

Niehaus Family Newsletter

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Wilhelmina "Minnie" Niehaus Kirn Fondly Remembered

One wish most people would have is that they would be fondly remembered after departing this life. There's no doubt that Minnie (Niehaus) Kirn fulfilled that wish.

Wilhelmina Gertrude Niehaus was born in 1893 in Indianapolis, Indiana, to German immigrants, Joseph and Gertrude Niehaus. Minnie was their twelfth child. Tragically, her mother died when she was only two years old. The large Niehaus family did their best to fill that gap in her life. Judging from the loving nature she displayed throughout her life, her father and siblings provided her with a stable and caring upbringing. She most likely never knew either set of grandparents, as all indications are that the family never returned to Germany after their immigration in 1886.

Baptized in Sacred Heart Catholic Church as Gertrude Wilhelmina, the family nickname of Minnie soon became her lifelong moniker. As a young woman of 17 she worked as a seamstress in an overall factory. I'm presuming that workplace was the C. B. Cones & Son Manufacturing Co. in downtown Indianapolis where several members of the Niehaus family were employed.

Minnie lived with her family on West Street until she married Ralph Kirn on November 27, 1917, also in Sacred Heart Church. The Kirn family grew by four between 1918 and 1925, with the births of Ralph, Frank, Gertrude and Marie. Sadly, the couple lost Ralph at only two years old. Minnie's granddaughters share her feelings about Ralph later in this story.

After living for years at their home on Lynhurst Drive, Minnie and Dutch built what became their final family home in the 1950s at 4819 Oaknoll Drive, next door to their daughter and son-in-law, Marie and Dominic Dallessandro. As life went on, Minnie left lasting impressions with her grandchildren. Their recollections tell the story of her family life and the impact she had better than any story I could create. I am grateful that Georgia Lee Kirn Taylor, Deborah Kirn Wyant and Susan Dallessandro responded to my request for their memories of their grandmother with generosity and openness. I am using their words here to paint the picture of Minnie's family history.



(Above are three of the Niehaus sisters and two brothers at Niehaus Reunion in about 1950. Left to right: Annie, Feenie, Joe, John and Minnie.)

Georgia Lee Kirn Taylor's Story:

I would love to put some ideas together. I love the picture of Grandma and her siblings sitting and the way one of them is looking at her. (above)

I am struggling to explain Grandma but the closest I can come is that she was the person we all most wanted to be around. Favorite stories are how after a long evening of (cutthroat) Tripoli we as kids would be leaving and Grandma would very quietly sneak any money we lost back into our hands. When I came back from Scotland with my fourth son for a visit after she had become very ill, the rest of us (of course) would be at the card table and she would be holding the baby in the rocker. I realized he had fallen asleep and went to take him to his bed to give her a rest and she told me with a smile that she would tell me when to come and get him. So many babies blessed to sleep in those arms. And he did finish his nap right there.

Debbie and I were in Indpls when I got your email because we spent the anniversary of Marie's death with Susan. Talking about one of the hardest days of her life, she suddenly knew Grandma was there in spirit and was comforted. Susan knew that she would be all right.

Grandma had an unlimited capacity for love. Amazing for someone who lost her mother at age two and her first child when he was two. She was never bitter.

But I remember clearly after my first little boy was born that she said he reminded her of Little Ralph. A few minutes later it hit me for the first time in my life what she had actually been through and I think I must have looked up at her with a look of horror because she knew what I was thinking. She said, "They say time heals all wounds. That is one it doesn't heal."

I am sharing this for two reasons. I like the opportunity to share Ralph and his too short life, along with other Niehaus children who died too soon. I also want to share that in spite of her pain, Grandma was able to move ahead and love unconditionally. I can say that she was happy. But I will also share that after she died and I was sitting quietly in her room one night, I opened a small drawer in her dresser and found in the very back a pair of small baby booties and a death notice.

I keep thinking about the term "the glue" that holds families together but it goes beyond that because I knew when I was with Debbie and Susan the other night it is still there, even though Grandma is not with us, somehow she embodied a life lesson that continues.

Below are five Niehaus sisters in about 1945.
Left to right: Rosa, Annie, Minnie, Feenie, Clara.



Deborah (Debbie) Kirn Wyant's Story:

My/Our Grandma always made me feel like I was so very special anytime we spent time together, from the time I was a child to the last time we shared lunch at a restaurant in tow with my 3rd child and the 4th on the way, shortly before her death. Her love was unconditional. It was a quiet love...a deep love. Not a "gushy" love.

She had her rules when we stayed with her and Grandpa in the summertime. Everyday I wanted to play under the sprinkler, but the rule was for the temperature to be at a certain degree on the temperature gauge hanging on Grandpa's barn. I must have driven her crazy begging to go turn on the green tri-spigot spinning sprinkler. Her answer was

"Have you checked the temperature, and what did it say?"

