

Growing up beside the Molalla River

First came my grandparents, Gottlieb & Katherine Meyer, in the 1880's to the area about 1/4 mi. up from Flyer Park, and like all pioneers were faced with choosing a site for the house, a barn, clearing land for fields, garden and a water supply. Life was a challenge, I'm sure. The cabin was just below where the road now is, later where the house now stands. The barn was made from the trees on the hill behind. Wooden wheels were hued from a log and used to bring the trees down the hill with horses. The water supply was pumped by a ram from the spring below the road and then up to a water tank in a wood tower, then by gravity to the house and buildings.

For income fruit trees - pears, apples and prunes were planted. These were dried when ripe in what was called the dry house. There was a trench about 10' long and 4' deep lined with brick using slow-burning wood for heat. There were frames to slide these moveable racks on called riddles, when fruit was dried then sold. Butter was churned in a large barrel on a frame and turned with a handle attached. In the winter when the cows were on hay only, I remember my mother saying our grand mother would use carrot juice for a deeper color so it would sell better.

There were 11 children 7 sons and 4 daughters, 2 died at birth and are buried in the Batty cemetery on the hill above the farm. Fritz the eldest at 21 yrs had a ruptured appendix and died on the way to a Portland Hospital. Then there wasn't a bridge yet, so the river was forded by wagon, him laying on a bed of straw.

As things progressed a shop was built with a forge for blacksmithing, a smoke house for curing ham, bacon ropes of sausage hanging on poles above. 4 & 5 hogs were butchered in the fall. Sausage was fried into patties and covered with melted lard that was rendered in a

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big iron kettle over the fire suspended on a large pole, a machine shed built, a threshing machine bought, a road grader, a steam donkey and an oil pull tractor. In the '20's Uncle Joe made a Delco plant to produce electricity using a sulfuric acid solution in glass jars lined up on heavy shelves.

As some of the family started out on their own, my mother, Louise, married Gus Johnson, who came from Sweden and moved on his families homestead of 1885 in Fernwood. They were married 5 years and had 3 daughters, Katherine, Orla, Hannah Schick and myself. One evening our father didn't come in after plowing in the field, my mother went to the barn and found him lying dead in the corner of the barn, apparently kicked by one of his horses. That was in 1922 and I was 8 mo. old, devastated and unable to manage their farm with 3 little children we moved down to her home place, Feyers. The first stayed in what was always called the Grandmother house on the corner, built for the Great Grandparents. She lived there for about 2 yrs till our Grandmother became ill with complications from Diabetes and soon died. There were 4 of her brothers and her father still home helping to run the farm when our mother took over the necessary duties. There was lots of cooking, mending and washing which was done outside. Clothes were boiled in a big iron kettle with home made soap and suspended on a pole over the fire which could be swung to the rinse tubs and rings. They were lifted with a long stick to the rinse tub. The rings were powered by a gas motor and mounted on tracks that could be moved over the tubs with a lever, bluing added to the last rinse.

As we grew up and more dependable our mother allowed us to play further from the house, and of course, where else but down the river. Crossing the road was no problem for cars didn't go fast and made plenty of noise. We got so we could tell whose car it was by the sound and rattling of the planks in the old red covered bridge - the 2nd bridge - another favorite place for fun. We learned

to swim at an early age. The river was deeper ³ then and we had a little homemade boat to row in. There were fish racks in the 20's across the river just below our house. They were used to hold the Salmon at spawning time and remove the eggs, then hatched in a wooden flume supplied by a spring in the river bank just above our house on the corner. It had different levels of water to hatch the eggs then fed and then the fingerlings returned to the river. There were lots of salmon in the river then I remember standing on the bank looking down and it would be black with salmon. The hole near the bank was about 15' ^{deep} then, deep enough for me to dive off the bank.

During the 4th of July times, then called Round up, now called Buckaroo, the Grand Ronde Indians would come and my uncle let them set up their camp site down by our orchard on the river. They would be there quite a while for there were 3 days of parades and evening shows. I can remember how impressed I was standing on the bank watching the Indian maidens swimming under water with their hair streaming behind. They were inquisitive little girls and stood around their camp checking things out. They were very friendly and gave our mother one of their handmade baskets.

In the 30's the river completely froze over solid and my uncle took their truck out on the ice to cut blocks of ice out and put them in sawdust. We had ice cream all summer. There was the spring right below the road with a cedar shake building over it that had 2 levels of cement on the floor one about 3" deep then 5" that the water flowed over and out where the butter and cream were kept. The cream was cold enough to whip, even in summer.

It wasn't always play, we had chores to do, hoeing in the garden, across the road down by the river was our favorite garden. Sometimes the hoe found itself leaning on the old rail fence and with the river so inviting, after you wet, why not swim. Our clothes would soon dry and we were usually barefoot and then start hoeing again. I'm sure, mama, know what

the haling didn't get done too quickly. There was wool to card for comforters, embroidering on dish towels & pillowcases. Girls were taught to prepare for their hope chest in those days. There was canning to do, corn to husk, it wasn't just a bucket full it would be a wheelbarrow full, picking wild blackberries, digging potatoes. There was a dish cellar with a trap door under the front porch with shelves for the canning jars and potato bins. When we had threshers and haymakers in the summer to cook for by the noon meal, it took lots of preparation for around 30 hungry men, then it was customary to cook the meals for neighbors when they worked.

The River was a place for lots of community gatherings for picnics and wienner roasts. In the summer we girls built a raft from the driftwood that collected in the log jam along the river bank. Every year when the river got high it floated down the river again, so the next summer we made another one. In summer sometimes mama let us put some bedding on the raft and we would float it across the river to spend the night.

Our family, hoping to preserve some of the river for others to enjoy, as we did, donated 27 acres to the county in 1957 which is known as Feyer Memorial Park.

Growing up on the Molalla River bank was and always will be a vivid memory to treasure and cherish. Hopefully with so many caring and dedicated volunteers the whole river corridor can be enjoyed by all.

Thank you,
Ellen D. Titronson

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