins seemed dark and damp, especially when it rained. A special event was a bus trip to Mackinac Island, a tourist resort where cars are forbidden.

I became friends with a lot of the girls because most came as a single. This camp was a bit expensive so most girls came from wealthy families. My sister, Marilyn, was a camp counselor there one summer.

*A CAMP MEMORY . . . Moistness in the air envelops my body as I snuggle under the rough, itchy Army blanket. The dark, dreary and rainy day brings shrouds of loneliness forcing its way into my psyche. Some of my cabin mates are shouting and laughing while playing cards on a foot locker used as a card table. Others are writing letters home. I curl up in my blanket in the unheated cabin awaiting the rain to cease and the rays of sunshine to appear, so I can attend lifesaving swim lessons. These past rainy days here in Orange Beach, Alabama, waiting for the rays of sun to appear remind me of this experience at 4-Way Lodge Camp on Torch Lake, Michigan.*

Another summer I went to Indian Beach Camp near Traverse City, Michigan for four weeks. I learned to sail on Houghton Lake that summer. The sailing was fun but we spent most of the summer learning the parts of the boat. No fun there. I can remember the two-day canoe trip down the river, especially the part in sleeping under our canoes. Sand was everywhere, including our peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches. Not my favorite activity. I did enjoy the rifle range and archery at the camps and generally excelled in most sports. At all camps we learned wonderful songs, which I still remember today. Singing songs by the fire and eating smores made me feel welcomed, warm and cared for. Oh, maybe a bit homesick too. Not too much though.

## GAMES AND HOBBIES

When I was a child, we didn't have a TV, computer, cell phone, iPhone or anything electronic. We had to be creative in keeping ourselves occupied. We had a huge side lot where our neighbors would congregate with us to play ball and other games. We played soft-ball, hide-and-seek, tag, hop-scotch, mother-may-I, red rover, dodge ball, and jump rope. Throughout my childhood, I played checkers and card games, such as gin rummy, old maid and hearts. During heavy snowstorms, the older kids rolled snow into balls and piled them up to build a giant snow fort in the side yard. I felt like I was "a big girl" when they allowed me to spend time in the snow fort. As I sat inside the fort, I imagined that I was in a real igloo.

My favorite game was called Jacks. I spent many hours playing Jacks on the kitchen linoleum floor. This game involved a ball and 10 multi-pointed metal or plastic Jacks. One threw the ball in the air and then scooped up the Jacks in many different maneuvers. I became quite good at Jacks and challenged my siblings and friends. This game gave me strength on the interior side of my right hand. Today I can scoop things up easily and have good movement and strength in that part of my hand.

Pick-up sticks was another of my favorite past-times. One threw the pickup sticks in a pile on the floor. With another of these sticks, one tried to undo all the sticks without moving the other sticks that were entwined. We always had play dough in all colors. We always had a variety of sizes of spinning tops; it seems every Christmas would bring a new shiny and colorful spinning top.

I loved to play with cut-out dolls. They were stand-up cardboard doll-figures which I'd dress with the cut-out clothes and other accessories. From a booklet I'd cut out or punch out the dolls. The clothes and accessories had tabs on them, which I folded over the dolls. I dressed my paper dolls; today children dress their Barbie dolls.

We didn't purchase glue, so Mom helped me make paste. We would mix flour and water to make a paste mixture. I don't remember what I pasted, but I remember spending many hours working with the goeey mixture on the kitchen table. When I make gravy today, I think of the many pleasant hours spent playing with the flour/water mixture.

I loved to color in coloring books. We always had a lot of crayons in the house. I was good at staying within the lines. When I entered grade school, I was expected to draw free hand. No more lined coloring books for me! I had no innate art ability or instruction, so I was humiliated when my teacher pulled my ears as punishment because I couldn't draw a sunset to her satisfaction. To this day I cannot draw! The ear pulling incident at a young age had a great effect on me with

regard to art. It stunted any latent talent I might have had. As I write this at the age of 79, I have signed up to take a “Yes, you can draw” class. Is this really possible? I think the answer is “No.”

After school we’d play hide-and-seek with the neighbors, especially the Gagel children who lived next door. We’d play Store by first collecting empty boxes of cereal and other food containers. We’d set up a store pretending to sell these items. Most times our store was between the clothes lines with blankets and sheets as walls. Mom was good at saving all those food boxes for us.

I spent time painting on old boards in the upstairs of our barn. I don’t think Dad knew what I was using for paint; I was finger painting with the salve medication he had discarded from his office. Thank goodness I wasn’t tempted to paint on the beautiful antique walnut bed stored nearby.

We would put on plays and presentations and charge people to attend these events. We thought we were quite creative in making up these plays; maybe our audience had a different opinion. Some of the best times in my life were when school was over and I played games with friends. The games would end only when I was called to eat or go to bed.

## HIGH SCHOOL EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES / SOCIAL

High school was a happy time for me. I had great friends, participated in many activities, and earned good grades. St. John High School was a small school so I had many opportunities to excel. I was a cheerleader for both basketball and football. I played the trombone in the concert and marching bands. At football games two of us cheerleaders were also in the marching band. We would cheerlead in our band trousers and sweater. At half-time we would put on our band jackets and march with the band. One of the perks for us cheerleaders was that we rode the bus with the team on nights we played away games.



JANET (4TH PERSON) AS CHEERLEADER FOR FOOTBALL IN 1951

Although we didn’t have a regular gym class at school, we were allowed to play on the basketball court at lunch time. We girls played half-court basketball at that time. The only school teams we had were boys’ football and basketball. Girls competitive sport teams came much later.

When I was a senior, I was voted to serve on the Homecoming



Court. The queen, my best friend Dolores Homan, was crowned at a football game. Everyone looked forward to junior and senior prom. The only students permitted to attend were the juniors and seniors in St. John High School. At that time I was going rather steady with Jim Rosselit of New Bremen, so I went to junior prom with a senior boy and senior prom with a junior boy. I was permitted to attend the New Bremen prom with Jim Rosselit.

I loved being in our class plays during my junior and senior years. We had a double cast so everyone who wanted to had a chance to participate.

I was editor of our yearbook my senior year. I graduated second in my class of 29 students. Don Eifert and I always seemed to compete with each other. He graduated first in our class and always seemed to beat me in being president of the band. Don is still a dear friend today as he always has been since high school. He lent me great support when Andrew was



JANET (2ND PERSON) AS CHEERLEADER FOR BASKETBALL IN 1952-53



HIGH SCHOOL. NOTE OUR SCHOOL CLOTHES. JANET, 3RD PERSON. MY TWO BEST FRIENDS, DOLORES HOMAN AND IRENE MESCHER ARE THE LAST TWO IN THE PHOTO.



JANET PLAYING BASKETBALL GOING IN FOR A LAYUP CIRCA 1953

ill and in the hospital. Don was a counselor at Oakwood High School, which was near where I lived and taught in Kettering. Today Jim and I visit often with Don and his wife Joni.

I had more than a few parties at our house which my classmates still remember today. We had a ping pong table in the utility room; I challenged my friends in ping pong as I was a serious contender. We were one of the few households who had a TV so it was an added attraction. My parents bought a TV in April 1951, and it only had one channel.

For many years we had the black and white TV which eventually increased to three channels. No alcohol was present at any of these parties.

In my freshman year we had a young, handsome history teacher who was also the football coach. It was during the Korean War, so he was drafted after the first semester. We missed having Mr. Speck as our teacher, but duty called.



MARIA STEIN SOFTBALL TEAM NAMED JINX. JANET — FIRST ROW, END. ROSANN — SECOND ROW, END. ESTHER HAUSFELD, RIGHT, (FUTURE SISER-IN-LAW) HOLDING TROPHY. JANET AND ROSANN'S DAD, DR. EDGAR WILLKE, COACH, 1952

Bill went to Culver Military Academy in Indiana for the last three years of high school. He excelled in three sports and served as captain of his football team. We visited Bill often at Culver, especially for basketball and football games. At times, Bill's friends would see me at the games and invite me to a dance that evening. I attended Culver's homecoming with Bill Adkins, son of a Coldwater doctor and friend of my parents.

During my teenage years I played softball on the girls' team, named The Jinx. Dad really enjoyed coaching us girls and teaching us the mechanics of softball. My future sister-in-law, Esther Hausfeld, was the very able catcher, and I was the short stop. We were a traveling team, playing teams of nearby towns. I had a good batting average although I wasn't an all-star short stop.

My friends and I went to many outdoor drive-in movie theaters. We inserted the speakers on the half-open window of the car. Two movies were usually featured, so during intermission it was the norm to buy popcorn, pop or candy bars. This was also a popular family activity.

