

Memories of Western Springs by Don Kennedy

I took up residence at 4357 Lawn Avenue in February 1932, recently arriving from the Hinsdale Sanitarium (now the Hinsdale Hospital). I immediately acquired Donald and Olga as parents and Barbara Ann a sister six years older. My sister died when she was 19 in 1945 and my father died in 1947. I also lived at 4205 Lawn when my mother married Raymond Geer in 1950. When I married Elaine Hagstrom we lived at 1352 Walnut and I currently reside at 4824 Creek Drive with my wife.

One of my earliest memories was of our milkman, Stanley Maxted. He owned a dairy farm at the southwest corner of Wolf Road and 55th Street, now a development called Ridgewood. In nice weather he came to town with a horse and white wagon named Maxted Dairy and when there was a lot of snow he came by horse and sleigh. His brother died in the first World War and there is a memorial outside the water tower for Harry G. Maxted. The American Legion Post is named in his honor. The paper caps on the glass milk bottles would stand tall when the cream froze in the winter.

The first floor of the water tower housed the Police Station. The Administrative Offices of the town were on the second and the Jail was on the third, under the water tank. Grace Meyers ran the office. Two relatively shallow wells supplied the water to the tank, one just east of the Burlington of the railroad crossing on Wolf and the other in front of the water softening plant on Hillgrove. Much later, two deep wells were drilled, the first between the current Town Hall and the Fire Station and the second on the west end of town by the Public Works garage.

Our garbage was collected by the town in a large wagon covered with canvas and a large mass of flies. One of our summer garbage collectors was Roy Slezak who banged the cans and sang loudly about 6:00 in the morning. The garbage was taken to the Village dump on what is now the west end of Spring Rock Park. Since there wasn't any Toll Road it was

wetlands between our town and Hinsdale. Because the freight trains slowed down going uphill to Hinsdale, the Hoboes (now called Street People) would jump off and camp between the towns. My friends and I would lie in the weeds and watch them cook their meals over open fires. Because of the Depression they were not really frowned on and many would do small chores in town and be fed at the back door by the citizens. In inclement weather they went under the track where Flag Creek went under the tracks. The west end of town in that area was largely peat which sometimes burned in the summer. When the breeze was from the southwest the smell was not very pleasant.

When I reached the age of five I started Kindergarten at the Grand Avenue school at the end of the block. There was a door on the South side. I stayed there through the 4th Grade.

During World War II the area where the barber shop is, next to the Community Bank, was a small building used for recycling. We used our wagons to collect paper and we balled up string and aluminum foil to take to the house. At this time the families were issued ration books for food items such as meat, butter, sugar, etc... We were told the farmers in Wisconsin would not let oleo to be sold in yellow color so it was sold in plastic bags with a little dot of yellow dye. We had to kneed the bags to blend the color. The oleo did not require a ration stamp. Each family also had letter decals for the rationed gasoline. An "A" card entitled the holder to the least amount of gas and a "C" card the most gas.

Almost every house had a cistern and a catch basin. In the attic of our house was a large galvanized tank like a horse trough. The basement had a pump with a long handle to pump from the cistern up to the attic tank. Gravity then brought the rain water to a third spigot at the kitchen sink.

George Bullerman was a local plumber who cleaned out catch basins. He lived in the little house on Hillgrove which is currently the Spaghetti Bowl.

He kept his black Model T in the alley behind the house. He had to crank the engine to start it which was difficult in the winter. The crank would jump around and hit him and the air would turn blue until his wife came out the back door and yelled at him.

Our only policeman was Pete Peterson, a very nice person. Alan Ross and I had a snow fort behind the bushes at the house at Lawn and Walnut. The squad car came by and, of course, I threw a snowball, failing to notice that Pete had the window down. It hit him in the side of the face and I ran all the way to Hinsdale because the Lane was open before the tollway was built.

A developer built several small houses on Hampton, just south of Ogden. The street did not go though and the area, unfortunately, was called "Fishville."

Albert Lundin had an "L" shaped lumber yard where the White Hen is now. There was a small building on the very corner which housed Winkleman Coal. Across the street you can see where the concrete bins along the tracks which was the back of the area where the coal cars dropped off coal. The area immediately West were corn fields down to Vaughan's large nursery. We would sit in the corn fields and fashion corn cob pipes, experimenting with smoking corn silk until Mr. Winkleman would chase us away by throwing lumps of coal at us.

Mr. Pratt had a store where the Edward D. Jones is now on Hillgrove. He sold penny candy and as children we would walk up and down in the front of the cases clutching our two or three pennies. Behind the cases Mr. Pratt would walk silently awaiting the moment of our big purchase. When he closed the store the two store fronts became a co-op grocery store that sold ownership shares.

Julius M. Keil owned a drug store a few doors East of where the Competitive Foot is now. When I was in seventh grade I began my first

job as the soda jerk. Mr. Keil sat in the back and drank Schlitz beer. A delivery truck pulled up one day and sent 75 cases down the chute into the basement. Since he stayed in the back for beer and prescriptions, I ran the front of the store. Lucky Strikes still came in green and we did not check age limits. The store had a large soda fountain which took up most of my time. One day a man came in and asked for prophylactics. Since I did not know what they were, I yelled to Mr. Keil to find out where we kept them. When I turned around the screen door slammed shut and the man was halfway down the street. I smelled gas in the basement one day and told the owner. A few minutes later he told me not to worry about it since he had gone down and lit a match and nothing had happened. Many of the cases and shelves are now on display on the second floor of the Tower at the Historical Society.

