

**My Childhood
in the
Coal Mining Town
of
Cedar Grove, PA**

by
Geraldine Donovall Revay

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I was born in a two-family house along the Main Road, two houses away from the "Company Store" (now Wanda's Tavern) on November 5, 1932, the fifth child of Joseph and Zoe Delahaut Donovan. My father was a coal miner in the Cedar Grove Mine and I remember him coming home from work very grimy from the coal dust, carrying his metal lunch pail that had two sections, the lower one for water and the top one for food. I know that times were hard during the strike and were not much better even when he worked since wages were very low at that time. The coal company gave us "script" to use as money at the company store. My Mother always worked hard to keep us fed and clothed; we raised a garden and canned what we could, we went berry picking and made jelly, and every Fall after the first big frost, we would gather black walnuts, hickory nuts, and butternuts.

For several years our family delivered the newspapers, the Washington Observer and the Pittsburgh Post Gazette in the morning, the Sun Telegraph and the Pittsburgh Press in the evening, and the Sun Tele and the Press on Sunday Morning. I delivered papers until I was a Senior in High School.

We did not own a car or a telephone until I was out of High School. Mom cooked on a coal stove, the house was heated with a coal furnace, and the Economy Store in Avella would deliver our groceries three times a week, write out our next order to be brought the next delivery day. I vaguely remember an ice box, but mostly we kept our meat on the back porch in the winter. Jello was a winter treat because we could set the pan out in the snow to gel.

I can remember one night there was a large group of people outside laughing and walking past our house. When we went to investigate, it turned out to be an old-fashioned "chivaree"- in honor of a newly married couple.

We always looked forward to Halloween, since we did not get much candy at home. We never missed going to Mrs. Clark's home because she always gave us a small brown paper bag with several items inside. In

those days, some people gave us "Nickel Bars" of candy and we couldn't wait to get home to see what loot we had accumulated.

We walked to school in Cedar Grove until I was in the Fourth Grade, then we were bussed to Patterson Mills until we finished Eighth Grade, then we attended the old High School on Avella Heights.

When I was about six or seven years old, the company houses were being sold for \$600 for a sixteen room, four family house. My family bought one and lived in one section, and rented out some of the other four room sections for \$6.00 a month. We used the rent money to make our \$10.00 a month house payment. We were able to have a larger garden here and we also raised chickens and sold eggs and occasionally a chicken. I believe we had a refrigerator by now, but we still had a coal furnace, and we carried all our water from a nearby spring or from a hydrant. We also caught rainwater to use for washing clothes and for shampooing our hair since it made our hair very soft and shiny. Water was heated in a teakettle or in a copper boiler when larger quantities were needed.

I don't think I was bored as a child even though we did not have Television. We listened to the radio, played jacks, marbles, checkers, dominoes, and Mumblety Peg; made home made fudge with black walnuts, made "pulling taffy", and went to bed early. During warm weather, we played with neighborhood children games such as "Go, Sheepy, Go," "Andy, Andy, Over", "Caddy", Hopscotch, we rolled hoops and we jumped rope. In the winter, we would go sled-riding and some children had "Yankee Clippers" made by their fathers. We would build a fire and sometimes baked potatoes in the hot coals. In the summer, we swam in a swimming hole in the creek.

The night the coal tipple burned (October 18, 1939), my mother awakened all of us to watch it burn. Mrs. Cook, who rented from John Adams, was afraid her home would burn also, so she picked up two large ceramic dogs which she had brought from her native England, and she came up to our house to watch the fire. Luckily no homes burned that night.

We would walk three miles to Avella to attend an occasional movie at Brozier's Theater, get an ice cream cone at Scouvar's and walk the three miles back home, about an hour's walk. Sometimes if we were lucky, someone we knew would be driving our way and give us a ride.

We also walked to Avella to visit Dr. Hoop, our dentist, mostly to get a tooth pulled. He would charge me a dollar for an extraction, then give me back a nickel to buy an ice cream cone "since I was such a brave girl".

When I was very young, we got our mail by walking to the house where Don and Helen Daudet now live, and Bessie Pollack was our Postmistress. Next we were put on the RD # 1, Rea, mail route, then on the RD # 2, Avella, route. All the mail boxes were on the main road at that time, and going for the mail became a social event where we heard all the latest news. We could also walk to George Pollack's Butcher Shop (now torn down) located across the road from the Alex Paris home.

Once we had a huge cloudburst and the bridge we used to cross over to get into "camp" was washed away. Car owners had to park them over on the main road and groceries, etc., had to be carried from there. A few cars were trapped in camp, but their owners were able to get them out by driving through Mr. Roy Bean's fields (old Drake Farm) and on to Bethel Church road.

The Community Hall was the social center of the town where weddings and dances were held and is now the site of the Woolen Mill. Women did hand sewing in the evenings, making patchwork quilts and crocheting. Men did woodworking projects and played soccer and baseball and softball, and also played Bocce Ball and Morra.

My brothers and my father would usually get their hair cut by George Cline or by "Little Louie" at a cost of 50¢. When someone died, they would usually be laid out in their own home and neighbors would take turns staying with the body all night.

Very few of the homes in the area had indoor plumbing until after World War II, so most homes had an out-house; some one-seaters and some two-seaters. The "Honey Dippers" came around every summer to clean them

out, or people would just dig another hole, move the out-house over it, then fill in the other hole. Most out-Houses had a catalogue in them, to be used for reading or for toilet paper. Every Halloween, the older boys would upset at least one out-house as a Trick-Or-Treat prank.

Every summer, the Dish Man would come around with his car filled with glass dishes, cups, etc. He had removed all but the driver's seat and filled the car floor with boxes of dishes. He blew his horn as he drove slowly around town and we would go out to the car to make our purchases. "Hucksters" also came around with trucks loaded with fresh fruits and vegetables. Phillip Joseph, the Peddler, also made his rounds, carrying his clothing with him. In my mind, I can still hear him asking my Mother, in his accent "Can I sell you something today, Missus? I have good pants, etc." Since we did not have a car, most of our clothes came from him or from Sears or Montgomery Ward catalogues, or wishbooks, as they were sometimes called.

I cannot guarantee that all of the above facts are true but I wrote them as I remembered them, and sometimes we remember things a little differently from anyone else. If you lived in the Cedar Grove area during the Thirties and Forties, I hope you remember them as fondly as I do, and will get some enjoyment from reading this.