I must have made hundreds of trips to check the barn before I would get the OK. Did I think she was being mean? Never! Unknowingly at my young age, there was always a sense of her kindness. I am sure it came from her profound religious conviction.

I remember feeling safe and happy when I got to sleep with her. As we would lie down and prepare to fall asleep, I knew she would silently be saying her prayers. I asked her if she would say them out loud for me. She would hesitate and tell me I needed to go to sleep. But as children do, each night I would ask again and again. She chose to relinquish to my hounding and reached for her rosary as she did every night from the shelf in the headboard. I can still remember how special I thought it was; but, of course, fell asleep before she finished. I see now how her faith sustained her through her very difficult times. It was a soft, quiet, intense devotion, just as her love was for us. It is still unending. Thank you, Grandma, for my very special love and memories.

Susan Dallessandro's Story:

Where do I start? My grandmother was so special. I always lived next door to her, my grandpa and my aunt Gert. I spent more time at grandma's house than I did at home. (She always made butterscotch pudding!) Grandma actually owned my best buddy Cleo. She was the best dog ever. We were always together.

When I think of grandma the words "quiet strength" come to mind. She was always calm. She always helped me to know what to do if I needed help. If I was mad then she would always say, "Don't be mad because you are just going to have to get glad". That used to make me so mad but then I would start laughing!

As I got older I naturally had problems getting along with my mother. Grandma would always smooth things over. She had such a strong faith.

I was a little older the first time I heard grandma talk about uncle Ralph. I had one of my sons with me and he was about 2 years old. She lovingly looked at him and said, "He is the same age that my Ralph was when I lost him". For the first time I saw how much hurt she carried with her all of her life. Losing a child, I have heard it said, is the worst slap in the face that life can give you. It was for grandma. Her faith had to help her carry on and keep a positive attitude.

The only time I can remember seeing my grandma upset was when she and I were at her house and the phone rang. The call was to tell her that my aunt Norma had died. (Debbie and Georgia Lee's mother) I felt so bad for grandma. She didn't know what to do next. She was so upset. I think that she told me to run next door and get my mother. It was a terrible shock to her and to me also.

When my husband left me and our three sons after

17 years of marriage, it was finally the day of my final divorce hearing. I went outside and sat in the sun on a blanket for a while to gather my thoughts. My grandma always said that when I saw a butterfly to think of her. She said that would mean that she was near. As I sat on the blanket a beautiful Monarch butterfly landed on my bent knee. I sat and watched it for quite a while. I felt that grandma was sending me a sign. After about 10 minutes or more I knew that I had to take my shower and get to the court. I finally had to nudge the little butterfly off of me. He flew around and landed on me again. Again I waited a few minutes and nudged him again. Again he came back and sat on my arm.

I can be slow at getting messages at times but I finally got it. Grandma was there for me and she was trying to tell me that I would be ok and could make it on my own. It was a huge daily struggle but I did raise my three boys alone. I sometimes worked three jobs at a time but we made it. Only after I said out loud, "O.K. grandma, I got your message" did the butterfly finally fly away!

Grandma knew how much I love dogs. About 4 years ago I saw a St. Bernard on the Franklin county humane web site. I immediately knew that he was my dog! His coloring kind of looked like Cleo. I called them and they were bringing Jayke to the Greenwood Petco on Saturday for a pet adoption event. The minute I saw him my heart was filled with love. I adopted him, took him home to my other large male dog and they were instantly best friends. It wasn't until I was sitting waiting for Mass to start later that same day that it dawned on me.....It was grandma's birthday!!! My mom couldn't believe it either. I know that grandma helped fill the void in my life. Jayke is such a comfort to me. You will never convince me that grandma didn't have her hand in it!

I believe that my strong faith comes from my grandma's example. Losing my mom last year was a huge loss. I really didn't know how I would feel after she was gone. It hasn't been easy but God is helping me like He has in every part of my life. I never would have made it if my two fantastic cousins had not been there for me and mom when she died. We all got the call at about 1 A.M. and I left work and my cousins were waiting for me at the nursing home when I got there. What a comfort that was for me. They stayed with mom when I couldn't be there because of work or just trying to take care of things at home. Mom was very lucky to have such caring nieces.

Life goes on and I am learning how to be an "only child" again after years and years of taking care of Mom. I took her everywhere. If I was not at work then mom had something for me to do or some place that I needed to take her; Kohls always had a sale on my days off! Now that she is gone I do spend a lot of time alone. I am finally able to spend time with my dogs. We go for at least one ride a week with the top down. Life is good. Sometimes lonely, but still good.

