



(Lin's note of info: the above picture is of Bertha, George, Rosa, Hattie, and Clarence on the east side of their birthplace.)

Aunt Rosie Suess was one of my dad's siblings, one of 9 children.

In about 1999, when she was 82 years old, she wrote this story about her childhood. Her daughter June put the story into typed form, not changing a word or punctuation. Aunt Rosie's daughter Sylvia sent the story to me and I LOVE it! Get yourself a cup of tea, find a comfy chair, and enjoy living life in the early 1900's through the eyes of a very sweet lady. Aunt Rosie has passed away now but her memories live on in this story and in the hearts of everyone who knew her.

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I am writing this, not because I think my childhood was different than anyone else's, but because things have changed so drastically since I was a child. Also I think most people don't think of.

The farthest back I can remember is standing above the register to dry my pants in the morning. We had one big register in the house. It was a large square one, in the dining room. This was in the old home place where Uncle Folkert lived after he married.

Now don't get the idea that my mother was a sloppy housekeeper that just set her kids on a register when they had an accident. (I like to think that was the only time I wet my pants.) My mother was 100% Dutch, and in my mind they have a reputation for being clean housekeepers, with exceptions. And she was but.....

My father passed away when I was 8 years old. I remember very little of him, just small

things here and there. Like when I lifted up Synovia's tail and spanked him. Synovia was a large police dog. I really got a good scolding for this unsanitary act, and for some reason or other, I've never forgotten it.

We lived in the country Northeast of German Valley. The place had an orchard with about every kind of apple available at that time. We also had several cherry trees and plum trees in this orchard. This fruit was only for home use. I guess with 9 kids, an apple orchard was a necessity maybe. We also had grapevines just a short distance from the house, where on one end they climbed all the way up a tree. Would you believe it? A Pancake Apple tree, with huge, and I mean huge apples on it every fall. I don't think a super market would have survived at that time, because people lived so differently. For breakfast, six mornings a week, we had pancakes, just made with flour, salt, BP and milk. Delicious fried with the shortening (lard of course) in the pan instead of in the batter, and the pancakes fried so the edges turned brown and crispy. Sunday morning we had corn flakes.

Of course before breakfast, before the cows were milked, we had tea, an old Dutch custom I think. And not only a spoonful of sugar in each cup, but also a spoonful of cream (real cream), put on very slowly and carefully so it would form a 'flower' on top.

When milking was done in the evening, the milk cans 10 gal. cans, were put in the water tank to cool. That is where we got the cream every morning. We would skim a pitcher full off the can of milk. We dropped a dipper in the milk can. Then about 10 o'clock in the forenoon, the milk truck would come and pick up the cans, and leave off cans full of whey for the hogs. Sometime before evening chores, those cans had to be washed good and rinsed so that the evening milk would not get sour.

Our cow barn just had a dirt floor, which was strewn with straw after cleaning. We had about 10 - 15 cows in it, and in the winter time the cows were let out in the forenoon just long enuf to pitch the manure out of the barn, (on a pile aside of the barn, by the way), then in the Spring the manure was hauled away, and scattered on the fields, which was the only fertilizer known of then. As far as I know. When they got towards the bottom of that pile of manure that laid there for months, it was really a rich, strong, stinky smell of manure, but the smell seemed to leave right after it was cleaned up. It was pitched into the manure spreader with a pitchfork, nothing mechanical about it. My sister Bertha and I helped pitch out the manure many times in the wintertime, simply because it kept us out of the house and we enjoyed it. Much more fun than doing dishes and cleaning the house.. We also helped milk cows, sitting on a 3-legged milk stool. I was more or less afraid to sit close to a cow, so I watched the cow's head, and if she blinked an eye, or quit chewing her cud I'd back up a little, as I thought she was getting ready to kick me into the gutter.

In the wintertime, we milked and fed cows by lantern light, which was hung on a nail on a post. This burned kerosene, and had to be filled daily. The wick had to be trimmed. For the experienced milker, the pail was held between the knees, otherwise it set on the straw beneath the cow. Occasionally, the pail was kicked over by the cow. The cow

usually had a pretty good reason for this, like having a sore teat, or being very nervous. The older ones in the barn always took care of these.

Electricity wasn't even thought of when I was a child. The house was lit with kerosene lamps, which also had to be filled and cleaned daily. This was the kind of lamp we keep upstairs now, in case of a power outage from a thunderstorm or otherwise. Speaking of thunderstorms, I think my mother had a fear of them, or maybe she just had a lot of respect for them. Mother always got us up and downstairs during a night storm and we all sat in the kitchen. It seems we had a lot more of them than we do now, and they were more severe, that is with thunder, lightening and wind. We never heard of tornadoes. The house I grew up in didn't have a furnace with one big register like the other one we were all born in. There was a cook-stove in the kitchen and a heater in the living room, which we lit on weekends, and when we had company, like we often had on a weekday evening. Even then, sometimes we just sat in the kitchen.

