TO THE BEST OF MY MEMORY

Stories from the Life of
Velva Magdalena Diede Walden

AN ORAL HISTORY
TOLD TO AND EDITED BY
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High School Graduation, 1935
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North Dakota Years

Antelope, N. D., My Birth and Birth Customs

I was born February 24, 1915, in my home at a location near Antelope, North Dakota, a village that no longer exists. Antelope was a store and two grain elevators; the post office was in the store. After the post office was closed, thirty years ago or so, they closed down the elevators, too. But it was right on the railroad track, on the Northern Pacific Railroad. The only reason people went to Antelope basically was to get the mail (after some years we had a rural mail carrier) and to take the grain to the elevator and the cream to the station platform. We would take our cream cans and put them on the platform, and then when the train came through they would be picked up. We had lots of heavy cream. So often now when I'll pick up something heavy somebody will come up and say, “Oh, that’s too heavy for you.” I tell them, “I was raised on eight and ten gallon cream cans!”

When I was born there was a midwife and her name was Mrs. Eisenbry. She was the midwife for the entire area. She lived about fifteen miles south of where we lived. I knew her well as the years went on, because we went to the same church. She attended all births during that whole period of time. In fact, my mother was attended by this same midwife for all my four brothers, except Lloyd. When Lloyd was born, the doctor came to our home. I don’t know why.

There was a doctor in Hebron, Dr. Sam Schierbaum, who was there for many years. When I was born, my father’s cousin, Emma Staiger, came and took care of my mother and me. She was a foster sister to my father, so she was “Aunt Emma” to us. Her older sister had a daughter named Velva, and I understand that the reason I was named Velva was because Aunt Emma wanted me to have that name.

There was an interesting custom when babies were born. I never remember taking a baby gift for a newborn, but being farmers we always killed and cleaned a hen. A batch of egg noodles was made (with egg yolks only because that made them so nice and yellow). A cake was baked. Sometimes it was an angel food because we had egg whites left over to use. Sometimes the cake was a two layer cake with jelly filling between the layers. These three items — hen, noodles and cake — were taken when you visited a new mother. The hen and noodles were to be used to make chicken noodle soup for the nursing mother.

I was the first child to survive infancy. My mother gave birth to two other daughters. My parents were married in 1910, and I was not born until 1915. There were two other births before I was born: Rachel Diana, who lived three weeks, and Maria, who was stillborn. After me came Oscar, Herman, Ishmael and Lloyd.
Figure 3: Velva’s parents, Maria Reich and Christian Diede, Jr., on their wedding Day, November 1, 1910.

Figure 4: Velva’s father driving six horses on the drill, seeding wheat, around 1920.