

Once again I will reminisce about my life in the midwest town of Columbus, Nebr. My family lived in several rental houses in Columbus after we moved from Schuyler, Nebr. Our final home there was at 2101 14th St. It sat on the corner of 14th St. and 21st Ave.

It was a lovely house, brick front porch and wooden siding. The lot was a double lot and the house sat on the half away from 21st Ave. There was a majestic row of Hackberry trees on two sides of the lot. They were much older than the house and grew to be nearly 50 feet tall. We lived in this house for nearly 20 years.

My mother loved lilacs and decided to plant tiny shoots of lilacs that divided the lot in half - front to back. My sister was only about four at the time and there is a picture of her sitting in front of the plantings. They are hardly to be seen. After many years, they grew to be about 20 feet tall and were so thick it was impossible to walk through them. They shielded us from the street and provided a beautiful garden backdrop for the back lawn. The aroma from the old-fashioned purple lilacs was overpowering, but wonderful when they were in bloom.

We also had a few roses, Mother's favorite was the Peace Rose, and pear and cherry trees - all in the backyard.

There are a number of stories about all of the above trees and shrubs. First the lilacs: this was the era before air conditioning. So during the hot summers in Nebraska, it was the custom for us and our guests to sit outside trying to catch whatever breeze there was. We had some Adirondack chairs that seemed to swallow us up when we sat in them. They were so deep and big. We also pulled out lawn chairs and even a cot or two to sit on. We lived close to the main line of the Union Pacific RR, so conversation was held between the noise of the passing trains.

One summer, my father was particularly annoyed by the mosquitoes. He purchased a bottle of liquid bug killer that could be attached to the garden hose. He proceeded to attach the bug killer to the hose and spent a good 45 minutes spraying the tall lilac bushes. He came back in the house and announced that "there, that will take care of the d---- bugs!". We were all pleased at the prospect, but that evening we were swatting mosquitoes. He went in and examined the bug killer. To his dismay he had neglected to punch a hole in the top of the bottle - which still contained the bug killer. The lilacs got a good bath anyway!

The Sickle Pear tree had been planted by the previous owners and was quite large. This species of pear trees has long, slender limbs and usually has a bumper crop of fruit. Each year we had to prop up the limbs loaded with pears to keep them from breaking. They were always picked before they were ripe, wrapped and put in the basement to finish ripening. Mom made pear butter out of the bulk of them - the rest we ate. I never remember anyone spraying them to keep them from the worms.

The trunk of the pear tree split in two and made a perfect place for my son Jim to sit and wait and watch for the trains to come through. I am sure he will remember this pastime.

We also had 3 sour cherry trees on the west side of the house. They were sheilded from the North wind by the house, but did get the full sun in the afternoon. They were always loaded with cherries, and there is nothing that tastes better than warm, red ripe cherries right off the tree. I can remember one year we harvested 5 bushels of cherries from those trees. We had a freezer at that time, so we were called into service to pit the cherries to save for the winter. At the time we were complaining about the wrinkled fingers and the time spent on the job. Later when that Cherry Pie appeared on the table it seemed well worth the effort.

We also had song birds -robins, sparrows and maybe bluejays- and red squirrels. I always thought the red squirrel was the only kind alive. Of course, now I know of other colors - and cherish the white squirrels we have in our backyard in Maryland. One spring, a bird built a nest on my parents front porch. It was at the far end and in a safe place. Of course, the birds would use anything they could find to "feather" their nest. This robin had found a string which she deemed suitable for her nest. On the other end of the string there was a tag which read "SALE". We left the nest up through the next season - and it was occupied again next year.

The front door of our house was not used during the winter months. There was a driveway near the garage in the back so the traffic would be at the rear of the house. When you think about it, isn't this ideal? No wet, dirty shoes through the living room over the carpet. The only reason we had to clean the snow off the front porch was for the paperboy or the milkman. Yes, the milk was delivered every day in glass bottles with the little space at the top for the cream. It was always a challenge to get the milk into the house before it froze and the little paper top popped up. Thank heavens we did not have neighborhood cats that could take advantage of the treat. One time my father had parked the car by the front walk. Overnight it snowed the usual 3 or 4 inches. The next day, the milkman, his cart and horse came by to deliver the milk. The horse was very familiar with the route, and we supposed the milkman was not completely in charge at the time. The horse, following its unalterable path collided with our car. Needless to say, the car was parked out back from then on.

This house at 2101 14th St. was a spacious and well-built house. During the bad economic times of the depression and the dust storms, many people lost their homes. This was one that had been repossessed and for sale at a very low price to cover the loss at the bank. When we bought it, I remember overhearing the monthly payment was around \$30.00.

