

News from Nan

NAN'S WRITINGS

NAN'S REMINISCENCES: BOOKS AND MUSIC

MARCH 7, 2022 | NAN

This post is part of a series of reminiscences that Nan (born 1906) wrote about her childhood in Minden City, Michigan. Most of the pieces were written sometime between 1990 and 1995.

This post describes the important role books and music played in the Riedel household.

Books

There used to be a story about how the Chinese so venerated learning that they cherished every scrap of paper, no matter how small.

Our family tradition is something like that. In the log cabin, Mother used to tell us, if a newspaper was received, it was put high up out of harm's (or children's) way, and to touch it was forbidden. Perhaps that made the children hunger for the knowledge the print represented: Mother cried to be allowed to go to school, but even when she got there, she had no books, and looking on with luckier students was very unsatisfactory. She never ceased to envy the kids who had books, and though she never achieved that happy state herself, she made sure her children did.

I think Dad had a little better opportunity. For one thing, he was a boy, who would become a breadwinner. Many women had to be that, but the fact was ignored. Then, too, the Riedels were business people, and Dad would be expected to help in the business. So he even had a little business training.



Louis Hermann Riedel

Mother bought us books when there were any to be had, which wasn't often in a small town like Minden. And occasionally a little religious book came our way from Sunday School.

When my brothers got older, they bought Horatio Alger books. Horatio worked hard and always succeeded: the work ethic formula in action.

I could — and did — read one book between school's closing and bedtime, and often another in the evening.

My happiest reading time was after Ray's marriage to Glad, who was a teacher. They subscribed to *Youth's Companion* for me, and I could scarcely live from one issue to the next.



Raymond (Ray) Riedel

Music

I'm so glad that we loved music in our family! Poor as we were, as few spare pence as Mother had, she paid music teachers for us and insisted that we all have musical opportunities. Not that Dad objected, for he himself played cornet in his youth, and all his life he sat transfixed when someone gave an especially good rendition on a cornet! There was a piano in the old hotel (West End), sounding pretty cracked by the time I was old enough to test it a little.

In the log cabin at Schreiters' there were more mouths to feed and less money. So there was no piano, but the feel for music was there, as witness Grandpa Schreiter's request in his letter [see Letters Home on page 37] for his mother to "bring song books."



Nan's "Grandpa" Schreiter

Mother's music in the early days was bird song. Over and over she has related the early morning chrous at the pond that the creek formed, below the log cabin, and how she would slip out early and go down there to listen to the music and watch the fabulous colors. One of the first chores of the day would be to carry pails of water up from the spring, but the morning concert was her pleasure.



Nan's mother, Anna Schreiter Riedel

Although she laughed at my infant conceit, it must have given her pleasure to hear me say, "Listen! My birdie, singing for me!" "I got it from no strangers," as people always used to say when a family trait revealed itself: I have always loved the birds and still find them one of the greatest joys!

Besides the cornet, Dad could play the piano. I think the only thing I remember his playing was "Frolic of the Frogs." [I (Anna) believe Ellen still has the Riedel family "Frolic" sheet music.]

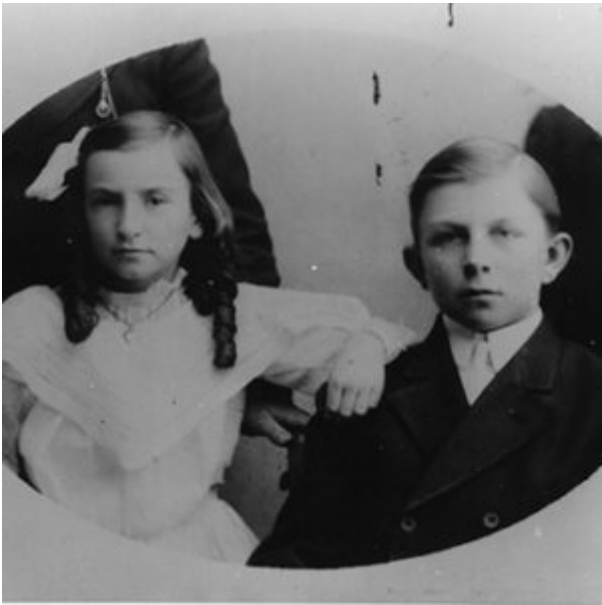
Louie had lessons, but didn't "take to" the violin. Mother used to relate her amazement and chagrin that Louie just sawed through it, and they hadn't thought to let Ray begin until he begged to. He arms had grown a bit crooked — they thought he "grew too fast." (One supposes that he, like me, was calcium deficient.) And lo — when he began, Mother would say with delight, "there is the violinist I always wanted!"



Riedel family. Louie is on the right. Ray is the baby.

The tune I always associate with Ray — my favorite tune and also Kelley's, when he was little — was "The Bohemian Girl."

Sal played piano, and when she and the older boys were all at home, we often had regular band sessions. I think Louie played an instrument, and Al, too. (Al says he liked guitar best.) We all gathered around the piano to sing. No radio, TV, or even records to play in those days: all music was self-made. The boys had a village band. And DeRosia's, who had a hotel in Minden, was also often a center for music. Bertha was the pianist.



Sal and Ray Riedel

When I was still on the yon side of Fool's Hill (assuming I eventually acquired some understanding), Mother used to like to hear "Down by the Old Mill Stream," and "Silver Threads Among the Gold," and such, and I think if I played them for her, it wasn't in good spirit, as I was snippily scornful of "that old stuff." I'm so sorry, Mom: I've regretted it so much! If I ever get the chance, I'll get the Heavenly Choir to sing them for you with heartfelt zeal!

Dad was sentimental, too. I never hear nor play "O, Tannenbaum" without seeing him beside the piano in the front room at the Red House, singing it with tears in his eyes! He had such rosy apple cheeks!



Louis H Riedel ("Dad")