

## Old people

-- Bud Lawry -- 2/28/13

"Come on, Buddy. Hurry up!" Mom was urging me to get cleaned up so we could go visit Auntie Sicotte. Auntie Sicotte was old and she had a powdery smell. She wore black dresses, button-up shoes and had small rimless glasses. Auntie Sicotte lived in L'Anse. L'Anse was about 50 miles away on a two-lane road and Mom didn't drive very fast. I'd rather stay home and play with Pal. He was an old smelly beagle but given the choice I'd pick him every time.

I wasn't fond of old people. My dad's aunt Pearl was old, too. Once, I remember a relative whispering to another, "Did you know, Pearl has never used water to wash her face?" Where the conversation went from there, I can't imagine. My mind snapped back to how Aunt Pearl liked to hug and kiss little boys who had to wash behind their ears and she never even washed her face! That's all I could think about whenever I saw her.

Mom liked to visit her aunt Sicotte because she grew up in L'Anse and had cousins there she liked to see on her trips to her old hometown. But mostly, she went to see her favorite aunt.

L'Anse is a small town on L'Anse Bay on the south shore of Lake Superior. It's a nice little town. You go down a big hill to get to it and if you turn left on Main Street, you could go around the bay to a similar town, Baraga, due west of L'Anse. If you turn right, you go up another hill and smack on the top is a big old white three-story house with peeling paint where Auntie Sicotte lived. It is also where my mother was raised. It was on that hill where Mom, as a seven year old, was sledding and was run over by a car. Auntie Sicotte nursed her back to health, because her mother had died the previous year.

Usually, after an hour visiting with her aunt, Mom would leave me and the old lady alone, while she sought out her cousins. I'll bet Auntie was almost 70. Ancient in my mind. She would ask me the questions she probably felt obligated to ask and finally would say, "Well, did you bring your pennies?" I would answer in the affirmative and we would begin playing Buckup.

Auntie Sicotte, did not like to lose. Often I would lose all my pennies very quickly and she would smugly say something like, "You made some pretty bad decisions today. Maybe you'll do better next time." She would then pick up her Bible, also black, and begin to read. I would feel abused by this old lady and mope around the rest of the day. On the rare occasion I was winning, Auntie Sicotte would get tired and not want to play any more. On those days I didn't resent the trip so much.

As I got older, we didn't play Buckup. I was given permission to go down the hill to the New Mazda movie theater. That's where I saw Moby Dick starring Gregory Peck.

Gregory Peck is gone now and so is Auntie Sicotte. She taught me how to gamble and to understand that losing was part of the game. I still like to gamble and I play poker regularly, but I've never played Buckup with anyone else. In fact I had to research the game to see if anyone still played it. My memories of those trips to L'Anse have mellowed over the years, as has my opinion of old people.