

Pleasant medleys of music flow from the comfortable stone home on "Wachter Avenue in Plain as the accomplished Gisela Kraemer is at the keyboard of her elegant grand piano.

For 61 years Gisela had been a devoted companion and amiable receptionist for her late husband, the renowned construction contractor, Edward Kraemer.

Gisela, the daughter of Joseph and Mary Frank, has spent her lifetime of 98 years in the Plain community. Her grandfather, Francis Frank, immigrated to Plain from Waldmunchen, Bavaria and homesteaded a farm in Wilson Creek.

Joseph, the fourth son of the Franks, as a young man bought the Baptist Schwartz farm. Joseph's caring sister, Carleina, was concerned about Joseph being a bachelor farmer and upon her return visit to her native country, Bavaria, she met Mary Soelder and introduced her brother through photographs.

Gisela explained: "My mother was a poor girl in a family of three. She had gone to work for a judge and lived in a castle in Salsburg starting at the age of 12. There she learned fine ways and how to speak High German and traveled with the judge and his family."

After some correspondence between Mary and Joseph, Mary arrived in Spring Green via train. Joseph's Uncle John met her with a horse and buggy and took her back to Plain. Shortly after there was a wedding for Mary Soelder and Joseph Frank in St. Luke's Catholic Church in 1883.

Ten children were born to Mary and Joseph Frank - Otto, Anne, John, Alphons, Joe, Clem, Gisela, Emma, Ted and Mary. The Frank family was one of activity and hospitality. Their spiritual and educational mainstay was St. Luke's Catholic church in Plain. Dr. Fowler came to the home in rain, snow or shine with his horse and buggy to comfort and help heal the family when that was necessary. Spring Green was the shopping center for products that couldn't be created or grown or found in Plain.

Gisela reviewed: "My father was a good one to have company. When the summer work was done and fall came the visiting started. Our place was quite a gathering place. The neighbors would come on bob sleds. There was always food. My mother was a good cook. She baked big loaves of bread. We couldn't buy bread even in Spring Green. We had fried potatoes and bologna. My father was well known for the excellent bologna he made. We had

# At 98, Gisela's still going strong

our own smoke house. After we washed the dishes we pushed back the table and chairs and we all danced in the kitchen. My brother, John, played the violin, my mother Alphons played the accordion and I played the piano. My dad would call square dances. He played the accordion, too. Sister Gregory taught me how to play the piano. He was a good teacher and could play the zither, violin and the piano. She taught me how to chord and had good timing. I still have my first lesson book.

"We walked to school four and one-half miles. There were no lunch pails. We took our lunches in molasses pails and kept them in the hall with our coats. The hall was cold so we really had 'cold lunches.' We had part rye in our bread. Sometimes we traded sandwiches with the other kids. In the spring and fall we would take a short cut through the woods to get home. We liked to eat wild apples when we had an orchard at home with 'good' apples.

"We girls had to milk. I liked to milk and was good at it. I milked eight cows by hand every day. If we pilled the milk my father didn't like that. Yes, we had cats to feed but we kept them in the barn."

Gisela, as a young lady, developed a special friendship with an energetic young farmer, Ed Kraemer. The Kraemer family lived around the bend two and a half miles from the Franks.

Ed Kraemer's grandparents, Paul Kraemer and Walburga Von Spangel Kraemer emigrated from Irlach, Bavaria in 1866 when they were in their 30s. They bought land three miles east of Plain to clear for farming. Their first son, Peter, who became Edward's father, was 2 years old when the family sailed across the Atlantic. He later purchased his own 120-acre farm between Plain and Spring Green on County Trunk WC. He married Anna Ring, who had emigrated from the same area in Bavaria as did the Kraemers. Edward grew up in a family of ten children,

Ben, Frank, Edward, Albert, Alphons, John, Annie, Elizabeth, Leo and Esther.

Anna Ring Kraemer died of pneumonia shortly after the birth of Ed's younger brother, Ben. Edward's second mother died of tuberculosis. Thus, Ed had yet a third mother, Kate Ekstein from Roxbury. At an early age, Ed Kraemer struck out to use his creative abilities and ingenuity on farm projects and also acquired work off of the farm. His first job was hauling rocks to build a barn. By the age of 21 he was known as a local carpenter and decided to go into business by himself. He had six employees and a total income of \$3,360 for the year.

Gisela remembered: "I knew Ed when we went to school. He was four years older than I. He was a friend of my older brother, Joe, and would often come down to our house. We'd go to Plain to dances in the bob sled. We didn't have to pay to get in. Only the boys paid. The dances were held upstairs of the Reuschlein store." There is where the Palace Hall, built by Ed Kraemer, is now located.