My mother shopped for groceries at Hendricksen Rose, now Casey's. Mr. Bolnow was the butcher and Horace got our groceries. He had a long pole with a clamp on the end, since many groceries were on shelves far above our heads.

There were very few homes south of 47th street and there was considerable vegetation.

My maternal grandparents, August and Barbara Petryl arrived in town about 1918 and built a home at 4140 Lawn, which is three doors North of Veteran's Park on the West side of the street. They also had a vacant lot to the North. My grandfather was born on the sea when his parents emigrated from Bohemia. He was very innovative and built grape arbors, chicken coops and an art studio on the north lot. There were a variety of fruit trees and vegetable plots. My grandmother always clutched the corners of her apron to hold all the produce while the chickens crowed in the background. The radiators in the kitchen always held dough which was rising. The house contained Edwin, Martha and Norma. Ed played the cello, Martha sang, and Norma played the piano. Grandfather painted

every pipe in the basement colors according to gas, hot and cold water or cistern water. A float in the cistern was connected to a gauge in the basement to show the level of the cistern water. He had a large shop in the basement and had fashioned little electric switches from brass, like door switches on modern cars. It was great fun to open the fruit cellar or closets and watch the lights go on and off. Panels on the back of the work benches held hand tools where the outline was painted in black so if a tool was missing you could always know what was missing. Used newspapers were balanced on a device which was lowered onto twine whenever 25 pounds were reached. The stairs to the second floor contained two gas jets that were obviously put in before electricity.

As a gift to my sister, he built a beautiful doll house which was an exact replica of our house at 4357 Lawn. The doll house was almost as tall as my sister. He replicated our furniture, wallpaper, books, etc...and had a transformer in the basement to light the handcrafted floor lamps from brass. Even the toilet paper roll was where it should be. I still have one of the books which has miniature pictures of our relatives. It was a labor of love. The dollhouse is now at our daughter Martha Weiss's house in Hinsdale.

My father, who was the youngest, and his two brothers came to Western Springs from Wabasha Minnesota which is on the Mississippi above Winona and below Red Wing. His brother Bill married Ruth Stocker and they had two children, William and Richard. They lived at 4150 Grand Avenue. Ed Stocker had three children, Ed, Ruth and Marion. The younger Ed had four boys: Ebbie, Jack, Bob and Jim. Marion married a Dana. All of the families celebrated Christmas Eve at the home of John and Geneive Williams at 4558 Grand Avenue. John's father, Edgar Williams, was in his nineties and was a retired engineer from the Chicago Sanitary District. He practiced astronomy from the "Widow's Walk" on the top of the house. He had a long white beard below his waist. He would stay upstairs until the clock struck nine and then you could hear his cane tap on the stairs on

Christmas Eve. He would eerily greet the guests and immediately go back upstairs. He was subsequently killed walking across the Burlington tracks. Geneive was well known at the Congregational Church as "Grandma Gen." Lucy Williams was the church secretary for Reverend Stubbs at the Congregational Church.

Pranks were quite common and less frowned on than by current society. My classmate, Dick Anderson, and I brought about ten packs of Feen-a-Mint chewing gum to our eighth grade class at Mc Clure. We took off the wrappers and passed out the gum to the class. Students developed the collywobbles and were sent home by the nurse. When Superintendent Theodore Saam arrived in the early afternoon, Dick and I were almost the only people left in the class. Our punishment was to sit on the floor next to Birdena Gift's desk for two weeks. I still remember the class before us at Lyons Township fed ExLax to a group of pigeons at an assembly. It was amazing when they turned on the spotlights. On Halloween we discovered that GM cars has a horn ring behind the steering wheel. If you tightened the ring the horn would blow continually until the owners came out and disconnected the batteries.

Many of the residents commuted to Chicago on the train to their jobs. Quite a few played bridge in the corner of the cars where the seats faced each other. The conductors put our boards for their laps and cards. The steam engines emitted a lot of soot which turned my mother's drying laundry dark and brought tears to her eyes.

The Little Theatre of Western Springs was founded by Mary Cattel. She and her husband, Hib, lived at 4140 Grand Avenue. Their son kept carrier pigeons in the barn. Ella Heimbrodt founded the Children's Theatre and lived on the Southwest corner of Lawn and Maple with her husband Carl. My mother and father were very active and Dad was the first business manager. My grandfather, August, was in the first play in 1929. Uncle Ed handled lighting. The plays were put on at the Village Club and they

played badminton every morning. The chairs were on carts under the stage and they had to be put up every afternoon and taken down every night. Eventually the Theater made enough money to build their own building near the Recreation Center. The Children's Theatre kept it tax free. I labored as a pin boy at the two bowling alleys in the basement of the Club. If your role exited stage left and you later entered stage right, you had to go out in the snow and walk around the back of the building! I had a role as a messenger in Junior Miss. The building was one of the only two buildings in the Midwest for performing arts that was built with private money.

Don Kennedy, March 2006.