Often, my girl friends and I would ride our bikes to St. Sebastian and other towns. Perhaps, we were scouting for boys. One time one of these boys asked me if I wanted to ride with him on his primitive motor bike. Of course, I said yes. Being a novice in the workings of a motor bike, I got a severe burn on my leg where it came in contact with the hot motor. No, I didn't tell Dad about it. I just suffered. Another time after one of our Jinx softball games, we had a party at Jane Bernard's barn in St. Henry. While opening a can, I got a severe gash on the inside of my thumb. I didn't show that to Dad either. I just suffered.

## SWIMMING

Swimming has been an important part of my life. It has enriched me physically, socially, and educationally. I worked at the New Bremen Pool during the summers when I was 17, 18, and 19 years old making 50 cents an hour. I had always excelled at swimming at camp where I earned my Junior and Senior Life Saving certificates.

I was thrilled to procure a job at the pool. Before the start of my second year at the pool, the manager asked me if I wanted to get my instructor's license so I could teach swimming lessons in the morning. So, I attended Camp Limberlost in LaGrange, Indiana for a week to obtain my certificates in swimming instruction, First Aid, CPR, and water rescue. First, the town officials had to give the OK to pay for a Mercer County resident to receive Auglaize County funds to attend the camp. I think their expenditure paid off. I set up a new swimming lesson schedule that was a gigantic success. The morning swim classes were, as usual, held for the children. I added classes for adults beginning at 5 pm. When



JANET AS LIFEGUARD AT NEW BREMEN SWIMMING POOL  
IN SUMMER OF 1952



JANET LIFE GUARDING AT NEW BREMEN POOL WITH CISSY HARRIS CIRCA 1952

the local newspaper spread the news that adult swim classes were available, we were inundated with adults who had never learned to swim. Registration brought more men and women than we could accommodate.

Elden Smith and Cissy Harris, also on staff, assisted me in teaching the bevy of non-swimmers. One vivid memory I have is seeing an adult male with his farmer tan on the high diving board ready to jump into the deep end of the pool. He felt confident in himself; I felt fear as he was a beginner and a big, muscular man. Rescuing him would have been a challenge, but, luckily, he did fine. After the last class, I received a multitude of gifts from my adult students. This is when I decided to major in education to become a high school teacher, maybe math or Spanish. I ended up majoring in English and Spanish.

I was the only one on staff qualified to teach life saving. At this time I was also playing short stop for the Maria Stein Jinx softball team. A base runner spiked me in the knee with her metal cleats as she was sliding into second base. The result was my being on crutches during testing day for my life saving students. My sister Rosann came to the rescue as she was certified in life saving. She played the part of the victim who needed to be rescued. In the past the students had to rescue me as the drowning victim in order to pass one segment of the test.

During my years at the pool I dated several New Bremen guys. One, Jim Rosselit, was my steady boyfriend for several years; we broke up when I was in my first (and only) year at Mt. St. Joseph College in Cincinnati. After my sophomore year at Miami University, Andrew Niekamp and his friends of St. Henry frequented the pool. The Coldwater pool was closer to St. Henry so why did they come to New Bremen? Hum. You know the rest of the story.

The pool, near the canal in downtown New Bremen, has been torn down. Today you can find the Crown Pavilion (of Indian Lake) in its place. It is a 100 year old building dismantled and restored and then installed at the site of the pool on West Plum.

## AILMENTS

Since childhood I have suffered from motion sickness, so I have avoided taking cruises or getting on many ships or boats. My mother and grandmother also suffered from motion sickness, so I guess I get it honestly. Like my mother, I am allergic to some flowers, incense, paint, and smoke.

# MUSIC



## EARLY YEARS

Music has always played an important part in my life. From childhood to adulthood it has enriched my life and provided multiple hours of enjoyment. My introduction to music was a WW II song “The White Cliffs of Dover” that my parents sang to us children. The feelings and meanings of the music have stayed with me throughout the years. My five uncles, Hains Landen Arnold Kleinhenz, Edwin Kleinhenz, Irv Klug, and Dick Stroh were fighting overseas at the time, so the song had great meaning.

Although I didn’t have a quality singing voice, I sang in the church choir during high school. I could read music, carry a tune, and harmonize by singing alto. I still remember the words and tunes of the songs I sang in the church choir. A wonderful experience! During my college years the organist recruited me to sing in the choir during Christmas Eve mass. It was a tradition to sing several Christmas carols in German. My mom and dad both spoke German in their homes during early childhood, but they never taught me. Still, German was familiar to me as I had grown up in a Germanic community.

When I went to camp every summer, I learned many fun and catchy tunes. This made me the life of the party and song leader when I returned home as my friends wanted to learn these interesting songs. I have fond memories of sitting around the campfire singing camp songs and roasting marshmallows. It was a highlight of summer camp. I can vividly remember some of those songs today.

In the late 1940s when I was at Fort Scott Camp, we were told that Al Jolson was coming to perform a concert. Of course, he didn’t appear. Al Jolson, known as “The World’s Greatest Entertainer,” was a white man and a talented comedian, actor and singer. He sang many popular songs, such as “Mammy” and “Swanee” appearing in blackface and accented large white lips. At that time it was not considered racially offensive. White men smearing their faces black and imitating African Americans had been common on American stage since the 1880s. I sang a good imitation of Al Jolson’s “Swanee,” but I didn’t blacken my face with burnt cork. Oh, how times have changed on this sensitive issue!

Music has been part of my life beginning in early childhood. My first instruments in the early grades were the tambourine and sticks. Then I began taking piano lessons. During the 5 or 6 years that I took piano lessons, Mom drove me to Minster to have instruction by Hilda Wernsing. I think Ms. Wernsing thought all her students would become concert pianists. We spent most of our time playing scales, concentrating on curving our fingers, correct posture, sitting on the edge of the piano seat, and learning chords. It would have been more enjoyable if we had played more popular pieces instead of concert-type music.



ST. JOHN HIGH SCHOOL BAND, 1951–52. JANET, 2ND LAST ROW, 7TH PERSON (WITH TROMBONE)

Mom required us to practice one-half hour a day. In spite of not practicing as much as I should have, I became good enough to play in recitals and also attend the Fort Wayne competitions. Playing the piano was a good background for instilling in me the love of music, and I thank Mom for that. She was persistent in having us excel at the piano. I can't say that practicing the piano one-half hour a day was always joyful, but it gave me a wonderful background to enjoy a lifetime of music. Throughout my life playing the piano has been a mixture of enjoyment, relaxation, and therapy. After playing the piano, I feel relaxed, happy and content.

I accompanied the high school choir on the piano. With my piano background, it was easier for me to learn to play the trombone in the high school band. In the seventh and eighth grade Marilyn Thobe and I took baton lessons and performed at the high school band concerts. I played in the concert and marching band for four years. Our band played at all the football games, parades, the county fair, and other events. Being in the concert and marching bands and being part of a group were important to me in my teenage years. I made many male and female friends, some of whom have remained friends throughout my life. Playing music was secondary to being with a great group of classmates. The camaraderie among band members was invaluable, as we all became good friends and worked toward a common goal. It introduced me to the sound of the variety of instruments, their tones and pitches. This background of band music has helped me to appreciate the sounds of individual instruments in today's orchestras, bands, and combos.

In about 1952, Mom took Rosann and me to New York City as she had previously done with Marilyn and Bill. Most memorable for me was seeing two Broadway stage musicals. We

saw Yul Brenner in *The King and I* and Julie Andrews in *My Fair Lady*. Even today, my greatest love is a good Broadway musical.

In high school, the fun part of going to local weddings was to square dance. If I had my preference, I'd dance every fast dance and square dance all night long. Often, a fellow would invite me to a wedding in their family, so he could have a dancing partner. I was ready, willing and able, even having my first date to a wedding reception. I was in the 9th grade when a young man came to our house the morning of his cousin's wedding asking me for a date that evening. My mom went to the office and asked my dad. As expected, Dad wanted to know who his parents were. So, I had my first date at age 13!

The bands at local weddings played mostly country music. We would dance slow dances, jitterbug to fast music, and also square dance. Weddings began at the 8:30 a.m. mass and the celebration continued throughout the day. Around 4 o'clock the farmers left to milk their cows and tend to their other animals. Then they'd return to the hall for a big supper of chicken, beef, gravy, homemade noodles, mashed potatoes, green beans, hot rolls and wedding cake. The real fun began when the music started up again for the evening.

On Sunday nights a live band played at Eldora, nicknamed Ma Shoes, in New Weston, a 3/4 hour drive from our house. My friends, Irene Mescher and Dolores Homan, begged our parents and siblings to take us to Ma Shoes so we could dance the night away. We girls always hoped a guy would ask us to square dance, jitterbug and slow dance. I met many nice young men from St. Henry and its surrounding communities. One of them, Andrew Niekamp, would become my husband and the father of our five children. He had just come home from the Army and was attending the University of Dayton and working nights full time at NCR. It was acceptable if a guy would ask a girl to "take her home." Seems rather odd today, but one of our main goals was to have a guy ask to take us home after the dance. We'd stop somewhere for a sandwich and head home. If we were lucky, he'd ask us for a date. There were dances on Saturday nights at the Eagles in Minster, some Sunday nights at Edgewater in Celina where big bands performed, and Sunday nights at Lindhaus Grove located on St. Route 65 between Newport and Ft. Loramie.

