

CHAPTER FIVE

Our High School days were over. Bessie had to wait one year before she would be old enough to go into Nurses training at Herman Hospital in Houston. Both of us went to work. We found a job at Foleys by seeing a long line of young women, so we got in line too. Foleys was going to have a big sale and were interviewing that day. Bessie and I both were shocked to find we each had a job. We were put to work immediately but in different departments. We did explain our mothers were doing volunteer work at Trinity School, and we were expected to have lunch with them. Could we just for this first day have the same lunch hour. This request was granted.

There were two very shocked mothers when they found out we had jobs. Mrs. Wagner was at the school too, and when she learned we found a job she called her daughter Selma to go to Foleys. Selma had graduated from High School with us. This was August. I had a job which I did not like so I just did not go back that day. Instead I went to town with Bessie. Bessie stayed with Foleys until she could go into Herman Hospital. Selma stayed many years, but I got a better paying job in September in the Jewelry department at Star Engraving Company. The lady over me accepted my resignation nicely, but she did say she was sorry to see me leave as it would not be long before she had a promotion.

My parents had sold their home on Pecore the year I was a senior in high school. Since my father was in the beginning of a very lengthy illness and could not hold a steady job, the house was sold and much of the money from the sale of the house was used for living expenses.

There was a lost feeling when my school days were over. Irma was accepted at Rice Institute. Emelia did not plan to go to college, and I would have preferred it if my parents would have been financially able to send me. I spent one day in law school, but when I realized what just the books would cost, I put it out of my mind.



Elsie at work at Star Engraving Company

At this time my father was forty-three years old, but he had been sick all summer. He could not hold a job. My mother went to work in an overall factory about this time. This was very difficult for me to accept. No woman in the Falke or Teinert family worked outside of their

home. I would go to church on Sundays, but as soon as it was over I rushed out of church. I avoided all my friend in my church except Bessie.

My cousin, Martha Teinert worked in the same department with me at Star Engraving Company. We did the enameling of High School and College rings. This was the busy season. Twice a week we worked over time, the men worked five evenings a week. At first I was not very impressed with my job. I thought it was too strenuous for my eyes. Soon after a certain young man started working in the jewelry department, it appeared my eyes quit hurting.

One morning when I went to work in the enameling department, the girls that worked with me were very excited about something that happened the night before. That night had not been my night to work. The girls told me about the young man that recently came to work in the jewelry department, he was asking all kinds of questions about me. He wanted to know if I had a steady boy friend. Who was the man that picked me up on the nights I worked late? That Man was my father! I was interested enough to ask which man. There had been two young men that started about a month after I came. I said "I like the other one better".

Since I knew Walter Penk wanted to meet me I ignored him. Was it because I was a bit shy or was I afraid if I talked to him that my colleagues would think I was too bold? Probably some of both. When rings had to be sent to the office, Christine, the head of the enameling department usually sent me. This meant I had to pass Walter's bench where he worked. I always turned my head as I passed near him.

Fortunately I did not know Walter had told all the jewelers that he was going to marry me some day. At that time we were both eighteen years old. When Walter told the men about marrying me they told him, "Why she won't even talk to you, much less would she marry you".



Elsie at Age 18-19 years old

Christine tried to hasten our getting acquainted with each other. She sent me with a large quantity of rings to be pickled. That means the rings must be placed in a dipper of sulfuric acid, then let them stand awhile, then wash them with water. This pickling was done a few feet across from where Walter's work bench was located. I hesitated. It was impossible to get all the rings in one dipper. Walter saw me hesitate, and all the men in the jewelry department stopped working.

Before this time, on each occasion that I passed Walter, the men would sing "I love you truly" or "All for Love". This time there was complete silence.

Walter walked over to me to ask if I needed some help. I told them I could not get all the rings in one dipper, and I did not know what to do. He replied "Why don't you use two dippers?" Then he proceeded to do my work for me as I silently watched.

At five o'clock that evening he walked me to the street car line, and stayed until the street car came. Then he walked back to his work.

