

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



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### “Up Home” — 1948

Besides the first day of October, when I expected birthday presents to be put ceremoniously at the foot of my youth bed (my birthday was the sixteenth but the *month* was right—the most important thing in the mind of a soon-to-be-four year old!), the day most Brighton and Green Oak kids I knew looked forward to most was the Fourth of July. That was when the carnival came to town and fireworks exploded in the night sky above Sloan Memorial Field. Before the carnival moved to the empty lots next to the town Chevrolet dealership, where it neither had the allure nor the excitement of its previous location, in the late 1940s and early 50s it was held on Main Street, which had been totally vacated. Barkers, colorful Roma, booths with tantalizing, exotic foods and rides took the place of gray and black Fords and Chevys. I begged and pleaded for days to know exactly when the carnival would be in front of Paul DeLuca’s store or Aunt Emma’s bank.

When the farm chores and dinner dishes were finally done we climbed into the green ‘41 Chevy sedan Dad had bought from my Uncle Carl Westin in Fowlerville. Dad drove—far too slowly—down Rickett Road to find a parking spot blocks away from downtown, likely as far as Aunt Maria’s home out West Main. It’s hard to know who enjoyed the banter and excitement more, my brother and I or our parents. They took their turn riding on the merry-go-round and other kiddy rides with us and, as we got older, the Ferris wheel. Far too soon it was time to go “*up home*” for a rest before going to Sloan Field at the high school for the second major attraction of the day.

“*Up home*” was my mother’s mother’s 19th century farmhouse on North Second Street, just a block west of Grand River. I remember it well because of the special persons who lived there. Amanda Westin’s cozy old-fashioned kitchen with a black cook stove in the center was the meeting place for a large family circle that included nieces, nephews and life-long friends, many of whom had emigrated from Sweden like my grandparents. In the war years, Grandma often shared things about the war in her native language that she did not want my brother’s small ears to hear. Even though I was very young, I remember her distinctive Scandinavian accent. Until I was six my parents and Mrs.

Chappel, my first teacher in school, could not coax me into pronouncing words like every other little kid in the neighborhood. I liked to make myself comfortable in an overstuffed “shair” in our warm sun-room during the winter rather than plop down on the hard bottomed “chair” with no cushion in the old dining room. Sunday dinner’s roast “shicken” with mashed potatoes, stuffing and a thick piece of juicy breast was far more appetizing than the leg or thigh of the stewed “chicken” with boiled potatoes that Mom sometimes served for supper on week-day evenings.

Eddie and I were the center of the universe “*up home*.” Grandma kept my toys and some of her treasured mementos from her home on the southwest coast of Sweden in a basket of wonders that she always brought out for me to play with on her hardwood dining room floor. She all but weaned me on strong percolator coffee that had been richly whitened with fresh cream, served with one of her special Swedish pastries and two or three coffee bean candies. After our arrival, Mom’s sister, Aunt Emma, dressed leisurely in a work smock after a long day with Brighton State Bank examiners, inevitably descended down dark, rickety stairs into the tomb-like basement, where our uncle teased us that the biblical Moses lived, then emerged with two cans of tuna fish for sandwiches to go with our special treats, O’Henry candy bars. While I contented myself with uncovering new treasures in Grandma’s basket, Eddie had complete freedom to be inventive rummaging around Grandfather Westin’s old gray barn that stood next to the garage. More than likely both of us would be spoiled with the latest toy from “Aunt” Arbor, my brother’s pet word for the big city where my aunt typically shopped on a day off from the bank.

*Excerpt taken with permission from Paul Weber’s upcoming book, “remarkably Brighton: Still in Touch.”*