

Mary Ehlert (Hoeving) (1902-1989)

Submitted by Vera Wodzinski "Memories My Mother Shared with Me"



Mary (Hoeving) Ehlert, my mother, the third eldest of a family of eleven, 2 sisters and 8 brothers, born to Joseph and Mary Hoeving, on June 13, 1902. In Collegeville, Minnesota, U.S.A. It was during a chaotic, busy time. Her parents were in the midst of gathering their possessions to be taken with them in their adventurous move to the unknown, North West Territories to make their new home. (Now Saskatchewan, Canada)

In April of 1903, her Dad, after boarding box cars with possessions: horses, cows, chickens, pigs, a walking plough, seeder, mower, grindstone, and some furniture and enough lumber to build a house, rode along with their belongings in the caboose of the train. With his brother, Barney's help they moved their belongings to the homestead land, about 20 miles northeast of Weyburn. The rush for homesteads being in full swing at this time. Weyburn was booming and had grown from a hamlet to a town of 500 people. The following months, Mary's mother arrived by train, with Mary (my mother) a babe in arms, along with two young boys, John (5) and Mathew (3) her Dad was there to meet them. It was pouring rain; the streets were muddy, with only a few wooden sidewalks. Her Dad took the family to the Hotel for the night. The next morning they all set out for the homestead. It must have been an anxious time for Mary's mother, as she was holding Mary in her arms, driving along over the green prairie, though sloughs with firm bottoms, the country seemingly looked to be half water, with not a tree in sight. Barney had a one-roomed shack on his homestead but that was six miles away, a good distance in those times, so a tent was set up for the summer.

Summer was a busy time. Barney helped her dad break 30 acres of sod, with a walking plough, seed, make hay and build a sod barn for the stock. They had to build a house before winter set in. Mary describes the house in detail: It was a small house 12x20 made from the lumber they had brought. It had one window and a door to the east, the inside was lined with paper and they piled sod around the perimeter for the warmth. There was no chimney, only stove pipes and a small cook stove that was used for cooking and heating. She said that her Mother often said that first winter was very severe with heavy snowfall and coal was scarce. It was that winter around Christmas time that her sister, Helen was born during a blinding blizzard.

In 1908 Wheaton School was built and Mary at six years of age started school. With a syrup pail in hand, containing her lunch consisting of syrup sandwiches and an apple, she walked three and one half miles across the prairie, with her two older brothers John and Mathew. She remembered being so tired when she got there, that she would often fall asleep at her desk. The children spoke different dialects of Swedish, Norwegian, German and English. Her teacher was Mr. Jones, who lived in a tent by the school in the summer and in the cloak room in the winter. Mary didn't know what grade she attended in school, as she wasn't able to attend school regularly. Being a girl, and the third oldest in the family, she was expected to babysit the younger siblings while her parents went about their work. One incident she

couldn't forget was when her younger brother Joe, shot a hole in the flour sack with the shot gun and she got the spanking from her Dad. In 1915 at the age of 13, she was sent with her sister Helen to the convent at Forget, to learn their "Catechism" and to receive their first Holy Communion and Confirmation. It was important to learn their Faith.

Mary saw Talmage her home town grow and decline, as she lived there as a little girl until she retired at the age of 65. In 1910 when plans were made for the railroad to be built, a triangular strip of land was bought from Mr. Tallmudge and surveyed into lots. The first building to go up was the General Store, with a Post Office, Restaurant, followed by a Blacksmith shop. A Hotel was necessary for the train crew workers, it was equipped with a Barber Shop and Pool room, and then came an Implement Shop, Town Hall, a Station for the train service. First one Lumber Yard, then another both doing a booming business. A Land office was set up for selling land and town lots. The United Church was built in 1915. The country school of Leader was moved into town and became known as Talmage School. Eventually two grain elevators and a railroad track to Weyburn providing daily mail and passenger service. Talmage was booming and became the center for social activities, annual Sports Days and many other interests. Mary wondered how a town once so active and full of activity could be so quiet and desolate now.

