



Mrs. August (Adella) Hetzel and her pet cat enjoy each other's company.

Adella Hetzel shares memories of a 'Plain' lifestyle

by Doris Litscher Gasser

Mrs. August Hetzel, in the big frame house on top of a little hill on Main Street, greeted the recorder with Plain hospitality. After a sumptuous fish fry at the corner cafe with Arlene Diehl, kind of a community communicator, we headed a few doors west and climbed the steep cement steps to the Hetzel home.

Adella Hetzel, who has been living in Plain for nearly a century, created a comfortable atmosphere from the onset by stating, "Everyone calls me Dela, the kids and everybody."

Dela was born in a simple, little structure on the same site on which her home is located today. It had been built by the Indians and sold to Arlene's great-grandfather. He had acquired this along with a considerable amount of other land, is now a part of the peaceful, little village of approximately 688 residents.

Adella reviewed: "I was born the 20th of May, 1895 in that old Indian house. Oh, it was cold. My father was a farm boy, John Beck, and my mother was a farm girl, Elizabeth Borget. They were going to stay on the farm, but my father

had tuberculosis and when he recuperated at the age of 20 he couldn't farm any more because of the dust and chaff. My dad and John Weiss bought a store and that home from John Morgan in 1892." The store was adjacent to the little home. It is now empty but well cared for.

Dela went on: "The Indians had no doors, just blankets hanging to keep out the cold. Sure, we burned wood in a stove in the living room, then, there was a cook stove in the kitchen. There was a living room, dining room, a kitchen and a bedroom downstairs. It had an upstairs that didn't have a very high ceiling.

There was no plaster upstairs. The walls were made with tree rings and papered. It was shingled with some big shingles and some small. We drove nails into the wall and then hung our clothes up there. My other sister, Clara, and I slept upstairs. We had just bare floors.

"The Indians had left a lot of barrels out here with a lot of old clothes and mother washed them and then had rugs woven, I think in Loganville. The bedroom had a poor floor and she covered it with rugs for the winter. The folks slept downstairs. My mother made our clothes and the shoes we bought in the store. We had about two dresses in the summer. The one for winter was wool and we wore an apron over it to keep it clean. We had home knit stockings and woolen petticoats and underwear. Yes, mother made those. She was a good sewer. She could make most anything."

The Becks built their new home in 1908 for a cost of \$2,400. The cold, old house was dismantled and part of it is still used as a garage.

Adella explained, "My dad's partner J.B. Weiss sold to Joe Nachreiner."

As one entered the central part of the store from Main Street there were groceries. The store also served as a post office. Behind the grocery section was the general department which stocked household items and clothing. On the east side there was a hardware section and to the west a warehouse and in the back there was a mortuary. This section also housed horses and buggies. There was a little outside convenience house for customers and salesmen.

Adella continued: "Things were bought by weight and sold by weight, like sugar, coffee, crackers, candy and dried fruit packaged."

"Joe Nachreiner sold caskets and did embalming. Joe was a good undertaker. You wouldn't think it to look at him. He learned how when he worked for Linsel and Hood in Spring Green. The caskets were kept in the shed behind the store. They were made of pine wood covered with black cloth, no handles or anything extra. The people would come and select the inside material. It was so much a yard, you know, the fancy part. My mother took excelsior and made a bed and a pillow and covered it with muslin and did all of the inside trimmings. Most

of the caskets were black. The children's were white. Some of the caskets were \$30, some \$50. The records are down at the library.

Joe Nachreiner went to the homes to embalm and put them into the casket. The wake and everything was done in the home. He put up a black wreath near the door. I think he took the wreath from home to home. We had a wonderful hearse and a team of new horses. The hearse was fancy. It had glass sides. It had black trimmings with gold fringes. It had curtains, you know, drape like. Nachreiner would go out to the country with the hearse and load the casket and bring it to church. There was singing by a mixed choir and mass done in Latin. The relatives were in the front pews and walked behind the casket. Oh, my, they were sorrowful. They wore black and a black veil. They wouldn't think of going into colors like you do today. Yes, there were flowers. We could get flowers from Spring Green -- those who could afford them."

