

Nellie's Memories

Helen "Nellie" Matejcik Nacincik (1912-1998) was born in the town of Hermon, of an immigrant family from Austria-Hungary who came to the area because of the work in the mines. The family later moved to Talcville, Town of Edwards, for the work in the talc mine in that community.

She was the second oldest child of the seven children of John and Mary Krsak Matejcik. Although she did not have the opportunity for a high school education, apparently, the desire for it was always in the back of her mind, and when in her seventies, she took classes for a GED diploma near her home in Michigan.

While attending these classes, her natural talent for story telling, using events from her life, came to the surface, and the following stories are her thoughts as she relates growing up in a small mining town in Northern New York, beginning with the difficulties encountered because of the inability to speak English.

Permission was received from her daughter, Peggy Nacincik Pierpont, to allow the adding of these marvelous memories to the Edwards History Center Internet site for all to enjoy and be enlightened of an age gone by.

Early School Years

I started school in a two room building in a small mining town in upstate New York. One room had first to fourth grade and the other fifth to eighth grade. The building had two sets of steps, or stairs, on either end and entered a hall, which had hooks on one side to hang up our coats. At the end of the hall was a table with a pail of water for drinking purposes. The privy was outside, with two separate entrances.

Since my sister nor I could speak English at the time, we had to put up with a lot of ridicule and tormenting jeers from the other children. However, we had an understanding teacher and she pantomimed programs that enabled us to learn English and before too long we were accepted by the other pupils. There must have been about fifty little desks and the teachers really put themselves out to teach us.

Of the early games, I remember tag and relay races. We also played "Annie, Annie, Over", throwing the ball over a roof and someone catching it on the other side. We had three high swings and seesaws for the younger ones.

Being such a small village, we didn't have any clubs. We didn't even have a movie house and only a small country store, and if the owner of the store didn't have the merchandise wanted, he would order it for you from Sears or the Montgomery Ward catalog.

The only contests we'd have in school were to see who had the best written paper or report card. With the best report, the winner would have every Friday afternoon off until the next monthly test. I think we all tried for that.

We weren't into fashion in the 1920s. As long as we had clean clothes and bodies and made a neat appearance and were well behaved, our teachers were satisfied.

A Day From the Past - Berry Picking

Between the ages of ten to eighteen, my brothers and I and my younger sister, Anna, spent the berry picking season doing just that, picking blueberries and blackberries. My older sister, Mary, generally stayed home with our baby sister and to make lunch for Dad and the boarders.

My three younger brothers, and they were all younger than I, and a younger sister, Anna, and Mom and a neighbor and her two older children would start in the morning. Dad would drive us as far as the meadow that was about half a mile away from the trail that would take us to the ridges where we picked the berries.

The meadow usually had high grass and my little sister had to be carried sometimes because the grass would be wet with dew and we'd all be wet up and over our knees before we'd get to the ridges, shivering and cold, the younger ones crying often. However, the sun would soon warm us up.

Mom would prepare hard-boiled eggs and bread and cheese, pickles and sometimes fruit for our lunches. We drank the lake water with our meal. Mom would wrap the eggs, bread, and cheese in a cloth square and tie it around me, as we had a lot of walking to do - sometimes seven or eight ridges to find the berries.



The Matejcik Family around 1928 or 1929. Front, left to right: Anna & Pauline. Second row: Paul, John & Peter. Back row: Mother Mary, Father John & Nellie. Oldest daughter Mary took this picture. She was married and living in Edwards at this point.

My brother, Paul, and I carried bushel baskets on our shoulders and Mom carried the pails and small pots 'til we got to the berrying spots and then we'd pick the berries into the small pails and pots and empty them into the bushel baskets. Each basket held thirty-two quarts and we had a twelve quart pail that Mom carried and smaller pails that my brother, Peter, carried. John and Anna were too small to carry anything on the trail going home. When the berries were plentiful, we would get the baskets and pails filled early and get started for home early, nevertheless, we were happy to see Dad either coming to the ridges to meet us or waiting for us at the meadow.

At seven o'clock every night the train would stop by our house and the engineer and fireman would drop off two milk cans, which would hold fifty quarts each and on the return trip pick up whatever berries we had picked. Most days we had picked about eighty quarts, which was very good for the children and Mom.

At the end of the day we had a treat - an ice cream cone. All in all, a pleasant day, as I recall. I guess at that young age we didn't mind the cold and wet and later the hot sun, but it is nice to think so far back and remember how it was. Thanks for the memories of yesteryear.

A Box Social

A Box Social gets its name from what it implies. A social get-together and a box - a place to put the eats or goodies in, an ordinary paper box, or container, decorated for that purpose. Generally a country house, or a farmhouse, and a fiddler in the community were the necessities.

The lady would prepare the box of food, generally sandwiches, cake, or fruit dessert and make a pretty package with ribbons and bows and sometimes a cigar on it and then hope that her boyfriend would bid on it.

The box would be placed on the table as the ladies came in. After most of the guests were in, the dancing would begin as soon as the fiddlers came in. Most of the dances were square dances, tho there were waltzes and foxtrots, too.

During intermission the auctioneer would announce the time to auction the food boxes and the fun would begin. The bids began at \$1.00 and some went as high as \$20.00. Once my brother bought my box for \$6.00. That was a laugh because his girlfriend had given me the paper and ribbon to decorate my box. He thought it was hers. Whoever bought the box had to eat with whose box it was. His girlfriend's box was bought by my other brother, so he had her with him anyway. We all had fun together.

We had the Socials for quite a while once a month at different residences and I don't know when or why they were discontinued. They were fun while they lasted.

The Box Socials were an entertainment not only for teenagers, but also for older people and grandmas and grandpas, who really whooped it up when a group of the oldies got together. The oldies knew the old songs and most of the barn dances. It was more fun watching them than participating in the dances. Everyone knew each other and it was their way to show their appreciation at being one of the crowd. It was fun that was really enjoyed.



The Matejcik family at Pauline's wedding in 1948. Left to right: Mary Brown, Paul, Anna Hurley, Peter, Mother Mary, John, Pauline Jasinski & Nellie Nacincik. Father John had passed away by this time.

Mrs. Nacincik wrote a number of other memories of growing up in Edwards, New York in a time when life was much different. Her happy marriage was arranged between the two fathers when she was born, - and where but in Talcville, would the train frequently stop and shoo her pet cat off the track rather than hurt the animal. Read more of her stories at the Edwards History Center when visiting our community.

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