We had four bedrooms upstairs, two bedrooms downstairs, one and one-half baths, kitchen, breakfast room, dining room and living room. We also had a full basement with 5 rooms. How would you

like to run into that bargain now!!! All the floors were oak and the window and door frames were also oak and natural color. We had storms on all the windows. They were the kind that hooked at the bottom of the sash and were all in one piece. During the summer season they were removed and the screens were put in place. When we first moved into the house, there was a coal furnace which had a "stoker" attached to feed the coal automatically. Of course, the other automatic part was the person with the shovel to fill the stoker from the coal in the coal room. This was somehow connected to a thermostat, but I can never remember a cold day in that house. The coal truck would pull up to the side of the house, open the coal chute and dump in the coal. Can you imagine the dust that created throughout the house?

After we lived in the house for about 6 or 8 years, we were fortunate enough to have a gas furnace installed. You can bet, my Mother cleaned that coal room - and we never used it again. The other appliance that caused much grief was the hot water heater.

There was no such thing as an automatic hot water heater when I was a child. In order to have hot water to bathe, wash dishes or wash clothes, the heater had to be hand lit. It took about 40 minutes to heat enough water to wash clothes which was a weekly Monday chore. That old grouch of a heater nearly blew up the house several times. If it was left on longer than it should have been, steam would replace the water in the tank. Many times we had to run and turn on all the faucets in the house - spouting steam- to avoid a catastrophe.

Speaking of washing clothes. My Mother had a Maytag Wringer washing machine. I do remember that it was replaced once. Her method of washing clothes saved water and got the job done. First, she sorted all the clothes in the clothes chute. She had piles of dish-towels (all white flour sack types), sheets and pillowcases (white), bath towels, underwear, socks and my Dad's handkerchiefs. The washer was filled with very, very hot water into which she cut small pieces of Ivory bar soap. The machine was turned on until the soap was dissolved. Then the clothes loaded from the sorted piles one pile by one. As each load was finished, the clothes were run through the wringer into a washtub full of clear water. Then they were run through a second rinse in the other washtub of clear water.

All the dirty clothes were run through the same water, sometimes with Clorox or bluing and ready to be hung to dry. During the winter, the clothes were hung in the big room in the basement. Our basement was warm because the furnace was nearby. In the summer, the clothes went outdoors to the clothes line.

Now Mom had a bit of a problem with the outside clothes line. If she was lucky, the first load would be dry by the time the second load was ready to hang. That second load would be the sheets. Many times, I can recall her frantic plea for help to remove the sheets from the line - wet or dry. We lived about 2 blocks from the main UP Railroad tracks. Back then the passenger trains were diesel, but the freight trains were still steam. If you have ever seen a steam

train spew steam and soot, you will realize her terror. Those white sheets were black spotted more than once and had to be washed over again!! She swore that the engineer could see her wash on the line and deliberately pulled the cord to bedevil her and see us run. I really believe this could be the truth.

There was little humidity in Nebraska, so the clothes dried soft and fluffy. Today that would be sufficient to fold them and put them away. Not to Mom's mind. All the sheets and pillow cases had to be ironed. This was my job, and although we had an old "mangle" to press them, it was still time consuming. Can you see that there was not a lot of trouble keeping the kids busy and out of trouble when summer vacation came around?

I would like to tell you about polio in my childhood and also about tagging houses where people had the measles, chicken pox or mumps. The scourge of polio was the most frightening thing I can remember about childhood diseases in the 30's and 40's. Unlike the measles, chickenpox or even whopping cough, polio had no cure. The only way to avoid it was by staying out of the swimming pool during the very hot part of the day, and making sure that the children were not chilled after being in the pool or similar situation. We always had to wait to swim after 4 p.m. during the hottest days of the summer - and never were allowed to swim with any hint of a cold or sore throat. Several of the children at school did contract polio, but I can remember only one that was paralyzed and had to live for a time in an "Iron Lung". Thank God that time is over and the vaccine is now available.

When a person would contract measles, chicken pox, whooping cough or scarlet fever, the local police department would have to be notified by the attending physician. The policeman would arrive at the house and place a cardboard sign by the front door. This would alert any visitor that they should exercise caution and not enter the house if they had not already had the disease. Believe me, it was a lost feeling to have that sign on the door - and a great relief for it to be removed.

