



Walter Doll Historical Tapes

Father Frank Brickl reminisces

Part 1 of 2

by Doris Litscher Gasser

Father Frank Brickl is back in home territory in Sauk Prairie after devoting 56 years serving the people as a priest in various parts of the state. His condominium on Ash and Oak Street in Sauk City overlooks the hill country of the Ferry Bluff area and provides a pleasant setting for him to reflect upon his thoughts in writing his memories soon to be published in book form.

Edith Alt, who Father refers to as "My Gal Friday" assists him in everything from typing his book to gardening to cooking and entertaining former parishioners from out of town. Edith, a lady from Plain, has been working with Father Brickl for ten years and said, "It was interesting being in the parishes and meeting the people, especially the children and the elderly."

Father Brickl was born on a farm near Plain in 1909. His parents were Simon Brickl and Barbara Blau Brickl, and he is now the sole survivor of a family of four sisters and four brothers.

Father decided at an early age that he would become a priest. He recalled, "I told my parents I either wanted to become a priest or a doctor" and I told the priest at home the same thing and he said, 'Why don't you try being a priest?' Young Frank learned to sing 'Ite Missa Est,' the closing of mass, which he loved to hear the priest sing.

Father Brickl attended St. Luke's Catholic School in Plain and completed the eight year course in seven years as a result of passing required county tests with high scores. Father remembered, "I passed everything except history and arithmetic. I nearly passed in history but failed miserably in arithmetic; I only had two courses I had to take so they put me in high school because I didn't have enough to do.

"From St. Luke's I went to high school and through two years of college at St. Lawrence at Mt. Calvary, Wis., near Fond du Lac. When I think back, we were confined. There was a fence around the approximately 40 acre area. We were not allowed to go out of the fence. We had lots of fun; at the same time I addressed myself to whatever was before me. I even did tutoring in algebra and algebra was not my long suit. I think there were about 200 young men from all over the nation.

"The instructors were all Capuchins priests, a branch of the Franciscans. They wore brown robes and we got a lot of personal attention, personal affirmations, because the classes were not big. They mingled with the students and enjoyed them.

"We studied the regular curriculum including the study of religion twice a week. We had to attend mass daily and morning prayers and night prayers were in common. We played baseball, handball, basketball. I bowled, I boxed, I was boxing and wrestling manager there and I kept myself so busy in so many ways, it's unbelievable. Sometimes when I went to bed I ached all over from the many activities. We had quite a lot of freedom among ourselves. Our library was great. It was open to get books anytime. I spent a lot of time reading. We had pool tables and billiards. I slept in dormitories the first three years. Three of us got in the habit of eating limburger cheese, onions and rye bread. We kept that up faithfully for quite awhile. Then, an epidemic broke out and everybody went down in the dormitory, it was a flue type of thing. Those of us who were on onions, limburger cheese and rye bread had the job of taking care of others. We didn't get sick."

Father Brickl graduated from the two year course at St. Lawrence College at Mt. Calvary and then went to St. Francis Seminary for six years.

He explained, "Here again, we had to address ourselves to our studies and, of course, the religious aspect became more intense. We had to study Bible five days a week."

Latin was in the curriculum as it was in high school at St. Lawrence. Father explained, "Some of our lectures for a time were in Latin at the seminary. Someone who understood it well would translate it and mimeograph it for the rest of us." The St. Francis students also studied Greek and Father Brickl decided he wanted to put the language into practice. Upon meeting some Greek emigrants he would try and carry on a conversation only to discover that the Greek he spoke was 'All Green to the the Greeks.' Father said, "Even the Greeks didn't understand my Greek. We had to practice the saying of the mass. We also had practice in homiletics, that is in preaching. English always stayed in the picture somewhere. We had a tough English Professor. His name was Father Riordon.

"I preached my very first homily on All Saints Day. This is the first day of November. In the seminary they had statues around of the saints and one of the saints was St. John Vianney. He's considered to be the patron saint of parish priests. John Vianney was not very bright as a student. He could not pass, so the bishop took him in private instruction and ordained him a priest. When he was ordained he put him in the smallest parish of his diocese called Ars in France and he stayed there the rest of his life. He was called the Cure of Ars. Anyway, I was giving my sermon on the life of those saints and got to St. John Vianney. I wrote, 'I'm sure he would be expelled at St. Francis Seminary for lack of fitness.' At that time we had to write our homilies to show them to the rector for correction or discussion. When we got to the part of St. John Vianney, the rector said, 'You wouldn't have to say that.' I said, 'I sure would. I put them in for two purposes.' He asked, 'What are they?' I said, 'number one it is true and number two if someone is sleeping at this time they will wake up.' I was right because when I said that three or four hundred of them laughed."

