

There are certain times of the year that bring back memories of people, places and events. Most of these are pleasant and bring a smile to the face and heart of the reader.

If you choose to read along with me, I hope that your reaction to my thoughts will also bring memories of your own - of people, places and events.

Let's call this episode "It's a Comedy".

Relatives are special people. They come in all sizes and ages - even though they really do grow up. My first memory of a special person is my Aunt Julia Tooher. She has a very infectious laugh, and likes to share her experiences. She and her husband live in Schuyler, Nebraska where they both grew up.

My family regularly drove from our home in Columbus, Nebr. to visit Jude and Charlie as we called them. There was always a warm greeting and a delicious aroma at the front door. My sister, brother and I were allowed to go out and play in the yard. There was a broken down, no longer operational Model T Ford sitting in the backyard under the cherry trees. We entertained ourselves pretending we had magically transformed the Tin Lizzy into a beautiful new car.

After spending a wonderful day crunching and rolling in the leaves, eating homemade rolls and pies, we would start to say our "Goodbyes". My father, Dr. Pat McGowan was not one to stay away from home too long. His patients might be in need of his help, and he was never OUT TO LUNCH or unavailable.

Jude loved to see us come, and hated to see us leave. She did a lot of visiting and there was never a good time to stop. Dad would announce that it was time to go. He would go out and get in the car and hope that Mother and the rest of us would follow. We did. But we never left without Jude following us to the car, and standing with the car door open, my Dad with the car engine running. She had a very strong way of finishing her story. She kept her foot on the running-board so my Dad could not drive away. As we grew older, this became a family joke and a fond memory of those we love.

One beautiful fall day, Julia or Jude came to visit us in Columbus. She didn't much like to drive, even though it was only an 18 mile trip. It's hard to believe, but this day, it was not an easy drive.

Especially after she entered the city limits of our town with population of around 8,000.

She was traveling along, I'm sure thinking about all the news she had to tell, when she heard a siren. Of all things there was a policeman behind her -- with the lights on! This unnerved her so that she screeched to a halt. After a "friendly" discussion with the officer, and securing a speeding ticket, she continued to our house. This all happened within about two blocks from us. Well, did she ever have the news!!!

When she got to our house, she came in and collapsed in a chair. Of course, my Mother was anxious and concerned. Jude had to catch her breath and then finally told us about her experience. Mother thought a little glass of wine would be a better idea than the usual tea at this point. After things calmed down, we were sent out to the car to bring in the surprise she had brought. Upon opening the trunk of the car, we discovered the surprise had changed form.

Inside a neat cardboard box, there were cherries and a piecrust, unassembled.

Although that cherry pie was delicious and still warm - we ate it with a spoon.

Life in the Mid-West during the 40's was easy, secure and far away from the cares of the world. High school was all that mattered - and occupied our entire waking moments. During this period, there was a group of 7 friends who were always together. I was one of the 7 and we had a ball!!

Finding something to do was never a problem. We all learned to play Rook, which was our first game of Bridge. When we played at each other's homes, one of the mothers always filled in as the #8 player. This way we learned the rules - and had fun all evening. The local newspaper covered "Social Events" once a week. We decided to select a name for the group - and settled on the FNG Club. Now, the FNG Club hit the Columbus Telegram as a news item about once a month. Nobody but the group knew the meaning of the name. I think enough time has passed to reveal it means Friday Night Gigglers. I think we enjoyed seeing it in print mostly because it was our secret name.

Over the years, we laughed together, sang together and planned our lives. We are now scattered across the country. Elizabeth and Betty are in Omaha, Nebr.; Donna and I are in Maryland; Elaine in Texas; Dorian in ; and Becky in Cozad, Nebr.

Donna was the only one who ever had a "car". Her father, Hank Slocum bought her a Model A Ford. He knew that it would not go far, and she was not allowed to leave the city limits with that car. One New Year's Eve, the party was at the McGowans house. Everyon was staying overnight for the big celebration. Snow was not

considered a big emergency at that time, and the weather forecast was the last thing on our minds. Everyone brought something wonderful to eat and the party went on. During the evening, it began to snow - and snow - and snow. It had no impact on the activities and we all just enjoyed the thought of a good sleigh ride or snowball fight in the morning. Well, it must have snowed at least 10 or 12 inches by morning. Breakfast was noisy and fun. Everybody pitched in and helped to prepare the food. My mother had baked fresh cinammon rolls and kolaches for the feast.

After breakfast we looked out the front window to discover that Donna's car named "Burp", was half buried in the snow at our front curb. Not only was it buried, but it had "Burped" it's last. For the next month, until the weather warmed up, the car sat in front of our house. No one came to put a ticket on it. It just sat and sat and waited to be towed away. We all felt like we had lost a friend

On another occasion, the FNG Club plus one or two other new members were having another gathering at the McGowan house (2101 - 14th St.). This night we were going to learn to play Pinochle and were seated in the Breakfast Nook which was a little room next to the kitchen. I was in the kitchen popping corn and getting the sodas ready for the play. It was in the late fall, and the furnace was geared up to warm the house.

Before we owned the house, there had been a cook stove in the kitchen where the electric range then stood. When the old stove was removed, the men covered over the pipe vent with a piece of tin.

Over the years, the soot built up in this pipe which somehow must have been connected to the furnace flue. On this night, conditions being just right, the cover on the pipe blew!!! The range was covered with soot as was the entire room. My mother assumed the worst and called the fire department.

The girls were eating the first bowl of fresh buttered popcorn, and decided to continue to eat while it was hot. Mom opened the doors to rid the air of the congestion and smoke. It was cold to say the least.

The firemen came in just a few minutes - all set for a fire. They checked all the possibilities and ran back and forth thru the house. Through all the excitement, one of the group played the piano and the rest joined in song. By the time the excitement subsided, playing cards seemed out of place. We moved to the living room, ate popcorn and gabbed for the rest of the evening.

Needless to say, Mom was left with a horrible film of oily dust all over the kitchen floor.