There were now eleven children at home, eight of which were born in the extended homestead house. Mary now fifteen years of age, decided to go out on her own to work. For two summers she worked for Mr. & Mrs. Porter, who spent their winters south, in the summer they lived on the farm near McTaggart which was his headquarters to manage his numerous farms. Mrs. Porter was alone much of the time with her infant, Jim. Besides caring for Jim and helping with household duties Mary was expected to get the cow from the pasture and milk her. Mary didn't mind the work, Mrs. Porter was good to her and taught her many things. She remembered receiving \$200.00 for two summers, which was a good amount at that time. With some of the money she bought a cabinet gramophone with records for the family to enjoy at home, also a little Brownie camera, taking many pictures which we have all been grateful for.

It was during the fall of 1918, while she was working for Wards, who also boarded the teacher of Snyder School, she and the teacher were invited for supper to the neighbor's one Sunday afternoon. It was there that she first met Tony. After harvest she began work at Stavely's, who lived in a large house on Second Street in Weyburn. (Which still stands today.) There was always a lot of work to do, however she had Sundays and Wednesday afternoons off. It was one of those Wednesdays that she met Tony up town, and he asked her to the show that night at the Hi-Art Theatre. He continued to keep in touch, often picking her up on her free time to spend time with his extended families. She enjoyed those visits and they made her feel so welcome. "Mary was a popular name at that time. Besides Tony's sister Mary two of his brothers were married to "Mary's". They would distinguish each by "Gus's Mary", "John's Mary", "Henry's Mary" and called her "Tony's Mary." Tony and Mary made plans to be married on March 4, 1924. It was a warm spring day. However the road was frozen over, so Mathew, Mary's bother took a team of horses and broke the trail. They were married at St. Vincent de Paul Church Weyburn, with Mary's sister, Helen as her bridesmaid, and her brother Al, Tony's best man. After a stop at the photographers, they had breakfast at the Commercial Café. The reception was at

Henry and Mary's farm at Talmage. Mary's sister Helen made the Wedding cake and a dinner was served for a small gathering. Tony and Mary spent the night there, then took the train from Talmage to Weyburn the next day, picked up Tony's team of horses and started off for their new home 15 miles south of Weyburn.



Tony had made arrangements to look after the cows, chickens, pigs and horses for a share, and machinery was supplied to farm. He had been batching there for a short time, so the house was furnished with a table and 4 chairs, a cook stove, two beds and a dresser. There was a panty with shelves containing dishes and adequate cooking utensils. There were two good sized rooms down stairs, a rather comfortable home. Mrs. Jensen, a close neighbor loaned them a heater, which made their home comfortable and warm in the winter. Mary planted a garden that spring and Tony traded his car for a Model T Coupe. They boarded

the teacher, who taught at Riverview school close by. Vera was born on Valentine's Day, on Sunday February 14, 1926. Mary had now become a "Mother."

Late in the fall of 1926, they decided to rent a section of land 6 miles S.E. of Talmage. The house hadn't been lived in for several years and was in need of repairs. That winter they only heated one room and found it very cold. There was no well water for the stock, water had to be hauled a mile from home over the winter. In the fall they boarded the teacher, who taught at Auburndale School. Jean was born November 30, 1927. The crops were fairly good for the first few years. Mary raised turkeys and one year treated herself to a dining room suite for \$149.00 from Eaton's. During the harvest Mary would put on a pair of Tony's overalls and help him with the stooking. Groceries were mostly bought from McRae's store in Talmage. She made butter and printed it in pounds to sell. This pretty well covered the grocery bill. Beginning, what they called "The Dirty Thirties" Tony and Mary as well as many other farmers faced many hardships. In 1931 a drought and a series of dust storms ruined the crops. Ditches along the road sides were filled with dirt blown from the fields. It was impossible to keep the dust out of the house; the air was heavy with it. Mary kept wet rags on the window sills, to settle the dust. Lamps were lit during the day, as the sun was completely obscured. Russian thistles were blowing and piled against the fences. Not a grain elevator was open that year. The municipalities began to furnish relief for feed, seed and fuel. The drought continued, so complete relief with groceries in the form of cheese, apples, fish, clothing, blankets and fuel was supplied.