## MUSIC IN MY ADULT YEARS

When my children were growing up, I encouraged them to take piano lessons, hoping they, too, would learn to enjoy music. Cindy, Andy, Mark, Jack and David all took piano lessons which became a good basis for when they played a musical instrument. Several became quite accomplished. In the band Cindy played the French horn, Jack played the trombone, and Mark played the trumpet. During his senior year Mark was the field commander (drum major) of the Fairmont West High School Marching Band. As a mother I enjoyed all of their performances, concerts and competitions. Cindy said that she wanted to take piano lessons until she became as good as I was. Quite a compliment! Music was a wonderful thing to share with my children, and I missed this when they graduated.

During the sad years when my husband, Andrew, was hospitalized, I remember playing "You'll Never Walk Alone" and other favorites on the piano in our living room.

Music that always touches my heart is Mexican mariachi music. Mariachis are strolling musicians playing the trumpet, violin and bass and sometimes the marimba. During my

studies in Mexico, I became fond of mariachi music. The music touches me because of all of my exciting and varied experiences in Mexico. Today when I am serenaded by mariachis in a restaurant or elsewhere, I choke up. It floods me with memories. I often embarrass my dining companions by singing the Spanish songs along with the musicians. On one occasion, our Sister Cities Organization had a dinner at Polen Farm where we featured karaoke music. You guessed it—I sang Spanish on the microphone along with the mariachi tape. Remember, I don't have a good voice, so this takes a lot of courage. Recently, my sister city friends wanted to liven up a dinner which was held at El Rancho Grande. Knowing my Spanish background, they recruited a Mexican waiter to sing a Spanish song with me. With a bit of coaxing, the waiter agreed to sing Cielito Lindo with me. I have no shame!

Singing was always an important part of my Spanish class curriculum. Every Friday the students would beg to sing Spanish songs. Sometimes, I had a piano in the classroom, so I would play while we sang. We'd sing Fray Felipe (Brother John) in singing rounds, "Eres Tu," "Guantanamera" and "Cielito Lindo."

Music is a love that I share with my husband, Jim. Early in our marriage we had season tickets to the Victoria Theater Broadway Series, the Frazee Jazz Series, the Wright State University Theater, and the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra. Today we have season tickets to the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra and the Gulf Shores Concert Series in Alabama. We like soft jazz, country and Broadway tunes and almost everything except rap and heavy rock. My neighbor and good friend, Janet DeBanto, and I used to have season tickets to the Dayton Opera and the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra.

During one period of time, Jim and I went to London about once a year. While there we attended many plays and musicals. Also, we led a Sister Cities group on a New York City Theater Tour from 1996 through 2007. Our sister city friends from Steyr, Austria and Kettering, England joined us on these tours. These NY trips were sold-out most years because our travel agent procured tickets to the latest and greatest Broadway shows. On every one of the twelve New York Theater Tours, we saw the Radio City Hall Christmas Spectacular. Each year this performance sent chills down my spine. The Rockettes, dressed as toy soldiers, never ceased to amaze me with their precision marching. The powerful sounds of the twin organs in Radio City Music Hall resounded throughout the theater. To me there is no better Christmas show in the entire world.

Yes, music makes my heart beat a little faster. Sometimes it has a calming effect. Listening to Jon Valjean sing "Bring Him Home" in *Les Miserables* always makes me melancholy and then the tears flow. It's a gut-wrenching song, but I love it. Listening to Michael Crawford singing "All I Ask of You" in *Phantom of the Opera* puts me in a dream world as I marvel at his fantastic voice. These songs sung by great male singers put me in a make-believe world whereby I am not aware of who I am or where I am. It's surreal. Also, listening to country western music puts a smile on my face, as I tap my foot in unison with the lively beat of the music. Listening to swing music and the big band sound makes me want to get on the dance floor and swing. Listening to soul and gospel music puts me into a highly charged spiritual mood. Ah—and better yet—there's music that puts me in a romantic mood. What would I do without music? Hard to imagine.



# LATER YEARS



## FINANCES

My parents grew up during the depression; consequently, they were very frugal. Their values were instilled in us children. They taught us the value of money, which has stayed with me throughout my life. Although my parents had money, we children were not spoiled nor did we flaunt our wealth. Dad talked about stocks and bonds and the stock market fluctuations. He and Mom gave us shares of stock, which was the beginning of my life-long interest in following the stock market.

In the early 1900's, my Grandpa, Dr. Aloys Willke, would take the bus to downtown Cincinnati where he could watch the stock market ticker tape. Today I can follow it on my iPhone. Throughout our lives we received stock from our parents. After their deaths, we received bonds, some of which I held for 20 years. My sister, Marilyn, and I attended more than a few financial seminars in Florida and Las Vegas, where we listened to analysts share their expertise.

Sometimes, my brother Bill would join us at the financial seminars, also called The Money Show. I was delighted when NBC started a financial news television show called CNBC in 1989. The network primarily carries business day coverage of US and international financial markets. I have spent many hours watching this channel. Besides watching CNBC I read the Wall Street Journal every day and subscribe to a monthly newsletter The Independent Adviser for Vanguard Investors. I'm happy to say that all my children have followed the Willke tradition in investing in the stock market.

## SPANISH

I started my love of the Spanish language when I took Spanish as a sophomore in high school. The more experiences we have in life, the better off we are. Two experiences determined my future job—teaching adults to swim and traveling to Mexico. My interest grew when Dad scheduled a trip to a medical convention in Mexico City the summer after I had completed my first year of Spanish. Dad, Mom, Rosann and I took the train to Mexico City. No sooner was I over the border into Mexico when I began conversing with anyone who would talk with me in Spanish. After I continued to talk with every Tomás, Ricardo, and Geraldo, Dad intervened a bit. I received the father/daughter lecture about talking with strangers and what this forwardness might mean to some of the men.

While we were touring in Mexico City, we walked the beautiful campus of the University of Mexico which had stunning mosaic buildings. I told my parents that I'd like to attend this university some day. And so I did! Five years later in 1957, I attended summer school classes at

the University of Mexico with my fellow Miami University Spanish students. I received 10 credits for my efforts; this enabled me to graduate from Miami University in 3-1/2 years. I lived with a Mexican family and took the bus to the university. Señora Gallardo, the lady of the house, was gone frequently, so I'd go to the kitchen and talk Spanish with Rosa, the cook. Señora Gallardo, upon seeing this, told me that Rosa spoke poor Spanish and that I should not talk with her.

While our Miami U. group was touring Taxco, we had a giant earthquake. We were sleeping at the time; I woke up thinking I was riding on a train. Our guide gathered all of us in the corridor as a protection from earthquake aftershocks. Upon returning to Mexico City, we were shocked when we saw the devastations and toppled buildings. This earthquake, called "The Earthquake When the Angel Fell," made major headlines in the US papers, so my parents were quite worried. Some days later I was able to call home; that was when I found out that I was an aunt for the first time. Baby Nancy Willke had been born.

Andrew and I became engaged before I went to Mexico. He wrote letters asking me if he could join me in Mexico and we could be married. That was not to be. We married one year later in 1958.

## MY EDUCATION

My first twelve years of education were in the small two-story, red brick building at St. John School in Maria Stein, Ohio. This school structure and its annex, across the street from the church, have been demolished.

The existing school in the western section of Maria Stein is called Marion Local. I graduated second in my class of 29 students. After graduating in 1954 I entered the College of Mt. St. Joseph on the Ohio near Cincinnati. It was a private girls' Catholic college established by the Sisters of Charity. Dad sent me there because he said I needed a "finishing" school. In reality, he insisted that I go there because he didn't want me to go to Miami University because my steady boyfriend was there.

At "The Mount" I felt like a country bumpkin and secluded from the real world. It was hardly a finishing school. We had to have our legs covered at all times, so we wore bobby socks and saddle shoes over nylon hose (often with big runners in them). We wore skirts and tops; girls didn't wear slacks until years later. Part of the school year my parents permitted me to have our old 2-door Chevy Coupe (probably a 1934 version) at the school, but I was not permitted by the college to drive it, except home and back. More than a few times my friends and I drove to the nearby Baskin-Robbins to have their delicious ice cream. The nuns never discovered the forbidden journeys to the ice cream store. Nor did they know that we sneaked away to sunbathe in the woods.

If I had stayed at The Mount I would have been the captain of their tennis team, as I excelled in tennis. Another year there was not to be! I broke up with my boyfriend that year and told my parents I wanted to transfer to Miami University in Oxford. When stern Mother Superior found out this news she called me into her office. She warned me about attending "that heathen school" and that she would pray for me. Whew!