Young, potential priests were kept busy at St. Francis. Life was great, not all spirituality, but they lived with as much restraint and self-control as possible. Father Brickl was ordained in 1934. He reiterated, "I was in St. John's Cathedral in Milwaukee receiving congratulations of my relatives and here to the side, stood a young woman, Anna. I recognized her from grade school. Anna was an orphan. She had been adopted, not out of charity, but to have a working girl. Anna was poorly dressed. She looked almost as though she was suffering from malnutrition. Her hair was straight. She was doing domestic work in Milwaukee. I went over and shook her hand. She congratulated me. I said I was happy to see her and she was glad to see me."

The newly ordained priest went back home to Plain for his first mass held at St. Lukes. He recalled, "After mass we had a banquet. We had a reception with lots of beer and singing. The guests were all of Bavarian ancestry. I'm of Bavarian ancestry. They trailed our ancestry back to 1638. We don't know about our ancestry before that. My grandfather came over to this country with his second wife in 1872. One thing is interesting. My grandmother was my grandfather's sec-

ond wife and my father was her only child. My grandfather was killed in a run away accident in the fall of the year on the way to church on muddy roads, I think it was the 15th of August, the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Then, my grandmother lived with my parents for some time. Then, she married Joe Dresen here in Sauk City. It was his third marriage and her second. Henry Dresen, co-owner of the Dresen and Little Funeral Home, was my grandmother's stepson."

Back to the first mass.

"At that time the whole mass was in Latin. The homilist of my mass was Monsignor Peter Leo Johnson, we called him 'Doc.' He was a history professor. We remained friends all of our lives.

After about a week I was called to the Bishop's House in LaCrosse where I was given my first assignment. We had absolutely no choice. There was supreme authority in the Bishop. My first assignment was St. Aloysius at Sauk City. We were also given the pledge. We had to promise the Bishop, on our knees, that we would abstain from all alcohol for five years. Sometime in June I moved into the rectory at the corner of Madison and Jackson in Sauk City. I moved into the upstairs office, across the hall was my bedroom. Part of my office was that tower. In it was a false fireplace. I had lots of papers to burn so I thought I'd throw them in the fireplace and burn them. I smoked up the house pretty much."

Father Brickl received his first assignment from his pastor, Father Frederick Forester in Sauk City. The assignment was to rejuvenate the Young Ladies Sodality. He started out with high hopes and decided to present a play for the following Lenten Season, called "Everyman." Father remembered, "One of the most interesting and leading characters of the group was Josephine Gundlach from Prairie du Sac. The play was about virtues and vices. The young ladies were happy and very interested, but when I got back to the rectory, Father Forester, although he was a kind man, said, 'You can't do that. You can't handle it.' I gave up and never even told him I was involved with the presentation of "Everyman" at the seminary.

"My next job was to supervise the cleaning of the school. We had an old janitor who snuffed tobacco up his nose. He took the cover off of the snuff box and snuffed a whole teaspoon of snuff up his nose. Father Forster went on vacation and I went over to the school, which is where Burnstads is now, to the second floor and here

was the janitor. There was a wooden floor and he was sloshing dirty water back and forth with a mop of rags and then would ring it out by hand in a tin pail and continued sloshing the muddy water around. So, I figured, 'This is no way to clean a school,' and I called a bee together to do a good cleaning. We painted desks and the trim around the windows; we repaired the curtains and cleaned the bathroom. We gave it a good cleaning from top to bottom. The floors were cleaned and resurfaced. One of the ladies I remember who helped with the cleaning was Mrs. Dr. Bachhuber. When Father Forster came back, he told me all I was supposed to do was supervise. So, again, I was kind of a failure.

