

Grandmother Christina nee Schweikert Hein

Judy A. Remmick-Hubert, Lafayette, California, shares an e-mail message with this story about Grandmother Christina nee Schweikert Hein

Since Vera shared her granny story, I've been thinking about my own German - Russian - American grandmother Christina, nee Schweikert, Hein who was one of those pioneering women who settled first in the Dakotas, then Wyoming and then in Montana in the early 1900s. It was because her independent spirit that I suppose I gained some of my spirit. She was a woman ahead of her time and so was I. Some of my favorite stories were the ones about protecting her lady friends from their husbands who ruled the house often with fist and curses. And, so, with this brief background let me begin the tale:

One Sunday morning, not unlike this Sunday morning, my grandmother and her ten children attended the old country church. As she sat listening to the "hell and brimstone" of the minister she noticed a lady friend who's face had all the signs of a being battered. All through the sermon she thought about what she must do to protect this dear friends.

After service, she went to her friend and took her by the arm and asked if her husband had beaten her, again. The sad and bruised face showed her fright and she shook her head knowing if she told anyone that her husband would retaliate. To make a long story short, my grandmother said she was going to make a visit to the lady's home that same afternoon.

My grandmother arrived at the lady's home. Got out of her buggy and saw the lady's husband present himself on the porch. His appearance was suppose to make her feel frightened. After all, most women should be frighten of the men. But my grandmother wasn't frighten and greeted the man as she still held her whip. "I've come to see" And, he cut her off by saying, "She's busy in her home like you should be." My grandmother reminded this man, "This is the Sabbath and the God Almighty tells all to rest, even your wife." My grandmother left her whip, walked up the steps and passed the husband.

In the house she found her friend who tried to give her a warm smile but her face showed, again, greater fear but not just for herself. She believed my grandmother was in danger, as well. My grandmother asked, "Did your husband beat you, again?" She could see the woman was not going to tell the truth. So she said, "God is listening, so answer me truthfully. Did your husband...." The husband had followed my grandmother and at the doorway he replied, "All wives need to be beaten from time to time. And, if your husband was man enough, he'd have beaten you this afternoon for if he had, you'd be home minding your own business, and be in your own house doing your duty as a obedient wife."

My grandmother turned and look at the husband. She saw his smirk smeared over his face. She had seen his kind as a child in the German-Russian villages. She had seen his kind in the Dakotas and Wyoming. And, suddenly, she knew it was time things changed. Near her was a broom and she snatched it up. She wasn't a large woman but she was strong, And she announced, "If you ever touch another hair on your wife's head, I'm going to come back her and beat you." The husband laughed. He held no fear of my grandmother or any woman. This arrogance churned my grandmother's insides and she moved toward the husband. "Perhaps it's time," she

declared, "you have a taste of your own medicine." And she swung the broom down on the husband with one hard and accurate blow. The husband gave out a yelp. She wasn't done. She struck him many times. And when she thought he had enough, she stopped and made her vow, "I promise you, if you ever lay another finger on my friend, I shall be back and next time I will not be so generous.

The husband, although bruised, grabbed the broom from my grandmother and laughed, [although not as jocular this time]. My grandmother wasn't going to back away. She knew she had gone over the line drawn so long ago my the men way back in time before Jesus was born. And, she couldn't back away not now not ever. The husband seem to be thinking of striking her and had raised the broom. "You dare touch me and you're a dead man and I'm not here to get you killed. Because I assure you my husband or my sons will kill you."

She didn't think that was true because her husband would let the law handle such things but she was desperate and needed some kind of leverage. "What good would that be to leave your wife a widow and your children fatherless." The husband's instinctively knew he had to stand his ground. "What they need is a kind hearted man not a Cruel monster like your self..." He bellowed, "Go home, you Beetch [sic] and mind your own business. I can take care of my wife and see to her as I feel I need...." My grandmother moved toward the carriage as if she was backing away in fear. In a moment, she had the whip in her hand. The husband felt her whip... My grandmother won this confrontation... And the husband learned a happy wife found time to make pies....

More than once my grandmother prevented the husband from ever beating their wives, her friends, again.

A silent truce blanketed the community.

Oh, there were a few men who continued to beat their wives but that was because those wives didn't have my grandmother as a friend.

When the husbands complained to my grandfather, he would always reply the same, "Treat others as you wish to be treated." And that was his answer and one of the most prized rules of life I learned.