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## **Legends of Freeborn County** **Ask an 'old man' to tell of bygone days**

by Bev Jackson

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There is a song called "See An Old Man." It was performed many years ago by a young man named Augustin Lira, and I do not know if he also wrote it. The words go something like this. "See that old man over there who does not speak? If only I could find out what he is thinking...what he knows, then I would know how to live my life."

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If only, if only. Something is happening in today's society that I do not understand. With all of our technology and resourcefulness, instead of creating a wonderful world for our children we've created a place of fear and danger.

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Might it have been different if we would do as the song suggests, if we would listen to the old men? Technology is pushing us further than we ever dreamed we would go: but it doesn't seem to be the ultimate answer. My parents managed just fine without a word processor, a telephone, answering machine, and a VCR. They seemed to be able to communicate without needing help from the electronics industry.

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I grew up in a world where talking and sharing were a normal part of our life. A world where my friends and I walked to school, or to the beach, or to the park, and as we walked we sang, and we discussed the wonders of our lives, and we told open ended, continuing stories.

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I really don't know how responsible we were to the stories of old men, but I do know that we respected them, that there was a security with that respect, and that we did not live in a world of fear and apprehension.

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A good friend of mine is writing her own stories for her granddaughter. Marlene was given one of those "Grandmother Remembers" books, one with an idea on the top of a blank page, and lots of room for her to reminisce. She is thoroughly enjoying the writing and is in the process of discovering the parts of her life that are the most meaningful.

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I purchased a similar book a couple of years ago. It's called "It's Your Story, Pass It On" by Colgin and van der Ven. One of the pages begins "What did your father do? What stories do you remember about him?" This is a small portion of what I wrote.

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"My father worked in a factory. All day long he stood by a machine that made loud, clanging noises like all of the other machines in the room. He cut tiny parts - and he used to say 'If I had a nickel for every part that I've cut, I'd be a rich man.' I think he was a rich man and he never knew it. My inheritance was: a love that I never doubted, a trust in myself, a respect for others, and the belief that all will be OK.,.,

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"He always had a comfortable chair in the living room where he'd take a nap in the evening because he was tired and 'It was too early to go to bed.' When my children were small, each one could sit in that chair beside him to watch TV. They just fit. I never told my dad that I loved him, but I do and now I visit his grave and cry because I miss him.

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The most exciting experiences that I've had while writing in that book, are the memories triggered by the remembering. I've smelled smells, felt textures, and relived experiences

as if I were still right in the middle of them. It's been wonderful for me, and I hope that someday my children and grandchildren will know me better because of these thoughts.

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In a recent visit with Dave Nystuen of the Minnesota Historical Society, I learned that Freeborn County was the second county in the state of Minnesota to build a museum specifically for housing historical artifacts and records. Counties and communities have always found homes for their history in court house basements, or abandoned schools, or libraries, or stores, or whatever the enthusiastic community historians could find a vacant spot. But Freeborn County people wanted more than that, and in 1965 our museum building was dedicated - truly an innovative and daring idea.

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I think that this announces to the world a strong sense of community history, a feeling of pride in that history, and a respect for the stories and the individuals who caused it to happen.

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This winter, as we work to revise exhibits in the museum, I am reminded of the time, and energy, and love that has gone into the building of our county and of the value of its history.

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The history that we share at the museum and in our personal communication with each other is both big - million dollar businesses - and small - naps in the evening with a comfortable rocker. Maybe our priorities are reversed, maybe that comfortable chair and the warmth it provided a man and his grandchildren is really the biggest story.

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However we define history, as our personal history or in connection with our place in the community, I'm wondering if we have somehow overlooked a valuable learning tool. Might it have been different if we would do as the song suggests, if we would listen to the old man?