Just before Thanksgiving he asked me to have a date on the coming holiday which I accepted. He also asked me if I could get a date for Johnny. Johnny was "the other one", the one I referred to when I said I like the other one better. Since my cousin Ruth Lehman would be in Houston from Giddings, she was the girl I introduced to Johnny.

The young men arrived in the afternoon, Thanksgiving day. My parents were cordial to them as well as my brothers. After a little while we went to a movie in town. We had a nice dinner in town, and the waiters seemed to enjoy coming to our table, treating us as someone special. Then we attended a play which was the most important part of our day. We all were four happy young people.

Christmas was the next time we could get together. My best friend Bessie Reglein, was substituted for Ruth. Walter gave me a beautiful silver compact that had a small perfume container built in. There also was an expensive grade of perfume in the container.

The day after Christmas, Walter did not come in to work. Johnny and I were puzzled because he appeared well when we last saw him. The phone rang for Johnny; he came to tell me Walter was in the hospital. He had an appendix operation.

At noon time Johnny and I went to visit Walter at the hospital. Here I met his mother for the first time. She was a beautiful young woman, friendly and cordial.

I could not understand the big amused smile of the nurses each time one looked at me. All on this floor appeared as if they wanted to laugh.

It was a long time later before I found the reason for the nurse's amusement. There was a popular song at this time with words "Just Molly and me and baby makes three". As Walter was being put to sleep for surgery, he was singing the song, but substituted the name Elsie for Molly. The song was "My Blue Heaven" which I later would play on the piano.

In January the Liederkrantz had their costume ball. Johnny and Walter invited me to the dance. With my father not being able to work, and my mother's small salary, a costume was a big thing to worry about. Fortunately my mother was gifted in sewing and always in earlier years I wore beautiful dresses. Even now my clothes were nice. Walter claimed it was the beautiful red plaid I wore to work one day which attracted him to me.

The two young men came in very nice rented corduroy suits. I had a glimpse of them and ran into my room and told my mother I was not going. My gypsy costume was home-made. Mother assured me my costume was beautiful.

The boys stared at me in delight and once more I felt better. When we got to the Liederkrantz, Walter asked me to dance with him. I told him I did not know how to dance.

Walter left me with Johnny and then walked to his mother and danced with her. Johnny said, "You don't know how to dance, and neither do I, so let's dance." When the dance was over Walter claimed the next dance. It was a fun night. Oh yes, once a little bit older man told me I was the prettiest girl in the crowd.

Not much later Johnny left for San Antonio to join the army. This was a surprise to me. Later Walter told me that Johnny was in love with me, but he realized I was Walter's girl friend. We never saw Johnny again. Some one told us Johnny was in a fight. Later we heard Johnny was in Fort Leavenworth Penitentiary. Since Walter's letter writing in English was not as he wished it to be, he asked me to write to Leavenworth. I did write as I knew Walter had only been in this country three years or more. I got an answer that there was no one named Johnny K.

Walter occasionally talked about his early life in Berlin. One story impressed me the most. After World War I was over, the revolution in Berlin made a serious shortage of food and other needs. One day Walter and his older cousin walked to the railroad track hoping to pick up some coal which might have dropped from a passing train.

Suddenly there was a lot of firing. The revolutionists were near. His grandmother was frantically hunting for her grand-son and the cousin. Walter saw his cousin's head shot off.

Walter and I continued to date. I know I was not very well accepted by his mother and step-father because Mr. D---- and Walter's step-father Mr. Kirsch planned that Walter and Mr. D---'s daughter were to be married as soon as they were old enough. Mr. D was a very wealth man and he had plans to put Walter into business. Therefore my feelings to the Kirsch's was not very good.

My father was a sickly man, and there was no hope of improved health. He had creeping paralysis; he would always need help financially. My mother went to work. No Falke woman ever worked publicly and it was very heart breaking to me. Even in 1930 women still did not work out of the home. I realized Mr. and Mrs. Kirsch were right in their belief if Walter married me that it could very easily happen that he would need to help take care of my father.