The open door of the oven on a cold winter night, of the cook stove, was a great place to warm feet. It did get a little bit crowded sometimes.

We did all our ironing with flat irons on the cook stove, even in the summer time. There were three or 4 irons and one handle, when the iron we were using wasn't hot enuf anymore, we put it back on the stove, & put the handle in another.

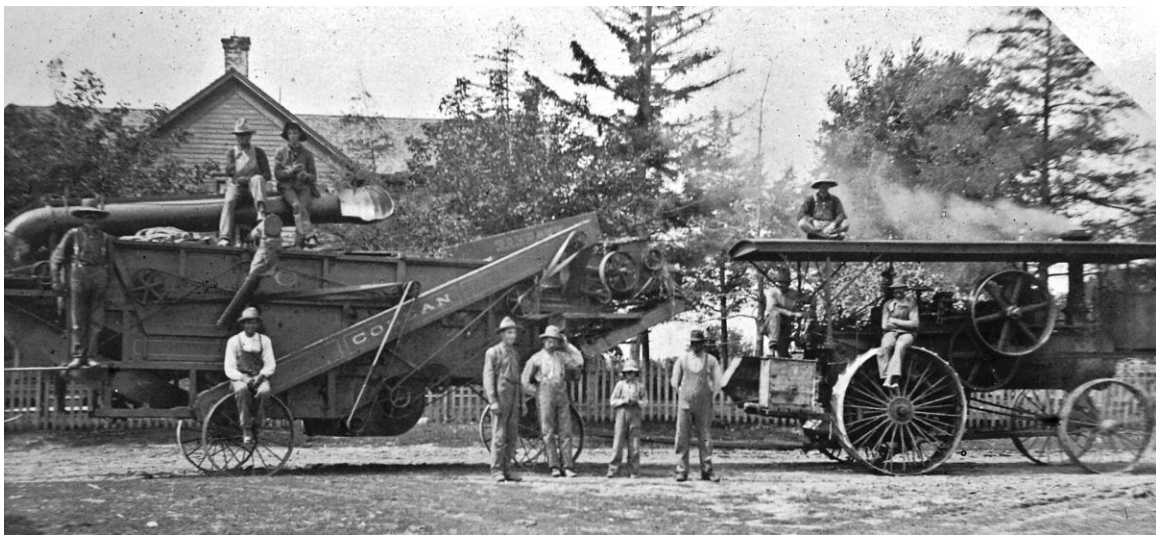
Permanent press was not invented yet, nor was nylon, so everything had to be ironed. We only washed once a week in the wash house. We had a 2-tub washer made of wood, with a wringer between them. One machine had soap water in it, the other rinse water. The water was heated in a big black kettle, with a stove underneath it. In there we cut the soap, homemade usually, while the water was heating.

There was a little gas engine in the wash house with a belt to the wash machine from the gas engine. When we wanted to pump water for the water tank, this belt was used going to the pump jack just outside the wash house. This pumped H₂O for the animals, to the water tank. This water was really delicious. I can almost taste it yet. Every evening we had to carry water for household use. There was a reservoir on one end of the cook stove, which held at least 4 water pails full. This kept us pretty well supplied with hot water. Then we had a stone crock, which we filled for drinking and cooking. Also a pail full. We kept a water dipper in the water for drinking.

When I was a girl, there was no such a thing as lights on a tractor. When it was chore time, the farm work stopped for the day. There was just one exception to this, and that was when we were shocking oats. Occasionally they would finish a field after supper. An oat shock was a bundle of oats with twine string tied around it, as it came out of the "binder". We picked up two bundles, one under each arm, and set them up, then 2 more until we had six set up. Then we put a bundle & laid it over the top of the six to keep water out of it. I say "we". I helped with that very little, just enough to know how to do it, but spent lots of time out there anyhow.

Then at threshing time, they'd haul these bundles on a hayrack, & pitched them into the threshing machine. The oats would come out of one spout into a wagon, & the straw

came out of the other end? When the thresh was over there was always a huge pile of straw. This was used all winter long for bedding for the animals, feed for the horses also. The threshing was done by a "threshing ring". This was a group of about 6 - 10 neighbors who worked together first one place, then moved on to the next until all were done. The women cooked for these men, and what a feast! Everything the very best for dinner, almost variety like the Steak Houses now. No sooner were the dishes done, and we had to think of tea with sandwiches always, and also cake or donuts. In the forenoon it was coffee, sandwiches and cake. We had a big blue enameled coffeepot, which we filled up and took out to the men. We always loved to take the lunch out. The men ate one or 2 at a time and there was always a lot of joking and teasing going on. My mother told of making breakfast too for the men, but that was before my time.



