

The following pages are some fond memories of mine, Esther (Lyman) Wilkinson, written and presented at the 1988 Lyman Family Reunion - it was appreciated so much that many family members requested copies - so here 'tis. Since writing this, I remembered a story about Uncle Rank in Cleveland, and I'll add it at the end, plus more if I think of them.

This is a horrible deduction, but now my generation is the "older" one. And I don't think we have had a "family rebellion" since Aunt Nina died. I believe the last one I can remember was in 1959, held in Rank's big building, soon after it was built, after the fire destroyed their farm buildings. At least, Rank says it was finished that summer and we had a family reunion in it.

When I heard talk of a gathering this summer, as I worked around the house, I kept having so many pleasant memories of picnics past. I even remember when we used to get together in the winter time, one year on or near Christmas, and the next year on New Year's Day - so families could go the other direction every other year. We had these meetings at one of the Aunts and Uncles homes till the family got too large, then we rented the Kibbee Hall. We even exchanged names, according to age category so kids got a gift for a kid near their age and adults for adults etc. Just one gift per each. On Christmas, Santa would arrive and on New Years, Father Time made an appearance. Of course, as long as he lived, Uncle George Breidenstein, our "should have been" actor, clown, or whatever, played both parts to perfection. I remember one time when he was Santa and came bursting in on the stage at the Kibbee Hall and jumped off the stage with gusto and almost knocked himself out. Then one time, when we met at my folks house on New Years, Janice Rice Bennett, was the New Years Baby, all dressed up in a diaper with a big red bow around her belly. She was such a cutie then, and she doesn't look bad now.

You younger members have a wonderful heritage, whether you know it or not. You have some great genes in your bodies, if you'll just make use of them. The original seven brothers and sisters were mostly self-educated people - they had such a zest for living and learning that they worked on it all their lives. With the exception of Aunt Cecile Paquin, who spent 6 months at Olivet College while living with an uncle, none of them had any schooling beyond the 8th. grade. But they were all avid readers, and interested in many things. They weren't bothered with TV, so spent their evenings improving their minds. It was a sad Christmas if any of us didn't receive several books, and they were a great family to play games, testing their mental faculties on geography, literature, etc. They were all blessed with that quality that I call, "Being afraid they might miss something in life," and I think many of us inherited that quality - making us more interesting people, and we surely have lots more fun than many families. It has always astounded me that when we really want to have fun, it is our relatives we search out, rather than friends - that says a lot about our family.

Two of the original seven taught school for several years, Aunt Cecile and Uncle Ed. When in Wisconsin, Aunt Cecile started the library and I'm sure some of her self-education was achieved while working around all those books. She always longed to travel and I've heard her give programs about some country and she would have researched it so well - you would have sworn she had been there in person - she always said that she did her traveling in books. After Aunt Cecile, Aunt Annie and Aunt Nina became widows, the 3 of them spent several winters in Bradenton, Florida. That was such fun for them, but all three had a time while they were gone worrying about what they were missing out on at home. While there, they had the So. Haven paper sent to them. One day, when Aunt Annie and Aunt Cecile read the paper first, they saw where one of our illustrious cousins had imbibed too much and spent a night in jail. They worried awful about Aunt Nina seeing it as it was one of her boys, but they didn't dare cut the item out or she would really be suspicious. So neither of them said a word and when Aunt Nina read the paper she looked up and said, "I see where one of your nephews spent the night in jail." Nuff said.

Most of you here today never had the fun of knowing your Great-Uncle Rank from Cleveland. He was such a character, loved to play tricks, tell jokes and was just naturally funny. He arranged his vacation every summer to be here for two weeks during the time we had the family reunion. Those of you who call our present day Rankin Lyman uncle, have a reasonable facsimile, but in a different way. Our Uncle Rank used to write letters of advice to a lot of us when he heard we were getting married. I still treasure the letter I received 46 years ago. Our Aunt Annie Breidenstein was a large, fat, jolly person that we all got such a kick out of, and in my letter of advise, he told me that the best method of birth control was to borrow one of my Aunt Annie's stockings and sleep with both of my legs in it. As you can see, I failed to take his advise.

