

Cherished Memories

By Yvonne Alexander

During my childhood years my grandparents were also residents of the same small town in Nebraska. We saw them often at work or at play. My grandma was an expert at work and at play. A short, sturdy peasant girl from a German village, she was also very strong, as was her work ethic. How she loved early mornings! She was out in her vegetable garden, tending her flower beds, having already filled the laundry lines and fed her chickens, stopping to slaughter a couple of chickens and ready them for the skillet for the noon meal. She had friendly conversations with neighbors and any family who came by. Always a smile and a big hug and kiss for grandkids. The kitchen smells were enticing-there seemed, always, to be bread dough rising or crullers coming from a kettle, ready to be sugared and enjoyed. A storage room in the basement had the pungent odors of the stone crocks filled with home-made sauerkraut and huge dill pickles. Grandma had no special appliance, just an assortment of good sharp knives. It was hard to believe that she could cut such fine sauerkraut and homemade noodles.

My love and admiration for Grandma grew through the years. She was so much more than the homemaker. Mother of seven children, she lost one at age 13 to a childhood disease. She kept smiling, as the star hung in her window during World War II while her youngest son served in the Battle of the Bulge. She was an uncomplaining, compassionate care-giver for her mother-in-law, who died while living in her home. This was all serious stress, but Grandma was undaunted. In her large dining room there was a permanent fixture-a quilting frame ready for use. The small, deft fingers that cleaned chickens, and planted gardens, and shoveled snow could create the most delicate tiny stitches on a quilt. She always had a radio background and loved to dance to polka music in her kitchen. If it was a sunny day, she would sit on the driveway and play jacks with us, but she preferred to use her own collection of small stones as she had used in her childhood.

When the neighborhood church doors opened, Grandma was there. She was a singer, always sang "Stille Nacht" at Christmas Eve services. She did this for the last time at the age of 98. In her later years, she had medical problems. She lived with each of her daughters for a period of time but eventually entered a nursing home. She had lost most of her children and the others were too old and sick to care for her. Her eyesight was gone but her vision of her home in glory was not. She became impatient wondering why God couldn't seem to finish her mansion. My last visit with Grandma was during her last week. We were alone in her room at the nursing home. She was in a deep sleep, a peaceful look on her face, her lovely hands were smooth but cold. She was 104 years old. Her work was done, her journey was ending, her mansion was ready.