

Anna Bernhard

Last Tuesday, Apr. 20, we celebrated Mom's 102 birthday. No one suspected then that she would take her leave of us so soon. She enjoyed everything about that last birthday party--the company, the flowers and gifts, the food, and the 6-handed Schmeer games. And she felt really honored that Abbot Jerome came to the party. At 8:00 she was sorry to see the last of us leaving her.

Now it is she who has left us. But she leaves us with memories--beautiful memories, poignant ones, and some that are amusing.

None of us here present was at her wedding day in May, 1916, but reliable sources have told us that it was a little unusual--at least, the evening of the wedding day was. Sr. Xavier, of happy memory, told me that on the eve of that May day as she was preparing to play the organ for May devotions at Muenster Cathedral, the whole wedding procession came in. The Sisters were, of course, impressed by such a devout beginning of married life. What Sr. Xavier did not know was that while the bride and groom and many guests were at May devotions, a few stayed behind to prepare for a chivaree at my father's house. I suspect Mom's high-spirited brothers Jake and John Stomp were behind the arrangements. Anyway, Mom was not familiar with Chivarees, and she went upstairs and refused to come down to join the party.

If her brothers were highspirited, Mom's sister Regine was downright rambunctious--so much so that Mom was reluctant to take us for more than 1 visit a year to the Stroessers. Not only was Aunt Regine's language quite descriptive, but she also said what she said in such a way that all of St. Gregor could hear it w/o even listening, and that embarrassed Mom. I must confess, I enjoyed the visits to Stroessers. They were never dull.

Our mother came from another strain in the family. She was basically a shy, private person who minded her own household and didn't have much use for gossip. She loved to play cards--a game called 66 that she played with Dad alone; and

eucker that she played with company. It sounded hilarious when one of them became buck. John Maier, who will be 97 next week, told me yesterday that he remembers playing eucker with Mom and Dad and Uncle John. He said they all tried to make Dad be buck.

Mom was a hard worker. During the 30's, when money was next to non-existent, most of our food came from the huge garden which was cared for primarily by Mother. She & Dad both loved gardening, but the planting and harvesting season were also Dad's busiest times in the shop. His contribution to bringing in the home-grown food was to drive us out to the country on Sundays to pick Saskatoon berries of which we usually canned over 100 quarts. In those pre-fridge, pre-deepfreeze days, the cellar shelves were also lined with an equal amount of canned tomatoes and lots of peas and beans, & pickles of all kinds. There were jams & jellies too--from pincherries and chokecherries; & the most delicious marmalade made from veg. marrow & lots of lemons.

Dad spoiled some of his customers. If he didn't finish sharpening their plowshares or fixing their tractors by mealtime, he would send a message over that so and so many would be coming along to dinner. Once in a while Mom would be exasperated. "we're not a hotel," she'd say. And that was true. Even in the 30's hotels didn't serve meals for free. We kids liked it. Not only because we liked company, but there might be a raisin bread-pudding garnished with cream skimmed from the top of the milk, and flavored with sugar and vanilla; or maybe a jar of canned crabapples. When there was no company there was also usually no dessert.

By 1943 the family had pretty well left the nest and Mom and Dad moved to Humboldt into a house that Dad had built on 10th St. with the lumber from the old parish house. Life became easier for Mom. Not only did she now have running water, but the garden was considerably smaller and the work much lighter. Now Mom could indulge her love for flowers, inside and outside.

In 1956 She and Dad went back to Europe for a visit--to Bavaria, GERM. which Dad had left in 1913; and to Luxembourg, which Mom had left the same year. And last year for the first time, relatives from

Luxembourg came here for a visit. We had wonderful get-togethers, and we discovered that our Uncle Nick in Luxembourg had passed on some very highspirited genes to his granddaughter Susy.

The reports the visitors took back to Luxembourg have tempted our 83-yr-old cousin Sisy and her husband to want to come too this summer. I don't know if Mom's leaving us will change those plans.

We didn't know it at the time, but a week ago yesterday we had a farewell party for Mom. On Friday morning she was admitted to the hospital and it was obvious that her condition was serious.

We spent those last few days with her. During the final vigil, we didn't say many prayers, because that was not Mom's kind of piety. Her prayer was more like that of the author of PS 131 "Like a weaned child on its mothers lap, so is my soul."

Now Mom has seen her loving God face to face, and in him she has found again all the lovely things she once treasured--her husband Meinrad, her infant daughter Julia, her three sons Arnold, Nick and Ray. She enjoys fruits and flowers more gorgeous by far than those she grew so lovingly. And she can enjoy again the beauties of the lovely little country where she grew up.

Now she knows what Easter is all about. We can't help saying "Alleluia."