

Sarah Rockenbach

Sarah Louise Rockenbach was born in rural Libertyville Township, Nov. 30, 1918, to Almon and Elizabeth Catlow Rockenbach. She was born in the home of Mrs. Smith, the local midwife. She was raised along with her thirteen siblings on a farm on Half Day Road. Across the street was Tripp School—a one room school of 8 grades where all of the children attended and made up most of the student body of 20 or so students. Sarah relayed that she suspected that once the 14 children were hustled off to school, her mother sat down to recuperate. She also recalled how just before lunch time at school, one of the kids would be sent across the street to retrieve lunches for all. She said life revolved around tending to the cows. If there was a social at the church or at school, they had to wait to go after the cows were milked. If there was a family reunion in Deerfield, they had to be home in time to complete the farm chores. Corn, clover, and wheat were the primary crops. Sarah said she and Lyle were sent out to pull weeds but that she must have pulled the good plants instead because she wasn't sent very often. Her chores also include riding the horse with her brother Rodney after school to bring in the cows.

In 1927, finding the family ready to move off the farm, Almon and Elizabeth loaded the kids up in their one small horse drawn wagon and an old Chevy truck, and moved them all to Crystal Lake. The house into which they moved still stands on the corner of Rockland Avenue and Route 14. This move was just prior to the Depression Era. Just after the Depression hit, Ma and Pa Rockenbach called all of the family together and told them that they had a choice to make. They could either go back to the farm as the people who bought the farm were not able to make the payments OR all of the kids could go to work. The family chose to stay in Crystal Lake. Sarah decision meant that she went to work for the Scoville family cleaning, babysitting, and baking. She was in fifth grade at the time, but recalled having to bake a peach pie for the family every day. She very tactfully recounted how the Scoville's daughter Crystal and she were pretty good friends, but that Crystal was lazy and never did a lick of work and was terribly spoiled. (Evidently being an only child looked pretty good from the viewpoint of someone who was one of fourteen.)

Sarah's remembrances of these years seemed to revolve around going swimming in Crystal Lake. She talked about hurrying to get chores done on a summer day so that right after lunch the whole crew could walk to Crystal Lake to swim, the older kids being in charge of the younger. Sarah also told about Grandpa Joe Catlow in Barrington buying a big hall and showing movies. This was the first movie theater in the area (which became eventually the Catlow Theater which still is in operation in Barrington) and she remembered all of the kids were taken there once in a while and dropped off for a free movie.

She remembered that some of the older kids had not made the move to Crystal Lake. For instance, brother Bob had opened a garage in Grayslake. That garage eventually became a car dealership known as Rockenbach Chevrolet. Ruth, Shirley, Elizabeth and Mary (maybe due to the fact that their mother had been a midwife) all attended nursing school. Sarah took great pride in noting that all 14 of the Rockenbach siblings graduated high school. After high school she got a job at the telephone company. She remembered taking the car to buy the groceries or run errands for Ma Rockenbach who never learned to drive because she was not "mechanically inclined" and because she had so much to do in the house with all of those kids.

Sarah told about how because the farm was on Route 14, they had lots of traffic and people coming by from Chicago on their way to the lake and to the golf course. She told how Woodstock boys would sometimes hitchhike to Crystal Lake and would stop at the end of the lane to be picked up to be caddies. Her mother would sometimes send her and Dory down to give the boys food or water, and one day she met Melvin Belcher there. They married in 1940.

Sarah and Melvin lived together in Woodstock until he went off to serve in the Navy in WWII. While he was gone, she lived in Chicago with Dory and Elizabeth, and worked with Dory at the Art Institute in the dining room. After the war and Melvin's return, they began raising a family while he worked at Belcher Brother's general store on Main Street. Sarah was a homemaker and mom to Alan, Lynn, and Dena. She also helped out in the family store and became very active in the Free Methodist Church.

Sarah's religion was very important to her. She worked diligently teaching Sunday School, working in the Missionary Society, helping with church socials, and later running neighborhood vacation Bible schools. Her grandchildren will tell you that they were required to learn Bible verses each time they stayed at Sarah's house, but she sweetened the deal by letting them pick a prize from the prize box if they did so. Sarah was not above a little bribery, or according to Alan, maybe a little arm twisting.

Sarah loved gardening, walking, bird watching and traveling. She was very close to her family and could spend hours on the phone talking to her sisters whom she loved very much. She was a loving grandmother to Shane, Danielle, Phaedra, Aaron, Adair and Steven.

Sarah was greatly loved by her family and was the last surviving sibling of the Rockenbachs. She is greatly missed.