

The principal of our High School, Charles Wetmore, said the Blaska's had one or two in High School for 20 plus years from 1923 through 1947. Lila and I attended high school in the old wooden building which was demolished following my graduation. While the new one was built, Lila attended school at various settings in the village, including the City Hall / Legion Hall and Tester's restaurant. I remember Dad driving us to school in the winter in the "Bob Sled", he in his wolf or fox skin fur coat, and all of us sitting/in the bed of the sled on straw, covered with blankets, and sometimes in 20 degree-below-zero weather, with flat irons that had been heated on the stove, placed near our little bodies to keep us warmer. The first stop was at the rural, Oak Lawn school to deposit one or two, then to Sacred Hearts school for two or two for the religious school requirement, and then to the High School where we were almost always late for the first class. Lila worried that she might have straw on her coat--with Link Sawyer, the high school janitor, waiting and sitting in the lobby, and always saying, "Here comes Lila, our Prairie Queen".

Our High School football field was located in Angel Park, some distance from the high school and I remember one fall day when I was a senior, I loaded the football team in our Ford car and drove them to the park. Driving through Main Street, our Dad, who was in town on business saw me drive through with that load of boys. I guess the weight was so great that the fenders rested on the tires. That night Dad told Mother that I had ruined the car, and he was certain I would bankrupt him. Another time, I drove six high school girls to the game at Mazomanie, had a flat tire, and needed a new one, so wrote a check for it signing Dad's name, per Evelyn. The lecture was long and with expletives following that episode. In addition, some of us smoked cigarettes, so we were in trouble with the principal as well.

Somehow, our parents managed to get all of us through high school with discipline problems to deal with, and with attendance at some athletic activities, prom outfits, high school graduation, and the "dating game". Our mother wasn't able to come to activities for the older ones as she had the smaller children to care for at home, and Dad was busy transporting us to the various places involving sports, contests, and social activities. One incident I remember concerned Cy or Jerome in high school when they skipped school one day. The principal called our Dad and asked him to come in for a conference. Dad told him he didn't have time for that, and if he couldn't handle the boys, send them home and he would put them to work on the farm. That message was relayed ^{to the offender}, and it seemed to take care of the situation very nicely.

SOCIAL LIFE AND ACTIVITIES

As children our activities were limited, and we stayed close to home. I believe all of us walked over the hill to visit our grandparents, John and Anna Blaska several times a week. Occasionally, we were asked to stay for dinner or supper, and I remember that no one moved until Grandma said the Lords Prayer and the Hail Mary in German. (This, too, changed after W.W. I, when he said it in English. We also liked to visit there to see our aunts, Louise, Laura, Irma, and Elvina who were young ladies, and to see their clothes, cosmetics, etc. Aunt Louise was a nurse, Laura a teach, Irma a nurse, and Elvina, a graduate, all of whom attended Catholic nursing school or school in Milwaukee, and we could learn a little about the world from them. Grandma made excellent poppy seed biscuits and sweet rolls, and she was always generous and kind to us.

Whenever another baby was to make its appearance at our home, we were sent "over the hill to Grandma's for the night and until the baby was born. There was a close relationship which we all accepted as normal and natural.

As we grew a little older, we were allowed to visit neighbors in the afternoon which meant walking a mile or two, perhaps having a lunch of fresh bread and brown sugar, and returning home which took several hours so these trips were infrequent. We also walked to the Old Lake, taking a little lunch, meeting friends there, swimming (mostly wading), and returning home before dark. The adults in the community did some socializing during the winter months, usually card parties, sometimes a dance in the home achieved by rolling up the living room rug. Otherwise, our evenings were spent, after all work was completed, by popping corn, cracking hickory nuts, and eating apples. We had our first radio on the farm in the late 20's, and of course television wasn't available in our young life. ^{late 40's}
almost always midnight Mass

Christmas meant religious services, a tree, some gifts (crayons, color books, dolls, sleds, and good food (home made fruit cake, poppy seed and prune biscuits, and, of course visits and dinner with relatives. Easter was celebrated with colored eggs, usually hidden and out-of-doors if the weather was mild, otherwise, hidden in the house. The Fourth of July was always a big event in our family as there were three birthdays on that day, Evelyn, Jerome, and Juanita, which meant having three cakes (an Angel food, devils food, and a sunshine) decorated with tiny American flags and candles. Our Dad, in the early years operated the engine which provided the energy to run the carousel (merry-go-round) at Angel Park, so if we could get to the park, we could sometimes get a free ride, otherwise a ride cost five cents. A quarter of spending money usually provided an ice cream cone, a soda,

a chance or a ride, cotton candy, each 5 cents a piece. Fireworks in the evening were a special treat. The fall festival at Sacred Hearts Church (or bazaar) was also a big event, and we attended them, when possible.

