Our House Was the Place to Meet

Saturday night dances brought family and neighbors together.

ALL of our family members—including my 12 siblings—have fond memories of Saturday nights at the Websters' home in Naches, Washington.

Our father, Dell Webster, had died, and the parties began as the older children—by then, young adults—assumed responsibilities for the family's needs and happiness. My two older sisters were married, but the rest of us lived at home.

The older kids had house parties, inviting all our friends to come to the dances and bring their instruments to play for part of the evening. Guests' friends also were welcome, but they were told that no drinking of alcohol was permitted.

Rules Were Set

Mom said if any drinking went on, there would be no more parties.

Every week, from 1938 until 1940, all the kids pitched in, moving the big furniture to the corners of the connected living and dining rooms, lining the walls with some benches and straight chairs for use at the dance.

Mom always made a big cake, about 16 inches square. The most popular was chocolate with fudge frosting. Coffee and lemonade were also served.

All our neighbors, friends and relatives joined us, bringing their kids if they had any. The little ones were bedded down whenever they got sleepy; the rest played together in the hallway or tried to dance.

Before the music began, they got to join our young siblings, slipping and sliding all over the floor to work the dance wax into the linoleum, and everyone enjoyed their actions.

The instruments varied at any given time. There might be violins, guitars, a banjo, a saxophone, a ukulele, a harmonica, a mouth harp or even two spoons, back-to-back, to tap out the beat.

When the musicians started playing, all ages had great fun. Sometimes, a grown man would dance with a little girl, and she'd stand on his feet as he glided to the music.

Little boys got in the act too, with ladies of all ages teaching them dance steps.

I loved dancing with my older brothers. I especially liked getting lessons from Dean, who had learned to guide the lady by a gentle movement of his left hand and his right hand under the lady's left hand so she knew just what to do next.

Allen taught me how to do the two-step and the polka, whirling and twirling all the while. Chuck and Frank were great dancers too, but I liked best to do Scottish or square dancing with them. Square dances weren't as precise and beautiful as today. Couples didn't have matching outfits and bouffant skirts, but the calls were easy to understand and, though at times silly, always rhymed.

The music was as varied as the calls. Some of the players also sang—all old songs that everyone new. If you wished, you sang along.

Strictly a Fun Time

There were no formalities, no entry charges to the dance and no pay to the musicians. At intermission, refreshments were served free. The dancing then resumed until everyone was worn out or had to go home.

Then we put things back in order and hit the hay ourselves. Mom always said, “If you want to dance, you must be willing to pay the piper.”

She made it clear that church was vital; dancing was secondary and could not interfere.

Today, with all the siblings married, our descendants and in-laws have a wonderful Webster family reunion on Memorial Day weekend to make sure that the new generations will be good friends, not strangers.

—Della Webster Kaminski, Everett, Washington