When the Paquin and the Roy and Ed Lyman families were living in Park Falls, Wis., those 13 or so years, the letters that were written back and forth between their parents and the other family members were entertaining and informative - we have managed to find a number of them and they are so enjoyable to read. I mentioned the interest in learning of the whole family and back then, postage wasn't so prohibitive and they used to send books and magazines back and forth between the families in Mich. and Wis. Uncle Ed and Uncle Roy went to Park Falls as young men, and after about a year, returned to Mich. and married their brides and took them back to Wisconsin where they cleared land and built houses - so many in one section of the town that it was named Lymantown - some maps still list it as such to this day. The Paquin boys, Guy and Gene, Rankin, Jean and Roger and Corlan and Guy Lyman were all born there - Clyde and I came along after their return to Michigan. While in Wisconsin, Uncle Lauren Paquin ran a Livery Stable.

For a number of years we held our summer reunions at Base Line Lake, it was such fun as the water was always warm, no waves, and not too deep and everyone in the family who could muster up a bathing suit and was able to navigate, went in swimming. For the very few who didn't, there was benches on the porch of the store and dance hall building where folks could sit in the shade and watch the water circus, put on by Rank, Guy and Gene Paquin, Roger, Guy, Nelson and all that age group. There was a big, tall slide in the water and you never saw such antics as those boys went through to entertain the rest of us. There was also one of these slides on land for the smaller children and my mother, Aunt Etta, always had to go down this slide at least once each year.

As far as food was concerned, I remember the fried chicken most. I think each of the Aunts agreed to fix chicken and it just wasn't a few pieces but a whole roaster full, enough so everyone had all they wanted. Back then, everyone had their own chickens so it wasn't a problem and families didn't just bring a dish to pass, as they say nowadays, but they brought a whole meal. Besides the chicken, each would bring some other dish, either a salad, vegetable, potato dish or such, plus some kind of desert. Since I was brought up that way, it is a hard habit to break and at church potlucks, I still take a big main dish, plus a desert and there is only me. Later in the afternoon, a rare treat was a 5 gallon can of Vanilla ice cream. All of us didn't have freezers then with ice cream on hand at all times, and it was a treat. We would rummage in the picnic baskets for a cup, glass or something to eat it out of and years later, they finally started getting a box of cones so we could have ice cream cones - we loved that.

At our summer gatherings, we usually had enough for two teams and had a rousing softball game, or if there was another family picnicking that day, we would challenge them to a game. At Baseline lake, the ball diamond was quite a ways from the picnic area, but we all walked up there and watched the game. Some of the Uncles always brought horseshoes and all day long they had a Quoits game going with much fun and laughter. We always had officers and a secretary who kept track of the goings on of the family throughout the year. Back then, it was exciting news when someone got a new car, new false teeth, a new piece of furniture, took a trip, had an operation, a new baby etc. All these things were recorded and every member was mentioned if possible. Before we went home, we always tried to get a picture of the Aunts and Uncles, as long as they were with us, plus a picture of the newest brides, grooms, and babies. One time we had a photographer come out and take a group picture of the whole tribe.

We had a few members of the family, very few, who used to like to imbibe some, and the Aunts frowned on our having; the picnic where anything was available, as at Baseline Lake - but it was such a nice place to swim and meet that they gradually overlooked that aspect and hoped for the best. One year, Eleanore and Pete rode up there with Variell and me and we talked about it on the way and when we went home, Eleanore said, "You know, I don't believe a soul had a drink today," and Variell grinned and then she said, "Unless it was you, Variell Wilkinson." And Variell said, "The only thing I had was one beer that your Father, meaning Uncle Edgar, bought me." That shut Eleanore up. Variell and Uncle Edgar hit it off real well - dating back to the day of our wedding. Uncle Edgar said, "He knew Variell was a great guy, because anyone who could stand in front of the church with his back to that many Lymans, had to have something on the ball."

