

# Niehaus Family Newsletter

Indianapolis, Indiana

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Editor: Nancy Niehaus Hurley

## Family Memories of Jane Stull Hickman



(A few Niehaus Cousins: L to R, Norris Niehaus, Charlotte Niehaus Baxter, Jane Stull Hickman, Larry Niehaus, Alberta Stull Hickman, Marie Kirn Dellassandra, Gert Niehaus Isom)

At last year's reunion Janie Hickman reminisced as she identified Niehaus family members in the 1939 photo: "These people are my childhood. We had such wonderful aunts and uncles. Any of us could go to any of their houses at any time and it was just like home." I knew at that moment I wanted to hear more of her memories. So I asked her if she would be willing to talk with me sometime. Of course, she said, "Call anytime." I enjoyed so much our recent talk about her memories of growing up in the Niehaus/Stull family. And I'm happy to be able to share a bit of the story with you here.

Background: Jane Stull Hickman is the daughter of Albert and Josephine "Feenie" (Niehaus) Stull. She is one of nine siblings and has given me permission to give her birth date of August 18, 1919. Yes, she is celebrating her 90<sup>th</sup> this year. Be sure to give her a hug and good wishes.

Because of timing and distance, Janie didn't know her grandparents. But she does remember her mother, Josephine talking about her father, Joseph Niehaus, having quite a challenge raising so many children when their mother died. There were nine children between 19 and 2 years old living at home on South West Street in Indianapolis when Gertrude died at 48 years old. Janie's mother, Josephine (Feenie), was 15. How sad for all of them, especially a teenaged girl.

A few years and bumps down the road Feenie married Al Stull, Janie's father. But first, Al had an adventurous youth. Janie recalled her father talking about how he left his home in

Kentucky at an early age to see the world. "He hopped freight trains, stopping at farm houses to get food, and then moving along to see someplace new. "But then," she quoted Al as saying, "I met Feenie and she straightened me out." Janie went on to tell how, "The family would kid each other if they wanted to say that a man was henpecked by calling him 'Al.'" "Mom watched every penny. She refused to give him extra money. She made Dad home-brewed beer in the basement. And she also made root beer for all the kids." "But my dad loved her so much. He was always hugging and kissing on her. They had a wonderful relationship." Feenie and Al were married 37 years and raised nine children.

Janie's childhood is remembered fondly. She grew up in a close community of family and friends. Aunts, uncles and cousins were her neighbors on Habig Lane, off South Meridian Street and in the surrounding area of Indianapolis. And there were close relationships with friends on her street as well. She remembers: "We all played euchre and canasta. There were all kinds of good times." In fact, one of her neighborhood relationships was especially significant. In 1940, when Janie was 21, she married one of her childhood friends from across the street, Gilbert 'Kemo' Hickman. They made their own family home on Habig Lane, in Aunt Mandy's former home, next to the Stulls and across from the Hickmans. Traditions brought Niehaus family members to the neighborhood often. It's obvious that there was a welcoming atmosphere.

Janie stated: "I remember Mom and her sisters and brothers playing euchre all the time. They went from one house to another, taking turns." In fact one of Janie's favorite pass times to this day is euchre. She and a group of friends from her church play every other Sunday afternoon.

Janie is also keeping busy by volunteering at the St. Francis Mooresville Hospital. It's close to home for her now. She enjoys living with her daughter and son-in-law, Libby and Kieran O'Connor at their Willowfield Lavender Farm in Mooresville. She not only has beautiful surroundings but she can lend them a hand with special events. Stop in some time at this lovely southern Indiana spot. ([www.willowfieldlavender.com](http://www.willowfieldlavender.com))

Thanks, Janie, for sharing your memories.

## Gerhardt John: The Eldest Child

Imagine the feelings of an eleven-year-old boy leaving not only his hometown but moving to a country across the ocean, never to return. In 1885 Gerhardt John Niehaus experienced that exactly. He must have thought: "Will our family make the long journey okay?" "What will our lives be like there?" "How will the neighbors treat us?" This young Niehaus family member found the answers to all his questions in America.

To pull together what we know about Gerald's life in America, I asked for help from Pat Niehaus Cracraft, Gerald's granddaughter and daughter of Bernie and Ruth Niehaus. What great history she provided. Drawing from Pat's input and other family history, I give you a short synopsis of the eldest Niehaus child.

Gerhardt John Niehaus was born to Joseph and Gertrude (Wilmsen) Niehaus at their home in Emsdetten, Westphalia, Germany on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1874. When he was 11 years old Gertrude and Joseph brought him and his five brothers and two sisters to Indianapolis. It must have been difficult for this young man to step into a completely new world. However, he most likely found familiarity and acceptance among the many German people where they settled on Indianapolis' south side.

We know this young Niehaus man made a fine life for himself in his new country. He learned to be a cabinet maker. At some point he worked at his trade in Peru, Indiana. There he met a lady named, Amanda Marsh, of Swedish descent, who became his wife in 1906. Gerald and Mandy's family eventually included five children, Geraldine, Joseph, Bernard, Harvey and Gerald, Jr., "Abe," all born in Indianapolis.

Gerald built a home on Habig Lane in Indianapolis, next door to his sister, Feenie, and her husband, Al Stull. Pat recalls: "From what my Dad and Abe said, he was a much better cabinet maker than house builder, as none of the walls were straight." She also remembered: "They didn't have indoor plumbing until .....about 1950."

