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Mrs. Wilkening

Rhetoric: The Essay

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Florence Gilbertson, also known as Stubba, lived through hard times and drastic changes in technology and lifestyles, but she has found ways to keep her head up and survive and progress. She was born in the time of the booming 20's when the stocks were soaring and people lived well. She was born in the house across the street from where she lives now. The date was September 21, 1922 in Milan, Minnesota. In that time, her mother, Annie, waited at home while in labor and Dr. M.A. Burns made a house call to deliver the baby. She was the fifth of six children born in that house to Osmond and Annie Strand.

During her younger childhood years she lived in the town of Milan. Her family was not overly wealthy, but they lived well. Her father Osmond owned a meat market and worked along with his two eldest sons Hans and Raymond. In back of the meat market he had a large building to store ice. During the winter he would cut ice from Lac qui Parle Lake and store it in sawdust in this storage building. Since people needed ice for their ice boxes to keep food cool he had Hans and Raymond delivered ice to people. Stubba remembers that the ice storage building was filled with the neighborhood's stray cats. She was always excited when her father would come home with a box full of kittens. Her sisters and she would spend many afternoons dressing the kittens in "dolly clothes" and pushing them around in buggies. Her father was also one of a small group of commercial fishermen from Milan who seined carp on Lac qui Parle Lake. This

occupation, however, was terminated after a secretive organization in Milan called "the Masons" protested commercial fishing in this area. Her mother stayed at home and worked tirelessly trying to feed and take care of her six children. She would send Stubba to her father's meat market each day to pick up meat for lunch. No matter what type of meat her mother requested, Stubba would always bring home pork chops because they were her favorite. "My father quickly caught on to me after I'd ask for pork chops every day though" said Stubba.

Living in a small town during the 1920's provided Stubba with many fond memories. In a time without television or video games the alleys of Milan were filled with youngsters. After she had finished helping her mother with housework, she would frolic out to the alley to meet the other neighborhood children. Then they would play games such as "Anti-I-Over" and "Run Sheep Run." Another fond memory is giving and receiving May baskets. Without getting caught, the town children tried to leave a basket filled with goodies for another child of the opposite sex whom they admired. "One time a boy left a whole quarter in my May basket and that was like 100 dollars back then, it made me feel really special as you can tell I still smile about it today" said Stubba. Stubba attended Milan Elementary with her friends. The neighborhood children spent every day playing with each other and became really close. The activities in a small town during the 1920's were a great time of recreation and friend making for Stubba.

Stubba's fun in the alleys and fun town way of life was about to end as the years of the Great Depression slowly hit the town of Milan and the Strand family. There was no work anywhere in Milan, and Osmond knew his small butcher shop could not provide enough earnings for Hans, Ray, and himself. Hans and Ray were coming out of high

school and needed jobs so Osmond took action. He sold his butcher shop and purchased a farm three miles south of Milan. He figured that now his sons would have a livelihood because even when the economy let them down the land could still support them. Stubba did not want to leave her home in Milan or her friends who she had gotten so close to. Moving out to the farm was a tough transition, but it was necessary to help the family survive.

The Depression was a time of economic hurt and changing of lifestyles all around the nation. In Minnesota when a bank foreclosed a farm the neighbors would chase away outside bidders. This allowed the neighbors to purchase the farmer's belongings for pennies and return it to the farmer's family more often than not. Manufacturing of luxuries such as automobiles almost came to a halt. A large drought was also going on at this time and that started to hit Stubba's family's farm quite hard. Enormous clouds of dust would sweep through the area when the winds picked up. Stubba remembers that dust blew into drifts along the fence posts and blew under the doors of stores and piled up on the floor. Some years Stubba's father would not get any crop at all. With those tough times Stubba's family had to work very hard and live prudently to get by. "We had to do the best we could with what we had" said Stubba. The Great Depression had a great effect on Stubba's life along with the rest of the people of America.

Life on the farm was a lot different from living in town. The farm house did not have electricity or running water. There was an outhouse for a bathroom, and it was very unpleasant and cold during the winter. They had a cook stove in their kitchen that they used to cook all of their food and help heat the house. They burned wood and corn cobs to fuel the stove and it created mass amounts of heat that made it unbearable during the

summertime but pleasant during the cold days of winter. There was also an orchard in the grove that produced a lot of apples. The orchard was beneficial because it provided a lot of food, but Stubba got really sick of eating apples. The farm also lacked modern farm equipment and Stubba remembers Hans and Ray having to pick and husk whole fields of corn using their bare hands and a husking hook. Farm life turned out to be much different from what Stubba's family was used to in town.