We always walked to school. The one room school with 10 or so kids in it was almost katy-cornered through the field. We climbed fences. Usually the neighbors' kids walked with us. It was really nice walking in the spring and fall, but in the winter we got a little cold. If the weather was bad, like a snowstorm or thunderstorm, our folks always got us all. By the time we got home, we were pretty hungry, as we only had cold lunch at noon. There was one teacher however: who made hot lunches for us. We all bro't something for her to make. I will never forget her cornstarch pudding. One day she told me we were going to have green cornstarch pudding on St. Patrick's Day. I didn't really believe her. We never ate anything green. On St. Patrick's Day I had a sore throat or something. Anyhow I didn't go to school. Sure enough, my brothers & sisters brought home a jar of green corn-starch pudding.

My classmate would never eat turnips. He said he hated them. This went on for a while until we told him one day we were having cabbage. (This was the veggie cooked with potatoes, then mashed.) He loved it, and ate his full share. He didn't know he was eating turnips. Kids just basically have not changed.

When we had cold lunches, we carried them in a gallon syrup bucket. Our lunches weren't so special, but we had sandwiches for sure. We weren't quite as lucky as two girls who walked to school with us. They always had a huge yellowish green, hard apple, everyday all winter long. However, we always were amazed and sympathized with a poor family who only had lard on their bread, and not much else besides. This family came from Germany and couldn't speak a word of English at first. They lived katy-cornered from us thru the field. My mother was a very generous person. She would make dresses for the girls, and once she even gave one of them one of my favorite dresses, which I didn't appreciate too much at the time. In Dec. this family celebrated Santa's birthday on the 6th of Dec. So every year my mother would fill a big flour sack with food and clothing, and took it to them on the evening of Dec. 6. I had never heard of it before, nor since.

This family, then and in later years, were, I think our very best friends. We saw them often, almost daily. For years, since we had no Uncles, Aunts, Grandparents etc. around, they were at our house for dinner on holidays, and many times in between. There are still a few of this family living, and tho' I don't see them very often, I still feel they are very good friends.

By the way, this family had a horse and buggy, and they usually came with that. Going back to school lunches, I don't know if this was a daily habit, but I can remember different times there would be a plate of food for each of us, fixed for us at dinnertime, & kept warm in closet of the stove. This closet went the full length of the cook stove; this is where we kept the frying pans, besides keeping things warm.

My father was, I hear, a sort of an inventor. An elderly man in Sibley, Iowa where my sister and brother-in-law live used to live in German Valley and knew my parents very well. He told the story that my father invented the manure spreader, but didn't have it patented, and if he had had it patented, we could have been a very rich family! He was also very brilliant, a farmer, he also developed pictures, which was very rare at that time. He had a room upstairs, just packed with the things he worked with.

This included a sewing machine he used to fix and sew our shoes. I faintly remember an iron shoe 'thing' he used to resole our shoes. He also made greeting cards with beautiful flowers on them, made of cardboard. Just small cards.

I want to get on paper the few things I know about him because they are so few. I remember him showing me a picture of a lady, and telling me that every time he looks at that lady, he feels like crying. Either he didn't tell me why, or who she was, or I was too young and thoughtless to listen and remember. Anyhow, this small incident has always stuck in my mind. My mother always said that he was a very religious man. She always said he'd spend hours praying. My mother and father lived very peaceable.

She told us once that he sold a load of potatoes, and she tho't they'd buy all of us kids a pair of new shoes, and he went and spent it on that shoe sewing machine I mentioned before. She told us that was the only time she was really mad at him. I sure can understand it, but I'll betcha' that sewing machine outlasted the shoes by years and years. And years. My father had the first telephone around. He had a machine and fix-it shop in the back yard, had it in there and had it wired in the house. Then he rang it, and the maid carrying a stack of plates, dropped the whole stack on the floor. Must have been exciting. Our Science teacher in H.S. told this story every year in the freshman class. Must have impressed him.

My mother came over from Holland with her parents when she was 13 years old. She only went through the 3rd grade in school. She must have loved reading, because when we brought books home from school, she usually had them read before we did.

The reading material at that time was rather scarce comparing to what we have now. Also all the reading we did evenings was done by lamplight, which of course, was on the table where we all did our schoolwork. I remember my brother George having a radio with its inside parts all over one end of the table.



This was when I was in H.S. He always managed to get them together again, and in working order. He repaired many radios and TV's later on. Eighth Grade graduations were a big deal when I graduated. A girl in German Valley won

the country honors for having the highest grade in the county at graduation. Never mind that mine was 1/8 of a point (only) lower than her average. She was a very smart girl, but she also was a real cheater in class. Very sly, which was how she got a lot of her grades. In High School, somewhere in there came the depression. If we had one outfit of clothes for school, we were lucky and we always had just one "Sunday Dress". Our Sunday afternoons were spent visiting, having visitors, or just going for walks. We always had to be back by suppertime, as we always had church on Sunday evenings. No TV. My H.S. graduation was very uneventful. I was sick in bed with measles, so I couldn't go. Oh well, I got my diploma anyhow.

