CHAPTER 8
Helen and Alfred Marry and Make Cheese – The Abplanalp Family

On November 3, 1947, two couples were married in a double wedding ceremony. Helen Martinson married Alfred Abplanalp, while at the same time, Alfred’s brother Harold was wed to his bride Rachel.

Helen met Alfred when he was working as a cheesemaker at the Malone Cheese Factory, not far from where she lived on the Martinson farm. Milk from her dad’s cows was delivered to this factory.

After meeting Alfred through her brother Gaylord Martinson, Helen had to say her goodbyes. Alfred was drafted by the Army in World War II and in 1945 he was at Normandy’s Omaha Beach on the French coast when the bloodiest of all battles took place. It was a huge relief for this courting couple when the war ended and he returned home.

During their married life, Helen and Alfred had two children – Chuck was born in 1948 and Nancy in 1951. They were raised and schooled in Middleton where Alfred operated the West Middleton Cheese Factory.

Alfred was an expert Swiss cheesemaker. His parents both emigrated from Switzerland and had raised him on a farm near Arena, Wisconsin. Alfred made cheese at the Malone Cheese Factory and also had learned the trade from his uncles who were cheesemakers in Monroe. He also had taken a UW-Madison Cheesemaking Short Course.

The Abplanalp’s West Middleton Cheese Factory was adjacent to their house on Mineral Point Road near Middleton. It was here that Alfred made Swiss cheese most of his working years. Alfred suffered with arthritis and was ill a number of months before he died, at age 53, from a blood infection. The factory and their house have since been torn down to make way for a Kwik Trip gas station.
Helen worked in an office setting in Madison most of her working years. In later years, she was employed at the Wisconsin Department of Motor Vehicles. In fact, she got a job there for her sister Benunie (my mother) on a temporary basis shortly after my dad Walter died in 1969.

As a young girl, I remember entering the Abplanalp house through the kitchen and seeing the pretty yard that surrounded their home. I thought Nancy was the cutest little two-year old cousin I had ever seen!

It was always fun to visit and learn how daily life was different for our cousins who weren’t on farms. I thoroughly enjoyed sneaking into the factory with Chuck and Nancy to see what their dad Alfred was doing. With my Grandpa Rudy Schwarz being a Swiss cheesemaker in the early 1900s near Daleyville, a fascination with cheese factories grew within me at a young age. To this day, I still am in awe when I enter a cheese factory. I love to watch cheese being made. And, yes, Swiss is one of my favorites!

![Bird’s eye view of the West Middleton Cheese Factory and home owned by Helen and Alfred Abplanalp in the 1950s-60s. It is no longer there. A gas station now operates on the same spot on Mineral Point Road.]

**Nancy Abplanalp’s Memories**

Helen and Alfred’s daughter Nancy has suffered from brain aneurysms in recent years. Therefore, some of her recollections aren’t real clear. She did the best she could to remember fond times with her parents, Helen and Alfred, and her older brother Chuck. Nancy, who is married to Rod Arneson, lives in Middleton. They have two daughters Heidi, 27 and Edie, 25 years old.

What Nancy remembers about Grandma Martinson is going to her house after a dentist appointment. She also recalls eating Grandma’s lefse. On Christmas, Nancy said, she would go to Grandma’s house and play with all her cousins. “When I was older, I was able to go to Mt. Horeb and go swimming with some of my cousins.”

Nancy recalls that her dad Alfred put in long hard days at the factory. “I remember playing with my dog, riding my tricycle, and playing in the cheese factory,” Nancy said.
“My Dad and I would always watch the Green Bay Packers together. He was a wonderful, thoughtful, caring, and loving person who excelled in people skills. I enjoyed the kind of ‘heart’ he had,” Nancy reflected.

In 1969 Nancy graduated from Middleton High School. Math, she says, was her favorite subject. School activities and social life Nancy enjoyed involved “running around with my girlfriends to the Capitol Square, Piasans, and McDonalds.”

Nancy’s chores during her childhood included keeping the house clean. Helen’s daily chores while raising two children included cooking, taking care of the garden, and doing lots of freezing of foods, Nancy recalls.

One of the funniest of Nancy’s memories is the day not too many years ago when she and her mother ate an entire pie. “Mom had just baked a lemon meringue, and it was really good,” Nancy recalls.

A fond memory for Nancy is thinking of her mother singing. “Mom sang to me when I was sick. I understand she sang to me recently when I had my brain aneurysms. My Mother is very concerned about me and my family,” Nancy concludes.

**Chuck’s Memories**

Chuck Abplanalp graduated from Middleton High School in 1966. He went on to school at UW-Madison and received a degree in economics in 1973.

“Chuck was drafted during Vietnam,” Helen said. “Because he had taken typing, he became a clerk for the commanding officer of an Army Division Support Brigade in Frankfurt, Germany. He was home in less than two years.”

Chuck had two children with his first wife, Sherryl. Jenny is 22 and Greg is 18. Chuck is engaged to Robin Hoyt and lives in Verona. He has worked at Madison Newspapers as a computer systems administrator for 25 years.

What Chuck recalls most about his dad is that he made good Swiss cheese. “He made Swiss and Cheddar, and he won awards at the State Fair,” Chuck said.
“Making Swiss cheese was quite a process,” Chuck explains. “Cheese likes bacteria. We’d place the Swiss cheese in the warm cellar at a certain temperature to generate bacteria. Part of the process was putting it in the cold cellar too, which had a brine tank in it. The Swiss cheese blocks went into a brine solution for 2-4 days so the salt could soak in.”