Adella and her older sister started school in Sunnyside when she was 4 years old. Adella remembered, "It was a public school. It was a one-story building with a 'wood stove.' My sister and I couldn't speak a word of English so the teacher, Edith Luther, said, 'Send those Dutchies up to me.' She was a good teacher."

Plain was a predominantly Catholic town and St. Luke's was an integral part of their lives. After their initial English lessons at Sunnyside, the girls continued their education in the Catholic school and were placed in the second grade. Here they completed the eight grades studying in German in the forenoon and English in the afternoon.

According to Adella there were six Sisters in the school, four regular teachers, a music teacher and a housekeeper. There were four rooms and two classes in each room.

The Beck sisters had to help with tasks at home and in the store. Adella loved to bake and started baking bread when she was 10 years old. Her sister liked to clean. Dela remembered: "We'd carry in the wood, empty out the ashes, wash dishes and clean. We mopped. We didn't dust like you do today. We didn't have furniture like you do today. We had to clean the cuspidors. The other kids thought that was terrible, but dad didn't have time so we had to do it."

"My mother cleaned all of the lamps and big lanterns in the basement. She had to clean the barn and get the horses ready for Nachreiner to go out in the country for his work. Washing the little building in the back was part of her job, just as we clean our bathrooms today."

Adella and Clara were scheduled to graduate from school in 1908. Adella explained: "I couldn't graduate with my sister. My grandparents, Adolph and Theresa Borget, lived next door and they couldn't help themselves. My mother asked the rest of her family to help but they didn't so she kept ME home from school a whole year to help. I didn't mind. I took the meals over and cleaned the house. My grandfather came from Cologne and my grandmother came from Wiesbaden. My father's people, Grandpa and Grandma Beck, Mary and Joseph, came from Bavaria and lived on a farm near Plain."

As a young lady, Clara worked in the Plain State Bank as assistant cashier to J. B. Weiss. Adella went to work for Bill Reuschlein who ran a big store on Wachter Avenue where the Palace Hall is now located.

Dela recalled: "That was a big store. There was too much work for

two people. Bill Reuschlein took over the post office and he had two mail routes. Everything was done with horse and buggy, you know. I worked from 8 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock at night, Saturdays and Sundays until 2:00. The first thing in the morning I'd get to the store and, if there weren't any customers I'd start dusting, picking up, cleaning, filling shelves. It seemed there was always something to straighten up. I wore a black satin apron. There was all glass in front and you know, that would have to be washed very often. I wanted to keep the store nice and clean. People would bring in eggs in 12 or 15 dozen wooden carriers. They sometimes traded the eggs for groceries. Sometimes the eggs were 15¢ a dozen, sometimes 18¢. We'd have to candle the eggs and wait on customers. There were no refrigerators in those days so the cheese, butter, syrup vinegar and kerosene were kept in the basement. I got \$28 a month.

 Adella

"Many young people would come to the store in the evening. They'd be my age, or a little younger, and come with their horses and buggies just to spend the evenings. In the wintertime they'd sit around the stove and tell stories. They didn't tell nasty stories, just fun, like how they'd go and ask a girl to dance and she refused. They'd eat peanuts and I'd tell them to throw the shells on the floor. The next morning the shucks would be like a sweeping compound to help clean the floor."

Through the years the Beck household was one of hospitality. Adella remembered: "There were 11 or 12 Sisters at the school then and we were a regular taxi taking them here and there, to the doctor or the store in my car."

The day came when matrimony came into Adella's life. She explained. "I knew my husband a long time before. We graduated from school together. I paid no attention to him. He was a farm boy. I was a city girl. Kids didn't do things in those days they do now. We never seemed to like this boy or that one better than the other. I met August Hetzel again when I was older. He had a garage on Main Street. He'd come into the store once in a while and I got to see more and more of him. When he was 21 he left the farm, went to Montana and worked out there and homesteaded some land, then he was drafted and went to Washington in World War I.

