

I Remember Mother Wald by Oletta Wald

Mother has been dead for some 28 years, so that is a long enough time to forget many things about mother, but not too long to remember some of the outstanding things. I will share with you what I remember about Mother.

Her Early Years

Augusta Simerson Wald was born in Belmond, Iowa in 1872. She lived on a farm there until she was married at the age of 18 years. She had about an 8th grade education, but was self-educated. Even so, she was self-conscious about her lack of formal education. She seldom wrote letters, even to her children. She would always ask one of them to write the letter for her. On the occasions that she did write a letter, she could write a good one, so she was better at it than she thought she was. She met her future husband when he came to her community as a seminary student to teach Bible school. They were married when he finished Augsburg Seminary. The wedding was on a hot July day, but Mother was dressed in a stylish high collared, long sleeved brown dress, according to the styles of that day. They moved to Chicago where he had his first call. They lived there less than three years because the climate did not agree with him. Their second call was to Fertile, Iowa. Those were turbulent years in the Lutheran Church with struggles concerning doctrines and loyalty to Augsburg College where father had attended. Father got caught in the struggle and had to leave the church in the town of Fertile and started another one in the country. Father contracted the flu and died from it on January 18, 1908, leaving Mother a widow with seven children and one on the way. I was born seven months after his death. She was a widow at the young age of 36 years old. These were very discouraging days for her. She owned the home in Fertile, so could continue to live there.

But in 1912, she moved her family to Belmond, Iowa, to live with her father. By now, her mother had died and Grandpa was alone. This might seem to have been the ideal arrangement for both of them, but it lasted about two years. Grandpa was a cantankerous old Norwegian who did not like children. Mother struggled to keep peace between grandpa and the children, but the last straw was the time when one of the boys

came in crying that Grandpa had chopped to pieces the wooden track and train the boys had made. Mother decided that her children were more important than free housing, so she moved to Slater, Iowa where the Wald relatives lived. We lived there until 1923 when we moved to Minneapolis because of better opportunities for college for the children. Because Mother had so little education herself, she was determined that her children have an education.

Her Health

On the whole, Mother had good health. Until the last year of her life, when she developed cancer, she did not have any of the common ailments of old people. She had good eyes, ears, no arthritis or high blood pressure. But she was plagued with migraine headaches. In her early years, there was little medication, so she had to endure the headaches. But she found that certain pressures increased the headaches. She made up her mind that she would not do what she could not physically do, no matter what people thought of her. This was true of all her attitudes toward life. Mother learned how to live with her body and refused to allow the opinions of others to deter her from doing what she thought was best for herself. Mother learned how to live with herself and be at peace with the world.

Her Personal Appearance

Mother was a slightly built person, medium height and on the slim side. As long as I remember her, she had gray hair rolled in a pug on the top of her head. There was a slight wave to it so it looked soft and becoming. Never did she have it cut or curled. You would not call her pretty, but she had a very interesting face, reflecting the serene spirit of her soul. She had regular features and a bone structure that was so well formed that I longed to make a sculpture of her face. She dressed neatly and always wore a hat when she went out, even for a ride in the car!

Her Temperament

Mother was a very calm, composed and peaceful kind of person. In all the years I knew her, I seldom saw her angry or upset. No doubt she had her times of frustration and

upsetting experiences, but she did not show her feelings. She accepted the problems of life with remarkable tranquility. Only one person really upset her and that was her sister-in-law who had done many mean things to her, among them was the refusal to let her know that her mother was dying, until after she was dead.

As a Parent

While Mother was a quiet and calm person, she was firm in her dealing with us children. She had deep convictions as to what was right and wrong. She never yelled or scolded you, but you always knew what she believed and how she wanted you to behave. You did not go against her wishes because you respected her convictions. Mother was really a very reserved and private person. She did not reveal her feelings very much. She was not a demonstrative woman, did not hug her children or say she loved them. But we found our security in her by what she did. I was a grown woman and teaching before I realized that not everyone loved or respected their mothers. I guess I thought they were all like my own. I was really shocked to hear a fellow teacher criticize her mother and indicate she neither loved or respected her. Mother showed her trust in us by the way she treated us as we grew up. She never sat up waiting for her children to come home from an evening affair. I believe she trusted us in doing the right thing. If she lay awake until we got in, she never indicated it to us. She did not have many close friends. Her life was her children, but she was highly respected by all who knew her.