In the fall of 1955 I transferred to Miami University (MU) where I lived in Walker House with other female transfer students. We ate all our meals at Oxford College Dormitory which

was across the street. During my two years on campus we were required to eat all our meals at a specific time in a specific dining hall, always accompanied by an adult woman at our table. This “house mother” insisted on proper etiquette and table manners. I was little prepared for the rigorous classes at Miami, as I had little preparation in high school. I spent many hours studying at the library and at my residence. I declared English as my major and Spanish as my minor in the School of Secondary Education. Because I was required to take Latin at Mt. St. Joe, I had missed a year in the study of Spanish. I could not get enough Spanish credits to major in it if I wanted to graduate in four years. During this year I had a part-time job working for a professor, although my parents paid for my room, board, books, and spending money. The approximate total cost for my years of college education was between \$4,000 and \$5,000.

The summer before my junior year, I met Andrew Niekamp, who was attending the University of Dayton. We made many trips between Oxford and Dayton. Andrew never entered my dorm as no men were allowed in our all-girl dorms. We had a curfew every night, perhaps 10 pm on weekdays and 11 pm on the weekends. Right before curfew one could see multiples of couples saying their good-byes near the dorm entrance. It was quite a sight. We weren’t permitted to have cars on campus, therefore we walked everywhere. One night during a snowstorm, Andrew and I missed my curfew, so I knocked on the door of my recently married girl friend, asking if I could sleep in her apartment that night. The summer after my junior year, I lived with a Mexican family, earning ten Spanish credits at the University of Mexico in Mexico City.

That fall I did my student teaching in English and Spanish at Belmont High School in Dayton. I lived with a group of girls at 718 Harman Avenue in Oakwood, across the street from Harman Elementary School. We had the entire second floor of a large house, which included a kitchen, dining room and four bedrooms. Every day I drove by the Wright Brothers’ house and didn’t know its significance.

I graduated from Miami in February, 1958 with a Bachelor of Science degree in education. Marilyn, Bill, Rosann and I all graduated from Miami.

Shortly after Andrew became ill in 1970, I began taking classes at the MU Middletown Branch, taking nine semester credit hours to update my teaching license.

Many years later while I was teaching at Alter High School and had five children at home, I took classes at Wright State University at night and in the summer. I received my Masters Degree in Education (High School Principalship) in 1979. The following years I took continuing education classes to keep my administrative/teaching certificate valid.

## TEACHING CAREER

When I grew up, no one ever mentioned or encouraged me to become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. Women were encouraged to pursue a career in nursing, teaching or perhaps business. So, teaching it was for me.

After my summer in Mexico I did my student teaching at Belmont High School in the Dayton Public Schools. A month before the supposed termination of my student teaching, Dayton Public Schools needed a Spanish teacher at Fairview High School beginning the first week in January. They offered me the position if I could get the permission of Miami University and my student teacher advisors. Miami eventually deducted some of my student teaching credits and allowed

me to start teaching at Fairview before my graduation on February 2, 1958. I taught at Fairview until several months before Cindy was born on May 13, 1959. Andrew and I lived at 658 Daytona Parkway after our June 14, 1958 wedding. During this time I also had an offer to teach Spanish at Fairmont West High School, the school our five children eventually attended.

Andrew entered The Ohio State Law School that fall, so I was a substitute teacher the first year we were in Columbus. The next year I had a full-time teaching position at Starling Junior High in Columbus, teaching until several months before Andy was born in May 15, 1961. While Andrew was in law school, we lived in a double at 1558 W Seventh Avenue. In 1959 and 1961 teachers were not permitted to continue teaching if their pregnancy was obvious. Both times I told the school officials that my baby was due in July, so I could continue to teach as long as possible.

## EMPLOYMENT AT ALTER HIGH SCHOOL

In 1971 the Spanish teacher quit the first day of school at Alter High School, which was several blocks from our new home on Karen Drive in Kettering. It had been 10 years since I had last taught school. Andrew was in the VA Hospital in Cincinnati fighting his ongoing mental illness. At the time, I had become depressed with my situation, having five children, the oldest being age twelve, at home and a husband with intermittent stays in the hospital. Within an hour or two, I had accepted the Alter job temporarily. Father Schaeper was happy with that, saying we could sign a contract later. Marilyn, who also had five children of her own, drove to Kettering and kept our five children for the entire Labor Day Weekend while I prepared for my new career.

Janet DeBanto, next door, offered to take full-day care of David and to see that Jack got to and from kindergarten. So began many happy and wonderful years at Alter High School where I eventually taught all four levels of Spanish. In time I became the Head of the Foreign Language Department and later I took the administrative position of Dean of Academics. My salary for the 1971-72 school year was \$6,285 as I did not hold a valid teaching certificate at the time. My last year at Alter, 1989-90, my salary was \$33,900 as I had a master's degree and was an administrator.

*I remember the day Father Schaeper called . . .*

Today is August 26, 1971. Each day I find it harder and harder to get out of bed in the morning. The burden of having a husband with a severe mental disorder is becoming heavier and heavier. Will the man I love so much be hospitalized forever? Will he recover from his state of schizophrenia and paranoia? What lies ahead for me? Has his depressive state now passed on to me? I must get out of bed.



JANET TEACHING SPANISH AT ALTER HIGH SCHOOL, KETTERING, OHIO, 1973. PHOTO TAKEN BY STUDENT

Oh, the telephone is ringing. I really don't feel like talking to anyone, but I'd better answer it just in case it's my husband's doctor calling from the hospital.

Oh, hello, Father Schaeper. Yes, I have spoken with Monsignor Gilligan about possibly substitute teaching this year. Yes, I have experience teaching Spanish in high school. No, I do not have a valid teaching certificate; I haven't taught for over 10 years and my certificate has expired. I'm sorry your Spanish teacher has quit the first day of school, but Father, I have five children—the oldest being 12 years old. My husband is in a mental institution, and I seriously doubt if I can manage a full-time teaching position at this time. You want me to help you out for awhile and make a decision later? Yes, Father, I'll see you at 2.

Jack, give me a big hug before you're on your way to kindergarten. I must talk with Janet. Can I really do this, Janet? Can I handle a full-time job? You'll take care of my children before and after school? Jack, too, in the mornings? David, all day? You really think this is what would be best for me?

I must call Mom and Dad. Really, Dad, you think I should "go for it?" You, too, Mom? A call from my sister, Marilyn. You'll pick up all five children and keep them over the long Labor Day weekend so I can prepare to start teaching on Tuesday? What a dear sister you are.

It's 2:15 p.m. in Father Schaeper's Office—Yes, Father, I'll take the job on a temporary basis. We can discuss a possible contract later. You say I can show movies the first week? Well, Father, I can do better than that. You shall see. Teaching Spanish has always been the love of my life.

Little did I know that day that my job at Alter High School would hold me together and even allow me to blossom during the difficult personal struggles that lay ahead. The Good Lord was looking over me!



JANET, DEAN OF ACADEMICS, IN FRONT OF ALTER HIGH SCHOOL IN 1986



JANET ALTER HIGH SCHOOL PHOTO IN 1986

## LIFE AT ALTER HIGH SCHOOL

I look back at the early years of teaching Spanish at Alter High School as the most successful years of my career. Each day I entered the classroom full of energy, new teaching techniques, and games and songs to make learning interesting and fun. In my years at Alter, I taught Spanish I, II, III, and IV. Eventually, I became Chair of Alter's Foreign Language Department. Every year we staged a huge one-day Foreign Language Fair where "we lived the language." We featured entertainment by students: French Can-Can dancers, Spanish dancers, German dancers, Roman gladiator fights, style shows, and much, much more. Foreign food made or bought by the students were sold: booths and monuments were constructed. It was an enormous amount of work, but made our foreign language department well known and well regarded in the area.

During this time I attended evening and summer classes at Wright State University, eventually earning my Master of Education degree. I remember well having Cindy, my daughter, help me with the basics of my college statistics class. I had forgotten math basics, even how to divide and multiply fractions. How could I master Statistics? Also, it was during this time that Cindy taught me to apply makeup. Before this time, my colleagues, in general, and I had not applied makeup. Anyway, I graduated and became certified to become a high-school principal. During a well-planned moment, I approached Sister Katie, principal at Alter High School, telling her of my qualifications and what I perceived to be the needs of the school—an Academic Director. In time she appointed me, and I eventually became full-time Dean of Academics. This was a challenging position as I dealt closely with parents, students, and teachers. I had attained the pinnacle of my career, and I enjoyed all the continuing challenges and responsibilities.

As part of my duties as Dean of Academics, I was responsible for the planning and hosting of Alter's Annual Senior Awards Ceremony. Guess who entered my office at this time? Yes, Jim Bolton himself. Jim was president of the Knights of Columbus, who gave the Maria Joseph Award every year to an outstanding senior. In 1987 it was my responsibly to introduce Jim to the audience before he presented the award to the student. Our courtship began soon after that and we were married three years later. As I write this in 2018, we are celebrating 28 years of happily married life. We have been good for each other.