When summer comes and it is very hot and HUMID here in Maryland, I sometimes see something, smell something that triggers a memory of past times in Nebraska. Just today while driving to work I saw a stand of orange summer lillies that somehow reminded me of a backyard filled with the beautiful blossoms waving in the warm summer breeze. It was like a sight seen just before a summer rain - as though the lillies were waiting to be cooled and washed clean. Sometimes when the warm breeze hits my face, the experience brings back the hot summers in Nebraska when I would be out on the bike - on the way to the pool or to a friend's house. There is a vast difference between hot and humid and just hot. At least under the shade of a tree, just hot is bearable.

My maternal grandparents names were Margaret "Mag" (Gaughen) Costello and Johnny Costello. They lived in Schuyler, Nebr. where I grew up

after they left the farm near Dublin, Nebr. They had a grocery store in Schuyler and my Uncle John and his wife Irma helped them to run the store. This was long before air conditioning, modern refrigeration and fancy shelves and cases. There is a store like this in NY and in Mt. Airy, MD. It had bare wooden floors, overhead fans, long wooden counters, bulk candy, cookies and pasta. It was a treat to visit the store and sample the goodies. There were cheese crackers in a barrel; cookies in sideways containers with little doors; and candy under the counter in the front of the store. Grandpa always spoiled us when we came in to see him. They did not stock ice cream or soft drinks. Those items were purchased at the "drug store" sitting at the soda fountain.

In the summertime, there were no chocolate covered cookies or nuts because without refrigeration the chocolate would turn gray and unappetizing. When fall came, the anticipation of all the good things denied us by the hot summers was exciting. I can remember that Grandpa and Uncle John always wore heavy aprons. I know they sold meat in the grocery store, but I don't recall any meat case. I guess I left that to my Mother and concentrated on the front of the store where all the fun things were to be found. There was also a pot bellied stove in the store. That was an absolute necessity in the cold, bitter winters.

Grandpa also was a meat butcher and made his own hot dogs, sausage and butchered the meat sold in the store. His butchering operation was on the "Slough" near the Loup River south of Schuyler. There is a park there now. How different things are now. Such a thing would not be allowed in these times. All meat packaging is done at central plants and then distributed for use. The only refrigeration in the store was a huge walk-in room. The refrigeration process was ammonia based and very unstable.

One horrible evening, my Uncle Charles who was quite young was working in the refrigeration room when the gases from the ammonia exploded. I was about 5 years old at the time. All I remember were the grim faces around me as the relatives watched and waited for the doctor's evaluation. It seemed like an eternity. All I could envision was that Charles would never see again. I was too young to know all the details but as a result of that accident, Charles lost the sight in one eye.

Another story about the grocery store: One day in the summer, there was a flag out in front of the Costello Grocery. It was a custom to put the flags out along the street on every Holiday. Some of the merchants noticed Grandpa's flag and, figuring it was a special day, also put their flags up. When they began to check with one another during the day as to what Holiday this way, they were confused. Someone remembered the fact that Mr. Costello was the first to put the flag out. When they inquired why he put the flag out, his answer was "It is Jean's birthday and that is reason enough!!!" Have you had the flag flying on your birthday?

My Grandmother "Mag" was from a large family. She was a typical Irish lady in the first sense of the word. She had 4 sisters - Kate Dowd, Ann Higgins, Bridget Costello and Liz Wilson. Ann, Bridge and Grandma all lived in Schuyler. Kate lived on a farm near Burwell and Liz lived in Omaha. Liz is the only one I do not remember.

Grandma loved to bake and had a big garden every year. She especially liked to bake bread. There was a lovely kitchen stove which had to be fueled with wood. Cooking on a wood stove is quite an art because temperature is not easily controlled. The foods that take the hottest temperature are baked first, then those that take the lower heat come last. Bread dough was set on the back of the top of the stove to rise. Can't you just smell that wonderful odor? She baked bread and made Koloche (fruit buns) at least once a week. Pies were also one of her favorites -apple, cherry and banana cream. I learned to bake pies from her and from my Mother.

One story about Grandma's cooking experiences: Her sister Bridge had a son Edward and Grandma watched him a lot because Bridge was ill. One day, Grandma was preparing to bake an Angel Food Cake. It didn't come in a box, you know. She had separated the egg whites and put them on the table until she was ready for them. The cake took 12 egg whites! Ed was very young and just able to talk and reach over the top of the table. Being curious, he tipped the bowl to see what it contained. THE BOWL WITH ALL 12 EGG WHITES WENT ON THE FLOOR. Grandma yelled "Ed what have you done!". He went in the other room very upset, and stayed until the mess was cleaned. Sitting there talking to no one in particular he said, "POOR MAG'S EGGS"!! He heard that expression and that story many, many times.