The new way of life was different, but her family started to adjust and find their place on the farm. Even though they lived in the country Osmond insisted on the children still attending Milan school instead of country school. All the school children in Stubba's family would pile into the back end of their old Model T Ford for transportation to school. Since they did not have a refrigerator they had to partially fry their meat and then try to preserve them in a cold place. The boys would take care of the outside work while the girls took care of the inside work. Stubba's duties included cooking with her mother, cleaning the house, and picking eggs in the chicken coop. Her family used these eggs to trade for groceries at the store in town. It also seemed that during the ripening season she was constantly picking and peeling apples. When she would sit down to rest her mother would say "Might as well peel some apples." Some of the foods they made the most of were lefse, milk mush, and apple pies. Trains would travel past their farm frequently during the day going back and forth from Montevideo to Milan, and one time a spark from a train passing by ignited the hay stack and burned it all up. After that disaster they did not have any feed for the livestock and Stubba's father almost cried. When baby pigs were born ^{Hans} ~~Ray~~ would have to slaughter them and sell them in town for a dollar. Since there was no electricity they were forced go to bed early and find other

means of entertainment. She would play the same alley games with her siblings and also a lot of card games. They were lucky enough to listen to the radio when the batteries inside it had enough power to run it. Another important part of her childhood was church. They always found a way to make it to town for church and Sunday school. Inside of Stubba's mother's dish cabinet they had a jar of pennies that the children would bring to Sunday school for offering. Stubba and her family settled in to the farm and lived the best they could.

Stubba kept growing through her childhood years and was soon a teenager. She continued to attend Milan High School in town. Back then they had stopped having girl's sports in Milan so Stubba took part in music. She sang in the school choir and competed in music contests. Some of her classes were math, English, and social studies. These classes were important, but home economics was really important for her because she would be responsible for keeping the house when she was married. She would attend boy's games in basketball, football, and baseball. She would watch her brothers play basketball in the old Milan gym that had only one row of seats along the edge and some chairs on the stage. Her brothers would get on the train to go play other towns like Ortonville. One time after her family had taken a trip to Montevideo they got to ride the train called *The Flyer* back to Milan. She had a clik of friends and she would stay in town with them on the weekends. Although she had fun with her group of friends her parents were strict and did not allow her to go to the dances in town. Her mother would sew all of her clothes and she would wear them until they were in rags. During the summer of 19⁵⁶~~55~~ Dunnick Brothers Construction Company dug out a lot of gravel from around her father's pond a mile south of Milan creating a small lake. Town and country

children alike would come to swim at the newly formed "Lake Annie." It was a great summer get together spot until one summer a young man who did not know how to swim drowned there after he had gotten done picking corn. She remembers her father's solemn face as he held the tongue of the limp young man while they tried unsuccessfully to revive him. After that Osmond would not allow children to come swimming anymore. Stubba was able to have some fun during her teenage years with many different events even with a few set backs.

After high school Stubba had to enter the real world. During Stubba's time it was very unusual for anyone to attend college especially a woman. This meant Stubba had to get a job and take care of the household duties. Most of her siblings entered the working world right away as well. Hans took over the farm duties on their farm, Ray bought a gas station on Highway 7 in Milan, Janet worked at a drug store in Montevideo, and Mary moved to California with a friend. Stubba worked at a restaurant in Milan where she would work from 6:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. six days a week for only six dollars. Bud was the only one to attend college and went to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Osmond had placed a trailer home next to Lake Annie and that became the summertime hangout for Stubba and her siblings except for Mary. They would go swimming, have picnics, and play cards together almost every day of the summer. Stubba also joined the Ladies Aid Club at church which became a very large part of her life. It was a lot more active back then and served as a huge part of people's service and social lives. She enjoyed visiting with other women while they made dish towels and quilts for the needy, teaching children's Sunday school, and helping out with a girls youth group called "The

Busy Bees.” After Stubba graduated from high school she quickly made the transition in to her working years.

As Stubba began her after high school life a threat to our country was growing far away in Europe and Asia. In December 1941 the United States declared war on Japan which caused Germany and Italy to declare on the United States as well bringing our country into World War II. Back at home many things had to be sacrificed and conserved. Milan did not have any munitions or ship factories so its citizens did not help the war effort in that way, but Stubba remembers having to use coupons in order to purchase sugar and other food items because everyone had to ration their consumption. Rubber could not be purchased because it was all needed for the war effort, and Stubba remembers Bud driving to school in Minneapolis with four flats. With mass amounts of casualties overseas and the need for a stronger military the government issued drafts for soldiers. Hans escaped the draft because he had trouble with his ear drum and Ray got a farming release, but Bud did not have an excuse. He was drafted and sent away to Europe and became a Lieutenant 1st Class. This was a terrible time for our country and it was rough on Stubba along with her family. They missed and feared for Bud and it was very difficult to communicate with him. He had an APO address and they would send letters back and forth but it took many weeks to get a response. During the World War II years it was a tough time for our country as well as for Stubba and her family.

World War II was a dark time, but it finally ended and our country tried to get back to normal. Stubba and her family welcomed home Bud with great joy. He did not like to speak of his war experiences, but commented on great battles he took part in such as “The Battle of the Bulge” and “The Siege of Berlin.” Stubba started to work as a clerk

at the post office in Milan and preferred that job because of better hours and working conditions. She met Glen Gilbertson when he moved to Milan to work at a hardware store and they began to date. Stubba was married to Glen at the age of 22 and they started their new family together.

Stubba grew up in a much different time than today. She faced many changes and hardships in her early life, but she was part of a close knit family and group of friends who helped each other stay happy and get through. While Stubba was growing up she was thankful for what she had and tried to make the best of every situation. She enjoyed the pleasures of growing up in a small town and a farm. She also witnessed and had to deal with the effects of World War II and The Great Depression. Stubba has many good memories of growing up along with memories of facing hardships.

Dear Stubba,

Thank you for taking the time to let me interview you for this project. I learned a lot about my family's history in the process. You have a wonderful story and was fun to write about.

Thanks

RJ Strand