

Through My Grandmother's Eyes

by Peggy Erhart

A sample of the opening pages

PREFACE

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by Peggy Erhart

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NOVEMBER 9, 1947

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PREFACE

PREFACE

When I was growing up, my family lived with my grandmother, my father's mother, Mary Erhart, or maybe she lived with us. I confess I have never known.

She was such a wonderful influence in my life. To this day, I recall sitting on my grandma's knee while she read "bookies" to me. She would let me pick out what story I wanted to hear - I knew them all by heart - and she would purposefully make a mistake just so I could correct her. She then pretended that she hadn't known and would take my correction. Such was her special love.

But what I remember most about Grandma Erhart was her devotion to the Catholic religion.

I remember tapping on her door, and when she called for me to come in, seeing her sitting in her rocking chair by the window with a rosary in her hands or else find her reading from her prayer book. She attended Mass every single day. Even when she was in her 80s, and couldn't get

around without the assistance of her walker, she would still attend employing the use of her walker to get to church. When she grew too frail that even the assistance of the walker was insufficient, the priest would come to the house to give her the Blessed Sacrament. She had a communion kit which was kept in a polished maple box. The kit contained a silver crucifix, snowy white napkins and a chalice to hold the host. She would be set it up and then await the priest's arrival. While she was waiting, she rearranged and straightened the box's contents nervously, she was so excited. I have been in many churches in my lifetime but there has never been one to compare with the sacred atmosphere that was as real and enveloping as that of my grandma's room.

Although she died years ago, just prior to my 17th birthday, I devote this book to her and her sweet memory and love. In it, I do my best to go back in time to when she began her married life with my grandfather, William, who I never met as he died before I was born. Though most of the book is imagined there are real dollops of family history interjected throughout its pages. I leave it to you, dear reader, to pick them out.

Thank you for reading and it is my hope that you have someone in your life who had the love and caring as my Grandma Erhart had for me; for if you do, you are a lucky soul indeed.

PREFACE

WEDDING DAY

Mary tried to resist the urge to scratch her arm. But the muslin sleeve of her brand new blouse was so itchy. The blouse had large puffs of white fabric on her upper arms narrowing at the elbow and hugging her forearms and her wrists. White gloves were on her hands. She also wore a new hat that sat exactly on top of her head. She had parted her dark hair simply, down the middle, and pulled it back at the nape of her neck so the hat could stay put. But just to be sure, she secured it with a hat pin. The hat had a profusion of satin yellow and pink flowers attached to it although her wedding today was in November. Feathers or ribbons might have been more seasonal but she and her mother had been unable to resist the pretty hat. A brown ribbon of the same hue as her skirt was in a bow around the stiff collar at her throat. Mary had never felt more fashionable. But it was her wedding day after all and she was young and feminine and enjoyed feeling pretty. Although her arm was itching madly, Mary did not want to scratch because it might take away from the solemn ceremony as she and William knelt before Father Mueller at St. Joseph Catholic Church.

Mary was 19 and William was 21 today, the day of their nuptials on 11/8/1896. Mary and William had noticed each other at this self same church. Young people in the parish delighted in taking the opportunity of Sunday services to look for prospective companions. Although William lived closer to Delphos, it was sometimes more comfortable to go to Mass in Ft.

Jennings because he would get soggy trouser cuffs as he had to cross over the Auglaize River to get to Delphos for Mass. Mary had appealed to him and William had worked up the courage to speak to Mary's parents. He introduced himself to them and after several weeks of cordiality towards Mary's parents and having received her parents' favorable opinion, the young William and Mary had begun courting. During the ensuing year, William would wait for Mary after church, and would take her for a buggy ride.

William had proposed on an April Sunday. Mary hadn't seen William at church but he was waiting for her in the buggy when she emerged from Mass. She smiled brightly to see him and he jumped down and handed her up onto the seat. She called to her mother saying William would take her home. It was warm and mild and there was a light breeze. Mary lifted her face to catch the breeze and to inhale the smell of the warming earth. She prattled on a bit to William as he clucked to his horse and the buggy jerked forward.

"Where were you sitting in church today? I didn't see you. Did you go earlier?"

