
Childhood Memories of Charlie: Oral Testimony of Edward Ernest Arnold, Collected by Oakley C. Johnson for a Biography of C.E. Ruthenberg, circa 1940

Newly edited version of a typewritten document in C.E. Ruthenberg Papers,
box 1, folder 3, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH.

Edward Ernest "Eddie" Arnold (born April 1883) was employed for 38 years at the Electric Illumination Company at the time of this interview, having worked his way up to foreman. He had no surviving children, his one daughter having previously died.

Charles E. Ruthenberg was 9 months older than I was. We went to school together at the Lutheran School from start to finish and grew up together. Charlie was very bright in school. In fact, after he went to grade school and went to public high school, he just jumped way ahead of the rest of them. He was very bright. He was a wonderful reader, a great reader. He was good in every subject, I don't care what it was. He read a lot of magazines, current magazines. He was just a man that got started in the wrong direction, that's all. Too bad he got in with the wrong gang.

He was very quiet in school, not noisy or talkative. Both boys and girls went — they sat on opposite sides of the room. There were two rooms in the Lutheran School, and two teachers. Each teacher had four grades. Both teachers were men — they have women teachers now, but did not have at that time. The teachers never played games with the kids, never joined in. They were strict disciplinarians, they spanked, used whips or a ruler, or anything they could get hold of. I don't remember Charlie ever getting punished, and he probably got less than most, because he was a good student and they would have no occasion to do so.

First of Charlie's teachers, primary school, was Horst. Second, in the other school, the teacher was Reckland. They taught for years and years. Both teachers have been dead for years.

He and I played a lot of marbles, both he and I did, at recess. He was good at that, too. We played some baseball, but not a great deal.

Saturdays we played baseball, and a great deal of the time — Saturdays and vacations — we went out to the Rocky River fishing. He did that more than I did, because I didn't have as much time as he did.

On Sundays we both went to church. We had to go.

Charlie had very fine parents. His father and mother were very fine people, especially his dad. Just good people and good neighbors. Charlie was the baby and did very little around the house. He was a spoiled kid. He was a good dresser. His sisters, especially the one named Anna — I think it was Anna, though we were kids and didn't pay much attention to them — did a good deal towards keeping Charlie looking neat.

Charlie didn't have to work as a kid. He'd study. A lot of times he'd study, and then go out and raise cain. Once he and other boys tore down a shed, a bathhouse, and made a raft out of it — and got pinched. The farmer that owned the bathhouse took them all to the sheriff and the sheriff said, "Aw, let 'em go, they're only boys." I wasn't mixed up in this, but Charlie was a leader in this. Charlie was a leader in everything.

Another thing we did a lot during the summer season, we used to make kites in his barn. We used to make 'em for stores in the neighborhood. We supplied all the stores from 73rd Street to 90th Street. We made quite a good many. I don't remember how much we got for them. Depends on the size, probably a penny or two.

When we were probably about 12 years old, we raised pigeons. The pigeons were not homing pigeons, at that time, just ordinary pigeons. Later on, when I was working, I had homing pigeons.

We also raised fighting bantam roosters, and we had rabbits, too. He had them all about the same time. He kept them in his place. I stole all the rabbits, and he came over and stole them all back from me. He raised them. As boys do, he'd trade rabbits for pigeons, and pigeons for something else.

The bantam roosters are not game. They fight for few minutes, then run away. Just among the boys, of course. We didn't sell them, as

I recall. We got most of our stuff trading, one thing for another. We had some good times together.

Charlie learned to swim as a boy, and darned near drowned once, in Rocky River. He was about 12. I wasn't there, so I can't tell much about it. An older boy pulled him out. I never did any swimming.

There were four of us boys. One was a carpenter's son, another was a well-to-do widow's son. My dad was a cabinet maker. All four boys were of German descent. The carpenter's son became a carpenter. The widow's son finally became a farmer. But most of the time, there were just the two of us.

In those days, Charlie went barefoot, as we all did, but he went barefoot less than the others. He had six toes on one foot, if I'm not mistaken. He had two small toes on that foot. The other foot was normal. He didn't need to get special shoes, for the two small toes were small — probably just big enough to make an ordinary little toe. He wasn't, so far as my knowledge goes, sensitive about the extra toe. Didn't seem to feel shy about it.

He left school a year sooner than I, and went to Business College. I left at 14 years old, and went to work and have been working ever since. I think it was Spencerian Business College he went to, but I couldn't say exactly. After he went on to school and I went to work, we drifted apart. I don't know much about things then.

One thing, Charlie was sincere. He didn't go into it [radical activities] out of wanting to be a damned politician.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · May 2012 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.