

Kraemer-Frank remembers

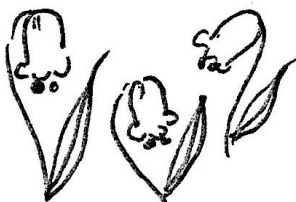
by Doris Litscher Gasser

"We thought it was great to play baseball with the boys." The boys were Ann Frank's brothers, John, Ed, Albert, Frank, Alphanz, Ben and Leo Kraemer from Plain. Her sisters who shared the honor of being on the boy's team with Ann were Elizabeth and Esther. Ann, who was born in 1899, thought the world of all of her brothers and sisters.

Ann Kraemer Frank recalled: "I was born on a farm on what they called Wilson, Creek, half way between Spring Green and Plain.

Ann explained: "All of my grandparents came from Bavaria, my father's mother and father and my mother's mother and father. My father was Peter Kraemer and my mother was Grace Ring Kraemer. The first thing I remember as a child is standing on a chair and looking in a mirror and wondering why I couldn't look like my two sisters. I thought they were better looking than I was.

"My doll was my favorite toy. I got it for Christmas. I would make clothes for her, mostly from hair ribbons. I would pin them together. We had a swing. My dad made it with ropes hanging from a tree with a board across the bottom. One of us would have to push to get it started. You bet your life I fell out sometimes. We had one swing for ten kids, but the boys were older so they didn't swing any more by the time the girls came along."



There was a big family who gathered 'round the table when it was dinner time for a feast of mashed potatoes, garden vegetables, sauerkraut and fried down pork.' Ann recalled: "The boys would cut the cabbage on a cutter. They'd push the cabbage back and forth on the cutter. We'd put it in the basement in big jars and put salt on it and stomp it down. We'd put a cloth over it and then a board and then a stone. Then, it would ferment until it was ready to eat. When we butchered we fried down pork and put it in big jars and covered it with melted lard to preserve it for winter.

"We had mostly dim kerosene lamps, but we did have two gas lamps in the living room and dining room. There was a tank upstairs that held gas for those brighter lamps. We slept upstairs. There were two beds and three of us girls. We took turns for a sleeping partner. We'd sleep once here and once there. Sometimes we had little fights."

The Kraemer children had a four mile uphill trek to St. Luke's Parochial School in Plain carrying aluminum lunch pails

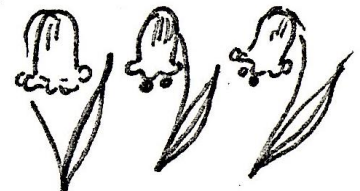
containing honey, jelly or syrup sandwiches. There were four rooms and two grades to a room. Ann remembers Sisters Fredricka, Germaine, Cleopha and Alberta very well. Ann mused: "They were good to all of us. It was good to learn how to obey. I admire them to this day. We had an enjoyable time. We liked playing Hide-and-go-Seek. We liked getting home without being caught. I mean home base. At home on the farm the boys liked to scare us. They'd hide and make an awful noise; maybe bang against the house. We couldn't see them so we were usually scared to death. We had lots of company. The Feiners, Wedners and Hubers were our best friends."

Ann attended a one room rural school near their farm for her eighth year. Upon Ann's graduation, her mother needed her at home to help with the work. Ann learned how to cook, bake, clean, wash and iron in top notch style. She explained: "We had a washing machine and you'd put your foot on a lever below the washer and push it back and forth to wash the clothes. We used homemade soap made from lard cracklings and lye."

Sundays were big days at the Kraemer farm. There were aunts and uncles, cousins and friends who came to call. There was always extra room at the table in their big dining room. The freshly baked pies, cakes, coffee cakes and bread, along with the potatoes, meat and pickles from the basement provided plenty of food for everyone. Ann remembered: "When we got a little older someone would play the accordion and we'd dance in our home after we ate. So, by the time we went to the dance hall in Plain we knew how to dance."

