

Girl Shoes

Brother Placid Gross, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, North Dakota, April 2021

I want to share a memory from my childhood. This incident happened when I was about 10 or 8 or maybe I even was as old as 12. During the war years many things were rationed which included such things as sugar, coffee, gasoline, tires, shoes, and many other things. During the summer we went barefoot most of the time and otherwise I mostly wore hand me down, ill-fitting and “well broken in,” shoes from my older brothers. When the shoes had a hole in the bottom of the sole we sometimes cut a piece of hard paper, such as cardboard-if we could find some, and put that into the shoe. That smooth surface felt so good on the feet, but the paper did not last longer than about two days.

One day Uncle Andrew was in Napoleon where he saw a pair of shoes that were available to buy for a very small price. He thought possibly the shoes would fit his daughter Julia. When he got home the shoes were too small for Julia. So, the Werner family brought the shoes to our place thinking that our Anna Marie, who is a little younger than Julia, might be able to wear them. As it turned out the shoes were too small for Anna Marie also. So, mother gave me the shoes to try on and they fit perfectly. They were new so they would now be my “church” shoes. A few days later I wore my good brown shoes to “Deutsche Schule” (German School.)

At that time our summer Catechism School still was called “Deutsche Schule.” That title still went back to the days when Catechism lessons were taught in German. The lessons had switched from German to English about four years before I started school. However, during recess all the games still went in German. Talking our “Deutsch” dialect was fun because we were not punished like we were in the regular school if we spoke as much as one word in German.

On the first day of me wearing my new shoes to “Deutsche Schule,” during the noon recess, one of the boys noticed that I was not wearing my old shoes. Then he took a second look, and hollered “MADEL SCHUH!” (GIRL SHOES!) Then all the boys came and looked at my girl shoes, and laughed. Up to that point I did not know that there were “girl shoes” and “boy shoes.” I had thought that all shoes were made for walking. I was being bullied. But I did not realize that I was being bullied. I had new shoes and they fit my feet. So HA, HA, HA!