

SUMMERTIME AND THE LIVING WAS EASY

I'm sure you've probably heard the expression, "They're from the wrong side of the tracks!" Well, I guess that's where we lived when I was growing up, but I never knew there were right sides and wrong sides until much later in my life. To really be specific, we also lived in the SOUTH END of Pekin and just a block from the Illinois River...not a quaint, picturesque house with a beautiful scenic view...just a house a block away from the river, but a house that had a big oak tree in the backyard with a great tire swing that went really high...much higher than just an ordinary swing with a board seat! We had a white picket fence in the front, and my mother had flowers planted along the fence, and I remember having to help weed those flowers, too!

When I was growing up, I had the best time any child could have. Our street, South 12th Street, had lots of kids for my brother and me to play with. The Smith's, down on the corner, had the most, though. They had six children. LeRoy was my age, and he had older brothers and sisters, and I think I remember a younger brother or sister who was about my brother's age. My brother, Ken, was seven years younger than I. There were 17 kids of varying ages to play with on our street! Our next door neighbors, the Rings had two girls and two boys and they were always over at our house, or vice versa. We all got together in the summer evenings and played out in the street. The street wasn't paved, but we did have a nice street light in the middle of the block, and we could play out until our parents called us to come in to get ready for bed. One game we played nearly every night was called "Chicken, Ham, Bacon." I don't remember exactly how the game went, but I know that we chose up sides and ran back and forth across the street. And of course we always played "Hide and Seek," which was really neat to play at dusk. Lots of moving from hiding place to hiding place when it was hard to see. What fun we "south enders" had down on 12th Street...on the wrong side of the tracks. My cousins, Elaine and Harold, always came to play, too. They lived with my Grandma Jenny because their mother had died, and they only lived about 2 blocks from us. Grandma Jenny was just what all Grandmas should be...happy, caring, kind, and a great cookie baker!

I could easily write a book about cousin Elaine, though, and I will jot down a few things later on in my story about this tall, slender, pretty cousin with the naturally curly hair who got to live with MY Grandma and could do anything she wanted to (according to Elaine)! Do you get the impression I was a little jealous? Well, I wasn't. I was a LOT jealous...until I would say my prayers at night and remember that I had a mother and Elaine didn't.

by Alice Van Etten

