



Things I Remember

By Shirley Bruce

Things I remember from when I lived on Tripp Avenue. I must have been about five years old. I was looking out the window watching Daddy and Joe Heinen Cutting down a tree.

After Joy started to school, she brought home the mumps and whooping cough—I had them both at the same time. Mother read to us a lot when we were sick. We had chicken pox, measles and all of the childhood diseases.

I remember my teacher in Kindergarten. I guess Mother must have walked with us to school. My teacher was pretty and blond—she must have been Swedish or Danish. She was nice to all of us.

After school we would go (I suppose with Mother) across the street to the school store, which was sort of in a basement, and get a chocolate dip. It was like ice cream on a stick, but on a round piece of cardboard. They would dip it in chocolate just before they gave it to you.

I think my teacher's name was Mrs. Peterson. I had a big fat terrible teacher in the first grade. She would make all of us put our head down on our desks and she would put her feet up on the desk and eat an apple. I don't remember learning anything from her.



I think I learned my reading and appreciation of books at home, because of mother reading everything from Dickens to Shakespeare and everything in between. I remember we went to the library a lot.

We had a two story house and to make ends meet, the folks took in roomers. Fred Brunner, I think it was, had a “crystal set” and he would go up to his room and put the earphones on and listen to the music.

Joy and I slept in an alcove off of the dining room downstairs. My folks slept in their bedroom upstairs in the front of the house. One of the couples that roomed with us for awhile was a Danish Duke and Duchess who were down on their luck. I think some one of the relatives had known them or of them in the old country. She would walk down the street and smoke—something never heard or seen in our neighborhood.

One day I took Mitzie, our little dog, down to the corner to meet Daddy. I don't remember if Dad was on the streetcar or across Fullerton Avenue, but somehow Mitzie saw him and made a mad dash across that busy street and got under the wheels of the streetcar. I yelled and cried because I thought she would be killed, but somehow she managed to get out OK.

I had a girlfriend who lived behind one of the stores on Fullerton, and I remember going to her birthday party and taking a box of chocolate covered cherries. On the southeast corner was an ice-cream shop. Upstairs was the dentist, Dr. Schraider, I think his name was. Ne never gave Novocain or anything when he drilled. He would always say, after we had our teeth fixed, “Now you can go down and get an ice cream cone”!!!! Imagine a dentist saying that today!!!

When I was about seven, we moved to our new home in Sauganash. Before it was built, we would drive out every week and see what the progress was. I guess the folks had sold the house on Tripp before we could move in, because we lived in an apartment for about a year near Nixon School.

Joy and I both had our tonsils out while we lived there and when we came home we each had a new pair of shoes under our beds. I think mine were red and hers navy with a little heel.

Grandpa and Grandma Bell lived on Keeler Avenue, which was the net street East of Tripp. Grandpa Bell would always bring us a bottle of grape juice when we were sick. I guess it must have been a special treat.



Grandpa Bell never went to Wednesday night meeting, so we would stay with him while the folks and Grandma went. He was Irish and could tell the best stories. He had a big white mustache (maybe it was black or gray at one time). He would take the train to work and home every day. Sometimes we would walk down to meet him at the train. I liked Grandpa Bell, but thought Grandma Bell was bossy. She did make good bread and apple pie and was a good Bible Student.

They had an enclosed front and back porch, and we often played on those porches. We never went in the front room except on Christmas. They had a living room, dining room with built in china cabinets and a chair rail around the room. It really was not a chair rail, because it was higher and she had dishes displayed there. These were her wedding dishes, and she and Grandpa gave them to David and me when we got married. We always enjoyed using them.

I loved living in Sauganash. It was outside the busy city and I had lots of friends. We would go horseback riding, skating and riding our bikes in the summer time. In the winter we would take our sleds out to the golf courses and slide down the little hills. The park association would food the baseball fields in the winter and we would ice skate days and evenings. We would play crack the whip. In the summer we would play baseball.

There was a little frame Catholic Church a block away from us—we were the closest house. In the winter, their water would freeze and they would come to our house to get water. I guess it became holy after the priest would bless it. There were empty fields all around, and we kids would build forts and have a great time. We lived about two blocks from the school. The school buildings were portable. Palmer Branch No. 2. I don't know where No. 1 was, but the main school was in the city, and we would go there sometimes. I don't remember how we got there, but I guess some of the mothers took us in cars as there were no school buses then.

There were eight grades and a kindergarten in four portables!! Each teacher had several grades—and besides eight grades, we had 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, etc. There was a big pot bellied stove in the corner, and we would hang our wet mittens and hats all around it so they would dry. I can still smell the wet wool!!