Wholesalers would buy his dad’s cheese and repackage it, according to Chuck, who said its final destination was mainly Mt. Horeb (Hentze’s), Dodgeville, and Monroe.

“We delivered cheese in blocks of roughly 90 pounds. Cheese was graded at one of four levels. I helped my dad make the cheese and drove one of his six trucks on weekends and in the summer. We’d pick up the milk and bring it to our factory.”

Does Chuck like Swiss cheese? “It’s my favorite,” he says.

Chuck also remembers his dad liked to play cards, mainly poker. “At Schwarz’s house, I can still picture us kids running outside and peering into the basement where the men were playing cards. My dad had quite a stash of winnings -- money or chips -- in front of him.”

At one time Alfred also liked to bowl, Chuck said. “Dad had a pretty good average on bowling leagues in Mt. Horeb, but later problems with his feet got the best of him.”

Social life for Chuck revolved around playing Little League ball, attending Sunday School, and going to his one-room school which later became two rooms – the West Middleton School. His favorite subject was math. For fun Chuck enjoyed riding his bike and playing football.

Chuck is quick to point out what he likes about his mother. “She is so tolerant, kind, and caring,” he says. “My cousin Joan Sholdt has been a godsend to my mother since Nancy became ill a few years ago,” Chuck added. “Prior to that, Nancy had been taking mom shopping and on errands each week. Now, Jo does it.” Chuck related how one day when Nancy was in the hospital, Joan and Chuck Sholdt were visiting Nancy. “They said to
let them know if there was anything they could do to help,” Chuck recalls. “And that was the start of my cousin Jo taking Mom shopping. She’s just been super to my mother.”

Helen and Alfred and their children Chuck and Nancy pose in front of their Middleton area home during the 1950s.

Above are Chuck’s two children — Jenny and Greg Abplanalp.

Helen Abplanalp walks with her son Chuck as he carries his little girl Jenny during an annual Martinson reunion at Stewart’s Park. (1985)
Helen and Alfred (seated at far end of table) enjoy their engagement party with relatives and friends at the Chanticleer Inn in Middleton. (1947)

Clara Martinson makes lefse for her nine kids, their families — and many others!

The nine Martinson brothers and sisters gather. Front (l-r) are the brothers Marty (mother Clara), Harland, Gaylord and in back, sisters (l-r) are Verna, Benunie, Geneva, Alma, Myrtle, and Helen. (1960s)
Favorite Family Recipes!

Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Cookies
A favorite cookie for the Abplanalp family!

1 c plus 2 T flour
1 c quick cooking oatmeal
2 T Dutch process unsweetened cocoa
¾ tsp baking soda
¾ c (1 ½ sticks) butter
½ c granulated sugar
½ c brown sugar (lightly packed)
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla
1 (6oz) pkg semi-sweet chocolate chips
½ c walnuts


Matrimony Bars (Oatmeal Date Bars)
These are Helen’s favorite, made often by her mother. Nearly everyone in the family made these bars. Over the years, Date Bars have been a family potluck staple!

CRUST:
2 ½ cups oatmeal 1 cup butter, melted
2 cups flour 1 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon salt

DATE FILLING:
1 large pkg dates, cut up 1 cup hot water
1 cup sugar

AHEAD OF TIME: Boil date filling ingredients slowly until quite thick. (Now dates are available pre-chopped and coated in sugar. No need to chop or add much sugar if using this type of date.)

While date mixture cools, make crust (half of which is also the topping). Put half the mixture into bottom of 9 x 13” pan. Reserve other half for on top of date mixture. Spread cooled date mixture over crust. Sprinkle or spoon remaining crust mixture over top of date layer. Pat down. Bake approximately 20-25 min. at 350 or until browned.
Mandarin Orange Salad

1 – 6 oz box orange Jello
1 pt orange sherbert
2 c boiling water
1 c miniature marshmallows
1 large or 2 small cans Mandarin oranges

Dissolve jello in 2 cups boiling water or juice from oranges. Stir in sherbert. Add oranges and marshmallows. Makes 6 servings.

Arneson Burgers

*A nice grilling burger from Nancy and Rod!*

1 pound lean ground beef
3 small onions
1/2 cup Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon salt
Colby cheese slices

1 pound lean ground turkey
5 teaspoons minced garlic
1 teaspoon accent seasoning
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Sauté the onions. In large mixing bowl, combine all the ingredients and mix together. Refrigerate for a few hours. Form into about 8 patties. Grill as normal. When the burgers are almost done, top with a slice of Colby cheese.

Burritos (Nancy and Rod Arneson)

*A friend gave us this recipe. It’s the best Mexican food ever!* 

3 pounds chopped beef chuck roast
3 tablespoons flour
3 large onions diced
16 ounces taco sauce green
2 cups water
16 ounces green enchilada sauce

3 pounds chopped pork roast
6 cloves garlic
12 ounces green chili peppers
16 ounces salsa Verde
2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 dozens flour tortillas burrito size

Cube meat and discard fat and gristle. Flour meat and then brown slowly with onions, garlic and seasonings (cumin, salt, pepper, and oregano). Use a heavy pot to prevent scorching. Add cans of minced green chilies, taco sauce and salsa Verde, water, and lemon juice. Depending how hot you like your chili, you can add another can each of salsa Verde, taco sauce, and minced green chilies. Simmer at least two hours. Heat the enchilada sauce in a separate pot. Spoon green chili into a tortilla and roll it up. I usually add shredded cheese on top and then the enchilada sauce. You can freeze whatever chile is left. Serves 24.