

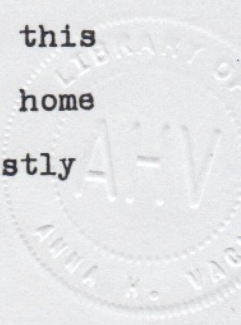
A Christmas Gift

By 1932, everyone felt the sting of the depression and our father had borrowed money for a larger barn and a silo, just before the depression had taken its grip on the country. Like so many others, my parents struggled to keep what little they had, saving enough money just for the annual taxes and interest was a struggle.

With farm prices falling to the rock bottom, and farms were small, it was hard for those farmers to keep their farms. Milk prices were \$1.00 a hundred pounds, eggs 8 cents a dozen, grain 28 cents a bushel. The small farms could supply enough winter feed for about six or ten cows, some young stock and a team of horses. Farmers cut marsh grass and carried the hay by hand to dry when the season was wet. Roadsides were cut for the hay, wherever a spear of hay could be made, it was made, no matter how hard it was, they toiled to survive for themselves and their families. They give so much of them selves, in labor and hope for a better to-morrow for their children.

Mother raised a large garden and canned vegetables and wild berries. Half an acre of potatoes. Raised two hogs for lard, hams, bacon and pork meat fried down and layer in the lard, usually it was placed in a stone jar and cover with a lid. Only groceries were purchased would flour, sugar, yeast, salt (by 100#), soap and on special occasion a ring of bologna or liver sausage, or when it was on sale 3 rings for 25 cents. The grocer always gave dad a sack of candy, we looked forward to this treat. If the neighbor's children were playing with us, dad came home we had to share the candy with them, and they shared with us, mostly baked beans with vinegar, some times oake or mollasses cookies.

Prices on milk were lower?



We picked wild raspberries and sold them for 10 cents a quart and the berries had to be clean otherwise there would be some old crow would complain to our parents her berries had a leaf or a bug which could easily be found in the wild raspberries, she had to have her dime back or another quart of berries. We got .50 cents to keep for ourselves to spend whenever we go to town. I kept my money for Christmas.

In later part of June, Dad would supply the meat, by killing only a buck whenever mother needed meat. Dad never killed a doe or fawn, until very late in the fall. Mother preserved the meat by making a brine of salt, spices vinegar and water. Dad had placed a large barrel in the ground, outside the barrel ^{was} lined with straw, the meat would be placed in the barrel and brine poured over the meat, ^{Covered} ~~covered~~ with a wash tub and covered with straw. Whenever mother wanted the meat, dad uncovered the barrel, mother ^{would} take out a supply needed and soak over nite in cold water, next day the meat was boiled and then fried with onions, it tasted so good.

After the first snowfall, Dad and I would go and snare rabbits, mother canned rabbit and venison in the late fall.

My sister and I had two dresses to wear to school, ^{dress} one pair of shoes for school or dress, an old pair for every day wear, we always wore shoes, because sis and I had too many cuts from being barefoot. Our brothers would go barefoot. Mother knit our mittens and stockings. We wore ^{the} handdowns and was happy to get them, regardless if they fit properly. My sister entered High School that fall, she worked for room and board doing housework and taking care of the children. Mother tried very hard to get a little extra for my sister, but it was hard.

My father was not keen having my sister going to High School, so poor mother had that battle to fight too, my sister never seemed to appreciate

the sacrifices our mother made, to keep her in school. My sister seemed to be concern^{ed} ^{about} the hardship she ^{went} ~~gone~~ through, not having proper clothing and how the students made fun of her. True, it must been hard for her too, but how much it meant to our mother to have her children educated. Mother always felt bad that they could not afford to send me to High School, but when I graduated from the eighth grade, the tuition was not paid by the township then, until two years later.

As Christmas was approaching, our parents told us ^{they} ~~that~~ ^{could} not afford any presents that Christmas for us, but we would have our traditional Christmas eve Polish supper, nuts and candy, and a tree. We carry on in the same manner as we always done, giving the house a complete Cleaning. The curtains were wash^d and heavily starch, stretch^d out on the curtain stretcher, fingers prick from the small nails on the stretcher. Every room was cleaned from top to the bottom, every item in the room was cleaned. Lastly the wooded floors were scrub^b with a stiff brush on hands and knees method. Hustle and bustle of preparing for Christmas eve supper was a happy occasion. Fresh bread and raisin strudel would be bak^ed that day. Salted herring soaked over nite, would be prepared with sugar, vinegar, onions and milk. Dried peas cooked added to the cooked sauerkraut ^{that} ~~that~~ ^{flavor} ~~flavor~~ ^{with} onion saut^ed in little lard and flour. Baked potatoes and rice pudding was a must to the Christmas evening meal.

