

A 1920's Spruce Story

Told by Helen Piper Vicary
Retold by Helen Olson

In the 1920's and early 1930's, when most of our parents were teenagers, big bands were popular and you could go dancing to one someplace in the Alcona/Alpena area every night except Sunday and Monday. And my sense is that our immediate forbearers did just about that. At least they went whenever there was an available car and a gang to fill it. (On Saturdays, incidentally, the dances closed at midnight so as not to break the Sabbath.)

One winter night Aunt Helen went with Adelaide Gunderson and four boys, with two cars, to a dance at Nicholson Hill. It was a snowy night, but that didn't stop them from staying until nearly the end of the evening.

The roads were worse than they had anticipated, with only one set of tire tracks down the middle through the snow. The boys had the lighter car and went first. About five miles from home, they slid in the ditch.

The nearest farm was the Ulanders. Fortunately, they knew the Ulander son, so they made their way through the snow to the farmhouse to ask for help. After getting the family out of bed, the younger Ulander went with the boys to hitch up the horses, while Mr. Ulander hurried the girls into the living room wood stove to warm up and Mrs. Ulander, in good Norwegian fashion, hustled out to the kitchen to put the coffee to boil and set out the bread and butter.

Everyone was soon settled in and cosy, with the good smell of Norwegian coffee drifting out from the kitchen, and Aunt Helen steeling herself for the possibility that she might have to eat bread and sour cream, a delicacy favored in Norwegian households and pretty distasteful to the Scots.

Mr. Ulander sat chatting with the girls, asking them about their families and the like. Then he said, "Ah, it's sooo nice havin' youse girls here. I like the way youse are comin' walkin in here. It's yust like youse was in the family way." The girls refrained from giggling.

*Addendum: When Aunt Helen first told this little story to my son Dan and me, Dan didn't get it. His generation doesn't know the term "in the family way," not having to consider delicate language about such matters.