After Alter High School, I spent five years teaching English and Spanish at Ferguson Junior High School in Beaver Creek. I retired after the 1994-95 school year. In the fall Alter needed a half-time Spanish teacher so I helped them out and then really retired.

## TRAVELING TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES WITH STUDENTS

One of the unintended consequences of teaching is that it has made me a somewhat well-known traveler. I have escorted high school students to foreign countries 14 times. These student trips began in 1973 when I took my first group of Spanish students on a 10-day trip to Mexico City, Taxco, Cuernavaca, and Acapulco. Just last week when I was at the Victoria Theater, a former student, who went on the first trip with me, approached me and said it was one of the greatest events in his lifetime. For many of the teenagers, traveling has opened up for them an entirely new world! Also, the young people enjoy the camaraderie and companionship of each other. Eight years after this first trip to Mexico, I attended a wedding of a young man and woman

whose friendship had blossomed on their trip to Mexico.

After taking five groups of Spanish students to Mexico, I organized a trip to Spain. What I remember most about this trip is spending hours convincing one of my female students not to get romantically involved with a young Spanish caballero who was telling her how charming and beautiful she was. The Mexican and Spanish men loved American women;

their own women were much more reserved and sheltered, and the men thought the American women were outgoing, charming and carefree. It was always a challenge keeping the men away. I always gave strong lectures to the girls, but some of them could not resist the new-found masculine attention.

After the Mexico and Spain trips, I organized a four-week student trip to Europe—England, France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. On this trip my four sons and husband were part of the group. On almost all trips I included one or two of my own children. As a result of these trips, my children have become a limb off their mother's tree. This traveling made quite an impression on them, as they all have the same desire to travel as I do. Following are some examples of my children and their love of foreign travel: Jack lived and worked for BP several years in London; Cindy worked with General Motors three years in Paris, France and later married a Frenchman; Jack attended a semester of college in the Netherlands, and Andy worked in London when employed by EDS; David participated in a summer work exchange in Austria. Today my son Mark is a consultant for 3M and often travels with his job to foreign countries. This love of travel has now transferred to my grandchildren.

Back to my high school student trips. On our European adventures, we rode the train from country to country. What great memories we have of climbing the Eiffel Tower in Paris, having rocklette in Switzerland, visiting the Vatican in Rome, almost missing the train in punctual Frankfort, German, and visiting Windsor Castle in London.



ONE OF JANET'S THIRTEEN TRIPS ESCORTING STUDENTS TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES, 1986

After a second summer's 3-week journey with students through Europe, I moved onward, this time a student trip to Greece, Israel, Turkey and Egypt. I remember fondly the camel ride at the pyramids in Cairo, Egypt, buying the gold cartouche, and buying the painted parchments (papyrus) which now hang in decorative frames in our den.

In summary, I chaperoned the following Alter student trips: Mexico (6); Spain (1); 3-week European trips (2); and Egypt, Israel, Greece, Turkey (1).

## SISTER CITIES

While at Alter in my capacity as Dean of Academics, I was in charge of foreign students and outside organizations. The Kettering Sister City Organization had started a student exchange with their sister city in Steyr, Austria. Don Hibbs, chair of the Sister Cities Steyr Subcommittee, asked me to promote this student exchange to the Alter students which I did. When the committee heard about my student travel experience, they asked Don Hibbs to have a chat with me.

In 1985 he stopped by my office and asked if I wanted to be on the Kettering Sister City Committee Board. I didn't know at the time that he was thinking of me as the next chaperone of students to Steyr, Austria. Shortly after I joined, they asked me to escort students on a three-week trip to our two sister cities, Kettering UK, and Steyr, Austria. So, I made all the preparations for this trip and took 12 students, being the only adult on the trip. We had home stays in our two sister cities, Kettering, England, and Steyr, Austria. We also visited Munich, Germany and London on this trip. We just happened to be in London the day Sarah Ferguson married Prince Andrew. The students waited outside Clarence House and witnessed the wedding procession on its way to Westminster Abbey.

In 1988 Dayton Sister Cities asked me to chaperone students to their sister city, Augsburg, Germany. They wanted me to teach Gerlinda Townsley, a German teacher in their organization, the mechanics of student travel, so Gerlinda and I took 18 students to Augsburg. I have fond memories of my 3-week home stay in Augsburg at the home/apartment of Elmar and Eva Fiederer who lived near the city center. I remember a German man coming up to me thanking the United States for liberating Germany from the clutches of Hitler. Another man told me he was a German POW imprisoned in the United States and what good treatment he received in the prison camp in one of our southern states. While we were in Augsburg, we took a 3-day trip to East and West Berlin. No one ever forgets the fear when crossing the border into East Germany at Check Point Charlie as East German soldiers pranced onto the bus and then placed a mirror under it looking for defectors. No one ever forgets the monuments constructed to those who were shot while crossing from East Berlin into West Berlin. Shortly after our visit (1988), the wall was torn down, meaning freedom for its people. After our stay in Augsburg, we took the train to Steyr, Austria where we stayed about four days.

On one of my four trips as chaperone to Steyr, Austria, our group met a German group from Plouen, East Germany, one of Steyr's other sister cities. It was the first time the East Germans had ever seen American youths and vice versa. The East Germans were always under the watchful eye of their leaders; my students lived freely with Steyr families. While we traveled as a group to Salzburg, each group eyed the other carefully. Our students had money to spend on frivolous items; the East Germans had little money which they spent only on basic necessities. The East



Germans were curious about the Americans living under Capitalism; they said our young people looked nervous. The last evening in Steyr the East Germans asked their leaders if they could attend a gathering with the Austrian and American students. This request was denied, and they were very unhappy about it. Too much chance of their defecting, I guess.

In total I organized four student exchange trips to sister cities (1986, 1988, 1992, 1994). Although I was the lone chaperone on the first trip, I am happy to report that Jim, my husband, joined me on the last two which were trips to Paris, the night train to Linz, and home stays in Steyr.

I am proud to say that these student exchange trips which began in 1976 have continued non-stop to this day. Every other year Steyr students visit Kettering; on alternating years Kettering students visit Steyr.

Based on the 1986 youth trip, Sister Cities International awarded our organization a coveted award, titled Outstanding Single Youth Program Award. Sister Cities International invited me to speak at the 1987 conference, but I was unavailable.

My volunteerism and service as student trip coordinator four times and later as Chair of the Sister City Board and other positions earned me another coveted award, i.e. Mayor's Award for Volunteer Service. This was awarded to me in 1994 by the Kettering Council at one of its meetings.

In 2006 at the annual conference in Washington, DC, three members of our organization were recognized for our volunteer work and leadership. Pat Mastbaum and I were honored in the category of Distinguished Volunteer. Former mayor Chuck Horn, Pat and I were given an all-expense paid trip to Washington, DC to collect our awards.

Recently two other volunteers and I collected a coveted award at the Sister City Conference in Virginia Beach, VA.

We won the Sister Cities International 2017 Best Overall Program Award for a city of its size. The Best Overall Program Award recognized sister cities programs that demonstrated outstanding accomplishment in 2017 in advancing the goals and missions of the sister cities movement.

Jim and I enjoyed attending Sister City International Conferences in Louisville, KY,

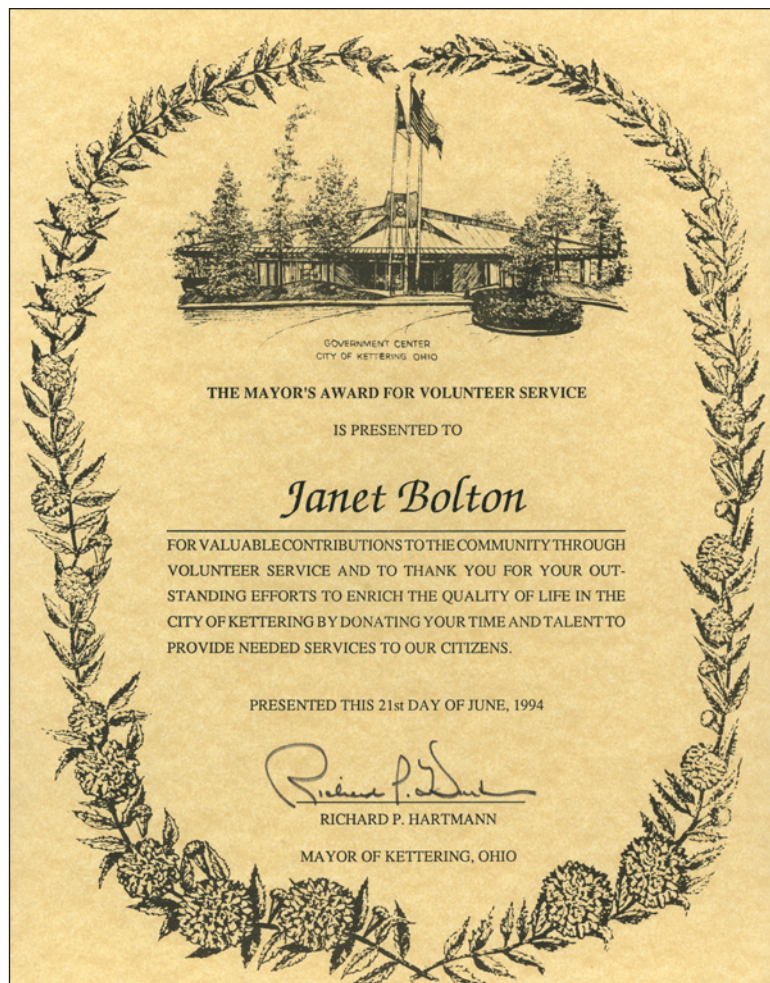


MAYOR HARTMANN PRESENTING OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER AWARD PLAQUE TO JANET AT THE KETTERING COUNCIL MEETING IN JULY, 1994

Washington, DC, Lexington, KY, Little Rock, AK, Spokane, WA, San Diego, CA, Chicago, IL, Toledo, OH, Virginia Beach, VA, Boston, MA, and Northern Ireland.

