

# Recollections of My Family History

By Melvin Breyfogle

My child hood in Alta, IA was several years ago so this may be just ramblings.

My parent's home was located in the northern part of town. We did not have house numbers, street names or numbers that I knew of at that time.



My Grandparents lived on the corner lot and the next house south of ours. This was my Grandma and Grandpa Sins and was of course my Mothers side of the family. Grandpa was a railroad section foreman on the M & STL, which ran east and west through town about three blocks south of our location. Grandpa had as part of his job pay first dibs on the old railroad ties that were removed from the rail line as they were replaced with new ones. These were transported to his yard and stacked up as high a mountain. This was a small boys impression. In this day one would have to call this an attractive nuisance. In fact many of the neighborhood kids would climb up and around these mountains. Grandpa was very adamant that we should not do this, as he knew these ties could be dissolved and we could be hurt badly. There was also a very big tree that grew very close to these piles of ties and this also was a challenge to climb.

Grandpa Sins was a very nice old man as my recollections of him stay with me. He liked his home brew beer and made it in the washhouse. This was in a large crock and covered with a cloth. The odor was very strong in the warm weather. I remember that it had to be siphoned off and into bottles. He would let me suck on the rubber tube a bit and laugh when I blew it out because of the bitter taste to me. He never let me get too much of it. I was curious as to what this was and this cured me of wanting any more of this brew.

I remember when Grandpa developed a lump on his neck. It grew rapidly and the local doctor could do nothing about it. He was sent to Chicago, IL for a treatment. This consisted of inserting radium needles in hope that it would kill this cancer. This was when I was about 8 or 9 years old. He finally succumbed in 1936. This was a very bad winter with lots of snow, so much in fact that

they could not get to the cemetery for many days. Grandpa lay in his casket in the house for that time. There was a cold room in the back of the house.

Grandma Sins had come from Germany on a sailing ship the first time she made the journey. I think that she went back for a short time and returned again, this time I am not sure if the ship was a sailing ship. She was a very grand lady. I don't remember of her ever losing her temper. I was her first grand child. She was always a very hard worker. She did gardening and of course the Mother of five girls and three boys that I knew of. I am sure that there was one baby that died at birth.

She was always doing all kinds of handy work in the evenings. I don't think I ever saw her just sitting doing nothing. She always had a very distinct speech; it was very much a German accent. Her schooling was limited which in those early years not uncommon. She was not by any means illiterate. Her writing was not the best penmanship but legible.

She was a very proper woman. I remember telling Roseline, her youngest daughter that she should not show her ankles or wear pants like boys do. I was very young at that time.

Another memory was the time I went to Storm Lake with Grandpa and Grandma. They were staying in a railroad car Grandpa was working on the eastern line. Grandma and some of the girls were to pick beans for the packing plant. I am sure that the pay was one penny a pound. I also went to the field and got my bag to put beans in when they were picked. I don't remember how many days this lasted or how many pounds of beans I was able to put in the bag but I do know that Grandma would sure pick a great amount of those beans, no one could keep up with her. One other thing about that stay with them was in the morning I could not sleep too late, as the flies would keep buzzing around my head. There were no screens on the windows and the weather was hot so the windows were open to get the cool night air.

Grandma did visit us several times and she was a very big hit with the four boys. She loved children. One time Betty and Grandma walked down town and back. Betty told me that she had a difficult time trying to keep up walking with her. She was a fairly tall woman and Betty was a lot shorter.

Grandma lived alone a lot of the time but she did have another elderly lady live with her for quite a few years, her name was Mrs. Hamilton. Later her son Johnny was married and they lived in the upstairs rooms for some time also. Also her son Joe lived in the upstairs rooms as his son Merlin and I used to play together, this was when I was in grade school as I remember.

Grandma lived until she was 101 years. She passed away in her own bed one night very quietly.