When the evening chores were done and feed ready for the cattle for the following day because we do just what ^{had} ~~had~~ to be done on Xmas day, everyone wash^d and clean^d everything in its place, then the food would placed on linen-cover^d table, with a unleavened wafer placed in the

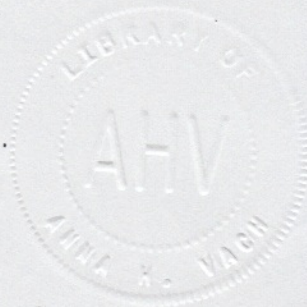
center of the table. (This Wafer was Sent to us by a relative from Chicago for Christmas) we ^{were} seated at the table in silence, Dad would take the wafer, break it ^{it} to enough pieces for each one, then he ^{took} take his piece of the wafer ^{and} he offered to mother first, as she broke a small piece off the wafer, Dad would make a wish or a greeting, then he ^{would} offer to oldest child ~~with~~ the same manner, most of the time, it be a wish ^{of} to the children, he ^{he} offer the wafer to every one at the table, and consumed the remaining piece. Next my Mother proceeded in the same manner and she had consumed her remaining wafer, then each one at the table offered their wafer to our parents first and to our brothers and sister ^{and} guest. Usually there was some one in the neighborhood that ^{had} no one to spend Eve with, would be invited. After the wonderful meal, dishes washed and everything put away, my three brothers were waiting for Santa Claus to bring the candy and nuts.

My sister and I pretend that we had heard Santa Claus, so we run to an opposite window from the kitchen door, while we peered into the ^{kitchen} darkness, mother and dad lined by the door, the sacks of candy, nuts, peanuts and apples. Seated at the dining-table, they pretend to hear noises in the kitchen, the five of us make a dash into the kitchen, leaving the younger ones first. What joy finding the sacks of goodies, my brothers bringing the sacks to the dining room and placing on the table, our two year old brother trying to bring in the larger bag of apples, we thought that was the climax of the evening. Again we gather around the table, shelling peanuts, taking turns using the one nut-cracker we had among us, chatter and enjoying our treat from Santa Claus. Time has come to trim the tree, dad cut one when he working in the woods, stored in the basement until Christmas eve, the few

ornaments were brought down from attic earlier in the day, so it did take ^{18^{hrs}} to trim the tree. Now time has come to light the candles, and I had my gifts to give them which I purchased from my raspberry money. ^{spinning} Tops for my two older brothers, a ball for baby brother, a pretty barrette for my sister and a shining Christmas bell for mother, at first I thought she didn't like it, because as she hung on the tree, her eyes glisten, (years later I learn how much she treasure the bell). Each gift cost 10 cents. For months I collected cigarette butts, ^x carefully saved the tobacco, manage to roll six cigarettes for my dad....by the time I gave everyone their gifts dad had a pail of water and the chairs by the tree. Dad lit the candles very carefully and sat on the chair besides mother, she was holding in her lap our little brother, ^{the} rest of us sat on the floor. As the candles flicker and flared, I looked at the faces of ^{parents} complete happiness. Dad in his clean overalls, mother in her cotton dress, holding a child and four children sitting at their feet, watching the candles on the tree and dad with his pail of water for safty,, That Picture I have Treasured As a My Special Christmas Gift,

Ann Vach July 1982

^x We had a cigarette roller to make perfect cigarettes



Patience

After the trees and timber were cut, clearing the land for farming had to be done. I believed our father choose this 80 arces for the timber, not for farming, because large pine stumps and stones had to be removed and it was hard work for them to clear ~~a~~ half an arce, in the spring or fall. No matter how the ^{field} was picked free from stones, after a rain or plowing, the field was cover^d with stones again, they appeared year after year. God blessed that little farm with good crop of stones.