"I was in charge of teaching catechism in school and teaching religion to high school students. The grade school classes were combined, over 40 in a room. Each teacher had 40 students. One of the teachers became sick and landed in the hospital. I substituted for her all day long and that is where I acquired an appreciation for the teacher. After that I was never so happy to be back in my office. My favorite class is third grade. They are beginning to become more sophisticated in their interests, including abstract aspects of death,

their concept of God and concept of sin. The most difficult class is the seventh grade.

"The Catholic High School students were really an experience. I had to be a policeman. I was also impressed or dismayed at the lack of knowledge of the students of the Catholic religion. I did try and gave it my best to keep the class interested. After two years I felt that the one area I was a failure in was my contact with young people. I felt good about my classes in Prairie du Sac. I walked to Prairie du

Sac, I think it was on Thursday nights, to Dr. Robert Hudson's house to the few Prairie du Sac Catholic students and some came who were not Catholic. It was kind of a unique, informal type of thing. I walked. I wasn't allowed to have a car. When it was announced I was leaving, the principal of the schools, who was not Catholic, said, 'We have not had a priest here with as much influence on young people of your parish as you have had. I couldn't believe it. It made me feel good.'

Father Brickl part two

by Doris Litscher Gasser

"One of the most interesting people here at this time was Father Alois Schauenberg. He was living here in retirement. He lived in the Henry Dresen home. He had a room and breakfast there. The rest of the time he was a man about town. He'd come to say mass in the morning wearing a Roman collar and he'd go back to Dresen's and have breakfast and he would change into a shirt and tie and he even wore a stick pin in his tie. It was from him that I learned not to be concerned about the wearing of the Roman collar. Wearing of the Roman collar is a mode of dress a little over 100 years old. The priests in Germany do not wear the Roman collar. They wear a shirt and tie.

"Father Schauenberg and I used to go out and play cards in the parish under the condition that the people we went to would never have to be his partner. He was very, what should I say, he had a short fuse with anyone who made a mistake. That didn't bother me. I learned to play cards because I got many a scolding and many a reprimand for misplays.

"It was through him that I broke the pledge, my promise from abstaining from alcohol. We went hunting with a group of young men, among them the Lang boys and Red Schroeder, who later became a dentist here. We finished hunting. We stopped in at the Fair Valley Store

and everyone ordered, mostly beer, and I being on the pledge didn't take a drink. Then Father Schauenberg tore into me and said, 'What's the matter with you? You know that pledge doesn't mean anything. You can't force something like that on someone. Even a bishop can't do that. Take a drink like the rest of us.' So, I took a bottle of beer and from then on I never realized I had the pledge and I still am not a drunk.

1909-1996

Deceased Oct 12 - 1996



"Father Schauenberg was born and raised in Germany and at that time Hitler was in his ascendance. He was vehemently anti-Hitler. Sometimes we would torment him a little with a pro-Hitler statement and he got so angry we were afraid he would get a heart attack. So, we refrained from making pro-Hitler statements.

"Being a man about town, Father Schauenberg played cards in the taverns and if someone asked him he would go along with them on a

trip. He usually had his main meal at Pulvermacher's, now the Press Box. One of the gathering places for quite a few people around town was Marzolf's Harness Shop. He was probably the most educated harness maker in Wisconsin. He could talk intelligently on any subject. He was an expert on crossword puzzles. There were many people who went there, including Father Forster. There was a Cap Lunenschloss and others who came there and talked about anything and everything. Marzolf's Harness

Shop was up the street from Montgomery's Buick Agency, where Weaver's Auto Body is now located.

"Of course, everyone knows about August Derleth. He was my age. August was a Catholic. At that time, a Catholic had to go to confession once a year on Trinity Sunday or before and go to communion once a year. August Derleth complied to that. He was very good to me. He invited me to his house and showed me his library and he had all of the books of the famous philosophers. His mother was a girl from Plain, a Volk. Being from Plain, she also was interested in me and I shared a few meals at her house. She was an excellent cook.

"August loved to needle the priests. Whenever he'd see that there were some priests at the rectory he would somehow appear and Father Forster would invite him in. One time there were a group of priests at the rectory and August made the statement that he would have absolutely no hesitation to commit murder if it were to his advantage and he could get away with it. Then he got a reaction from the priests, and August was in his glory.