As I write this in 2018, I am still very active and serving on the Sister City Board. Having served for 33 years in this capacity, I am the senior member of the board. I have served as Chair of the Board three years, Chair of the Steyr and the Kettering UK Subcommittees, and editor of the SC Newsletter for six years. Throughout the years Jim and I have hosted many people, therefore we have many lifelong dear friends from England and Austria.

Jim and I accompanied a group of adults to Steyr in 2016 as we were celebrating 40 years of continuous student exchanges. My dear friend, Otti Bruckbauer, and I were asked to tell a dinner crowd of 150 people about our three generations of sister city friendship. First generation: Otti hosted me numerous times in Steyr and I hosted her in Kettering. Second generation: I hosted Otti's daughter, Christina Bruckbauer, who was on a work exchange program in Kettering, and Bruckbauers hosted my son, David, while on a work exchange in Steyr. Third generation: Christina's daughter, Louise, was on a youth group to Kettering and David's daughter, Molly, stayed with Louise at the Bruckbauers in Steyr. Yes, this friendship has stayed strong for a long, long time. It's amazing how one's professional life leads one to other challenging and rewarding avenues.



# HAPPY MEMORIES AND SAD ONES, TOO



## OUR CHILDREN

Our first child, Cindy, was born in May, 1959 when I was 22 years old. David, the last of our five children, was born in January, 1967 shortly after my 30th birthday. One can only imagine what a busy, involved life we had with five active, healthy, and inquisitive children. On more than one occasion a stranger would approach us and say, “Are all of these children yours?” I was proud to respond, “Yes, ma’am, they most certainly are!” Our rented half-double at 979 Manhattan Avenue in Dayton had three bedrooms and one bath, so we quickly outgrew this house on a street that had large stately homes filled with big families.

When we moved to our new house at 4416 Karen Drive in Kettering in December, 1967, our older children were enrolled in the Kettering School System. They all eventually graduated from Fairmont High School: Cindy in 1977, Andy in 1979, Mark in 1980, Jack in 1983 and David in 1985.

We always had piles of library books at our house. At one time all four sons were paper carriers



OUR FAMILY NOW COMPLETE WITH THE BIRTH OF DAVID. CINDY, JANET HOLDING DAVID, ANDREW, ANDY, JACK, MARK. MANHATTEN AVENUE HOUSE, 1967



PROUD PARENTS WITH FOUR EAGLE SCOUT SONS. JACK, MARK, DAVID, ANDY. SEPTEMBER 26, 1982

for the Dayton Daily News. Our children learned the value of work by holding part-time jobs and were active in school activities and sports. They learned to manage their own money, to be self-reliant, and to do well in their studies at school. All five children had saved enough money to pay for their first year of college; we paid for the last three years.

Cindy earned a degree in Industrial Engineering at Purdue University, graduating in 1981. She received her MBA from Harvard Business School in 1983.

Andy earned his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree at Bowling Green University in 1983. He majored in Management Information Systems. Andy earned his MBA from Wright State University in 1988 with a concentration in Finance.

Mark graduated from The Ohio State University in 1984 with a degree in Industrial Engineering. In 1988 he received his MBA in Corporate Finance at Indiana University.

Jack was an accounting major earning a BS degree in Business at the Kelly School of Business at Indiana University in 1987. He received his MBA in 1992 with a Finance Concentration at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

David graduated from the The Ohio State University in 1989 with a degree in Business Administration. He was a Production and Operations management major.

In 1990 when I married Jim Bolton, I gained three beautiful caring daughters, their spouses, and six grandchildren. Julie and Mike Maletic, Ann and Rich Barone, and Beth and Troy Deaton have been an important part of my life these past 30 years. They and the entire Bolton family have welcomed me with open arms, and I love them dearly.

## MY HUSBAND, ANDREW J. NIEKAMP

When I met Andrew in 1956 he was attending the University of Dayton (U. D.) full time and working nights full time at the National Cash Register (NCR). He had completed his 2-year stint in the US Army, so was eligible for the G. I. Bill when attending college. We met at a dance hall called Ma Shoes, also called Eldora in Rossburg, Ohio. Today this place is the Eldora Speedway. We dated in the summer of 1956 and then during the school year when he attended U. D. and I attended Miami University in Oxford. Being very much in love we became engaged in the summer of 1957 and married in 1958 shortly after I graduated from Miami University.



JANET AND ANDREW ON WEDDING DAY, JUNE 14, 1958



WEDDING ENGAGEMENT PHOTO. MAY, 1957

He graduated with a degree in Business Administration in 1959 and that fall entered The Ohio State University Law School, whose studies he completed in two and one-half years by attending summer school.

After a brief stint training in the FBI Academy at Quantico, VA, he left the academy and we moved from our apartment on 1130 W. Wakefield Drive in Alexandria, VA, into a double at 979 Manhattan Avenue in Dayton, Ohio, the monthly rent being \$78.00. At this time I was pregnant with our third child, Mark. Andrew found employment searching titles for a title company in downtown Dayton.

He met Lee Falke, a Democrat, who was running in the 1964 election to be Prosecutor of Montgomery County. Andrew campaigned for Lee with the aspirations of being appointed assistant county prosecutor if Lee was elected. Lee won the election and Andrew became an assistant county prosecutor about

the time Jack, our fourth child, was born. He held this position until his retirement. In December, 1967, 11 months after our fifth child, David, was born, we moved from Manhattan Avenue in Dayton to 4416 Karen Drive in Kettering.

Eventually, he and a cohort were appointed to the Criminal Division. He loved trial work and excelled in this position, doing murder and rape trials on a regular basis. In January of 1968 he conducted a murder trial against F. Lee Bailey, a high profile defense criminal attorney, who later was an attorney for OJ



NIEKAMP FAMILY AT CAROL WILLKE'S BAPTISM. LAST ROW – JANET HOLDING DAVID, ANDREW, FRONT ROW – CINDY, JACK, MARK, ANDY. OCTOBER, 1968

Simpson. Andrew and I went to Columbus in February, 1970, where he argued an appeal before the Supreme Court of Ohio. With this same murder case he wrote a brief to the Supreme Court of the United States; F. Lee Bailey wrote a brief for the defendant. Andrew always hoped that the Supreme Court would accept the case so he could present it arguing against Bailey in front of the Supreme Court. They did not accept the case.

Although he had not been actively involved in the Democratic party, he asked the party in 1969 to endorse him on the ballot to be Montgomery County Juvenile Court Judge. The party did not endorse him, which was a great disappointment for Andrew.

At about this time the pressure and strain must have taken its toll on him. In September, 1970, he suffered a severe mental breakdown. He fell at the pinnacle of his career. In time he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and bipolar disease. Life for this industrious, intelligent, caring and capable man was never the same. Many difficult struggles lay ahead. This severe blow caused him to become despondent at times, and it greatly reduced his self confidence.

His first hospitalization was at St. Elizabeth Medical Center where he was given a series of shock treatments. In his subsequent two hospitalizations at Veterans Hospital in Cincinnati,



FAMILY PORTRAIT. BACK ROW MARK, ANDY, FRONT ROW — JACK, DAVID, CINDY. MARCH, 1969

he did not receive shock therapy. Living was difficult. He didn't like how he felt when on medication. When he decided not to take his medication, he would slip into his paranoia and schizophrenia state.

During this time Lee Falke was a "shining star" in our lives as he told Andrew to report to work when he could. One time when Andrew was hospitalized, Lee called me into his office. My greatest fear was that he would dismiss Andrew. Well, this was not to be. I was relieved when this special man called me into his office only to tell me that he could not continue to pay any more sick leave. Andrew returned to work soon after that, taking less stressful positions in the prosecutor's office, such as working the grand jury or the juvenile court. For a period of time, he also was able to try major crime jury trials.

