

A Remembrance: For Robert Emmet Lyons, Uncle Bob
The Story Teller

-by Nona Lyons

It was his voice that first caught your attention--
the cadence carried the deep timbre of his voice.
It held you there. Then caught you up in some story and you listened.
You really wanted to listen -

Sometimes there were morals to these stories.
Sometimes not.

The most dramatic ones were family tales.
Told direct. Spare stories-- stark.
Like the story of the family farm;
lost in the depression for want of money that couldn't be raised;
Lost for a farm remortgaged--
a fortune then--a fortune lost to fate.

There were stories too of earlier migrations:
Not just out of Ireland,
But across Iowa, Dakota -- to
Badus, Carthage, Wagner.
Of people seeking, who knew what;
Of ploughing up the plains, of life in modest claim shanties, of chancing it.
But always of love and hope nurturing higher ambitions.

And there were great achievements, he knew well.
Recited whenever he could, if even in a quiet way.
Of Lyons' who helped write the South Dakota Constitution,
--Build a bell tower at the University;
--Serve in the legislature;
--Work for the election of presidents; or governors.

Some stories were tragic ones,
etched it seemed forever in his mind's eye.
Held there as some essential
human experience one dared not to forget:
 --mostly women's stories:
 --of a mother holding a dying child;
 --of a burial on a moonlit plain;
 --of quiet sorrows, silent keenings
reverberating forever in one's heart.
Uncle Bob telling and re-telling them, lest he forget.

Other tales were of politics,
of his own experiences--
But not always of the loud issues of the day.
These were of smaller deeds, kitchen table deeds:
Of how to see the land and its people as community,
keep a community,
Whether by serving on a committee for an educational tv
tower,
Or keeping up a country cemetery.

Woven together, these stories cloaked a life-- Uncle Bob's.
To us listeners they are his heritage,
One mingling forever with the stories we have yet to tell
or to create. A treasured heritage.

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