

My Story

Karen F. Sizemore

My story starts in the small town of Greenbelt, Maryland just outside of Washington, DC. My parents met through friends, married, lived and raised a family there for over twenty-five years before moving to Tennessee.

But this story is not about my parents or family but about me and my relationship with my American born 'Norwegian' grandparents, Ralph and Beret Neumann. They too lived in Greenbelt, just down the hill from where we lived, so I could walk to their home and visit with them just about any time. I loved my grandparents and I would walk over to their home on many a Friday to eat dinner with them. I can't ever remember not going on Friday's until I got much older and was in high school.

We would spend hours talking about family or their childhood. That is also the time I learned about a "Norwegian Costume" my grandmother's mother's brother had made. But as a small child I didn't pay much attention to the "Norwegian Costume." We would spend many Fridays looking at pictures, and my grandfather showed me a ship-in-a-bottle that his dad had made when he was a sailor. This "ship-in-a-bottle" fascinated me so much when I was a child and when I had children of my own my grandmother gave me the special 'ship-in-a-bottle.'

I remember going on a trip to Wisconsin with my grandparents to see my great-grandmother, great aunts and uncles and cousins. This was when I saw for the first time the "Norwegian Costume" from Norway. We stayed on the farm where my grandmother's sister lived and they had pigs. I never had seen a pig up close and they were big. I would sneak out the back door and feed the pigs apples or I would go into a walk-in freezer and sneak ice cream and I would crawl with my new found cousin into the garden and sneak and eat a watermelon. Of course my grandmother knew all the time what I was doing and never said a word. For me it was great fun and she let me think I was getting away with it.



Me, Great-grandma Bret Hanson and Grandma Beret Neumann

My great aunt and grandmother would start cooking in the kitchen and before you knew it they would start talking gibberish "Norwegian." Of course, I had no idea what they were saying. My grandmother was a wonderful cook and showed me how to make and cook many things. But best of all was how to make krumkaga. Every year, I would go over to her house and with her help make some for school parties or gifts. I also wrote a paper on making krumkaga! We would all go over to their house for Christmas Eve dinner and have krumkaga, rice pudding and other goodies and, of course, it wasn't Christmas without krumkaga. I now at Christmas make krumkaga for all my family and grandchildren. My grandmother also taught me to sew and how to make different crafts. She could do anything. "I am who I am" because of her, I love cooking, sewing and crafts.

My grandparents had what they called a 'little house' down on the Potomac River. They would take me with them down to the 'little house' at least once a month and I would watch the big ships go down the river and I would play for hours riding on my "sawhorse" horse which had a blanket for a saddle. I would pick up pawpaws and we would make pawpaw jelly. This is where I learned about nature and country living (no indoor toilet). My grandfather also taught me how to make things, how to use tools and how to cut grass. On the trips to the 'little house' we would stop at a bakery for cup cakes and my Grandmother would get four, one for each of us and one extra for me for after I took my nap.



At the "little house"

I now realize how special my Grandparents were and how special it was for them to live so close to us and me being able to spend my childhood with them.