Our father always believe^d that whenever the other work was done, there was stones to be picked off a certain field. One day mother and dad were going to town, taking the younger children with them, leaving my sister and me to pick stones off the potatoe field to the edge of each row. After our parents left, sis and I picked them a while, she got the idea if we got the team and stoneboat and haul stones to the stonepile. My sister was three years younger than I, but she use^d her knowledge to do the work with the least effort.

So we got the horses from the pasture without any problem. But when we tried to harness the horse, we found ourselves in serious trouble, my sister assured me it was nothing that we could not handle. I managed to get the collar ~~and~~ bridle on. When I put the front part of the harness sis could not help me with rear of the harness, she was small for her age and not very strong. I suggested that if she hold to front part, when I got ^{harness} over the horse, maybe I could do the hip and breeching straps over rear of the horse, but when I tried sis was not strong ^{enough} to hold the front of the harness. After several tries, sis thought if ^{she} could stand on the milkstool and take the back^k end which she said was lighter in weigh^t, so we tried again and sis fell off the stool, by this time

we also got Sean & Roebuck Catolay to see if we ~~harness~~ ^{harness} correctly

the harness came down on to the stable floor with a tangled mess, we had no choice, but to give up the idea using the horses. We didn't have enough strength to hang the harness in its original place, left it on the cement floor in the barn, returned the horses out to the pasture.

Time we wasted bringing the horses, our effort in trying to harness a horse, we lost time, ^{to} ~~in~~ picking the stones off the potato field, time had passed, and our parents returned from town, it left a lot of explaining for us to do. No matter how convincing we tried to be our parents did not seem to understand us. Dad did not mind the tangled harness or they did not mind the stones left to be picked, their concern was of the danger we were in, trying to harness the horse.....so I was the oldest and should ^{have} known better, got the spanking. It seemed hard for my sister and me to understand their concern for us.

Years passed by, to-day I am a mother, grandmother and great grandmother can fully understand our parents concern. How grateful ^{we} should be to the huge team that stood still, while two youngsters (unknowly) were testing the patience of two magnificent animals.

Ann Vach. 1982

Our Two Winter Social Events

One^{or} social events in the winter, would be neighborhood gathering, in our home on the 1st of February, because many in the community had birthday near or on this date, my mothers birthday was on this date....other date was March 19, St. Joseph day, many men in the neighborhood had the name Joseph. Even this day would be in Lent season and a strict Catholic community, it was believed that St. Joseph day was exempted from the rules of Lent, and a party could be held on this day. This gathering would be at the neighbor's home, three miles from our home. There were three Josephs in this family, grandfather, father and a son.

The entire families would attend the gathering, from youngest child to the grandparents who lived in the same home. The family who lived the furthest, the father would prepare the team and big sleigh with piles of straw for the journey to the big social evening, after getting his family nestled on the sleigh, among the straw and blankets, he would take the reins, gave the command to his team, and they were on their way to the next neighbor, where the family would^{be} coming to the road, bringing more blankets and get onto the sleigh, continue on to the next farm home, awaiting at the road was another family. By time, the sixth or seventh families were picked up, the sleigh was filled, so the men and boys would walk behind the sleigh, of couse the girls would walk too if we had a crush on a certain boy. We could walk behind and hold hands, it was so romantic and the younger boys teasing the romantic couple. The cold February air carry^{ed} the laughter, merry voices and the jingle of the sleigh bells could be heard a long distance.

About 7:30 or 7:45, the neighbors arrived, everyone filed into the house, bringing their blankets in onto the porch, each family would bring a large cake or pan of sandwiches, placing on the kitchen table or in the pantry. Taking their wraps to the upstairs bedroom, ^{the bed} would resemble ~~as~~ a huge mountain with all the caps, coats, etc. Mittens would be placed inside of their caps to avoid the going-home confusion, ¹⁸² which was last event of the evening, like fitting a puzzle, who, where, mine, yours, etc, with all the coats, scarfs, and caps.

While everyone was getting settled in the house, my father and few of the men help^d to take the team to the barn, usually hay would be given to the horses, the men came to the house for evening of being with the neighborhood families.

