

Recollections by Ethel B. Grover

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My earliest recollections begin in a house at 4516 Denison Avenue in Cleveland – the house was torn down to build a ramp for the freeway. I remember my mother, father, three older brothers and my sister Linda. An older sister Isabelle died three months before I was born and Leonard was three years younger than Linda. This made us six remaining children who through the following years formed the nucleus of an interesting family.

My mother Charlotte Gedeon came to this country at the age of 5. The sailing vessel they came on took 4 months to cross the Atlantic. The steamboat they should have taken went down and no one was saved. She was one of 4 children – John, Mathew, Anna and Charlotte. Her parents settled in the west side of Cleveland and in the course of their lives they build four different homes, one on Storer Ave – and the last one on W. 44th St. off Denison Ave. I remember my grandmother as a very placid, good looking woman who loved her home and managed it well. Grandfather had much more spirit and we loved for him to come to our house. When my mother went to school they lived on Storer Ave. and she and grandfather walked each morning – she to school and he to Forest City Spring Works where he was a blacksmith. Then after the day's work was finished they would walk home again. Trolley fare was 3 cents and to spend that each day was to take money from other areas. I heard my mother tell of Grandfather working when they came to this country for 25 cents a day unloading freight boats. They were never on relief, grandfather always worked and there was always a pot of soup cooking. My mother was usually the first one at school each day, so she started the coal stove and brought in several buckets of snow to melt. This was used for washing hands, desks, blackboards. The children were taught by Catholic nuns who ruled with an iron hand – there were no discipline problems and if there were they were settled with the yardstick. I think my mother must have been a good student but she went only to the 8th grade and then to work in a garment factory. There she worked 12-14 hours a day running a power driven sewing machine and I recall her saying after a few months of this she lost the bloom in her cheeks. Both my grandfather and my mother continued walking to work and walking home at the end of the long day. I don't know what her wages were, but each week she turned her pay over to grandmother (as did the 3 other children) so there were 5 people contributing to the household. In return each one of the children received 50 cents a week for themselves for spending. Of course, they all lived at home until they were married – no one ever thought of leaving. Grandmother saw to it that they were amply fed and clothed.

My grandparents had a beautiful house as I recall – on a tree lined street. It had 3 rooms on the first floor, three bedrooms and bath on the second floor, a full basement and attic. I remember all the lovely furniture, ladder back chairs, beautiful dining room always with lovely linens and china – these things impress a child. When we went over to see them, we were always served green tea, frosted honey cookies and peppermint candies.

We were told what chair we were to sit in and we didn't hardly move. Grandmother was a spotless housekeeper, and both the inside and outside was a pleasure to behold. Uncle John, who lived with grandmother, was an avid hunter and there were always two hounds tied under the sink in the kitchen. I guess they had their house outside, but they were always under the sink when we went to visit. Uncle John, by the way, was a most unusual person. First of all, he always wore a hat in the house, and then again he had a philosophy about work. Since he never married, he decided when he would work enough to keep himself and take time off when he so desired, consequently he worked one year and stayed home the next year. He enjoyed his hunting and loved the outdoors so he had no trouble keeping himself busy. Since he was a good machinist, he was never without work. When he died, my mother received a good sum of money from his estate. Maybe we should all take a lesson from him (couldn't do it now because of taxes).

Entertainment in my grandmother's house was typically of the era – family dinners, visiting friends, walking to the park and grandfather spent most of his spare time watching the triple A ball games at Brookside park. He was an avid baseball fan!

Grandfather's sister, Aunt Juliana, was another person we dearly loved. She liked my mother and father and would come to see us often. When she did she always brought something for us and most of the time it was a cocoanut cake. How we loved it and her. This good soul was married to a ne'er do well who drank to excess – so Juliana threw him out and brought up her two sons herself. She did this by going out to work as a laundress – educated the boys and paid for a two family home by doing just this and did it until she was past 70. And she was less than 5 feet tall. Laundering in those days was done in wooden tubs with a wash board, harsh soap and a good old boiler. She was the most wonderful person ever, always cheerful lovable and eager to help everyone. Usually after ding a big laundry she would even cook supper for the family she worked for.

I mentioned that my grandmother had beautiful things in her possession, but I remember my mother getting only a few. A string of garnets which she wore on her wedding day and two Chinese vases. My sister has both of these items.

