

## Some Memories of Long Ago

In 1931, the heart of the Great Depression, I was eight years old. My mother, two brothers, a sister and I were living for a few years with my maternal grandparents, two aunts and an uncle in their two-story frame home on the south side of Chicago. To accommodate our family Grandpa had put an addition on the back of the house. We were a huge intrusion in their lives, but they accepted us in their warm, gentle way with love and kindness.

Recollections of my childhood at Grandpa and Grandma's house remain particularly clear and distinct. Our presence brought to ten the number of persons using the tiny, old-fashioned bathroom with its ancient claw-foot tub. We children bathed only once a week, extending the limited supply of hot water by taking turns in the same tub of water – bladder control was imperative.

I can remember coming down the backstairs to the kitchen early in the morning and seeing Grandpa (who was born in Sweden) sitting on a chair with the coffee grinder between his knees, crushing coffee beans to make "Swedish gasoline," which was brewed on the stove in a tall, blue-enameled pot and drunk throughout the day. Occasionally, as a delightful treat, Grandpa gave us youngsters sugar cubes that had been dipped in his coffee.

My grandparents had a chicken coop in their backyard. For a special Sunday dinner Grandma roasted a chicken that Grandpa had dispatched with a hatchet and my aunts had plucked using a pail of boiling water. For desert Grandma served a delicious pudding prepared from the juice she had squeezed out of Concord grapes and stored in a basement crock.

At Christmastime, Grandma baked cookies and let us children participate. We made an array of holiday shapes with cookie cutters, licked the batter bowl, and then got to eat the cookies that had been broken during baking. We never forgot the fun of "helping" Grandma with the Christmas cookies.

The Christmas tree had a prominent place in the front parlor, which was reserved for special occasions. I took great pride one year in being given the task of keeping the lights lit on the tree. In those days the lights were wired in series, so that when one of the short-lived bulbs burned out, the entire string went dark. Getting it to work again required checking each bulb and replacing the bad one. Two bulbs burning out at the same time created a major problem because of the difficulty in locating both bad ones. Each of us children chose a favorite spot under the tree and vowed to stay awake for Santa's visit, but didn't succeed. Reflecting the straightened times of the depression, our gifts were modest, though we thought they were wonderful.

It is hard to believe these boyhood experiences occurred more than eighty years ago, when horse-drawn wagons still plied the alley behind my grandparents' house. I look back fondly on those days.