

Early Childhood Recollections
By Lillian Klein

I was a nurse at age 3 ½. During World War I. I wore a white Red Cross headscarf and imagined that I was a nurse as I tended my little doll in her buggy.

A short time later, Mother became very ill and had to have a kidney removed. Her surgeon was Dr. John Kellogg. His family was famous for the Kellogg cereal company in Battle Creek. He predicted that Mother would have a long recovery so Dad took my sister Eleanor and me to my great aunt who lived in Des Moines, Iowa. Mother lived with her family before she got married and they were very close.

We were two little children among all the adults and got a lot of attention and care. Eleanor was a toddler and both of us had to take naps every afternoon. Eleanor had a cradle that was cranked up with a handle and would rock her to sleep. One day I got a new pair of patent leather baby doll shoes. Aunt Helen said I could put them on after my nap. Within 10 minutes I came downstairs wearing my new shoes. She said I had not napped yet but I told her that I had slept a very long time. She smiled and let me stay up to admire my beautiful shoes. Another day her daughter Flo took me to the movies. One scene showed a dead man in a casket. For many nights I had nightmares and Flo got a real scolding. It affected me for many years. I would not view a corpse until after I became an adult.

After 8 months, my parents came for us and I didn't recognize them. Remember Mother holding out her arms and I didn't want to go to her. Now I wonder how she must have felt?

Before going to Des Moines, I could only speak Hungarian and now I knew only English. However, every Saturday we would go to visit Grandpa Gunsberg. He was a real patriarch and respected by young and old alike. I was a little in awe of him as he sat in a big chair with a black pillbox cap on his head, a small white beard and holding a long Turkish pipe. After Sabbath was over, we would line up according to age, and he would put his hands on our head and bless each of us. At Grandpa's Hungarian was spoken so it became familiar to me again but now English was easier.

My childhood may have been a little different from most but I learned a lot of niceties that made my life more pleasant and helpful over the years.