William's mouth pursed. "I had chores to do this morning."

"But William, not attending church on Sunday is a mortal sin!"

William grunted. "Oh Mary, don't you think that God has more to do than to look down to see if I'm occupying a seat in the church pew? I think that God is more concerned about how I live my life than if I sit on a bench in the church, don't you? "

"But William!" Mary blurted.

"So I'll confess it then! I'll get a couple of prayers as penance and then it's all over and done. Doesn't seem to have much of a point to me though."

Mary fell silent and looked down in her lap and they continued the ride for a time with tension running between them. Finally, William pulled up on the reins to stop the buggy. He turned to Mary.

"Mary..." She turned her face and the soft April breeze caught a tendril of hair and it caressed her cheek. He lifted his hand and gently pushed it back by her ear. "I love you."

"I know. I love you too."

"Will you marry me?" he asked as he looked tenderly into her eyes.

Mary's blue eyes opened wide and her mouth parted with surprise and she wrapped her arms around him and said "Yes, oh yes I'll marry you!"

They embraced and kissed for a while.

"Please let's go. I want to tell my family." Mary sighed.

The young couple received the full support of their families and preparation began for the young couple to take over William's parents' farm because William's parents wanted to retire to town.

The time sped by in a happy blur for there was much to do to get ready for the wedding and for their new life together.

The wedding service was attended by family and friends of William's and Mary's families in the small village. This amounted to around 30 hardy souls who braved the cold and traveled the distance to church. Most of the families had emigrated from northern Germany and spoke low German even though they had made their lives in Ohio where English was the home tongue. The older parishioners had learned a smattering of English but the young folks were bilingual, speaking both English and the low German dialect fluently. The Mass, of course, was in Latin but the message given by the priest was in low German so everyone could understand.

As the service reached its ending, Mary felt as if she was in a gauzy dream as she and William turned toward each other to complete the vows. Mary could vaguely hear her mother sniffing in the background but her attention was completely focused on William. His face was bathed with bright blue, green and red light that was colored and streamed over him from the stained glass window behind her. As he placed the shining gold band on her hand, Mary could see the Bible scene depicted in the window reflected in the glass lenses of William's round silver rimmed spectacles. His wavy black hair was combed back over his high forehead. He had high cheekbones and his face then narrowed toward a determined and firm mouth and Mary thought he was very handsome.

After the priest pronounced them husband and wife, William and Mary turned to the congregation and, with wide smiles, descended the few steps from the altar. Strains of music from the organ which rested in the choir loft filled the church and accompanied the young couple's exit.

William and Mary preceded the gaggle of wedding guests and after slipping on their coats, they quickly stepped onto the wide walkway in front of the rosary cathedral. Then, accompanied by their friends and families, they made their way to the large home of Josephine and Charles Kramer who had graciously offered its use to the young couple and their fellow parishioners to hold a small wedding reception. Since it was such a short distance, all but the frailest crisply walked to the Kramer home, all the while chattering and laughing. It was the kind of November day that Ohioans treasure. The sky was bright blue, and the cold air was bracing and felt sharp as one inhaled it into one's lungs. So often, Ohio skies in November were overcast and gray and made the countryside appear drab and dreary.

Josephine opened the door wide and with a joyful smile, admitted Mary and William and the guests into her home. Mary clapped her hands over her mouth with delight when she entered the front room and saw the friends' cake sitting on the table in the center of the room. Josephine, a friend of Mary's mother, had organized the baking of the cake. She had enlisted some of Mary's

friends to each bake a one layer vanilla cake and then cover it with a coating of apple butter or apple sauce that had been canned the previous summer. The cake layers were then placed one atop the other to make a multi-layer delicious wedding gift for the young couple to share with their friends and families. Beneath the table, gifts from their family and friends were gaily tossed into a pile. The coats were then removed and collected, the wedding cake was cut and served with coffee or tea, and the gifts were opened and exclaimed over.