As we grew older, Dad would take us along to Sun Prairie on a Saturday night to see a free movie or watch the street dances and listen to band music (a block in Main Street was cordoned off and the band provided the music). (Dances in park--big name bands--and at Sacred Hearts Hall) Halloween meant "pranks in the community", and we would walk miles to upset some machinery, or outdoor toilets, of course the boys and young men did the more bizarre things, such as spreading a load of manure on Main Street in Sun Prairie.

May Day was a pleasant event when we hung May baskets (filled with fresh flowers from our woods--May flowers, trilliums, jack-in-the pulpits, etc.) along with candy or a pop corn ball at the homes of school friends, teachers, neighbors and relatives.

We visited Mother's parents, Grandma and Grandpa Schuster at their farm in the Town of Medina on Highway 19 on holidays, and they retired and moved to Sun Prairie in _____. We children sometimes stayed over nite at their home when road conditions were severe and we couldn't get home.

POLITICS

Our table conversation included world events, farm prices and conditions, neighborhood problems, and school activities. Our Dad was the Town Chairman, and a member of the County Board for 20 years. He was one of the early Democrats in the community, and many farmers stopped to talk with him about their problems. He was Chairman of the Dane County Highway Committee for _____ years during which time the right-of-way was purchased for the building of Highway 19 with cement surface, and later I-94 (?)

I was eight years old when the Armistice was proclaimed at the end of WW I in 1918, and can remember the trip to Madison, by car, to attend the celebration. The tough financial times came in the early 30's following the stock market crash of 1929. Dad had purchased some car loads of corn as an investment, and when prices dropped, they were almost on verge of bankruptcy. It was necessary for him to apply for a federal loan which he obtained, and they managed to keep afloat until the 1940's when World War II eased financial problems, and increased farm prices. (Our mother had an old felt hat full of holes, and which she wore, calling it her Hoover Hat ;

World War II found Cyril in the Navy; Lila in the Navy WAVES; Burdette in the Navy Nurse Corps, Jerome in the Army, John in the Army, and Juanita working for the Civil Service. My husband, Bob Owens, was a flight Instructor for four years and died in a plane crash in Michigan. My brothers and sisters, except Burdette who was a career officer in the Navy Nurse Corps, and the farm home bulged with all the returnees, including me and my two children, Bob and Kay. Eventually, we all found employment and took our place in the community in areas away from the farm home, Gregory and Jerome excluded as they began to work in partnership with Dad who supplied all of the equipment, oil, gasoline and expenses involved in farming.

FATHER

To try to sketch personality pictures of our Dad and Mother maybe isn't possible, but from my own viewpoint, I will try: I can remember Dad at age 30; black hair, hazel eyes, widow's peak, 5'10" tall, bustling, loud, sensitive, apprehensive; but an innovator with a very subtle sense of humor. He couldn't stand gossip, and none of it was allowed. I recall many instances when we would attempt to criticize persons, for divorce, theft, poor morals, etc.; and he would stop it saying, "you don't know the facts". Let each person live their own way." He was community minded--always willing to help others. His political life, which included township Chairman for _____ years; member of the County Board; chairman of Dane County Highway Commission, and later Assemblyman, was a means for him to contribute to the community and gov't. Our Dad, like his own father, John Sr., was "ahead of his time". He believed there was a better way of doing things and made use of the University of Wisconsin Agriculture Extension Dep't. from the time that I can remember. He planned, with the Agriculture experts, the planting and harvesting of grains, crop rotation, and care and feeding of farm animals. When our barn burned in 1926, there was no fire equipment for the rural area, and he worked to establish Fire Prevention and control in the community. We had the first aero-electric windmill plant in the area which provided power for electricity, milking machine, pumping water, etc. until rural electrification was established in our county.

I always felt that nine children were a real problem for Dad. We were independent, strong-willed, and sometimes difficult to manage. Our mother wanted us to have all the education we wanted, and Dad felt that jobs following High school graduation were a must, especially for the girls. We argued over many of the problems, and Dad would end up saying, "Well, if you insist on bankrupting me, go ahead." Trying to understand him, I now realize the expense involved in the care and education of nine children along with farm expenses, transportation, medical care, and social activities. Also, he found the activities of the family a trial, having difficulty

with the crowds of young people who drove out to talk, to party, etc. Our mother enjoyed the young people and their activities in contrast to Dad's stern appraisals and commands.