My father came from a family of five children, he being the second oldest. There was Louis, Robert, Leontine, Anna, and Emil. Grandfather Bodenlos was in business – he owned the first blast furnace in Central Europe and used it in the manufacture of agricultural tools. They were born and lived in the town of Metzenseifen, Hungary. The people were all German, were governed by the German Kaiser, and migrated to Hungary in 1100 to help populate the land which had been ravaged by the Turkish wars. If you read history, you will find this to be historically correct. If it hadn't been for Hungary, Europe would have been overrun by the Turks.

The town was situated in the valley between 7 hills – very fertile land. Grandfather's house was the largest one in the village and also the most wealthy. Grandmother had 4 servants living on the premises, so she did nothing but take care of the children, cook and sew. It is said she was a fabulous cook. My mother

said when grandmother came to this country to visit she could hardly keep her in supplies – butter, eggs, sour cream, etc. It is said when she was married she weighed 100 lbs. – in later years 225 lbs.

Grandfather did a lot of traveling, this being done in horse drawn coaches and on occasion he brought gifts for his wife. One precious item was a strand of Bohemian garnets which glisten like diamonds. My sister had this restrung and the jeweler wanted to buy the strand. He said he had never seen anything more beautiful.

The houses in this town were built close to the road and not too far apart – this was to conserve land which in Europe is at a premium. Behind the house was the flower bed, the kitchen garden and the farms stretched out a great distance. Hungary in those days was called the bread basket of Europe with wheat, oats, barley grown profusely. The house as I said was a large one, all the construction in the town was native stone with walls 36" wide, windows at each side of the wall and a place for flowers between. In the kitchen, one entire wall had tile on it and this was the cooking area. Bread ovens were built outside and bread was made about once every 6 weeks. At the end of that time the last loaf was just as fresh as the first one had been. Today, good European bread is far superior to ours because it is made of freshly ground grains and baked to perfection.

The tables were always set in white linen with exquisite silver and crystal. There was a set of Bohemian glass goblets (12) which graced the table because there were always business people and friends at dinner. My mother had two of the goblets which are 400 years old (handed down in the family). One is pink and one blue. These used to be on our sideboard and one day when we were dusting it, the pink one was broken. My mother cried, but very patiently glued it together. Linda has these goblets in her possession.

The bedrooms had hand made featherbeds on each bed, plus over sized down pillow. They (the beds) were so tall a stool was required to get into bed. I was given a pair of hand loomed pillow cases which I carefully ripped open, put lace insertion between the two, added a crocheted edge and I have a tablecloth for my dining room table. This tells something of the size of the pillowcases.

Since Grandfather entertained a lot and wine was used at every meal, he had his own wine cellar and grew his own grapes. A huge room was carved out of the side of the mountain and there the kegs were lined up ready for use. Some were so old that the staves fell off – but the wine was in a skin which was formed by the grapes.

As I stated, Grandfather was a manufacturer. Most of the men went to work at night because the water was used by the households during the day so the pressure was much better at night. The men had quite a distance to walk and they always carried guns to protect themselves from wild animals. It was a thriving business.

All the children went to the gymnasium which is the equivalent of our high school

plus year of college. Louis was the oldest and was quite a good violinist. It is said he owned a gypsy leader's violin and could really make it sing.

My father, Robert, was good in mechanical ability and also in sports, especially parallel bars, etc. He was expelled from school quite often because he did exercises which were too dangerous and daring for him. He was also quite a marksman. This was part of their heritage – they used their guns for protection. Both Anna and Leontine were brought up in the fine arts which were indicative of the ladies at that time. Anna came to this country and married John Pimsner. They lived in Cleveland and had 7 children. Leontine stayed in Hungary and married a man who had a thriving retail clothing store. Emile was the youngest and he always was in the kitchen with Grandmother. He loved to watch her cook and often did a lot of it with her.