"One thing I often wondered about is how he got as much writing done as he did. No matter when I went out I would see August in his turtle neck sweater or T-shirt walking, observing and getting involved in some kind of controversy. He created controversy. I found August to be very interesting. I don't think I either impressed him or annoyed him because I never could identify myself in any of his books. August was also a great nature lover. He could identify birds and leaves and plants.

"Then there were the Dresen brothers, Frank, Bill and Joe. At that time the Dresens owned three lumber companies, one in Sauk City, one in Prairie du Sac, and one in Mazomanie. I remember they used to come out and visit us once a year when I was a boy on the farm. The Bill Dresens especially were very kind to me when I came to Sauk City as a priest. I was very thin at the time so Mrs. Dresen invited me to come and have an eggnog every afternoon. It was too rich. I couldn't eat supper and it tied me down. Mrs. Dresen was a very gifted woman at playing piano and singing and was annoyed with the everyday affairs of life. When there

was a special show in Madison or Baraboo I always managed to get a ride in their Franklin car which did not have water in the radiator. It was air cooled."

The local golf course was a spot of interest to the priests. Father Brickl reviewed, "I used to go golfing with Father Forster. He could not see so in a way I was his caddy. We went golfing every day, nine holes. So, that is where I learned to golf fairly well. One time a group of priests were here to visit and we went out golfing and one of the priests in teeing off, I think it was hole number four, put three successive balls in Lake Wisconsin behind him. Unbelievable.

"The Gaukel family was so good to all of the priests, especially the assistants. It was embarrassing. They had a resort over at Fish Lake. Whatever they had I could use, a boat, a riding horse, even a pipe from the back bar or cigars, anything. They insisted. I have always been grateful to them.

"I mentioned hunting with the Lang boys and Doc Schroeder. Sometimes Cap Lunenschloss and Jack Hahn went along. We went out to our old farm at Plain where my brother had a beagle. Jack Hahn and I took the beagle. The beagle was happy to go. He got a track and he yelped and helped and he got closer and closer and finally we could see the rabbit hopping along. Jack Hahn was standing to my right. Soon the rabbit came right up in front of him. He had that gun in his hand and saw that rabbit coming at him and he pointed the gun and said, 'Shoot him! Shoot him!' without pulling the trigger. He had the rabbit fever."

Father Brickl enjoyed sports and the townspeople and was a dedicated young priest. His first sick call was a challenge. He recalled, "Father Forster and I were at Cliff Kaufman's Restaurant, now the Prairie Cafe, in Prairie du Sac. While we were eating a sick call came in so Father Forster told me to take his car and go on the sick call. Cliff would take him home. I went to the rectory and got my supplies and garments I needed to make a sick call. There was a man who had a stroke. He seemed to be black and blue, unconscious in bed. When I started the ceremonies I was shaky. I had to read the instructions. They were in red. The rest of the prayers were in black. Anyhow

it took me so long that by the time I was finished the man was sitting up and we were exchanging pleasantries."

The ministry of Our Lady of Loreto near Denzer is a memorable occasion for Father Brickl. He recalls, "The mass server was a man by the name of Paul Brylla. He had a peculiar mustache. It went one direction on both sides. At that time he had to ring the bell at different parts of the mass. When Paul Brylla rang the bells they really rang. He shook his arms and hands as hard as he could. He rang the bells like he stoked the big stove in the church. You'd think the building was going to come down the way he rattled that stove. Whenever I went out there I had breakfast at Paul Brylla's house. He was also the janitor. He lived in the rectory.

"Our Lady of Loreto was the first church in that area. Plain and Spring Green were served from that church. The resident priest lived there. My folks attended that church when they first came to this country. Margaret Murphy was a lady at Our Lady of Loreto. She walked from the boondocks seven miles on Saturday to do the church cleaning, and stayed for mass the next day. She had a brother who never came to church but when he got sick I was called out to minister to him."

Now Father Brickl continues to share as he serves mass on Saturday mornings at St. Aloysius in Sauk City, St. Luke's in Plain or at St. Patrick's at Loreto, in Franklin north of Plain. Father also serves mass from the altar in his own condominium with the assistance of Edith Alt. Part of the lives of Father Brickl and Edith Alt involve activities in the open air as they are a busy gardening team on the Frank Bindl farm.

Father Brickl has many memories to tell. He states, "President Bush said, 'Read my lips,' I say, 'Read my book, which will be entitled **Brickbats and Bouquets**,'"