There were times because of the excruciating painful attacks he would have that he could not do anything. I was a very proud girl, I had almost everything I wanted. My parents did a lot of church work. My mother helped when the lunch room was established; she volunteered to work once a week there.

Perhaps this helped me to fall in love with Walter, because his mother worked. I felt comfortable with him. He was not a church member, his parents did not allow him to attend church. I did not feel inferior to him. At least we never accepted charity. We just did without luxuries. There was a great deal of love in our family and that sustained us, and the comfort when we read the Bible.

In March 1930 Walter left his home to go to Chicago because his parents did not approve of his seeing me. He asked me if I would wait for him. The north felt the depression earlier than the south, which made it difficult for Walter to find work. Actually he had a very rough time in the large city with no one to help him.

Walter's mother was very ill with malaria when I went to their home. Mr. Kirsch asked me if I would stay with his wife at nights while he was gone to Chicago. (He had found out about Walter's situation and went to Chicago to bring him back home) He decided to take the night train. I even helped him get ready by ironing a shirt or two for him. He wanted his step-son home because of his mother and it also helped him to have a short visit with a dear cousin of his Wanda Schmidt and her husband Alex Schmidt. His reunion with his cousin, whose parents had reared Mr. Kirsch while he was young because of

the death of his parents, was a happy one. Walter also consented to go back home with him.

The depression was beginning to hurt in the south too, but in September 1930 the Star called Walter to come back to work. It was with less pay, but he had an income. In November his mother divorced Kirsch. I felt sorry for him because I think he really loved her.

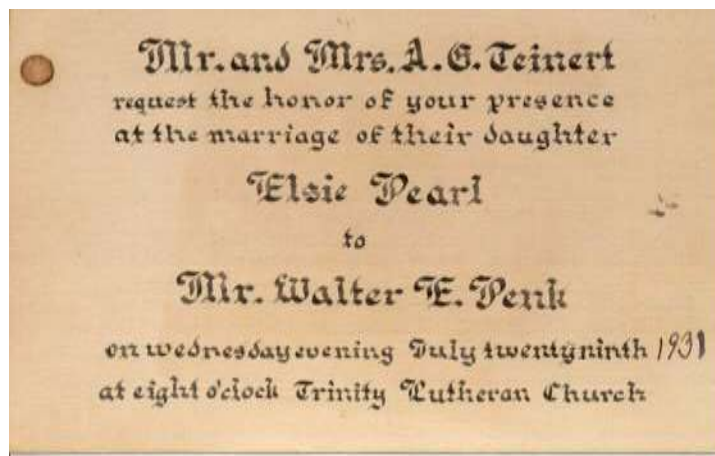
In June 1931 Walter's mother married John Smith, an American and friend of the family. She had heard American men were good to their wives and John probably would have been a good husband if the depression had not been so severe. John was an excellent painter and paper hanger, he had done this type of work at the Warwick Hotel. Now there was only occasionally a job. Then there was Jucille, John's daughter age about twelve, not loved by the new Mrs. Smith. Some months later I asked Walter's mother how long did this last? She replied "one week."

Walter and I dated over the years before we got married. To be exact it was three years and eight months. We were only eighteen when we met. We became engaged Christmas day 1930. My Christmas gift from him was a watch. The engagement ring had a larger diamond than most young bride-to-be received in these depression years. Walter's mother gave Walter the diamond she had brought along from Germany.

A few friends came over for a small celebration. The Sterlings were very close friends of my family. Mrs. Sterling and my mother knew each other when they lived in Warda and Giddings. We planned to get married the next Christmas.

Late in June, Walter came over to my home to tell me that we were getting married this year in July. I could choose whatever day I wanted. This was a shock so I said I could not possibly be ready for a church wedding that soon. He claimed "It is July or never." Finally I said I will just buy a nice suit and accessories.

When Walter left I told my parents about the wedding plans. She exclaimed I was the only girl in the family and it must be a church wedding. The next day Walter and I talked on the telephone. His mother told him he was the only child she had and she expected a church wedding.



The Calligraphy for the invitation was done by hand by Roy Teinert, Elsie's older brother.