When Grandfather was 42, he contracted pneumonia and died within a short time. His wife knew nothing about the business so within a short time she lost it and was unable to do any work to help keep herself. In the meantime, after grandfather's death, Louis decided to come to America as did Emile. Not knowing of their whereabouts, Grandmother sent Robert to look after the two already here. My father was 19 years old and could speak no English. He came to Cleveland and in a short time had work with the old Globe Iron Works as a machinist. He took pride in his work and in a short time advanced to higher positions. He lived with ___ until he was 24 and then married my mother who was 22. On May 25, 1895, they were married at St. Elizabeth's church (Hungarian) on Buckeye Road which is the largest Hungarian settlement in the country. The priest who married them was Fr. Boehm, himself from Metzenseifen, and in searching the records they found my mother and father to be 4th or 5th cousins. I have the wedding picture which shows my father with a full beard – quite a handsome man and so serious about life.

They began their married life like so many people of that era – with nothing but the bare necessities – and I mean bare. There were 2 knives, 2 forks, 2 spoons, 2 plates, cups and saucers, a bed to sleep in and a table and 2 chairs. At the time, my father earned \$2.50 a week and they were paid in gold coins. The place they lived in rented for \$2.50 a month, so there was not much left to work with.

Seven children were born – 4 boys, 3 girls. Births are recorded in the family bible which my father gave to my mother in 1900. Isabelle died in 1905, just a few months before I was born. My parents had bought a house at 4516 Denison Avenue and we were all brought up there. Isabelle was a beautiful blonde with big blue eyes. She contracted pneumonia which developed into empyema (?). In those days, medicine was not so advanced and instead of being in a hospital, she was operated on in the kitchen of our house. My mother said when they opened her she was so full of pus that it shot to the ceiling. She was buried in West Park Cemetery.

The first four children were born over a period of 5 years. My mother really had her hands full. Emil, the third one, had a lot of illness and many times had the same disease twice. This may have accounted for some weakness he had in later life. It is

said that he nearly died of scarlet fever and measles both. Remember that these diseases were more deadly in those days. We three younger ones had scarlet fever when we were about 8-10-12. Linda was left with ear trouble for the rest of her days. Our house was quarantined for a month, no one was allowed to enter or leave. It was really bad.

The three boys were such handsome lads. Elmer with his curls which my mother insisted he wore even when he started school. He was teased so much by other boys that we became quite a scrapper – had to defend himself. Because of the curls, he became known as “Curly”.

We lived in a German neighborhood, across from Brookside Park and all of us went to Milford School. Our house had living room, den, dining room, kitchen and a both on the first floor. The second floor had 3 bedrooms and an attic which became a storage room. There was no basement, no central heat and gas fixtures. A baseburner was placed in the dining room which burned hard coal. A kitchen stove (coal) was used for cooking and heating water. The baseburner was chrome which had to be polished, isen (?) glass windows in the door and heated just about one room. There were sliding doors at entrance of the living room and they were most always closed off in the winter. The stove was cozy when you sat in front of it, but the second floor was always frigid and there was always ice on the windows. We were sent to bed with fascinators on our heads, hot bricks at our feet, flannel nightgowns, woolen socks and feather beds to cover us. The stove was banked at night, but it usually required work to get it going again in the morning. It was cozy in the kitchen in the winter time, but was so hot in the summer. Coal for both stoves was kept outdoors in the coal shed and had to be brought in several times a day depending on the weather. Many times I remember the water pipes in the bathroom being frozen and my father had to work so hard to thaw them. The tank for the toilet was suspended about six feet from the floor with a chain to pull to flush the toilet and sometimes that would freeze.

Every Monday was wash day at our house and I disliked it so much. My father made a wash bench which held two wooded laundry tubs. Water was heated on the coal stove to fill the tubs and the boiler which stood on the stove. My mother always had a laundress who came early Monday morning. The water was usually hot when she arrived. Our tub was filled with hot water, a wash board was used along with Fels Naptha Soap and starting with white clothes. They began the scrubbing as each article was washed, it was put through a hand wringer (attached to the tub) and then placed in the copper boiler and boiled vigorously to sterilize them. They then had to be taken from the boiler, rinsed thoroughly and put through the wringer again. On windy and warm days, the clothes were hung outdoors to dry and in inclement weather they were hung in the attic. Many times they froze up there, but the clothes were always so clean smelling. The odor of the hot soap suds permeated the whole house and I never liked it. One day I remember one of the tubs broke and what a mess it was!

In the early days, we used to take our baths in front of the kitchen stove. My father made a galvanized tub for the smaller kids. It was easier to empty and transport.

We also used to bring our clothes in front of the stove to dress each morning.

