

GROWING UP IRISH

Family, as I grew up, was more than just siblings, grandparents and cousins. It extended almost to the whole human race, or so it seemed. We carried soup to the neighbors, shoveled their snow, ran their errands, helped clean their homes, and babysat their young ones. You see, I grew up among the Irish, and this was a way of life. You saw a need; you attended to that need, and the dickens to pay if you ever accepted a cent for the deed!

My family lived in Pekin, but the maternal roots and most of the close family lived in Peoria. We buried the dead – a lot! In fact, I always claimed to know the many mortuaries in Peoria before I ever discovered the shopping possibilities. My grandfather, a lawyer and politician, always drove a black car because as he said, “They looked so grand in a funeral procession.”

Growing up Irish wasn’t all grim, however. The family was constantly involved in the transfer of individuals and/or families from the “old sod.” This transfer entailed more than a “welcome to the land of plenty party.” It meant finding lodging, furnishings, jobs and whatever else was necessary – usually much more than these people ever had in the old country.

But the process of making all this happen is what I remember most! The gatherings to make the plans, as well as welcome the newcomers, were priceless times of fun, music, storytelling, and shared food. Francis Moran, who sang like Caruso, and could weave a tale so enchanting, so hilarious, so exaggerated – that even as a small child I knew his stories to be “embroidered”...but somehow we didn’t care. We knew that “growing up Irish” definitely meant “growing up LOVED!”

by M. Kella