Gisela continued: "We'd sing on the way home until everyone was sleeping and the driver was alone." Gisela was amused as she said, "I wasn't allowed to go to dances until I was 16, but I played the piano with my brothers Al and John for dances when I was 15. Sometimes Ed and I would go to school on the two seated cutter and the other Kraemer boys would catch a ride hopping on and off of the runners."

Ed's friendship with Gisela led them to the altar at St. Luke's in Plain Aug. 20, 1912. Gisela has a story as to how she acquired her wedding dress. "There was no such thing as buying a ready-made wedding dress even in Madison. My two brothers, Al and Clem, had mastoid surgeries by Dr. Reginald Jackson, in the Jackson Clinic (now Meriter). My mother wanted to stay in Madison. She couldn't

speak English. Dr. Jackson knew of a place mother could stay where they talked German. They were fine people and their neighbor had a daughter who was a dressmaker. She made a long beautiful satin dress with a high neckline with short sleeves, a long light veil and a crown made with fresh orange blossoms. It was a big wedding. The dressmaker brought along some extra orange blossoms just in case."

The wedding picture wasn't taken until weeks later when a traveling photographer came to Plain. Following the wedding came the dinner and celebration at the Frank farm. Gisela explained, "There was a lot of cooking and baking going on. Mother had an outdoor oven where she baked bread and ham. We had the threshers on Saturday and our wedding was the following Tuesday. My sister made a big, high cake. She put raisins and other fruit in it. The cake was all white and decorated with greens. There were two table set up in the living room and one in the kitchen. These were the horse and buggy days and someone had to go to Spring Green and get some of the guests from the train the night before.

"We had many guests for dinner and supper. There was no such thing as paper plates. The ladies would have to keep washing the dishes. People came to the reception about 3:00 in the afternoon. We set up a bowery a week before. It was a tent with a plank floor for dancing. We had a little band. A man named Harris played the violin; Nelson from Arena played the cornet; and Hitchcock from Wyoming played the accordion. We danced waltzes, polkas, the two step and square dances. We were entertained with Swiss Alp singing by three Annen sisters from Madison. Later outsiders came and gave us a surprise shivaree. They made a lot of noise and wanted money to buy beer."

The wedding festivities culminated when the newlyweds braved the challenges of dirt roads for a brief honeymoon to Madison in Ed's one cylinder, "Brush," automobile.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Kraemer made their first home in a large brick home on Wachter Avenue which was converted into a two family apartment. Gisela remembers having to do a lot of scrubbing when they moved in. The home is now owned by James and Marie Neider.

Gisela described Plain at the time as having three general stores, a meat market, a hotel, a blacksmith shop, the church and taverns - dirt



**Gisela Kraemer**

roads and no sidewalks. Ed Kraemer was already recognized for his excellence in carpentry and was instrumental in changing Plain log homes and primitive lifestyles into an up and coming town with modern homes and more sophisticated living. His building projects included homes, barns, cheese factories, a little school and a little church and a design for a home for his new bride and himself. The Kraemers were married in August and moved into their new home on Cedar Street the following July.

Ed's business was flourishing but he charged modestly and Gisela lived frugally, caring for their three boys, Rudolph born October 1913, Fred born March 1915, and Victor

born August 1916. their only daughter, Iris, was born later in 1921. Much later, in 1937, another son, Duane, joined the Kraemer family as a child of 3. Gisela said, "Ed liked to take Duane wherever he went."

Gisela was a busy little body, gardening, scrubbing floors, washing clothes, mostly by hand, ironing, canning, cooking, cleaning, answering the phone for Ed and caring for the children. However, she experienced a bit of luxurious living when Ed contracted to sell home plant electricity for Delco Light and provided Gisela with her first electric motorized washing machine and electric lights to replace the kerosene lamps.

After six and one-half years the Kraemers moved into a new home at 1030 Cedar Street, designed and built by Ed. Gisela reviewed, "With more business and more children we needed more room. Ed needed space for an office. I always liked that house." Now, Gisela became more involved as a receptionist, answering phone calls and receiving home business callers.

Even with the hustle and bustle of daily living the Kraemers managed to be active in supporting the community. Edward was on the village board for 55 years and served in many capacities for the Catholic Church. Gisela added pleasure to the community with her musical entertainment. She created her own lilt-ing style and played piano during intermissions for church plays and many social gatherings. She described social gatherings as people playing cards in the afternoon with music and singing with dancing in the evening. Gisela recalled, "After the children were in bed Ed would be in his office designing his buildings and I would play the piano softly for him. He liked that."