My father was the son of William and that family was a large one also. I think the family consisted of Opal, the only girl. Forrest, who passed away before I was born, Arthur, who was a career Navy man, Ivan, Lionel, and Delfred the youngest.

They lived on the west side of Alta. To me it was a farm but today it would have been called an acreage. Grandpa had a team of horses that he kept in a barn that looked huge to me, I am sure now it was a small one. Grandpa ran a dray route. This was a delivery business of hauling all sorts of material. He also had some small fields that he farmed adjacent to the out buildings. He also collected junk and old iron. He had a pile of old iron next to the barn. It had all sorts of neat things that lured me to it. He was very gruff about me getting into it and accused me of scattering it all over. I of course did not think I had done this but it caused me to get a good rear end tanning from him. This is not a very good memory to hold but it is what I remember most of him.

Grandma Breyfogle was a hard working woman as well she had to be with the large family to take care of. The kitchen table was a large round table and at mealtime it was piled high with the staples, potatoes and meat. These sons had very large appetites. I remember when their plates were loaded up it looked like mountains. The potatoes were piled up at least 6 inches high.

She would can most all the late summer. The cellar that she stored the jars in seemed to be almost endless. The house was of course a large one and the cellar was just for storage of foodstuffs. It was like a lot of them in that day dug out under the house just for that purpose. The entrance was from an outside cellar door. There were all kinds of root crops stored there also. Grandma put up almost everything that could be canned in jars. This included fruits, vegetables and meats of all kinds.

I don't know the year that Grandma passed away but I remember that her casket was placed in the parlor. This was a room not very often opened as I recall. Most of the living and eating was done in the huge kitchen. There also was a living room but it was smaller. I remember this room as very interesting as it had a player piano that had to be pumped with the feet and produced music with a roll of paper punched with holes. The keys would move up and down with the music, almost as if by some ghost playing it. This living room also had a huge coal heater that was filled with little isinglass windows and I only remember this having a fire in it once, it was very impressive with the red glow through the windows.

I don't remember Grandma's funeral but I did see her in the casket. This was the first dead person I had ever seen. I will always remember her as wearing long dresses and she was not a very large woman. She always had a smile for me when Mother and I visited her. After her death we did not visit Grandpa very much. I could only recall of two times. One was when Grandma's daughter was home.

Several of the sons were still staying at home but I can't remember whom they all were. Delfred of course, Roy, Ivan, and I think Lionel came home when he was released from prison. He was sent to prison for bootlegging. I was too small at that time to have been told the entire story. I later learned that he took the sentence for Grandpa who was the one that was making the illegal booze. I have no proof of this but reading between the lines of things I have been able to read this is the only conclusion I can draw. The years passed and I don't have any knowledge of what transpired. Our family just did not keep in touch even in that small town.

Grandpa in his later years went to live with son Carl and his wife Alice in Storm Lake and I am sure later was put in a rest home until he passed on. I do not have his date of death or exactly what his age was.

Son Arthur was a career Navy man and several years later he did come home and at that time he stayed in our home for a short time. I believe because there was no place for him to stay. I think the old Breyfogle house had been sold.

Art brought a number of things and gave them to Mother and Dad. One was the string of ivory elephants on a stand. I still have this minus the stand and one elephant. He gave Dad a silver cigarette case, which is still here. The one thing I thought was really great was a letter opener that is like a saber with a hooded hilt. It has a metal sheath and was hung on our wall at home for a long time. The elephants used to set on the big console Coronado radio.

I remember Roy because he helped Betty and I out when we first got married. I was right out of the navy after WW II and there was no place to live, so Roy pulled his converted truck camper up beside my dad's place. This was long before anyone thought of camper type vehicles. It was what he took on the road for carnivals to run his pitch penny games.

He later sold the truck and loaned us a trailer to live in, all out of the goodness of his heart. He later took the trailer back to go back on the road and we moved to Estherville to start our business. I did sell Roy my dad's place after he died. I was glad to help Roy out since he had helped us out when we got started.



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