My mother was an immaculate housekeeper and cook. Each day the kitchen floor was scrubbed and every week the entire windows in the house were washed. My mother made curtains for our windows and hand drawn doilies for the furniture. She never sat idle – there was always some handwork that she was making. Each year also we cleaned the whole house. This was really a project, starting with cleaning the wallpaper, washing all woodwork, taking mattresses and springs outdoors to air, taking rugs out to beat and sweep, taking the baseburner out of the house and storing it in the coal shed, laundering woolen blankets and stretching curtains on wooden stretchers. Many times our fingers were sore after having been stuck by all the pins. We usually had this job all done in several weeks, but it really was a monumental job. Then, in later years, my parents decided to have a basement placed under the house. This meant packing up the building an excavating the dirt to make the basement. This was done by using a scoop which was drawn by a horse. The job was done in August and I remember that it rained every day. Can you imagine what this was with seven people coming in and out of the house?

I have never seen so much mud and my mother was nearly beside herself, but the result was so nice – a place to keep canned fruit and vegetables and potatoes without having them frozen. Along with the basement there was a new hot air furnace put in the house and we really felt we were living like royalty. Now my mother had a washing machine which could be used along with stationary tubs. Laundry could be hung in the basement to dry on bad days and there were no more frozen water pipes.

Gas fixtures were replaced with electric lights and what a joy to press a button and have a light. The soft gas lights in the streets were used for a while and we used to watch the young man who lit these each night. Telephone was another exciting invention. We were so overawed when we talked the first time that we stuttered and stammered. Only a few people had phones. They were a luxury then.

My earliest recollection about my life is shortly before I started school. Our residence was on Denison Avenue in Cleveland. We had a valley behind our house so there was use of the whole back yard. My mother loved flowers and we always had beautiful flower beds and a lush lawn. Also there was a cherry tree in the back yard and I remember many a good cherry pie. Linda and Leonard were younger than I, in fact quite a bit younger. When I started school, Linda was only 1 ½ years old. I went to Milford School on West 46th Street. The school is still in use. We walked to school, came home for lunch, and went back for the afternoon. No one had transportation except their two good feet and it made no difference what the weather we always walked. I remember once the wind was so strong it turned the umbrella inside out but that was no reason to stay home. Our teachers were mostly maiden ladies, even the principal was a stern woman. Her name was Miss Clara Mayer and she signed it with a grand flourish. She demanded respect and her discipline was strict. A visit to her office was not relished.

As I remember, we were taught the essentials of the day – reading, writing, spelling, geography, arithmetic, art, etc. Spelling was stressed along with good penmanship. I still recall the exercises we had to do (examples). Exercise papers and writing papers were exhibited around the room, as was art work. I always was envious of children who were artistic because my abilities were not in that area. I loved music, reading, spelling, but even math was not my specialty. The extent of physical exercise was to open the windows in the room, do a series of breathing and stretching exercises and playing in the school yard during recess time. When I was about 9-10 years old, I started to take piano lessons from my brother Robert. He was teaching music at the time and also studying with Mr. Fessler. I loved the piano and practiced daily, but Bob had time for me only about once a month or so. What I learned was by listening to him and playing for my own enjoyment. Later when I was out of college, I studied with Mr. Fessler for a short time, but by then there was a limit to my practice time and I could not continue. Music has always been an important part of my life.

The eight grades in Milford School went quickly for us. One thing I remember is the last two years I was chosen to play marching music for the whole school as they marched out of school. It was quite an honor for me.

As we were growing, my sister and I were taught the many things that are entailed in running a house. We both liked to cook, we learned so much from mother. She did things then which are considered new today. For instance, there were always bushels of fruits and vegetables to can. If we were canning peaches or pears, the peelings would be saved, cooked (there were no injurious sprays), sweetened and cooked down to syrup consistency to be used in the winter for pancakes, etc. I remember there was a bushel of fresh prunes to be canned. When my mother started to wash them she discovered that each plum in the top row had a bite out of it. Linda confessed that she had taken a taste. Needless to say, she was punished and did she have a stomach ache! Everybody helped with peeling the fruit, washing jars and of course, tasting as we went along. We always had peaches, pears, plums, applesauce, pickles, pickle relish, catsup, chili sauce, and gallons of jam and jelly. All the jams and jellies were put up in stone crocks – 1 qt., 2 qt., and even gallon size. Of course, when these things were being made, the aroma was most tantalizing, and when catsup and chili sauce were cooked, we could smell it on the way home from school. What a busy time this was, and what a hot kitchen to work in. But everything was so delicious in the winter! Besides, these fruits and vegetables, there was always 5-6 bushels of potatoes and several bushels of apples put in the storage room for winter. Sometimes close to spring the potatoes would begin to sprout and then we were put to the task of breaking off the sprouts. Also, there was a crock of sauerkraut and a big bag of onions. Our mother was so very thrifty and such a wonderful cook.