A sweeping event Gisela remembers vividly was the devastating cyclone that struck Plain and the surrounding area in 1918. The raging winds had no favorites and the church was among the buildings to be struck down, save the steeple that was still pointing upward. The community lost a dear priest who survived being blown through a wall only to become a victim of a heart attack two weeks later. The citizens of Plain united with efforts to clear away debris, scrub and clean for a brighter tomorrow. The cyclone, added business to an already busy contractor, Ed Kraemer.

The Kraemer business expanded in the '30s into building bridges and highways for Sauk County and working with men in WPA projects from 1935 to 1940. In 1937 the business legally became Ed Kraemer Contractor. Kraemer continued his childhood pattern of being innovative and inventive. He received a patent for a double jawed crusher in 1936.

Gisela recalled: "There were so many people coming in and he entertained a lot so Ed wanted a bigger house. He wanted more office space. So, we built this house I am in now. I kept on answering the phone and the door. When Ed got up early I had to get up early, too."

While the beautiful stone home on Wachter Avenue was active as far as business was concerned it began to become somewhat of an empty nest for family. It became the era of marriages for the Kraemers. Rudolph married Marion Murphy, a school teacher from Lime Ridge, in 1938. Fred married Margaret "Peggy" Hogan of Arena on Thanksgiving Day in 1938. Victor, who had been in the Army stationed in England in World War II, married Jacquall Kosinski from Chicago in August 1944, and Iris married Richard Umhoefer at St. Luke's in June, 1945. Iris corresponded with 'Dick' when he was in a POW Camp in Germany. Dick later owned and operated the Umhoefer Lumber business in Plain. Duane married Gwendolyn Hill of Madison in 1958 at St.

Luke's in Plain. Gisela explained, "Ed was glad when the boys came back to work with him." The business was incorporated as Edward Kraemer and Sons in 1949.

Ed and Gisela celebrated their 60th anniversary with a special mass on Oct. 27, 1972 followed by a family dinner at Kraemer Hall in Plain, now converted to the Stars Motel. About a year later the news of Ed's sudden death came as a shock to Gisela. She recalled, "Ed was going to his appreciation party he had planned for his employees. He fell and hurt his hand but he insisted on going anyway. He said, 'This will be a party to remember.' He picked up Ernest Koenig from Sauk City, who did his trucking, and went to the Dell View in Wisconsin Dells for the party. Ed was having such a good time talking to an old friend who ran the Dell View and all at once he slumped."

Ed's death left Gisela alone with fond memories of hard work, good times and travels to Germany.

Gisela's oldest son, Rudy, died unexpectedly in 1987 at the age of 74. Just recently, Oct. 18, 1992, Gisela lost her only daughter, Iris. Iris, who had received her musical training in Milwaukee at Mt. Mary College, had followed in her mother's footsteps to become a beautiful musician and had been organist at St. Luke's for 55 years. Two grandchildren died at an earlier time - Gloria, the daughter of Fred, and Iris' infant daughter, Amy.

Gisela met these losses with faith and poise and is thankful for her 20 living grandchildren, 39 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

Rudy's wife Marion lives in Madison; Victor and Jacquall and Fred and Margaret are retired and live in Plain. Gisela's youngest son, Duane, is still with Edward Kraemer and Sons as superintendent in aggregate. Duane's wife, Gwen is a receptionist at the home office on Plainview Road in Plain.

Gisela enjoys her home in the spirit of graciousness she has created. She cooks every day, gets out to church, shopping, goes to the beauty parlor, and loves to play the piano with the encouragement and appreciation of Patricia Temple, her live-in companion from Lime Ridge. On occasion Gisela visits Adella Hetzel on Main Street, a former classmate and friend since childhood.

The Kraemer business with its humble beginnings is surging forward into the third and fourth generations of family members and continues to carry on with the same thread of excellence of its founder over 80 years ago.

Gisela's grandson, son of Rudy, David Kraemer, is president. Victor's sons, William Kraemer is vice-president and division manager; Joseph Kraemer is assistant operation manager; John Kraemer is area manager in the Construction Division; and his son-in-law Edmund Bettinger is assistant vice-president. One great-grandchild, Thomas Kraemer, David's son, is a director. Today Ed Kraemer and sons, Inc. construction has expanded from Wisconsin into Michigan, Ohio, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Colorado, Minnesota, and has approximately 700 employees. As the wheels and gears of the Kraemer construction business turn steadily, harmoniously, sometimes crashing and pounding with cranes soaring high into the sky - building the future, Gisela is playing background music at the keyboard at her home on Wachter Avenue in Plain.

*An inclusive and interesting story of the Kraemers has been written by Claire Geeseman of Edgewood College, Madison, entitled a "Kraemer Chronicle" and can be found in the Plain Library or obtained from the family for a contribution to St. Luke's.*

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