

Stories about Grandma Agnes

My favorite stories about Grandma Agnes are those she told about herself to Kort and me when we were little. Usually she told them right before bedtime when we always were read to or maybe during the occasional pause that happens right before dinner is ready.

She lived in the real west of Colorado and Durango when she was growing up. I was fascinated with Roy Rogers and the San Fernando Valley west so she would tell us stories about what she remembered the west was *really* like.

Apparently, Agnes' mother, Johanna, was not too impressed when she and her husband and the older children who had been born in Denmark first arrived in Colorado. They had been persuaded to leave Europe and move to the new land of opportunity and riches by his brother. One of the items that had made an impression in the letters traveling across the Atlantic was a sewing machine that her sister-in-law described. It was a **real** sewing machine unlike those found in Denmark. When the family arrived in Durango great-grandma found the real sewing machine to be only a hand-cranked table model just like the one she had left behind.

Agnes told stories mostly on herself. She thought Inez was a prettier version of Agnes though she pronounced it eye-nez and not eee-nez. She wanted to change her name but her mother was not persuaded.

Agnes/Inez loved the smell of vanilla. She was sure that anything that smelled so good must taste wonderful. One day when her mother was busy elsewhere, Agnes slipped into the pantry and took a big swig out of the bottle. The stuff tasted bitter and awful and she had to go spit it out. She was sure her mother knew, but nothing was ever said. Nothing needed to be said.

Her real west contained real Indians who lived on a reservation nearby headed by a chief called Charlie. He was important enough to go to Washington to meet with the President. I think Agnes said McKinley but my memory may tell me McKinley because he was a great favorite of my mother's family of great aunts and uncles.

Charlie came to dinner at the Isacksen's one day with one of his wives perhaps to celebrate his tour of Washington DC. Grandma remembered the wife as a little tiny woman. Both of

the guests were dressed like everyone else; to Agnes' disappointment, no feathers, no beads. She said that she and Lillie were shocked when the wife picked up apple pie and tried to eat it with her fingers. Her more sophisticated husband tried to show her how to use a fork but to no purpose. Great grandma shushed the two little girls and told them it was impolite to comment on the manners of others. Agnes mentioned that when she got older she realized the poor woman probably had not left the reservation many times and had really handled the whole situation very well.

Charlie later warned the Isacksen's and other settlers in the area to leave their homes and hide for awhile. The younger men in the tribe had gotten hold of some whiskey and had decided to go on the warpath. Charlie and the older men could not talk them out of it. The warpath seemed to consist of burning a couple of barns before the Indians went back to the reservation. Agnes never saw any war-painted Indian but did spend a couple of nights camping in the woods, which she liked.

Agnes and her brothers and sisters used to play by the irrigation ditch. The two boys had thrown themselves in and taught themselves to swim. The girls only dangled their feet. She said later how silly she was not to have learned to swim but she hadn't.

When she mentioned riding out horseback to collect the cows, I asked her if she had a fancy split skirt like Dale Evans. She looked vaguely displeased and said no. She had worn jeans, the only thing to wear on horseback, and she didn't ride sidesaddle either, which was plain silly.

Thor (or was it Oscar) rescued her from a mean cow with a broken (or was it curly) horn and had been scraped in the process. She was crossing the corral as a short cut which she had been forbidden to do because of the angry cow. She thought it was tied up, but it hadn't been, and the older boy scooped her up and set her on the fence just in time. She still felt bad that he had gotten hurt. I forgot to ask her, who got to milk the beast, anyway?

She was a fun grandmother to have. She was a quiet person with a good sense of humor, curious about things and a little adventurous. I remember her discussing a pair of shoes she had gotten with my mother around 1950. Were they too young looking? They were solid heeled black suede with a cutout toe à la Eleanor Roosevelt and they sure looked like Grandma shoes to me. Momma told her, if you like them,

wear them. When the recent shoe exhibit appeared at the DeYoung Museum there was a blurb that mentioned that toeless shoes on older women was considered immodest as late as the mid-1950's. Tsk, Grandma!

One favorite memory was an evening she got Kort and me out of bed and told us to stand next to the front door. "Don't open it until all the lights are out!" The three of us stood on the front porch on Magee Avenue and watched the stars falling. It was absolutely gorgeous and I have never seen anything like it since. It had to be during the war as the streetlights were not on and because of her concern that the house lights be turned off.

(My other memory of the war was feeling sorry for my dad because the draft board never wanted him because of his blind eye. He was very startled when I told him how sorry I was. I guess I thought it was some sort of popularity contest.)

Submitted by Louise Nygard Randolph, June 1, 1997