

LIVING, LAUGHING, AND LAMPSHADES

Mrs. Lilja Dressner is the kind of woman everyone should get to know. She's a happy, healthy person—one who has led a very full life. Her good nature and extraordinary memory made her a spectacular candidate for an interview on the Great Depression. She was born in the town of Ironwood, Michigan, on January 3, 1899, which makes her 85 years young. Her vivid memories and her love of life made her a joy to interview.

Mrs. Dressner did not remain in Ironwood, but later moved to Ishpeming when her father became secretary of the Finnish National Temperance Society. So naturally she and her family belonged to the Temperance Union and were firm believers of prohibition.

Mrs. Dressner's education started at the Cleveland School where she attended the first, second, and third grades. Her education continued with grammar school and then she moved on to Ishpeming High School where she graduated in 1917.

In 1928, Mrs. Dressner moved out to California where she supported herself by designing lampshades. I had never heard of anyone designing lampshades so I questioned her further about it. "First I painted the designs and then they were dipped in some kind of glue. After that little beads were thrown on them," she described.

Her interest in art and crafts began in high school. She was one of the favorites in her class and was allowed to go on Saturdays to work at the school. Her ability in art and music eventually led her to develop her acting talents. Mrs. Dressner was even in a musical comedy that played on Broadway in New York!

While designing lampshades in Hollywood, Mrs. Dressner worked under a man who designed and made lapel ornaments. She was his sample maker. Many of the jewelry pieces Mrs. Dressner made were modeled by the late, great movie actress, Rita Hayworth.

Even with her busy, exciting life Mrs. Dressner still had time to listen to the fireside chats. "They were more like the modern talks now. The President's talk to the people too. But ah, before that everything had been so formal, it was really nice to have the President talking to you."

The Depression affected family life in a variety of ways. The man of the house was usually out of work which led to a feeling of shame that he couldn't support his family. Mrs. Dressner said it was hard on her because she wasn't with her family at the time. She also said it was difficult for everybody because there was no work, but fortunately, food was very cheap. "Grapes you could get for a penny a pound and carrots a penny a bunch. But if you didn't have the money it was just as bad. They could have been a million," replied Mrs. Dressner.

Although Mrs. Dressner wasn't with her family then, she told me about holidays when she was a child. "Well, holidays were wonderful when we were kids because we always had a big Christmas tree and we had real candles. I can still smell the candles," she said with a smile.

I then asked her about any hobbies she had and learned of her doll collection. She started collecting dolls in the 1940's in Chicago. Not only does she collect them but she also repairs and makes her own dolls. She has some German, Italian, and French dolls. She says she has had almost every kind of doll. She has given quite a few away but still has many. When asked about a favorite she replied, "Well my favorite doll was a French fashion doll and ah, she was beautiful porcelain with a kid body. She had handmade lingerie and a full organza skirt and a taffeta coat. If I would have kept her, she would today have sold for thousands of dollars."

The afternoon I visited Mrs. Dressner we went into her work room and looked at some old pictures. I remember the beautiful wedding pictures and I decided to ask her what weddings were like then and she replied, "Weddings, I imagine were just like they are now, they're very gay affairs. They'd have outdoor weddings in the summer and beautiful gowns. I still remember the rustle of the taffeta dresses and they were lovely affairs."

Mrs. Dressner said she walked to a lot of places but she did mention the railroads. She talked about the L.S.I. Railroad and also, the train that ran to Chicago. The L.S.I. went to Presque Isle and she often went on Sunday school picnics along with all her friends and siblings.

Although Mrs. Dressner never had any children of her own she says she's always enjoyed them. Now she has nieces, grand nieces, and great-grand nieces to help fill her need.

Mrs. Dressner is a very healthy lady for her age. I thought of asking her about any sicknesses or epidemics back then. "Yes, diphtheria was a pretty

bad thing in those days. I remember going to see my friends when they were gone," she replied solemnly.

I asked Mrs. Dressner if she had to walk a lot of places. She said her family had a car and she replied, "Well, I'm sure they had a car. I remember my kid brother writing to me^{and} telling me of an accident he'd had with a car and he said it used to have a top, now it doesn't," she replied laughing heartily.

I'd like to thank Mrs. Dressner for sharing a part of her life with me. Her vivid memories, love of life, and enjoyment of people young and old made her a joy to interview. With a twinkle in her eye and a laugh in her voice she looks ahead as well as back with a smile. She's a great example of what more people should be like.

JoAnn Anderson