Memorials

Marie Kirn Dallessandro
mother of Susan Dallessandro
and daughter of
Ralph and Minnie (Niehaus) Kirn
22 Feb 1925 - 21 Aug 2012

Richard L. Jones, Jr.
son of Richard and Shirley (Ellis) Jones
17 Oct 1955 - 20 Aug 2013

***We will miss them and
cherish their memories.
May they rest in peace.***

Veterans Project

Let's honor our veterans. Marti (Niehaus) Fleetwood is developing a history of the veterans in our family, past and present. This information will be included in our family albums, as well as recognized on Veterans Day on the family history website.

There is a form at the Family History table at the reunion where you can add your veteran to the list. Thank you for assisting in collecting this information.

History Corner Do You Know?

Question #1: Joseph Niehaus, our immigrant ancestor, had two brothers, Heinrich August and Bernard Joseph. Bernard came to the United States around 1879, settled in Indianapolis and was joined by Joseph in 1886. Bernard married Laura Baumann in Indianapolis in 1902, but they had no children. Heinrich August stayed in Germany, married and had seven children. As far as we know, the family in Germany continued using the Niehues spelling.

Some of our family traveled to Germany to visit with the Niehues/Niehaus relatives in years past. I am wondering if anyone knows who in this family is remaining in Germany. Do you have any hints?

Question #2: Can you name the locations of the Niehaus Family Reunions? They began in 1939 at Garfield Park. But where have they moved over all these years? How many reunions took place between 1939 and 2013?

Can we put together these facts about our history?

2012 Reunion Report

It was a sweltering hot July 22nd for our 2012 Niehaus Reunion. But the gathering at Pioneer Park in Mooresville, Indiana, was still a super time. We had our usual outstanding meal together. Everyone enjoyed their lunch and lively conversations. Then, the corn hole competitors didn't waste any time in getting heated up! Others circulated from table to table catching up on family happenings. While many took a little time to peruse the family photos and history, too.

As per tradition, the family quilt raffle was popular and resulted in another happy winner. In fact, that's me! This unique heirloom skillfully created by Peg Stull is a real treasure. Not only does the quilt raffle help to fund the reunion; but, most importantly, the family is memorialized in a beautiful way. Don't forget to make your quilt square this year. You might even create a memorial square for a departed family member(s).

As we say each year, Thank You Rosie! The organization of the Niehaus Reunion by Rosie Walters always results in a very nice event. We appreciate it!

Thanks to everyone for being there, adding your own special touch. You are the glue.

Niehaus Family Albums



(Above is an excerpt from the 1939 Reunion Photo. Niehaus brothers and sisters seated left to right: John, Rosa, Clara, Annie, Lena, Feenie, Joe, Minnie. The full photo and a list of the folks we can identify is available at the reunion or by mail.)

The family photo albums are growing with each reunion. Take a look at the Family History table. Some people are as yet unidentified, so if you know anyone, please write their name(s) in the books or add them to the lists for 2010 or 2012.

There are some miscellaneous copies of photos that you are welcome to take. Look for them at the family history table at the reunion. I can also email photos. Write your request on the Email List also located with the albums.

Thanks to Gib Hickman, for our group photo. They are a lot of fun!

Nancy's Notes

Family History Website News: Hopefully, you're already into our family history website. But, if not, I invite you to come on over to www.indianaties.com for more stories, photos and to explore whatever pops up in the family search. Comments and contributions are totally encouraged!

There's a new series on the website called "**Family Recipe Friday.**" I'm sharing favorite recipes and making a log of them so that anyone can come back at anytime to pick up an idea for something delicious. They can be old, passed down in the family, or new ones that you or a friend just really enjoy. It's easy to get them to me: just leave a comment at the end of any blog post on the website or send them to be at nancyhurley1@gmail.com.

More Family History Reporters

If you have news or history to pass along, get in touch with me. I will share it on the website or in this newsletter. If there's a young person who has written a family story, I would be happy to share it here.

Newsletter delivery:

This newsletter is available by email or snail mail. Just let me know to whom and where to send it.

Ready to Do Your Own Research?

Are you thinking of starting family history research yourself? I believe that if you like solving mysteries and you have the desire to preserve the record of your family, you will enjoy the experience of finding out more about all of the people that are why you are here.

Before you jump into finding those records, take a little while to learn about genealogy and the ways you can put together a history that is solidly documented. There are many websites, books and seminars, some of them free, that offer a foundation. Then you are armed with understanding and a plan.

To get started, first, document yourself. Gather together the records that prove your birth, your schooling, your residences, etc. Then, move on to your parents, and so forth. The process is not fast and can have frustrations. But there are so many aha! moments and eye-opening revelations that make family research fun. Enjoy!

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