

It's effortless how our business-minded daughters adjust – make decisions on the fly. Like yesterday. It was one of those precious calm, mosquito free June evenings. We were hosting a reception for our daughter Ida's marriage and wouldn't you know it, Alice, our next daughter announced her engagement – and since pastor, friends and relatives were here, they got married on the spot! What a party!

Oh, how I pray this works out. Why am I wary? Life can be cruel! When our girls were little, they had older siblings. We were a full, contented family. Until, that is, we woke to the crackling of wood - realizing our home was on fire. James and I had time just to grab the two youngest and jump from an upstairs window. We held them close watching in helpless disbelief. On the positive side, a special bond was forged that night.

The girls graduated from Menota school with few available options. They could marry – or - get teacher training and then marry. But their true love was always with clothing. With fashion. They'd pour over Eaton's catalogues - imagining combinations and alterations they would make.

Ida and Alice can feel opportunity. They were barely in their twenties when they started their business. As females they can't get a loan – unless their father signs. Nevertheless, with a bit of help from us, they took on a small apartment in nearby Hartney, above the bakery. They set up sewing machines, hung out their shingle, ordered the latest fashion books and invited women to browse. In the blink of an eye they had a thriving enterprise, even hiring staff.

Timing, I guess. In 1884 James and I moved to our pioneer farm near Menota. It was tough for us, but scarcely 15 years later our daughters travelled by train to Minneapolis to learn of the latest fashions so they could make and sell the finest to local women. Much can change in a few years!

The way it works now, a seamstress is invited

into a home to stay until mother and girls are decked in silks, velvets and lace – choosing from pictures in fashion books. There's great excitement as friends n' neighbours gather to watch the creation happen. Certainly, tedious as well. We're not the pampered rich with oodles of time for repeated fittings and adjustments. Then, as a final flourish our girls bring boxes of fancy hats, offering practiced advice on which will attract attention and complement each outfit.



Alice & Ida

Aiy! And the hats we wear! Great mountains of silk flowers, leaves and feathers precariously perched on straw "platters". Not ideal for prairie winds! I personally keep adornments modest, but the girls! They flourish in the latest and the most flamboyant. And, oh, how I flourish in their happiness!

David Neufeld adapted 'The Edwards Sisters' from a story written for Vantage Points 4.