

Words from a 'Pioneer Lady'

"I so regard myself as one of the 'Last of the Pioneer Ladies,'" Martha Gutensohn was saying, "partly because of where I was born, and partly because of where I lived later."

Martha is my mother-in-law. We were just sitting around yesterday, drinking coffee and talking. It was her 82nd birthday.

She spent her first five years in Port Washington, Ohio, where "the big events were the gypsies and the tramps coming through." Her father was a Moravian

parsonage in North Dakota, Colorado, Missouri, Iowa and Wisconsin. After Sam died in 1950 — "almost 30 years ago and that's longer than we were married" — she went back to teaching school for another 15 years.

Despite all those ministers in the family she doesn't think of herself as a "religious" person.

"I'm not pious," she insists. "All those years have given me a strong, basic faith in Life. In People. And in the Possibility of

Footloose



Press Connection photo by Tom Riles

Youth and fishing mix well in Door County.

North Country Notebook OCT 25 1979 By George Vukelich

minister here and they had a horse and surrey "to see the neighbors." They also had the Ohio Canal for skating when it was cold enough.

In 1902, the family moved to Ephraim, Wis., and Martha's sister, Katharine, remains in Door County to this day a lifelong resident of Sturgeon Bay.

In the autumn of 1902, Martha recalls, there was only one summer cottage in all of Ephraim, no hotels and she doubts if there were "a hundred people" in the whole countyside. That was the year they started building the first structure of what would eventually become The Anderson Hotel.

Good."

She thinks she was influenced more by Ephraim than any other place.

"The people there," she says, "gave you a feeling of love and a real desire for education."

But Colorado left a profound impression too.

"On the Western Slope, in the 1920s," she remembers, "Sam and I met people who were fleeced in a land scheme and they stayed right there and put their lives together. They had lost all their money and yet they stayed and worked it out."

The lesson of Colorado was: When hardship comes, meet it head on. It will make you

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Martha Gutensohn

"It was a wonderful place for a child," she says. "The beach was as free as the air. Life was primitive. The parsonage was next to the Anderson Hotel and we shared a two-handled pump for water between us."

They had a wood stove. An outdoor privy.

"I didn't have an inside toilet," she laughs, "until I got to Colorado. That was in 1923. I was 26 then."

She was married by then, to a young man named Sam, who was also a minister. As a matter of fact, their only son became a minister — "for a little while" — before he wound up in Massachusetts state government.

Her life with Sam took them to

stronger.

Martha has come from the pioneer life to boarding jets to visit her scattered children. And 10 grandchildren. She doesn't presume to advise any of them.

"I think it's tougher for young people to grow up today than it was so long ago in Ephraim. And having made so many mistakes in my own life, I say only this to young people: Make your own mistakes but don't let those mistakes get you down."

She sits erect, her hands folded, like every teacher you've ever known.

"I also tell them," she says primly, "that I've learned not to worry because the things that you worry about don't happen. Other things happen."