One year, at this very park, the whole family was in swimming and it was one of those warm summer days when Lake Michigan water was warm as bath water but the waves were big and we had a whole row of us sitting on the edge of the water line, just being rolled around by the big waves and you never heard such laughing and giggling. Aunt Grace Rice got so tickled and was laughing so hard that she lost her teeth. We all looked and looked but the waves must have washed them away - but that wasn't the end of the story. The next summer when we were here for our reunion, we found her teeth.

At our winter time gatherings, we always had a program put on by all the talent in our family. Aunt Nina Irey would recite some of her famous poems and end up with "Oh, Kate Penoyar," which she partially sang. Uncle George Breidenstein always had his red wig in his pocket so he could recite about the Swede, "Olie Yonson", and we always insisted that he do "And They Named Him After Me," with his teeth out, plus others. My mother, Aunt Etta, always had to do "The Raggedy Man," "Little Orphan Annie" and "Naughty Zell" and probably "The Moo Cow Moo." I'm sure you older ones will remember all of these. Aunt Grace Rice had several favorites she did too, such as "Aunt Sylvia's Geography Lesson," "Naming the Baby," and "Earthquake in Charleston." These are just some of the things I remember - and at one time, our generation, Clyde Lyman, used to do a great job on several monologues he gave.

Another of our favorite stories that a lot of you may not have heard - one day Aunt Nina and Uncle Bill Irey had to go away for the day, leaving quite early in the morning and she didn't have time, or forgot, to empty that vessel under the side of the bed. It was one of the lower down variety with a big handle on the side like an oversized cup. Wouldn't you know, cousin Guy Paquin, would decide this was a good day to call on the Ireys. Finding no one home, he couldn't just leave without leaving his calling card - no one locked houses in those days, so of course, Guy found this vessel under Aunt Ninas bed, took it and put it right in the middle of her dining room table with this note leaning up against it. "What kind of soup is this?" As soon as they arrived home, Aunt Nina knew who had been there so she went right to the phone, called Guy, and when he answered, she said, "That was pea soup, and if you come over, I'll show you how to make it." Aunt Nina lived to be 92, and even though she spent several years in a nursing home, she never lost her sense of humor and when one went to visit her, you came away amused and delighted, whether you did her any good or not - she could always tickle us most to death.

With the exception of my Dad, Roy, who lacked 6 weeks of being 82, all 7 lived well into their 80's, and most stayed alive every minute of their lives - Aunt Annie, as I remember, was the sickest before she passed away - she was diabetic, but most of them were reasonably well till their deaths. Some of my fondest memories are connected with Aunt Grace's family. On Fri. nites I used to go home from Hi School with Eleanore and Shirley so I could attend the Kibbee dances. Some of the time, Aunt Grace worked for the Clark family, keeping house during the week, and Uncle Edgar kept the home fires burning. I'll never forget a meal he often had waiting for us on Fri. nite, he called it "Hamburger Stew" but as I remember it was sort of a goulash made with macroni, but my gosh, it was good.

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On Sat. noon, Eleanor often made home-made tomato soup, with the last of Aunt Grace's homemade bread from the previous weekend, cut into squares and toasted in the oven for croutons and they were so good. I still make my own home-made tomato soup and my kids have always sworn by it too. Aunt Grace used to make the best molasses cake. One time Verrill and I were there and someone had given them a quart of sorghum - so she used that for a cake, like the molasses one, and it too was delicious. It seems like anything she made was good. They were the most devoted couple and I can still see Aunt Grace sitting on the divan, mending, darning or such, with Uncle Edgar as close as he could get, with his arm around her. Their family were always an intellectual bunch too, and I so loved to be in on their family get-togethers. It was a most stimulating day - trying to keep up with the smart remarks, contests, games etc.

All of us cousins loved to go to any of the Aunts and Uncles houses. I remember one night when Corlyn Irey and I stayed all night at Aunt Annie's. She just knew we would both get homesick and cry to go home about bedtime - so in their big front upstairs room, there were two double beds. When we went to bed, she came up with us and said she would lie on the other bed till we got to sleep, and keep us company so we wouldn't get lonesome. Well, she was asleep instantly, snoring so loud it would wake the dead. Corlyn and I giggled and giggled and I don't remember getting any sleep at all, but I suppose we did, and I don't remember if she woke up and went downstairs or not either. Her daughter, Zella, inherited that ability to snore and we ended up living next door to each other. Whenever I was having another offspring, if it happened in the night, we would run up and get Zella to come down and stay with the kids. Well, it never was a secret when I went to the hospital - Zella snored so loud she woke up all the kids and they knew I had taken off again.

