

Legends of Freeborn County

What is your heritage?

by Bev Jackson

Forty-ninth in a monthly series of Freeborn County Articles - April 2004

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According to the American Heritage Dictionary, this word means "1. Property that is or can be inherited: inheritance. 2. Something other than property passed down from preceding generations; legacy; tradition. 3. The status or lot acquired by a person through birth; birthright; for example - a heritage of affluence and position."

What is my heritage? For lack of a better method, I used a greeting card pattern for my description. Please bear with me.

H - HOME. Home was my Mom in a house dress and apron making noodles for chicken sour. She never used a recipe, but her combination of flour, eggs, salt, pepper, and water sprinkles made the most delicious noodles I have ever tasted. I remember the huge pie crust shape that she rolled out on the counter top, sprinkled with flour, and then rolled up. From this long tube shape, she sliced very thin strips, then unrolled them to dry for a while before dropping them into the bubbling chicken broth. No one has ever made chicken soup as good as my Mom's.

E - ENERGY. As soon as I was old enough, I walked. With a wonderful group of friends who lived on the South Side of town, we walked to the high school, to church, to the beach, to Abbott Field, to the Maid-Rite, or to the Broadway Theater. In the evenings, for a summer job, we'd walk for hours between the little, orange, A & W Root Beer Stand of 7th Street and the cars that lined the parking lot. Those nickel root beers were the best in town.

R - RESPECT. Even Though we did not always agree with the "powers that be," we respected them. The minister who firmly suggested that we never date someone from another church, or the teacher who unfairly locked us in a classroom to write 500 times "I will not cheat when correcting test papers," were surely aware of the conversations that went on when they were not in our presence, but we never would have challenged them directly. Most of the time, they deserved our respect and they got it.

I - INDEPENDENCE. Even though my Dad worked in a factory most of his life where his hours were controlled by employee rules and regulations, and Mom was a very traditional homemaker, they instilled in me a sense of independence - a belief that "they," whoever "they" may be, don't always have the answers to my needs, and I must reach far down inside to find the knowledge that gives me peace. That is not always easy to do.

T - TENDERNESS. Ours was a very quiet home. I only remember Dad and Mom seriously disagreeing twice, and both times I was devastated. The rest of the time, our life was very mellow, and in my teen-age years, I thought it was boring. Even though we did not talk about loving each other, that love was never doubted, and the security of that home was never questioned. Now when I try to explain it, I have a hard time finding the right words.

A - ANNUAL FAMILY GET-TOGETHERS. Christmas Eve with my older sisters and their families and the questions, "Are the dishes done yet?" "Can we open the presents?" "Are the dishes almost done?" = Mother's Day and the back yard picnics - Father's Day and the cellophane wrapped shirts = little spots of togetherness that provided the jumping off places for the independence of the months in between.

G - GARAGE. That's where Dad kept the oldest car in the world. Or so it seemed to me. When I was in high school, he drove a 1937 Buick. It had no rust, always started, and ran on the coldest mornings. It was always cleaned and shined, but I was so embarrassed that our cars were never of the same decade that we were living in. How could they be? Dad paid cash for his vehicles. He wasn't going to be beholden to a bank or a car dealer.

E - EXCITEMENT FOR LEARNING. Even though Dad and Mom had country school eighth part of our lives. Zane Grey westerns, Anne of Green Gables, Gone with the Wind, the history books that I brought home from school or the public library, even comic books - maybe not classical literature, but reading to enjoy and to learn from. How were they to know that this foundation would provide the determination that carried me through nine years of college courses?

HERITAGE. What is it? It didn't occur to me until I finished this column, that I never mentioned heirlooms or inheritances. HERITAGE - it's a powerful word.