"After the war he came back home and went to school at Milwaukee and took up business and automobiling. He bought and sold Ford cars. He wanted to get married but I wouldn't because I was afraid he would take me to Montana and I was a 'mama baby.' Oh, I couldn't leave Mother. He asked my mother if she had anything against us getting married. 'No,' she said, 'You can come and live with me. I've got this big house.' We were married in St. Luke's by Father Surges in Plain in 1928. My sister was the maid of honor. We had a small group for dinner. My father wasn't living any more. He died in 1913. In the afternoon we went to Reedsburg in August's Ford and had our pictures taken. We came home and had supper. There was a small group of friends there, the Rings, Kraemers, Nachreiners, Hilda Thering and the Hausner girls. Mrs. Ring helped get the meal. Frances Hausner worked for Mrs. Hetzel, August's mother. After supper Hilda Thering played the piano and we sang songs and sat around telling stories until midnight or so. We were married on Tuesday and

couldn't go on our honeymoon until Friday. We were both sponsors for confirmation on Thursday. He was sponsor for Henry Riech and I was for Loma Niedam. We couldn't say 'no'.

"Friday morning we went to Montana, sure, in a Ford. Then we went to California and to Phoenix, Ariz., and visited Father Duren and came back home.

When Hetzels' baby, Dawn, was

born in St. Mary's in Madison in 1934, Adella was in the hospital for two weeks. Adella recalled: "Everything worked just fine living with mother, just fine. We had Dawn in a basket and she enjoyed taking care of her while I washed and did other things. We had a big garden."

Adella supported her husband's business and took trips to Milwaukee to purchase new cars. Adella recalled, "Sure, I'd drive new cars out from Milwaukee. He'd follow me home or sometimes he'd get ahead. One time I took Hilda Kruse along just for the company. I've driven lots of cars, a Cadillac, a LaSalle and, of course, Fords.

Mother lived with us for nine years and then she died. My sister died in 1987.

August was in the garage business until 1938 and then sold out and took up electricity." In October of 1941 August took advantage of an opportunity to work in a government experimental station in Annapolis, Md. The following Christmas he returned and Adella found herself headed east with August, Dawn and a supply of bedding and towels, rambling along in their Ford automobile.

August's plans for housing didn't fall into place and the family found themselves in a hotel for two weeks. This was a pent up feeling for Adella and she said, "I'm going home." Fortunately there was a new housing project that had developed and the Hetzels found a house to purchase. When the school term for Dawn was finished in June she and her mother did return to Plain. August completed his commitment with the experimental station and returned the following October.



Arlene Diehl

The year in Maryland added a spark of variety to their lives, but the Hetzels were happy and comfortable to be back in Plain where August went into the electric business. August was self taught and soon became a well known success in his new business, "Mercy." Adella said, "He was called to Spring Green and Leland and event o Sauk City." August died about a year ago.

Adella gave up her love for driving when she was 92. She explained: "The license bureau wrote and said I'd have to have my picture taken and go to the doctor and all of that. So, I said 'if people don't want me to drive, I won't.' Her car, no, not a Ford, a Chevrolet is still in the garage in the back yard. Adella enjoys the company of her pet cat, Toby and likes to go shopping. Arlene takes her to church on Sunday. Dela is enjoying life in the home in which she was born and is

fortunate to have Sister Mary Agnes to be her live-in companion. She and Sister have daily prayers together.

Our Plain recording chat ended with a glass of fresh grape juice prepared by Sister Mary Agnes. And, Toby was resting peacefully in Adella's easy chair as if to say, "All is well."

A 229 page "A History of Plain, Wisconsin written by Hildegard Thering - 1982 can be found in the library in Plain.

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