"Let's have some music then!" shouted Charles. And with that, he strode over to the piano bench, lifted the seat and removed a piano roll. He then placed the musical roll onto the spindle in the instrument, sat on the bench and began pumping the foot pedals. The music began with a lively rendition of Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight followed by And the Band Played On. That tune was a favorite of Mary's and she found herself silently singing "I married the girl with a strawberry curl and the band played on." Some of the wedding guests gathered around the piano and as the keys on the piano depressed and the popular songs rang out, the guests picked up the tune and sang along. William took Mary's hand and drew her over to the gathering where they too picked up the chorus. Mary caught a glimpse of her new ring and she then looked up at William, looked back at her ring, then back at William. They shared a loving look and Mary mused "Maybe one day husbands will wear a ring just like a wife."

PREFACE

AFTER THE WEDDING

After the wedding, Mary had hoped that she would get a respite, at least for a while, from the never ending work of a farm wife. Such was not to be the case. From the beginning, Mary found herself overwhelmed with work. Before, she had worked alongside her mother and her sister, Agnes, in getting the chores done. But now, it was all on her shoulders.

From morning to night she was busy. There was bread to be baked, eggs to be gathered, cleaning to be done, not to mention that she found herself having to do a great deal of cooking. She even had to cook potatoes to feed the pigs! Baking the bread took so much time. The ingredients had to be mixed, then kneaded, then placed in the sun to rise. This process was repeated again and yet again before the bread could be placed in the oven.

After William did the milking, the heavy buckets had to be carried to the milk house for cooling. When the cream separated from the milk and rose to the top, Mary would churn butter. When spring came, the sheep were sheared and Mary would wash the oily wool, then brush and spin it to make yarn. All this was in addition to keeping up with the everyday work. She also knew she would have to pitch in when harvest time came around.

Sometimes, after William had left to work, Mary would break into tears. She was so exhausted and overwhelmed and lonely. There was so much to do and never seemed to be enough time of

accomplish all of it. There was no one to talk to or pitch in and lend a hand to get the work done. It all fell on her shoulders and she missed her mother and sister. It had always been so companionable to be together and share the work and the time would pass quickly.

Mary looked forward to Sundays when she and William would get in the buggy to go to church. When they went to church, Mary had the chance to see her beloved family. She also could catch up with some of her school chums. Some of them were married and they talked about what was happening in their lives and on their farms. And, of course, they talked about their husbands.

One Sunday morning after Mass, Mary and William were dawdling with some friends, Greta and John and Alfred and Clara. Greta and Mary were lamenting about how busy they were and that there never seemed time to socialize with friends.

"Well, let's change that right now! I'm inviting all of you to our house next Saturday night." Clara piped up.

"Why yes! What a good idea." agreed her husband.

"Are you sure? Wouldn't it be hard to get ready for entertaining with all your other work?" wondered a surprised though delighted Greta.

"Not if you bring something along with you." Clara responded.

The young couples then agreed to this spur of the moment plan, excited by the idea of spending an evening with good friends.

All through the week, Mary anticipated the get together even though she had begun feeling not exactly unwell, but just not herself. She spent time thinking about what she would bring. Clara would be providing sausage and sauerkraut and Alfred would provide beer. Her spirits lifted thinking about the chance to see Clara and Alfred and enjoy their hospitality.

When Saturday finally came around, Mary and William got into the buggy, Mary carrying a bowl of potato filled dumplings. She would ask that the dish could be reheated once they arrived at Clara and Alfred's home. Mary and William chatted companionably along the route. Mary slipped her hand around William's arm and leaned close to him as he handled the buggy reins. It was so nice to be out with William once again and not have to even think about what chore needed to be attended to next. It was a warm September evening and she sat enjoying the delightful ride. Mary listened to the horse clopping along as she gazed at the maple leaves that were just beginning to turn gold and red. Mary's eyes drank in the beautiful natural panorama being displayed all around her.

Mary and William arrived after Greta and John. After seeing to his horse, William joined Mary and their friends. Clara took them on a tour of their home, including the guest quarters attached to the home. It was usual for family or friends who traveled to visit to spend several days or a week. The sitting room and bedroom were ideal to let visitors have their own place to stay so as not to disrupt the family's everyday sleeping arrangements. In the front room of the home, Clara

had stenciled some leaves on the white walls just beneath the ceiling.

End of sample

Read the rest - the complete eBook is available at bibliobookstore.com