Twice a week, she would bake bread – four large loaves and two to three pans of rolls each time then on Saturday there was always kuchen, pies, cake – never one pie, but at least three. With eight people being fed three times a day, nothing lasted long. Also, every Sunday during the summer there was a gallon of homemade ice cream. I still remember the White Mountain Freezer that was used.

It had a wooden bucket and was hand churned. The boys used to take turns churning. It was really luscious with fresh country cream, eggs and fruit in season. I especially liked the fresh peach ice cream. I recently saw a White Mountain Freezer in the store for \$49.00!! Same kind we had.

As Linda and I grew older, we had to learn how to sew, knit and crochet. Our first lesson was sewing buttons on material. It is easy now, but for unaccustomed fingers, it required a bit of dexterity. Then we were given the job of sewing carpet rags. Mother would cut them to size, put them in shoe boxes, and many an afternoon we spent on the back porch sewing and balling the carpet rags. After there was a sufficient number of balls (weight) they were taken to a lady who had a loom and she wove them into rugs. We used the carpets in our kitchen, bedrooms, bath room or wherever an extra rug was needed. I used several of them after I was married. As we progressed, we were taught to crochet. I picked it up quickly, but somehow Linda never took to it. She started to make a washcloth. It was about six inches to begin with, but by the time she finished, it was about 12 inches. She never did learn to crochet or knit, but she did beautiful embroidery which I never liked to do. There was so much handwork at our house. My mother made the curtains – all hand drawn, fagotted, etc. We had exquisite doilies for tables, dressers, sideboard. When I became more proficient in crochet, she would place inserts into the scarves and then heavy filet edging which I made. She made sweaters for us and during the war made helmets by the dozen for soldiers. Her hands were never idle.

Our clothes were made by my mother as well as coats, mittens, scarves, etc. I don't know how she did all this work and she was active in P.T.A. and was always helping someone. What a fulfilling and productive life my mother and father had!

The old base burner is an important item in my memory. It was cast iron with chrome trim and isen glass inserts. It stood in our dining room and was fed hard coal to make heat. The fire would glow and send off so much warmth that it would heat the first floor of our house. Of course, the parlor was closed off in the winter to keep the rest of the house warm. We would gather round the base burner – Robert would tell stories, we would watch the glowing embers, maybe toast apples or popcorn and spend a wonderful evening. Our mother knew where we were at night – home. It was our job to polish the chrome with whitening and ammonia every week. The same was true of the kitchen stove, but that had to have black polish as well. The looked gleaming clean after being taken care of, be it did take time.

It seems my brothers were always busy. Everyone had to help with the housework, the older boys had to help take care of Linda and Leonard, and then there were always music lessons. Robert and Elmer took piano and Emil took cello. They all were very good, but Robert was the best. As I look at Liberace, I am reminded of my brother, the wavy hair, the million dollar smile and the beautiful talent. The three older boys went to Lincoln High School. It was quite a distance from home but they walked every day. They had problems as do most boys, but were graduated after four years.

Robert went on to Reserve and eventually was enrolled as a medical student. Elmer did not go to college, but enlisted in the Navy during the First World War in the Naval Officers' training. He finished at the top of his class in mathematics and had hated it in high school. Emil went to Reserve Dental School and became a very fine dentist.

At the time, I was ready for high school, West Technical High was being built and my parents decided that was the place for we three younger ones so that we would get the advantage of having cooking, sewing, etc. It was quite a transition from Milford School to West Tech which was the largest in the city with an enrollment of 2500 students. It was three miles from home but we walked it every day unless the weather was so terrible that we couldn't. Then we were allowed to ride the street car (cost 5 cents). This meant 15 cents one way and that was a lot of money in a week. We carried our lunches, so there was no lunch money needed.