At all times Andrew showed great love to me and our five beautiful children. When he worked full time and stayed on his medication, he didn't have much energy for outside activities. Supporting his family consumed all of his energy. There were many good years but also many difficult years. He did what he could. He loved his children. He was in charge of the Boy Scout Paper Drives and supported our children in activities whenever possible. He encouraged and helped our four sons become Eagle Scouts. He and I played in two monthly bridge groups, one with Fairmont West High School parents and one with St. Charles Parish adults.

After our last child, David, left for college, I moved out of the house on Karen Drive into an apartment at 4724 Marshall Road. I had been lonely and unhappy for many years. Andrew lived in our original Karen Drive house until his death on November, 2009, at the age of 76.

## BREAST CANCER

It was a beautiful sunny day in Orange Beach, Alabama, when I felt the lump in my breast. I had picked up a variety of pamphlets when we arrived in Orange Beach, one being a reminder to do a self breast check. I had put this pamphlet by my bedside. On February 8, 2017, I had an itch on my right breast. Then is when I checked for lumps. Lo and behold, this lump was easy to find. I knew it immediately. No doubt whatsoever.

Within an hour, I was in the waiting room at a nearby clinic. The doctor confirmed my suspicions and ordered a mammogram within 48 hours. Yes, I was shaken up and nervous but still optimistic. Breast cancer was not prevalent in my family. I had been on hormone therapy for many years, so maybe this was the cause. When Jim returned from golf that day, I gave him the news. Two days later I had a mammogram at 7 am at South Baldwin Regional Medical Center in Foley, Alabama. Then an x-ray. I asked if I'd see the radiologist, and the technician responded, "Only if there is something to report." Later, when the radiologist entered the room, my heart rate went up. I started to cry (which I do too frequently).

Dr. Mark Connell was a kind and gentle man, who gave Jim and me the news. He held my hand as he spoke to me in an encouraging and caring manner. I was told I had Stage I malignant breast cancer. My mind went into Outer Space. How could this be?

The results were sent to my family doctor and to Miami Valley Hospital where I soon scheduled an appointment to have a biopsy the following week. Because it was difficult to talk about without crying, I emailed our children. This was stressful as I knew how people reacted to the word "cancer." My son, Andy, who was also in Orange Beach at the time, was a great help in





FAMILY PORTRAIT. FRONT ROW — DAVID, JANET, CINDY, BACK ROW — JACK, ANDY, MARK. DECEMBER, 2009

getting the mammogram results sent overnight to Dayton. The process had begun. I found the lump on Monday, had a mammogram on Wednesday, and was back in Kettering on Saturday.

The next week I had an appointment with my family doctor, Dr. Steve Robbe, a former student of mine at Alter. He was more serious than usual when he talked to me about my breast cancer. He was very encouraging and suggested a surgeon.

After my first biopsy, I had an appointment with Dr. Sutherin. The biopsy also showed micro calcifications which are small calcium deposits that look like white specks on a mammogram. If they appear in certain patterns and are clustered, they may be a sign of precancerous cells or early breast cancer. A second biopsy confirmed these suspicions. My calcifications were numerous and some were clustered near a primary node. Two different radiologists spoke about the possibility of a mastectomy.

During this difficult period, Jim was my pillar of strength. We attended many movies and kept occupied. Our combined family and children all offered support and encouragement. I received flowers from our neighbor, Pat Hahn. I spoke with the neighbor across the street who was recovering from breast cancer. She and her husband were very helpful in informing us on a subject which was foreign to us.

We saw Dr. Sutherin on a Monday who suggested a mastectomy because of the tumor and micro calcifications. We made our decision that day to have surgery on Friday of that week at 7 a.m. Things were moving quickly. I found my lump on February 8 and had surgery less than five weeks later.

All my five children offered to be present during surgery. I told them that surely I'd need them in the future, but not now. Jim, Andy, Julie, and Mike were with me as I entered the surgery area. Dr. Sutherin had stated earlier that he did not think I'd need chemotherapy or radiation. I asked Andy to write down exactly what Dr. Sutherin said about my surgery, making sure to note if I needed chemo or radiation. As I was coming out of the anesthesia, I asked Andy three times if I indeed didn't need chemo or radiation. He replied three times, "No." Thanks be to God. I was a lucky lady. Life was good!

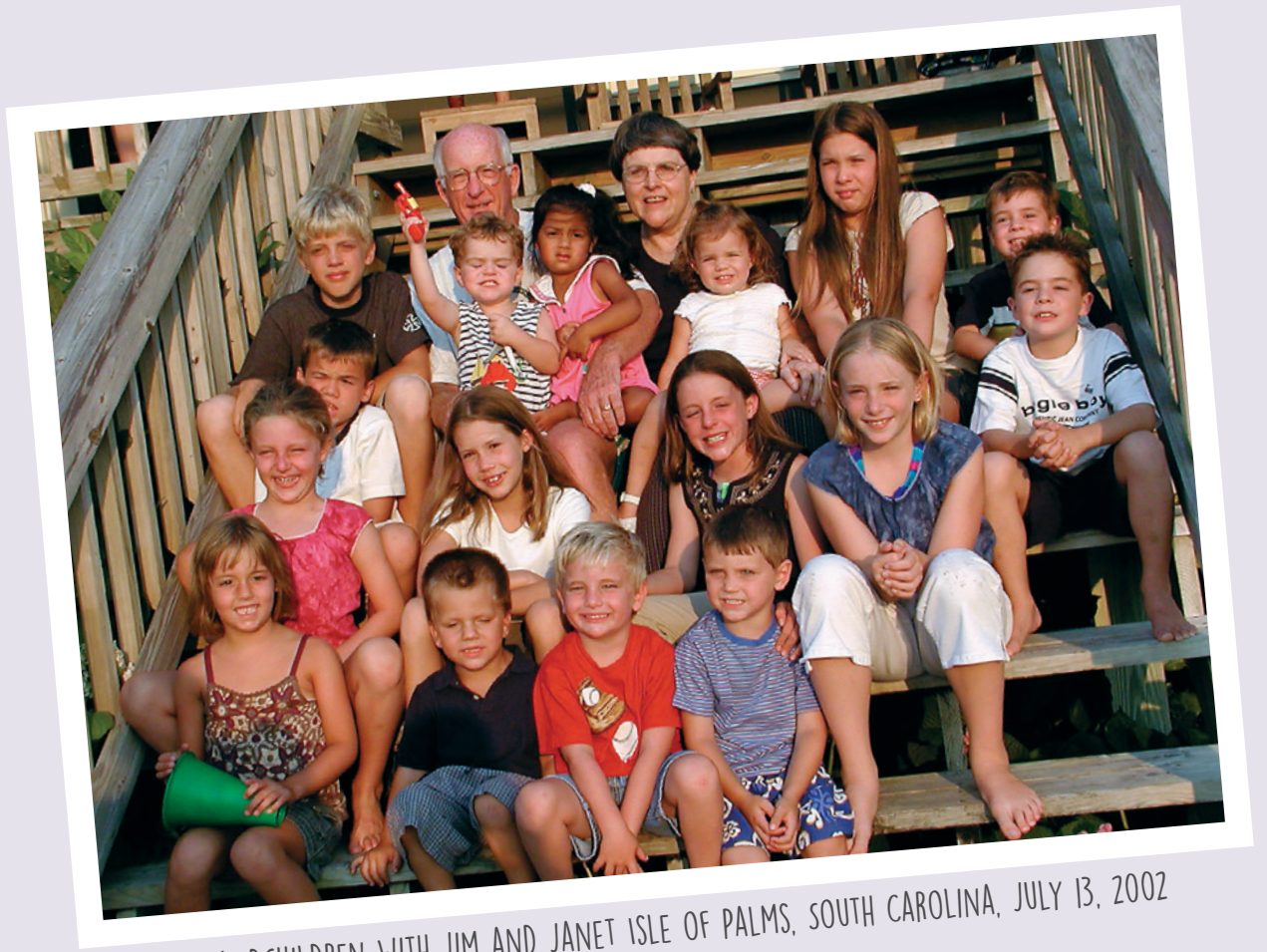
On the evening of my surgery I was walking the halls with Andy. The nurses noted that I was doing very well, so they asked if I wanted to walk out of the hospital when it came time to be dismissed the next day. So I did! No wheelchair for me. Of course, I had Julie, Mike and Jim at my side watching me closely.

I had a short, relatively pain free, and complete recovery. I received get-well cards from people I'd never expect. So much love and support! It made me cry (not foreign to me) to get all those cards, emails, texts, and phone calls. The next weekend Cindy brought food for our freezer and cooked our meals.

I am writing this 12 months after surgery. My journey was quite difficult emotionally at times, but I think I managed it well. I remember vividly the phone call from Emilie, my granddaughter, who was in uncontrollable tears as I comforted her. I remember the love and support of Jim, our 8 children, and 17 grandchildren. Truly, I am a very lucky lady!