Her Family

Mother had eight children: Bertilla, Alvah, Ferdinand, Joseph, Burton, Ina, Reuben, and Oletta. One of her foremost desires was that they might get an education. Bertilla and Alvah attended business college and were stenographers most of their lives, Bertilla spending her last years with the Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance Company in Minneapolis, and Alvah with an accounting firm. Ferd, Joe, and Reuben earned electrical engineering degrees and worked in that line of industry. Burton got a degree in business and was mainly with the Toastmaster Company. Ina got a degree in home economics, taught for a few years, and then served as lunchroom manager in Minneapolis public schools. Oletta got a BA degree from Augsburg College and a Master's Degree in Christian Education from Biblical Seminary in New York. After some years teaching in the public schools, she became an instructor on the staff of the Lutheran Bible Institute

and in the department of Christian Education of the American Lutheran Church. Her work entailed both writing and teaching, writing courses of instruction for Sunday Schools, Bible Studies and many articles. Out of her teaching experiences came two books which are still selling: The Joy of Discovery, a book on how to study the Bible, and The Joy of Teaching Discovery Bible Study.

Her Abilities

Mother was a very gifted person. Seldom did she face a problem that she could not figure out some kind of an answer. Life never stumped her. She could be the artist, carpenter, seamstress, engineer, plumber--whatever the need, she used her abilities to solve it. She would draw her own pictures for embroidering and hooking rugs. Give her a hammer, some nails and a few boards and she would soon have a cupboard built in the basement. We still are using some of the cupboards she built. Always she was busy with her hands, crocheting, knitting, embroidering, even in her last years. When she was no longer strong enough to garden, she still would sit on her haunches in the yard and dig dandelions and crabgrass.

As a seamstress she was a master. She had to support herself sewing for others in a day when a person got five dollars for sewing a dress. If you made over a dress for someone, the person thought she should pay only three dollars! Mother was a very patient seamstress. Because she was so good, none of her daughters became very proficient in sewing clothes. (But Ina does very well in sewing quilts!) The daughters would do the cooking while she sewed. Her patience was most in evidence when she sewed for her daughters. We were all very fussy and many was the time that she would patiently rip a dress because we did not quite like the way it was made or fit. Never do I remember her making a fuss--which she should have done! Nor was any pattern too difficult for her to make, even though it took much time if it were an unusual one. As children we had many made-over dresses, but she could make them look like new. One of the nicest coats I ever had was made from the trousers of Ferd who had been in the Navy.

She was not a leader. I doubt she ever held an office or gave a public speech in her life. She did not like the spotlight, but was a loyal member in any group to which she belonged.

Her Faith

Mother had a deep abiding faith in Jesus Christ as her personal Savior. But she was not one to talk glibly about her faith. Yet she had definite convictions about what she believed and would defend her convictions if anyone tried to teach what she considered wrong doctrine. Her faith was reflected in her actions. Often she read her Bible. She truly demonstrated the reality of the fruit of the spirit as is revealed in Galatians 5:22. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Her Husband

Our father was a pastor, a very evangelistic preacher whose main emphasis was focused on the importance of a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. After several years in Chicago, he moved to Fertile, Iowa where he served two congregations. First in the town of Fertile, but due to disagreements with some of the members on doctrinal issues, he was asked to leave. Then he started a church in the country which flourished under his energetic leadership. He was greatly loved by his parishioners. Down through the years when we met members of his congregation, they always spoke of him in loving terms. He was a social man, loved people and loved to entertain them. He also loved children, especially his own. His practice was to take some of them with him when he went on his calls, even to special services in other congregations. Our older sisters remember many times when they rode along with Father to his meetings. On the way as he drove his horse, he would sing the many hymns he knew. He was a man who loved music. While he was a good husband, kind and thoughtful, he was not too good mechanically. Mother had more skill than he did to fix things. Physically, he was not a rugged man and had his struggles with health. He died January 18, 1908 after a two-week bout with the flu. I believe his heart gave out. His death was a great shock to that small community. He had helped many to come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ and they mourned the passing of their pastor. He was buried in Slater, his boyhood home, at the age of 47 years.

Her Final Illness

At the age of 76 years, she developed a cancerous growth in her intestines. I remember how desperately ill she became one day. When we called the doctor, he sent an ambulance to take her immediately to the hospital. We really did not realize how very ill she was. The doctor performed surgery that night to release the pressure that the growth had built up in the abdomen. She was so ill that the doctor did not expect her to live through the night, but we went home and slept peacefully, believing all was going to be okay. A week later she had an operation removing the growth. That was a time when we became aware of the grace of God. Had the doctor not operated that night, she would have died. God in his mercy spared her life. She recovered and lived five more years.

One cold March day in 1953, we took her to the doctor for a checkup. Getting out of the car, she had to climb over a pile of snow, slipped and fell right in front of the doctor's office. She was rushed to the hospital where they found she had broken a hip. Chest X-rays revealed that she had also developed cancer of the lungs. She lingered in the hospital nine weeks, until she died on May 3, 1953 at the age of 81 years. She too was buried in the family plot in Slater, Iowa, along side her husband.



Fertile home: Burton, Reuben, Augusta, Ina, Oletta (in front) - 1910