

A Grandchild's Recollections of Grandpa and Grandma Sauter

By Burt Riskedahl

Col. Eberhardt Sauter

I had just turned 13 about a month before Grandpa died in October of 1953. I remember a traditional practice at the time, the deceased being brought to the family home for a time of reflection and socializing before the body being transporting to the church for a funeral.

My earliest recollections are staying in Grandpa and Grandma's house located north of the baseball field in Tuttle. Staying overnight in an upstairs bedroom and having some assistance from Louise or Ruby, the two daughters who lived with their parents most of their adult lives because they never married or had families of their own.

One morning I was in the kitchen, at or before receiving breakfast. I observed Grandpa take a glass from the cupboard and reach up to a high shelf for a bottle of whiskey and pouring the glass partially full. I didn't ever observe grandpa being different because of drinking, but later in life I learned about his daily use of alcohol and also the considerable time he would spend in the local pool halls, socializing, playing cards, drinking and conducting his trading business. I observed grandpa in his easy chair in the living room of the newer home in Tuttle they lived in in later years. His interactions with others seemed gruff to me and my conclusions now as an adult is that Grandpa was not a happy or contented person. I have a recollection of him handing me a birthday gift of a leather belt at the age of 10 or eleven, but overall, I did not experience him as a giving or friendly person. I believe I remember seeing his working as an auctioneer, with his son Eddie serving as clerk. My understanding as an adult that his practice was to pick up many of the bargain items at auction sales he conducted and later resell the items for profit. I was also aware of the little house a half block off main street, west of Max Miller's store which had a desk in it, which made up his 'office.' In a corner of the large room there were pelts piled up, representing the subject of his fur trading enterprise. I assume a truck would come from somewhere periodically to purchase large quantities of furs and pelts which he had acquired from the local trappers, many of them who were high school age kids.

Grandpa's reputation as a shrewd businessman was well known. Buying and selling farm implements, iron and tools. My sense was that he was respected for the way he conducted business and was seen as a fair person.

Grandpa's drinking problem was well known, although I never learned how it had negatively affected people, other than his own family members. As the child of Erna, one of the older daughters, I became aware of how the female children in particular, resented his drinking and found much of his behavior in the home, and I believe abuse, at least on at least a social area directed at grandma. Grandpa did provide the essentials for his family. As a child in their home, I don't recall seeing grandma and grandpa communicating with each other or interacting as a couple. My overall impression as I grew older, after grandpa's death was that he was considered to be a successful businessman and farmer, who had a reputation for fair dealing. While he would extend credit to customers or even operate as a lender at times, his positive image as a main street businessman differed from the reputation of being a hard taskmaster towards his own children, and perhaps inconsiderate of the many challenges faced by grandma in tending to all the children in the family.

Grandma Mathilda Sauter

Grandma Sauter had a wonderful reputation as kind and considerate of other people. As a child I associate her with a welcoming and nurturing spirit. Grandma was seen as a good cook and generous in terms of extending hospitality to people who would be in her home. This was true in spite of all the responsibilities she had with 10 children, born to her between 1907 and 1927. My memories of grandma include her being a soft spoken and kind person, but having definite expectations of the children, especially the daughters, to assist with caregiving with the younger kids.

In spite of all the requirements daily with childcare, Grandma had a reputation of being a very good seamstress. Most Sauter households would even today have some evidence of Grandma's ability to crochet things like bedspreads, tablecloths and smaller items like dresser covers. She also passed on her skill as a seamstress to her daughters. Grandma also made many quilts from scraps of material, and again, passed this skill along to her daughters.

The family dynamics of this large family are hard to evaluate. It seems like Grandma held the family together, with Grandpa conducting his business on main street and providing for the family in reasonable fashion, but not have much emotional investment with the children. While I have no recollection of seeing anyone in this family showing evidence of abuse from Grandpa, there seems to be indications on the part of the daughters primarily, that Grandma had a times had to run interference for the children in terms of the stern expectations of Grandpa. The daughters all seemed to convey that in addition to his drinking to excess, Grandpa had at times, unreasonable expectations

regarding work assignments for the children. Grandma was much more protective and understanding of the issues faced by the Sauter children during their growing up years.

Grandma continued to live in the family home after grandpa's death in 1953. As she became older, Louise and Ruby, who lived with her assumed more and more responsibility for the home. Grandma died July 18th, 1964. Submitted with this narrative is one of the final pictures taken of grandma at the wedding of Burt and Margo Riskedahl on June 21, 1964. She is seated at a serving table next to her oldest daughter, Hilda, who 'poured' at the wedding reception.

Grandpa and Grandma Sauter are buried in the Tuttle Cemetery.

Submitted in August 2021