The furniture was removed from the dining-room, which was the largest room in the house for dancing. An elderly bachelor could play an accordion, the polkas, waltzes, schottische, rheinlander, Jingle Bells and Home Sweet Home. Grandfathers would settle in the kitchen, keep the old range filled with wood, and water boiling when it came time to make the coffee. When I was young, ¹⁸³ sit in a corner away from a window, and listen to the old-timers, tell the stories, as they came to the wilderness. As I grow older, remember every location of old homesteads, logging camps, forgotten graves, etc. Reason I sat in a corner away from a window, the stories told about the Indians, were very frightening to me then, certainly it would be safer if I sat away from a window, no Indian could grab me. (there were no Indians left in that area, but I was not going take any chances of being capture by the Indians.

The grand mothers sat in the living room among the extra furniture holding a baby or two, there seemed always lot of babies and small children around. They sat and watch^d the dancing for a while, after the little ones fell asleep, they moved into the bedroom, one by one the little ones were placed on the beds, the older women sat in the bedroom watching the children and visiting.

While in the archway of the two rooms, sat our neighborhood bachelor running his fingers over the keys of his accordian. The first piece would be a waltz,,the parents danced the first dance, no matter how many were dacing^d, they danced in perfect step, that no one bumped into each other. The parents danced with the young children, as well as with the older teenagers, brother and sisters, neighbors young and old danced^d with each other. Each dance was taught to the entire family, from the youngest to the oldest. During the course of the evening, time came when a parent dance with their child, the entire dance floor was theirs. A father(Norwegian) takes his daughter to dance the schottische, and could they dance. My father would take me dance the Polka or the Polish hop. But when the Jolly Coppersmith was played, a son danced with his grandmother. Her little plump, short body and feet kept in tune with the music. She came from Germany to the area many years ago.... years ago she walked 10 miles to nearest town, to purchase a sack of flour on a Saturday, next day she attended Mass, walked back home carrying the flour. It was said she walked the trail barefoot, ~~carried her shoes~~ *to protect her shoes she carried them.*

Dancing^{would} last till 11:30, The dining table would be returned to the dining room and the food placed on the table, the only drinks were milk and coffee, mothers with the smaller children filled their

plates first, sat the children on the floor along the wall. Rest of group fell in line filling their plates, older folks sat on chairs, but the teenagers sat with the little ones on the floor. About a hour and half later, the table was cleared and taken back to the living room, couple of polkas would be played, followed by Home Sweet Home. Some of the men and the teenage boys would return the furniture to the dining room, the girls helped the parents with wraps, my father with a few of the men got the team ready to the house, while some of men and boys carry out the blankets, which were warm as they were brought into the kitchen from the cold porch about two hours before going home.

After everyone was ready, the driver ^{would} take each family to ^{their} ~~the~~ house, there were many sleepy youngsters to ~~be~~ carry in. As one by one families ^{was} left off, made room for some of the men and boys, as they were not as spry as they were going to the party.

St. Joseph's gathering at our little German lady's home, would be the same gathering, only the weather was unpredictable, and years gave us from snow storm, windy, rain to mild weather. But there always was a way to gather to-gether and enjoy ourselves, without the worry of the weather. In those days the roads were not snowplowed, so it seemed as if the sleigh was the most popular transportation, I can recall once a wagon was used, regardless how we got there, always had a good time.

But as the years passed, time had changed the neighborhood and other means of entertainment beginning ^{with} the younger group. Dance halls, some halls were converted from an old barn or shed. It ^{had} ~~be~~ two rooms, one small room for the bar, mostly beer was sold, other large room was the dance area, with a small band platform for three or four piece.

band, accordion, saxophone or clarinet, and drums, each were paid \$2.50 or \$3.00 a nite. Always a good floor and benches around the outer wall. So seventeens and older started to go to the dances, and the young newly wedded..... So gathering at the homes with entire family faded out by the 1932, The old folks had their gathering for a few years, but automobiles had a hand in changing the entertainment for the neighbors, visiting friends and relatives, Friday evening driving into town shopping for groceries, taking in a family nite movie, which was a bargain nite. Neighborhood gathering faded away with the changing times, only wonderful memories are still with in my heart of family love and enjoy each other in spite of all the hardship those folks endured. I shall be grateful that I have these memories of those pioneers who gave so much of themselves to us.

Ann Vach.
July 1982.