## FAMILY VACATIONS

It has been my goal to establish a strong bond with my grandchildren. My mother and father were greatly loved and cherished by their 19 grandchildren. My parents loved their



GRANDCHILDREN WITH JIM AND JANET ISLE OF PALMS, SOUTH CAROLINA, JULY 13, 2002



GRANDCHILDREN, JIM AND JANET JJ, RANCH IN MICHIGAN IN 2008

grandchildren unconditionally and were always interested in what they were doing. On four different occasions they took three or four of their grandchildren for a week to Rimrock Ranch in Cody, Wyoming. The strong bond between my children and their grandparents increased during this time together on the dude ranch. I have worked to imitate my parents in how they related to their grandchildren—a hard act to follow!

Jim and I, who married in 1990, had a goal to blend our families as much as possible. To attain this goal we sponsored many summer vacations inviting all of our children and grandchildren. We spent week-long beach vacations at The Isle of Palms in Charleston, SC (three summers) and Wrightsville Beach, NC (four summers.) We usually had a beach house with enough bedrooms to accommodate all of us. The Wrightsville beach house was an old rooming house adjacent to and owned by the Blockade Runner Hotel, which had a giant swimming pool. Oh, what fun! Each family took turns preparing our meals. The grandchildren will always remember these happy days on the beach. So, I'd say I was well on my way in the goal of blending these two wonderful families.

When Jack, Laura and family were living in London in 2000, we sponsored an adult trip to London and surrounding areas. Jack was employed by BP at the time. Also, we invited the entire



NIKAMP AND BOLTON CHILDREN, SPOUSES, AND GRANDCHILDREN AT NEWFOUND GAP IN THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK IN 2008

family to Gatlinburg, TN, one summer. Also, I invited the women, Andy, and David (who didn't have wives) to Canyon Ranch, a health spa, in Lenox, Massachusetts for 3 days of exercise and learning to live a more healthy life.

My fondest memories are taking our grandchildren to Double JJ Ranch in Rothbury, Michigan. Before Double JJ Ranch Jim had taken Daniel and Sean, our two oldest grandchildren, on a Road Scholar Intergenerational program in Norfolk, VA. Then we took groups of grandchildren of similar ages to Double JJ Ranch: Group 1 (Emilie, Chelsea, Katie); Group 2 (Jennifer, Elizabeth); Group 3 (Jordan, Thomas, Steven, Hannah); Group 4 (Grant, Luke, JT); Group 5 (Tate, Molly). They spent their days riding horses in the corral and on the trail, shooting a rifle, archery, boating, swimming and using the slide in the giant pool. There were camp fires, hay rides, corral games with and without horses, walking the sled dogs, and feeding the small animals. In later years they were able to enjoy the indoor water park at Double JJ Ranch. The children, Jim and I enjoyed it so much that one year we invited all of them to JJ. All the grandchildren learned to ride a horse which was important to me. The days with the grandchildren at the ranch bring back many of my fondest and happiest memories. The grandchildren have always been near and dear to my heart.



THE JIM BOLTON FAMILY, THANKSGIVING 2014



JANET AND JIM ON THEIR WEDDING DAY ON APRIL 8, 1990

# FINAL THOUGHTS



I have 5 children and 11 grandchildren; my husband, Jim, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren. Now the great grandchildren are enriching our lives. We both have taught our children to work hard and be independent. I am extremely proud of the exemplary lives they lead and their accomplishments. All our children are self-reliant, caring, involved, and successful in their careers. What more could a mother ask for? This, in itself, has made my life worthwhile.

My goal is to live an active and involved life as long as I am able. At this time, 2019, I have back problems; for many years the severe pain in my right leg was attributed to my back. Well, my physical therapist diagnosed my leg pain as originating from my hip. An x-ray showed bone-on-bone due to osteoarthritis, so I had a total hip replacement on November 26, 2018. This surgery has given me a new life as I can now walk without a cane. I am able to walk long distances, and I continue to swim laps three times a week without any problems. Many of my friends are not doing as well as I'm doing at the age of 82. In recent years we have been able to travel to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Europe, and Alaska. For that I am thankful. My wish is to continue this happy and busy life which I share with my wonderful husband of almost 30 years, who has added so much to my life. May this relationship continue for a long, long time.

Today my faith and belief in the Catholic Church remains strong, but I reason more and have personal opinions and make decisions about the teachings of the church. I do not have blind faith. I attend Mass every Sunday, contribute financially to the church, pray often, and feel the presence of God. Listening to the church bells reminds me that God has given me a helping hand and is with me at all times. He has guided me through the difficult periods in my life. This gives me a deep sense of well-being and belonging. Yes, I thank God for this wonderful family and for all the goodness He has bestowed upon me.

*One of the reasons that I am writing this memoir is to share with my descendants what it was like to be born in the 1930's. The writing piece that follows was passed on to me via the internet from a high school classmate. My friends and I all agree that it gives a true picture of what life was like when we were kids.*

# *To All the Kids Who Survived the 1930's, 40's and 50's*

**F**irst, we survived being born to mothers who may have smoked and/or drank while they were pregnant.

We took aspirin, ate blue cheese dressing, tuna from a can, and didn't get tested for diabetes.

Then, after that trauma, we were put to sleep on our tummies in baby cribs covered with bright colored lead-based paints.

We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, locks on doors or cabinets, and, when we rode our bikes, we had baseball caps, not helmets, on our heads.

As infants and children, we would ride in cars with no car seats , no booster seats, no seat belts, no air bags, bald tires and sometimes no brakes.

Riding in the back of a pick-up truck on a warm day was always a special treat.

We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle.

We shared one soft drink with four friends, from one bottle, and no one actually died from this.

We ate cupcakes, white bread, real butter, and bacon. We drank Kool-Aid made with real white sugar. And we weren't overweight. Why? Because we were always outside playing . . . that's why!

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one was able to reach us all day . . . and, we were OKAY.

We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then ride them down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times, we learned to solve the problem.

We did not have play stations, Nintendo's and X-boxes. There were no video games, no 150 channels on cable, no video movies or DVD's, no cell phones, no personal



computers, no internet and no chat rooms. We had friends and we went outside and found them!

We fell out of trees, got cut, broke bones and teeth, and there were no lawsuits from those accidents.

We would get spankings with wooden spoons, switches, ping-pong paddles, or just a bare hand, and no one would call child services to report abuse.

We ate worms, and mud pies made from dirt, and the worms did not live in us forever.

We were given BB guns for our 10th birthdays, 22 rifles for our 12th, rode horses, made up games with sticks and tennis balls, and—although we were told it would happen—we did not put out very many eyes.

We rode bikes or walked to a friend's house and knocked on the door or rang the bell, and just walked in and talked to them.

Little league had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment.

The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke the law was unheard of . . . They actually sided with the law!

These generations have produced some of the best risk-takers, problem solvers, and inventors ever.

The past 60 to 85 years have seen an explosion of innovation and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned how to deal with it all. If you are one of those born between 1925–1955, CONGRATULATIONS!

*Author Unknown*



JANET PLAYING IN THE DIRT. MOM SAID I LOVED TO PLAY IN DIRT. 1938



JANET AT 6 MONTHS OLD



JANET SITTING ON FRONT STEPS OF DOCTOR OFFICE IN 1938



JANET AT AGE 18 MONTHS IN FRONT YARD.  
POHLMANN HOG BARN IN BACKGROUND



JANET IN 1938



JANET, BILL, MARILYN ON FRONT PORCH  
OF OLD HOUSE IN 1938



BILL AND MARILYN WITH MY MOTHER HOLDING ME. WE ARE  
SEATED ON OUR FRONT PORCH OF OUR OLD HOUSE. 1939



ROSANN AND JANET CIRCA 1949



JANET WITH BOOTS THE DOG CIRCA 1949



FAMILY PORTRAIT. FRONT ROW — ANDREW, JANET, DAVID.  
BACK ROW — ANDY, CINDY, MARK, JACK, 1976



FAMILY PORTRAIT. FRONT ROW, ANDREW, JANET, CINDY,  
BACK ROW — JACK, MARK, ANDY, DAVID. DECEMBER, 1980



FAMILY PORTRAIT. JACK, MARK, DAVID, CINDY, ANDY. DECEMBER, 1977



FAMILY PORTRAIT. FRONT ROW — JACK, DAVID, MARK,  
BACK ROW — CINDY AND ANDY. DECEMBER, 1983



JANET AS BRIDE ON JUNE 14, 1958



ROSANN, JANET, MOM, DAD, MARILYN, BILL IN BACKYARD.  
PARENTS' 25TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY, JULY 21, 1956



JANET, ROSANN, BILL AND MARILYN AT CINDY'S WEDDING ON SEPTEMBER 15, 1990



COMBINED FAMILY VACATION, ISLE OF PALMS, CHARLESTON, NC, JULY 13, 2001