

MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This past week we held two celebrations in the basement at St. John. Some might consider them at opposite ends of the emotional spectrum, but I feel the connection between the two resides at the same level. The first celebration became a milestone for me as I experienced somewhat of a rarity for the average pastor. The second had become all too commonplace, especially with an aging congregation.

Last Sunday, the ladies of St. John threw a big bash for Ruth Miller, who reached her 100th birthday. Some of Ruth's relatives came from hundreds of miles away to get in on the festivities. Still fairly alert, Ruth was the belle of the ball.

Yesterday, the following Saturday, we laid Ruth to rest. The ladies of St. John came through once again with a feast after the funeral and burial. During the meal, Ruth's daughter, Mary, came to me and asked if I would read something to those gathered at the tables. What follows is an excerpt from a yellowing handwritten manuscript titled, "My Autobiography" by Ruth Miller.

In the month of October in the year 1924, I was born in my grandparents' farmhouse several miles from Deshler, Ohio. I remember it had a porch painted an odd color green. Later, we moved into town, but would occasionally visit my grandparents back on the farm.

After a few years in town, my father built a house on Main Street. It was a sturdy brick house with beautiful hardwood floors. Beside it, he built a house for his parents. My grandmother and my mother and father talked a lot of Low German at home, so I spoke it when I was very young. I started school there when I was six years old, but in the fall of that year, my father decided to move out west. We sold the homes and dad and grandad built a house trailer. It was a large one pulled behind a truck and contained 4 bunks and a beautiful nook with benches and windows all around. At that time, I realized little of what it meant to leave our pleasant home.

We had relatives in Colorado who lived on a ranch about 25 miles from Colorado Springs. We

parked our house trailer there and lived in it that winter. Grandmother and grandfather stayed in the house with my aunt and uncle. It was a very severe winter, but I remember an exciting Christmas eve. My aunt and uncle with their six children, my grandmother and grandfather, another aunt and uncle who were staying there also, mother and dad, and my brother and I were all present. Uncle Bill played Santa Claus, who seemed real to me at the time.

My father bought some cattle, and we moved to a ranch with an old brick house, two big ponds with wild geese, and a creek running down past the milk house into the ponds. The one-room schoolhouse was about one-half mile down the lane from our place. I often walked down that lonely lane, but sometimes some people who drove an old Model T Ford would give me a ride. I remember I would often be afraid to walk past a certain field because there was a bull in it. Once in a while, when there was nice snow on the ground, one of the boys who worked for my dad would come after me on horseback and have a sled hitched to it so I could ride home on the sled. That was great “fun”.

When I was about eight years old, we moved into the beautiful little city of Colorado Springs at the foot of Pikes Peak. My grandparents had a chicken ranch there on the outskirts of town. We stayed with them while my father began a Hay and Straw business. The home on the chicken ranch was a good-sized one-room cabin. I liked the school there, but my brother hated it, so once or twice we played ‘hooky’ and stayed up on top of a hill, extending up to a huge golf course, until school was out. I took an extraordinary interest in Sunday School while living there and attended every Sunday.

In 1935, my dad decided to move back to Ohio. The trip was very eventful because on our way from Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming, we ran into flooding rains. Cattle along the roads were being beaten by pounding hail. Soon the water was several inches deep. As darkness fell, we kept on driving. It was difficult driving, and the night was inky black. The water was swirling on both sides and sometimes over the road. About halfway through, highway officials stopped us advising us to wait till morning to continue because the storm had washed out many roads, but dad kept on and

we had to drive over the hills and around curves by staying within lights placed on washed out spots. We were thankful the next morning to be through it safely. The only damage was that hail had broken the glass of one of our trucks. I was glad it was not the one I was riding in.

It seemed strange being back in Ohio, where the land was flat. I tried to remember something about what it had been like when I had been here before, but it all seemed new and strange to me. The first place we went was to my mother's folks, where we stayed all summer until we got a house in town. The farm seemed so much different from the ranches back west.

This entry was dated December 3, 1942. Ruth later went on to graduate from Concordia College in Seward, Nebraska. She taught school in Indiana, married a police officer, and had four children. They eventually ended up here in Cedar Crossing.

It's always interesting to get a glimpse into another era from someone who has lived it. The family relationships fascinated me. Grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles—their lives were

interwoven into an interesting family fabric. It is something I do not see in the present generation. Oh, there are still some vestiges of it in the smaller farm communities like Cedar Crossing, but elsewhere it does not seem to exist. While the current era has many pluses like medicine, transportation, communication, and computer technology, it is missing that certain family fabric that I think people today could benefit from.

Ruth taught Sunday School here at St. John for many years and was a devoted servant of the Lord. I wish I had seen this autobiography earlier so I could have teased her about playing 'hooky'.

Continue to reap the wisdom of your elders!

Pastor Arnold Schmidt