But, sadly, at 44 years of age and after only twelve years of marriage, Gerald passed away suddenly after returning home one evening from work. His son, Bernie, gave these details in an interview a few years ago: "Where the street car line ended, there was a saloon, Berringer's. His death occurred during the time of prohibition (May 1918). The doctor that pronounced him dead said that if it hadn't been for prohibition and the fact that Berringer's couldn't sell whiskey, he might have lived. He was feeling badly when he got off the streetcar and walked home (about 3 miles). Had he been able to stop in at Berringer's, he probably would have survived the heart attack. Carrie Nation was responsible for my father's death."

Gerald's family had many struggles after his death. Especially since Mandy was pregnant with their fifth child when he died. Bernie said: "All of us, including my mother, worked at whatever jobs we could find where we would earn even a very small amount of money." And Pat adds to this story: "My grandmother really had it hard financially. They moved from relative to relative for a while, received flour, sugar and other foodstuffs from Catholic Charities. The kids

worked at the Fletcher Estate and for the truck farms around Bluff Road. Abe told that they were allowed to bring home damaged vegetables. The boys hunted and fished to help put food on the table."

She remembered too that her father and his brothers and sister rode a manure wagon from Habig and South Meridian to Sacred Heart School. And that her uncle Bud had a car with a fabric roof and his brother, Abe's, goat ate the roof off the car. These are the types of events that are much funnier after a few years have gone by. And, it seems they may have played a part in the family's unity.

One of Pat's memories is, perhaps, the best way to conclude Gerald's story:

"On Sundays we would go to my Grandma's and Aunt Feenie's children and grandchildren would be there for Sunday dinner. After dinner the cousins (my Dad's generation) would play euchre, sometimes volleyball, mostly cards, though."

Surely Gerald would be pleased at the results for the family.

(Gerald and Amanda's family tree is on the back of the newsletter.)

### Memorials

#### *May they rest in peace.*

*I did not have any notifications of family who have passed since last year.*

*We remember them all with love.*

### Reunion Flashback

*The first reunion was in 1939 at Garfield Park on Pleasant Run Pkwy. The organizers were Mary Stull Bius and Charlotte Niehaus Baxter. Charlotte and Mary did a fabulous job. There was a great turnout. Jane Stull Hickman recalls that after several reunions: "They stopped letting people have beer at Garfield Park. So we didn't have any more reunions there. That's when they began at Longacre Park." The reunion has moved around over the years, to various parks in and around Indianapolis. But it's still going strong. Let's keep it up!*

*Celebrating  
the 70<sup>th</sup>  
Niehaus  
Reunion  
in  
2009*

## 2008 Reunion Report

Niehaus family members gathered again from far and wide for the 2008 reunion at the Pioneer Park in Mooresville, Indiana on July 11, 2008. There were approximately 125 people attending, from our oldest at 96, Charlotte Niehaus Baxter, to a few months old.

We played games, shared family news and stories, raffled handmade items and ate the usual scrumptious array of food. The winner of the beautiful family history quilt, created by Peg Stull with the usual loving care, was Robert Drake. He was a very happy man, after hoping for years to have one of these treasures. And, I am pleased to say that I won the crocheted flag throw made by my sister, Marti Fleetwood. Very nice work Peg and Marti.

We can't say enough thanks, once again, to Rose Walters for organizing the reunion. And thanks also to Doug Walters for his support in many ways.

It's nice to have this gathering and to have the special touches that family members put into it. I know everyone appreciates these efforts.

## Family News Around the Country

Some of us aren't able to be at the annual reunion. But we can still share news or greetings via this newsletter. Thanks to those who provided the first pieces for "Family News Around the Country." I hope that others will give me your family news for future issues. My address is at the end of this newsletter.

**Florida: From Pat Cracraft** (*daughter of Bernie and Ruth Niehaus, granddaughter of Gerhard and Amanda Niehaus*) Pat won't be at the reunion this year. She's making a trip a little later to Indianapolis for her 55<sup>th</sup> class reunion at Shortridge High School. She's also busy training for the 60-mile Susan Komen Breast Cancer Awareness walk in November in Arizona. She participated in this three day walk in Tampa Bay, FL, last year. Good job, Pat! In addition to her physical fitness routine, she is now enjoying a total of seven great grandchildren.

**Chicago: From Jennifer Masterson** (*great granddaughter of Ralph and Rosa Niehaus Lark.*) Jenni gave birth to a handsome son on March 1, 2009, Dylan James David Masterson. And Jenni also reports that her sister, Melanie Pitt married Christopher Wolfe, in March as well.

**Everywhere: From Nancy and Jerry Hurley** (*Granddaughter of John and Louise Niehaus, daughter of Frank and Rosemary Niehaus*)

We are continuing our full-time RV life, traveling the country. This summer we're volunteering at the Stones River National Battlefield near Murfreesboro, TN. If you'd like to follow us, we have a blog at [www.hurleytravels.blogspot.com](http://www.hurleytravels.blogspot.com) If you're passing through, stop in and say hi.

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## Nancy's Notes

I am happy to send a copy of this newsletter to anyone. Just send me an email or snail mail address at the address below. Of course, these addresses will never, never, be shared with anyone else.

Also, send me stories you want to share in the newsletter. It can be just an idea for a family memory or the entire story.

And, as usual, this is my request for photos of ancestors to include in the family history. Where is a photo of Joseph or Gertrude? Any ideas on where to look? A loan of your family photos would be appreciated. I will copy them and return them promptly. I promise.

Also, If you have knowledge of a death in the family that you would like to have listed in the newsletter, I would be glad to include them. Lastly, I am very glad to hear any suggestions on how this newsletter might improve.

Thanks.

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