We would play baseball at recess in an empty lot next door that was cleared. The girls all wore dresses, so you can imagine what we looked like with our skinned knees, etc. All around the portables were cinders and we were always falling on them when we played chase.

There were wooden walkways between the portable rooms and when it would rain, the water would come up to the walkways and some neat kid was always pushing somebody into the “lake.”

The kids’ dogs would follow them to school and wait for them. Most of us went home for lunch, but some of the kids had too far to walk, so would bring their lunch. The milk man would come and sell the kids white or chocolate milk in little bottles. In summer it was terribly hot and the teacher would get a pail of water, and give us a drink a couple of times. Most of the teachers that we had lived in the neighborhood. Mrs. Ford lived across the alley from Cynie. She and her husband had gone to Syria at one time and she was always talking about Syria. They were nice people and sometimes she would have parties in their home.

Daddy never lost his job during the depression, but he didn’t make too much either. Our three Aunts Hazel, Ethel and Eleanor all had good jobs and had nice clothes. They would give the dresses they were tired of to Mother and she would take them apart and make clothes for us. I hated these silk dresses—all I wanted was a plain cotton dress like the other kids!! Can you imagine playing baseball and roller skating in a silk dress? I can remember the boys teasing me one time we were playing baseball—I had on a red silk dress. Whenever I got up to bat, they would start singing, “The Lady in Red—the boys are all crazy about the Lady in Red....” I loved riding my bike and wore out three of them.

Mother loved any holiday. They had to be careful of every nickel, but they hadn’t lost anything during the depression because they had sunk it all in the house. One time they couldn’t make their mortgage payment, but the bank honored them and they soon paid it back.

Mother made a lot of things for us and would always have a package for Valentines, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas and of course, our birthdays. We got the “big” presents from our Aunts. One year my Grandpa Foss made a three story doll house and the Aunts furnished the whole thing. I wish I still had it—we played with it a lot—but I guess when the folks moved to California they must have given it to my Aunt Frankie’s kids.

Aunt Frankie had six kids and they were always poor. We liked going out to her house, though, and we would go on a couple of busses. They always had rabbits, dogs, cats, and of course, a new baby. They stayed with the JWs when my folks left, so it sort of broke up that closeness.



I think Uncle George was always a little jealous of Daddy and Uncle Dan, as they were Elders and he was not. All of their children are still JWs as far as I know.

Aunt Frankie made the best chocolate cake for our birthdays. I can taste it now. They also had a big garden, and we would have all kinds of good stuff to eat when we went out there. They were always adding on to their house, as all of the kids came along. My dad was always shelling out money to help—the Morehouses had Uncle George do a lot of work around their house as the Morehouses had an old house and George was a carpenter, and he remodeled it. The Bells owned the house where Lenzes lived.

Mother used to say that Grandpa had three important things in his life. One was the house, one was Grandma Bell's beautiful diamond ring, and Mother got Grandma!

Jens Copeland was always Santa. After dinner on Christmas Eve, he would disappear into Eleanor's bedroom, which was off the living room. Soon we would hear the bell ring and Santa would come in with his bundle of goodies. We always had such a good time on Christmas Eve. Jens always gave Marie beautiful presents. Daddy always gave Mother practical presents.

Marie was Dad's cousin. Her Mother and my Grandfather Foss were brother and sister. They also had two other sisters and two other brothers. We knew Tanta Meana and Uncle Martin, but the other sister had died and the other brother was a drunk so nobody knew where he was. Sometimes we would meet some of the cousins of my Dad at a funeral or a wedding, but we did not have much to do with them. When I was 6 or 7 we got to the Foss home on Christmas Eve and there were no presents and no tree and no decorations. Joy and I each had an envelope on our plates at dinner with money in it. We were told that we were "too big for presents"—maybe Joy understood, but I didn't. I just sat there wondering what had happened.

Mother and Daddy were getting upset about many of the things that the Watchtower was coming out with and we four, Br. John Read, the Wylams and the Hollisters and I suppose some others, would not go to meeting some Sundays, but would have picnics. They were trying to decide what to do as the meetings were not giving them what they wanted.



Joy was smarter and older than I was and would ask my folks all kinds of questions on the way home from Sunday School. So much was being taught that was not in harmony with what the folks had taught us at home. Finally on Sunday when I was about nine, there was a big gathering at our meeting place.

The Headquarters had summoned all of the classes to be together, the Polish, Scandinavian, German, Black, etc. There were large groups of all of them and they usually met separately. The Headquarters had sent out a “Brother”??? to get everyone to vote about something.

