

Every now and then I open the filing cabinet and go to a particular folder that has some unconnected items that are interesting to me. This morning I took out my mother's autograph book, an item that is surely an unknown entity to most people today. Over the years, though, there have been periods of time when autograph books were popular. I believe the custom has a related practice today, too, when high school graduating seniors "sign" yearbooks, often writing messages. But, perhaps, in the age of social media, that, also, has disappeared.

My mother's old autograph book is interesting, anyway, at least, to me. It has fake leather covers and is six inches wide and four and a half inches up and down. The covers were a deep red, but they have faded over 90 years to a reddish-brown. On the front, in flowing script, is the word "Autographs." The book may have been bound together with a leather or ribbon thong that connected the three eyelets in the left side of the book, but a black shoestring has fulfilled that duty as long as I can remember.

The pages in the book, about 50 in the beginning, I believe, were various pastels—yellow, blue, pink, and green. They, too, have faded somewhat. And, many, though all have readable messages, were defaced by indulged children (maybe my brother and sister, too, but probably, just me). I couldn't leave paper alone, even when I was little.

But, still, the messages are what make the book so fascinating to me. They span mostly a couple of years—Frances was a high school senior in 1930-31, and the next year, when she was attending the teacher training school called County Normal that turned young people—mostly women—into teachers to work in the one-room country schools.

Many of the names in the book are familiar to me, and some I have known personally. But, what the other young people wrote revealed the slang of the era, the customs, the culture, and perhaps, a bit of innocence, something all of us today could do well to have.

Some were serious. Roberta Smith wrote: "May there be just enough clouds in your life to cause a glorious sunset." Bessie Thompson's message was: "May your joys be as deep as the ocean/And your sorrows as light as its foam." And Vivian Roggow wrote: "Could one paint a picture of wishes?/Well, then, without more adieu/What a picture of life long happiness/My wishes would paint for you."

Others penned humorous messages: Mary Hierell, a second or third cousin who grew up next door to Frances, wrote: "By hook or by crook, I'll be the first one to write in your book." From Dorothy Johnson: "Byers is your name/ Single is your station/But happy be the little man/That makes the alteration." Elvera Carlson wrote: "When Cupid shoots his arrows/I hope he Mrs. you." Violet Myers penned: "Crackers are dry,/Without cheese;/So is a kiss,/Without a squeeze."

Advice was present in some of the entries, too: Mickey, a friend at Osceola County Normal, wrote: "Love many/ Trust few./ Always paddle/Your own canoe." From Bess Stang: "Smile awhile, and as you smile, others smile, and soon there are miles and miles of smiles, and life's worthwhile because you

smiled.” Another Frances wrote: “Don’t be sharp/Don’t be flat/Just be natural.” This entry was illustrated by the musical symbols for the words.

Many of the messages showed the society of the 1930s. Some understanding of the automobiles of the day can be gleaned from the entry written by one of my mother’s best friends, Mary Updike: “As you climb the hills of the coming years/May you travel in high and never shift gears,/ With plenty of spark and never a knock/And a joy-filling station on every block.” Hilda Johnson gave advice that might puzzle girls today: “When you are bending over the wash tub/Think of me before you rub.” And Stan Johnson wrote: “In your woodbox of memories, drop a chip for me.”

Some of my mother’s brothers—there were eight of them—wrote in her autograph book, too. John wrote this: “Dear Sister: Twas midnight on the back porch, their lips were tightly pressed; the old man gave the signal, and the bulldog did the rest.” And Lester had this message: “Flowers may wither/Loved ones may die/Friends may forget you/But never shall I.”

One page, this one a pale blue/ is folded so that the message is hidden. On the part that is visible are the words: “For girls only. “ Unfold the page and read: “Ain’t men curious?”

That is one of two entries that were later than the others. The other one was this: “Joy or sorrow, which ever may come; Just keep on a smiling, and think of your Bum.” It is dated March 11, 1934 and is signed, “Einar.” That was my father, and just over two months later, when Burdell Number 7 school closed for the summer, Einar and Frances drove away and were married.