

The Ashamuttie

By Vivian Kleisl Shaw Lawrence
as told to Carol Lawrence Rusnak

This story dates back to the early 1920s. When I was a little girl, my grandmother used to tell me about “the Ashamuttie.” She was a legendary make-believe person like Santa or the Easter bunny, but she became quite real to a small child—especially if the child was being naughty and overly excitable around Christmastime. That is when my grandmother’s stories usually began.

The Ashamuttie was an old woman who would take toys away from naughty children after Christmas. She would keep them indefinitely or until the children were good enough to earn them back.

I always pictured the Ashamuttie as a small woman wearing a gray dress, with gray hair stringing out from a babushka on her head. She never really frightened me, but I did have a certain respect for her and what she would do. She was real to me, a legend passed down through the ages by old German families. I also passed the legend on to my children.

My daughter, who was 8 in 1948, was the one person that was most affected by the Ashamuttie. Carol was the oldest of my three children. She was the first grandchild and great-grandchild and, as it turned out, the only girl among six grandchildren. She was the only child for almost four years, and so she had everything her own way. A dotting aunt and happy grandparents gave her too many things. So she was quite a spoiled child.

Christmas came to our home in Portage, Wis., and the children

received many nice gifts. Carol received a beautiful blue padded rocker, which she prized highly. But, as was her style, she started looking at the gifts her brothers received. When she counted them and found that they had gotten more than she did, she threw a temper tantrum. Needless to say, that night the Ashamuttie took away her beautiful blue rocking chair. Now her most prized gift was gone because she had been a naughty girl. She was really surprised the next morning when she discovered that it had disappeared.

Her belief in the Ashamuttie hadn’t been quite real until this happened. Then she recalled all the things I had told her, and she was sorry for her actions.

For several weeks thereafter, she was a fairly good girl, in hopes of getting her chair back. But one day I had to go away, and my mother was babysitting the children. Something didn’t



*Top: Vivian and her daughter, Carol Lee, winter 1943.
Above: Uncle Howard and Vivian at our house in Portage, Wis. The attic windows had 4-inch stained glass squares.*



go quite to Carol's liking, so she pouted. When Carol pouted, she always went to a secret place where no one could find her. This place was up in the attic, so she could look out a stained glass window in the gable of the house. From there she could see the street and the children playing through the red, blue and gold panes in the window.

While she was up in the attic, she would look around at the many old things up there. This time, lo and behold, there was her blue padded rocker, tucked away in a corner.

She came running down the stairs, hollering, "I found the Ashamuttie's house! I found my rocking chair!" Of course, my mother had to get it down for her then.

When I got home, Carol was all smiles and happiness, and she vowed never to be bad again. And as it turned out, the Ashamuttie never did have to take away toys again.

Carol is now a grown woman with two children of her own. And yes, they know the story of the Ashamuttie. I'm sure, no doubt, they will pass it on to their children. ❖