

News from Nan

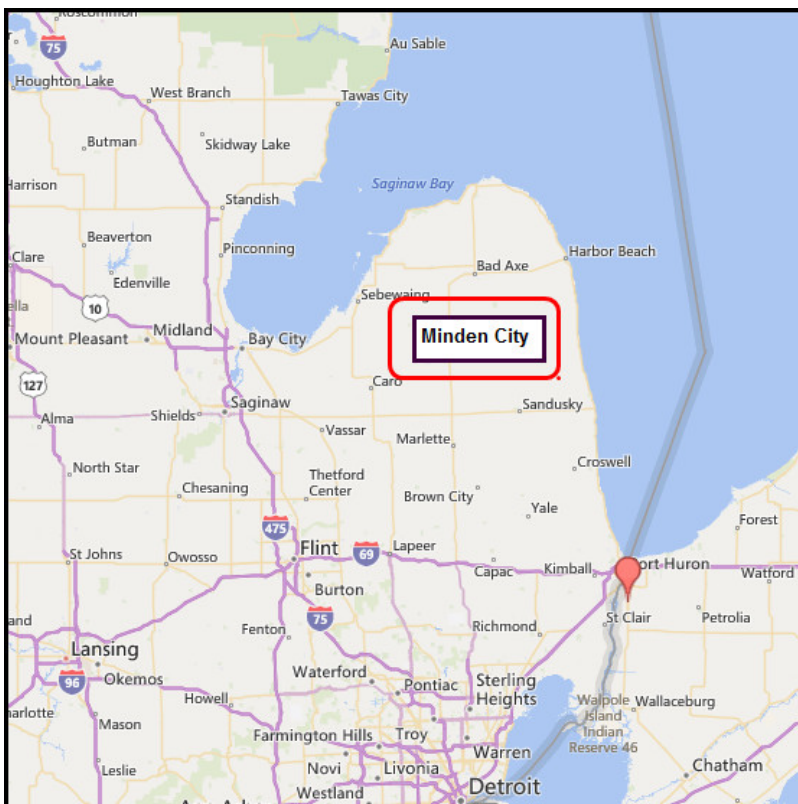
NAN'S WRITINGS

NAN'S REMINISCENCES: CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 17, 2018 | 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.

In this piece Nan talks about how she and her family celebrated Christmas.



Christmas was, of course, *the big one*, in every way. It wasn't a matter of gift exchange. We didn't give gifts ourselves until we were grown up, married, or in a job. The gifts under the Christmas tree were from Santa Claus, believe it or not!

I still believe it, because I wanted to then so desperately. I remember the year "Cheech" (Chi Chi) De Rosia made me have to admit to myself that I knew it was my parents who put the gifts under the tree. I didn't thank him for it, though he perhaps thought that at my age, I naturally didn't believe in Santa

Claus. And lying in bed on Christmas Eve, in the back bedroom, with Paul (we slept together that one exciting night of the year), I could tell from the trips up and down stairs, and out to the garage and back, who was assembling Christmas. All the while I was urging Paul to hurry and go to sleep, because if Santa found us awake — *Oh, Horror!* — he would not leave any gifts!



Nettie (Nan) and her brother Paul

The tree, of course, was the central core of the celebration. Dad had probably gone to the swamp himself to cut it, and it was hidden behind the garage to keep fresh and cold until Christmas Eve. I think I saw it there once, but I manfully ignored the evidence and never disillusioned any young believers myself.



Nettie's (Nan's) dad standing on the ice of Lake Huron

On Christmas Eve, after we were asleep, or making a good pretense of being, Dad would put the tree on a stand and bring it in, and Mother would trim it, complete with real wax candles in little snap-on holders. While it was still pitch dark, we would be awake and importuning our parents to let us go and see what Santa had brought. We were held off until Mother could get down ahead of us to light the candles, so that the sight we saw was enchanting: the fragrant green tree in full glory of illumination with the gifts spread out (no wrappings) under it. We didn't note that Mother was now Santa's Fire Department, standing by with a pail of water and a dipper.



*Nettie (Nan) and her mother in Minden City,
Michigan*

One of our favorite decorations was a set of little musical instruments. One year a little horn was the first thing Paul saw, and in reaching up to blow the glad tidings, he pulled the whole tree over!

We were especially lucky with our gifts. Most of the kids got serviceable things: wool socks or mittens, new underwear, a toy for the lucky. My parents really made it a memorable day. I can't ever remember ever having stood with nose pressed against a window yearning for a special toy that I didn't receive that toy. That took a real Santa spirit even for the sleuthing!



Nettie (Nan) with some of her favorite stuffed pets

There was a musical merry-go-round that I still mourn (it wore out eventually) and a hand-cranked music box that had “records” made with perforations. “On a Sunday Afternoon” was one tune. I saw a replica in the tax-free shop... in Amsterdam, I think. The handle would wear down, and Mr. Sundquist would repair it. Eventually, alas, it could no longer be repaired, and it ended in a drive for metals during one of the wars.

One year it was a set of doll furniture. Those were all at Mahon’s hardware store; perhaps Frank, who was such a silent person, was in Santa’s employ! (He was the justice of the peace who married John and me.)



Winter in the thumb of Michigan

Paul's gifts ran to wheel toys. When Dad went on business trips, he always brought back gifts for us. I remember a toy truck with a little driver who lifted out. Paul cried when he found he couldn't get into the space himself! I got a nice doll buggy that year. Paul couldn't ride in it, but he enjoyed wheeling it. That must have been a relief to the neighbors, for when he was a little younger, Paul started his morning early by taking a garden hoe and dragging it behind him all around the block. On the sidewalk, it made a nice, busy sound to a little boy who liked machinery.



Nan's parents: Anna Schreiter Riedel and Louis Riedel