However, Dad did have a sense of humor, and if life wasn't too hectic in the house, he could enjoy some of our opinions, especially if they involved politics, national and state and community affairs. He was always a problem to our mother regarding religious obligations and church attendance. He paid the yearly pew rent; assisted the priest in the building of the Catholic church, school, and parish hall through committee work and actual labor, but disliked the annual Easter duty imposed on him. Our mother begged, pleaded, and ordered until she got him to make his yearly confession and communion so that he should remain an active, participating member of the church with a guarantee of burial in the Catholic faith and cemetery. When we couldn't get to Mass on Sundays because of weather, or other valid reasons, we kids knelt on the kitchen floor while our mother led the prayers while preparing the noon meal. One day Dad came in and said, "Rose, we need rain badly. Get the kids dressed and give them each an umbrella, and I'll drive them to church". He smiled and we all felt some relief that things weren't so serious, and maybe we weren't doomed. He had a real aversion to the confessional and I recall him saying many times, "Rose, I am supporting my family, I haven't killed anyone, haven't stolen a penny, and I am not visiting my neighbor's wife—so why should I bother the priest, and anyhow, the confessional box is hot and stuffy.

As the family grew older, and the education process from grade one through High school was completed, he could say that he wished he had had more schooling, especially when he was in the Assembly, and later he felt he could have done more had he had greater educational opportunities, when young.

MOTHER

Our mother, Rose, was an attractive, classy lady, 5", 5", light brown hair, fun-loving, and the life of a party (but so few parties). She loved to dance, sing, was organized and healthy, emotionally and physically. We children arrived at regular intervals, and along with this tremendous task, she was a farmer at heart. She was a real part of the farm and all of its work. In fact, I recall many people saying that she could "out-work" any farm hand and still could produce the best dinners in the neighborhood.

Mother believed in education for the girls as well as the boys, and helped in every possible way to get us professional training, if we wanted it. She always said she wished she had had more education—she would have enjoyed being a teacher, or ____, that she didn't want to marry so young—but since she did she called it a commitment and made her contribution with diligence

through her family, and her interest in farming. She had a tremendous drive, strong will power, and through it all, she kept her sense of humor.

EVELYN BLASKA OWENS

Evelyn completed grade 8 at Oak Lawn School in 1923; graduated from Sun Prairie High School in 1927; and Mount Mary College, Milwaukee in 1931. There were no jobs so tried a stint with directing Home Talent Plays for a company in Fairfield, Iowa. After three plays in Minnesota, (Fertile, Long Prairie, and Three Rivers), I returned home as I couldn't make a living. Then, I applied for a position as a Caseworker in the Dane County Outdoor Relief Department and obtained the job with help from Dad. The depression was in full force, and I received \$70.00/month, and had to have a car. So, with monthly payments of \$20.00, the remaining \$50.00 took care of room, board, and clothing. I paid for the car on 3-1-34, and on 3-21-34, had a car-train accident, (no insurance) which kept me out of work for a year. The driver of my car, Elsie Frothingham, was killed, and Grace Signer, another passenger, injured. There was no unemployment insurance, no sick leave, and after several months in the hospital, had to return home. In the winter of 1935, I returned to work, and later worked as a Probation Officer for the Mother's Pension Dep't., I married Jerome A. Owens on 9-3-1938; continued to work for Dane County Dep't of Public Assistance until World War II. Bob (J.A.) had taken flying lessons, and he and Burt Egan had owned a plane, so he and Bert were drafted as Flight Instructors. I followed Bob to Texas (Lamesa) with Baby Kay, born at St. Mary's Hospital on 12-17-42, then to Pittsburg, Kansas where Bob taught glider and small fighter plane to new Army flight recruits. By 1945, the U. W. was needing the 18-year old for flight training, so he was transferred to Detroit, Michigan to teach senior high-school boys. The war ended in Europe in May, 1945, and in August, 1945 in the Pacific. After starting the Michigan Aviation Company with two other flight A. and E. mechanics, he was killed on 7-15-1946 while delivering a new plane to Pontiac Michigan. Robert John was born 1-8-45 in Detroit, and so with Kay, age 3, and Bob, age 1 returned home again.

After an uncussessful marriage to George Kohler, I bought a home in Sun Prairie, went to work for the State Dep't of Public Welfare (7 years), obtained a Masters degree in social work from U. of Wis., Madison; became Ass't Sup't at Girls School, Oregon, and then in 1960, accepted a faculty position at the School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and retired Professor Emeritus in 19 73 ??