

Books

By Nettie (Nan) A. Riedel van Raaphorst

Written ca. 1990, tells of her childhood in Michigan in the 1910s

Nan was nicknamed "Chapter" for a good reason.

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, so 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 that 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, and people felt that it was more worthwhile to educate 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.

Mother bought us books when there were any to be had, which wasn't often in a small town like Minden [Minden City, Michigan]. 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 [Nan's older brother] marriage to Glad [Gladys Kelley], who was a teacher. They subscribed to "Youth's Companion" magazine for me, and I could scarcely live from one issue to the next.