At the age of 16 Ann worked for her brother Ed and his wife Gisela in Plain and helped care for their three boys. She explained: "Everyone knows Ed. He started out with nothing but his bare hands. He borrowed money to buy his first gasoline engine. He got a little crew together and started building all kinds of small buildings and one thing led to another. But, all of my family was successful. To me they are all alike."

In 1917 the peaceful little Catholic town of Plain with its friendly people, was struck by a tragedy. Ann reviewed: "A tor-



nado tore the Catholic Church down and swept everything away except the steeple. The tornado came from Lone Rock and seemed to follow the highway to Spring Green and on to Plain and then on to Irish Valley. It destroyed a barn or home or every single building on a farm along the way. One boy was killed. The side of the house fell on him. The church was a hundred thousand dollar building. It had been painted and had a new slate roof. Father Pesch, who had been blown right through the wall, comforted the people and told them that with God there would be a way through. Tragedy for the people struck again when they lost Father Pesch to a heart attack several weeks later."

St. Luke's church services were held upstairs of Bettinger's Store in what was a dance hall at that time. It was also the setting for the wedding ceremony for Ann Kraemer and Clem Frank, brother of Gisela, brother Ed's wife, on September 26, 1919. Clem had just returned from military service after WWI.

The bleak memories of the tornado were offset by the beautiful, petite bride who wore a white ankle length dress with silk embroidery on the front, a belt and a long white jacket over the top. A white veil flowed down to the length of her dress.

The wedding was a festive, happy time with dinner and supper served to guests at the Kraemer farm home. There was a bowery constructed on the lawn with a tent canvas to cover the dance floor and orchestra. The jovial crowd danced into the night doing the two step, polka and square dances. Ann reminisced, "It was a great day for me to have

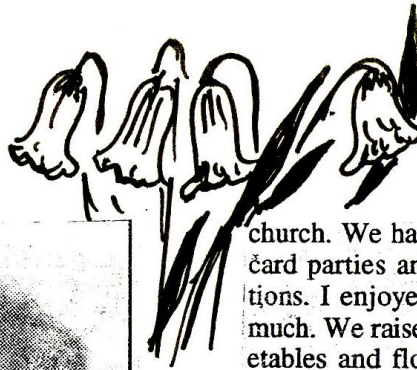


Ann Frank

so many people turn out in our honor. There wasn't a lot of money so our honeymoon was going to one of Clem's father's farms to start a new life together. My husband was good at making sausage. Soon we moved to Plain and he started a meat market of his own. The town was small. Everyone knew every man, woman and child who lived there. There was a happy feeling. We had three sons, Harold, Gordon and Victor. Our boys all went through grade school and high school at St. Luke's in Plain.

"They liked to play baseball. We had good times and good neighbors. When the boys got a little older I could help at the

August 7,
1997



church. We had picnics, bazaars, card parties and wedding receptions. I enjoyed our garden very much. We raised all kinds of vegetables and flowers - geraniums and petunias. There was a nursery in Sauk City. We drove there in our Model A Ford. It was exciting.

"The boys liked to go fishing at Lin's Slough. Later the two older ones were in the war in Germany during WWII. Victor was quite a bit younger. He got as far as California and the war ended.

"All three of our boys married girls from Milwaukee, Anita, Rita and Rosemary. I couldn't have better daughters if they had been my own."

Ann lost her husband, Clem, in 1969. This left an empty place in her life. However, she made the best of things and has lived in her beautiful home in Plain since that time, as a good neighbor in the town she loved.

Recently she has made her home in Maplewood in Sauk City. She has a smile on her face when she speaks of the ladies who care for her. She said, "I call them my girls."

Ann has had the unusual experience of celebrating 50th year wedding anniversaries for two of her sons. Recently Gordon and Rita celebrated their 50th at the Cherokee Country Club in Madison. A year ago Harold and Anita honored their 50 years together in Plain. Ann has 23 grandchildren and a number of great and great-grandchildren.

She concluded with a twinkle in her eyes. "If one didn't have children and a family, it would be pitiful to grow old." And how fortunate for the younger set to have dear, sweet Ann to share yarns of yesteryear with them.

Sauk Prairie Star