Dad was very upset by this time and he, Uncle Ben Hollister and Br. Read had decided they were going to meet separately and go back to studying Br. Russell’s Six Volumes of Scripture Studies. My Dad got up and said he would like to make an announcement. “Everyone who is interested in returning to studying Br. Russell’s writings can meet with us at 910 N. LaSalle Street next Sunday.” Br. Orel said, “Br. Foss, you can’t make that announcement.” My Dad gathered up his books and said, “I already have”—and walked out with my Mother behind him. I was sitting in the back with my Uncle George and he was furious. I don’t remember, but I guess I went out after the folks—my heart was pounding!!

The next Sunday we met at 910 N. LaSalle Street. Dad and the others had informed all of the splinter groups who had left the Watchtower since Br. Russell died that we were meeting there, so there was quite a crowd. My sister and I were the only children for quite awhile.

The Copelands started meeting with us about a year later. I hated going to meetings in that crummy neighborhood—and on Sunday afternoons. The Community Church was only two blocks away from where we lived and had a choir (I loved to sing) and they met in the mornings and the kids always did something fun in the afternoons. The folks would try to take us someplace or do something special with us on Saturdays—I know this was to make up for Sundays, and later I appreciated this, but at the time I hated the whole setup.

We had always gone to the Fosses for dinner on Saturday night. The adults would talk Truth and my Aunts would play games with Joy and me. Aunt Ethel would always let me play with her curly hair—so we looked forward to that and had a good time. After the folks left the JW’s, there was an argument almost every Saturday. All three Aunts still lived at home.

Finally they told my Dad that they still wanted us to come over, but Dad was not to talk Scriptures. It was hard for my Dad to keep still, but to keep the family together, he promised to keep quiet.



We played Pinochle every Saturday. I learned to play cards before I could hold all of the cards in my hand and would spread them out on a chair beside me and make everyone promise not to look at my cards. I think Joy would read. I don't ever remember her playing with us.

One day I was sitting in meeting toward the back with Gene Jezuit. By that time the second generation Polish had started coming to our meetings. And in walked Grandpa Foss. Grandpa and Grandma Foss lived together but hardly spoke until he died—except about things in the home. Grandma stayed with the JWs. Grandpa went out tracting, etc., every week. They never talked about religion. Sad. In later years they would go up to Wisconsin every summer and probably that was their happiest times during those years because there were no meetings up there. I know they both studied on their own because the Six Volumes and all of the Watchtower books were together on the shelf in Wisconsin.

I remember one day I was rowing the boat for Grandpa and he was reading. After awhile when he was sitting in the boat, I said, "What are you reading about?" He said, "The Tabernacle." My Danish-German Grandparents showed much sign of affection, but they were always doing things to show they loved us. When Grandma died, she left Joy and me each \$1,000.00—the rest to the JWs. Grandpa had died the year that I moved out to California—1941. He was the first person I knew of to be cremated.

I had a happy growing up time. It was harder after I gave my life to the Lord. My friends in the world were such nice people, yet the young people at meeting were mostly of foreign background and were very critical except for Gene. He was really a good friend.

My folks, Joy and I drove out to the July 4th Convention in LA in 1941. We had no air conditioning and it was a hot long trip. Heinens had gone out to California in the middle 20's and Mother and Margaret had written to each other every week for all those years.



The Heinen family had come to Chicago for the Chicago World's Fair. Joe wanted Dad to go to work for him as a salesman, but Wahl Eversharp (for whom Dad had worked for many years) offered Dad more money every time he decided to leave Chicago, so they didn't move to Pasadena for awhile.

I fell in love with California when we went out in 1941, so turned around and went back in the Fall of 1941. One week later Pearl Harbor was struck.

Mother had gone out with me on the train and then had returned to Chicago and was on the train when it was Dec. 7, 1941. They never even knew about Pearl Harbor until they arrived back in Chicago!! Of course, she was worried because she had both girls out on the West Coast. Joy and Ed had moved out there also.

We did have blackouts because it was said that the Japanese subs were off of the Coast. First Jessie McKissik (Hill) and I loved with Joy and Ed. Ed's Mother kept asking him to move back to Chicago. They finally did, and then she moved to Florida. I moved in with an older girl that I worked with at Norris Stamping Company. Mr. Norris was a nice man, but a workaholic. But I liked my job there and the people I worked with. Art Abrahamsen was the Personnel Manager there. Margaret, the girl I roomed with, had a cute apartment over a garage. Her husband had been called into the Navy. A lot of the boys I went to High School with in Chicago were shipped from Los Angeles. I said goodbye to many of them—and many never returned.

