

On Being a Fienning  
Edith Fienning Morris Croake  
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I used to prepare for Grandpa's squeezing hug. When we had just arrived in Richmond and Grandpa was approaching, I would take a deep breath so I wouldn't get squashed. I smile looking back on his "Fienning Hug." I was warmly welcomed at any "Fienning" home—in Richmond, at Wayne Lakes, around the country. (Mom encouraged me to stay connected. "You're driving to Janesville? Remember to stop at the Des Plaines Oasis and call Aunt Ruth. And I did.) When I was young, I didn't appreciate how unusual it is to be loved by your extended family. I still experience this, and know I am fortunate .

Grandma and Grandpa's home at 1011 South 8<sup>th</sup> Street was a great place to play hide-and-seek. Grandchildren were able to explore just about anywhere in this generously sized house (much of which Grandpa built). I remember the large closet in the TV/sewing/birthing room, the grape arbor next to the swing, behind the glider on the front porch, crouched next to the piano in the living room, in the rain barrel storage closet and other nooks in the attic. It was fun to play in this house and run around outside.

Grandma let me "help" her bake. Her cherry and apple pies were delicious. She supervised while I made an apple pie. When she had a bite, she declared: "I've never tasted any better." She also "let" me clean her deep, wide, and numerous kitchen cupboards.

The family gathered around the kitchen table for meals and for visiting. Everyone was welcome, including Uncle Paul. I was a little afraid of Uncle Paul, but I could tell he was pleased to be there. Mom told us: "Never forget your Uncle Paul." Near bedtime, Grandma and Grandpa would come to the kitchen table and have coffee and ice cream. Others present could have ice cream too, and I tried not to miss a single night.

I liked going for walks with Grandpa. He would stop and have pleasant—and often lengthy—conversations with neighbors who were in their yards or sitting on their porches.

When I was 13, Grandpa told me I was a good enough at taking care of a house that I could get married. "But I'm not ready, Grandpa!"

Throughout the years, good times and bad, it was clear to me it meant a lot to my mother to be with our Fienning family. I'm glad she had that time.

But it wasn't just because of her that I have treasured memories of the Fiennings. I have been grateful to be at Fienning gatherings such as weddings,

funerals, worship services, birthdays, picnics, being shown someone's home, or slides from a trip. Reunions were especially memorable-- sleeping toe to toe with cousins in the attic, searching for fossils in the blue clay of a cold water stream, organizing—with my cousins' outstanding help-- my parents' 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration, presenting the hilarious skit of "Prinderella and the Since" at the FF Talent Show. The audience laughed so hard that night that I had to stop sometimes because I was laughing too hard to continue. Another important memory is when, finally it was my turn to "help" at the grocery.

I feel connected to the family history. The Fienning and Von Pein families chose to live in the community of Germans here in Richmond when they emigrated to the USA. (They knew some of them earlier in Osnabruck, Germany.) They worked very hard and were people of integrity and faith. They helped each other as best they could. When tragedy struck, (for example, when Grandpa's father, John Heinrich, died when they had been in the US only six months or when Frances died during the flu epidemic of 1917), they relied on family and friends for support. The women were strong even when they had to leave their birth families or be a single parent. It seems to me that adversity did not extinguish their concern for one another but intensified their understanding about why this caring is so important.

I remain immensely grateful for the support the Fienning family provided to me throughout the last illnesses and deaths of my husband, Dick, my twin brother, Frank, my mother, Edith, and my father, Vern. Now the Fiennings are the largest reservoir of memories about them.

Being a Fienning has taught me about unconditional love. Yes, there are differences, hurts, mistakes. But these things do not alter that you respect each one, empathize with their joys and sorrows, hold them in your heart, and wish them well. It is an honor to be a Fienning.

Lovingly,

Edie

Edith Croake

## Hand Me Downs

Every August, Mom would take my twin brother, Frank, and me on the trolley to the Stix, Barr, & Fuller Department Store, in downtown St. Louis, to get underwear, socks, and shoes. Most of our clothes came in a cardboard box delivered by the mailman. Aunt Ruth in Chicago sent the clothes her children, Gene and Sandy, several years older, had outgrown. Our too-small clothes were sent to cousin Dana in Oklahoma, two years younger.

It was an exciting day when such a box arrived. We would open it right there in the living room, take off what we had on, and try on the clothes inside. Some of the pants, shirts, sweaters would fit Frank, and some would fit me. We would carry away our pile of "new" clothes with pride and put them away.

When I was four, my Boston Grammie sent me a beautiful pastel yellow dress with smocking imbedded with little flowers on the top, a deep hem, and a generous sash that tied in back. I loved it! I wore it to church and whenever I could. It was so much fun to twirl in it and see the skirt balloon with air. I felt so pretty wearing it! I wore it the day the school photographer took our kindergarten picture in the fall of 1945.

Then came the terrible day when I was supposed to give the dress to Dana. It was folded on our closet shelf because I had outgrown it. Dana and her family were visiting us, and I saw my mother give it to Aunt Rosamond. I cried. Mom said: "You're too big to wear it anymore. Dana will get a lot of use out of it." I bawled some more. Dad said: "You're a big girl now. Stop crying!"

My body shook with dry sobs as we drove to the Union Railroad Station. When we were standing on the platform, steam washed over us as the train pulled away. I broke down and sobbed out loud as we waved to Dana and her family through the train window. I cried when I saw the photograph of Dana wearing **my** dress on her first day of school.

Twenty years later at a family reunion, Aunt Rosamond approached me with a box about the size of a dinner plate. I opened it and found my beloved yellow dress, albeit faded now.

Aunt Rosamond said: "You probably don't remember this, Edie, but you were so upset when you had to give your beautiful yellow dress to Dana that I promised you I would bring it back to you. Here it is."

Tears came to my eyes. I hugged her right there in the asphalt parking lot of the Holiday Inn in Richmond, Indiana.