1937 broke all records, severe drought, army worms and grasshoppers, resulted in crop failures. There were no crops to harvest and no hay for the cattle and horses. They decided to move the stock to Manitoba and spend the winter there. Here they

found neighbors very generous and helpful, supplying them with an abundance of vegetables from their gardens. When they returned home in the spring, they found the school had been closed, for the lack of students, so the girls completed their grades in the Boarding school in Forget.

In the fall of 1938 they rented a section of land a mile east of Talmage, with a school for the girls to attend. There was also a well with plenty of water. Times became better as the years passed. Tony was able to purchase modern machinery, making work easier for both. Mary would help during busy times by milking cows and doing chores. She had an excellent spot south of the house for a garden, which she enjoyed working in. They owned a Model A Ford car which took them to Weyburn for groceries and church on Sundays. After the girls finished grade 10, they left home to further their education.

In 1948 Tony and Mary bought a house and moved into Weyburn. Both girls were now married and on their own. During Christmas, Birthdays and special occasions both families would gather at their house, which pleased her. These were memorable years for Mary. There was always a baby to be "Cuddled" and she would look forward to their visits.

In March of 1974, Tony and Mary celebrated their 50 years of marriage. A special evening was planned and Mary looked radiant; she said she felt like a young teenager in her long gown. They continued to enjoy 7 more years together, until Tony passed away January 18th 1981. Mary continued to live in her own home for several years, until she acquired that dreaded disease of "Confusion," and required special care. Mary passed away on November 7th of 1989. I regret not being able to give her the care she needed in her last years, but so grateful to have spent some quality time with her after Tony passed away, sharing memories when her mind was so alert. Mary, my Mother, as I remember her stood 5'2" tall, pleasingly plump, with a twinkle in her blue eyes. I saw her hair turn from brunette to an attractive grey, always neatly kept. Her dresses fit just right because she sewed them to fit herself. She walked with a quick step, was agile and had a spontaneous reflex action. In an emergency she knew instantly what to do, and could do it without hesitation. Being talented with her hands, she could sew, loved to crotchet many things, make hand stitched; patch work quilts and many woolen afghans for everyone. In the kitchen, she made the best homemade bread ever, and her apple pies were second to none. Being an all-around good cook, with a tight budget, she preserved hundreds of jars of fruit, vegetables, chicken, pickles, relishes, jams and jellies. Nothing went to waste. She was handy with all household jobs: cleaning, papering walls, painting and varnishing. She was fussy about her laundry. It had to be sorted and the whites had to be "White." Everything was ironed even the tea towels and pillow cases. Outside she would work side by side with Tony, milking cows, doing chores and also helping him stook many fields of grain and was always ready to lend a helping hand, when ever needed. Mary loved to work in the garden and no one could pick beans or shell peas like her. If anyone was sick or ailing, she knew just what to do. Seldom was she sick herself, and had no arthritic pain. She was a good caregiver, but no pampering once you were feeling better. Mom took the time to teach us our prayers and arranged for our "Catechism" instructions every summer. She strived for us to get our education and maintained "that was something we would always have, and no one could take away." She taught us the "Right and the Wrong." Mary enjoyed every one of her

grandchildren. As babies she loved to hold and cuddle them I admired the way she could nurture and comfort them when they were fussy. How she did love to encourage them when they were about to take their first steps. As they grew older she would teach them nursery rhymes, tell them stories, get down on the floor and play with them, funny noises, -anything to make them laugh and be-happy. She was proud of them when they graduated. She was able to attend some of their weddings, sharing their happiness. They called her "Granny" and they all loved her.