Uncle Ed was the politician of the bunch and loved being in the public eye, talking in front of a crowd etc. Besides his earlier school teaching days, he was also the adult S. S. teacher for many years at the old East (Leisure) church. He served as Twp. Supervisor for many years, and at that time the Bd. of Supervisors ran the County too - sometimes I think a better method than we now have of elected Commissioners. My Dad, Uncle Roy, was the worker and thinker. He was quieter and never happier than when doing his job, whatever it might be. His dry sense of humor was always enjoyed by those who really knew him. His nephew, Guy Lyman, was quiet and a lot like Uncle Roy. In fact, often we kids of the two families confused folks and Rank and I have been accused of being Uncle Ed's kids many times - probably because we have always been so mouthy. Many of us in the family inherited those pesky Migraine headaches that bothered Grandad so many years. In a dairy we have of Grandad's, about every 6 weeks he wrote about having one of his sick headaches and that was about the schedule many of us had them - thank goodness, you do outgrow them with age - so that is one advantage of growing older.

Uncle Lauren Paquin was a great story teller - Aunt Cecile used to shake her head sometimes at some of his tall tales and say, "One must have a great memory to be a good story teller." I think sometimes she figured he added to them a little to make a better story, and the older he got, the better the stories got. We have often kicked ourselves to think we failed to write down some of them for posterity. The bigger his audience - the better his stories got. My favorite was about his dog, who was so smart, that when he shot a deer out of season, this dog would immediately start hauling in brush to cover up the evidence. Now, that was a smart dog.

During their later years, after Uncle Rank retired from work, he and Aunt Maude, opened their home, at 15242 Lake Shore Dr., in Cleveland, as a Tourist Home - a fore-runner of what we know today as "Bed and Breakfasts." It really made their older years very enjoyable as they thoroughly enjoyed the "guests" who stayed at their house. Uncle Rank was as free with his great advice to strange "newly-weds" as he was with our family young folks. They played cards with folks - if they were card players, visited, told stories etc.

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In Cleveland at that time, there was a Dr. Lyman, who was a Urologist. One evening, the phone rang, and apparently whoever was calling dialed the wrong Lyman - but knowing Uncle Rank, he talked to this lady, asked her questions about her symptoms etc., and I can just hear his voice and his concern. After quite a few minutes of conversation, he said, "Lady, you don't need a Doctor, you need a Plumber", and hung up. Those of us who knew him best - can well imagine him doing this stunt and telling about it to anyone who would listen. He was such a character. Our present day cousin, Victor Ridley, talks so much like Uncle Rank, has the same laugh etc., that it is fun to watch him talk. His face isn't shaped like Uncle Rank's but he sure sounds like him.

There were 28 of us first cousins and half of us are now gone - you may wonder about some of the rest of us but we are putting up a good fight yet. If I didn't miss one, there is 68 of you off-springs that belonged to the 28, and it is sad to say that 8 of you are no longer with us. To the best of my knowledge, only 3 of the next generation are gone but I didn't even attempt to count how many of you there are as I just didn't know how many children you all had etc. Of the 14 first cousins left, 13 of us manage to get to the 1988 reunion - only Harry, and his wife Pauline, who live in Bradenton, Florida didn't make it - though in reasonably good health, Harry is now 90 and they thought the trip too much to tackle - but we sure missed them.

I forgot to mention the original 7 all had great senses of humor and we are so fortunate that none of them lost that, nor their minds before their deaths - so maybe we have a chance to stay, at least as sane as we have ever been, to a ripe old age too. This story could go on and on - there is no end to the tales we could tell about our ancestors - you should be real proud to think you are one of this great tribe - we are something else - and don't you forget it.